

AN EXPANDING WORLD
Volume 8

Merchant
Networks in the
Early Modern
World,
1450-1800

Sanjay Subrahmanyam



An Expanding World
Volume 8

Merchant Networks in
the Early Modern World

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The European Impact on World History, 1450–1800

General Editor: A.J.R. Russell-Wood

with the assistance of Mark Steele

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The European Impact on World History 1450–1800

Volume 8

Merchant Networks in the Early Modern World

edited by
Sanjay Subrahmanyam

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General Editor's Preface

A.J.R. Russell-Wood

An Expanding World: The European Impact on World History, 1450–1800 is designed to meet two objectives: first, each volume covers a specific aspect of the European initiative and reaction across time and space; second, the series represents a superb overview and compendium of knowledge and is an invaluable reference source on the European presence beyond Europe in the early modern period, interaction with non-Europeans, and experiences of peoples of other continents, religions, and races in relation to Europe and Europeans. The series reflects revisionist interpretations and new approaches to what has been called 'the expansion of Europe' and whose historiography traditionally bore the hallmarks of a narrowly Eurocentric perspective, focus on the achievements of individual nations, and characterization of the European presence as one of dominance, conquest, and control. Fragmentation characterized much of this literature: fragmentation by national groups, by geography, and by chronology.

The volumes of *An Expanding World* seek to transcend nationalist histories and to examine on the global stage rather than in discrete regions important selected facets of the European presence overseas. One result has been to bring to the fore the multicontinental, multi-oceanic and multinational dimension of the European activities. A further outcome is compensatory in the emphasis placed on the cross-cultural context of European activities and on how collaboration and cooperation between peoples transcended real or perceived boundaries of religion, nationality, race, and language and were no less important aspects of the European experience in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Australasia than the highly publicized confrontational, bellicose, and exploitative dimensions. Recent scholarship has not only led to greater understanding of peoples, cultures, and institutions of Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Australasia with whom Europeans interacted and the complexity of such interactions and transactions, but also of relations between Europeans of different nationalities and religious persuasions.

The initial five volumes reflect the changing historiography and set the stage for volumes encompassing the broad themes of technology and science, trade and commerce, exploitation as reflected in agriculture and the extractive industries and through systems of forced and coerced labour, government of empire, and society and culture in European colonies and settlements overseas. Final volumes examine the image of Europe and Europeans as 'the other' and the impact of the wider world on European *mentalités* and mores.

An international team of editors was selected to reflect a diversity of educational backgrounds, nationalities, and scholars at different stages of their professional careers. Few would claim to be 'world historians', but each is a

recognized authority in his or her field and has the demonstrated capacity to ask the significant questions and provide a conceptual framework for the selection of articles which combine analysis with interpretation. Editors were exhorted to place their specific subjects within a global context and over the *longue durée*. I have been delighted by the enthusiasm with which they took up this intellectual challenge, their courage in venturing beyond their immediate research fields to look over the fences into the gardens of their academic neighbours, and the collegiality which has led to a generous informal exchange of information. Editors were posed the daunting task of surveying a rich historical literature and selecting those essays which they regarded as significant contributions to an understanding of the specific field or representative of the historiography. They were asked to give priority to articles in scholarly journals; essays from conference volumes and *Festschriften* were acceptable; excluded (with some few exceptions) were excerpts from recent monographs or paperback volumes. After much discussion and agonizing, the decision was taken to incorporate essays only in English, French, and Spanish. This has led to the exclusion of the extensive scholarly literature in Danish, Dutch, German and Portuguese. The ramifications of these decisions and how these have had an impact on the representative quality of selections of articles have varied, depending on the theme, and have been addressed by editors in their introductions.

The introduction to each volume enables readers to assess the importance of the topic *per se* and place this in the broader context of European activities overseas. It acquaints readers with broad trends in the historiography and alerts them to controversies and conflicting interpretations. Editors clarify the conceptual framework for each volume and explain the rationale for the selection of articles and how they relate to each other. Introductions permit volume editors to assess the impact on their treatments of discrete topics of constraints of language, format, and chronology, assess the completeness of the journal literature, and address *lacunae*. A further charge to editors was to describe and evaluate the importance of change over time, explain differences attributable to differing geographical, cultural, institutional, and economic circumstances and suggest the potential for cross-cultural, comparative, and interdisciplinary approaches. The addition of notes and bibliographies enhances the scholarly value of the introductions and suggests avenues for further enquiry.

I should like to express my thanks to the volume editors for their willing participation, enthusiasm, sage counsel, invaluable suggestions, and good judgment. Evidence of the timeliness and importance of the series was illustrated by the decision, based on extensive consultation with the scholarly community, to expand a series, which had originally been projected not to exceed eight volumes, to more than thirty volumes. As General Editor, my task has been facilitated by the tireless assistance of Dr Mark Steele who was responsible for the 'operations' component of the series, and of John Smedley whose initiative

gave rise to discussion as to the viability and need for such a series and who has overseen the publishing, publicity, and marketing of *An Expanding World*.

*The Department of History,
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Introduction

Sanjay Subrahmanyam

The growing contact between peoples and cultures, sometimes peaceful but all-too-often not, which is an important characteristic of the early modern world from the fifteenth century onwards, brings into relief the role of merchants as privileged intermediaries. The in-between class in most societies of the epoch, in the sense of being sandwiched hierarchically between patricians and plebeians in imagined constructs of social order, merchants also become the group in between societies, inhabiting *inter alia* the meeting grounds created by European expansion. Portuguese and Italian merchants like Fernão Gomes and Alvise de Cà da Mosto pushed along the charting of the African west coast in the 1460s and 1470s, while Gujarati and Konkani merchants (often called *bantias*) from western India penetrated up into the Zambezi valley a century later, bringing Indian textiles into this market in exchange for ivory and gold. Chinese merchants settled in Manila, Jakarta and Ayutthaya, to further their commerce, while factors of the Dutch East India Company suffered isolation and humiliation in the island of Deshima, artificially built by the shogunal state in the harbour of Nagasaki in the seventeenth century, to keep open their access to the Japan trade.

Whoever says 'European expansion' or indeed 'early modern' winds up saying 'merchant'. Merchants could of course on occasion be warriors, or they could be buyers and sellers of slaves, could build fortresses and commission epic poems celebrating their own heroism; in short, they could engage in a number of activities that bely the notion that trading was a peaceful and somehow sanitized activity that had to do with the play of demand and supply rather than of chain and sword, gunpowder and shot. Indeed, once one leaves behind the antiseptic realm of theoretical economic models, and enters into an historical world of flesh and blood, merchants appear not as faceless facilitators, but as a social reality, an interest group, or even a class. Merchants thus do not appear as abstract individuals but as concrete collectives, indeed as merchant communities.

How does one understand the workings of these merchant communities in the early modern world, and what are the appropriate tools of analysis? One strand of Marxist and neo-Marxist historical writings has for long focused on merchants as a 'new' class that emerges in the course of European expansion, by garnering the profits of trade, and then transforming this accumulated commercial capital into industrial capital. This is not to deny that mercantile activity had existed earlier, even in the high tide of European feudalism, but rather that the extent, power and social influence of merchants had been radically altered

over the early modern centuries.¹ Over the years, more and more nuanced versions of this argument, locating merchants in the 'transition from feudalism to capitalism' in western Europe, have appeared, which take into account the purchase by merchants of lands and titles and their partial gentrification, the fact that mercantile profits may have been more limited than initially believed, and even that long-distance trade itself may have been of lesser significance than regional trade. Incarnations of this argument have passed from Marx and the Marxists, to Max Weber and Werner Sombart, and even latterly been elegantly theorised by the economist John Hicks. Of course, the latter versions were rather more celebratory of merchants than the former, and Hicks's *A Theory of Economic History* has been sardonically subtitled *Mercator Gloriosus* by one reviewer.²

Historians of societies that somehow 'failed' to make this classic transition have equally blamed it on the imperfect relationship between merchants as a collectivity, and other classes, notably landed patricians. Thus, Vitorino Magalhães Godinho has argued at some length that in Portugal, despite a substantial involvement in long-distance overseas trade, the bourgeoisie remained fragile, since it was subject to the arbitrary and debilitating exactions of a landed aristocracy and a central state. Further, he argued, since the bulk of the urban mercantile elements in Portugal were either Jews or New Christians, the irrational medieval legacy of anti-Semitism acted to aggravate matters even more.³ In a similar vein, historians of China and India (and even more so 'world historians' unfamiliar with China and India) have found it convenient to argue that Confucian ethics and the caste system respectively marginalised merchant communities in these two areas. Alternatively, it has been argued that the states that were formed in these regions were essentially agrarian, and that the dominance of their necessarily rural elites did not leave sufficient room for manoeuvre to mercantile interests.

