PROBLEMS

Changes in the Structure of the Wheat Trade in Seventeenth-Century Sicily and the Building of New Villages

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1. *Introduction*

Until the late sixteenth century Sicily continued to fulfil an historic rôle as the principal wheat supplier of the Mediterranean.[1] The question of how the seventeenth-century decline in Sicilian wheat exports was connected with the island-kingdom's greater 'peripheralisation' during a period of contraction in the world-economy is of related importance for the historian. That there was a severe decline in wheat exports now seems beyond doubt, although the available data are still incomplete and the existing evidence shows that wheat production in Sicily increased during this period. It has long been accepted by historians that production must have increased, especially in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as a result of extending the area of land under cultivation.[2] The extensive cultivation of the areas most suited to

* The following abbreviations are used: A.S.P. = Archivio di Stato, Palermo; *Prot. Reg.* = *Protonotaro del Regno*; *Cons. Merc.* = *Conservatoria del Registro* (*Mercedes*). The wheat measure referred to in the text is usually the salma alla generale (= 275 litres = c. 2 quintals), but sometimes the salma alla grossa (= 343.8 litres = c. 2.6 quintals) which was used at Castrogiovanni, Raccuia and Leonforte. The Sicilian money of account was the onza. 1 onza = $2\frac{1}{2}$ scudi = 30 tarì.

[1] F. BRAUDEL, *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II*, I, Paris 1966, p. 525.

[2] G. SALVIOLI, *Le Colonizzazioni in Sicilia nei Secoli XVI e XVII*, "Vierteljahrschrift für Social-und Wirtschaftgeschichte", I, 1903, pp. 71-73; C.A. GARUFI, *Patti Agrari e*

wheat growing, the western and central parts of the island, was assured, for feudal lords founded numerous villages on their estates. More precisely, some 67 villages were successfully founded between 1595 and 1650 — years in which internal colonisation reached its peak; and these formed about 50% of the 'new foundations' which appeared in the three centuries before the formal abolition of feudalism in Sicily in 1812. This article shows how the structure of the wheat trade changed in the seventeenth century by looking at the ways in which wheat surpluses from the new villages were distributed and consumed largely within Sicily itself, so elucidating, albeit partially, a thesis already put forward by Maurice Aymard.[3]

As in other 'peripheral' regions of Europe the experience of Sicily was characterised by long-term withdrawal from production for the world market.[4] The process began in the late sixteenth century with the collapse of sugar production; it became increasingly apparent during the early seventeenth century in the case of wheat and was completed after the 1670s with the virtual demise of silk exports.[5] In the early seventeenth century domestic markets for wheat came to be much more important for Sicilian feudatories and their agents; this was especially true of the silk-growing north-eastern region of Sicily, as towns in this area traditionally needed to augment local food supplies with the produce of more fertile parts of the island. This problem was made more difficult by the demographic upswing of the sixteenth century. Between 1550 and 1570 population in the north-east increased by up to 30%. The problems of supplying wheat to the north-east — and Palermo in the north-west — were a major stimulus to colonisation in the western interior of the island. For the north-east, this situation continued only so long as its inhabitants could afford to pay high prices for wheat with the profits gained from a sustained foreign demand for Sicilian silk. By the end of the seventeenth century however more localised demand claimed the predominant share of the wheat surpluses of western Sicily. This is shown above all by the demographic imbalances which by this time had effectively come to split the island. Between 1580 and 1680 population increased by as much as 20—50% in western and western-central Sicily where most of the new villages were built. Elsewhere it grew only feebly or declined,[6] although some short-term growth

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Comuni Feudali di Nuova Fondazione in Sicilia, "Archivio Storico Siciliano", Third Series, I, 1946, pp. 31-111; II, 1947, pp. 7-131.

[3] M. AYMARD, *In Sicilia: Sviluppo Demografico e Sue Differenziazioni Geografiche, 1500-1800*, "Quaderni Storici", XVII, 1971, pp. 417-46.

[4] I. WALLERSTEIN, *The Modern World-System II*, New York 1980, pp. 130-34.

[5] M. AYMARD, *Commerce et Production de la Soie Sicilienne aux XVI^e-XVII^e Siècles*, "Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire", LXXXVII, 1965, ii, pp. 609-40.

[6] M. AYMARD, *In Sicilia: Sviluppo Demografico*, cit. and ID., *Une Croissance Sélective: La Population Sicilienne au XVII^e Siècle*, "Mélanges de la Casa de Velasquez", IV, 1968, pp. 203-27.

in numbers was sustained in the north-east as a result of the regular food supplies which continued to be sent there.

The following analysis places the history of Sicilian wheat in the seventeenth century firmly within the context of the 'new foundations' and supplements the fragmentary data for global movements of Sicilian wheat by focusing upon the earliest stages in the economy of two new villages. It further explores the dimensions of the internal wheat market by considering the 'new foundations' in relation to the economic and political structure of an old town situated in the centre of the island.

2. *The Importance of the Internal Wheat Market*

The existing evidence of the long-term decline in wheat exports can be summarised briefly. In the 1570s and '80s annual exports from Sicily averaged little more than 100,000 salme (or 200,000 quintals).[7] Though much reduced when compared with those of fifty years previously such quantities were still very considerable. Between 1601 and 1618, in contrast, exports are only once (in 1616) recorded as having exceeded 100,000 salme.[8] According to Aymard more than 200,000 salme were exported in 1620-21 but this was followed by decline later in the seventeenth century.[9] By the 1680s and '90s

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[7] A CRIVELLA, *Trattato di Sicilia (1593)*, Caltanissetta-Rome 1970, pp. 101-2.

[8] *Archivio Spadafora*, ser. II, 61, fos. 381-421, *Relatione dell'estrationi fatte da diverse persone vendutoci dalla R. C. dell'anno 12ª Ind. 1598 per tutti li 2 Novembre 1618...*, undated. I wish to thank Signor G. Spadafora, Prince of Spadafora, for allowing me to consult his family archive.

The document gives figures for both duty-paying and duty-free exports according to the *caricatore* (grain magazine) from which they were extracted. These were the export totals:

Year	Total Exports (salme)	Year	Total Exports (salme)
1588-99	126,187	1608-09	5,950 +?
1599-1600	97,736	1609-10	52,948
1600-01	38,515	1610-11	23,559
1601-02	36,020	1611-12	30,094
1602-03	41,923	1612-13	39,179
1603-04	6,808 +?	1613-14	23,765
1604-05	53,351	1614-15	33,675
1605-06	78,988	1615-16	103,518
1606-07	Nil	1616-17	38,739
1607-08	7,250 +?		

[9] M. AYMARD, *Il Bilancio d'Una Lunga Crisi Finanziaria*, "Rivista Storica Italiana", LXXXIV, 1972, p. 992.

annual exports averaged less than 50,000 salme.[10] It is difficult to comment with precision on the trend between 1621 and 1680, for, with the exception of fragmentary data on duty-free exports discovered by myself, virtually no other figures for the period seem to have come to light so far. In the 1570s and '80s, according to Alfonso Crivella, a commentator of the time, nearly 37,000 salme were exported duty-free each year; this was apparently 29% of the total wheat exported.[11] Between 1598–99 and 1617–18, however, duty-free exports averaged 20,273 salme per annum, representing around 35% of the total exports.[12] It would appear that only in very few years were more than 20,000 salme exported duty-free between 1621 and 1680; this was in the early 1620s and, possibly, in the mid-1670s.[13] With these exceptions, if duty-free exports are calculated as having been one-third of the total, then total exports in these middle years of the century were probably between 30,000 and 40,000 salme per annum, and certainly no more than 50,000.[14]

In analysing the wheat export crisis of the seventeenth century, Orazio Cancila has emphasised three factors. First, and most important, the export market suffered from increasing control by foreign merchants — notably the Genoese — partly as a result of the aversion of Sicilians to the external trade. Secondly, the system of the *caricatori* — the vast grain magazines situated in various coastal towns — operated as an obstacle to efficiency. Lastly, though this was probably only to a very limited degree, the harshness of the export duties acted as a disincentive.[15]

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[10] A.S.P. *Trabia*, ser. A, 637, fo. 423–28, undated.

Year	Total Exports (salme)	Year	Total Exports (salme)
1680–81	47,126	1683–84	30,605
1681–82	31,059	1684–85	31,675
1682–83	11,308	1685–86	72,214

It is possible that these figures may represent just part of the total exports. An isolated figure of 86,187 salme is given for 1698–99 in A.S.P. *Trabia*, ser. A, 651, fo. 192–93. For exports in the 1690s, see G. MARRONE, *L'Economia Siciliana e le Finanze Spagnole nel Seicento*, Caltanissetta 1976, p. 89.

[11] A. CRIVELLA, *Trattato di Sicilia*, cit.

[12] *Spadafora*, ser. II, 61, MS. cit.

[13] Figures for 1622–27 are in *Spadafora*, ser. II, 72, fo. 427; for 1625–44, and (duty-free exports only) for 1639–55, see *Trabia*, ser. A. 624, fos. 704–32, report dated 13 Dec. 1731.

[14] Archivio di Stato, Genova, *Giunta di Marina*, 3, letter of the Genoese Consul at Palermo to Doge, dated 28 Aug. 1652, estimating that it would be possible to export 52,000 salme before December. See also AYMARD, *In Sicilia: Sviluppo Demografico*, cit. p. 440.

[15] O. CANCILA, *I Dazi sull'Esportazione dei Cereali e il Commercio dei Grani nel Regno di Sicilia*, "Nuovi Quaderni del Meridione", XXVII, 1969, pp. 27–29.

The Sicilian 'aversion' to the export trade was a consequence of the greater attractions of the inland wheat trade. There were two main types of inland trade — the local trade carried on within a few kilometres' radius and the longer-distance coasting trade which took place via the *caricatori*.[16] The expansion of both types of inland trade during the seventeenth century occurred largely at the expense of the export market. By the end of the century, probably a greater volume of wheat was traded on a very local scale. Although the evidence to prove this is limited, the coasting trade in wheat seems to have expanded and contracted on a quid pro quo basis with the fortunes of the silk trade, which was primarily concentrated in the Val Demone (the north-eastern region). The respective characteristics of the export and coasting trades in wheat during the early seventeenth century emerge when it is realised that whereas some *caricatori* were mostly used for storing wheat going abroad (*per fuori regno*), others were utilised as clearing houses for wheat destined for home consumption (*per infra regno*). In contemporary language the difference was expressed in terms of *caricatori di fuori* and *caricatori di dentro* (i.e. 'outside' and 'inside' depots). During the early seventeenth century, and probably before, most exported wheat was dispatched from the *caricatori* of Sciacca and Girgenti, whereas most wheat for home consumption was sent from those of Termini and Castellamare.

Lack of data precludes a systematic investigation in quantitative terms of the relationship between the two patterns of wheat distribution via the *caricatori*. The only figures for wheat exported by *caricatore* so far published are those for the 1520s to which Bianchini and more recently Braudel have drawn attention.[17] The only comparative data which exist are for the years between 1609 and 1617 (see Map and Table 1) and the source for this is a report drawn up for the aristocratic owner of an alienated fraction of the export duty, ostensibly derived from the accounts of the *Maestro Portolano* (Comptroller-General of the Ports). Figures are given for the quantities exported duty-free, as well as those on which duty was paid. During these eight years 90% of the total exports (an average of 43,185 salme per annum) were dispatched via the four south-east *caricatori* of Sciacca (45%), Girgenti (35%), Licata and Terranova (10%). Only very small quantities were exported from the *caricatori* along the north coast — from Termini (3%), Castellamare (1%), Tusa (1%) and from Palermo, which strictly speaking, did not have a *caricatore*. Even smaller quantities seem to have been exported from Catania and Augusta on the east coast.

