
ANNALIS
UNIVERSITATIS MARIAE CURIE-SKŁODOWSKA
LUBLIN – POLONIA

VOL. LII, 1

SECTIO H

2018

War Studies University. Faculty of National Security

TOMASZ KOŚMIDER

t.kosmider@akademia.mil.pl

Book Review: Andrea Zanini, Impresa e finanza a Genova. I Crosa (secoli XVII–XVIII), Genova, Sagep, 2017 (Collana di Studi Fondazione Conservatorio Fieschi, No. 12), pp. 191

Recenzja książki: Andrea Zanini, *Impresa e finanza a Genova. I Crosa (secoli XVII–XVIII)*, Genova, Sagep, 2017 (Collana di Studi Fondazione Conservatorio Fieschi, No. 12), ss. 191

This book reconstructs the history of a prominent Genoese family, the Crosa, which during the 17th and 18th century was protagonist of a brilliant economic and social ascent. At that time Genoa was not only a leading Mediterranean port and a financial market of international relevance, but also the capital of a small regional Italian state: the Republic of Genoa. This monograph is the number twelve in the book series promoted by the “Fondazione Conservatorio Fieschi”, a Genoese non-profit charitable and cultural institution, which already collects several important works concerning the city’s history and culture. The author, Andrea Zanini, is an economic historian, working at the University of Genoa, who has extensively published on Italian economic history.

Starting from a rather modest condition – at the beginning of the 17th century, the Crosa were retailers – over three generations they were able to develop a successful business, which allowed them to gain wealth and political influence. This paved the way to the entrance into the Genoese patriciate, and to further strengthen their economic and social position. After reaching the peak in the 1860s, during the following decades the Crosa had to face several crises which resulted in a significant decrease of their wealth; however, they were able to avoid social and economic decline.

A distinctive feature of this monograph is that the author analyses the evolution of the Crosa and of their business in its various aspects, branches, and phases, paying special attention to the international multi-faceted context in which they operated. In particular, he considers the influence of international economic dynamics and of geopolitical matters of the time. For this reason, it will be a useful reading for scholars interested in the economic and social history of early modern Europe.

The book is clearly structured with a brief introduction, five chapters, a documentary appendix, an extensive list of archival sources consulted, a lengthy bibliography, a useful family tree, and an index of personal names. The book also featured sixteen pages of beautiful coloured plates.

Chapter one deals with the origin of this “dynasty” of businessmen and focuses on the most important economic activities of the 17th century, among which stands up the production and trade of silk textiles (exported in Spain, Portugal, and France), together with another emerging Genoese family: the Cambiaso.

Chapter two concentrates on the phase of the social and economic ascent. In 1727 the Crosa were co-opted in the Genoese patriciate, and a few years later they obtained the marquisate of Vergagni, an imperial fief in the neighbouring Borbera valley (in today’s Piedmont). During that period the Crosa focused on maritime trade, especially with the Iberian Peninsula; the most important commodities were cereals, above all grain. This was a high profitable business, which allowed them to increase the family’s wealth. In fact, during the central decades of the 18th century they were ranked among the wealthiest families of the city: in 1737, for example, the French diplomat Jacques de Campredon considered them “puissamment riches” (extremely rich).

Chapter three describes the apogee of the family and pays attention to the two prominent members of the second half of the 18th century: the brothers Gio. Nicolò and Gio. Ambrogio, sons of Gio. Batta¹. This phase saw a further diversification of the business, with a growing engagement in international finance. Special attention deserves the involvement of Gio. Nicolò in the trade with North Africa, through the company established by two other Genoese: the marquis Francesco Saverio Viale and the ambitious businessman Nicolò Maria Cavagnaro.

