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The Genoese Response to the Collapse of the Spanish Empire in America*

by Catia Brillì

Abstract. – This article focuses on the effects of the Spanish Empire's crisis on the Genoese Atlantic trade, which in the early 19th century shifted its main commercial axis from the port of Cadiz to Buenos Aires and Montevideo. Despite the Republic of Genoa's international marginalization, during the 18th century Ligurians continued to participate in the Spanish colonial trade due to the persistent productive and naval shortfalls of the monarchy: the monopolistic port of Cadiz became their main operative center. The Napoleonic wars, the consequent crisis of the Spanish Empire and the collapse of the oligarchical republic, which culminated in the annexation of Genoa to the Sardinian kingdom, decisively damaged the Genoese system of participation in the *Carrera de Indias*. But the conjuncture also created the conditions for their autonomous Atlantic adventure. The neutrality of the Sardinian flag and the traditional ties woven in the Iberian trade allowed Ligurian vessels to play an essential role of commercial intermediation between Spain and the lost colony of Rio de la Plata. Buenos Aires became the new destination of many Ligurian migrants, who contributed to local economic growth and created tight bonds with the new host society.

CADIZ, THE CORE OF THE 18TH-CENTURY GENOESE ATLANTIC TRADE

Genoese merchants and businessmen participated in the Atlantic trade from the very first stage of the Iberian expansion overseas. As is well known, they established a veritable symbiotic alliance with the Habsburgs. By supporting Spanish imperial projects and taking advantage of the Crown's problems with solvency, they acquired trading licenses in the *Indias* and dominated European finance until the Spanish

* I wish to thank Alan Gallay of the Ohio State University for his useful comments on the essay.

“bankruptcy” of 1627.¹ The Hispanic-Genoese alliance came to an end with the Treaty of Münster (1648), which formalized the succession of the United Provinces over Genoa for transport of American silver to Flanders in exchange for countless royal concessions.² The loss of the privileged relationship with the Crown, however, did not paralyze Genoese trade in the Spanish Empire. In a context in which the enjoyment of Atlantic trade benefits was closely linked to political and naval power, the Genoese traders, who couldn’t count on political support of the mother-city or on a competitive merchant fleet, found in the Spanish monarchy new means to survive. By adopting multiple strategies of integration in the host society and trade institutions, they continued to prosper within the Spanish “monopoly”, and the port of Cadiz, emporium of the *Carrera de Indias*, became one of the largest Ligurian commercial settlements of the 18th century.³

These ties of reciprocity were particularly relevant in the maritime sector due to the Bourbon authorities’ need to cope with increasing naval competition in the Atlantic. In order to solve the problem of the chronic lack of vessels, aggravated by the War of the Spanish Succession, the Bourbons adopted two different strategies: they invested in

¹ Ramón Carande, *Carlos V y sus banqueros* (Barcelona 1987, 3rd ed.); Felipe Ruiz Martín, “Las finanzas españolas en tiempos de Felipe II”: *Cuadernos de Historia. Anexos de la Revista Hispania* 2 (1968), p. 109–173; idem, “Los hombres de negocios genoveses de España durante el siglo XVI”: Hermann Kellenbenz, *Fremde Kaufleute auf der Iberischen Halbinsel* (Cologne 1970), p. 84–99.

² Carmen Sanz Ayán, “Asentistas holandeses en las finanzas de la Monarquía hispánica, 1680–1715”: *Diálogos Hispánicos de Amsterdam* 16 (1995), p. 139–156; eadem, “Negociadores y capitales holandeses en los sistemas de abastecimientos de pertrechos navales de la monarquía hispánica durante el siglo XVII”: *Hispania. Revista Española de Historia* 182 (1992), p. 915–945; Stanley J. Stein/Barbara Stein, *Silver, Trade and War. Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore 2000).

³ Catia Brilli, “Mercaderes genoveses en el Cádiz del siglo XVIII. Crisis y reajuste de una simbiosis secular”: Ana Crespo Solana (ed.), *Comunidades transnacionales: colonias de mercaderes extranjeros en el mundo atlántico, 1500–1830* (Madrid 2010), p. 83–102; eadem, “Administrando la debilidad. Los mercaderes genoveses y sus instituciones en la capital del comercio hispánico dieciochesco”: Bartolomé Yun/Fernando Ramos (eds.), *De Estambul a Potosí: Instituciones y Crecimiento Económico en el Mediterráneo y el Atlántico, 1500–1800* (Valencia, forthcoming); Carlo Molina, “L’emigrazione Ligure a Cadice, 1709–1854”: *Atti della società Ligure di Storia Patria* CVIII, 2 (1994), p. 285–377.

local shipbuilding by establishing the Carraca arsenal in Cadiz, and authorized the acquisition of foreign ships by only charging a duty fee (the *extrangería* tax). In 1752 the Genoese consul in Cadiz reported the arrival of "120 Genoese shipwrights and caulkers to build vessels in the arsenal for this Crown", many of which had been hired in Genoa while others were "volunteers".⁴ Nevertheless, as the local shipbuilding sector was mainly oriented towards the construction of warships, it was never capable of fulfilling the maritime trade's needs, and still needed to purchase foreign vessels. This also resulted from the convenience of collecting the *extrangería* tax rather than invest capital in the shipyards.⁵

Between 1717 and 1778, only 130 (26.4%) of the 492 ships engaged in the *Carrera de Indias* (whose origin has been identified) were from Spanish or American yards; 24% of them were built in Great Britain, 23% in France and 10.4% (51) in Italy. The majority (37) of the latter came from Genoa.⁶ In some cases the rent or acquisition of these vessels was managed directly by Spanish authorities;⁷ more often, the transactions were between private owners who instructed the Genoese captains to find buyers for their ships.⁸ Ligurians also contributed to the development of a private shipbuilding sector in Spain. The wholesale merchant Domingo Colombo owned a great shipyard in Puntales,

⁴ Archivio di Stato di Genova (hereinafter ASG), Archivio Segreto, n. 2673, Montestiso, Cadiz, 27th of November, 1752.

⁵ Marina Alfonso Mola, "La marina mercante colonial en la legislación borbónica, 1700-1828": Carlos Martínez Shaw (ed.), *El derecho y el mar en la España moderna* (Granada 1995), p. 173-215.

⁶ Antonio García-Baquero González, *Cádiz y el Atlántico, 1717-1778* (Seville 1976), p. 105.

⁷ In 1720, the *intendente general de Marina* Patiño bought three ships by the Genoese captains Lanfranco, Sanguinetto and Oneto; four years later the Crown acquired from Oneto another vessel. ASG, Archivio Segreto, n. 2673, Lorenzo Maria Grassi, Cadiz, October 1, 1720; ASG, Archivio Segreto, n. 2673, Gio. Dom.o Pavia, Cadiz, May 2, 1724.

⁸ These practices were so common that in 1720 the Genoese consul of Cadiz reported: "the [Genoese] mediocre ships sail under the French flag, while the good ones are sold [in Spain]". ASG, Archivio Segreto, n. 2673, Lorenzo Maria Grassi, Cadiz, 30th of July, 1720. See also ASG, Archivio Segreto, n. 2673, Andrea Gherardi, Cadiz, 23th of October 1791.

near Cadiz;⁹ in the same place Jacome Patron owned several warehouses for the sale of naval supplies.¹⁰

Ligurians did more than support the Spanish shipbuilding industry. By obtaining naturalization or entrusting their business to their sons born in Spain they were able to access the legal circuits of colonial trade and organize expeditions with their own vessels: in 1793, they owned 33 Spanish-flag ships enrolled in the *Carrera de Indias*.¹¹

The Ligurian prosperity in late 18th-century Cadiz confirms that the decree of *Libre Comercio* (1778) had not damaged the position of the port. In fact, although Cadiz had lost its status of monopolistic emporium, in the last quarter of the 18th century it continued to absorb more than 70% of colonial trade.¹²

The Spanish monarchy's war commitments and trade indirectly boosted Ligurians to participate in local maritime activities at different levels, including navigation. The Genoese presence in the crews of Spanish vessels had ancient roots. Because of their Catholic faith and the secular ties that bound them to the Iberian coasts, Genoese were considered more reliable than other foreigners. They also were favoured by the Spanish navy's scarcely regulated methods of recruitment, traditionally based more on practical needs than on a determined legal regime.¹³

With the rise of Bourbons to the Spanish throne (1700), however, seafarers were submitted to a growing attention by the authorities, who attempted to control and increase maritime forces for military purposes by creating a seafarers' register, the so-called *matrícula de mar*. The first step was a *real orden* in 1726 which tried to make the registration attractive by offering exemption from Army recruitment.

