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0521023068 - The Two Italies: Economic Relations between the Norman Kingdom  
of Sicily and the Northern Communes

David Abulafia

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## PART I

### THE FOUNDATIONS

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## THE SOURCES

## I

The *campanile* still casts its shadow over the study of medieval Italy. For the towns and their citizens remain the focus of attention; less interest is displayed in the larger economic and political unit that comprised both the city and its surrounding countryside.<sup>1</sup> Predominantly rural areas such as Sicily and southern Italy have suffered especially. The influence of the *campanile* extends further: there are signs of what the Italians call *campanilismo*, an aggressive species of parochialism. The local rivalries of the Middle Ages have been succeeded by manifestations of local pride; there have, in consequence, been few attempts to examine the economic relations between individual regions of Italy. As far as a composite picture of medieval Italy is available, it is weighted towards northern Italy and is made of units that fit together rather ill. It is true that the commercial centres of the north, such as Genoa, Pisa and Venice, have been examined in the light of their overseas interests, but the more distant and 'heroic' endeavours of the mercantile cities have received most attention. Not Sicily and southern Italy but Syria and Constantinople have been favoured in studies of north Italian trade.<sup>2</sup> In part the explanation for this failure to consider Italy as a whole lies not in *campanilismo* but in considered attitudes to medieval Italian history. It might, for instance, be argued that Italy was

<sup>1</sup> A valuable corrective is supplied by Philip Jones, 'La storia economica: dalla caduta dell'Impero romano al secolo XIV' in R. Romano and C. Vivanti (eds.), *Storia d'Italia* (Turin, 1974), vol. II, 1469–1810; an expanded version of Dr Jones's monograph is eagerly awaited.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., R. S. Lopez, *Storia delle colonie genovesi nel Mediterraneo* (Bologna, 1938); E. H. Byrne, 'The Genoese colonies in Syria', *The Crusades and other historical essays presented to Dana C. Munro* (New York, 1928); R. Heynen, *Zur Entstehung des Kapitalismus in Venedig* (Stuttgart, 1905); meanwhile Pisa has fared better with G. Rossi-Sabatini, *L'Espansione di Pisa nel Mediterraneo* (Florence, 1935), but even though the Pisan sources are sparse, they are not fully exploited by the author.

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no more an economic unity in the twelfth century than it was a political unity. Thus the study of north–south trade within Italy cannot claim any necessary priority over the study of north Italian trade with Syria or the Greek empire. To establish such priority it would be necessary to show that the wares of exchange in south Italian and Sicilian trade were of especial importance to northern merchants: as indeed they will be seen to have been. Or it would be necessary to show that Sicily and southern Italy were favoured by very heavy investment on the part of north Italian merchants: this too was the case, though intermittently. Another explanation for the failure to consider Italy as a whole undoubtedly lies in the feeling that the northern communes were an important political and cultural phenomenon that must be viewed as the context for the life of Francis of Assisi, Dante or Giotto. But the failure of communal developments in the south Italian and Sicilian towns sheds some light on the success of these developments in the north; in other words, it helps explain the mechanics of the political evolution of the northern towns. Secondly, the rôle of the north Italian merchants in the agrarian south was not simply that of trading entrepreneurs. The northern communes needed food and other raw materials from Sicily and southern Italy; the growth of the communes cannot be detached from their needs elsewhere in Italy. Finally, the lasting economic imbalance between an industrial north and an agrarian south may have had some of its roots in the early penetration of Sicily and southern Italy by the merchants of twelfth-century Genoa, Pisa and Venice. For a historian who wishes to gain a balanced view of the Italian economy in the twelfth century it does seem, therefore, that the study of north–south relations promises to be of interest; and for a historian who wishes to concentrate on events and themes of long-term importance – to dig for roots, however well hidden they may have been during the twelfth century – the same theme also promises questions and answers of value.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Thus Jones, 'Storia economica', p. 1,469n. announces his intention to concentrate on the 'aspetti significativi e innovatori' rather than on the 'elementi tradizionali e conservatori'. Also valuable from this point of view is the provocative essay of R. S. Lopez, *The commercial revolution of the Middle Ages* (New Jersey, 1971); while G. Luzzatto, *An economic history of Italy from the fall of the Roman empire to the beginning of the sixteenth century*, tr. P. J. Jones (London, 1961), combines both forms of treatment.