The histories of merchant communities are thus not their histories alone; they are equally the histories of assumptions concerning their contexts. Since the 1980s, an alternative to the older Marxist (and Weberian) approach to merchants has been suggested, using the idea of the 'diaspora'. The central idea here is to free merchant activity from the strait-jacket of developmental stages, and to locate merchant communities as relatively open and 'floating' groups that exist through all of human history. Drawing in good measure on the anthropological literature, this newer work has both its fervent proponents and its uncompromising critics.

¹ See, for example, Pierre Jeannin, *Merchants of the Sixteenth Century*, tr. Paul Fittinghoff (New York, 1972).

² For a discussion, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Introduction', in Subrahmanyam, ed., *Merchants, Markets and the State in Early Modern India* (Delhi, 1990).

³ Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, *A Estrutura na Antiga Sociedade Portuguesa* (Lisbon, 1971), especially pp. 117-37.

In the first category one would include writers such as Philip D. Curtin, whose widely read and cited work *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (1984) is devoted to an application of the idea of 'diaspora' to a number of varied situations, ranging from ancient Assyria and Mesopotamia to the European chartered trading companies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴ Employing a theoretical formulation by the anthropologist Abner Cohen, Curtin argues that 'diaspora' characterises much of long-distance trading activity in the world from the earliest times to the Rise of Modernity, which he locates with 'the birth of the industrial age' between 1740 and 1860, and which 'ended once and for all the long era in history when trade diasporas had been the dominant institutional form in cross-cultural trade'.⁵

Some other historians of early modern trade have been sceptical for a number of reasons. Thus, K.N. Chaudhuri notes for example that 'some caution is needed in using the term "trading diasporas" as an analytical tool. The argument that merchants who live and operate through dispersed communities constitute a special category because they need to work through family or common friends is not really valid as a theoretical proposition. Merchants and traders in our period conducted business through close-knit groups, irrespective of their location; whether they lived at home or in foreign lands, that is how they worked'.⁶ Thus, Chaudhuri wishes to suggest that the emphasis on spatial dispersion (implicit in the very word 'diaspora') may be irrelevant; rather the tendency to monopolise trade in goods, to possess a collective social and political organisation of an informal nature, and to exchange commercial information thereby, all these are no more than 'the general characteristics of human behaviour'.

A rather more serious consequence of the idea of the 'diaspora' is that it de-historicises merchant communities, creating a form of false congruence between the activities of such groups, which were in fact quite varied over space and time. From such a notion of the 'diaspora' as a universal category, it then becomes possible to construct other illusory universal categories; thus, one recent writer, Janet L. Abu-Lughod, uses the diaspora as a stepping stone to generalise the even more tenuous notions of 'world-system' and even 'world-economy' to the thirteenth-century Afro-Eurasian landmass.⁷ Using a somewhat indiscriminately defined mass of materials, evidence drawn from say eleventh- and twelfth-century South India, and conflating it with materials from the fifteenth-century Malay Peninsula, Abu-Lughod posits a unique 'system' located historically at a halfway

⁴ (Cambridge, 1984).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

⁶ K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 224.

⁷ Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (New York, 1989).

point, that is between 1250 and 1350, when neither the Cholas nor the Sultanate of Melaka had any real significance. This is a thoroughly idealised system moreover 'from which all apparently benefited'.⁸ This veritable Golden Age of peaceful mercantile expansion is touted finally as one from which 'we have much to learn' for the organisation of the unequal and violent modern world.

If Abu-Lughod's methods are somewhat astonishing in their laxity, the conclusions of the work are however not always off the mark. Certainly, the emphasis on the fact that western European mercantile techniques were not markedly 'superior' by 1500 to those east of the Suez is broadly borne out by the work of serious comparative scholars. This work is not as advanced as it might be, since the survival of merchant records in the period is quite uneven by geographical region. Thus, it is far easier to generalise concerning the financial techniques of fourteenth-century Florentine merchant-bankers, than for their contemporary *ṣarrāfs* in Baghdad or Bhatkal (a port on the Indian west coast): the texts published by Armando Saponi, Raymond de Roover and others permit this.⁹ But to the extent that 'superiority' and 'efficiency' were measured by contemporary observers, they do not leave us with the sentiment that in the sixteenth century Europeans outside of Europe carried all before them by virtue of their superior accounting, banking or mercantile techniques. Further, to the extent that these concepts can be tested by the process of competition, it emerges that in markets where western European merchants vied for place with competitors from the Near East, South Asia or East Asia, they were very often unsuccessful.

Thus, for example, when the Dutch East India Company in the seventeenth century entered into trade between the Persian Gulf and Gujarat, or between the Coromandel coast of south-eastern India and Burma, it had to withdraw because it was unable to compete effectively with other merchant communities. This process should not be mystified into some celebration of the 'traditional' in the face of the 'modern'. Nor should we be willing unquestioningly to accept the interpretation that 'traditional merchants' were not motivated by economic considerations, and were willing to trade even in conditions which made it 'irrational'. Rather, it seems likely that in markets characterised by highly imperfect information, much depended on the access one had to it. Further, since European trading companies had high fixed costs on account of their investments in fortresses, armed ships, and the paraphernalia of quasi-sovereignty, they were simply unable to develop an institutional response that was flexible enough to deal with their rivals through price-competition alone.

Indeed, this only brings us to a far more central problem with Abu-Lughod's work, namely her complicity with Immanuel Wallerstein's ill-informed and

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹ See, for example, Raymond de Roover in ed., Julius Kirshner, *Business, Banking and Economic Thought in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Chicago, 1974).

theoretically unsound construct on the role of mercantile institutions in European expansion into the rest of the world after 1500. Unlike what the reader of Wallerstein's work might conclude, European expansion did not result in the folding up of rival trade networks without a whimper. Indeed, the very European-ness of some of the networks that expanded in the course of the early modern period may be called into question. In Africa, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the work of Paul Lovejoy (see Chapter 2 below) shows that African communities expanded together with the rise of new states in Central and sub-Saharan Africa. This is the case of the Wangara (or Soninke-Wangara), which refers to a set of ethnicities originally from central Ghana, between the Niger and the Senegal rivers. Converted to Islam, this group took a share of the trans-Saharan trade at a time when the first Portuguese caravels were beginning to put in on the west coast of Africa. In Asia, in the seventeenth century, the trade of the English East India Company was aided by their close dealings with the Armenian community of New Julfa; and Armenian trade expanded rapidly through the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, eventually extending from Amsterdam to Astrakhan, and Venice to Manila. Gradually accumulating data from the internal records of the Armenian community reveal methods of capital-sharing, partnership, account-keeping and insurance that had been long inferred but seldom demonstrated. These methods were not the same as those which developed in the Mediterranean, just as the Persian system of *siyāqat* (accounting) employed in Iran and parts of India was distinct from each of these. The significant point is that they were not perceived as inferior, and did not directly give way to unitary methods as a consequence of European expansion; indeed, they are yet to yield in many parts of the world.

What defined a merchant community? Factors such as religion, ethnicity and patterns of marriage obviously played a role, as indeed with any other community – be it of peasants, artisans or aristocrats. Rejection by, or at least hostility from, the rest of society at times played a role too, as with the Jews. The following mid-sixteenth-century description of Jews in Istanbul and elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, by the German traveler and intellectual Hans Dernschwam (1494–1568), who was employed by the banking house of Fugger, gives us a sense of how deep this hostility could run.

Many Marranos – that is Jews who turned Christian, as in Spain, or voluntarily became Christians in other places – when they can't make an honest living abroad, go crooked, and in order to escape the gallows all come to Turkey and become Jews again. They endure contempt, poverty, hunger, and thirst in order to be able to have time for themselves and not be kept captive by the Turks like the Christians. They tolerate all sorts of knavery and roguery. They are not ashamed to commit any villainy.