⁹ Archivo Histórico Provincial de Cádiz (hereinafter AHPC), Not. Cádiz, 0048, Testamento de Domingo [Vallarino] Colombo, 1803.

¹⁰ Archivo General de Indias (hereinafter AGI), Arribadas 209A, Ordenes e informes sobre licencias de embarco, Cádiz, 18th of August 1810.

¹¹ AGI, Consulados 929. This rank of great merchant shipowners was dominated by a nucleus of naturalized wholesalers who possessed two or more vessels coming from Genoa or other European and American ports. See Marina Alfonso Mola, "Los navieros naturalizados de Cadiz, 1778-1820": Antonio García-Baquero González (ed.), *La burguesía de negocios en la Andalucía de la Ilustración*, vol. I (Cadiz 1991), p. 209-226.

¹² Antonio García-Baquero González, *El Libre Comercio al examen gaditano* (Cadiz 1998).

¹³ Mola, "La marina mercante colonial" (note 5), p. 173-215.

But this was a superfluous privilege, for seafarers traditionally enjoyed exemption because their skills were needed at sea. The new provision also granted to registered seafarers precedence over the non-registered in participation in transatlantic shipping, which was the most lucrative employment at sea.¹⁴ These strategies of persuasion were accompanied by forced recruitments in which Ligurians were both the agents and the victims. The case of Commander Spinola is particularly meaningful in this regard. In 1730 he was instructed by the Spanish Crown to go to Genoa with 150 soldiers to acquire a vessel and recruit the greatest possible number of seafarers.¹⁵

In 1737 the Bourbon authorities offered to registered seamen some additional "privileges", such as an exemption from quartering troops in their houses, and the right to practice maritime activities in an exclusive way. This was clearly a gimmick to make the registration mandatory. They offered the same privileges to the foreign seafarers who were married or *avecindados* (residents) in Spain; the other Catholic foreigners had full "freedom" to serve in the *Armada Naval* (the Spanish navy) with the rank that corresponded to their skills.¹⁶ The *ordenanzas* of 1748 and 1751, which subordinated the enjoyment of those "privileges" to the service in the *Armada Naval* in case of war, unavoidably bound maritime activities to military life.¹⁷ However, the reiteration of *ordenanzas* reveals the *matrícula's* scarce attractiveness, as it represented a real menace for a sector which was traditionally regulated by autonomous and flexible organisational logics; the frequent desertions and episodes of military authorities' corruption in order to avoid the service were the natural consequences.

Parallel to this, the need to support colonial trade forced the Crown to authorize the foreigners' participation in transatlantic shipping. The Free Trade Decree (art. 3) established that all captains, *patrones*, *maestros*, *oficiales de mar* and the two-thirds of the sailors who were

¹⁴ Roberto Fernández Díaz/Carlos Martínez Shaw, "Las revistas de inspección de la Matrícula de Mar en el siglo XVIII": Martínez Shaw, *El derecho y el mar* (note 5), p. 241–271.

¹⁵ ASG, Archivo Secreto, n. 2673, Prasca, Cadiz, 17th of January 1730.

¹⁶ Ordenanza del Infante Almirante, Art. 5, 18 de octubre de 1737: Francisco Javier de Salas, *Historia de la matrícula de mar y exámen de varios sistemas de reclutamiento marítimo* (Madrid 1879), p. 169.

¹⁷ Olga López Miguel/Magda Mirabet Cucala, "La institucionalización de la Matrícula de Mar: textos normativos y consecuencias para la gente de mar y maestra": Martínez Shaw, *El derecho y el mar* (note 5), p. 217–239.

engaged in the *Carrera* had to be Spanish or naturalized, while the remainder could be foreigners: they had to be Catholics, registered in the *matrícula*, and were obligated to return to Spain under the captain's responsibility.¹⁸ However, the chronic scarcity of matriculated seafarers induced the Crown to revoke that disposition a few years later. By 1785 it was possible to engage foreign seamen – but also shipwrights and caulkers – whether or not they were registered in the *matrícula* and those who had not yet served in the *Armada*: the only prerequisite was a special request presented by the shipowner, or by the captain, to maritime authorities.¹⁹ In this way, foreigners could continue to embark for the Indies without being considered illegal and not having to pay the travel: once they arrived at their destination, it was easy for them to leave the crew to find buyers for the goods they usually carried with them and establish their business.

The absence of the Genoese flag in the Atlantic, thus, does not mean that the Republic had reduced its commercial relations to the Euro-Mediterranean coasts. Ligurians continued to participate in colonial trade thanks to the Bourbonic reforms' intrinsic limits, which allowed them to prosper in the capital of the Spanish monopoly by operating in symbiosis with the monarchy's needs. This system was irrevocably damaged by the crisis of the colonial order in the early 19th century. But, at the same time, Latin American independence opened new spaces to maritime competition in the Atlantic.

THE NAPOLEONIC WARS AND THE CRISIS OF THE GENOESE TRADE SYSTEM

The Napoleonic Wars submitted Ligurian trade to a double crisis. The French invasion of the Republic in 1797 determined the fall of the Republic's oligarchic system, which was followed by a devastating commercial crisis as a consequence of the British blockade of the port of Genoa. The Napoleonic invasion of Spain and the abdication of Fernando VII in favour of Joseph Bonaparte gave impetus to the independence movements in Spanish America, striking once and for all

¹⁸ *Reglamento y Aranceles Reales para el comercio libre de España a Indias, de 12 de octubre de 1778, en la Imprenta de Pedro Marin* (Seville 1978).

¹⁹ Real Orden para que, a falta de marinería matriculada, se pueda admitir la que no lo esté, 30 de septiembre de 1785: AGI, Consulados 97, Consulado de Cargadores a Indias, Secretaria, 1720–1817, Impresos e documentos curiosos y varios, exp. 15.

Cadiz's role of commercial intermediation between the two shores of the Atlantic.

The occupation of the Republic had unexpected and disruptive effects. Requisitions of war, infrastructural damages and commercial isolation became even more serious after the annexation of Liguria to France in 1805. The imperial authorities further damaged Genoese trade by extending the French customs system to Liguria; they also diverted neutral ships to Toulon and Marseille, and gave precedence to the export of silk from Lyon.²⁰

Until annexation the Ligurian maritime trade had prospered thanks to cabotage shipping, which was traditionally exempted from formalities.²¹ French customs officials, instead, were particularly zealous imposing duties on coastal navigation and discouraging foreign ships' landings in order to prevent smuggling. The precautionary embargo imposed on allied flags and the Spanish uprising against French occupation completely interrupted direct trade between Genoa and the Iberian Peninsula.

These limitations were accentuated by the presence of Barbary pirates on Sicilian and Sardinian coasts, but also by the untenable French military policy. Due to the Republic's traditional choice for political neutrality, Liguria was a bad basin of recruits. For this reason, every attempt made from 1797 to organize local armed forces failed, obligating the new administration to resort to French soldiers.²² Thus, Napoleon tried to recruit the seafarers with the aim of organizing a fleet capable of coping with the British enemy. Once again, the episodes of escape and resistance were numerous.²³ The Napoleonic expedition to Egypt cost the Ligurian merchant navy all of its large vessels, so that by 1804 it was almost exclusively made up of cabotage ships.²⁴ It was precisely the incompatibility between political autonomy and the capacity of military control which led to the annexa-

²⁰ Luigi Bulferetti/Claudio Costantini, *Industria e Commercio in Liguria nell'età del Risorgimento, 1700-1861* (Milan 1966), p. 261.

