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MEDITERRANEAN MARITIME HISTORY NETWORK

**MAKING WAVES
IN THE MEDITERRANEAN
SULLE ONDE DEL MEDITERRANEO**

Proceedings of the 2nd MMHN Conference
Messina and Taormina, 4-7 May 2006

Edited by
Michela D'Angelo Gelina Harlaftis Carmel Vassallo

ISTITUTO DI STUDI STORICI
Gaetano Salvemini

In questo volume sono raccolti gli atti del convegno internazionale di storia marittima che è stato organizzato dal *Mediterranean Maritime History Network* (MMHN) e che si è svolto a Messina e Taormina dal 4 al 7 maggio 2006.

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Un particolare ringraziamento a Diletta D'Andrea, che ha attivamente collaborato alla realizzazione e all'*editing* di questo volume e che ha anche tradotto in italiano i testi di alcune relazioni presentate al convegno e pubblicate sul *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* (2006, vol. 16, n. 1/2); a Pierangelo Pirak, che ha curato il video del convegno; a Valeria Arena, Davide Billa, Roberto Bonsignore, Sergio Busà, Alice Pino e Clara Sturiale, studenti dei corsi di laurea in Scienze Politiche per il Giornalismo e di Scienze dell'Informazione Giornalistica, che hanno realizzato immagini, riprese e resoconti del convegno sotto la guida del giornalista Rino Labate. Un particolare ricordo per l'ambasciatore Salvatore Cilento, che ha dato il suo prezioso apporto all'iniziativa. Infine, *last but not least*, un sentito ringraziamento per Maria Teresa Panella che con competenza e pazienza ha realizzato questo volume.

Per informazioni sull'attività del MMHN e per contattare gli autori dei saggi pubblicati in questo volume si può consultare il sito www.um.edu.mt/events/mmhcn

Foreword

The Mediterranean Maritime History Network (MMHN) has come a long way since that day ten years ago when a small band of historians decided on a number of initiatives to give the Mediterranean a more prominent presence in international maritime history circles. Increased participation in conferences beyond our shores, our own conferences in Malta, Messina-Taormina, Izmir, and - still to come - Barcelona; publications; a website and a directory hosted by the University of Malta's Mediterranean Institute, are testimony to that commitment made a decade ago.

Throughout these ten years, the MMHN has rested firmly on three major pillars: Professor Michela D'Angelo, of the University of Messina; Professor Ruthy Gertwagen, of the University of Haifa; and Professor Gelina Harlaftis of the Ionian University. All three have been an invaluable source of support for me and an inspiration to us all. More specifically, they have ensured the academic success of each of our meetings by organizing sessions which have given us insights into some of the most exciting research being conducted in the field of Mediterranean maritime history.

Professor D'Angelo, in particular, was responsible for the hosting of the 2006 Sicily conference which put a still fledgling movement firmly on its feet. Ably assisted by a team of young, up-and-coming historians, especially Diletta D'Andrea and Flavio Corpina, Professor D'Angelo had the overall responsibility for the organization of the conference and was able to secure generous backing for it.

Hers as well was the decision to undertake the awesome task of publishing all the papers in these proceedings, over and above the selection of the papers customarily published in the University of Malta's *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, and thus offer researchers access to the wide and varied range of contributions in its entirety. The MMHN owes her a debt of gratitude. I look forward to many more years of fruitful cooperation.

PROFESSOR CARMEL VASSALLO
Coordinator Mediterranean Maritime History Network

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Salvatore Bottari

The port of Messina, 1591-1783

1. *The background* *

Under Arab domination (IXth-XIth century) Sicily was divided into three valleys: the Val di Mazara (the north-western section of Sicily), the Val di Noto (the southern part of the island) and the Val Demone (the north-eastern area)¹. Messina, near the north-east corner of Sicily, was the most important town in the Val Demone.



Antonio Bolifoni, Sicily, engraving, 1692 (Private Collection, Messina)

* I should like to thank Michela D'Angelo, John Dickie and Nicola Criniti who read earlier versions of this essay and who all offered useful comments and suggestions.

¹ MICHELE AMARI, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia* (Firenze, 2002), vol. I, 346-348; PIETRO CORRAO, VINCENZO D'ALESSANDRO, "Geografia amministrativa e potere sul territorio nella Sicilia tardomedievale (secoli XIII-XIV)", in GIORGIO CHITTOLENI, DIETMAR WILLOWEIT (eds.), *L'organizzazione del territorio in Italia e in Germania: secoli XIII-XIV* (Bologna, 1994), 395-444.

Since ancient times ‘*grande histoire*’ and local history have been intertwined in the Straits of Messina². In fact, thanks to its geographical position, the city was the meeting point both for the ships sailing between East and West Mediterranean, and for coastal navigation between the Ionian and the Tyrrhenian Seas³. Products and merchandise coming from and going to Sicily, Calabria and many ports in the Mediterranean Sea passed through the port of Messina, which was the main trading place in Sicily.

Because Messina was isolated from the food-producing interior areas of Sicily, its survival depended on trade along the coasts. Its hinterland yielded very few cereals, so it was driven to trade in order to pay for grain and other staple goods coming from the Val di Mazara and Val di Noto⁴. Messina was hemmed against the sea by the Peloritani Mountains, making its real hinterland of Messina the sea: its port was a natural shelter for ships and vessels of all kinds and had been a commercial emporium for centuries. Messina, in sort, was pushed inexorably outwards, towards the other countries of the Mediterranean⁵. The core of the economic and social life of Messina was the natural ‘sickle-shaped’ port in the Straits, described by the Sicilian historian Tommaso Fazello in the following terms (1558):

Proinde sita est Messana pro maiori parte in planitie, ad littus maris, ortum prospectans, longior quam latior. Habet in conspectu (freto vorticoso, parvoque; euryppo interfluente) extremos Italiae montes: ad quorum radices oramque maritimam Rhegium et Flumara de muro Calabriae visuntur oppida. Habet citra ipsius maris angustias curvum telluris tractum falcis (ut diximus), instar, longum, ac tenuem, longitudinis utpote passuum circiter octingentorum, latitudinis vero ferme centum, ac maris interfluxu (qui portus est) ab urbe mille et paulo plura. p.m. distantem, et ab eius dextera saepagatum, Brachium S. Rainerij hodie, sed aetate superiori, et a D. Hyacintho et a Lingua Phari, ac Messana appellatum. Ea tellus cum instar iactae natura molis propendeat, quosque in sinuosum arcum curvata protenditur, quietum, tutum, spatiosum, ac profundum etiam ad littus ipsum efficit portum. Nam et onerariae, inusitati etiam magnitudinis naves, tuto littori ita adhaerent, ut nautae altero pede littus, altero navim saepe attingant⁶.

Since the Norman conquest (XIth century), Messina had experienced a

² See, for example, GEORGES VALLET, *Rhégion et Zancle. Histoire, commerce et civilisation des cites chalcidiennes du détroit de Messine* (Paris, 1958); GIACOMO SCIBONA, “Zancle”, in *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Classical Sites* (Princeton, 1976), 998-999; MARIA CACCAMO CALTABIANO, “Storia antica”, in GIOVANNI MOLONIA (ed.), *Messina. Storia e civiltà* (Messina, 1997), 45-55; SEBASTIANA NERINA CONSOLO LANGHER, “L’età greca e romana”, in FULVIO MAZZA (ed.), *Messina. Storia, cultura, economia* (Soveria Mannelli, 2007), 25-61.

³ AMELIA IOLI GIGANTE, *Messina* (Roma-Bari, 1980).

⁴ ORAZIO CANCELILA, *Baroni e popolo nella Sicilia del grano* (Palermo, 1983), 44-51.

⁵ SALVATORE BOTTARI, *Post res perditas. Messina 1678-1713* (Messina, 2005), 121-124.

⁶ TOMMASO FAZELLO, *De rebus siculis decades duae, deca I, liber II, De Zancle et Messana urbibus* (Palermo, 1558), 47-48.

significant immigration, and large trading community of native and foreign merchants (especially from Amalfi, Genoa, Pisa, Florence, Venice and Catalonia) developed⁷. Furthermore, the city of the Straits became a regular stop on the route to the Holy Land at the time of the Crusades⁸. Muhammad al-Idrisi, the Andalusian geographer who lived in Sicily at the court of Roger II, characterised Messina as a port where ships, coming from Christian and Muslim countries, landed for loading and unloading various products and merchandise⁹. The importance of the role of Messina was even underlined by two of the major Spanish travellers in the Mediterranean during the XIIth century: Benjamin of Tudela described it as a place where most of the pilgrims assembled to cross over to Jerusalem and Ibn Jubayr portrayed the town as the 'merchant infidels' main market¹⁰.

After 1197 the natural harbour of Messina began to be considered a free port¹¹. Moreover, time after time, the Norman, Swabian, Angevin and Aragonese kings granted the city other privileges such as the *Consolato del Mare*, duty free, fair dockyard, etc., and made it an emporium between the Levant and Europe¹². Under Spanish rule Messina acquired new privileges so most historians have defined it as a sort of 'republic in a kingdom' or a kind of 'city-state'¹³. At the beginning of the early Modern Age the port of Messina was well connected with the Mediterranean as well as with the North European sea trade routes thanks to the special facilities granted to the foreign merchants and ships calling there¹⁴. Moreover, still at the begin-

⁷ ENRICO PISPISA, *Medioevo fridericiano e altri scritti* (Messina, 1999), 221-238; LUCIANO CATALIOTO, "Il Medioevo: economia, politica e società", in MAZZA (ed.), *Messina*, 63-101.

