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*The «Nationality» of Sea-Borne Trade  
between England  
and the Mediterranean around 1400\**

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The increasingly wide and rich range of sources available to the economic historian has made it possible for us increasingly to penetrate and understand economic phenomena, so that we are able to capture even their slightest variations. Particularly valuable is the evidence which was created step by step as the events themselves were developing, for evidence of this sort has the great advantage of resulting directly from commercial transactions themselves, arising either from the need for planning or (even more valuable) from the need to direct and manage. Of course, the records dealing with the final and conclusive stages of a commercial operation also have added value in that they contain a systematic summary of the results. Evidence of this sort is to be found in particular in both commercial letter-books, which are rich in information of all kinds and often in penetrating observations as well,<sup>1</sup> and in account books which provide accurate quantitative

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\* This article by Federigo Melis was received some weeks before his death. This Journal is honoured to be able to publish it, and will publish an appraisal of Federigo Melis as a historian of Europe in one of its forthcoming issues.

<sup>1</sup> I have had various opportunities of illustrating the nature of this commercial correspondence and to emphasize its incomparable breadth: cf. my volume *Documenti per la Storia Economica dei Secoli XIII-XVI*, Firenze 1972, pp. 14-27, 136-229.

records.<sup>2</sup> Documents of this kind are particularly valuable for reconstructing and explaining the various operations involved in commercial transactions, and allow us to distinguish individual actions, to determine whether they were essential or secondary, and also to understand and evaluate accurately the whole.

One of the most interesting topics which can be studied through such documents is sea-borne trade in its different forms, and in particular the question of the "nationality" of commercial operations and the importance of a secondary or auxiliary (or in today's term "tertiary") factor such as shipping, on the primary factor of commercial exchange, both in economic (the price of transport and its share in the total formation of costs) and technical terms (such as the chronology, duration and frequency of shipping services for example). I have already employed documentation of this type to throw light on the economic aspects of the second of these problems, for the documents clearly indicate that by the end of the 14th century the charges for sea transport were ideally suited to the commercial requirements of different groups of commodities, and discriminated in a modern way, that is in direct proportion to their value, so that they weighed more heavily on the cost of expensive goods than on those that were cheap.<sup>3</sup> In this present essay I shall be concerned only with the problem of "nationality".

It is often the case that the "nationality" of a commercial operation is deduced solely from the nationality of the transport employed, but in fact this is to confuse a secondary for a primary factor. The large number of Venetian and particularly Genoese vessels in the ports of the North Sea, for example, is often taken as an indication of the overall, and even of the absolute, predominance of these two over all other Italian cities in trade with

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<sup>2</sup> The analytical and preparatory branches of accountancy, which hitherto have been neglected, were well developed, especially for the topics with which this essay is concerned: cfr. my study *op. cit.*, pp. 61-70.

<sup>3</sup> This brought with it one of the major developments in our civilization, the importance of which was not solely economic, since it allowed the development of a mass market which brought incalculable advantages for the poorer social orders: cf. my article *Werner Sombart e i problemi della navigazione nel Medio Evo*, in « L'Opera di W. Sombart nel centenario nella nascita », Milano 1964, pp. 87-149.

this area. The same is also argued for Catalonia and the Biscayan towns, whose ships often visited the same area, the Biscayans from the late 14th century and the Catalans in considerable numbers from the mid-15th. A particularly striking example of such arguments is to be found in Gino Luzzatto's work on Florence, which despite its great value tends to rely on such arguments almost exclusively. It is claimed, for example, that Florence, one of the major Italian commercial centres, was able to expand its sea-borne trade on any significant scale only after 1421, once it had established its own fleet — with "galleys" to perform State services on the Venetian model<sup>4</sup> — and had also gained possession of a port of its own with the acquisition of Porto Pisano and Livorno.<sup>5</sup> The possession of the fleet and the port are thus seen to have been necessary for Florence to play an appreciable role in maritime trade. But in order to have reached the very peaks of expansion in maritime commerce, however, it had only been necessary to be able to use them when necessary; not to own them.<sup>6</sup>

I think it is essential to distinguish between the terms "maritime power" and "naval power".<sup>7</sup> The first refers to commercial activity, while the later simply implies shipping. To my mind the term "maritime power" should be used to describe only those countries which were heavily involved in sea-borne trade, irrespective of the means of transport (both ships and ports) used. "Naval power" on the other hand should be reserved for those countries which possessed numerous ships and were heavily engaged in shipping (by virtue of which they also came to develop as "maritime powers", and made use of ships belonging to other countries).

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<sup>4</sup> For details of the Florentine galleys see: M. MALLET, *The Florentine Galleys in the Fifteenth Century*, Oxford 1967.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. G. LUZZATTO, *Storia Economica d'Italia. Il Medioevo*, Firenze 1963, pp. 220-221; for reference to the acquisition of the port. For more general references see also the other arguments in the same volume and the major works by the same author.

<sup>6</sup> With reference to Florence and the port — or ports — which it could use, see my article *Firenze e le sue comunicazioni con il mare nei secoli XIV-XV*, in « *Arti e Mercature* », a. XIX, 1964, pp. 19-32. For the other aspect of the question references will be found in my various works and I shall return to it in this essay.

<sup>7</sup> Occasionally Luzzatto does speak of Florence as a 'naval power' when it was building up its own fleet.

At opposite poles in this distinction are the Biscayan towns and Florence. The former constituted a naval power, and made little use of their shipping in their own commercial transactions. The second, despite the fact that it only occasionally possessed any vessels (and even then in very small numbers) still constituted one of the greatest, if not the greatest, "maritime powers". This was possible because Florence made use of the shipping of all other countries, Genoese, Catalan, Venetian, Provençal, Andalusian, Basque, Portuguese, English, Flemish and German, as well as those from smaller Italian shipping centres, at least until 1400, without discrimination, so that it was often the case that her shipping was entirely chartered, either for individual voyages or for stipulated periods, and this was true even of convoys.