²¹ See Luca Lo Basso, *Il Sud dei Genovesi. Traffici marittimi e pratiche mercantili tra l'Italia Meridionale, Genova e Marsiglia nel Settecento* (forthcoming).

²² Giovanni Assereto, "Coscrizione e politica militare negli anni francesi": idem, *Le metamorfosi della Repubblica. Saggi di storia Genovese tra il XVI e il XIX secolo* (Savona 1999), p. 308-310.

²³ Ibidem, p. 314.

²⁴ In 1804, 1,250 of the 1,400 Ligurian ships were "liuti", feluccas, and boats. Bulferetti/Costantini, *Industria e Commercio* (note 20), p. 273.

tion of Liguria by France. The consequent extension of the French standards of recruitment to the former republic led to the organization of 26 drafts for the army, which affected about 31,500 individuals and multiplied the episodes of emigration and rebellion.²⁵ Even the administration's efforts to make a meticulous register of all the individuals who were engaged in maritime activities in order to strengthen the French naval force failed and caused a massive abandonment of the maritime professions.

After the annexation of Liguria to the Sardinian kingdom sanctioned by the Congress of Vienna (1815), the region remained in a state of economic isolation. The lack of capital and the lasting custom barrier with Sardinia maintained the merchant fleet in a condition only sufficient to make modest cabotage trade. Besides, in 1816 the government of Turin decided to re-establish the obligatory conscription, which had been abolished only two years before because of its huge unpopularity.

During the reign of Carlo Felice, the government began to deal with the problem of maritime trade by initiating a protectionist policy that led to commercial agreements with the Ottomans in 1823 and with Morocco two years later. In 1825 the government established a sliding scale of taxes on the importation of cereals, wine, and oil. While this measure granted to Sardinian ships the quasi-monopoly in the transport of grains, it discouraged the international trade around the port of Genoa, as many foreign ships began to prefer Livorno. Even the trade in the Black Sea was severely affected by the conflicts between Greece and Turkey, and between Turkey and Russia. The commercial difficulties were accompanied by serious problems with the fleet: in 1815 only 966 ships remained, 882 of which had a tonnage less than 100 tons.²⁶

In parallel, the center of Genoese Atlantic trade system had begun its irreversible decline. The crisis of Cadiz started with the war against Great Britain (1796–1801), during which the port was submitted to a prolonged maritime blockade by Admiral Nelson. The blockade severely damaged Ligurian commercial settlement. It was decimated by

²⁵ Assereto, "Coscizione e politica militare" (note 22), p. 315.

²⁶ Ugo Marchese, "L'industria amatoriale ligure dal 1816 al 1859": *Archivio Economico dell'Unificazione Italiana*, vol. VI, fasc. I, 1957, p. 11.

bankruptcies,²⁷ forced contributions to sustain the war effort, and the numerous requisitions of their ships. This happened in 1797 to Ligure captain Bozzo, who was coming from Martinique with his *polacre* under Spanish flag: he was captured by the British Navy and forcibly sent to Gibraltar, where he was robbed of his load and dismissed without receiving payment for the ship's hire.²⁸

The truce granted by the Peace of Amiens (1802) was soon interrupted by the Napoleonic invasion of Spain in 1808. In 1812, Cadiz was completely isolated by the siege of Napoleonic troops. In these years the process of the Spanish colonies' movement towards independence was too embryonic to have appreciable effects on the peninsular economy. The exception was the viceroyalty of Río de la Plata, whose struggle for emancipation interrupted the direct trade with Spain since 1810. The volume of trade from Cadiz to the *Indias*, in spite of a certain recovery in 1808–1810 and 1815–1818, gradually decreased in accordance with the success of the Hispano-American movements of independence, and reached its lowest level in 1819–1820.²⁹

The commercial crisis of Cadiz is reflected in the rapid disappearance of local shipowners, who diminished from 300 to 20 between 1800 and 1824.³⁰ Those who had well-established interests in the colonies in some cases decided to abandon Cadiz and join their parents or associates overseas. This was the case of the aforementioned Ligure shipowner Jacome Patron: in 1810, after the total ruin of his affairs, he asked for a royal license to go to Montevideo and join his

²⁷ Julián B. Ruiz Rivera, *El Consulado de Cádiz. Matrícula de Comerciantes, 1730–1823* (Cadiz 1988), p. 101–102. See also Antonio García-Baquero González, *Comercio colonial y guerras revolucionarias. La decadencia económica de Cádiz a raíz de la emancipación americana* (Seville 1972), p. 219–242; and García-Baquero González, *El Libre Comercio al examen gaditano* (note 12), p. 99.

²⁸ ASG, Archivio Segreto, n. 2672A, Il Console Generale della Repubblica Ligure in Cadice Andrea Gherardi all'Incaricato d'Affari presso S.M.C. [Ottavio Sappia], 16th of November 1798.

²⁹ John Robert Fisher, "Commerce and the Imperial Decline: Spanish Trade with Spanish America, 1787–1820": *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30 (1981), p. 459–479.

³⁰ Amedeo Lepore, "Il Mediterraneo Napoleonico. Spazi, merci, idee. Le vicende dei traffici coloniali e l'attività di un'impresa mercantile a Cadice nel periodo del blocco continentale": *Tiempos Modernos. Revista Electrónica de Historia Moderna* 4, 9 (2003–2004), p. 1–21, here: p. 16.

two uncles, who were well-off and able to help him.³¹ The prolonged crisis in Cadiz had disruptive consequences on the whole population, oppressed by unemployment, an epidemic of yellow fever,³² and the local military policy. The Bourbonic administration, with the *ordenanzas* of 1802, implemented a program of seafarers' militarisation which intended to regulate the maritime activities even in times of peace. This provision aimed to correct the deficiencies of the previous *ordenanzas*, which had unsuccessfully attempted to make the enrollment attractive by granting to seafarers the exclusive "privileges" of fishing and trading.

The new *ordenanzas*' first concern was to transfer the territorial administration from civil to military personnel, who also received direct command over the conscripts. Then, in an attempt to limit desertions, the decree established rigid norms of conduct not only for the *Armada*, but also for maritime activities. As a consequence many irregularities, even when they occurred on merchant vessels, became crimes under military jurisdiction: practicing lucrative maritime activities without prior registration and unauthorized boarding on domestic or foreign ships were now punished with enrollment in military campaigns or with forced labour in the arsenals. The so-called "privileges", instead, remained the same as those enunciated in 1737.³³

The *ordenanzas* of 1802 managed to increase the Spanish navy's quota of personnel, but they also caused a relevant haemorrhage of seamen, who in many cases emigrated overseas. This phenomenon became particularly evident in Cadiz, where the *Consulado de Indias* in 1804 denounced an alarming migration of sailors, shipwrights, and caulkers.³⁴ According to the *Consulado*, seafarers tried to avoid service in the Spanish navy by all means, due to the inevitable risks related to it, as well as the amount of time it took them to get paid; in many cases they preferred devoting themselves to smuggling or taking

³¹ AGI, Arribadas 209A, Ordenes e informes sobre licencias de embarco, Cadiz, 18th of August 1810.

³² Archivio di Stato di Torino (hereinafter AST), Mazzo Consolati Nazionali Cadice 1790-1835, Andrea Gherardi, Cadiz, 22th of October 1819.

³³ López Miguel/Mirabet Cucala, "La institucionalización de la Matrícula de Mar" (note 17), p. 217-239.

³⁴ AGI, Consulados 62, exp. 11, Representación del Consulado de Cádiz sobre el problema de la emigración de la marinería al extranjero, 17th of June 1804.

refuge in Latin American ports, where the growing number of vessels offered many occasions for employment and good wages.