Commenting later in the same account on the household of Graça Mendes Nasi, a Jewish banker-family of Portuguese origin settled in Istanbul in the mid-1550s,

he noted that she and her son-in-law 'live in such state that it would amply befit a prince'. How could they have such money, he wondered, and concluded that 'they must have cheated people somewhere. Something must be wrong with them'.¹⁰

From an aristocratic point of view, it might appear, merchants were always the 'Other', to deploy the binary scheme that has gained vogue in recent years. But this is surely reductive in turn. The relationship between merchants and state power, and merchants and aristocracy was complex, and identities could blur in the process of interaction. At times, merchants themselves hesitated to affirm the legitimacy of their own activity, cloaking it under the guise of aristocratic pursuits or pretensions. Sylvia Thrupp's classic work on the merchants of medieval London, published a half-century ago, makes this plain enough. Referring to the celebrated fifteenth-century figure of William Caxton (1422–91), she notes:

Caxton, too, lent his press to the propagation of the cult of chivalry. The only London merchant to leave us his views on the divisions in society, he fell under the spell of the romances and treatises on chivalry that formed part of his stock in trade as a publisher. Far from wishing to dignify the merchant class or to draw the middle social strata closer together, he wrote like an arch-aristocrat.¹¹

No doubt some later English writers, such as Richard Hakluyt, represented a sensibility that stressed merchant virtues and strengths to a greater extent. But there is a tension that remained present into later times, since many theological writers – whether Catholic, Calvinist or Muslim – remained fervent critics of the making of profit. The attraction of merchants to the pole of urban or landed aristocracy, described with great eloquence by Thomas Mann earlier this century in *Buddenbrooks*, could as well be the trajectory of the Fuggers, or that of the dynasty of Mulla Abdul Ghafur, the Bohra merchant-prince of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Surat.

This means in turn that merchants rarely articulated a full sense of themselves as a group, with a consciousness and pride in their activities. We should not expect to find, apart from a few rare exceptions, writings that celebrate the accumulation of liquidity, profit and the undoing of rivals, in the same sense that chivalric or pseudo-medieval works of the early modern epoch celebrate honour, the accumulation of land, and warfare, or other texts celebrate humility, poverty and asceticism. Indeed, in the rare instances that we find such texts and voices, there is often something forced, defiant and even perverse about them,

¹⁰ Cited in Jacob R. Marcus, ed., *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Source Book, 315–1791* (New York, 1972), pp. 411–17.

¹¹ Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Ann Arbor, 1948), pp. 297–98. For Caxton, see also George D. Painter, *William Caxton: A Quincentenary Biography* (New York, 1977).

as if they are aware that they run against the grain. True, by the sixteenth century, money was seldom equated to filth, defecated by apes and other unseemly animals, as had been the case in the most violent anti-mercantile tracts of the medieval period. But a more positive affirmation was as yet difficult.

We may consider for instance a classic text of the early sixteenth century, Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (published in 1517), a work that seeks to link itself (in a heavy-handed playful way) to the Spanish and Portuguese expansion of the epoch. Let us recall that More claimed that news of the island of Utopia was brought to him by a chance meeting with a Portuguese mariner, with the improbable name of Raphael Hythloday, who had sailed with Amerigo Vespucci, then set out on his adventures from the land of Gulike until he eventually found himself in Taprobane (Sri Lanka), whence he made his way to Calicut. Now, towards the end of the text, in the Second Book, More launches an attack through the mouth of Hythloday on mercantile profit and on money in general. Most commonwealths that exist, he declares, are 'but a certain conspiracy of rich men procuring their own commodities under the name and title of the commonwealth'.¹² If only money were banished, most of the cares in the world would vanish. More thus proposes a return to a natural economy, in which merchants would certainly have no place.

One of the reasons why it may have been difficult for merchants to articulate a sense of identity as such is because the merchant class itself was so divided. Indeed, in any analysis of a complex society, or even a city, by horizontal stratum, one runs into the problem of vertical divisions amongst this most cosmopolitan of classes. Thus, the sense of 'community' and the sense of class or stratum militated against one another. Merchant society was prone to factionalism based on community, and this was thus the characteristic of any great mercantile city. This problem was further aggravated when the stakes grew higher, particularly when merchants came closer to political power either by turning bankers and financiers, or attempting to seize political power directly by a transformation of their own roles. 'Looking at the fate of merchant-bankers who entered government service between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries', writes Richard Kaeuper, 'it is logical to conclude that however seductive the profits and privileges awaiting king's bankers, the relationship was inevitably fatal for them'.¹³ Although written with the experience of Italian merchant-bankers in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England in mind, the case-histories of the Riccardi, the Frescobaldi, the Bardi and the Peruzzi, could be generalised into the relationship

¹² *The Utopia of Sir Thomas More*, tr. by Ralph Robinson, ed. H.B. Cotterill (New York, 1966), pp. 144–45.

¹³ Richard W. Kaeuper, *Bankers to the Crown: The Riccardi of Lucca and Edward I* (Princeton, 1973), pp. 248–49.

between the Spanish Habsburgs and the Fuggers, or indeed a number of other cases both in Europe and Asia.

Merchants were thus constantly on the fringes of politics, and at times entered it; alternatively, political power transformed itself into mercantile power. This process of engagement between trade and politics is more or less universal in the period, but the institutional forms and limits vary greatly from one society to another. At one extreme, there are merchant republics or, more likely, merchant oligarchies, where families of merchant origin and with trading interests dominate political life. This was usually possible only in political structures of relatively small dimensions, and even there did not necessarily happen. As one moves up the scale, from city-states to empires, besides, it would be incorrect to assume that a complete transformation takes place from the mercantile to the agrarian. This is unlikely for a number of reasons, and may also be empirically falsified. There is first of all a crudely functional argument to be made. As international trade increased in significance from the fifteenth century, the price to be paid by any state which refused to engage in trade also increased considerably. Thus, material pressures to seek some form of institutional arrangement to deal with trade obviously grew for the states that found themselves on the major trade routes. Indeed, it is often forgotten that customs-revenues were not the only ones that states derived from trade; even the collection of agrarian revenues demanded a sort of *mise en valeur*, that usually meant passing through the market. Further, the growing importance of merchant groups translated into an enhancement in their social and political prestige; and once they had accumulated such prestige, such groups often sought to penetrate the political hierarchies of even agrarian states.

Recent studies on the Ottomans and Mughals thus seek to argue that, contrary to an earlier interpretation which portrayed these states as indifferent to trade, institutional engagement with trade and with mercantile communities was pursued.¹⁴ In the Mughal case, for example, the engagement took two forms. First, members of the royal family and high notables of the empire directly took part in trade, particularly from the early seventeenth century onwards. It has been argued elsewhere (see Chapter 4 below) that in part, it is possible to attribute this participation to the growing influx, and political influence, of Iranians in the Mughal court. Second, the role of 'indigenous' communities in this process too

¹⁴ Palmira Brummett, *Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy in the Age of Discovery* (Albany, 1994); Brummett's discussion, while not wholly satisfactory, builds on earlier work by Andrew C. Hess, 'The Evolution of the Ottoman Seaborne Empire in the Age of Oceanic Discoveries, 1453-1525', *American Historical Review* LXXV, no. 2 (1970), pp. 1892-1919. The most recent statement of the 'traditionalist' position, by now hedged in by a number of caveats but still recognisable, is M.N. Pearson, 'Merchants and States', in ed., James D. Tracy, *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350-1750* (New York, 1991), pp. 41-116.

is not devoid of significance. State-building and management, it came to be realised, was not a wholly different activity from the running of businesses, or – in a more extreme form – shopkeeping. As states took to more and more record-keeping and maintained accounts of greater precision and amplitude, the skills of those called upon to participate in the state equally began to resemble those of commercial scribes. Thus, in the seventeenth century, we see a rash of manuals on state-building in Mughal India which emphasise similarities rather than differences between *imārat* (statecraft) and *tijārat* (trade). The role of groups such as the Khattris and Kayasthas also grew proportionately, even if such groups did at times articulate a form of identity crisis.

