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MARCO MARIANO

Trade, Liners, Treaties. Piedmontese Consuls in the Long Atlantic, 1819-1838

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Resumen

The article discusses the role played by Piedmontese consuls in the US to facilitate the economic and political integration of Piedmont in the Atlantic world of the post-Restoration years. It shows that their effort to promote commercial exchanges with the United States often found strong local resistance but, nonetheless, helped undermine protectionist policies and international isolation in the following decades.

Furthermore, their quest for Atlantic integration was the ultimate outcome of flexible adaptations and creative interpretations of the official policies formulated by the political and diplomatic establishment. This case study, then, prompts further investigation on how consular networks in Europe and the Americas worked as a connective tissue between state actors and transnational forces in the shaping of commercial and political relations across the Atlantic since the first half of the 19th century.

Entradas del índice

Keywords : Atlantic trade, commercial treaties, consular networks, Italian states, United States

Texto integral

- 1 In 2004, in a thought-provoking essay on the origins, present state, and future prospects of Atlantic history, Donna Gabaccia urged practitioners of the sub-field not to fall prey to “parochial globalism” and challenged them to broaden the geographical scope and deepen the chronological range of their inquiry. In her view, criticism of the Atlanticist paradigm by world and global historians which emphasized the connections and interactions between world regions would not lead to a demise of Atlantic history but rather to its reconfiguration. The Atlantic did not come to an end as a historical space and unit of analysis at the end of the 18th Century; rather, “the very changes that undermined the earlier Atlantic ‘world’ were creating a new Atlantic, with a new geography, and place in the world” in the 19th Century.¹
- 2 Several years after her case for a new periodization of Atlantic history in the light of the changing place of the Atlantic in the wider post-1800 world, research on a “long Atlantic in a wider world” is still the exception, rather than the rule. On the one hand, a significant amount of the research conducted by world and global historians on the circulation of commodities, people, and ideas in the 19th Century either does not embrace, or explicitly rejects, the Atlantic paradigm. On the other, Atlanticist historians and academic institutions stick by and large to the traditional periodization of early modern history. This is hardly surprising, given that Atlantic history as we know it is mostly the outcome of a convergence of three research strands firmly rooted in early modern history, namely the history of the transatlantic slave trade, the history of colonial societies in the Americas, and the history of transatlantic empires.²
- 3 In this essay I discuss, from a peripheric-local, rather than a world-global, perspective, how the “new Atlantic” that was being shaped in the first half of the 19th Century – as a consequence of the overlapping of and interaction between technological advances, trade, the circulation of economic and political ideas, and the geopolitical framework generated by the Atlantic revolutions, the American independences, and European Restoration – affected the Kingdom of Sardinia (Piedmont). I assume, therefore, the time-tested perspective of cis-Atlantic history, which concentrates on “the history of any particular place – a nation, a state, a region, even a specific institution – in the wider Atlantic world.”³ At the same time, I challenge prevailing assumptions about spatial and chronological range by focusing on how developments in the 1820s and 1830s started to partially integrate a small, peripheric state of Mediterranean Europe into the dense network of economic, political, and cultural exchanges spanning the Atlantic.
- 4 A turning point of such integration is the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation between the US and the Kingdom of Sardinia, signed in 1838, which followed a number of similar treaties signed by the US and European monarchies since the 1820s and was the first between an Italian state and an American republic. The treaty, which led to an increase in transatlantic trade through the port of Genoa, was a significant step toward the adoption of liberal economic policies by the Piedmontese government which, in turn, paved the way for the wider liberal turn of the 1840s and 1850s.⁴ However, its premises are, for the purpose of this study, at least as important as its consequences. Diplomats, consuls and merchants, ideological concerns and commercial opportunities, technological advances and deep-rooted mental maps concurred to lay the groundwork not only for the 1838 treaty but also for a more general reconfiguration of the Atlantic landscape after the Restoration. It is to the early stages of the formation of this landscape, observed from the vantage point of Turin and Genoa, that we now turn.

