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Collective Voices in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Alps

Council Proceedings of Mountain Communities (1300-1530)

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edited by
Marta Gravela

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Marta Gravela

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the forms of popular politics emanating “from below” and exploring the role of “common people”, frequently in relation to the current broader dissatisfaction with, or the perceived alienation from, institutional politics and central political authorities.¹ Historians have focused on the diverse expressions of these popular politics – from social conflict and revolt to collective petitions – which frequently yielded direct political statements and provoked action from powerful authorities.² However, along-

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1. John Walter, *Crowds and Popular Politics in Early Modern England*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2006; Jan Dumolyn et al. (eds.), *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe. Communication and Popular Politics*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2014; Hipólito Rafael Oliva Herrero, *Sobre la politización ordinaria de la gente común a finales de la Edad Media*, in Esther López Ojeda (ed.), *Una nueva visión de la Edad Media. Legado y renovación: XXVI Simposio de Estudios Medievales, Niza, del 2 al 31 de julio de 2015*, Logroño, Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 2016, pp. 259-290; Christian D. Liddy, *Contesting the City: The Politics of Citizenship in English Towns, 1300-1530*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017; Claire Judde De Larivière, Julien Weisbein, *Dire et faire le commun. Les formes de la politisation ordinaire du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, in «Politix», 119, 2017, pp. 7-30; Ben Eersels, Jelle Haemers (eds.), *Words and Deeds. Mapping Urban Politics from below in Late Medieval Europe*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2020; Leen Bervoets, Jan Dumolyn, *Urban Protest in Thirteenth-century North-western Europe: A Comparative Approach*, in «Journal of Medieval History», 8, 1, 2022, pp. 75-102; Tom Johnson, Claire Judde De Larivière, *Ordinary Politics in Late Medieval Europe*, in «Past and Present», 268, 1, 2024, pp. 250-288.

2. Monique Bourin, Giovanni Cherubini, Giuliano Pinto (eds.), *Rivolte urbane e rivolte contadine nell'Europa del Trecento. Un confronto*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2008; Justine Firnhaber-Baker, Dirk Schoenaers (eds.), *The Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt*, London-New York, Routledge, 2017; Samuel K. Cohn, *Lust for Liberty: The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1000-1300*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2006 and Cohn's

side such exceptional and extraordinary expressions, daily, “ordinary” practices played a substantial part in community life and the political engagement of the population. This special issue is devoted to such practices, with particular reference to the crucial theatre of collective decision-making, community councils, and to the records issuing from them.

While historians have largely examined these sources in an urban context, this special issue evaluates them through the study of Alpine communities during the late medieval and early modern periods. The aim is to lay the groundwork for a better understanding of these political entities that gained significant importance within the greater European landscape during this era.³ Few studies have attempted investigations of this terrain, especially with respect to the late medieval period, due to a scarcity of sources in some localities and to a preferred interest in the early modern phase of communal development.⁴ Unsurprisingly, only the Swiss region has received significant attention.⁵ Given the importance of the Swiss communal model, there is a pressing need to examine neighbouring Alpine territories; yet, unlike the Swiss examples, these regions were part of wider political structures and frequently governed by multiple layers of local and “central” authority, which made the situation more complex.

more recent *Popular Protest and Ideals of Democracy in Late Renaissance Italy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021; Marta Gravela, *Altre rivolte. Violenza antisigora ile nell’Italia tardomedievale*, in Sandro Carocci (ed.), *La sigora ia rurale nell’Italia del tardo medioevo*, 4 *Quadri di sintesi e nuove prospettive di ricerca*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2023, pp. 277-297; Fabrizio Titone (ed.), *Disciplined Dissent in Western Europe, 100- 160. Political Action b tween Submission and Defiance*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2022; Henry Miller et al. (eds.), *Petitions and Petitioning from the Medieval Period to the Present*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2024

3. Peter Blickle, *From the Communal Reformation to the Revolution of the Common Man*, Leiden, Brill, 1998; Beat Kümin, *The Communal Age in Western Europe, c. 1100-180. Towns, Villages and Parishes in Pre-Modern Society*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. On urban council proceedings see Marta Gravela, Jean Paul Rehr, *Collective Decision-Making in the Alps. Researching Late Medieval Communal Politics Through a Digital-Native Project*, notes 9-13, in this special issue.

4. Notable exceptions include Massimo Della Misericordia, especially *Divenire comunità Comuni rurali, poteri locali, identità sociali e territoriali in Valtellina e nella montagna lombarda nel tardo Medioevo*, Milano, Unicopli, 2006; Nicolas Carrier, Fabrice Mouthon, *Paysans des Alpes. Les communautés montagnardes au Moyen Âge*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010; Fabrice Mouthon, *La naissance des communs. Eaux, forêts, alpages dans les montagnes de Savoie (XII-XVI siècles)*, Chambéry, Société savoisienne d’histoire et d’archéologie, 2016.

5. Paul Schaefer, *Il Stato toceneri nel Medioevo. Contributo alla storia del Medioevo italiano*, Lugano, La Commerciale, 1954; Randolph C. Head, *Early Modern Democracy in the Grisons: Social Order and Political Language in a Swiss Mountain Canton, 10- 18*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995; Immacolata Saulle-Hippenmeyer, *Nachbarschaft, Pfarrei und Gemeinde in Graubünden, 100- 160*, Chur-Desertina, Kommissionsverlag Bundner Monatsblatt, 1997; Caroline Schnyder, *Reformation und Demokratie im Wallis (152- 163)*, Mainz, von Zabern, 2002; André Holenstein, Thomas Maissen, Maarten Prak (eds.), *The Republican Alternative. The Netherlands and Switzerland Compared*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2008; Prisca Roth, *Korporativ denken, gesellschaftlich organisieren, feudal handeln. Die Gemeinden und ihre Praktiken im Bergland des 14- 16Jahrhunderts*, Zürich, Chronos, 2018.

This special issue is thus chiefly devoted to the western Alps (the entire French and Italian Alpine regions and the Swiss Canton of Ticino). Profound research still lacks on this area despite the survival of extremely rich archives, a relevant number of which preserved by local municipalities from which they originated centuries ago. The western arc of the Alps is at the core of a large research project, DEMALPS. *Democracies of the Alps. Issues, Practices and Ideals of Politics in Mountain Communities, 1300-1500*, which has undertaken the study of Alpine communities in comparative perspective through a digital methodology enabling real, live research exchange.⁶ Guiding this research project are questions regarding the meaning of politics, social and political inclusion or exclusion, social mobility, as well as the content of political decisions and actions. While political decisions and actions were certainly driven by the practical, local necessities and desires connected to the rural and mountain environment, they were also informed by conceptions of social hierarchies and the expectations of roles of superior authorities in local matters and beyond.⁷

In order to examine community politics and language in the late medieval and early modern Alps, the papers presented here focus specifically on proceedings of councils and assemblies. Other community institutions certainly existed, such as parishes and *confrarie*, though their relevant archives or written traces of meetings, if they were produced, have rarely survived.⁸ As a point of clarity of taxonomy, “council proceedings” for the project are those sources issuing from a meeting of the local council, an institution whose size and functioning varied strongly from place to place. “Assembly proceedings” refers to the documents resulting from a general assembly of the community heads of household. The original sources employ a variety of terms, in Latin or vernacular depending on the region: from a general *liber communitatis*, to *liber propositarum*, to a more precise *liber reformationum consilii communitatis*, to *ordonnances* and *délibérations*.

These records, often – but not always – collected in registers, report a preamble setting out date and place of the assembly, the officer calling it, and the formulas confirming the validity of the meeting. Other elements may follow: the list of participants; one or more *proposita* (issues under debate); one or more *consilia* (the opinions of the councillors taking part in the assembly); a vote; and one or more *reformationes* (decisions by the council). However, as the articles demonstrate, the lack of standardized rules for drafting these documents at the time means that the preservation, form, and structure of these sources constitute essential points of entry into the investigation of communities and their political expressions. Furthermore, the proceedings were clearly not precise, exhaustive accounts of meetings. Rather, they were an elaboration of what took place, often

6. Marta Gravela, *Medieval Alpine Communal Politics under the Spot light*. The ERC Project DEMALPS, in «Studi di Storia Medioevale e di Diplomatica», n.s., 7, 2023, pp. 45- 76.

7. On the environmental issues in the Alpine regions see Jon Mathieu, *History of the Alps, 1500-1900. Environment, Development, and Society*, Morgantown, West Virginia University Press, 2009.

8. Another important medieval institution, the guild, does not appear in sources for the Piedmont and the Aosta Valley, as opposed to their appearance in the sources of the Alpine Provençal area.

aiming at concealing moments of great conflict, internal dissent, and factionalism. This is likely the reason why individual speeches nor detailed accounts of voting were rarely recorded. We can nevertheless discover between the lines fragments of political conflict and divergent opinions. Council and assembly proceedings were thus more than just administrative records for growing communities; they were powerful tools for projecting a community's identity, internally and externally, as a cohesive and legitimate political entity.

The first article, by Jean-Paul Rehr and myself, introduces council proceedings and the methodological challenges of such a large comparative investigation, fused with the stakes of the digital approach adopted by the DEMALPS team and the database resulting from it. The two papers that follow, by Chiara Corradini and Clément Carnielli, offer an overview of the census of proceedings carried out by the research team in the Italian and French Alps respectively, highlighting clusters of council registers in some areas – sometimes particularly precocious, such as in Sisteron, Haute Provence – and archival voids in others, arguing for different community solidity and documentary models. Focusing on certain local case-studies, these articles pursue a deeper analysis of the documentary practices of Alpine communities, which suggest different political uses of record-keeping, notably in relation to superior authorities.

Specific themes are developed in the following of this special issue. The emergence of council registers in the fifteenth century in a community in Piedmont is examined by Davide Morra, who links this to a process of social mobility and creation of a local elite, capable of collaborating with local lords and consolidating municipal institutions. Elisabetta Canobbio shifts our attention to worship practices discussed in the council meetings of fifteenth-century Lugano, in the Canton of Ticino, and opens a comparison with another community in the duchy of Milan, Bormio, thus expanding the investigation to the central Alps. Controlling the resources of local churches emerged here as a community prerogative that they were not willing to let go, showing the different resoluteness of communities in this area. The subsequent article, by Massimo Della Misericordia, also focuses on Bormio, a large *borgo* with a complex settlement fabric. By examining the extensive spatial references used between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in council proceedings, where we find Latin merged with expressions in local dialects, the paper investigates the political representations of territorial conflicts and the inhabitants' perceptions of the variety of mountain ecology and its transformation. The comparative perspective and chronological openness towards the early modern centuries are further proposed in the concluding paper by Beat Kümin, which offers insights into possible thematic and geographic extension of research to the Swiss area, a key region in the scholarly work of the past few decades.

Marta Gravela, Jean-Paul Rehr

Collective Decision-Making in the Alps. Researching Late Medieval Communal Politics Through a Digital-Native Project

ABSTRACT

Late medieval social and political history has disproportionately focused on urban contexts, particularly Italian and Mediterranean cities, regarding the political dynamics and decision-making processes of communities. This bias has neglected a significant portion of medieval society, notably Alpine mountain communities, despite their vital economic roles and large populations. The DEMALPS project addresses this gap through a trans-national survey of hundreds of little-explored archives across the Western Alps. Because this investigation uncovers a vast corpus of council proceedings and decision-making records never before examined from within, the project adopts a “digital-native” framework that prioritizes sharing raw sources alongside analysis. Rooted in FAIR principles and Open Science, this methodology represents a new way of doing history “from below”: making both the evidence and the historian’s reasoning transparent and accessible to the broader scholarly community.

KEYWORDS: Late medieval history; Alps; Council proceedings; Rural history; Digital humanities

1. *Beyond cities. Council and assembly proceeding in the late medieval period*

The history of the Alps, notably in pre-modern times, has often been the subject of misconceptions derived from modern perspectives on these territories rather than historical data. One of these misconceptions lies, as we know, in the view of mountain areas as scarcely populated and economically marginal regions, a view which rather mirrors the nineteenth and twentieth century depopulation of various Alpine areas. In reality, by the end of the Middle Ages approximately 2.9 million people lived in the Alps, which not only included hundreds of small villages counting 50 to 100 inhabitants, but also a surprisingly high number of

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The article is the result of joint reflections and discussions: Marta Gravela wrote sections 1 and 2, and Jean-Paul Rehr sections 3-6.

larger settlements of approximately 2,000-3,000 people, and several small towns reaching 5,000 residents.¹ The current state of research does not allow us to be conclusive about these numbers. Historians, however, have highlighted in the past few decades that their demographic weight was not the sole reason for the importance of mountain areas: from the late Middle Ages onwards, the Alpine economy became complementary and vital to those of the surrounding areas, the Alpine population being involved not only in providing essential products, but also in specialised manufacturing activities and trade, resulting in complex social and political structures.²

In spite of the crucial role played by mountain communities, studies in late medieval social and political history have traditionally favoured cities. Peasant studies, extremely popular between the 1960s and the 1980s, largely disregarded Alpine regions, generally focusing on other rural areas; moreover, given the strong influence of the Marxist perspective, they were thus mostly – if not exclusively – devoted to economic questions, leaving aside issues of social and political development of peasant communities.³ As far as the Alpine regions are

1. Before the Black Death the Alpine population is estimated to have reached 3.5 million people. Estimates from Jon Mathieu, *Storia delle Alpi 1500-1900. Ambiente, sviluppo e società*, Bellinzona, Casagrande, 2000, pp. 30-9; Alessio Fornasin, *La demografia alpina in età preindustriale: Interpretazioni, problemi, prospettive*, in Markus Denzel et al. (eds.), *Oeconomia Alpium I: Wirtschaftsgeschichte des Alpenraums in vorindustrieller Zeit: Forschungsaufsätze, -konzepte und -perspektiven*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter-Oldenbourg, 2017, pp. 57-72; Alessio Fornasin, *Storia del popolamento alpino dalle origini alla fine del XIX secolo. Continuità e discontinuità*, in «Popolazione e Storia», 1, 2024, pp. 113-141. Some data regarding valley floor settlements in Maria Ausiliatrice Ginatempo, *La popolazione dei centri minori dell'Italia centro-settentrionale nei secoli XIII-XV. Uno sguardo d'insieme*, in Federico Lattanzio, Gian Maria Varanini (eds.), *I centri minori italiani nel tardo medioevo. Cambiamento sociale, crescita economica, processi di ristrutturazione (secoli XIII-XVI)*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2018, pp. 31-79.

2. Denzel et al. (eds.), *Oeconomia Alpium I*; Markus Denzel, Andrea Bonoldi, Marie-Claude Schöpf er (eds.), *Oeconomia Alpium II: Economic History of the Alps in Preindustrial Times: Methods and Perspectives of Research*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter-Oldenbourg, 2022; Fornasin, *Storia del popolamento alpino*, pp. 124-126; Alessio Fiore, Alma Poloni, *L'economia medievale. Un profilo storico (secoli V-XV)*, Roma, Carocci, 2025, pp. 209-221; but see also Ginatempo, *La popolazione dei centri minori*, p. 57.

3. The exception was represented by peasant revolts, extensively studied throughout Europe and recently resumed. See Justine Firnhaber-Baker, *The Jacquerie of 1358: A French Peasants' Revolt*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021; Vincent Challet, *La révolte des Tuchins: banditisme social ou sociabilité villageoise?*, in «Médiévales», 34, 1998, pp. 101-112; Vincent Challet, *Un mouvement anti-seigneurial? Seigneur et paysans dans la révolte des Tuchins*, in Ghislain Brunel, Serge Brunet (eds.), *Les luttes anti-seigneuriales dans l'Europe médiévale et moderne*, Toulouse, Presses universitaires du Midi, 2009, pp. 19-31; Monique Bourin, Giovanni Cherubini, Giuliano Pinto (eds.), *Rivolte urbane e rivolte contadine nell'Europa del Trecento. Un confronto*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2008; Justine Firnhaber-Baker, Dirk Schoenaers (eds.), *The Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt*, London-New York, Routledge, 2017; Sam K. Cohn, *Lust for Liberty: The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1000-1300*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2006 and Cohn's more recent *Popular Protest and Ideals of Democracy in Late Renaissance Italy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021. Some classic studies still offer valuable contributions, notably Michel Mollat, Philippe Wolff, *Orléans Bleus. Jacqueries et Ciompi. Les*

concerned, pioneering research was conducted in the 1970s by Peter Blickle, who argued for the substantial political development of Alpine communities between the fifteenth and sixteenth century, also linking this growth to his concept of communalism and the circulation of the Reformation values;⁴ his work fostered new in-depth investigations, such as the extensive work on the Lombard Alps by Massimo Della Misericordia, who highlighted the complexity of local political culture, and Beat Kün in's work on community and parish structures.⁵ Scholarly interest was especially devoted to the Alpine economy and social structures, to the ecclesiastical structures of the region, as well as to the relationships between the Alps and the surrounding territories.⁶ With few notable exceptions, the attention of historians disproportionately focused on Switzerland, the central and eastern Alps, and very rarely took into account questions of internal community politics, scrutinising sources – council and assembly proceedings – which offer an incomparable insight into community life.⁷

révolutions populaires en Europe aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1970; Rinaldo Comba, *Rivolte e ribellioni fra Tre e Quattrocento*, in Nicola Tranfaglia, Massimo Firpo (eds.), *La storia: I grandi problemi*, Torino, UTET, 1981 vol. 2, pp. 673-691; Rodney H. Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free. Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381*, London, Temple Smith, 1973; Rodney H. Hilton, Trevor H. Aston (eds.), *The English Rising of 1381*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984. The perspective of studying mountain communities through conflict and revolt is still present in Marco Bellabarba, Hannes Obermair, Hitomi Sato (eds.), *Communities and Conflicts in the Alps from the Late Middle Ages to Early Modernity*, Bologna-Berlin, Il Mulino-Duncker & Humblot, 2015.

4 Peter Blickle (ed.), *Resistance, Representation, and Community*, Oxford-Strasbourg, Oxford University Press, 1997; Peter Blickle, *From the Communal Reformation to the Revolution of the Common Man*, Leiden, Brill, 1998 Previous notable work in Paul Schaefer, *Il 8^{to} toceneri nel Medioevo. Contributo alla storia del Medioevo italiano*, Lugano, La Commerciale, 1954

5. See especially Massimo Della Misericordia, with particular reference to *Divenire comunità Comuni rurali, poteri locali, identità sociali e territoriali in Valtellina e nella montagna lombarda nel tardo Medioevo*, Milano, Unicopli, 2006; Beat Kün in, *The Communal Age in Western Europe, c. 1100-1800. Towns, Villages and Parishes in Pre-Modern Society*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

6. Nicolas Carrier, Fabrice Mouthon, *Paysans des Alpes. Les communautés montagnardes au Moyen Âge*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010; Paolo Ostinelli, Simona Boscani Leoni (eds.), *La Chiesa dal basso. Organizzazioni, interazioni e pratiche del contesto parrocchiale alpino alla fine del Medioevo*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2012; Gian Maria Varanini (ed.), *Le Alpi medievali nello sviluppo delle regioni contermini*, Napoli, Liguori, 2004 Andrea Castagnetti, Gian Maria Varanini (eds.), *Storia del Trentino*, 3. *L'età medievale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2004 Marco Bellabarba, Giuseppe Olmi (eds.), *Storia del Trentino*, 4 *L'età moderna*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2002.

7. See the works by Massimo Della Misericordia (note 5) and Nicolas Carrier, *Quand la communauté parle d'une seule voix: prendre la parole dans les assemblées paysannes à la fin du Moyen Âge (Alpes nord-occidentales et Jura, XIII^e-XV^e siècle)*, in Société des historiens médiévistes de l'Enseignement supérieur public (ed.), *La voix au Moyen Âge. 50^e Congrès de la Société des Historiens Médiévistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur Public*, Paris, Editions de la Sorbonne, 2020, pp. 29- 264 On the Swiss area see Randolph C. Head, *Early Modern Democracy in the Grisons: Social Order and Political Language in a Swiss Mountain Canton, 14- 18*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995 and Immacolata Saulle-Hippenmeyer, *Nachbarschaft, Pfarrei*

Urban societies and their organisation, on the other hand, traditionally received significant attention from historians of the late Middle Ages. This is especially true when it comes to questions involving political participation and representation, political ideas, desires, and decisions, as well as the recording practices of community deliberations. Proceedings kept by local councils and officers – the privileged source to address these questions – have been the focus of extensive studies in the past couple of decades, which nonetheless were exclusively devoted to cities and to a few large towns lacking the official status of *civitas*, but in many ways comparable to them (so much so that Giorgio Chittolini introduced the definition of «quasi città» to describe them).⁸

Italian cities, with particular reference to northern and central regions, have unsurprisingly played a leading part in this field of studies, as communal governments offered the ideal framework to investigate the role and functioning of assemblies, the ways representation was organised over time, the ideals of *bonum commune*, the transformation of ruling elites, and their relationships with lay and ecclesiastical authorities.⁹ The reason for such a great interest undoubtedly lies in the unrivalled abundance and precocity of urban archival sources. It is common knowledge that several city archives preserve long and often continuous series of council and assembly proceedings from the thirteenth century onwards; it is not only the case of the renowned archives of Siena, Florence, Venice, and Bologna, but also of San Gimignano, Orvieto, Perugia, and Prato, to name but a few examples.¹⁰ Moreover, scholarly interest was directed to Italian cities because

und Gemeinde in Graubünden, 1400-1600, Chur-Desertina, Kommissionsverlag Bündner Monatsblatt, 1997. On the vocabulary used to define these sources see the introduction to this special issue.

8 Giorgio Chittolini, «Quasi-città. Borghi e terre in area lombarda nel tardo medioevo», in «Società e storia», 47, 1990, pp. 3-26, now also in Giorgio Chittolini, *Città comunità e feudi negli stati dell'Italia centro-settentrionale*, Milano, Unicopli, 1996, pp. 8-104. The subject was more recently brought up and further assessed by Ginatempo, *La popolazione dei centri minori*, pp. 32-8. For a comparison to German cities see Eberhard Isenmann, *Die deutsche Stadt im Mittelalter, 1200-1500. Stadt, Recht, Adregiment, Kirche, Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft*, Ulmer, UTB für Wissenschaft, 198.

9 Massimo Sbarbaro, *Le delibere dei Consigli dei Comuni cittadini italiani (secoli XIII-XIV)*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2005.

10. Fundamental work for Italian cities was carried out by Lorenzo Tanzini, *Delibere e verbali. Per una storia documentaria dei consigli nell'Italia comunale*, in «Reti Medievali Rivista», 14 1, 2013, pp. 3-79; Lorenzo Tanzini, *A consiglio io. La vita politica nell'Italia dei comuni*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2014. Lorenzo Tanzini, *Consigli, delibere e verbali: il panorama comunale italiano*, in Ermanno Orlando, Gherardo Ortalli (eds.), *Le delibere consiliari dei comuni italiani. Uno sguardo comparativo a partire dai Misti del Senato di Venezia*, Venezia, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2023, pp. 97-112. On cities of central Italy see Francesco Poggi, *Conflitti di popolo. Lo spazio politico di Orvieto (1280-1337)*, Roma, Viella, 2022; Francesco Pirani, *Libertas, oligarchie e governo papale. Ascoli nel "lungo" Quattrocento (1377-1502)*, in «Reti Medievali Rivista», 22/1, 2021, pp. 321-353 and Pierluigi Terenzi, *«In quantum communis». Scritture pubbliche e cancelleria cittadina a L'Aquila (secoli XIV-XV)*, in «Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen Âge», 128 2, 2016, pp. 49-510; Pierluigi Terenzi, *Scritture di confine. Verbali e registri consiliari nelle città dell'Abruzzo settentrionale (secoli XIV-XV)*, in Isabella Lazzarini, Armando Miranda, Francesco Senatore (eds.), *Istituzioni, scritture, contabilità. Il caso molisano nell'Italia tardome-*

of the originality and complexity of their political institutions, entailing multiple councils at once, as in Venice, where proceedings were issued by the *ḡ nato* as well as the *Mag ior Consiḡ io* and the small board called *Consiḡ io dei Dieci*, to mention but the most relevant councils; or Siena, where larger and smaller councils included the *Consiḡ io Generale*, *Concistoro*, and *Balia*.¹¹

The attention to assembly and council proceedings, however, was not limited to the Italian peninsula. Further studies, often in comparative perspective, focused especially on the Mediterranean area, notably French and Catalan cities, and more recently on English towns, introducing distinctions between local councils and parliaments.¹² Four main lines of research have tended to dominate so far: firstly, how internal politics worked, by focusing on council organisation, forms of elections and voting systems, as well as on local political struggles, social mobility and changes within the elites; secondly, what we might define as foreign policy, meaning the relationships with superior authorities as well as other cities.¹³ A third perspective has often combined councils' proceedings with

dievale, Roma, Viella, 2017, pp. 193-216. For a wider and updated account on Italian cities see Orlando, Ortalli (eds.), *Le deliḡ re consiliari dei comuni italiani* and the essays on Italy in François Otchakovsky-Laurens, Laure Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemb ées. Quelle démocratie urbi ne au travers des registres de déliḡérations? Méditerranée-Europe, XIII^e-XVIII^e siècle*, Aix-en-Provence, Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2021.

11. See the essays by Gherardo Ortalli, *I reḡ stri del ḡ nato veneziano: al cuore della politica lagnar e*, pp. 3-13; Ermanno Orlando, *Le scritte in reḡ stro dei consiḡ i del Comune lagnar e*, pp. 21-39; Roberta Mucciarelli, *Il consiḡ io ḡ nerale e ḡ i ordinamenta a Siena (fine XIII-inizio XIV secolo): una nota*, pp. 135-152 all in Orlando, Ortalli (eds.), *Le deliḡ re consiliari dei comuni italiani*.

12. Noël Coulet, *Les deliḡ rations communales en Provence au Moyen Âḡ*, in Claude Carozzi, Huguette Taviani-Carozzi (eds.), *Le médiéviste devant ses sources. Questions et méthodes*, Aix-en-Provence, Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2004 pp. 227-27; Martine Charageat, Corinne Leveleux-Teixeira (eds.), *Consulter, deliḡ rer, décider: donner son avis au Moyen-Âḡ (France-Espagne, VII^e-XVI^e siècles)*, Toulouse, Presses universitaires du Midi, 2010; Michel Hébert, *La voix du peuple. Une histoire des assemblées au Moyen Âḡ*, Paris, PUF, 2018 Otchakovsky-Laurens, Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemb ées*; Eliza Hartrich, *Locality, Polity and the Politics of Counsel: Royal and Urban Councils in England, 1420-1429*, in Jacqueline Rose (ed.), *The Politics of Counsel in Eng and and ḡ otland*, 18 107, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 101-116; Christian D. Liddy, *Who Decides? Urban Councils and Consensus in the late Middle Ages*, in «Social History», 4/ 4 2021, pp. 06 -34 The interest for such records, especially in France, is proven by a series of ongoing projects, such as *Reḡ del* (<https://regidel.hypotheses.org/>), last access 06.01.2026; the *Groupe de recherche sur l'écrit deliḡ ratif dans l'espace francophone* (<https://calenda.org/1206152>); or the conference series on the "assemblées d'habitants" (<https://lamop.hypotheses.org/1359>) (the last access for all the link here and below was on 06.01.2026).

13. On voting practices see Serena Ferente, Lovro Kunčević, Miles Pattenden (eds.), *Cultures of Voting in Pre-modern Europe*, London-New York, Routledge, 2018 see also Federica Lazzarini, Davide Morra, *The ALLORA Project. Methods and Challenges through the Case-study of Electoral Practices in Romance-speaking Europe (c. 12th-18th centuries)*, pp. 25-50 and Lorenzo Tanzini, *Il voto e le pratiche elettorali nelle città comunali italiane (secoli XII-XIV): contesti istituzionali e materiali*, pp. 191-212 both in Davide Morra, Federica Lazzarini, Francesco Senatore (eds.), *Words and Thing in Motion. Methodological Issues in Studying the Circulation of Legal-administrative*

other sources, namely court records, in the attempt to uncover traces of popular politics, the voices of those social groups more often than not excluded from offices and institutional politics.¹⁴ Finally, a research interest of particular prominence in Italian historiography focused on recording practices and the role of notaries in the compilation of assembly proceedings.¹⁵

Research in this area thus focused on towns and cities, with at best a few local studies on rural settings. Nevertheless, many communities in the (particularly western) Alps preserve remarkably rich archives, which often include late medieval council proceedings as well as charters issued as a result of political assemblies (not to speak of their economic and religious holdings); in addition, a significant amount of community records survive in family archives of local lords. These offer unique insights into the social and political life of mountain communities, very rarely examined from within.¹⁶ The peculiar geomorphological and climatic conditions, specific economic developments and resulting social complexity, but also the political entanglement of these territories well into the early modern period call for deeper investigations on the political practices and decision-making processes of Alpine communities.¹⁷ The abundance of sources offers the opportunity – and the challenge – to overcome isolated case-studies and attempt a broad, trans-national comparative investigation. What follows examines the methodological questions confronted in the ERC project DEMALPS. *Democracies of the Alps. Issues, practices and ideals of politics in mountain communities, 1300-1500*, devoted to the study of late medieval Alpine council and assembly proceedings. We also consider how the project's research tasks have been approached through a deliberately “digital-native” framework.

Lexicon and Practices in Europe (12th-18th century), Napoli, Federico II University Press, 2025; most of the other issues emerge from the essays in Otchakovsky-Laurens, Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemb ées* and Orlando, Ortalli (eds.), *Le delib re consiliari dei comuni italiani*.

14 Jan Dumolyn et al. (eds.), *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe. Communication and Popular Politics*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2014 Ben Eersels, Jelle Haemers (eds.), *Words and Deeds. Shaping Urban Politics from below in Late Medieval Europe*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2020; Christian D. Liddy, *Contesting the City: The Politics of Citizenship in English Towns, 1300 -1530*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017; see also Liddy's more recent *Who decides?*

15. This interest characterised Tanzini's works, see note 10, and Attilio Bartoli Langeli's studies, see most recently *Le scritture in reg stro dei Comuni italiani*, in Orlando, Ortalli (eds.), *Le delib re consiliari dei comuni italiani*, pp. 113-122; other recent case-studies in the same volume by Pierluigi Terenzi, *Delib ragioni e verbi i dei consig i nelle città dell'Italia meridionale (secoli XIV-XV)*, pp. 173-189, Alberto Luongo, *Delibere comunali ed interventi signorili a Gubbio nel XIV secolo*, pp. 191-208 and Piero Gualtieri, *Dinamica consiliare, produzione normativa e assetti della documentazione: la realtà di Firenze fra XIII e XIV secolo*, pp. 209-223.

16. An initial survey on Alpine council proceedings, limited to the Italian area, in Marta Gravela, *Le delib re dei comuni piemontesi nel Tre e Quattrocento (città 'qas i-città , comunità rurali)*, in Orlando, Ortalli (eds.), *Le delib re consiliari dei comuni italiani*, pp. 225-240.

17. Jon Mathieu, *Conditions historiques de la spécificité montagnarde*, in «Revue d'Histoire moderne et contemporaine», 52/2, 2005, pp. 9-25.

2. Methodological challenges

The ERC project DEMALPS looks at council and assembly proceedings and charters as a way to investigate the collective political values, ambitions, and practices of late medieval mountain communities from below. This is in contrast to the few existing studies of the area which have by and large resorted to records produced by superior authorities (princes, dukes, lay and ecclesiastical lords) to examine their relationship with local communities. By addressing a large set of questions usually applied to urban contexts, the research focuses not only on the content of proceedings, but also on their written form and record-keeping practices. Which issues were at stake in local politics? How was political participation perceived and practiced? Who had the right to a voice in collective debates and how? What margins of agency did local polities have and to what extent did they contest such limits? Which values inspired the political action of villagers? To what extent did they differ from those developed in the cities? How was all this recorded and its evidence preserved (or dispersed)? How did the mountain environment influence all these issues (if it did)? Can we detect specific political practices?

To address these questions, we examine the western Alps as a whole through a systematic survey of all communities – within the Alpine Convention area corresponding to the western arc of the range – that produced and, in many cases, preserved records of their political life between the late thirteenth and the early sixteenth centuries (see fig. 1).¹⁸ The area contained in this arc spans mountain ranges and valleys from the French-Italian Mediterranean coast in the south (the Alps of Provence and Maritime Alps) to the western Swiss Alps in the north (with the Canton of Ticino at its eastern end). Such a broad comparative and interdisciplinary approach – combining not only medieval history, but also archival science and diplomatics – required a coordinated and collective mode of work. Rather than relying on separate individual research, the team adopted a shared collaborative framework, conceived from the outset to integrate research, documentation, and comparison. From the project's earliest conception, this framework included a purpose-built working environment designed to answer the specific questions of this study and to allow researchers to collect, verify, and analyse large sets of data in common, in real time, following the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable). The online research environment (<http://www.demalps.com>) was developed by the DEMALPS team on the basis of preliminary archival investigations and experiences drawn from city and town council proceedings examined in previous research.

The initial work was aimed at creating three essential entry points: communities, archives, and council proceedings. Each presented a number of issues, reflecting not only the specificity of the various case-studies, but also the conceptual choices made by the team. These challenges led us to compare and refine our working practices continuously. While the research objectives and questions

18 For the boundaries of the Alpine convention see <https://www.atlas.alpconv.org/info/>.

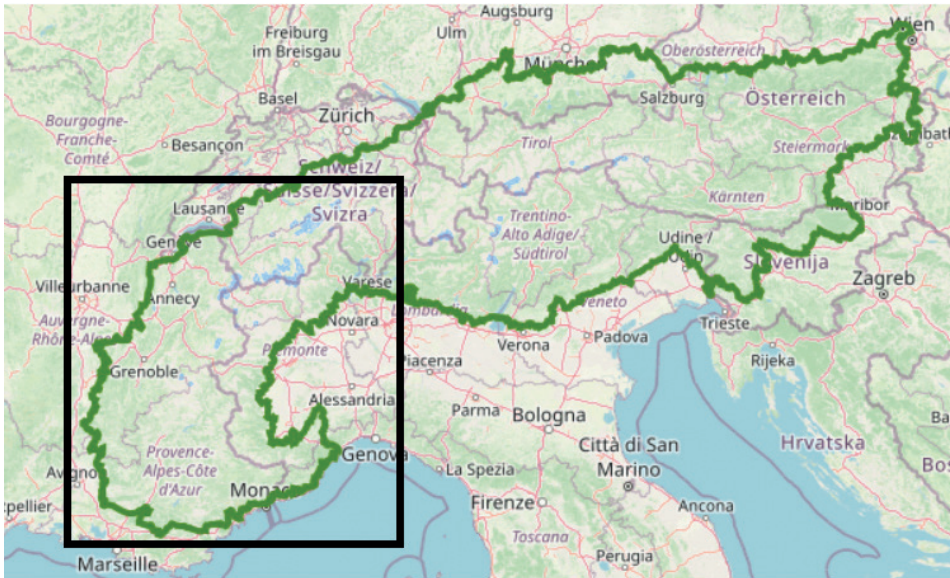


Fig. 1. The western Alps within the boundaries of the Alpine Convention.

outlined above remained central, the process of designing the shared corpus in turn influenced how we thought about our material – forcing us to decide what information to record and in what form, and to reconsider familiar categories of description. Rather than producing a database as a final product of research, we developed it as a working instrument that has continued to evolve with the investigation itself, prompting reflections on the relevance, structure, and inter-connection of research data while archival investigations have been carried out. In particular, this collaborative design process transformed our thinking on three main issues.

- a) The relationship between communities, their sources and their archives. This question, apparently simple, proved crucial for structuring our research output. The theoretical framework was shaped through archival surveys, previous research experiences, and relevant literature on communities and their archives between the Middle Ages and the early modern period.¹⁹ Yet such a relationship cannot be taken for granted, as our preliminary investigations clearly showed: while some communities established their archives in the late medieval period, mostly from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries, as evidenced by the first copies of older charters, many other

19. See the essential Attilio Bartoli Langeli, Andrea Giorgi, Stefano Moscadelli (eds.), *Archivi e comunità tra Medioevo ed età moderna*, Roma, Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Direzione generale per gli archivi, 2009.

communities did not collect their records in a stable archive until much later. The reasons for this, under comparative scrutiny in the project, are multiple: in some cases the notaries who wrote the records were in charge of keeping the locality's written memory, either in their protocols or, less frequently, in dedicated registers;²⁰ in other cases, given a lack of suitable buildings, records were entrusted to ecclesiastical institutions; strong seigneurial control could likewise hinder the establishment of autonomous community archives (and perhaps of community autonomy itself). Because of these varied circumstances, much ancient material has been lost or dispersed, requiring the integration of information from several archival institutions to reconstruct a community's documentary production. This underlined the crucial importance of archives not merely as repositories of evidence, but as sources for understanding the formation and endurance of communities between the late medieval and early modern periods.

In addition, even established community archives could undergo unforeseen transformations. Beyond the common risks of loss through fire, flood, or decay, modern initiatives often transferred local records to central repositories. French municipal archives were generally moved to the Archives Départementales without significant dispersal.²¹ One example from the Italian context tells a different story: the nineteenth-century project launched by Quintino Sella to establish a large archive of the territory of Biella, which led to the creation of the composite holding *Comuni* in the State Archives of Biella, now including the records of various distinct communities.²² Subsequent additions to this collection were included however in a different archival holding of the same State Archives, that of the *Archivio Storico del Comune di Biella*, thus creating the series *Comuni diversi* and *Serie I*.²³ Some municipalities nonetheless retained part of their archives locally. As a result,

20. As in the area examined by Federico Del Tredici, *Senza memoria? La conservazione delle scritture comunitarie nel Milanese (secoli XIV-XV)*, in «Studi di Storia Medioevale e di Diplomatica», n.s., 2, 2018pp. 4- 62.

21. That is nowadays the most common place of conservation, see Clément Carnielli, *Forms and Functions of (Non-) Registration of Political Actions in Late-medieval French Alpine Communities*, in this issue.

22. Quintino Sella (187- 1888) : Umberto Levra, *Sella, Quintino*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 91, Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 2018 pp. 89- 102. Archivio di Stato di Biella (hereafter: ASBi), *Comuni*: the holding includes records from 26 former municipal archives, 19 of which in the Alpine area and 5 preserving late medieval records.

23. ASBi, Archivio Storico del Comune di Biella, *Comuni diversi*: this holding includes records from seven former municipal archives, five of which in the Alpine area and two preserving late medieval evidence. The most striking archival series is however ASBi, Archivio Storico del Comune di Biella, Serie I, in which the *buste 32- 378* relate to materials from 20 municipalities in the Alpine area, in great part starting from the fifteenth century: <http://www.asbi.it/inasb.html>. Part of these records were published in Luigi Borello, Armando Tallone (eds.), *Le carte dell'archivio comunale di Biella fino al 1379*, 4 vols., Voghera-Torino, Mario Gabetta, 1927-1933. On this archival series see Flavia Negro, *Fra riordinamento e reinvenzione: l'Archivio Storico di Biella dal Medioevo al XX secolo*, in «Rassegna degli Archivi di Stato», n.s., 3/3, 2007, pp. 49- 530.

some components can still be found in local archives, while others were entirely moved to Biella, and in certain cases the same community's records were split among multiple repositories.²⁴ Reconstructing their coherence therefore means acknowledging the archival histories that produced such dispersal.

- b) The structure of records and the work of notaries. In general, medieval council proceedings follow a recognisable pattern: a preamble setting out date and place of the assembly, the officer calling it, and the formulas confirming the validity of the meeting; the list of participants; one or more *proposita* (issues under debate); one or more *consilia* (the opinions of the councillors taking part in the assembly); a vote; and one or more *reformationes* (decisions by the council).²⁵ Yet few records follow this ideal model. Layouts vary from place to place and even within the same community over time. A list of participants may be included in each meeting, or open the register without detailed information on individual participation in specific assemblies; propositions and decisions may shift order; *consilia* and details of vote are frequently absent; a final notarial subscription may or may not appear. A rigid data structure risks imposing modern expectations from scholarship rather than capturing this variation. Greater flexibility was therefore needed in order to record relevant information without distorting the sources, a central question for the project.
- c) The content of council proceedings. As the ultimate goal of the project is to compare the political ideals and practices of Alpine communities, effective recording of the content of political decisions was essential. From the earliest archival surveys, certain recurring themes became apparent, allowing the team to identify the key topics for further examination, while significant differences also emerged in how communities organised political life – for example in the rotation of councillors and officers. The challenge was how to record these elements so that they could later be analysed comparatively.

The methodological and technical reasoning behind these solutions is developed in the following sections, under the sign of a digital-native project.

3. *Going digital-native: digital methods and historical practice*

DEMALPS is described as a digital-native project not because its sources are born digital – the sources are paper and parchment found in archives across the western Alps – but because the research process itself is conceived and executed

²⁴ To provide but one example, the records produced by the community of Andorno are now divided into three archival holdings without any apparent criterion: ASBi, Archivio Storico del Comune di Biella, Serie I, b. 32- 361 (records from 1200 onwards); Archivio Storico del Comune di Biella, Comuni diversi, Andorno (from 1598); Archivio Storico del Comune di Andorno Micca (from 1598). See <https://www.demalps.com/communities/plandornomiccapemonte>.

²⁵ Tanzini, *Deliberazioni verbali*; Tanzini, *A consilio*.

entirely within a digital environment specifically built not merely to produce final outputs but to support the entire course of inquiry. In this sense, the database is not an accessory to the research but its medium.

