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**BUSINESS ADOLESCENCE: THE EDUCATION OF ANTONIO
BRIGNOLE, FOREIGN-RESIDENT, COMMERCIAL
AGENT (1554–1573)**

by Russell Ives Court

This paper will follow the foreign tenure of a young merchant to explore his formative experiences and the effects he had on the parent company. Antonio Brignole worked abroad as an agent for Giovanni Brignole's silk manufactory and, after Giovanni Brignole's retirement in 1567, headed the family business, which evolved into a banking and shipping firm. The Brignole rose to prominence in the sixteenth century with others of the *nobili nuovi minori*. The minor new nobility had neither the political authority of the Fieschi, the Adorno, the Giustiniani, or their affiliates, nor the clout and landed wealth of the Grimaldi, Spinola, Doria, and the rest of the viscountal elite. What they did have, increasingly, through the course of the sixteenth century was a network of personal and often familial relationships that formed a network through which they conducted long distance commerce very successfully. This network—first described by Braudel, Ruiz, and Spooner—and above all the “know-how” required to make it function—illuminated by Giorgio Doria—will be more fully explored in a broader study. The wealth and political prominence that were the fruits of this network interest me less than the function of these personal relationships or, as treated specifically here, the initiation into this network. The latter often was in the form of a foreign subsidiary of a family or allied activity providing shipping, insurance, or exchange banking for the parent enterprise. Many studies have in passing lauded the benefits of a foreign sojourn for the education and training of young merchants. Here I will treat this subject through an examination of a specific company.

All of the material used for this study is contained in the Brignole Family Archive, bequeathed to the city of Genoa by the last of the Brignole, Maria Brignole-Sale, the duchess dei Ferrari di Galliera, upon her death in the 1860s. The documentation, apart from scattered notarial *filze* (sundry letters and notarial acts *infilzate* or stitched through after they were registered), commences in 1514 and contains

scores of *Mastri* (master ledgers), *Libri di Fiera* (exchange fair registers), and *Registri di lettere commerciali* (registers of outgoing commercial letters), and ends in the 1860s with *libri di cucina* (“kitchen”), *cantina* (“cellar”), *elemosina* (“charity”), *chiese* (“churches”), etc. The broader study, of which this paper is a chapter, treats the period from 1514 to 1637. This span of time—from the oldest extant *mastro* of Giovanni Brignole to the death of his grandson Gio Francesco Brignole, when the family opted out of network-based activity for safer public debt activities—mirrors the evolution of the *nobili nuovi minori* both chronologically and qualitatively. The career path of the Brignole is similar to that of the Durazzo, Balbi, Sauli, Moneglia, Invrea, and Rapallo; this fact, together with the richness of the archive, makes them an ideal case study.

The study advances through successive financial ledgers, following the merchants through their foreign sojourns. Antonio Brignole was resident agent in Antwerp for his father from 1554 to 1558. He then sold insurance policies to other merchants during 1559 and exchanged a limited amount of bills of exchange at the fairs of Besançon in 1560. Forming a partnership with his uncles for two years, and acting in the subsequent year as an independent banker, Antonio took on four times the financial paper of his first foray. After the death of Antonio’s father, the Brignole family enterprise followed a far more network-oriented strategy.

This study is also a contribution to the debate over the significance of family ties or more informal relationships in early modern commerce. I maintain that subsidiary firms are fundamental to the maintenance of the sixteenth-century Genoese commercial network. They function as foreign trading schools and they extend a business’s reach, innovating its activities. Subsidiaries are often, but not always, run by younger relatives. Although there is general agreement on the trust-generating effects of kin relationships and the heuristic value of voyages abroad, most studies present few details upon which we should judge either. For example, in examinations of *commenda* contracts, the question of trust has only recently entered the debate¹—the investments

¹Notably R. Berlow, “The Sailing of the ‘Saint Esprit,’” *Journal of Economic History* 39.2 (1979) 345–362; J. Pryor, “Commenda: The Operation of the Contract in Long Distance Commerce at Marseilles During the Thirteenth Century,” *Journal of European Economic History* 13 (1984) 397–440, and “Mediterranean Commerce in the Middle

are so widespread that historians think they must have been safe and relatively conservative. In the analysis of family firms, trust is assumed to be generated and preserved by blood relationships. The importance of family ties and foreign experience is never questioned.² The mistaken assumptions are first, that kin always do what they are told; second, that simple obedience would suffice; and third, that kinship offers special opportunities unavailable to those not related by blood. On the other side of the debate, there are those (notably Lopez and Lane) who dispute the importance of familial relationships in early modern commerce, especially toward the middle of the sixteenth century, stressing instead an increased flexibility in commercial enterprises and business relationships.³ Lopez envisions a confraternal social structure that allows the Genoese to create non-familial commerce, avoiding “mediocre brothers and spendthrift sons.” Lane cites instead state involvement that mitigates the need to rely heavily on relations; Venice, the *Serenissima*, provided the fleet, the insurance, and therefore the guarantees. Antonio Brignole had close relations with his brother in law and other associates only distantly related, one brother having died, the other exiled after a conspiracy to overthrow the government. While there is an inclination to deal with family members—Antonio relied on his father and uncles in the start of his career—the real strength of the Genoese commercial network is in the exchangeability of relationships.

I will describe the formation and evolution of Antonio Brignole’s semi-autonomous subsidiary activities operating in the Genoese sphere (Spain, the Low Countries, Sicily, and the kingdom of Naples) to give concrete examples of his relationships. This study will not only consider the Brignole network in the context of the above debate, but will also go further to propose various effects that similar subsidiary companies may have had on the evolution of their parent companies and on their relationships with other merchant houses. The junior firms of

Ages: a Voyage under Contract of Commenda,” *Viator* 14 (1983) 133–194; K. Reyerson, *Business, Banking and Finance in Medieval Montpellier* (Toronto 1985).

²In C. Mathers, “Family Partnerships and International Trade in Early Modern Europe: Merchants from Burgos in England and France, 1470–1570,” *Business History Review* 62.3 (1988) 367–397, Mathers stresses the central importance of family partnerships but is at a loss when she tries to explain just why family relations cannot seem to hold these companies together for more than one generation.