We can draw this rough conclusion from these two opposite examples (but it can be applied to other cities as well) thanks to the huge volume of sources of the type which I mentioned at the outset. They allow us to go down into the very holds of the vessels (especially the larger ones which were more carefully watched over) and inspect every item of the cargo intended for trade, and it is this alone which makes it possible to attribute the "nationality" of the different commodities involved in commercial transactions.

For the present I shall be concerned only with the principal English ports — London and Southampton — in particular in the twenty-year period bridging the 14th and 15th centuries, which is the period for which the sources are the most relevant, and for which there is also a considerable amount of Datini material, which in fact makes it possible to reconstruct virtually completely the traffic in these ports. This is facilitated by the fact that we have similar information for Bruges, which acted as the main terminus for many of the shipping routes which called at Southampton or London (for the State galleys of Venice, for example, which formed a single convoy but split up to visit London, Sandwich or Bruges). Concentrating on the contents of the holds of some of the larger ships and some of the more important shipping services, I shall attempt to divide the cargoes into two categories: on the one hand those despatched by the Italian cities of the interior (with particular

attention to the principal cities concerned, Florence, Milan and Lucca) and on the other those originating in the shipping cities themselves, especially Genoa, Venice and Catalonia, which dealt with the largest cargoes carried between the two seas. In short, I shall attempt to show in rounded terms, and drawing on only the very large scale operations, the extent of the involvement of the inland cities in maritime trade, as well as that of the main shipping ports, which were able to employ vessels of other nationalities as well.

The most important and decisive evidence is provided by the number of charters to which the great Florentine companies had frequent recourse, especially those based in Bruges with agencies in London, when trading between the Mediterranean and the North Sea. If we look only at the period 1391 to 1410, we find that at least 164 vessels sailed from the English ports (the majority had come from Sluys, the port of Bruges) for destinations in the central Mediterranean which were chartered in full by Florentines, while some were even destined for Egypt and the Levant.<sup>8</sup> The annual average reached the surprisingly high figure of 8 and more.

Normally the charter was made for the whole voyage, and was particularly frequent for the return passage. For certain years as many as three or four Genoese ships, out of a total of five, carried back goods from England "for our country", as Florentines used to write.<sup>9</sup> On other occasions such references were accompanied

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<sup>8</sup> Lack of space prevents me giving full archival references, as this would be very cumbersome. I shall refer only to the main sources, which are comprised of the Datini letter-books containing correspondence from Bruges and London (written to Florence, Prato, Pisa, Genoa, Avignon, Barcelona, Valencia and Palma de Majorca) and much other material, including reports from the other principal Italian and Western Mediterranean cities. This is due to the practice of distributing news in a manner which I would call capillary, at least for the main agencies which attracted the most amazing number of letters from even the most far-flung places, just as replies were equally copiously returned to them.

<sup>9</sup> *Archivio Datini, Prato*, n. 905, letter from Paris to Barcelona, Comp. Giovanni Orlandini (this was the despatching agency; when the recipient was the Datini Comp. in the place to which the letter was addressed this is not indicated) 27th Feb. 1406 (the modern dating system was always used). The contract for the journeys was renewed and the name of the ship together with that of the company using it was registered as it was their property. For example there are references to ships of the Pazzi, of the

by a description of the cargo; for example the "alum ship" belonging to the Alberti which distributed its northern goods in various Mediterranean centres before continuing to Altoluogo (present day Ayasuluk) to return with a cargo composed principally of that commodity; the Alberti also possessed "herring boats" which took on this name on their return journey.<sup>10</sup>

As far as the Florentines were concerned the largest number of their charters were contracted with the Genoese, whose ships were larger<sup>11</sup> and more resistant to the dangers of the voyage.<sup>12</sup> In reading the letters sent from Bruges one is struck by the great freedom with which the Florentine companies based there ordered and effected the movement of ships so that they might reach ports where there were goods that they desired, as was the case with Southampton. « Pietro Nottone [of Savona] has an agreement with us Florentines and will go to England to load wool: Termo Centurione and Polo Italiano [of Genoa] will also proceed to England to see if they can obtain madder there, because there is need of another vessel for the Florentines in addition to that of Pietro Nottone . . . », <sup>13</sup> « . . . together with the others we have

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Medici, of the Portinari, of the Alberti, of the Capponi, of the Orlandini, of the Tornabuoni etc., as well as of the Guinigi, of the Dal Portico, the Quarti, the Bernardini and the Bocci (see my references to the Lucchesi below).

<sup>10</sup> For example: 26th Jan. 1398 the ship of Giame Inglés of Bilbao reached Majorca from Bruges. It had been chartered by the company of Alberto degli Alberti, and was loaded with herrings. ADP, n. 966, *Letter from Barcelona to Valencia*, Comp. Datini, 7th Feb. 1398; n. 1048, *Letter Barcelona-Majorca*, Comp. Datini, 12th Feb. 1398. As well as the herrings about 40% of the cargo was composed of: Flemish madder, together with goods brought from the 'Germanic' lands such as furs and copper pots: n. 1059 *Letter Bruges-Majorca*, Comp. Alb. Alberti, 28th Oct. 1397. Other vessels which the Alberti had chartered in full occur repeatedly, many of which carried more varied cargoes (cloth and wool featured prominently) although they also experienced difficult times — one for example ran aground at Plymouth (n. 854, *Letter Bruges-Barcelona*, Comp. G. Orlandini, 1st July 1400) and another was shipwrecked in the Guadalquivir (n. 856, *Letter Bruges-Barcelona*, Comp. Tommaso Quarti, 11 July 1410).

<sup>11</sup> From the second half of the 14th century Genoese ships (amongst which I have included indiscriminately those of Savona) operating in the North Sea always exceeded 700 barrels capacity (equivalent to 500 tons), while those over 1,000 barrels were not exceptional.