A claim of being a digital project is, in itself, no longer novel. In recent years, several ERC projects in medieval history have adopted large-scale digital infrastructures – among them DISSINET (inquisitorial records)²⁶ and DiDip (diplomats)²⁷ – each advancing ambitious agendas for the computational analysis of sources. What DEMALPS proposes, however, is to extend the meaning of digital-native beyond research products or delivery formats. Here, digital form is not a container for completed work but an *embodied methodology*: the infrastructure is conceived as inseparable from historical reasoning itself. From the project's first months, the DEMALPS team developed a collaborative online environment (<http://www.demalps.com>) that serves simultaneously as public and private data repository, research log, and space of collective interpretation.

This choice arose as much from the explicitly comparative and collaborative nature of DEMALPS as from the character of the Alpine sources. Our researchers and developers work across the French, Italian, and Swiss Alps, often in archival research trips separated by distance, language, and jurisdiction. The application therefore became not only a tool but a *meeting place* – the single shared space where sources, discussion, and verification converge. What might elsewhere have been a logistical necessity – an online platform for data entry – here merged with the historical-methodological core of the project.

Many projects in the historical and philological humanities have likewise turned to databases, especially as mass transcription and *Handwritten Text Recognition* (HTR) have expanded access to archival material. The large-scale initiatives HIMANIS (for the *Trésor des Chartes*),²⁸ CoMMA (aggregating manuscripts via *Gallica*),²⁹ or regional efforts such as *Crimes et châtiments* at the Archives de l'ancien Évêché de Bâle³⁰ exemplify this trend, as do aggre-

26. David Zbiral, *DISSINET. Networks of Dissent: Computational Modelling of Dissident and Inquisitorial Cultures in Medieval Europe*, ERC Consolidator Project (2021-2026), <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/1010004>.

27. Georg Vogeler, *DiDip. Digital and Distant Microanalysis of Late Medieval Diplomats*, ERC Advanced Grant (2021-2026), <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101019327>.

28. Dominique Stutzmann, *HIMANIS – Historical Manuscript Indexing for user-controlled search*, IRHT – A2IA – Rijksuniversiteit Groningen-Universitat Politècnica de València, 2015-2018 <http://himanis.huma-num.fr/app>. See Dominique Stutzmann, Jean-François Moufflet, Sébastien Hamel, *La recherche en plein texte dans les sources manuscrites médiévales: enjeux et perspectives du projet HIMANIS pour l'édition électronique*, in «Médiévales. Langues, Textes, Histoire», 73, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.9000/medievales.898>.

29. Project located at <https://comma.inria.fr> with description in Thibault Clérico *et al.*, *CoMMA, a Large-scale Corpus of Multilingual Medieval Archives*, <https://inria.hal.science/hal-05299220>.

30. Fondation des Archives de l'ancien Évêché de Bâle, *Crimes et châtiments: Procès de sorcellerie et procédures criminelles: numérisation, mise en ligne et médiatio*, 2025, <https://www.aueb.ch/fr/Crimes-et-chatiments/Description-et-objectifs-du-projet/Description-et-objectifs-du-projet.html>.

gation projects like CEMA (*Cartae Europae Medii Aevi*)³¹ and long-running network databases such as PoMS (People of Medieval Scotland).³² Numerous other projects could be cited, varying in scope and aim, but what unites them is that their databases generally appear *after* the research phase – as deliverables or dissemination tools. The databases thus frequently act as online explorers for corpora they also make available through repositories such as Zenodo or Nakala. Such models have advanced accessibility and reproducibility across the field, yet they typically separate the digital structure from the day-to-day work of historical interpretation. They were never intended to do otherwise: their purpose was to publish sources, not to mediate collaborative inquiry. What DEMALPS adds is an ethical layer – an insistence that verification, transparency, and accountability be built into the very architecture of research, not deferred to its results.

As such, DEMALPS begins where most projects conclude. Its database is not the endpoint but the point of departure – a space where data collection, modelling, and analysis interact in real time. Few medieval projects offer an interface designed for *continuous scholarly contribution*: databases too often close when funding ends. There are notable exceptions, often maintained through the persistence of their founders or small rounds of renewal. *APOSC RIPTA – Unified Corpus of Papal Letters*, for example, has become an ever-expanding collection of papal letters spanning all periods, inviting external contributors to add editions and indexes under editorial control.³³ The *Thesaurus Exemplorum Medii Aevi* (ThEMA),³⁴ now in its third version, has preserved and grown its data over twenty-five years, demonstrating that historical databases can endure and remain collaborative. Members of the ThEMA team attended the birth of *Fairs in*

31. Nicolas Perreux, *CEMA – Cartae Europae Medii Aevi (5th-15th c.)*, Université de Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne / LaMOP, 2025, <https://cema.lamop.fr/>. On this project see Nicolas Perreux, *Possibilities, Challenges and Limits of a European Charters Corpus (Cartae Europae Medii Aevi – CEMA)*, 2020-2021, <https://hal.science/hal-03203029>.

32. Amanda Beam *et al.*, *People of Medieval Scotland: 1094-1372*, London-Glasgow-Edinburgh, King's College London-University of Glasgow-University of Edinburgh, 2019, <https://www.poms.ac.uk>. See now the interesting discussion, directly relevant to DEMALPS, on making databases from fragments of sources, in Dauvit Broun, Joanna Tucker, *The People of Medieval Scotland Databases as History*, in Julianne Nyan *et al.* (eds.), *On Making in the Digital Humanities: The Scholarship of Digital Humanities Development in Honour of John Bradley*, London, UCL Press, 2023, pp. 105-126, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2wk727j.10>.

33. Julien Théry, *APOSCRIPTA Database – Unified Corpus of Papal Letters*, Telma/IRHT, 2018 <https://telma.irht.cnrs.fr/chartes/aposcripta/page/presentation>.

34. Jacques Berlioz, Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu, Pascal Collomb, *Thesaurus Exemplorum Medii Aevi (ThEMA)*, EHESS, 2001-2025, <https://thema.huma-num.fr>. Two articles encapsulate the journey of ThEMA and describe its operations, Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu, Jacques Berlioz, *Introduction. Le ThEMA: l'avenir d'une base de données sur Internet*, in «Les Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques. Archives», 35, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.4000/crrh.3008>, and Jean-Paul Rehr, Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu, *Thesaurus Exemplorum Medii Aevi: une base de données collaborative sur les exemplaires médiévaux*, in «Humanités numériques», 42021, <https://doi.org/10.4000/revuehn.2630>.

History, the database of the CoMOR project,³⁵ which sought to interlink metadata on merchants, markets, and people.

Both ThEMA and CoMOR offered online interfaces that balanced contribution with editorial control and peer-review workflows. Yet the form of collaboration they fostered was additive rather than reflexive: contributors supplied or corrected records within a predefined framework whose structure remained stable over time. DEMALPS, by contrast, treats collaboration itself as a mode of historical reasoning. Work within the shared environment does not simply populate a database; it reshapes the framework through which evidence is interpreted. As researchers confront new archival material, categories, priorities, and even the architecture of the system evolve in response.

The authors of this article first collaborated on *Fairs in History*, and it was from those experiences that DEMALPS drew its foundational lesson: that a historical database can be a shared workspace rather than a final deliverable; that collaboration and quality control must be built into its very architecture; and that continuity depends on designing a system historians can use, maintain, and reinterpret themselves (without recourse to technicians).

These principles, which govern both the infrastructure and the research workflow, define what we mean by a *digital-native* project in historical research. They are not technical conveniences but methodological positions – the conditions that make collaborative historical inquiry possible at scale.

1. Early availability. The database is built and deployed from the outset of the project, allowing real data and experimentation to shape its structure through rapid, iterative improvement. The data and its application environment (“the database”) are available to the research team and the external research community.
2. Comprehensive integration. All components of research – communities, archives, records, and their taxonomies – are managed within a single system designed for historians, not adapted post-hoc from generic technical frameworks.
3. Collaboration as priority. The platform enables real-time work among researchers across regions; data entry, discussion, and verification occur in a shared online space rather than through local files or intermediary technicians.
4. Direct responsibility. Historians and palaeographers enter data themselves, including object images, without passing through technicians or secondary reformatting; this ensures scholarly accountability for every record.
5. Quality control. All entries pass through defined workflows, preserving the scholarly standards of peer review within the digital environment.

35. Jean Louis Gaulin, Susanne Rau, *Fairs in History*, ENS de Lyon, 2022, <https://fairs-in-history.huma-num.fr>. On the CoMOR database, see Noémie Lacroix, Jean-Paul Rehr, Leif Scheuermann, *Fairs in History: The Public Database of the CoMOR Project*, in Jean-Louis Gaulin, Susanne Rau (eds.), *Fairs, Cities and Merchants. Spatiotemporal Analysis (14th-17th century)*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter-Brill, 2025, pp. 71- 81 <https://doi.org/10.1515/978111621296-018>.

6. Transparency and traceability. Every record links directly to its archival citation and image, allowing verification of evidence and documenting each researcher's intervention.
7. FAIR open data. Data and code are structured to be FAIR – that is Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable – balancing internal collaboration with public dissemination.

Together these principles make DEMALPS not simply a database but a living infrastructure for collective historical research. What follows describes how that collaborative, reflexive environment took form – the architecture through which historians research together across the Alps and which is now open to the broader scholarly community.

4 *Designing for discovery: agile principles in historical practice*

Historians typically follow a working rhythm that has changed little in generations: go to the archives, transcribe, reflect – most often in solitude – before presenting conclusions to others. Cameras, spreadsheets, and transcription software have accelerated parts of this cycle but have not altered its logic. Collaboration, when it occurs, usually comes late, once material and interpretation are already fixed. Even large collective projects tend to coordinate more than they truly co-produce research.

The DEMALPS' project priorities of speed and collaboration unsettled that rhythm. Because the project's principal tool – the database – had to function from the outset, design and research evolved together. Each transcription and annotation shaped the system's structure and was immediately visible to others. To manage that simultaneity, we drew on principles familiar from *agile* development – flexible, incremental design, early deployment, iterative testing and improvement – and on the notion of a *minimum viable product* (MVP). These ideas provided a pragmatic framework for a historian-driven collaboration: they offered tools for working amid uncertainty and for keeping interpretation open while progress remained measurable.³⁶

36. The agile methodology and MVP concepts referenced here are drawn from software development practices, adapted for historical research rather than adopted wholesale. While “agile” is often dated to a 2001 manifesto, extensive debate has since ensued far beyond its original business-oriented formulations. The principles are adapted here specifically to address historical research challenges – preserving source fidelity and while enabling collaborative iteration – rather than displacing traditional scholarly methods. The literature on agile methodology is vast, with useful overviews having been complemented in the last ten years with specific case studies of applications. Pragmatic overviews are therefore best found in older literature, including the venerable Pekka Abrahamsson *et al.*, *Agile Software Development Methods: Review and Analysis*, arXiv preprint, 25.09.2017, available at <https://doi.org/10.5508/arXiv.1709.0839> (originally published as: Pekka Abrahamsson *et al.*, *Agile Software Development Methods: Review and Analysis*, VTT Publication 48 Espoo, 2002), see especially sections 1-3.

- a) **Minimum Viable Product as historical epistemology.** In software design, a *minimum viable product* is a working version that delivers core functionality early enough to test it in practice. In DEMALPS the concept became a methodological stance: build the smallest possible framework that still enables meaningful engagement with the sources. Whenever we faced a choice between structuring and observing, we favoured observation. For example, names, offices, and assembly types were entered as they appeared in the records, and we resisted imposing typologies; controlled vocabularies and ontologies were deferred until sufficient volumes and comparative experience makes their creation a reflection of the source. This minimal approach safeguarded fidelity to the evidence and prevented premature, possibly distorting abstraction. The MVP principle thus translated into an *ethic of sufficiency*: create only the scaffolding required to begin historical research and reasoning, and let new layers of organisation emerge from use. The goal was not to engineer a finished product but to cultivate a space where the data's own behaviour could guide future structure. Limiting the initial database build became a way to preserve interpretive freedom.
- b) **Rapid Prototyping and Source Engagement.** Where the MVP defined how much to build, *rapid prototyping* governed how to build it. Early in the project, researchers compiled large spreadsheets mapping archives and communities across the Alps. When an initial online interface was ready to receive that data, the discussion changed immediately. Seeing the material in an interactive environment exposed assumptions that static tables had concealed. A field that seemed sensible on paper could collapse when tested against an actual record. Deciding whether to use a dropdown list (controlled vocabulary) or a free-text field (transcription), or whether what precisely an “act” was in a deliberation, required interpretive judgment, not mere technical choice. The prototype became a *heuristic instrument*: manipulating it was a way of asking historical questions. Each rapid iteration of the interface generated new understanding. The screen layout, the order of fields, even scrolling through long participant lists revealed dimensions of the sources that had gone unnoticed. Prototyping, in this sense, did not follow interpretation – it produced it. Interface design became an extension of archival reading, turning theoretical debate into direct, testable interaction with evidence.
- c) **Iteration as Collective, Collaborative Interpretation.** In most historical scholarship, iteration happens privately, through successive drafts. In DEMALPS it became collective and continuous. Every record entered into the shared environment was visible to the entire team; each modification could spark immediate discussion. Researchers working in different archives or languages engaged in a rolling process of critique and adjustment, not only of the database use and functionality, but of how they looked at records not just from an individual research perspective, but viewed through the lens of needs and possibilities in collaboration and comparative research.

This collaborative iteration soon reshaped the data model itself. For example, our initial structure treated the names of people in the council proceedings as attendees, and the acts of the proceedings (voting, etc.) as related to all persons in attendance. Substantive early indexing of different deliberations revealed complexity: certain deliberation acts could involve only certain people, or each act involved people in different ways beyond just “attending” them. As such we needed to rethink the model, moving from a flat unidirectional relationship between the participants and acts of deliberations to a web of relations between them. Had we persisted with the early model and fitting sources to it (founded on a small sample and a theory of how assemblies worked), the historical reality would have been distorted. Although one can argue it is simply trying to “reflect reality”, that technical revision was also an historical interpretation: it embodied a claim about how communal deliberations occurred. Often historical projects fall into reification of working models into their sources either because of time invested (“sunk cost”, coming back to agile concepts) or no budget or time for a programmer to rewrite code or ask researchers to redo the work. Through these cycles of testing and refinement, the system grew closer to the logic of the sources. Iteration was not just a technical workflow; it became a method of reasoning together. The evolving database recorded not only information but the dialogue and negotiation through which that information acquired meaning.

- d) Agile Infrastructure as Scholarly Method. Agile practice values transparency, accountability, and responsiveness. Re-cast for historical research, these same principles define scholarly integrity. A historian-built infrastructure inevitably encodes assumptions about evidence, authority, and verification; recognising and documenting those assumptions is part of the method. Several design decisions in DEMALPS made such assumptions explicit. Repeated transcription of long lists of recurring names slowed data entry, prompting development of a tool to copy and edit participant lists between meetings. What began as a convenience led to a methodological insight: repetition was not data entry distraction but evidence of continuity in communal life. Similarly, careful attenuation to the structure of “events” within deliberations revealed a greater complexity of collective decision-making. These choices became what can be called *infrastructural arguments* – positions materialised in code and interface. Because historians themselves designed and used the system, scholarly responsibility remained visible: each record links to its archival citation and image, and every revision is versioned and attributable. The infrastructure therefore performs, within its architecture, the same principles – verification, transparency, and critical dialogue – that guide historical research. Agile ideals of openness and accountability find their scholarly analogue here, not as metaphors but as practical conditions of work.
- e) From Framework to Practice. Agile and MVP principles offered DEMALPS a language and structure for managing uncertainty while keeping research active. They were never ends in themselves, nor external templates im-

posed on historical work, but reference points for acting quickly, testing ideas, all while maintaining fidelity to evidence and making visible our decisions. Through this adaptation, the act of building infrastructure became a form of historical practice – collaborative, reflexive, and transparent. The resulting database embodies both the data and the reasoning that produced it. The next section turns from these methodological foundations to their concrete outcome: the DEMALPS research environment and the growing corpus of assemblies and their deliberations now accessible through it.

5. *The DEMALPS research environment*

The DEMALPS research environment (also referred to as the “DEMALPS database”) has reached early maturity: a significant set of data with browsing and searching interfaces providing access to it. The data is structured around three interlinked components (as initially previewed in section 2) – communities, archives, and records, thousands of which are already interacting and accessible through a variety of interfaces. The database also provides workflow and publishing controls, and a complement of additional features that support FAIR data practices. The description and interaction of all these elements follow.³⁷

Communities. The principal parameter for communities studied in DEMALPS are settlements that fall in the boundaries of the western territorial arc of the Alpine Convention (AC). The database indexes all of them falling within the Alps of France, Italy, and Switzerland, but also adds to them communities that may be outside that boundary (as a location of an archive that holds relevant materials, or as a place referred to by a source issued from, or referenced within, the AC).³⁸ There are 2,128 distinct communities currently referenced in sources in the DEMALPS database, as either centres of production of the sources or mentioned in them. The great majority of these communities are still extant, however on occasion we encounter communities which have disappeared or merged. In the case of disappearance, we annotate it as “historical” with a date of appearance. Where settlements have merged into others, that too is documented by cross linking of communities, creating a traceable chain. Nevertheless, all communities in the database carry geo-coordinate and elevation data, potentially important factors in spatial analysis of community relations and in understanding the transmission of archival materials over time. For convenience of researchers, communities in the database are provided with their modern department/province/canton and their country which allow filtering of browsing, searching, and mapping interfaces. As mentioned, communities occur in the database as physical bases of sources (e.g. issuing from a place of assembly), as a reference in a

37. The following is a high-level view. The online interface provides much more detail of data schema, organization, taxonomy and tools for exploration at <https://demalps.com/user-guides>.

38 <http://demalps.com/communities>.

source (e.g. mention of one community in the deliberation of another), but also the modern settlement for archival holdings subject to research (e.g. Archives Départementales d'Alpes-de-Haute-Provence in Digne-les-Bains).

Archives. The DEMALPS project consults numerous types of archives: municipal, state, ecclesiastic, and private.³⁹ Archives containing material relevant for the DEMALPS project are connected to sources in two ways. The first are the inventories which claim to represent the holdings of the archive. These inventories can be contemporary, or they may have been compiled in the consolidation of archives in the nineteenth century, or, in some cases, drawn up in the early modern or medieval period (in the latter case the inventory becomes a source itself!). These inventories – online, in books or PDFs, or on paper in the archives – are the starting point of the DEMALPS research process. For each archive inventory we review, we detail the nature of the inventory, a link to access it or download it (if possible) and its general relevance for the project (even if they are of no research interest to us, we still provide the work product). Where the inventory reveals sources of potential interest, the database contains a careful indexing of their content by community. This index includes an assessment of potential deliberations, statutes, fiscal, and other records. Researchers will find that we have thus far discovered potential research materials for 2,111 communities across 535 French, Italian, and Swiss archives. These numbers reflect the theoretical base of research materials according to the archive's own records and thus serve as the basis for our research missions where we may discover more or less sources than those claimed in the (sometimes ancient) inventories. The database indicates precisely those archives we have visited (§ to date). Those sources that we do consult become the second layer of data connected to archives – records – discussed in the next section. The DEMALPS research environment thus provides not only archival sources, but an understanding of the entire source base for the western Alps through the archival inventories. The researcher can quickly assess, through map-based explorers and browsable, filterable lists, the distribution of research materials for projects and a meta-analysis of the transmission of community documents (see fig. 2).⁴⁰

Records. Historical sources selected in archival missions for entry in the database become “records” in DEMALPS nomenclature.⁴¹ We determine two types of records, “documents” and “collections”, the latter functioning as containers for the former. In practical terms, the sources we are currently investigating and entering are council proceedings, thus a collection in the database may be a registry of deliberations (a codex, a roll), and then each deliberation a

39. <http://demalps.com/archives>.

40. The intensity of colour indicates the depth of archival inventories found for a given community, with an additional yellow flag indicating when we have indexed the documents in the database (metadata, transcriptions, etc.). The pop-up on a community displays further details of the materials found for the community, with links to the archival inventories and the indexed records themselves. The map can be filtered through many facets, seen in the right-hand panel.

41. <http://demalps.com/records>.

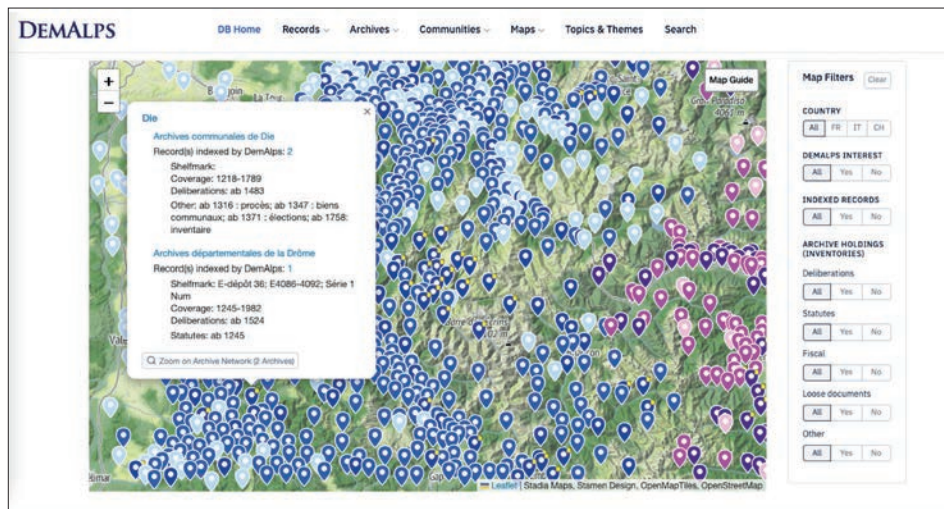


Fig. 2. DEMALPS database map interface showing the communities in Hautes-Alpes, France (blue markers) and the province of Cuneo, Italy (purple markers).

“document” (a folio, a segment of a roll). The user can see the relations between the two at a glance, and may browse within a specific collection. The model for data captured for a given record is dependent on the source type, for example deliberations, testaments, statutes, franchises, *inter alia*. But the models share a common base that allows them to be analysed as a digital corpus through such dimensions as people, places, and actions. Below we will focus on the model of council proceedings (sometime referred to as deliberations).

Document records are composed of a six-part model:⁴

1. Archival information. Every record is identified by archive, shelf marks, folio or other location marks, as well its composition (codex, roll, etc.), support (parchment, paper, etc.), languages, and any remarks on condition and location.
2. Source Images. The DEMALPS researchers are tasked with taking pictures or scans of sources if they are not already available from the archive. Whether produced by the team or the archival institution, if rights permit it the images are made freely accessible through a viewer on the site. The user may further download those same images under Creative Commons license.
3. Production context. If it exists, notarial subscription, witnesses, and other data related to the production of the document.

4. Collections contain only four of the six components: archival reference, a production context and its own bibliography. They inherit images from their constituent documents, and the content is contained within the documents inside a collection – the collection thus acts as a “wrapper” for many documents.

4. Topic Keywords. A controlled vocabulary of topics and themes applicable to the entire record (differentiated from those applied to actions in the content).
5. Bibliography. Although much of the material being investigated by DEMALPS has never been studied, there are opportunities to link it to bibliographic references that may shed light on the source, its contents or context, whether studies or editions. The researcher can link the source to bibliographic references that are listed in the DEMALPS public project bibliography (see below in Open Data).
6. Content. The content of a deliberation is subdivided into three subsections. The first concerns the context of the assembly: where it takes place, what community or communities it represents, who convened it. The second is the identification of attendees, with additional flags for indicating whether there were declared absentees, and whether (rarely, it seems) women were involved.⁴³ The final section is related to what was described in section four above, an infinite list of actions of the assembly, which in DEMALPS taxonomy are referred to as the *events*. Each event itself carries a combination of elements:
 - Action Type. A controlled list of actions including vote, election, interventions, *inter alia*. This is accompanied by a transcription.
 - Related Persons. Persons mentioned related to this action, as transcription.
 - Related Communities. Communities mentioned related to this action as link to community index.
 - Topics. A controlled list of topics and themes specifically related to this assembly action.
 - Each event may also have public researcher remarks, and a set of transcriptions.

At present, the database represents 268 collections containing 438 records of deliberations involving 52,304 named attendees across 9,514 assembly or deliberation events.

Controlled Vocabularies and References. Beyond the community index, the DEMALPS research environment currently deploys two major index reference site-wide. The first is a controlled list of topics and themes created by the DEMALPS team for tagging records. These topics act as facets and filters for search and exploration across the interfaces, as well as having a specific page for researchers to start by exploring the 25 topics individually.⁴ The second is an ongoing public project bibliography hosted on Zotero.⁵ Bibliographic references may be tagged on records, communities and archives.

43. A specific flag for female attendance is needed until an ontology of people is established for the project, at which point the ontology (or index) entries will carry this information.

4. <https://www.demalps.com/topics>.

5. Found at <https://www.zotero.org/groups/51898/demalps>. The Zotero bibliography is also synchronized to appear in the database at <https://www.demalps.com/bibliography>.

Workflow. Along with the development of models for the data, the team put in place a number of tools and features which adapt research processes and quality control measures to a digital-native environment. Some are prosaic in character, but adjust work patterns to reflect the intensity and needs of human-curated data. As the researchers are entering sources into the database, they can add their personal observations and notes in the same workspace (hidden from others), and while reviewing or browsing the records created by colleagues. These are organized and searchable from within the researcher's own personal dashboard. The same goes for records that any logged-in researcher can mark as "favourite", a bookmarking feature for quickly tagging an item to which the researcher wishes to return. These two fairly basic functions heighten the attention paid by researchers to their own contributions and how their contributions are used by their peers. All records start in a draft status, and the researcher must "publish" it in order to make it visible to public visitors. This creates a moment's pause to reflect, «Is this in publishable state?» The stakes are greater than making a record visible – when a record is published it obtains a DOI and becomes citable as their work product (see next section).⁴⁶

Open Data. The DEMALPS as a digital-native project developed as a radically FAIR-inspired historical research effort. Our desire to make data available early was in order to make our hypotheses testable early and with ease, to be challenged and improved during the research journey through public collaboration and scrutiny. Our first effort is to ensure availability. All data are stored in TEI XML, an established open scholarly standard for textual data, ensuring long-term readability and interoperability. As mentioned above, the DEMALPS publishing process includes version-controlled deposits of the TEI files to Nakala which in turn generates a citable DOI for the records. Within the DEMALPS research environment, the TEI files are also direct downloadable, as are other open format files: GeoJSON files for spatial analysis, and, once the DEMALPS persons ontology is eventually established, node and edge files for network analysis applications. All transcriptions, indexing and metadata published by DEMALPS are created in open formats and released under open licenses, and contain revision history and named contributors. The aim is practical transparency: historians can cite stable versions, inspect provenance, and reuse data without guessing how it was shaped. Moreover, the project commitment to transparency and verifiability extends to creating user guides for accessing data and understanding the context of our choices. The distribution of images is entirely subject to the policies of government agencies and public and private archival institutions. While, for example, French law mandates public archival documents be released without restriction and not for profit (at least in an academic context), some regions or institutions do not have single policies and require case by case negotiation.

The FAIR practices are underwritten by technological decisions that assure, insofar as possible, data permanency. While the project is hosted on university

4. The potential proliferation of DOIs is avoided by assigning them on collections and not on individual records; in other words documents carry the DOI of their containing collection.

servers, normally not subject to the vagaries of the market place, the database is an open source XML stack which can be quickly and painlessly re-established on alternate servers. This is secured by a two-fold strategy: the code for the database will soon appear on Github, and the data files themselves stored in the social sciences and humanities data repository Nakala, an infrastructure co-funded by the French National Research Agency.⁷

Risk management. The foregoing account of our agile, iterative workflow may risk presenting too optimistic a picture. In reality, this approach carries real challenges. Reorganizing data “on the fly” requires rebuilding parts of the corpus whenever the database model evolves. Early design decisions, sometimes taken with limited information, can solidify too quickly and obscure patterns that only emerge later. We cannot address these issues fully here – a separate article on the methodology is planned – but our approach incorporates “safeguards” at different levels. Constant dialogue between historians and programmers (including a historian-programmer on the team) ensures that technical choices never outpace historical reflection. Periods of focused development are followed by collective review, prompting reconsideration of structure and use. TEI, as our underlying format, provides a flexible container while exposing us to solutions tested in other projects, which helps validate ideas and challenge assumptions. As a team, we also accept the necessity of re-doing data, especially during early “alpha” and “beta” phases, and support this through clear documentation and training (of old and new team members). Regular cross-review of records by different researchers creates “pause and check” moments that allow us to bring forward doubts about the meaning or utility of fields and tools, or the basis of comparison between regions touched by the DEMALPS project. These practices temper the “productive volatility” of agile work with deliberate moments of methodological self-correction.

6. Frameworks and practices

The principles of “developing while researching” continue to guide the project’s evolution. Rather than imposing a technical framework on the historical material all at once, we are introducing structured tools gradually and always testing against our sources before moving forward. Fields in our database that were originally simple transcriptions, for instance, are beginning to attach controlled vocabularies and the first outlines of an emerging ontology – essentially a structured list of names, offices, and recurring expressions. These layers are designed for computational use, but they never replace the transcribed text itself. On the contrary, each act of “normalization” remains anchored in the sources.

This principle also shapes our current effort to transform the large, manually transcribed name database into what might be called a local ontology or historical thesaurus. To test how far the most repetitive tasks can be automated, we are

7. Nakala is part of the Huma-Num infrastructure, see <https://www.huma-num.fr/>.

experimenting with named-entity recognition and linking. In practice, this means combining narrowly scoped algorithms with recent large language models – what is now broadly termed “artificial intelligence” – to help identify individuals and places, track their appearances across the DEMALPS corpora, and generate indexes. The purpose is not to replace scholarly judgment but to reduce the most labour-intensive stages of compilation.

We are likewise evaluating whether advances in handwritten text recognition can support our workflow. Initial tests on fourteenth- and fifteenth-century notarial registers have so far yielded accuracies in transcription below fifty per cent, far from adequate for automatic transcription. Yet rapid progress in the field, including through projects such as COMMA mentioned above, indicates that substantial improvements are likely. Even partial success could enable meaningful full-text searches across our archival images.

Finally, because the project now holds a large and growing body of images, we are considering the adoption of an IIIF-based infrastructure.⁸ Such a system would allow our digitized materials to be cited, reused, and exchanged across projects in a standardized, machine-readable manner, embedding DEMALPS more fully within the wider digital humanities ecosystem while maintaining our commitment to source-based historical work.

Taken together, these developments reflect DEMALPS’ broader understanding of what digital-native research requires. Each technical advance emerges from the same methodological commitment that shaped the initial design: keeping interpretive processes visible and accountable while allowing analytical capabilities to evolve in response to new questions. The technical work is thus not a sequence of feature additions but a continuation of the core challenge of maintaining transparency in digital historical research.

These considerations return us to a deeper methodological problem that has accompanied the project from the outset: how can digital infrastructures make the historian’s reasoning more visible rather than less? Georg Vogeler has articulated this challenge sharply. Traditional historical databases tend to obscure the interpretive processes through which historians transform sources into structured knowledge, creating difficulties for verification and reproducibility. Once evidence is normalized into fixed taxonomies and relational structures, the reasoning behind those choices becomes invisible within the database architecture, undermining the discipline’s commitment to transparent and falsifiable argumentation. Vogeler proposes RDF-embedded markup as one solution, preserving both source text and interpretive layers within semantic annotation.⁹

⁸ IIIF (International Image Interoperability Framework) is a shared standard that lets institutions and projects present and exchange digitized images in a consistent way. It ensures that manuscripts, charters, and other image sources can be displayed, cited, and reused across different platforms. See the official site and documentation at <https://iiif.io/>.

⁹ Georg Vogeler, *The ‘Assertive Edition’*, in «International Journal of Digital Humanities», 1/2, 2019, pp. 309-322, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s2003-019-00025-5>, especially the concluding remarks on pages 318-319.

DEMALPS responds to the same epistemological problem through a different route. Instead of resolving transparency through machine-readable encoding standards, the project demonstrates how collaborative infrastructure development itself can render interpretive work visible. Decisions about representing assembly proceedings, for example, became explicit historical arguments about collective decision-making, debated and revised in real time. The collaborative environment ensured that interpretive choices were exposed to the entire research team, rather than concealed within predetermined structures. Building the infrastructure alongside interpretation thus created opportunities for discovery that traditional database models tend to hide. Making transcription and annotation visible across the team prompted new questions and connections that arose from shared engagement with sources, generating insights that would not have emerged from individual analysis of pre-structured data.

This collaborative model highlights a broader point about how digital methods can support, rather than undermine, the epistemological foundations of historical scholarship. Digital infrastructures can assist both traditional interpretive work and quantitative analysis, but only if historians retain active control over how those tools develop, rather than adapting their research to externally imposed models. The approach is not without challenges: it demands a tolerance for uncertainty and a willingness to rebuild systems as understanding deepens. Yet for projects where collective interpretation may reveal patterns invisible to individual researchers, “developing while researching” offers a practical methodological alternative. It preserves disciplinary commitments to evidence-based reasoning while opening new possibilities for collaborative historical inquiry that remain transparent and verifiable.

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Assemblies Proceedings in the Alpine Space. Piedmont and the Aosta Valley (1300-1530)

ABSTRACT

The paper outlines the preliminary results of a census of medieval sources held in the municipal Alpine archives of Piedmont and the Aosta Valley. The first part focuses on the census work carried out and on providing an overview of the types of records found and their distribution. The second part of the work is dedicated to the council registers. Starting from the registers found in some communities in the area, the aim is to initiate first reflections on the practices of producing and preserving assembly proceedings.

KEYWORDS: Late Middle Ages, Western Alps, Council registers, Municipal archives, Documentary practices

The main objective of this work is to highlight the presence and characteristics of the DEMALPS project's primary documentary source: the registers of council proceedings. Secondly, it aims to provide a general overview of the sources related to community political activity between the fourteenth and early sixteenth centuries in Alpine region of Piedmont and the Aosta Valley. The identification of the council registers involved a survey of the medieval documentation currently preserved in the Alpine municipal archives of the area, offering an outline of the number and types of documents present. In the first part of the essay, we will therefore briefly review what has been done to find and organise the data concerning medieval sources present in the historical archives. The second part aims to provide an overview of the types of documents found in

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List of abbreviations: ASCBa = Archivio Storico del comune di Barge; ASBi = Archivio di Stato di Biella; ASCCu = Archivio Storico del comune di Cuorgnè; ASCOs = Archivio Storico del comune di Ostana; ASCPi = Archivio Storico del comune di Pinerolo; ASCRe = Archivio Storico del comune di Revello; ASCSV = Archivio Storico del comune di Settimo Vittone; ASCVe = Archivio Storico del comune di Verzuolo; ASRVA = Archivio Storico Regionale della Valle d'Aosta; ASTO = Archivio di Stato di Torino.

descriptive tools and the first archival surveys, as well as to highlight their distribution. Based on the creation of four macro-categories – council registers, statutes, parchment and deeds, accounting volumes and registers – an attempt will be made to reconstruct a (virtual) map of their presence in the archives of this area. The intention is to highlight the conspicuous, and hitherto rather neglected, amount of documentation concerning the political activities of Alpine communities that are preserved in the municipal archives and the potential value of these collections for the purposes of historical research.¹ Finally, this essay will focus on the analysis of some case studies relating to various contexts and areas in the western Alps – southern Piedmont, Cuorgné, and Aosta – and thus try to highlight some aspects of these registers. The objective, albeit a preliminary one, will be to capture the differences and peculiarities of this documentary form both in relation to the different contexts of their origins as well as in their evolution within the institution itself, in an initial overview.

1. *General background and census*

Piedmont today represents the second-largest region in Italy in terms of the number of municipalities with approximately 1,100 existing ones for a population of about 4 million. Aosta Valley, too, with only 74 municipalities and a population of only 122,000, is a territory rich in small municipalities.² Of these, according to the Alpine Convention, about 550 – 48 for Piedmont and all 74 municipalities in Aosta Valley – are located in a mountainous environment.³

1. An important body of research has focused on the production and preservation of documentation related to rural communities. I will limit myself here to highlighting some key works: Attilio Bartoli Langeli, Andrea Giorgi, Stefano Moscadelli (eds.), *Archivi e comunità tra medioevo ed età moderna*, Siena, Cantagalli, 2009. Within the same volume, see: Andrea Giorgi, Stefano Moscadelli, *Ut ipsa acta illesa serventur. Produzione documentaria e archivi di comunità nell'alta e media Italia tra medioevo ed età moderna*, pp. 1-110; Massimo Della Misericordia, *Mappe di carte. Le scritture e gli archivi delle comunità rurali della montagna lombarda nel basso medioevo*, pp. 155-278; see also Massimo Della Misericordia, *Divenire comunità. Comuni rurali, poteri locali, identità sociali e territoriali in Valtellina e nella montagna lombarda nel tardo Medioevo*, Milano, Unicopli, 2006; Federico Del Tredici, *Senza memoria? La conservazione delle scritture comunitarie nel Milanese (secoli XIV-XV)*, in «Studi di Storia Medioevale e di Diplomatica», n.s., 2, 2018, pp. 43-62. The following works fall outside the context of rural communities, but serves as an up-to-date starting point for understanding the formation of archives and the roles of those involved in the editing and preservation of records during the medieval and modern periods: Filippo De Vivo, Andrea Guidi, Alessandro Silvestri (eds.), *Archivi e archivisti in Italia tra medioevo ed età moderne*, Roma, Viella, 2015; Randolph C. Head, *Making Archives in Early Modern Europe. Proof, Information and Political Record-Keeping, 1400-1700*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019.

2. First is Lombardy, with around 1,500 municipalities for a population that is more than double that of Piedmont (just over 10 million). The third region in terms of the number of municipalities (560) is the Veneto, with a population slightly greater than that of Piedmont (4.8 million). *Annuario statistico italiano 02*, Roma, Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2024pp. 3-2.

3. The Alpine Convention is a declaration of common intentions which was presented and signed in 1992 between the various nations and municipalities that are parties to it. «The Conven-

Such a significant presence of municipal bodies leads to an equally significant existence of preservation institutions, whose proper management is subject to the supervision of the *Soprintendenza Archivistica e Bibliografica del Piemonte e Valle d'Aosta* (Archival and Bibliographic Superintendency of Piedmont and Aosta Valley – henceforth, SABPVA). An important period of archival research between the 1990s and the early 2000s enabled extensive work on the arrangement and description of historical document collections in the two regions under analysis.⁴ This research has left traces in the paper inventories held at the SABPVA headquarters. The records of these municipalities' archives are not available in the national information systems.⁵ However, an initial point of access to these collections is provided by the website of the *Spr intendenza* itself. In the *inventari online* (online inventories) section – which does not actually contain any inventories – it is possible to find the list of municipal bodies, along with information on the collections as well as the chronological span of the preserved documents. To access more detailed data, one must either visit the SABPVA offices in Turin to consult the paper inventories or contact the individual municipalities directly.

The need to provide tools for accessing documentary heritage – even if only partially – was addressed in the second half of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth through major census campaigns.⁶ One particularly useful work for our investigation is *Le carte deḡ i archivi piemontesi* by Nicomede Bianchi.⁷ This work, which was the product of Bianchi's personal initiative, set itself the ambitious goal of carrying out a census of all the collections preserved in the public archives of Piedmont – as well as Aosta Valley – that were both state- and non-state-owned, thus including municipal archives.⁸ The entire

tion is the legal basis for safeguarding the sensitive Alpine ecosystems, the regional cultural identities, heritage and traditions in the Alps». The list of municipalities included in the Convention was used as a reference to define the scope of our archival research. See <https://www.alpconv.org/en/home/convention/framework-convention/>.

4. Between the 1990s and the early 2000s the Piedmont region developed its own software, GuariniArchivi, for the purposes of archival description and the development of accompanying tools. During those years, numerous reorganisations and inventories were likewise carried out in municipal archives.

5. On the SIUSA website, and even on its regional thematic page, it is currently not possible to find information on these institutions (producers and/or conservators), their collections, or the documentation they preserve. The new national information system, which is currently being developed, will perhaps be able to address these shortcomings.

6. The result of one of these large census campaigns is, for example, the *Catalog della raccolta di statuti: consuetudini, legḡ, decreti, ordini e privileḡ dei comuni, delle associazioni e degli enti locali italiani dal Medioevo alla fine del secolo XVIII*, 10 vols., Roma, Tipografia del Senato, 193- 2023.

7. Nicomede Bianchi, *Le carte deḡ i archivi piemontesi*, Torino, Fratelli Bocca, 18. Nicomede Bianchi was an Italian politician, historian, and director of the State Archives of Turin, as well as a senator in the fourteenth legislature: see Maria Fubini Leuzzi, *Bianchi, Nicomede*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 10, Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1968pp. 156-163.

8. Bianchi, *Le carte*, p. xxii: «I take full responsibility for this work, which was undertaken and completed by my own head and hand, without any obligation or direct official assignment.»

work is divided into provincial districts, in which the description of municipal archives follows that of all other collections. Bianchi relied on dense correspondence with municipal secretaries – or archivists, where appointed – and managed to reach a large number of locations. The section on municipal archives is organised in alphabetical order and contains a summary of the most important documents preserved (such as statutes, privileges, ordinances, etc.), along with the respective date and a brief description of the state of the archive (whether ordered or inventoried, or in terms of other relevant information on the state of the collections). The work is an interesting attempt «to provide a ready and safe guide for scholars to have the documents at hand, without lingering uncertainty and excessive research efforts», with the aim of making the «extremely rich heritage of the Archives of Piedmont» more easily accessible.⁹

More than a century later, another useful tool was created for surveying the various pieces of information on Piedmont's municipalities. This is the project that has been carried out since 2006 by the Centro Interuniversitario di Storia Territoriale "Goffredo Casalis", to which the University of Eastern Piedmont, the University of Turin, and the University of Genoa belong. Through the creation of historical-territorial factsheets, this project «aims to constitute a point of reference for historians and administrators interested in the development of historical knowledge regarding institutions, administrations, and the territory itself».¹⁰ These factsheets, which are organised by individual municipalities and searchable by province, collect comprehensive information on the municipalities surveyed, offering a full and detailed profile of the history (territorial, administrative, in relation to a settlement, institutional, etc.) of each municipality, a description of the most important maps of the entity concerned, and their conservation location.

