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# *The Origins of the Florios, a Leading Family of Italian Entrepreneurs in the XIXth and XXth Centuries*

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## 1. Introduction

Reviewing the principal phases in the economic fortunes of the Florio family in Sicily, Trasselli claimed that by the mid-19th century 'the whole Sicilian economy passed through the portals of the Via dei Materassai, n. 46', the street in Palermo where the company's head offices were located\*. In the course of a century Vincenzo Florio (1799-1868) — the son of the Paolo with whom we shall deal in this essay — his son Ignazio (1838-1891) and his grandson Ignazio (1868-1957) were involved in a whole series of commercial, financial, and entrepreneurial operations which went far beyond the regional context in which they were born and acquired an important place in the international economy of the period. No longer small traders in colonial goods, as at the end of the 18th century, the Florio family became major investors and a fundamental feature of the Sicilian economy, being deeply involved in Italy's economic and political development. During the 19th century were added to the original Florio apothecary and drug store the Florio tuna fish factory, the Florio marsala wine factory, textile factories, the Oretea iron foundery, the Florio ship-yards, the General Italian Navigation Co., the Florio Bank and the newspaper *L'Ora*. And these cover only a few of the more important branches of economic activity which enabled this family of entrepreneurs — whose development has been compared, although with a degree of exaggeration, with that of the Rothschilds, the Rockefellers, the Vanderbilts,

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\* C. TRASELLI, *Premessa* in M. TACCARI, *I Florio* (Caltanissetta-Roma) 1967, p. XXVI.

the Krupps or the Duponts — to become an expression of a very exceptional and complex period in Sicily's economic history which, like the Florios themselves, also took on an international dimension.

2. *The town of Bagnara — between Sicily and the Western Mediterranean.*

It has recently been claimed that 'looking at it from the present, the phenomenon of the Florio family tends to lose substance and fall to pieces, leaving only a mass of legends which flutter into the unreachable realm of dreams'.<sup>1</sup> While it is true that much has been done to reconstruct clearly the more important aspects of the family's economic success, which still remains today a unique case of entrepreneurial development, especially for the period in which they prospered most, little research has been done on the situation from which all this developed — a situation which still remains shrouded in obscurity and doubt.<sup>2</sup> As Trasselli has rightly claimed, a 'history' of the Florios which might serve to represent Sicily's economic history is as yet neither possible or practicable.<sup>3</sup> The question which we asked was whether it is possible to write a prehistory of this entrepreneurial career, whether it was possible to investigate and evaluate the original point of departure in Bagnara Calabria in the context of the economic history of the Mediterranean at the end of the 18th century. And the sources existing in the archives which provide an explanation as to why a family of small Calabrian dealers in spices and medicines should have moved to Palermo and also of the predominant paths and types of trade which crossed what Braudel called the 'historic Mediterranean' in the period between the close of the *Ancien Régime* and the opening of the contemporary age,<sup>4</sup> make it possible to answer this question,

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Behind the individual case of the Florio family lay the links which tied

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. INNORTA, 'Introduzione', in M. TACCARI, *op. cit.*, p. VII.

<sup>2</sup> A general study of the Florio family and their entrepreneurial activities may be found in M. TACCARI, *op. cit.* (which has an extensive bibliography). On individual members of the family and events see: R. GIUFFRIDA, 'Vincenzo Florio Governatore del "Banco Regio" di Sicilia', *Annuario dell'Istituto Magistrale Pascasino (Marsala)* VIII, 1968-9, pp. 41-50; ID., 'Un capitano industriale dell'800. Vincenzo Florio (1799-1868)', *Economia e Storia*, 1975; R. LENTINI, 'La Fonderia Oreteca di Ignazio e Vincenzo Florio', in *Nuovi Quaderni del Meridione*, 1977 (60); ID., 'I Florio e la produzione del vino Marsala', in *Nuovi Quaderni del Meridione*, 1977 (57).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Premessa* by C. Trasselli in M. TACCARI, *op. cit.*, pp. XXXII-XXXIII.

<sup>4</sup> Abbreviations used in the notes:

ASM: State Archive, Messina

ASN: State Archive, Naples

ASP: State Archive, Palermo

ASRC: State Archive, Reggio Calabria.

Bagnara to Palermo. It was this relationship which impinged either directly or indirectly on the entire society of the small Calabrian city of Bagnara. Behind the decision of the Florios to open up a shop in Palermo can be seen the influence of the strong economic interests which had for some time bound Bagnara to Western Sicily, and it was against this background that the Florio enterprise in Sicily took shape.

