

ATLANTIC ITALIES

ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL ENTANGLEMENTS (LATE 15TH - EARLY 19TH CENTURIES)

Two-Session Panel at the
5th European Congress on World and Global History
Budapest, 31 August – 3 September 2017

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from the Black Sea to West Africa and the Americas (15th-16th Centuries)

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GENERAL ABSTRACT

Fernand Braudel's seminal thesis on the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II vividly depicted the 'Northern invasion' of the Mediterranean at the end of the 16th century. Following Europe's 'discovery' and colonization of the Americas, and Portuguese and Dutch penetration of Asian markets, this 'invasion' confirmed, in Braudel's eyes, the shift of Europe's political and economic core from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. Despite current reassessment of Braudel's thesis, the predominant grand narrative about early modern Europe's 'expansion' and economic development still considers that – after having been a propulsive centre in the Middle Ages – the Italian peninsula underwent a process of steady decline and marginalization in the age of Atlantic trade.

This interpretative framework resulted into different historical foci. While the history of Europe's Atlantic engagement was concerned mostly with the 'triumphant' cases of Portugal, Spain, the Dutch Republic, France and England, scholars of Mediterranean history mainly dealt with intra-Mediterranean relations. Although research in both Mediterranean and in Atlantic history has fuelled vivid debates about cross-cultural contacts in the pre-industrial world, they tend in general to develop as separate fields.

This panel will tackle the pertinence of these traditions. By highlighting the porous borders of early modern empires and reconstructing trans-imperial connections between and beyond them, it will examine the multifold entanglements between the Mediterranean space and the Atlantic world from the late 15th to the early 19th century. The session focuses on "Italies" – that is the plural and internally fragmented Italian-speaking areas – which connections with the Atlantic world prior to the (well-studied) late-nineteenth-century mass migrations to the Americas are under-researched. How did Mediterranean/Italian commodities enter Atlantic markets, what role did they play in shaping processes of cultural change, and what kind of meanings did consumers in the Americas and Africa assign to them? How did Atlantic commodities arrive in Italian societies and how did they transform the patterns of consumption and the material culture of both popular and elite households? What strategies did actors from an allegedly peripheralized region develop to connect themselves to the thriving oceanic trade routes, which interstices did they occupy, and what kind of patronage relations did they profit from? What kind of mobility patterns and what channels of knowledge circulation emerged between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic? How did Atlantic powers and interests shape political and economic decisions in Italian peninsular states before Italian independence? And what kind of efforts –both diplomatic and informal– were undertaken by the governments of the Italian states to defend their interests in the Atlantic space? By tackling these questions, we aim at shedding new light on inter-continental entanglements in the early modern age and at contributing to a renewal of both Atlantic and Italian history.

Carlo Taviani (Deutsches Historisches Institut, Roma)

Steven Teasdale (University of Toronto)

Genoese Merchant Networks from the Black Sea to West Africa and the Americas

(15th-16th Centuries)

Scholars following Braudel have considered the sixteenth-century as the “age of the Genoese”, a golden era where Genoese merchants and bankers played a central role financing the Spanish empire. It is believed that after the fall of Constantinople, the Genoese moved away from the Levant and invested westwards. This is a broad picture, but not many studies have been devoted to prove such a hypothesis. Our research project studies a wide network of Genoese merchants that stretched from the Black Sea to southern Spain (Seville, Malaga), West Africa and the Americas.

The first part outlines the social and mercantile networks of the Lomellini family in the Quattrocento Mediterranean and Atlantic worlds through the lens of the slave trade and its adjacent activities. It will outline the mercantile and administrative activity of the Lomellini in the eastern Mediterranean and how they leveraged their social, intellectual, and financial capital to become associates, advisors, and investors to the Portuguese in their expansion into the Atlantic islands and the west coast of Africa. This will be elucidated through an analysis of notarial records, letters, and the mining of existing printed sources from archives in Genoa and elsewhere.

The second part presents a quantitative study of 15th century Genoese families - the Spinola, Centurione, Marihoni and Pinelli - that traded in Malaga, Seville, Lisbon, and from there to North and West Africa. It shows how they moved their investments to the Canary Islands and the Americas in the following decades, financing technical innovations and geographical explorations. Enrique Otte, Ruth Pike and others have used extensively the Spanish and Portuguese archives to study the Genoese in Spain and the early Americas, but Genoese notarial records kept in Genoa contain an enormous amount of information and have not been systematically studied.

Cecilia Tarruell
(University of Oxford)

**Between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic:
The Network of the Gasparo Corso Brothers in the Late 16th Century**

This paper will explore the strategies implemented by merchants of the Mediterranean basin in order to expand into the Atlantic world, as well as the many connections between these spaces during the early modern period. These issues will be analysed through the case study of the network of the Gasparo Corso brothers.

This family of Corsican origins was especially active during the second half of the sixteenth century. Its members were settled in different seaports, such as Marseilles, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, Lisbon and Algiers. Like many other merchant networks operating between Europe and the Maghreb, the Gasparo Corso network combined a wide array of activities like coastal navigation, commercial transactions, ransoming of Christian captives and the gathering and diffusion of information among different courts. Yet, this family was exceptional due to its political weight in the 1570s and 1580s, especially in the court of Abd al-Malik, sharif of Morocco, and immediately following, in the court of Philip II, first at Lisbon and then in Madrid.