The works just described, although useful in providing a starting framework and a valid methodological reference, offer an often incomplete view of the reality of the municipalities we are interested in and their documentation. Why should we therefore carry out a census of the documents in the Alpine municipal archives? The DEMALPS project needed to systematise as much information as possible on the medieval documentation which has been preserved in these bodies in order to be able to make survey choices and undertake the first study efforts. This was the starting point for systematic data collection on the surviving documentation which was carried out, in large part, on the document inventories in the SABPVA, and partially by consulting the various institutional sites (the websites of institutions as well as State archives, project portals, etc.). In approximately 180 Alpine archives containing pre-1530 documentation, it was therefore possible to carry out more analytical work aimed at highlighting the types of documents present as well as the consistency of the material to which the following pages are dedicated.¹¹

9. *Ib dem*, p. XXI.

10. See the project's webpage, and in particular the file section: <https://www.archiviocasalis.it/localized-install/content/schedario-storico-territoriale-dei-comuni-piemontesi>.

11. Much of this data has been systematised and made available in the "Archives" section of the database on the DEMALPS project's website. See <https://www.demalps.com/>.

2. Overview of the sources

A long tradition of studies has dealt with the themes of production, transmission and documentary preservation in the communal world. Several specific works and attempts at synthesis have sought to trace a picture of that «révolution documentaire» which, in Italian cities between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, marked a profound change in the type of records produced by municipal institutions and in the forms of support used.¹² Work carried out by Laura Baietto and Paolo Buffo on the documentation of Piedmontese municipalities showed how, during the thirteenth century, similar changes took place in this area too, but with their own specific chronological and typological characteristics.¹³ Similar studies devoted to rural communities have been less fortunate, although important works, including the valuable volume *Archivi e comunità*, have demonstrated the potential of exploring this field of investigation. However, the communities of the western Alps have remained on the margins of this historiographical season. The aim of the following pages will thus be to shed light, at least in part, on the sources “buried” in the municipal archives of the area.¹⁴

Before focusing on the various types of documents, a few preliminary remarks are in order: what is presented in this section is mainly based on the information provided by the accompanying descriptive tools. The latter were drafted at very different times, and thus also reflect different methodological approaches. This has necessitated a certain degree of attention to the “archival typologies” employed in these inventories, which at times may conceal significantly different kinds of documents. In principle, the filing of sources based on archival descriptions will always require careful comparison with the actual documents held in the archive. In the following pages, the focus will be on juxtaposing the results of the survey with the documents consulted, in order to highlight the complexity of the document types encountered. The indexed documentation is therefore subdivided into macro-categories that are intended

12. Paolo Cammarosano, *Italia medievale. Struttura e geografia delle fonti scritte*, Roma, Carocci, 2016; Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur, *Révolution documentaire et révolution scripturaire: le cas de l'Italie médiévale*, in «Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes», 153, 1995, pp. 177-185.

13. Laura Baietto, *Elaborazione di sistemi documentari e trasformazioni politiche nei comuni piemontesi (secolo XIII): una relazione di circolarità*, in «Società e storia», 98, 2002, pp. 65-679; Laura Baietto, *8 rittura e politica. Il sistema documentario dei comuni piemontesi nella prima metà del secolo XIII*, in «Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino», 98, 2000, pp. 105-165; Paolo Buffo, *Prassi documentarie e gestione delle finanze nei comuni del principato di Savoia-Acaia (Moncalieri, Pinerolo, Torino, fine secolo XIII-prima metà secolo XIV)*, in «Scrineum Rivista», 11, 2014 pp. 217-259; see also Paolo Grillo, Francesco Panero (eds.), *Le ib i iurium» e ogni rizzazione del territorio in Piemonte*, Cuneo, Società per gli Studi Storici della Provincia di Cuneo, 2003.

14 Bartoli Langeli, Giorgi, Moscadelli (eds.), *Archivi e comunità*; In particular, Giorgi and Moscadelli's paper offers us interesting methodological insights into the archives of these communities, both in terms of documentary production practices and the relationship with rural institutions and officials (notaries) responsible for drafting deeds; as well as in terms of how the documents were transmitted and preserved: *Ut ipsa acta*.

to illuminate the complexities of the collections as well as to provide a map of the documentation's distribution across the area.

The first category is that of council registers, which I shall outline only briefly here, as they are the subject of the final section of this essay. What I would like to focus on at this point is the geographical distribution of this type of source. Firstly, we have found a rather small number of specimens concentrated within a fairly limited area. Nevertheless, certain clusters and gaps already offer some food for thought.¹⁵ In total, there are approximately 8 pre-1530 registers held in the historical archives of 13 localities. With the exception of Pinerolo – which preserves a fairly complete series (37 registers) from the 1320s onwards – the evidence of deliberation documents is largely confined to the fifteenth century.¹⁶ Among these 13 localities, in addition to the aforementioned Pinerolo, Biella and Aosta also stand out as exceptions in terms of size when compared to the predominantly small – or very small – Alpine municipalities.¹⁷ The remaining registers, by contrast, are concentrated in a specific area: the pre-Alpine zone stretching between Pinerolo and Cuneo, particularly around Saluzzo. Registers are preserved in the following locations (from north to south): Luserna San Giovanni, Barge, Revello, Sanfront, Verzuolo, Costigliole Saluzzo, and Caraglio. A few small- to medium-sized localities likewise contain isolated registers; among these, Cuornè stands out. Situated in the Canavese region and subject in the late Middle Ages to the lordship of the Valperga family,¹⁸ the community of Cuornè possesses a rich and varied archive, preserving – among other materials – 12 council registers dating from 135 to the 1530s.¹⁹

The second type of document I would like to focus on is statutes. I should specify that what is highlighted here is the presence of medieval codices in the current municipal archives, with the intention of distinguishing them from the large number of letters of privilege that have been preserved as loose documents. It is also important to emphasise that the ancient statutes preserved in other archives (not least the State Archives) in the communities under analysis are far more numerous, and have also been the subject of various editions and studies.²⁰

15. Concerning the French side, see Clément Carnielli in this volume.

16. Of the 37 surviving registers relating to the municipality of Pinerolo, 14 are from the fourteenth century, 18 from the fifteenth, and five from the early sixteenth. ASCPi, cat.12, Atti del consiglio, 164-18

17. ASBi, Archivio storico della città di Biella, I serie, Ordinati, mazzo 13 (136- 137; 138- 139; 1509; 1520; 1524-1525); Archivi di Famiglie e persone, Del Pozzo della Cisterna, b. 2 (13; 1523-1524).

18. On Valperga, see: Marta Gravela, *Conti di Valperga*, in Federico Del Tredici (ed.), *La signoria rurale nell'Italia del tardo medioevo*, 5. *Censimento e quadri regali*, Roma, Universitalia, 2021, pp. 107-114

19. The registers of deliberations reported in the inventories of the Historical Archives of the municipalities of Beura-Cardezza in the Ossola area and Garessio in the Maritime Alps have yet to be verified.

20. In addition to the above-mentioned *Catalogo della raccolta*, I would like to point out here some particularly interesting publications regarding the Alpine area by the Società per gli studi

According to the survey, statutes are present in 24 municipal archives. The pre-Alpine area between Pinerolo and Cuneo emerges once again, although there is only a partial overlap with the communities that have preserved council registers. The area of the Maritime Alps preserves several examples, and we find similar situations in the Lanzo Valleys as well as the Canavese and Ossola areas.

The phenomena of the dispersion and relocation of these types of documents – especially in the nineteenth century – should not be ignored. One example is the statutes of Barge, whose rich municipal archive preserves several council registers, land registries, notarial registers, letters, and registers of accounts and taxes (*tablie*), along with an extensive parchment collection (about 14 of them starting from the mid-fourteenth century) and several copies of its statutes. During research conducted in this archive, a statutory code (fifteenth century) was identified, which had been returned to the archive only in 2003, recovered from a private residence in Liguria.²¹

Among those statute codices which were found during our archival undertakings, those of communities such as Revello and Verzuolo, which were both under the Marquisate of Saluzzo, are particularly interesting.²² The statutes of Verzuolo, which were granted by Marquis Ludovico I in 1423 and approved in «pleno et generali consilio comunis et homines Verzolii», are contained in a very neat parchment volume featuring a black parchment cover decorated with geometric shapes. The interior consists of 36 numbered folios marked by the use of two colours, black and red, the latter being used to highlight the titles of the various chapters.²³

Statutes remain a primary source for studying these communities, as they provide a picture of their institutional and administrative organisation. Evidence may emerge, for instance, regarding the representative bodies and the offices they

storici, archeologici ed artistici della provincia di Cuneo: Giuseppe Gullino (ed.), *Gli Statuti della Valle Maira Spe riore (1301-14)*, Cuneo, Società per gli studi storici, archeologici ed artistici della provincia di Cuneo, 2008; Pier Paolo Giorsetti (ed.), *Gli Statuti del comune di Valgana (1311)*, Cuneo, Società per gli studi storici, archeologici ed artistici della provincia di Cuneo, 2004; Giuseppe Gullino (ed.), *Gli Statuti di Dronero (1381)*, Cuneo, Società per gli studi storici, archeologici ed artistici della provincia di Cuneo, 2005.

21. Inside the folder (unnumbered) containing the parchment code, there is a document certifying the return of the volume to the municipal archive. This recovery operation is detailed in the SABPVA inspection files and correspondence with the municipality. ASCBa, pergamene, 2, s.n. Between the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, two editions of the statutes of Barge were published: Felice Amato Duboin, *Raccolta per ordine di materia delle leggi, editti e manifesti, ecc. pubblicati sino al 8 dicembre 1810 sotto il felicissimo dominio della real casa di Savoia*, Torino, Tip. Eredi Bianco e comp., 1831, IX, pp. 78-78; Giovanni Battista Rossano, Gian Carlo Buraggi (eds.), *Gli statuti di Barga*, Torino, F. Mittone, 1913. A copy of the statutes granted by Amadeus VI of Savoy in 1378 is preserved in Turin: ASTo, Sezione Corte, Scritture della città e provincia di Pinerolo in Paesi, Provincia di Pinerolo, Barge, fasc. 6.

22. Only those of Revello have been published, while those of Verzuolo are preserved in the municipal archives: Rodolfo Sacco (ed.), *Statuti di Revello 1301-17*, Bene Vagienna, Vissio, 1993; ASCVe, Sezione I, Statuti (franchigie e privilegi), 2.

23. ASCVe, Sezione I, Statuti (franchigie e privilegi), 2.

held, their relationship with the higher authority, the judicial practices, and the organisation of the commons. In addition, as is well known, statutes often provide indications into documentary production and the way in which the community's most important documents are preserved. In the statutes of the aforementioned community of Revello, we find almost all these elements. One chapter in particular regulated the custody practices governing the commune's books and documents by its mayors. The commune's officers were required to store books and writings in a chest which was secured by two keys and kept in a place determined by the council:

Teneantur habere unum coffenum ad reponendum omnes libros et scripturas comunis quem coffenum ponere debeant ubi ordinatum fuerit per onsilium Revelli et habeat dictus coffenum duas claves quarum una custodiatur per syndicos libertatis et alia per syndicum comunis expensis comunis.²⁴

The third category is fiscal documentation, which emerged in good quantities from the census and the first archival investigations. What is remarkable is the preservation of land registers, which date as far back as the fourteenth century, as well as a large number of registers of *consegam enti*. These two types of registers are sometimes confused in archival descriptions. In Settimo Vittone, for example, the inventory reports the presence of a cadastre as well as a register of *consegam enti* relating to very close years (140 and 143). Upon examining the two copies, however, it was noted that they describe the same group of people. The incipit of the cadastre shows how it was compiled following a deliberation by *credentia* and *vicinatia* of the community of Settimo Vittone, which obliged all men who owned real estate in the judicial area (*mandamento*) to declare the extent of such possessions. The second register, which was much less carefully edited than the first, describes the same properties and their taxable value more concisely; it is therefore not, as described in the inventory, a register of *consegam menti*, but rather a property survey (143).²⁵ What I would like to emphasise for the purposes of the DEMALPS project's research objectives is that these sources – in the absence of other documentation such as statutes and council registers –

24 The community of Revello had two mayors *comunis* and two *lib rtatis*. The latter served as guarantors and guardians of the commune's letters of privilege and ordinances. Sacco (ed.), *Statuti di Revello*, p. 6. Similar rules are also found in the statutes of other localities nearby. For example, in Saluzzo in 10, chapters were put down regarding the preservation of community documentation: «Quod syndici comunis debeant habere unum archivium», which continues by stating: «Item statutum est quod syndici comunis semper teneantur habere pro comuni unum archivium cum bona clave et clavatura in quo reponantur omnia instrumenta, tam franchixiarum, quam alia spectantia ad comune. Et ecciam libri omnium rationum redditarum comuni et ecciam libri causarum et capitulorum Saluciarum, qui cofinus teneatur in loco per eos ordinato. Et curet potestas quod dicto coffino ponantur due clavature, quarum claves teneant syndici comunis, videlicet quilibet unam»; Giuseppe Gullino (ed.), *Gli Statuti di Saluzzo (10)*, Cuneo, Società per gli studi storici, archeologici ed artistici della provincia di Cuneo, 2001, p. 118

25. ASCSV, I, Rapporti con i signori feudali, fald. 3, n. 6 (6); I, Antico catasto di Settimo Vittone, fald. 1, n. 1 (185).

provide valuable information regarding the organisation and political practices of these communities, as well as providing data that, with the appropriate caution, can be used for demographic surveys and socio-economic research.

Other documentation of a fiscal nature also emerges from the municipal archives: registers of accounts (often relating to the mayors' affairs), *qi nternetti* (quires) recording taxes, and revenue notebooks detailing income and expenditure. Particularly interesting in this regard are the account books of daily expenses – *Lib r iornaliorum* – that are found in Revello's historical archives.²⁶ They take the form of small *qi nterni* relating to the mayors' activities and containing a daily account of the expenses required by the community and its various officers.²⁷ These two examples help us to better understand not only the variety of documentation in these archives – which are often concealed by the definitions used in the descriptive tools – but also the potential for studying documentation of a fiscal nature. Alpine archives appear to be quite rich in this documentary typology, even in areas where the two categories previously analysed are completely absent, such as the Susa Valley and Aosta Valley.

Finally, the last category I wish to highlight – as well as the most substantial – is that of the heterogeneous world of parchment collections. The first point I want to note is their distribution. Although parchment collections are widespread, they are more concentrated in those areas where no council records or statutes have been found, but where there is a significant presence of documentation of a fiscal nature: the Susa Valley and Aosta Valley. Shifting our attention to the types of parchment documents – based on the archival descriptions in the inventories – we find, alongside the more predictable letters of privilege, a considerable number of notarial tools concerning different legal actions, in which communities often acted as the principal parties. One finds traces of assembly practices which were aimed, for example, at electing representatives – mayors or consuls – to be sent to deal with concessions or manage disputes, but also documents that record decisions taken by the community as a whole, including voting results. Barge's historical archive preserves a large parchment recording the voting of the 72 heads of household from the local community. Drafted on 10 September 177 and concerning the confirmation of the statutes, this document details the summoning and voting of the men of Barge: the heads of household were summoned to the church of San Giovanni Battista by the ducal commissioner to listen to «Alta et inteligibile voce vulgari sermone lingua que laica» as well as to cast their vote. Voting was then carried out through the widespread practice of handing out black and white beans. Even more interesting is the list of voters. At the end of the document we find two columns listing, on the left, those who «dederunt fabas albas» (399) in favour of the provisions presented, and on the right, those «qui

26. ASCRe, *Lib r occasionum*, 102; 103; 104; 106; 107.

27. *Ib dem*, 1042. The heading on the first page reads: «Sequitur liber Iornaliorum sive occasionum homines Revelli et Martignani ad oppus communitate loci Revelli inceptus et inchoactus sub anno domini millesimo IIII° LXIII die VI novembris pro uno anno etc.».

nollent ipsis literis capitulis et ordinamentis obtemperarent nec illa vellent tenere et observare ponerent et ponere debeant in ipso pileo fabam nigram» (73).²⁸

These parchment series likewise contain other noteworthy types of documents, such as wills. These show us the links between the inhabitants and their communities through bequests addressed both to the latter as well as to their poor, but they also provide important information on the activities of the local notaries – specifically, their origin and training – which will be a valuable resource for the research carried out by this project.

This brief excursus on the medieval documentation found in historical municipal collections in the western Alps does not exhaust the existing documentary landscape. There is also a wealth of documentation of a judicial nature (deeds of litigation, cases, judgments), while the preservation of letters, notarial protocols, and miscellaneous volumes is more sporadic. On the basis of this initial survey, I would like to highlight the most significant data that emerged: the presence and/or absence of certain types of documents allows us to draw up some possible geographies of document production and preservation practices. The Aosta Valley area, for example, is characterised by municipal archives that preserve very few documents, and those few, in addition to being late, consist mainly of fiscal sources and a few scattered parchments.²⁹ The presence of parchment documents is also notable in the Susa Valley, but here the numbers are considerably higher and include a wide variety of documents: privileges and franchises, deeds of litigation, fiscal documents and records attesting community activities (such as the numerous powers of attorney granted to mayors). The use of rolls persisted in this area, reflecting the strong influence of the administrative documentary practices of Savoy officers and of the large ecclesiastical centres in the valley.³⁰

The regular use of loose parchment deeds until the end of the fifteenth century seems to have been widespread in the Ossola area, where some municipal archives preserve real treasures. It is instead mainly in the small towns of

28 ASCBa, Pergamene, fald. 3, no. 108. An incomplete version of the document appears in: Tiziano Vindemmio, *Il feudo di Bargone. Frammenti di storia di un'antica terra del Piemonte dalle origini al secolo XVIII*, Savigliano, L'Artistica, 1990, pp. 168-170.

29. If we exclude Aosta and partly also the community of Cogne, the only community that leaves this horizon is that of Étroubles. Joseph-César Perrin, Ezio Eméric Gerbore, *Inventaire des archives historiques de la commune d'Étroubles*, in «Bulletin de l'Académie de Saint-Anselme», n.s., 1, 198, pp. 175-328.

30. Paolo Buffo, *La produzione documentaria di monasteri e canoniche regali nelle Alpi occidentali*, in Maria Luisa Bottazzi et al. (eds.), *La società monastica nei secoli VI-XII. Studi di ricerca*, Trieste-Rome, Centro Europeo Ricerche Medievali-École française de Rome, 2016, p. 320; Livia Orla, *Il tribunale dell'abate di San Giusto di Susa. Prassi, conflitti e scritture nel secolo XIV*, Torino, Accademia University Press, 2025, pp. 4-4. Bernard Andenmatten, Guido Castelnuovo, *Produzione e conservazione documentarie nel principato sabauda, XIII-XV secolo*, in «Bullettino dell'Istituto italiano per il Medio Evo e Archivio Muratoriano», 110/1, 2008, pp. 279-338. Guido Castelnuovo, *The Rolls, the Prince, and their Depositories: The Archiving of Late Medieval Financial Accounts Reconsidered (8th-14th Century)*, in Ionuț Epurescu-Pascovici (ed.), *Accounts and Accountability in Late Medieval Europe. Records, Procedures, and Socio-Political Impact*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2020, pp. 18-202.

southern Piedmont that archives are much more heterogeneous, both regarding the variety of deeds produced and preserved and the supports used. Archives, mostly relating to the fifteenth century, preserved: codex statutes, *qi nterni*, volumes, registers, letters and a much more limited number of loose parchment deeds. On the basis of the census presented, this would seem to be the only area whose rural communities embraced, albeit only at the end of the Middle Ages, the «révolution documentaire» mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph.

A second issue concerns the level of uniformity in documentary forms and practices. While small and large municipalities in Piedmont adopted, albeit very late, the notarial practices typical of central and northern Italian cities, a separate discussion is needed for the Aosta Valley, which had its own legal, institutional and documentary traditions as it did not belong to the Kingdom of Italy.³¹ Nonetheless, as the last section of this essay will show, this area also saw the affirmation of the figure of the notary from the fourteenth century onwards. The relative homogeneity found for the fourteenth and fifteenth will thus have to be further scrutinized. The framework and reflections presented here, far from being exhaustive, are actually intended to be a starting tool for future research.

3. Alpine communities and registers of council proceeding

In order to identify indications of communal political activity, particular attention was paid to tracing the presence of documents of a specific type: council registers. Such sources have been the subject of several studies investigating both urban and rural, as well as Alpine and non-Alpine communal spaces, thus showing the potential of such documentation.³² In the previous section, we briefly

31. Paolo Buffo, *Charta Augstana. Chiesa, cancelleria e scriptorium ad Aosta nel secolo XI*, in «Memorie della Accademia delle Scienze di Torino. Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche», 5, 2/ 2, 2018pp. 4-76.

32. See Marta Gravela, in this volume. I mention only some of the works that have had the greatest impact on the research carried out: Marta Gravela, *Le delibere dei comuni piemontesi nel Tre e Quattrocento (città gas e i-città comunità rurali)*, in Ermanno Orlando, Gherardo Ortalli (eds.), *Le delibere consiliari dei comuni italiani. Uno sguardo comparativo a partire dai Misti del 8 nato di Venezia*, Venezia, Istituto Veneto di Scienze Lettere ed Arti, 2023, pp. 225-240; Lorenzo Tanzini, *Delibere e verbali. Per una storia documentaria dei consigii nell'Italia comunale*, in «Reti Medievali Rivista», 14 1, 2013, pp. 3-79; Lorenzo Tanzini, *A consiglio io. La vita politica nell'Italia dei comuni*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2014; Marta Mangini, *I gas erni consiliorum trecenteschi di Bormio nel panorama delle fonti di matrice consiliare*, in «Nuova rivista storica», 9/ 2, 2005, pp. 45-83; Noël Coulet, *Les délibérations communales en Provence au Moyen Âge*, in Claude Carozzi, Huguette Taviani-Carozzi (eds.), *Le médiéviste devant ses sources: Questions et methods*, Aix-en-Provence, Presses universitaires de Provence, 2004, pp. 227-247; François Otchakovsky-Laurens, Laure Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemblées. Quelle démocratie urbaine au travers des registres de délibérations? Méditerranée-Europe XIII-XVIII siècle*, Aix-En-Provence, Presses universitaires de Provence, 2021; Michel Hébert, *La voix du peuple. Une histoire des assemblées au Moyen Âge*, Paris, PUF, 2018; Christian D. Liddy, *Who Decides? Urban Councils and Consensus in the Late Middle Ages*, in «Social History», 46, 2021, pp. 306-344.

mentioned the survival of this type of document in the Alpine area under investigation, but if we broaden the view to the neighbouring lowland areas, we can see that, although significant, these examples date no earlier than to the 1320s.³³ In the following pages, we will analyse some of the cases that emerged during the archival research which was carried out in various areas of the Italian Alps in 2024 so as to highlight some peculiarities and differences in the drafting and binding of these registers. I will first examine the area of southern Piedmont, where, as already mentioned, there is the highest concentration of deliberations in those registers that have been preserved in municipal archives of our interest. The second case on which I intend to focus is the community of Cuornè, which is quite unique as far as the preservation of documents in the Alpine area of Canavese is concerned. Finally, I would like to focus on the fifteenth-century volume of *ordinati* from the city of Aosta, precisely in order to emphasise the peculiarities of documents of this type in the urban sphere, as in the case of the main centre of Aosta Valley. The following pages do not aim to exhaustively cover the research work required by these registers, which will be the specific subject of study during the project, but rather to provide an initial overview of the potential of these sources. We propose an approach aimed at highlighting certain specific features, moving from the general (the registers of an area) to the local (a series of registers of a single community) to the particular (the Aosta volume), leaving a systematic codicological analysis of the sources to future research.

3.1. *Council registers in Southern Piedmont: from the Pellice Valley to the Stura Valley*

Before dealing specifically with the registers of deliberations found in this area's archives, it is worth dwelling for a moment on the geographical location of these communities in relation to the Alpine space as well as their political status. As previously mentioned, what immediately emerges is the position of these centres at the foot of the Alps – at the mouth of all the main valleys that, pointing towards France, extend from the Pellice to the Stura Valley.³⁴ We thus find Luserna San Giovanni at the entrance to the Pellice Valley, Barge at the mouth of the northern fork to the Po Valley, Revello and Sanfront at the beginning of the southern fork, Verzuolo and Costigliole Saluzzo at the beginning of the road leading to the Varaita Valley, and finally Caraglio, which opens the doors to the Grana Valley (fig. 1).³⁵

33. Gravela, *Le delibere*, pp. 229-234. The oldest registers preserved in the area are those of Torino (1325), Moncalieri (1328), Pinerolo (1328), Chieri (1328) and Ivrea (1330).

34. We chose to exclude Pinerolo because, as the centre and capital of the Principality of Achaea until 1418, it presents certain characteristics that do not fully fit the case to be analysed in these pages. Ilario Manfredini (ed.), *Pinerolo: mille anni di storia*, Pinerolo, Centro Studi Silvio Pellico, 2022, vol. 1.

35. In the same area – and not only in the foothills – we find other communities that lack registers of deliberations but preserve documentation that provides important information on their

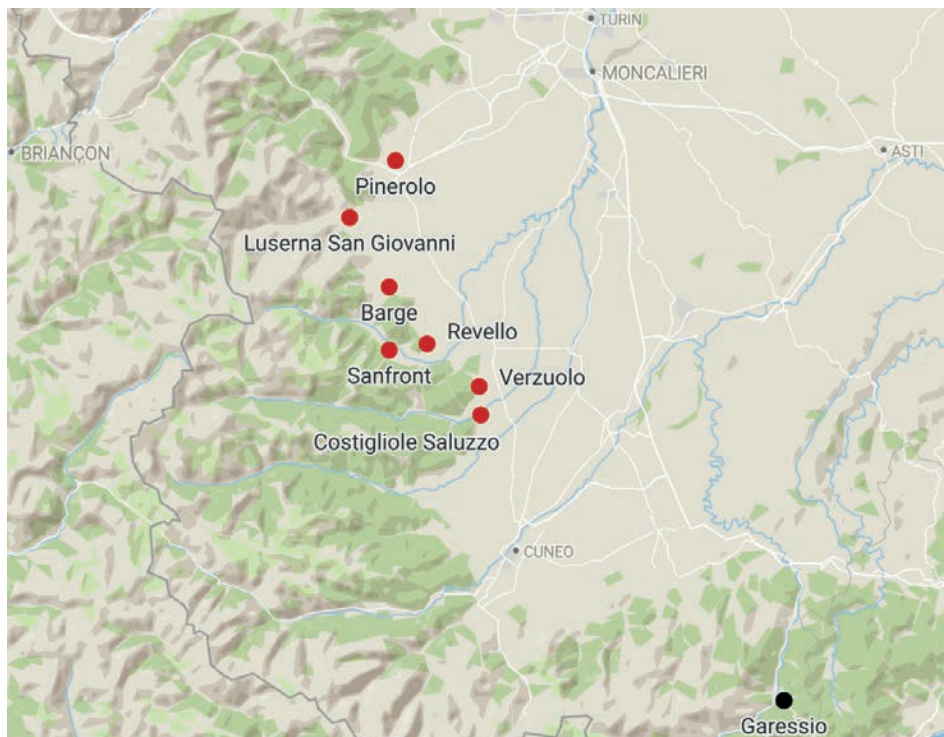


Fig. 1. Municipal archives preserving medieval council registers in southern Piedmont (Open Street Map).

Politically speaking, these communities did not all answer to the same authority between the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Starting from the north, Luserna San Giovanni was subjects of an ancient seigniorial *consortile* which was in turn subject to the Savoy dukedom.³⁶ In the fourteenth century Barge was contested between the Marquisate of Saluzzo and the Principality of Achaia; in the fifteenth century, it then came under the direct control of the Duke

political and institutional structure, such as their statutes. In addition to the aforementioned statutes of Dronero, Valle Maira, and Valgrana (see note 20), we also have the statutes of Villanovetta and Ostana. They are respectively preserved in: ASCVe, Archivio Storico dell'ex comune di Villanovetta, sezione I, serie I, 151; ASCOs, Sezione Antica, fald. 1, fasc. 1. Tito Morsero, *Statuti di Villanovetta*, Torino, Università di Torino, a.a. 1965-1966 (degree thesis).

36. See Davide Morra in this volume, as well as Marta Gravela, *Luserna*, in Del Tredici (ed.), *La signoria rurale*, pp. 155-157, and Gabriella Ballezio, *Luserna San Giovanni*, Centro Interuniversitario di Storia Territoriale "Goffredo Casalis", 1996 (<https://www.archivioacasalis.it/localized-install/content/luserna-san-giovanni>). For an overview of the Duchy of Savoy's political evolution, see Alessandro Barbero, *Il ducato di Savoia. Amministrazione e corte di uno stato franco-italiano*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2018

of Savoy.³⁷ Revello (and Martiniana Po), Sanfront, Verzuolo, and Costigliole Saluzzo were instead subject to the Marquis of Saluzzo.³⁸ Finally, the community of Caraglio was placed under the control of the Duke of Savoy following its purchase by Amedeo VII at the end of the fourteenth century.³⁹

This brief reconstruction of the geographic and political space of the communities with a register was intended to frame the area and emphasise the environmental characterisation of these places and highlight how the peculiarities found from a documentary point of view are not the result of unequivocal subjugation and political influence.

Turning to the documentation we are interested in, it seems useful to provide some descriptive information. The total number of registers found in the municipal historical archives is 18 (plus a fragment conserved in Costigliole Saluzzo), of which 12 date back to the fifteenth century and the remainder to the early sixteenth century. The community that preserves the most specimens is Revello, which is also the one with the oldest records of deliberations (the first recorded council meetings date back to 1366). More generally, it is the second half of the fifteenth century – especially the 1480s and 1490s – that is best represented. The covers of many registers were replaced in later centuries, but some originals survive. The parchment cover of the first specimen preserved in Barge (1455-1464) features the drawing of a small decorated bell that is slightly off-centre towards the left side; although this is one of the classic representations of this type of document, it is the only such case we have found. A shield with a cross inside is drawn on the bell: this symbol – possibly a reference to the Savoy coat of arms – is still included in the town's coat of arms today (fig. 2).

Apart from the covers, the registers are made of paper – which are mostly watermarked – and are composed of a highly variable number of sheets. In some cases they have a coeval numbering marked at the top right of the *recto*. It is precisely the presence of such numbering that often indicates the absence of certain parts of the registers.

More generally, the registers we have analysed appear fairly stable in their formulation and are consistent. When we refer to their stability, we mean that even where there is a certain chronological depth – as in the case of Revello, where the registers span almost a century – the way the meetings are recorded shows no

37. See the historical introduction preceding the statutes: Rossano, Buraggi (eds.), *Gli statuti di Barge*, pp. III-XIV; Giorgio Di Francesco, *Barge: l'evoluzione di un centro urbano*, Pinerolo, Alzani, 1996; Giorgio Di Francesco, *Un archivio riletto: Barge nelle carte e nelle mappe dell'archivio storico municipale*, Pinerolo, Alzani, 1993.

38. On the Marquisate of Saluzzo, see the contributions in Rinaldo Comba (ed.), *Ludovico I marchese di Saluzzo: un principe tra Francia e Italia (1461-1505)*, Cuneo, Società per gli studi storici, archeologici ed artistici della provincia di Cuneo, 2003. In particular, within this volume see: Paolo Grillo, *Comunità signorili del saluzzese nell'età di Ludovico I*, pp. 207-234.

39. Maurizio Ristorto, *Caraglio nei secoli*, Cuneo, Stabilimento tipografico editoriale, 1947; Nino Lamboglia, *Caraglio io e l'arco alpino occidentale tra antichità e Medioevo*, Cuneo, L'Arciere, 1998.



Fig. 2. The cover of Barge's first council register (source: ASCBa, cat. I, cla. VIII, 130).

significant variation. By consistency, we wish to emphasise the specific function these communities assigned to the registers: recording what was proposed and decided in council meetings. As we will see in the following sections, stability and consistency are not common features of the registers of the other communities we will examine.

As we delve into the study of a few examples, some common elements and differences emerge. I would therefore like to focus for a moment on the communities of Barge and Revello, since they are territorially close – both are located at the beginning of the two forks leading to the Po Valley – but, as we have seen, they were under different lordships. Both have rich and varied archives – including statutes, fiscal documents, parchments, letters, etc. – most of which date back to the fifteenth century. For Barge we have only three council registers, but they cover the most of the second half of the century up to the beginning of the sixteenth.⁴⁰ Revello's five registers instead cover the period from 1436 to 1502.⁴¹ This allows us to observe the dynamics of these assemblies in terms of their very close realities in very close years. The two communities seem to have achieved similar institutional results in this period: they both had a town hall (*palacium* for Barge, *domus* for Revello), produced similar documentation, and elected similar officials to manage and organise their commune.⁴² Besides mayors, we find *extimatores*, *disboinatores*, *adiustatores*, and *stanciatores*, who were elected together every four months (according to the statutes) for Revello and once a year for Barge.⁴³ *Massari*, *campari*, and ambassadors were also regularly appointed.⁴⁴ In Barge, among the other offices, we find the annual mention of a *scriba communitatis*, who was paid an annual salary of eight florins: from 1460 to 1464 – the year of the end of the first register – Giovanni Barbieri was appointed and confirmed as scribe of the community *sub salario consueto*. It is interesting to note that neither he nor his predecessor are ever referred to as notaries.⁴⁵

0. ASCBa, cat. I, cla. VIII, 130; 131; 132. Relating to the years: 155- 164 148- 191; 1515-154

4. ASCRe, Deliberazioni del Consiglio e della giunta, Prepositari, 26 (composed of several fragments covering a period between 136 and 1595); 27 (14- 156) ; 28 (160- 164) ; 29 (17- 18) ; 30 (190 -193) ; 31 (197- 1502). To these we should add a fragment relating to the years 138 195, which was found within a later register (34) .

2. On the subject of communal buildings, see the contributions in the volume: Simone Balossino, Riccardo Rao (eds.), *Ai margini del mondo comunale. 8 di del potere collettivo e palazzi pubblici dalle Alpi al Mediterraneo*, Sesto Fiorentino, All'insegna del giglio, 2020.

3. The verb *disbi nare* means "to draw boundaries". It seems that these officials – land surveyors – were in charge of measuring and dividing land (especially agricultural land). They are also found in the registers and statutes of other communities in the area. See Matteo Rivoira, *Le parole dell'agricoltura. 8 giorni di un glossario da fonti latine medievali del Piemonte*, Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 2012, p. 78

4 ASCBa, cat. I, cla. VIII, 130, f. 32.

5. *Ib dem*, f. 136. He first appears as scribe of the community, and was only to be reappointed for the following years during each change of officers.

In Revello, on the other hand, it is interesting to note the appearance of *sindici lib rtates* following a reform of the statutes that took place in 1414 and which was recorded in the same council registers.⁴ These seem to have been an institutional experiment specific to the communities directly under the Marquisate of Saluzzo, as they were also present in Verzuolo. For the latter the available registers date from the end of the 1470s, but the statutes granted by Marquis Ludovico I in 1431 already mention *sindici lib rtates*, 20 years before the reforms found in the Revello registers of deliberations.

3.2. *The Libri communis et credencie of Cuorgnè*

The series of *ordinati* in Cuorgnè's historical archive takes us into the Canavese area. There are 12 registers from the period under analysis, i.e. before 1530.⁷ In the fifteenth century, the community of Cuorgnè was the most important centre of the *Valpergato* – that is, the territory subject to the lords of Valperga.⁸ From a territorial point of view, Cuorgnè is also located in the Alpine foothills, north of Turin, at the mouth of the Soana and Orco Valleys, with the capacity to exercise strong control over the road through the valley and the stream of the same name. The series of *ordinati* is part of a historical archive in which the medieval documentation – dating mostly from the fifteenth century – is quite substantial, and consists of deeds of various kinds: land registries (the oldest from the late fourteenth century), accounts, judicial papers (litigations), and about 30 parchments (transactions, letters, wills, pleadings, etc.).

While we have used the categories of stability of the formulation and consistency of content to describe the registers of southern Piedmont, an analysis of the first 12 copies preserved at Cuorgnè reveals a rather different picture. The

46. ASCRe, Deliberazioni, Prepositari, 26, ff. 25-26.

7. ASCCu, Atti deliberativi (Ordinati e deliberazioni del Consiglio), 1 to 12.

8. On the *Valpergato*, see: Gravela, *Conti di Valperga*. Further information can be found in: Mario Bertotti, *Appunti per una storia di Cuorgnè. Vita civile*, Ivrea, Enrico, 198; Antonino Bertolotti, *Passeggiate nel Canavese*, 8 vols., Ivrea-Torino, 187-188; Giuseppe Frola, *Corpus Statutorum Canavisii*, Torino, Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, 1918, vols. 2-3. Between the late fourteenth century and the first half of the fifteenth, the Canavese area had been at the centre of several clashes between different local lords – in particular between the Valperga and San Martino families – as well as of revolts against the same lords, a phenomenon known as *tuchinaggio*: see: Alessandro Barbero, *Una rivolta antinobiliare nel Piemonte trecentesco: il Tuchinaggio del Canavese*, in Giuliano Pinto, Monique Bourin, Giovanni Cherubini (eds.), *Rivolte urbane e rivolte contadine nell'Europa del Trecento. Un confronto*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2008, pp.153-196; Alessandro Barbero, *La rivolta come strumento politico delle comunità rurali: il Tuchinaggio nel Canavese (1381-1399)*, in Andrea Gamberini, Giuseppe Petralia (eds.), *Linguaggi politici nell'Italia del Rinascimento*, Roma, Viella, 2007, pp. 25-266; Marta Gravela, *La semina del diavolo. Duca, signori e comunità ribelli (valli del Canavese, 1414-1530)*, in «Studi di Storia Medioevale e di Diplomatica», n.s., 3, 2019, pp. 173-204; Marta Gravela, *Prima dei Tuchini. Fedeltà di parte e comunità nelle valli del Canavese (Piemonte, secolo XIV)*, in Alessio Fiore, Luigi Provero (eds.), *La signoria rurale nel tardo medioevo, 3. L'azione politica locale*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2021, pp. 21-9.

first register is the most homogeneous. The volume begins with an incipit that presents it as a «Liber communis et credencie locii Corgnati», begun in January 135 under the supervision of the *vicarius* – the *legm doctori* Giacomo Ballani *de Raconixio* – and intended to keep track of «omnes et singule propositae ac omnia et singula tractata, disputata, ordinata et optenta in dicta credencia seu consilio pro ipsam credencia et hominem dicti loci».⁹ After recording the first deliberations relative to 135, the register makes a chronological leap to 140, and then continues without breaks until the end (142).⁵⁰ The elections of consuls (two) and *credendari* (between 11 and 13) and a few other officers including *extimatores* are recorded.⁵¹ The *credentia* was renewed once a year and would appear to have been the community's only decision-making body. The figure of the *vicarius* was always present at the meetings, and these were almost exclusively held nearby («sub porticum») or in his home. The last figure we find regularly – and who is of particular interest to us as the author of the documentation we are analysing – is that of the notary, scribe, and community *clavarius*.

This institutional structure does not appear to have changed in the century between the first and last registers analysed, but the way in which the *lib r communis* was used and compiled did change considerably. To illustrate this development, I will now consider the register for the year 1526. The cover – which is made of cardboard, with leather inlays and reworked along the edges – features the volume's title in rather small print: «Liber communitatis Corgnati de anno 1526 de imposizioni, taglie et ordinationi».⁵² The register does not in fact only contain deliberations. It is divided into three sections: the first contains evidence of the management of debts owed by the community to individuals. The *mise en pag*, on the sheet's *verso*, provides information regarding the creditors, along with the various amounts owed to them, while on the *recto* we find references, with a cross-reference to the sheet, to the receipts of payment which are then reported in the same register.⁵³ In the second section we find precisely such receipts. These are sometimes written on the register's pages, at other times stitched onto it, but even in the latter case, the numbering of the sheets is given on the sheet that was added following the pagination. The receipts are signed by various notaries, although those written directly on the register's pages are always signed by the same one: *Guidetus Clavantoni*, whom we find again in the third section of the *lib r* as the notary, scribe, and *clavarius* of the commune. The records of deliberations for the year 1526 are concentrated in this last section. They open with the election of the *credendari* in January 1526 and close

9. ASCCu, Atti deliberativi, vol. 1.

50. In his work, Bertolotti also mentions the sessions held between 136 and 139, which means that some parts of the register were lost but had been preserved and were still in the municipal archive in the late nineteenth century. Bertolotti, *Passeg ate*, vol. 2, pp. 298–300.

51. There is also mention of *caprari*. ASCCu, Atti deliberativi, vol. 2.

52. ASCCu, Atti deliberativi, vol. 10.

53. *Ib dem*, f. 11. «Vide quitationem pro termino pasce in presenti libro foglio 23».

with the election of the new *credendari* in January 1527 (with 22 council meetings having been held in that year).