At the end of the 18th century Bagnara was typical of many Southern Italian cities 'divided' between land and sea. This ambivalence was common to all the towns on the Tyrrhenian coast of Calabria between Reggio and Palmi and was the result of physical as well as institutional factors, making them 'towns of men with little land' who tended to look to the sea for an alternative means of survival. Scilla, which had developed a sizeable coastal trading fleet which was very active in the Adriatic, provides a typical example of this situation.<sup>5</sup>

For its part, Bagnara had become a centre for the collection, trade and export of the agricultural products of its hinterland. In its export economy a leading role was played by timber and olive oil, supported by a sizeable local merchant fleet.<sup>6</sup> Although olive oil could not be called a typical local product, it was an important commodity for local merchants who traded in the oil produced in neighbouring centres, often on behalf of groups of 'foreigners'. The more typical product was timber, a key feature of the town's economy and of that of its coterminous neighbourhood. Even as late as 1811, over a third of the territory of the commune, or administrative district, of Bagnara was taken up by woodland.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. the remarks by G. CINGARI, in 'La vita politica calabrese tra Giacobinismo e Restaurazione' (VI Congresso storico calabrese, 1-4 Nov. 1977); ID., *Scilla nel Settecento* (Villa S. Giovanni, Centro di Servizi Culturali, 1978 - cyclostiled); G. SPIRITI, *Riflessioni economico-politiche d'un cittadino relative alle due provincie di Calabria. Con un breve prospetto dello stato economico della città di Messina* (Naples, 1793).

<sup>6</sup> To meet the needs of shipping and commerce there was often pointed out, especially after the earthquake of 1783, 'the clear need which existed there for a port for the safety of naval and merchant vessels which were often subject to violent storms along these coasts of the Tyrrhenian'; the port was also 'of great utility to commerce and the royal fisc because it was an excellent storing place for olive oil'. R. CARDONE, *Storia di Bagnara* (Reggio Calabria, 1873), pp. 96-7.

<sup>7</sup> Ufficio Tecnico Erariale - Reggio Calabria, *Catasto provvisorio della Comune di Bagnara formato in esecuzione del decreto del dì 12 agosto 1809 e delle Istruzioni Ministeriali del dì 1 ottobre dell'istesso anno* (compiled 4th Oct. 1811):

Units of measurement	Type of property	Area cultivated
Moggio of	Vineyard with trees	133 $\frac{2}{8}$ $\frac{3}{32}$
50,126 square	Vineyard	447 $\frac{7}{8}$
palmi	Olive grove without other crops	96 $\frac{1}{8}$ $\frac{1}{16}$

Both as a product and as an item of trade timber provided work for the bulk of the population -- from the sawmen who felled and cut the trees and the *bovari*, or carters, who brought the timber into the town, to the craftsmen who used and worked it (such as the important *hooper*, and the carpenters and shipwrights who built small boats and Feluccas) and above all to the sailors in whose vessels it was exported to the main ports of the Western Mediterranean.

Economic life and the town's inhabitants looked either directly or indirectly towards the sea and maritime trade. It was from the sea and from maritime trade that the often low earnings of the seamen and the almost always considerable profits of the 'well-placed' citizens came, and many of the latter were amongst the most intrepid and successful owners or backers of the small merchant vessels. Much of the income which the latter acquired from the sales of timber and olive oil was ploughed back into land, and investment in land went towards purchase of the small and medium-sized landholdings which, apart from the massive estates of the Dukes of Bagnara, typified the local agrarian landscape. Some of the income also went back to the sea, in the form of bottomry loans or else in the purchase, or more often the financial backing, of ships and cargoes.

This maritime wealth then was drawn into a circular relationship between production on land and trade at sea. And virtually every social group had

(Note 7 contd)

Ploughland - hay	759
» grain and hay	420 $\frac{1}{8}$
» white grain	34
» mulberries	59 $\frac{2}{8}$
» shrubs	3 $\frac{5}{8}$
» olives	13 $\frac{2}{8}$ $\frac{1}{16}$
Uncultivated mountain slope	354 $\frac{2}{8}$ $\frac{1}{16}$
Irrigated market garden	25 $\frac{4}{8}$ $\frac{1}{16}$
Market garden with shrubs	10 $\frac{3}{8}$
Citrus fruit	15 $\frac{3}{8}$ $\frac{1}{16}$
A spinney	1 $\frac{3}{8}$ $\frac{3}{32}$
Plum trees	3 $\frac{5}{8}$
Tomatoes	63
Chestnuts	2
Oaks and pasture	208 $\frac{6}{8}$
Oaks	270
Helm-oaks	132
Chestnuts (timber)	627 $\frac{6}{8}$
Chestnuts	316 $\frac{4}{8}$
Reeds	1 $\frac{2}{8}$ $\frac{1}{36}$ $\frac{1}{64}$
Indian figs	3 $\frac{9}{16}$
Nuts	1 $\frac{5}{8}$
Wooded hillside	12 $\frac{3}{8}$
Uncultivated hillside	16 $\frac{1}{8}$

some involvement in this. Alongside a merchant like Gaetano Caezza, one of the wealthiest inhabitants of Bagnara, who in the middle of the 18th century owned three vineyards, two 'chestnut woods' and four ships (all *feluccas*),<sup>8</sup> can be found a carpenter like Domenico Arena who owned two 'vineyards with trees' and a 'tomolo and a half of vines' and 'had invested for maritime commerce in the vessel belonging to Giuseppe Savoca one hundred ducats, which each year yield fifteen ducats',<sup>9</sup> or a ship's master like Antonino Puleio, who owned 'a vessel for charter, the income from which is gauged at twenty ducats a year', together with a vineyard and a small chestnut plantation<sup>10</sup>.

