The Corsican Revolution: 1729-69

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Chapter I. *Il Secolo di Ferro*

I.

In 1637, the Genoese Doge Agostino Pallavicino entered into negotiations with the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II over his proper title. Seven years prior, the Pope Urban VIII had restricted the usage of the term of "Eminence" to crowned monarchs and ecclesiastic electors. Because Genoa remained, at least theoretically, a possession of the Holy Roman Empire, this edict stripped the Genoese Doge of his traditional designation.

Though purely ceremonial, the issue assumed a particular importance due to Genoa's precarious international situation. The Republic of Genoa occupied a subservient position in the European states system of the 17th century. This had not always been the case. Several centuries prior, the Genoese flag had flown as far East as Crimea and Chios. Throughout the Middle Ages, Genoese merchants had served as intermediaries between Western Europe and the lucrative markets of the Black Sea, the Maghreb, and the Levant, and as recently as 1509, the Genoese merchant navy had carried 30% of overall traffic in the Christian Mediterranean.[1] But during the 16th century, Ottoman conquests had swept away Genoa's Eastern empire. The Republic had assuaged these losses through a close alliance with the Spanish crown and emerged as a prominent financier of Spanish foreign policy, but this arrangement required them to surrender control of their navy and foreign policy to the Habsburgs. In this context, the Genoese nobility bristled at the prospect of losing yet another vestige of their sovereignty, symbolic though it may have been.

These negotiations resolved in 1641, when the Holy Roman Emperor agreed to recognize the Doge as a sovereign monarch. The legal justification for this decision rested on Genoa's possession of the island of Corsica, the last remaining fragment of Genoa's maritime empire. Since Corsica lay outside the boundaries of the Holy Roman Empire, Imperial law held that the Genoese Doge acted as sovereign in his capacity as the ruler of Corsica. To buttress this claim, the Genoese Senate passed a decree reconstituting the island as the Kingdom of Corsica. Henceforth, the Genoese Doge would be crowned as the King of Corsica, the Palace of the Doge would be known as the Royal Palace, and Genoese currency would display the Doge's crown.[2]

[1] Graziani [2009], chapter "L'Ancien Régime Génoise", subsection "Une ville en mutation"

[2] Graziani [2009], chapter XVII "L'Ancien Régime Génoise", subsection "La crise du sys-

Despite Corsica's centrality to Genoa's pretensions of grandeur, few Genoese regarded it as anything more than a provincial backwater. The island brought few direct commercial benefits to Genoa; its administration ran a persistent deficit, and only a handful of Corsican regions exported produce on any meaningful scale. Yet geography had endowed the island of Corsica with great strategic significance to the Serenissima. Whoever controlled Corsica could easily obstruct the maritime trade routes between Italy and Spain, between France and the Levant, and between Europe and the Maghreb. Moreover, possession of Corsica allowed its occupier to project power onto mainland Italy, as France had attempted during the Italian Wars and Britain would accomplish during the French Revolutionary Wars. Throughout the Middle Ages, a large number of maritime powers had attempted to establish hegemony over Corsica: the Byzantines, the Saracens, Pisa, Aragon, and, eventually, Genoa itself. Most recently, Genoa had engaged in a fierce struggle with the Kingdom of France over the island, a struggle which culminated in two French-backed uprisings against Genoese rule in 1553-9 and 1564-9; though neither uprising succeeded in detaching the island from Genoa, the Republic incurred massive expenses (over 800,000 ducats, per the Spanish ambassador) while suppressing them. They tolerated these heavy costs, because they had no other choice; possession of Corsica represented a strategic necessity. As one Spanish ambassador wrote, "if we could make sure that there was no Corsica in the world or if we could sink it into the sea, nothing would be more pleasant; as this is impossible, Genoa must keep it. He who is master of Corsica is master of Genoa."[3]

Historians have generally viewed Genoese rule between the end of Sampiero's Wars and the outbreak of the Corsican Revolution in 1729 in an unfavorable light. Some writers have gone so far as to dub this period *Il Secolo di Ferro*, an Italian expression denoting a period of barbarism, and, as recently the 1970s and 1980s, many Corsican historians characterized Genoa as a colonial power. Two general histories of Corsica written during this period, each authored by well-respected specialists, made extensive comparisons between Genoese rule in Corsica and French colonial rule in Algeria.[4] Modern scholarship has taken a more nuanced approach. Whatever the faults of the Genoese administration, few were truly unique to Corsica. The protectionist policies towards Corsican agriculture, the high incidence of rural criminality, the regressive taxation system, and the overreliance of the state on a select clique of notables to enforce their directives all had parallels throughout the 17th and 18th century Mediterranean (and, indeed, throughout much of 17th-century Europe). Moreover, the Genoese administration did contribute substantially to the economic development of Corsica, particularly during the 1630s and 1640s. With this in mind, this chapter will attempt to examine the means by which the master of Corsica governed its dependency

tème espagnol"

[3]Quoted in Graziani [1997], p. 43

[4]Antonetti [1973] and Arrighi and Pomponi [1967].

and examine the trends that led to the outbreak of revolution in 1729.

II.

Genoese authority in Corsica emanated from the coasts and in particular from the coastal presidios of Bastia, Ajaccio, Calvi, St Florent, Algajola, and Bonifacio. The better part of Genoese administrators and troops sequestered themselves in these well-fortified villages, where Genoese commissars and lieutenants judged cases from the surrounding countryside in appeal. For historical reasons, the presidios also constituted the major political base of the Genoese regime. Most of them had originated as Genoese colonies in the Middle Ages, and their inhabitants retained hereditary Genoese citizenship. The founding statutes of these presidios accorded them with particular privileges which set them above the surrounding countryside: exemption from the the head tax (the *taglia*), reduced export duties, etc. Bound to the metropole by blood and custom, these villages spoke a dialect of Italian close to the Ligurian one, engaged in the stereotypically Genoese activities of finance and maritime trade, and were, in the words of one 17th-century commissar, "hardly distinguishable from [Genoese] subjects of the continent".[5]

Though this official exaggerated slightly, a cultural divide did persist between these coastal centers and their environs. The significance of this gap varied from place to place. In Calvi and Bonifacio, Corsicans were banned from residing in the city, and inhabitants continued to consider themselves as ethnically Genoese. By contrast, Ajaccio and Bastia had each attracted large Corsican populations. True, Bastia remained largely segregated between the Genoese quarter within the old citadel (the *Terra Nova*, approximately 2,000 inhabitants) and the Corsican quarter outside the city walls (the *Terra Vecchia*, approximately 5,000 inhabitants), but the Corsican population there had a sizable influence on city politics; a long-standing agreement guaranteed that Corsicans and Genoese would evenly split the posts on the Council of Anziani, the city's main governing body, and that the office of *podesta* (roughly equivalent to the mayor) would alternate between them. A similarly tolerant attitude prevailed in Ajaccio, where the city government had granted Genoese citizenship to all Corsicans settled there in 1592. Over the next two centuries, intermarriage between the Corsican and Genoese communities became relatively common. What's more, the settlements that clung most intensely to their Genoese identity, Bonifacio and Calvi, experienced a steady economic decline over the course of the 16th and 17th centuries, while the "open" villages of Bastia and Ajaccio grew in importance as trading centers. Thus, by the early 18th century, the traditional antagonisms between Corsicans and Genoese had been partially subsumed by more general antagonisms between urban centers and their environs.[6]

Throughout Genoese rule, a number of projects had attempted to intro-

[5] Quoted in Graziani [1997], p. 21

[6] Graziani [1997], p. 264, 280-281

duce a more substantial Ligurian presence in Corsica. These schemes had several motivations. To begin, Genoese officials harbored certain a certain chauvinism towards the Corsican population, who one governor considered "not fit for agriculture".[7] Certain officials also hoped that Corsica could serve as an outlet for the masses of impoverished Ligurian farmers who had uprooted themselves from the Ligurian countryside during the agricultural depression of the late 16th and early 17th centuries and now sought work inside Genoa proper.[8] Above all, the Genoese administration wished to repopulate Corsica's coastal plains, which had been deserted over the previous centuries due to some combination of Barbary piracy and malaria, leaving the island's most fertile lands uncultivated. During the 16th century, this tendency materialized in a series of decrees conceding coastal lands to Genoese patricians, often in exchange for the construction of coastal fortifications, though few concessionaires actually set foot in Corsica, and the agricultural output of these concessions often proved disappointing. Later, in 1587, a Decree of the Genoese Senate permitted any Genoese noble to establish a fief along the Corsican coast provided they could find Ligurian settlers to populate them. Historically presented as presented as a colonial endeavor, more recent research has highlighted the limited extent to which this decree was implemented. Only two such fiefs ever metastasized: Porette-Firumorto and Porto Vecchio. The former became an emphyteutic concession in 1701, while the latter, afflicted by malaria deaths among settlers, ceased to exist by 1662. Meanwhile, in Genoa, opponents of Ligurian colonization cited the risk of provoking the Corsican population and the loss of tax revenue associated with feoffement of state lands. By the early 17th century, the government had essentially abandoned the Decree of 1587. Whatever the intentions of the Genoese administration, the results can hardly be characterized as colonial.[9]