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[16] For an example, see G. Di Welz, *Saggio su i Mezzi da Moltiplicare Prontamente le Ricchezze della Sicilia*, Paris 1832, p. 49, note 1, although the distinction is made in documents of earlier date.

[17] See the figures in F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II*, Paris 1949, p. 466, and also the diagram in the second edition, I, op. cit., p. 526, fig. 49. Cancila (art. cit. p. 6) has insisted that the quantity of grain exported from Girgenti in these years must have been higher.

In this period the pattern of wheat withdrawls from the *caricatori* for destinations within the realm was very different. In the coasting trade the most important *caricatori* were those of Termini and Castellamare, which were of mediocre standing in terms of the exports dispatched from them. Various reports suggest that by the early seventeenth century wheat from Termini was mainly sent to Messina, whereas wheat from Castellamare was sent to relieve Sicily's ' great wen ', Palermo.[18] It was for the purpose of coping with the increasingly great need for supplies of wheat that a new *caricatore* was built in the capital in 1631.[19] Besides the fact they were nearer the island's wheat-deficient zones than the other main *caricatori*, it also seems to have been easier to load barques and small vessels at Termini and Castellamare with wheat which could later be unloaded on to beaches further east. Not only was there less risk attached to operations from these two *caricatori* than from the *caricatori di fuori*, but the cost of freight and insurance was also less. This illuminating point was made in a viceregal *prammatica* (edict) of 1560,[20] and a similar observation was was made nearly a century later by one of the most successful of the Genoese financiers in Sicily, Gregorio Castelli.[21] In addition, wheat extracted for the purpose of home consumption from Termini and Castellamare was supposedly of better quality than that which was sold to foreigners. This was reflected every year in the fixing of the *mete* (price rates) at each of the *caricatori*, for they were always at least 2 tarì — and sometimes 4 or 6 tarì — higher per salma of wheat at Termini and Castellamare than at Sciacca and Girgenti.[22] If the Genoese merchant can be believed, the price difference narrowed — at least in the case of the *caricatore* of Termini — when there were good harvests in the Val di Noto (south-eastern Sicily) and it became possible to supply the wheat-deficient Val Demone by way of the east-coast *caricatori* of Catania, Agnone and Vendicari.[23]

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[18] Università degli Studi, Genova, *Archivio Doria*, scatola 29, busta 102, gruppo A, memorandum of A. Palma, viceregal secretary, dated 1642; also, scatola 30, busta 105, gruppo A, 7 Mar. 1618, J. del Escano to Viceroy Castro.

[19] F. Maggiore Perni, *La Popolazione di Sicilia e di Palermo dal X al XVIII Secolo*, Palermo 1892, p. 236.

[20] *Pragmaticae Sanctiones Regni Siciliae*, edited by F. P. di Blasi, tome II, Palermo 1793, p. 210, 26 Nov. 1560, ' ... attento in li carricatori che sonno dentro cioe di Termini e Castellamare sonno li frumenti in magior reputacione e suolino valere a più prezzo di quelli frumenti chi sonno negli carricatori di fora perche in detti carricatori di Terminj e Castell' ad mare si carrica con manco risico e nolo e li securtati se fanno con manco prezo... '

[21] *Archivio Doria*, scatola 30, busta 105, gruppo C, 18 Dec. 1643, *Parere del Conte Castelli sopra l'estratione delle tratte dell'Almirante.*

[22] Cf. the observations of M. Aymard, *Amministrazione feudale e trasformazioni strutturali tra* '500 e '700, " Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale ", LXXI, 1975, pp. 24-25.

[23] *Parere del Conte Castelli*, MS. cit.

Wheat exports from the Sicilian caricatori
in the years 1609 - 1617

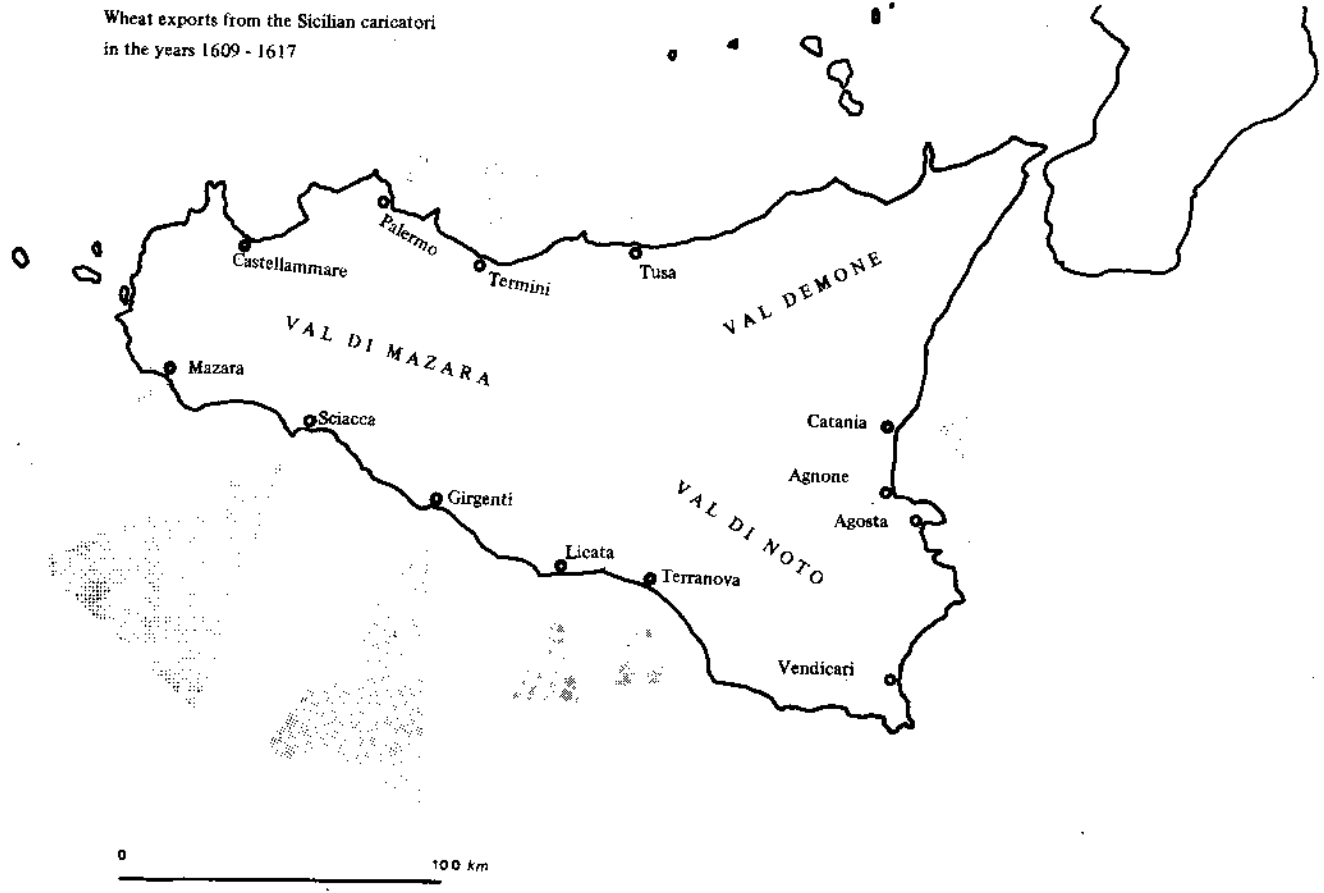

TABLE 1

TOTAL QUANTITIES OF WHEAT EXPORTED FROM EACH CARICATORE (1609-1616)
(in salme alla generale)

Caricatore	Years 1609-10	1610-11	1611-12	1612-13
Sciacca	17,117	13,343	8,368	19,446
Girgenti	23,551	4,238	12,411	10,542
Termini	200	156	1,325	1,895
Castellamare	—	—	500	200
Licata	3,707	1,322	—	1,376
Terranova	4,499	2,500	—	2,000
Palermo	3,707	—	—	—
Catania	—	—	—	480
Tusa	—	2,000	—	—
Agnone	—	—	—	240
Unknown	—	—	580	3,000
Totals	52,958	23,559	30,094	39,179

Caricatore	Years 1613-14	1614-15	1615-16	1616-17
Sciacca	12,294	11,493	60,324	12,647
Girgenti	6,381	16,405	24,680	21,405
Termini	960	1,315	1,700	1,550
Castellamare	360	200	2,138	—
Licata	2,620	3,910	6,080	—
Terranova	150	303	4,335	187
Palermo	—	50	—	—
Catania	—	—	3,761	1,500
Tusa	1,000	—	—	1,000
Agosta	—	—	500	—
Mazara	—	—	—	450
Totals	23,765	33,676	103,518	38,739

Source: *Spadafora*, ser. II, 61, fos. 381-421, MS. cit.

As regulators not of the export but of the inland trade it was intended that the rates at which the *mete* were fixed should also reflect the state of the harvest. The *mete* were basic prices to which additional ones could be joined, allowing for transport costs and supplier's profit.

The dimensions of the coasting trade in wheat are difficult to assess. The most significant indication of its growth in the early seventeenth century was

the Government's imposition of a duty on all grain withdrawls through the *caricatori* destined for home consumption.[24] The duty, which was much resented by the wheat-deficient towns of the north-east — especially Messina [25] — was levied from 1636 at the rate of 3 tarì per salma of wheat and 2 tarì per salma of barley. An official estimate in this year calculated the duty would yield 16,000 onze per annum compared with 80,000 onze from the *tratte*.[26] It was hoped, therefore, that as much as 160,000 salme of wheat — and even more if allowance is made for barley — would be traded within the realm through the *caricatori* each year. An agent of Camillo Pallavicino, an important Genoese financier, who bought a rent-charge on the duty thought the potential yield was even higher. He estimated it would amount to 100,000 scudi per annum, suggesting that 400,000 salme of wheat would be thus coasted.[27] Such optimism was far-fetched, for although the coasting trade did expand in the early seventeenth century it seems to have fallen off drastically later in the century. At a rough estimate 124,000 salme could have been traded around the coast in the early 1650s but only 52,000 salme by 1713, representing a possible decrease of over 50%.[28] By the middle of the eighteenth century, in fact, the volume of wheat comprising the coasting trade had greatly diminished if one is to judge from the complaints presented by creditors of charges on the internal grain duty.[29] This decline can be attributed, at least in part, to the increasing importance of direct supply overland.[30]

The clamour of growing numbers in need of food caused direct wheat supply by mule across the Sicilian terrain to assume a new prominence during the second half of the sixteenth century. Substantial quantities of wheat were

[24] M. VECCHIONI, *Nuove Considerazioni per i Creditori Granatarj del Regno di Sicilia*, Naples 1776, pp. 4-5 and passim.

