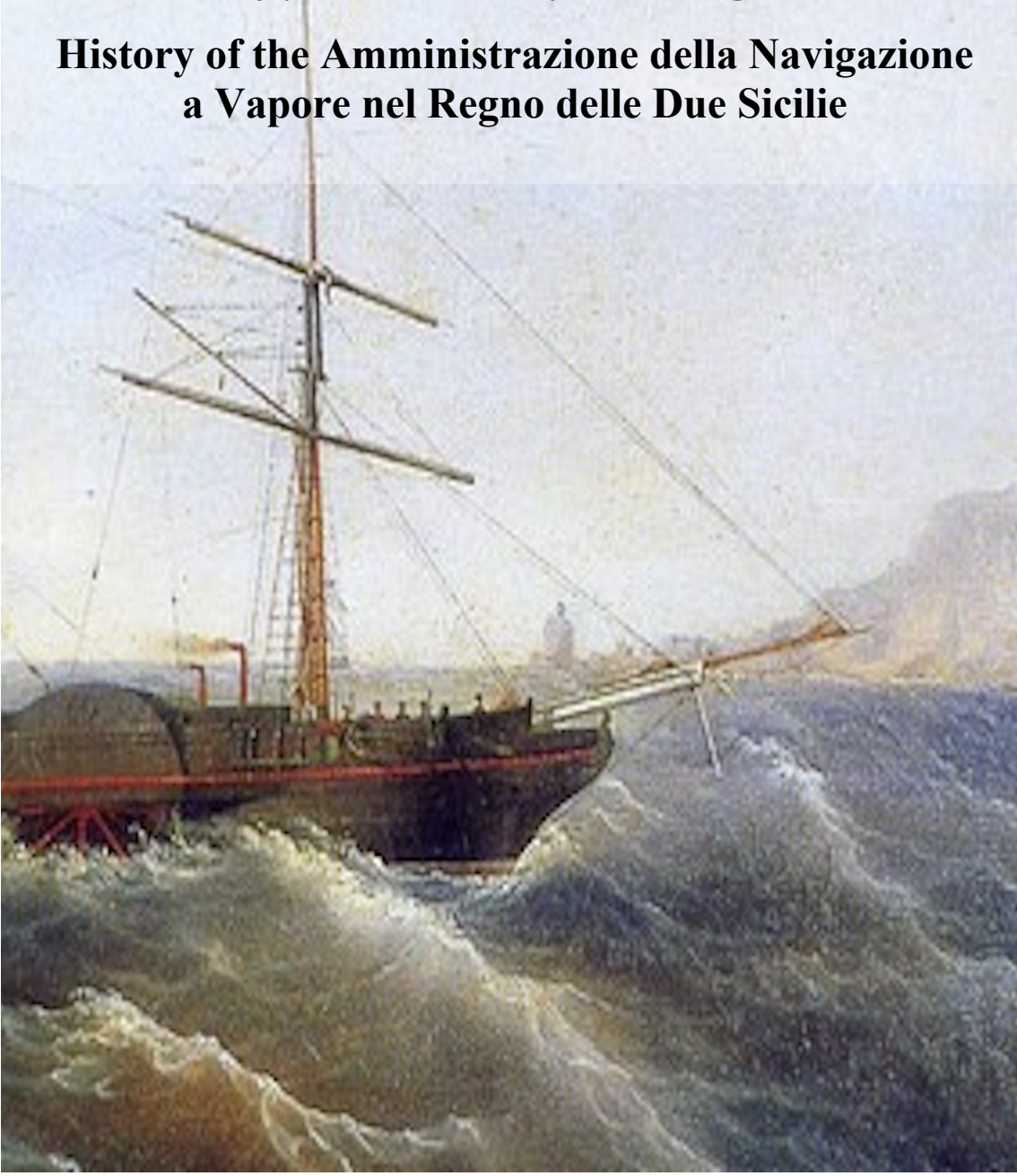


Mario A. Iannaccone

If you don't risk, you don't get

**History of the Amministrazione della Navigazione
a Vapore nel Regno delle Due Sicilie**



The history of steam navigation in Italy and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies is due to the initiative of financiers and industrialists such as Charles Lefèbvre and the Rothschild family of the Maison of Naples, who founded the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore nel Regno delle Due Sicilie* in 1808. It was an adventurous story, with mysterious implications – due to unexplained deaths and accidents – that continued until 1865, when the new Kingdom of Italy stripped the *Amministrazione* of all orders and transferred it to Sicilian, Tuscan and Genoese fleets, eventually leading to its bankruptcy. Among the records of the *Amministrazione*, which only armed steam ships first with a side wheel and then also with a stern propeller, was the first Mediterranean cruise, reserved for rich industrialists and nobles, carried out in 1832.



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Nothing venture nothing have.

AMMINISTRAZIONE

DELLA

Navigazione a Vapore

NEL REGNO DELLE DUE SICILIE.

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Chapter 1

The 18th century

Charles III of Bourbon (Carlos III de Borbón y Farnesio, 1716-1788) ruled Naples for about 25 years. His policy, the management of the state, is described in historical literature as enlightened. The reforms he initiated were inspired by principles that, in economics, finances and relations with the Church, fall into the category of «enlightened absolutism».¹

Limiting ourselves to maritime policy, it can be said that he took steps to modernise the Kingdom's military and merchant fleets not only to strengthen the army but also to give oxygen to trade. When he took possession of the throne on 15 June 1734, uniting the Kingdom of Sicily and the Kingdom of Naples under his person, the two fleets were in a deplorable situation. The Spanish and Austrian viceroys who had succeeded one another over the last fifty years had not had the opportunity, the ability or even the interest to strengthen them. For both of them, the kingdoms of southern Italy were functional for the powers of Spain and the Austrian Empire, motherlands for the rulers, and were governed according to this logic. The Austrians were more interested in controlling the Adriatic routes, the natural continuation of the Habsburg territories; the centre of gravity of Spanish power and trade had now shifted to the Atlantic routes.

¹ I take the main news from Francisco Sánchez-Blanco, *El absolutismo y las luces en el reinado de Carlos III*, Marcial Pons Historia, Madrid 2002.

Also for the reasons briefly mentioned above, the maritime mercantile potential of Reggio Emilia was under-utilised; most ports were on the coasts of Calabria and Apulia. Few, and generally foreign, ships were able to tackle deep-sea navigation and go beyond the Mediterranean. In the absence of certain regulations, many ship owners preferred to hoist foreign flags in order to enjoy benefits and privileges. Many of those involved in the trade were profiteers, declaring hold capacities that did not reflect reality or mortgaging ships to wreck them to collect insurance premiums. Ultimately, there was no maritime transport system comparable to the French, English or Hanseatic system.

From the year following his arrival, King Charles started to implement the first measures that, in general, improved the situation within a few years. In 1735, at his instigation, the Council of Commerce was reorganised (*Royal Edict*, 6 April 1735) and, in October 1739, he also reorganised the Supreme Magistrate of Commerce, a 10-member magistracy (magistrates and nobles) that constituted the last instance in the field of litigation and judgments. This magistracy «offered a highly competitive jurisdiction compared to the seigniorial and municipal courts, because it decided quickly, used the Italian language that everyone could understand, and kept the costs of justice low».² In a short time, various branches of this magistracy, which had its headquarters in Naples, were created, in particular the Supreme Magistrate of Sicily.

² Mario Caravale, *Storia del diritto nell'Europa moderna e contemporanea*, Laterza, Bari-Rome 2012, p. 73. See, *Editto, proclami, ed ordini reali per la creazione, e governo del supremo magistrato del commercio, e de' consolati di mare, e terra in questo fedelissimo Regno di Sicilia, regnante Carlo re delle Due Sicilie Infante di Spagna &c. negl'anni MDCCXL e MDCCXLI*, Stamperia di Francesco Cichè Impressore del Supremo Magistrato del Commercio, Palermo 1741.

The same magistracy had the task of deciding on customs and tariff matters and collecting duties and taxes for ships and cargoes. In December 1739, the two consulates were merged into a single structure, the Consulate of Land and Sea; later there were further reforms to make the body more responsive to practical needs and five peripheral consulates of land and sea were established. Charles also re-established the Court of the Grand Admiralty (Court of Admiralty), which had previously been abolished.³

These and others (such as the abolition of organs deemed obsolete, such as the Collateral Council) were all attempts to organise and rationalise a system of controls, bodies, rules and offices inherited from the past and often no longer responding to the new rationalisation requirements, especially for what was about to become a regional power. These reforms were largely inspired by the ideas of Antonio Genovesi (1713-1769), an exponent of the Southern Enlightenment and professor of Mechanics and Commerce at the University of Naples. Further clarifications regarding the powers, rights and duties of the Consulate of the Sea and the Admiral of the Sea were later laid down by Charles' son Ferdinand in a reform of 1783.⁴

In 1741, Charles had a table (*pandetta*) of the rights to be demanded of ships and their cargoes compiled and published, so that there could be no abuses.⁵ In the following years, by issuing rules and regulations of various kinds, the king tried to bring order to the regulations concerning the construction of ships, the rights and duties of pilots and captains, sailors, ship-owners, and crews; to establish rules regulating when to leave port, when to enter,

³ *Prammatica* V, tit. CLXXIX, 1746.

⁴ *Prammatica* I, tit. 191, *De Officio Admiratus et Consulatus*, 6 December 1783.

⁵ *Prammatica* I, tit. 179, *De Officio Nautis et Portibus*, 7 April 1741.

and when to dock. A system of licences and permits was established that made it compulsory to pass an exam for anyone wishing to pilot a ship above a certain tonnage or perform delicate operations. Charles also enforced the obligation to hoist the Bourbon flag and keep a regular logbook.⁶

With regard to the compulsory examinations (of hydrography and coastal and deep-sea navigation) that those who were responsible for driving a timber had to undergo, it entitled them to receive a certificate that was also recognised in other countries. A minimum age for driving a ship was also established.⁷ Many other aspects were regulated, such as the minimum crew that had to be present on each type of ship, the price of charters depending on the route, and also the procedures for embarking and disembarking, the health licence, the quarantine regulations, the health fees to be paid to the Deputation of Health.⁸

In particular, very important was the establishment in Naples of a corps of pilots who had the exclusive right to pilot ships along the coasts of the Kingdom, at least alongside other commanders (1754).⁹ Charles III also devoted himself to cultivating diplomatic relations and signed treaties with various states (Sweden, Denmark, the United Provinces and various Muslim powers). Most of these treaties were unsuccessful in those years. Finally, all the *Prammatiche*, the documents issued by the king that regulated specific aspects of navigation, were brought together in a single, organic text, the *Prammatica de Officio Nautis et Portubus* (1751 and then 31 January 1759). This was done in

⁶ *Prammatica* XIV, tit. 94, *De Officio Nautis et Portibus*, 16 December 1751.

⁷ *Prammatica* XIII, tit. CLIV, 8 December 1751.

⁸ Established by Viceroy García de Avellaneda y Haro Count of Castrillo since 30 May 1659.

⁹ *Prammatica* XIII, 24 May 1754.

anticipation of the publication of a *Navigation Code* that had been being written and thought about since 1741.

The problem of flag privileges

A major problem that Charles III, and also his successors, had to deal with was the so-called “flag privilege”. These were tax privileges enjoyed by ships flying the English, French or Spanish flag and derived from various treaties, notably the Treaty of Madrid (23 May 1667); the Treaty of Aachen (2 May 1668); Madrid again (6 March 1669); Utrecht (9 December 1713); Madrid (13 December 1715) and Vienna (14 March 1731). These agreements regulated trade between states and were the diplomatic outcome of wars and alliances. Formally signed between Spain and the other European powers, they maintained their validity until the Bourbon viceroyalty ceased to be a part of the Kingdom of Spain and became autonomous.

With a few exceptions, all goods carried by French, English, Dutch and Spanish vessels enjoyed duty-free status. They were exempt from all maritime duties; not only that, ships could drop anchor outside ports, subject to increased controls, load and unload; they were also exempt from customs inspections for the control of smuggling until after they had unloaded completely. These privileges harmed competition, since they exempted those ships from paying duties to which other ships were subject, causing economic damage to them and to the state, and favoured all kinds of clandestine traffic.¹⁰ Even the constitution of a Maritime Sigurtà Company, which was supposed to guard against

¹⁰ Lamberto Radogna, *Storia della Marina Mercantile delle Due Sicilie (1734-1860)*, Mursia, Milan 1982, p. 12.

fraud, speculation and bad faith, had minimal results although it pointed in an interesting direction.¹¹ In the same year, the sovereign allowed all commercial ships to be armed with rifles, small arms and small cannons. A prammatica of 1759 fixed the fees to be charged by the Kingdom's consuls in the main Mediterranean ports according to the type of ship.

For the rest, as was the case with many kingdoms of the time, Bourbon policy under Charles III, and to a large extent also under his son Ferdinand IV, was characterised by being strongly protectionist: customs tariffs, set by the Supreme Magistrate of Commerce, were extremely protective. At that time, as Lamberto Radogna rightly observes, one of the causes of protectionism was also the extreme fear of epidemics: poorly controlled ships, kept in loose quarantine, could easily spread terrible epidemics that mowed down cities, especially coastal ones, causing real slaughter. It had happened several times in the century and would happen again in the next, but less often precisely because of the increasingly stringent controls. But the fear also included famines: a trade in consumer goods and basic necessities, taken from one city to sell in another, could aggravate famines, as happened in 1764.¹²

When Charles, following the death of his brother, King of Spain, moved to Madrid, leaving the Kingdom to the Regency Council of his son Ferdinand, who was only 8 years old, he left a State that was finally regulated in the field of the Merchant Navy. As well as a first important, albeit partial, rationalisation of the sector as we have seen, Charles was also credited with founding the Royal Castellammare Shipyards whose main purpose was to

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Pietro Colletta, *Storia del reame di Napoli dal 1734 al 1825*, Le Monnier, Florence 1846, I, cap. XXI.

modernise the military fleet. These were still small shipyards, which did not allow Naples to become self-sufficient in shipbuilding to the extent of its power, its extension and its role on the Mediterranean chessboard. But it was a start. Until then, vessels were bought abroad, in France or in the shipyards of Genoa.



Antonio Joli, *Partenza di Carlo di Borbone per la Spagna vista da terra* (Departure of Charles of Bourbon for Spain as seen from land, 1759) On this occasion, the Kingdom showed its naval power, which was however insufficient for its ambitions as a regional power.

The Merchant Fleet

However, Naples could boast a very large merchant fleet, even if it was generally not of high quality. From the point of view of the number of vessels, it could claim to be a true naval power. Merchant registers prove the presence and activity of thousands of vessels, small and large. An interesting testimony to the

liveliness, though not the modernity, of the Neapolitan merchant navy at the end of the 18th century is given to us by Giuseppe Maria Galanti in his *Della descrizione geografica e politica delle Sicilie* (1786). He writes that «The places where it is practised are Naples, Procida, Ischia, Torre del Greco, Castello a Mare, Sorrento, Vico-Equense, Positano, Conca and Vietri». Sorrento, at the time, referred to various villages and hamlets around the city (today Meta, Piano di Sorrento and Sant'Agello).

The Mediterranean trade, at that time, was on the upswing after a long period of wars and difficulties due mainly to the raids of the Barbary pirates. Thus, the inhabitants of the Neapolitan coastal areas took advantage of the relative prosperity resulting from the need to supply a city that, at that time, had a population of about 350,000. Tens of thousands of people worked in the transport of agricultural products, especially wheat, fruit, cereals and citrus fruits. Part of the transport was by sea: the cheapest and fastest way in a territory that was partly mountainous, apart from the plains of Campania.

There are lively trades between Naples and Genoa, Marseilles, Cadiz but also Livorno and Palermo. Some Neapolitan ships, few in number, however, managed to leave the Mediterranean by venturing into the Atlantic to transport oranges or silks to Northern Europe. These were ships built by the renowned masters of Procida: the tartanes, which weighed between 6,000 and 8,000 tomole.¹³ The ships built in Procida but also in Sorrento had a well-deserved reputation for solidity and functionality. According to Lamberto Radogna, who examined registers of the

¹³ The tomolo, a unit of measurement widespread in the territories of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, was on average worth 55 litres. It could be applied to areas or volumes. It generally referred to the contents of a container with a capacity of 50 or 55 litres and the olives (or grain) it could hold. Its measure can be calculated in about 50 kg.

Neapolitan port authorities, there were at least 7,500 ships active around the port of Naples and in the neighbouring ports at the end of the reign of Charles III (around 1,750), perhaps even 8,000.



Launch of the vessel *Partenope*, 1784.

Chapter 2

The innovator king? Ferdinand IV

The child king

Charles's son, Ferdinand IV of Bourbon, ascended the throne when he was only 8 years old and for this reason, given his very young age, he was assisted by a Council of Regency headed by Domenico Cattaneo Prince of San Nicandro. The preeminent figure on the Council was Bernardo Tanucci (1698-1783), a native of Arezzo, who had studied at the University of Pisa and had arrived in Naples following Charles III on his return from Tuscany. During this period, which lasted eight years and was known as the Regency Period, no major measures were taken concerning the navy, although strict regulations concerning smuggling were issued in 1762.¹⁴ When he came of age in January 1767, the Regency Council was dissolved but the most influential figures, such as Tanucci, remained in the king's service. The following year, in 1768, Ferdinand married Maria Carolina of Habsburg-Lorraine (1752-1814), daughter of Francis I, Emperor of Austria, who brought to the Neapolitan court his strong personality and the ideas, thoughts and reform movement of the Austrian Enlightenment absolutism.

In 1776 Tanucci left his services and was replaced by Giuseppe Beccadelli Bologna, Marquis of Sambuca (1726-1813), former

¹⁴ *Prammatica* XVII, t. 94, 15 December 1762.

ambassador to Vienna. At that point, thought was again given to a naval policy worthy of the kingdom. At the third renewal of the family pact between the different branches of the Bourbon dynasty, in 1766, Spain declared the flag privileges granted to the English to be forfeited and 11 years later, in 1776, after Tanucci's departure, Ferdinand too was tempted to declare forfeited those privileges that had been signed when Naples was under Spain, but he did not succeed: the aggressive English policy made even war possible in such cases. The decision therefore had to be postponed.

After a period of relative immobility, also due to his very young age, Ferdinand set about promoting modernisation initiatives in the maritime field. Having listened to the Queen, who had inquired in the various European courts to hire an experienced man, he agreed to call the Irishman John Edward Acton (1735-1811), a man of great experience, and summoned him in April 1778. Ferdinand IV had in mind to have the *Code of Navigation* completed, which had been planned since 1741 and never completed. Acton arrived in Naples in August of that year where he was to remain for the rest of his life. He acquired considerable power as a special advisor but never formally became a minister. He was an experienced man who had been educated and trained as a naval captain. As for the *Codice*, the order to compile it was given in 1779 to the expert jurist Michele de Jorio of Procida (1738-1806) who completed it in 1781 as the *Codice marittimo compilato per ordine di Ferdinando IV*. It was an impressive work, some 2,400 pages that were printed in a few copies and distributed to the members of the Council of State for examination. It was compiled taking into account the Aragonese, Catalan and Amalfi codices of the last centuries. However, due to the problems that occurred from 1789 onwards on the international chessboard, the actual application of the *Codice*

marittimo was temporarily shelved, and this shelving was postponed *ad libitum*, so much so that this great work remained, in fact, unused. Only one copy remains of it and it is now in the State Archives in Naples.

In 1782, the competences relating to the Merchant Navy were placed under the control of the Secretariat of State for Dispatch and the Navy, in essence a Ministry of the Navy that centralised many competences previously scattered among several magistrates.¹⁵ Acton was involved in the reorganisation of the fleet, in the foundation or strengthening of schools for ship pilots and technicians, and in the enlargement and modernisation of the shipyards of Castellammare and Procida. To bring himself up to par with the other powers, Acton called as a consultant to the shipyard the Frenchman Antoine Imbert, a renowned engineer and ship designer, who arrived in 1780 with his collaborator Pietro Leopar. The two immediately established an effective design workshop, taking advantage of the best local workers and training new engineers. In the course of their activity, between 1734 and 1860, the Castellammare shipyards would build 136 major vessels (vessels, frigates, corvettes, xebecs, wheeled and propeller-driven notices, pirofregate) and 300 smaller, mostly military units (gunboats, bombardier, spur boats). Maritime traffic was naturally a priority for a Kingdom facing the sea with 3000 kilometres of coastline and several important ports, such as those of Naples, Palermo and Messina among others.

As for the renovated nautical schools of Piano and Meta di Sorrento, to which Acton devoted particular attention, it was decided that they should provide future pilots and ship captains with a complete education including arithmetic, geometry,

¹⁵ *Decreto Reale (Royal Decree)*, 16 October 1782.

calligraphy and English language in the first two years; solid geometry, algebra, logarithms and French language in the third; and plane and spherical trigonometry, solid geometry, nautics and astronomy in the fourth year.

The first ship launched from the expanded Castellammare shipyards was the *Partenope*, in 1786, a three-decker vessel with 74 cannons and a crew of 680. At that time the shipyards employed about 200 people but proved insufficient 20 years later. A famous painting by Philipp Hackert illustrating the launching of the large vessel shows already large shipyards; in the picture, a second ship can be seen under construction next to the first. However, at that time, only one ship could be built and “rigged” (i.e. finished with sails and completed) at a time.

The costs were considerable and it was often necessary to ask for technicians and pilots from the French market. During the course of the century, relations between France and Naples had become remarkably close, also because of the proximity of the coasts (one could reach Marseilles in 5 days). These relations were further strengthened especially during the French Decade and under very different circumstances. However, a very close relationship was already established during this period when the king looked upon France as a modern state, a resource, a place where technological and scientific advances were cultivated and whose spin-offs could also enrich the Kingdom. Ferdinand, as his descendants would do, would often make use of French professionals who could help him make his Kingdom more powerful and modern. There was not much choice, after all: turning to Spain was not convenient, it was more backward than the Kingdom of Sicily, other nations did not guarantee fast transport as France did.



Launch of the vessel Archimedes in the Castellammare di Stabia shipyards (1795). L. Ducros - Musée Cantonal Des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne. There are many paintings that testify to the launching of large ships built in Castellammare after the second half of the 18th century.

Acton also acted as Minister of War. He endeavoured to reorganise an army that had slackened off, which was disorganised and ill-equipped also because of 50 years of uninterrupted peace, a peace broken only by regional skirmishes. By the end of the century, the smooth running of the Castellammare shipyard was evident, as was that of the Royal Navy Regiment and the commissioning of a good number of naval pilots.

Another important achievement was diplomatic and in some cases commercial relations with distant naval powers. In September 1784, Ferdinand IV, with the good leadership of Francesco d'Aquino Prince of Caramanico (1738-1795), Naples'

ambassador to Paris, officially recognised the birth of the Republic of the United States of America. Immediately after the proclamation of the new state's independence, various Neapolitan emissaries sought closer relations. There was little effect at the time, but in March 1797 Ferdinand IV had Jean Sabin Mathieu accredited as Consul General of the United States of America. In April of that year, the first American ship docked in Naples, filling its holds with liquor, pasta, raw silk and soap. The voyage had more of a promotional purpose than an economic one and served to strengthen the friendship between the two states, but relations would remain close, or at least friendly, in the following years. No treaty was concluded with France, despite intense consultations that proceeded from 1776 until 1783.

Meanwhile, in January 1787, after Catherine II's army had taken control of the Crimea, Ferdinand and Russian emissaries concluded the Treaty of Czarskogesello, agreed there on 17 January and then in the Royal Palace of Caserta on 21 March 1787. The treaty had been prepared by the capable Antonino Maresca, Count of Serracapriola (1750-1822), ambassador in St. Petersburg. It was an important agreement that allowed Neapolitan grain ships to reach the Crimea to procure the grain so necessary for pasta production. The wheat grown in the kingdom was not sufficient and it was cheaper to import it from Russia. Another clause allowed Neapolitan ships bound for the Black Sea to pass the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus under the Russian flag (Treaties of Kajnargie of 21 July 1784 and of Constantinople of 10 June 1783). In 1788 another treaty opened Russian ports in the Baltic (1784).

A Russo-Turkish war suspended this trade for a few years, which resumed when Russia secured final control of the region in 1792. Other treaties concluded during the period were those with

the Regency of Tripoli (August 1785), the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Republic of Genoa (July 1786). Ferdinand obtained exemption from the right to toll in the waters of Nice and Villafranca (Villefranche). Another treaty was made in 1787 with the Regency of Algiers. As Lamberto Radogna well demonstrates, citing numbers and statistics, by the end of the 18th century the Neapolitan Merchant Navy had progressed: the protective measures put in place by Ferdinand IV had taken effect.

The reigns of Charles and Ferdinand brought considerable progress to the Neapolitan merchant navy. Neapolitan ships frequented all the major Mediterranean and Atlantic ports: Livorno, Genoa, Marseilles, Trieste, Venice and also Lisbon, Bordeaux, Nantes, London, Liverpool, Rotterdam and the ports of the Baltic, the Crimea and the Antilles. The period from the beginning of Charles III's reign in the French Decade until Ferdinand's resumption of government showed considerable progress, a general modernisation of procedures, a rationalisation of regulations and a strengthening of the fleet with larger sailing ships.

During the 1760s, traffic increased steadily.¹⁶ As an example, Radogna mentions how from 5 January to 28 April 1790, 13 English, 12 Danish and 9 Dutch ships entered the port of Naples. Meanwhile, Neapolitan ships were arriving as far as Martinique and beyond.

By the end of the 18th century, there were already ships operating regular passenger services such as the sailing "packet" *Tartarus*, an elegant and solid American-built sailing ship.

¹⁶ Lamberto Radogna, *Storia della Marina Mercantile delle Due Sicilie (1734-1860)*, cit., pp. 21-23.

Passage cost 30 ducats in a special cabin with board and 3 ducats below deck without board.¹⁷ Giuseppe Maria Galanti in his *Descrizione storica e geografica delle Due Sicilie* of 1789 (t. III, p. 359) records that in 1784 as many as 2683 merchant ships of various size and capacity entered the port of Naples. The city had a population of approximately 5,000 embarked sailors. In the same period, 343 foreign ships entered (93 French, 89 Genoese, 39 English, 10 Swedish, 7 Danish, 7 Tuscan, 6 Dutch, 5 Venetian, 5 Dubrovnik, 5 Ottoman, 5 German, 1 Spanish, 1 Russian).¹⁸ A Royalist ship arrived in 1783 in the USA, others in the West Indies and again in the Crimea. During an expedition in 1794, a ship financed by the Prince of Torella and Prince Pignatelli was lost because the captain preferred to stay in the Antilles to be a privateer.¹⁹ In addition to Naples, a real small maritime power was Procida, which boasted 97 mostly Polish ocean-going vessels (often over 5,000 tomola), ships that could sail as far as the Baltic and Boreal seas.

Engineers' and architects' expeditions

A little known aspect of Ferdinand IV's activity, but one that is beginning to be studied in depth, is his openness to the technical innovations that came from abroad, an attitude that led him to request competent people to work and settle in the Kingdom but above all to inaugurate a constant structure of exchanges between

¹⁷ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Viaggio in Italia*, Rizzoli, Milan 2005, passim.

¹⁸ The source is still Giuseppe Maria Galanti, *Della descrizione geografica e politica delle Sicilie*, Naples 1789, the whole of chapter 6 in volume III.

¹⁹ ASN, Affari esteri Americani, b. 4210.

Neapolitan architects and engineers. This propensity for innovation will make it easier to explain how and why it was that Ferdinand granted and protected initiatives proposed by the French from the very first months of his return (with concessions to Antoine Beranger, for the paper industry, to George Sicard for steam navigation, to Charles Lefèbvre and to Auguste Viollier for paper mills, printing works and steam navigation). All these entrepreneur-financiers favoured the entry of French and English engineers and technicians into the kingdom with the king's approval. But, indeed, this favour was explained by a 30-year history of trade.

In January 1787, Ferdinand IV supported Acton's proposal to send some engineers to France for further training. Other scientists, mineralogists in that case, left in 1789.²⁰ The first expedition was planned by General Giuseppe Parisi (1745-1831), founder of the military school known as the Nunziatella. In this case, the engineers were sent to France to become familiar with the latest techniques in hydraulics. Their interest was mainly in improving the basin systems of civil and military ports, an Acton objective. The destination was the prestigious *École des Ponts et Chaussées*.²¹ These official missions, which were agreed upon by the heads of the kingdoms, were to have an equally important

²⁰ On technical, technological and scientific exchanges, Fabio d'Angelo has written an interesting study: *Ingegneri e architetti del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, Limina Mentis, Villasanta 2014, from which I take some information. See there, pp. 110-124. The mission came to an unhappy end due to a duel between two officers, however the engineers returned better prepared. This trip opened a channel for scientific collaboration not only in the military but also in the civil field.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 113. D'Angelo cites the documents from which the preparation of the mission, its aims, and the selection of the individuals to be sent: ASNA, *Segreteria di Guerra e Marina*, *Lettera di Giuseppe Parisi al Re*, 8 September 1786, Authorisation no. 6/2013.

quid pro quo: as a result of the exchange and thus the transfer of engineering knowledge and technology, the French, not necessarily military, would receive favourable treatment from the Bourbon kingdom even after the French Decade.

In order for scientific culture to take root, it needs its application, and in order to realise the latter, the individual or group cannot intervene; the presence of the state is essential. It is certainly evident that some initiatives, particularly those sponsored by the Bourbons, are not linked to the idea of technical-scientific and economic improvement. On the other hand, however, the presence among the archive sources of documents testifying to an interesting mobility, also promoted and financed by the State, highlights the desire of the sovereigns who took turns on the throne of the Kingdom of Naples to try to keep up with the European countries.²²

The granting of privatisations to those who wanted to introduce advanced technologies into the kingdom was evidence of this willingness.

²² Fabio d'Angelo, *Ingegneri e architetti del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, cit., p. 162.

Chapter 3

The Merchant Fleet in the French Decade

A period of rehearsals

When the French Revolution broke out, General Championnet's advance forced the king to flee on the English vessel *Vanguard* on 23 December 1798. In the portrayal of Bourbon power, naval pomp is always in the foreground, as demonstrated by, among others, the painting by Antonio Joli (1700-1777), *Partenza di Carlo di Borbone per la Spagna vista da terra* (1759) where the king's departure takes place in a blaze of sailing ships. During the months of the Neapolitan Republic, partly due to the pressures of events and the fragility of the new regime, no measures were passed concerning the Merchant Navy. The government of Naples and the Kingdom was succeeded by Joseph Bonaparte (15 February 1806-14 July 1808) and then by Joachim Murat (from 15 July 1808 until his escape in 1815).

The former, Napoleon's brother, succeeded in doing little: he brought the Merchant Navy under the Ministry of the Navy (1806) and appointed a Board of Directors and a Naval Inspectorate whose function was to check and rationalise expenditure. During the time of his government, maritime traffic suffered. The continental blockade imposed by the British fleet against Naples almost completely paralysed sea trade.

However, the increasingly close contact with the French and the British who brought valuable *expertise* in building ships suitable for the oceans led to a rather rapid replacement of the typical

Mediterranean vessels (poles, pinques, tartanes, marticans) with new types of cargo ships: brigantines (*bricks*) and *golette* (*schooners*), which were especially popular in Atlantic waters.

Among the few measures implemented during this period was the adoption of the new Customs Law that reorganised customs and port services and adjusted tariffs. A Navigation Law was also enacted, which abolished numerous duties and charges stemming from ancient customs that were no longer appropriate for a modern naval power. These were taxes levied in ports, such as harbour dues, anchorage, ballast, tanning, hull, spread and haste, susta, licence, reach, embarkation, visit, practice, assistance, jus ports, jus passengers, jus strangers, relief and groins, and others derived from ancient customary rights. These gabels were collected by customs, port captains, commanders of forts and castles, chiefs of maritime movements (officers stationed in ports), the Admira's office, port police and former baronial customs, and the management of these exactions was sometimes so laborious as to encourage corruption.²³ In fact, taxes were sometimes demanded several times - the various authorities were not in connection with each other - and tips and bribes were used to remedy this. Having realised this, Joseph Bonaparte decided that the system had to be reformed.

