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Genoa and Livorno: Sixteenth and Seventeenth-century Commercial Rivalry as a Stimulus to Policy Development

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Abstract

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, while Genoa was at the height of its colonial expansion, Livorno was little more than a fishing village. The Genoese had assembled a territorial state in Liguria, taken the island of Corsica and, as early as 1277, were sending ships directly to England and Flanders. All the while Livorno was merely a malaria-infested appendix of Porto Pisano. Over the course of the sixteenth century, however, Livorno grew by leaps and bounds and by the end of the century concerns over the Tuscan city's growing importance as a commercial port had become a conditioning factor in the establishment of Genoese maritime policy. The concern was well founded. An ever-greater portion of trade in the western Mediterranean was to gravitate to Livorno during the seventeenth century, threatening to transform Genoa into a commercial satellite. The Republic of Genoa did not hesitate to react, and the subsequent rivalry between the two ports provided the principal stimulus in the experimentation of innovative fiscal policies in both cities and to the development of the modern free port. Indeed, the free port as it is known today, namely a specific port or area within a port where goods may transit duty free, emerged as the policies of the two cities slowly converged, formulating a single response to differing historical contingencies.

When the Republic of Genoa sold the port of Livorno to Florence in 1421, for the sum of 100,000 florins, the Genoese could not have foreseen that two centuries later the Tuscan port would have grown to rival and even surpass the older maritime republic as an emporium and redistributive centre of the Mediterranean trade.¹ When the eventual fall of Pisa to Florentine troops began to appear

¹ The works of Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York, 1972) [hereafter Braudel, *The Mediterranean*] and *Civilization and Capitalism 15th–18th Century* (New York, 1984), continue to provide the most comprehensive overview of the economic and political panorama of the Mediterranean world. C. Costantini, *La Repubblica di Genova* (Turin, 1986) [hereafter Costantini, *La Repubblica*] provides a good synthesis of the evolution of Genoese society during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while more detailed analyses of the complex political and economic developments within the republic can be found in the collections of essays by Giorgio Doria and Edoardo Grendi, *Nobiltà e investimenti a Genova in Età moderna* (Genoa, 1995) and *La repubblica aristocratica dei genovesi* (Bologna, 1987), respectively.

inevitable, Gabriello Maria Visconti, lord of Pisa, placed both Porto Pisano and Livorno under the protection of the French king in the person of Boucicault, the French governor of Genoa (12 July 1404).² Florentine troops occupied Porto Pisano, but Livorno remained in Genoese hands for seventeen years. During this brief period the Genoese made a number of improvements to the port, building a canal from the Torre Nuova del Molo to the Porta a Terra and creating the small wet-dock, or *darsena*, called the 'Porticciolo'.³ At the time of the port's sale to Florence it had fewer than 500 inhabitants.⁴ For the Genoese, Livorno had been a convenient haven and an important outlet for trade with Florence; it had not been an important hub in the Genoese network of ports.

Though lacking a fleet of its own, the Florentine republic had begun to experiment as early as 1419 with tax exemptions on the transit trade through Pisa and Porto Pisano.⁵ At this time the Genoese presence in Livorno must have posed a threat to the continued prosperity of Pisa as a maritime trading centre; the Genoese had a powerful fleet and already controlled much of the trade in the Tyrrhenian Sea. They had also begun to improve the port, while Porto Pisano was silting up and becoming less and less practicable (a fact which would eventually lead to the port's abandonment during the latter half of the sixteenth century). The measures adopted in 1419 granted complete exemption from entry and exit duties and from storage fees to merchandise arriving in Pisa from outside the Florentine state and re-exported within one year. This policy was repealed in 1429 for all but a few precious items. By this time the exemptions were no longer necessary since Livorno had been purchased by Florence and the Florentines had begun building their own galleys in the Pisan arsenal; privileges were maintained only for products necessary to the Florentine textile industry. Though short-lived, the exemptions enacted in 1419 for traffic passing through Pisa represent an important precedent for the policy later adopted by the Medici grand dukes in order to launch Livorno as one of the Mediterranean's most important emporia.

Apart from some minor territorial disputes in the late fifteenth century, relations between Genoa and Florence were generally good on a political and diplomatic level. With the marriage of Francesco I de'

An overview of the Medici dukes' policies regarding Livorno can be found in F. Diaz, *Il Granducato di Toscana – I Medici* (Turin, 1987) [hereafter Diaz, *Il Granducato*].

² M. Tangheroni and O. Vaccari, 'L'osservatorio datiniano di Livorno e la navigazione mediterranea tra Tre e Quattrocento', *L'uomo e il mare nella civiltà occidentale da Ulisse a Cristoforo Colombo. Atti del convegno, Genova, 1–4 giugno 1992* (Genoa, 1992), p. 147.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁴ The famous Florentine *catasto* of 1427 illustrates a community of 118 hearths (*fuochi*) and a resident population of 429 souls; L. Frattarelli Fischer, 'Città fondata e sviluppo demografico: Livorno dal 1427 al 1750', *Vita Morte e Miracoli di Gente Comune. Appunti per una storia della popolazione della Toscana fra xiv e xx secolo*, ed. C. Corsini (Florence, 1988) [hereafter Frattarelli Fischer, 'Città fondata'], p. 119.

⁵ G. Pagano de Divitiis, 'Il porto di Livorno fra Inghilterra e Oriente', *Nuovi Studi Livornesi*, i (1993), 79.