<sup>12</sup> On shipping risks and the resilience of medieval ships see my *Origini e sviluppo delle assicurazioni in Italia (secoli XIV-XVI)*, to appear shortly.

<sup>13</sup> ADP, n. 980, *Letter Bruges-Valencia*, Comp. Orlandini, 16th Jan. 1406.

chartered two of the five Genoese vessels coming from the Levant, that of Nicolo Lomellino and that of Paganino da Biascia . . . ».<sup>14</sup> Such references could be repeated for all the 164 operations together with the names of all the vessels involved.

The Genoese, like all the other naval powers, went to great lengths to offer their vessels to the Florentines, as can be inferred from the jealousies which arose when their Catalan or Venetian rivals attempted to do the same. Such jealousy was apparent, for example, when the Genoese learned of negotiations between the Florentines and the huge Barcelona vessel belonging to Gherardo di Don (of 1000 barrels capacity), since it was remarked in a letter of the Orlandini company that « . . . the Genoese have interfered, and they have no desire that vessels other than their own should gain any footing here . . . ».<sup>15</sup>

It seems also to have been the case that if the Florentines did not contribute to the cargo of the Genoese vessels, then they often sailed with empty or nearly empty holds. One of the many references available states: « . . . on this day (23rd August 1407) the ship of Batista Lomellini which was returning to Genoa loaded in Antona (i.e. Southampton) 70 bales of wool and 15 bales of cloth set sail; it was not given more goods because our people will not send any there, so that they may not be troubled by Buccicalto » (the governor Boucicault).<sup>16</sup>

To meet the needs of the Florentines, the Ligurian ships whose holds were filled with their goods (and even those which had not been fully chartered by the Florentines, to which I shall refer shortly) called first at the port of Pisa, which was the most convenient and popular unloading point for Florence, and even went to

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<sup>14</sup> The other ships were commanded by Gabriele Grillo, Giuliano da Mare and Raffaele Larcaro (from Savona), and a 'cocca' from Venice also sailed with them: ADP, n. 664, *Letter London-Firenze*, Comp. Domenico Caccini and Piero Cambini, 27th Dec. 1401; n. 777, *Letter London-Genova*, Comp. G. Orlandini and Neri Vettori, 5th Oct. 1401.

<sup>15</sup> ADP, n. 855, *Letter Bruges-Barcelona*, Comp. G. Orlandini, 10th Nov. 1404.

<sup>16</sup> ADP, n. 856, *Letter Bruges-Barcelona*, Comp. G. Orlandini, 14th Sept. 1407. In order to avoid returning with short cargoes the Genoese, Venetian and Catalan ships lingered on in the ports of Bruges, London and Southampton. There are many references to this, and the phrase justifying such delays « because they are awaiting the Florentines cargo » is often to be found.

the trouble of calling at Piombino or Talamone when Florence had to use these ports during the war with Pisa (Motrone, the port of Lucca, was also used for smaller consignments). When it happened that the first, or only, stop was made at Genoa, it is clear from the commercial correspondence that the goods were destined either for Genoa or the Po valley or even for Venice.<sup>17</sup>

From this it is also apparent that the Florentine shipments in the North Sea ports often filled the holds of several vessels at any given moment. The use of convoys became ever more widespread, and was nearly always adopted by the Genoese "caracks" which gathered in Sluys and Southampton, often in numbers as great as nine, and were sometimes also joined by vessels of other nationalities. I have elsewhere remarked that they were accompanied by a Venetian ship and would now add that the same occurred for certain Catalan vessels.<sup>18</sup>

In terms of full charters, then, the vessels of at least eight different nations were involved in Florentine commerce, with the Biscayan ports heading the list until the last years of the 14th century. In every port between Fuentarrabia and Bayonne (slightly north of the outlet of the Miño) ships were built which plied between the two seas, mainly in the service of foreigners, especially the great Florentine companies and to a lesser extent those of Lucca and Milan.<sup>19</sup>

In the final years of the *Trecento* the Catalan fleet began to press irresistably forward.<sup>20</sup> The huge vessel owned by Gherardo di

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<sup>17</sup> To send goods to Venice, the Florentines frequently landed them at Genoa or Porto Pisano, after which they followed the various land and river routes. This was in order to save time as the Venetian convoys had to circumnavigate the peninsula, and also to spread their operations with Venice over as many routes as possible (Florence also employed the sea routes of course). See my *Le comunicazioni transpeninsulari sostenute da Venezia nei secoli XIV e XV*, in «Economia e Storia» a. 1972, pp. 157-174.

<sup>18</sup> The most striking example occurred in 1400, when there were 9 Genoese ships at Southampton (two of which were from Savona, those commanded by Barnaba d'Entruo and Novello Lucaro, while there were two more at Bruges at the same time: ADP, n. 854, *Letter from Bruges to Barcelona*, Comp. G. Orlandini, 19th May 1400.

<sup>19</sup> Bilbao and Bermeo held the lead in this. I have come across at least 30 ships which had come from there in the 20 years in question.

<sup>20</sup> I use this time in its widest sense, including the ships of Barcelona, Valencia, Majorca and even those of Collioure, although these were used only for partial charters.