This last register shows an evolution of administrative practices and its documentary implications that seems to optimise practices to meet the community's needs. What does not seem to change is the institutional structure of the commune itself. The figure of the notary-scribe-*clavarius* is present both in the earliest records that have come down to us (135) as well as in the latest ones analysed by us (1526). The council's work continued to be held in the hands of a limited number of *credendari*; the presence of the lord's *vicarius* was still very strong; and meetings continued to be convened, for the most part, in the latter's house, and communal activities continued to be recorded by a single official (the notary-scribe-*clavarius*). The recording techniques changed to better suit the needs of this official and the triple role he played, however. He was the community's scribe and therefore the one who recorded the council's activities in a book; he was a notary capable of drawing up documents for the council, including in the commune's external relations (with lords, other communities, and private individuals); finally, he was the *clavarius*, i.e. the treasurer and accountant, in charge of managing economic activities (which were closely linked to most of the council's deliberations).

In the first specimen, there was only a record of the *credendari*'s activities. This activity was actually quite limited, so much so that almost 15 years of council meetings were contained in a single, modestly-sized register. As we approach the sixteenth century the registers change: they begin to cover fewer years, and there is more and more room for economic reporting. The second *lib r* preserved in the Cuornè historical archive – relating to the years 149- 147 – already shows the first changes in this direction. The council's deliberations only take up three quarters of the volume. The last part – which was written in reverse starting from the end – instead contains information on the community's debts, which are gradually crossed out, and refer to the same years (148 142).⁵⁴

The later books also show the difficulty of reconciling the compiler's different roles, as registers mainly containing accounts and receipts of payment alternate with others in which council deliberations reappear. For example, the *lib r* of the year 1523 takes the same form as the one we have seen for 1526, while only two years earlier, in the register of 1521, we find solely accounts of expenses, accompanied by the receipts for payment, without these being followed by the minutes of the council meetings for that year.⁵⁵

54. ASCCu, Atti deliberativi, vol. 2. The register is not bound and the numbering of the sheets is missing, which makes it difficult to tell whether we are looking at the register's first pages or simply that part of it is missing.

55. ASCCu, Atti deliberativi, vol. 9. In this case the receipts do not all follow the expenditure section, but each page relating to the community's debts to a creditor – the *verso* – is matched by the payment receipt on the *recto*. Again, this is sometimes copied directly onto the register, and is sometimes stitched on.

In conclusion, it is clear that in the cases analysed it is often difficult to draw clear-cut distinctions and rigid definitions of document types. It seems even more difficult to define what a registers of council proceedings is in a context such as that of Cuorgnè. Despite its solid institutional structure – the result of chronological continuity and depth – this community opted for more flexible documentary solutions which were designed to adapt to the specific administrative/practical needs of its institutions. These solutions nonetheless fit within communal documentary culture insofar as they incorporate its formulas (minutes of council meetings), practices (the use of notaries at the service of the commune), and tools (registers).

3.3. *The Ordinati of Aosta: a composite source*

Compared to the documentation just examined, the registers of deliberations from Aosta show yet different solutions. The *Archivio Storico Regionale della Valle d'Aosta* preserves the historical collections of the city of Aosta.⁵⁶ The series of *ordinati* opens with a volume containing council deliberations from the second half of the fifteenth century and the early sixteenth. The volume was assembled by stitching together parts of registers pertaining to the council's activities.⁵⁷ It consists of several sections of varying size that are not arranged chronologically and which are often interspersed with numerous blank pages. It begins with some blank sheets, followed by the minutes of the council meetings for the year 1492, and ends with small files – possibly rough drafts, judging from the writing style – all relating to the first 30 years of the sixteenth century. As already mentioned, the volume does not follow a chronological pattern, so much so that the oldest records date back to the 1460s, but we can only read them on folio 77. This older section moreover does not contain any resolutions, but rather those statutory chapters issued by the vice-*blivus* of Aosta Valley concerning the operations of the commune's offices and council.⁵⁸

56. On the commune of Aosta, see: Alessandro Celi, *Il comune di Aosta dal medioevo alla fine dell'ancien régime 1470-1770*, in Tullio Omezzoli (ed.), *Il comune di Aosta. Figure, istituzioni, eventi in sei secoli di storia*, Aosta, Le Château, 2004, pp. 1-97; Maria Alda Letey Ventilatichi (ed.), *Le livre rouge de la cité d'Aoste*, Torino, Deputazione subalpina di storia patria, 1956; Joseph-Gabriel Rivolin, *Les Franchises d'Aoste: la charte de Thomas I^{er} de Savoie*, in Anna Fosson, Joseph-Gabriel Rivolin (eds.), *Liberté et libertés. VIII^e de la charte des franchises d'Aoste*, Aosta, Amministrazione regionale delle Valle d'Aosta, 1993, pp. 99-114; Alessandro Barbero, *La libertà aostana e le libertà delle città italiane: un confronto possibile?*, in Fosson, Rivolin (eds.), *Liberté et libertés*, pp. 175-190.

57. ASRVA, Ville, *ordinati*, vol. I. The second volume in the series is similarly structured and contains documents from across the entire sixteenth century.

58. *Ibidem*, f. 77: «Hic continentur aliquae ordinacionee et capitulla bonam polliciam honorem et utilitatem boni communis civitatis et burgi Auguste tangencia et in futurum observanda». This is followed by about 20 chapters regulating the election of mayors (one for the Cité and one for Borgo) and the number of consuls (eight for Cité and three for Borgo), as well as other offices such as *collectores talliaroum*. It regulates the inspection of the mayors' work as well as salaries, and indicates the place designated for council meetings (the church of San Francesco, which was part of the convent of the Friars Minor).

Within the volume, there are numerous incipits introducing ordinances or council registers – often without their follow-ups – in rather varied forms. The sheets were renumbered during the volume’s creation (214 excluding blank pages at the beginning and end).⁵⁹

It is quite difficult to identify its constituent parts, as there is a succession of council records and documents of different types which were drafted – and often signed – by various notaries and that almost always display discontinuous dates. The documentary output is rather disorganised and makes it difficult to reconstruct the context in which the documents within it were produced. Nevertheless, some aspects are worth highlighting: first of all, it appears that numerous notaries participated in the drafting of the registers in the volume. In very close years, not only do the writers change frequently, but so does the manner of presenting the deliberations. We find more extended formulas showing the convocation of the council of the *civitas* and of the *br gs* of Sant’Orso di Aosta (the two bodies that made up the commune), along with the topics of discussion and the relative decisions; but also more compact formulas, with the presence of short titles (e.g. «Electio sindici burgi porte sancti Ursi Auguste»), followed by a shorter text recording the decision taken.⁶⁰

In addition, receipts, administrative documents, and other records follow one another in an apparently inconsistent manner. There is also a small section (five sheets) in which only the elections of mayors for the years 174 to 18 are recorded; these were evidently written by different hands, and in some cases are also signed by different notaries.⁶¹

The chapters concerning the Aosta commune of 1467, which we discussed earlier and that describe the structure of the town’s administration, do not contain any specific references to a communal notary/scribe or, more generally, to the methods of recording the council’s activities.⁶² Such omissions are an early indication of the relationship between the commune and the production of its documentation. Thus, while we have the absence of specific ordinances, what is also missing is a physical place, a town hall; what we find instead, as in the chapters themselves, is the mention of a place of mediation – the refectory

59. *Ib dem*, f. 21: «Hic est liber in quo sunt reducta statuta et ordinaciones facte in consilio alme civitatis et burgi porte sancti Ursi Auguste per cives, burgenses et habitatores esiumdem civitatis et burgi in consilio publico fieri ordinatus per me Aymonem de Villa notarium et incohatus die martis sexta mensis Iunii anno domini millesimo quatercentesimo octuagesimo sexto indictione quarta»; f. 31: «Anno domini M° IIII centesimo LXXI die prima mensis augusti. Incipit liber comunis Civitatis et Burgi Auguste in quo debeant scribi et reduci omnia pro bono communi et pro honore et utilitate Reipublice fienda et ordinanda a modo in antea per sindicus et consules dicti loci ordinata»; f. 77: «Hic continentur alique ordinacionee et capitulla bonam polliciam honorem et utilitatem boni communis civitatis et burgi Auguste tangencia et in futurum observanda».

60. *Ib dem*, f. 101 v.

61. *Ib dem*, ff. 81r-85v.

62. *Ib dem*, f. 78v. We find indications of certain officers’ activities, such as the *collectores talliarum*, whose specific tasks, although not explicitly mentioned, required the production of documentation for their fulfilment.

of the Franciscan monastery – which stands as a third subject in relation to the town's two “souls” (i.e. the two districts).⁶³ At the end of the fifteenth century, everything seems to have been subject to the significant presence of the Duke of Savoy through his official (the *balivo*): all the commune's activities appear to have been carried out under his gaze, or else that of his deputy.⁶⁴ It looks as if the Aosta commune, in accordance with well-known and widespread documentary practices, also tried to create registers of deliberations through the work of various notaries without, however, succeeding in ensuring a degree of unity and delegating the work from time to time. The final form of the volume, which was probably assembled in the second half of the sixteenth century, could be an indication of a (posthumous) need to recompose what was produced in the sphere of communal political/administrative activities in an attempt to present a history of the institution, which was defining its structures in the course of the sixteenth century.

4 Conclusion

On the basis of the evidence shown in the last section, I would like to move on to the conclusions by drawing attention to a series of issues, which will be addressed in the course of further research as central themes of the DEMALPS project. The presence or absence of these registers should prompt us to question the reasons for these differences, which could be the result of several factors: firstly, political and institutional differences. The late formalisation of communities could be one of the factors behind the even later appearance of registers, as suggested by some cases in the Saluzzo area studied by Luigi Provero.⁶⁵ The communities in the area under analysis were subject to numerous local lordships – often organised into *consortili* – and/or territorial principalities (such as the Duchy of Savoy and the Marquisate of Saluzzo).⁶⁶ However, as we have seen in the previous section, the presence of council registers (and, in general, of records in registers) does not seem to follow institutionally defined patterns; that is to say, the production and preservation of registers does not appear to be determined by a superior authority. The largest number of this type of document is concentrated in southern Piedmont and especially in the territory subject to the Marquis of Saluzzo, but similar administrative and documentary practices can also be

63. *Ib dem*, f. 78 «teneor consilium in predicto loco Sancti Franciste».

64. The granting of the chapters themselves is «ordinata facta et publicata» before the *bl ivus*.

65. Luigi Provero, *La pratica dei luoghi*, Roma, Viella, 2025, pp. 223-256. In particular pp. 24- 256 dedicated to Revello.

66. Cammarosano, *Italia medievale*, pp. 10- 12. In the area under analysis, the community documentation system is not the result of organisations established and/or imposed by dominant cities on their *contadi*. See, for example, the case of some municipalities in the Bergamo area: Paolo Gabriele Nobili, *I contadi orgni zzati. Amministrazione e territorialità dei “comuni rurali” in qat tro distretti lombr di (120- 130 c circa)*, in «Reti Medievali Rivista», 14 1, 2013, pp. 8- 130.

observed in neighbouring areas subject to different authorities.⁶⁷ At present, it is not yet possible to provide exhaustive answers on this subject, but the data does not appear to be random; only more specific research focused on local contexts will be able to shed more light on the links between the political and institutional structure and the administrative/documentary organisation of the communities. Here I would simply point out that, outside the Marquisate of Saluzzo, the communities where registers were preserved were mostly those included during the fourteenth century in the principality of Savoy-Achaëa, where also Turin, Pinerolo and Moncalieri – the oldest Piedmontese communes preserving series of council records – were located.⁶⁸

In some cases, problems related to the transmission and preservation of these records cannot be ruled out. For example, the council records preserved in Saluzzo itself are late (dating back to the second half of the sixteenth century). However, it is hard to imagine this reality being excluded from the documentary processes that we have seen present in the marquisate, and traces of those administrative and documentary practices are preserved in some chapters of Saluzzo statutes.⁶⁹ Even a community such as Biella, where very few medieval *libri consiliorum* survived – three small registers from the fifteenth century –, shows archival gaps most probably due to a lack of, or unfortunate, conservation practices that compromised the structure of the municipal archive.⁷⁰

Finally, we must consider community archives where the absence of records is not due to poor preservation. In the second section, we looked at the configuration of medieval archives that have survived in areas such as the Susa Valley and Ossola. Here a large number of loose parchment records dating to the late Middle Ages survived; this could be interpreted as the result of the failure to absorb notaries and their functions within community structures. The archives of the municipalities of the Vigezzo Valley (in the province of Verbano-Cusio-Ossola), for example, preserve a substantial and chronologically extensive amount of documents from the medieval period, consisting exclusively of loose notarial deeds.⁷¹ The preserved documents relate to the administrative and documentary needs of the communities in the valley (election of representatives, use of common property, rural announcements, etc.) and as such they have been passed down and preserved to form a memory/archives of rights.

Even in areas where community archives seem to have preserved little or nothing until the end of the Middle Ages, such as the Aosta Valley, there is a need to question the relationship and role of notaries as third-party custodians

67. I refer to the council registers of Barge, Luserna San Giovanni, Caraglio and Garessio, all communities located on the borders of the marquisate but subject to different powers.

68. Gravela, *Le delibere*, pp. 230-232. See note 33.

69. Gullino (ed.), *Gli Statuti di Saluzzo*, p. 118. See note 24.

70. See note 17.

71. On the Vigezzo Valley, see: Enrico Rizzi, *Vigezzo. Notizie storiche*, Domodossola, Grossi, 2024; Luisa Federica Zagni (ed.), *Villette: scorci di una storia di una comunità attraverso le sue pergamene*, Alessandria, Ferraris, 198.

of community records. In the Aosta Valley, there seems to have been no need or desire to organise and preserve acts *in mundum* outside notarial registers, despite the fact that several acts were most probably requested to be “extracted” from notarial protocols. This can be observed precisely in the Aosta Valley thanks to medieval notarial protocols (almost totally absent instead in Piedmont), which have been preserved in large numbers and through which it is possible to glimpse documentary traces of these communities (statutes, rural legislation, franchises, election of representatives, etc.) alongside records produced by notaries during their private activity.⁷²

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72. The registers of notaries active in the Aosta Valley since the fourteenth century are kept at various archives, including the State Archives in Turin, the Regional Historical Archives of the Aosta Valley and, in particular, the District Notarial Archives in Aosta. See, for example, the edition of some of these notarial deeds in: Joseph-César Perrin, *Franchises, statuts et ordonnances des seigneuries de Vallaise et d'Arnad (XIV-XVI siècles)*, Aosta, Imprimerie, 1968

Clément Carnielli

Forms and Functions of (Non-)registration of Political Actions in Late-medieval French Alpine Communities

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the very rich documentation for community politics in the French Alps in the late Middle Ages, with a particular focus on assembly proceedings (*reg- s- tres de délib- rations*). After offering a general overview of the corpus, it tries to understand when, how and why political assemblies were recorded, and by extension, why others were not. The main argument is the importance of these documents in the political dialogue between communities and their lord(s): they testified of a certain autonomy, but also showed that the councillors and citizens abide with the rules of good government and respected the authority of their prince. However, this formulary was not always strictly followed, and some fragments offer glimpses of the many faces and dynamics of town or village public life.

KEYWORDS: Local politics, French Alps, Council registers, Late Middle Ages

On 2 June 1300, a meeting was held at Couloubroux, now a hamlet attached to the municipality of Seyne.¹ Deploing the damages to their pastures caused by flocks from neighbouring communities, the attendees decided to restrict access to members of the *universitas* only. This membership was strictly defined: one had to live there, pay the local taxes and share in the collective chores. A village with a few hundred dwellers, located deep into the Provençal Alps, at an altitude of over 1,300 meters, thus had some kind of assembly, with two consuls, as early as in the beginning of the fourteenth century. It had the power to negotiate with

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1. Archives départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône, B 161, f. 23-25v. In the DEMALPS database: <https://www.demalps.com/records/D00056>. In the following, the *archives départementales* will be signalled by AD with the number of the *département*, as follows: 04 for the Alpes de-Haute-Provence, 05 for the Hautes-Alpes, 06 for the Alpes-Maritimes, 13 for the Bouches-du-Rhône, 26 for the Drôme, 38 for the Isère, 73 for the Savoie, 74 for the Haute-Savoie, 8 for the Var and 8 for the Vaucluse. Communal archives will be signalled by AC (Archives Communales), followed by the name of the town.

its neighbours to protect its rights. This power of negotiation could be pushed as far as Aix-en-Provence, where the count's seneschal usually held court. Indeed, the source for this meeting is a copy kept in a register from 1345, compiling all conflicts on pastures rights in the first half of that century.

This image of a small community holding councils and fighting for its rights is quite far from the long-standing view on medieval mountain communities. For a long time, they have been considered as passive observers, or victims, of history. This vision, laden with old stereotypes, did not resist the recent close study of the sources available: there were *universitates* even in the highest inhabited areas, in which practices of negotiation, conflict and decision can be observed.² The DEMALPS project stems from this renewal, and proposes to analyse these political practices and cultures in the western Alps. While a specific focus on mountain communities helps to go beyond the clichés mentioned above, it is not self-evident. The specificity of mountain areas is not obvious in medieval sources, even if they posed particular challenges. The western Alps were divided into several political entities, connected by trading routes, and their communities were *universitates*, as in the lowlands. The surest way to reach the political fabric of the region is to start from the way reality was expressed.

This paper focuses on the French side of the Alps, between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, through one of the main sources for political life: deliberations. The first reason of that choice is availability: hundreds of registers and loose parchments still exist. Their study is difficult, because they are scattered and sometimes badly inventoried. For this work, I went to 20 different deposits, at least five others are of interest for this study. Moreover, they are not part of long series that would allow an in-depth analysis of one community: we rather have few documents for many locations.

Deliberations have been considered as a precious source of information by medievalists for a very long time. They were mined to enlighten various topics, but seldom considered as a whole, in context. More recent works on the “documentary revolution” initiated in the twelfth century changed the perspective on these documents. Beyond the mere surge in the number of charters or registers, historians have drawn attention to the development of a written culture, with its rules and functions.³ In our case, the choice to organize how to record delibera-

2. Georges Comet, *Montagnes médiévales, qu'est-ce à dire?*, in Société des historiens médiévistes de l'Enseignement supérieur public (ed.), *Montagnes médiévales*, Paris, Editions de la Sorbonne, 2004, pp. 9-20; Nicolas Carrier, Fabrice Mouthon, *Paysans des Alpes. Les communautés montagnardes du Moyen Âge*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010, pp. 7-9.

3. Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England, 1066-1307*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1979; Paolo Cammarosano, *Italia Medievale. Struttura e geografia delle fonti scritte*, Roma, Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1991; Pierre Chastang, *La ville, le gouvernement et l'écrit à Montpellier (XII^e-XIV^e siècle): essai d'histoire sociale*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013; Lorenzo Tanzini, *Delibere e verbali. Per una storia documentaria dei consigli nell'Italia comunale*, in «Reti medievali», 14/1, 2013, pp. 43-79; Isabella Lazzarini, *De la “révolution scripturaire” du Duecento à la fin du Moyen Âge: pratiques documentaires et analyses historiographiques en Italie*, in Benoît Grévin, Aude Mairey (eds.), *Le Moyen Âge dans le texte*,

tions, how to collect them in registers, alone or with other types of documents, how to categorize or mix those types, were all decided following certain patterns, under the control of specific authorities. Our documents are not only the trace of a real event, they are also its official version. Thus, they were part of political life, as a script, a tool and a mirror.⁴

Who decided? How? On which matters? Deliberations can help answer these questions in context, and reflect on the roles of the various social groups involved in this aspect of public life, although we bear in mind that this is only a part of the “words and deeds” used by the actors of these communities, some of which are completely absent from this specific source.⁵

This is the first line of questions we will ask. The specific nature of the documentation explained above calls for a second one, about the silences and filters of the deliberations. Did they hide, or euphemize certain practices? The context of production here is crucial, because it gives us details about the functions, the uses these registers could have. How can we explain the presence or absence of registration of deliberations? What was the precise connection between document and practice? Was this connection widely shared in our area, or were there variations? If there were any, why?

1. *Documentary landscape*

Assembly proceedings, whether on loose parchments or in registers, are not medieval categories: as we will see, the documents they describe were originally not labelled that way. In France, the expression *reg stre de délibérations* became widespread in the eighteenth century administrations, and was transposed back onto earlier documents. When the classification grids for departmental and communal archives were decided in the 10s -180s, assembly proceedings became the main item in the BB series, which gathers all documents pertaining

Paris, Editions de la Sorbonne, 2016, pp. 277-294; François Otchakovsky-Laurens, *La délibération, acte fondateur de la démocratie urbaine*, in François Otchakovsky-Laurens, Laure Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemblées. Quelle démocratie urbaine au travers des registres de délibérations? Méditerranée-Europe, XIII^e au XVIII^e siècle*, Aix-en-Provence, Presses universitaires de Provence, 2021, pp. 5-17.

4 Massimo Vallerani, *Log ca della documentazione e log ca dell'istituzione. Per una rilettura dei documenti in forma di lista nei comuni italiani della prima metà del XIII secolo*, in Giuseppe Gardoni, Isabella Lazzarini (eds.), *Notariato e medievistica. Per i cento anni di Sudi e ricerche di diplomatica comunale di Pietro Torelli*, Roma, Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo, 2013, pp. 109-143; Otchakovsky-Laurens, Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemb ées*.

5. For a broader perspective on public life in the late medieval West, cf. Vincent Challet *et al.* (eds.), *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe. Communication and Popular Politics*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2014; Ben Eersels, Jelle Haemers (eds.), *Words and Deeds. Shaping Urban Politics from below in Late Medieval Europe*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2020; Christian D. Liddy, *Who Decides? Urban Councils and Consensus in the Late Middle Ages*, in «Social History», 46/4, 2021, pp. 406-434.

to “communal administration”.⁶ However, given the hybrid nature of many medieval registers, and the specific logic of medieval archive system, what we call deliberations can be found in other series, alongside accounts or, as in the opening example, in a collection organized not by type of document but by topic.

Therefore, even if the first stage of the project targeted deliberations, I tried to look for them everywhere I could think of. That means an exhaustive review of the BB series, but also of the AA series, where charters and “constitutive acts” are kept. The CC series, which gathers accounts and fiscal documents, the DD series, for communal estates and the FF series, for trials and judiciary matters, were also punctually investigated, whenever the inventories mentioned documents of possible interest. Finally, the II series in which are kept, between others, old inventories, was researched when such inventories were registered.

This research reveals that deliberations are an archivistic construction, whose meaning changed since they were composed. Even before having access to them, we have a notion of the type of archive we are about to open: how it should look like, what must be inside. This first filter derives from the recent history of their conservation, transmission and sometimes transformation into monuments. The works mentioned above have helped to discard this false familiarity, to focus on the documents themselves, how they were entitled and what was inside them.

What I call here deliberation is the various forms of deliberative writings which have in common their *auctoritas*, an *universitas* or its elected representatives, and their purpose, registering a public intervention, be it a petition, a decision, an election. I say an, and not the, *universitas*, because there could be more than one *universitates* in a given location: neighbourhoods associations, professional guilds, confraternities etc.⁷

If assembly proceedings constitute the main part of the corpus, other documents have been included. I call “administrative acts” documents issued on public matters by officers elected by the communities, without the intervention – at least on paper/parchment – of a deliberative process: they are orders, decrees. The category “others” similarly contains public actions produced outside of an assembly, but before another authority or another community. They nonetheless register a form of collective action in which the *universitas* was a protagonist.

The number of documents found is, as I said earlier, quite intimidating.

6. Françoise Bibolet, Mireille Massot, Arnaud Ramière, *Les fonds anciens des Archives communales aujourd'hui*, in «La Gazette des archives», 125/1, 1983 pp. 179-206; Julie Lauvernier, *Mettre en ordre les archives des départements: genèse et élaboration du cadre de classement des Archives départementales*, in «La Gazette des archives», 229/1, 2013, pp. 23-40.

7. Michel Hébert, *Unité et diversité de la ville. Rapport introductif*, in Patrick Gilli, Enrica Salvatori (eds.), *Les identités urbaines au Moyen Âge. Regards sur les villes du Midi français*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2014pp. 171-18

Tab. 1. Documents for community politics in the French Alps (Briançonnais and Embry-nais excluded), 1253-1530.⁸

Type of document	Number of items	Number of folios
Council records	237	21500+
Deliberation on a loose folio	75	327
Election on a loose folio	120	197
Administrative document	68	48
Others (oaths, petitions, transactions)	103	218

We can try to define this corpus by its chronology and geography. The first deliberation dates back from 1253, but there are clear discrepancies.

Tab. 2. Progression of the number of deliberations (loose parchments or registers) in the corpus.

1253-1299	1300-1349	1350-1399	1400-1449	1450-1499	1500-1530
9	34	8	120	90	90

The table above only includes documents issued after the meeting of communal assemblies, that is to say the first three lines of the first table. The most striking result is the explosion after 1350: more than a constant increase in the production of deliberations, there was a violent acceleration in the late fourteenth century, followed by a more stable period. The existence of documents as early as in the mid-thirteenth century, even if residual, is unusual for this region: it is contemporary to the first area where deliberations first appeared, northern Italy. The marked difference between fourteenth and fifteenth century is more common, and even more pronounced nearly everywhere else: most deliberations in Northern France, Germany or England appear after 1400.⁹ There are more examples in south-western France, Aragon and Castile, where the situation seems closer to ours, with a parting line around 1350.¹⁰ The French Alps thus seem very much connected to the documentary changes of the time. Mountains were not a

8. The two excluded areas are studied by Noémie Lacroix for her PhD thesis inside the DEMALPS project, and I left to her the exploration of this part of the documentation.

9. There are notable exceptions: Besançon's first deliberations are dated from 1290, Valenciennes' from 1302. There is a handful of examples in the second half of the fourteenth century like Saint-Jean-d'Angély (1332), Dijon (1341), Mâcon (1351), Konstanz (1376), Rouen (1389), Salisbury (1388) .

10. Hipolito Rafael Oliva Herrer, *La voix du peuple dans les registres de délibérations castillans à la fin du Moyen Âge*, in Otchakovsky-Laurens, Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemblées*, pp. 263-277; Laura Miqe l Milian, Albert Reixach Sala, *Enregistres la prise de décision des*

barrier in that sense, even if we cannot generalize: the situation in the Piedmont is quite different, with later documents nearly everywhere. Yet comparisons are difficult to establish: the French area has more than three times as many communities as the Italian area studied; the demographic discrepancy is in proportion.

The corpus is also clearly spatially divided. To put it plainly, the southern Alps concentrate a very large part of the corpus: 71 per cent of all the documents listed in tab. 1, and as much as 8 per cent for the sole assembly proceedings.¹¹ This is no accident: the northern border of this area is the limits of the current *départements* of the Alpes-de-Haute-Provence and Vaucluse, which was then the border of the ancient county of Provence, one of the three principalities of our area, alongside the Dauphiné and the duchy of Savoy. The particularism comes from Provence, whose coastal and lowland communities are better known than their mountain counterparts, but offer the same profile.¹² Several explanations have been proposed: the influence of an “Italian culture”, the centrality of notaries, the documentary practices of the counts, who were also kings of Naples and Jerusalem. If proximity did not work everywhere, as the Piedmont case shows, the notarial culture and, more importantly, the place of written documents in the Angevine administration are more grounded in past studies.¹³

We will come back to this below, but it seems important to remember for now that the existence of these documents seems to be a political choice: it will be important to know who made it, and what for. It seems also relevant to point that this choice became widespread after 1400, pointing to the construction of a common culture, whose level of integration we will need to assess.

If we look inside the documents, even at a general level, one thing strikes the eye: the homogeneity of the formulary. The picture below is an example, with a particularly clear layout, but quite representative of the corpus.

By homogeneity, I mean that the same different parts appear in deliberations as distant in space and time as between Sisteron (mid-thirteenth century)

conseils municipaux de la Catalogne du Bas Moyen Âge, in Otchakovsky-Laurens, Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemblées*, pp. 35-9.

11. See map of the distribution of the documents on the DEMALPS website: <https://www.demalps.com/maps/deliberations-by-community>.

12. Michel Hébert, *Tarascon au XIV^e siècle: histoire d'une communauté urbaine provençale*, La Calade, Edisud, 1979; Noël Coulet, *Aix-en-Provence: espace et relations d'une capitale*, Aix-en-Provence, Université de Provence, 1981; Jean-Paul Boyer, Thierry Pécourt, *La Provence et Fréjus sous la première maison d'Anjou: 1382-1388*, Aix-en-Provence, Presses universitaires de Provence, 2010; François Otchakovsky-Laurens, *La vie politique à Marseille sous la domination angevine (1382-1388)*, Rome, École française de Rome, 2017.

13. Patrick Gilli, *Culture politique et culture juridique chez les Angevins de Naples (jusqu'au milieu du XV^e siècle)*, in Noël-Yves Tonnerre, Elisabeth Verry (eds.), *Les princes angevins du XIII^e au XV^e siècle: un destin européen*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2003, pp. 131-154; Jean-Luc Bonnaud, *Un Etat en Provence. Les officiers locaux du comte de Provence au XIV^e siècle (1309-1382)*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2007; Laure Verdon, *Les notaires, officiers du comte de Provence au XIII^e et XIV^e siècle*, in «Rives nord-méditerranéennes», 28 (2007), <https://doi.org/10.4000/rives.1223>.

and Annecy (late fifteenth century), whose princes had very different administrations. It is no surprise that late-medieval European deliberations look alike. We know of notarial textbooks, and perforce unofficial rules, which described precisely the composition of a deliberation.¹⁴ They were seldom directly used, but defined a progression, from *cong egt io* to *consilia* and then *reformatio*, which can be found in many thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italian registers. Our documents were often reduced to the first and the last items. The recordings often began with a short preamble, with the date, the name of the authorities calling the assembly, and sometimes the type of assembly, as in the example above: «Anno Domini millesimo CCCLXXX die tertio mensis aprilis, de mandato magistri Johannis Rehucii clavarii et vice iudicis Apte, et ad requi sitionem sindicorum, fuit presens consilium congregatum ad subscripta faciendum».

The list of attendees was not systematically registered, but it increasingly became a common feature by the end of the fourteenth century. The core of the document was the *reformationes*, that is, the dispositive part of the deliberation, sometimes recorded with some context (the syndics proposed [...]), but much more often given without detail, as shown above, with the verb *ordinaverunt* or *fuit ordinatum* to introduce each decision. For example, the first decision of the session documented in the picture above is about the organisation of a new corporation: «Et primo ordinaverunt, super facto artis nove operis perfectionis pannorum quod predicta fiant per dominos syndicos, Guillelmum de Medulano, Raymundum Englesii, Rastagnum Porquerii, Anthonium Bricii et Guillelmum Regis». It seems to be a topic (*super facto*), maybe a part of an agenda, but we don't know how this agenda was determined, and whether the questions were debated during the sessions. These parts, the *consilia* and the votes, seem to have been expunged from the recording process in the documents from Southern Europe.¹⁵ Piedmontese documents look alike, although less systematically and mostly on late fourteenth- or fifteenth-century documents. What could be particular in our case is that this formulary is used since the first registrations we have.

If we first try to embrace the whole corpus, what do we read? The formulary begins with ordinary formulae to contextualize the session, naming at least the representative of the prince, under whose authority nearly all councils were held. After the date and place, a list of presence can be included, although less systematically. Then, the formulary proceeds directly with the *ordinationes* or *conclusiones*, almost always expressed by the verb *ordinare*. There is usually no conclusion or subscription. We know nothing about what really happened in the sessions: these records are just lists of the decisions the councillors have taken, a

14 Tanzini, *Delib re e verbl i*; Lorenzo Tanzini, *A consiğ io. La vita politica nell'Italia dei Comuni*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2014pp. 8- 112.

15. Lorenzo Tanzini, *La vie politique et les formes de l'écrit dans les villes italiennes du Moyen Âge. Entre ritualisation et conflits*, in Otchakovsky-Laurens, Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemb ées*, pp. 201-219.

representation of how well they ruled the community. This was only one way to register deliberations in the late Middle Ages.

What do we *not* read? First, we don't know much about the context of these assemblies. In some communities, a weekly meeting was mandatory, but we never see this regularity in the registers. Since the *propositiones*, that is to say the order of the day of the meetings, were kept off-book, we only notice that necessity, and at times urgency, seemed to be the main reason for calling a meeting. However, the urgent matters we know of are only those for which a consensus was reached: we rarely know who proposed them, whether or not there were debates, or even outside interventions. Finally, the conditions and precise results of the votes are absent. We do not know if the councillors voted publicly or secretly, what was the lowest majority required. A few exceptions exist, which I will study in the last section. We know that assembly proceedings were not minute books, and were meant to demonstrate the good government of the council. The specific features in our corpus accentuate this tendency: we only see the decisions validated, supposedly unanimously, by the councillors listed. These documents are registers of ordinances.¹⁶

I will try in the next section to question the functions of registration, and the meaning of its absence in certain cases. The descriptions proposed above offer a set of hypotheses to consider. First, the deliberations seem to owe their existence and shape to different actors: the prince's administration, the notarial networks and the communities themselves. That explains why the mountain particularism does not seem that important: what we see in our document also appears in many others written in the lowlands, on the French or Italian side of the Alps. The rising need to register ordinances, and to register them in a certain way, from the fourteenth century onward, is crucial: it is a subject of study in itself.

2. *The meanings of registration*

I explore in this section the relationship between the practices of deliberation, and their registration. I chose to focus on the history of registration itself: the importance of the corpus, its wide chronological range, offer an opportunity to better understand the evolution of these documents, the rules behind their redaction, and the functions they had for their authors, and for their communities. I will therefore leave the message for my later studies, to focus here on the messenger, which already tells us much about political practices. How were deliberations recorded? Why? Were there any changes in the form, in the content? If there were, what do these changes tell us?

16. Carole Mabboux, *Transcrire et reconstruire le débat. De la prise de notes à l'enregistrement de la parole en conseils: l'exemple de Fucecchio (XIII^e-XIV^e s.)*, in «Registres de délibérations urbains du Moyen Âge», 2019, <https://regidel.hypotheses.org/1217>.

2.1. Evolution and variety of “deliberations”

Two main types of documents are present in the whole corpus: loose folios and registers. Early studies have tended to demonstrate that these were two stages of a linear evolution toward coherent, normalized assembly proceedings.¹⁷ This broad, chronological evolution is supposed to be nearly achieved by the end of the Middle Ages. Others insist that communities chose, at a precise moment of their history, to resort to registers.

The first dimension of this evolution is difficult to assess. I already mentioned the marked increase in the production of documents in the fifteenth century. This is especially true for registers: two thirds were written after 1400. This does not specifically mean that they replaced loose folios, whose production is nearly evenly distributed between both centuries (64 per cent in the fourteenth century vs. 46 per cent in the fifteenth century). In communities where both types have been found, the same proportions apply. All we can conclude is that, when recording was rare, and restricted to certain places of the corpus, loose folios represented the bulk of the production.

Did communities choose to pass from one form to the other? Do we still have loose folios after the composition of the first register? I tested this idea for the Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, the *département* from which come two thirds of the registers, and half of all documents considered. Among the ten communities where both types are present,¹⁸ there is a clear change from loose parchments to registers in seven of them. This leaves Sisteron, Manosque and Digne-les-Bains, the three best documented communities in the corpus, whose registers are the oldest. The overlaps are always residual.

Tab. 3. Chronological overlaps between loose folios and registers.

Community (first register)	Total number of loose folios (14 th h-15 th centuries)	Overlaps	Total number of documents (folios and registers)
Digne-les-Bains (1388)	17	2	32
Manosque (1366)	13	3	0
Sisteron (1344)	13	6	54

In all cases, the acts on loose folios were not copied in the registers: the overlaps are simply chronological. Sisteron seems the most contrasted case, but four

17. Noël Coulet, *Les délibérations communales en Provence au Moyen Âge*, in Claude Carozzi, Huguette Taviani-Carozzi (eds.), *Le médiéviste devant ses sources: questions et méthodes*, Aix-en-Provence, Presses universitaires de Provence, 2004, pp. 227-247.

18. Castellane, Digne-les-Bains, Forcalquier, Les Mées, Manosque, Moustiers, Reillanne, Riez, Roumoules and Valensole.

out of the five loose folios written after 1341 (a very early date for a first register by our corpus' standards) are acts of election. These documents are specific, because they often served to prove the authority of officers in the context of a dispute between the community and a superior authority. They are the latest loose folios we find in the whole corpus, up to the early sixteenth-century. Half of the overlaps for Digne and Manosque are also acts of elections.

These rare exceptions confirm the existence of a trend, especially for the recording of the councils' activity: whenever a register was begun, it was extremely rare to resort to another form. This evolution is, however, strongly connected to the specific context of the community: the institutionalisation of the council, the importance given to official acts, the practices of scribes had a role to play, partly independent from what happened elsewhere. Partly only, for by the end of the fifteenth century, *libri consilii* or *cartularii* were everywhere, not only in Provence, but in the entire French Alps. How was this change possible? What are these documents we call registers? Were they all the same?

Recent works on deliberations in Northern France insisted on the heterogeneity of the registers: very often, they gathered more than just deliberations; the same titles were used for very different types of documents.¹⁹ The situation is similar in the French Alps, especially in the fourteenth century. To describe precisely the process of registration is difficult, because the documents have been transformed, rebound, often with the objective of creating a coherent series that did not exist at the beginning. The four oldest series we have are Sisteron, Apt (1362), Manosque and Moustiers (1369). In Manosque and Moustiers, the first deliberations are not recorded chronologically; in Sisteron and Moustiers, only a handful of deliberations appear for the first years: they were collected and registered *a posteriori*.²⁰ This gives the impression that a decision was made to make a register; the notary began by gathering all the old records he could find, certainly on loose folios, and copied them into the first booklet, without giving much care to the formulary or the chronology.²¹ In a second time, he could start recording contemporary deliberations, in good order. The second volumes in Sisteron, Apt and Moustiers follow the same formulary, only record deliberations from one electoral year: the regular series began then. This is more difficult to assess in the case of Manosque, because the booklets were bound together to cover eight to ten years, later in the constitution of series.

If these registers were becoming more ordered, their content remained hybrid: for many years, deliberations were recorded alongside accounts, lists of public properties etc. Again, we can see the slow process of separation and creation of different typologies. In registers from Apt and Moustiers, accounts are

19. Cléo Rager, *Autopsie des « registres de délibérations municipaux » de la moitié nord de la France (XIII^e-XV^e siècle). Quelques éléments pour une typologie*, in Otchakovsky-Laurens, Verdon, *La voix des assemblées*, pp. 51-63.

20. This is also the case for the first register in Digne, which covers the period 1388-1413, but with only a handful of deliberations.

21. AC Sisteron, BB77; AC Manosque, Ba25-1; AD04E depot135-2/1.

singled out from deliberations by a note in the left margin, and disappeared when account books were created a few decades later. In Manosque, booklets were used in both direction: deliberations began at one end of the booklet; to read the accounts, you have to turn the booklet over and start from the “end”. A typology was slowly appearing, and different techniques were tested before the apparition of separate series. Both practices appear in Sisteron’s first registers, but without an established standard, implying that there was space for adaptation and variations.²² This flexibility endured: late in the fifteenth centuries, registers from other communities, especially those without established series of public documentation, resorted to these hybrid forms.

However, if we look at the whole corpus, there are clear traces of normalization over time. Three aspects are particularly striking:

The constitution of separate registers, covering different functions. The best example is the distinction between accounts and deliberations: the practice of recording them together was progressively abandoned, and account books appeared. In Manosque and Sisteron, this change happened around the 130s, strongly linked to the creation of the office of *clavaire* or the community, the word for treasurer. In Manosque, the recording of deliberations and accounts on the two sides of the same booklet was abandoned in 1380, and four separate documents were written each year: deliberations, accounts, *querelae* and *pendentes*.²³

The structuration of the registers. In addition to using the same formulary, a set of new elements appeared, not everywhere and not completely. In many instances, the first folio was used as a title page, with the year, the name of the syndics and of the notary. Tools were used to speed up the reading: marginal notes, *maniculae*, sometimes even subtitles for every ordinance.²⁴ At the end of our period, this system could become quite elaborate. In Grenoble, the proceedings from 1517-1518 have a full index of all the ordinances. It distinguishes two categories: *rerum ordinarium* et *extraordinarium*. This seems to be a posterior construction, to retrieve more easily ordinances in registers that, by then, were not booklets anymore, but enormous volumes of up to 600 folios, already bound and ready to use before the first registration.²⁵ With these internal references, registers could be consulted long after they had been written. They were not only meant to keep a memory: they were tools of government.

22. On the history of public document in Sisteron, cf. Alexandra Gallo, *Sisteron au Moyen Âge : un atelier de la démocratie, XIII^e-XIV^e siècles*, Paris, CTHS, 2016, pp. 64-91.

23. *Querelae* were complaints addressed to newly created officers, the *iustificatores*. *Pendentes* were lists of public properties, be it documents, objects or weapons, as well as debts and credits not yet paid. They were written at the end of an electoral year, to inform the new officers of the ongoing and unfinished business. Cf. Michel Hébert, *L'ordonnance de Brignoles, les affaires pendantes et l'information administrative en Provence sous les premiers Angevins*, in Claire Boudreau, Kouky Fianu, Claude Gauvard (eds.), *Information et société en Occident à la fin du Moyen Âge*, Paris, Editions de la Sorbonne, 2004pp. 4-56; Gallo, *Sisteron au Moyen Âge*.

24. Marginal notes were systematically used in Sisteron after 1375, after 1380 in Manosque.

25. AC Grenoble, BB5, ff. 1-5.

Lastly, their scribe gave them titles. They were *libris* or *cartularii*, with a genitive indicating either their practical content (*ordinationum* or *conclusionis*), or the authority they emanated from (*consilii*, more rarely *sindicorum*). The first terms are generic, even if the use of *cartularium*, shared with other types of documents used to keep the rights of the communities, shows a desire to collect and keep these documents on the long run.²⁶ A common form emerged at the end of the Middle Ages, which echoes the central place taken by the council in these communities.

