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**The transformations of shipping in the second half of the
nineteenth century from the viewpoint of a minor
harbour: The case of Savona**

Paolo Calcagno

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Via Giovanni Battista Tuveri, 130-132 — 09129 Cagliari (Italy).
Telefono | Telephone: +39 070403635 / 070403670.
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Table of Contents / Indice

Fabrizio Filioli Uranio	5-26
<i>L'Obra Pía de los Santos Lugares</i> come antesignano di successo delle proposte di erari pubblici nella Monarchia cattolica (secoli XV-XVII) / <i>The Obra Pía de los Santos Lugares as a successful forerunner of public treasury proposals in the Catholic Monarchy (15th-17th centuries)</i>	
Tamsin Prideaux	27-52
Istituzioni e potere: il rapporto fra i mercanti levantini e i <i>Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia</i> a Venezia nel Cinquecento e Seicento / <i>Institutions and Power: The relationship between Levantine merchants and the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia in Venice in the 16th and 17th centuries</i>	
Paolo Calcagno	53-76
The transformations of shipping in the second half of the 19th century from the viewpoint of a minor harbour: The case of Savona	
Bruno Cimatti	77-107
De haces y flechas: fascismo y falangismo durante la Guerra Civil Española en Bahía Blanca (Argentina, 1937-1939) / <i>Of Beams and Arrows: Fascism and Falangism during the Spanish Civil War in Bahía Blanca (Argentina, 1937-1939)</i>	

Oscar Monterde Mateo

109-135

La città, la pace e l'Europa. Il Mediterraneo nel pensiero e nell'azione politica internazionale del sindaco Pasqual Maragall (1982-1997) / *The city, the peace, and Europe. The Mediterranean in the thought and international political action of Mayor Pasqual Maragall (1982-1997)*

Focus

Costanza Lisi

137-146

Un nuovo strumento per la ricerca negli archivi consolari preunitari italiani: archiviconsolari.it / *A new tool for researching Italian pre-unification consular archives: archiviconsolari.it*

Book Reviews

Fabio Manuel Serra

147-149

Manuel Alejandro Castellano García (2022). Gran Bretaña y la paz española de Utrecht. Valencia: Albatros Ediciones

The transformations of shipping in the second half of the 19th century from the viewpoint of a minor harbour: The case of Savona

Paolo Calcagno

(Università degli Studi di Genova)

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Riassunto

L'articolo si focalizza sulle trasformazioni nel campo della navigazione durante il XIX secolo, osservate attraverso la lente di un piccolo porto in Liguria, Savona. L'utilizzo di una varietà di fonti primarie (visite alle navi, registri dell'equipaggio, resoconti di viaggio) consente la ricostruzione del graduale passaggio dalla navigazione a vela tradizionale alla nuova era della navigazione a vapore. Tra gli anni '50 e gli anni '70 del XIX secolo, anche grazie alle politiche economiche del Regno di Sardegna, si verificò l'ultimo grande exploit della costruzione navale tradizionale in legno. Successivamente, nel giro di pochi anni, l'industrializzazione rese necessaria l'espansione dell'area portuale e creò le condizioni per la predominanza delle navi a vapore, accompagnate da una serie di innovazioni nel settore del lavoro marittimo.

Parole chiave

Navigazione a vela; Navigazione a vapore; Savona; XIX secolo.

Abstract

The article focuses on transformations in the field of navigation during the 19th century, observed through the lens of a small port in Liguria, Savona. The use of a variety of primary sources (ship visits, crew rolls, travel reports) allows for the reconstruction of the gradual shift from traditional sail navigation to the new era of steam navigation. Between the 1850s and the 1870s, also thanks to the economic policies of the Kingdom of Sardinia, there occurred the final major feat of traditional wooden shipbuilding. Subsequently, within a few years, industrialization necessitated the expansion of the port area and created conditions for the dominance of steamships, accompanied by a host of innovations in the maritime labor sphere text.

Keywords

Sail Navigation; Steam Navigation; Savona; 19th Century.

1. *Savona from short-sea dock to large-scale industrial port.* - 2. *Shipping in Liguria at the time of the great transition: contextual elements.* - 3. *Ship, routes and crews seen through documentary records.* - 4. *Bibliografia* - 5. *Curriculum vitae.*

1. *Savona from short-sea dock to large-scale industrial port*

At the end of the *ancien régime*, Savona did not have a marked maritime vocation: in 1746, although “a hundred and more vessels” could be accommodated inside the dock, the local navy could count no more than twenty units, almost all of them of very modest capacity, for a total of 1.200 tons¹. They were mainly ‘*pinchi*’ (14 units out of 21), i.e. boats between 10 and 30 metres in length, whose first models in the Ligurian-Provençal area dated back to the mid-seventeenth century, suitable for transporting mixed loads, especially barrels of wine and oil². The “seafarers” in the modest port of Savona numbered 223 elements (out of a population of approximately 9,000 people)³, whereas small villages in the western Riviera of Liguria, such as Laigueglia and Alassio, boasted respectively 548 and 732 men engaged in maritime activities. Although agriculture and urban crafts were showing signs of a fair degree of liveliness, Savona’s mercantile range remained rather narrow, due also to the enduring infrastructural problems of the port, buried by the Genoese rulers in 1528 and subject to continuous silting throughout the 17th-18th centuries⁴.

The situation certainly did not improve with the Napoleonic occupation in the earlier part of the following century, when the blockade of maritime trade removed «those miserable leftovers of resources that were still available» to the city⁵: the only

¹ Report by the Savoy prefect Vercellino Allara of 25 November 1746 (stored in Archivio di Stato di Torino, hereinafter referred to as ASTo, Paesi, Genova, Riviera di ponente, categoria XIV, mazzo 2). See also De Negri, 1957; Tarditi, 2009.

² On the pinco, see Gatti, 1999, pp. 214-218; a useful summary of the nautical characteristics and the commercial attitudes of such prototype is found in Lo Basso, 2009. On the sustained development of Savona viticulture in the eighteenth century, see Calcagno, 2013, pp. 364-366.