During the first years of the Murat Age (circa 10 years), Neapolitan shipowners controlled 44% of the entire merchant fleet of the Two Sicilies (about 60% if we refer only to the mainland provinces; over 200 tonnes the ships are 94% Neapolitan). Meta and the island of Procida have the same number of Atlantic ships (54) as the whole of Sicily. In 1811, a

²³ Lamberto Radogna, *Storia della Marina Mercantile delle Due Sicilie (1734-1860)*, cit., p. 26.

sort of census was completed that enrolled 20,000 people from the Gulf of Naples embarked on some 500 large ships and another 2,000 smaller ones engaged in Mediterranean trades, including long-haul ones. To the 20,000 sailors had to be added the workers in the shipyards and the allied industries (shipwrights, blacksmiths, caulkers, sailmakers, rope-makers).

Naples and the Kingdom definitively freed themselves in this period from dependence on Genoese, French, Dutch, English and Danish ships: it was largely the southern merchant fleet that carried their exports and imports. In addition, improvements in shipbuilding and nautical education enabled the Neapolitan crews to compete with the navies linking the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Levant with the North Sea, the Baltic and the Atlantic ports of the Americas. The protagonist of this performance in long-distance maritime trade is not only the capital but also the coastal towns: Procida and the towns along the Sorrento coast (Vico Equense, Castellammare di Stabia, Meta and Piano di Sorrento). In Torre del Greco, mid-century coral fishing and processing employed over 700 boats and almost 5,000 sailors.

Rearranging the fleet

Joachim Murat is credited with further reorganising the Castellammare shipyards so that they could build more than just one large vessel, although his interest was mainly in the war fleet and not the Merchant Navy. One of his merits was also the extension of the system of “privatisations” and incentives. As for Castellammare, the enlargement took place in 1808 and the first variants of the new shipyard were two large sailing ships: the *Capri* (1810) and the *Gioacchino* (1812).

Napoleon's edict of 21 November 1806 decreed the continental blockade against the English; this blockade also became effective in the Kingdom of Naples from December of that year.²⁴ From then on, no wood from the English domains was allowed into the ports of the Kingdom. In response, the Order of Council (1 November 1807) imposed a commercial, maritime and land blockade on all states that excluded English ships. Napoleon responded by extending the blockade to neutral powers that accepted the British decisions. In the Kingdom of Naples, Murat established a Council of Maritime Prey.²⁵ The US president, Thomas Jefferson, imposed an embargo (26 December 1807) forbidding American ships to sail to European ports and stopping all ships of the warring countries in American ports. In turn, in 1808, Murat judged American ships as "privateers" and as such considered them liable to be intercepted, cannonised or captured.²⁶

During 1809 and 1810, the conflict with England and the USA did not subside. Many ships, particularly American ones, were captured as prey and confiscated by Muratan pirates (24 in 1810 alone; 55 from September 1809 to May 1811). Further episodes occurred in 1811 and 1812. It was only in 1813 that Joachim Murat cancelled the provisions and authorised free traffic, free import and export of goods from any friendly but also neutral power, giving new life to trade that had been paralysed by years of war.

When his rule ended, the Southern Kingdom had on the whole transposed new government practices, a more efficient bureaucracy, but had not progressed in maritime trade, despite the

²⁴ *Decreto*, 20 December 1806.

²⁵ *Decreto*, 31 August 1808, No. 279.

²⁶ *Ordinanza*, 9 May 1808.

greater number of ships. In particular, as we shall see, the modern practice of privatisation had been absorbed and adapted according to a rational system of examinations and controls that would remain in force until the Unification of Italy, which allowed innovations and improvements to be introduced from abroad even in the nautical field in a rational and orderly manner. This legislation and these provisions would be definitively implemented between 1816 and 1824.²⁷

Ferdinand IV of Bourbon returned to Naples on 17 June 1815, taking the name Ferdinand I of the Two Sicilies. The king found a disastrous maritime trade situation, partly to blame for Joachim Murat but also the international situation and Napoleon. The war had strangled the maritime power of Naples. At that point, many threads had to be reknotted, taking care to keep the good that had been done but also to restore the old or suppressed.

²⁷ Maurizio Lupo, *Il calzare di piombo. Materiali di ricerca sul mutamento tecnologico nel Regno delle Due Sicilie*, Franco Angeli, Milan 2017, pp. 21-24.

Chapter 4

The return of King Ferdinand

When Ferdinand returned to the throne of Naples in 1815, he continued the work begun by Joachim Murat to reorganise and strengthen the fleet. He could no longer draw on the experience of Acton, who had died in 1811. He recognised that the imprint of the latter had been decisive, and in fact continued along the lines of his reforms and modernisation. He further enlarged the Castellammare shipyards and ordered the construction of a masonry slipway.²⁸ Above all, he issued new regulations for the reorganisation of the royal fleet (1815-1816) and in 1818 he had the *Ordinanze generali della Real Marina* (Decree, 1 October 1818), signed by the Minister of the Navy Diego Naselli (1754-1832) and the Chancellor Marquis Donato Tommasi (1761-1831). They reorganised the maritime sector in terms of hierarchies and administrative structures by establishing the Departments of Naples, Palermo and Messina. After the interventions of previous years, the training courses for the Royal

²⁸ Maria Sirago, *L'organizzazione della marineria, della flotta e del sistema portuale nel Decennio*, in Renata De Lorenzo, ed., *Ordine e disordine. Amministrazione e mondo militare nel Decennio francese*, Atti del sesto Seminario di Studi "Decennio francese (1806-1815)", Vibo Valentia 2-4 October 2008", Giannini, Naples 2012, pp. 67-91; Ead., *Il cantiere di Castellammare dal 1784 ai primi del '900*, in L. Capobianco, edited by, *Le donne di Castellammare ricordano e raccontano*, "Meridione Nord e Sud nel Mondo", a. IX, no. 3, July Sept. 2009, pp. 30-42.

Navy's men of war and also for the commercial navy were further reorganised, updating them and adding new subjects of study.

The construction of new ships (vessels, frigates, corvettes and other smaller vessels) was also ordered. In these institutions, which were further strengthened, notions of navigation, geometry, astronomy, geography and mathematics were imparted, training officers and subordinates prepared for navigation in peace and war. Senior officers were given a gentleman's education, knowledge of French and notions of diplomacy because often, in certain places, the commander of a military ship could act as consul.

Among Ferdinand's first measures regarding the merchant navy was the prohibition to sell Neapolitan ships abroad (*Royal Decree*, 15 July 1815, No. 31). In 1816, the king set navigation rights for domestic and foreign vessels and established the minimum number of sailors for each vessel (*Royal Decree*, 1 August 1816, No. 436). The same law stipulated that the commercial navigation of the continental and island dominions was to be placed under the Ministry of the Navy for technical and political aspects and under the Ministry of Finance for economic and taxation aspects. At that point, the Directorate General of Navigation was established, consisting of an administration and the Director General of Indirect Duties for the customs side.

As soon as Ferdinand resumed his kingdom, the British raised the question of the flag privileges that had been abolished by Murat with the 1809 law. Diplomatic negotiations were thus begun in Naples between Minister William à Court and Tommaso di Somma Marquis of Ciercello, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. In London, other talks took place between Fabrizio Ruffo Prince of Castelcicala, Minister Plenipotentiary of the Two Sicilies at the English court, and Lord Robert Stewart Viscount Viscount of Castlereagh, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of

the United Kingdom. Despite Luigi de' Medici's contrary opinion, the ministers decided to restore flag rights, on 25 August 1815, limiting them to English ships with the exclusion of those from the Ionian Islands and Malta subject to the British crown. Since the restoration of this ancient system conflicted with the new customs system and maritime commercial interests, through De' Medici's intervention the new navigation law was corrected in July 1816. The English accepted the renunciation of the privilege in exchange for a 10% reduction on customs duties on goods imported with vessels from England and all its dominions. Similar reductions were granted on 1 July 1818 to French ships and a month later to Spanish ships. In exchange for customs favours, the British made the friendship and trade treaties signed with Omar Pasha, bey of Algiers (3 April 1817), with Mahum Pasha, bey of Tunis (17 April) and with the bey of Tripoli (15 May) valid for the Two Sicilies.

Freedom of trade in the Mediterranean was finally restored and all subjects of the kingdom imprisoned in the barbarian regencies were also freed. Favourable trade agreements also followed with the USA, France, Sweden, the Netherlands, Russia, Prussia, the League of Hanseatic Cities, the Duchy of Oldenburg and Sardinia. An important trade treaty with the United Kingdom was made executive on 22 December 1815.

On 26 April 1816 William Pinkney's mission also began. He arrived in Naples (with 6 warships for intimidation purposes) to ask for compensation for the cargoes confiscated under Murat's regime, which amounted, according to their estimate, to over 3 million ducats for the confiscated cargoes, 69,000 for the ships and other expenses totalling 3,157,679 ducats.²⁹ Supported by the United Kingdom, which was favourable to the Bourbon at the

²⁹ SSN, Affari Esteri Americani, bundle 4455.

time (also because of advantageous treaties for the extraction of Sicilian sulphur), the king refused to return those ducats that had actually been confiscated by the usurper Murat. Ferdinand was also right in law. At that point, Pinkney and the American ships left the port of Naples on 30 August 1816 without a shot in the arm. The dispute would not be settled until 1832 when Naples would be obliged to pay the USA 2,115,000 ducats plus 7,670 for repatriation expenses in 9 instalments up to 1842 for a total sum of 2,538,000 ducats.³⁰ A bad legacy left by Murat. From then on, however, there was full freedom of navigation for the ships of the two states.

Important for the modernisation of the Neapolitan merchant navy was the decree issued in January 1818 forbidding the use of foreign flags by Royal vessels.³¹ Between March and July of the same year, all privileges that exempted ships flying English, French and Spanish flags from customs duties were abolished.³² Relief from customs duties was also granted to the first two cargoes of goods produced in the Kingdom and on ships built in the Kingdom with a capacity of more than 200 tonnes, excluding olive oil, silk and liquorice, while the rates of navigation duties were adjusted, reducing the rate for national ships without distinction of origin to grain 4. To facilitate the purchase of foreign ships - a practice that could especially speed up the acquisition of new construction techniques - the import duty was reduced from 25% to 10% in November 1818. This reduction made it advantageous to purchase the new steamships, which had just been invented and were being tested.

³⁰ *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, 25 June 1842.

³¹ *Decreto Reale (Royal Decree)*, 15 January 1818.

³² *Legge (Law)*, 30 July 1818, No. 1259.

Other measures of 1818 and 1819 favoured ships built in the Kingdom with a capacity of more than 200 tonnes. These ships were relieved of exit duty if they transported goods produced or extracted from mines in the Kingdom. Regarding the size of the merchant fleet, Radogna, citing the *Annali Civili delle Due Sicilie* (*Civil Annals of the Two Sicilies*) of 1834, recalls that on 1 January 1818 Naples had 1,376 merchant ships out of the Kingdom's total of 2387 (total tonnage 92,269); Giuseppe de Thomasis, Acting Minister of the Navy noted that the merchant shipping on 1 January 1820 amounted to 3,127 transport ships, 1,047 fishing ships (for a total tonnage of 98,265).³³ Other statistics were reported in the aforementioned *Journal* (22 June 1825).

Again: in August 1823, a decrease of 10% on export customs duties was granted for all goods that had no other benefits and were transported on ships from the dominions on this side of the lighthouse. At the end of 1823, the reform of customs policy gave freedom to the export of royal products, decreasing duties on raw materials necessary for national manufactures and abolishing the free scale in the port of Naples.³⁴ Other liberalisations related to the Merchant Marine came in those years, such as the free exportation of merchant ships with the prohibition, however, of exporting timber to build ships (a raw material of which there was always a great shortage and which was beginning to become scarce in, for example, England). The 10% reduction on customs duties and building premiums were also extended to the island dominions by decrees of January 1824 (13 January 1824, No. 941; 26 January, No. 956) and 31 December 1824.

³³ *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, 17 October 1820 (p. 87).

³⁴ *Decreto Reale (Royal Decree)*, 15 December 1823, No. 884.

After a long pause, between 1815 and 1819 the Royal ships sailed overseas (the crossing of the brig *Oreto* that docked in Boston in 1818 is famous), to the Black Sea, the West Indies, Brazil and many other countries.³⁵ There was a new pause between 1820 and 1823 due to new revolutionary uprisings that broke out in various Italian cities and also in Naples. These were fuelled, very often, by the nostalgic Jacobins and Murattians; this lull was followed by a remarkable upswing in the late 1820s with trips as far as the Cuban capital of Havana, Vera Cruz, Boston and New York.

They were mostly brigs, poles and schooners that weighed 200 or 300 tonnes and had 10 to a maximum of 16 crew, almost all Neapolitans, Procidans, with a few Sicilians. These were ships that had narrow spaces.

In the stern were the officers' berths around a small room that served as a nautical room, a meeting and recreation room and a refectory; while in the bow were the cramped crew quarters, in an area of the ship most exposed to the shocks and bumps of the waves.³⁶ The men who plied the seas on those ships were trained to endure immense hardship and a very hard life. But their mortality rate was high, their profession risky.

³⁵ Lamberto Radogna, *Storia della Marina Mercantile delle Due Sicilie*, Mursia, Milan 1982, pp. 40-41.

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 42-43.

Chapter 5

Andriel and Sicard

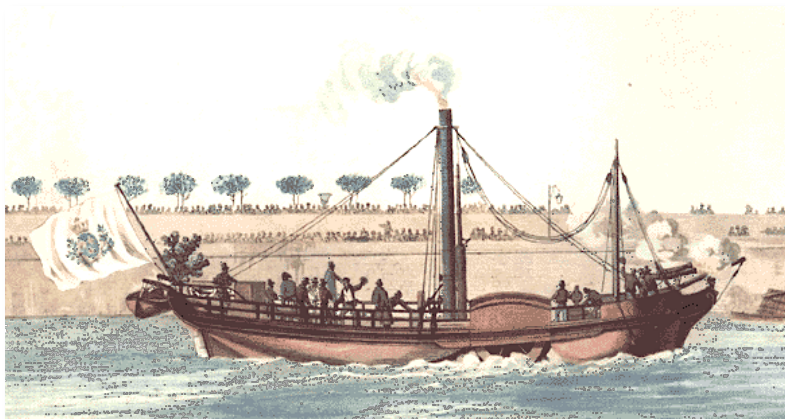
Steam navigation in Naples: men and capital

In 1816 and 1823 royal decrees were published to facilitate the merchant navy and promote the adoption of a new class of vessels, namely brigantines, two-masted sailing ships with a tonnage ranging from 100 to 300 tonnes and developed sails, particularly suitable for journeys on the high seas and ocean crossings. In 1824, the royal shipyards in Castellammare launched the large vessel *Vesuvio*, with more than 100 pieces of artillery of various types (cannons, carronades, howitzers). As was also the case in Genoa and Trieste, in the Neapolitan area, and especially in the city, between 1818 and 1831 a dozen or so insurance and maritime exchange companies were set up to share the risks and reinvest part of the profits. About 10 years after the start of the reforms and after a sustained construction campaign, in 1826 the Royal Bourbon Fleet was put on an equal footing with the French, English and Spanish fleets as far as the laws of the sea were concerned.

Meanwhile, a novelty had literally exploded: the application of steam power to ships. In 1807, the age of steam navigation had begun when American engineer Robert Fulton (1765-1814) built the first steam-powered ship, the *Clermont*, making a voyage from New York to Albany some 240 kilometres, covered in 32 hours. Soon afterwards, the construction of small steamships

began. In Europe, Pierre Andriel, a naval captain and entrepreneur from Montpellier, stood out for his resourcefulness. In April 1815, he asked the French Minister of the Navy for permission to take one of his boats, the *Margery* (Mercey) to Paris. The boat, renamed *Elise* (so as not to upset French sensibilities), actually made the journey from England to France, reaching the French capital in 1816. The river trip from Le Havre to Paris lasted 11 days, from 16 to 27 April.³⁷ Andriel had formed a company for this venture, the Andriel & Pajol with his partner Pierre Claude Pajol (1772-1844, French army general). The company was short-lived and was dissolved when Andriel did not receive the hoped-for aid from the French government. But there were many competitors in France, whereas the same could not be said of Naples; having therefore learnt that important concessions and benefits were given there to foreigners wishing to invest their money and skills, he moved there.

³⁷ Maria Sirago, *A Bridge between Conceptual Frameworks: Sciences, Society and Technology Studies*, ed. Pisano, Springer, Amsterdam 2014, pp. 497-498.



The little 21-metre Elise.

The introduction of navigation in Naples was due to the strong will of Luigi de' Medici, Prince of Ottajano, who wanted to bring to the Kingdom the primacy of that type of navigation of which he saw many advantages. It was also thanks to the resourcefulness of Pierre Andriel, but also to a small group of men who took risks in the enterprise, including the Frenchman Charles Lefèvre, who had been resident in Naples for some years.

The *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie* of 22 February 1817 encouraged not to leave the Kingdom behind in such an advancement: steam navigation. It went against the tide, if one can say so, because the prevailing idea at the time was that steamboats were only usable in very calm seas and for small cabotage. Many considered them suitable for navigation in inland waters: rivers, lakes perhaps sea fjords.

Despite their technical limitations, the first examples already showed undoubted advantages: they could manoeuvre very easily in ports, more easily than sailing ships. But they still suffered considerable disadvantages when it came to navigation on the

high seas, although the unceasing work of technicians and engineers tried, one could say on every voyage, to solve the problems that gradually arose. Moreover, boilers were very consuming and coal was very expensive; it had to be piled up in large quantities, greatly reducing loading capacity. In fact, for at least twenty years, steamships would not have a proper hold, but only space for storing goods above deck. The rest of the space was for crew and passengers. Consequently, the high costs made it difficult, indeed impossible at that time, to compete with wind-powered ships. It was also observed that the wheels, in case of high waves, came out above the water surface most of the time reducing the speed of the ship.

However, Luigi de' Medici was convinced that time would bring further improvements and that possessing the technology was essential for a Kingdom surrounded by water. He was echoed by the Kingdom's official newspaper: steam navigation would make travelling more frequent by bringing the peoples of the southern part of the Peninsula closer together (*Giornale delle Due Sicilie*, 1 March 1817). In 1816, academic Luigi Serristori (1793-1857) wrote and printed, in Florence, also thanks to De' Medici, the essay *Sopra le macchine a vapore*. The book, which clearly recounts the short but adventurous history of steam technology, includes an engraving of the *Elise*, the prototype of all steamboats of that decade.³⁸

Pierre Andriel submitted a proposal on 15 December 1816 to the Minister Secretary of State for the Navy for "the establishment of steam ships in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies". In his petition, Andriel presented a convincing picture of the advantages such an

³⁸ Pierre Andriel, *Coup d'oeil historique sur l'utilité des batimens-a-vapeur dans le Royaume des Deux-Siciles*, De l'Imprimerie du Ministère de la Secrétairerie d'État, Naples 1817, pp. 30-36.

adoption would bring. On 20 December 1816, Marquis Tommasi, Minister Secretary of State for Internal Affairs, invited the Frenchman to submit to him the final text of his requests, which provided, as was the norm, for a privative for steam navigation and the enjoyment of the privilege of the Royal Navy with the exemption of the sanitary licence in the choice of crewmen, who would in any case be chosen from among Italian sailors.

On 8 January 1817, the Minister Secretary of State for War and the Navy, Diego Naselli, submitted his report on Andriel's request to King Ferdinand and the latter, on the following 14, approved the granting of a 15-year licence for "accelerated navigation by means of fire trumpets known as steam navigation, in the waters that bathe the coast and rivers of the Kingdom".³⁹

On the following 6 February, he read the text *Coup d'oeil historique sur l'utilité des batimens-a-vapeur dans le Royaume des Deux-Sicules* to the Royal Institute of Encouragement, in which he reiterated his reasons, also bringing in historical arguments.⁴⁰ On 10 April 1817, the notary Gaetano Lapegna of Naples drew up a public deed constituting a limited partnership called *Compagnia privilegiata per la navigazione a vapore Andriel & C.* (*Andriel & C. Privileged Steamship Company*), which had its headquarters at Vicolo Concezione a Toledo No. 32 in Naples. The company was established with an endowment of 200,000 shares of 1,000 ducats each, of which the first 100 formed the company's fund in cash and were advanced by the bank Emmanuel Appelt & C. The limited partners included the following names:

³⁹ *Decreto Reale (Royal Decree)*, 14 January 1817, No. 616.

⁴⁰ Pierre Andriel, *Coup d'oeil historique sur l'utilité des batimens-a-vapeur dans le Royaume des Deux-Sicules*, De l'Imprimerie du Ministère de la Secrétairerie d'État, Naples 1817.

Luigi de' Medici
Agostino Serra, on behalf of the reason of Emmanuel Appelt
Ludovico Potenzani, Marquis
Carlo Filangieri, General
Augusto Lefèbvre
Carlo Lefèbvre
Giovanbattista Bourguignon, Swiss Consul
Augusto Rougon
Maurizio Dupont
Domenico Catalano
Carlo Fourquet
Fortunato Wolff

The shareholders purchased 15 shares each, worth 1,500 ducats. The Board of Directors included Carlo Fourquet, Giuseppe Pignatelli Duke of Terranova, Carlo Lefèbvre, Giovanbattista Bourguignon, Edoardo Valentin, Domenico Catalano and Abbot Teodoro Monticelli. Secretary was Giuseppe Cottrau.⁴¹

After discussion of various estimates for the construction of a steamboat to be named *Ferdinando I*, the order was awarded to master Stanislao Filosa for 5780 ducats. He had a small shipyard at Ponte della Maddalena near the Vigliena fort near San Giovanni a Teduccio, in an area now incorporated into the city. It was one of the many small but renowned factories that stretched north of Naples to the Amalfi coast. The wooden hull was built under the supervision of the English engineer Ferry. The launch was set for 18 June 1818 but, due to an accident, it took place on

⁴¹ ASN, Protocollo Notar Lapegna No. 549 (1817). Giovan Battista Bourguignon was probably a son of Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville (1698-1782), a famous geographer and explorer and contributor to the *Encyclopédie*. This "Gianbattista" does not appear to have lived in Naples.

the following 24 June. The boat was towed into the port of Naples by the pontoon *Forte*.⁴²

The schooner *Ferdinando I* was small but not very small: 36 metres long, it weighed 213 tonnes (not 115 as we sometimes read) and in its hull were 16 dressing rooms for “passengers of distinction” and the captain’s room “very comfortable and proper”. She had a large aft room for about 50 people who wanted to travel economy class. She could also carry a load of up to 60 tons.⁴³ She was fitted with an English 50-horsepower double steam boiler with a consumption of 20 canisters per day, which Andriel had personally transported from England.⁴⁴

On 27 September 1818, the *Ferdinando I* made its maiden voyage under the command of ensign Giuseppe Libetta, who was then only 24 years old.⁴⁵ Also on board were the pilot, Andrea de Martino, 10 crewmen and an English engineer who had to steer the large boiler. Libetta wrote in his logbook a report of the voyage that led to Livorno. This logbook seems to be lost today,

⁴² *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, 25 June 1818.

⁴³ Ernesto Mazzetto, *Il mare*, Guida, Naples 2006, p. 104. A reproduction of the ship, or an almost identical ship, is kept at the Naples State Archives in ASN, fs. 70/bis, folder B-8, *Elevazione del primo pacchetto a vapore che verrebbe costruito in Napoli in seguito del privilegio reale di San Ferdinando*.

⁴⁴ Carlo Perfetto, *Vicende della Marina Mercantile a vapore nel Reame delle Sicilie dal 1818 al 1860*, Stabilimento tipografico G. Barca, Naples 1923, pp. 21-22. As reported by various authors, there is a beautiful colour print of the ship preserved in the State Archives in Naples. However, its resemblance to the *Elise* and the fact that a second ship very similar to the first was launched in 1824 leads some to think that the ship illustrated is not the first Ferdinand I. But of this there is no certainty.

⁴⁵ *Giornale del Regno delle due Sicilie*, 14 September 1818 (according to other sources, the journey took place on 24 September). Giuseppe Libetta was born on 17 January 1794 in Naples.

but the text was read by the editors of the *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie* (*Newspaper of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies*) who reported various passages from it. On 13 October, the boat left Livorno bound for Genoa, where it arrived the next day, arousing great interest: the noise it produced, its speed without sail, the flames coming out of its tall smokestack, were an absolute novelty. It was the first steamship to enter the port of Genoa and its 12-foot (about 3 metre) diameter wheels made of tarred iron, each with 8 paddles, aroused echoes and wonder.

There was a change of command in Genoa: Libetta officially left the command to De Martino, who was considered more experienced: it had been realised that sailing this type of vessel presented considerable difficulties. And also disadvantages: in fact, ever since the maiden voyage, the captain and pilot had realised that the ship suffered from construction defects and was subject to frequent breakdowns; in particular, the machinery that transmitted the movement to the wheel had not been properly housed and secured and tended to oscillate. From the chimney above the boiler came high flames that, depending on where the wind blew them, could appear harmless but also very threatening.

On 30 October, the *Ferdinando I* left for Marseilles where it arrived on 4 November, always followed by wonder and interest.⁴⁶ The ship, however, had left almost empty and had found no passengers in either Livorno or Genoa, so the financial outcome of the venture had proved to be a failure.

Andriel thought of selling it in Marseilles with the obvious intention of financing a new one, according to his original plan. But on 25 May 1819, a buyer had still not been found.⁴⁷ Six

⁴⁶ *Le Moniteur Universale*, 13 November 1818.

⁴⁷ ASN, Protocollo Ministero Marina, year 1819.

months later, on 19 November 1819, she was at anchor in Genoa where, with difficulty, she managed to find a cargo and some brave passengers. But another serious breakdown forced her into the port of Lerici and repairs at La Spezia. She returned at that point to Genoa. On 18 January 1820 she returned again to Livorno and on 8 February to Civitavecchia.⁴⁸ In this port, she probably needed another repair because she did not sail again until a month later, and on 8 March she finally returned to Naples.⁴⁹

In Andriel's plan, the first ship, which inaugurated the Naples-Marseilles route, was to be followed by three others. Historians date the beginning of steam navigation in the Mediterranean from this time, but as far as we know, it was probably the first ever voyage of a steam ship on the open sea in Europe. The schooner was not competitive with sailing ships that were faster, safer and more comfortable at the time. No one in Naples was willing to buy the *Ferdinando I* and Andriel, unable to do anything else, was forced to have the ship dismantled in 1824 and return, defeated, to France.⁵⁰ The first venture was a financial failure and some partners - Fourquet, Filangieri, Rougon and the Princess of Paternò never paid their dues. The others - Lefèbvre, Filangieri, Catalano, Dupont - lost their money, realising, however, that they had opened a new era. In the meantime, Andriel had received permission with a licence to experiment with gas lighting, another field that promised profit and development. It was, however,

⁴⁸ ASN, Protocollo Ministero Marina, No. 533 year 1820.

⁴⁹ ASN, Protocollo Ministero Marina, No. 1021 year 1820.

⁵⁰ Antonio Formicola - Claudio Romano, ed., *Storia della marina da guerra dei Borbone di Napoli. Dal 1815 al 1830*, v. II, Uff. Storico Marina Militare, Rome 2010, pp. 701-706. The news of the decommissioning in 1824 can be found in *Annali d'Italia* (1750-1861) by Antonio Coppi, 1824, No. 20.

other people, his fellow countrymen, who developed this other innovation in Naples. He did not have the financial strength to start.

Overview of the patent system

When addressing the subject of technological adaptation in the Bourbon kingdom, as introduction or improvement, we touch on the subject of privative rights. However, the system of privative rights, which already existed before the French Decade, was only organically regulated on 2 March 1810. It was in that year that, taking up a similar measure that had been established in France in 1781, an organic system of privative rights or privileges was introduced. A distinction was made between three different types of rights: invention rights, improvement rights and introduction rights. The *right of invention* was granted to the inventor of an entirely new discovery; the *right of improvement*, similar to the first, concerned the improvement of an already known invention; the *right of introduction*, which concerns the specific case dealt with here, allowed the sovereign to protect those who introduced, i.e. from abroad, devices or processes or entire industries or branches of industries, when this was absent in the country of introduction, but protected by a privilege in the country of origin. The privilege protected for 5 years, extendable twice more up to a maximum of 15 for reasons of public utility.

Anyone wishing to apply for a patent had to draw up an application describing the object or technology, the process to be introduced, to be filed with the local authorities. The application was then examined by the Ministry of the Interior, which drew up a report and, if necessary, a preliminary examination of the application, which was compulsory only for projects from which

dangers to public health or safety could arise (explosives, poisoning). If the examination was positive, the project was submitted to the Sovereign, who published the permit with the indication that it had to be realised within one year, under penalty of forfeiture. Various protections were provided for the beneficiary, who could apply to seize counterfeits, claim damages and could also sell the privilege.⁵¹ Frequently, privilege holders then accessed financial aid such as soft loans and the granting of premises.

The Bourbons approved Murat's system of privileges with a sovereign Resolution that was first applied to the continental part of the Kingdom (25 May 1816) and then extended to Sicily (4 June 1824). If the laws regulating this matter were not touched again until unity, the process leading to the granting of privileges from 1824 onwards was subjected to the judgement of three institutional subjects with an always obligatory examination.

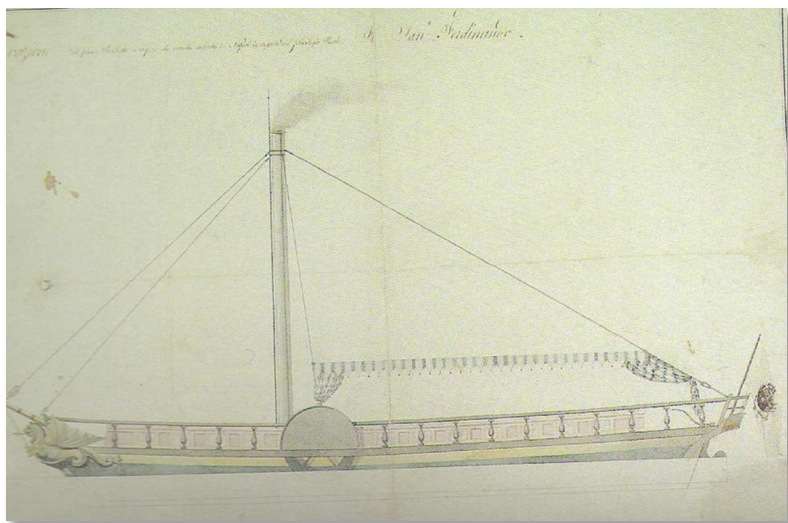
The judgement of the Royal Institute of Encouragement, founded in 1806 by Joseph Bonaparte and considered as an

⁵¹ *Bollettino delle Leggi del Regno di Napoli*, V. I, 1810, pp. 200-211. The first draft of this decree was presented by a French official, a certain Le Riche who was inspector of manufactures and director of the Convitto del Carminiello al Mercato, see Anna dell'Orefice, *La politica delle privative industriali nel pensiero degli economisti meridionali (1830-1848)* in AA.VV, *Fatti e idee di Storia economica nei secoli XII-XX: Studi dedicati a Franco Borlandi*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1977, p. 769. The text of the proposal that was to follow the French one was ready in December 1807, sent to the Ministry of the Interior and approved by Joachim Murat. See Anna Portente e Adriana Tolomeo, *Il progresso tecnologico nel Mezzogiorno pre-unitario*, 2 vols., Mapograf, Vibo Valentia 1990-1991, Ivi, vol. I, p. 14. Del Giudice goes on to explain how before this measure, privatisations were granted in the Kingdom by simple favourable opinion of the competent ministry: Francesco del Giudice, *Notizie storiche, del Regio Istituto di Incoraggiamento alle scienze naturali dalla sua fondazione sino al 1850*, Naples 1862, p. 149.

Academic Body in which the best scientists and technicians of the Kingdom gathered, was not final and binding. After its opinion it passed to the Consulta di Stato, a body made up of magistrates, administrators, notables, military and ecclesiastics, men much closer to political power than those of the Royal Institute of Encouragement. The last instance was the Ordinary Council of State, the supreme organ of the Bourbon administration, in which the sovereign, with his ministers, made important decisions for the life of the country.

All decisions concerning the introduction of techniques relating to the textile industry, papermaking, gas lighting, railway transport, steamboat technology, wallpaper and many other aspects went through these three levels of judgement and examination.⁵²

⁵² *Regolamenti da osservarsi per il Consiglio di Stato da tutti i nostri ministri e segretari di Stato*, Stamperia Reale, Naples 1826. For a broader overview, see Renato Giannetti, *La legge sulle privative industriali e l'innovazione industriale regionale in Italia prima e dopo la legge Scialoja del 1859*, in Piero Barucci - Gabriella Gioli - Piero Roggi, ed., *Antonio Scialoja e la politica economica del Risorgimento*, Atti del Convegno di Studi a Napoli del 22-23 febbraio 2007, Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, Naples 2007.



