Introduction

> The natural outcome of commerce is to bring peace. Two nations who trade together become mutually dependent. If one should sell, the other should buy. All alliances are based on mutual needs.
>
> —MONTESQUIEU, *De l'Esprit des Lois*[1]

In 1559, the Genoese ambassador in Madrid, Marcantonio Sauli, addressed King Philip II about their common stake in keeping the western Mediterranean both Spanish and Christian:

> In order to muster our fortunes together, we should make sure that in the winter we have many galleys that navigate the Mediterranean. To your twelve galleys more should be added so that they would provoke jealousy and disquiet in the Turks. This way they would think twice before coming into our waters and crushing the designs of His Majesty.[2]

Ambassador Sauli's proposition was more than suggestive. By recommending the mustering of their mutual forces, the Genoese demonstrated a shared concern with the king of Spain. Sauli's tone was indicative of Spain's reliance on the Genoese forces. Most importantly, Sauli was speaking to the king as an

1. "L'effet naturel du commerce est de porter à la paix. Deux nations qui négocient ensembles se rendent réciproquement dépendantes: si l'une a intérêt d'acheter, l'autre a intérêt de vendre; et toutes les unions sont fondées sur des besoins mutuels." Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des Lois*, vol. II (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1979), 10.
2. Archivio di Stato di Genova (ASG), Archivio Segreto (A.S.) 2707, "Istruzioni al Pronotario Marcantonio Sauli, Ambasciatore al Re di Spagna," Genoa, February 14, 1559.

equal because their defense of the Mediterranean rested on mutual participation. As the Mediterranean Sea had been the stage of continual warfare between Muslims and Christians for the better part of two centuries, the exchange between Sauli and Philip II illustrates the main theme of this book: the forging of an alliance between the Genoese merchant empire and the Spanish dynastic empire against the growing advance of their mutual enemies. The Atlas Miller shows the division of the Mediterranean Sea through Muslim and Christian flags (Figure 1.1).

The alliance took a shape I call "symbiotic imperialism." Just as biological symbiosis is a mutually beneficial relationship between two different organisms in close association, so the proximity of the Spanish rulers to the Genoese granted the Genoese a family network through which to extend their mercantile empire across the major cities of Europe and gave the Iberian crown a financial network to undergird its imperial expansion in Europe and the Mediterranean. The dynastic imperialism of Spain and the mercantile imperialism of Genoa expanded simultaneously. This thriving symbiosis benefited both parties in their efforts to advance their interests in and around the highly contested Mediterranean Sea. The Genoese depended on Spanish imperial authority to protect their coastal trading posts, vital locations where commodities from the Levant were unloaded, making southern Italy a pivotal point in the Spanish imperium on the continent. Through trade, the Genoese colonies in the two kingdoms of

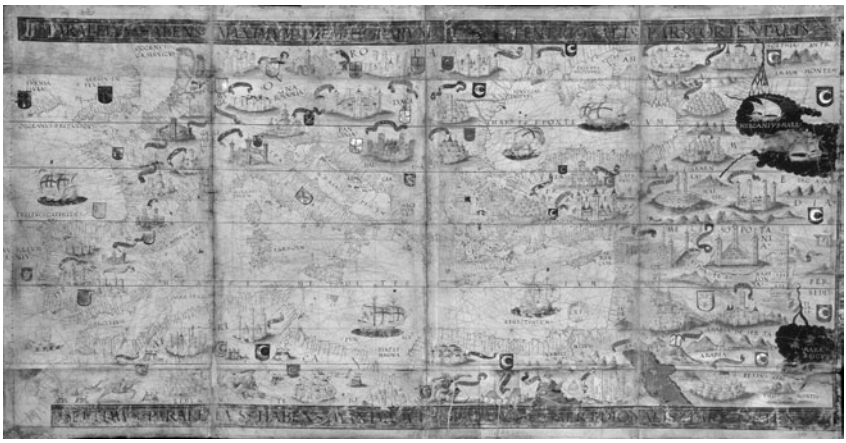

FIGURE 1.1. Lopo Homem, *The Mediterranean Sea*, also called "Atlas Miller," 1519
Courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Richelieu, Ge AA 640 (RES)

Naples and Sicily generated revenues that allowed the Spanish Crown not only to feed the Spanish territories on the continent but also to sustain large armies in Europe and to combat frequent rebellions. Genoese finances enabled Spanish ascendency in Europe; in return, Spain granted the Genoese financial privileges in its domains.

