

Mott, Lawrence. “The Art of Raiding: The Catalan-Aragonese Raid of the Aegean in 1292.” In *Mapping Pre-Modern Sicily: Maritime Violence, Cultural Exchange, and Imagination in the Mediterranean* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2023: 53-74.

Raiding in the Middle Ages, whether on land or sea, is often portrayed as an ad hoc adventure with little or no planning. It is also assumed that it involved brute force applied relatively indiscriminately. The reality is that successful raids involved detailed planning, diplomacy, and timing, and that a good commander avoided a protracted fight whenever possible. Moreover, items targeted by the raiders often were not what one would expect. A raid of the Aegean Sea by the Catalan Aragonese fleet in 1292 is a perfect example. The accounts of the fleet while at Messina during the War of the Sicilian Vespers (1282-1302), preserved in the Cathedral Archives of Valencia, provide us with unique insight into how a raid was planned, organized, and conducted. Not only do we learn about planning, but also about the particular items targeted by raiders. Some of the products could be surprising, resulting in a useful and somewhat unexpected view of trade in the eastern Mediterranean at the end of the 13th century.

By 1292, the War of the Sicilian Vespers between the Crown of Aragon and the Angevins for the control of Sicily had been raging for ten years. While the war had reached a stalemate on land, the Catalan-Aragonese fleet was in virtual control of the Western Mediterranean. That summer the fleet, under the command of Admiral Roger de Lauria, set out on a mission with the object of no less than the capture of the Island of Chios and the systematic looting of the Aegean for good measure. The planning for this operation demonstrates the forethought and planning required to undertake an extended operation such as this raid.

The Raid

The raid into ‘Romania’ would not be the first, but the result of earlier incursions. The first mention of the office of the admiral sending ships into the Aegean Sea is for two galleys of 120 oars and a *vaccetta* sent into the region under the command of Berlinger de Villaraguto for two months starting on March 15, 1289.¹ In the summer of 1290, the fleet followed up the Villaraguto mission with a raid into the region. In May 1290 Alfonso III (r. 1285-1291) had sent two galleys of 116 oars and three galleys of 120 oars to Acre under the command of Captain Arnaldo Sinagudeo and Nicholas Buiaygua, *prothontinus* of Messina, ostensibly to support the garrison there.² However, during the voyage back these galleys proceeded to raid ‘partes ultramarinas’ and turned in a substantial profit from the sale of slaves and ransom of captives.³ Unfortunately, it is not known what islands or towns were raided, but it must have been apparent that the Aegean Sea represented a fat and relatively unprotected target.

The fleet did not follow up this raid in 1291, partly because of the death of Alfonso III in June and partly because the office of the admiral would have to decide how to deal with the Venetians and Genoese who had substantial holdings in the Aegean Sea. However, that same year the truce between Venice and Genoa that had stopped the first Genoese-Venetian war ended and though neither party immediately undertook overt hostile acts, the situation provided the office of the admiral with a golden opportunity. By 1292, relations between the Crown of Aragon and Genoa had been deteriorating in part because of Genoese piracy against Catalan merchants in the Eastern Mediterranean. Likewise, the inhabitants of the Byzantine town of

¹ Archivo de la Catedral de Valencia (hereafter cited as ACV), Pergamino 738. For a description of the various vessels mentioned in the accounts, see: Lawrence V. Mott, *Sea Power in the Medieval Mediterranean: The Catalan-Aragonese Fleet during the War of the Sicilian Vespers* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 186-209.

² ACV Perg. 738. A *prothontinus* was the commander for a naval district responsible for the arsenal, equipment and food production for the fleet, and for recruiting.

³ ACV Perg. 738. Unfortunately, the account lumps together the amounts from the raids into North Africa and the Aegean so it is not possible to ascertain exactly how much money came from the raid in the Ultramarina.

Monemvasia (Malvasia in the accounts) had been preying on Catalan ships with little or no intervention from the government.⁴

Planning for the Aegean raid of 1292 had begun sometime in the fall of 1291. On October 3, 1291, James II wrote to the Infante Frederick in Sicily ordering him to provide 3,000 ounces of gold from the *promissio*, which was an island-wide tax on the population to support the fleet, that Roger was to use to recruit and pay the crews and mercenaries for the coming year.⁵ Interestingly, the account for 1292, which covers this date, has no entry indicating that this amount was ever paid to Roger. The part of the *promissio* turned over to Roger was 1,400 ounces to pay off a loan he had made previously to the fleet.⁶ As we will see below, the curia may have decided that, based on anticipated profits from the coming summer, that it could afford to let Roger float a loan to the fleet for 2,183 ounces of gold and then pay him back.⁷ The entry for the account shows that during December 1291 Roger was already active in recruiting men and preparing the necessary ships for the summer campaign. On January 28, 1292 James II authorized Roger to pay the crossbowmen he recruited and then on February 12th sent Roger a letter to accelerate the arming of galleys in Valencia, Tarragona, and Barcelona so that the fleet would be ready by March.⁸ All of this indicates that the plans for fleet operations in 1292 had been laid at least by the fall of 1291.

⁴ Gabriella Airaldi, "Roger of Lauria's Expedition to the Peloponnese," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 10.2 (1995): 21.

⁵ Giuseppe La Mantia, *Codice diplomatico dei re aragonesi di Sicilia*. 2 vols. (Palermo:Ristampa Anastatica, 1990), *Codice*: vol. 2, doc. 36, 51-52.

⁶ The order for this payment was made on January 21, 1292 and noted in the fleet account. La Mantia, *Codice*, vol. 2, doc. 58, 77-79. The only amount of the *promissio* noted in each of the districts was money to pay Roger. ACV Perg. 737.

⁷ Roger was able to float significant loans to the fleet because of various privileges, duty and tax exemptions, income from raids, and a private fleet of transports. It was good to be the admiral, but there was a significant quid pro quo, and some the loans were not paid back. Mott, *Sea Power*, 103-5.

⁸ La Mantia, *Codice*, vol. 2, doc. 65, 84-85.

All told by July 1292 the fleet could muster an amphibious force of 62 knights, 62 *jannetti*, 109 light infantry, 469 crossbowmen, and 1,968 armed sailors. It may not have appeared to be a sizable force, but it would accomplish a great deal. In total, the expedition consisted of thirteen galleys of various sizes, seven armed transports (*galea aberta in puppa*), one light galley (*galion*), and one light vessel (*vaccetta*) of 24 oars.⁹ These numbers are the exact figures for vessels sent on the raid as listed in the fleet accounts.

The fleet sailed at the beginning of July 1292 for Calabria and captured Cotrone sometime in June (Figure 1).¹⁰ What other towns and ports the fleet attacked in Calabria at this time is difficult to ascertain. Because these attacks were designed to cripple the Angevins there is no notation concerning the locations attacked in Calabria. The attacks would have had the effect of disrupting the Angevin fleet to the point that it would not be able to interfere when the Aragonese fleet sailed east.

The raids into Calabria and Apulia were only a precursor to the main operation, which began in late July. Sometime on or around July 14th the fleet attacked the County of Cephalonia and sacked the surrounding islands, including Corfu. Roger was paid 614.04.13 ounces of gold by the captain of the county to go away, but this was not the last the region would see of the fleet.¹¹ At this point the fleet could have simply worked its way down the west coast of the Peloponnesus, but instead the fleet made a dash to Monemvasia (Malvasia) and had captured the town by July 28th, the date the town ransomed itself for 210.27.02 ounces of gold.¹² Typical of Roger's raids, he ordered that the population not be harmed, except if they were French. Like the

⁹ Mott, *Sea Power*, 250-1; Fig. 20.