The papers collected in this volume also articulate a form of identity crisis, but a different one from that mentioned above. They test, implicitly at least, the validity of the concept of ‘merchant communities’ for the furthering of research on the early modern world by juxtaposing writings from a rather diverse set of areas in the world. What binds these papers (and on occasions chapters from books) is that they refer in one fashion or the other to an overarching process of global economic contact, which does not however do away with community identity. The papers themselves have been written over somewhat more than a quarter of a century; the earliest, by Khatchikian, dates to 1966, and is followed by Steensgaard’s important and neglected essay on the Levant, published in 1967. Inevitably, a large number of them focus on the Mediterranean, in part because the Mediterranean possesses one of the richest historiographies on the subject, be it on Italians, southern French, Egyptian or Jewish traders. However, an effort has been made to trace the connections of the Mediterranean communities to regions other than their place of origin; thus Brachtel’s piece deals with Italian traders in London, while Kafadar’s path-breaking but little-known essay points out that it was not only Italians who went out to the Ottoman empire, but Turkish merchants who traded in the reverse direction. Besides the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean and China Sea have received a fair share of attention, not least of all because of the sheer weight of these areas in early modern trade. Once more, the effort has been to cast the net as widely as possible, and to bring to light, where feasible, essays that have somehow not received due credit in the historiography. In some instances, these essays may be related to larger works by their authors, and in some cases (as with Robert Brenner), the essays represent no more than the tip of an iceberg. In a few instances (the essays by Trigger and Usner), the role of merchant networks appears posed in relation not merely to historical but to anthropological and ethno-historical concerns.

It is not the intention to be comprehensive in such an enterprise, nor indeed is it even faintly feasible within the limits of a volume with the dimensions of the present one. An effort has been made to extend coverage over all the continents, and to avoid an overly Europe-centered vision of mercantile activity. Indeed, the reader will find what may seem to be some puzzling omissions: the

Portuguese in Africa and Asia, the East and West India Companies being the most notable. This is, it should be noted, neither the result of lack of interest in these areas on the editor's part, nor the lack of relevant literature. Rather, since this volume is part of a series in which a major part will be devoted to precisely the narrative of Iberian and northern European expansion overseas, essays on these themes were deemed redundant. The reader is referred, in the interim, to general surveys by the present author on the Portuguese, by Jonathan Israel on the Dutch, by Kenneth Andrews on the English, and by Holden Furber on trading empires in the Indian Ocean (all in the bibliography following).

By way of conclusion, it is perhaps worth reminding the reader that the central position in any study of early modern trading communities over the past three-quarters of a century has been that of the redoubtable comparative sociologist Max Weber. Weberianism, we have been told repeatedly over the past half-century, is dead; the need to repeat this statement periodically suggests, however, that it is not. Weber's motives in positing that merchant values became the dominant cultural values in one and only one societal complex – that of Protestant northern Europe in the early modern period – were no doubt complex, more complex undoubtedly than the theories of his latter-day followers allow. The resulting teleological vision, where all of world history is made the handmaiden as it were of this single crowning moment, has produced as its ancillaries the theories of Rostow and Wallerstein. Our intention is to avoid that error, which led as perceptive an observer as Fernand Braudel to fall into the trap of arguing that urban mercantile society in India and China was 'well and truly frozen in a sort of irreducible system, a previous crystallisation'.¹⁵ This is not the place to demonstrate how ersatz Weberianism still dominates early modern history, to provide a comforting sop to north Atlantic triumphalism based on clichés concerning how caste, Confucianism, tribalism, religious fundamentalism, anti-Semitism, and so on, prevented other societies from becoming 'like the West'. More appropriate perhaps to end with this vision of merchant communities in western India from the pen of a Florentine merchant-turned-warrior, writing in December 1510:

We believe ourselves to be the most astute men that one can encounter, and the people here surpass us in everything. And there are Moorish merchants worth 400,000 to 500,000 ducats. And they can do better calculations by memory than we can do with the pen. And they mock us, and it seems to me that they are superior to us in countless things, save with sword in hand, which they cannot resist.¹⁶

¹⁵ Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400–1800*, tr. Miriam Kochan (New York, 1974), p. 410.

¹⁶ Letter from Piero di Andrea Strozzi at Goa, to his father in Florence, in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India, 1500–1650* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 7.

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Italian Merchant Organization and Business Relationships in Early Tudor London

M.E. Bratchel

For the eminent Italian historian, Armando Sapori, the closure of the London branch of the Medici Bank in 1478 symbolizes the effective end of Italian mercantile activity in England.² In reality, there was a continued Italian presence, and even a continued Italian importance, which has long been accepted by historians of Tudor trade.³ But whereas recently in France the rôle of Italian merchants in supplying the expanding markets and in financing the revitalized monarchies of the early sixteenth century has attracted considerable attention,⁴ this interest has produced little response from English scholars. The history of alien involvement in England has remained the peculiar preserve of the medi-

¹ I am very grateful to Mr G.V. Scammell and Dr Stuart Jones for reading and commenting upon this article in draft.

² A. SAPORI, *Studi di storia economica, Secoli XIII-XIV-XV* (Florence, 3rd edn, 1956), ii, p. 1070.

³ For example, G.D. RAMSAY, "The Undoing of the Italian Mercantile Colony in Sixteenth Century London", in N.B. HARTE and K.G. PONTING, eds. *Textile History and Economic History: Essays in Honour of Miss Julia de Lacy Mann* (Manchester, 1973), pp. 22-49.

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evalist, and the sixteenth century continues to be studied mainly with regard to the development of native talents in both commercial and financial fields.

The emphasis upon the rising importance and developing business techniques of English merchants is very understandable. Clearly the typical Elizabethan merchant must be portrayed as an Englishman, whilst the future was to lie with the English regulated and joint-stock companies of the seventeenth century. At the same time a preoccupation with the future may well have tended to obscure the economic and social realities of the early Tudor period. The first half of the sixteenth century was a period in which aliens came to control an even larger share of England's cloth exports;⁵ the Italians, for much of Henry VIII's reign, continued to control the import of fine cloths of silk and gold; German merchants virtually monopolized the importation of wax. Banking was to remain largely an Italian preserve long after the accession of Elizabeth. There can be no doubt of the continued importance of alien communities in English economic life, and that these are documented more richly than the affairs of their earlier and more familiar predecessors. In terms both of importance and of source material alien merchants in early Tudor England offer a fruitful and neglected area of research for the economic historian.⁶

Early Tudor London contained a large but diminishing Italian mercantile community consisting of perhaps seventy individuals. The present paper aims to examine the structure of Italian companies operating in England and to investigate the nexus of business relationships binding together members of the Italian community. Whilst much detailed work has been done on individual medieval Italian firms, the rapid expansion of source material in both Italian and English archives for the early modern period

⁵ D.C. COLEMAN, *The Economy of England 1450-1750* (Oxford, 1977), p. 54 reminds us that rather more than fifty percent of total English cloth exports were in alien hands by the early 1540s.

⁶ The wider issues raised above are discussed in M.E. BRATCHEL, "Alien Merchant Communities in London, 1500-1550" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1975).

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has made it possible to view the Italian community as a whole during the last half-century of their real prominence in English affairs. The focus on London is dictated by that city's dominance of English overseas trade in the early Tudor period. This ascendancy, accompanied by the decline of the outports, resulted not only in the attraction towards London of the most enterprising among English merchants⁷ but also in a similar movement of Italian merchants from the outports. During the early sixteenth century Italian activity in England is largely embraced by the history of the London communities.

I. THE FAMILY AS A BUSINESS UNIT

Recent studies of Italian mercantile organization during the Renaissance have centred around the rôle of the family. Raymond de Roover once contrasted an older form of partnership in which members of the family predominate with the series of partnerships entered into by the fourteenth-century Medici with non-family members.⁸ Frederic C. Lane, writing of Venice, has also noted the growth of non-family partnerships,⁹ and the transition hinted at by de Roover and Lane constitutes the theme of Richard A. Goldthwaite's *Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence* with its reverberant thesis that Renaissance Florence witnessed a fragmentation of the family unit and the liberation of Italian commerce from the family connexion.¹⁰ But generally the more extreme expressions of a movement away from a commercial organization

⁷ A.A. RUDBOCK, "London Capitalists and the Decline of Southampton", *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. II (1949), pp. 137-51. Clearly not all of the outports were adversely affected by the rise of London, but the conclusions of Penelope Corfield, "Urban Development in England and Wales in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", in D.C. COLEMAN and A.H. JOHN, eds. *Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-Industrial England: Essays presented to F.J. Fisher* (London, 1976), pp. 214-47, that the rise of London was not harmful to other towns and ports, seem to me unconvincing.