Dono,<sup>21</sup> to which we have already referred, was accompanied by many others.<sup>22</sup> The Catalans were extremely keen to win charters from the Florentine companies, and even began to organize regular convoys along the lines of the Venetian republic's "*muda di Fiandra*" under State direction. The initiative came from the Catalans in Bruges with regard to the expeditions between that country and England, and the Florentines intervened to obtain them safe-conducts in England.<sup>23</sup> It is important not to forget political events, and especially the relations between Britain and France who were engaged in the Hundred Years War, with consequent reprisals and so forth, when explaining why the shipping of certain countries was considered preferential by the Florentines at certain moments. A good example of this may be found in the correspondence of the company of Francesco Tornabuoni and Piero Gambini: « . . . we believe that it will be best this year to use vessels other than Genoese, due to what has befallen their ships captured by the English; due to the war they are believed to be Frenchmen, so that we cannot use their ships in that country and have little confidence in them. Let them arrange to obtain two good Catalan ships . . . ».<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> There was of course no definitive port. When preparing to besiege Pisa, the Florentines simply stopped using it and turned to Piombino and Talamone: « the ship of Gherardo di Dono will go to England to load, and all we Florentines are agreed that it should proceed to Piombino or Talamone to land its cargo for Florence. It will be a fine cargo for we have taken a large charter »: ADP, n. 1060, *Letter Bruges-Majorca*, Comp. G. Orlandini, 17th Dec. 1404. In fact it left Southampton on the 16th March 1405 carrying over 2,000 '*pocche*' of wool and some hundreds of bales of wool as well as tin and hides: ADP, n. 980, *Letter Bruges-Valencia*, Comp. G. Orlandini, 11th April 1405.

<sup>22</sup> The names of some of the captains, which were often given an Italian form, spring to mind from the documents: Ramón Ferrer, Niccolao Madriges, Francesco Colobiere, Pere Brunochieri, Stefano Broglio, Giovanni Bastieri (the latter from Collioure).

<sup>23</sup> The Orlandini Company wrote to the Datini agency in Barcelona in the following terms: « . . . these Catalans have spoken to us Florentines and have told us that they hope to find cargo for the return journey, and that they believe that the city of Barcelona will send two or three galleys here in the Venetian style. They say that they have loaded goods everywhere, even at Pisa and Motrone. And we have told them in turn that we will give them cargo . . . and as they cannot go to England we shall try to obtain safe-conducts for them so that they might go there »: ADP, n. 853, *Letter Bruges-Barcelona*, 10th Jan. 1400, 1t (in indicating position I will indicate where a passage occurs on the reverse).

<sup>24</sup> ADP, n. 648, *Letter Bruges-Firenze*, Comp. Francesco Tornabuoni and P. Cambini, 30th June 1405.

Even many Venetian ships gave over their entire holds to Florentine merchants, the contracts often being drawn up in Bruges even though the main cargo was loaded in England.<sup>25</sup> On such occasions the Venetian ships also made Pisa their first port of call in the Mediterranean, although it was otherwise rarely used, while Genoa of course was never touched.<sup>26</sup> The Venetian State galleys also took on considerable quantities of Florentine goods<sup>27</sup> which were unloaded at various points<sup>28</sup> but in particular in Venice, from whence they were distributed by agencies or correspondents and on occasions even reached Florence.<sup>29</sup> In 1401, for example, the Florentine cargo was so considerable that the Venetians made Pisa their first port of call in the Mediterranean, and unloaded some three fifths of their goods there, some of which were taken on to Venice, through the activities of other merchants, and arrived there considerably faster than those which had remained in the holds of the galleys. The journey from Pisa via Florence, Bologna and Ferrara (which had its own port, Francolino, on the Po) to Venice could take as little as 12 days, or even less, while the Venetian

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<sup>25</sup> The larger cargoes loaded at Southampton in comparison with Bruges should be seen as an indication of the complementary nature of the composition of the loads in the two ports, and not as a recurrent phenomenon as has been claimed by R. DE ROOVER, *La Balance Commerciale entre les Pays Bas et l'Italie au quinzième siècle*, «Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire», XXXVII (1959), pp. 374-386. The late Belgian-American historian's contention that many ships on the return voyage did not call at Bruges is in fact correct, but it was also the case that the English ports were often missed out as well.

<sup>26</sup> Always as a result of the operations in Bruges, as this reference to a typical charter indicates: «and then two days ago another catak set sail, ser Paolo Bianco of Venice being its master, of 450 barrels capacity, which we have chartered to go to Antona [Southampton] to load wool for the Florentines there; when it leaves there it will proceed to Pisa», ADP, n. 753, *Letter Bruges-Genova*, Comp. Luigi and Silvestro Mannini, 9th Feb. 1397. When the charter was settled, partnership with a Lucca company was also formed; ADP, n. 1072, *Letter London-Majorca*, Comp. Alamanno and Antonio Mannini, 8th April 1397.

<sup>27</sup> Normally the annual convoy consisted of 4 or 5 vessels. On reaching Sandwich it split in two, two galleys proceeding up the Thames to London, the others going on to Sluys.

<sup>28</sup> The ports which were never missed were Cadiz (rarely Malaga), Alicante or Valencia, Majorca and Sicily (Palermo or Messina); the same was true for the outward voyage.

<sup>29</sup> On this see my article *Le comunicazioni transpeninsulari . . .*, *cit. supra*.

*muda* which left Pisa on 21st November only reached Venice on 3rd January 1402.<sup>30</sup>

Although not many, there were also a few Provençal vessels which were chartered in full by the Florentines — in particular the ship of Giam Bottone<sup>31</sup> is often mentioned — while others were chartered in part. At times certain northern ships were also to be found on these routes, but this was rather rare, as one can imagine. In 1393, however, the English ship belonging to « messer Tommaso di Presi » was chartered in London for a voyage to Pisa by the Manini company together with two other Florentine companies.<sup>32</sup> In the same year a Flemish vessel, from Zeeland, sailed from London to Pisa, chartered by Florentines who due to the danger of war between Genoa and Catalonia wished, as was their custom, to take advantage of its availability.<sup>33</sup>

It is worth drawing attention to the fact that the voyages of these two ships into the Mediterranean are of interest because of the year in which they occurred. This is much earlier than what are believed to be the first examples of this kind, which are normally dated in the early 15th century. However, the first established case goes back to 1348, when certain Flemish vessels from Bruges visited the Mediterranean; to 1390 for Andalusian vessels from Seville; to 1391 for Portuguese vessels from Lisbon; and to 1392

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<sup>30</sup> There are numerous references in the Archive to this voyage, as there are for all the other *muda*. It is mentioned in particular in the letters from Bruges and London, and those from Majorca, Livorno (in this rising city the leading Pisan agencies operating in Porto Pisano had their headquarters), Pisa, Firenze and Venice.