[25] *Archivio Doria*, registro 430, fos. 3-5, *Nota del raguaglio dell'Impositione della Gabella delli tre tarì per Salma*, undated but about 1636, ' Questa Città di Messina va tentando di sottrahersi da questa Cabella con haverla per franchigie nel donativo che deve far delli sc. 240,000... '.

[26] *Archivio Doria*, scatola 352, pacco D, passim.

[27] *Nota del raguaglio*, MS. cit.

[28] The yield was estimated at 31,000 scudi per annum in the early 1650s, according to a budget printed in MARRONE, op. cit. p. 135. But it was only 13,000 scudi by 1713, according to a Royal Patrimony budget printed in V.E. STELLARDI, *Il Regno di Vittorio Amedeo II nell'Isola di Sicilia*, III, Turin, 1866, pp. 233-34. A more precise estimate could no doubt be made by utilising figures studied by L. A. RIBOT GARCÌA, *La Hacienda Real de Sicilia en la Segunda Mitad del Siglio XVII*, " Cuadernos de Investigación Histórica ", II, 1978, pp. 401-42.

[29] VECCHIONI, *Nuove Considerazioni*, cit. passim.

[30] Cf. the picture of the Neapolitan coasting trade in wheat presented by P. MACRY, *Mercato e società nel regno di Napoli. Commercio del grano e politica economica nel Settecento*, Naples 1974, pp. 66-76.

carried by mule-train over a network of tracks which were utilised without modification from the Middle Ages into the nineteenth century,[31] It was also possible to do this in the Val Demone, although the more rugged nature of the terrain to be negotiated made overland supply much more expensive than supply via the *caricatori*. The demographic upswing of this period presented greater provisioning difficulties not only to the north-east but also, albeit to a lesser extent, to officials of both domanial and feudal towns throughout the whole of Sicily. In these cases municipal failure to put aside adequate wheat supplies often stemmed more from political weakness than from dearth in their various localities. During the sixteenth century the older towns underwent successive reductions in what might be described as ' territorial self-sufficiency '. In the first place, they suffered physical reductions in territory, a process which was initiated by the *infeudazioni* (enfeoffments) of common land. By sanctioning the emergence of new territorial and jurisdictional units, the licences issued to feudatories for the founding of villages (*licentie populandi*) recognised the territorial losses of the older towns. In consequence the right of local officials to provision their town with wheat produced in the communal territory at the local *mete* which they themselves had established diminished in value.[32] Secondly, territorial sufficiency was impinged upon to a greater extent than before by the increase in municipal factiousness. Powerful citizens, usually local feudatories, struggled to obtain exclusive rights to supply local towns on a monopoly basis — *a porta chiusa* according to the contemporary phrase. Such citizens, who dominated the municipal oligarchies of the older towns, were sometimes not strong enough to prevent wheat from being ' exported ' by influential citizens who held fiefs within the communal territory but who were not included in their political group; alternatively, it may have suited members of the municipal oligarchy to turn a blind eye to illicit withdrawls for reasons of private advantage.

It was the long-term production deficiencies of the constricted territories of Sicily's older towns which caused direct wheat supply to become more common in the early seventeenth century, and dominate inland trade by its closing years. Two main patterns of overland supply existed, although there may have been others. The first was the disposal of wheat produced on feudal land to the inhabitants of a neighbouring wheat-deficient town, whether domanial or feudal. The second was the consignment, by a feudatory, of the surplus from his ' wheat-abundant ' estate to one of his possessions which was deficient in wheat. New villages founded in the early seventeenth century would therefore have fulfilled an obvious need, that of supplying wheat to areas within the realm

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[31] C. Trasselli, *Les routes siciliennes du Moyen Age au XIX^e siècle*, " Revue historique ", CCLI, 1, 1974, pp. 27-44.

[32] See, for example, T. Gargallo, *Memorie Patrie per lo Ristoro di Siracusa*, II, Naples 1791, p. 46.

— either fairly locally or much further afield — known to suffer from perennial difficulties in making up their municipal stocks.

3. *The 'New Foundations': a General View*

In the peak period of internal colonisation, the landscape of western Sicily was modified but not profoundly altered by the emergence of the new settlements. They were invariably laid out on a gridiron pattern, and often on sites which had been abandoned during the medieval period.[33] Their rapid population growth — they gained in total about 85,000 inhabitants between 1583 and 1714 — made possible the cultivation of land which was often of poor quality and which in many cases had hitherto been cultivated, if at all, only on an irregular basis. The regular harvestings of wheat in the fiefs adjacent to the new villages signified the transition from the transhumant stock-raising which characterised so many localities of the island's western interior during the later Middle Ages. However, at the end of the sixteenth century market influences on the feudatory were relatively weak compared with those which stemmed from the nature of his family economy and detracted from his security although ready markets for wheat existed within Sicily.[34] By establishing a 'new foundation', a feudatory could hope to secure a regular income sufficient to enable him to meet financial obligations to his family, especially in respect of the payment of portions and dowries, the chief determinants of social prestige. The new village could also satisfy the craving for prestige, although this may have been more the case for 'new' families, namely erstwhile grain merchants and *gabelloti* or provincial feudatories who lacked a family tradition of being associated with the island's chief offices of state. The increase in the numbers of feudatories who, as possessors of villages of more than 40 households, gained seats in the Parliamentary *braccio militare* (baronial chamber) in the peak colonisation period — 88 between 1614 and 1648 — may be indicative of the prestige some founders attached to building a village, but only 45% of these newcomers 'represented' new villages and not all founders of villages made applications for seats.[35] It should be added that usually a large part — perhaps 20—30% — of the total nominal expenses of building a village were apparently accounted for by the baronial palace,

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[33] M. AYMARD and H. BRESC, *Problemi di storia dell'insediamento nella Sicilia medievale e moderna, 1100-1800,* "Quaderni Storici", XXIV, 1973, pp. 945–76. A useful resumé of the ideas put forward about internal colonisation is to be found in M. VERGA, *La "Sicilia dei Feudi" o "Sicilia dei Grani" dalle "Wüstungen" alla Colonizzazione Interna,* "Società e storia", III, 1978, pp. 563–79. See also my article in a forthcoming issue of "Storia d'Italia. Annali".

[34] Cf. W. KULA, *An Economic Theory of the Feudal System. Towards a model of the Polish Economy 1500-1800,* London 1976, pp. 52–55.

[35] This point is expanded in my forthcoming article in "Storia d'Italia. Annali".

which was the most imposing symbol of family prestige, as is exemplified by the villages of Alessandria and Santa Caterina.[36] Finally, in weighing up the advantages of building a village, a potential founder could count on being able to cover his costs quickly thus ensuring, certainly after the first years, the cultivation of his estate.

Viewed as the culmination of a long-term shift towards investment in cultivable land, rather than in other forms of enterprise by aristocracy and bourgeois aspirants to their ranks, village building was part of the aristocratic search for security, a Sicilian variation on a theme repeated throughout the Mediterranean.[37] In the late sixteenth century the purchasing of feudal land was a sensible way of keeping pace with inflation; [38] and even after the ' price reversal ' adversely affected income from land — from the 1620s onwards — there was no lack of buyers of land. In many cases a ' new foundation ' was established shortly after the purchase of an uninhabited estate, often thereby securing a shaky title to possession. Insecurity frequently existed because a great deal of feudal land was originally sold on a provisional basis, with pact of redemption, and subsequently became the object of lawsuits to repurchase. Such lawsuits might be brought against a purchaser's family even when a provisional sale contract had been supplemented at some later date by the purchase of the right of redemption (*ius luendi*). The lawsuit brought against Orazio Branciforti in the middle of the sixteenth century for the repurchase of his barony of Tavi hinged upon the alleged invalidity of a marriage contract by which the *ius luendi* had been sold to one of his ancestors at the end of the previous century.[39] Thus, by officially populating an ostensibly uninhabited estate, a feudatory could strengthen his hand against potential repurchasers who were usually descendants of previous owners. In this way he could then show in Court, by reference to lists of improvements, that the estate's current value was significantly higher than at the time of the original purchase.

The purchase of land was a universally attractive investment, particularly for those whose only encumbrable assets consisted of rent-charges (*soggiogazioni*) on municipal taxes of noble patrimonies, but the land market was still a closed one and perhaps became increasingly restricted in the early seventeenth century. Only those who enjoyed some political influence in a given locality could be reasonably certain of being able to establish a new village, the necessary guarantee of the regular income which would make an estate potentially attractive to a *gabelloto* (estate farmer). The fief of Rabinseri, for example, changed hands twice — both times for 16,000 onze — shortly before the village of Santa

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[36] Cf. the conclusion of D. LIGRESTI, *Sul tema delle colonizzazioni in Sicilia nell'età moderna. Una perizia del Seicento sulla costruzione di Leonforte*, " Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale ", LXX, 1974, pp. 367-85.

[37] BRAUDEL, *La Méditerranée* (2nd edition), I, cit. pp. 388, 478-79.

[38] AYMARD, *Amministrazione feudale*, cit. p. 29.

[39] A.S.P. *Trabia*, ser. I, 370, passim.

Ninfa was built there. In 1603 the fief was sold unreservedly to Adriano Papè, an untitled merchant of Ragusan origin, by Guglielmo Graffeo, prince of Partanna.[40] Graffeo's estates, administered by the *Deputazione degli Stati*, were encumbered to breaking point, and 80% of the sale price went to pay his creditors. Papè sold the estate to Aloisio Arias Giardina, the founder of Santa Ninfa, in 1605, and this may have been prompted by Papè's lack of local standing.[41] Papè's chances of building a village in the area could have been seriously jeopardised because he was an outsider. As the *gabelloto* of fiefs and a sugar mill in the hinterland between Termini and Cefalù, moreover, his chief economic interests lay far from Santa Ninfa.[42] The background of Aloisio Arias Giardina was similar to that of Papè, but his local influence was undoubtedly increased by the advantageous position he enjoyed as chief farmer of the estates in western Sicily of the count of Modica, possibly the island's wealthiest magnate.

The indebtedness which led to the alienation of the fief of Rabinseri by the prince of Partanna was a long-term source of insecurity which affected all aristocrats. Ultimately, financial management rather than actual income determined a noble family's success or failure. In his study of the dukes of Terranova, Aymard has shown the correlation between accumulating indebtedness and the size of portions and dowries.[43] In the long term there may have been more casualties among families that were 'new' in the sixteenth century, such as the Grimaldi of Santa Caterina. In order to increase family prestige more rapidly, 'new' families had to shoulder the burden of paying out larger portions and dowries. Some 'new' families were relatively successful. The Giardina of Santa Ninfa, for example, were able to avoid placing rent-charges on their patrimony by assigning directly to creditors of portions part of the wheat harvest of their 'new foundation'.[44]

Since the noble family's capital resources were always pledged to meet feudal obligations, a feudatory's investment in a new village was necessarily very small. In a feudal economy improvements were not paid for with money, but two elements were needed in order to effect them: manpower, above all, and a certain quantity of new materials.[45] This must have applied in the building of most if not all of the new villages. A founder gained manpower, his human

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[40] A.S.P. *Villarosa*, 324, fo. 138 ff., 4 June 1603.

[41] *Spadafora*, ser. II, 563, fo. 1 ff., 19 Feb. 1605.