³R. S. Lopez, “Le Marchand Génois. Un profil collectif,” *Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations* 8 (1958); F. C. Lane, “Family Partnerships and Joint Ventures in the Venetian Republic,” *Journal of Economic History* 4.2 (1944) 178–196.

Antonio Brignole Cicala and Bartolomeo Pallavicino Coronata and that of Giulio Rapallo and Gio Francesco Brignole provide a clear view of their respective formative experiences. The junior subsidiaries of other merchant firms also appear in the Brignole's documentary series. Because they are visible through their direct dealings with the Brignole and Sale families, what these entries reveal, although suggestive, is fragmentary. For this reason, we should not consider these subsidiary/parent relationships as exclusive to the Brignole. The registers recording the humbler activities of the family activity have survived because they graced the shelves of the Brignole's noble library, projecting the image of longevity of elite experience long after the registers' practical use had been eclipsed. Similar registers were kept by similar families, whose eventual fortunes were less than those of the Brignole. They eventually used their obsolete registers for book-binding, scratch paper, and kindling.

The names of merchant companies are suggestive. Often the basis for such partnerships, whether matrimony, political affiliation, or reputation, eludes the historian. We can only speculate as to why Antonio and Bartolomeo formed a partnership. Was it to expand their network? How were these subsidiary companies organized? What were the other specific benefits to the parent firm? Was the *raison d'être* of the junior firm to train the agent living abroad with shipping, insuring, and financial and point of sale services provided at reduced cost and limited liability? Was it an effort to create or expand the scope and direction of local networks centered around the junior partner/factor/agent/relative? Clearly, the junior firm served all of these purposes, differing in degree according to the junior partner's experience and acumen. The first three elements have been taken for granted, while the fourth is rarely mentioned: the agent is seen as a mere employee of the parent company. The Brignole's archive provides material that casts light on these questions.

The most detailed materials are from the junior firm of Antonio Brignole and Bartolomeo Pallavicino, 1564–1573. The firm illustrates the function of the subsidiary within a greater commercial context. However, by the time Antonio and Bartolomeo formed their partnership, the professional training of Antonio Brignole, foreign agent, was almost complete. Following Antonio Brignole's career provides a unique view into five or six different subsidiaries, which can best be

evaluated within the context of the rise of the *nuovi minori* over the span of the sixteenth century. This study, which concentrates on the three subsidiaries with which Antonio was directly involved, does not seek to establish a model for the formation of commercial companies in Genoa, but it will provide insight into how relationships function and how such companies were changed by and capitalized on innovation. Excluded from this study, but nevertheless informing it, is the market for free agents offering various services—handlers, buyers, shippers, insurers, and expeditors—which will form the subject of a chapter of the broader study.

When Antonio was sent to the Low Countries in 1554,⁴ the Brignole enterprise was a manufacturing company producing high quality velvet cloth. To follow Antonio Brignole, born in 1535, is to follow the evolution of the Brignole company. Antonio's small firm evolves from a wholesale textile shop in Antwerp to the inclusion of simple financial services (initially restricted to the transfer of revenue from sales to the parent in Genoa) to a network-based services firm that would completely supplant the parent.

The Imperiale-Balliani family handled the exchange activity for the Brignole in conjunction with their foreign sales, remitting revenues back to Genoa through the seasonal Besançon exchange fairs. For a commission, they traded the accounts receivable of the Brignole and others in cities abroad for the accounts receivable in Genoa of those needing funds *oltremare*, overseas. The Balliani were new nobility, related to the Brignole through Antonio's paternal grandmother. By 1560, Antonio and his brother Francesco conducted independent exchanges at the fairs, forming a partnership with Benedetto Imperiale⁵ [Balliani] the next year. Three years later, when Francesco, Antonio's younger brother, reached twenty years of age he took on the management of the textile factory in Genoa (*Volta nostra*, "our loom"). Thus, their father Giovanni Brignole changed the scope and direction of the

⁴The Flemish groat accounts beginning 1554. The 1553 parent ledger's frontispiece records that it is written in part by *manu mea [et] Antonii eius filii primogeniti* and shows him selling cloth, although it is unclear where. The groat ledger has no *introito* so this is as close as we can get.

⁵In this case, "Imperiale" denotes the noble conglomerate, or *Albergo* typical to Genoa, followed by the surname. In the same way, the Brignole are most often referred to as the Cicala; as with all new noble families known by their *Alberghi*, the surname is often not even mentioned (a logistical nightmare).

company by dividing it into two distinct arms, financial/sales and manufacturing. It would remain in this format for ten years until the death of the manufacturing manager, when the company would change more radically, reflecting ten years of experience and the establishment of the Brignole network. Since the documentary evidence for the activity of the younger Brignole is found in the subsidiary ledgers, it is constructive to follow the surviving registers one by one to construct a picture of these merchants' activities.

ANTONIO CICALA "IN LIRE FIAMMINGHE" 1554–1558⁶

The sale of velvet constitutes the main activity found in the first Antwerp book. Antonio's agency is an advance on their former Antwerp agent Antonio Centurione Illice, and agents of this type were generally an advance over the *commenda* contracts (both in cost and consistency) that continued to dominate the *Libro Mastro* in the 1550s. I say this mindful of the probable criticism that, to be judged a success, Antonio would have to have done a better job than Illice and would have to have earned more in Antwerp than he could have elsewhere. Since the volume of sales before and after Antonio's arrival fluctuated little and the commissions collected were the same, the never-questioned heuristic value of foreign experience should be seen as frosting on the cake. While it is more difficult to answer the second possible objection, the family business was velvet manufacture, and sixteenth-century Europe's primary market for textiles was Antwerp. Further, I maintain, it is the participation in the great emporium of the north that lead Antonio to push the family business into ever more lucrative activities.