The extent of the migratory flow is confirmed by the Spanish authorities' increasing interest in foreigners which led to the promulgation of a more inclusive law in order to use them as a basin of recruitment. In 1807 the Crown ordered the compilation of a census where each foreigner had to specify whether he wanted to be considered as a transient or a natural, "so that we can treat him, regarding his rights as well as his duties, with the distinction prescribed by the laws of the Kingdom".³⁵ Then, due to the "current circumstances' compelling needs", the Crown ordered the immediate enlistment of non transient foreigners in the Army.³⁶ In 1817, however, the Genoese consul of Cadiz revealed that the Crown had put its needs before the foreigners' rights guaranteed by law:

"The foreigners were traditionally exempted by extraordinary contributions, forced loans and military service [...], but during the last war against France they were obligated to the same services as the Nationals [...]. All the foreigners with the exception of the consuls were obligated to military service and to quarter the troops. At present, they host the numerous soldiers who are waiting in the port to board for America".³⁷

In his report on the conditions of the Spanish navy, Minister Vázquez Figueroa in 1812 complained that this strategic sector had been "annihilated" by the government's "ignorance and bad faith".³⁸ One of the major pieces of evidence was the state of wages. They were so low that, as Figueroa said, sailors were "devoured by hunger".³⁹ The General Captain of the Department of Cadiz, José de Quevedo, expressed a similar opinion denouncing "the regrettable state of all branches of the Royal Navy because of the authorities' indifference and contempt".⁴⁰

In 1820 the *Cortes* attempted to remedy the situation by nullifying the *matrículas de mar*. Then, they entrusted the regulation of maritime activities and the seafarers' military service to civil officials. The *Cor-*

³⁵ AGI, Consulados 98, Impresos y documentos varios y curiosos, 1771-1849, Bartolomé Muñoz, Madrid, 6th of July 1807.

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ My translation. AST, Mazzo Consolati Nazionali Cadice, 1790-1835, Andrea Gherardi, Cadiz, 10th of June 1817.

³⁸ Javier de Salas, *Historia de la matrícula de mar* (note 16), p. 234.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 238.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 243.

tes also exempted all captains, *patrones*, shipowners, maritime traders, and fishing vessels' owners from service in the *Armada*.⁴¹ These new measures, however, could not help gain the seafarers' trust. It became clear in November 1822 at the calling of the Department of Ferrol's maritime forces, to which only 84 registered individuals out of 1,622 responded. All of them were sick or otherwise unable to perform service.⁴² Maritime activities in Spanish ports, thus, became less and less attractive both for the long established seafarers and for the new waves of Genoese migrants who fled from Liguria for similar reasons.

THE SARDINIAN PENETRATION OF THE RÍO DE LA PLATA ROUTE

As noted above, after the annexation of Genoa by the Sardinian kingdom, the Ligurian merchant navy was reduced to a minimum. However, in a few years the local shipbuilding sector experienced a spectacular recovery owing to the private initiative of the coastal population. Because of a lack of government or other institutional support they resorted to traditional systems of familiar production based on improvised yards along Ligurian coasts.⁴³ The capital needed to finance the fleet's reconstruction came from the modest but constant work of seafarers and small traders who invested their cabotage profits in shipbuilding. Between 1816 and 1831 the number of ships doubled and the tonnage quadrupled.⁴⁴ This growth revealed that Ligurians aimed to participate in Atlantic navigation; but the contemporary crisis of the Spanish imperial trade system centered on Cadiz led them to look for alternative routes.

The annihilation of trade between Genoa and Cadiz is confirmed by the *Guía General de los forasteros* of the port, which noted that none of the 2,083 boats that entered the port in 1815 raised the Sardi-

⁴¹ Decreto XLVII. "Se extinguen las matrículas de mar y se establecen reglas para la navegación y el servicio militar de Marina": *Colección de Decretos y Ordenes Generales de la primera legislatura de las Cortes Ordinarias de 1820 y 1821 desde 6 de julio hasta 9 de noviembre de 1820*, tomo IV (Madrid 1821).

⁴² Javier de Salas, *Historia de la matrícula de mar* (note 16), p. 271.

⁴³ Ugo Marchese, "L'industria ligure delle costruzioni navali dal 1816 al 1859": *Archivio Economico dell'Unificazione Italiana*, vol. VII, fasc. I, 1952, p.1.

⁴⁴ Giulio Giaccheri, *Storia economica del Settecento genovese* (Genoa 1951).

nian flag.⁴⁵ This situation certainly resulted from the Ligurian merchant fleet's state of prostration, but also the insecurity of the bay because of the corsairs – mostly coming from Buenos Aires – who forced many merchant ships to unload in Gibraltar.⁴⁶

To maintain their trade in Spain, Ligurian captains resorted to their traditional strategy of sailing under other nations' flags.⁴⁷ In parallel, they started to orientate their shipping towards other ports where they could access American or Asian goods. Their main destination became Gibraltar, due to the advantageous rates guaranteed by its status as a free port. In a few years the British port superseded Cadiz in transatlantic intermediation; the Spanish emporium, instead, in 1826 chose the path of protectionism, in the hope of recovering the relevant losses caused by independence movements.⁴⁸ Ligurians established an important enclave in Gibraltar,⁴⁹ through which Sardinian vessels illegally shipped a volume of goods that in 1825, according to the French diplomat Baron de Boisilecomte, was greater than those sent from Genoa to the Spanish ports and even than those sent from the United States and the Low Countries.⁵⁰ In Gibraltar, Ligurians mainly shipped Italian and Russian wheat, returning to Genoa with goods coming from Asia and the Americas.

In those years, Sardinian vessels made their first timid attempts to penetrate South America, driven by the dominant protectionism in Europe and the spaces opened by the crisis of the colonial empire. The Río de la Plata ports had been traditionally frequented by foreigners, especially Luso-Brazilians and their British allies, who regularly used them since the 17th century as a backdoor for the smuggling of the

⁴⁵ *Guía General de los forasteros de Cádiz para el año de 1816*, Imprenta de D. Ramón Hoove, Plazuela del Cañón (Cadiz 1816).

⁴⁶ AST, Mazzo Consolati Nazionali Cadice, 1790–1835, Andrea Gherardi, Cadiz, 23rd of February 1816.

⁴⁷ AST, Mazzo Consolati Nazionali Cadice, 1790–1835, Andrea Gherardi, Cadiz, 7th of March 1817.

⁴⁸ García-Baquero González, *Comercio colonial y guerras revolucionarias* (note 27), p. 246.

⁴⁹ Within a few years Gibraltar became one of the main destinations of Ligurian migrants: between the 1st of January 1824 and the 31st of May 1831 only 298 of them went to Cadiz, while those who went to Gibraltar were 913. Molina, "L'emigrazione Ligure a Cadice" (note 3), p. 360.

⁵⁰ Rafael Sánchez Mantero, *Estudios Sobre Gibraltar. Política, diplomacia y contrabando en el siglo XIX* (Cadiz 1999), p. 84

silver coming from the Peruvian city of Potosí;⁵¹ the same viceroyalty had been established in 1776 with the aim of combating foreign influence, but the Crown's projects had failed because of contingencies of war. Spain's involvement in the United States' War of Independence alongside France led to a conflict with Great Britain (1779–1783) which seriously damaged the Spanish monopolistic trade with the colonies. Thus, in 1781 the Crown decided to open the *Carrera de Indias* to the Portuguese flag, allowing foreign merchants to penetrate the Lisbon–Rio de Janeiro–Buenos Aires route.⁵²

The same happened during the British Navy's blockade of Cadiz in 1797, which induced the Crown to open the *Carrera de Indias* to neutral ships. This provision was revoked in 1799, but the return to traditional monopolistic restrictions was impeded by the numerous derogations that the Crown had to grant in order to maintain the fiscal and trade flows between the two shores of the Atlantic. This was because Spanish merchants who were operating in America had reluctance towards giving up the advantages they had acquired with the liberalisation.⁵³ The neutral trade decree favoured not only the traditional maritime powers but also new competitors like the United States,

⁵¹ See for example Sergio R. Villalobos, *Comercio y contrabando en el Río de la Plata y Chile* (Buenos Aires 1965); Hernán A. Silva, "La Colonia del Sacramento, el Virreinato del Río de la Plata y el Libre Comercio. Mito y realidad en el rompimiento de relaciones económicas con el Brasil": idem (ed.), *Navegación y comercio rioplatense*, vol. 1 (Bahía Blanca 1996); Zacarías Moutoukias, "Contrabando y sector externo en Hispanoamérica colonial": Marcelo Carmagnani/Alicia Hernández Chávez/Ruggiero Romano (coords.), *Para una historia de América, II: Los Nudos, I* (Mexico City 1999), p. 172–197; Allan Christelow, "Great Britain and the Trades from Cadiz and Lisbon to Spanish America and Brazil, 1759–1783": *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 27, 1 (1947), p. 2–29.