While efforts at establishing Ligurian settlements in rural Corsica amounted to little, a number of foreign populations did install themselves in the Corsican countryside over the 17th century. Coastal farms, for example, employed a number of seasonal laborers from Lucca to aid with the harvest, and some portion of these settled in Corsica permanently.[10] The Greek community of Paomia on the Western coast offered a more striking example. Throughout the 17th century, Greek populations fleeing the "beastliness and evil treatments" of the Ottoman Empire had established colonies throughout the Western Mediterranean, particularly in Italy, and during the 1670s, the Genoese leadership favorably received the proposals of Maniot Greek communities to settle in Corsica. Though the first expedition of Maniots to-

[7]Quoted in Graziani [1997], p. 83

[8]See Graziani [2009], chapter "L'Ancien Régime génois", subsection "Une ville en mutation"

[9]For examples of this historical view of the 1587 decree as a colonial endeavor, see Ettori [1956], Pomponi [1983], and Antonetti [1973]. For a more modern view on this topic and an overview of concessions pre-1587, see Graziani [1991].

[10]Pomponi [1983], p. 92-100

wards Liguria in 1674 concluded with the capture and enslavement of four hundred Greeks by Barbary pirates, a 1675 expedition led by the Bishop Parthenios Calgandis brought well over a hundred families to Genoa, where they obtained a concession of lands in the arid and sparsely-populated Gulf of Sagone. The eventual agreement of concession granted the Greek colonists low-interest loans to purchase agricultural equipment and finance the restoration of deserted villages, temporary exemptions from various taxes, and even some limited guarantees of religious tolerance for the Orthodox faith. This is not to say the colonists had an easy lot; disease and poor harvests literally decimated the settler population during 1675 and 1676. However, by the early 18th century, these colonists had established Paomia as a prosperous agricultural settlement, counting roughly four hundred inhabitants.[11]

Despite the presence of these Genoese and foreign populations on the coast, Genoa's politics of favoritism towards the coastal towns had its limits; Corsican society in the 18th century remained overwhelmingly rural. The various censuses of this era only provide a fuzzy picture of Corsican demographics, since they count households rather than inhabitants, but the most reliable estimates place the island's population at roughly 120,000 in early 18th century. Of these, 6,000-8,000 resided in Bastia, 4,000-5,000 in Ajaccio, 2,000-3,000 in Bonifacio, and around 1,200 in Calvi. None of the remaining coastal population centers exceeded 1,000 inhabitants. Though Bastia and Ajaccio grew throughout the 17th century, the concurrent decline of Calvi and Bonifacio counteracted this effect somewhat. The two major urban centers in the island's interior, Corte and Sartene, each counted around 1,200 inhabitants by the 18th century, but their political and economic situations differed significantly from the coastal presidios. (Though both stationed Genoese troops, these villages' permanent inhabitants were comprised primarily of native Corsicans.) Similarly, the population of foreigners in Corsica did not exceed a few thousand at any given time. This meant that the government could not rely solely on coastal populations as a political base and had to cultivate a clientèle among ethnic Corsicans.[12]

Genoa's esteem for the Corsican population tended to decline as a function of distance from the coasts. For Genoese administrators, the main metric of civilization was the extent to which a population engaged in trade, and a number of coastal zones, endowed with soil well-suited for cultivation, fulfilled this criterion. The Cap Corse, the island's Northern peninsula, exported wine in large quantities through a privately-owned merchant fleet. Similarly, the region of Balagne, situated in the island's Northwest, had over the 17th century become a major exporter of olive oil. The communities of the Eastern-coast cultivated grain in large quantities, though they remained underpopulated due to Barbary piracy and malaria. But, as one moved further inland, the coastal plains gave way to the mountainous interior. The men of the mountains produced mostly for subsistence and sup-

[11]Pomponi [1974a]

[12]Arrighi [1970], p. 23-36

plemented the products of their fields with pastoral activities. They spoke a form of Italian characterized by one French observer as "very corrupted and...mixed with Moorish words that foreigners and even polite Corsicans do not understand".[13] Genoese administrators were inclined to view these areas as economically unproductive and culturally backwards. All of this applied doubly to the *Diladimonti* (abbreviated *Dila*), the areas to the South of the island's main mountain range, as opposed to the Northern *Diquadimonti* (*Diqua*). There were exceptions, to be sure; communities such as Orezza, which played a large role in the transportation of merchandise and were intertwined with the island's larger economy, earned the administration's respect. However, the 17th-century commisar Francesco Antonio Malaspina captured the prevailing sentiment well when describing the Corsican mountains as a "barbarous country".[14] During the 15th century, this sentiment had manifested in the policy of *disabitazione*, in which various mountainous communities were expelled from their villages in order to deprive rebellious lords of supplies from the surrounding countryside. (A majority were eventually allowed to return.[15]) More recently, it had expressed itself in Genoese officials' preoccupation with increasing the coastal population, a constant fixture of Genoese agricultural policy.[16]

It is easy to overemphasize the extent of cleavages between Genoese and Corsicans, but it should also be remembered that these populations had a good deal in common - in particular the Italian language and the Catholic faith. These bound Corsicans not just to the metropole but also to the larger sphere of the West Mediterranean. Though Corsica's peasantry remained largely insular, its elites exhibited strong cosmopolitan tendencies. Since Corsica lacked a university (and had only a handful of Jesuit institutions for secondary education), Corsicans seeking intellectual betterment frequented the universities frequented the universities of early modern Italy, in particular Naples. In Marseille, a large Corsican diaspora dominated the city's trade with Algiers through the *Compagnie du Corail*, and, in Seville, Corsican merchants grew fabulously wealthy from trade with the new world. Many Corsicans also enrolled in the militaries of foreign powers, a practice Genoa resented but never fully suppressed. Between 1603 and 1662, the Pope maintained a Corsican Guard who policed the city of Rome, though a diplomatic incident ultimately forced him to dissolve the unit. A larger number still received commissions from the Republic of Venice, including a large number of future revolutionaries. (Some authors have gone as far as to speculate that familiarity with Venice's political institutions made these individuals uniquely inclined to pursue reform in Corsica.) All throughout the Mediterranean, Corsicans acquired a reputation for martial talents, an impression bolstered by the saga of Sampiero di Bastelica and his son Al-

[13]Jaussin [1758], p. 115

[14]Graziani [1997], p. 21

[15]For a discussion of *disabitazione*, see van Cauwelaert [2011], p. 136-157

[16]This analysis of Genoese attitudes towards the Corsican population is drawn primarily from Graziani [1997], page 21-35

fonso d'Ornano, the latter of whom rose to the rank of Marshal of France during the French Wars of Religion. Illustrious as they were, these emigrés highlighted an uncomfortable reality of the Genoese social order - the fact that Corsicans could attain greater status in the service of foreign powers than they could inside Genoese Corsica.[17]

III.

The revolutionary propagandist Gregorio Salvino wrote of the Genoese administration that it was "poor, ignorant, and venal" and that it "could not, did not want to, and did not manage to govern well"[18]; few historians prior to the 1970s would have substantially disagreed. The administration suffered from three fundamental deficiencies: it was understaffed, it was composed of foreigners, and its authority declined sharply as one moved inland. Nonetheless, for the 150 years between the conclusion of Sampiero's Wars and the outbreak of the Corsican Revolution, it more or less succeeded in maintaining the "Genoese Peace". It was able to do so because of the cooperation of local actors, in particular the stratum of local notables who dominated village politics. This cooperation often functioned imperfectly - indeed, these local actors were not so much subordinate to the administration as they were haphazardly grafted onto it through patronage - but when the interests of the center aligned with those of the periphery, the Genoese administration showed itself capable of a certain dynamism.