These transformations were not linear, and the features described do not appear everywhere. Moreover, other types of registers existed. In Nyons, for example, the only register is a “livre de police”,²⁷ combining accounts, letters and decrees from the sixteenth century, with no apparent link to the council: the authority was the syndics. This category is not unknown in northern France.²⁸ Mixed registers of this type are also found in Provence.²⁹ The logic and date of their composition is more difficult to understand, and would need further analysis. These communities have made different choices, maybe more adapted to their institutions, but they used registers, which is interesting to notice.

These few cases aside, everywhere assembly proceedings existed by the end of our period, they had a common form – a prepared, pre-bound register – and common functions – the recording of the council’s ordinances, their availability for officers, their conservation on the long run. It did not include, by far, all communities, and variations can be observed. However, compared to the documents a hundred years before, the change, if not one-sided, is meaningful. *Universitates* seemed to have a margin to choose the way to record their decisions, if they wanted to. How to explain, then, that some of them did not record their assemblies, or did so very late, even in the area where these documents were the most common?

2.2. Registration, conservation: the political importance of deliberations

The recording and keeping of registers had several, entangled purposes. They were linked to the political context, and to earlier documentary practices. They were also set in a broader documentary landscape which, as a whole, was a tool to give a symbolic authority to the *universitas*. What we know about these choices is altered by the hazards of conservation in the past five centuries.

26. For the definition of cartulary, cf. Maria Milagros Carcel Orti, *Vocabl aire internacional de la diplomatiqe*, Valencia, Universitat de Valencia, 1997, <https://www.cei.lmu.de/VID/#4>.

27. AD26, Edepot81-5. The expression is from modern archivists, the first folio is too damaged to know the original title, if there was one.

28. Cléo Rager, *Les premiers reys stes de delib rations municipals tenus dans les villes champenoises: enjeux politique s et innovations documentaires (XV^e siècle)*, in «Médiévales. Langues, Textes, Histoire», 76, 2019, pp. 93-112.

29. In Saignon (AD§ Edepot Saignon-BB1-5 and BB2), in Bonnieux (AD§ Edepot Bonnieux-BB1) or in Saint-Vallier-de-Thiery (AD06, Edepot Saint-Vallier-de-Thiery-112-13).

Manosque and Forcalquier will serve as a case-study. They were typical Haute-Provence dynamic towns. They are both located on the slopes above the Durance Valley, twenty kilometres apart, along the Durance axis for the first, the old *Via Domitia* for the latter. This insured important tax revenues, which they fought to control. They had respectively 700 and 400 fiscal households at the beginning of the fourteenth century.³⁰ They severely suffered from the epidemics from 1348 onwards. Their first “cadastres” date from 1421 (Manosque) and 1468 (Forcalquier), and seem to show that Forcalquier had less suffered than Manosque.³¹

However, their current archives seem to tell very different stories. Manosque boasts one of the longest series of deliberations in southern France, starting in 1366; the same situation is found in comparable cities like Apt, Moustiers or Sisteron. Forcalquier’s earliest register starts in 1744 and is the only one before 1500; with Riez, this is an exception for such important towns. How can it be explained?

Production and conservation are two distinct parts of the history of the registers. I will study them in turn. Everything suggests that proceedings were written in Forcalquier since the late fourteenth century. In 1388, a privilege was negotiated with Queen Mary to have a council and a *notarius consilii*.³² It is hard to imagine that this officer would not have composed registers, which were his main task. The comparison between Forcalquier’s first register and those in other cities is also telling. I described above the evolution towards individualized registers, after several decades of mixed registers. The register from Forcalquier resembles most of its contemporaries: a specialized register, continuously updated; it was not composed by binding several booklets together, but already prepared to be a few hundred folios long. In this aspect, I think Forcalquier was not an exception and had the same documentary practices than Manosque.

After they were composed, why were registers kept? How? Our direct sources here are old inventories, which date from the early sixteenth century in both cases. I will come to them in a moment, but I want to start with the documentary landscape I was talking about. If we try to understand all the documents drawn and kept each year, and the political function behind this production, differences appear. In Manosque, the chronology is clear. In 1316, a cartulary was composed with all the old privileges, going back to the twelfth century. It

30. Edouard Baratier, *La démographie Provençale du XIII^e au XVI^e siècle. Avec chiffres de comparaison pour le XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, SEVPEN, 1961, p. 65; Martin Aurell, Jean-Paul Boyer, Noël Coulet, *La Provence au Moyen Âge*, Aix-en-Provence, Publications de l’université de Provence, 2005, pp. 295-302. Using the common coefficient of 4.5 people by household before the 1380s, this means roughly 3,000 inhabitants in Manosque, 1,800 in Forcalquier.

31. AC Manosque, CC2, AC Forcalquier, CC3. About 50 households were recorded in Manosque, and about 700 in Forcalquier. These numbers must be taken with caution: there were still epidemic waves in the 1400s, whereas sixty years later, a demographic growth is attested everywhere in Western Europe. Moreover, the rules for the composition of these documents varied, and are not clear in these cases.

32. AC Forcalquier, AA14, ff. 30v-31.

was closely linked to the tensions between the community and the local lord (the Hospitallers): the latter refused to recognize the existence of a civic body, and imposed heavy taxation and military duties, calling for a gathering of all the old rights. The *universitas* was then conducting an intense lobbying in courts to ask to the count's judges for support.³³ In 1334, a general assembly confirmed the early thirteenth century privileges: Manosque was an *universitas*, had a council and elected officers, authority over taxes etc.³⁴ In this context, deliberations, then account books were composed and kept, respectively from 1366 and 1370 onwards.³⁵ As early as in the 1380s, a first draft of inventory can be found in the deliberations.³⁶ Public documents, thoroughly composed and well kept, were essential in these tensions, which never abated in the following century. These registers were proof that the *universitas* had, and exercised, its rights.

In Forcalquier, things were different. The city was directly subject to the count, which meant both a weaker tradition of political autonomy (the city never had a consulate), and less tensions between several parties.³⁷ In 1385, the city went through intense political negotiations, such as what happened in Manosque in the early fourteenth century. The community produced a big roll listing all the old privileges, asking Queen Mary to confirm them, and adding more political liberties.³⁸ Why then? This was during the Aix League War, when two members of the Anjou family claimed the title of count. Many cities bargained their support in exchange for advantages: Forcalquier was one of them.³⁹ A second stage of intense documentary activity happened between the late fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth century: in addition to the first assembly proceedings, a cartulary was composed. It shows that, except for the routine confirmations, no new privileges or rights were granted before the 1450s. From the 1480s to the 1530s, extensions to the rights of the citizens, and to the city's jurisdiction, were secured. Finally, the first inventory of the archives was drawn up in 1557.⁴⁰ This was the time when the kings of France became counts of Provence. A permanent Parliament was set in Aix

33. Michel Hébert, *Autour de la cavalcade: les relations entre le comte de Provence, les Hospitaliers et la communauté de Manosque (XIII^e-XV^e siècles)*, Aix-en-Provence, Publications de l'université de Provence, 198, pp. 14- 158

34. AC Manosque, Ba7. For the cartulary, Aa8

35. Between 1368 and 1395, we find booklets of income and expenses in the registers of deliberations. The separate series of account books starts in 1395.

36. AC Manosque, Ba25-3, ff. 199v-200v.

37. Aix-en-Provence, the other and more stable capital of the county, presents the same history, cf. Sandrine Claude, Noël Coulet, *Naissance d'une capitale, émergence d'une ville*, in Noël Coulet, Florian Mazel (eds.), *Histoire d'Aix-en-Provence*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2020, pp. 8- 118

38. AC Forcalquier, AA14f. 2.

39. Michel Hébert, *Les capitulations provençales de Marie de Blois (1385-1390): une démarche constitutionnelle?*, in François Foronda, Jean-Philippe Genet (eds.), *Des chartes aux constitutions: autour de l'idée constitutionnelle en Europe (XII^e-XVII^e siècle)*, Paris, Editions de la Sorbonne, 2019, pp. 19- 210.

40. AC Forcalquier, AA14 for the cartulary. The 1557 inventory is now lost, but mentioned in the introduction of earliest one available, written in the 1590s (*ib dem*, II55, f. 1).

in 1482. It was also at this time that Manosque petitioned, twice, the king to become head of the *viguerie* instead of Forcalquier, to no avail.⁴¹

This struggle between the two cities is recalled in the first folios of a late fifteenth century inventory in Forcalquier. It exaggerates the old relationship between the city and the count, and insists on the presence of troops from Manosque in the siege the city suffered during the Wars of Religion. This is the *causa scribendi* of this inventory: keeping trace of rights and powers under threat. It therefore focuses on privileges, kept in the *armarium* (coffer), and deliberations were absent. They only resurfaced in early seventeenth century inventories, in both cities. At that time, the aim was different: archives were restructured and described comprehensively. We learn of many bags and registers, that were never mentioned before. Deliberations appear as we know them now: a whole series in Manosque, only two registers in Forcalquier. What happened in Forcalquier?

The city suffered a siege, and a sack in the 1560s. Churches were destroyed, and maybe public documents. A comparison between the two old inventories mentioned above show no loss in the privileges, but they were kept in the *armarium*, and we don't know where registers were. In Manosque, it was in the same building, but in a different room. They could have been kept by the notaries who wrote them. We will likely never know, but it is not the point. Both cities had common features: they most certainly had deliberations, public notaries, and cherished their rights. The difference is in the status of these rights: the political position of Forcalquier appears more stable and secure than Manosque's. We saw that it directly influenced when a coherent documentary activity was decided. I think it might explain why deliberations lack in Forcalquier: they were less important in the dialogue of power than other documents, kept with greater care.

Registration was both an urge and a notarial practice. Communities fought to have a council, and records materialized that right. In Provence, this was a new chapter of a long history of political activity, initiated by the twelfth and thirteenth century consulates, the first form of civic autonomy.⁴² What the citizens from Manosque received in 1334 was not a new privilege, but the confirmation of the 1203 charter: already then did they have a council, consuls to represent them, and fiscal and military rights. They fought for them, remembered them. Sisteron, Reillanne, Apt and Saignon also were consulates, and all belong to the earliest communities to write and keep deliberations records. The inheritance of autonomy and collective agency played a crucial part in the political vitality of these communities, and its transcription into registers.

Another main factor is the fact that important towns were chosen as intermediaries in the political network of the county. We do not find important series of deliberations in Apt, Sisteron, Forcalquier, Digne, Moustiers, Castellane by chance. They were also all the seat of a *viguerie* or a *biellie*, the county main circumscriptions. Only Seyne and Colmars, the two other seats in Haute Provence,

4. Abbé Féraud, *Histoire civile, politique, religieuse et bibliographique de Manosque*, Digne-Bains, Repos, 1838, pp. 258-269.

42. Aurell, Boyer, Coulet, *La Provence au Moyen Âge*, pp. 95-14.

have only loose folios. More tellingly, the councils of these towns were often used to gather representatives from the villages of the whole district, especially when county matters were discussed.³ They had the role the Assemblies of the Provence estates played at county level.⁴ This meant coordination: decisions had to be kept and relayed. The need for good registration also came from above.

Finally, registration *and* conservation required notaries, and especially public, elected notaries. The relative homogeneity of the formulary came from professionals. The case of Manosque is interesting. We know of two notaries who occasionally worked for the community before the office of *notarium consilii* was created, in 1334: *Andreas Raynaudi* and *Jacobus de Balma*. In their minutes, written between 1308 and 1335, I found a few acts from the *universitas Manu-asce*: a complaint against the Hospitallers, several disputes involving the *cominales*, both from 1333.⁴⁵ I attempted the same research in the minutes of the two first *notarii consilii*, *Guillelmus Autrici* and *Johannes Burle*,⁴⁶ to no avail. I think this proves the distinction these officers began to make between public and private activities. This created the need for a public deposit, which was not automatic: I found ordinances asking previous notaries to hand back the public documents they were keeping to the councillors, once room had been made for an archive.⁴⁷ We might have lost a considerable number of deliberations because they were kept in private archives, more likely to be destroyed after the death of their owner.⁴⁸

Assembly proceedings were not minutes, taken in haste and then collated. They were ordered, pre-designed documents kept because they were needed. Indeed, they first demonstrated the existence of the *universitas*, a polity which had the right to assemble. They were, with the seal and the town hall, a material expression of its power. This meant that, beyond their form and regularity, composing them and looking after them was important. They were a tool of political communication, especially useful in the context of tensions with superior authorities. In the Provençal examples we described, they transcribed a dialogue of power between the prince and its subjects. Indeed, they only give us access to a specific kind of assembly: the councils gathered under the authority of the count, whose registration proved they were held abiding to the rules defined by the

43. Two examples among many: AC Sisteron, BB91, ff. 6v-7 (<https://www.demalps.com/records/D002178>); AD04, Edepot039-002, ff. 186v-187v (Castellane, <https://www.demalps.com/records/D000273>).

44. Some of their records are kept in AD04, Edepot135-031.

45. AD04 2E0286 to 2E0280 (*Andreas Raynaudi*); 2E0281 and 2E03737 (*Jacobs de Balma*). For the examples mentioned, 2E02830, f. 23; 2E02831, ff. 18 and 20.

46. AD04 2E0374 to 2E03760 (*Guillelmus Autrici*); 2E0285 to 2E02857 (*Johannes Burle*).

47. Among others: AD04, Edepot039-002, ff. 187v-188 (<https://www.demalps.com/records/D000274>); AC Sisteron, BB79, ff. 35-36 (<https://www.demalps.com/records/D001567>), BB92, f. 8 (<https://www.demalps.com/records/D002662>); AC Manosque, Ba25-1, f. 135v (<https://www.demalps.com/records/D000083>).

48. Federico Del Tredici, *8 nza memoria? La conservazione delle scritture comunitarie nel Milanese (secoli XIV-XV)*, in «Studi di Storia Medioevale e di Diplomatica», n.s., 2, 2018 pp. 3- 62.

privileges. Finally, these documents coexisted, and sometimes were mixed, with others: accounts, trial records, collection of charters, inventories, fiscal inquiries, all of these documents were kept and marked, in a real archivist program.⁹ This is what registration was chiefly about: a way – but not the only one – to claim a position and negotiate with superior powers.

3. *Public life beneath and beyond deliberations*

Recent works on political life, and especially popular politics, highlighted the limitations of the sources usually studied to understand how people took decisions, why, and what was their conceptions of public activity.⁵⁰ What we mean by politics cannot be reduced to the restricted arenas of council chambers, where speeches and actions were often scripted, where only the *sanior pars* existed. Deliberations are, of course, one such typical “political” document, but only a fragment of what they tell has been used until recently. We saw how, in the French Alps, their formulary, their very format became similar, giving the impression that all communities shared, by 1500, a common culture. This idea does not resist close study of their context of production. The way they present homogeneous *conclusiones*, however, serves a purpose. What do we read in charters, or in registers, these primary sources of public life? Consensus, in form and in fact, between *universitates* and lords. Stability of the institutions: of the documents which keep the trace of their activity, of the citizens who make them live. Centrality of these institutions in the decision process.

Written records have the power to impress this image, these values. This is political life as their authors, their promoters, wanted it, dreamt it, imposed it at times. It does not come even close to what it really was, what we know it was in better documented occidental cities. Deliberations impose a mask on medieval public life, on what happened outside assemblies, but also inside them. This mask is the formulary. We know how it works, how and why it was built. It is holed.⁵¹ Trying to peer through the holes, to read the sources against their grain, helps us to better answer our initial questions: who decided? How? On what?

The life of late medieval assemblies is now well known: we know the rules councillors had to respect, we have examples of minutes which take us closer to the voices of the actors, we have copies of documents that could be produced before the officers.⁵² Of course, these samples are scattered across Europe, which

9. Chastang, *La ville, le gouvernement et l'écrit*; Lynn Gaudreault, *Pouvoir, mémoire et identité: le premier registre de délibérations communales de Brignoles, 1387-1391*, Montpellier, Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2014; Florie Varitille, Benoît Grévin, *Mémoire municipale et culture notariale. Le cartulaire doré de Dige*, in «Provence historique», 259, 2016, pp. 217-238.

50. Eersels, Haemers (eds.), *Words and Deeds*; Claire Judde de Larivière, *L'ordinaire des savoirs. Une histoire pragmatique de la société vénitienne (XV^e-XVI^e siècles)*, Paris, Editions de l'EHESS, 2023.

51. Tanzini, *La vie politique*.

52. Jelle Haemers, Christian D. Liddy, *Popular Politics in the Late Medieval City: York and Bruges*, in «The English Historical Review», 128, 2013, pp. 771-85; Mabboux, *Transcrire et reconstruire le débat*.

makes comparisons difficult. They at least give indications as to the activities that were hushed, or erased on purpose from the records we have. We can try the same work for Provençal assemblies, with three examples.

One of the most striking features of the formulary described earlier is the absence of any mention of vote. This is important: many Italian records are filled with counts of white and black beans, of raised and sat councillors. It added legitimacy to the decisions.⁵³ The underlying choice not to record the votes can be to insist on the consensus in the assembly. It also simplified the registration. Councils were not peaceful and unanimous affairs. In the French registers, I found two different ways to record votes. The first one seems to be accidental, left by the scribe at the corner of a folio or at the end of a booklet. It consists of a series of vertical dashes drawn on a long, horizontal line. There are usually two of these lines, between the two possible votes. They are especially used in the context of an election, to choose between several people for an office.⁵⁴ The second one seems to be more purposefully recorded. It is expressed with the verbs *voluerunt* (they agreed) and *noluerunt* (they refused). In its shortest form, only those who voted against are marked, often besides their name in the list of attendees.⁵⁵ More developed versions can be found, where two separate lists are made, one for each *opinio* expressed.⁵⁶ Why they appeared at times and not at others remains unclear. But the existence of different opinions was not a problem in itself: there were divisions, debates. Their registrations however, was certainly not deemed useful.

The usual *iter* of a session was centred on the propositions raised by syndics, voted by the councillors. This order was at times disrupted by interventions from other actors, councillors or *adiuncti*. They were often called *querelae*, and their expression was certainly prepared: external attendees were exceptionally given a seat in order to express them. Frequently, they were about financial matters: many *querelae* appear at the end of an electoral year, when the community had to pay its employees and creditors. Other kinds of *querelae* seem closer to what was called, in other contexts, petitions. They could be individual or collective: in 1392 in Sisteron, butchers asked for a reduction in taxes.⁵⁷ Other complaints required more complex procedures. Such *controversie* or *rancurae* appear in Manosque or Sisteron, forcing the council to elect a new officer, called *procurator* or *clarifficator*, to look into the problem. The exact content of these complaints was almost never recorded.⁵⁸ However, they demonstrate the capacity of citizens to express their disagreements

53. Albert Rigaudière, *Voter dans les villes de France au Moyen Âge (XIII^e-XV^e s.)*, in «Comptes-rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres», 14 4 2000, pp. 139- 141; Tanzini, *A consiġ io*, pp. 104 112.

54. For example, AD04E depot039-003, inside ending cover; AC Malaucène, BB9, f. 72v.

55. At other times, the refusal is registered directly in the *conclusio*, with a sentence starting with «excepto/is [name of the councillor(s)] causa [...].».

56. AD04, Edepot039-002, ff. 143v-144v (<https://www.demalps.com/records/D000214>); AC Manosque , Ba25-2, f. 234 -v (<https://www.demalps.com/records/D002579>).

57. AC Sisteron, BB92, f. 6 (<https://www.demalps.com/records/D002699>).

58. AC Manosque , Ba25-2, f. 192v (<https://www.demalps.com/records/D002556>).

or their claims, with a certain degree of efficiency. We can assume that this is only a fraction of the discords that could be raised in assemblies. Indeed, the dissensus we can read is accepted, and its registration was used to demonstrate the good government of the councillors. It must not have always been the case.

Lastly, not all assemblies were registered. People gathered, sometimes without authorization. A few examples of sentences condemn these illegal gatherings, as in Manosque in 1334, or in Colmars in 1479.⁵⁹ Conversely, we also have acts authorizing an assembly, either separate from, or in preamble of, the record of the session.⁶⁰ Assemblies of equals, *coniurationes*, were at the origins of late-medieval communities. But when they became accepted as *universitates*, these gatherings were tamed. The assemblies recorded in the deliberations are the institutionalised form of a wider range of regular meetings which happened on the margins of written sources, and thus of political life, which were disqualified and distrusted.⁶¹

These limits lead us beyond the registers whose workings and functions I tried to describe. To conclude, I would like to insist on this distinction: non-registration does not mean, by far, the absence of political activity in the communities. Councils, or even parliaments mentioned in our registers were a specific political arrangement, chosen in many *universitates* as the main legitimate place of discussion between citizens and lords. That was not always the case, and there were many other ways to manage collective business. Many studies have underlined the importance of petitions, silent resistance or even open revolt, all forms that have echoes in our registers.⁶² I will stay closer to the deliberative forms we observed in this paper.

Universitas does not only mean the urban or rural community of pledged citizens, living in a territory more or less well defined, and enjoying a series of fiscal and political privileges. This was one form of something much simpler: a group of equals, united by certain rules, around certain matters. There were *universitates* everywhere. Some of them left traces of their dealings: diocesan chapters, universities (in its academic sense). In our area, religious and social life was structured around confraternities, particularly the one dedicated to the Holy Spirit.⁶³ We find documents about them in nearly every important deposits. Only in one instance do

59. AC Manosque , Ba5; AD04E depot061-5.

60. AD73, 206Edepot-10.

61. Janna Coomans, *Making Good and Breaking Bad: Materiality and Community in Netherlandish Cities, 1380-1520*, in «The English Historical Review», 137, 2022, pp. 1053-108.

62. In addition to the works cited in introduction, cf. Claire Judde de Larivière, *L'ordre contesté. Formes, objets et discours de l'action publique des gens ordinaires à Venise (XV-XVI siècle)*, in Challet et al. (eds.), *The Voices of the People*, pp. 215-233; Patrick Lantschner, *The Logic of Political Conflicts in Medieval Cities. Italy and the Southern Low Countries, 1370-1440*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

63. Jacques Chiffolleau, *Entre le religieux et le politique: les confréries du Saint-Esprit en Provence et en Comtat Venaissin à la fin du Moyen Âge*, in Jacques Chiffolleau, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (eds.), *Le mouvement confraternel au Moyen Âge. France, Italie, Suisse*, Rome, École française de Rome, 1987, pp. 9-40; Noël Coulet, *Le mouvement confraternel en Provence et dans le Comtat Venaissin au Moyen Âge*, in Chiffolleau, Paravicini Bagliani (eds.), *Le mouvement confraternel*, pp. 83-110.

we have a medieval deliberation. In Thônes (Haute-Savoie), the confraternity had statutes from the fifteenth century, and regularly elected officials, in the same way as in town councils.⁶⁴

Management of common goods was another cause of collective organization. In well-known areas such as the Roya Valley, the negotiation of pasture rights is, as best we can tell, at the origins of the “communalisation” of Saorge, Breil or Tende, in the twelfth century.⁶⁵ In 145, a few members of the village of Marlens are granted perpetual rights over pastures and lowlands, which they have to manage and preserve together.⁶⁶ This is also a form of *universitas*, even if the term is not used. The charter makes formal arrangements that were very common in the northern Alps, called *pareries*, which served to organize the fruition of lands, waters or forests held together.⁶⁷

Let us finish here, in Savoy, where deliberations are so scant. Now that we know what Provençal deliberations were for, we can be more precise about what we don't have in the North: registration of a dialogue between the duke and its subjects. We don't have that specific form of dialogue, but we have others. Unlike many other regions, the old institution of *placitum* endured in Savoy way into the fourteenth century. Gathered around a lord, they mainly served as a court of law and to confirm privileges on an annual basis. However, Nicolas Carrier found instances were interventions by the community, which used them to voice their grievances and present cases. Some of them were recorded, and show the ability of the attendees to use the opportunity to block the confirmation of the privileges, and thus the political consensus, to advance their interests.⁶⁸ In a context where the duke and the lords had little interest in community business, unless they needed money, this may have been one way to negotiate, at least well adapted to this specific balance of powers.⁶⁹ The rest of collective action, internal affairs that did not necessarily need registration, may well be beyond our reach.

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64. AD74 Edepot28- GG35.

65. Juliette Lassalle, *Terres communes et délimitations de territoires à partir des litiges sur la transhumance dans la haute vallée de la Roya (XII^e-XV^e siècles)*, in «Provence historique », 51, 2001, pp. 4- 46.

66. AD74 Edepot167-DD4

67. Fabrice Mouthon, *Entre familles et communautés d'habitants: les pareries dans les Alpes savoyardes des XIII^e et XIV^e siècles*, in «Actes des congrès nationaux des sociétés historiques et scientifiques», 125/3, 2002, pp. 97-120.

68. Nicolas Carrier, *Les communautés montagnardes et la justice dans les Alpes nord-occidentales à la fin du Moyen Âge: Chamonix, Abondance et les régions voisines, XIV^e-XV^e siècles*, in «Cahiers de recherches médiévales», 10, 2003, pp. 9- 118

69. Guido Castelnuovo, *Les élites urbaines et le prince dans les Etats de Savoie à la fin du Moyen Âge*, in Société des historiens médiévistes de l'Enseignement supérieur public (eds.), *Les élites urbaines au Moyen Âge*, Paris, Editions de la Sorbonne, 1996, pp. 257-268 <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pSORbonne.34234>.

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Being a Community within a Lordship. A Perspective from Luserna San Giovanni on the Emergence of Council Registers in the Western Alps (14th-15th Centuries)

ABSTRACT

This paper provides a preliminary contribution on the data emerging from a survey of Italian municipal archives in the Western Alps, especially those of Piedmont and Valle d’Aosta. After an introduction dedicated to framing the problem of the production and preservation of council registers in the rural communities of this area, I will discuss the case-study of Luserna San Giovanni, combining records from municipal and seigneurial archives. I will show that during the fifteenth century this small community was affected by processes of growth and social mobility. This fostered the consolidation of municipal institutions cooperating with the seigniorial clan and allowing for flexible and open forms of political participation.

KEYWORDS: Late Middle Ages, Western Alps, Rural communities, Lordship, Council registers

1. Introduction: a methodological problem

What are council registers? What does their production (and conservation) tell us about the history of small- and medium-sized communities in the late Middle Ages?

In recent decades, questions such as these have reflected historians’ renewed methodological attention to their sources, and have been associated with linguistic, cultural, and documentary approaches. This enquiry has extended to the records of medieval deliberations, as scholars have begun to question the oversimplifications inherent in certain modern archival classifications.¹ A survey of the munic-

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1. Cléo Rager, *Autopsie des « registres de délibérations municipaux » de la moitié nord de la France (XIII^e-XV^e siècle). Quelques éléments pour une typologie*, in François Otchakovsky-Laurens, Laure Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemblées. Quelle démocratie urbaine au travers des registres de*

ipal archives of the Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta Alps confirms this suspicion, showing that the definition of "Ordinati" used in this area's inventories often conceals a range of different documents.² It is possible and useful to draw some distinctions in order to analyse the structural and layout choices made in specific contexts and the contents to which they relate. Here I will use the expression "council registers" to refer to documentary units designed from the outset for the sequential recording of documents that, at least for the most part, summarise the proceedings of community assemblies according to formulas roughly inspired by those of the influential *Summa totius artis notariae* by Rolandino de' Passageri.³

Once we have agreed on the distinctiveness of documents of this kind within the broader and more fluid landscape of "community registers", what significance can we attribute to the emergence of council registers? Historiography offers some clues which are typically derived from the analysis of urban contexts. In general, these registers reflect a political and documentary culture that tends to take root where council activity intersects with the presence of a notarial milieu.⁴ More specifically, many factors can influence the form of the documents and the decision on whether or not to draft them, which can even lead to similar outcomes for different reasons. For example, some scholars suppose that the reproduction of parts of a council debate reflects a cohesive oligarchy, while others explain it in terms of the need for a pacified representation of a changing elite's internal relations.⁵ At least one thing is certain: generalisations are difficult.

Let us start to narrow the field, then, and look at the appearance of council registers in the Cottian, Graian, and Pennine Alps (figg. 1-2).

In an area less extensive than the French Alps, we find only two relatively large centres with a fairly important commune: Pinerolo, which preserves the

délibérations? Méditerranée-Europe, XIII^e-XVIII^e siècles, Aix-en-Provence, Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2021, pp. 51-63.

2. See Chiara Corradini (and, for the French side, Clément Carnielli) in this issue of the journal.

3. See Marta Mangini, *I quaterni consiliorum trecenteschi di Bormio nel panorama delle fonti di matrice consiliare*, in «Nuova rivista storica», 89/2, 2005, pp. 465-482: 475-476.

4. Lorenzo Tanzini, *Deliberare e verbalizzare. Per una storia documentaria dei consigli in nell'Italia comunale*, in «Reti Medievali Rivista», 14/1, 2013, pp. 43-79; Otchakovsky-Laurens, Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemblées*.

5. See Caroline Fargeix, *Les élites lyonnaises du XV^e siècle au miroir de leur langage. Pratiques et représentations culturelles des conseillers de Lyon, d'après les registres de délibérations consulaires*, Paris, De Boccard, 2007 and Lorenzo Tanzini, *La vie politique et les formes de l'écrit de gouvernement dans les villes italiennes du Moyen Âge. Entre ritualisation et conflits*, in Otchakovsky-Laurens, Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemblées*, pp. 201-215: 208-209; Xavier Nadrigny, *Débattre en temps de crise. Les registres de délibérations de Toulouse à la fin du Moyen Âge (1371-1418)*, in Otchakovsky-Laurens, Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemblées*, pp. 95-112. On the decision not to draw up registers and on their distortion due to particular needs, see for example Morwenna Coquilley, *Délibération montrée, délibération cachée. L'action du Conseil juratois dans ses registres de correspondance (XV^e siècle-début XVI^e siècle)*, in Otchakovsky-Laurens, Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemblées*, pp. 173-187 and Francesco Senatore, *Le dit et le non-dit dans les registres de délibérations des villes du royaume de Naples, XV^e siècle*, in Otchakovsky-Laurens, Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemblées*, pp. 65-81.

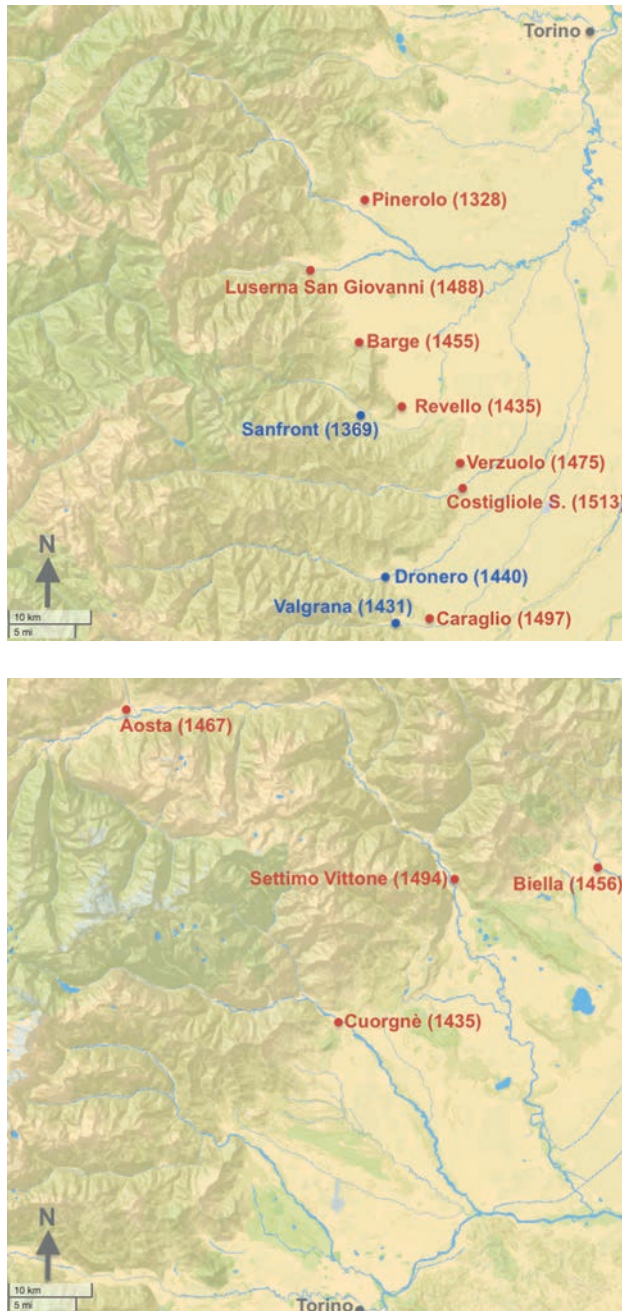


Fig. 1-2. Council registers on the Italian side of the Western Alps (in red, first register preserved in local archives; in blue, indirect mentions in local statutes).

earliest and largest series of council registers (from 1328);⁶ and Biella, where no registers have survived from before the mid-fifteenth century. Apart from these two cases, the sources in question date from the fifteenth century onwards and concern communities of small-town size or smaller. All of them are situated at the outlets of the Alpine valleys leading to the plains – with the exception of Aosta, which is also the only settlement with an episcopal see in the area and period we are considering. The geographical distribution of the records is strongly skewed towards the Cottian Alps, particularly communities subject to the marquisates of Saluzzo (Costigliole Saluzzo, Revello, and Verzuolo) or adjacent to it (Barge, Caraglio, and further away, Luserna San Giovanni); the only exceptions are Cuornè and Settimo Vittone.⁷

It is not easy to explain this distribution, because there are not very many studies on late medieval town and village communities in Piedmont as of yet. At the moment, there are no satisfactory overviews of the local communalisation processes or alternative ways of organising community life – for example, around seigniorial rather than communal administration.⁸ For this same reason, focusing

6. The same is attested from the second quarter of the fourteenth century in other urban or semi-urban centres of the Piedmontese plain (Chieri, Ivrea, Moncalieri, and Turin). See Marta Gravela, *Le delibere dei comuni piemontesi nel Tre e Quattrocento (città ‘città’, comunità rurali)*, in Ermanno Orlando, Gherardo Ortalli (eds.), *Le delibere consiliari dei comuni italiani. Uno sguardo comparativo a partire dai Misti del 8 nato di Venezia*, Venezia, Istituto Veneto di Scienze Lettere ed Arti, 2023, pp. 225-240.

7. As in the case of Pinerolo, for these smaller communities as well the phenomenon in the Alpine area echoes the roughly contemporary situation in the plains: in addition to the essay by Gravela cited in note 6, see the mentions of council registers in Alessandro Barbero, *Politica e comunità contadina nel Piemonte medievale. Il caso di Villafalletto*, in Rinaldo Comba (ed.), *Villafalletto. Un castello, una comunità, una pieve (secoli XI-XVI)*, Cuneo, Società per gli studi storici archeologici ed artistici della provincia di Cuneo, 1994, pp. 113-157 (for 1433); and Paolo Grillo, *Comunità e signori del 81 uzzese nell'età di Ludovico I*, in Rinaldo Comba (ed.), *Ludovico I marchese di 81 uzzo. Un principe tra Francia e Italia (146-147)*, Cuneo, Società per gli studi storici archeologici ed artistici della provincia di Cuneo, 2003, pp. 207-233: 221.

8. See Barbero, *Politica e comunità*; Nicolas Carrier, Fabrice Mouthon, *Paysans des Alpes. Les communautés montagnardes au Moyen Âge*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010; Marta Gravela, *La semina del diavolo. Duca, signori e comunità ribelli (valli del Canavese, 1446-1450)*, in «Studi di Storia Medioevale e di Diplomatica», n.s., 3, 2019, pp. 173-204; Marta Gravela, *Prima dei Tuchini. Fedeltà di parte e comunità nelle valli del Canavese (Piemonte, secolo XIV)*, in Alessio Fiore, Luigi Provero (eds.), *La signoria rurale nell'Italia del tardo medioevo*, 3. *L'azione politica locale*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2021, pp. 31-49; Grillo, *Comunità e signori*; Elisa Mongiano, “*Predecessorum suorum imitando vestigia*”: *autorità del principe e autonomie locali sotto il governo di Ludovico II*, in Rinaldo Comba (ed.), *Ludovico II marchese di Saluzzo. Condottiero, uomo di Stato, mecenate (1475-1504)*, Cuneo, Società per gli studi storici archeologici ed artistici della provincia di Cuneo, 2005, I, pp. 79-114. I will only refer to Riccardo Rao, *Dinamiche sociali nei centri di fondazione del Piemonte sud-occidentale (XIII-XIV secolo)*, in Federico Latanzio, Gian Maria Varanini (eds.), *I centri minori italiani nel tardo medioevo. Cambiamento sociale, crescita economica, processi di ristrutturazione (secoli XIII-XVI)*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2018, pp. 133-147 for an overview and further references to the extensive literature which, in examining «the founding of the new towns in south-western Piedmont», «has mostly overshadowed their subsequent

on the emergence of council registers may offer a surrogate for examining such issues on a large scale.

This is certainly no small challenge and there is at least one other fundamental issue to consider. According to the statutes of certain communities – specifically, Dronero and Valgrana – communal notaries had to draw up *libri comunis* and *libri reformationum*, but no late medieval examples of these registers have survived.⁹ Even in Biella's case, as mentioned above, some references in the thirteenth-century statutes lead us to wonder whether the council registers that have come down to us were really the first that the commune had produced in its long history.¹⁰ Archival events have a decisive impact on the documentary landscape, either due to the randomness by which certain documents were lost or because conservation scenarios can, in turn, inform us about the communities we study. In this sense, the archive is itself a source.¹¹ Once again, this discourages easy generalisations.

It is precisely to avoid this that, in the present essay, I will focus on the case of Luserna San Giovanni, which is also interesting due to the close coexistence between the community and the local lords. I will examine the municipal archive, shedding light on the traces of council activities both before and after the appearance of the only council register that has come down to us, which was begun in 1488 and abandoned in 1507. I will also make use of other relevant archives, in particular the Luserna d'Angrogna collection.¹² In closing, I will return to placing the story of this community (and its archive) in a broader context, suggesting some of the questions it raises in relation to the distribution of records in the area of interest to us.

development» (see p. 135; my own translation). More generally on the processes of communalisation, beyond Peter Blickle's initial approach, see: Massimo Della Misericordia, *The Rural Communities*, in Andrea Gamberini, Isabella Lazzarini (eds.), *The Italian Renaissance State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 261-283; and Beat Kümin, *The Communal Age in Western Europe, c. 1100-1800. Towns, Villages and Parishes in Pre-Modern Society*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

9. Pier Paolo Giorsetti (ed.), *Gli statuti del comune di Valgrana (131)*, Cuneo, Società per gli studi storici archeologici ed artistici della provincia di Cuneo, 2004, pp. 54-59; Giuseppe Gullino (ed.), *Gli statuti di Dronero (13)*, Cuneo, Società per gli studi storici archeologici ed artistici della provincia di Cuneo, 2005, pp. 105-109.

10. Patrizia Cancian (ed.), *Statuta Comunis Buglle. Statuti del Comune di Biella*, Torino, Centro Studi Piemontesi, 2009, pp. XXXIII, 48.

11. See Attilio Bartoli Langeli, Andrea Giorgi, Stefano Moscadelli (eds.), *Archivi e comunità tra medioevo ed età moderna*, Roma, Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali-Direzione Generale per gli Archivi, 2009, particularly the essays by Marcello Bonazza and Massimo Della Misericordia. See also Federico Del Tredici, *Senza memoria? La conservazione delle scritture comunitarie nel Milanese (secoli XIV-XV)*, in «Studi di Storia Medioevale e di Diplomatica», n.s., 2, 2018, pp. 43-62.

12. I will use the following abbreviations: ASCLu = Luserna San Giovanni, Archivio Storico del Comune, fondo Luserna; ASTo = Torino, Archivio di Stato; BRTo = Torino, Biblioteca Reale. Sources of interest for this essay are missing in the archiepiscopal archive of Turin's inventory (Giuseppe Briacca [ed.], *Archivio arcivescovile di Torino*, Torino, Curia arcivescovile, 1980).

2. *Luserna b fore 18* a community without reg sters?

2.1. *The commune's first appearance*

The earliest written record of a *castrum Lucerne* at the mouth of the Pellice Valley, in the Cottian Alps, dates back to the end of the eleventh century.¹³ We know that there was a church of San Giacomo there from the middle of the twelfth century, but also that in the same «loco et fundo» there was a church of San Giovanni. The location of these two points of reference must not have been very different from the current one: Luserna, on a low morainic relief on the orographic right of the Pellice; and San Giovanni, about two kilometres from there, in the plain to the left of the river (fig. 3).

The establishment of the lordship of an aristocratic lineage descending from Arduin took place in the area, possibly as early as the late eleventh century. This lordship eventually organised itself into a clan (*consortile*). From at least 1295, we know that the clan's members received feudal investiture over the so-called Luserna Valley from the Savoy-Achaea princes. It is unclear how they managed this territory, but by 1277 a system for dividing up qot as and responsibilities among the family's various branches – at least those of the Bigliatori, Manfredi, and Rorengi – appears to have already been in place.¹⁴

The lords' power must have been quite pervasive, but likely relied on a certain degree of consensus.¹⁵ For many centuries, we have no evidence of disputes with the valley's inhabitants – except those related to the Waldensian heresy, but this is a complex matter on which I will not dwell. The *condomini* appointed *podestà* in the communities or fulfilled this function themselves. They also lived in these places; collected fines; controlled pastures, tolls, and mines; and levied various dues and services, including a share of the inheritances upon the death of their *homines*. Furthermore, it seems that until the early fifteenth century, they also mediated the fiscal relationship with the higher authority of the Savoy-Achaea princes.¹⁶

13. Unless otherwise indicated, the information provided below comes from Alessandro Barbero, *Il dominio dei sigor i di Luserna sulla Val Pellice (secoli XI-XIII)*, in «Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino», 91/2, 1993, pp. 657-690; Marta Gravela, *Luserna*, in Federico Del Tredici (ed.), *La sigor ia rurale nell'Italia del tardo medioevo*, 5. *Censimento e qadr i reg onali*, Roma, Universitalia, 2021, pp. 155-157; Pietro Rivoire, *S oria dei sigor i di Luserna*, in «Bulletin de la Société d'histoire vaudois», 11, 1894, pp. 3-86 and 13, 1896, pp. 38-112.