Based on the transnational setting of the Gasparo Corso's activities, this paper will address two main questions: firstly, the connections and similar dynamics that marked the Mediterranean and its Atlantic extension, namely Portugal and the Atlantic Morocco; and, secondly, the ways in which the Gasparo Corso brothers used their political influence in Philip II's court in order to access the American market, as well as opportunities provided by the Asian dominions of the Portuguese and Spanish empires.

Alida Clemente
(Università di Foggia)

Atlantic Naples
Merchant Networks and New Consumptions in the Eighteenth Century

Between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, the intensification of transnational trading networks stimulated widespread changes concerning patterns of consumptions, especially in the urban areas of Western Europe. According to the specific context, the results of this process varied with regard to the social diffusion of new items and the significance the latter assumed in social practices. A common feature was the exoticism associated to the consumption of colonial goods and eastern style objects. While historiography has tended to depict this ‘consumer revolution’ as a mainly Northern-European phenomenon, Mediterranean countries were actually largely involved in the commercial and cultural integration which accompanied the spreading of new items and patterns of consumption.

The Mediterranean metropolis of Naples, which traditionally functioned both as bridge and a border between Europe and the Middle East, clearly participated in this general transformation and got progressively integrated into an ‘Atlantic’ system of exchange. The re-export of colonial items by foreign merchants, (mainly French, British, and Dutch) – and sometimes by way of other Mediterranean hubs such as Genoa and Leghorn – fostered the entry of new goods (sugar, chocolate, tobacco, potteries, printed cotton...) which added to the items traditionally imported by the Kingdom from the Atlantic world (for and foremost stockfish).

By questioning the influence of transnational commercial and cultural networks in shaping the urban panorama of new consumptions and styles, my aim is to analyse the characteristics of the Neapolitan market for Atlantic merchandises as it emerges from Neapolitan commercial letter-books of the 1740s-1750s. This source allows us to trace the paths of merchandises, the changing links between Mediterranean and Atlantic markets, the way in which foreign merchants interacted, negotiated and perceived the local market and its main actors, as well as the roles played by Neapolitans in these networks.

Luca Codignola

(University of Notre Dame / Saint Mary's University / Université de Montréal)

Antonio Filicchi, Vito Viti, and Other Atlantic Entrepreneurs

From the Grand Duchy of Tuscany to the United States, 1815-1847

This paper will make use of the recently-found and still untapped archives of the Filicchi family, currently housed in Pisa and Leghorn, to reconstruct the family and business networks at play between early-Risorgimento Tuscany and the early US Republic. Antonio Filicchi, whose brother Filippo had been the first US consul in the Italian peninsula, was a merchant and a banker. Vito Viti was a Volterra merchant who carried marble as alabaster as well as foodstuff and wine, besides other trade items, across the Atlantic. Both Filicchi and Viti were also instrumental in facilitating the travel of people across the Atlantic Ocean. This paper, together with previous research and publications on earlier times carried out by the presenter, show that movements of goods and people between the Italian peninsula and the United States were much more substantial than previously thought.

Roberto Zaugg

(Université de Lausanne)

From the Mediterranean Sea to the Royal Court of Benin

Trade Networks and Cultural Meanings of Red Coral (15th-18th centuries)

On wedding day, middle- and upper-class brides and grooms in nowadays Benin City (southern Nigeria) often display sumptuous ornaments made of coral beads – or at least of synthetic coral imitations produced in China. This ‘tradition’ is the result of a century-old cross-cultural trade. On the one hand, my paper outlines the commodity chains of red coral (*Corallium rubrum*) which, through to the intermediation of Sephardic and Christian merchants, used to connect the shores of the Maghreb with the Bight of Benin by the way of port cities of Mediterranean (Genoa, Livorno, Marseilles...) and Atlantic Europe (Lisbon, Amsterdam, London...). On the other, it uses a variety of written and visual sources to explore the multiple cultural meanings associated to coral in various Mediterranean, European and West African contexts. As we know, in Europe and the Mediterranean coral was employed to make charms protecting infants against the ‘evil eye’, as a pharmaceutical element, as well as for religious objects such as Catholic rosaries or Jewish Torah-pointers. And of course – as the works by G. Yogev and F. Trivellato have shown – it was exported in substantial quantities to India and other Asian regions, where coral had been – since the antiquity – a highly priced commodity. By contrast, the export of coral to sub-Saharan Africa has been largely neglected by scholars. Coral was actually traded to and used in different African contexts, stretching at least from the empires of the Niger bend to the Kingdom of Kongo. However, in no other polity it attained such a prominent material and symbolic value as in the Kingdom of Benin (Nigeria), where starting from the late 15th century coral became a crucial attribute of the king (*Oba*) and his dignitaries, the object of severe sumptuary norms, as well as a key-element of dynastic mythologies, ritual practices and art.

