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## Italian Elites under Napoleonic Rule

### A Turning Point

Current public debates in Italy frequently address issues of elites and ruling classes, their emergence and their (failed) renewal. This explains the interest shown by political scientists, sociologists, and political philosophers in analysing the characteristics of the Italian elites, their difficult relationship with the masses, and the criticism to which they are exposed.<sup>1</sup> The underlying problem seems to be the very presence of elites – a concept that remains problematic, as it can be understood in a broad or narrow, neutral or axiological sense – in a democratic context based on the principle of equality.<sup>2</sup> In this context, elites may appear as an imperfection of the system, whereas they can in fact be compatible with a democratic society. Indeed, according to the etymological meaning of the term, elites can represent the best part of a democratic society if they prove themselves equal to the high ethical and political task of subordinating personal to collective interest. This, however, has not always been the case in recent Italian history.<sup>3</sup>

To situate the existing dynamics within the historical process of affirmation of the democratic principles of equality and the separation of public and private interests, we need to focus on the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. It was in fact the French Revolution that abolished all distinctions based on birth, sanctioned equality before the law, opened public employment to all citizens »selon leur capacité«, and laid the foundations – later developed during the Napoleonic era – of a centralised administration governed by impersonal principles.<sup>4</sup> After 1789, elites had to re-think themselves accordingly. According to the »Memorial of St. Helena«, Napoleon claimed to have been guided by the maxim »la carrière ouverte aux talents«, while in the »Commentaries on the Wars of Julius Caesar« he stated that the aristocracy had always existed and would always continue to exist, since even if it was eliminated from the nobility it would reappear in the form of the rich and powerful families of the bourgeoisie. Rather than trying to eliminate it, it was better to reinvent it according to new principles.<sup>5</sup> This was precisely the point of Napoleonic action, which aimed at a ›fusion‹ (*amalgame*) of *Ancien Régime* nobility with the emerging bourgeoisie. The result was to be elites »who were defined by wealth, education

1 *Carlo Carboni*, *Élite e classi dirigenti in Italia*, Rome/Bari 2007; *Carlo Galli*, *I riluttanti. Le élites italiane di fronte alla responsabilità*, Rome/Bari 2012.

2 On the conceptual task of defining »controlling minorities« and elites, see *Giovanni Sartori*, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited. Part One: The Contemporary Debate*, Chatham 1987, pp. 142–144.

3 *Giulio Azzolini*, *Dopo le classi dirigenti. La metamorfosi delle oligarchie nell'età globale*, Rome/Bari 2017, pp. 39 f.; *Carlo Carboni*, *Dust of Italian Stars*, in: *Robert Kaiser/Jana Edelmann* (eds.), *Crisis as a Permanent Condition? The Italian Political System between Transition and Reform Resistance*, Baden-Baden 2016, pp. 157–182.

4 *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (1789), article 6.

5 *Emmanuel de Las Cases*, *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, Paris 1842, vol. 2, pp. 581 and 642; *Louis-Joseph Marchand*, *Précis des guerres de César par Napoléon*, Paris 1836, pp. 209–210.

and comportment»: the notables.<sup>6</sup> Although not immediately realised, this *amalgame* would prove to be long-lasting legacy.

Although Italy was not involved in the beginnings of the Revolution – Vincenzo Cuoco, in a much-discussed term, has spoken of a »passive revolution« – since 1796 it found its fate closely linked to that of France. The creation of the Sister Republics during the democratic *triennio* (1796–1799) introduced French legislation and institutions. The old separate jurisdictional institutions based on social rank (feudal estates, municipal organs of self-government, and provincial assemblies) that managed power on a local scale were replaced by democratic municipalities open to all citizens. Ecclesiastical properties were sold as *biens nationaux*, and the feudal system and connected juridical tools (fideicommissum and primogeniture) were abolished, so that the nobility could no longer use them to preserve the inalienability of its estates. Despite the great fervour, this new political experience was short-lived because of the military failures of the French army. The ensuing restoration was short-lived, however. Within six or seven years most of Italy returned to the French orbit, whether in the form of the Kingdom of Italy (in the north and on the Adriatic side), the Kingdom of Naples (in the south), or departments annexed to the Empire (north-west and Tyrrhenian side). Sicily and Sardinia were home to their respective dynasties in exile: the Bourbons and the house of Savoy. Napoleon had kept the crown of king of Italy for himself, leaving the Kingdom of Naples to his brother Joseph (1806–1808) and then to his brother-in-law Joachim Murat (1808–1815).<sup>7</sup>

In their brief existence, Napoleonic governments in Italy pursued the aforementioned amalgamation policy, which had important long-term consequences. For this reason, in response to the studies on French notables undertaken by Louis Bergeron and Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, Italian historians also devoted themselves to this subject.<sup>8</sup> Their research was first summarised in a special issue of the journal »Quaderni storici« entitled »Notables and officials in Napoleonic Italy«, published in 1978.<sup>9</sup> It was only in the 1970s, a little later than many of their European counterparts, that Italian historians became interested in elites. As Renato Camurri has explained, this delay was due to the several factors: first, to the constraints imposed by the historiography inspired by Benedetto Croce and by the Marxist historiography; second, to the conservative interpretation of the elitist theories developed by some left-wing historians, who did not consider this category applicable to the study of the class structure of Italian society; and finally to the various semantic meanings of the term »elite«.<sup>10</sup> A precise definition of the latter, however, shows its considerable advantages over, for example, the notion of political class. In a more fle-

6 *Stuart Woolf*, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe*, London/New York 1991, pp. 109–110 and 125.

7 For a recent historiographical overview, see *Anna Maria Rao*, *Napoleonic Italy: Old and New Trends in Historiography*, in: *Ute Planert* (ed.), *Napoleon's Empire. European Politics in Global Perspective*, Basingstoke 2016, pp. 84–97.

8 *Louis Bergeron/Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret*, *Les masses de granit. Cent mille notables du Premier Empire*, Paris 1979. See also the dictionary of departmental notables they edited, collectively entitled *Grands Notables du Premier Empire*, 31 vols., Paris 1978–2012 (still in progress).

9 See in particular *Carlo Capra*, *Nobili, notabili, élites: dal modello francese al caso italiano*, in: *Quaderni storici* 13, 1978, no. 37, pp. 12–42.

10 *Renato Camurri*, *Le élites italiane: lo stato degli studi e le prospettive di ricerca*, in: *Le Carte e la Storia* 15, 2009, no. 1, pp. 9–19, here: pp. 11 f.

xible and inclusive way, belonging to the elite goes beyond the strictly political sphere, embracing all the highest levels of the economic, artistic, cultural, and scientific world.<sup>11</sup>

Precisely because this allows a better understanding of the articulation of power relations within a society, the notion of the elite made its way into social history between the 1980s and the 2000s. This also had an impact on Italian Napoleonic historiography. Where earlier studies had emphasized the little difference between Napoleonic notables and the nobles of the *Ancien Régime*, later research – looking beyond the »notabilissimi« and restricting the scale of observation to the provincial level – identified a large group of individuals from local administrative bodies, Electoral Colleges, Chambers of Commerce, Academies, or Cultural Institutes who, in addition to being landowners, were lawyers, merchants, bankers, engineers, university professors etc.<sup>12</sup> While not questioning a great continuity in territorial arrangements, these considerations stimulate further examination, in the wake of the New Napoleonic history, of the composition of Napoleonic elites, as well as their »participation«, both in terms of collaboration and of the assimilation of new models and values.<sup>13</sup> This essay therefore attempts to offer new insights into these dynamics, focusing on two case studies. The first concerns the Kingdom of Italy and focuses on the internal dynamics of the elites of the territories previously belonging to the Republic of Venice. The second case study focuses instead on the vocabulary used by candidates for employment in the Napoleonic administration, in both the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of Naples. I seek to demonstrate that, although social mobility in Italy was much more limited than in France, the composition of the elites did undergo distinct changes. The criteria for membership also changed, and their interpretation was itself a factor determining inclusion or exclusion.

## I. Being Part of the Elite of the Kingdom of Italy: The Venetian Case

As mentioned above, Napoleonic governments pursued a policy of »amalgamation« in Italy as well. In need of stability, the Kingdom of Italy sought to gain the support of both the *Ancien Régime* nobility, with its long-standing control of the territory, and those who had supported the French since their first arrival in Italy in 1796.

