

# Unwanted People and Desired Citizens

Contemporary Attitudes, Challenges and Perceptions  
of Migration and Integration



Edited by

**Cezary Smuniewski, Andrea Zanini,  
Cyprian Aleksander Kozera, Błażej Bado**

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Warsaw 2024

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# Foreign Labor in the Port of Genoa: Privileges, Integration and Conflicts (15<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> Centuries)

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## Abstract

This work examines the presence of foreign labor in the port of Genoa in the period between the early modern age and the 1830s, focusing on manual transport sector, where the phenomenon was most evident. The aim is to understand first of all the mechanisms that operated both on the demand side, determining the need to recruit workforce outside the city context, and on the supply side, favoring the emigration of unskilled workers who settled more or less permanently in the city. We shall also analyze the peculiarities of their organizational structure, the privileges obtained from the city authorities, the principles of mutual assistance and solidarity that characterized them, their integration into the city's social fabric, but also their conflictual relations with other categories of dockworkers.

**Keywords:** Genoa, port labor, foreign porters, privileges, conflicts

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The presence of foreigners in the main Mediterranean ports was and continues to be an economically and socially relevant phenomenon. Port cities are crossroads of trade, places of exchange, and are traditionally considered “open” or at least tolerant towards those who wish to settle there permanently. Actually, this openness is not always so evident, and above all does not necessarily include all social categories. As Francesca Trivellato (2009: 1) points out, historical studies rarely offer an analytical explanation of the ways in which economic cooperation functioned across

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geopolitical, linguistic and religious boundaries. Further conceptual confusion arises from the use of the term “intercultural intermediation” with reference to a range of activities, including intellectual exchanges and diplomatic negotiations. Moreover, such analyses often tend to be confined to the sphere of trade relations, neglecting to analyze migration phenomena and socio-economic integration process concerning the workforce.

Each port of call faces different problems, depending on the structure of the basin, the volume of traffic, the characteristics of the workforce employed, and socio-political factors that vary over time. These elements influence its degree of openness to foreign workers, together with an economic assessment in terms of labor costs and efficiency of the service offered, and thus the match between supply and demand.

For this reason, beyond a mere quantification of the foreign presence within a city, it is necessary to deepen the analysis in order to assess its actual degree of openness and tolerance. As to the first aspect, the intensity of the migratory phenomenon, i.e. the number of people who travel a certain distance to move from point A to point B is directly proportional to the job opportunities they will be able to find once they reach their destination (Calabi, Lanaro 1998: XIII). With this in mind, it is appropriate to consider as foreigners only those who enter the city to work and reside there, also activating mechanisms of self-defense and protection of their common interests (Poleggi 1998: 115).

## 2. The port of Genoa and its level of openness to foreigners

The first records of outsiders settling in the city of Genoa date back to the late Middle Ages. Its geographical location as the center of an important crossroads of trade between the Mediterranean Sea, the Po Valley behind it and northern Europe, and the many opportunities to do business thanks to the dynamism of the local patriciate attracted merchants from all over Europe (Piccinno, Zanini 2022: 35–47). The merchants who settled in the city were, however, “privileged” emigrants, who gave rise to *nationes*, whose activities were subject to specific rules that included the granting of *fondachi*, lodges and consulates (Casarino 1999: 89).

From the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and especially in the following one, craftsmen from Lombardy, Flanders and Germany operating in the textile and metal-working sectors also settled in the city and, thanks to their



specialization, were allowed to open workshops (Racine 1994: 555–567). Generally speaking, the city guilds regulated access to the various trades and thus the degree of openness to foreign workers according to need and the market situation. Some guilds that operated in niche sectors expressly banned foreigners, others allowed them to be admitted, although demanded they pay higher admission fees than the citizens of the Republic, while others, conversely, were reserved exclusively to specific categories of foreign workers. In the latter case, the privilege was determined either by particular technical skills (such as the *magistri antelami Lombardie*, sculptors of stone and marble), or by reasons of reliability (such as certain categories of porters). The presence of foreign craftsmen in a guild, however, implied the fear that they might suddenly decide to return home. For this reason, many statutes required them to reside permanently in the city, and the same also applied to laborers and apprentices (Casarino 1982: 79).