Medici with Joanna of Austria in 1564, and the creation of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in 1569, the Genoese took particular care to groom their relationship with the Medici state. On her way to Florence, in fact, the archduchess travelled on Gian Andrea Doria's galley and was met with great fanfare and festivities when the squadron of galleys put in to port at Genoa.⁶

The numerous joint naval expeditions organized by the Republic of Genoa and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany during the latter part of the sixteenth century are further evidence of the friendly relations between the two states. The galleys of the republic often patrolled the western Mediterranean with the galleys of the Tuscan Knights of St Stephen during the 1580s, capturing a number of corsair vessels. The success of these joint efforts fired the imagination of those Genoese who envisioned a renewed naval power for the republic, making a hero of the Genoese General Francesco Grimaldi and taking the Tuscan galleys as a model to be imitated in the development and reorganization of the republic's naval forces.⁷

In terms of commercial rivalry, the first sign of awareness and alarm that the port of Livorno was becoming a potential threat to Genoese trade in the Tyrrhenian can be found in the minutes of a debate in Genoa's Minor Consiglio in July 1568, little more than two years after Cosimo I's reform of the Tuscan port's fiscal structure.⁸ Genoa was then involved in putting down a long-lasting rebellion in Corsica, and an increase in the size of the republic's galley fleet had been proposed, together with an increase in customs duties to cover the costs of the new ships. One councillor warned that 'we should fear that imposing new customs duties could damage the shipping and traffic [in Genoa] in comparison to nearby ports where all can see that most trade is drawn, being little or hardly at all taxed.'⁹ Prior to the 1590s, however, the Genoese did not adapt their policy in reaction to the growing importance of Livorno and any changes in the fiscal structure of the city's port, whether merely suggested or actually implemented, should be seen strictly in light of internal questions. In Genoa the reforms most closely resembling those made in Livorno were limited to the grain trade. In fact, in 1555, to encourage wheat merchants to frequent the city during the first of the sixteenth-century wars in Corsica, the senate discussed the possibility of eliminating

⁶ F. Casoni, *Annali della repubblica di Genova nel decimo sesto* (Genoa, 1779–1800), iii, 161.

⁷ Ibid., iv, 150–8. See also T. Kirk, 'Genoa and the Sea: Ships and Power in the Early Modern Mediterranean (1559–1680)', unpublished PhD thesis (European University Institute, Florence, 1996) [hereafter Kirk, 'Genoa and the Sea'], pp. 112–15.

⁸ Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (hereafter BNCF) MS II.4, *Riforma dello Statuto del Porto e Terra di Livorno, promulgata nel 1565*, fos. 1–25. See below.

⁹ Archivio di Stato di Genova (hereafter ASG), Archivio Segreto, Politicorum, 1650, fasc. 69, dated 20 July 1568, *Ricordi delli Gallere, con la posta al minor Consiglio*: 'si può temere che l'imporre nuove gravetze in dugana non venga a causar gran danno alla navigatione et al traffico rispetto alle vicine scale ove hoggidi come ognun vede concorre la maggior parte del negotio essendo elle poco o niente gravate'.

the *gabella di grano* for wheat brought to the city and subsequently re-exported unsold. According to this scheme, duties were to be paid in full on cereals sold for consumption in the city and double on those bought by grain merchants for re-export.¹⁰ The tax burden would thus have been shifted from the shippers bringing foodstuffs to the city to the buyers of the cereals, in effect transforming the *gabella* into a tax on consumption. Doubling the duty to be paid on grain bought for re-export was seen as a means of compensating for any loss of customs revenue. Paying duties only on the grain they sold, shippers would face fewer risks and would be free to find an alternative market for any unsold foodstuffs left on board without having to pay duties twice (or more) on the same grain.

Similar terms were temporarily adopted to supply the city with wheat during the civil war of 1575. Factional strife between the *nobili nuovi* and the *nobili vecchi*, a constant feature of the sixteenth-century Genoese political scene, had escalated into armed conflict in March 1575. During the fighting that ensued, the *nobili nuovi* took possession of the city of Genoa, while the *nobili vecchi* maintained control of nearly all the territory of the eastern and western *Riviera*. Cut off from the surrounding countryside and unable to match the *nobili vecchi* at sea, the *nobili nuovi* in Genoa resorted to tax reductions – a sort of free port – in order to attract foodstuffs to the city. Shippers were even offered customs exemption on any grains that they re-exported unsold. The supply of grain brought to the city was more than sufficient, but the lack of fiscal counterbalances to the exemptions granted led to a long and controversial legal battle between the republic and the 1575 tax farmers who demanded the payment of damages.¹¹ Indeed, city authorities did not collect taxes directly. The right to gather specific taxes was auctioned off to private individuals who paid for that right in advance. The government's suspension of duties on grains in 1575 deprived the tax farmers of the possibility of recovering their investment.

Fifteen years later, in August 1590, the city was explicitly declared a free port for grain shipments. Like the granting of exemptions in 1575, the declaration of the free port in 1590 was an emergency measure. A series of bad harvests had brought about a shortage of cereals throughout the western Mediterranean. The Genoese senate moved in several directions at once, dispatching grain merchants to the ports of northern Europe, arming galleys to intercept shipments of wheat destined for other ports and enacting the free port. This first version of the *porto franco* incorporated a general safe conduct for anyone bringing at least a two-thirds cargo of grain to Genoa or any of the republic's ports (a policy which had already been in effect for decades) and the possibility of re-exporting the unsold portion of that cargo without paying duties on it.