[42] A.S.P. *Trabia*, ser. I, 237, fo. 482 ff., 11 Sept. 1593; A.S.P. *Notaio O. Allegro*, 14221, fo. 144 ff., 19 Sept. 1609.

[43] M. AYMARD, *Une famille de l'aristocratie sicilienne aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles: les ducs de Terranova*, "Revue historique", CCXLVII, 1972, pp. 29-66.

[44] *Spadafora*, ser. II, 153, fo. 1 ff., 28 May 1641.

[45] KULA, *An Economic Theory*, cit. p. 52. Cf. the observations of R. ROMANO, *Tra XVI e XVII secolo, una crisi economica: 1619-1622*, "Rivista storica italiana", LXXIV, 1962, p. 512.

capital, as a result of endemic overpopulation in the neighbouring older towns. In this respect the moratoria which he held out to potential settlers as inducements were perhaps of minimal importance. In any case, such concessions as he made were soon outweighed by the economic burdens with which the majority of his immigrant vassals found themselves saddled. The heaviest of these was the interest payable on the ' cultivation capital ', the *soccorsi*; at Santa Ninfa, where the mechanism of rural usury became well established from the time of the foundation, interest of up to 50% was sometimes paid.[46] The founder assumed, usually correctly, that the presence of a resident labour force made it likely that a marketable wheat surplus would be produced very quickly, perhaps only one year after the foundation. To do this he realised he would have to establish his effective authority over his new vassals, initially by getting the first settlers to agree to *capitoli* which specified his baronial rights and monopolies in the village. The *capitoli* drawn up in 1588 between Carlo Barresi, founder of Alessandria, and his vassals are a good example of such agreements.[47] In other new villages, at Santa Ninfa and Leonforte for example, for which no *capitoli* have been discovered, it is quite possible that the founders simply imposed their terms on the immigrants. Unless the jurisdictional and territorial autonomy of a ' new foundation ' were generally recognised a feudatory could not exert any social control over it without interference. Complete autonomy was only legally accorded by the *licentia populandi* and therefore a feudatory always applied for such a licence before building his village since he was anxious to reduce interference from those with possible claims.

Because of the legal constraints which a founder imposed upon his vassals it was usually the immigrants themselves who erected most of the houses with materials provided by him. For more than thirty years — from 1607 onwards — Aloisio Arias Giardina and his successors allocated small plots of land to their vassals and obliged them by emphyteutical contract to build houses.[48] The same system was employed at Alessandria, Santa Caterina, Lercara and perhaps most other new villages. At Leonforte, where the construction was on a very ambitious scale, no assessment was made for the majority of the houses in the list of improvements compiled in 1651, thus suggesting that the founder did not build them.[49] Other buildings could also be erected at little cost to the founder. For example, prior to the foundation of Santa Ninfa there already existed ' ... edificij, benfatti, beveraturi ', probably as a result of improvement convenants written into the *contratti di gabella* by the feudatory.[50] After its foundation Aloisio

[46] *Spadafora*, ser. II, account books.

[47] *Spadafora*, ser. II, 389, fos. 103-7, 14 Oct. 1588.

[48] *Spadafora*, ser. II, vols. 163, 168, 191, 292, passim.

[49] A.S.P. *Trabia*, ser. I, 375, fos. 19-259. The list is printed in Ligresti, *Sul tema delle colonizzazioni*, cit., pp. 383-84.

[50] *Spadafora*, ser. II, 130, fo. 340 ff. 8 May 1602, the prince of Partanna's request for viceregal authorisation to sell the fief of Rabinseri.

Arias Giardina assigned 1 grano per tumolo (12.5 kg.) of wheat ground at Santa Ninfa, together with the rents from 20 houses, for building the church of Santa Anna.[51] A founder would actually pay wages to only a small number of skilled builders for work on the baronial palace or the *chiesa madre*. The Giardina accounts for 1635-36, for example, show that of a total expenditure of 48 ounces on improvements, 66% was for wages, 16% for materials, 10% for repairs, and 8% for estimates made: further analysis of their accounts would probably reveal similar percentages for other years.[52] Wages thus accounted for in monetary terms were in fact often if not always paid in kind, usually in land or livestock, as where, in 1640, a builder received 12 tumoli (2.5 ha.) of land for making the stairway of Santa Ninfa's castle.[53] The building materials used, especially stone, sand, lime and gypsum, ware usually available locally and could be provided by the founder with little difficulty. Wood, on the other hand, was was often in short supply and transporting it over long distances was expensive. The founder of Santa Ninfa obtained many beams of poplar from the woodlands of neighbouring Partanna and other founders were lucky enough to have entire woods at their disposal, but in many cases, especially in the centre of the island grain stubble and canes had to be used as substitutes for wood.

It was wheat rather than money which was the real measure of feudal costs in building villages, minimal though they were. Calculation of the cost of planting a vineyard or granting common land to immigrants tended to be made in terms of the loss this represented in wheat production.[54] Building costs accounted for by a feudatory in money for a particular year must be related to the size of his current wheat harvest. This could done by converting the estimated money expenses into wheat at the price-rate (*meta*) fixed for that year. An average of 75 onze per annum accounted for improvements made at Santa Ninfa between 1618 and 1641. This represented as much as 10% of the current money income of the Giardina family but less than 5% in terms of the current harvest (see Table 2). Estimates of this nature can only be made, even approximately, when accounts are available, and lists of improvements are of no use.

Just as a feudatory was able to found a village at little actual cost to himself, he could also shift onto others the risks of cultivation. By giving free rein to a handful to immigrants to get rich at the expense of the majority, he freed himself, to a large extent, of the problem of providing the cultivation capital, particularly as far as cattle were concerned. He was the beneficiary in many cases of the more adverse circumstances which were being felt by the owners of small herds of livestock, severely affected by the widespread enfeoffments of common grazing

[51] *Spadafora*, ser. II, 127, fo. 208, 6 June 1623.

[52] *Spadafora*, ser. II, account books.

[53] *Spadafora*, ser. II, 191, passim, 28 July 1640.

[54] For examples, see *Spadafora*, ser. II, 76, fo. 95 ff.; *Spadafora*, ser. II, 146, fo. 983, undated but about 1690.

TABLE 2

ANNUAL EXPENDITURE ON BUILDING IMPROVEMENTS AT SANTA NINFA (1618–41)*

Crop Year	A	B	C	D	E
1618–19	95	18%	72	40	—
1619–20					
1620–21	100	—	71	42	5%
1621–22	43	2%	26	50	3%
1625–26	47	—	26	54	1%
1626–26	29	—	12	68	2%
1627–28	45	—	—	—	—
1628–29	Nil				
1630–31	116	—	83	42	5%
1634–35	48	4%	24	60	2%
1637–38	278	—	—	—	—
1640–41	105	15%	70	45	9%

* Column A – total annual money expenditure (in onze)
Column B – column A as % of total money income
Column C – column A converted into wheat at the current price-rate (in salme)
Column D – current price-rate (in tari)
Column E – column C as % of the total current harvest

Source: *Spadafora*, ser. II, 122, passim; and *Spadafora*, ser. II, 123, fos. 67–99.

land. From the mid sixteenth century onwards the feudatory was able to take advantage of their predicament. It was because of their potential usefulness to the founder that the immigrant élite was able to profit from opportunities to lease baronial monopolies, such as the grinding of wheat and retailing. The dependence of feudal families upon one or two 'clans' sprung from this élite — such as the Ditta of Santa Ninfa — became increasingly greater in the late seventeenth century as income from land remained stable. The diminished profitability of the feudal estate comprising a 'new foundation' also meant that *gabelloti* attached to the municipal oligarchies of the older centres of population were less interested in taking it in *gabella*.

Seen in a wider context, the mushrooming 'new foundations' exemplified a political development which was operative in all the 'peripheral' areas of the seventeenth-century world-economy; they represented the strengthening of aristocratic power at the expense of the state-machinery.[55] By raising taxes on a massive scale in the early seventeenth century, the Spanish Government

[55] WALLERSTEIN, *The Modern World-System II*, cit., pp. 142–45.

fuelled the process of jurisdictional fragmentation leading to ever greater baronial autonomy, thus weakening its authority in Sicily as in Spain's other territorial possessions.[56] The Government had no consistent policy with regard to the 'new foundations' and did not concern itself with the details of village building. There were no government laws in Sicily dealing with colonisation as there were in the New World. The Government was interested in the possibility of increasing the volume of revenue from the *tratte* paid on wheat exports and this seems to be shown by the greater number of *licentie populandi* granted after a succession of bad harvests in the island. Government interest may have reached its peak between 1606 and 1610 as by the 1630s it was probably realised that optimism of this kind was unjustified, a recognition which manifested itself in the decision in 1636 to tax the inland wheat trade passing through the *caricatori*. From the 1620s, with the continued downturn in Sicilian wheat exports and the greater frequency of provisioning deficits in the island's older towns, the new villages were probably seen less in terms of any economic advantage they represented than as a check on potential public disorder and the influx of vagrants into Palermo and Messina. This idea of course appealed to the authorities throughout the peak period of internal colonisation.

4. *Santa Ninfa and the Provisioning of Palermo and other towns*

Like Naples and Rome, Palermo was one of Italy's main urban parasites.[57] Although the Sicilian capital was not a productive city it continued to grow, albeit slowly, throughout the seventeenth century. The high proportion of the island's total wheat production comandeered by Palermo — along with Messina and Catania [58] — is testimony to the efficiency of these towns' provisioning systems. By the late sixteenth century, given the overpopulation of the older inland towns, their needs could only be met by the new villages, by Ogliastro, Villafrate, Altavilla, Ventimiglia and Santa Ninfa for example, all of which were founded in the seventeenth century. From Santa Ninfa, the foundation of which is extensively documented, wheat was sent both to the capital and to older towns in its locality.

During the years 1607-9, the founder of Santa Ninfa, Aloisio Arias Giardina, allocated small plots of land to his new vassals and obliged them by contract to build houses there. The building contracts followed upon the licence — the first of two — which in 1606 was issued by the viceroy to Aloisio Arias, enabling

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[56] See, for example, R. VILLARI, *La rivolta antispagnola a Napoli. Le origini (1585-1647)*, Bari 1967, p. 166; and also F. CARACCIOLO, *Il regno di Napoli nei secoli XVI e XVII*, Rome 1966, p. 250 ff.

[57] BRAUDEL, *La Méditerranée*, I, cit., pp. 316-17.

[58] M. AYMARD, *La transizione dal feudalesimo al capitalismo*, "Storia d'Italia. Annali", I, 1978, p. 1188.

him to populate his newly-acquired fief of Rabinseri.[59] A series of accounts (*conti finali*) provides a picture of the short-term production of grain at Santa Ninfa. (See Table 3). Grain here meant predominantly wheat, for very little barley was grown at Santa Ninfa. Barley was mostly needed, in fact, as fodder for the mules that carried the wheat surplus on their backs and most of what was needed for this purpose (60-90%) was brought to Santa Ninfa from neighbouring towns such as Partanna. During the four decades 1612 to 1652 an average of 1200 salme of wheat was produced at Santa Ninfa each year. Production rose fairly steadily from an average of 800-1000 salme per annum in the early years to one of 1750 salme in the early, and in 1633 a record harvest of 2816 salme was gathered. These gains were lost in the next fifteen years, however, when in some of the worst years the total harvest did not even reach 1000 salme. The production trend of these years can be correlated with the yield ratios from the quantity of seed sown. In the initial period of expanding wheat production up to the early 1630s, yield ratios at Santa Ninfa were mostly 5 or 6 for 1, reaching a peak of 8 for 1 with the harvests of 1632 and 1633. The phase of production decline which followed is reflected in yield ratios which were almost invariably less than 4 for 1, with the exception of the 1640 harvest at 6 for 1.