Atlantic beginnings

- 5 A combination of factors “from below” and “from above” connected Piedmont to the Americas after 1815. While the former have been investigated by scholars working on the early stages of Italian migration to the New World and on the diasporas of Italian exiles, the latter are largely ignored. The early stages of migration from Liguria to the Plata region date back to the end of the 18th Century; however, significant communities in Buenos Aires and Montevideo and trade routes between Genoa and the Plata region took shape after the 1820s. In the following decades the Ligurian presence spread along the Pacific coast in Valparaiso, Lima and eventually reached San Francisco with the gold rush of the late 1840s, while a few hundred Italians settled in New York, Philadelphia, and New Orleans.⁵ Thus, tens of thousands of Ligurian merchants, sailors, artisans, and exiles had settled in the New World and created links with their homeland which paved the way for a massive increase in trade and migration in the second half of the nineteenth century. From the last years of the *ancien regime*, then, an “American dimension” gradually became part of the mental maps of Ligurians from different cultural and class backgrounds, who came to consider the New World as a resource, as just another option available in their quest for business, political freedom, personal emancipation, or draft dodging.⁶
- 6 Similarly, an American dimension was changing the international outlook of Piedmont. It was at this time, after the Congress of Vienna, that the former Republic of Genoa was transferred to the House of Savoy, which was among the most ardent champions of the legitimist order set up by the great powers of Europe. As a consequence of this annexation, Turin found itself with an open door to the Mediterranean and the Atlantic at a time when political and commercial relations between Europe and the Americas were being reshaped by the “Western question.”⁷ As the wave of independences across Latin America was leading to the creation of new republics and the end of the war between the US and Britain was reopening trade routes, major European powers competed with each other and with the United States to gain influence and commercial opportunities in Central and South America. Latin American leaders, for their part, tried to enlist international support for their fight against imperial Spain. Furthermore, European concerns about developments across the Atlantic increased in the late 1810s and early 1820s, when legitimist fears that subversion and instability might spread from the New World to the Old via Spain were revived by the liberal revolutions of 1820. At the Aix-la-Chapelle conference of 1818, Russia and France went so far as to pledge their support for Spain’s ambitions to restore its rule in the former colonies. Finally, after Britain managed to establish its leadership in the Atlantic during the early 1820s, attempts by great and small European powers alike to profit from the re-opening of transatlantic routes continued, while the United States was going through the “market revolution” of the Jacksonian years and Latin American nations saw Atlantic trade as an instrument with which to bolster their domestic stability and pursue their integration into the international system.⁸
- 7 Piedmont, whose security and prosperity were closely related to the European balance of power, found itself involved in this web of commercial and political relations that was shaping the post-Restoration Atlantic world. Consequently, following the example of the major European powers, from 1815 it set out to create a consular network in the Americas both to monitor the political developments of the Western question and to open up opportunities for international trade, which was suffering as a consequence of the Napoleonic wars. The general consulate that was established in Philadelphia in 1819 remained the center of the consular network until the mid 1830s, when it was transferred to New York, while consulates in the republics of Latin America were established from the mid-1830s onwards.⁹
- 8 The political and commercial concerns behind these efforts were strongly

interrelated, as the instructions of the Piedmontese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Gaspare Deabbate, the first general consul in the US, aptly show. Deabbate, who served in Philadelphia until 1825, was required by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Marquis de San Marzano to negotiate commercial reciprocity, thus ending discriminatory navigation charges for Ligurian vessels in the US, while ensuring that the same conditions would be applied to American vessels. The aim was to develop Genoese direct trade across the Atlantic and placate the anti-Savoy sentiments which were widespread in Genoa, at a time when the Spanish empire was collapsing, France and the US were fighting a commercial war, and finally – San Marzano erroneously believed – tensions between the US and Spain over Florida might precipitate a conflict involving Britain, thus providing new opportunities for Genoese merchants.¹⁰ Deabbate successfully negotiated with US Secretary of State John Quincy Adams; commercial reciprocity was agreed upon in 1822 and eventually ratified by the US Congress in 1824.¹¹

9 At the same time, he was also expected to monitor political and diplomatic developments in the US and in the Americas. During his tenure he reported and commented on a wide array of topics including the domestic US political scene, torn by the crisis over slavery in Missouri and turmoil in Latin American republics; US recognition of these republics and tensions with Spain over Florida; and finally, transatlantic relations and competition among European powers in the Americas in the light of the premises and consequences of the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. As was often the case with general consuls in extra-European posts at that time, the distinction between the consular and the diplomatic sphere was often blurred in his activity.¹² Strictly consular matters like trade policies and the protection of Piedmontese subjects and interests were part of the larger Atlantic landscape that Piedmont, a second-rank power in the concert of Europe and a peripheric player in international trade, had decided it could not ignore.