The velvet was sent to Antonio by his father to be sold in Antwerp from 1554 to 1558. Antonio did do a limited amount of cloth sales for others, but the 2,125 scudi of commissions Antonio executed for five individuals (some related by marriage) is dwarfed by the 45,814 scudi of business he conducted for his father. 1,715 scudi of the income from sales was converted into purchases of Flemish cloth for sale in Italy. The remainder was converted into exchange notes and sent to the Be-

⁶Archivio storico comunale di Genova, Brignole-Sale, Libri di conti, Copialettere, Registri vari, Libri di fiera, 9 (1554–1558 'in Lire fiamminghe,' that is, pounds groat). I have converted all figures into scudi at a rate of 3.2 pounds groat to the *écu du marc*. The ledger is in both coins, and all of the ledgers discussed here have the *écu* in common. I hope to have removed that which initially caused me great confusion and replaced it with a more consistent, not to mention universal, currency.

sançon fair. The activity is very straightforward: sell velvet, buy salable cloth when prices allowed for “honest” earnings—*guadagno honesto* (at least covering all costs no matter the morality and hopefully furnishing a decent profit)—and remit the remainder.

Rather than by salary, Antonio’s Antwerp office was supported entirely by the 3 2/3% commissions that the elder Brignole and other clients paid for services. The fees that Giovanni paid out to his son were collected in a costs account (*avarie*) from which fees paid by Antonio for remittances, the guild fees, and general expenses were deducted. After four years, the balance of this account was 310 scudi. We ascertain that Antonio made a tidy profit on agency services when we consider that Giovanni would have paid the 2,227 scudi to someone else to sell his velvet and make useful purchases. Since we do not have the former agent’s account books, we are unable to gauge the relative success of both agencies. Antonio turned a 14% profit on services after rent, guild dues, purchase, and exchange commissions were deducted, which financed his foreign training. The volume of business forwarded by the parent made this possible. The success of the agency rested on the agent’s ability to secure the highest price for his goods.

The agent also sold credit, that is, speculated on the money supply with sales for cash or on time. If the local currency was in abundance (*larghezza della moneta*), the agent would sell on credit, payable on the next or subsequent exchange fair. If there was a dearth of coin (*strettezza*), then he would try to sell for cash. A less obvious calculation to be made was the state of the money supply in Genoa or elsewhere if strategy dictated the need for capital in another city. An over abundance of coin at home may have suggested a loan at interest instead of remittance easily disguised with fictitious exchange. All of these considerations were contingent on the availability of trustworthy debtors, both in Antwerp and Genoa or in the other cities to which remittance was made. The bills of exchange would be traded, finally generating sales revenue one or two quarters, if not an entire year, later.

The overall profits of the Brignole’s textile enterprise are not traceable from Antonio’s ledger alone. Commissions were based on the sale price of a lot of cloth and not on a value set by the sender. The total value of a lot and its corresponding commissions and guild dues were calculated only after all of the individual pieces of cloth had been sold. To find the cost of producing a particular shipment and to determine

how profitable the whole activity was, one would have to analyze the main ledger or *Libro Mastro* in conjunction with the now lost *Libro della Volta*.⁷

The services Antonio provided his father's firm were not very complex at first. The receipt and sale of large shipments of luxury textiles were recorded in the first four years covered by the ledger. These sales were either in cash or, more frequently, on credit, that is, on "time." Shipments received were registered in the current account of *Johannes de Brignolis Cicalla pater noster*, whereas sales on credit were moved to an account called *Johannes Cigalla de Brignolis conto terminibus* (credit) and to the individual purchasers (debit). Though there is a cash account, it is limited to coins on hand. Cash transactions, sales, expenses, and "costs" are registered in the account of Antonio's deposit banker, Geronimo Lomellini Clavero. Such entries account for roughly half of the names found in the register. The remainder of the accounts are concerned with the perennial problem of moving revenue home after the sale. This half of the business is just as time consuming and risky as the first. For the entire period '54-'58, exchange transactions were still arranged by the Imperiale-Balliani. In theory, the exchange is easy to deconstruct: a note payable in Antwerp (e.g., one of the sales on "time") is exchanged for a note of equal value, minus .33% payable in Genoa (or wherever funds were required). Special care had to be taken to accept only the notes of solvent, stable merchants. The correspondence registers are full of reminders to agents to solicit "mature" debtors—those whose notes have come due.

The subsidiary's ledger seemed mundane at first sight, and I initially thought that the ledger was a manual, subset, or long description of the accounts in Antonio's father's *mastro*. In truth, the ledger is much more. It is the documentary manifestation of a social and legal space carved out by Giovanni for his son's activity. It is fueled by the volume of Giovanni's business, but his risk is limited to the goods sent. At first, the sale of Giovanni's goods constituted almost all of Antonio's activity, but this would change. As we shall see, this social space provided Antonio a freedom of movement to evolve his activity in ways that his father never intended, cutting himself loose from Giovanni's manufacturing moorings.

⁷The *Mastro* has numerous references to the *Libro della Volta*. Many similar ledgers

ANTONIO CICALA “IN LIRE FIAMMINGHE” 1559–1560

The opening entries of the ledger continue as in the earlier one. Antonio took delivery of one shipment of cloth for his father, two for the partnership newly formed with his brother, and one for himself. Only the sale to Giacomo Fagnani for his father, for 2198 scudi, would be converted to a timed debt and left to mature. On April 20⁸ Antonio abruptly closes up shop, remitting much of the firm’s cash and calling in all of the remaining receivables. A total of 5029 scudi from Giovanni’s time account, 991 scudi from the account held in common with his brother Francesco, and 561 scudi from his personal account were replaced by the collection of “*cedule*” from nearly all of the firm’s debtors. These promissory notes were to be administered by Geronimo Lomellini Clavero & Bros., in an account specifically fashioned for them, called *Geronimo et fr conto di avallo* (literally “guarantee account”). While I have not encountered this exact formula, *cedule-conto di avallo*, elsewhere in the series, it is common to assign debt to be collected by an agent, as mentioned above. This case is particular, however, since it indicates the sale of receivables in exchange for a future obligation to a third party. It is unclear from this ledger how these instruments were eventually resolved. This is an important question, as 6581 scudi is no mean sum. Antonio would widely employ the collection of mature debt as a prerequisite of network participation throughout his career.