¹⁰ ASG, Atti del Senato, 1292, *Tractatio de reformatione gabellae granorum*.

¹¹ ASG, Membranacei di San Giorgio, 112, fo. 130.

The Genoese free port for grain of the 1590s was a great success. The 1590 decree, which had a validity of only one year, was renewed in August 1591 and again in September 1592 in virtually the same form,¹² the sole variation being that its validity was restricted to the port of Genoa and not to all the ports of the republic as in the initial version. In his annals of the republic, Antonio Roccatagliata reports that by early 1592 the price of wheat had fallen from 45 lire per mina to 30, and that, on the single day of 18 January 1593, 130 ships laden with grain entered the port of Genoa.¹³ By June 1593 the price of a mina of wheat in Genoa had fallen to only 18 lire.¹⁴ The abundance of wheat in Genoa, however, was perhaps not the most striking result of the free port.

Furnishing the famine-stricken Italian provinces of the Spanish empire had been placing a strain on Spain's already scarce grain production. Therefore, the possibility of creating an entrepôt for cereals in Genoa capable of supplying Lombardy and the Kingdom of Naples with wheat from northern Europe in 1591 led Philip II to allow safe passage through Spanish waters to all ships carrying grain to Genoa, even to the English and the Dutch.¹⁵ Milan and Naples could be supplied without depleting the Spanish stocks of grain and without employing Spanish ships. The economic power of the Genoese merchants, with the aid of albeit flimsy free-port measures, not only succeeded in feeding the city, but also in influencing international diplomacy in a way that the republic's military forces had never been able to do.¹⁶

In spite of the free port's success, however, the regulations governing the importation and exportation of foodstuffs were not loosened further during the following years. On the contrary, they were tightened. For the year 1593 free-port privileges were allowed only for ships coming from beyond the Strait of Gibraltar¹⁷ and in 1594 no tax exemptions were granted at all. Re-enacted in 1595, for ten years the free-port policy was applied only to ships bringing at least 300 mine (roughly 27 metric tons)¹⁸

¹² Archivio Storico del Comune di Genova (hereafter ASCG), Magistrato dell'Abbondanza, Aetorum, 723, 2 Aug. 1591; see also ASG, Archivio Segreto, Propositionum, 1028, doc. 72, dated 18 Sept. 1592.

¹³ A. Roccatagliata, *Gli annali della Repubblica di Genova dall'anno 1581 all'anno 1607* (Genoa, 1873), p. 158.

¹⁴ Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter ASF), Mediceo del Principato, 2860, fo. 222.

¹⁵ ASG, Archivio Segreto, Lettere Spagna, 2419, letter from the Genoese ambassador in Spain, Pier Battista Cattaneo, to the republic dated 12 Sept. 1591. Earlier in the year Spanish galleys had captured a number of ships carrying grain from Danzig to Livorno and the Spanish continually appealed to Genoa for permission to attack English shipping in Ligurian waters. Upon request by the senate, however, in September Philip II granted safe conduct to all ships carrying foodstuffs to Genoa.

¹⁶ During the decade prior to the enactment of the free port in Genoa, a series of diplomatic incidents involving the naval forces of Spain and the republic had revolved around questions regarding the republic's sovereignty over the Ligurian Sea and, in concrete terms, Genoa's insistence on allowing safe passage to English ships in republican waters. See T. Kirk, 'The Implications of Ceremony at Sea: Some Examples from the Republic of Genoa (16th and 17th Centuries)', *The Great Circle: Journal of the Australian Association for Maritime History*, xviii (1996), 1–13.

¹⁷ ASCG, Magistrato dell'Abbondanza, Aetorum, 725, dated 5 Dec. 1592.

¹⁸ ASG, Archivio Segreto, Propositionum, 1028, doc. 156, dated 9 April 1595; see also ASG, Archivio Segreto, Propositionum, 1029, doc. 35, dated 19 Sept. 1600.

of cereals to the city, and from 1605 only to ships bringing 300 mine from beyond Gibraltar.¹⁹

The gradual restriction of free-port privileges highlights both the role that Livorno had assumed as a rival to the Ligurian port and the difference between the conception of the free port in the two cities. On the one hand, the restriction of free-port privileges clearly illustrates Livorno's capacity to draw traffic away from Genoa. Apparently, a significant number of wheat shipments were sent first to Livorno and then any wheat left unsold there was sent to Genoa or the towns along the Riviera. The initial restriction of privileges to the sole city of Genoa at the expense of the towns on the Riviera represents an attempt to direct this cabotage trade through the capital city, *la Dominante* in the terminology of the day, in order to maintain some control over the levying of customs; the interests of the smaller centres did not always correspond to those of the central government and local officials could at times be willing to forgo collecting taxes in order to ensure an adequate food supply for the population. The subsequent restrictions – a ship's provenance from beyond Gibraltar and a load of at least 300 mine of wheat – mark further efforts to discourage shippers from landing in Livorno first and using the Tuscan port as a base for supplying the Ligurian Riviera with foodstuffs. Genoa and Livorno were competing for the redistributive trade in grain from northern Europe and the Baltic area, and the Genoese wanted to encourage northern captains to bring their ships to Genoa first, thus giving the city's merchants the role of primary distributors of the wheat. The Genoese did not apparently see the need to intervene in the commerce of goods other than grain.

