

On the Significance of Gadflies: the Genoese East India Company of the 1640s

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The XVIIth century was in many ways the century of the chartered trading Companies. The most celebrated of these were the Dutch and the English East India Companies, both formed when that century was as yet in its infancy, and still in excellent health when the year 1700 approached. Besides, there were the West-India Companies — often modelled on those to the East Indies — as well as many relatively minor Companies created to exploit trade between Europe and parts of the Old World. Amongst the last mentioned, we may number the Danish East India Company formed in 1616, several French attempts in the same direction culminating in the relative success of Colbert's *Compagnie des Indes Orientales* formed in 1664, and even a Portuguese *Companhia do Comercio* for trade on the Cape route in the late 1620s¹ The career of each of these, even when less than successful, has been seen as meriting attention, if only because the 'formula' for success is often best understood by

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¹ The best survey on the East India Companies is HOLDEN FURBER's *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800*, Minneapolis 1976, especially Chapter 4. But also see collections of conference papers, such as MICHEL MOLLAT, ed., *Sociétés et Compagnies de commerce en Orient et dans l'Océan Indien*, Paris 1970, and L. BLUSSÉ - F.S. GAASTRA, eds., *Companies and Trade: Essays on Overseas Trading Companies during the Ancien Regime*, Leiden 1981.

grasping the reasons for failure.² This is one of the justifications for the present essay, which deals with perhaps the most obscure of the XVIIth century East India Companies, one formed in Genoa in the late 1640s.

Historians who have focused exclusively on the most successful of the East India Companies of the XVIIth century have tended to see these as harbingers of change, which created a sort of institutional revolution in long-distance trade. In his widely-acclaimed writings, Niels Steensgaard compares the "rational" decision-making of the Dutch and English Companies to the atomistic and apparently inefficient trade of Asian merchants in the Near East, as well as to the seigneurial enterprise of the Portuguese Crown, concluding that the triumph of the Companies was the triumph of superior economic organisation.³ Critics of his work have pointed out, though, that his characterisation of both the Iberian and the Asian competitors of the Companies often borders on caricature; Steensgaard neglects the *evolution* of the Portuguese East India trade in the XVIth century in order to pursue an avowedly "structural" model, and also fails to enhance our understanding of why Asian merchants in the XVIIth century so often competed the East India Companies out of markets.⁴

² In particular, see A.R. DISNEY, *Twilight of the Pepper Empire: Portuguese Trade in South-west India in the early 17th century*, Cambridge, Mass., 1978; G.D. WINIUS, "Two Lusitanian Variations on a Dutch Theme: Portuguese Companies in Times of Crisis, 1628-1662", in BLUSSÉ-GAASTRA, *ibid.*, pp. 119-134; JACQUES MACAU, *L'Inde Danoise: La Première Compagnie, 1616-1670*, Aix-en-Provence 1972; OLE FELDBAEK, "The Organisation and Structure of the Danish East India, West India, and Guinea Companies in the 17th and 18th Centuries", in BLUSSÉ-GAASTRA, *ibid.*, pp. 135-158.

³ See NIELS STEENSGAARD, "The Companies as a specific institution in the history of European expansion", in BLUSSÉ-GAASTRA, *ibid.*, pp. 245-264; *Idem*, "The Dutch East India Company as an institutional innovation", in MAURICE AYMARD, ed., *Dutch Capitalism and World Capitalism*, Cambridge/Paris 1982, pp. 235-257; for his original statement of this theory, see STEENSGAARD, *Carracks, Caravans and Companies: The Structural Crisis in the European-Asian trade in the early 17th century*, Copenhagen 1973, pp. 151-53, *passim*.

⁴ Cf. M.A.P. MEILINK-ROELOFSZ, "The structures of trade in Asia in the 16th and 17th centuries", *Mare Luso-Indicum*, Vol. IV, 1980, pp. 1-43; H.W. VAN SANTEN, *De*

A related and particularly problematic question concerns the use of force by these Companies. In recent times, and particularly following on an important essay by the American historian Holden Furber in 1969, this aspect of the Companies has been neglected and even replaced by the notion of an 'Age of Partnership', when Asia and Europe colluded to their mutual benefit.⁵ While there certainly was collaboration of various sorts between Asians and Europeans in the XVIth, XVIIth and early XVIIIth centuries, it would be scarcely just to the historical record to consider the use of force by Europeans in this period as an aberrant or unusual phenomenon. The Dutch and the English Companies as much as the Portuguese before them systematically counterposed their power on the sea to the power of Asian political structures. Often however, the sphere of conflict remained limited — because the costs of unlimited conflict were too high from the *European* viewpoint. But, as a Dutch historian has recently put it, the use of violence was nonetheless an intrinsic part of the market strategy of the Dutch Company from as early as 1615 or 1620 (if not earlier still).⁶ The process of expanding into markets was often at the cost of others, and the barriers to entry by which these partial or complete monopolies operated, once created, were backed by live ammunition.

Such a recourse to violence, rather than allow prices to do the talking (as it were), was not confined to the intra-Asian aspect of the activities of these Companies. Equally, the Dutch Company jealously guarded its privileges on the Cape route, ignoring Grotius's strictures on the question of *Mare Liberum*

Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in Gujarat en Hindustan, 1620-1660, Ph.D. dissertation, Leiden University 1982, pp. 51-63, *passim*; SANJAY SUBRAHMANYAM, *Trade and the Regional Economy of South India, c. 1550 to 1650*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Delhi 1986, pp. 229-34, *passim*.

⁵ HOLDEN FURBER, "Asia and the West as Partners before 'Empire' and After", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXVIII, (4), 1969, pp. 711-721; this also forms the theme of his *festschrift* edited by BLAIR B. KLING and M.N. PEARSON, *The Age of Partnership: Europeans in Asia before Dominion*, Honolulu 1979.