Genoa, however, was above all a port city, with an urban structure that gradually developed around the port and with an economy whose trend was closely linked to that of sea trade. From the definition of port provided by the seventeenth-century Genoese jurist Carlo Targa, according to whom it is “an enclosed sea bosom in which vessels are reduced and held for their safety, and for the embarkation or disembarkation of its people and goods, from which no one, except enemies, can by justice be excluded,” (Targa 1972: 187) we grasp the cosmopolitan nature that characterized every port city, as previously emphasized. The port was the place where vessels docked in order to deposit their cargoes and to look for new ones: the activities carried out within it and the relative services offered generated a parallel demand for labor, with different levels of specialization, to which the local population was not always able to respond: from the personnel in charge of disembarking and handling goods, to supplying ships, to repairs, to pilotage and rescue services.

In the late Middle Ages, the port of Genoa presented these characteristics and problems: a high volume of traffic, docking difficulties (due to the silting up of the seabed and the lack of water surface protected from the south-westerly winds), a shortage and dispersion of storage areas, and an urban morphology that did not allow wagons to pass along the narrow streets surrounding the port basin. In order to adapt the port's infrastructure to the growing traffic needs, in the early Modern Age the port underwent numerous improvements, which partially resolved the aforementioned deficiencies. The labor force operating within it was based

on an articulated guild system, which began to consolidate in the fourteenth century and remained, strengthening itself, for about five centuries. All the guilds had a monopoly in their respective spheres of competence and were governed by a rigid system of rules and tariffs subject to the approval of the port authorities. We can classify them in two categories according to whether they carried out their activities on land, such as porters and ship repairers, or in port waters, such as boatmen, who provided their services to ships anchored in the roadstead using small boats. This division reflected the division of competences between the two authorities respectively in charge of the management of the port and of the services at sea: the *Padri del Comune* and the *Conservatori del Mare*. The former was responsible for the administrative management of the infrastructures, and the control of the guilds operating ashore; the *Conservatori del Mare* exercised their power over everything concerning navigation (such as compliance with safety regulations), and supervised the guilds that carried out their activities on the water (Piccinno 2022: 39–42).

The labor organization that became consolidated between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was characterized by coexistence of some fifteen very heterogeneous professional groups in terms of numbers, specialization and, above all, nationality of their members. For instance, the degree of expertise was certainly higher in the guilds where the technical knowledge of the masters was an important prerequisite for admission to the group (as in the case of caulkers, shipwrights, barrel makers, cooperers), while it was more limited in the guilds involved in transport by hand or with the use of boats. Heterogeneity was even more evident within a particular category, the porters, who in Genoa were known under the term of Arabic origin *camalli* (Brusa 1953: 145). In fact, there were guilds composed of more than 700 members and others of only 10–15; some had been established in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and were able to enjoy considerable privileges in both economic and social terms thanks to a monopoly position consolidated by long tradition. Others, on the other hand, only came into being at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in response to the increase in trade, and thus at a time characterized by strong tensions due to political and ideological changes pushing towards liberalization of labor. Moreover, access to some groups was exclusively reserved for foreign workers, while in other cases the situation was diametrically opposed as only citizens of the Republic could be admitted. Between these two extreme situations we finally find groups that, although predominantly composed of local workers, also provided the possibility of access for foreigners. The legal framework

within which all the porter guilds operated was very detailed, but not sufficient to regulate an organizational situation that, especially from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, became rather confused and characterized by strong contrasts and an increasingly sharp contraposition between “national” and foreign workers.

