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Diplomatic Exchanges between the City of Pisa and the States of the Maghrib (from the 12th to the 14th Century)

Mohamed OUERFELLI

Les échanges diplomatiques entre la cité de Pise et les États du Maghreb (XIIe-XIVe siècle)

Grâce à un corpus documentaire conservé dans l’Archivio di Stato di Pisa, composé de traités de paix et de commerce, d’instructions pour les ambassadeurs et de lettres échangées entre souverains et hommes d’affaires, il est possible d’étudier les modalités des relations diplomatiques et commerciales entre la Commune de Pise et les États du Maghreb pendant les XIIe-XIVe siècles. L’originalité de ce fonds documentaire réside dans le fait qu’il nous offre plusieurs versions, en arabe, en latin, voire en italien, des lettres et des accords négociés entre les deux parties. Une première étape de ces relations est marquée par des accords verbaux, confirmés par des lettres échangées entre les deux pouvoirs. À partir de la fin du XIIe siècle, les modalités de négociation et de rédaction des accords changent et aboutissent à la mise par écrit de traités en bonne et due forme. Cette nouvelle phase est le signe de renforcement des relations diplomatiques et d’un échange régulier d’ambassadeurs; elle est marquée également par la croissance des activités commerciales entre les deux rives de la Méditerranée.

I. Introduction

Despite major publications undertaken by leading scholars such as Michele Amari¹, Louis de Mas Latrie² or André Sayous³, the study of diplomatic and trade relations between the Maghrib

¹ Michele Amari, I diplomi arabi del Regio archivio fiorentino, Florence, 1863-1867, 2 vols.
³ André Sayous, Le commerce des Européens à Tunis depuis le XIIe siècle jusqu’à la fin du XVIe
and European cities has not been given the attention it deserves. However in recent years the renewal of diplomatic studies has brought this question to the forefront of the scientific scene. This resurgence of interest can be explained not only by history and vicinity but also by rapidly changing currently complex events. Both sides wonder about the best way to deal with the other, for despite exchanges, rapprochement and dialogue, there is still misunderstanding and mistrust.

The republishing and the study of diplomatic exchanges, peace treaties and trade agreements between Pisa and the States of the Maghrib from the 12th to the 14th century should be seen as part of this renewal of studies. In this respect, two main areas should be focused on: the first revolves around a diplomatic study of letters and treaties and their edition and translation. The objective of the second area is to analyse the content of and to relocate these documents within the broader perspective of inter-Mediterranean relations in the Middle Ages.

II. Document Corpus

In order to conduct this study of diplomatic and trade relations between Pisa and the Maghrib, it is necessary to introduce the text corpus according to its content and physical characteristics. Similarly, it is important to bear in mind that one contribution is not sufficient to scrutinize all the documents and to be aware that it is still early to draw firm and definitive finding. Nevertheless, I shall outline these relations by drawing on concrete examples, which emphasize the importance of the text corpus for the study of diplomatic and trade relations in the Medieval Mediterranean area.

Diplomatic correspondence and peace and trade treaties agreed upon by Pisa and the States of the Maghrib are for the most part kept in the Archivio di Stato in Pisa, in the Atti publici series.

of the Diplomatico archives and in the Archivio di Stato in Florence. This collection of slightly more than a hundred documents – still more if we add those concerning Florence, dating mainly from the 12th to the 14th centuries. It is made up mainly of correspondence between Pisa and the Maghribi states or their representatives, of peace and trade treaties, recommendations, and instructions for ambassadors, as well as safe-conducts and letters for merchants. Two versions of some of theses documents have been preserved, in Arabic, Latin or even in Italian, sometimes on the same medium, which would enable us to make a detailed, comparative analysis, not only of the diplomatic discourse but also of the content. These documents written in two languages and of which several copies were made, concern mainly the Maghrib, whereas not many exist concerning Egypt for the same period. Often only one version remains, either in Arabic, Latin or even in Italian.