### *Electoral Colleges of Landowners*

The glue designed to hold this amalgam together was property. For this reason, the Constitution of the Italian Republic – which had preceded the Kingdom – since 1802 entrusted the representation of the nation to three Electoral Colleges, the most im-

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> *Stefano Levati*, Notabili ed élites nell'Italia napoleonica: acquisizioni storiografiche e prospettive di ricerca, in: *Società e storia*, 2003, no. 100/101, pp. 387–405, here: pp. 395 f.

<sup>13</sup> *Michael Broers*, Introduction: Napoleon, His Empire, Our Europe and the »New Napoleonic History«, in: *id./Peter Hicks/Agustín Guimerá* (eds.), *The Napoleonic Empire and the New European Political Culture*, Basingstoke 2012, pp. 1–17, here: pp. 1–5.

portant of which was that of landowners. The other two were the college of scholars and the college of merchants.<sup>14</sup> To become a member of these bodies, as for all positions of prestige and power, one had to receive a designation from Napoleon. However, as he could not personally know all of the local notables, the names were chosen from lists that were often prepared within each department and then examined by the Ministry of the Interior and the viceroy of Italy, Eugène de Beauharnais. The criteria for appointments within the three colleges were the possession of the main requirement (one had to be a large landowner, a distinguished intellectual, or a rich merchant), social esteem, and political support. Because the government gave different weight to these criteria depending on the situation, the composition of these bodies was heterogeneous. In addition, for the landowners, one must consider the different impact of the military campaigns and the sale of national properties on the modification of previous landholding structures in different areas. This led to the greater or lower prominence of wealthy bourgeois, whose fortunes began to rival those of the oldest and most prestigious noble families.

A comparative analysis of the Electoral College of landowners and its members from the different departments – that is, provinces – of the Kingdom of Italy can therefore outline the characteristics of a part of the Napoleonic elite, highlighting continuity or discontinuity with the *Ancien Régime*. Starting from the first appointments in 1802 – made at the time of the Italian Republic, then comprising mainly Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna – one can observe that only half of the three hundred landowners belonged to the nobility. After the aggregation of the territories of Veneto and Friuli (1806) and Marche (1808), the incidence of the nobility among the total number of landowners (537 people) exceeded 82 %. This change in the internal balance, in the name of a greater continuity with the past, was due both to the more conservative decisions taken during the years of the Kingdom of Italy and to the higher percentage of nobles in the Venetian and Friulian departments (89 % compared to 77 % in the departments that had been part of the Cisalpine Republic).<sup>15</sup> These percentages indicate that the role of the nobility in Italy continued to be important.

As mentioned in the introduction, this was due to the short duration of the democratic triennium (1796–1799), which in many parts of the Italian peninsula was followed by a restoration which abrogated revolutionary legislation. The abolition of the fideicommissum (i.e., the inalienability of noble property) was only reintroduced in Veneto and Friuli in 1806 with the annexation to the Kingdom of Italy. The same applies to the Kingdom of Naples, where the abolition of feudalism was only decreed in 1806 with the establishment of the new Napoleonic regime. This means that major changes in land ownership occurred in the long run, but in the short run ancient regime nobles were still among the major landowners. This explains why,

14 When it was created in 1802, the Electoral College of landowners was composed of three hundred citizens with an annual income on real estate of at least six thousand lire. The other two Electoral Colleges were composed of two hundred members each. *Carlo Zaghi, L'Italia di Napoleone dalla Cisalpina al Regno*, Turin 1986, pp. 295–297.

15 *Carlo Capra, Una ricerca in corso: i Collegi elettorali della Repubblica italiana e del Regno italoico*, in: *Annuario dell'Istituto storico per l'età moderna e contemporanea* 23–24, 1971/72, pp. 475–497, here: p. 481.

for example, the Electoral College of landowners of the Adriatic department, based in Venice, was composed entirely of Venetian patricians. Although the class that had ruled the Republic for centuries was heavily in debt, most of the sales that the patricians were forced to make began in the years following their appointment.<sup>16</sup> The beneficiaries of these sales were often members of another Electoral College: that of merchants. It was in fact businessmen who often profited from the sale of national properties, the dismantling of many noble estates and speculation in public contracts.<sup>17</sup>

This was especially true for Veneto and Friuli. Consider Angelo Papadopoli, from a recently ennobled Corfiot family based in Venice, who was the largest buyer of national properties during the Napoleonic era (to the value of over half a million lire) and belonged to the Electoral College of merchants. The same applies to Angelo Comello, who also belonged to a family of wealthy merchants, bankers, shipowners, and insurers. His nephews married Anna Papadopoli, Angelo's daughter, and Maddalena Montalban, a noblewoman from the province of Treviso. Further examples are the brothers Andrea and Valentino Galvani, whose family was engaged in the production of paper, silk, and ceramics. The first, Antonio, was a member of the chamber of commerce in Venice, while the second, Valentino, belonged to the Electoral College of merchants in the Passariano department (with Udine as its capital).<sup>18</sup>

Prominent in the acquisition of real estate and national properties were also members of the Venetian Jewish community, such as the merchant Vita Vivante and the banker Giuseppe Treves. In 1797, Vivante became a member of the Venetian democratic Municipality – the political body which replaced the Great Council of the former Republic for eight months – and his company provided food for the French troops during Bonaparte's first Italian campaign. Treves later became president of the Venetian Electoral College of merchants and the chamber of commerce, acquiring the title of baron of the Kingdom of Italy.<sup>19</sup> Having for decades played a significant role in commerce, brokerage, public contracts, and credit activities, after the end of the Venetian Republic in 1797 the Jewish community took advantage of

16 Renzo Derosas has calculated that in Venice alone, real estate of a total value of 145 million Italian lire was exchanged between 1797 and 1820. Its main purchasers were bourgeois (54 %), followed by Venetian patricians (19 %), other nobles (15 %), and Jews (7 %). Most sales took place in 1797 and then from 1806 onwards, reflecting the abolition of the fideicommissum. *Renzo Derosas, Aspetti economici della crisi del patriziato veneziano tra fine Settecento e primo Ottocento*, in: *Cheiron* 7, 1990, pp. 11–61, here: pp. 14, 21 and 41–43.

17 For a comparison with the rise of businessmen in Napoleonic Milan, see *Stefano Levati, La nobiltà del lavoro. Negozianti e banchieri a Milano tra ancien régime e restaurazione*, Milan 1997.

18 *Mirella Calzavarini, La vendita dei beni nazionali nei dipartimenti veneti dal 1806 al 1814*, in: *Gian Luigi Fontana/Antonio Lazzarini (eds.), Veneto e Lombardia tra rivoluzione giacobina ed età napoleonica. Economia, territorio, istituzioni*, Milan/Rome 1992, pp. 133–163. *Valentina Dal Cin, Il mondo nuovo. L'élite veneta fra rivoluzione e restaurazione (1797–1815)*, Venice 2019, pp. 157, 163 and 231.

19 However, Vivante went bankrupt in 1813. *Giovanni Zalin, Assetto fondiario e ceti sociali nel Veneto durante le dominazioni straniere (1797–1848)*, in: *Archivio veneto*, 1996, no. 181, pp. 61–103, here: pp. 81 and 89. *Cesare Vivante, La memoria dei padri. Cronaca, storia e preistoria di una famiglia ebraica tra Corfù e Venezia*, Florence 2009, pp. 107 and 124–128. *Almanacco reale per l'anno bisestile 1812*, Milan 1812, pp. 97, 108, 172, 252 and 283.

emancipation to invest its large amount of liquid capital. However, the time was not yet ripe for a full social ascent. When it came to choosing the members of the Senate, the viceroy, Eugène de Beauharnais, advised Napoleon to think carefully about appointing Treves, precisely because he was Jewish.<sup>20</sup>

