The British Academy

Journal of the British Academy, **9(s4)**, 137–150
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/009s4.137
Posted 27 August 2021

Security and border making in 19th-century southern Italy

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Abstract: The article focuses on the border region between two states in pre-unification Italy, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the Papal States. Although negotiations to define the border precisely started only following the cholera epidemic of 1836–7, the early 19th century already saw the start of greater control of the territory and of the borders by the 'administrative monarchies'. Analysed through the lens of securitisation, movement control processes reveal a variable geography of 'security spaces' and freedom of movement for different social groups, where state security and collective security needs overlapped.

Keywords: 19th century, southern Italy, Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, state security; collective security, mobility control.

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Security history at the border

Before Italian unification in 1861, the boundaries that criss-crossed the peninsula were inter-state borders and, therefore, political borders. These borders delimited a sovereign territory, conceiving territory as a 'political space', as defined by Charles Maier.[1] Such borders were signs that distinguished 'space' from 'territory', as Daniel Nordman, author of a seminal study on France's borders, has recently stated.[2] The actual border-making processes in the Italian peninsula, as in most of Europe, started around the second half of the 18th century.[3] Nevertheless, only in the second half of the 19th century is it possible to talk of truly defined state borders on the continent.[4]

This article focuses on one specific border in pre-unification Italy, that lay between the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the Papal States, horizontally crossing the peninsula, roughly from Gaeta to Civitella del Tronto. This can be considered a significant case study, on the one hand for geographical reasons, as it was the only land border of the largest state in pre-unification Italy, connecting the whole southern part of the peninsula with the centre; and on the other hand, because it linked a socially and economically integrated trans-state region, and was therefore particularly involved in the movement of people. Some of these individuals crossing the border, such as the poor, vagrants or political suspects, were considered a threat to state or collective security.

The inter-state negotiations for a precise definition of the border started only following the cholera epidemic of 1836–7, after which guard huts were arranged along the border in order to create a sanitary cordon. The positioning of these huts resulted in numerous points of uncertain attribution along the border, and served to reignite territorial disputes that had been going on for centuries, leading to protests from the border communities who were worried that the established positions of the huts, endowed with institutional recognition, could have long-term repercussions on the attribution of certain lands to one state or the other.[5]

The law defining this border, being the result of the negotiations begun in the late 1830s shortly after the cholera epidemic, only came into force in 1852. Nevertheless, despite this latter formalisation of the border, it was from the beginning of the 19th century that the two Italian 'administrative monarchies' had deployed greater control of their territory and of their borders. In the wake of the French domination, both states introduced, as has been highlighted by several studies in recent years, innovative

[1] Maier (2016).

[2] Nordman (2015).

[3] Balani (2007); Meriggi (2016).

[4] See the Spanish, Portuguese and French cases: Sahlins (1989); García Álvarez (2015); Garcia Álvarez & Puente Lozano (2017); Puyo (2018); Capdevila i Subirana (2012).

[5] Di Fiore (2013).

tools for identifying people and controlling their movements,[6] as well as the new 'modern' police force, which has also been the focus of a renewed historiography.[7]

In previous works, I have analysed this border-making and consolidation process, historicising the border through the category of production. Here, I argued that the definition of borders has to be read in terms of a construction process to which actors other than the state contributed, rather than as an institutional action from above through a state-centred approach—the border was a sort of plural enterprise. In this framework of the de-naturalisation of political borders, which reconfigures them in terms of human, political, social and then historical product, I moreover showed how it is not convincing to rigidly distinguish the lines of a border as a product of the action of state institutions and the borderlands as regions designed just by economic, familial and social networks indifferent to the border. Both, in fact, are the result of multiple interactions between institutions and society.[8]

Based on this insight into the construction of borders, the present article aims to analyse this border through the lens of security, showing how securitisation policies impacted on border making, tending to shape the border space in different ways, sometimes making it more rigid, sometimes more porous, depending on security needs and objects and also on their interlacement with other social dynamics. It is therefore a question of focusing not on the construction of the border through diplomatic negotiations, but on the way it is modelling by passing through administrative circulars and police measures developed to guarantee the safety of the border against what was considered a threat. The space of the border is pivotal in this analysis. It is inspired by the insights of the 'spatial turn',[9] which proposes the centrality of space as an analytical category, no longer viewing it as immobile or in the background, but analysing it as a social, political and cultural product. Intertwining these principles with the 'dynamic' and procedural dimension recognised by border studies,[10] borders can be framed as the product of a historical construction, to which, as will emerge, issues related to its security crucially contributed. Moreover, if the space is produced, it is at the same time itself a producer.[11] As we will see, if securitisation policies contributed to shape the border space, the latter came to strengthen and embody security practices and narratives.