Furthermore, when the restrictive measures taken to limit the Genoese *porto franco dei grani* are compared with the policy adopted by Ferdinando I of Tuscany regarding Livorno during the same years, it is evident that, in spite of a certain degree of common (and confused) terminology, the approaches taken by Genoa and Livorno for increasing port traffic were radically different. The 1590s in Livorno were the years of the 'Livornine', the famous laws of 1592 and 1593 inviting merchants of any and every nationality and religion to settle in the city. The 'Livornine' offered a series of tax exemptions and guaranteed freedom of religion to both Jews and Muslims without subjecting those religious minorities to special taxes, as was the practice elsewhere. In very general terms these two statutes established the nature of the Livornese free port as it would remain until the broad reforms of 1676. While the fiscal reforms enacted by Cosimo I in 1566 had created a rational and coherent programme to enhance the importance of the port by instituting a series of customs reductions aimed at favouring the transit trade, the truly innovative and characteristic reforms were the 'Livornine'. The principal goal of the 'Livornine' was the creation of a free port for merchants where persons

¹⁹ ASG, Archivio Segreto, Propositionum, 1029, doc. 148, dated 14–19 Jan. 1605.

entered and left the port, and even settled there, with no discrimination. It is only in this way that we can make sense of the way in which the term 'free port', *porto franco*, is used in reference to Livorno prior to the complete revision of the port's fiscal machinery in 1676. In 1645 the *Provveditore* Pandolfo Attavanti wrote to the Grand Duke, 'the custom has always been that even our enemies the Turks have enjoyed and enjoy the port's freedom [*franchigia*] . . . which is not the case in other ports where there is no *free port* and in other places of Your Highness's state where a passport is necessary. They can come and trade here in virtue of the freedom of the port.'²⁰ The tax exemption allowed to foreign merchants resident in Livorno had been revoked in 1642, while customs duties and anchorage taxes had been raised across the board during the first half of the 1640s.²¹ The use of the term in this letter indicates that the accepted meaning of the term 'free port', at least in Tuscany, referred to the freedom of access to the port granted to any and all merchants. In Genoa, on the other hand, the term 'free port' first appears in the August 1591 'free port for cereals' where it is explicitly stated that the port is open to merchants of every nationality. This, however, had long been the case. Since the novelty of the measures taken in Genoa in 1590, in comparison with the republic's usual fiscal policy, lay exclusively in the ability to re-export unsold grain without paying customs duties on it, it can be deduced that, for the Genoese, the term 'free port' referred precisely to this aspect of fiscal policy rather than to the generalized safe conduct associated with the same term in Livorno. In Genoa the term *porto franco* was used with reference to material goods, while in Livorno it was used with reference to persons.

The seventeenth century was to witness a deep structural change in the nature of the Mediterranean trade. The overwhelming majority of grain shipments made from northern Europe to the Mediterranean region during the famines of the 1590s were sent in northern European ships. As Fernand Braudel and many other historians have pointed out, the previously sporadic presence of English and Dutch ships and merchants in the Mediterranean was intensified during the 1590s.²² Having thus established a presence in the Mediterranean, a great number of northern ships that had arrived carrying foodstuffs remained for relatively long periods, engaging in the rich infra-Mediterranean trades. The consequences of the arrival of the northerners in the Mediterranean is well

²⁰ ASF, Mediceo del Principato, 2160, letter of 19 Feb. 1644 (1645): 'la consuetudine è stata sempre che fino i turchi nostri nemici hanno goduto e tuttavia godono la franchigia del porto . . . il che non si costuma in altre scale dove non è *porto franco* e negli altri luoghi dello Stato di S.A. senza il passaporto, e qui possono venire e negoziare solo in virtù della franchigia del porto' (emphasis added).

²¹ M. Baruchello, *Livorno e il suo porto. Origini, caratteristiche e vicende dei traffici livornesi* (Livorno, 1932) [hereafter Baruchello, *Livorno*], pp. 285–6; Frattarelli Fischer, 'Città fondata', p. 128; Diaz, *Il Granducato*, pp. 396–7. The increases in duties were accompanied by the restriction and more rigid interpretation of the traditional exemptions.

²² Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, i. 631–40.

illustrated in a Genoese *relazione* of 1613 calling for state subsidies in order to encourage shipping and shipbuilding among the Genoese. The document states that ‘in particular the Flemish [i.e. Dutch], not only through their understanding of trade, but also with the great number of vessels that they have and that they send about for fees, have taken nearly all commerce and goods into their own hands.’²³ Given the political nature of the document it is clear that the author exaggerates the gravity of the situation. It is true, however, that the size of the Genoese fleet had been contracting for decades and the percentage of goods entering and leaving the port in Genoese ships was in constant decline.²⁴ There are many reasons for these trends, not least of them a transformation within the Genoese economy in favour of activities other than shipping, and the willingness of the republic’s merchants to entrust their wares to foreign shippers, thereby leaving the riskier and less lucrative business of the transport industry to others. At any rate the arrival of large numbers of English and Dutch ships in the Mediterranean coincided with the beginning of a debate within the republic concerning the need to re-launch Genoa as a maritime power.

The 1613 report quoted above attributes the decline in Genoese sea power to the fact that many of the city’s wealthiest merchants had left maritime trade in favour of financial activities, primarily in the service of the Spanish monarchy. In the wake of a series of Spanish defaults on payments to the crown’s creditors,²⁵ a growing number of the city’s plutocrats began to see a renewed maritime vocation for the city as an alternative to financial involvement with the Spanish. In fact, political debate in the republic during the first half of the seventeenth century revolved around various schemes for reviving the city’s lost medieval maritime power, stimulating shipbuilding and maritime trade.²⁶ During the same years the institution of the free port continued to evolve as well, reinforcing the city’s role in Mediterranean trade in a very different way.