Alejandro García-Montón

(Universidad Pablo de Olavide, Sevilla)

Mediterranean institutions and the transatlantic slave trade

Creation, diffusion, and re-appropriation (17th and 18th centuries)

In 1662, the company of the Genoese merchants Domenico Grillo and Ambrosio Lomellino made a proposal to the Spanish Crown in order to manage the slave trade to Spanish America. After some negotiations, the Spanish Crown finally accepted the deal and the Genoese company got a charter lasting until 1674. This charter was certainly path-breaking: In contrast to previous periods, the slave trade was now orchestrated as a monopoly; local customs and duties were eliminated in exchange of a single tax payment; the number of American ports allowed to receive slaves increased; and a special court to deal with the slave trade was created. Perhaps more crucially, this new system grounded the organization of the slave trade in the Spanish empire until mid-eighteenth century. On the one hand, this paper will analyze how the negotiations of the 1662 charter took place and the main innovations it brought. On the other hand, it will tackle the process through which that charter became the frame of reference for future holders of the monopoly over the slave trade to Spanish America. One after another, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, French and English companies aiming at operating that trade re-appropriated, re-interpreted and re-used the 1662 Genoese model when negotiating their contracts with the Spanish Crown. In so doing, this paper aims at unraveling the way in which Italian-inspired institutions circulated beyond the Mediterranean Sea, how they crossed imperial borders, and how they were finally ingrained in the institutional ecology of the Atlantic world of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Anne Ruderman
(Harvard University)

Venetian Beads for the Atlantic Slave Trade

In the 1760s, the leading Venetian diplomat in England, Cesare Vignola, journeyed from London to Liverpool to meet with members of William Davenport's beads company. Vignola's goal was a simple one: He wanted to secure Venice as the sole supplier of Davenport's business. The financial opportunity for the bead manufacturers of Venice was significant; Davenport was one of the largest slave-ship outfitters in eighteenth-century Liverpool and he had joined forces with others to directly supply his slave ships with beads for the transatlantic slave trade. For Vignola there was also an element of national pride and international prestige at work.

Venice had historically manufactured beads for the transatlantic slave trade, but by the late eighteenth century, Venetian manufacturers were challenged by nascent British beadworks, and manufacturers in Central Europe. Davenport's beads business, for example, sourced its goods from Frankfurt and Prague. This paper argues that the world of Atlantic trade represented a commercial opportunity for Venetian manufacturers, but they faced competition from factories on the Atlantic rim, as well as deep within the European interior. In his letters from Liverpool to the Venetian senate, Vignola conveyed a sense of being both on the edge of the known world and at the epicenter of a new commercial civilization. In order to orient his readers to this new universe, he included a detailed map of the city of Liverpool. He also explained exactly how the triangular transatlantic slave trade worked. Vignola followed his visit to Liverpool with a series of negotiations with the Liverpool beads company, as he promised that Venetian manufacturers could make beads in the styles demanded by the company's African consumers. In the nineteenth century, these negotiations were reframed as a glorious moment in the Republic's history, and documents about Venetian beads for the slave trade were repackaged as wedding gifts.

Giulia Bonazza (EUI Florence)

Alessandro Tuccillo (Collegium de Lyon, IEA – Université de Lyon)

Italian States and Atlantic Slave Trade.

Imperial Diplomacy and Debates on Slavery during the first half of the 19th century.

This paper aims at analysing the Italian debate on colonial slavery and the participation of the Italian States in the diplomatic campaign for the abolition of the slave trade during the first half of the 19th Century. The interest in colonial slavery and the diplomatic situation were rather unexpected, given the fact that the Italian States were not directly involved in the colonization process of the Americas or the slave trade business. Hence they have been neglected by scholars up to now. However, on the one hand, the abolitionist argument against the Atlantic slave trade and slavery was present in Italian newspapers, annals and books: in particular, we will present articles of the Florentine newspaper *Antologia* of Vieusseux, reviews on the *Annali Universali di Statistica* in Milan. At the same time, the Italian abolitionist debate was somehow contradictory, as it ignored the persistence of slavery and captivity in Italian contexts. On the other hand, after the Congress of Vienna (1815) Italian States participated in the diplomatic campaign for the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. In fact, this campaign experienced a turning point with the two Anglo-French treaties in 1831 and 1833. The United Kingdom and France agreed to cooperate on three main objectives: the capture of ships carrying slaves, legal actions against individuals involved in trafficking, and the participation of other countries in the two treaties. Although the Italian States were not colonial powers, the United Kingdom and France imposed the signing of the treaties of 1831 and 1833 and the adoption of abolitionist laws to the Kingdom of Sardinia (1834), the Grand Duchy of Tuscany (1837) and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (1838-1839). In 1839, when Pope Gregory XVI promulgated the apostolic letter *In supremo apostolatus*, the Holy See too was involved in this almost unknown 'Italian campaign'. We argue that this participation has to be explained with regard to British and French imperial strategies and that, to a certain extent, the abolitionist ideology was used to limit the political autonomy of the Italian States and to strengthen the Anglo-French hegemony in the Mediterranean area.