³ A few general hints on Savona’s demography between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries are included in Assereto, 2007, pp. 205-207.

⁴ On the state of Savona’s port during the modern age, I refer the reader to Cerisola, 1968; Assereto, 1988, pp. 223-258.

⁵ The quotation is taken from the anonymous *Riflessioni sopra la decadenza della marina*

routes used by the merchant ships that headed for the port of Savona were those of Genoa and Marseille, which carried artefacts and agricultural products (bricks, wooden rings, majolica, chairs, wood, rice, chestnuts, etc.); moreover, the propensity for short-sea shipping had increased (with a higher number of units of the merchant fleet, albeit with a simultaneous lower total tonnage than in previous decades), and according to the city municipality, maritime owners were making fewer and fewer trips and were earning only what was strictly necessary to maintain their families⁶. Many sailors had emigrated abroad, while several ship owners had divested their capital.

The inclusion of the city (and the entire territory of the former Republic of Genoa) within the complex of Savoy dominions, following the Congress of Vienna, did not help invert the trend at first: a short-sighted customs policy aimed at penalising foreign ships stimulated severe retaliations by foreign states (for instance by France, traditional trading partner), with negative repercussions on harbour traffic and shipbuilding throughout the region (Tonizzi, 2013, pp. 65-68; Maragliano, 1957). Moreover, throughout the first half of the 19th century the interventions on port infrastructures were insufficient; until Cavour rose to power, “the economic thermometer of the city only recorded low temperatures” (Assereto, 1991, p. 61). The only positive note continued to be the high number of “factories”, engaged in the production of a variety of artefacts pursuant to traditional methods⁷; despite a relationship with the sea that remained faltering, in 1827 500 “seafarers”, 2,700 craftsmen and 5,000 farmers lived in Savona⁸.

It was the House of Savoy’s adherence to free exchange that led to a surge in traffic (55,114 tons of ships entering and exiting the port were reached in 1854), and accordingly lent new impetus to shipbuilding, with seven launches of good-capacity ships in Savona in 1852, for slightly less than 1,000 tons in total: a sign of a ready productive fabric and a real maritime potential (Cerisola, 1968, pp. 159-161; Gatti,

savonese e mezzi di ristabilirla, nella stamperia Sabazia, contrada di S. Chiara, Savona, 1816. The difficulties faced by Ligurian shipping in the period of annexation by France are described in Bulferetti - Costantini, 1966, pp. 267-281.

⁶ Archivio di Stato di Savona (hereinafter referred to as ASSv), *Prefettura del Dipartimento di Montenotte*, 47.

⁷ See the “report on the economic governance of the province of Savona” dating from 1839, stored in the ASTo, *Paesi in genere per province, Provincia di Savona*, marzo 88.

⁸ Archivio di Stato di Genova (hereinafter referred to as ASGe), *Prefettura sarda*, 385.

2008, pp. 94-95)⁹. On the other hand, that of Savona was, since the centuries of *ancien régime*, one of the most prolific shipbuilding hubs in the Mediterranean area as a whole; that was due to the fact that it also comprised the small centre of Varazze, where between 1816 and 1865 about a thousand sailing ships were launched into the sea (Giacchero, 1973, pp. 65-86)¹⁰. Meanwhile, the coke was beginning to arrive at the port of Savona (80,000 tons entering in 1852), which supplied the first local foundries and the plants established in the Piedmont area; while the range of action of Savona ships was expanding considerably, reaching the Black Sea on the one side and America on the other¹¹.

For the city, 1861 marked a couple of important events: the national Unity and the beginnings of industrialisation (Penner, 2010; De Maestri -Tolaini, 2011). Moreover, the first metallurgical factory, opened because of the transplant of Savoy and German capital and technical skills, was placed precisely on the seashore, to finally reunite the urban area with the port. Savona thus became an industrial city and resumed (as in the late Middle Ages) its role as an important seaport. At the same time, an important agrarian crisis took place, forcing hundreds and hundreds of Savona inhabitants to migrate overseas: but the boarding location for South America was certainly not Savona, but rather Genoa¹²; and this despite the fact that its retrieved maritime vocation, fuelled across the national Unification by governmental measures and industrial development, translated into a further acceleration of wooden shipbuilding: the ships launched from city yards rose from 1,153 tons in 1855 to over 2,099 tons in 1858; and in the decade between 1863 and 1872, the ships launched totalled 131, most of them sailing ships of 500 tons, with a medium capacity and a length ranging from 36 to 41 metres¹³. The major

⁹ As emphasised by the city mayor on 10 August 1836, when proposing the construction of a new shipyard along the shore, Savona had everything that was needed to enhance the shipbuilding sector: builders, labourers, sail, rope and anchor factories, and over and above that the space for assembling the hulls (ASTo, *Paesi per A e B, Savona*, mazzo 31).

¹⁰ The ships produced within the maritime district of Savona (which comprised the coastal stretch between Arenzano and Ceriale) rose from 23.323 tons in 1840-1844 to 35.082 tons in 1855-1859. On the Varazze shipyard during the age of the *ancien régime*, see Gatti - Ciciliot, 2004.

¹¹ ASTo, *Archivio della Marina, Materiale*, mazzo 512.

¹² For accurate data on emigration in Liguria, the reader is referred to Felloni, 1961, pp. 139-151. See also: Tonizzi, 2000, pp. 39-59; Doria, 2008b, pp. 47-79; Devoto, 1993, pp. 1-35.

¹³ ASTo, *Archivio della Marina, Statistica*, mazzo 667; ASSv, *Sottoprefettura*, 49; Marchese, 1957.

shipbuilders (Francesco Sirello and Giovanni Tixi) had expanded operations until they eventually covered, with their construction yards, 7,025 and 9,912 square metres of sandy shore respectively; and in 1865, a special nautical and shipbuilding high school had also been opened (Scovazzi, 1960-1961, p. 413)¹⁴.