A free port for merchandise was declared in Genoa in 1609, open to ships of any size bringing goods to the city from beyond the republic’s western border, or from beyond the river Tiber to the south and east.²⁷ In other words, ships that had not put in to port between Monte Carlo and the mouth of the Tiber could enter and leave the port without paying import and export duties on their cargoes. Significantly, ships sailing

²³ ASG, Archivio Segreto, Politicorum, 1652, doc. 22, dated 2 March 1613: ‘si vede in particolare delli fiamenghi, li quali non solo con il disegno delle mercantie, ma con tanta quantità di vascelli che hanno, e mandano attorno per li noli, hanno quasi ridotto tutto il negozio, e mercantia in man loro.’

²⁴ E. Grendi, ‘Traffico e navi nel porto di Genova fra 1500 e 1700’, *La repubblica aristocratica dei genovesi* (Bologna, 1987) [hereafter Grendi, ‘Traffico e navi’], pp. 309–64.

²⁵ The Spanish crown had already defaulted on payments, forcing a reconversion of its debts in terms favourable to the monarchy in 1559, 1575, 1596 and most recently in 1607, the latter *quiebra* being the most damaging to the Genoese financiers. See Kirk, ‘Genoa and the Sea’, pp. 141–6.

²⁶ T. Kirk, ‘A Little Country in a World of Empires: Genoese Attempts to Penetrate the Maritime Trading Empires of the Seventeenth Century’, *Journal of European Economic History*, xxv (1996), 407–21.

²⁷ ASG, Archivio Segreto, Politicorum, 1652, fasc. 1, 30 Jan. 1609.

from Livorno or Civitavecchia did not benefit from these measures. The new free port for merchandise was also kept separate from the free port for grains; in fact, the two sets of regulations were applied by two different magistracies. In addition to the general exemptions from import and export duties, a number of other duty reductions were made with the intention of facilitating the transit trade and the creation of an emporium in Genoa. Goods, for example, transboarded from one ship to another and destined for re-export beyond the republic's territory were subject to a duty of only 1 per cent on their value (as opposed to the 7 per cent normally due). An additional 1 per cent was to be paid on the same goods if they had been sold or in some way had changed proprietor. A reduction on duties was also allowed for goods stored on land for up to six months or for merchandise imported overland from Piedmont or Monferrat, if those goods were to be re-exported by the same merchant, and not sold for consumption within the city of Genoa or the republic's territories. Silks and all other goods originating in the Kingdom of Naples were excluded from the free-port benefits, but were afforded reduced tariffs if only transiting the port.

The free-port regulations enacted in Genoa in 1609 clearly reveal a growing concern over the importance of Livorno as an emporium and a commercial rival. The third article of the regulations even stipulated that anyone benefiting from the free port and wishing to export goods to Livorno was required to leave a caution of 2,000 scudi, to be reimbursed only after having unloaded in Livorno and returned directly to Genoa.

The regulations governing the Genoese free port were rewritten and modified several times between 1609 and the middle of the century, though few qualitative changes were introduced. The geographical limits determining which ships were allowed to benefit from the free-port privileges were extended to the Strait of Gibraltar and the island of Sicily for ten years, from 1613 to 1623, but were then redrawn in order to allow ships coming from as nearby as the rival ports of Livorno and Marseille. Duty reductions were also introduced on some specific items and tax reductions were also allowed on goods imported by sea and subsequently re-exported overland in an effort to favour the use of Genoa as an emporium for supplying the interior as well. In 1646 Savona, the republic's second largest city, was declared a free port with the same regulations as Genoa, but only for ships of less than 1200 cantari burden (approximately 60 tons).²⁸

²⁸ The successive versions of the free-port regulations for the years 1613–1645 can be found in: ASG, Archivio Segreto, Propositionum, 1031, doc. 99, dated 18 Dec. 1612/22 Feb. 1613; ASG, Archivio Segreto, Propositionum, 1032, doc. 156, dated 29 Jan. 1618; Biblioteca Civica Berio, Genoa [hereafter BCB], Miscellanea genovese, B.32.1, *Porto franco di 1618*; ASG, Archivio Segreto, Propositionum, 1033, doc. 230, dated 31 Jan./1 Feb. 1623; ASG, Archivio Segreto, Propositionum, 1035, doc. 20, dated 5/18 May 1628; ASG, Archivio Segreto, Propositionum, 1036, doc. 31, dated 25 Aug. 1631; ASG, Archivio Segreto, Propositionum, 1036, doc. 119, dated 29 Jan. 1633; ASG, Archivio Segreto, Propositionum, 1037, doc. 244, dated 27 Sept. 1638; BCB, Miscellanea genovese, B.32.2, *Porto franco di 1646*.