10 In a long report on the future prospects of Piedmontese trade in the Americas, requested by the Ministry, Deabbate argued that the volume of exchanges between the US and Sardinia would easily benefit from reciprocity, especially in terms of duty differentials, as well as from a network of vice-consuls able to act “like agents” and surrogate Genoese merchants, which were virtually absent in North America.¹³ By 1822 consular posts had been established in the major ports of the Atlantic coast of the US and in New Orleans. He also stressed that much greater benefits would be derived from indirect trade, with Piedmont acting as a broker between its neighbors and the US.

11 Eventually, Deabbate's efforts to facilitate trade between the two nations met strong resistance in economic as well as political circles. The admiralty of Genoa, which supervised the navy and the merchant marine and was consulted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on these matters, was sceptical about indirect trade and believed that making Genoa the hub connecting Mediterranean and Atlantic trade was “illusory,” given the competition from Marseilles, Leghorn, Venice, and Trieste. Consequently, the tonnage differentials for American vessels in Genoa were maintained, to protect national shipping. Furthermore, the Piedmontese government feared that such an ambitious plan could antagonize its neighbors and endanger its stability and security. Turin's pursuit of neutrality in the European balance of power reinforced Genoa's commercial isolation.¹⁴

12 Finally the American, British, and French merchants serving as vice-consuls could hardly help to integrate Piedmont into existing North Atlantic trade, given the lack of Ligurian communities and commercial networks in North America in the 1820s and the contradictions that marred Piedmontese commercial policies, which wavered between the tentative pursuit of new markets and a strong allegiance to the traditional

protectionist policies which prevailed through the early 1830s.¹⁵ However, Deabbate's tenure in Philadelphia has a twofold relevance in this story. At a general level, it exemplifies how the consular network tried to mediate between the international dimension of trade policies and treaties, and the transnational dimension of the circulation of goods and people across the Atlantic, thus providing the connective tissue for the new Atlantic economy that was being built in the first half of the 19th Century. At a local level, it anticipates the role that the consular network would play in, and the domestic opposition it would find to, the integration of Piedmont into the Atlantic economy in the following years.

13 When Piedmont established its consular network across the Atlantic, it was following the lead of the major European powers.¹⁶ On the one hand, expanding trade and influence across the Atlantic required the creation of listening posts and agents with first-hand knowledge of developments overseas and an ability to negotiate with the American nations. On the other, the republican character of those nations prevented their full inclusion into the international system originated by the Restoration, which was based upon a legitimist notion of sovereignty. What was needed, then, was a *de facto* recognition that allowed European monarchies to do business with American republics without undermining the ideological assumptions behind the balance of power established in 1815. Since the late 1810s the consular service had provided a connective network among nations which was just short of formal recognition, and paved the way for the treaties of commerce and navigation which would regulate transatlantic trade patterns and help to increase the volume of exchanges from the 1820s. Britain was the leading proponent of these treaties, which were inspired by the president of the Board of Trade, William Huskisson, an advocate of reforming the Navigation Acts and of commercial reciprocity. This commercial, rather than diplomatic, blueprint also suited the Latin American republics and especially the US which, since John Adams' Model Treaty of 1776, had tried to avoid formal alliances and to separate the commercial and the political levels when dealing with European powers. In the following years most European countries adopted this tool, including Piedmont in its treaty with the US in 1838.¹⁷ It is no accident that Huskisson was also among the advocates of the reform of the consular service promoted by prime minister George Canning. The Consular Act of 1825 was an attempt to turn a loose, inefficient group of individuals serving overseas into an efficient government service; it was also a response to the dramatic expansion of the British consular network, which went from forty-six consuls in 1790 to fifty-seven in 1814 and jumped to 107 in 1824 after the opening of several posts in the newly-independent states of Latin America.¹⁸

14 In fact, transatlantic exchanges had already been increasing in quantitative terms and changing in qualitative terms and, eventually, they shaped a new Atlantic in which transnational factors (trade, technology, migrations, ideas) were intertwined with the role played by policy-makers and diplomats on both sides of the ocean. The case of another Piedmontese consul in the US, Angelo Garibaldi, will show how the rise of this new Atlantic produced shockwaves which eventually affected Piedmontese policy-makers' mental maps and policies in the 1830s.

