

The Genoese Annals of Ottobuono Scriba

The Genoese annals were begun in 1100 by Caffaro di Rustico, then a young man of twenty who went on to have a distinguished career in the government of the city of Genoa. Caffaro continued his annals into old age, only laying down his pen in 1163. Some years earlier, in 1152, he had formerly presented his work to the consuls and commune of the city, who had a copy made and kept in the city archives. After his death his 'annals' were continued by others as the official history of the city of Genoa, down until 1294. The notary Ottobuono was the second continuator after Caffaro, and wrote the section from 1174 until 1196, although he only began writing in 1189, and his account of the previous fifteen years was written retrospectively. He was however an eyewitness of the events of the 1190s, and his first-hand account reveals the anger of the Genoese at the failure of Henry VI to fulfil the promises that he made to the city in return for its naval aid, as well as the problems posed to the imperial expeditions by the continued rivalry of the Genoese and Pisans.

*These extracts have been translated by G.A. Loud from the *Annales Ianuenses Otoboni Scribae*, in *Annali Genovesi di Caffaro e de' suoi continuatori*, ii, ed. L.T. Belgrano and C. Imperiale di Sant'Angelo (Fonti per la storia d'Italia 1902), pp. 38-41, 45-53.*

[1191]

Let it be known to both those of the present day and those who come after in future that King Henry, son of the late Emperor Frederick, whom afterwards Pope Celestine III crowned as emperor, sent his envoys and a letter to the aforesaid lord Manegold the Podestà and the commune of Genoa, asking that the commune of Genoa grant him help to acquire and obtain the kingdom of Sicily, and prepare a fleet and army [*expeditio*] for him. Through the said envoys, namely Archbishop Otto of Ravenna and Arnaldo Stretto of Piacenza, he indeed promised many and great things in return for this. To confirm and finalise these matters the Podestà and commune of Genoa sent envoys to the emperor, who was in a great

camp besieging Naples - these envoys were Ugolino Mallonus and Ido Piccio. To them the emperor made all sorts of big promises, and swore (to these), and confirmed them with his privilege, sealed with a golden bull. For he confirmed the old customs and privileges, and the march and county [of Genoa?], the mountain of Monaco, the *castrum* of Gavi, the city of Syracuse with everything belonging to it, and 250 knights' fees [*caballarii*] of land in the Vallo di Noto, as well as many other things which are contained in the privilege. Afterward, however, he dishonestly failed to observe these terms, against his honour and in contravention of his sworn promise; indeed what is worse, he did everything clean contrary to them, as will be shown to those in the future who wish to know later on in this present volume of chronicles.

After completing these negotiations the aforesaid envoys returned to Genoa. The city of Genoa had already prepared a fleet and army for the service of the said emperor, even before they received the *castellum* of Gavi. (This indeed they have held at this time, for it was their rightful possession, and lordship over it had been assigned and given to the aforesaid Manegold on behalf of the commune of Genoa). The whole force sailed from Genoa on the day of the Assumption of the Blessed Mary. There were 33 galleys in which the consuls Bellobruno and Rolando di Carmadino were appointed commanders and leaders. These galleys went to the river [mouth] at Castello di Mare, which is near Mondragone, where Margaritus, the admiral of King Tancred (who had held Sicily for a considerable period) had blockaded the Pisan fleet. When the galleys of the Genoese arrived there the Pisan fleet was not to be found, for they had fled at night, and there they learned that the emperor had been taken ill, and had then been carried half-dead to Capua.

On hearing of this the Genoese who were in the fleet lamented at [his] death. They came with the whole fleet to the island of Ischia, and then, sailing through the night, they headed for the islands of Ponza and Ponziane. In the morning Bellobruno waited in his galley for the fleet, and he found himself with 23 galleys, while the other consul Rolando remained at sea with the rest of the galleys. However, when they were close to Monte Circeo, behold Margaritus appeared with King Tancred's fleet, comprising 72 galleys, two

sagittei and two *scurzati*, and challenged the aforesaid 22 [23?] galleys. Seeing this our galleys raised their sails and took up arms, wishing to attack King Tancred's fleet. Finally it happened that Margaritus and the royal fleet turned tail and steered towards the island of Ischia, and the Genoese fleet steered towards Rome. It reached Civitavecchia, and they then sent envoys to the emperor who was laying ill at S. Germano, asking him to give orders as to what should be done. Through his envoy Arnaldo Stretto, and by letter, he gave the fleet permission to return home, saying that he himself would come to Genoa in person, to discuss the raising and preparation of a new fleet to obtain the kingdom of Sicily; he also complained bitterly that King Tancred had deprived him of his wife whom he had had taken from Salerno to Sicily. The fleet thus returned to Genoa. When winter came the aforesaid emperor arrived in Genoa around the feast of St. Martin [*11th November*]. A meeting was held and the provision of a new fleet was discussed. He made many promises to the city and commune of Genoa which were to be badly observed and not fulfilled. Once this was done, the emperor left and went to Germany. ...