⁸ DAVID ABULAFIA, *Commerce and Conquest in the Mediterranean. 1100-1500* (Aldershot-Brookfield, 1993), 196-212.

⁹ IDRISI, *Il libro di Ruggero*, transl. and ed. by Umberto Rizzitano, (Palermo, 1966), 41-42.

¹⁰ DAVID ABULAFIA, *The two Italies. Economic Relations between the Norman Kingdom of Sicily and the Northern Communes* (Cambridge [et alt.], 1977), 42-43.

¹¹ "Considerantes igitur fidei puritatem et devota servitia, que Cives Messanenses, fideles experti nostri, semper et in presenti tempore maxime nostris studuerunt servitiis fide non ficta, et immaculate puritati propensius exhibere, eis de solita benignitate concedimus, ut liceat eis omnia mercimonia et res eorum quaslibet libere et sine aliqua dacione per portum nostrum ipsius Civitatis nostre Messane tam per mare quam per terra immictere vel extrahere". See the privilege given to Messina by Henry VI of Hohenstaufen (11 May 1197) in CAMILLO GIARDINA (ed.), *Capitoli e privilegi di Messina* (Palermo, 1937), 25-30; and also CARMELO TRASELLI, *I privilegi di Messina e di Trapani (1160-1355)*, (Messina, 1992), 17-19.

¹² CARMEN SALVO, "Il Consolato del Mare di Messina", *Clio. Rivista trimestrale di studi storici*, XXVI, No. 2 (1990), 187-226.

¹³ LUIS ANTONIO RIBOT GARCÍA, *La revuelta antiespañola de Mesina. Causas y antecedentes (1591-1674)* (Valladolid, 1982), 54-64; GIUSEPPE GIARRIZZO, "La Sicilia dal Cinquecento all'Unità d'Italia", in VINCENZO D'ALESSANDRO, GIUSEPPE GIARRIZZO, *La Sicilia dal Vespro all'Unità d'Italia* (Torino, 1989), 326-332; MARINO BERENGO, *L'Europa delle città. Il volto della società urbana europea tra Medioevo ed Età moderna* (Torino, 1999), 34-35.

¹⁴ MICHELA D'ANGELO, "Porti e traffici marittimi in Sicilia fra Cinquecento e Seicento", in GIORGIO SIMONCINI (ed.), *Sopra i porti di mare*, III, *Sicilia e Malta*, (Firenze, 1997), 71-110.

ning of the XVIth century, many local merchants, sailors, and ships had constant and direct trade with the main English and Flemish ports as well as with the Levant Seas¹⁵. The role of Messina as an important center of seaborne trade is well exemplified by the story of Tuccio Fieravanti, a Pisan merchant residing in the city of the Straits, who exported Sicilian silk and imported English and Flemish clothes in the 1520s¹⁶. Therefore Messina was at one point of a trade triangle that had the other two points in London and Antwerp; but it also had strong links with Lyons, Palermo, Pisa, Lucca and other Italian cities. Moreover the merchants from Messina were involved in trading wine from the Levant which they sent to London on Biscayan ships¹⁷. The dearth of records relating to the port of Messina makes the fragmentary data provided by a register of the *Secrezia* (Customs) from January to April and from June to August 1587 particularly valuable¹⁸. This register attests the presence of 49 vessels (i.e., 15 Ragusean, 13 French, 8 Sicilian, 6 Venetian, 2 Neapolitan, 2 Genoese, 1 from Apulia, 1 from Chios, 1 unknown) and confirms the vitality of the harbour as a commercial emporium between Western Europe and the Levant.

In the Mediterranean, where Christianity was trying to contain the advance of the Sublime Porte, the port of Messina proved to be strategic also under the geopolitical profile. The Ottoman conquest of Cyprus (1570) brought Spain back in force to the Mediterranean¹⁹, and Messina was chosen as the assembly-point for the allied forces of the Holy League (mostly the Pope, the King of Spain and the Republic of Venice)²⁰. On 16 September 1571, the Christian fleets sailed from the port of Messina and, three weeks later (7 October), defeated the Ottoman galleys at Lepanto²¹.

¹⁵ CARMELO TRASELLI, "Porti e scali in Sicilia dal XV al XVII secolo", in *Le grandes escales*, II, *Le temps modernes* (Bruxelles, 1972), 257-281; AMELIA IOLI GIGANTE, "Rotte del commercio della seta", in CATERINA CIOLINO (ed.), *La seta e la Sicilia*, (Messina, 2002), 89-90.

¹⁶ See GIOVANNA MOTTA, "Dal Mediterraneo al Nord Europa. La presenza italiana sui mercati di Londra e di Anversa 1526-1527", in GIOVANNA MOTTA (ed.), *Mercanti e viaggiatori per le vie del mondo* (Milano, 2000), 45-63.

¹⁷ CARMELO TRASELLI, "Il mercato dei panni a Messina all'inizio del secolo XVI", *Annali della Facoltà di Economia e Commercio, Università degli Studi di Messina*, XI, No. 1 (1973), 74.

¹⁸ CARMELO TRASELLI, "Sul movimento del porto di Messina nel 1587", *Economia e storia*, II, No. 4 (1955), 453-461.

¹⁹ MOLLY GREENE, "The Ottomans in the Mediterranean", in VIRGINIA H. AKSAN, DANIEL GOFFMAN (eds.), *The Early Modern Ottomans. Remapping the Empire* (Cambridge, 2007), 106-116.

²⁰ GIUSEPPE ARENAPRIMO, *La Sicilia nella battaglia di Lepanto*, (Messina, 1892); GIOVANNA MOTTA, "Da Messina a Lepanto. Guerra ed economia nel Mediterraneo cinquecentesco", in GIOVANNA MOTTA (ed.), *I turchi, il Mediterraneo e l'Europa* (Milano, 1998), 78-102.

²¹ ROGER CHARLES ANDERSON, *Naval wars in the Levant. 1559-1853* (Liverpool, 1952), 34-46; BARTOLOMÉ BENNASSAR, *Don Juan de Austria. Un héroe para un imperio* (Madrid, 2004),



Andrea Calamech, The Christian Fleet in the Port of Messina, bronze bas-relief on the pedestal of the statue of John of Austria, 1572 (Messina, Italy)

2. The 'golden silk thread'

The discovery of America and the shifting of '*grande histoire*' from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic seems to have had scarcely any consequences in Messina, which received new impetus from the silk trade²². Throughout the XVth century and almost all of the XVIIIth, local silk manufactures became the city's economic mainstay²³.

In Sicily sericulture and silk production had specific characteristics. Abundant fresh mulberry leaves were fundamental for successful silkworm rearing and therefore plantations of black mulberries became a typical element in the rural scenery of the Val Demone. Moreover sericulture and silk production reflected a gender division of labour²⁴. The first stage, the breeding of silkworms, was a task performed by women. The next stage in silk production, that of making a useful thread from the cocoon, was a job for men, who carried cocoons to the '*posti delli mangani*' - i.e. the places of mangles, where the reeling machines, used to unwind the

107-139; ONUR YILDRIM, "The battle of Lepanto and its impact on Ottoman history and historiography", in ROSSELLA CANCELILA (ed.), *Mediterraneo in armi (secc. XV-XVIII)*, 2 vols., (Palermo, 2007), vol. I, 533-556; NICCOLÒ CAPPONI, *Lepanto 1571. La Lega Santa contro l'Impero Ottomano* (Milano, 2008), 195-264; GIANCLAUDIO CIVALE, *Guerrieri di Cristo. Inquisitori, gesuiti e soldati alla battaglia di Lepanto* (Milano, 2009), 69-84.

²² STEPHAN R. EPSTEIN, *An island for itself. Economic development and social change in late medieval Sicily* (Cambridge-New York, 1992), 251-295.

²³ SALVATORE BOTTARI, "L'ingresso nella modernità: da Ferdinando il Cattolico al terremoto del 1783", in MAZZA (ed.), *Messina*, 103-181.

²⁴ SIMONA LAUDANI, *La Sicilia della seta. Economia, società e politica* (Catanzaro, 1996), 43-49.

silk filaments from a group of cocoons, were located - where the filaments were unwound from the cocoons and the thread itself prepared²⁵. Just one filament was too thin and weak to be of any practical use, so it was combined with others²⁶. The resultant thread was wound onto a fast moving reel. Manufactures used large-scale reeling machines for reasons linked to the taxation system in use in Sicily (the first tax on raw silk was collected during this phase of the production process, which was therefore subject to intensive control)²⁷.

