

Hiperborea

Volume 10, Issue 2
December 2023

Bruno Figliuolo. *Dal Mar Nero al delta del Nilo: I Pisani e i loro commerci nel Levante (secoli XIII-XIV)*.

UDINE: FORUM, 2021. 139 PP.

[*From the Black Sea to the Nile Delta. Pisans and Their Trades in the Levant (13th-14th Centuries)*]

<https://doi.org/10.5325/hiperborea.10.2.0251>

Pisa, the historical rival of Genoa and the Kingdom of Aragon for supremacy in the western Mediterranean, also played a major political role in the East, where the presence of Pisans is documented starting from the First Crusade (1096-1099).¹ Notary deeds, city chronicles, and hagiographic literature highlight the nature of this presence and its importance and evolution over time. Particularly significant Pisan sources include the ancient

parchments conserved in the archives of the charterhouse of Calci;² the annals by Bernardo Maragone;³ and especially the life of St. Rainier, the patron saint of Pisa, as told by his disciple Benincasa in the twelfth century. After arriving in the Holy Land to trade in cheese, Rainier discovered his true way by divine inspiration, left his business partners, and took up a life of prayer and penance. It is said that he worked several miracles after death, saving merchants from illnesses and shipwrecks.⁴ The choice of a merchant saint as patron speaks volumes about the identity of this Tuscan city.

The book by Bruno Figliuolo explores the commercial activities of Pisans in the Levant from the earliest written sources to the end of the fourteenth century and fills a gap in the historiography of economy and trade in the medieval Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Based on published and unpublished sources conserved in Pisa, Siena, Genoa, Venice, and Messina, the book is divided into twelve chapters: “Historiography and Available Documents;” “Pisans in the Levant Until 1270;” “From 1270 to 1290: Relations with *Romania* and the Black Sea;” “Pisans in Laias in the 1270s;” “In Egypt from 1270 to 1290;” “The Pisan Presence in Acre Until the Fall of the City (1291);” “Pisans in Egypt from the End of the 13th to the End of the 14th Century;” “In Greece, *Romania*, and the Black Sea in the 14th Century;” “In Cyprus from 1291 to the End of the 14th Century;” “For an Overview of the City’s Mercantile World;” “An Attempt to Summarize;” “Conclusion.” The sequence of the chapters follows Pisans’ main travel destinations in the East: the Byzantine Empire (Constantinople), Genoese Crimea (Caffa, Sudak), the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia (Laïas), Mamluk Egypt (Alexandria, Damietta), Palestine (Acre), and Cyprus (Famagusta, Limassol).

In these Eastern markets, Pisan traders sold Western products (clothes, wines) and bought Oriental goods (grain, slaves, jewels, hides, fox cloaks, wax, gallnuts, sugar, cotton, pepper) to be resold in other Levant sites, in Italy, or in Provence. Pisans were also involved in trading timber and iron from Cilician Armenia to Acre, Syria, and especially Egypt. After the Arab conquest of Acre in 1291, the hub of Western trade in the East moved from Palestine to Cyprus, where Tuscan merchants continued to do excellent business until the early years of the fourteenth century, when their presence in the Levant began to decrease until disappearing almost completely in the second half of the century. According to Figliuolo, it was neither a decline because of the Pisan military defeat in the war against Genoa (1284) nor a slow fading due to competition by Genoese and Venetian merchants, as other scholars think. The Pisans abandoned

their Eastern markets because of a reorganization of Pisa's entire economy "based on finance, on some high-quality productions (such as hides and clothes), and on medium-range commercial distribution, taking advantage of the extraordinary rise of the Florentines and the equally extraordinary position of Porto Pisano,"⁵ the Republic of Pisa's main seaport on the Ligurian Sea.

The text is integrated with tables concerning commodities, trade routes, types of ships, and investment amounts. The book concludes with an appendix containing biographical information on 370 Pisans (listed in alphabetical order) who were active in the East from 1245 to 1400.

With its prosopographical approach, *From the Black Sea to the Nile Delta* is not only an innovative historical essay on Pisans and their trades but also a useful model for reconstructing the presence of other Italian merchants (for example, Anconitans, Astesans, and Mantuans) in the Levant.

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NOTES

1. Emilio Cristiani, "Pisa: repubblica marinara," in *Tuttitalia: Enciclopedia dell'Italia antica e moderna: Toscana* (Florence: Casa Editrice Sansoni and Novara: Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 1965), 566–585; *Genova, Pisa e il Mediterraneo tra Due e Trecento*. Per il VII centenario della battaglia della Meloria. Atti del convegno. Genova, 24–27 ottobre 1984 (Genoa: Società Ligure di Storia Patria, 1984); Michael Mitterauer and John Morrissey, *Pisa nel medioevo: Potenza sul mare e motore di cultura*, Italian ed. (Rome: Viella, 2015) [German ed.: Michael Mitterauer and John Morrissey, *Pisa: Seemacht und Kulturmetropole* (Essen: Magnus Verlag, 2007)]; Antonio Musarra, *1284: La battaglia della Meloria* (Bari: Laterza, 2018).

2. Bruno Figliuolo, "Pergamene due-trecentesche della Certosa di Calci rogate in Levante," *Crusades* 20 (2021): 185–200.

3. Bernardo Maragone, "Gli Annales Pisani," in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, ed. Michele Lupo Gentile (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1930–1936).

4. Gabriele Zaccagnini, *La «Vita» di san Ranieri (secolo XII): Analisi storica, agiografica e filologica del testo di Benincasa. Edizione critica dal codice C181 dell'Archivio Capitolare di Pisa* (Pisa: ETS, 2008).

5. Bruno Figliuolo, *Dal Mar Nero al delta del Nilo: I Pisani e i loro commerci nel Levante (secoli XIII–XIV)* (Udine: Forum, 2021), 86.