Islamic countries, unlike those of the Latin world, have only preserved a small part of their archives. No peace or trade treaty has remained from the period of the Middle Ages, whereas several copies, including translations must have reached the sovereigns of those countries. The Muslim chancelleries only kept documents that were valid and damaged them once they had expired. In other words, when a peace agreement expired the document was destroyed. It follows logically that if there was no change, a new treaty would replace the previous one. However many other documents have been carefully preserved especially waqfs acts in the Cairo archives, which date back to the Middle Ages. But these documents are not as extensive or as numerous as those found in Western archives.

Some documents have survived thanks to chancellery manuals in which they were used as models for drafting new agreements such as Subh al-’aṣā of al-Qalqašandī who reproduced several in his work, especially treaties which date back to the second half of the 13th century, made between the Mamluk sultans and the Frankish principalities of Syria-Palestine. Al-Sahmāwī, Egyptian author of chancellery manual died in 1464, also recorded examples of peace agreements made between Muslim sovereigns and their Christian counterparts. As there is such a shortage of documents it has been necessary to resort to documents preserved in Western archives so as to be able to study all aspects of relations between both shores of the

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Mediterranean.

Most of these documents were published by Michele Amari in 1863-1867 in Florence\(^{10}\). This publication has been extremely useful for many decades but today is out-dated and no longer meets the standards of scientific research. The codicological study of this documentary corpus and comparison with other types of documents from the archives of Pisa, Genoa and the kingdom of Aragon are relevant to understand the production process of these documents and to better analyse their content. Still a certain number of documents have not been published, particularly in the archives of Florence, of which Pisa was a vassal from 1406. Their publication would complete the corpus of texts relating to diplomatic and trade relations between Italy and the Muslim world in the Middle Ages and would thus help to renew research undertaken in the 19\(^{th}\) century by Michele Amari and Louis de Mas Latrie.

Most of the documents concerning Pisa and the States of the Maghrib, both peace treaties and correspondence from 1157 to 1397, were written on paper. The format varies from one document to another. The chancelleries of the Muslim world used this material most since it had replaced papyrus in the mid 8\(^{th}\) century, the beginning of the Abbassid caliphate. Parchment was also used along with paper. Some treaties were drafted on parchment such as the commercial treaty signed by the Marinid sultan Abu’Inān Fāris (1348-1358) and the Republic of Pisa in 1358\(^{11}\). There is both an Arabic and Latin text in this document; one above the other, but the second one is not a translation of the first. It is the ratification by the authority of Pisa of a treaty negotiated at the court of the Marinid sultan\(^{12}\).

When looking at the whole corpus, it is noticed that there is no general rule concerning the layout of bilingual texts. The two versions can follow one another on the same document; the translation is sometimes on the other side or inserted between the lines of Arabic; they may also be completely separate, sometimes because they were cut off later.

Without counting unpublished documents or those published elsewhere, in other words only those published by Michele Amari, the corpus is made up of 118 original documents: 31 are written in Arabic, 31 in Italian and 31 in Latin. Ten documents are written in Italian and Latin\(^{13}\); nine are written in both versions and four in Arabic and Italian. Two documents should be added, one in the Venetian dialect and the other written in Italian but in Arabic letters. In the whole corpus 41 documents are Pisan and 28 from the Republic of Florence but they are about Pisans because in 1406 the Republic of Florence annexed Pisa. Therefore there are about seventy documents without counting the different versions.

According to diplomatic usage during the Middle Ages both peace and trade treaties were written up on two original documents; one copy was given to each contracting party. Copies

\(^{10}\) Michele Amari, *I diplomi arabi del Regio archivio fiorentino*, op. cit.


\(^{12}\) Pisa, *Archivio di Stato, Diplomatico deposito Bonaini*, April 7, 1358 (the treaty in Arabic) and August 21, 1358 (the ratification of the treaty in Latin).