The supreme representative of Genoese authority in Corsica was the governor, a functionary appointed by the Genoese Senate who ruled from the administrative capital of Bastia. The basic duties of the governor consisted of commanding the Genoese military forces and police stationed in the isle, implementing the laws and directives issued by the Genoese Senate, and judging criminal and civil cases in final appeals. To incentivize rigorous enforcement of the laws, the governor received a fixed percentage (25%) of all fines issued during his tenure. As the island's chief magistrate, he also reserved the capacity for summary judgement, which could entail the banishment or imprisonment of suspected criminals without trial. This is not to say Genoese governors acted as despots; various institutions served to check their authority. While in office, the governor was obliged to follow the broad directives issued by him by the *Magistrato di Corsica*, a body composed of eight to ten members of the Genoese Senate; decrees of the governor which defied the *Magistrato* could be overruled by the Genoese Senate, and, at the end of each term, the governor delivered a report of his conduct before the *Sindicato*, a legal body composed of twelve Corsicans and two Genoese.[19]

Throughout his term, the governor participated in a series of ceremonies meant to convey the power of his office and, by extension, of the metropole.

[17] See Antonetti [1973], p. 296-304 and Graziani [1997], p. 23-31
[18] Salvini [1758], p. 56
[19] Antonetti [1973], p. 244-250

Each governor began their term with a procession through the Genoese quarter of Bastia, accompanied by a crowd of locals bearing crosses and banners. Upon reaching the cathedral of St Mary at the center of the village, the governor would receive the Scepter of the Kingdom from his predecessor, symbolizing the passage of the office from one figure to the next, an event celebrated in the latter half of the 17th century with a fireworks display. This imagery consciously borrowed from that of royal coronations, and, indeed, many locals regarded the governor with the same respect as they would a sovereign, obsequiously referring to the governor by his traditional title of "Excellency".[20] Ambitious notables even competed for physical proximity to the governor at state events. In one famous instance, a member of the Noble Twelve, the governor's chief advisory body, engaged in a public quarrel with the Sergeant Major of Bastia over the right to be seated in a church's choir section so as to be closer to the throne of the governor; the former eventually escalated the matter before the *Magistrato* and obtained a favorable resolution.[21]

But pageantry masked the true impotence of the governor and of the administration in general, an impotence which stemmed above all from the lack of administrative continuity in the upper levels of government. Post-1528 Genoese political institutions had been designed with the almost singular intention of preventing factional strife, and they accomplished this primarily by limiting the power of individual officials. As such, governors, lieutenants, and commissars each served terms of two years and could not occupy the post again for at least ten years after their departure. This had the corollary of obstructing long-term planning, since the upper posts of the island's administration changed hands biennially. Antoine Marie Graziani gives the construction of a pier for Bastia's port as an example of this phenomenon; Genoese functionaries initially conceived the project at the end of the 16th century and even drew up a preliminary design in 1602, but the constant turnover of Genoese officials meant that it was not realized until 1668.[22]

A large body of professional bureaucrats under the governor's direction probably could have overcome this deficiency, but governors rarely commanded more than a few dozen administrative officials. The most important among these were the Vicario, who advised the governor on judicial matters and judged appeals in his absence; the *Bargeli*, who headed the rural police force (*sbirri*); and the *Fiscale*, who oversaw substantial criminal investigations. Financial matters fell under the aegis of the *Sindico della Camera*, a small body of officials periodically appointed by the *Magistrato*, who in turn appointed provincial tax collectors and allocated funds according to the government's wishes. The remainder of the governor's direct subordinates served as notaries. At the provincial level, the bureaucracy was even more skeletal. Each of Corsica's ten provinces possessed a Genoese-appointed lieutenant or

[20]Graziani [1997], p. 464-466
[21]Franzini [2017], p. 51-53
[22]Graziani [1997], p. 56

commissar who, like the governor, had at their disposal a handful of troops and a few notaries. One of these, the Commissar of Ajaccio, functioned more or less as the supreme Genoese representative in the *Dila*, acting as the judge of final appeal within that region. The men occupying these posts were not, by and large, professional bureaucrats, and few of them relished abandoning the metropole to serve in Corsica. In fact, the Genoese nobility proved so reticent to accept posts in Corsica that the Genoese Senate eventually passed legislation stipulating a large fine for those who refused appointments there.[23] The limited Genoese military presence in the island, which peaked at 3,000-4,000 in the immediate aftermath of Sampiero's War and continuously diminished thereafter, similarly limited the administration's freedom of action. At the time of the Revolution, the government commanded perhaps 500 troops, almost entirely garrisoned in the coastal presidios. Worse still, these troops consisted almost entirely of infantry, who could not quickly travel in the island's mountainous interior.[24] The administration could also count on a small force of rural police (the Barigeli), but they too were concentrated primarily around Bastia (72 of 159).[25] These personnel shortages seriously hindered the administration's ability to project power in the Corsican interior.

In many contemporary European states, the central government relied on the nobility to extend their authority over the countryside. In Corsica, however, the traditional nobility, the *Cortinchi* and *Cinarchesi*, had sunk into irrelevance by the early 18th century. The *Diqua* had liberated themselves from seigneurial rule as early as 1358, when a popular revolt against the seigneurs had brought the area under Genoese rule in exchange for protection against the deposed seigneurs. True, certain institutions of nobility had reasserted themselves in the following centuries, with popular leaders assuming the hereditary title of *caporali*, but the prerogatives of the *caporali* were limited in comparison to the old nobility and declined further during the *Secolo di Ferro*. In the *Dila*, the *Cinarchesi* seigneurs remained in power for some time longer thanks to Aragonese aid, but the Genoese conquest of 1483 forced them too to submit to Genoese rule. Subsequent revolts by the seigneurs of Leca and la Rocca resulted in the dissolution of the island's two largest fiefs; shortly thereafter, the Genoese administration absorbed seigneur's judicial powers and banned arbitrary taxation. Genoese jurists even conspired to fragment disloyal fiefs through legal machinations; since Corsican custom guaranteed all heirs an equal right to inheritance, these jurists could selectively apply the right to equal inheritance against fiefs they considered disloyal, while allowing loyal seigneurs to conserve their patrimony in tact.[26] The decline of the traditional nobility further accelerated in the aftermath of Sampiero's War, when the administration attainted large swaths of nobles who had rebelled against them. Finally, in 1614-5, a peas-

[23]Graziani [1997], p. 56-69
[24]Graziani [1997], p. 70-71
[25]Serpentini [2003], p. 14
[26]van Cauwelaert [2011], p. 243-260

ant uprising in Taravo extinguished what little remained of Corsican feudalism. The peasants of Taravo assassinated several dozen members of the families of Bozzi and Ornano, and, in the aftermath, Genoa bought out most of their remaining holdings. Similar purchases in the Cap Corse brought many of those fiefs under direct Genoese jurisdiction.[27] By the 18th century, vassals represented only a miniscule population of the Corsican population; the most significant remaining seigneurs, the Istria family of the *Dila*, held only 1000 or so vassals, and the handful of remaining seigneurs in the Cap Corse (all descended from Genoese) held no more than a few hundred each.[28] Of course, some seigneurial families remained relevant as large land owners, and most held onto some pride in their lineage. (A large number of prominent families even added "Colonna" to their surnames in the 16th and 17th centuries to emphasize their supposed descent from Ugo Colonna, the mythical figure who reconquered Corsica from the Sarrasins and from whom the *Cinarchesi* supposedly descended.[29]) However, on the whole, the landed nobility in 18th century Corsica enjoyed far fewer privileges and far less political power than their counterparts in most of Europe.