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Several of the issues raised already cannot, it is true, be dealt with very adequately from the point of view of the twelfth century. Lacunae in evidence during that century, or the need for a longer perspective, provide yet further reasons for the reluctance of historians to consider these matters in a twelfth-century context. The evidence available is, in fact, balanced soundly in favour of the single city of Genoa, though Venice is also quite well served by the documents. Nevertheless the material is rich and is capable of indefinite extension into subsequent centuries too. Happily there are signs that Genoese trade with twelfth-century Sicily was particularly intensive, compared even to that of Pisa or Venice. Happily also there are signs that the Genoese broke into Sicilian and south Italian markets on a large scale only from the beginning of the twelfth century. Thus it seems defensible to take the earliest material, for all the problems of imbalance, as a starting-point for the study of the economic relationship between north and south Italy in the Middle Ages. In however partial a sense, Italy began once again to function as an economic unity in the twelfth century; a unity, certainly, based upon disparity, given the commercial rôle of the northerners and the agrarian rôle of many of the southerners, but a unity that had been shattered with the barbarian invasions and the ending of the *pax romana*.

This is not to deny that twelfth-century politicians recognised in Italy a political unit. Frederick Barbarossa claimed both southern and northern Italy for himself; and Roger II, for a brief period, styled himself 'King of Sicily and Italy'.<sup>4</sup> Nor is this to deny that some Italian historians have addressed themselves to aspects of these problems. Vito Vitale, for many years the presiding genius of Genoese history, was by origin an Apulian, and gave preliminary consideration to the commercial activities of the Genoese in Sicily; but he paid only limited attention to the evidence of the Genoese commercial contracts for trade in Sicily and, instead, concentrated on the grants of commercial rights by the Norman kings and by the German emperors. More recently the Genoese scholar Mario Chiaudano exhorted an audience in Bari to examine the Genoese evidence more closely; and Professor Pistarino, another Genoese scholar,

<sup>4</sup> Roger used this title for only nine years (1130–9): K. A. Kehr, *Die Urkunden der normannisch-sicilischen Könige* (Innsbruck, 1902), 416, 419, 421–2.

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reminded an audience in Palermo how significant was the rôle of the north Italians in the diplomacy of Sicily during the twelfth century.<sup>5</sup> But it has not so much been these voices that others have heard. Adolf Schaube's encyclopaedic study of the trade of the Latins in the Mediterranean has remained the basis for comment on south Italian and Sicilian economic history. Political relations with the north Italians in the reign of Frederick II were analysed in an attractive study by Heymann Chone, built entirely on the evidence of treaties and chronicles – it was a study of commercial privileges, not of actual commercial activity. Some attempt has been made to link Frederick's economic policies to the economic development of southern Italy and Sicily in studies by James Powell and Erich Maschke, but neither has been able to pay close attention to Frederick's Norman antecedents.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile those historians who specialised in the economic history of northern Italy have tended to concentrate either upon the inner history of the towns or, as has been said, on their long-distance trade; this is particularly true of the famous Wisconsin School of medievalists, which concentrated on the production of invaluable editions of the notarial cartularies of twelfth-century Genoa.<sup>7</sup> Aspects of Venetian relations with southern

<sup>5</sup> V. Vitale, 'Le relazioni commerciali di Genova col Regno normanno-svevo', *Giornale storico e letterario della Liguria*, n.s., III (1927), 3–29. This article is subtitled 'I Normanni', suggesting that a separate section on the Swabian period was being planned, though such a sequel was never published. The first half of Vitale's earlier study, 'Genova ed Enrico VI di Svevia', *Miscellanea di studi storici in onore di Camillo Manfroni* (Padua, 1925), 89–102, was incorporated in 'Le relazioni commerciali'. See also M. Chiaudano, 'Genova e i normanni', *Archivio storico pugliese*, XIII (1959), 71–8; G. Pistarino, 'I Normanni e le repubbliche marinare italiane', *Atti CISSN*, 241–63.