14. In several sections of this essay I will refer to practices which were dependent on the complex (and opaque) mechanisms of the clan's functioning. I will not dwell on this, but for a recent overview, see Alessio Fiore, *S temi parentali e consortili nel mondo sigor ile*, in Sandro Carocci (ed.), *La sigor ia rurale nell'Italia del tardo medioevo*, 4. *Quadri di sintesi e nuove prospettive di ricerca*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2023, pp. 131-161.

15. On the category of pervasiveness, see Sandro Carocci, *The Pervasiveness of Lordship (Italy, 1050-1500)*, in «Past and Present», 256/1, 2022, pp. 3-47. The Luserna lordship fully fits the category of «signoria statalizzata» proposed by Alessio Fiore, *La sigor ia nel g oco politico: una lettura strutturale (area subl pina, secoli XIV-XV)*, in Fiore, Provero (eds.), *La sigor ia rurale nell'Italia del tardo medioevo*, 3, pp. 9- 103.

16. Flavia Negro, *I comuni di valle nelle Alpi occidentali: una prima inda g ne in chiave comparativa*, in Francesco Panero, Giuliano Pinto (eds.), *Insediamenti, economia e società in aree*



Fig. 3. The Pellice Valley.

With the exception of Luserna San Giovanni, the area's municipal archives do not preserve documents from prior to the middle decades of the sixteenth century (such is the case with Bricherasio, Torre Pellice, and Villar Pellice) or even the seventeenth (Angrogna, Bibiana, Bobbio Pellice, and Rorà). On the other hand, we know that the «fines, iurisdictiones et territoria» of these communities were distinguishable from at least 1277¹⁷ and that confraternities (*confratrie*) existed in the valley from at least the fourteenth century.¹⁸ During the fifteenth century, various documents drafted by notaries attest to the presence of representatives as well as of communal councils in these communities. Only in the case of Luserna San Giovanni does the contemporary municipal archive preserve such ancient records, however. I will now examine the situation for Luserna in more detail, leaving aside the case of the other *loci* in the valley.

A copy from 1499 testifies to the existence of a statute of Luserna, which on 20 December 1276 had been read to an assembly of heads of families.¹⁹ This statute regulated the way in which the *podestà* and his *curia* were requi red to

di montagna. Appennino settentrionale-Alpi occidentali (secoli XII-XVI), Cherasco, Centro internazionale di studi sugli insediamenti medievali, 2023, pp. 153-229: 213-214.

17. A mid-fifteenth-century source (see note 42) explicitly states that the place of Luserna is «distinctus et separatus» from the places of Bobbio, Villar, Torre, and Angrogna; i.e. that it has «fines, iurisdictionem et territorium separata». For the definition of these *territoria* from as early as 1277, see ASCLu, 129, 954, 1.

18. Traces for Torre Pellice can be found in some fourteenth-century wills (BRT0, Luserna d'Angrogna, 66, 1; 2; 4; 5; 6).

19. ASCLu, 130, 955, 7.

punish certain crimes, and emphasised the binding weight of «iura et consuetudines Lucerne», alluding to the fact that those who could not pay certain fines had to be punished at the discretion of «potestate et sui consilii». There is nothing to suggest that this document was issued by a communal institution, however, and for a long period we have no specific evidence of the existence of councils or officials appointed by the population.

The earliest original document in the municipal archive dates back to 1418: it is a notarial deed drafted in the church of San Giacomo in Luserna that testifies to the compromise reached between three mayors (*sindicos*) from Luserna and two prosecutors (*procuratores*) from Angrogna, with the mediation of two lords from the clan.²⁰ The matter in dispute was the imposition of a *tağ ia* by «homines et credendarios, consiliarios et communitatem dicti loci Lucerne». This was a direct tax that the community had imposed on itself to pay the subsidies requested by the Duke of Savoy, giving rise to a classic problem in cases of this kind: did the men of Angrogna who owned property in the territory of Luserna have to pay the taxes imposed by the people of Luserna?

This controversy confirms both the existence of distinct territories for those communities which were subject to the Luserna clan, as well as the fact that from the beginning of the fifteenth century such communities acquired a more prominent role in the local distribution of those taxes owed to the Savoy.²¹ Once again, however, it is clear how integrated the lords were in the life of these places, how important they were in coordinating the government, and how the inhabitants themselves could consider the *domini* a resource. This is particularly true of Luserna. A mid-fifteenth-century source defines the small town as «caput vallis et comora spectabilium dominorum [... in qo ipsi domini ocurentibus casibus tenent eorum consilia [...]]». ²² It is also significant that the three mayors of Luserna in 1418 were Antonio Manfredi, a member of the clan, and Benettino and Giovanni Rio, who came from a family that, according to *consigam enta* (registrations), included several of the Manfredis *homines proprii* – i.e. men linked to this household by oaths of personal loyalty.²³

2.2. *The commune in the seigneurial curia's documents*

Further proof of this close coexistence can be found in some of the earliest documents preserved in the municipal archive. From the 1440s onwards, the presence of a communal council becomes more evident and well-established, yet on the documentary level it continues to appear in symbiosis with that of the seigneurial *curia*.

20. ASCLu, 1344. A ducal sentence from 1429 deals with a similar dispute with Torre Pellice (ASCLu, 129, 954, 3).

21. See Negro, *I comuni di valle*, p. 214.

22. ASCLu, 129, 954, 12.

23. See note 48. Antonio Manfredi may have been the brother of Giacomo and Giorgio, to whom his share of the lordship went after his death in 1427 (BRTto, Luserna d'Angrogna, 36, 11).

We have a letter dated 14 October 1443 from Giovanni Bigliatori to the officials of the communities bordering Luserna.²⁴ Giovanni, a member of the clan, was serving as *podestà* of Luserna at that time, as it seems that the lords with rights in that area would rotate in this office (or else appoint lieutenants) on a yearly basis.²⁵ The letter shows that Bigliatori acted in close concert with the community. On 14 October a «consilium generalis» took place which was attended by eight «consiliarii» and «nonnullis aliis ex maioribus comunitatis dicti loci». The meeting was convened at the sound of the bell, by the order and in the presence of the *podestà*, «in loco congregari solito» (most probably the church of San Giacomo), so as to decide how to update the land and property registry. Furthermore, the mayors and councillors (*credendari*) asked the *podestà* to contact the officials of the neighbouring areas to ensure that the *forenses* who owned property in the territory of Luserna prepared their declarations, justifying the request «pro bono et utilitate ac interesse dicte comunitatis et rei publice». The identity of the notary who signed the letter is also significant: Antonietto Baudi was a freelance professional, but also one of the *consiliarii* of Luserna.

Other loose documents that bear traces of council meetings have very similar characteristics to the one we have just seen. On 22 May 1453, the «plenum et generalis consilium» of Luserna met in the parish church in the presence of a member of the clan, Lord Michele Manfredi, who was in office as *podestà*. Four individuals called consuls were present, as well as another thirty whose names are clearly stated, in addition to many others who are not listed. This time the notary who drew up the act was Pietro Girardi, *clavarius* and scribe of the *curia* of Luserna.²⁶ In 1457, a mayor and a communal tax collector urged the *podestà* to write to the officials of nearby Bricherasio, requesting that *forenses* landowners contribute to the tax established by the general assembly of Lusernese. On this occasion it was the *podestà* himself, the notary Antonietto di Andrea, who drafted the document.²⁷ On 9 May 1482, instead, a letter similar to the one from 1443, this one in the name of the *podestà* Burnone Rorengi (who was again a *condominus*), was drawn up by a notary whom we will meet again: Michele Carreto. This document reflects the decisions made at a meeting of the community's «consilio et credentia», which was attended by six «consules et credendarii» and three other people «ex popularibus» (we will consider the meaning of the latter term).²⁸

This series of documents is very interesting. Its production was spurred by the activities of communal institutions devoted to the imposition, distribution, and collection of direct taxes. There was a select council, which could be joined by people variously called *maiores* or *populares*, and a general assembly.

24. ASCLu, 129, 954, 4.

25. This is clearly evidenced by a notebook documenting the rotations between 1419 and 1460 (BRTo, Luserna d'Angrogna, 51, 2).

26. ASCLu, 129, 954, 7. In Piedmont, the *clavario* was usually a local officer with financial responsibilities.

27. ASCLu, 129, 954, 11.

28. ASCLu, 129, 954, 19.

The documents that mention them were produced by the *iussio* of the *podestà*, however, and the notaries who drafted them worked for him, even when they were not scribes of his *curia*.

These same characteristics also mark a very important document of particular interest to the community: the land registry of 1463.²⁹ It was a general assembly that initiated the procedure for collecting self-declarations on 17 November 1462, but once again everything took place in the presence of the *podestà*-lords. Above all, the notary entrusted with drawing up the land register, Pietro Pellegrini, described himself as «notarius et scriba curie Lucerne iuratus».

Furthermore, Pellegrini reported the existence of a more extensive record of the council that had elected the appraisers, «in libro propositarum». This is the earliest mention of a council register in Luserna. Did Pellegrini himself draw it up, in his capacity as scribe of the seigneurial *curia*? Was it part of a series? It is impossible to answer these questions, as no physical traces of this document have survived. It is nevertheless worth noting that in other communities in the Western Alps, there is evidence that notaries in the service of seigneurial *curie* may have recorded council activities.³⁰ It seems that few such sources have been preserved in municipal archives, which suggests an explanation for some gaps in the documentary landscapes that we face today.³¹

2.3. *The commune in the confraternity's documents*

The municipal archive of Luserna preserves a rather rare source: a composite booklet of 54 pages, with some parts missing. Although discontinuous, the annotations inside it follow the activities of the *Confratria del Snt o Sfi rito* (Confraternity of the Holy Spirit) of Luserna between 1426 and 1518 (the bulk of the annotations concern the years from 1450 to 1480).³² There are documents signed by notaries, priors' accounts, records of benefices received, and much more. Numerous hands contributed to the text, and alongside those of professional

29. ASCLu, 126, 951. The municipal archive preserves an earlier land registry (see note 50), but we do not know who drew it up.

30. See the 1369 statutes of Sanfront (Carlo Corsetti [ed.], *Gli statuti di Sanfront*, Roma, Aracne, 1994, p. 176), the 1423 statutes of Verzuolo (Verzuolo, Archivio Storico del Comune, ASVE I/2, 1, c. 13r) and the 1431 statutes of Valgrana (Giorsetti [ed.], *Gli statuti del comune di Valgrana*, p. 56). A register of this sort is preserved in Settimo Vittone, Archivio Storico del Comune di Settimo Vittone, 35, 564.

31. A similar kind of registration in Trets, a small town of 330 households in the Provençal Alps, is discussed in Laure Verdon, *S'émanciper par la délibération? Autour du premier règlement des délibérations communales de Trets (Provence, 1300)*, in «Edad Media: Revista de Historia», 21, 2020, pp. 153-177.

32. ASCLu, 129, 954, 5. See Jacques Chiffolleau, *Entre le religieux et le politique : les confréries du Saint-Esprit en Provence et en Comtat Venaissin à la fin du Moyen Âge*, in *Le mouvement confraternel au Moyen Âge. France, Italie, Suisse*, Rome, École française de Rome, 1987, pp. 9-40; Elena Corniolo, *La confraternita del Snt o Sfi rito della Porta Snt Orso (Aosta, secoli XII-XIV)*, in «Reti Medievali», 15/2, 2014, pp. 3-39.

scribes – who added their *signa* – we also find those of individuals less accustomed to using a pen.

This source shows the close link between the confraternity and the commune. In the accounting records we see that already in 1450 the *homines de consilio* of Luserna (also called *consules*), together with a variable number of *populares* and the confraternity's two *massari*, examined the priors' work. In 1452 it was explicitly established that certain of the priors' actions could not take place «sine licentia hominum consilii Lucerne et masariorum confratrie».³³ On the other hand, in a document dated 5 June 1458, we see that it was precisely four *homines de consilio*, together with the mayor, who elected the *massari*.³⁴ In subsequent documents it was again the communal council that made decisions about the confraternity: on 11 June 1468 the *consules* «in numero sufficienti» and thirty-six *populares* met in the presence of one of the lords in the church of San Giacomo to regulate the collection of offerings and impose a tax; on 20 May 1472, the mayor, four *consules*, and twenty-two *populares* met «in domo confratrie», in the presence of two *podestà*.³⁵ These documents were once again drawn up by notaries acting as freelancers, or as *clavari* of the seigneurial *curia*.

Evidence from other sources suggests that the confraternity gradually became an extension of the commune. It is a clear sign of continuity in terms of identity that the confraternity was responsible for the upkeep of the church of San Giacomo, the very place where the community meetings were held; the community in turn put pressure on the Bishop of Turin to obtain decrees calling for the reconstruction of the church's vault in 1467 and 1469.³⁶ Significant diachronic clues also emerge from the fact that in registers of *consignamenta* to the lords between 1429 and 1449, we find declarations made out to the lords on behalf of the confraternity by the *massari* in charge, concerning the possession of a few plots of land and a *domus cum curte* located *ad ruatam Rectam* in the *burgus* of Luserna.³⁷ On the other hand, in a similar register from 1491, we find that the *domus confratrie Sanctus Spiritus* was recorded as property of the commune of Luserna.³⁸

A process of incorporation is also quite evident on a documentary level. Decisions concerning the confraternity tended to be recorded in the register of communal deliberations, which is available from 1488 onwards. Thus, while the booklet examined in this section reports, among other things, the inventories of

33. ASCLu, 129, 954, 5, c. 4r.

34. *Ib dem*, c. 7r.

35. *Ib dem*, cc. 10r-11r.

36. ASCLu, 129, 954, 13. See Simona Boscani Leoni, Paolo Ostinelli (eds.), *La chiesa «dal basso». Organizzazioni, interazioni e pratiche nel contesto parrocchiale alpino alla fine del medioevo*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2012.

37. BRTo, Luserna d'Angrogna, 43, 7, c. 31v; 44, 11, cc. 55r-56r. Note that in the declaration for the confraternity of 18 February 1379 there is no mention of such a *domus* (BRTo, Luserna d'Angrogna, 42, 3, c. 50r).

38 ASCLu, 8 , 639, c. 166r.

the church of San Giacomo's assets dating back to 1455, decades later similar lists appear in the register of communal deliberations.³⁹

Union with the commune also provided an opportunity for the confraternity to develop its activities. The aforementioned document from 1472 makes it clear that the council had the authority to levy a tax on the entire local population for the benefit of the confraternity – a practice that went far beyond traditional financing through bequests and donations, and seems to have been possible only because of the fiscal role that had been acquired by the communal organisation.

3. *The surviving council register and the rise of the commune's notaries*

3.1. *A growing community*

I would now like to demonstrate that what was happening in Luserna depended on wider economic and social changes. This is not easy, because the effects of the “fourteenth-century crisis” in the western Alps require further study.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the documentary evidence available for Luserna is rather late, which makes it difficult to identify long-term economic and demographic trends. We know that the town had long been involved in certain economic activities. The existence of a market has been documented from 118, and in 1256 a customs agreement was signed between the lords of Luserna and the castellan of Briançon to facilitate the movement of goods and people between Queyras and Piedmont through the Pellice Valley. In Luserna, transhumant livestock was bought and sold, along with various other goods. The customs agreement was renegotiated for the first time in 1320, but we have to wait until 1463 for further changes.⁴¹ Perhaps this is no coincidence, because around the middle of the fifteenth century, issues related to transalpine passages seem to have been very much on people's minds.

In 1443, the communities of Angrogna, Bibiana, Bobbio, Torre, and Villar begged the lords to allow them to use an alternative route to the one that passed through the town of Luserna when entering and leaving the valley. Less than ten years later the matter caused a dispute with the people of Luserna, who feared that this attempt to go around their town would cause the «manifesta distructio» of their fairs (*nundine* in the sources: two are mentioned – in other words, another in addition to the one already known – along with two weekly markets), as well as to

39. ASCLu, 129, 954, 5, cc. 50v and 51r; ASCLu, 128, 953, 2 (deliberations of 4 and 7 July 1497). All deliberations included in this register are filed, with photos attached, in the DEMALPS database: <https://www.demalps.com/records/C000419>.

40. For a general introduction, see Sandro Carocci, *Il dibattito teorico sulla “congiuntura del Trecento”*, in «Archeologia medievale», 43, 2016, pp. 17-32. Late medieval socio-economic restructuring is one of the focuses of Lattanzio, Varanini (eds.), *I centri minori italiani*. For Piedmont, one could refer to many studies by Rinaldo Comba. Here I will only mention Rinaldo Comba, *La popolazione in Piemonte sul finire del medioevo. Ricerche di demografia storica*, Torino, Deputazione subalpina di storia patria, 1977.

41. Barbero, *Il dominio dei signori*; Rivoire, *Storia dei signori*.

the impoverishment of its inhabitants, who used to live «ex actibus mercatorum et similibus».⁴²

In 1448, thanks to the mediation of the ducal counsellor Amedeo di Luserna and the payment of 300 florins, the valley's *condomini* and communities succeeded in obtaining from Ludovico di Savoia exemption from any tax rights for livestock grazing and trade «in terra nostra Pedemontium».⁴³ In 1460, on the other hand, the men of Luserna as well as of the whole valley acted in concert against certain abuses of the lords' *pedağ atores* in Bobbio, in defence of the «bonas consuetudines antiquas» that made them «immunes, liberi, franchi [...] et exempti» to «ire, transire, seionare, pernoctare, morari, stare et reddere» in the Bobbio territory when passing «de partibus Ultramontanis in dictam vallem». It is interesting to note that the lords immediately showed themselves willing to protect the valley's inhabitants.⁴⁴ New episodes of this sort were recorded in 1508 on the French side of the Alps, in the Briançonnais area, where the men of the Luserna Valley also tried to defend their right to pay reduced customs tariffs.⁴⁵

Both the chronology of these documents as well as certain evidence, such as the number of markets and fairs held in Luserna, could support the idea that from the 1440s onwards those economic interests linked to transit through the valley and across the Alps experienced a certain vitality, the last signs of which date to the first half of the fourteenth century.

Other clues further suggest that growth was taking place. In the decades following the mid-fifteenth century a significant event occurred, which in turn points to a certain wealth and cohesion in the community: it decided to take on the burden of an important collective investment. From 1469 compromises were made with the various members of the *consortile* who held rights in the territory of Luserna over «domibus, sediminibus, edificiis, terris cultis et incultis, pratis, vineis, altenis, hortis, canapalibus, curtibus, curtilibus, gerbis, boschis, nemoribus, pascuis, aquagiis, rivagiis, venationibus et aucupationibus et in quampluribus et diversis possessionibus et prediis tam urbanis quam rusticis». Those who received these goods from one of the *condomini* were then required to render services that varied from case to case. However, under the new compromises, such services were converted into a single annual tax paid by the community. In exchange, the community secured the right that all those goods should be converted «in allodium francum et liberum», and that «omnia et singula nemora, gerba, pascua et communia» pass under the commune's jurisdiction.⁴⁶ The costs of maintaining these enfranchise-

42. ASCLu, 129, 954, 12.

43. BRTo, Luserna d'Angrogna, 47, 4. In ASCLu, 129, 954, 2 we see the community's commitment to ensuring that this exemption would be respected in Barge in 1453.

44. ASCLu, 1345.

45. ASCLu, 1348.

46. A copy of the transaction documents is kept in ASTo, Corte, Paesi, Pinerolo città e provincia, 9, 7, cc. 1r-22v (13 March 1469, with Michele, Benettino and Tommaso Manfredi), cc. 25r-43v (18 July 1469, with Burnone Rorengi), cc. 44r-64r (same day, with Cristoforo Rorengi), cc. 65r-86v (same day, with Bartolomeo Bigliatori), cc. 88r-101v (7 February 1480, with Pairone and Chiaberto

ments (*franchimenta*) thus became one of the main expenses that the municipality covered through the imposition of taxes:⁴⁷ a clear indication of the importance attributed to the possibility of enjoying fuller management of the territory.

Confirming the patterns observed thus far using demographic data is a delicate task. By consulting both communal and seigneurial archives, it is possible to assemble a series of property registers for the territory of Luserna, detailing the goods for services which were owed to the *domini* Manfredi.⁴⁸ These sources are not without uncertainty, however: each lord or group of lords from the clan may have held rights to other properties which were recorded in separate registers. Even if we assume that the members of the Manfredi branch handed down their shares in Luserna undivided, the registers examined do not account for the rights registered under the clan's Bigliatori and Rorenghi branches. A person could certainly have properties granted by several lords, but there is no way of knowing if this was the case for all the inhabitants of Luserna. Consequently, it is only with a certain degree of scepticism that we can interpret these data in a demographic sense.

Tab. 1. Property owners in Luserna San Giovanni in the *consigam enta* for the Manfredi *condomini*.⁴⁹

Year	Homines proprii	Extranei	Total
1379	37	121	158
1429	21	8	104
1449	22	95	117
1491	//	//	236

The impression is that, following a population collapse between the late fourteenth century and the early decades of the fifteenth, there may have been a period of rather intense demographic growth from the mid-fifteenth century onward, possibly even doubling the population within fifty years. At the same time, there is also a certain reduction in the weight of the *homines proprii* when compared to the *extranei*. The difference between the two conditions is not very clear, but

Rorenghi). See also *ib dem*, cc. 23r-24v and cc. 86v-87v (for the assent of the Dukes of Savoy to these agreements).

47. This is clear from the council register. See e.g. ASCLu, 128, 953, 2 (deliberation of 29 September 1493).

48. BRTo, Luserna d'Angrogna, 42, 3 (1379-1381, for Percivalle and Benettino Manfredi); 43, 7 (1429, for Giacomo and Giorgio Manfredi); 44, 11 (1449, for Benettino Manfredi in the name of his father Giacomo). ASCLu, 87, 639 (1491, for Giacomo, Giovanni, and Battista Manfredi).

49. Note that these data are consistent with the trends outlined in Comba, *La popolazione* (esp. pp. 52-53, 89-92) for some areas of central and south-western Piedmont. Luserna would thus be included among the mountain areas (such as Val Susa, Val Gesso, and Val Vermenagna) that escaped the marginalisation suffered by others (perhaps including Valle Stura di Demonte) after the crisis.

it seems that the *homines proprii* (also called *accasati* in the register of 1379) were bound to the lords by oaths of personal loyalty and perhaps were required to provide services and fulfil obligations, for example in the form of legacies, more so than the *extranei* (also called *liberi* in the register of *consigam enta* to the Bigliatori of 1467).⁵⁰ This distinction seems to have been lost in 1491, perhaps due to the enfranchisements stipulated in the meantime.

This series of data can be integrated with the examination of the two Luserna land registers that have come down to us, the one from 1463 and an older one that I would date to 1443.⁵¹

Tab. 2. Owners of properties in land registries of Luserna San Giovanni (source: ASCLu, 126, 951; 132, 958).

Year	Luserna	San Giovanni	Uncertain location	Total
1443	100	26	6	132
1463	149	73	//	222

The figure for 1443 is quite compatible with that of the *consigam enta* for 1449, even if it confirms the tendency of those sources to underestimate the size of the population. The figures for 1463 emphasise the growth trend that we had intuited and in fact show how quickly it developed over a twenty-year period. Moreover, the scale of the phenomenon in the San Giovanni plain – that is, in the territory of Luserna yet outside the town – is quite evident. Significantly, the land registry of 1443 lists a single section for Luserna, while it also records those people who owned a house beyond the Pellice. The land registry of 1463, however, contains two distinct sections: one for Luserna and one for San Giovanni. Over the course of those twenty years the population living outside the town, in scattered groups of houses organised around family units (traces of which can still be found today in the microtoponyms of the area, such as via Bellonati, or the localities of Nazzarotti and Malanot), had almost tripled, while the growth of the population living within Luserna's walls proceeded a little more slowly.

The parallel between this phenomenon and the decline in the number of the lords' *homines proprii* offers insights into the crucial changes that took place in local society.

50. ASCLu, 128 953, 1, c. 39r. It seems likely that further investigation could reveal situations of personal dependence comparable to those described for the Canavese valleys in Gravela, *Prima dei Tuchini*, esp. pp. 35-37.

51. ASCLu, 126, 951 (1463); 132, 958 (undated). The undated land registry also includes the movable property, credits, and debts of the registrants, while the one from 1463, which states in its beginning that the land registry criteria had changed since the «antiquo registro», only includes real estate. Some undated marginalia in the land registry show later dates, referring to the 1460s. Before 1463, the only information available on the production of a land registry is the 1443 letter mentioned in note 24. Some people mentioned in the undated land registry are recorded as deceased in the *consigam enta* of 1449.

3.2. *Families old and new*

It is difficult to say to what extent these changes depended on the arrival of new families in Luserna San Giovanni. It is even more difficult to ascertain the weight of the Waldensian presence, which I will not deal with, limiting myself to mentioning that it was precisely in the 1450s that an inquisitor arrived in the valley.⁵² Some evidence suggests that there was at least a certain degree of geographical mobility, and that this had some weight. The 1463 register includes a number of surnames absent from the previous register and earlier *consigam - menta*. We note above all those of families that we will later find working in the commune, such as the Carretos, the Cadraciis, the Becs (or Bechis), the Fontanas, the Girardetis, the Lageriis, and the Pellizones. But we will see that surnames are a difficult parameter with which to assess mobility.

Other elements that can be inferred from the land registry of 1463 are more reliable. Towards the end of the section reserved for Luserna, it reports the oath sworn to the clan's *podestà* and the representatives of the community by a certain Guglielmo Merta, to be accepted «tamquam habitator Lucerne». Merta was assigned a taxable amount of two quarters of lire.⁵³ In the following pages, another 18 people are listed with no mention of their possessions, with taxable incomes of between one and two quarters. One wonders whether it is legitimate to consider them all new *hab tatoes* such as Merta, or whether they were only among Luserna's poorest inhabitants (both possibilities were taken into consideration in the *capitula* for the renewal of the land register).

There is no doubt, however, that the six people added to the register at a later date – specifically, between 1473 and 1477 – were new inhabitants. Sometimes these additions show mobility on a sub-regional scale, as in the case of Gabriele Gamba, a master shoemaker who came from Turin; or *maḡ ster* Nicola Novelli from Villafranca.⁵⁴ But it is possible that mobility was often internal within the Luserna Valley itself, bearing witness to the attraction that the town exerted above all within its lords' domain.

Let us focus on the histories of two families that clearly illustrate the connection between these phenomena and the rise of a commune in Luserna San Giovanni, beginning with the settlement of a branch of the Pellizone of Villar family in the town. This was an illustrious family of ancient lineage, a true «notary dynasty» that left behind abundant material traces of its work for the lords of Luserna, some of which hold a certain aesthetic value.⁵⁵ The Pellizones make

52. Rivoire, *Ḥ oria dei sigor i*, p. 77.

53. ASCLu, 126, 951, c. 72r. I am interpreting “qr” as an abbreviation for “quarti”.

54. For some people, the land registry shows other revealing origins: Pinerolo for Iacobo Alexii; Scarnafigi for Giovanni Dominici; and Ristolas, in the Queyras area, for Arnolfo Girardi.

55. See in particular one of the *consigam entorum* registers drawn up by Chiaberto Pellizone for the Bigliatori di San Giorgio, in BRTo, Luserna d'Angrogna, 43, 9. The quotation is drawn from Rivoire, *Ḥ oria dei sigor i*, p. 71 (my translation). We have a deed drawn up in 1369 by Pellizone of Pellizone, son of Perone Pellizone of Montebobbio, the earliest member of the family that I have come across so far (BRTo, Luserna d'Angrogna, 66, 3).

their first appearance in the Luserna sources in 1449, when a Giovanni of Benedetto alias Pellizone is shown as the owner of a rented house with a courtyard and half of another house with a courtyard and vegetable garden, both in the town's *ruata Ponteti*.⁵⁶ It is unclear whether this is the same Giovanni who in 1465 was co-owner of a house in Villar with his brother Chiaberto Pellizone.⁵⁷ In any case, this latter Giovanni seems to be the person involved in the settlement in Luserna.

In 1460, it was Giovanni who drew up the aforementioned document of protest on behalf of the communities of the valley against the toll at Bobbio, while in 1469 he drew up the deeds of transaction between the commune of Luserna and the lords. Both of these documents were signed by Giovanni Pellizone of Villar. In 1472, confirming his profitable relations with the lords, he served as *podestà* of Luserna. It was in the following year that his name was added to the land register for the possession of a house just outside the walls, *ad Pusternam*.⁵⁸ In 1480 he held the office of mayor for the municipality, and was also in charge of collecting a *tağ ia*.⁵⁹ At the same time he seems to have acted as commissioner for the Duke of Savoy, and in 1482 he was the lieutenant of the *podestà* of Luserna.⁶⁰ In 1488 he was again *podestà*, and the communal council sometimes met at his house.⁶¹ He must have died shortly afterwards. Pietro Pellizone may have been Giovanni's brother, since the 1491 *consigam enta* to the Manfredi family mention him as curator and guardian of Giovanni's heirs (Simeone, Margherita, Caterina, and Brigida). Pietro would appear to have played a leading role in the life of the commune of Luserna during those and subsequent years, becoming its «scriba» from at least 1509 and writing a lost «liber propositarum». ⁶² The sixteenth-century documents in the municipal archive are often the work of Pellizone notaries.

Despite this outcome, it is interesting to note that Giovanni seems to have been little involved in the commune and practically absent from the confraternity's life. From this point of view, his path was defined above all in relation to the lords, for whom he had also worked as a notary on other occasions.⁶³ This shows that the attraction to Luserna depended on the town's centrality in the valley, regardless of the presence of the commune. The growth of the latter, however, was of more direct relevance to other people's lives.

Particularly revealing is the history of another family, a history inseparable from that of Luserna's surviving council register. *Mağ ster* Bertino de Carreto appears for the first time in the land register of 1463. His surname is not found in the oldest sources, but the land register reveals that he was the brother of Stefano

56. BRTo, Luserna d'Angrogna, 44, 11, c. 17r bis.

57. BRTo, Luserna d'Angrogna, 43, 9, c. 53v.

58. ASCLu, 129, 954, 5, cc. 10v-11r. ASCLu, 126, 951, c. 75v.

59. ASCLu, 129, 954, 17 and 20, receipts dated 28 September 1480, 6 January 1481 and 11 October 1482; ASTo, Corte, Paesi, Pinerolo città e provincia, 9, 7, cc. 88r-v.

60. ASCLu, 129, 954, 19.

61. See the records in ASCLu, 128, 953, 2, up to 4 June 1488.

62. ACLu, 67, 481, c. 3r-v.

63. BRTo, Luserna d'Angrogna, 67, 4, and 12.

Vilanoti. Bertino was called «Caretì alias Vilanoti», however, while Stefano was only called «Vilanoti»; another relative, Francesco, was referred to as «Vilanoti alias Careti». While the logic behind the choice of one surname or the other is not entirely clear, Bertino would appear to have opted for the more recent one. Furthermore, while he and his brother still owned a house in the San Germano district in the San Giovanni area, adjacent to Francesco's home, Bertino also declared that he owned a house with a courtyard, a stable, and other outbuildings in the main square of the town of Luserna.⁶⁴

At the time of his first appearance in 1463, Bertino had already made his way in local society, and rather quickly. He was already among the commune's *consules* at the meeting for the election of the appraisers. In the following years he took an interest in the confraternity's affairs; he was among the *populares* present at the aforementioned assemblies of 1468 and 1472. In 1482 he was once again one of the commune's *consules et credendarii*.⁶⁵ He must have died shortly afterwards, as the sources begin to refer to him as *quondam*, and there is mention of a bequest he made to the confraternity.⁶⁶

Bertino, however, was only the initiator of the family's involvement in the commune, where two of his sons, Michele and Domenico – both notaries – would go on to play a leading role. As early as 1479, Michele began signing some of the documents recorded in the confraternity's booklet described in the previous pages.⁶⁷ In the late 1480s, he was responsible for almost all the surviving documents produced for the confraternity and the commune. In 1488, during his tenure as mayor, Michele began recording the community's meetings in a special register, which is still preserved in the municipal archive. Finally, on 9 December 1489 the commune allocated an annual expenditure of ten florins «pro scriba seu massario comunis» – «videlicet michi Michaeli Carreti», as the scribe himself noted. Since the end of November, he had already begun marking his own presence in the list of councillors with the words «ego Michael Carreto, syndicus, notarius et scriba». ⁶⁸ This was the first time the commune had hired a notary on a permanent basis.

After Michele's death, which may have occurred at the beginning of 1491,⁶⁹ his brother Domenico was appointed *scriba comunis* on 24 October 1492, again with a salary of ten florins. He continued to compile the register for a good 15 years, until 1507. During this period Domenico also held other positions for the commune and participated in its council. He could be described as one of its leading members. Without going into too much detail, I will mention just two further aspects of his rise: in 1493 he was appointed *podestà* of the men of the

64. ASCLu, 126, 951, c. 33v. Later sources reveal that he left his heirs a house-workshop with a portico: see the receipts dated 1, 3, and 6 December 1490 in ASCLu, 129, 954, 23.

65. ASCLu, 129, 954, 19.

66. ASCLu, 129, 954, 5, cc. 14v and 16v.

67. *Ib dem*, cc. 21v, 22v, 23r.

68. ASCLu, 128953, 2, *ad datam*.

69. The last document signed by his hand in the council register is dated 5 October 1490, but in the first days of December he was still drawing up some receipts in ASCLu, 129, 954, 23.

lord Michele Rorenghi in Angrogna;⁷⁰ in 1497 he is recorded as having purchased the house of the late lord Pairone Rorenghi in Luserna's *ruata Ponteti*.⁷¹

Like the Pellizones, the Carretos had likewise moved to Luserna from outside the town, though from a nearer location: the hamlet of San Giovanni. Unlike the Pellizones, the Carretos' history is much more clearly a story of social ascent, built through their relationship with the confraternity and the commune of Luserna, where Bertino's sons effectively applied their acquired expertise as notaries.⁷² Through Michele and Domenico's extensive use of the first person, the council register reflects the centrality of this organisation to their identity and their effort to develop forms of documentation suited to representing its public profile – an endeavour inseparable from their *publica fides*. While the register lacks solemn headers and opening pages, it is filled with the two men's subscriptions and *sigla*, especially during Michele's tenure.⁷³ This did not prevent – indeed, it likely facilitated – the establishment of relations with the lords of Luserna, further legitimising the Carreto family's rise among the town's influential families: those best suited to governing by mediating between the various centres of local power.

3.3. *The populares in the council*

To emphasise the fact that the council register is not only the mirror of a family history, but also a product of a society characterised by a widespread desire for political participation, I would like to make one final point. From the time of the earliest surviving records of council meetings in Luserna (1418), we can observe that, in addition to councillors in the strict sense, local assemblies – including those that were not general assemblies of heads of households – docu-

70. BRTo, Luserna d'Angrogna, 56, 2.

71. ASCLu, 130, 955, 5.

72. It is unknown where the two men received their education, but it is interesting to note that in the oldest document in which Michele Carreto appears in Luserna, as a witness to one of the deeds of enfranchisement of 1469, he is referred to as a “notary from Bagnolo” (ASTo, Corte, Paesi, Pinerolo città e provincia, 9, 7, c. 1r). As of now, notaries' geographic and social mobility in Piedmont has been studied mainly in relation to princely authorities and, to a lesser extent, to urban centres and bishoprics. Among the many studies, I will mention Paolo Buffo, *L'entourage notarile dei principi di Savoia-Acaia: statuto professionale e percorsi familiari nel secolo XIV*, in Paolo Grillo, Stefano Levati (eds.), *Legittimazione e credito tra medioevo e ottocento. Notai e ceti notarile tra ruoli pubblici e vita privata*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2017, pp. 57-8 and Antonio Olivieri, *Il salario dei notai ad officia. *¶*sunt i torelliani e ricerche regionali. Il caso di Torino nel Trecento e nei primi decenni del Quattrocento*, in Isabella Lazzarini, Giuseppe Gardoni (eds.), *Notariato e medievistica. Per i cento anni di Studi e ricerche di diplomatica comunale di Pietro Torelli*, Roma, Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo, 2013, pp. 213-230, with many further references. For a broader overview, but with an Alpine slant, see Andrea Giorgi *et al.* (eds.), *Il notariato nell'arco alpino: produzione e conservazione delle carte notarili tra Medioevo ed età moderna*, Milano, Giuffrè, 2014.

73. Subscriptions became less frequent in Domenico's time, and were only used to emphasise the value of certain specific acts; sometimes this led to the addition of *sigla* or simple subscriptions by *clavari* and *podestà* of the seigneurial *curia*.

mented varying participation from other individuals. These participants were referred to in one instance as *maiores* (in 1443) and, from at least 1450 onwards, more consistently as *populares*. These were not members of *societates populi*, as attested from the fourteenth century onwards for the main centres of Savoyard Piedmont:⁷⁴ we meet representatives of both old and new families who had settled in the town or in San Giovanni, including people who were defined as *nobles* (even those with surnames typical of the clan) or who had held offices for the commune, or had even been *consules*. The label *popularis* simply denoted someone who, although not a member of the council in office, had taken part in a council meeting.

From 1488, thanks to the council register, the phenomenon appears in all its regularity: not only was there an average of two *capita domorum* meetings per year, out of seven or eight meetings recorded, but the participation of some *populares* in the councils seems to have been the norm. This also stimulated the search for appropriate formal solutions by the communal notaries, with significant developments taking place during Domenico Carreto's term of office. His brother Michele had written the lists of those present at the councils in continuous fashion along the lines, without separating them from the body of the text, opting for concise wording on the occasion of the general councils (for example, 3 February 1489: «ex popularibus ultra due partes»; and 30 November 1489: «multitudo populi capitum domorum ultra quam due partes»). Domenico, on the other hand, created actual lists divided into one or two columns, segmenting them with side brackets and notes to distinguish the mayor, the *consules*, and the *populares*.⁷⁵ During the general councils he drew up exhaustive (or almost exhaustive) lists that also show significant participation rates compared to the demographic estimates we have discussed (I would say up to 50-60 per cent).

In the light of all this, it is interesting to note that in 1497 an attempt was made to tighten up the councils' functioning. On 27 or 28 February, at a general assembly attended by 130 heads of households, a series of new *ordinamenta* were established that were then transcribed into the council register with some care, according to a *mise-en-pag* reminiscent of a statutory code. A reform of the councils was also planned, based on the idea that many people participated in the general councils who «nihil operantur in ipso consilio [... sed tantum modo amittunt tempus]», which «nullum commodum est rey publice». Consequently, it was decided that from then on the convocation of the general council would be replaced by that of 20 «intelligentes et utiles» people, who, together with the «consilium ordinarium», would have the power to deliberate on matters that had previously involved the general council. The 20 *adiuncti* were elected

74. See Umberto Delmastro, *Il Popolo del principe. Il governo popolare del comune di Moncalieri, 1338-1368*, in «Quaderni Storici», 1, 2022, pp. 197-228.

75. On the importance of lists such as these in the community's documentary self-representation, see Massimo Della Misericordia, *Figure e di comunità. Documento notarile, forme della convivenza, riflessione locale sulla vita associata nella montagna lombarda e nella pianura comasca (secoli XIV-XVI)*, Morbegno, Ad Fontes, 2008.

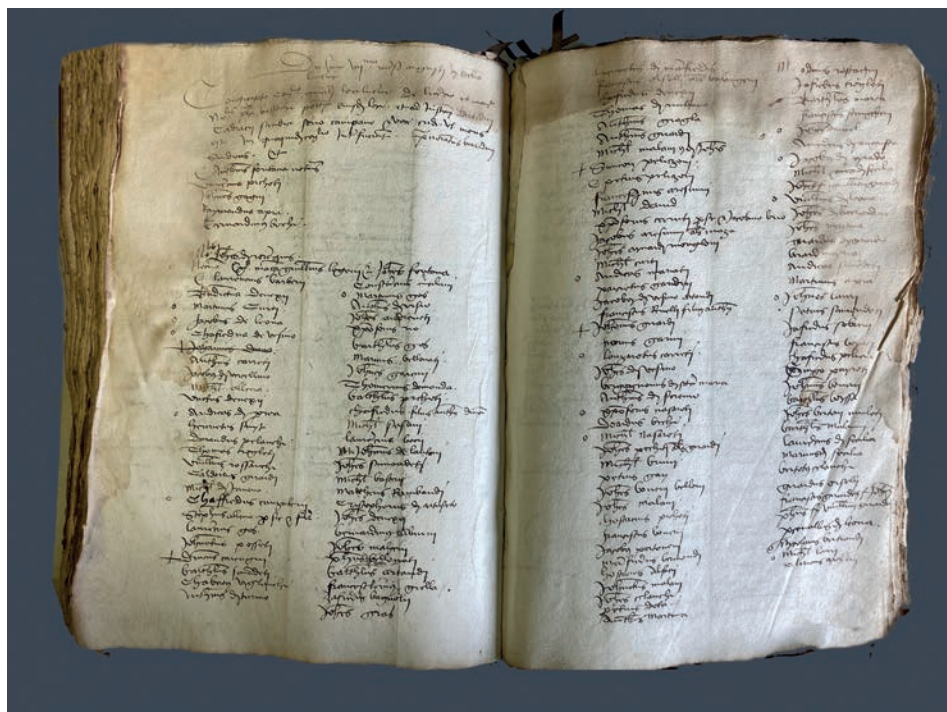


Fig. 4. The heads of households in the minutes of 7 August 1497 (source: ASCLu, 128, 953, 2).

immediately, with the idea of renewing their appointment year after year, as with the ordinary councillors.