It took only a few years for a radical change to materialise: the great transition, with the switch from sailing to steam, entailed a tragic collapse of traditional shipbuilding (a sort of “silent” social “drama”)¹⁵, with significant occupational repercussions; yet it opened up new economic prospects due to the boom of steamers that began to frequent the Savona port to back up the large-scale industrial effort in the eighties and nineties of the nineteenth century. To get an idea of the effects produced in the field of harbour work, 298 porters operated in 1879, toiling in the fields in the evening “in order to get the day off for the portage of hard coal in the port” (Cougnet, 1995, p. 84). Thanks to the opening of the Savona-Turin railroad and the activation of a 1,700 metre track connecting the port to the railway station (Dell’Amico - Rebagliati - Siri, 1994), as well as the works extending the harbour through construction of the new “Vittorio Emanuele” dock that made 950 linear metres of new bays available, port traffic increased tenfold (from 44,000 to 506,000 tons between 1885 and 1889), with steamships accounting for more than 3/4¹⁶. The dominant element was hard coal: as many as 385,000 tons, corresponding to 65% of total traffic (Penner, 2010, p. 50), landed in 1883; and in 1887, the local Chamber of Commerce reported to the Ministry that “Savona [was] a great seaport for hard coal”, one where you “could easily find it at all times at moderate prices”¹⁷. On the other hand, in the course of these years Savona’s iron and steel hub, fully enmeshed in an economic system of European scope, ensured 1/3 of the national production of iron and steel: an exceptional leap forward, in terms of quality, for a city that only a short while before was a coastal docking station characterised by a mostly artisanal fabric of production.

As Guy de Maupassant, who transited through Savona in 1889, said, coal for Savona entered the port almost exclusively aboard English steamers; however, in

¹⁴ In the seventies, around 600 labourers were employed in the city yards.

¹⁵ Giacchero, 1980, p. 269. This resulted in the fall of imports of construction lumber, which dropped from 268.000 linear metres in 1874 to 38.135 in 1878 (Calcagno, 2013, pp. 475-476).

¹⁶ Archivio centrale dello Stato (hereinafter referred to as ACS), *Ministero dell’interno, gabinetto, rapporti dei prefetti*, busta 10; *Divisione industria e commercio*, busta 12A and 202. See also Cerisola, 1968, pp. 174-175 and 179.

¹⁷ ACS, *Divisione industria e commercio*, busta 202.

the mid-eighties the Migliardi & Vené shipyard, specialised in metallic shipbuilding, had been inaugurated at the mouth of the Letimbro stream. In 1900, the shipyard secured a commission from the Argentinian government for the construction of two “dock-gates” (so much so that the employed personnel reached 121 units in 1906) (Cerisola, 1982, p. 555). Regardless of the flag and nationality of merchant ships, at the beginning of the twentieth century steam navigation had become a structural reality of the Savona port: in 1909, one could even see queues of steamers outside the harbour, waiting for a chance to come closer for the unloading; it reached the point where new works (possible thanks to huge State funding) became necessary to expand the surface area of port docks (Baldino, 1916, p. 40)¹⁸. Lastly, a further productive impetus was provided by the Great War (1915-1918), a real “test under stress” for the entire Italian economy: the factories of Savona, alongside those of the nearby locality of Vado and the small centres of Val Bormida, in the hinterland, totally revolutionised by the industrial reconversion, specialised in the production of bullets and explosives; while the regional committee of industrial mobilisation¹⁹ took pains to verify that no defections took place among loaders/unloaders of steamers at the port during the most intense months of the agricultural calendar. In this context, the current paper seeks to emphasize several considerations regarding the trajectory of the port of Savona during the age of transition. This will be achieved by initially delineating the asynchronous development of its harbour in comparison to Genoa. Subsequently, the paper will present the abundance of information derived from relatively unexplored documentary sources.

2. Shipping in Liguria at the time of the great transition: contextual elements

A good way to bring into clearer focus the dynamics that concerned when the “ancien régime of maritime history” drew to an end²⁰ is to compare them with those relating to Genoa, the seaport that in the Ligurian area has always played a

¹⁸ ACS, *Ministero dei lavori pubblici, Direzione viabilità e porti, porti 1903-1938*, busta 35. Overall, between 1905 and 1913 the tonnage handled in Savona had increased by a further 33%: cf. Doria, 2008a, p. 453.

¹⁹ To coordinate the war effort, the Italian territory was divided into 7 (and later 11) industrial mobilisation committees: on Italian industrial history, an essential contribution remains that of Castronovo, 1980.

²⁰ I am borrowing this nice expression from Lo Basso, 2020, p. 14.

leadership role²¹. What emerges quite clearly is first of all a chronological displacement, whereupon on the eve of the Italian Risorgimento²² the port of the ancient Ruler had already witnessed the harbingers of the “nautical revolution”.

Overall, in Liguria, too, sailing ships and steamships coexisted during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, and the outcome of their contest appeared uncertain long before motorised navigation took over²³. Sailing retained a marked competitiveness for most of the late nineteenth century, as it was closely associated with traditional forms of raising share capital and recruiting and orienting crews, as well as with well-tested organisational structures of shipbuilding.

Based on a repertoire (currently being implemented) created by the *Società Savonese di Storia Patria*, between 1861 and 1924 more than 1,400 large sailing ships were built in the Savona region – in the area, punctuated by small shipyards, comprised between Andora and Varazze. They were mostly “schooners” and “barques”, with a peak reached in the seventies and eighties²⁴. On many routes, both Mediterranean or European and oceanic ones, sailing ships were initially more convenient than steamships: the barque *Natale Gallino*, built in Varazze in 1876, went as far as Hamilton, in Bermuda; in 1883, another similar vessel, nicknamed *Fratelli Arecco*, was shipwrecked off the coast of Durban, in South Africa; while in 1899 a hurricane surprised in Gulf Stream a barque improvidently called *Fortunato* (*Lucky*) – built in Savona, at the Sirello shipyard, in 1873. Better luck shone, again in Florida (Pensacola), in 1889, on the crew of the barque *Barone Podestà*, who, while the ship was sinking, were rescued by a steamship passing by²⁵: an episode we might classify

²¹ See, concerning this transitional phase, Tonizzi, 2000.