<sup>6</sup> A. Schaube, *Handelsgeschichte der Romanischen Völker des Mittelmeergebiets bis zum Ende der Kreuzzüge* (Munich–Berlin, 1906); H. Chone, *Die Handelsbeziehungen Kaiser Friedrichs II. zu den Seestädten Venedig, Pisa, Genua* (Berlin, 1902); J. M. Powell, 'Medieval monarchy and trade: the economic policy of Emperor Frederick II in Sicily', *Studi medievali*, ser. 3, III (1962), 420–524, with a reply by E. Maschke, 'Die Wirtschaftspolitik Kaiser Friedrichs II. im Königreich Sizilien', *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, LV (1966), 289–328. Work in a rather different sphere by H. Misbach is discussed *infra*, Chapter 10, 267–73. P. Nardone's posthumous study of Genoa, Pisa and the Mezzogiorno, based on grants of privilege and on chronicle sources, does not range further back than Henry VI: *Genova e Pisa nei loro rapporti commerciali col Mezzogiorno d'Italia* (Prato, 1923). W. Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au Moyen Age*, tr. F. Raynaud, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1885–6) has little to say about Sicily.

<sup>7</sup> The interests of the Wisconsin school are well indicated in D. Herlihy, R. S.

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Italy were illuminated by Francesco Carabellese early this century; while the work of Gino Luzzatto on the merchant class of medieval Venice has helped enormously in attempts to place the commercial activity of the Venetians in its Italian context.<sup>8</sup>

The greatness of the gap in economic history is particularly odd since work in other fields relating to Norman Sicily has been ample and excellent: Amari's translations of the Arabic sources and his monumental history of the Muslims in Sicily; Chalandon's general study of the Norman period; Caspar's painstaking account of Roger II's career; Evelyn Jamison's magisterial studies of Norman administration.<sup>9</sup> All these, and later, works provide a secure and substantial base for further study of Norman Sicily.<sup>10</sup> Much of the research has, however, been confined to the editing of important texts – a necessary preliminary, certainly; but there remain more tools than artefacts. In any case, it is inherently possible that the sources for an economic history of Norman Italy and Sicily do not survive. Economic historians are no longer content with treaties, partisan chronicles and travellers' tales as sole indices of economic developments. Trade contracts or customs accounts, sources that

Lopez and V. Slessarev, eds., *Economy, society and government in medieval Italy: essays in memory of Robert L. Reynolds* (Kent, Ohio, 1969). For the cartularies, see *infra*, 11–20.

<sup>8</sup> F. Carabellese and A. Zambler, *Le Relazioni commerciali fra la Puglia e la Repubblica di Venezia dal sec. X al XV*, 2 vols. (Trani, 1897–8); G. Luzzatto, *Studi di storia economica veneziana* (Padua, 1954) and his *Storia economica di Venezia dall'XI al XVI secolo* (Venice, 1961).

<sup>9</sup> M. Amari, *Biblioteca arabo-sicula, versione italiana*, folio ed. in one vol., 8vo ed. in 2 vols. (Turin–Rome, 1880–1); M. Amari, *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*, 2nd ed. prepared by C. A. Nallino, 3 vols. in 5 books (Catania, 1933–9; new edition in preparation); F. Chalandon, *Histoire de la domination normande en Italie et en Sicile*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1907); E. Caspar, *Roger II. und die Gründung der normannisch-sicilischen Monarchie* (Innsbruck, 1904); E. M. Jamison, 'The Norman administration of Apulia and Capua', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, vi (1913), 211–481, and subsequent works listed *ibid.* xxiv (1956), 1–4, and in *Atti CISSN*, 525–7.

<sup>10</sup> Some idea of the state of research can be gained from *Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi Ruggeriani*, 2 vols. (Palermo, 1955), and from *Atti CISSN*, recording a conference of December 1972. It is only fair to add that certain Sicilian scholars have looked at problems of Norman economic history; see I. Peri, *Città e campagna in Sicilia*, 2 vols. (Palermo, 1953–6), based largely on Idrisi's geographical description of Sicily; C. Trasselli, *Privilegi di Messina e di Trapani, 1160–1355* (Palermo, 1949) – the greater part of which, along with most of Trasselli's studies of the Sicilian economy, is concerned with the later Middle Ages.