⁶ VAN SANTEN, *De VOC in Gujarat en Hindustan*, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

and *Mare Clausum*. We know this to be the case from stray incidents of the first three decades of the XVIIth century; the Dutch were hostile, for example, to the first Danish expeditions (though not resorting to open violence), but were far stronger in their reactions to the Norman ship *La Magdaleine*, which they attacked in 1616, torturing some of its crew and hanging others.⁷ Other French expeditions of the 1610s and early 1620s equally met with hostility, overt and covert,⁸ and it is even possible to see in Dutch factors' writings of the period an unconscious echo of the very attitudes of the Portuguese which they had decried late in the XVIth century.

By these and other means, including an admittedly well-oiled economic machinery, a comfortable capital position, and some thoughtful strategic moves, the Dutch had by the early 1630s made their Company much envied in Europe. Envy translated in many cases into attempts at emulation: such was the case in Portugal (the East India Company of 1628 to 1633, and the Brazil Company of the 1650s and thereafter), and later in Ostend and Sweden. It was also most certainly the case in Genoa in the 1640s.

It is well-known that the Genoese had commanded a good share of the Oriental trade in the centuries preceding the discovery of the Cape route to Asia. By the late XVth century however, their role in this trade had been overshadowed to a large extent by the Venetians. But, if in the first instance, the early XVIth century Portuguese expansion into the Indian Ocean struck at the Venetians, it did not assist Genoa to any great extent either. Jacque Heers has perceptively argued that despite the Genoese and Florentine participation in the financing of the voyages of discovery, the exploration of the African west coast (and — by an extension of the same argument — of the markets

⁷ Cf. SUBRAHMANYAM, *Trade and the Regional Economy*, op. cit., pp. 283-284.

⁸ FURBER, *Rival Empires of Trade*, op. cit., pp. 201-02; also see OM PRAKASH, ed., *The Dutch Factories in India, 1617-1623*, New Delhi 1984, pp. 31-33, 35.

of the Indian Ocean, struck in a subtle way at the Genoese economy. He concludes:

“On voit que malgré la présence à Lisbonne de plusieurs familles marchandes génoises, l'expansion maritime portugaise est nettement dirigée contre la Méditerranée. Ces marchands, coupés de leur ville d'origine, avaient eux-mêmes une mentalité portugaise et atlantique, hostile aux monopoles et aux systèmes méditerranéens”⁹

Besides, the XVIIth century Genoese economy was beset by other problems too, notably the lack of availability of food, which meant a growing dependence on imported supplies. Repeated famines in the late 1520s, 1530s, and even up to 1570 suggest an image of an urban centre whose economic vitality was seriously in question; if a temporary recovery in trade and artisanal production is perceptible in the 1550s and 1560s, this was soon reversed. The contemporary polemicist Paolo Foglietta wrote of the city in the late XVIIth century, “Genova ha cambiato in fame l'antia fama” (“Genoa has exchanged its old fame for famine”), and there was at least a grain of truth in this wry witticism.¹⁰

Despite another phase of recovery which followed the major crisis of the 1590s, the second quarter of the XVIIth century once again found the Genoese economy in some difficulties, in particular where commerce was concerned. This period has been described by a recent historian as a “long phase of depression and difficulties of every sort”¹¹ — a remark which points too to

⁹ See JACQUES HEERS, “Portugais et Génois au XVe siècle: La Rivalité Atlantique-Méditerranée”, reprinted in HEERS, *Société et Économie à Gênes (XIVe-XVe siècles)*, London 1979, IV: 147. Also see GIAN GIACOMO MUSSO, *Navigazione e Commercio Genovese con il levante nei documenti dell'Archivio di Stato di Genova (sec. XIV-XV)*, Rome 1975, on the Genoese role in Euro-Asian trade in the pre-Vasco da Gama period.

¹⁰ Cited in CLAUDIO COSTANTINI, *La Repubblica di Genova nell'età moderna*, Storia d'Italia, ed. Giuseppe Galasso, Vol. IX, Turin 1978, p. 75. I have relied extensively on Costantini's excellent synthetic work for general background on Genoese history in the epoch.

¹¹ DANILLO PRESOTTO, “Da Genova alle Indie alla metà del seicento: Un singolare contratto di arruolamento marittimo”, in *Atti della Società Ligure di Storia Patria*, N.S., Vol. IX, 1969, p. 71.

the political aspects of the crisis, which buttressed the economic ones. To the invasions by Savoy of Genoese territory were added the problems of the plague, and on to these were heaped the repeated bankruptcies of the Spanish treasury, where the Genoese mercantile class had a substantial financial interest.

Things were little improved in the 1630s, when Genoa found itself threatened by piracy in the Mar Ligure, and in a precarious position of neutrality in the Franco-Spanish war. All this must have made the Dutch model appear that much more attractive: for what better way to refloat the fortunes of a small nation than through this new innovation — the chartered Company? The Dutch had long been the objects of an ill — concealed admiration on the part of the Genoese, and — as Claudio Costantini puts it — “(even if) heretics and rebels, the Dutch incarnated a model of civil and economic organisation, perhaps inapplicable to Genoa, but suggestive nonetheless”.¹²

On the other hand, Genoese shipping and maritime resources were, by the 1630s, at a low ebb. In the course of the XVIth century, the Genoese trading fleet had scarcely grown at all (and may even have shrunk slightly between 1509 and the 1590s, according to some estimates); besides, from the late XVIth century, they were being overwhelmed in the harbour of Genoa itself by foreign ships — mostly Dutch, but also English, and of the other northern nations.¹³ The growing Dutch presence was accorded institutional recognition in 1616, when their trading community in the port was allowed an autonomous consulate, along the lines of that of the Germans.

The first of the Companies to be created in Genoa “all’olan-

¹² COSTANTINI, *La Repubblica di Genova*, *op. cit.*, p. 172, “... gli olandesi incarnavano un modello di organizzazione economica e civile, forse inapplicabile in Genova, ma non per questo meno suggestivo”.