²² A nice book in this connection is that of Beales - Biagini, 2012.

²³ Within the Italian context, the moment steam tonnage overtook its sailing counterpart occurred only in 1907. See: *Sulle condizioni della marina mercantile italiana al 31 dicembre 1914. Relazione del Direttore generale della marina mercantile a S. E. il Ministro dei Trasporti Marittimi e Ferroviari*, (Rome: Officina Tipografica Italiana, 1916), p. 105.

²⁴ <<http://www.storiapatriasavona.it/repertorio-velieri-savonesi-del-xix-e-xx-secolo/>> (date of last visit: November 24, 2023).

²⁵ The brig had been built in Varazze and had a capacity of 725 tons. These vessels could vary considerably in size: the *Natale Gallino* had a capacity of 871 tons, the *Fratelli Arecco* 953 and the *Fortunato* 890; but, for instance, the schooner brig *Colomba*, built by the Varazze shipyard Baglietto in 1876, reached a capacity of 503 tons, and the *Veloce*, likewise launched in Varazze in 1870 (which sank at the mouth of Rio de la Plata in 1890) recorded a capacity of 576 tons.

as emblem of the nautical transition in the late nineteenth century. On the other hand, the schooner brig *Pietro* had a capacity of 55 tons only and travelled in the Tyrrhenian Sea (it sank in Gaeta on New Year's Eve in 1894); the same goes for *Amabile Maria*, which reached 79 tons and got lost in the waters of Sardinia; slightly wider was the range of action of the schooner *Erasmus C.*, emerged from the Sirello shipyard of Savona in 1881, which sank in the Strait of Messina while returning from Genoa with wine loaded in Lèucade (Santa Maura)²⁶. Some voyages in the first decades of the twentieth century still recalled the short-sea navigation of the ancient regime: the brig *Adelaide* was shipwrecked in 1933 off the coast of Castellammare while carrying tiles and cement to Palermo (the ship reached a capacity of 213 tons); and the barque *Audax* met a similar fate off the coast of Stromboli in 1935, while carrying on board marble loaded in Marina di Carrara (and meant to arrive in Crotone).

Steamship took the lead thanks to the injection of liquid capital by the banks and by the burgeoning national State with its public subsidies (and at that point, in fact, the freight rates of sailing ships collapsed)²⁷. Until that moment, however, the Ligurian sailing ships did not experience any decline, nay, they even strengthened that international vocation they had temporarily lost during the Napoleonic age and at the beginning of the Restoration. The voyages in the American continent enabled good deals to be clinched on the return leg with the loads of coffee, sugar, lumber, leather, etc.; moreover, destinations also featured Cadix and Lisbon, where it was possible to intercept the oceanic cargoes on their way back; not to mention the Black Sea, which dozens of Ligurian sailing ships regularly headed for to purchase grain they would then resell partly in the Mediterranean and partly in England in exchange for the coal needed by the nascent industry²⁸. Turning back to Savona, it is not difficult to imagine what had been loaded on the barque *Bartolomeo Cerruti*, which left in 1887 from England and sank to the bottom of the sea off the coast of Cape Spartel, in Morocco; or what another barque, nicknamed *Giulio II*, with a

²⁶ The *Erasmus C.* had a capacity of 157 tons.

²⁷ On the Italian subsidy system, see: Corbino, 1921, pp. 370-389; Corbino, 1922, pp. 65-81; Giretti, 1905 pp. 37-59. More generally, on Italian protectionism: Del Vecchio, 1979-1980. On the collapse of freight rates, at an international level, see: Stopford, 2009, p. 108; to consider the relationships between technological change and the fall of the freight rates, see: Knick Harley, 1988, pp. 851-876; Knick Harley, 1971, pp. 215-234.

²⁸ About the main axes of trade practiced by the Ligurian and later Italian merchant marine, see: Flore, 1966, pp. 155-305; La Macchia, 2018, pp. 9-48.

capacity of 653 tons, was doing in Cardiff in November of 1876, when it was towed by an English steamship. They were wooden ships (sometimes over 50 metres long)²⁹, built according to the organisational schemes of previous centuries, and funded through an archaic system, which envisaged the division of the ship into “carats” (i.e. quotas) and the distribution of such carats (or fractions of carats, which were also freely traded as if they were shares) among several investors. In this way, it was possible to parcel out the risk and increase the chances of profit, while also allowing small investors to channel their interests towards maritime traffic³⁰. In short, traditional sailing was a large-scale social enterprise that involved the entire city fabric – or the community one, as regards the small localities on the Ligurian coasts.

It is precisely at this level – i.e. the narrowness of funding channels – that the disappearance of the “old” and “glorious” fleet of Ligurian ships unfolded itself: the bourgeoisie, albeit with some injections from the ancient city aristocracy and the funds disbursed by small savers, could not square up to the large shipping companies backed up by banks and State, the only sources of finance capable of investing in steamers and knocking down the construction and maintenance costs (all of this was of course affected by the fall in the price of hard coal). There were even less chances of survival, in the context of minor cities and coastal centres, for the small ships that relied on the economic commitment of local notables and family circuits (Doria, 2001, pp. 83-107)³¹.

We should not forget, however, that some pioneering experiments in the field of steam navigation had been attempted in Genoa since the thirties of the nineteenth century. More specifically, regular connecting lines with Marseille, Naples and Cagliari, as well as intermediate stopovers (in the event of southbound voyages) in Livorno and Civitavecchia, had been inaugurated³². The protagonist of this debut by coal was a prominent exponent of the local mercantile bourgeoisie, namely, Raffaele Rubbattino, who was able to attract State subsidies (Genoa was then part of the

²⁹ Note the increase in average length compared to sailing ships built in the Savona area in the sixties (see above).

³⁰ On this point, I refer the readers to Lo Basso, 2016, pp. 81-106.

³¹ The case study of the most important Ligurian maritime community is presented in Scavino, 2022b.