The evolution of policy in Livorno followed a significantly different line of development. The first series of reforms aimed at creating an emporium in Livorno was enacted on 16 March 1566 (1565 following the Florentine calendar) by Cosimo I of Tuscany.²⁹ These measures allowed for the complete tax exemption of goods to be consumed in the city of Livorno and on all goods simply transiting the port without being bought or sold or changing hands in any way. Complete exemption from duties was also granted on any merchandise arriving by sea from a distance of more than one hundred miles and re-exported within one year to destinations lying more than one hundred miles from Livorno. If, however, those goods had been sold or had in some way changed proprietor while in Livorno, or if they were to be exported overland to destinations beyond the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, they paid only one-third of the normal customs duties. Meats and cheeses were subject to only one-third of the normal duty if imported from and re-exported to areas beyond the one-hundred mile limit. Imported wheat and other cereals were also subject to payment of one-third the normal duty, though without the one-hundred mile restriction. Finally, goods arriving overland from beyond the grand duchy's borders and re-exported by sea to destinations lying more than one hundred miles away also paid only one-third of the normal duties. All other items, including those imported by sea and sold for consumption in the Tuscan interior, paid all duties in full.

In general terms, these statutes, taken together with the 'Livornine' of 1592 and 1593, established the nature of the Livornese free port. Privileges and exemptions were given to merchants willing to settle in Livorno, while incentives and limited exemptions were offered to encourage the transit trade and the formation of an emporium. The full taxation of goods redistributed in the rest of Tuscany, however, made Livorno an isolated city quite separate from the rest of the country. In 1627 all time limits regarding the storage of goods benefiting from the free-port privileges were removed, and in 1629 customs duties were substituted by a tax on the storage of such merchandise. In 1643, however, a series of restrictive modifications were made to the regulations governing the free port in Livorno. A time limit of two years was re-introduced on the storage of goods, and anchorage and storage taxes were increased. These changes led to a number of protests by the foreign merchants active in the Tuscan city, inducing Ferdinand II to promise a more comprehensive set of reforms in 1661.

While not in complete synchrony with the changes made in the free port of Livorno, beginning roughly mid-century the intents and techniques adopted for the regulation of the Genoese free port tended to converge with those of Livorno, reaching substantial similarity by the second half of the 1670s. The institution of the free port, however, was

²⁹ See BNCF, MS II.4, *Riforma dello Statuto del Porto e Terra di Livorno, promulgata nel 1565*, fos. 1–25.

not the only feature of Livorno to attract the attention of the republic's rulers. There was, in fact, a continuing debate within the Genoese oligarchy concerning the maritime policy that the republic should adopt. Alongside the more conservative elements of the city's aristocracy, who tended to favour keeping the role of the state to a minimum, therefore tacitly approving of the free port, there was also a growing number of patricians who supported more decisive state intervention in attempts to recreate an active and aggressive role for the city modelled on its medieval colonial past. This latter group, often referred to as the *repubblichisti* for their ideal of a strong and independent republic, free of what they saw as excessive Spanish interference in Genoese affairs, produced a long series of projects for naval rearmament. While this political group did not usually favour the institution of the free port, they did not disdain looking to the experience of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany for ideas. Indeed, one of the most curious proposals for re-launching the city's lost vocation for shipping and shipbuilding borrows heavily from the model of the Tuscan Knights of St Stephen. In October 1638 a project was submitted to the senate calling for the foundation of a knightly order and the construction of twelve to fifteen galleons to be used both for commerce and for military purposes. Maintenance of the fleet was to be financed through freight charges and the contributions of aspiring knights, who, following a certain number of years in the order, would be eligible to enter into the republic's oligarchical caste, a means of tapping the financial resources of the wealthy non-nobles who aspired to a higher social status and access to the government,³⁰ thus fulfilling much the same function as the Tuscan knightly order.³¹

During the 1640s some of the programmes of the *repubblichisti* for a naval build-up were enacted, and the size of the city's galley fleet more than doubled between 1640 and 1642. A number of changes also came about in Genoese maritime policy in 1654. During that year diplomatic relations with Spain broke down, leading to the confiscation of Genoese goods in the Spanish territories of Italy, a Genoese block on credit to Spain and much marauding of one another's shipping. This situation brought about a real neutrality for the Republic of Genoa, at least temporarily, allowing the political room for manoeuvre necessary both to create a modest fleet of galleons and to reform the city's free-port policy. During the year of crisis in relations with Spain participation in state-organized and escorted convoys was high, and the fees charged amply covered the operating costs of the public galleons. Political neutrality also led to an alteration in the nature of the Genoese free port. The first point of the regulations formulated in November 1654 in fact read as follows:

³⁰ ASG, Archivio Segreto, Politicorum, busta 1654, fasc. 65, *Progetto d'instituire un ordine de' Cavaglieri sotto il titolo di S. Giorgio. E per la negoziazione in Levante*.

³¹ F. Angiolini, 'La nobiltà "imperfetta": cavalieri e commende di S. Stefano nella Toscana Moderna', *Quaderni Storici*, 78, xxvi (1991), no. 3, 875–99.

Any and every person of any nation, state, rank and condition without exception is permitted to come to the present city of Genoa with their families, goods and belongings and to stay in the city for as long as they please, with the constant freedom to depart when they so desire with no obstacles or impediments, and to trade there in [financial] exchanges, merchandise and foodstuffs and to carry on any sort of traffic . . . Jews and infidels will also be received according to the modalities established by the Most Serene Colleges . . .³²

This brief moment of fervent change was soon to pass. Within a year relations with Spain had returned to normal and as a result the number of ships taking part in the Genoese convoys fell off dramatically. Apparently the threat of Spanish attacks on the republic's shipping had been the primary factor inducing merchants to send their goods in convoyed shipping. Once that threat had dissipated there was no need to accept the economic disadvantages inherent in convoys.³³ When it became clear that the operating expenses of the galleon fleet could not be completely covered by the fees for participating in convoys, supporters of the two institutions came into conflict with one another. In March of 1656 the Colleges (the republic's highest governing body, consisting of the senate and chamber of *Procuratori* in joint session) deliberated to apply the 2 per cent fee for participation in the convoys on all goods leaving the port and to forbid goods from being shipped to Spain except in ships participating in the convoy.³⁴ The decree was not enforced and in the final convoy prior to the outbreak of the plague that summer, departing on 30 April 1656, only two merchant vessels took part, accompanied by a single galleon.