The complementary relationship between land and maritime income found its unifying factor in the commercial operations which linked Bagnara with the principal westward trade routes. With their cargoes of timber and olive oil, its *feluccas*, or those chartered by the merchants and operators of the town, found their way from time to time to ports like Leghorn, Genoa, Marseilles, and Malta, in addition, of course, to the Sicilian ports. But Bagnara's trade with such ports was badly damaged by the plague which broke out in Messina in 1743. The ships' masters who before 'had continually been called for at Leghorn, Genoa and Malta' in this period 'kept away for fear of being chased off for reasons of contagion', while the 'Vessels of Linguiglia and other places' deserted the shores of Bagnara since they were not 'instructed to load cargoes of oil, as they used to, and to sail on with them to Genoa, Leghorn, Malta or Rome', so that the oil was left unsold. But the recovery was rapid, and the volume of traffic began to increase, especially after 1780.<sup>11</sup>

There were also strong commercial links between Bagnara and Sicily in a complex chain which also involved the western Mediterranean trade routes. Placed geographically in an area of the Mediterranean of which the commercial port of Messina formed the centre, Bagnara's links were however mainly with western Sicily. The reason for this is to be found in certain economic and commercial factors of very ancient origin. In fact Bagnara was quite different, perhaps in order to avoid competition, from the neighbouring and rival town of Scilla. In a certain sense, the two sea-going towns has effected a division of their spheres of influence and economic activity. While the *feluccas* of Scilla found stable bases for stocking up and for either full or partial off-lading of their cargoes at Messina and the eastern Sicilian ports on their long journeys towards Trieste and the ports of the Adriatic, the coastal trade of Bagnara was

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<sup>8</sup> ASN *Regia Camera della Sommaria*, Catasti Onciari 6032, Bagnara: Onciario del 1754.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Catasti Onciari 6033, Bagnara: Libro del Catasto, Vol. I, anno 1742.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> ASRC notary G. Savoja, Bagnara, 71, 31.12.1743 - Pubblico Testimonio di Pn. (Trans: Padron) Bonavireo Barbaro e Pn Antonino Savoca and Pubblico Testimonio di Pn. Giacomo Russo, Pn. Gregorio Melluso e Pn Domenico Saffioti.

characterised by the 'westerly' direction of its routes and destinations. Of course, vessels from Scilla were to be found in the ports of western Sicily, just as Bagnara merchants were often present in Messina. But for the latter Messina was not so much an outlet market as a 'bourse' for commercial operations (ships' charters, insurances etc.).<sup>12</sup>

In terms of Bagnara's westerly orientation, Sicily was important as an intermediate port-of-call for seamen voyaging outside the confines of the Kingdom of Naples. The ships of Bagnara were able to take on supplies for the longer voyages at Palermo, from which a considerable amount of traffic directed towards the West sailed.<sup>13</sup> The principal Sicilian ports were also well known to the sailors of Bagnara, and provided them with an important market for the timber of the forests of Aspromonte. This is shown by the large number of companies formed between the seamen, merchants, and shop-keepers of Bagnara who had close links with operators in western Sicily and to whom they supplied 'various types of timber, boards, hoops, and such like, which are loaded at this or neighbouring ports, and carried to Palermo, Termini, Trapani, and other parts of Sicily'.<sup>15</sup>

Trade with Sicily was concentrated mainly on Palermo, however. Here the Bagnara merchants imported the goods requested by the local market, or else transferred them from their own to other vessels for the longer journeys to Trapani, Mazzara, Castellammare, or Sciacca.<sup>16</sup> The imports and transfers were of 'timber boards, hoops, and beams of Calabria'. Vice versa, dried fish were brought back to Calabria from Sicily.<sup>17</sup> In fact, trade between Bagnara

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<sup>12</sup> For Scilla, see G. CINGARI, *Scilla nel Settecento cit.* In Messina, for example, Antonio Pulejo of Bagnara drew up a charter contract with the captain of a Neapolitan ship to transport 'on board and under cover' timber, and planks from Bagnara to Termini di Palermo (ASM, notary G. Micale, Messina, 1489, 12.6.1805).

<sup>13</sup> On the commercial trade centred around Palermo see: A. DELLE VEDOVE, 'Il traffico del Porto di Palermo dal 1790 al 1815', in *Quaderni di Geografia Umana per la Sicilia e la Calabria*, 1956, pp. 51-79.

<sup>14</sup> Bagnara vessels took on preserved fish in particular in the Sicilian ports: see, e.g., ASP, *Secrezia di Palermo*, Reg. di lettere, 315, Provisioni di Bastimenti dell'anno 1776-7: 'Li Regi Custodi lascieranno uscire a Pn. Tommaso Caja della Bagnara p. prov.e della sua bacca n.ta GMG con uomini n. 20 per fare il suo viaggio in ponente e domentre in questo n.tro porto l'infra cioè Grossame B.li 2. Pal. II dec. 1776'.