### 3. Customs service and the demand for “incorruptible” workers

In order to understand the dynamics that led to the emergence of such contrasts, it is necessary to take a step back. We must in fact analyze the reason why, a few centuries earlier, the city authorities exclusively entrusted some transport services within the port to foreign workers. In the late Middle Ages, in port cities and in the main traffic hubs of the Italian peninsula (including Genoa, Leghorn, Venice, Milan, Florence, Rome), it was usual to entrust the handling of goods subject to customs duties to companies made up of foreign workers, generally from the Alpine valleys. The underlying logic behind this choice was that for certain tasks with significant tax implications, it was appropriate to trust only foreigners. First of all, they were considered “incorruptible” as they had no family ties locally and were therefore more reliable than local workers; secondly, as we shall see later, their “incorruptibility” was guaranteed by privileged labor conditions and a higher average wage level than the latter (Addobbati 2018: 11, 17). Everywhere, foreign porters thus enjoyed a monopoly position that confined national workers to a subordinate one. For example, in Leghorn, a 1631 customs regulation established the principle of irremovability for fifty Swiss porters from their place of work except in cases of demerit; it provided free accommodation for them inside the customs house, and it set relatively high transport rates to guarantee them an adequate wage level. In return, they were obliged to pay an annual fee to the city authorities and the members were responsible for the quality of the service provided: in the event of a damage or loss of the goods transported, they had to personally recompense the owner or merchant for the loss incurred. The twenty-eight porters operating within the Florence customs house enjoyed privileges and were subject to obligations very similar to those laid down for Leghorn porters; as we shall see later, a similar situation also characterized the Genoese context, highlighting the presence of an operative standard adopted almost uniformly in early modern customs structures (Orelli 1996: 25).

The phenomenon requires an analysis of the labor market from the supply side as well in order to understand both the economic and social motivations for this migratory flow. When did the phenomenon start and where did these workers come from? What drove them to migrate? What had been their social status in their land of origin and how close a bond did they retain with it? According to some dated studies, it seems that the first vanguards of a later and more substantial migratory flow were already employed in the Pisa customs house in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. They all came from Urganò, a village in the lower part of the Bergamo valley (Belotti 1961: 376). Emigration from the Alpine valleys became much more intense in the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries with port cities as its preferred destination. Some recent studies, based on the analysis of unpublished sources preserved in archives and institutions in the areas of origin, allow us to obtain some indications regarding their living conditions in their countries of origin and the motivations that drove them to emigrate (Acerbis, Invernizzi 2009). The emerging picture allows us to overcome the boundaries of the traditional historiographic view, based exclusively on sources relating to the host cities, according to which it was the poorest who abandoned their lands in search of work. Indeed, they were people from relatively well-off families, or at least not in a poor condition: as Addobbati (2018: 84) states “the porter’s wage did not provide the basis for their subsistence but was rather an additional resource, which allowed for an increase in spending capacity and gave greater stability to the domestic economy.” Certainly the mountain economy was poor, but not to the point of not being able to guarantee subsistence for its inhabitants: they therefore did not emigrate to survive but to improve their income situation. From a social point of view, they were positioned well below the noble class and the landowning elite, but a significantly higher position than the small peasant farmers.

A further element confirming this assumption is the custom of the foreign porters to consider the job a proper patrimonial asset, therefore transferable against monetary payment. This was despite the fact that the companies’ internal rules (so called *Statuti*) expressly stated that it could only be transmitted by inheritance or donation. This illegal practice was widespread both in Genoa, in the field of the porters employed at the customs house and at the free trade area, as well as in other places, such as Pisa and Leghorn. Despite a few scandals and some attempts at intervention by the city authorities, it remained a constant in the long history of the presence of workers from the Alpine valleys in port cities. But

what was the socio-economic mechanism underlying this phenomenon? On the basis of what emerges from a study based on the analysis of notarial sources preserved in the archives of the small mountain communities of the Bergamo valleys, it is clear that workplaces were an integral part of the assets of many families, bound together by close interdependent relationships. Workplaces were not only sold, but also rented, subdivided into quotas, mortgaged, given as a collateral for dowries. For this reason, in many cases it is not easy to precisely trace the actual ownership of each one due to its fragmentation. The situation is further complicated by the fact that often, when the ownership of the workplace was divided between several individuals, they alternated in port work. We can, however, state that the economy of entire communities revolved around the job of a porter and for this reason the labor market liberalization and the consequent loss of the privilege would have wiped out its patrimonial value, and would have had negative consequences on a much larger number of subjects than the actual number of members of each company (Acerbis, Invernizzi 2009: 93–100).