³² Some years later (April 1848) in Savona, a local company promoted the subscription of 45 shares for 1.000 lire each in order to set up a regular Savona-Genoa line, through a 52-ton steamer nicknamed *Giulio II*: cf. Presotto, 2002, pp. 255-260.

Kingdom of Sardinia) and convince the Savoy government – via the local press as well – that steamers could be converted into war ships (Doria, 1990). The first steamer of the Rubbattino company was called *Dante*: the muster-roll of 20 November 1856 evinced a capacity of 63 tons and a crew of 18 men, mostly domiciled in Genoa and in the coastal areas, or at the most in Nice-Villafranca; the captain was the forty-year-old Giacomo Crocco, ready on that occasion to set out with the ship precisely for Nice. As for the repercussions on maritime labour, 9 persons were employed in “engine services”: four of them (including two “stokers”, the highest-paid crew members, with a salary ranging between 70 and 80 liras) were Tuscan³³.

A short while later, Rubattino expanded his horizons, making his steamers sail for North Africa, all the way to Alexandria in Egypt; and the route eventually stretched even further, reaching Bombay through the opening of the Suez Canal (Codignola, 1938)³⁴. His fleet of steamers increased dramatically, rising from 15 to 38 between 1865 and 1880; a year that served as prelude to 1881, when his company merged with another giant of the sector, headed by Florio, entrepreneurs from Palermo (albeit from Calabria originally), giving rise therefore to a real sectoral giant: the General Italian Navigation, the first large Italian shipping group in absolute terms, the result of mergers and consolidations that occurred over the years. The group eventually extended into a fleet of 90 steamers³⁵. At this point, steam was definitely gaining ground, and contributed to the success of a new model, not only from a technological, but also from a social viewpoint broadly understood (origin of capital, manpower, job duties, salaries: everything had changed)³⁶.

The first steamers operating in the port of Genoa in the first half of the nineteenth century were built outside Liguria: it is no coincidence that *Dante* came out of a shipyard in Livorno. On a similar note, it was abroad – as far away as in England – that one of the steamers (*Torino*, named after the capital of the Kingdom of Sardinia) of that company, significantly called “Transatlantic”, was launched. The steamer,

³³ ASGe, *Ruoli di equipaggio*, 1856, series 13, no. 9601.

³⁴ On Italian shipping and the Suez Canal, see also the recent collective volume: Curli (ed.) 2022; particularly, the essay by Leonardo Scavino.

³⁵ See also Cancila, 2019.

³⁶ For a representation of the main transformations in the field of maritime labour during the age of transition, see: Rollandi, 2002; Lo Basso, 2020. Internationally, the debate traces its origins to at least the 1980s, as evidenced by discussions held during conferences organized by the International Maritime History Association: see, Ommer - Panting, 1980; Royen - Bruijn - Lucassen, 1997; Gorski, 2007.

although for a short period only, connected in the fifties Genoa to North America³⁷. Significantly, shortly after its establishment, this company started using its own steamers mainly on other routes, especially the one of the Black Sea, since sailing ships continued to be strongly competitive in voyages across the Atlantic. Turning back to shipbuilding, an 1858 report by the English consul stressed the total lack of innovation in construction methods and in the arrangement of plants compared to the first decades of the century. Sailing still prevailed: in those years, only six, all of them small-sized, were the steamships built in the shipyards adjacent to the city (after all, Genoa's port was traditionally narrow, so much so that during the *ancien régime* it had been forced to "outsource" the construction of larger vessels)³⁸. In this scenario, it is significant that the large plant of the Westermann brothers, which built iron boats in Sestri Ponente, a few kilometres from Genoa, and which, in 1867, launched 30% of the tonnage of the newborn Kingdom of Italy, went bankrupt within a few years. In those years, the true shipbuilding hub of Italy, for new steam-propelled ships, was Livorno, hosting the important shipyard of the Orlando brothers. Genoa reconverted its ship-owning sector during the seventies: in the division managed by the city, the staff involved in building sailing ships dropped from 8,737 to 3,616 units, and many persons employed in the sector turned to liberal professions and real estate investments. At the same time, the old Westermann plant, after its bankruptcy, was taken over by the Odero family, and the new shipyard launched in March 1874 the construction of the first steamship, with exclusively Italian machinery, quickly raising the number of workers from 300 to 500. Thereafter, in the eighties, the construction of iron ships rose significantly with the orders placed by the Italian navy, and the Odero factory was flanked by Ansaldo and the Cravero shipyard: the three ship-owning groups pocketed 13 and a half million in funds between 1883 and 1890 (Giorgio Doria, 2008a, pp. 223, 296-299).

Besides the responsiveness of the entrepreneurial class, Genoa's precocity compared to Savona can also be explained in the light of the events that involved the port. As late as 1875, Agostino Depretis – about to take over the leadership of the Italian government – had defined Genoa's port as "medieval", utterly unsuitable for the increasingly more substantial growth in traffic. However, precisely in that year

³⁷ Notwithstanding the State subsidies, the company went bankrupt due to the speculative manoeuvres of its own board of directors: see Doria, 1990, pp. 45-55.

³⁸ You can read in this regard Lo Basso, 2021. On the resilience of sailing ships in the regional setting of Liguria, see also Doria, 2001.

(after more than 19 projects for the arrangement and improvement of port infrastructures had been proposed in 1874), Raffaele De Ferrari, Duke of Galliera – local aristocrat, as well as a prominent figure in international finance – donated to that end the sizeable sum of 20 million liras, which made it possible to extend the harbour and adapt it to the new steam navigation (Tonizzi, 2000, pp. 39-59)³⁹. Accordingly, the city industry was able to take off, thanks to English coal and American raw cotton transported by the new steamships. Relatively speaking, to implement its reconversion Savona registered a fifteen years' delay: the addition of the quays of the new dock was completed in 1883, and the huge leap forward by the port activity took place in the second half of that decade.