Over time, the history of southern Italy, as I demonstrate, began to reflect the Genoese shift from a Mediterranean commercial network to a European financial empire. This empire allowed the Genoese merchant bankers to successfully combine economic and social capital and thereby weather the many Spanish bankruptcies that occurred throughout the early modern period; thanks to their international network, the Genoese became mediators for the Spanish imperial project on the European continent.

In the Middle Ages, the merchants of Genoa developed a network of family members and associates located in strategic outposts across the Mediterranean Sea.[3] Genoa, the "*Superba*," managed the state as a business affair and acted as a republic of merchants.[4] These merchants, affluent bourgeois of feudal origins, founded self-governing commercial colonies across the Mediterranean and functioned as importers of riches from the East.[5] The situation changed in the mid-fifteenth century as a result of Genoese control of their colonies' finances. What made the Genoese a merchant empire was their determination to heighten their financial acumen. Adding to their prosperous sea commerce, they began dominating the financial life of their host, though not its politics.[6] They monopolized the

3. See David Jacoby, "Les Génois dans l'Empire Byzantin: Citoyens, Sujets et Protégés (1261–1453)" in *Trade, Commodities and Shipping*, ed. David Jacoby (Aldershot: Variorum, 1997), 245–284. See also Benjamin Kedar, *Merchants in Crisis: Genoese and Venetian Men of Affairs and the Fourteenth-Century Depression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

4. See Steven A. Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese, 958–1528* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

5. Enrico Basso, *Genova: un Impero sul Mare* (Cagliari: Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Istituto sui Rapporti Italoiberici, 1994). The quintessential study on Genoese colonies in the Mediterranean is Roberto López, *Storia delle colonie Genovesi nel Mediterraneo* (Genoa: Marietti, 1996). See also Georges Jehel, *Les Génois en Méditerranée Orientale (fin XIè-Début XIVè siècle)* (Amiens: Université de Picardie, 1993).

6. Looking at the city of Genoa itself, Thomas Allison Kirk has argued that the revival of shipbuilding and maritime commerce served as a counterbalance to the city's volatile financial sector. See *Genoa and the Sea: Policy and Power in an Early Modern Maritime Republic, 1559–1684* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2005).

trade in certain commodities but retained an informal sociopolitical organization. As a merchant empire that boasted both commercial and financial supremacy, Genoa was the most compelling candidate for symbiosis with the Spanish Crown's dynastic empire.

Imperial Ambition underscores that the symbiosis between the Spanish and the Genoese was not just a matter of economics, as the current historiography suggests, but was also underpinned and strengthened by powerful sociocultural ties. Scholars have acknowledged the economic coalition between Genoese bankers and Spanish monarchs, but there was a more entrenched religious, sociological, and cultural bond between the two parties. Examining this bond in southern Italy expands our understanding of early modern imperialism. The symbiosis of Spanish and Genoese imperialism in the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily was balanced by acculturation. The Genoese were vital supporters of Spanish power in the western Mediterranean not only because of their financial links to the Iberian crown, but also because of their feudal investment in the viceroyalties of Naples and Sicily, their social pledge to local institutions, and their moral commitment to upholding the Spanish Empire as a Catholic polity in conflict with the Protestants in Europe and with the Muslim Turks in the Mediterranean.

Both the Spanish dynastic imperium and the Genoese financial emporium vested political, financial, and religious interests in southern Italy, which they sought to protect through a reciprocal alliance. Spain proposed itself as the advocate of Catholicism in Europe and the Mediterranean, and the Genoese community demonstrated a particular concern for the protection of Christian souls in southern Italy. The Muslims' repeated forays into the western Mediterranean reinforced the alliance of the Christian empires, which sought to protect their spiritual interests in southern Italy through charities, hospitals, churches, religious festivals, civic processions, orphanages, and confraternities. Both the Genoese and Spaniards demonstrated an alternative imperial system in that they invested money in safeguarding, protecting, and relieving souls in southern Italy. The Genoese mercantile empire concentrated not only on financial resources but also on spiritual rapprochement with both the Spanish Crown and southern Italian subjects through organized beneficence, representation at civic ceremonies, and spiritual guidance during religious holidays.

The spiritual entente between the Genoese and Spaniards was mainly informed and reinforced by the religious division of the Mediterranean Sea.