[6] About & Denis (2010); Breckenridge & Szreter (2012); Antonielli (2014).

[7] Napoli (2003); Emsley (2007); Milliot (2007).

[8] Di Fiore (2013; 2017; 2020); Di Fiore & Rolla (2018).

[9] Warf & Arias (2009).

[10] Wastl-Walter (2011); Donnan & Wilson (2012). On the relation between border studies and spatial turn in global history, see Di Fiore (2016).

[11] Lefebvre (1974).

In order to apply the lens of security to the study of borders from a historical perspective, it is necessary to turn to the analytical categories developed in the field of security studies. Particularly, but not exclusively, interesting for a historical analysis are the constructivist approaches that emerged in the field in the aftermath of the Cold War. These approaches distanced themselves from the positivist epistemology of the traditional 'realist' approach—inclined to an ontological and static conception of security—favouring an interpretation of the latter in terms of construction by social actors and politicians, produced in different forms according to specific moments and contexts. The even more radical position of Critical Security Studies was developed in the mid-1990s around the Copenhagen School and the theory of securitisation, which 'captures the performative power politics of the concept "security" and has shown how issues acquire the status of security through intersubjective socio-political processes'.[12] Currently, even from a very different position, open-minded and interdisciplinary perspectives share an interpretation of security in terms not of 'a fixed attribute or a dispositional quality, but a dynamic and complex process'.[13]

This emphasis on the procedural nature of the formation of security policies and discourses offers a particularly fruitful perspective for historians, since it recognises their evolution and the different forms they have assumed in their historical dimension. Security history is still an embryonic research field, one of the last to be developed within security studies.[14] Security history focused on borders would be worthy of investigation, as the border is undoubtedly a pivotal space for security issues, conceived as security of the state territory. One of the main means deployed for this territorial security was actually the control on people's movements. Since the period of French domination, people's mobility in the Italian peninsula had become subject to an unprecedented degree of surveillance. With the introduction of compulsory travel documents aimed at a generalised control of the population, some categories of subjects required particular attention from the authorities, as they were considered particularly dangerous for security. What kind of security? And which subjects were considered security objects at the border from the perspective of the state?

Poor people and vagabonds: a threat to collective security

First of all, security measures targeted the poor. In similar ways to what had happened in many other European contexts since the mid-18th century,[15] in the Kingdom

[12] Vuori (2016: 64); Buzan *et al.* (1998); Balzacq *et al.* (2016).

[13] Bourbeau (2015: 8);

[14] De Graaf *et al.* (2019); De Graaf & Zwierlein (2013); Conze (1984); Di Fiore (2019).

[15] Chevalier (1958); Benigno (2014).

of the Two Sicilies, too, the poor were also subject to particular surveillance. This especially related to their mobility, as their category overlapped with those of 'vagabonds' and 'the idle', from which, according to the police interpretation in the city of Naples, 'the class of troublemakers of all kinds originates'.[16] The very category of 'vagabond' was actually remarkably broad, including all those without 'possessions, industry, art, or any occupation, fixed or daily assignment or other secure means of subsistence of this nature'.[17]