The centuries-long decline of the traditional nobility facilitated the emergence of remarkably democratic institutions at the village level. The central administrative unit of Corsican life was the *pieve*, a jurisdiction grouping together one or several villages typically situated within the same parish; the *pieve* system had existed intact since the period of Pisan domination, even as other Italian states abandoned it due to demographic growth. At some time in the Middle Ages, the *pievi* of the *Terra di Cumunu* began holding periodic assemblies to regulate the usage of communal lands, and, over the course of the 14th and 15th centuries, these assemblies assumed most functions of basic governance: the collection of tithes, the enforcement of the law, the maintenance of the roads, etc. The assembly even deliberated on appropriate dowries for brides. From the late 16th century onwards, parish assemblies increasingly delegated these functions to elected officials, in contrast to the direct democracy which characterized earlier periods. The annually-elected offices of the *Padri dei Cumunu* and *podesta* emerged within the late 16th century; the latter initially served as a form of magistrate, but, as the 17th century progressed, the role increasingly resembled that of a mayor. In some some areas, these officials served only a single village, while, in others, they had authority over the entire *pieve*. From 1557 until 1715, the *podesta* of each *pieve* also participated in the election of the Noble Twelve, an advisory body to the governor which in fact counted eighteen members (twelve from the *Diqua* and six from the *Dila*). Although mostly ceremonial, the Twelve could appoint a pair of orators to attend sessions of the Genoese Senate, and the governor frequently relied on the Twelve to serve as a liaison with local governments.[30] These institutions inspired variable reactions from contem-

[27] Graziani [1997], p. 132-138
[28] Antonetti [1973], p. 282-284
[29] van Cauwelaert [2011], p. 349
[30] Lamotte [1956]

poraries. Writing about the Corsican *podesta* system as it existed under the Corsican Republic, the English writer James Boswell stated "I look upon it as the best model that hath ever existed in the democratical form".[31] The French Count de Marbeuf took a slightly more cynical view, writing that "all the conditions" in Corsica were "confused by the spirit of equality".[32]

These men perhaps overemphasized the democratic character of Corsican government. In reality, hereditary privilege continued to permeate Corsican politics, albeit in subtler forms than on the continent. The composition of local electorates, which varied substantially between time and place, demonstrates one key limitation of this local democracy. Though some communities, such as Belgodere and Morosaglia, even allowed women to vote, this was never a universal nor a common practice, as certain 19th century authors would claim.[33] By the 18th century, most villages' electorates consisted exclusively of males or male notables. A classic study by Pierre Lamotte claims that these communal franchises generally contracted during the 17th and 18th centuries, possibly as a consequence of Genoese agricultural reforms. Lamotte contrasts the 1585 elections of Piezolle, Francolaccie d'Orezza, Belgodere, and Morosoglia, which practiced universal suffrage, with the 1768 elections of Zicavo, in which only 17 male notables participated.[34]

The disparity between romantic visions of Corsican politics and the reality appeared even more blatantly in the island's clan system. At each level of Corsican society, political competition manifested as a bipartite struggle between a ruling faction (partitu) and its opposition (contrapartitu). Each of these factions (clans) was linked together through some combination of kinship and economic dependency. Kinship relations, which took the form of marriage among social equals and baptismal relations between members of different classes, served to reinforce and perpetuate the bonds of a clan, and economic dependency arrangements brought political clients (seguaci) into the orbit of clan leaders (capi). The nature of these economic relations varied according to the local economy; in coastal regions, the capi often employed their seguaci as sharecroppers, while, in pastoral regions, capi often recruited seguaci as shepherds for their flocks. In all cases, the distribution of economic resources played a key role in determining political loyalties. As one 19th century capo described:

> I give my life, and I could almost say [I give] my fortune, to our clients, and our clients give us their voices...Our properties are, like all properties of the island, aside from those of the Eastern coast, very fragmented. We have some in a dozen communes. They are rented to 50 households...under very mild conditions for which we rarely demand rigorous execution. These 50 households who make their living [thanks to] us are entirely devoted to us.

[31] Boswell [1768], p. 161
[32] Quoted in Carrington [1985], p. 174
[33] For an example of authors promoting this idea, see Bartoli [1866]
[34] Lamotte [1956]

> Here are almost 200 voices already. I have said that our lands are very fragmented. In certain villages, our lands are so thoroughly mixed with those of the rest of the inhabitants that if we banned them to pack animals, grazing would be impossible for everyone. The soils remain fallow for one year, often two years, out of every three; during this time, we allow free grazing. Our woods are likewise unused; any of our friends who wish can go there. This tolerance, indispensable to our way of life, guarantees us three hundred more votes. They form...the core of our loyalists...Once they would have followed us to war; now, they follow us to the ballot.[35]

Of course, the continued privatization of communal lands following the French Conquest had exacerbated the political domination of large landowners, so this quote presents a reality somewhat more extreme than existed under Genoese rule. During the Genoese period, the political system characterized by distribution of personal lands in exchange for political favors applied primarily to those areas of the island where privatization of communals lands was the furthest advanced. But even in regions with high shares of communal lands, clan leaders had ample opportunities to buy political loyalty from the distribution of agricultural territory, since elected political officials such as the *podesta* and guardiani oversaw and enforced the distribution of communal territory. Taken together with restrictions on the suffrage, the influence of these clans over the political process diluted the democratic character of Corsican local politics. This should not be taken to mean that Corsican egalitarianism existed only in the imaginations of Whig authors, but, in many regions of the island, a small number of number of notables monopolized local offices.[36]

It was in these rural notables that Genoa found their clientèle. The administration had several tools at their disposal to buy the loyalty of powerful rural Corsicans. Just as Bastian notables affirmed their social status through physical proximity to the governor, rural notables sought the title of *Benemerito* as a form of social differentiation. Being recognized as a *Benemerito* exempted an individual and their descendants from the *taglia*, granted them the unrestricted right to bear arms, and, in certain cases, entitled them to a pension from the Genoese state.[37] In addition to these privileges, Genoa also secured notables' loyalty though the distribution of state lands. Throughout the 1630s and 1640s, Genoa introduced a number of policies and institutions aimed at the development of Corsican agriculture, chief among which was the emphyteutic concession, a means by which state and

[35]Quoted in Giordani [1976], p. 172-173

[36]This analysis of the clan system comes primarily from Lenclud [1986], Giordani [1976], and Pomponi [1977]. It should be noted that certain scholars have proposed abandoning the term "clan" to describe Corsican political factions; this document will still use it, because a majority of the literature does.

[37]Graziani [1997], p. 138-146

common lands could be privatized in exchange for guarantees of cultivation. These privatizations overwhelmingly benefited a small class of notables and helped assure the cooperation of large landowners with Genoese policy, at least for a time.[38] In their capacities as local officials, these notables played a key role in the exercise of justice and implementation of the government's decrees.

Despite Genoa's deference towards the Corsican notability, certain frictions existed between them. Foremost among these was the ban of ethnic Corsicans from serving in most government offices outside the local level. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, the Genoese administration conspired to exclude non-Genoese from most aspects of government; in 1588, the notary and registry ceased to employ those without Genoese citizenship, and, in 1624, the office of import collection followed suit. A 1612 decree proscribed the employment of any Corsican in any civil office within his native village. Nominally, these measures aimed to prevent corruption within the administration, but distrust of ethnic Corsicans following Sampiero's Wars probably played some role.[39] Though Corsican historians have never ceased to condemn these measures, more recent research has cast doubt on the stringency with which they were enforced; Antoine Marie Graziani has identified several apparent violations of these rules, particularly at the lower levels of administration. It should also be specified that the category of "Genoese citizen" included most inhabitants of the coastal presidios, including some of Corsican descent.[40] Nonetheless, these policies had the effect of depriving a large number of well-educated Corsicans of opportunities for advancement. In some sense, this formed the central contradiction of Genoese rule in Corsica. For over a century, Genoa worked to aggrandize a handful of notable families, but, by the time they acquired significant wealth and prestige, these families found themselves blocked from further advancement.

IV.

Nowhere are the fruits of this cooperation between government and notables clearer than in the economic revitalization which took place from the mid 17th century onward. By every available metric, the Corsica of 1729 produced and exported more per capita than the Corsica of a century prior. Between the periods of 1621-7 and 1688-97, Corsican merchants' requests for export licenses increased 2.5 times for cereals, 3.5 times for olive oil, and 5 times for chestnuts. Between 1575 and 1704, overall tax revenue collected by the Genoese state, a reasonable proxy for overall economic activity, tripled.[41] Certain regions even began to practice commercialized agriculture on a wide scale, the prime example being Balagne, which by the mid-17th century pro-

[38] Serpentini [2000]
[39] Antonetti [1973], p. 248-250
[40] Graziani [1997], p. 66-68
[41] Antonetti [1973], p. 263

duced over 10,000 barrels of olive oil annually and exported half towards the metropole.[42] These economic developments also had profound consequences for Corsica's social landscape, allowing rural notables to consolidate political power, and, in some sense, the social transformations which took place over the course of the 17th and early 18th centuries constitute the single greatest long-term cause of the Corsican Revolution.