¹³ EDOARDO GRENDI, “Traffico portuale, naviglio mercantile e consolati genovesi nel cinquecento”, *Rivista Storica Italiana*, Vol. 80, (3), 1968, pp. 593-638; *Idem*, “I nordici e il traffico del porto di Genova, 1590-1666”, *Rivista Storica Italiana*, Vol. 83, (1), 1971, pp. 23-71. Finally, for a synthetic account, see COSTANTINI, *Genova*, *ibid.*, pp. 164-172.

dese" (in the Dutch manner), was the Compagnia di Nostra Signora di Libertà, formed in the late 1630s by the Giustiniani brothers (Galeazzo and Francesco Maria), together with Raffaele Della Torre and Agostino Centurione (later to be Doge of Genoa). This Company, whose creation was approved after some hesitation by the Senate, began its operations by organising an expedition to Sicily for silk procurement.¹⁴ The voyage was a considerable success, and the profits poured in, as did investors eager to sink money in the venture. Raffaele Della Torre even began to think that finances might become sufficiently comfortable to float an enterprise of the dimensions of the Dutch Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie — no less!

The bubble was pricked the next year. Two ships were sent out to Naples and Sicily, but encountered the opposition both of interested parties in Spain, and a powerful faction in Genoa itself. When the voyage was repeatedly obstructed and diverted, one of the two captains, Galeazzo Giustiniani, abandoned the venture in disgust, while the other ship returned without profit.

With this expedition, the Company of Nostra Signora di Libertà folded up unceremoniously. But the idea had taken root. The Doge, Agostino Pallavicini, himself had an eye on the India trade, and the notion was explicitly to emulate the English and the Dutch. On the face of it, the 1640s appeared to be a good time to embark on such a venture. The Netherlands and Portugal (the latter having just emerged from sixty years of Spanish rule) had recently signed a Truce, which was in the process of being implemented piece-meal in Asia.¹⁵ The spice trade in Europe was booming, with Dutch profits in particular showing the positive effects of the conquest of Melaka, and of the tightening up on the 'contraband' trade in cloves to Makassar.¹⁶ Be-

¹⁴ COSTANTINI, *ibid.*, pp. 306-310.

¹⁵ Cf. CHARLES R. BOXER, "Portuguese and Dutch colonial rivalry, 1641-1661", *Studia*, no. 2, 1958, pp. 7-42.

¹⁶ This period is discussed in some detail in my thesis, *Trade and the Regional Economy of South India, c. 1550 to 1650*, *op. cit.*, pp. 254-256, 268-76, 361-67.

sides, it was not the Genoese alone who were interested in promoting such a venture. The monopoly enjoyed by the VOC over the trade of Asia, sanctified by an act of the States-General of the Netherlands, stuck in the craw of at least a few Dutch merchants. One of these, Willem Meulman, a resident of Amsterdam, was in a particularly good position to give expression to his grievance — for his brother Hendrik had for an extended period resided in Genoa and was in the 1640s the Dutch Consul there. Hendrik Meulman apparently boasted close relations with the leading merchants of Genoa, and they for their part (for the reasons already discussed) needed no great persuasion to move towards setting up an East India Company.¹⁷ The Meulman brothers promised to have the ships for the Company's Asian voyages secretly constructed in Holland along the lines of the Dutch East Indiamen, and also agreed to arrange for expert steersmen, merchants and mariners to help staff the vessels. While it is not clear whether they in fact also financed a great proportion of the venture, the Meulmans almost certainly had a part interest.

This "Compagnia di Negotio", or "Compagnia Genovese delle Indie Orientali", was formed then in early 1647, with a capital of 100,000 *scudi*, of which a substantial amount belonged to the principal participants in the earlier Company of Nostra Signora di Libertà.¹⁸ There are also indications that some other leading Genoese families — the Invrea, the Fieschi, and the Centurione — took an interest in the venture.

There are at least three sets of contemporary sources which touch on the brief history of this Company. First, there are the sources originating from the Genoese archives, examined in

¹⁷ COSTANTINI, *Genova*, *op. cit.*, pp. 315-17; J.E. HEERES, ed., *Bouwstoffen voor de geschiedenis der Nederlanders in den Maleischen Archipel*, Vol. III, The Hague 1895, letter from the Governor-General and Council at Batavia dated 31 December 1649, p. 466; finally see the mentions of Enrico Mülman in E. GRENDI, "I nordici e il traffico del porto di Genova", *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46.

¹⁸ COSTANTINI, *ibid.*; PRESOTTO, "Da Genova alle Indie", *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75.

some detail by Giuseppe Pessagno over a half-century ago, and more recently discussed by Presotto and Costantini.¹⁹ These sources, and the historians who have made use of them, tend to focus exclusively on the Genoese perceptions of the venture, and see it almost solely in the context of the history of that city-state. A second set of sources, explored late in the last century by N.P. van den Berg, is the Dutch, and includes both the records of the VOC's organs in the Netherlands, Batavia and elsewhere in Asia, and private memoirs — of which the most important is that of the sailmaker and traveller Jan Janszoon Struijs, who ventured on a Genoese expedition to Asia at the age of seventeen.²⁰ But van den Berg's summary of events, while undoubtedly useful, is beset in turn by two problems: a lack of access to sources other than the Dutch, and a singular lack of sympathy for all those who would oppose Dutch sovereignty as vested in the VOC. And finally, there is a third set of sources, which have to my knowledge never been explored. These are the Portuguese documents on the affair, which fill out the picture to a certain extent, and reveal an unsuspected Portuguese dimension to the episode. These documents are principally letters exchanged between Lisbon and Goa, and appended to one is a brief but engaging account penned by an anonymous Genoese merchant resident at Goa, of the whole venture.²¹ In what fol-

¹⁹ GIUSEPPE PESSAGNO, "Il Commercio dei Genovesi", in CARLO MIOLI, ed., *La Consulta dei Mercanti Genovesi, 1805-1927*, Genoa 1928, pp. 9-38, especially pp. 35-36; PESSAGNO, *La grande navigazione al secolo XVII e la Compagnia delle Indie Orientali*, Genoa 1930. Also see the writings of COSTANTINI and PRESOTTO, *ibidem*.

