

STEFANIA BIANCHI, MIRIAM NICOLI (EDS.)

WOMEN'S VOICES

Echoes of Life Experiences in the Alps and the Plain
(17th-19th Century)

HISTOIRE



WOMEN'S VOICES

**ECHOES OF LIFE EXPERIENCES IN THE ALPS
AND THE PLAIN (17th-19th CENTURIES)**

EDITED BY STEFANIA BIANCHI & MIRIAM NICOLI

WOMEN'S VOICES

ECHOES OF LIFE EXPERIENCES IN THE ALPS
AND THE PLAIN (17th-19th CENTURIES)

WITH A FOREWORD OF ANNE MONTENACH

ÉDITIONS ALPHIL-PRESSES UNIVERSITAIRES SUISSES

© Éditions Alphil-Presses universitaires suisses, 2023
Rue du Tertre 10
2000 Neuchâtel
Switzerland

www.aphil.ch

Alphil Distribution
commande@aphil.ch

DOI: 10.33055/ALPHIL.00557

ISBN paperback 978-2-88930-521-6

ISBN PDF 978-2-88930-522-3

ISBN epub 978-2-88930-523-0

All the essays passed a double-blind peer review.

The present volume is part of the research project “Traces de vie vécue. Parcours d’hommes et de femmes au prisme des écrits du for privé (Tessin et Grisons, fin xvii^e-première moitié xix^e siècles)”, directed by Miriam Nicoli and financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (grant number 168122).

This publication was made possible through the support of the following institutions: *Friedrich-Emil Welti Fonds* (Universität Bern), *Centre interdisciplinaire de recherche sur la montagne* (Université de Lausanne), *Faculté des Lettres* (Université de Lausanne), *Fondazione Felix Leemann* (Lugano), *Fondazione Agnese e Agostino Maletti* (Mendrisio).

The Éditions Alphil have structural support from the Federal Office of Culture for the years 2021-2024.

Cover image: Luigi Rossi (1853-1923), *L’eco*, watercolour on paper, 1912, 52 x 75 cm.
© Casa Museo Luigi Rossi, Capriasca

This text is under license:



This text is under a Creative Commons license: it requires, if you use this writing, to cite the author, the source and the original publisher, without modifications to the text or the extract and without commercial use.

Cover layout: Nusbaumer-graphistes sàrl, www.nusbaumer.ch

Anne Montenach

Foreword

For a long time, mountain women have been seen through the eyes of men, travellers, doctors or administrators who discovered Alpine villages in the 18th century. Comparing mountain women to pack animals to be exploited by men and growing old before their time were a regular *topos* of scientific and travel literature on the Alps. Given perceptions of mountains as peripheral and marginal territories and of valleys as areas of gender imbalance due to male emigration, the role of women has long been considered to be subsidiary in a restricted area characterized by immobility and passivity. Following on from seminal works by Raul Merzario and Pier Paolo Viazzo, recent historiography has challenged this very reductive image of mountain women. Numerous studies have now shown that women's activities were crucial for mountain communities while highlighting the diversity of roles and of autonomy they enjoyed.

The articles presented in this collective volume contribute to this historiographical renewal. They focus on the French, Italian and Swiss Alpine and pre-Alpine areas, offering a kaleidoscope of micro-regions from the 17th to the mid-19th centuries: these territories shared a number of features, but were also influenced by various legal or religious contexts circulating throughout this period.

This book focuses on an observation widely shared by gender historians, as recalled by Patrizia Audenino in her conclusion: if women have remained invisible for so long, it is not because of a lack of sources, but because the available sources have not always been properly analysed. In all these contributions, the common thread is clearly the importance of hearing the long-silenced voices of women. This approach is not without its difficulties and it is to the credit of the authors and editors of this book – Stefania Bianchi and Miriam Nicoli – that they have been able to overcome the methodological obstacles involved in bringing together extremely diverse sources.

Some of these sources had never been exploited before, while others are more traditional but have benefited from a fresh approach. Patience and inventiveness are required when seeking to glimpse women's lives from beneath statements by husbands or male judicial officers and when taking roundabout routes to find women – too often overshadowed or invisible in written sources. It is generally thought that women have left few direct traces of their lives. However, precious ego-documents (journals, personal testimonies), private papers (account books) and the correspondence of well-born women can be uncovered and these have been meticulously exploited in this volume. Court documents, criminal proceedings, notary deeds, parish archives, papers of charitable institutions and confraternities, together with more unexpected documents such as *ex-votos* or large genealogical databases, have also been studied by the authors. Collectively, they allow us to identify circumstances in which women could make their voices heard and have their words recorded, regardless of constraints or domination that trapped so many women. Throughout these contributions, the texture of women's lives in the Western Alps and pre-Alps is displayed against the background of their personal, familial and collective experiences and trajectories.

The women we will meet in the following pages were obviously not a homogeneous group. They came from different social categories, from female members of the noble or merchant classes to the poorest villagers. Some were young girls about to be married, others young mothers, dutiful wives or widows; many had minor children in their

care. The authors have explored the wide variety of their situations, indicative of the diverse roles they assumed within their family, village and parish: they were responsible for educating their children and, in many cases, taking on financial and managerial responsibilities in place of their husbands working far away. It was the women who maintained the family's relationships and helped ensure its cohesion as part of the wider community in which they lived.

Alongside the authors' shared interest in the lived experience of women, insofar as it can be perceived, a second common theme is agency. As stated in the introduction and conclusion, this concept has been revived and revisited by recent historical research. Here, agency provides a key for reading and interpreting the ways in which these women sought, at various levels, to control their own lives. Agency is also expressed in nuances within the contexts in which these women lived.

Everywhere, the law determined the status of women and provided a framework for their actions, but, on occasion, it could provide them with room for manoeuvre. Although not exhaustive on this point, several contributions shed light on local situations within the kaleidoscope of legal regimes existing in the Alps prior to the introduction of the Napoleonic Code. In many regions, due to the high rate of male emigration, other roles and margins of manoeuvre opened up for women. Sometimes, a husband's incapacity might force a woman to protect the interests of their children and the family property. In an "economy of absence" that characterized many Alpine and pre-Alpine areas, women were able to exercise power of attorney and thus circumvent institutional obstacles, which allowed them to enjoy a certain independence in the daily management of family affairs. They could control the financial resources of the household or the domain, supervise family assets, make decisions and, in some cases, leave the strict confines of their home and travel. Occasionally, circumstances forced them to assert their authority and autonomy in the presence of men. All these actions required competence, knowledge and expertise, from the ability to read, write and count to specific botanic, medical, agricultural or business knowledge: as shown in the careful

and thorough examination of various and sometimes unexpected documents discussed in this volume.

Here we see female spaces for action in a variety of contexts, within the family and the domestic sphere but also in a number of other, often quite complex, situations. Living in a strictly controlled social and religious environment, women were particularly scrutinized to ensure protection of their honour and physical safety. However, attempts to see them as helpless were often defeated by their ability to defend their reputation before the courts and their own communities and in their assistance to other women threatened by social exclusion. Overall, while situations of social isolation and dependence on a violent husband could lead to resignation and mental distress, female networks created bonds of solidarity, trust and protection which helped them confront periods of difficulty. Female – and male – social capital was therefore a reality, as can be seen in the mass of correspondence between elite women throughout Europe. Furthermore, devotional societies and brotherhoods were increasingly open to female members, though their sexuality was seen as “deviant” by religious authorities, and provided them with mutual support and respectability. Female solidarity was crucial for poor women whose freedom was seriously limited and who often found themselves trapped in relationships of dependence.

In fact, research on female agency has led to an examination of power dynamics at different levels and of their evolution over time and space. In the absence of men, noble women who controlled the purse strings for their domains were able to develop considerable agency, as can be seen in their account books and diaries. Although poor women had fewer freedoms than noblewomen, they often found solidarity in certain circumstances and were able to take advantage of opportunities that emerged, as shown in several articles here. Sometimes, an outside observer – a priest, a judge or a doctor – might provide insight into women’s formal and informal powers. The great merit of these presentations lies in their ability to identify and reconstruct the, often tenuous, traces of such unequal situations by exploring a variety of sources. They show that women could take the initiative and develop strategies for creating space for action. They were able to interpret

their situation and knew how to take advantage of the material and immaterial resources at their disposal within their family or community. The circulation of money among women emerges as a common feature that deserves further study. Here again, female actions and stratagems mobilized in various contexts served different goals: poor women could call on charitable institutions to supplement the family income or finance an economic project, while others sought to restore their honour tarnished by rape or attempted rape by making use of informal practices thanks to community solidarity. During a period of religious conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism, the church would often offer a refuge, but might also become an instrument for resistance in the hands of clever and pragmatic female protagonists, as in the example of the Waldesian women and their ad hoc conversions to Catholicism. Women should not be systematically presented as victims – of men or male institutions – as they can also take on an active and positive role within their couple, household or community.

Overall, the contributions in this volume highlight the multifaceted construction, negotiation and affirmation of female identity throughout the Western Alps and the surrounding regions. The expression of self emerges in many different contexts and women's voices and agency can be found in a wide range of often unexpected sources. Not only does each chapter provide a precious contribution to our knowledge of mountain women between the 17th and mid-19th centuries but it also confirms the central position of the Alps as a fertile observatory in the history of women and gender and encourages further exploration and comparisons.



Stefania Bianchi and Miriam Nicoli

Introduction

Thanks to the many up-to-date historical, geographical and anthropological studies, the Alpine and pre-Alpine world is becoming more and more visible, appearing no longer as a marginal area but as a dynamic entity in a global economic system¹, now described as an authentic “laboratory of itinerancy”². Research has shed light on a multiform political, economic, linguistic, religious and cultural reality, which constitutes a true “mosaic of microcosms with marked vocations and identities”³, influenced by various forms of hereditary

¹ See, for example, FONTAINE Laurence, *Histoire du colportage en Europe, XVI-XVIII siècle*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1993; RADEFF Anne, *Du café dans le chaudron: économie globale d’Ancien Régime (Suisse occidentale, Franche-Comté et Savoie)*, Lausanne, Société d’Histoire de la Suisse Romande, 1996; FONTANA Giovanni Luigi, LEONARDI Andrea, TREZZI Luigi (eds.), *Mobilità imprenditoriale e del lavoro nelle Alpi in età moderna e contemporanea*, Milan, CUESP, 1998; LEGGERO Roberto (ed.), *Montagne, comunità e lavoro tra XIV e XVIII secolo*, Mendrisio, Mendrisio Academy Press, 2015; DENZEL Markus A. et alii (eds.), *Oeconomia Alpium*, 2 vols, Berlin; Boston, DeGruyter, 2017 and 2022.

² See WALTER François, *Histoire de la Suisse. L’âge classique (1600-1750)*, t. II, Neuchâtel, Alphil, 2009, p. 52. More in general, see HOLENSTEIN André, KURY Patrick, SCHULZ Kristina, *Schweizer Migrationsgeschichte: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, Baden, Hier und Jetzt, 2018.

³ Un “mosaico di microcosmi segnati da spiccate vocazioni e identità”: LORENZETTI Luigi, MERZARIO Raul, *Il fuoco acceso. Famiglie e migrazioni alpine nell’Italia d’età moderna*, Rome, Donzelli, 2005, p. vii.

transmission⁴, natural resources and specific migratory forms, as well as a nature that required constant adaptability. One need only recall that the Alpine area extends from the Maritime Alps to the eastern Alps, which are of varying altitude, and involves eight European nations⁵.

These differentiated characteristics influenced gender relations as well as women's destinies. The Alpine and pre-Alpine regions, which are no longer seen as a caesura but as a hinge between the Mediterranean and Atlantic or continental geographies⁶, where

⁴ Dionigi Albera has described the hereditary systems as follow: the Bauer model, widespread in the eastern Alps, by which the inheritance goes to the eldest male alone; the male kinship model, present in the eastern and southern Alps, entailing a division of the inheritance among the sons and a dowry for the daughters; and the bourgeois model, common in the central regions, dividing the inheritance equally among sons and daughters. See ALBERA Dionigi, *Au fil des générations. Terre, pouvoir et parenté dans l'Europe alpine (XIV^e-XX^e siècles)*, Grenoble, Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 2011.

⁵ France, the Principality of Monaco, Italy, Switzerland, the Principality of Lichtenstein, Germany, Austria and Slovenia. Jon Mathieu estimates the population of the Alps at 4,000,000 around 1600; 4,400,000 around 1700 and 5,300,000 around 1800. See MATHIEU Jon, *Geschichte der Alpen 1500-1900: Umwelt, Entwicklung, Gesellschaft*, Vienna; Cologne; Weimar, Böhlau Verlag, 1998.

⁶ It would be impossible here to summarize the long bibliography concerning the Alps. Without trying to be exhaustive, here are some works of reference: BASSETTI Piero et alii (eds.), *Le Alpi in Europa*, 5 vols, Rome; Bari, Laterza, 1974-1975; BERGIER Jean-François (ed.), *Histoire des Alpes. Perspectives nouvelles – Geschichte der Alpen in neuer Sicht*, Basel, Schwabe, 1979; GUICHONNET Paul (ed.), *Histoire et civilisations des Alpes*, Toulouse; Lausanne, Privat; Payot, 1980; VIAZZO Pier Paolo, *Upland Communities. Environment, Population and Social Structure in the Alps since the Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989 (republished in Italy with an afterword by the author: *Comunità alpine. Ambiente, popolazione, struttura sociale nelle Alpi dal XVI secolo ad oggi*, Rome, Carocci, 2001); COPPOLA Gauro, SCHIERA Pierangelo, *Lo spazio alpino: area di civiltà, regione cerniera*, Naples, Liguori, 1991; BERGIER Jean-François, GUZZI Sandro (eds.), *La découverte des Alpes*, Basel, Schwabe, 1992 (Itinera 12); WALTER François (ed.), *Quand la montagne aussi a une histoire. Mélanges offerts à Jean-François Bergier*, Bern, P. Haupt, 1996; MATHIEU JON, *Geschichte der Alpen 1500-1900...*; CESCHI Raffaello, *Nel labirinto delle valli. Uomini e terre di una regione alpina: la Svizzera italiana*, Bellinzona, Casagrande, 1999; ALBERA Dionigi, CORTI Paola (eds.), *La montagna mediterranea: una fabbrica d'uomini? Mobilità e migrazioni in una prospettiva comparata (secoli XV-XX)*, Cavallermaggiore, Gribaudo, 2000; FONTAINE Laurence, *Pouvoir, identité et migration dans les Alpes occidentales, XVII^e-XVIII^e siècle*, Grenoble, Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 2003; REICHLER Claude, *Entdeckung einer Landschaft: Reisende,*

substantial economic, social and cultural exchanges intersected, also gave women a voice, a voice that was sometimes loud and clear, but often soft and whispered⁷.

The contributions in this collective volume aim to reassess, in a society in constant movement, the female roles that filled in for the departed menfolk, generating socio-economic structures comparable to those of other geographical and socio-economic areas affected precisely by the economy of absence⁸. Examining hitherto unpublished sources, the studies – centred on Italy, France and Switzerland,

Schriftsteller, Künstler und ihre Alpen, Zurich, Rotpunktverlag, 2005; DIONIGI Albera, LORENZETTI Luigi, MATHIEU Jon (ed.), *Reframing the History of Family and Kinship: From the Alps towards Europe*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2017; LORENZETTI Luigi (ed.), *Le Alpi di Clio*, Locarno, Dadò, 2020. See also the various special issues of the journal *Histoire des Alpes – Storia delle Alpi – Geschichte der Alpen*, organ of the *Associazione internazionale per la Storia delle Alpi* founded in 1995 and issues of the journal *L'Alpe* founded in 1998 in collaboration with the Musée dauphinois.

⁷ This volume continues the reflections on female roles and presence in the Alps that began in the 1990s. For the modern period, we give some general studies as examples: AUDENINO Patrizia, “Le custodi della montagna: donne e migrazioni stagionali in una comunità alpina”, in: CORTI Paola (ed.), *Società rurale e ruoli femminili in Italia tra Ottocento e Novecento*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1990 (Annali dell’Istituto Alcide Cervi 12), pp. 265-287; GRANDI Casimira, “Emigrazione alpina al femminile: lo spazio del possibile (secc. 17-20)”, *Histoire des Alpes- Storia delle Alpi- Geschichte der Alpen* 3, 1998, pp. 49-62; ROSENBERG Henriette G., *Un mondo negoziato. Tre secoli di trasformazioni in una comunità alpina del Queyras*, preface by Pier-Paolo Viazzo, Rome, Carocci, 2000 (first English edition 1988); FONTAINE, Laurence, “La montagna fabbrica di donne: une vision pionnière dans l’étude des migrations montagnardes”, in: LORENZETTI Luigi, LEVATI Stefano (eds.), *Dalla Sila alle Alpi. L’itinerario storiografico di Raul Merzario*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2008, pp. 37-44; GUZZI-HEEB Sandro, *Donne, uomini, parentela: Casati alpini nell’Europa preindustriale (1650-1850)*, Turin, Rosenberg & Sellier, 2008; VALSANGIACOMO Nelly, LORENZETTI, Luigi (eds.), *Donne e lavoro: prospettive per una storia delle montagne europee XVIII-XX secc.*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2010; MONTENACH Anne, *Femmes, pouvoirs et contrebande dans les Alpes au XVIII^e siècle*, Grenoble, Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 2017; BIANCHI Stefania, *Uomini che partono. Scorci di storia della Svizzera italiana (secoli XIX-XIX)*, Bellinzona, Casagrande, 2018 (in particular the chapter Donne e migrazione). And “Une montagne au féminin?”, *L’Alpe* 12, 2001, respectively “Donne di montagna”, *L’Alpe* 4, 2001.

⁸ On this topic, see CHARPENTIER Emmanuelle, GRENIER Benoît (eds.), *Femmes face à l’absence, Bretagne et Québec (XVII^e-XVIII^e siècles)*, Quebec, CIEQ, 2015 and the recent volume CHARPENTIER Emmanuelle, GRENIER Benoît (eds.), *Le temps suspendu. Une histoire des femmes mariées par-delà les silences et l’absence*, Pessac, MSHA, 2022.

with references to the German-speaking world – seek to bring out the range of opportunities that gave women a voice either through acquired expertise or knowledge handed down, both in and outside the urban centres.

The scientific and methodological conjectures, which interact reciprocally in the contributions, are based both on decades of historiography of the Alpine world and on more recent work linked to the history of women and gender studies⁹. Part of the Swiss National Science Foundation Ambizione project *Traces of lives lived. Men and women's life trajectories recorded in personal writings (17th-first half of 19th centuries)*, directed by Miriam Nicoli, this volume aims to show the importance of studying individual paths and family trajectories so as to give more substance to differences in behaviour and mentality. There are, in fact, many variables to consider, not only regarding social stratification and sex but also civil status, the phases of life and the female condition, both in the Church and in society. An important role is also played by the women's attitude towards obstacles, which for many of them turned into resignation in the face of male aggressiveness.

Understanding and working on women's lives does not make us mere biographers¹⁰. As Joan W. Scott has already pointed out, working

⁹ The category of gender, introduced in historical research during the 1980s (see SCOTT Joan W., "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", *American Historical Review* 91/5, 1986, pp. 1053-1075), has spread rapidly and in many ways, so that it is impossible to summarize the many works that have now led research to take a greater interest in the history of social relations between the sexes and the historical construction of sexual identities. Here we simply note two summaries that critically discuss the historiography of women's history and gender history: the thematic dossier "Storia delle donne e storia di genere. Metodi e percorsi di ricerca", *Contemporanea* 13/2, 2010, pp. 303-342, and the volume that emerged from a 2016 conference on the state of research twenty-five years after the publication in France of *L'Histoire des femmes en Occident* and twenty years after the publication in Italy of *Storia delle donne in Italia*, ASQUER ENRICA, BELLAVITIS ANNA, CALVI GIULIA, CHABOT ISABELLE, LA ROCCA CRISTINA, MARTINI MANUELA (eds.), *Vingt cinq ans après. Les femmes au rendez-vous de l'histoire*, Rome, École Française de Rome, 2019.

¹⁰ For some thoughts on methodology, see POMATA Gianna, "Close-Ups and Long Shots: Combining Particular and General in Writing the Histories of Women and Men", in: TREPP ANNE-CHARLOTTE, MEDICK HANS (eds.), *Geschlechtergeschichte und*

on experience is methodologically important for interpreting from a critical perspective what, until today, historiography has left aside or undervalued¹¹. Focusing on the texture of life enables us to give greater weight to personal implications and thus enrich – anthropologically – the important demographic research on mountain regions that has quantified the imbalance between the sexes and the high number of unmarried people¹². At the same time, we look at the specifics of women in the Alps in those studies that deal with gender through the prism of agency, an analytical concept of great significance in recent years¹³.

allgemeine Geschichte: Herausforderungen und Perspektiven, Göttingen, Wallstein, 1998, pp. 99-124.

¹¹ SCOTT Joan W., “The Evidence of Experience”, *Critical Inquiry* 17/4, 1991, pp. 773-797.

¹² Without making any claims to completeness, on Alpine demography, we refer to: MERZARIO Raul, *Il paese stretto: strategie matrimoniali nella diocesi di Como, secoli XVI-XVIII*, Turin, Einaudi, 1981; VIAZZO Pier Paolo, *Upland Communities...*; HEAD-KÖNIG Anne-Lise, “Malthus dans les Alpes: La diversité des systèmes de régulation démographique dans l’arc alpin du XVI^e au début du XX^e siècle”, in: WALTER François (ed.), *Quand la montagne aussi a une histoire...*, pp. 361-370; LORENZETTI Luigi, *Économie et migrations au XIX^e siècle: les stratégies de la reproduction familiale au Tessin*, Bern, P. Lang, 1999; FORNASIN Alessio, ZANNINI Andrea (eds.), *Uomini e comunità delle montagne. Paradigmi e specificità del popolamento dello spazio montano (secoli XVI-XX)*, Udine, Forum, 2002.

For reflections on historical demography and women’s history, see HAED-KÖNIG Anne-Lise, “Demographic History and its Perception on Women from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century”, in: OFFEN Karen, PIERSON Ruth Roach, RENDALL Jane (eds.), *Writing Women’s History: International Perspectives*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991, pp. 25-44. On the importance of contextualizing the demographic approach through the prism of lived experience, see ORIS Michel, BURNET Guy, DE LUCA BARRUSSE Virginie, GAUVREAU Danielle (eds.), *Une démographie au féminin: risques et opportunités dans le parcours de vie - A female demography: risks and chances in the life course*, Bern; New York, Peter Lang, 2009.

¹³ The term “agency” returns systematically in the titles of the most recent gender literature. See, for example: CALVI Giulia (ed.), *Women Rulers in Europe. Agency, Practice and the Representation of Political Powers (XII-XVIII)*, Florence, EUI Working Papers HEC, 2008; PERSON Andrea G. (ed.), *Women and Portraits in Early Modern Europe: Gender, Agency, and Identity*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008; KANE Bronach, WILLIAMSON Fiona (eds.), *Women, Agency, and the Law, 1300-1700*, London, Pickering & Chatto, 2013; SIMONTON Deborah, MONTENACH Anne (eds.), *Female Agency in the urban Economy. Gender in European Towns, 1640-1830*, New York, Routledge, 2013; HOWELL Martha, “The Problem of Women’s Agency in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe”, in: MORAN Sarah J., PIPKIN Amanda C. (eds.),

Apart from making considerations on the many limitations that effectively influence women's destinies, the analytical concept of agency enables us to study women as social actors, able to act creatively and intentionally, thus breaking the preconceived idea of immobility. In these essays, the notion of agency is not understood as a subversive, conscious or direct resistance to male authority or the model of patriarchy, but rather as a series of attitudes, such as the capacity to negotiate, the acquisition of experience as a tool of autonomy, the affirmation of oneself and one's desires and the weaving of personal networks. In this way, other spaces of presence and female activities emerge that open the way to new research that can critically discuss the roles, expertise and sentiments of both sexes.

To what extent did the socio-economic structure of the Alps and pre-Alps between the 17th and early 19th century influence destinies? What kind of "powers" – formal and informal – did women exercise in these regions? What modus operandi did they develop to make their voices heard, protect their propriety and handle situations of conflict? How did men and women negotiate the changes induced by social and political changes in gender relations?

Answering these questions is no easy task, partly because women left few direct traces in the studied period and geographical areas. The authors who have contributed to this volume have, however, taken up the challenge to clear this hurdle, reading or rereading with fresh eyes the archival sources and following the women's voices, which were often filtered through a male society and expressed through public documents, personal testimonies, received or written letters, depositions or membership of welfare institutions and confraternities¹⁴.

Women and Gender in the Early Modern Low Countries, 1500-1750, Leiden; Boston, Brill, 2019, pp. 21-31.

¹⁴ This operation was also made possible by an important quantitative computerization of sources and archival, genealogical and iconographic data. See, for example, the platform ViaticAlpes, devoted to the experience of travelling in the Alps: www.unil.ch/viaticAlpes.

Dealing with women in all their complexity and in their constant interaction with the male world, the studies, which take into account the specific contributions of various historical disciplines, run along four thematic axes that are crucial factors in the balance of life: family, religion, norms and the body¹⁵. The essays cover the period from the Ancien Régime to the early 19th century, a time of change in both mentality and law, partly as a result of the Napoleonic Code, which was widespread in the Alps and had a decisive and regressive effect on gender relations. The writers move constantly between mountain and plain, revealing a dualism of mutual influence and complementary relations¹⁶. In fact, the limiting element that necessarily makes “ordinary” women more present and active is in some ways the result of a syllogism of the geographical context that is repeated in the essays.

The decisive ingredient, inherent in the different geographical contexts, is mobility, which implies demographic, economic and cultural openness and an indirect emancipation. This, in turn, quickly becomes a form of integration centred mainly on specific aspects¹⁷.

Agency and daily life: material needs and feelings in women’s writings

By exploring chosen paths and given paths, the first section deals with female roles and family ties and culture by studying private papers held in the archives of both Catholic and Protestant families. Female egodocuments are still relatively unknown for mountain regions and

¹⁵ On the importance of combining gender history methodology with the methodology of other branches of history, see CALVI Giulia (ed.), *Innesti. Donne e genere nella storia sociale*, Rome, Viella, 2004.

¹⁶ On this topic, see in particular the special issue of the journal *Histoire des Alpes – Storia delle Alpi – Geschichte der Alpen* entitled *Ville et montagne – Stadt und Gebirge*, published in 2000.

¹⁷ If it is true that absence led to an increase in women’s workload, thanks to “*phenomena of improved literacy and increased independence for women*”, it also “*activated irreversible mechanisms of participation in the crucial changes in family existence*”. See AUDENINO Patrizia, “Le custodi della montagna...”, p. 287.

are here considered critically so as to investigate not only the culture and literacy of women in the Alpine elites, but also the strategies deployed to create for themselves a space of action in daily life. Starting from different situations, albeit ones rooted in upper-bourgeois and minor aristocratic socio-economic contexts, the contributions show that relations were a capital for women, providing wealth but also protection. The “web of relations”¹⁸, skilfully woven in part through letters, became indispensable for sustaining female agency¹⁹, women’s multiple activities and consequent self-awareness.

Miriam Nicoli’s *A Network of Words: Three Generations of Women in the Records of an Alpine Family (18th-19th Centuries)*, analysing women’s writings held in the private archive of the a Marca family of Mesocco, concentrates on the culture and possibilities available to women in a Catholic Alpine valley in Switzerland. The essay illustrates the developing destinies that intertwine in time and space (Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Austria), weaving a solid family network that testifies to the importance of family ties and a capital of relations to draw on. It suggests that for mountain regions, too, teaching women to interact through letter writing was an important part of female education, and not only for the elites.

In the essay entitled *Writing in Absence: Being Seigneuses in the French Pre-Alps in the 18th Century*, Camille Caparos takes a comparative approach to the extensive papers of two women in the French Alps. One is Françoise (1724-after 1791), the young wife of Alexandre de Robert d’Escragnolle, who – because of her husband’s prolonged absence – gradually took over his powers and capacities and became the “*seigneuse d’Escragnolles*”. Her correspondence, which is held in the departmental archives of the Alpi Marittime, illustrates the process by which she became autonomous and in charge of her actions. The

¹⁸ FERRANTE Lucia, PALAZZI Maura, POMATA Gianna (eds.), *Ragnatele di rapporti. Patronage e reti di relazioni nella storia delle donne*, Turin, Rosenberg & Sellier, 1988.

¹⁹ The importance of social networks for supporting female agency in the urban economy is brilliantly underlined in several contributions to the following volume: SIMONTON Deborah, MONTENACH Anne (eds.), *Female Agency in the Urban Economy. Gender in European Towns, 1640-1830*, New York, Routledge, 2013.

other is Henriette Louise de Fresse de Monval (1755-1825), pupil of Madame de Maintenon at Saint-Cyr, an astute and cultivated woman. On becoming a widow, she was made heiress and the guardian of her sons and goods, equal to a *pater familias*, and supervised the family estate scrupulously and effectively. Lady of Monval painstakingly kept accounts in the household ledgers and managed to safeguard the family lands despite the tumult of revolution.

In contrast to these texts, the essay entitled *Sabine Gonzenbach's Report About her Unhappy Marriage, or an Egodocument With a "Second Truth"* by Ernest Menolfi takes us to a town in the plains. The author demonstrates that social isolation could lead to a situation of dependence, violence and resignation. This is what happened to Sabine Gonzenbach (1774-about 1830), wife of Julius Hieronymus Schlatter, merchant of St. Gallen – a rich, overbearing man. Focusing on the request for divorce made in 1798, of which we have two versions (Sabine's draft and the official one, revised by her father and a lawyer), Menolfi highlights the marital distress and the reasons for the separation, revealing Sabine's point of view. The shortcomings in this relationship, which gradually deprived Sabine of her own living and relational space, reduced the woman to a state of mental confusion.

Faith and belonging: personal freedoms within the confines defined by communities and confraternities

The essays in the second section bring a fresh perspective to the now abundant studies on the relationship between women and religion, illustrating how women in the Alps could access resources, whether these were material or immaterial goods. The authors investigate how women, caught in a space balanced precariously between the Catholic and Protestant worlds, negotiated faith, moral control and private interests, also dwelling on the process of the female polarization of Catholicism during the 19th century. Religious commitment is furthermore considered through intersections within the community and specific features of the local and domestic context.

In *Women, Religious Conversions and Waldensianism: Persistence and Room for Action (17th and 18th Centuries)*, Marco Bettassa examines the relationship between the female condition and belonging to a religious minority in Sabaudan Piedmont through three sources – the minutes of Synods, the registers of the Banks of the Poor and the lists of the Hospice of Catechumens – that describe the stratagems that women in a state of destitution adopted to survive. Challenging the authorities, some of them did not hesitate to renounce Waldensianism. Having pocketed the allowance offered by the Catholic Church to converts, they returned to their valleys with few qualms, (re)marrying Protestant men. These attitudes illustrate the complexity of the processes of confessional disciplining, showing how religion was both a tool and a refuge.

Sandro Guzzi-Heeb, in *Women, Sex, Religion: Evolutions in Gender Relations in an Alpine Society between 1700 and 1850*, considers the social and behavioural changes in the 18th and 19th centuries in Liddes, a village in the Swiss Alps. Considering the evolution of traditional practices and sexual customs, the essay shows how local society and the Church sometimes came into direct conflict on matters connected with the public and private spheres. Registering increased sexual freedom, Guzzi-Heeb examines the responses of the community. He notes a certain tolerance on the part of the women themselves to also maintain solid social cohesion, which was favoured by their membership of confraternal groups, in a historical period of strong political instability that weakened the “official” religious institutions and alienated those with traditional affiliations.

In *An Increasingly Gendered Religion: the Targeted Audience of Brotherhoods in the Valais Alps (18th-19th centuries)*, drawing partly on the resources of the important genealogical databank developed by the Centre regional d'études des populations alpines²⁰, Aline Johner carefully examines male and female membership of the confraternities of the Swiss communities of Martigny, Vollèges and Bourg-Saint-Pierre. The growing involvement of women in the Tridentine confraternities – culminating in the mid-19th century, when female enrolments exceeded male ones

²⁰ <https://www.crepa.ch>.

in the confraternities of the Holy Rosary and the Blessed Sacrament – shows that in outlying regions, the traditional religious associations became places of female socialization and support, which were useful to women in the various phases of their life. Unlike the men, they seemed to select the confraternities that were most independent from the Church.

Duties and rights: the alchemy of women’s economic contribution in patriarchal societies

In strictly economic contexts, too, the contribution of women has mainly been described as passive, neglecting the “subjective variables”, as if the socio-economic balance of a region was subject simply to the alternation of absence and presence. It is known that this dichotomy determined a division of labour, complementary resources, the shared managing of material and immaterial goods, shared intentions and mutual trust within the family group²¹. But all this cannot and should not be reduced to the functioning of a “well-oiled machine” without personal implications. The contributions in this section consider the sub-Alpine area, where the women – in addition to performing their customary marginal duties – had further ambitions, as a direct result of the prevalent absence of men and thanks to a solid network of relationships even if these ambitions have thus far been silenced by research.

In the essay entitled *The Contradictory Condition of Women: Legal Immobility and Social Dynamics in Pre-Alpine Lombardy in the Early Modern Age*, Marina Cavallera focuses on the province of Varese, a varied territory where transits of people, markets and consumption offered ever-changing prospects and where women’s multiple activities were an increasingly important component, from the silk industry to the less visible network of smuggling. It was in the production of goods that women established themselves, following a pyramid of power that

²¹ The story of the Pedrazzini family is exemplary for the upper valleys of Ticino, as explained in CHIESI-ERMOTTI Francesca, *Le Alpi in movimento. Vicende del casato dei mercanti Pedrazzini di Campo Vallemaggia (XVIII s.)*, Bellinzona, Casagrande, 2019.

was not without solidarity. However, in an economy centred on credit, this solidarity could prove insidious, chaining the poorest women to the landed properties. The whole of female society thus seems very well structured and invites us to examine the extent to which expertise and authority led the women to “go far beyond the institutional spaces allowed”. And, Cavallera concludes, “it could easily become an instrument of power and control over that society”.

Stefania Bianchi's contribution, *Women, Judges and Notaries: the Legal Rights of Women in the Italian Part of Switzerland (17th-19th Centuries)*, also deals with everyday life in the territory of the pre-Alpine lakes, but in Switzerland²². She offers a comparative study of the female figures that we encounter in the judicial sources and in notarial records. The women summoned to court mainly displayed the heterogeneous nature of poverty, a marginalized social but also geographical, condition: the maidservant, the wet nurse and the indigent widow are all Alpine. The women who visited the notary essentially belonged to an incipient bourgeoisie of master craftsmen and merchants who possessed land and money, because one visits the notary above all to defend family interests. Holding power of attorney, as the study of 120 cases shows, they were the “plenipotentiary” agents of husbands, sons, brothers and so on, women who moved resources and capital, managed properties and businesses, and who, if necessary, went on journeys. In fact, another aspect that renews the accepted historiographical models was the now recognized female mobility, which broke with the traditional vision of the woman waiting patiently and passively by the hearth.

²² On the structural continuity of these areas, see MOCARELLI Luca (ed.), *Tra identità e integrazione. La Lombardia nella macroregione alpina dello sviluppo economico europeo (secoli XVII-XX)*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2002; LORENZETTI Luigi, VALSANGIACOMO Nelly (eds.), *Lo spazio insubrico. Un'identità storica tra percorsi politici e realtà socio-economiche, 1500-1900*, Lugano, Fidia, 2005.

Bodies and destinies: wet nurses, healers and victims of violence

The body inextricably determines every aspect of the female condition, and it therefore returns, expressly, allusively or tacitly, in every essay in this volume, whether it is the body of mothers or battered women, appreciated for their physical and moral qualities or despised despite these qualities, or that of women bowed down by labour and hunger, “hostages of society” for various reasons and circumstances²³.

The fourth section ranges from social history to the history of medicine or law, and examines themes linked to the body, which in modern times became more and more an object to be monitored by the Church, the State and science. It is in the juxtaposition between life and death that the subjects of the three essays become physically palpable, for example in considering the risks of maternity, the effects of sexual acts – whether passively suffered or desired – and the knowledge and acts linked to caring for adults and children. It was precisely through care work that women found extensive spaces of action for themselves to alleviate the pain of the body and perhaps the pain of violated spirits, too, in a social texture in which “women’s bodies were at the centre of the systems of kinship and power” and thus became subject to the law²⁴.

Rolando Fasana, in *The Unsaid of Microhistory: Anthroponymy of Wet-Nursing. The Wet Nurses of Southern Ticino and the Ancient Province of Como (18th-19th Centuries)*, has considered the problems involved in the study of wet nurses. Are there any sources that tell us where they came from, who their families were, what their circumstances and contract conditions were, and that can give a face to all those unknown women who lent their bodies to nourish so many abandoned babies? In addition, how widespread was the phenomenon and how do we

²³ FILIPPINI Nadia Maria, PLEBANI Tiziana, SCATTIGNO Anna (eds.), *Corpi e storia. Donne e uomini dal mondo antico all’età contemporanea*, Rome, Viella, 2002.

²⁴ PERROT Michel, “Donne in lotta per i diritti del loro corpo”, in: FILIPPINI Nadia Maria, PLEBANI Tiziana, SCATTIGNO Anna (eds.), *Corpi e storia...*, p. 3.

place this important figure in the Alpine and pre-Alpine communities of migrants? Was wet-nursing also, in a certain sense, a strategy for intergenerational control or, on the contrary, did it have no effect as other methods were practised? A systematic analysis of the sources has enabled the author to advance some interpretations, restoring an image of these women that has not always been clear, being at the mercy of personal matters, male insistence and social needs.

Madline Favre's essay, *What Sources Can Be Used to Document the Role of Women in Health Practices in the Alps? The Case of Valais in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, examines the relation between women and health, particularly in outlying mountain areas, where medicine was handed down orally in popular culture. She draws on two specific sources: the memory surviving in votive offerings, which the author has reconstructed based on hundreds of examples, and the genealogy of some family groups that handed down knowledge of herbs and remedies. Examining the marital ties of five generations of healers in Hérémente (a village in the Swiss Alps), the author identifies some families known for their knowledge of botany. She concludes that the women, too, might have had specific expertise concerning all aspects of health; indeed, the only midwives known in the village belonged to these families.

Federica Re, in *Mountain Municipalities and Female Agency: Rape Trials in the Province of Como from 1820 to 1833*, describes her research on criminal proceedings for rape in the Court of Como. The women's voices reach us from the documents, filtered by the men who dealt with the legal process. Additionally, she has considered the cases of sexual violence in Alpine and pre-Alpine towns so as to describe the characteristics of the phenomenon but also what the procedures were to restore a woman's honour even before taking legal action. She has therefore concentrated on the plaintiffs' narratives – highlighting their reasoning skills, conceptions of gender relations and networks of solidarity – and on how the accusations were seen by the judges, whose opinions walked a fine line between applying the law and showing a certain degree of personal discretion.

Stolen figures

Stealing female figures of different generations and social classes from the records, the contributions of the volume – in the wake of a fresh interpretation of women’s roles and mobility – further soften the image of backwardness, passivity and ignorance often attributed to women in mountain regions, also avoiding certain historiographical models that consider the women to be invariably subjected to male domination. Just as the Alps appear to be a puzzle of cultures and microeconomies in macrohistory, so the condition of women refuses to conform to expectations and reveals itself in all its complexity. To speak of “Alpine women” in the sense of a female typology is misleading, then, because the nature of the place, the social status and working conditions, religious faith and personal temperament and attitudes decide their authority and autonomy compared with the bonds of custom.

Starting from individual trajectories, the contributions mainly illustrate social networks in which not only the relations between the sexes are structured but also the spaces of action, and testify to the shared management of resources and economic activities typical of the Alps. Where respect, collaboration and alliances define the relations between men and women, autonomy is strengthened on both sides, and the women present themselves as “directors of community life”²⁵.

The kaleidoscope of life courses makes the women’s voices re-echo through the pages of this volume: they rise up to defend their bodies, dignity, feelings and sense of belonging to face emotional and physical fragility, in a corollary that is at times a chiaroscuro, where the rules of patriarchy – partly internalized by the women themselves – are in force.

²⁵ “Donne di montagna”, *L’Alpe* 4, 2001 (back cover). More in general, on the importance of social networks in societies characterized by migration, see: ZUCCA MICHELETTO Beatrice (ed.), *Gender and Migration in Historical Perspective. Institutions, Labour and Social Networks, 16th to 20th Centuries*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

A multifaceted world emerges from the contributions, one that invites us to undertake further research, looking beyond the Alps to the plain, and from the household to the world.

Before giving way to the women's voices, we want to express our sincere gratitude to Patrizia Audenino, Dionigi Albera and Sandro Guzzi-Heeb, who have followed the various phases of the book's development from the initial conference in June 2021. Other participants included the Argonaute and Via Mulieris associations, both of which are active in promoting the history of women in mountain regions. A special thought goes to Jasmina Cornut, co-organizer of the conference, with whom we have had fruitful discussions on the theme of Alpine women.

Our thanks also go to the authors, the cultural institutions, the foundations and to all the colleagues who have encouraged us from the beginning of this project.

We are grateful to Massimiliano Ferri for his careful editing work, to Gianluca Poletti for the graphic treatment of some of the images and to all those who, in various ways, have helped us during the various stages of the publication.

Finally, thanks to Franca Cleis for sharing her passion for the history of women and her invaluable friendship.

The translations from Italian (contributions by Audenino, Bianchi, Cavallera, Fasana and Nicoli) were done in collaboration with Richard Bates. The translations from French (contributions by Caparos, Favre and Guzzi-Heeb) were done in collaboration with Clare Ferguson.

Part I

AGENCY AND DAILY LIFE: MATERIAL NEEDS AND FEELINGS IN WOMEN'S WRITINGS

Giuseppe G. M.
di Napoli 1847



Miriam Nicoli

**A Network of Words: Three Generations
of Women in the Records of an Alpine Family
(18th-19th Centuries)**

The question of gender relations in the Alpine regions has attracted growing attention in recent decades, giving rise to many important research projects that reflect various themes and approaches, linked to the specificity of the territories and the examined social groups¹. Recently, greater sensitivity towards qualitative sources has made it possible to give more weight to women's life trajectories. Private family archives are proving to be indispensable to regain a sense of these pathways and strategies in the broadest context of gender and kinship². Of particular interest is the archive of the a Marca family of Mesocco, one of the most important families of the Grisons at the time³.

¹ See the literature discussed in the introductory essay of this volume.

² On the territory of present-day Switzerland see, among others: GUZZI-HEEB Sandro, *Donne, uomini, parentela. Casati alpini nell'Europa preindustriale (1650-1850)*, Turin, Rosenberg & Sellier, 2007 and CHIESI-ERMOTTI Francesca, *Le Alpi in movimento. Vicende del casato dei mercanti migranti Pedrazzini di Campo Vallemaggia (XVIII s.)*, Bellinzona, Casagrande, 2020.

³ See SANTI Cesare, "La Fondazione Archivio a Marca a Mesocco", *Quaderni Grigionitaliani* 70/3, 2001, pp. 232-235; A MARCA Andrea, "Fonti e percorsi:

The sources, most of which have thus far not been published, reveal a complex system of relations in what was certainly a “transnational family”⁴. This extremely rich collection of documents includes many texts written by women over at least three generations, giving us a glimpse of the daily lives of well-born women in the Alps in the 18th and 19th centuries and showing us the dynamics of female socialization, which has as yet been little studied outside the urban areas. The women of the a Marca family – by birth or marriage – thus emerge as social actors. The a Marca records demonstrate the existence of female networks in which we can trace destinies intertwined in time and space, providing evidence of feelings, friendships, power relations and gender dynamics. The family correspondence in particular brings out the weaving of a female web. These networks developed within a family that was open to the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment, politically involved in the Republic of the Three Leagues (the canton of Grisons, from 1803) and the Old Swiss Confederation, and linked to Europe through mercenaries, merchants and émigré businessmen.

Compared with the abundance of male writing on the self⁵, the a Marca women, rather than deliberately describing their lives, left traces of them mainly in the form of letters and notes. The female writings, which are preserved discontinuously and randomly, depict these women at precise moments in their lives. Only a small proportion of these records has reached us, as the sources themselves suggest. What

l'Archivio a Marca per la storia del Moesano”, *Archivio Storico Ticinese* 155, 2014, pp. 66-77; FIORINA Eugenio, *Note genealogiche della famiglia a Marca*, Milan, U. Marucelli & Co., 1924, p. 20.

⁴ On this concept, see ALBERA Dionigi, AUDENINO Patrizia, CORTI Paola, “L'emigrazione da un distretto prealpino: diaspora o plurilocalismo?”, in: TIRABASSI Maddalena (ed.), *Itinera: paradigmi delle migrazioni italiane*, Turin, Fondazione G. Agnelli, 2005, pp. 185-209.

⁵ Of particular interest is the diary of the governor Clemente Maria a Marca (1746-1819). See A MARCA Martina, SANTI Cesare, *Il Diario del Governatore Clemente Maria a Marca 1792-1819 con la continuazione scritta dai figli Ulrico e Giuseppe 1819-1830*, Mesocco, Fondazione Archivio a Marca, 1999.

emerges from the papers is an image that is certainly partial but that nevertheless allows us to develop more general considerations.

As a wide literature on the topic shows⁶, the letter was the main form of female writing in general, but it also served as a fundamental means of expression for the construction of female identity. Regarded as functional to domestic management, this kind of writing was accepted within the limits imposed by the genre even in conservative circles, and it indeed became an open place for discussion for many women, as well as a performative space halfway between the private and the public. Identity and alterity converge in a textual space described by Giulia Calvi as a “laboratory of autonomy”, in which women gave form and meaning to their own destinies⁷.

An extended network of contacts

The correspondence between the women of the family is in fact part of a more extensive network of communication. In an economy of absence typical of the Alpine regions, which were also marked by a strong presence of single women, the latter connected the Mesolcina Valley with the rest of the Grisons and the whole of Europe, essentially keeping communities and families that were in constant movement united⁸.

⁶ ZARRI Gabriella (ed.), *Per lettera. La scrittura epistolare femminile tra archivio e tipografia (secoli XV-XVII)*, Rome, Viella, 1999; BETRI Maria Luisa et alii (eds.), *Dolce dono graditissimo: la lettera privata dal Settecento al Novecento*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2000; CHARTIER Roger (ed.), *La correspondance. Les usages de la lettre au XIX^e siècle*, Paris, Fayard, 1991.

⁷ CALVI Giulia, “La scrittura epistolare femminile”, *Quaderni storici* 104/2, 2000, p. 507.

⁸ See also NICOLI Miriam, “Face à l’absence: écritures de femmes et agentivité dans l’arc alpin à l’époque moderne”, in: BERTIAUD Emmanuelle (ed.), *Paroles de femmes. Rôles et images dans les écrits personnels, Europe, XVI^e-XX^e siècle*, Paris, Le Manuscrit, 2017, pp. 87-105.

In fact, in addition to the documents produced by female members of the family, the a Marca archive preserves traces of what must have been an extended network of contacts in which the women of the elite and those of the business bourgeoisie were an active part, both at home and abroad.

This abundance of letters reflects the nature of the Mesolcina Valley, the epicentre of the network examined here. Crossed by the Moesa river, the valley served as a transit path linking the north and south of the Alps via the San Bernardino Pass. An ancient access road to the Po Valley, it became easier to cross in the early 19th century, thanks to a carriageway that the a Marca family had long desired⁹.

The valley's economy was characterized by an internal and a vertical mobility, linked to farmwork and forestry; by seasonal immigration, particularly from northern Italy for sheep farming, but also by educated immigrants, owing to the presence in the valley of Capuchin monks from the main cities of Lombardy; and, finally, by the emigration of specialized workers to the whole of Europe (mercenaries, architects, plasterers, glass makers, traders, master chimney sweeps, house painters) that also included women. They followed their husbands to Austria and Germany (like the Martinetti, Toscano, Martinola, Ferrari and Antonini families)¹⁰: in Vienna, for example, a few families of the Mesolcina Valley had a monopoly in the chimney sweep business, thanks to a series of privileges granted between 1670 and 1673 by the Emperor Leopold I of Austria, and in Regensburg, a large community of *Mesolcinesi* active in textiles and finance had settled on an *Oberer Wöhrd*, an island on the Danube¹¹.

In the village of San Bernardino, the presence of thermal waters, known since antiquity for their curative properties, made it easier

⁹ See MANTOVANI Paolo, *La strada commerciale del San Bernardino*, Locarno, Dadò, 1988.

¹⁰ On female mobility in Italian-speaking Switzerland, see BIANCHI Stefania, "Donne che seguono i mariti", *Percorsi di ricerca* 4, 2012, pp. 15-20. More in general, see ZUCCA MICHELETTA Beatrice (ed.), *Gender and Migration in Historical Perspective. Institutions, Labour and Social Networks, 16th to 20th Centuries*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

¹¹ On the community of Regensburg, see TRAPP Eugen, "Die Toscanische Handlung. Misoxer Schicksale im Regensburg des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts", *Verhandlungen des Historischen Vereins für Oberpfalz und Regensburg* 162, 2022, pp. 155-214.

for people to meet¹²; in the early 19th century, the region became an appreciated destination for wealthy Milanese looking for a “health retreat”. Apart from private socialization, sometimes on a lavish scale (as when the a Marca family served Champagne, Tocai, Bordeaux, coffee and chocolate in their homes¹³) and occasionally religious in nature, the fashion of “taking the waters” in the Three Leagues offered women, too, an important occasion to meet, their opportunities for social life (salons, concerts, theatres) being generally limited.

The physiognomy of the valley was, then, varied and complex, far from the simple dichotomy of town and country proposed by bucolic poetry; the nature, both magnificent and wild, of the region encountered urban features such as palaces and churches richly decorated by local artists renowned throughout Europe, such as Giovanni Antonio Viscardi (1645-1713) or Francesco Antonio Giorgioli (1655-1725)¹⁴. In short, we encounter architectural elements, cultural influences and forms of consumption linked to an interpenetration of the Alpine and the urban that was widespread in many regions of the Three Leagues: the “city in the mountains”¹⁵.

¹² On the thermal waters in the Grisons, see FUCHS Karin, *Baden und Trinken in den Bergen. Heilquellen in Graubünden, 16. bis 19. Jahrhundert*, Baden, Hier und Jetzt, 2019.

¹³ A MARCA Andrea, “Macchie di vino sulla carta. Appunti sulla presenza della vite e del vino in Mesolcina prendendo spunto dalle pagine di un diario tra Settecento e Ottocento”, in: SANTI Cesare (ed.), *Alle pendici del Piz Pombi*, Poschiavo, Menghini, 2007, p. 24.

¹⁴ Palazzo Viscardi at San Vittore is considered an early work by Giovanni Antonio Viscardi. The exterior frescos of the convent of the Capuchins of Soazza were painted by Giorgioli in 1686.

¹⁵ CESCHI Raffaello, “La città nelle montagne”, *Histoire des Alpes* 5, 2000, pp. 189-204. See also LORENZETTI Luigi, “Notes sur les pratiques spatiales de la ruralité et de l’urbanité dans le monde alpin (XVIII^e-XXI^e siècle)”, *Revue Suisse d’Histoire* 71/1, 2021, pp. 111-124.

A social capital

The earliest letters in the a Marca archive that are signed by women date back to the late 17th century. There is, for example, a letter by Dorotea Brocco, wife of the governor Carlo a Marca (1622-1681), to the colonel of the French regiment in which her son Carlo (1662-1709) had enlisted, asking that “*possia una volta venir a chasa che tanto il mio core lo brama di vedere*”¹⁶. These one-off letters illustrate a certain female literacy and can be explained by the widowed state of the writers. The 17th century was a relatively troubled period for the women of the valley. The region was marked by Counter-Reformation “propaganda”, implemented since the 16th century by the Archbishop of the Diocese of Milan Carlo Borromeo (1538-1584), with the aim of stemming the valley’s adhesion to Protestantism. On the one hand, it led to clear cultural and educational progress, partly due to the arrival of the Capuchin monks; on the other hand, it led to many witchcraft trials – a sad feature that was widespread in other Italian-speaking Alpine areas, which certainly did not encourage female expression outside the convent walls¹⁷.

The most substantial part of the collection dates from 1750 to 1870. This can be explained by the development of female literacy in that period, which meant that women were better educated in reading and writing, but also by the new social and cultural functions that women were taking on, as a result of which they acquired more expressive freedom¹⁸. In this specific case, the places mentioned in the letters suggest that the greater need to

¹⁶ Fondazione Archivio a Marca (FAaM), 7114, letter from Dorotea a Marca (née Brocco) to Colonel Giovanni Enrico de Mont, 3 July 1684.

¹⁷ See NICOLI Miriam, CLEIS Franca, *La Gran Regina del Cielo e le Benedettine di Claro. Genealogia femminile di un Sacro Monte in area alpina nel manoscritto di suor Ippolita Orelli (1697)*, Locarno, Dadò, 2021.

¹⁸ See GUZZI-HEEB Sandro, “Mère aimée, mère domestiquée? Mères valaisannes du XVIII^e siècle et leurs fonctions sociales”, in: *La Madre – The Mother, Micrologus* 17, Florence, Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2009, pp. 437-462.

communicate was also linked to increased female mobility, particularly in the valley and the Three Leagues.

From 1750 onwards, the letters of the adult women in the family show a certain ability to organize and participate in the network of relationships at home and abroad. In this Alpine society, building a web of personal relations was at once an enriching and protective act. Setting up lasting relations meant creating a capital that could be spent at the right moment, to support oneself or loved ones. As Benedetta Borello puts it, within the limitations imposed on the women, the network became a social capital that was necessary to construct a “*sistema integrato di rapporti, utile alla famiglia o contrario ad essa, che avrebbe costituito la necessaria base di partenza per qualsiasi strategia*”¹⁹.

Therefore, letter writing in its various forms enabled women to establish family relationships and cultivate fruitful contacts, managing and effectively extending those margins of manoeuvre available to them in an economy of absence thanks to good, stable contacts²⁰.

Educating for sociability through letter writing

In the a Marca family, education towards sociability through letter writing began at home and continued in convents or boarding schools, where the boys, and occasionally also the girls, were educated and expected to write regularly to parents and other relatives. The boys completed their education abroad, at the *Collegio Elvetico* in Milan or

¹⁹ BORELLO Benedetta, *Trame sovrapposte. La socialità aristocratica e le reti di relazioni femminili a Roma (XVII-XVIII secolo)*, Naples, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2003, p. 19.

²⁰ See also DE MARTIN PINTER Albina, “Reti di donne sul confine friulano. Lettere femminili nell’archivio Della Torre (XVII secolo)”, *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome - Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines* [En ligne], 125/1, 2013, <http://journals.openedition.org/mefrim/1200>; DOI <https://doi.org/10.4000/mefrim.1200>.

at Jesuit-run colleges; female education essentially took place in Swiss territory²¹. Thus, the web of letters began to be woven.

From an educational viewpoint, this correspondence allowed young members of the household to practise their spelling and express themselves in good Italian (the spoken language in the Mesolcina Valley was a regional variant of the Lombard dialect) and in one or more foreign languages²². At the same time, as they were often checked by the teachers, the letters bore witness to an educational course that led the children to acquire the necessary skills to express ideas, construct a pathway to independence and then develop more elaborate forms of self-expression. In addition, the expressive models were internalized through practice, which contributed to regulating and refining the expression of feelings depending on circumstances, in a mixture of intellectual schooling and moral education.

Although the letters written by women contain grammatical and stylistic uncertainties, they give us a glimpse of the ability of the family's female members to use different expressive levels. Over time, women became experts in that arduous task of emotional management required of them, which the historian Martha Tomhave Blauvelt has called "the work of the heart"²³: that is, learning to handle emotions and attitudes with the aim of both adhering to the social models imposed on them by rank and age, and at the same not giving up the need for self-expression.

²¹ The boarding schools mentioned in the letters are: the *educandato* of the Benedictine sisters of Claro, the *educandato* of the Capuchin sisters of Lugano, the *educandato* of the Capuchin sisters of Zugo (*Kloster Maria Opferung*), the *educandato* Santa Chiara of Como, the girls' school of Ascona and the girls' college of Montmirail run by the Moravi brothers.

²² On plurilingualism among the elite of the Grisons, see HEAD Randolph C., "A Plurilingual Family in the Sixteenth Century: Language Use and Linguistic Consciousness in the Salis Family Correspondence, 1580-1610", *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 23/3, 1995, pp. 577-593.

²³ TOMHAVE BLAUVELT Martha, "The Work of the Heart: Emotion in the 1805-1835 Diary of Sarah Connel Ayer", *Journal of Social History* 35/3, 2002, pp. 577-592; TOMHAVE BLAUVELT Martha, *The Work of the Heart. Young Women and Emotion, 1780-1830*, Charlottesville; London, University of Virginia Press, 2007.

These letters were the first form of written socialization. Sent to parents, brothers and sisters, grandfathers and relations and fostering intergenerational solidarity – a cornerstone of migrant society. Creating the basis for “teamwork”²⁴ was important in large families like the a Marca’s, where the age gap between a firstborn and a lastborn could be more than twenty years, which could lead to a lack of understanding and tension.

Over the course of time and through habit, letters became a key element of the desired – but not always present – shared affection within a family in constant movement, and whose identity was partly constructed throughout the thousands of letters that convey a mixture of feelings, conflicts, news, patrimonial strategies and politics.

To illustrate the network and its functions, I will focus on the letter exchange between the a Marca branch that descended from the Landamman and *Podestà* of Tirano Carlo Domenico (1725-1791) and his high-born second wife Maria Lidia Toschini (1742-1824)²⁵. The destinies of women of other patrician Alpine families were woven around this family unit, particularly the Ferrari of Soazza, one of the most ancient families of Mesolcina, who were mainly active as traders and master chimney sweeps in Germany, Austria and Hungary, and the von Donatz of Sils im Domleschg, a family of officers, who were Protestant but allied with the Catholic Saint-Sixte à la Roche family in Upper Savoy²⁶.

²⁴ AGO Renata, “Gioco di squadra. Uomini e donne nelle famiglie nobili del XVII secolo”, in: VISCEGLIA Maria A. (ed.), *Signori, patrizi e cavalieri nell’età moderna*, Rome; Bari, Laterza, 1992, pp. 256-264.

²⁵ Carlo Domenico’s first marriage was to Maria Orsola Fantoni (1732-1760), with whom he had three children: Maria Fedela (1751-1799), Giuseppe Maria Bernardo (1753-?) and Anna Maria (1755-1782).

²⁶ At Sils im Domlesch, Conradin von Donatz (1677-1750) built a majestic palace with an Italian-style baroque garden. In the 19th century, the palace was inherited by the a Marca family.

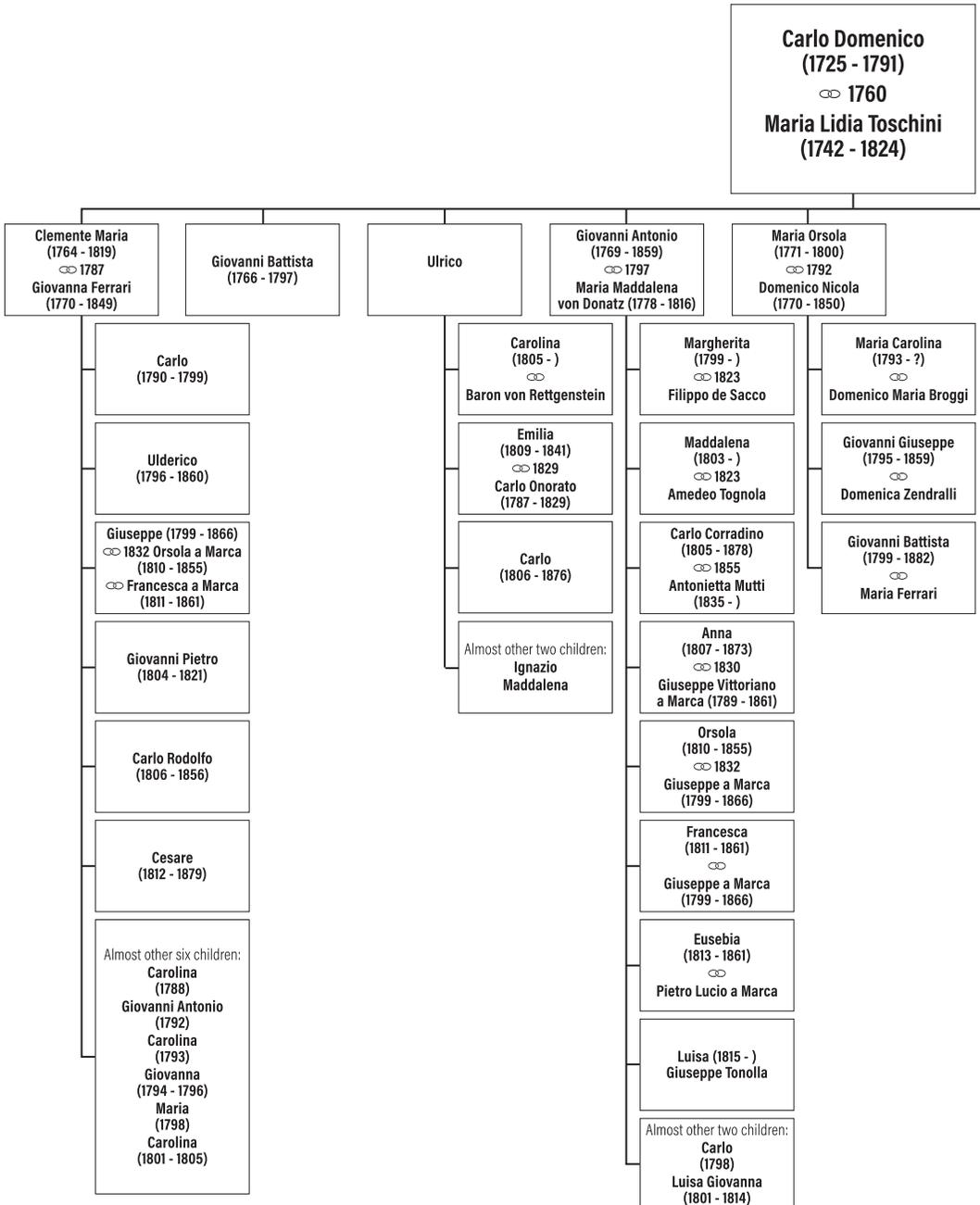
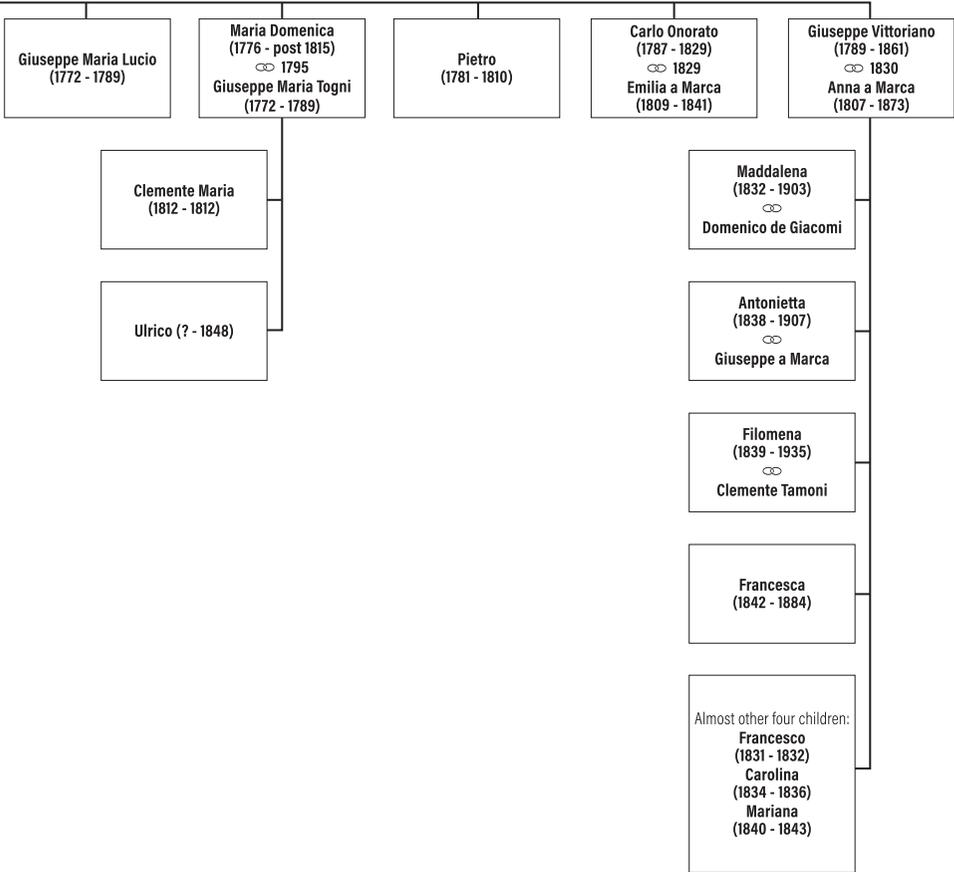


Fig. 1: The descendants of Carlo Domenico a Marca²⁷

²⁷ Carlo Domenico's branch descended from that of the *Podestà* Carlo (1622-1681), a captain serving the Venetian Republic and the King of France. See A MARCA Gian-Carlo, SANTI Cesare, *Iconografia della famiglia a Marca di Mesocco GR*, Locarno, Dadò, 1991.



Giovanna Ferrari-a Marca: long-distance love

The only daughter of a prominent family, Giovanna was undoubtedly an educated woman, like her mother Barbara Zoppi (1744-1819), some of whose letters have survived. In the extensive and regular correspondence with her husband Clemente Maria, a politician and the last governor of Valtellina, who was often absent, she was able to keep alive the flame of a relationship that seemed to be based on strong feelings:

*“Vi basio e vi abbraccio mille e mille volte e ricordatevi che troppo vi amo e continuamente penso e voi. O caro, così fate voi col sovenirvi alla memoria il grande amore che vi porto e almeno per questo, se non ho altri meriti, ricordatevi sempre di me. Ti seguirò col cuor e cor sempre eguale fin’alla sepolcralle fase ti seguirò, e sempre ti amerò”*²⁸.

The conjugal and domestic space created around the couple in the letters is marked by an open sharing of emotions, probably fostered by literary works of the period; there are references, for example, to the poet and librettist Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782)²⁹. The correspondence opens up a space of intimacy that shows support and collaboration, as well as mutual trust.

Reading the letters, we get a glimpse of a relationship that was based on the sharing of ideas but also marked by complex and unequal dynamics³⁰. Although Clemente Maria listened to the wise advice of his wife, who was a sharp observer of the social context, many of Giovanna’s aspirations – particularly that of being able to travel and enjoy the cultural opportunities of the cities – were silenced by her husband. Clemente Maria perfectly embodied an Enlightenment man: cultured,

²⁸ FAaM, 070-05026, letter from Giovanna Ferrari to her husband, 18 August (no year). In this excerpt Giovanna expresses her love for her husband and assures him she will love him with the same intensity until their death.

²⁹ FAaM, 002-459, letter from Clemente Maria a Marca to his wife, 26 May 1795.

³⁰ On the complex link between marital love and patriarchy, see BARCLAY Katie, *Love, Intimacy and Power. Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650-1850*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2011.

cosmopolitan, affectionate with his children, attentive to the needs of his wife, whom he esteemed greatly, and yet convinced that the woman's role was above all that of a mother, guarantor not so much of the domestic economy – which was handled by sharecroppers, servants and secretaries – but of the stability and cohesion of the family unit that he yearned to return to, as also emerges from his journal. Clemente Maria was, after all, the son of a mother he regarded as a model: Maria Lidia Toschini. Her children often mention letters sent to, or received from, their “*dilettissima mamma*”. Although we have no direct writings by this woman, the family archive enables us to place her at the centre of a closely knit social group (family and religious associations), which gave her visibility and prestige in the valley. Despite a hard life marked by eighteen pregnancies (only four children outlived her), the woman was able to keep the children united even though the family never lived together under the same roof.

Anna Deutz-a Marca: an example of successful integration

Anna Deutz, the German wife of Ulrico a Marca, banker in Regensburg and adviser to Carlo Anselmo, Prince of Thurn and Taxis, was definitively an expert at constructing a network. In 1803, she secretly married Ulrico. An outsider in the system of alliances of the a Marca family, which, like other dynasties of the elite, was closing in on itself to consolidate its social and economic position³¹, Anna was

³¹ See SABEAN David, *Property, Productions and Family in Neckarhausen, 1700-1870*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990 and *Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700-1870*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998; JORIS Elisabeth, “Kinship and Gender. Property, Enterprise, and Politics”, in: SABEAN David W., TEUSCHER SIMON, MATHIEU Jon (eds.), *Kinship in Europe. Approaches to Long Term Development (1300-1900)*, New York, Berghanh Book, 2007, pp. 231-257; LANZINGER Margareth, “Kin-Marriages in the 19th Century: Expanded Perspectives and Challenges”, in: CHACON FRANCISCO, DELILLE Gérard (eds.), *Marriages and Alliances. Dissolution, Continuity and Strength of Kinship (ca. 1750-ca. 1900)*, Rome, Viella, 2018, pp. 67-81.

at first regarded as “*la straniera*” (the foreigner) and looked upon with suspicion by her new family.