Returning to the percentage data on the presence of nobles in the Electoral College of landowners, it should be added that a high incidence of nobles did not mean a complete continuity with the past. This becomes clear when analysing, for example, the Electoral College of landowners of the Adige department, based in Verona. Half of its twenty-two members had already taken part in the pro-French democratic bodies of 1797, and a third of them had been invited to Lyon in 1802 to attend the Assembly that would ratify the Constitution of the Italian Republic. Nevertheless, around 80 % of the Veronese landowners were noble. This is not surprising, considering that even the most radical political body created after the fall of the Republic of Venice, the Municipality of Verona (1797), included a substantial percentage of nobles (just under 60 % of the total).<sup>21</sup> However, it should be remembered that, although noble, not all these individuals had a real chance of emerging on the political scene during the ancient regime. Therefore, their involvement in the new political and administrative bodies should also be seen in this light. The desire shown by a part of the nobility of the mainland – in this case, the Veronese – to welcome the French was due to the desire to find new spaces for action. In fact, from the moment it was annexed to the Republic of Venice during the 15th century, the nobility of the mainland had to be content with political-administrative positions at city level, because the government of the *Serenissima* was firmly in the hands of the Venetian nobility alone. The possibility of joining the Venetian patriciate, membership of which could be bought from the 17th century onwards, did not heal the centuries-old rift between the Venetian and mainland nobility.<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting that in 1789 the election of a doge who belonged to a family of Friulian origin, even though aggregated to the Venetian patriciate for over a century, caused a rival to exclaim: »They made a Friulian doge, the Republic is dead.« This sad prophecy was destined to come true a few years later.<sup>23</sup>

Even at a strictly local level the highest political-administrative offices were not open to everyone but remained the preserve of a small group of urban noble families. Within this group, moreover, opportunities were not equal, because top positions were monopolised by the most prestigious families. Consequently, the presence of members of the lower nobility or recently ennobled individuals within the new bodies created from 1797 onwards can be considered a new element. In the case of

20 *Emilio Veggetti*, Note inedite di Eugenio Beauharnais sui candidati al Senato del Regno italoico, in: *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento* 20, 1933, pp. 109–125, here: p. 115.

21 *Dal Cin*, *Il mondo nuovo*, pp. 30, 40–42 and 126 f.

22 On the Venetian patriciate and its relationship with the mainland nobility, see *Piero Del Negro*, *Proposte illuminate e conservazione nel dibattito sulla teoria e prassi dello Stato*, in: *Girolamo Arnaldi/Manlio Pastore Stocchi* (eds.), *Storia della cultura veneta*, vol. V/2: *Il Settecento*, Vicenza 1986, pp. 123–145; *Volker Hunecke*, *Der venezianische Adel am Ende der Republik 1646–1797*. *Demographie, Familie, Haushalt*, Tübingen 1995; *Marion Lühe*, *Der venezianische Adel nach dem Untergang der Republik*, Cologne 2000.

23 *Paolo Gaspari*, *Terra patrizia. Aristocrazie terriere e società rurale in Veneto e Friuli. Nobili e borghesi nella formazione dell'etica civile delle élites terriere, 1797–1920*, Udine 1993, p. 43.



Verona, examples include Giacomo Gaspari, Luigi Polfranceschi, or Leonardo Salimbeni, to mention the most famous names. Giacomo Gaspari's family had been ennobled a short time before, and had the era of the Republic of Venice not ended, he would certainly not have been able to aspire to the career he later led. A convinced and ardent democrat, in 1797 he joined the Municipality of Verona. During the Napoleonic era, he became a member of the Electoral College of landowners and received the honour of the Iron Crown. In 1805, he was appointed vice-prefect of Legnago and was then promoted to prefect of Macerata (1808) and Ancona (1811), his ›iron fist‹ being considered useful by the government in newly annexed departments, such as Marche, which were difficult to govern.<sup>24</sup>

Gaspari's case shows that, behind the facade of apparent continuity, the strong presence of the nobility in the new Napoleonic apparatus may actually conceal the emergence of new possibilities. Of course, these possibilities did not open up for everyone, because, as noted, property was the key to the new elite. However, the new regime also made some of the social differences that during the ancient regime would have been considered relevant disappear in a substantive – and not only formal – way. In addition to the previous examples, this is demonstrated by the absence of the Venetian patriciate from the Electoral Colleges of landowners in the mainland departments. The exclusion was justified by the authorities through the requirement of residence in the department for which one was nominated, but it was essentially a political decision. The government of the Kingdom of Italy needed the support of the elites of the whole of Veneto and Friuli, which it did not intend to alienate by allowing the Venetians to recreate the old order in a new guise. Nevertheless, there were Venetians who were ready to make a stand on this issue, counting on the fact that they were among the major landowners in the departments of Treviso and Padua, where for centuries the patriciate had reinvested its commercial profits. This was the case for Pietro Benzon – husband of the famous *salonnière* Marina Querini, celebrated by Stendhal – who asked two influential people to intercede on his behalf, so that he could enter the Electoral College of landowners of the Tagliamento department, based in Treviso. He enlisted the help of Giuseppe Rangoni, venerable master of the Masonic lodge *L'Eugenio Adriatico* in Venice, and that of the viceroy's chamberlain and future senator, Tommaso Condulmer, but Benzon's plan failed, as the government did not intend to make exceptions to the rule.<sup>25</sup>

### **Departmental Administration**

If membership of the Electoral Colleges was primarily a symbol of belonging to the Napoleonic establishment, appointments within the departmental administration were of greater weight and came with greater responsibilities. The Kingdom of Italy was in fact divided into departments, headed by a prefect, who was assisted by a secretary and three or four prefectural councillors. Each department was in turn subdivided into districts, administered by a vice-prefect; the districts, in turn, were

<sup>24</sup> Livio Antonielli, *I prefetti dell'Italia napoleonica*, Bologna 1983, pp. 331 f.

<sup>25</sup> *Dal Cin*, *Il mondo nuovo*, pp. 104–106.

subdivided into communes, administered by a *podestà* or a mayor, who was assisted by a municipality and a city council. A departmental general council of thirty or forty members met once a year for a maximum of fifteen days to represent the needs of the department and to present any complaints to the minister of the interior. The same applied to the council of the district, which represented the needs of the district. The councillors in these broad bodies – whether at departmental, district, or municipal levels – only gave advisory opinions and were therefore unpaid. The other roles mentioned above (prefects, vice-prefects, secretaries, and prefectural councillors) were, on the other hand, held by salaried officials on a career path. Despite this substantial difference, it should be remembered that in both cases, almost all appointments were made by the sovereign, even if they were proposed to him by the viceroy and the minister of the interior.<sup>26</sup>

Among these appointments, the most interesting ones for the study of local elites are those of prefectural councillors and vice-prefects. Prefectural councillors were always chosen from among the inhabitants of the department and combined different characteristics: on the one hand, they had to be able to assist the prefect in many administrative duties, and on the other, they had to be representatives of the local elite. The low salary which they were paid ensured that the post could only be accepted by wealthy landowners.<sup>27</sup> However, this made acceptance of the office problematic, because even a landowner might consider that the prestige guaranteed by the role and its remuneration were inadequate for the effort required. If the Napoleonic government acted in this way, it was to try to draw members of the nobility, who should have been attracted by the hybrid nature of the post, into administrative careers, thus integrating them into the heart of the system.<sup>28</sup>

More important was the role of vice-prefect, which essentially acted as a ›nursery‹ for young talents, whose ability and devotion could be put to the test, leading where successful to a prefectural appointment. Vice-prefects might originate from the geographical area they were called upon to administer – unlike prefects, whose crucial role required them to be free of partisan interests. For this reason, the principle was to appoint prefects from a department different from their own.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, in a Venetian department, for example, there could be officials reflecting the local elite (prefectural councillors and vice-prefects) and officials belonging to the Lombard elite (prefects and secretaries general). Naturally, the reverse was also possible, but the first situation was the most common, because the elites from the territories that had formed the Cisalpine Republic since 1797, which became the Italian Republic in 1802, played a more important role throughout the Napoleonic

26 On the administration of the Kingdom of Italy, see *Alexander Grab*, *The Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy: State Administration*, in: *Broers/Hicks/Guimerá*, *The Napoleonic Empire and the New European Political Culture*, pp. 204–215.

27 In the Kingdom of Italy, a prefectural councillor received an annual salary of 1,500 lire, a vice-prefect 3,000 lire, and a prefect 15,000 lire. This means that a prefect received ten times the salary of a councillor. *Livio Antonielli*, *Alcuni aspetti dell'apparato amministrativo periferico nella Repubblica e nel Regno d'Italia*, in: *Quaderni storici* 13, 1978, no. 37, pp. 196–227, here: pp. 199–201.