15 This new Atlantic was by no means self-contained or separated from other world regions. Practitioners of global history rightly stress the multiple connections between "the West and the rest" as well as the significant volumes of trade and migration in Asia and the Pacific in the early-modern era; consequently they question the relative weight of the Atlantic region in the global context and its role as the source of a model – Western modern capitalism – which would later spread across the world.¹⁹

16 However, the Atlantic world of the first half of the 19th Century can be studied as a significant and cohesive unit of analysis for two qualitative, rather than quantitative,

reasons. Firstly, economic historians have showed that the 1820s were a turning point in the history of globalization due to the sharp decline in transportation costs and, consequently, in commodity prices which was made possible by the transportation revolution originated by transatlantic liners.²⁰ While these technological advances were not exclusive to the Atlantic basin, their big-bang impact on international trade initially took place along transatlantic routes. In January 1818, a few months before the great powers of Europe renewed their Quadruple Alliance “strengthened by the ties of Christian brotherhood” in the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle, a packet boat of the Black Ball Lines leaving New York on its way to Liverpool inaugurated the era of regular freight and passenger services across the North Atlantic. Other companies followed suit in the subsequent years and, while new destinations were added in the US (Boston, Philadelphia) and in Europe (London, Hamburg, Le Havre), the ports of New York and Liverpool continued to play a major role in transatlantic trade, which was based on cotton, thus replacing ports like Cadiz, Bordeaux, and Nantes which had flourished before the Napoleonic wars. These regular services offering reliable, timely, and fast connections dramatically improved communication and transportation across the Atlantic, and the introduction of steamers between Liverpool and Boston from the late 1830s further contributed to the transformation of the Atlantic into a conduit for the circulation of goods and people.²¹

- 17 Secondly, and more importantly, this revolution in Atlantic crossings overlapped with and was related to various developments which, while seldom considered by the prevailing Atlantic history paradigm, transformed old Atlantic networks and created new ones in the first half of the 19th Century. The capitals behind transatlantic liners were also invested in railroads, again mostly in countries surrounding the Atlantic basin. Increasing trade and the integration of markets in the North Atlantic brought with them new business practices and financial services; they also triggered a circulation of workers which eventually paved the way for mass migration. Finally, economic and technological transformations had intellectual and political consequences at a time when advocates of free trade like Richard Cobden revived the eighteenth-century critique of the idea of the balance of power, deeming it a thing of the past and arguing that the unlimited movement of goods, people, capitals, and ideas would inevitably connect the people of the world by peaceful means.²² Free traders were part of a larger liberal critique of the Restoration which emphasized how the transnational forces of commerce, travel, and intellectual exchanges were undermining the old order of European statesmen and diplomats. The opposition between Old World monarchies and New World republics forged by the Congress of Vienna and the Monroe Doctrine was being eroded and eventually replaced by a dense network of exchanges in which the political culture of nationalism played a major role: “In the wake of colonial and republican evolutions,” Gabaccia writes “ideologies of nation building ...attempted to rewrite Atlantic cultural connections” around the mid-19th Century.²³ The history of 19th-century Atlantic connections is, then, also a “history of meaning.”²⁴

Piedmont as Atlantic periphery

- 18 The story of Angelo Garibaldi, consul of the Kingdom of Sardinia in Philadelphia from the late 1820s to 1835, exemplifies how these connections not only transformed the core of the Atlantic world, but also affected its periphery.
- 19 Information on the elder brother of the hero of the Italian Risorgimento is scarce. Apparently he was a merchant in New York before moving to Philadelphia, where he

ended up serving in the consular service after he met the general consul Caravadossi de Thoet, also from Nice, who hired him as Chancellor and Vice-Consul in 1826.²⁵ Notwithstanding the ongoing professionalisation of the consular service, at that time it was still possible for merchants to serve as consuls, especially in the cases of small countries having to deal with a shortage of adequate staff in extra-European areas. In fact, the Piedmontese network in Latin America did not really become effective until the 1840s, when consular officials in Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Chile were replaced by agents indicated by influential residents of the Ligurian communities who, eventually, were instrumental in signing commercial treaties between Piedmont and those nations.²⁶ Thanks to this diverse recruiting base the consular service was a rather unique blend of individuals from different backgrounds working to promote the interests of their country of origin, of the communities of merchants and immigrants they worked with and, not infrequently, of themselves. This enabled them to mediate between international policies and transnational actors and, again, to provide the connective tissue that facilitated the integration of the Atlantic economy during the first half of the century.