The port of Messina was not only where most Sicilian silk was marketed, but a large quantity of silk from southern Calabria would be sold here as well²⁸. The activities of the silk sector were regulated by an institution that played a leading role in Messina during the early Modern Age, namely the "*Consolato dell'Arte della Seta*" (Consulate of the Silk Craft). In 1520 Messina's silk weavers, at their own request and by intercession of the city's Senate, obtained permission from Viceroy Pignatelli to establish a Consulate of the Silk Craft whose chapters were approved by Emperor Charles V ten years later²⁹. In the beginning there were four consuls (two of them weavers and two of them silk cloth merchants). In 1617 two of them - a merchant and a weaver - were replaced by an aristocrat and an elected member of the Senate, while in 1703 the number of consuls was raised to six to include a master spinner and a master dyer.

The attempt to put a tax on silk dates back to 1562³⁰. That year a tax of 1 *tari* was levied on every ounce of silk cloth, wool, fur and the like, while another *tari* was levied on each pound of raw silk regardless of whether it was produced in Sicily or imported from abroad. The tax could be collected either at the moment of production or exportation. As we have already noted, due to tax laws, a centralized system for silk-throwing was set up in Sicily. This activity was carried out in dedicated places (*posti delli man-*

²⁵ The process consisted in placing cocoons in a basin filled with hot water (60° or 70° Celsius). Placing cocoons in hot water softened the sericin (the resinous substance that cements fibroin fibre in the cocoon) and allowed the end of the filament to be found. See RICHARD L. HILLS, "From cocoon to cloth. The technology of silk production", in SIMONETTA CAVACIOCCHI (ed.), *La seta in Europa. Sec. XIII-XX* (Prato-Firenze, 1993), 59-90.

²⁶ A number of cocoons were unwound together to give strength to the thread. Therefore the individual filaments from all of them were drawn together and fixed into one as the softened sericin dried. See Archivio di Stato di Palermo (ASP), *Miscellanea Archivistica*, s. II, No. 447, *Lettera di autore ignoto*, Messina giugno 1779.

²⁷ LAUDANI, *La Sicilia della seta*, 70-79.

²⁸ CARMELO TRASELLI, "Ricerche sulla seta siciliana (sec. XIV-XVII)", *Economia e Storia*, II (1965), 226; GIUSEPPE CARIDI, *Lo Stretto che unisce. Messina e la sponda calabra tra Medioevo ed Età moderna* (Reggio Calabria, 2009), 46-52.

²⁹ CAIO DOMENICO GALLO, *Apparato agli Annali della Città di Messina* (Napoli, 1755), 66.

³⁰ HELMUT KOENIGSBERGER, *The Government of Sicily under Philip II of Spain. A Study in the Practice of Empire* (London-New York, 1951), 154-155.

gani'), where the silk cocoons had to be taken by law to be unravelled. Two years later the Sicilian Parliament summoned in Messina abolished the tax, which was then levied again in 1575 together with a tax of one *tari* per ounce on various textiles for 10 years. The tax was further extended by Parliament in 1585³¹. Messina's ruling class reacted, and six years later (1591) it donated 583,333 scudos to Philip II, who granted Messina the privilege of being exempted from the tax³². Thanks to this privilege, Messina established a monopoly over the silk trade in the large area covering the Termini-Messina-Syracuse triangle and it also saw the confirmation of some privileges and the granting of other concessions. The operation turned out to be less profitable than expected because it came at the price of a loan at an 8% interest rate for the creditors. In order to pay back the loan, they were forced to levy new city taxes that turned out to be even more burdensome than the despised royal tax and a tax of 25 *grani* per ounce of silk leaving the port of Messina was imposed. This triggered a vicious circle that fuelled smuggling and the quantity of silk reaching Messina proved to be less than estimated. In addition, in order to cover the city's deficit, the 'funded debt' was securitized through the issue of treasury stocks thus yielding the creditors a fixed and secure income weighing on precise tax receipts. The social impact was clear to all: led to a redistribution of wealth that hit consumption and favoured the ruling class.

Moreover, the Genoese now had a tool to better control silk production³³. The silk market started to take on the form of a network of connections and interdependencies. The Val Demone became a highly specialized economic area. The huge burden resulting from the city taxes led to easier and more profitable transactions shifting capital from investments in production to public debt, stifling entrepreneurship and exacerbating parasitic interests. In 1612 came a new clash between Messina's Senate and the judges of the *Corte Stratigoziale*, on the one hand, and the Viceroy, the Duke of Osuna, and the *Deputazione del Regno*, on the other. The Sicilian Parliament approved a tax of one *tari* on each pound of raw silk to be collected at the moment of silk-throwing, an action that violated the privilege granted to Messina in 1591³⁴. The violation of Messina's exemptions led to an uprising in the city on the Strait, which was brutally repressed

³¹ LODOVICO BIANCHINI, *Storia economico civile della Sicilia*, ed. by FRANCESCO BRANCATO (Napoli, 1971), 130.

³² Archivio di Stato di Torino (AST), Fondo Sicilia (FS), 130/1, cat. 2, m. 3, f. 26, *Relazione delle gabelle di Messina, loro pesi e modo d'augmentarle*, Messina 16 maggio 1714.

³³ GIARRIZZO, "La Sicilia dal Cinquecento all'Unità d'Italia", 248-249.

³⁴ FRANCESCO BENIGNO, "Messina e il duca d'Osuna: un conflitto politico nella Sicilia del Seicento", in DOMENICO LIGRESTI (ed.), *Il governo della città. Patriziati e politica nella Sicilia moderna* (Catania, 1990), 173-207.

by the Duke of Osuna. After alternating fortunes the new tax was abolished by Philip III (May 15, 1616). Messina's privileges were confirmed in exchange for a donation of 180,000 scudos and the renunciation by the city to the taxes unduly collected amounting to about 150,000 scudos. In that same year, in order to cover the new outlay the Senate levied a new city tax of 5 *grani* on each pound of silk. The other donations to the King in the years that followed, among them a donation of 150,000 scudos to Philip IV in 1622, were matched by a rise in city taxes³⁵.

In the first half of the 17th century silk had become Sicily's most important export, totalling more than 400,000 pounds a year³⁶. The sector's first signs of decline were noticed by Messina's ruling *élite* only towards the middle of the century. Thanks to the handsome income from silk, Messina, whose territory was poor in wheat, could pay for this precious cereal coming from southern and western Sicily.

3. Sugar, shipbuilding and other economic activities

Up to the mid-17th century a major role was played by the cultivation of sugarcane in the plantations - *cannameleti* - located especially around Taormina, Milazzo and Patti³⁷. Cultivating sugarcane required abundant water for irrigation and wood for cooking. The processing was done in mills (*trappeti*) and the production cycle required the labour of dozens of workers. Another result of its cultivation was the development of related economic activities employing many other people³⁸. Blacksmiths, carpenters, woodcutters, boilermakers, potters and other labourers supported and created the conditions for the development of the sugar industry by carrying out various tasks (e.g., transporting firewood) or making the tools needed for the processing and sale of sugar (presses, canvas sacks, clay moulds for the sugarloaves, the vats to boil molasses, and so on). Sugar production started an unrelentingly decline during the second half of the 17th century; this was due particularly to high production costs, climate change and, above all, competition by sugar from Brazil, which

³⁵ CARMELO ELIO TAVILLA, *Per la storia delle istituzioni municipali a Messina tra Medioevo ed età moderna* (Messina, 1983), vol. II, 301.

³⁶ MAURICE AYMARD, "Commerce et production de la soie sicilienne aux XVI^e-XVII^e siècles", *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, École française de Rome, LXXVII, No. 2 (1965), 609-640.

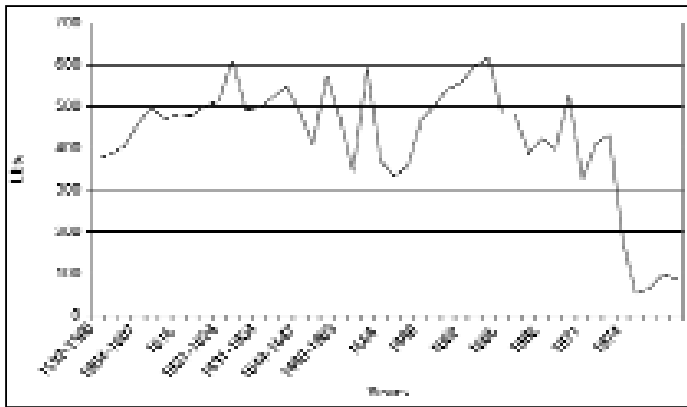
³⁷ SALVATORE BOTTARI, "Note sulla produzione dello zucchero nel Valdemone tra Medioevo e Età Moderna", in LUIGI CHIARA (ed.), *Attività produttive e dinamiche socio-culturali in Sicilia in Età moderna e contemporanea* (Roma, 2005), 93-106.

³⁸ CARMELO TRASELLI, *Storia dello zucchero siciliano* (Caltanissetta-Roma, 1982), 96-104; ANTONINO MORREALE, *Insula dulcis. L'industria della canna da zucchero in Sicilia (secc. XV-XVII)* (Napoli, 2006), 139-153.