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 202 f.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 204–207. *Edward Whitcomb*, *Napoleon's Prefects*, in: *AHR* 79, 1974, pp. 1089–1118, here: p. 1098.



era. It is worth noting that all of the leading figures came from this area: the vice-president of the Italian Republic, Francesco Melzi d'Eril, belonged to the Milanese patriciate; the minister of foreign relations, Ferdinando Marescalchi, came from a noble Bolognese family; and Antonio Aldini, Secretary of State in Paris, was also from Bologna. The same could be said of prefects, who had to demonstrate solid skills and a good knowledge of the bureaucratic machine, a role in which the Lombards were favoured. As regards Veneto and Friuli, nine individuals from these areas were appointed elsewhere, compared to thirteen non-native prefects appointed within its seven departments, which yields a ratio of 1.44 between the two components. However, in Emilia-Romagna the data are similar. There, too, thirteen non-native prefects were appointed, whereas ten local prefects were appointed in other departments, with a ratio of 1.3.<sup>30</sup> Of course, this superficial analysis might be deepened by counting the length of time these individuals served in office and by carrying out a detailed analysis of their work. What is of interest here is not so much the performance of the appointees, however, as their social status and the criteria that led the government to choose them.

For this reason – leaving aside the leading roles mentioned above – it is more profitable to look inside the various departments, analysing both prefectural councillors and vice-prefects. In the seven departments of the north-eastern part of the Kingdom of Italy, I surveyed 55 prefectural councillors appointed between 1805 and 1814. In the Adriatic department (Venice) in this period, five individuals alternated; in the Bacchiglione (Vicenza) and Tagliamento (Treviso) departments, seven; in the Piave department (Belluno), eight; in the Adige (Verona) and Passariano (Udine) departments, nine; and in the Brenta department (Padua) no fewer than ten individuals alternated. The stability of the personnel employed in Venice is easily explained: its department was the only one not affected by the temporary invasion of the Austrian armies in the spring of 1809. In the other cases, many councillors decided to collaborate with the enemy occupiers and were therefore dismissed a few months later, when the fate of the conflict turned in favour of Napoleon, who on 14 October 1809 ended the war of the Fifth Coalition with the Treaty of Schönbrunn. Looking closer at these 55 prefectural councillors, it is possible to make some general observations: about 64 % belonged to a noble family, about one third also belonged to one of the three previously mentioned Electoral Colleges, just under 30 % had been members of the political bodies of the democratic season and roughly the same percentage were reemployed inside the Provincial or Central congregations created by the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia in 1815. As far as is known, among the non-nobles the prevailing status was that of landowner, but there were also many lawyers and only a few merchants.<sup>31</sup> These appointments were therefore entirely in line with the profile required: a wealthy local notable, preferably with legal or administrative skills. To gain better insight into this profile, it is useful to analyse in

30 *Valentina Dal Cin*, Presentarsi e rappresentarsi di fronte a un potere che cambia: l'élite della Repubblica dopo la Repubblica, in: *Società e storia*, 2017, no. 155, pp. 61–95, here: p. 67 f.

31 The count includes the additional councillors for »water and roads«. Regarding the Kingdom of Italy, all appointments are extracted from *Bollettino delle leggi del Regno d'Italia*, 21 vols., Milan 1805–1814. Regarding the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, the 1815 appointments are extracted from *Giornale di Venezia*, 18 December 1815. Noble status was ascertained through *Franz Schrö-*

detail the appointments of councillors in the Brenta department, which saw the largest turnover.

The first replacements took place in 1809, when suitable candidates had to be evaluated to replace all four previous councillors, who had collaborated with the Austrians. The prefect Bonaventura Zecchini, a native of Bologna, submitted four pairs of possible candidates to the minister of the interior, among whom he declared his preference for Giovanni Battista Polcastro and Marsilio Papafava. The former had already joined the prefectural council with responsibility for matters of water and roads, was a wealthy landowner, a »person distinguished for his knowledge, morality and affection for the government«, and was also the brother of a senator of the Kingdom of Italy. The second was a landowner who had knowledge, enjoyed »public favour« and boasted a manifest »attachment to the government«. <sup>32</sup>

At the request of the minister of the interior, the director-general of police gave his opinion on all eight candidates, rejecting some of them. These included a university professor of law, because men devoted to theoretical studies were not considered »the most successful in the performance of practical administration«, and a lawyer. The latter was unsuitable because he was unlikely to give up his profession for a poorly paid job and could not be allowed to hold both posts, as there was a risk of conflict of interest, even if the candidate was »honest and good«. <sup>33</sup> Zecchini tried to insist on the latter candidate, arguing that he was willing to accept the post and had already been a good legal advisor to the prefecture, but he was turned down. <sup>34</sup> In the end, the two people favoured by the prefect, along with Rizzardo Lenguazza and Antonio Cittadella, were appointed as prefectural councillors. <sup>35</sup>

However, the resignation of Giovanni Battista Polcastro just over a year later posed a new problem. In 1811, the prefect put forward two candidates, but both were rejected by the director-general of police, because one had never held public office and the other had been compromised during the Austrian occupation of 1809. According to the director-general, it was necessary to propose »men of greater prestige, and more esteemed for their talents and knowledge«. <sup>36</sup> Zecchini, the prefect, irritably replied that the department did not have an abundance of people who, in addition to being the »principal proprietors«, possessed »distinguished knowledge«, were educated in »administrative practices«, and possessed the right »aptitude« for the task, as well as the will to devote themselves to it, recalling that the candidature of a worthy lawyer had been rejected the year before. If he had had to exclude even

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*der*, Repertorio genealogico delle famiglie confermate nobili e dei titolati nobili esistenti nelle provincie venete, 2 vols., Venice 1830.

32 The prefect of Brenta to the minister of the interior, 28.8.1809, Archivio di Stato di Milano (ASMi), Uffici e Tribunali Regi (UR), parte moderna (p.m.), folder 18.

33 The interim director general of Police to the minister of the interior, 18.9.1809, ASMi, UR, p.m., folder 18.

34 The prefect of Brenta to the minister of the interior, 30.9.1809, ASMi, UR, p.m., folder 18.

35 The minister of the interior to the prefect of Brenta, 7.10.1809. The prefect of Brenta to the minister of the Interior, 12.10.1809, ASMi, UR, p.m., folder 18; Bollettino delle leggi del Regno d'Italia, Milan 1809, p. 344.

36 The director-general of police to the minister of the interior, 31.1.1811, ASMi, UR, p.m., folder 18.

those who were compromised by collaboration with the enemy in 1809, he would have had no one left to propose.<sup>37</sup>

The minister of the interior replied that the criterion of political loyalty was negotiable: Zecchini could propose candidates who had been dismissed or prosecuted following the Austrian invasion of 1809 if they were endowed with »truly special merits«. The final decision lay in the hands of the viceroy. Property was also a negotiable criterion to be taken into consideration.<sup>38</sup> The prefect then decided to propose the merchant Marco Zigno and the nobleman Nicolò Da Rio. Da Rio was chosen in March 1811 and had already been a prefectural councillor between 1806 and 1809, having been dismissed for collaborating with the Austrians. The government therefore preferred a noble landowner who had previous experience in this role and was the brother of the podestà of Padua, to a merchant preoccupied with his business and of lesser status.<sup>39</sup> The only missing requirement was a firm political allegiance, but the prefect had made it clear that it was not possible to find individuals who perfectly personified the model. When compromises had to be made, it was therefore preferable to employ people of a certain prestige – preferably nobles and landowners – rather than favouring more resolute political supporters with less social prominence or more modest fortunes.