¹⁰ We know the fleet put in at Cotrone because three sailors deserted there. ACV Perg. 737. Bartholomaeus de Neocastro, *Historia Sicula*, in *Cronisti e Scrittori Sincroni Napoletani*, edited by Giuseppe del Re (Naples, 1868), Volume II, 409-627, Chapter 121.

¹¹ ACV Perg. 737. The money is listed as ounces.tarens.grains of gold.

¹² ACV Perg. 738.

islands the fleet had just left, the population of Monemvasia had not seen the last of Roger and the fleet.

Where the fleet put in next is difficult to ascertain for though there is an entry for August 3rd, the name of the island is blurred. All of the chronicles agree that after leaving Monemvasia the fleet proceeded to raid the “insulas Romanie” but after that there is little agreement other than that Chios and Monemvasia were raided. Muntaner states that the fleet raided all the Cyclades and then the islands of Lemnos and Mytilene before striking Chios, but Neocastro and Speciale make no mention of this specifically.¹³ Again, the only dates given in the accounts are for when the fleet received the ransom of the various towns and islands, so it is quite possible the fleet had been at Chios for a substantial time before the ransom was paid. However, based on the time required by the fleet to sail between the various points it appears the fleet was averaging between fifty and sixty kilometers per day.¹⁴ Assuming the fleet did not stop after leaving Monemvasia, the maximum distance the fleet probably covered before August 3rd, when the ransom of 114.06.14 ounces of gold was paid, was a maximum of 300 kilometers, which would have put the fleet in the Cyclades.¹⁵

The main target of the raid was the island of Chios and the mastic produced there, and the arrival of the fleet in late August was no accident. The island had over 35,000 trees producing the resin, which was harvested in early August. When the fleet arrived, the mastic would have

¹³ This description from Muntaner is badly misplaced chronologically in his work, but other aspects appear to match the raid. Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, in *Les quatre grans cròniques*, edited by Ferran Soldevila (Barcelona, 1983), chap. 159; Neocastro, *Historia Sicula*: chap. 122; Nicolaus Specialis, *Rerum Sicularum*. In *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, edited by L. A. Muratori. Vol. 13 (Rome, 1727): book 2, chap. 19.

¹⁴ This estimate is based on entries in the account for 1292. In sailing from Cephalonia to Monemvasia the fleet covered approximately four hundred kilometers in fourteen days for an average speed of 1.2 kilometers per hour. It is not known if the fleet stopped or sailed directly to Monemvasia. In another example, the fleet took approximately five days to sail approximately three hundred kilometers from Chios to Monemvasia for an average speed of 2.5 kilometers per hour, or 2.7 knots. Estimates for the average speed of a galley fleet fall between two and three knots, which coincides with the values generated from the account.

¹⁵ ACV Perg. 737. The time the fleet actually was underway is unknown as we only have the dates on which the ransom was paid in each location.

just been processed by the factories on the island and ready for shipment.¹⁶ Mastic was a highly prized aromatic resin that was an important source of income for both the Byzantine Empire and the Genoese who were entrenched on the island.¹⁷ How long the fleet stayed at Chios is difficult to determine, but the fleet acquired enough goods that it bought a *tarida* from a Venetian merchant to help haul the loot. The fleet paid only 40 ounces of gold for the large two-masted vessel, its gear and large ship's barge, which suggests that the admiral made Peter Russo an offer he could not refuse.¹⁸ The fleet purchased the *tarida* to haul the iron, animal hides, and fabric that the fleet had acquired up to this point. More importantly it was needed to carry the main prize of the raid which was the mastic. There is little doubt that the main target of the raid was the mastic of which the fleet hauled in 158.7 metric tons.¹⁹ When the account was made the majority of the mastic was not sold, but based on the selling price of mastic sold at Tripoli by Henrico Nigrino in February 1293 the value of the total haul would have been 11,526 ounces of gold.²⁰ This amount was more than the total amount spent to operate the fleet in 1292.²¹ Unlike a large portion of the other items captured by the fleet during the voyage, the crown did not split half of the seized mastic with the crews which was the normal custom.

¹⁶ The resin comes from a Mediterranean shrub (*Pistacia lentiscus*) with dense twisted branches, 1-4m (3-13ft) in height. The resin occurs in the bark and is made to flow by making about 10 to 20 incisions (called "hurts") in the trunk and main branches. About 100 cuts are made over the season, though "hurting" younger trees inhibits future yields. The resin is collected as the tree 'weeps' the 'tears' of resin. Harvesting is from June to September during which time the syrup coagulates as the gum mastic drips from the cuts. These 'tears' are collected and then rinsed in barrels and dried. A second cleaning is done by hand. At its prime, a tree will yield 4.5kg (10 lbs) of mastic in one season. *Mastic - Copyright 2005 The Epicentre*, <http://www.theepicentre.com/Spices/mastic.html>.

¹⁷ Frederic C. Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 79, 128.

Freddy Thiriet. *La Romanie Vénitienne au moyen-âge: le développement et l'exploitation du domaine colonial vénitien (XIIIe – XVe siècles)*. (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1959), 103.

¹⁸ A new *navi* cost 106 ounces of gold, while a used galley sold for 80 ounces in Palermo. Clearly, the price of the transport was below market value. ACV Perg. 738; La Mantia, *Codice*, vol. 2, doc. 241, 620, 622.

¹⁹ ACV Perg. 737.

²⁰ ACV 737. The price per cantaria of mastic is equal to 173 tarens (1 ounce of gold = 30 tareni; 1 tarenus = 20 grani). The entry does not tell us what type of mastic was sold but using the above figure the 158.7 metric tons of mastic was worth approximately 11,526 ounces of gold.

²¹ 11,103.15.15 ounces of gold. ACV Perg. 737.

The fleet sailed from Chios sometime after August 25th and returned to Monemvasia on or before August 31st; here the admiral extorted more money from the population.²² On the outward voyage, the fleet had passed by Clarentia and the Venetian port of Modon, referred to in the documents as Portus Junctus.²³ That the admiral passed by is not surprising considering Modon was the one of the most important Venetian naval bases. However, if the admiral and the curia were intimidated by the Venetians, they certainly did not show it for on or about September 6th the fleet sacked the city.²⁴ And there was not the usual payoff for the fleet to go away. Unlike the attack at Monemvasia, at Modon the fleet demanded individual ransoms and took hostages who were not released until May 1293. The reason the Venetians were handled so roughly is probably because they put up a fight. According to the chronicles and the accounts, Modon was the only city to attempt a serious resistance to the fleet, which ultimately proved to be futile. The fact the curia believed it could attack the Venetians with impunity speaks volumes about the current political situation, the reputation of the Catalan-Aragonese fleet, and the confidence it gave the Crown of Aragon.

Up to this point the admiral and the fleet undoubtedly had annoyed the Angevins, the Byzantines, the Genoese and the Venetians, but they certainly were not done. On or about September 11th, the fleet raided the port of Clarentia, but unlike Modon the port did not put up a fight and so was let off with a general ransom for the whole port. However, the ships in the port and their cargo were fair game, including a Genoese galley commanded and owned by Daniel Spinola of the influential Spinola family.²⁵ Daniel was undoubtedly unhappy about losing his

²² See note 14.

²³ The name Portus Junctus does not appear in any of the lexicons. Fortunately, Specialis in describing the attack by the admiral on Modon states “And when sailing to Muton he came, in the port, which in the vulgar they call Juncis ...” Specialis, *Rerum Sicularum*: bk 2, chap. 19.

²⁴ ACV Perg. 737.

