

# Communities beyond borders: internal boundaries and circulations in the 18th century

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*Abstract:* To understand the political, social and economic conditions which made possible a certain freedom of movement in early modern Europe, it is necessary to abandon the idea of a state sovereignty which expressed itself through the control of boundaries and its territory, which is a relatively recent notion in Western legal culture. Thus, in early modern Europe external borders were porous, and surveillance systems were organised in a plurality of jurisdictions and responded to multiple logics and interests. This article focuses on Turin, the capital of the States of Savoy, where boundaries were defined by the control of urban institutions responsible for the police of the city, as the Vicariate. To observe the process of defining these frontiers, I have chosen to use an emic perspective, attentive to the point of view of the actors. This contribution is interested in the strategies adopted by a group of people subject to high mobility—construction workers—when faced with internal borders. This approach allows us to consider the ‘relational’ substance of the border, its multiple and changing nature.

*Keywords:* multi-local communities, internal boundaries, trade brotherhoods, professional circulations, construction workers.

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## Introduction

Boundary, in all its meanings, represents a complex object of study, as shown by the amount of works that have been devoted to it. The related notion of frontier has also opened up passionate debates, and it is significant that Daniel Nordman devotes a large part of his famous book to analysing the different terms used in French to designate a multiple reality up to the end of the early modern era.<sup>1</sup> In particular, boundary as a demarcation line between two states, two sovereignties and two jurisdictions is the result of a long and complex process. In early modern Europe, the Peace of Westphalia (1648) is traditionally referred to as the beginning of an international system in which states recognise that they are mutually entitled to exercise authority and jurisdiction in their territories. However, the idea of a state sovereignty expressed through control of its boundaries and its territory was still far from being fully agreed by Western legal culture, which was established only in the 19th century.<sup>2</sup> Concretely, sovereignty was organised for a long time within a plurality of jurisdictions with which the central power shared administration and control of the territory. Thus, for example, the very definition of borders involves a plurality of institutional and social actors—village communities, landowners, local institutions—who constantly incite their redefinitions. Some studies have recently shown that boundaries, far from being defined exclusively by governments at the time of international treaties, are the product of social practices.<sup>3</sup> In the middle of the 19th century, for example, certain disputes over boundaries were still resolved on the basis of the rights of land use.<sup>4</sup>

For this reason, in early modern Europe, external borders were often porous and surveillance systems were organised as part of a plurality of jurisdictions and responded to multiple logics and interests.<sup>5</sup> It is no coincidence that Daniel Roche's monumental book on the circulation of people in early modern Europe devotes only a few pages to borders.<sup>6</sup> Control, in fact, was exercised more over the movement of people and goods than over territories. Historiography has shown that controls were carried out along routes of communication, in strategic and commercial places, and inside cities,<sup>7</sup> defining a multitude of internal borders, according to the idea that boundaries are located where control materialises.<sup>8</sup> In this perspective, the institutions

<sup>1</sup> Nordman (1998).

<sup>2</sup> Itzcovich (2013).

<sup>3</sup> Stopani (2008); Herzog (2015).

<sup>4</sup> Di Fiore (2013); Di Fiore & Meriggi (2013); Beltrametti (2016).

<sup>5</sup> Moatti (2004).

<sup>6</sup> Roche (2003: 363–71).

<sup>7</sup> Lefèvre (2004).

<sup>8</sup> Le Courant (2010).

that exercised their authority over the routes of communication provide a useful case for analysing border making.<sup>9</sup> Or rather, if we want to reverse the terms of the reasoning, it is mobility itself that in some way contributes to defining these jurisdictions and these internal boundaries.<sup>10</sup> The rights of passage and the access to towns were continuously negotiated with local authorities and were the subject of special agreements, conventions and privileges: mobility thus sparked the shaping and defining of jurisdictions.

This article contributes to debates regarding the definition of borders, and in particular internal borders, from the point of view of actors engaging with them. What strategies do actors adopt when confronted by borders? And how are their actions able to negotiate conditions of access, exclusion and inclusion? To answer this question, in this article I examine a group of people characterised by their high mobility: workers of the building sector. More specifically, this article analyses professional migrations from Alpine villages in the 18th century. In the building sector, geographical mobility was an inherent condition of the professional careers of construction workers. Since the early modern period, their spatial circulations quickly acquired a European and—from the middle of the 19th century onwards—also a global dimension. Their vicissitudes therefore allow me to observe the extent and dynamics of their mobility and to probe their ability to build their professional itineraries by forging ties across European borders. This article is focused on the case of Piedmont, which allows me to observe the process of defining internal borders and the way in which these can be negotiated at different levels.