\(^{13}\) This is a feature specific to Italian when two languages are mixed when a document is drafted.
were made in two languages from these originals, one in Arabic and the other in Latin or Italian. New documents were written up to be used for work in the different offices of the chancelleries and to be given to diplomatic staff and to representatives of the states in the different ports involved.

In the case of documents concerning Pisa and the states of the Maghrib, they are often written in three languages but we need to know if these are original documents or copies. Many examples show the numerous questions raised by these documents and the need for a detailed study and a revised edition. We should question the role of the versions which have come down and which are not always original documents. For example we do not always realise why it was necessary to make another Latin translation of the Arabic version, which was itself a translation of the original Latin version. Who could use this new translation and what was the reason for making it? Possibly, the original Latin version that we do not have today was lost for some reason and thus the Pisan authorities felt the need to have the Arabic version translated which was the only one available. We need to back up this hypothesis with other examples, evidence and testimonies.

### III. First Diplomatic Contacts: Verbal Agreements

The first diplomatic contacts between the two parties did not result in the drawing up of proper peace treaties as we might have thought. Extracts from chronicles and especially letters show the existence of verbal agreements made between Pisa and the Maghrib. The first treaty recorded dates from 1133; according to the Pisan chronicle of Bernardo Marangone, the Almoravid sultan, ‘Alī Ibn Yūsuf Ibn Tāšfin (1106-1146) entrusted his admiral Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muhammad Ibn Maymūn with the mission to travel to Pisa on board of two galleys to negotiate a peace and trade treaty with the Pisan authorities. This initiative can be explained by the internal difficulties the Almoravids were experiencing due to the increased number of rebellions and the appearance of the Almohads as well as their failure on several military fronts. Thus it was necessary to seek out new alliances especially with maritime powers like Pisa in order to exit the crisis.

This was probably the only embassy that the Almoravids sent to Tuscany. In the rest of the documents we notice that the Pisans always initiate the sending of ambassadors to the Maghrib to negotiate peace treaties. The two parties, as a general rule came to verbal agreements up to the 1180s. Thus in 1166, as the urban chronicle of Bernardo Marangone demonstrated a new embassy led by Cocco Griffi went to the Maghrib to enter into a new peace and trade treaty with

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the Almohad sovereign, Abū Ya'qūb Yūssuf (1163-1184)16.

In this first stage of diplomatic relationship there is no trace of written treaties. Verbal agreements were validated by an exchange of letters between the governments of the two States. The letter sent in 1157 by ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Abī Khɔrassān, emir of Tunis, to the Archbishop of Pisa illustrates this first diplomatic phase particularly well17. It is written on a roll of paper 25cm wide, 3.67m long, in Arabic, in the naskhī script used by the Fatimid administration, with a Latin interline translation.18 This letter is the result of negotiations between the Pisan ambassador, Abū Tamīm Maymūn, son of Guglielmo, and the emir of Tunis. It is not a peace treaty but rather a sign that the treaty has been validated. The latter had already been negotiated and finalised orally as the end of the letter written by the emir of Tunis shows: «We have agreed on all these things with your envoy, by a firm and irrevocable act that we have ratified sincerely and in a correct form19». The negotiations between the Pisan ambassadors Maymūn son of Guglielmo with the Ifrīqiya authorities were not finalised by a formally written act, as will be the case in the following centuries. Indeed the only proof, which summarises the most important part of the treaty, finalised by the Pisan ambassador and the emir of Tunis is the letter written by the emir. The Latin interline translation must therefore have been carried out shortly after the drafting in Arabic20. The convention or treaty was discussed and finalised verbally. Then there was a general confirmation of the treaty, which was finalised by some circumstantial, final and physical gesture such as a handshake, an oath or the handing over of a letter or both at the same time.

