Sixteenth Century Journal • XLIV/2 (2013) • pagg. 625-627

Libertà e dominio: Il sistema politico genovese: Le relazioni esterne e il controllo del territorio. Matthias Schnettger and Carlo Taviani. Rome: Viella, 2011. 387 pp. €40.00. ISBN 978-88-8334-477-0.

reviewed by **Brian G. H. Ditcham**, Gillingham, Kent, England

The history of the late medieval and Genoese state (as distinct from that of the city's economic role) remains relatively understudied, certainly by comparison with the city's historic rival, Venice. The often chaotic nature of Genoese politics scarcely encouraged the development of a "myth of Genoa" to match that articulated by and about Venetian political elites. Genoa from 1390 to 1790 is often portrayed as a nest of factions under ephemeral foreign overlordships in the fifteenth century, a docile Spanish satellite in the sixteenth and seventeenth and an anachronistic backwater in the eighteenth – an economic powerhouse but a political weakling.

With one exception, the papers in the present volume focus on Genoa's relations with external powers and with the components of its territorial state in Liguria and beyond. The outlier is Marco Veronesi's piece on nineteenth-century German historiography; more descriptive than analytical, this suggests that Genoa was of particular interest to historians participating in debates on commercial and company law in imperial Germany.

On the external relations side, Christine Shaw examines the brief interlude of French rule from 1458 to 1461 while Fabien Levy seeks to identify common features in the periods of foreign rule that saw French and Milanese governors alternating with "native" governments in dizzying succession from 1396 to 1512. Unsurprisingly, the foreign governors sought to strengthen the central powers of the state and to physically dominate the city with building projects. Equally unsurprisingly, each period of foreign rule began with a honeymoon period as the new rulers established peace and order – followed by a steady process of mutual disillusionment as their priorities failed to match those of the Genoese elites. Levy seeks to identify an underlying sense of Genoese identity throughout this period, expressed in a defense of civic customs – though others might see this as simply elite self-interest.

Three papers examine relations with key powers – Spain, the empire, and the papacy. A rather disjoined piece by Arturo Picini looks at the language Spanish commentators used to describe Genoa's position in their imperial "machine," followed by detailed examination of its role as a logistical base for Spanish fleets in the 1570s and the frantic efforts of the Genoese authorities to manage financial markets in the run-up to the Spanish bankruptcy of 1607. Matthias Schnettger argues that the empire, though physically remote, retained enough "soft" power to complicate Genoese attempts to assert full sovereignty in the years around 1600. Julia Zunckel examines this issue from the perspective of relations with the papacy. Despite the number of Genoese cardinals, Genoa struggled to achieve formal recognition in the status war triggered by Pius V's promotion of Cosimo de' Medici to grand duke in 1569 and ultimately took unilateral action in 1637, first proclaiming the Virgin as Queen of Genoa and then giving the doge a formal coronation – though family links made managing the fallout from these actions easier. Finally, Carlo Bitossi analyzes the information published by outsiders on Genoese government during the early modern period (scanty and out-of-date) and Spanish and French ambassadorial reports on the subject. Even these semi-insiders were often inaccurate, though Don Francisco de Melo's protosociological examination of the nobility in 1633 is impressive.

The second section opens with three papers that focus on the role of the Casa di San Giorgio – the uniquely Genoese institution that grouped the shareholders of the city's funded debt into a corporation capable of taking over the administration of Genoese overseas colonies, on which Antoine-Marie Graziani contributes a rather slender piece about the Casa's relations with local elites in Corsica in the early sixteenth century. It also played an active role in mainland Italy. Andrea Bernardini examines its role in eastern Liguria in the years before the dispute with Florence for overlordship of Sarzana in 1484, tracing the processes that saw the Casa becoming involved in the region. These derived from its role in the salt monopoly, which gave it considerable local powers of patronage but sucked it into local factional struggles linked with competing Genoese, Florentine, and Milanese claims, in which the Casa emerged as an autonomous player. In these struggles the Casa stressed that it stood outside Genoese factionalism – a point developed by Carlo Taviani, who points to a long-standing tendency of non-Genoese observers to idealize the Casa and denigrate the Genoese state. While this was reflected by Machiavelli, it predated him. Insiders were less persuaded of the Casa's virtues.

The final two contributions concern Genoa's relationship with the communities that composed its mainland territories. Andrea Zanini demonstrates that fiefs under direct Genoese rule were far less intensively managed than those held by nobles – though the much lower revenue that Genoese administrators extracted may reflect a detached attitude to economic development rather than lower levels of exploitation. Vittorio Tigrino gives a rather opaque account of the modern historiography of the Genoese state's re-

lations with local communities before analyzing eighteenth-century history wars that saw Genoese attempts to impose central control on them challenged both from below (as communities scoured their archives for documentation to justify privileges) and above (where imperial claims over Genoa were revived as part of the House of Savoys claim for an imperial vicariate in Italy).

While the book is more coherent than some collections of conference papers, its contents rather tend to confirm the conventional wisdom that contrasts Genoa's economic power with its weakness as a state.