The *cedule* were balanced against accounts receivable in the time account. Similarly, all of Giovanni’s other accounts, divisions of shipments (*partimenti*), his current account, and all but the most recent shipment of cloth, were closed. The current account was emptied and remitted four months earlier, as it would have been normal each quarter, but this activity went beyond the periodic fair. Giovanni’s last entry of April 20 is illuminating: *per quanto resto creditore avallato* (“for which I remain a guaranteed creditor”). While there is an exit, or *avallo* (again, “guarantee” in modern Italian), that leads on to another ledger

are extant for earlier periods.

⁸This can be seen in a reconstruction of the process apparent in Brignole-Sale (henceforth Bs) 9 libro 3, fols. 44, 69 [Ger e fr conto cassa], 121 [Ger e fr conto di avallo] 49, 72 [Gio conto term], 48 [Gio conto nto], 50 [Antonio proprio], 73 [Antonio e Francesco fr], 56 [Pezze 18 di Vta], 119 [Cambii di fiera].

entitled *Antonio and Francesco Cicala*, it contains only the loose ends of the Antwerp agency and continues with only marginal dabbling in purchases and sales.

After a five year absence Antonio returned to Genoa in 1559 to conduct a new agency for the family firm that would last just over one year: that of insurance underwriter. Antonio maintained a very limited number of clients, seven in all, including himself, four buyers, and three sellers. In comparison to his Antwerp brokerage, the volume was small change. The thirty-six policies had premiums ranging from 6% to 7% with one as high as 15%. Antonio insured 2,469 scudi of merchandise sent from Genoa for a total of 163 scudi in premiums to be paid upon safe arrival of the merchandise at various Spanish ports. Antonio sold insurance to his clients and traded the policies at the exchange fair for policies sent, and collectable in the other direction. In return for his efforts, Antonio insured seven of his own shipments for 36 scudi entirely funded by the other policies, representing a 22% profit. One of clients, who purchased two policies, could have been his undoing. Battista Torrese bought a policy at 15% for 21 scudi, insuring 140 scudi. A loss on this, or on any of the policies, would have wiped out almost all of Antonio's revenue. And it would have happened if not for the fact that "insurance made on the *tomini* loaded in Lagos for Battista Torrese on a ship, lost, but for not having been made in time one is able to recuperate only the cost . . ." ⁹ It seems that Torrese tried to insure the cargo after he had learned that the ship was lost. The premium would be refunded.

The ledgers show no evidence that the Brignole personally repeated their foray into insurance, but later they farmed it out to an agent based in Florence. Antonio did, however, repeat his exchanges at fairs, this time as a banker. There is no evidence that Antonio attended the fairs of August, All Saints, and Annunciation for 1558–1559 either to exchange insurance policies or to remit timed debt, although it is likely that he did. Antonio Imperiale-Balliani exchanged all of the Brignole's notes for the first three fairs,¹⁰ notwithstanding the entries recorded in *Antonio e Francesco nostri di Besanzone*. This ledger contains an exchange for 1295 scudi, the first of a long series of interest-earning loans, based on the fair (*fiera fredda*, "cold fair"), but never sent. One

⁹Bs 9-3, fol. 66, debit.

year later in early 1560, with experiments in insurance and wholesale cloth sales concluded, Antonio and his brother did attend the Savoy fair, as their official, notarized public obligations ledger, or *Scartafaccio*, clearly attests.

SCARTAFACCIO DI ANTONIO E FRANCESCO CICALA,
 FIERA DI SANTI DI 1560¹¹

What is immediately apparent from an examination of the *Scartafaccio* volume of transactions is a departure from everything that Antonio had engaged in up to this date. Giovanni's revenues for the first quarter of 1560 (26,960 scudi¹²) far exceeded the six years of Antonio's combined activities up to 1559. Antonio also exchanged 1480 scudi for his and his brother's partnership.¹³ Nearly ten thousand scudi of this total activity are probably loans to Genoese bankers in Antwerp for whom no actual exchange was executed. Notwithstanding its greater complexity, trading in exchange bills worked the same way as trading in insurance policies. The Brignole conducted multiple activities in Spain, the Netherlands, Naples, Milan, Florence, and Venice. Antonio brought bills from Naples and Antwerp to trade them for bills for Genoa, Antwerp, Naples, Milan, Florence, and Venice. Some of the Naples-Naples and Antwerp-Antwerp bills were certainly some sort of interest-generating loan. But because this type of ledger is the most synthetic, opaque, deeply coded, and abbreviated of all, my suspicions of usury rest unconfirmed. The names from the accounts receivable in the register above are on all of the Antwerp bills, names so familiar that they jump off the page.

The buyers of this debt and, consequently, sellers of the Neapolitan, Florentine, Venetian, and especially Genoese bills reads like a *Who's Who* of Italian banking.¹⁴ Still, many well-known surnames are absent, leading me to believe that clusters of relationships may be aligned along political or class lines. One undated letter (perhaps never sent) found in

¹⁰Bs 9-3, fol. 126-7.

¹¹Bs 280, Antonio e Francesco Cicala, Fiera dei Santi di 1560.

¹²Bs 280, fols. 10, 20.

¹³Bs 280, fol. 12.

¹⁴Although we cannot tell who these people are with any certainty since they are all entered into the ledger by *Albergo* and not by surname. In the case of the Imperiale-Balliani we have the *Libro Mastro* of the same year, Bs 11 1557-62, which contains their names written in long-hand.

the 1574–1575 *copialettere*¹⁵ warned against lending to any Genoese resident in Messina. The fear was of malicious default connected to the political crisis in the city. On the off-chance that the profit on such a loan was too good to pass up, credit could only be extended if the merchant was determined to be trustworthy and “of the same party and color.” In this specific example the “parties” are the old and new noble factions entering into the long-honored Genoese tradition of bloody civil wars; in general, there was always some political flare-up to pay mind to. Proficiency in both the social and economic workings of the fair was indispensable for the management of diverse elements of any commercial network in the Genoese sphere. At the fair, the logic of interest-earning loans, sale of finished goods, and the purchase of raw materials and food-stuffs, as well as political realities and conspicuous social climbing, crystallize. Although his father’s exchanges for one quarter far exceeded Antonio’s entire earnings up to this point, both figures must have been dwarfed by the huge sums moved about by the Imperiale, Spinola, Doria, and Pallavicini with whom he was trading. One Giustianiani bought dozens of Brignole contracts—7,878 scudi worth—in one cash purchase. Few of their Flemish contracts exceeded a couple hundred scudi.