Visiting relatives abroad, in his diary, Clemente Maria a Marca noted the following about his brother’s marriage:

*“Andai a vedere l'alloggio che il fratello Ulrico] si fa preparare per abitare colla sua signora – egli fa molte spese ed alla grande, io non so capire ove voglia andare a finire questa faccenda. Questa sua sposa è figlia de fu Kellermeister D'eutz del principe Torni e Taxis, giovine, galante e bella, educata con tutti i comodi e inviziata, e però stante le diversità dell'età non so come farà per riuscire il matrimonio – Iddio faccia che abbia felicità e fortuna”*³².

Thanks to ties of spiritual kinship and regular correspondence in German, French and some words of Italian with various members of the a Marca family, Anna Deutz gradually managed to integrate herself and to show her worth; from being “*la straniera*” she thus became “*cara Nanette*” (dear Nanette). The network she created proved extremely useful.

After the Napoleonic wars, which had radically changed the political system and, consequently, the alliances and power relations in Regensburg, Ulrico and Anna found themselves in serious economic difficulties. The crisis was aggravated by the fire that destroyed the city in 1809. Many of Ulrico’s loans were never repaid. On becoming a widow only a few years later, in 1813, Anna managed to activate the support network she had patiently constructed from Regensburg to Mesolcina, where she travelled with her children to visit her relatives in 1814³³. When the institute for female education that she had opened in Regensburg in 1820 (with funds coming from the sale of all her jewels) no longer provided her a sufficient income,

³² Note of 26 July 1803 in A MARCA Martina, SANTI Cesare, *Il Diario del Governatore Clemente Maria a Marca...*, p. 323. Clemente Maria expresses serious doubts about the success of his brother’s marriage to the woman, whom he considers too young and spoilt.

³³ FAaM, 002-356, letter from Anna Deutz to her brother-in-law Carlo Onorato, 4 September 1814.

she fell into further financial difficulties and did all she could to marry off her daughter Emilia, a highly educated girl³⁴, to her very wealthy uncle, Carlo Onorato a Marca, a businessman in textiles who was resident in Milan but constantly on the move for his work and a long-standing bachelor, with whom she had been exchanging letters for years³⁵. In February 1829, the two wed in partial secrecy at Mendrisio³⁶ and spent their honeymoon in Italy, where they attended the Venetian Carnival. Carlo Onorato died suddenly the following month, leaving Emilia some capital that enabled her to go back to live in Regensburg and help her family³⁷.

With the support of another brother-in-law, Giovanni Vittoriano a Marca, a commander in the second regiment of the Royal Swiss Guard in the service of the King of France, and of the von Donatz family, Anna schemed to benefit her son Karl, asking favours without hesitation. The latter enlisted in the service of France and subsequently in the papal service³⁸, beginning a career that, to Anna's great grief, kept him far from Regensburg for some years³⁹.

³⁴ FAaM, 002-1537, letter from Carlo Onorato a Marca to his brother Giovanni Antonio, 19 February 1829 (002-1537). From her passport we know that Emilia was blonde, with blue eyes and a well-proportioned nose (032-285).

³⁵ In 1825, Anna considered moving to Mesocco to become a tutor to the daughters of Giovanni Antonio and Maria Maddalena. See Carlo Onorato's letter to his brother Giuseppe Vittoriano, 6 February 1825 (FAaM, 002-1406).

³⁶ They obtained a dispensation for a marriage between blood relations on 16 November 1828. Parish archive of Mendrisio, Register of marriages, 1827-1876.

³⁷ In his will, drawn up on 20 December 1828, Carlo Onorato left a significant sum to Emilia, his future bride. He had not yet actually told his brothers of his marriage (letter dated Milan, 11 February 1829) and had not even been accepted by Emilia. In 1833, Emilia returned to Mesocco to see the family and her brother (002-559).

³⁸ See, for example, the letter from Anna Deutz to her brother-in-law Giuseppe Vittoriano, 2 February 1821 (FAaM, 002-341).

³⁹ In 1833, he had already been away for seven years. FAaM, 002, 4219, letter from Anna Deutz to her brother-in-law Giuseppe Vittoriano, 17 August 1833.

Louise de Saint-Sixte à la Roche-von Donatz: a mother's policy

Helping one's sons and daughters was part of a mother's role. The rhetoric centred on maternal love is effectively mobilized in many letters, with the aim of promoting specific interests. During the Napoleonic wars, politics and troop movements became a personal question for mothers, as these were the stages of their sons' lives: sons who needed to enter the market of army officers, sons whose careers needed boosting, sons to be brought home if wounded or missing in action – taken prisoner in the best of cases. Among the letters written by Baroness Louise de Saint-Sixte, the widow of a brigadier in the service of Piedmont, Peter Conradin von Donatz (1720-1787), those to and from her daughter and son-in-law, Giovanni Antonio a Marca, are of particular interest in that they mix politics and maternal love. Inquiring about her son Claude-Philibert (1776-1809), who was at the front, she wrote to Mesocco from Geneva, where she spent the last years of her life, seeking support and comfort:

“tous les instans c'est de nouvelles et cruelles allarmes pour l'existence de mon fils, dont je n'ai point de lettre, depuis qu'il a quitte Utrecht; ma vie est une angoisse habituelle; et dans la perplexité de mon âme, je n'ose pas même désirer de perdre cette incertitude, qui pourtant, est un grand tourment? Dans le moment violent ou nous nous trouvons je ne suis pas non plus sans crainte pour la patrie; si près du théâtre de la guerre? Comment pouvons nous ne pas en repentir quelques contre-coup, la localité du pays grison nous expose à nous voir la proie, ou moins momentanée du premier, qui voudra nous prendre, pour s'assurer de passages importantes”⁴⁰.

The lad had been taken prisoner close to Trafalgar. He died in 1809 in the Kingdom of Naples, without ever re-embracing his

⁴⁰ FAaM, 002-1832, letter from Louise de Saint-Sixte to her daughter, probably 1805. She expresses unbearable distress at living without any news from her son at the front and fearing that the Grisons might have been invaded.

mother⁴¹. The baroness then took steps to ensure a military career in the foreign service for her second son, Peter Ludwig (1782-1849), who was promoted to a higher rank. Having herself been an officer's wife, she knew how and where to get help⁴².

She had been in direct contact with her son-in-law Giovanni Antonio since his engagement to her daughter Maria Maddalena. The tie between her and her brother-in-law was also based on a patronage and mutual interest, particularly in relation to the management of economic matters: goods that could be part of the estate⁴³. Her social position enabled her to be on equal terms with her son-in-law and even to criticize him (and not only for his abysmal handwriting!):

*“tout cela sont la conséquence de la mauvaise base sur laquelle vous avez formé vos arrangemens de famille, rien n’y a été traité avec cette prévoyance qui doit prévenir les inconveniens sur tout quand le sort nous destine à vivre si loin les uns des autres”*⁴⁴.

⁴¹ It was her son-in-law who gave her the sad news (FAaM, 002-3673).

⁴² On this topic, see: BÜSSER Nathalie, “Die Frau ‘Hauptmannin’ als Schaltstelle für Rekrutenwerbungen, Geldtransfer und Informationsaustausch. Geschäftliche Tätigkeiten weiblicher Angehöriger der Zuger Urlaube im familieneigenen Solddienstunternehmen um 1700”, in: GILOMEN Hans-Jörg *et alii.* (eds.), *Dienstleistungen. Expansion und Transformation des dritten Sektors (15.-20. Jahrhundert)*, Zurich, Chronos, 2007, pp. 143-153; CORNUT Jasmina, “Beyond Gender Boundaries: Women’s Involvement in Military Careers in the Swiss Foreign Service (18th-19th Centuries)”, in: HOLENSTEIN André, ROGGER Philippe (eds.), *Officers, Entrepreneurs, Career Migrants and Diplomats: Military entrepreneurs in the Early Modern Era* (forthcoming).

⁴³ For a further and more general discussion of the topic in another Alpine region, see: CASELLA Laura, “Border Patrimonies: The Transmission and Claiming of Property in Women’s Everyday Writings in Sixteenth to Eighteenth-Century Friuli”, in: LANZINGER Margareth, MAEGRAITH Janine, CLEMENTI Siglinde, FORSTER Ellinor, HAGEN Christian (eds.), *Negotiation of Gender and Property through Legal Regimes (14th-19th Century). Stipulating, Litigating, Mediating*, Leiden; Boston, Brill, 2021, pp. 254-281.

⁴⁴ FAaM, 002-1792, letter from Louise de Saint-Sixte to her son-in-law Giovanni Antonio. She criticizes her son for mismanaging family affairs.

The baroness – who signed the letters she wrote in French “*votre bonne maman*” – knew how to use rhetoric to ask for favours or steer decisions in favour of her sons, who were not actually part of the a Marca dynasty, partly because – unlike her daughter Maria Maddalena – they had been brought up in their father’s confession, Protestantism⁴⁵.

The letters also show how the epistolary exchange saved her from isolation (sons at the front, a daughter at Mesocco, a brother in Lugano). Hence, in her will, she left a substantial bequest to her nurse, Aimée Berthoud, who took good care of her in the last years of her life⁴⁶.

Anna Rascher-von Donatz: the intimacy of correspondence between women

Born in Zuoz in 1807, Anna Rascher was Maria Maddalena’s sister-in-law and wife of the eldest son of the above-mentioned baroness: Peter Ludwig von Donatz. Although she was married to an officer who was always away and childless⁴⁷, Anna, known by everyone as Nina, was essentially “single”, enjoying close relations with her mother, grandmother and brothers. After her honeymoon in France, Nina frequently travelled through the Three Leagues, staying at Zuoz, Splügen, Chur and Mesocco in order to visit the different members of the family. In the harsh winter months spent with her mother in Zuoz, she felt isolated, but in Chur, she enjoyed the social life of the Alpine city, attending salons and meeting members of the

⁴⁵ On the question of mixed marriages in the Three Leagues, see NICOLI Miriam, “La religione del padre, l’educazione della madre. Matrimoni misti, identità confessionale e scritte autobiografiche in una valle alpina”, *Swiss Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies - xviii.ch*, 2022, pp. 14-30.

⁴⁶ Will, 10 January 1830 (FAaM, 2.4256.264).

⁴⁷ The couple had no children, but in the spring of 1826, Anna Rascher was pregnant, as we read in a letter by her friend Elisa Perey (30 April 1826, FAaM, 2.4256.289). In the end, she lost the baby.

important von Salis-Zizers and Planta families. She was sometimes urged to mediate with her husband to advance the career of one or other of her sons⁴⁸. In her spare time, she pursued her interests, such as music (lute and piano), which she had learned to play at the school of the Moravi brothers in Montmirail (in what is nowadays the canton of Neuchâtel), where she received a good education.

In the French-speaking part of Switzerland, she enjoyed creating friendships, traces of which remain in her writings. The letters to her “*amie pour la vie*” (a friend for life) Elisa Perey from the canton of Vaud are noteworthy⁴⁹. The two women established a space of female intimacy in writing, a sisterhood that lasted even after Elisa’s marriage: “*Adieu encore mille fois. Je te presse sur mon coeur*”, Elisa wrote in an affectionate letter, planning the long visits that the two friends would make as soon as possible, but which were unfortunately thwarted by Anna’s early death in 1833⁵⁰. For Anna, a young woman various people described as extremely shy, writing to her college friends was certainly an opportunity to express herself more freely, allowing room for feelings rarely expressed in the letters to her husband, 25 years her senior and focused mainly on his military career.

Conclusion

The possibility of studying the correspondence of three generations of high-born women from an Alpine family open to Europe, like that of the a Marcas, allows us to illustrate a series of female functions that partially confirm those already identified in studies centred on women from urban, noble households: from replacing absent husbands to educating their children, who needed guidance towards appropriate marriages and careers that could have positive spin-offs for the

⁴⁸ FAaM, 2.4256.101, letter from Anna Rascher to her husband, 27 December 1828.

⁴⁹ FAaM, 2.4256.289, letter from Elisa Perey to Anna Rascher, 30 April 1826.

⁵⁰ Translation: “Farewell again a thousand times. I press you on my heart”. FAaM, 2.4256.288, letter from Elisa Perey to Anna Rascher, 2 March 1826 (2.4256.288).

family; from managing the family's relations with the outside world to regulating its complex internal stability and keeping it together⁵¹.

This network, both inside and outside the Mesolcina Valley, proved necessary to keep the “*fuoco acceso*” (the fire lit) – which meant maintaining access to the nobility's resources when the men were absent⁵² – and to ensure that the family remained united and could benefit from advantages and informal support.

If approached in this light, namely as objects weaving a network, greetings cards accompanied by small gifts for births or marriages and seemingly uninteresting courtesy letters – long regarded as “female bagatelle” by scholars looking for a literary expression rather than the voice of a female self seeking to relate to others – take on a central value in this context of fragile relations; as such, they deserve to be reconsidered as indicating a certain female agency as well as places for the expression of feelings. Furthermore, partly on the wave of Romantic literature, love – whether between spouses, family members or friends – became effectively a private and collective value to be cultivated⁵³. Maternity, as a strong value in the period bridging the late 18th and the 19th centuries, also took on more fluid outlines: the role of the mother, albeit harnessed in a complex work of emotional management, projected women far beyond the domestic walls.

⁵¹ See also PAPAGNA Elena, “Strategie familiari e ruoli femminili: le donne della famiglia Caracciolo di Brienza-Martina (secoli XVI-XVIII)”, *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome* 112/2, 2000, pp. 667-735; BORELLO Benedetta, *Trame sovrapposte...*; BRAMBILLA Elena, ARCANGELI Letizia, LEVATI Stefano (eds.), *Sociabilità e relazioni femminili nell'Europa moderna. Temi e saggi*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2013.

⁵² See LORENZETTI Luigi, MERZARIO Raul, *Il fuoco acceso. Famiglie e migrazioni alpine nell'Italia d'età moderna*, Rome, Donzelli, 2005.

⁵³ See CORNUT Jasmina, “Une thématique taboue? L'énonciation de la sexualité dans la correspondance conjugale des officiers suisses au service étranger et de leurs épouses (XVIII^e-XXI^e siècles)”, *Le temps suspendu. Une histoire des femmes mariées par-delà les silences et l'absence*, Pessac, MSHA, 2022, pp. 109-126; GUZZI-HEEB Sandro, “L'amour en lettres. Écriture, émotions et parenté dans l'élite valaisanne (1750-1830)”, in: HENRY Philippe, JELMINI Jean-Pierre (eds.), *La Correspondance familiale en Suisse romande aux XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles. Affectivité, sociabilité, réseaux*, Neuchâtel, Alphil, 2006, pp. 55-74.

Analysing these letters highlights the fact that women assumed many roles within the respective network. Power dynamics varied and evolved over time with the changing position of women within the family, allowing for spaces of action to emerge. Even the microcosm of an Alpine valley reveals that constellation of unequal powers on which Joan W. Scott insisted from a theoretical viewpoint, and to which it is important to devote studies on women's networks, which are still little explored as regards the Alpine areas⁵⁴.

The subjects of the letters, however, are more revealing of social ties than those of sociability, particularly if this term refers to a space for expression in which ideas, political and religious convictions, and cultural and philosophical opinions are freely exchanged. This is perhaps one of the greatest gaps between the city and the valleys. Private sociability and the many books that circulated in the a Marca houses in Mesolcina (for which there is an inventory) could not compensate for the lack of cultural gatherings, performances and social events, during which women could have discovered new ideas or increase their sphere of cultural influence. As Marina Caffiero rightly pointed out, "*I salotti funzionavano come spazi di istruzione femminile, capaci di oltrepassare i limiti della formazione impartita comunemente da precettori o educandati e finivano anche per questo motivo per diventare luoghi di spinta alla produzione scrittorica – non necessariamente pubblicata – da parte delle donne stesse*"⁵⁵. Hence, the women of the valley do not seem to have been encouraged by the emulative spirit of the "*società della conversazione*" (conversation society) to extend their cultural horizons beyond certain limits⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ SCOTT Joan W., "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", *The American Historical Review* 91/5, 1986, p. 1067.

⁵⁵ As Caffiero underlines, salons were spaces where women could overcome the limits of a standard education, and they consequently became places where women were encouraged to write. CAFFIERO Marina, "Dal monastero al salotto alla tribuna. La mediazione culturale femminile nella Roma di metà Settecento", in: ALFONZETTI Beatrice (ed.), *Settecento romano. Reti del Classicismo arcadico*, Rome, Viella, 2017, p. 409.

⁵⁶ See LILT Antoine, *Le monde des salons. Sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, Fayard, 2005; CRAVERI Benedetta, *La civiltà della conversazione*, Milan, Adelphi, 2001.

The journals kept by women in the Alpine regions of the Grisons and the Ticino in the early 19th century derive from very specific situations that exposed the diarists to social competition, which made it easier for them to enter the cultural circuits: Ernestine von Salis-Zizers (1791-1868), who had followed her officer husband to Vienna, kept a diary about her intense social life in Austria and, in this, was later emulated by her daughters⁵⁷; Countess Giuseppina Morosini Negroni Prati (1824-1809), a woman whose important cultural network included the composer Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)⁵⁸, kept a diary about her Grand Tour⁵⁹.

In sum, the analyses of the life trajectories presented in this essay present a constantly relating female subject⁶⁰: a relational self focused on concrete matters and knowledge to be put at the service of large families that required constant attention. Care, including emotional care, and faith seen in concrete terms, which became a central feature of 19th-century Catholic female sociability, are confirmed as strong elements of women's identity. There is therefore no evidence of an introspective writing practice centred on self-analysis, which can be found mainly in diaries of women close to quietism.

The letters of the a Marca family illustrate an expression and an affirmation of the self that is by no means banal, particularly as it is directed towards the continuity of the household in a context of

⁵⁷ The documents, on which I am working, are located at the State Archives of the canton of Grisons.

⁵⁸ Giuseppina's mother Emilia was also in contact with Verdi. Giuseppina was joined by Annetta, Carolina and Cristina, her sisters. Verdi's correspondence with the Morosini women contains more than two hundred letters. See MONTORFANI Pietro (ed.), *Carteggio Verdi Morosini, 1842-1901*, Parma; Lugano, Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani; Archivio storico di Lugano, 2013.

⁵⁹ The document is held in the Morosini collection in the Archivio di Stato of the canton of Ticino. On her cultural connections, see GILI Antonio, MONTORFANI Pietro (eds.), *Nel Gabinetto di Donna Marianna. La Biblioteca Morosini Negroni a Lugano tra Europa delle riforme e Unità d'Italia*, Lugano, Archivio storico di Lugano, 2011.

⁶⁰ As Cavarero has shown, female identity is mainly expressed through relations and only in part through the figure of the other. See CAVARERO Adriana, *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti: filosofia della narrazione*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1997.

uncertainty and handled with a mixing of “strong” and “weak” ties (neighbours, religious associations) – an important strategy that the limits of this essay prevent us from exploring further⁶¹.

The case study presented here cannot easily be generalized to the whole Alpine context; it is the fruit of contextual, cultural and social factors that merge in a family open to Europe, where the written and dialogic culture played a central role in the construction of identity, opening spaces of expression for women too. Yet it is also true that we can see it as representative of the elite of the Three Leagues, where the asymmetry of male – female ties was in some way balanced by relationships of mutuality and economic interdependence. In the Three Leagues, rights of succession, influenced by German law, guaranteed equality of inheritance for sons and daughters; matrimonial law also guaranteed equality of treatment and entailed the sharing of acquisitions and losses⁶². Compared with other southern Alpine regions where the dowry system was in force, this strengthened women’s rights, albeit only partially (the shared goods were managed by the husband owing to the legal incapacity of women, as also laid down by law in the Grisons)⁶³. This confirms Gianna Pomata’s suggestion that there is a link between writing about oneself and structures of patrilineality. We can thus claim that where the latter were weak, spaces emerged that women filled with private writings and family records⁶⁴.

⁶¹ See FAZIO Ida, “‘Legami forti’ e storia della famiglia. Questioni di metodo, questioni di genere”, *Storica* 33, 2005, pp. 7-39.

⁶² See CARONI Pio, *Einflüsse des deutschen Rechts Graubündens südlich der Alpen*, Cologne; Vienna, Böhlau, 1970.

⁶³ For a comparison of the law in Ticino and that of the Grisons, see CARONI Pio, “Le développement des régimes matrimoniaux dans la Suisse italienne du XVI^e au XIX^e siècles”, *Mémoires de la Société pour l’Histoire du Droit et des Institutions des anciens pays burguignons, comtois et romands* 27, 1966, pp. 39-64.

⁶⁴ POMATA Gianna, “Storia particolare e storia universale: in margine ad alcuni manuali di storia delle donne”, *Quaderni Storici* 74/2, 1990, p. 357.

Abstract

Le tissage des relations sociales dans le monde alpin est le fil rouge de cette contribution, qui discute la nature des échanges épistolaires des femmes de la famille suisse des a Marca ainsi que leur importance dans la configuration de réseaux familiaux et de soutien personnel. Les correspondances étudiées illustrent les possibilités offertes aux femmes dans une vallée alpine, les chemins choisis ou subis, et surtout les espaces d'autonomie féminine. Les relations de pouvoir et les dynamiques de genre sont considérées dans leur complexité, dans un contexte caractérisé par la mobilité et l'absence.



Montagne de Bleine

la Ferriere

Pugnesfort
Com.

la Vallée

la Vallée de Roure-Lee

Lane R.

Caille

Montagne de la Velle

Tour enc

St. Pons

Elmont R.

Andon

le Villar

les Jourdans
les Merciers
les Comards

Chau

les

Montagne de Lubac

la Cluc

Rouaine

Montagne d'Audiberg

Mont de Cornete

Grange

Font Michel

Clars

les Galanter

Mabile

Grande

Morlans

S. Pons

Succ.

le Logis

Viguerie de Draguignan

El cragnolle

les Caban

M. R.

les Gras

Montagne de Bomer de Brigno

le Gouret

B. de
Briafq

la Colle de Mont

Camille Caparos

**Writings in Absence: Being Seigneuresses
in the French Pre-Alps in the 18th Century**

“Au non de dieu il et tems à votre age que vous pensies solidement et lors que en continuant votre service vous ne tenteres pas davoit un congé dethé, disant que votre terre etant à la montagne dans vos semestre il et impossible que vous puissies donner ordre à vos affaires que votre pere etant mort depuis vint ans, vous ni avois pas passé un ethe, je ne doucte pas que lon ne vous lacorde, et moy meme jesposeré au ministre ces raisons, je crois quil faudré quil vous y exila pour un an”¹

¹ Archives Départementales des Alpes-Maritimes (ADAM), Robert d’Escragnolle, 1 E 3/2: letter from Françoise de Robert d’Escragnolle, née De Blacas, to her husband, Alexandre Joseph de Robert d’Escragnolle, 5 February 1772: Françoise sends a letter to her husband begging him to ask for a leave of absence from his regiment to return to Provence and manage his seigniory in the mountains.

Alexandre Joseph de Robert d'Escragnolle (1718-1793), absentee seigneur, was with his regiment when he received these words from his wife, Françoise, née De Blacas (1724-after 1791). For twenty years, this noblewoman was the “*procuratrice generale et speciale*”² of the Escragnolles estate in the Pre-Alps. Raised among the urban nobility of Grasse (Alpes-Maritimes), she did not initially feel capable of taking on the daily management of a farm in the mountains, which included supervising the harvests, dealing with the harsh winters, overseeing the repair of the barns in springtime and collecting the farmers' rents. Over time, however, she came to embrace her seigneurial powers.

In addition to looking after the farm, she had the important task of securing her children's future by giving them an education that befitted their position³. In a lengthy correspondence, some two hundred letters of which are preserved in the Archives Départementales des Alpes-Maritimes, she gives an account of her capacity to act in her husband's absence⁴.

Françoise's complex situation was similar to that of other southern French noblewomen who, following their husband's death, also became the heads of their families. One such widow⁵ was Henriette Louise de Fresse de Monval (1755-1825), née Des Michels de Champorcin. Instituted as “*héritière Générale*” and guardian of her children during the French Revolution, she began to keep a *livre de raison*⁶. A true

² GRENIER Benoît, *Seigneurs campagnards de la Nouvelle France: Présence seigneuriale et sociabilité rurale dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent à l'époque préindustrielle*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2007.

³ BROUARD-ARENDIS Isabelle, PLAGNOL-DIÉVAL Marie-Emmanuelle (eds.), *Femmes éducatrices au siècle des Lumières*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2007.

⁴ GUILHAUMOU Jacques, “Autour du concept d'agentivité”, in: MONTENACH Anne (ed.), *Agency un concept opératoire dans les études de genre?, Rives Méditerranéennes* 41, 2021, pp. 25-34; HAICAULT Monique, “Autour d'agency. Un nouveau paradigme pour les recherches de genre”, in: MONTENACH Anne (ed.), *Agency un concept ...*, pp. 11-24.

⁵ She was the wife of Jean Alexandre de Fresse de Monval (1752-1798).

⁶ Archives Départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône (ADBR), Fresse de Monval, 248 J 106: *livre de raison* kept by Henriette de Fresse de Monval during her widowhood. A *livre de raison* was a handwritten book kept by the head of the family containing a record of the family's assets (purchases and sales of goods, receipts or payments of rents and debts, etc.) and details of the family members' births, baptisms, marriages, deaths, illnesses, and so on.

materfamilias⁷, she recorded the history of the Grand Jardin estate, located in Valensole (Alpes-de-Haute-Provence), and kept scrupulous household accounts⁸. As a former pupil of the *Maison Royale d'Éducation de Saint-Louis*, a renowned boarding school for girls from impoverished noble families, Henriette diligently applied Madame de Maintenon's home economics precepts⁹. These different records allowed her to successfully administer an estate that produced almonds, wine and wheat. By turns the perfect housekeeper, thrifty manager and judicious educator, Henriette Louise managed to navigate the storm of the Revolution and safeguard her land¹⁰.

The presence or absence of these women's husbands conditioned their role and agency within their family and social groups. Whether young mothers, dutiful wives or widows, they were at the heart of their family and ensured its day-to-day viability. A diversified documentation resulting from the daily writing activities of these two noblewomen reveals their lives in the Provençal Pre-Alps of the 18th century¹¹.

⁷ MOUYSSET Sylvie, *Papiers de famille: introduction à l'étude des livres de raison (France, XV^e-XIX^e siècle)*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2007.

⁸ ADBR, Fresse de Monval collection, 248 J 106: *livre de raison* kept by Henriette de Fresse de Monval during her widowhood; ADBR, *Fresse de Monval*, 248 J 97: journals recording food expenditure, 1783-1791.

⁹ PICCO Dominique, "De St-Cyr à la 'vie de château'? (fin XVII^e-XVIII^e s.)", in: COCULA Anne-Marie, COMBET Michel, *Le château au féminin. Actes des Rencontres d'Archéologie et d'Histoire en Périgord le 26, 27 et 28 septembre 2003*, Bordeaux, Ausonius Éditions, 2004, pp. 190-203.

¹⁰ DAUCHEZ Chantal, "Femmes et conservation du patrimoine familial dans le Périgord révolutionnaire", in: COCULA Anne-Marie, COMBET Michel, *Le château au féminin...*, pp. 205-217.

¹¹ This article is the outcome of a doctoral study in progress, CAPAROS Camille, *La plume des secondes. Papiers de famille et écriture féminine dans la noblesse de France méridionale (XVII^e-début du XIX^e siècles)*, TELEMMe, Aix Marseille Université, CNRS.

Being a mother in the Provence Alps: pregnancy, childhood and education

Both Françoise and Henriette Louise entered into marriages in accordance with their social status. Neither had a father or brothers, so their dowries were comfortable enough to attract heirs with military careers. As wives, they were required to give birth to a line that would ensure the continuity of their husband's name. Their personal writings show how they embraced their role as mothers.

Shortly after Françoise and Alexandre de Robert d'Escragnolle were married, Alexandre, a cavalry captain, was called to Flanders, leaving behind his young wife pregnant with their first child. The infant, nicknamed Antonin, quickly became the couple's focal point, and their correspondence soon turned into a full-blown *journal d'éducation*. A *journal d'éducation* (which incidentally was more popular in Switzerland than in France) was a journal kept by mothers at the time to record the development, health and education of their offspring¹². In the 1750s, the epistolary pen became a real affirmatory tool for Françoise as she was finding her feet as a mother and educator¹³. Through her correspondence with her husband, this young noblewoman created a filial link between an absent father and his son. Her numerous descriptions had to fill the void created by the captain's departure. The letters are touching and reveal the level of attention paid to a young heir at the time:

“quant au petit je ne croit pas quil vive il et si aimable que vous puissies vous limagine ce ne pas prevantion de ma part tous ceux qui le voit en sont enchantés cet meme au dessus de son age il ne dit que quelque mots mais il comprend et entant tout toujours grasioeux

¹² MORET-PÉTRINI Sylvie, *Pratiques éducatives familiales et écriture du for privé en Suisse romande (1750-1820)*, PhD thesis defended in 2016, supervised by Danièle Tosato-Rigo at the Université de Lausanne.

¹³ MORET-PÉTRINI Sylvie, “La plume: instrument d'affirmation de la mère-éducatrice”, in: TOSATO-RIGO Danièle (ed.), *Appel à témoins. Écrits personnels et pratiques socioculturelles (XVII^e-XX^e s.)*, *Etudes de lettres* 1-2, 2016, pp. 87-108.

*saluant tous le monde connoissant chacun il marche seul [...] il dans il chante cet un petit singe*¹⁴.

The personal writings of Henriette Louise de Fresse de Monval, born in 1755, are much less loquacious. Her accounts books and journals provide no information on this noblewoman's lived experience of motherhood. She gave birth to her children with the help of a midwife¹⁵ and handed them over to a wet nurse as soon as they were born. The wages and soap she gave to her midwife and wet nurse are recorded in her accounts books¹⁶. Like so many other women, these two mothers decided to resort to mercenary breastfeeding¹⁷.

Françoise entrusted her "*poupon*"¹⁸ to a wet nurse in Saint-Vallier, a mountain village situated halfway between Escagnolles and Grasse. This location choice suggests she felt the need to visit her child regularly but also that she was seeking a strong patrimonial base, because some of her paraphernal belongings, constituted by her marriage contract, were located in this village¹⁹. Notably, the young child was also entrusted to the care of Françoise's mother, Marie de Funel. It is clear there was a

¹⁴ ADAM, Robert d'Escagnolle, 1 E 3/2: letter from Françoise de Robert d'Escagnolle, née De Blacas, to her husband, Alexandre Joseph de Robert d'Escagnolle, undated: Françoise is describing to her husband their young son's progress and talents. He is taking his first steps, loves to dance and seems to be adored by everyone around him.

¹⁵ ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 97: journals recording food expenditure, April 1791 expenditure: "*a la sage femme 6L / a la petite qui m'a tété 6L*".

¹⁶ ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 97: journals recording food expenditure, January 1791 expenditure: "*a anne clemene nourrice de ma fille 6L*".

¹⁷ HANAFI Nahema, "Les élites féminines face à l'allaitement. Pratiques privées, stratégies familiales et enjeux politiques", *Allaiter. Histoire(s) et cultures d'une pratique*, forthcoming.

¹⁸ ADAM, Robert d'Escagnolle, 1 E 3/2: letter from Françoise de Robert d'Escagnolle, née De Blacas, to her husband, Alexandre Joseph de Robert d'Escagnolle, 24 December 1751.

¹⁹ AGRESTI Jean-Philippe, *Les régimes matrimoniaux en Provence à la fin de l'Ancien Régime. Contribution à l'étude du droit et de la pratique notariale en pays de droit écrit*, Aix-en-Provence, Presses universitaires de Marseilles, 2009.

high level of familial support and solidarity and that Antonin's "*mode d'élevage*" was a multigenerational female affair²⁰.

In her letters, Françoise gives an account of Antonin's first teeth, childhood illnesses and first words: "*il ce porte toujours bien tout à leure il marche seul il est comptant tout et commence à dire quelque mots il et toujours bien aimable*"²¹. Although less loquacious, Henriette Louise's journals are just as rooted in the day-to-day care of her children and contain, for example, lists of their toys²², shoes²³, little hats²⁴, and so on. They combine the mistress of the house's financial responsibility with the maternal affection of a noblewoman at the end of the 18th century.

The daily writings of these two women also give some indication of the educational strategies adopted by the nobility in the Pre-Alps region in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Coming from the *noblesse de robe*, Françoise had ambitions for her son. With the head of the family absent, decisions concerning his education rested solely on her capacity to act. Raised by Françoise and her mother, Antonin would also receive visits from his paternal uncles. His education was of the utmost importance. He was heir to the estate and was rendered an only child when his younger sister died after being "*enlevée par [la petite vérole] le disieme jour de sa maladie*"²⁵. He could not remain in village life, because it was unsuited to his

²⁰ HANAFI Nahema, "Les élites féminines...".

²¹ ADAM, Robert d'Escragnolle, 1 E 3/2: letter from Françoise de Robert d'Escragnolle, née De Blacas, to her husband, Alexandre Joseph de Robert d'Escragnolle, undated: Françoise is telling her husband that her son's first teeth have come through and that he's started talking.

²² ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 97: journals recording food expenditure April 1790 expenditure: "*un petit tambour pour mon fils*".

²³ ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 97: journals recording food expenditure, May 1790 expenditure: "*2 p. souliers pour les enfants 3L 4d 1/2 s*".

²⁴ ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 97: journals recording food expenditure, January 1788 expenditure: "*1 chapeau de paille pour le petit 1L 2s*".

²⁵ ADAM, Robert d'Escragnolle, 1 E 3/2: letter from Françoise de Robert d'Escragnolle, née De Blacas, to her husband, Alexandre Joseph de Robert d'Escragnolle, 13 October 1764: the child dies of smallpox after ten days of illness.

future position²⁶. Despite his mother's best efforts, he received only an elementary education from Father Rouquier, who taught him the rudiments of Latin through a reading of the classical authors²⁷.

In the end, Françoise deployed a significant amount of agency to have her son join his father in the regiment. She saw this as following the “*ordre naturel*” of things. She had taken charge of her son's childhood, and now Alexandre Joseph must assume his role as father to an adolescent in need of a male presence. Her maternal ambition drove her to demand that the cavalry captain take responsibility:

*“jay vous ecrivis à la acte mon cher epoux afin que vous tachiez de prendre des arrangements pour profiter de votre semestre, votre fils sil savet que vous ne venies pas cela seroit capable de le tuer la melancolie le seziré, nous faisons tout pour lui, et nous manquons au plus exensiel dabort son education tout le monde sent recrië et chacun souffre de le voir dans un mauvoix vilage je vous assure que cela et bien humiliant, que faire je ne eu guere que de choses humiliantes dieu la permis insi javois trop dambission pour ma famille”*²⁸.

When the captain decided to come to Provence and take his son back to the regiment, Françoise's “*mère par correspondance*” role was reinforced. She was able to contribute to educational decisions from a distance through her letters, which were replete with advice. For example, in 1766, she suggested that her son ask his “*cher papas de [lui] donner un maitre à danser et un pour la musique*” because “*tout cela*

²⁶ ADAM, Robert d'Escragnolle, 1 E 3/2: letter from Françoise de Robert d'Escragnolle, née De Blacas, to her husband, 13 October 1764: “*voions de donner au seul enfan qui nous reste une education convenable à son etat vela notre consolation et notre espoir dans ce monde*”.

²⁷ ADAM, Robert d'Escragnolle, 1 E 3/3: letters from Antoine de Robert d'Escragnolle to his father Alexandre Joseph, 28 October 1760 and 24 April 1763.

²⁸ ADAM, Robert d'Escragnolle, 1 E 3/2: letter from Françoise de Robert d'Escragnolle, née De Blacas, to her husband, Alexandre Joseph de Robert d'Escragnolle, 2 June 1765: Françoise begs her husband to come and get their son, who is old enough now to want to follow in his father's footsteps to the regiment and complete his education. She also points out that the village of Escragnolles is not a desirable place for a young nobleman.

*entre dans leducation du jeune homme*²⁹. She told him to continue to “*s’aplique à la leture [...] il ni à rien qui forme plus un jeune homme*” and thanked Alexandre Joseph for organizing German and art teachers for him. Later on, she again acted to decide Antonin’s future through her correspondence. As heir to the title of seigneur, Françoise refused to see him enter the same career as his father. His duty was to get married and take over the management of the seignory in order to relieve his mother, who had “*sacrifier [sa] junesse [sa] tranquillité et [sa] santé*” for the “*personnes pour lequel [elle a] de l’attachement*”³⁰.

The code of conduct that Henriette Louise set out in her journal seems to show that she embraced her role as mother and educator during her marriage. As a true “*personne raisonnable*”³¹, she oversaw her children’s education:

*“je veillerai avec grand soin l’education de mes enfans, et surtout leur education chrétienne et leur moeurs; je ne laisserai rien approcher d’eux qui puisse corrompre leur innocence; je les surveillerai avec la plus grande exactitude, je ne les quitterai que par la plus grande nécessité et jamais pour etre plus libre”*³².

From 1798 onwards, Henriette Louise, *héritière universelle* and her children’s guardian, invested a significant amount of money securing their future. At the age of fifteen, Henri was sent to boarding school in Lyon. The school fees and the transportation of his belongings are

²⁹ ADAM, Robert d’Escragnolle, 1 E 3/2: 11 June 1766: she recommends dance and music teachers.

³⁰ ADAM, Robert d’Escragnolle, 1 E 3/2: 9 June 1762.

³¹ AUBIGNÉ (d’) Françoise, Veuve Scarron, Marquise de Maintenon, *Portrait d’une personne raisonnable*, 1701, *Lettres et entretiens sur l’éducation des filles par Madame de Maintenon*, collected and published for the first time by Théophile Lavallée, second revised and enlarged edition, vol. I, Paris, Charpentier Libraire-Éditeur, 1861, pp. 342-348.

³² ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 103: code of conduct written by Henriette Louise de Fresse de Monval in the 1770s: she swears to take care of her children’s education, especially their Christian instruction.

listed in an accounts book Henriette Louise kept for the year 1806³³. It also shows the *Comptes des maitres donnés à [sa] fille*, Aglaé, born in 1789. Aglaé had been at boarding school in a convent in Aix until the Revolution but was then home-schooled in the family estate in Valensole, with daily lessons in music, dance, writing and embroidery³⁴. The educational precepts of the lady of the house also appear in a small notebook that she put together for her children. Entitled *À mes enfans*, it establishes her as their advisor even after death. Because she was the chief custodian of power in the family in terms of the written word, Henriette Louise composed this notebook as a collection of warnings and advice. Devoutly married, her sons had to take care of their young sister's future and protect their siblings: "*souvenez vous mes chers enfans que l'amitié l'union entre les freres est le plus grands de tous les bien <que ceux de la fortune vous être enlevés> personne nosera vous attaquer si on vous voit unis*"³⁶.

Being the heart and soul of the Château d'Escragnolle and the Grand Jardin estate in Valensole

The power of attorney signed by Alexandre Joseph on 21 and 22 March 1748 formally named his wife as the "*procuratrice generale et speciale*" of all his worldly goods and powers. Françoise effectively replaced him concerning all acts requiring ratification by the head of the family and the seigneur of the estate³⁷. However, this young

³³ ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 106: expenditure book kept by Henriette Louise de Fresse de Monval for the year 1806, pp. 17-18.

³⁴ ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 10 6: expenditure book kept by Henriette Louise de Fresse de Monval for the year 1806, pp. 13-14.

³⁵ Supralinear addition.

³⁶ ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 103: "À mes enfans", written by Henriette Louise de Fresse de Monval, née Des Michels de Champorcin: she reminds her children of the importance of fraternal bonds.

³⁷ GRENIER Benoît, FERLAND Catherine, "«Quelque longue que soit l'absence»: procurations et pouvoir féminin à Québec au XVIII^e siècle", *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire* 37, 2013, pp. 197-225.

woman soon became overwhelmed by her new status. Raised in the city, she had no specific knowledge of how to manage an estate in the mountains. Indeed, her correspondence in the early years seems to have been a tool that helped her transition into this new “*procuratrice*” role because she constantly sought Alexandre Joseph’s approval. Moreover, her sharecroppers paid her little heed: “*votre presence et ausi necaissere pour votre terre je ni paré plu [...] je bau dire je beau crier [...] une femme lon ne la craint pas, vos vasseaux son tous republicains*”³⁸.

Above all in her letters, she strongly condemns the precarious lifestyle forced on her by her husband. Chasing military glory, he had given his wife no option but to take on responsibilities that entrapped her:

*“le sort dun militaire marie et charmant et celui de sa femme et a plaindre il à tous les agrements du mariage [...] et il ne ressent nule des incommodites chagrins et sousis que le mariage entrene eloigné de deux cent lieux de chez lui il et toujours regardé comme le chef et le maitre, [...] dans le tems qune pauvre femme ne fait que inquieter que le soin et le sousis la mettent dans un etat deplorable”*³⁹.

Henriette Louise’s writings show that she applied the precepts handed down by Madame de Maintenon to the letter. All the young ladies at the Maison Royale d’Éducation de Saint-Louis, in order to return “*dans le monde*” knowing how to “*faire quelque chose*”, must “*se faire à [elles-mêmes] une règle de journée [qu’elles] suivr[ont] fidèlement*”⁴⁰. This code

³⁸ ADAM, Robert d’Escragnolle, 1 E 3/2: letter from Françoise de Robert d’Escragnolle, née De Blacas, to her husband, Alexandre Joseph de Robert d’Escragnolle, undated: she denounces the disobedience of these sharecroppers, who act like “republicans”.

³⁹ ADAM, Robert d’Escragnolle, 1 E 3/2: letter from Françoise de Robert d’Escragnolle, née De Blacas, to her husband, 12 November 1751: Françoise complains openly about her situation as a “*femme en puissance de mari*”. While her husband is away with his regiment, she is subject to her duties as a wife, mother and “*procuratrice*” of the estate. She rejects the subjugation that she has been subject to ever since her marriage to an absent soldier.

⁴⁰ AUBIGNÉ (d’) Françoise, Veuve Scarron, Marquise de Maintenon, *Portrait d’une personne raisonnable...*: the young ladies of Saint-Cyr must write a code of conduct and follow it scrupulously.

of conduct is attested in a small loose-leafed notebook kept among Henriette Louise's personal papers. She promises to be "*de la plus grande douceur envers [son] mari*" and thus swears to avoid "*toutes les occasion de le contredire même avec raison*". She will "*le ramener a [son] avis quand [elle le croira] juste et raisonnable*" through delicate negotiation based on "*l'asçendant de l'amitié*". She modestly promises to fulfil her conjugal duty and to show herself "*complaisante avec lui dans les choses qu'il est en droit d'exiger et ne pas lui laisser appercevoir des repugnances quelque peine qu[elle] éprouve a [se] surmonter*". However, as a good Christian and a respectable woman, she states that if her husband were to "*blesses [sa] conscience*" with inappropriate requests, she would "*lui résisterai avec courage et fermeté, mais toujours avec douceur*"⁴¹.

Henriette Louise strives to be a "*femme en puissance de mari*"⁴². Her daily study of piety and virtue was founded on reading, prayer and an examination of conscience:

*"je combattrais autant que je le pourrai [...] cette sensibilité extrême que la moindre chose réveille, et qui peut me rendre pénible et désagréable dans le commerce de la vie; [...] je prendrai tous les moyens de me ramener a des sentimens plus humbles qu'un peu de retour et de réflexions sur moi même me feront aisément trouver"*⁴³.

Finally, for both these women, writing seems to have been a tool for understanding the subjugation imposed on them by French society

⁴¹ ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 103: code of conduct of Henriette Louise de Fresse de Monval, née Des Michels de Champorcin, 1770s: she promises to be docile and to fulfil her marital duty while taking care to remain a respectable woman.

⁴² See, in particular, POTHIER Robert-Joseph, *Œuvres de Pothier contenant les traités du droit français. Traité de la puissance du mari. Traité de la communauté. Traité des donations entre mari et femme. Appendice au traité des donations. Nouvelle édition mise en meilleur ordre et publiée par les soins de M. Dupin, ... augmentée d'une dissertation sur la vie et les ouvrages de ce célèbre jurisconsulte par le même*, Paris, Béchét Aîné, 1824-1825, BNF, Département Droit, Economie, Politique, F-41956, p. 1.

⁴³ ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 103: code of conduct written by Henriette Louise de Fresse de Monval in the 1770s: she promises to control her emotions and her pride to be a chaste, pious and modest woman.

under the Ancien Régime⁴⁴. Although they conformed to it, their writing expresses the limitations they set on this state of powerlessness. Indecency and the non-respect of social proprieties were valid reasons to “*secouer le joug*”⁴⁵.

Eighteenth-century Provence was a society strongly marked by patriarchy, and the distribution of power gave the head of the family a distinct advantage⁴⁶. The wife therefore had to negotiate her share of the responsibility. Accounts books and diaries give us an indication of the distribution of power between couples in the nobility during the modern era⁴⁷. Some wives had significant domestic power because they controlled the financial incomings and outgoings.

Henriette Louise seems to have received extensive training in bookkeeping. Although classified by archivists under her father-in-law's name, the journals for the years 1783 to 1791 were written in her own regular, refined handwriting:

Saint-Cyr had the duty of training future wives and ladies of the house to be highly accomplished when it came to their domestic duties⁴⁸. The young ladies were therefore taught how to keep accounts books, write

⁴⁴ GODINEAU Dominique, *Les femmes dans la France moderne, XVI^e-XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2015.

⁴⁵ DIDEROT Denis, “Autorité politique”, in: DIDEROT Denis (ed.), *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. I, Paris, Briasson, David, Le Breton et Durand, 1751, pp. 898a-900b.

⁴⁶ COLLOMP Alain, *La maison du père. Famille et village en Haute-Provence aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1983.

⁴⁷ TAGUE Ingrid H., *Women of Quality Accepting and Contesting Ideals of Femininity in England, 1690-1760*, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2002.

⁴⁸ AUBIGNÉ (d') Françoise, Veuve Scarron, Marquise de Maintenon, *Avis aux maîtresses des classes sur l'instruction sainte des demoiselles (décembre 1691), Lettres et entretiens sur l'éducation des filles par Madame de Maintenon*, collected and published for the first time by Théophile Lavallée, second revised and enlarged edition, vol. I, Paris, Charpentier Libraire-Éditeur, 1861, pp. 84-85: “*Rendez-les ménagères et laborieuses; elles en seront plus propres à tous les partis qu'elles peuvent prendre; accoutumez-les à ne point perdre de temps: je ne compte point pour perdu celui qu'elles emploient à se divertir quand il est réglé*”.

1. farine	6	21.	4. L. farine	8	S. 11
2. pain de seigle noir	2	22.	5. pain de seigle	8	11
3. chanvre a 1/2	3	23.	6. chanvre a 1/2	7	11
4. pain rapé au lait de seigle	1	24.	7. pain rapé au lait de seigle	4	11
5. pain de seigle	2	25.	8. pain de seigle	5	11
6. pain de seigle a 1/2	3	26.	9. pain de seigle a 1/2	2	6
7. pain de seigle	2	27.	10. pain de seigle	1	6
8. pain de seigle	4	28.	11. pain de seigle	18	11
9. pain de seigle	4	29.	12. pain de seigle	2	11
10. pain de seigle	2	30.	13. pain de seigle	4	10
11. pain de seigle	2	31.	14. pain de seigle	5	11
12. pain de seigle	2	32.	15. pain de seigle	4	6
13. pain de seigle	12	33.	16. pain de seigle	3	12
14. pain de seigle	9	34.	17. pain de seigle	4	6
15. pain de seigle	15	35.	18. pain de seigle	1	6
16. pain de seigle	3	36.	19. pain de seigle	1	6
17. pain de seigle	4	37.	20. pain de seigle	4	6
18. pain de seigle	3	38.	21. pain de seigle	4	6
19. pain de seigle	9	39.	22. pain de seigle	3	6
20. pain de seigle	16	40.	23. pain de seigle	2	3
21. pain de seigle	11	41.	24. pain de seigle	12	11
22. pain de seigle	15	42.	25. pain de seigle	3	11
23. pain de seigle	2	43.	26. pain de seigle	7	11
24. pain de seigle	5	44.	27. pain de seigle	5	11
25. pain de seigle	14	45.	28. pain de seigle	4	11
26. pain de seigle	7	46.	29. pain de seigle	2	10
27. pain de seigle	1	47.	30. pain de seigle	1	4
28. pain de seigle	10	48.	31. pain de seigle	7	4
29. pain de seigle	3	49.	32. pain de seigle	1	1
30. pain de seigle	1	50.	33. pain de seigle	1	1
31. pain de seigle	6	51.	34. pain de seigle	1	6
32. pain de seigle	6	52.	35. pain de seigle	8	11
33. pain de seigle	1	53.	36. pain de seigle	19	11
34. pain de seigle	1	54.	37. pain de seigle	2	11
35. pain de seigle	21	55.	38. pain de seigle	1	11
36. pain de seigle	6	56.	39. pain de seigle	3	11
37. pain de seigle	5	57.	40. pain de seigle	3	6
38. pain de seigle	4	58.	41. pain de seigle	1	11
39. pain de seigle	4	59.	42. pain de seigle	1	6
40. pain de seigle	5	60.	43. pain de seigle	4	6
41. pain de seigle	5	61.	44. pain de seigle	10	10
42. pain de seigle	1	62.	45. pain de seigle	0	0
43. pain de seigle	1	63.	46. pain de seigle	0	0
44. pain de seigle	1	64.	47. pain de seigle	0	0
45. pain de seigle	1	65.	48. pain de seigle	0	0
46. pain de seigle	1	66.	49. pain de seigle	0	0
47. pain de seigle	1	67.	50. pain de seigle	0	0
48. pain de seigle	1	68.	51. pain de seigle	0	0
49. pain de seigle	1	69.	52. pain de seigle	0	0
50. pain de seigle	1	70.	53. pain de seigle	0	0
51. pain de seigle	1	71.	54. pain de seigle	0	0
52. pain de seigle	1	72.	55. pain de seigle	0	0
53. pain de seigle	1	73.	56. pain de seigle	0	0
54. pain de seigle	1	74.	57. pain de seigle	0	0
55. pain de seigle	1	75.	58. pain de seigle	0	0
56. pain de seigle	1	76.	59. pain de seigle	0	0
57. pain de seigle	1	77.	60. pain de seigle	0	0
58. pain de seigle	1	78.	61. pain de seigle	0	0
59. pain de seigle	1	79.	62. pain de seigle	0	0
60. pain de seigle	1	80.	63. pain de seigle	0	0
61. pain de seigle	1	81.	64. pain de seigle	0	0
62. pain de seigle	1	82.	65. pain de seigle	0	0
63. pain de seigle	1	83.	66. pain de seigle	0	0
64. pain de seigle	1	84.	67. pain de seigle	0	0
65. pain de seigle	1	85.	68. pain de seigle	0	0
66. pain de seigle	1	86.	69. pain de seigle	0	0
67. pain de seigle	1	87.	70. pain de seigle	0	0
68. pain de seigle	1	88.	71. pain de seigle	0	0
69. pain de seigle	1	89.	72. pain de seigle	0	0
70. pain de seigle	1	90.	73. pain de seigle	0	0
71. pain de seigle	1	91.	74. pain de seigle	0	0
72. pain de seigle	1	92.	75. pain de seigle	0	0
73. pain de seigle	1	93.	76. pain de seigle	0	0
74. pain de seigle	1	94.	77. pain de seigle	0	0
75. pain de seigle	1	95.	78. pain de seigle	0	0
76. pain de seigle	1	96.	79. pain de seigle	0	0
77. pain de seigle	1	97.	80. pain de seigle	0	0
78. pain de seigle	1	98.	81. pain de seigle	0	0
79. pain de seigle	1	99.	82. pain de seigle	0	0
80. pain de seigle	1	100.	83. pain de seigle	0	0

Fig. 1: Journal of Henriette Louise de Fresse de Monval. ADBR, Fresse de Monval collection, 248 J 97.

out receipts and manage correspondence⁴⁹. Every day, Henriette Louise would apply the principles of home economics she had acquired and make a list of the purchases required to feed her family and ensure their well-being. Her geographical location meant she had access to foodstuffs from across a large rural area and, in particular, that she could practise self-sufficiency. Her purchases of game, mutton and lamb testify to a local supply. The southern Pre-Alps had specialized in sheep and goat farming since the Middle Ages⁵⁰.

Writing and arithmetic formed part of the training in the domestic arts. Henriette Louise's journals illustrate the importance that was attached to learning how to keep accounts. The mistress of Grand Jardin displays significant mental capacities, attributable to her education at Saint-Louis. Her writings show her calculations and mathematical entries⁵¹. Her use of space on the pages also reveals her material and mental organization skills. In particular, the careful management of her written materials means she would have been able to obtain reliable information quickly and easily on the status of the household accounts and provisions. Literacy (the mastery of reading and writing⁵²) and numeracy⁵³ (the ability to mentally manipulate and write down numbers over twenty) combined to secure her role in writing as mistress of the house. For example, she conscientiously and diligently inserted the monthly totals, showing the general data collected at the bottom of each page.

⁴⁹ ROCHE Daniel, *Les Républicains des lettres: gens de culture et Lumières au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, Fayard, 1988, p. 364.

⁵⁰ MORICEAU Jean-Marc, *Histoire et géographie de l'élevage français. Du Moyen Âge à la Révolution*, Paris, Fayard, 2005.

⁵¹ GARDEY Delphine, *Écrire, calculer, classer. Comment une révolution de papier a transformé les sociétés contemporaines (1800-1940)*, Paris, La Découverte, 2008, digital edition, chapter 5, paragraph 11.

⁵² FRAENKEL Béatrice, MBODJ-POUYE Aïssatou, "Introduction. Les *New Literacy studies*, jalons historiques et perspectives actuelles", *Langage et société* 133, 2010, pp. 7-24.

⁵³ CLINE COHEN Patricia, *A calculating People: The Spread of Numeracy in Early America*, Chicago; London, University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 9.

Being the seigneuresse of an estate in the mountains

Both Françoise and Henriette Louise used writing to understand, accept and take charge of their roles as seigneuresses of an estate in the mountains.

Given her husband's indifference, Françoise was obliged to take on her duties and status as seigneuresse of Escragnolles, and in so doing, she had to confront the men around her. The disputes she wrote about in September 1771, in particular those with her cousin Muraire, illustrate not only her strength of character but also the confidence she had in her ability to manage the estate's affairs single-handedly:

“je meme dit à muraire que je vous envoie 1000 tt et je lui et dit larangement que javois pris pour lui faire voir je navois besoin de personne car comme je le vis de mauvoise humeur [...] lors que je lui fis voir que je navois besoin de personne et que javois conté à monsieur bonnin la lettre de change il changea de ton.”⁵⁴

Above all, it was the various legal proceedings she had to face that established her as the Dame d'Escragnolles. Between 1768 and 1770, the grazing lands conflict between the inhabitants of Escragnolles and those of Mons escalated. The herds of Escragnolles had regularly grazed the neighbouring pastures since the beginning of the 18th century, ravaging the fruit crops and fallow lands. The seigneur legitimized these incursions through his inheritance of a feudal right that had been in place since 1486. However, the practice destabilized the agropastoral economy of the Mons community. Françoise deployed a significant capacity of action in this matter. She employed the services of lawyers and wrote letters to the *subdélégués* and public prosecutors⁵⁵.

⁵⁴ ADBR, Robert d'Escragnolle, 1 E 3/2: letter from Françoise de Robert d'Escragnolle, née De Blacas, to her husband, Alexandre Joseph de Robert d'Escragnolle, 25 September 1771: Françoise tells her husband how she responded to an excessive outburst of anger from her cousin by affirming that she could manage the affairs on her own.

⁵⁵ ADAM, Robert d'Escragnolle, 1 E 3/2: letter from Françoise de Robert d'Escragnolle, née De Blacas, to her husband, 18 December 1761.

As the seigneuresse, she defended the rights of her noble house. The whole affair was dangerous and required a great deal of composure on her part. In 1761, for example, a shepherd opened fire on a tenant at Escragnolles. Several animals were killed, and the shepherd was wounded⁵⁶. In 1764, after an appeal to the Conseil du Roy, the case was concluded in favour of the seigneur. The inhabitants of Mons were ordered to pay 150 livres to “*Madame d’Escragnolle*”, who was recognized as the seigneuresse of her community⁵⁷.

In 1798, Henriette Louise found herself at the head of an agricultural estate that had been scarred by the Revolution. A mother of three, she began writing a *livre de raison* to evidence her successful management of the family estate and all its affairs. She was fully aware of her newly acquired responsibility and the duties attached to it. As a widow, she had acquired a new status as “*cheffe*” of the family, and she fully embraced this role through her writings. By starting her own *livre de raison*, she was in fact asserting her legitimate place as the family writer, an assertion reinforced in two rather more confidential writings addressed to her children⁵⁸. Faced with legal proceedings brought by her brothers-in-law, she in fact proceeded to rectify some of the content in her father-in-law’s *livres de raison* through her writings in order to rehabilitate her husband’s memory:

“*moi henriette Louise des michels de Champorcin v[eu]e de jean alexandre de fresse de monval je dois à la mémoire de mon mari, à la vérité, de rectifier les fausses idées que mes enfans pourroient*

⁵⁶ ADAM, Robert d’Escragnolle, 1 E 3/2: letter from Françoise de Robert d’Escragnolle, née De Blacas, to her husband, 4 December 1761.

⁵⁷ SOLAKIAN Daniel, “Un exemple de lutte villageoise unitaire au XVIII^e siècle: la défense des herbages du terroir de Mons-en-Provence (Haut-Var)”, in: *Le Village en Provence. Actes des journées d’histoire régionale Mouans-Sartoux, 16 et 17 mars 1984*, Mouans-Sartoux, Centre Régional de Documentation Occitane publication, 1985, p. 198.

⁵⁸ As Sylvie Mouysset showed, the *livre de raison* could be used as evidence in trials. These records could therefore serve as official evidence before the monarchic authorities. See MOUYSSET Sylvie, *Papiers de famille...*, pp. 219-221.

prendre de la conduite de leur père s'ils en jugeoient d'après l'écrit de leur ayeul"⁵⁹.

By “*refut[ant] l'Écrit*”, she was contradicting the patriarchal discourse of the *livre de raison* and instituting a performative discourse. Through her refutatory efforts, her writings were established as the only documents that laid down the law. The former young lady of Saint-Louis deposed the “*totem fondateur de la famille*”⁶⁰ and replaced the voice of the departed patriarch. She established a different memory and made sure her husband’s memory was unsullied. This subjective undertaking was based on a combined sense of affection and duty⁶¹.

While these two noblewomen did not “work” as such, they can be seen as genuine businesswomen⁶², managing their entire households and participating in the administration of their husbands’ estates⁶³.

The leases instituted between Françoise and her tenant farmers give an indication of her duties, which included maintaining the farms and

⁵⁹ ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 103: “*observations et réfutations sur l'écrit précédent intitulé Livre de raison tenu par moi Pierre alexandre de fresse de monval*”, written by Henriette Louise de Fresse de Monval, née Des Michels de Champorcin: Henriette Louise is stating that she owes it to her husband’s and her father-in-law’s memories to rectify the family *livre de raison*.

⁶⁰ MOUYSSET Sylvie, “Quand ‘Je’ est une femme: les spécificités d’une écriture ordinaire?”, in: BARDET Jean-Pierre, RUGGIU François-Régis (eds.), *Car c’est moy que je peins. Écriture de soi, individu et liens sociaux (Europe, xv^e-xx^e siècles)*, Toulouse, CNRS-Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, digital edition, 2010, paragraph 36.

⁶¹ MOUYSSET Sylvie, “Quand écrire, c’est faire: de la performativité des écritures de soi (Europe, xvi^e-xviii^e s.)”, in: TOSATO-RIGO Danièle (ed.), *Appel à témoins...*, p. 25.

⁶² PONTACQ Mariannick, “Madame de Marcellus, une femme d’affaires à l’époque des Lumières”, *Annales du Midi: revue archéologique, historique et philologique de la France méridionale* 118/253, 2006, pp. 51-71; LE MAO Caroline, “Une redoutable femme d’affaires: la première présidente Olive de Lestonnac (1572-1652)”, *Annales du Midi* 118/253, 2006; MARZAGALLI Silvia, “Mariées et indépendante? Une femme d’affaires à la fin du xviii^e siècle: Hélène de Meyere, épouse Skinner”, *Annales du Midi* 118/253, 2006, pp. 73-84.

⁶³ LARSEN M. Ruth, *Dynastic Domesticity: The Role of Elite Women in the Yorkshire Country House, 1685-1858*, PhD thesis, University of York, Department of History, 2003. The author reflects on the notion of work among women in the English gentry of the 18th and 19th centuries.

giving livestock to her tenants. In February 1770, when she was having a barn repaired using wood from her forests, she ensured that the “moutons profiteron un peu des herbages de la fore” and “*par ce moien* [ils] *fumeron*” the “sous-bois”⁶⁴. Over the years, she seems to have acquired a great deal of expertise as a country seigneuresse, managing wheat, olive and fruit tree farms. In addition, her gardens and groves produced hemp, lentils, beets, spinach, leeks and cabbages⁶⁵, and her sheep’s wool was sold in Grasse, the main regional trading place⁶⁶.

Henriette Louise kept a note of the estate’s yields and developed her agricultural observations in her *livre de raison*. Wheat was a major crop in Provence. During her marriage, Henriette Louise had noted down the quantity of wheat produced on the seigneurial land and the amounts of flour ground and sold through its mill. Most importantly, her records show that she had participated in managing the estate alongside her husband when he was alive. When her husband inherited the estate, they had decided together on future courses of action. For example, they built a “*magazin, [une] Ecurie et [une] remise*” and undertook “*réparations au bâtiment [...] pour loger des fermiers*”⁶⁷. After her husband’s death in 1798, she increased the pig stock and continued to pay the “*granger, valets, bergers et porcher*”⁶⁸. She also managed an almond orchard. In the 19th century, the Alpes-de-Haute-Provence was a significant almond-producing area⁶⁹. Over the years, Henriette Louise refined her farming strategy. For example, she wrote in 1819:

“*Je n’ai pas été fort contente du cueilleur quoiqu’il y ait gagné très honnêtement. il faut se souvenir lorsqu’on vend ses amandes sur*

⁶⁴ ADAM, Robert d’Escragnolle, 1 E 3/2: letter from Françoise de Robert d’Escragnolle, née De Blacas, to her husband, Alexandre Joseph de Robert d’Escragnolle, 7 February 1770: the sheep will graze in the woods to fertilize them.

⁶⁵ ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 106: *livre de raison*

⁶⁶ GRASSI Marie-Claire, “Deux budgets nobiliaires en Provence”, *Dix-Huitième siècle* 15, 1983, pp. 233-248.

⁶⁷ ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 106: *livre de raison*, she reports on the construction of various farm buildings.

⁶⁸ ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 106: *livre de raison*, she continues to pay the workers.

⁶⁹ VILLENEUVE (de) Christophe, *Statistique du département des Bouches du Rhône avec atlas*, vol. IV, Marseille, Prissat Ainé, 1829.

les arbres de mettre dans le marché qu'on se réserve expressément non seulement les amandes fines et les demi fines mais encore toutes les amandes amères. Ces dernières étant plus recherchées par les Négotiants et d'un meilleur débit."⁷⁰

Henriette Louise's significant agronomic expertise was acquired through experience, and it allowed her to provide for her family and continue to manage the agricultural lands even after her sons came of age. An accounts book dating to the 1810s, which mainly contains her personal expenditures, shows that she was still a country seigneuresse in charge of the farming and selling of agricultural products during this period⁷¹.

Conclusion

These personal writings preserved in family archives give us a glimpse of the lives of two women from the Alpine minor nobility in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Armed with their agency, which they deployed on a daily basis, they fully assumed their roles as wives, mothers and ladies of the house. In the absence of the men of the house, they maintained the exploitation of the land they were responsible for, whether as *procuratrice* or *héritière universelle*. Just like the wives of sailors and peddlers, these noblewomen put in place survival strategies⁷².

These two women used the written word to implement and report on their actions. While Françoise de Robert d'Escragnolle became an accomplished letter writer, Henriette Louise de Fresse de Monval compiled different written materials to ultimately break free from the

⁷⁰ ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 106: Henriette Louise de Fresse de Monval's accounts book: Henriette Louise indicates the procedure to be followed in the cultivation and sale of almonds in order that the best, that is, only the fine and semi-fine almonds, are retained.

⁷¹ ADBR, Fresse de Monval, 248 J 106: Henriette Louise's accounts book.

⁷² BOËR Claire, "La vie fragile des femmes de marins en Provence au XVIII^e siècle", in: CHARPENTIER Emmanuelle, HRODEJ Philippe (eds.), *Les femmes et la mer à l'époque moderne*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2018, p. 35.

strict confines of female writing by opening, writing and transmitting a *livre de raison*. The fate of these two writers is comparable to that of other French noblewomen during this period, such as Madame de Marcellus and the Comtesse de Laric. Also good writers, these women “*encombrent*”⁷³ their letters full of matters concerning the management of their crops and the administration of their lands⁷⁴. Faced with the incapacity or absence of the heads of their families, they took charge of their estates. A study of their personal papers and the materiality of these documents thus gives us a better understanding of their competences and responsibilities.

Finally, in the Pre-Alps, as in the whole of Provence, written law seems to have had a positive impact on women’s participation in the management of the family’s affairs. Broadly recognized as *héritières universelles* on their husbands’ deaths, these women had significant scope for action from the very start of their marriages due to *paraphernal* clauses in their marriage contracts⁷⁵. Both Henriette Louise and Françoise were heiresses who had been well provided for. Could it be that these Provençal women’s self-directed writing activity was linked to the fact that they had their own personal assets? This question is at the heart of my doctoral study, which will add to the existing research on women’s capacity for action in the event of being single or separated or having power of attorney, all situations that forced women to leave the strict confines of the private sphere during this period.

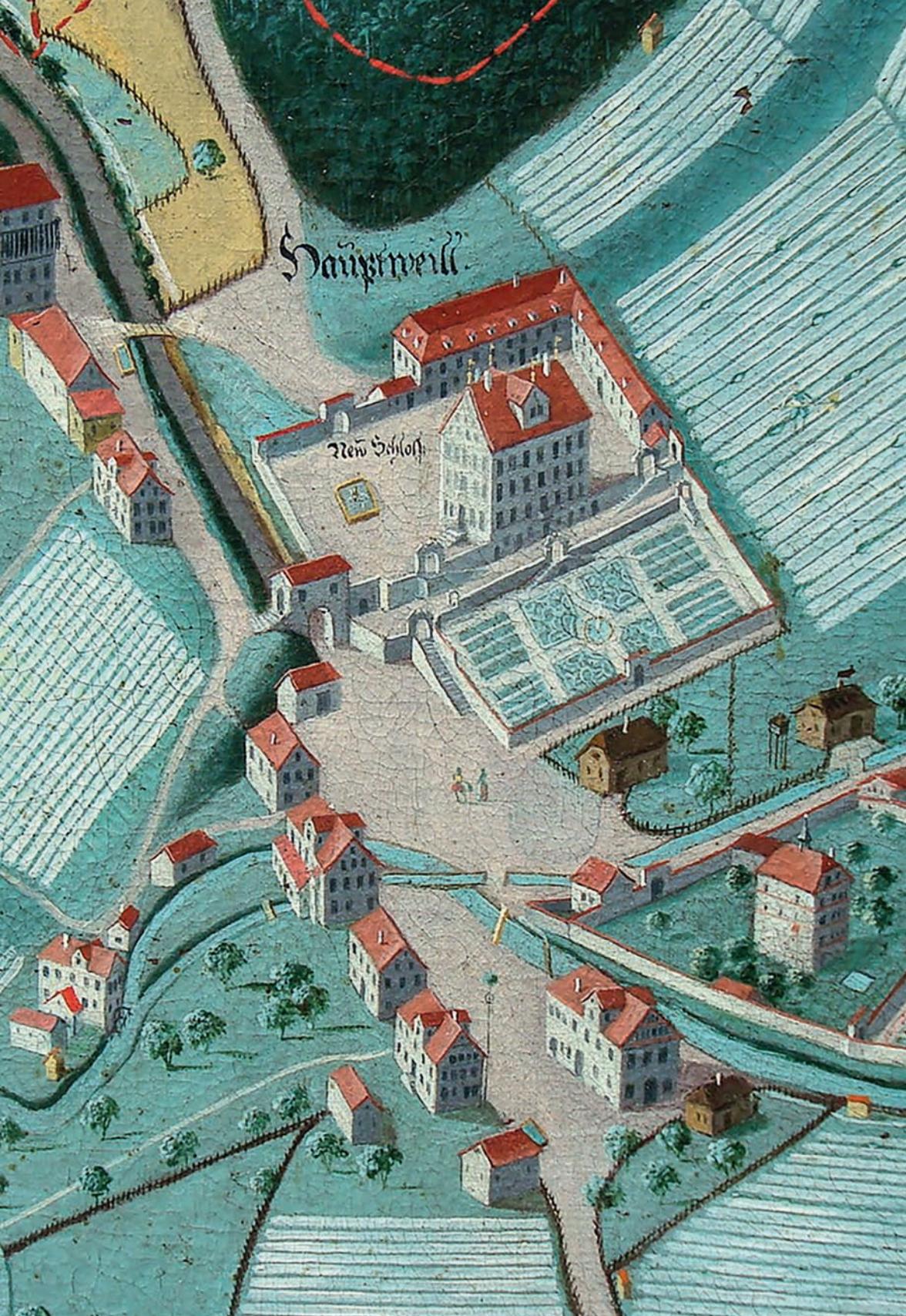
⁷³ ROUX Christine, *La Comtesse de Laric en sa correspondance. Un destin de femme au temps des Lumières*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2011, p. 27.