²⁵ ACV Perg. 737.

cargo, but at least he got to keep his galley, though he probably had to pay a ransom along with everyone else to do so. The fleet left Clarentia and sailed north to pay another visit to Corfu.²⁶ On September 16th, 1292 the captain of Corfu paid another ransom to the admiral of 92.25.16 ounces of gold not to return to the island.²⁷ Finally, the fleet left and returned to Messina sometime before September 21st.

The incidents at Modon and Clarentia provide an interesting insight into the general conduct of the fleet during its three-month excursion. Of the twelve towns and islands the fleet attacked, only Modon reportedly put up any kind of organized resistance. In that case, the fleet looted the town and took the nobility as hostages. In all the other cases, Roger negotiated a ransom for the town of money and goods. The raid against Clarentia is described in detail in the *Libro de Fechos et Conquistas de Principado de la Morera* and is probably a good example of what typically took place when the fleet showed up on a town's doorstep.²⁸ The port had been aware of the previous raids and was preparing a defense. According to the chronicle, a Greek noble had been taken at Modon, and Princess Isabella of Villehardouin, who ruled the province, arrived at the port to negotiate with Roger the release of the noble. According to the chronicle the fleet entered with great pomp and ceremony, and instead of a fight, negotiations took place. A ransom was paid, which included the port, and the release of the nobleman. As mentioned, Daniel Spinola's galley was looted, but the galley itself was left untouched. This was undoubtedly part of the negotiation. The point here is that the fleet got money and goods without having to get involved in a fight. Likewise, the town was left standing, the homes of the

²⁶ Muntaner states that Patras was attacked sometime during the voyage, but there is no entry for ransom from the town and the dates for the fleet either going to or returning from the Aegean Sea do not appear to permit enough time for the fleet to have stopped there. Muntaner, *Crònica*: chaps. 117.

²⁷ 'ACV Perg. 737.

²⁸ *Libro de los Fechos et Conquistas de Principado de la Morera compilado por comandamiento de don fray Johan Ferrandez de Heredia maestro del Hospital de S. Johan de Jerusalem*. Publications de la Société de l'Orient latin. Série historique; IV (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller, 1968), 108-110.

inhabitants were left unmolested, and the port left untouched. Considering the relatively small size of the raiding fleet, this was a good outcome, and it was repeated except where the fleet met resistance.

The fleet returned on September 21st, where it was unloaded and the booty prepared for sale. Finally, any hostages had to be accounted for and then placed in the house of the admiral or the arsenal until their ransom could be paid. The chronicles states that the admiral took a number of slaves for sale. Likewise, Neocastro states that the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Monemvasia was taken and “paid a great weight of gold for his release.”²⁹ The problem is that the accounts make no mention of the sale of slaves, and while noting in detail the ransoming of prisoners taken at Modon, there is no mention of the bishop or ransom from persons from Monemvasia.³⁰ Considering the accounts are very punctilious about noting what was captured and sold, the absence of any notation concerning the sale of slaves or of ransom from Monemvasia strongly suggests no slaves or prisoners were taken back to Messina except those from Modon.

Yet even with all this, there was still a significant amount of work to be done to gain all of the benefits from the raid. Much of the silk and *fusta* (coarse cotton or linen cloth) captured during the voyage were sold to merchants in Messina. Most likely the goods were put up for auction as was suggested by the *Siete Partidas*, as commonly practiced elsewhere in the Mediterranean.³¹ Of the cloth and hides sold at auction, the crews received half of the value, which amounted to 443.28.00 ounces of gold, and the admiral took the other half for himself.³²

²⁹ Neocastro, *Historia Sicula*, chap. 123.

³⁰ See Note 30.

³¹ *Las Siete Partidas del Rey Don Alfonso El Sabio*. (Madrid: La Real Academia de la Historia, 1804), Book II, Title XXVI, Law XXXII. A good example of an auction of a captured ship can be found in Andrés Díaz Borrás. “La lucha anticorsaria en Valencia durante la Edad Media: El episodio protagonizado por Pere Cabanyelles (1417-1418).” *Revista de Historia Naval* 7 (1989): 105-129.

³² ACV Perg. 737.

For whatever reason, other goods seized by the fleet were not divided with the crews, the most conspicuous being the mastic captured at Chios. However, this amount was still a handsome sum for everyone.

As noted above, the mastic seized was worth approximately 11,500 ounces. However, the fleet had to divide 158.7 metric tons into smaller amounts that could be readily sold. Because mastic was bought for its aromatic qualities, the office of the admiral had also to ensure that it was stored in such a manner to insure it did not dry out. In total, the fleet had 3,925 boxes made for transporting the mastic with each box holding approximately 45 *rotulos* or 34.7 kg of mastic.³³ After the mastic was placed in the box, the container was then wrapped in new canvas.

By November, the boxes and the mastic were ready to be shipped. On the orders of James II, 511 boxes were sent to him in Catalonia. However, the majority of the mastic was apparently sold in North Africa at Alexandria and Tripoli.³⁴ For whatever reason, it appears that the main market for mastic at this time was in the North Africa and the Middle East, and not Europe. The final transaction of the raid came in May 1293 when the last of the hostages taken at Modon were ransomed and released. All told, the fleet took in approximately 15,000 ounces of gold from the raid, not including the 888.16.00 ounces taken as spoils by the crews and the admiral (Figure 2). Put another way, the fleet, even after all of its expenses, turned a profit of at least 9,300 ounces of gold for the year!

Goods Seized and Their Value

Among the goods seized were those of Daniel Spinola, whose merchant galley had the misfortune of being in the port of Clarentia when the Aragonese fleet arrived to sack it. The

³³ ACV Perg. 737.

³⁴ ACV Perg. 737.

goods from the galley, along with other goods from the looting spree, were sold in auctions at Messina on November 8 and 12, 1292, and on February 26, 1293. The results of those auctions were summarized in the fleet accounts of the Catalan-Aragonese fleet for 1292.³⁵

The fleet's itinerary shows that it made a rather thorough sweep of the Aegean. As mentioned, the goods from the raid, except mastic which was held for the Crown and marketed in North Africa, were sold in a series of auctions at Messina and half of the proceeds went to the crews. The results of these auctions provide us with a rare glimpse of relative cost of a variety of raw materials and manufactured goods to each other at a single point in time. While at first glance the items in the auction appear to be what might be expected from such a 'revenue enhancement' expedition, closer examination of the goods, and the prices paid for them, raises some issues about the state of trade in the Aegean at this time and what was considered truly valuable. A case in point is that of the mastic that was seized at Chios. When one looks at the Total Income (Figure 2) from the raid, it is clear that mastic was the major contributor at 68%, followed by ransoms. Raw materials and manufactured goods only provided 14% of the revenue. This disparity has been noted in the chronicles, and the assumption has been that since most of the raid's income came from the sale of mastic, then mastic must have been the most valuable commodity. But was it?

When we look at the weight of the commodities brought back (Figure 3), we see that mastic made up 66% of the weight. The fleet made a lot of money off mastic because they had a lot of it, 158 metric tons to be precise, and as important, a market for it. The sheer weight gives an idea of the size of this industry and the level of production at the three Genoese factories. To produce this much mastic in one season required over 35,000 trees. Considering the harvest

³⁵ The dates, goods seized, and prices paid for those goods come from the Fleet Accounts of Roger de Lauria for 1292 (Archivo de la Catedral de Valencia, Perg. 737, fol. 1).

season ended by the start of September, it is clear the arrival of the fleet at Chios on August 25 was not a coincidence.³⁶

The percentage of revenue and weight of the other goods raises some issues. From the chronicles, it would seem that large quantities of silk and cloth were captured, but when we look at the two charts, we see that cloth and silk (raw and finished) represent only 4% of the revenue and less than 1% of the total weight (this number is a bit low since some of the cloth was sold as bolts so there is no weight given for them). Food and raw materials not only represent 10% of the income, but 33% of the weight of goods hauled back, or 77 metric tons. The two figures show that the fleet went to a lot of trouble to bring back materials NOT mentioned in the chronicles, and that silk, while valuable as we will see, actually provided only a fraction of the proceeds from the raid. So, what did they bring back besides mastic?