⁵² It is the case of José María Cambiaso, a Ligurian merchant whose trade house was settled in Lisbon: during the war, he became the greater importer of Río de la Plata's silver and leathers after Agustín Casimiro Aguirre, who was the agent of the powerful trader Ustáriz, relative of viceroy Vertíz and representative of the *Real Consulado* of Cadiz in Buenos Aires. Juan Carlos Garavaglia, *Economía, Sociedad y Regiones* (Buenos Aires 1987), p. 76, 89, and 103. See also Silva, "La Colonia del Sacramento" (note 51), p. 54–59. Regarding the Cambiaso family, see Catia Brillì, *La diaspora commerciale ligure nel sistema atlantico iberico. Da Cadice a Buenos Aires, 1750–1830* (doctoral thesis, Università degli Studi di Pisa 2008), p. 99–100.

⁵³ Tulio Halperín Donghi, *Reforma y disolución de los imperios ibéricos, 1750–1850* (Madrid 1985), p. 81.

which together with Hanseatic, Nordic and Turkish ships began to trade regularly with South American ports.⁵⁴

The Genoese merchants who had settled and prospered in the viceroyalty of Río de la Plata strongly protested against the spread of foreign vessels in the region. In 1802 the shipowners and some captains of vessels anchored in Montevideo, lead by Pascual José Parodi, Carlos Camuso and Bernardo della Torre, presented a memorial to the *cabildo*'s notary Bartolomé Domingo Bianchi, who was also Genoese. The memorial denounced the damages that the Spanish Monarchy had suffered over two centuries from English, French, and Dutch intrusion. The Genoese traders demanded the immediate withdrawal of the decree and hoped for a return to a mythical past, the 16th century, when foreigners were practically abstent from the *Indias*.⁵⁵ However, by then the return to the past was impossible, and soon even the most reluctant realized that foreign ships were vital for the survival of their trade.

The independence movements in Latin America damaged Spanish Atlantic trade to such an extent that, in 1823, the Crown decided to maintain the existing regime of free direct trade between the colonies and the allied powers in order to gain the consent of the Spanish merchants who were established overseas.⁵⁶ This provision clearly did not concern Río de la Plata, which had formally declared its independence in 1816 and opened its ports to foreign trade in 1810. Thus, Spain concentrated its maritime forces in Veracruz, Havana, and Manila, agreeing to share colonial trade profits with the other maritime powers.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Tulio Halperín Donghi, *Revolución y guerra. Formación de una elite dirigente en la Argentina criolla* (Buenos Aires 2005, 2nd ed.), p. 47.

⁵⁵ Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires (hereinafter AGNBA), IX, 31-1-9, leg. 23, exp. 3, Montevideo, 10th of March 1802, "Expediente obrado a representacion del comercio de esta Capital, del de Montevideo, y la de los navieros capitanes y Maestros de los buques surtos en su puerto, sobre que se prohiban las arribadas a estos opuer-tos de barcos extranjeros".

⁵⁶ AGI, Indiferente General 2465, Real orden sobre comercio por los extranjeros, El Rey, Madrid, 10th of March 1824.

⁵⁷ Regarding the conditions of the Spanish navy in those years, see Marina Alfonso Silvia Marzagalli/Bruno Marnot (eds.), *Guerre et économie dans l'espace atlantique du XVIe au XXe siècle* (Bordeaux 2006), p. 63-81.

The Sardinian merchant navy was unable to cope with the competition in the Caribbean. But in Río de la Plata it found the conditions to undertake its Atlantic adventure, playing a complementary function to the Spanish monarchy's need to maintain commercial relations with the lost colony. In order to penetrate the South American routes, Ligurian captains initially did not use their own flag. Marquis Cesare Grimaldi, the first Sardinian Plenipotentiary Minister of Rio de Janeiro, in 1820 informed Turin that Sardinian vessels usually arrived in the ports of Maranhão and Montevideo under the British flag, which they got from Gibraltar.⁵⁸ After establishing the first trade contacts and experiencing the safety of the route, Sardinian vessels began raising their own flag. The commercial paper *British Packet* reported that by 1821 the Sardinian ships' arrivals in Buenos Aires rapidly increased, and continued to do so, particularly between 1829 and 1834.

TABLE 1: ARRIVALS OF SARDINIAN SHIPS IN THE PORT OF BUENOS AIRES⁵⁹

1821	1822	1823	1824	...	1829	1830
3	7	7	6		14	23
1831	1832	1833	1834	1835	1836	1837
20	26	30	43	23	21	20

The case of the brigantine "Trionfo" reveals that Sardinian penetration into Río de la Plata was also supported by local or Spanish merchants searching for neutral flags to cover the lack of Spanish vessels. The "Trionfo" was hired in 1822 by José Requena, José de Vea Murguía and Martín Irazuqui to send a load of leather and other goods from Montevideo to Cadiz. "Because of the critical circumstances in which the shipment was made",⁶⁰ they obtained the right to pay the same customs duties as Spanish vessels paid. Requena had resorted to this gimmick also in 1809, when he asked for permission to hire two neu-

⁵⁸ Marco Mariano/Duccio Sacchi, "La formazione della rete consolare del Regno di Sardegna nelle Americhe, 1815-1860": *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Einaudi* XL (2006), p. 327-370.

⁵⁹ Clifton B. Kroeber, *La navegación de los ríos en la historia argentina* (Buenos Aires 1967), p. 131.

⁶⁰ AGI, Buenos Aires 589, Consulado y Comercio al Director General de Aduana, n. 19, Buenos Aires, 5th of August 1822.

tral ships to send a load from Montevideo. He justified his request by the emergency caused by the war and the scarcity of available Spanish vessels. The authorities not only granted him the permission with the same customs exemptions, but they also instructed Requena to load the vessels in Cadiz with mercury and Spanish goods.⁶¹

Thus, the Spanish merchant navy's disappearance in Río de la Plata opened a new space to Sardinian ships, which in a few years succeeded to impose their own flag in the Atlantic despite the competition of Great Britain and other maritime powers. The traditional ties that Ligurians had woven in Spain played an essential role in this process, as is demonstrated by the relevant contribution of Cadiz to Sardinian trade in South America.

THE ROLE OF CADIZ IN THE CONSOLIDATION OF SARDINIAN TRADE WITH RÍO DE LA PLATA

The crisis of the Spanish empire had not completely annihilated Ligurian trade in Cadiz. The *Guía General de los forasteros* of 1817 reveals that several long established Genoese intermediaries (Ravina, Castañeto, Castelli, Colombo, Enrile, Jordan, Merello, Pallavicini, Patron, Picardo, Procurante and Tomati) had remained active in the port. Surprisingly, also some first-generation immigrants (Firpo, Gazzino, Luchi, Lavaggi, Oneto, and Revello) had chosen this port to settle their trading houses:⁶² although their arrival in Cadiz coincided with one of the darkest periods of the port's history, these new traders consolidated their position by establishing networks with the well-rooted Genoese merchant families and by taking advantage of the Sardinian merchant navy's recovery.