⁷⁴ PONTACQ Mariannick, “Madame de Marcellus, une femme d’affaires à l’époque des Lumières”, *Annales du Midi: revue archéologique, historique et philologique de la France méridionale* 118/253, 2006, pp. 51-71; PONTACQ Mariannick, “Les Marcellus ou l’image des liens multiformes unissant la noblesse bordelaise à la terre à la fin du XVIII^e siècle” in: LE MAO Caroline, MARACHE Corinne (eds.), *Les élites et la terre. Du XVI^e siècle aux années 1930*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2010, pp. 282-291; ROUX Christine, *La Comtesse de Laric...*

⁷⁵ AGRESTI Philippe, *Les régimes matrimoniaux en Provence...*

Abstract

Les lettres et les registres comptables de deux femmes issues de la noblesse des Préalpes françaises constituent les supports d'étude de cette contribution. Françoise de Robert d'Escragnolle (1724-après 1791) et Henriette Louise de Fresse de Monval (1718-1793) utilisent la plume pour assimiler leurs rôles d'épouse, de mère et de maîtresse de maison. Grâce à leur pratique scripturaire, elles parviennent à s'approprier celui de « seigneuses » de domaines montagneux : suite à l'absence de leurs époux, elles prennent en charge la gestion des affaires agricoles et assurent la pérennité de leurs familles et de leurs terres.



Hauszweil

New Schloss

Ernest Menolfi

**Sabine Gonzenbach's Report About
her Unhappy Marriage, or an Egodocument
with a "Second Truth"**

In 1793, Sabine Gonzenbach (1774-about 1830) and her husband were on a hike uphill outside the city gates of St. Gallen in the Pre-Alpine region of the Appenzellerland. The young woman was expecting her first baby. She felt weak and was walking with great care. Whenever she stopped or stumbled her husband pushed her roughly forward. When passers-by were wondering about his ruthless behaviour he sarcastically explained to them that she must learn how to walk.

That is one of about two dozen unpleasant occurrences his wife, Sabine Gonzenbach, describes in her report entitled "Extracts from the History of My Sad Marital State and My Sufferings"¹. The text offers an intimate insight into both married life and the upper-class concept of marriage at that time. It was ready for full publication in 2019, but

¹ Museum Bischofszell, Gonzenbach Archiv, GoA 19 (formerly GoA 115). Due to the ongoing reorganization of the archive the new detailed shelf marks are not yet available, but all the respective material is now collected in GoA 19. In order to support new research for the time being the former shelf marks are noted down as well.

shortly before the project was carried out the author of this study was charged with the reorganization of the Gonzenbach Family Archive. Bit by bit, thus far unpublished background material came to the fore. Some of it could be assigned to Sabine Gonzenbach's case only with growing knowledge.

The following study mirrors the gradual process of acquiring a new insight into her life and her text. As there exists no analysis of comparable trajectories in the respective region it concentrates on that special case and does not include an interpretation with regard to general aspects of gender history either.

Sabine Gonzenbach grew up in Hauptwil in a rural area, a two-hour walk away from the mountainous Appenzellerland. In 1665 her forefathers had a large industrial place built there, after their spectacular breach of the rigid restrictions in the trade system of the city of St. Gallen². The Gonzenbach families were involved in the textile trade for more than two centuries. First they established a linen manufactory exporting textile products to France and Italy and therefore participating in the transalpine business network. They pursued a modern, liberal business policy and basically intensified the cooperation with the Appenzell region. They promoted the new linen market in Trogen in 1667 and became important business partners of the rising group of new textile entrepreneurs in that area. That commercial axis meant serious competition for St. Gallen's merchants and their outdated economy. At the end of the seventeenth century the Gonzenbach family was one of the most successful Swiss textile traders³.

In the 18th century the customers beyond the Alps, in the Italian part of Switzerland and, above all, in the greater Milan area, were of foremost importance. One of the haulage contractors was the

² MENOLFI ERNEST, BOLLI Peter, "Frühes Unternehmertum in Hauptwil. Die Textilmanufakturen Gonzenbach im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert", *Thurgauer Beiträge zur Geschichte* 157, 2019, pp. 48-60, 65-78.

³ LÜTHY Herbert, *Die Tätigkeit der Schweizer Kaufleute und Gewerbetreibenden in Frankreich unter Ludwig XIV. und der Regentschaft*, Diss. Zurich; Aarau, 1943, pp. 224-225.

Bavier family in Chur. There were also close contacts between the Gonzenbach families and the large German-speaking community of merchants in Milan. At the time when Sabine Gonzenbach was in the limelight of this study, one of her elder brothers lived there, but he died young.

In the early 18th century a second branch with Sabine Gonzenbach's immediate ancestors became pioneers in textile printing in Eastern Switzerland⁴. Although engaged in different fields of production the narrow space of the village of Hauptwil stirred up an ardent rivalry between the two families. The main bone of contention was the limited water supply. So, the love relation between Sabine's father from one branch and her mother from the other was a kind of Romeo and Juliet affair. But in contrast to Shakespeare's two unhappy lovers, the two families in Hauptwil became reconciled in good time so that tragic deaths could be avoided. The couple founded a large family with Sabine as their second child and eldest daughter. The contact with the Appenzell region was maintained by the marriage of Sabine's beloved aunt to the leading textile merchant in Speicher, Johannes Schläpfer.

A private tutor was in charge of the children's education until about the age of 14 to 16 years. In accordance with a tradition among merchant families, young Sabine received additional education at a boarding school or private guest house in France⁵. When she returned home, her parents had already looked out for a suitable partner for her. Their choice fell on a relative and businessman. Sabine, however, must have rejected him, which seemed to have caused some anger, especially with her father. In a letter home he sent his greetings to all the family, but explicitly did not include Sabine⁶.

⁴ MENOLFI ERNEST, "Frühes Unternehmertum...", pp. 121-151. MENOLFI ERNEST, "Early Textile Printing in Eastern Switzerland and its Forgotten B(l)oom around 1800", in: SIEBENHÜNER Kim, JORDAN John, SCHOPF Gabi (eds.), *Cotton in Context. Manufacturing, Marketing, and Consuming Textiles in the German-speaking World (1500-1900)*, Vienna; Cologne; Weimar, Böhlau Verlag, 2019, pp. 121-128.

⁵ GoA 19 (formerly GoA 112), letter of 23 February 1791.

⁶ GoA 19 (formerly 112), letter to his family, 2 June 1790.

Soon after, a new match was arranged. This time the elected bridegroom was Julius Hieronymus Schlatter, the son of another St. Gallen merchant family. His parents lived in a residential building, which once belonged to the evangetic reformer and town doctor Joachim von Watt (Vadianus). Like other wealthy families they owned a so-called "campagne", i.e. a large country home or castle outside the city. Theirs was situated near the Lake Constance. It was there that Sabine was introduced to the Schlatter family. Sabine's brother George, who had accompanied her, immediately informed his parents that Sabine had received a hearty welcome in that renowned circle. Among the distinguished guests were the mayor of St. Gallen and his wife. The young couple then moved into a separate home in the city. However, living together and founding a family turned out to be trickier than expected. Before long, unpleasant events occurred. Their marriage ended in divorce in 1798.

"Extracts from the History of My Sad Marital State and My Sufferings" by Sabine Gonzenbach

Sabine Gonzenbach wrote her text in 1798⁷. The succeeding description renders a selection of the most meaningful incidents she experienced in the seven years of her marriage. While Sabine Gonzenbach was pregnant for the second time her husband was particularly cruel towards her. Shortly before giving birth she begged him to accompany her on a walk hoping it would relieve her pain. But he refused to do so. Then, during childbirth he humiliated her deeply. According to a tradition a husband used to give his wife a bottle of fine wine as a strengthening medicament and present, but Sabine's husband intentionally chose a cheap quality. When the maid asked

⁷ GoA 19 (formerly 115), 3 double sheets, handwritten. An extract of it was published and interpreted in 2002; see PILLER Gudrun, "Trauriger Ehestand: gescheiterte Ehen in Selbstzeugnissen des späten 18. Jahrhunderts", *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 52/4, 2002, pp. 448-462. The report is listed in a collection of egodocuments at the History Department of the University of Basle.

him for a better one, he replied that it was good enough for his wife. One hour after she had given birth, he violently reprimanded her for not having prepared enough announcement cards.

One evening he excessively beat their little daughter Sofia. The mother and a maid interfered, but he pushed them away so violently that his wife staggered and fell to the ground. Once she even got caught in a marten trap that he had installed in the garden. Instead of pitying her he said that it had served her right. He always had a big knife with him, and he repeatedly threatened his wife and friends with it without any serious cause. He ridiculed religion, called it “a matter for children” and did not believe in life after death. He wasted money himself, but was miserly towards his wife and thought of her as a squanderer. Later, he even took away from her all household duties and charged the governess with them.

When once the couple were invited to a family dinner he refused to accompany her. Although it was dark and nasty weather, he forbade the servants to help her home late at night. On the way she stumbled over a pile of stones and hurt herself. When she arrived home, he doused her with reproaches, called her bad names, beat her on the breast, broke his smoking pipe, smashed a drinking glass and was on the verge of throwing her out of the house. At another dinner with several couples, he said to the men present: “*Nehmt mit meiner Frau vor, was ihr wollt, ich bekümmere mich nichts darum.*”⁸

There are further incidents that help to outline her husband's character. He was cruel, violent and heartless. He never really cared for her and did not inquire about her state of being when she felt unwell. He had uncontrolled outbursts of wrath, and he became a drunkard. Drinking might have been the cause of his bad behaviour, but it might also have been the result of his way of life. He conversed with dubious friends and increasingly avoided social contact with family members. He neglected his business. He became sick of breeding pigeons, a hobby he had once cherished so much. As a father he was unfit to

⁸ Translation: “You can do with my wife whatever you wish, I do not care.”

educate his child. He would have preferred to have a rough boy as a child instead of a delicate girl. According to him there were no upright and honest women in the world. His repeated offences and violence against his wife generally convey the impression that he was a misogynist. Generally speaking, her detailed report is nothing but a horror vision of married life.

Sabine Gonzenbach particularly complained about his attitude towards her during her periods of pregnancy and of illness. In those situations, men generally seem to be afraid of losing control over their female partners, and they suspect them of deception⁹. Maybe her delicate health and, as a consequence, perhaps sometimes strange behaviour had been too much for him to handle. Some negative traits of his character are also hinted at by family members and friends of his. They believed his parents had not given him a proper education. A look at his life in later years, as reported by neighbours, underlines his strange and unsocial features. He spent the rest of his days more or less isolated in a secluded country house together with a housekeeper¹⁰.

Sabine Gonzenbach's text is neither a diary nor a thoroughgoing report. It is a list of events and as such appears incomplete. What was the purpose of writing it? Why are witnesses mentioned? Why is there a title? Why does she accuse her husband of being the cause of all her health problems? Time indications soon make it clear that the document was put together at the time of their divorce. Indeed, further hints confirm the supposition that it was actually the plea of her lawyer at the divorce court and thus meant for "official use".

The first finding in the archive was that there exists an earlier version of the text¹¹. A comparison of the hand helped to identify it as a draft written by Sabine Gonzenbach. Basically, the occurrences described are identical in the two versions. Some alterations are purely

⁹ PITTNER Ulrike, pp. 453, 458-461.

¹⁰ BUENZLI Kurt (ed.), *Johann Heinrich Mayr. Meine Lebenswanderung*, vol. III, Frauenfeld, Verlag Huber, 2010, pp. 1101-1104.

¹¹ GoA 19 (formerly 116).

stylistic. Her draft, however, is more spontaneous and richer in details. She writes about members of her husband's family and about some of his notorious friends, even mentioning their names. She describes the sexual harassment by a friend of his and states that after having pushed him back he did not turn up any more. She lays open the unfriendly behaviour that she experienced by her mother-in-law. Sabine once joined her for an ironing session together with some other women but was humiliated by her as she was not familiar with the ordinary procedure. Maybe the women looked down on her as a real innocent.

The draft includes remarks about their sexual life as well:

“War die Zeit da, wo er seine thierische Gelüste befriedigen wollt, so schmeichelte er mir vor eine halbe Stunde ...” [When the time came that he wanted to satisfy his animal-like lust, he flattered me for half an hour...]. *“Er nahm anders wo Vergnügungen, die er nur mit mir geniessen sollte. [...] Ich kann anzeigen, dass, obschon er gesund und wohl ist, in 3 Wochen, auch Monate und 6 Wochen vorbegehen liess, ohne seine eheliche Pflicht in Acht zu nehmen”* [He took pleasures elsewhere that he should have taken only with me. Although he was healthy, he did not fulfil his marital duties for weeks, even months].

The process of making up the “official” version can be traced back. Margin signs and remarks in another hand clearly indicate that someone else had interfered with her draft and had decided what was adopted and what was left out. This intervention can only have been made by Sabine's father or by the family lawyer, court secretary J. G. Rogg, Frauenfeld. The arguments were rearranged to avoid repetition and to make them sound more logical. Further witnesses are mentioned to make it more trustworthy. But what is really intriguing is what they omitted. Why the notes about sexuality are left out is open to speculation. Perhaps her description was not sufficient to accuse him of neglecting his sexual duties. Leaving out the incidents with relatives and prominent friends was most probably meant to avoid further trouble with their families. Besides, those events were not directly connected with the divorce case. Other facts were left out

because they might have weakened her position in court, for instance that she admitted that she had become seriously ill and was only able to do the most necessary things in the household for about half a year.

To sum up, Sabine's plea is a rare and unusually detailed text in the context of a divorce case. Its length basically originates from the fact that her family wanted to prevent her from personally appearing in court. So her text was meant to supply the court with all the necessary arguments. The "official" version with its omissions and emphasized passages was a report revised by a male person. Its purpose was to influence the judges in order to get a favourable sentence. And there is another surprise in store: a comparison with the handwriting of some family letters indicates that the report was most probably written by Sabine's father himself. Because of that it undeniably loses some of its quality as a purely feminine personal document. Moreover, there remains an essential question: Are Sabine Gonzenbach's accusations true? Admittedly, her complaints are wholly subjective and only render her view, but they mention an extraordinary number of details. Although they cannot really be verified, it is very improbable that she had made up a series of lies for the court. Furthermore, most accusations were based on testimonies of witnesses. Some of her complaints can also be found in letters or notes in different contexts by different people. In other words, there is sufficient evidence that her accusations can be relied on to be true.

The divorce

In the sixth year of their marriage Sabine Gonzenbach left her husband and returned to her parents. But some time later, she secretly arranged a reconciliation with her husband and joined him again for a few months. Yet, a divorce became inevitable. The preliminary sessions of the court started in September 1798 and the case was finally closed before the appeal court in 1799.

A divorce was still rare at that time, including among members of the upper classes. Divorces were only accepted when they were

well grounded. A further problem was the political situation at that time. The year 1798 was the year of the Helvetian Revolution, which brought about decisive changes in the system of jurisdiction. The old administration and the law courts were reorganized and replaced by new institutions. Before the revolution Sabine's divorce case would have been judged by the Protestant "*Ehegericht*" (marriage court) of St. Gallen. But in the summer of 1798, a District Court was established with new, perhaps inexperienced judges. The jury consisted of an equal number of Protestant and Catholic judges. That made the situation for Sabine even more difficult because the Catholic judges were more reluctant to accept a divorce than the Protestants.

According to the president of the court, both Sabine Gonzenbach and her husband wanted to get a divorce as soon as possible, not least to avoid a public scandal in the city¹². On Sabine's side it was her father who undertook all the necessary steps. The contact between the two families was kept up by a friend of J. H. Schlatter. As Sabine's father renounced financial support from J. H. Schlatter the salient question was who would attain the right to bring up their daughter. Her husband would have accepted that the child was given to a foster mother so that neither of the two owned the child. That, however, was unacceptable for the mother. Sabine Gonzenbach must have hoped that her husband's poor methods of education and anti-religious attitude would influence the judges in her favour. Her lawyer, however, mainly argued that Sabine felt an "extraordinary mental aversion" to her husband. Schlatter himself must have accepted the situation and was not intent on fighting for his wife. Maybe he felt confirmed in his conviction that women can never be relied on. His strongest argument, however, was that she had left him willingly without official permission.

As mentioned before, Sabine did not attend the divorce court's session on 27 November 1798. Her father had a medical report made

¹² Copies of the court documents are to be found in GoA 19 (formerly 118/119); see also the court documents in the Staatsarchiv of the canton of St. Gallen (StASG), HA R, 72, District Court, 1798-1800.

up for her. It said that for several months her state of health was shaken to a degree that the slightest emotion would lead to fits of fainting due to general neurasthenia and, as a consequence, to a failure in her abdomen¹³. Yet, for the judges a medical report was not sufficient to allow an accused person to stay away. Based on their comment at the session they were confronted with an exceptional and unprecedented situation and imposed a high fine on her.

The judges realized that the two partners were in a state of nervous disposition and edginess and that there was no hope of a future life in harmony¹⁴. They agreed to the divorce, but their sentence shattered Sabine and her family. Their daughter Sofia was given to a foster mother, an aunt of hers in St. Gallen. As the parents were still young and a remarriage was probable, the decision for a foster family was meant to avoid the child having to grow up with a step-mother or step-father. Sabine's father had already been warned in advance by David Gonzenbach, a relative of his and an influential personality of the St. Gallen administration. He had informed him that the rule that girls follow their mother and boys follow their father was just a tradition and not based on law. He additionally warned Sabine's father not to exaggerate his sensitiveness as it might easily be interpreted as egotism¹⁵. Yet, Sabine's father would not accept the sentence and appealed to the higher court. To their relief the appeal was successful. On 1 February 1799 the child was given to the mother, but only on condition that the father had the right to see his daughter for a few days from time to time. In order to keep up that arrangement the court claimed a right for supervision. So the first half of Sabine's trajectory seemed to have come to a happy ending.

¹³ Gonzenbach Archiv, GoA 19 (formerly GoA 119), Copy of the medical report by Dr Jacob Christoph Scherb jr. and W. Friederich Zwinger, Bischofszell, 19 January 1799.

¹⁴ StASG, HA R, 72-2-1, p. 74; Ehesachen Kanton Säntis, letter of 17 May 1800 to Johann Conrad Bolt.

¹⁵ GoA 19 (formerly GoA 9), letter from David Gonzenbach-Huber to Anton Gonzenbach, 4 December 1798.

A self-characterization, and role conflicts with merchant families

Sabine Gonzenbach's text makes it possible to paint a picture of her character, and her concept of marriage. She believes herself to be honest, brave and upright. What stands out is her almost unshaken loyalty towards her husband. She assists him even when he is sick with drinking. It was her who offered him a chance for a new start, but although promising to improve, he invariably fell back into his usual habits. When he was recruited against the invading French troops in Berne, she sent him tender letters and hoped in vain for an emotional change in him. For her a good partnership meant respect, love, confidentiality, mutual trust, intimacy, tenderness and helping each other in times of need. When his family and friends reproached her that she had not turned to them for help she replied:

“Das hätte mir noch einzig zu meinem übrigen Elend gefehlt, wann ich die Unvorsichtigkeit gehabt hätte, Hülfe bei solchen Leüthen ohne Gefühl zu suchen, und denen ich von Anfang an mein Unglück zu verdanken hatte” [It would have increased my misery if I had asked for help from those callous people who, right from the beginning, were to blame for my unhappiness].

She obviously had not the least support from them either. Interestingly enough, she then mentions and analyses the term “silent sufferer”. Although she maintains that suffering is one of the greatest virtues of a wife, she repeatedly reports that she confronted her husband with her complaints and tried to make him better. Finally, by leaving him she clearly manifested that she was not ready to stand his nasty behaviour for ever¹⁶.

Sabine Gonzenbach considered herself to be an emotional, sensitive woman. This may mean that tenderness and love counted a lot

¹⁶ Susanna Mayr, married to the merchant Johann Friedrich Andreas Saalmüller, was in a similar unhappy situation, but endured all her hardship and did not dare to leave her husband, BUENZLI Kurt, *Johann Heinrich Mayr...*, vol. II, p. 112.

for her, but it may also reflect her fragility. As a sign of her sensitivity we might interpret the fact that she quoted the verbal humiliations word by word. When a person is deeply hurt, he or she is often in a position to render a detailed report of the words spoken. Anyway, despite being “emotional” Sabine seems to analyse her situation astonishingly accurately and rationally. So, leaving him was an inevitable act of self-salvation for her.

Due to her family background Sabine Gonzenbach had a clear and traditional notion of what her role was: as a hostess, as a mother and as the manager of the household. She considered modesty and economizing to be outstanding virtues of her family. Bookkeeping was a matter of self-understanding. She describes herself as a good housewife who is careful with money and clothes. She tailored most clothes for her and for their child by herself, and her aunt made a series of nappies when her niece was expecting her baby. The portrait of the wealthy relatives in St. Gallen, David and Maria Elisabeth Gonzenbach-Huber, depicts the mother busy with her needlework.

Nevertheless, Sabine also claimed some independence the way she had learned from her mother. But her concept could not differ more from the one of her husband and his friends. They were of the opinion that a woman should be content if she gets food, drink and clothes. As a consequence, Sabine felt that she was “*ein Geschöpf, das von seiner Gnade leben muss*” [a creature having to live by her husband’s grace]. In the first years, Sabine received some housekeeping money from him and had to show him the bills at the weekends. Without checking them carefully, he blamed her for wasting money. Over time she received less money and was in constant stress about how to get the money for shopping and the necessary things. Sometimes her parents supported her with some extra money. It must have been hard for her to suffer her husband’s constant disputes about the way she was running their household. Nevertheless, the worst abasement for her was, as mentioned above, that he took away from her all household matters and charged a female housekeeper with it. She felt this was seen as a disgrace by everyone in the city.



Fig. 1: David Gonzenbach (1738-1810), his wife Maria Elisabeth Huber (1746-1805), and their son Johann David (1777-1842). Mrs. Gonzenbach is portrayed with her needlework. Nationalmuseum, Zürich, LM 81296.

Moreover, Sabine was used to being involved in business matters. Her mother was a model for her, as she replaced her husband perfectly as the patron of the enterprise when he was absent on business trips. She was once characterized as follows:

“... sie ist eine mit männlicher Tätigkeit und Spekulation handelnde Kaufmännin” [...she is a female merchant with masculine activity and speculation]¹⁷.

¹⁷ GAIER Ulrich, *“Unter den Alpen gesungen”. Hölderlin als Hauslehrer in Hauptwil*, Band 20/5, Tübingen, Schriften der Hölderlin-Gesellschaft, 2008, p. 40.

In the past in her mother's family several women held leading positions in the textile trade. For almost half a century three single aunts ran the family business almost on their own. First, they substituted for their sick father, then they backed up their single brother in a difficult period of business transition, and finally, after his death, they appointed a successor, supervised him and supported him financially. Their oil portraits on the wall reminded the following generations of what they had done for the enduring existence of the enterprise.

While young men usually did a six-year apprenticeship with another firm¹⁸, there was no official professional training for women. But if girls were eager to be involved and were allowed by their parents to do so they learned a lot through practical work and often reached a professional level equal to that of their brothers. As mentioned above, some merchants also appreciated cooperating with their wives in business affairs. With Sabine's husband, however, it was all different. As he increasingly neglected business himself, it was no surprise that he also excluded his wife from any business matters. So for her as a sensitive woman, none of her dreams and concepts were fulfilled while she was married.

Sabine Gonzenbach also knew what she could normally expect from a merchant husband, but not from him. He had no close relationship with the Protestant church, and he refused to take on responsibility as a father and as a husband. He did not maintain contact with business friends and people of the same social standing. Although being seen in public together meant a lot to his wife he refused to go for a walk or a ride with her. His behaviour seemed like a kind of protest or rebellion against the class he grew up in. Instead, he enjoyed being together with people from the lowest classes and frequented pubs with a bad reputation. So he did not accomplish any of the prerequisites of an upright and traditionally minded merchant.

Leisure activities played an important part in the life of upper-class families. According to Schlatter, reading and making music

¹⁸ MENOLFI Ernest, *Frühes Unternehmertum...*, pp. 184-186.

were sophisticated and useless activities, although he knew that home concerts were highly appreciated in his bride's family. By forbidding his wife to practise them in his presence, he cut her off from an essential part of etiquette in social life. Talking about writers and composers and their works was an important part of it. Housewives could show their musical and intellectual talents to the guests, and making music helped newcomers to be introduced into a family, and it gave girls a chance to present themselves to young men.

When the couple married the bridegroom was twenty years old, only three years her senior. Normally the age difference with merchant couples was about five to seven years¹⁹. Apart from the deficiencies of his character, Schlatter was obviously not mature enough for marriage.

There might also have been the problem of a social gap between their families. Marriage was a chance to improve one's financial situation. The parents therefore were eager to find suitable partners for their offspring with a similar or even better social status. Sabine's husband came from a wealthy family. Sabine, however, was brought up in the country and her parents were nowhere near as rich as the groom's family. Consequently, her dowry was comparatively modest, which might have been an additional reason for their marriage problems.

Sabine Gonzenbach's health problems, and the role of her family

Sabine's marriage seems to have been a period of endless pain and misery. It would have been understandable if she had hated him for what he had done to her. Remarks between the lines, however, reveal that she nevertheless felt some love for him and desperately tried to gain his love too. So, we may ask ourselves whether there was or had been at least some temporary normality and real love between them.

¹⁹ MENOLFI Ernest, *Frühes Unternehmertum...*, p. 190. A comparable situation with a very young husband is described in BUENZLI Kurt, *Johann Heinrich Mayr...*, vol. IV, pp. 1653-1654.

Surprising finds in the archive offer a somewhat irritating answer. After the divorce Sabine Gonzenbach wrote several notes or drafts of letters. Due to her bad state of health her former nice hand had turned into uncontrolled scribbles. The letters were addressed to relatives or to her husband's friends in St. Gallen. Sabine Gonzenbach wanted to get information about her husband. Some passages stand out: "*Liebt mich mein Schlatter nicht mehr? Sie glauben mich verrückt, aber ich habe gute Gründe, warum ich schreibe.*" or "*Parlez à Schlatter, et dite lui que je l'aime encore et que je l'aimerai jusqu'à la fin de mes jours*"²⁰.

Those desperate outcries reveal that their marriage was livelier and more ambiguous than her accusations made one suppose. There must have been ups and downs, and perhaps also a deep, intensive emotional and turbulent though often unhappy relationship between them. Perhaps she was to a certain degree also emotionally dependent on him. As the letters and fragments of letters are still in the family archive one must assume that they were returned by the addressee or even have never been delivered. In other words, someone in the family must have withheld them before they were sent away. The fact that Sabine explicitly asked the addressee not to send their responses to her home address with her parents in Hauptwil but to other people in the village shows that the confidence between her and her parents was damaged.

Sabine Gonzenbach's health problems are of utmost importance in the affair. Her text contains several details and hints at her precarious state. While pregnant she repeatedly seems to have had serious attacks of weakness. She had first a stillborn baby, and then no more children in the four years after the birth of Sofia. Perhaps a key to the answer lies in the utterances in the medical report at the time of their divorce that she suffered from a failure in her abdomen²¹. She also mentioned that

²⁰ Translation: "Does my husband love me no more? You may think I am crazy, but I have good reasons to write. Speak to Schlatter and tell him that I still love him and that I will love him until the end of my days". GoA 19 (formerly GoA 120), Letters by Sabine Gonzenbach to Mrs Fels and Mr Weniger, St. Gallen.

²¹ See annotation 10.

she took strong medicaments that made her sick. She had fits of unconsciousness accompanied by acute fear of death. Finally, she excused her leaving him temporarily with her general bad health situation.

No doubt, Sabine Gonzenbach was sensitive and lacked resilience. Over the years things got worse and her health became even poorer. She herself put all the blame for her bad state of health on her husband's ruthless behaviour: "*Meine Gesundheit war nun zu Grunde gerichtet*" [Now, my health was entirely shattered]. By that she clearly suggests her husband was the cause of all her misery. But perhaps things were not as clear as that.

It is an open question whether her health problems only started during the time of her marriage or whether they had already existed before. In order to find answers one must focus on Sabine's family background, particularly on the role of her father, Anton Gonzenbach (1748-1819). He influenced Sabine's life considerably over the years. Although Sabine Gonzenbach stated that it was her decision to leave her husband, it might have been her father who had ordered her home during her marriage as he was unable to endure the gradual decline of his daughter. It was definitely him who did everything in his power to get a divorce for his daughter. One reason for that might have been new marriage plans for her. In the late 1790s there were numerous French refugees in the region. One of them was Guillaume Louis Ternaux, who got in contact with the Gonzenbach family. More about him below.

Sabine's state of health can also be seen from a different point of view. There is proof of inbreeding as a deep-rooted family problem. As in the nobility, marriage traditionally took place among partners of more or less the same level or profession. Yet, the range of choice was extremely limited. There were already general complaints about that fact in the 17th century²². It is of no surprise that the Gonzenbach

²² SIMON Volker A., *Der Wechsel als Träger des internationalen Zahlungsverkehrs in den Finanzzentren Südwestdeutschlands und der Schweiz. Historisch-dogmatische Untersuchung der Entwicklung des Wechsels bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Verhältnisse in St.Gallen*, Diss. Universität Tübingen, Stuttgart, 1974, p. 255.

family also had close and continuous marriage relationships with the few merchant families. They were almost interwoven with branches of the Zollikofer families over the centuries. How inbreeding affected the health situation of the family cannot be defined, but it is a fact that Sabine's father and mother were comparatively close relatives. Sabine's brothers died as young adults, and there is proof that her father suffered from severe depressions. It is therefore not a far-fetched supposition that Sabine had already suffered from mental problems earlier in her life.

The question of a "second truth"

After the divorce things took a swift turn, and a new personality entered the scene: Guillaume Louis Ternaux (1763-1833), a Frenchman in Swiss exile. His family originated from Sedan but then moved to Paris for business reasons. In 1794, during the revolutionary years, he was compelled to leave France. In the late 1790s he lived either in the vicinity of Hauptwil or maintained connections with the Gonzenbach family. He was on the verge of becoming one of the leading wool merchants in France. Because of his inventions and his economic influence, he was later compared to Henry Ford in the United States²³. After returning to France he not only made Sabine Gonzenbach follow him but he also took with him from Hauptwil a young so-called "mechanic", Jacob Messmer, who became his main engineer and inventor of new machinery.

Ternaux met Sabine Gonzenbach at her lowest moment. When they got married on 5 May 1800, he must have been aware that she still had mental and physical problems. Although the wedding marked a new beginning in Sabine Gonzenbach's life her difficulties were by no means solved, as will be shown below.

²³ LOHMÜLLER Louis Marie, *Guillaume Ternaux (1763-1833), créateur de la première intégration industrielle française*, Paris, Les Éditions de la Cabro d'or, 1977, p. 28. For further information about Ternaux see also Lohmüller.

When for the researcher the affair seemed to be analysed satisfactorily, a letter stirred up new confusion. Schlatter had informed the court that his former wife had married again and departed with her child to Paris on 8 May 1800. The chairman of the court was outraged and felt deceived by Sabine Gonzenbach, who had mischievously broken the agreement, whereupon a correspondence between different officials was started. According to one of their letters²⁴, Schlatter was deeply hurt. What tormented him most was the fact that he imagined his child in the arms of the man who had robbed him of his wife and disturbed his "marital bliss". In his deplorable state he asked the court for help to get the child back. The chairman begged the addressee to do everything in his power to help the father "in his despair". Yet, Schlatter's claim was rejected by the French administration and returned to the St. Gallen administration.

Does that information stand for "another truth"? Is it a revenge of a deserted husband with an unjustified accusation of adultery? Is it a true outburst of fatherly emotion or just pretence? As the report cannot be verified one has to content oneself with the mere information and cannot consider it further.

Not much is known about the following ten years' stay of Sabine Gonzenbach in Paris, nor about their married life or about a special marriage arrangement. She had no children with Ternaux. Incidentally, Sabine's father joined her in Paris after he had become a widower in 1805 and had sold most of his possessions in Hauptwil. There is some evidence that some kind of business relationship was maintained between the Ternaux family and Sabine's father, as well as with the Gonzenbach family of the other Hauptwil branch²⁵.

For Sabine her stay in France certainly meant a life in some luxury, and perhaps also with representation tasks. But there must have been a rising feeling of unhappiness in her, and, above all, an accumulation

²⁴ StASG, HA R 72-2-1, Ehesachen Kanton Säntis, Letter from J. Reuthi, president of the Cantonal Court St. Gallen to Johann Conrad Bolt, 17 May 1800, with a copy of the answer from France by Minister Talleyrand.

²⁵ GoA, Kopierbuch of Daniel Gonzenbach, 1822.

of her health problems. Eventually she returned home to Switzerland, and her second marriage was annulled at the local court at Sitterdorf, canton of Thurgau, in 1810 with confirmation in 1811²⁶. The reason given in a medical report was that she had been in a tormented state at the time of the wedding a decade before, a fact that led to such an unhappy new union. The court stated that living together with her husband any longer would cause a total mental and physical breakdown for her. Yet, it was a harmonious separation from her husband. In order to support her in the years to come he granted her a considerable yearly pension.

Back in Switzerland, Sabine's remaining years were full of sadness and pain. Her mental state was gradually deteriorating. One of her married sisters in St. Gallen took care of her and offered her a country house as a new home. But due to her strange behaviour she became more and more excluded from social life there. According to a relative of hers, a coach accident even aggravated her mental problems. She died at the age of little more than fifty years. In the meantime, her daughter Sofia had married a merchant in St. Gallen and had founded a family herself.

Sabine's reports, both in the form of her draft and in the "official" version, offer an intimate insight into married life and social aspects of her time. Her text delivers a nucleus of trustworthy facts, but it turned out to be a distorted female egodocument. The special purpose as a court document influenced the given information to a high degree. Furthermore, the text is incomplete and only renders her view. As a result, the image of her personality is inconsistent and may range from the description of a self-confident woman to a broken, oversensitive one. Finally, her marriage report describes a short but salient period of her life, yet it does not reflect her trajectory fully. It turned out that she might have already had mental problems at an earlier stage of her life. But also the picture of her married life is shown in a new light: it must have been an intensive time with ups and downs, a mixture of love,

²⁶ Staatsarchiv des Kantons Thurgau (StATG), 6'280'3, Ehegerichtsprotokoll Thurgau, 13 December 1810, p. 252.

fear, care, intimidation and pity. Marriage seems to have overtaxed the two partners.

The goal of this study was to demonstrate how the interpretation of an egodocument may vary should any further archive material be or not be available. In this case, extensive research made it possible to focus on her health situation, on her family background, on the period before and after her divorce and in that way get a more distinct view of an intriguing life story. Taking into consideration the pretended love relation with Ternaux while still married, however, makes one accept that there might be even more “truths” than just a second one as originally assumed.

Abstract

Sur la base de documents d'archives, cette contribution propose une étude de cas lié aux dynamiques privées des Gonzenbach, une famille de marchands des Préalpes suisses. L'article discute notamment de manière critique un mémorial inédit écrit par Sabine Gonzenbach (1774-1830 environ), épouse malheureuse d'un marchand de Saint-Gall: lors de son divorce en 1798, la femme rédige en effet un rapport détaillé de ses problèmes conjugaux. La lecture contextualisée du document met en lumière la complexité des rapports de genre et de pouvoir, ainsi que l'importance des réseaux de soutien.

Part II

FAITH AND BELONGING: PERSONAL FREEDOMS IN THE CONFINES DEFINED BY COMMUNITIES AND CONFRATERNITIES

Marco Bettassa

**Women, Religious Conversions
and Waldensianism: Persistence and Room
for Action (17th and 18th Century)**

The role of women in the Protestant world is of great interest to scholars examining the big changes brought about in Europe in the modern age by the advent of the Protestant Reformation. There are three main lines of investigation with regard to the close links between the Reformation and the presence of women.

Natalie Zamon Davis has underlined their propulsive role starting from the diffusion of literacy, which enabled women to enter the world of letters and see their particular social position differently¹. Lyndal Roper, in contrast, maintains that the Reformation reinforced the role of patriarchy inside the family, relegating the woman to a somewhat marginal position and binding her to a rigid sexual morality². The third reading, by Raymond A. Mentzer, proposes looking at the female

¹ ZAMON DAVIS Natalie, "City Women And Religious Change in Sixteenth-Century France", in: MCGUIGAN Dorothy (ed.), *A Sampler Of Women's Studies*, University of Michigan, Center for Continuing Education of Women, 1973, pp. 17-45.

² ROPER Lyndal, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 296.

role in the Reformed world from a twofold perspective. On the one hand, the rejection of ecclesiastical celibacy would allow women to put themselves forward as active protagonists within their own family setting³. This is what Susanna Peyronel Rambaldi has recently identified using a very evocative formula: a “theological sexual revolution”, in which a woman is no longer simply considered as the weak part of the world⁴.

Even more so, as Mentzer points out, the role of the pastor's wife became central in the community⁵. Shown consideration by members of the Church, when the pastor died, she received an annual maintenance pension that was often a bone of contention in the community. On the other hand, an attitude of strong censure was to continue and greatly hold back the woman inside the family. As Mentzer⁶ rightly and, more recently, Yves Krumenacker and Noémie Recous⁷ have underlined, this dual path was mainly due to the consistory, which took shape as the Protestant Church's organ of territorial governance, set out the moral conduct of believers, and censured those women and those men who tried to elude what the community decided. There was, therefore, an inherent well-defined hierarchy that left little room to act for Reformed women. Then, of course, as well as the hierarchical aspects mentioned so far, the geographical context in which the Reformed experiences flourished had a notable impact.

³ MENTZER Raymond A., “La place et le rôle des femmes dans les Églises réformées”, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 113, Janvier-Mars 2001, pp. 119-132.

⁴ PEYRONEL RAMBALDI Susanna, “L'uomo e la donna sono creature di Dio'. Donne e Riforma protestante”, in: TOMASSONE Letizia, VALERIO Adriana (eds.), *Bibbia, donna, profezia. A partire dalla Riforma*, Florence, Nerbini, 2018, p. 75.

⁵ PEYRONEL RAMBALDI Susanna, “L'uomo e la donna sono creature di Dio'...”, pp. 78-85.

⁶ MENTZER Raymond A., *Sin and the Calvinists: Morals, Control and the Consistory in the Reformed Tradition*, Kirksville, Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994.

⁷ KRUMENACKER Yves, RECOUS Noémie, “Le consistoire et les femmes, les femmes et le consistoire. L'exemple de la province synodale de Bourgogne au XVII^e siècle”, *Revue d'histoire du protestantisme* 6, 2021, pp. 81-107.

Reformation in an Alpine context

The physical space within which the Protestants of the early modern age lived defined the very evolution of this minority group. Putting the Reformation into practice in urban centres is completely different from doing so in an Alpine context. Relations with those outside the faith and between the various denominations were structured very differently and bound up with the specific configuration within which one had to act. From this perspective, what happened in Piedmont is exceptionally important. The Waldensian movement, the leading and most numerous Reformed minority in Italy, worked its way into a well-defined territory that shaped its specific features. It runs through the Alpine valleys from the town of Pinerolo to the French border and is commonly known as the Waldensian valleys⁸. Its configuration made it into a frontier area of transit⁹. At the same time, the mountains enabled the Waldensian religion to take root and defend itself against the numerous attempts made by the religious and secular authorities to destroy it¹⁰.

In this regard, Waldensian historiography in the 20th century coined two expressions that have for a long time defined the Waldensians: “martyrs of

⁸ FRATINI Marco, “Cartografia di età moderna e frontiere religiose: il caso delle ‘Valli valdesi’”, in: FRATINI Marco, MORRA ENRICA, PEYRONEL Ettore, ROSSELLI Domenico, USSEGLIO Bruno (eds.), *Dal Monviso al Moncenisio. Cartografia a stampa dal XVI al XVIII secolo*, Pinerolo, Alzani Editore, 2019, pp. 29-37.

⁹ RAVIOLA Blythe Alice, VARALLO Franca (eds.), *Gli spazi sabaudi. Percorsi e prospettive della storiografia*, Rome, Carocci, 2018, p. 317.

¹⁰ DE LANGE Albert (ed.), *Dall’Europa alle Valli valdesi, Atti del XXIX Convegno storico internazionale: “Il Glorioso Rimpatrio (1686-1989). Contesto - significato - immagine”*, Torre Pellice, 3-7 settembre 1989, Turin, Claudiana, 1990, p. 627; DE LANGE Albert, “L’importanza della politica religiosa nell’asilo dei valdesi in Germania (1699) nei territori luterani”, *Bollettino della Società di Studi valdesi* 185, 1999, pp. 27-60; TRON Daniele, *Le “Pasque piemontesi” e l’internazionale protestante*, Turin, Claudiana, 2005, p. 48; CIACCIO Renata, *L’inferno è dirupato. I valdesi di Calabria fra resistenza e repressione*, Turin, Zamorani, 2014, p. 190; CIVALE Gianclaudio, “Une petite histoire-bataille. Guerriglia, milizia e reinsediamento valdese nell’esperienza del cavaliere Giovanni Battista Vercellis (1690-1694)”, *Riforma e Movimenti religiosi* 10, 2021, pp. 89-137.

the faith”¹¹ and “church people”¹². These formulas pointed to two main aspects, namely persecution and their religious and communal cohesion. The existence of alternative paths deviating from the Waldensian Church’s morality is given little space in these works and mentioned for the purpose of reiterating even further the sense of religious cohesion. And among these alternatives, the space given over to women in the accounts of the Waldensians is quite limited, overshadowed by a reading that sees in the religious ministers the main protagonists and narrators of the Reformed Church’s epic history¹³. This narration had already been formalized by the writings of some important ministers in the 17th and 18th centuries, including Henri Arnaud¹⁴.

In his *Histoire de la Glorieuse Rentrée des Vaudois* (1710)¹⁵, the Waldensian people are described as indefatigable fighters. This work recounts the return of the Waldensians to the valleys they had been driven from following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the guerilla resistance in the mountains to defeat their Savoy and French enemies, and the courage and unity of intention of those engaged in the repatriation, as indicated in the title of the work. Arnaud makes fleeting reference to his own wife, who during the years of fighting was

¹¹ PASCAL Arturo, “Le valli valdesi negli anni del martirio e della gloria (1685-1690)”, *Bollettino della Società di Studi valdesi* 68, 1937, p. 5.

¹² TOURN Giorgio, *I valdesi. La singolare vicenda di un popolo-chiesa*, Turin, Claudiana, 1999, p. 304.

¹³ MUSTON Alexis, *L’Israël des Alpes. Première histoire complète des Vaudois du Piémont et de leurs colonies...*, 4 vols., Paris, Librairie du Marc Ducloux, 1851; ARMAND HUGON Augusto, *Storia dei Valdesi. Dall’adesione alla Riforma all’Emancipazione (1532-1848)*, vol. 2, Turin, Claudiana, 1974, p. 327.

¹⁴ DE LANGE Albert, “Henri Arnaud (1641-1721) in den Jahren 1698 und 1699”, in: DE LANGE Albert, SCHWINGE Gerhard (eds.), *Pieter Valkenier und das Schicksal der Waldenser um 1700*, Heidelberg; Ubstadt; Weiher; Basel, Verlag Regionalkultur, 2004, pp. 61-107; DE LANGE Albert, “*Ho una doppia vocazione*”. *Il pastore e colonnello Henri Arnaud (1643-1721). In occasione del tricentenario della sua morte*, Turin, Claudiana, 2021, p. 67; DE LANGE Albert (ed.), “I valdesi tra guerriglia ed esilio. Alla ricerca del libero esercizio della confessione riformata (1686-1735). Saggi in occasione del tricentenario della morte di Henri Arnaud (1643-1721), ‘pastore e colonnello dei valdesi’”, *Riforma e Movimenti religiosi* 10, 2021.

¹⁵ ARNAUD Henri, *Histoire de la Glorieuse Rentrée des Vaudois dans leur Vallées*, s.d., s.l.

in Neuchâtel¹⁶. In the proceedings of the Synods – the general assemblies of the Waldensian Church – a woman was indicated as “*fidèle*”¹⁷ to her husband, and to the customs and morals of the Church. The disputes that might arise between husband and wife had to be settled inside the family unit so as to avoid a public scandal. The fate of the woman was tightly bound to that of the man and her individual freedom appeared to be meaningful only if exercised for the benefit of conjugal life and of the Church. Augusto Armand Hugon, one of the most important 20th-century Waldensian historians, noted the following considerations regarding the role of women in their history:

*“se infatti i Valdesi in ogni circostanza seppero sempre resistere, difendersi, affrontare pene e torture di ogni genere, dimostrando sempre una fede tenace ed incrollabile, ciò si deve in gran parte all’educazione che essi avevano ricevuto nell’ambito della famiglia. Ed ecco che allora appare l’importanza della donna, la quale, oltre ad essere collaboratrice nel duro lavoro dei campi, ispira ed istilla nei suoi figli il valore della fede, l’importanza della libertà di coscienza, il sentimento di una tradizione cui non si deve venire mai meno: è infatti alla donna più che all’uomo che tocca il compito dell’educazione dei figli”*¹⁸.

As this scholar puts it, the woman is the linchpin in the sphere of the family and education. While it can be asserted that in the 1800s

¹⁶ ARNAUD Henri, *Histoire de la Glorieuse Rentrée...*, p. 395.

¹⁷ PONS Théophile, *Actes des Synodes des Eglises Vaudoises, 1692-1854*, Turin, Società di Studi Valdesi, 1948, p. 31.

¹⁸ Translation: “If in all circumstances the Waldensians were always able to resist, defend themselves, put up with punishment and torture of every kind, demonstrating their tenacious unshakable faith, was due in large part to the education they had received within the family. And this is where the importance of women comes in, who, as well as helping with the hard work in the fields, inspired and instilled in their children the value of faith, the importance of free will, the sentiment for a tradition to be unfailingly upheld. It is in fact more up to the woman than the man to educate the children.” ARMAND HUGON Augusto, *La donna nella storia valdese*, Torre Pellice, Società di Studi valdesi, 1980, p. 78.

women did indeed play an important role in Waldensian education¹⁹, the documentation for previous centuries shows a more uncertain picture such that we need to ask whether and to what extent the presence of women was a distinctive feature in group belonging and the handing down of the values of the faith. In brief, the historian's observation is worth analysing and checking against the facts. This is undertaken for three key moments in the evolution of Waldensianism. The first is connected with the regency of Marie Jeanne Baptiste of Savoy-Nemours, who in place of her infant son Victor Amadeus II governed religious and political affairs in Piedmont from 1675 to 1684. Her years of rule were characterized by a strong control over Christianity culminating in the opening in 1679 of the Refuge for the Catholicized of the Lucerne valleys, the institution for converting Waldensians to Catholicism²⁰. The second occurred when the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 banned the Protestant religion in the French dominions and was then put into effect in Piedmont in 1686, given the alliance between Victor Amadeus II and Louis XIV. The third moment is that of the 18th-century climate of formal tolerance, in which was organized the activity of the *Borsa dei poveri*, a Waldensian charity to help the most needy among the Reformed believers. Alongside and in opposition to it, the Hospice of the Catechumens of Pinerolo was opened in 1743. In a strategic position where the Waldensian valleys meet, it acted as a local bastion for the conversion of Waldensians to Catholicism²¹.

¹⁹ BALLELIO Gabriella, MAYNERI CERIANA Giorgio, PASQUET Sara, "Universités des chèvres: l'istruzione primaria tra i Valdesi della Val Pellice, Chisone e Germanasca", in: PISERI Maurizio (ed.), *L'alfabeto in montagna. Scuola e alfabetismo nell'area alpina tra età moderna e XIX secolo*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2012, pp. 187-188; BALLELIO Gabriella, RIVOIRA Sara, *Leggere, scrivere e cucire. L'istruzione femminile alle Valli valdesi nell'Ottocento*, Turin, Cludiana, 2013, p. 47.

²⁰ DE CARIA Francesco, *L'Albergo di Virtù di Torino. L'aristocratica illusione*, Turin, D. Piazza, 2001, p. 78; MARITANO Marcella, "Confratelli e benefattori. Profilo sociale e reti di relazione da metà Seicento al 1852", in: BARBERIS Walter, CANTALUPPI Anna (eds.), *La Compagnia di San Paolo*, vol. 1, Turin, Einaudi, 2013, pp. 234-241.

²¹ BETTASSA Marco, "Voglio andar in Paradiso e farmi cattolico". Conversioni valdesi", *Contesti. Rivista di microstoria* 3, 2015, pp. 1-41.

It is in this period that women made their presence felt. As Mentzer observes²², belonging to a group became negotiable and above all in the phases of greatest intolerance showed its fragility. The present work lies within this perspective in its intent to investigate one of the strategies for resistance by Waldensian women against established authority: that of ad hoc conversions. Choosing to recant the Waldensian religion would be the litmus test for understanding how women were able to interpret their situation and carve out a role as protagonists in the public and private life of their community.

The Refuge for the Catholicized of the Lucerne valleys: a new approach to the Waldensian minority

In February 1679, the Duchess and Regent of Piedmont, Marie Jeanne Baptiste, inaugurated the Refuge for the Catholicized of the Lucerne valleys. The letters patent began thus: “*È sempre stata così grande l’attenzione, che i Serenissimi Predecessori di questa Casa Reale hanno avuto pel’ Divino Servizio in ciò che riguarda la conservazione e propagazione della Fede cattolica*”²³. Sabaudian Piedmont was probably a unique case on the Italian national scene in the modern age. It is in the Alpine heights on the border with France that those areas are located traditionally called the Waldensian valleys with a religious minority, the Reformed Piedmontese, who in the post-Tridentine centuries resisted against the intolerant policies of the papacy and of the regents of the Savoy lands, and who settled in the Alpine communities in the Pinerolo valleys. As borne out by the name given to the aforesaid Refuge, Luserna Valley (now Pellice Valley) was probably the

²² MENTZER Raymond A., *La Place et le rôle...*

²³ Translation: “The attention has always been of the utmost that the Serene Predecessors of this Royal House have paid to Divine Service in what concerns the preservation and propagation of the Catholic Faith.” Archivio Storico della Compagnia di San Paolo (ASSP), I, CSP, Altre opere pie, Albergo di Virtù (già Albergo di Carità) - Rifugio dei cattolizzati delle Valli di Luserna, 242/1, Patenti con le quali la duchessa di Savoia, Maria Giovanna Battista, madre e tutrice di Vittorio Amedeo II, erige la Casa di Rifugio dei Cattolizzati.

part of Piedmont where the Waldensian religion became most present. Alongside it, however, San Martino Valley (now Germanasca Valley), Perosa Valley (now Chisone Valley) and Prapelato Valley (now upper Chisone Valley) should also be remembered, which to varying extents and at different times were under the domination of Savoy between the 17th and 18th century²⁴. The communities in these valleys were of mixed religions, often with a Reformed majority, where Waldensians and Catholics used the same paths and talked about borders and doctrine. The question of the permeable geographical borders, which became religious ones, is central to understanding the policies for repressing the Waldensian heresy in Sabaudian Piedmont²⁵.

This was very clear to Marie Jeanne Baptiste who, not infrequently, received updated reports on the presence of heresy from her regional intendants. The creation of the Refuge for the Catholicized fitted in with a greater rationalization of the local interventions aimed at universal conversion in the Alpine valleys. A survey carried out in 1678 showed that out of a total of 11,903 valley inhabitants only 2,515 were Catholics, 21% of the population²⁶. Prior to 1679, it had been the Jesuit and Capuchin missions spread out over the territory that dealt full-time with the Waldensians²⁷. The missionaries swept through the valleys and in a not very organized fashion carried out the work of conversion. Evidence of this are the loose sheets on which they wrote down the names of the converted, where the number of conversions was more important than how genuine they were.

²⁴ BATTISTONI Marco, *Comportamenti di confine. Cattolici e valdesi nell'età della confessionalizzazione*, Alexandria, Istituto di Politica, Amministrazione, Storia, Territorio – PAST, 2012, p. 30.

²⁵ See ALLEGRA Luciano, “La porosità dei confini sociali. Il caso dei valdesi nelle valli piemontesi”, in: CIACCIO Renata, TORTORA Alfonso (eds.), *Valdismo mediterraneo. Tra centro e periferia: sulla storia moderna dei valdesi*, Nocera Inferiore, Viva Liber Edizioni, 2013, pp. 13-33.

²⁶ Archivio di Stato di Torino (ASTo), Riunite, Senato di Pinerolo, Valdesi professanti, mazzo (m.) 95, Consegna del sale nell'anno 1678.

²⁷ POVERO Chiara, *Missioni in terra di frontiera. La controriforma nelle valli del pinerolese. Secc. XVI-XVIII*, Rome, Istituto storico dei Cappuccini, 2006, p. 422.

The procedure for conversion involved the neophyte appearing before the missionary and, aware of the choice to be made, declaring his or her readiness to convert. In return, besides spiritual salvation, they were given a sum of money or a property expropriated from a Waldensian. Between 1667 and 1679, the missionaries noted down an average of forty conversions a year: 25% of those appearing were widows, 20% young women of marriageable age and 55% family units of five members whose children were under thirteen at the time of the request²⁸. The main efforts were reserved for the second category, those women who left their own family so as not to be a financial burden. Still malleable for Catholic doctrine, they were given special attention. As the intendant general for the Pinerolo valleys wrote to Marie Jeanne Baptiste a few months before the opening of the Refuge, charitable works were to be considered as fundamental in religious policies directed at Waldensians about to be or already converted. It had not to be forgotten to give them “*le solite elemosine*”²⁹ of a hundred lire if the whole family came over to the Holy Roman Church or fifty lire if only some of them recanted, and to distribute among the converted young women on Annunciation Day the customary 3,000 lire that would be used for their dowries. Undertaking this publicly was seen, above all, as indispensable since it would encourage other women to follow suit.

The opening of the Refuge led to a change in mentality and how a “heretic” was viewed compared to previous years, in which killing them was the most common resort. It was a matter of seeing Waldensianism first of all in terms of an economic investment that should provide a positive return. Thus, the objective set by the charitable institution from the outset was to hold the monopoly on conversion. Most importantly, a confessional path was planned on a daily and then monthly basis, beneficial for the neophyte and under the constant supervision of those with a high religious profile. As the letters patent signed by Marie Jeanne Baptiste explicitly stated, the Waldensians would find in

²⁸ ASTo, Riunite, Camerale Piemonte, articoli, pp. 583-584.

²⁹ Translation: “The usual alms”. ASTo, Riunite, Senato di Pinerolo, Valdesi professanti, m. 95 p. 203.

the Refuge an “*ampio e comodo riparo*” in which they could embrace Catholicism³⁰.

Under its statutes, the charity had to take in “heretics” of any age and sex, give them food and lodging, an education in line with the holy canons, a trade, and in the case of young women of marriageable age their dowry and a husband. The latter – “*donne non maritate*”³¹ as they were called – received 200 lire as a dowry against the promise to hand it over to a man not residing in the Waldensian valleys. The Refuge was financed by two fixed annual incomes. The first, amounting to 3,600 lire, came from general taxation; the second was paid by the Mauritian Order, guardians of the Sabaudian Holy Faith³². To these were added bequests from private individuals. When it opened, the Refuge took in thirty-seven young women and thirty-seven young men, its maximum capacity. This was very good news, which certified its utility according to those in charge. In 1680, the numbers were maintained with 38 young women and 19 young men³³. Unfortunately, the entry registers were not systematically preserved and its activity came to an end in 1743 on the opening of the Hospice of the Catechumens of Pinerolo. However, it has been possible to obtain more precise indications as to the Refuge’s activity from some spies. In 1688, the regulations for its maintenance were drawn up. To save the soul “*occoreva comandare et insegnare tutti i giorni la Dottrina cristiana*” and confession was held regularly³⁴. To save the body, there was a specific diet of bread,

³⁰ Translation: “Spacious and comfortable shelter”. ASSP, *Altre opere pie, Albergo di Virtù*, 242/1, Patenti con le quali la duchessa di Savoia, Maria Giovanna Battista, madre e tutrice di Vittorio Amedeo II, erige la Casa di Rifugio dei Cattolizzati.

³¹ Translation: “Unmarried daughters”. ASSP, *Albergo di Virtù*, Patenti.

³² ASSP, *Albergo di Virtù*, Patenti. On the Mauritian Order see GRISOLI Piera, “L’ordine dei SS. Maurizio e Lazzaro a Pozzo Strada”, *Studi piemontesi* 13, 1984, pp. 340-350; GAFFURI Laura, COZZO Paolo, “Linguaggi religiosi e rimodulazioni di sovranità in uno spazio urbano: Torino fra XV e XVII secolo”, in: BOUCHERON Patrick, GENET Jean-Philip (eds.), *Marquer la ville: Signes, traces, empreintes du pouvoir (XIII^e-XVI^e siècle)*, Paris; Rome, Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2013, pp. 253-283.

³³ ASTo, Corte, Opere pie, m. 152.

³⁴ Translation: “Christian doctrine was taught and proclaimed every day.” ASSP, *Albergo di Virtù*, 242/3, Istruzioni per il rettore della Casa dell’Albergo di Virtù e del Rifugio dei Cattolizzati.

wine and veal. Residents were subject to meticulous supervision with the need, besides those for entry, for other registers in which meals skipped (and why) were recorded and what matters were talked about during one's stay there. Lastly, to safeguard Christian morals, men and women were kept separate, thus avoiding any possible complications.

In 1701, Victor Amadeus entrusted its running for the following six years to the master workman of the Hospice of Virtue, into which the Refuge had been incorporated³⁵. Thereupon, the first cracks appeared in an already fragile institution, and in 1705 Count Forno, delegated by the Compagnia di San Paolo to manage a legacy for the Refuge, wrote a report on the condition it was in³⁶. It ascertained that "*vi era poco profitto [del]la maggior parte de figlioli, e figlie in essa casa ricoverate*"³⁷ and, more particularly, it was open to question how often Waldensian women confessed. The act of confession was the doorway to the neophytes' conscience; in secrecy, the confessor could delve into the words spoken by the converted and assess whether they were on the right path or not. It added that it was not an easy thing to make it more frequent given the lack of instructors and it "*non è utile che il Confessore comandi ai Penitenti che vadino a confessarsi*"³⁸. The count suggested bringing back Saturday as the day for confession, inviting all the young women – not young men, held to be more "*stabili nel carattere*"³⁹ – into the chapel and proceeding to give confession to one half while the other half, observing the first, would prepare themselves for the following week. This point was insisted on because, in effect, those who were converted in the Refuge and then left to return to their Alpine towns and villages often went back to the Waldensian religion.

³⁵ ASSP, Albergo di Virtù, 242/10, Remissione per sei anni ai padre e figlio Giovanni Battista e Cesare Aliberti, e a Vittorio Tenivella del governo e dell'amministrazione della Casa dell'Albergo di Virtù e del Rifugio dei Cattolizzati.

³⁶ ASSP, Albergo di Virtù, 242/16, Relazione del conte Forno.

³⁷ Translation: "Most of the young men and women taken in there did not benefit very much." ASSP, Albergo di Virtù, Relazione del conte Forno.

³⁸ Translation: "It is not useful for the Confessor to order penitents to go and confess." ASSP, Albergo di Virtù, Relazione del conte Forno.

³⁹ Translation: "Stable in character". ASSP, Albergo di Virtù, Relazione del conte Forno.

Isabella Bleyinat, who had been converted in Turin, was sent back to San Germano, a small village in Val Germanasca, with a dowry and to work as a servant for a local noble family. She did not remain Catholic for long, getting married and going back to openly practising the Reformed confession. Maria Goutier, of Torre in Luserna Valley, became a Catholic in Turin and married a Catholic inhabitant of the valley. After becoming a widow, she remarried and returned to the Waldensian faith. She gave her new husband the dowry of 200 lire received on her conversion, “*come era risaputo*”⁴⁰. Maria Appia, the daughter of a minister in the valleys, was converted in the Refuge in 1680 and readopted the Waldensian religion in 1682⁴¹. According to an estimate made by cross-referencing the data for the first two years the charity was operating with the names contained in a contemporary report, 39% of the neophytes went back to their former faith. This partial failure was initially due to the real difficulty of maintaining a hold over those who returned to the valleys. In addition to the distances and a lack of parish priests to undertake this task, there was a further rift: the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.

The wind of intolerance blowing from the France of Louis XIV across the whole of Europe also reached the Waldensians in Sabaudian Piedmont. In 1686, Victor Amadeus II issued an edict banning the Waldensian confession from his lands. The choice was between conversion for those who still persisted in the “*vomito dell’eresia*”⁴² or exile. In the same year, the number of converts started to rise again. In a letter to the Roman Congregation, the Inquisition’s Vicar made this comment: “*Io ho ferma fiducia in Dio che, massime in quest’anno calamitoso si farebbe buon raccolto d’heretici. [...] Pare infatti che la presente caristia apra la porta a detti Heretici, per entrare nel grembo di Santa*

⁴⁰ Translation: “As was well known”. ASTo, Corte, Paesi, Provincia di Pinerolo, m. 21.

⁴¹ ASTo, Corte, Paesi, Provincia di Pinerolo, m. 21.

⁴² Translation: “Vomit of heresy”. ASTo, Corte, Paesi, Provincia di Pinerolo, m. 21. See VIORA MARIO, *Storia delle leggi sui Valdesi di Vittorio Amedeo II*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1930, pp. 59-61. On the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and Waldensianism see Tourn Giorgio, *La revoca dell’editto di Nantes*, Torre Pellice, Società di Studi Valdesi, 1985, p. 36; CARPANETTO DINO, *Nomadi della fede. Ugonotti, ribelli e profeti tra Sei e Settecento*, Turin, Claudiana, 2014, p. 214.

*Chiesa*⁴³. The ecclesiastic's pragmatism reveals that anything was allowed in conversion. The threat of expulsion in 1686 and the hunger that persisted in the Alpine areas provided an unmissable opportunity for carrying out their mission.

The combination of the Edict of Fontainebleau and the food shortage in the Waldensian valleys led to a new wave of conversions to Catholicism. In 1694, Victor Amadeus II issued a new edict allowing the Waldensians to resettle in their lands. On this occasion, the focus was on the *ralapsi*, namely those who were converted a number of times: "*Molte figlie convertite che per maritarsi hanno ricevuto la Dote de nostri Reali Sovrani con lusinghe, o con minacie sono apostatate, et altre morte nell'eresia le quali doti sono assicurate da Padri, e sposi, sopra diversi Beni*"⁴⁴. The process of conversion followed a pattern of taking place at times of highest intolerance and then, as soon as the religious conditions changed, there would be a return to practising the Waldensian religion. It thus happened that families of mixed confession were formed with the woman being Catholic and the other family members Waldensian. It was difficult to find one's way around in this entanglement of religious beliefs. Religious ministers condemned this practice but had to adapt to it. Rulers continued to siphon off money that was wasted. Missionaries did not keep track of accomplished conversions. The Pope issued papal bulls to cancel the secular edicts. The Waldensian tradition was still alive and also began to involve the domestic sphere in that Catholic maidservants worked in the homes of some wealthy Waldensians and vice versa. The situation was even more complicated in this case as it was difficult to keep control over life within domestic walls. The problem thus became a big one since

⁴³ Translation: "I have firm trust in God that especially in this calamitous year there could be a good harvest of heretics. [...] It seems indeed that the present hunger may pave the way for the said heretics, so they can enter the womb of the Holy Church." ASTo, Riunite, Senato di Pinerolo, m. 95, p. 274.

⁴⁴ Translation: "Many converted young women who were given the Dowry of our Royal Sovereigns to get married are apostates following allurement or threats, and others have died heretics, their fathers and spouses using various goods as a guarantee for their dowries." ASTo, Corte, Paesi, Provincia di Pinerolo, 1714. Memoria degl'abusi, che si commettono da Valdesi in pregiudizio della Religione Cattolica.

where there were no prying eyes, Waldensianism could take root without anyone being aware of it. Information given to officials by some men in the valleys explicitly mentioned that the maidservants had with them their own children, who “*allevandosi in Casa di medesimi Eretici vivono ereticamente, et abbandonano la fede cattolicha*”⁴⁵.

The real picture was evidently the impossibility of control and, however manifest the efforts made, the variables at work in the period considered were too many. It was with this in mind that, under his governance, Victor Amadeus II relaxed the intolerant hold over the Piedmontese Reformed. In general, the 18th century saw a reduction in sudden expulsions and mass killings by the secular authorities⁴⁶. The centralization of power through a redefining of the privileges of independence by the Dukedom's ecclesiastical authorities led to a decrease in the pressure on the Alpine territories⁴⁷. It was not a question of the Sabaudian dynasty renegeing on its Christian-Catholic vocation. Rather, what we have is a political use of the Waldensian minority by Victor Amadeus II as an instrument in negotiating his own autonomy at the local, national and supranational level⁴⁸. In this intricate context of governing the world of religion, the Waldensian tradition managed to organize its own welfare institution: the *Borsa dei Poveri*, the aforesaid fund for the poor.

⁴⁵ Translation: “They growing up in the homes of these heretics live heretically and give up the Catholic faith.” ASTo, Corte, Paesi, Provincia di Pinerolo, 1714. Memoria degl'abusi.

⁴⁶ ROMAGNANI Gian Paolo, “*Religionari*”. *Protestanti e valdesi nel Piemonte del Settecento*, Turin, Claudiana, 2021, p. 309.

⁴⁷ Rosso Claudio, *Il Piemonte sabauda. Stato e territori in Età moderna*, Turin, UTET, pp. 173-276; SILVESTRINI Maria Teresa, *La politica della religione. Il governo ecclesiastico nello Stato Sabauda del XVIII secolo*, Florence, Olschki, 1997, p. 428; BETTASSA Marco “‘L’universale edificazione del popolo cristiano’. Giudicare e reprimere l’eresia nel Piemonte sabauda”, *Bollettino storico-bibliografico Subalpino* 2, 2021, pp. 313-342.

⁴⁸ Likewise for the Jews in Turin. See ALLEGRA Luciano, *Identità in bilico. Il ghetto ebraico di Torino nel Settecento*, Turin, Zamorani, 1996, p. 341.

The *Borsa dei Poveri*: Waldensian women and economy of assistance

Based in villages, the *Borse dei Poveri* were comprehensive bodies for giving benefits to those asking for help. In charge was the local consistory assisted by the religious minister. The Synods repeatedly intervened to counter the very pernicious practice of some opportunists receiving benefits from more than one body despite it being forbidden⁴⁹. It was not allowed to go to other *Borse* outside of the community in which one resided. The aim was to inhibit those who were by convention described as “poor by profession” and whom the members of the Synod considered to be “*pernicieux*” for the community⁵⁰. According to the religious ministers, the Alpine areas were filled with men and women on the paths and roads. Among the categories that siphoned off a substantial part of the institutions’ funds were the widows. They were all a mass of “*misérables*” engaged in begging with not even the slightest intention of finding for themselves the minimum to live on⁵¹. This is what the ministers thought, whose wages were a burden on the community and came from a part of the funds for the *Borse*.

The widows were not necessarily older women, but 37% of them suffered from an illness such as blindness, or more often they were “*estropié*”⁵². Their social fragility was added to their family plight: around half of those turning to the *Borsa dei Poveri* in Angrogna between 1730 and 1770 had a daughter with them. They were usually given a monetary benefit of no more than five Piedmont lire. Bear in mind that a hemina (24 kg) of *barbariato*, a mix of corn and rye much used in the diet of the Piedmontese Alpine region, cost about three lire. Sometimes the widows asked for clothing to survive the

⁴⁹ BETTASSA Marco, “Sbandire la mendicITÀ. L’assistenza ai poveri per cattolici e valdesi nel XVIII secolo”, *Riforma e Movimenti religiosi* 6, 2019, pp. 46-47.

⁵⁰ PONS Théophile, *Actes des Synodes...*, p. 75.

⁵¹ “Miserable”. PONS Théophile, *Actes des Synodes...*, p. 51.

⁵² “Crippled”. Archivio della Società di Studi valdesi (ASSV), Diaconia, Concistoro di Angrogna, *Borsa dei Poveri*, m. 138-139.

cold winter months. In either case, it is clear that there was a common specific method in asking for benefits.