Table 1. Silk exports from the port of Messina (1592-1678)

Year	Total (in lbs.)	Year	Total (in lbs.)
1592-1595	376,320	1657	334,601
1596-1599	385,612	1658	355,096
1600-1603	404,041	1659	468,352
1604-1607	460,202	1660	500,905
1608-1611	497,088	1661	541,208
1612-1615	470,669	1662	559,198
1616	482,412	1663	593,888
1617-1619	479,610	1664	619,182
1620	503,600	1665	481,279
1621-1624	512,020	1666	482,170
1625-1626	610,063	1667	385,897
1627-1630	492,401	1668	423,366
1631-1634	497,443	1669	398,004
1635-1638	520,302	1670	522,640
1639-1642	550,736	1671	327,128
1643	-	1672	410,140
1644-1647	483,031	1673	430,600
1648	407,251	1674	174,962
1649	570,448	1675	52,536
1650-1653	467,211	1676	66,069
1654	344,644	1677	100,110
1655	592,278	1678 (until August)	88,020
1656	368,948		

Source: Maurice Aymard, "Commerce et production de la soie sicilienne aux XVI-XVII siècles", *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire, École française de Rome*, LXXVII, 2 (1965).



joined the other traditional competitors on the sugar market, namely Madeira, Cuba, the Canary Islands and Asia³⁹.

Another of Messina's major economic activities was shipbuilding. Besides the old dockyard, a new one was built in 1565 in the San Raineri

³⁹ SIDNEY W. MINTZ, *Storia dello zucchero. Tra politica e cultura* (Torino, 1990), 30-33; ANTONINO MORREALE, "La produzione siciliana dello zucchero (1550-1650): ipotesi e stime", *Società e storia*, 89 (2000), 421-445.

Peninsula, near Forte San Salvatore⁴⁰. In 1615, with the easing of Ottoman pressure in the Mediterranean, the new dockyard was dismantled, while the older and smaller dockyard (near the Royal Palace) continued its activities, although these were limited to maintenance and repair works.

Messina was also home to Sicily's mint, which employed a large number of skilled technicians and workers⁴¹. Other important activities included printing and publishing and the making of maps and nautical charts. Salt pans could be found in the San Raineri Peninsula and between Faro and Ganzirri⁴². The salt was mainly used to preserve fish and tuna, which was principally exported. Swordfish was caught predominantly for local consumption. Coral fishing in the Strait was rather important at least until the end of the 17th century. The coral was exported or used by local craftsmen. The other products exported from Messina included olive oil, wine, salted fish, hazelnuts and cheese⁴³. Of course, they did not all come from the Messina district, but they would reach its market, which was a major one in those days.

A port of call for French, Dutch, Genoese, Tuscan and Neapolitan merchants, Messina was almost a compulsory stop along the route that English vessels covered between the Levant and Livorno and it consolidated this role further around the mid-17th century when the 'safe routes' system was adopted⁴⁴. It was also a hub to other Mediterranean ports where English merchant ships and man-o-wars were based⁴⁵.

Trade was supported also by the insurance market despite the fact it witnessed a sharp decline in the early decades of the 17th century⁴⁶. Before a journey, merchants or shipowners would insure the goods or the entire vessel for a given amount by paying a premium. In turn, the insurer would cover the risk, in case of loss, up to a certain amount usually equal to just a part of the total insured. The policy signed by the insurers would be given to a notary who would make an authenticated copy to use if the original was lost. In case of a dispute between the parties the Consulate of the Sea of Messina would pass judgement.

⁴⁰ MARIA GIUFFRÈ, "L'isola e il mare: il porto di Messina e altri porti", in SIMONCINI (ed.), *Sopra i porti di mare*, 202-209.

⁴¹ ANTONINO GIUFFRIDA, *La finanza pubblica nella Sicilia del '500* (Caltanissetta-Roma, 1999), 285-312.

⁴² ORAZIO CANCELILA, *L'economia della Sicilia. Aspetti storici* (Milano, 1992), 54.

⁴³ MASSIMO PETROCCHI, *La rivoluzione cittadina messinese del 1674* (Firenze, 1954), 39-42.

⁴⁴ GIGLIOLA PAGANO DE DIVITIIS, *Mercanti inglesi nell'Italia del Seicento. Navi, traffici egemonie* (Venezia, 1990), 72-73.

⁴⁵ HELMUT G. KOENIGSBERGER, "English Merchants in Naples and Sicily in the Seventeenth Century", *English Historical Review*, LXII (1947), 302-366.

⁴⁶ CARMELO TRASELLI, "Banchieri, armatori, assicuratori", in *Storia della Sicilia*, vol. III (Napoli, 1980), 487-500.

Craftsmen making luxury goods (goldsmiths, silversmiths, silk makers, etc.), banks and specialized agriculture (grapes and olives) on Messina's farmsteads completed the city's and its district's range of production activities⁴⁷. The population grew three-fold over the course of a century: from the 25,000-30,000 inhabitants of the early 16th century, it rose to 100,000 inhabitants in the early years of the 17th century. This was the result of the sharp rise in birth compared to mortality and of the fact that the city drew migrants from its hinterland and especially from the Nebrodi area and from Calabria.

Among its speculative activities, besides insurance – as mentioned above – and banks – which, according to the few indicators available seem to witness a sharp decline in the 17th century⁴⁸ –, it is worth pointing out the major interests linked to the running of administration. In particular, by the agreement of 1591, Messina had offered to the king 583,333 scudos for the abolition of the tax on crude silk and other textiles. This sum was borrowed from Genoese bankers at high interest rates, and for the repayment of it new taxes were imposed. Furthermore, the practice of contracting out the taxes (*arrendamento* - leasing) set in motion a vicious circle, which led to a rise especially in the taxes on consumer goods and products essential to the city's economy (e.g., silk) to pay those reaping revenues from the public debt⁴⁹.

This state of affairs in the running of city finances led to a rise in the cost of living, which starting from consumer goods, was reflected in all production and commercial activities to the point that it became the cause of the structural weakness of Messina's economy, which was doomed to rely more and more heavily on a system of monopolies⁵⁰. Moreover, these could allow collectors (lease holders) to control the entire production and marketing cycle of any given commodity.

The obligation for silk makers to export the silk manufactured in the area covered by the Syracuse-Messina-Termini triangle, as ordered by the privilege of 1591, also led to an increase in the revenues of the city of Messina as result of the increase in exports from the city's port. The silk leaving the port of the city on the Strait was burdened by a tax, which, in addition to the one levied in 1616, added up to a total of 30 *grani* per

⁴⁷ BOTTARI, "L'ingresso nella modernità", 119-121.

⁴⁸ VITO CUSUMANO, *Storia dei banchi della Sicilia*, 2 vols. (Roma, 1887-1892); CARMELO TRASELLI, *Note per la storia dei banchi in Sicilia nel XV secolo*, 2 vols. (Palermo, 1959-1968); ROMUALDO GIUFFRIDA, *Banchi e banche in Sicilia dal XVI al XIX secolo* (Palermo, 1994), 14-17.

⁴⁹ ROSSELLA CANCELILA, *Fisco, ricchezza, comunità nella Sicilia del Cinquecento* (Roma, 2001), 298-318.

⁵⁰ SALVATORE BOTTARI, "Dalla rivolta antispagnola al 'decennio inglese' (1674-1815)", in SALVATORE BOTTARI, LUIGI CHIARA, *La lunga rincorsa. Messina dalla rivolta antispagnola al terremoto del 1908* (Manduria-Bari-Roma, 2009), 30.

pound of silk exported⁵¹. There was a drop in exports from the middle of the century. This took place against the background of a more general re-organization, which - especially in Italy - changed the sector's territorial hierarchies⁵². Moreover, starting from the end of the 16th century there was a rise - first slowly and then at an ever increasing pace - in silk production in Palermo and, in the mid-17th century, in Catania as well to meet the demand for inexpensive products⁵³.

4. From the Revolt of 1674 to the end of the Spanish Government

The 1674-1678 rebellion in Messina made Sicily and, in particular, Messina's port, one of the fronts in the war between Spain, the Netherlands and France during the Dutch War⁵⁴. Messina rebelled against the Spanish rule and called for the help of the French who sent a fleet. During the war the British were neutral, so the fighting favoured British trade and cut out its traditional Dutch and French trade competitors - at least for the time being⁵⁵. However, both the French and Spanish would force British ships

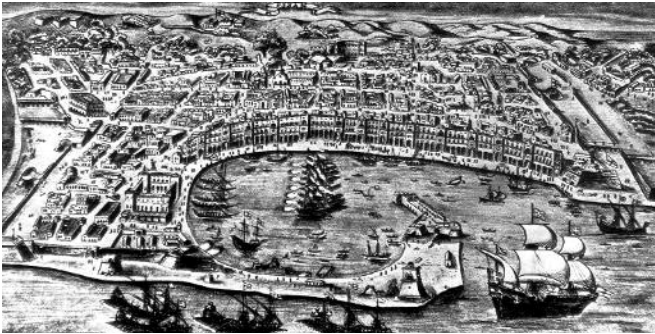
⁵¹ UMBERTO DALLA VECCHIA, *Cause economiche e sociali dell'insurrezione messinese del 1674* (Messina, 1907), 17-18.