Contrary to what one might assume, 74% of the loot, not counting mastic, was raw materials; either hides (32%) or iron (42%). The high-value commodities brought back, silk and *kermes*, made up only 5% of the loot by weight (Figure 3). The remaining 21% of material was food in the form of cheese or olive oil. The point here is that the fleet went to a lot of trouble to haul back material one would not consider to be of high value nor a target for such a raid. Yet the vast bulk of the material hauled back was exactly that: items one would consider to be normally low priority targets.

Because the goods from the raid were sold essentially wholesale, the auctions provide us with a unique set of data for comparing the price of a wide variety of goods for a specific moment in time. A good way to look at the relative value of various goods is to look at the Revenue-To-Weight Ratio: ounces of gold per 100 kilograms (Figure 5). While some of the results are as one might expect, others are decidedly not.

³⁶ See Footnote 16.

Processed silk, as one might expect, is the highest value item and is literally off the chart, followed by *kermes*, which were dried insects crushed to make the distinctive red dye used in silk cloth manufacturing.³⁷ The next item is a bit surprising in that it has a value more than what would have been assumed from chronicles and documents. *Cucculo* is a rough silk that could not be reeled and had to be spun much like flax to produce a course silk fabric.³⁸ Despite this, it still had a value of over 20 ounces of gold per 100 kilograms.

What is of interest here is that mastic is so low compared to the previous two (a ratio 7.5 compared to 125.9 and 37.8). In fact, mastic is only slightly more than 100 kgs of ram skins. Again, this reinforces the point that it was not that mastic was overly expensive as a spice, but rather there was a lot of it and, as important, a market for it.

But again, when we look at the raid, the vast bulk of material brought back, other than mastic, was of relatively low value: iron 33 mt, cheese 8.9 mt, olive oil 7.6 mt (56 US drums) and 2.9 mt of “putrid lambskins.” What one would do with 1,600 “rotting and putrid” lambskins, which were collected and sold for a total of 1.6 ounces of gold, is an interesting question. As we can see from Figure 4, they are not even a blip on the graph at 0.06 ounces per hundred kilograms, but this does not mean they were worthless. When we compare them to price of grain at Messina during this same period (Figure 5) we find that 100 kgs of “rotting and putrid” lambskins was equivalent to about 100 kgs of grain. You might wonder why it was worth the trouble of putting up with the stench of 1,600 “rotting and putrid” lambskins for 2 months in a

³⁷ This high-quality, solid scarlet colorant was obtained from the pregnant female kermes parasite (*coccum ilicis L.*), which after being killed was dried, crushed, and mixed with water. Because of its high cost, kermes was only used for the dyeing of high-quality yarns. The kermes parasite settles mainly on the holly oak (*quercus coccifera*), an arborescent bush common in Boeotia, Euboea, and practically the entire Peloponnese. David Jacoby, “Silk in Western Byzantium before the Fourth Crusade,” *Trade, Commodities and Shipping in the Medieval Mediterranean*. (Variorum, 1997), VII, 483.

³⁸ David Jacoby, “Silk production in the Frankish Peloponnese: the evidence of fourteenth century surveys and reports.” *Trade, Commodities and Shipping in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Variorum, 1997), VIII, 53-54.

ship, but it turns out that “putrid lambskins” make excellent vellum, and this undoubtedly explains why they were brought back and why they had such a relatively high price.

When we look at the chronicles and the Revenue/Weight Ratio graph, it is easy to assume that silk was the most valuable commodity. However, the contents of the Genoese merchant galley owned by Daniel Spinola throws that assumption into question. As mentioned, some of the cloth seized in the raid was sold as bolts of cloth (*peccia*), and this is true of the cloth seized on the Spinola galley at the port of Clarentia (Figure 6). Bolts of silk cloth, including *samite*, had been seized elsewhere on the raid, but none was found on the Spinola galley. The galley contained a total of 42 bolts of cloth (30 blue cloth, 6 brown cloth, 6 camel-hair cloth). There is no further description, such as other material interwoven, normally noted in the account. It is assumed that the amount of cloth per bolt did not vary much based on Pegolotti which shows only a minor variation in the amount of cloth per *peccia* between various cities. Normally, if there was a major deviation from a standard measurement, the accounts would note it and adjust for it.

When compared to the silk cloth bolts sold, we see a rather remarkable disparity in price. The “cloth” (*panni*) on the Spinola galley sold for an order of magnitude more than the silk captured on the raid. In fact, the blue and brown “panni” sold for more than the camel-hair cloth on board, which probably came from Persia (according to Pegolotti). The point here is again that assumptions about value can be misleading. The accounts simply state “panni blui” and “sete alba”, and based on that it would be easy to assume the silk was worth more. However, as we can see, the “cloth” was substantially more valuable than silk.

The relatively low cost of the samite, normally considered a high-value item, might be due to the fact it was *cocometa*, which was a cheaper version of samite.³⁹ Finally, it has to be noted there is no information in which direction the Spinola galley was sailing. The camel-hair cloth and the high value of the “cloth” suggest it was returning from the Levant, but that is sheer speculation. Also, if was returning, one would expect it to have more silk and other items on board.

As noted, the fleet went to a lot of trouble to haul back about anything they could find, including “putrid” lambskins. We have also seen that they made a pretty thorough scouring of the Aegean islands. So, the issue is not only what they brought back, and thought was valuable, but also what is NOT in the inventory (Figure 7).

The table here lists materials from both Pegolotti and a Catalan merchant manual.⁴⁰ The items highlighted in *Bold Italics* are materials and goods that were captured by the Aragonese fleet. What becomes immediately apparent is that there are a large number of items missing. Other than mastic and kermes, there are NO spices and NO rare items, such as coral or amber. Moreover, there is a long list of raw materials that, if present, the fleet would have seized if for no other reason than they used those materials in large quantities in the arsenals. This is particularly true of pitch, tallow, wood of all types, ginger, and wine.

There are other materials missing that are ubiquitous throughout the region: copper, tin, lead, and alum. These are all bulk materials, but if the fleet was willing to haul 33 metric tons of iron, it is doubtful it would have shrunk from loading these other valuable materials. The absence of alum is particularly hard to fathom. Mytilene and Chios are right in the area of Phocaea where

³⁹David Jacoby, “Silk in Western Byzantium before the Fourth Crusade,” 496.

⁴⁰Miguel Gual Carmena (ed.). *El primer manual hispanico de mercaderia (siglo XIV)*. (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1981); Francesco Pegolotti. *La Pratica della Mercatura* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Medieval Academy of America, 1936).

the mineral had been mined by the Genoese since 1275; it was a valuable mordant in textile processing. Likewise, grain, which the fleet used in vast quantities to make biscuit, was a major export of Monemvasia, and yet there is no mention of it.⁴¹

Why the other items listed in the merchant manuals are missing is impossible to say. The lack of spices might be partially explained by the fall of Acre in May 1291 and the subsequent stranglehold the Mamluks had on the Indian spice routes. But it does not explain the lack of materials that would be coming up through Persia or along the Silk Road. All of the materials seized in the raid come from the Mediterranean Basin, and more specifically the Aegean. The most exotic item is the camel-hair cloth on the Spinola galley, which may have come from Persia.

