



Cultural Heritage of the Genoese in Chios

Maria Manola & Margarita Nasiou

University of Western Attica, Department of Tourism, Athens, GREECE

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Abstract

Greece and Italy as neighboring countries have exchanged elements of their language and culture over the centuries since they are connected by many historical events. The purpose of this work is to study the influence of the city of Genoa in Greece. There will be a reference to the Greek areas conquered and lived by the Genoese, a general presentation of the Italian element in the northern Aegean.

Keywords: culture, possessions, Chios, language, cultural heritage.

1. Introduction

1.1 *The beginning of the Genoa-Greece connection*

The first known influences of Genoa in Greece date back to the Middle Ages. At the time of the Crusades the Italians were present with three naval democracies: Pisa, Genoa and Venice. The Republic of Genoa, was founded in the 11th century and from the beginning of its existence developed into an important commercial center (Manola, 2019). In the 13th century an alliance was formed with the Empire of Nicaea trying to capture Constantinople. When this was achieved in 1261, the Treaty of Nymphaeum was signed. This treaty was a trade agreement with the Byzantine Empire that provided for the naval reinforcement of the Byzantines and the occupation of areas and islands in the northern Aegean (Manola & Tsatalbassoglou, 2021).

1.2 *The Genoese possessions*

The general action of Genoa was determined by two factors: its constant competition with Venice and the intense activity of individual Genoese in the Aegean islands. After the treaty of Nymphaeum, the Genoese settled in Galata, on the East Coast of the Horned Gulf. Then the Byzantine Empire, always with the primary goal of protecting itself from its enemies, entered into an alliance with pirates of Genoese origin such as Ioannis de le Cabo, to whom Anafi and Rhodes were ceded in 1278. Michael the 7th also ceded to his brothers Benedict and Manuel Zakaria the Phocaea of Asia Minor and then they expanded to Chios on a 10-year contract.

Apart from Phocaea, it seems that in 1326 they also owned the port of Smyrna and for a certain period of time Samos, Ikaria and Kos but for those islands we don't have enough information. Another important acquisition is the one of Lesbos. As Vekri refers (2019: 199 cit. in Manola), the noble pirate Francesco married the emperor's sister and took the island as a dowry.

The Gattiluzi remained in Lesvos until the final occupation of the Ottomans and at they also conquered the islands of Thassos, Samothrace, Imvros and Lemnos.

2. The Genoese in Chios

2.1 *Chios – The island-treasure for the Genoese*

Chios was the most important project of the Genoese. The first major merchants of the island as we saw above were the Zaccaria family. Emanuele Zaccaria was the lord of Phocaea and at a time when Chios was looted by the Turks, he offered to help by fortifying it. This move apparently had as its ultimate goal the domination of the Zaccaria on the island as it was a crossroads between Phocaea and Genoa. In the following years, however, it turned out that the Zaccaria as Miller refers (1911) exploited the island and did not pay taxes, so the island passed into the hands of Byzantium. Later, when a fleet had to be built to defend against Mongol attacks, noble families helped financially and rallied under the name of Giustiniani. The Giustiniani clearly gained many economic benefits from this act. The island was given to 29 merchants and shipowners of the family who established a stock company named Maona and its shareholders Justinians.

The main reasons why the island became so popular with the Genoese were originally mastic. They founded and organized the villages of the island (Mastichochoria) and built settlements in places invisible from the sea to protect themselves from the invaders who often threatened the Aegean. Also, an important product for the Genoese was alum, which was necessary throughout Europe for the manufacture of fabrics, glassware, parchments, medicines and tanneries. Mastic on the other hand, natural resin of mastic trees was used in medicines, in the making of musical instruments, to make holy myrrh etc. Of course, there were also other products that passed through the island, such as salt, wine, silk and many others that were supplied from the East. In fact, the trade activities of the Genoese are due to the import of citrus as well as the cultivation of silkworm, which until then was unknown.

2.2 *The Papal Holy Inquisition*

At the same time, a conception of salvation was formed in Western theological thought which is claimed to have come to Greece in areas with larger Roman Catholic communities such as Chios. This is the Sacred Examination. It was considered by the papacy to perform divine acts and was a work of great faith. Nevertheless, the “sinners” went through horrible tortures such as burning in the fire, but this was not considered anti-Christian, on the contrary it was salvation and beneficial, since with pain people were freed from evil and in some cases from eternal condemnation and were satisfied divine justice. The priests on the island were mostly of Chian descent but of course did not come from the Greek inhabitants who remained committed to Orthodoxy. They were born in Chios, descendants of Genoese. The Holy Inquisition was hated by all the locals. It is worth noting that they did not allow the stay of an Orthodox bishop, which culminated in their dissatisfaction. There were sentences of moderate to light, but a moderate sentence could be imprisonment or exile. They also treated the mastic thieves very harshly. Depending on the amount they stole if they did not pay the price immediately, they were amputated. These actions of the Pope had as their main goal the Ecclatinization of the Greeks. Apart from Chios, similar Roman Catholic communities were established in other ports of Greek islands.

2.3 *The problems of the rural population of Chios*

Although the Giustinians upgraded the island and made full use of its potential for the rural population, they followed a tactic of pressure and cruelty. They exploited the peasant anarchically and not in the systematic way that was developed in Feudal Europe. In fact, the settlements were specially designed not only to be protected from attacks but also to control the rural population at the supply level but also in possible revolts of the farmers for the unjust behavior they faced. Also, deeds of concession of plots were never found by the Chians, which means that they came under the rule of the Giustinians in an illegal way. This resulted in 1566 when the Ottomans tried to occupy the island and they didn't face significant resistance from the natives and not because they were welcomed but at least the Ottomans were against slavery ([greekgastronomyguide](#)).

