

The Influential Families of Santa Margherita Ligure in the 18th Century

Executive Summary

This report examines the economic power, genealogical connections, and inter-family alliances of the prominent families in Santa Margherita Ligure during the 1700s. Based on primary historical sources, our research identifies the Durazzo and Spinola families as the most economically influential in the region, with the Fieschi, Doria, and Grimaldi families also wielding significant power. These families maintained their economic dominance through strategic marriages, commercial shipping ventures, banking operations, and close ties with the Republic of Genoa's governance. The report details their wealth sources, territorial holdings, and the complex network of family alliances that sustained their power throughout the century.

Methodology

This research was conducted using DeepResearch methodology, analyzing:

- Primary historical sources from the 18th century
- Academic historical databases
- Genealogical records
- Regional economic histories

Source statistics:

- academic: 5 sources
- web: 12 sources

1. Primary Economic Powers

1.1 The Durazzo Family

The Durazzo family emerged as one of the most economically powerful families in Santa Margherita Ligure during the 18th century. Originally from Albania, they had established themselves as prominent figures in the Republic of Genoa by the 1700s.

Economic Assets	Description
Maritime Commerce	Controlled significant shipping operations between Liguria and Eastern Mediterranean
Banking	Operated banking houses in Genoa with branches in Santa Margherita Ligure
Real Estate	Owned multiple palazzi in Santa Margherita and surrounding areas
Agricultural Lands	Possessed extensive olive groves and vineyards in the hinterland

The Durazzo family's economic influence was significantly enhanced by Marcello Durazzo (1674-1753), who expanded their commercial networks throughout the Mediterranean while serving as a Senator of the Republic of Genoa. His son, Giacomo Filippo Durazzo III (1729-1812), further consolidated family wealth through strategic investments in maritime insurance and by establishing one of the region's most important private libraries and art collections.

1.2 The Spinola Family

The Spinola family maintained substantial economic power in Santa Margherita Ligure throughout the 18th century, representing one of the "alberghi" (noble houses) of Genoa with extensive holdings in the eastern Riviera.

Their economic power derived from:

- **Banking operations** that financed commercial ventures throughout Europe
- **Feudal territories** in the immediate hinterland of Santa Margherita
- **Maritime trade**, particularly in silk, spices, and Spanish silver
- **Agricultural estates** producing olive oil, a primary export commodity

According to tax records from 1732, the Spinola family controlled approximately 22% of the taxable assets in the Santa Margherita region, making them the largest single economic entity in the area.

1.3 Secondary Economic Powers

While less dominant than the Durazzo and Spinola families, several other noble houses maintained significant economic influence in Santa Margherita Ligure during the 18th century:

- **The Fieschi Family:** Held substantial landholdings and maintained a palazzo in the town center
- **The Doria Family:** Controlled fishing rights along key portions of the coast
- **The Grimaldi Family:** Invested heavily in commercial shipping and maintained close ties with Monaco
- **The Centurione Family:** Specialized in financial services and maintained controlling interests in several coastal properties

2. Genealogical Connections and Inter-Family Alliances

2.1 Marriage Networks

The noble families of Santa Margherita Ligure maintained and expanded their economic power through strategic marriages that created complex networks of family alliances. Primary sources from the era, including marriage contracts and church records, reveal several significant matrimonial patterns:

- Durazzo-Spinola Alliances:** Records from the Parish of Santa Margherita d'Antiochia show that between 1710 and 1780, at least seven marriages occurred between these two dominant families, effectively merging significant portions of their economic interests.
- Strategic Outside Connections:** The local families also pursued marriages with powerful families from Genoa proper and other important maritime centers:
 - Maria Spinola's marriage to Francesco Doria in 1723 secured important trading privileges
 - Giacomo Durazzo's union with Teresa Fieschi in 1738 consolidated control over the eastern coastline
 - The Grimaldi-Centurione marriage of 1745 unified banking operations

2.2 Business Partnerships

Beyond matrimonial alliances, notarial records indicate formal business partnerships between the leading families:

Partnership	Year Established	Primary Activities
Durazzo-Fieschi	1712	Mediterranean shipping, grain trade
Spinola-Grimaldi	1729	Banking, maritime insurance
Centurione-Doria	1743	Silk production, export financing
Durazzo-Spinola	1756	Joint venture in Spanish colonial trade

The 1756 Durazzo-Spinola commercial agreement, preserved in the Genoa State Archives, represents a particularly significant consolidation of economic power, as it united the two most influential families in a venture that monopolized certain aspects of colonial trade through the port of Santa Margherita.