⁵² For a general discussion on this theme, see CARLO PONI, "Archéologie de la fabrication: La diffusion des moulins à soie «alla bolognese» dans les États vénitiens du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle", *Annales. Économie, Sociétés, Civilisations*, XXVII, No. 6 (1972), 1475-1496; PONI, "All'origine del sistema di fabbrica: tecnologia e organizzazione produttiva dei mulini da seta nell'Italia settentrionale (sec. XVII-XVIII)", *Rivista Storica Italiana*, LXXXVIII, No. 3 (1976), 444-497; GABRIELLA SIVORI, "Il tramonto dell'industria serica genovese", *Rivista Storica Italiana*, LXXXIV, No. 4 (1972), 893-944; PAOLA MASSA, "Conseguenze socioeconomiche dei mutamenti di struttura nella tessitura serica ligure (secoli XVI-XIX)", in *Studi in memoria di Mario Abrate* (Torino, 1986), vol. II, 601-620; ROSALBA RAGOSTA PORTIOLI, "Specializzazione produttiva a Napoli nei secoli XVI e XVII", in CAVACIOCCHI (ed.), *La seta in Europa*, 339-349; GIUSEPPE CHICCO, *La seta in Piemonte, 1650-1800. Un sistema industriale d'ancien régime* (Milano, 1995), 19-115; FRANCESCO BATTISTINI, *L'industria della seta in Italia nell'età moderna* (Bologna, 2003), 19-28.

⁵³ TRASELLI, "Ricerche sulla seta siciliana", 245-246; FEDELE MARLETTA, "L'arte della seta a Catania nei secoli XV-XVII", *Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale*, XXII (1926), 46-91; ANTONIO PETINO, "L'arte ed il Consolato della seta a Catania nei secoli XIV-XIX", *Bollettino Storico Catanese*, VI-VII (1942-1943), 15-78.

⁵⁴ GIACOMO GALATTI, *La rivoluzione e l'assedio di Messina (1674-1678)* (Messina, 1899); FRANCESCO GUARDIONE, *Storia della rivoluzione di Messina contro la Spagna (1671-1680)* (Palermo, 1907); ÉMILE LALOY, *La révolte de Messine, l'expédition de Sicile et la politique française en Italie (1674-1678). Avec des chapitres sur les origines de la révolte (1648-1674) et sur le sort des exilés 1678-1702*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1929-1931); FRANCESCO BENIGNO, "Lotta politica e sbocco rivoluzionario: riflessioni sul caso Messina (1674-1678)", *Storica*, V, 13 (1999), 7-56; LUIS ANTONIO RIBOT GARCIA, *La Monarquía de España y la guerra de Mesina (1674-1678)* (Madrid, 2002); SAVERIO DI BELLA, *Caino barocco. Messina e la Spagna 1672-1678* (Cosenza, 2005); BOTTARI, *Post res perditas*, 57-84.

⁵⁵ KOENIGSBERGER, "English Merchants in Naples and Sicily", 318-324.



Anonymous, View of Messina, engraving XVIIth century (Private Collection, Messina)

sailing through the Strait to stop seizing their loads⁵⁶. However, while the British merchants were paid by the French for the loads they were carrying, the Spaniards seized the loads to prevent them from reaching the rebels.

The failed 1674-1678 rebellion was followed by harsh repression by the Spaniards. Some of the measures affected the city's economic livelihood. These included the confiscation of exiles' property, the abolition of the mint, and the abolition of the privilege that allowed Messina and its district not to be included in the census and hence not to pay royal taxes⁵⁷. The city taxes were now managed by the *Regia Giunta*, a body set up by the Viceroy Francisco Benavides, Count of Santo Stefano. Messina lost most of its artworks: those not carried away by the French were taken to Spain, while another part of the city's patrimony was lost elsewhere. The Senate Palace was torn down.

As for the silk industry, the royal treasury took over the tax of three carlines (30 *grani*) on the export of silk from the port of Messina and it limited the obligation to export silk from Messina only to strictly specific towns and to the district. Then in 1679 there came the order to levy a royal tax of 36 *grani* on raw silk; the tax was to be collected at the moment of silk-throwing. When added to the two city taxes of two *grani* each on the silk manufactured in Messina's territory, this new measure 'de facto' imposed the two-*tari* tax on silk levied in the rest of Sicily⁵⁸. The city's revenues, without the three-carline tax, were compensated by the levying of another nine city taxes. Messina's producers had lost their privileges and now had to bear a very heavy tax burden. This led to the emigration of skilled workers, merchants and foreign merchant companies. Their destinations included not only France, but also Naples, Catania, Palermo and other Italian cities.

⁵⁶ GIACOMO DENTICI, "Rapporti del console inglese a Messina negli anni della rivolta (1674-1678)", *Rassegna degli Archivi di Stato*, XXVII, No. 1-2-3 (1977), 19-43.

⁵⁷ BOTTARI, *Post res perditas*, 89-100.

⁵⁸ AST, FS, 130/1, cat. 2, m. 3, f. 23, *Relazione delle 26 gabelle del patrimonio della città di Messina*, Messina 16 maggio 1714.

Soon came, however, the problem of reviving the city's economy after being stifled by the events following the 1674-1678 rebellion, while the climate of suspicion and distrust did not help the situation.

Sicily's silk production still played a major role on international markets. In the 1680s the city of Lyon received 6,000 bales of silk, 1,600 of which from Sicily, 1,500 from the rest of Italy, 300 from Spain, 1,400 from the Levant and 1,200 from Languedoc, Provence and Dauphinate⁵⁹. A major role was also played by trade with Britain⁶⁰. Quality control over the goods was a key issue for Messina's Consulate of the Silk Craft⁶¹. In 1680 Catania was granted the Consulate of the Silk Craft and could hence manufacture cloth with a code like Palermo's. Competition with Catania started to be felt in Messina as a result both of the lighter tax burden on Catania's products and of the cheaper cost of living thanks to the greater availability of wheat and lower taxes on basic necessities. On 8 May 1693, a few months after the terrible January earthquake that hit Catania and the Noto Valley, Catania's Senate issued a call to draw skilled workers and revive the city's silk industry⁶². Moving to Catania and setting up a business there became even more convenient especially for Messina's craftsmen.

In 1685 the Viceroy Benavides, who had played a leading role in the harsh repression aimed at administering an exemplary punishment to Messina, showed that he was aware of the situation and tried to stop the city's economic decline by ordering the construction of a new lazaretto within the framework of a policy to revitalize trade with the Levant⁶³. However, several years passed before the plan to give Messina a free port actually took off. It was finally set up in 1695⁶⁴. The regulations governing the free port included the granting of a 25-year safe-conduct to foreign merchants, including Jews, who would move to Messina. Despite some

⁵⁹ LAUDANI, *La Sicilia della seta*, 99.

⁶⁰ See Biblioteca Regionale Universitaria di Messina (BRUM), Manoscritti (Ms), Fondo Vecchio (FV) 126, *Consulta del Principe di Niscemi in risposta di alcuni quesiti fattegli da S. E. sopra la pannizzazione e trafichi di Messina*, Messina 16 dicembre 1702, ff. 35r-36r. See also BRUM, Ms, FV 126, *Rappresentazione per il negozio della Piazza di Messina del Principe di Niscemi*, Messina 25 gennaio 1703, f. 18v.

⁶¹ Archivio di Stato di Messina (ASM), Consolato della Seta (CS), vol. I, ff. 25v-26r, Messina 1 luglio 1695; ff. 26r-26v, Messina 15 luglio 1695. See also *Istruzioni seu capitoli del Consolato dell'Arte della Seta della Nobile, Fedelissima ed Esemplare Città di Messina, formate d'ordine della Maestà del Re Nostro Signore Carlo III di Borbone Re delle Due Sicilie, di Gerusalemme, &c. Infante di Spagna, Duca di Parma e Piacenza, e di Castro, Principe Ereditario di Toscana, &c.* (Messina, 1736), 61-63.

⁶² PETINO, *L'arte e il Consolato della seta a Catania*, 29-30.

⁶³ Archivo General de Simancas (AGS), Estado, leg. 3503, doc. 103, *Disposizioni per il ristabilimento del commercio; costruzione di un nuovo lazaretto, e Istruzioni dettate dal viceré conte di Santo Stefano per il suo governo*, giugno 1685.

⁶⁴ BRUM, Fondo Messano-Calabro, Misc. C. 1210/1, *Bando di istituzione della Scala e Porto franco di Messina*, Messina 15 agosto 1695.

adjustments to the operation of the free port in 1698, the positive effects were short-lived. Although it is difficult to make an estimate, a Jewish community was established in Messina following the creation of the free port. British merchants trading silk thread could also be found in Messina. Up to the second decade of the 18th century, Britain lacked the technical know-how to make silk thread that was strong enough for the warp.

The free port's structural shortcomings and, above all, the outcome of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713) weakened the effects in the medium and long term, since the British left Sicily taking huge amounts of money home with them⁶⁵. Moreover, the Grand Duke of Tuscany took advantage of the delicate political situation arising at the death of Charles II and exerted pressure on ministers and officials to hinder the business of foreign merchants operating in Messina to make the free port go bankrupt⁶⁶.

5. *Between the House of Savoy and the Austrian Habsburg Dynasty*

At the end of the War of the Spanish Succession, the Treaty of Utrecht (11 April 1713) granted the title of kings to the Savoy family who were given the island of Sicily.