The drawing of the *Ferdinando I* by the Company of Sicard & associates, preserved in the Naples State Archives. First Mediterranean steamer financed by Sicard, Fourquet, Pignatelli, Lefèbvre, Bourguignon, Valentin, Catalano, Monticelli, Rougon, Dupont and Wolff (Watercolour by Antoine Roux, Marseille Museum). It was presented on the occasion of the request for an introduction.

Chapter 6

The Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore nel Regno delle Due Sicilie

The Sicard Company

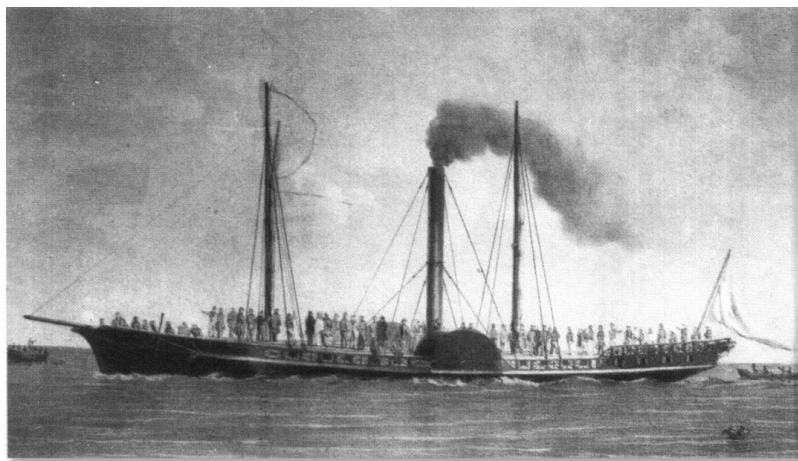
The modern history of Italian shipping began again in Naples a few years later. Luigi de' Medici, Prince of Ottajano (1759-1830), Minister of Finance in pectore since 1803 and then with full powers over the Kingdom from 1815, set to work to create a more suitable situation for the development of trade and infrastructure. He was temporarily removed during the uprisings of 1820 (in which he had not participated) and recalled at the first opportunity. Despite the hiatus, therefore, his management displays characteristics of continuity and medium-term planning.

One of his first concerns was the strengthening of the Merchant Marine, which was strategic in a maritime city like Naples and still inadequate for the rank of the Kingdom. De' Medici therefore envisaged a construction plan by financing and facilitating private ship companies; at the same time he decided on a reorganisation of the ports and a strengthening of their infrastructure. The choice of a policy of fiscal incentives and “privatisations” was a winning one and made it possible to attract capital and enterprising entrepreneurs. Rather quickly the conditions were created in Naples for the development of private initiatives aimed at building fleets of steamships.

In 1824, he created the Corps of Bridges and Roads (later to become a first-class engineering school) within which engineers

and designers who had also worked under Murat were recruited. These men were led by the capable Carlo Afan de Rivera (1779-1852), a military man and brilliant engineer. The Corps planned the development of shipbuilding docks and harbours. Afan de Rivera, however, had written a pamphlet in 1818 in which he argued that the Kingdom's top strategic priority was the development of its waters and coastline.⁵³

As mentioned above, ships of that period did not have a hold, all the space was used for crew and coal storage at the stern. To allow for a smoother voyage, the deck - on which the bulk of the cargo transported was located - was covered.



The *Real Ferdinando I* on one of her maiden voyages.
(Macpherson Collection)

Unimpressed by the poor outcome of the first shipping company, Luigi de' Medici was publicly in favour of resuming

⁵³ Carlo Afan de Rivera, *Considerazioni su i mezzi da restituire il valore proprio a' doni che ha la natura largamente concesso al Regno delle Due Sicilie*, Naples 1818.

attempts. With a request presented to the Crown Prince, Duke of Calabria, the future king, in October 1822 Francesco Stella asked permission to harbour two Scottish-built steamers with a capacity of 200 tonnes and power of 80 horsepower to connect Naples to Marseilles on periodic voyages and another two to connect Naples to Sicily. The applicant undertook to perform the postal service by transporting parcels and letters if he was granted a 15-year licence. A second application was submitted by the English firm Maingy, Price & Co. which had settled in Naples on 21 October 1822 to build two 200-tonne vessels with a capacity to carry 140 passengers to connect the continent with Sicily. They asked for the same conditions as Stella but renounced the privatisation.⁵⁴

In November 1822, there was a third request from the Englishmen Walther Vallin, Routh and Edward Valentine requesting a ten-year “privative” to found a steam navigation company for passengers and mail on the route between Naples and Palermo. The solvency and good reputation of this London company was probably guaranteed on that occasion and on others by the Rothschilds themselves who wrote about it in their correspondence a few years later:

My chef ordered me to get information on the house Vallin Routh Valentine & C. and communicate it to you. I have asked about it the chef of a first rate house here who told me he knew said gentlemen as men of probity and had not seen they did business above their means or meddled with too large speculations and he had already taken their paper to about 2/m £; the said friend observed still that certainly much would also de pend on the state of their house in London on which acc. He however had formerly also got satisfactory information. You will

⁵⁴ ASN, Agricoltura e Commercio, bundle 204.

oblige me to tell me your opinion of this London establishment of said Gentlemen.⁵⁵

And again:

The firm Vallin, Routh, Valentine & Co. tho' not wealthy, is in my opinion good from the respectability of its connections & extent of its business. A few thousand pounds (one to 11,500) may be safely entrusted on its signature.⁵⁶

The Council of Ministers of 25 January 1823 favoured the proposal of Maingy, Price & Co. "being the one that did not claim privity and did not prevent anyone else from being able to introduce such woods".

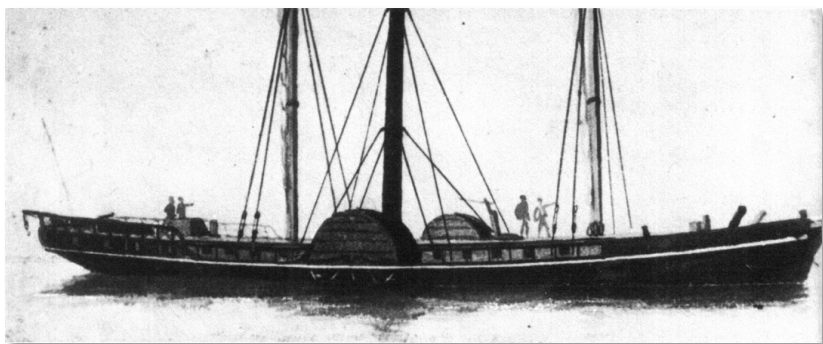
Later, on 28 April of the same year, they renounced and Walther Vallin, Routh and Edward Valentine reapplied for a ten-year "privative" to set up a steam navigation company to transport passengers and mail on the route between Naples and Palermo. They planned to charge a ticket of 120 ducats per voyage, very expensive therefore.

Their request was supported as a general partner by Giorgio Wilding, Prince of Radali and Butera (1791-1841), a German officer and native of Dresden, who was appointed a gentleman of the king's chamber.⁵⁷ It was most probably also supported by the Rothschilds of the Neapolitan *maison* with whom Wilding had documented dealings.

⁵⁵ See RAL, *Correspondence from C.M. von Rothschild & Sons*, XI/84/1A-7A. Cited in *Carl Mayer Rothschild e Il Credito Commerciale nel Regno delle Due Sicilie*, in "Società e Storia", No. 110 (2005), pp. 705-739. Ibid, p. 709.

⁵⁶ RAL, *Correspondence from C.M. von Rothschild & Sons*, XI/84/1B (letter of 12/11/1825).

⁵⁷ *Neuer Nekrolog der Deutschen*, Bern Friebr Voigt, Weimar 1943, p. 538.



The *Real Ferdinando* (watercolour by an anonymous artist, Naples).

Luigi de' Medici had this request approved by royal decree on 2 December 1823 (No. 876). Initially the ship owners, all of English origin, established their office in Palermo, while a Neapolitan office was established in Naples at vico (via) Pileo 29.⁵⁸ The company was also granted the franchise and privatisation of warships (for the Sicilian route only) on condition that the steamers were commanded by officers belonging to the Royal Navy and that voyages commenced within 9 months of the issuing of the decree. Thus the first *steam* navigation company of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was created with an office in Naples and one in Palermo. The *Amministrazione* (this name would remain for the next 30 years of the company's history, through its various transformations) ordered a steamer built according to the most modern concepts from England. After some negotiation, it purchased an already launched ship, the *Superb*, built in the Scott & Sons shipyards in 1820, renaming it the *Real Ferdinando I*.⁵⁹ It had a capacity of 250 tonnes and could carry

⁵⁸ *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, I, Naples 1824, p. 578.

⁵⁹ And not in 1823 as stated in Radogna's book: see *Scottish Built Ships Register*: *Superb*.

up to 200 passengers. Those travelling first class were accommodated in an aft gallery that served as a dining room. The boat arrived in Naples on 14 June 1824 and began its service by setting sail for Palermo on 20 June under the command of Andrea de Martino, who had been the *Ferdinando I*'s second officer.

The *Giornale delle Due Sicilie* (*Newspaper of the Two Sicilies*) of 8 March 1825 specified the fares: 27 ducats for first class, with the right to board, bed with linen and free luggage transport; 20 ducats in second class in the fore room, including board and luggage transport; 4 ducats in third class, on deck, without board and lodging. Subsequently, prices were adjusted downwards for first class (24 ducats), second class (8 ducats) was no longer entitled to board and third class as the previous fare but without luggage. Despite receiving the first example of a maritime postal agreement in Italy, the financial results of *Real Ferdinando*'s management were passive. Coal was expensive, breakdowns were frequent and there were probably not enough passengers. The ship did not always travel with a full load at a time when sailing was still competitive.

As will be noted, the partners who had been part of Andriel's company were absent from this partnership, and they were also absent in the subsequent company configuration, when an attempt was made to sell the boat in England, but in vain.⁶⁰ When it was put up for auction for 48,000 ducats in Naples, however, it was bought by one of Andriel's old partners, Maurizio Dupont, to whom the prince of Butera's patent was transferred in June 1826.⁶¹

On 4 January 1825 Ferdinand I died and was succeeded by Francis I (1777-1830) who, in his reign that lasted only five years

⁶⁰ *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, 25 April 1826.

⁶¹ *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, 21 July 1826.

- until 1830 - tried with sincere passion to promote the Merchant Navy. By now it was clear to everyone in the royal entourage that this was a strategic sector. In February 1826, after months of work by a commission specially commissioned by the new ruler, a law was issued that united all the provisions relating to the Merchant Marine, established new tariffs for navigation rights and reorganised the Maritime Commissions of the provinces according to a logic of greater order and rationality.⁶²

In December 1827, the king personally issued an order granting a 20 per cent discount on customs duties for goods imported directly from the West Indies, for the duration of 10 years (*Sovrano rescritto*, 16 May 1827), and in the same year signed a navigation treaty with the Ottoman Empire that gave full freedom of transit through the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus to ships flying the Kingdom's flag, partly restoring ancient privileges but avoiding, as had happened in the past, that they had to change the Kingdom's flag to the Russian one (Royal Decree 14 December 1827). As Ludovico Bianchini reports in his *Storia economica-civile di Sicilia* at the end of 1825, the Merchant Navy of the Two Sicilies had 440 large ships (tonnage 65,184) and 4,568 smaller ones (tonnage 42,754).

On 2 May 1826, the *Real Ferdinando* resumed its voyage en route to Palermo and on 2 August opened the line north to Marseilles. The costs of this service were very high, prohibitive: 42 ducats the first class to Livorno and 72 that to Marseilles; the second class, respectively 21 and 36 ducats, were not granted the right to the forward room with board and bed. And third class (which still cost 6 ducats to Livorno and 10 to Marseilles) was reserved for servants. Dupont was a general services contractor

⁶² *Legge (Law)*, 25 February 1826.

for the army and managed the construction of the Muro Finanziere, a customs wall, commissioned by King Ferdinand IV now I (who reigned under this name between 1816-1825) and built between 1826 and 1830 under Francis I. In order to make the most of the ship at times when passengers or goods were missing, Dupont also organised sightseeing tours in the Gulf of Naples, which was then the destination of a cultured tourism that favoured places associated with classical memories. As well as providing views of Cape Miseno and Posillipo, these tours took travellers, mainly French, English and German, to Ischia and Capri.

The management was unsuccessful, or perhaps it was the paying public that was lacking. However, as Dupont did not pay for the ship in full, it was seized and sold at public auction on 15 April 1828. It was bought on 19 June 1828 by a merchant named Gennaro Finizio who resold it for 32,500 ducats to a company formed by the French George Sicard, the Romans Camillo Pizzardi and Domenico Benucci and Augusto and Ilario Degas.⁶³

George Sicard (c. 1790 -1836) was a well-known figure. Consul General of the Netherlands in Naples, married to the Neapolitan Giuseppina Politi,⁶⁴ acquired the concession, which guaranteed exemption from navigation taxes, by setting up the *Giorgio Sicard, Benucci and Pizzardi Company* in 1829, with the advice of his son Leopoldo, a shipbuilding expert. John Davies calls

⁶³ Deed notar Gaetano Scoppa, 1 July 1828.

⁶⁴ The funeral monument of George Sicard, described as “Viennese” by birth, was placed in 1837 in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Naples, opposite the Origlia Chapel. Visitors could see the sculpture made by Gennaro de Crescenzo. The church, in a state of abandonment, has been closed to worship for some time. See Carlo Celano, *Notizie del bello, dell'antico e del curioso della città di Napoli*, vol. III, Stamperia di Agostino de Pascale, Naples 1858, p. 333.

Pizzardi and Benucci “Neapolitan bankers” and this allows us to identify them. The first was Marquis Camillo Pizzardi, born in Bologna and Roman by adoption, and the other Domenico Benucci (who died in 1847 and is buried in Poggioreale).⁶⁵ Participating in the society, with a smaller share, was Teodoro Block (often wrongly spelled Beck), a wealthy German merchant who had been living in Naples for years. The supporters of this society therefore all came from abroad (even the Romans came from what was then the foreign Church State).⁶⁶ We know from various sources that Pizzardi and Benucci worked for the manufacture of tobacco in the state monopoly.

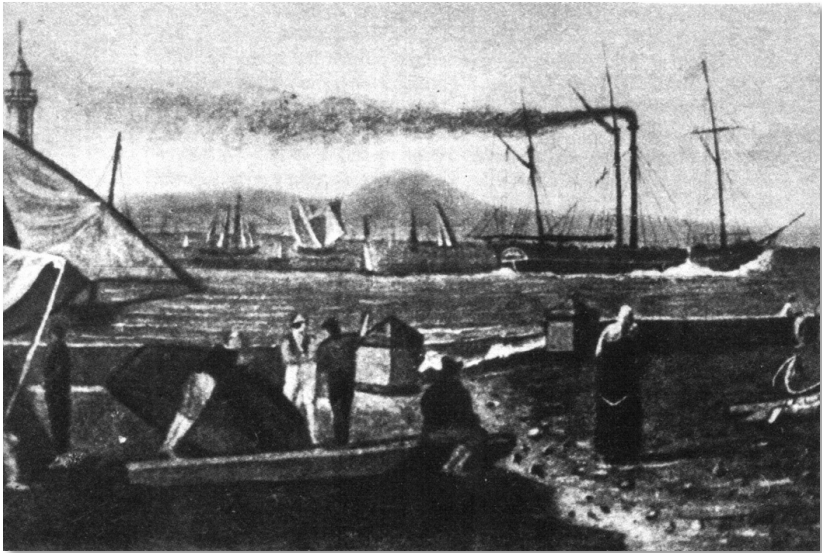
At that time, the Sicard Company only owned *Real Ferdinando*. With the new money brought in by the shareholders, Sicard & C. could think of more ambitious plans. It was soon clear from the results that Sicard management was generating attractive profits and so the share capital was increased from 38,000 ducats to 140,000 in August 1829.⁶⁷ The shareholders of what was officially called *Impresa della privilegiata navigazione a vapore nel Regno delle Due Sicilie* (although in some deeds the later word *Amministrazione* was already used) were Giorgio Wilding, Teodoro Block, Carlo Orlando, Auguste Viollier, Camillo Guerra, the Duke of Ferrandina, Marquis Luigi Gagliardi, Mariano Buonocore, Marino Torlonia, Lorenzo Lezzani of Rome, Giulio de Grossi and Claude Clerc of Marseilles. To these were added minority partners, buyers of shares, such as Charles Lefèbvre, who never got out of the deal. These partners with

⁶⁵ Camillo Napoleone Sasso, *Storia de' Monumenti di Napoli*, Federico Vitale, Naples 1858, p. 184.

⁶⁶ John Davies, *Società e imprenditori nel Regno borbonico (1815-1860)*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1979, p. 114.

⁶⁷ *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, 28 August 1829.

symbolic share packages in the intermediate phase, from 1829 to 1839, temporarily decreased their commitment.



The *Ferdinando I* or *Royal Ferdinando* leaving the port. The anonymous oil painting is intended to demonstrate his unprecedented speed.

Sicard also obtained the privilege of carrying mail abroad with the benefit of half the ordinary postage. The *Royal Ferdinand* continued its journeys to Palermo and Marseilles (with the usual stops at Civitavecchia, Livorno, Genoa) and to make one-day and two- or three-day cruises in the Gulf of Naples to Stromboli, Taormina and Malta.



The *Real Ferdinando* when he was called *Superb* in a painting by William A. Knell in the Norfolk waters (Naval Museum, London).

In August 1829, the company announced the purchase of a second steamer, initially called *Bella Partenope* and then *Francesco I*.⁶⁸ Aside from this specific case, the policy of “privatisations” and their impact on the economy, in this case, of steam navigation, was a fundamental impulse to an entrepreneurial sector that had been very successful for decades, in Naples and in the Kingdom. Privatisations made it possible to establish and then revitalise a sector for which the Bourbon Kingdom, with its 3,000 kilometres of coastline, was suited. In addition to privatisation, other forms of incentive such as discounts on navigation rights were at other times an important

⁶⁸ *Giornale del Regno delle due Sicilie*, 28 August 1829.

driving force favoured by the king and his ministers, especially Luigi de' Medici.

Most of these ships were, however, English-built: while English shipyards had a technology equal to that of Italy in the construction of sailing ships, they were much more advanced in the design and construction of steam ships, where engineers were needed who knew how to deal with quite different problems, such as the presence of a boiler. The *Superb*, which became the *Real Ferdinando I*, was for the time a large ship that could carry up to 200 passengers on pleasure voyages, real cruises. The three-masted vessel was entrusted to the command of Captain Andrea de Martino, a former pilot of the *Ferdinando I*.



The new vessel inaugurated the route between Naples and Palermo on 20 June 1824, while Minister De' Medici granted special privileges to the *Impresa della privilegiata navigazione a vapore nel Regno delle Due Sicilie* for the state postal service, the

first in Italy.⁶⁹ As can be seen, apart from a few minor contributions, the “capitalists” and entrepreneurs who dedicated themselves to this type of new enterprise were all foreigners.

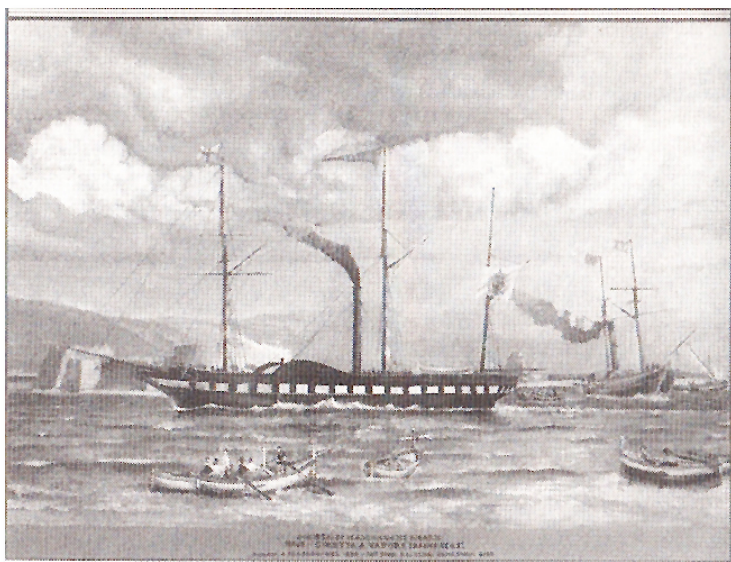
George’s son, Leopold Sicard, signed a contract in Glasgow to build the engines for the boat *Francesco I*, intended for foreign voyages. The hull was instead built in the Castellammare di Stabia shipyards during 1831 and sent to Scotland for completion. It appears that the steamer had exceptional speed compared to ships of the time thanks to its 120 horsepower engines, and was able to cover the distance between Naples and Palermo in a time very similar to that of today’s ships. It weighed 309 tonnes, had three masts armed with schooners (useful in case of damage), the hull was made of wood, beautifully built and shaped, and lined with copper; the bow had a bowsprit. The steam was carried by the motive power of two low-pressure machines, less dangerous than the previous ones, with a balance of 160 horsepower. Her length was 45 metres, her breadth 8. She left Glasgow on 12 September 1830 and remained in Liverpool for a few weeks before leaving for Marseilles on 9 November, where she stayed for some time due to a cholera epidemic. He left again on 28 November and arrived in Naples on 5 December with 62 passengers. Three days later King Francis I died and was succeeded by Ferdinand II.

Meanwhile, *the Real Ferdinando* continued to ply the route between Naples and Palermo and offered cheap Sunday trips to the Gulf of Naples. It was commanded by Luigi Consiglio. When the machines had to undergo drastic repairs, from January 1831, Sicard entered into an agreement to charter the Parma boat *Maria*

⁶⁹ *Storia della marina da guerra dei Borbone*, cit., p. 707. The first to tell the story of Neapolitan society was Luigi de Matteo, “*Noi della meridionale Italia*”. *Imprese e imprenditori del Mezzogiorno nella crisi dell’unificazione*, ESI, Naples 2002 in chapter 43 of his work.

Luigia (until 31 October 1831), while keeping the *Francesco I* in service for foreign voyages. This began its journeys on 15 December under the command of Andrea de Martino with 41 passengers.⁷⁰

In the same 1830s, competition from the Kingdom of Sardinia began, with the *Carlo Felice* and *Carlo Alberto* vessels travelling the same routes, touching Naples and Palermo. This amounted to a violation of the privilege granted to Sicard, but the king could do little against a foreign state and, in order not to incur diplomatic incidents, was forced to let it go. Others tried to obtain Sicard's patent when it expired, among them again Maurizio Dupont and a certain Gennaro Gioia, but they did not obtain it.



The *Francesco I*. The Mediterranean's first cruise ship. More properly: the first cruising ship in History 11 years before the P&O one.

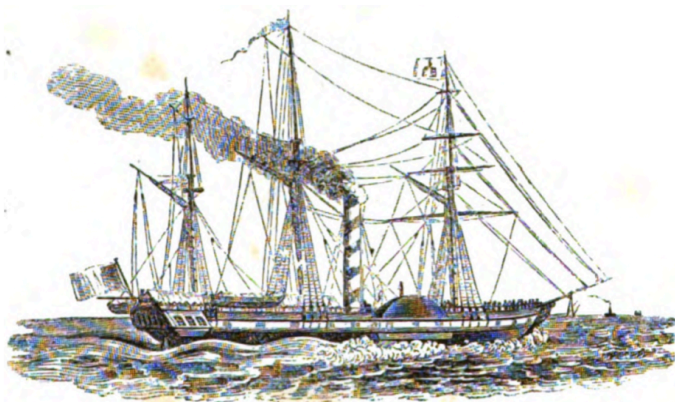
⁷⁰ *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, 7 December 1830.

Meanwhile, the *Société Bazin* was founded in Marseilles, which set up a service to Naples with the boats *Enrico IV* and *Sully*. Despite various difficulties, the *Sicard & C.* company continued to prosper. In order to make its activities and the safety of its ships better known, in 1832 it announced the organisation of the world's first cruise, which was to touch the entire eastern Mediterranean in the summer of 1833, between May and August. The cruise, which took place on the *Francesco I*, was attended by many illustrious personalities. Among them was George Sicard, who touched the ports of Messina, Catania, Malta, those of the Ionian Islands, Patras, Nafplio, Athens, Smyrna, Constantinople and the Bosphorus, the coasts of Asia Minor, Zakynthos, returning to Malta, Palermo, Messina and Naples, according to the account of one of the 60 wealthy cruise passengers, Marchebeus (a pseudonym), who made a *report* on this first “tourist” voyage, the *Voyage de Paris a Constantinoples par un Bateau a Vapeur* (1839).

When it entered the port of Constantinople (it is said that the sultan followed it from his palace with binoculars), the motor ship aroused admiration and amazement. Its arrival had been preceded by a veritable publicity campaign. During the voyage, balls, concerts and elegant parties were organised on board. The cruise lasted almost three months in all and with the intermediate stops, especially on the way back, it allowed visits to various cities, inaugurating the style of cruises as they were to become popular around 1880-1890. The *Francesco I*, with its passengers aware that they had been part of a historic event, the invention of leisure travel, returned to Naples at noon on 9 August 1833. A testimony reads:

The *Francesco I* is the largest and most beautiful of all the steamships seen so far in the Mediterranean, the others are inferior, the French

Enrico IV and *Sully* have engines with a strength of 80 horsepower (while the engine of the *Francesco I* is 120) ... the two Genoese packages are of little value, the *Maria Luisa* (of the Kingdom of Sardinia) is small, its engine does not exceed the strength of 25 horsepower, and although it was once seen in Mediterranean ports, it is now destined only for navigation on the Po.⁷¹



The *Francesco I* designed by Marchebeus, 1839.

Following this first cruise and the opening of the excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum to the public, real tourist agencies were opened in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. After all, the major cities with the greatest number of tourists at that time were Naples and Paris. In Naples, in 1838, the first-class hotels had 8500 visitors. The influx was continuous, especially in winter.

⁷¹ Michele Vocino, *Primati del Regno di Napoli. Attività meridionali prima dell'Unità di Napoli*, Mele Editore, Naples 1950, p. 33.

In 1834, Sicard's "privilege" was expiring and the sovereign did not renew it. Sicard requested the possibility of forming a joint stock company even without the privilege, he had found shareholders including several of those who had participated in the very first company with Andriel, such as Charles Lefèvre, but he was not granted it.⁷² That same year his son Leopold went to Glasgow to buy a third steamer, the *Maria Cristina*, which was launched the following year (28 April 1835), purchased thanks to an increase in share capital to 110,000 ducats. She had a tonnage of 293 tons, was 42.60 metres long and 8.50 metres wide with elegant interior furnishings in maple and mahogany. The two wheels were powered by a 130-horsepower engine. She entered service on 30 November 1835 under the command of Raffaele Cafiero.

In 1836, the king established the commercial company called *Real Compagnia de' Battelli a Vapore* by decree on 17 May 1836. The public company operated four steamers: the *Ferdinando II*, the *Nettuno*, the *Veloce* and the *Santa Wenefrede*. But that service was not profitable and the liabilities accumulated in a very short time caused the king to withdraw from the project just as quickly. Competition from fierce French, Austrian, English and even Royal companies convinced the king to liberalise cabotage traffic in the Royal Dominions by decree on 15 May 1839, finally abolishing the Royal Delegation's postal service.⁷³

Sicard was momentarily in crisis due to the loss of its patent, increased foreign competition and the exorbitant fees charged in the port of Marseille, which had organised the first steamship companies at that time.

⁷² Sovereign Rescript 10 July 1834.

⁷³ Alessandro Arseni, *Storia della Navigazione a Vapore*, vol. I, The Postal Gazette, p. 58.



Nothing venture nothing have.

AMMINISTRAZIONE
DELLA
Navigazione a Vapore
NEL REGNO DELLE DUE SICILIE.

George Sicard attempted to transform the company from a partnership into a joint-stock company, with the privilege of using sailors from the royal fleet, to be kept at his own expense with the obligation to instruct them in the new type of steam navigation and to keep them at the disposal of the government should they be required. The project did not succeed: George Sicard died in August 1835 and the *Sicard, Benucci & Pizzardi* company was dissolved on 31 December 1835. The intention, however, was to open a new one immediately afterwards, with a larger number of shareholders, again asking the king for permission to transform the limited partnership into a joint-stock company, a type of company structure that was still very rare, if not entirely unheard of in that form in the Kingdom.

Initially an intermediate form was chosen: at the beginning of 1836 the company was reconstituted as a limited partnership

under the company name of Leopold Sicard and partners, owning the steamers *Real Ferdinando I* (which was in the meantime disarmed in 1838), the *Maria Cristina* and the small cabotage vessel *Furia*. The general partnership was changed to a limited partnership with a duration of 8 years from 1 January 1836.⁷⁴ It had a capital of 250,000 ducats in the first subscription of 500 shares of 500 each. The subscribers were Leopold Sicard, Giuseppe de' Medici (son of Luigi), Luigi Caracciolo, Emmanuele de la Tour, and Pietro Alvarez di Toledo. Subscribers from the first company, such as Charles Lefèbvre, also came to the fore.

Four years later, in 1839, an unspecified illness struck and 28-year-old Leopold Sicard, who had been running the company brilliantly for about three years, died after a year of deterioration.⁷⁵ At that point, the Sicard family exited the Neapolitan business under its own name. Only another of George's daughters, Joséphine Sicard (1819-1851?), married to the French engineer Enrico Falcon (1810-1868), continued entrepreneurial activities by renovating an old villa in Sorrento and turning it into a luxury hotel.⁷⁶

In the same year, in May 1839, the Kingdom's Navy granted a premium of grana 2 (a fraction of a ducat) per tonne for all goods transported from port to port in the Kingdom. The incentive was granted to all ships purchased or operated by royalty. In the

⁷⁴ Public Deed, notary Bonucci, 31 December 1835.

⁷⁵ An obituary outlining the life of the young Leopold Sicard can be found in the periodical *Poliorama Pittresco*, 28 September 1839, pp. 53-54.

⁷⁶ The history of the Falcon family, another French family that had important activities in Naples from the Napoleonic era onwards, is recounted in a manuscript published by Maria Ercolano, *Le memorie di Ernesto Falcon. Una famiglia dalla Francia a Napoli e Sorrento nel lungo Ottocento*, Franco Angeli, Milan 2019.

meantime, there had been heated discussions on the granting of steam privatisation, which the government considered a valid economic incentive as long as it did not become a monopoly. Therefore the sovereign, in response to the request to allow development of the new navigation system, in 1839 granted a premium for those who built steamships in the kingdom and granted freedom of cabotage to every steamship. This was the decree:

Naples 8 June, Ferdinand II by the Grace of God, King of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies [...]. Having regard to our Royal Decrees of 2 December 1823 and 17 May 1836 directed to the subsequent increase of steam navigation: wishing now to favour it even more; on the disposition of our Minister Secretary of Internal Affairs; having heard our Ordinary Council of State; have resolved to decree and we decree the following Art. 12 to counting from the publication of our Royal Decree, it shall be granted to our subjects and to foreigners established in our Royal Dominions to transport by sea goods or passengers from place to place by means of steamers belonging to them, whether built in the shipyards of the Kingdom or in those of foreign countries, provided that they have been provided with a corresponding act of nationality and recognition in accordance with the laws in force, and therefore covered by Our Royal Flag.

Art. 2 In order to further promote this branch of trade, we grant to any of our subjects or foreigners established in the Kingdom from the publication of this Royal Decree, for the whole of May 1841, who will build a steamer in the shipyards of the Kingdom, where they will introduce a foreign steamer for use in the terms of the previous Article, and with the formalities ordered by the same to the merchant navy of our Royal Dominions, a reduction of two grains per tonne on the tonnage fee, and this for voyages from port to port in the Kingdom.

Art. 3 All provisions contrary to the contents of the previous decree shall be revoked. [...]. Naples 15 May 1839.⁷⁷

In fact, apart from liberalisation, the main purpose of this act was to encourage the importation of technology from abroad also by foreigners who had settled in the Kingdom, lived there and transferred their business there, as had been the case for the Sicards, the Meuricoffres, the Lefèbvres, the Violliers and others, the dynamic French-speaking community of French and Swiss origin who constituted the cutting edge of Neapolitan entrepreneurship and its drive for innovation at that time. It must also be said that these families also received fundamental help at that time from conspicuous Neapolitan families.