First the widow would go to the *Borsa* and then the fatherless daughter or son two weeks later. In this case, probably due to the repeated request from members of the same family, the second donation was no more than one and a half lire. However, the resources given might not be sufficient. The only way around this problem was to go to the *Borsa* in nearby villages despite knowing it was prohibited. This strategy of accumulating benefits was specifically a female one. Analysis of those going to the *Borsa dei Poveri* in Angrogna and Luserna San Giovanni, both in Luserna Valley, between 1730 and 1740 makes it immediately clear that the repetition of requests came from women in 62% of cases, of whom 42% were widows. The Costabel family, made up of widow Susanne and her daughter Madeleine, came to the two *Borse* seventy times in ten years, the widow Franche fifty-two times and the widow Madeleine Rivoire and her two daughters fifty-seven times⁵³. In this period, a yearly average of 127 widows accompanied by fifty-seven daughters turned up. Between November and March, they received from their own *Borsa* an annual amount of about 50 Piedmont lire to which was added about ten lire from another *Borsa*. The total sum of 60 lire was enough to get through the hard, precarious winter months. In spring the situation changed slightly as they made a small amount of money from the sale of dairy produce from grazing animals. As soon as children were able to work, they helped to maintain the family, daughters being sent to other families as maidservants. The other possibility for them was marriage. But since it was very difficult to put together a dowry, finding a husband was no easy matter. The way out of this impasse was the usual, always effective one of converting to Catholicism. At the behest of Charles Emmanuel III, in 1743 a new institution for this purpose was set up in Pinerolo: the *Hospice of the Catechumens*⁵⁴.

⁵³ ASSV, Diaconia, Concistoro di San Giovanni, Borsa dei Poveri, m. 148-149.

⁵⁴ POVERO Chiara, "I convertiti dell'Ospizio dei catecumeni di Pinerolo. Primi risultati di una ricerca in corso", *Bollettino della Società di Studi valdesi* 201, 2007, pp. 33-73; BETTASSA Marco, "Voglio andar in paradiso'...", pp. 9-49.

Funded by the royal authorities, the *Hospice* attracted all Waldensians in economic difficulty, larger families who needed to reduce the burden of maintaining themselves, young women of marriageable age and widows. The intention behind opening a hospice in the town of Pinerolo – a centre from which the Waldensian valleys radiated out – was, among other things, to meet the specific necessity of keeping converts under much closer control so that they kept to the Catholic faith after going back to their villages. It did not produce the results they hoped for. The nubile young women were given a dowry and then disappeared. According to information gathered on the ground from witnesses in the years following conversion, once back in the valleys, the women in question married a Waldensian to whom they handed over their dowry. As previously mentioned, families of mixed faith emerged: Waldensian fathers, Catholic wives and Waldensian children. A few years later, the wives “relapsed” into the Waldensian religion: “*Non è lecito agli eretici maritarsi con donne cattoliche, ne’ altre donne eretiche con uomini cattolici, salvo che si preceda autentica promessa dell’eretico di cattolizzarsi e che ne segua fra breve termini l’effetto*”⁵⁵. It was not, as the Bishop of Pinerolo asserted in 1749, legitimate but it was a common practice. Analysis of those going to the institution between 1743 and 1753 shows that its efforts were for the greater part directed towards neophytes between the marriageable age of seventeen and twenty. Though found among the Catechumens, widows were not those in whom the *Hospice* was mainly interested. In the new plan for converting the valleys, widowhood was a marginal factor; the rise in the age of those applying to, on average, fifty posed the question of how credible conversion was. For this reason, widows turned their attention to the *Borse dei Poveri*, the only body left that was interested in their fate.

⁵⁵ Translation: “It’s not legitimate for heretics to marry Catholic women or other heretical women to marry Catholic men, unless the heretic has previously made a true promise to become a Catholic and soon puts it into practice.” ASTo, Corte, Provincia di Pinerolo, Valle di Luserna, Valle di Pragelato, Valle di Casteldelfino, Eretici, m. 1, prima addizione.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in light of what Augusto Armand Hugon said, did an exemplar of a Reformed woman who took it upon herself to hand on the faith and the community's cohesion exist? This is a more complicated and nebulous question. The narration of a compact minority, in which the internal hierarchy is that desired by God, was undermined by the choices made by its own members. Waldensianism, all things considered, is not a monolithic denomination that continues unchanging through the centuries but one that is alive and changes in line with the context in which it finds itself. From this perspective, at times of the greatest political and social challenges, the traditional interpretation conveyed by the Church elite was weakened. As observed above, at these times the female presence manifested itself, almost as if women understood they could find room for acting within a state of conflict. Attempts at disciplining their presence clashed with women's personal initiative. Certainly, this was in part aimed at maintaining their own family. But this was not all. A painful choice, conversion was also the space in which a woman learned a new skill, faced the uncertainty of a new life and renegotiated her own identity. Thus, while it is not possible to detect a single model, a common way of acting can be indicated. It may be precisely due to that *struggle to resist* during the Reformed events in Piedmont in the 16th and 17th centuries that the Waldensian woman developed her own strategy for resistance.

Conversion became the way to move into the marriage market and to take advantage of the community resources. Above all, the *Refuge*, the *Hospice* and the *Borsa dei Poveri* represented to the Waldensian women the room for renegotiating their own identity and their role in the Alpine context. The physical space in which Waldensianism arose had a crucial impact on women's life; in fact, the permeable borders of the Alpine communities in the Pinerolo valleys allowed Reformed women to avoid religious and secular regulations of Sabaudian Reign. In the meanwhile, widows and nubile young women wanted to obtain an economic autonomy; for this reason, despite the ministers' censure and prohibition, they decided to take advantage of the economic and

social resources offered by the Waldensian and Catholic world. The conflict that this choice triggered represents the key to comprehending the vital presence of Waldensian women in Piedmont. They did not take up arms only against an external enemy but fought against every authority that was imposed on, and experienced by, themselves.

Abstract

L'étude, focalisée sur le XVII^e et XVIII^e siècle, discute le rôle des femmes vaudoises dans le Piémont, sous le règne de la Maison de Savoie, et les stratégies confessionnelles de cette minorité lors de l'acte d'apostasie pour se convertir au catholicisme. Il en ressort une image vive de la présence féminine dans le contexte alpin piémontais, qui redéfinit le profil même du groupe confessionnel. La dernière partie de l'article se concentre sur la principale institution caritative vaudoise, la Bourse des Pauvres. À travers l'analyse des requérantes, on peut voir de quelle manière les femmes ont contourné les règles afin d'obtenir une forme d'indépendance économique.



Sandro Guzzi-Heeb

**Women, Sex, Religion:
Evolutions in Gender Relations
in an Alpine Society between 1700 and 1850**

The scholar and his parishioners

On that Sunday in November 1790, a parish priest named Laurent-Joseph Murith must have realised that what he was about to do was not without its risks, but after several years of conflict and tension, the temptation must have been too great. He had to show this spirited community of Liddes, nestled at an altitude of more than 1300 m in the Valais Alps, that he was right once and for all. So, on that Sunday, he climbed the slopes to personally inform the gathered parishioners that the Diocesan Tribunal had found in his favour. He intended to show the faithful, and more importantly the communal council members, that he was not going to be put off by the countless problems that the civil authorities and notables had created for him since his arrival in the parish¹.

¹ See LATTION Théo and QUAGLIA Lucien, *Liddes à travers les âges*, Liddes, Commune de Liddes, 1984, pp. 206-207. See the acts relating to the events of 1790 in Archives de l'Evêché de Sion (AES) 204-03.

The very first conflict he had encountered had centred on the tithes that the parishioners owed to their priest. In a letter to his superiors in 1779, Murith described the commune's syndics as notorious "*amateurs de rixes et de procès*"². The tensions never really eased from that point on. When Murith finally left the church, it came as no surprise that some of the parishioners saw him off by hurling stones and that instead of calming the situation and punishing the rabble, the Entremont troop commander, Major Eugène Riche, set up a military occupation of the commune to prevent the parish priest's return to the presbytery. Up until this point, the Bishop of Sion and the Grand-Saint-Bernard chapter had always supported the decisions of their representative in Liddes, but the overwhelming opposition against the priest in 1790 forced him to leave the parish and continue his career in Martigny, where he was made prior in 1791.

Murith was probably able to take some comfort from the fact that, one year on from the French Revolution, these remained difficult times. Moreover, he was not the first parish priest to have been driven out of his parish. His predecessor, Jean-Jérôme Darbellay, had also been removed from Liddes in 1769 following tensions not just with the community but with the Maison du Grand-Saint-Bernard, which held the collation rights and ecclesiastical tithes in the Valais region of Entremont³. A few years earlier, another parish priest with a strong personality, Jean-Maurice Clément, had been removed from the Valais parish of Mase after many years of conflict with his parishioners⁴.

² See LATTION Théo, QUAGLIA Lucien, *Liddes à travers les âges*, p. 206. Translation: "lovers of brawls and lawsuits".

³ See LATTION Théo, QUAGLIA Lucien, *Liddes à travers les âges*, pp. 205-206; BERTRAND Jean-Bernard, "Le chanoine Jérôme Darbellay, 1726-1809", *Petites Annales valaisannes* 1, 2-4, 1928, pp. 17-26.

⁴ FAVRE Madline, *Entre religion et médecine. Pratiques et savoirs du corps et de la santé en Valais au XVIII^e siècle*, PhD thesis, Université de Lausanne, in progress; see FAVRE Madline, "Réseaux, pratiques et motivations des acteurs locaux de la recherche botanique en milieu alpin. Le cas du Valais entre 1750 et 1810", *Histoire des Alpes* 26, 2021, pp. 32-49. I would like to thank Madline Favre for reading through this paper and for the many valuable insights she contributed on Jean-Maurice Clément and his background.

These three clerics were no anodyne figures, however. All three were intellectuals, renowned scholars in their region and beyond, who had made significant contributions to the body of scientific and historical knowledge on the canton of Valais. We will not dwell here on the scientific careers of Murith and his colleagues, but it is important to note that all three were, in their own way, “enlightened” clerics who were influenced by the scientific thought of their time and by the general movement defined as the Catholic Enlightenment. It was this progressive mindset that often put them at odds with the rural populations they served, especially the women.

Priests, women, tradition

So what were the accusations levelled at Murith in 1790 by the notables of Liddes? An anonymous memorandum submitted to the diocesan court certainly reveals some interesting allegations. The parish priest’s rights figured among the parishioners’ grievances, but they were by no means top of their list. Their main concern seemed to be linked to Murith’s personal behaviour, which does in fact appear surprising for a priest in a mountain village. The parishioners wondered:

“(1) Si M. Murith n’a pas longtemps scandalisé la paroisse en gardant chez lui des Bernoises, auxquelles il permettait au grand scandale non seulement de cette paroisse, mais aussi des paroisses voisines, d’assister aux offices divins avec toute l’irrévérence possible... dans des attitudes criantes pendant l’adoration et l’adoration-même du Saint Sacrement; (2) S’il ne passait pas bien souvent le temps avec elles chez lui le temps des offices divins et processions du très Saint Sacrement le troisième dimanche du mois en regardant avec elles aux fenêtres de la cure. (3) ...S’il n’a pas scandalisé la paroisse en se promenant avec elles, tantôt ici, tantôt là en leur donnant le bras comme s’ils eussent été mariés”⁵.

⁵ AES 204-03, 18.11.1790. Translation: “(1) If Mr Murith has not outraged the parish for a long time by keeping women from Berne in his home, causing great scandal not only in this parish but in the neighbouring parishes too by allowing

So, we have a chivalrous priest strolling happily through the village lanes or across the meadows with two probably quite elegant women on his arm. This could not possibly have gone unnoticed in the villages of the region. It might not have been such a serious offence if the courtesy shown to these women had not ruffled the feathers of the ladies of the local elite. According to the enquiry records, Mrs Eugene Riche and other ladies of the parish were obliged to leave the front pew during the offices to make way for the women from Berne. Given this context, it is not surprising that there was a rumour of an illicit sex trade circulating in connection with Murith. However, the parishioners clearly had no concrete evidence against their parish priest in this regard because the allegations remained vague. The accusation was nevertheless significant. In recent times, the villages in the region had become unsettled by a latent concern about sexual discipline and family order. I will come back to this point.

It was not just Murith's fondness for ladies' company that irritated the local population. It was also the fact that he took a surprisingly unconventional approach when it came to religious tradition. If his critics are to be believed, he never heard confessions, never bothered to attend Masses or vespers if he was not the celebrant and always removed his habit as soon as the service was over. He also allegedly "*supprimé cette année une grande partie des processions qu'on avait coutume de faire devant la grande messe les fêtes et dimanches en été*"⁶. Processions were a moot point in the 18th century, and progressive clerics viewed them with suspicion. They considered them to be superstitious forms of popular religiosity that were often an occasion for excessive behaviour,

them to attend the divine offices with the utmost irreverence... and with their flagrant posturing [attitudes criantes] during the Mass and during adoration of the Blessed Sacrament itself; (2) If he did not often spend time at home with them gazing out of the presbytery window during divine offices and processions of the Blessed Sacrament on the third Sunday of the month. (3) ...If he did not scandalize the parish by going out hither and thither for walks with them and giving them his arm as if they were married."

⁶ AES 204-03, 18.11.1790. Translation: "cancelled many of the processions this year that usually accompany the High Mass on feast days and Sundays in summer."

drunkenness and scandals. Many bishops sympathetic to the ideas of “moderate devotion” would have willingly abolished them⁷.

This must certainly have caused some discontent among Murith’s parishioners. Processions were the primary sphere of influence of the various local confraternities, especially the powerful Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, which was dedicated to the upkeep of the altar, and the more popular Confraternity of the Rosary. These ancient confraternities included a large section of the commune’s population – including a growing number of women – with notables and their wives playing key roles among officers and officials and generally maintaining significant control over parish life. Murith’s cancellation of the summer processions thus put him in an awkward position with these devotional societies. He was implicitly calling into question the critical link between religious worship, the harvest and the protection of the agricultural world, which until very recently was a crucial association in most Catholic rural societies⁸. The scholar-priest was thus posing as a reformer who had little concern if not outright contempt for local traditions. This annoyed a community used to having its say in the practical running of parish life.

On some points, however, Murith, like his enlightened colleagues, was uncompromising. He set up a “dance bureau”, whereby those who had danced without his permission did not receive absolution in confession but had to pay a sum of money. We know that he fined several young people of the parish for taking part in prohibited dances in 1780.

As already mentioned, Murith was not the only cleric in conflict with his parishioners. His curate at Liddes, Nicolas Cavé, was to leave

⁷ See recently, for example, SIDLER Daniel, *Heiligkeit aushandeln. Katholische Reform und lokale Glaubenspraxis in der Eidgenossenschaft (1560–1790)*, Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 2017, pp. 261-287. The key reference on moderate devotion is MURATORI Ludovico Antonio, *Della regolata divozione de’ cristiani* [1749], Milan, 1820.

⁸ See, for example, HERSCHE Peter, *Agrarische Religiosität: Landbevölkerung und traditionale Religiosität in der voralpinen Schweiz 1945-1960*, Baden, Hier + Jetzt, 2013.

the parish of Bovernier temporarily in 1806 after a long conflict with the communal council, which had become imbued with a republican spirit. Moreover, Murith was not the only priest to have problems related to women. Clément, for example, recounted a dispute with the confraternities of Mase over a female member he had reprimanded for her behaviour. According to the parish priest's diary⁹, he expelled Marie Madeleine Torrent from the confraternity in 1769 because of "*de la conduite scandaleuse de la susdite fille*", which was "*notable et très public*"¹⁰, despite protests and open resistance from her two brothers.

Once again, a cleric was trying to impose social and sexual discipline in his parish but was met with resistance from families and communities determined to retain control over their lives. And once again, Clément – like Murith – was an enlightened parish priest who found himself at odds with his parishioners over the interpretation of true religion and, in particular, over the thorny issue of superstitions – another key theme of the Catholic Enlightenment. It is clear that many of these superstitions, which the cleric wrote at length about, either concerned women or were passed on and maintained by women¹¹. Moreover, like Murith, Clément struggled to prohibit young people from meeting at dances:

*“Il y a eût cette année 1768, aux fêtes de Pentecôte des danses entre personnes de différent sexe contre la défense expresse, ce qui a causé une révolte presque générale et qui dure encore en 7bre, 8bre & ils ont cependant été condamnés de L'Evêques même”*¹².

⁹ Currently being studied by Madline Favre. See FAVRE Madline, *Entre religion et médecine....*

¹⁰ Archives d'Etat du Valais (AEV), Sion, Fonds Clément, Ms 55, fol 34; see Aline Johner's contribution to this volume. Translation: “the scandalous conduct of the aforementioned girl” and “significant and very public”.

¹¹ AEV, Fonds Clément, Ms 55, Journal of J.-M. Clément.

¹² AEV, Fonds Clément, Ms 55, fol 27. My thanks to Madline Favre for transcribing this document and allowing me access. Translation: “On the feast of Pentecost this year, 1768, there was dancing between people of both sexes in contravention of the express ban, which has caused an almost universal outcry and which is still ongoing in September, October, and despite the fact they have been condemned by the Bishops themselves.”

These local conflicts offer a valuable insight into some of the changes directly involving and affecting women that were taking place in local Alpine society at the time. Despite the fact that the available sources contain very little information on these transformations and often no explicit mention of women's involvement, the role of women in local beliefs, in the defence of a traditional religiosity, in the confraternities, in sexual relations and of course in the dances should not be underestimated. This poses a major methodological problem, because it often means trying to decipher what the sources do not say, or what they hide. This is partly possible by comparing the content of one source with that of other often serial sources, which can provide essential additional information. In fact, this study would not have been possible without extensive recourse to a large genealogical database, the *Registre Historique de la Population du Valais (RHPV)*, which is developed and managed by the *Centre Régional de Recherches sur les Populations Alpines (CREPA)* in Sembrancher, Valais¹³.

“Scandals” and “libertinism”

In the 18th century, Church representatives were faced with increasing sexual and moral indiscipline. The Bishops of Sion were quite explicit on this subject in their pastoral letters at the end of the century, lamenting the shamelessness of the faithful¹⁴. This was incidentally not just a temporary fixation among clerics. Figures drawn from the parish registers confirm this was in fact an ongoing evolution. Data are presented below for the parishes of Bovernier and Liddes, which I will return to in more detail later:

¹³ The RHPV is a dynamic genealogical database (HEREDIS software) that links up individuals, parents, spouses, godparents, marriage witnesses, and so on. The database contains information on more than 258,000 individuals, 72,000 marriages and 14,600 family names. The genealogical information is taken mainly from parish registers.

¹⁴ AES, vol. 326, *Litterae pastorales*, N 54: *Constitutio contra impudicos* (1802); see EYÉQUOZ-DAYEN Myriam, “Inconduite et contrôle social dans le Valais romand (1780-1850)”, *Equinoxe* 20, 1998, pp. 79-87.

Tab. 1. Children resulting from licit or illicit sexual relations in Bovernier, Liddes and Martigny according to the parish books, 1650-1899¹⁵.

Year	Bovernier		Liddes		Martigny	
	CRIR	Legit.	CRIR	Legit.	CRIR	Legit.
1625-1649	4,76%	95,24%	0,0%	100,00%	3,74%	96,26%
1650-1674	4,44%	95,56%	0,0%	100,00%	1,27%	98,73%
1675-1699	--	--	0,8%	99,20%	1,26%	98,74%
1700-1724	--	--	1,0%	99,00%	0,92%	99,08%
1725-1749	--	--	1,3%	98,70%	0,88%	99,12%
1750-1774	--	--	2,1%	97,90%	1,83%	98,17%
1775-1799	6,97%	93,03%	1,3%	98,70%	4,18%	95,82%
1800-1824	7,94%	82,06%	2,8%	97,20%	6,23%	93,77%
1825-1849	9,96%	90,04%	5,6%	94,40%	6,78%	93,22%
1850-1874	14,24%	85,76%	5,3%	94,70%	8,62%	91,38%
1875-1899	19,62%	80,38%	6,5%	93,50%	8,82%	91,18%

CRIR= children resulting from an illicit sexual relation (illegitimate children or prenuptial conceptions)

Legit.= Legitimate children

Statistics: Pascal Cristofoli, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), Paris

¹⁵ The phenomenon was observed in several villages in the region: EVÉQUOZ-DAYEN Myriam, "Inconduite et contrôle social..."; GUZZI-HEEB, Sandro, *Passions alpines. Sexualité et pouvoirs dans les montagnes suisses (1700-1900)*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014; PAPILLOUD Jean-Henri, *Histoire démographique de Contthey (Valais)*, Fribourg, Éditions universitaires de Fribourg, 1973.

While the rates of illegitimacy and premarital conceptions varied considerably from one parish to the next, the general trends were similar to those observed for other communities in the canton of Valais and in western Switzerland more generally. The problem from the clergy's point of view was not just that they had to deal with a rise in cases of sex outside marriage and the number of single mothers (and illegitimate children), which they already had experience in, but that very often these "scandals" now involved notables, communal council members and representatives of local elites, including the women in their families.

In 1793, Jean-Alexis Michaud, who lived in Bovernier, had an illegitimate child with his cousin, Marie-Elisabeth Sarrasin. Michaud was a member of the communal elite that was in conflict with the parish priest Cavé at the time¹⁶. Shortly after this, Joseph Bourgeois, a former *métral*¹⁷ and influential local figure, also seems to have had an illegitimate child and was, in addition, involved in legal proceedings to separate from his wife. In Liddes, there were cases of illegitimacy in the Bastian family, which included several *métraux* among its number. The Bastians led the mobilization that resulted in the removal of the parish priest Murith. In 1802, Anne Marie Madeleine Massard, daughter of the notary Jean-Joseph Simon Massard, one of the most prominent figures in the village, appeared at the altar visibly pregnant, and her child was born three weeks later¹⁸.

In the Entremont region and in the French-speaking area of Valais more broadly, such sexual offences were not confined to a marginal sub-society, as suggested by studies conducted in the 1980s¹⁹, but were

¹⁶ Archives de la Paroisse de Bovernier (APB), H2/3. See MICHAUD Jean-Marc, *Histoire de la paroisse de Bovernier*, Sierre, Éditions À la Carte, 2005, pp. 91-92.

¹⁷ An official appointed by a cleric who was responsible for collecting tithes and enforcing the Church's decrees.

¹⁸ The information given in this paper on the cases of unlawful sex is taken from the RHPV database (see note 13).

¹⁹ LASLETT Peter, "The bastardy prone sub-society", in: LASLETT Peter, OOSTERVEEN Karla, SMITH Richard M. (eds.), *Bastardy and its Comparative History*, London, E. Arnold, 1980, pp. 217-246.

widespread across every class of society. The phenomenon marked a detachment of a section of the elites from the Church and its moral conceptions. A certain demand for autonomy in relation to religion was emerging in several sectors of social life, including sexual morality. This demand manifested in a number of ways, including in a certain tolerance of the growing number of couples conceiving their first child before marriage. While this evolution, which has often been referred to as “secularization”, can be described quite accurately for men, what were the consequences for women?

Women and unlawful sexual activity

In 1764, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who was born and raised in Geneva, published his bestselling novel *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (*Julie or the New Heloise*). The touching story of Julie and Saint-Preux begins in Clarens, on the shores of Lake Geneva. However, these two lovers were not the only ones who had to contend with forbidden desires. In Montreux, for example, the number of couples having premarital sexual relations increased throughout the 18th century²⁰. This evolution indicates a significant change in the power relations between parents and children. Paternal authority was no longer unquestioningly accepted. The virtuous Julie reveals an interesting plan relating to her sexual adventures: “j’espérais tirer de ma faute un moyen de la réparer, et j’osai former le projet de contraindre mon père à nous unir. Le premier fruit de notre amour devait serrer ce doux lien”²¹. In other words, she thought that the birth of her child, conceived before marriage, would force her father to give his blessing to a marriage that the family disapproved of. In the Reformed canton of Vaud, this strategy seems to

²⁰ JOHNER Aline, “Sexualité avant et hors mariage, l’exemple de trois familles de Montreux au XVIII^e siècle”, *Revue vaudoise de généalogie et d’histoire des familles* 25, 2012, pp. 49-75.

²¹ ROUSSEAU Jean-Jacques, *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse* [1762], COULET Henri (ed.), Paris, Gallimard, 1993, p. 411. Translation: “I hoped to find a way to make amends for my transgression, and I dared to form a plan in my head of forcing my father to let us marry. The first fruit of our love was to strengthen this sweet bond.”

have been quite successful. Premarital sex was increasingly accepted as long as it led to a marriage blessed by a priest²².

A few dozen kilometres from Clarens, in the Catholic canton of Valais, the number of premarital conceptions remained low compared to the Reformed regions, but it was far from stable. The implications of the phenomenon were the same. The rise in unlawful sexual activity reduced the parental generation's control over young people of marriageable age. The increasing mobility of the population in the 18th century, at the end of the early modern period, was another contributory factor in the family's diminished control. A significant proportion of the illegitimate births before 1800 in Montreux (Pays de Vaud), Vouvry and Bovernier (Valais), for example, was linked to immigration from other communes, including even Piedmont and Savoy on occasion. In Entremont, many of the couples conceiving children before or outside of marriage in the 18th century were made up of individuals from different parishes²³. The migrant population, which was subject to less social control than the sedentary population, often exhibited a freer behaviour. However, the phenomenon cannot be attributed solely to the presence of immigrants. In the 19th century, illegitimacy was just as prevalent in middle-class families as it was in immigrant families²⁴.

Without wishing to idealize this evolution, the consequences were visible at several levels. First, unlawful sexual activity, because it weakened familial control, undermined reproduction control mechanisms. Before 1750, only the notables or wealthy people had large families, but over the course of the 18th century, the number

²² JOHNER Aline, *La sexualité comme expression d'identités religieuses et politiques dans le canton de Vaud (fin de l'Ancien Régime–1848)*, Neuchâtel, Alphil-Presses universitaires suisses, 2022; see also HALDENMANN ARNO, *Prekäre Eheschliessungen. Eigensinnige Heiratsbegehren und Bevölkerungspolitik in Bern, 1742-1848*, Munich, UVK Verlag, 2021.

²³ In this section, I am summarizing previous research results, some of which have already been published. See, in particular, GUZZI-HEEB, Sandro, *Passions alpines...*; GUZZI-HEEB, Sandro, *Sexe, impôt et parenté. Une histoire sociale à l'époque moderne (1450-1850)*, Paris, Éditions du CNRS, 2022.

²⁴ GUZZI-HEEB, Sandro, *Passions alpines...*, pp. 195-207.

of working-class couples having ten or more children grew. Indeed, there is evidence of a significant association between large working-class families and permissive sexual behaviour within the kinship. In the vast majority of cases (95%), there was a kinship relationship between parents with more than ten children and a couple who engaged in unlawful sexual behaviour. This was a close relationship in 71% of the cases, that is, up to the second degree of kinship (first cousins). This correlation is illustrated by the case of Jean-Joseph Alter, who had eighteen children, the most of any of the genealogies in the municipality of Bagnes in the early 19th century. He had also fathered children before marriage and came from a family where unlawful sexual relations were common. In this sense, there seems to be a very clear association between sexual indiscipline and demographic transformation²⁵.

The general rise in illegitimacy in the 18th century was defined by researchers in the 1970s as a “sexual revolution”²⁶. While this is probably an overstatement, the consequences for the Alpine populations, and especially for the women, remain underestimated. There is no doubt that this evolution did not bring about a general emancipation for women, but it does seem that, in some sectors of Alpine society, new – partly secularized – religious and political milieus were emerging in which attitudes towards women, girls and sexuality were undergoing a significant transformation²⁷. In these families, the female members tended to be better educated and have more independence, including a certain freedom to choose their own spouse. They could also begin sexual relations and get married earlier and were generally

²⁵ GUZZI-HEEB Sandro, “Sex, Politics, and Social Change in the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth Centuries: Evidence from the Swiss Alps”, *Journal of Family History* 36, October 2011, pp. 367-386.

²⁶ SHORTER Edward, “Illegitimacy, Sexual Revolution and Social Change in Modern Europe”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2, 1971, pp. 237-272; see, more recently, DABHOIWALA Faramerz, *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution*, Oxford; New York, Oxford University Press, 2012.

²⁷ GUZZI-HEEB Sandro, *Passions alpines...*, pp. 79-101 and pp. 195-207.

valorized within their family, for example from the point of view of inheritance and social or professional opportunities²⁸.

Unlike their Reformed contemporaries, however, their room for manoeuvre as far as social action was concerned remained constrained by the absence of contraception – at least until 1850. While young Valais women had enjoyed more freedom since the late 18th century, their life trajectory was still largely conditioned by their status as a mother or single woman. If they survived childbirth, which was still a high-risk process in the early 19th century, the young wives generally went on to have many children.

No emancipation at all then? We must be careful to avoid an anachronism here. There is evidence to suggest that, for young working-class women, having a large family was not just a fate that befell them but an affirmation of their independence, ambition and sometimes even success. Prior to 1700, early marriage was the prerogative of wealthy families, who could afford to have a large number of children. However, from the late 18th century onwards, an increasing number of working-class families dared to claim this privilege. In the 19th century, most of the large families in Bovernier and Vouvry were formed in a radical milieu. A similar trend was found by Johner in the Reformed parish of Payerne, where the women from a liberal/conservative background would use contraceptive methods more often than those from a radical background. In this context, sexuality and reproduction became markers of identity and distinction. Indirectly, they manifested social ambition for a lifestyle previously reserved for the rich as well as a certain claim to power and influence²⁹.

²⁸ GUZZI-HEEB Sandro, *Passions alpines...*, pp. 79-101 and pp. 195-207; GUZZI-HEEB Sandro, *Donne, uomini, parentela. Casati alpini nell'Europa preindustriale*, Turin, Rosenberg & Sellier, 2007.

²⁹ In the Ancien Régime societies, having a large number of descendants was seen as an instrument to extend and maintain power through securing multiple influential positions and expanding social influence. See, for example, NETTING Robert M., *Balancing on an Alp: Ecological Change and Continuity in a Swiss Mountain Community*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 85-87; see JOHNER Aline, *Sexualité, identités religieuses et politiques...*, pp. 333-368.

Confraternities and the feminization of parochial religion

The 18th century is often referred to as the Age of Enlightenment. Data drawn from the confraternities' registers suggest that, generally speaking, women became the foundation of religious life from the late 18th century onwards, counterbalancing the effect of a growing disaffection among men. Historians have called this phenomenon a 'feminization of religion'. As a section of men began to detach themselves from the Churches and turn instead to the Enlightenment or to ideologies inspired by the French Revolution or by liberalism, women seemed to maintain their loyalty to the Churches, where their roles were often less visible but were traditionally recognized³⁰.

A micro-historical approach that takes into consideration the dynamics of well-identified social groups may provide a better account of the evolution that took place between 1750 and 1850 by revealing the role that women played in the reorganization of the Catholic milieu. The registers of the confraternities existing in the 18th and 19th centuries in the villages of Bovernier and Liddes (which are both situated on the commercial route towards the Grand-Saint-Bernard pass and Italy) include member lists. In Bovernier, there were three local confraternities competing for the attention of the faithful between 1749 (the date the parish was founded) and 1900. These were the Confraternities of St Joseph, the Blessed Sacrament and the Rosary³¹. All three were open

³⁰ See, for example, GOETZ VON OLENHUSEN Irmtraud, "Die Feminisierung der Religion und Kirche im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert. Forschungsstand und Forschungsperspektiven", in: GOETZ VON OLENHUSEN Irmtraud (ed.), *Frauen unter dem Patriarchat der Kirchen. Katholikinnen und Protestantinnen im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1995, pp. 9-21; VAN OSSELAER Tine, BUERMAN Thomas, "Feminization Thesis: A Survey of International Historiography and a Probing of Belgian Grounds", *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 103, 2, 2008, pp. 497-544; PASTURE Patrick, *Gender and Christianity in Modern Europe Beyond the Feminization Thesis*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2012; JOHNER Aline, *Sexualité, identités religieuses et politiques...*, pp. 307-308.

³¹ Registers in APB, E2. The regions' parochial archives are held at the Maison du Grand-Saint-Bernard in Martigny.

to women as well as men, and all had a dual hierarchy to some extent, with parallel offices for both female and male members. However, the member lists show that there were always significantly more female than male members. This imbalance was even more marked during the French Revolution period, between 1790 and 1810, and most notably during the rise of radicalism, which was particularly pronounced in this region between 1825 and 1860. Women were mainly attracted to the Confraternity of the Rosary, which remained an essentially female society until the 1860s³². Liddes experienced similar trends, but the chronology and modalities were not the same. The gender imbalance was not as marked as it was in Bovernier, but it was significant nonetheless, especially during certain periods of religious and political conflict, such as from 1780 to 1800 and in the 1840s.

Generally speaking, the nature of the devotional societies changed considerably between the 18th and 19th centuries. The 1780s and 1790s, in particular, saw a dramatic decline in membership. As already mentioned, this was a period of intense conflict between the communal authorities and the parish priests. Murith was removed from Liddes in 1790, and his former curate, Cavé, had to leave the parish of Bovernier temporarily in 1806 while waiting for new guarantees from the municipality. In 1798, the year the Helvetic Republic (1798-1803) was established following the fall of the Ancien Régime in Switzerland, a distinctly republican rhetoric against the Church's privileges was beginning to creep into the tensions³³.

The devotional societies' memberships grew again after the crisis of the Revolutionary period as a result of new mainly female

³² The Confraternities of the Rosary were fairly long established in the Alpine region. In the French-speaking area of Valais, they seemed to gain new momentum after a relative crisis at the end of the Ancien Régime. See AYMARD Agathe, *Lectures et interprétations du Rosaire en France (X^e-XVIII^e siècles)*, Master's dissertation, Université de Lyon, 2017 (supervised by Philippe Martin). It should be noted that these figures represent the number of new members in the confraternities rather than the actual membership. In this sense, there is a cumulative effect to some extent if one assumes that the majority of new male and female members remained active in the association for several years.

³³ APB, C8-C18 (1786-1803).

members, especially the Confraternity of the Rosary. Men left the Church and the devotional societies during this period to join anti-clerical groups. These were very turbulent times. In 1835, the Valais radicals formed an association called La Jeune Suisse, which was inspired by the Young Europe association led by the Italian agitator Giuseppe Mazzini. In 1836, the conservatives coalesced under the banner of La Vieille Suisse – a name that was already a sort of manifesto. The 1840s, in particular, represented a decisive turning point in the region's and indeed the whole country's history. In 1844, there were violent clashes in the Valais region between liberal radicals (“*radicaux*”) and conservative Catholics, which left several people dead. The number of male confraternity members declined dramatically during the 1840s, while the number of female members increased to an all-time high. Male membership in Liddes was at its lowest, while in Bovernier, 89 new female members revived the village's societies during these crucial years. This picture suggests there was a mass mobilization of women against radicalism, especially given that this evolution was not specific to Liddes and Bovernier. Similar trends can be observed in a number of parishes in the region to the north of the Grand-Saint-Bernard³⁴.

In the French-speaking area of Valais, women thus contributed to the maintenance of parish and devotional life during the critical period of the political and religious conflicts. This is not an isolated case. France also saw a mass mobilization of its female population in support of the Catholic cause in the early 19th century³⁵. The Valais women represented the main pillar of support for the local clergy, who were not going to be defeated by the rise of liberalism and radicalism. The ecclesiastical authorities made their voices heard against the indiscipline, or even indifference, that they observed

³⁴ Registers in Archives de la Paroisse de Liddes (APL), F. See Aline Johner's contribution to this volume.

³⁵ *La femme catholique*, vol. 2, Paris, Auguste Vaton Libraire-Éditeur, 1855, p. 485 and p. 492, cited in CHOLVY Gérard, “L'émergence d'un laïcat catholique: le premier XIX^e siècle”, *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 95, 2, 2000, p. 278.

among the faithful. In 1825, the parish priests of Entremont sent a letter to the communal councils in an attempt to curb the “*débordement des mœurs*”³⁶ (such behaviour had first been denounced by the bishop at the beginning of the century). In 1826, the Church Council issued fines to those who did not take part in the processions, which remained popular despite the debates of the late 18th century³⁷. Clearly, the female majority support for the Church contributed to preserving traditional forms of religious life.

Confraternities and social discipline

At the time of the Council of Trent, the revival of the confraternities had been conceived as one of the instruments for ensuring the spread of the Catholic faith and the loyalty of the people to the Church of the Counter-Reformation³⁸. It can therefore be hypothesized that Catholic women, through the confraternities, ensured a certain political and social discipline within their community. One of the statutes of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament of Liddes, written in the first half of the 18th century, read: “*Aucun ne peut être reçu en cette confrérie s’il est reconnu coupable de quelque vice, ou crime notable, et scandaleux, ny aussi sans le consentement du recteur, prieur, sous-prieur,*

³⁶ Translation: “excesses”.

³⁷ LATTION Théo, QUAGLIA Lucien, *Liddes à travers les âges...*, pp. 213-220. See MICHAUD Jean-Marc, *Histoire de la paroisse de Bovernier...*

³⁸ See, for example, FROESCHLÉ-CHOPARD Marie-Hélène, *Dieu pour tous et Dieu pour soi. Histoire des confréries et de leurs images à l’époque moderne*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2006; DOMPNIER Bernard et VISMARA Paola (eds.), *Confréries et dévotions dans la catholicité moderne*, Rome, École française de Rome, 2008; PASTORE Stefania, PROSPERI Adriano, TERPSTRA Nicholas (eds.), *Brotherhood and boundaries – Fraternità e frontiere*, Pisa, Ed. Della Scuola Normale, 2011. On the Alpine region: ADAMOLI Davide, *Le confraternite della Svizzera italiana. Storia di una presenza dal 1291 a oggi*, 2 vols, Lugano, Ritter Edizioni, 2015; TORRE Angelo, “Confréries et localité dans une vallée du Piémont (XVII^e-XVIII^e siècles)”, *Annales, histoire sciences sociales* 1, 2007, pp. 41-53.

*et conseillers, qui se trouveront pour lois en charge*³⁹. In general, the members vowed to lead a pious life and to avoid sin.

As we have seen, this certainly applied to sexual behaviour, but how far was this ideal achieved in reality? In Liddes, there were already significant transformations underway even before the community entered into conflict with the parish priest Murith. To simplify, until the 1770s, most of the women involved in unlawful relations were not members of a confraternity. The clergy deplored these carnal relations, but they could console themselves with the fact that the confraternities still represented a solid stronghold against the “debauchery”. After 1775, however, this situation began to change. Increasingly, women conceiving a child before marriage and even single mothers were confraternity members⁴⁰ – who according to the societies’ statutes should have been especially modest and chaste.

In 1777, Marie Petronille Gambonod Gallien gave birth to an illegitimate child fathered by Pierre Vorache. She had been a member of the Confraternity of the Rosary since 1767. The following year, Marie Ursule Darbellay had a child before she and the father had received the priest’s blessing. She had also been a member of the Confraternity of the Rosary since 1767. Two decades later, in 1797, Anne Marie Arlettaz gave birth to an illegitimate child, whose father, Jean Joseph Luy, came from the Bagnes Valley. She had been a member of the same society as him, the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, since 1793. These three supposedly pious confraternity members were therefore no longer considered models of virtue according to Catholic doctrine. However, it appears that, despite the fact that their sexual

³⁹ APL, F9, 2, Statutes and accounts (1741-1771) of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, Register. Translation: “No one may be admitted into this confraternity if he has been found guilty of any vice or any notable and scandalous crime, nor without the consent of the rector, prior, subprior, and counsellors, who shall be responsible according to the law.”

⁴⁰ This analysis involved a comparison of the names of the male and female members recorded in the confraternity registers with the names and genealogical data presented in the RHPV database, which contains information both on illegitimate births and, indirectly, on premarital conceptions (see note 13).

behaviour was not unblemished (from the Church's point of view), they were not excluded from the devotional societies. On the contrary. In 1791, Marie Madeleine Beth gave birth to a child conceived seven months before her marriage to Pierre Nicolas Exquis and joined the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament that same year. This incidentally was a few months after Murith's departure. Was this just a coincidence?

Whether a coincidence or not, the confraternities were no longer able to ensure sexual discipline. This was especially evident in Bovernier, a small parish where unlawful sexual activity was frequent. In the Bourgeois/1 branch (according to my genealogical classification) of Bovernier, for example, there was a clear concentration of unlawful sexual behaviour from the late 18th century onwards. These were the descendants of the Joseph Bourgeois mentioned above, who was an influential *métral* for the canons of Grand-Saint-Bernard and probably the father of an illegitimate child. He is cited by the parish priest Cavé in the late 18th century as one of the main protagonists in the conflict between him and the community. Each generation of Joseph Bourgeois's descendants are distinguished by relatively liberal sexual behaviour, premarital pregnancies and sometimes illegitimate children. This did not prevent them from playing a major role in the parish confraternities, however. Marie-Elisabeth Bourgeois, Joseph's daughter, even held the position of subprior in the Confraternity of the Rosary. The same phenomenon can be observed in other family groups whose sexual discipline was also not a model of Catholic morality. The parish of Bovernier was by no means exceptional.

From this point of view, Clément's intervention against the "scandals" caused by the female members of the Mase confraternities was not insignificant. In the late 1760s, the disciplinary function of the devotional societies continued to be defended. They could still be seen as instruments for combating the loss of sexual and moral control. This, in principle, was in line with the position of the Church in Valais. In a pastoral letter of 1802, the Bishop of Sion decreed on the subject of people exhibiting scandalous conduct that "*si elles sont*

*dans quelques confrairies, elles en seront rayées et mises hors de ces sociétés pieuses qu'elles déshonorent*⁴¹.

Despite the clerics' best efforts, however, the confraternities' policy, under the growing influence of women, had changed significantly since those troubled times. Female members now increasingly engaged in sexual misdemeanours, and women were often admitted into the confraternities after giving birth to a child visibly conceived outside of marriage. Anne-Catherine Darbellay had an illegitimate child to Benjamin Lattion (according to the baptismal registers) in 1797 and went on to become a member of the confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament in 1803. Claire Geneviève Oreiller also became a member of the same confraternity in 1805, a year after giving birth to an illegitimate child, whose father was Etienne Biselx, a "foreigner" from the Rhône plain.

I could cite many other examples. It seems that the confraternities' policy was no longer to act as a disciplinary institution punishing prohibited behaviour but as an institution that sought to integrate "sinners", probably in the hope of exerting a positive influence on their behaviour. A number of historians have suggested that the devotional societies seemed to evolve from a disciplinary approach with an emphasis on punishment to a new sensibility that was influenced by compassion and Christian solidarity⁴². In any case, the shift that coincided with the end of the Ancien Régime and the establishment of the Helvetic Republic had a major impact on parish life. As the Church came under threat and became politically weakened, the confraternities were opening up. Instead of defending the rigid sexual morality propagated by the clergy, they were encouraging the integration of women – and men – whose sexual activity did not strictly adhere to the norms dictated by the clergy.

⁴¹ AES, vol. 326, *Litterae pastorales*, N 54: *Constitutio contra impudicos* (1802). And "if they are present in some confraternities, they will be removed and excluded from these pious societies that they dishonour".

⁴² See, for example, VAN OSSELAER Tine, BUERMAN THOMAS, "Feminization Thesis...", pp. 497-544.

New forms of devotion that were more individual and centred on the idea of Christian solidarity became popular, especially among women, partly as a result of the resounding success of the Confraternity of the Rosary. In the 1830s, this confraternity welcomed in Bovernier three unmarried mothers from the Arlettaz-Aubert group. The Rosary members' interpretation of the confraternal code of ethics was clearly more tolerant than that of the authorities. In this sense, a sensibility that differed from the one espoused by the Church seemed to gain ground after the crisis of the revolutionary period.

Conclusions: women, men, religion

When Murith was driven out of his parish in 1790, major transformations were already underway in the Alpine valleys that affected men's and women's relationships with religion. These transformations can only be understood in light of the evolutions in gender relations, sexual behaviour and the family unit.

In the Valais mountains, a section of men began distancing themselves from the Church in the late 18th century as they looked to the new social and political ideas of the time, while the concrete life of the parishes was being increasingly underpinned by women. Of course, it is important to stress that the secularization process only concerned specific milieus and kinship groups, not the whole of society. In the confraternities, however, the imbalance between male and female members increased dramatically during this period.

At the same time, the content of the religion being practised was changing. At the risk of pushing the interpretation too far, one could conclude that a female majority appropriated the confraternities at that point and turned them into something different. The devotional societies were now at the centre of female sociability in a society where opportunities for horizontal organization were rare. This evolution should not be underestimated. For the women of the Alpine valleys, the confraternities provided the only opportunity to meet collectively

in a formal, regular context. On the one hand, the women's societies effectively defended a strongly outward-looking "baroque" religiosity against the reformers' attacks. On the other hand, despite the disciplinary function that the bishops and some clerics sought to confer on the devotional societies, they focused on opening up and integrating different groups and people, including single mothers and daughters who had not waited until marriage to indulge in the pleasures of the flesh, the wives and sisters of notorious anticlericals, liberals and, over time, even liberal radicals who were fighting against the Church's privileges. In so doing, the female members were endorsing social transformations that presented certain advantages for women, notably the weakening of "patriarchal" or family control over young people (and girls in particular), a certain sexual or relational freedom and a degree of intellectual independence.

In fact, both the male and female confraternity members, supported by the municipal authorities, rebelled against the repressive interventions of rigoristic clerics, particularly in the areas of sexual relations and dances, which were often linked to morality problems. The community of Liddes rose up against Murith's attempts to prohibit or supervise the young people's dances, believing that problems of sexual discipline should remain under the control of the community and families and be managed in a pragmatic and flexible way. This same situation can be observed in countless other cases⁴³.

By adopting this approach, the women who remained attached to the Church prevented an irreparable social and political divide in their community and mitigated the effects of the ongoing polarization. There were also even serious divides within families and kinship groups, but kinship solidarities helped to avert the fatal disintegration of these communities. Of course, this was not just down to the

⁴³ SIMON Christian, *Untertanenverhalten und obrigkeitliche Moralpolitik: Studien zum Verhältnis zwischen Stadt und Land im ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert am Beispiel Basels*, Basel; Frankfurt am Main, Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1981; SCHMIDT Heinrich Richard, *Dorf und Religion. Reformierte Sittenzucht in Berner Landgemeinden der frühen Neuzeit*, Stuttgart; Jena; New York, Fischer, 1995; GUZZI-HEEB Sandro, *Le sexe, l'impôt, la parenté...*

women, but the men were divided on many issues, as were the clergy. In this fluid and unsettled context and with the Church weakened by the revolutionary experience and in search of a new consensus, the vitality and popularity of the confraternities gave early nineteenth-century women a valuable platform for a common cause.

More in-depth studies will no doubt be able to show how far the new religious sensibilities contributed to the relative sexual tolerance observed in Valais in the first half of the 19th century and to what extent the women's new pragmatic attitudes helped to build bridges between opposing political factions and avoid a much deeper social divide.

Abstract

Dans le domaine de l'histoire des femmes, le problème des sources rares et peu fiables a souvent été évoqué. C'est une difficulté réelle; cependant les archives alpines regorgent de documents permettant des approches intéressantes au sujet des rapports de genre. Cette contribution se concentre principalement sur la sexualité illicite et la religion dans le Valais occidental, où des évolutions significatives sont observables entre le XVIII^e et le XIX^e siècle. D'intéressantes conclusions relatives aux destins féminins émergent si nous nous concentrons sur des listes nominatives ainsi que sur des bases de données généalogiques, dans le but de reconstruire l'influence de la parenté ainsi que de réseaux ou milieux particuliers.



Edvard Ravertson

Aline Johner

**An Increasingly Gendered Religion:
the Targeted Audience of Brotherhoods
in the Valais Alps (18th-19th Centuries)**

In the course of their long-term existence, the devotional brotherhoods have been evolving in many ways and have fulfilled different purposes. From one locality to another, or even within the same parish, several of these foundations have been coexisting, each one having its own characteristics. Beyond the aspects associated with a specific devotion, geographical, economic and social differences may have had a significant influence on the way in which they developed¹. In Switzerland, however, little research has been done on the brotherhoods of the modern era. Davide Adamoli's recent work on the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland² has partly filled this gap, but for the rest of the country the field is just beginning to be explored.

¹ RAMELLA Franco, TORRE Angelo, "Confraternite e conflitti sociali nelle campagne piemontesi di ancien régime", *Quaderni Storici* xv/45, 1980, pp. 1046-1061; TORRE Angelo, "Faire communauté: Confréries et localité dans une vallée du Piémont (XVII^e-XVIII^e siècle)", *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 62/1, 2007, pp. 101-135.

² ADAMOLI Davide, *Confraternite delle Svizzera italiana*, 2 voll., Lugano, Ritter Edizioni, 2015.

Generally speaking, work on brotherhoods has also been less focused on the 18th and 19th centuries, which are perceived as a period of decline of the secular confraternity model. The brotherhoods, however, remained numerous in the Valaisan Alps and lasted for a large part of the 19th century. This continuity is certainly largely due to the fact that women prevented confraternities such as those of the Holy Rosary and the Blessed Sacrament from experiencing a decline in new members.

Many studies have highlighted the growing interest of women in religion since the end of the 18th century and especially in the 19th century. In this regard, Claude Langlois has often referred to the proliferation of female congregations in France during the 19th century³. The same phenomenon can be observed within the confraternities of secular devotions, although the participation of women in the brotherhoods has been less studied⁴. While in the Middle Ages confraternities were still rarely mixed, after the Catholic Reformation there was a new emphasis on opening this type of association to a larger part of believers, and post-Tridentine confraternities have since welcomed an increasing number of women⁵. At the end of the modern period, most brotherhoods had a higher proportion of female members than of male members.

³ LANGLOIS Claude, *Catholicisme, religieuses et société: le temps des bonnes sœurs, XIX^e siècle*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2010; see also CHOLVY Gérard, *Le XIX^e, grand siècle des religieuses françaises*, Perpignan, Artège, 2012.

⁴ CASAGRANDE Giovanna, "Confraternities and Lay Female Religiosity in Late Medieval and Renaissance Umbria", in: TERPSTRA Nicholas (ed.), *The Politics of Ritual Kinship*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 48-66; CASAGRANDE Giovanna, "Confraternite senza barriere? Un 'viaggio' tra casi ed esempi", in: PASTORE Stefania *et alii* (eds.), *Brotherhood and Boundaries. Fraternità e barriere*, Pisa, Edizioni della Normale, 2011, pp. 3-30; VENARD Marc, "Les femmes dans les confréries normandes du XIV^e au XVIII^e siècle", in: *La femme en Normandie*, Archives départementales du Calvados, 1986, pp. 297-303.

⁵ CASAGRANDE Giovanna, "Confraternite senza barriere?..."; TERPSTRA Nicholas, "Women in the Brotherhood: Gender, Class, and Politics in Renaissance Bolognese Confraternities", *Renaissance and Reformation* 26/3, 2009, pp. 193-212; TERPSTRA Nicholas, *Lay Confraternities and Civic Religion in Renaissance Bologna*, Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

On the one hand, there is no single reason for the continued interest of women in brotherhoods and religious careers. On the other hand, the loss of involvement in the religious sphere on the part of men must also be put into perspective, instead of simply contrasting the feminization of religion with the de-Christianization of men. The aim of this contribution is to argue that the 19th century was characterized by a gendered differentiation between specific devotional associations. We suggest that women could still find opportunities in the devotional brotherhoods inherited from the Catholic reform, while men were more likely to engage in structures less dependent on the authorities of the Church.

The following study covers three parishes in the Swiss canton of Valais – Martigny, Vollèges and Bourg-Saint-Pierre – located along the road leading to the Grand-Saint-Bernard Pass. The plain town of Martigny lies in the bend of the Rhône, with 2,409 inhabitants in 1802 and 2,545 in 1850⁶. Vollèges is situated about 15 km above Martigny. It consists of Vollèges itself, at an altitude of 800 m, and five smaller localities in higher regions up to 1330 m. The entire community had 657 inhabitants in 1802⁷ and 869 in 1850⁸. The village of Bourg-Saint-Pierre is located at the entrance to the pass leading to the Grand-Saint-Bernard hospice. The settlement is located at a higher altitude than Vollèges (1600 m) and has a harsher climate. As a result, agriculture was less productive and an important part of the economy depended on transit to the pass, the transport of goods and mountain guides. In contrast to Vollèges, the population decreased during the first half of the 19th century, falling from 344 inhabitants in 1802 to 305 in 1850⁹.

⁶ *Recensement de la population valaisanne du XIX^e siècle*, Archives de l'Etat du valais. Online: <https://recensements.vallesiana.ch/1802>; HUGO Albano, “Martigny, commune”, in: *Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse*, 13.8.2021 version. Online: <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/002732/2021-08-13>.

⁷ *Recensement de la population valaisanne du XIX^e siècle*.

⁸ GABBUD Jean-Yves, “Vollèges”, in: *Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse*, 21.07.2021 version. Online: <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/002680/2021-07-21>.

⁹ RAEMY-BERTHOD, Catherine, “Bourg-Saint-Pierre”, in: *Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse*, 14.10.2004 version. Online: <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/002676/2004-10-14>.

The feminization of brotherhoods in Vollèges

In early modern times and in the first half of the 19th century, numerous confraternities remained in these three parishes. Material is unevenly available, but it was possible to carry out a study that covers several types of brotherhoods within a small geographical area.

During the 17th and 18th centuries new devotional brotherhoods were founded in Martigny: the Scapular confraternity, the Blessed Sacrament, the Holy Rosary, the Poor of Jesus Christ as well as a brotherhood of the Forty Hours and another one dedicated to the Three Kings. Finally, at the very end of the 19th century, a congregation of the Blessed Virgin Mary was created. These associations are known only from scattered references, the Blessed Sacrament being the only one to have provided documentation by the brotherhood itself, but it contributes a very complete register that contains precious information on the life of the brotherhood.

In Bourg-Saint-Pierre, the parish was endowed in the 17th century with the brotherhoods of the Blessed Sacrament and the Holy Rosary, and in the 18th century with a brotherhood dedicated to Saint Peter and the Three Kings, the latter being the only one to have left sources.

Finally, Vollèges is the parish where the records have been best preserved, since all the foundations active in the modern period provided documentary evidence. As the sources uncovered in Vollèges are the most complete, it is possible to trace the evolution of the brotherhoods between the 18th and 19th centuries and thus to highlight the phenomenon of feminization.

In 1644, two new brotherhoods were founded in Vollèges, the Blessed Sacrament and another one dedicated to Saint Sebastian. They both succeeded that of the Holy Spirit, which was active during the Middle Ages and ceased to exist at the end of the century. During the last years of the 17th century, a third brotherhood was established, dedicated to Saint Joseph, and it was also during this period that the Holy Rosary was founded in the parish. Finally, a brotherhood of the Sacred Heart was founded in 1805 but is no longer reported after

1810. The confraternities of Saint Joseph and the Blessed Sacrament are mentioned at least until 1866, the Holy Rosary until 1868 and that of Saint Sebastian lasted until 1873. The collection of the Valais Cantonal archives contains lists of members for each of the four brotherhoods¹⁰.

A first observation can be made by counting the number of new registrations between 1720 and 1870: rather than embodying a drastic decline of the confraternity world, the transition between the 18th and 19th centuries marked a turning point in the evolution of the Vollèges confraternities, when the two most popular devotions gave way to two other models (Fig. 1).

In the brotherhoods of Saint Sebastian and Saint Joseph the number of new members decreased at the end of the 18th century, before new registrations almost completely disappeared in the following century. It should be noted, however, that the peak of new affiliations with the brotherhood of Saint Joseph between 1771 and 1780 must be put into perspective: it reflects an inaccuracy in the recording of inscriptions, with the parish priest failing to give precise dates after 1766, before he took over the count for some names in the 1790s and after 1830. These enrolments have therefore been arbitrarily recorded in the calculation within a single chronological bracket, but the entries must in fact have lasted until the end of the 18th century. It is also difficult to know whether membership of the Holy Rosary increased in the 19th century compared to previous centuries, as lists are only available from 1795 on. Nevertheless, it is obvious that during the 19th century this brotherhood and that of the Blessed Sacrament were favoured over the others.

¹⁰ List of members of the Confraternity of Saint Joseph (1703-1866) and the Holy Rosary (1795-1868): *Livre de la confrerie de Saint Joseph érigée en l'église paroissiale de Saint Martin de Vollege contenant les règles et statuts de la dite confrerie et aussi du Saint Rosaire de la Ste Mère de Dieu*, CH AEV, AC Vollèges, P 110; List of members of the Confraternity of Saint Sebastian (1644-1868): *Livre de la confrerie de saint Sebastien, Érigée en l'église paroissiale de saint Martin de Vollege le vingtieme janvier 1644*, CH AEV, AC Vollèges, P 20; List of members of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament (1644-1863): *Catalogue des Confreres du Très saint Sacrement érigée en l'Eglise de St. Martin de Vollege en 1644*, CH AEV, AC Vollèges, P 71.

Fig. 1: Enrolments in the Volleges brotherhoods between 1721 and 1870

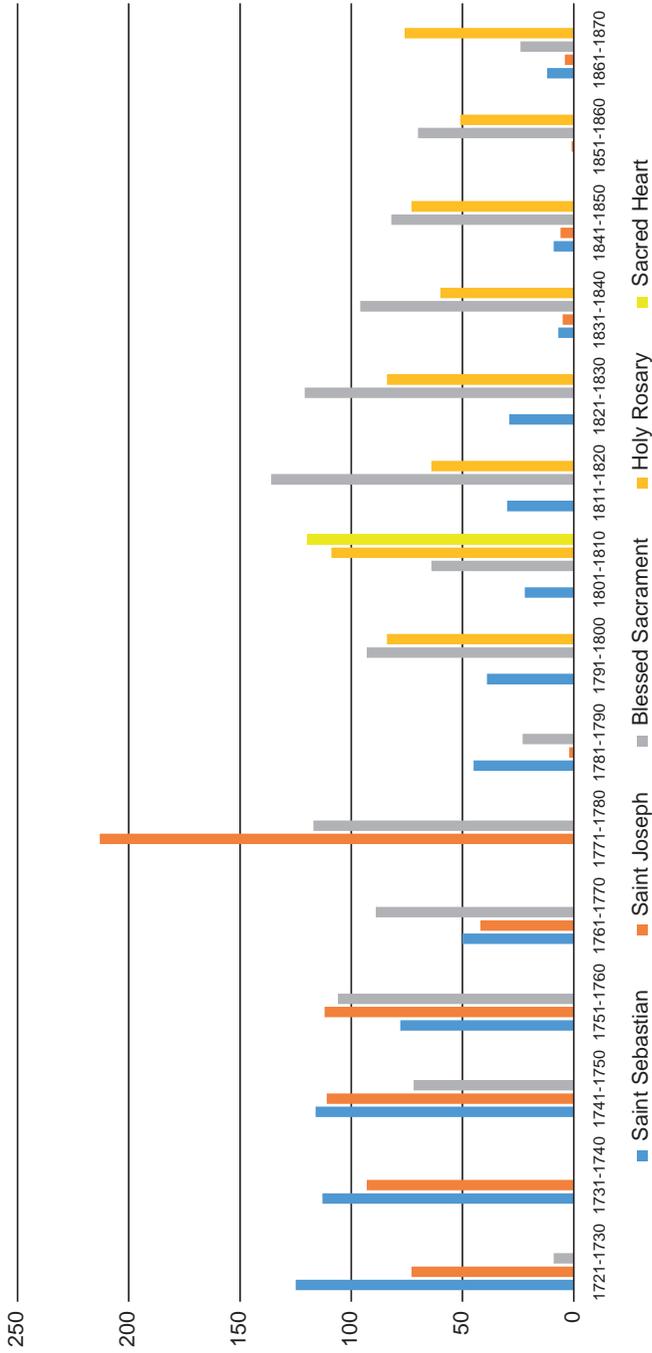
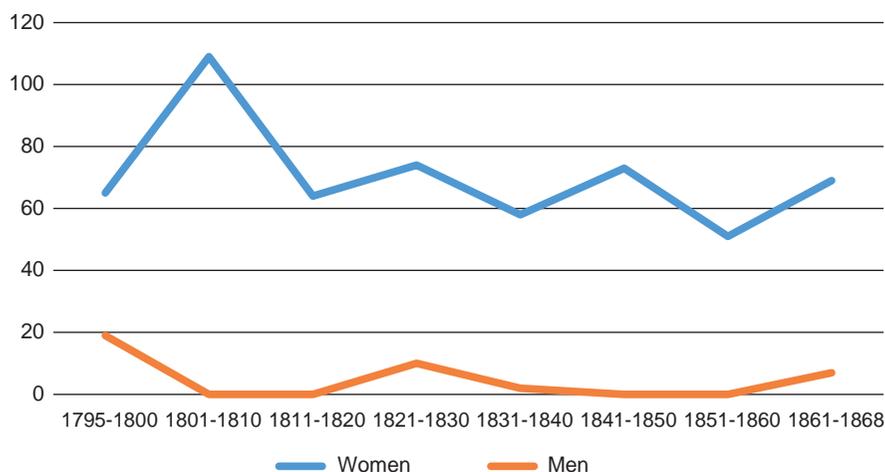


Fig. 2: Female and male registrations at the Holy Rosary of Vollèges (1795-1868)



A differentiation between male and female members thus indicates that the success of the confraternities of the Holy Rosary and the Blessed Sacrament was mainly due to female members (Figs. 2-3). After 1800, many more women than men joined the Holy Rosary, and it turns out that the gender gap in the Blessed Sacrament was widening at exactly the same time. The percentage of female enrolment after 1800 exceeded 60%, even reaching 80% from the 1830s on.

This trend does not seem to be specific to Vollèges, since it can also be observed in Liddes, studied by Sandro Guzzi-Heeb, and with the Blessed Sacrament of Martigny, where the curve of new registrations by gender follows a similar pattern (Fig. 4).

Not all brotherhoods declined in the 19th century, as several historians have shown in recent decades¹¹; on the contrary, some experienced a

¹¹ ZARDIN Danilo (ed.), *Corpi, "fraternità", mestieri nella storia della società europea*, Rome, Bulzoni, 1998; ZARDIN Danilo, "Tra chiesa e società 'laica': le confraternite in epoca moderna", *Annali di storia moderna e contemporanea* 10, 2004,

Fig. 3: Female and male registrations at the Blessed Sacrament of Vollèges (1721-1863)

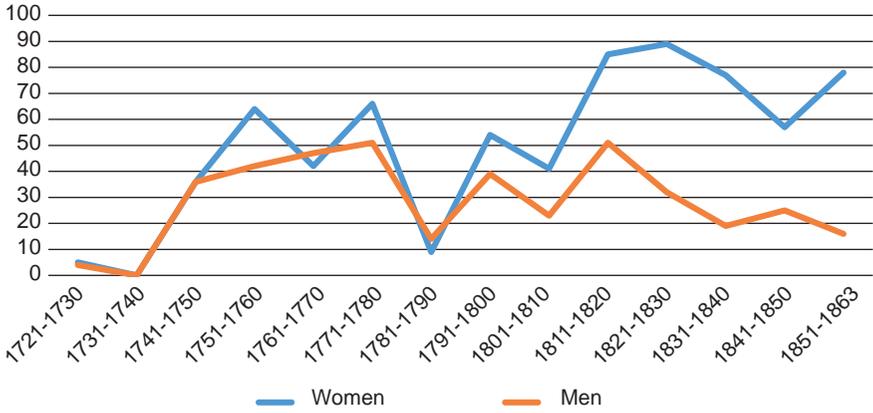
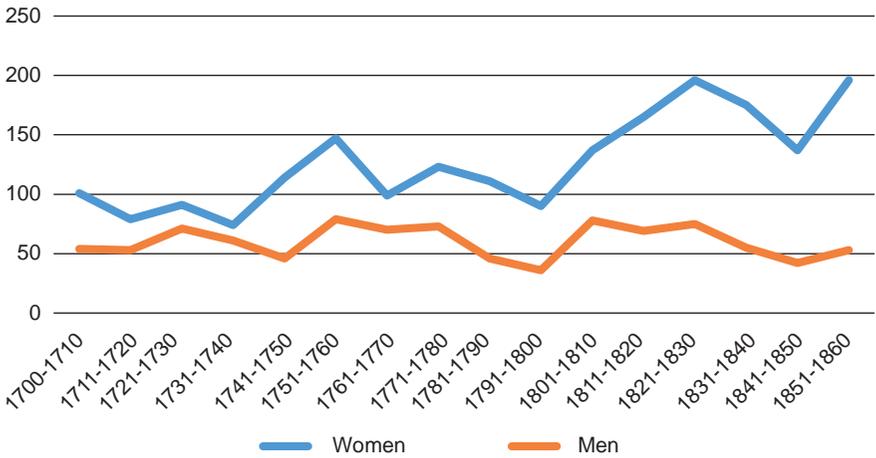


Fig. 4: Female and male registrations at the Blessed Sacrament of Martigny (1700-1860)



revival between 1800 and 1850, and it is true that in Vollèges (and with Martigny's Blessed Sacrament) this success was mainly due to women.

Explanations for the gender difference are difficult to give on a purely demographic or economic basis. Seasonal emigration from the Valais and Entremont is not as important as in other Swiss Alpine regions, especially in Ticino¹². In Lugano, Adamoli noted that the decline of the confraternity movement partly coincided with a demographic decline, with secular devotional associations concentrating around certain elite families¹³. However, in the geographical area considered in this study it was not until the second half of the 19th century that the inhabitants really left the valleys and that demographic growth slowed down¹⁴. In addition, the degree of celibacy was still quite high in Martigny and the Entremont before 1850, but the difference between men and women was not significant enough to explain the numerical superiority of the latter within the brotherhoods¹⁵. Finally, the Valaisan family succession model was egalitarian, allowing women to have an inheritance similar to that of their brothers. According to Sandro Guzzi-Heeb, they held a significant share of real estate, although they were generally less likely to appear in the context of transactions¹⁶.

pp. 529-545; DOMPNIER Bernard, VISMARA Paola (eds.), *Confréries et dévotions dans la catholicité moderne: mi-XV^e-début XIX^e siècle*, Rome, École Française de Rome, 2008, pp. 411-412.

¹² LORENZETTI Luigi, MERZARIO Raul, *Il fuoco acceso: famiglie e migrazioni alpine nell'Italia d'età moderna*, Rome, Donzelli, 2005; HEAD-KÖNIG Anne-Lise, "Hommes et femmes dans la migration", in: EIRAS ROEL ANTONIO, REY CASTELAO Ofelia (eds.), *Les migrations internes et à moyenne distance en Europe, 1500-1900*, Santiago de Compostela, Consellería de educación e ordenación universitaria, 1994.

¹³ ADAMOLI, *Confraternite delle Svizzera italiana*, p. 21.

¹⁴ ROSSIER Eloi, "La démographie du district d'Entremont 1850-1950", *Idéologies et population*, 1985, pp. 117-138.

¹⁵ In 1811, 57% of men and 60% of women in Vollèges were single. In Martigny, the rate of celibacy was even lower among women, 59% compared to 62% among men. Calculations based on census tables published by MEYER Léo, *Les recensements de la population du canton du Valais de 1798 à 1900*, Bern, Staemplfi, 1908, p. 314; see also GUZZI-HEEB Sandro, *Passions alpines, sexualité et pouvoirs dans les montagnes suisses (1700-1900)*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014, p. 243.

¹⁶ GUZZI-HEEB, *Passions alpines, sexualité et pouvoirs...*

It is therefore more likely that the brotherhoods continued to provide women with something they did not necessarily find elsewhere. The main vocations of those associations do not themselves explain the gap between male and female enrolment in the 19th century. Yet, we know that in addition to being a space for devotion and expression of faith, the brotherhoods may have provided opportunities for women. They were primarily built on a model of mutual support and offered a possibility of integration into the spiritual and temporal life of the village, which may have attracted women, who were excluded from the majority of local public and political spheres.

Women's interests in the brotherhoods

– Support in death

The purpose of the brotherhoods was first to maintain a link between members even after death. The brothers and sisters engaged to assist each other to guarantee a “good death”. More specifically, a portion of the income generated by membership fees and donations was dedicated to the funeral of members, to provide the luminaries for the ceremony and to pay the parish priest for the service. The salvation of the souls of the deceased brothers and sisters was also sustained beyond the funeral ceremony itself, by annual prayers and masses, while also generating expenses covered by the confraternities.

– Support during illness

Support for the sick was part of the duties assigned to the brothers and sisters. A procession went to the home of the dying members to bring them the Holy Eucharist, so that they could receive the last rites. The brotherhoods thus played above all a spiritual role, salvation being obtained through individual practices, but also through those of other members. Being part of a brotherhood, therefore, meant creating a network of mutual financial, moral and spiritual support in case of sickness and death.

– Public space visibility

One of the major events of the brotherhood was the processions, which marked the course of local religious life. In Vollèges, religious processions were held in the parish almost every Sunday, sometimes even twice. The members wore the penitents' habits and paraded with torches while reciting rosaries or singing litanies. The procession was regulated according to a strict order, the liturgical objects being carried by members especially designated for this purpose. Women had the opportunity to occupy privileged ranks, since they were also elected to the role of bearers of liturgical objects, apart from the "Gonfanon" (flag) and the stick, which seemed to be reserved for men¹⁷. Given that the confraternities became predominantly female from 1800 onwards, it is easy to imagine that it was mainly Sisters who made processions in the villages on Sundays and feast days.