Christianity unified the two empires, serving as a tool for state building and providing a way to preserve civic identity. Both the Spanish and Genoese financially sheltered widows, orphans, the sick, and the poor because their empire was Christian. Through an analysis of the religious liturgy that the Spaniards and Genoese adopted and transformed, I outline the interplay between Catholic rituals and Spanish imperial strategy in the Mediterranean. In their Christian empire, spiritual and material welfare worked in unison.

The Genoese played a crucial role in the defense of the Spanish-Christian empire both on the continent and in the Mediterranean. They adapted to the Spanish imperial system, which used its naval expertise to serve Spain's defense of Catholicism and its pursuit of religious uniformity.[7] For Spanish imperialism, politics and religion were entwined. The Turks were not only a major military and economic power but also a much-feared religious opponent, a fact that strengthened the emergence and then the longevity of symbiotic imperialism between the Spanish and Genoese in southern Italy. In the Mediterranean, the Genoese had to prepare for a war unlike those in any of their other outposts, such as Bruges, London, or Lyon. Many acts of social life expressed the underlying notion that the Ottoman Empire was a constant threat: guild members bequeathed funds for the care of soldiers' widows and orphans or established hospitals to accommodate the victims of the Ottoman wars and religious and civic rituals sought to bind people to Christianity in the face of Muslim attacks or processions represented the universalism of Christianity. Moreover, in their symbiosis with the Spaniards, the Genoese had to consider the spiritual welfare of a third party: the local southern Italian population.

What made the Genoese the quintessential partners for symbiotic imperialism was their willingness to acculturate to the Kingdom of Naples through donations to charities, religious processions, and spiritual architecture. Their capacity to acclimatize to southern Italy's social mores enabled the Genoese to remain significant even after 1627, when the Spanish Crown started using Portuguese Marranos operating out of Amsterdam as imperial financiers.

7. Carla Rahn Phillips has found that the Catholic faith as a tradition served as an organizing principle for Iberia's transoceanic empires. See "Organization of Oceanic Empires: The Iberian World in the Habsburg Period" in *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges*, eds. Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal, and Kären Wigen (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 71–86.

While other nations in southern Italy competed with Genoese supremacy, the Spanish chose the Genoese as their symbiotic partners because only they took steps to adapt culturally to their new environment.

Along with the discussion of the financial and cultural alliances, this book offers a new independent perspective on the Habsburg Empire in premodern times, that of the Genoese. The Genoese were not only very active in the symbiosis but were also intent on building their own mercantile empire. Historians have examined either Spanish or southern Italian sources, but this study, combining archival research from Simancas (Spain), Naples, Messina, Palermo, and Genoa, proposes a merchant banker point of view on the construction of the Habsburg imperial domain in southern Italy. The Genoese were not under the thumb of Spanish power; their vision was different from those of local vassals or Spanish authorities, both of whom have dominated the historiography. In the Kingdom of Naples, although they acted hand in hand with the Spanish, they were no less imperialistic, monopolizing the trade, extracting goods sent to their European entrepôts, and acting as a vital link in the precapitalist economy.

Scholars have long emphasized the Genoese as financiers of the Spanish Crown, but we have to transcend the notion that they acted solely as merchant bankers.[8] The symbiosis with the Spaniards worked because the Genoese were power brokers, too, which explains the longevity of the Spanish Empire. The Genoese were essential to establishing the political legitimacy of the Spaniards. They acted as traders, bankers, and financiers but also worked in the central and peripheral administration of the state. Through a careful reconstruction of nearly three hundred years' worth of dispatches from consuls, ambassadors, ship captains, guild members, princes, merchant bankers, and religious figures (chaplains, popes, and cardinals), this book presents the Genoese as significant actors in the imperial management of Italy. Both their outlook and their contribution to the Spanish Empire afford a new assessment of the Spanish capacity to resolve financial and religious pressures throughout the early modern era.