This agricultural boom had its roots in the decade of intense Genoese investment from 1637 onwards, known to Genoese officials as *La Coltivatione Universale*. Following the reincorporation of Corsica as the Kingdom of Corsica that year, a renewed interest in the island's development had compelled the Genoese Senate to convene a meeting of the *Magistrato* and former governors of Corsica in order to formulate a policy of agricultural development for the island. As outlined in a September 1637 document, the Coltivatione would seek to clear land for cultivation, encourage the exportation of produce towards Genoa, and eliminate the practice of slash-and-burn agriculture. To accomplish this, the administration would distribute loans to individuals and communities, financed by an increase in the salt tax, estimated to bring an additional 12,000 *lira* in annual revenue.[43] The Noble XII received these proposals favorably, voting ten-to-one in favor of the increased salt tax, and the governor Giovan Battista Lazagna commissioned the Twelve to conduct surveys of private and communal holdings across the *Diqua*, as well as state lands which could be cultivated. The zeal of these local actors would play a large role in the success of the government's policies over the next decade.[44] A 1638 Decree from the *Magistrato* enacted this augmentation of the salt tax and set forth the basic structure of Genoese policy over the next decade. The document specifies that any individual could receive a grant of state lands in exchange for the payment of an annual fee (Canone) to the administration. These land grants would take the form of emphyteutic concessions, under which the concessionaire and their descendants received lands in perpetuity subject to their observance of certain conditions; to retain their concessions, beneficiaries agreed not to engage in slash-and-burn, to build fencing around conceded lands, to drain marshes, and to cultivate the territory. In areas designated as suitable for arboriculture, the terms of the concession often mandated that the beneficiary plant particular types of trees. The Decree also formulated the basic structure of agricultural loans, which would serve as the engine of Corsican agriculture for the next century. Any individual seeking to cultivate unused land could receive a loan of 400 *lira* loaned in 3 tranches with an annual interest of 4%. Those who planted trees in enclosed settings could qualify for loans of between 10 and 12 *lira* per tree. The scope of this investment significantly exceeded any previous Genoese efforts. From 1638 until 1644, the *Magistrato* itself agreed to finance agricultural loans, a sharp contrast with the frugality which had characterized earlier periods of

[42] Pomponi [1983], p. 103

[43] Serpentini [2000], document 16

[44] See Serpentini's analysis in the preface of Serpentini [2000].

Genoese agricultural policy in Corsica.

This investment coincided with a series of measures aimed at reshaping agricultural practices at the local level. One of the administration's major objectives was the segregation of pack animals from cultivated areas, whether those of the coastal plains or those within communities. From 1641 onward, the government mandated that each community construct enclosures for their pack animals and that herds remained outside a five-hundred-foot radius from any circoli, sown land, or vineyards. (An exception was made for Fiumorbo, an extremely pastoral region.) The punishment for violations of these policies ranged from fines between 10 and 100 *lira* to strappado. To enforce these various regulations, the government further required that each village to appoint *guardiani* in order to guard sown or enclosed fields from the incursions of livestock. The government also sought to encourage arboriculture through a series of mandates requiring each household to plant a certain number of trees in the village circoli (25 per household in the year 1639). A report from July 1642 attests to the effectiveness of these policies; in the span of just four years, Corsicans had planted 161,135 trees and vines planted. Of course, certain villages simply ignored these regulations, but, taken together, these decrees demonstrate the extent of Genoese ambitions to transform Corsican agriculture.[45]

Unfortunately, like many projects of the Genoese administration, the initial wave of investment eventually gave way to apathy. The 1643 departure of the agricultural commissar Franceso Maria Giustiani, who had directed the government's efforts over the previous five years, left the government without a dedicated bureaucracy to manage agricultural investment, and, from 1644 onward, the *Magistrato* ceased to contribute to agricultural loans. By the start of the 18th century, state-backed agricultural loans usually did not exceed 6,000 *lira* per year.[46] Historians have difficulty estimating the effects of this reduced investment, but the diminution of export duties over the first quarter of the 18th century suggests that declining Genoese investment incurred a concurrent decline in commerce.[47]

Whatever the case, these sorts of aggregate trade statistics obscured a high degree of regional variance in agricultural practices. One 18th century French visitor to the island remarked that "the Corsicans are a sober people, and provided that a household, however large it may be, has in its possession six chestnut trees and as many goats, they would not think to cultivate other crops nor to do the least commerce".[48] Clearly, the successes of Balagne and the Cap Corse had not extended to the whole of the island. Census data recorded in the aftermath of the French Conquest offers some insight into these discrepancies. Even by 1786, pastoral and agricultural practices coexisted in over 75% of communities, while a further 1.5% practiced only pastoralism. The products of this pastoral economy, which came

[45]Serpentini [2000], p. VI-XXI
[46]Serpentini [2000], p. XXVII
[47]Pomponi [1974b]
[48]Jaussin [1758], p. 202

primarily from goats and sheep, served almost entirely for subsistence and did contributed little to the island's broader economy.[49]

Even the institutions of private property had not fully penetrated the island's interior by the start of the 18th century. Within most of these communities, elected officials still managed the distribution and use of communal lands, which were partitioned between three categories: land intended for cultivation (presa), land intended for arboriculture (circoli), and woodlands, often used for grazing (foresti). Traditionally, communal institutions reallocated presa lands on an annual or biennial basis; within the portion destined for cultivation in a given period, each household received a certain allotment (lenza), while the fallow portions remained open for grazing. By the 18th century, many communities had begun to exercise primitive forms of private ownership through enclosure (chioso). Though not communal property in the traditional sense, enclosed lands did not entirely meet the standards of private property either; custom generally prevented patriarchs from alienating these lands outside of the family, and only in rare circumstances could they alienate their goods outside the community. Similar communal arrangements prevailed in the circoli, where many regions treated the land itself as a communal good but the trees planted there as private property. Pastoral practices depended entirely on this customary understanding of property rights. During the winter, shepherds displaced by mountain snows (in particular, those of Niolo, Vico, and Sartène) would descend with their flocks to graze on the coastal plains before returning to the mountain pastures for the summer. Access to these lands functioned on a first-come-first-served basis, a practice predicated on the view of uncultivated land as a common good.[50]

However, the agricultural reforms of the 18th century had resulted in a slow but steady erosion of this traditional system of land management, a process which decimated the livelihood of predominantly-pastoral communities. Even the financing of agricultural investment weighted disproportionately on pastoralists, whose diet consisted largely of meat and cheese furnished by their flocks and who therefore suffered disproportionately from increases to the salt tax.[51] But the most significant upheavals resulted from the formalization of individual and communal property rights. As Genoa awarded unclaimed lands towards concessionaires and clearly delimited communal boundaries, pressure grew for villages to cement their claim on existing territory. These incentives sparked what Francis Pomponi calls the "War of Frontiers", in which neighboring communities competed to claim potentially valuable lands at the outskirts of their communities, even if they did not have a present need for them. This, combined with the privatization of coastal lands used for summer grazing, resulted in a sharp decline in available pastures. Already in 1667, the community of Serragio could not find open space to pasture its herds, and the continued enclosure and delimitation of commu-

[49] Albitreccia [1942a], p. 52

[50] See Pomponi [2003], Lamotte [1956], Lenclud [1979], and Defranceschi [1974]

[51] Serpentini [2000], p. VII

nal lands would only aggravate this situation over the next several decades. Many pastoralists thus resorted to paying the erbatico, a grazing fee, to the landowners who occupied their traditional grazing land.[52] Occasionally, pastoralists' desperation fueled intercommunal violence. A typical case is that of Sposata valley, a fertile region frequented by Niolin shepherds. Shortly after the concession of this valley to a Genoese noble in 1704, a Niolin mob descended into the valley, destroyed its crops, and burnt several buildings. The concessionaire fled to Calvi and never returned, and the concession was cancelled in 1709, but the administration still refused to recognize the Niolins' rights to graze in the region.[53] In other instances, pastoral discontentment expressed itself in less overtly political ways, with some impoverished pastoralists resorting to banditry or brigandage.