In the Kingdom, as early as 1818, a ban on issuing passports for travel to foreign countries to subjects without livelihoods had been prescribed. Most of these subjects continued travelling without documents until the 1850s, as they did in all the countries of Europe. Precisely because of the difficulty in obtaining documents, besides being *sans aveu*, they also became *sans papiers*, and for this reason their stories often became entangled in the police archives. The main reason why the government wanted to prevent their movement outside the Kingdom was the fact that, once abroad, they had not only to be assisted at the expense of the local diplomatic representatives, but they also had to be repatriated. Therefore, the prohibition on authorising the poor to travel was repeated periodically. For example, in 1847 when the royal consul in France raised the problem of 'the shepherds of our mountains, bagpipe players',[18] who frequented the streets of Paris. These Neapolitan migrants had initially been welcomed by the queen herself who had been 'moved by the memory of her first homeland', and had granted them a subsidy,[19] but they had since multiplied to the point of making the situation unmanageable. In fact, the consul reported, if the Parisian police at first granted them the authorisation to perform on the street, they began later to deny it, due to the increasing number of complaints about the noise produced. They submitted the bagpipe players to repressive measures relating to wandering and begging, with the result that it placed a burden on the Neapolitan authorities in the city. Similarly, the Neapolitan consul in London, requiring a ban on the movement of the destitute, referred to the story of six bagpipers coming from France who, 'thrown into this immense city where they understand nothing and where they cannot do anything, without any means of sustenance covered with poor and bizarre clothes and lacking in nourishment for about two days, their presence has become immediately the object of pity and laughter'.[20]

[16] *Istruzioni per reprimere gli oziosi e i vagabondi nella città di Napoli*, 2 February 1828 (Petitti 1852: 262–4).

[17] *Istruzioni per reprimere gli oziosi e i vagabondi nella città di Napoli*, 2 February 1828 (Petitti 1852: 262–4).

[18] Naples State Archive (ASNa), Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6214, 27 April 1847.

[19] She was the wife of Louis Philippe D'Orléans, Maria Amelia of Bourbon, daughter of Ferdinand I of Bourbon, king of the Two Sicilies.

[20] ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6214, 29 April 1847.

The greatest number of poor people poured into the nearby Papal States. In 1816 alone, about 50 vagabonds were sent back to Naples, eight to ten at a time. Their names were communicated to the Neapolitan police so that they could keep a record of these individuals. In a phase in which the management of the masses of poor people who crowded the urban scene was a major issue for European governments, the first imperative was that each country should keep its beggars for itself.

A particularly significant exceptional event occurred on the occasion of the Catholic jubilee in 1825. On the occasion of this Holy Year, it was feared that Rome would see the arrival of 'a prodigious quantity' of pilgrims, including 'many poor people to maintain', based on what had happened during the previous jubilee in 1775.[21] An extremely alarming factor in this regard consisted of the fact that most of the faithful would present themselves 'dressed in the style of pilgrims'.[22] The cause of the concern is to be found in the impossibility of deducing the socio-economic status of travellers from the way in which they were dressed. This is interesting evidence that identification was still partially entrusted to the appearance of a person, and in particular to their clothing, which had constituted one of the main categories of identification in the late medieval and early modern eras.[23] To overcome this challenge, it was decided that only those pilgrims who had been provided with a special passport would be allowed to go to the Papal States, bearing the indication 'he goes to Rome in pilgrim's dress on occasion of the jubilee'.[24] In fact, the prerequisite for the issuing of this type of document was that the applicants proved to the competent authorities, 'in the most valid form, that they had the necessary money for travel and a stay in Rome'.[25] As for the potential poor who could have entered the Kingdom from the border with the Papal States on the same occasion, it was simply decided not to admit any foreigner in pilgrim's clothing who did not carry a passport.[26] More generally, this strengthened regulations that since 1816 had forbidden poor and vagrants entry to the Kingdom, especially from this land border.

Another category of people subject to particular mobility restrictions was made up of individuals we could generically call 'itinerants', namely those who exercised itinerant crafts and who, because mobility was a constitutive factor of their condition, were particularly elusive to the eyes of the police. This was also because their kind of work did not always guarantee them a livelihood. Since 1823, in this regard,

[21] ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6212, Letter of the Neapolitan consul in Rome, Filippo Accarisi, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 11 September 1824.

[22] ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6212, Letter of the Neapolitan consul in Rome, Filippo Accarisi, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 11 September 1824.

[23] Groebner (2008: 71–80).

[24] ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6212, 25 October 1824.

[25] ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6212, 25 October 1824.