The issue of the free port came back to the fore under the Savoy family in the debate on how to revive Messina's economy. The blame was placed on the port's structural shortcomings and on the diversity of the economic and commercial situation in Messina compared to Livorno's. The Tuscan port's liveliness – according to reports sent to King Victor Amadeus II – was due to the development of local economies with a high demand for goods drawing trade and, above all, due to the fact that – unlike Messina – the privilege had been extended to the city's entire territory⁶⁷. In August 1714 Victor Amadeus II of Savoy issued new rules for the management of Messina's free port and lazaretto⁶⁸. However, the measure did not have the hoped-for effects, since the Savoy government turned a deaf ear on

⁶⁵ BOTTARI, *Post res perditas*, 156-166.

⁶⁶ Biblioteca Comunale di Palermo (BCP), Ms. Qq. G. 66, *Supposizioni di fatto per maggior intelligenza delle risposte e sentimenti del Tribunale della Regia Giunta alli capitoli della due proietti, che s'hanno presentato per li negozianti di Messina, sovra il vero stabilimento del porto e scala franca della medema* [1727], ff. 648r-652v.

⁶⁷ See IDA FAZIO, "Rappresentazioni di un'economia urbana. Le proposte all'amministrazione sabauda e il rilancio di Messina dopo la crisi di fine Seicento", *Bollettino Storico-Bibliografico Subalpino*, No. 1 (1996), 214-272.

⁶⁸ AST, FS, 130/2, cat. I, m. 5, f. 13; *Istruzioni di Lazaretto Scala e Porto Franco della Città di Messina, Tassa delle mercedi che potranno esigere dalli Padroni de' bastimenti li Piloti del faro per loro servitù, con la tariffa, seu stima delle mercanzie che entrano in Lazaretto a far quarantena, ed altra de' stallaggi di Porto Franco, e dritti spettanti al Giudice Privativo, Ufficiali, e servienti di esso*, Messina 28 agosto 1714.

Table 2. Silk exports from the port of Messina (1678-1729)

Year	Total (in lbs.)	Year	Total (in lbs.)
1678-1679	224,787	1704-1705	95,012
1679-1680	250,552	1705-1706	168,016
1680-1681	229,276	1706-1707	150,022
1681-1682	230,727	1707-1708	133,642
1682-1683	262,421	1708-1709	48,835
1683-1684	218,781	1709-1710	103,893
1684-1685	254,981	1710-1711	86,215
1685-1686	197,814	1711-1712	93,765
1686-1687	332,669	1712-1713	112,324
1687-1688	246,127	1713-1714	176,742
1688-1689	323,780	1714-1715	94,499
1689-1690	269,313	1715-1716	133,014
1690-1691	295,165	1716-1717	183,656
1691-1692	274,846	1717-1718	137,816
1692-1693	295,373	1718-1719	44,842
1693-1694	314,568	1719-1720	55,099
1694-1695	177,687	1720-1721	42,429
1695-1696	400,633	1721-1722	75,956
1696-1697	242,626	1722-1723	149,572
1697-1698	269,071	1723-1724	67,276
1698-1699	219,753	1724-1725	38,385
1699-1700	233,402	1725-1726	69,960
1700-1701	232,245	1726-1727	98,192
1701-1702	111,287	1727-1728	73,841
1702-1703	121,565	1728-1729	24,111
1703-1704	207,632		

Source: Maurice Aymard, "Commerce et production de la soie sicilienne aux XVI-XVII siècles", *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire, École française de Rome*, LXXVII, 2 (1965).



the calls for reforms from the city's economic operators and the free-port area was left unvaried and without the much-desired interaction with the rest of the city. Basically this marked the introduction of what had been ordered 20 years before by Charles II with just a few changes.

The new king stayed in Messina between May and August 1714; during his visit, he was presented with memoranda containing proposals for re-

viving the silk trade. The reduction in the revenues from the three-carlini tax on silk exports, collected after the repression of the Messina rebellion by the royal treasury, had a substantial impact on the Kingdom's finances and its sharp drop from 25,000 scudos in 1707 to 8,000 in 1712 caused great concern⁶⁹. In 1715 silk exports amounted to 132,841 pounds. The quantity was rather meagre and reflected a situation of decline.

Taken as a whole, though, Savoy policy on the issue proved to be ineffective. Moreover, the reorganization of the Piedmontese silk industry in the second half of the 17th century and its reconversion to the production of raw and semi-finished silk made the king rather reluctant to take measures favouring the export of Sicilian silk to France and Britain and stepping up the competition for Piedmont's yarns on foreign markets⁷⁰.

The measures taken under Austrian rule (1719-1734) to revitalize the city's economy had positive effects. Efforts were made to favour manufacturing. In 1727, by government initiative, a group of entrepreneurs from Messina established a Trade Company whose main purpose was the production of gold, silver and silk fabrics⁷¹. This new consortium also was granted a series of privileges, among them the exemption from taxes and donations, the granting of premises and the right of monopoly for five years for the sale of the new textiles developed and manufactured by the Company. In the short term, the foundation of the Trade Company seemed to stimulate business in the silk sector. The 314 new registrations with the Consulate of the Silk Craft marked a positive change⁷². There was a rise in the number of foreign merchants especially from Greece who would open shops in Messina⁷³.

The issue of exorbitant customs duties was still pending though. Silk was also exported from the port of Palermo where customs were cheaper. As a result, the silk exported from the port of Palermo during the decade was almost double that of the silk leaving Messina (1,264,990 pounds as opposed to 688,440.90 pounds)⁷⁴. Corrective measures were adopted to

⁶⁹ LAUDANI, *La Sicilia della seta*, 99.

⁷⁰ BOTTARI, "L'ingresso nella modernità", 146-147.

⁷¹ RAFFAELE MARTINI, "Le condizioni economiche di Messina durante il governo di Carlo IV d'Austria (1719-1734)", *Archivio Storico Siciliano*, XXIX, No. 1-2, (1904), 27-28; FRANCESCA GALLO, *L'alba dei gattopardi. La formazione della classe dirigente nella Sicilia austriaca (1719-1734)* (Catanzaro, 1996), 118-122.

⁷² BCP, Qq. G. 41, f. 228, *Fede di Domenico Gaetano, Regio Maestro Notaro della Corte del Consolato della Seta di Messina*, Messina luglio 1732.

⁷³ MICHELA D'ANGELO, *Comunità straniere a Messina tra XVIII e XIX secolo. Alle origini del British Cemetery*, (Messina 1995), 19-20.

⁷⁴ Haus-Hof und Staatsarchiv (HHSA), Italien Spanischer Rat (ISR), Sizilien, Korrespondenz, Karton 13, alt 26, *Fede del maestro credenzero della Regia Dogana di Palermo Abadal*, Palermo 6 maggio 1729.

standardize customs at the two Sicilian ports, but it is rather difficult to assess their effectiveness.

In 1732 – except for the months of March, October, November and December for which data are lacking – besides Sicilian and Calabrian vessels and 64 Neapolitan boats, 201 foreign vessels stopped in the port of Messina: 50 were Maltese, 21 British, 19 Genoese, 17 French, 7 from the Morea, 6 from the Levant, 5 from Rijeka, 5 Spanish, 2 Venetian, 1 from Trieste, 1 from Constantinople, 1 from Alexandria, 1 from the Ambracian Gulf, 1 from Lisbon, 1 from Preveza and 1 from Finale⁷⁵. Upon leaving Messina, some of these vessels were headed for other Sicilian ports where they loaded wheat, or Milazzo where they loaded olive oil, or for the Levant.

Foreign sailors and merchants were supported in the customs and administrative paperwork by the consuls of their countries who would make sure that there was no abuse by customs officers and that the landing and the sale of their commodities were both carried out according to the privileges of their country. Every shipowner or captain would pay a set fee to the consul for the support received in these activities.

According to data provided by Liliana Iaria, whose researched draws on the logbook of a captain from the port of Messina for the period between 1735 and 1738, of the 1,707 foreign vessels landing in Messina, the most numerous were English (386), followed by the Genoese (371), French (307) and Maltese (281)⁷⁶. The British vessels carried here: Bristol cloth, first and second-choice British cloth, black and white textiles, scarlet wool, black Loden cloth, Eden cloth, long-staple wool, fabrics, sugar, lead, tobacco, camel fur, linen, porcelain, cotton, Spanish wool, pepper, cinnamon, saffron, tin rods, iron, steel, copper, paper, alum, sandalwood, leather, cocoa, coffee, leather, Venetian paper and commodities, dried salted cod, herring, stockfish and salmon. Raw silk, soda ash, sumac, manna, citrus fruit and salt would be loaded in Messina. Salt had become one of Sicily's main exports. However, it was mainly exported from Trapani⁷⁷.

6. *The Bourbons' mercantilist policy*

The effort made by the Bourbons in the early years to revive Sicily's economy and, in particular, Messina's soon clashed with corporative interests and the dramatic crisis of the 40-year period stretching between

⁷⁵ LILIANA IARIA, "Il porto di Messina tra Austriaci e Borboni", *Memorie e Rendiconti dell'Accademia di Scienze, Lettere e Arti degli Zelanti e dei Dafnici di Acireale*, III (1983), 36.