This divergence of fortunes between communities mirrored similar processes within them. While rapid expansion of the Corsican economy enabled certain Corsican notables to accumulate large fortunes, the desire that loans be promptly repaid meant that money flowed primarily to those who already had it. Between March 1639 and September 1640 alone, the government transferred over 58,000 *lira* to just twenty-seven notables, equivalent to five year's worth of profits from the increase in the salt tax.[54] The effects of these policies become clear when consulting the aforementioned 1786 French census, which records that some 11% of the surveyed population did not personally tend to their lands, instead employing agricultural laborers or sharecroppers. Of course, the privatization of communal lands accelerated in the decades after the French Conquest, and this census did not record professional data data for much of the island's interior, where the communal regime remained comparatively in tact. Nonetheless, the extent of social stratification would seem to suggest that these processes were already well-advanced by the start of the 18th century.[55]

The Matra family typified this class of rural notables. Originally *caporali* from the region of Aleria, the Matra had lost much of their land during the 16th century but remained politically influential for some time thereafter. This political influence allowed them to reclaim a good chunk of the Alerian plain through a short-term lease in 1642, later extended to an emphyteutic concession. Over the next century, the Matra added to their fortune by exporting vast quantities of wheat and wine cultivated by a network of sharecroppers, and, by the mid-18th century, they had established themselves among "the most illustrious … and most opulent families" of the island, according to one 18th century chronicler.[56]

The burgeoning trade between Corsica and the continent also meant boom times for coastal merchants and financiers, some of whom managed to secure immense wealth by lending capital to finance trading expeditions. The most

[52]Pomponi [2003]
[53]Pomponi [1972], p. 162
[54]Serpentini [2000], p. XIX
[55]Carrington [1985]
[56]See Pomponi [1983], p. 88-91. Quote taken from Jaussin [1758], p. 201

striking example are the Favalelli, who during the latter half of the 17th century rose from provincial obscurity to become the richest merchants in Bastia.[57] Bastia in general benefited significantly from agricultural expansion; at the start of the 17th century, it ranked only as the island's tenth largest port in terms of volume exported, but within 100 years, it had become Corsica's single largest port, thanks in no small part to a series of protectionist measures implemented by Genoa.[58]

But, as notables consolidated their fortunes, a large chunk of the rural population sunk into economic dependency. In many regions, Genoese agricultural policy resulted in a vast diminution of communally-held lands. Reliable statistics during Genoese rule are sparse, but land usage statistics recorded in the immediate aftermath of the French conquest underscore the regional differences in the extent of privatization. While mountainous and pastoral regions retained large shares of collective holdings - 69.9% in Corte, 72.78% in Niolo, and 81.12% in Sevidentro - land in coastal regions had become concentrated within private holdings - 87.84% in Bastia, 82.26% in Tuda, and 60.28% in Ajaccio. Across the entire island, communal holdings had shrunk to 30.3% of sown surface area by 1769.[59] Pastoral populations did not entirely escape these trends. Though the privatization of communal lands did not affect Corsica's interior to the same extent as the coasts, the increased costs of maintaining herds due to erbatico and related fees allowed a handful of wealthy individuals to accrue large flocks. Many shepherds turned to soccida contracts, a pastoral analogue to sharecropping in which a shepherd received a fixed portion of goods (or, in some cases, offspring) produced by a flock-owner's livestock in exchange for their services.[60] This probably served to reinforce the clan system, with the owners of large flocks accruing greater political influence in their communities.[61]

Even the major beneficiaries of *La Coltivatione* harbored certain resentments against Genoese economic policy. A number of protectionist policies inhibited the flee flow of trade between Corsica and the continent. The exportation of all grains, olive oil, and wine required direct approval from the governor, who sold licenses (*tratta*) to merchants and restricted exportation in times of crisis. Certain commodities, in particular grain, could not be sold abroad before the coastal presidios – most notably Bastia, Ajaccio, Bonifacio, and Calvi – had received a set supply at a price fixed by the governor, typically low. Even when Corsican merchants did obtain permission to export grain, this could only take place from a handful of designated ports and could flow only towards Genoa.[62] Furthermore, when Ligurian harvests proved

[57]Miceli [2022]

[58]Antonetti [1973], p. 276

[59]Albitreccia [1942b], p. 119-122

[60]See Defranceschi [1974] for a general overview and Serpentini [2006], p. 967-968 for an overview of soccida contracts in particular.

[61]See the first chapter of Casanova and Rovère [1979]

[62]See Antonetti [1973], p. 255-256 and Graziani [1997], p. 99-102. Antonetti appears to misunderstand the nature of export restrictions on wine. Though the administration did

disappointing, they would often coerce or outright force Corsican merchants into selling their produce so as to supplement the metropole's supplies. For example, when the 1678 Ligurian olive crop fell short of Genoa's needs, the *Magistrato* forced every ship exporting olive oil to sell one quarter of their load to state officials at a fixed price.[63]

Corsican historiography has traditionally viewed these protectionist measures as a colonial scheme to exploit Corsica's agricultural resources for the benefit of the metropole, with historians drawing comparisons to French Algeria and the colonies of the New World.[64] The analysis of Antoine Marie Graziani has cast doubt on this interpretation. As Graziani points out, the governor's restrictions on exports via the license system functioned more often than not to ensure Corsican food security. The end of the 16th century had produced climatic conditions unfavorable to Mediterranean agriculture, and it was within this context of famine that the administration established the license system in 1592; most Mediterranean states implemented similar policies during this period.[65] Likewise, the limitation of imports and exports to certain coastal towns betrays a certain favoritism towards the coastal presidios, but these measures also had the more mundane aim of streamlining revenue collection. In short, it would be overly simplistic to describe Genoese agricultural policy in purely colonial terms.

V.

Despite the administration's achievements in agricultural development, their broader fiscal policy did little to ingratiate them with the rural population. Genoese taxation was regressive by design; exemption from the *taglia*, the 20 *soldi* household tax which represented the government's largest single source of revenue, served as an easy way to reward populations loyal to the government. Inhabitants of the presidios, former *podesta*s, the Cap Corse, *benemiriti*, and *caporali* all benefited from exemptions. This added to the already-regressive nature of uniform taxation, since the classes of individuals exempted from taxation tended to be well-off to begin with.

The founding agreements of Genoese rule in Corsica, the *deditio* of 1358 and the *Veduta di Lagu Bendettu* in 1453, provided that the Genoese government would exercise no direct taxation beyond the *taglia*, but the low level of the Corsican population made this impractical. To augment their revenue, the administration relied on a number of exceptional taxes, levied for a lim-

periodically ban exports of wine (aside from those towards Genoa) at various points, they always reversed this after some time and typically granted exceptions to large merchants in the Cap Corse.

[63]Calcagno, p. 72-74

[64]To give just one example from Antonetti [1973], p. 256, "Thus Corsica found itself in absolute dependence towards its 'legitimate lords' [Genoa]. A situation which, it is true, was not unique to Corsica, as Ambrosi has observed, since Corsica shared it with the English colonies of North America, French Canada, Mexico, and Peru."

[65]Graziani [1997], p. 99-102

ited period in order to fulfill some particular purpose. The administration had a tendency to renew these taxes long after their initial duration had elapsed. One such exceptional tax was declared in the mid-17th century to finance the construction of a new governor's palace following the relocation of the governor from Bastia to Calvi. Although the administration quickly reversed the decision to change its administrative capital, the associated tax stayed in place for sixty-six years thereafter.[66] By 1650, these supposedly temporary taxes comprised anywhere between 32% and 50% of overall direct taxation, depending on the region.[67]

Genoa was far from the only power to resort to these sorts of exceptional taxation. In effect, most early modern European states struggled to achieve consensus on the state's right to direct taxation and thus maintained the useful fiction of collecting only temporary taxes, limited in scope and duration. Habsburg Spain drew anywhere between 20-30% of its revenue in any given year from the millones, a highly regressive foodstuffs tax originally previewed to last ten years but which the Spanish parliament renewed continually from 1601 onwards.[68] Great Britain, which by the early 18th century had endowed itself with a relatively developed fiscal-military state, represented the major exception to this rule, but it had taken a century of political turbulence and two revolutions to forge a delicate consensus between the Crown and the aristocracy over the constitutional principles of taxation.[69]

Like in most of Europe, elite resistance frustrated any attempts to modernize the Corsican taxation system. Between 1560 and 1564, Genoa had experimented with transforming the *taglia* into a tax on productive goods, but pushback from the notable population and the difficulties of recording taxable wealth forced them to abandon this endeavor. (Though fiscally inadequate, a head tax was at least easy to collect and required little administrative overhead.) Instead, the state eventually settled on a doubling of the *taglia*, originally intended to last just four years but which became permanent.[70] The burden of direct taxation appears to have further increased towards the end of the 18th century. Genoese records reveal a twofold increase in the revenues of the *taglia* between 1679 and 1729, an increase which does not correspond to any comparable population growth and which cannot be explained by the minor augmentation to the *taglia* from 1715 onward. The sole remaining explanation, at least per Francis Pomponi, is that Genoese tax collectors altered their definition of "households", which, intentionally or not, resulted in a significant increase in revenue from the *taglia*.[71] In short, Genoese taxation was not only regressive but became increasingly so throughout the *Secolo di Ferro*.