<sup>31</sup> ADP, n. 1060, *Letter Bruges-Majorca*, Comp. G. Orlandini, 17th Dec. 1404. As always I refer only to the document which refers most extensively to this in order to save space.

<sup>32</sup> ADP, n. 777, *Letter London-Genova*, Comp. L. & S. Mannini, 5th Oct. 1392.

<sup>33</sup> « A ship belonging to a Zeelander named Pieter Suto from a town on the island of Midelburg called La Vera [present day Veere], who is an excellent seaman and his ship is good and stout too » (its capacity was 600 barrels): ADP, n. 664, *Letter from London to Florence*, Comp. A. & A. Mannini, 16th March 1392.

<sup>34</sup> See my *Origini e sviluppo delle assicurazioni...*, etc., cit.

<sup>35</sup> See my *Documenti per la storia economica nei secoli XIII-XVI*, cit.

<sup>36</sup> See my paper at the Conference of foreign merchants in the Iberian peninsula, held at Cologne in 1967: *Di alcune figure di operatori economici fiorentini attivi nel Portogallo nel XV secolo*, in « Fremde Kaufleute auf der Iberischen Halbinsel », Cologne-Vienna 1970, pp. 56-73.

for German vessels.<sup>37</sup> With the passing of the century, however, all the Atlantic fleets of the late Middle Ages had begun to operate in the Mediterranean, except for the Norman, mainly as a result of the Hundred Years War,<sup>38</sup> and the English, which began to expand only in the later 15th century.<sup>39</sup>

The 15th century, however, saw a tremendous expansion in the Portuguese fleet. The Florentine companies in Lisbon, who operated through other Florentines in Italy, Flanders and England, played an important role in providing employment for it, both through charters for certain periods and for stipulated journeys. The Florentines used it to ply between the two seas, or between Madeira and both the North and the Mediterranean, or else simply directly to and from Lisbon. The latter was the case after 1435 when a number of important Florentine merchant bankers, including Bartolomeo di Iacopo de ser Vanni, Giovanni di Bernardo Guidetti, and, above all, Bartolomeo di Domenico Marchionni, who were also owners of whaling boats, became established in Lisbon.<sup>40</sup>

A similar pattern is evident for the other three leading cities of the Italian hinterland, Lucca, Milan and Piacenza. They nearly always used only partial charters (to which I shall return shortly), however, although there are certain exceptional cases of full charters for both the Lucchesi<sup>41</sup> and the Milanese.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> There is reference to a certain '*Gian tedesco*' sailing from Bruges for Genoa (ADP, n. 753, *Letter Bruges-Genova*, Comp. Vieri de' Medici, 31st Oct. 1392). In the same period it was recorded that « a ship of Germans, captained by Guglielmo Stoldi, coming from Flanders » berthed at Porto Pisano (n. 684, *Letter Pisa-Firenze*, Comp. Datini, 22nd Dec. 1392); a little earlier, five days after calling at Lisbon, « two ships of Germans coming from Flanders... and never were there finer ships to be seen » called at the island of Ibiza (n. 885, *Letter Ibiza-Barcelona*, Giovanni di Gennaio, 15th April 1404). On the arrival of the English and Portuguese in the Mediterranean see J. HEERS, *L'expansion maritime portugaise à la fin du moyen âge: la Méditerranée*, in « *Rivista da Faculdade de Letras de Lisboa* », s. 2, t. XXII, 1956, pp. 84-112.

The Florentines had visited Harfleur for some time, and the main ship yards on the Seine estuary were sited there.

<sup>39</sup> See my *Documenti per la storia economica...*, *cit.*, p. 454.

<sup>40</sup> See my paper *Di alcune figure di operatori...*, *cit.*

<sup>41</sup> For example a « catalan ship chartered to certain Lucchesi but manned by Catalans » (ADP, n. 648, *Letter Bruges-Firenze*, Comp. Bernardo degli Alberti, 23rd Dec. 1388); « an English ship chartered [in Southampton] for Motrone by Luigi dal Portico » (ADP, n. 777, *Letter Bruges-Genova*, Comp. A. & S. Mannini, 16th Nov. 1398).

<sup>42</sup> For example in 1392 three ships bound for Pisa were chartered in Southampton,

Essentially then the "economic powers" which I have chosen to define as "maritime powers" were represented by certain cities of the Italian interior — those most heavily engaged in sea-borne trade — while the same characteristic was clearly also common to the maritime cities which possessed their own fleets and used them on their own account. The only exception is presented by the somewhat marginal case of the Biscayan towns, which operated solely for other countries. The maritime cities also had recourse to chartering vessels from elsewhere, although not on a very large scale,<sup>43</sup> and this never led to the chartering of an entire vessel, except in the case of Genoese charters of Basque ships.<sup>44</sup> After the battle of Meloria (1284) Pisa never subsequently reconstituted its fleet, except for small-capacity vessels, and increasingly became a hinterland economic power reliant on foreign shipping for any large-scale maritime operation.<sup>45</sup>

Returning to the question of full charters, those contracted for a specified period rather than for a voyage are of particular interest, for this was done in cases where a certain journey was to be repeated and it allowed complete freedom over the choice of landing places. In this context an example provided by the Alberti companies in London and Bruges (in whose operations the Orlandini company had a minor share) is of great interest, for they chartered three ships (of three to four hundred tons) from Bilbao and Bermeo for a period of about three years. In this period the vessels made the journey down into the Mediterranean four times, breaking up and then re-forming their convoy formation as they went, and calling at numerous ports in Spain, then at Aigues-Mortes and

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two by Florentine companies and one by a Milanese company: ADP, n. 753, *Letter Bruges-Genova*, Comp. V. de' Medici, 31st October 1392.