⁷⁶ IARIA, "Il porto di Messina", 78.

⁷⁷ ORAZIO CANCELILA, *Aspetti di un mercato siciliano. Trapani nei secoli XVII-XIX* (Caltanissetta-Roma, 1972), 53-73; FRANCESCO BENIGNO, *Il porto di Trapani nel Settecento. Rotte, traffici esportazioni (1674-1800)* (Trapani, 1982), 47-64.



Anonymous, View of Messina, engraving, XVIIth century (Private Collection, Messina, Italy)

1743 and 1783. But inconsistency in economic policy was also a problem. New chapters of the Consulate of the Silk Trade were approved by Charles III by initiative of the corporation's consuls; once approved, they confirmed the excessive number of restraints that were already in place, on both the manufacture and sale of silk products. Meanwhile, Catania and other Italian producers were tackling the expansion in commercial circuits and the ensuing transformations in a much more dynamic manner⁷⁸. The Bourbons' mercantilist policy was based on the signing of trade treaties, on customs measures, and on the appointment of magistrates to centralize powers on commercial matters. This led to the appointment of the *Supremo Magistrato del Commercio* in Sicily with the order of November 28, 1739⁷⁹. However, this instrument too met with corporate resistance, and Viceroy Corsini yielded. Soon the institution was emptied of relevance and deprived of its main competences thus leading to its paralysis and powerlessness, although it was never formally abolished. A similarly inconsistent line in economic policy regarded the situation of the Jewish community. The Jews had been called to settle in Naples and Sicily through the granting of favours and privileges in February 1740⁸⁰. They were then expelled with the order of July 30, 1747, because – as it was alleged – only “poor Jews without any credit, driven only by the wanton craving of wealth through usury” had come⁸¹. A period of weak growth registered in the 1730s, thus seemingly reversing the long negative trend, but even that increase came to a sudden end in 1743 due to the outbreak of the plague, which led to a sharp drop in population and the collapse of

⁷⁸ BOTTARI, “L’ingresso nella modernità”, 154-156.

⁷⁹ GIOVANNI RAFFIOTTA, *Il Supremo Magistrato del Commercio in Sicilia* (Palermo, 1953); VITTORIO SCIUTI RUSSI, “Il Supremo Magistrato di Commercio in Sicilia”, *Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale*, LXIV, No. 1 (1968), 253-300.

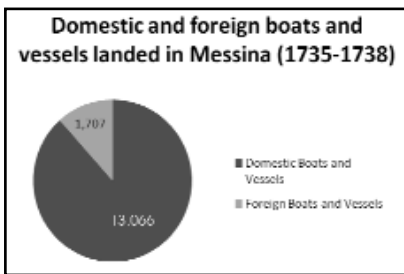
⁸⁰ ASP, Real Segreteria, Incartamenti, Rappresentanze, b. 246, *Isidoro Terrana al viceré*, Palermo 25 febbraio 1735.

⁸¹ LODOVICO BIANCHINI, *Storia economico civile della Sicilia*, ed. by FRANCESCO BRANCATO (Napoli, 1971), 305.

Table 3. Domestic and foreign boats and vessels landed in Messina (1735-1738)

Year	Domestic Boats and Vessels	Foreign Boats and Vessels	Total
1735	3,399	399	3,798
1736	3,201	448	3,649
1737	3,602	493	4,095
1738	2,864	367	3,231
1735-1738	13,066	1,707	14,773

Source: Liliانا Iaria, "Il porto di Messina tra austriaci e Borboni", proceeding from *Memorie e Rendiconti dell'Accademia di Scienze, Lettere e Arti degli Zelanti e dei Dafnici di Acireale*, III (1983).



the city's economy⁸². In fact, because of the plague all communication was cut off not only with the rest of the Kingdom but likewise with the whole of Europe for upwards of two years⁸³. The next set of measures were enforced by Viceroy Eustachio de Laviefeuille, who came to Messina in July 1751 and stayed in the city for

two years; these fell within the framework of the Bourbons' centralized approach, but did very little to change the city's economic fabric⁸⁴. The brief experience of the New Trade Company established in 1752 and dissolved just a few years later did not give the positive and lasting results expected, although it did meet with the immediate favour of the city's inhabitants⁸⁵.

The scars left by the plague of 1743 were very difficult to heal, and as a result the 1750s and 1760s were difficult decades. The heavy rains that hit the city on October 8th and 9th of 1754 led to the overflowing of the Portalegni and Bocchetta streams, which damaged many homes in the city centre⁸⁶. The alluvial debris carried by the streams partly blocked the operation of the port of Messina. Proposals to open the port again were

⁸² ORAZIO TURRIANO, *Memoria Istorica del Contagio della Città di Messina dell'anno MDC-CXLIII* (Napoli, 1745); FRANCESCO TESTA, *Relazione istorica della peste che attaccossi a Messina nell'anno 1743* (Palermo, 1745); GIUSEPPE RESTIFO, *Peste al confine. L'epidemia di Messina del 1743* (Palermo, 1984).

⁸³ SALVATORE BOTTARI, "Relations between Sicily and Great Britain in 1750-1800: the interplay of culture and economy", in CARMEL VASSALLO, MICHELA D'ANGELO (eds.), *Anglo-Saxons in the Mediterranean. Commerce, Politics and Ideas (XVII-XX Centuries)* (Malta, 2007), 83-84.

⁸⁴ BOTTARI, "L'ingresso nella modernità", 159-162.

⁸⁵ GIOVANNA ANASTASI MOTTA, "La compagnia di commercio di Messina del 1753", *Annali della Facoltà di Economia e Commercio, Università di Messina*, X, No. 1 (1972), 20-36.

⁸⁶ GAETANO OLIVA, *Annali della città di Messina*, vol. V, (Messina, 1892), 34-35.

heavily debated in the press of the day. Three years later, on July 6, 1757, there was a rainstorm with strong winds⁸⁷. It lasted just a few hours, but it was so intense that the streams overflowed and flooded many ground-floor homes causing casualties and huge damage. The Senate was forced to allocate large funds to solve the most urgent problems.

As for maritime trade, despite Messina's downsizing, coastal navigation still survived, as did trade on board small vessels and especially feluccas⁸⁸. They soon became the means for Messina's merchants to project themselves at sea: feluccas (about 15 meters in length) were suitable for navigation along Sicily's and Calabria's coasts and for longer journeys along Mediterranean routes⁸⁹.

The major traffic was dominated by foreign fleets, but there was a return of the Genoese fleet⁹⁰. On May 20, 1770 Patrick Brydone wrote that the port of Messina had many boats and that three of them had set sail in the morning to guard the coast against raids by Barbary pirates who targeted the southern shore especially⁹¹. Two days later, in another letter, he described the road between Giardini and Messina noting that the Strait was "covered with chebecks, galleys, galliots and a quantity of fishing boats"⁹².

The demand for silk on international markets started to grow again including the demand for Sicilian silk and it was matched by a widespread rise in prices. Between September 1764 and August 1765, the export of raw and semi-finished silk amounted to 177,789 lbs from the port of Messina as opposed to the 116,231 lbs from the port of Palermo⁹³. According to the British consul in Messina, George Tatem, about 200 bales per year of raw silk and *organzine* were sent directly to Britain⁹⁴. It should be noted that, while silk exports witnessed a recovery in absolute terms, this greater foreign demand was covered mainly by Piedmont in terms of percentage⁹⁵.

⁸⁷ OLIVA, *Annali della città di Messina*, 42-43.

⁸⁸ GAETANO CINGARI, "Uomini e navi nell'area dello stretto di Messina nel Settecento", in ROSALBA RAGOSTA (ed.), *Le genti del mare Mediterraneo* (Napoli, 1981), 1003-1029; and also SERGE COLLET, *Uomini e pesce. La caccia al pescespada tra Scilla e Cariddi* (Catania, 1993), 114-115.

⁸⁹ GAETANO CINGARI, *Scilla nel Settecento: «feluche» e «venturieri» nel Mediterraneo* (Reggio Calabria, 1979), 19-29, 43-53.

⁹⁰ ORAZIO CANCELILA, *Impresa, redditi, mercato nella Sicilia moderna* (Roma-Bari, 1980), 282-283; ROSARIO BATTAGLIA, "Attività commerciali nei porti della Sicilia tra Settecento e Ottocento", in SIMONCINI (ed.), *Sopra i porti di mare*, 123-124.

⁹¹ PATRICK BRYDONE, *A tour through Sicily and Malta in a series of letters to William Beckford, Esq. Of Somerly in Suffolk* (London, 1773), 53-95.

⁹² BRYDONE, *A tour through Sicily and Malta*.

⁹³ TRASELLI, *Ricerche sulla seta siciliana*, 214.

⁹⁴ The National Archives (TNA), Public Record Office (PRO), Colonial Office (CO), 388/95, Letter from George Tatem to the Board of Trade, Messina 14 May 1765.

⁹⁵ MICHEL MORINEAU, "Il commercio settecentesco tra Francia e Italia", *Rivista Storica Italiana* XCV, No. 2 (1983), 350-388.

