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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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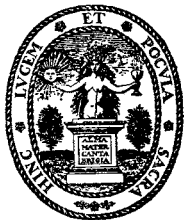
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THE TWO ITALIES
ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN
THE NORMAN KINGDOM
OF SICILY
AND THE NORTHERN COMMUNES

DAVID ABULAFIA

*Fellow of Gonville and Caius College
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MATRI FRATRIQVE
PATRIS MEMORIAE
OPTIMIS CVSTODIBVS

ואיך ספר יכיל מהללו
לאיש אשר אלה לו

(Hebrew inscription from Toledo)

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*Abundanciam frumenti, vini et olei,
et omnium frugum opulenciam, ex largitate divini muneris
longa per tempora tribue ut illo regnante
sit sanitas corporum in patria,
et pax inviolata sit in regno.*

From the Coronation *Ordo* of the Norman kings of Sicily
(R. Elze, 'Tre Ordines per l'Incoronazione di un Re e di una Regina del
Regno normanno di Sicilia', *Atti CISSN*, 447–8.)

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PREFACE

In this book I have traced the fight of the Genoese, Pisans and Venetians for privileged commercial status in the Norman kingdom of Sicily and southern Italy; and I have traced the exercise of that status where evidence exists. I have tried to show that Sicily and southern Italy played a special and crucial rôle in the commercial expansion of the north Italian towns. Not merely was the Norman kingdom a convenient base midway between the north Italian ports and more distant destinations such as the crusader states or Andalusia; not merely were luxury items available in the markets of Sicily, Campania and Apulia; but, in addition, the need to purchase wheat and raw cotton from the Norman kingdom made that kingdom a desirable and, ultimately, a wealthy ally. Most of the detailed evidence concerns Genoa (though it also speaks eloquently for Lucca), but the activities of the Genoese can themselves only be understood in the wider context of Pisan, Venetian, Greek and, on occasion, German attitudes to the Norman kings of Sicily. No apology seems necessary for the Genoese bias of his book, given the bias of the evidence; nor does apology seem necessary for the omission of Amalfi from this book. There is simply very little to say about the activities of the south Italian merchant cities on the basis of surviving twelfth-century sources. Nor does this work pretend to provide an overall survey of the trade of Norman Sicily. Such material as the Cairo Geniza documents, or other North African sources, may one day provide enough evidence for a study of twelfth-century trade between Sicily and the Islamic lands. Apart from the fact that I do not know Arabic, there is much to be said for containing my analysis within what are effectively Italian limits; for the subject of this study has some bearing on the emergence of the lasting contrast between the economy of north and south Italy.

It will be apparent from my discussion of the sources that my tables

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of Genoese annual investment in overseas ports provide only a vague index of the actual proportions of investment. Commercial contracts often name a number of ports of call; and it is not always easy to discover to which sailing season, current or future, they refer. I have made some use of tables published by Erik Bach, as appendices to his study of twelfth-century Genoa. These tables are, however, divided by calendar year, rather than by sailing season; and, as they stand, they bear little relation to the rhythm of trade. Thus I have taken care to adjust his figures to the divisions of the sailing year. I have not recalculated his non-Sicilian tables, except to remove from them certain contracts that mention Sicily or southern Italy as one trading halt among a number of others. Where the Norman kingdom was clearly an early or an important port of call, it has served my purpose better to classify these documents with others that name Sicily or Campania.

I have shown rather less consistency in the spelling of names. My policy has been to convert the Latin names of the Genoese notarial documents into Italian, in accordance with the practice of Italian historians; but nobody can pretend that these versions are identical to those of twelfth-century spoken Genoese. Some names, anyhow, are impossible to contort into sensible Italian versions; and with French, Provençal and other non-Genoese merchants, I have generally abandoned Italian for a comprehensible 'native' form. Thus 'Iohannes de Leges' has become 'Jean de Liège'. In the case of Greek names I have conserved the letter 'k' and the ending '-os', even though this provides only an approximation to medieval Greek usage. I have tried to be rigid in my use of geographical terms. North Africa is properly divided into the Maghrib (far west), Ifriqiya (Tunisia, the classical 'Africa') and Barbary (Tripolitania and Cyrenaica), as well of course as Egypt. By 'Syria' I mean Israel, Lebanon and modern Syria. By 'Romania' I mean the twelfth-century Byzantine empire; north Italian merchants meant, in particular, Greece and the Bosphoros. By 'Mezzogiorno' I mean the mainland areas of southern Italy, though the name is nowadays extended to include Sicily, Sardinia and parts of Italy north of the ancient Norman frontier. The term 'the *Regno*' is a conveniently short alternative to 'Kingdom of Sicily'; it refers both to the mainland and to the island parts of the kingdom. There is, however,

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deep water between Sicily and Calabria, and I have almost certainly been sucked into it by confusing island and mainland. This book is meant to be about both, but it will be clear that the evidence about the island is much fuller. Generalisations about 'Sicily' are indeed aimed at the island of Sicily; but, to add complication, the term 'Kingdom of Sicily' means both island and mainland, and where I have slipped unconsciously from one to the other I hope the effect has not been too disastrous.