<sup>43</sup> As one would expect the Genoese never used Venetian ships, and vice-versa, nor did the Genoese often use Catalan ships, while the latter often carried goods for them. The same occurred in the case of the Venetians and the Catalans.

<sup>44</sup> On this see the excellent study by J. HEERS, *Le Commerce des Basques en Méditerranée au XVème siècle (d'après les Archives de Gênes)*, in « Bulletin Historique », t. LVII, 1955, pp. 292-324.

<sup>45</sup> For example the Pisan Company of Giovanni Grassolini reserved space on the Genoese ship of Giglio di Negro for nearly 800 packs of wool from England to Pisa: ADP, n. 525, *Letter Livorno-Pisa*, Comp. Niccolò di Giovanni e Benvenuto Michi, 1st April 1393.

Marseilles, Pisa, Motrone, Gaeta, Naples, Sicily and finally at Alexandria in Egypt. The Basque captains retained command of the vessels, but over them was a *conducitore* appointed by the Alberti company (a Florentine named Luca del Biondo, whose letters from various ports have survived<sup>46</sup>) whose task it was to coordinate the convoy (at times one ship was in Valencia, another in the Tyrrhenian off Pisa, and the third in Egypt and the Levant) and also to take charge of commercial transactions, the loading and unloading of goods as well as their sale. On the final voyage other employees of the company were taken on board, who subsequently became independent in the sense that they performed the same function on individual vessels.<sup>47</sup> In this way, then, by following the trade currents which linked the great commercial maritime ports together, the convoy created a myriad of internal contacts across the Mediterranean and even took on various local service operations. The cargo space left once the northern goods had been unloaded at Majorca was filled with goods from the island or those which had arrived there from Languedoc, Provence and the Barbary coasts, which were then transported to the ports of the Tyrrhenian and the East (as far as Alexandria, the easternmost point reached by the convoy). Goods from the Middle East were then brought back in the opposite direction to be unloaded at Pisa where silks from Lucca, Bologna and Venice, or Florentine woollen cloths were loaded in their place. These in turn were then unloaded in Spanish ports, where the ships again took on board local goods or those of the interior. So it went on; on both the outward and inward journeys the convoy would call at Southampton, loading and unloading respectively wool, assorted cochineals, woad, silk goods, spices, sugar, saffron, and fats, including olive oil. In fact, there was an extremely well-developed complementary trade, involving an extended and intensive series of

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<sup>46</sup> There are 80 letters written from Bruges, Valencia, Denia, Barcelona, Majorca, Genoa, Pisa, Alexandria (Egypt) between an. 1395 and June 1398.

<sup>47</sup> This was the case with Luca Bencivenni and Giovanni di Bartolo da Empoli, known as 'il Banderone': ADP correspondence in the series nn. 635, 750, 852, 918, 1049, 1059, 1060, 1072, 1111 etc.

loading and unloading operations which were concentrated in particular around the central area of the vast trading axis from Bruges to Alexandria and vice-versa, which illustrates well the power and strength arising from the combination of commercial and shipping operations, and also their links with the inland and river-mouth regions of the Mediterranean.<sup>48</sup>

The chartering of whole vessels, in addition to the purely functional advantages which it conferred (the auxiliary factor of transport becoming adapted to the primary commercial operation in the most convenient manner), also created the decisive and suitable condition for what I would not hesitate to describe as a revolutionary event: the adaptation of the transport factor to commercial operations in an economic sense, as I mentioned at the outset. With the breaking down of the rigid system of charters this gave rise to a great variety in prices, which became differentiated according to the value of goods following what we would today call the principle of price discrimination. This was an event which our sources allow us to attribute unequivocally to the late 14th century, and which had the effect of allowing the establishment of commerce for a mass market.<sup>49</sup>

So far we have been concerned with establishing the "nationality" of commercial operations in the case of charters of whole vessels, for which the evidence is straightforward. But the numerous instances of partial charters for any significant portion of a vessel, must also be borne in mind. For the inland cities, in fact, charters of this type outnumber the former. Without going into

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<sup>48</sup> On the wanderings of this convoy and on its various fortunes (captures, releases and other problems) there are at least 500 fragments of letters, mainly in the series containing the correspondence with Bruges, Valencia, Barcelona, Majorca, Pisa etc. (the important letter from Alexandria is in: ADP, n. 692, destination Valencia, 28th July 1397). Cf. my paper *Conclusions et synthèse de la section I: Antiquité e Moyen Age*, in « Actes du huitième Colloque international d'Histoire maritime » (Beirut 5-10 Sept. 1966), Paris 1970, pp. 703-715.

<sup>49</sup> On this 'revolution' see my paper *La situazione della marina mercantile all'inizio dell'epoca enrichina: fattori tecnici ed economici di sviluppo*, in « Actas do Congresso Internacional de Historia dos Descobrimientos » (Lisbon 1960), vol. V, Lisbon 1961), pp. 451-459; and the article *W. Sombart e i problemi della navigazione...*, *cit.*

detail, a study of ten Genoese vessels of large capacity, between May 1400 and December 1404, shows that out of a total cargo of 12,000 bales of wool loaded in Southampton, 9,200 belonged to agencies in the Italian hinterland, of which 7,500 were Florentine (the others were Lombards and Lucchesi, in that order). In the same period there were other large but unspecified quantities of the same commodity, the greater part of which was bound for Florence.<sup>50</sup>

Moving from the Mediterranean-North Sea axis to the intensive and hence important commercial relations between Catalonia and the Italian peninsula, we find a similar pattern for the cargoes of the vessels involved, with again a clear predominance for the Florentines and a significant share held by other Italian cities of the interior. As in the case of full charters, it was still the practice to refer to the charterer as if he were the owner of a vessel; for example, « . . . the ship of the Pazzi will go to Ancona (from Venice) and it may be that some of the wool will go on to Fano ». <sup>51</sup> The reference was to an Anconan ship which the Pazzi had formerly owned.