20 Once Caravadossi had left Philadelphia for Marseilles in early 1832 due to illness, Garibaldi stepped in as Acting Consul and followed in his footsteps. His dispatches covered economic as well as political matters, including the monitoring of Italian exiles in the US and throughout the Americas. In fact, the Minister of Foreign Affairs had instructed his consuls in North America to report on subversive activities among the Piedmontese and Italian diaspora in the New World since the early 1820s. Interestingly, in April 1834 he reported on the activity of a branch of La Giovine Italia, the organization founded by Giuseppe Mazzini, in Rio de Janeiro.²⁷ In the meantime his brother Giuseppe, a member of the organisation, left Italy after a failed insurrection promoted by Mazzini and eventually arrived in Rio de Janeiro in the following year. However, Angelo Garibaldi was mostly interested in trade and its political implications. His tireless work to expand commercial relations between Piedmont, the US, and the Americas went far beyond the duties assigned to him by the Ministry and, not surprisingly, his efforts were met with strong resistance in Turin and Genoa. Nonetheless, he anticipated several developments that contributed to the integration of Piedmont into the Atlantic world from the late 1830s.

21 Relatively free from the constraints of career diplomats, Garibaldi infused his activity and his dispatches to the Foreign Ministry with a businesslike attitude and a liberal political culture that reflected many of the features of the 19th Century Atlantic world. In 1830 he ventured to draft an extensive, unsolicited report discussing the causes of the poor state of commercial relations between the US and Piedmont, urging the government to adopt specific solutions and evoking a triumphant picture of Piedmontese hegemony in the Italian peninsula as a consequence of the full integration of Piedmont into the Atlantic trade patterns. His assumptions about economic theory and his confidence in free trade were made clear from the start by an epigraph which quoted Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. "Two worlds have been opened to their industry, each of them much greater and extensive than the old one, and the market of one of them growing still greater and greater every day." Writing on the eve of American independence, the Scottish economist believed that the discovery of the New World had brought prosperity to the Old and concluded his work by exposing the "cost of empire," that is, the damage done by excessive regulation of colonial trade by European colonial powers. Another influence on Garibaldi's views was Jean-Baptiste Say, the French economist and author of the *Traité d'Economie Politique* (1803) who advocated free trade and the lifting of barriers. According to the so-called Say's Law, the abundance of other products, more than the abundance of money, facilitates sales and generates

wealth; therefore, international trade is instrumental to any increase in domestic prosperity. Garibaldi combined these economic theories with his first-hand experience as a merchant and the vantage point offered by the Piedmontese general consulate, where he was required to keep track of the major economic and political trends between the US, the Americas, and Europe.²⁸

22 As he was drafting his “Considerations,” trade between Genoa and North American ports was virtually non-existent. Ligurian merchants were mostly active in the traditional markets of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, especially after the 1823 treaty with Turkey. In the Americas, Brazil and later Argentina were by far the most popular destinations of Piedmontese exports – mostly paper and foodstuffs – throughout the 1820s; in 1831, 14 Genoese ships reached Brazil and 17 Buenos Aires, while only 5 reached the US. In the following year, the 19 ships headed to what was technically defined as “North America” were actually directed to Vera Cruz and to Caribbean ports (St. Thomas, Santo Domingo, Havana and Trinidad). Similarly, American ships seldom touched Ligurian shores, and when they did it was mostly on their way to their final destinations in Sicily and Leghorn, where they loaded profitable goods like textiles, marble, sulfur, and fruit.²⁹

23 Garibaldi stressed in his dispatches to Turin that states like the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and especially Tuscany were successfully penetrating the North American market and earning a business reputation. On the one hand, he wanted to play on Piedmontese aspirations to hegemony among Italian states; on the other to show that commercial opportunities with the US could be expanded if only the old paradigm of direct trade were replaced by a more ambitious strategy. Purely bilateral exchanges between Piedmontese and American goods were unlikely to grow, given that the Piedmontese economy could hardly compete in the North American and Atlantic market. However, he argued, the port of Genoa could be turned into a general depot for goods produced in the Italian states, in South-Western Europe, and in the Mediterranean basin and destined for the US and the Americas. In fact he envisioned Genoa playing a leading role in Italian trade with the New World, similar to the role that New York had acquired for the US and the Americas:

24 Qui peut donc empêcher plus longtemps la formation d’un établissement qui, uni aux avantages naturels à notre marine, permettrait à celle-ci de prendre une part active au vaste commerce qui se fait au delà de l’Atlantique? Qui peut empêcher la Ville de Gènes de devenir l’entrepôt général des marchandises italiennes par rapport à l’Amérique, et l’entrepôt général des marchandises américaines par rapport à l’Italie?³⁰

25 He answered his own rhetorical questions by pointing to two solutions which would make up for the virtual absence of Ligurian merchants in North America and put an end to the virtual absence of Genoese merchants in North-Atlantic routes: first, a regular service of packets between Genoa and New York and, second, a commercial treaty between Piedmont and the US to overcome local opposition and international isolation.