²⁰ See N.P. VAN DEN BERG, "De Oost-Indische Compagnie der Edelen van Genua (1648-49)", in *Tijdschrift voor Indische taal-, land- en volkenkunde*, Vol. 24, Batavia 1897, reprinted in VAN DEN BERG, *Uit de dagen der Compagnie: Geschiedkundige schetsen*, Haarlem 1904, pp. 64-94. STRUIJS' account is entitled *Drie aanmerkelijke en zeer rampspoedige Reizen door Italien, Griekenlandt, Lijfflandt, Moscouien, Tartarijen, Meden, Persien, Oost-Indien, Japan en verscheijden andere gewesten*, Amsterdam 1686. The episode of the Genoa Company is dealt with in the first section of the book.

²¹ *Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo*, Lisbon, (henceforth ANTT), Documentos Remetidos da Índia, no. 58, fls. 16, 17, 39, 41, 42, 53 and 55-56. I have relied in particular on the "Relação sobre as duas naos Genovesas q chegarão aos

lows, we shall attempt a synthesis of all three sets of sources, before proceeding to our conclusion.

The Company that had been formed early in 1647 had as its avowed purpose to "open navigation and traffic in merchandise in the East Indies, in particular in Japan, its vicinity, and in other free and practicable places".²² However, Japan does not seem really to have figured in the minds of the participants in the first venture, whose eyes were directed instead to the Indian west coast, to Indonesia, and to Portuguese Macao. The Dutch participants — the Meulman brothers and their associate, a certain Jakob van den Heuvel — must have been aware of the fact that, by 1647, Japan was neither 'free nor practicable' for their trade. Even if they did not, it is more than likely that the personnel they hired did so. These included a certain Jan Maes van Duijnkerken, who was to command the expedition, and had earlier sailed Asian waters in the employ of the VOC; besides, there was Jan Benning van Weesp, his deputy, and two persons designated the captains of the vessels of the Genoa Company — Hendrik Christiaensz van Amsterdam, and Harmen Voogd van Schiedam.²³

We have already noted that Willem Meulman had taken upon himself the task of having the ships constructed at Texel. The two vessels, later named *San Giovanni Battista* and *San Bernardo*, were both of around 200 lasts burthen; *San Giovanni*, the larger of the two, carried twenty-eight guns, and *San Bernardo* twenty-six.²⁴ Even before these ships had made ready

Mares do sul este anno de 649", fls. 55-56. But also see the correspondence between the Hague and Lisbon, collected in EDGAR PRESTAGE and PEDRO DE AZEVEDO, eds., *Correspondência Diplomática de Francisco de Sousa Coutinho durante a sua embaixada em Holanda*, Vol. II, (1647-48), Coimbra 1926.

²² COSTANTINI, *Genova*, *op. cit.*, p. 347, "... aprire navigazione et trafico di mercantie nelle Indie Orientali, in particolare nel Giappone, suoi vicini et altri luoghi liberi et praticabili".

²³ VAN DEN BERG, "De Oost-Indische Compagnie van Genua", *op. cit.*, p. 69 ff; ANTT, Doc. Rem. no. 58, fls. 55-55v.

²⁴ STRUIJS, *Drie aanmerkelijke Reizen*, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

to sail from Texel to Genoa however, the secret was out. Surprisingly, it was not the Dutch who got wind of the matter but the Portuguese. Already in April 1647, Francisco de Sousa Coutinho, Portuguese ambassador at the Hague, had been apprised by Lisbon of the Genoese venture. At first, the Portuguese were uncertain whether the expedition was being mounted with the connivance of the VOC, but over a period of time concluded that the *Heeren XVII* were themselves completely in the dark. By early July 1647, Coutinho had conferred with the VOC's Directors: these gentlemen were, he later reported, "amazed, because they knew nothing of it; as it had been done very secretly; they thanked me and said that we might rest assured that they would strive to undo the voyage and would also advise us of what would be required either from them or from us to prevent such navigations".²⁵

Surprising though it may seem then, the Portuguese and the Dutch, still in the process of enforcing an uneasy truce in Asia and in a state of war in parts of Brazil, *both* perceived a mutual-ity of interests in keeping others out of the commerce on the Cape route. On 20 September 1647, D. João IV, King of Portugal, wrote to his viceroy at Goa: "You should be aware of the intent that some merchants from Genoa have of sending ships to that *Estado*. I commend you strongly, that with the attention that this affair requires, you give the necessary orders, so that by all possible means which present themselves to you, you impede this navigation and commerce".²⁶ And barely two weeks later, the *Heeren XVII* at Amsterdam despatched a letter to the Governor-General at Batavia, Cornelis van der Lijn, with the "express charge, order and responsibility" to ensure that the

²⁵ Letter from Francisco de Sousa Coutinho to D. João IV, *ANTT*, Doc. Rem. no. 58, fl. 17; also see Coutinho's letters to the Marques de Niza dated 8th April, 24th June, and 8th July 1647, published in PRESTAGE AND AZEVEDO, eds., *Correspondência Diplomática*, op. cit., pp. 81, 142 and 151.

²⁶ *ANTT*, Doc. Rem. no. 58, fl. 16, "... vos sera presente o intento que alguns Mercadores de Genova tem de imviarem embarcações a esse Estado...".

monopoly rights of the Dutch in Indonesia and other parts of Asia be protected against the Genoese.²⁷

The Dutch legal position was simple. First, it was argued, the States-General of the Netherlands had by a decree of 1632 forbidden any person from the United Provinces to seek employ with another Company in Asia, the more so if he had earlier been an employee of the VOC. And second, the "exclusive treaties" they had signed with rulers in various parts of Indonesia were seen by the Dutch as legally binding on other parties and nations as well. As for the Portuguese, despite their long-standing ties with Genoa, and despite the fact that by 1647 they had no more than a marginal share of traffic on the Cape route, their instinctive reactions were still as they might have been a century earlier.

This combination of reactions was quite clearly one foreseen neither by the Genoese investors, nor by their Dutch employees. It is possible, as Claudio Costantini puts it, that the considerable and active Dutch presence in Genoa had resulted in a miscalculation on the part of the Genoese;²⁸ besides, there had in the past been Dutchmen employed by other Companies, and the VOC had done precious little about it. As for the Portuguese factor, this seems to have been wholly unforeseen — and even modern-day historians of Genoa have not perceived the existence of a Portuguese hand in what followed.