⁸ R. DE ROOVER, *Business, Banking, and Economic Thought in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Julius Kirshner (Chicago, 1974), p. 264. The Medici, as de Roover points out, reverted around 1386 "to an older form of partnership — one in which members of the same family predominated." — *ibid.*

⁹ F.C. LANE, *Venice: A Maritime Republic* (Baltimore, 1973), p. 138.

¹⁰ RICHARD A. GOLDTHWAITE, *Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence: A Study of Four Families* (Princeton, 1968).

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governed by familial ties have either been denied or ignored, and the continuing importance of the extended family and of family solidarity is emphasized in much recent work on the leading mercantile families of Genoa, Venice, and even of Tuscany.¹¹

The current debate on the continued cohesion of the family unit is sustained, in part, by differences of perspective and emphasis. Much depends upon whether the family is analysed primarily as a political, a social or an economic force. Much depends also upon differences as to what constitutes family solidarity. But real differences of interpretation remain, and a study of Italian business relationships in early Tudor London serves to clarify the part which ought to be attributed to the family, as a business unit, in the later years of Italian commercial prosperity.

Family cohesion in economic pursuits may find manifestation in several ways. At the simplest level, the sixteenth-century merchant might be expected to equip his sons with the rudiments of a business education. This training might involve voyages to distant markets by the young merchant acting as his father's agent. A document preserved in the Genoese notarial archives, for example, shows Carruchio Spinola in the later fifteenth century sending his son, Francesco, then aged twenty-two, to England to do his business. Francesco, in return, appointed his father and brother as his procurators whilst he was away.¹² Often the young merchant would be sent to gain business experience in the employ of one of his father's trusted contacts overseas, who was likely

¹¹ Generally, see JACQUES HEERS, *Le clan familial au moyen âge* (Paris, 1974). D.O. HUGHES, "Urban Growth and Family Structure in Medieval Genoa", *Past & Present*, 66 (1975), pp. 3-28 insists that, whatever the pattern elsewhere, in Genoa the essential strength of the great aristocratic families remained unimpaired. Similar conclusions have been reached for Venice by JAMES C. DAVIS, *A Venetian Family and its Fortune, 1500-1900* (Philadelphia, 1975), and for Lucca by Marino Berengo, *Nobili e mercanti nella Lucca del Cinquecento* (Turin, 1965). Litchfield R. BURR, "Demographic Characteristics of Florentine Patrician Families, Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries", *Journal of Economic History*, XXIX (1969), pp. 191-205 accepts the continued rôle of the extended family, though arguing that after 1500 the extended clans became smaller with the diminishing number of collateral lines after this date.

¹² A(rchivio di) S(tato di) G(enova), Atti del notaio Garumberò Nicolò, f. 17, c. 322. The notarial archives of Genoa are of forbidding bulk, and I am indebted to Professor E. Grendi who has provided me with a number of references, including the above, gathered over a long period of research in the Genoese archives.

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to be a relative. Not only does this occur frequently in the case of the prominent Italian mercantile dynasties of the sixteenth century; there are examples involving lesser individuals as well. Taking illustration again from the Genoese community, Pietro Antonio Ardisono arrived in London by the 1530s to join his uncle, Giorgio, who had settled in England. Later, Pietro Antonio was named heir and executor in Giorgio's will.¹³ These examples simply show a world in which there was a large measure of occupational stability from one generation to the next, and in which a measure of trust was inspired by blood relationships. In this limited sense family relationships are clearly important. It is not surprising that this should be so, and there is nothing distinctively Italian about such arrangements. Similar examples could be multiplied from among members of other merchant groups established in early Tudor London.

A more pronounced family solidarity than that suggested above is not difficult to find, though again this should not be taken as a specifically Italian phenomenon. A witness before the High Court of Admiralty in 1556 explained that it was common mercantile practice, not only in Italy but in France, the Low Countries, and elsewhere, for brothers to act together in one society, and that in such cases all writings, bills of exchange and transactions were made in the name of the eldest brother and his society.¹⁴ After this fashion, two Florentine merchants, Niccolò Vinacceisi, in London, and Bernardo Vinacceisi, in Florence, acted together in one company for more than ten years, doing everything together and holding all their wares and merchandise in common until Bernardo appointed his son, Pietro Filippo, to wind up the company's affairs.¹⁵ When the London merchant, Stephen Vaughan, bought goods from the Genoese merchant, Bastiano Salvago, in Bordeaux, he was bound for payment by obligation to Francesco Salvago in London. According to Vaughan's testimony, the two cousins, Bastiano and Francesco, acted together

¹³ *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, ix, 504 (16); P.R.O. Prerogative Court of Canterbury, PROB 11/27 (28 Dyngeley).

¹⁴ P.R.O. H.C.A. 13/11 fo. 113.

¹⁵ P.R.O. E.C.P. 586 (27-8).

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from their respective abodes in all bargains, promises and contracts to their joint uses.¹⁶

The above examples are important because they offer not merely instances of brother acting for brother, son for father, nephew for uncle, in which the English records of the High Court of Admiralty and the Court of Chancery abound. They show rather a more perfect community of interests and property which modifies the findings of scholars who would stress the diminishing incidence of the common ownership of goods and the more flexible business arrangements of the later Middle Ages.¹⁷

When historians have talked of the rôle of the family in Italian commercial relationships they have normally sought to portray a network of business connexions of a far more extensive character than the simple filial and fraternal ties which were a commonplace of the medieval and early modern eras. The family partnership has been placed at the very centre of Italian business life, and emphasis given to the way in which the great Italian mercantile dynasties became widely dispersed throughout the commercial and banking centres of Europe by means of overseas branches established and staffed by younger members of the family. There can be no doubt that this traditional picture remains true for the early sixteenth century. Tuscan and, on a smaller scale, Genoese and Venetian companies operating in early Tudor London often formed part of a wider organization bound together by family relationships and investments. This pattern of widely dispersed merchant families is illustrated *par excellence* by the commercial dynasties of Tuscany.

Of the Florentine firms with branches in England, the Frescobaldi, described by Ehrenberg as being, with the Gualterotti, "the foremost financial powers in Europe" from the fall of the

¹⁶ P.R.O. E.C.P. 587(13); L.P. iv, ii, 3053. We also find Francesco acting for Sebastiano Salvago resident in Genoa; E.C.P. 499 (66).

¹⁷ DAVID HERLIHY, "Family Solidarity in Medieval Italian History", in D. HERLIHY, R.S. LOPEZ and V. SLESSAREV, eds. *Economy, Society and Government in Medieval Italy: Essays in Memory of Robert L. Reynolds* (The Kent State U.P. 1969), pp. 180-2. More recently, Herlihy seems to have placed greater stress on the tendency in the later Middle Ages for brothers "to keep their patrimony undivided for some years after the death of their father", "Deaths, Marriages, Births, and the Tuscan Economy (ca. 1300-1550)", in R.D. LEE, ed. *Population Patterns in the Past* (New York, 1977), p. 147.

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Medici to the rise of the Fuggers,¹⁸ were the most important in the early decades of the sixteenth century. The Frescobaldi may be regarded as entirely typical of the widely dispersed Italian business structure based on familial ties.

Girolamo Frescobaldi was operating in Bruges at least from the 1470s, and Girolamo himself remained in the Low Countries, first at Bruges and later at Antwerp,¹⁹ but already by the early years of Henry VII he was represented in England by two factors, Lodovico della Fava of Bologna and the Florentine Lorenzo Barducci.²⁰ In 1509 Lodovico della Fava still appears to be the chief representative in England of the firm of Girolamo Frescobaldi and company of London,²¹ a firm which is appearing with increasing frequency in the English and Florentine records.²² Early in Henry VIII's reign, however, Girolamo's son, Leonardo, began to act on behalf of the Frescobaldi in England,²³ though retaining the services of a certain Alessandro della Fava.²⁴ Leonardo and his brother, Francesco, remained in England after the bankruptcy of the Frescobaldi firm in 1518; Leonardo dying in England in September 1529, and Francesco returning to Florence soon afterwards.²⁵

¹⁸ R. EHRENBURG, *Capital and Finance in the Age of the Renaissance: A Study of the Fuggers and their Connections* (London, 1928), p. 198.

¹⁹ J. DENUCÉ, *Italiaansche Koopmansgeslachten te Antwerpen in de XVIe-XVIIIe Eeuwen* (Mechelen/Amsterdam, 1934), pp. 19-25.