26 Garibaldi had already explored the possibility of creating a regular service of liners, with the help of the Sardinian consul in New York, Vincent Bouland, a French merchant who had been approached by the agents of the company running the New York-LeHavre line.³¹ Transatlantic liners, he now insisted, had paved the way not only for a spectacular increase in the volume of exchanges, but also for a change in consumption patterns:

27 Non seulement la masse ordinaire des importations européennes a considérablement augmenté, mais des goûts nouveaux ont été créés en Amérique, avec des articles nouvellement importés; d’autres, tels que les soieries de Chine, ont cédé la place à ceux venant d’Europe, dont la facilité à se les procurer, résultant du bas fret des navires et de la promptitude des communications, ont fait perdre aux premières leur principal mérite,

qui est le bon marché.³²

28 Establishing regular connections with New York was necessary in order to overcome the limitations of direct, bilateral trade and rationalise exchanges with the Caribbean and South American markets, which were increasingly gravitating toward New York as a harbour for their trade with Europe. Additionally, once Genoa had become the major gateway for American goods in the Mediterranean, it could re-export part of them toward the Eastern Mediterranean, thus making Piedmont a broker between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic.

29 Finally, Garibaldi also made it clear that a strong initiative by the Piedmontese government was required to implement such an ambitious plan, and insisted on its political implications for the Italian situation. In the conclusions of his “Considerations” he warned against the commercial activism of Austria in the Mediterranean through Trieste and Venice and urged Piedmont to take the lead: economic reform which opened up Genoa to transatlantic trade would eventually set the stage for a “natural” Piedmontese hegemony on the Italian peninsula. In his view, embracing the free market and economic reform and reaping the benefits of Atlantic trade would enable this small state in north-western Italy to be the leading power in Italian affairs, much like Prussia in Germany:

Une liberté de commerce plus grande que celle dont jouissent ou pourront jouir, par la suite, les autres Etats de l’Italie attirera dans nos ports la plus grand partie de leur commerce extérieur; et le premier rôle dans les affaires mercantiles de cette péninsule contribuera, plus qu’on ne saurait l’imaginer, a préparer aux Etats de S.M. le premier rôle dans ses affaires politiques – car il faut bien se pénétrer de cette vérité, que l’un de ces deux conditions ne tardera pas d’amener l’autre: elles sont, pour ainsi dire, inséparables.³³

30 1830 marked the climax of protectionist policies in the Kingdom of Sardinia. It was also the high point of Piedmontese subalternity to Austria after the July revolution in France and insurrectional attempts in Italy led the House of Savoy to revive its legitimist profile, as Charles Albert feared that a new clash between order and revolution was on its way.³⁴ It is not surprising, then, that Garibaldi’s audacious call for liberal reform and economic activism was ignored. In fact, in March 1832 he lamented that his reports had been totally ignored and urged the Minister to take action. The treaty signed between the US and Turkey in 1831, which threatened to erode the traditional Genoese influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, gave him the opportunity to insist that the integration of Atlantic and Mediterranean trade was to be taken seriously.³⁵ When, finally, his insistence persuaded the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to submit his proposal for the establishment of a regular service with New York to the Chamber of Commerce of Genoa, the protectionist interests which had gained influence in the previous decades repeatedly rejected it, notwithstanding his reports and dispatches illustrating in detail the potential benefits for the Piedmontese economy.³⁶

31 Still, from the early 1830s domestic and international developments were setting the stage for cautious reform. The July revolution in France, the Zollverein in Germany and especially the anti-mercantilist reform movement in Britain showed that the bourgeoisie was on the rise; the liberal critique of the Restoration mentioned earlier was gaining strength and undermining protectionist policies across Europe. The expansion of consular networks in extra-European regions and the treaties of commerce and navigation of the 1820s and 1830s exemplified this growing concern for economic matters in international politics. The political implications of anti-mercantilism, namely the confidence that trade would lead to an international order based on peaceful competition and prosperity, rather than secret diplomacy and war, resonated in Europe

and across the Atlantic, as Angelo Garibaldi's views aptly show, and this new climate of opinion percolated into Turin and Genoa. Liberal circles began to make their voices heard in public opinion and intellectuals advocated social and economic progress as a prerequisite of political reform. Giacomo Giovannetti's writings on the benefits of the liberalization of trade apparently influenced Charles Albert, who gradually implemented a sort of "authoritarian *laissez faire*"³⁷ during the 1830s after Tuscany passed tariff reforms to attract foreign ships to Leghorn and Austria attempted to gain access to Atlantic trade via Trieste by signing a treaty with the US in 1831.