As for vice-prefects, there were thirty Venetian-Friulians employed in that role, either within or outside their departments.<sup>40</sup> Many had already held public office and continued to serve even after the Napoleonic era. For example, Stefano Luigi Gervasoni and Giuseppe Giacomazzi – both Venetian *cittadini originari* – had held diplomatic posts on behalf of the Republic: the former had been consul in Genoa and the latter resident in Turin.<sup>41</sup> Giacomazzi (the future vice-prefect of Adria) had been appointed provincial vice-captain of Udine during the first period of Austrian domination, while Gervasoni (the former vice-prefect of Crema) continued his career under the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia as secretary-general of the Adda prefecture, secretary of the provincial delegation of Sondrio, adjunct to various provincial delegations and finally worked at the general directorate of archives in Milan.<sup>42</sup> They were not alone, as many former vice-prefects held public posts after 1815: Francesco Ferri, Marino Zuliani, Antonio Quadri, Giovanni Battista Contarini, Ferdinando Porcia, and Giacomo Jacotti are the most notable examples.<sup>43</sup> They show that the role of vice-prefect was considered important and often served as a springboard

37 The prefect of Brenta to the minister of the interior, 10.2.1811, ASMi, UR, p.m., folder 18.

38 The minister of the interior to the prefect of Piave, 20.2.1811, ASMi, UR, p.m., folder 18.

39 The director-general of police to the minister of the interior, 9.3.1811, ASMi, UR, p.m., folder 611. Niccolò Da Rio had been charged with taking an oath of loyalty to the Austrians.

40 As in the case of prefectural councillors, all appointments of vice-prefects are extracted from *Bollettino delle leggi del Regno d'Italia*, 21 vols., Milan 1805–1814.

41 On *cittadini originari*, see *Andrea Zannini*, *Burocrazia e burocrati a Venezia in età moderna: i cittadini originari* (sec. XVI–XVIII), Venice 1993.

42 ASMi, UR, p.m., folder 540. ASMi, UR, p.m., folder 538.

43 In 1815, Ferri joined the Provincial Congregation of Padua, while Zuliani joined the Central Congregation based in Venice. Quadri and Contarini became secretaries of the Austrian government, while Porcia and Jacotti became governmental councillors. The appointments within the Lombardy-Venetia Kingdom can be found in *Giornale di Venezia*, 18 December 1815. On the transition from the Napoleonic to the Austrian period, see *John Reuben Rath*, *The Provisional Austrian*

to more prestigious roles. The names listed above in fact include both nobles of the *Ancien Régime* and members of the bourgeoisie who owed their social prestige to their administrative career, and thanks to their curriculum vitae were able to hold public offices even during the Restoration.

At the same time, however, there were people who, although possessing the requisite qualities to join the Napoleonic elite and to hold a prominent position in the administration, preferred to remain on the sidelines. This is why, as part of the nomination criteria, the government also assessed the willingness of candidates to accept office. Under these circumstances, it is interesting to examine not only the profile of those who received an appointment but also their willingness to work actively for it.

## II. Understanding Selection Criteria

Actively seeking an appointment often meant making a spontaneous application to the minister of the interior, the king or the viceroy. Because this was a goal-oriented action, it is reasonable to assume that the candidates were trying to achieve their goal by framing their applications in terms they thought best suited the government's expectations.<sup>44</sup> If the records drawn up within the ministry of the interior allow us to know which criteria were assessed by the government, the applications allow us to investigate the external perception of these criteria. Although property was a fundamental requirement, it has been underlined that other elements were also considered. In fact, words such as talent, ability, skill, and knowledge recurred in the assessments of individual applicants. The principle of »career open to talent« was combined with the pragmatism of the Napoleonic administration, which needed capable officials to ensure an efficient functioning of the bureaucracy and effective control of the conquered territories.

It is therefore interesting to examine the extent to which the »vocabulary of merit« was present in applications for employment and to what extent the custom of presenting the application as a plea to the sovereign persisted.<sup>45</sup> In the latter case, instead of framing their curriculum vitae in terms of degrees earned and previous

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Regime in Lombardy-Venetia 1814–1815, Austin 1969. On Austrian Congregations cf. *Eurigio Tonetti*, *Governo austriaco e notabili sudditi. Congregazioni e municipi nel Veneto della Restaurazione (1816–1848)*, Venice 1997.

44 When analysing sources such as pleas and petitions, it is necessary to situate the texts »within the social contexts and institutional routes, considering who is writing and who are the addressees, because the change of referent and procedure also modifies the strategies followed to obtain responses as close as possible to the predetermined goals«. *Cecilia Nubola/Andreas Würigler*, *Introduzione*, in: *id.* (eds.), *Suppliche e gravamina. Politica, amministrazione, giustizia in Europa (secoli XIV–XVIII)*, Bologna 2002, p. 11.

45 On semantic shifts of the concept of merit in the 17th–18th centuries, see *Jay M. Smith*, *The Culture of Merit. Nobility, Royal Service and the Making of Absolute Monarchy in France*, Ann Arbor 1996. For 1789–1790, see *Rafe Blaufarb*, *Une révolution dans la Révolution: mérite et naissance dans la pensée et le comportement politiques de la noblesse militaire de province en 1789–1790*, in: *Histoire, économie & société* 33, 2014, no. 3, pp. 32–51.

positions held, applicants insisted on their economic difficulties and family needs, imploring the sovereign's grace.

### ***Job Applications in the Kingdom of Italy***

A qualitative analysis gives examples of both types. In 1808, the young Paduan nobleman Francesco Ferri (at the time vice-prefect of Este) asked the minister of the interior for a promotion to the role of prefect, pointing out that his administrative ability had ensured that »in the space of a few months the district was as organised as the others in the Kingdom«, i.e. as efficiently as those which had been part of it for longer. He added that his »uninterrupted vigilance« had ensured that »the new disciplines had become practically routine«. For this reason, Ferri stated that he had »fulfilled the difficult duties« to which he had been called, and that he was therefore »in a state of rest« that was »mortifying« for him, given his strong desire to devote himself to the Emperor's service.<sup>46</sup> The authorities were evidently persuaded by his arguments, since Ferri was appointed prefect of the Piave department. However, it should be added that the young man had also used a letter of recommendation from his mother, Leopoldina Starhemberg, who praised her son's zeal and devotion to the sovereign.<sup>47</sup> Such letters of recommendation were common at the time, and their presence does not necessarily indicate a lack of professionalism on the part of the candidate. On the contrary, when written by his superiors or by high officials (which was not the case for Ferri), these letters guaranteed the candidate's claims and supported his requests. They were also found in applications for employment in the Prussian technical bureaucracy examined by Stephan Strunz, whose rhetoric between 1806–1848 was largely based on individual merit.<sup>48</sup>

In 1806, the conservator of the register, Antonio Quadri, also applied for the place of vice-prefect, relying both on his advanced studies and his excellent references from the prefect of his department and the state councillor Etienne Méjan. Although he started from a low-ranking position, his application was successful.<sup>49</sup> Not yet satisfied, in 1808, Quadri began to ask for a promotion, citing in his favour his father's service to the state for over 60 years and his own service for over eleven years. It is interesting to note that Quadri glossed over the three political discontinuities that had occurred during that time span, considering that his family's loyalty went to an abstract institution, regardless of the political conjuncture. At the same time, in his opinion, merit was not merely linked to personal qualities but involved the entire family tradition.<sup>50</sup> His point was not unique, as similar ones had been made by the French candidates of the 1820s and 1830s studied by William Reddy. According to Reddy, in a post-revolutionary society based on property, the rhetoric

46 Francesco Ferri to the viceroy, 4.8.1808, ASMi, UT, p.m., folder 524.

47 Leopoldina Starhemberg to the viceroy, 15.3.1809, ASMi, UT, p.m., folder 524.

48 Stephan Strunz, Organizing Careers for Work. The *curriculum vitae* (CV) in Prussia's Technical Bureaucracy, c. 1770–1830, in: *Management & Organizational History* 15, 2020, pp. 315–337, here: pp. 320 and 323.

49 Etienne Méjan to the minister of the interior, 12.12.1806, ASMi, UR, p.m., folder 616.

50 Antonio Quadri to the minister of the interior, 5.6.1808, ASMi, UR, p.m., folder 616.

of the candidates was still imbued with a code of honour that often combined meritocratic elements with references to a system of gift exchange and personal and family loyalty. The reference to the family dimension did not correspond to the »notion of merit as a strictly personal achievement« and appeared even more contradictory when it emphasised needs and sufferings as a criterion considered valid for obtaining employment.<sup>51</sup> In the case of Quadri, traditional elements were accompanied by more modern ones. Intending to prove that he had the zeal and commitment required to obtain a promotion to the rank of prefect – for example in the Illyrian Provinces – or to that of secretary-general of the ministry of the interior, Quadri emphasised his exploits during the Austrian invasion of 1809. He wrote that he had worked hard to enlist national guardsmen, adding that he himself had followed and led them »in the face of the enemy even beyond the borders of the state« to restore public order.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately for him, this proof of courage and devotion earned him a harsh reprimand from his superior, the prefect of the Bacchiglione Pio Magenta, who complained that he had disobeyed orders and moved away from his seat, Bassano del Grappa.<sup>53</sup> In his desire to move quickly up the administrative ladder, Quadri had relied heavily on his proactiveness, but had underestimated one of the main qualities expected of an official: respect for the hierarchy. Perhaps by applying directly to the viceroy, he had hoped to bypass his direct superiors and gain greater recognition for his initiative, but his efforts proved unsuccessful.