To proceed with the history of the expedition, the two ships arrived in Genoa late in February 1648, having set sail from Texel just after Christmas.²⁹ It was decided that while the bulk

²⁷ VAN DEN BERG, "De Oost-Indische Compagnie van Genua", op. cit., p. 65; also see W. PH. COOLHAAS, ed., *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden der VOC*, Vol. II, (1639-1655), The Hague 1964, pp. 341, 349.

²⁸ COSTANTINI, *Genova*, op. cit., p. 317. "La fiducia riposta nell'amicizia olandese fu mal ripagata..." etc.

²⁹ The dates in Struijs's journal are problematic and of varying accuracy, steadily becoming more erratic as he proceeds farther from Europe. However, one presumes the date of departure from Texel is at least accurate, as it does not contradict other evidence.

of the crew would be Dutch, some Genoese "noblemen" (or patricians) would be sent on board, both to ensure that the Dutch captains and merchants maintained financial order, and to permit the next expedition to be made without Dutch assistance — if the necessity arose. The Italian sources suggest that the number of these Genoese was five, but later documents in the Dutch archives mention only four: Paolo Emilio Invrea, Giovanni Battista Fieschi, Stefano Centurione and Pietro Maria de' Marchesi.³⁰ These persons carried letters of exchange worth 312,000 rials of eight, besides which there was the cargo loaded on the ships — the value of which is not specified in the documentation.

Before the ships left Genoa on 3 March 1648, several rather special agreements were signed between those on board the vessels and the financiers of the venture. One of these agreements, published by Danilo Presotto, is a "Contratto di Arruolamento" (or enlistment contract) specifying the terms and conditions under which the mariners were to serve.³¹ This included such clauses as one forbidding private trade or the carriage of freight goods aboard the ships, others concerning the distribution of food and wine, actions in case of fire, the dispensation of justice on board, and a final one forbidding all officials and mariners from "insulting, using force, or insolence, or stealing or assaulting" any Indian, except on the express orders of the Captain or the Director (the last being Jan Maes). One of the most curious clauses in the agreement is the twenty-seventh, which promises to compensate at fixed rates those on board the vessels for any injury sustained while defending the ships. The rates are as follows: 800 *fiorini* for loss of the right arm, 500

³⁰ Some of these identifications are speculative, as the Dutch have rendered Latin versions of the names, which are as follows: Johannes Baptista Fliscus, Stephanus Contevonus (or sometimes Cenonomis), Petrus Maria de Marchis, and Paulus Aemilius de Inuren. For the mention of *five* Genoese, see PRESOTTO, "Da Genova alle Indie", *op. cit.*, p. 75.

³¹ PRESOTTO, *ibid.*, pp. 86-91.

fiorini for the left, 300 *fiorini* for either eye but 900 *fiorini* for the loss of both, 600 *fiorini* for the right hand, 400 for the left, and so on.

A second agreement, mentioned neither in the Dutch nor in the Italian documents, but described in an anonymous account written by a Genoese merchant at Goa, was between the *direttore* Jan Maes and the *vice-direttore* Jan Benning, and their principals.³² This agreement guaranteed the two Dutchmen a fifth part of the profits of their voyage as recompense for the expertise they brought with them.

The ships set sail from Genoa then in early March, and proceeded to Alicante and Malaga, where they remained until mid-April.³³ Then, proceeding through the Straits of Gibraltar, they made their way past the Cape Verde Islands to Sierra Leone, where they put in for provisions. The journal of the sailmaker Struijs suggests that there was trouble at Sierra Leone, when a quarrel between Jan Maes and a local chief resulted in an attack on some coastal villages.³⁴ The ships seem to have emerged unscathed though, and in early July the expedition set off from Sierra Leone for the Cape of Good Hope, and arrived at Madagascar (in the Bay of António Gil) in September 1648. Here they were to remain for several months, awaiting a favourable monsoon.

The winter spent by the Genoese fleet of two at Madagascar (or the Ilha de São Lourenço as it was better known in the epoch) was an eventful one. In the course of it, Jan Benning, *vice-direttore* of the expedition, died, and there followed a quar-

³² ANTT, Doc. Rem. no. 58, fl. 55v. "E assy armadas as duas Naos e providas de Genova, os ditos homens piloto mor e superintendente pedirão por partido ao Magistrado Genovez da nova Companhia por satisfação de seus serviços e pagas e merecimentos a quinta parte de todos os intereçes, no que o Magistrado veo..."

³³ Anonymous letter from Genoa to D. João IV, dated 4th March 1648, ANTT, Doc. Rem. no. 58, fl. 42; the author of this letter was in all probability a certain "Judge" Fieschi, on whom see PRESTAGE-AZEVEDO, eds., *Correspondência Diplomática*, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 304.

³⁴ VAN DEN BERG, "De Oost-Indische Compagnie van Genua", *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72.

rel between those who wanted to raise Harmen Voogd to this post, and others who favoured Hendrik Christiaesz.³⁵ Jan Maes seems to have been inclined to support the latter, so that a near-mutiny resulted on the *San Bernardo* (of which Voogd was the captain). However, the Genoese on board the fleet, who were finding to their increasing dismay that the terms of the agreements signed at Genoa gave them little decision-making power in comparison to Maes, interceded and the situation was temporarily defused. Voogd was invited to parley on board the *San Giovanni*, but as soon as he arrived, Jan Maes had him placed in irons — where he remained for several months.³⁶

This matter having been settled, and the crew reconciled to it, the ships prepared to sail in early 1649. Neither the Dutch nor the Italian documents are clear on what exactly the intentions of Jan Maes were. It was believed in Lisbon (on the basis of information provided by a Genoese patrician, himself of the Fieschi family, who corresponded with D. João IV) that the purpose of the ships was to sail eventually to Macao and Manila.³⁷ On the other hand, the other anonymous Genoese, to whose account we have referred earlier, is quite explicit in stating that the first destination was Goa.³⁸ It was only on account of “contrary winds”, he asserts, that the ships found themselves in March 1649 — some three months after they had left the Bahia de António Gil — on the west coast of Sumatra. There is

³⁵ VAN DEN BERG, *Ibid*, pp. 73-74; also pp. 89-94, “Remonstrantie ende Verzoek van Harman Vooght”. Finally, see *ANTT*, Doc. Rem. no. 58, fls. 55-56, “Relação sobre as duas Naos genovesas”.