[26] ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6212, 25 October 1824.

access to the Kingdom had been restricted for artisans who came in large numbers from abroad 'with the hope of finding an establishment proportionate to their circumstances', but, who, 'most of them being disappointed, increase the number of idlers and vagabonds with risks for public order'.[27] Public order was the main concern used to justify restricting the incoming movement of people. In the following years, for the same reasons, 'jugglers and dangerous animal carriers' were barred from entering the Kingdom as well as 'wanderers, buskers, drivers of wild beasts or petty curiosities'.[28] In short, police provisions contributed to build a regulatory framework that dispensed different degrees of freedom of movement, so that some classes, the poor in particular, were subject to considerable mobility limitations. Freedom of movement was not for all, or not for all in the same measure.

This point is also evident if we turn to another securitisation concern, the political enemy. In 1823, shortly after the Neapolitan uprising of 1820, which was part of the wider liberal and constitutional revolution spreading in the Mediterranean area, passports were again employed by the state as a means of security. The uprising, led by the liberal movement, had forced King Ferdinand I to grant a constitution and allow the election of a parliament. However, the constitutional experiment had quickly ended with the repression at the hands of the Austrian troops, who rushed to support the Bourbon king. However, in response to the continuing threat of unrest, in April 1823 the Minister for the General Police forwarded to the Royal Minister in Rome, the Marquis of Fuscaldo, the request to issue passports for Naples from the Papal State worded so as to allow travellers to go to the Kingdom exclusively the Via Terracina, namely along the Appian Way that led from Rome to Naples. Choosing to follow the itinerary to Naples through another point of the border, along the provinces of Abruzzo, was considered 'very suspicious',[29] as it made it difficult to guarantee surveillance, given the width of the border and the multiplicity of hard-to-control passages in the region. The Marquis was therefore invited to issue passports directly with the words 'Good for Naples on the via di Terracina' while, if someone asked to take a different route, they would forfeit the visa. Additionally, the Marquis was further requested to draw up reports related to any such requests to be sent to Naples, 'with observations on the conduct and personal qualities of the individuals themselves, in order to get sovereign resolutions'.[30] Not only was the political conduct of the aspiring guests of the Kingdom to be recorded, but also details of their social context were submitted for the king's evaluation. A few months later, a resolution by the king in the Council of State that responded to complaints about the long wait for a visa

[27] ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6215, 29 October 1823.

[28] Ivi, 22 March 1829.

[29] ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6212, 14 April 1823.

[30] ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6212, 3 June 1823.

by travellers served to ratify the discrimination represented by the social status of individuals upon entrance. Despite authorising the minister in Rome to issue valid passports to travel the Abruzzi road, the royal instructions strictly limited the issue of these cards to 'persons of known probity or distinguished by birth who did not fall under suspicion'.[31] To all those who could not boast a personal acquaintance with government officials or prove noble origins, the possibility to travel along alternative itineraries to the Via Terracina was denied. In this way, a different degree of freedom of movement was practically granted to different social categories. Security spaces assumed variable contours, in light of the social status of people who were on the move. The securitisation policies thus designed a space with variable geometry along the border. But they not only do this. It was the very shaping of the border, regulated on the basis of the social status of the person to be controlled, which represented a spatial dimension of the process of identifying a threat particularly in the poor or in vagabonds. As recently stated by Philippe Le Billon, 'space is at the same time the way security is performed and the way securitized space becomes performative in relation to security-related actors and objects'.[32]

The political enemy and the security of the state

Political subversion represented a further threat to security that had to be taken into consideration by the state. In the light of this very object of securitisation, the privileges accorded to certain categories of subjects in relation to freedom of movement were rethought. An emblematic case is represented by the mobility of ecclesiastics.

Religious actors had a greater ability to move in space, and a cassock could still act as a pass in the 1850s. The provincial police authority of L'Aquila, a border province, communicated in May 1852 to the Police Director that, in the border municipalities of the District of Cittaducale, some friars of different orders, coming from the Papal State, crossed the border for religious purposes but were not provided with documents. 'In order to prevent any fraud that could go unnoticed under … that dress',[33] the provincial authority reported that he had ordered the rejection of all those belonging to mendicant orders who travelled without valid documents. This report shows that, at least until this point, the undocumented movement of members of the clergy had been tolerated out of deference to their status. It is undeniable that until the 1850s there persisted in southern Italy a profound legacy of 'ecclesiastical citizenship', as identified by Marco Meriggi in the context of the Kingdom of Naples in the 18th as

[31] ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6212, 9 December 1823.