[66]Graziani [1997], p. 71-72
[67]Graziani [1990], p. 60
[68]Jago [1981]
[69]Brewer [1988]
[70]Graziani [1990], p. 58-59
[71]Pomponi [1974b], p. 20-23

But the most significant chunk of Genoese revenue came from a variety of indirect taxes. The most valuable among these was the state salt monopoly, run by the Genoese Office of Salt. In 1704, this accounted for 132,296 *lira*, or 21% of overall state revenues, second only to the *taglia* (32%) as a source of income.[72] Though regressive by nature as a tax on foodstuffs, the price of salt was at least relatively uniform across regions. The same could not be said in ancien régime France, where the price of salt set by the state could vary two or three times across administrative boundaries. Similar (though less profitable) state monopolies applied to the sale of iron and steel, and consumption taxes targeted a variety luxury goods such as alcohol or playing cards. The administration also drew a sizable portion of its revenue from the sale of various rights and privileges, including (until 1715) the right to own firearms and the right to fish in ponds.

Most other forms of indirect taxation targeted trade. The *Gabella di Porto Cardo*, for instance, taxed all merchandise entering or leaving the zone between St Florent and Solenzara, encompassing most of Corsica's Eastern coast, at a rate of 5%. In 1704, this represented roughly 7% of state revenue, making it the third largest form of income overall. The next most significant customs tax, the *Gabella del Scuto al Botte*, taxed all wine exported from the Cap Corse at a rate of 1/5 of a soldi per barrel. Beyond these, the sale of export licenses (*tratta*) made up most of the state's remaining income from trade taxes.[73] Genoese taxation on trade undoubtedly had a depressive effect on commerce, though this statement merits several qualifications. Firstly, a number of regions enjoyed significant commercial advantages associated with internal and external customs barriers. Bastia managed to establish itself as the principal outlet for the produce of the Eastern plain precisely because it lay within the customs zone defined by the *Gabella di Porto Cardo*, allowing them to compete with the established merchants of the Cap Corse. Moreover, a number of individuals and communities benefited from partial or total exemptions to these taxes; many concession contracts passed with the Genoese administration exempted the beneficiaries from payment of particular import or export taxes. Lastly, a lively smuggling industry enabled an unknown but significant portion of Corsican commerce to circumvent these taxes entirely.[74]

Corsican elites preferred indirect taxation, not just because it lightened their fiscal burdens but also because of how Genoa collected these taxes. Like many early modern European states, Genoa relied on a system of tax farming, in which individuals and associations submitted bids for the right to collect indirect taxes; whoever offered the highest bid could then retain the full revenue collected over a specified duration. Such a system appealed to Genoa for several reasons. Because the income from indirect taxation yielded variable incomes due to temporary economic shocks, state revenue

[72]All financial data cited in this chapter from the year 1704 is taken from a government document republished in Cambiagi [1772], p. 337.

[73]Graziani [1990], p. 64-72

[74]Graziani [1997], p. 106-108

from indirect taxes fluctuated from year to year. With tax farming, elites assumed all this risk, and the administration received a relatively consistent income stream. The outsourcing of tax collection to private entities also allowed the state to reduce its personnel requirements. Beyond purely fiscal benefits, tax farming served to offset the population's resentment from the state towards whichever notable happened to collect a given tax at some time. Wherever employed, tax farming precipitates the transfer of the population's wealth towards private citizens, but in Corsica, it functioned in particular to concentrate wealth among the citizens of Bastia; as a study of Genoese tax revenue between 1570 and 1652 has demonstrated, the Genoese state awarded the vast majority of tax farming contracts to citizens of Bastia. Predictably, this did little to ease the traditional urban-rural tensions between the capital and its hinterlands.[75]

The final significant category of Genoese taxation consisted of labor levies, the administration's principal means of maintaining infrastructure. Each Corsican inhabitant, save notables, nobles, clergy, or the inhabitants of coastal presidios, owed three days of labor per year to the Genoese government. The uneven distribution of the population produced significant regional gaps in the quality of infrastructure, with the comparatively densely-populated *Di-qua* enjoying a much more developed road system than the *Dila*.[76] Genoa's handling of coastal defense suffered from similar issues. The state financed the construction and maintenance of coastal towers through direct taxes imposed on a regional basis, but since a region's population did not correlate perfectly with its coastline, the amount owed by each household could vary wildly. A household in Verde, for instance, paid nearly twice that of a household in Casinca.[77]

Despite the litany of direct, indirect, and exceptional taxes collected by the Genoese state, they proved completely insufficient to support the state's expenditures. Between the years 1718 and 1728, the Genoese administration ran an average annual deficit of 70,972 *lira*, or 35.9% of average annual revenues. This appears to have worsened during the early 18th century; the 1710 deficit had amounted to just 43,000 *lira*. Though the causes of this trend are poorly understood, the declining levels of state investment in agriculture during the early 18th century probably played some role in these declining revenues, a thesis corroborated by declining levels of customs income during this period.[78] In any case, this deficit ensured that Genoa's bureaucratic and military presence on the island remained minimal.

[75]Graziani [1990], p. 75-82
[76]Graziani [1997], p. 94-95
[77]Graziani [1990], p. 61
[78]Pomponi [1974b], p. 20-25

VI.

Perhaps the Corsican population could have better tolerated Genoese taxation if they felt that the state put their money to good use. However, by the 1720s, Genoa's failures to curb rural criminality had become particularly glaring. Even before the Revolution began in proper, large chunks of Corsica had already descended into intercommunal violence. This disorder manifested both in the sensational forms of vendetta and clan warfare but also in the more mundane activity of rural brigandage.

The most basic deficiency of Genoese justice was its overreliance on local actors. The responsibility to apprehend accused murderers fell directly upon local governments, and governments which failed to arrest suspects incurred a fine, the pena capitale. When soldiers ventured outside the presidios to make arrests, they were directed to discreetly consult the *podesta* and notables of a village to identify bandits and contraband before entering. Of course, this meant that recalcitrant villagers could easily obstruct the enforcement of the law. In July 1722, for instance, the governor dispatched 20 *sbirri* to Orezza in order to confiscate illicit firearms, but a crowd of women harassed the soldiers so persistently that they were forced to leave empty-handed.[79]

The unwillingness of local populations to collaborate with Genoese agents stemmed in part from a disconnect between Corsican custom and Genoese law. Like many lightly-governed societies, rural Corsica had an acute sense of honor which justified extralegal relation for perceived offenses. For instance, those who engaged in extramarital sex, whether it take the form of adultery or the seduction of a young woman without her father's consent, could face serious consequences at the hands of the village mob. One chronicler recalls an instance of a young woman who attempted to return to her father's home after having been "seduced" by a man. The woman in question was dragged through the village, bound, placed backward atop a donkey, and marched through the village as the surrounding mob jeered at her; upon leading her to a remote area, the mob deposited her in a brushland. St. Leonard of Port Maurice records another instance in which two brothers murdered their sister after having learned she was pregnant out of wedlock.[80] Certainly, this was an extreme case, but it demonstrates the importance Corsicans attached to concepts of honor. Extramarital sex constituted an affront to the honor of the patriarch, whether he be the woman's father or her husband, and therefore called for retaliation. Corsican society knew no greater affront to the honor of a family than the killing of a relative, an act which warranted and necessitated retaliation; from this notion of honor arose the practice of *vendetta*, under which the relatives of a murder victim could avenge their loss through the murder of the perpetrator or, if he could not be found, of his relatives. The prominence of the vendetta

[79]Franzini [2017], p. 37-38

[80]Both anecdotes detailed in Arrighi [1970], p. 228-229.

reflects to a large extent the failures of state justice in Corsica; since the Corsican government had never been strong enough to effectively prevent or prosecute murders, Corsicans turned instead to private justice in order to deter violence. Unsurprisingly, the proliferation of *vendetti* often provoked long-running feuds between families or clans, leading Genoese officials to resent Corsican customs as a source of disorder. One administrator from the 1680s characterized Corsican notions of honor as nothing more than a means to justify "the assassination of well-removed relatives of murderers".[81] Of course, rural populations accorded much greater importance to this customary law, so they often shielded the perpetrators of *vendetti* or other honor-related crimes from the authorities.