On the whole, the success of the measures taken in 1654 to increase maritime traffic in Genoa was undeniable; the level of traffic entering the port rose to 1,013,530 cantari in 1654 and 1,285,700 in 1655, compared to an average of roughly 718,000 cantari for the three preceding years.³⁵ The figure of 985,500 cantari for 1656 would in all probability have been much higher, even surpassing that of the previous two years, if the plague had not broken out in June of that year, bringing port traffic to a halt. There can be no doubt concerning which of the 1654 innovations contributed

³² BCB, *Miscellanea genovese*, B.32.5: 'Si permette ad ogni e qualunque persona di qualsivoglia nazione, stato, grado, e conditione nessuna esclusa, il poter venire alla presente Città di Genova etandio con le loro famiglie, roe, & avere, & in essa stare e dimorare tutto quel tempo che vorranno, con libertà di partirsene sempre, e quando a loro piacerà senza verun ostacolo, ne impedimento, e di potervi negoziare in Cambi, merci, e vettovaglie, & essercitare qualsivogli altra sorte di traffico, sotto libero, generale e generalissimo Porto franco come si dirà in appresso; E gli Hebrei, gl'Infedeli ancora s'ammetteranno e saran ricevuti sotto li modi, e forme che comanderanno li Serenissimi Colleggi, esclusi però sempre dalla presente Concessione e Privilegi, i relegati, e banditi dallo Stato della Serenissima Repubblica.'

³³ Apart from the fees to be paid for sending goods in escorted ships (usually 2 per cent of the goods' value), there was also the problem that the arrival of an entire convoy in a given port flooded that particular market, driving prices down. Likewise, just before a convoy's departure the prices of export goods tended to rise as merchants sought return cargoes for the ships taking part in the convoy.

³⁴ Costantini, *La Repubblica*, p. 373.

³⁵ Grendi, 'Traffico e navi', p. 358.

most to the dramatic increase in port traffic. In 1655 only eight of the 396 merchant ships entering the port took part in the convoy organized by the state, and participation in the convoys diminished during the following years. The republic continued to organize convoys for nearly thirty years, but they were no longer presented as an alternative to the free port for increasing maritime traffic.³⁶

The impact of the epidemic of bubonic plague in 1656 forced the republic's rulers to modify the regulations governing the free port, though attempts were made not to change its essential nature. With the evolution of the free port, especially in the decade and a half prior to the epidemic, the weight of the city's fiscal structure had been significantly shifted toward taxes on local consumption in order to lighten the burden on goods transiting the port and the creation of an emporium. While the transit trade could conceivably be recuperated in the wake of the plague, it was much more difficult to push consumption back up to its previous levels, given the dramatic decrease in population.³⁷ In March 1658 the free-port regulations were revised for the first time since the plague, and the boundaries were redrawn in order to allow goods coming from Civitavecchia, but not from Livorno. Complete tax exemption for six months was also granted to any merchants living outside the republic's *Dominio*, but within the free port's geographical limits (i.e. Livorno), who were willing to take up residence in Genoa. Finally, goods arriving *in dirittura*, that is without touching another port, from outside the geographical limits could be transboarded and reshipped without paying any duty whatsoever even if sold or otherwise alienated. These were the broadest regulations in Genoa yet. But for some slight modifications made in 1660 and 1662 with the introduction of duty reductions on silks and woollen products (which had always been excluded from the free-port benefits) and the elimination of the possibility of transboarding goods within the boundaries, respectively, the Genoese free port would remain unchanged for several decades.

³⁶ Amid the economic and financial turmoil in Spain during the second half of the seventeenth century a broad disinvestment trend was underway among the many Genoese financiers and merchants with capital tied up in that country. Until mid-century a great deal of bullion was exported from Spain to Genoa in the galleys of the republic and those of the Genoese *asentistas de galeras*. In September 1651, however, the Spanish port officials searched Carlo Doria's galley in the port of Cartagena, finding much more gold and silver on board than Doria was authorized to export. It had become dangerous to use galleys for the transport of contraband precious metals due to the limited autonomy of the ship type and its consequent need to put in to port. The galleons offered an alternative. Anchored offshore, they did not risk inspection by port officials. The continued willingness of the Genoese government to subsidize the convoys, even when there was little or no participation by merchant vessels, can be explained in terms of this important function. See Kirk, 'Genoa and the Sea', pp. 264–6.

³⁷ The income from the *Carati*, the principal customs duty on port traffic, fell from an annual average of 350,000 lire (1651–1655) to 230,000 in 1660, but rose again to 290,000 during the 1660s. Most of the ground recovered, though, was to be attributed to an increase in traffic in 'silk, woollens, sugar and drugs, of which the poor consume little,' and not to a recovery of grain or oil consumption. See ASG, Cancellieri di San Giorgio, Sala 35, sc. 39, Viceti 1660–1687, doc. 29; and ASG, Cancellieri di San Giorgio, Sala 35, sc. 36, Maberini, Secretorum 1658–1667, docs. 69 and 175 *bis*.