²⁰ P.R.O. E.C.P. 84 (103). See also E.C.P. 76 (113). For Barducci, a former employee of the Medici in London, see R. DE ROOVER, *The Rise and Decline of the Medici Bank, 1397-1494* (Cambridge, Mass. 1963), pp. 331, 333.

²¹ L. LYELL and F.D. WATNEY, eds. *Acts of Court of the Mercers's Company, 1453-1527* (Cambridge, 1936), pp. 342-4, 383, 387. See also P.R.O. E101/129/11, 111.

²² A(rchivio di) S(tato di) F(irenze), Carte Stroziane, ser. iii, cccxiii, fo. 64 - concerns marine insurance, and dated 24 May 1509; A.S.F. Archivio del tribunale di mercanzia, libro di deliberatione, no. 349, fo. 27 (6 May 1512). L.P. i, i, 1573.

²³ Leonardo was governor of the Frescobaldi Company in London at least from 1511; G. MASI, *Statuti delle colonie fiorentine all'estero* (Milan, 1941), p. 188. See also, A.A. RUDDOCK, *Italian Merchants and Shipping in Southampton, 1270-1600* (Southampton, 1951), p. 195; A.L. MERSON, ed. *The Third Book of Remembrance of Southampton, 1514-1602*, i (Southampton, 1952), pp. cccxiii-iv, 10; L.P., i, ii, 2011, 2510, 3614 iv (224-5).

²⁴ L.P. i, i, 1785, ii, 3613 i (98), 3614 vi (150) (158).

²⁵ For Leonardo's death, see L.P. iv, iii, 5974-5. These letters from Francesco to Wolsey are the last references I have found to Francesco in England. Much later, one Robert Gaynesford, esquire, appears in the records of Chancery as administrator of the goods of the late Leonardo Frescobaldi; P.R.O. E.C.P. 1005 (44).

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From the period before the Frescobaldi bankruptcy, an indenture between the English king and Leonardo Frescobaldi together with his business partner the Lucchese merchant, Antonio Cavallari, bears striking testimony to how far the Frescobaldi had expanded from their base in the Low Countries by the year 1517. For surety of payment of sums owing to the Crown, Leonardo bound the companies of Girolamo Frescobaldi of London, the heirs of Girolamo and Leonardo Frescobaldi of Bruges, Leonardo Frescobaldi of Florence; and individually bound Girolamo, Leonardo, Alessandro, Filippo, Antonio, Giovanni and Francesco Frescobaldi, together with a number of business associates like the Cavallari, the Pigli,²⁶ and Domenico Canisanis.²⁷ The document fails to mention the branch of the Frescobaldi run by Giovanni Frescobaldi and Bartolomeo 'Nauly' ²⁸ in Venice.²⁹ The historian of the Fuggers may be correct to attribute the failure of the Frescobaldi in part to their limited business connexions,³⁰ but clearly the family were spreading their attentions very rapidly at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

After the failure of the Frescobaldi company, the most important Italian firm in London was that of the Bonvisi of Lucca.³¹ The Bonvisi were importing English wool by the reign of Edward IV,³² and in the 1490s the name begins to appear very frequently in the English records. The Lucchese firm offers another example of commercial expansion based on the family unit, for the Bonvisi of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries dispersed its progeny liberally throughout the business centres of Europe. During the reign of Henry VII the Bonvisi were represented in London by

²⁶ I take here the name "Pilly" to be an anglicized form of Pigli.

²⁷ P.R.O. E101/129/7.

²⁸ Possibly an anglicized form of Nerli.

²⁹ P.R.O. E.C.P. 123 (63).

³⁰ EHRENBURG, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-200.

³¹ For a detailed history of the Bonvisi connexion with England, see BRATCHEL, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-196.

³² *Archivio di Stato in Lucca*, *Anziani al tempo della libertà*, 534, reg. 41, c. 12.

³³ The London branch seems to have been established by Lorenzo di Paulo; E. LAZZARESCHI, ed., *Inventario del R. Archivio di Stato in Lucca*, v. *Archivi Gentilizi* (Pescia, 1946), p. 98.

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three brothers; Lorenzo,³³ Girolamo,³⁴ and Nicolao.³⁵ These men were the sons of Paulo di Lorenzo, who himself traded, after his father's death, in partnership with his brother, Benedetto.³⁶ Benedetto in turn produced a number of sons; Bernardino, Antonio, Ludovico, Martino and Vincenzo.³⁷ And these, as they grew up, were despatched to serve in the branches established overseas apparently by their elder cousins.³⁸ Bernardino appears to have remained at home, and to have died early.³⁹ Martino seems to have spent some of his early life in Antwerp,⁴⁰ and from about 1517 there are numerous references in the notarial archives of Genoa to the firm of Martino Bonvisi and company of Antwerp.⁴¹ Ludovico, in partnership with his father's associate, Bonaventura Micheli, was connected with the Bonvisi bank in Lyon from at least 1512.⁴² Both Ludovico and Martino, however, were, after

³⁴ Girolamo was chiefly concerned with promoting his ecclesiastical career, though in both English and Lucchese records he is on occasion described as a merchant of Lucca; P.R.O. E.C.P. 115 (95); A.S.L. Notarile, 2048, ser. Lorenzo Nicolai, 7 March 1513.

³⁵ Nicolao succeeded his brother, Girolamo, as one of the brokers of the Lucchese nation in London; Corporation of London Record Office, Journals of the Common Council, 10, fo. 157; Repts. of Aldermen, 1, fos. 39, 43v; L.P. Add. i, i, 49. Nicolao succeeded his other brother, Lorenzo, as head of the Bonvisi firm in England; C. SARDI, *Dei mecenati lucchesi nel secolo xvi* (Lucca, 1882), p. 32. This pamphlet — with different pagination — was reprinted in *Atti dell'Accademia lucchese*, XXI (1882).

³⁶ A.S.L. Notarile, 2062, ser. Lorenzo Nicolai, 3 April 1529 (three documents no pagination).

³⁷ A.S.L. MS 189, G. BURLAMACCHI, *Ricordi sulle famiglie nobili di Lucca*.

³⁸ Nicolao may well have been responsible for establishing the Bonvisi branch in the Low Countries. Certainly he was resident in Bruges in 1513; A.S.L. Notarile, 2062, ser. Lorenzo Nicolai, 3 April 1529.

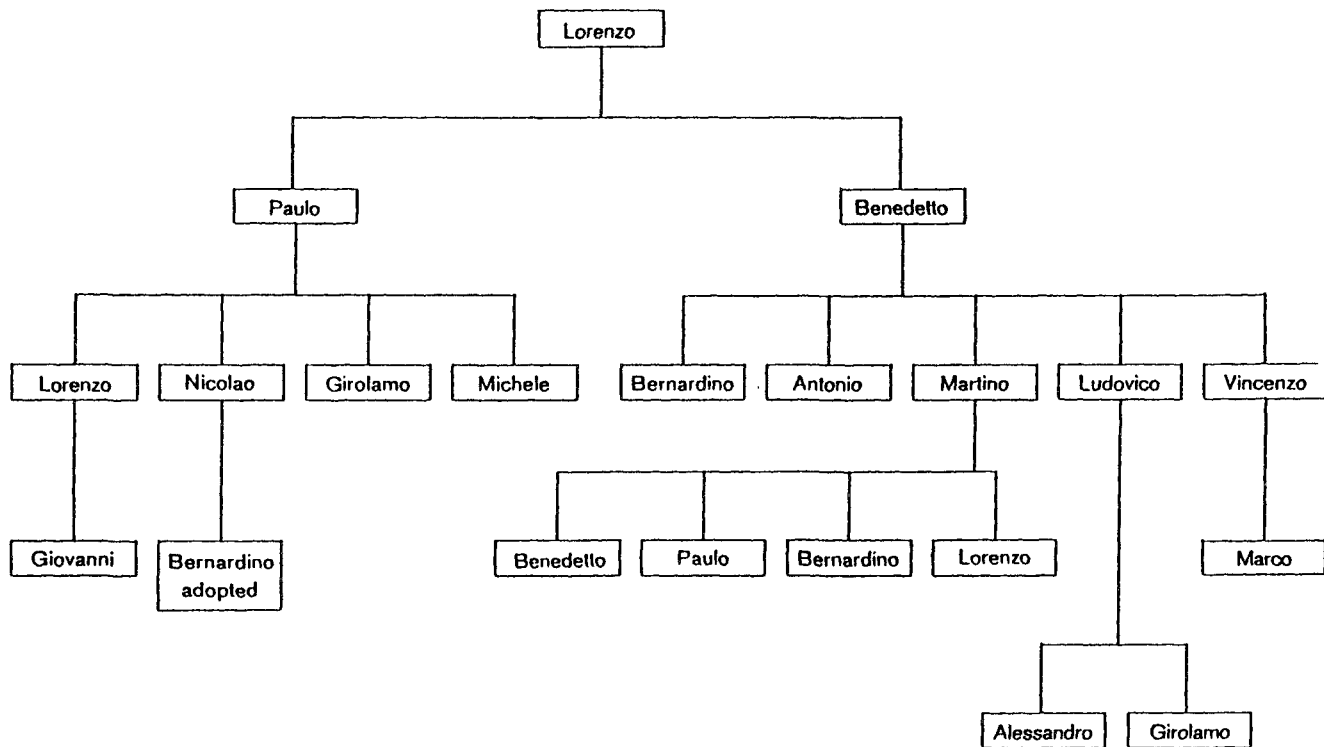
³⁹ A.S.L. Notarile, 2051, ser. Lorenzo Nicolai, 29 Nov. 1516.