#### 4. The Caravana of Bergamo and other foreign porter companies

In this context, Genoa was the seat of the oldest known guild of foreign porters, more precisely of Bergamo origin: the “Compagnia dei Caravana” whose year of establishment is unknown but whose first statute, dated 11 June 1340, has been preserved. Since its origins, the Caravana had a monopoly for the transport of goods that transited through the Genoese port’s customs house and annexed warehouses (Cervetto 1901: 46). With the establishment of the Free Trade Area (the so-called *Portofranco*) in 1590, the monopoly was also extended to the handling of goods unloaded at the Ponte della Mercanzia and bound for the warehouses of the *Portofranco*, except in emergency situations in which the intervention of some Genoese porters, or “nostrali,” (ASCG 1) was also required, both the transport by hand and the surveillance activities in these areas of the port, and the right to supervise the weighing of goods, which was carried out by public weighers (Lepetit 1893: 15–16).

The first statutes did not contain any requirements concerning citizenship for joining the guild, nor did they use the term Caravana. This expression appeared for the first time only in 1381, in an inventory

of the owners of beds at the hospital of Santa Maria Maddalena. The circumstance that some of the company's porters had this property, which they could use in case of need, is a clear signal of their relatively wealthy condition (Lepetit 1893: 10). The word Caravana probably derives from the Italian term caravan, derived from the Persian word *kairewan*, meaning an association of merchants, or travelers, or pilgrims, or any other kind of people (Cervetto 1901: 38–39). The first evidence of the nationality of the porters dates back to 1487, when the guild was officially recognized by the city authorities: on that occasion, the Caravana members were indicated as coming from Bergamo and "Brambilla" (i.e. from the Brembana Valley and in particular Zogno). However, we can say that the privilege of joining the company had already been reserved for the inhabitants of these areas prior to this date. Further requisites were included in the new statute issued in 1576 (Cervetto 1901: 35–44). First of all, the obligation of Bergamo citizenship was definitively codified as an essential requirement for admission. Confirming the rigidity of this provision, tales from the period narrate about the wives of the Caravana porters who went to give birth in their homeland to allow their son to replace his father once the latter died or gave up his place. Admission to the company, for which a minimum age of nineteen was required, was subject to the approval by the port authority and payment of twenty-four Genoese liras, half of which had to be donated to the *Padri del Comune* and the other half to the company itself. Over time, the regulations for the admission of new members became progressively stricter. For example, in 1756, the obligation was instituted to undergo a 15-day trial period, without any salary, and a subsequent year of salaried apprenticeship before obtaining definitive admission to the guild (ASCG 2).

From the very beginning, the internal organization of the group was strongly characterized by religious sentiments of its members and by a great mutualistic spirit, probably exacerbated by their status as outsiders, which led them to develop a strong sense of solidarity. The company in fact had a chapel at the church of Santa Maria del Carmine, and members were obliged to pay a portion of their individual earnings into a common fund to provide economic assistance to those who were unable to work (Costamagna 1964: 134). They were recognizable in the docks thanks to their characteristic clothing: a blue moleskin skirt, tight at the hips and of knee-length (called *scossale*), strictly without pockets to avoid the temptation to hide stolen goods. The use of nicknames was another peculiarity and a distinguishing mark of the company: in some cases the nickname given



to the porter was handed down over the years as if it were connected more to the work place rather than to the person to whom it was given. Probably, moreover, the use of the nickname instead of the proper name facilitated the mechanism of alternation between several individuals in the workplace in cases where its ownership was divided into shares (Piccinno 2000: 537–545).