The association between these old and new families emerges in a letter they sent to Turin in 1824 asking for the replacement of the old

⁶¹ Ibidem, Pedro Garibay, Seville, 18th of August 1809; ibidem, D. Josep de Riquena, Cadiz, 30th of June 1809.

⁶² *Guía General de los forasteros de Cádiz para el año de 1817*, Imprenta de D. Ramón Hoove, Plazuela del Cañón (Cadiz 1817). For more information about these families, see Brillì, *La diaspora commerciale* (note 52), chapters 2 and 6; and eadem, "Da Cadice a Buenos Aires: crisi e rinascità del commercio ligure nella nuova configurazione dell'Atlantico iberico, 1797-1837": *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Einaudi*, XLIII (2009) p. 143-173.

and sick Genoese consul Andrea Gherardi by his son Vincenzo. The signatories to the proposal, which was welcomed by Turin, were Angel Gazzino, Juan Felipe Ravina, Domingo Oneto, Angelo Revello, Benedetto Picardo, Luigi Galliano, Nicola Montobbio, Angel Nervi, Alessandro Firpo and J. B. M. Cambiaso.⁶³ It is not clear how they maintained their business during these critical years for the Spanish emporium. In this period most of the goods coming from the international market arrived in Spain from Gibraltar: because of the informal character of this trade, we cannot be sure about the scope of the Genoese involvement in transactions with this British port, but several clues lead us to think that it was not inconsequential.⁶⁴

In regard to Mediterranean trade, Ligurian intermediaries of Cadiz easily consolidated direct and exclusive relations with the Sardinian merchant marine. This became evident in 1818, when all Sardinian ships anchoring in Cadiz were leaving for Genoa and were loaded by Gazzino, Gherardi, and Peñasco.⁶⁵ In November 1819, the commercial paper of Cadiz *Diario del Vigía* registered the presence of three Sardinian vessels, whose loadings were respectively managed by Joaquin Luchy, Angel Gazzino, and Benito Picardo.⁶⁶

Up to 1830 the *Vigía* lacks information about Río de la Plata. In 1828 it noted the arrival of 30 Sardinian vessels but only specified the provenance of five of them (the Caribbean), and the destination of one (Havana). In 1829, we find only two Sardinian vessels, both going to Lima.⁶⁷ In February 1829, the Sardinian brigantine "Esperanza" arrived from Gibraltar with a load of goods imported from Montevi-

⁶³ AST, Mazzo Consolati Nazionali Cadice, 1790–1835, Cadiz, 10th of August 1824.

⁶⁴ In the 1820s, Antonio Domingo Jordan Oneto y Cia and Tomas Ravina protested several bills of exchange for transactions involving traders of Gibraltar: AHPC, Cadiz, Not. 1825, leg. 459, p. 488–489; AHPC, Cadiz, Not. 1825, leg. 459, p. 518–519. There was also a "historical precedent": in 1801 Tomas and Juan Felipe Ravina were arrested with G. B. M. Cambiaso for smuggling in Gibraltar: ASG, Archivio Segreto, n. 2673, Il Commissario Generale delle Relazioni Commerciali della Repubblica Ligure in Andalusia residente in Cadice [Andrea Gherardi] al Cittadino Sappia Incaricato d'Affari della Medesima presso S.M.C., Cadiz, 20th of November 1801.

⁶⁵ *Diario Marítimo del Vigía* (Cadiz 1818).

⁶⁶ AGI, Arribadas 196, Testimonio de revisión de navíos, 1809–1819, Lista semanal de los buques entrados salidos y existentes en Bahía, Cádiz, 1819, n. 48.

⁶⁷ AGI, Indiferente General 2299, Lista semanal de los Buques entrados y salidos y existentes en Bahía, 1829.

deo, addressed to Joaquin Francisco Luchy.⁶⁸ This suggests that, at this time, Gibraltar was still the main hub for South American imports.

It was precisely the untenable competition of Gibraltar that convinced the Spanish authorities to grant Cadiz the privilege of free port, a decision welcomed in the city with "a general jubilation".⁶⁹ That privilege, in force from 1829 to 1832, opened new opportunities to Cadiz, which attracted many vessels that previously preferred to land in Gibraltar.⁷⁰

The *Vigía's* data about the ships involved in Atlantic trade between 1830 and 1835 highlight a clear predominance of the Río de la Plata route for Sardinian vessels sailing between Spain and the Americas.⁷¹ The comparison with other foreign ships that left Cadiz for Río de la Plata in the same years reveals that Sardinians were second only to those of Great Britain.⁷² The register of Genoa's port confirms the significance of that route: in 1833, 33 of the 44 Sardinian vessels departing from Genoa for the Americas were destined to Buenos Aires and/or Montevideo.⁷³

It is interesting to note that most of the Sardinian ships stopped in Cadiz only when they were returning. Between 1830 and 1835, 54 Sardinian ships arrived at Cadiz from Río de la Plata, while only 14 left Cadiz for that destination.⁷⁴ Besides, many of the latter were

⁶⁸ Manifiesto del bergantin-polacra sardo "Esperanza", su capitan Carlos Lazzolo, que entró de Gibraltar el 16 del corriente, consignado a Joaquin Francisco Luchy, *Diario del Vigía*, Cadiz, 25th of February 1829.

⁶⁹ Archivio di Stato di Napoli (hereinafter ASNA), Affari Esteri, Regio Console Napoli a Cadice, 1815–1829, fasc. 2480, Marco Machiavelli al Cav. De' Medici, n. 4, Cadiz, 24th of February 1829.

⁷⁰ The Neapolitan consul of Cadiz in June 1829 noted: "It is incredibile to see how many goods, people and trade house have arrived from Gibraltar to Cadiz after the free port's decree [...] the trade in that place [Gibraltar] is completely paralyzed, without any possibility to recover". ASNA, Affari Esteri, Regio Console Napoli a Cadice, 1820–1829, fasc. 2483, Marco Macchiavelli al Cav. De' Medici, n. 17, Cadiz, 30th of June 1829.

⁷¹ Between 1830 and 1835, 54 of the 65 Sardinian vessels which arrived in Cadiz from the Americas came from Río de la Plata, while 14 of the 20 that left Cadiz for the Americas were destined to Buenos Aires or Montevideo. *Diario del Vigía* (Cadiz 1831–1836).

⁷² The British ships were 34, followed by the Sardinian Kingdom (14), the United States (9), Holland (1), Brazil (1), Tuscany (1), and Belgium (1). *Ibidem*.

⁷³ ASG, Sanità, 1594.

⁷⁴ *Diario del Vigía*, Cadiz, 1831–1836.

coming from Genoa with the hold mostly full. They stopped in Cadiz to complete their loads, sell passage for the Americas, and take orders for return loads. This data reveals that emporium of Cadiz had become a mere end market, with little control over exports and largely dependent on Sardinian vessels for imports from South America.

The Sardinian consul in Cadiz, Tapperi di Castellamonte, in 1831 illustrated the state of commerce:

“The increase in consular income of the past quarter is the result of the growing commercial relations between Genoa and Cadiz. It is confirmed by the arrival in this bay of numerous national vessels returning from several ports loaded with sugar, coffee, indigo and leather. Our captains’ good conduct, economic ability and nautical knowledge lead many foreign merchants to prefer Sardinian ships [...]. There are also several national vessels leaving for the Americas hired by foreign traders, which I have to assist due to the frequent problems caused by their ingenuous and badly organized transactions”.⁷⁵

The Sardinian ships’ registers also show that the sale of their loads in Cadiz was almost exclusively managed by Ligurian traders, mainly the aforementioned Jordan Oneto, Tomas and Juan Felipe Ravina, Angel Revello, and Juan Bautista Chapella: Ligurian wholesalers of Cadiz had become the principal intermediaries for imports from Río de la Plata.