– Women in the hierarchy of the Blessed Sacrament

In Martigny, the list of officers of the Blessed Sacrament has been preserved¹⁸, and it shows that women did not only play a secondary role. Although the positions of rectors, presidents and secretaries were reserved for Brothers, the Sisters were not only responsible for visiting the sick or carrying liturgical objects during the processions. Like the men, they held the positions of Prioresses, sub-Prioresses and councillors, who were involved in the discussions and decisions of the brotherhood. The register of the brotherhood contains the minutes of some of the council meetings. In 1808, for example, the councillors came into conflict with one of the sacristans of the brotherhood¹⁹. His claim concerned a bench belonging to the brotherhood, which the Nuncio had granted to the Church administration. Each councillor was asked to give his or her opinion on the matter, i.e. to support the sacristan

¹⁷ *Livre d'activités de la Confrérie du très Saint et du très Auguste Sacrement de l'Autel de Martigny (1625-1907)*; "Élection des Officiers de la dévôte Confrérie du très auguste Sacrement de l'Autel", CH AcMy Mixte, S 3668.

¹⁸ *Livre d'activités de la Confrérie...*; "Élection des Officiers de la dévôte Confrérie du très auguste Sacrement de l'Autel", CH AcMy Mixte, S 3668.

¹⁹ *Livre d'activités de la Confrérie...*

or to comply with the Nuncio's decision. The sub-Prior was the first to speak, followed by the vote of the six male councillors and then the five female councillors, the majority agreeing with the Prior's recommendation not to oppose the Nuncio. The case may seem anecdotal, but it highlights an episode in the life of the brotherhood in which women were truly involved in the decisions taken.

– Respectability

Some researchers have argued that the success of religion among women in the 19th century was due to a desire on the part of churchmen to promote a “softer” and more “affective” religion in order to attract women, who would then have served as the last stand against increasing secularization²⁰. Several studies have since challenged this interpretation²¹, and Schwind even argues that in the 19th century brotherhoods may on the contrary have been used as a tool of moral control, particularly for women²². Interestingly, in Martigny, in 1824, the council of the Blessed Sacrament voted for an addition to the statutes:

“L’honorable conseil de la Confrérie du très Saint Sacrement de l’autel a délibéré et arrêté unanimement qu’il seroit défendu aux femmes agrégées à la Confrérie du très Saint Sacrement et aux filles admises à la Confrérie du St Rosaire, non seulement d’aller danser

²⁰ GIBSON Ralph, “Le catholicisme et les femmes en France au XIX^e siècle”, *Revue d’histoire de l’Église de France* 202, 1993, pp. 63-93; FOUILLOUX Étienne, “Femmes et catholicisme dans la France contemporaine: Aperçu historiographique”, *Clio* 2, 1995, pp. 319-329.

²¹ PASTURE Patrick *et alii*, “Beyond the Feminization Thesis: Gendering the History of Christianity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries”, in: DE MAEYER Jan *et alii* (eds.), *Gender and Christianity in Modern Europe: Beyond the Feminization Thesis*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012, p. 7-33; BRAUDE Ann, “Women’s History is American Religious History”, in: TWEED Thomas A. (ed.), *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, University of California Press, 1997, p. 87-107; VAN OSSELAER Tine, BUERMAN Thomas, “Feminization Thesis: A Survey of International Historiography and a Probing of Belgian Grounds”, *Revue d’Histoire Ecclésiastique* 103/2, 2008, p. 497-544.

²² SCHWINDT Frédéric, “Des anges sous le regard de Dieu: Le contrôle de la vertu des filles en Lorraine du XVII^e au XIX^e siècle”, *Histoire & Sociétés Rurales* 31/1, 2009, pp. 67-96.

*au Bourg, les jours de foires et marchés mais d'y assister, d'entrer même dans les maisons où l'on danse, sous peine d'être privées les filles du voile et les femmes de l'habit de pénitent. Où que l'on reconnoitra désobeissantes et coupables on les denoncera publiquement à l'Eglise le Dimanche suivant*²³.

Not that the ban on dances was a new phenomenon, or even specific to this brotherhood; throughout the Old Regime dances were regularly pointed out by the clergy. What seems more original here is that the prohibition applies to Sisters and not Brothers. This suggests, at least for this brotherhood, a similar pattern to that observed by Schwind, namely greater control over women in the 19th century.

But did the brotherhoods actually apply these restrictions? Undoubtedly, there are significant differences between parishes. In his contribution to this volume, Sandro Guzzi-Heeb shows that in Liddes, located between Vollèges and Bourg-Saint-Pierre, several women who had given birth to illegitimate children were nevertheless accepted into the village brotherhoods. In Vollèges, no mother of a natural child was enrolled before 1850. However, this information should be treated with caution, as it was gathered from the genealogical database – based on baptismal registers – and not from a systematic analysis of lawsuits relating to illegitimacy. The difference may also be due to the political opinions of the leaders of the confraternities or the power of the parish priest over the organization.

This is suggested by the diary of the priest of Mase, another Valais village situated further east, towards Sion, in which Jean-Maurice

²³ Translation: “The honourable council of the Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar has unanimously deliberated and decided that it would be forbidden for women admitted to the Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament and for girls admitted to the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary not only to go dancing in the town at fairs and markets, but also to attend, and even to enter, the houses where dances are taking place, on pain of being deprived of the veil in the case of the girls, and of the penitential garb in the case of the women. Wherever they are found to be disobedient and guilty, they will be publicly denounced to the Church on the following Sunday”. *Livre d'activités de la Confrérie du très Saint et du très Auguste Sacrement de l'Autel de Martigny*, 13 juin 1824, p. 216.

Clément relates the various events of his life and that of his parishioners. In 1769, the priest was involved in a conflict that led to his having to leave the parish. The case concerned his decision to deprive a woman, Marie Madeleine Torrent, of her Sister's habit, to exclude her from the confraternity and to denounce her publicly to the Church because of her "scandalous conduct".

“Le 12 du même mois, après un détail abrégé de la conduite scandaleuse de la susdite fille sans pourtant la nommer, ut minus diffamaretur, Monseigneur me donna pleine autorité, (outre celles que donnent la dessus le règlements de la confrérie) de punir, et même d'exclure des confréries la fille en question. En un mot, la seule connoissance que j'avois de sa mauvaise conduite était plus que suffisante, sine alia auctoritate, pour lui enlever son habit de consoeur [...].”²⁴

We do not know the exact nature of Marie Madeleine Torrent's offence, but the parish priest's decision was contested by her brothers, who took steps to cancel the punishment and suspend the priest: *“Les deux frères, le prêtre, et surtout Nicolas ont ensuite fait toutes les demarches dans Sion & avocats, et leur possible auprès de l'Evêque pour me faire retracter et réhabiliter leur sœur, en me noircissant pour la laver [...].”²⁵*

The case highlights the authority issues that could exist between the confraternities, the parishioners and the parish priests. In this example, the power of the laity prevails over the morality the priest wants to impose on the brotherhoods. In the case of Marie Torrent of Mase, the

²⁴ Translation: “On the 12th of the same month, after an abbreviated detail of the scandalous conduct of the above-mentioned girl without naming her, ut minus diffamaretur, the Bishop gave me full authority (in addition to that given by the rules of the confraternity) to punish and even to exclude the girl in question from the confraternities. In a word, the mere knowledge I had of her bad conduct was more than sufficient, sine alia auctoritate, to remove her habit as a Sister.” *Manuscrits Clément*, “Annotationes factae 1765-1769”, CH AEV, Ms. Cl. 55, f. 34. I would like to warmly thank Madline Favre, who drew my attention to this very rich material.

²⁵ Translation: “The two brothers, the priest, and above all Nicolas, then did everything they could in Sion and with the lawyers, and what they could with the Bishop, so that I retract, and to rehabilitate their sister, by blackening me to clear her name [...].” *Manuscrits Clément...*, Ms. Cl. 55, f. 34.

energy deployed by the two brothers to rehabilitate their sister should be noted more specifically. It seems that the girl's reputation would be more damaged if she were to be deprived of her consort's habit than by the "scandal" itself. For the Torrent brothers, their sister's reinstatement in the brotherhood seemed to be a pledge of morality, and it is easy to understand that this had to involve the whole family. From this point of view, showing a desire for strict control of women's morality may not have been an obstacle to enrolment but rather encouraged families to have their daughters registered, starting with the Holy Rosary, which mainly welcomed young parishioners.

Women's devotional life course

The scarcity of studies that have undertaken research on the actual ages of enrolment is certainly due to the difficulty of compiling demographic data, and the time needed to do so. Thankfully, the Entremont region in the Valais, where Vollèges is located, has benefited from the huge amount of work done by CREPA (Centre régional d'études des populations alpines)²⁶: the research centre, in collaboration with genealogists, has created a large genealogical database, using the original parish registers of fifteen municipalities in the region, and makes it available to researchers. Despite the many homonyms that make it difficult to identify all registered members in the database, a reasonable number of Brothers and Sisters could be found. This made it possible to establish the age of the Brothers and Sisters when they joined the brotherhoods (Fig. 5).

In the 19th century, women, who formed a large majority of the Holy Rosary, registered between the ages of twelve and fifteen, most likely after having received their First Communion. It is unclear how long the members continued to attend the Holy Rosary afterwards. But we can see that in a second phase, as adults, the parishioners of Vollèges joined

²⁶ <https://www.crepa.ch/>.

the Blessed Sacrament. During the same period the members of the confraternity usually enrolled at the age of twenty (Fig. 6).

Fig. 5: Ages of the members of the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary at the time of their registration (1795-1898)

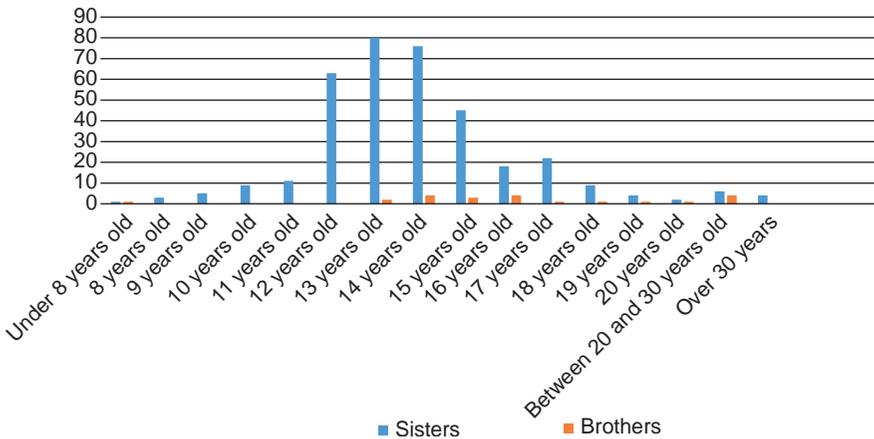
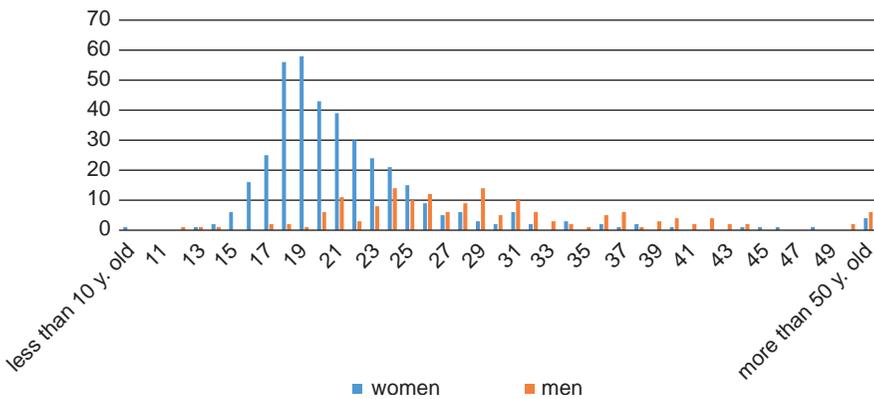


Fig. 6: Ages of the members of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament at the time of their registration (1750-1863)



In Vollèges, where lists of members of the Rosary and Blessed Sacrament brotherhoods are available, it appears that the same girls often enrolled in both associations. Only the brotherhood of Saint Joseph also welcomed younger members of both sexes, between 15 and 16 years old, but this brotherhood was in sharp decline in the 19th century. The gender difference is therefore more striking from 1800 onwards, with a “devotional path” seemingly favoured by girls from an early age. Both boys and girls attended catechism together, followed by First Communion. But afterwards, it was the girls who most often continued this journey, which marked every stage of their lives. The ultimate achievement of this devotional journey was to obtain a seat within the hierarchy of the brotherhood. In fact, in Martigny, we can see that women who were appointed to office were much older: the councillors, sub-Priors and Prioresses were never elected before the age of 30, and in most cases, they were even older than 50²⁷.

Should we believe, like Venard, that the gradual disengagement of men from the brotherhoods, while their success, on the contrary, was growing among women, is an indication of the decline of confraternity movements²⁸? One should not be too rash to conclude that men entirely disappeared from the devotional scene. The non-attendance of the latter in an official Church institution does not necessarily mean a rejection of all forms of religious practices. The existence of an exclusively male brotherhood in Martigny and Bourg-Saint-Pierre calls this interpretation into question.

²⁷ *Livre d'activités de la Confrérie...*; “Élection des Officiers de la dévote Confrérie du très Auguste Sacrement de l’Autel”.

²⁸ VENARD Marc, “Préface”, in: FROESCHLÉ-CHOPARD Marie-Hélène, *Dieu pour tous et Dieu pour soi. Histoire des confréries et de leurs images à l’époque moderne*, Paris, Harmattan, 2006, p. 401.

The Brotherhood of the Three Kings: an 18th-century male confraternity

The Confraternity of Saint Peter and the Three Kings of Bourg-Saint-Pierre was founded in 1706²⁹. It was then subject to several cancellations and reintroductions. Abolished in 1739, it was created again in 1763, dissolved in 1857 and re-established in 1866. The statutes of the brotherhood, adopted in 1763, shed light on the structure and aims of the association. It defines itself as a “brotherhood of Musketeers associated to honour with arms the days of the Holy Patrons of the place”³⁰. Membership, restricted to men, was obtained by paying an entrance fee of 40 baches³¹, or by inheritance, reserved for the first legitimate living son. The Brothers promised to provide services for saints’ days and for the death of members who had no male descendants. Money seems to have played an important role in the brotherhood, since Brothers did not only buy the entrance fee if it was not inherited. The auctioning of ranks during the processions also gave rise to a real market where the price for privileged positions could reach amounts as high as 50 baches, which represented more than the entrance fee³². These sales generated a sponsorship system, since each buyer was guaranteed by one or more Brothers. Another particularity of the financial organization of the brotherhood concerned the distribution of share capital, which could be recovered or inherited if the brotherhood were to be dissolved. Half of the 20 points in the statutes concern the inheritance of the shares of a deceased Brother without a legitimate son.

In addition to male exclusivity, paid admission and the granting of financial shares, the brotherhood is also characterized by its autonomy

²⁹ “Règles et statuts de la confrérie de Saint-Pierre et des Trois Rois érigée en l’église de Bourg-Saint-Pierre”, 1739, AC Bourg-Saint-Pierre, R 12, p. 3.

³⁰ “Règles et statuts de la confrérie de Saint-Pierre et des Trois Rois...”.

³¹ In the early 19th century, 10 baches (or batz) were worth 1 Swiss franc. REICHENBACH Pierre, “Les comptes personnels de P.-J. de Riedmatten, ancien bourgmestre de Sion, pour les années 1800-1804”, *Vallesia* XIII, 1952, p. 239. For example, in 1806, 1 pound of beef cost about 2.5 baches. GASPOZ A., TAMINI J.-E., *Essai d’histoire de la vallée d’Hérens*, Sierre, Éditions à la Carte, 1999, p. 206.

³² “Enchères des principaux offices de la confrérie de Saint-Pierre et des Trois Rois de Bourg-Saint-Pierre”, AC Bourg-Saint-Pierre, R 12.

from the religious authorities. In 1739, the Bishop's visitor ordered it to be disbanded, on the grounds of abuse, especially the holding of banquets (*abusus comessationum*), which would lead to the "absence of the divine" (*absentiam a Divinis inducant*)³³. The brotherhood is mentioned again in the context of the parish being visited in 1810, where it is described as a "worldly society" (*société mondaine*), thus denying it its status as a brotherhood approved by the Bishop: "another kind of brotherhood, under the name of the Three Kings, which should rather be called a worldly society or tribe, formerly extinct but now founded again"³⁴.

A brotherhood of the Three Kings was also founded in Martigny, but unfortunately the documentation is much more incomplete. It consists of a list of members probably dating from the end of the 17th century and another one from 1838, but limited to the inhabitants of the "city" district³⁵. Finally, records show that it was dissolved in 1859³⁶. According to Alfred Pellouchoud, the foundation of the brotherhood could be linked to the Stockalper family of Brig, in the German-speaking part of the Valais³⁷. Yet, still based on Pellouchoud, the Three Kings were the patrons of the Stockalpers, who also owned possessions in Martigny³⁸. Gaspard Stockalper was the town's lord of the court between 1646 and 1691³⁹, i.e. in the period during which the brotherhood was founded. Further research will be necessary to

³³ *Actus visitationis In et circa Ecclesiam Parochialem et Prioralem Burgi St. Petri*, 1739, AC Bourg-Saint-Pierre P 224/6 [f. 5].

³⁴ "une autre espèce de confrérie, sous le nom des Trois Rois, qu'on devoit plutôt nommer société mondaine ou tribu, ci-devant éteinte mais de nouveau fondée". *Acte de Visite Episcopale faite dans et sur les avoires de l'église paroissiale et prieurale du Bourg St. Pierre Mont Joux pour les jours 23eme et 24eme juillet 1810*; AC Bourg-Saint-Pierre, P 224/10 [f. 4].

³⁵ "Pièces relatives à la Confrérie des Trois Rois établie dans la paroisse de Martigny" CH AcMy, Ville, I 5.8.

³⁶ "Inventaire des obligations de la Confrérie des Trois Rois établie dans la paroisse de Martigny, actuellement dissoute" 1860, AcMy Co Mixte, B 2.2.1.2.

³⁷ PELLOUCHOUD Alfred, "Notes sur la continuité des biens féodaux à Martigny", *Annales valaisannes* 4, 1953, p. 431.

³⁸ PELLOUCHOUD Alfred, "Notes sur la continuité...", p. 431.

³⁹ SCHÖPFER PFAFFEN Marie-Claude, "Gaspard Stockalper de la Tour", in: *Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse*, 29.5.2012 version (translated from German). Online: <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/021488/2012-05-29>.

establish the link between the brotherhood and this noble family and between the two associations – in Martigny and Bourg-Saint-Pierre – the latter having been founded later on. The fact remains that the model of the brotherhood was very different from the one that prevailed in Valais at the same time.

In many ways the Three Kings brotherhood was more similar to pre-Tridentine organizations than to parish confraternities such as the Holy Rosary or the Blessed Sacrament. The accusation of spending money on banquets was usually made by the religious authorities against brotherhoods that were beyond their control. This argument was already used in the early modern period, when the Tridentine Church attempted to regulate confraternity movements. In fact, the Three Kings confraternity did not reflect most of the essential elements of the brotherhoods promoted during the Catholic reconquest in the 16th and 17th centuries: it was not accessible to everyone⁴⁰; charity was not promoted⁴¹ and money would also have been spent on secular activities. Above all, it was emancipated from control by the Church and self-administered⁴².

The association could also to some extent be compared to the male village societies of the 19th century. For example, one point in the statutes imposed a penalty on members who remarried. In a certain way, this calls to mind the youth societies that, in many parts of Europe, acted as regulators of the distribution of resources by sanctioning marriages with foreigners or second marriages⁴³. The use of firearms

⁴⁰ ZARDIN Danilo, “Relaunching confraternities in the Tridentine era: shaping consciences and christianizing society in Milan and Lombardy”, in: TERPSTRA Nicholas (ed.), *The Politics of Ritual Kinship. Confraternities and Social Order in Early Modern Italy*, Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 190-209.

⁴¹ FROESCHLÉ-CHOPARD Marie-Hélène, “Le Rosaire, élément de christianisation des campagnes?”, in: *La christianisation des campagnes. Actes du colloque du C.I.H.E.C (25-27 août 1994)*, Bruxelles; Rome, 1996, pp. 419-443.

⁴² FONTBONNE Alexis, “Dévotion et institution: Pour une histoire cohérente des confréries en Europe occidentale (XII^e-XVIII^e siècles)”, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 170, 2015, pp. 191-208.

⁴³ SCHMITT Jean-Claude, LE GOFF Jacques (eds.), *Le charivari. Actes de la table ronde organisée à Paris (25-27 avril 1977)*, Paris: Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1981, 444 p.

as well as the designation as a “musketeer” society also reminds us of the military organization of shooting societies. However, the brotherhood did not specifically welcome young men. The ages at the time of registration were naturally variable, since they depended on the death of the father, with the son succeeding him as a member. Undoubtedly, the confraternity of the Three Kings was nevertheless a devotional organization, showing the essential characteristics of the veneration of saints, support in death and processions. It reflects in some ways the *confratria* of the late Middle Ages, such as those of the Holy Spirit, which differed from the confraternities of penitents, as Angelo Torre recalls: “Territorial associations with a segmental base, widely spread in Northern Italy and in Southern and Alpine France. To distinguish them from the confraternities of penitents, they are indicated in the sources by the Latin *confratria* or the Italian *confraria*”⁴⁴.

The Three Kings confraternity reconnected with an earlier, more autonomous model that was rejected by the Church, while adopting the characteristics of the male societies that flourished in the 19th century. It thus appears that in Valais in the 18th and 19th centuries men did not totally disengage from the brotherhoods but rather chose a model that was different from the one available to women at the time, who meanwhile were part of a continuity scheme.

Conclusion

With regard to spatial aspects, the confraternity movements in Valais did not seem to show any territorial specificity, as there were no major differences between isolated areas and larger agglomerations. On the contrary, the brotherhood of the Three Kings being active in Martigny and Bourg-Saint-Pierre rather indicates a circulation of models between the plain and an Alpine village. Besides this example, the confraternities that lasted after the Old Regime were those established in the whole territory at the time of the Catholic Reformation,

⁴⁴ TORRE Angelo, “Faire communauté’...”, p. 101.

in particular under the influence of Charles Boromé⁴⁵. And it was this model that women continued to favour in the area during the 18th and 19th centuries. Women being attracted by religion at this time can be observed elsewhere in Europe as well as in other religious fields (mass attendance, congregations, convents, etc.) and can be seen in both confessions⁴⁶. The explanations for this phenomenon are still partly unknown, but it appears that the women of the Alpine regions of the Valais allowed the post-Tridentine brotherhoods to last throughout most of the 19th century. These confraternities could provide them with a space for mutual support in case of illness, death and for the salvation of their souls. More specifically, they offered a role in the religious community and in local life. It also allowed them to exercise decision-making within the organization and to secure – or perhaps regain – respectability.

On the other hand, the prevalence of women in the brotherhoods was also increasing due to men turning away. It turns out that the period in question was one of great political changes in Europe, when in most regions men could become involved in other types of organizations, especially in the political sphere⁴⁷. Nevertheless, most democratic innovations were not yet accessible to women. As Dumons noted, in France the increasing opening of convents and churches to women in 19th-century France offered them “spaces of freedom and promotion that the Republic denied them”⁴⁸. From this point of view, their growing involvement in the brotherhoods since 1800 could also be interpreted as

⁴⁵ DI FILIPPO BAREGGI C., “San Carlo e la Riforma cattolica”, in: CITTERIO F., VACCARO L. (eds.), *Storia religiosa della Svizzera*, Milan, Centro Ambrosiano, 1996, pp. 193-246.

⁴⁶ JOHNER Aline, “La place des femmes durant le clivage religieux vaudois (1824-1847)”, in: SCHOLL Sarah et alii (eds.), *Les fractures protestantes en Suisse romande au XIX^e siècle*, Geneva, Labor et fides, 2021, pp. 193-211.

⁴⁷ BLASCHKE Olaf, “The Unrecognised Piety of Men: Strategies and Success of the Re-masculinisation Campaign around 1900”, in: WERNER Yvonne Maria (ed.), *Christian Masculinity: Men and Religion in Northern Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2011, p. 21-46.

⁴⁸ DUMONS Bruno, “Femmes et genre”, in: DUMONS Bruno, SORREL Christian, *Le catholicisme en chantiers. France XIX^e-XX^e siècles*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013, p. 120.

a strengthening of female agency in the field of religion. It seems to us, however, that political currents did not completely replace the religious investment of men. They continued to benefit from the existence of these brotherhoods, sometimes by becoming involved themselves and certainly also by enrolling their daughters, who thus gained respectability. But it was another type of brotherhood that they preferred if they existed in the parishes, such as that of the Three Kings.

Overall, it appears that a (new) kind of specialization of the confraternity milieu was beginning to emerge. Before the Council of Trent, the confraternities were already characterized by a segmentation of their audience – elites, districts, immigrants, professional sectors. But in the course of the modern age the Church used the confraternities as a tool for Catholic reconquest, trying to regulate them and to homogenize the social profiles of members. In Valais, during the 18th and 19th centuries, the segmentation seemed to be according to gender and age rather than to territorial or socio-economic issues. Little research has been done on the gendered separation of brotherhoods in the 19th century. Tine van Osselear addressed the issue of the early 20th century⁴⁹. She highlights the existence in Belgium of a strictly male Sacred Heart League, promoted by religious men in order to win back men. The leader of the organization used arguments highlighting supposedly masculine values and exploited the tropes of the feminization of religion. They also gradually moved the Sisters away from public religious events to impose their influence on the female section. As Gibson pointed out, the Catholic Church's reconquest of souls in the 19th century, like that of the 16th and 17th centuries, did not necessarily consist of a re-Christianization of the countryside but more of an attempt by religious authorities to maintain control over devotional practices⁵⁰. Indeed, the image reflected by the brotherhoods of the

⁴⁹ VAN OSSELAER Tine, “‘From that Moment on, I Was a Man!’ Images of the Catholic Male in the Sacred Heart Devotion”, in: DE MAEYER Jan *et alii* (eds.), *Gender and Christianity in Modern Europe...*, pp. 121-135.

⁵⁰ GIBSON Ralph, “The Christianisation of the Countryside in Western Europe in the Nineteenth Century”, in: *La christianisation des campagnes. Actes du colloque du C.I.H.E.C (25-27 août 1994)*, Bruxelles; Rome, 1996, pp. 485-509.

three parishes under analysis seems to indicate less a loss of male religiosity than a “de-Tridentineization” of men. What is striking with the brotherhoods analysed in Valais is their dependence on the religious authorities. The Confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament and the Holy Rosary were administered by the parish priests and approved by the Bishop, who also had to validate the statutes. Therefore, women continued to attend religious organizations subordinate to the Church and established by the Tridentine Catholic Reformation, thus ensuring continuity.

Abstract

La contribution porte sur les confréries du Valais, dans les Alpes Suisses, présentes dans chaque paroisse et persistantes pendant le XVIII^e et une large partie du XIX^e siècle. Plutôt que d’opposer une féminisation de la religion à une désaffection des hommes envers les pratiques dévotionnelles, l’étude soutient l’hypothèse que le XIX^e siècle se caractérise par une différenciation entre associations dévotionnelles : si les femmes pouvaient encore trouver des opportunités dans les confréries héritées de la réforme catholique, les hommes étaient plus susceptibles de s’engager dans des structures moins dépendantes des autorités de l’Église.

Part III

DUTIES AND RIGHTS: THE ALCHEMY OF THE FEMALE ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION IN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETIES



Marina Cavallera

**The Contradictory Condition of Women:
Legal Immobility and Social Dynamics
in Pre-Alpine Lombardy in the Early Modern Age**

We know little about the condition of women in the Lombardy Alps in the modern age, yet, by simply examining some cases in a sample area such as the Province of Upper Varese there emerge interesting fragments of life. There was much variety in its geo-environmental characteristics: here the mountainous territory slopes down gradually to the lakes and rivers, and there was much migration, even over long distances, between the Mediterranean and northern Europe¹.

¹ See the important studies by BERGIER Jean François, “Les Alpes centrales et le trafic européen au Moyen Age”, in: *Hermès et Clio. Essai d'histoire économique*, Lausanne, 1984, pp. 41-52; BERGIER Jean François, “Le rôle des Alpes dans l'histoire de l'Europe du Moyen Age au XXI^e siècle”, in: PANZERA Fabrizio, ROMANO Roberto (eds.), *Il San Gottardo: dalla galleria di Favre all'AlpTransit*, Lugano, Salvioni, 2009 (Quaderni del Bollettino Storico della Svizzera Italiana 8), pp. 35-49; BERGIER Jean François, GUZZI Sandro (eds.), *La découverte des Alpes- La scoperta delle Alpi- Die Entdeckung der Alpen*, Basel, Schwabe, 1992 (Itinera 12), pp. 229-230 and also CAVALLERA Marina (ed.), *Lungo le antiche strade. Vie d'acqua e di terra: Stati, giurisdizioni e confini nella cartografia dell'età moderna*, Busto Arsizio, Nomos, 2007.

As well as the high-lying villages – the “*paesi stretti*” inhabited only by women² – “*borghi grossi*”, trading centres in the valleys, regarded as “*quasi città*”, had developed here early on³. As for resources, there was farmland in the valleys, vineyards on the slopes, and then chestnut groves and forests, as well as grazing and pasture land.

During the modern age the condition of women was to develop in these areas too: in a mixture of tradition and innovation, internal dynamics were slowly redefined, new sensibilities generated and new customs established. Starting from some reflections on the 18th century⁴, a long-term perspective can show us the changes in how the local female world developed, and here we shall indicate some of the many aspects of a widespread situation that deserves further study.

From studies on emigration to studies on women: preliminary remarks

Apart from the formal aspects, in the early 18th century old and new ways of using primary resources seemed to be controlled by a female world that was now visible and active in a large part of Lombardy's mountain regions. Modern interest in this owes much to anthropology

² MERZARIO Raul, *Il paese stretto Strategie matrimoniali nella Diocesi di Como, secoli XVI-XIX*, Turin, Einaudi, 1981.

³ CHITTOLINI Giorgio, “Terre borghi e città in Lombardia alla fine del medioevo”, in: CHITTOLINI Giorgio (ed.), *Metamorfosi di un borgo. Vigevano in età visconteo-sforzesca*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 1992, pp. 7-30 and CHITTOLINI Giorgio, *L'Italia delle civitates: grandi e piccoli centri fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, Rome, Viella, 2015.

⁴ CAVALLERA Marina, “L'emigrazione nel secolo XVIII: terre lombarde nell'Arco Alpino”, in: BRUSA Carlo and GHIRINGHELLI Robertino (eds.), *Emigrazione e territorio: tra bisogno e ideale*, vol. II, Varese, Edizioni Lativa, 1995, pp. 149-191; CAVALLERA Marina, “Imprenditori e maestranze, aspetti della mobilità nell'area alpina del Verbano durante il secolo XVIII”, in: FONTANA Giovanni Luigi, LEONARDI Andrea, TREZZI Luigi (eds.), *Mobilità imprenditoriale e del lavoro nelle Alpi in età moderna e contemporanea*, Milan, Cuesp, 1998, pp. 75-116.

and studies on emigration⁵, but only recently have we looked at those women who were conditioned by the “Alpine model”⁶.

The pioneering studies on the villages around Como, where hard labour aged women so quickly that they were defined as “*animali bipedi*”⁷, had concentrated on a popular world scarred by poverty that implicitly evoked old theories on factors of expulsion as causes of emigration. Later approaches, too, to the female world of the Alpine area between Ticino and Lombardy mainly followed this view⁸ and, though new research on it, at least since the 1990s, brought out the importance for this area of an economic and cultural elite linked to emigration⁹. Anyway, the old prejudices regarding the role of women in mountain areas have continued to hold sway. As regards the men, their “*non isolamento*” and their cultural and professional “*non arretratezza*”

⁵ VIAZZO Pierpaolo, *Comunità alpine. Ambiente, popolazione, struttura sociale nelle Alpi dal XVI secolo ad oggi*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1990, 2nd edition revised and enlarged, Rome, Carocci, 2001; ALBERA Dionigi, “Oltre la norma e la strategia. Per una comparazione ragionata dell’organizzazione domestica alpina”, *Histoire des Alpes - Storia delle Alpi - Geschichte der Alpen* 6, 2001, pp. 117-132; ALBERA Dionigi, *Au fil des générations. Terre pouvoir et parenté dans l’Europe alpine (XIV^e-XX^e siècles)*, Grenoble, Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 2011.

⁶ See PIZZORUSSO Giovanni, “I movimenti migratori in Italia in Antico Regime”, in: BEVILACQUA Piero, DE CLEMENTI Andreina, FRANZINA Emilio (eds.), *Storia dell’emigrazione italiana*, 1: *Partenze*, Rome, Donzelli 2001, pp. 3-16, 7.

⁷ MERZARIO Raul, *Bestie a due gambe. Le donne nelle valli insubriche*, in: ARRU Angiolina (ed.), *Pater familias*, Rome, Biblink, 2002, pp. 123-136.

⁸ Recently, see LORENZETTI Luigi, “La condizione femminile nelle valli sudalpine tra statuti giuridici e vita quotidiana (XVII-XIX secc.)”, *Laboratorio di Storia delle Alpi-Università della Svizzera italiana* LI, 2007, pp. 1-8.

⁹ This view derives from studies and thoughts on the Lugano area: there is a well-known debate in MERZARIO Raul, “Famiglie di emigranti ticinesi (secoli XVII-XVIII)”, *Società e Storia* 71, 1996, pp. 39-55, BIANCONI Sandro, CESCHI Raffaello, “Note in margine a ‘Famiglie di emigranti ticinesi’”, *Società e Storia* 78, 1997, pp. 883-886 and Raul Merzario’s reply, *Società e Storia* 78, 1997, pp. 887-888. For the first studies on the Lombardy elites in the areas we deal with here, see CAVALLERA Marina, *Imprenditori e maestranze...*; CAVALLERA Marina, “Imprenditorialità e strutture cetuali nel versante italiano delle Alpi in età moderna”, in: ALBERA Dionigi, CORTI Paola (eds.), *La montagna mediterranea: una fabbrica d’uomini? Mobilità e migrazioni in una prospettiva comparata (secoli XV-XX)*, Cavallermaggiore, Gribaudo, 2000 pp. 71-92.

have been established¹⁰, the material and immaterial resources they had access to considered¹¹, the advance of an entrepreneurial spirit and widespread professional specialization ascertained and the idea of an emigration elite discussed¹². For many families all this meant social advancement and accumulation of wealth, as well as the adoption of new behaviours, both in their town of birth and the world beyond, where they had made their fortunes. New dynasties had been created on the Italian side of the central Alps in the 16th and 17th centuries: from the Rosazza family of the Biella district¹³, to the various branches of the Brentano family in Lake Como¹⁴, to the Bonduri clan¹⁵ and the Tasso family of Bergamo¹⁶, all of them evidence of fortunate processes of economic and social advance at the highest level. Alongside these peaks of success, there were also many more families of significant weight in the Upper Province of Varese: in Varese itself the households of the Bernascone, the Tatti or the Orrigoni, in which ancient and recent nobility conjoined with a never-stilled entrepreneurial spirit¹⁷,

¹⁰ FONTANA Giovanni Luigi, LEONARDI Andrea, TREZZI Luigi (eds.), *Mobilità imprenditoriale e del lavoro...* and in particular Pier Paolo Viazzo essays's *La mobilità del lavoro nelle Alpi in Età moderna e contemporanea: nuove prospettive di ricerca tra storia e antropologia*, pp. 17 - 30; ALBERA Dionigi, CORTI Paola (eds.), *La montagna mediterranea...*, especially the introduction, pp. 7-27.

¹¹ Recently in PAGANO Emanuele (ed.), *Immigrati e forestieri in Italia nell'Età moderna*, Rome, Viella, 2020.

¹² CAVALLERA Marina, "Imprenditori e maestranze...", pp. 76 and ff.; CAVALLERA Marina, "Imprenditorialità e strutture cetuali...", pp. 71-92.

¹³ AUDENINO Patrizia, VERZOLETTO Giulia (eds.), *Voyage agreable, Itinerario in Italia di Vitale Rosazza e sua consorte nelli mesi di giugno e luglio 1812*, Vigliano Biellese, Edizioni Gariazzo, 2012.

¹⁴ See HEIDENREICH Bernd, BROCKHOFF Evelyn, BOHNENKAMP-RENKEN Anne, BUNZEL Wolfgang, *Die Brentanos. Eine romantische Familie?*, Frankfurt am Main, Henrich Editionen, 2016, in particular the contributions in section II "Die Frankfurter Brentanos", pp. 61-214.

¹⁵ PIZZORNI Geofrey J., *La "Marcantonio Bonduri" di Gandino. Un'impresa laniera in controtendenza tra Sei e Settecento*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2005.

¹⁶ Comune di Bergamo e del Ministero delle Poste e delle Telecomunicazioni (ed.), *Le poste dei Tasso, un'impresa in Europa*, Catalogue for the exhibition *I Tasso e l'evoluzione delle poste*, Bergamo, ex Church of St Augustine, 28 April-3 January 1984, Bergamo, Poligrafiche Bolis S.p.A, 1984.

¹⁷ CAVALLERA Marina, *La società delle ville, la cultura del lavoro. Varese e il territorio nel secolo XVIII*, Busto Arsizio, Nomos, 2017.

or the Adamoli of Besozzo¹⁸, or those of the Leone or Ronchelli of Valcuvia¹⁹ and the Tinelli of Laveno²⁰ were the vanguard of development in the 16th and 17th centuries. They coordinated local activities, also maintaining close contact with the great Lombardy dynasties who possessed fiefs and allodial properties there: from the Borromeo to the Visconti Borromeo Arese, from the Morigia to the Sormani, the Mandelli, the Castiglioni and the Biumi²¹ or the Della Porta at Casalzuigno²². Starting from local chronicles²³, the assiduous presence of these families in the castles and palaces in the territory in the sources indicates their constant, personal interaction with the local population at every level of the social hierarchies, the mutual exchange of favours and the protection of their respective states, the rationale of which Domenico Sella explained long ago²⁴. Above all in the localities that were a focus for the most advanced activities, in the villages flanking Lago Maggiore or the town of Varese, we can see places where activities were expanding like wildfire in the immediate district, as well as the outer reaches and the “*paesi stretti*”.

Though there were inevitable effects of these changes of fortune on mothers, daughters and sisters, who still comprised the majority in the town of origin, we know little of the varied and complex female world

¹⁸ ARMOCIDA Giuseppe, “Le ‘Notizie storiche di Besozzo e della famiglia Adamoli’ di Giulio Adamoli”, in: LACAITA Carlo Giacomo (ed.), *Fare Storia. Studi in onore di Luigi Ambrosoli*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 1995, pp. 151-164.

¹⁹ On the Leone and Ronchelli families from Castello Cabiaglio, operating at Aquila, CONTINI Serena (ed.), *Cassano, Ferrera, Rancio. Aspetti, eventi, immagini di tre paesi della Valcuvia*, Varese, 2004; COLAPETRA Raffaele, “L’Aquila degli Antinori. Strutture sociali e urbane della città nel Sei e Settecento”, in: Deputazione Abruzzese di Storia patria (ed.), *Antinoriana. Studi per il bicentenario della morte di Antonio Ludovico Antinori*, vols II and III, L’Aquila, Edizioni Libreria Colacchi, 1978.

²⁰ CAVALLERA Marina (ed.), *I Tinelli. Storia di una famiglia (secoli XVI-XX)*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2003.

²¹ CAVALLERA Marina, *La società delle ville....*, pp. 170-191.

²² GRIMALDI Alberto (ed.), *Interni lombardi del Settecento. Villa Porta Bozzolo a Casalzuigno*, Milan, Guerrini Studio, 1994.

²³ See ADAMOLLO G. Antonio, GROSSI Luigi, *Cronaca di Varese*, Varese, Tipografia arcivescovile dell’Addolorata, 1931 (photostatic ed., Gavirate 1998).

²⁴ SELLA Domenico, “Postilla sui feudi”, in: SELLA Domenico, *L’economia lombarda durante la dominazione spagnola*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1982, pp. 247-286.

of this area, as if it bore no signs of the changed times and conditions. With few exceptions²⁵, whatever concerned women remained complementary to the other objectives of research – inevitably, given the structure of society at the time, which interpreted the world from a male point of view.

Tradition and change in the early modern age

Women seem to have enjoyed greater freedom in the Middle Ages than in the Modern Age²⁶: in the 14th and 15th centuries the Statutes²⁷ had laid the foundations for a legal system that remained in force until the fall of the Ancien Régime. This explains behaviours in the daily lives of Alpine peoples that otherwise would be inexplicable and in the early modern age they were replaced and modified by the *Nuove Costituzioni* promulgated by Charles V in 1541²⁸. Not that the latter were particularly favourable to women, and nor did the regulations of the post-Tridentine Church have a different emphasis, particularly in the Borromeo territories²⁹.

Yet those norms, though ever more rigid, were not always respected. Other factors – political, economic, social and even religious – intervened too, and for a growing number of women in these districts there

²⁵ BIANCHI Stefania, *Uomini che partono. Scorci di storia della Svizzera italiana tra migrazione e vita quotidiana (secolo XVI-XIX)*, Bellinzona, Casagrande, 2018.

²⁶ ZANOBONI Maria Paola, *Artigiani, imprenditori, mercanti. Organizzazione del lavoro e conflitti sociali nella Milano sforzesca (1450-1476)*, Florence, La Nuova Italia, 1996.

²⁷ See AUREGGI Olimpia, “Problemi giuridici connessi con la immigrazione e la emigrazione nella alta Lombardia. La capacità giuridica di immigrati e emigrati nelle comunità rurali lombarde”, *Archivio Storico Lombardo* LXXXVIII, 1961, pp. 168-192.

²⁸ Promulgated by Charles V in 1541, the *Constitutiones domini mediolanensis* were most recently edited by Gabriele Verri, Mediolani, Joseph Richini Malatestae Regii Typographi, anno MDCCXLVII.

²⁹ Carlo Borromeo's presence in this area is well known. See the studies of ZARDIN Danilo, *Carlo Borromeo. Cultura, sanità, governo*, Milan, Vita e Pensiero, 2010, pp. 105-137, 170.

were opportunities for work that took them outside the four walls of their homes. Notary deeds also tell us much about the ongoing factors of change with regard to the possession of property and the managing of it, both within the family and in the life of the community³⁰. If a woman's marriage was not a merely personal fact, nor just limited to strategies of kinship, such as possessing and inheriting, we know that there was no shortage of *éscamotages* to get around any obstacles³¹. The natural law of feelings, the social network of kinship and alliances sometimes had the better of the law of the jungle in the early modern age, even in localities far from the centre of power.

In 1571, on the shores of Lake Maggiore³², at Barza, a district of Ispra, Giacomina De Curte, the daughter of Pedro De Clemente of Ispra and the owner of a "*possessione quieta e pacifica*" there, left by her father, had to deal with aggressive behaviour from her neighbours, the brothers Camillo and Orazio Ferraro from Romagnano, the principal landowners of the place. At the time, she was 67 years old and her two sons, in their thirties, lived far away, when, in September, she had had "*segare in detta terra tanto feno magro che poté essere un carro de pretio et valore de scuti uno d'oro in circa*"³³. But her neighbours seized her harvest, their cronies brandishing swords and daggers, one with an "*archibugio con il foco*", another with sword and musket, another with

³⁰ MERZARIO Raul, *Adamocrazia. Famiglie di emigranti in una regione alpina (Svizzera italiana, XVIII secolo)*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000; FONTAINE Laurence, "La montagna fabbrica di donne: une vision pionnière dans l'étude des migrations montagnardes", in: LEVATI Stefano, LORENZETTI Luigi (eds.), *Dalla Sila alle Alpi. L'itinerario storiografico di Raul Merzario*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2008, pp. 37-44; CAVALLERA Marina, "Statuti di valle e trasformazioni socioeconomiche nelle Alpi centrali (secoli XVII-XVIII)", in: PIOLA CASELLI Fausto (ed.), *Regioni alpine e sviluppo economico. Dualismi e processi d'integrazione (secc. XVIII-XX)*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2003, pp. 331-354; LORENZETTI Luigi, MERZARIO Raul, *Il fuoco acceso*, Rome, Donzelli, 2005; LORENZETTI Luigi, "La condizione femminile nelle valli...".

³¹ MERZARIO Raul, *Adamocrazia...*, pp. 50-60; LORENZETTI Luigi, "La condizione femminile nelle valli...", pp. 1-8.

³² ARMOCIDA Giuseppe, *Ispra e Barza. Una lunga storia sul Lago Maggiore*, Galliate Lombardo, Comune di Ispra - Artestampa, 2009, pp. 100-101.

³³ According to a Census of 1574, Giacomina De Curte was then aged 70 and her two sons 36 and 32, respectively. See Archive of the Seminario di Venegono, Varese (ASVe) J. IV, 45 and the private archive Giuseppe Armocida, Ispra.

a “*trenta*” and another with a “*spontone astato*”. Having to rely on her own forces to defend her property, she could count on a network of kinsmen to support her case before the feudal judge. In this case she commanded a dual patrimony: as well as her actual property, there was a capital of social relations that was no less strong within that small community. She stood before the magistrate of Luino as the head of the family, and as such, partly in the name of her sons and heirs, had her aggressors condemned and the damage done to her compensated.

Even drawing up a will could at times benefit wives and daughters more than the law provided for, but, equally, a woman’s situation could also be penalized far beyond what custom and the law set out. One example would be two women belonging to extreme opposites of the social hierarchy: the noblewoman from Padua Peregrina Speroni, daughter of the nobleman Aurelio and wife of the nobleman Giorgio Orrigoni, *miles gravis armaturae* living in the fortified town of Biumo Inferiore, part of the larger settlement of Varese, and her servant Marta, a poor orphan from Albiolo in the diocese of Como³⁴. Neither of them was born in Varese and so they had no family support network *in loco*, unlike the author of their misfortune, Giorgio Orrigoni, who belonged to one of the leading families of Varese and its environs³⁵. When Orrigoni died in 1573 his will penalized both women, as he had thought only of protecting the interests of his kindred: Giovan Pietro Orrigoni, Massimiliano Besozzi, the son of his sister Caterina, and his legitimized natural daughter, Marta Orrigoni³⁶. The widow tried at length and in vain to have at least her dowry of 550 scudi restored to her, while her servant complained she had received no salary for two and a half years. The specific weakness of both women did not depend so much on their social status as on neither of them having, *in loco*, their own family clan to defend their interests. Not even the

³⁴ See DEIANA Alessandro, “Marta di Albiolo strega decapitata in Varese il 22 luglio 1579”, *Rivista della Società Storica Varesina* xxxvii, 2020, pp. 11-31, in particular pp. 12-17.

³⁵ CAVALLERA Marina, *La società delle ville...*, for example p. 81 and ff., *et passim*.

³⁶ There is much documentation in Archivio di Stato di Milano (henceforward ASMi), *Notarile*, Gio. Antonio Comolli, quondam Cesare, string 14862.

intervention of Archbishop Carlo Borromeo in person could make the priest Aluigi Besozzo, the tutor of the testator's main heir, relent³⁷. Penniless, the widow gave up hope of moving to Rome as she would have wished, and, now sixty-five years old, asked in her will of 1578 to be buried in Varese next to her husband³⁸, leaving a legacy for Marta: as well as 25 florins, a small endowment of domestic objects³⁹. All the same, her mistress's generosity was not enough to protect the young maidservant "*dalle insidie del mondo*": left to herself, she was seduced by a friar, Ambrogio Giana of the convent of San Francesco in Varese. Wanting to rid herself of the fruit of their relation, she killed the infant, for which she was charged with witchcraft – an accusation not infrequent in 16th-century Varese⁴⁰ – and, though there was no proof of this, it did not save her from being beheaded for infanticide⁴¹.

³⁷ Archivio Storico Diocesano di Milano (henceforward ASDMi), *Visite Pastorali*, Varese, vol. XI, q. 13.

³⁸ ASMi, Notarile, Cesare Cartiglioni quondam Pietro Maria, string 15082, will of Peregrina Speroni, 1578.

³⁹ Specifically, "*doi matarazzi sopra quali dorme (Marta) con la cariola, doi para di lenzoli con sua coperta et altre soi finimenti/Item una tovaglia et quattro matinier, doi sugamani con una servietta/Item quattro camice, quattro coletti, et doi scossali dei miei / Item una cassa de pobbia bianca cioè in costano /Item una tavola con suoi trespidi / Una catena di ferro per il foco /Una padella de rostire con la sua paretta di ferro/ Itemun laveggio/ due cadreghe di dona di paglia /Item una cazola /Item una seggia*".

⁴⁰ On witchcraft cases in the area, see MARCACCIO CASTIGLIONI Anna, *Streghe e roghi nel Ducato di Milano. Processi per stregoneria a Venegono Superiore nel 1520*, Milan, Thelema, 1999; DEIANA Alessandro, "Le streghe di Arcisate (fine sec. XVI)", *Rivista della Società Storica Varesina* xxxvi, 2019, pp. 47-64. More generally, GREMMO Roberto, *Streghe e magia. Episodi di opposizione religiosa popolare sulle Alpi del Seicento*, Biella, Edizioni ELF, 1994.

⁴¹ The local priest, Cesare Porto, wrote of it to Carlo Borromeo on 27 October 1579, invoking the scandal and "*rovine spirituali*" of Varese. See MARCORA Carlo, "Corrispondenza del prevosto di Varese Cesare Porto con S. Carlo", *Rivista della Società Storica Varesina* VIII, 1964, p. 47. The Origoni family and other members of the elite of Varese kept the scandal quiet, enabling the friar to return to his convent without consequences. On Marta di Albiolo's execution, see ADAMOLLO G. Antonio, GROSSI Luigi, *Cronaca di Varese*, p. 46 verso.

Land and labour

The variety of environmental conditions in the Province of Varese, depending on the position of the terrain, its fertility, height and access to water resources, determined the domestic choices and inner dynamics of the communities. In the hilly areas where the land yielded more from the cultivation of rye and millet and vine growing, the women were active in the work of the fields alongside the men, as we see, for example, at Morazzone⁴², Comerio⁴³, Angera⁴⁴, Ispra⁴⁵ and Taino⁴⁶, though their activities often did not end there. In Valcuvia, by contrast, the work of mountain pasturing was mainly hired out: a few shepherds from Val Verzasca were paid by the communities⁴⁷. The production of fodder was supplemented by the chestnut groves and fruit gathering in the woods, work that was generally performed by women: this was an area with much emigration for building work.

But what conditioned most of all the lives of the women of Varese in the 16th and 17th centuries was the planting of mulberry trees, which

⁴² DELLA GASPERINA Diego, MASTORGIO Carlo (eds.), *Morazzone, storia di una comunità*, vol. I: *Dalla Preistoria al Settecento*, Varese, Ask, 1991, pp. 160-165.

⁴³ CAVALLERA Marina, "Le logiche della modernità: un processo di lungo periodo", in: CAVALLERA Marina (ed.), *Comerio. La sua storia*, Busto Arsizio, Nomos, 2011, pp. 57-100.

⁴⁴ AA.VV., *La città di Angera feudo dei Borromeo sec. XV-XVIII*, Gavirate, Nicolini, 1995.

⁴⁵ ARMOCIDA Giuseppe, *Ispra e Barza. Una lunga storia sul Lago Maggiore*, Galliate Lombardo, Comune di Ispra - Artestampa, 2009.

⁴⁶ On Taino, FACCINI Luigi, *La Lombardia fra '600 e '700*, Milan, Sugarco, 1988, pp. 46-48, *et passim*.

⁴⁷ On this, see CONTINI Serena (ed.), *"Il libro della Comune" di Cabiaglio in Valcuvia. Comunità, diritti, confini*, Gavirate-Varese, Nicolini, 2005; more generally, CONTINI Serena (ed.), *Cassano, Ferrera e Rancio...*; on mobility "*dalla montagna alla montagna*" see CESCHI Raffaello, "Migrazioni dalla montagna alla montagna", in: BRUNOLD Urs (ed.), *La migrazione artigianale nelle Alpi*, Atti del Convegno Davos 25-27 September 1991, Bolzano, Athesia, 1991. On the "*movimento di sostituzione*", see also LORENZETTI Luigi, "Reti, flussi, integrazioni. Temi e approcci alle migrazioni sudalpine in Età moderna", in: PAGANO Emanuele (ed.), *Immigrati e forestieri...*, pp. 109-138, 114-116.

changed the economy of the whole area⁴⁸. The development of the industry of silk production, from silkworm farming to the spooling in the silk mills set up especially in Varese, and to following all the later stages of production and trading, enriched many people here. All this involved widespread use of female labour, which was already familiar with the *Werlagsystem*, producing and working flax and hemp⁴⁹, all of them alternative activities that required the acquisition of specific manual skills in childhood. Particularly in the silk sector, irregular and seasonal activities added extra incomes to the domestic budget, quickly bringing a short-distance mobility of women in the territory that included the inner valleys too.

Mulberry and silk cultivation, then, renewed the peasant world, and it was the basis of entrepreneurial and trading activities by which Varese, with its mills and markets, could look not only to Milan, but to Switzerland and Germany, and, above all, the market of Lyon⁵⁰.

These women along the confines also supplemented family income with smuggling cereals and salt in particular. These various activities contributed to creating a *forma mentis* that ran deep in the life of local society. Mills for various uses, paper mills and tanneries could also be

⁴⁸ MOIOLI Angelo, *La gelsibachicoltura nelle campagne lombarde dal Seicento alla prima metà dell'Ottocento*, Trento, Libera università degli studi, Dipartimento di economia, 1981; SELLA Domenico, *L'economia lombarda...*; SELLA Domenico, "An Industrial Village in the Sixteenth Century Italy", in: *Wirtschaftskräfte und Wistschaftwege. Festschrift für Hermann Kellembenz*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1978, vol. III, pp. 37-46.

⁴⁹ SELLA Domenico, *L'Economia lombarda...*, and SELLA Domenico, *Per la storia della coltura della lavorazione del lino nello Stato di Milano durante il secolo XVII*, in AA.VV., "Felix olim Lombardia". *Studi di storia padana dedicati a Giuseppe Martini*, Milan, Tipolitografia Ferraris, 1978, pp. 791-803; BEONIO BROCCIERI Vittorio, "La manifattura rurale nella 'pars alpestris' dello Stato di Milano fra XVI e XVII secolo", *Archivio Storico Lombardo* CXIII, 1987, pp. 9-46 and BEONIO BROCCIERI Vittorio, "Piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo". *Famiglie e mestieri nel Ducato di Milano in età spagnola*, Milan, Unicopli, 2000. Now also COLOMBO Emanuele, *Giochi di luoghi. Il territorio lombardo nel Seicento*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2008.

⁵⁰ ADAMOLLO G. Antonio, GROSSI Luigi, *Cronaca di Varese...*, pp. 95 verso-96 verso.

considered so many means of access to fresh economic resources for them too⁵¹.

An apparently restricted local world was becoming increasingly part of a more complex context; the local organization of relations in this society was now going far beyond what the rules imposed and the development of migratory systems and the long-distance mobility of entrepreneurs and merchants emphasized these new aspects. When husbands and sons were far away, the handling of family interests fell to the women, who became a key component of this. The landed estates were still the foundation of the social condition of the family, even where female wealth and activity were expressed mainly on an organizational level.

At Porto Valtravaglia in the early 18th century

A gradual detachment from tradition can be seen when we examine the notary deeds, which often came into play to modify in part what the law would impose. On the banks of Lake Maggiore the notary Cesare Luvini of Porto Valtravaglia⁵² was a leading figure in his field⁵³: here the buying and selling of estates and buildings was frequent and throws light on the system of relations in the community of this area.

In 1726, Marta Maria Adami, widow of Giovanni Maria Albertolli of Ronchiano, had been represented by the magistrate of Porto for the sale of a piece of land for 800 imperial lire⁵⁴. Guardian and administrator

⁵¹ COLOMBO Emanuele, "Carta e società a Besozzo in età moderna" and CORRITORE Renzo Paolo, "Una città e una famiglia di imprenditori cartari: Varese e i Molina. L'accumulazione originaria nel settore serico, la conversione all'attività cartaria", both published in: CORRITORE Renzo Paolo, PICCINNO Luisa (eds.), *Cinque secoli di carta. Produzione commercio e consumi della carta nella "Regio Insubrica" e in Lombardia dal Medioevo all'età contemporanea*, Varese, Insubria University Press, 2005, respectively on pp. 101-120, and pp. 133-170.

⁵² ASMi, *Notarile*, Rubriche dei notai – 2827 (1726-1764) Porto Val Travaglia.

⁵³ ASMi, *Notarile*, see the strings from no. 41665 to no. 41698 inclusive.

⁵⁴ ASMi, *Notarile*, string no. 41665 Thursday 21 February 1726, Porto Valtravaglia Sale of a plot of land by Marta Maria Adami to Matteo Albertolli with redemption agreement.

of the property of her sons Pietro, Antonio and Natale, she had to deal with her husband's creditors and sold it with a *patto di redenzione* valid for ten years to a relative, Matteo Albertoli. As is generally known, the formula was widely used when the sale concealed a loan: securing one's property guaranteed one's creditor a future balance of the debt. However, a loan was also widely used for managing affairs, and the ease with which Marta acted is evidence in itself that recourse to such practices was already familiar to her. She herself declared that the operation had the aim of settling the remaining part of a previous debt her husband had contracted with someone else in the village, whose son and heir, Galeazzo Martinoni, had asked for settlement. The widow had then decided to quickly close this outstanding case, turning to Matteo for a new loan, with which she could also find herself with a surplus to pay off other small debts.

There is further evidence of the network of interpersonal relations and interests between families in the same town⁵⁵: another member of the Martinoni family, Antonio, claimed in his turn an old credit of 700 lire contracted in Milan with Giovanni Maria Albertoli and his brother Francesco. Marta Adami was again summoned and Matteo's family loyalty proved true in this case too, though without concealing the widow's role in the whole operation.

There were many other mothers, wives and sisters like her, in the front line, managing family property in the valleys of Upper Varese⁵⁶. The above-mentioned Martinoni family had significant interests elsewhere too: in 1726, in his town of origin, a male member of the family, Francesco, was delegated in 1717 by the head of the family, another Francesco, to handle all the family affairs *in loco*⁵⁷. However,

⁵⁵ ASMi, *Notarile*, string no. 41665 Thursday 21 February 1726, Porto Valtravaglia debt recovery of Francesco Martinoni.

⁵⁶ See BRUSA Carlo, GHIRINGHELLI Robertino (eds.), *Emigrazione e territorio...*; further information in PARNISARI Francesco, *“Andare per il mondo” dalle valli lombarde. Migrazioni, Comunità e culture locali in età moderna*, Milan, Edizioni Unicopli, 2015.

⁵⁷ ASMi, *Notarile*, string no. 41665 Thursday 21 February 1726, Porto Valtravaglia. Power of attorney of 9 November 1717 of Francesco Martinoni to his relative of the same name, Francesco, son of Angelo.

before acting, Francesco Martinoni Jr always had to consult with the sister of the signatory Santina Martinoni and have her consent. These conditions were set so forcefully that it is clear she was the one pulling the strings in family affairs and relations with others in the town. The head of the family was convinced that if he was to be able to “*aggiustare tutti li miei interessi con ogni equità e carità dovute*” he needed “*il consenso anche di Santina Martinoni, mia diletteissima sorella, lasciando però da parte ogni livore che avessero* [other members of the family] *si d’havere o d’altro perché così è la mia volontà*”⁵⁸ and respect and esteem he also felt for his sister-in-law Anna, wife of his brother Antonio, to whom he gave his “*saluti e rispetti*” as well as “*sperando* [that she] *haverà ogni attenzione alla mia casa e d’allevare la figlia, mia nipote con ogni attenzione nel timor di Dio*”⁵⁹.

The role of women, then, in this district seemed to go far beyond the institutional spaces allowed. Nor was this an isolated case: managing the family assets was often left in the women’s hands, though a corresponding trust in them does not always emerge from the authorizations. They were frequently urged to consult with prominent members of local society⁶⁰, and the close ties of local elites with the Church and its exponents also emerged in the authorization of Francesco Martinoni Sr, which suggested that, if family conflicts or problems within the community arose, he should consult with the local priest. The elite, then, had a sense of responsibility towards their fellow citizens: a role of patronage that was now structural and that, at operative level, was performed by the women of the “house”.

Among the deeds drawn up by the same notary Cesare Luvini in 1726 there are numerous operations carried out by women, sometimes between themselves: in the small village of Ronchiano, Domenica Rubea, wife of Pietro Francesco Tognetta, who was away for work, sold some land to Margherita Gianola, wife of Matteo Albertolio, who

⁵⁸ ASMi, Notarile, string no. 41665 Thursday 21 February 1726, Porto Valtravaglia.

⁵⁹ ASMi, Notarile, string no. 41665 Thursday 21 February 1726, Porto Valtravaglia.

⁶⁰ See PARNISARI Francesco, ‘*Andare per il mondo’ dalle valli lombarde...*, p. 257.

was also away in that period, for the sum of 150 imperial lire⁶¹. And so, in these cases did the wives left behind at home enjoy some real margins of independence?

That these women belonged to various levels of society is confirmed by the activity of Anna Francesca, the daughter of Carlo Ambrogio Valiano, a notary who was born in the region of Lakes, but was now mainly active in Milan⁶². Her father delegated to her the handling of the negotiations at Porto Valtravaglia, in the office of the notary Luvini, to resolve a long-standing loan of 100 imperial lire. This sum had been given in the distant 1710 by her father to Giovanni Matteo and Giovanni Gemolo Barozio, who had promised to give it back within eight days at 1.5% interest in Milanese coinage, but had failed to do so. Sixteen years later, in 1726, the dispute was still open and Carlo Ambrogio Valiano delegated to his daughter the task of finding an acceptable compromise; with her mediation the debt was partly repaid, and what remained became a kind of annual income.

In the 18th century the ancient statutes were still in force, but the growing use of powers of attorney made it possible to circumvent the institutional obstacle, allowing *de facto* greater freedom of action to women. A formal power of attorney with the approval of a family member had already become a structural feature of life in the mountain communities in the 17th century⁶³, where families continued to live whose increased wealth had changed the tenor of their lives⁶⁴. The intervention of women in economic matters of the family had become more frequent in line with greater recourse to loans, a necessary way of managing affairs *in loco*, and the possession of estates was

⁶¹ ASMi, Notarile, string no. 41665 Monday 6 May 1726, Ronchiano. Domenica Rubea with power of attorney from her husband Pietro Francesco Tognetta sells some land to Margherita Gianola with the consent of her husband Matteo Albertolli.

⁶² ASMi, Notarile, string no. 41665 Monday 23 September 1726, Porto Valtravaglia, Anna Francesca Valiano acts in the name of her father, Carlo Ambrogio, notary in Milan and with power of attorney from him.

⁶³ See also PARNISARI Francesco, “Andare per il mondo’ dalle valli lombarde...”.

⁶⁴ See VALSANGIACOMO Nelly, LORENZETTI Luigi (eds.), *Donne e lavoro. Prospettive per una storia delle montagne europee XVII–XX secc.*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2010.

no longer only the distinguishing feature of families born in the place, the recognized members of the neighbourhood.

Social hierarchies and female roles

In the last century of the Ancien Régime the development of women's lifestyles and mentality, of their roles in the family and in daily life, reflected that of the social groups, and now some of these bore out a presence in their town of origin that had become intermittent: absences and presences were organized in such a way that the more numerous female figures could manage more authoritatively the complex relations with the rest of the community. Tending towards an institutional and economic interpretation of reality that regarded entrepreneurs, labour organizers and moneylenders to fellow citizens as exclusively male roles⁶⁵, research paid little heed to the frequency with which the men relied on female members of their family, those women who remained in the town or village, who kept the house open and brought up the children there⁶⁶. Whether they lived in a modest home or a large manor, which in the modern age was the symbol of the power a family had achieved, their role could prove central. In a sort of parallel reality to the male one, the women had their own spaces in the town, and coordinated with each other in strong networks; though sometimes the cause of internal conflicts, they usually kept alive the relations in a context of kinship and subordination from which a solidarity emerged that had been constructed through a close-knit web of news and information, transactions, economic operations and speculations. The women thus proved to be a "*motore immobile*"⁶⁷

⁶⁵ My first studies went in this direction too: CAVALLERA Marina, *Imprenditori e maestranze...*, CAVALLERA Marina, *Imprenditorialità e strutture cetuali...*

⁶⁶ LORENZETTI Luigi, MERZARIO Raul, *Il fuoco acceso...*

⁶⁷ Cavallera, Marina, "Un 'motore immobile': emigrazioni maschili di mestiere e ruolo della donna nella montagna lombarda dell'età moderna", in: VALSANGIACOMO Nelly, LORENZETTI Luigi (eds.), *Donne e lavoro...*, pp. 26-49.

that actively contributed to the fortune and expansion of the “*casa*” (household)⁶⁸.

At the upper end of the social scale, it was they who pulled the strings of extended family clans and kindred, represented with their behaviour the very image of the elites⁶⁹ and were the mirror of them, of their honour and their prestige⁷⁰. These female figures offer models of behaviour that were certainly not new at the pinnacle of social hierarchies. Already noticeable in the Italian Renaissance in princely dynasties and the leading families of the nobility, including Lombardy⁷¹, the phenomenon went on extending itself over time at lower social levels and in prominent local figures, consolidating the action of patronage in the modern age here too as a duty and prerogative. This was a distinguishing feature and field of action both of the old elites and the new emerging classes, an action never without implications or interpretations, political and economic as well as social.

In the area considered here too, women of the minor elites reproduced systems of patronage in the hierarchical relation with subordinates, and built up stable ties and understandings over time; they acted as a filter in strategic operations such as systems of loans and work guarantees, both for those who proposed and those who accepted them. Professional and family protection, help and assistance were sought and offered in cases of need. What gave the local elites credibility was their capacity to provide support for the weaker fringes of society, those who were going through a difficult period, and this also extended to those who asked for help in other fields, such as the resolution of internal conflicts and, above all, interventions of help and

⁶⁸ VALSANGIACOMO Nelly, LORENZETTI Luigi (eds.), *Donne e lavoro...*

⁶⁹ On honour as linked to women's behaviour, LAGIOIA Vincenzo, PAOLI Maria Pia, RINALDI Rossella, *La fama delle donne. Pratiche femminili e società tra Medioevo ed Età moderna*, Rome, Viella, 2020.

⁷⁰ MERZARIO Raul, *Anastasia ovvero la malizia degli uomini. Relazioni sociali e controllo delle nascite in un villaggio ticinese 1650-1750*, Rome; Bari, Laterza, 1992; LAGIOIA Vincenzo, PAOLI Maria Pia, RINALDI Rossella, *La fama delle donne...*

⁷¹ See in particular ARCANGELI Letizia and PEYRONEL Susanna (eds.), *Donne di potere nel Rinascimento*, Rome, Viella, 2008.

charity where many of them were able to provide a useful voice. This might be in the town or the nearest major centres (Varese, Milan), or in those more far-flung places of emigration, especially through developing and supporting systems of mutual aid that were active both in their town of origin and where migratory flows were greater (for example, Rome, Naples, l'Aquila and Palermo)⁷². It is no coincidence that it was in these latter places that we find an increase in legacies, provision of financial assistance or other forms of relief extended not only to the poor relations of those who had activated them, but all their fellow citizens⁷³. Not the least of these benefits were those encouraging an education⁷⁴, legacies to marry “*citelle*” or to distribute food and primary commodities to the poor.

In developing this charitable work and mediation, the women of the elites were thus expressing a dual strongly held sense of belonging: not only to their family clan, but also to the inhabitants of their village by defining forms of support that remained particularly strong in the small mountain communities. But there were two sides to these interpersonal relations in an environment where everyone knew everyone else: from an effective tool for organizing labour and consolidating relations between the members of the local society, it could easily become an instrument of power and control over that society. We can thus see in these contexts, fully formed and in all its variants, how

⁷² Now, for example, also PAGANO Emanuele (ed.) *Immigrati e forestieri...*, in particular the essays by ZARDIN Danilo, “Reti confraternali per immigrati e forestieri nell’Italia della prima età moderna”, pp. 65-108, 78 and CORSI Alessandro, *Le confraternite di forestieri a Milano in Età moderna. Tra mecenatismo privato e tutela delle identità ‘nazionali’*, pp. 189-222.

⁷³ CAVALLERA Marina, GHEZZI Angelo Giorgio, LUCIONI Alfredo (eds.), *I luoghi della carità e della cura. Ottocento anni di storia dell’Ospedale di Varese*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2002.