3. *Ship, routes and crews seen through documentary records*

The “great transformation” that occurred in the port of Savona throughout the nineteenth century can be observed through archival sources. Whereas, until the first decades, the documents available provide scarce and incomplete information about mostly cabotage vessels incoming to Savona, with the resetting of the maritime administration subsequent to the birth of the Savoy merchant marine, the sources offer more details and portray a much more diversified scenario in terms of vessel types. Even on the quantitative level, the growth is tangible. The “visits to the ships”, conducted at the time of departure by “technicians” (labelled “maritime experts”) to ascertain the state of conservation of the ship, provide us with detailed information on ship types and on destinations. A series of visits conducted in Savona between 1848 and 1851 confirms the widened range of action of the ships that used to frequent the harbour, and, simultaneously, also the persistence of a circumscribed coastal navigation whose roots were steeped in the previous centuries⁴⁰. So much so, indeed that the tartan *Nostra Signora della Misericordia*, visited on 28 June 1848 and said to be “in a good state”, was about to leave for a voyage with the “coast”, a reference to the coastal arch of Liguria (called in the *ancien régime* “dominion”) as its destination⁴¹. The same type of indication was recorded during the visit of *Nostra Signora del Rosario* of skipper Gian Domenico Musso, who, apart from the limited Riviera projection, shared with the previous ship the religious sphere, likewise a vestige of

³⁹ See, also: Marchese, 1959.

⁴⁰ ASSv, Tribunale di commercio, Processi verbali di visite dei bastimenti, 1848-1851.

⁴¹ The skipper of this 29-ton tartan di happened to be one Giovanni Bosio.

a world on the way to extinction⁴². There were also trips to traditional cereal markets of Liguria: the tartan *Sant'Antonio* of skipper Giovanni Battista Conradi, visited on 3 August 1849, was heading for Sardinia; another tartan, that of skipper Angelo Gheri, departed on 18 October of the same year for Marseille; and two days earlier, a larger-sized brig (nicknamed *Unione*, of 120 tons) headed for the fertile Tuscan Maremma⁴³. Further south went the mystico *Nostra Signora di Misericordia*, which on 9 August 1849 reached the coasts of Africa. In addition to preserving the traces of the usual Tyrrhenian navigation, the mid-century «visits» imposed by the maritime governance of Savona attest to the fact that new routes were being ploughed, both eastwards and westwards. Departures towards the Black Sea began to be regular. It was a new strategic area for the procurement of grains, especially the “hard” ones necessary to the industrious Ligurian pasta factories: two are the brigs that on 16 June 1848 left for this destination, under the command of captains originally from Camogli⁴⁴; one of the two, not by chance, was called *Azov*. At the same time, some sailing ships were beginning to move in the opposite direction, heading for as far as America: this is the case of the brig *Livia* of captain Lorenzo Viale, with a capacity of 151 tons, visited on 25 July 1848.

Another type of source that can be used to study shipping and maritime labour in this phase (not available for the centuries of the modern age) is represented by “muster-rolls”. Based on a body of 20 rolls “issued” and registered in Savona between spring and autumn 1858, we draw further details of the increasingly more frequent extra-Mediterranean voyages⁴⁵. We generally find brigs, which did not yet reach, however, the capacity of those eventually built over the following decades (see above), ploughing the Inland Sea to cross the Dardanelles or the Strait of Gibraltar: the *Fratellanza* brig of captain Fortunato De Gregori (likewise from Camogli), departing on 26 April 1858 for “Constantinople and the Black Sea”, was only slightly over 330 tons; the one nicknamed *Profeta Elia* (*Prophet Elijah*), which a

⁴² The capacity of the felucca of skipper Musso was still lower than that of the tartan of skipper Bosio: 14 tons. Other times, to specify that a ship would head for Genoa or for another Ligurian seaport, on the “minutes of the visit” the words: “coastal voyage”, “beach voyage”, “limited coastal trip” would be written.

⁴³ On the origin of the cereals purchased by the trading standards office of the Republic of Genoa in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries, and then redistributed throughout the Ligurian territory, see Calcagno, 2012.

⁴⁴ On the traffic of Camogli sailing ships, see Scavino, 2022b.

⁴⁵ ASGe, Ruoli di equipaggio, 1858.

few days later (8 May) was said to be heading for “Montevideo and Buenos Aires” under the command of Giorgio Semeria from Savona, had a capacity of merely 134 tons. Moreover, the “rolls” indicate the year and place of construction. The first data allows us to understand how many years these vessels could sail for: the brig *Fratellanza* had been built the previous year, and in this sense does not provide us with many elements; but, for example, the *Profeta Elia* had been launched in 1846; and the age of the brig *L’Unione*, registered on 3 April 1848 and bound for Tunis, similarly exceeded 20 years (construction carried out in 1834). As for the rest, the shipyards in which they were built were the same as those that would eventually endure until the late nineteenth century, mainly located in Savona or Varazze.

The voyage of the brig commanded by Giorgio Semeria, a fifty-three year old in the employ of the small-scale Savona company “Minuto & C”, epitomises the first oceanic crossings, i.e., the first migratory flows of Ligurian populations towards the Americas: 22 persons had embarked (“with regular passport”) to get off in Montevideo; 81 headed instead for Buenos Aires; they included several unaccompanied women and some family units, such as the one made up by a certain Giovanni Battista Martino with his wife and four children, or that of Luigi Servetti with wife and son of just six months. The crew, besides the captain, consisted of 12 persons, almost entirely from Savona or from neighbouring communities (for example Albisola), to shape up a ship-environment still characterised by a strong endogamy. The same argument can be advanced with regard to the brig *Fratellanza* headed for the Black Sea, aboard which captain De Gregori could count on other 13 persons, belonging for over 50% to the same community as his⁴⁶. In short, during the fifties the port of Savona enlarged its maritime and commercial horizons, but within an organisational framework hardly different from the one prevailing in the eighteenth century: the ships continued to be built in the same places and by recourse to the same techniques, exploiting the wind-force and sailing with crews trained on a family and communal basis.