The records in the register are silent concerning any opposition. The register itself suggests that this development was not entirely peaceful, however. While in the minutes of 5 May 1497 the list of those present distinguished *sindicus*, *consules*, and the people «de numero XX^{ti} iurati», there was still a vague mention of the presence of «quamplures alie persone populares». On 29 June we find the familiar list consisting of the mayor, the consuls, and the *populares*. A general council was held on 1st August, attended by 29 *populares*. A few days later, the existence of a dispute became clear: on the 7th, a meeting of the heads of households was held – 137 of them crowded into the church of San Giacomo. There was a heated discussion («facta super hoc altercatione») about whether the new order was really more useful than the traditional convocation of the *capita domorum*. In the end, the *podestà* called for a vote, which revealed the express dissent of 17 people. To resolve the situation, the *podestà* himself decided that the new *ordinamentum* would be put to the test for one year from the date of its enactment, and that during this period the 17 «repugnantes» would retain the right to participate in council meetings anyway, if they so wished. This must be why the

notary Carreto, adopting a highly unusual solution, marked a small O next to their names on the list of those present (fig. 4).

On closer inspection, the register shows that the way councils were held continued to fluctuate between ordinary councils, general assemblies, councils with *adiuncti*, and ordinary councils with varying numbers of *populares*.

The case just described seems revealing to me. There is no space here to clarify the identities of the reform's opponents, but their opposition seems to reflect the existence of a group of people who were particularly interested in ensuring the flexibility of council participation. After all, many people took advantage of this flexibility: both individuals who were sometimes registered as council members as well as larger groups, perhaps for specific issues. Some took advantage of this possibility more consistently than others, of course, but overall the mechanism allowed a range of secondary figures to materialise around a core of fairly recurrent names and surnames, who, as had happened with the Carretos, could also become more regular attendees and become involved in the management of the commune.

4. *Concluding remarks*

On close examination, Luserna San Giovanni's municipal archive reveals significant gaps. For the purposes of the present enquiry, it is worth noting that at least two council registers are missing: one prior (ca. 1463) and one subsequent (ca. 1509) to the surviving register from 1488-1507. This, together with the statutory attestations mentioned in the *Introduction*, further discourages us from making definitive statements about the lack of such records in Alpine communities. As recent historiography teaches us, however, even this uncertainty tells us something.

The first references to the centralisation of municipal records «in archa comunis» can be found in the council minutes of 24 August and 2 September 1505. This initiative must have contributed to the initial establishment of the communal archive, but it evidently did not achieve definitive results and did not entirely prevent the scattering and loss of the documents. After all, we know for certain that the *clavarii* of the seigneurial *curia* produced documents for the community, and that at least part of their salary must have depended on the issuing of judicial *acta*. We also know from many references that notaries passed on their protocols from father to son, and that this made them the custodians of an important part of the local memory. If we take into account the long documentary symbiosis between the commune and the seigneurial *curia*, and the prominence of notarial lineages such as those of the Carretos and Pellizones in local society, the lack of coherent archival series until the second half of the sixteenth century does not seem to be a coincidence.

We are approaching a fundamental issue: the link between the discontinuity of certain archival-documentary paths and the socio-institutional structure of

the western Alpine milieus under examination. In these settings, often until the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, communal organisations were neither exclusive nor predominant in shaping the institutional poles which structured the life and choices of the local population and its elites (for example, the notarial elites). The Luserna archive therefore reflects the consequences of a close coexistence with a seigneurial authority on the dynamics of the production and conservation of documents for the commune. In these circumstances, the existence of communal organisations was only a prerequisite, and not a sufficient condition, for both the appearance and survival of council registers. Other factors were necessary of a cultural, political-institutional, and even social and economic nature, and explanations must be sought on a case-by-case basis, even if they can be linked to broader transformations.

Luserna San Giovanni offers further insights in this regard. Council registers emerged here in what was likely a context of socio-economic growth, marked by the intersection of social mobility and the development of communal institutions, particularly from the mid-fifteenth century onward. The history of the Carreto family perfectly exemplifies these processes: rising “from the bottom” and from outside the town – the San Giovanni area, which was clearly affected by growth dynamics – they became involved in the local councils and confraternity as a means of ascending the social ladder. Eventually, they even established a professional relationship with the commune as its scribes. The register compiled by Michele and Domenico is the product of a political-documentary culture that emphasised the community’s unity while highlighting the guiding role of an elite closely connected to both the people as well as the lords and their officers. It reveals a pursuit of public legitimisation, both for the commune itself and for the families – both old and new – who invested in it in order to cultivate their own identities and interests.

In what cases did the appearance of council registers depend on phenomena similar to those seen in Luserna San Giovanni? Can we assume that elsewhere as well it was a sign of the renewal of local societies, resulting (with the potential involvement of higher powers) in the questioning of pre-existing institutional balances, more or less characterised by the presence of communal and seigneurial institutions?

If this were the case, the map shown at the beginning of this paper would be a trail leading to new questions, first of all about the discrepancies in the chronology of the appearance of council registers within the area examined. The early emergence of this phenomenon in Pinerolo may be linked to the political rise of new social groups, a pattern common to other urban or semi-urban centres where the Savoy-Achaea princes had begun to acknowledge the leading role of *societates populi*.⁷⁶ It would seem, however, that many rural contexts experienced something similar later, in the wake of the “fourteenth-century crisis”. The

76. Umberto Delmastro’s doctoral research promises to provide new answers regarding this topic. See the article cited in note 74.

limited presence of council registers in most of the Alpine areas that were under Savoy rule in Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta (but also in France),⁷⁷ as well as the significant concentration of such documents in the Marquisate of Saluzzo and its bordering areas, therefore reflect how the aforementioned contexts experienced late medieval change in different ways.

The reasons for these differences represent a second issue that requires further reflection. In some cases, local societies may have maintained a closer connection with seignorial institutions (not always to the satisfaction of all their members) or adopted alternative forms of documentary representation instead of council registers. In other instances, these societies may have been only marginally affected by the economic dynamism that influenced others in the fifteenth century, or else the redistribution of its benefits may have been highly unequal and conservative. Also, opportunities beyond the local context – for notaries, for example – may have weakened the identification of an elite with the commune. Additionally, it should not be forgotten that some of the present-day municipalities (and their archives) originated from the aggregation of smaller communities during the modern age.

Ascertaining the significance of the gaps in our map will therefore require more in-depth investigations.

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77. See Carnielli in this issue of the journal.

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Deciding on the Sacred in Registers of Council Proceedings. Cases from the Central Alps

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the actions in the sacred sphere carried out by communities in Central Alps in the late Middle Ages, using Lugano and Bormio as cases of study. The surviving councils' records as well as the documents drafted by the accounting offices of both *br g* highlight concrete practices regarding the administration of church incomes, the care of buildings and sacred furnishings, as well as the organization of religious ceremonies and the dignity of clerics appointed to pastoral care. These responsibilities assumed an increasingly significant role during the fifteenth century, when the sacred sphere appears to have played a key role in representing collective membership. However, an analysis of these practices cannot disregard the specific interactions between the entities involved in the dynamics outlined by the deliberations.

KEYWORDS: Council proceedings, Alpine communities, Religious life, Collective membership

This paper aims to contribute to the study of collective decision-making processes, the focus of the *Democracies of the Alps* project (DEMALPS), by highlighting the main issues concerning worship practices that were discussed during the fifteenth century in Lugano and Bormio, two significant settlements on the northern borders of the Duchy of Milan.¹

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List of abbreviations: AP = Archivio del Patriziato; ASCB = Bormio, Archivio storico del comune; ASCL = Lugano, Archivio storico della città; QC = *Quaterni consiliorum*; QD = *Quaterni datorum et receptorum*.

1. For a general overview of DEMALPS see Marta Gravela, *Medieval Alpine Communal Politics under the spot light*. *The ERC Project DEMALPS*, in «Studi di Storia Medioevale e di Diplomatica», n.s., 7, 2023, pp. 63- 76, <https://doi.org/10.5403/2611-318/2018>.

The general subject has been extensively researched and documented. In the past few decades, a significant strand of studies has emphasised how considerably the participation of communities in managing the sacred contributed to late medieval political and administrative structures in the Alpine region. Investigations carried out on a regional basis have engaged with interpretative frameworks outlined in particular by German-language historiography, beginning with Peter Blickle's studies on the process of "communalism" and its implications for Early Modern European religious and institutional structures;² this dialogue has enabled scholars to articulate the central role of collective action within the sacred sphere and its consequences on local institutional and religious structures.³ The localization of pastoral care has proved to be a significant catalyst for community engagement. The growing responsibilities that *vicini* took on in crucial areas of sacred and charity – such as the administration of church property, the identification of resources to establish a benefice and the distribution of alms to the poor of the commune – often gave rise to new obligations and prompted unprecedented forms of institutional experimentation, which were corroborated by a religious culture rich in identity-related significance.⁴

2. Peter Blickle, *Gemeindereformation. Die Menschen des 16. Jahrhunderts auf dem Weg zum Heil*, München, Oldenbourg, 198; Peter Blickle, Johannes Kunisch (eds.), *Kommunalisierung und Christianisierung. Voraussetzung und Folgen der Reformation 1400-1600*, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 198; Peter Blickle, *From the Communal Reformation to the Revolution of the Common Man*, Leiden, Brill, 1998e especially pp. 1-15.

3. For more in-depth discussion on this approach see Cecilia Nubola, *Chiese delle comunità. Diritti consuetudinari e pratiche religiose nella prima età moderna. Qualche spunto di ricerca*, in Cecilia Nubola, Angelo Turchini (eds.), *Fonti ecclesiastiche per la storia sociale e religiosa d'Europa: XV-XVIII secolo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1999, pp. 441-464; Daniela Rando, *Ai confini d'Italia. Chiese e comunità alpine in prospettiva comparata*, in Francesco Salvestrini (ed.), *L'Italia alla fine del medioevo: i caratteri originali nel quadro europeo*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2006, vol. 1, pp. 164-186; Simona Boscani Leoni, Paolo Ostinelli (eds.), *La chiesa "dal basso". Organizzazioni, interazioni e pratiche nel contesto parrocchiale alpino alla fine del medioevo*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2012; Emanuele Curzel, *Prima delle parrocchie. Comunità rurali e chiese in area trentina*, Trento, Società di Studi Trentini di Scienze Storiche APS, 2025, pp. 13-24. Recent research provides a different perspective on the role of communal institutions in the religious sphere, focusing on the community form as a result of a spatial redefinition of social relations: Josef Morsel (ed.), *Communautés d'habitants au Moyen Âge (XI^e-XV^e siècles)*, Paris, Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2018, doi:10.4000/books.psorbonne.53888. On the relations between parishes and the inhabitants of a place (rather than *vicini*), refer to the two papers, by Josef Morsel, *Communautés d'habitants médiévales. Position des problèmes et perspectives*, pp. 5-39, (<https://doi.org/10.4000/books.psorbonne.53913>) and *La faucille ou le goupillon? Observations sur les rapports entre communauté d'habitants et paroisse en Europe du Nord-Ouest (notamment en France aux XII^e-XIII^e siècles)*, pp. 359-419 (<https://doi.org/10.4000/books.psorbonne.54058>), both in Morsel (ed.), *Communautés d'habitants*.

4. On the territories of the Central Alps ecclesiastically encompassed by the diocese of Como (including a few Milanese enclaves) see Paolo Ostinelli, *Il governo delle anime. 8 rotture ecclesiastiche nel Bellinzonese e nelle Valli ambrosiane (XIV-XV secolo)*, Locarno, Dadò, 1998; Paolo Ostinelli, *Chiese, istituzioni ecclesiastiche e vita religiosa*, in Paolo Ostinelli, Giuseppe Chiesi (eds.), *8 rotture del Ticino. Antichità e Medioevo*, Bellinzona, Stato del Canton Ticino-Casagrande, 2015, pp. 38-38; Elisabetta Canobbio (ed.), *La visita pastorale di Gerardo Landriani alla diocesi di Como (1414-1415)*, Milano, Unicopli, 2001; Elisabetta Canobbio, *8 rotture della "cura animarum"*

In other cases, as discussed in these pages, collective initiatives demonstrated the strength and coordination achieved by local institutions, as well as the project, from time to time, to extend their prerogatives within ecclesiastical institutions, to protect the resources allocated to them and to ensure regularity and order to the ceremonial life of the community too – and much more. In view of this versatility, the following pages provide an overview of the multifaceted collective initiative resulting from a strong tradition of formalising and preserving council proceedings. Some final considerations highlight potential areas of focus for the future.

1. *Institutional and documentary contexts*

In the fifteenth century, the villages considered here were important *br ġ* in the settlement hierarchy and political order of the Milanese duchy.

Lugano was a flourishing economic centre and crossroad for trade routes between Lombard, Swiss, French and German towns, and the seat of the ducal representative in the *br ġs* and *Vallis Lugni* as well; its governing body consisted of a 24 member board and eight of them were elected councillors.⁵ The parish of Saint Lorenzo was the fulcrum of *cura animarum*, yet there was also a long-standing presence of Friars Minor at the convent of Saint Francesco and a “double” community of Umiliati which, in the second half of the fifteenth century, was divided into the houses of Saint Caterina and Saint Antonio.⁶ From the 1400s onwards, the council became more involved in governing the hospital of Saint Maria, which indeed ended up fully controlled by the community within a decade.⁷ By the 1500s the parish territory was disaggregating quite rapidly,

in diocesi di Como: pievi, parrocchie, comunità, in Boscani Leoni, Ostinelli (eds.), *La chiesa “dal bs so”*, pp. 69-102; Massimo Della Misericordia, *Divenire comunità Comuni rurali, poteri locali, identità sociali e territoriali in Valtellina e nella montagna lombr da nel tardo medioevo*, Milano, Unicopli, 2006; Massimo Della Misericordia, *Protagonisti sociali, vita religiosa e luoghi di culto nel bs so medioevo*, in Valeria Mariotti (ed.), *La Valtellina nei secoli: studi e ricerche archeologiche che*, Milano, Soprintendenza Archeologica della Lombardia, 2015, vol. 1, pp. 8- 194 Massimo Della Misericordia, *Comune ecclesie. Chiese e società locali in Valtellina e nelle Alpi lombr de nel tardo medioevo*, Sondrio, Società storica valtellinese, 2015; Massimo Della Misericordia, *Ritual Surveys. Conflict, Articulation, and Composition of Local Societies within the Sacred Sphere in the Lombardy Alps during the Late Middle Ages*, in Marco Bellabarba, Hannes Obermair, Hitomi Sato (eds.), *Communities and Conflicts in the Alps from the Late Middle Ages to Early Modernity*, Bologna-Berlin, Il Mulino-Duncker & Humblot, 2015, pp. 127-150. A recent examination of these interactions in another Alpine context appears in Elena Corniolo, *Pratiche di appropriazione e di delimitazione del sacro. Le visite pastorali di XV secolo alla diocesi di Aosta*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2023.

5. Paul Schäfer, *Il St toceneri nel Medioevo. Contributo alla storia del Medioevo italiano*, Lugano, la Commerciale, 1954pp. 273, 318-320.

6. Antonietta Moretti, *Da Feudo a Baliaġ o. Le comunità delle pievi della Val Lugno nel XV e XVI secolo*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2006, pp. 215-222.

7. Massimo Della Misericordia, *Ne partecipavano indifferentemente poveri et ricchi. Clientelismo, coesione comunitaria e selezione dei b sogni : indignanza e ospedali nell’alta Lombardia fra*

triggered by the move to allocate *cura animarum* prerogatives to the churches of a number of villages.⁸

The ecclesiastical organisation of Bormio, in Valtellina, was less complex: religious services were centred on the church dedicated to Saints Gervasio and Protasio, which was governed by an archpriest and a chapter of canons in charge of the care of souls even in the hamlets scattered throughout the communal territory. The fulcrum of the collective decision-making activity was the people's council, entrusted with legislative power, the management of common property, the election of officers – including the more restricted ordinary council – and everything else debated in assemblies.⁹

The surviving councils' records of both villages, which are the result of long-lasting and sturdy community government structures, are of great significance in the documentary landscape of late medieval Lombardy, as they are regarded as notable archival "highlights", featuring many interesting elements concerning various contexts (institutional, documentary, cultural) of their production and tradition.¹⁰ Specifically, the Lugano *lib i consiliorum* date back to 10, ¹¹ but the records of Bormio are older, albeit fragmentary, and include a *quat ernus* from 1334 ¹² the registers then begin again from 14 to extend uninterruptedly from 140 to 1796.¹³ Thanks to careful conservation practices, it is also possible to

hs so medioevo e prima età moderna, in «Studi di Storia Medioevale e di Diplomatica», n.s., 5, 2021, pp. 107-168 <https://dx.doi.org/10.1764 9787 737805> .

8. On the process of separation and elevation to parish status for the churches of Sonvico (147- 149) , Carona (125- 127) , Gandria (143) , Comano, Lamone, Pambio and Pazzalino (148) see Moretti, *Da Feudo a Balia* o, pp. 236-23.

9. Canobbio (ed.), *La visita pastorale*, pp. 177-178 Massimo Della Misericordia, *Paesagg o, istituzioni, identità locali di una valle alpina nel tardo medioevo. Elementi per una storia sociale della Valfurva*, in «Bollettino della Società storica valtellinese», 60, 2007, pp. 27-69: 37-39; Massimo Della Misericordia, *Le orig ni di una chiesa di contrada: devozione e identità locale*, in *La chiesa della Sn tissima Trinità di Terega in Valfurva. Storia, arte, devozione, restauro*, Milano, Associazione Teregua, 2011, pp. 17-97; Enrico Besta, *Bormio antica e medioevale*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1945, pp. 158-161.

10. For these reasons, at the moment they are being granted visibility as part of the PRIN 2022 project *Scrivere la comunità: Le fonti consiliari nelle Alpi del tardo medioevo* coordinated by Marta Gravela and Fabrizio Pagnoni: Andrea Barsacchi, Pietro D'Orlando, *Archivi di comunità e registri consiliari nella montagna lombarda alla fine del Medioevo. Un censimento*, in «Studi di Storia Medioevale e di Diplomatica», n.s., 9, 2025, pp. 299-334, <https://doi.org/10.54103/2611-318X/2025>.

11. See the online inventory at <https://patrimonio.luganocultura.ch/>.

12. This register is the oldest of its kind in the diocesan territory, perhaps resulting from a reorganisation of the community's writing practices: Marta Luigina Mangini, *I qua terni consiliorum trecenteschi di Bormio nel panorama delle fonti di matrice consiliare*, in «Nuova rivista storica», 9/ 2, 2005, pp. 65- 8: 72; Massimo Della Misericordia, *Mappe di carte. Le scritture e gli archivi delle comunità rurali della montagna lombr da nel hs so medioevo*, in Attilio Bartoli Langeli, Andrea Giorgi, Stefano Moscadelli (eds.), *Archivi e comunità tra medioevo ed età moderna*, Trento, Dipartimento di Filosofia, Storia e Beni culturali, 2009, pp. 155-278: 174.

13. Antonella Colturi et al. (eds.), *Archivio storico del comune di Bormio. Inventario d'archivio*, Milano, Archidata, 1990, https://www.provinciasondrio.it/_static/ArchiviStorici/testi/archivi/bormio/bormio.htm. For 1356-1357, the documentary gaps in the *quaterni consiliorum* may

cross-reference entries relating to the council with documentation produced by the accounting offices of both communities (for the period considered here, the *quat erni datorum et receptorum* in Bormio and account books in Lugano).¹⁴

Some intrinsic and material elements are also very interesting, such as the extensive use of notarial validation characterising the council resolutions in Lugano and the membranous material used to make the Valtellina registers.¹⁵

Other formal elements common to both series, such as the text being broken down into proposals and resolutions, and the absence of references to the assembly debate, were consistent with documentary canons that had been codified by doctrine and widely practised.¹⁶ A few years ago, Massimo Della Misericordia observed that these models were quite effective in meeting the need to certify and publicise community records, as well as representing and perpetuating collective unity underlying the intentions expressed by the resolutions, rather than divisions.¹⁷

2. *The resources of the churches*

The governance of resources destined for maintaining the sacred buildings is a well-defined element of decision-making in the deliberative writings examined here. These assets consisted of real estate and variable incomes deriving

be supplemented thanks to the transcriptions made in the first half of the nineteenth century by Giacomo Silvestri, canon of Tirano, rector of the gymnasium of Bormio and a scholar of local history who was in close contact with eminent figures in the field of Lombard scholarship: ASCB, Manoscritti Silvestri, 7-8; Mangini, *I quaterni consiliorum*, p. 472; Rita Pezzola, *Le trascrizioni di documenti tiranesi di Giacomo Silvestri (1820 ca.): un'esperienza editoriale tra la montagna valtellinese e la Biblioteca Ambrosiana di Milano*, in Rita Pezzola (ed.), *L'ospedale di San Romerio e Santa Perpetua fra Valtellina e Val Poschiavo. Contesti sociali, circuiti culturali, confronti territoriali*, Morbegno, Ad fontes, 2025, pp. 65-94: 66, <https://adfontes.it/biblioteca/scaffale/avsrsp/avsrp.html>.

14 In Ticino, a very similar case study from a documentary perspective is that of Bellinzona. This can therefore offer valuable points of comparison also with regard to community interventions and public resources allocated to local ecclesiastical institutions and the management of sacred spaces: Giuseppe Chiesi, *Bellinzona ducale. Ceto dirigente e politica finanziaria nel Quattrocento*, Bellinzona, Casagrande, 198e specially pp.18- 18

15. On the material characteristics of Bormio's *quaterni* see Mangini, *I quaterni consiliorum*, pp. 473-477 but these elements are being studied as part of the PRIN project, too: Barsacchi, D'Orlando, *Archivi di comunità*; Marta L. Mangini, *Forme e materie delle deliberazioni. Per una codicologia dei registri consiliari delle comunità alpine lombarde (secoli XIII-XV)*, presentation at the conference «Le fonti consiliari nelle Alpi del tardo medioevo. Forme documentarie e pratiche politiche a confronto», Polo UNIMONT (Università degli Studi di Milano)-Edolo (BS), 11-12 September 2025.

16. Mangini, *I quaterni consiliorum*, p. 474; Lorenzo Tanzini, *A consiglio. La vita politica nell'Italia dei comuni*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2014, pp. 47-50. A wider overview in a comparative perspective in François Otchakovsky-Laurens, Laure Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemblées. Quelle démocratie urbaine au travers des registres de délibérations? Méditerranée-Europe, XIII^e au XVIII^e siècle*, Aix-en-Provence, Presses universitaires de Provence, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pup.58944>.

17. Massimo Della Misericordia, *Decidere e ag re in comunità nel XV secolo (un aspetto del dibattito politico nel dominio sforzesco)*, in Andrea Gamberini, Giuseppe Petralia (eds.), *Lingag politici nell'Italia del Rinascimento*, Roma, Viella, 2007, pp. 291-379: 311-316.

from individual devotion: «*q̄e bona dicte ecclesie donata et partim adiudicata fuerunt [.] per homines et personas olim et tunc habitantes in dicto burgo*», as stated in a proposal on how such resources were to be managed, which was presented to the Lugano councillors in 14 8¹⁸ In Lugano the first entries of this kind concern the work carried out in 10 on the bell tower of Saint Lorenzo¹⁹ and the council's role in the patrimonial management of this church seems to have gained institutional importance in the following years, similarly to what has been found for smaller settlements in the diocese as well as at the *fab ica* of Como cathedral.²⁰ In 12 in particular, three *sufficientes* men were appointed to audit the Saint Lorenzo accounts and were granted full authority to provide for its *fab ica*; four years later, deliberating «*pro novo modo optimo circha fabricam [.] imponendo*», two councillors were delegated to collect rents and take care of everything concerning the church's *honor*. In 13 these powers were also extended to the supervision of the work of the custodian, paid by the commune.²¹

In a completely unprecedented occurrence in the diocesan territory, in Bormio the «*sindici et procuratores*» of the commune carried out administrative activities that also affected the *mensa* of the canonical chapter at the church of Saints Gervasio and Protasio, as was ascertained by the bishop of Como's visitors in 14 5.²² Some twenty years later – drawing on some examples from the registers – the council authorised the canons to cede land and deliberated on the revenues that would be used to pay the *monachus* who would be responsible for the maintenance of the church.²³

In addition, the councils carefully supervised the management of churches controlled by the communities. At the end of the 140s, the commune, the *homines* and *br g nses* of Lugano claimed patronage over the church of Saints Gottardo and Biagio whose beneficiary had been appointed by the council for at least twenty years.²⁴

The commune of Bormio held broader rights, however, based in part on rather complex statutory regulations. At the collegiate church, two council dele-

18 ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 2, f. 117v, 7 July 18

19. See note 39.

20. Ostinelli, *Il gv erno delle anime*, pp. 253-263; Canobbio (ed.), *La visita pastorale*, pp. 0- § Elisabetta Canobbio, “[.] q̄od rationes fabricae ecclesie cathedralis Cumarum recto ordine et modo transeant”: *la fab ica di S Maria Mag ore nel Quattrocento*, in «Periodico della Società Storica Comense», 57, 1995, pp. 33-§

21. ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 1, f. 8v, 30 December 12; Libri dei Consigli, 2, f. 75r, 19 April 16; f. 117v, 7 July 18 The 14 resolution is transcribed in Enrico Maspoli, *La chiesa di S Lorenzo in Lugno*, in «Bollettino Storico della Svizzera Italiana», 3, 1926, pp. 52-64 56-58 regarding this, see Moretti, *Da Feudo a Baliağ o*, p. 213.

22. Canobbio (ed.), *La visita pastorale*, p. 177.

23. ASCB, QC, 4, f. 3r, 14 November 1465; f. 3v, 3 December 1465.

24 Sometimes acq̄i escing to the ambitions of clerics who were supported by the Sanseverino, lords of the valley: ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 3, f. 57r, 2 April 1454; f. 60r, 17 November 1454; f. 152r, 23 October 1458; f. 238r, 29 September 1462; Luigi Brentani, *Miscellanea storica ticinese. Notizie d'arte, di coltura, di reliḡ one, di politica e di curiosità*, Como, Arti grafiche Bari, 1926, pp. 146-149.

gates governed the revenues of the altar of Saint Gottardo and appointed the beneficiary,²⁵ yet *providi* representatives of the inhabitants were also responsible for the administration of the chaplaincy of Saint Marta – for example by drafting inventories of the incomes, when requested by the beneficiary – and, from the end of the fifteenth century onward, of the altar of Saint Rocco as well.²⁶ The commune also confirmed the *anziani* in charge of collecting the income of Saint Pietro *de Castello* and supported them in more specific circumstances;²⁷ «capellanus communis» was likewise the beneficiary of Saint Antonio in the Combo neighbourhood, whose construction had been supported by the council in the first half of the fourteenth century.²⁸ In the last decade of the fifteenth century, there were also intense interactions between the governing bodies of the *br gs* and the territorial subunits – quarters and neighbourhoods – that were beginning to render religious services local by holding them at the village churches.²⁹ From time to time, the procurators of the commune resolved to assign loans «causa edificandi ecclesiam»: between 1493 and 1497 to the *vicini* of Uzza,³⁰ Pedenosso and Dossiglio,³¹ once again in 1497 to the agents appointed to rebuild the church of Saint Maria di Cepina, and to the *homines* of Magliavacca, who received five perches of communal property so that they could erect a house «pro honore, utili et necessitate» of the church of Saint Caterina.³² In 1499, three councillors were instead assigned to assist the *homines* of Molina and Premadio in recruiting the *mag stri* who were to rebuild the ancient Saint Martino «ai bagni» church and communal funds were also committed to this project.³³

25. ASCB, QC, 5, f. 4, 23 March 1483; QC, 22, p. 12, 28 January 1494. Sometimes, as stipulated in the statute, it was the council that designated the priest, as in the election of Francesco Alberti: QC, 15, p. 10, 31 December 1491; Lyde Martinelli, Sandro Rovaris (eds.), *Statuti ossia leggi municipali del comune di Bormio civili e penali*, Sondrio, Banca Piccolo credito valtellinese, 1983, p. 172.

26. ASCB, QC, 19, p. 2, 15 February 1492 and *infra*, text corresponds to note 36.

27. See the confirmation of the church *anziani* in ASCB, QC, 8, p. 10, 18 April 1483 and the payment order of two lire to be assigned to the church *agentes* in charge of imparting an indulgence in QC, 11, f. 10v, 5 February 1490. According to the statutes, moreover, the council was also required to appoint the *conversus* in charge of looking after the church: Martinelli, Rovaris (eds.), *Statuti*, p. 140.

28. This is how the priest Innocenzo Alberti was certified in 1489. His election was arranged by the council with the compensation of seven lire and ten *soldi* for celebrating masses «que fiunt nomine communis ad ecclesiam Sancti Antonii» for each four-month period: ASCB, QC, 11, f. 5v, 7 December 1489. The intervention of the commune in the construction of the church is evidenced by the loan of six florins made in 1357: ASCB, Manoscritti Silvestri, 7, p. 10.

29. Della Misericordia, *Paesaggio*, pp. 39-40; Massimo Della Misericordia, *Le origini di una chiesa*, pp. 50-55, 79-80.

30. ASCB, QC, 20, p. 9, 16 April 1493; QC, 23, f. 9r, 14 June 1494; QC, 26, f. 12r, 1 June 1495.

31. ASCB, QC, 31, p. 11, 17 April 1497.

32. *Ibidem*, p. 19, 8 June 1497.

33. ASCB, QC, 37, p. 7, 10 April 1499. The rebuilding of the church, under the patronage of the commune (Martinelli, Rovaris [eds.], *Statuti*, p. 264), had been approved in 1496; the land

3. *Maintaining the churches*

The resolutions concerning the structures of the collegiate churches were highly draining on collective resources as these sites constituted the hub of pastoral services in the villages.

In 1491, the project to fortify the parsonage, driven by the factional clashes, induced the Lugano council to impose a bounty of ten lire and put communal revenues up for auction for four months, also rejecting the exemption requests made by the «magnificus comes» Loterio Rusca.³⁴ In the year 1491, the councillors issued instructions to four *homines* to assess the necessary repairs to the temple roof. They were also tasked with ascertaining the canons' willingness to contribute to the repairs using their customary alms, and with determining whether some of the parish communities were obliged to contribute to the costs. The subsequent reiterations of the request and reluctance on the part of the various actors involved in the process show that this was a delicate area of intervention in the *res Ecclesie*, affected by the divergent interests of multiple actors.³⁵

Towards the end of the century, the community of Bormio made significant investments in the church of Saints Gervasio and Protasio. In March 1492 in particular, after adopting measures to curb the spread of the plague, two *deputati* were authorised to undertake the necessary expenses to build an altar dedicated to Saint Rocco, the income and alms of which were controlled by the commune a few years later through a number of *gubernatores*.³⁶ In 1497 the council earmarked one of the alms offered by the *consortium* of the Blessed Virgin for building an altarpiece for the high altar commissioned by the same association; this project was to be supervised by the archpriest, one of the *scholars*, and a deputy from the commune.³⁷

The structures attached to the collegiate churches also called for extensive work. In Lugano, as mentioned above, the first evidence that community bodies had responsibilities in terms of maintaining Saint Lorenzo dates back to the work carried out on the church's bell tower, which was also used as a public watchtower.³⁸ An initial resolution from July 1440 to prevent the bells from falling down was followed by a contract for the renovation work, with the official recording of the rebates proposed by Porinus da Viganello, the person who was awarded the

earmarked for construction was to be measured in the presence of the *camerarius maius* and a councillor of Bormio: ASCB, QC, 30, p. 2, 3 November 1496; QC, 31, p. 21, 13 June 1497.

34. ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 2, f. 132v, 5 March 1491; f. 135r, 9 March 1491. Regarding the church and its clergy's involvement in the factional clashes of the second half of the century, see Moretti, *Da Feudo a Balia*, pp. 232-236.

35. ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 2, f. 172r, 8 April 1491; f. 10r, 6 August 1491. In 1499, it was a Dominican from the Como convent who urged repairs be made to the plebeian church, while the council reiterated the pressing need for work on the church roof in 1465: Libri dei Consigli, 3, f. 170r, 29 July 1499; Brentani, *Miscellanea*, p. 159.

36. ASCB, QC, 18p. 5, 24 March 1492; QC, 28f. 10v, 28 May 1496.

37. ASCB, QC, 30, p. 13, 18 January 1497.

38. Payment orders for the guards assigned to the structure appear in ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 2, f. 136v, 16 April 1491; Libri dei Consigli, 4 f. 5r, 19 May 1467.

contract, his oath to perform his task well, and a first note of payment. In the spring of 1441 the notary responsible for maintaining the *liber* recorded the report of the three councillors who had assessed the «sufitientia» of the contractor's work, as well as the payment order for the work carried out.³⁹ A few years later, restoration work on the clock in the same bell tower followed a similar procedure, and the ordinary maintenance of this element was guaranteed by a *magister* who was likewise paid by the council.⁴⁰ In addition to the public tower, the councillors of Bormio also took care of the bell tower of the collegiate church: the *libri consiliorum* and registers of the *canevaria* contain resolutions and payment orders for maintaining the bells and carrying out one-time work on the structure.⁴¹

Among the areas in front of the plebeian churches, cemeteries were also the object of assembly debates. By 1445, the Lugano council provided for part of the cemetery of Saint Lorenzo to be fenced off and gates to be built, to prevent wild animals from entering,⁴² and in the second half of the century a commissioner was appointed in Bormio to oversee decorating the burial area between the collegiate church and communal buildings: the patron saints and the image of the Virgin Mary were portrayed on the «ianua mastra» of the fence, later protected with a roof.⁴³

The councillors also resolved to contribute towards the cost of lighting the collegiate churches, especially during major solemnities and on the days dedicated to the patron saints. In addition, the community of Bormio contributed to the expenses for the baptismal font.⁴ At times, the council acted to support the improvement of sacred furnishings: for instance, there was a 143 decision to send some councillors from Lugano to Como to assist the canons of Saint Lorenzo in purchasing a tabernacle and chalices for the church, and ten years later the sum of 8 lire was allocated to the same canons as they proposed to purchase a «pulchrum et laudabillem» vestment costing approximately 60 ducats.⁵

Resolutions to improve those vestments that fostered the faithful's spiritual and emotional participation in liturgical activities were intended to enhance the solemnity of worship. Community expenditures included the *salarium* of the

39. ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 1, f. 14r, 16 July 1440; ff. 19r-20r, 10 post 16 July-15 October; ff. 38v-39r, 5 April 1441. For following work on the structure and bells see Libri dei Consigli, 2, f. 118, 8 July 14 and 119v, 21 July 14 Libri dei Consigli, 3, f. 2r, 20 January 152; f. 14, 26 May 158S see also Brentani, *Miscellanea*, pp. 279-28: 38

40. ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 2, f. 32r, 16 October 14 Brentani, *Miscellanea*, pp. 76-78

41. ASCB, QC, 13, f. 4, 7 August 190; QC, 18p. 15, 2 June 192.

42. ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 2, f. 54, 24 April 14.

43. ASCB, QC, 28 f. 7v, 16 April 196. Concerning the implementation of the work, see the payments of two lire to the commissioner in charge of the roof construction and sum of 28 lire «pro auro, colore, assibus, clavis et mercede ac labore» in QD, 196 (*sorte veris*), f. 6r. On the spaces between the commune and the collegiate church of Saints Gervasio and Protasio, see Della Misericordia, *Protaggi sti sociali*, p. 160.

44. ASCB, QC, 18p. 17, 9 June 192; Martinelli, Rovaris (eds.), *S atuti*, p. 168

45. Brentani, *Miscellanea*, pp. 168 169; ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 3, f. 250r, 17 March 163.

organist – whose employment terms were specified in the resolutions⁴⁶ – as well as contributing to replacing the instruments: in 1492, the Bormio council set a limit on spending for the new organ, reiterating that three of its deputies were to reach an agreement with the canons on the terms for constructing the instrument; the following year, this work was entrusted to Giovanni Antonio da Como.⁴⁷

4 *Residency and doctrine: the clergy*

Moreover, the deliberations also reveal elements related to ensuring the continuity and quality of the religious and sacramental services administered by priests working in local communities.

Of the decisions recorded in Bormio's oldest register, one is an injunction issued to the archpriest of the collegiate church specifying that three of the clergy «in plebe» should have the rank of *presbyter* and receive payment from those who had provided the church with chrisms;⁴⁸ a century later, in the winter of 1499, the people of Lugano decided to write to the bishop of Como to require the priests in charge of Saint Lorenzo to establish «firmam residentiam» at the church, celebrating the services there and guaranteeing all the activities needed to care for parishioners.⁴⁹ The Bormio community's patronage of the altar of Saint Gottardo took the form of appointing a priest to celebrate «missas oportunas et necessarias [...] summo mane»⁵⁰ there, but they were also very vigilant in supervising the celebration of masses resulting from bequests that had been established at the church;⁵¹ in 1451, the Lugano council passed its first resolutions to restore the church's baptistery and indeed the community had the structure renovated twenty years later, adding its coat of arms.⁵²

The council also took action to encourage the heartfelt participation of the clergy in paraliturgies held both on customary dates or occasions of special need:

46. The Bormio organist's involvement in precept festivals, salary and the extent of fines for any non-compliance are specified in ASCB, QC, 5, f. 4v, 26 March 1481; QC, 11, f. 6v, 21 December 1480; QC, 22, p. 9, 8 January 1491; in 1463, the choice of organist elicited «maximum tumultum» among the Lugano councillors: ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 3, f. 255r, 19 August 1464 and f. 261r, 28 December 1463.

47. ASCB, QC, 19, p. 3, 3 November 1492; QC, 22, p. 3, 26 June 1493 and p. 5, 1 August 1493; QC, 23, f. 6r, 28 April 1494.

48. ASCB, QC, 1, p. 5, 28 February 1334.

49. ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 3, f. 156v, 31 January 1459. Later, a similar resolution urged the bishop to intervene against the Varese priest Cristoforo *de Zeno*, a «sacerdos curatus» who had, however, long been absent from the church: f. 162v, 12 February 1459.

50. ASCB, QC, 5, f. 4, 23 March 1480; QC, 15, p. 10, 7 January 1491.

51. See, for example, the resolution that arranged for canon Eutichio *de Rezano* to be elected as chaplain at the altar of the Blessed Virgin Mary with the obligation of celebrating two weekly masses, as arranged in his will by priest Simone Marioli: ASCB, QC, 28f. 4, 9 March 1496.

52. ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 2, f. 10r, 6 August 1451; Brentani, *Miscellanea*, pp. 108–110; Della Misericordia, *Comune eccliesie*, p. 9.

in Bormio, the local clergy was compensated for taking part in litanies with offerings of wine, while in August 14 the councillors of Lugano recommended that the canons of Saint Lorenzo officiate «cum meliori devotione prout facere melius poterint» at processions called to bring an end to the drought.⁵³

The quality of training the clergy members received was also taken into consideration. «Bonus» was to be the confessor requested by the council of Lugano for Lent, and in 145 the councillors resolved to request that the Provincial of the Minors send friars who were «honesti [...]. et bene morigerati et bene docti» to the village's friary; some twenty years later, the councillors granted an alms of 32 lire to support Friar Francesco *de Lugno* in studying theology, following his request for funding.⁵⁴

In the second half of the century, furthermore, the need to consistently make use of religious services at collegiate churches drove community bodies to take action against ecclesiastical benefices being given to clergy from outside the villages. This latter practice, encouraged by the ecclesiastical policies of the dukes and the expansion of apostolic provision, has been widely shown to have deprived prominent local families of resources, sometimes substantial in amount.⁵⁵ Given the necessities of pastoral activity, in 140 the Lugano councillors requested that the bishop of Como step in and mediate to ensure that three curate benefices in Saint Lorenzo be bestowed on resident clergy members rather than the three candidates – likely non-locals – who, «ut dicitur», would never have fulfilled the responsibilities associated with these canonships.⁵⁶ The same kind of considerations can be seen in the Bormio council's decision to approve disbursements in order to encourage a ducal cantor to relinquish his claims on a canony in the area in 146.⁵⁷

5. *The community's ceremonial life*

Resolutions about the solemnities of the liturgical year show a further facet of deliberative activity in matters of worship.

In the spring, village councils resolved on the cycle of sermons that would mark Lent and the week following Easter. In Lugano, the preacher was often

53. ASCB, QC, 16, p. 18 13 June 141; QC, 18 p. 17, 9 June 142; ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 1, f. 76r, 17 August 142.

54. *Ib dem*, f. 86v, 11 March 143; Libri dei Consigli, 3, f. 70v, 1 June 145; Brentani, *Miscellanea*, pp. 18- 18

55. Concerning the regions examined here, see Ostinelli, *Il governo delle anime*, pp. 12- 153 and Canobbio (ed.), *La visita pastorale*, pp. 66-72.

56. ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 2, f. 13B , 25 May 140.