Corsican banditism sprung from these gaps between law and custom. A sizable number of Corsican bandits only pursued a life of criminality after committing some crime to protect the honor of their relatives or clan. In fact, the practice of fleeing to the Corsican brushland to avoid criminal charges was so ubiquitous that it spawned a French idiom in the decades after the conquest: *prendre le macquis*, or "to take to the brushland". This expression conceals the fact that many bandits continued to benefit from the support of their relatives and communities, who provided them with food and shelter; many bandits even continued to attend important social functions such as baptisms or weddings, and a good number only took to the brushland when scouts informed them of state agents in the area. In return for this support, bandits gifted the proceeds of criminal activities towards their supporters, often forging alliances with politically influential individuals. This was particularly true in pastoral communities, where gangs of bandits could help to extort lower rents from the owners of pastures. Here again, we see Corsican banditry serving to uphold customary notions of land ownership against encroaching Genoese authority.

This is not to say that bandits enjoyed the universal approval of rural communities. On the contrary, many villages grew to resent the extortion and theft committed by bandits. These conflicting sentiments crystallized in the dichotomy between "bandits of honor" and *parcittori*. While the bandit of honor only harassed state agents and those with whom he had some particular feud, the *parcittore* extorted populations indiscriminately; the word *parcittore* literally translates to "tax collector". In practice, this distinction proved rather blurry. Generally speaking, extortionate behavior increased as a function of distance from one's home village; though bandits had incentives to maintain close ties with their kin and surrounding communities, these decayed with distance.[82]

The combination of rural banditry and the weak Genoese presence in the Corsican interior resulted in a high rate of rural criminality. Unfortunately, many Corsican historians have significantly exaggerated this phenomenon

[81] Quoted in Graziani [1997], p. 158
[82] Wilson [2004]

by uncritically promoting the statistic of 900 murders per year.[83] This is a transparently ridiculous figure drawn from a 1758 revolutionary propaganda pamphlet; the murder of 900 individuals per year from a population of 120,000 would imply greater annual per-capita losses than those suffered by the UK during WWI. A more sober analysis conducted by Antoine-Laurent Serpentini has shed some light on the reality of violent crime in Corsica in the decades before the Revolution. Over the 16 years between 1690 and 1720 for which island-wide data is available, the Genoese archives record 868 murders in Corsica (averaging 54 per year), not including "accidental deaths" (a nebulous category containing both true accidents and instances of manslaughter). The murder rate reached its peak in 1704-6 with 178 murders over a 2-year period.[84] It is difficult to find accurate statistics on violent crime rates in early modern Europe, but we can safely posit that this compares unfavorably with most of 18th-century Italy, with the possible exception of Sardinia.

Genoese attempts to curtail this violence often demonstrated the weakness of their authority. Unable to curb this violence by force, Genoa instead took to negotiating peace agreements between feuding clans or communities, often including clauses of marriage between their members.[85] When the need arose to cleanse the countryside of bandits, the administration would declare an *indulto*, offering safe passage into exile for large classes of criminals convicted in absentia. It bears noting these policies were not unique to Corsica. Many regions of Spain, for instance, exercised an *indulto* system similar to Corsica's.[86]

However, by the early 18th century, the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that new measures were necessary. In 1711, the Orator of the Noble XII suggested a ban of firearms to the Genoese Senate. This was a reasonable request; as Genoese records bear out, firearms (primarily arquebuses) were used as the murder weapon in 71% of cases. Genoa initially vacillated, due to important revenue drawn from the sale of licenses to bear arms, but similar requests from the Noble XII and Noble VI in 1715 pushed them to implement an island-wide firearm ban that year. To compensate the loss of revenue from firearm sales, the administration announced an additional uniform tax of two *soldi* per household over the next year. But, as with many temporary taxes, Genoa repeatedly renewed the tax of *due seini*, which remained in place 15 years after its stated expiration date. This has led many historians to denounce the firearms ban as a cynical revenue-seeking measure with minimal effects on the island's security. The statistics reported by Serpentini present a more complex reality. In 1716-8, the period immediately following the institution of the firearm ban, the recorded homicides fell to 53, a reduction of over 60% from the previous 6 year's average, and, during the following 2-year period of 1718-20, the eight provinces for which

[83]For a recent example, see Passo [2007], p. 97

[84]Serpentini [2003]

[85]Graziani [1997], p. 164

[86]See the explanation given in footnote 61 of Serpentini [2003] for more detail

data is available experienced only 33.

Unfortunately, these gains appear to have been short-lived. Genoese record-keeping ceased in 1720, so we do not have exact data for the period immediately preceding the Revolution, but a spate of violent anecdotes from the 1720s point to a decay in public order. In June 1725, a band of 50 men from Santa Maria d'Ornano, armed with swords and daggers, ambushed and disarmed a group of 5 soldiers. The subsequent year, a number of attacks led by bandits from Rostino and Ampugnani targeted arms depots in the Cap Corse, and, later that year, bandits seized the tower of Cagnano, beat the guard, and stole the arms stored there. In 1729, a prolonged feud erupted between two clan leaders, Fabio Vinciguerra and Giovanni Gavini, and left several dead. The governor declined to intervene with troops, apparently for fear of escalating the situation; instead, he proceeded to arm Gavini's supporters in blatant defiance of the ongoing firearms ban.[87] No doubt this appeared to Genoese administrators as little more than the rural criminality – the "barbarous cruelty of the population", in the words of the governor from 1729-30.[88] But, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see how this breakdown in public authority augured the revolutionary riots of 1729.

VII.

A large number of Corsican historians have sought to explain the Corsican Revolution in 1729 by emphasizing the exceptional characteristics of Genoese rule in Corsica. Under this view, the onset and duration of the Corsican Revolution are linked to the uniquely exploitative character of Genoese rule. Pierre Antonetti provides a typical example of this analysis in his 1974 *Histoire de la Corse*:

> If we admit that, all things considered, the Genoese peace was beneficial for Corsica, how can we then explain that, in 1729, there suddenly began, for an apparently futile reason, a forty-year war which quickly took on the character of a national uprising? Here is a comparison which will perhaps be the beginning of an answer. Algeria was also calm, prosperous, in full agricultural and urban development, when, in November 1954, some "outlaw" groups triggered an insurrection which no one understood at first and which ended eight years later in the way we all know. And if by chance, *mutatis mutandis*, the same was true of Corsica and the Genoese peace? "Comparison is not reason", assuredly. But, if history never repeats itself, it is no less true that we cannot write that of Corsica without referring to our experience of the colonial fact. No one disputes today that the occupation of Corsica by Genoa is precisely defined as "colonial".[89]

[87] Franzini [2017], p. 35-43
[88] Pinelli [1730], p. 38
[89] Antonetti [1973], p. 241

However, when examining Corsican society and government on the eve of the Revolution, one can find grievances among the Corsican population that did not also apply to contemporary European states. Though Genoese taxation and trade policy were regressive and inefficient, the same was true in France, Spain, and virtually every other state on the European continent. Banditry and brigandage, while comparatively prevalent in Corsica compared to the continent, represented a reality of rural life throughout Europe. Even the most apparently onerous feature of Genoese rule, the bans on Corsicans from occupying state positions, was not universally enforced and had parallels in various Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, the grievances which pushed Corsicans to revolt in 1729 overlapped significantly with those that brought France into revolution six decades later.

But if we accept that the defects of the Genoese administration in Corsica mirrored similar defects across Europe, this begs the question of why Corsica attempted to shed its ancien régime decades before comparatively advanced societies such as France. Corsica at the start of the 18th-century displayed few of the characteristics associated with revolutionary societies; its literacy rate remained low, and, though it possessed a small urban bourgeoisie, this class was comparatively small compared to the France of 1789 or the England of 1641. In my view, the work of Franco Venturi (one of the few non-specialists to have taken an interest in the Corsican Revolution) does the best job of synthesizing these views. As Venturi writes in his Settecento Riformatore, the 18th-century crisis of Europe's old order had its roots in the periphery of Europe. The ancien régime decayed first in those places where its authority was weakest, "on the margins of traditional states and empires", in places such as Greece, Bohemia, the Cossack regions of the Volga, and Corsica. Only after several decades did this momentum reach the center of Europe, culminating in the French Revolution of 1789.[90] With this in mind, the remainder of this document (change this when you find a better word) will trace the development of the Corsican Revolution from its early stages in the fiscal riots of 1729 until the collapse of the Corsican Republic in 1769. Though the revolutionaries did not ultimately succeed in establishing an independent Corsican state, the ideology and rhetoric of these Corsican revolutionaries with offer valuable insight into the broader trends which shook 18th century Europe. In the words of Voltaire, "all of Europe is Corsican".

[90]Venturi [1991]

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