The Byzantine samite probably came from Andros, which was known for its production. The other silk products probably came from somewhere in the Cyclades. Greece had a thriving silk industry until the arrival of the Catalans in 1312, and silk, both raw and processed, was traded throughout region.⁴² The lack of an adjective to indicate the silk came from outside the Aegean strongly suggests the silk was indigenous. The iron possibly came from Thassos. Neocastro states that the sheep and cow hides were seized at Monemvasia, which is quite probable.⁴³ Hides were apparently a major product of this region at this time.⁴⁴

There is ample material on the various treaties signed between the Byzantine Empire and the Franks, Genoese and Venetians, but information for what items were in the system being traded is lacking. The fact is there is a dearth of information of exactly what was being traded in

⁴¹ Angeliki E. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins: The Foreign Policy of Andronicus II 1282-1328*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 72-73.

⁴² David Jacoby, "Silk production in the Frankish Peloponnese," 49.

⁴³ Neocastro, *Historia Sicula*, chap. 122.

⁴⁴ Klaus-Peter Matschke, "Commerce, Trade, Markets and Money: Thirteenth-Fifteenth Centurie," In *The Economic History of Byzantium: from the seventh through the fifteenth century*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2002), 780; Haris Kalligas, "Monemvasia, Seventh-Fifteenth Centuries," in *The Economic History of Byzantium*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou, 890-1.

the Aegean, much less the level of trade, during the last half of the thirteenth century. The raid of 1292 gives us a snapshot of what was in the trading system during that summer. This is not to say this is a final or definitive answer concerning anything, but it does raise some questions as to the level of trade in certain items and just what was in the system at this time. It also raises the question as to how reliable 14th century merchant manuals are when looking back into the 13th century. Clearly, the value of an item did not necessarily equate to its availability, as in the case of mastic. Finally, as the putrid lambskins demonstrate, that value of seized items truly was in the eye, or in this case the nose, of the beholder.

Repercussions

The raid into the Aegean had been extremely profitable for the fleet, but it had managed to assault the interests of virtually every naval power in the Mediterranean while going about its business. Every act the admiral had carried out against the Angevins, Genoese, Byzantines, and Venetians was in itself grounds for war. The Angevins really posed no serious threat, but the Venetians had, and in the future would, go to war over incidents much smaller than the sack of a major and highly strategic naval base. The fleet had directly attacked Genoese interests by raiding Chios, and looting a galley owned by the influential Spinola family certainly could not have helped matters. Yet the repercussions from this raid were virtually nonexistent. This author has not been able to find any documents sent by either the Venetians or the Genoese to the Crown of Aragon protesting the actions of the fleet. Undoubtedly there must have been some exchanges, if for no other reason than to release the hostages, but the diplomatic fallout one might expect from such a raid apparently did not occur.

The reason for this inaction by the offended parties is multifaceted. In 1290 the Crown of Aragon and Genoa had tried to come to terms concerning trade. On March 3, 1290 Alfonso III had sent two ambassadors to Genoa in order to settle differences.⁴⁵ On July 3, 1290 a treaty between Genoa and the Crown of Aragon was signed at Palermo protecting the rights of Genoese in Sicily and allowing them to trade freely.⁴⁶ However, by 1291, relations between Genoa and Aragon had become shaky at best, and while the Catalan-Aragonese fleet was seizing Genoese vessels trying to run the blockade at Naples, the Genoese had been sending out pirates to raid Catalan shipping.⁴⁷ Yet the Genoese in 1291 were faced with the prospect of war with Venice as the truce expired, and neither side appeared willing to reinstate it despite papal intervention.⁴⁸ Genoa was in a difficult position in that to reach its colonies in the Levant its ships had to pass through waters controlled by the Crown of Aragon. The major naval base for the Catalan-Aragonese fleet was at Messina and any attempt by Genoese merchants to sneak through the narrow Straits of Messina would certainly have met with failure. Likewise, even if Genoese shipping tried to take the much longer route around Sicily it would still have to avoid the ubiquitous patrols sent out from Sicily and Malta. Despite its economic and military power, Genoa could not afford to fight both Venice and the Crown of Aragon, especially with the Catalan-Aragonese fleet positioned to choke off any trade with the Levant.

The Venetians were in a similar position. While the Crown of Aragon did not sit on any of the important Venetian trade routes, engaging in open war with the Catalans would not have been in Venice's best interest. Again, the position of the fleet in Sicily put it in a position to cut

⁴⁵ ACV Perg. 738.

⁴⁶ La Mantia, *Codice*, vol. 1, doc. 203, 480-481.

⁴⁷ Andrea Caffaro, *Annali genovesi di Caffaro e de' suoi continuatori dal MXCIX al MCCXCIII*, vol. 5 (Rome: Fonti per la Storia d'Italia, 1929), No. 14.2: 131-132; Steven A. Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese, 958-1528* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 182.

⁴⁸ F. C. Hodgson, *Venice in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*. (London: George Allen and Sons, 1910), 253.

off Venetian trade with the western basin. Moreover, open hostilities with the Crown of Aragon ran the risk of driving the Aragonese into the Genoese camp, and the last thing Venice needed was to be fighting a war with two powerful naval forces. This was also why the Genoese probably had second thoughts about retaliating for the raid. Had Venice and Genoa been on peaceful terms, the repercussions from the Aegean raid might have been more substantial. However, both parties hated each so much there was no real prospect of the two joining in an attempt to punish the Aragonese or Roger. The Catalan-Aragonese fleet had proved itself to be an extremely effective fighting force, as the Genoese had found out to their detriment every time they had supported the Angevins.⁴⁹ What had happened to the Angevins and the Genoese had not been lost on the Venetians either. Roger de Lauria and the curia most likely realized that both Genoa and Venice would be paralyzed with inaction by the fear that any major retaliatory action might drive the Crown of Aragon into an alliance with their opponent. James II and Roger knew they held the strategic and political high ground and that such a large raid, which on its face might appear highly dangerous, was in fact relatively safe from a political standpoint.

The Byzantine reaction was to seize the belongings of Catalan merchants in retaliation. As mentioned, relations between the Crown of Aragon and Andronikos II had been problematic. James II would eventually repay the harmed parties, but the amount was a pittance of the amount actually taken. In part, the reason Andronikos II went no further was that he simply did not have the naval force to challenge the Crown of Aragon. Hostilities would have disrupted trade and diminished the income which the Byzantine government so desperately needed.

⁴⁹ Lawrence V. Mott, "Trade as a weapon during the War of the Sicilian Vespers," *Medieval Encounters* 9:2/3 (2004) Special Edition: 236-243.

Conclusion

The raid of 1292 was one of the most spectacular medieval naval operations from several standpoints beyond the amount of loot acquired. From the standpoint of efficiency, it was truly remarkable simply for the relative lack of casualties. While the accounts do not provide any details of casualties taken by the mercenary forces, the losses in the crews from combat and desertion amounted to only 58 men. The horses, of which 34 died out of the 124 taken on the voyage, took the highest percentage of casualties during the raid.⁵⁰ The low casualty rate for the crews is remarkable considering the time the fleet was raiding and the important ports that were captured. Moreover, except for a *vaccetta* lost in a storm, the fleet lost no ships during the entire raid into the Aegean Sea. In part, this was due to the negotiating skills of the admiral. In all of the cases save one, Roger negotiated with the towns for a ransom and goods. It saved the towns from being looted, but also meant the fleet did not have to engage in protracted battles that would have sapped its strength.

The length and accomplishments of the Catalan-Aragonese fleet during this voyage is a credit to the organization of the office of the admiral and to the leadership of Roger de Lauria. For the fleet to operate so efficiently for over two months in hostile waters required that the admiral not only have the necessary leadership skills but also necessitated a high degree of organizational skill to plan and carry off such an operation. Finally, it shows that a successful operation then, as today, required careful thought, planning and execution.