Another interesting application was that submitted in 1809 by the Friulian nobleman Ferdinando Porcia, then vice-prefect of Conegliano, for promotion to the rank of prefect in a new German-speaking province of the Kingdom of Italy. The request was based on rumours of a probable northward expansion of the Kingdom, and Porcia justified it by his extensive knowledge of German countries and Hungary, where he had studied, as well as by his ability to speak German perfectly.<sup>54</sup> All this stemmed from the Porcia family's traditional closeness to the German-speaking world and the Habsburgs. The vice-prefect thus showed great political nonchalance in using those elements to convince the Napoleonic government to give him a job that would allow him to confirm the pre-eminence of his family in those areas. At the same time, Porcia perfectly understood that knowledge of the language of the country to be administered was considered an important requirement, as shown by the following example. When the secretary of state asked Marshal Davout, governor-general of three Hanseatic departments, why he had not offered a post to his former personal secretary but had recommended him elsewhere, Davout replied that he did not speak German, a skill he required without exception.<sup>55</sup>

51 William Reddy, *The Invisible Code. Honor and Sentiment in Postrevolutionary France, 1814–1848*, Berkeley/Los Angeles etc. 1997, pp. 138, 155–159 and 172 f.

52 Antonio Quadri to the viceroy, 31.10.1809, ASMi, UR, p.m., folder 616.

53 The prefect of the Bacchiglione to the minister of the interior, 5.10.1809, ASMi, UR, p.m., folder 616.

54 Ferdinando Porcia to the minister of the interior, 28.7.1809, ASMi, UT, p.m., folder 612.

55 *Stéphane Soupiron*, *Les tribulations d'un solliciteur et la recommandation sous le Premier Empire*, in: *Frédéric Monier/Olivier Dard/Jens Ivo Engels* (eds.), *Patronage et corruption politiques dans l'Europe contemporaine*, Paris 2014, pp. 67–83, here: p. 78. The importance of bilingualism is recognised in a study on the courts of Turin and Brussels; *Déborah Cohen*, *Le recrutement des cours impériales en 1810: construction d'une administration européenne ou validation de privi-*



Two other noteworthy applications are those of the vice-prefects Stefano Luigi Gervasoni and Giacomo Concina. In 1809, the former requested the role of secretary of the Ministry of Interior, affirming that he knew it was a promotion in line with his profile. Shortly afterwards he asked for a post in the future Illyrian Provinces, assuming that the viceroy of Italy, Eugène de Beauharnais, would become their sovereign and thus demonstrating his availability for a posting far from home.<sup>56</sup> The same applies to Concina, a Friulian nobleman and vice-prefect of Cento, who, during the advance of Murat's Neapolitan troops in February 1814, applied to the minister of the interior of the Kingdom of Naples to become secretary-general of the Prefecture in one of the Italian departments provisionally occupied.<sup>57</sup> That Quadri, Gervasoni, Porcia, and Concina were willing to leave their city and region of origin and move to pursue their careers is an interesting element, because it is among those identified by Michael Broers as indicators of a deeper understanding of what the Napoleonic government required – an understanding which the Italian elites often seemed to lack.<sup>58</sup> This quick overview of examples shows that this understanding was certainly only partial – the »mixture of old and new« that Broers attributes to the Italians »already inside the system«<sup>59</sup> – but it did exist. If the traditional elements linked to the family dimension were not the only ones mentioned, they were evidently not considered sufficient. Adding references to studies, skills, and achievements, as well the willingness to move wherever necessary, indicates that members both of the nobility and the middle class began to realise that they had to compete on this ground, too, and not only in terms of status and family connections.<sup>60</sup>

### **Job Applications in the Kingdom of Naples**

However, qualitative analysis has a weak point: the selection of source quotations, which risks being based on the need to confirm the research hypothesis of the scholar, even at an unconscious level. For this reason, I also decided to undertake a quantitative analysis through a limited case study based on job applications submitted within the Kingdom of Naples. This is a different context from that of the Kingdom of Italy, yet here too – as elsewhere in Italy – it is possible to find the two sides of the coin: »fierce opposition as well as active support and collaboration«. As stated

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lèges locaux traditionnels?, in: *François Antoine/Jean-Pierre Jessenne/Annie Jourdan et al. (eds.), L'Empire napoléonien. Une expérience européenne?*, Paris 2004, pp. 332–346, here: p. 335.

56 Stefano Gervasoni to his friend Giuseppe Rangoni, 11.11.1809, Biblioteca civica dell'Archiginnasio di Bologna, Carteggio Rangoni, folder XXXIX.

57 Giacomo Concina to the minister of the interior of the Kingdom of Naples, 17.2.1814. Archivio di Stato di Napoli (ASNa), Ministero degli Esteri, folder 5421, subfolder 5481/6.

58 *Michael Broers*, *The Napoleonic Empire in Italy, 1796–1814. Cultural Imperialism in a European Context?* Basingstoke 2005, pp. 199–201.

59 *Ibid.*

60 A similar combination of old and new elements can also be found in the demands for relief and pensions of French *hommes de lettres* and *savants*. *Jean-Luc Chappey/Antoine Lilti*, *L'écrivain face à l'État: les demandes de pensions et de secours des hommes de lettres et savants (1780–1820)*, in: *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 57, 2010, no. 4, pp. 156–184.

by John Davis, in the Kingdom of Naples the government's efforts to integrate the elites into the new regime had »mixed results«: although in every province there were important families who sided with the new regime, many notables did not want »to shoulder the heavy administrative burdens delegated to the provincial and local assemblies«. One of the reasons for this was that these were unpaid posts, exercised for pure prestige, like the Electoral Colleges and departmental general councils of the Kingdom of Italy. The situation was different for administrative posts, which were in such high demand that there was an imbalance between applicants and available posts. The reorganisation initiated in 1806 failed to create new careers and opportunities, since once the employees of the *Ancien Régime* tribunals and the feudal administrations had been rehired, there was little room left, as some coveted positions were given to Frenchmen.<sup>61</sup>

This explains why a single vacant post of councillor of *Intendenza* elicited a very high number of applications, which is why I was able to use them for a quantitative analysis. The latter can be useful for comparison, since although the Neapolitan context was different from that of the Kingdom of Italy, the administrative organisation was quite similar, being based on the French model. In the Kingdom of Naples, the prefectures were called *Intendenze*, at the head of which was an intendant appointed by the king. Here, too, the intendant was assisted by several councillors of the intendency, whose role corresponded to that of the prefectural councillors of the Kingdom of Italy already described.<sup>62</sup> Even in this case, differences between the various posts were reflected in salary levels. In 1807, a councillor of the intendency received about 360 ducats per year, whereas a sub-intendant received 840 ducats and an intendant 2,400 ducats, as well as an allowance for representation expenses.<sup>63</sup> Between November 1812 and March 1813, the ministry of the interior received 84 applications for a single post of councillor of the intendency of Naples, sent by 58 individuals (some of whom submitted more than one application).<sup>64</sup> There were thus many candidates, although the salary for the post was less than one sixth of that of a prefect. After all, it has been calculated that, in many areas of the Kingdom of Naples, an income of 200–250 ducats was sufficient to raise its beneficiary above the wealthy peasantry, bringing him closer to the middle class, while an income above 500 ducats was already substantial.<sup>65</sup> The salary of a councillor of the intendency was therefore not entirely negligible. Moreover, many considered this position as the first stage of a distinguished career. An analysis of the stated occupation of the candidates at the time of application shows that most of them were lawyers (22) or administrative officials (21). Their applications are in fact the most substantial, with over 6,700 and over 8,200 occurrences, respectively.

61 John Davis, *Naples and Napoleon. Southern Italy and the European Revolutions (1780–1860)*, Oxford 2006, pp. 10 and 244–247.

62 On the administration of the Kingdom of Naples, see Armando De Martino, *La nascita delle intendenze: problemi dell'amministrazione periferica nel regno di Napoli*, Naples 1984.

63 Antonio Saladino, *I collegi elettorali dei possidenti e dei commercianti del Regno di Napoli per la formazione del Parlamento Nazionale del 1811*, in: *Atti dell'Accademia Nazionale di Scienze morali e politiche in Napoli*, vol. LXVIII, 1957, pp. 169–249, here: pp. 199 f.

64 Councillors of Intendency of Naples »Nota de' concorrenti a questa carica«, ASNa, Ministero dell'Interno, I inventario, folder 184 bis.

65 Saladino, *I collegi elettorali dei possidenti e dei commercianti*, pp. 199 f.

When examining the use of lists of words referring to different themes – which I have broadly classified under the rubrics of »misfortune«, »family«, and »merit« – some notable differences emerge.<sup>66</sup> A calculation of the relative frequencies – that is, investigating the use of the terms pertaining to the three themes by each category of applicants in proportion to the number of total occurrences – reveals a prevalence of the use of the »vocabulary of merit« by administrative officials. It also emerges that terms referring to personal misfortunes and family needs were used proportionally more by lawyers.<sup>67</sup> A calculation of the specificities, which outlines a tendency to overuse (positive specificity) or underuse (negative specificity) the terms relating to the three themes identified, shows more clearly the situation already sketched above. The area of merit is underrepresented in the applications of lawyers (–2), while the other two areas (misfortune and family) are over-represented (+3 and +4 respectively). Administrative officials, on the other hand, present an opposite situation, with both areas of misfortune and family being significantly underrepresented (–4 and –10 respectively).<sup>68</sup> This means that, compared to the other professional categories, administrative officials who applied for the post of councillor rarely mentioned their personal misfortunes and almost never mentioned their family needs. It is therefore likely that those who were already dealing with the Napoleonic administration understood what they had to focus on in order to be hired: showing their work experience, knowledge, and skills was more useful than insisting on the need to support children and relatives. Self-employed professionals, such as lawyers, meanwhile continued to use the rhetoric of the *Ancien Régime*, ai-

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66 Terms related to misfortune that have been identified: accagionato, annichilita, catastrofe, desolata, difficile, difficilissimi, disgrazia, disgraziato, distrussero, dolente, dolersi, dolgo, dolore, dolori, gravata, grave, gravi, guasti, incomodo, infelice, infelici, irreparabilmente, male, massacro, perdette, perdita, perdite, perdute, perduti, perduto, sciagurata, sciagure, sofferta, sofferte, sofferti, sofferto, soffri, soffrire, soffrirne, soffrono, soggiacere, sventurata, sventuratamente, triste. Terms related to merit: abilità, capace, cognizioni, competenza, conoscenza, esame, istruito, istruzioni, laurea, laureato, merita, meritar, meritare, meritargli, meritarle, meritato, meritava, meriti, merito, meritò, talenti, titoli, soddisfazione, zelo. Terms related to family: anziano, famiglia, famiglie, familiari, figli, figlio, fratel, fratelli, fratello, germani, germano, madre, mantenimento, maritato, marito, moglie, numerosa, parenti, prole, pupilli, sorelle.

67 Misfortune (lawyers: 64; administrative officials: 30); family (lawyers: 90; administrative officials: 27); merit (lawyers: 43; administrative officials: 64). The calculation of relative frequencies is based on the ratio: frequency of the theme in number of occurrences to the size of the section, multiplied by 10,000.

68 The method for this analysis using *Lexico 3* software is explained by Jean-Marc Leblanc in these terms: »According to the hypergeometric model, a form is noted as being specifically positive if its frequency in a section is higher than the expected theoretical frequency, and specifically negative if this frequency is lower than the set threshold. These probabilised frequencies are based on the comparison of four data points: the number of occurrences in the corpus, the number of occurrences in the section, the frequency of each form in the corpus and the frequency of each form in the section. The indicators represent the degree of specificity of each form and the absolute value of the probability exponent. An exponent of value 2 expresses a probability of the order of a hundredth, 3 of a thousandth.« *Jean-Marc Leblanc, Analyses lexicométriques des vœux présidentiels*, London 2017, p. 36.

med at eliciting the pity of the sovereign to obtain the 'gracious favour' of employment.<sup>69</sup>

A brief return to qualitative analysis confirms this observation. Benedetto Marra, controller of direct duties in Naples, gave two principal reasons in his application for the post of councillor of *Intendenza*: the first was that the previous councillor had held the same post and had been promoted precisely because of his knowledge of fiscal matters; and the second was that he had served the state for twenty-three years, having carried out many administrative tasks, which he carefully described. Finally, he added that his request was not motivated by a desire for enrichment, as the salary was about the same.<sup>70</sup> Similar arguments were put forward by the former bureau chief in the *Intendenza* of Naples, Nicola Marini. He emphasised the importance of the position he had held in the *Intendenza* for two years, before being appointed secretary of the royal health magistrate and later administrator of the former fief of Castel Volturno. He also specified that he had carried out his duties »with the exactitude, diligence and zeal« required both in administrative matters and in legal disputes, which were witnessed by both the substitute attorney general of the court of cassation, Davide Winspeare, and the councillor of state and intendant of the royal household, Luigi Macedonio. He added that his brother Salvatore Marini had served the Napoleonic government first as auditor in Catanzaro, then as criminal judge in Cosenza (province of Calabria Citeriore) and sub-intendant in Catanzaro, before becoming president of the criminal court of Monteleone (both in the province of Calabria Ulteriore).<sup>71</sup>

Antonio Catenacci, brother of the councillor of the *Intendenza* whose death had left the post vacant, put forward different arguments. He began his letter with a list of the positions held by his brother Bartolomeo, emphasising his devotion to public service and the fact that he was survived by two elderly parents and five brothers. He then underlined the suffering he had endured »because of his attachment« to the French »in the tragic events« that followed the Parthenopean Republic of 1799 – that is, during the Bourbon restoration. However, these unspecified sufferings had not earned him any appointments. In fact, he continued to practise as a lawyer in the courts of Naples. According to Catenacci, the recent »misfortune« that had befallen his family, together with the »serious damages suffered because of an attachment to the government« were valid and sufficient arguments for obtaining the appointment, and he repeated them as such in the final part of his letter.<sup>72</sup> The same rhetoric was used by numerous other applicants from outside the administration. For instance, the lawyer Liborio Galiani claimed that his family had been »one of the first victims of the persecution« under Bourbon rule, having lost a brother and

69 On appointments seen as being in the grace of the sovereign in the 18th-century Kingdom of Naples, see *Angelantonio Spagnoletti*, *Reclutamento e carriere dei magistrati provinciali nel sec. XVIII*, in: *Rivista storica del Sannio*, 1994, no. 1, pp. 9–29, here: p. 23.

70 Benedetto Marra to the king of Naples, 14. 12. 1812, ASNa, Ministero dell'Interno, I inventario, folder 184 bis.

71 Nicola Marini to the minister of the interior, undated but probably November 1812, ASNa, Ministero dell'Interno, I inventario, folder 184 bis.

72 Antonio Catenacci to the king of Naples, 1. 11. 1812, ASNa, Ministero dell'Interno, I inventario, folder 184 bis.

three uncles, who had been »cruelly slaughtered« in 1799. He had also suffered a »plundering« and a »seizure« of property and had been forced to take refuge in France with his parents, six sisters, and three other brothers. When the family came back to Naples with the return of the French, two brothers found public employment. Their salary, however, was not enough to support the »supplicant's large family«. By not citing any kind of skill or other evidence of the candidate's qualifications, Galiani's letter best exemplifies the case of those who appealed to the sovereign or to the minister of the interior for their benevolence and magnanimity.<sup>73</sup>

Who finally became councillor of the Intendency? On 1 April 1813, Pietro De Angelis was appointed, although I was unable to find any application from him. It must be said, however, that his appointment was short-lived, because on 23 January 1814 he was replaced by the aforementioned Nicola Marini, who held the post for much longer. He would appear to have been successful, for in 1817 – during the Bourbon restoration – he was confirmed and held the post until his death.<sup>74</sup>

## Conclusions

A few conclusions can be drawn from what has been said so far regarding the social composition of the Italian elites under Napoleonic rule. These were selected by the government and largely concentrated within the three Electoral Colleges of landowners, scholars, and merchants. Although this office was mainly honorary, among the members of the Electoral Colleges there were many individuals who were also actively engaged in the Napoleonic administration and held positions of power as well as prestige. At the local level these were the posts of prefect, vice-prefect, and prefectural councillor. They were often members of the Electoral College of landowners, which was considered the most prestigious, property being one of the cornerstones of the new regime. For this reason, the strong presence of *Ancien Régime* nobility within it might suggest a marked degree of social immobility. However, the situation was more complex.