Other exports included: oils, manna, Lipari raisins, wines, Spanish fly powder (cantharides), and tartar. In 1770 the French Vice Consul D'Armeni wrote that about 79,000 lbs of Sicilian silk reached France from the port of Messina, while silk exports were also sent to Piedmont, Britain and Livorno⁹⁶. The unknown author of a memoir dated 1779 estimated that Sicilian silk production amounted to about 1,300 bales, 500 of which were produced in the territory of Messina⁹⁷. Since the weight of each bale, as stated by the author, amounts to approx. 300 lbs, total production stood at about 390,000 lbs. The 150,000 lbs produced in the Messina area accounted for slightly more than 38% of Sicily's silk production.

Tatem's account also inform us that trade registered a period of decline in Sicily and in particular in Messina because products exported from Calabria were now being shipped from the port of Naples predominantly⁹⁸. Moreover the plague of 1743 isolated Messina and led to, or at least increased, direct trade between smaller ports outside Messina and the ports of Genoa and Livorno; smuggling also continued to spread.

During the second half of the 18th century the port of Messina registered a rise in the exports of citrus fruit, citrus essences and wine produced both in the Milazzo area and in the territory between Mascali and Acireale⁹⁹. In the 1770s, when the Tuscan abbot Domenico Sestini came to Messina, he was impressed by the great number of British, Dutch, Danish and Russian ships that called at Messina to load citrus fruit and its by-products¹⁰⁰. Sestini estimated the value of these exports at around 30,000 *onze* per annum. Some of the lemons, were salted, pickled, barrelled and sent to Russia, where lemons were used to treat leather in the tanning industry; others were squeezed and their juice was sent in barrels to England, France and Holland, where it was used to make cosmetics and dyes¹⁰¹.

The detailed account written by Herman Katenkamp (8 February 1774) is very useful in providing a clear description of the shipping movements in the port of Messina in 1773¹⁰². Katenkamp informed the British Minis-

⁹⁶ LILIANA IARIA, *Per una storia economica di Messina nel '700. Un rapporto inedito del vice-console francese M. Lallement*, Nuova Rivista Storica LII (1968), 673.

⁹⁷ ASP, Miscellanea Archivistica, s. II, No. 447, *Lettera di ignoto*, Messina June 1779.

⁹⁸ TNA, PRO, CO, 388/95, Letter from George Tatem to the Board of Trade, Messina 14 May 1765.

⁹⁹ GAETANO CINGARI, "I traffici tra l'area calabro sicula e la costa orientale adriatica nel Settecento", *Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale*, LXXV, No. 2-3 (1979), 277-296; SALVATORE LUPO, *Il giardino degli aranci. Il mondo degli agrumi nella storia del Mezzogiorno* (Venezia, 1990), 21-22; ENRICO IACHELLO, *Il vino e il mare. Trafficanti siciliani nella contea di Mascali* (Catania, 1991), 107-130.

¹⁰⁰ DOMENICO SESTINI, *Lettere scritte dalla Sicilia e dalla Turchia a diversi suoi amici in Toscana*, (Firenze, 1779-1784), vol. IV, 175-178.

¹⁰¹ ORAZIO CANCELIA, *Storia dell'industria in Sicilia* (Roma-Bari, 1995), 15.

¹⁰² TNA, PRO, State Paper (SP) 93/29, Herman Katenkamp to William Hamilton,

ter Plenipotentiary at the Court of Naples, William Hamilton, that 609 vessels landed in Messina: 40 were British, 211 Neapolitan, 39 Sicilian, 172 French, 45 Spanish, 87 Genoese, 7 imperial, 2 Dutch, 2 Greek, 2 of the Pontifical Navy, 1 Maltese and 1 Danish¹⁰³. According to the records of British consul Katenkamp, Messina was the favourite commercial port of the French. There was a greater presence of Spanish and Genoese ships in Palermo, while the Swedish would land especially in the port of Trapani where they would load the salt needed for preserving fish. As for British merchant ships, in the light of their ports of origin and the commodities composing their loads, it is clear that British goods would reach Messina directly. The vessels would reach Trapani in ballast to load salt, which would then be shipped to Britain or Newfoundland in North America or even Russia and Sweden. British merchant ships doing trade by commission would land in Palermo. In Messina British ships would predominantly unload, wool products and lead and load mainly lemons as well as silk, manna, raisins, tartar, linen rags, sulphur and wine.

In 1781 the economist Carmelo Guerra proposed revitalizing the trade in silk products with the Levant¹⁰⁴. In addition, he proposed that an important role could be played by the relaunch of the free port.

On February 5 1783, Messina and most of Calabria were hit by a terrible earthquake¹⁰⁵. About 700 people out of more than 40,000 inhabitants died in Messina, while the ruins covered about half the city¹⁰⁶. Considering the intensity of the earthquake and the impact on the city's buildings and monuments, the number of victims was relatively low¹⁰⁷. However, in the following months diseases and poor hygienic conditions plagued the survivors. Moreover, many craftsmen, among whom silk weavers, were left without any work and forced to leave the city to find work elsewhere. According to estimates, the 1798 census would have counted an additional 6,000 inhabitants, had it not been for the diseases and emigration following the earthquake¹⁰⁸.

Messina 8 February 1774. On December 27th 1771, Katenkamp was appointed British consul in Sicily and the adjacent islands. See, *The annual register, or a view of the history, politics and literature for the year 1771* (London, 1772), 175.

¹⁰³ TNA, PRO, SP 93/29, Herman Katenkamp to William Hamilton, Messina 8 February 1774.

¹⁰⁴ CARMELO GUERRA, *Stato presente della città di Messina*, (Napoli, 1781), 54-68.

¹⁰⁵ AUGUSTO PLACANICA, *L'Iliade funesta. Storia del terremoto calabro-messinese del 1783* (Roma, 1982); PLACANICA, *Il filosofo e la catastrofe. Un terremoto del Settecento* (Torino, 1985).

¹⁰⁶ VINCENZA CALASCIBETTA, *Messina nel 1783*, ed. by GIOVANNI MOLONIA (Messina, 1995), 13-25.

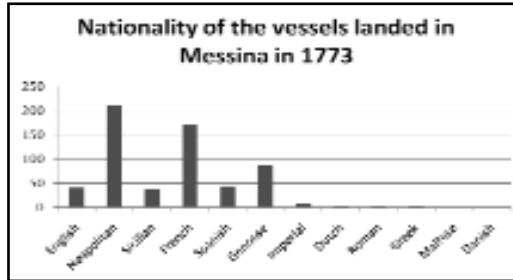
¹⁰⁷ NICOLA ARICÒ, "Cartografia di un terremoto: Messina 1783", *Storia della città*, No. 45 (1988), 7-53.

¹⁰⁸ GIUSEPPE PARDI, "Storia demografica di Messina", *Nuova Rivista Storica*, V, No. 4 (1921), 450.

Table 4. Ships arrived to the three main Sicilian Ports in the year 1773

Nationality	Messina	Trapani	Palermo	Total
English	40	38	57	135
Neapolitan	211	87	312	610
Sicilian	39	40	61	140
French	172	29	116	317
Spanish	45	4	47	96
Genoese	87	42	112	241
Imperial	7	2	8	17
Dutch	2	14	19	35
Roman	2	-	-	2
Greek	2	-	-	2
Maltese	1	1	-	2
Danish	1	12	12	25
Swede	-	32	8	40
Total	609	301	752	1662

Source: TNA, PRO, SP 93/29, Herman Katenkamp to William Hamilton, Messina 8 February 1774



The city's economy was on its knees again, but it was the earthquake of 1783 – the second major disaster to hit Messina in the 18th century after the plague 40 years earlier – that set in motion the change in trend. The Bourbon government revamped the free port by providing it with the infrastructure necessary to draw large ships¹⁰⁹. In the 19th century, despite the international scenario marked by the fast growth of transoceanic trade, which downsized the commercial role played by the Mediterranean, and the situation in Sicily where Catania's economic and political growth led to the rise of a new and fierce competitor right next door, Messina was able to recover a vocation of its own and redefine its identity¹¹⁰.

¹⁰⁹ MICHELA D'ANGELO, MARCELLO SAJA, "A City and two Earthquakes: Messina 1783-1908", in GENEVIÈVE MASSARD GUILBAUD, HAROLD L. PLATT e DIETER SCHOIT (eds.), *Cities and Catastrophes. Villes et catastrophes* (Frankfurt am Main [et alt.], 2002), 122-140; ERNESTO PONTIERI, *Il Marchese Caracciolo viceré di Sicilia ed il Ministro Acton. Lettere inedite sul governo di Sicilia (1782-1786)* (Napoli 1932), 100-192; GIARRIZZO, "La Sicilia dal Cinquecento all'Unità d'Italia", 565-568.

¹¹⁰ MICHELA D'ANGELO, "Un «lungo Ottocento»: 1783-1908", in MAZZA, *Messina*, 183-232. See also ROSARIO BATTAGLIA, *L'ultimo splendore. Messina tra rilancio e decadenza* (Soveria Mannelli, 2003); LUIGI CHIARA, *Messina nell'Ottocento. Famiglie, patrimoni, attività* (Messina, 2002).