Joint Stock Company

After Leopold Sicard's death, the company was transformed into a joint-stock company undergoing a further transformation, which, however, showed substantial continuity: the group of people interested in the business were still the same. The subscription was launched on 28 September 1840, at the office of the notary Giovan Battista Bonucci, and the company was officially born with this name: *Amministrazione della navigazione a Vapore nel Regno delle Due Sicilie*.⁷⁸ This made it

⁷⁷ *Decreto Reale (Royal Decree)*, 15 May 1839.

⁷⁸ Luigi de Matteo, "Noi della Meridionale Italia", cit., p. 163 ss. Giuseppe Galasso, *Storia del Regno di Napoli*, V, *Il Mezzogiorno borbonico e risorgimentale (1815-1860)*, UTET, Turin 2007, pp. 492-493; Carlo Perfetto, *Vicende della Marina Mercantile a vapore nel Reame delle Sicilie dal 1818 al 1860*, Stabilimento tipografico G. Barca, Naples 1923, p. 48.

possible to broaden the audience of subscribers. Négociants, merchants, financiers and notables of the Kingdom were invited, increasing the share capital by another 200,000 ducats. The total capital of 450,000 ducats was divided into 900 shares of 500 ducats each and offered on the market in Naples.

This new company had a duration of 15 years and is considered by historians to be the first steamship company in the Mediterranean. The proceeds from the shares sold were used to strengthen the company's ship fleet, which at that time only included the *Francesco I* and the *Maria Cristina*.⁷⁹ Another small ship, the *Veloce*, was sold in the meantime and replaced by the *Furia*, which was only used for transport within the Gulf of Naples. But this small boat did not do honour to its name, and so it was sold in 1841 because it was considered too slow.⁸⁰ Stendhal, a traveller and diplomat, expressed his admiration for the state of steam navigation in the Bourbon kingdom at that time. He used the steamers of the *André & Abeille* company of Marseilles (the *Maria Antonietta* and the *Leopoldo II*) but was also familiar with the Amministrazione's steamers, on which he travelled happily, the *Francesco I* and the *Maria Christina*, journeys of which he left traces in his extensive correspondence.⁸¹

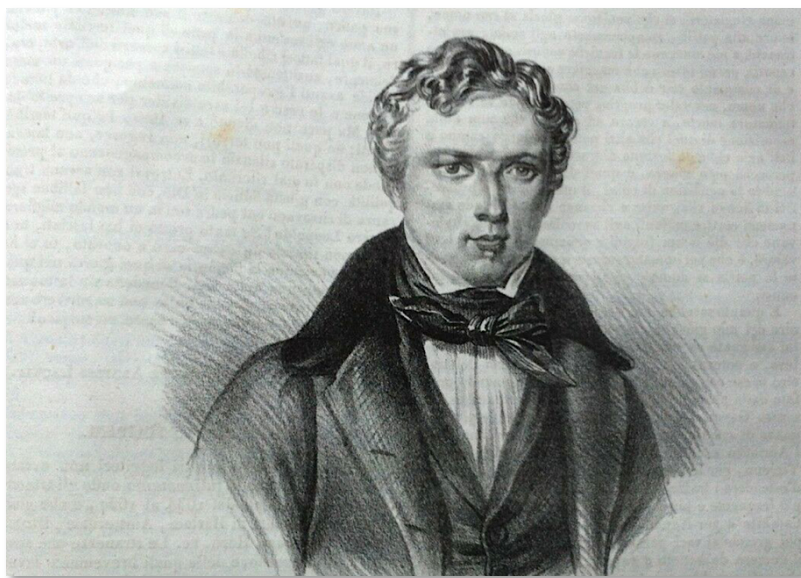
The well-informed French traveller wrote that the Amministrazione's boats guaranteed a very good annual return which, when the combined net revenue of the two was calculated, gave 18% in those years, even though *Francesco I* was out of action for a few months for repairs.⁸²

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Lamberto Radogna, *Storia della Marina Mercantile delle Due Sicilie (1734-1860)*, Mursia, Milan 1982, p. 66.

⁸¹ Stendhal, *Correspondances*, ed. H. Martinau, III, Gallimard, Paris 1968. In particular pp. 441-444 (2 February 1840 - 25 May 1841).

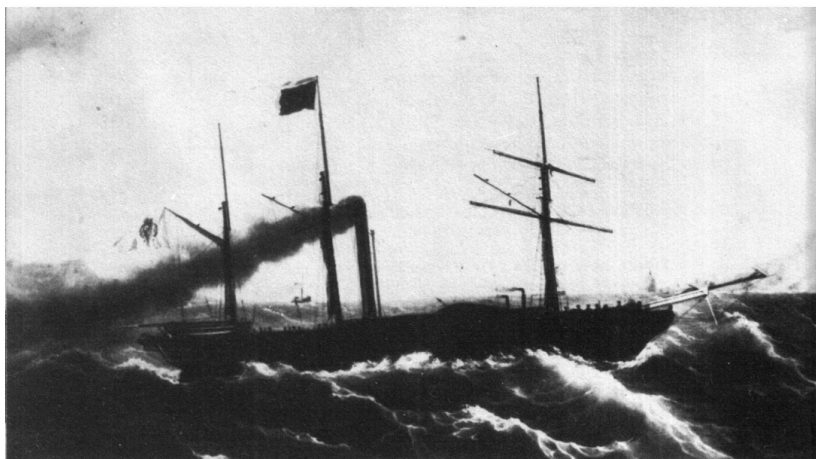
⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 443, 25 May 1841.



Leopold Sicard (1811-1839) portrayed on the occasion of his obituary in the 1839 *Poliorama Pittresco*.

Among those who subscribed substantial sums were various members of the Pignatelli Ruffo family and Francesco Pignatelli Strongoli (1774-1853, nephew of the Loyalist general Francesco Strongoli Prince of Laino,) the Lefèbvres, the Rothschilds, the Degas, Filangieri, De' Medici and Laviano. This included some partners from the very first company, Andriel's, and new subjects, such as Pignatelli Ruffo. It is more or less the same group of wealthy individuals that we find in two other important companies of the period, the *Società Lionese per l'illuminazione pubblica a gas di Napoli*, and the *Società Industriale Partenopea*, the first holding company in southern Italy, which came into being in the same years. The latter was promoted by Domenico

Laviano, a high-ranking member of the financial bureaucracy, Auditor General of the State and later Auditor General of the Post Office.⁸³



Another image of *Francesco I* going against the wind on a windy day. (San Martino Museum in Naples, painting by an anonymous artist).

From the very first meetings, as we shall see, there were, in addition to the French, Germans and a few English and Russians. But the British were mainly present as technicians as the steamers were mostly British-built.

The company gave itself a solid organisation with a director endowed with broad powers, paid with 10% of the profits at the end of the year and therefore strongly incentivised to run the company well. It was governed in a modern manner by a board of directors consisting of 5 ordinary directors and 2 alternates in office for 5 months who had to meet every Friday. A mandatory rotation of 2 members per year was also established.

⁸³ *Almanacco del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, Naples 1840, p. 331.

From the very beginning, a rather extensive calendar of general meetings and gatherings was established. The headquarters of the society was at Vico (street) Piliero No. 1, in the harbour area, where a workshop for ship repairs was also set up. Later, the area was changed by a cove that widened the width of the street, distorting the urban form, and the street was then called Calata Piliero. However, the numbering corresponds by comparing different maps and pictures, and thus one can identify the building where the company had its headquarters: it was the first on the street, coming from the south. Today it has been demolished.

It was a large venue. We can understand this from the meetings that were held there gathering as many as 50, 60 or 70 people. The company had its own dock, offices, repair workshops for sails, wooden parts and even boilers.

Thanks to recent state subsidies, it was decided to purchase three new steamers between 1839 and 1842. The first were the *Ercolano* (342 tonnes, wheeled, with a 220 horsepower double-cylinder engine) and the *Mongibello*, a more modern design, wooden, 290-tonne, wheeled, although relatively small (47.70 metres x 8.03). At the time, it boasted a capital of 250,000 ducats and was described as “florid”.⁸⁴ It also operated the small *Furia*, as well as the *Mongibello* and the *Ercolano* (later sunk in a collision with the *Salvatore de Pace*). They were all English-built steamers, with *Maudslay & Company* engines and hulls built by the *William Pitcher Company* of London.

The company adopted a logo featuring a steamship and the English words *Nothing venture, nothing have* which, loosely, can be translated: *if you don't risk, you don't get*.

⁸⁴ *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore del Regno delle Due Sicilie*. Sovereignly established joint-stock company. Capitulations, p. 3.



An image of Via Piliero taken from the castle. It was on the sea front. In the first building on the corner, immediately after the church was the seat of the Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore.

The next picture shows another photograph, taken in front of the *Amministrazione* building, near the port authority's control cage, showing the street in front of the building. It was, as can be seen, a very busy street, full of shops and shops, where many companies with activities related to the sea were based.



The long quay on the right lined fishing boats and, further to the rear, small and medium-sized sailing ships. Steamships were included in the dock in the outer area, not visible in these photographs dating from around 1870-1880.

Chapter 7

Two testimonies: 1833 and 1841

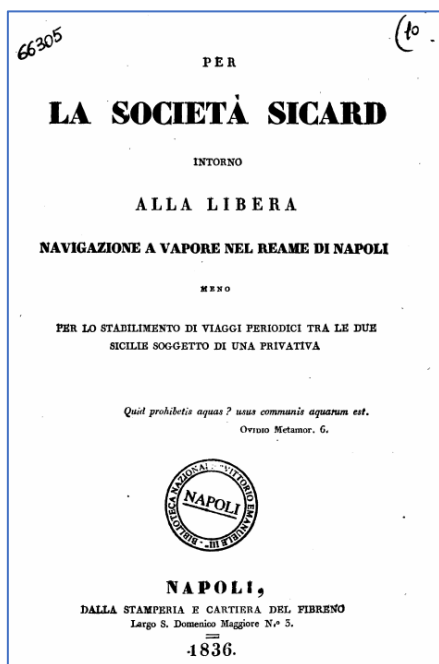
Promotional Cruises

Interesting with regard to strategies to publicise the advantages of steam navigation are two written testimonies that give us information on the life of the *Amministrazione*'s ships. One is the above-mentioned testimony of the architect Marchebeus, guest on the first cruise of the *Francesco I*, and the other is an article in the *Giornale delle Due Sicilie* (21 June 1841) by Luigi Scovazzo. Both ships, flagships evidently in their respective decades of the small Neapolitan merchant fleet, were steered by Commander Cafiero.

The 1833 cruise

The book *Voyage de Paris a Constantinople*, written by a French architect who signed himself Marchebeus, has already been mentioned in part. He described himself as a curious *artiste, ancien militaire et voyageur* who had found himself, in the course of his Italian tour, able to board a boat on a cruise in 1833. The first one of all times registered in History before the P&O one considered the first cruising ship by historian like Vincenzo Zaccagnino in *Storia delle Crociere* (Mursia, Milan 2014). The story begins with the author's departure from Paris and includes Genoa, Livorno and Civitavecchia among its stops on the way.

The book, with 11 illustrations, is conceived as a travel report with curiosities and information on local customs, coins and units of measurement.



The text defending the institution of steam privatisation, in this case, of the Sicard Company.

The voyage of the *paquebot* (packet, in Italian) *Francesco I* had long been announced in the newspapers, writes the author, and had also aroused keen interest in France. It was the first time, he writes, «that a steamboat travelled the Mediterranean, to explore it, combining both pleasure and education». The programme announced that it would touch Sicily, Malta, the Aeolian Islands,

Greece, Turkey and Asia Minor. Not only that, it was the first time that such an undertaking had been organised by uniting “such a select company of people who were gathered together for a journey of this nature. Ladies of merit, artists and sages had vied to board the *Francesco I*, and that contest of distinguished personages contributed no little to the charm of our interesting voyage”.⁸⁵ The blue-blooded guests included, among other nobles, the Crown Prince of Bavaria, who visited his brother, the King of Greece, on that journey; the King of the Two Sicilies, who went to meet the Sultan and then the Duchess of Berry, on the return journey from Palermo. At the main stops, guests would disembark and take part in banquets and dancing parties. Of his book he said:

This report is nothing more [...] than a summary of the observations of 60 travellers assembled on the *Francesco I*: it is a kind of logbook whose notes were collected day by day, where each person wrote or dictated his own page.

The logbook conveyed a lot of curiosity about the cities visited, their history and landscapes, but not about the ship itself, despite its novelty: it was a steamship. But the architect seemed little interested in technical advances. The guests were almost all French, apart from a few Tuscan nobles, Count Strozzi of Florence, Count Bandini of Siena, a certain Martaselli in charge of the Kingdom’s affairs in Turkey.

When he embarks on the *Francesco I* in Naples on 16 April, there is a huge crowd on the quay, the sea is rough but not rough enough not to leave and when the ship pulls away, cannon shells are fired.⁸⁶ We realise that the ship is a prodigy for the time and

⁸⁵ Marchebeus, *Voyage*, cit., p. XI-XII.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 14.

that there are some new phenomena, such as flames coming out of the boilers

Our boat raises long tongues of flame called phosphoric flames on its way, but few of the passengers manage to take any interest in this phenomenon; soon all are gripped by the annoying seasickness.

In addition to Constantinople, the cruise also visits Messina, Syracuse, Malta, Patras, Delphi, Morea, Nauplia and other places. Each time the ship casts anchor for a few days, the passengers - if they wish - can disembark and visit the port and the city, according to a time schedule that is already that of the cruises of a century later. As already mentioned, the book is more interested in the cruise, the people and the erudite digressions, and not once in the 350 pages of the text does the author focus on the ship, its machinery, its spaces; this is however repeatedly defined, generically, as comfortable, elegant and fast.

Uninteresting for the history of navigation per se, due to the poverty of technical descriptions of the ship, the French architect's elegant book is a *divertissement in the* form of a minimalist tourist guide. It is, however, an important document when one considers that it bears witness to perhaps the first cruise, and a luxury cruise at that, in the history of seafaring, and not just that of the Mediterranean. It was a pleasure trip that combined information, knowledge of exotic and picturesque places with the pleasure of conversation, banquets, and strolls in cities bathed in Mediterranean sunshine.



The mini-cruise of 1841

A second demonstration cruise, much shorter and more modest than the first, a one-day boat trip to Capri, Sorrento, Castellammare, was organised by the dall' *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore* in 1841 to show the public a technically advanced ship. This time, on board was a journalist and poet, Luigi Scovazzo, who was given the task of describing the ship, the sensations, the technical marvels, the comforts. In fact,

Scovazzo gives us copious details about the ship's conformation and organisation, more so than the French architect who was much more interested in places, history and the picturesque than in the voyage itself.

First of all, the writer is amazed at the speed. The ship took passengers from Naples to Capri in an hour and a half covering 18 miles. Thirty years after the first steamship model and after more than twenty had been seen in Naples, many people still wondered whether it was a safe journey and whether it was, in short, a comfortable transport. Scovazzo responded to these words with conviction: "It seems that the *Mongibello* combines all the qualities that are necessary for the course, safety, motion, comfort, pleasure, and without any of these advantages detracting from the achievement of the others. - The *Mongibello* is a reasoned work, it is a work truly worthy of the times".⁸⁷

He then provides some interesting details on the driving machines and their appearance:

The machines were built by the famous London mechanics *Maudslay Sons and Field*, who were confident of a principle that was licensed and applied for transatlantic navigation. The two *low-pressure* machines are of the strength of 240 *horsepower*. He built the vessel *W. Pitcher*. To avoid the distraction of heat, the boilers are lined with an incombustible felt - the cylinders are wrapped in mahogany wood, which remains unscathed by virtue of the felt. - The boilers are tall and narrow and can turn around, so that the weight rests on the centre and the boat goes faster and freer. - The pulsations of the cylinders and the revolutions of the rotors alert us to the swiftness with which we go.

The *Mongibello* was perhaps not the fastest of steamers - it was very wide, not very slender in relation to its length - but precisely

⁸⁷ Luigi Scovazzo, *Una corsa sul Mongibello*, 2 June 1842.

because of this it was very safe, stable in swinging along its longitudinal axis (stable, therefore, in rolling). «The driving part was fixed to the hull by a very strong lintel of cast iron, and the lintel rested on twelve iron columns and leaned against two massive mahogany beams stretching the full width of the vessel». The boilers are also protected to such an extent as to make the many fire accidents that had often ruined or bedevilled those ships unlikely: «How many disasters have so far occurred to vessels, in which under the lash of gales a portion of the boilers was left exposed to the action of fire or a portion of the boilers?».

The *Mongibello*'s boilers were protected by a newly invented apparatus that was able to precipitate and concentrate all the salt at a specific point and from there blow it out. This was because it was found that the salt in the seawater used for cooling encrusted the different iron layers of the boilers, quickly corroding them and causing them to burst. The *Mongibello* also had a design that made it suitable for storms. In fact, 23 May was a very windy and almost stormy day and yet, the journalist testifies, «no tremors were felt». Above all, the *Mongibello*, compared to all previous steamships, was more comfortable and spacious. The ship contained 140 beds and 14 carriages could be accommodated on deck. Below deck there was a gallery where tables could be arranged to feed up to 80 people at once.

Below it were the cabins and two sleeping rooms. As for the gallery, it has wealth and luxury, it is well conceived; isolated as it is, it leaves on its wings two corridors for people to pass at their own pace; - the seats and the second-class hall present wealth and nobility; - most of the beds are in the shape of a staircase: so that those in the upper bed do not disturb those in the lower bed; - the beds are not cramped, as is usual, which seem to be for receiving dead patients, but are for receiving restless living travellers, and are, as best they can be, adorned;

- the interior rooms are well ventilated, and the windows are lined and protected with glass and shutters; - the roof of the gallery is a robustly made loggia that invites you to stroll in pleasant conversation with distinguished travellers, to enjoy the summit of the sky, the face of the sea, the consortium of man who knows how to create such stupendous works.

All the spaces of the *Mongibello* appeared elegant and worthy of an era of progress and growing prosperity: the engine room had an ornate floor, the linens, towels, silverware, plates and crockery of the ship were «worthy of those who know how to marry taste to wealth and carry the coat of arms of the Two Sicilies». The tables in the dining room were made of mahogany, the chairs were in various styles and there were also marbles, bronzes, mirrors, gilded frames, and «a harmony between English solidity and Italian taste». Beauty and utility combined, therefore, for the journalist. The cabins looked outwards through clear crystals.

For the journalist who had travelled, enthusiastically, on the *Mongibello*, steam became the ethereal stuff of that mercurial century of progress in which travel was becoming extremely fast. Even if certain remarks today may make one smile, but only if they are not put into context, we know that travellers of the time declared themselves literally impressed by those few extra knots of speed that gained a day, even two in particularly favourable cases.

Steamships, long opposed to sailing ships, were increasing in that decade. The Royal Duosicilian Navy already owned the *Ferdinando II*, the *Nettuno*, the *St. Wenefrede* and others were being planned, also for the navy of war. In Sicily, new shipping companies announced the *Palermo* and the *Messina*. The *Amministrazione* counted the *Francesco I*, the *Maria Cristina* and the *Ercolano* (which would be delivered shortly afterwards), the

Mongibello and the little *Furia*. These ships, of different tonnage, different even in the offer of tickets and services, were able to cover many groups of users: wealthy travellers, nobles and diplomats, but also merchants and even humble travellers who could spend little money to reach Marseilles or Civitavecchia. Of course, the lower cost entailed considerable inconvenience: one even had to adapt to sleeping on a blanket, under the stars or perhaps, for a small extra charge, under a waxed tent. There was no shortage of travellers, however, and the launching of the ships *Vesuvio* and *Veloce* by other ship-owners was already being announced. On its way back to its harbour, the *Mongibello* crossed paths with the French *Charlemagne*, also considered a technological marvel of the time as it covered the Naples-Marseilles route in five days, saving 24 hours compared to sailing ships.



Picture of the 1842 *Poliorama Pittoresco*, an elegant review published in Naples, looking at Piliero Street from the south. The *Amministrazione* building and workshops were located in the block of buildings after the railing, on the right, probably in the last building in the row.

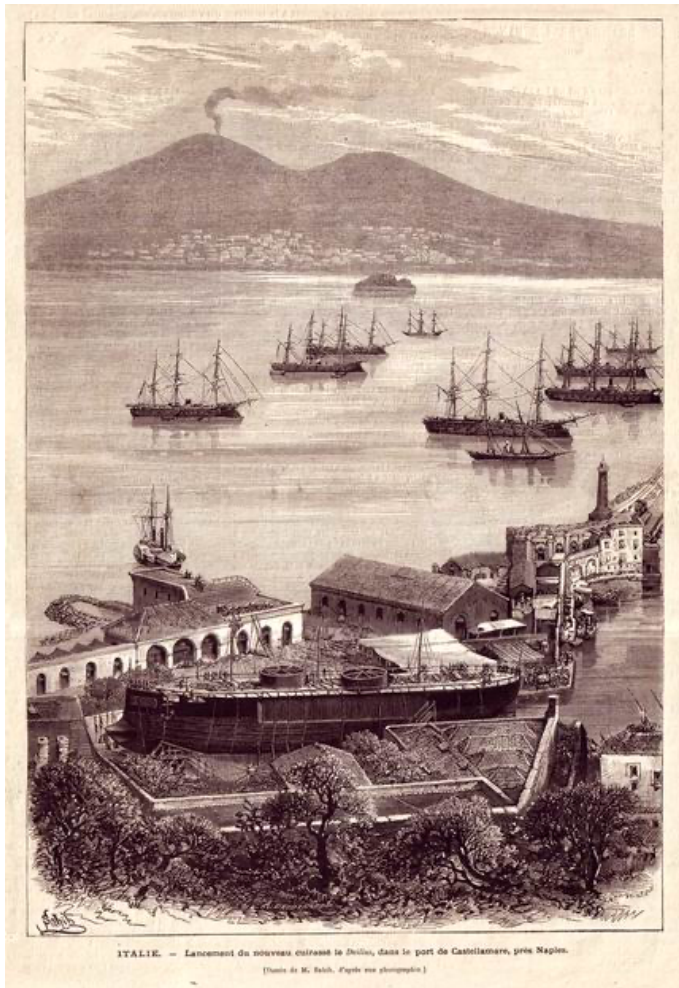
A brief anticipation at this point may be useful. As can be seen from the history of the construction of the *Francesco I*, built in 1831 between Castellammare and Glasgow (and part of the interiors at Vigliena in another, smaller shipyard) - the first of a long series - the *Reali Cantieri* of Castellammare di Stabia had acquired the skills to build steam boats that were able to withstand the stresses of engines powered by large boilers, engines that often caused dangerous oscillations and in any case put a strain on the structure of the ships. Over the course of a few years, his engineers acquired the ability to build steamships entirely, first in wood reinforced with copper, then in iron, thus switching from ships with wheel propulsion to those with propeller propulsion. The main, though not exclusive, clientele, looking at the long list of ships launched, was military. Already in the aftermath of the Unification, the construction of large battleships began, such as the *Duilio* (1876), the gigantic *Italia* (1880) and the pirofrigata *Giuseppe Garibaldi* (initially *Borbona*, 1860).

The long history of the Castellammare *shipyards*, barely mentioned here but deserving of a separate in-depth study, was to merge with that of other shipyards in the Gulf of Naples, especially when, in 1939, the *Navalmeccanica* company was founded, incorporating the main shipyards in the area: the Castellammare di Stabia *Shipyards, Officine & Cantieri Partenopei*, the *Vigliena Shipyard* in San Giovanni a Teduccio - which had a tradition of particularly skilful master builders - and *Officine Meccaniche e Fonderie*, which took up the legacy of *Hawthorn & Guppy*, great English builders of hulls and engines, who settled in Naples following the decision of Thomas Guppy

(1797-1882), an eclectic and ingenious engineer, of whom we shall speak further on.⁸⁸

Left out of the big game were the Cantieri di Procida, smaller, ancient and for centuries renowned builders of sailing ships and fishing boats of various sizes, which were unable to renew their great and ancient tradition in the new shipbuilding industry, partly for logistical and geographical reasons. In 1984, the large complex that had been formed with Navalmeccanica merged into the Fincantieri group, one of the most prestigious shipbuilding companies in the world.

⁸⁸ All these shipyards and companies have a complex and important history. In particular, for the history of the Castellammare shipyards in the Bourbon period, see Antonio Formicola - Claudio Romano, *Storia della Marina da guerra dei Borbone di Napoli, Storia della marina da guerra dei Borbone di Napoli*, II vol., 1815-1830, Ufficio Storico della Marina Militare, Rome 2010; for a general and concise history of Finmeccanica, also useful is Vera Zamagni, *Finmeccanica. Competenze che vengono da lontano*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2009.



The Parisian *Le monde illustré* (no. 100, 10 June 1876) wrote: “On 8 May [Italy] launched a ship whose size far exceeds anything that has been built by other nations. This true monster of the seas has been named Duilio...”.

Chapter 8

The 1840s

The accounts for the management of the forties, at least until 1848, remained good and the company boasted a sometimes considerable asset, having paid all the expenses and loans taken out for the purchase or modernisation of steamships. The *Amministrazione* also had paid agents abroad who worked in the various ports touched by the ships (there were permanent ones in Marseilles, Genoa, Livorno, Palermo and Malta), work that yielded results, although some complained about the excessive cost of these agents, who probably had representation expenses for actions that were not done. This at least is the suspicion that emerges in the minutes of the meetings.

From the 1840s onwards, new models with iron hulls, which were lighter, and with steam propulsion tending increasingly to replace the paddle wheel with the less bulky and less dangerous propeller, were perfected in England; this made it possible to increase the speed of ships and gave a new impetus to steam navigation. The technical improvements, meanwhile, had made the breakdowns that still plagued steamships in the 1820s and 1830s less frequent, and protected the “fire” parts of the ships. However, still for part of the 1850s, deep-sea voyages, such as the ocean crossings of the Cunard lines, were carried out - as we shall see - with vessels that were very similar to those of the dell’*Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore*.

What appears in the resolutions of the general meeting of 15 March 1841 is very interesting.⁸⁹ In it, there was a transitional management between the limited partnership closed in December 1839 and the new one that had started *de facto* on 29 September 1840. Of the previous one, give and take of 9 months was calculated and of the new one of 5 months.

It was only in 1842 that the fruits of the new management began to be reaped. The Sicard management had decided to modernise the *Francesco I* both in the boilers, which had to be changed after a few years, and in the hull and interior spaces (at a cost of around 20,000 ducats). The ship was laid up from March 1839 to April 1840, because it was sent to Livorno to be restored in its 'interior layout' and then waited in vain for six months for a new boiler from England, which did not arrive. This unforeseen event forced the *Amministrazione* to work with only one steamer, the *Maria Cristina*, at the busiest time.

Under the new management, the steamships had guaranteed good profits: the *Maria Cristina* had made 17 voyages to the Ponente and 11 to Sicily with an income of around 97,000 ducats, judged very good because, after deducting expenses, 42,000 ducats of net profit remained. Before being restored, the *Francesco I* had instead made 20 voyages, guaranteeing a net income of 20,000 ducats. There was also a residual surplus from the Sicard management which, including the shares in the treasury, amounted to 40,000 ducats.

Furthermore, in August 1839, a law was revoked that subjected the steamships of the Neapolitan company to an “extraordinary imposition” of taxes that had further reduced their income. A

⁸⁹ *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore nel Regno delle Due Sicilie. Estratto delle deliberazioni dell'adunanza generale del 15 marzo 1841*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Naples 1841.

request was thus made to get that money back. Meanwhile, two new ships had been purchased, to be added to the *Francesco I* and the *Maria Cristina*: on 15 March 1841, delivery of the *Ercolano*, which was almost finished, was expected. The *Mongibello* was to follow after the summer. The purchase of the steamships had been financed by the sale of shares and using the company's reserve fund. It was also stated that the total sum for the purchase should not exceed 80,000 ducats. If the net profits from new management guaranteed 42,000 ducats for one ship and 20,000 for another, the gains were considerable. A few months later, it was decided to refit the *Maria Cristina* as well. It is not clear whether these modernisations were advised by dangerous situations on the ships or whether, as happened in the case of the *Francesco I*, there was also an attempt to make the ships larger in order to guarantee the transport of a greater number of people, which was always on the increase. Probably both hypotheses: when a ship presented some problem, even a non-critical one, it was given the go-ahead for modernisation. The average lifespan of these ships was, however, rather short. In the meantime, we learnt at the meeting on 15 March that in September 1840, Mr. Meuricoffre, one of the early members, a member of a family of Swiss people who had moved to Naples and who would run important businesses, had died.

As for the arrival of the *Mongibello*, the event was publicised in the newspapers of the time, between the end of 1841 and the beginning of 1842, with advertisements such as this one that appeared in the *Corriere mercantile* of Genoa:

The Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore nel Regno delle due Sicilie. It is reported that the new Neapolitan steamer, the *Mongibello*, built in London, with low-pressure machinery by the celebrated mechanics Messrs. *Maudslay, Sons & Field* of 240 horse-power will enter our harbour for the first time this March; she will be followed by

another steamer, of equal strength, named *Ercolano*. These two grandiose and elegant steamers, together with two others favourably known, the *Maria Cristina* and the *Francesco I*, will make periodic decadal voyages from Naples and Sicily to Marseilles, calling at Genoa, Livorno, Civitavecchia and vice versa.

The Society of Naples, which was the first to introduce steam navigation in the Mediterranean, is honoured that its example has inspired considerable emulation, which cannot fail to be of immense benefit to every branch of traffic and commercial industry from day to day.

If experience has already shown for many years how exacting a service the Neapolitan company has justified the confidence with which it was honoured by Messrs. Shopkeepers and Travellers, now that after a notable increase in capital, ships and spare machinery, it has obtained from the sovereign grace the constitution of a joint-stock company, it nourishes the flattering confidence that, by reason of so much care and sacrifice, it will be reciprocated by public favour and the preference of the applicants, who will obtain all the greatest and possible desirable benefits from a gracious enterprise.⁹⁰

The case of Polluce

The *Polluce* was a new boat from the Sardinian company *De Luchi & Rubattino*. Like her twin, the *Castore*, she had been built in the *Augustin Normand* shipyards in Le Havre, shipyards she had left only three months earlier. She was considered a jewel: about 50 metres long, 160 horsepower engine, 10 knots of speed, shiny black hull, high funnel. It carried passengers in first and second class. It was skippered by 40-year-old Carlo Lazzuolo from Genoa and its engines were steered by Englishman Wilkins who, with his men, toiled in the boiler room. On board, the

⁹⁰ *Corriere Mercantile di Genova*, February 1842.

catering was neat and the elegant porcelain services were taken from the boats of the Naples *Amministrazione*. The wheeled boats of that time, after all, all looked alike.

At half past four on 17 June 1841, it had left Civitavecchia. In addition to the usual cargo of wealthy passengers, rich French, English, Russians and Neapolitans, the *Polluce* was carrying several chests of valuables and gold ingots, a real treasure. Around 11pm it was sailing in sight of the coast of Elba, about five miles offshore. At a certain point, out of the darkness, unnoticed, came, very fast, a steamer that ripped into the side of the *Polluce*. After a few minutes of bewilderment, before the Sardinian-Genovese ship sank, the passengers of the ramming ship, the *Mongibello*, helped the survivors of the *Polluce*. It was initially said that a castaway, believed dead, had managed to reach the shore and save himself, but later the news proved unfounded: one person had indeed died.

The commander of the *Mongibello*, Ferdinando Cafiero, immediately after the collision, turned the ship around to the protests not only of his own passengers but also of the shipwrecked *Polluce*, sailors and passengers, and then turned away. He arrived at the port of Langone and stayed there for a few hours. He then presented himself to the Neapolitan consul and had four witnesses, two of the crew and two passengers, swear to testify against him.

Instead, the commander of the *Polluce* went to the competent court and denounced Cafiero and his men. When he lodged the complaint it was Friday 18th; the next day, Saturday, he deposed many witnesses, 31 in all, including 3 from *Mongibello* and 9 from *Polluce*.

In the following days, the case of *De Luca & Rubattino* against the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore* in the person of the Livorno lawyer Domenico Guerrazzi was heard. The trial,

which began in 1842, had obvious political overtones and lasted about two years. It was a trial involving a wood from the Sardinian kingdom against a wood from the Bourbon kingdom.