The Catalans also played an important part in this commerce, although the large number of non-State Venetian ships which frequently called at Pisa is perhaps even more striking. As well

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<sup>50</sup> From the many examples of precise quantitative references we can cite one which details the ownership of an entire cargo (made up of wool, the major English export in this period): « on the 18th of February two ships set sail from England [those of Piero Centurione and Raffaello Squarcialico], with wool to bring us here, and of this 1400 bales is destined here and 300 for Lombardy; there are also 350 bales of cloth » (ADP, n. 663, *Letter Genova-Firenze*, Comp. Ardingo de' Ricci, 28th Feb. 1404). In an earlier letter there is a reference to the same cargo which simply speaks of « two rich vessels: they are owned mainly by Florentines » (n. 855, *Letter Bruges-Barcelona*, Comp. G. Orlandini, 31st Dec. 1403 — there are also many other letters referring to the same shipment, giving further details of the cargo of cloth, tin and furs which had been loaded at Sluys). Even when there are no such details (e.g. « the ship of Francesco Doria which is sailing from Flanders [and from England one should add] is laden with wool which they say all belongs to the Florentines »: n. 891, *Letter Majorca-Barcelona*, Comp. Datini, 27th April 1407) there is often some indication of the total value of the cargo and of the shares held by the different 'nations'; when on 4th May the Doria ship reached Pisa, for example, we learn that the total cargo amounted to 180,000 florins, of which the Florentine owned 120,000: n. 338, *Letter Firenze-Prato*, Comp. Datini, 5th May 1407.

<sup>51</sup> ADP, n. 1002, *Letter San Matteo-Valencia*, Agnolo di Jacopo, 22nd July 1406.

as the large number of Genoese vessels, galleys from Malaga and Almeria frequently called at Pisa, as well as other ships from Provence. There were even several Anconan ships, too, as we have seen. In the lively coastal traffic along the Tyrrhenian shores as far south as Sicily, there were also many Ligurian, Gaetan, Neapolitan and Sicilian vessels acting in the Florentines' service, and many of these were of a very considerable size (between 400-500 barrels capacity). Calabrian vessels, known as *barche* carried a large share of the wine trade, and after the mid-15th century Ragusan ships became increasingly numerous and were much favoured by the Florentine companies.

In the trade with the Levant "Florentine methods" were, however, used less frequently. The Florentines again used mainly Genoese and Catalan vessels, yet the portions of vessels which they chartered were very much smaller than in the case of the trade with the north. When Venetian ships were used, the Florentines operated on a commission basis, but the actual trading operations were conducted by Venetian merchants although they too were often acting simply as agents for a foreign buyer or seller (in cases of sales on commission, however, it is often extremely difficult to distinguish clearly the identity of the parties involved in a particular transaction<sup>52</sup>).

I have discussed the trade between England and the Mediterranean mainly in terms of the return journey to the Mediterranean, since it was here that the greater part was concentrated and as the trade was focussed on the two ports of Southampton and London (in addition of course to Bruges which I have almost completely left aside in this essay) this also provides us with the clearest impression of the composition of the cargoes involved.

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<sup>52</sup> The Tuscan and Lombard merchants usually purchased goods in Venice when the ships arrived from Venetian subjects who acted either in their own purchase supplies or else on a commission basis of some form. These were effected by means of a *viago* (literally a journey), by which an entrusted individual went to a particular locality and remained there often as long as three years. This was the case for Giacomo Badoer, and is fully documented in his: *Il libro dei conti di Giacomo Badoer* (Costantinopoli 1436-1440), edited by U. Dorini and T. Bertelè, « Il Nuovo Ramusio », III, Roma 1956. The same occurred for sales.

For the outward journey, however, goods were loaded in a variety of ports, even if one considers only those from which individual vessels set out. Naming only the more important, these included Venice, Marseilles, Pisa, Genoa, Aigues Mortes, Barcelona, Majorca, and Valencia. It is worth adding too elements of detail, however, to make this picture less stark: which were the principal intermediary ports of call on this route, and what was their comparative importance? In what goods did they mainly deal, both for outward and inward sailings?

I have already mentioned the landings made by the "galleys of Flanders", while the Genoese galleys, from the late 14th century at any rate, called particularly at Malaga which was increasingly attractive on account of the Arab products which were to be found there (silk, cochineal,<sup>53</sup> saffron, sugar, dried fruits such as raisins and figs). Lisbon on the other hand was rarely visited, except by ships employed expressly by the Florentines resident there, although they generally preferred to use the expanding Portuguese fleet. For the goods coming from the north we have already mentioned the importance of wool which was purchased in really huge quantities, provided that when the ships sailed from Bruges they were not already packed full with cloth from Brabant or Flanders, or with Flemish madder or furs from the "Germanic territories" and other products of the same two regions. Sailing outward from the Mediterranean, the ships invariably loaded a huge assortment of spices, including sugar from the Middle East, silk cloths, cottons, paper, leather goods, Valencian wines, woad, pastel, Brazil-wood, cochineal, fats (including Italian, Andalusian and Portuguese olive oils) and soap, even before they visited the Kingdom of Granada. But of all the goods coming from the north, those most sought after in the intermediary ports of call were cloths and furs, while of those on the outward journey, Italian — and in particular Florentine — woollen cloth was the most prized commodity, certainly up to Lisbon.

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<sup>53</sup> Although cochineal was obtained from an insect it required a specific vegetation to survive.