This “state of grace” was short-lived. The privilege of free port did not manage to stimulate Spanish manufacturing in order to cope with the monarchy’s chronic productive deficit. It could not even return to Cadiz its previous importance in the international trade, a purpose that definitively vanished after Latin American independence. The rise of Ligurian trade reveals that the free port’s decree had enriched only the foreign merchants, apart from increasing contraband and damaging the other peninsular ports: all reasons enough to convince the authorities to withdraw the privilege in 1832.

In the following years, Ligurian trade in Cadiz did not experience a sudden collapse because of the persistent usefulness of Sardinian ships in maintaining the commercial relations between Spain and Río de la Plata. It is confirmed by the dispatches that Sardinian and French consuls of Río de la Plata sent to their respective governments in

⁷⁵ AST, Mazzo Consolati Nazionali Cadice, 1790–1835, Tapperi di Castellamonte, Cadiz, 10th of July 1831. Translation by the author.

1834,⁷⁶ as well as by a report which the *Junta de Comercio* of Cadiz addressed to the *Ministerio de Marina* in 1837 asking for the withdrawal of a decree that forbade Sardinian ships from landing in Spanish ports. This provision was only the most recent consequence of the tensions existing between Madrid and Turin because of their respective protectionist policies. It was enacted in response to a similar decree enacted by the Piedmontese government, which in addition had suspended all the Spanish consuls in the Sardinian kingdom.⁷⁷

The *Junta's* plea leaves no doubt about the Sardinian merchant navy's indispensable role for the trade of Cadiz with Río de la Plata:

"The merchants of this city have been unofficially informed [...] of the royal decree that prohibits entrance into the port to those Sardinian vessels devoid of the certificate of the port of origin's Spanish consuls. [The merchants of Cadiz] have turned to this *Junta* in order to implore Her Majesty to dissolve with a new provision the damages caused by this *real orden* to trade with America [...]. Sardinian vessels conduct trade with South America both for their structure [...] and for the protection granted by their flag. At present our merchants are using these vessels to import the goods coming from Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and other ports of that continent. In a few days some of those vessels will arrive in this bay, but their captains are devoid of the required certificate because of the lack of Spanish consuls or vice-consuls in the ports from which they come [...] so that they won't be admitted, and the trade of this port will be sacrificed to the political interests which led to the above mentioned royal provision [...]. [If the decree won't be modified], it will only damage the Spanish trade, because the loads of the Sardinian vessels belong entirely to American and Spanish merchants. Sardinian captains will have to land in Gibraltar, so that [...] the transport of the loads to Spain will be considered as trade with a foreign country concerning the payment of hires and customs duties".⁷⁸

⁷⁶ José Carlos Chiaramonte, "Notas sobre la presencia italiana en el litoral argentino en la primera mitad del siglo XIX": Fernando J. Devoto/Gianfausto Rosoli (eds.), *L'Italia nella società argentina* (Rome 1988), p. 44–58, here: p. 55–56. See also José Carlos Chiaramonte, *Mercaderes del Litoral. Economía y sociedad en la Provincia de Corrientes, primera mitad el siglo XIX* (Buenos Aires 1991), p. 95.

⁷⁷ ASNA, Affari Esteri, Regio Console Napoli a Cadice, 1830–1839, fasc. 2485, Marco Macchiavelli a S.E. il Principe di Cassaro – Ministerio de Estado, n. 46, Real Orden, 8th of August 1837.

⁷⁸ ASNA, Affari Esteri, Regio Console Napoli a Cadice, 1830–1839, fasc. 2485, Marco Macchiavelli a S.E. il Principe di Cassaro – Ministerio de Estado, n. 46, Real Orden, 21th of March 1837, n. 16, Junta de Comercio, José María Pastor, vocal Presidente, José María Aguayo, Secretario Contador al Excelentísimo Señor Secretario de Estado y del Despacho de Marina, Comercio y Ultramar, Cadiz, 8th of March 1837. Translation by the author.

Regardless of the decree's modification, in the following years Sardinian ships' landings in Cadiz slowly decreased to only five in 1843.⁷⁹ This was because of the growing British merchant navy's predominance, the restoration of direct commercial relations between Spain and the South American republics, and the contemporary development of Spanish manufacturing. Genoa would consolidate its direct trade with Río de la Plata, but for the intermediaries of Cadiz and the whole Ligurian commercial settlement of the bay, the economic opportunities declined irrecoverably. In a few years the ancient "emporio del orbe"⁸⁰ had become a mere regional port.

The parenthesis of 1829–1832 demonstrates that the recovery of Ligurian trade in Cadiz had been a consequence of the Sardinian merchant navy's dynamism, favoured by the international conjuncture and the neutrality of its flag. But it was a mutual convenience, as the Spanish market and the traditional Genoese presence in Cadiz played a relevant role in supporting the consolidation of commercial ties between Genoa and Río de la Plata.

LIGURIAN MIGRATION TO ARGENTINA. TOWARDS A NEW SYMBIOSIS

In a few years Argentina also became one of the favourite destinations of those Ligurians escaping from the consequences of the Napoleonic wars. This migratory flow was so vast that it represented the main component of the large Italian settlement in Argentina during the first half of the 19th century.⁸¹ They mainly concentrated in Buenos Aires, where in 1836 resided about 5,000 Ligurians.⁸² This remarkable migratory movement cannot be explained only by the "vacuum" left by the Spanish navy. What attracted these migrants escaping from their own country's conscription policies to a region whose first deca-

⁷⁹ Molina, "L'emigrazione Ligure a Cadice" (note 3), p. 371.

⁸⁰ Gerónimo de la Concepción, *Emporio de el Orbe. Cádiz ilustrada, investigación de sus antiguas grandezas, discurrida en concurso de el general Imperio de España* (Amsterdam 1690).

⁸¹ In 1850, 25,000 to 26,000 Sardinians resided in the Argentinean Confederation, three quarters of which came from Liguria. Fernando J. Devoto, "Liguri nell'America australe": Antonio Gibelli/Paride Rugafiori (eds.), *Storia d'Italia. Le regioni. La Liguria* (Turin 1994), p. 653–688, here: p. 662.

⁸² AST, Consolati Nazionali, Montevideo, bundle n. 1, 1836–1850, Picolet d'Hermillon, Buenos Aires, 3rd of July 1836.

des of independent life were tormented by an uninterrupted series of civil wars and international conflicts?

Independence in the Río de la Plata activated a process of internal “Balkanization” that led to the secession of wide areas – Paraguay, Alto Perú, and Provincia Oriental (present-day Uruguay) – and to the configuration of provincial states contending with Buenos Aires about the definition of the new bases of political legitimacy and for the control of the trade’s customs revenues.⁸³

However, this process also created the conditions for the establishment of Ligurian migrants in the ports of Río de la Plata. The collapse of the colonial order and the crisis of the mining economy decisively reversed the territorial hierarchy. The inland regions linked to silver trade (Jujuy, Salta, Tucumán, Santiago del Estero, Córdoba, La Rioja, Catamarca, San Luis, San Juan, and Mendoza) were marginalized in favour of those of the littoral (Santa Fe, Corrientes, and Entre Ríos), Provincia Oriental, and the province of Buenos Aires, which were oriented to the production of livestock for export. Cattle breeding had started to expand in the second half of the 18th century due to the region’s growing integration in the Atlantic trade and the presence of waterways (the Paraná and Uruguay rivers) which facilitated the local circulation of goods.⁸⁴ After independence, this sector would become the main source of revenue for the republic. By the middle of the 19th century cattle by-products constituted most of Buenos Aires’s exports.⁸⁵

⁸³ At this regard, see José Carlos Chiaramonte, *Ciudades, provincias, estados: los orígenes de la nación argentina, 1800–1846* (Buenos Aires 1997); idem, “Formas de identidad en el Río de la Plata luego de 1810”: *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana ‘Dr. E. Ravignani’* tercera serie, 1, I semestre (1989), p. 71–92; idem, “El federalismo argentino en la primera mitad del siglo XIX”: Marcelo Carmagnani (ed.), *Federalismos latinoamericanos: México/Brasil/Argentina* (Mexico City 1993), p. 81–127; Miron Burgin, *Aspectos económicos del federalismo argentino* (Buenos Aires 1960).