⁵⁰ ACV Perg. 737.

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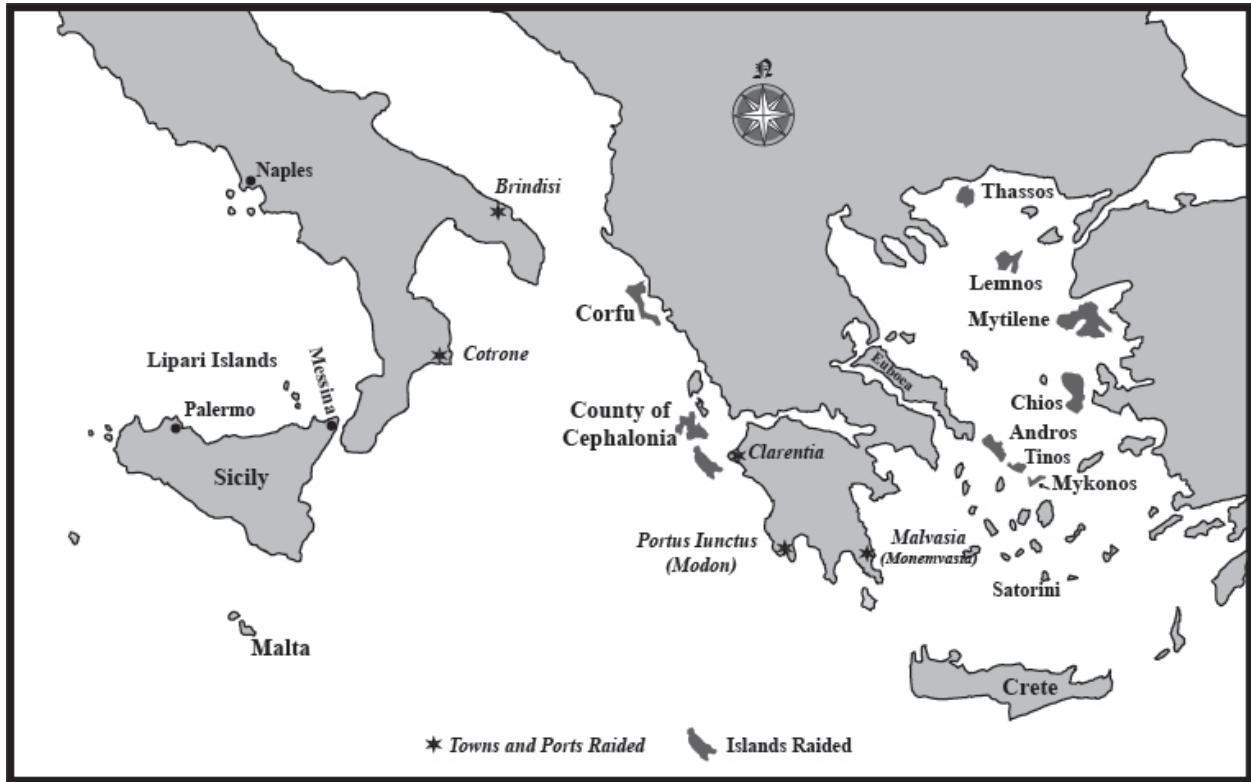


Figure 1: Aegean Raid of the Catalan-Aragonese Fleet: July – September 1292.

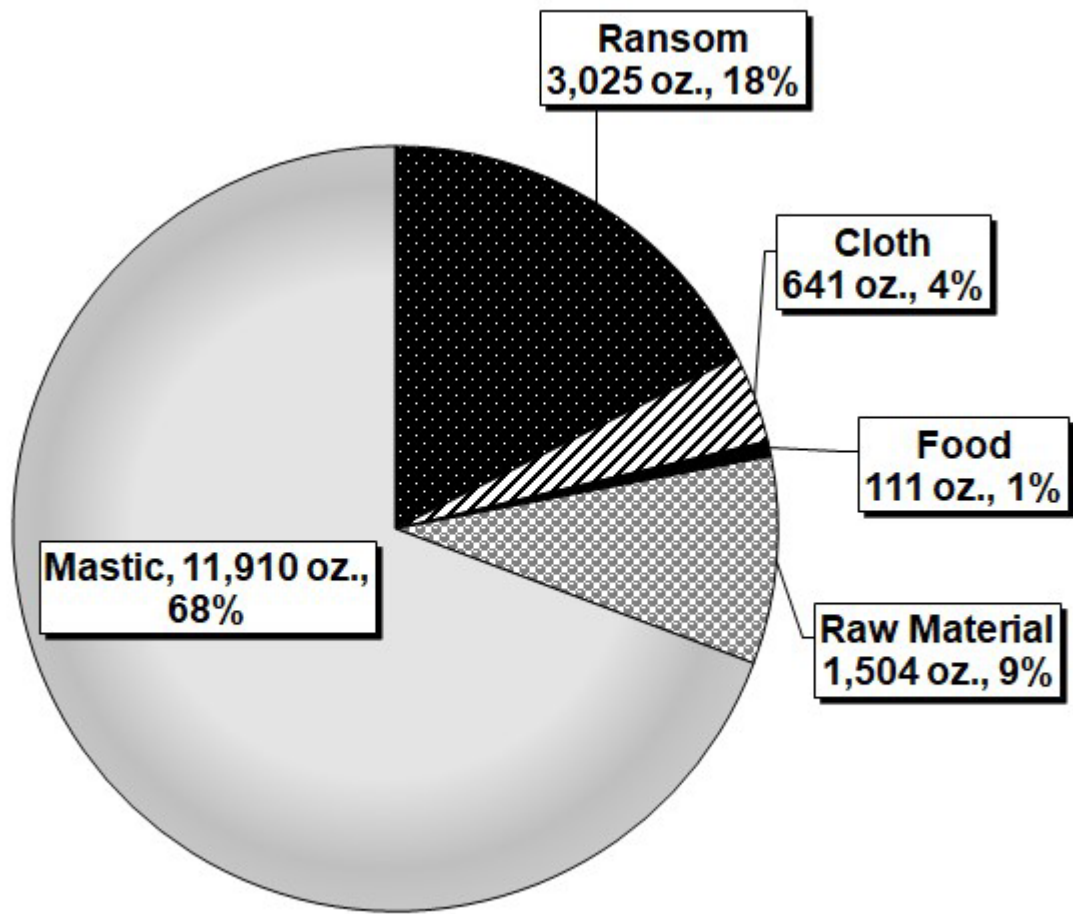


Figure 2: Distribution of Revenue from the 1292 Raid (ounces of gold).