Other documents of the same type and of the same period confirm these procedures for finalising agreements. Similarly, in 1154 Pisa ratified, through its ambassador, Ranieri Bottacci, a peace and trade treaty with the Fatimids21. The letter sent by Abû al-Faḍl al-‘Abbās, vizir of Fatimid caliph al-Zāfir (1149-1154), provides details about the negotiation procedures and reveals the details of this verbal agreement, validated by the exchange of letters with the Pisans22. In that letter we also find the oath of the Pisan ambassador, which was a sworn declaration and a sign of the validation of the treaty signed with the Egyptians. Thanks to another missive sent by the same al-‘Abbās we also know that this oath was written in Arabic and Latin23.

18 See appendix 1.
19 Michele Amari, I diplomi, op. cit., doc. n° 1/1, p. 4-5.
We are thus in the first stage of diplomatic relations between Pisa on the one hand and Egypt and the Maghrib on the other, which consists of negotiating peace treaties verbally and confirming or validating them by an exchange of correspondence between the two parties. From the end of the 12th century onwards the negotiating and drafting procedures of treaties changed and peace and trade treaties began to be written up more formally.

**IV. Diplomatic Exchanges and Peace and Trade Treaties**

Numerous documents which have been preserved since the middle of the 12th century indicate that relations between the Maghrib and Pisa began early and how their relationship developed. Indeed if we examine the content of the documents corpus, which should be completed and enriched by other types of sources, especially the documents of Pisan notaries who practised in Florence in the 14th century, it is indisputable that Pisa was very active during the 12th and 13th centuries as is demonstrated by the very intense diplomatic activity related to the numerous political and military events of the Mediterranean world; but this is also linked to Pisa’s will and determination to intervene to defend the growing commercial interests of its citizens.

As for the States of the Maghrib, the Almoravid and above all the Almohad reconquests created certain stability and reduced the momentum of the Norman expeditions, taking place from the beginning of the 12th century. Ifrīqiya was experiencing great difficulty because of the increase of local governments and the weakening of central government. However the unity brought by the Almohads was soon challenged by new revolts. From the beginning of the 13th century, as part of the administrative division carried out by the Almohads, the Maghrib was from then on divided up into three independent states: the Marinids in Fez, the Abdalwādids in Tlemcen and the Hafsids in Ifrīqiya.

Diplomatic and commercial relations between Pisa and the Maghrib states thus began in this political and economic context. In this regard, numerous formal peace and commercial treaties were signed and letters exchanged out of convergent interests.

The first peace and commercial treaty written up in a formal way, which has come down to us concerning Pisa, was made on November 16, 1186. There was however an earlier treaty finalised between Genoa and the prince of Majorca, Abu Ibrāhīm Ishāq, in 1181, the oldest treaty which has been preserved and which is detailed and drafted article by article. In 1184 Pisa also finalised a treaty with Majorca but there only remains the letter of transmittal in Arabic and Latin versions being sent with a copy of the treaty.

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24 Ibid., n° 5/1, p. 17-22.
The 1186 treaty was to be valid for twenty five years between the Almohad caliph Abū Yūssuf Ya’qūb al-Mansūr (1184-1199) and Pisa. Only the Arabic version of this paper document is preserved, written in fine Arabic script\(^{27}\). In this treaty the Almohad sovereign granted Pisan merchants the right to trade freely in the biggest ports of the kingdom i.e. Ceuta, Oran, Bugia and Tunis and on the coast of Andalusia, except Almeria which harboured the military arsenal. This treaty supplies considerable detail concerning how the Pisans should carry out business, the rules which regulate their activities, the concession and organisation of fondouks in the largest cities of the Maghrib\(^{28}\).

It is also known that there were five original copies of this treaty, one of them, as is stipulated at the end of the treaty, was to be sent to Pisa, which is perhaps the Arabic version being preserved in the archives of Pisa\(^{29}\). The other copies were meant to be sent to the other cities where the Pisans were allowed, from then on, to trade i.e. Ceuta, Oran, Bugia, Tunis and one of the Andalusian ports\(^{30}\).