In fact, the word »nobility« could encompass families of very different conditions. This is clearly illustrated by the stratified society of the territories of the former Venetian Republic, where only Venetian patricians had ruled before 1797. The nobility of the mainland, whether ancient or recent, had a purely local role, unless it was aggregated to the Venetian patriciate. The same applied to those *cittadini originari* who were secretaries in the main Venetian magistracies: although they embodied institutional continuity within the Republic, they were excluded from the highest offices of state. Finally, the only chance for the rich bourgeoisie to rise in society was to accede to the nobility of the mainland, by being co-opted into the city

73 Liborio Galiani to the minister of the interior, 11. 11. 1812, ASNa, Ministero dell'Interno, I inventario, folder 184 bis.

74 *Giuseppe Civile*, Appunti per una ricerca sulla amministrazione civile nelle province napoletane, in: *Quaderni storici* 13, 1978, no. 37, pp. 228–263, here: p. 257; *Pasquale Liberatore*, Della amministrazione pubblica considerata ne' suoi principii e nella loro applicazione per servire di prolegomeni alle istituzioni della legislazione amministrativa pel Regno delle Due Sicilie, Naples 1836, p. 185.

councils of Padua, Verona, etc., since direct access to the Venetian patriciate was much more difficult. Before the Revolution it was therefore society, and not the state, that defined the elites: the Venetian patricians co-opted the new families that met the requirements they set, and so did the nobility of the mainland in their respective city councils.

With the democratic *triennio* and the Napoleonic age this changed radically, and it was a long-lasting change that was not undermined by the Restoration. Social advancement came through service to the state, and it was the state, not internal co-optation mechanisms, that defined noble status. Once the old class barriers had fallen with the introduction of revolutionary legislation, the very concept of nobility was reshaped, becoming a substantially honorary status, devoid of jurisdictional prerogatives or tax privileges.<sup>75</sup> In the case of Veneto and Friuli, the disappearance of the Republic of Venice also meant the disappearance of the above-mentioned stratification, and therefore opened up new possibilities for non-patricians. By means of some examples I have shown how nobles from the mainland (Gaspari, Ferri, Porcia etc.), Venetian *cittadini originari* (such as Giacomazzi and Gervasoni), and members of the middle class (such as Antonio Quadri) managed to build a career within the Napoleonic administration and often to continue it in the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia.

As mentioned, those who were not interested in an administrative career could still consider themselves included in the Napoleonic elite, through membership of the Electoral Colleges, which besides landowners included scholars and merchants. Although poorly represented in the Napoleonic bureaucracy due to their commercial commitments, in Veneto merchants were the main beneficiaries of the new land legislation. They bought many of the secularised ecclesiastical possessions sold as national properties, as well as large estates sold by indebted nobles, which were no longer protected by the inalienability guaranteed by the *fideicommissum*.

The social rise of the bourgeoisie therefore began in these years, but became more evident in the following decades, as purchases and sales changed the land structure of the region. Emblematic in this respect is the figure of the banker Giuseppe Treves, president of the Venice Chamber of Commerce, and a prominent member of the Venetian Jewish community, who received one of the new noble titles – purely honorary – created by the Kingdom of Italy. In the 1820s and 1830s his family was ennobled by the Austrians and crowned its social rise by purchasing a palace on the Grand Canal.<sup>76</sup>

Indeed, it took a few decades for the social engineering that had been undertaken in the Napoleonic era to be consolidated. It was based on property, as mentioned, but also on merit. Merit, however, is a polysemic term, which may include

75 Marco Meriggi, *State and Society in Post-Napoleonic Italy*, in: David Laven/Lucy Riall (eds.), *Napoleon's Legacy. Problems of government in Restoration Europe*, Oxford/New York 2000, pp. 52 and 56.

76 Gaspari, *Terra patrizia*, pp. 109 and 132.



knowledge and skills, but also seniority or political loyalty.<sup>77</sup> There is no doubt, however, that it was underpinned by the notion of competition: for the first time, *Ancien Régime* nobles felt that they were also competing with the bourgeoisie. Even for them, a university degree was increasingly becoming a necessity, hence in the first decades of the 19th century – even after the end of the Napoleonic governments, which had given much importance to education – the number of students enrolled in universities grew significantly.<sup>78</sup>

Despite their propaganda, the governments of Restoration Italy were not turning back the clock. On the contrary, they welcomed some of the innovations introduced in previous years. These included the abolition of the feudal system and other institutions of the ancient regime, and the creation of a modern bureaucratic apparatus controlled from the centre, which some monarchs retained almost unchanged. In the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia prefects were called provincial delegates, while in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies the administrative staff, which often remained in office, even kept the Napoleonic name (the intendants, for instance). Sometimes there was an immediate noble backlash, but it faded quickly, leaving room for a new »school of professional bureaucrats«. <sup>79</sup>

As these changes were profound, but took time to be fully felt, their understanding was mixed. When applying for a job in the Napoleonic administration, some candidates appealed to very traditional arguments, such as financial constraints and family needs, conceiving of the employment as a favour granted by the sovereign's grace, rather than a recognition of their individual merit. Others combined traditional elements – such as use of letters of recommendation and reference to family merit – with more modern ones, such as academic qualifications, languages spoken, or skills demonstrated in carrying out their duties. Some were willing to serve far away from their city, showing an awareness of what was required of a professional official. The case study of the aspiring councillors of the Intendenza of Naples, on which I applied quantitative analysis, suggests that the difference between the former and the latter was experience within the bureaucracy. Compared to those who were already »inside the system«, the others – mostly lawyers – were more likely to use a rhetoric steeped in the »vocabulary of misfortune«. This conclusion suggests that it was the contact with the new governments that favoured the assimilation of their vision, and thus the penetration of new elements into a traditional and consolidated rhetoric.<sup>80</sup> Further analysis comparing different areas of the Italian peninsula may corroborate or modify it, revealing how pervasive were both new and traditional elements. As demonstrated by recent studies on France and Prus-

77 Pansini describes the first as talents and the second as merits, *Valeria Pansini*, Pour une histoire concrète du talent: les sélections méritocratiques et le coup d'œil du topographe, in: *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 2008, no. 354, pp. 5–27, here: p. 21.

78 *Elena Brambilla*, Selezione delle élites tra vecchi e nuovi luoghi di educazione (da fine Settecento all'età napoleonica), in: *Gianfranco Tortorelli* (ed.), *Educare la nobiltà*, Bologna 2005, pp. 37–41.

79 *Meriggi*, *State and Society in Post-Napoleonic Italy*, p. 55.

80 Although in 19th-century Italy they were still vulgarly called pleas (*suppliche*), many letters based on the candidate's qualifications were applications for employment. In fact, a manual of literature for secondary schools of the Kingdom of Italy specified that the *supplica* was based solely on »one's own need and the goodness and generosity of the person« addressed. *Enrico Catterino Sinibaldi*, *Saggio teoretico e pratico di letteratura italiana*, Modena 1877, p. 454.

sia<sup>81</sup>, this may offer a new perspective from which elites can be observed, through an approach which combines social, cultural, and administrative history.

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81 *Chappey/Lilti*, *L'écrivain face à l'État*; *Strunz*, *Organizing careers for work*; *Cohen*, *Le recrutement des cours impériales*; *id.*, *Commis et fonctionnaires entre service du public et droits de l'individu, de 1792 à l'an IV*, in: *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 2017, no. 389, pp. 101–117; *Virginie Martin*, *Devenir diplomate en Révolution: naissance de la «carrière diplomatique»?*, in: *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 63, 2016, no. 3, pp. 110–135; *Aurelien Lignereux*, *Les Impériaux. Administrer et habiter l'Europe de Napoléon*, Paris 2019.