### **Labour migration of artists of the Lakes: a European diaspora**

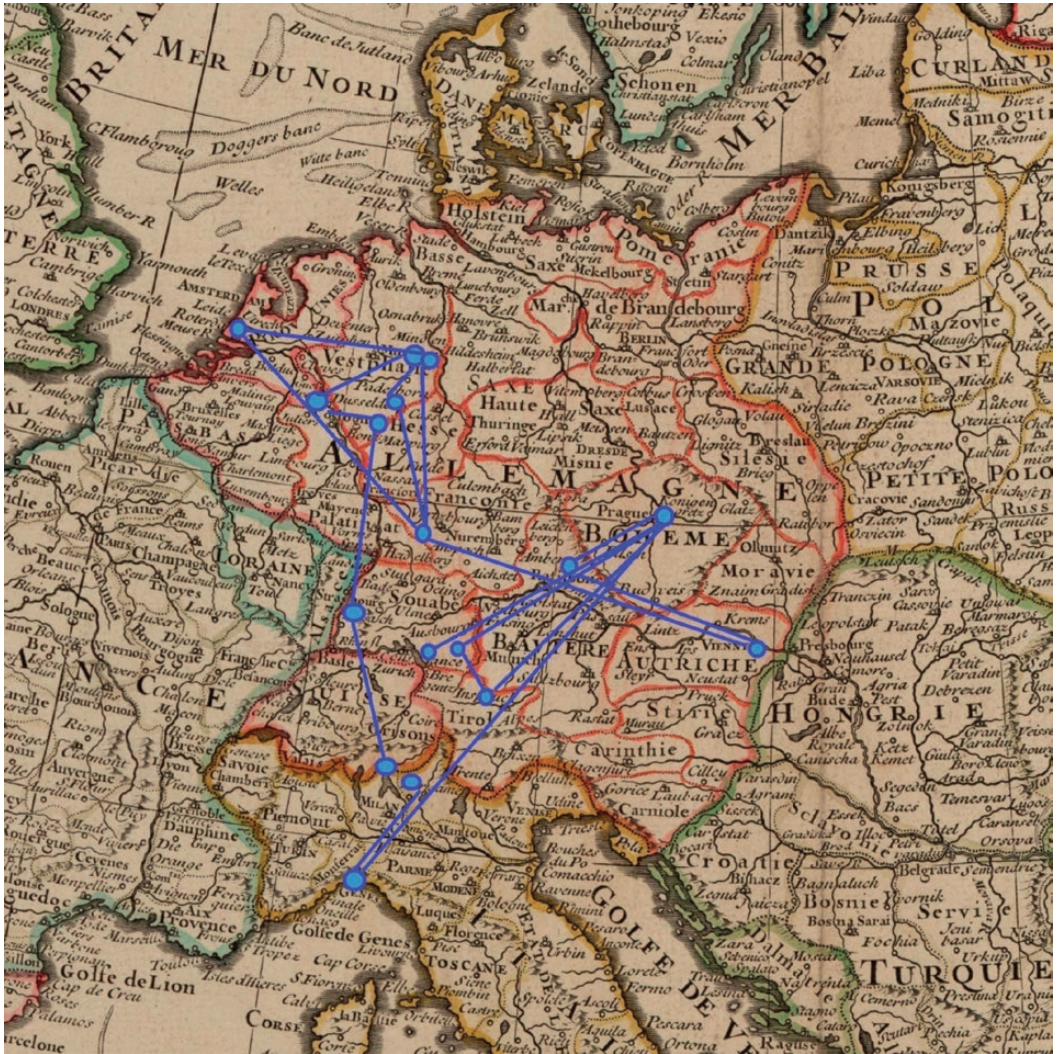
The migrations of architects, entrepreneurs and masters (masons, carpenters, sculptors, plasterers, stonecutters, etc.) from Alpine villages towards the principal European towns began in the medieval period and became more constant during the 17th and 18th centuries.<sup>11</sup> Alpine villages were the epicentre of a far-reaching movement that crossed all of Europe, from Spain to Russia.<sup>12</sup> These were seasonal or temporary movements, the duration of which varied from a few months to several years. Here, this article focuses more precisely on the so-called ‘lakes region’ (Lago Maggiore and the lakes of Como, Lugano, Varese) that lies between the Duchy of Milan and Switzerland, and on that surrounding the city of Biella, the *biellese* (the Elvo, Mosso

<sup>9</sup> Torre (2007); Bernard (2014); Scholz (2018).

<sup>10</sup> Bernard (2018).

<sup>11</sup> P.P. Viazzo (1989); Audisio (1989); Bernardi (1995).

<sup>12</sup> Agliati (2010); Navone (2010); Parnisari (2015).



**Figure 1.** Giovanni Oldelli's journeys according to his letters (1707–58); source: [Martinola \(1963: 123–154\)](#). Europe's map (detail) by Guillaume Delisle, 1724; source: Gallica, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

and Andorno valleys). As Arslan argues, the circulation of 'artists of the Lakes'—also called *magistri commacini*—was one of the most important 'artistic diasporas' in the history of architecture.<sup>13</sup>

In the construction sector, labour practices were inextricably linked with the experience of migration. To observe the extent and intensity of these circulations, we can attempt to map the itineraries of construction workers, based on their regular letters to their families sent during their wanderings from one construction site to another.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Arslan (1964).

<sup>14</sup> Martinola (1963).



The itinerant life of construction workers from Alpine villages began early, with the signing of an apprenticeship contract (*pacta ad artem*).<sup>15</sup> Young people left home at the age of 12 or 13, following adults in their ‘campaign’ as workers or apprentices. It was the beginning of wanderings that would last for a lifetime, taking them around Europe to wherever job opportunities opened up. Generations of men of all ages, married and unmarried, spent most of their lives away from their countries of origin. These long journeys were interrupted only periodically by visits to their hometown every four or five years. The plasterer Giovanni Antonio Oldelli, for instance, left Meride, his birthplace near Lugano, in 1707 at age 16 with—and probably in the service of—two countrymen, and after a perilous journey he arrived at Münster. It was the beginning of a long life of itinerancy, which over the next 50 years took him to Germany, Holland, Austria, Bohemia, Switzerland, France and Italy, crossing borders many times (figure 1).<sup>16</sup> The compass for this plasterer’s journeys was the information that migrants transmitted to each other on the various job sites. From the different countries where he worked, Giovanni Antonio maintained regular relations with his country of origin and with other migrant workers—both local and non-local—dispersed throughout various European construction sites.

Giovanni Antonio’s case was the norm in the construction sector, where workers left their countries of origin for several years in order to follow job opportunities by moving long distances. It is now well established that early modern societies were not, as has long been thought, inhabited by sedentary populations, but were traversed by continuous movements of people and goods. Migratory phenomena, of short or long duration, characterised modern Europe and has attracted the attention of historians who have attempted to reconstruct the conditions and dynamics of this mobility. The question of control over migrations is clearly an important one, especially for contemporary sensibilities, accustomed to the dramatic images of migrants trying to cross the many barriers that have multiplied in the world in recent years. But the idea of police or total control applied to the territories of the *ancien régime* states would be anachronistic. In these contexts, the activities of control were not necessarily carried out on the state’s external borders. On the one hand, because unguarded crossings—through, for example, the Alpine passes—involved a significant flow of migrants. On the other hand, because the frontiers themselves in this period were still undergoing a process of stabilisation, often involving the interests of local communities. It is not surprising that in the many travel accounts there is rarely any mention of identity checks on people at the borders, while complaints about the exorbitant taxes on transported goods are recurrent, at least in Italy.<sup>17</sup> Even when reading letters from construction

<sup>15</sup> Dubini (1991).

