

Maria Elisa Soldani. *Uomini d'affari e mercanti toscani nella Barcellona del Quattrocento*.

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Maria Elisa Soldani's volume, *Uomini d'affari e mercanti toscani nella Barcellona del Quattrocento*, is a well-researched addition to the study of connections between Mediterranean regions in the late medieval period. She focuses on the merchants from the Tuscan cities of Florence, Lucca, and Pisa who conducted a significant portion of trade between Italy and Barcelona — principal city of the Catalan-speaking region of the Kingdom of Aragon-Catalonia. Her work fits into the Braudelian school, which seeks to see the Mediterranean as an integrated network instead of as clearly separated spheres of influence with little interaction. Among those who have most readily accepted and followed this theoretical approach have been those who study the Western Mediterranean through the connections between Catalonia and the Italian maritime centers. The Archive of Francesco di Marco Datini of Prato has been the principal archive for scholars, such as the late Federigo Melis and his students Giampiero Nigro, Angela Orlandi, and Luciana Frangione, focusing on Italians penetrating the port of Barcelona. Others, such as the scholars until recently led by Marie Teresa Ferrer i Mallol at the CSIC in Barcelona, concentrated on the interaction between foreign merchants and the locals in Catalonia through the Catalan records. Soldani's is the most successful attempt to date to combine material from both sides of the Western Mediterranean in order to examine trade.

Soldani shows with this book why she is considered to be one of the best of the new generation of scholars working on the Mediterranean. Educated first in Italy with the late Professor Marco Tangheroni from Pisa, and then in Barcelona for her PhD, Soldani brings together both approaches to the study of Tuscan-Catalan interactions during the fifteenth century. She, however, broadens the concept of the important players in this interaction by recognizing that Tuscany included the important communes of Lucca and Pisa above and beyond the well-studied Florence. She shows that the Italian men of affairs and merchants who did business in Barcelona during the fifteenth century were much more numerous and diverse than just a few elites from the greatest cities.

Soldani divides the book into three parts: a study of the general conditions and rules under which Tuscans in Aragon-Catalonia lived, their relationship to the rich and powerful in the region, and a catalogue of the Tuscans involved. Using the rich archives of the Crown of Aragon plus published material about the Datini correspondents, she details the activities of the Tuscan merchants in Barcelona and their methods. While they followed patterns similar in all markets, they did adapt to the unique circumstances of this host city. For example, the Tuscans in Barcelona did not group together on one specific street or in a defined compound called a *fondaco*; instead they rented quarters throughout the city that would give them access to the port, warehouses, and the local markets. Conditions they had to adapt to included periodic spasms of anti-Italian hostility because of the large amounts of venture capital they brought to the city for buying commodities such as wool: the money allowed Tuscans to buy rights to work in Aragon-Catalonia from the king to the detriment of his own citizens. A major portion of the book presents profiles of four important Lucchese families, twelve Pisan families, and almost forty Florentine families who Soldani found represented in the royal and city archives.

This book will be very useful to those studying patterns of Mediterranean trade because of the huge amount of detail she includes to support her conclusions about Tuscans' commercial expertise. She attempts to help the reader with this detail in several ways. When she refers specifically to one of the families highlighted in her company profiles, she puts the family name in parentheses in bold font. This signal to the reader is helpful even if it is not a conventional way to handle the problem. Second, she supports her text with detailed notes and a very detailed bibliography. Finally, Soldani chose to write this book in active Italian with shorter and more-direct sentences than the traditional, convoluted academic Italian. The overall result is a readable book, rich in detail and analysis of how the Tuscan merchants went about their business, which demonstrates why Maria Elisa Soldani is and will be a leader of a new generation of scholars working on the interactions across regions in the Mediterranean.

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