The last-mentioned aspect is all the more evident if we examine the “muster-rolls” of smaller vessels, those that resisted with short-sea shipping. The *Santissima Concezione* boat (a capacity of 11 tons only), built in Finale in 1844, was commanded by the second class skipper Michele Morello from Finale and had on board five men

⁴⁶ Eight crewmen, three of whom sharing the same surname: Schiaffino, headed from Camogli like the captain (who, being born in 1807, had more or less the same age as Giorgio Semeria).

from that town, three of whom bore the same surname as the skipper. Similarly, the schooner brig *Caterina*, whose muster-roll had been issued and registered on 14 April 1858, the only case in the examined sample of a vessel built outside the region (in Livorno), had a crew consisting exclusively of men from Savona (altogether 14 persons). Other times, it happened that small cohesive “groups”, which turned the common origin into one of their strengths, would embark: the aforementioned *Unione* had four sailors from Lerici, a small community from Eastern Liguria (with all that the skipper was from Savona, Francesco Zino); while five men from Nice and Villafranca worked on another brig, *l'Amabile Antonietta*, commanded by Luigi Nicolò Martino from Pietra Ligure. The latter, too, like most of the brigs departing from Savona, eventually set out for the Black Sea; whereas the destinations of the small vessels (feluccas, boats, tartans and xebecs) were much nearer: Genoa, Porto Maurizio, Nice, and only in a few other instances Marseille.

Even the relationship between command and ownership of the ships confirms the “local” dimension of the shipping action revolving around the seaport of Savona in the middle of the century. In a large number of cases, the skipper and the ship owner coincided: the felucca *La Misericordia* of Sebastiano Caboto from Savona, built in Savona in 1853 and registered on 29 April 1858, happened “to belong to said owner”; same as the gondola *La Concezione* owned by the skipper from Finale Filippo Berlengeri, whose “muster-roll” was issued on 21 July 1858, the smallest specimen in the examined sample (a capacity of 2 tons). The same holds true of the brig *Fratellanza*, the schooner brig *Caterina*, and the boat *Santissima Concezione*, previously mentioned. But even where there was more than one owner, i.e. a group of people gathered in a company, the communal or even family bond still persisted: we have seen that the *Profeta Elia* of captain Semeria belonged to a group of investors gathered under the name of an important family from Savona, Minuto; and in the case of the xebec *Gesù, Giuseppe e Maria*, the ship owners – Bernardo Manara and Nicolò Odera from Savona – shared with the skipper Giovanni Battista Manara the place of origin (Savona) and, partly, the same surname as well. Only in one instance, that of the brig *Argentina* (registered on 17 April 1858, and heading for the Black Sea), ownership belonged to the “Fratelli Rocca trading firm established in Genoa”⁴⁷,

⁴⁷ It was the well-known company born as “Rocca frères du feu Jean-Baptiste” in 1817, which later went bankrupt in 1861. In the middle of the century, the Rocca brothers, scattered between London, Marseille, Genoa, Naples and Odessa, achieved a huge turnover, with a fleet of 55 ships boasting an average capacity of 400 tons. Defined “the most significant

which had entrusted command to a captain from Loano. In all cases, we are still far removed from the reality that was gaining ground in Genoa, with large entrepreneurial and banking cartels capable of managing fleets of steamers.

Who used to work on these ships? The roles of command (skipper or captain) were generally allocated to expert men, of rather advanced age: the average age corresponds to 42 years, in between the extreme cases of the twenty-five-year-old Stefano Lotero (captain of the schooner brig *L'Italia*) and the sixty-four year old Giuseppe Calcagno (skipper of the tartan *Nostra Signora di Misericordia*, whose birth dates back to as early as the *ancien régime*). Conversely, the crewmen had an average age of 27.3 years, with sailors of age comprised between 20 and 40 years (but the sailor Antonio Schelotto on the *Profeta Elia* brig had as many as 65 years at the time of embarkment) and teenage ship's boys (Domenico Zino boarded the schooner brig *I tre fratelli* at the age of 8)⁴⁸. Lastly, the payment systems, likewise confirming the survival of extremely old set-ups: most of the crews was still being paid "based on the amount of harvested fish", proportionately to the profits from the voyage, and only on some brigs headed for farther destinations were fixed payments starting to appear. On the felucca *Misericordia*, the skipper Caboto was paid one and a half share of harvested fish, while sailors were paid one share and ship's boys ½ or ¼ of a share. More complex was the system of wages in force on the *Unione*, where the skipper was entitled to two shares, the boatswain one and a half share, the steward one share and ¼, and sailors one share. Likewise, through the system of "shares" were wages settled aboard the brig *Letimbro*, 199 tons of capacity and 14 crew members, headed for Cadix in May 1858 (on top of that with 64 passengers). Salaries were instead fixed on departure with regard to the *Argentina* and the *Fratellanza*: the captain of the former brig was expected to receive 150 liras per month, as opposed to the 100 liras of the captain from Camogli on the latter brig; in diminishing order, the highest pays were allocated to the first officers, the boatswains and the captains (more or less between 50 and 70 liras per month); lastly, there were sailors with a salary fluctuating around 30-40 liras and the ship's boys whose pay did not go beyond 20 liras (in some instances, they did service "free of charge"). Lastly, let us record the special case of the captain and the first officer of the *Profeta Elia* brig sailing towards

event of the new eighteenth century Ligurian entrepreneurship", it was studied by Carrino, 2018, especially on pp. 67-83.

⁴⁸ *I tre fratelli* took its name from the ship owners: Lorenzo, Domenico and Giuseppe Zino (same surname as the ship's boy). The skipper was one of the three ship owners, Lorenzo.

America: in the column corresponding to remuneration, in their case, the phrase “special agreements” appear.