From the beginning of the 13\(^{th}\) century up to 1397 the chancelleries of Pisa and the Maghrib have left several copies of six peace and trade treaties in Latin, Arabic and Italian. The 1234 treaty signed between Abū Zakariya Ibn Abī Hafs (1228-1248) and the ambassador Tediccio d’Uguccione Lamberti was to be valid for thirty years\(^{31}\). That of 1264 finalised between Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Mustansir (1249-1277) and the Pisan ambassador Parent Visconti was to be valid for a period of twenty years\(^{32}\). However during the 14\(^{th}\) century the period of the treaty validity was reduced to ten years, in reference to the treaty concluded between the Prophet Muhammad and the Qurayshites of Mekka in Hudaybiya in 628\(^{33}\); this was the case in 1313\(^{34}\), 1353\(^{35}\) and 1358\(^{36}\). Only in the last treaty of 1397 is there no reference to a period of validity\(^{37}\).

The treaties of peace and commerce included letters of recommendation and accreditation for the ambassadors and the official correspondence exchanged between the authorities of Pisa and the Maghrib. They reveal the conditions of agreement and the numerous diplomatic staff being involved in reaching a peace treaty between the two parties.

\(^{27}\) Appendix 2.
\(^{29}\) Michele Amari, *I diplomi*, doc. n° 5/1, p. 22.
\(^{30}\) *Ibidem*.
\(^{34}\) Michele Amari, *I diplomi*, doc., n° 29/1, p. 87.
\(^{35}\) *Ibid.*, n° 30/1, p. 101; n° 30/2, p. 303.
In all the documents it is clear that the practice of increasing the number of copies or letters was meant to make the agreements known so as to make sure they were preserved but also to send a copy of the treaty to every town that the Pisans were allowed to trade in. The trade treaty drawn up between the Hafsid sultan, Abu Ishāq Ibrāhīm (1350-1369) and the Pisan ambassador Ranieri Porcellino of the 16th of May 1353, is preserved in two versions, in Arabic and in Latin\(^{38}\). This agreement mentions at the end that there were six original documents, one copy of which was sent in both versions to the city of Pisa\(^{39}\).

The linguistic question posed by these documents is significant in that it is useful to understand how the document was drafted, circulated and preserved. The drafting of a treaty, act or letter involves a team of interpreters, translators, notaries and scribes\(^{40}\). Although the latter played an essential role in the production of the documents they remain unknown\(^{41}\).

On June 10th 1366 the Hafsid sultan of Bugia Ahmad Ibn Abī ‘Abd Allāh Muhammad, sent a letter to the doge of Pisa, in which he promises to guarantee the security and privileges granted to Pisan merchants trading in Hafsid possessions\(^{42}\). This letter was written in Arabic but was sent with an Italian translation written in Arabic script with all the vocalisation.

Why was this copy made and for whom was it intended? The Italian translation must have been given orally in Bugia itself. Perhaps this Italian version written in Arabic was intended for the ambassador or representative of Bugia, who, at their arrival, would read it in front of the Pisan officials. This ambassador from Ifrīqiya could probably only read Arabic script.

Other elements which illustrate the sometimes significant differences between versions of peace and trade treaties should be pointed out. The protocols are more developed in the Arabic copies whereas commercial clauses are often more precise in Latin or in the vernacular language (Italian). Thus only the Latin and Italian copies of the last treaty between Pisa and Tunis of the 14th of December 1397 specify that food brought into Hafsid lands for their own consumption by the Pisans would only pay half the standard customs duties of around 10%\(^{43}\). This treaty finalised between the Hafsid sultan Abū Fāris Abd al-Azīz (1394-1434) and Giacomo d’Appiano, a Pisan captain, through the intervention of ambassador Andrea di Michele del Campo, is in four versions\(^{44}\): two very different Arabic versions, Latin and Italian version and three other versions