32 A reduction of tariffs in 1835 was the first, cautious sign of this new pattern, but the turning point came with the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation, signed by Sardinia and the US in November 1838, which finally introduced the principle of commercial reciprocity after the false start of the early 1820s. To be sure, the impulse for this relevant step toward the integration of Genoa into transatlantic routes again came from the outside. It was the US special representative in Vienna, Nathaniel Niles, who proposed the agreement to the Sardinian Minister in Austria, mostly to facilitate the transit through Genoa of American tobacco and cotton directed to the Kingdom of Sardinia and its inland neighbors of northern Italy and central Europe. This American move was part of a larger strategy to penetrate the Mediterranean and Middle-Eastern markets that had been pursued throughout the 1830s during the presidency of Andrew Jackson. The treaties with Austria, which opened American commerce with Trieste, and with Turkey, which was seen also as a door to the Russian Black Sea, were responses to the deliberate efforts of the US to modify its trade patterns, which were strongly concentrated on Britain and continental Europe, at a time when international exchanges were an important source of national prosperity.³⁸

33 Niles' proposal found an unlikely supporter in the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Clemente Solaro della Margarita, a strong advocate of reacting against the principles of liberalism who was well known for his support for legitimist parties across Europe. However, as the first Piedmontese minister coming from the ranks of the diplomatic service, Solaro was also a realist. Since his appointment in 1835 he had decided to create general consulates in Buenos Aires and Montevideo, both to protect the interests of the growing community of Sardinian subjects in the Plata region and to negotiate the *de facto* recognition of these South American republics without deviating from the legitimist principles of Restoration diplomacy.³⁹ In his *Memorandum storico politico* (1851) he ridiculed the critics of his opening up Argentina and Uruguay: "the idea that the King should not recognise them, as if they had been founded by savage tribes, had not ports to reach and cultivated people with whom to establish relations, was absurd."⁴⁰ In the same vein, he saw the American proposal as a commercial and diplomatic opportunity. Firstly, he believed that continuing to exclude foreign merchants from the port of Genoa through duty differentials at a time of widespread liberalisation in commercial policies and increasing international competition benefited ship owners, but was detrimental to merchants and perpetuated domestic economic stagnation.⁴¹ Secondly, he maintained that establishing formal commercial relations with the US had a political dimension which was all the more relevant at a time when the Atlantic was turning into a conduit between the Old World and the New. In his instructions to Augusto Avogadro di Collobiano, the first Piedmontese *chargé d'affaires* in Washington, Solaro wrote:

Nos relations avec l'Amérique septentrionale paraîtraient au premier coup d'œil ne devoir être que des relations purement commerciales, vue la distance qui nous sépare, mais les distances se rapprochent aujourd'hui par la multiplication des voies de communication et les rapports sans nombre qui se sont établis entre l'ancien et le nouveau monde ont créé entre eux une telle complication

d'intérêt que toute commotion politique qui se prépare ou qui surgit dans l'un des deux continents doit avoir, nécessairement un grand retentissement dans l'autre. Les traités de commerce cachent souvent des vues politiques ou du moins peuvent leur être associés. Il n'est guère permis de douter que les États-Unis en proposant à sa Majesté un traité de cette espèce n'aient quelque arrière-pensée politique.⁴²

34 To be sure, local resistance to the full implementation of commercial reciprocity continued during the negotiations surrounding the treaty. Protectionist interests among ship owners opposed the elimination of duty differentials on grain, oil, wine, and spirits. It was also feared that ending duty differentials on all US imports would leave Piedmont faced with a dilemma: that of either extending commercial reciprocity to trade with other nations or being accused of discriminating against them. In the end an agreement was reached; also thanks to the efforts of the US consul in Genoa, Robert Campbell, who urged Genoese merchants to lobby against protectionist interest groups.⁴³

35 The immediate impact of the treaty was limited in quantitative terms. The importing of American tobacco was discouraged by checks and transit charges across Piedmont. More importantly, reciprocity favored the US, whose economy was on the rise; Piedmont could hardly compete given its relatively backward industrial sector, while investments in infrastructures for communication and transport came mostly after the 1840s. While the volume of exchanges in the port of Marseilles more than doubled between 1838 and 1842, the increase in the trade of tobacco, cotton, and grain through the port of Genoa was moderate.⁴⁴