Maritime law at the time lacked codes that could help: the operation of steamships had not yet been regulated and this caused some difficulties. Therefore, Rubattino's lawyer pushed for the trial to be done according to common law. Guerrazzi in his indictment went so far as to advance the hypothesis that the Neapolitan *Amministrazione*, inspired by political plots, had ordered the sinking of the *Polluce* because it was jealous of the two boats and determined not to have any rivals. When the accident occurred, the night was clear, with no waves and no wind. How was it that the captain of the *Mongibello* had run into the other ship? How come, as it turned out, many of the crew were below deck? In the course of his arguments, Guerrazzi insinuated that this collision between two ships that had set sail from opposite points and had bumped into each other on a calm night, with no wind, calm seas and excellent visibility, could not have been an accident. If it was an accident, it had to be attributed to inexperience and negligence, but there was more. Perhaps it had been deliberate, that sinking?

Guerrazzi alluded to wilful misconduct, but then said that there was certainly also negligence and cowardice on the part of Cafiero. The Maritime Law Code at the time did not contemplate the wilful or negligent sinking of a steamer on the high seas. The Neapolitans overlooked an important fact that later emerged in the course of the trial: the *Polluce*'s cargo was lost, but it was a precious cargo, indeed a cargo of valuables - gold coins and probably ingots - and a not insignificant part of them were valuables that belonged to the Jewish community of Livorno.


This is why the trial was held in Livorno and not in Naples and Guerrazzi was inflexible about this.⁹¹

The defence of the Neapolitan company was entrusted to Giacinto Galanti, who printed his *Difesa dell'Amministrazione a Vapore nel Regno delle Due Sicilie* in the presses of the Stamperia del Fibreno.⁹² According to historian Lamberto Radogna, the legal dispute ended with the Rubattino's boat being wronged and the shipowner being condemned. However, there is no longer a copy of this sentence, which seems to have been in the National Library in Florence where it was destroyed in 1966. In any case, the authors of the book *L'oro dell'Elba*, attest to its existence and have photographed the frontispiece. Instead, the text cited by Galanti exists (technically an "exception of forfeiture rejected by the Court of Livorno") dated August 1842. As for Rubattino, he always remained convinced that the ramming was malicious. On this there is no certainty, the affair actually remains shrouded in many doubts. The shareholders of the *Amministrazione*, at that time, were all men of the king, and it may be that they organised such a drastic operation to slow down the financing of the Tuscan revolutionaries.

⁹¹ Domenico Guerrazzi, *Replica ai dubbi comunicato dal tribunale di prima istanza di Livorno in causa di abbordaggio tra il Polluce e il Mongibello*, Livorno 1842. There is a series of harangues and cases on the trial that have been printed. In addition to the previous one: *Difesa della amministrazione sarda de Luchi, Rubattino contro l'amministrazione dei piroscafi napoletani nella causa di abbordaggio tra il Polluce e il Mongibello*, Livorno 1842, there is also the deposition of the witnesses: *Consolato relativo al naufragio del battello a vapore Polluce dell'impresa De Luchi, Rubattino e Comp.*, of Genoa.

⁹² Giacinto Galanti, *Difesa dell'Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore nel Regno delle Due Sicilie*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Naples 1842.

AMMINISTRAZIONE
dei Pacchetti a Vapore Napoletani

VESUVIO POMPEI AMALFI		CAPRI MONGIBELLO SORRENTO
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IL CAPRI

Reduce da **Napoli** e **Civitavecchia** giungerà in questo Porto giovedì 21 corrente e partirà lo stesso giorno a ore 4 pomeridiane per **Genova** e **Marsilia**.

IL POMPEI

Reduce da **Marsilia** e **Genova** giungerà in questo Porto Venerdì 22 corrente e partirà lo stesso giorno a ore 4 pomeridiane per **Civitavecchia**, **Napoli** e **Palermo**.

I Raccomandatarj

In FIRENZE, **Santi Borgheri Figlio e C.**
Via dell'Oche N.º 795.

In LIVORNO, **Torrello Borgheri e Nipoti**, Via
del Porticciolo, N. 3 primo piano.

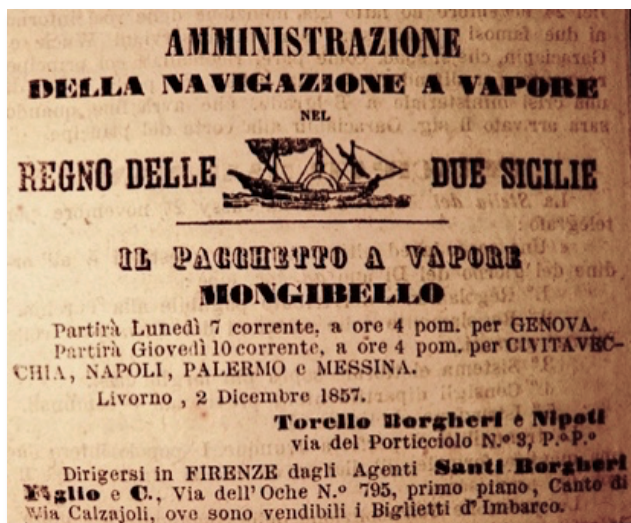
An informative advertisement from the dell'Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore (as can be seen, the ships were also referred to as "packages").

The fact remains that this incident, apart from the conviction, probably weighed fifteen years later when it came to the decision by the Genoese and Piedmontese to award well-paid contracts to companies from the South. Did the precedent of the Polluce make the Florio?

Members of the Amministrazione

As for the history of the groups and individuals who led these enterprises, a few remarks must be made about the families and economic subjects who were first involved in animating the history of steam navigation in Naples. First of all, Auguste Viollier stands out in the management group. The latter was an enterprising Frenchman who had served the subsistence of the Napoleonic and Murattian armies before settling in Naples. He did his first business with fellow countrymen Antonie Beranger, Joseph-Isidore Lefèbvre, Charles Lefèbvre and Emmanuel Appelt. Charles Lefèbvre and Emmanuel Appelt were his companions in the introduction of steam navigation, and a complex story of intertwined business between France and Naples emerges in a pamphlet published undated in Naples, but probably in 1818, by the printer Porcelli. All these men were accustomed to circulating money and networking among themselves to introduce new technologies in particular, while they seemed less interested in traditional trade (in grain, oil or coral).⁹³

⁹³ A great deal of information on the first Viollier and Lefèbvre affair can be found in the pamphlet *Per sig. Ibert contro reclamanti la proprietà degl'effetti da lui sequestrati a danno di C. A. Beranger*, Porcelli s.d., Naples 1818.



Viollier went into business with them in a limited partnership to manage the concession of a printing works with type foundry on the premises of the Carminello at Chiaia, and in a larger concession at Isola di Sora (in the province of Terra di Lavoro), where the great Manifatture del Fibreno would later be established - taken over and expanded by Charles Lefèbvre alone from 1818 onwards. A few years later, Viollier sold his shares to Lefèbvre. Coming out of that deal, in 1822, Viollier was commissioned, along with other printers, to create the dies for printing the bonds of the Sicilian government.⁹⁴

This group of French immigrants represented an extremely dynamic element in the Neapolitan society of the time. Their dynamism can also be seen in the fact that their paths separated and intertwined in different enterprises. After going their separate ways, one in the printing business and the other in papermaking, Charles and Augusto found themselves in the business of the

⁹⁴ *Giornale di Sicilia*, 20 January 1824, Supplement to No. 16.

Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore, and not only that, forming a partnership based on the culture of their countries of origin that has recently been investigated in a text dedicated to the world of technical immigrants in the Kingdom in those years.⁹⁵ During the 1830s, Lefèbvre worked mainly in the Isola paper mills, while Viollier became an executive in a ship-owning group. Significantly, however, he named Lefèbvre among the financiers.

It was Viollier who took the initiative to take over the *Amministrazione* from the Sicard family and associates on death in 1839. Charles Lefèbvre joined, along with other conspicuous individuals - nobles, *négociants*, bankers, merchants - in the new shipping company. A daughter of Auguste Viollier, Joséphine, born in Naples, married Francesco Torelli, giving birth in 1842 to the Eugenio Torelli Viollier (1842-1900) who was to become the founder in Milan of the *Corriere della Sera*. Another important partner was Achille Meuricoffre (1793-1840), a member of an important family of Swiss bankers who had found their fortune in Naples. Meuricoffre had married the daughter of a Frankfurt banker, Victoria Bansa. Meuricoffre, like Charles Lefèbvre, was a personal financial advisor to King Ferdinand and especially his son Francis. His business was set up as a bank, the Meuricoffre Bank. When Achilles died in 1840, his son Oscar (1826-1880) continued his participation in the *Amministrazione*.

The shareholders of the first hour included the entire Lefèbvre family. Charles bought shares for himself and his wife Rosanne, but also for their children Ernest and Flavia. Shares were also taken by Flavia's husband brother-in-law Raoul de Raigecourt

⁹⁵ Marco Rovinello, *Cittadini senza nazione. Migranti francesi a Napoli (1793-1860)*, preface by Daniela Luigia Cogliati, Le Monnier, Florence 2009.

and Charles' brother Auguste. The latter two had French citizenship and only came to Naples on family holidays or anniversaries. The Lefèbvre family's commitment never fell below about 9,000 ducats, plus thousands more bought by Raoul and Auguste. The commitment of the Rothschilds of Naples was also significant. We find important shares bought by Baron Carl Rothschild and his wife Adelheid and other shares in the names of their three sons Adolph, Wilhelm and Alexander. Rothschild had arrived in Naples following the granting of a large loan of 20 million ducats to the king on two dates: 20 May and 5 December 1821. They had settled in a large new house but did not disdain other business ventures such as participation in joint-stock companies or the oil trade in which they became, for a few decades, the main merchants.⁹⁶ These commitments, which were also to be found in other companies such as the *Società lionese per l'illuminazione a gas*, contradict, as the scholar Marco Rovinello has already pointed out, the idea that:

Carl Rothschild did not engage in trade in Naples. He hardly ever did business with private individuals. Instead, he thought of using the Rothschilds' powerful capital and connections to organise government loans, as the four other Rothschilds had done so successfully in four other large states.⁹⁷

Few Englishmen participated in the company; they were generally technicians involved in shipbuilding, boilers and maintenance until at least the 1840s, such as Carl James Ridgway.

⁹⁶ On the loan to the king, see Nicola Ostuni, *Finanza ed economia*, cit., pp. 155-156.

⁹⁷ Ignazio Balla, *I Rothschild*, Treves, Milan 1935, p. 205. See Marco Rovinello, *Un Grande Banchiere in una piccola piazza: Carl Mayer Rothschild e Il Credito Commerciale nel Regno delle Due Sicilie*, in "Società e Storia", no. 110 (2005), pp. 705-739. *Ibid*, p. 709.

Naturally, the presence of Neapolitans was substantial. In fact, we find shares purchased by the Pignatelli Strongoli family and in particular by Francesco Pignatelli Strongoli (1775-1853), a former military man, a leading exponent of the pro-Giacobian party, who had adapted to the Kingdom by working in army procurement and other sensitive economic sectors.

Various shares were purchased by members of the Staiti, De' Medici di Ottajano, Lucchesi Palli and other families. These were in these cases symbolic shares, which allowed these families to be part of the innovation without risking too much, although in the case of the Lucchesi Palli the participation was more demanding. A share of bonds was also bought by the important ship-owning firm *Claude Clerc & C.* of Marseilles. This remained in contact and collaboration with *Amministrazione* throughout the company's life. Marseille was the port of departure and arrival in the North. In Marseille, the terminus, the ships were put into roadstead, refuelled, cleaned, repaired. It was necessary for the two companies to have good, close relations. Also significant was the convinced participation of the family of Auguste and Ilario Degas, among others. The Degas had settled in Naples in the second half of the 18th century; we find them in many, even important, economic activities in the Neapolitan area.

In 1846, the company decided to purchase two steamers from England of the new iron model, but still wheeled, the *Vesuvio* and the *Capri*. The former had a tonnage of 432 tonnes, was 55 metres long by 7.85 wide; the latter 475 tonnes by 55.95 and 7.82 wide. That these were remarkable ships, still regarded as technical marvels, and that the *Amministrazione* was considered to be absolutely in the vanguard of the field, can be seen from various journalistic and printed sources. A remarkable example is the article written by Giacinto Galanti on 7 November 1846,

celebrating the arrival of the new steamship *Vesuvio*, which replaced the *Francesco I*, which was being retired after a not very long life.⁹⁸ The *Vesuvio* was the first iron-hulled steamship to enter service in Naples, later followed by the *Capri*. Auguste Viollier had personally supervised the commissioning and construction phases of the *Vesuvio* and the *Capri* in London, wheeled boats with 300 horsepower, built in the *Ditchburn & Marc* shipyards on the Thames. The editor of the *Giornale delle Due Sicilie* (*Newspaper of the Two Sicilies*) announced these prides of the new royal navy:

The *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore nel Regno delle Due Sicilie* always intent on activating communications, had two magnificent iron steamers built in London with low-pressure machines of 300 horsepower. These two steamers, called *Vesuvio* and *Capri*, were executed by the renowned builders Ditchburn & Mare of Blackwall and the machinery by *Maudslay & Field*.⁹⁹

The editor was delighted that the ports of the Kingdom and the Mediterranean would soon enjoy better and much faster connections. When, on that sunny day and calm sea, 7 November 1846, the steamer led by Captain Pietro Cusmano approached the quay and docked there, there were many spectators crowded on the quay. The boat remained moored for a few days, was refuelled and on the 11th King Francis with the Royal family, the Count of Aquila and the Count of Trapani, visited and stayed on board for a one-day cruise of the archipelago.

⁹⁸ Giacinto Galanti, *Il Vesuvio, piroscifo di ferro della forza di 300 cavalli proveniente da Londra il 7 novembre 1846*, Porcelli, Naples 1846.

⁹⁹ *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, 26 October 1846.

And he was delighted to see his subjects second his ardour for social improvement, commending all the improvements introduced into the machines; the wheels articulated to cut through the waves with greater ease; the construction in iron, and how in harmony this is with the wood stopped; the solid, refined construction in all parts of the hull and over the cover; every point worked out with incredible exactitude; up to the point of foreseeing and repairing any variety that the immense metal could have produced in the compass.

The monarch was delighted with the beautiful layout of the interior, where an elegant gallery on the first floor towards the stern meets with delicate paintings, carvings of the finest wood, the most sought-after furnishings from the whims of fashion, and luxurious tools and fittings to fully satisfy the senses.¹⁰⁰

A luxury ship, therefore, and suitable for Mediterranean cruises, like its sister ship *Capri*. Supplies, decorations, carvings, paintings, luxury furniture make it clear that these were ships for transporting passengers who could spend. As for the internal distribution of spaces, Galanti noted that below deck there were, separated from other spaces, a sleeping room for the men, with a few cabins for the more wealthy located on the outer sides, and equal accommodation for the women with their “sleeping quarters”.

The boat could travel at 15 miles per hour, a considerable speed for the time «without that shaky, uncomfortable feeling, common to other boats; but with equable motion by virtue of the variation of the machinery and wheels and the iron armour, it was most admirable, and fully satisfied the Sovereign and the august Germans». ¹⁰¹ Before leaving, the Royal family greeted the board members and the director with a toast.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, pp. 5-6.

Four days later, on the 15th, a short cruise with members, subscribers and managers was scheduled.

Laughing skies, calm sea, gentle zephyrs on one side; the magnificence of the boat and its movement, the luxury and elegance of the ensemble on the other, accompanied by a banquet restaurant, made the hours of transit delightful.¹⁰²

The boat travelled the 17½ miles separating Capri from Naples in one hour and eight minutes. The speeds continued to shorten. A few days later its sister ship, the *Capri*, arrived in port. In the same year that *Vesuvio* and *Capri* were beginning their sailing careers, the *Maria Cristina* was being laid up for a complete overhaul that had been postponed for years because of the cost. Its old, noisy boilers were replaced with others built in Naples in the workshop of Zino & Henry. Within ten years, the Neapolitan workshops had acquired the *know-how* to build powerful boilers to generate the motive power for steam ships and, soon, the first machines for industry.

On the death of Count Lucchesi Palli in 1847, Charles Lefèbvre was appointed to the Board of Directors, who held the position for five years, according to regulations, together with Giovanni del Gaudio, Nicola Serra Count of Montesantangelo, the Prince of San Giacomo, Ilario Degas and the Duke of Bivona.¹⁰³ An English newspaper reported a number of interesting commercial details. The tickets could be sold from various offices in Europe: in Marseilles by Clerc & C., who were therefore agents of the company as well as being partners (Rue Montgrand, 56); Degrossi in Genoa; in Palermo at the agency Morrison, Seager & C.;

¹⁰² *Ibid*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰³ ASN, *Archivio Borbone*, f. 884, Minutes of the general meeting of 13 March 1847 on the management of the year 1846.

in Rome, in Via dei Condotti no. 7, at the agent Freeborn. At Marseilles, Civitavecchia, Livorno (and at certain times also at Palermo, Messina and Malta) there was one departure per week, two of them from Naples. The ships offered a luxury first-class service with porcelain tableware bearing the company's brand name.

In 1847, the *Amministrazione*, led by men of modern ideas, established a new supremacy, stipulated an agreement with Raffaele Rubattino's *Società dei vapori sardi* (or *Compagnia Rubattino*) to jointly manage a number of maritime lines, such as the one between Marseilles, Genoa, Civitavecchia, Naples, Calabria, Sicily and Malta. The Rubattino's ships *San Giorgio* and *Virgilio* were reserved for the Marseilles-Naples line, alternating them with the *Amministrazione*'s *Ercolano*, *Mongibello*, *Maria Cristina* and *Vesuvio*. In this way, by distributing the revenue according to agreed schedules, a frequent and regular service was guaranteed. Three times a month, moreover, the *Maria Cristina*, the *Ercolano* and the *Mongibello* arrived in Naples from Marseilles and continued their journey to Reggio Calabria, Syracuse and Malta, while the *Capri* and the *Vesuvio* linked the Neapolitan capital to Messina and Palermo. It was the first example of an integrated collaboration between two shipowning companies in Italy that, moreover, belonged to two different states. The idea was proposed under the management of Charles Lefèbvre and worked magnificently. If it was interrupted, it was due to the outbreak of the 1848 uprisings and the capture of some ships, as we shall see.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, 6 August 1847.

Incidents of war: 1848-1853

In the second part of the 1840s, partly due to the political turmoil, the Sicilian uprisings (1848-49) and the Crimean War (1853-1856), society began to experience difficulties and its cash supply diminished: in the crisis of 1848-1849, which also affected many cities in France and the Italian peninsula, people travelled much less. Visiting trips abroad and from abroad were all but stopped.

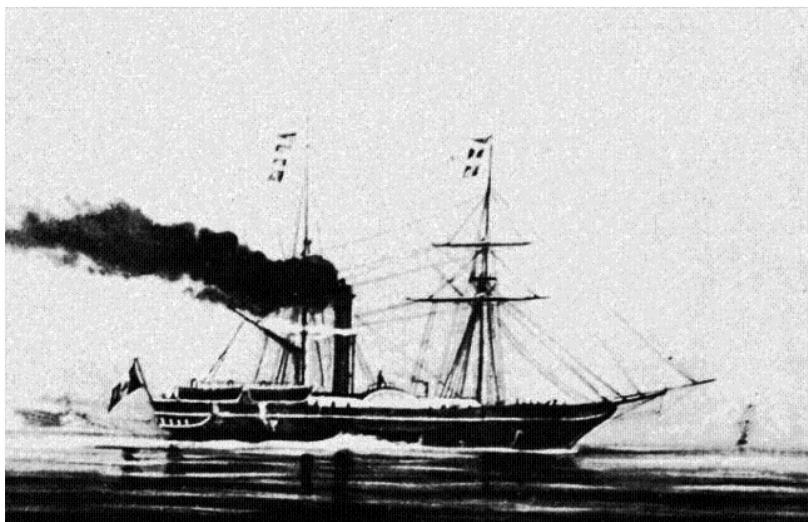
In Naples, maritime activity, not so much of the ships carrying basic necessities as of those dedicated to transporting passengers, slowed down considerably for whole months. However, at the dawn of the 1850s, it was observed that passenger traffic was increasing, as was that of goods. The company, however, had few vessels to cope with the competition of an increasingly crowded Mediterranean. In 1848, the *Mongibello*, which had been sent to the Adriatic along with the Kingdom's naval school commanded by Raffaele de Cosa, was sold to the War Navy of the Kingdom of Sardinia (May 1848).



The Mongibello when it belonged to the *Amministrazione*.
Black and white reproduction of an anonymous oil painting.

After the sale, it was renamed *Monzambano* and 13 years later participated in the siege of Gaeta (1861).¹⁰⁵ On 20 January 1861, he entered the port of Gaeta to notify the naval blockade of the Bourbon fortress. On the 22nd of the same month, he took part in the actions against the so-called Batterie di Ponente. In the following month, he transported prisoners of the defeated and now dissolved Bourbon army to Ponza and Genoa.

¹⁰⁵ Lamberto Radogna, *cit.*, II, p. 70.



The Mongibello armed as a military ship.
It was renamed the *Monzambano*.

Two years after her first triumphant entry into Naples, the *Vesuvio* was involved in an unfortunate incident during the riots of January 1848. When the uprising broke out in Sicily, trade between “the Two Sicilies” was never interrupted and so the steamships of the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore*, *Capri*, *Ercolano*, *Maria Cristina* and *Vesuvio* continued to shuttle between Naples and Palermo, sometimes carrying special government commissions.

On 20 May, the *Vesuvio*, captained by Leopoldo Minutolo, sailed towards Palermo on a voyage duly anticipated by notices. As it was preparing to depart, on the morning of 22 May, despite protests from the captain and crew, the steamer was seized by a Sicilian officer named Castiglia. After two and a half months of useless protests, Auguste Viollier petitioned the relevant



government offices in Naples on 12 August to unblock the situation. During the ensuing war, *Vesuvio* was used by the Sicilian rebels to bring as many as 1400 soldiers from Palermo to Milazzo. When the rebels fled for other operations, the *Vesuvio* on its return to Naples

was stopped by the Russian vice-consul who asked that the Russian flag, and not the Neapolitan one, be flown to prevent the rebels from boarding the ship again.

The ship was finally returned to Naples, the crew interrogated and then released while Viollier asked the Royal Navy to cover the cost of the damage and urgent repairs the steamer needed. Meanwhile, the *Vesuvio* was held as “prey” (good prey). Again on 12 October and 21 November it demanded its return. On 15 March 1848, after almost a year of inactivity, the ship was returned to its owners and after a while, in the summer of 1848, it was able to resume its voyages. The damage to the *Amministrazione* was not insignificant. The Royal Navy

meanwhile demanded the vessel back as it had been captured by the rebels and had thus become free prey but lost the case.¹⁰⁶

These events did not cause irreparable damage at the time, but they did make the company more fragile and began to convince many members that the business of shipowning was more risky than they had thought, also because these steamships were generally more fragile than sailing vessels, despite the advantages they had (being able to sail even when there was no wind). Still fresh in many people's memories was the case of the *British and American Steam Navigation Company*, which in 1838 tried to enter the transatlantic travel market alongside the *Great Western Steamship Company* and the *Cunard Steamship* by fitting out the SS *British Queen* and the SS *President*, large ships but with underpowered engines. The second vessel was lost in a shipwreck in 1841 and the company, which had intended to expand, went bankrupt.¹⁰⁷

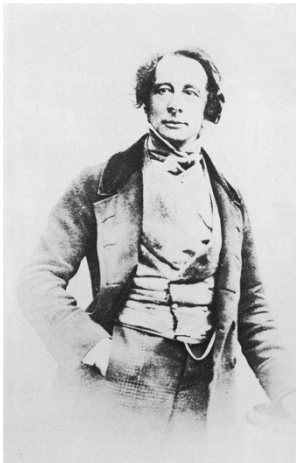
¹⁰⁶ The events summarised here are recounted on pages 5-13 of the text *Cenno de' veri fatti e confutazione delle contrarie fallacie ... nella causa tra il sig. Augusto Viollier Direttore dell'Amministrazione della Navigazione de' Vapori del regno delle Due Sicilie contra l'intendenza della Real Marina ...*, Migliaccio, Naples 1848. After the first summary of the facts, the paper summarises the arguments of the *Amministrazione's* lawyers and includes as an appendix documents that may be of interest only to Military History.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Robert Vernon Gibbs, *Passenger Liners of the Western Ocean: A Record of Atlantic Steam and Motor Passenger Vessels from 1838 to the Present Day*, John De Graff, New York 1957, pp. 41-45.

Chapter 9

A journey with the steamboat

A rare description of the interior appearance of steamships in the 1840s, and the harsh travelling conditions to which passengers were subjected, can be found in a text by Charles Dickens, *America (American notes)*, published in October 1842. The interest of this text is heightened by the fact that Dickens travelled on a boat very similar to that of the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore*.



Charles Dickens (1812-1870) made a transoceanic voyage in the winter of 1842 on the ship of the British company *Cunard*, which had been founded in 1840 in collaboration between Samuel Cunard (1787-1865), a shipowner, and Robert Napier (1791-1876), a great shipbuilder. The voyage lasted from January to June of that 1842.

This was the *Britannia*, which was very similar in structure, construction technology, interior space and size to the Neapolitan company's British vessels. This ship had been built at the Robert Duncan & Company shipyard in Greenock. This was followed by the construction of five sister ships that varied little in size and technology, apart from a few improvements: the *Britannia* or *Acadia*, the *Caledonia* and the *Columbia*, which were powered by engines from Robert Napier & Sons and Mergery & Co. These

ships, called Britannia Class Steamships, were, in turn, built on the model of the *Great Western*, to which we will return. On the ship on which Dickens travelled, employed until 1849 on that route, also travelled one of the members of the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore*, Ernesto Lefèbvre, with his wife Teresa Doria d'Angri, in the summer of 1847.

Dickens embarked in Liverpool in February 1842. The *Britannia* was similar to the boats of the Neapolitan company but was several metres longer and wider as she had to endure the ocean crossing. It also had to take in a lot more coal: the *Britannia*, for example, consumed as much as 38 tonnes per day for a crossing that lasted an average of 15 days and could be extended by 3 or 4 days; a crossing that did not allow for very long port calls. This took up a lot of space, which could not be used for additional passenger cabins. While the average Neapolitan company's vessels were 56 metres by 8, the *Britannia* was 63 by 10. The fundamental difference lay not so much in size, structure and space, but in the power of the engines.



Cunard's *Britannia* on her maiden voyage, June 1840.

The average crossing duration in 1842 as in 1847 was 15 days, although crossings sometimes lasted less (13 days) or longer (20 days). Berths included the port of Halifax and then Boston.

Enboth pairs of travellers, the Dickens and the Lefèbvre, made equal journeys on the American continent, as *Cunard* also organised that type of service.

The Dickens' voyage on the *Britannia*

Catherine and Charles Dickens' journey was very tormenting and difficult. The writer described it as «a gigantic effort». The ship on which they travelled had a powerful engine, for the time, of 720 horsepower while the Mediterranean ships had one of 280 to 320. While the latter could accommodate up to 300 people including crew, the *Cunard* liners carried 115 plus 83 crew, a third of whom worked as mechanics or in the engine room. For the first three days of the Dickens' voyage, which took place at the worst time of the year, January, everyone on the ship felt terrible because of the high waves. The writer's wife had difficulty even getting out of the cabin. In his usual humorous style, the writer describes the hardships of living in such a cramped space for so many days.

During the course of the fifth day, the boat entered «the middle of a mighty storm», so powerful that the funnel was destroyed by the impact of the waves and the wind, and the lifeboats were even torn from their moorings. This shows how risky those voyages were and how the problem of the funnel, which was fragile and threw black smoke on the passengers, had not yet been solved.

Catherine Dickens - her husband would later write - experienced «moments of sheer terror» for several days. The crossing, even after that storm, was tormenting and, at several moments, terrifying. To make matters worse, there was the toothache that the poor woman developed and which could not be treated on board because it was not possible to carry out any kind of intervention due to the ship's movements. Dickens recounts that the passengers' pastimes, even in less dramatic moments, were difficult: they tried to amuse themselves with card games and board games in the only room, while the waves moved tables and chairs and knocked over glasses.

When the ship entered Halifax Bay in Nova Scotia, she dropped anchor for supplies and unloaded cargo of materials and mail (she also operated a mail service between England and the United States and between the city of Halifax Boston). The Dickens' crossing aboard the *Britannia* as a whole was three days longer than planned and lasted 18 and a half days.

Very different was the experience of the Lefèbvre family, who travelled with a brother-in-law and a nephew. They took tickets for the *Britannia* in the summer of 1847. Their Atlantic crossing, scheduled to take 15 days, lasted exactly that long. They were warned, before boarding, that it would be 15 days of suffering and seasickness on the outward journey and 15 on the return. They were assured, however, that the accommodation on the ship could be, if not comfortable, at least safe, as sailing was calm and storms rare at that season. In fact, they were lucky, they did suffer seasickness but much less than the Dickens and above all they did not have to sail through any storms. They left on the evening of 14 August from Le Havre to reach the port of Cherbourg, *Cunard's* embarkation point for the ocean crossing.¹⁰⁸ They

¹⁰⁸ AB XIX 4481, vol. IV, p. 167.

would return the following 12 November, over 80 days later after an itinerary that followed almost exactly that of the Dickens.¹⁰⁹

As a historical document, Dickens' exact description of the cabin is interesting, as it matches the layout of the cabins on the ships of the Neapolitan company.

I shall never forget the expression of astonishment, one-quarter serious and three-quarters amused, that was on my face when, on the morning of 3 January 1842, I opened the door and looked out into the "luxury cabin" of the mail steamer *Britannia*, registered at 1,200 tons and leaving for Halifax and Boston.

That that was the cabin assigned to "Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dickens" even my troubled mind understood this from a note proclaiming the fact, pinned on a thin couch, intended to cover a very thin mattress lying in an apparently unreachable place. My mind could not yet realise, at least for the moment, that that very one was the luxury cabin around which "Mr Charles Dickens and Madame" had been arguing day and night for four months; that precisely that was the small, cosy little room, with at least a small sofa, that Charles Dickens' strong prophetic spirit had foreseen and that Madame, with a splendidly measured sense of proportion, had predicted with only two large cupboards placed in some remote corner (cupboards that could have passed through the door with the ease with which a giraffe enters a flowerpot). Impossible to connect the extravagant and impractical sort of box we had in front of us with the delicate and graceful, not to say splendid, mansion image painted by a master hand in the shipping company's advertisements, hanging in the London agency's offices. Impossible not to think that that luxury cabin was just a pleasant joke by the ship's captain, invented on purpose to make people appreciate more the real luxury cabin where they would soon let us in. So, I dropped myself on a sort of horsehair chair and

¹⁰⁹ AB XIX 4481, vol. IV, p. 175. The journey to the USA included Boston, New York, Baltimore, Washington, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Niagara, Montreal, Toronto, and back along the coast to Boston.

turned, with an expressionless look, towards some friends who had accompanied us on board, and were making a thousand grimaces trying to squeeze through the small door of our luxury cabin.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Charles Dickens, *America*, trans. it., Feltrinelli, Milan 1842, pp. 71-72.

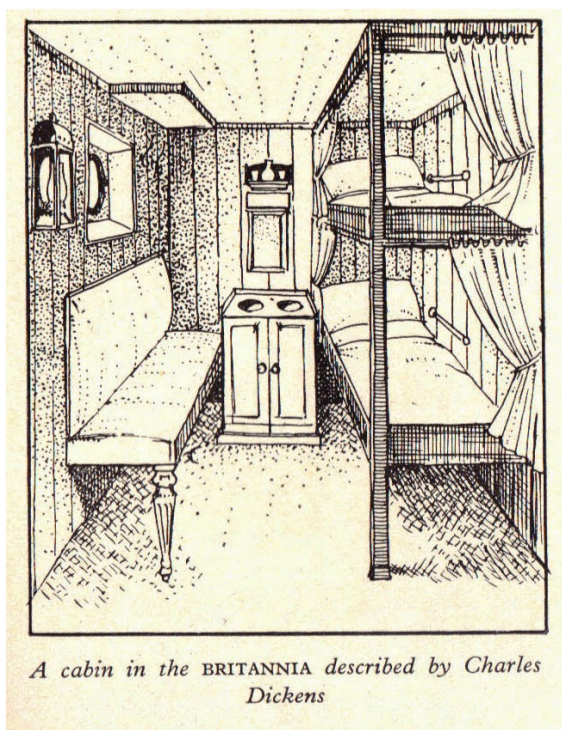


Illustration from Frank E. Dodman, *Ships of the Cunard Line*, Adlard Colers 1955.