<sup>15</sup> ASRC notary C. La Piana, Bagnara 134, 7.6.1800: deeds for the liquidation of the company of Vincenzo and Giacomo Denaro, Pasquale and Giuseppe Romeo and Costanzo Morello of Bagnara.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the transhipment operations carried out by Luca and Vincenzo Antonio Morello in Bagnara in ASP, *Secrezia di Palermo*, Responsali, 1742, 6.9.1791, p. 5 and 19.9.1791, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> In order 'to buy preserved tuna fish' on commission for Pietro Sergi, a Bagnara dealer, Pn Giuseppe Barbaro went to Palermo with his *feluca* (ASRC, notary R. Sofio, Bagnara, 84, 14.1.1750); and on account for Domenico Dato of Bagnara, Do-

and western Sicily was mainly composed of timber and Sicilian fish. But although one often finds reference in notarial documents to 'the business of buying and selling' beams, timber, dried fish, and similar goods,<sup>18</sup> this did not exhaust the trade. With their own *feluche*, or with vessels chartered both within and outside the Kingdom, the merchant seamen of Bagnara took an active part in the Tyrrhenian in what was still in the 18th century what Braudel described as the 'first world trade', the trade in spices and colonial goods, 'Spices and other goods which come from distant countries and are used in Medicine, for Dyeing and for Manufactures'.<sup>19</sup>

The ships of Bagnara took part in the final leg of the spice routes, between the European import markets and the markets of consumption. And Sicily, as well as Calabria, was a major centre of consumption. There was also a contrary flow, although smaller in volume and value, arising from the transport and marketing of Calabrian spices, some of which were of good quality and in demand in Sicily as well as 'outside the Kingdom'. For this reason, the merchants of Bagnara regularly visited the ports of the northern Mediterranean which were the main centres for the distribution of spices imported into Europe. The spices and colonial goods of the West, from America and the ones the Dutch and British imported via northern Europe or Gibraltar met up with those of the Levant in the ports of Marseilles, Genoa and Leghorn. It was here that the seamen of Bagnara became involved and made their purchases, although the quantity was not great, to carry back and sell in markets of the southern Mediterranean.

The occupation of 'dealer in spices' was therefore very common in Bagnara. In addition to the principal trade route mentioned, there was also another domestic route used by those wishing to reach the inland areas of the Kingdom of Naples and of Sicily to sell spices. The Neapolitan mainland and Sicily were all one for the seamen and merchants, and indeed Sicily was often closer than many parts of the mainland in their mental and economic geography. But the two different routes crossed and became one, not just because they were all part of the same circuit but also because the same merchants often operated in both.

The sources provide us with a wealth of information on this. A very interesting "testimonio" of 1772 contains precise information on the trade routes used for the spice trade as well as detailing of the ways in which capital was employed and

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menico Cacciottolo and Giuseppe Lobrano of Procida he loaded in Palermo 'Twenty barrels of salted fish' for Bagnara. (ASRC, notary G. Fedele, Bagnara, 91, 15.7.1774).

<sup>18</sup> E.g., ASRC, notary P. A. Fedele, Bagnara, 147, 1782: liquidation of the company of Vincenzo Vitetta and Luca and Vincenzo Antonio Morello.

<sup>19</sup> This is the definition of the entry *droghe* (spices) in the *Dizionario di Commercio dei Signori Fratelli Savary* (Venice, 1770). The greater part of the spices came from vegetable bases (known as *Aromi*) in the form of 'Roots, Stems, Stalks, Leaves, Flowers, Fruits, and Resinous Gums'.

and loaned on bottomry: Gregorio and Giuseppe Caruso (father and son), Santo Cesareo and Bruno Vizzari 'who have been engaged in trade for many years' stated that they had always 'been used to taking respectively sums of money from particular Citizens and Shopkeepers in this city, to transport them to Leghorn, Genoa, or Marseilles, for the purchase of Spices and other goods, paying the Principals the normal interest rates'; they added that 'after spending this money in the West, each would come back with whatever profit he had made either to the Kingdom of Sicily or to that of Naples'. Vizzari stated, in more detail, that 'finding himself in Leghorn, he set sail for Palermo to discharge his merchandise there'; and that other sailors 'after spending the money which they had raised here, sail from Leghorn to the City of Marsala, and there in the Kingdom of Sicily they sell their merchandise'.<sup>20</sup>

These is also information on internal trade: Francesco, Domenico and Giovanni Caruso sold in Naples 'rhubarb and barks';<sup>21</sup> for the sale of spices, the spice factor of Giuseppe di Majo and Tommaso Bruno held credits in Taranto, Lecce, Trepuzzi, Castellani, and Cosenza;<sup>22</sup> in 1781 Francesco La Camera went to 'Caltanissetta, in the Kingdom of Sicily, for the purpose of selling different spices';<sup>23</sup> the brothers Vincenzo, Antonino, and Domenico Puntillo 'who were engaged in the trade of selling spices' travelled 'throughout the towns and Provinces of the Kingdom';<sup>24</sup> Santo Gentiluomo 'was engaged in the selling of rhubarb and was wont to take his spices to Sicily to sell them there'.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. *The Florio family between Bagnara and Palermo*

Towards the end of the 18th century Paolo Florio, the founder of the Sicilian Florios, also became involved in the spice trade with the western Mediterranean and Sicily. Born in one of those 'basic cells' of maritime trade, as Braudel described them, in about 1770, Paolo Florio, the father of Vincenzo, the future 'captain of industry', began his activities as a small spice trader in the last decade of the century.