During the early seventeenth century annual sales of wheat by Alosio Arias and his successors averaged 60-75% of Santa Ninfa's total harvest in most years. The surplus wheat was either sent to the *caricatori* to await further distribution or sold directly to local municipalities. Whereas, in the period 1626-51, there was a persistent decline in the quantities of wheat that were sent to the *caricatori* — from 50-55 to 10% of the total — in the same years there was an increase — from about 15-20 to 40% — in the quantities sold directly. In terms of ratios, whereas in the years 1617-36 the volume of sales through the *caricatori* was about two to three times that of direct sales, by the following decade — i.e. 1637-46 — it had been halved.

Unfortunately no record was usually made of the ultimate destinations of the wheat sent to the *caricatori* and so it is difficult to distinguish clearly between what was sent abroad and what was sent to other parts of the island. However the fact that the Giardina made use of the two *caricatori* of Sciacca and Castellamare seems to indicate their two different functions: Sciacca for export, Castellamare for home distribution. In the years 1610-16, Aloiso Arias exported considerable quantities of wheat — on all of which the *tratta* was paid — from Sciacca.[60] Probably all this wheat came from the count of Modica's estates in Western Sicily. In contrast, during the four decades 1612-52 the wheat surpluses of Santa Ninfa sold through the *caricatori* were almost invariably sent to Castellamare, except after the harvests of 1614, 1619, 1621 and 1634. This seems to

[59] For the viceregal licence of 7 Sept. 1606, see A.S.P. *Prot. Reg.*, 500, fo. 118 ff., and for the royal licence of 10 Nov. 1613, see GARUFI, art. cit., II, p. 121.

TABLE 3

WHEAT PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION AT SANTA NINFA (1612-53)

Crop Year	Total Production (salme)	Yield (seed sown = 1)	Quantity of seed sown (salme)	Total Wheat Sold (salme) Through caricatore	% of total harvest	Directly to towns	Price range per salma (in tari)
1611-12	1300	—	—	—	—	—	—
1612-13	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1613-14	1290	—	—	663 (Sciacca)	51%	—	—
1614-15	431 +?	—	—	—	—	—	—
1615-16	862	—	168	410	48%	—	—
1616-17	280 +?	—	226	Nil	—	56	52-56
1617-18	950	4.2	170	419 (C/mare) *	44%	140	44
1618-19	835	4.9	100	307 (C/mare) 232 (Sciacca)	64%	96	33-36
1619-20	451 +?	4.5	—	513 (C/mare)			
1620-21	1323	6.8	214	494 (Sciacca)	57%	485	40-56
1621-22	1121	6	185	—	—	627	45-46
1622-23	868	4.7	—	—	—	—	—
1623-24	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1624-25	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1625-26	1400	6	136	1093 (C/mare)	75%	35	64-72
1626-27	985	7.2	236	—	—	350	68-72
1627-28	1556	6.6	219	960 (C/mare)	62%	138	48-56
1628-29	1654	7.6	200	1125 (C/mare)	68%	14	36
1629-30	924	4.6	300	—	—	504	40
1630-31	1741	5.8	200	1036 (C/mare)	60%	104	48-52

* C/mare = Castellamare.

Sources: *Spadafora*, ser. II, vols. cit., accounts.

TABLE 3 (*continued*)

Crop Year	Total Production (salme)	Yield (seed sown = 1)	Quantity of seed sown (salme)	Total Wheat Sold (salme) Through caricatore	% of total harvest	Directly to towns	Price range per salma (in tari)
1631-32	1547	7.7	360	639 (C/mare) *	42%	270	—
1632-33	2816	7.8	400	798 (C/mare)	28%	212	36
1633-34	2067	5	560	364 (Sciacca)	18%	392	32-36
1634-35	1406	2.5	400	400	28%	450	60-68
1635-36	977	2.4	—	—	—	—	—
1636-37	1762	—	409	244 ?	—	380	43-62
1637-38	1302	3.2	467	350 (C/mare)	27%	290	40-48
1638-39	1587	3.4	225	Nil	—	1276	64
1639-40	1403	6.2	227	400 (C/mare)	29%	704	?
1640-41	796	3.5	197	500 (C/mare)	63%	Nil	—
1641-42	(651-964?)	—	—	—	—	—	—
1642-43	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1643-44	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1644-45	1569	—	303	420 (C/mare)	27%	667	51-54
1645-46	1140	3.7	358	270 (C/mare)	24%	412	52-74
1646-47	1333	3.7	298	367 (C/mare)	27%	481	80-96
1647-48	983	3.3	—	45 (C/mare)	5%	—	
1648-49	—	—	—	165 +?	—		
1649-50	536 +?	—	236	116 (C/mare)	22%	156	—
1650-51	650	2.7?	244	—	—	115	—
1651-52	1044	4.2	304	345 (C/mare)	33%	40	—
1652-53	188 +?	—	—	—	—		

* C/mare = Castellamare.

Sources: *Spadafora*, ser. II, vols. cit., accounts.

suggest that most of Santa Ninfa's wheat surplus was eaten by Sicilians. Only one example can be given — in 1647 wheat from Santa Ninfa sent to Castellamare was eventually sold to the municipality of Rocca in the wheat-deficient Val Demone — but it seems likely that most of the wheat thus distributed was eaten by the inhabitants of Palermo, bearing in mind Gregorio Castelli's remarks. This becomes more plausible in view of the Giardina family's traditionally close economic and political ties with the capital. At the close of the sixteenth century Aloisio Arias owned several houses and warehouses in Palermo: [62] he lived there at the time of the building of Santa Ninfa, developing a very personal link with the city's Ospedale Grande e Novo which he endowed handsomely.[63] Such ties were no doubt strengthened by the pattern of marriage alliances which Aloisio Arias arranged between his own family and members of the Palermitan office-holding patriciate. Aloisio Arias's long-standing relationship with the capital would have given him many insights into the nature of its wheat market. The capital's known and growing demand for wheat must have been a substantial factor in his decision to buy the fief of Rabinseri in 1605 and apply for a *licentia populandi* in the following year. The theme of producing wheat for the capital is very much apparent in terms of wheat sold directly to municipal buyers without using the *caricatori*, difficult though it is to discern a clear pattern from the limited data available. Direct sales of wheat to local municipalities began soon after Santa Ninfa's foundation in 1606. The earliest recorded wheat sales were to Calatafimi and Salemi in 1612,[64] although at that time no tendency was apparent in favour of a particular town. The marketing of wheat in the locality becomes clearer if all the quantities of wheat sold to known destinations over thirty five years (1617-51) are added together. On this basis, of a total of 6736 salme sold, 20% and 38% went to Palermo and to the municipality of Santa Ninfa, smaller quantities — 17% and 11% — to Partanna and Castelvetrano, and even smaller ones to Marsala, Pantellaria, Salemi and Trapani.

During this period there was a steady tendency for the Giardina to sell larger proportions of their wheat to Santa Ninfa — a rise of 1-4% of the total average harvest between 1622 and 1631 to 18-20% between 1642 and 1651. Perhaps this can be seen as a presage of a later period in which wheat surpluses from Santa Ninfa probably diminished as a result of its ever-increasing population. It is this which suggests that wheat production must have continued to increase in the long run despite the setbacks of the late 1640; for Santa Ninfa's numbers almost trebled in the first four decades of its existence (1616-52), and

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[60] *Spadafora*, ser. II, 61, MS. cit. fos. 399, 460, 493.

[61] *Spadafora*, ser. II, 146, fos. 59-61, 129-68.

[62] A.S.P. *Patta del Bosco*, 78, passim, act of donation, 18 Sept. 1593.

[63] *Spadafora*, ser. II, 126, fo. 198, dated 1609; *Spadafora*, ser. II, 131, fos. 445-47, undated report.

[64] A.S.P. *Prot. Reg.*, 504, fo. 92, 15 Jan. 1612; *ibid.*, fo. 217, 20 Mar. 1612.

doubled again within the next hundred years.[65] There is virtually no evidence for the state of wheat production in this later period, but it may be indicative that six months after the harvest of 1683, the village's six warehouses stored over 3420 salme of wheat — nearly three times the average annual harvest during the years 1612 to 1651 [66] — and the harvests of the late 1680s would seem to have been good to judge from the low price-rates of these years.[67]

5. *Leonforte and the wheat-deficient Val Demone*

The mountains of the Val Demone marked it off from the rest of the island. In the late medieval period its topography had meant fewer abandoned settlements; in the sixteenth and early seventheenth centuries, when population pressure in this area must have been at its densest, it meant more severe provisioning problems. The ' new foundation ' of Leonforte is the only documented example of a village built to meet the need for wheat in the Val Demone. It was probably for this purpose that work began on Sperlinga, Montemaggiore, Alia, Alimena, Vallelunga, Aliminusa and Valledolmo — all ' new foundations ' of the early seventeenth century and sited fairly near the wheat-deficient zone. The building of Leonforte was authorised by a viceregal licence issued to Nicolò Placido Branciforti in 1610.[68] There is evidence to suggest that part of the barony of Tavi, in which the new village was situated, was being extensively cultivated and that buildings already existed there.[69] An earlier attempt seems to have been made to populate the barony, in fact, after the granting of a licence for this purpose to Nicolò Placido's great great grandmother, Belladama, who referred to it in her will.[70]

When he founded Leonforte, Nicolò Placido's social standing was very different from that of Aloisio Arias Giardina. Unlike the latter he was no newcomer to the Sicilian aristocracy but took pride in belonging to a family prominent in the island since the fourteenth century and to a branch which by the close of the sixteenth, ranked among Sicily's wealthiest. Whereas Santa Ninfa was built in a fief which its founder had purchased only a year previously, the site of Leonforte had remained in the same family's hands since the fifteenth century. One hundred years before the founding of the village, however, the barony

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[65] AYMARD, unpublished data.

[66] *Spadafora*, ser. II, 138, fos. 1-34, 27 Jan. 1684, Simone II Giardina's inventory.

[67] *Spadafora*, ser. II, 140, fo. 152 ff. Figures are given for the years 1684-90.

[68] A.S.P. *Prot. Reg.* 502, fo. 88, 30 Oct. 1610, cit. in GARUFI, art. cit. II, p. 121. This was followed by a royal licence in 1613.

[69] A.S.P. *Trabia*, ser. I, 77, fo. 176, 30 May 1596, G. Branciforti's Will declared that 540 salme of wheat were stored in the barony's warehouses; see also *Trabia*, ser. A, 638, fascicolo ii, passim, 16 Mar. 1574.