[1194] ... The usual deadly disease of sedition not only did not cease but rather grew more and more and received increase. ... [*An account follows of the battles within the city*]. ... Finally the consuls saw that they were making no headway in any matter. On the urgings of the emperor's seneschal Markward, to avoid holding up the force which had been promised to the emperor for the business of the kingdom of Sicily, they freely stepped down and resigned the office of consul. A council was held and the general assembly elected as Podestà and Consul of Genoa Oberto di Olevano of Pavia, a man both noble and active. He was to be Consul and Podestà of Genoa from that day to the Purification of Saint Mary [*2nd February*], and then for one year after that. He took the towers of those who were quarrelling into his power, and greatly advanced the preparation of the fleet for the emperor's expedition. Once the force was in a high state of readiness, the Emperor Henry came to Genoa in June. He requested and strongly advised the nobles and people of Genoa that they commit themselves fully to take part in the army and the expedition. 'If I shall gain the kingdom of Sicily through your efforts, after God, the honour will be mine but the profit will be yours, for I should not remain in it with my Germans, but you and your descendants

will remain there, and that kingdom will be treated not as my kingdom but as yours'. Pretending that he would give almost the whole of the kingdom to the Genoese, he deceived everybody with seemingly generous promises of cities, towns and villages, and pledged his hand to the people of Genoa. He had an empty and worthless privilege drawn up containing details of these and countless other riches, and had his seal fixed to it.

The Genoese trusted implicitly in the emperor's mendacious promises, and so they then pledged themselves to provide the fleet for the expedition to conquer the kingdom of Sicily for him, that by the middle of August they would sail from the port of Genoa with large numbers of sailing ships (*uxerii*) and galleys, with arms and knights and everything else which pertained to the army. The Pisans were also to take part in this fleet for the service of the emperor with twelve galleys and [other?] sailing ships. Since the lord captain Oberto de Olevano went with this force from Genoa, he appointed as his vicar in the office of Podestà Draco de Gambolato, who remained in that office until the feast of the Purification of Saint Mary. They set sail, made their journey and arrived at Gaeta, which they wished to capture by force. The city finally surrendered to Markward, the emperor's seneschal, Boniface Marquis of Montferrat and Oberto de Olevano, the Podestà of Genoa, who were the leaders of the great fleet. They then left with the fleet, leaving behind Betramo Salimbene, the podestà's judge and Ottobuono the scribe of the commune of Genoa, to receive the oaths of fealty from the bishop, consuls and people of the city of Gaeta. The fleet reached Naples on the vigil of St. Bartholomew the Apostle [23rd August]. That city and Count Aligern came to an agreement with the leaders of the fleet and surrendered, and made an oath of fealty to the emperor. The islands and towns of Ischia, Capria, Gerone and Procida [also] surrendered. The fleet set sail again and with a favourable wind came to the Straits, reaching Messina on 1st September.

When they arrived at the city it happened, through the instigation of the devil, that there was a very serious, if indecisive, battle between the Genoese and the Pisans. This fight lasted for a long time, and many of the Pisans fell to the sword that day and suffered mortal wounds. The Genoese who fought with them at sea captured thirteen of their galleys and

took them away. However the Pisans stormed the St. John market in which there was a small force of Genoese soldiers, and they kept the Genoese who were there as prisoners and took away a large sum of money. They took over the houses in which they found Genoese men, and carried off their money, although they were much more concerned with securing the honour and victory than with money chests. Thus they held on to John the advocate and the other Genoese nobles who had fought so bravely that day for the republic of Genoa, and for some days held them prisoner to the shame and embarrassment of the others in the palace that had formerly belonged to Margaritus.

On the next day the majority of the bravest nobles and people of Genoa determined to attack them by both land and sea, to avenge this grave insult at sword point, to burn the ships of the Pisan corsairs and to rescue the nobles who were being held prisoner. When they attacked the Pisans, they captured and held thirteen of their galleys, and most of the Pisans manning those galleys that day found death, either by the sword or in the Straits of Messina into which they sank with their armour and weapons.

The aforesaid seneschal tried for some days to secure a truce between the Pisans and Genoese. After the prisoners had been freed, as the Pisans demanded, he then had both the Pisans and Genoese swear to restore everything that had been taken, and once both sides had sworn these oaths, the Genoese restored a thousand marks of silver and the hulls of their galleys to the Pisans. The Pisans, who not unnaturally had doubted the Genoese, made restitution to them ... [*Nevertheless Pisan attacks on the Genoese continued*] ...