He was a new arrival, since there was no merchant or naval tradition in the family. Throughout the 18th century the Florio family had been small and had played no part in Bagnara's maritime trade. They were mostly involved in craft or 'land' activities, and had no contact, even indirectly, with investments in maritime activities, being for the most part carpenters, labourers,

<sup>20</sup> ASRC, notary G. Savoja, Bagnara 75, 16.6.1772.

<sup>21</sup> ASRC, notary G. Fedele, Bagnara 90, 14.7.1767.

<sup>22</sup> ASRC, notary C. La Piana, Bagnara, 131, 26.2.1780.

<sup>23</sup> ASRC, notary C. La Piana, Bagnara, 131, 3.4.1781.

<sup>24</sup> ASRC, notary C. La Piana, Bagnara, 131, 9.4.1782.

<sup>25</sup> ASRC, notary C. La Piana, Bagnara, 133, 1.12.1792.

dyers, market gardeners, and so forth.<sup>26</sup> Paolo Florio was the son of Maestro Vincenzo Florio, almost certainly an artisan.<sup>27</sup> But despite the lack of a family tradition, he quickly became involved in the spice business. And his debut also came at what was a particularly difficult moment in Bagnara's economic life, as the town was still recovering from the tragic consequences of the earthquake of 1783.<sup>28</sup> But one might also argue that it was the calamity of the earthquake which had encouraged him to break away from the family tradition, especially when one bears in mind the destruction wrought on both men and possessions and also the strength of the subsequent recovery.

We are better informed, however, on the relationship which he established from the start of his activities as a spice merchant with the better known Paolo Barbaro. The 'company' formed by Paolo Florio and Paolo Barbaro was operating in Bagnara from the beginning of the 1790s (the earliest document we have found refers to a loan in 1793);<sup>29</sup> and it was the same company which transferred to Palermo after 1800 under the title 'Florio-Barbaro of Bagnara'.<sup>30</sup> Paolo Barbaro was also from Bagnara, but unlike Florio was part of a family with a long sea-going and merchantile tradition.<sup>31</sup> He was probably the son

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<sup>26</sup> According to the *Stato delle Anime* (Trans: the parish population survey) for Bagnara in 1742 there were 22 Florios between the ages of 1 and 60 (ASN, *Regia Camera della Sommara*, Catasti Onciari, 6033, Bagnara, 1742). The various documents of the 1754 Catasto Onciario show that there were 9 Florio family groups composed of 34 persons in all — of these, 3 were carpenters, 5 were labourers, 1 was a dyer, 1 a market gardener, and 1 a Hacksmith (ASN, *Regia Camera della Sommara*, Catasti Onciari, 6032, Bagnara 1754).

<sup>27</sup> It has not proved possible to reconstruct the tree of the family from which Paolo Florio was descended: the 'Baptismal Registers' for Bagnara no longer exist, and the Bagnara notarial registers have not provided other information which could be used for this purpose.

<sup>28</sup> On the consequences of the earthquake for Bagnara, see: R. CARDONE, *Storia di Bagnara op. cit.*; also I. PRINCIPE, *Città nuove di Calabria*, Chiaravalle Centrale 1977.

<sup>29</sup> ASRC, notary C. La Piana, Bagnara, 134, 15th Jan. 1799: *Inventari dei Beni Ereditari del fu Don Carmine Romano*.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. ASP, *Secrezia di Palermo*, Responsali, 1746, 7th Feb. 1801, p. 152, & 18th April 1801, p. 207.

<sup>31</sup> In the mid-18th century there were 16 Barbaro families living in Bagnara, and at least 14 of these were 'sea-going' (ASN, *Regia Camera della Sommara*, Catasti Onciari, 6032, Bagnara 1754). The Barbaro were very much at home in the ports of the Mediterranean; some — like Simone Barbaro — had permanent residence at Malta (cf. the will of Padron Elia Barbaro, ASRC, notary G. Fedele, Bagnara, 87, 27th Sept. 1748; and the marriage contract of Vittoria Barbaro of Malta with Padron Domenico Messina of Bagnara, ASRC, notary R. Sofio, Bagnara, 86, 11th Jan. 1774). These various groups of the Barbaro families which were scattered around the Mediterranean provided an important network of communications linking Bagnara with the principal Mediterranean ports.

of the ship's master Francesco Barbaro, who exercised 'the profession of master of *feluche*, in which he voyaged to the Kingdom of Sicily and elsewhere with cargoes of various types'.<sup>32</sup> He had for some time sailed the trade routes towards the West,<sup>33</sup> and spent most of each year away from Bagnara on the sea and on the Sicilian markets.<sup>34</sup> And it was on these same traditional routes of the trade of Bagnara that the commerce of the Florio-Barbaro company was conducted, so drawing on the elder partner's wide experience of Mediterranean sea-borne trade. The two partners frequently visited the ports of the Tyrrhenian and dealt mainly in spices, using capital raised on maritime loans from local merchants in a range of activities which although quantitatively modest brought them into contact with numerous markets in Calabria, Sicily and outside the Kingdom. In 1793, for example, they borrowed 200 ducats on maritime loan from the Bagnara merchant, Don Carmine Romano, which was used 'in the West';<sup>35</sup> and again, similarly in 1796, from Don Annunziato Messina.<sup>36</sup>

Sicily, and Palermo in particular, were habitual ports-of-call for Florio and Barbaro in their voyages towards the West. In addition, there was a largish 'colony' of people from Bagnara, while there were also many families of Palermitan origin in Bagnara. The links between Bagnara and Palermo resulted from a long tradition based on the overlap between exchanges of goods, men, and whole families involved in commercial activities. In the second half of

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<sup>32</sup> ASRC, notary C. La Piana, Bagnara, 130, 28th Feb. 1779: *Pubblico Testimonio di Padron Giuseppantonio Denaro, Padron Vincenzo & Padron Liborio Saffioti, Padron Francesco Barbaro, Padron Francesco Carbone, Padron Tommaso Caja, Padron Luca Morello.*

<sup>33</sup> In 1776, together with his father Padron Francesco and their partner Domenico Bottari, Paolo Barbaro voyaged to Genoa from Messina on a Genoese vessel, to purchase 'goods' for sale in Sicily 'in the city of Marsala, but not having found it worth their while there' they were shipped on to Messina (ASRC, notary C. La Piana, Bagnara 130, 6th July 1777; *Testimonio di Carmine di Majo*).

<sup>34</sup> Because he was 'unable to take care as to the good and proper cultivation' of his own vineyard and that belonging to his wife, 'since on account of his business he had to travel often to places in Sicily,' Paolo Barbaro sold the two farms in 1790; (ASRC, notary C. La Piana, Bagnara, 132, 13th Jan. 1790). Paolo Barbaro was married to Mattia Florio, the daughter of Vincenzo Florio, blacksmith (Cf. the marriage contract in ASRC, notary C. La Piana, Bagnara 132, 8th Feb. 1784).

<sup>35</sup> ASRC, notary C. La Piana, Bagnara, 134, 15th Jan. 1799, *Inventario dei Beni Ereditari del fu Don Carmine Romano.* The merchant also noted in his ledgers the 'money loaned on bottomry for use on land and in other ways' from 1793 onwards.

<sup>36</sup> This loan, also for 200 Ducats, 'on bottomry' was recorded as follows in Messina's Register: '1796. The 6th day of January. To Paolo Florio and Paolo Barbaro, on bottomry, to be paid by the end of December as indicated on the bill - 200 Ducats' (ASRC, notary C. La Piana, Bagnara, 133, 1st March 1797, *Inventario de' Beni di Annunziato Messina*).

the 18th century there were many marriages between inhabitants of Bagnara and Palermo,<sup>37</sup> as well as the transfer of various individuals from Palermo to Bagnara.<sup>38</sup> But it was more often the case for merchants of Bagnara to move to Palermo. This was the case with Don Emiddio Barbaro 'resident in Palermo' for his business,<sup>39</sup> as with former partner of Paolo Barbaro's father, Domenico Bottari, who after many journeys had set up a shop in Palermo and dealt in spices, a fact which was to be of considerable importance for the outcome of the Florio venture.

There were a whole series of business contacts between Bottari, originally from Bagnara but now resident in Palermo, and the sailors and merchants of Bagnara. But those with Florio and Barbaro were closer and more special. They acted as witnesses when he drew up his will in Palermo in June 1797, shortly before his death.<sup>40</sup> and they also inherited his business. From his wife's inheritance to which they succeeded in the same year, the two partners acquired 'all the stock of spices left by my late husband, the equipment of the shop, and the credits held from the Grand Hospital and from Signor Chiarella' worth 1,001 ducats and 12 grains.<sup>41</sup>

There are two clear points which emerge from this episode: that Florio and Barbaro had close links with Palermo by the summer of 1797; and that the size of the business was already quite considerable. From small traders they had now become medium-sized merchants in the area, probably abandoning their former role as 'travelling spice dealers' and taking on an authentic intermediary function. In March 1798, for example, Paolo Florio took over in Palermo the cargo of a ship coming from outside the Kingdom, and shipped it on to Acireale. The cargo was made up of typical spice commodities: quinine,

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. e.g., the marriage contract of Antonia Caratozzolo of Bagnara and Pietro Todaro of Palermo. The niece was a grand-daughter of Paolo Florio, carpenter (ASRC, notary G. Savoja, Bagnara 74, 25th Nov. 1762).

<sup>38</sup> Amongst the 'Foreigners living in this City' (Bagnara) in 1754 there were two Palermitans; Giuseppe Maida, son of Pietro, gilder, aged 62 and Sebastiano Cambrea of the City of Palermo carpenter aged 40 (ASN, *Regia Camera della Sommaria*, Catasti Onciari, 6032, Bagnara 1754). Nicola Ruffino of Palermo had also 'been resident in Bagnara for many years' together with his sister and brother-in-law (ASRC, notary G. Savoja, Bagnara 72, 22nd Dec. 1749).

<sup>39</sup> ASRC, notary C. La Piana, 132, 23rd July 1791. He was permanently resident there by 1800 as he was described in that year as Don Emiddio Barbaro of Palermo (ASP, *Secrezia di Palermo*, Responsali, 1746, p. 103).

<sup>40</sup> Padron Domenico Bottari's will is in ASP, notary A. Albertini, Palermo, 20513, 25th June 1797.