³⁶ *Ibidem*. The Portuguese version describes it thus: “... e assy lhes persuadirão q se viesse com elles a Nao São João aonde o trouxerão, e o capitão tanto que vio ao borão o prendeo logo em ferros E se puzerão as couzas em ordem castigando aos de parcalidade do prezo, e continuarão a viagem”.

³⁷ *ANTT*, Doc. Rem. no. 58, fl. 41, letter from D. João IV to D. Felipe Mascarenhas, dated 21st April 1648. “... hirem estes navios tomar a carga a Malega parece q ajuda a presunção de Machao e Manilha”.

³⁸ *ANTT*, Doc. Rem. no. 58, fl. 55v “... e continuarão a viagem, com detreminação de virem aportar em Goa. Mas em rezão de ventos contrarios aribarão sobre a Java e tomarão o porto de Tico...”.

a certain plausibility to this. First, the same had occurred on more than one occasion to Portuguese vessels sailing from Lisbon to Goa in the XVIth century. Second, we have seen that the Genoese were unaware of the hostile sentiments harboured by the Portuguese Crown towards their venture. And third, if (as is agreed by all sources) Macao formed part of their proposed itinerary, it is not unreasonable that Portuguese Goa should have constituted the first port of call of the Genoese. At least one other "interloper" of the period, the English Captain John Weddell, had proceeded in almost exactly the same fashion.³⁹

In fact, although they were unaware of it, Weddell's ghost dogged the Genoese. As the leader of an expedition for the short-lived Courteen's Association of the 1630s and 1640s, Weddell had earned something of an unsavoury reputation in the Indian Ocean, attacking Asian shipping, incurring debts that remained unpaid, and even on occasion passing counterfeit rials of eight.⁴⁰ When the two Genoese ships arrived at the port of Tikou on the Sumatran west coast, they seem to have been mistaken for Courteenians. According to our anonymous Genoese reporter, Jan Maes went ashore at this port with the intention of buying pepper to carry to Macao, and in fact arrived at an agreement with the local *pangeran* and *shahbandar*. But, the account continues, "some ships of the Malays impeded them in their commerce, denouncing them to the Governor of the land, and saying that they were English, for their flags showed it, and that they had been found to carry false coins".⁴¹ The sins of the

³⁹ On Weddell, see the travel account of Peter Mundy, who was on his fleet, i.e. R.C. TEMPLE, ed., *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608-1637*, Vol. III, London, The Hakluyt Society, 1919.

⁴⁰ Cf. SUBRAHMANYAM, *Trade and the Regional Economy of South India*, op. cit., pp. 285, 417-19; FURBER, *Rival Empires of Trade*, op. cit., pp. 69-70.

⁴¹ ANTT, Doc. Rem. no. 58, fl. 56, "... e feita ja avença com o Governador da dita terra, algũas embarcações de Malayos lhes impedirão o comercio acuzãdo os ao Governador da terra dizendo que elles herão Inglezes pois o mostravão as bandeiras, e se achavão q trazião patacas falços...". On this incident, also see Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven*, II, p. 463.

Courteenians at Bandar Aceh having been visited on him, Jan Maes retaliated. He swiftly captured some Malay craft in the harbour, and forcibly took pepper off them; though advised by by other members of his council to pay the Malays for what was taken, Maes (who was known for his choleric temper) refused to do so.

According to Struijs' journal, however, this was not the first such act of the fleet. His account contains a picaresque description of the earlier capture of an Acehnese vessel, the crew and passengers of which were (he recounts) all thrown overboard, save for one woman — who, he claims, was “mishandled and ravished” by the Genoese patricians, and finally sent ashore, where she was “krisse” (viz. killed with a *kris*) by her husband for her misfortunes.⁴² Struijs does not strike one, though, as the most trustworthy of witnesses. For instance, in the particular incident referred to above, it is not clear how he could have come to know what happened to the woman once she went ashore. Elsewhere, in the Madagascar section of his journal, his account is patently modelled on the picaresque romance of the period: there is prurient interest (how the local king shared his concubines with Maes and the Genoese), and also an all-too-familiar story of how this king turned out to be a long-lost friend and companion of Jan Maes, who at first did not recognise him. There is even a touching reconciliation, in which the King “Diembro” falls on Maes's neck and kisses him.⁴³

All the documents agree however, that the incident at Tiku proved the undoing of Maes and the expedition. One of the Malay *nakhudas* who had been present at the port arrived in Batavia on 26 March 1649, and complained to the Dutch of Maes's doings. He reported too that the ships were, at that point, in the Sumatran port of Salida, “trying their best to enter into the pepper trade with the inhabitants of that and neigh-

⁴² STRUIJS, *Drie aanmerkelijke Reizen, op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

bouring places".⁴⁴ Governor-General van der Lijn and his Council had, we have already seen, been apprised of the impending arrival of these ships in Asian waters by a letter from the *Heeren XVII* of October 1647. Bearing in mind the strong tone of that letter, it was decided to take immediate action. Two fleets, each of four ships, were sent out; the one, under Willem van der Beecq and Hendrik Craijer, was to scour the Sumatran west coast, the other — under the redoubtable Rijklof van Goens — was to block the Sunda Straits passage.⁴⁶

In the event, the capture proved no problem. The Genoese on their pepper-procurement trail left Salida for Sunda in mid-April. When they fell into the arms of van Goens's fleet, there was not even a show of resistance, possibly because (if one is to credit Struijs) the incidents at Madagascar had divided the fleet so sharply that Maes's authority had been greatly eroded.⁴⁷ The Dutch fleet returned to Batavia with its two prizes on 26 April 1649, exactly a month after the first reports of the Genoese presence had been received.