[70] A.S.P. *Trabia*, ser. I, 373, fo. 72, 15 Mar. 1514, reference is made to a *iure reedificandi*.

of Tavi was undoubtedly held to be of relatively little importance in the Branciforti economy, since in 1514 it was bequeathed to a younger son as a portion. By the mid-sixteenth century some estates in north-eastern Sicily where profitable silk could be produced were of greater interest to the cadet line founded by this son, Blasco. Thus, within the space of four years, Blasco's son and heir, Nicolò, acquired no less than three populated baronies in the area: Mirto, inherited from his uncle Antonio in 1550; Raccuia, purchased unreservedly in 1551; and Sinagra, purchased with pact of redemption in 1554.[71]

By the end of the century two of these estates, Sinagra and Mirto, had passed out of the family's possession. Admittedly, these had been bought on a conditional basis, but the ease with which they left the Branciforti contrasts with the determination with which the family resisted attempts to wrest the barony of Tavi from them.[72] In 1560 Nicolò instructed the executors of his will to sell Sinagra as it was ' harmful to his inheritance '.[73] He may have been prompted to do this by growing concern about the large population increases taking place on all three of these estates, which amounted to an overall increase of 26% between 1548 and 1569. These increases were least apparent at Raccuia (+18%), more so at Mirto (+25%), and most marked at Sinagra (+37%).[74] Such calculations could have been worked out by Nicolò's successors by consulting the population censuses made at these dates. Although silk and wheat production figures for these estates are not available, it is probable that considerable quantities of wheat had to be supplied to them at great cost, because the Branciforti at this time found the profitability of silk production was outweighed by the growing problem of wheat supply. They were unable to alleviate the problem by supplying wheat from the barony of Tavi before the early seventeenth century since it was officially uninhabited. Hence, on selling Sinagra in 1569, there would have been 8% less people to feed than in 1548; and in 1588, when Mirto was sold, there would again have been roughly 8% less people to feed than in 1569.[75] The factor of wheat supply probably reduced the market value of these baronies, for at 11,000 onze and 8,000 onze respectively, these populated estates were sold much more cheaply than ostensibly uninhabited fiefs in potentially wheat-surplus producing areas of Sicily. Thanks to the possibility of supplying wheat from from the centre of Sicily, Raccuia's population increased by nearly 50% in the half century after the famine years of the 1590s, but this increase might well not have occurred had the Branciforti continued to hold Sinagra and Mirto.

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[71] A.S.P. *Trabia*, scr. I, 54, fascicolo ii, passim, 1550; *Trabia*, ser. I, 133, fo. 61, 24 Nov. 1551; *Trabia*, ser. I, 370, fo. 106 ff. 1554.

[72] A.S.P. *Trabia*, ser. I, 370, passim; *Trabia*, ser. I, 369, passim, agreement between Nicolò Placido and the duke of Terranova, 24 Feb. 1622.

[73] A.S.P. *Trabia*, ser. I, 54, fascicolo ii, passim, 21 Nov. 1560.

[74] AYMARD, unpublished data.

[75] For these sales, see A.S.P. *Trabia*, ser. I, 390, passim, 22 Dec. 1567; *Trabia*, ser. I, 54, fascicolo ii, passim.

Three great ledgers and a number of lesser account books compiled for Nicolò Placido Branciforti in the early seventeenth century testify to the fact that Leonforte was founded to provide food for the growing population of Raccuia.[76] It was only worthwhile to do this, of course, so long as foreign demand for Sicilian silk remained high. Evidence for such demand is provided by the great increase in the volume of silk produced at Raccuia during the first half of the century, although the market price — from 16 to 24 tarì per libbra (= 3.17 kg.) — varied only slightly during the period. Whereas, between the mid-1590s and 1623, the average quantity of silk sold per annum was never more than about 3000 to 3500 libbra (950-1100 kg), between 1623 and 1643 the annual average was 6500 to 7500 libbra (2060-2380 hg). By 1643-53, the last decade for which there are figures, an annual average of 10,500 libbra (3333 kg) was sold.[77] During the later seventeenth century the decline in silk production at Raccuia, and consequently in the movement of the wheat trade to the north-east from Leonforte, seems to be well attested by the town's considerable loss of population, wiping out the gains of the century's earlier decades.

Between the 1620s and the 1650s, observers could regularly have seen mules laden with wheat setting out from Leonforte and about to make their way to Raccuia, at least 80 km. to the north-east. The mule-trains were an expression of the symbiotic economy which bound the two villages to each other. There was considerable variation from year to year in the quantities of wheat thus sent, in terms of proportions of Leonforte's wheat harvest. They could range from as little as 13-35% of the totals in relatively good years, to as much as 67-83% in the poor years of the late 1640s. It is difficult to be precise in this respect since the wheat transfer figures are more complete than those of the total wheat production at Leonforte istelf. The wheat transfer figures, together with fragmentary data on wheat production at Raccuia, offer some insight into consumption trends in a small town (or large village) which did not produce enough food for its needs. (See Table 4). About 80% of Raccuia's provision was, on average, made up with wheat supplied from Leonforte. The figures available show not only that the Raccuiesi usually had to make do with fairly small quantities of wheat, even in relatively plentiful times, but also, significantly, that even such meagre fare did not check the rising population. Each year during the late 1620s each Raccuiese would have managed to eat, on average, 88-94 litres of wheat, a ration which may have doubled in the 'boom' years of the following decade.[78] In the late 1640s, however, stomachs

[76] See especially A.S.P. *Trabia*, ser. N, vols. 36 (*Libro Azzolo*: 1616-24), 37 (*Libro Rosso*: 1625-37), 27 (*Libro Giallo*: 1637-60); and 38 and 39: two *libri generali*.

[77] Data are given in *Spadafora*, ser. I, 90, fos. 319-46, 365-89, 418-38, receipts from the *secrezia* of Palermo. Also see A.S.P. *Trabia*, ser. N, 27, fos. 6, 71, 73, 95, 108, 115, 142, 155, 185-6, 218, 248, 264, 304, 336, 363, 377, 381.

[78] These estimates are made on the basis of the data in Table 4 and AYMARD, unpublished data on Raccuia's population: 2155 souls in 1623; 2299 in 1636; and 2341 in 1651.

TABLE 4

WHEAT SUPPLIES SENT FROM LEONFORTE TO RACCUIA
(in salme alla grossa)

Supply Year	From Leonforte	Produced at Raccuia	Other Source	Total Available at Raccuia
1625-26	623			
1626-27	600	97	—	697
1627-28	263	142	105	511
1628-29	417	155	—	572
1629-30	399	157	60	615
1630-31	358	99	100	557
1631-32	1009	115	—	1124
1632-33	1033	184	—	1216
1633-34	707	286	—	994
1634-35	1122	279	—	1400
1635-36	1260 ?	214	21	1495
1636-37	791 +?	199	3	1009
1637-38	705	220	218	1145
1638-39	503	220	55	777
1645-46	489	—	—	—
1646-47	539	—	—	—
1647-48	525	—	—	—
1648-49	515	—	—	—
1649-50	433	—	—	—
1650-51	680	—	—	—
1651-52	680	—	—	—
1652-53	451	—	—	—
1653-54	496	—	—	—
1654-55	192	—	—	—

Sources: for the years 1625-36, *Trabia*, ser. N. 37, fos. 19, 74, 77, 95, 102, 103, 113, 137, 151, 158, 167, 170, 193, 201, 214, 233, 246, 253, 306, 307, 310, 316, 317, 362, 370, 371, 372, 374, 392, 401, 412, 413, 421, 422, 432, 442, 453, 459. Letter inserted on fo. 192. For the years 1637-39, *Trabia*, ser. N, 27, fos. 40, 70, 105. For the years 1645-55, *Trabia*, ser. N, 38, fos. 37-149, 51-162, 165-223, 218-287, 288-399, 331-370, 64.

must have been emptier. Although it is not known much wheat was harvested at Raccuia — probably very little — the wheat transfer figures are available. In these years Leonforte's wheat would have given each Raccuiese an annual average of 73-80 litres, about 50% less than the quantities sent in the '30s (138-144 litres p.a.). Between 1645 and 1655 the average quantities of wheat received by the Raccuiesi may have been reduced to an even more modest level. If Raccuia's own total wheat production in these years was maintained at 215

salme, then it is probable that each inhabitant could not have eaten more than 100 litres in a year.

Raccuia's food supply in the early seventeenth century, then, depended on Leonforte's continuing wheat surpluses. Over a period of thirty five years (1617-52) for which an almost complete series of production figures is available, an average of nearly 1500 salme was produced there each year. (See Table 5). The short-term trend was similar, in fact, to that of Santa Ninfa. Production almost doubled between the first decade of the village's existence and the early 1630s — from 1476-2065 salme p.a in the years 1617-21 to a peak of 3042 salme in 1629. In the 1640s, however, production slumped back to earlier levels — an average of about 1300 salme p.a. in the decade 1642-52 — and in the very bad years of 1647-51 the annual average was less than 1000 salme. No figures are available for the later seventeenth century, nor is it known how any surplus wheat was distributed. As at Santa Ninfa, there must have been some increase in production to keep pace with a very rapidly growing population which increased fivefold in the first half of the century and trebled again in the following hundred years.[79] Production could only be increased by extending the area of land under cultivation. In the middle years of the century, the Bran-

TABLE 5

WHEAT PRODUCTION AT LEONFORTE (1594-1654)
(in salme alla grossa)

Crop Year	Harvest	Crop Year	Harvest
1594-95	540	1630-31	—
1616-17	1476	1631-32	—
1617-18	1780	1632-33	2560
1618-19	1910	1633-34	2214
1619-20	1735	1634-35	1907
1620-21	2065	1644-45	1481
1621-22	1538	1645-46	1128
1622-23	1208	1646-47	1492
1623-24	1382	1647-48	1069
1624-25	—	1648-49	641
1625-26	1568	1649-50	818
1626-27	1810	1650-51	1070
1627-28	1523	1651-52	1294
1628-29	3041	1652-53	1378
1629-30	—	1653-54	1285

Sources: *Trabia*, ser. I, 77, fos. 176 ff; *Trabia*, ser. N, 36, fos. 69, 119, 122, 123, 152, 158, 177, 178, 238, 239, 240, 248, 255, 300, 305, 329, *Trabia*, ser. N, 37, fos. 159, 170, 195, 197, 207, 214, 215, 253, 306, 307, 310, 316; *Trabia*, ser. N, 38, fo. 143 and *passim*; *Trabia*, ser. N. 39, *passim*

[79] AYMARD, unpublished data.

ciforti managed to do this by renting, on a semi-permanent basis, the fief of Spitalotto, near Aicone.[80] It seems likely that by the late seventeenth century the practice of renting additional land in this way had become a regular one for the Branciforti.

6. *From an old to a new pattern of self-sufficiency*

With the exception of Palermo, of Messina and of the north-eastern towns, each of the inland municipalities aimed to make up its wheat provision from the produce of its own territory.[81] Most land, for fiscal and provisioning purposes, officially belonged to the territory of an inhabited centre, although some uninhabited fiefs were categorised as being of 'no territory' (*nullius territorii*). In Sicily, as a result of unbearable economic and political pressures, the disappearance of the municipal ideal of 'territorial self-sufficiency' was a crucial element in the long-term redistribution of the Sicilian wheat trade, and thus in the rise of the 'new foundations'. Autarky was the predominant feature of so many local economies of the Mediterranean world. In this context it would be interesting to examine the processes of territorial erosion suffered in this period by towns in Spain, the kingdom of Naples and other Mediterranean areas as well.[82] There it was not a question of emerging 'new foundations' but rather of already existing satellite communities gaining territorial and jurisdictional advantage at the expense of the mother towns.