⁷⁴ The phenomenon concerned the whole of Piedmont and Alpine Lombardy; see TOSCANI Xenio, *Scuole e alfabetismo nello Stato di Milano da Carlo Borromeo alla Rivoluzione*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1993; TURCHINI Angelo, *Sotto l’occhio del padre. Società confessionale e istruzione primaria nello Stato di Milano*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1996. For Varese, see also CAVALLERA Marina, “‘Pia Loca’ e società di antico regime (secoli XVI-XVIII)”, in: CAVALLERA Marina, GHEZZI Angelo Giorgio, LUCIONI Alfredo (eds.), *I luoghi della carità e della cura...*, pp. 191-258.

solid that “*capitale sociale delle donne*” was in the Ancien Régime, which Miriam Nicoli has already commented on⁷⁵.

As for the living conditions of women at the opposite extreme of the social hierarchy, those figures who have already been examined by Raul Merzario and others⁷⁶, it was in this very ambit, particularly among the womenfolk of those luckless men who emigrated for work and the small landowners, that we note the more complex and two-sided conditions. They were women in need of help who might have remained in poverty when the money transferred by their menfolk was slow to arrive and they had to fall back on temporary subventions or loans to make up for the generosity of the elites, of an entrepreneurial class that often identified with those who organized the work of emigrants, creating a state of constantly renewed indebtedness that would never finally be resolved. Generosity and mutual interest existed along with marks of gratitude, material indebtedness with moral indebtedness, and the employer’s interest in keeping his workforce close with that of the worker seeking guarantees in terms of continuity of work, making the ties closer and the subordination more binding. In this framework the woman who remained behind in the town was herself a component of the mutually given guarantees, and in some respects the network of ties in which she moved limited her freedom of movement, making her almost a hostage. When relations of patronage became a vice-like grip from which it became more and more difficult to extricate oneself, it became clear that they were a solid instrument of power to hold the local society together, with its institutional, social and economic hierarchies. Those ties that had been established in the workplace developed and consolidated, generation after generation, and often it was mothers, wives and sisters, as well as sons,

⁷⁵ See Miriam Nicoli’s contribution to this volume.

⁷⁶ See, for example, FRIGERIO Pierangelo-MARGARINI Giorgio, “Donna di montagna, donna di fatica”, in: Gruppo Archeologico Mergozzo (ed.), *Domina et Madonna. La figura femminile fra Ossola e Lago Maggiore dall’antichità all’Ottocento*, Omegna, Oca Blu, 1997, pp. 207-231; ASTINI MIRAVALLE Piera, GIAMPAOLO Leopoldo, *Monteviasco. Storia di un paese solitario*, Germignaga, Tipografia E. Rossi, 1974, and recently PARNISARI Francesco, “*Andare per il mondo*” *dalle valli lombarde...*, p. 243.

with their constant presence in the town, who were the guarantee that those distant fathers and husbands would return, and that, meanwhile, they would continue to labour “*in giro per il mondo*” in the gangs of workers of an entrepreneur from their own town.

Abstract

L'actuelle province de Varèse (Italie) est un observatoire privilégié afin de mieux cerner les conditions de vie des femmes des Alpes lombardes à l'époque moderne entre le XVI^e et le XVIII^e siècle. Après avoir discuté de la complexe réalité sociale, économique et environnementale de la région, cette contribution propose l'analyse d'actes notariés et de documents légaux afin d'illustrer les nombreuses activités (de l'industrie de la soie aux réseaux de contrebande moins visibles) et les responsabilités des femmes qui, à un niveau informel, accomplissaient des tâches qui allaient bien au-delà de ce que la norme permettait.



Stefania Bianchi

**Women, Judges and Notaries: the Legal Rights
of Women in the Italian Part of Switzerland
(17th-19th Centuries)**

The Italian-speaking part of Switzerland during the era of the bailiwicks is an interesting field of research as different aspects determined by territorial resources, cultural standards, and demographic questions interacted in a geographically restricted space, ranging from the countryside in the South up to the Alpine Ridge. These aspects, of course, were governed by rules of custom, the edicts of sovereign authorities and community statutes, and hence women's destinies were affected to these atavistic impositions. However, people's mobility (not only departures for European destinations, but at the same time arrivals filling the gaps) tends to question and undermine this web of moral and material certainties. It was a world in constant movement, but far from the courts; its geography, being traversed by merchants, soldiers, prelates and pilgrims, was essentially rustic but also marked by urban characteristics induced precisely by the passage of these travellers¹.

¹ CESCHI Raffaello, "Rusticità e urbanità", in: CESCHI Raffaello, *Nel labirinto delle valli. Uomini e terre di una regione alpina: la Svizzera italiana*, Bellinzona, Casagrande, 1999, pp. 59-74.

Therefore, the analysis of notarial acts, including powers of attorney, property inventories, dowry agreements, wills, and judicial enquiries of various kinds, allows us to glimpse peculiar life trajectories, see the abuses often carried out by the notabilities and the ministers of the Church (the untouchables)², and consequently break up the wall of the *omertà*. Such an approach confirms the courage of women in the face of injustice and at the same time attests to the important socioeconomic contribution of female arms and minds³.

Women's studies on the Italian part of Switzerland have centred above two main topics: witchcraft⁴ and religious life⁵. Attention has focused on these themes beyond the confines of the Southern bailiwicks too, along with many portraits of educated noblewomen who held salons, corresponded and were involved in cultural debates, playing their part in the unfolding development of history⁶.

² On the clergy's abuse of power, see BARATTI Danilo, "Giustizia e criminalità", in: CESCHI Raffaello (ed.), *Storia della Svizzera italiana dal Cinquecento al Settecento*, Locarno, Dadò, 2000, pp. 375-76; SPINELLI Isabella, "Relazioni illecite in una comunità cisalpina. Processi a donne nel baliaggio di Mendrisio", *Archivio Storico Ticinese (AST)* 131, 2002, pp. 3-32, 27-32; CESCHI Raffaello, "La giustizia e i falli delle donne", in *Parlare in tribunale. La giustizia nella Svizzera italiana dagli Statuti al codice penale*, Bellinzona, Casagrande, 2011, pp. 61-87.

³ See as an example the role of these women in Milan in the modern age in BIANCHI Stefania, *Ticinesi a Milano e in Lombardia dagli ultimi Sforza a Radetzky*, in: AUDENINO Patrizia, BARCELLA Paolo (eds.), *Migrazioni a Milano e in Lombardia*, Roma, Centro Studi Emigrazione, 2021, pp. 583-598.

⁴ In the Ticino area alone (there have been so many studies on these themes that any list would be incomplete) we note MENA Fabrizio, "Pratiche dell'infanticidio nel Mendrisiotto fra Antico Regime e primo Novecento", *AST* 125, 1999, pp. 23-38; CAMENISCH Yvonne, "La donna nei processi penali del baliaggio di Lugano nel XVIII secolo", in *AST* 125, 1999, pp. 53-58; BARBERIS Serena, "I processi per stregoneria nel baliaggio di Blenio nel Seicento", in *AST* 146, 2009, pp. 207-248.

⁵ MORETTI Antonietta, *Gli Umiliati, le comunità degli ospizi della Svizzera italiana, Helvetia Sacra*, Basel-Frankfurt am Main, Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1992; NICOLI Miriam, CLEIS Franca, *Un'illusione di femminile semplicità. Gli Annali delle Orsoline di Bellinzona (1730-1848)*, Rome, Viella, 2021; NICOLI Miriam, CLEIS Franca, *La Gran Regina del cielo e le Benedettine di Claro*, Locarno, Dadò, 2021.

⁶ Out of the many studies, we note PLEBANI Tiziana, *Le scritture delle donne in Europa. Pratiche quotidiane e ambizioni letterarie (secoli XIII-XX)*, Rome, Carocci, 2019.

Apart from a necessary digression recalling some well-known aspects, the other women examined in this article could be placed in the broad spectrum between opulence and wretchedness, monetary wealth and spiritual wealth. They were not always protagonists, but they were at times enterprising and, above all, reflected a bourgeois or petit-bourgeois male class working, producing and making money, following life strategies shared with their partners.

As it is generally known, women's freedom of action was defined by social and institutional rules, and only widowhood seemed to allow a degree of emancipation from legal constraints. The rules governing civic use of the territory or the production contracts differed markedly by region, but when it was a question of women and the family, they were more or less the same from the Lavizzara Valley to the parish of Balerna, from the Alps to the Lombardy Plain⁷.

Not so with the administration of justice, which, in the bailiwicks of the present-day canton of Ticino, had its own local procedures and showed a clear gap between theory and practice⁸. Therefore, if there were differences in how women operated in the Alpine areas, these should be sought in the level of education and socio-economic status. In other words, where, for example, there was significant migration, whether in the upper valleys of Mesolcina, or the southern pre-Alpine valleys such as Mara Valley or the Muggio Valley, or the administrative centres of bailiwicks, any discrepancy lay in the strategies of absence and presence according to the personal mobility⁹, which in turn was "grist to the notaries' mill".

⁷ LUMIA Gianna, "Famiglia, casa, eredità nel Mendrisiotto del Seicento", in: CESCHI Raffaello (ed.), *Storia della Svizzera italiana...*, pp. 329-352, and the bibliography therein.

⁸ WEISS Otto, *Il Ticino nel periodo dei baliaggi*, Locarno, Dadò, 1998, pp. 93-107; BARATTI Danilo, "Giustizia e criminalità", p. 362; on the concept of subjectivity, CARONI Pio, "Sovrani e sudditi nel labirinto del diritto", in: CESCHI Raffaello (ed.), *Storia della Svizzera italiana...*, pp. 581-596; CARONI Pio, "Quale continuità nella storia del diritto commerciale?", in: BIROCCHI Ilario (ed.), *'Non più satellite'*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2019, pp. 30-31.

⁹ It is the "*cultura della mobilità*", to use the definition of ALBERA Dionigi, "Cultura della mobilità e mobilità della cultura: riflessioni antropologiche sull'emigrazione biellese", in: OSTUNI Maria Rosaria (ed.), *Studi sull'emigrazione. Un'analisi comparata*, Milan, Electa, 1991, pp. 117-132.

The sources

With regard to the documents analysed (always allowing for the possibility that others as yet unknown might modify the point of view) we can claim that the kinds of women (directly or indirectly) appearing before magistrates are very different from those using the services of a notary or those featuring in deeds, apart from public or private examinations concerning pregnancies and fatherhood. The women summoned to court mostly represent the various forms of poverty. Substantially, noblewomen do not appear, and, unlike what we find in notary deeds relating to private family matters, gender variety is mostly among the less affluent social classes. Whether in court as an accused, a plaintiff or a witness, there was a wider social range than is seen in notary deeds. Appearing in court were not only mountain women, but also tavern keepers, servants, wet nurses, penniless widows and wives of sharecroppers or foremen¹⁰.

By contrast, the notary deeds that involve women were the product of an incipient bourgeoisie; they mainly concerned the families of migrants and merchants with property, credit and a recognized status, as the notary served above all to defend the interests and respectability of the family name. And even if a situation tended to get private, it probably had its roots in the property or wealth of the disputant families, in accordance with culturally urban paradigms¹¹. Directly appearing were the “unfortunate”, being unfortunate because before the judge they were victims of fraud or the moral judgment of a respectable society¹².

¹⁰ The last mentioned were summoned mainly to verify their identity (see BIANCHI Stefania, “La mobilità e il morbo. Le implicazioni socioeconomiche dei contagi fra i magistrati dei laghi”, in *AST* 168, 2020, pp. 17-25).

¹¹ See NAYMO Vincenzo, “Donne e notai: la presenza e il ruolo femminile negli atti notarili del Regno di Napoli in età moderna”, in: CARBONARA Angela (ed.), *Scritti in onore di Giovanna Da Molin. Popolazione, famiglia e società in età moderna*, vol. II, Bari, Cacucci, 2017, pp. 447-473.

¹² Not that immorality is exclusive to the male, any more than illegality. See, for Italian Switzerland, BARATTI Danilo, “Giustizia e criminalità”, pp. 374-375.

Yet, the woman who appears in court proceedings because of suffering circumstances, events and their consequences cannot be compared with the woman who can make an appointment with the notary to protect her interests as well as the roles men have given her.

We do indeed find echoes in notary deeds of ambitions for personal freedom, but documents produced by law courts also speak of women who aspire to manage their own lives. Nor can we contrast systematic models of behaviour, given that specific circumstances and personal choices, as it has already emerged markedly from letters¹³, show that character and determination can decide female destinies. At the same time, the deeds we present indicate that male behaviour, despite the premises we have mentioned, was not always the same, and that many women came forward to defend their rights as mothers, or their interests as wives and/or heirs¹⁴.

Accused or accusable: women “swallowed up by paperwork”

What kind of women do we encounter in the courts? Witches, adulteresses, infanticides, petty thieves and their victims, but, above all, women of allegedly easy virtue, victims of harassment and the future mothers of illegitimate children, as, though in many cases the father was identified – after an investigation that seemed less concerned with what had happened than with preventing the maintenance of a child becoming a burden on the community – this rarely led to a shotgun marriage. This also emerges clearly in private documents in which the parties were trying to settle family matters discreetly, because the father

¹³ BIANCHI Stefania, “Annetta Cantoni Fontana: l’aristocrazia femminile dell’emigrazione nell’esercizio dei poteri quotidiani”, *Rivista storica svizzera* 68/1, 2018, pp. 108-127, and the bibliography therein.

¹⁴ This also implies that being able to write was essential; see NICOLI Miriam, “Face à l’absence: écritures de femmes et agentivité dans l’arc alpin à l’époque moderne”, in: BERTIAUD Emmanuelle (ed.), *Paroles de femmes. Rôles et images dans les écrits personnels, Europe, XVI^e-XX^e siècle*, Paris, Le Manuscrit, 2017, pp. 96-97.

was a man of the Church¹⁵, or he was already married, or a seasonal worker, or a foreigner from abroad who had remained there for a few months to work the Alpine pastures or in the forests¹⁶. It was generally the consul of the district where the young women resided who took the initiative in reporting any wrongdoing on the basis of local gossip.

Geographical isolation and solitude seemed to encourage illicit relations and violence. In the bailiwicks of southern Ticino these took place in the outskirts of settlements and the victims were single girls and women whose husbands had been absent for years. Reports reached the bailiff and the lieutenant from the most varied places: from the Alps of Capriasca, the heights of Malcantone, the Alps of Mara Valley and the Muggio Valley, and from usually isolated farmsteads and mills.

Illicit relations could have dramatic consequences, including the crime of infanticide, aggravated by incest, as the consul of Muggio noted in 1641 regarding Maddalena Bulla and her brother-in-law Pietro Carabelli, who fled abroad¹⁷.

Equally sad and disturbing was the case of Susanna, who worked for the respectable notary Abbondio Capello of Salorino, a man very easy on himself but intransigent with his servant. She was obliged to sleep in primitive conditions in the same room as his illegitimate son, who had impregnated an illegitimate daughter of his. The young woman disposed of the baby, and her trial ended with her being sentenced to death¹⁸.

¹⁵ There are many cases, published and unpublished, of churchmen involved in "carnal commerce" (see notes 1 and 2). In 1789, the consul Panzera of Cademario reported that Maddalena Pianca "*fu ingravidata dal parroco don Angelo Maffini che la tiene a vivere in casa sua*". On the same date Panzera noted "*che l'estate scorsa Marta Vanetta ha partorito per opera del don Angelo*". Archivio storico di Lugano (ASL), Tribunale distrettuale, 1.35, 12 January 1789.

¹⁶ BIANCHI Stefania, "Anastasia e le altre. Tre donne, tre storie irregolari", *AST* 152, 2012, pp. 273-276.

¹⁷ MENA Fabrizio, "Pratiche dell'infanticidio...", pp. 28-29.

¹⁸ In 1634, another Maddalena, who for years had had relations with Bartolomeo Capello, gave him her baby girl to take to Como. The baby died and he was interdicted for two years Evident dual standards (MENA Fabrizio, "Pratiche dell'infanticidio.....", pp. 28-29).

In the questioning the same procedures recur and show how female guilt is taken as certain. There are invariably questions about regular carnal relations with different men: how often and with whom else apart from the alleged father who has been summoned to confirm or deny his paternity.

Some of the answers, assuming we have a faithful transcription of what had been said, indicate that these young women were deceived by the mirage of marriage¹⁹ and that some were clearly indignant at the suggestion from many of the men who gave evidence that they had also been intimate with others. One clear example is the evidence from Giacomo Negri of Avegno, Vallemaggia, who had been pastor in Rovio, from the month “*mese di aprile fino a tutti Santi*”, which makes no attempt to deny his relationship with Domenica Mazzetti. The facts date from 1743. The young man, who had met Mazzetti at her home, as she ran a tavern in the town, became familiar with her when she went into the mountains to purchase some *mascarpa* cheese²⁰. The familiarity became physical outside the cheese storehouse, which in the month of May became repeatedly the scene of “*copula carnale perfetta*”²¹. But the pastor, who had now left to climb other mountains, had few qualms over it as, on learning of the matter, his masters had told him that Mazzetti had also had an understanding with one Guglielmo di Pelsotto of the neighbouring Intelvi Valley²².

Maria Elisabetta Bianchi of Ponte Capriasca escaped a rape attempt while looking after the animals, but was so shocked by the experience that she resorted to phlebotomy. She registered a complaint and, after setting out what had happened, the failed aggression, death threats and demands for her silence, concluded “*e per non aver prove serve la*

¹⁹ CAMENISCH Yvonne, “La donna nei processi penali...”.

²⁰ Ricotta, in CHERUBINI Francesco, *Vocabolario Milanese Italiano*, Milan, Stamperia Reale, 1814, *ad vocem*.

²¹ ASL, Tribunale distrettuale, 1.33, 9 gennaio 1743.

²² Mazzetti was not at the hearing as she was in labour; Parish Archive of Rovio, Battesimi, 1743 “*gennaio 9 è nata la figlia di Maria Domenica Mazzetti e di padre ignoto. In pericolo di vita è stata battezzata da Sabina, moglie di Francesco Conza, ostetrica probata*”.

presente", obviously as a precaution against any possible suggestion that she was a willing participant²³.

The accounts also give us an idea of the vernacular of that time, which in translation can have an unintended modernity. The witnesses in the enquiry concerning Barbara Pozzi were her sister-in-law and brother, who refer to each other as "*il mio uomo, la mia donna*". The scene is Coldrerio in 1598, when the local priest, Don Donato, worried about the girl, approached her sister-in-law to warn her that "*Barbara è grossa*", he or perhaps someone else being the father. The sister-in-law then stated that she wanted her no longer at home as she brought shame on the family²⁴. The priest then took her to Varese and of Barbara we know nothing more than that she gave birth to a girl²⁵.

In this case too, though a woman herself, the witness attributes all the responsibility for this family misfortune to the girl and not to the priest who was her confessor. And in the same year another "*poveraccia*", Caterina, fell victim to the maltreatment of an offended wife who got her own back on her, sending her son-in-law with other armed men to "*bravare*" (seize and punish her), instead of turning on Gio. Luigi Pusterla, her unfaithful husband²⁶. This acceptance of a husband's flings was widespread and the situation was often resolved by including the illegitimate child in the family.

Accusations, interrogations and verifications followed a standardized procedure whose end is hardly ever known, like the fate of those women, young and less young, who had been stained by the shame of selling their bodies or finding themselves with an unwanted baby. Ill treatment within the family ranged from beatings to the violation of minors.

In the two notary deeds we quote as examples some sort of agreement was sought, a sign of a change in the times. In 1774, Angelica Maina

²³ ASL, Tribunale distrettuale, 1.35, 26 October 1788.

²⁴ In the social networks, honour and dishonour played a predominant role. See CAVALLO Sandra, CERUTTI Simona, "Onore femminile e controllo sociale nella riproduzione in Piemonte fra Sei e Settecento", *Quaderni storici* 44, 1990, pp. 346-349.

²⁵ ASTi, Notarile, Buzzi 419, 21 February 1598.

²⁶ ASTi, Notarile, Buzzi 419, 7 April 1598.

and Giuseppe Masina of Caslano decided to “*divorziare per l'impossibilità di vivere insieme*”²⁷; thirty years earlier, due to “*degli impropri trattamenti fattigli e gravi percosse datagli li giorni passati dal detto Liberato suo marito*”, Anna Maria Andreoli of Muzzano had returned to her father. Her husband asked her to come back, but the woman obtained the judgment that “*ogni qualvolta contro speranza il detto Liberato senza forte, sufficiente e ragionevole fondamento di nuovo maltrattasse la medesima di lui moglie con schiaffi, calci o altre più gravi*”, she might “*absentarsi e ritirarsi ad abitare se sola e che debba avere e godere un conveniente et onesto vitalizio*”²⁸, exercising her rights without need of proof²⁹.

A far worse fate befell the little Angelica, who may have been the child born to the “*poveraccia*” Caterina³⁰. In 1609, the consul of Vacallo reported the pitiful case of an unfortunate ten-year-old girl, the “*figlia illegittima del noto Gio. Luigi Pusterla, di Balerna, la quale, seviziata dallo snaturato suo padre, morì di inanizione, in una valletta, per non ritornar ai supplizii, che le erano inflitti*”³¹. Despite the infamy and the cruelty Pusterla had merely to pay 200 gold scudi, thanks to the power of money and the privilege of birth. On the latter, women too could rely – as long as they had a title, like Maria Brigida Franzoni, daughter of the Marquis Giacomo di Genova, who, in September 1742, wrote from Lugano with the assistance of the notary Rusca, soliciting the Pope to “*ottenere la sua libertà alla quale non ha mai rinunciato*”³².

²⁷ ASTi, Notarile, Rusca 1381, 12 December 1774.

²⁸ ASTi, Notarile, Rusca 8101, 28 September 1746. In short, if the husband ill-treated her, Anna Maria obtained the freedom to leave him and an allowance to maintain her.

²⁹ See CONTINI Alessandra, “Corpo, genere e punibilità”, in: FILIPPINI Nadia Maria, PLEBANI Tiziana, SCATTIGNO Anna (eds.), *Corpi e storia. Donne e uomini dal mondo antico all'età contemporanea*, Rome, Viella, 2002, pp. 45-52.

³⁰ The documents tell us that the name of the girl ill-treated by her father may have been Angelica (evidence of the noblewoman Lucrezia Castello Perti of Vacallo in January 1609) and that she was an illegitimate child of ten, and so the figures add up.

³¹ According to the register on the folder containing the court proceedings, in ASTi, Archivio Torriani, Grandi crimini, 5 January 1609.

³² ASTi, Notarile, Rusca 8101, 27 September 1742. “*Protestatio*” to obtain the financial means that were her right so that she might live independently, written, read and registered in the presence of Count Giacomo Riva. The plea shows that life

Women with power of attorney and women granting power of attorney

If someone is not committed to complying with his or her duties, it is easy to make up any possible excuse, especially if the opponent is a woman. In an ongoing suit over a policy between the heirs of Paolo Mola of Coldrerio and Nicolò Scala of Vico, the latter sought any pretext not to pay, as the heirs who were his creditors were two ladies. And he justified his position in these terms:

“[...] Per la fragilità e imbecillità del sesso femminile è statuito per legge comunale e municipale che la donna non si può obbligare senza il consenso dei suoi agnati quali hanno da prestare il loro consenso altrimenti il contratto è nullo. [...] Se la polizza fosse pure in qualche parte non chiara e qualche solennità tralasciata per inavvertenza, ma Dio bono tutte le scuse che si possono allegare in favore di detta polizza vengono atterrate dalla stessa polizza; le persone non sono state inavvertenti perché hanno avuto l'occhio e senso a coerenziare l'istrumento di tutela, hanno avuto mira a fare che uno contutore fosse presente, hanno voluto farla sottoscrivere da doi testimoni per la qual causa specificare anco la conversione di detto denaro. Non potevano già ignorare detti huomini tutti, quali sono nominati in detta polizza che non conoscesero donna Ottavia tutrice dei figli, Foscha donna che non aveva un soldo del suo, donna che non aveva economia alcuna, donna senza alcun governo di casa, donna conosciuta da suo suocero qual inabile alla tutela, che però provista di doi contutori et può pagare 150 ducatonì a simil donna senza sapere dove si convertissero sapendo li detti huomini che non eran denari che aspettassero a detta Ottavia, ma si bene a minori a quali un giorno bisognava darne conto”³³.

The text of the deed clearly states the premises denying a woman a status of equal opportunity: the frailty and folly of her sex, lack of

was not a bed of roses for noblewomen either (see PAGANO Emanuele, “Maltrattate, defraudate, diffamate: mogli in tribunale nella Milano di Giuseppe II”, *Archivio Storico Lombardo* 127, 2001, pp. 61-105).

³³ ASTi, Notarile, Ghiringhelli 2494, 1649.

expertise and unreliability – all arguments taken for granted and in keeping with public opinion of the time³⁴; and the need for assent, which in this case, though, becomes a drawback, the advantage designed to protect the interests of the “*fosca donna senza un soldo del suo*”. This detail is significant too as many powers of attorney set up by women or attributed to them aimed precisely to formalize a degree of autonomy in acting to preserve investments, earnings, and property and chattels.

Like letters, wills and dowry agreements, powers of attorney are fundamental for understanding what was seen as the limits of women’s competence and the reasons that led women, in turn, to assign the protection of matters of the home to trustworthy persons³⁵, this modification of the credit system and the management of property being activated by many artisans’ workshops and skilful merchants to differentiate investments and contain margins of risk. This raises a question that has been little researched so far and about which there are few comparative discussions, which would be important and necessary to properly interpret both quantitative and qualitative data³⁶. The sources are multiple and complementary and thus involve taking sides. We intend to consider in particular the female figures who were given power of attorney through an enquiry centred on the bailiwicks of southern Ticino as there is an unfortunate shortage of notary deeds in the Alpine valleys, especially in the Leventina and Blenio Valleys, where there were significant movements of people.

So far research has revealed 120 notary deeds in an arc of time running from 1565 to 1793³⁷, in which wives, mothers, sisters,

³⁴ PASTORE Alessandro, “Donne e criminalità. Percorsi e prospettive di ricerca”, *AST* 125, 1999, pp. 3-10.

³⁵ Women with power of attorney for husbands, brothers, etc. also used the notary’s services to give third parties room for manoeuvre so that both roles quite often appear in the same document.

³⁶ Though referring to the distant context of 18th-century Quebec, the article by GRENIER Benoît, FERLAND Catherine, “Quelque longue soit l’absence: procurations et pouvoir féminin à Québec au XVIII^e siècle”, *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire* 37, 2013, pp. 197-225, is a significant study that presents formal analogies, determined by shared legal and socio-economic roots (the colony was French), though there are class nuances, in the context of a rising bourgeoisie.

³⁷ This figure is, of course, an underestimate, as there are other sources that suggest that deeds were drawn up, even when we have no record of them, as we can see from

daughters and sisters-in-law were given power to act in the name of husbands, brothers, fathers and relatives, and occasionally even to represent female blood relations or trusted acquaintances³⁸.

Almost half of the deeds formalize the reciprocity of the marriage sacrament, for better or worse, trust being the inescapable premise for making the strategy of absence function. This underlies shared projects that involve expertise that is occasionally recognized even in the notary deeds: the ability to read, write and count, and recognize the various currencies in circulation and the resources of the territory, which were sometimes managed in businesslike fashion. An emblematic example is that of Anna Maria of Santino Bussi, who in 1732 was about to marry Gio. Antonio Bianchi, known as Santa Maria di Besazio. He described her in these terms: “*anni 28, mediocrementemente avvenente, di buoni costumi, virtuosa in leggere, scrivere e fare conti, la quale sta a Mendrisio presso Maria Visetti zia del fiscale di Mendrisio e ava materna*”³⁹. Later married to Giovanni Battista Oldelli, who repeatedly renewed the power of attorney, in the later documents

such letters as the following, from Antonio Bariani of Arogno da Berga to his wife Maria Maddalena di Rovio [1761]: “*Amata mia consorte vo a salutarvi con la presente e darvi nova della mia bona salute chome spero in Dio che sarà di voi e di tutti li nostri figlioli circha li nostri interessi tra mi e voi come siamo restati Andate pure in pagnare tutto quello che volete à ciò non patite né voi né li nostri figlioli che sé Dio mi darà vita e sanità satisfèrò il tuto Verso di voi sapevo la mia oblicacione che il presente me ne parto Andare in Franza e subito che né sarò là ne scriverò come che la me paserà*” (ASTi, Notarile, Roncajoli 1121).

We have also taken into consideration cases in which women established an agent in their place without claiming to put a figure on the resulting deeds, which must be at least three times as many.

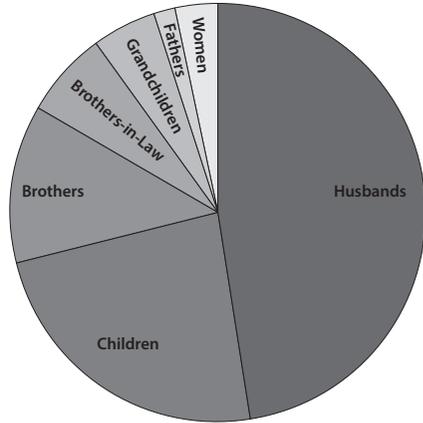
³⁸ The deeds examined are the result of a minute inspection of many notary documents held in the State Archive of Bellinzona. Hence the location of the documents is indicated only when the source is quoted.

³⁹ ASTi, Notarile, Oldelli 2783. The deed was exceptional, but so was the family network (one of Anna’s sisters had married Antonio Bibiena); indeed, before her, Anna Maria’s grandmother, Maria Canevali Visetti, had shown herself more than capable of handling the affairs of all her nephews and nieces in Vienna. As regards the relations between Oldelli, Bussi and Visetti, see also MARTINOLA Giuseppe, *Lettere dai paesi transalpini degli artisti di Meride e dei villaggi vicini (XVII-XIX)*, Bellinzona, Edizioni dello Stato, 1963, pp. 136-137, 154.

Fig. 1: Kinship ties and attributions of powers of attorney (1565-1800)

**Female Representatives
with Power of Attorney
(1565-1797)**

Husbands' Power of Attorney	58
Children's Power of Attorney	29
Brothers' Power of Attorney	15
Brothers-in-Law's Power of Attorney	8
Grandchildren's Power of Attorney	6
Fathers' Power of Attorney	2
Women's (Mothers, Sisters, ecc) Power of Attorney	4



we find her involved in purchasing a large farm and then overseeing silk production, drawing on a capital of 3,000 lire.

These were ladies of the artisan and merchant bourgeoisie; in fact, only rarely in the deeds do we encounter the wives of noblemen or high-ranking officers, as families with extensive property gave power of attorney directly to the family notary.

With power of attorney, the women, rigorously cited with their maiden name along with their father's forename, and then the name of any husband, past or present, were authorized to act in buying, selling, renting and collecting earnings even from properties abroad or from abroad. They were the *fil rouge* of multiple localities, so that, for example, if a husband in Vienna gave his wife in Meride power of attorney, she, in turn, could nominate a legal agent for family properties in Rome. We should bear in mind that these powers "started" in Rome, Milan, Venice, Turin, Genoa, Bologna, Mantua, l'Aquila, Asti, Sassari, Caserta, Pavia, etc...; there are many in Vienna and Prague, but also in Leipzig, Mainz, Dresden, Stuttgart and Liège, in Poland, Denmark, France, England and Hungary, and in Madrid and Barcelona. From

there, they reached wives, mothers and sisters scattered in the parishes of southern Ticino and sometimes residing abroad⁴⁰.

And the further away the destination, the more necessary a common purpose became, particularly when the patrimony at stake was substantial, as we see from the sale of the residence “*chiamata il Sole d’Oro*” in 1679 by Carlo Canevali of Lanzo, an architect and citizen of Vienna, who promised to pay his wife “*ongari d’oro mille, quali sono per la metà del valore della casa, che possediamo, et habbiamo comprata unitamente qui in Vienna, havendomi detta mia consorte Maddalena data ampia facoltà et autorità di poterla vendere a mio piacere*”, or the collecting of credit advanced by Antonia Ruggia of Morcote, also in the name of her husband Gerolamo Vegezzi of Magliaso. In 1734, this wealthy lady gave power of attorney to Carlo Croci of Brusino, resident in Venice “*a poter particolarmente a nome della predetta Antonia, far ed operar tutto quello che occorresse al Magistrato Ecc.mo. delle Aque e degli Ecc.mi. Sri. Inquisitori, sopra le Scole Grandi, come pure nella Veneranda Scuola di San Rocco, e qualsivoglia luogo, Magistrato e Tribunale di Venezia per il giro e trasporto in nome di detta signora Antonia delli ducati diecimilla ad essa spettanti per ora del Corpo delli ducati 50 milla del Fideiunisso ordinato dal q. David Fossati di lei zio*”⁴¹.

⁴⁰ Women with power of attorney can be found in almost all localities of the parish of Riva San Vitale, of Muggio Valley and of part of Intelvi Valley (which was included in the study for its geographic and socio-economic similarities), the lake districts (Bissone, Morcote, Magliaso, etc.) and some localities of Malcantone, with its famous tradition of migration. Some were intended for abroad, in Milan, Venice, Genoa, Rome, Karlsburg and Vienna. In Rome in 1732, Benedetta Martinola was given power of attorney by her son Antonio Bardelli, a sergeant in the military forces stationed in Livorno, while in 1696 Marietta Martinelli de’ Saluzzi was nominated by her husband Giuseppe Martinelli of Morcote to “*dimandare, scotere, conseguire, esigere, ricevere et avere from the Noble Man Paolo Balbi son of the noble Barberigo*” the capital advanced for a tender and also to “*poter elegere et nominare un murar et un marangone a nome d’esso Giuseppe Martinelli costituente*” (ASTi, Notarile, Fossati 21).

⁴¹ ASTi, Notarile, Roncajoli 153. In both cases the women are recognized as having property rights, whether to buildings or capital inherited.

Fig. 2: Network of powers of attorney conferred to women (1582-1800)



Yet, when it was a matter of defending the dowries or goods inherited from their families, the women quite often went in person wherever it was necessary to manage these goods, travelling extensively⁴². In addition, as widows, these guardians often took great pains in the education and professional training of their children before their emancipation, mortgaging houses and land to obtain liquidity to provide dowries for their daughters; and if, as widows, they were living in cities where their husbands worked, they sought in every way to stay there to ensure for their progeny any cultural privileges unavailable in their own country.

Power of attorney for sons, brothers and nephews derived from the need to preserve and defend family wealth. Some powers of attorney for women state this explicitly: the women did not necessarily rely on their husbands but on an intermediary to take care of their father's legacy.

At times we also find "unusual" powers of attorney that confirm the concept of trust: a stepmother, a mother-in-law or a daughter who has power of attorney for the father or mother, friend/relative, women who trust other women, like Tommasina Trezzini, both a daughter of the famous architect Domenico and a wife who had been "left" by Carlo Giuseppe Trezzini, a distant relative of the architect, when he died in 1768. The following year, to protect interests in St Petersburg, she gave power of attorney to her niece, Maria Gertrude Suvalet⁴³. Then there was the *canoness* Maria Alessandretta de Torbin, from an abolished

⁴² For some comparisons, see GRENIER Benoît, FERLAND Catherine, "Quelque longue soit l'absence...", p. 207.

⁴³ Perhaps a mistranscription of Sciualov, the surname of Count Ivan, former president of the Academy of Fine Arts, cited in ANTONOV Victor, "Capomastri italiani a Pietroburgo nel settecento", *Bollettino storico della Svizzera italiana* xc, 1978, p. 169, which also documents the role of Tommasina Trezzini, reconsidered by CAVALLERA Marina in "Un 'motore immobile': emigrazioni maschili di mestiere e ruolo della donna nella montagna lombarda dell'età moderna", in: VALSANGIACOMO Nelly, LORENZETTI Luigi (eds.), *Donne e lavoro. Prospettive per una storia delle montagne europee XVII-XX secc.*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2010, pp. 26-49. Two interesting facts: after Tommasina's death in June 1769 an inventory was drawn up that included an iron hair-curler, in line with current French fashion; and her executors renewed the power of attorney, giving it to one Rusca of Agno, resident in Muscovy and regarded as more reliable than Suvalet.

chapter house in the region of Calvados, who, from Mendrisio, gave power of attorney to Marianna Corday of Caen in 1794.

Conclusions “in real time”

Given its fortunate historical and geographical context, Italian Switzerland in the modern age, its Alpine and pre-Alpine society result in some respects in being close to urban society, as the wealth acquired by the workforce, and hence by their wives, interrupted the day-to-day relation with the fields⁴⁴. Where we see a great difference is in the countryside, dominated as it was by farms and land mainly owned by the Church and the nobility. Here the silence of the sources reflects not only gender, but also socio-economic distance. From the records available, the only men and women who had dealings with the law in the peasant and rural world were those involved in various kinds of court order: breaking a contract, committing or suffering acts of violence or sexual behaviour that marginalized those involved. These communities operated a strict vigilance that annulled these people, depriving them of any rights deriving from belonging to the neighbourhood, which for poor, single women was equivalent to a final, irreversible condemnation.

An examination of the many notary deeds, by contrast, confirms the opportunities that in some ways gave women agency because they were mothers, wives, widows or guardians of minors. These women handled the sale of property, made credit claims, and solicited higher authorities to let them sell farms and estates, bonds and mortgages for capital to ensure the professional training of sons, dowries for daughters and the good of the family in general. It was in these respects that geographical distance was reduced in the city, while it increased in the countryside, where women (though this goes for men too) are mentioned for

⁴⁴ The artisans' letters often urge wives and mothers not to labour in the fields but to leave that work to male and female servants, who often came from other Alpine valleys in the present-day canton of Ticino and neighbouring Lombardy.

the reasons given above or, otherwise, for the few signs certifying their labour: the wretched daily pay for farmwork; the tools for that work (for example, *zappe da donna*); or the objects listed in the repossession that remind us how indispensable peasant women were for the domestic economy⁴⁵. It was different for those women who migrated, as many – among the families of craftsmen and merchants – did in the studied area. They showed an awareness and expertise that suggests there should be further study of the supposedly weaker or gentle sex (though the documents show that women too could be strong and anything but gentle). The powers of attorney are the proof. The act of entrusting meant that wives and mothers were familiar with managing property (lands, mills and even quarries), capital (credit, bonds and taxes) and remittances (redistribution of money from abroad, and hence knowledge of the value and purchasing power of ducats, thalers, filippi, genovine, etc.).

This suggests that they also had other forms of expertise (reading, writing, counting) that sometimes emerge clearly in the notary documents or letters attached, and that the woman was the custodian of the success of the house. In this female world some of them showed an enterprising or adventurous spirit and managerial gifts. These aspects have yet to come to light, like the women who shared their husbands' destinies.

At first, when I was preparing to trace the signs of female mobility, which tended to challenge the dominant historiographic model of the dichotomy “woman = home, fields, income: man = absence, migration, monetary remittances”⁴⁶, I had the impression of coming up

⁴⁵ Unusually for this area there are also cases of female involvement in building sites (BIANCHI Stefania, “Fede che fa reddito. L’oratorio di Sant’Anna a Morbio Superiore: un cantiere di comunità (1692-1705)”, in: LEGGERO Roberto (ed.), *Lavoro e impresa nelle società preindustriali*, Mendrisio, Academy Press, 2017, pp. 169-189.

⁴⁶ The historiographic models are, however, fundamental for approaching the primary sources and still valid for the poorer economies based on seasonal emigration. For the context studied see the essays of MERZARIO Raul, *Il paese stretto. Strategie matrimoniali nelle diocesi di Como secoli XVI-XVIII*, Turin, Einaudi, 1982; MERZARIO Raul, *Adamocrazia. Famiglie di emigranti in una regione alpina (svizzera italiana,*

against very special situations regarding only socially and economically successful families. Ten years – and hundreds of documents – later⁴⁷, the mobility of women in the Alpine region seems much more complex, going far beyond family reunifications. Similarly, the powers of attorney provide clues for further exploring their autonomy of action despite the obstacles of legal rules, an autonomy that, in the present state of our knowledge, in some (for now, a few) cases is surprising and is a further stimulus to research.

Abstract

Cette contribution, axée sur la zone alpine et préalpine de la Suisse italienne entre le XVI^e et le XVIII^e siècle, examine les figures féminines rencontrées respectivement dans les tribunaux et dans les cabinets des notaires. Les premières représentent l'hétérogénéité de la pauvreté dans des contextes géographiques et socio-économiques largement périphériques. Les secondes, identifiées dans les nombreux actes qui les rendent « opérationnelles » grâce à la procuration du notaire, sont le miroir d'une bourgeoisie entrepreneuriale fondée sur la mobilité des hommes et parfois des femmes elles-mêmes.

XVIII secolo, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000; LORENZETTI Luigi, MERZARIO Raul, *Il fuoco acceso. Famiglie e migrazioni alpine nell'Italia moderna*, Rome, Donzelli, 2005.

⁴⁷ See BIANCHI Stefania, “Donne che seguono i mariti”, *Percorsi di ricerca* 4, 2012, pp. 15-21.

PART IV

BODIES AND DESTINIES: WET NURSES, HEALERS AND VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

Come, Carrozzieri della Cattedrale,
li 20 Giugno 1858.

I coniugi Carlo Arraboldi e Lucrezia Sinchri, domiciliati in
questa Parrocchia, trovansi in istato di assoluta miseria,
non avendo altro mezzo per vivere, che il loro giornaliero guadagno,
come calzolaio il marito, e cucitrice la moglie.

Si riteneva la present, onde potessero ritirarsi dal questo ospedale un
proprio figlio stato esposto la sera del 10 agosto 1855 nell'età
allora d'un giorno. Venne presentata l'apposito segno.

avv. G. Silenzi

PARROCCHIA



— Io l'avevo indov
— Sì, signora, rep
presentava.

Tip. Fr. Centena

A. M. P. del 1858
Umbrogio Acquistapane
+ 25. Feb. 1858. morto in
quella P. L.

Rolando Fasana

**The Unsaid of Microhistory:
Anthroponymy of Wet-Nursing.
The Wet Nurses of Southern Ticino
and the Ancient Province
of Como (18th-19th Centuries)**

“Mi salvò la zia Lena ad interim con una tetta (la Ester già grandicella pendeva imbronciata dall'altra) finché fu trovata una balia, la mia balia, l'Annetta, di cui non rimane più nulla, un ritratto, un grembiale lasciato appeso ad un chiodo, qualcosa ha senz'altro lasciato ma sarà sotto le assi, o murato in un vano dietro le scale; so che aveva una figlia, e mi cruccio che di questa sorella di latte, non so il nome, il colore degli occhi, gli aspetti delle culatte”¹.

¹ MENEGHELLO Luigi, *Pomo pero. Paralipomeni d'un libro di famiglia*, Milan, Rizzoli, 2007, p. 14. Luigi Meneghello (1922-2007), born in the province of Vicenza, was founder, head of department and professor of Italian Literature at Reading University, England. His studies and numerous publications ranged from essays to literary criticism and philosophy; even in works of fiction and poetry he found room to discuss the development of the language and the relation between Italian and dialect.

This is Luigi Meneghello, recalling his first years of life in the villages of the country around Vicenza during the 1920s. His Annetta condenses remarkably some aspects connected with birth, survival and suckling. Specifically, his portrait of the wet nurse is extremely interesting: a woman with certain clearly defined features, dress, a name, children, a private life, a person crucial to the baby's survival and with whom he most certainly created a relation, if not a bond, that would persist even as just a distant memory, synaesthesia linked to a fragrance, an odour, a taste or a sound. The author suggests the existence of an irresolvable and perhaps inexplicable tie – partly with the wet nurse's offspring too – underlining her name to allow her existence to emerge from anonymity, to indicate her centrality, not only in relation to her professional role, but as a woman and a mother.

It was that very anonymity that often hid wet nurses in the shadow cone of history. Relegating them behind the impersonal, ascetic definition of their professional status invites us to consider them largely in quantitative, statistical terms, or in relation to their geographical origins or employment strategies². For centuries, indeed, behind the wet nurse was a male: her father, husband, brother, uncle or other close relative who accepted the offers of work, negotiated the payment and defined the tasks, taking on the main role and, at least until the 19th century, appearing in the documents and contracts, leaving the woman no more than the physical task itself. And this was so down to the modern age. In support of this claim are some parish sources from the late 19th century, which, referring to babies who died of vomiting, dysentery or pneumonia during the period of breastfeeding at the wet nurse's home, omitted her name in favour of that of the head of the family. This aspect has already been studied as regards 15th-century Florence by Klapisch-Zuber, but it is also to be found in the Alpine region in a more extensive time span, at least down to the 19th century. As Zuber makes clear: “*Dietro il suo rozzo marito, la balia non è altro che un'imprecisa figura femminile, un'ombra anonima, a cui*

² Specifically, gravitating to facilities for suckling babies, becoming part of aristocratic or wealthy families, and emigration.

non appartiene nemmeno più il suo seno fecondo”, to the point that it is reasonable to confirm that the *“baliatico appare proprio come un affare di uomini. Non soltanto perché l'accordo si conclude il più delle volte tra padre e balio, ma anche perché gli interventi dei genitori durante tutto il periodo in cui il bambino è a balia e fino al suo ritorno, restano essenzialmente paterni”*. Nevertheless, it seems it was the father *“che discute di nuovi patti con la balia, se occorre; è lui che, tutto sommato, effettua gli anticipi sul salario o che regola il saldo al balio; è lui soprattutto che controlla la decisione più importante dopo la scelta iniziale, quella che concerne il momento dello svezzamento”*³.

Bringing to light the anonymous wet nurses and discovering their names, not just as a simplistic piece of research on onomastics, but rather to lay the foundations for a micro-historical study on a specific geographic and temporal area, means investigating social, economic and gender-behavioural pathways while avoiding abstract conclusions.

This contribution, then, aims to develop the theme of wet-nursing in the pre-Alpine and Alpine region of the Lombardy lakes and the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland in the period from the early 18th to the late 19th centuries. This was a territory significantly marked by powerful dynamics of centuries-old emigration for work and by various, intricate socio-economic aspects. Focusing on the image of the wet nurse suggests dwelling on an exclusively female figure and on a small number of women who spent a limited interval of their lives determined by the activity of their ovaries and the beginning of their reproductive cycle. In addition, if the possibility of ascertaining the presence of wet nurses in the Alps is essentially occasional, the role of dry nurses is documented and more easily observable, certifying the relation between highlands and lowlands. Indeed, the figure of the dry nurse involved a legally regulated work contract with the appointed institutions. Wet nurses, by contrast, were required not only in the sphere of religious institutions for foundlings, but also in

³ KLAPISCH-ZUBER Christiane, “Genitori naturali e genitori di latte nella Firenze del Quattrocento”, *Quaderni storici* 44, August 1980, p. 550.

the community in a balanced exchange between private parties; but this aspect of everyday life surfaces only in particular sources⁴.

Hence, studying the function and role of wet nurses directs our attention to many different sources and factors that are interwoven and linked to sexuality, behaviour, sociality, and matrimonial and family questions. Just as central is the question of birth, pregnancy – linked to the topic of abortion rates and contraceptive practices and strategies – and of infancy in general, and so also of abandoned babies, foundlings and orphanages, inasmuch as wet-nursing was a varied, complex phenomenon, changing over the centuries. In addition, the phenomenon of abandoned babies was not local, but linked to a more extended geographical area, which, for the region between Lario and Ceresio, relates the southern parishes of the present-day canton of Ticino with the territories of the ancient province of Como and with part of that of Milan⁵. The historiography has dealt with many of its aspects copiously, at least in the last thirty years⁶. I shall simply recall some topics linked to wet-nursing by way of introducing the subject and defining better its features, contours and peculiarities.

First, it is worth mentioning briefly the importance of cults devoted to milk-bearing divinities since ancient times: from the Paleo-Christian age these had mutated in many parts of the peninsula and the Alpine area into worship of St Mamante or Mamete, who was also regarded as a support for, and saviour of, abandoned babies⁷. Later, from the 13th

⁴ See, for example, the investigation by the authorities of Lugana to identify the strangers in the town in 1687, where we read that the nobleman Giovanni Pietro Morosini stated that he had Maria Manzina of Indemini (a mountain village in the area) in his home as a wet nurse. Private archive; I thank Stefania Bianchi for drawing my attention to it.

⁵ FASANA Rolando, *Bambini abbandonati, confine e perdute identità*, Como, Nodolibri, 2020.

⁶ For the area in question, see MERZARIO Raul, “Trovatelli. Un problema comasco del Cinquecento”, in CESCHI Raffaello, VIGO Giovanni (eds.), *Tra Lombardia e Ticino. Studi in memoria di Bruno Caizzi*, Bellinzona, Casagrande, 1995, pp. 35-48.

⁷ San Mamante is the name used for San Mama of Cesarea, a martyr venerated in the East; on proto-historic lactogenic cults and the anthropological and folklore concept of milk as a vital element, see CAMPORESI Piero, *Le vie del latte*, Milan,

century on, there was growing popular veneration of the Madonna of the Milk – the *Virgo lactans* for the West and the *Galaktrophousa* for the East⁸, which spread markedly in Lombardy and Italian-speaking Switzerland, leaving many iconographic works scattered in the territory⁹. Invoking the breastfeeding Madonna was not a prerogative of the female world: often intercession was asked for problems such as a lack of milk in mothers and wet nurses, and for milk-bearing animals, which were important in a farming economy. In the area around Como, at least until the late 19th century, a popular saint, one Wilhelmina of England, who may in the distant past have been a nun from a convent on the hill of Brunate, near the city of Como, was venerated by mothers and wet nurses. She exuded sanctity, a painted mural of her remained in the church, and it was in her name that prayers were raised for an abundant onset of milk¹⁰.

As regards the system of paid breastfeeding that took place at orphanages, it is worth mentioning that they included women of humble birth from the poorer classes, who abandoned their own children to be taken in by religious institutes, where they would later seem to have been taken on as internal wet nurses, as we learn from the main Hospital of Milan in the early 16th century¹¹. Similarly, from the late 19th century on, new medical wards for mothers-to-be, women in labour or maternity were set up close to the orphanages,

Garzanti, 1993, and Camporesi's work in general. There were in this area churches, chapels and oratorios dedicated to San Mamete, in, for example, Valsolda, Claino in the neighbouring Intelvi Valley, in Mezzovico, north of the city of Lugano, and in Lumino near Bellinzona.

⁸ PEREGO Natale, *Una Madonna da nascondere. La devozione per la "Madonna del latte" in Brianza, nel Lecchese e nel Triangolo Lariano*, Oggiono (LC), Cattaneo, 2005, p. 26.

⁹ At the moment at least a hundred works are registered in the territories of the present-day canton of Ticino alone, see VALLE PARRI Silvia, *Madonne del latte*, Locarno, Dadò, 2020. In PEREGO Natale, *Una Madonna da nascondere...*, there is an inventory with the works registered in the Como and Lecco provinces of Brianza and certain areas of Lario.

¹⁰ BALBIANI ANTONIO, *Como. Il suo lago, le sue valli e le sue ville*, Milan, Francesco Pagnoni, 1877, photostatic reprint, Como, 1971, p. 42.

¹¹ REGGIANI Flores, *Sotto le ali della colomba*, Rome, Viella, 2014, pp. 54-55.

ready to receive and assist women who went there to give birth: they were often pressed by doctors or midwives to offer their services as nurses for the many foundlings at the nearby orphanage, whether or not they intended to recognize their own child¹². This is connected to the question of health: the problems regarding the spread and transmission of diseases to and from the wet nurses, the most noted being what was known as “wet-nurse syphilis”¹³. There was also infanticide – the deliberate elimination of newborn babies who had been entrusted to wet nurses with the barely concealed intention of procuring their death. They were known as “killer nurses”, of whom there are traces in some episodes in late-18th-century England¹⁴, while it seems relatively rare in the places examined, or at least not so evident. In fact, deaths by asphyxia of suckling babies with wet nurses in the country – to be understood as nurses belonging to the peasant, farming world, who were much in request as they were part of an environment regarded as healthy, “*in quell’aree puro*”, brought up “*al desco frugale*”¹⁵ – were probably due to inattention, inexperience or the use of dangerous practices, such as the habit of swaddling small babies too tightly to limit their movements and thus having freedom for domestic tasks or farmwork. When chestnuts or grapes were being gathered, orchards tended or crops harvested, there was a risk of death by suffocation due to the nurse tying the infant to her in a sort of sack so as to have her hands free to carry out the

¹² On the hospitalization of maternity and childbirth, see the contributions of Gianna Pomata.

¹³ For health questions linked to the transmission and spread of syphilis, see POMATA Gianna, “Madri illegittime tra Ottocento e Novecento: storie cliniche e storie di vita”, *Quaderni Storici* 44, August 1980, pp. 497-542 and FASANA Rolando, *Bambini...*, pp. 62-66. The question of the transmission of diseases raises questions related to behaviours and sexual customs, which were indirectly connected to the social and person control over the lives of certain categories that certainly included paid wet nurses as well as prostitutes and women suspected of such or unseemly conduct.

¹⁴ MCKEOWN Thomas, *L'aumento della popolazione in età moderna*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1979.

¹⁵ *Negli istituti di beneficenza per poveri e dello Spedale Maggiore di Como. Memoria del fisico Antonio Della Porta*, P. Ostinelli, Como, 1802, p. 145.

various tasks, but thus sometimes bringing about a lack of oxygen and asphyxia¹⁶.

The geography of the enquiry

The area of enquiry in these pages is the same as that in my recent study on foundlings and the religious institutes where they were left, and with the same diachronic confines set out there¹⁷. This was the region including the city of Como and its province, particularly the territory adjacent to Lario, the border valleys, the farming villages in the rolling countryside between Como and Varese, and, for the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, southern Ticino in the 18th and 19th centuries.

For that reason, I shall draw again on the same interpretative strategy so as to analyze the phenomenon of wet-nursing in relation to the presence in those territories since the 15th century of two important charitable institutions, the *Luoghi Pii degli Esposti* in Como and Milan, also bearing in mind, for the more westerly area washed by Lake Verbano, the existence of the Hospital of Santa Maria Maggiore in Novara, which also welcomed foundlings.

And so, how and how much did these institutions determine, or rather encourage, potential wet nurses? Can we glimpse specific places where their presence was so much more evident as to suggest the existence of a special network, that it gave rise to a kind of breastfeeding industry that can be placed alongside the better-known and more studied examples? I refer, for example, to the French wet nurses of the region of Morvan, who were sent to Paris, or those from the Veneto

¹⁶ See DE MARCHI Elena, "Il mestiere di balia. Assistenza agli esposti, cura dei 'figli di famiglia', ricerca di un salario nella campagna milanese tra Sette e Ottocento", *Archivio Storico Lombardo* CXXXV, 2009, pp. 119-151 and DE MARCHI Elena, *Dai campi alle filande. Famiglia, matrimonio, lavoro nella 'pianura dell'Olona' (1750-1850)*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2009.

¹⁷ FASANA Rolando, *Bambini...*

mountains near Belluno and Feltre, who went as far as Vicenza and beyond¹⁸. In other words, did southern Ticino and the regions of the great pre-Alpine lakes, Verbano, Ceresio and Lario more generally, see significant numbers of wet-nurses or not? Are there any sources to be discovered that could enable us to develop a study of them – their origins, family structure, work dynamics – and try to bring out the many unknown wet nurses whose bodies served to nurture so many foundlings? In addition, in the light of any documentation of the wet nurse that we may discover, how are we to position her in the Alpine and pre-Alpine migrant communities in these territories? How widespread was wet-nursing and what relation was there between the communities themselves and this activity?

Was wet-nursing also, in part, a strategy for intergenerational control in those regions, or did it have no influence, other strategies being in force?¹⁹ On this last question, it is worth mentioning at once that on this topic the historian Raul Merzario emphasized that, according to some sources, it was customary in these territories to pass from breastfeeding to solid food quickly after birth, by administering bread and milk, and so “*se queste annotazioni fossero vere, avremmo una serie di nascite distanziate nel tempo per il fattore emigrazione degli uomini, ma contemporaneamente non si potrebbe godere del periodo di amenorrea da allattamento che teoricamente avvicinerrebbe la successione delle nascite. Un fattore condiziona l'altro e viceversa*”²⁰.

¹⁸ As underlined by Francine Rolley: “[...] *dans la seconde moitié du XIX^e siècle, lorsque Paris vint recruter dans le Morvan les nourrices que l'Île de France, la Bretagne et le Nord ne lui fournissaient plus en nombre suffisant. L'industrie nourricière se développa de manière extrêmement rapide, et les salaires élevés des nourrices permirent une transformation du pays qui retarda pendant quelques décennies l'exode rural*”: see “L'industrie nourricière et les transformations du Morvan dans la seconde moitié du XIX^e siècle”, in: VALSANGIACOMO Nelly, LORENZETTI Luigi (eds.), *Donne e lavoro. Prospettive per una storia delle montagne europee XVIII-XIX secc.*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2010, p. 225. See also PERCO Daniela, “Il latte prezioso”, *L'Alpe* 4, summer 2001, pp. 24-29.

¹⁹ On birth control strategies in the Alpine region of Italian Switzerland, see the thoughts and interpretations of Raul Merzario in his various contributions.

²⁰ MERZARIO Raul, “Famiglie di emigranti ticinesi (secoli XVII-XVIII)”, *Società e storia* LXXI, 1996, p. 46.

This is an interesting and necessary detail, requiring further study, as if breastfeeding was interrupted early in the Alpine territories with high levels of male emigration, the mothers with milk would have naturally been in a condition to offer themselves as wet nurses, at least until it dried up or their husbands' return allowed them to plan another pregnancy²¹. In addition, entering the market of wet nurses would have enabled them to supplement the family income while waiting for their husbands to return from their work far from the community. This is a subject that meets the question – raised at the outset – of how widespread wet-nursing was in the Alps and what relation there was with the complex phenomenon of emigration²².

Let us now look at what sources seem most promising in supplying information for studying the question of numbers and at the same time identifying the nurses and where they came from. For the more remote period – from the late 15th century – the foundation of the Hospital of Sant'Anna and the *Uniti Luoghi Pii* in Como are interesting: its records reveal specific traces of dry nurses and midwives. One example is the nurse Carolina from Uggiate, who was scolded by the Council of Deputies – the hospital's ruling body – for ill-treating the infant she had been given to feed²³. For the *Luogo Pio degli Esposti* at the Hospital of Sant'Anna, whose charitable work had included caring for foundlings as well as pilgrims and the chronically sick since the last quarter

²¹ Though it is still necessary to underline that in the light of the most recent scientific knowledge, there is no certain percentage of continuing post-natal amenorrhea and infertility as a result of breastfeeding, unless in specific conditions, and the Lactational Amenorrhea Method (LAM) is not considered a safe, infallible system of contraception. See, for example, https://www.salute.gov.it/imgs/C_17_pubblicazioni_2212_allegato.pdf.

²² On the logics of nuptiality and fertility in Alpine communities, see LORENZETTI Luigi, MERZARIO Raul, *Il Fuoco acceso*, Rome, Donzelli, 2005, particularly the chapter “Formare la famiglia, creare i destini”.

²³ On the case and the collection held in the State Archive of Como, DUBINI Marco, “La pratica della carità. L'ospedale S. Anna ed i suoi assistiti nei primi anni di attività dell'istituto (1485-1505)”, *Periodico della Società Storica Comense* XLIX, 1982, pp. 35-78.



Fig. 1: Dry collodion stereophotography (C. M. Ferrier, Paris, 1865). Partial view of Como with the Sant'Anna Hospital and the *Uniti Luoghi Pii*. Private collection Nodolibri, Como.

of the 15th century²⁴, the lack of nurses seemed a constant. From the outset these were found among the “*abitanti in città e nel contado, che – dietro compenso in denaro o generi alimentari – allevavano gli orfani dell’ospedale*”²⁵.

One of our sources is the reports of the so-called inspectors (*ricognitori*), who were charged by the Institute to comb the territory to check on the conditions of foundlings given to nurses for milk or fostering, and that the women involved were honouring the conditions accepted when they agreed to take care of a child. Though they were not so very numerous²⁶, an analysis of the documents containing the

²⁴ See DUBINI Marco, “La pratica della carità...”, p. 36: “*Pellegrini, Infermi, Languidi ed altre povere e miserabili persone e i bambini esposti... erano privilegiati dall’assistenza comasca*”.

²⁵ DUBINI Marco, “La pratica della carità...”, p. 40.

²⁶ The reports date from the 1790s and are in the collection Esposti in the Historical Archive of the Province of Como (ASPCo). Unfortunately, the

inspectors' detailed impressions throws light on some points. Leaving aside the infants already weaned, and thus entrusted to foster families from a more extensive area that included the mountains, we can reconstruct a small geographical map of the wet-nursing in the region of the lakes and learn something of the nurses themselves, partly through the details of their husband or father. To take a few examples that will clarify the spatial dynamics that intersect the city and the country: in 1792, the nurse Caterina Nosedà breastfed Giulia Maria at her home in the small village of Civiglio near the gates of Como, although the girl had been given to another nurse in Switzerland, at Novazzano to be precise; while Serafino was in neighbouring Stabio, fed by Caterina "*moglie di Gabriello Peracca detto il Loscia*". In the borderland with Varese, at Clivio, little Maria's wet nurse was "*Maddalena [moglie] di Giuseppe Monzini*"²⁷.

Particularly interesting is the research on alternative, or rather indirect, sources: those documents that were intended for a very clear and different enquiry but reveal very different and sometimes unexpected information. Here at least two typologies of sources should be mentioned.

The first is the collection *Parrocchia di Sant'Anna in Como, presso l'Ospedale Sant'Anna in Como*, the registers and loose papers constituting the archive of the parish of Sant'Anna, whose territory and care of souls were simply the hospital and the adjoining *luoghi pii* – including that for foundlings – in the city of Como. What made it unique was its being the seat of the parish – instituted by papal bull in the late 15th century – with the specific features of parishes, such as having a priest to administer the sacraments to the souls in care, in this case the resident staff and the sick, including infants. The notes in the parish registers of the sacraments performed – births, marriages and deaths – constitute an undoubted serial source.

information is decidedly scanty regarding age and other details that might fill in our picture of these women.

²⁷ ASPCo, Esposti, cart. 10857, years 1792, 1794.

In regard to wet nurses, examination of the death registers in the parish throws light on where these women came from and other details about them, as often in certifying the death of an abandoned baby who died outside the institute the priest would note the age, place of death and, in the case of babies still suckling, the name of the nurse it had been entrusted to, with an additional reference to the death certificate in the register of the parish where the child died.

Thus, in an early-19th-century book of those who died in the hospital²⁸, we find Marta who “*morì in Novazzano presso la nutrice Giuseppa Conconi in età di circa mesi sei*”, Maria who died in July 1816 “*ad Arzo presso la nutrice Teresa Rossi di mesi 2*”, a few days later Giuseppa “*di mesi 11 a Viganello presso la nutrice Chiarina Mosconi*” and Agostino “*di mesi quattro presso la nutrice Giannella Giovanna*”. Again, a month-old baby died in Schignano at the home of the wet nurse Marta Peduzzi and, still in Intelvi Valley, at San Fedele a little boy “*di mesi due*” died at the home of the wet nurse Maria Lanfranconi (both in 1818).

There are communities that recur various times, showing the simultaneous presence of some wet nurses: at Arzo in 1816, from the deceased infants we find traces of the nurses Teresa Rossi, Maria Rossi and Agostina Ferrari; at Castelnuovo, and in the countryside between Como and Varese, the wet nurses Teresa Casartelli and Annunciata Mistó. The surnames Rossi and Ferrari recall the families of migrant labourers – masons, stonecutters, hewers and diggers – for whom the village of Arzo was noted for centuries²⁹. Taking up what we have already hinted at, we may therefore conjecture that the wives of emigrants offered themselves as wet nurses with the aim of helping the family budget while their

²⁸ Historical Archive of the Diocese of Como (ASDCo), Parrocchia di Sant’Anna in Como, presso l’Ospedale Sant’Anna in Como, sez. I, serie IV, s. serie II, Morti dal 1816 al 1817.

²⁹ BULGARINI Federico, CASSANI Rosa, GALLI Beppe, TRAPLETTI Antonio, *Secoli di artisti*, Viggìù (VA), Parrocchia di Viggìù, 2004.

husbands were in distant building sites, as well as, possibly, with a view to family planning³⁰.

Sometimes, although rarely, the documents mentioned the nurse's husband name too: Pasquale Gennaro died in May 1816 "*in Casargo* [mountain village in Valsassina in the uplands of eastern Lario] *presso la nutrice Caterina Rusconi moglie di Carlo Antonio Muttoni, all'età di circa mesi 2 e giorni 10*", while at Olgiate, a farming community not far from Castelnuovo, a baby died at the home of the wet nurse "*Maddalena Braga moglie di Pasquale Monti*". The wet nurse seems a figure that bestrides the city and the rural, farming world – peasant society and urban communities.

It thus seems that serial study of the death registers of the Hospital of Sant'Anna in Como will lead to much information on the nurses scattered across much of the countryside and valleys of Lario and the villages of southern Ticino³¹. It seems equally noteworthy that, while in many sources the names of the nurses – as we have already indicated above – were omitted in favour of husband or father, when the baby died in the home of the wet nurse, there was no reticence in setting down their particulars. In my view, we are back with the subject of blame: for the wet nurse there were no extenuating circumstances or insufficient evidence. While for negotiations on payment she was excluded from decision-making and kept down by the authority of the male figure, she was in the front line when it came to responsibility for adequately nourishing the baby she had been entrusted with and keeping it alive. Indeed, "*la conduzione dell'allattamento – questo affare da uomini – comporta dei rischi di cui il padre fa generalmente ricadere la responsabilità alla balia. Raramente parla al plurale, alludendo alla coppia nutrice ritenuta corresponsabile, del modo in cui il bambino è stato*

³⁰ On the economic and social contribution of the paid wet nurses and migrant nurses, see <https://www.officinadellastoria.eu/it/2020/06/29/la-rappresentazione-iconografica-delle-balie-in-italia-secc-xix-xx/>.

³¹ The registers show that rural wet nurses were to be found from the lakeside villages of lakes Lario and Ceresio, towns in the rolling countryside between the cities of Como and Varese and lower Mendrisiotto, to the mountain communities of Valsassina, Valmasino, Valtellina, Colla Valley and Muggio Valley.

trattato e delle condizioni in cui glielo si è reso. È quasi sempre alla balia che si attribuisce il 'soffocamento' del lattante. [...] Anche se l'esito non è sempre così tragico, è per una mancanza della balia che il padre in genere giustifica la decisione di cambiarla"³².

There is more to be said on this: given the same typology of sources, which were from the Church, this collection also contains the registers for baptisms, which included those carried out in the hospital or, sometimes, in parishes of the diocese where the abandoned babies were brought. In the 19th century, practically all the certificates indicated the name and surname of the midwife who had been present at the birth and who, quite often, also had the authority to perform baptism with water alone, whenever there seemed imminent risk of death for the newborn child. They were known as the "*ostetriche approvate*", meaning they were recognized by the authorities as fit to help with a birth as they had followed a course of instruction at schools of obstetrics, which had become more and more widespread since the 18th century³³. As a result, these sources give a misleading dual opposition – death/life, wet nurse/midwife: once again the concept of blame, the baby's death depended on the wet nurse's malice, and her particulars were not concealed; birth, the miracle of life, in which the decisive contribution of the *levatrice* required proper celebration and recognition. In addition, it should be said that for a long time the wet nurse was also regarded as a somewhat ambiguous figure: someone whose morality was not exactly crystal-clear, was perhaps lecherous or in any case far from faultless as regards sexual continence or promiscuous behaviour.

³² KLAPISCH-ZUBER Christiane, "Genitori naturali...", p. 553.

³³ As previously mentioned, 18th-century medical science was gradually trying to remove the managing of childbirth from the female world of the women in the family, set it apart, made up of custom and neighbours, linked to atavistic convictions, and set it on course for the hospitalization of maternity in a world overturned, with the male doctor assisted by women trained in the new practices, midwives acquainted with scientific knowledge. See the studies of POMATA Gianna and CORTI Francesca, "Da balie a ginecologhe: l'evoluzione dell'apporto femminile nell'ospedale di S. Giovanni Battista a Bellinzona (secoli XVII-XX)", in: VALSANGIACOMO Nelly, LORENZETTI Luigi (eds.), *Donne e lavoro...*, pp. 205-224.

The second set of documents that show some traces of women who were wet nurses for a time are the papers produced by the *Luogo Pio dei Catecumeni*, founded in the city of Como at the end of the 17th century. This was a charitable institution, created to give material help to the poor who intended to abjure their faith in favour of the Catholic Church and so found themselves having to leave the community and suffer oppression or injustice as a result³⁴.

In the register containing notes on spending and information on benefactors and beneficiaries, there are many women who to varying degrees were helped by the work of this moral body. These included cases that reveal different possible circumstances that could lead to wet-nursing. In January 1762, for example, the *Pio Luogo* received a request for assistance from a young woman: “*Maria Elisabetta figlia di Conrado Longer de luogo de Apenzel nelli Svizeri d’età d’anni 30 circa, nubile*” reached Como pregnant, turning directly to the Institute and clearly indicating her intention to abjure her own faith for Catholicism, and receiving help to end her pregnancy in safety. She was thus “*mantenuta nella casa della levatrice Marianna nel Borgo di Vico e la figlia che ha partorito si è mandata all’ospitale e dopo è partita e non si sa per dove*”³⁵. Hence, she was not so much a wet nurse as a potential one: needing to complete a hidden pregnancy, the woman had travelled far from home, and, making use of the services provided by the institution, succeeded in giving birth, and by its intercession having the child accepted by the orphanage. The sudden departure of the mother without her daughter made Maria Elisabetta a candidate for paid breastfeeding.