There is evidence that this twenty-four-year-old small fish was not alone. All but hidden in the background of this *Scartafaccio* is what must have been the watchful eye of his father’s first cousins, Benedetto and Antonio Imperiale-Balliani, who come into view as mediators in some of the most important exchanges. Here we confront the issue of family ties and the role they played in Antonio’s career. We may speculate that Antonio’s tenure was contingent on the participation of the much older and experienced Balliani. (Confirming that Cicala and Balliani are related took no small amount of digging.) Many of the firms found in the *Scartafacci* are unmistakably related—Nicolò, Benedetto e Geronimo Gentile, for example—however, since new nobles are referred to by their *Albergo* (coincidentally old noble surnames), we can only wonder at the connection between Ottobone Giustiniano, Bernardo Gentile, and Leonardo Spinola, or for that matter, Antonio Cicala Brignole and Bartolomeo Pallavicino Coronata.¹⁶

¹⁵Bs 104. The letter was addressed to Paolo Vincenzo Sauli, resident agent in Messina.

¹⁶Antonio’s partnership that lasted from 1564 to 1574.

The former may have been related; the latter assuredly were not.

After one year in attendance at the fair, in which he exchanged 26,960, 13,557,¹⁷ and 20,579¹⁸ scudi in bills for his father and 1,480, 4,565, and 2,987 for himself, Antonio entered into a direct partnership with his second cousins that would last five fairs.

SCARTAFACCIO DI BENEDETTO E ANTONIO IMPERIALE E ANTONIO
CICALA, FIERA DI PASQUA DI 1561¹⁹

The very thickness of this ledger—ninety-six pages in comparison to the twenty to twenty-five pages of Antonio's—hints at a change in the scale of operations. Apart from his father, his brother and a few cousins with small accounts, Antonio had no clients. In this banking partnership the younger Brignole was the junior partner, but his father is by far their biggest client, with 38,000 of 42,000 scudi of exchanges. The firm had to reconcile the frequent criss-crossing activity of Antonio and his brother, Giovanni Brignole, and their cousins Benedetto and Antonio Balliani and kin and partners (and Giovanni's uncles) Bartolomeo, Nicolò, and Francesco Balliani. In addition, there are references to Antonio Balliani's private dealings with Nicolò Cibo, Antonio's future father-in-law, and a certain Nostro Giovan Battista Saoli, related or allied in some manner to the Balliani. The geographical points of exchange have also expanded to include Messina, Palermo, Taranto, Lyon, and several places in Spain. The intersection of three major and at least four minor enterprises conducting hundreds of deals in a dozen or so cities with literally scores of different people is visible within the space of just one Balliani-Brignole quarterly exchange ledger. The view from this intersection is like a major metropolitan airport's radar screen. Each exchange carries concentrated information: debtor, seller/buyer, location, and amount. I have no means of knowing whether this formative experience in such complex commercial high ground inspired Antonio to abandon his father's manufacturing-based firm for a free-

¹⁷Bs 281, Scartafaccia di Antonio e Francesco Cicala, Fiera di agosto 1560, fols. 12, 13, 20.

¹⁸Bs 282, Scartafaccia di Antonio e Francesco Cicala, Fiera di Apparizione 1560, fols. 9, 14, 16.

¹⁹Bs 283, Scartafaccio di Benedetto e Antonio Imperiale e Antonio Cicala, Fiera di Pasqua di 1561.

flowing network in which the buying, selling, insuring, shipping, and manufacturing were farmed out. Antonio's personal activity, begun in Antwerp in 1554, continued to grow, coming to represent an increasing proportion of the Brignoles' total activity. As Antonio's ledgers grew thicker and more complex, Giovanni's withered.

ANTONIO CICALA (BRIGNOLE) E BARTOLOMEO PALLAVICINO
(CORONATA) 1564–1565

A year later, Antonio severed the Balliani partnership at the Besançon fair. He formed a partnership with another young merchant, Bartolomeo Coronata, who would be forever remembered for his role in an attempted *coup* in 1575. Antonio's brother Teramo would also be implicated. He and Bartolomeo would be among a small number who died in exile for their part in the conspiracy, leaving the elder Brignole the last of the clan still standing. In 1564, after four years in Antwerp and four years at fair fueled by the volume of his father's activity, Antonio formed a curious partnership with Coronata. The association was permanent in that they had a continuous association, until Giovanni's death in 1574, through which Antonio routed nearly all of the family's activities. It was temporary in that all that this enterprise held in common was set on a schedule that mirrored the fair. All remittances were sent to *Antonio Cicala e fratelli e Bartolomeo e Antonio Pallavicino di Besanzone*. Each quarter, for over forty exchange fairs, the partners formed a new and distinct partnership. When the last exchanges were completed at the exchange fair immediately proceeding Giovanni's death, the partnership was unceremoniously left unrenewed.

In addition to exchange fairs, the partners dealt in large shipments of gold and silver bullion²⁰ from Spain, transferred through Genoa to other Italian cities. Giovanni continued to be an important client, but he was far from the biggest. With a new partner came new collaborators, like Giacomo Calvo²¹ and Giovanni Lercaro, who represented the partnership and coordinated exchanges and secured new clients from the Fieschi, Calvi, and Di Negri. The commissions that these partners paid in order to sell exchange contracts were more than offset by the commissions they charged the other parties in the exchange. The alliances and partnerships that would have been clear to Antonio and Bartolomeo

²⁰Bs 14-3, conti Au and Ag.

are rendered opaque by the coded text of the *Scartafaccio*, so we cannot determine the effective profits of this operation. Of the volume of costs (*avarie*) of 590 scudi—on exchanges for clients as well as for collaborators and kin mixed together—nearly 190 scudi was left over as revenue. If we ignore that perhaps 40% of the exchanges made at the fair were for family members and other partners whose exchanges are subsidized, *Antonio e Bartolomeo nostri di Besanzone* represents quite a successful firm.