According to the 16<sup>th</sup>-century statute, the number of members was set at forty for the period from 1 October to 30 April and thirty for the remaining months of the year in order to allow porters to return to their villages during the harvest season. With this exception, it was forbidden to be absent from work for more than one day and the obligation to answer the call to work even at night and on holidays. The workers' interests were thus clearly put before the port's operational needs: the consequence was that during the summer, i.e. during the period of greatest traffic, the company only had three quarters of its men at its disposal. Notwithstanding this problem, their exclusive right of access to the Caravana was only abolished in 1848, as can be observed from the guild's register, which includes the names of all members of the Caravana for more than two centuries. In fact, almost all surnames recorded therein were clearly of Bergamo origin and from the surrounding valleys, such as Brambilla from Zogno, Dossena from the Brembana valley, Noris from Bracca, Acerbis from Rigosa. Some names were also very frequent: for 6.6% a father-son relationship can be hypothesized, and for 6% a brotherly relationship (Massa Piergiovanni 1995: 218–219).

**Table 1**  
Number of porters enrolled in the Bergamo Caravana (1343–1848)

Year	Number of porters	Year	Number of porters
1343	32	1763	90
1579	30–40	1787	130
1671	55	1791	155
1679	60	1832	200
1750	67	1848	250

Source: Massa Piergiovanni 1995: 219.

When we analyze the trend in the number of registrations over a long period, we see an initial upward phase during the 17<sup>th</sup> century due to the extension of the operating area of the company to the handling of goods

from the free trade area. This was established in 1590 for grain only, in order to attract the imports needed to overcome the famine that affected the Mediterranean area, but was later renewed and extended to almost all other products. The consequent rise in the incoming port traffic generated a corresponding increase in the demand for labor, which was met by an increase in the number of members of the Caravana. Nevertheless, starting in 1630, the city authorities began to regulate access to the customs area for some so-called “nostrali” porters, who were probably already working there illegally. Initially, there were ten, which grew to 25 in 1707 and 40 in 1761, when they established an autonomous guild (Piccinno 2000: 243–246). The following and more significant growth in the number of members of the Bergamo Caravana that emerged in the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century can be only partly justified by the increase in the amount of work entrusted to the company due to the increase in trade. Rather, it was a clear sign of the erosion of its monopoly, which led to a decrease in the individual earnings of its members, and, as will be seen later, to an increased conflict with local porters. It should be also noted that a similar phenomenon occurred in the nearby port of Leghorn (Addobbati 2018: 47, 75–76).

The fall of the Republic in 1797 and the following annexation first to the Napoleonic Empire and then to the Kingdom of Savoy only marginally influenced the life of the company and port labor. Despite the relative loss of power, the Caravana still maintained a significant social weight in the city. For example, on 4 May 1815, eight members of the guild obtained the honor of transporting Pope Pius VII in the gestatorial chair on his way from the church of the Annunziata to Palazzo Negrotto, and shortly afterwards, the same Pope granted a plenary indulgence to all members of the Company (Lepetit 1893: 22). Even at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the guilds had already been formally abolished and port labor liberalized, Emilio Lepetit described the company in these words, highlighting its close connection with the city and the values of cohesion and mutual assistance that had distinguished its members for five centuries.

“Little known in Genoa, where it is also very popular, and almost completely unknown to scholars outside the Superba city walls, an association of porters still flourishes today. It was founded more than five centuries ago, and to the pride of an always honest and beautiful history, of a life always based on industriousness, on the principles of solidarity and welfare, it adds the decorum of an archive that documents and illustrates every act.” (Lepetit 1893: 8)



The Caravana of Bergamo was not the only foreign guild operating in the port. In fact, there were also two so-called minor Caravane: the *Caravana of Grassini*, in charge of transporting cured meats, whose members came from Domodossola and the neighboring valleys, and the Caravana of Swiss porters, from Lake Maggiore, who transported oil. In both cases, these workers were initially part of the larger Caravana, i.e. the Bergamo one, from which they later spun off to establish two independent guilds. We must emphasize that the legal form of the Caravana was an organizational system to guarantee equal working conditions for its members through joint collection of earnings and their subsequent distribution in equal shares. It also included mutual assistance mechanisms for members who were elderly or unable to work, made necessary by their distance from their homeland. In addition, the Caravana was financially liable in case of theft, fraud or damage caused by the porters in charge of transport. For a long time, this type of organization was in fact the exclusive prerogative of the foreign porters' associations both in the Genoa and in other ports, including Leghorn. In return for greater autonomy and higher earnings, compared to the "national" workers organized in the form of traditional guilds or companies, they had to implement mechanisms of self-control, with the aim of simplifying the inspection and policing tasks of the city authorities (Grendi 1964: 348–351).