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38 Ibid., n° 30/1, p. 98-111; n° 30/2, p. 303-308.
39 Ibid., n° 30/1, p. 111: the six copies of the treaty are only mentioned in the Arabic text.
42 Michele Amari, I diplomi, doc. n° 32 et 33/1, p. 115-118 and 119-122.
43 Archivio di Stato di Pisa, Diplomatico Atti Pubblici, 14th December, 1397; Michele Amari, I diplomi, doc. n° 35/2, p. 319-325, in p. 320; Louis de Mas Latrie, Traité de paix et de commerce, op. cit., doc. n° 17, p. 70-87, in p. 75.
44 The parts drafted in Arabic were not written by the same hand, the layout of the page is different
recorded in the registers of the Pisan chancellery. These versions are very unequal from the point of view of content and seem to favour one side rather than another. Yet they do not help to identify a commercial or political hegemony. Nevertheless they reveal policies and concerns corresponding to different situations. In addition to peace and trade treaties Pisans and citizens of the Maghrib exchange embassies and correspondence so as to be informed of the development of their relations. The thorny problem of piracy and possible corsair attacks is an important subject in the exchange of missives with the aim of limiting this endemic phenomenon, which hindered trade between the two sides of the Mediterranean. It is a constant concern for all states and particularly the Italian trading cities as is the compensation of victims and the buying back of captives. This recurring problem is brought up in many letters from the chancelleries of Pisa and the Maghrib.

In September 1200, in the port of Tunis, two Pisan ships called the Orgogliosa and Incoronata, along with two galleys captured three merchant ships and goods belonging to inhabitants of Tunis. Many passengers, sailors and merchants were killed in this Pisan attack. This case of piracy was mentioned in about ten letters written in both languages.

They are not literal translations of the letters, as the Arabic versions are much longer and more detailed than those written in Latin. These missives were sent by the Almohad authorities to protest to Pisa and ask for compensation since Pisan citizens had committed this act. Numerous versions were sent to all the ports of the kingdom and fortunately found their way to the Pisan archives. These letters were also intended to warn against the danger of pirates, to denounce them and encourage their capture so that they would give back stolen goods and compensate for the damage caused to the merchants of Tunis and to their fellow countrymen, hindered in their trade with the Maghrib.

... and there are divergences in the content.

45 Archivio di Stato di Pisa, Diplomatico cartaceo, December 14, 1397. See appendix 4.
V. Conclusion

The city of Pisa’s policy in the Western Mediterranean from the 11th century onwards was highly successful as the first peace and trade treaties signed with the Muslim states and the installation and active involvement of Pisan merchants in the larger Maghribi and Andalusian ports indicate. However Tuscany’s presence gradually declined; at the same time the drop in the number of diplomatic exchanges and of treaties finalised is a revealing sign of the inability of Pisa to intervene to support the activities of its merchants in the Western Mediterranean. The destruction of the Pisan war fleet by Genoa at the battle of Meloria, in 1284, partly explains the slowing down of Pisan investment, particularly in the Maghrib. In 1397 the city of Pisa finalised the last peace treaty with the Hafsid sultan. Nevertheless Pisan merchants remained active in Mediterranean ports but their links with their city became less close, particularly after 1406 when Pisa was annexed by the Republic of Florence. The latter relied on a Pisan network built up from the 12th century to ensure that its diplomatic relations would continue and took its turn in negotiating and finalising peace and trade treaties with the states of the Maghrib. Conventions were then set up in the name of Florence and privileges granted to Tuscan merchants.
Appendix

Document 1  Pisa, Archivio di Stato, Diplomatico cartaceo, July 10, 1157 (detail):
letter of the emir of Tunis Abd Allâh Ibn Abî Khorâssân to the Archbishop of Pisa.

Document 2  Pisa, Archivio di Stato, Diplomatico cartaceo, November 15, 1186:
treaty of peace and trade concluded between the Almohad caliph al-Mansûr and the city of Pisa.

Document 3  Pisa, Archivio di Stato, Diplomatico dep. Bonaini, April 7, 1358 and August 21, 1358: treaty of peace and trade concluded between the Marinid sultan Abû 'Inân Fâris and Pisa (in Arabic); and his ratification by the authority of Pisa (in Latin).

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