[32] Le Billon (2015: 66).

[33] ASN, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6214, 22 May 1852.

well as in the early 19th century, which allowed the religious to move around, relying on their dress to document their status.[34] Along with a progressive secularising trend in terms of identification aimed at subjecting clergymen to norms valid for lay subjects, the political threat tended to be perceived more strongly in the aftermath of 1848–9, just as in previous politically turbulent conjunctures, such as the start of the Restoration or the years following the 1820–1 revolution. Both on the Sicilian isle and in the continental part of the Kingdom were protagonists of the 1848 revolution in Italy, forcing King Ferdinand II, as had happened to his grandfather, to grant a constitution. On this occasion, however, a similar fate had befallen the nearby Papal States, where in 1849, following revolution, a republic had been established and Pope Pius IX had been forced to take refuge in Gaeta, a site within the Bourbon kingdom.

In particular, the post-1848–9 period marked a turning point in control for political purposes and, therefore, in practices in defence of state security.[35] For instance, the closure of the Kingdom's borders to liberals and democrats as political enemies was swiftly deployed. Thus, when the Roman Republic ended in July 1849, fearing that several fleeing revolutionaries could seek asylum in the neighbouring Kingdom, specific police provisions were issued aimed at prohibiting entry into the Neapolitan domains 'to all those who have taken service in the fallen revolutionary government in Rome, both by carrying weapons and by any other way in which he has worked for it'.[36] Passports for Naples were thus endorsed only to those who in Rome presented a certificate issued by the local Police Prefecture where it was made clear that the individual in question 'did not belong to any political circle and during the past republican regime [had] not taken part in the last war'.[37]

The revolutionaries of the Roman Republic were not the only political enemies to which the Neapolitan kingdom closed its borders. Throughout the 1850s, the surveillance threshold was very high for foreigners entering the Kingdom. Moreover, a sort of inner border was created with Sicily. Following the surrender of Palermo in May 1849 and the fall of the constitutional government in Sicily that had been established as a result of the uprisings that occurred on the island in the first months of the previous year, in July 1849 royal representatives abroad were prohibited from issuing passports to Sicilians to enter the Neapolitan provinces. Neapolitans themselves who intended to return to their homeland were also subjected to an extremely rigid and distinctly political control: at the request for a passport to return to Neapolitan territory, consuls abroad were required to inform the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who asked the police for a certificate of political reliability.[38] Although in this way the 'political'

[34] Meriggi (2007).

[35] Liang (1992); Deflem (2002); Di Fiore & Lucrezio Monticelli (2017).

[36] ASN, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6214, 18 July 1849.

[37] Ivi, October 1849.

[38] Di Fiore (2013).

boundary for Bourbon subjects was displaced to the consular network abroad, attention still remained high on the physical boundary of the Kingdom, where lists of foreigners who were forbidden to enter the Kingdom, because they had been involved in the revolutionary events of various Italian and European states, were maintained and monitored as they had been since the 1830s and 1840s.

Nevertheless, despite this focus, security was not the only factor in managing the border space. Security issues were complex to handle in the light of a border which, as in many borderlands, was also a contact zone. The trans-state border region represented an integrated economic system and was perceived as such by the border population, having had a good level of structuring and consolidation from a centuries-old tradition. The Roman Campagna in the Papal States was a vast, sparsely populated area, where the huge latifundia relied chiefly on seasonal labour for cultivating and harvesting wheat and for grazing livestock. A great flow of workers from the Abruzzi mountains or the Terra di Lavoro countryside, in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, had travelled along seasonal migratory routes to work in these sites throughout the whole of the modern period. This was the result of a complementary economy having fostered and consolidated interdependency between two portions of territory located within two different states and regarded throughout the modern period as a single 'transhumance area'. However, during the French domination this has changed, and seasonal workers had become obliged to hold a specific travel document—a passport—to circulate within this physical space that had hitherto been experienced as unitary. In turn, this cross-state territorial entity found itself up against the Napoleonic administrative organisation, which placed greater emphasis on the state border's power to divide than on its capacity to connect.