The origins of the *Caravana of Grassini*, made up of twelve men, date back to 1465, following a split agreed upon with the Bergamo porters, from both a juridical and an operative point of view, as can be seen from a report of 1830: "They said that in very remote times they were part, or rather a single body, of the Caravana of Portofranco, and that the split was made by mutual agreement, separating the tasks." (ASCG 3) The first evidence of the presence of some Swiss porters in the Genoese port of call dates back to the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century: in some acts of the Caravana of Bergamo from that period the names "Pedrotus et Dominicus et Tani et Todecus omnes de Lacu Maiori" are recorded, and a few years later "Antoni dito Marang, Todescho, Lorenzo, Zoan del Math, Domeneg, tutti de lo lago Maior." (Costamagna 1965: 16, 40) In 1492, they separated from the Caravana of Bergamo and were officially recognised by the *Padri del Comune* with the approval of an autonomous statute (Orelli 1996: 42–44). It listed the names and countries of origin (Lugano, "Brizargo," "Santovalio" and "Vegetti") of the ten workers who gave life to the company, highlighting a Swiss monopoly situation within the group, but without making it official: in fact, any specific indication as to the members' origin was missing.

In the case of the *Caravana of Grassini*, the requirement to come from Domodossola, or from the surrounding valleys (in particular Mendrisio and Monte Crestese), in order to be admitted was instead decreed with the issuing of the first statute in 1586, more than a century after the actual foundation of the company. Their activity was the monopoly transport of all goods subject to the homonymous tax (cheese, butter, candles, anchovies and cured meat) arriving in the town through the land and sea gates; they were also responsible for weighing the cheeses within the premises prior to the payment of the duty, where they had to stand waiting for work from dawn to dusk (ASCG 4). Simultaneously, the Swiss Caravana had the monopoly of transporting all the oil that entered the city from both land and sea and was subject to the homonymous duty, as well as produced within the territory of the Republic and headed for the public warehouse. In order to minimize the risk of fraud, members of the Caravana were prohibited to do any trade in oil (ASCG 5).

Both the Swiss Caravana and the *Caravana of Grassini* lasted an exceptionally long time, as both were only formally abolished in 1840. Over about four centuries of activity they managed to preserve their compactness by maintaining a limited number of members, never exceeding 18 in the first case and 12 in the second, unlike the Caravana of Bergamo, as seen before. The small size of these groups therefore guaranteed constant and secure earnings for their members, who lived in relatively wealthy conditions, especially when compared to the so-called “national” porters, who were more numerous and often living in poverty.

## 5. Conflicts with local porters

Due to the extremely favorable conditions granted to foreign workers, disputes with other categories of porters operating within the port area were very frequent. As early as the late Middle Ages, there are records of several complaints submitted by some local porter guilds to the city authorities against the monopoly of the Caravana of Bergamo, which were regularly resolved in its favor. Apart from the constant battle from the legal point of view, made up of pleas, appeals and replies from the competent authorities, the persistent attempts by other guilds to erode the foreign monopoly were a source of riots, public order problems, and inefficiency in cargo handling. Generally speaking, the presence of a multitude of companies and perhaps excessive operative specialization were in turn

the cause of an unavoidable overlapping of the spheres of competence of the various guilds, which often went into disputes over the right to transport unloaded cargoes. These problems were most evident in the places where handovers from Genoese porters to foreign Caravane and vice versa took place, i.e. at the gates of the free trade area, the customs house or the areas where duties were paid. Further problems stemmed from the lack of a single authority in charge of managing the portage system, as mentioned above, which often led to different degrees of efficiency in the control of the members' activities. The contrast between the foreign porters and the local ones (on average, about 50% of whom were Genoese, while the remainder came from the Rivas and the hinterland) originated from the privileges enjoyed by the former, which were expressed in a greater degree of closure of the guilds to which they belonged, better economic treatment, and more developed social security forms.