8. The Genoese are still portrayed as precapitalist entrepreneurs who, because of a lack of local resources, took on to the sea. See for instance Thomas Kirk, *Genoa and the Sea* and Quentin van Doosselaere, *Commercial Agreements and Social Dynamics in Medieval Genoa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Imperial Ambition reveals that the Genoese adeptness at creating a mercantile empire stemmed from their ability to make use of family-based networks to penetrate the local market.[9] The Genoese role as merchants in the Spanish Empire was based on local kinship networks, reciprocal favors, and a strong commitment to the mother city.[10] They used southern Italy as one of their commercial outposts, operating under the model of "trade diaspora." Anthropologist Abner Cohen has defined a trade diaspora as "a nation of socially dependent, but spatially dispersed communities,"[11] whereas historian Philip Curtin has outlined it as "an interrelated net of commercial communities forming a trade network."[12] The particular feature of these Genoese mercantile colonies was a sense of solidarity reinforced by a clan- or family-based system of operation.[13] In the case of Naples, members of the Genoese community identified themselves as Genoese even after a few generations because connecting to the Genoese commercial network was more beneficial than acquiring a new citizenship.[14] The trade diaspora communities found support in family ties, which

9. Avner Greif sees the trade expansion of the late medieval period as fundamental in the transformation of the medieval economy, itself sparked by institutional innovations. See *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

10. A trade diaspora community is spatially dispersed: its members strive to monopolize the trade in certain commodities, enjoy informal social and political organization, and exchange commercial information through friends belonging to the same group. See Kirti N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

11. Abner Cohen, "Cultural Strategies in the Organization of Trading Diasporas" in *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*, ed. Claude Meillassoux (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 266–278.

12. Philip D. Curtin, *Cross Cultural Trade in World History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

13. Jonathan Israel talks about "networks within networks" when examining the early modern Jews' use of non-Jews and non-correligionists within their commercial dealings. See *Diasporas Within a Diaspora: Jews, Crypto-Jews, and the World of Maritime Empires, 1540–1740* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

14. This was a conscious choice on the part of the Genoese as their lack of Neapolitan citizenship meant that they could not participate in the government of the city. The Genoese government prohibited its citizens from entering the Neapolitan *seggi*, the city's seven districts, which would have given political power to nobles but also to high-ranking professionals. See Maria Antonietta Visceglia, *Identità sociali: La nobiltà napoletana nella prima età moderna* (Milan: Ed. Unicopli, 1998), 144–147.

in turn facilitated their adaptation to all kinds of political milieux and alien nations.[15] As a commercial state, the *Superba* instructed its merchants to diversify their portfolios in times of need but to always maintain mercantile activities as their economic basis. As a result of the profits reaped from trade diaspora, by the mid-sixteenth century, most Genoese merchants resided outside of Genoa.[16]

As a diasporic nation, the Genoese in southern Italy followed the leadership of their doge, who resided in the *Superba*. Whenever they had a conflict with their host community, the Genoese consuls in Naples examined their doge's instructions on how to conduct diplomatic relations. The doge corresponded with his conational, who resided in the merchant colonies, via instructions on the necessary course of action.[17] The doge's power was great, and the consuls had to obey his mandates. For instance, although the consuls were voted in situ, the nation ratified the elections with the doge back in Genoa.[18] In their colonies, the Genoese registered via their consulate as members of the Genoese nation, thereby accessing the networks of family, commerce, and alliances necessary for immigrant life. Their registration with the Genoese consulate entailed declaring Genoese citizenship, which was mutually exclusive. Through affiliation with the consulate, members acquired the privileges bestowed on Genoese citizens: they could obtain Genoese citizenship for their heirs; vote for the consul; access the Genoese commercial network in southern Italy and abroad; benefit from the services of the Genoese church and charitable institutions; create

15. Maartje van Gelder examines the trade diaspora of the Netherlands's merchants in early modern Venice, arguing that the Antwerp diaspora community sought its fortune in one of the historical hearts of Mediterranean trade. See *Trading Places: The Netherlandish Merchants in Early Modern Venice* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

16. See Edoardo Grendi, *La repubblica aristocratica dei genovesi: Politica, carità e commercio fra Cinque e Seicento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1987), 19–20.

17. Michael J. Levin, *Agents of Empire: Spanish Ambassadors in Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) explores the limitation of Spanish power through diplomatic machinery.