The available documentation allows only an incomplete analysis to be made of the ways in which the provisioning of Sicilian towns became more and more precarious. The surviving records of the ancient municipalities do not bear comparison with the abundance of noble family archives. Thanks to Aymard's systematic retrieval of data from the *riveli di beni e anime* (census books), the population conjuncture is no longer in doubt, but not enough is yet known about wheat production trends within the territories of the older towns, or about the nature and extent of the successive decreases in the cultivable land within them. The scrutiny of a long-term series of *riveli di frumento*, if they still exist in some archive, might provide valuable information about production. These *riveli* were declarations of sowings and harvestings of wheat which cultivators were obliged, by order of the Royal Patrimony, to register in the towns in whose territory their land was situated.[83] Failing such a source, however, evidence of the growing numbers of temporary mi-

[80] A.S.P. *Trabia*, ser. N, 58, fos. 178 and 252, 10 Jan. 1648.

[81] Cf. F. BRAUDEL, *La Méditerranée*, I, cit., pp. 350-52; and ID., *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme, XV^e-XVIII^e siècle*, I, Paris 1979, p. 99.

[82] Cf. A DOMINGUEZ ORTIZ, *Sociedad y estado en el siglo XVIII español*, Barcelona 1976, pp. 458-60.

[83] See N. TORRISI, *Aspetti della crisi granaria del secolo XVI*, "Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale", Fourth Series, X, 1957, pp. 174-86.

grants from the older towns — who were often to become permanent settlers — is perhaps the most telling indication of greater territorial constraints.

The political life of Sicily's inland towns in this period remains even more obscure for the historian than the economic problems which faced them. It is clear, however, that by the second half of the sixteenth century it was dominated more completely than ever before by aristocratic faction.[84] Unfortunately, almost no research has been carried out to illuminate the process of coalition-formation in the older towns at this time. The existing evidence shows that it was the aim of the most powerful members of the municipal oligarchy to monopolise, as far as possible, the rôle of supplying their native town with wheat. This could be done by gaining jurisdictional autonomy for one part of the municipal territory on the successful founding of a new village. Control of the wheat supply was achieved not simply by being able to deliver to or withhold from the towns' granaries, but also by the power which a feudatory had of levying feudal dues on migrant cultivators who transferred wheat from peripheral wastelands to old centres of population. In many cases, it would seem, a prominent citizen who desired to participate in the general spoliation of the municipal patrimony could do so through the political support he derived from the local middlemen who farmed his estates or held annuities on them. The cohesiveness of the dominant aristocratic faction — the exact nature of which must have varied from town to town throughout Sicily — acted as an effective check on the participation of outsiders in the economic spoliation of the locality. It was less effective when the influence of such outsiders at a higher political level, in Palermo or Madrid, was sufficiently powerful to offset their shortcomings in terms of local influence.

The seventeenth century trend towards territorial fragmentation would become more definitive if the evidence were fully observable in the case of one of the older towns. Some, though by no means complete, evidence is available for Castrogiovanni (Enna) which suffered grievous long-term territorial and population losses. The rise of the domanial town's population to a peak by the 1580s — increasing by some 25% between 1548 and 1579[85] — led to the virtual disappearance of the transhumant economy which had characterised it in the medieval period. In the early sixteenth century farmers of the municipal *secrezia* (municipal customs-house) of Castrogiovanni derived considerable financial benefit, it would seem, from the toll known as *baglia di fora* which was levied on livestock droves passing through the communal territory.[86] Although so much territory was devoted to pasture, this period

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[84] BRAUDEL, *La Méditerranée*, II, cit., pp. 70-71; cf. CARACCIOLO, *Il Regno di Napoli*, cit., pp. 239-59.

[85] AYMARD, unpublished data.

[86] A.S.P. *Villarosa*, 315, fos. 80-95, *Iure gabellarum Regie Secretie Civitatis Castri Joanni*, undated but mid-sixteenth century.

seems, relatively speaking, to have been one of abundance in wheat production. In 1554 it was estimated that 21,000 salme alla grossa of wheat-barley probably being included — had been harvested in Castrogiovanni's territory, about one-third more than the municipality needed in order to make up its annual provision.[87] On such a reckoning each household might have received, over a year, a fairly generous ration of 15 quintals of wheat. The graver situation of the 1570s and '80s is indicated by the local oligarchy's decision, in 1580, to abolish the municipal duty levied on grain brought into Castrogiovanni's territory from outside.[88] Greater resort than before was had to purchasing wheat from outside to make up for shortfalls in wheat production within the communal territory.[89] Such purchases were also a result of the difficulties the municipality experienced in requisitioning the grain production of its own territory.

The growing inadequacy of Castrogiovanni's territorial resources for the needs of its inhabitants is suggested by increased subsistence migration. At least initially, short distance movements were undertaken by landless *borgesi* (peasants), without intention to change their permanent place of residence. By the late sixteenth century the need to cultivate land which lay on the periphery of the municipal territory must have been apparent to all. In Castrogiovanni's case the wastelands on its territorial extremities were steadily encroached upon by cultivators from Calascibetta and other old towns. The fiefs of Gasba and Bombinetto, for example, which lay on its western edge, were largely tilled by *esteri* (outsiders) from neighbouring Calascibetta whose territory was traditionally very small.[90] The territories of Piazza, Castronovo and Salemi provide similar examples of a development which occurred all over the island.[91] In the outlying fiefs of Castrogiovanni ' spontaneous ' colonisation of this kind led to the building of numerous thatched hovels known as *stanze*. These hovels would spring up around an isolated *massaria* (farmhouse complex), or around some ancient tower or church, which were themselves very often relics of settlements abandoned in the late medieval period. Though tiny, the hamlet populations which gathered in this way actually formed the nuclei of the future new villages, sometimes long before the official foundation was declared.

The municipal oligarchy's failure to escape from the strait-jacket of population pressure reflected the subservience of local politics, both in feudal and domanial towns, to aristocratic interests. At Castrogiovanni it was the

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[87] *Notamento di lo rivelo ... di li frumenti del Regno* ..., MS. printed by Torrisi, art. cit.

[89] As in 1636, 1640 and 1641: Archivio di Stato, Enna, *Archivio Storico di Castrogiovanni*, 10, passim, 7 Dec. 1636; A.S.P. *Prot. Reg.*, 580, fo. 137, 23 Aug. 1642.

[90] A.S.P. *Villarosa*, 404, fo. 29 ff., document of the late seventeenth century.

[91] A.S.P. *Villarosa*, 167, passim, 1640; A.S.P. *Trabia*, ser. I, 901, passim, 6 Sept. 1636.

governing faction who were able to decide upon the membership of the municipal oligarchy by arranging for the appointment of officials who were relatives or friends. In the late sixteenth century the increasingly parlous state of communal finances, and the omnipresent problem of grain provisioning, was turned by local feudatories and their clients to their own advantage. It was they who forced the majority of citizens to bear the brunt of the financial burden, and this was clearly shown with regard to the payment of the *macina*, the tax on the grinding of grain. At Castrogiovanni, where no *macina* was levied at all in the mid sixteenth century, the tax was payable at the rate of 4 tarì per salma in the 1620s and 6 tarì by the late 1630s.[92] It was the citizen élite, however, who benefited from the widespread enfeoffments of municipal 'common land' on which the populace traditionally enjoyed the right of free pasturage (*ius pascendi*). These enfeoffments — which took place with the greatest frequency in the sixteenth century — had to receive the sanction of popular assent.[93] The apparent ease with which this was obtained can be attributed to the general awareness of the need to produce more wheat in the locality, and to the fact that in any case livestock was in the hands of relatively few citizens.[94] In the territory of Castrogiovanni some 410 aratati (or nearly 30,000 ha.) of land seem to have been enfeoffed by the early seventeenth century, an area capable of bearing — it may be estimated — at least another 13,000 to 18,000 quintals of wheat per annum.[95]

It is not absolutely clear how segments of enfeoffed common land came to be definitively alienated from the patrimonies of the older towns. It is known that sometimes thay were assigned to wheat suppliers in default of payment. In any case, their annexation was part of an aristocratic competion to monopolise local resources which were extremely meagre. Their efforts to do so, which foreshadowed the struggles of local *gabelloti* and peasant entrepreneurs in later centuries, were manifested in the legal wrangles which usually attended and sometimes prevented the emergence of a 'new foundation'. Opposition from the officials of older towns, as expressed in letters to the Royal Patrimony, voiced fears that the foundation of settlements in their neighbourhood would be detrimental to them in terms of territory and population, and that the consequent loss of citizens would impair their ability

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[92] A.S.P. *Villarosa*, 315, fos. 80-95, MS. cit.; A.S.P. *Tribunale del Real Patrimonio Riveli*, 2023, fo. 615 ff., 1623; *Archivio Rosso di Cerami* (Enna), unmarked volume.

[93] For an example of such 'popular' consent, see A.S.P. *Villarosa*, 405, fo. 278 ff. 24 Mar. 1587.

[94] This certainly seems to have been the case in neighbouring Caltanissetta: A.S.P. *Prot.Reg.*, 567, fo. 34 ff., '... non ni godono si non pochissimi Cittadini li quali hanno bestiame'.

[95] Biblioteca Comunale, Palermo, *2Qq.* H. 217, fos. 90-108, *Pandetta regia super gabella Tareni possessionum...*, eighteenth century MS. (enfeoffment dues paid to the *Regia Corte*).

to raise the quota of government taxation which each of the island's towns was assessed to pay. On the other hand, such officials would also have appreciated the advantages of a new settlement in the locality, at least in the short term. It not only held out the welcome prospect of an additional source of wheat supply but also promised to be a possible magnet for large numbers of unwanted *miserabili* and indebted citizens. This might prove to be especially the case if a founder were willing to allow migrant cultivators of his fiefs to carry wheat back with them to their native town. The founder of the village of Floridia, Lucio Bonanno, drew up an agreement with the domanial town of Siracusa in 1634 whereby he promised he would not tax the wheat extracted in this way from his territory.[96]

Whether or not contentions of this nature took place depended on the relationship of a potential founder of a new village to the governing oligarchy of the local municipality. In the early seventeenth century the oligarchs of Castrogiovanni made little fuss about the 'new foundations' of the Grimaldi: for not only were members of this family traditionally prominent at Castrogiovanni as office-holders and tax-farmers but, by the late sixteenth century, they were also connected to the most important of the lesser aristocratic families of the locality through a series of marriage alliances. Such lack of opposition to the Grimaldi is significant, bearing in mind that the barony of Risichillia — in which Santa Caterina was built — seems originally to have been a *feudo nobile* ('noble fief') forming part of Castrogiovanni's territory. This territorial connection is explicitly stated in 1611, when the barony was vested in Pietro Andrea II Grimaldi on his father's death,[97] even though by that time two *licentie populandi* — and hence autonomous territorial status — had been granted. The fief of Monaco, in which Pietro Andrea attempted to plant a village to be named 'Grimaldi', belonged even more clearly to Castrogiovanni's territory since it was described in the town's *riveli* (census) of 1623.[98] In contrast, the 'town fathers' could afford to be forthright in their condemnation in August 1610 of a settlement projected in the fief of Geraci by its owner who was a doctor of law from Piazza. This was probably because he was an outsider so far as the municipal politics of Castrogiovanni were concerned. The fief was, to be sure, in Castrogiovanni's territory, and its officials lamented the loss of revenue and population it would bring about;[99] but if such were their fears, why did they not set forth objections to the foundation of

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[96] *Spadafora*, ser. I, 14, fo. 182, 31 Aug. 1634.