<sup>41</sup> *Onze 360, tari 11, grana 4*. Cf. the settlement of Veneranda Veneziano, widow and heir of Padron Domenico Bottari, in favour of Paolo Barbaro and Paolo Florio, Partners, in ASRC, notary C. La Piana, Bagnara, 133, 30th Dec. 1797.

ceruse, valerian, soaps, verdigris, and powdered ivory, all of which were substances used either as medicines or for dyeing.<sup>42</sup>

For some years the company remained based in Bagnara. The two partners continued to return there between voyages, but the acquisition of Bottari's shop in Palermo meant that henceforth this became the main base for their business. Between 1797 and 1798 Paolo Florio was married in Bagnara. The marriage deeds with Giuseppa Saffioti were dated 17th January 1796<sup>43</sup> and show that he was by then fully established in maritime trade. His wife came from a wealthy sea-going family. The daughter of Vincenzo Saffioti and Donna Giovanna Coscinà, she had been brought up with her sister Vittoria and brother Domenico, by her grand-father and paternal uncle after the death of her parents. Her grand-father, the aged Domenico Saffioti, had earlier in the century sailed on the westerly routes in a 'lateen *Felucca*',<sup>44</sup> while her family were heirs of the wealthy Caezza family, who had moved from Lipari to Bagnara making a fortune as feudal administrators and financiers.<sup>45</sup> And it was in Bagnara that the couple's first child, Vincenzo Florio, was born in 1799.<sup>46</sup>

The move to Palermo came either immediately or soon after the birth of their son. In 1800 Paolo Florio was still in Bagnara to receive a credit owed by his brother-in-law Domenico Saffioti incurred 'some years earlier in the City of Palermo on the Island of Sicily for certain spices'.<sup>47</sup> It is not clear, ho-

<sup>42</sup> ASP, *Segreteria di Palermo*, Responsali, 1745, 18th May 1798.

<sup>43</sup> ASRC, notary C. La Piana, Bagnara 133, 17th Jan. 1796. The date of the wedding is not known, although it must have been between 1797 and 1798, because the Bagnara parish records have been lost. There is no mention of the wedding in the 'List of marriages between the years 1784 and 1809' (kept in the Commune of Bagnara), but the list was drawn up in 1830, after the Florios had broken their links with their native town, on the basis of verbal evidence in order 'to make good the absence of the parish register'.

<sup>44</sup> ASN, *Regia Camera della Sommaria*, Catasti Onciari, 6032, Bagnara 1754: Onciario del 1754 e libretto di Tasse.

<sup>45</sup> Vincenzo Caezza was also mayor (*sindaco*) of Bagnara in 1768 and 1769 (ASRC, notary Savoja, 75, 13th May 1770).

<sup>46</sup> Vincenzo Florio's birth date is also uncertain: according to L. DI MAGGIO, *Pei solenni funerali del Cav. Vincenzo Florio*, Palermo 1868, he was born in 1799; M. TACCARI, *op. cit.*, gives 4th April 1799; R. GIUFFRIDA, *Un capitano d'industria... op. cit.*, gives the date as 23rd May 1799, on the basis of information on employees in the 'Banco Regio dei Domini Reali al di là del Faro', on 18th June 1855, at which time he was 56 years and 26 days. The loss of the parish registers and the gaps in the 'List of marriage in the Commune of Bagnara between 1784 and 1809' which is preserved in the Commune of Bagnara and was compiled after 1830 makes it difficult to resolve these differences. The latter list shows that by that time Vincenzo Florio had no links with his native town, and had already received Palermitan citizenship from the city Senate in 1822 (cf. L. DI MAGGIO, *op. cit.*, p. 25).

<sup>47</sup> ASRC, notary V. Bottari, Bagnara, 1398, 1st Feb. 1800.

wever, whether by that time Florio and Barbaro had made the move to Palermo. We can only date this at some point between the end of 1800 and the beginning of 1801, and the permanent presence of the Florio-Barbaro Company, spice merchants, in Palermitan commercial life in fact dates from February 1801.<sup>48</sup>

Together with Paolo Florio, his wife and son Vincenzo and brother Ignazio, who was also involved in running the Palermo spice business, all left Bagnara.

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The sources which reveal that Paolo Florio was trading in Palermo even before 1799 — which has in the past been considered to be the year both of his arrival and the 'discovery' of Palermo by the Florio family — also suggest that the small spice dealer from Bagnara decided to make the move for purely economic and commercial reasons, rather than on account of the political situation. For this reason, although the transfer of the Florio-Barbaro company to Palermo followed the crucial year of 1799, it would not seem that there was any cause and effect relationship between the political events on the mainland in 1799 (the Jacobin Republic and its repercussions on Bagnara and the surrounding area) and Florio and Barbaro's decision to leave their native Calabria.

Although Bagnara felt the blows of the Jacobin upheaval and the counterblows of the Sanfedist reaction,<sup>49</sup> it did not, even in the dramatic months of 1799, differ much from the general tendency in southern Calabria — especially in the area around Reggio — of remaining 'more or less immobile, in some cases dissenting, in others refuting'<sup>50</sup> both Jacobin and Sanfedist overtures. Bagnara was amongst the many in Calabria Ultra [translator's note: name of the province] where the 'liberty tree' was never planted. And while, as was generally the case in the area around Reggio, the diffusion of revolutionary ideology was minimal there, nor did Cardinal Ruffo's activities have any significant sequel when he passed through Bagnara looking for recruits for the Sanfedist army.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> ASP, *Segreteria di Palermo*, Responsali, 1746, p. 152 & p. 207.