The reason for which the Brignole closed shop in Antwerp is not spelled out in the account books, but the collaboration with Bartolomeo suggests that their leaving cost them dearly. The heirs of Lodovico Benedetto Bonvisi, agents of the Coronata in Leiden, handled 33,567 scudi of velvet cloth, the proceeds of which were divided equally among the Coronata, Bonvisi, and the Brignole.²² This represents a huge loss for the Brignole, both in capital and in a market for their products. This also is indicative of a return to the high costs of the *commenda* contracts found in their ledgers ten years earlier. Unless some letters or manuals from ca. 1559 still survive, the specific reason why the Brignole left Antwerp, or why Antonio's youngest brother Teramo returned there ten years later, will remain unanswered. The shift out of Antwerp does not seem to have been out of choice. What is clear is that the market for their textiles was restricted to Milan and Leiden and that the Brignole's costs associated with those markets were much higher.²³ Access to Coronata collaborators might have been swapped for the volume of exchanges and experience and prestige that Antonio held in the fair. Both families benefited from the long association that went beyond Antonio and Bartolomeo's narrow partnership. There was also the shorter lived *Teramo Cicala e Antonio Pallavicino di Sebillia 1569–1572*, and the agency Bartolomeo's sons provided in Seville in the 1580s and 1590s. Whether moved by difficulties in Antwerp or opportunities in Besançon with the advent of the firm of Cicala-Pallavicino, for the first time in his career the majority of Antonio's activities were conducted with people not related to him.

The family firm, divided into two distinct units—sales/banking and

²¹The holder of numerous *commenda* contracts in Giovanni's *Mastri*.

²²Bs 14-3, fols. 98–99, 101.

²³Bs 8 (1553-57); Bs 12-1 (1562–1565), Velvet accounts 8: fols. Antwerp 105, 114, 128, 138, 143, 150, 161, Leiden 206; 12 85, 88, 117.

manufacturing—changed more completely on the death of Francesco in 1567. Giovanni was 86 years old; Antonio was 32. Antonio does not explain what took his brother's life even though he mentions it in several places. Francesco's death is announced on the frontispiece of the ledger containing the activities of *Antonio, Francesco and Teramo Cicala*, giving notice that the firm would thereafter be known as *Antonio e Teramo Cicala* and that all obligations of the older firm would be honored by its successor. The departure from sales/banking and manufacturing occurred just as abruptly and completely as the closure of the Antwerp office. It is eerie to see that an activity carried on by the family for more than sixty years should be ended so decisively. The family firm sold off the loom (*Volta nostra*) and ceased the production of cloth.²⁴ The Brignole stopped paying the rent on the workshop and stopped registering the thread and other supplies to the cloth-workers' accounts. The debits and credits of *Volta nostra* (and consequently the now lost *Libro della Volta* of 1567) were reconciled, and the account was simply not carried forward to the next ledger. Giovanni Brignole did not leave a memoir. His only surviving comment recounts his sharing a closet, and narrowly escaping death, with Ambrogio Doria during the Fieschi Conspiracy in January 1547.²⁵ As important as this event may have been, it is chilling that the ledgers, which always begin with notes on the births and deaths of children, do not mention the end of Giovanni's life's work.²⁶

REGISTRO DI LETTERE DI ANTONIO E TERAMO CICALA 1572–1573

The types of deals that would now dominate the family ledgers are similar to the purchases and sales registered in Giovanni's books for decades, although the method employed in contracting them had changed radically. Giovanni had bought his raw silk from an agent, either in Messina or in Palermo. Likewise, he had sold his cloth through him or another agent living in Leiden or Antwerp. Either he had had to pay commissions to the seller or split the revenues with a traveling agent. Giovanni had sent his son to Antwerp to avoid paying the commission on sale. He had sent him to the fair to avoid the commission on

²⁴Bs 12-2, all accounts for *tessitori, filatori, pili, stabilimenti* and above all final accounts for *Volta nr.*

²⁵Bs 8, frontispiece.

²⁶Bs 12, multi-volume with three frontispieces.

exchanges. After Antonio took over the family's operations, they changed radically. He understood that the family activity earned revenue because it formed a sequence of interdependent deals. Money was made, and risk spread through these connections. It did not matter who owned the loom, and in the end, even that was farmed out. In doing so, Antonio converted the family enterprise to a kind of fair; he traded goods and services that complemented the needs of his collaborators. Through these collaborators the family would buy wool from Spain, sugar from the Canaries, raw silk from Sicily, grain from the south; sell finished cloth from Genoa, Florence, and Venice through similar collaborators; and make loans, ship specie, or remit the proceeds as needed.

The commissions were gone. Instead, a certain number of contracts were made available, to be divided between informal partners. Antonio, in the following example, and his brother-in-law, agreed to buy half of the available contracts. The other half were the responsibility of the commodity dealer and his associates. The buyers were Antonio's old partners Bartolomeo and Antonio Pallavicino in Granada. They are given contracts for 10,000 *real* to buy wool futures.