⁴⁰ Martino does not seem to have been in Lucca at the time of his father's death in 1515, though he is mentioned in a document of Dec. 1516, together with his brother, Ludovico, acting on behalf of themselves, and in the name of their brothers, Antonio and Vincenzo; A.S.L. Notarile, 2051, ser. Lorenzo Nicolai, 4 Dec. 1516. Certainly the Bonvisi branch at Antwerp, from at least 1517 onwards, was named "Martino Bonvisi and Company", though this does not provide evidence that after 1517 Martino was actually resident in the Low Countries. Indeed two documents from late 1519 show Martino in Lucca acting on behalf of his brothers; A.S.L. Notarile, 2054, ser. Lorenzo Nicolai, 29 Sept., 5 Oct. 1519.

⁴¹ See particularly A.S.G. Atti del notaio Pastorino, Ant. f. 39, (1518). See also E. LAZZARESCHI, ed. *Libro della comunità dei mercanti lucchesi in Bruges* (Milan, 1947), pp. xxi-ii; and EHRENBERG, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-7.

⁴² A.S.L. Notarile, 2047, ser. Lorenzo Nicolai, 2 May 1512. For later references to Ludovico and Bonaventura of Lyon, see 2048, 4 June, 3 Nov. (two documents), and 12 Nov. 1513.

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* A more complete genealogical record is provided by B. BARONI, A.S.L. Bibl. Manoscritti no. 20, vol. i, pp. 108, 162, 201. The above table is not taken from Baroni, but has been compiled from a number of documents in L'Archivio dei notari della Repubblica Lucca and L'Archivio Buonvisi which serve to clarify relationships between the individuals with whom we are concerned. See particularly, A.S.L. Notarile, 2062, ser. Lorenzo Nicolai, 3 April 1529, and A.S.L. Archivio Buonvisi, pt i, no. 64, 5, 26 Oct. 1555, Testamento d'Antonio Buonvisi.

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their father's death, to spend most of their lives in Lucca where they did business in partnership,⁴³ and where both rose to high office.⁴⁴ Of Benedetto's other sons, Vincenzo, who was a minor at the time of his father's death,⁴⁵ lived much of his life in Lyon,⁴⁶ where he died in 1573,⁴⁷ whilst Antonio was sent at an early age to the Bonvisi bank in London.

Antonio Bonvisi was an important figure in an international network which covered all the chief centres of Europe. Antonio himself became head of the London bank,⁴⁸ maintaining from London close links with the Bonvisi establishments in Antwerp, Lyon, Lucca, and elsewhere. In Lucca, Antonio's personal and business affairs were looked after by his brothers, Martino and Ludovico.⁴⁹ From the 1520s Antonio was a non-resident partner in the Bonvisi firm in Lyon,⁵⁰ and by 1546 the Antwerp firm was entitled "Anthony Bonvise, Lodowic Bonvise, Nicholas Diodati and their Company, of Antwerp".⁵¹ Such links facilitated the trade in merchandise at a time when Italian silks, the re-exports of Antwerp, and French wares figured largely in the imports of the Italian merchants established in London; they also assisted the international banking activities of the Bonvisi. The rôle of Antonio Bonvisi in financing the schemes of Henry VIII's latter

⁴³ The notarial archives of Lucca for the sixteenth century are full of references to Martino and Ludovico Bonvisi and Company of Lucca.

⁴⁴ See particularly, BERENGO, *Nobili e mercanti*, pp. 112-3, 115n, 120, 123, 139n, 143, 240n, 247; SARDI, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁴⁵ A.S.L. Notarile, 2051, ser. Lorenzo Nicolai, 6 Feb. 1516 (two documents). Vincenzo was born in Lucca in 1500; SARDI, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁴⁶ He was certainly in Lyon during the political troubles of 1531; SARDI, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁴⁷ A.S.L. Archivio Buonvisi, pt i, reg 43, cc. 203, 233.

⁴⁸ References to the formation of the London company of which Antonio was to be governor and administrator; A.S.L. Notarile, 2063, ser. Lorenzo Nicolai, 27 Jan., 22 Nov. (two documents) 1530.

⁴⁹ A.S.L. Notarile, 2051, ser. Lorenzo Nicolai, 28 Dec. 1515, 6 Feb., 8 March, 9 April, 18 April, 4 Dec. 1516; 2062, 20 July 1529; 2063, 5 Jan., 27 Jan., 22 Nov. 1530; Corte dei mercanti, 210 (1532), 12 Jan. 1532.

⁵⁰ A.S.L. Notarile, 2058, ser. Lorenzo Nicolai, 15 Oct. 1524; 2059, 17 March 1526; 2061, 1 Oct. 1528; 2063, 23 Nov. 1530. See also A.S.L. Corte dei mercanti, 230 (1545), fo. 8ff. Neither Antonio nor Ludovico spent much time in Lyon, and business there seems to have been handled by their brother, Vincenzo.

⁵¹ L.P. xxi, i, 716 (14).

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years is well-known,⁵² and the correspondence of Henry's agents in Antwerp at this time is full of references to bills of credence sent by Antonio in London to the Bonvisi in Antwerp for money to be paid in the Low Countries for the English King's use.⁵³

The researches of F. Bayard have shown that in the early seventeenth century Bonvisi enterprise continued to be based on the family unit. The six Bonvisi companies established at Lyon between 1575 and 1629 were formed entirely by members of the Bonvisi family. Members of the family also continued to dominate among the partners of the Bonvisi branches at Genoa, Venice and Plaisance.⁵⁴

These examples of family firms, often consisting of independent units, but bound together by family relationships and investments, can be greatly multiplied. The phenomenon was characteristic of Italian, and indeed of comparable South German⁵⁵ business relationships in general; and to the Tuscan examples cited above might be added others involving the prominent banking houses of the more individualistic Genoese⁵⁶ and the more limited establishments of the Venetians. The Grimaldi of Genoa were represented in England successively by Ludovico;⁵⁷ by Giovanni Battista, the son, and sometime servant and factor of Ludovico, who was involved in the exactions of Henry VII's notorious official, Edmund Dudley;⁵⁸ by Francesco, who was in the service of Katherine of Aragon and married one of her servants;⁵⁹ by Benedetto;⁶⁰ and by Benedetto's brother and executor, Goffredo.⁶¹

⁵² See particularly R. B. OUTHWAITE, «The Trials of Foreign Borrowing: The English Crown and the Antwerp Money Market in the Mid-Sixteenth Century», *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser. XIX (1966), pp. 289-305.

⁵³ Illustrative of such references is *L.P.* xix, i, 887.

⁵⁴ BAYARD, *art. cit.*, pp. 1235-7.

⁵⁵ H. KELLENBENZ, *The Rise of the European Economy* (London, 1976), pp. 150-2, 173.

⁵⁶ On the rôle of the family in Genoese business see HEERS, *Le clan familial*, pp. 234-6.

⁵⁷ P.R.O. E.C.P. 93 (8).

⁵⁸ P.R.O. E.C.P. 109 (59), 1022 (57); E101/129/11, 113.

⁵⁹ *L.P.* i, i, 474; P.R.O. E.C.P. 315 (66).

⁶⁰ *L.P.* v, 684.