The overwhelming predominance of wool amongst the goods making the journey down into the Mediterranean fully justified the great interest shown by the Florentines and their leading share in the various cargoes loaded on to "their" ships in England. The Florentine woollen industry was not only the largest in the Mediterranean, but it also produced goods of very high quality which could be achieved only with the use of English wools. Historians have rightly related the export of wool from England to the development of the woollen and cloth industry there, which it deprived of raw materials, and also to the fortunes of the Florentine industry to which it found its way. The commercial records of the Florentine houses reveal, however, that the Florentines purchased wool not only for their own industry but also to sell in its natural state to others, and in fact much was sold outside Florence.<sup>54</sup> It was for this reason that the volume of wool exported from England does not correspond with the volume of raw material consumed by the Florentine industry, which was much less.

The exports of English wool greatly diminished as time passed and as her own cloth industry expanded. Nonetheless, during the period in question the consignments of wool exported to the Mediterranean remained considerable,<sup>55</sup> and even in 1517 large quantities of English wool were still to be found in Florence.<sup>56</sup> The first surge of the other commodity involved in this equation, English cloth, dates from 1401 when the Florentines reported from London that « the ships are carrying much cloth but little wool in comparison with other years ».<sup>57</sup> Afterwards the abundant

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<sup>54</sup> For example the Florentines provided large supplies of English wool for Lombardy (especially for Milan, Bergamo and Brescia), for Verona, Venice, Pisa, Prato, Pistoia, Arezzo and Perugia to mention only the leading destinations.

<sup>55</sup> One need only remember that certain Genoese ships exported more than 2,000 packs of wool each, as is recorded in my paper: *Il commercio della lana inglese nei documenti mercantili italiani, 1360-1460*, in « Atti della I Settimana di studio dell'Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica F. Datini » at Prato.

<sup>56</sup> For example, a single consignment was worth over 4,200 florins: *Archivio di Stato di Firenze*, Archivio Gondi, n. 3 « Libro grande rosso segn. H », Comp. Alessandro e Bernardo d'Antonio Gondi of Florence, c. 247.

<sup>57</sup> ADP, n. 664 *Letter London-Florence*, Comp. G. Orlandini and N. Vettori, 6th July 1401.

export of wool resumed, as I have said. It is worth noting, however, that the supply of wool was also often affected at source by factors which were quite unrelated to the development of the cloth industry but which could nevertheless cause temporary falls in exports. This was the case, for example, in the same year, 1401, when it was reported from London that there was little wool available due to the "mortality" which had struck down the sheep.<sup>58</sup> In the following year the situation was no better and promised an even tighter market « due to the many sheep which have died because of the great rains which have fallen ».<sup>59</sup> In spite of this, however, one single consignment of wool sent to Florence for the Datini company, which was far from being one of the largest in Florence, was worth the very large sum of 7,000 florins.<sup>60</sup> By 1403, however, it is clear that matters in England had begun to improve again, and that the English flocks had once again made up their numbers,<sup>61</sup> for the Florentines were very active once more and « from early March [were buying] the wool on the sheeps' backs ».<sup>62</sup>

This slight digression serves to indicate the size of the Florentines' share in the English export trade, for it has been argued by those who claim that there was a decline in the Florentine economy after 1350, taking the supposed crisis in the wool gild as their main evidence, that this shrunk as it was composed mainly of wool. One should also note that even when cloth production in England did increase, the greater supplies of wool required in consequence could have come, at least in part, from an expansion in sheep rearing and need not necessarily have been diverted from the export trade to Italy.

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<sup>58</sup> ADP, n. 664, *Letter London-Florence*, Comp. P. Cambini, 12th Oct. 1401.

<sup>59</sup> ADP, n. 664, *Letter London-Florence*, Comp. D. Caccini and P. Camini, 13th April 1402.

<sup>60</sup> ADP, n. 598, « *Libro grande nero segnato A* », Azienda individuale Datini di Firenze, c. 229r.

<sup>61</sup> ADP, n. 664, *Letter London-Florence*, Comp. D. Caccini & P. Cambini, 21st June 1403.

<sup>62</sup> ADP, n. 664, *Letter London-Florence*, Comp. F. Tornabuoni & D. Caccini, 30th June 1404.

To summarize, then, the issues which I have considered in this essay, it appears that the commercial sources and materials on which we have drawn allow us to define with considerable accuracy the various components of the sea-borne trade between England and the Mediterranean, and also to distinguish between its primary and secondary features. The transport facilities which the maritime cities provided served to assist the activities both of their own merchants and those of foreigners. Although it is obvious that merchants were able to use foreign shipping, the commercial sources reveal that this was done on a scale which hitherto has not been properly appreciated, so that we must now revise our notions of the "national" division of the shares in "maritime commerce" in this period, in order to establish a clearer understanding of the identity and role of the "maritime powers".

Although the leading "naval powers", Genoa, Catalonia, Venice and Provence, were at the same time also "maritime powers",<sup>63</sup> this still left ample space and opportunity for the inland cities which can also rightly be considered as "maritime powers". Between the two there was a reciprocal web of stimuli and developments. Genoa, Catalonia and Provence (and of the lesser powers, Portugal and the Biscayan towns) gradually made it possible for the commercial companies, and hence for the states to which they belonged to expand the maritime branches of their commercial activities. This in turn led to an increase in the size of the merchant fleets and also to considerable technical progress.

Reciprocity of this sort constituted one of the major and most fruitful causes of the train of inventions and innovations, of new methods, means and institutions, which were the peculiar mark of economic man in the age of the Renaissance. In this case we have seen the ways in which the essential and the secondary, or auxiliary, aspects of commercial operations were brought into

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<sup>63</sup> This was not always the case even amongst leading naval powers such as the Biscayan towns and, in the early 15th century, Portugal. Their fleets were predominantly at the service of foreign merchants.

ever closer and more malleable union, so creating a whole range of contacts between land and sea. The maritime cities were quite ready to place their vessels at the disposal of merchants from the cities of the interior, and it was this which allowed the latter to expand freely across the sea without needing to possess either ports or ships of their own.