36 On the other hand, the agreement with the US was a watershed in terms of its implications. Firstly, it turned out to be the blueprint for similar treaties with Britain (1841) and later with France as well as with several South American republics. Secondly, ending duty differentials, which protected Sardinian shipping in the Mediterranean, and embracing commercial reciprocity, which was necessary to integrate Genoa into the expanding networks of international trade, signalled a positive attitude toward the Atlantic landscape and new trade patterns. Finally, this opening up to international trade triggered a wider effort to develop the legislative framework and the infrastructural network which in turn led to the economic dynamism of the Kingdom of Sardinia during the 1840s and 1850s.⁴⁵

37 At that time, the influence of liberal, anti-protectionist orientations in the Genoese business community and in public opinion more broadly was on the rise; the success of Gobden's visit to Genoa exemplifies the fact that the cultural and economic stagnation of the post-Restoration years was being undermined.⁴⁶ At the same time, other stimuli from outside Genoa seemed to pave the way for the creation of the regular transatlantic service that Garibaldi had been advocating since the late 1820s. In 1840 a dispatch from the Sardinian consul in Marseilles, reporting on the successful launching of a service of steamers by the *Société Méditerranéo-Transatlantique* which connected the French port with the Caribbean and New Orleans, reached Genoa. In the following years, businessmen like G.B. Venzano and Prandi, ship owners like Lecoq of Rouen and Lewingston and Wells of New York each approached the Piedmontese government with similar proposals, only to meet with strenuous opposition from the Genoese Chamber of Commerce. Finally, the Compagnia Transatlantica was set up in 1852 by the Genoese ship owner Raffaele Rubattino, with the strong support of prime minister Cavour, to establish passenger and cargo services to Rio de Janeiro and the Plata region and to New York. However, marred by mismanagement, financial problems, and the unfavourable context of the Crimean War, the company shut down in 1857 after a few trips to South America; the North American route was never activated. To sum up, the dismal experiment of the Compagnia Transatlantica aptly shows that the full integration

of Genoa into the Atlantic was yet to come.⁴⁷

Conclusions

38 This selective look at the Piedmontese consular network in the US sheds light on the way in which international and transnational factors affected the ideologies and practices of the Italian nation-building process in the post-Restoration years. Deabbate, Garibaldi and others contributed stimuli that reflected the changing patterns of interaction between the Old World and the New and resonated with the quest for economic and political reform at home. They were part of a network of officials and agents meant to connect Piedmont not only with the Americas, but also with other world regions. However, their transatlantic vantage point enabled them to understand that the new Atlantic which was being forged in the 1820s and 1830s would present dramatic challenges and opportunities not only to the traditional actors of the Atlantic scene, but also to a peripheric state of Southern Europe like Piedmont. To be sure, their quest for Atlantic integration, which was the ultimate outcome of flexible adaptations and creative interpretations of the official policies formulated by the political and diplomatic establishment, found persistent opposition in entrenched economic interests and traditionalist circles. However, the fact that their insights triggered controversies and often anticipated later developments suggests that consular networks deserve a broader and deeper investigation by historians of Italian Risorgimento. Such investigation is also relevant to scholars exploring new directions in the study of 19th-Century transatlantic crossings, specifically the economic history of the Atlantic world and the history of Atlantic information.⁴⁸

39 From a more general perspective, this study aims to raise questions and prompt further discussion on two controversial aspects of the Atlanticist paradigm, namely its periodization and geographical range. The context in which the Piedmontese consuls operated suggests that taking the “long Atlantic” perspective seriously is necessary in order not only to understand how constitutive elements of the old Atlantic, like slavery, persisted into the 19th Century, but also to grasp the features of the new Atlantic and of its global connections. As Emma Rothschild argues, “the connections of Atlantic commerce and finance did not disappear in a suddenly universal world, in which all exchanges were global.”⁴⁹ Whether or not this new Atlantic was the first stage of economic globalisation is open to debate; in any event it can hardly be studied without a strong emphasis on its impact on and connections with other world regions, including the Mediterranean. Finally, the focus on consular networks, a somewhat hybrid terrain, helps to question traditional historiographical barriers between the social and the political spheres, international and transnational dimensions; between history “from below” and “from above.”

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Autor

Marco Mariano

Assistant Professor of Contemporary and US History
Università del Piemonte Orientale
marco.mariano@lett.unipmn.it

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