They [*the Genoese*] said that: 'we must suffer all this in peace for love of the lord emperor, to prevent the service owed to him being hindered by what has happened'. What more? So many and so great were these insults and outrages that one can scarcely describe them all. As a result that man of great and praiseworthy valour, Oberto di Olevano, the Podestà of Genoa, fell ill from the anxiety and grief caused by such shameful incidents and became feverish. Weakened by this illness and the flux in his stomach, continually feverish, it was pleasing to the Divine will that he ended his days. And while the body of this great

man was being ceremonially borne to his tomb by the nobles, lo and behold the wicked Pisans prepared an ambush. They remained hidden in their houses clad in armour and carrying their weapons, for they planned and hoped that while the seneschal, the marquis and other other noblemen were busy outside the city they would capture all the city fortifications and get possession of the town. Afterwards they would send out a force of armed men to massacre the aforesaid marquis and seneschal, and all the others who were following the corpse. But by the grace of God their intention was frustrated since the marquis and seneschal were warned by their friends and followers who had learned of this wicked plot. On hearing of it, they and the aforesaid nobles returned to their lodgings, nor did they allow the other Genoese nobles to follow the body any further. They then garrisoned the royal palace and the castle, and had them more closely guarded than usual. The seneschal was informed by his friends and followers who had gained knowledge of the Pisan plot that these same Pisans favoured the wife and children of the former king, Tancred, and that they had received letters and promises from them.

Meanwhile the emperor had taken the land route, and had been delayed for some time while he destroyed the city of Salerno. The Genoese and their army now headed for the city of Catania which surrendered to them. They were attacked by the Saracens and the army of the queen, the widow of the former king, Tancred, but they drove the Saracen army from the field and the latter fled. Then they went to Syracuse which they attacked for some time and stormed. There they killed some Pisans who were among the defenders. From that time onwards no city, town or *castrum* held out but they all surrendered, except for the city and palace of Palermo, while the Genoese won a number of engagements in the open field. The Pisans however did not move from Messina, either by land or sea.

Once the emperor and his army had arrived at Messina then the Genoese and Otto di Carretto, whom they had elected Podestà, went to him, and held lengthy discussions with him, requesting that he now grant what had been agreed upon and promised, but never fulfilled. The foresaid Otto said on behalf of the Genoese: 'lord emperor, it has been pleasing to your excellency to make an agreement with the Genoese in which you promised

Syracuse and the Val di Noto to us. By the grace of God and to the benefit of your name, we have attacked and conquered this area with the sword. If it please you, we now ask that you give to us what God has placed in your power'. To this the emperor replied, 'You have already behaved well and with energy, as you are accustomed to do in the manner of your ancestors; but we have not yet taken the palace at Palermo. Once that has been done, you will receive Syracuse and the Val di Noto and everything else that was promised to the commune and citizens, and I shall add a great deal more. But now, I beg you, let us go to Palermo'.

The army set off by land and sea, and the emperor left Messina and went to Palermo. The city of Palermo and the royal palace were finally surrendered to the emperor. Once this had successfully been achieved and he had gained lordship over the whole island, the Genoese went once more to the emperor, who was in the palace gardens called *Giloardus* ['*Earthly paradise- (Arabic)*]. They said to him: 'My lord, everything has now by the grace of God been fulfilled. You have lordship over the whole kingdom, and we have given it into your hands. We beg, if it is pleasing, that what you have agreed with and promised to the community and citizens of Genoa shall be fulfilled through your grace's generosity'. He replied to them that: 'your power is dead. I don't see here anyone who represents the commune of Genoa, nor do I recognise that commune. But whenever I do see someone or some people who do represent the community, then I shall indeed fulfil what I have promised'

It was thus that like a rogue he ignored the promises which he had made; and at the wicked suggestion of some of the citizens of Genoa and of other evil and shameless people he not only did not keep his promises, but indeed he behaved tyrannously and most cruelly towards the city of Genoa which he admitted with his own mouth had gained him the kingdom. Hence he abrogated everything that the city of Genoa had gained within the kingdom through the generosity of the former kings of happy memory Roger, William his son, and the other William son of this William. He even forbade any Genoese to presume to call himself consul within his kingdom of Sicily - if anybody did do this he ordered that

they suffer execution; and he threatened them, saying that in future the Genoese would not dare to go anywhere by sea, and that he would destroy the city of Genoa. Look at all this and think whether any treachery was ever as bad as this treachery, and if down the centuries any such deeds have been done by any tyrant, even the most pagan. Do you wonder whether anybody should trust him in anything else?