The problem became more acute from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century due to the worsening living conditions of local workers. They hardly tolerated that the Republic's government continued to pay special attention to foreign guilds even at the time when social tension within the sector was very high. In these years, in fact, and especially from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, portage companies became an important employment opportunity for people who were poor and jobless. For instance, around the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century a new guild of "national" porters was formed to handle coal, given the growing importance of unloading this fuel in the Genoese port. The trend in the membership of this company reflects the phenomenon highlighted above: 130 in 1797, 370 in 1815. A similar trend also characterized national companies with older origins, such as that of the wine porters: 225 enrolled in 1797, 440 in 1815 (Piccinno 2022: 45).

In addition to the steady increase in the number of members, some of these guilds decided to transform their legal status by adopting the Caravana formula, thus imitating the same organizational model as the foreign guilds: the aim was to guarantee equal employment opportunities for all workers and to provide assistance in case of need at a time of great pressure on the sector, also due to the push towards liberalization of port labor. For example, the wine porters implemented this legal transformation in 1821 and those of the Ponte Mercanzia in 1831, but the excessive increase in admissions to the guild did not allow for a significant improvement in wages and consequently in their living conditions (Piccinno 2000: 328–334).

Nevertheless, it must be considered that the lack of a significant intervention in the urban road system in order to allow wagons to enter the

city walls, placed porters, both domestic and foreign, in a still monopolistic position. Moreover, the structure of the port, despite a partial shift of the mooring areas towards the west, i.e. in a decentralized position with respect to the urban center, was still characterized by the overcrowding of the docks and lack of space for handling cargo, favoring human labor over animal transport. Finally, the Savoy government, which since 1815 took control of the Ligurian territory following the dissolution of the Napoleonic Empire, only partially implemented the structural changes necessary for the definitive liberalization of labor and the consequent abolition of the privileges of both foreign and national porter companies. This process would only be completed with the unification of Italy and the entry of Genoa into the national port system.

## 6. Conclusions

The port is the observation point adopted in this paper to analyze the presence of foreign workers in Genoa in the early modern age, the rules that regulated their activity and the degree of integration of conflict with local workers. Port cities, in fact, always tended to be open to foreigners as trading centers and by their very nature cosmopolitan. Genoa was no exception, but in this respect it presented some peculiarities worthy of an in-depth investigation. This analysis has allowed to trace the presence of an articulated guild system within which each group operated in its own sector as a monopoly. In this context, portage guilds were characterized by heterogeneous wages, working conditions, and different degrees of openness to foreigners. Access to some of them was reserved for those who were born in Genoa or had been resident there for at least ten years; on the other hand, there were guilds whose access was reserved exclusively to foreign workers. The underlying motivation was that for certain tasks with tax implications it was appropriate to rely only on foreigners because they were considered "incorruptible" as they had no family ties locally. Meanwhile, their "incorruptibility" was guaranteed by privileged working conditions and a higher average wage level than local Genoese porters.

As it has been shown, the flow of emigration came from some specific areas in the Alpine valleys and was driven more by the search for supplementary income rather than by actual poverty. This situation placed foreign porters in a position of strength, from which also derived borderline behavior: for example, they considered their job in the port

of Genoa as a patrimonial asset, therefore transferable (sold, rented, etc.) against monetary payment. Due to the extremely favorable working conditions they enjoyed, disputes with local workers were very frequent. Even though this caused operational problems in the distribution of work and the efficiency of cargo handling, the situation did not change over time. It was only with the beginning of the liberalization process of port work and consequent abolition of the guilds carried out from the 1830s onwards that a formal abolition of these privileges and equalization of local and foreign porters was achieved.

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