Once in Batavia, the situation grew daily more bizarre. Harman Voogd gave vent to his accumulated grievances in a long "Remonstrantie ende verzoek" to Governor-General van der Lijn, accusing Jan Maes of every conceivable mischief, and liberally peppered with rhetorical exclamations such as "O, goddeloosheijt!", and "O vuijle daedt!". He concluded with the request that his goods be taken off the ships and brought on land, and that he be employed by the VOC.⁴⁸ Besides, Maes and

⁴⁴ VAN DEN BERG, "De Oost-Indische-Compagnie", *op. cit.*, p. 64.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

⁴⁶ The first fleet comprised the yachts *Jonge Prins*, *Poppensburg*, *Lillo* and *Kievieth*, and the second the fluyts *Zwarte Beer* and *Os*, and the yachts *Hulst* and *Alkmaar*. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

⁴⁷ Cf. STRUIJS, *Drie aanmerkelijke Reizen*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁴⁸ "Remonstrantie ende verzoek van Harman Vooght, gewesene schipper op den schepe genaemt St. Barnardo, overgegeven bij denselvigen aen den Edn. gestrengen, de Heer Cornelis van de Lijn, Gouverneur Generalissimo van India Orientae, ende sijne bijwesende mede Raden", Resolutieboek van het Cateel Batavia, 17th May 1649, re-

Hendrik Christiaensz fell out too, the latter accusing the former in a letter of 15 June (addressed to the Dutch Council of the Indies) of having illegally unloaded goods from the ships, and traded in them for his own profit.⁴⁹ In turn, a month later, the Genoese Giovanni Battista Fieschi, in a petition of his own, accused Christiaensz of engaging in precisely the activities that he attributed to Maes. Also, the four Genoese patricians in a collective petition requested that they be allowed to return to Genoa together with Jan Maes, Voogd, and Christiaensz, and that their goods be restituted to them.⁵⁰

The *Raden van Indië* were not inclined to look kindly on this last request. In a meeting of 19 July, they asserted that the use of a Dutch crew and merchants by the Genoese was against the laws of the United Provinces, and refused to restitute the goods of the Genoese, or even the letter of credit of 312,000 rials which had been taken from them. Not content with this, the VOC set about selling the two ships, a process that bore fruit in late 1649, when a certain Sebastien Beaulieu (described as a French private trader) purchased the *San Bernardo* for 6,100 rials. The other ship, *San Giovanni Battista*, was sold to the Portuguese Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo somewhat later for 9,000 rials.⁵¹

News of the unhappy end of the expedition reached Genoa only in December 1650, and pressure was immediately applied on the Dutch through diplomatic channels, in order to secure the restitution of the goods and money. It does not seem that

produced in VAN DEN BERG, "De Oost-Indische Compagnie van Genua", op. cit., pp. 89-94.

⁴⁹ VAN DEN BERG, *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁵⁰ Petition from Joannes Baptista Fliscus to the Governor-General and Council, dated 13 July 1649; another petition from Fliscus, Contevonus, Marchis and Inuren, dated 29 June 1649, reproduced in VAN DEN BERG, *Ibid.*, pp. 80ff, 81-83.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87. On the Portuguese private trader who purchased one of these vessels, see C.R. BOXER, *Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo: A Portuguese Merchant-Adventurer in Southeast Asia, 1624-1667*, The Hague 1967; for further details of this transaction and its aftermath, Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven*, II, pp. 395-96, 431, 598, 624 and 659-60.

the pressures that were brought to bear were wholly successful, though the four Genoese did apparently manage to return eventually to Europe on Dutch ships.⁵² Many of the Dutch mariners who had served on board the Genoese ships succeeded, for their part, in gaining employment in Asia with the VOC; Struijs himself was employed by early 1650 as a sailmaker on the Dutch ship *Zwarte Beer*.⁵³

It was on the shoulders of the *direttore* Jan Maes that the Genoese placed the blame for the debacle. The anonymous Goa-based Genoese merchant writes in 1650, "In all this, the culprit is the said João Massa, because he always worked against the instruction of the Genoese Magistrate, treated the fidalgos whom he brought with him very badly, giving them little to eat and depriving them of all services, and reducing them to a worse state than grummets, making himself the absolute master, robbing against the orders he had been given at Genoa, and thus the said João Massa was a traitor to them...". He goes on to lament "the damage that has been suffered by the Genoese nation in terms of goods and honour on account of João Massa, giving occasion that they may in India be known as corsairs and pirates".⁵⁴ But Maes did not live long enough to account for his deeds, dying in Batavia in early 1650 at the hands of an unknown assassin.⁵⁵

In Genoa, ideas of participating in the India trade were abandoned only temporarily, for the capital of the *Compagnia Genovese delle Indie Orientali* was soon transferred in large measure to form another company, the *Compagnia Marittima di*

⁵² ANTT, Doc. Rem. no. 58, fl. 56; COSTANTINI, *La Repubblica di Genova*, *op. cit.*, p. 318. In the homeward bound Dutch fleet of winter 1649-50, 39, 341 rials worth of bills of exchange were sent back on account of the Genoese, but it is evident that the four patricians did not themselves travel aboard this fleet; cf. COOLHAAS, *ed.*, *Generale Missioen*, *ibid.*, pp. 396, 399.

⁵³ STRUIJS, *Drie aanmerkelijke Reizen*, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁵⁴ ANTT, Doc. Rem. no. 58, fl. 56. "No que tudo he culpado o dito João Massa pois sempre obrou contra o Regimento do Magistrado Genoves, tratando muito mal aos fidalgos q consigo trazia..." etc.

⁵⁵ VAN DEN BERG, "De Oost-Indische Compagnie van Genua", *op. cit.*, p. 88.