<sup>16</sup> Martinola (1963: 123–54).

<sup>17</sup> Bertrand (2004: 255–6, 263–4).

workers, the border experience is never mentioned. The journey is instead recounted to describe the difficulties or dangers travellers might encounter on the road, or the cost of transportation.

However, in early modern Europe the tools for identifying people were not yet generalised and unified. It was often letters of recommendation, passes, licences or safe-conducts that allowed people to move. These documents expressed—and contributed to construct—legal categories that legitimised the mobility of people. In societies organised into classes, such as those of early modern Europe, rights were attributed not so much to individuals as to those individuals who could prove their belonging to a particular social group. Mobility thus became a matter of ‘class’, or rather of social group. There were mobilities admitted by virtue of the ‘quality’ of the persons, such as that of diplomatic agents, merchants, pilgrims or students.<sup>18</sup> These constituted groups that were endowed with certain privileges that allowed them to move, crossing external and internal borders. Other categories of people acquired this faculty by virtue of treaties between states: this was the case, as will be seen, for the Swiss in the States of Savoy. The mobility of construction workers did not properly fall within a juridical category, but it used the same instruments of legitimation as letters, namely letters of recommendation. In 1703, for example, the plasterer Giovanni Battista Clerici helped a compatriot in difficulty, Antonio Melchion, by buying him some clothes and paying for his journey by carriage from Würzburg, where they were, to Frankfurt, and by writing him a letter of recommendation to be delivered to some merchants in Frankfurt who would direct him to Münster ‘without danger’.<sup>19</sup> The risks were primarily related to the route one chose to take. The one Giovanni Battista chose for Antonio avoided the roads considered most risky, namely those towards Mainz and Cologne. Instead, he faced dangers of a different nature. In his first letter home, Giovanni Antonio Oldelli recounted that during the journey to Münster he had run into a company of hussars who had ‘respected’ him because of the passport he had with him.<sup>20</sup> Even a promise of recruitment could be a useful document to legitimise a journey: in his letter home Giovanni Battista Clerici in 1721 wrote that he was in Mannheim and was waiting for a letter of engagement in order to leave for Darmstadt.<sup>21</sup>

To be part of this world in constant motion, there were certain conditions to be fulfilled. First, the circulation of construction workers—such as, for example, that of chapmen studied by Laurence Fontaine<sup>22</sup>—was based on and presupposed a transnational credit network. Available funds were mandatory in the building sector.

<sup>18</sup> Gilissen (1958).

<sup>19</sup> Martinola (1963: 15).

<sup>20</sup> Martinola (1963: 124).

<sup>21</sup> Martinola (1963: 27).

<sup>22</sup> Fontaine (1993: 153–75).

They were necessary to leave one's birthplace and to cover the cost of the journey. Recourse to credit was frequent also to support workers through periods of unemployment that intermittently afflicted migrant workers, especially in a context such as the construction sector, which offered only irregular jobs and did not guarantee constant employment. In this situation of uncertainty, periods of illness or inactivity could not be borne without recourse to credit. For instance, in 1725, during his stay in Prague, Giovanni Antonio fell sick and was unemployed, and he was forced to write to his family in Meride asking for a loan.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, when artisans obtained an order, they had to buy materials and tools, borrowing significant sums of money to start and complete a job. When in 1719 Giovanni Antonio Oldelli, after a period of uncertainty and wandering, received a long-term job offer in Hégenheim in France, he did not have enough money to buy the necessary material and asked for a loan from his cousin Pietro Francesco, at that moment in Weltenburg in Bavaria.<sup>24</sup> A transnational credit network connected countrymen dispersed in different countries and connected them with others in their birthplace. Furthermore, when work abounded, a migratory chain was activated, which attracted other workers from their country of origin or from various parts of Europe, defining a transnational labour market. The network woven by these migrant workers was one that unfolded throughout Europe and that guaranteed the circulation of information and reputation, financial and social resources.

Observation of this network between migrants who maintained strong ties with each other as well as with their country of origin beyond boundaries, has led historians to conclude the existence of multi-local communities. This perspective has enriched our understanding of Alpine migration and of migration dynamics more generally. They have shown how mobility in the Alpine context was part of a specific economic system<sup>25</sup> and was organised in multi-sited communities, settled in several localities and based on a system of multiple memberships.<sup>26</sup> Several factors combine to define the multi-local character of these communities: the dynamics involving the different places where migrants work;<sup>27</sup> the strong emotional and economic connections between the place of origin and the places of work; the family structures that often included branches in different places.<sup>28</sup> Due to the multi-local character of the social systems to which they belonged and the continuous mobility in which they participated, construction workers were constantly faced with

<sup>23</sup> Martinola (1963: 129).

<sup>24</sup> Martinola (1963: 135).

<sup>25</sup> Fontaine (1993; 2003); Ceschi (1994; 1999); Lorenzetti & Merzario (2005); Viazzo & Cerri (2009).

<sup>26</sup> Albera *et al.* (2005).

<sup>27</sup> Portes (1997).

<sup>28</sup> Gabaccia (2000).

frontiers and developed strategies and tools that could affect their mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion.

### Internal boundaries in Savoy States: the Vicariate of Turin

If we assume that boundaries in early modern Europe coincided with places where there were apparent measures of control,<sup>29</sup> they became particularly visible in cities. In the 18th century, Turin—the capital of the States of Savoy—was a fortified city and the seat of a military garrison stationed in the Citadel which occupied a large part of the city's north-eastern sector (figure 2). The four city gates—Porta Palazzo, Porta Po, Porta Susina and Porta Nuova—were the first place of control where the guards were responsible for noting the entries of people and merchandises. Within the walls, the control of the mobility of people and things was under the jurisdiction of urban political and police institutions. From 1724, this responsibility was entrusted to the Vicariate of Turin.<sup>30</sup> This was a medieval institution, which experienced a series of changing fortunes, but always remaining at the centre of city politics. In 1724 this institution became, in the king's intentions, an instrument of central control over the city's administration, which until then had been managed with relative autonomy by the city council. From then on, the Vicariate was placed under the direct control of the king and its powers were extended.<sup>31</sup> After this reform, the Vicar brought together large competences which cannot be reduced to mere police control alone. The Vicar was first and foremost an ordinary judge in charge of hearing and adjudicating on matters of offences against public order, but also those related to the retail trade in foodstuffs, the salaries of servants and day labourers, and rural bans. He was also responsible for ensuring the regular supply of essential goods to the city and all the city's markets and shops for food, wood and wine fell under his jurisdiction. He dealt with weights and measures, the maintenance of streets and squares, fire prevention and the cleaning of the city. In short, according to the definition of the politics and police of the ancient regime, it was responsible for 'everything that may concern the peace, security and happiness of citizens and inhabitants'.

Despite these extensive powers, the Vicar only had command of a small police force. According to the edict of 1723, he had eight guards under his direct command, in charge of monitoring the observance of the rural bans, enforcing political and police regulations and ensuring public order. Every day, guards visited the farmlands

<sup>29</sup> Le Courant (2010).

<sup>30</sup> Balani (1987); Rolla (2010).

<sup>31</sup> F.A. Duboin, *Raccolta per ordine di materie delle leggi, editti, manifesti ...*, Turin: Davico e Picco, 1827, vol. 5, pp. 1467–9, *Regio editto per l'unione dell'Ufficio del Vicario a quello della prefettura della città e provincia di Torino, con la giurisdizione e incombenze ivi stabilite (11 febbraio 1724)*.



near the town, the town markets, the shops and taverns to check compliance with the prohibitions on the production and sale of foodstuffs, town cleaning, public feasts and prohibited games. In the event of infringements, they had to draw up a report on their inspection and summoned the offender before the Vicar's court, which would determine the amount of the fine. The guards also had to arrest criminals guilty of loitering, brawling, insults and disturbances, who were imprisoned in the Porta Palazzo Towers. In the arrest of criminals, they benefited from the cooperation of the governor's guards, who were required to hand over to the Vicar's office all prisoners under his jurisdiction. From 1717 onwards, the Vicar's guards were called upon to collaborate with those of the Hospital of Charity in the arrest of beggars, who were then entrusted to the charitable institution. The Vicar also benefited from the collaboration of 50 district captains. They were responsible for compiling up-to-date lists of the inhabitants of the city, classified according to age, sex, profession and military skills. The district captains were also given the task of registering daily and domestic workers employed on the blocks under their jurisdiction.

The competences and composition of the Vicariate show how the police of the ancient regime performed complex functions that were not limited to repressing or preventing crimes, but touched on heterogeneous areas of city administration, starting from the provisioning of the city and the control of the market for essential goods. Only an efficient administration of these aspects of city life and the guarantee of the population's well-being could ensure public order and legitimise the vicar's intervention against those who threatened to compromise it.<sup>32</sup> Among these, the Vicar undoubtedly also identified the foreigners against whom his interventions multiplied in the first half of the 18th century. From this point of view, his activities defined the internal borders and contributed to fix criteria of inclusion and exclusion. It was on the definition of foreigners, therefore, that the definition of internal borders was played out.

### **Foreigners in the town**

At the beginning of the 17th century, Turin has only recently become the capital of the Duchy of Savoy and was still a relatively small city. One hundred years later, Turin was the capital of the kingdom of Sardinia and its surface area had increased significantly after three successive expansions of its walls in 1620, 1673 and 1719.<sup>33</sup> As in many other European cities, urban development—a material consequence of demographic growth—was due in no small measure to the presence of immigrants from different

<sup>32</sup> Piasenza (1990; 2002).

<sup>33</sup> Comoli Mandraci (1983).

areas within the Duchy and nearby States. Between 1614 and 1719, that is between the first and the third expansion of the city walls, the number of inhabitants rose from 14,244 to 47,433.<sup>34</sup> An analysis carried out on the origin of married couples makes it possible to estimate that immigrants represented 51.6 per cent of married couples in the first decade of the century (1700–9) and 68.1 per cent of married couples in the central decade (1740–9).<sup>35</sup> According to the data provided by the population census of 1705, several districts of Turin were inhabited mainly by immigrants: for instance, 65 per cent of heads of families residing in the district of St Christopher and 60 per cent of those who lived in that of St Juvenal declared that they came from outside Turin.<sup>36</sup>

The capital was thus traversed by and involved in the movement of people mainly from the territories of the Kingdom, but it was not so much definitive emigration that characterised the population of the *ancien régime* as temporary and cyclical emigration that implied periodical returning to the communities of origin.

As early as the 1670s, a number of royal provisions aimed to control the movements of people into and within the city. Inside the city, according to a royal edict of 1679, all innkeepers had to report the presence of individuals coming from the territories of the kingdom and from abroad to the colonel of the urban militias and, from 1724, to the Vicar and the Military Governor of the Citadel. To ensure that the order was known to those concerned, ‘the Guardians, the gatekeepers of this City’ were instructed ‘to warn all those who enter that they must ask the innkeepers to report to our office every evening’.<sup>37</sup> Each evening, the Vicar received a list of foreign people who spent the night in Turin from the guardians of city gates and innkeepers.<sup>38</sup> This was an attempt to gather information on the passage of foreigners through the city, but in addition to the difficulty of obtaining compliance from innkeepers and gatekeepers, there was a more complex problem surrounding the identification of people. Even the movements of Turin residents within the city was under control. This function was entrusted to the 50 Quarter captains, officers who were appointed by the Vicar and responsible for reporting changes of residence of the inhabitants of the blocks under their jurisdiction.

Faced by the population growth, one of the most important government acts concerned public assistance. Through a series of regulatory initiatives, the city’s main institution, the Charity Hospital, was reformed between 1716 and 1717. The aim was to rationalise its intervention and the provision of aid at a time when population

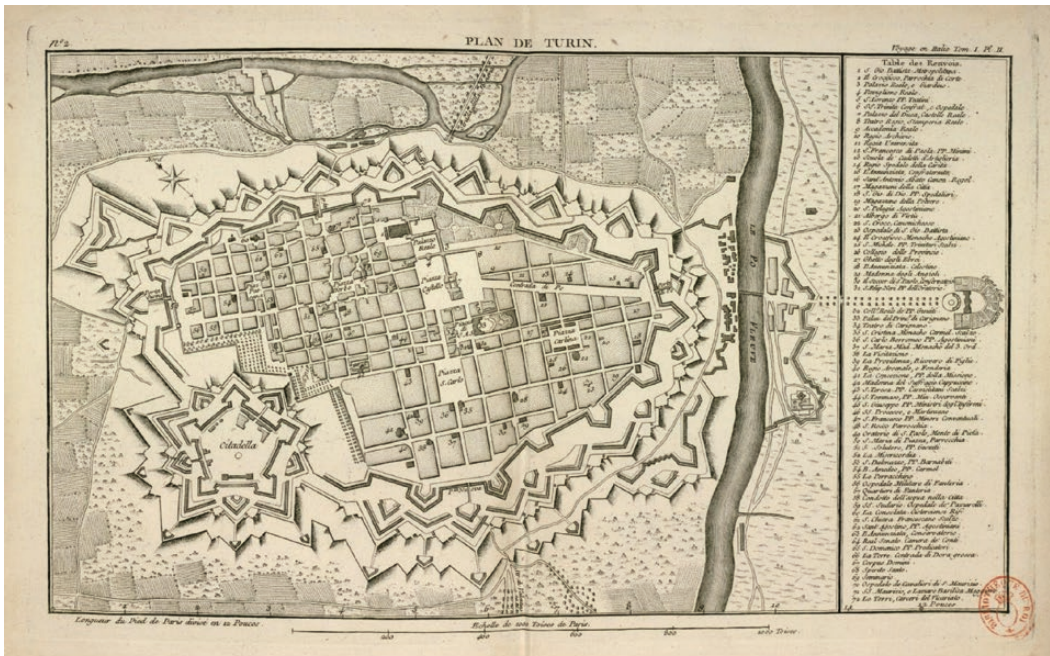
<sup>34</sup> Balani (2002)

<sup>35</sup> Levi (1985); Zucca Micheletto (2012).

<sup>36</sup> National Archives of Turin (ASTo), S.R., Art. 530, mazzo 1, (1613–14; 1705).

<sup>37</sup> Historical Archives of the City of Turin (ASCT), Editti, Patenti, Manifesti, 1697.

<sup>38</sup> F.A. Duboin, *Raccolta per ordine di materie delle leggi, editti, manifesti* ..., Torino: dai tipi degli editori Davico e Picco, 1827, vol. 5, pp. 1467–9, *Regio editto per l'unione dell'Ufficio del Vicario a quello della prefettura della città e provincia di Torino, con la giurisdizione e incombenze ivi stabilite (11 febbraio 1724)*.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

**Figure 2.** Turin's city map by Francesco Scotto, 1761; source: Gallica, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

growth was also resulting in greater demand for assistance. Stricter criteria were set for access to the Charity Hospital. A first criterion for selection was belonging to the citizenship or, at least, stable residence in the city for a minimum of three years, which was considered an indispensable requirement to benefit from Turin's welfare service. Foreigners were not only prohibited from begging, which was also valid for residents, but were also ordered to leave the city to avoid being a burden on the city's welfare system, which was reserved for needy local persons only. However, even among the latter, there was a hierarchy of need that created differences in status among the poor on the basis of a logic of patronage rather than criteria of necessity more familiar to contemporary sensibilities.<sup>39</sup> The importance attached to citizenship did not only respond to the need to rationalise the distribution of aid, but also reflected an established practice that favoured, among candidates for assistance, those who knew the mechanisms of preferential access and were able to activate a certain circuit of protection.

According to the edict of August 1716, foreigners were to leave the city and return to their countries of origin, while beggars from Turin were to present themselves spontaneously within three days to the Charity Hospital where they would be examined and, if possible, helped. The hospital's eight guards, together with those

<sup>39</sup> Cavallo (1991: 149).

of the Vicariate, were responsible for arresting idlers and vagrants who did not turn themselves in or leave the city, while the Vicar's court was to deal with cases against people caught giving alms. From the welfare reform emerged a definition of strangers linked to the duration of residence in the city which, according to the edict, defined citizenship. The figure of the stranger, in these measures, was juxtaposed with that of the beggar, vagrant and idler. Here itinerant life and a lack of work defined the very category of foreigner.

This juxtaposition returned later in the edicts against theft that were issued in the 1740s. Concern about crimes against property was recurrent in the legislative provisions of the first half of the 18th century. During these years, according to sovereign's edict in 1740, the suspicion of the authorities was directed towards the 'vagabonds, and the idlers, without trade, or profession, without goods or sufficient income to maintain them',<sup>40</sup> who for this reason had to be locked up in the prisons of the Vicar. A few years later, in 1747, the list of suspects was expanded to include 'foreign individuals, who enter the city of Turin',<sup>41</sup> about which the Vicariate was invited 'to inquire about their movements [...] if they have come to exercise a trade, or profession, or for what legitimate reason'. Otherwise, the Vicar 'will not allow him to stay in the city just for a short time, but will expel them from our states, if they are foreigners, or from the city of Turin in other cases'.<sup>42</sup> In these ordinances, then, 'strangers' as well as beggars and idlers were often indicated as the main suspects for disorder and thefts committed in the city. It is not surprising that in the Vicar's prisons most inmates for theft or suspicion of theft were not from Turin, and that the origin of the inmates more than the seriousness of the crime or the value of the stolen goods weighed on the length of detention.

Also significant is the evidentiary system applied in court, where a person suspected of theft could be convicted if he was 'defamed', i.e. if he did not enjoy a good reputation, and if the goods he had with him did not correspond to his status. The procedure applied in the Vicariate, in short, favoured precisely that evidence, reputation, which could only be built through stable insertion in the local social context, and which therefore translated the criteria of local belonging into the legal system. By combining reputation, mobility and lack of work, the legislative action of the sovereign and the activity of the Vicariate translated and contributed to clarifying a definition of foreigner.

<sup>40</sup> F.A. Duboin, *Raccolta delle leggi editti patenti manifesti*, vol. 8, *Editto di provvedimenti a riguardo de' furti* (5 janvier 1740), p. 119.

<sup>41</sup> F.A. Duboin, *Raccolta per ordine di materie delle leggi, editti, manifesti ...*, vol. V, *Regie Patenti con le quali S. M. commette al Vicario di Torino l'espulsione dei mendicanti, gente di mal costume ...* (25 settembre 1747), p. 1515.

<sup>42</sup> Ivi, p. 1514.

The Vicariate of Turin carried out its function of controlling mobility in the dual role of police institution and civil and criminal court of first instance. Its competence was limited to criminal misdemeanours and to disputes that arose in the city markets and regarding the salaries of servants and journeymen. In this capacity, the Vicar had the authority to expel people who, having been arrested for some reason, were not considered to have a legitimate reason to remain in the city.

To obtain release from the Vicariate's prisons and avoid expulsion from the city, the prisoners had to sign an act of submission in which they accepted certain conditions. These were often the result of negotiation between the judge, the prisoner and those who presented themselves as guarantors (in most cases family members). Among the conditions imposed to obtain the release and the right to remain in the city was the promise to exercise a job. On 21 April 1727, for instance, Giovanni Francesco Delfino, detained as insolent and suspected of theft, was released from prison thanks to the intervention of his mother and the carpenter and *minusiere* (woodworker) Felice Cheis and in recognition of his commitment to 'learn the art of carpentry, and *menusiery* under the discipline of Felice Cheis'.<sup>43</sup> Application for a profession had to represent the guarantee of a good integration into the city community and the possibility of living off one's work, avoiding the risk of falling into idleness and vagrancy.

The legal action of the Vicar and the ordinances on public order issued during the period under consideration outline a physiognomy of foreigners, on whom the Vicariate's attention was directed. The presence of migrants, which in itself was not perceived as a danger, became a public order problem when combined with idleness and the lack of stable employment. This last point has been the subject of recent studies that have shown how the category of foreigner in the societies of the *ancien régime* was not necessarily defined by geographical origin. In particular, Simona Cerutti has insisted on the relational nature of the category of foreigner, which was defined as such because it lacks the social relations that allowed the construction of local belonging and access to certain rights.<sup>44</sup> So, the definition of 'foreigner' was not necessarily linked to the geographical origin of individuals, but to a relational weakness. Residential stability was often indicated—by the sources as well as by historiography—as a fundamental tool for social insertion. The foreigner was someone who, because of his mobility and temporary residence in the city, was unable to build up a network of stable social relations there. The foreigner was therefore such not so much by virtue of his geographical origin as by virtue of his imperfect inscription in the city context. It was deregulated mobility, outside of a social or institutional framework, that raised the concerns of the police. In the case of Turin, the apposition in legal texts of beggars and idlers—that is to say unemployed—with foreigners

<sup>43</sup> ASCT, Vicariato, Sottomissione dei detenuti, vol. 9, f. s.n.

<sup>44</sup> Cerutti (2012).



is interesting. Work, like residential stability, in itself traced a boundary between social inclusion and exclusion. Lack of work pushed migrants, who ordinarily were a resource for city economy, into the grey zone of deregulated mobility, on which the attention of the city authorities focused. It is not surprising if the Quarter captains paid particular attention to the movements of apprentices, journeymen and servants, who were noted in specific lists, updated each month. In these provisions, attention was clearly directed towards worker mobility. The case of construction workers, who experienced a double mobility both geographical and professional, represents an interesting point of view to observe the capacity of the actors to shape this internal border, the one drawn by the city authorities on the basis of the criteria of local belonging.

### **The boundary between migrants and foreigners**

The demographic growth in the first half of the 18th century coincided with an important process of urban transformation. During the years of peace between the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) and the entry of the Kingdom of Sardinia into the War of the Austrian Succession (1742), Turin experienced a period of great architectural and urban development. Demographic pressure and the prospect of fruitful real estate speculation boosted the works for the third expansion of the city, with the construction of 18 new blocks in the western sector from 1719. At the same time, the acquisition of the royal title by the House of Savoy (1713) relaunched the realisation of an architectural programme that was both urbanistic and political. Over the course of 30 years, the appearance of the city and its surroundings was transformed, with the construction of some of the masterpieces of the Italian Baroque—Madama Palace, the Basilica of Superga, Stupinigi, to name a few—and with the improvement of the road system. Simultaneously, the period of peace made it possible to repair and improve the defence system of the state and its capital, leading to work on the main fortresses in Piedmont (such as Exilles, Brunetta and Fenestrelle).

At the height of its urban development, Turin attracted many entrepreneurs and construction workers, most of them coming from Alpine villages and the ‘lakes region’.<sup>45</sup> The strength of attraction of Turin and Piedmont can be measured by analysing the contracts of the *Azienda fabbriche e fortificazioni*, the office responsible for royal building sites: between 1713 and 1742, only 25 per cent of contractors were from Turin—or, at least, defined themselves as such—and from communities around Turin. The others came from around ten communities in the region of Biella (25 per cent), from the Duchy of Milan (20 per cent, in particular from Como, Varese, Valsolda and

<sup>45</sup> Di Fiore & Rolla (2018).

the Intelvi valley), while 7.9 per cent were from Lugano.<sup>46</sup> The presence of Luganese in Piedmont was part of a migration practise dating back to the previous century, encouraged by the special conditions enjoyed by the Swiss in the Savoy states. As early as 1512, a military treaty between the 12 Swiss cantons and Duke Charles III of Savoy regulated, among other things, the conditions for the entry and stay of Swiss subjects in the Savoyard states. Under this bilateral agreement, they enjoyed special privileges, including the exemption from certain taxes, such as *cottizzo* (trade tax) and *fogaggio* (hearths tax), and from the obligation to lodge soldiers.<sup>47</sup> They were also exempted from the *ubena* which allowed the Piedmontese authorities to confiscate the assets of foreigners who died without legitimate heirs in the Duchy of Savoy.

As we have seen, workers in the construction sector could only rely on irregular employment, since the construction site was a constantly changing workplace, where labour was employed and dismissed in a rapid turnover that followed the progress of the work and the seasonality of some jobs. Workers in this sector were often exposed to the intermittency of work and moments of unemployment, which stimulated geographical mobility. What also made the position of construction workers more fragile were the types of employment contracts, based on oral agreements, whereby part or all of the wages were only paid at the end of the ‘campaign’.<sup>48</sup> Construction workers were also exposed to frequent accidents at work that forced them into inactivity.

In these short or long periods of unemployment there was a strong risk of entering the crowd of those who, without a stable job and residence and because of this foreign, easily attracted the suspicions of the authorities. In May 1736, for example, one of the prisoners in the Vicar’s jails was a certain Giuseppe Calvi from Lugano, accused of being part of a gang of criminals who used to attend fairs to commit thefts. When questioned together with two other defendants, Calvi claimed his innocence and declared he had worked as a bricklayer all over Italy for two years. Although witnesses questioned by the Vicar did not recognise him as a member of the gang of thieves, he was detained in prison because—having no fixed abode and having been absent from his homeland for seven years—he could be considered a vagrant.<sup>49</sup> The case of Calvi shows very well how mobility without a framework—provided by networks of relations or the exercise of a profession—was soon associated with vagrancy and punished by imprisonment or expulsion from the town.

To overcome these problems, workers and entrepreneurs in Turin set up instruments to regulate and manage geographical and professional mobility, such as the

<sup>46</sup> ASTo, S.R., Ministero della Guerra, Azienda fabbriche e fortificazioni, Contratti, m. 1–19, *passim*.

<sup>47</sup> Severin (1933).

<sup>48</sup> Rolla (2011; 2018).

<sup>49</sup> ASTo, Corte, Materie economiche, Vicariato, Mazzo 1, f. 27.

‘national’ trade confraternities. The term ‘national’ appears in the sources themselves and roughly indicates the geographical origin of the members, even if in reality, belonging to a ‘nation’ followed more complex processes. Historiography has shown the importance of confraternities in the process of social inclusion and access to local resources.<sup>50</sup> Maurice Agulhon’s classic study of sociability in southern France at the end of the 18th century had already shown the range of functions fulfilled by these heterogeneous institutions.<sup>51</sup> In the confraternities and in their assistance activity, some historians have seen the anticipation of workers’ mutualism of the 19th century.<sup>52</sup> The confraternities also represented autonomous political spaces, used by their members to defend their rights and prerogatives.<sup>53</sup> The political aspect was evident in the world of work, where the confraternities were instruments for organising workers’ discontent<sup>54</sup> and for regulating labour mobility.<sup>55</sup> The contribution of confraternities to the local economy,<sup>56</sup> and in particular to credit circuits, has recently been demonstrated in the rural context.<sup>57</sup>

In Turin, building professions were represented mainly by two confraternities, both devoted to Saint Anne: the Company of architects and master masons from Lugano and Milan, founded in the 1620s, and the Confraternity of master carpenters from Graglia, Muzzano and Pollone (three villages in the Elvo valley, in the department of Biella), created around the 1710s. The balance sheets of the Turin confraternities reveal their main areas of intervention.<sup>58</sup> Their financial efforts were in part allocated to the devotion of their patron saint, such as with the construction and maintenance of chapels, but they also provided assistance to masters in difficulty and their families. Faced with the strong variability of the job offer in the construction sector, the assistance offered by the two confraternities assumed a fundamental function, especially in the Turin context, recently concerned by the profound reform of the welfare system. The reform of 1716–17, detailed above, and their admission criteria created obstacles for the access to assistance for these migrants, who did not have solid social ties to count on in the city.<sup>59</sup> In this way, the exclusion of some from urban assistance contributed to define who was a foreigner and to fix criteria for inclusion and exclusion from citizenship. Thus, an assistance system was organised, outside the charitable

<sup>50</sup> Canepari (2007)

<sup>51</sup> Agulhon (1966).

<sup>52</sup> Massa & Moioli (2004).

<sup>53</sup> Torre (1995).

<sup>54</sup> Garrioch & Sonenscher (1986); Garrioch (2013).

<sup>55</sup> Cerutti (2010).

<sup>56</sup> Pastore & Garbellotti (2001); Bianchi (2009).

<sup>57</sup> Schwindt (2008); Di Tullio (2011).

<sup>58</sup> Archives of Sainte Anne Company (henceforth ACSALT), Ordinati e verballi, II, 1, *passim*.

<sup>59</sup> Cavallo (1989; 1991).

institutions of the city, and in particular at the autonomous initiative of professional groups and migrants.<sup>60</sup> In the Turin context, construction workers were pioneers in their autonomous organisation of assistance. This precocity of their institution was sparked by the specific requirements of the building trade, being exposed to dual mobility, both spatial and professional, which could limit access to local assistance.

The assistance to master masons in moments of inactivity was often transformed into support for their return to the country in the form of a small contribution towards travel expenses. Requests arrived at the brotherhoods for assistance because of 'bad luck, fell from a scaffolding in Turin', for 'vacillating infirmity', being 'in very miserable condition due to a long illness', for 'having no food' and being 'devoid of anything and father and mother'. The request ultimately petitioned the brotherhood for economic aid to be able to 'withdraw as best as he can to the homeland where he has a few parents'.<sup>61</sup> In 1719, for example, the Company of Saint Anne of Master Masons supported the travel expenses for returning to the country of origin of eight masters, a widow and three journeymen from Milan and Lugano. Through this company, the community of origin was able to regulate the mobility of workers, by financial aid and the exercise of social control.

The confraternities' assets were also used to offer loans, which were mainly but not exclusively granted to members. The interest-bearing loan was counted among the activities of the company of master masons since its foundation in 1622, when the company 'by having some unproductive sums [...] decided to invest them with an able and responsible person'.<sup>62</sup> The amount of credits recorded in the Saint Anne accounts varies from 40 to 3,000 lire. As we have seen, access to credit represented one of the conditions for working in the construction sector, at any level: from the manual worker to the entrepreneur, everyone at some points of their professional cycle had to resort to credit. Letters mentioned above show the capacity of migrants to manage a translocal credit network that linked arrival countries with birthplaces. Locally, in the countries of arrival, migrants were able to equip themselves with the necessary instruments to encourage the circulation of financial resources via the confraternities. Ultimately, the credit activity of the confraternities was part of that transnational circuit that supported the circulation of 'artists of the Lakes'.

The Company of architects and master masons from Lugano and Milan performed another essential function, negotiating the conditions of the Luganese presence in Piedmont. The renewal of the privileges enjoyed by the Swiss in the Savoy states was the subject of negotiations during the 17th century. The supplications sent to the sovereigns for the confirmation of privileges are kept in a collection called 'Negotiations

<sup>60</sup> Rolla (2020).

<sup>61</sup> ACSALT, Attività assistenziali, Sussidi, *passim*.

<sup>62</sup> ACSALT, Conti e bilanci, fol. 40.

with the Swiss',<sup>63</sup> which also contains all the documentation concerning the political-military negotiations that marked the relations between the Savoyard state and the Swiss cantons during the 17th and 18th centuries, also concerning boundaries. During the whole of the 17th century, in fact, the correspondence between the Swiss and Piedmontese authorities was intense, especially regarding the rights and interests that the Dukes of Savoy claimed in some territories in Vaud and Geneva. Thus, the conditions of the presence of the Swiss in Piedmont remained strictly connected to the outcome of the Swiss–Savoy political-military negotiations. In this process, the Company of Saint Anne proposed itself as a legitimate interlocutor with the Piedmontese authorities to represent the interests of the Swiss residing in the states of the Dukes of Savoy regardless of their profession.

It was the company that turned to the sovereign whenever abuses were committed by the Piedmontese authorities to the detriment of an inhabitant of Swiss origin for non-compliance with the exemptions provided for by the Swiss–Savoy agreements. Such violations suffered by a single individual were perceived as a threat, a precedent capable of compromising and eroding the privileges enjoyed by the entire Swiss population in Piedmont. It is indicative that in the archive of the company of Saint-Anne in the Statutes series there is no statute, only the renewal licences of the privileges enjoyed by the Swiss in Piedmont.

The company also played an essential role in defining the membership of the community of Luganese in Turin. From its foundation, in fact, the company had the authority to certify the real geographical origin of those who declared themselves Luganese, determining their access to the privileges provided by the agreements between the states of Savoy and the Swiss cantons. It is important to note that these exemptions assimilated the Swiss immigrants as subjects of the Duke of Savoy, being the same enjoyed by the citizens of Turin.<sup>64</sup> In this respect, the company's action thus in many ways determined the boundary between migrants and foreigners, between those who belonged to a community recognised by the urban authorities, protected during their moments of inactivity, and framed in their mobility, and those who, without this protection, risked being considered by the city authorities as vagrants to be expelled.

## Conclusion

The case of construction workers allows us to observe from a novel perspective the places and moments in which borders materialised and in which inclusion and

<sup>63</sup> ASTo, Corte, Materie politiche per rapporto all'estero, *Negoziazione con gli Svizzeri e i Vallesani*.

<sup>64</sup> Cerutti (1995).



exclusion were disputed. Their profession required them to continually cross European borders during their itinerant life moving from one construction site to another. But in building workers' reports and letters, the experience of boundaries was not noted, and they paid more attention to other aspects of their itinerant lives: work and unemployment, access to credit or economic aid, reputation and belonging to a social network were the elements that determined the demarcation between inclusion and exclusion. These same elements constituted the criteria used by the urban authorities to define the 'stranger', i.e. someone who has no solid social ties, no certain reputation, no stable house and job and who, for this reason, had to be expelled. The lack of these resources made the presence of migrants in European cities precarious and, in the eyes of local authorities, illegitimate. In Turin, it was often the lack of work and access to assistance that defined the border between inclusion and exclusion from the city. In the prisons of the Vicariate, this boundary was continuously subject to negotiation between the institution and the prisoners. To cope with these problems, the construction workers from the Alpine regions—the artists of the lakes—built trans-local networks of credit, information and assistance that guaranteed the circulation of people and resources beyond the borders of states. These circuits were supported and consolidated locally thanks to some institutional instruments. In the case of the Savoyard states, it was the brotherhoods that, by providing those same resources, i.e. credit, assistance and information to their members, favoured their presence and circulation. Not only was the company of Saint Anne recognised by local institutions as a legitimate counterpart in the process of negotiating the conditions for the presence of the Swiss in the Savoyard states, by defending the privileges of the Swiss the company also obtained their assimilation as subjects of the Dukes of Savoy. This process of continuous negotiation of the internal borders made them variable according to the social body to which one belongs. In Piedmont, for instance, the internal frontier represented by the city's police authorities was not the same for all individuals but changed according to their membership of a specific social body: this was the case of the Luganese building workers, whom a series of privileges assimilated to the people of Turin and put in a favoured position compared to others. Looked at from the point of view of the actors, borders are not only porous, they are also multiple: they are as many and as changeable as the statuses of people.

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