On a more strictly material level, the obligation to hold travel documents represented a significant problem for all those who had to cross over the border for work-related needs, given that the procedure entailed applying to the papal representative resident in Naples for a visa. This meant that the labourers of the border provinces had to undertake an arduous journey to the capital which, in many cases, was longer than the journey that would have brought them to their destination across the border. Agricultural workers, in particular, were quick to inform the authorities of the difficulties caused by the new regulations regarding documents. These objections were accepted and codified at a legislative level in the form of a law promulgated in 1821 and based on agreements with the papal government.[39] The law absolved the shepherds and day labourers of the Neapolitan provinces bordering the Papal States from the obligation to hold a passport in order to travel abroad, granting said individuals the right to cross the border with a less 'formal'

[39] *Regolamento sulle così dette carte di sicurezza, di permanenza, di passo e su de' passaporti, sanzionato da S. M. pe' suoi Reali dominii al di qua del Faro*, 30 November 1821 (Petitti 1852: 237–9).

document, in other words a simple pass card. This was the same document used for internal mobility and issued by the mayor of local municipalities free of charge and was valid for a period of one year (and not just for one journey). Thus, the card holder was exempt from the preliminary police check required for the issuing of a passport.

This represented a significant exception, one that increased the porosity of a state border which, otherwise, was in the process of being strengthened, as we have seen, for political reasons. Nevertheless, state institutions regarded cross-border mobility needs as a priority and hence created, in this instance, a special area along the border.[40] Indeed, up to the end of the Kingdom, a series of administrative circulars and ad hoc regulations were issued to foster a gradual extension of movement-related concessions granted to various categories of labourers leading a cross-border existence. In this way, institutions recognised and helped to structure the character of a connected trans-state region. The privileges for the inhabitants of the border and for peasants and shepherds were maintained even during the most turbulent political moment, despite the probability that the feared revolutionaries were concealed under their shepherd's costume. Infiltration of bandits into the ranks of shepherds was anything but rare, as they were also attracted by the privileges granted to the shepherds, namely the right to bear weapons. In these cases, people who were the object of security measures could cross the border not without documents or by trying to escape police control, but by showing the very official documents provided by the state, taking advantage of the interstices left open in the security spaces.

Conclusion

In conclusion, by intertwining the suggestions of the spatial turn with the border studies approach, the border can be considered as the result of a socio-political construction, and we can see how security issues contributed to shaping its space. Looking at the border through the lens of security allows two types of security to emerge with respect to those being defended: a state security, defending the throne against subversives, and a collective security, defending the population through public order from what were considered dangerous classes.

Nonetheless, despite the tendency to tighten the border in the light of security needs by regulating freedom of movement in a different way for different social groups, multiple cracks were left open in the border security space until Italian unification, in order to meet other social and economic dynamics than security. The security net

[40] Di Fiore & Rolla (2018).

narrowed and expanded on the basis of different needs, delineating a border space with a changing profile. Not infrequently, social actors insinuated themselves into the folds of these variable geometries, exploiting them to evade border security. Nonetheless, if security issues contributed to shaping the border space, the latter offered a spatial representation of narratives and practices of securitisation. Borrowing again the words of Le Billon, 'space is thus itself a political object constituted by, and constitutive of, security discourses and praxis'.[41] By keeping away vagabonds, on the one hand, and political enemies, on the other, preventing them from entering the kingdom or, in the case of vagabonds, even limiting their movement outwards, the demarcation of the border materialised the line of exclusion from the social body, as well as from that of the Kingdom, of those whom the securitisation policies identified as enemies.

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To cite the article: Laura Di Fiore (2021), 'Security and border making in 19th-century southern Italy', *Journal of the British Academy*, 9(s4): 137–150.
DOI https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/009s4.137

Journal of the British Academy (ISSN 2052–7217) is published by
The British Academy, 10–11 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AH
www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk