

Can Elites Make a Difference? The Building Up of Prerequisites for Modernisation in Lombardy and Venetia (1814-66)*

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ABSTRACT

The long-term socio-economic divergence between Venetia and Lombardy after the Restoration period (1814-66) is generally attributed to their Habsburg rulers, but alternative explanations are also possible. Drawing inspiration from Macry's idea of 19th-century transformations revolving around elites, in analysing primary sources from Italian archives we reveal the existence of two very different privileged groups in Lombardy and Venetia. Albeit within the same framework of Habsburg rule, the two elites encouraged technical culture and change in quite distinct ways. Section 1 introduces the centrality of elites within the Lombard-Venetian Kingdom, transcending the negative bias against Venetia. Sections 2 and 3 provide practical examples of the divergence between the Lombard and Venetian elites concerning the main economic activities of the time, namely agriculture and the silk industry. Sections 4-6 offer possible explanations for the existence of two types of elite within the same Kingdom. Section 7 concludes.

1. Introduction

The secondary literature to date has attributed the relative

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slowness of economic development in 19th-century Venetia to the Habsburgs, the region's official foreign ruler from 1814. It was, however, the local elite who decided to finance a particular industry, develop a scientific culture, or invest in new machinery. As members of the provincial assemblies, or *congregazioni*, and of the Chambers of Commerce, they could sponsor a range of projects. Examination of the structure of Venetia and Lombardy prior to Italian unity helps us to understand whether elites played an active role in this period of transformation.

Blaming the Habsburgs for the failure of some Venetian provinces to develop is typical of a dated historiographical approach echoing the Italian insurrection ideology of the 1840s. Regarding fiscal policies, for instance, both Lombardy and Venetia paid land, poll, consumption, stamp, registration, and professional taxes. However, in Lombardy taxes amounted to 38% less in 1815 than had been collected by the French government three years earlier.¹ Thus the Habsburg tax burden was less than crushing; nor did it favour Lombardy in any obvious way. In 1843, the expected *Grundsteuer*, or land tax, per square mile was L.19,000 in Lombardy and L.12,673 in Venetia, the actual revenue collected being L.19,900 and L.11,629, respectively.² A decade later, in 1857, praedial tax revenue amounted to Fl.6,429,248³ in Venetia and to Fl.10,168,128 in Lombardy (or Fl.2.80 and Fl.3.58 per head⁴), while the consumption tax came respectively to Fl.9,932,909 and Fl.12,524,875⁵ (or Fl.4.33 and Fl.4.40 per capita⁶).

In addition, the Habsburgs' introduction of a cadastral land register (*catasto*) in the Kingdom became a proper "anchor of general salvation"⁷ for Venetia. It ended the arbitrary conduct of the municipal administrations, abusive exemptions for the wealthy, and the

¹ R. Rath, *The Provisional Austrian Regime in Lombardy-Venetia*, London, 1969, p. 109.

² ASV, Tafeln.

³ Fl.1 = L.3.

⁴ ASV, B.Leg., b. 531, c. 43, n. 13.

⁵ A. Meneghini, *Le imposte nella Venezia e nella Lombardia*, Turin, 1863, pp. 25-ff.

⁶ ASV, B.Leg., b. 531, c. 43, n. 13.

⁷ ASV, B.Leg., b. 319, C. Lupi, *Storia del catasto prediale*, 1844, p. 30.

disputes between the centre and the periphery.⁸ The landowner was assured that the praedial tax levy was based on the land actually possessed, “being able at any instant to verify the precise location of any of his properties, the type of cultivation, [its] quality, and surface area.”⁹ This benefited the state of agriculture in general, encouraging landowners to “spread their money [for] the improvement and remediation of the properties, in the certainty that the product grown could not be subject to any increase in cadastral estimates.”¹⁰ In this regard, Locatelli (2003) stressed the relevance of the cadastre in defining property rights while limiting the typical disadvantages of feudal systems, and thus fostering agricultural activity.¹¹ A decade earlier, Komlos (1990) referred to the Habsburgs as a very present power, in bureaucratic and financial terms, whose ability to overcome internal problems was reflected in reforms favouring both agriculture and industry.¹²

The fact that official cadastral registration did not begin in Venetia until half a century after its full implementation in Lombardy was probably a factor in the region’s backwardness, but it is not the Habsburgs who should be blamed. Venetian patricians borrowed heavily and on a regular basis and were notorious tax evaders.¹³ The Crown, conversely, tried to activate the new land register as soon as possible, witness the request by the imperial official Count Wumser for a “detailed narration” of land taxes¹⁴ in the Venetian provinces.

Being under Austrian rule also meant privileged access to a large number of markets and progressively less sporadic legislative support. On January 7, 1831, Count Spaur, the governor of Venice, an-

⁸ B. Caizzi, *Storia dell’industria italiana*, Turin, 1955, p. 79.

⁹ ASV, B.Leg., b. 319, C. Lupi, *Storia*, p. 148.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

¹¹ A.M. Locatelli, *Riforma fiscale e identità regionale. Il catasto per il Lombardo Veneto (1815-1853)*, Milan, 2003, p. 213.

¹² J. Komlos, *Economic Development in the Habsburg Monarchy and in the Successor States: Essays*, Boulder, 1990, pp. 220-221.

¹³ M. O’Connell, *Men of Empire*, Baltimore, 2009, p. 400.

¹⁴ ASV, B.Leg. (13 July 1814), b. 319.

nounced that manufactures could be traded “without limit of quantity” within the monarchy, including silk and laces “of the finest quality.”¹⁵ In 1846, when Asian silks were putting Lombard and Venetian firms under pressure, the Crown reduced export duties by two thirds.¹⁶ This pragmatism benefited other industries, too, as when the Austrian *Hofkammer* allowed the Milanese company Balledyer to import melted iron from the UK and the firm Schlegel to import 3,000 *zentner* of metal plates for producing steam boilers.¹⁷ As noted by Pichler (2001), this was a period when the Habsburgs agreed to accommodate requests from local industries and merchants in view of the fierce international competition, such as that from Piedmont, which could no longer be ignored.¹⁸ It was also the Habsburgs who provided access to 1.5 million more consumers between 1853 and 1857 with the Parma-Modena agreement, helping the Kingdom’s recovery after the pébrine disease affected silkworms.

The legacy of the two regions from the 18th century certainly resulted in some differences in the period under examination here. Lombardy experienced the reforms of Maria Theresa and the Milanese Enlightenment, something quite alien to the immobilism of independent Venetia. Even taking this into account, however, as in Macry (2002), the 19th-century transformations were nevertheless at least in part the product of local elites. Entrepreneurs and innovators needed the acquiescence of those with political responsibilities, a cultural role, or significant wealth.

2. The management of agriculture

The first domain where the attitude of the Lombard and Vene-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, b. 77, tit. 4, n. 46.

¹⁶ K.R. Greenfield, “The Italian Nationality Problem of the Austrian Empire”, in *Austrian History Yearbook*, 3/2, 1967, p. 44.

¹⁷ I.A. Glazier, *Il Commercio estero del Regno Lombardo-Veneto dal 1815 al 1865*, Turin, 1966, pp. 24-25.

¹⁸ R. Pichler, *L’Economia lombarda e l’Austria: politica commerciale e sviluppo industriale 1815-1859*, Milan, 2001, pp. 86-96.

tian elites had a real impact was agriculture. Soil and weather are never a constant, but the landed aristocracy could certainly facilitate agricultural progress. For Stone (1989) and Romani (1957), landowners in the areas that eventually advanced favoured progress in land administration. As early as the 1750s, English landowners had begun to turn to big tenants, invest their family assets in canals, or support mercantile companies.¹⁹ While liberal ideas of this sort penetrated the Milanese aristocracy,²⁰ in Venice the lack of interest in the mainland resulted in the underdevelopment of farming, reducing the peasantry to a semi-servile state.

In a region where innovative measures to favour production were few and far between, post-Napoleonic economic recovery was difficult to imagine. Furthermore, an exclusive attitude could have dramatic consequences. The livelihood of 70% of the Venetian population depended on agriculture, but progress was obstructed by the modest propensity to invest in existing fields and new techniques. Nineteenth-century Venetian aristocrats probably fit the category of risk-averse individuals who preferred fixed income from land immobilisation to uncertain profits from new productive activities. Nor did the nobles often encourage other, more market-oriented social groups. The latter tended to possess less than a third of the total land, and not the most profitable at that; rather, their holdings included hilly or even mountainous terrain.²¹

What the Venetian population did not know was that innovation in productive factors, whatever the cause, could guarantee the independence that advocates of the *Risorgimento* demanded, even informally. Taxes would become less of a problem, social tensions would abate, and the entire region, including the port of Venice, would prosper. Archduke Maximilian himself, the Kingdom's gov-

¹⁹ L. Stone, *Una élite aperta? L'Inghilterra tra 1540 e 1880*, Bologna, 1989, pp. 229-230, 251.

²⁰ D.E. Zanetti and B. Maltby, "The Patriziato of Milan from the Domination of Spain to the Unification of Italy", in *Social History*, 2/6, Oct. 1977, p. 754.

²¹ M. Berengo, *L'agricoltura veneta dalla caduta della Repubblica all'Unità*, Milan, 1963, p. 3.

ernor in 1856-59, acknowledged the importance of transforming agriculture into a strong source of revenue.²² But the landowners preferred to maintain their titles and their plots, rather than working to increase technical competence.

Venetian agriculture was backward not only because of sandy or swampy terrain but also, indeed above all, because of the nobility's reluctance if not outright refusal to get involved in its amelioration. The preference for mixed crops, or rather the lack of interest in specialisation, reflected a privileged order that was "socially torpid and incapable of innovation."²³ By contrast, the first form of capitalism in Lombardy included an elite active in agricultural reform and aware of the benefits of the transformation. In line with Locatelli and Tedeschi (2015), who described the development of a "nationalist enlightened aristocracy"²⁴ in this period, the Lombards contributed to real agricultural innovation in Northern Italy.

The more entrepreneurial attitude of the Lombard elite resulted first of all in specialisation, avoiding over-production of crops such as grain. If sharecropping was more primitive, patriarchal, closed in itself, and demanded only human labour, tenancy was known for being intensive and aiming at increasing the productivity of the land, requiring both capital and intelligence.^{25, 26} Tenants in Como, for instance, limited viticulture in favour of mulberries after the price of silk cocoons rose.²⁷

On the other hand, for landowners the sharecropping system meant always having someone working the land, and hence an in-

²² M. D'Asburgo, *Il Governatorato del Lombardo-Veneto*, Pordenone, 1992, p. 11.

²³ M. Berengo, *L'Agricoltura*, p. 196.

²⁴ A.M. Locatelli and P. Tedeschi, "New Common Knowledge in Agronomics: the Network of the Agrarian Reviews and Congresses in Europe During the First Half of the 19th Century", in S. Aprile et al. (ed.), *Une Europe de Papier. Projets Européens au XIX^e Siècle*, Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2015, p. 200.

²⁵ For simplicity, the systems of *mezzadria*, or sharecropping, and of tenancy, will be considered without their sub-categories.

²⁶ S. Jacini, *Atti della Giunta per la inchiesta agraria e sulle condizioni della classe agricola*, Rome, 1855, pp. 192-193.

²⁷ A. Dewerpe, *L'Industrie Aux Champs*, Rome, 1985, p. 232.

come; but it also meant restricting activity to crops such as wheat and sweet corn only. Indeed, no sharecropper could have an interest in replacing grain with mulberries. They had neither the financial means nor the permission or the incentive.. This contrasted with the advice of the contemporary economist Gioia (1824): “Rent out all the fields that cannot be supervised by the landowner, do not split the product in half anymore, reunite your fields into one instead of dividing them into small pieces [which] damages you, the farmer, and the land.”²⁸ The large-scale cultivation, long leases, and the shipment of the product to the market that characterised Lombardy contrasted with the small, subsistence farms of Venetia. This is not surprising given that tenancy required forms of improvement such as irrigation, reclamation, and manuring, for which the Venetians were not particularly renowned.

The Lombard approach, by contrast, recognised the benefits of large-scale cultivation in terms of technical surplus. Locatelli and Tedeschi (2018) refer to the Lombard acknowledgment of “profitable property”²⁹ over social order. Privileged individuals learned to support the division of labour in favour of economic development. The Milanese patrician Biumi (1773) stressed the “great advantage to the public economy” when “cultivation of land [was] undertaken by those [with] efficient wealth.”³⁰ In Brescia, wealthy landowners would rent out their fields with leases in cash for not less than 9-15 years, allowing for the efficient use of machines, and introducing the figure of the contractor.³¹ At least 7,000 fields bought by the Lombard elite in 1834 were farmed as rice paddies,³² with hilly and irrigated areas dedicated to dairy farming and silk.

²⁸ R. Salvadori, “Il dibattito sulla piccola e grande coltura”, in R. Giusti, *Il Lombardo*, p. 390.

²⁹ A.M. Locatelli and P. Tedeschi, “Innovations and Changes in Property Rights, Agrarian Contracts and Economic Development: the Case of Lombardy, 18th-20th Centuries”, in A. Carera (ed.), *Agricultural Resilience in Lombardy. How It Supported Economic Growth in the 19th and 20th Century*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan, 2018, pp. 3-26.

³⁰ M. Romani, *L'agricoltura in Lombardia dal periodo delle riforme al 1859*, Milan, 1957, p. 103.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 99, 129.

These Lombard groups were not only open to cooperate with experts such as engineers for the valuation of farmyards and sheds; they also participated directly in modernising the land system. While Count Porro-Lambertenghi from Como travelled to France and the UK to import the newest methods of irrigation,³³ the Milanese Count Castiglioni analysed solutions for reforestation in the United States.³⁴ The landowner and agronomist Lomeni collaborated with the economic periodical *Annali Universali* on rural economy and drafted the Lombard-Venetian *Giornale Agrario*.³⁵ In all, Lombard landowners contributed about L.381 million to agricultural improvement.³⁶

The Venetian cadastral documents, by contrast, show a kind of stasis that was also reflected in the disposition of land. The first geometrically parcelled evaluation of the territory displays some recurring agronomic features.³⁷ In Chiesanuova, the system of rent, whether in cash, in kind, or mixed, was “not in use.” Land was divided into small fields to guarantee landowners some “savings”. The peasantry, described as “ill-equipped with farm tools and cattle”, “barely [obtained] sustenance for their families”. Similarly, in Avesa, “the principal products [were] wheat, grapes and firewood, a few olives, a few mulberry leaves, very few chestnuts, and no cheese.” “A couple of old oxen” were found grazing on the 30 “pieces of land” available and were described as underfed owing to “lack of hay.” The lack of the tenancy system, owing to the impossibility of agreement between self-contained landowners of neighbouring but separated fields, impeded agricultural advancement.

If the Lombard landed aristocracy, such as the landowners in Lodi, used the soil left to stand fallow to feed the animals, in Venetia the obsolete two-field system did not permit this. In the Venetian

³³ D.E. Zanetti, *La demografia del patriziato milanese nei secoli XVII, XVIII, XIX*, Pavia, 1972, p. 43.

³⁴ M. Romani, *L'Agricoltura*, p. 158.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁷ Descriptions from: ASV, *Catasto*, bs. 66, 124.

municipalities of Santo Stefano, Madonna, Altavilla, and Campo Marzo, the crop rotation lasted 2-3 years, alternating wheat for landowners and sweet corn for peasants, with the result that “the farmer [would] not dedicate himself to any branch of industry.”³⁸ The landowners’ management of the land, including parcellisation of properties into tiny plots, impeded land transformation, discoveries, better diets,³⁹ and all the beneficial consequences. Overall, it delayed industrialisation. The Milanese Count Jacini wrote in 1881: “Where sharecropping is in use, who will take on the huge expense of a specialisation reform? Both parties? But the sharecropper absolutely lacks the means. And would the landowner leave half of his product to the sharecropper as before?”⁴⁰

Both tenancy and sharecropping yielded substantial revenue. But whereas the Venetian elite favoured sharecropping for reasons of paternalism and social control, in Lombardy the tenant could make the land more productive with new crops and rotation, thanks to the acquiescence of the landed aristocracy. Conversely, in 1839 the Venetian hereditary elite still possessed 184,504.53 *pertiche* of land in the plain of Verona alone, with the paradox that many families incurred incredibly large debts. The Pisani family, for instance, had to sell their casino, atelier, coffee shop, and 575 fields, valued at an estimated L.115 million, for a mere L.60,000. A similar fate dogged the Venetian families Diedo, Dolfin, Capello, Correr, Foscarini, and Venier,⁴¹ with debts passed down from generation to generation.

However, the risk aversion of the Venetian landowners, possibly explained by the parcellisation of the land into small plots, proved to be totally ineffective. And where tenancy was used instead, this was often for speculative reasons, as the tenant would simply sublet the

³⁸ In 1847 in Padua, 1,630,930 cadastral *pertiche* were devoted to cereals. C. Vanzetti, *La Dinamica delle qualità di coltura del Veneto nei secoli XIX e XX*, Verona, 1982, pp. 72, 101.

³⁹ Pellagra spread in Venetia but not in Lombardy.

⁴⁰ *Atti*, p. 126.

⁴¹ R. Derosas, “Aspetti economici della crisi del patriziato veneziano tra fine Settecento e inizio Ottocento”, in G. Fontana and A. Lazzarini (eds.), *Veneto e Lombardia tra rivoluzione giacobina ed età napoleonica*, Milan, 1992, pp. 95-98, 117-119.

field to some sharecropper.⁴² Moreover, families such as the Malaspina or Spolverini in Verona seldom oversaw their possessions. Clientelism in this region was a major factor in administrative decisions, with land divided into a multitude of small plots held by different families who were presumably reluctant to agree on a collective sale. Even if they may have been prone to buy, out of utilitarianism or profitability, the Lombard tenants had little incentive to do so.

Letting out the land to wealthy tenants, who modernised and kept the soil productive for the landowner, was a key factor in the progress of the economy. The openness of the Lombard landed aristocracy proved to be less risky than the solipsism of the Venetians, who rather than lose their established power over the land⁴³ preferred to have subordinate sharecroppers manage it, occasional debt, and no improvement of the region's economy.

Thus to find contemporaries like Merlini (1857) describing the Lombard elite as very generous should not come as a surprise. These landlords offered mortgages to tenants and experts, or encouraged local banks such as the Cassa di Risparmio delle Province Lombarde eventually to support agriculture.⁴⁴ The Lombard dismissal of the culture of inheritance, which Fabbroni (1796) called an abuse, resulting in the highest rate of extinction of family names (54.5%) between 1750-1848,⁴⁵ made active land management the norm. Around the middle of the century, Count Trivulzio of Milan worked enthusiastically with the engineer Reschisi to create a model village to give tenants a functional education in agriculture.⁴⁶ Count Dandolo (1817) corresponded with more than 40 Lombard landowners, including Count Caccia, Marquis D'Adda, and Don Appiani D'Aragona,⁴⁷ to improve the rearing of silkworms; this was another

⁴² F. Della Peruta, "Il Veneto nel Risorgimento," in G. Benzoni and G. Cozzi (eds.), Venezia, p. 394.

⁴³ Assigning the land to a tenant made the latter its legal possessor.

⁴⁴ A.M. Locatelli and P. Tedeschi, *Innovations*, p. 10.

⁴⁵ D.E. Zanetti and B. Maltby, *The Patriziato*, table 1.

⁴⁶ C. Lacaïta, *L'Intelligenza*, pp. 68-69.

⁴⁷ M. Romani, *L'Agricoltura*, p. 160.

reflection of a dedicated elite that supported progress to the detriment of caste privileges. In short, the Lombard elite was proactive toward what Locatelli and Tedeschi (2018) call agricultural experiments.⁴⁸

The total cultivated land area in Italy prior to national unification amounted to 13.5 million hectares.⁴⁹ It is no accident that between 1876 and 1881 the value of agricultural production in Lombardy was L.245 per hectare compared with L.196 in Venetia.⁵⁰ True, the Venetian lands were not as favourable as those of the irrigated Lombard plain, and in some cases intervention could not be decisive. But as Valenti (1911) argued, productivity is not just the generous gift of Mother Nature.⁵¹ Federico (2009), in recounting the backwardness of agriculture, stresses the important role of institutions.

Contractual decisions, techniques of cultivation, crop organisation, and professional relations differed in the two regions, showing a Lombard elite that was more committed to transformation. The Venetians tended to favour social peace over modernisation, keeping the sharecropping system for decades, along with sweet corn production and the culture of inheritance.

3. The silk industry

The uneven state of agriculture within the Kingdom leads one naturally to wonder whether elite activism diverged also in other

⁴⁸ A.M. Locatelli and P. Tedeschi, "Institutions, Agrarian Élités and Agricultural Development in Lombardy," in A. Carera (ed.), *Agricultural Resilience*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan, 2018.

⁴⁹ G. Federico, *Breve storia economica dell'agricoltura*, Bologna, 2009, p. 34.

⁵⁰ P. Malanima, *L'Economia italiana: dalla crescita medievale alla crescita contemporanea*, Bologna, 2002, p. 131.

⁵¹ Land productivity in the Lombard plain could reach a yield of 2,000 kg of wheat per ha., against the average 500-900 for all of Northern Italy. C. Pazzagli, "Colture, lavori, tecniche, rendimenti", in R. Cianferoni et al. (ed.), *Storia dell'agricoltura italiana*, 3, Florence, 2001-2, p. 57.

domains and what this entailed. The demand for silk, for instance, was booming in Europe in the 19th century. Mulberry leaves, worked in peasant households, were used to rear silkworms whose filaments in the reeling process later produced raw silk. Women and children then produced usable silk in the spinning mills, or *filande*, through silk throwing and doubling. After the yarn was formed using skein winders, the weaving stage completed the process.

Mulberry trees, which did not thrive beyond certain latitudes, compensated for Italy's relative lack of natural advantages. As a result, the Milanese magazine *Crepuscolo* compared the Kingdom's silks to the best of France.⁵² Even post-unification, the Ministry of Agriculture acknowledged that it was in the silk industry that one could observe the greatest endeavours of national industriousness.⁵³

Silks were created according to local taste, available liquidity, and technology. While some companies specialised in low-quality silks, such as the thick *realine*, used in household goods, others competed with foreign silks and engaged in the production of fine satins. Lombardy usually exported its silks to Germany, France, or Britain, while the Venetians focused more on the domestic market, with repercussions on product quality. Lombardy's export vocation modernised the interaction between agricultural activity and commerce, getting the manufacturing system used to competition and learning from the economic modernisation of Northern Europe, including new techniques and new relationships between ownership and entrepreneurs.⁵⁴ Both domestic and international markets were, of course, necessary, as were both cheap and more elaborate silks. But the different perception of experimentation by the local elites perceptibly shaped the Kingdom's manufacturing organisation. Where tenancy was the norm, as in Como, large-scale cultivation permitted new and more profitable specialisations and techniques. Tedeschi

⁵² C. Guarinoni, "Della copertura del naspo da seta e sistema di ventilazione", 31 July 1853, p. 490.

⁵³ ASM, A.d.G., P.M., *Commercio*, b. 26.

⁵⁴ M. Romani, *Storia economica d'Italia nel secolo XIX (1815-1882)*, Bologna, 1990, p. 94.

(2018) relates the decline of sharecropping to the use of new fertilisers or farming machines.⁵⁵

The Lombard silk industry saw wealthy aristocrats and landowners join with “rootless entrepreneurs.”⁵⁶ This was not at all the case in Venetia, especially as regards the behaviour of the elites in regulating and training labour. Documents from the Chambers of Commerce show how the elite’s respect for the subordinate classes in Lombardy significantly improved the safeguards of workers and the quality of work. In Mantua, for instance, disputes between owners of spinning mills and their workers were managed “in an amicable manner,” according to the *delegato* Gatti.⁵⁷ In Brescia, the authorities compensated for the workers’ lack of instruction by guaranteeing that “verbal contracts [would] be trusted” against aggressive masters.⁵⁸ Finally, in Milan, the director of a spinning mill, inspired by a manufacturer from Bedlington, introduced common rooms for songs and prayers to create a “cordial family” environment.⁵⁹ The silk industry’s potential having been grasped, the effort to cooperate with different social groups for its development was a natural consequence.

When the Habsburgs made known their intention to limit mobility to the other provinces of the Empire, the reactions were again very different. While the Venetian elite of industrialists would complain about the stamp duty that the registration booklet entailed, in Cremona the institutions could not accept the threat to limit workers’ expertise. The provincial representative Guicciardi wrote that “for those few arts and mechanical professions that flourish in preference in the foreign countries, and in which [one] would have [the

⁵⁵ P. Tedeschi, “Note sull’evoluzione dei contratti di compartecipazione nelle campagne lombarde (secoli XVIII-XX),” in V. Varini (ed.), *L’Uomo al centro della storia. Studi in onore di Luigi Trezzi*, Milan, 2017, pp. 153-77.

⁵⁶ A. Moioli et al., *Un sistema manifatturiero aperto al mercato, Storia dell’industria lombarda*, vol. 1, ed. Il Polifilo, Milan, 1988, p. 253.

⁵⁷ ASM, A.d.G., P.M., *Commercio*, 22 June 1822, b. 176.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 17 Sept. 1823.

⁵⁹ G. Sacchi, *Intorno allo stato dei fanciulli impiegati nelle manifatture*, Milan, 1843, p. 284.

possibility] to improve”, mobility for workers outside the Empire had to be authorised.⁶⁰

While the Lombard authorities translated Count Chaptal’s writings on French labour regulation for reference, there is a near-total lack of evidence of labour improvement in Venetia. The alleged tendency of “the weaver [to] steal the sketch, delay the work, change the silks, [...] confuse them”⁶¹ could also represent, at least in part, a reaction to the deceitful behaviour of the more powerful. Renowned for their family lineage, the Venetian patricians found it easy to bribe local collectors⁶² and avoid paying taxes on the texturing heaters they occasionally owned, with poor families of the mainland compensating for them.

Meanwhile, the Lombard elite encouraged workers and employed even foreign workers where necessary. The reason for accepting foreign labour was not cost-cutting. Rather, the local elite knew that importing new skills would improve local production and enhance transformation. By the end of the 18th century, the son of Baron Bellerio wrote that when foreign workers excelled in their craft “it [was] advantageous to invest to persuade them to come to [Lombardy as], without them, [they could] not introduce new manufactures.”⁶³

The success of the weaving school of the two Lombard families Pensa and Lorla would not have been as great as it was in the 19th century if they had not received L.715,450⁶⁴ in private and public funds at the end of the 18th. Similarly, without the support of the Society of Encouragement of Arts and Professions, made up for the most part of noblemen, the collaboration of the 1860s to reproduce Japanese wormseeds in Brianza between the engineer Susani from Mantua and Louis Pasteur⁶⁵ would certainly have been more un-

⁶⁰ ASM, A.d.G., P.M., C., 22 June 1822, b. 176, 16 Nov. 1834.

⁶¹ B. Caizzi, *Industria e commercio della Repubblica Veneta nel 18 sec.*, Milan, 1965, p. 34.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁶³ ASM, A.d.G., P.A., *Commercio*, b. 242.

⁶⁴ B. Caizzi, *Industria, Commercio*, pp. 112-114.

⁶⁵ F. Bof, *Il filugello prezioso*, Udine, 2014, pp. 39-40.

likely to develop. The Lombard elite recognised the value added contributed by certain individuals and supported new systems, schools, and collaborations.

The self-reinforcing logic of the Venetian elite could not promote forces coming from below, which probably contributed to the resignation of many professionals and to the dominance of handicrafts over technology even at the end of the century. While in Venetia disputes between workers, owners of spinning mills, and the richest industrialists overstepped any sort of limit,⁶⁶ firms in the Lombard provinces were able to survive crises, such as that provoked by Asian silks, through joint ventures and strategic acquisitions. If the Venetian rentier elite passively observed “the annihilation of the art and the misery of many families,”⁶⁷ industrial initiatives in a typically rural reality were necessarily rare indeed.

In 1822 Padua’s factories, including those of *cordicelle*, or strings, were still “of small size and inconsiderable traffic” and finding “consistent and positive solutions” was difficult.⁶⁸ The same went for the drapes in Venice, and the *fettucce*, or ribbons in tailoring, in Verona.⁶⁹ It is not surprising that the registers of the *fabbriche privilegiate*, those whose products had been approved by the Crown, include only a few entrepreneurs in the silk industry, such as the brothers Mazzorin, Agugiano, Agnino, or Cavenzia.⁷⁰

Looking at primary sources, the hegemonic elite of Venice seems to have been preoccupied with dominating not only the mainland, with which the relationship was always controversial, but also any other group outside their privileged class. Jewish entrepreneurs, for instance, introduced fine silk to the region but were prohibited by the Inquisitor of the Arts from producing it after the 1790s. In the first decade of the 19th century, the provincial captain of Venice, Hi-

⁶⁶ B. Caizzi, *Industria e commercio*, p. 33.

⁶⁷ ASV, C.d.C, b. 10, tit. 3, n. 9.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, b. 36, tit. 3, n. 12.

⁶⁹ B. Caizzi, *Storia*, pp. 236-237.

⁷⁰ ASV, Comm. Sorv., 1835-73, inv. 459.

genau, allowed existing shops to continue their business but prohibited the formation of new ones.⁷¹ The risk was not the oligopolistic supply per se but the fact that the production usually consisted of “sacerdotal dresses, blankets for altars, and other similar uses for the Church.”⁷² Limiting the outlet market to a very specific, domestic segment implied a lack of incentive to improve the quality of the silks, there being no external competitor, while the Church, although a trustworthy customer, created a risky dependence on its orders. Not surprisingly, before the annexation of Venetia to Italy “the three looms that [existed in Venice were] still of old construction.”⁷³

The elite activism in Lombardy, the involvement of ordinary people, and the level of mechanisation distinguished the region from Venetia. Count Porro-Lambertenghi introduced the first Gensoul machine⁷⁴ to Milan in 1815, for twisting the silk. Three years later, the Lombard director of a silk weaving school, Piazza, introduced the Jacquard loom⁷⁵ for weaving embroidered fabrics. The statement of the Chamber of Commerce of Venice (1816) that silk was “still spun without innovation of the ancient manufactures,” and that Vicenza too had not introduced a new method for spinning the silk⁷⁶ is also emblematic of a different attitude. What is interesting here is not so much the slowness of the Venetians to institute new systems such as the Gensoul machine as their reference to the Milanese experiments as “well-pondered and judicious.”⁷⁷

The first divergence with Lombardy consisted precisely in the different promotion of technical capital. Before the spread of pébrine disease, the production of raw silk in Lombardy amounted to 1,310

⁷¹ G. Castelbolognesi, “Gli ebrei di Padova e l’industria della seta fra il 1779 e il 1803”, in *Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 5/3, July 1930, p. 155.

⁷² ASV, Commissione di Sorveglianza, inv. 459, 12 Dec. 1831, b. 77, tit. 4, n. 46.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 20 July 1851, b. 74, n. 50.

⁷⁴ R. Tolaini, “Note sulla diffusione di una innovazione tecnologica: le filande a vapore nell’Italia Settentrionale della prima metà dell’800”, in S. Cavaciocchi (ed.), *La seta in Europa*, Prato, 1992, p. 354.

⁷⁵ C. Lacaita, *L’Intelligenza*, p. 58.

⁷⁶ ASV, C.d.C, 2 Jan. 1816, b. 10, tit. 3, n. 9.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

tons against 700 in Venetia, with Brescia, Milan, and Bergamo producing 57.3% of the Kingdom's raw silk in 1841.⁷⁸ In Portogruaro, in Venetia, there was no spinning mill registered for "fine silk" in 1843.⁷⁹ In Vicenza, even the coarse method of spinning cocoons in cold water, for neater silk, failed miserably,⁸⁰ as did the introduction of the *tavella* for combining silk filaments.

These failures make it all the harder to ignore the successful results of the Lombard experiments. In 1844, the French Talabot method, or silk conditioning, was introduced in Milan, Como, Brescia, and Bergamo to determine the degree of humidity of the silks, preventing disputes between producers and consumers over the actual weight and price of the silks.⁸¹ In 1847, the noble Kellerer, "landowner and merchant in Milan," obtained a patent "for the improvement of a system for the twisting of the silk without doubling, so-called *Mariage*."⁸² In the same period, the Gambon system, wherein a glass divider was applied to the mill to avoid the intertwining of the strings, spread through the provinces of Brescia and Como, where 60% of all the ateliers for silk throwing were located.⁸³

The Lombard interest in guaranteeing high-quality products had long been recognised, but it was in the 19th century that the region's silk industry truly stood out. Indeed, the most striking difference between the two regions involves twisted silk, hence the relative inclination to mechanisation. The fact that between 1851 and 1859 Lombardy exported 27 million pounds and Venetia just 141,096,⁸⁴ is certainly not fortuitous. In 1856 GropPELLI, owner of a well-known Lombard factory for the conditioning of the silks, employed the innovative method of the engineer Odazio of drying them using a ra-

⁷⁸ A. Dewerpe, *L'Industrie*, pp. 21, 52.

⁷⁹ ASV, B.Leg., b. 149, tit. 3, n. 9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, b. 10, tit. 3, n. 9.

⁸¹ G. Merlini, *Il passato, il presente e l'avvenire della industria manifatturiera in Lombardia*, Milan, 1857, p. 53.

⁸² ASM, A.d.G., P.M., *Commercio*, b. 402.

⁸³ G. Merlini, *Il Passato*, p. 43.

⁸⁴ I.A. Glazier, *Il Commercio*, pp. 98-102, 175 and 105, 151, 201.

diator “to obtain the most regular and exact results.”⁸⁵ At the same time, producers in Verona “never committed to obtain those fine silks [necessary] to produce valuable organzine” but instead produced coarse ones often used to make cords, the *cuirine*.⁸⁶ In the same period, 140 active steam boilers were registered in Lombardy, while steam-powered spinning mills in Venetia were still rarities. A decade after the provincial *delegato* of Como noted that “a spinning mill based on steam could only contribute to the growth of the national industry,”⁸⁷ the government of Milan received 32 requests to introduce steam-based machines.⁸⁸

The local elite dealt positively with this change. In 1854, thanks to wealthy families such as Manzoni, Croce and Ruschetti, 140 out of 192 active steam boilers were being used in the silk factories, of which 89 fabricated in Lombardy itself.⁸⁹ In Venetia, meanwhile, the increasing output of silks, especially in Verona, is explained by longer work days rather than technical improvement.⁹⁰ The fact that higher coal prices may have caused a “day by day”⁹¹ increment in steam power in Lombardy takes second place to the importance of its effect. This difference is significant, given that steam also changed the quality of this product. Suffocating the cocoons made the silk cleaner and more regular.

Essentially, the Lombard elite financed new methods, regulated new machinery, imported international systems, and made contractual decisions beneficial both to the economic system and to workers. In Venetia the local elite favoured only a few factories, obstructed entrepreneurs in implementing modern production methods, and in fact failed to support them in any evident way. And not only in the silk industry. The transformation of foreigners such

⁸⁵ ASV, B.Leg., b. 558, Annuario-Statistico Milano.

⁸⁶ B. Caizzi, *Storia*, p. 64.

⁸⁷ ASM, A.d.G., P.M., *Commercio*, 22 Mar. 1841, b. 323.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, b. 422, n. 14.

⁸⁹ R. Tolaini, *Note*, p. 362.

⁹⁰ B. Caizzi, *Storia*, p. 57.

⁹¹ ASM, A.d.G., P.M., *Acque*, b. 394.

as Krumm or Bodmer⁹² into Lombards is the result of the open environment created by the local elite to develop the region's economic potential. Opportunities had been present since the end of the 18th century, when the textile pioneer Schmutz was accorded six months of free rent in the Milanese monastery of Santa Teresa and a loan of L.30,000 under "the warranty of a Milanese patrician."⁹³ In the following decades these opportunities became more evident. Not surprisingly it was a Lombard, the Milanese Turati, to provide Venetia with its second cotton factory in 1846,⁹⁴ after that of Pordenone went bankrupt under the administration of the local Count Papadopoli.⁹⁵

Experienced at financing valuable silk inventories, financiers in Lombardy could easily extend this activity to expensive cotton inventories. While this outcome in the cotton industry was thus a second-generation result of elite activism in Lombardy, in Venetia it could not get started because there was no silk industry foundation on which to build. The analysis of the relevant sectors for the Kingdom, including silk and agriculture more generally, illustrate the existence of two very distinct types of elite. The explanation appears to lie in their cultural and scientific interests, as well as their degree of entrepreneurship or openness to new technical figures.

4. The Lombard and Venetian elites

For Acemoglu (2012), economic growth is often the result of inclusive institutions that foster economic prosperity. These are institutions that "allow and encourage participation by the great mass of people in economic activities that make the best use of their talents and skills,"⁹⁶ in contrast with extractive systems, which do not per-

⁹² B. Caizzi, *Storia*, pp. 137, 211.

⁹³ *Industria, Commercio*, p. 92.

⁹⁴ B. Caizzi, *Storia*, p. 217.

⁹⁵ A. Bernardello, "Capitale veneziano e industria cotoniera: il cotonificio di Pordenone," *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto*, 153, Venice, 1994-5, p. 695.

⁹⁶ D. Acemoglu and J.A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, New York, 2012, p. 144.

mit individuals to achieve their maximum utility using their human and physical resources. In this regard, what we are interested in here is whether the age-old tendency to admit innovation only insofar it did not threaten the power of the rulers persisted or if, instead, innovation was encouraged at an intellectual level.

With the Restoration, the Italian elites regained some of the privileges lost during the Napoleonic domination; hence the importance of studying their actions. Public life in the two regions was managed by “the class of city fathers, landowners, business men.”⁹⁷ An assembly of 30-60 landowners (*convocato*), for instance, coordinated the administrative life of the community, with at least 4,000 scudi required for election in Milan and Venice, and 2,000 for the other provinces.

The more hereditary nature of the Venetian privileged order, with social order prevailing despite the incapability of some patricians, was immediately reflected in their attitude towards men of business and the industrial professions. As councillor, Contarini was described as a man “of great fortunes [but] without talents or preparation” and indifferent to political matters.⁹⁸ Despite this, individuals such as the Count Arrigoni would still threaten to desert the assembly if a “commoner” was present.⁹⁹ Similarly, while the higher Milanese clergy included individuals such as the cardinal Ferrari or the councillor Count Mellerio, benefactor to the central hospital *Ospedale Maggiore*,¹⁰⁰ the Venetian Catholic elite was isolated in its theological ideas. On the occasion of the construction of the Maghera-Padua railway, for instance, the Bishop of Padua obliged workers to go to church in the morning hours and interrupt any activity during religious festivities,¹⁰¹ obstructing the progress of the project. In this re-

⁹⁷ M.R. Di Simone, “Il Diritto austriaco,” in G. Benzoni and G. Cozzi (eds.), *Venezia e l’Austria*, Venice, 1999, p. 134.

⁹⁸ M. Meriggi, *Amministrazione e classi sociali nel Lombardo-Veneto, 1814-48*, Bologna, 1983, p. 219.

⁹⁹ E. Tonetti, *Governo austriaco e notabili sudditi*, Venice, 1997, p. 57.

¹⁰⁰ M. Bona Castellotti, *Cultura, religione e trasformazione sociale*, Milan, 2001, pp. 40, 401.

¹⁰¹ A. Bernardello, *Veneti sotto l’Austria: ceti popolari e tensioni sociali (1840-1860)*, Verona, 1997.

gion tradition was the prime consideration, regardless of the consequences.

When in 1859 Count Giulini admired the efficiency of the Lombard municipal administration, the provincial *delegato* Marzani denounced the poor state of the Venetian municipality of Belluno for the lack of energy and industry of its *podestà* Count Agosti.¹⁰² Similarly, Fracastoro, in Verona, was said to lack the necessary knowledge of laws and regulations, while Panigai, *podestà* in Treviso in 1825-31, was held in disrepute for spending most of his time at his country estate instead of the town hall.¹⁰³ Family background and financial means appeared to be the essential criteria for choosing the persons in charge of administration in Venetia. The Lombard elite, by contrast, welcomed the rising members of the civil and professional class, in favour of the local interest and not necessarily tradition. Lombardy encouraged social mobility for the sake of economic development, as theorised by Dahrendorf (1959), in that the ruling class was open to support the “ablest elements of other classes.”¹⁰⁴ Already by the 14th century there was no equivalent in Lombardy to the Venetian “golden book” for the nobility.¹⁰⁵

Aristocrats or landowners were not lacking within the Lombard juridical and administrative organisations, but their attitude differed from the hereditary beliefs of the Venetian nobility in that they acted in the name of an open society where policies were designed to broaden socio-economic opportunities for everyone. At the end of the first decade of the Restoration, eight of Lombardy’s nine provincial delegates were nobles, with five members of the Milanese patrician class: Pallavicini in Milan, Torriceni in Brescia, Del Mayno in Bergamo, Pallavicino in Como, and Venini in Cremona.¹⁰⁶ But noble birth and an idle life were usually diametrically opposite terms in Lombardy.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² E. Tonetti, *Governo*, p. 29.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁴ R. Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, Stanford, 1959, p. 57.

¹⁰⁵ F. Calvi, *Il Patriziato milanese*, Milan, 1865, p. 48.

¹⁰⁶ M. Meriggi, *Amministrazione*, p. 98.

¹⁰⁷ F. Calvi, *Il Patriziato*, p. 198.

Examination of conduct in terms of civic-mindedness and liberties granted to the local elites, whether these were landed aristocracy, patricians, leaders in politics, or even high clerics, helps one to understand the differences between the privileged orders in Lombardy and Venetia. One of the best sources for investigating these attitudes and actions is the Government Acts. These documents include water and transport records, financial reports, and commercial notifications from the Chambers of Commerce, which supported provincial coordination and public credit. Here we can find evidence of the extent to which the local elites perceived the potential of change in the 19th century and acted to favour it.

5. Promoting technical culture

The difference between the two elites is clearest in relation to the inclination to promote scientific skills. If there was still a marked divergence in 1871 in terms of education, with literacy rates of 56.1% in Lombardy and 36.1% in Venetia,¹⁰⁸ this is probably due to developments in the previous decades in terms of educational infrastructures. The Habsburgs made the school system of the Lombard-Venetian Kingdom one of the most revolutionary in Italy,¹⁰⁹ but historiographical controversy still surrounds the school system imposed by the Crown, which was strongly conservative in content and dependent on the spending capacity of the local authorities. This meant that the local elite played a major role in the diffusion of the educational network; especially the wealthy Lombards, who understood the importance of making education broad-based rather than exclusive. While the Catholic Church promoted vocational training, civil society more generally enriched education with technical studies, most likely in the Enlightenment tradition.

¹⁰⁸ E. Felice, *Perché il Sud è rimasto indietro*, Bologna, 2013, app., table A.7.

¹⁰⁹ For apprenticeships too. ASV, B.Leg., *Progetto di un piano di organizzazione*, b. 433, c. 27, n. 10.

In 1819 Aporti, with other wealthy individuals, opened the first public kindergarten in Milan, an institution that was still rare in Venetia in the 1830s.¹¹⁰ Over time, more members of the Lombard elite collaborated with the public sector so that the number of public schools in the region rose from 2,630 in 1822 to 4,427 in 1855, while the dominant presence of the Venetian higher clergy allowed only 1,774 public schools to exist in 1856.¹¹¹ Similarly, while the nobility of Milan, Brescia, and Mantua contributed to the establishment of mutual education schools by importing didactic methods from abroad,¹¹² in Venetia there was just a single attempt at this, by Verona's *podestà* Persico.

Laying the foundations for an educated population meant the possibility of disseminating knowledge, often of a technical kind, through newspapers and magazines on the techno-economic situation of the local and international industries. The nature of the local technical schools and the objects of discussion in the local newspapers, often inspired by both French and Belgian *journaux d'agriculture* and *sociétés*,¹¹³ illustrate the inventiveness of the elites and their purposes.

In Venetia, the Faculty of Mathematics was separated from Philosophy only in 1846, with technical studies experiencing a turning point only at the end of the century.¹¹⁴ In Lombardy, by contrast, subjects such as hydrometry, geodesy, and engineering were already being promoted in the first half of the century, leading to the 1859 law promoted by the Milanese Baron Casati, who had been *podestà* in 1837, for the creation of the Milan *Politecnico*, the technical institute.¹¹⁵ The fact that 1,925 students at the University of Pavia re-

¹¹⁰ L. Ambrosoli, "Appunti sul problema dell'istruzione popolare nella Lombardia e nel Veneto," in R. Giusti (ed.), *Il Lombardo-Veneto (1815-1866) sotto il profilo politico, culturale, economico-sociale*, Mantua, 1977, p. 154.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹¹² M. Deambrosi, "La Stampa nella Restaurazione nel Lombardo-Veneto (1815-30)," *ibid.*, p. 164.

¹¹³ A.M. Locatelli and P. Tedeschi, *New Common Knowledge*, pp. 187-203.

¹¹⁴ M. Minesso, *Tecnici e modernizzazione nel Veneto*, Trieste, 1992, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

ceived scholarships in 1843, mostly in scientific courses, and none at the University of Padua,¹¹⁶ also reflects the greater interest of the Lombard elite in education. Giovanni Vigo (1971) interpreted the lower salaries of scholars and teachers in Venetia as the result of a dominant group that considered education to be of marginal importance.¹¹⁷

It should be noticed that while newspapers and magazines published in Venetia, including the *Gondoliere*, *Favilla*, *Fratellanza dei Popoli*, and *Fatti e Parole*,¹¹⁸ were of a more political nature, in Lombardy there was an effort “to tie the newspapers to the productive categories”¹¹⁹ to support both agriculture and industry. The Lombard newspapers of this period include *Eco della Borsa*, *Indicatore Lombardo*, published by the patron Baccaglione, and the popular *Annali Universali*, founded in 1824 by the aristocrat Lampato to promote the “social order of wealth,”¹²⁰ so that all could enjoy the benefits of innovation. While the publisher of the Venetian *Gazette* maintained in 1848 that “the exaltation of the industrious bourgeois [and] the connection between provinces” still needed to be satisfied,¹²¹ in Lombardy there were already a good many articles written by modernising aristocrats. In the *Annali*, Count Confalonieri described his adventure on the first steamboat in Britain; and in the *Conciliatore*, Mompiani from Brescia and Count Arrivabene from Mantua reported on the mutual education system of Lancaster and Bell.¹²²

The foundation of cultural and scientific societies typical of the 19th century, then, is emblematic of the role that local elites accorded to partnership for technology. In 1817, 61% of the members registered at the Society of Arts, Literature, and Science of Milan were

¹¹⁶ ASV, Tafeln (1843).

¹¹⁷ G. Vigo, *Istruzione e sviluppo economico in Italia nel secolo XIX*, Turin, 1971, p. 59.

¹¹⁸ “Facts and words”.

¹¹⁹ R. Giusti, “Il Giornalismo Lombardo-Veneto nei rapporti tra Carlo Tenca e Pacifico Valussi”, in R. Giusti, *Il Lombardo*, p. 98.

¹²⁰ *Annali Universali di Statistica*, 34, Jan., Febr., March 1833, p. 63.

¹²¹ R. Giusti, *Il Giornalismo*, p. 106.

¹²² M. Deambrosis, *La Stampa*, pp. 163-164.

nobles; and between 1815 and 1820 nobles accounted for 80% of the members holding the triple badge for the five existing societies.¹²³ By participating in societies that promoted science and culture, the Lombard elite, especially the Milanese patrician class, proved that they were open to change and willing to play an active part in it.

The climax was reached in 1838, when the Milanese banker and silk merchant Mylius created the Society of Encouragement of Arts and Professions, a proper technical training centre with annual contributions from nobles and the Chamber of Commerce. The results obtained by the Society, whose capital reached L.68,348 in 1841,¹²⁴ led other provinces to establish subsidiary forms of it. In 1837, the provincial representative Terzi encouraged the creation of a Council for the Natural and Industrial Productions of Arts and Professions in Brescia.¹²⁵ In 1844, the Industrial Society of Bergamo was established thanks to a member of the Chamber of Commerce, Berizzi, while 46 city fathers promoted a Society of Encouragement of the Agrarian Industry.¹²⁶ The benefits for the middle class could be combined with those for the wealthier and more powerful precisely because of the active bent of the Lombard elite.

While the Venetian elite's traditional desire to protect its status discouraged direct participation in similar activities, the patriot and writer Cattaneo praised the Lombard Society "for the promoters, the increasing squad of donors [that] with teaching, opinions, and scientific investigations spread a herald light."¹²⁷ On the occasion of the inauguration of the Society, the founder-member Mylius expressed his optimistic view on the potential "results of prosperous industries, diligent harmony, [and] scientific culture."¹²⁸

¹²³ M. Minesso, *Tecnici*, pp. 61, 84-85.

¹²⁴ Single contributions could amount to as much as L.1,860. M. Meriggi, *Milano borghese: circoli ed élites nell'Ottocento*, Venice, 1992, pp. 119, 121.

¹²⁵ S. Onger, *Verso la modernità. I bresciani e le esposizioni universali 1800-1915*, Milan, 2010, p. 83.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹²⁷ ASV, C.d.C, Atti della Società, 11 Nov. 1846, b. 168, tit. 2, n. 2.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

Such optimism offers a sharp contrast to the supplication to the Chamber of Commerce in 1846 from the director of a technical school in Venice, Parravicini, who denounced the lack of any membership ferment in Venetia: "I beg you to take into consideration my supplication about the necessity to establish in Venice a Society of Encouragement of Arts and Professions [...] similar to the one that now flourishes in Milan. One of the principal aims would be to examine the various branches of Venetian manufactures and to investigate the reasons for their decline."¹²⁹

Despite these urgings, the situation failed to improve, and twenty years later, another professor, Clementini, wrote "on the necessity to spread technical education also in the counties of the district."¹³⁰ The narrow-minded Venetian elite refused to take action in branches of the economy that needed its support, including the creation of institutions like these, where solutions and inventions were presented to improve existing manufactures and create new ones. If present at all, the privileges of novelty were kept within the borders of the lagoon of the patricians of Venice.

Conversely, the number of aristocrats registered in the Society of Milan increased year after year, with such members as Confalonieri, Oneto, Lampato, Decio, Ponti, Fornara, De Cristoforis, Taverna, Tinelli, Belgiojoso, Sessa, and Candiani, as well as those joining the Chambers of Commerce, among them Uboldi, Galli, Ghiglieri, Pestalozza, Carmagnola, and Valaperta.¹³¹ The fact that the Society welcomed women, such as Carlotta Bollini, for instance, is also symbolic of the innovative character of the Lombards, given the presence of individuals such as the noble councillor of Brescia Torriceni or the governor of Lombardy Count Spaur.¹³² The lowering of the dues from L.60 to L.24¹³³ also indicated the inclination of this elite to include a larger portion of the middle class in the Society.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid., ? June 1869, b. 428.

¹³¹ C. Lacaita, *L'intelligenza produttiva*, Milan, 1990, pp. 18, 21.

¹³² Ibid., pp. 21, 46.

¹³³ M. Meriggi, *Milano*, p. 114.

What needs to be emphasised is that the formation of an autochthonous human capital¹³⁴ was favoured precisely by the stimulus from institutions such as the academies, the local entities, and the Chambers of Commerce. Since the object of the Venetian patriicians was control, not creation, the transformation failed miserably in this region. Conversely, the Lombard elite laid the foundations for a technical culture that supported experimentation and hence innovation. Experts such as engineers, who lacked the social status for a relevant collective action, were finally provided with the necessary educational setting.

6. Technical collaboration

No sector can really contribute to the socio-economic wellbeing of a population unless it is regularly improved from the practical standpoint as well. For Rossetto (1999), the environmental protection inherent in farming is just as valuable as the agricultural products as such. How the Lombard elite acted in the 19th century, especially in terms of water control, is testimony to this. Sectors of success, such as the silk industry, depended on water both to irrigate the land and to power the machinery. Nor can the backwardness of Venetia in this sector be blamed solely on topography, proximity to the sea, or the greater danger of floods. The fact that the region suffered from disastrous floods with no evident intervention on the part of the landed aristocracy is indicative. Consortia for water control, for instance, were the usual way of dealing with and preventing floods. The Lombard elite established voluntary consortia for the collective benefit, compromising between coordination and externalities. This is all the more remarkable when contrasted with the failure of the Venetian landowners to follow any such course.

In the Venetian municipality of Tomba, where the river Adige caused soil erosion in the lower plain, the supervisors of the cadas-

¹³⁴ S. Onger, *Verso*, p. 12.

tral register declared that in 1827 there were still “no protection works [and] no consortium for agriculture.”¹³⁵ Signs of positive distinction were rare in the other Venetian provinces as well. While in Verona there were no regulations for the waters and “the persons concerned [were] not in the field,”¹³⁶ in Casale external authorities noted that “some permission for the Bacchiglione and the Tesina [was] necessary [for] protection from floods,”¹³⁷ which indicates that in 1830 there still was none. Conversely, in Lombardy, in a report from Cremona dated 9 November 1855 concerning the dikes on the river Casalmaggiore, the engineer Ghirardini observed that the majority of these had existed for a long time and that “several times landowners [had] formed regular consortia.”¹³⁸

Decades earlier, in the 1820s and 1830s, the Milanese judiciary published a myriad of regulations, including rules for the safety of navigation.¹³⁹ As port activities were essential for Venetia, one might expect efficiency at least in this field. However, by 1856 one of the access dikes in the Malamocco lagoon had yet to be completed, the port of Lido was filled with sand, and several internal canals still needed to be dug.¹⁴⁰ Unsurprisingly, it was the Lombards Gavazzi and Quinterio who financed the Kingdom’s Society for Navigation on the Po in 1825.¹⁴¹ Unlike the proactive Lombards, the Venetian ruling class was not distinguished for the frequency or quality of its interventions.

A study done in 1894 on documents published in 1841 denounced the self-centred landed aristocracy of Venetia. In relation to the request from some landowners “to regulate the public lagoon differently from that where private property [prevailed]”, the engi-

¹³⁵ ASV, *Catasto*, b. 66.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ ASV, *Catasto*, b. 124.

¹³⁸ ASM, A.d.G., P.M., *Acque*, b. 564.

¹³⁹ ASV, B.Leg., *Indice delle Leggi*, b. 558.

¹⁴⁰ A. Bernardello, *Venezia nel Regno Lombardo-Veneto*, Venice, 2015, p. 19.

¹⁴¹ “Investimenti e Industrializzazione nella Venezia Austriaca della Prima Metà dell’Ottocento”, in *Storia Urbana*, 55, Venice, 1991, p. 119.

neer Ferrari commented that “to let [people] imagine that there could exist different hydraulic laws regulating the different parts of the same basin [was] a scientific blasphemy.”¹⁴² In the meantime, the Lombard Count Pecis studied the possibility of connecting Bellinzona with Lake Como, re-activating the old pass of San Jorio.¹⁴³ Similarly, the execution of the Paderno canal was entrusted to a very rich and expert company formed by Nosetti, Marliani, Fé, and the renowned banker Busti.¹⁴⁴ The prudent Milanese judiciary assigned projects only to men whose professional credibility and financial creditworthiness was demonstrated. This distinguished Lombardy from Venetia, where the public right was often subordinate to the necessities of the private sector.

By the late 1820s, the Habsburg marshal Thurn was complaining of “multiple breakdowns to the public streets [in Venetia]”¹⁴⁵ leading to unjustified expenditures. By contrast, in 1823 the Lombard General Direction of Public Works observed that “the prosperity and security of [provincial] revenues” depended “in very large part” on the defence of waters.¹⁴⁶ The director recalled the importance of the “quality of the defences of the alloys in the water” and of the so-called *fascinoni*¹⁴⁷, for damming the rivers. Similarly, the authorities in Mantua limited contracts for the protection of the banks of the Po to a maximum of three years in order to guarantee the effective functioning of the artificial brushes and support sacks.¹⁴⁸ This approach made high-quality techniques the priority.

In this regard, the Lombard elite contributed to the creation of an adequate environment. In 1836 the *delegato* of Mantua recognised “the specific skills of Count Rinaldo Castiglioni [in] Reggiolo, [dur-

¹⁴² ASV, *Regolamento Lagunare*, 16 Dec. 1894, b. 189, c. 1, 65, pp. 21-25.

¹⁴³ B. Caizzi, *Industria, Commercio E Banca in Lombardia nel XVIII secolo*, Milan, 1968, p. 242.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 244-245.

¹⁴⁵ ASV, *Indice delle Leggi*, b. 189, c. 1, 75.

¹⁴⁶ ASM, A.d.G., P.M., *Acque*, b. 40.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

ing] a tender for the contract of the embankment works of Panzi and Ferrano"¹⁴⁹ for the Po. The councillor Berrovia, too, authorised projects to repair the "occasional damage"¹⁵⁰ caused by the river Mincio. Two decades later, in Como, the Milanese authorities compensated landowners for sacrificing their grazing lands on the occasion of land reclamation for "the material and sanitary advantage of the population."¹⁵¹ Countess Parravicini, for instance, obtained a "congruous allowance"¹⁵² for the nature reserve Pian di Spagna.

Lombardy seemed to be well prepared for floods and for embankment works. The situation in Venetia was far more critical. The landed aristocracy did not show particularly strong interest in issues of water control, especially in the area of Vicenza. In Laghetto, irrigation was a disaster: "for men [they] would use the waters from the springs; for animals, the rainfall."¹⁵³ In Venetia, technical experts could exert influence only if they were part of a larger undertaking sponsored by those in power, and they saw their schemes blocked by the Venetian local elite. By contrast, the more public-spirited Lombard elite encouraged the provision of public goods through the investment of time, energy, and money, and the sacrifice of control. Their activism supported technical features that, if not totally indispensable to economic growth, did certainly help accelerate it.

7. Conclusion

If the Venetian elite saw local activism as threatening to hasten the decline of their class, the original source documents highlight how the Lombard elite – under the same sovereign and the same rules – was, instead, able to create the necessary conditions for economic and social transformation. They applied modern agricultural

¹⁴⁹ ASM, A.d.G., P.M., *Acque*, b. 564.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ ASM, A.d.G., *Bonifiche*, b. 462, tit. 33.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ ASV, *Catasto*, b. 124.

techniques, travelled abroad to study the latest mechanical discoveries for manufactures like silk, and supported scientific projects for the public benefit. Further research on other fields of economic activity, such as the cotton industry or transport, would presumably highlight the differences between the two elites even more sharply. Naturally it is hard to find evidence for something that did not happen. But having consulted the same kind of sources for the two regions, the activism of the Lombard elite emerges immediately from every source, while the Venetian elite is conspicuous by its absence. The glorious past of Venice probably contributed to the reserved character of the 19th-century Venetian elite. In any case, viewing the two in the common political framework of Habsburg rule, what emerges is that the Lombards, albeit not without contradictions, were more open to the novelties of the day.

The purpose of this study was not to define Lombardy as the standard-bearer of the Kingdom, but to show that even though they are subject to the same overarching dominion, those in power locally can react differently: either creatively with a view to modernisation or with unquestioning adherence to conservative principles.

Abbreviations

A.d.G.: Atti di Governo; ASM: Archivi di Stato di Milano; ASV: Archivi di Stato di Venezia; b.: busta; B.Leg.: Biblioteca Legislativa; C.d.C: Camera di Commercio; Comm. Sorv.: Commissione di Sorveglianza alle Fabbriche ed Arti Privilegiate; inv.: inventario; P.A.: Parte Antica; P.M.: Parte Moderna; tit.: titolo; fl.: florins; L_(AT): Lire_(AUSTRIA); M.: million.

Archival sources

ASM: A.d.G. Commercio: Parte Antica: bs. 4, 23, 176, 242, 319, 323, 330, 394, 422; Parte Moderna: b. 26; Acque: bs. 40, 394, 564.
ASV: Bibl.Leg. XIX-XX: bs. 10, 77, 149, 189, 319, 433, 558; Fondo Censo Stabile, 1807-52: Catasto, bs. 66, 124; C.d.C: bs. 10, 36, 168; Comm. Sorv. 1830-73: inv. 459, bs. 74, 77.

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