The number of passengers that the ships of the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore* could accommodate was much higher than those of *Cunard* precisely because the latter had to carry much more. To withstand the winds and ocean waves, a much larger engine was needed, twice the size of the ships built for the Mediterranean.

Thomas Guppy of Great Western in Naples

An interesting connection between *Cunard's* ocean shipping fleets and the *Amministrazione's* Mediterranean fleet can be found in the figure of Thomas Richard Guppy (1797-1882), a member of a British shipbuilding family based in Bristol.

In 1836, Isambard Kingdom Brunel (1806-1859) and his friend Thomas Guppy, who had met in 1829, together with a group of investors from the city of Bristol, founded a partnership that led them first to establish the *Great Western Railways Company* and later the *Great Western Steamship Company*. Of the latter, Guppy was chief engineer. The former built a railway in the Bristol area, the latter was to design and build a line of steamships covering the Bristol-New York route. They were not the only ones to think of a transatlantic passenger and freight service, but they were the first and their work was to be the model for *Cunard's* designers. Both Brunel and Guppy were brilliant and versatile inventors, important designers in a variety of fields, from lighting systems to bridges, railways, tunnels and the first steam liners.

Great Western's engineers designed very large ships, such as the *Great Western*, the first example of which underwent various improvements during the early 1840s. Other engineers of the time considered this type of ship too large, dangerous and above all expensive. However, Isambard and Guppy had realised that larger ships could be more efficient in fuel management, a crucial aspect of transatlantic transport. Brunel rightly held the principle that a ship's carrying capacity increased with the cube of its size while its water resistance increased with the square of its size.

The *Great Western* was a wooden-hulled, but steel-reinforced, wheeled boat, with auxiliary sails to be used during rough seas so that the ship would not be derailed from its course and, above all,

to allow a trim that would not cause the side wheels to come out of the water. The large ship was fitted with two engines produced by *Maudslay, Sons & Field* for 750 horsepower, the same engine supplier as the Neapolitan *Amministrazione*, and entered service on 19 July 1837.

The *Great Western* was based on Side Lever Engine technology. The ships built by *Cunard* from 1840 onwards were a scaled-down version of the *Great Western* but adopted the same construction principles, the same as those found in the Neapolitan company's *Vesuvio* and *Stromboli*. Between the 1830s and the 1850s, when the propeller gradually began to be introduced, the structure of these ships was the same for all of them.

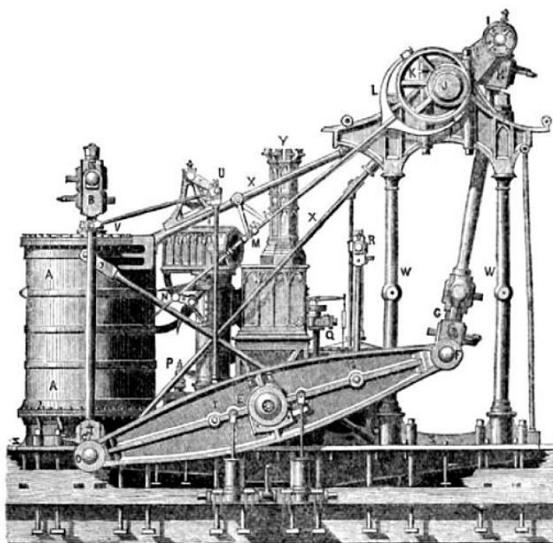


FIG. 92.—The Side-Lever Engine, 1849.

Diagram of the Side Rod Engine that moved the machines of the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore*, the *Great Western* Steamship and part of the *Cunard* ships.

What connects Thomas Guppy's story to the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore* is the fact that he, having developed important works in the field of steamboats as well as in the construction of railways and bridges, but also in gas lighting (these technologies were always linked to the same groups of people, industrialists, financiers and engineers), now internationally renowned, moved to Naples on 1 December 1849, permanently, taking with him over a thousand professional and scientific books. Here he founded a company, the *Officine Meccaniche Guppy & Macry*, which would later attract various partners, many from the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore* and even Ernesto and Charles Lefèbvre.

The arrival of a professional known in the United States and England for his great technical achievements in Naples suggests that at this time the Neapolitan city was considered promising for the developments it could have in the near future.

Guppy died in Naples Portici on 28 June 1883.



The *Britannia* in Boston harbour imprisoned by ice (1842).

Chapter 10

The 1850s

At the meeting of 20 December 1850, Charles Lefèbvre and sons were found to own 18 shares worth 19,000 ducats. Other shareholders still included the richest financiers and landowners in Naples, such as Carlo Maria and Adolfo Rothschild (53 shares), the Marseilles company *Claude Clerc & Figli* (40), *Ilario Degas & Figli* (30) and Giobatta Staiti (24).

This group of shareholders - mostly of foreign origin - continued to represent the cutting edge of Neapolitan entrepreneurship. It was a group of wealthy people and financiers who had common interests in other sectors (public lighting, the *Società Industriale Partenopea*, trade in oil, wheat, silks, agricultural products).

At the time of its transformation into a joint-stock company, the *Amministrazione* owned four steamships. Its profits came mainly from the privatisation of postal services. But the real problem was that it lacked money to purchase new steamships.

All the people mentioned, and not just the Rothschilds, had considerable family and industrial financial resources, but they had made it a rule not to finance the company beyond what had been determined in the company prospectuses. They wanted it to make profits with the money that had been decided. This shows how the *Amministrazione* was also a kind of experiment for many of them and how the network of smaller shareholders reacted.

In 1851, with great effort, the company purchased the *Mongibello* (280 tonnes), a ship famous for having rammed and

sunk the *Polluce* in 1841. The ramming affair caused much discussion at the time and also afterwards.¹¹¹

The Rope

Meanwhile, Auguste Viollier's management continued. The company was saved from a crisis around 1850 thanks to an important loan. After the 1850 financial year, the *Amministrazione di Navigazione a Vapore* decided, after a general meeting, to have two large propeller steamers built. The two new ships were needed to withstand the increased competition. The decision had to be made soon because in 1851 the last year of the company's life according to the original plans expired, and a decision to extend it required good reasons. However, there was not enough money and none of the wealthy partners offered their help for some time, so they turned to private credit, i.e. loans regulated by the laws of commerce.

Offered to provide money for the huge operation, probably necessary for the survival of the company, was a small group of entrepreneurs who on this occasion presented themselves as financiers, but who were already partners in the company: Ernesto Lefèbvre, Enrico Catalano and Marianna and Luisa de Berner. Ernesto Lefèbvre was already a partner in the company and did this operation independently of the other family members. For example, his father Charles, a founding partner and already managing director, did not participate with his personal assets in the financing of the ship. And the same can be said of the other individuals who participated in the operation, Catalano and

¹¹¹ Nicola Cappelletti - Gianluca Mirto, *L'oro dell'Elba. Operazione Polluce*, Addiction-Magenees, Milan 2004.

Marianne and Luisa de Berner. The latter appears in other documents of the time as Catalano's daughter. Marianna was Catalano's wife, and was of foreign nationality.¹¹² Details of these events are provided by the published resolutions of the navigation company's meetings but also by the lawsuits filed by Ernesto Lefèbvre and associates with documents signed on 20 September 1866.¹¹³

The contracts signed for the disbursement of the money were signed on 1 October 1852 and 21 April 1853 in the office of the Company's notary. With the first, the Company's Director, authorised by the Board of Directors, obtained a loan from Ernesto Lefèbvre amounting to 65 thousand ducats (15 to 20 thousand lire in the post-unification period) to be used for the purchase of the steamer *Sorrento*. It was decided to divide that sum into 130 "obbliganze" (bonds) of 500 each, put into circulation and purchased by the shareholders. In the second operation, a loan of 90,000 ducats was obtained from the Catalano-De Berner family group for the purchase of the *Amalfi* and the sum was divided into 180 "bonds" of 500 ducats. In the case of Ernesto Lefèbvre, the money was taken from his personal assets without involving the Fibreno paper mill complex.

¹¹² Girolamo Nisio, *Della istruzione pubblica e privata in Napoli dal 1806 sino al 1871*, Testa, Naples 1874, p. 160. In this book, for example, as in others dedicated to childhood, the "gentlewoman" Luise de Berner née Catalano appears as a benefactress.

¹¹³ *I creditori a cambio marittimo sui vapori Sorrento e Stromboli contro il signor Giuseppe Cartoux*, 20 September 1866 (ASN, Tribunale di commercio, Atti Depositati); there is also a later deed that has the same title but is dated 23 January 1867 and contains some clarifications and additions.



Propeller steamer *Sicilia*.

It was written in the contracts that those who financed the Company were granted «the privilege on the body, tools, machinery and fittings of the two ships; privileged mortgage over any other credit for having served the money for the construction of the ships». And it was added that the money was to be considered as given in maritime exchange. This meant that the contracts had to be entered in the registry of the Court of Commerce on the maritime exchange register, which was done on 17 November 1852 and 23 April 1853.

With that money, the two large steamships were built in English shipyards. These gave the company oxygen for about a decade. Proof of the confidence of those years is also the elaborate project to improve the wharves and the marina of the merchant port that Auguste Viollier presented to the State in 1853.¹¹⁴ The ships were quickly built and in 1854 the *Sorrento* and the *Amalfi* entered service. The propeller-driven *Sorrento* and *Amalfi* both had iron hulls of about 300 tons each and could carry over 300 passengers. With these ships, capable of long voyages, the new route was

¹¹⁴ Giorgio Simoncini, *The Kingdom of Naples*, Olshky, Florence 1993, p. 34.

inaugurated which, rounding Calabria, sailed up the Adriatic to Trieste. That same year, however, a collision led to the sinking of the *Ercolano*. It happened that the steamship *Sicilia*, on the night between 24 and 25 April 1854, a night when a strong wind was blowing, collided with the *Ercolano*. The *Sicilia* was much bigger than the *Ercolano* and slashed the side of the steamer with its prow, which was literally cut in two and sank off the coast of Nice. Forty-eight crew members and passengers died. Also on board the *Ercolano* was the son of the British Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel junior. Detained for a few days in Marseilles, the *Sicilia* was able to set sail again. A long and costly lawsuit began between the two companies, which contributed to the *Amministrazione*'s collapse.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Carlo Perfetto, *Vicende della Marina Mercantile a vapore nel Reame delle Sicilie dal 1818 al 1860*, Stabilimento tipografico G. Barca, Naples 1923, Appendix VIII.

Chapter 11

The *Ercolano* tragedy

The case of the sinking of the *Ercolano* became an issue for some time for the British Foreign Office, which had to establish whether it was intentional, an accident and whose fault it was. This interest was due to the fact that Thomas Plumer Halsey MP (1815-1854) and the son of the British Prime Minister Robert Peel Jr. (1822-1895) were travelling on board the boat. The two were travelling together. Halsey, his wife, Federica Johnson, and their infant son, Ethelbert Arthur Sackville Halsey, one year old, as well as his service staff, drowned.¹¹⁶

For this reason, too, the investigations were lengthy. For the *Amministrazione*, the problem was serious because, although the evidence pointed to a maneuver by Commander John Carson, born in 1819 in Palermo, suspicions of wrongdoing also affected Cavalier Francesco Miceli, who was one of the best pilots in the Neapolitan company. The facts were described in various newspaper articles, both Italian and foreign, and in a *Difesa pel Cavalier Francesco Miceli* that was published in 1858 written by the lawyer Santi de Cola.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Foreign Intelligence *The Times* April 28, 1854; *Lecture by Sir Robert Peel*. Most Interesting Account of His Shipwreck, *Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle* March 31, 1855.

¹¹⁷ Santi de Cola, *Difesa pel Cavalier Francesco Miceli tenente di vascello della R. Marina Napolitana comandante del piroscapo Ercolano e sottoposto a giudizio*, Stamperia Pappalardo, Messina 1858; another paper tried to keep the judgement in Naples, where the Court was supposed to be more favourable to Miceli: Leopoldo Tarantini,

The cause was described by the author as “gigantic”: “it has taken on gigantic proportions, it has attracted universal attention for so many miserably wasted lives, which justice must avenge with its powerful arm, for so many lost values, for which compensation is demanded, for the just punishment, finally, that the guilty must suffer”.¹¹⁸ The disaster, it is recalled, occurred in the waters between Antibes and Villefranche between the steamer *Ercolano* and the much larger propeller-driven steamer *Sicilia* (about 75 metres long and almost 10 metres wide, 828 tons, iron hull) that belonged to the *Sicula Transatlantica* of the Palermo ship-owners Luigi and Salvatore de Pace.

Both of the ships’ captains were residents and natives of the Kingdom although one was of English parents; they were Francesco Miceli of Naples and John Carson, 35. And so “in a few minutes 45 people unfortunately found their death [...] significant values were annihilated; that ship that had challenged storms and waves in a few moments disappeared”.¹¹⁹

Miceli was a long-serving and experienced captain who had led several ships of different companies. The *Sicilia* was an ocean liner built in Glasgow, at *James and G. Thompson*, which left the shipyards the previous 31 March 1854.¹²⁰

Breve ragionamento in sostegno della competenza della Gran Corte Criminale di Napoli nella causa pel comandante signor Francesco Miceli contro il comandante signor Giovanni Carson, Naples 1854.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ The Sicilian brothers De Pace ordered it built at the James & G. Thomson shipyards in Glasgow, paying £18,500. The *Sicilia* was a propeller steamer of 828 tons deadweight and 462 net, with an iron hull. She was 220 English feet long and 28 wide, three-masted, with a clipper bow and 250 horsepower engines. Launched on 16 January 1853, she sailed on 31 March 1854, under the command of Capt. John Carson, resident in Palermo and a citizen of the Kingdom, with a crew of 24 men.

She embarked 26 crew members and travelled at 11 miles per hour under the sea captain Carson, who «had sailed far seas carrying the flag of the Two Sicilies to remote regions, but who was unluckily for the first time steering a Steamer». This was no small detail. Until then, in fact, he had steered sailing ships, and so, it was written, «the little knowledge he had of such a command had become evident from the very beginning of that fatal voyage: twice he had run over other ships in the port of Marseilles, having broken the left prow of the anchor on a French steamer, and the whole mast on a Cutter for pleasure».¹²¹ These were indisputable facts, witnessed by Marseilles port authorities.

Off the coast, the two ships sighted each other and reached each other at about 1.30 a.m. and «the *Sicilia*, running at full force, struck the *Ercolano* on her port side, and cut her off on the left, right at the mainmast with such violence that she split it in two», then plunging her bow into the *Ercolano* in a tremendous impact. The passengers, at that hour mostly asleep in their cabins, are thrown by the dozens into the water or torn apart in the tangle of metal sheets and wooden debris, and «each is driven by the thought of his own salvation: those who, consulting their own strength and hoping in it, launch themselves into the sea; those who, at that extreme moment, provide themselves with a plank, a piece of wood, any object that they tenaciously grasp, clutching it as the one and only means of avoiding death, go out to challenge the waves; those who, more fortunate, care nothing for the others on a small ship, rely on it».

At this point, the lawyer describing the accident indulges in a piece of tragic literature that nevertheless does not exaggerate what really happened:

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p. 5.

When a still young woman was seen on the quarterdeck overcome with fright, her face dishevelled, with inexpressible anxiety she turned her eyes around, searching for dear objects. It was a mother who was running to her children; to her the Frenchman Valentin presented himself generously: to her who, having warned of the imminent danger of all salvation, despaired; he called her by name; he pointed to the sea as her last refuge and would have saved her! But the distraught, exhausted girl does not answer, her children she calls, her children she seeks, she despairs of life, she rejects the salvation she cannot share with her children; her motionless pupils turn to the sky as if to contemplate once more her homeland, to which she would soon return as a citizen, she sends not a tear, she runs, she knows not where; Valentin can no longer hesitate, fulfilled the duties of humanity he thinks of himself, and believes he seeks in the water that salvation he could not provide for the wretch, he rushes into the waves to fight with new dangers and then a cry is heard, only one; but so shrill, so. Desperate and savage that the heart of the generous man was pierced: it was the last that sent the unfortunate mother, who disappeared into that abyss.¹²²

At that point, the story goes, a *go back* scream is heard. Miceli orders the engineer Wilkins a maneuver to disentangle himself. He goes to the point where the *Sicilia*'s prow has entered the *Ercolano*, breaking away, and left a chasm, into which he falls. He is injured by a shower of debris and then hears his son's screams.

he wounded wished for death, as cowards succumb to the thought of it, the spirited wear it like a crown of flowers, but the supreme voice of nature, of religion, held him back, a hope of salvation for him. For his son, what a light of God shone on that bewildered heart, he did not despair, he trusted in Providence, and a stroke of the oar on his

¹²² *Ibid*, pp. 9-10.

shoulders brought him from that agony of death; it was the oar of a lance of the steamship *Sicilia* so wounded, so battered he is picked up by the waters and carried on that steamer [...]. But the presence of his son miraculously saved calls him back to life.¹²³

Then, within three minutes, the *Ercolano* sank. The *Sicilia*'s culpable behaviour is insinuated when it is written that she «left that scene of horror too early and sailed for Genoa, and at half past one o'clock at night was seen in that port appearing with her, dragging signs of the misfortune caused: her progress was slow; a portion of the mainmast, the last relic of the lost *Ercolano*, was seen hanging from her».¹²⁴ Everyone in the port of Genoa realised that this was a shipwreck with sinking, and a serious one at that. There, «taciturn» shipwrecked passengers and men from *Sicilia* disembarked. Meanwhile, at daybreak, a small boat that had picked up some shipwrecked people disembarked with four people: the two helmsmen of the *Ercolano*, the stoker and the Englishman Carlo Sampson. On hearing of the casualty, French lieutenant Borrel, commander of the *Chacal* anchored in Cannes, moved into the Gulf of Antibes to look for other survivors and did not find them.

¹²³ *Ibid*, p. 12.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 13.



Robert Peel junior (1822-1895).

On the 26th Miceli left his detailed statement to the Royal Neapolitan Consulate in Genoa, followed by that of the crew. The captain and crew of the *Sicilia* also gave theirs. The Magistrate also heard from experts, seafarers and navigators who «gave their unanimous opinion, attributing the fatal collision to a lack of vision and calculation in the commander of the *Sicilia*».¹²⁵ Miceli was hospitalised for his injuries and all declared a reconstruction that seemed to agree with the commander of the *Ercolano*. In the meantime, experts surveyed the *Sicilia*, determined the characteristics of the collision and established that the damage

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 15.

suffered by that ship was 2455 lire.

Justice moved and on 4 May, the Magistrate of Genoa began his work but determined that, as both ships were kingly, the trial should take place in Naples - subject to minor facts to be judged in Marseilles - and determined that it was a culpable *offence* and not a *crime*.

Captain Michele d'Urso, rapporteur at the Maritime Court Martial, placed the two commanders under preventive arrest at the instructor's disposal until 13 December 1854 when, after discussing where the trial should have been held, by Sovereign Rescript the king decided on the Civil Grand Court of Messina acting as the Criminal Grand Court, and the two, released after six months in prison, moved to Palermo after posting bail of 200 ducats each.

The Sicilia's captain's mistake seemed obvious: the two steamers were running in a situation known as «opposite rhombus», they had sighted each other at a distance of four miles so, according to night navigation regulations, both had to sail keeping to their starboard side. Miceli had ordered two strokes of the bell and had left the entire left flank lit by the red light «so that the commander of the wood who was about to run him down could be warned of his position without a shadow of a doubt». Miceli accused the *Sicilia's* commander of neglecting the precepts of night navigation and miscalculating: he had, in short, deceived himself into believing that the *Ercolano* would pass him on his right in a two-mile parallel. And yet he could have remedied this if he had not made other fatal errors of maneuver. Miceli had proved on charts and with nautical calculations that the *Sicilia's* commander had given an incorrect reconstruction.

Carson, however, in his interrogation, took a different position, continuing to maintain that the two steamers were running in opposite

rhombus in a two-mile parallel, described the maneuver he had ordered, from the time he had detected the white light of the Ercolano by the foresail rigging, and how he had had to keep to his left when he discovered a green light, a sign, as he said, that a steamer was presenting him with a straight side: stated how that Steamer all of a sudden had shown him the red light, and how in spite of his just maneuvers the same had come to cross under the bow, and although he had given orders to stop the engine and turn back, the collision had taken place; deduced that Captain Miceli at the time of the collision was in his cabin sleeping when he should have been on watch, and added other particulars tending to corroborate this fact which he assumed to be justified, for he named no less than nine witnesses to the proof of his sayings, among whom was the Honourable Sir Robert Peel.¹²⁶

The naming of Robert Peel j. gave another weight to the affair, beyond the ascertainment of truth. Because the word of Robert Peel j., son of the very powerful Conservative politician Robert Peel (1788-1850) - twice prime minister and then again minister in key roles - himself a minister with important roles as an MP and then as a minister in the Liberal-Conservative party, had its own importance. Just then, in March 1855, Lord Palmerston, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, was about to appoint Robert Peel junior as Civil Lord of the Admiralty.

Moreover, Peel was an ardent supporter of Italian unification and an enemy of the Bourbon kingdom.¹²⁷ A colleague of his on the same ship, Thomas Halsey, had drowned together with his wife and small son, and there is no reason to believe that he could have covered up for Carson if the latter's conduct had caused such grief. It was this fact that partly weakened the verdict in favour of the Miceli's reconstruction despite the fact that Carson, in the

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 122.

¹²⁷ S.v. Peel Robert (1822-1895), *Dictionary of National Biography*, Smith, Elder & Co. 1885-1900.

reconstruction by many experts, had made fatal errors.

Carson was not an experienced steamship captain, he had indeed caused damage to the port of Marseilles, but the concurrence of guilt between the two captains was more serious in the case of Miceli if he really was absent from the steering position at the time of the impact. Was he? The cited defence examines in detail in 240 pages the reconstructions of the two. The officers of the *Ercolano* had on the whole done all they could do at that juncture. Definitive proof that Miceli was not at his post was not found: various testimonies intertwined, contradicting each other in a very complex circumstantial and accusatory picture that it would be futile, here, to attempt to reconstruct. A very detailed, technical *Rapporto sull'abbordaggio de' piroscafi Sicilia ed Ercolano*, compiled by the experts Mario Patrelli and Luigi Chrétien, captains of vessels, and the frigate captain Eugenio Rodriquez, placed the blame on Carson in 1858, before the final judgement.¹²⁸

Finally, the lengthy trial determined the guilt of Giovanni Carson (John Carson), convicted in Palermo and Marseilles, whose responsibility was recognised as “on that occasion proceeding in the night without the regulation lights”.¹²⁹ It was a long and complex trial, and a very expensive legal battle with dozens of witnesses, expert opinions, and various judgments.

What is most important to say here is that when it came to the Carson's conviction, the *Amministrazione* had in the meantime paid a lot of money to the lawyers, compensation that was in any

¹²⁸ Mario Patrelli - Luigi Chrétien - Eugenio Rodriquez, *Rapporto sull'abbordaggio de' piroscafi Sicilia ed Ercolano de' periti capitani di vascello Mario Patrelli e Luigi Chrétien e del capitano di fregata Eugenio Rodriquez*, Messina 1858.

¹²⁹ Lamberto Radogna, *Storia della Marina Mercantile delle Due Sicilie (1734-1860)*, Mursia, Milan 1982, p. 116.

case due to the British. And it had not received a ship instead of the *Ercolano*. The insurance company had not paid and when it came to discussing repayment of damages the financial hardship was considerable.

Chapter 12

The terrible mid-century

The troubles, however, were not over with the sinking of the *Ercolano*. A terrible cholera epidemic raged for a long time between 1854 and 1855 in all the coastal cities of the western Mediterranean, especially in France and Italy, hitting Naples in particular, where it also wreaked havoc among the upper classes. This prevented for a long time the inauguration of the new line between Marseilles and Trieste for which ships had been purchased to hold their own against the Genoese companies and the Sicilian Florios. This caused considerable damage. During the two years of inactivity, which lasted until the autumn of 1856, the ships were chartered for the Crimean War (5 October 1853 - 30 March 1856) but were damaged and ruined. The elegant clientele who had cruised on those ships and paid for comfortable transport did not want to travel on ruined, dirty, troop-worn ships. The two ships, some of which still had to be paid for, had to be refitted.¹³⁰

In those same years, two more of the six remaining steamships were put into storage for repair, including the *Capri*. The company thus found itself on the brink of bankruptcy and had to negotiate repayment terms for its debt. At that time, Domenico Laviano, the director, formerly Inspector General of the Post Office, finally succeeded in obtaining a government contract for the Company, which was entrusted with the postal service for the

¹³⁰ Lamberto Radogna, *Storia della Marina Mercantile delle Due Sicilie (1734-1860)*, cit., p. 120. However, few records are preserved on the episode.

year 1856-1857. In 1857, the contract was withdrawn and the following year it passed, with very advantageous conditions, to Florio. Another stroke of bad luck occurred on 17 September 1857 when the *Mongibello*, commanded by Domenico Ferrara, sank off the islands of Cap Cros, Hyeres the *Santa Annunziata* loaded with grain and cereals from the Sardinian company Rubattino. The *Amministrazione*, having quickly clarified the commander's error of manoeuvre, was ordered to pay compensation.

Nevertheless, the balance sheets of 1857-1858 went better and the company seemed to recover when the ships started sailing again. However, it was unable to pay the bond premiums. That year, unable to repay the bonds on their due dates, it proposed to its creditors to pay off the remainder through annual draws over ten years. Despite some discontent on the part of the creditors, this solution was adopted in 1857, 1858, 1859, 1860 and 1861. At a meeting in 1857, it was decided that the company would change its name from *Amministrazione* to *Compagnia di navigazione a Vapore delle Due Sicilie*, and Francesco Dentice, Carlo Lefèbvre, the Duke of Bivona, Ilario Degas and Giovanni del Gaudio joined the first Board of Directors.

However, Lefèbvre died suddenly at the beginning of that year, on 10 January 1858, and from then on the interests were held by the other member of the family who had already played an active role in running the company, Ernesto Lefèbvre. In the same months, Auguste Viollier, who was very old and ill, resigned. Captain Luigi Consiglio was called in to manage the company for a few years, and this decision may have been politically inappropriate, as Lamberto Radogna points out, because the man, although experienced, shrewd, with good relations in the world of seafaring, was much disliked by the sovereign for his liberal political ideas, as were Captains Cusmano and Ferrara. All of

them were suspected by the Bourbon police of favouring Neapolitan and Sicilian exiles who had taken refuge in Genoa or Palermo. Perhaps for this reason, the contract for the weekly postal service between Naples and Palermo, which was basically rewarded with 14,650 ducats per year (280 per trip), was revoked and entrusted to Florio.¹³¹

At the advent of the Unification of Italy, the *Compagnia* owned 6 steamships with a higher tonnage than the Rubattino Company, while the Florio Company, based in Palermo, owned 5. In those years, however, there were increasing difficulties in paying suppliers, especially repairers, as in the case of the *Maria Cristina*, which gave rise to a lawsuit.¹³² The question of the company's very survival therefore began to be raised. The administrators, and in particular the Director, were being attacked jointly and severally by creditors with a crescendo that made the situation untenable. As if that were not enough, the war also began. In October 1860, the *Sorrento* was confiscated by Garibaldi's provisional government to tow a brig loaded with passengers bound for Genoa (and from there probably to the Fenestrelle fortress).¹³³ In the meantime, Domenico Laviano was removed from his position as Inspector General of the Post Office, leaving any remaining possibility of obtaining that service from the government.¹³⁴

At the first post-unification meeting of the *Compagnia di*

¹³¹ Lamberto Radogna, *Storia della Marina Mercantile delle Due Sicilie (1734-1860)*, cit., p. 121.

¹³² ASN, Tribunale di Commercio of Naples, 54 - Volume 926 1859 Jan. 03 - 1860 Jan. 14 - Evaluation of the accounts of give/take between the parties for the repair of the steamer *Maria Cristina* today *Pompei*. Parties in dispute: Donzelli Antonio and *Compagnia di Navigazione a vapore (Regno delle due Sicilie)* / Viollier Augusto.

¹³³ *Gazzetta del popolo*, Naples, No. 280, 9 October 1860, p. 721.

¹³⁴ *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, 1935, p. 388.

Navigazione delle Due Sicilie, on 30 December 1861, Ernesto Lefèbvre was in possession of 6 shares out of 940 placed. A few weeks later, he acquired a further 3, or around 1%, and then a few more until he reached around 9,000 ducats, to which the approximately 65,000 ducats lent in 1852 had to be added. The Catalano-De Berner and Lefèbvre family groups were in fact the largest shareholders, while others began to sell. The *Compagnia* promoted bond purchase campaigns several times during those months, but, as is easy to understand, it was becoming increasingly difficult for them to be successful, also because of the war, the collapse of the Kingdom, changes of power, and the impossibility of resuming normal passenger traffic.

Another serious problem that had deprived the *Compagnia* oxygen was that it had been unable to obtain fixed services, postal and transport, from the state, although there had been efforts in this direction after the break of 1856-1857. The situation on this front had definitely deteriorated. The transport agreed by the newly united Kingdom of Italy was not granted. Its administrators protested when they discovered that some northern shipping companies, in particular Genoese and with Piedmontese capital, obtained conventions for postal transport from which southern companies were excluded outright. Controversy raged, protests were also raised through official channels and public statements that continued for some years. The *Compagnia* kept pressure on its contact in Genoa, Mr. Giulio Degrossi (who had an office at Strada Nuovissima 790), a man of long experience in the field, active in maritime transport since about 1830. He kept the Neapolitans informed of developments by shuttling between Genoa and Turin. In essence, the Post and Telegraph Director of the Piedmontese ministry believed that the *Compagnia* was in bad shape: it was, but the situation became untenable after 1860. He therefore preferred to exclude it from competitions and entrust the

contracted service to Piedmontese companies. The *Compagnia*'s directors responded by presenting the figures of the last balance sheet, from 1860, a balance sheet that was still positive. Despite the evidence, there was nothing to be done. To all intents and purposes, the Piedmontese government treated Naples and its industries as colonies to be exploited.¹³⁵

This statement can be nuanced, articulated, and distinctions can be made, but in perusing the rich bibliography specific to the southern economy in the period immediately following Unification, it is difficult to escape this impression. Other similar negotiations, in other sectors, ended in nothing and the lack of expected orders began to seriously deteriorate the company's profit and loss accounts.

¹³⁵ This is today historical evidence that is difficult to refute. One can at best compare classical and critical interpretations. One has to wonder whether many flourishing companies, such as those under discussion, would have gone bankrupt or closed down without this treatment. For a comparison of the various interpretations of the Risorgimento, see at least Lucy Riall, *Il Risorgimento. Storia e interpretazioni*, Donzelli, Rome 2007; Rosario Romeo, *Risorgimento e capitalismo*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1959; Aldo Servidio, *L'imbroglio nazionale. Unità e unificazione dell'Italia (1860-2000)*, Guida, Naples 2002; Antonio Nicoletta, "E furon detti Briganti...". *Mito e realtà della "Conquista del Sud"*, Il Cerchio, Rimini 2001.



Castellammare di Stabia shipyards, about 1865.

In that year, due to other difficulties, it became impossible for the company's exhausted coffers to pay debts of various kinds to its bondholders, lenders and third parties. In particular, Ernesto Lefèbvre, cavalier Enrico Catalano, Catalano's daughter and his sister-in-law, Gioacchino di Saluzzo, who was acting on behalf of his daughter Lucia, remained creditors of the company for large sums. Saluzzo had meanwhile granted a loan of around 30,000 ducats in 1863 to the company's administrator.

The General Assembly of 28 June 1864 denounced some of the main problems which, apart from dwindling liquidity, were creating great - but still not deemed insurmountable - difficulties for the *Compagnia*. In that same Assembly, Prince Ferdinando Pignatelli Strongoli (son of Francesco) was elected president and Pietro Prota, a former soldier and officer in the Bourbon army, was elected secretary.

On the Board of Directors sat Baron Gaetano Labonia, a notorious Garibaldian who would be active until almost the end of the century in several Neapolitan joint-stock companies. The presence of Gioacchino di Saluzzo, Labonia and many others close to the Risorgimento cause could not suggest that the *Compagnia di Navigazione* was a den of Bourbonists as was being claimed. However, all of them, if they did not become senators of the new kingdom like Saluzzo, had to swear allegiance to the new king, so suspicion of pro-Bourbonism was unlikely. Saluzzo and Labonia showed how still important notables in Naples were involved in the affairs of the troubled shipping company.