“... for next year '74 from our Nicolò and Giulio Cibo [Sale] you have been given commission for 10,000 *real* of wool that are assigned $\frac{1}{2}$ to you and your 'amici', and the other $\frac{1}{2}$ to them and to us, for $\frac{1}{2}$ as such for us in turn of that deal for $\frac{1}{4}$, all must be sent to Florence to those Cibo as much as it is and that you may complete that commission we content ourselves with that $\frac{1}{4}$ part...in all you serve the order of those Cibo, you will not be surprised by the low limitation, because anticipating by a year we do not want that it cost more . . .”²⁷

The Pallavicino, in this illustrative example, will either invest their own capital, sell shares to their *amici* (allies, kin, associates) at a premium for services, or, more likely, do both. Generally, the buyer's job is to inspect the flocks and to put down a deposit on the lowest cost,

²⁷Bs 102, Copialettera di Antonio e Teramo Cicala, 1572–in 1573, fol. 25, “April 23, 1573 . . . p si vent.o anno de 74 da nri nic e Giulio Cibo vi e stata datta com.e de r.e 10V di lane che hanno a spettare la a/2 @ voi e vri amici a l'altra a/2 @ loro e @noi p a/2 talche a noi ha da toccare di d.a Imp.ia p a/4 p dover le mandar tutte in fir.e @ essi cibo p tanto q.do di agiusti E che possiate essa com.ne Compire si content.mo p d.a a/4 parte restarle interessati che in tutto s.viate l'or.ne di d.i cibo non vi maravigliando della bassa limitacione p che anticipandosi di un anno non voriano costar piu darette di ogni successo aviso/Adio.”

highest quality wool that he can find. His future dealings with Brignole & Co. were based on his success. The wool was shipped to Antonio, Giovanni, and the Balliani's agent in Livorno (Leghorn)/Pisa, and then on to Giulio Cibo Sale in Florence. Giulio would sell the wool at market, and Antonio would transfer the revenue from Florence to wherever the partners most required funds. All of the profits and expenses were divided evenly according to shares. Due to the particular seasonal nature of these commodities sales, new contracts were offered in a competitive annual market for such agency services.

The operation of the network is similar in some ways to the *com-menda* in that one partner is abroad. The primary difference is the exchange of local network functions (and local intelligence)—in this case, Granada and Florence—for the use of a global network, the exchange fair, and connecting sellers and buyers. The wool buyer in Spain would strive to find the cheapest and best wool, because for half of the contracts, he is buying for himself, and because in doing so, he will retain the use of the global network he needs to bring his wares to market. He can count on Giulio selling well and on Antonio exchanging well for the same reasons. Antonio deals with many such relatives and collaborators. The complex of Antonio's business dealings closely resembles the highly overlapping exchange fair partnerships, first with the Imperiale Balliani, then with the Pallavicini Coronata, and then finally with Giulio Cibo Sale. Antonio understood that the key to commerce in the Spanish empire was to organize it, to trade local influence and know-how for long-distance services. In effect, Antonio was a broker, not in commodities, but in connections. Long-lasting collaboration meant that the Coronata and the Brignole shared a close relationship; but this was not a prerequisite, nor was it the general rule.

Family connections did matter, although they were neither necessary nor the norm, as evidenced by a letter from Antonio to Alessandro Lercaro di Messina. In this example, there is a similar solicitation of a commission to buy Calabrian and Sicilian raw silk with the proceeds of textile and other commodities sales in Palermo and Messina. This time, however, the request for a commission, presumably in the divided form above, cannot be granted, due to familial obligations. Simon Lomellino Sorba is married to Antonio Brignole's sister Minetta.

“ . . . in response to your dearest letter of the 14 of the last, we shall say

that we are not for now able to please you this year by giving you commissions for raw silk having the same reason as you to search for them, on behalf of our Simone Lomellino . . . would that the deal be already concluded but since he is there for other particular business of ours, we are constrained by kinship to deal with him and not with others. We tell you definitely that when we do not have our own person there and we shall not neglect to give you a part . . . conforming to the promise made to you which we will not neglect you, when a similar occasion fixes itself, we are at your pleasure.²⁸

This apology demonstrates the common interaction of both familial and free agent relationships (shown by a large group of letters). Furthermore, the letter illustrates the existence of local networks managed by the free agents. Equally clear is the lack of a commission monopoly controlled by Antonio's brother-in-law. In fact, if we take the letter at its word, the Brignole promise that when the temporary requirement vis-à-vis Simon passes, commissions will go to Alessandro. In this light, we cannot assume, as do historians who argue for the primacy of

²⁸Bs 102, fol. 152.

familial relationships, that marriage ties facilitate the enforcement of these commissions or foster trust in general. This example suggests a examination of the specific benefits of family-ties. In any case, the agent, related or not, barter his local authority. That is, he barter his ability to move on a local level (requiring local knowledge, connections, possessions, and rights) for the farther-reaching but less specific authority of inter-local networks of the Brignole and their like.

The Brignole were not the only firm to conduct this kind of business. A letter to Giovanni Dons of Barcelona from Luca Ayroli²⁹ (the Brignole Company's manager) delivered by Nicolo Salvago³⁰ contains, in essence, the payment of part of an old debt, owed to the Brignole by the "reddi di Lodovico Benedetto Bonvisi" di Lione. 1000–1500 ducats, *quanto da lui* [our traveling agent Nicolo Salvago] *vi sara richisto* (between 1000 and 1500 ducats, how ever much he requires) is to be paid where the Brignole have no contacts. The figure is paid out by Giovanni Dons of Barcelona to fund the purchase of textiles in "happy" colors, to be shipped to Messina for sale by Paolo Vincenzo Sauli, the Brignole resident agent, who has a demand for bright cloth (in the preceding letter). Paolo Vincenzo will buy raw silk, grain or sugar with the proceeds, eventually cashing in, three deals removed, on the same velvet sales with the heirs of Lodovico Bonvisi seen above.³¹ They owed the Brignole money on the sales in Leiden, and Bonvisi have debtors in Barcelona, where the Florentines also did business. The Brignole collect on a debt for the heirs of Bonvisi, presumably in Lyon where Gio Dons is instructed to send the letter of credit. They also collect for themselves, expanding their contacts in the process. They do this by closing a triangle of relationships. Geronimo De Franchi, son of Pietro Battista, has relationships both with the Brignole and Giovanni Dons

²⁹The Brignole's business manager, fair agent (after 1576), and closest collaborator. Luca married an Invrea; Antonio's sister Pelina married another Invrea, Luca's brother-in-law. In the strictest sense Luca is not a relative, but Antonio's letters to him are prefaced with the rare salutation "*Nobile Fratello Honorato*." Simone Ayrolo, Luca's son, would eventually replace him. He is mentioned repeatedly as Simone Ayrolo nostro di Milano. Although little remains to give the details of his service, his transfer of funds to pay for a *fante* (knight?) sent to Pisa is both interesting and confusing. The archivist Stefano Patrone warned me to take all of these relations with a grain of salt. "If you need them to be related," he told me, "look close enough and you will find that all of these Genoese are kin."