⁶¹ *L.P.* v, 684. The reference to Galfridus (?) de Grimaldis in L.C.R.O. Reps. of Aldermen, 5, fo. 88 almost certainly relates also to the Jeffrey Grymbaldys of the English records.

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The Venetian merchant Lorenzo Pasqualigo frequently appears in the first two decades of the sixteenth century acting in London for, and corresponding with his brothers in Venice.⁶²

The structure of the Italian business community in London in the first half of the sixteenth century provides overwhelming support for those scholars who would stress the continuing importance of the Italian family in economic life. The restoration of a degree of political stability, in parts of Italy at least, may have caused the extended family to lose some of its more specifically military and political functions. But in the sixteenth century, as in the past, sentiment combined with the difficulties of finding reliable representation abroad to preserve economic links based on family relationships. This is true for both the more impressive commercial structures and for the multitude of smaller business organizations.

It may even be that the family as a business unit recovered some of its earlier cohesion during this period. No firm conclusion can be reached until a clearer picture emerges of late medieval Italian business relationships as a whole, but in general theoretical terms it is not difficult to see how the European economic climate, as it touched upon Italian businessmen of the late fifteenth, early sixteenth centuries, may well have prompted a renewed sense of family solidarity.

For the Italian mercantile cities generally the sixteenth century was a time of grave problems, of shrinking horizons. This is true of Florence where, as David Herlihy points out, economic opportunities failed to keep pace with an expanding population.⁶³ And it is true of Venice as well.⁶⁴ In this atmosphere, there are many indications of attempts by Italian families to conserve

⁶² *Archivio di Stato di Venezia*, Canc. Inferiore, atti notarili, busta 6620, no. 4; *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian*, i, 752, ii, 138, 145, 174, 183, 186, 215-7, 228-9, 239, 253, 340, 395-7, 401, 405-6, 455-6, 500, 661, 817.

⁶³ HERLIHY, *Deaths, Marriages, Births*, p. 158.

⁶⁴ Historians today are careful not to antedate the economic decline of Venice, but a summary of the difficulties faced by Venetian merchants throughout the sixteenth century is provided by DAVIS, *A Venetian Family*, pp. 28-32.

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wealth by consolidating the family unit,⁶⁵ and of efforts to reduce costs by living under one roof and the pooling of assets.⁶⁶ The remarkable business solidarity displayed by the vast Bonvisi clan throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries may well be viewed as a defensive reaction at a time of limited opportunities and economic uncertainties.

In search of opportunities, many Italian merchants focused their attentions more exclusively than hitherto on the lands of the future: Spain, France, the Low Countries, and England.⁶⁷ It is significant that the Frescobaldi were based in the Low Countries rather than in Italy, and that the Frescobaldi bank in Florence appeared only after the family had established themselves in Bruges.⁶⁸ Certainly the Frescobaldi family formed part of a large Italian community in Bruges, but Italian family businesses with a northern, rather than an Italian, focus may well have been prompted to look to their own resources even more intensely than in Italy itself. The domiciling among strangers of the very nucleus of the family must have served to foster self-dependence.

II. THE LIMITS OF FAMILY COHESION

In the sixteenth century the family must still be regarded as the basis of Italian business organization. But the notion of large family clans united by an identity of economic interests requires to be qualified both in its broader medieval setting and more specifically in relation to the Italian community of early Tudor London.

First, whilst there are many examples of business networks binding together brothers and their immediate descendants, me-

⁶⁵ After 1500 in Florence there seems to have been a movement to reduce the number of marriages within the family and consequently the number of collateral lines; BURR, *art. cit.*, pp. 196-8. Similar developments were taking place, rather later, in Venice; DAVIS, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-112.

⁶⁶ HERLIHY, *Deaths, Marriages, Births*, pp. 147, 158-160; DAVIS, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8; BRIAN PULLAN, "The Occupations and Investments of the Venetian Nobility in the Middle and Late Sixteenth Century", in J.R. HALE, ed. *Renaissance Venice* (London, 1973), p. 387.

⁶⁷ DENUCÉ, *Italiaansche Koopmansgeslachten*, pp. 5-6.

⁶⁸ EHRENBERG, *Capital and Finance*, p. 198.

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dievalists have shown that such business connexions seem seldom to have survived a second or third generation. Such rapid fragmentation remains apparent in the sixteenth century, for example in the case of the earlier history of the Bonvisi of Lucca.

Paulo and Benedetto di Lorenzo Bonvisi were operating together at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and we have already described how the sons of Benedetto, as they reached maturity, received their early business education in the overseas branches established by their older cousins. Antonio di Benedetto himself received in London his nephew, Benedetto, the son of Antonio's brother, Martino.⁶⁹ But the connexions binding together the children of Paulo and Benedetto di Lorenzo were not maintained. The London company formed by Nicolao di Paulo and Antonio di Benedetto did not long survive the former's return to Lucca. Thereafter both men formed separate companies,⁷⁰ and the accounts of the London company, which remained unsettled, resulted in a long dispute⁷¹ which was only finally settled by arbitrators in Lucca after Nicolao's death in November 1530.⁷² Nicolao's brother, Lorenzo, remained in London until his own death, and seems to have maintained business connexions with Nicolao's firm in Lucca.⁷³ But I know of no references connecting the names of the two cousins, Lorenzo and Antonio, though both men lived and did business contemporaneously for many years in the city of London. However impressive the network of family connexions built up by the leading Italian mercantile dynasties, these connexions seem seldom to have encompassed more than one or two generations.

The rapid fragmentation of a family's economic interests is neither surprising nor a development peculiar to the sixteenth

⁶⁹ The earliest references found to Benedetto are from 1545/6; *L.P.* xx, ii, 596.

⁷⁰ The termination of the London partnership between Nicolao and Antonio is referred to in *A.S.L. Notarile*, 2063, ser. Lorenzo Nicolai, 27 Jan. 1530.

⁷¹ It is presumably to this that the following documents refer: *A.S.L. Notarile*, 2058, ser. Lorenzo Nicolai, 15 Oct. 1524; 2059, 2 July 1525, 18 Jan. (two documents), 24 Jan., 27 Jan. (two documents), 18 June 1526 (two documents); 2060, 27 April 1527; 2061, 6 Feb., 29 Oct. 1528.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 2063, 22 Nov. 1530 (two documents).

⁷³ Lorenzo's son, Giovanni, was a partner in Nicolao's Lucchese firm; *ibid.*, 2060, 1 Aug. 1527; 2061, 6 Feb., 29 Oct. 1528; 2062, 3 April 1529 (four documents).

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century. A unified business commitment could hardly survive the proliferation of collateral lines, and historians of the Alberti have illustrated the disintegration of the extended family as an economic unit in the mid-fourteenth century.⁷⁴ Indeed the tendency for dissatisfied individuals to break away from the family unit may have been checked somewhat in the more difficult economic climate of the sixteenth century. During this period families were attempting to preserve their status and wealth by a policy, consciously adopted, of restricted marriage.⁷⁵ It has already been suggested that the immediate consequences of such a policy would be to reinforce economic and social ties between brothers. The long term consequence was to reduce the number of collateral lines and consequently the possibility of division among future generations.

In the sixteenth century, as in the past, close economic ties normally bound only relatively near kinsmen. To this qualification must be added the further point that by the sixteenth century the component parts of the family network were no longer as clearly subordinate to the family establishment in Italy as had been the case in the past. Italian merchants resident overseas were often important figures in the mercantile and banking world who not only dominated their own companies, but also held substantial investments in their family's branches elsewhere.

In the early fourteenth century, large Florentine firms like the Peruzzi with their branches outside Florence were legally a single unit ruled over by the partners in Florence. Branch managers were salaried individuals who might be dismissed.⁷⁶ Later firms such as the Medici were structured differently. The overseas branches of the Medici were in fact subsidiary partnerships over which control was maintained by the senior partners in Florence by virtue of the fact that they provided more than half of the

⁷⁴ DE ROOVER, *Business, Banking and Economic Thought*, pp. 57-8; SAPORI, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 975-1012.

⁷⁵ HERLIHY, *Deaths, Marriages, Births*, pp. 150-2 shows, however, that Tuscan families were pursuing a similar marital policy in the mid-fourteenth century.

⁷⁶ DE ROOVER, *Business, Banking and Economic Thought*, pp. 133-4, 209; SAPORI, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 653-91.