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provide a day-by-day picture of commercial movements, are called for instead.<sup>11</sup> From them something approaching a dynamic view of an economic system can be obtained, whereas treaties and works of geography do not tend to place commodities in accurate proportion to their production, nor can they tell much about changes of interest in the merchandise available on the commodity market. In the case of Sicily and southern Italy there are no customs records still surviving from the Norman period, and virtually no commercial contracts survive in the form in which they were registered in the ports of the *Regno*. The customs records certainly recorded the exemptions on taxes due to individual merchant groups, and probably recorded in addition the commodities or tonnage that passed through the major ports of the kingdom. Some may have been destroyed as early as 1160, others were probably discarded during the Spanish régime.<sup>12</sup> In consequence, the search for suitable material must obviously be directed outside the *Regno*, to the maritime republics themselves and, most of all, to Genoa, where large notarial cartularies survive from the second half of the twelfth century onwards. There are naturally great advantages and great disadvantages in having to turn for trade figures outside the *Regno* – advantages, in that comparisons can be made between trade figures for Sicily and those for other destinations; and disadvantages, in that the notaries who provide the surviving details were more concerned to settle legal obligations that might arise in Genoa than to help plan merchant voyages in any detail.

## II

It was always desirable to record transactions involving money, such as transfers of land or investments in long-term projects from which financial returns were expected. Fear of default was ex-

<sup>11</sup> An extreme form of dependence on this type of material is illustrated in P. and M. Chaunu's monumental *Séville et l'Atlantique* (Paris, 1955–9).

<sup>12</sup> The occasion in 1160 was a riot in Palermo during which the royal palace was partly sacked and many records destroyed – Chalandon, *Hist.*, II, 277. The earliest Sicilian commercial contracts to survive in quantity date from the late thirteenth century; but acts drawn up in the *Regno* on behalf of merchants of Pisa, Genoa, Marseilles and Savona do survive from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. For a contract for trade within Sicily (in Arabic) see S. Cusa, *I diplomi greci e arabi di Sicilia*, 2 vols. (Palermo, 1860–2), II, 502–4, 719. This would appear to be unique.



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pressed very plainly in north Italian commercial contracts, and was a major reason for giving them documentary form at all.<sup>13</sup> A further reason was the considerable scale of mercantile activity, which became in the twelfth century a regular form of financial investment that stepped beyond the boundaries of family or class groups to comprehend foreign visitors to the north Italian ports, and, similarly, long-term visits by north Italians to foreign ports. The official who drew up these contracts, the notary, was, technically, an imperial civil servant, though appointed in the twelfth century by the commune; and it was for the commune and its citizens or visitors that he normally worked. His acts had legal force, so that documents enrolled in his book or charters issued by his hand were legal instruments. All these circumstances conspired to make the compilation of commercial contracts a major element in the work of Genoese and Venetian notaries, amid their traditional routine of land grants, wills and court suits.<sup>14</sup>

Although their internal structure is very similar, Venetian and Genoese commercial contracts have, as they survive, an important difference in presentation. What survive from Venice are individual examples of complete charters on parchment in their final form – in other words, the exact documents that partners in a deal held, one for each partner. The Venetian documents were kept among the title deeds of the great families, jumbled up with land grants and purchases. Their survival is accidental and random.<sup>15</sup> They have been acquired by the Archivio di Stato in Venice along with the archives of the Venetian churches into whose hands they, and the lands which many of the other deeds concern, gradually fell. Although they contain varied and often vivid accounts of trade with the Adriatic and east Mediterranean towns, they can only be used

<sup>13</sup> Any view of this topic will involve the incorporation of certain individual conclusions that differ in degree or as a whole from other writers' opinions. In large measure my own comments are drawn from the study of the original documents and cartularies in the Archivio di Stato at Genoa and at Venice.

<sup>14</sup> 'Mostra Storica del Notariato Medievale Ligure', ed. F. Borlandi, G. Costamagna, D. Pincuh, *et al.*, *ASLSP*, n.s., IV, fasc. 1 (1964). Commentaries, photographs and transcriptions bring out many facets of the notary's work.

<sup>15</sup> A comprehensive collection of commercial contracts has been made available by A. Lombardo and R. Morozzo della Rocca, *Documenti del commercio veneziano nei secoli XI–XIII*, 2 vols. (Rome–Turin, 1940); supplement by the same editors, *Nuovi documenti del commercio veneto dei secoli XI–XIII* (Venice, 1953).