[97] A.S.P. *Villarosa*, 367, n. 64, 8 Oct. 1611.

[98] A.S.P. *Tribunale del Real Patrimonio, Riveli*, 2023, fo. 111 ff., 21 Aug. 1623.

[99] Archivio di Stato, Enna, *Archivio Storico di Castrogiovanni*, 5, fos. 198–99, 12 Aug. 1610, '... molti personi andirano ad habitarci il che seria disabitar questa et altre citta e terre convicinj'.

Leonforte, when the opportunity to do so arose about a month afterwards? [100] Admittedly, no territorial dispute was involved, but Leonforte was of similar proximity to Castrogiovanni as the projected settlement of Geraci, and during the next four or five years the new village was to attract around 50% of its settlers from the ancient town. The political eminence of the founder of Leonforte, Nicolò Placido Branciforti — who was just about to become one of the deputies of the realm — would have made successful opposition all but impossible.

Lacking adequate territories, the older towns found themselves to be especially vulnerable in years of universal wheat shortage, as in the 1590s and late 1640s. Following these crises, the numbers of Castrogiovinnesi declined respectively by 22% and 25%. In the 1640s, when hundreds of people died of hunger, the years of dearth are marked by the high price-rates which were imposed after the harvests of 1645 (66/67 tarì per salma), 1651 (78/80 tarì), 1654 (65/66 tarì), and 1657 (66/67 tarì).[101] The little surplus wheat that was available for purchase in the late 1640s was secured by the silk-producing towns of the north-east to the detriment of Castrogiovanni. The wheat transactions carried out in eastern Sicily at this time by Nicolò Placido Branciforti seem to epitomise the workings of the inland wheat market in times of general shortage. Between 1645 and 1654 he bought 2465 salme of wheat, 90% of which was from central Sicily, almost 30% from feudal estates in the territory of Castrogiovanni. About 70% of the wheat purchased in these years was sold by him to wheat-deficient localities, most of which were near the northern coast.[102] Almost no use was made of the *caricatori* for this purpose and virtually no wheat was sold to wheat-deficient areas in the centre of the island.

The profitability of these transactions becomes evident when it is realised that little cash was used and that Nicolò Placido obliged the silk-producing towns to pay for wheat by delivering silk to his village of Raccuia.[103] In 1648 Nicolò Placido sold silk at Palermo at a price which was about 10% higher than the assessed value of the silk delivered to him at Raccuia. He was probably in an exceptionally advantageous position to manipulate the movement of wheat in eastern Sicily during the time he was Vicar General of the Val di

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[100] *Ibid.*, fo. 208, 25 Sept. 1610.

[101] Archivio di Stato, Enna, *Notaio V. Battalionti*, prefaces to vols. 80-112.

[102] A.S.P. *Trabia*, ser. N, 27, fos. 165, 217, 270, 276, 293, 294, 298; *Trabia*, ser. N, 36, fos. 27, 255, 288, 292; *Trabia*, ser. N, 38, fos. 37, 143, 234, 244, 256, 288, 321, 331, 370, 386, 399; *Trabia*, ser. N, 39, passim and fos. 376, 392; *Trabia*, ser. N, 47, fos. 57, 239; *Trabia*, ser. N, 53, fos. 25, 118; *Trabia*, ser. N, 54, fos. 12, 14, 30, 33, 36; *Trabia*, ser. N, 56, fo. 148; *Trabia*, ser. N, 57, fos. 33-278; *Trabia*, ser. N, 58, fo. 57; *Trabia*, ser. N, 59, fo. 94, *Trabia* ser. N, 60, passim.

[103] See, for example, A.S.P. *Trabia*, ser. N, 54, fo. 14, 30 Nov. 1647.

Noto. In 1636, for example, the magistrates of Castrogiovanni modified the viceregal edict governing the price of wheat in deference to his wishes.[104] Castrogiovanni clearly did not benefit, however, from the wheat transactions carried out by Nicolò Placido in the late 1640s, for, unlike the towns of the north-east, the town was unable to pay for wheat with silk, the only acceptable 'hard currency' at a time of general wheat shortage.

Whereas the inhabitants of the 'new foundations' multiplied during the seventeenth century, those of the older centres declined in numbers. Population increases, at Santa Caterina, Santa Ninfa and Leonforte, of four, six and even ten fold between 1616 and 1714 were matched over the same period by decreases of 20% and 40% at Mazara and Castrogiovanni.[105] In the older centres the downturn of population did not relieve the human pressures on food supplies, for in the long run the adequate provisioning of these towns was prevented by the stagnant or declining volume of wheat produced in their territories. This problem was compounded by the failure of the new villages of a particular locality to make up these deficiencies. Utilising a set of six wheat production figures for the period 1620-1760, it can be estimated that annual wheat production in the territory of Castrogiovanni was perhaps between 9,000 and 10,000 salme alla grossa (about 25,000 quintals) in the early seventeenth century but no more than 8,000 in the latter part.[106] During the seventeenth century annual per capita consumption may have fallen from 230 litres to 210 litres of wheat. The town's inhabitants tried to compensate for the lack of wheat, it seems, by eating more barley, which may possibly have increased from 12 to 35% of the total grain consumed over this period.

The long-term decline in wheat production suffered by Castrogiovanni can be attributed not just to the physical reductions in territorial area but also to the greater difficulties experienced by the *borgesi* of the older towns in raising the necessary 'cultivation capital', namely seed-corn and bovine livestock. This defectiveness was a consequence, first, of the inadequacy of the municipal provisioning office as a seed bank and, secondly, of the evasion, both by the aristocracy and the urban bourgeoisie, of the greater part of the costs of production. Further research is needed to throw light on this problem. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the older towns tried to encourage the resettlement of former inhabitants who had emigrated because of indebtedness by offering moratoria from such debts.[107] Significantly, however, they did

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[104] Archivio di Stato, Enna, *Archivio Storico di Castrogiovanni*, 10, fos. 5-6, 17 Oct. 1636.

[105] AYMARD, unpublished data.

[106] Archivio di Stato, Enna, *Archivio Storico di Castrogiovanni*, vols. 20, 21, 22, 31, 39, passim (no pagination).

[107] As exemplified in the *capitoli di grazie* offered by Castrogiovanni: A.S.P. *Prot. Reg.* 537, fo. 71 ff., 27 May 1624.

not offer to make ' cultivation capital ' available. The task of doing so seems increasingly to have been assumed by the richer peasants, with whom the new villages were better supplied.

7. *Conclusion*

In trying to assess the importance of the new villages of Sicily founded in the early seventeenth century it is useful to refer to the model constructed by Aymard to explain the course of economic development in Italy.[108] Effective during the medieval and Renaissance periods, the model essentially consisted of relationships operating between the towns and the surrounding countryside under their economic control and between the quasi industrial north and the agricultural south of Italy. In both cases the dominant ' partner ' systematically exploited the resources of the weaker one, or tried to do so. The features of the model began to break down towards the close of the sixteenth century although it did not completely disintegrate until about 1670. The inability of northern industry to compete on the world market, as is well known, caused its capital and labour to be shifted into agriculture. As the northern cities achieved self-sufficiency in the materials hitherto obtained from the south — especially, in grain and, later, silk — so the economic ties between north and south grew weaker. The early seventeenth century was a period in which the south of Italy, with little demand for its products on the world market, found itself obliged to cope with a new situation. The period was also characterised by the steady crumbling of the relationship between southern towns and southern countryside.

The argument of this article has focused upon the decades 1590-1650) in which the long-established model of the Italian economy — until then without other European parallels — was collapsing. In Sicily's case the changing distribution pattern of its wheat surpluses and the building of nearly 70 villages during this period show that many aristocratic families realised they had to adapt themselves to a new situation. The increasingly unfavourable nature of the foreign market for Sicilian wheat coincided with the worsening of aristocratic indebtedness. The dictates of social prestige condemned perhaps most of the capital resources of such families to immobilisation from one generation to the next for the payment of dowries and portions. Thus, indebtedness stemming from the nature of the noble family economy prompted the decision to found a village. This promised to bring in a source of income out of which a founder could meet obligations to his family, and at the cost to himself of only a small investment in manpower and raw materials. To see his project crowned with success, a feudatory also needed to enjoy an adequate political reputation in a given locality. When outsiders who did not have the backing of a local network of friends attempted to build villages their efforts were often thwarted

[108] AYMARD, *La transizione dal feudalesimo al capitalismo*, cit., especially pp. 1172-88.

unless they could look to Palermo or Madrid for powerful support. The factiousness of local politics had the effect of eliminating much of the potential competition for supplying wheat to the various domestic markets.

Much emphasis has been laid upon the importance of the internal demand for wheat in stimulating colonisation. Immanuel Wallerstein has pointed to the vitality of regional markets in the central and eastern European 'peripheries' when exports from these areas to 'core' countries were declining.[109] This was also true of Sicily where the internal markets for wheat enjoyed a short-lived 'triumph' over the external one during the early seventeenth century. Evidence has been adduced to show that, in some cases, village building was a response to the needs of the 'urban' markets of Palermo and Messina — particularly as wheat could be sent there by sea on small coasting vessels after passing through the *caricatori* used for home trade. In other cases, the major stimulus came from one of the 'rural' markets. Food supplies were urgently needed by the small silk-producing towns of the north-east where the terrain did not favour adequate wheat production. They were also needed by the ancient towns of the interior where traditional self-sufficiency was in jeopardy not only in years of general dearth but steadily diminished in the late sixteenth century with the erosion of their territorial 'cushions'. The transfer of wheat from new villages to the 'rural' markets did not check the decline in living standards in the older centres, as is shown by the evidence — admittedly very limited — for Raccuia and Castrogiovanni. By comparison, the 'urban' market — particularly Palermo — fared better with regard to wheat supplies, although the question of the capital's provisioning in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries remains an open one.

The most obvious short-term effect of the early seventeenth-century 'new foundations' was a rapid increase in wheat production. The quantities produced at Santa Ninfa and Leonforte more than doubled in the 1620s and '30s. Still higher annual production levels may have been reached in these villages by the later part of the century. These increases were achieved by continuously extending the area of land under cultivation, however, and crop sizes were maintained only by sowing on tilled fallow. The tilling, moreover, was done by hoes which barely scratched the surface of the soil. In the long term the new villages retreated into autarky, and further research is needed to elucidate this. It should focus on the decline in living standards within the new villages which made itself felt as the size of their populations came to outstrip wheat production. of connected importance is the question of the long-term rôle of peasant middlemen from the new villages in bridging the communication gaps between the increasingly self-contained localities of the Sicilian interior.

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[109] WALLERSTEIN, *The Modern World-System II*, cit., pp. 137-38.