⁸⁴ Roberto Schmit/Miguel A. Rosal, “Las exportaciones del Litoral argentino en el puerto de Buenos Aires entre 1783 y 1850”: *Revista de Historia Económica. Journal of Iberian and Latin American Economic History* 3 (1995), p. 581–607.

⁸⁵ Idem, “Las exportaciones pecuarias bonaerenses y el espacio mercantil rioplatense, 1768–1854”: Raul O. Fradkin/Juan Carlos Garavaglia, *En busca del tiempo perdido. La economía de Buenos Aires en el país de la abundancia, 1750–1865* (Buenos Aires 2004), p. 159–193; John Lynch, “Las repúblicas del Río de la Plata”: *Historia de América Latina*, vol. 6 (Barcelona 1991), p. 264–315.

The economic and demographic growth of the so-called *cuenca rioplatense* gave the river trade an increasing protagonism in the articulation between local and international markets.⁸⁶ The rivers became not only the Argentinean economy's strategic axis (and one of the main reasons for interprovincial conflicts), but also an opportunity for Genoese migrants. Due to their experience in commerce and navigation, Ligurians had no difficulty in penetrating this profitable sector: in the 1830s and 1840s, they were the largest foreign group engaged in river trade.⁸⁷ They also contributed to the development of the local shipbuilding sector by settling small yards for the construction of cabotage ships at the mouth of the river and importing vessels and naval equipments from Genoa.⁸⁸

In critical circumstances, Ligurians established profitable ties of reciprocity with the new host society. When the United Provinces of Río de la Plata went to war against Brasil for control of Provincia Oriental (1825–1828), Ligurian traders asked the authorities of Buenos Aires for numerous commercial and privateering licenses in order to protect river trade. One of the first was the great shipbuilder Carlos Galliano, who asked for a licence in defence of the “national interests” and armed his schooner “Anna Bella” with two cannons to combat nine Brazilian privateers in the *puertos de arriba*.⁸⁹ The government had enacted a decree that prohibited the arming of ships if their capacity was less than 25 tons. Nevertheless, the impossibility of guaranteeing the rivers' security caused numerous protests from the captains, which led to the decree's withdrawal and to the concession of privateering or commercial licenses even to smaller boats: Captain Domingo Grimaldi and Nicolas Siniglia could arm their *ballenera* “Provincia Oriental”, and Girolamo Sciurano did the same with his *lanchón* “Recompensa”; Captain José Claveli, by virtue of his protests, obtained not only the license of privateering for him and for his second in

⁸⁶ Roberto Schmit/Miguel A. Rosal, “Comercio, mercados e integración en la Argentina del siglo XIX”: *Cuadernos del Instituto Ravignani* 9 (1995), p. 5–118.

⁸⁷ Chiaramonte, *Mercaderes del Litoral* (note 76), p. 91–96. One third of the ships that arrived in the river port of Paraná between 1843 and 1853 were steered by Sardinian captains. Beatriz Bosch, “Notas sobre la navegación fluvial, 1843–1853”: *Ensayos e Investigaciones* 19 (jul.–dic. 1975), p. 325–345, here: p. 335.

⁸⁸ Brillì, *La diaspora commerciale* (note 52), p. 274–276.

⁸⁹ AGNBA, X, 14-9-7, Informe al Comandante General de Marina, Buenos Aires, 28th of June 1828.

command, Antonio Carbon, but also permission to arm all residents' boats.⁹⁰ Even though Provincia Oriental was eventually lost and became independent, it seems that Ligurian mobilization was successful. The data of the ships' arrivals in Buenos Aires reveals that the first great increase of Ligurian presence in cabotage trade coincided with the war's conjuncture, by going from 89 landings in 1823 to 215 in 1828.⁹¹ Engagement in defence of the host society's interests had allowed Ligurians to protect and even extend their own economic activities.

In the following years, Ligurians continued to play an important role in the growing local economy. Though there was no diplomatic or commercial treaty between the Argentine Confederation and the Sardinian kingdom – it wasn't signed until 1855 – under Rosas's regime (1829–1852) Ligurians benefited from informal governmental protection. They were free to register their own boats under the flag of Buenos Aires, had no problem in starting commercial or productive activities, and were substantially exempted from military service.⁹² For some of them, the maritime conflicts that afflicted the region in the following years represented a profitable opportunity: during the French blockade of the port of Buenos Aires (1845–1848), the safety of the neutral Sardinian flag allowed Ligurian captains to play an essential role of commercial intermediation.⁹³

All this explains why, despite the local political instability and the lack of a governmental migratory policy to attract them, in a few years Genoese established a larger settlement in Buenos Aires than the one in Cadiz.

⁹⁰ AGNBA, X, 14-9-7, Informe al Comandante General de Marina, Buenos Aires, 22nd of June 1828, 27th of June 1828, and 4th of August 1828. See also the cases of the schooner "Estrella del Sud", the *ballenera* "Convención Argentina", the "Trionfo Argentino", the schooner "General Brown", the lugger "General Lavalle", the *ballenera corsario* "Recompensa", the *ballenera corsario* "Provinciano Oriental", the *lanchón* "Republicano Argentino", the *lanchón* "La Venganza de la Carlota", the *ballenera corsario* "Carlota", AGNBA, X, 4-5-5, 1826–1827, and, finally, the case of the *ballenera* "La Liguria", AGNBA, X, 14-5-1.

⁹¹ AGNBA, X, 36-8-9, 36-8-10.

⁹² Brilli, *La diaspora commerciale* (note 52), p. 271–320; Juan Carlos Garavaglia, "Ejército y milicia: los campesinos bonaerenses y el peso de las exigencias militares, 1810–1860": *Anuario IEHS* 18 (2003), p. 153–187, here: p. 159.

⁹³ During the blockade, Ligurian traders dominated the expeditions from Buenos Aires to Brasil and Europe by using Sardinian ships, which were hired also by Argentinean and foreign merchants. Kroeber, *La navegación de los ríos* (note 59), p. 236–238.

CONCLUSION

Studies of trade networks and diasporas have shown that imperial metropolis' difficulty in coping with "the strength of Atlantic geography" offered economic opportunities not only to other great maritime powers, but also to small dynamic merchant groups lacking navies, trade treaties, and significant political support from the mother country.⁹⁴ This was true for Ligurians as well. They structured their participation in the Atlantic trade by establishing a symbiotic alliance with the Crown of Castile. The loss of this privileged position in the 17th century induced them to adopt different strategies to maintain their trade with America. Those strategies succeeded because they continued to fill the Spanish monarchy's needs and never represented a menace to the Empire's integrity.

After Spanish American independence, the Genoese Atlantic trade not only persisted but entered a new phase of expansion. While under Spanish mercantilism Cadiz was the center of Ligurian trade with the *Indias*, with the disruption of the colonial order Cadiz became the springboard for the Sardinian Atlantic adventure. The conflicts that reconfigured the Iberian world allowed Ligurians to expand their trade and migratory networks in the Río de la Plata, where they were able to create new forms of reciprocity with local society and institutions.

Their story helps us to understand what at first glance appears as a paradox: the capacity of a mercantile diaspora to prosper within the Spanish empire as well as to benefit from its collapse.

⁹⁴ See for example the bibliography proposed by Horst Pietschmann (ed.), *Atlantic History. History of the Atlantic System, 1580–1830* (Göttingen 2002), p. 33; Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History. Concept and Contours* (Cambridge/London 2005); Pieter C. Emmer/Wim Klooster, "The Dutch Atlantic, 1600–1800. Expansion without Empire": *Itinerario* XXIII, 2 (1999), p. 48–69; Jonathan Israel, *Diaspora within a Diaspora: Jews, Cripto-Jews, and the World of Maritime Empires 1540–1740* (Leiden 2002); Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation Upon the Ocean Sea. Portugal's Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire, 1492–1640* (Oxford 2007).