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with extreme caution to detect fluctuations in trade with particular regions. For the whole of the twelfth century only about five hundred of these documents have come to light; many are, in fact, quittances that cancel (and therefore repeat verbally) the original trade contract, and all claims arising therefrom. To compensate for the limitation in quantity there is the fact that the Venetian contracts are primarily concerned with the great families, the governing élite that led an active life in government and war. These were the families whose title-deeds were most likely to fall *en masse* into ecclesiastical hands by an act of charity or by dynastic extinction. A further compensation for lack of quantity is that the surviving series includes documents written in the Venetian colonies and trade-counters overseas, in Apulia, Constantinople and Syria, and even on board ship (notaries travelled in the merchant convoys as a matter of course).<sup>16</sup>

Although the Venetian contracts are the final, 'polished', version of the partnership agreements they represent, their physical form is frequently modest. The contracts are written in a crabbed hand on end scraps of parchment, irregular in shape and crowded with writing. The relatively poor quality of the parchment and the signs that the notary scraped and saved reflect the ephemeral nature of this material, by comparison with land grants or public acts. By now the commercial contracts are in a state of advanced decay; several of those read by Lombardo and Morozzo have been overwhelmed by fungus, though fortunately the major series from the church of San Zaccaria has been better preserved.<sup>17</sup> What does repay attention, however, is the series of autograph signatures by Venetian merchants who witnessed the partnership agreements. Although it is plain

<sup>16</sup> Genoese notarial registers compiled in the colonies on the Bosphoros and the Black Sea do survive, but all are much later in date than the period of this study.

<sup>17</sup> I have taken care to examine in the originals accessible material published by Lombardo and Morozzo, in the Archivio di Stato, Venice. It should be noted that the twelfth-century charters have now been reclassified. The most important single group, San Zaccaria Busta 40, is now numbered Busta 34. The only emendation to record is a possible reinterpretation of *DCV*, I, no. 251, which has been published as a contract for Peschiera (*depiscaria*); 'Pescara' would be an alternative translation, and would bring the contract into the series of trade partnerships for the *Regno* – S. Zaccaria, perg. B. 34. There is little chance that material unnoticed by Lombardo and Morozzo will come to light. I can only add one text, an apology from the Doge dated 1198, addressed to a merchant of Gaeta whose goods had been seized – Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, MS Lat. XIV-72 (coll. 4,273), no. viii.

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that some signatories had little idea of the form of letters, and could probably write only their names, it is evident too that literacy was not confined to any one group of merchants, such as the noble class.

What survives in Genoa, by contrast, is a series of paper books filled with summaries of charters, books compiled by the city notaries as a basic record for purposes of authentication in cases where documents were lost or suspect. In addition, the Commune required notaries to deposit copies of their cartularies in the city archive (no other word is possible), so that even after the notary's death reference could, if necessary, be made to his acts. Here is displayed that concern for documentation that prompted the consuls to patronise the writing of the city annals, and to bring together the public documents of the Commune in the *Liber Jurium*.<sup>18</sup> Obviously in this instance the main interest was land transfers and other permanent transactions, but in the process thousands of commercial contracts were preserved as well, surviving complete until 1684 when the cartularies were the victim of French bombardment of Genoa.<sup>19</sup> Several early volumes were destroyed and enormous disarray resulted, so that fragments of damaged cartularies are now to be found bound up haphazardly in the wrong register, and big gaps exist between groups of documents from the same hand.<sup>20</sup>

These cartularies represent a different stage in the production of the final contract from that represented by the Venetian material. The procedure in Genoa seems to have been this. The interested parties came to the notary in his booth or at any other place agreed upon, and declared their intention to make a business deal. The notary wrote down in rough form, either on a scrap of paper or in a manual reserved for the purpose, the details of the transaction – the amount of money involved, the names of the partners, the destination if it were a deal for overseas trade, and, of course, the names of the witnesses. A few of these paper scraps survive loose in the early cartularies, and their unusual simplicity and brevity suggests that they should not be seen simply as registrations made when the

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *infra*, 24–5, 28.

<sup>19</sup> G. P. Bognetti, *Per l'edizione dei Notai Liguri* (Genoa, 1938), 24. The name of M. Moresco, general editor, also appears on the title page.

<sup>20</sup> Thus MS *Diversorum* 102 in the Genoa State Archive binds together work by Oberto de Mercato, Oberto de Placentia and Guglielmo da Sori.