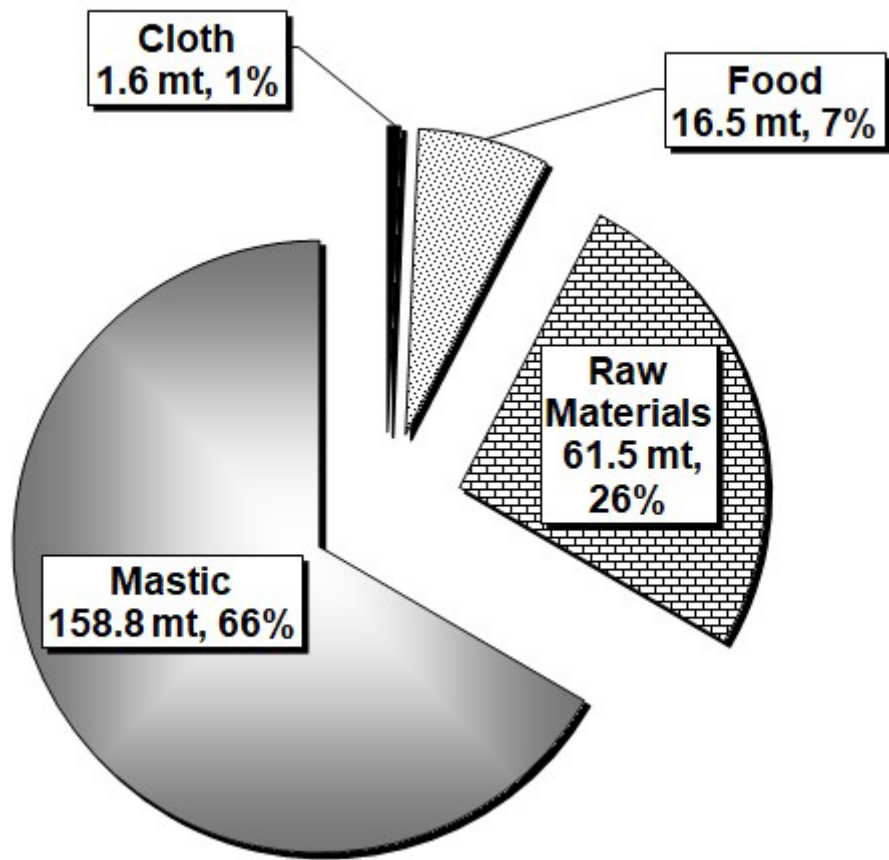


Figure 3: Weight distribution of goods seized.

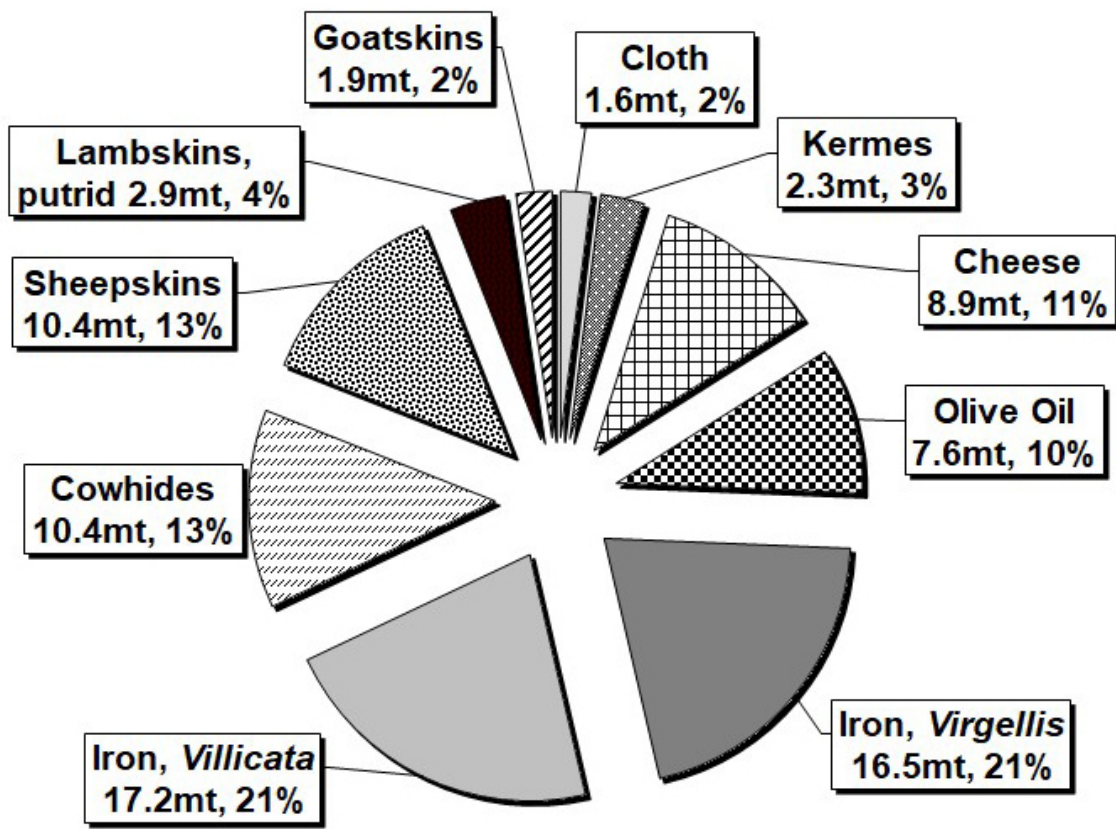


Figure 4: Weight distribution of goods (excluding mastic).