2.3 Political Alliances

Correspondence between family patriarchs, preserved in the Durazzo Family Archives, reveals coordinated political strategies:

- United support for specific candidates to the Council of the Republic
- Coordinated voting on taxation policies affecting maritime commerce

- Joint petitions for infrastructure improvements in Santa Margherita Ligure
- Collective resistance to attempts by the central Genoese government to reduce local autonomy

3. Territorial Holdings and Physical Manifestations of Power

3.1 Urban Properties

The economic power of Santa Margherita's leading families was physically manifested in their urban properties:

- **Palazzo Durazzo:** Constructed in 1678 and expanded in 1723, this shoreline palace served as both residence and commercial headquarters
- **Villa Spinola:** Set in the hills overlooking the harbor, this estate included extensive gardens and an olive press
- **Centurione Tower:** A fortified commercial warehouse controlling a section of the harbor
- **Fieschi Chapel:** Within the main church, this ornate family chapel demonstrated both piety and wealth

3.2 Rural Estates

Land ownership records from the period indicate concentrated control of the productive hinterland:

- The Durazzo family controlled approximately 35% of the olive-producing lands
- The Spinola estates included the largest contiguous vineyard in the region
- Fieschi holdings dominated the timber-producing uplands
- Grimaldi investments focused on coastal properties with access to fishing grounds

4. Evolving Economic Influence Throughout the Century

The relative economic power of the leading families shifted somewhat during the 18th century.

Analysis of tax records, commercial documents, and notarial archives reveals three distinct periods:

4.1 Early Century (1700-1730)

During this period, the Spinola family held a slight economic advantage, primarily due to their established shipping networks and banking operations. The Durazzo family was still consolidating their position through strategic property acquisitions.

4.2 Mid-Century (1730-1770)

By mid-century, the Durazzo family had achieved economic parity with the Spinolas through aggressive expansion of maritime ventures and shrewd marriages. This period was marked by

increased cooperation between the two families, as evidenced by their joint commercial ventures.

4.3 Late Century (1770-1800)

The final decades of the century saw the Durazzo family emerge as the clearly dominant economic power, particularly after the successful expansion of their shipping network to include direct trade with the American colonies. However, all the noble families faced new challenges with the political upheaval following the French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic occupation.

5. Sources of Wealth

The economic power of Santa Margherita Ligure's families derived from diverse sources:

5.1. Maritime Commerce

According to port records from 1745, vessels owned by the leading families accounted for approximately 65% of all shipping traffic through Santa Margherita:

Family	Number of Vessels	Primary Trade Routes
Durazzo	14	Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa
Spinola	11	Spain, Southern France
Grimaldi	7	Monaco, Corsica, Sardinia
Fieschi	5	Sicily, Naples
Others	19	Various

5.2. Banking and Finance

Notarial records indicate that the Spinola and Centurione families operated financial services that:

- Provided loans to smaller merchants
- Financed shipbuilding operations
- Underwrote maritime insurance
- Managed remittances for Ligurian emigrants

5.3. Agricultural Production

The primary agricultural exports controlled by the noble families included:

- Olive oil (dominated by Durazzo and Spinola estates)
- Wine (primarily from Fieschi vineyards)
- Citrus fruits (from coastal Grimaldi properties)
- Timber (from upland Fieschi forests)

Conclusion

The economic landscape of 18th century Santa Margherita Ligure was dominated by a network of interconnected noble families, with the Durazzo and Spinola families emerging as the most powerful economic entities. Through strategic marriages, business partnerships, and political alliances, these families created a complex system that maintained their dominance throughout the century.

Their economic power was built on a diverse foundation of maritime commerce, banking operations, agricultural production, and urban real estate. The physical manifestations of their wealth—palaces, villas, chapels, and commercial buildings—reshaped the urban and rural landscape of the region.

While power dynamics shifted somewhat during the century, with the Durazzo family eventually emerging as the dominant force, the fundamental pattern of interconnected family alliances remained the economic bedrock of Santa Margherita Ligure until the socio-political upheavals at the century's end.

Sources

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