As we have seen on the strength of the data collected by the *Società Savonese di Storia Patria*, the following decades (especially the seventies and eighties) witnessed a further qualitative jump ahead by the “Savona” sailing ships – meaning by this term those built in the shipyards of Savona and of neighbouring centres alike – with an increasingly regular ploughing of global routes. Ships leaving for America, heading for England to load coal on board, stretching as far as the Far East (we could mention the barque *Giuseppina Accame* launched in Loano, which in 1887 sank in the waters of Java); of larger size, moreover, than those whose “muster-rolls” of 1858 we examined⁴⁹; and despite that, however, still made of wood and with an Aeolian tradition. If, however, we turn our attention to the end of the century, another source of considerable interest for the history of navigation, such as “journey reports”, allows us to describe a changing world: if, on the one hand, some sailing brigs still resisted, the new harbour extended by the infrastructural interventions of 1883 had already grown accustomed to the movement to and from of several steamers⁵⁰.

The journey reports represent a partial source, as they were only produced as a result of ship damage or damage to the transported goods, and do not accordingly enumerate all the vessels that frequented the Savona seaport; but, in all instances, they set out information on the ship types, capacity, crew, and, of course, on the routes and travel times. When reading the report of captain Giuseppe Schiaffino, recorded in Savona on 24 May 1899, we feel like being thrown back to the centuries of the modern age: the forty-seven year old captain, born and resident in Camogli, had departed from Cagliari with his barque *Luigia* on 15 May, and together with his eleven men had encountered “strong wind” and “turbulent sea”, to the point that the water had reached the deck, damaging the cargo. More or less the same time was spent, to cover the Cagliari-Savona route, by the brig *San Pietro* owned by Domenico Poggi from Savona, which left on 25 April and entered the port on 3 May; the capacity, too, more or less coincided, thereby denoting the existence of a short-sea shipping fleet that was still active: 395 tons the *San Pietro*, 491 the *Luigia*. In the Mediterranean Sea, moreover, many boats of modest size, capable of covering rather

⁴⁹ The *Giuseppina Accame* had a capacity of 840 tons.

⁵⁰ Here we will examine some journey reports recorded in 1899: In the State Archives of Savona, in the Commercial Court Fund, journey reports are stored for a very long period, beginning in 1860 all the way up to 1927.

long distances, still ploughed the sea: on 10 June 1899, the fifty-year-old captain of Chio Emanuele Demetrio (Italianised name) related that he has landed in Savona, with his schooner *Theodosios* of just 226 tons, after a forty-day voyage begun in Cyprus when it had fallen foul of the usual “rough times”. Looking beyond the Mediterranean waters, even more surprising was the voyage by a barque registered in a Finnish maritime district, with a capacity of no more than 471 tons, which, after departing with twelve men on board from Sydney on 7 January, entered the Savona port on 11 June.

On the other hand, the steamship *Galaxidiosi*, with a capacity of 1,125 tons, belonged to another nautical generation. It arrived in Savona on 20 June, after a voyage commenced on the last day of May in Taganrog, for one of the usual transports of grain that had been engaged in for several decades: the 23 men of the crew⁵¹ had passed Constantinople without any problem on 11 June, had stopped at Piraeus to load coal on board on the 13th, and the next day had chanced upon a storm that made it “veer slightly to the left”. Of similar size was the “Germanic steamship Poochah”, with a capacity of 1,165 tons, which with 18 crewmen left from Iquique (Chile) to reach Savona on 26 July 1899: the captain of the ship gave his report in front of an interpreter who was a native of Copenhagen and had been residing for some years in the Ligurian city. Nor could the steamships arriving from the Northern seas, loaded with the coal needed to fuel the Savona industry, be missing from the list: this is the case of the English steamship *Ackwork* of 1,393 tons, which entered the port on 19 April after a two-month voyage begun in Newcastle. Lastly, even some inhabitants of Savona had by then converted to steam: for instance, the fifty-one-year-old Angelo Bertolotto, who, with the steamship *Andrea* (961 tons), went in winter to load grain on the Black Sea, departing on 3 January from Mykolaïv and reaching destination on the 19th day of the same month.

It was a period of great changes, at the Savona port as well, which also affected the field of maritime labour. If, on the sailing ships registered at the end of the fifties, brigs and other vessels of lower tonnage were staffed by drawing from members of the same family and the same community as the skipper, on the steamships that anchored more and more regularly along the quays of the new dock of Savona the regional differentiation between deck and engine staff became increasingly more pronounced: in particular, there was a strong representation of men coming from the maritime districts of Southern Italy. In this segment of the century, which

⁵¹ The skipper was Giorgio Marlas of Galaxidi, aged 50.

witnessed a very sizeable increase in “seafarers” of the Kingdom of Italy, the areas disclosing the highest rate of maritime population, together with Liguria, were Campania and Sicily (Lo Basso, 2020, pp. 36-37): it is no coincidence that attestation of the truthfulness of the journey report drawn up by Giuseppe Arata, captain of the *Colombo* steamship that came back to Savona from Berdjans’k on 4 September 1899, came from a thirty year old from Messina and a thirty-three year old from Castellammare (both of them illiterate).

In summary, after a somewhat sluggish first half of the 19th century, Savona experienced a highly dynamic second half. On one hand, the liberal policies of the House of Savoy, and on the other, industrialization, laid the groundwork for a significant upswing in shipping. Emulating Genoa, the major neighboring port where commercial companies had already been established in preceding decades with funding from banks and the state, Savona also evolved into a hub for shipbuilding and the reception of steamships. An old productive fabric collapsed dramatically, making room for new players, both along the port docks and on board the ships. The horizons expanded immensely compared to the ancient regime era: first with schooners in the 1850s, and later with the large steamships at the end of the century, placing the small Savona within a network of trade spanning from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In Europe, this network connected the port to the Black Sea and the North Seas.

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5. *Curriculum vitae*

Associate Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Genoa and a member of the Laboratorio di storia marittima e navale – centro di ricerca “Fernand Braudel”, he primarily focuses on trade and navigation during the early modern period. Among his publications, notable is the monograph titled *Fraudum. Contrabbandi e illeciti doganali nel Mediterraneo (secolo XVIII)* published by Carocci in 2019. For the journal *RiMe. Rivista dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Europa mediterranea* he edited the Issue 8/I n.s., 2021 entitled “I generi coloniali americani nel Mediterraneo: i grandi porti come centri di destinazione, di consumo e di redistribuzione (XVII-XIX secolo)”.

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