2.4 *The mix of Genoese and Chians*

In the city of Chios, it seems that at some point there was a kind of unification of the Genoese with the Chians. This happened in the years of the decline of the Genoese presence. According to notarial deeds, mixed marriages take place mainly in the middle and upper classes. A document has also been found in which Francesco Giustiniani authorizes Giovanni Giustiniani in 1457 with complete freedom of choice of the bride, to perform his marriage according to the laws of the Roman church. This shows that in Chios they followed the procedure known in Genoa "missa sponsalida" (representative who had the freedom to choose the bride and perform the marriage). Another reason for harmonious coexistence was the legislative and economic factors. In Chios the circulation of Byzantine coins stopped and the Genoese and other western ones prevailed. The Giustinians even had the power to mint their own silver or gold coins. This gave the island its own economic and monetary status and empowered the locals.

3. The lending between two cultures

3.1 *The linguistic heritage*

The linguistic heritage of Genoa in the east has not been adequately studied. One reason is that the areas inhabited by the Genoese were formerly conquered by the Venetians and the Ottomans. Take for example the Pontiac dialect which has influences from Turkish, Georgian, Russian and Genoese. Another reason is that there was a variety of dialects on the islands from one village to another. For example, in the village of Pyrgi of Chios they had a dialect that is difficult to understand and although two hard foreign yokes passed through the village, a Genoese and a Turkish one, the locals were little influenced. Finally, another reason that contributed to the difficulty of recognizing Genoese in Greek is attributed to a misunderstood refinement of the authors of the Greek languages, including the author Paspatis, publisher of a well-known 19th century glossary on the Chian dialect.), in which, according to what the main scholar of Genoese-Modern Greek E. Ramondo complained, words that are more or less easily recognized as not belonging to the Greek language tend to be ignored. For example, the word *marsapas*, which is macaroon, has a Genoese influence and comes from the word *marzapane* (Manola & Tsatalbassoglou, 2021)

We also observe a large spread of bilingualism in Chios. While in the first notarial documents the interpretation of the interpreter was necessary, in the process it faded. These documents are still preserved in the Genoa archives. Inscriptions have also been found on the island's churches stating that the Giustiniani used a strange language for documents on Chios and that it was for use on the island. Greeks written in Latin characters... they called it, franchiotico. This dialect is still spoken in Mastichochochia with the pronunciation being very reminiscent of

Italian influence. Nowhere else in Chios the dialects are characterized by such rhythm and musicality.

3.2 *The arts*

The Genoese by being the only ones to offer these products in the international markets, had no competitors and they quickly spread throughout Europe. This fact did not leave them room to be passionate about antiquities and the arts. They were significantly different from the Florentines in Athens or the Venetians in Crete. The first contact with art happened between the 14th and 16th century, at the beginning of the Renaissance. The first collectors of Greek art were Vincenzo and Benedetto Giustiniani. They were the sons of Giuseppe Giustiniani, the last ruler of Chios. The works they managed to collect have undoubted importance, giving the world the opportunity to discover Greek culture as well.

3.3 *The Genoese architecture*

One of the main features left behind by the Genoese is the characteristic architecture. The architectural methods were purely Western European rather than Greek and with almost identical structural elements to those of Genoa. Some examples that testify to this architecture are the two-tone limestone used in the construction of walls and houses and the alternating white black or green patterns on stones or marble. These characteristics are found in Chios mostly in the village of Pyrgi. In fact, through paintings they describe the city of Chios as a miniature of the city of Genoa. The photos below clearly show the similarity (clioturbata.com).

The buildings generally had pointed roofs and the houses were well constructed with decorated and carved marbles, balconies and terraces made of stone similar to that found on the Ligurian coast. In many buildings the Genoese used red-yellow sandstones of the incense burners emphasizing the large dimensions of the doors and windows. The floors of the houses, the columns of the entrances of the houses and the windows were decorated with colored marbles. They also used to have the family coats of arms on the vaulted ceilings. Another integral part of the Genoese period was the tower, either a central one or two, at both ends of the house as described by many travelers is represented in many paintings such as the 16th century one kept in the Naval Museum of Genoa and presenting the city of Chios. Unfortunately, there are not enough elements in churches as they have all been destroyed but we know that the architecture was definitely not Byzantine (petrunitskina.wordpress).

Below we see some of the Genoese castles. On the left we see the castle of Chios that was started by the Genoese ruler of the island, Martino Zaccaria. To the right is the Justinian Palace, the only administrative building surviving from the fortress (Belles, 2018).

The vigils of Chios are medieval, cylindrical turrets on the coasts and capes of the island in order to observe the sea and to warn the inhabitants in time in case of a hostile or pirate invasion (Manola, 2020). When an unknown ship approached, fires were lit one after the other so the news quickly reached the villages. Today, 35 vigils have been identified on the island, of which 24 are declared as protected monuments. The vigils were developed during the Genoese era (1346-1564) and their operation continued until about the middle of the 17th century. Sources state that in Chios there were more than 50 vigils on the perimeter of the island (Manola & Papagrighoriou, 2020).

4. Conclusions

The Genoese saw their possessions in the North Aegean mainly as a source of income and a means of developing Genoa. During the time they lived in Greece, many considered them as tyrants as they had imposed on the local population of the islands a slavery regime such as in Chios. On the other hand, many Greeks over the years saw them as anything but enemies like in Lesbos. Of course, the views differed as the treatment from one Italian family to another differed. However, their presence contributed to the development of trade and made the Greeks realize how important their products are. Their passage in general, could leave many more features in the arts, letters and architecture. Nevertheless, the claim of the North Aegean by foreigners that continued, such as that of the Turks, destroying a lot, but also natural phenomena such as the earthquake of 1881, allowed to save much less.

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