This book provides no adequate return for the many debts I have incurred. Dr R. C. Smail, who supervised my doctoral dissertation on a similar theme, has inspired me with his enthusiasm and friendship; in Genoa, Professor Geo Pistarino provided every scholarly facility, along with a warm welcome. Professor Walter Ullmann's constant encouragement while I prepared this book has injected into it whatever vigour it may possess, as has the unremitting support of Professor Philip Grierson and Dr Jonathan Riley-Smith. My grateful thanks also to Mr Arthur Hibbert, Professor Christopher Cheney (Cambridge), Dr Dione Clementi (London), Dr Philip Jones (Oxford), Professor Eliyahu Ashtor (Jerusalem), Professor Hans Eberhard Mayer (Kiel), Dr Anthony Luttrell (Malta), Professor Francesco Giunta (Palermo). The late Miss Evelyn Jamison gave my Norman Sicilian interests strong and friendly encouragement.

The award of the Rome Medieval Scholarship for 1972–4, by the Faculty of Archaeology, History and Letters of the British School at Rome, provided me with invaluable facilities in Italy. In Cambridge, the college of my education, King's, has been very generous. The Master and Fellows of Gonville and Caius College have, by electing me into their company, earned my immeasurable gratitude; they have also made it possible for me to benefit from the services of the Fellows' research typist, Mrs P. McCullagh.

The most ancient debts are the greatest and freshest. Long ago my father talked to me of the past; and my mother has continued to set high standards of literary elegance that I can hardly emulate; while my brother taught me to appreciate Italy and its contents.

Gonville and Caius College
Cambridge

D. S. H. A.

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A NOTE ON THE TABLES

To draw up ‘statistical tables’ that set out concisely the information contained in the Genoese commercial contracts demands either exceptional folly or exceptional courage. Some documents are simply ambiguous, vague either about the total sum invested in overseas trade or about the intended destination; some contain poor arithmetic, with totals that fail to tally with the itemised accounts. There is the problem whether to include stray fragments from the hand of a known notary whose cartulary is evidently an incomplete record of overseas business he recorded. These difficulties are particularly acute in the case of Giovanni Scriba (active 1154–64); each scholar who examines his evidence seems to offer a widely different total *per annum* or overall. The tables that are offered should therefore be treated as a very rough guide – rough in the sense that there are often holes in the evidence that suggest that the figures may not be a complete record even of one notary’s activities; and rough in the sense that they represent only one way of adding together sums of money provided by a reasonably, but not entirely, consistent series of documents. The tables are expressed in Genoese pounds, of 240 silver *denarii*, and no attempt has been made to include sums of Sicilian *tari* nor of other coins, except where a credible current value is indicated; where, similarly, the travelling partner in a commercial expedition is to carry goods of a specified pound-value, that value in pounds has been included in the totals offered. On occasion, moreover, partners specified not the value of the money or goods they were carrying abroad, but the amount that would be produced by the travelling partner on his return, in settlement of his obligations to his partner. This was, in essence, a ruse to avoid accusations of usury, since a loan of £10 to a travelling partner might well win from £2 to £5 ‘commission’. Such documents are relatively rare, and the pound total offered has had to be included in the

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export figures cited; for the alternative of ‘adjusting’ figures downwards seemed even less excusable than the distant ruses of Genoese usurers. Loans that do not mention nor can be linked to known overseas voyages have not been listed under the heading of trade for ‘no stated destination’; some, to be sure, must have been used to back commercial ventures, but others than traders needed credit in the twelfth century.

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ABBREVIATIONS

COLLECTIONS

*ASLSP: Atti della Società Ligure di Storia Patria.**BAS, versione italiana: Biblioteca arabo-sicula*, versione italiana, ed. and tr. M. Amari (Turin 1880–1). This was published both in a folio edition (1 vol.) and in octavo (2 vols.); references here are to the folio version.*FSI: Fonti per la Storia d'Italia* (Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 101 vols.).*MGH: Monumenta Germaniae Historica.**Const.: Legum Sectio IV, Constitutiones et Acta Publica.**SS: Scriptores.**RISS: Rerum Italicarum Scriptores.* Two series: 1st ser., ed. L. A. Muratori; 2nd ser., in course of publication.

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G. Cass.: M. W. Hall, H. C. Krueger, R. L. Reynolds (eds.), *Guglielmo Cassinese (1190–1192)*, *Notai Liguri del sec. XII*, II; 2 vols. (Genoa, 1938).

GS: *Il Cartolare di Giovanni Scriba*, ed. M. Chiaudano and M. Moresco, 2 vols. (Rome and Turin, 1935).

H.Falc.: Hugo Falcandus, *La Historia o Liber de Regno Sicilie e la Epistola ad Petrum Panormitane Ecclesie Thesaurarium*, ed. G. B. Siragusa, FSI (Rome, 1897).

Hist. ducum venet.: *Historia ducum veneticorum*, ed. H. Simonsfeld, MGH. SS., XIV, 42–89.

Ibn Jubayr: *The travels of Ibn Jubayr*, tr. R. J. C. Broadhurst (London, 1952).

NDCV: *Nuovi documenti del commercio veneto dei secoli XI–XIII*, ed. R. Morozzo della Rocca and A. Lombardo (Venice, 1953).

OSM (1186): C. Jona (ed.), *Oberto Scriba de Mercato (1186)*, *Notai Liguri del sec. XII*, IV (Genoa, 1940). This work appeared under the name of M. Chiaudano, General Editor, in view of the Fascist race laws.

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PSIFB: *Popolo e Stato in Italia nell'Età di Federico Barbarossa – Alessandria e la Lega Lombarda, Relazioni e comunicazioni al XXXIII congresso storico subalpino per la celebrazione dell'VIII Centenario della Fondazione di Alessandria, Alessandria 1968* (Turin, 1970).

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the twelfth century

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MAP 2. The Norman Kingdom of Sicily