As for the young women who offered to become wet nurses at the orphanage, there are some traces of them for the last quarter of the 19th century in the papers of the doctors of the hospital of Sant’Anna

³⁴ Over the centuries, the *Luogo Pio dei Catecumeni*’s history was intertwined in various ways with that of the Hospital of Sant’Anna in Como and the papers in ASDCo are particularly interesting: a large body of unpublished material worth further study.

³⁵ ASDCo, Parrocchia di Sant’Anna ..., sez. I, s. serie IV, reg. 1, Convertiti alla Fede dal 1862 al 1839 et ultra.

in Como, who examined the candidates. They were women who presented themselves, asking to be designated as wet nurses ready to feed abandoned babies. They were given clear guidelines regarding the physical suitability required for the task; “[...] è sana e ben fornita di latte ed idonea ad assumere le funzioni di nutrice interna”³⁶.

Research prospects

So far, research has identified the sources mentioned, which seem to respond well to the need to focus on the presence of wet nurses – not only quantitatively – in the pre-Alpine area of the Lombardy lakes and southern Ticino. However, with the aim of setting up a more in-depth study and wanting to tackle one of the topics presented in this essay – the phenomenon of paid wet nurses where there was a large-scale persistence of seasonal migrants – it would be desirable to define further research paths. Specifically, it seems necessary to identify some communities with significant migrant movement – for example, towns with significant movements of building workers – and in the light of the results emerging from these sources, explore the parish archives of the territories to discover the real presence of wet nurses and thus reconstruct, by studying the parish registers and records of births, marriages and deaths, the development of family groups and individual behaviours.

For the moment, let us focus on Intelvi Valley – the homeland of the *magistri intelvesi* – extending from the first lake of southern Lario to the co-terminal Muggio Valley in Italian Switzerland, precisely for its peculiarity of having long been the site of high emigration in building and allied trades, along with the adjacent Muggio Valley³⁷. In the foundation called *Parrocchia di Sant’Anna in Como, presso l’Ospedale Sant’Anna in Como*, already mentioned above, we note,

³⁶ ASPCo, Esposti, cart. 10857.

³⁷ Among the many publications on the subject, see CAVAROCCHI Franco, *Arte e artisti della Valle Intelvi*, S. Colombano al Lambro, Sanco, 1992.

for example, that in the 19th-century baptism records as many as ten foundlings were recorded between 1817 and 1822 in the territory of Schignano, situated at the south-western entrance to the valley. This fact is certainly interesting for a community of around one thousand souls³⁸, in which the many emigrant males were for centuries in the building trade as stonemasons, stonecutters, plasterers, sculptors and painters; from the late 19th century on, emigration was mainly to North America and the Vosges in France³⁹.

Some of these foundlings were given directly to the Hospice as illegitimate, their mothers' names being precisely recorded. Of them there are no further traces in the sources, but, very probably, they would have become part of the market in wet-nursing, directly at the orphanage, where there was a chronic shortage of them, or in the local community, close by or more far-flung. This is probably what happened, for example, to Antonia Peduzzi "*vedova del Militare Gian Maria Berini morto nella campagna di Russia, il padre della bambina non si sa*"⁴⁰. A similar fate no doubt awaited Maria Francesca Bereta, "*domiciliata in Schignano [...] moglie di Gaetano che trovansi in questo ospedale a motivo di malattia, partori il controscritto, quale essere spurio asserisce la madre stessa*"⁴¹.

When the infant was handed over to the orphanage directly, either by the mother herself or her delegate, she was liable for covering the costs of breastfeeding, unless she had a declaration of *miserabilità*, certified by the parish priest. These certifications included personal data and the explicit request to the governors of the Hospital:

“La Deputazione comunale di Stazzona [in the mountains of Alto Lario] li [invia] un figlio per nome Gusmeo di Eremita Bercini

³⁸ ASDCo, titolo I, s. serie I, b. 2/1, year 1797 and Miscellanea, b.4, f. 1, year 1807.

³⁹ GIOBBI ZANOTTA Cesara, *Schignano Intelvi*, Mariano Comense (CO), Grafica Mariano, 1964.

⁴⁰ ASDCo, Parrocchia di Sant'Anna ..., serie I, s. serie II, reg. 1, Nati dal 1816 al 1817.

⁴¹ ASDCo, Parrocchia di Sant'Anna ..., serie I, s. serie II reg. 2, Nati dal 1817 al 1820.

*figlia poverissima che inabile ad allevare detto figlio, dunque si prega la Compiacenza di questo onorevole ospitale che sia accettato, et allevato come che si unisce la fede rilasciata dal riverendo Parroco*⁴².

In any case, the medical board of the orphanage reluctantly asked the mother – if regarded as suitable, after careful examination – to become a wet nurse in the Hospice, but forbidding her to feed her own child to avoid partiality in administering milk in relation to the babies entrusted to her. Nevertheless, for the mothers of children “*di ignoto padre*”, and so illegitimate, there remained the taint of sin; it was no accident that in the rules for becoming nurses there was an explicit request for a certificate from the mayor of her own town indicating, among other things, “*la moralità della nutrice e della propria famiglia*”⁴³. We cannot be sure, but given the constant lack of sufficient wet-nurses for the ever-growing number of foundlings – specifically, for the 19th century, down to the last twenty years – we may presume that the governing body of the Hospice compensated properly for these services so as to guarantee the survival of the infants.

⁴² ASPCo, Esposti, cart. 47, fasc. 238, year 1854. The declarations of poverty together with the request to temporarily house infants to be breastfed and cared for also came to help the children of legitimate couples in a serious state of destitution: “*Bianchi Maria Teresa [...] stata in questo ospedale ricoverata attesa la miserabilità comprovata di detti genitori, per non aver la puerpera sufficiente latte per alimentarla, e perché il padre è infermo*”; “*Bianchi Maria Luigia di sesso femmineo nata in Colico figlia del fu Giacomo Piva, che per l'estrema miseria s'affogò nel lago, [...], questa figlia si ritiene in questo ospedale provvisoriamente*”; see ASDCo, collection *Parrocchia di Sant'Anna...*, serie I, s. serie II, reg. 1, Nati dal 1816 al 1817”.

⁴³ Provincial Hospice for Foundlings in Como, *Libretto di scorta degli esposti appartenenti all'Ospizio provinciale di Como*, Como, C.P. Ostinelli, 1882.

Abstract

Par une approche microhistorique, et sur la base d'un corpus de sources composites, cette contribution vise à reconstituer le vécu, les réseaux et les modalités de travail (auprès des hôpitaux et chez les privés) des nourrices actives entre le XVIII^e et le XIX^e siècle dans les territoires de l'ancienne province de Côme et les régions méridionales de la Suisse italienne. L'étude systématique des documents a permis d'esquisser des portraits de ces femmes, à la merci des vicissitudes personnelles, des impositions masculines et des exigences sociales.



EX VOTO.
1714.

Madline Favre

What Sources Can We Use to Document Women's Role in Health Practices in the Alpine Context? The Case of Valais in the 18th and 19th Centuries

Introduction

The history of the links between women and health has evolved considerably over the last two decades. We have gone from a consensus that women's role in medicine was marginalized during the modern era to the discovery, through new sources and methods, that women had a very real presence on the healthcare scene¹.

In this new writing of the history of women and their role in the field of health, we are faced with two problems, as identified by the historian Fissell. One is that women's work in health was under-documented compared to men's, despite the reality of their activity. The other is that academia continues to valorize certain boundaries between practitioner types even though these were irrelevant in the

¹ STROCCHIA Sharon, "Introduction: Women and Healthcare in Early Modern Europe", *Renaissance Studies* 28, 2014, p. 496.

modern era². In an attempt to overcome these problems, a number of recent studies on women and health have been innovative in their mobilization of new sources and methodological approaches. However, these studies have often been focused on cities and urban elite families³.

In this paper, I will look at the Alpine environment of the canton of Valais⁴ and its particular geographical space, that is, the Rhône plain (from its source to Lake Geneva) and surrounding Alpine valleys. Taking into account women from working-class and rural backgrounds as much as possible, I will show the types of sources and methods that give us access to the health practices of women in this environment. I will present the initial results of an analysis of two sources of information rarely mobilized in research, namely iconography, or more specifically ex-votos, and genealogies. These results reveal the specificities of the Alpine space in relation to the roles of the sexes in health and also the multidimensionality of this space in terms of the differentiated practices on the plain and in the mountains.

The paper is split into two parts. The first focuses on the role of women in their family's health, and the second, on their level of involvement in societal healthcare more broadly.

² FISSELL Mary E., "Introduction: Women, Health, and Healing in Early Modern Europe", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 82, 2008, p. 5.

³ See, in particular, KINZELBACH Annemarie, "Women and Healthcare in Early Modern German Towns", *Renaissance Studies* 28, 2014, pp. 496-514; STEVENS CRAWSHAW Jane, "Families, Medical Secrets and Public Health in Early Modern Venice", *Renaissance Studies* 28, 2014, pp. 597-618.

⁴ For information on the situation in Valais in the 18th to 19th centuries, see: FAYARD DUCHÊNE Janine, "L'État patricien (xvi^e-xviii^e siècle)", in: *Histoire du Valais*, Sion, SHVR Société d'Histoire du Valais Romand, 2001, vol. 2, pp. 337-435; PAPILOUD Jean-Henry, "Le creuset révolutionnaire", in: *Histoire du Valais*, Sion, SHVR Société d'Histoire du Valais Romand, 2001, vol. 3, pp. 445-503 and GUZZI-HEEB Sandro, *Passions alpines. Sexualité et pouvoirs dans les montagnes suisses (1700-1900)*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014.

Within the family

According to Cavallo and Strocchia, the emergence in the last decade of the “domestic turn” in the history of medicine, which has shifted researchers’ attention away from professional institutions and structures to domestic medical activities and the role of “laywomen”⁵, has contributed to finally giving women the recognition they deserve in health practices⁶. Despite an absence of official sources to draw on (censuses, contracts, registers, etc.), this work has identified the home as a significant site of medical activity and considered laywomen as real medical agents⁷. However, the focus has generally been on England⁸, Germany and, to a lesser extent, Italy and Spain.

In the French-speaking context, the main source mobilized in research on women and health has been egodocuments⁹. Because access to these documents is often dependent on the family’s sociocultural level and capacity to preserve them, the practices of well-to-do women

⁵ In other words, “non-physicians”.

⁶ CAVALLO Sandra, “The Domestic Culture of Health”, in: EIBACH Joachim, LANZINGER Margaret (eds.), *The Routledge History of the Domestic Sphere in Europe 16th to 19th Centuries*, London, Routledge, 2020, p. 455; STROCCHIA Sharon, “Introduction: Women and healthcare ...”, pp. 498-502.

⁷ CAVALLO Sandra, “The Domestic Culture of Health...”, p. 455.

⁸ See the work of Elaine Leong, in particular: LEONG Elaine, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge: Medicine, Science, and the Household in Early Modern England*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2018.

⁹ HANAFI Nahema, *Le frisson et le baume. Expériences féminines du corps au Siècle des lumières*, Rennes; Paris, Presses universitaires de Rennes; Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2017; HANAFI Nahema, “Formules domestiques: pratiques genrées de la compilation de recettes médicinales (fin XVII^e siècle – début XIX^e siècle)”, in: RIEDER Philip, ZANETTI François (eds.), *Materia medica: savoirs et usages des médicaments aux époques médiévales et modernes*, Geneva, Librairie Droz, 2018, pp. 146-160; CHOLLET Mathilde, “Les remèdes thérapeutique de Mme de Marans, un syncrétisme entre savoirs savants et traditionnels au XVIII^e siècle”, *TraverSCE* 13, 2013, pp. 64-75; on French-speaking Switzerland, see, in particular, MORET PETRINI Sylvie, *L'enfance sous la plume. La diffusion de l'écriture éducative en Suisse romande, 1750-1820*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2022, including chapter 18, which examines the role of mothers in childcare; on German-speaking Switzerland, see PILLER Gudrun, *Private Körper: Spuren des Leibes in Selbstzeugnissen des 18. Jahrhunderts*, PhD thesis, Cologne, Böhlau Verlag, 2006.

in large urban centres have been the principal research object. Women from the more modest strata of the population tend not to have left such documents behind and so have been largely neglected.

There is no doubt that egodocuments are a key source when it comes to identifying the role of women in healthcare within the family, and a study of those available in Valais is quite feasible¹⁰. In this paper, I will use them mainly to compare the research conducted in other environments with the situation in Valais in order to uncover any Alpine specificities. Hanafi notably exploited collections of medicinal recipes and *livres de raison*¹¹ in the French context to dispel the myth that these were old wives' remedies. She revealed that it was often in fact men who compiled these recipes, demonstrating that healthcare within the family was a shared responsibility¹². This is also evidenced in the Valais context, because the majority of the medicinal recipe collections contained in the various archives were compiled by men.

Cavallo also examined this question of gender and domestic medical knowledge. Although recent studies in France and England have shown a non-gender-specific distribution, in other words they have found that the manuscripts were generally written by both the mother and the father or by the whole family, it is nevertheless thought that men took a more intellectual interest in the medical issues of their time while women dealt with the more practical side of everyday family healthcare, for example by giving medical advice or reminding their family to maintain a healthy lifestyle¹³.

Men were the keepers of the recipes and prescriptions that they carefully wrote down as managers of the family records, and women acted as the intermediaries between this knowledge and their family's

¹⁰ See, in particular, the work of Jasmina Cornut. On the question of Valais sources more specifically, see CORNUT Jasmina, "La vie quotidienne des femmes du patriciat valaisan. Etude des écrits du for privé", *Annales Valaisannes*, 2017, pp. 30-53.

¹¹ A *livre de raison* was a book generally kept by the head of the family containing the household accounts and the family members' births, baptisms, marriages, deaths, illnesses and so on.

¹² HANAFI Nahema, "Formules domestiques ...".

¹³ CAVALLO Sandra, "The Domestic Culture of Health ...", pp. 464-465.

health needs. This role of women is very clearly revealed in correspondence. For example, the letters exchanged between one Valais woman, Marie-Julienne de Nucé de Rivaz, and two successive doctors over a period of more than thirty years reveals that the doctors' prescriptions and advice all went through her¹⁴.

In addition to acting as the link between family and doctor, women also sought practical solutions to their family's ailments through their own networks, as shown in the following extract from a letter from a certain Monsieur Du Fay to Major Kuntschen:

*“Monsieur
Madame votre épouse est venue avant hier au soir chez moi pour me prier de faire faire chez l'apothicaire de l'opiate que je faisais usage il y a deux trois ans lorsque j'avais le cour du ventre; cette opiate m'ayant retablis; madame votre épouse pense qu'elle arretera l'empire de votre judisposition.”*¹⁵

Epistolary and private sources outside the collections of the patrician families also provide some information on women who did not belong to the socio-economically advantaged strata. The writings of two botany experts examined during my research on botanists in Valais¹⁶ offer glimpses of the role of women in the cultivation of medicinal plants. One such expert was the parish priest Jean-Maurice Clément, who drew up an inventory of useful plants that he wanted to grow in the region. He wrote:

“La digitale pourprée, (Digitalis purpurea) que j'ai vû, in viâ, entre Vouvry et Port Vallais, et même en 1781, dans l'enclos des

¹⁴ AEV, Rivaz, Rz box 51/11 Doctor Michel Cocatry 1764-1773, Rz box 51/12 Doctor Michel Cocatry 1774-1784 and Rz box 51/10 Doctor Gerard Payerne 1784-1791.

¹⁵ Letter from Monsieur Du Fay to Major Kuntschen, 12 September 1801, CH AEV, Charles Allet, P 294. Translation: “Sir, Your lady wife came to my house the day before yesterday to ask if I might have the same opiate made up by the apothecary that I used two or three years ago when I had a stomach ache, since this opiate restored me to health. Your lady wife thinks it will prevent your condition from worsening.”

¹⁶ FAVRE Madline, “Réseaux, pratiques et motivations des acteurs locaux de la recherche botanique en milieu alpin. Le cas du Valais entre 1750 et 1810”, *Histoire des Alpes* 26, 2021, pp. 33-49.

[...] *Relig. de Collombay, et que je me propose d'introduire ici, avec quelques autres, est estimée dans l'hydropisie, propriété qui est attestée par des médecins allemands et anglais.*¹⁷

Indeed, Clément wrote on a number of occasions about the plants grown by the Collombay nuns, even though these women in no way assumed the role of hospitallers and nothing in their *livre de maison*¹⁸ indicates that they dispensed remedies. The second botany expert was a doctor called Jean-Baptiste Claret, who wrote that “*certaines femmes les cultivent dans les jardins*” in reference to a particular plant he was describing in a letter to the famous Albrecht von Haller¹⁹. It therefore seems to be the case that the garden and thus the production of medicinal plants for the home was generally managed by women.

While egodocuments can therefore shed some light on the very practical role that women played in healthcare, whether as intermediaries between a learned medical culture and their family or in the production of medicinal plants, this information mainly only applies to women of the elite, most of whom lived on the Valais plain. They provide no clues as to the potential specificity of the mountain regions. In order to uncover the family health practices of this other sector of Valais women, we must look to a different source type and approach.

A new way of studying healing in history has been developed in recent years that moves away from the usual limitations associated with the use of the word “medicine” by mobilizing the broader category of “bodywork”. This category encompasses all actions related

¹⁷ AEV, Jean-Maurice Clément, Ms. Cl. 70, f. 75. Translation: “The purple foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) that I have seen on the road between Vouvry and Port-Valais and even in the enclosure of the [...] Relig. de Collombay in 1781, which I propose to introduce here along with a few others, is considered to have a property that is effective in the treatment of dropsy, as attested by both German and English physicians.”

¹⁸ The *livre de maison* here was a book compiled by the nuns over time containing their house rules, order statutes and an account of their history.

¹⁹ Letter from Jean-Baptiste Claret to Albrecht von Haller, 3 September 1764, *Editions- und Forschungsplattform hallerNet*, <https://hallernet.org/data/letter/01102>, accessed 01.02.2022. Translation: “some women cultivate them in their gardens”.

to healthcare²⁰ and allows us to consider new health practices as an integral part of the healing system. We can thus incorporate care practices administered at the bedside of the sick or the deceased into our research by including the people who looked after these people as actors in this system. This type of care work was often too mundane and insignificant to make its way into written documents and therefore generally passes under the historian's radar. However, because these care tasks were usually assumed by women, this gap in our knowledge reinforces a biased vision of gender in the history of medicine²¹.

In an attempt to fill this gap, I propose here to exploit a particular iconographic source that represented women as much as men and that was relevant to all sociocultural backgrounds and geographical areas in the canton of Valais.

Ex-votos – an abbreviation of the Latin expression *ex-voto suscepto* – were gifts offered by the faithful to a celestial figure in thanks either for his protection or for a granted wish²². They could take several forms, including a significant object that was no longer of use because the wish had been granted (e.g. crutches), an object representing the wish granted (e.g. a small sculpture of the healed body part) or a votive painting depicting the wish granted. These votive paintings, which first appeared in Valais in the 17th century²³, provide us with considerable information not just on the religious practices of this population but on their daily life, costumes, house interiors and relationship to health. Indeed, most of these paintings were given in thanks for the granting of a wish that was linked to an illness, injury or difficult birth.

²⁰ Mary Fissell and Kathy Brown both used the word “bodywork”, which interconnects with the expressions “techniques of the body”, coined by Maria Montserrat Cabré and Monica Green, and “artisans of the body”, which appears in the work of Sandra Cavallo. For specific references to these studies, see FISSELL Mary E., “Introduction: Women, Health, and Healing...”, p. 10.

²¹ FISSELL Mary E., “Introduction: Women, Health, and Healing ...”, p. 11.

²² COUSIN Bernard, *Le regard tourné vers le ciel. Ex-voto peints de Provence*, Aix-en-Provence, Presses universitaires de Provence, 2017, p. 7.

²³ WYDER Bernard, ANDEREGG Klaus (eds.), *Ex-voto du Valais = Walliser Votivbilder: exposition, Manoir de Martigny du 24 juin au 16 septembre 1973*, Martigny, 1973.

In the 1940s, the Société Suisse des Traditions Populaires compiled an index of all the ex-votos in Switzerland by canton²⁴. There are 1,057 entries in all for Valais, including 870 paintings, which allows us to extract quantitative information from these sources. Following Cousin, who analysed the ex-votos of Provence²⁵, I created a database containing the 870 paintings and coded the different information they provided. The results showed that these representations were very stereotyped. They almost invariably took the form of a heavenly top half depicting the intercessor in question (the Virgin, a saint, the Trinity, etc.) and an earthly bottom half depicting the petitioner(s) and clues as to their entreaty (e.g. a sick person represented in a bed, a person injuring themselves, etc.). A quantitative analysis of these recurring designs in the paintings revealed the number of men and women petitioners, the popularity of the intercessors and the different scenarios presented. Of these 870 paintings, 350 were directly linked to a health problem (illness, infirmity or difficult birth)²⁶, which enabled me to investigate health practices linked to the intercession of celestial beings in some detail. The great advantage of these paintings was that they pertained to all strata of the population. While the elite may have introduced this votive practice in the 17th century, it quickly spread throughout society and continued until the end of the 19th century.

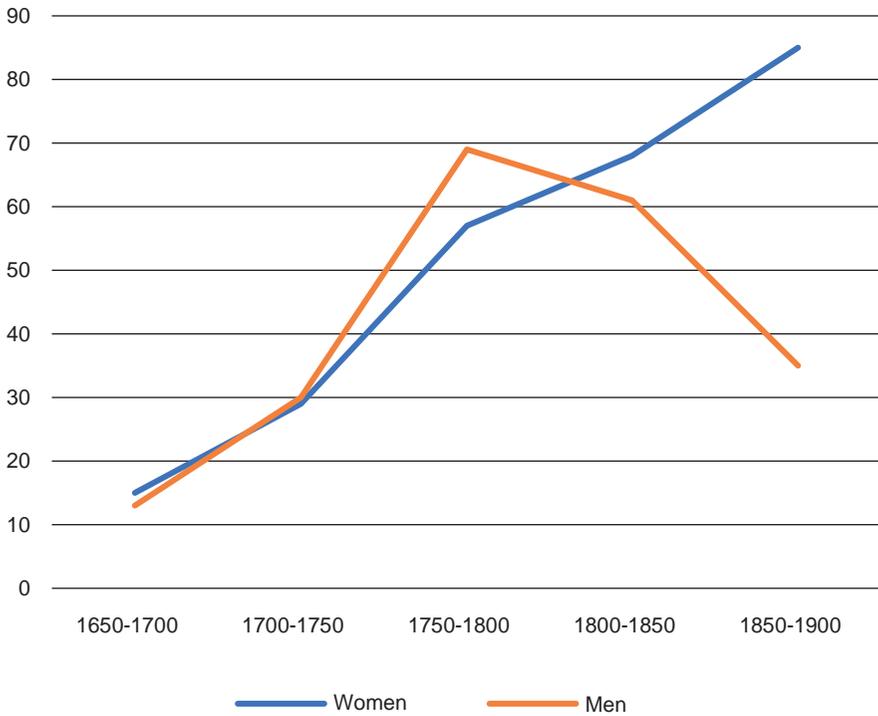
A comparison by 50-year chronological period from 1650 to 1900 of the number of men and women giving ex-votos (Fig. 1) reveals that the initial male predominance switched to a female predominance from the beginning of the 19th century onwards. This finding corresponds to the feminization of the religion phenomenon theorised in a number of studies²⁷.

²⁴ ANDEREGG Klaus, "La redécouverte des ex-voto. Un chapitre mouvementé de l'histoire de l'ethnologie", in: CREUX René (ed.), *Les ex-voto racontent*, Paudex, Editions de Fontainemore, 1979, p. 215.

²⁵ COUSIN Bernard, *Le regard tourné vers le ciel...*

²⁶ I decided not to include scenes depicting accidents that did not clearly show the injury (such as falls, work accidents, avalanches and drowning). Only paintings showing the unfortunate consequences of accidents were therefore included.

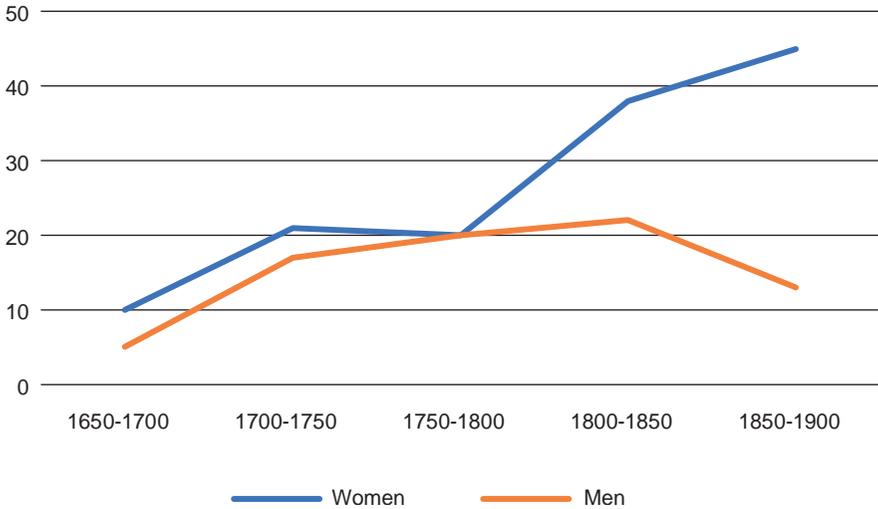
²⁷ See, in particular, LANGLOIS Claude, "Féminisation du catholicisme", in: LE GOFF Jacques, RÉMOND René (eds.), *Histoire de la France religieuse*, Paris, Le Seuil,

Fig. 1: Number of men and women giving ex-votos

A comparison according to gender solely of the ex-votos that thematized situations linked to health (Fig. 2) shows a constant female predominance throughout this period, with a marked increase from the beginning of the 19th century onwards. It is possible that this corresponds to the gendered separation of the spheres, with women

1991, pp. 292-307; and, more recently, VAN OSSELAER Tine, BUERMAN Thomas, "Feminization Thesis: A Survey of International Historiography and Probing of Belgian Grounds", *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 103, 2008, pp. 497-544; PASTURE Patrick, "Beyond the Feminization Thesis: Gendering the History of Christianity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", in: PASTURE Patrick *et alii* (eds.), *Gender and Christianity in Modern Europe*, Leuven, Leuven university Press, 2012 (Kadoc-Studies on Religion, Culture and Society 10), pp. 7-33.

Fig. 2: Number of men and women giving health-related ex-votos

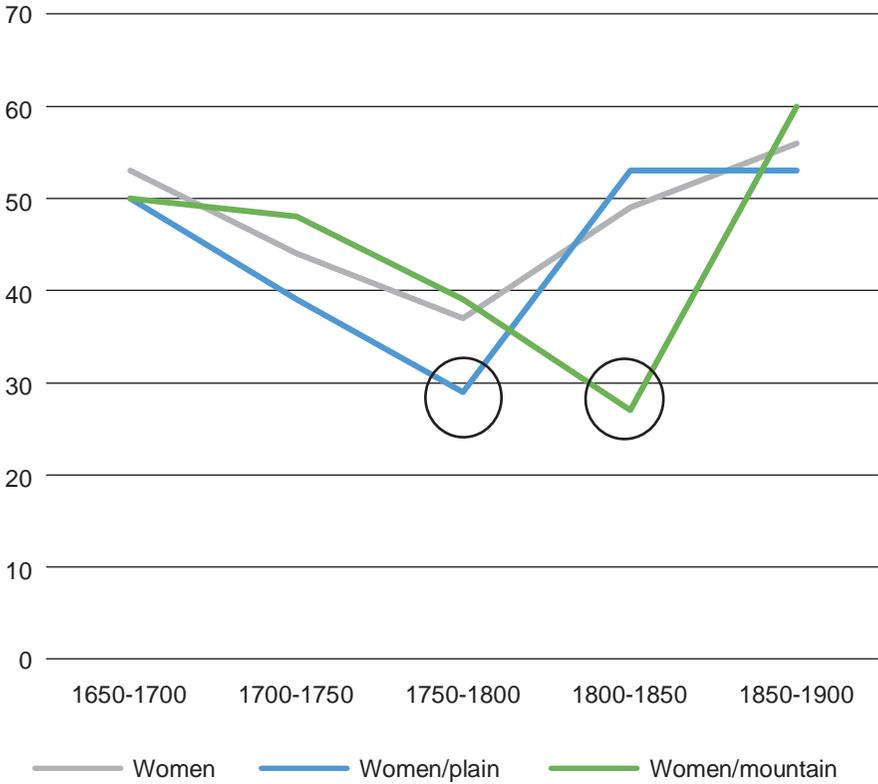


beginning to concentrate more on domestic tasks, including the family's education and health, around this time²⁸.

I allocated the places where these paintings were deposited (in other words the various churches) to one of two categories (plain and mountain) according to their altitude, isolation and ease of access from the plain²⁹. The analysis revealed differences between these two geographical areas (Fig. 3 and 4).

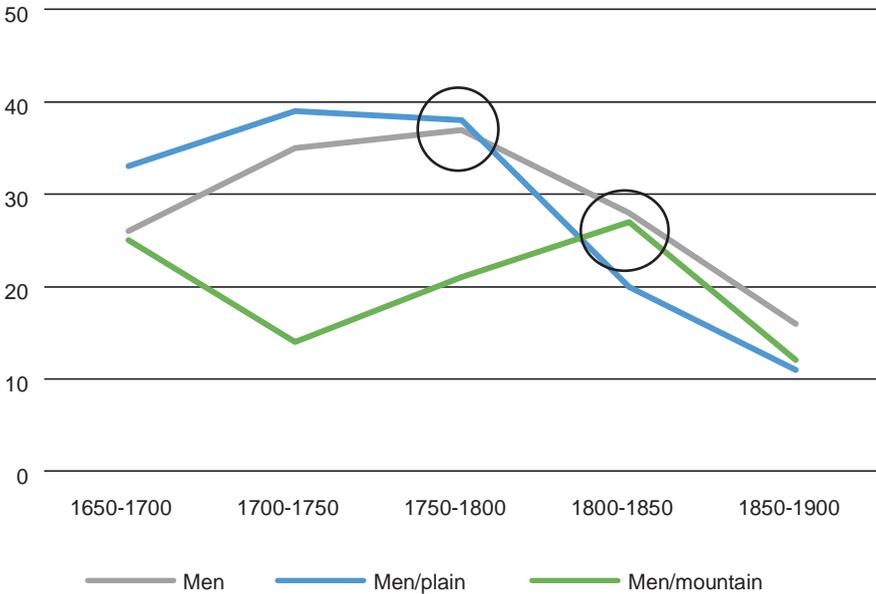
²⁸ Although more detailed studies, particularly on Valais, tend to qualify this assertion. See GUZZI-HEEB Sandro, "Mère aimée, mère domestiquée? Mères valaisannes du XVIII^e siècle et leurs fonctions sociales", in: *La Madre – The Mother*, Florence, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2009, pp. 437-462; CORNUT Jasmina, "La vie quotidienne des femmes du patriciat valaisan...".

²⁹ For example, Longeborgne, which is situated above Bramois, and the Chapelle du Scex, situated above Saint-Maurice, were very popular with people living on the plain, so they were included in the "plain" category despite their altitude.

Fig. 3: Difference between plain and mountain for women

There was a clear time lag of approximately fifty years between the sharp increases in the two female representations and the sharp decreases in the two male representations according to geographical environment. This change in societal paradigm therefore emerged later at high altitude than it did on the plain. Given that the Valais elite (the large patrician families) tended to live on the plain, might the women of these families have been the first adopters of the religious feminization and domestication “fashions” before these then surfaced in the subsequent generations of their less well-off neighbours living at higher altitudes?

Fig. 4: Difference between plain and mountain for men



Cousin compared several Mediterranean regions with the Alps region (including Tyrol, southern Germany and Valais) and found major differences between the two geographical areas³⁰. One was a gender-based dimorphism in the ex-votos, which seemed to be much less marked in the Alps than elsewhere in the Mediterranean, suggesting a link between altitude and the distribution of tasks between men and women. This theory is supported by the results presented in the two graphs, which indicate that gender parity lasted longer at altitude than on the plain, even though the Alpine plain was still less split at this point than other Mediterranean areas.

The results of these analyses therefore show that women had a greater involvement in health practices within the household from

³⁰ COUSIN Bernard, *Le miracle et le quotidien. Les ex-voto provençaux images d'une société*, Aix-en-Provence, Sociétés, Mentalités, Cultures, Centre Méridional d'Histoire, 1983, pp. 291-293.

the 18th century onwards. In particular, they reveal both an Alpine specificity, namely that the gender-based dimorphism evidenced in the representations was less marked in the Alps than elsewhere, and a time lag between the plain and the mountains within the same region.

Within society

So, what about women's place in the public sphere, away from the informal setting of the home? As already mentioned, women's roles have often been underestimated in the literature because researchers have generally tended to focus on professional statuses and therefore drawn on administrative sources, which contain very few references to women³¹. It is therefore essential to mobilize other types of sources and approaches in order to qualify this highly restrictive view of the role of women in health practices.

First, I will set out, for the case of Valais, what information these sources can offer in terms of women's role in connection with health-care and what conclusions we can draw. Second, with a view to overcoming this documentary obstacle, I will mobilize a new approach, namely genealogy, to identify any possible female fields of action.

Usually, when we examine women's roles in health, the two most visible groups are midwives and hospital workers³², and the Valais case is no exception.

Thanks to Vouilloz Burnier's work, we know that midwifery training in Valais began in 1804 at the instigation of Doctor Joseph-Emmanuel Gay³³, and there is evidence that nuns provided midwifery services in hospitals. We also know that, in the second half of the 18th century, the director of Sion Hospital decided to introduce nuns to care for the

³¹ FISSELL Mary E., "Introduction: Women, Health, and Healing...", p. 1.

³² KINZELBACH Annemarie, "Women and healthcare...", p. 620.

³³ VOUILLOZ BURNIER Marie-France, BARRAS Vincent, *De l'hospice au réseau santé: santé publique et systèmes hospitaliers valaisans, XIX^e-XX^e siècles*, Sierre, Monographic, 2004, p. 31.

sick, and so he sent a young Valais woman, Barbe Anthamatten, to be trained by the nuns of Sainte-Marthe in Pontarlier. On her return to Sion, Anthamatten established a small religious community, which was later exported to Fribourg and Martigny³⁴.

Public health was not accorded any real importance in Valais until Switzerland came under the French protectorate in the early 19th century, which saw the development of effective policies to combat cretinism and goitre and the introduction of strict controls for doctors and other health practitioners. This movement was initiated by French residents and strongly supported by European-trained Swiss doctors, who were keen to see the situation in Valais improve³⁵. The majority of administrative sources relating to healthcare therefore only began to appear in the 19th century.

This was notably the case with the sources drawn from the health regulator's archives, which contain a small number of women's requests for authorization to practice. One such application was made in 1820 by Thérèse de Riedmatten from de Conches Valley, who asked to be allowed to continue treating her patients³⁶. Another was submitted in 1830 by a woman calling herself "*la femme de l'aveugle Debon de Savièse*", who wished to continue selling her own remedies³⁷. In the family archives, we find a third healer, Jeanne-Marie Dayer of Hérémente, who was practising more towards the end of the 19th century. While these three cases do not provide us with a great deal of information, it is important to note that all three women came from high-altitude villages³⁸. Moreover, we know that each Alpine valley

³⁴ CRETAAZ Sulpice, "L'Hôpital de Sion", *Annales Valaisannes*, 1949, p. 165.

³⁵ On the health situation in Valais in the early 19th century, see the first few chapters of VOUILLOZ BURNIER Marie-France, *L'accouchement entre tradition et modernité. Naître au XIX^e siècle*, Sierre, Monographic, 1995.

³⁶ AEV, DI, 175.4.2, Illegal practice of medicine: quacks, healers, etc.: Thérèse de Riedmatten, 1820.

³⁷ AEV, DI, 175.5.1, Sale of drugs and poisons. Fishing for leeches: Wife of the blind man of Savièse, 1830. Translation: "the wife of Debon, the blind man of Savièse".

³⁸ Savièse sits at an altitude of 820 m, Hérémente at 1237 m and Conches Valley is the highest of all the Valais valleys.

in the canton had its own regular family of healers³⁹. These practices therefore seem to be intrinsically linked to altitude, which fits with the “*le médecin des Alpes*” nickname given to the famous 18th-century Swiss healer Michel Schuppäch⁴⁰.

This quick tour of the information on women's place in health practices as provided by the administrative sources thus reveals that while practices on the plain were quite regulated and formalized with regard to midwifery training and the nuns' work in the hospitals, the practices in the mountains seem to have been more irregular and sometimes even illegal, as in the case of the three healers mentioned above. These administrative sources therefore suggest the hypothesis that the official status and formality of health practices decreased as altitude increased.

In addition, these administrative sources are only really available from the beginning of the 19th century onwards, but we know that women were involved in care tasks long before that. A change of approach is therefore needed if we are to examine this earlier involvement.

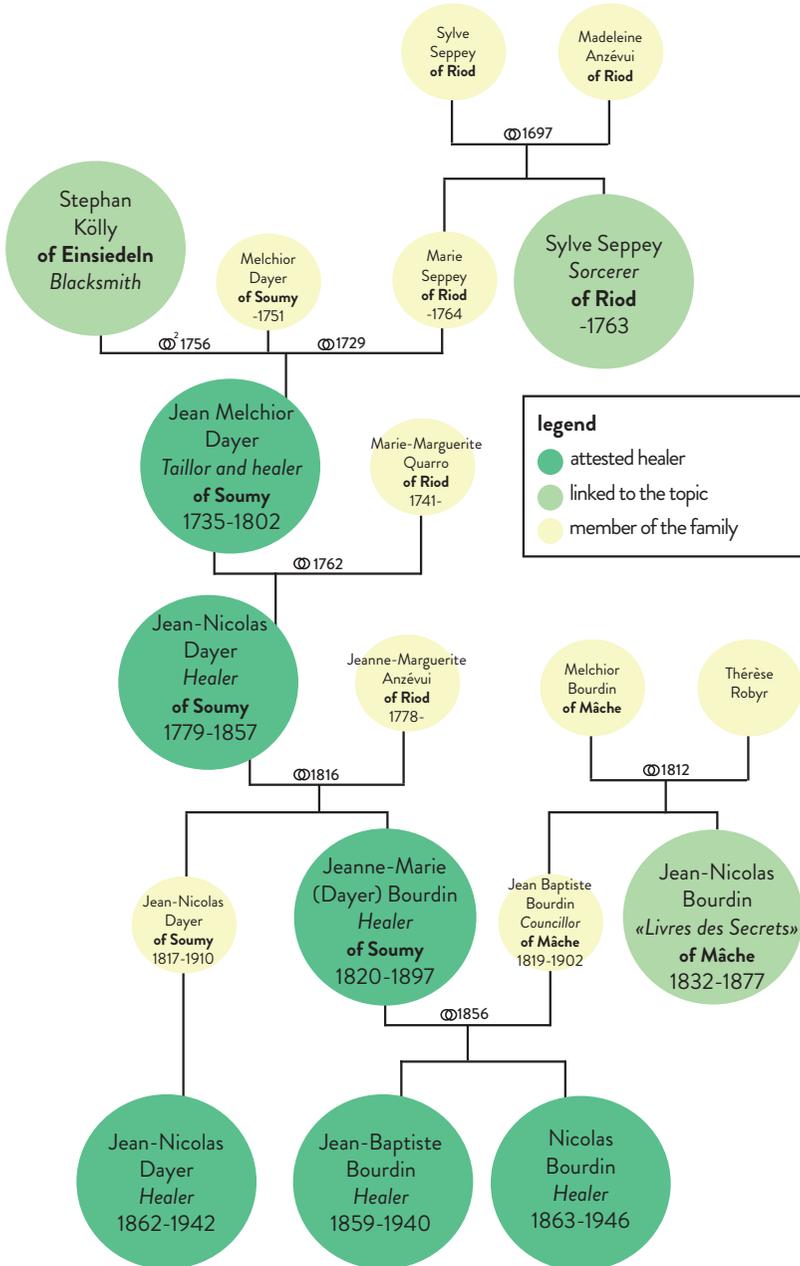
Over the past decade, the study of familial involvement in public health practices has finally enabled researchers to show the contribution made by women to this domain while also challenging the major distinctions frequently drawn between “women's domestic medicine” and “men's official medicine”⁴¹. I therefore mobilized this approach to identify women's involvement in public health in the Alpine environment through an analysis of the genealogical data of Jeanne-Marie Dayer, one of the three women healers identified in Valais in the 19th century. The marriage strategies over five

³⁹ BERTRAND Jules-Bernard, “Notes sur la santé publique et la médecine en Valais jusqu'au milieu du XIX^e siècle”, *Annales valaisannes* 3, 1939, p. 654.

⁴⁰ BOSCHUNG Urs, “Schüppach, Michel”, in: *Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse*, 23.10. 2012 version (translated from German). Online: <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/014634/2012-10-23/>, accessed 18.02.2022. Translation: “the Alps doctor”.

⁴¹ STEVENS CRAWSHAW Jane, “Families, medical secrets and public health...”, p. 599.

Fig. 5: Genealogy of the healer Jeanne-Marie Dayer (1820-1897)



generations of healers in this woman's ancestry reveal that certain kinship groups were apparently known for their botanical expertise and were specifically targeted for marriage. This finding allows us to put forward the hypothesis that there was a genuine field of action for women in health practices despite the fact that this is not visible in the written sources.

It is clear that Jeanne-Marie's father, Jean-Nicolas Dayer, was himself a healer, because several of his manuscripts contain recipes for remedies copied down from Matthiolus's well-known work⁴² as well as summaries of his own interventions and the remunerations he received⁴³. Jean-Nicolas Dayer's father, Jean Melchior Dayer, can also be described as a healer, because his profession is listed as "*Tailleur et Rhabilleur*"⁴⁴ in the 1802 census⁴⁵. If we go back a generation further, however, to Melchior Dayer, we find no evidence of any health practices.

The ethnologist Schüle also studied the Dayer family in the 1970s. Drawing on the oral traditions she collected, she proposed that the origin of this line of healers could be traced back to two potential ancestors. One was called Stephan and was of German origin. After various adventures, including once being held captive by Turks, he arrived in Hérémente, reportedly armed with a number of medical books, to work as a blacksmith. The other was a man called François Dayer, who was said to have returned to the region around 1720 with a small library after completing his military service in Spain⁴⁶. The common element in these two possible ancestral lines as suggested by the oral traditions is, of course, the supply of medical books, which

⁴² *Les commentaires de M.P. André Matthiolus, médecin Senois, sur les six livres de Pedacius Dioscoride Anazarbéen de la matière medicinale*, Lyon, 1619.

⁴³ In all, five manuscripts are preserved at the AEV under classification AVL, pp. 453-457.

⁴⁴ That is Tailor and healer. A *rhabilleur* was a healer specialized in the treatment of fractures, sprains and dislocations.

⁴⁵ Population census of 1802 for Hérémente, CH AEV, 3090-1, 1802, Hérémente.

⁴⁶ SCHÜLE Rose-Claire, "Les guérisseurs d'Hérémente (Valais)", *Gesnerus* 32, 1975, p. 174.

could have been the foundation for this line of lay healers. This finding incidentally corresponds to the vernacularization of medicine in the modern period, which saw the publication of medical books in the vernacular in small format (and hence cheap to produce and purchase) explicitly aimed at a lay audience⁴⁷. Through the research conducted more recently by the genealogist Hervé Mayoraz⁴⁸, we now know that Jeanne-Marie's great-grandfather, Melchior Dayer, died in 1751 and that his wife, Marie Seppey, remarried a certain Stephan Kölly of Einsiedeln in 1756, who worked as a blacksmith after settling in Hérémente. We can therefore trace this lineage back to the probable arrival of medical books with this second husband.

It is interesting to note that on two occasions in Jeanne-Marie's genealogy, the Dayers married women with a connection to witchcraft. Melchior Dayer married Marie Seppey, sister of the famous Sylve Seppey, who was well known at the time for his skills as a witch hunter and who was allegedly able to control animals from a distance⁴⁹, and Colin Dayer married a woman from the neighbouring valley (Bagnes Valley) in 1645 called Jeanne Perrodin, who was forced to flee her village because of accusations of witchcraft. Interestingly, the dialect name of the inhabitants of the Hérémente hamlet of Ayer, which is where the Dayer family name comes from, is *Lè Chorchiët*, meaning the sorcerers. The Dayer family was therefore already linked to people known for their esoteric practices even before the arrival of the medical books in the mid-18th century and was therefore possibly already familiar with healing knowledge.

Jeanne-Marie's genealogy also reveals that the Dayers systematically married women from the hamlet of Riod and more particularly from the Anzévuï family. Riod was unusual in that it was not located along the valley's main route but was isolated in a more elevated position. The inhabitants of Riod were called *Lè Cliococ*, meaning

⁴⁷ CAVALLO Sandra, "The Domestic Culture of Health...", p. 459.

⁴⁸ I would like to thank him for his regular help.

⁴⁹ SIERRO Georges, "Les dernières chasses à l'ours dans la vallée d'Hérémente", *Annales valaisannes* 3, 1937, pp. 217-219.

the bell ringers, probably in reference to the chapel, which had been built in the 17th century (or possibly earlier) in honour of Saint Sebastian, who was believed to have spared the hamlet from the plague epidemic, thus linking Riod to health matters. According to oral traditions, Riod was a recognized source of knowledge on plants and illnesses. Indeed, several inhabitants of the region made this point after a conference held in February 2020. One told me: “*c’est bien connu ici, les noirs (les guérisseur·euse·s) se marient entre eux pour garder leur savoir secret*”⁵⁰. This would support the idea of a marriage strategy based on specific knowledge or skills. The fact that Riod was geographically isolated, that it had a potential affinity with health-related matters and that it repeatedly provided spouses for the Dayers is therefore significant.

While the male healers in the Dayer family systematically chose their wives from the Anzévui family of Riod, Jeanne-Marie Dayer, the first female healer in the sources, married into the Bourdin family, which was known to have several herbalist ancestors⁵¹ as well as a *livre de secrets* containing many recipes and healing formulas⁵².

Having established this endogamy between the Anzévui, Dayer and Bourdin families and potentially linked these families to botanical or medical practices, I will now demonstrate how this illustrates a possible female involvement in societal healthcare.

The assumption of female involvement is based notably on Cavallo’s work, which has revolutionized the study of the transmission of trades by shifting the focus away from one specific trade to the wider professional field. Rather than just confining her study to the barber surgeons of Turin, who would pass their trade on

⁵⁰ FAVRE Madline, “La population valaisanne et la médecine au XVIII^e siècle. Le cas d’Hérémece et de ses guérisseurs”, Conference, Patrimoine Hérémece general assembly, Salle Polyvalente d’Hérémece, 29.02.2020. Translation: “it’s a well-known fact around here that the blacks (the healers) married each other to keep their knowledge secret.”

⁵¹ SCHÜLE Rose-Claire, “Les guérisseurs d’Hérémece (Valais)...”, p. 175.

⁵² Preserved in the Valais State Archives, AEV, AVL, 583, *Livre des secrets* (book of secrets).

to their sons or sons-in-law, she looked at the city's "artisans du corps". She also incorporated kinship, in the broad sense, into her analyses⁵³. Hence, by taking into account the barber surgeons' wider family members, who became wigmakers, jewellers, valets, upholsterers and tailors⁵⁴, she uncovered very coherent marriage strategies. The high level of endogamy within this specific group of artisans also revealed a strong involvement of female family members in healthcare, information that is always completely missing from the censuses. Unusually, Cavallo was able to access an administrative source that confirmed her hypothesis. This was a list of French citizens who were present in Turin at the time of the war against France that was drawn up by the authorities with the aim of accurately identifying the foreign population and its professional activities, including those of the women⁵⁵.

There is another recent study that further supports this interpretation of the invisible contribution made by the female relatives of health practitioners. Kinzelbach investigated women's roles in healthcare in Germany. Her findings showed that when only the administrative sources were taken into account, women's visibility in this field – which was exceptionally high between 1400 and 1600 – appeared to have decreased from 1700 onwards. This apparent evolution had been interpreted as a devalorization of women's medical expertise. However, she was able to qualify this representation by mobilizing another type of source, namely a doctor's practice diaries, which revealed a real female expertise that had in no way become devalorized in the 18th century. This source showed that the women in this doctor's household played an important role, with both his servant and his wife involved in his practice. He even referred to five women in his region as "Doctor".

⁵³ CAVALLO Sandra, "Métiers apparentés: barbiers-chirurgiens et artisans du corps à Turin (XVII^e-XVIII^e siècle)", *Histoire Urbaine* 15, 2006, pp. 27-48. Translation: "artisans of the body".

⁵⁴ Cavallo explained the links between each of these professions and the body and health. CAVALLO Sandra, "Métiers apparentés...", pp. 31-38.

⁵⁵ CAVALLO Sandra, "Métiers apparentés...", p. 44.

What is interesting here is that two of these five women, whose recipes for domestic remedies he documented, whose practices he followed and to whom he even entrusted some of his patients, were part of his family network. One was his daughter's godmother, and the other his brother-in-law's fiancée.

It is therefore very clear that women in the household or family of health professionals during the modern era also engaged in health practices. This new perspective on the work of these health professionals allows us to postulate that it is highly likely that there was also a female field of action in the families of the healers of the Alpine valleys in Valais.

Conclusion

These new approaches to women in the history of health have opened up new research avenues that have not only demonstrated women's place in healthcare within the home and within society more generally but also possibly identified some specifically Alpine features. With regard to the home, egodocuments clearly show not just the very practical role that women played in the day-to-day management of the medical knowledge they put into practice but also their role in the cultivation of medicinal plants for domestic use. However, these documents provide no direct information on the mountain environment because the extant sources document only the practices of the lowland elite. Quantitative analyses of ex-votos, on the other hand, which pertained to all socio-economic strata of the Valais population, offer real perspectives on the specifically Alpine and mountain natures of certain practices. In light of Cousin's work, this study has shown a lower dimorphism in the representation of men and women in healthcare in the Alpine context than elsewhere in Europe. Most significantly, there was an approximate fifty-year gap between the plain and the mountains in the evolution of these practices, with women on the plain taking on healthcare tasks earlier than their counterparts at higher altitudes.

With regard to women's potential role in societal healthcare, the administrative sources, although only available from the 19th century onwards, tend to show a further difference between the plain and the mountain environments, which is that the official status and formality pertaining to these women's roles decreased with altitude. Hence, trained midwives and nuns were more likely to be found on the plain, while healers, with their illegal practices, were generally found in the elevated villages.

Finally, in order to document women's involvement in health practices prior to the 19th century, it is essential to move away from a study of administrative sources and individuals towards a focus on the family through the use of genealogical analysis. The finding here that there was a high level of endogamy between three specific families and that there were links between them and botanical or medical practices shows that the women in these healers' households had a role to play in the health practices of their male family members. This changes our perspective on these great dynasties of healers in Valais and would merit an in-depth genealogical study of other lineages recognized as healers in the region, including the Fourniers of Salvan, the Dubuis of Savièse and the Ponts of Saint-Luc.

This article proposes more potential new research avenues than it presents findings. Ultimately, however, I hope to have contributed to showing that it is possible to move away from a study of the large urban centres and the elites to focus on women from different environments (in particular the Alpine environment) and more modest social strata.

Abstract

Tout en questionnant l'état de la recherche sur la place des femmes dans l'histoire de la santé, cette contribution propose une étude de cas axée sur la région du Valais, canton alpin de la Suisse. La contribution vise à sonder des approches méthodologiques

susceptibles d'éclairer des pistes de recherche encore inexplorées par les sources mobilisées jusqu'à présent (egodocuments, sources administratives). Par le recours à l'iconographie (ex-voto) et à la généalogie (interrogée grâce à une large base de données), l'article laisse voir des spécificités dans la gestion des pratiques de santé liées aux régions alpines et au genre.



Federica Re

**Responding to Sexual Violence.
Female Agency and Rape Trials
in the Province of Como (1820-1833)**

Sexual violence as a crisis

In modern and contemporary Western society, extramarital sexual violence against women has long represented a critical moment extending from the physical and psychological trauma of the individual victim to the entire family community since it could generate illegitimate offspring¹. In other words, it would undermine “that source of social certainty which [was] genealogy”², as did adultery. This outlook can best be understood by recalling the patrilineal structure that such

¹ On the history of sexual violence in Western society, see: CORBIN Alain (ed.), *La violenza sessuale nella storia*, Rome; Bari, Laterza, 1992; VIGARELLO Georges, *Histoire du viol. XVI-XX^e siècle*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1998; BANTI Alberto Mario, *L'onore della nazione. Identità sessuali e violenza nel nazionalismo europeo dal XVIII secolo alla Grande Guerra*, Turin, Einaudi, 2005; BOURKE Joanna, *Rape. A History from 1860 to the Present Day*, London, Virago, 2007.

² “quella fonte di certezza sociale che [era] la genealogia” (MERZARIO Raul, *Il paese stretto. Strategie matrimoniali nella diocesi di Como. Secoli XVI-XVIII*, Turin, Einaudi, 1981, p. 32).

genealogy assumed. By guaranteeing “an organization of power hierarchies around the figure of the father”, it reserved for the woman the “main function [...] of reproducing ‘certain’ children for her husband” and the family³. Based on this rationale, the abuse suffered by the female subject, once it came to light, could easily turn into a social stigma: a dishonour that, having compromised her good conduct in life and therefore her ability to give birth to legitimate offspring – considered, precisely, the sources of her honour –, cast “a shadow of doubt [also] over her whole family”⁴.

In early 19th-century Italy, the phenomenon has been studied in depth just in central-southern contexts, such as Romagna⁵, Tuscany⁶ and Calabria⁷. At the same time, there is a lack of targeted research on Lombardy-Venetia⁸ and, more generally, on the Italian Alpine

³ “un’organizzazione delle gerarchie di potere attorno alla figura del padre”; “funzione principale [...] di riprodurre figli ‘certi’ per il marito” (DONATO Maria Clara, FERRANTE Lucia, “Introduzione”, in: DONATO Maria Clara, FERRANTE Lucia, *Violenza*, Rome, Viella, 2010 (*Genesis IX/2*), p. 8).

⁴ “un’ombra di dubbio [anche] su tutta la sua famiglia” (MERZARIO Raul, *Il paese stretto...*, p. 32).

⁵ ZAVAGLIA Elena, *Abuso del corpo. La violenza sessuale nella Romagna-Toscana dell’Ottocento*, Imola, Santerno, 1998.

⁶ NOCE Tiziana, *Il corpo e il reato. Diritto e violenza sessuale nell’Italia dell’Ottocento*, San Cesario di Lecce, Manni, 2009.

⁷ CICONTE ENZO, “Mi riconobbe per ben due volte”. *Storia dello stupro e di donne ribelli in Calabria (1814-1975)*, Alexandria, Edizioni dell’Orso, 2001.

⁸ The only exceptions are the references to some rape cases, which, however, do not go as far as to develop a systematic analysis of the phenomenon, contained in POVOLO Claudio, *La selva incantata. Delitti, prove, indizi nel Veneto dell’Ottocento. Saggio di etnografia giudiziaria. Con la collaborazione di Michelangelo Marcarelli, Giovanni Pellizzari e Luca Rossetto*, Sommacampagna, Cierre, 2006, pp. 59-90; 117-122; 157-163; 303-316; 362-372; 569-584; 663-676; CHIODI Giovanni, “Il fascino discreto del libero convincimento. Per un identikit del giudice penale lombardo-veneto”, in: CHIODI Giovanni, POVOLO Claudio (eds.), *Amministrazione della giustizia penale e controllo sociale nel Regno Lombardo-Veneto*, Sommacampagna, Cierre, 2007, pp. 7-59; BADESI Licia, *Donne davanti alla giustizia del Lombardo-Veneto. Stupro, aborto, esposizione di infante nei documenti dell’Archivio di Stato di Como*, Como, Nodo libri, 2013. On rape trials in the Province of Varese after the Italian Unification see LUCATO Roberta, *Processi per stupro. Ottocento*, Varese, Macchione editore, 1994. The context of the Kingdom of Sardinia also suffers from a lack of studies from such a perspective, but this has been compensated for by

and pre-Alpine Arc⁹. The present essay aims at beginning to fill this gap, putting forward an initial analysis of how women in this area responded to extramarital sexual violence. Taking such a viewpoint implies further widening the investigative horizons in terms of historic-geographical contexts as well as research perspectives. It means capturing the figures of the complainants not only in their experience as injured parties – victims – but, simultaneously, also with regard to their agency, as acting and reacting subjects in the face of life's difficulties. Sharing the position of Montenach and Simonton, “[a]gency here is not conceptualised strictly in terms of resistance to male authority or patriarchal patterns, but arose from the variety of everyday interactions in which women accommodated, negotiated or manipulated social rules and gender roles”¹⁰.

To fathom what personal strategies the female subjects of the zones in question were able to implement in coping with such a severe issue and what consequences this had on the judicial level, some elements for reflection may come from the papers of the Criminal Court of First Instance in Como (1818-1859), which are a valuable source thanks to their richness. They cover a large geographical space that, during the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, extended between the north-western and south-eastern Alps and included in the Province of Como, in addition to the Como hills and pre-Alps, the territory of Lecco – with

the pioneering research on a related topic – spousal abuse – by BORGIONE Andrea, “Separazione coniugale e maltrattamenti domestici a Torino (1838-1889)”, in: FECCI Simona, SCHETTINI Laura (eds.), *La violenza contro le donne nella storia. Contesti, linguaggi, politiche del diritto (secoli XV-XXI)*, Rome, Viella, 2017, pp. 87-105.

⁹ The Swiss picture, on the other hand, has been more explored, with the *Archivio Storico Ticinese* 125, 1999; CESCHI Raffaello, *Parlare in tribunale. La giustizia nella Svizzera italiana dagli Statuti al Codice penale*, Bellinzona, Casagrande, 2011; TÖNGI Claudia, *Um Leib und Leben. Gewalt, Konflikt, Geschlecht im Uri des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Zurich, Chronos, 2004.

¹⁰ MONTENACH Anne, SIMONTON Deborah, “Introduction: Gender, Agency and Economy: Shaping the Eighteenth-Century European Town”, in: SIMONTON Deborah, MONTENACH Anne (eds.), *Female Agency in the Urban Economy. Gender in European Towns, 1640-1830*, New York; London, Routledge, 2013, p. 5. This essay is also referred to for an effective reflection on the concept of agency and its application to early modern history.

offshoots in the Orobic Alps and Bergamo pre-Alps – as well as part of the territory of Varese, with its hills and pre-Alps. Moreover, this documentation features working-class women and men, thus allowing us to reconstruct their peculiar biographical trajectories, which would otherwise be barely traceable.

On the methodological side, however, it is necessary to point out that the voices and stories of these people, who were often illiterate, have mostly come down to us indirectly, through the transcriptions that the authorities – men – made of their statements in the legal proceedings. The main document types that we find are the report of the complaint and interrogation, but above all, in a predominant quantity, the *referato* of the judge in charge of the trial, which consists of a final report of the entire case. Nevertheless, the presence of dialect words and expressions in these sources – a residual trace of the original oral nature of the depositions given – reassures us about their ability to reflect the plaintiffs' speeches, of which they remain an irreplaceable testimony.

With respect to the institutional framework, we need to specify that from 1816 in Lombardy-Venetia, the Austrian Criminal Code of 1803¹¹, at that time one of the most modern legislations on sexual violence, was in force. First of all, unlike the 18th-century criminal law

¹¹ On this subject, the bibliography is endless and, therefore, we mention the overview of VINCIGUERRA Sergio (ed.), *Codice Penale Universale Austriaco (1803). Ristampa anastatica*, Padova, Cedam, 2001. On the application of this criminal legislation to the Lombardo-Venetian context, see the studies, with relevant bibliography, by RAPONI Nicola, "Il Regno Lombardo-Veneto (1815-1859/66)", in: *Amministrazione della giustizia e poteri di polizia dagli Stati preunitari alla caduta della Destra. Atti del LII congresso di Storia del Risorgimento italiano (Pescara 7-10 novembre 1984)*, Rome, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento, 1986, pp. 91-164; POVOLO Claudio, *La selva incantata...*; CHIODI Giovanni, POVOLO Claudio (eds.), *Amministrazione della giustizia penale...*; GARLATI Loredana, *Il volto umano della giustizia. Omicidio e uccisione nella giurisprudenza del Tribunale di Brescia. 1831-1851*, Milan, Giuffrè, 2008; BASIOLO Eliana, "L'amministrazione della giustizia penale nel Regno Lombardo-Veneto. Il controllo gerarchico: garanzia e limite della giustizia asburgica", *Il diritto della Regione* 3, 2010, pp. 129-189; BRUNET Francesca, *Per atto di grazia. Pena di morte e perdono sovrano nel Regno Lombardo-Veneto (1816-1848)*, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2016.

doctrine, it had abolished the offence of “simple rape”, i.e. a sexual act with a consenting woman to whom there was no marriage bond, and therefore deemed “rape” only intercourse characterized by violence, in other words, committed despite the opposition of the female subject¹². Secondly, it did not allow for any reduction in the offender’s sentence if the woman’s moral conduct was considered dubious – in the case of a prostitute, for instance¹³ – and included the crime among offences against personal safety, without placing it in other categories related to public morals¹⁴, which were envisaged by the Napoleonic *Code pénal*¹⁵ and most of the pre-unification codes¹⁶. Thirdly, it had mitigated the punishment of the old “rape characterized by seduction under promise of marriage” by moving the offence from the category of “crimes” (“*delitti*”) to that of “police transgressions” – particularly “against public

¹² See *Codice penale universale austriaco coll'appendice delle più recenti norme generali*, Parte I *Dei delitti. Seconda edizione ufficiale*, Milan, Dall'Imp. Regia Stamperia, 1815, p. 40, par. 110. On 18th-century criminal law doctrine and its evolution in early 19th-century Italy, see NOCE Tiziana, *Il corpo e il reato...*, pp. 67-69, where it is pointed out that the only pre-unification code to retain the crime of simple rape was that of the Papal State (*Regolamento sui delitti e sulle pene*, Rome, 1832, p. 20, art. 168).

¹³ See CHIODI Giovanni, “Il fascino discreto del libero convincimento...”, pp. 38-41.

¹⁴ See *Codice penale universale austriaco...*, Parte I..., p. 22, par. 50; *Il diritto privato naturale di Francesco nobile De Zeiller, I. R. Consigliere aulico presso il Supremo Tribunale di Giustizia, membro della Commissione aulica di legislazione, Direttore degli studj di diritto e Presidente della Facoltà legale nell'Università di Vienna. Prima versione italiana compilata sulla seconda edizione tedesca*, Milan, A spese di Gio. Battista Orcesi e C., 1818, p. 68, par. 51.

¹⁵ This placed violent rape in the chapter of the “*Crimes et délits contre les personnes*”, but within the section “*Attentats aux mœurs*” (*Code pénal. Édition originale et seule officielle*, Paris, De l'Imprimerie Impériale, 1810, artt. 330-340).

¹⁶ Like the Napoleonic *Code pénal*, the *Codice penale per gli Stati di Parma Piacenza e Guastalla* included violent rape among crimes against persons, but within the chapter “*attentati a' buoni costumi*” (pp. 100-103). Instead, they placed the offence directly under the category of crimes against “family order” (“*l'ordine delle famiglie*”) or “against public morality” (“*contro i buoni costumi*”) the *Codice per lo Regno delle Due Sicilie* (1819, p. 82), the *Regolamento sui delitti e sulle pene* (Rome, 1832, parr. 168-176), the *Codice penale per gli Stati di S. M. il Re di Sardegna* (1839, pp. 159-162) and the *Codice penale pel Granducato di Toscana* (1853, pp. 280-303, where the expression “carnal violence” (“*violenza carnale*”) appeared).

morality” – regarded as less serious¹⁷. In no case, not even in the latter, did it contemplate the solution – alternative to the imprisonment of the culprit with the compensation of damages to the injured party – of the so-called “shotgun marriage” with the seducer or the kidnapper, unlike what was set out in the majority of the pre-unification codes¹⁸.

A twofold level of analysis must be concurrently used to grasp some of the specific features of the phenomenon of sexual violence in the Alpine and pre-Alpine Arc at issue: on the one hand, to highlight the main characteristics that this social problem took on in the entire Province of Como, hillside areas included; on the other, to identify the peculiarities by which it was marked out in the mountain municipalities. The chronological focus will be on the period between 1820, the date of the oldest preserved documentation, and 1833, when the promulgation of the *Sovrana patente* of 6 July on circumstantial evidence reformed the criteria followed by magistrates, thus partially changing the parameters of their work in the subsequent years¹⁹.

From a quantitative examination of the relevant criminal files, it emerges that rape or attempted rape was among the forms of violence most frequently reported by women²⁰. However, the reconstructed

¹⁷ *Codice penale universale austriaco coll'appendice delle più recenti norme generali*, Parte II *Delle gravi trasgressioni di polizia. Seconda edizione ufficiale*, Milan, Dall'Imperiale Regia Stamperia, 1815, p. 78, par. 251. The majority of pre-unification codes kept “rape characterized by seduction under promise of marriage” within the category of crimes. The only ones to abolish it were the *Codice per lo Regno delle Due Sicilie* (1819) and the *Codice penale per gli Stati di Parma Piacenza e Guastalla* (1820) (see NOCE Tiziana, *Il corpo e il reato...*, p. 70).

¹⁸ See *Regolamento sui delitti e sulle pene* (Rome, 1832, par. 168); *Codice penale per gli Stati di S. M. il Re di Sardegna* (1839, art. 541); *Codice penale pel Granducato di Toscana* (1853, artt. 287, 298); *Codice criminale e di procedura criminale per gli Stati estensi* (1855, art. 435).

¹⁹ On the *Sovrana patente* of 6 July 1833, see POVOLO Claudio, *La selva incantata...*, pp. 47-50, 106-116; CHIODI Giovanni, “Il fascino discreto del libero convincimento...”, pp. 27-38.

²⁰ Between 1820 and 1831, 78 incidents of physical and verbal violence against women were reported to the Criminal Court of First Instance in Como: most of them concerned “public violence” (21 cases), “violent rape or attempted rape” (20 cases) and “wounding, injuries, bodily harm” (17 cases). See Archivio di Stato di Como (ASCo), Tribunale criminale di prima istanza di Como (TCPICo), I A; I D.

figures must be understood as lower – it is difficult to say by how much – than the reality because, as we shall see, it was not uncommon for victims to choose silence. The outcome of the trial was usually disappointing: out of 37 incidents received, of which 16 were labelled as attempted rapes and 21 as rapes, none made it past the “preliminary investigation” (“*investigazione preliminare*”) stage, the first prescribed by the inquisitorial system and of legal proof on which the Austrian Criminal Code of 1803 was based. After inspecting the legal evidence, the magistrates concluded the proceedings with a “*concluso di desistenza*”, i.e. a decree of dismissal or non-prosecution, without ever arriving at a sentence of acquittal or conviction of the accused. This question is partly to be interpreted in the light of the high rate of proceedings halted for lack of proof, which characterized the Lombardo-Venetian judicial picture and reached 48% in the decade 1822-1831²¹. Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly also an indication of the critical aspects encountered by the magistrates in assessing rape complaints, with all the related repercussions that their decisions could have in terms of women’s perception of a general sense of impunity for the crime.

Women’s responses between personal strategies, legal action, and narratives

We can go deeper into these dynamics and recover the female protagonists’ viewpoint only by conducting an analytical study. On the whole, the data collected tell us that the injured parties and the accused both belonged to the working classes and, in the majority of cases (86%), they knew each other, as they lived in the same town, which was most often a small municipality in the province. When

²¹ See SPRINGER Giovanni, *Statistica dell’Impero d’Austria di Giovanni Springer dottore in ambe le leggi ed Imp. R. Professore nell’Università di Vienna. Tradotta in italiano dall’originale tedesco*, tomo II, Pavia, Presso Pietro Bizzoni, 1845, p. 176; RONDINI Paolo, “*In dubio pro reo?* La prassi giudiziaria dell’arbitramento degli indizi nel Regno Lombardo-Veneto”, in: CHIODI Giovanni, POVOLO Claudio (eds.), *Amministrazione della giustizia penale...*, pp. 93-148.

considering the altitude zones, we notice that, out of a total of 37 episodes, 22 – more than half – took place in the Alpine and pre-Alpine Arc, divided into 10 attempted rapes²² and 12 rapes²³, involving the Como, Varese and Bergamo pre-Alps and the Orobic Alps. In the hillside areas of Como, Varese and Lecco, 15 cases were recorded: 6 attempted rapes²⁴, 9 rapes²⁵. The first significant difference between the two belts can be seen in the female complainants' professions, which reflected the economic geography of the Como area. In the mountain region, characterized, as we know, by higher male emigration and a consequent heavier female employment in the agricultural sector²⁶, they were mainly peasants. In the hillside areas, distinguished by the emerging silk manufacturing industry and proximity to large city centres²⁷, the number of spinners increased, alongside peasants, owners of small plots of land and maids. However, we observe a marked similarity in the ways in which the accused acted: the most usual situation appears to be that of the individual who, having found the woman alone in an isolated place (such as a wood, a field, in the street, but also an enclosed space, such as a house or a spinning mill) at an unusual time (after 7 p.m., before and after midday, at dawn), had taken the opportunity to attempt to or successfully abuse her.

²² ASCo, TCPICo, I D, cartt. 1, fasc. 295; 6, fasc. 875, 887; 7, fasc. 969; 10, fasc. 1199; 27, fasc. 5; 42, fasc. 421; 45, fasc. 513; 48, fasc. 635; 50, fasc. 662.

²³ ASCo, TCPICo, I D, cartt. 2, fasc. 321, 349; 8, fasc. 1004; 13, fasc. 1289; 14, fasc. 1324; 17, fasc. 1403; 20, fasc. 1464; 27, fasc. 2; 33, fasc. 134, 146; 37, fasc. 290; 38, fasc. 313.

²⁴ ASCo, TCPICo, I D, cartt. 2, fasc. 274; 6, fasc. 825; 7, fasc. 990; 16, fasc. 1384; 34, fasc. 167; 42, fasc. 434.

²⁵ ASCo, TCPICo, I D, cartt. 6, fasc. 801; 8, fasc. 1015; 10, fasc. 1212; 29, fasc. 70; 34, fasc. 152; 41, fasc. 400; 43, fasc. 447; 50, fasc. 677; 54, fasc. 789.

²⁶ On this topic, see the investigations of AUDENINO Patrizia, "L'emigrazione della Lombardia", *Archivio Storico dell'Emigrazione Italiana* 2, 2006, <https://www.asei.eu/it/2006/11/l-emigrazione-della-lombardia/>, last access 01.02.2022; CAVALLERA Marina, "Un 'motore immobile'. Emigrazioni maschili di mestiere e ruolo della donna nella montagna lombarda dell'età moderna", in: VALSANGIACOMO Nelly, LORENZETTI Luigi (eds.), *Donne e lavoro. Prospettive per una storia delle montagne europee XVIII-XX secc.*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2010, pp. 26-49.

²⁷ See ZANINELLI Sergio (ed.), *Da un sistema agricolo a un sistema industriale: il Comasco dal Settecento al Novecento*, vol. 2, *La lunga trasformazione tra due crisi (1814-1880)*, Como, Camera di Commercio, Industria e Agricoltura, 1988.

If we reflect on what strategies the injured parties put in practice to remedy the damage suffered, we notice two trends, in both mountain and hillside municipalities. The first one concerns the victims of attempted rape, who were more inclined to turn to justice quickly (within fifteen days of the event in 75% of cases), sometimes with the help of family members (mothers, fathers, husbands). The vocabulary used in the documentation suggests that they were motivated by the intention of defending their outraged respectability on a public level to counter any gossip that might have arisen in the small community in which they lived, especially if witnesses had come forward immediately after the incident.

In mountain areas, though, we encounter notable exceptions to this kind of behaviour. In the absence of other people who could support her version of events, it was not uncommon for the injured party to prefer not to report the crime or to wait until new circumstances had emerged to her advantage. Breaking the silence, then, depended on a new material condition, such as further damage caused by that episode and suddenly brought to light (for example, an illness or a theft), but, above all, the intervention of a local female solidarity network that could support the plaintiff's accusations. This dynamic does not seem to be found in the hillside areas. It appears typical of the Alpine and pre-Alpine contexts where, due to the high rate of male emigration, there was, as already mentioned, a feminization of agriculture and society, which would seem to have given rise to closer solidarity bonds between the women of the community that became particularly apparent in the most critical situations.

A representative case happened in 1829 in Brusimpiano²⁸, a village of fewer than 700 inhabitants²⁹ on the south-western coast of Lake Lugano, in the Varese pre-Alps. On 26 August, Maria Gerolama,

²⁸ ASCo, TCPICo, I D, cart. 7, fasc. 969.

²⁹ In 1853, it numbered 680 people (see I. R. Luogotenenza Lombardia, *Compartimento territoriale della Lombardia*, 23 giugno 1853, in: *Bollettino provinciale degli atti di governo per la Lombardia. Parte 1^a. Volume unico-Puntata 1-16. Anno 1853*, Milan, Dall'Imperiale Regia Stamperia, 1853, p. 267).

the wife of Giovanni Battista Bagattini, was at home with her sister-in-law, Maria Antonia Coppi, in Bagattini, while her husband had gone to Venice³⁰. She was attacked in her bedroom at two o'clock in the morning by Pietro Talleri, an acquaintance who had already tried to do similar violence to her two months earlier, in June. The arrival of her sister-in-law, alarmed by Maria Gerolama's screams, put the aggressor to flight. However, the affair did not end there, as her husband, on his return, failed to find a sum of money that he had hidden in the bedroom and so, listening to his wife's story, assumed that Talleri might be the culprit. The incident was quickly brought to the attention of the authorities, who classified it as "attempted rapes and theft" (*attentati stupri e furto*)³¹.

What is most striking is how, at that time, in support of Maria Gerolama, there was a veritable explosion of complaints about attempted rapes suffered years earlier by other women in Brusimpiano, also by Talleri, who had surprised them alone in the woods during their regular daily activities, gathering wood and chestnuts. Her sister-in-law, Maria Antonia Coppi, stated that she had been a victim in October 1825, Maddalena Duca in 1826 and Giuseppa Battaglia in 1827. The memory was vivid in their minds; they still remembered the man's advances and gestures, but they had not spoken of it to the competent authorities until a real possibility had arisen that the assailant – a serial offender, one might hypothesize – would be convicted. Therefore, it seems clear that they wanted to expose themselves only when they believed that the probability of obtaining judicial success was higher, thus removing a dangerous individual from the community. The circumstances of the last assault gave hope of a positive outcome since there were two witnesses – in addition to the

³⁰ Brusimpiano, in fact, was a village with high male emigration, whose inhabitants took up, in particular, the profession of plasterers and architects (see FRIGERIO Pierangelo, GALLI Beppe, TRAPLETTI Antonio, "Le valli varesine e l'emigrazione delle maestranze d'arte", in: BRUSA Carlo, GHIRINGHELLI Robertino (eds.), *Emigrazione e territorio: tra bisogno e ideale. Convegno internazionale, Varese, 18-20 maggio 1994*, vol. 2, Varese, Edizioni Lativa, 1995, p. 186).

³¹ ASCo, TCPICo, I D, cart. 7, fasc. 969.

sister-in-law, the neighbour, Orazio Lombardini, who had seen Talleri “hastily” (“*precipitosamente*”) fleeing from the house³² – and another crime, theft, had also been involved. Chorally, the victims’ voices had risen to demand justice.

Mountain communities also had another face – contrary to the one of solidarity – that, instead of helping the injured parties, could place them in difficulty: the high level of social control, a second variable no trace of which was found in hillside areas. Sometimes, although neither the victim nor her relatives or friends had filed a complaint, the local civil authorities, in particular the municipal official (*agente comunale*), became aware of a possible rape or attempted rape and informed the relevant District Commissioner (*Commissario distrettuale*), who, on behalf of the respective District Court (*Pretura*), started investigating. The opening of the inquiry, then, forced the victim to give evidence against her intentions; her astonishment became especially apparent if it was a sexual violence that she had prevented in time and which, seemingly, no one had witnessed.

This occurred in November 1832 to Antonio Guerra’s wife, Elisabetta Vicini of Carlazzo³³, a village of fewer than a thousand people³⁴ on the slopes of Mount Pidaggia, in the Como pre-Alps. One evening, she was grabbed by the waist on her doorstep, dragged into the street and groped; she tore at the hair and scratched her attacker’s face – it was an acquaintance, Francesco Fontana, who fled the scene. Called to testify, she was amazed at how the legal bodies had been able to discover this. Someone – perhaps from the windows – had seen it and, within a month, the indiscretion had reached the municipal official. Knowing of the assailant’s recidivism in this type of crime and, therefore, reporting it to the District Commissioner,

³² ASCo, TCPICo, I D, cart. 7, fasc. 969.

³³ ASCo, TCPICo, I D, cart. 42, fasc. 421.

³⁴ Only in 1853 did it reach 1,000 inhabitants (see I. R. Luogotenenza Lombarda, *Compartimento territoriale...*, p. 259). This place too was characterized by male emigration (see MERZARIO Raul, “Il capitalismo nelle montagne. L’evoluzione delle strutture familiari nel Comasco durante la prima fase di industrializzazione (1746-1811)”, *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome* 99, 2, 1987, p. 1102).

he had worked for his definitive indictment. Nevertheless, his intervention was not without ambiguous implications for the woman's life, as her sense of surprise and bewilderment seems to indicate: unsolicited solidarity, which, unlike in the case of Maria Gerolama Bagattini, did not arise from below, but descended from above, forcing her to testify in a lawsuit she did not want to bring, may have embarrassed her in front of her fellow villagers and even affected her relationship with her husband, with whom she had perhaps not thought it appropriate to confide. Rather than protecting the injured party, the conduct of the municipal official appeared to be aimed at safeguarding the order of the community, ensuring the punishment of the perpetrator at any cost.

The second trend in women's interaction with the justice system was dictated by those who had suffered a "fully completed" rape, from which an illegitimate pregnancy had – or they feared had – resulted. Whether in the mountains or the hills, these women, before resorting to legal action, appeared most inclined to avail themselves of various alternative *escamotages*, the outcome of informal social practices to restore their honour that seemed rooted in tradition. They found themselves, against their will, on a slippery slope of breaking social conventions and, initially, they kept the secret. Some of them halted at this stage of resigned silence because they were aware that the absence of witnesses made their testimony less credible. They hoped to preserve their honour by hiding the fact and possibly carrying the pregnancy to term in a public care home far from their small towns, such as the *Pia Casa degli esposti e delle partorienti in Santa Caterina alla Ruota* in Milan³⁵.

Conversely, other women – whose stories vividly resurface from the sources – tried to bring their condition back to normal by binding

³⁵ As these two cases suggest, the first one of seduction under promise of marriage, the second one of violent rape: ASCo, TCPICo, I D, cart. 8, fasc. 1015; 43, fasc. 447. On the public care home mentioned, see the reconstruction, with relevant bibliography, by REGGIANI Flores, "Pia Casa degli esposti e delle partorienti in Santa Caterina alla Ruota (1780-1866)", <https://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/archivi/oggetti-produttori/ente/MIDB001711/>, last access 26.03.2022.

themselves to a male figure to whom they could attribute the paternity of their future offspring and who would contribute to their financial support. Thus, if unmarried, they encouraged their fiancés to speed up the wedding, as did Maria Baragiola of Resenterio in 1831, in the Larian Triangle. A housemaid in a notary's house, she was impregnated by her rapist, a work colleague (Giovanni Nosedà); four months later, at the age of eighteen, she married her betrothed, a nineteen-year-old from Camerlata, Filippo Rezzonico³⁶. Rosa Ambrosini from Ronchi di Biumo Inferiore (1832) and Giuseppa Santina Sommaruga from Morazzone (1833) behaved likewise in the Varese hills³⁷. Alternatively, some began a relationship with their aggressor in the hope of a "shotgun marriage", sometimes through the mediation of relatives. This expedient was adopted in 1822 by Maria Uberti from Pagnona in the Orobic Alps³⁸ and in 1831 by Anna Maria Arnaldi from Germasino in the Como pre-Alps³⁹.

In the absence of a potential spouse, however, the injured parties, supported by their families and the village authorities, such as the parish priest and the doctor, endeavoured to negotiate informal, out-of-court compensation with the attacker or his family to receive monetary indemnity that was, simultaneously, tangible proof of the damage suffered. In the Como pre-Alps, Maria Elisabetta Noli from Castiglione d'Intelvi (1831)⁴⁰ and Teresa Biacchi from Menaggio (1831)⁴¹, as well as Rosa Rossi from Ticinello (1831) in the Varese pre-Alps⁴², took this path.

Only when all these avenues had failed did they appeal to institutional justice, which was the last resort for rehabilitating a good reputation by demonstrating that they had been wronged. Here, the complainants, after a period of time varying from two to 13 months from the

³⁶ ASCo, TCPICo, I D, cart. 14, fasc. 1324.

³⁷ ASCo, TCPICo, I D, cart. 34, fasc. 152; 50, fasc. 677.

³⁸ ASCo, TCPICo, I D, cart. 2, fasc. 321.

³⁹ ASCo, TCPICo, I D, cart. 20, fasc. 1464.

⁴⁰ ASCo, TCPICo, I D, cart. 13, fasc. 1289.

⁴¹ ASCo, TCPICo, I D, cart. 27, fasc. 2.

⁴² ASCo, TCPICo, I D, cart. 17, fasc. 1403.

event (76% of cases), told the whole story: how the secret had been revealed, the pregnancy or early birth that had made the new husband suspicious, the hopes of marriage dashed, the promises of financial compensation broken. They demanded reimbursement for the costs of childbirth, lost workdays due to pregnancy, and living expenses for them and the baby.

Looking at how their narratives were structured, the differences between mountain and hillside areas fade even from this perspective. These women's statements had in common with those of the victims of attempted rape the emphasis on the violence used by the assailant to bend them to his own ends and, consequently, on their defiance. So, the key concepts of the argument were coercion and resistance, precisely the two poles around which the definition of the crime in the Austrian Criminal Code of 1803 revolved⁴³.

It seems clear that the analogy with the legislative text was not accidental but the outcome of a shared conceptual universe concerning sexual violence, in which the category of honour played, as in previous centuries⁴⁴, a crucial role. It went back as much to the criminal codification as to the complainants' narrations and reasserted itself under the guise of a lack of female consent to the act that had to be expressed through pugnacious resistance⁴⁵. This represented rape as conflictual antagonism between male aggression and female opposition, manifested through a vast range of reactions, from screaming to

⁴³ *Codice penale universale austriaco...*, Parte I..., p. 40, par. 110.

⁴⁴ *Constitutio criminalis thesiana ouvero Costituzione criminale di sua Sacra Cesarea Regia Apostolica Maestà d'Ungheria, e Boemia &c. &c. M. Theresa arciduchessa d'Austria &c.*, Vienna, Presso Giovanni Tomaso nobile di Trattnern, 1769, pp. 211-212; the Josephine Penal Code (*Codice generale sopra i delitti e le pene*, 1787, pp. 47-52). On the history of the concept of honour, see also FIUME Giovanna (ed.), *Onore e storia nelle società mediterranee. Città di Palermo, Arcidonna. Atti del seminario internazionale (Palermo 3-5 dicembre 1987)*, Palermo, La Luna, 1989; STRANGE Carolyn, CRIBB Robert, FORTH Christopher E. (eds.), *Honour, Violence and Emotions in History*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2015.

⁴⁵ On the topic of female consent in the culture of the Modern Age, see CAZZETTA Giovanni, *Praesumitur seducta. Onestà e consenso femminile nella cultura moderna*, Milan, Giuffrè, 1999.

engaging in a physical fight. On the whole, the result was an image of a woman who was a victim and resilient at the same time, according to a self-representation that went beyond the figure of the raped woman described by the Code and ended up instead enhancing the agency shown by a female subject in that particular situation of danger.

Under the judges' scrutiny

Turning now to the judges and how they evaluated these depositions, we should first remark that the above Code, with its inquisitorial structure, assigned the magistrate in charge of the trial with the triple function of investigator, defender and judge at once⁴⁶, giving him the task of “looking for, in addition to the evidence of guilt, also everything that [could] benefit the innocence of the accused”⁴⁷. Moreover, the same law placed an important limitation on his actions, constituted by the system of negative legal proof, which had to be adhered to ascertain the crime and the subsequent conviction or acquittal of the accused. As Chiodi noted, it was a “rather close-knit legislation”, which “certainly harnessed the judge’s powers” “as regards the nature and number of clues”, but which still left him minimal room for manoeuvre on their assessment that was entrusted to his moral conviction⁴⁸. This residual area of subjective discretion seems to come into play in the legal opinions expressed by the magistrates of the Province of Como on sexual violence, in a mixture of unfamiliarity with the Code’s rules and cultural prejudices of the time.

⁴⁶ See CHIODI Giovanni, “Il fascino discreto del libero convincimento...”, p. 21.

⁴⁷ “*di ricercare accanto alle prove della colpevolezza, anche tutto quanto [potesse] giovare all’innocenza dell’imputato*” (DEZZA Ettore, “L’impossibile conciliazione. Processo penale, assolutismo e garantismo nel Codice asburgico del 1803”, in VINCIGUERRA Sergio (ed.), *Codice Penale...*, p. CLXV).

⁴⁸ “*normativa a maglie piuttosto strette*”, che “*certamente imbrigliava i poteri del giudice*”, “*quanto alla specie e al numero degli indizi*” (CHIODI Giovanni, “Il fascino discreto del libero convincimento...”, pp. 27, 32, 28).

In the absolute absence of other witnesses, the law set out that the testimony of the injured party sufficed to prove the merit of the fact (*qualità del fatto*)⁴⁹ – in other words, in the cases examined here, whether there had been violence or not, which was essential for the charge of violent rape. Obviously, other legal evidence was also required to convict the accused, but its probative value could be enhanced by the judge's skill in handling the law if he was convinced of the accused's guilt⁵⁰. Much depended, in essence, on the experience and idea of the magistrate in charge of the case, whose legal opinion would then be submitted to the vote for or against of the entire judicial assembly. In this regard, in the *referati* of the Criminal Court of Como, we can observe instead an almost systematic tendency to belittle the event and the plaintiff's deposition.

Due to the inquisitorial form of the trial, the centre of attention lay on the credibility of the injured party. If the complaint was swift – as it tended to be in cases of attempted rape – the woman's version seemed reliable, and so the next step consisted in checking whether the appropriate legal grounds for the charge subsisted. As a consequence, the focus was on the victim's degree of resistance so as to establish the aggressor's level of violence and whether or not there had been penetration. The defiance emphasized by the female subjects during the complaint and interrogation phase, which was crucial to demonstrate their dissent from the act, was now transformed, under the judge's scrutiny, into an indication of the low level of violence perpetrated by the assailant. Since the injured party had managed to avert the worst, the physical and sexual violence was minimized and, if it had not left unmistakable marks on her body, was expressly denied in terms of the procedural truth.

If the reporting time proved to be too long, as in most cases of completed rape, the plaintiff's version was radically challenged. She was asked why she had not screamed, cried, or vehemently resisted

⁴⁹ *Codice penale universale austriaco...*, Parte I..., p. 139, par. 404; CHIODI Giovanni, "Il fascino discreto del libero convincimento...", pp. 38-41.

⁵⁰ As well illustrated by CHIODI Giovanni, "Il fascino discreto del libero convincimento...", pp. 7-59.

without considering all the psychological variables that could come into play in such circumstances. The doubt about her consent to the act was persistent, and the social practices of “shotgun marriage” and informal compensation negotiations with the rapist only instilled further distrust in the judges.

On the other hand, the possible guilt of the accused was assessed based on the criterion of likelihood, i.e. whether it was likely that he was involved in the crime from the evidence gathered and information about his conduct⁵¹. This principle contributed to diverting the magistrates’ suspicions away from men who were too old, of good morals, with a clean criminal record and known to the injured party, and instead to people who were unrelated, young and with a criminal record. This meant targeting an absolute minority of the accused who, though, ideally corresponded more to the type of criminal and, more specifically, to the rapist, depicted by the Austrian Criminal Code of 1803 as a man incapable of curbing, through morality, his sexual instincts, defined as “libidinous desires” (“*voglie libidinose*”)⁵².

As a result of this heterogeneous mix of factors, then, the judicial assembly voted in 30% of cases to dismiss it due to a lack of or insufficient legal evidence or the non-existence of a crime, and, in the remaining 70%, to refer it to the relevant District Court (*Pretura*) or Provincial Delegation (*Delegazione provinciale*) or Political Judiciary (*Giudicatura politica*), so that they could examine whether it amounted to “serious police transgressions” (“*gravi trasgressioni di polizia*”). In practice, this implied impunity or a considerable reduction in the possible punishment: instead of five to ten years of “hard prison” (“*carcere duro*”), fines, confiscation, loss of rights, corporal punishment, removal from a place or province, banishment and up to a maximum of six months’ “rigid detention” (“*arresto rigoroso*”) could be prescribed⁵³.

⁵¹ *Codice penale universale austriaco...*, Parte I..., p. 84, parr. 259, 261; p. 87, par. 268; p. 88, par. 270.

⁵² *Codice penale universale austriaco...*, Parte I..., p. 40, par. 110.

⁵³ *Codice penale universale austriaco...*, Parte II..., pp. 5-10.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it emerges from the analysis carried out so far on the Province of Como that in the face of such a complex social and legislative framework, in which it was difficult to prove the existence of the crime of sexual violence at the judicial level, in the case of rape, both the women of the hillside areas and those of the mountain municipalities were inclined to react by relying on, first of all, personal alternative strategies to restore their honour. Turning to the court acted only as a last, desperate resort. In dealing with these critical issues, however, women's lives in the Italian Alpine and pre-Alpine belt, despite the many similarities in behaviour to those of the hillsides, seem to be distinguished by some specific features related to the best-known socio-economic peculiarities of the area, resulting from the high rate of male emigration. A strong network of female solidarity appears to have been available to intervene in support of victims at the time deemed most appropriate. A more pronounced social control also comes to light, which the male civil authorities of the municipality used to maintain order and identify dangerous individuals.

Abstract

Cette contribution explore les manières dont les femmes des régions alpines et préalpines du Royaume lombard-vénitien ont répondu au problème de la violence sexuelle extraconjugale. Grâce à l'analyse des dossiers relatifs au crime de viol (Tribunal pénal de Côme, années 1820-1833), la recherche souligne les similitudes et les différences entre les épisodes survenus dans les municipalités de montagne et ceux qui ont eu lieu dans la région de plaine, décrit les caractéristiques des cas de violence, discute les pratiques sociales de réparation de l'honneur, et examine les récits des plaignantes et les attitudes des juges.



Patrizia Audenino

Conclusions

As the reader will have noted, the essays in this volume focus on four main thematic areas: family, religion, norms and the body. The first section analyses female roles, observed through family ties and culture, as they emerge from collections of private writings held in the archives of entrepreneurial and aristocratic dynasties. The essays in the second section centre on the link between women and religion, illustrating how women used religious institutions pragmatically to gain access to goods, material and otherwise, in an Alpine area that was a frontier between Catholicism and the Reformation. The third group of essays observes and analyses female action in contexts dominated by the “strategy of absence”. This led women to experiment with previously unknown decision-making spaces and areas of autonomy, which surrounding families and society had always perceived as incursions into male power that were tolerated because they were exceptional, and, as such, not normative. Finally, the fourth section collects contributions on themes linked to the body, such as wet-nursing and care work, investigating areas where women could show their expertise and knowledge, within social norms and those of the civil and religious authorities.

The course of enquiry illustrated in these contributions can effectively be connected with an important historiographic precedent: the

publication of *Donne e lavoro: prospettive per una storia delle montagne europee XVIII-XX secc*, edited in 2010 by Nelly Valsangiacomo and Luigi Lorenzetti. Then, as now, the analysis focused on fields of female action that were operative either in the absence of men or in parallel with them, but not necessarily always separate from them, with greater emphasis than in the past on the concept of agency. As highlighted by the two editors in the introduction, this noun has gradually taken on ever greater significance in the last decade. Suffice to say that in *Donne e lavoro*, Anne Montenach, quoting a piece by Françoise Thebaud of 2007, noted the persistence in studies on women of a permanent tension “*entre une analyse pessimiste, qui souligne les poids des structures [...] et une analyse plus optimiste, peut-être dominante aujourd’hui, qui les relativise et laisse place à l’action et aux stratégies des individus*”. More recently, however, in a collection of essays she edited with Deborah Simonton in 2013, Montenach explicitly invoked the concept of agency to investigate the where and how of female action in the urban contexts of modern Europe. The very approach of the conference that gave rise to this collection of essays thus shows how outdated that tension now seems, and how contemporary studies focus strongly on individual action and the strategies that guided it. The turning point, which is tangible in the whole collection, consists of a sort of revolution that has affected the methods of historical enquiry and the use of sources. More decisively than in the past, the search for witnesses from alternative or more innovative backgrounds as opposed to traditional witnesses has been able to circumvent that persistent ‘silence’ of the sources regarding the history of women, which has long determined the way the latter was conducted and the results it found.

To respond to the questions raised by the need to understand the reasons for, and outcomes of, female behaviour in the varied cultural, linguistic and religious contexts of the Alps, the authors of these essays have examined sources of various kinds. The results of their enquiries reveal that they have been guided by the conviction that the constantly evoked invisibility of women, more than being the product of a scarcity of documents in the archives, is the effect of

the inadequacy of the questions raised. It is therefore appropriate, in these concluding remarks, to share a few thoughts on sources, rather than on themes.

Letters and other writings such as registers, reports and depositions are the first group of sources that are analysed in these essays. Letters proved particularly significant and have been recognized for many years as the main source of female expression in writing, as a well-known collection edited by Maria Luisa Betri and Daniela Maldini Chiarito showed in 2000. In the cases analysed here by Camille Caparos and Miriam Nicoli, this form of writing confirms two important aspects of the experience of female members of families in the minor nobility of the Alps of Provence and the canton of Grisons in the 18th and 19th centuries. First, letters were a way of creating, maintaining and reinforcing family ties in the absence of the relevant male figures, building up and directing a network of relationships that crossed many borders, as the correspondence of the various generations of women in the Grisons dynasty studied by Miriam Nicoli shows. Secondly, they constitute a further proof of the power and authority that could be created in the course of time by women left on their own by male family members who had been called elsewhere by wars or family business. As Caparos says about the writings of the two Provençal noblewomen she analysed, “[w]hile these two noblewomen did not ‘work’ as such, they can be seen as genuine businesswomen, managing their entire households and participating in the administration of their husbands’ estates”. By contrast, the case of the deposition set down for a divorce suit by an unhappy young bride of Saint Gallen led to a disconcerting outcome. Ernest Menolfi discovered it by cross-referencing the case with other later sources, showing the reader how this is the inescapable duty of historical research in contextualizing egodocuments.

A second group of sources comes from ecclesiastic and civil institutions. The sources regarding the former have revealed their important heuristic potential in research on the distribution and social role of the confraternities, as shown by Aline Johner and Sandro Guzzi-Heeb, and by Marco Bettassa’s essays on the self-interested conversions and

crossing from one side to the other of the border between Catholicism and Reformation in the Waldensian valleys: a strategy adopted above all by the poorer women to make use of the advantages of each religious group. In these enquiries, and in the use of sources of this nature, as Sandro Guzzi-Heeb has noted researchers have to “decipher what the sources do not say, or what they hide” and, to this end, cross-reference information from different fields and combine qualitative sources with serial sources. The use of these research methods enabled Aline Johner to show unexpected implications for the women of the Valais region who were members of religious confraternities, which was the subject of her study. Long-term serial sources, flanked by qualitative documents, allowed her to confirm the already known gradual feminization of religious practices that took place in the 150 years or so between 1721 and 1870. In addition, adopting this methodology demonstrated that joining a confraternity conferred a certificate of morality, which guaranteed members a certain respectability and, with it, their place in local society. Guzzi-Heeb, too, by cross-referencing ecclesiastical sources with others in the case of another community in Valais, was able to verify the deep cultural reasons, connected with advancing secularization, for a conflict in 1790 between a parish priest and his flock over the observance of the sixth commandment by young future spouses, which ended with the priest’s surrender and transfer.

There is a documentary basis of court and notarial records in the research of Stefania Bianchi, Marina Cavallera and Federica Re, centred on a geographical area between the regions of Varese, Ticino and Como. In this case, too, the chosen sources proved able not only to give a voice to the most silent part of a past society – in this case, poor women – but also to show convincingly how many strategies these women had at their disposal to appeal to the judicial authorities. The very nature of the sources on which this research is based outlines a border that is one of class rather than geography: while “the women summoned before a court exemplify for the most part the various forms of poverty”, as Stefania Bianchi claims incisively, those we encounter in notarial papers belong to the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie. They principally appeared to act with power of attorney

to manage property and financial assets of absent men, as representatives of the family they belonged to, as their “stationary engine” (*“motore immobile”*), to take up a useful definition coined by Marina Cavallera years ago. In the examples that she and Bianchi give, the women took the initiative in representing men who were far away, but also with a clear increase in their autonomy of action, thanks to their personal expertise and the authority that followed from it. By contrast, the facts that emerge from judicial sources offer images of women as victims and at the same time resilient, as Federica Re has described them in cases of trials for rape, where the women wanted to give the courts the most convincing representation of themselves, validating “the agency shown by a female subject in that particular situation of danger”.

A further aspect, well demonstrated by this kind of source, concerns the network of solidarity between women that sustained and assisted victims of violence, able both to prevent such violence from taking place in some cases and to support the victim’s claims, confirming and corroborating their evidence. This capacity to construct, maintain and reinforce networks of solidarity also clearly emerges from the papers studied by Camille Caparos and Miriam Nicoli. The frequent exchanges of letters written by the women in the families analysed appear to have been the main tools for constructing and maintaining networks of family solidarity in an everyday routine that was dominated by the physical distance between the various members of the clan. Historians have now evaluated the extent to which these networks managed to become an authentic form of social capital, a necessary starting point for any individual initiative. An intense activity in the daily weaving of this web of female writings emerges, which displays the drama of the entire family life and the individual plans of the leading women in the story.

Finally, in research on the body (here specifically practices of popular medicine and wet-nursing), the sources ranged from those used most in historical demography, such as registers of orphanages and charitable institutions, as shown by Rolando Fasana, to those of the pharmacopeia based on botanical knowledge handed down by tradition, as Madline Favre does in her essay. Fasana was able to show

that the organisation of wet-nursing was primarily a male affair, even though the provided service involved the body of the women and the wet nurses were in any case regarded as responsible for the survival of the infants entrusted to them. As for the popular medicine studied by Favre, an analysis of herbaria, books of prescriptions and popular medical practices, mostly handed down over time from mother to daughter, shows that caring activities in the family were entrusted to the botanical expertise of women in inverse proportion to the availability of institutionalized medicine, which was monopolized by men.

Overall, the identification of new sources or their innovative use has shown that it is possible to broaden the range of questions that can be asked about the past of the Alpine women and to find answers that increase our more general understanding of Alpine society in the course of the early modern period and the transition to contemporary times. The studies presented here thus constitute an important contribution to understanding the processes, spaces and characteristics of the power of the women and their capacity to present themselves as social actors. This capacity was identified in the management of patrimony and in the education of the children as part of a negotiated relationship with the civil and religious institutions, and in that of assistance and care. Its principal characteristic seems to be that of the informality of the situations in which this power of agency was constructed and exercised, through conscious individual action aimed at shaping from within the rules and norms of a male society, circumventing them or turning them in their favour, partly by constructing networks of solidarity.

The choice of this vast geographical area, which includes the pre-Alpine areas, has already been fully explained by the editors in their introduction, and, at this point, it takes us back to the initial question as to why the Alps are so significant for the history of women. The frequent absence of men, due to widespread traditional migratory habits, gave the women in this large area of Europe a variety of roles to perform in various areas that were usually male only, before this happened elsewhere, and also helped them to become literate relatively early on. This made those spaces of power more visible than in other contexts, where women exercised it more sporadically or in exceptional

situations such as wars or the great 19th-century migration. This last event led women living in places far from the Alps and far from each other, such as the communities in Portugal studied by Caroline Brettel or those in Sicily studied by Linda Reeder, to experience much later what other women had already gone through in various Alpine localities in the modern age. In addition to already well-known disciplinary areas such as the construction of cultural and linguistic boundaries in Europe and migration dynamics, the Alps too are confirmed as a remarkable laboratory for gender history.

List of Contributors

Patrizia Audenino PhD is a former Professor of Contemporary History and History of Migration at the University of Milan. She collaborated in major publishing initiatives related to Italian emigration history and published several contributions on the history of the Alps. She is a member of the scientific committee of the Gaetano Salvemini Institute of Historical Studies in Turin and of the journals *Altreitalia* and *Qualestoria*. Author of several publications, she recently wrote *La casa perduta. La memoria dei profughi nell'Europa del Novecento* (2015), *Emigrazione e spopolamento: il caso delle Alpi occidentali* (in *Via dalla montagna*, ed. by A. Fornasin, C. Lorenzini 2019). She edited with P. Barcella: *Migrazioni a Milano e in Lombardia* (Studi Emigrazione 224, October-December 2021).

Marco Bettassa is a historian and independent researcher. He has been a fellow at the Società di Studi Valdesi (Torre Pellice), with which he continues to collaborate, and he is a DAAD Alumnus. His research interests concern the social and economic history of religious minorities in the early modern and contemporary period, focusing on the Piedmontese Reformed context. For the journal *Riforma e Movimenti religiosi*, he recently published “*Nei commerci occorre tener gli occhi dove tutto accade. Nascita e consolidamento dell’imprenditoria valdese nel Piemonte sabauda (xvii-xviii secolo)*” (2022).

Stefania Bianchi holds a PhD from the University of Lucerne (2011). Former teacher at the Mendrisio High School, Associate Researcher at the Laboratorio di Storia delle Alpi (LabiSAlp) (2000-2015) and director of the historical archives of Mendrisio, she is an independent historian. She has published widely on migration history and network analysis in early modern Switzerland and Europe. Her publications include *I cantieri dei Cantoni. Relazioni, opere, vicissitudini di una famiglia della Svizzera italiana in Liguria* (2013) and *Uomini che partono. Scorci di storia della Svizzera italiana tra migrazione e vita quotidiana* (2018).

Camille Caparos is a doctoral student at Aix Marseille University (UMR 7303 TELEMMe). Her dissertation, *La plume des secondes. Papiers de famille et écriture féminine dans la noblesse de France méridionale (XVII^e-début du XVIII^e siècles)*, is supervised by Prof. Emmanuelle Chapron and Prof. Isabelle Luciani. Working in family archives of southern France, her studies focus on the writing practices of French noblewomen between the 17th and early 19th century. On this topic she recently published “Femmes, archives familiales et bibliothèques (Provence et Avignon, XVIII^e siècle)” (2023). She is currently an ATER in Early Modern History in Aix-Marseille University.

Marina Cavallera, former professor of Early Modern History at the University of Milan, and member of national and international academic organizations and institutions, is the author of several contributions about political, social, economic and religious history, especially related to the Alpine regions and Lombardy. Her work focuses on analysis of the concept of “borders”, commercial transits and migration systems. She is the editor of *Lungo le antiche strade. Vie d'acqua e di terra: Stati, giurisdizioni e confini nella cartografia dell'età moderna* (2007). She recently published *La società delle ville, la cultura del lavoro. Varese e il suo territorio nel secolo XVIII* (2017).

Rolando Fasana is an independent historian, formerly a research associate at the Laboratorio di Storia delle Alpi (LabiSAlp) (2010-2015) and manager of the Centro Studi e Ricerche Raul Merzario of Cernobbio where he organized and catalogued the Raul Merzario Archive (2009-2016). His research fields range from seasonal

emigration to family dynamics to the problems of abandoned childhood in the early modern period. He recently published *Bambini abbandonati, confini e perdute identità. Esposti e trovatelli tra Como e Svizzera italiana: abbandono, assistenza, balie nei secoli XVIII e XIX* (2020).

Madline Favre is currently a graduate assistant at the University of Lausanne. Since 2019 she has been working on a doctoral dissertation on the social history of medicine in 18th century Wallis, a region of the Swiss Alps, under the supervision of Prof. Sandro Guzzi-Heeb. She published *Suzanne Necker et son hospice de charité* (2018).

Sandro Guzzi-Heeb is Maître d'Enseignement et de Recherche for Early Modern History at the University of Lausanne. He is a member of the board of the Swiss Society for Economic and Social History and of the Swiss Rural History Society. He is the author of several books and numerous articles on the history of the family and kinship. He is currently working on a new social history of sexuality in early modern Europe. Since 2020 he has led a project financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation on Catholic confraternities in the Alps (1700-1850). He recently published *Donne, uomini, parentela: Casati alpini nell'Europa preindustriale (1650-1850)* (2008), *Passions alpines. Sexualité et pouvoir dans les montagnes suisses (1700-1900)* (2014) and *Sexe, impôts et parenté* (2022).

Aline Johner holds a PhD in history from the University of Lausanne (2020). Her work focuses on religious and political identities, with an emphasis on the importance of the family, especially women, in shaping social, cultural, sexual and religious environments. Since 2020, she has been collaborating on the project *Devotional brotherhoods in the Alpine region (1700-1850)* as a Swiss National Science Foundation senior researcher and lecturer at the University of Lausanne. She is the author of *La sexualité comme expression d'identités religieuses et politiques dans le canton de Vaud (fin de l'Ancien Régime-1848)* (2022).

Ernest Menolfi holds a PhD from the University of Basle with a thesis on historical demography (1980). He is currently a freelance historian working on local and Swiss history from a socio-economic and demographic perspective (e.g. immigration to Switzerland, mercenaries,

economic development of small towns). He recently published *Frühes Unternehmertum in Hauptwil. Die Textilmanufakturen Gonzenbach im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (2019).

Anne Montenach is Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Aix-Marseille (France) and a member of UMR TELEMMe (Aix-Marseille Université-CNRS). She defended her PhD at the European University Institute in Florence, published as *L'économie du quotidien. Espaces et pratiques du commerce alimentaire à Lyon au XVII^e siècle* (2009). Her current research focuses on the history of women's work and their roles in the early modern economy, and on the links between the licit and illicit economy. She has co-edited with Deborah Simonton *Gender in the European Town: Female Agency in the Urban Economy, 1640-1830* (Routledge, 2013). She recently published a monograph entitled *Femmes, pouvoirs et contrebande dans les Alpes au XVIII^e siècle* (2017). She is also the general editor, with Deborah Simonton, of *The Cultural History of Work* (Bloomsbury, 2018, 6 volumes) and she has published several articles in various European journals.

Miriam Nicoli holds a PhD from the University of Lausanne (2011). In her dissertation she studied scholarly communication and publishing strategies in 18th-century Europe. Research fellow and lecturer at the University of Lausanne, postdoc at the Universities of Rennes 2 and Bern, visiting scholar at the German Historical Institute in Washington, and visiting researcher at Georgetown University, she has extended her research focus to egodocuments and gender history. Former Ambizione Fellow of the Swiss National Science Foundation, she is currently working for the Institut Kulturforschung Graubünden. She has published, with Franca Cleis, *La Gran Regina del Cielo e le Benedettine di Claro. Genealogia femminile di un Sacro Monte in area alpina nel manoscritto di suor Ippolita Orelli (1697) and Un'illusione di femminile semplicità. Gli Annali delle orsoline di Bellinzona (1730-1846)* (2021).

Federica Re holds a PhD from the University of Milan (2018). After receiving research fellowships at the same university, at the German Historical Institute in Rome and at the Burzio Foundation in Turin, she currently works at the Institute for the History of Philosophical and

Scientific Thought in Modern Age (National Research Council of Italy) and is an associate researcher at the Laboratorio di Storia delle Alpi. Her main interests lie in cultural and socio-political history of 19th-century Italy and Europe, with particular attention to gender and nation-building processes. She has published articles in *Il Risorgimento*, *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* and *Genesis*.

List of illustrations

Each essay is introduced by an image that recalls its main contents.

Bianchi, Nicoli (Introduction):

Luigi Rossi (1853-1923), *Il canto dell'aurora*, 1910-1912, Oli on canvas, 125.7 x 187.5 cm. CCL-1419.

© Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano. Città di Lugano Collection.

Nicoli:

Giovanna Ferrari-a Marca (1770-1849), 1801, Oli on canvas. Picture: Gian-Carlo a Marca.

© Fondazione Archivio a Marca, Mesocco. Private collection, Mesocco.

Caparos:

Cassini Map (Academy's Map), "Hauslab-Liechtenstein" version, sheet n°147 "Vence", Escragnoles, 18th century.

Menolfi:

The industrial settlement of Hauptwil of the Gonzenbach family in 1670. Above, centre: the Upper or New Castle of the Hans Jacob branch (with Sabine Gonzenbach's mother). Below, middle: the Old Castle (tower building, to the right), and the *Kaufhaus* (to the left of it) of the Anton branch (Sabine's father). Sabine grew up in the *Kaufhaus*.

Map on wood, presumably painted by Daniel Beich (about 1624-1700).

© Staatsarchiv des Kantons Thurgau, 1, K/P 03000.

Bettassa:

J.-B Nolin, *Les Vallées du Piémont Habitées par les Vaudois ou Barbets dressées sur les Mémoires de Valerius Crassus et de Jean Leger Ministre des Vaudois et sur plusieurs Relations Nouvelles*, à Paris, Chez I. B. Nolin sur le Quay de l'Horloge du Palais proche la Rue de Harlay, à l'Enseigne de la Place des Victoires, avec Privilège du Roy, 1690.

© Private collection.

Guzzi-Heeb:

G. Danzer, engraving by Johann Philipp Nilson, *Messe de procession près de la chapelle Saint-Laurent à Liddes*, colored aquatint, ca. 1836-1837, 12.5 x 7.8 cm. Gr 79. Musée d'histoire du Valais.

© Musées cantonaux du Valais, Sion. Jean-Yves Glassey

Johner:

Edouard Ravel (1847-1920), *Fête patronale au Val d'Hérens*, 1889, Oil on canvas, 211 x 166 cm. Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne. Collection of the Swiss Confederation, Federal Office of Culture, Bern, 1891. Inv. 1207.

© Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne

Cavallera:

Giuseppe Bisi (1787-1869), engraving by J. J. Falkenstein, *Veduta presa in Valcuvia*, about 1842.

© Private collection.

Bianchi:

William Hogarth (1697-1764), engraving by Thomas Cook, *The Complaint*, etching, about 1729.

© Private collection.

Fasana:

Attestato di miserabilità (1855), Archivio storico della Provincia di Como, fondo esposti, cart. 10150.

Favre:

Ex-voto (1714), A nun praying at the beside of a sick woman, Notre-Dame-de Compassion chapel, Martigny. Picture: Madline Favre

Re:

Ex-voto (1834), Oil on canvas. DIA-1980/0174. Picture: Roberto Pellegrini.

© Centro di dialettologia e di etnografia, Bellinzona.

Audenino (Conclusion):

Raphael Ritz (1829-1894), *Veille de fête ou Les deux âges*, 1873, Oil on canvas, 80.5 x 117.5 cm. Musée d'art du Valais, Sion, inv. BA 205

© Musées cantonaux du Valais, Sion. Michel Martinez.

Index of Names¹

A

- Adami, Marta Maria 184, 185
Adamoli, *Family* 177
Albertolli, Antonio 185
Albertolli, Francesco 185
Albertolli, Giovanni Maria 184, 185
Albertolli, Matteo 184n, 185, 186
Albertolli, Natale 185
Albertolli, Pietro 185
Alter, Jean-Joseph 134
a Marca, Anna Maria 39n
a Marca, Carlo (1622-1681) 36
a Marca, Carlo (1662-1709) 36
a Marca, Carlo Domenico (1725-1791) 39, 39n
a Marca, Carlo Onorato 44n, 45, 45n
a Marca, Clemente Maria 42, 42n, 43
a Marca, Emilia 45, 45n
a Marca, Giovanni Antonio 45n, 46, 47, 47n
a Marca, Giuseppe Maria Bernardo 39n
a Marca, Giuseppe Vittoriano 45, 45n
a Marca, *Archives* 34, 36
a Marca, *Family* 20, 31, 32, 34, 35, 37, 39, 39n, 43, 44, 52
a Marca, *Houses* 51
a Marca, *Women of the family* 32
a Marca, Karl 45
a Marca, Maria Fedela 39n
a Marca, Ulrico 43, 44
Ambrosini, Rosa 273
Andreoli, Anna Maria 203, 203n
Anthamatten, Barbe 250
Antonini, *Family* 34

¹ Page numbers followed by an “n” indicate a reference to a footnote.

Anzéviu *Family* 255

Appia, Maria 114

Arlettaz, Anne Marie 140

Arlettaz-Aubert *Group* 143

Arnaldi, Anna Maria 273

Arnaud, Henri 106

B

Bagattini, Giovanni Battista 270

Bagattini, Maria Gerolama 269, 270, 272

Balbi, Barberigo 208n

Balbi, Paolo 208n

Baragiola, Maria 273

Bardelli, Antonio 208n

Bariani, Antonio 206n

Bariani, Maria Maddalena 206n

Barozio, Giovanni Gemolo 187

Barozio, Giovanni Matteo 187

Bastian, *Family* 131

Battaglia, Giuseppa 270

Bercini, Eremita 233

Bercini, Gusmeo 233

Bereta, Gaetano 233

Bereta, Maria Francesca 233

Berini, Gian Maria 233

Bernascone, *Family* 176

Berthoud, Aimée 48

Besozzi, Massimiliano 180

Besozzo, Aluigi 181

Beth, Marie Madeleine 141

Biacchi, Teresa 273

Bianchi, Maria Elisabetta 201

Bianchi, Maria Luigia 234n

Bianchi, Maria Teresa 234n

Biselx, Etienne 142

Biumi, *Family* 177

Bleynat, Isabella 114

Bonduri, *Family* 176

Borromeo, Carlo 36, 168, 178n, 181, 181n

Borromeo, *Family* 177

Borsa dei Poveri 108, 116, 117, 118, 120

Bourdin *Family* 255

Bourgeois, Joseph 131, 141

Bourgeois, Marie-Elisabeth 141

Braga, Maddalena 229

Brentano, *Family* 176

Brocco, Dorotea 36

Bulla, Maddalena 200

Bussi, Anna Maria 206

Bussi, Santino 206

C

Canevali, Carlo 208

Canevali Visetti, Maria 206n

Capello, Abbondio 200

Capello Bartolomeo 200n

Carabelli, Pietro 200

Casartelli, Teresa 228

Castello Perti Lucrezia 203n

Castiglioni, *Family* 177

Cavé, Nicolas 127, 131, 137, 141

Charles Emmanuel III, *Duke of Savoy* 118

Charles V, *Emperor* 178, 178n

Claret, Jean-Baptiste 242, 242n

Clément, Jean-Maurice 124, 128, 141, 160, 241, 242

Comolli, Gio. Antonio 180n

Compagnia di San Paolo 113

- Conconi, Giuseppa 228
Confraternities of Mase 141
Confraternity of Blessed Sacrament 23, 125, 126n, 127, 136, 139, 140, 141, 142, 148, 150, 151, 153, 155, 157, 158, 159n, 162, 163, 166, 170
Confraternity of Sacred Heart 150
Confraternity of Saint Joseph 136, 150, 151, 163
Confraternity of Saint Peter and the Three Kings 150, 164
Confraternity of Saint Sebastian 150, 151
Confraternity of the Forty Hours 150
Confraternity of the Holy Rosary 23, 127, 136, 137, 138, 140, 141, 143, 148, 150, 151, 153, 158, 159n, 161, 163, 166, 170
Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar 158, 159n
Confraternity of the Three Kings 150, 165, 166, 167
Congregation of Moravi Brothers 49
Congregation of the Blessed Virgin Mary 150
Coppi Maria Antonia 270
Corday, Marianna 211
Costabel, *Family* 118
Crocì Carlo 208
- D**
- Darbellay, Anne-Catherine 142
Darbellay, Jean-Jérôme 124, 124n
Darbellay, Marie Ursule 140
Dayer, Colin 254
Dayer François 253
Dayer, *Family* 253, 254, 255
Dayer Jean Melchior 253, 254
Dayer, Jeanne-Marie 250, 251, 253, 254, 255
Dayer Jean-Nicolas 253
De Clemente, Pedro 179
De Curte, Giacomina 179, 179n
Della Porta, *Family* 177
Deutz-a Marca, Anna 43, 44, 44n, 45, 45n
Donatz-a Marca, Maria Maddalena von 45n, 47, 48
Donatz, Claude-Philibert von 46
Donatz, *Family* 39
Donatz, Louise von *Baroness of Saint-Sixte à la Roche* 46, 46n, 47n
Donatz, Peter Conradin von 46
Donatz, Peter Ludwig von 47, 48
Dubuis *Family* 258
Duca, Maddalena 270
- E**
- Exquis, Pierre Nicolas 141
- F**
- Fantoni-a Marca, Maria Orsola 39n
Ferrari, Agostina 228
Ferrari-a Marca, Giovanna 42, 42n
Ferrari, *Family* 34, 39
Ferraro, Camillo 179
Ferraro, Orazio 179
Fontana, Francesco 271
Forno *Count* 113
Fossati David 208
Fourniers *Family* 258
Franzoni, Giacomo 203

Franzoni, Maria Brigida 203
 Fresse de Monval, Aglaé de 65
 Fresse de Monval, Henri de 64
 Fresse de Monval, Henriette Louise de 21, 58, 58n, 59, 59n, 60, 61, 62, 64, 64n, 65, 65n, 66, 67, 67n, 68, 70, 71, 72, 73n, 74, 75, 75n, 76
 Fresse de Monval, Jean Alexandre de 58n, 72

G

Gambonod Gallien, Marie Petronille 140
 Gay, Joseph-Emmanuel 249
 Gennaro, Pasquale 229
 Giana, Ambrogio 181
 Giannella, Giovanna 228
 Gianola, Margherita 186, 187n
 Giorgioli, Francesco Antonio 35
 Gonsenbach, *Archiv* 80
 Gonzenbach, Anton (1748-1819) 95
 Gonzenbach, Anton (1777-1798) 88n
 Gonzenbach, David 88, 88n, 90
 Gonzenbach, Georg 82
 Gonzenbach, *Family* 80, 81, 96
 Gonzenbach, Sabine 21, 79, 81, 82, 84, 86, 87, 89, 90, 92, 93, 94, 94n, 95, 96, 97
 Goutier, Maria 114
 Guerra, Antonio 271

H

Haller, Albrecht von 242, 242n
Hospice of the Chatechumens 22, 108, 112, 118, 119, 120

Hospice of Virtue 113, 113n
Hospital of Milan 221
Hospital of Santa Maria Maggiore 223
Hospital of Sant'Anna 225, 227, 229, 231, 231n, 232
 Huber, Maria Elisabeth 90

L

Lanfranconi, Maria 228
 Lattion, Benjamin 142
 Leone, *Family* 177, 177n
 Leopold I of Austria, *Emperor* 34
 Lombardini, Orazio 271
 Longer, Conrado 231
 Longer, Maria Elisabetta 231
 Louis XIV, *King* 108, 114
Luoghi Pii degli Esposti 223, 225
Luogo Pio dei Catecumeni 231, 231n
 Luvini, Cesare 184, 187
 Luy, Jean Joseph 140

M

Maffini Angelo 200n
 Maina, Angelica 202
Maison du Grand-Saint-Bernard 124
Maison Royale d'Éducation de Saint-Louis 59, 66
 Mandelli, *Family* 177
 Manzina, Maria 220n
 Martinelli de' Saluzzi Marietta 208n
 Martinelli Giuseppe 208n
 Martinetti, *Family* 34
 Martinola, Benedetta 208n
 Martinola, *Family* 34
 Martinoni, Anna 186

- Martinoni, Antonio 185
 Martinoni, Francesco junior 185
 Martinoni, Francesco senior 185, 185n
 Martinoni, Galeazzo 185
 Martinoni, *Family* 185
 Martinoni, Santina 186
 Masina Giuseppe 203
 Massard, Anne Marie Madeleine 131
 Massard, Jean-Joseph Simon 131
 Mazzetti, Domina 201
 Mazzini, Giuseppe 138
 Messmer, Johann Jacob 96
 Michaud, Jean-Alexis 131
 Mistó, Annunciata 228
 Mola, Paolo 204
 Molina, *Family* 184n
 Monti, Pasquale 229
 Monzini, Giuseppe 227
 Monzini, Maddalean 227
 Morigia, *Family* 177
 Morosini, Giovanni Pietro 52, 220n
 Morosini-Negroni-Prati, Giuseppina 52n
 Mosconi, Chiarina 228
 Murith, Laurent-Joseph 123, 124, 125, 125n, 126, 127, 128, 131
 Muttoni, Carlo Antonio 229
- N**
- Nanette, see Deutz-a Marca, Anna
 Negri, Giacomo 201
 Nina, see Rascher-von Donitz, Anna
 Noli, Maria Elisabetta 273
 Nosedà, Caterina 227
- Nosedà, Giovanni 273
 Nucle de Rivaz, Marie-Julienne de 241
Nuns of Collombay 242, 242n
- O**
- Oldelli, Giovanni Battista 206
 Oreiller, Claire Geneviève 142
 Orrigoni, Caterina 180
 Orrigoni, Giorgio 180
 Orrigoni, Giovan Pietro 180
 Orrigoni, *Family* 176
 Orrigoni, Marta 180
- P**
- Peduzzi, Antonia 233
 Peduzzi, Marta 228
 Peracca, Caterina 227
 Peracca, Gabriello, detto il Loscia 227
 Perey, Elisa 48n, 49, 49n
 Pianca, Maddalena 200n
 Piva, Giacomo 234n
 Planta, *Family* 49
Poor of Jesus Christ 150
 Porto, Cesare 181n
 Pozzi, Barbara 202
 Pusterla, Giovanni Luigi 202, 203
- R**
- Rascher-von Donatz, Anna 48, 49, 49n
Refuge for the Catholicized 110, 111, 113, 113n, 120
 Rezzonico, Filippo 273
 Riche, Eugene 126

- Riche, Eugène 124
 Riedmatten, Thérèse de 250
 Riva Giacomo 203n
 Rivoire, Madeleine 118
 Robert d'Escragnolle, Alexandre
 Joseph de 57n, 58, 63n
 Robert d'Escragnolle, Antoine de
 60, 63n
 Robert d'Escragnolle, Françoise de
 20, 57n, 58, 60, 63n, 71, 71n
 Rogg, Johann Georg 85
 Ronchelli, *Family* 177, 177n
 Rosazza, *Family* 176
 Rossi, Maria 228
 Rossi, Rosa 273
 Rossi, Teresa 228
 Rubea, Domenica 186, 187n
 Ruggia, Antonia 208
 Rusconi, Caterina 229
- S**
- Salis-Zizers, Ernestine von 52
 Salis-Zizers, *Family* 49
 Sappy, Marie 254
 Sappy, Sylve 254
 Sarrasin, Marie-Elisabeth 131
 Savoy-Nemours, Marie Jeanne
 Baptiste of *Duchess of Savoy* 108,
 109, 109n, 110, 111, 112n
 Scala, Nicolò 204
Scapular confraternity 150
 Schläpfer, Johannes 81
 Schlatter, Julius Hieronymus 21,
 82, 87, 92, 93, 94, 94n, 97
 Schlatter, Maria Sofia 83, 88, 94
 Schuppäch, Michel 251
- Sommaruga, Giuseppa Santina 273
 Sormani, *Family* 177
 Speroni, Aurelio 180
 Speroni, Peregrina 180
 Stockalper, Gaspard 165
 Stockalper, *Family* 165
 Suvalet, Maria Gertrude 210, 210n
- T**
- Talleri Pietro 270, 271
 Tasso, *Family* 176
 Tatti, *Family* 176
 Ternaux, Guillaume Louis 95, 96,
 97, 99
 Thurn und Taxis, Carlo Anselmo
Prince 43, 44
 Tinelli, *Family* 177
 Tognetta, Pietro Francesco 186,
 187n
 Torbin, Maria Alessandretta de 210
 Torrent, *Family* 161
 Torrent, Marie Madeleine 128, 160
 Toscano, *Family* 34
 Toschini-a Marca, Maria Lidia 39,
 43
 Trezzini, Carlo 210
 Trezzini, Domenico 210
 Trezzini, Tommasina 210, 210n
- U**
- Uberti, Maria 273
Uniti Luoghi Pii 225
- V**
- Vadianus see Watt, Joachim von
 Valiano, Anna Francesca 187n

INDEX OF NAMES

- Valiano, Carlo Ambrogio 187
 Vanetta Marta 200n
 Vegezzi, Gerolamo 208
 Verdi, Giuseppe 52
 Vicini, Elisabetta 271
 Victor Amadeus II, *Duke of Savoy*
 108, 109n, 112n, 113, 114, 115,
 116
 Viscardi, Giovanni Antonio 35
 Visconti Borromeo Arese, *Family*
 177
 Vorache, Pierre 140
- W**
- Watt, Joachim von 82
 Wilhelmina of England 221
- Z**
- Zoppi-Ferrari, Barbara 42

Index of Places¹

A

Aix-en-Provence 65
Albiolo 180
Alps Swiss 22
Angera 182
Angrogna 117, 118
Arogno 206n
Arzo 228
Ascona 38n
Asti 207
Austria 14n, 20, 34, 39, 52
Avegno 201

B

Bagnes, Municipality 134
Bagnes, Valley 140, 254
Balerna 197, 203
Barcelona 207
Barza 179

Belluno 224
Bergamo 176
Bergamo, pre-Alps 268
Besozzo 177
Bissone 208n
Biumo Inferiore 180
Bologna 207
Bourg-Saint-Pierre 22, 149, 150,
159, 163, 164, 166, 167
Bovernier 128, 129, 131, 133, 135,
136, 137, 138, 141, 143
Bramois 246n
Bretagne 224n
Brig 165
Brunate 221
Brusimpiano 269, 270, 270n
Brusino 208

C

Cademario 200n
Caen 211
Calabria 252
Camerlata 273

¹ Page numbers followed by an “n” indicate a reference to a footnote.

Carlazzo 271
 Casalzuigno 177
 Casargo 229
 Caserta 207
 Caslano 203
 Castello Cabiaglio 177n
 Castelnuovo 228, 229
 Castiglione d'Intelvi 273
 Ceresio, Lake 220, 224, 229n
 Chur 48
 Civiglio 227
 Claino Intelvi 221n
 Claro 38n
 Clarens 132, 133
 Clivio 227
 Coldrerio 202, 204
 Colico 234n
 Colla, Valley 229n
 Comerio 182
 Como 26, 38n, 175, 180, 200n, 220, 221, 221n, 223, 225, 227, 228, 229, 229n, 231, 231n, 232, 263, 276
 Como, Lake 176
 Como, pre-Alps 263, 268, 271, 273
 Como, Province 25, 26, 223, 263, 266, 266n, 275, 278
 Como, Territory 268
 Conches, Valley 250, 250n

D

Denmark 207
 Dresden 207

E

Einsiedeln 254
 England 207, 222, 239, 240

Entremont 124, 131, 133, 139, 155, 161
 Escragnoles 58, 61, 63n, 65, 71, 72

F

Feltre 224
 France 14n, 15, 40n, 45, 48, 60, 80, 81, 96, 97, 97n, 109, 114, 138, 148, 167, 168, 207, 233, 240, 256
 France, Alps 20
 Fribourg 250

G

Geneva 46, 132
 Geneva, Lake 132, 238
 Genoa 207, 208n
 Germany 14n, 20, 34, 39, 183, 239, 248, 256
 Germasino 273
 Grand-Saint-Bernard, hospice 149
 Grand-Saint-Bernard, pass 136, 138, 149
 Grasse 58, 61, 74
 Grisons 31, 32, 33, 35n, 46n, 52, 53, 53n

H

Hauptwil 80, 81, 94, 96, 97
 Hérémece 26, 250, 250n, 253, 253n, 254
 Hungary 39, 207

I

Ile de France 224n
 Indemini 220n
 Intelvi, Valley 201, 208n, 221n, 228, 232

- Ispra 179, 182
 Italy 14n, 15, 20, 34, 45, 80, 105, 136, 167, 239, 262
- K**
- Karlsburg 208n
- L**
- Lanzo d'Intelvi 208
 L'Aquila 177n, 190, 207
 Lario, Lake 220, 221n, 224, 229, 229n
 Lario, Triangle 273
 Laveno 177
 Lavizzara, Valley 197
 Lecco, Province 221n
 Lecco, Territory 263, 268
 Leipzig 207
 Lichtenstein, Principality 14n
 Liddes 22, 123, 124, 125, 127, 129, 131, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 144, 153, 159
 Liège 207
 Livorno 208n
 Lombardy 23, 34, 174, 175, 189, 190n, 221, 211n
 Lombardy-Venetia 262, 263, 264
 Longeborgne 246n
 Lugano 38n, 48, 155, 203, 221n
 Lugano, Lake 269
 Luino 180
 Lumino 221n
 Luserna San Giovanni 118
 Luserna, Valley 109, 114, 118
 Lyon 183
- M**
- Madrid 207
 Maggia, Valley 201
 Maggiore, Lake 177, 179, 184
 Magliaso 208, 208n
 Mainz 207
 Malcantone 200, 208n
 Mantua 207
 Mara, Valley 197
 Martigny 22, 124, 149, 150, 153, 155, 155n, 157, 158, 163, 165, 166, 167, 250
 Mase 124, 159, 160
 Menaggio 273
 Mendrisio 45, 211
 Mendrisiotto 229n
 Meride 207
 Mesocco 20, 31, 45n, 46, 48
 Mesolcina, Valley 33, 34, 38, 39, 44, 50, 51, 197, 221n
 Mezzovico 221n
 Milan 36, 37, 45, 81, 183, 185, 187, 187n, 190, 196n, 207, 208n, 220, 223, 272
 Monaco, Principality 14n
 Montmirail 38n, 49
 Montreux 132, 133
 Morazzone 182, 273
 Morcote 208, 208n
 Morvan 223, 224n
 Muggio 200
 Muggio, Valley 197, 200, 208n, 229n, 232
- N**
- Naples 190
 Naples, Kingdom 46
 North America 233

Novara 223

Novazzano 227, 228

O

Olgiate 229

Orobic Alps 268, 273

P

Padua 180

Pagnona 273

Palermo 190

Papal State 265n

Paris 96, 97, 223, 224n

Pavia 207

Perosa, Valley 110

Pidaggia, Mount 271

Piedmont 22, 46, 105, 108, 109, 110, 114, 120, 121, 133, 190n

Pinerolo 105, 108, 109, 112, 119

Pinerolo, Valley 111, 120

Poland 207

Pontarlier 250

Ponte Capriasca 201

Porto Val Travaglia 184, 187

Po, Valley 34

Pragelato, Valley 110, 119n

Prague 207

R

Regensburg 34, 43, 44, 45

Resenterio 273

Riod 254, 255

Riva San Vitale 208n

Romagna 262

Romagnano 179

Rome 190, 207, 208n

Ronchiano 184, 186

Ronchi di Biumo Inferiore 273

Rovio 201, 206n

S

Saint-Luc 258

Saint-Maurice 246n

Saint-Vallier 61

Salvan 258

San Fedele Intelvi 228

San Mamete 220, 221n

San Martino, Valley 110

Sardinia, Kingdom 262n

Sassari 207

Savièse 250, 250n, 258

Savoy 133

Savoy, Upper 39

Schignano 228, 233

Schignano, Territory 233

Sedan 96

Sils im Domleschg 39

Sion 124, 129, 141, 159, 160, 160n, 249, 250

Sitterdorf 98

Slovenia 14n

Soazza 39, 35n

Spain 239

Speicher 81

Splügen 48

Stabio 227

Stazzona 233

St. Bernardino, Pass 34

St. Bernardino, Thermal Waters 34

St. Gallen 21, 79, 82, 87, 88, 90, 94, 94n, 97, 97n, 98

- St. Petersburg 210
 Stuttgart 207
 Switzerland 14n, 15, 20, 24, 49, 60, 80, 81, 98, 131, 137, 147, 183, 195, 196, 211, 219, 221, 223, 227, 232, 244, 250
- T**
- Taino 182
 Three Leagues 32, 35, 37, 48, 53
 Ticinello 273
 Ticino 25, 52, 53n, 155, 175, 196n, 197, 200, 205, 208, 211n, 217, 220, 221n, 223, 224, 229, 232
 Trafalgar 46
 Trogen 80
 Turin 114, 207, 255, 256
 Tuscany 262
 Tyrol 248
- U**
- Uggiate 225
- V**
- Valais 26, 124, 125, 131, 133, 138, 141, 143, 145, 149, 155, 161, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 238, 240, 241, 243, 244, 248, 249, 250, 251, 257, 258, 284
 Valais Alps 22, 123
 Valcuvia 177, 182
 Valensole 59, 65
 Valmasino 229n
 Valsassina 229, 229n
 Valsesia 176
 Valsolda 221n
 Valtellina 229n
 Varese 176, 177, 180, 181, 181n, 182, 183, 185, 190, 202, 223, 227, 228, 229n
 Varese, pre-Alps 264, 268, 269, 273
 Varese, Province 23, 173, 176, 182, 284
 Varese, Territory 264, 268, 273
 Vaud 49, 132, 133
 Venice 207, 208, 208n, 270
 Venice, Republic of 40n
 Verbano, Lake 223, 224
 Verzasca, Valley 182
 Vicenza 224
 Vico Morcote 204
 Vienna 34, 52, 206n, 208, 208n
 Viganello 228
 Vollèges 22, 149, 150, 151, 155, 155n, 157, 159, 161, 163
 Vosges 233
 Vouvry 133, 135, 241, 242n
- W**
- Waldensian Valleys 108, 109, 112, 115, 119
- Z**
- Zouz 48
 Zug 38n

Table of Contents

Anne MONTENACH <i>Foreword</i>	7
Stefania BIANCHI and Miriam NICOLI <i>Introduction</i>	13
PART I. AGENCY AND DAILY LIFE: MATERIAL NEEDS AND FEELINGS IN WOMEN’S WRITINGS	29
Miriam NICOLI <i>A Network of Words: Three Generations of Women in the Records of an Alpine Family (18th-19th Centuries)</i>	31
Camille CAPAROS <i>Writings in Absence: Being Seigneuses in the French Pre-Alps in the 18th Century</i>	57
Ernest MENOLFI <i>Sabine Gonzenbach’s Report About her Unhappy Marriage, or an Egodocument With a “Second Truth”</i>	79

PART II. FAITH AND BELONGING: PERSONAL FREEDOMS IN THE CONFINES DEFINED BY COMMUNITIES AND CONFRATERNITIES.....	101
Marco BETTASSA <i>Women, Religious Conversions and Waldensianism: Persistence and Room for Action (17th and 18th Century)</i>	103
Sandro GUZZI-HEEB <i>Women, Sex, Religion: Evolutions in Gender Relations in an Alpine Society between 1700 and 1850.....</i>	123
Aline JOHNER <i>An Increasingly Gendered Religion: the Targeted Audience of Brotherhoods in the Valais Alps (18th-19th Centuries)</i>	147
PART III. DUTIES AND RIGHTS: THE ALCHEMY OF THE FEMALE ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION IN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETIES	171
Marina CAVALLERA <i>The Contradictory Condition of Women: Legal Immobility and Social Dynamics in Pre-Alpine Lombardy in the Early Modern Age.....</i>	173
Stefania BIANCHI <i>Women, Judges and Notaries: the Legal Rights of Women in the Italian Part of Switzerland (17th-19th Centuries)</i>	195
PART IV. BODIES AND DESTINIES: WET NURSES, HEALERS AND VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE	215
Rolando FASANA <i>The Unsaid of Microhistory: Anthroponymy of Wet-Nursing. The Wet Nurses of Southern Ticino and the Ancient Province of Como (18th-19th Centuries).....</i>	217

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Madline FAVRE

*What Sources Can We Use to Document Women's Role
in Health Practices in the Alpine Context? The Case
of Valais in the 18th and 19th Centuries.....* 237

Federica RE

*Responding to Sexual Violence. Female Agency and Rape Trials
in the Province of Como (1820-1833)* 261

Patrizia AUDENINO

Conclusions 281

List of Contributors 289

List of illustrations 295

Index of Names..... 299

Index of Places 307

Achévé d'imprimer

En septembre 2023

Pour le compte des Éditions Alphil-Presses universitaires suisses

Responsable de production : Anne-Caroline Le Coultre

This volume is centred on the voices of women belonging to different generations, religious faiths and social classes, and presents a range of possible life courses in the Alps and the pre-Alps during the Ancien Régime and the early 19th century. Focusing on life trajectories that have emerged from a gender-conscious reading of the sources, the contributions illustrate how migration led women to take on roles of responsibility or follow their husbands in their careers as artists, traders and businessmen. They also reveal a widespread literacy that was combined with practical skills and knowledge marked by biological, legal and religious preconceptions; these features permeated the studied communities, where family, religious and patronage ties prevailed upon the dichotomy of public sphere/private sphere.

The essays in this book deal with the web of complex social networks that served to sustain the mutual autonomies as well as the strategies of living together. The vitality and agency of the presented female figures help to dispel the image of backwardness and passivity often associated with women living in mountain regions.

With the contributions of: Patrizia Audenino, Marco Bettassa, Stefania Bianchi, Camille Caparos, Marina Cavallera, Rolando Fasana, Madline Favre, Sandro Guzzi-Heeb, Aline Johner, Ernest Menolfi, Anne Montenach, Miriam Nicoli, Federica Re.

ISBN : 978-2-88930-522-3



9 782889 305223