The Polluce case again

In August and September 1841, in an action unprecedented in the history of deep-sea shipping, an attempt was made to salvage the *Polluce* whose sinking point was marked by a cork float. The operation involved many vessels (10 ships), authorities and technicians and is recounted in the book *L'oro dell'Elba. Operazione Polluce* of 1982. Technically, it was an almost impossible operation, considering the state of the *Polluce*'s hull, which had been ripped open, and the depth of over 100 metres. After 40 days of work, the wreck had been lifted a few metres off the bottom; the operation seemed destined for success, but due to the unpredictability of the weather, they had to abandon the venture because of strong contrary currents. Raffaele Rubattino - who, moreover, like Guerrazzi, was a coalman - was in a hurry to recover the wreck with its "huge" contents, and the attempt cost

him about 50% of the cost of the ship itself.¹³⁶ This reason, and others - such as the fact that the ship contained gold that James (Jakob) Rothschild was having transported to Livorno - makes the sinking of the *Polluce* a fascinating historical enigma that has never been solved. Perhaps the ship was carrying gold that was meant to finance early insurrectional and unitary attempts? Was the *Mongibello* really given the task of sinking that cargo that Rubattino was desperately trying to salvage? These are questions that are beyond the scope of this writing. But it should be noted that they have been considered and that some support exists to back it up. Perhaps this interpretation, better substantiated, could explain the undoubted hostility that the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore* felt from the Genoese (the Rubattino was Genoese) and from the Savoy after the Unification. Other historical hypotheses hypothesise the existence of a cargo of about 170,000 coins loaded in Naples and intercepted by Bourbon spies, which would have involved hypothetical financing to the Russian consulate in Livorno for operations against the Kingdom: a hypothesis that is not very credible considering the good relations between the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the Russian Empire. Another hypothesis concerns the alleged existence of Rubattino's money from operations he did not want to make known. The most credible of all is now considered to be the trail that leads to the English Rothschilds, who certainly, from the cargo documents, carried valuables on the ship (and a lawyer for the Queen of England took an interest in the case) probably destined for political operations that had their head in the liberal or Carbonara community of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. What is testified in the newspapers of the time, such as the *Cronica delle Due Sicilie di C. de Sterlich dei marchesi di Cermignano*, is

¹³⁶ Enrico Cappelletti - Gianluca Mirto, *L'oro dell'Elba*, cit., pp. 172-191.

actually not so peregrine:

The whole cargo, however, was lost; with it two and a half thousand ducats of the house of Rothschild and about twelve that Messrs. Meuricroffe remitted to two houses in Genoa. There is no hope of salvaging anything, such being the depth of the waters in which the boat sank.¹³⁷

For bankers like the Rothschilds, who were certainly insured, 2000 ducats was certainly not much. Greater was the loss suffered by the Meuricroffe, who were loyal to the Bourbons and certainly did not finance subversive activities. Perhaps the ship was carrying something else that was not in the cargo registers? In fact, that cargo was of great interest: another attempt was made to recover it in 1859, and more in the following decades until 1982 and perhaps beyond.¹³⁸

Extreme remedies

The total shares at that time were 321 and the valid votes 125.¹³⁹ It was therefore reported that money was being sought for the *Capri*, evidently to return it to Gioacchino di Saluzzo who had financed the repair of the steamer, and for other debts. In vain. Neapolitan good society and French capitalists were no longer

¹³⁷ C[arlo] de Sterlich, *Cronica delle Due Sicilie di C. de Sterlich dei marchesi di Cermignano*, Tipografia Nobile, Naples 1841, p. 93.

¹³⁸ Enrico Cappelletti - Gianluca Mirto, *L'oro dell'Elba*, cit., pp. 228-232. The issue is complex, dealt with in many books from time to time and here, as mentioned, can only be touched upon.

¹³⁹ ASN, Fondo Ruffo di Bagnara, *Estratto delle deliberazioni dell'adunanza generale straordinaria degli azionisti nella tornata del 28 giugno 1864*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Naples 1864, p. 1.

willing to invest in the venture. Moreover, on 20 and 21 February and 27 and 28 March, the port of Naples had been hit by a strong gale with extremely violent winds that had damaged many ships, including two of the *Compagnia*'s ships moored in front of Via Piliero. In particular, the *Vesuvio* had suffered the breakage of the "starboard halyard" and the molinello or *paddle-box*, i.e. the sails, a mast, and expensive mechanical mechanisms. The damage was estimated at 38,510.34 Italian lire (9,062.88 ducats). There was a need to repair that boat as soon as possible and then continue with the repair of the *Capri*.

Apart from Saluzzo, none of the members had lent large sums, apart from the purchase of new shares of 500 ducats. As liquidity was scarce, it was announced that other debts had been contracted by acquiring loans on the market, totalling 120,106 lire (28,261 ducats) from 1 January 1864. Of the *Compagnia*'s six boats (*Capri*, *Vesuvio*, *Sorrento*, *Amalfi*, *Francesco I*, *Mongibello*) at that time, two were laid up. In order to meet the debts incurred, the decision was taken to issue new bonds for 120,000 lire, both for repairs and to meet debts falling due.¹⁴⁰ In the meantime, as we shall see, the board of directors in those very days closed an agreement to sell two more steamers, the *Sorrento* and the *Amalfi*, wronging mainly three creditors, Ernesto Lefèbvre, Enrico Catalano and the group composed of his (presumably adopted) daughter Luisa and his sister-in-law Marianna De Berner.

The next meeting took place on 28 November 1864, a few months before the bankruptcy.¹⁴¹ Notice of the meeting had been

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 2.

¹⁴¹ *Compagnia di Navigazione delle Due Sicilie. Estratto delle deliberazioni dell'adunanza generale straordinaria degli azionisti nella tornata del 28 novembre 1864*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Naples 1864.

given on the 12th and 15th of the same month in the *Giornale di Napoli*. Two members of the Neapolitan upper classes, Prince D'Angri (probably Marino Doria d'Angri, 1827-1905) and Baron Labonia, were appointed president and secretary of the meeting. The dramatic report was read by the latter who, in his words, mixed hope with difficulty but made no secret of the fact that the situation was becoming desperate. At the beginning of November, after lengthy repairs, the *Capri* had resumed its navigation on the Marseilles-Palermo route, a route that was also being travelled at the time by the *Vesuvio* and the *Mongibello*. The baron praised the efficiency of those vessels that carried passengers, goods and mail and, he added polemically, "without being obliged to do so by any government compensation". In fact, the official postal service had been entrusted for years to Florio, which could buy new boats with the money granted to it.

All efforts to have the boats chartered to the government had failed, it was pointed out, despite the director's best efforts. A contract was then announced with the Società di Industrie Meccaniche (the Macry & Soci) for the repair and maintenance of the steamships so that the repair shops owned by the *Compagnia* itself, which had become too expensive, could be closed. An attempt to sell boats to Tunis and Marseilles was also announced, which was unsuccessful (but in the meantime agreements were being finalised to sell the *Sorrento* and *Amalfi* boats, as is veiled). A total of 274 bonds had been sold and the repair of the *Capri* had been completed. At that point, evident internal lacerations emerged: Labonia criticised the Managing Director for failing to bring the *Compagnia* back to a more stable situation as had happened in previous crises, the last of which was that of 1857.

The latter, Federico Stolte, resigned, now disheartened.¹⁴² This rich Neapolitan businessman, very industrious, belonged to a conspicuous family of German origin. His adventure in maritime affairs, for the time being, ended there.

After a few years during which the directors tried to keep the Society afloat, cheques and bills of exchange began to be protested in 1864 and 1865. In particular, the director Ernesto Sideri personally risked arrest for the Society's debts. At the General Assembly of 18 November 1864, the plan was put forward to charter the two propeller steamers *Sorrento* and *Amalfi* to a company from Marseilles. At the time, however, only one could be chartered to the company *Clerc & C.*

At a subsequent extraordinary meeting, held on 25 January 1865, the Board of Directors revealed that the Managing Director had opened negotiations for the sale of the *Mongibello* in Marseilles. It was expected to yield 200,000 lire.¹⁴³ All that was obtained was a credit of 117,000 lire - although one had hoped for more - from *Clerc & C.* of Marseilles in exchange for an "insurance" - i.e. a form of preventive and non-enforceable attachment - on *Pompei* and *Mongibello*.¹⁴⁴ The Marseilles firm agreed to pay for various routes and to provide some cash but in a limited way compared to the Neapolitan company's needs: the *Compagnia*'s poor state of health made more decisive exposures difficult.

The board also revealed that it had opened negotiations to sell the *Stromboli* and the *Amalfi* (renamed *Sorrento*) and that it had

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p. 3.

¹⁴³ *Compagnia di Navigazione delle Due Sicilie. Estratto delle deliberazioni dell'adunanza generale straordinaria degli azionisti nella tornata del 25 gennaio 1864*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Naples 1864, p. 1.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 2.

received offers of 80,000 lire for the former and 100,000 lire (much less than the loans of Ernesto Lefèbvre, De Berner and Catalano) for the latter, offers that were expected to be accepted, subject to the approval of the shareholders that was required. The board of directors, however, made no mention of the privileged loan bonds inscribed on the two steamers in favour of Lefèbvre, Catalano and De Berner: this would give rise to a ten-year lawsuit with the small group of financiers who had lent money to the company.

The lack of prospects, the government's deafness, the impossibility of obtaining new capital in Naples and Marseilles, forced the sale or decommissioning of all the steamships except the *Capri* and *Vesuvio*, which were still profitable, giving up other lines, such as the Adriatic or for the ports of the Near East or even the extension of the lines to Palermo. With the expiry of the Officine's 400 ducats a year rent, they took the opportunity to close them down by dismissing the technicians and clerks and keeping only one or two people for administrative duties.

We will also painfully dismiss many of our employees, limiting it to only the director who is indispensable for our statutes and a few others who are purely necessary. We promise ourselves an economy of approximately 7,000 lire per annum on this side. We have also prepared a new combination for the crews of the two steamers that we keep in operation for the Marseilles line, which will bring us another economy of approximately 16,000 lire per annum.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 3-4.

Chapter 13

The End

Gales

On 15 March 1865, a crowded, dramatic general meeting of shareholders met again in the company's premises at vico Piliero 21 to hear the Board's report on the state of affairs. From the report it emerged that the Board of Directors with a private deed made in Naples on 15 February 1865 had sold the *Stromboli* and the *Amalfi* for 180,000 lire (100,000 for the *Stromboli* and 80,000 for the *Amalfi* now called *Sorrento*) to Giuseppe (Joseph) Cartoux from Marseilles (we do not know his age but he died around 1871). The latter was reported to have been domiciled in Naples at Strada Grottone di Palazzo no. 52 as a merchant of various kinds. Since his widow, Elisabetta Fiedler (widowed in 1872), was still living in Naples in the following decades (she was, among other things, Nino Bixio's correspondent), it must be assumed that Cartoux had fixed his residence in Italy. At that point, counting on the fact that there had been an injection of liquidity, the bondholders demanded payment of their sums without mentioning the loan taken out by the lenders and arguing that their claims should be transferred to a third steamer, the wheel steamer *Vesuvio*. It is difficult to escape the suspicion, put forward by other historians, that Cartoux had been a front man and had made the purchase on behalf of others.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ *Fra Spazio e tempo: studi in onore di Giuseppe de Rosa*, II, Edizioni

By that time, the two steamers were already in the port of Marseilles. The agreement for the sale of the two steamers had been closed between 13 and 15 July 1864. Subsequently, what was called the “purge” of all claims and obligations had been carried out by having the ship travel “under the flag”, i.e. on behalf of a certain Mr. Tessier (probably a front man for Cartoux) who had chartered the *Sorrento* for 15 months (at 4,250 lire per month for the first year and 4,675 for the following months) to sail it from one side of the Mediterranean to the other. It was only after this transaction that payment had been made. The Board of Directors declared that they were obliged to «guarantee the purchaser against any harassment that might be caused to him at any time by anyone who might claim to have any right or to be able to experience any reason or dominion or credit whatsoever on the two ships».¹⁴⁷

After the turn of events, «for reasons of mere delicacy», the board of directors resigned en bloc. Feeling that their rights had been seriously violated, Ernesto Lefèvre and his brother-in-law Gioacchino di Saluzzo tried to get themselves elected among the new directors at a meeting on 9 April 1864 in order to take a more active role in the management of the company, but Lefèvre was defeated in a ballot.¹⁴⁸ Protests and executions began to rain down on the company’s directors in the meantime. The liquidation management had to be appointed. The list of nominees included Eduardo Degas (uncle and namesake of the painter Edgar Degas), Federico Laviano del Tito,¹⁴⁹ the Count of Montesantangelo, but

scientifiche italiane, Rome 1995, p. 281.

¹⁴⁷ *Causa legale (Lawsuit)*, cit., p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 183-184.

¹⁴⁹ The painter Edgar Degas lived in Naples between 1854 and 1857 but never entered into the financial affairs of his wealthy Neapolitan family who lived in a palace that had belonged to the Pignatelli Strongoli

also Federico Stolte, the Prince of Alessandria, the Count of Balsorano, the Duke of Cardinale, Gaetano Labonia, Augusto Sideri and Gioacchino di Saluzzo.

Saluzzo and De Riso, proposed to lead the assembly, refused, anticipating stormy discussions. In the meantime, Ernesto Lefèbvre, who failed by a few votes to join the board of directors, became an alternate director. Angelo Persico was then appointed company director. In the following days, another meeting: it was admitted that it had been impossible to pay a debt to Gioacchino di Saluzzo and the bill of exchange had gone into protest. The 180,000 lire from the sale of the *Stromboli* and the *Sorrento* had not been enough, but with that money, debts and obligations with Mr. Tessier, the Banca di Credito Italiano, Mr. Stolte and Messrs. Patania, Imperato and Degas had been settled.¹⁵⁰ At that point, however, a dramatic conclusion was reached.

Gentlemen! The state or rather the progress of the company, as everyone can see from the things stated, has become difficult and rough, both because of the amount of the bonds and because of the decrease in the movement of goods and passengers. Nor can this be borne by anyone, while the Postal Vapors subsidised by the Government, travelling from one end of Italy to the other, prevent others from running the same line with useful enterprise.

Added to this fact is the absolute lack of working capital, and that the express debts at the head of the Company make it impossible to attempt or activate any other line of exchange than the one hitherto held on the shores of Italy. And yet, again in our opinion, it seems that there is no other way to resolve the social ambage than to proceed with the

family.

¹⁵⁰ *Compagnia di Navigazione delle Due Sicilie. Estratto delle deliberazioni dell'adunanza generale straordinaria degli azionisti nella tornata del 15 marzo 1865*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Naples 1865, pp. 5-6.

liquidation of the Company, while prolonging it would no longer be possible without greater harm to those concerned.¹⁵¹

According to Lefèbvre's lawyers, that «proceeding» was irregular, and was certainly fraudulent even if it had been carried out in accordance with law and custom because it deprived Lefèbvre, Catalano and the Berners of a large claim of their own. A few days after the purchase contract was signed, the parties appeared before Notary Moreno of Naples and signed a contract dated 25 February 1865.

The parties by private contract dated 15 February *mutually agreed to the sale of the Sorrento and the Stromboli*. This writing, by which the full price of 180,000 lire was paid to the selling *Compagnia*, was registered and the parties have now deposited it with a notary to fulfil the law's vow that the sale must be by authentic deed. Therefore, the members of the Board of Directors declare that they absolutely must sell the steamships to Mr. Cartoux. The purchase price of 180,000 lire *has already been paid by the selling Compagnia*. The purchaser Cartoux will follow up at the Navy Consulate in Naples the transfer of ownership of the two ships in his head, which will follow the Italian flag, by which they are covered. "The buyer, therefore, who on 15 February was obliged to pay the price after the purging of the vessels from the affections by which they were burdened, paid that price ten days later without fearing that creditors would exercise their rights! We take note of this circumstance, which further reveals the concert between contracting parties to the detriment and disregard of creditors" rations.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 6.

¹⁵² ASN, Tribunale di Commercio, Atti depositati. *I creditori a cambio marittimo su ' vapori Sorrento e Stromboli contro il signor Cartoux*, 20 September 1866, Stamperia del Fibreno, Naples 1866, p. 6.

In closing, Gennaro de Riso, Ernesto Lefèvre's partner and lawyer, asked whether guarantees for various kinds of loans had been passed on the *Vesuvio*. The question was answered that they were guaranteed and that among the bondholders were the two largest: Ernesto Lefèvre (8,900 ducats, plus credit for the loan) and the Berner sisters (14,900, plus credit for the loan).¹⁵³ A subsequent meeting was then convened for 1 May 1865, which would be the last and would simply prepare the paperwork for the delivery of the books to the court.

A long legal case

As we have seen, in 1865, as soon as Gennaro de Riso and Ernesto Lefèvre became aware of the extrajudicial proceedings at a shareholders' meeting, they resigned from their positions in the company and filed a lawsuit, the former as lawyer and the latter as plaintiff. De Riso, a good friend of Ernesto Lefèvre, whose house he frequented, belonged to a wealthy Neapolitan family of lawyers and professionals with interests in various fields. He was also a shareholder in the Banca del Popolo, with a large number of shares.

They protested against the procedure and ordered the buyer to reimburse them. A lawsuit was brought against the Count of Balsorano, Enrico Catalano, Marianna and Luisa de Berner on one side and Giuseppe Cartoux on the other. The summons was issued on 3 August 1865. Shortly afterwards they were joined by Gioacchino di Saluzzo, who was acting on behalf of his younger daughter. Gioacchino, however, had more than one case open with the *Compagnia*: he had initiated a lawsuit for a loan of 7,000

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 7.

ducats taken out in 1863, which had been protested at the beginning of March 1865. It should also be noted that the lawsuits pitted two groups of Neapolitan notables against each other: the Count of Montesantangelo and Ilario Degas, on the one hand, and Lefèbvre and Saluzzo, on the other. The legal battle was bitter, costly, protracted and, as we shall see, lasted for over 10 years. Given the tone of the various documents, most of which are preserved in the State Archives in Naples, it is likely that personal relationships were at stake. The sums involved were enormous, and the bankruptcy of a company that employed hundreds of people went into liquidation even before Lefèbvre and Saluzzo's lawsuit.

In any case, the lawsuit was brought against Giuseppe Cartoux, who was ordered to pay the sums owed to him as a maritime exchange creditor of the steamers *Sorrento* and *Stromboli*, viz to the Count of Balsorano, for 23,375 lire on the *Sorrento*, calculated as five bonds of 500 ducats (the figure seems to have been devalued) and six on the *Stromboli*; and to Messrs. Catalano and De Berner, for 57,375 lire, for fifteen bonds on the *Sorrento* and twelve on the *Stromboli*.

The applicants also claimed interest on these sums and court costs. Joining the main claim was Gioacchino di Saluzzo who demanded payment of four bonds held by his younger daughter Lucia, daughter of Marie-Louise Lefèbvre. Cartoux defended himself by having his lawyers say that those who had sued him did not possess privileged claims on the vessels *Sorrento* and *Stromboli*, either because they had consented to the sale by transferring their rights to the *Vesuvio* or because the buyer had purged the vessels of all privileged claims. Reference was made, in this case, to an article of maritime commercial law (Laws of Exception, Art. 199) according to which ships that had sailed to other ports, under the name of another shipowner for more than

60 days and without the owners, or creditors, objecting, could pass into their ownership. Faced with reasons thus stated, the petitioners' lawyers then asked: «If the shipowner has a vessel built without his own pecuniary means, and borrows it from others and uses the money to make that purchase; would we deny the lender the right to be reimbursed with privilege from the thing bought with his pecuniary means?».¹⁵⁴

Lefèbvre's lawyers protested that, as a matter of law, the writs of 1852 and 1853 explicitly conferred on their clients the privilege arising from the special *Amministrazione* of the money for the purchase of the *Sorrento* and the *Stromboli*, without which the steamers could not have been purchased by the *Amministrazione*, then the *Compagnia di Navigazione a Vapore delle Due Sicilie*. This credit privilege was not only authorised by law but formally permitted by the interested party, and published in the Registry of the Court of Commerce.

Creditors are granted a privilege, giving them a special mortgage on the body, tools, machinery and equipment of the new steamers; a privileged mortgage over any other credit, for having served the money for the construction of the ships.

Ernesto Lefèbvre had not consented to the sale proposed by the *Compagnia*'s board of directors, which was instead approved by the shareholders' meeting, but the shareholders were debtors. Lefèbvre intervened in the meeting of 25 January 1865, when the sale was authorised, but as a creditor, because he had signed the company's resolution with the clause that he «*reserved the right to assert his privileged creditor rights over the steamers that were*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 9.

being sold».¹⁵⁵ Mr. Cartoux, when he became the buyer of the ships, had certain knowledge of the resolution authorising the sale and found Lefèbvre's reservation written in it. It was pointed out that the ship had departed in Cartoux's name and risk, after the agreement, from the port of Naples where its former owner was and where the creditors lived. The latter should have immediately objected to the departure: but the creditors, who were not part of the direct Amministrazione of the company and were lenders, could not know that a ship had left to "purge the afficiencies".¹⁵⁶ Not even notices of departure were posted, as was usually done in the newspapers or at the gates of the City of Naples. After that, the steamships had never returned to Naples, as was certified by the commander of the port of Naples.

I certify that from the registers existing in this office it appears that the national steamer *Sorrento* under command of Vincenzo Sacco on November 29, 1864 received from the said Command the regular shipments to leave for Marseille, and the other national steamer *Stromboli*, under command of Bartolomeo Monti, received again the shipment to Marseille on January 25, 1865. Following the departure of said two steamships, up to this date *they have not docked in this port. Naples 17 August 1865 - signed Negri Captain of the port.*¹⁵⁷

Despite good reasons, the lawsuit was lost by Lefèbvre and partners in the first instance. The first section of the Court of Commerce of Naples proved the creditor wrong and relieved the

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 14.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 16. "For the purpose of executing the purge of any obligation or credit, privileged or unsecured, it is agreed that the price will only be paid after two months counting from the day on which the law declares the purge to have taken place according to the different cases indicated in articles 199 and 200 of the laws of exception". *Ibid*, p. 17.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 19-20.

company's main managers and board members from all liability: Cavaliere Domenico Laviano, Giuseppe Pignone del Carretto, Prince of Alessandria, Baron Gaetano Labonia, Edgardo Degas, Count of Montesantangelo Nicola Serra, Luciano Serra Duca di Cardinale, and Giuseppe Cartoux. The court also rejected the possibility of sentencing the Serras, Pignone del Carretto, Laviano, Labonia, Cartoux, Degas and others jointly and severally with provisional arrest.

The case was lost by Ernesto Lefèvre and partners not because the existence of the claim was contested but because it was not claimed before the company's bankruptcy. It was therefore disputed on the merits of privileged credits: which should be repaid first and which not; it was declared that at the time of the company's bankruptcy, declared on 25 November 1865, the *Stromboli* and the *Sorrento* were already alienated (they had been in January of that year). The two steamers, therefore, were not part of the bankruptcy assets.

[...]. Observe, that it is a very serious mistake to oppose to the purchaser, Mr. Cartoux the right to discuss the entitlement of the privilege claimed by the plaintiffs and the intervener on the *Stromboli* and *Sorrento* steamers. And truly, if the privileged quality of the claim is the basis of the action that is tried against the third possessor, it would be against reason and justice to deny him the right to search, if the plaintiffs are each in the condition required by law to pursue the thing when it is passed into alien dominion. That the claims of the plaintiffs and the intervener originate from the contracts of 1 October 1852 and 21 April 1853 by which the Navigation Company of the two Sicilies, in order to buy the steamer *Sorrento* and to meet the cost of the *Amalfi*, which was then called the *Stromboli*, contracted a loan of several thousand divided into shares. [...]. However, in the one and the other it was expressly agreed that the Amministrazione would take upon itself all the risks of the navigation of the ships that would have to be insured

at its own expense in London from the moment their construction was completed until their arrival. [...]. A debtor cannot create in favour of one of his creditors a privilege that is not among those established by law. Therefore, whatever the stipulations made between the Navigation Company and the lenders, in order to determine whether or not they have a privilege over the steamers the *Sorrento* and the *Stromboli*, it is necessary to ascertain whether the nature and conditions of the loan are such that they fall within one of the cases of privilege established by law.

The privilege cannot be inferred from the fact that the contracts state that the sums borrowed for the purchase of the *Sorrento* and the *Amalfi* are to be served, because among the various privileged claims on ships established by article 197 of the *Leggi eccezionali* (transl. Exceptional Laws), the sums borrowed for the purchase of the ship are certainly not read. It is true that they speak of the sums owed to the seller, to the suppliers and artists employed in the construction, and to the creditors for the outfitting of the ships, but, apart from the fact that the privileges modify the general rule according to which all the debtor's goods are the common property of his creditors, the provisions establishing them must be applied in the same way as the general rule according to which all the debtor's goods are the common property of his creditors. If this privilege could be extended to the lenders of the money paid to the vendors, to the purveyors, to the artists, it would have been extinguished by the fact that these ships had sailed in the name of the company for a number of years. And if the reason for the privilege of the common law could be established, it would not even support the privilege claimed by Messrs. Lefèbvre, Catalano, de Berner and Saluzzo. In fact, article 1971 L.C. does not include among the privileged claims for furniture money lent for the purchase of movable property, and in the case of immovable property, article 1972 number two of the said laws grants the privilege to whoever lends money for the purchase of said property, but requires the condition [...] that it be authentically proved by the deed of loan that the sum was intended for such use, and by the receipt from

the seller, and by the deed of payment itself, that the payment of the price was made with the money lent.¹⁵⁸

The privilege claimed by Messrs. Lefèbvre, Catalano, De Berner and Saluzzo cannot even be derived from the fact that the money was supposed to be lent by way of maritime exchange. In a maritime loan, the borrower is released from the obligation to repay the principal and the interest if the ship is lost during the voyage. If, on the other hand, the voyage is successful, the borrower is obliged to pay, in addition to the principal sum, a nautical interest, that is, higher than the legal interest on money, which is the price of the rice to which the lender has exposed himself. The essence of this contract, therefore, is that the lender is exposed to the consequences of the risk of the sea and has no other liability than that arising from the goods on which the loan is made. Now, in the above-mentioned contracts, not only does the obligation to expose the lender to the risks of the sea not disappear, but, on the contrary, we read that the borrowing company assumed all the risks of the navigation of the vessel and also promised to insure the two vessels. If, therefore, the loan granted by the aforesaid contracts cannot be regarded as a maritime exchange, the privilege of s. 196(9) cannot be invoked in respect of the sums so borrowed. The agreement cannot extend to an ordinary loan the privilege inherent in a maritime exchange loan.¹⁵⁹

For these reasons, primarily, the application was dismissed. Because the loan of a “real estate” purchased by the bankrupt company, which was subject to the risks of the business according to the rules of the so-called “maritime exchange”, could not be

¹⁵⁸ The point of the case revolved at length around the interpretation to be given to certain lines of the Laws of Exception in force in the early years of Unity, but later amended, which attributed to ships the status of immovable and not movable property.

¹⁵⁹ ASN, Tribunale di Commercio, *Conte di Balsorano e altri contro Cartoux*, 13 March 1867, pp. 13-20.

included among the privileged claims. That claim was therefore subject to the risks of the sea.

On 10 August 1868, Gennaro de Riso presented a new petition, very articulate and comprehensive, that rediscussed the whole matter: the claim of Lefèbvre and associates was admitted but the rules of alienation of a vessel had to be rediscussed. The case had several hearings during the autumn of 1868 and January 1869 but was again rejected. Again, Lefèbvre and associates filed an application for annulment in 1871. Again, rejected and for the same reasons.

The last official document relating to the dispute is dated 1874. It is an appeal by Lefèbvre, Saluzzo and Catalano against Cartoux, the text of which was printed by the Stamperia del Fibreno. Giuseppe Cartoux had died, probably in 1870. His wife, Elisabetta Fiedler, was sued. According to the records, neither Lefèbvre nor any of the others ever received their money back, as there are no other documents to prove that the case continued. Gioacchino di Saluzzo died in 1874. In practice, Gennaro de Riso's long-standing claim, written by Gennaro de Riso together with Angelo Mele and Giuseppe Castrone, was not granted.

In a document signed on 6 June 1876, there is evidence that the dispute continued, although the document submitted to the court has not yet been found; the text is written by Ernesto Lefèbvre in his own hand, and we read of his willingness to continue the lawsuit: "Gennaro de Riso, together with Angelo Mele and Giuseppe Castrone, wrote the lawsuit.

Declaration of the Count of Balsorano Ernesto Lefèbvre and of Enrico Catalano in the case against Giuseppe Cartoux and his heir.

We, the undersigned Counts of Balsorano and Enrico Catalano, in the case that we, together with the Lady Duchess of Bagnara, have argued before the Second Section of the Court of Appeal of Naples in the

degree of referral of the Court of Cassation, have rejected the petitions forwarded against the late Mr. Giuseppe Cartoux. Because we believe that the sentence of the Court of Appeal has the result of law and deeds, and for facts contradicted by the deeds in our possession, we have decided to appeal the second time to the Court of Cassation [with] Mr. Duke of Bagnara, legitimate administrator of a cassante.

In order not to end the dispute, we have asked the Bagnara couple to join us in the production of such a new souvenir, which they have agreed to do on the condition that we bear their responsibility for the greater expenses that will be incurred. We will therefore pay with our own money the expenses that the Bagnara family will incur for this new experiment.

Naples, 6 June 1876. Written by Ernesto Conte di Balsorano and signed by Enrico Catalano.¹⁶⁰

Ernesto Lefèbvre and Enrico Catalano attempted an annulment of the previous ruling, also calling the Dukes of Bagnara into their attempt. There is no proof that this attempt was completed or even that it was only begun. The above-mentioned text is handwritten.

Gioacchino di Saluzzo, known for his choleric temperament and the violent passion with which he tackled his business affairs, had been involved in another parallel dispute, already mentioned, against two partners of the *Compagnia di Navigazione a Vapore Delle Due Sicilie* in the years between 1863 and his death. On 25 November 1863, in fact, rather imprudently, he had personally lent 29,750 lire (equivalent to 7,000 ducats) to the then director of the *Società Anonima di Navigazione*, Angelo Prota, and to the managing partner (administrative director) Domenico Laviano. The sum, a loan (thus a private bank action but registered in the form of a promissory note), was granted for the “refitting” of the

¹⁶⁰ Archivio di Stato di Napoli, Archivio Ruffo di Bagnara, Part II, Various 213.

steamship *Capri*, which had been damaged during a storm in the port and had caused damage to other ships belonging to the *Compagnia*. This dispute was completely independent of the one involving his daughter Lucia, Ernesto Lefèbvre and the Catalano-De Berner family group.

The loan granted by Saluzzo was for 15 months and five days and had to be paid back by the end of February 1865, but by then the company was already in bad shape and the sum was not paid. The craftsmen who had renovated the *Capri* were also not paid, and they in turn sued the company, which found itself in a concentric firestorm of demands for payment.

A rejected payment was lodged and the Marquis Gioacchino di Saluzzo demanded that the money be returned. In the meantime, the positions in the company had changed, and the unfortunate one was Angelo Persico, who was protested on 2 March 1865 in his capacity as director of the company, and on the following 7 March he was ordered to appear to pay the sum of 29,750 lire, also with personal money.

Saluzzo also requested that he be arrested for the debt, if necessary. A few days later, however, before the end of November that year, the company was declared in bankrupt and the entire dispute was passed on to the liquidators.