³⁰Bs 102, fol. 147.

(the Brignole have no correspondent in Barcelona). Nicolo Salvago is also carrying a letter from De Franchi to Gio Dons, vouching for all involved. The relationship with the important Geronimo is announced after the typical formula: “con dar del successo aviso a fin possiamo dar bon ordine per il compimento e *si siamo di voi valse essendone stato detto da messer Geronimo de Franchi q Pietro Battista che ci servirette volentieri* e se per voi possiamo qualcosa comandare *ci ne troverete pronti* Adio. (. . . advising of the conclusion so that we may give proper orders for its completion and *we have been directed to you being told by Mr. Geronimo De Franchi son of Pietro Battista that you would come to our service willingly* and if we can command anything for you, *you shall find us ready. Adieu*) (my emphasis). I sense that neither of these statements were made or taken lightly. Reciprocity was the life-blood of the network. The proceeds of the cloth sale almost certainly went to buy grain or raw silk in Messina through Paolo Vincenzo Saoli, or wool in Granada, Conca, or Serena through Nicolo Salvago, and so forth ad infinitum. It is easy to see that even if Antonio and associates were to break even on this string of deals, it presented a net gain, allowing them to cultivate their networks of relationships that would eventually pay off.

TESTAMENT OF GIOVANNI BRIGNOLE 1556³²

There is good reason to believe that Giovanni Brignole did not conceive of his firm's taking on the form that it did. To Giovanni the family firm was best anchored in manufacturing. He felt that the family should never stray from the activity that consistently generated wealth. Giovanni might have come around to the idea of the non-anchored network, but only after his son made it a reality. His will of 1556 lent great importance to the *volta seateria, mercatura seateria et velutorum et aliis rebus* and he invites his sons to *talia negocia agere ad honorem dei et sine lucro in hac vita ut habeant maiorum retributionem in fu-*

³¹The firm continued to function without pause, notwithstanding the death of the principal.

³²ASCG-Brignole-Sale scatola B, cited in M. S. Rollandi, “Da mercanti a ‘rentiers’. La famiglia Genovese dei Brignole-Sale (secc. XVI–XVIII),” 105–24, 110, in *Tra rendita e investimenti formazione e gestione dei grandi patrimoni in Italia in eta' moderna e contemporanea*, Atti del terzo convegno nazionale, Torino 22–23, 1996 (Bari 1998). I am indebted to Stella Rolandi for pointing me towards the perfect citation to elucidate what Giovanni was saying through his ledgers and his dealings.

tura. Should the loom fail to provide, or should his heirs lack the *observantia et circumspectio*, the family could resort to revenue generating bonds, like those of the Banco di San Giorgio. As late as 1556, Giovanni still believed that velvet was the key to the family's future and that it would allay his "frequent fears that his family could become indigent."³³

One could argue that the Brignole did indeed change businesses, from manufacturing to banking. Certainly, by sending Antonio to the fair, the family took over their own exchanges from their agent-cousins. One could also argue that the Brignole became speculators in grain, raw materials, precious metals and luxury goods. In the end though, there is no change in types of activities conducted by Giovanni and sons. The real change came with the understanding that everyone involved in a sequence of deals could be made to rely on everyone else, to their mutual benefit, and that this did not require large expenditures on agents or direct ownership of the loom itself. After all, Giovanni was never a silk weaver himself. Since at least 1514, the date of the oldest surviving ledger, Giovanni had been the manager of a factory. His goods were sold abroad by others and he derived his profits through his share of remittances or through the importation of commodities and bullion organized by someone else. Antonio understood that the importance of the individual deal was subsumed in that of the entire chain, from manufacturing to export, importation, resale or remittance. The Balliani certainly understood this when they incorporated Giovanni's manufactory into their complex of activities, but Antonio and his contemporaries wove this into their contracts, and educated their agents to this end. Antonio himself explains this through his ledger, in how he constructs and cultivates his network, including all the mundane details.³⁴ Antonio's training abroad and at fair shows in his taking over of the central position in the network, formerly occupied by his cousins.

It important to remember that the activities of the Brignole enterprise were unique, but typical of the actions of other individuals or

³³Ibid. n. 14.

³⁴Which he explains to his long suffering brother-in-law Simon. In a series of twelve letters explaining the ramifications of Simon's blunders, poor judgment, and bad timing, Antonio read the riot act to his "brother," and in so doing gives the historian a private tutorial.

family enterprises. There were many “Antonio Brignoles.” For Antonio to have reorganized the family business in the way that he did, he had to cooperate with like-minded merchants with similar backgrounds and training. Antonio initiated his participation in the fluid world of Western Mediterranean trade with a subsidiary agency that stressed a string of deals over the individual sale. Antonio Brignole and his associates were less concerned with whether family relationships or more flexible business relationships should be stressed, than using a variety of configurations to exploit a wide range of commercial opportunities from long distance reach to local knowledge, privileges and influence. In the wider study I will also consider the varying degrees of influence that the weak Genoese state and strong merchant presence within the political context of the Spanish empire had on the social context of the mercantile world. The importation of precious metals in large quantities in the 1550s, the resulting price revolution, the Dutch wars after 1567, and continual financial crises provided an impetus for closer cooperation in an increasingly difficult marketplace. Antonio and his associates were also a *nobili nuovi minori*. He and his entire class came of age economically and politically in this context and the evolution of the family enterprise. The short answer to the question at the outset of this paper, “Do family relations matter?” is yes and no. They matter in that Antonio’s start in mercantile life was as a factor and agent for his father and the Balliani. Antonio’s cousins, his brothers-in-law and his sons, Gio Francesco and Gio Battista, leaned on him as he leaned on his father and on other relations. But on the other hand, only when Antonio ventured away from those safe relationships did his network blossom.

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