Chapter four is with no doubt the most interesting for Polish readers. The title is “Gli affari di Polonia” (“Business with Poland”), and refers to the period of the kingdom of Stanisław August Poniatowski. The author starts with a reconstruction of the relationships between the Republic of Genoa and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It should be pointed out that for a long time no relevant diplomatic and economic relationships existed between the two states, but there were only sporadic contacts. A turning point occurred in 1766 when the Polish King appointed a Genoese, the count Andrea Bollo, as his own *chargé d’affaires* in Genoa. Although Bollo is

¹ It should be noted that most Genoese names of the time consisted of two words. The first one, “Gio.,” abbreviation of Giovanni (John), is in homage to Saint John the Baptist, which is the patron of Genoa.

well-known to Polish historians thanks to Jerzy Łojek's works, the author adds some new insights on this shady individual [Łojek, 1969, 1982]. As Zanini clearly shows, in 1766 Bollo persuaded Gio. Nicolò Crosa to serve as an agent of Stanisław August. His task was to float a loan to the Polish crown of 1.350.000 Genoese lire (about 1.800.000 zlotys); to collect this sum of money Crosa convinced several Genoese investors to participate in this business. Two years later, the King newly turned to Gio. Nicolò, which was able to float a second loan of 1.000.000 Genoese lire (more than 1.300.000 zlotys). On both, the occasion Stanisław August had to provide security for these loans, which included several crown's revenues, among which that of Wieliczka salt mines. For his services Gio. Nicolò received a commission on the amount of the loans; moreover, he obtained the status of Polish nobles through the *indigénat*. During the following years, others Genoese businessmen concluded new loan contracts with private borrowers, including the Theatine Fathers of Warsaw and the Prince Antoni Sułkowski. At the same time, Gio. Nicolò Crosa was able to start several new businesses. These included the trade of Italian luxury goods, especially Genoese silk fabrics, slabs of marble and marble fireplaces, which were sold to Polish nobles; furthermore, he was authorised to establish a state lottery in Warsaw based on the Genoese model. However, as the author clearly shows, this situation was greatly threatened after 1772 due to the first partition of Poland. As a consequence of this dramatic event, the King was unable to meet his obligations arising out of the payment of interests and the reimbursement of the loans. It was the beginning of a phase of great worry for the Genoese investors. After a long period of negotiations, in 1785 they were forced to accept the Crown's conditions, although this entailed a considerable economic loss. Therefore it is not surprising that a few years later, when once again, Stanisław August applied the Genoese for a new huge loan of 10.000.000 zlotys, they refused to meet the King's request. On the whole, this situation had a strong negative impact on Gio. Nicolò, not only in monetary terms: also his reputation within the Genoese business community was seriously damaged.

Chapter five describes the new difficulties that the Crosa had to face during the 1870s as a consequence of the bankruptcy of the above-mentioned Nicolò Maria Cavagnaro. This fact, together with the considerable loss coming from the Polish area, produced a relevant diminution of the Crosa's wealth and progressively forced them to drop their business activity. However, thanks to several ties with other important families (including the aforementioned Cambiaso), the Crosa did not decline, and once finished the turmoil of the Napoleonic era they were able to find a suitable social position in the Kingdom of Sardinia (which after the Congress of Vienna ruled Genoa).

The book ends with a documentary appendix, containing several interesting documents from Italian archives concerning the economic relationships between the Genoese businessmen and the Polish Crown. On the whole, this book is fluently written and well-researched, firmly grounded on primary sources. The historical reconstruction has required a careful work based on a disparate amount of unpu-

blished documents of various kinds (notary deeds, official correspondence, business letters and accounting records, parish registers, etc.), scattered throughout a number of public and private archives, first of all the Archivio di Stato di Genova (the local State Archive). Due to the importance of the part concerning the relationships between the Republic of Genoa and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the author also consulted several sources preserved in the Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych in Warsaw, especially in the series Archiwum Ghigiottiego, Archiwum Koronne Warszawskie and Zbiór Popielów. The large and detailed bibliography is another strong point of the book. Zanini deals with the most relevant scholarship in this field at the international level, including, several Polish historians.

To sum up, this is really a welcome book, which adds invaluable elements to the existing literature, and will surely stimulate further research, especially in the field of the relationships between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Italian regional states in the 18th century.

Bibliography

- Łojek J., *Polska inspiracja prasowa w Holandii i Niemczech w czasach Stanisława Augusta*, Warszawa 1969.
Łojek J., *Siedem tajemnic Stanisława Augusta*, Warszawa 1982.