18. Interestingly, as of 1578, there was a fee of eight cent of gold imposed on anyone refusing the charge of consul. See ASG, A.S. 2635, Letter from Consul Paolo Giustiniano to Doge of Genoa, Naples, May 5, 1589. Responsibilities that involved civic consciousness such as doge, consul, or governor could not be turned down across the Italian city-states. For ample explanation on the Genoese consuls, see Giovanni Brancaccio, *"Nazione genovese" Consoli e Colonia nella Napoli Moderna* (Naples: Guida, 2001).

family alliances back in Genoa; and most of all inherit feudal privileges such as government gabelles (taxes levied on commodities) on revenues, legal proceedings, and customs in the Kingdom of Naples.[19]

An interesting feature of the Genoese in southern Italy, however, was their capacity to simultaneously acculturate to their new environment and maintain their Genoese identity. They settled in Naples and Sicily, acquired fiefdoms and titles, joined local institutions, and partook in local social and spiritual life while they continued to express and advance a Genoese agenda. They continued to operate as a Genoese community using mechanisms of solidarity such as allegiance to the mother patria, provision of assistance to their poor, endogamous intermarriages, and devotion to the Ligurian patron St. George. This hybridization enabled them to perforate the socio-spiritual landscape while remaining faithful to their collective identity, and this dynamic facilitated their diasporic community's continuity and adaptability.

The Genoese hybridity and adaptability stemmed from their capacity for social change. What aided the Genoese to both participate in the sociocultural life of southern Italians and continue living as foreign merchant bankers was the very concept of Genoese nobility. In Genoa, the *nobili* (urban patriciate) were members of the feudal aristocracy. The Doria, Spinola, Fieschi, Grimaldi, and any other family that had served on the Council of Elders, or as consuls, were considered noble. From the twelfth century on, the feudal nobility took up residence in the city and were at the same time active in maritime trade. Starting in 1289, however, nobles could not hold public offices (according to a law ratified in 1339 by Simon Bocanegra, the first doge). But the benefit of trade led some families to abandon their nobility to become *popolari* (men of the people who practiced trade, such as the Giustiniani, Sauli, Franchi, Fornari, and Promontorio).[20] Feudal investments enabled commercial, maritime, and financial activities. In Genoa, "the people who controlled most of the land were the same ones who took to the sea."[21] Over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,

19. See the Archivio di Stato di Napoli (ASN) series on *Arrendamenti*, *Dogane Antiche* and *Precettori dei Diversi Tribunali*.

20. For a longer discussion on the process see Thomas Kirk, *Genoa and the Sea*.

21. Steven A. Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese*, 25.

these *popolari* acquired imperial fiefs and landed estates in Liguria, a process they would replicate when they settled in Naples. By that time, both *nobili* and *popolari* could serve in government as they could and did engage in trade. Thus, the feudal aristocracy of Genoa formed a heterogeneous group, albeit a socially adaptable one.[22] Naval Commander Andrea Doria's contract with Emperor Charles V in 1528 put the final touch on the alteration of Genoa's social compact. The admiral restructured the city into twenty-eight *alberghi* (clans) that made up the ruling class. The 1528 contract also conferred Doria and his fellow Genoese fiefdoms in the Spanish realms, notably Naples and Sicily.

Imperial Ambition underscores that the success of the Genoese was attributable to their capacity to both organize under an efficient mercantile system and work under the umbrella of the Spanish Empire. David Abulafia relates the success of diasporic medieval Italians to the fact that they were "citizens who had travel in their blood."[23] The Genoese merchants operating in the Spanish world developed skills born out of their diasporic conditions. This book shows that Renaissance Genoese had a unique talent for combining family networks and imperial alliances. Whereas family business dictated the terms of their relations with their host society, collaboration between political and economic interests allowed the Genoese merchants to fashion an informal empire within the formal empire of the Spanish. Felipe Fernández-Armesto has described the Genoese traders as "hermit crabs," "versatile in their ability to adapt to every economic environment and political climate."[24] As a result of this versatility, the Genoese thrived in all the cities dominated by the Spanish Crown.

As a result of Muslim encroachment in the Mediterranean, notably after the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Genoese lost their markets in the

22. The subdivision in Genoese social ranks is more complex than the partition between *popolari* and *nobili*. For instance, the *alberghi* (families along with their retinue) of great, medium, or lower importance provided order (and disorder) to the social world of the Genoese. Also, even though *popolari* and *nobili* engaged in the same activities, they made a distinction between merchants and artisans. For a detailed account, see the first two chapters of Edoardo Grendi, *La repubblica aristocratica dei genovesi: politica, carità e commercio fra il Cinque e Seicento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1987).
23. David Abulafia, "Gli Italiani fuori d'Italia" in *Commerce and Conquest in the Mediterranean, 1100–1500*, David Abulafia ed. (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), 261–286.
24. Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus: Exploration and Colonisation from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1229–1492* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1987).