San Giorgio. Some ships that the East India Company had under construction in Texel were diverted to this end, the basic purpose of the new Company being to participate under license in Portuguese overseas ventures.⁵⁶ It will be recalled that the post-Restoration period in Portugal sees a brief era in which the Crown monopoly over navigation from Lisbon to India, and other overseas possessions, is loosened somewhat.⁵⁷ The Genoese, unaware of the role played by the Portuguese in scuttling their East India expedition, decided to participate in these ventures. While there is no evidence of Genoese ships being sent to India, they did succeed in sending some in the late 1650s in the Portuguese convoys to Brazil. But this venture too soon folded up.⁵⁸

The brief and somewhat unhappy career of the Genoese East India Company is instructive in various ways. For historians of Genoa like Claudio Costantini, it forms an episode in the process that he terms "the rediscovery of the sea" (*la riscoperta del mare*) by that city in the second quarter of the XVIIth century. Viewed from this perspective, the episode sets the seal on the loss by the Genoese Republic of its active maritime orientation.⁵⁹ To other historians such as N.P. van den Berg, writing in the last century, the history of the Genoese Company is symptomatic of the degeneration (in a moral sense) of southern Europe, besides being a reaffirmation of the values that created the VOC.⁶⁰ This characteristically Whiggish approach has major

⁵⁶ COSTANTINI, *La Repubblica di Genova*, *op. cit.*, pp. 319-321.

⁵⁷ For details, see *Historical Archives*, Panaji, Goa, Mss. 2358, *Registo dos alvarás e cartas régias* (1610-1645), fls. 348-49.

⁵⁸ COSTANTINI, *Genova*, *op. cit.*, pp. 320-21; also see the brief comment in C.R. BOXER, *The Dutch in Brazil, 1624-1654*, Oxford 1957, p. 207.

⁵⁹ COSTANTINI, *Ibid.*, Chapters X, XVII and XVIII.

⁶⁰ VAN DEN BERG, "De Oost-Indische Compagnie van Genua", *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76, *passim*. A typically judgemental passage runs: "Zoo werd derhalve ook de les van den apostel om niet in brasserijen en dronkenschappen te wandelen door de officieren van de Heilige Bernard en de Heilige Johannes de Dooper op treurige wijze in den wind geslagen...". Given the notorious devotion of VOC employees in Asia to Bacchus and

problems inherent in it, which are however of too obvious and general a nature to require much elaboration here. From our viewpoint, the episode is instructive for two reasons. First, it shows those arch-rivals, the Dutch and the Portuguese, united for a brief historical moment by a common "dog-in-the-manger" attitude, and thereby also indicates that the two nations did in some important respects share a perspective on monopolies in long-distance trade. The second point is a more complex one. The basic legal justification that the Dutch used to confiscate the Genoese vessels was that they carried Dutch crew and merchants. This was based on the application of a *Plakkaat* of 1606, renewed in 1632, and laid down by the States-General. The point to be stressed in the present context is that this legislation was *selectively* applied by the Dutch, depending on the concrete political circumstances.

When the Dutch merchants Pieter Willemszoon "Floris" and Lucas Anthonisz participated integrally in the Seventh Voyage of the English Company between 1611 and 1615, the Dutch did not attempt recourse to confiscation.⁶¹ Equally, the instigation for the Ceylonese adventure of the Danish Company was provided by a former VOC employee, Marcelis Michielsz de Boschouwer; later, the Danes numbered among their staff a certain Christoffel van der Molen, and had as their President Barent Pessart, both Dutchmen.⁶² In all these cases of Dutchmen, some of them even former VOC employees, the *Plakkaat* of 1606 (and 1632) was not invoked. Thus, it is not the legality of the Dutch position in 1649-50 which is so central as the realpolitik that informed it.

Venus, it seems somewhat unfair to see all this as characteristic solely of a Genoese "roofpartij".

⁶¹ Cf. W.H. MORELAND, ed., *Peter Floris - His Voyage to the East Indies in the "Globe", 1611-1615*, The Hakluyt Society, London 1934; also see SUBRAHMANYAM, *Trade and the Regional Economy of South India, op. cit.*, pp. 251-52.

⁶² SUBRAHMANYAM, *Ibid.*, pp. 265-276; also see KAY LARSEN, *De Dansk-Ostindiske Koloniers Historie: Trankebar*, Copenhagen 1907.

In reality, the Dutch had two choices. They could shrug off the gadfly Company, and wait for it to fold up for economic reasons, even as the first Danish Company was perilously close to doing in those very years, or they could resort to the use of force. If, as Niels Steensgaard has argued, "their success was not based upon government monopolies or the use of violence, but on their ability to compete in the market", the Dutch overreacted.⁶³ The consistent pattern of such "over-reactions", in Asia and in Europe, does suggest however that Steensgaard greatly understates the importance of violence in determining the success of the VOC.⁶⁴ This was realised, sadly, after the event, by Genoese such as Giovanni Battista Pallavicini, who wrote in 1653 of "the jealousy and envy of the Flemings in fearing that others would involve themselves in that trade, by the exercise of which they [the Dutch] have transformed themselves from the inhabitants of a few marshes to the most powerful people in Europe".⁶⁵ For, he concluded, the Dutch believed that if the Genoese entered trade on the Cape Route, soon the other powers which in the mid-XVIIth century sailed solely within the Mediterranean might show an interest — a possibility which the Dutch did not wish to contemplate. It appears in the final analysis then, that neither the *Heeren XVII* nor the Governor-General at Batavia shared the confidence of modern-day historians in their Company's ability to compete without the use of violence.

⁶³ N. STEENSGAARD, "The Companies as a specific institution" in BLUSSÉ and GAASTRA, eds., *Companies and Trade*, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

⁶⁴ Cf. the references in note 4 *supra*.

⁶⁵ *Archivio di Stato*, Genoa, Archivio Segreto, Lettere ministri, 2185, dated 19th December 1653, cited in COSTANTINI, *Genova*, *op. cit.*, pp. 318-19. The correspondence of Francisco de Sousa Coutinho also makes it amply clear that the Dutch and the Portuguese were determined to stop the Genoese, whatever the legal position might be. Thus, he writes, "... o de que estou certo he que se os da Companhia os colherem nos mares da India, que os hão de confiscar, fação os nossos o mesmo se os encontrarem, seja onde fôr..." (emphasis added). Cf. PRESTAGE AND AZEVEDO, eds., *Correspondência Diplomática*, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 304, letter dated 3rd February 1648.