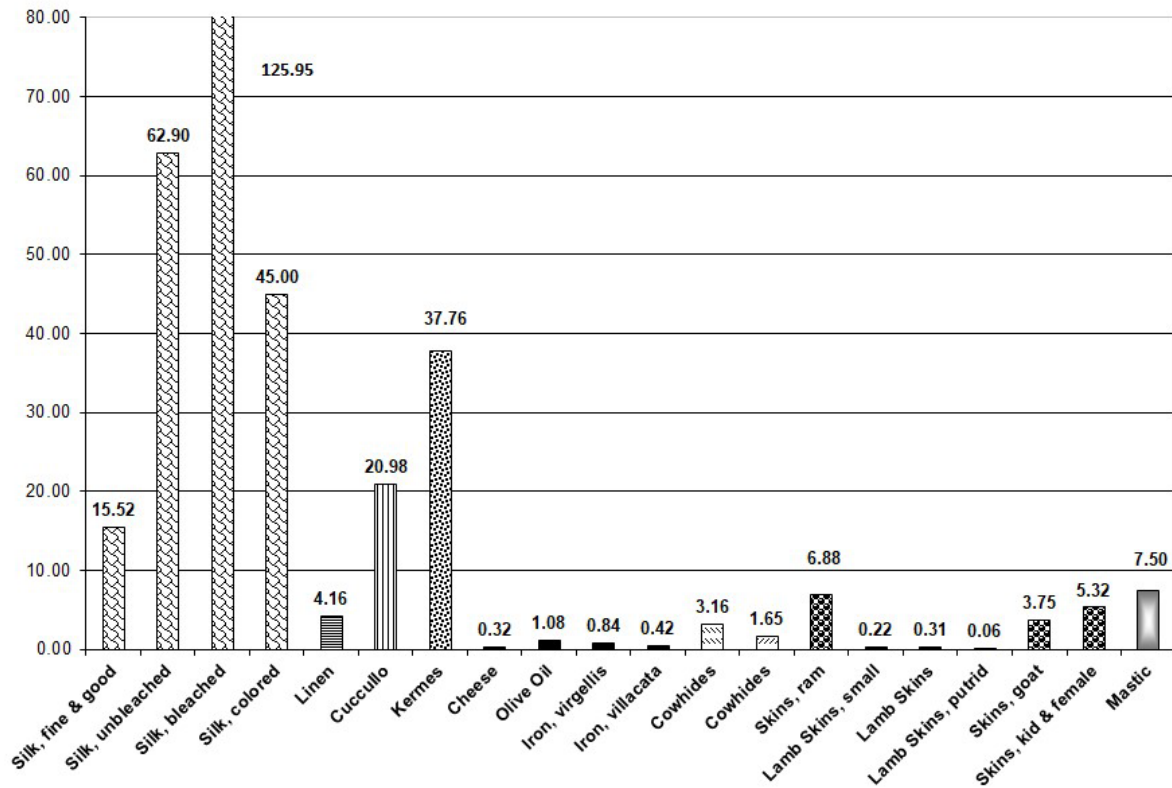


Figure 4: Revenue-to-Weight Ratio of goods seized

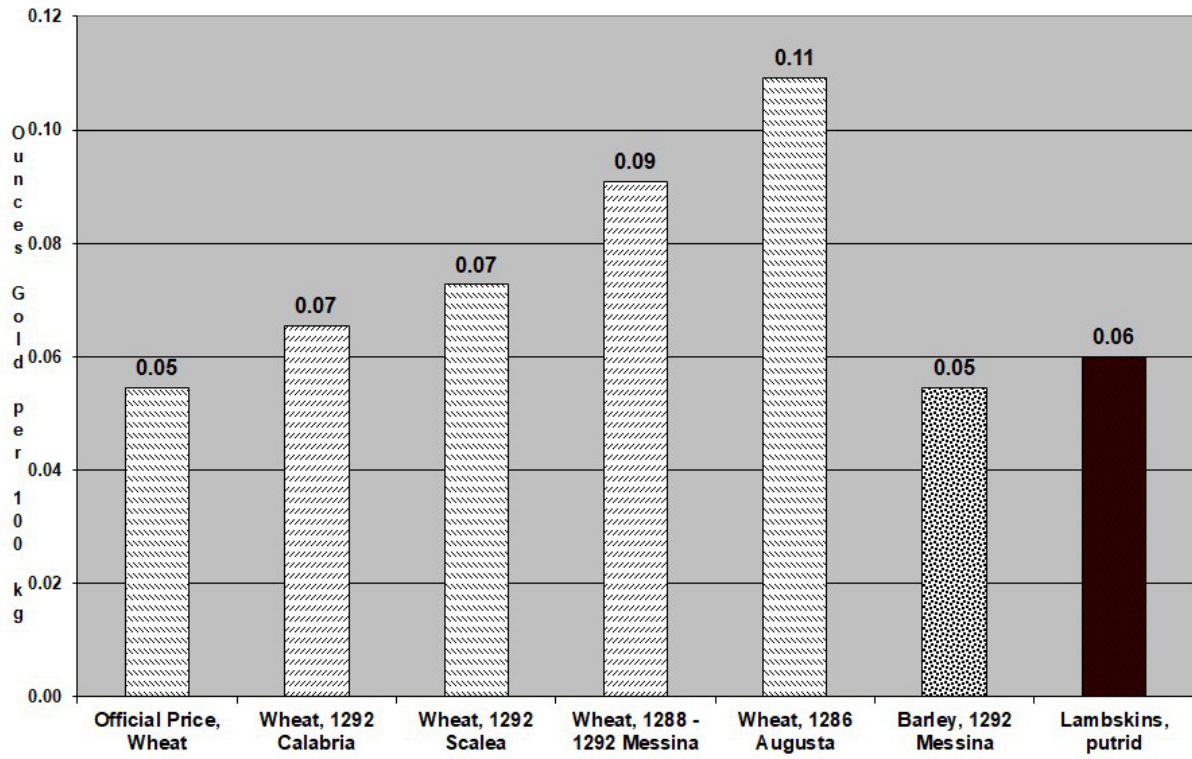


Figure 5: Price of grain compared to that of “putrid lambskins”

Ounces of Gold per Bolt of Cloth

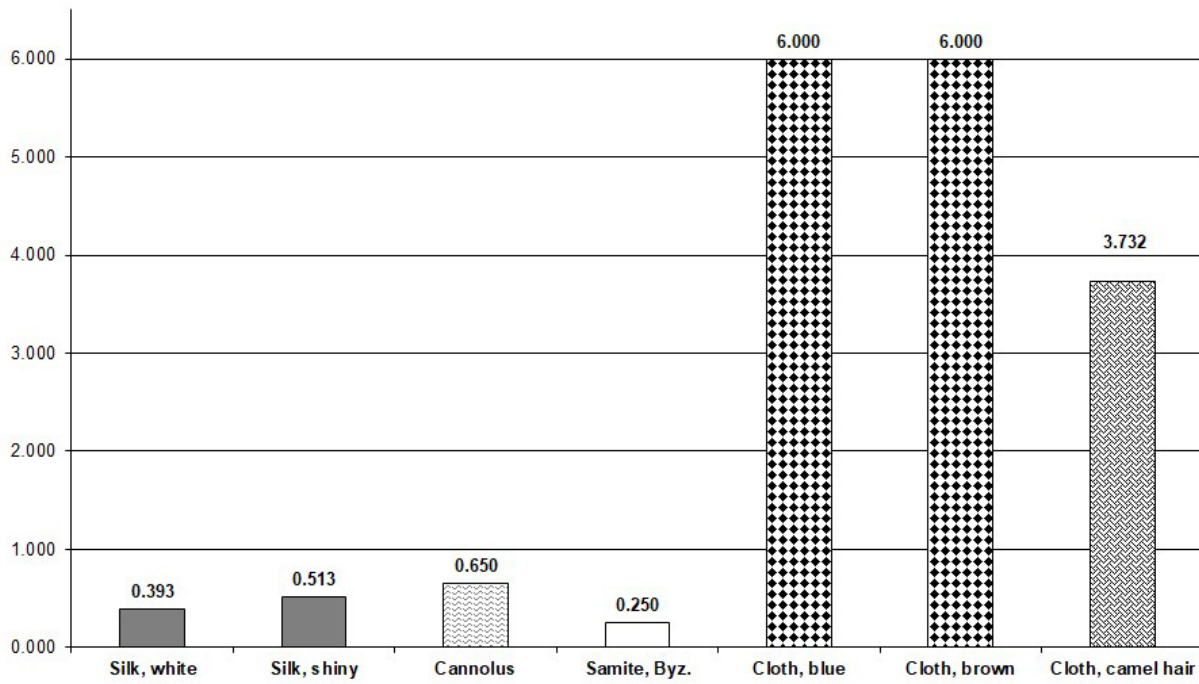


Figure 6: A comparison of the price of cloth and silk seized

Location	Pegolotti (1340)	Catalan manual (1381)
Tannis (Sea of Azov)	<i>cheese, linen, olive oil, silk cloth, cloth, grain, cow-hides</i> , wax, ladanum, copper, tin, ginger, pepper, all spices (in bulk), cotton, madder, tallow, honey, silk, saffron, amber, vair-skins, fox-skins, sable, weasel-skins, martin-skins, canvas, caviar	"... where the products of India and Persia are deposited."
Tabriz	<i>silks, linens, camel-hair cloth</i> , spices (all types), cinnabar, tin, leopard-skin, vair-skin, amber, coral, weasel-skin	
Constantinople (Pera)	<i>hides, iron, cheese, flax, mastic, silk, boiled silk</i> , indigo, wax, tin, lead, raisins, soap, almonds, honey, cotton, rice, gum-lac, figs, orpiment, safflower, henna, cumin, pistachios, sulfur, senna, pitch, mordasanguie, salt beef, chestnuts, wool, Brazil-wood, black pepper, long pepper, lac, sugar, incense, aloe, cassia, mercury, salammoniae, cinnabar, galbanum, ladanum, copper, coral, saffron, cloves, cloaks, nutmeg, cardamom, Dragon's Blood, amber	<i>fine cloth and clothes</i>
Romania (Byzantium)		<i>hides, fine clothes, silk</i> , seed, incense, gum-lac, timber, aloe, lead, madder, wax, cooper
Clarentia	<i>grain</i> , vine, copper, tin, wool cloth	

Figure 7: Goods listed in 14th century merchant manuals

Item seized in the raid NOT listed in either manual: Byzantine Samite.

Note: ***Bold Italic*** indicates items seized in the 1292 raid and found in the merchant manuals.