In Tuscany, the reforms promised for the Livornese emporium in 1661 were finally enacted in 1676.³⁸ On 11 March of that year (1675 following the Florentine calendar) Grand Duke Cosimo III presented the new port regulations.³⁹ With these regulations all import and export duties on merchandise were eliminated in favour of payment of the *stallaggio* on the deposit of goods in the city's warehouses. Goods entered and left the port with no restrictions concerning provenance and were taxed only very lightly and uniformly.

In the end, circumstances had brought the Genoese to align their free-port policy, in very broad terms, with that of Livorno. And those circumstances were not so very different from the ones that had led to the 1565 and 1593 reforms in the Tuscan port. The plague of 1656–7 had overturned conditions in Genoa; there was no longer an abundance of merchants and a relative lack of shipping, but rather a lack of merchants operating in and bringing goods to the port. The size of the national merchant fleet had been irrelevant to the logic lying behind the creation and evolution of the *porto franco* of the first half of the seventeenth century which was aimed at resolving the problem of finding return cargoes for the Atlantic shipping that brought grain, but also Levantine and colonial goods to the Ligurian port. The idea of attracting foreign merchants to Genoa had also been extraneous to the early versions of the free port; the Genoese merchants considered it only natural that they should act as intermediaries in redistributing the goods that arrived in Atlantic ships. The regulations of the free port, therefore, had been directed exclusively towards the goal of convincing northern shippers to bring their goods to Genoa where they could be sold, or where shipment to the final point of sale could be organized (by Genoese middle-men). This underlying logic was first reversed in 1654 with the explicit invitation to foreign merchants to move to Genoa and again in 1658 with offers of tax exemption to any merchants moving to the city within six months of the publication of the free-port rules. While in 1654 the innovation had been motivated by the desire to tie up as much foreign capital in the city as possible, especially English and Dutch interests, therefore increasing the likelihood that those countries would come to Genoa's aid in times of need,⁴⁰ in 1658 the primary motivation was simply that of bringing merchants to the city to carry on their business and fill the void left in the wake of the plague. In effect, Genoa in the late 1650s suffered many of the same problems faced by Livorno in the late sixteenth century,

³⁸ Diaz, *Il Granducato*, p. 397.

³⁹ ASF, Reggenza, Finanze, 799, published in Baruchello, *Livorno*, pp. 294–300.

⁴⁰ Once again following the example of Livorno, many Genoese oligarchs spoke openly of the free port as an alternative to naval armament for policing the republic's waters. The idea was to encourage merchants from a number of different foreign powers to establish merchant colonies there, thus tying up a considerable amount of capital in the Ligurian port. In times of conflict the merchants' parent countries would be willing to protect the port and enforce the neutrality of the republic's waters in order to avoid jeopardizing the interests of their own merchants. See Kirk, 'Genoa and the Sea', pp. 208–11, 284–5.

namely the lack of a native merchant class active in long-distance, overseas commerce (decimated by the plague in Genoa) and an inadequate national presence on the sea to guarantee plentiful traffic in the port and sufficient protection at sea.

The analogy, of course, is only partly valid. The original liberalizing reforms in Livorno had greatly reduced taxation on local consumption which continued to be the backbone of the Genoese fiscal system. In the meantime, as Livorno affirmed itself as the primary emporium of the western Mediterranean, that difference had been reduced as local consumption became an important source of revenue for the grand duke's tax collectors in Livorno as well.⁴¹ So, by the mid-seventeenth century the two cities presented themselves in similar terms, as prospective emporium ports specializing in the storage and eventual redistribution of goods, though with some notable differences. Genoa offered the advantages of a large city which constituted an important market in itself and was much more favourably positioned for the inland redistribution of goods to northern Italy, but also the Rhine valley. Livorno, however, had the incomparable advantage of housing consolidated merchant communities from various nations ranging from the eastern Mediterranean to the North Sea. The repeated Genoese attempts to draw traffic away from Livorno and to penalize merchants operating out of the Tuscan port, together with the complaints that such penalties in the end damaged Genoa itself, indicate the Genoese inability to outstrip Livorno in its capability to attract shipping and in its function as an emporium. That being said, the free port had affirmed itself within Genoa and cannot be evaluated negatively simply because one of its primary objectives – allowing Genoa to surpass Livorno – did not meet with complete success. Even as a partial satellite of the Tuscan centre, Genoa's free port ensured it a substantial level of traffic and provided the republic with a considerable degree of political influence. In the end the most eloquent testimony of the success of the free-port model was its actual adoption in a number of Italian and Mediterranean ports during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴²

⁴¹ The trend of curtailing tax reductions on local consumption began with a series of reforms in 1643. See Diaz, *Il Granducato*, pp. 396–7.

⁴² A limited free port was established in Naples as early as 1633 and even before that Nice and Villefranche offered considerable free-port privileges in 1613. Venice temporarily offered similar privileges between 1661 and 1681. Civitavecchia also tried out temporary measures, beginning as early as 1630. Ancona was declared a *città franca* in 1732, Messina a free port also in 1732, Trieste and Fiume in 1719. See L. Perini, 'La funzione dello Stato', *Storia dell'economia italiana*, vol. 2: *L'età moderna: verso la crisi*, ed. R. Romano (Turin, 1991), pp. 297–8 (who, however, would have the free port in Trieste and Fiume date to 1771, when permanent regulations replaced the 'temporary' measures in place since 1719).