Chapter 14

Consequences

The Port of Naples (1863-1883)

While the drama of the first Neapolitan steamship company was unfolding, the authorities were discussing major works that were to be carried out right in front of Via Piliero where the *Compagnia* had its headquarters, in what was called the Neapolitan *dock*, where the steamboats would drop anchor. The engineer Giustino Fiocca had proposed a project in 1856, which was discussed by special commissions, as evidenced in various publications such as *Studi sul porto di Napoli per la camera di commercio e arti* (1863).¹⁶¹ An inconvenience had to be overcome: the busy Via del Piliero ran between the port and the customs house, so that goods had to reach the customs house by passing a canal that ran under the street to reach the Mandracchio marina. This inconvenience was remedied with a series of works that would be carried out in the following years and that would extend the harbours and “colmate” (docks) that would widen the base of Via Piliero - already joined to Via della Marina - completely changing the layout of the area and the management of the dock. These were improvements that would increase the management costs, in prospect, and which could not be tackled by the company. It was

¹⁶¹ *Studi sul porto di Napoli per la camera di commercio e arti*, Stabilimento Tipografico Banchi Nuovi, Naples 1863.

not until 1883, after much discussion, that the project to modify the harbour would begin.¹⁶²

Conventions

In 1858, the Italian government had decided to grant the state postal service to the *Rubattino and Florio Company* until 1865 inclusive, so the Neapolitan company, crushed by competition and with no hope of obtaining orders, closed in 1865 due to bankruptcy. Before bankruptcy, however, the *Compagnia's* director, Mr. Laviano, manager of the Royal Post Office, asked for and obtained a last, useless and perhaps humiliating meeting at the Ministry, in Turin, to support the Genoese agent Degrossi. As usual, he was told that it was being considered to grant only one company the contracted services. Much to Laviano's surprise, he later learned that, in fact, the conventions had been divided among several companies, but all of them from the north, particularly Genoa.¹⁶³

Finally, a liquidation commission was appointed, which decided to dismiss all employees and crew members of the ships, effective 30 September.¹⁶⁴ Angelo Persico was appointed custodian of the steamships pending their sale on 15 November. The first auction

¹⁶² Giuseppe Acocella, ed., *Lo Stato e il Mezzogiorno: a ottanta anni dalla legge speciale per Napoli*, Guida, Naples 1986, p. 83. On the port area that was about to undergo great transformations see Vincenzo D'Auria, *Dalla Darsena all'Immacolatella* in "Napoli nobilissima", v. I, (1892), p. 157; Antonio Colombo, *I porti e gli arsenali di Napoli* in "Napoli nobilissima", v. III (1894), pp. 142-143.

¹⁶³ Luigi de Matteo, "Noi della meridionale Italia", cit., p. 182. See also Lamberto Radogna, *Storia della Marina Mercantile delle Due Sicilie (1734-1860)*, Mursia, Milan 1982.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 202.

was deserted or did not take place (it is not clear), but by the end of the year most of the *Compagnia*'s assets were sold.

In fact, the bankruptcy hearings continued throughout 1866 and 1867. Until, at the hearing of 9 July 1867, the Court of Cassation in Rome declared inadmissible all the objections that had been filed in the meantime as a last ditch attempt to save what could be saved. The *Compagnia*'s remaining assets were therefore definitively liquidated and the company ceased to exist.¹⁶⁵

According to Luigi de Matteo, with the *Compagnia di Navigazione* (which was close to the milestone of 25 years of activity, from 1841-1865, from 30 considering the year 1823 when Sicard began), Naples and the Mezzogiorno «lost an active and competitive company», a company «endowed with conspicuous capital and the expression of consolidated entrepreneurial skills» and which, unlike the three subsidised companies in the North, was a joint-stock company, i.e. it had a structure suited to expansion, widespread shareholding and was not a company concentrated in a few hands.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, an examination of the company's records from 1840 to 1860 shows that the shareholders were increasingly numerous and belonged to the *crème de la crème* of Neapolitan society.

Perhaps it was disadvantaged because it was judged pro-Bourbon? So it is written, among other things, in the book dedicated to the Florio company.¹⁶⁷ Certainly the perception of this dynastic nostalgia existed but it was not widespread among

¹⁶⁵ *La Legge. Monitore giudiziario e amministrativo del Regno d'Italia*, Tuesday 6 August n. 63 (year VII), Rome 1867, pp. 750-751.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 206-207.

¹⁶⁷ Orazio Cancilia *I Florio. Storia di una dinastia imprenditoriale*, Bompiani, Milan 2008 (2019 edition, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli), pp. 120-125 et seq.

the protagonists of the company who were, for the most part, businessmen. More likely, the other companies enjoyed better political referents. Ultimately, the fate of the promising *Compagnia di Navigazione a vapore delle Due Sicilie* was also sacrificed by unfair lobbying.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, its collapse had a depressing effect on the Neapolitan economy.

In September 1865, hundreds of workers, porters, sailors, maintenance mechanics, shipboard and transport personnel lost their jobs. Hundreds more lost their jobs working in the workshops where periodic refitting was carried out. Several thousand, counting the ancillary industries, were reduced to poverty. Among them, many were forced to emigrate on the steamships that were starting to leave for the Americas.

The *Compagnia*'s steamships continued their life for a few decades, until, generally before 1914, they were dismantled because they were too obsolete. Unlike the Neapolitan *Compagnia* its most direct competitor, the *Società dei vapori siciliani* founded by Vincenzo Florio and partners in 1840, was able to overcome the pre- and post-Unitarian straits because it was granted a lucrative postal transport agreement by the Bourbon Kingdom but also by the unified government of the Kingdom of Italy. In addition, there was a majority partner in it who put money earned from the flourishing Marsala trade into the company; the Florio family invested a great deal of money and managed the company directly, eventually merging in 1881 with another company that had expanded in the meantime, *Rubattino* of Genoa.

The history of the former *Sicard*, then *Compagnia di*

¹⁶⁸ Lamberto Radogna, *Storia della Marina Mercantile delle Due Sicilie (1734-1860)*, Mursia, Milan 1982, p. 56 ssg. and p. 119 ssg.

Navigazione a Vapore delle Due Sicilie, is highly indicative of the characteristics of the transport industry in the Bourbon capital: on the one hand, attentive to modernisation, on the other hand, dependent on foreign technology and also squeezed by liquidity constraints. However, it has often been pointed out that the total number of Bourbon ships tripled between 1818 and 1860, and at the time of unification represented 40 per cent of all Italian shipping. Of course, this was also due to geographical reasons: a large part of the Lombardy-Venetia region could not take part in this competition, but Genoa could. To sum up, a recent author, Maurizio Lupo, recalls that the technology was foreign and that, apart from the cases of the companies that used steamers with propellers or wheels, most of them still used sails after 1860; on the other hand, the average tonnage was rather low, many ships had wooden hulls and most of the ships were used for cabotage or fishing. Moreover, due to historical circumstances and the growing importance of Atlantic and Pacific trade, the Bourbon Navy began to find itself behind the times and cut off from the main international trade routes. However, as it turned out, the same shortcomings of the Bourbon navy could also be attributed to the Italian navy in general.¹⁶⁹

As already noted, for example, by Luigi de Matteo, the *Compagnia di Navigazione a Vapore*, at the time of its closure, or at least shortly before its closure, was Italy's largest shipowner in terms of ship tonnage (if one excludes warships, of course). Its six steamships still active at the time of Unity had a net tonnage of over 1,800 against the 1,329 of the six smaller *Rubattino*'s

¹⁶⁹ Maurizio Lupo, *Il calzare di piombo: materiali di ricerca sul mutamento tecnologico*, Franco Angeli, Milan 2017, p. 45. In general, the contribution by P. Frascani, *A vela e a vapore. Economie, culture e istituzioni del mare in Italia nell'Ottocento*, Donzelli, Rome 2001.

ships.¹⁷⁰ Immediately after came *Florio & C.*

The allied industries, as mentioned above, were considerable. The Pietrarsa workshops, which provided maintenance and repair services for the ships and also built boilers, employed 800 workers, generally specialised workers. In those same years, the Castellammare di Stabia shipyards employed no less than 3,400 workers, including specialised workers, labourers and clerks, figures that allowed a comparison on a par with the Genoa shipyards.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Luigi de Matteo, “*Noi della meridionale Italia*”, cit., p. 149 ssg.

¹⁷¹ Luigi de Rosa, *Iniziativa e capitale straniero nell'industria metalmeccanica del Mezzogiorno 1840-1904*, Giannini, Naples 1968, p. 63. From the data reported by De Rosa, it appears that the railway and naval metalworking factories in Naples had the same numbers as the workshops in Sampierdarena.

Chapter 15

The Shipping Company of the Kingdom and Southern Italy

The troubled history of the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore* then *Compagnia di Navigazione* is unique in the history of shipping companies in the South. Completely unprecedented was its ability to attract investors in share (bond) placement operations, which at that time, in 1840, involved around 200 people and at least sixty family groups. Numbers varied but at times reached over 300 people. The fact that half were French confirms the importance that *négociants* of that nationality had with the Neapolitan city. Naples was very much linked with the Midi of France, with Montpellier but above all with the great port city of Marseilles. Then there had been the French Decade that had brought with it dark sides but also very positive aspects, of technical and bureaucratic modernisation that were then permanently absorbed.

The above-mentioned tariff concessions, which encouraged transport by steamship, were taken advantage of by the Sicilian entrepreneur Vincenzo Florio (1799-1868), a merchant active in various sectors, from tobacco to wine, and whose story has been recounted in studies and books.¹⁷² Vincenzo Florio is today much better known than the pioneering animators and capitalists of Neapolitan society. In the Sicilian case, the foreigners who had

¹⁷² Orazio Cancilia, *I Florio. Storia di una dinastia imprenditoriale*, Bompiani, Milan 2008 (2019 edition, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli).

the most interest in doing business on the island were the British. The latter had their military and commercial stronghold in Malta but did not disdain the Italian island, which could supply products much in demand by the British. For instance, they maintained a hold on the island for the extraction of sulphur in the *first place* - sulphur that they could obtain in abundance and at low prices due to an agreement from which the Kingdom tried to extricate itself several times - but they were also interested in wines, Marsala above all. Florio went into partnership in 1840 with the wealthy Englishman Benjamin Ingham (1810-1872) to found a shipping company.

The *Società dei Battelli a vapore siciliani* was founded by Florio and Ingham, his partner in many businesses (especially Marsala wine), with a smaller group of investors than the Neapolitan company (120 partners) and a capital of 35,000 onze (about 210,000 ducats). The declared aim was to break the monopoly of the Neapolitan companies, especially in the transport between Sicily and the continent. The company ordered the construction of its first ship in England, in the shipyards of Greenwich. On 27 September 1841, the 150-horsepower steamer *Palermo* docked in the port of Palermo. The *Palermo* was certainly not a competitive ship. In fact, the company survived for several years by covering its expenses. It should be noted that there is no evidence of any crossbreeding between the Neapolitans and the Sicilians: the two circles were completely separate and distinct, hostile even. Moreover, a centuries-old rivalry existed between Naples and Palermo, which was to become even more pronounced in 1848 and later with the Unification, partly favoured by the Sicilian nobility.

In 1847, Florio bought and delivered the *Indépendent* to Palermo under the French flag. When he cast anchor in Palermo, he was in the midst of revolution. Thus, in 1848, the revolutionary

government seized the *Palermo* but not the *Indépendent*. At that time, the first company was closed and the *l'Impresa Ingham e Florio per la navigazione a vapore dei piroscafi siciliani*. Once the revolt was over, the ship, renamed *Diligente*, began its voyages circumnavigating Sicily.

In 1851 Florio ordered the construction of the *Corriere Siciliano* from the Thompson shipyards in Glasgow. It was a 250 horsepower steamer capable of carrying a hundred passengers between first and second class. It began to travel the Palermo-Marseilles route, calling at the same ports as the Neapolitan company's ships. Unlike the Neapolitan company, in 1856 the Sicilian company managed to enter into an agreement with the Bourbon government for the transport of soldiers and materials, obtaining a fee of 7,500 ducats per year; it then managed to obtain postal service in Sicily with good margins.

Why the Florio succeeded where the Neapolitan *Compagnia* failed is not entirely clear. In fact, while Naples had in the meantime acquired the *know-how* for the construction of iron hulls and boilers in the Pietrarsa workshops, Palermo was still completely dependent on England. Probably much was at stake in the close contacts the Florios had with the British and the new Italian political class, linked to British interests. Certainly, it was as a result of favourable political contacts (which the Neapolitan company did not have) that the Florios were able to obtain the coveted concession for the postal service between Naples and Sicily, with an advance of 30,000 ducats per year, a service that was then extended, for the same amount, another 6 years. With that money, he bought new ships: first the *Etna* and then the *Eclettico*.

The *Eclettico*, in particular, gave the company a considerable competitive advantage as it could travel at the then exceptional speed of 13 knots. During the war, the Bourbons chartered

Florio's ships that had been laid up and equipped them with cannons to guard the Sicilian coast. They were then requisitioned by Giuseppe Garibaldi in the operations following the landing of the Thousand. When they returned to the Florios, only the *Etna* was unserviceable and irreparably ruined, and was therefore sunk. By then the company had five boats: the *Diligente*, the *Corriere Postale*, the *Archimede* and the *Eclettico*. During the post-unification period, Florio became increasingly prosperous until it became a large shipping company with dozens of boats and ships by the end of the century.

Chapter 16

The Royal Fleet

After the *Amministrazione* in Naples had been stripped of its exclusive navigation rights, King Ferdinand II founded the *Real Delegazione de' pacchetti a vapore* in 1836, with which he intended to establish a regular service for the transport of mail and passengers with Sicily in particular. Some aspects of the decision had to be taken on impulse because first the Sicard company, the only competitor, was made subject to the payment of navigation fees, but then, on 8 June, the magistrate prevented the *Real Ferdinando* from leaving the port, even though it was loaded with goods to be transported and passengers. They were all disembarked and the holds unloaded because, according to the magistrate, the new decrees concerning the privileges of the *Real Delegazione* were violated. Great was the dismay and considerable the damage for Sicard & C. The voyages then resumed but that damage was never repaid. From that moment on, Sicard knew it had a competitor.¹⁷³

The king himself had decided that his own small ship-owning company had to stand on its own feet; he had to follow shrewd, managerial choices. He began his activity with the management of two wooden wheeled ships purchased in England, the *Nettuno* and the *Ferdinando II*. Extensive documentation exists on the latter in particular. Built between 1833 and 1834 at the behest of the king in the Union Dock shipyards in London, it was

¹⁷³ Domenico Bianco - Luigi Bonghi, *Per la società Sicard*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Naples 1836, p. 7.

characterised by a very high chimney that made travel easier in windy weather. These steamships were later joined by the English steam schooner *St. Wenefreda*.

Finally, in 1839, the *Real delegazione de' pacchetti a vapore* was abolished for lack of profit and the three ships were incorporated into the Royal Navy where they continued to serve as a link between Naples and Sicily.¹⁷⁴ A year later, in 1840, the king purchased three steamers, the *Nettuno*, the *Lilibeo* and the *Peloro*, in order to organise regular transport of mail, travellers and goods. This service was entrusted to the General Amministrazione of Posts and Procures, under the Ministry of Public Works. The service was inaugurated in 1842 and was expanded the following year when three more steamships were purchased, again in England: the *Rondine*, the *Antilope* and the *Argonauta*; two more steamships were purchased in France, the *Palinuro* and the *Misero*, both used exclusively for the postal transport of state documents.

In 1846, the postal service between Naples, the ports of Calabria and Sicily was put out to tender and won by *Vicesvinci & Co.* of Naples for the Naples-Messina route and by the small shipowner Adolfo Hornbostel for the Naples-Palermo and Palermo-Messina route (and not vice versa). The latter had his offices in Strada Piliero No. 8, next to the headquarters of the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore*. There followed bitter legal issues that lasted several months until Hornbostel was able to start work in 1847. However, the service was not regular and in 1848 both conventions reverted to the state.¹⁷⁵ As already mentioned, in

¹⁷⁴ The ship, later incorporated into the navy of the Kingdom of Sardinia and later into the united navy, after undergoing various improvements was finally dismantled in 1861. She previously had a rated power of 180 horsepower, after the refit 330.

¹⁷⁵ Vincenzo Giura, *Contributo alla Storia della navigazione a vapore*

1856, for a short time, the service was entrusted to the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore* (1856-1857) until, in 1858, it went to the Florio group for 7 years with a total financing of 210,000 ducats.

Willingness for independence

In 1835, steamships had been purchased in England for the Royal Fleet, harbour dredgers (“cavafondi”), such as the *Vulcano*, whose machines were built in the pyrotechnic workshop founded in 1830 in Torre Annunziata by Scottish-born Captain William Robinson (1772-1836). The latter, after serving in the English army, had been hired as director of the Royal Armoury and died in 1836 from a cholera epidemic that wreaked havoc particularly in Castellammare.¹⁷⁶

Between 1840 and 1849, the Castellammare di Stabia shipyard (formerly the Royal Arsenal) was refitted with machinery purchased in England to adapt it to the new draught of the ships: progress in boiler construction and power transmission had made it possible to build wider and longer steamships. As early as 1843, a 300-horsepower frigate, the *Ercole*, was launched, followed by the *Archimede*, the *Carlo III* and the *Sannita*. These were all steam frigates with formidable armaments (pirofregate) for the navy.

The Neapolitan shipyard continued to be used for the repair and maintenance of the sailing fleet and for the construction of smaller ships. But the sovereign felt the need to free himself from

nel Regno di Napoli, cit., pp. 720-727.

¹⁷⁶ *Discorso pronunciato ne' funerali di Guglielmo Robinson*, Stamperia di Guerra, Naples 1837.

the foreign yoke, since the machinery and the engineers still came from England or France.

After Robinson's death, he moved the fireworks workshop to the Royal Palace. In 1840, the construction of Pietrarsa, near Portici, the royal fireworks factory, began, and by 1841 it employed more than 200 workers. There, Carlo Filangieri founded a school to train not only machinists, but also future builders of boilers and mechanical vehicles in the management of steam ships.

The factory produced steam engines for ships and later for the railways and, together with the private Officine dei Granili, played an important role in the early industrialisation of Naples. In 1851 the pirofregata *Ettore Fieramosca* was built in Castellammare, with an engine built in Pietrarsa, the first ship built entirely in Naples, which remained in service until 1883.

Chapter 17

The Calabro-Sicula

In the aftermath of the liberalisation decided by the king in 1839, the *Società di navigazione* was born, a company that was to connect Naples with the south of the kingdom. That very same year, the king published a short text entitled *Sulla navigazione a vapore delle Calabrie (On the Steam Navigation of Calabria)* in which he called for better connections between the capital and the Calabrian ports, especially Reggio Calabria. The initiative came from Andrea de Martino, pilot of the *Ferdinando I* and *Francesco I*, thus trained on the ships of the *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore delle Due Sicilie*.

De Martino, after leaving the company he worked for and acquiring valuable skills on the new type of ships at the time, founded the *Società di navigazione pel traffico de' battelli a vapore nel Mediterraneo di Andrea de Martino e soci* in 1840. He fitted out the ship *Vesuvio* (it had the same name as the other ship, owned by the dell'*Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore delle Due Sicilie*), which he had Raffaele Cafiero command, and between 1840 and 1842 organised voyages between Naples, Tropea, Messina and Palermo. When De Martino died in 1842, the company *VicesVinci & Co.* was established in Naples, which renamed the *Vesuvio* in *Polifemo* to emphasise the company's elective Sicilianity and armed the *Duca di Calabria*.

All these ships linked Naples to Messina, stopping in Calabria. In 1846, the company commissioned an English shipyard to build the iron-hulled propeller steamer *Giglio delle onde*, the first one

with a propeller in the Kingdom. At the end of 1845, the steamer *Polifemo* was chartered and used by Raffaele Rubattino's company in Genoa, but it was owned by Domenico Ferrante, director of the *Società rassicuratrice rischi marittimi* in Naples. It was an insurance and financial company that was therefore a shipowner.

In 1849 the *Polifemo* and the *Duca di Calabria* resumed service armed by the *Società Calabro Sicula per la navigazione a vapore*.¹⁷⁷ The *Duca di Calabria* was owned by Domenico Benucci, the first partner of the *Sicard*, which had a small ship-owning company in Via Piliero No. 19. As for the *Società Calabro Sicula*, it still survived a few years after 1862, administered by the director of the joint-stock shipping company *Urania*, Carlo Cacace, a company that had its headquarters at 16 Via Piliero.¹⁷⁸ This street, elegant and wide at the time, before becoming an alley between two concrete coves, was the real heart of the Neapolitan shipowners' business.

The uprisings of 1848 in Sicily were a real war. The steamships of the *Società Calabro Sicula* were requisitioned by the Bourbon army from March-April 1848 to June 1849 to transport troops. Despite this, business was quite good and in 1854 it was decided to purchase the *Calabrese*. In 1856 the *Polifemo* underwent a refit and continued sailing under the name *Ercole*. The company survived the Unification and continued for a few years.¹⁷⁹

In 1850, an attempt was made in Naples to set up a propeller boat company called *Società anonima per la navigazione dei piroscafi con elice*, but it failed to find shareholders and failed to place a sufficient number of bonds. The company was therefore

¹⁷⁷ *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, second half of 1849.

¹⁷⁸ *Almanacco italiano for the Year 1862*, p. 2.

¹⁷⁹ Carlo Perfetto, *Vicende della Marina Mercantile a vapore nel Reame delle Sicilie dal 1818 al 1860*, cit., p. 64 ssg.

dissolved: the mid-century financiers were not yet convinced that propeller technology could overtake side-wheel technology.

It should be noted that in those same years, even the *Compagnia della Navigazione a Vapore*, despite its long history, was struggling to find shareholders. If it had not been saved by the loan from Lefèbvre, Catalano and De Berner that enabled the purchase of two new steamships, it would probably not have lasted beyond that year. The attempt to set up new companies that hoped to rake in money on the Neapolitan market therefore appears unrealistic. However, such an attempt was made in 1853 by Giuseppe Cianelli, a Neapolitan maritime agent and Royal Exchange and Transfer Agent with an office in Largo San Ferdinando 48.¹⁸⁰ He set up the *Giuseppe Cianelli & C.* with three English-built propeller steamers, the *Elba*, the *Partenope* and the *Newa*. In 1855 the company was transformed into a limited partnership under the name *Giuseppe Cianelli & C. Vapori ad Elica* and continued sailing two steamers, the *Elba* and the *Partenope* with weekly trips to Calabria and Sicily and connections with Capri and Ischia during the summer season.

In 1860, the elderly Cianelli resigned and the company was taken over by a partner, Francesco de la Tour, who had been an active shareholder in the dell' *Amministrazione della Navigazione a Vapore* with his entire family. He had sold his shares and invested a lot of money in *Società dei vapori ad elica napoletani del conte Francesco de la Tour*, with the same ships as Cianelli. However, the count suffered a great loss when, in 1860, the two steamers were seized for transporting troops to Sicily. When they resumed service, competition with the Florio became untenable despite the crisis of the *Compagnia della Navigazione a Vapore*.

¹⁸⁰ *Almanacco Reale del Regno delle Due Sicilie per l'anno bisestile 1840*, Stamperia Reale, Naples 1840, p. 375.

Before it went bankrupt, Francesco de la Tour's company was liquidated in 1864.¹⁸¹

The last to be established, in the pre-unification period, in 1842, was the *Società di navigazione di Domenico Bellini ed Enrico Quadri*, both Neapolitans. They obtained a concession for the route between the Sicilies and the Americas with a steamship. But due to numerous difficulties, including finding a suitable ship, the project was abandoned. It was taken up again in 1852 by Luigi and Salvatore de Pace, owners of sailing ships covering various Mediterranean routes, who formed the *Siculo-Transatlantica* company. They armed the steamship *Sicilia* and in 1854 - after the sinking of the *Ercolano* - made the first voyage to New York in no less than 26 days (a lot, since the ships of *Cunard* and other competitors could take 15). Commanding the steamer was a member of a famous family of ship captains, Ferdinando Cafiero (sometimes, Caffiero), originally from Meta di Sorrento. The 1854 voyage was the only one made because it was found that (at least with that steamship) there was no margin for profit in view of the considerable risks.¹⁸² In reality, other companies would soon manage to make a profit: the problem was linked to that ship, which was excessively slow. It is well known that between 18 and 20 May 1854 alone, 20,000 Italian emigrants landed in New York.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Lamberto Radogna, *Storia della Marina Mercantile delle Due Sicilie (1734-1860)*, cit., pp. 99-101.

¹⁸² Lamberto Radogna, *Storia della Marina Mercantile delle Due Sicilie (1734-1860)*, Mursia, Milan 1982, pp. 114-118.

¹⁸³ A history of 19th century passenger lines, listing the major companies, apart from the most important, Cunard, can be found in Charles Robert Vernon Gibbs, *Passenger Liners of the Western Ocean: A Record of Atlantic Steam and Motor Passenger Vessels from 1838 to the Present Day*, John De Graff, New York 1957.

When the crisis in the south became more acute in the aftermath of unification and after 1873, the flow of migrants was channelled by organised companies with large transport ships. It is believed that in 1870 the total number of steam ships exceeded that of sailing ships; the calculation of the year is difficult but certainly at that time the technological overtaking must have been close.

Many of the shareholders of the defunct *Compagnia della Navigazione a Vapore* who had bought shares in the *Società Industriale Partenopea* also entered the business. This, especially in the 1860s and 1870s, transported many tens of thousands of emigrants to Ellis Island, New York, offering a full expatriation service with document preparation, finding a job, a home, a social safety net and a loan.

Chapter 18

An important competitor: Rubattino

Another important steamship company was founded in Genoa in 1838, the *De Luchi, Rubattino & C.*, with the chartered steamer *Colombo*, which remained in the north of the Bourbon Kingdom on the fast line Genoa-Livorno.¹⁸⁴ In 1839, a second entity was founded, the *Società in accomandita per la navigazione a vapore sul Mediterraneo*, which went as far as Naples, touching the classic ports of call in Livorno and Civitavecchia. The company's share capital came mainly from wealthy Milanese. The first steamships owned by the company were the *Dante*, the *Virgilio* and, in 1841, the *Castore* and the *Polluce*, already mentioned. After the accident in 1841, the company lost half of its share capital.

In 1844 the company became *Compagnia Rubattino* and overcame the crisis. In that year it had 6 steamships. The *Lombardo* and the *San Giorgio* were added to those already owned and others were chartered in the months of peak traffic. Rubattino also did business in other sectors but his fortune was to belong to the political party that supported the Unification of Italy. It was he who provided Carlo Pisacane (1818-1857) with ships for his enterprise, as well as Giuseppe Garibaldi to whom he granted the charter of the *Piemonte* and *Lombardo*. Despite some mishaps (the steamships granted to Garibaldi were stolen),

¹⁸⁴ Giorgio Doria, *Debiti e navi, la Compagnia di Rubattino, 1839-1881*, Marietti, Genoa 1990, p. 20.

the *Rubattino* was one of three companies to obtain postal concessions, along with the *Periano* and Florio's *Società dei Vapori Postali*. The *Lombardo* had also come into Auguste Viollier's interest on behalf of the shipping company he presided over. He had tried to buy it in 1844, but the deal had fallen through. The boat had thus come into the possession of the Sardinian steamship company (*Rubattino*) in 1845.¹⁸⁵

It was saved by the state from bankruptcy in 1869.¹⁸⁶ The company was bailed out several times and after the development of railways, the era of profitable concessions also came to an end. However Rubattino realised the importance of the Middle Eastern routes and extended the Genoa-Livorno line to Alexandria and Porto Said (as far as Bombay, 1870). In 1873 the limited partnership was once again placed under Amministrazione, but this resulted in a rescue that allowed it to start operations and merge with *Navigazione Generale Italiana* in 1881, forming with the latter the *Flotte Riunite Florio e Rubattino*.

This quick recapitulation of the history of the Rubattino, later merged with the Florio, has here the sole function of comparing the development of this company, with capital coming mainly from northern Italy and banks, with the smaller *Compagnia per la Navigazione a Vapore nel (or del) Regno delle Due Sicilie*, which did not survive Unification after 1865.

¹⁸⁵ *Annali di giurisprudenza. Decisioni della corte suprema*, Anno decimo, Nicolai, Florence 1848, p. 448.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 132-135.

Note

A cohesive social group

It has already been mentioned that the men who participated in the establishment and then the financing of the *Amministrazione* belonged to a cohesive social group that had a diverse social origin: there were nobles who had gone on to a military career, such as Carlo Filangieri and Luigi de' Medici; French merchants and traders who had settled in Naples in the group of at least 5,000 people, according to Marco Rovinello's calculations, between the second half of the 18th century and the early years of the Restoration, such as the Degas, the Sicards, but also the Violliers, Lefèbvre and Fourquet.¹⁸⁷ There were the Swiss, such as the Meuricoffre. There were Russian, French and German diplomats. There were of course the Neapolitan or Kingdom nobles - the Capece, the Torlonia, the Serra, the Doria, the Pignatelli, the Strongoli, the Lucchesi - who tended to increase; at first few, then more and more numerous. Then there were the royal merchants like the wealthy Persico family.

It is surprising to always read the same names in the most diverse industrial activities. The *Società Lyonese*, a *Gas Company*, the *Società Industriale Partenopea* and the *Società Partenopea Partecipata* (associated with many stakeholders), where we find many of the same names as in the *Amministrazione*

¹⁸⁷ Marco Rovinello, *Cittadini senza nazione. Migranti francesi a Napoli (1793-1860)*, preface by Daniela Luigia Cogliati, Le Monnier, Florence 2009.

della Navigazione a Vapore. The same can be said for *Officine Macry & C.*

We find, for example, many of the same names: Carlo Filangieri, Alessandro Torlonia, Domenico Benucci (former partner of *Sicard*), Rosario Persico, Ilario Degas of the famous family of *négociants*, in a de facto company concerning the supply of gunpowder to the army (1835-1839).¹⁸⁸ In 1834, Filangieri, Persico and Degas undertook the sale of salt and gunpowder. This limited partnership was later succeeded by the partnership of Filangieri, Persico, Benucci and Torlonia (1839-1842). Beyond the development and outcome of the negotiations, one can clearly see how they were the same people, the same families, the same group.¹⁸⁹ And the examples could be multiplied. Viollier, Lefèbvre, Laviano and Filangieri are to be found in companies such as the *Amministrazione per la Navigazione a Vapore*, the *Società Industriale Partenopea*, the *Società Lionese*, and the first two also in the 1818 printing privatisations (those that gave rise to the Fibreno paper mills). At the beginning of his classic study of entrepreneurs in the South, Davies produces tables showing the persistence of certain names in various contemporary enterprises or over time, and notes that until 1860 the names involved were always the same, with minimal turnover.

These were people who, at least until the period immediately following unification, when new immigration and political upheavals changed the human landscape of the city not a little,

¹⁸⁸ The Persico family were a wealthy merchant family who owned a beautiful house in the Chiaja area described in Camillo Napoletano Sanno, *Napoli e degli architetti che li edificavano*, II, Federico Vitale, Naples 1858, pp. 254-255.

¹⁸⁹ *Contratto per la Regia de Sali e delle polveri da sparo ed appalto pe' trasporto de' Sali*, stipulato il 31 luglio 1837, Naples 1837.

found themselves in the same places, sharing the same pleasures, values and recurrences, and who, especially in the foreign component, were in favour of and interested in the introduction of new and very new technologies.

The analysis of the composition of the groups of entrepreneurs, merchants, financiers who ran the *Amministrazione* operation with continuity over several decades (sons succeeded fathers), can lead to interesting, new insights into the Kingdom's economic environment. As already noted, the analysis - of which this book is a first nucleus - will have to assess the native families on the one hand and the immigrant families on the other, especially French-speaking ones (French, Swiss and, more rarely, Belgians).

These immigrant groups had a rather fluid composition (there were departures and arrivals) but in the period following the French Decade about a hundred individuals, not all with families, settled permanently in Naples. In various messages sent in 1826 by the French consul, Chevalier Charles Desjobert (1783-1832) and the attaché Gauthier, it was stated that:

There are about 40 French traders, a similar number of shopkeepers and about 400 French men and women living in the city. There are also about 60 Frenchmen in and around Naples who have started various manufactures.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (MAE), *Correspondance Consulaire et Commerciale*, Naples, vol. 45, ff. 142-144; 218-319; Rapport adressé à Monsieur le Chevalier Desjobert, Consul General de France par M. Gauthier, Chargé du Vice-Consulat; C.C.C., Naples, vol. 53, ff. 269-298 and ff. 425-426, Liste des établissements français dans la ville de Naples. These sources, although known, have not yet received adequate study.

The 400 Frenchmen named had activities of lesser importance (waiters, service men and women, but also pedagogues, journalists, soldiers who had remained in the city to undertake some minor economic activity), but the 100 who lived in and around Naples formed the *crème de la crème* of the Kingdom's enterprise at that time, especially for the high technical and innovative content that their enterprises brought to the Kingdom.

As we have seen, about ten of them, i.e. about 10 per cent, perhaps more, were engaged in the *Amministrazione*, and some in multiple activities that saw them partners in various fields, from textiles to papermaking, from mechanics to basic chemistry, to mining, to the maritime sector. Many of these participated in the Neapolitan Industrial Exhibition of 1853. The importance of the activities of Andriel, Sicard, Fourquet, Viollier, Beranger and Lefèbvre, among a few others, has yet to be adequately explored.

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