

Genoa and the Sea: Policy and Power in an Early Modern Maritime Republic, 1559–1684. By *Thomas Allison Kirk*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005. xv + 276 pp. Index, notes, bibliography, appendix, illustrations, tables. Cloth, \$49.95. ISBN: 0-801-88083-1.

Reviewed by Luisa Piccinno

The theme of this study is the development of the early modern Mediterranean world and the changing relations between that world and the rest of Europe. Thomas Allison Kirk traces this development by examining the evolution of Genoa's maritime policy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although several studies on this subject have been published in Italian by Genoese scholars, until now there have been no English-language works. In fact, the existing references to Genoa in English tend to be to individual Genoese or groups of Genoese citizens, rather than to the republic or its maritime history.

The first of two sections provides an overview of the republic's history from the medieval period through the early modern age, and it emphasizes the factional divisions that existed in both domestic and international politics. In the two chapters that comprise this introductory section, Kirk presents a short analysis of the republic's constitutional structure and the distribution of political power among its various social divisions. An examination of the nature of the Genoese presence at sea illustrates the role of the port in the life of the city.

The second section (chapters three to six) consists of an interesting and complex analysis of Genoa's maritime policy and its evolution in response to the city's changing political and financial relations with the Spanish court. Kirk divides this policy into three distinct phases. The first phase was dominated by internal conflicts as the ruling class became consolidated, and it was characterized by intense financial interactions with the Spanish court. During the second phase, the Genoese aristocratic class experienced a long period of financial withdrawal and political distancing from Spain. In this period, they made various attempts to promote the republic's maritime standing but failed to form a

coherent economic policy. In the third phase, the republic relaunched itself economically in the Mediterranean world by adopting a free port policy.

The connecting thread of the book, which is organized chronologically, is the difficult balancing act required of the city in conducting its international relations (especially with Spain and France) in a way that enabled it to preserve its independence. One part of the Genoese ruling class clung to the belief that the way to pursue this objective was by relaunching the republic as a maritime (and military) power (as it was during the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries): the main goal was to establish a major emporium, thereby enhancing Genoa's importance as a commercial center in the western Mediterranean. In trying to achieve the first part of the goal, the city's government was internally divided over the types of economic activities it wanted to promote. These divisions initially hindered the creation of a state squadron and, once it was built, slowed its enlargement. The city's first notion of building a publicly owned fleet was conceived during the 1550s, a period of growing factional tension. Until then, the Genoese presence at sea had been represented by privately owned ships, and the republic's defense was based on its ability to requisition or hire those ships in times of need. Several projects that were proposed between the end of the sixteenth and the first part of the seventeenth century were never realized. However, the evolution of the free port (first built in 1591 for grain, and then opened to general trade in 1609) followed a less politicized course. Created as a temporary solution to a situation of crisis, the free port eventually became an important instrument in reviving the republic's economy, and it represented a valid alternative to naval armament.

As Kirk points out, the dual nature of Genoa's identity during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—as a loyal subject of Spain, on the one hand, and as a neutral port of trade on the other—can be viewed as a model for relations between small countries and large, dominant ones. In order to avoid being absorbed by more powerful neighbors, a small state must either establish a close relationship with a single country by using its accumulated wealth to create a bond of mutual dependence, or it must remain neutral and pit potential aggressors against one another. The presence of three conditions is required to make this strategy possible. First, the small country must occupy a strategic geographic position. Second, it must control the supply of a particular resource. And third, it must be

able to protect the economic interests of larger powers. The republic of Genoa fulfilled the first condition; the development of its free port enabled the city to fulfill the third one as well.

Kirk has integrated a large amount of disparate material, adding more material in an appendix and including two previously unpublished archival sources. He has tackled a complex subject, but his treatment would have been improved had he consulted the large collection of documentary sources preserved in Genoese archives and cited in a bibliography that was recently published in Italy. Nevertheless, the book's originality and its adoption of a useful analytical model ensure that *Genoa and the Sea* will become a valuable addition to the literature on the economic history of the Mediterranean.

Luisa Piccinno is assistant professor of economic history at the University of Genoa. She is the author of numerous books and articles on the development of the port of Genoa in the modern age, including Economia marittima e operatività portuale: Genova, secc. XVII–XIX (2000) and Città, porto, economia locale: I progetti di ampliamento del Portofranco di Genova tra Sei e Settecento (2005). At present she is working on a study of the development of the economic relations between the republic of Genoa and North Africa from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.