<sup>49</sup> On 11th Feb. 1799 two citizens of Bagnara (a doctor and a magistrate) were killed 'for being Jacobins' by the brigand Giovanni Calarco, known as Gioannazzo. But this single and tragic episode of violence had no ideological or 'political' motives, but was carried out by 'a group of perverse people ...who rose up in arms against their own town, sacrificing to brute force the best educated, honest and peace-loving citizens, because moved by false political principles, by private feuds, and in the hope of plundering these good people who were fully devoted to good order and their homeland' (R. CARDONE, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-7). The episode had a particular importance because it coincided with the arrival of the royal troops (cf. G. CINGARI, *Giacobini e Sanfedisti in Calabria nel 1799*, Messina-Florence 1957, p. 177).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. G. CINGARI, *La Vita Politica Calabrese... cit.*

<sup>51</sup> Following his landing at Pezzo, Cardinal Ruffo stopped in the course of his

The slight impact of the revolutionary uprising and the reaction in Bagnara is to be explained in terms of the different importance of 1799 as a moment of political, ideological, and social breakthrough in the different areas of Calabria, distinguished by 'differences in the agrarian landscape, in types of production and social structures'.<sup>52</sup> There were many areas of Calabria Ultra which remained unaffected by the events of 1799, especially those like Bagnara whose economic and social structures were not determined by the latifundum, and which had commercial contacts with both internal and European markets on which they played an important role as centres of trade as well as exporters. Bagnara's economic interests were directed abroad and towards the sea-borne trade which affected the whole social and economic structure of this town with little land, in which the agrarian problem could not acquire a disruptive character. And in this probably lies the explanation of Bagnara's 'wait and see' reaction in 1799.

In fact, the effect of the Jacobin and Sanfedist wind on the social and economic fabric of Bagnara were not sufficiently deep or damaging to upset commercial activity to the point of forcing the inhabitants to emigrate. For this reason, the departure of the Florio family from Bagnara for Palermo is to be explained not so much in terms of the consequences of the 1799 revolution but rather in terms of the commercial links binding Paolo Florio, like so many other spice merchants in Bagnara, with Sicily and with Palermo, which in those years was a rapidly expanding commercial port.

For nearly a decade, at least, Paolo Florio had been carrying on his business operations in the Sicilian capital. And during this decade he had had the opportunity to take account of the city's expansion as a market which was often frequented by foreign traders, who were themselves beginning to set up their own factors there.<sup>53</sup> The Palermo which Paolo Florio was able to observe in

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march north at Scilla (where he arrived on the 13th Feb.) and at Bagnara. But the help provided by these two towns which Ruffo considered to be 'most loyal places' and from which he expected considerable support was in fact hardly noticable — only two men from Scilla and four from Bagnara joined the Sanfedists (Cf. G. CINGARI, *Giacobini e Sanfedisti etc. cit.*, pp. 176 et seq.).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. G. CINGARI, *La Vita Politica Calabrese... cit.*

<sup>53</sup> On the function of the foreign capitalists in Sicily in the 18th and 19th centuries see: G. FALZONE, *La Sicilia tra il Settecento e l'Ottocento*, Palermo 1965, pp. 52-3; and S. F. ROMANO, *Momenti del Risorgimento in Sicilia*, Messina 1952 (pp. 57-8) also attributes foreign capital with a 'colonial' role in the Sicilian economy. But R. LENTINI ('Note su un operatore commerciale in Sicilia: Abraham Gibbs, 1799-1802', in *Nuovi Quaderni del Meridione*, 1976, n. 56), would seem to be right when he says that the foreign presence in the island has not yet been given a right consideration to explain, especially in the economic field, the real role in the process of transformation of the old Sicilian social structure. For a general appraisal of the Sicilian economy, see R. GIUFFRIDA, *Aspetti dell'economia siciliana nell'Ottocento*, Palermo 1973 (esp. pp. 9-24).

these years of travel was already showing the first signs and the first flowering of the beginnings of a process of capitalist development (of which the Sicilian Florios were to be co-authors), which the presence of a number of French and English entrepreneurs made open to stimuli from the international economy. For an energetic and enterprising man like Paolo Florio the fervour of economic activities based around the port of Palermo must have seemed to offer better guarantees and better prospects than the more restricted economic structures of Calabria, which was in addition in upheaval due to the anarchic brigandage of the period.

The economic expansion of the Sicilian capital is also evident from its demographic growth.<sup>54</sup> The presence of the Court of Ferdinand IV, which in 1798 had hurriedly abandoned Naples, also served to make Palermo an even more attractive commercial centre. And thanks to Nelson's fleet Sicily also seemed in these years to be 'a quiet haven while Europe was in upheaval'.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> By the end of the 18th century Palermo already had about 150,000 inhabitants — having grown from 109,993 inhabitants in 1700 to 146,937 in 1799 (Cf. F. MAGGIORE PERNI, *La popolazione della Sicilia e di Palermo dal secolo X al secolo XVIII*, Palermo 1892, pp. 352-3).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. M. TACCARI, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