57. The cantor was Ugone *de Parisio* (ASCB, QC, 28 f. 8 , 25 April 146) , and the council assigned him a pension of six lire as compensation for giving up the canony vacated by the death of priest Simone Marioli: f. 12r, 4 June 1496; QC, 30, p. 2, 16 November 1496; QC, 31, p. 11; 22 April 147.

recruited by consulting the friars of the local convent of Saint Francesco, or chosen from among the same community. In some cases, however, the council directed the request for preachers and confessors to *domus* outside the local context, such as to the Dominican convent of Como.⁵⁸ In Bormio, the local government was responsible for funding Lenten preaching.⁵⁹ In the last two decades of the fifteenth century, in particular, the community resolved to call one or two friars to the village and provided the material support needed for their upkeep: sometimes hospitality was entrusted to Bormio inhabitants,⁶⁰ but more frequently the preacher was assigned wood, wine, butter, candles,⁶¹ or a daily sum to enable him to be «bene expensatum nomine comunis»;⁶² in other cases, he was paid a fee at the end of the mission.⁶³ In the last decade of the century, the organization of the cycle of sermons was sometimes delegated to two members of the council who also worked in concert with the canons of the collegiate church;⁶⁴ in a couple of cases, the community's preferences tended toward the Augustinians,⁶⁵ while the Lenten sermons of 1492 and 1493 were entrusted to Friars Minor recruited from among the Observants of Saint Angelo in Milan and the Conventuals of Como, respectively.⁶⁶

As other solemnities approached, deliberative bodies again made decisions that emphasized the public value of the festivity.

In the sphere of communal charitable practices, in Bormio alms were arranged for Christmas and the Ascension, in accordance with the statutes⁶⁷ and Corpus Christi involved figures from the community's organization – «servitores comunis», «tubicines seu fistulatores» – who played at ceremonies.⁶⁸ On the occasion of the liturgical commemoration of Saints Gervasio and Protasio, the council (as required by village regulations) promptly approved the making of two candles, thereby expressing the village's collective devotion to its patron saints.⁶⁹

In the second half of the fifteenth century, resolutions by assemblies expanded the framework of local devotions. Presumably at the urging of the Minors of the convent of Saint Francesco, in 1491 a resolution was passed in Lugano to

58 ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 1, f. 8v, 11 March 14.

59. The statutes suspended court activities from mid-Lent to the eighth of Easter so as to allow people to see to their spiritual health «potius quam humanae curae»: Martinelli, Rovaris (eds.), *Statuti*, p. 10.

60. ASCB, QC, 6, f. 5r, 17 September 13.

61. ASCB, QC, 8p. 2, 7 February 13; p. 9, 4 April 13.

62. ASCB, QC, 5, f. 3v, 13 March 13.

63. *Ibidem*, f. 6r, 26 April 13 and f. 6v, 27 April 13; QC, 6, f. 2r, 14 June 13; QC, 12, p. 3, 8 February 140; p. 9, 14 April 140; QC, 18 p. 3, 2 March 142; QC, 20, p. 7, 26 March 143.

64 ASCB, QC, 22, p. 17, 15 February 1494; QC, 31, p. 3, 22 February 1497; QC, 20, p. 9, 12 April 1493; QC, 26; p. 3, 5 March 1495; f. 12v, 12 June 1495; QC, 28 f. 5v, 6 April 1496; f. 9v, 4 May 1496.

65. ASCB, QC, 6, f. 5r, 17 September 13; QC, 31, p. 7, 29 March 147.

66. ASCB, QC, 18p. 827 April 1492; QC, 20, p. 812 April 1493.

67. ASCB, QC, 20, p. 10, 27 April 1493; QC, 23, f. 5r, 2 April 1494; Martinelli, Rovaris (eds.), *Statuti*, p. 168

68 ASCB, QD, 146 (sorte veris), f. 4; Della Misericordia, *Protagnisti sociali*, p. 14.

69. ASCB, QD, 145 (sorte estiva), f. 2r; Martinelli, Rovaris (eds.), *Statuti*, p. 168

commemorate the feast day of the recently canonized Bernardino di Siena with an annual procession and the donation of a candle to the friars;⁷⁰ in September 1495, the councillors of Bormio resolved to propitiate the end of a plague epidemic with a solemn vow to the Most High, the Virgin and Saints Rocco and Sebastiano.⁷¹ The vow, pronounced by the secular clergy in the presence and with the consent of the *podestà* and four councillors, brought with it new collective devotional responsibilities – a pilgrimage to a Marian shrine in Val Venosta made by a group of twenty men every year for five years and, «citius quam poterit», one pilgrimage to the church of Saint Maria «de Angelo» (this site cannot be identified based on current research) and wax offerings to altars and churches dedicated to Saints Rocco and Sebastiano. The formalization of the vow, in the form of a notarial *instrumentum*, was transcribed in full in the council register; the entry is introduced by a passage praising the deity and corroborating the solemnity of this commitment made on behalf of the community.⁷²

In addition to stipulating the devout participation of the clergy, as seen above, Lugano's councillors also directed specific attention to the ceremonial performance of the litanies that dotted the spring calendar across the areas served by churches offering pastoral services. Likely in connection with the approach of the annual procession, a proper *ordo* was drawn up for the festivities in May 1446 by the two deputies to the Saint Lorenzo *fabbrica*: in addition to requiring all heads of families to participate, the councillors outlined the order of the procession that was to follow the clergy behind the cross, detailed the behaviours deemed inappropriate («tripodiare, cantare, pulsare») and set penalties for non-compliance and transgressions.⁷³

6. *The sacred and community identity*

Finally, in addition to some resolutions such as the ones outlined above, at times it is the lexicon of the sources that expresses how important decisions

70. ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 2, f. 174, 19 May 1491.

71. ASCB, QC, 27, f. 5r, 27 September 1495. The vow was the first of a number of devotional initiatives addressed to these prominent health-promoting saints that went on to fuel the community's claims to the church of Saint Sebastiano in the early sixteenth century: Massimo Della Misericordia, *Il rito: cerimonie polemiche e conflittualità festiva nelle Alpi centrali*, in Francesca Antonacci, Massimo Della Misericordia, *La guerra dei bimboni. Gioco, violenza e rito da una testimonianza rinascimentale*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2013, pp. 73-98, 94-96.

72. The offerings to altars and churches dedicated to Saints Rocco and Sebastiano must have generated some tension with communities in the parish, as in 1496 the council ruled that the tenancies granted to the fulfilment of vows and coming from the income of the altar of Saint Rocco in the pieve and church of Saints Rocco and Romedio in the contrada of Uzza should remain at the disposal of these same churches: ASCB, QC, 29, f. 6r, 12 October 1496. In the spring of that year, however, the *canevarius* had paid the salary owed to the archpriest for chanting mass once a month in the church of Saint Sebastiano «occasione voti comunis»: QD, 1496 (*sorte veris*), f. 1v.

73. ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 2, ff. 77v-78r, 19 May 1446.

on religious life were in consolidating and perpetuating a sense of community belonging.

In Bormio, the significance accorded to the church of Saints Gervasio and Protasio in terms of local identity was made explicit in a 1490 resolution addressed to the «ecclesia nostra plebana». Two years later, an entry emphasized the scope of the patronage exercised by the two saints, extending from the church dedicated to them to encompass the entire community.⁷⁴ This close bond was conveyed in more articulate expressions in Lugano. In 14, in particular, the proposal to introduce new procedures for governing the pieve's assets was supported by arguments framing as one and the same the good governance of church resources and the common good, both spiritual and material («Cum cuilibet plurimum interest bona ecclesiastica conservare, ut animabus et corporibus cunctorum bene cedat []. . »).⁷⁵ Two years later, a resolution concerning the obligations of the church custodian was endorsed – as mentioned above – by asserting the need to safeguard the patrimony given to the church by *homines* and *persone* «olim et tunc habitantes in dicto burgo Lugani» over the course of generations.⁷⁶ In 145, reiterating the urgent need to make repairs to the roof of Saint Lorenzo, the assembly associated the honor of the community with the decorum of this building, suggesting that, due to its state of deterioration, «per forenses dicitur []. . esse et videtur cassina». The cemetery space was also held up as similarly important when, in 18 «pro onore omnium et maxime cadavera que ibi sepeliuntur», the council decided to build doors to enclose it – a project the town had unsuccessfully asked the canons of Saint Lorenzo to carry out in the previous three years.⁷⁷ However, this argument of collective honor was also used to support the requests for subsidies the Minors of the convent of Saint Francesco had made to the commune in the 160s.⁷⁸

In both *br g*, moreover, this osmosis between religious and civic values took specific forms in the sphere of participation in public life itself. Particularly in Lugano the council ruled that people could only hold public offices if they had sworn adherence to the *sacra unio* that had been solemnly proclaimed in 10 by Silvestro da Siena, a leading figure in preaching missions in the duchy explicitly directed also at pacifying factional conflicts through articulated paraliturgies.⁷⁹

74. ASCB, QC, 13, f. 4r, 7 August 1490; the two saints are defined as «patroni Burmii» in QC, 18p. 5, 24M arch 192.

75. ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 2, f. 75r, 19 April 14.

76. *Ib dem*, f. 117v, 7 July 18 f. 94, 17 May 14; f. 130r, 10 January 18

77. *Ib dem*, f. 130r, 10 January 18

78. ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 3, 12 June 163.

79. This pacification effort is evidenced in the resolution urging men aged 14 and older who had not participated in the proclamation by the friar to take the oath, and by a subsequent council measure that, subscribing to the same peace, banned the playing of dice and cards: ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 1, f. 21v, 18 December 10; f. 5r, 5 September 14. This sworn concord followed the one established in Como: Elisabetta Canobbio, *Dalla città al villaggio: aspetti dell'insediamento dei Minori osservanti nella diocesi di Como (secolo XV-inizio secolo XVI)*, in Letizia Pellegrini, Gian Maria Varanini (eds.), *Fratres de familia. Gli inse-*

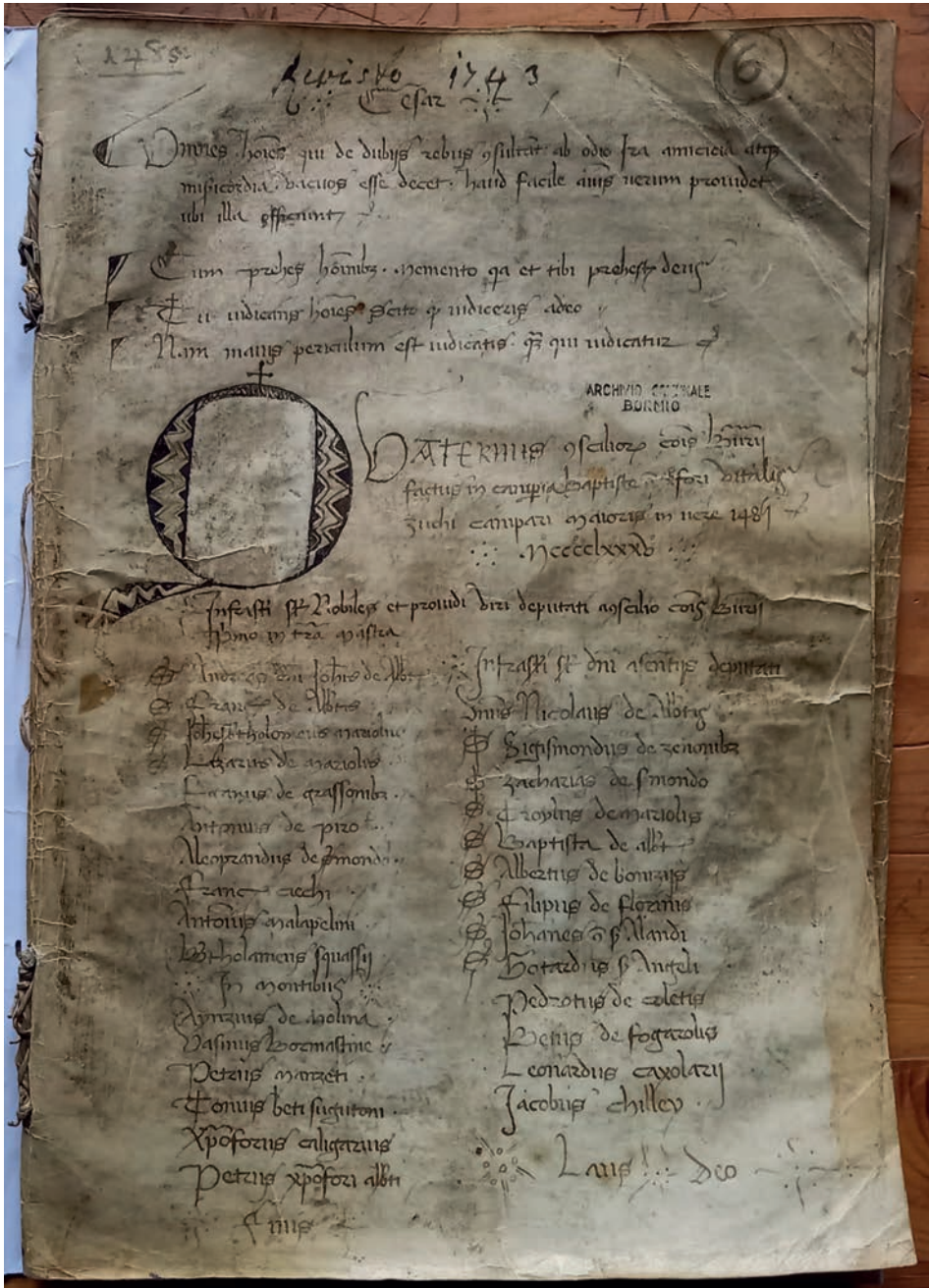


Fig. 1. The first instance of the mottos about human and divine justice typical of Bormio's registers of council proceedings (source: ASCB, QC, 818)

In 14, the Lugano council passed a resolution to renew this union, making it compulsory for every male at least 14 years of age to take an oath to it under penalty of exclusion from public office.⁹

The *offitia* benediction solemnized the beginning of each of the three *sortes* into which the administrative year of Bormio was divided⁸ but, more broadly, the local magistracies' entire sphere of activity was understood to be inspired by the values of divine justice. This aspect is made explicit in the mottos from the 10s penned on the covers of the *quat erni consiliorum* («Cum prees hominibus memento qo d tibi prest Deus» / «Cum loqe ris de Deo, scito qi i iudiceris a Deo» / «Nam maius periculum est iudicantis quam qui iudicatur»). Such mottos were mainly accompanied by other, ethically focused formulas that became one of the identifying elements of the council's proceedings, almost as if serving as a reminder of the values deemed necessary for collective living.⁸

7. Concluding remarks

In summary, in Lugano and Bormio the council resolutions delineate the extension of collective action in the sacred sphere. The councils frequently intervened in the administration of church property, in the care of buildings and the enhancement of their sacred furnishings as well. However, they also deliberated on the organisation of religious ceremonies, which were to be officiated with decorum and continuity by clerics capable of satisfying the spiritual needs of the people.

The responsibilities of communities in the administration of church incomes undoubtedly became central within this set of practices in fifteenth century. Focusing on these practices in larger parts of the Alps will therefore enable us to measure this crucial area of collective political action, as well as to clarify its origins and identify local peculiarities in a comparative perspective with more well-known case studies in other parts of Europe.⁸

diamenti dell'Osservanza minoritica nella penisola italiana (sec. XIV-XV), Verona, Cierre, 2011, pp. 75-99: 78-79.

8. ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 2, f. 2v, 8 January 14; Giuseppe Martinola, *La pace del 1445 fra i guelfi e i ghibellini luganesi*, in «Bollettino Storico della Svizzera Italiana», 26/1, 1951, pp. 54-55.

8. ASCB, QC, 6, f. 7v, 29 October 18; QC, 18 p. 3, 2 March 192; Della Misericordia, Comune ecclesie, p. 7.

82. The first instance appears in 1485 on the cover of ASCB, QC, 8, p. 1 (fig. 1). For a discussion of the mottos on these registers that valorised aggressiveness as long as it was enacted in the service of the "patria", see Massimo Della Misericordia, *L'iniziazione violenta: le relazioni individuali, l'azione collettiva, la guerra*, in Antonacci, Della Misericordia, *La guerra dei bmbni*, pp. 33-57: 57.

83. On the large competences of lay parish officers see above all Beat Kümin, *The Bapng of a Community. The Rise and Reformation of the English Parish c. 100- 150*, Aldershot, Scolar Press, 1996; Pascal Vuillemin, *La prise en main des paroisses*, in Marie-Madeleine de Cevins, Jean-Michel Matz (eds.), *Structures et dynamique religieuses dans les sociétés de l'Occident latin*,

Secondly, the sacred seems to have been very effective in representing collective membership, complementing the rhetoric of council deliberations, which proposed decision-making unity as an idealised model for the arduous search for shared consensus.

Evidence of this can be observed in the decisions made in Bormio regarding the most significant religious feasts, as well as in the devotions that characterised the activities of the council.⁸ With respect to Lugano, the aforementioned decision on *rogationes* is indicative, as is a resolution approved in 1511 which stipulated that one member of each family was obliged to attend the funerals in the village and communal territory, under penalty of five *soldi*.⁵

However, beyond these insistent calls for unity, any analysis of the communal action underlying the organisation of religious life should also consider the concrete interactions between the various entities involved in the dynamics outlined by the deliberations. These relations were in fact changeable and fluid, for example due to competition between spaces shaped by the various community organisations.⁶ In Bormio, decisions regarding the multiplication of churches in the commune seem to have primarily strengthened community identity at a supra-local level – in line, for example, with the practices of integration that facilitated the proper functioning of the communal government itself.⁸ In 1500 the council authorized the *anziani* of the church of Saint Niccolò in Valfurva to involve hamlets scattered throughout the valley in the repairs of the building and twenty years later, the same «contrate» were called upon to contribute to the construction of the church of Saint Barbara in Bormio.⁸ On the contrary, in Lugano some resolutions about ceremonial life might also have been driven by the need to reaffirm the unity of the parish territory on a ceremonial level, as this unity had been eroded for several decades, as mentioned above, by the centrifugal pressures of villages striving to promote their churches as fulcrums of pastoral care. Evidence of this necessity is documented in the investigation ordered in 1511 to ascertain the obligations of the communities in maintaining the church of

Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010, pp. 229-22: 231-234 <https://doi.org/10.1000/books.pur.131223>; Immacolata Saulle Hyppenmeyer, *Nachbarschaft, Pfarrei und Gemeinde in Graubünden 1400-1600*, Chur, Kommissionsverlag Bündner Monatsblatt-Desertina, 1997. A recent overview of these entities in Italy in a comparative perspective in Andrea Tilatti, *I conti in ordine. Primi approcci per una ricognizione e una interpretazione dei libri contabili di pievi e parrocchie friulane (XIV-XV secolo)*, in Andrea Tilatti, Roberto Alloro (eds.), *Redde rationem. Contabilità parrocchiali tra medioevo e prima età moderna*, Sommamacampagna, Cierre, 2016, pp. 9-8 on Central Alps, see here bibliography in note 4

⁵ See §.

⁶ ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consiglieri, 2, f. 192r, 28D December 1511.

⁷ Della Misericordia, *Rituals*; Della Misericordia, Comune ecclesie.

⁸ The people's council, in particular, comprised representatives from both the *burgenses* and the valleys encompassed within the communal territory: Besta, *Bormio*, pp. 157-158

⁸ ASCB, QC, 11, f. 8, 18 January 1500; on the construction of Saint Barbara see Della Misericordia, Comune ecclesie, p. 4 and Della Misericordia, *Le origini di una chiesa*, p. 8.

Saint Lorenzo.⁸⁹ Indeed, this seems to be the context in which we should interpret the previously mentioned decision concerning funerals, or a later made in 1470: this deliberation stipulated that a procurator from the community and one from the family of the Capitano di Valle should summon everyone in the village and communal territory – «de focho in focho» – to take part in the litanies.⁹⁰

Finally, with regard to the decision-making process more broadly, the resolutions considered here concretely outline the capacity of communities to detail their needs in the specific sphere of worship, articulating them in practice and negotiating them locally or with political and religious authorities. The specifics of these initiatives, which placed considerable reliance on the communities' capacity for mediation, are scarcely documented in councils' proceedings. Consequently, they can only be ascertained through the utilisation of other sources. In particular, the Sforza's correspondence with the northern districts of the Duchy highlights the promptness and tenacity with which local bodies took action against occasional attempts by the *domini* to dispose freely of community churches as well as against the broader objective to impose rigorous oversight over ecclesiastical institutions.⁹¹ The involvement of *vicini* in church governance was widely recognised by the diocesan authorities during pastoral activities, when allocating benefices, and when resolving disputes brought before the bishop's court, too. In the fifteenth century the bishop's visitors conferred upon local organisations substantial prerogatives in the administration of church assets and the care of sacred buildings in the valleys of the diocese of Como.⁹² In determining the obligations of priests paid by the communities and the distribution of income from pastoral activities (such as funeral offerings), the episcopal vicars took into consideration local statutes and customs.⁹³ Even the significant prerogatives by the commune of Bormio over the collegiate church was, to a certain extent, justified by the prevailing ecclesiastical authority. Following an extended period of contention (which was not evidenced in the council proceedings), in 1528 Bishop Cesare Trivulzio formally recognised the council's prerogative to elect the *canevarius*, in accordance with the archpriest and the canons, to supervise the administration of the resources allocated to the church's building and sacristy.⁹⁴

89. See note 35.

90. ASCL, AP, Registri e atti protocollari, Libri dei Consigli, 4f. 133r, 13 May 1470.

91. On the ecclesiastical policy of Sforza see bibliography in Canobbio, *8 rature della cura animarum*, pp. 8- 93.

92. Canobbio, *La visita pastorale*, pp. 8- 8. On the responsibilities assigned to laity by ecclesiastical authorities with regard to the care of sacred buildings, see also the case studies outlined in synodal regulations and visits by bishops from Aosta: Corniolo, *Pratiche di appropriazione*, pp. 199-220.

93. Massimo Della Misericordia, *Il prete del comune e l'ufficio della cura d'anime in diocesi di Como nel tardo medioevo*, in Federico Zuliani (ed.), *Una nuova frontiera al centro dell'Europa. Le Alpi e la dorsale cattolica (sec. XV-XVII)*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2020, pp. 103-131: 120-127.

94. The *canevarius* was *requi red to redde rationem* directly to the diocesan ordinary: Ilario Silvestri, *Soria del Capitolo di Bormio nei primi decenni del XVI secolo*, in «Bollettino Storico Alta Valtellina», 17, 2014pp. 93-120: 107.

The outlining of the strategies used from time to time to pursue these outcomes, resorting to diverse jurisdictional options or activating the most effective mediations, as well as the considerations of failures, are undoubtedly further promising areas of investigation into community decision-making processes.

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Intus and foris. Cultures of Space, the Alpine Environment, and Territorial Relations in the Language of Communal Documents (Bormio, 14th-16th Centuries)

ABSTRACT

The paper examines the wide range of deictic and, more generally, spatial references that more markedly diverge from the standard of notarial and chancery Latin found in the documentation of the commune of Bormio, especially in the Council's minutes. Documentary Latin is not immobile, and in the final two decades of the fifteenth century and the first two decades of the sixteenth the language written by all the town chancellors makes room for many forms of dialectal speech. This change, of course, can be explained by specific cultural, social and economic reasons. Even with the help of linguistic and ethnographic tools, which will allow us to focus on the relationship between «language and environment» (G.R. Cardona), the ultimate objective will be an analysis of spatial relations between the late Middle Ages and the early Modern Age, taking into account the political representation of territorial conflicts and the more general framework of an Alpine population's experience of the mountain ecological variety and transformation.

KEYWORDS: Communal records, Spatial representation, Alpine environment, Territorial conflicts

1. *Prologe*

The subject of this paper is the expression of space in the language of Bormio's Council registers, which survive in fragmentary form from the 1330s and then more

Translation by Sergio Knipe.

Unless specified, all the documentation cited below is kept in the Archivio storico del comune di Bormio: QC = *Quaterni consiliorum*; QD = *Quaterni datorum et receptorum*; QI = *Quaterni inquisitionum*; QR = *Quaterni receptionum*.

For an overview, see Lorenza Fumagalli *et al.* (eds.), *Archivio storico del comune di Bormio. Inventario d'archivio (1321-1971)*, Milano, Archidata, 1996. I would like to thank Pietro D'Orlando, Federico Del Tredici, Marta Mangini, Flavia Negro, Gianmario Raimondi, and Hitomi Sato for their comments on my paper, which I have tried to take into account. I would like to thank Davide Morra for designing the map (fig. 1). The historical photo of Bormio was provided by Ilario Silvestri; the other images published are by the author.

regularly from 1481 onwards. Here we will analyse them up to around the third decade of the sixteenth century.¹ This essay is intended as a contribution to the collective work that we are proposing to undertake on communal decision-making, its written record, and the underlying political culture.² A comparative interest in the use of either the vernacular or Latin in different areas of the Alps has already emerged within the DEMALPS – *Democracies of the Alps* project. The following pages will show that even the almost exclusive use of Latin in Lombardy does not mean that the written language was standardised and devoid of local connotations, nor that it was immutable. This will allow me to highlight those linguistic dynamics that I consider to be of particular historical importance.³

This study will be placed in a broader documentary context consisting of the surviving public documents from Bormio (especially accounts and judicial minutes), together with the notarial *imb eviature* from the same area. An in-depth analysis of the Council documents implies a preliminary examination of the fact that behind the minutes there lies a discussion, which can explain, to a certain extent, the interference between written and oral language. On the other hand, it should be noted that in Bormio, as in many other places, the record is generally confined to the decisions which were made, without taking the course of the meeting itself into account.⁴ The case is different with the drafting of judicial *qat erni*: the greater importance attached to the witnesses' and disputants' words made these documents increasingly faithful to the actual exchanges on which they were based.⁵ The language of the Council *qat erni*, on the other hand, is no different from that of the revenue and expenditure *qat erni*: although the latter are not based on a similar oral context, they were compiled after the implementation of the Council's decisions and constantly refer back to the relevant record. Where the original ties have been preserved, it is still possible to detect how the minutes of Council meetings were stitched together with some more specialised deeds (such as records of *securitates*) from the same *sorte* (one of the four-month periods – spring, summer, and winter – which marked the commune's administra-

1. Marta L. Mangini, *I Quaterni consiliorum trecenteschi di Bormio nel panorama delle fonti di matrice consiliare*, in «Nuova rivista storica», 9, 2005, pp. 45- 8.

2. Marta Gravela, *Medieval Alpine Communal Politics under the Spot light . The ERC Project DEMALPS*, in «Studi di Storia Medioevale e di Diplomatica», n.s., 7, 2023, pp. 45- 76.

3. For a recent historical analysis of Latin and vernacular documentation, see Paolo Buffo, Fabrizio Pagnoni, *Traffici e scritture mercantili tra Bergamo e il Garda. I registri di Bartolomeo Avvocati (146 149)*, Udine, Forum, 2023, pp. 9- 93.

4. See Lorenzo Tanzini, *A consiġ io. La vita politica nell'Italia dei comuni*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2014. François Otchakovsky-Laurens, Laure Verdon (eds.), *La voix des assemb ées. Quelle démocratie urbi ne au travers des reġ stres de déliġ rations? Méditerranée-Europe, XIII^e au XVIII^e siècle*, Aix-en-Provence, Presses universitaires de Provence, 2022; Ermanno Orlando, Gherardo Ortalli (eds.), *Le delibere consiliari dei comuni italiani. Uno sgar do comparativo a partire dai Misti del 8 nato di Venezia*, Venezia, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2023.

5. See Denise Bezzina et al. (eds.), *Giustizia, istituzioni e notai tra i secoli XII e XVII in una prospettiva europea. In ricordo di Dino Puncuh*, Genova, Società Ligure di Storia Patria, 2022.

tive activities).⁶ The Council documents went through at least a double drafting: a first draft, which was evidently closer to the time of the actual discussion, on paper, which has rarely survived; and a second one on parchment, as a more official record of political affairs. At least as far as the linguistic phenomena on which we will focus are concerned, however, I have not detected any significant differences between the two phases. In addition to these main series of documents, we find sparser and more practical writings, such as records of auctions and the documents left by the *caniparius b adorum*, the person in charge of the commune's grain store, which are less rigid from a formal point of view and therefore potentially more absorbent of linguistic exceptions.

Finally, with regard to the broader communicative context, I would like to point out that, in addition to the various spoken dialects, Latin as the language of documentation and chronicles,⁷ and the Tuscan-influenced vernacular which was used in the political relations with the Duke of Milan and his magistrates,⁸ multilingualism in the Bormio area was reinforced by dealings with their German and Romansh-speaking neighbours. As a rule, German was not well understood and important documents required a translation, either into Latin or the vernacular.⁹ This need obviously became more pressing when Bormio became subject to the Three Leagues in 1512.¹⁰ Bormio's administrative Latin – a Latin with a rather uncertain syntax and spelling¹¹ – was thus immersed in a stream of words and writings in different languages and did not maintain a purist's imperviousness to external influence.

In the following pages, within this framework, we will examine the wide range of deictic¹² and, more generally, spatial references that diverge more markedly from the standard of notarial and chancery Latin found in the documentation of the commune of Bormio, especially in the Council's minutes. Even with the help of linguistic and ethnographic tools, which will allow us to focus on the relationship between «language and environment» in the terms introduced in Italy by Giorgio Raimondo Cardona, the ultimate objective, given the limits of my expertise, will be an analysis of spatial relations between the late Middle Ages and the

6. In the following pages, the abbreviations s.v. «in sorte veris» (spring), s.e. «in sorte estatis» (summer), and s.h. «in sorte hiemis» (winter) will be used.

7. Cristina Pedrana, *I Memoranda*, in «Bollettino storico Alta Valtellina», 18 2015, pp. 111-12.

8. Serenella Baggio, *Osservazioni di carattere storico-linguistico*, speech at the presentation of the book by Gianluca Battioni (ed.), *Carteggio degli oratori sforzeschi alla corte pontificia*, 1. Niccolò V (27 febbraio 1447-30 aprile 1452), Roma, Roma nel Rinascimento, 2013 (Milan, 16 December 2014); Silvia Morgana, *La lingua (secoli XIII-XVI)*, in Paolo Ostinelli, Giuseppe Chiesi (eds.), *Storia del Ticino. Antichità e medioevo*, Bellinzona, Casagrande, 2015, pp. 451-462, 619-621.

9. QC, 1509:04 12.

10. QD, 1536, s.e.; 154s .e. etc.

11. For example, as the reader will notice, movement towards something is often constructed using the ablative. I will avoid pointing out any irregularities below.

12. See Federica Da Milano, *La deissi spaziale nelle lingue d'Europa*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2005.

early Modern Age, taking into account their socio-economic implications as well as the needs of political representation within the more general framework of an Alpine population's experience of space.¹³

2. *The documentary language of movement and location*

In the last years of the fifteenth century, the Bormio documentation shows a marked increase in spatial determination, with the infiltration of colloquial expressions into bureaucratic Latin which, on the basis of even more fragmentary documentation, we can say were still absent in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.¹⁴

A first significant, if still rather indirect, clue is the multiplication of phrasal verbs (*verb sintagmatici*, as Raffaele Simone has defined those constructions consisting of a verb and an adverb that, when combined, acquire a specific meaning that is either derived from the sum of the two components or is of a figurative nature).¹⁵ First of all, these verbs, which are widely in use in Alpine and Po Valley dialects,¹⁶ reflect – along with other indicators that we cannot examine here – the influence of oral speech on the Latin in which the Bormio documentation was written. Also significant is the presence in these structures of the particles that, as we shall see, are used to express movement or position in a territory, which is the focus of our analysis. This is evidence of a cultural and social continuum in which spatial relations constituted a central category. Positional adverbs

are used to form an impressive amount of phrasal verbs, a datum that documents the role of spatial orientation as a strategic metaphorical source for shaping general experience. In this use, positional adverbs identify in the first instance the main axes of spatial orientation [...]. The motivation, however, is not always so direct and transparent.¹⁷

13. Giorgio Raimondo Cardona, *I sei lati del mondo. Lingua e esperienza*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 198, pp. 33-39.

14 See the QC in Folder 1. We also have complete or more often fragmentary records of revenues and expenditures that I have mostly consulted in their provisional location in the folders *Documenti medievali*, 1 and 2.

15. Raffaele Simone, *I verb sintagmatici come costruzione e come categoria*, in Monica Cini (ed.), *I verb sintagmatici in italiano e nelle varietà dialettali. Stato dell'arte e prospettive di ricerca*, Frankfurt a.M., Peter Lang, 2008 pp. 13-30. See also Daniela Guglielmo, *Parlare coi "verb sintagmatici"*, in Massimo Pettorino, Antonella Giannini, Francesca M. Dovetto (eds.), *La comunicazione parlata*, Napoli, Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale, 2010, 3/I, pp. 3-21.

16. Giuliano Bernini, *Per una definizione di verbi sintagmatici: la prospettiva dialettale*, in Cini (ed.), *I verbi sintagmatici*, pp. 141-157: 155-156. See also Emanuele Miola, *Che cosa resta di Cherub ni oğ? Due casi di studio*, in «Italiano Lingua Due», 8 1, 2016, pp. 232-23.

17. Michele Prandi, *Ground-oriented Deixis: Theoretical Implications and Empirical Data*, in «Archivio glottologico italiano», 103, 2018 pp. 59-74 See also Gabriele Iannaccaro, *La lingua del paesaggio montano*, lecture delivered within the cycle *Paesaggi storici del mandamento di Sondrio. Temi, strumenti e prospettive*, 11 December 2020, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcRIruivV&t>.

Some attestations may be relatively expected (*went out* instead of *exited*, *went down* instead of *descended*).¹⁸ Others are highly evocative, both in terms of their vernacular flavour and of the immediacy of the action in space or the actual movement of the body they suggest. Wages were paid to the two persons in charge «ad accipiendum sursum certa arma communis».¹⁹ Payments were made for the rope installed in the communal palace «pro trahendo sursum aqua m»²⁰ and for the expenses «in faciendo sursum stamagnas in stuffis palatii», i.e. for closing the shutters in the heated room of the public palace.²¹

The language of accounting is unconventional. The *caniparius maior*, the person in charge of the commune's finances, was entitled to «accipere extra a qi buscumqe [].. habentibus intus de here communis omnes illos denarios et res».²² Having established a *tağ ia* (extraordinary tax) by a majority vote of the *Consilium ordinarium* (Ordinary Council), which was supported by the *Deputati ad sententias* (judges) as well as deputies from the village and the valleys, two men were elected to «recipere intus denarios dicte talee» who were not allowed to «dare foris ipsos denarios aliqi bus personis» without the opinion of another Council of sixty men.²³

The use of prepositional phrases, which is to say compound structures instead of simple prepositions, brings us even closer to our subject. As we will see, these phrases are used in conjunction with place names to describe territorial relationships.²⁴ The communal bell (called Baiona) was moved several times in the late fifteenth century due to the work of raising the public tower, and in 1490 it had to be temporarily relocated. On this occasion, compensation was offered to the person in charge «conducendi extra Baionam a ture in ecclesia Sanctorum Gervasii et Protasii».²⁵

As regards movement in the spaces of the village, in the accounts of the ambushes and chases that accompany brawls, we frequently come across expressions such as «eundo ipse Leonardus sursus per viam audivit unam vocem dicentem “caveas te Leoarde”»²⁶ or «obviaverunt Menicho pictore et Antonio eius fratri cum armis similiter qui peregebant infra per viam».²⁷ The

18. E.g. in court papers: «ivit foras» (QI, 1502:02:15); «venit deorsum» (QI, 1501:10:21).

19. QC, 190: 03:19.

20. QD, 1500-1501, s.h

21. QD, 154 -154, s.h. For the dialect lexicon, see Glicerio Longa, *Vocabl ario br mino*, Tirano, Associazione G. Longa, 1975²; Remo Bracchi, *Il dialetto di Bormio attraverso i secoli (profilo lessicale diacronico)*, in «Rivista archeologica dell'antica provincia e diocesi di Como», 164-198, pp. 5-110.

22. QC, 193: 10:23.

23. QC, 194 01:07.

24. See again Prandi, *Ground-oriented Deixis*.

25. QC, 1490:06:05. See Enrico Besta, *Bormio antica e medioevale e le sue relazioni con le potenze finitime*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1945, p. 186; Ilario Silvestri, *Note storiche sulla Torre delle Ore di Bormio*, in «Bollettino storico Alta Valtellina», 15, 2012, pp. 31-4.

26. QI, 1502:02:05.

27. QI, 1502:02:11.

square is also crossed according to a specific orientation: «dum transiret sursum per plateis communis».²⁸

When prepositional phrases are associated with a toponym, they indicate the basic territorial relations that define Bormio's layout (fig. 1). We can begin with the primary axis between the town and its outlying areas: what is *outside* is, first of all, the surroundings of the town. Thus, when epidemics made it necessary to convene councils not in the grid of the inhabited area, but in nearby and external churches that could exert their propitiatory power over those present, the minutes record that the meetings were held «foris in prato de Sancta Barbara»,²⁹ or at the church of Saints Fabiano and Sebastiano, «sitta foris in Ruynazia».³⁰ The first of these two sacred buildings was also a crucial environment for the management of epidemic emergencies in other respects: the *spazatores* were paid for two nights and two days of lodging «foras ad Sanctam Barbaram».³¹

Outside and *inside*, however, likewise indicated movement along the valley furrows. As is well known, in a complex space such as the Alps, the dimensions “high” and “low” are expressed by the local populations according to further modulations.³² The centre of Bormio is located at an altitude of 1,225 metres above sea level on a valley floor where three major valleys with permanent settlements converge: Valdisotto (from the south), Valfurva (from the east), and Valdidentro (from the west) (fig. 2). To the north there are also valleys with smaller (Fraele) or no (Braulio) settlements, which are nonetheless important for farming, metalworking, and transit.³³ The great road that came up from Valtellina via Valdisotto reached the town and then branched off; the two main routes were those of Fraele and Braulio. Finally, beyond the watershed, and to the north-west of the town, there extended the long valley of Livigno. In order to express position and movement in such a jagged space, in the language of the Bormio documentation we find the distinction between high/low in the sense of the depth of the valleys – with “inside” describing the place further upstream and “outside” the place located more externally according to the direction in which the stream flows – and “up/down”, when the main element perceived is altitude.

The “inside/outside” polarity articulates the space of the two main valleys that extend upstream of the village, Valdidentro and Valfurva. The commune donated land to the church which was built at the highest altitude among the

28. QI, 197: 05:15.

29. QC, 1520:07:22.

30. QC, 1522:06:*

31. QD, 1521-1522, s.h

32. See e.g. Martina Irsara, *Ladin*, in Konstanze Jungbluth, Federica Da Milano (eds.), *Manual of Deixis in Romance Languages*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2015, pp. 10- 166; Andrea Martocchi, *Deissi ambientale nei toponimi dialettali di Piuro (SO) tra «livellamento cartografico» e realtà etnolinguistica*, in «Bollettino dell'Atlante linguistico italiano», 3/9, 2025, pp. 251-268

33. Ilario Silvestri, *Le strade dell'Umbra e dello Stelvio dal Medioevo al 1900*, Bormio, Parco nazionale dello Stelvio, 2001; Ilario Silvestri, *Val Fraele, storia e immagini di persone, luoghi, maglie e malghe*, in «Bollettino storico Alta Valtellina», 24/2021, pp. 51-10.

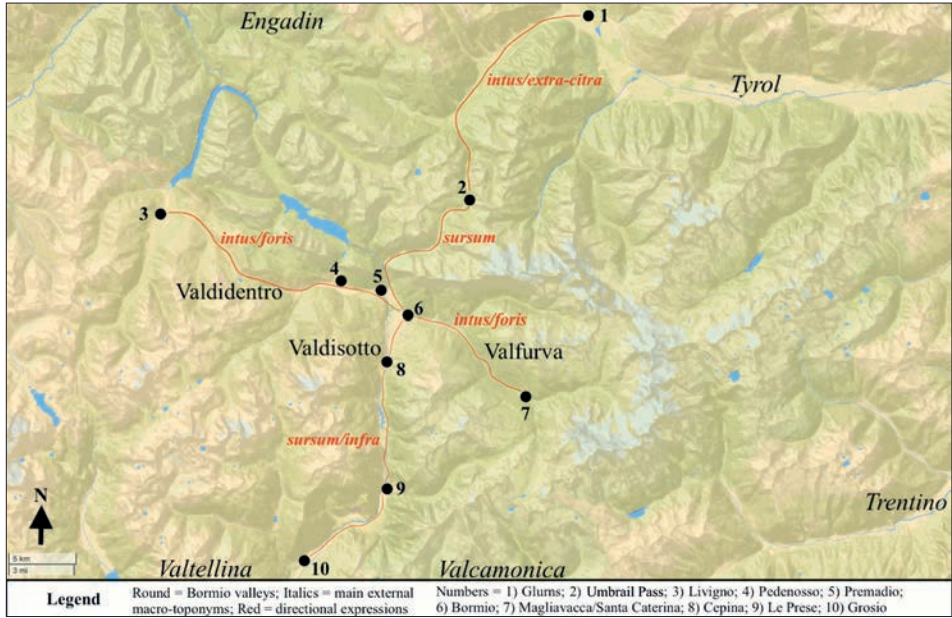


Fig. 1. Map showing the fundamental spatial orientations in the Bormio area (graphic by Davide Morra).

Fig. 2. View of Bormio and its surrounding cultivated countryside at the beginning of the twentieth century.

sacred places in the second valley, to the east, in a temporary dwelling station (Magliavacca, or present-day Santa Caterina): «quod ecclesie Sancte Chataline de Maliavacha sint date et largite pertice qi nqe tereni communis intus ad Maliavacam et prope ipsam ecclesiam». ³⁴ In a westerly direction, wages were recorded «aptandi crucifixum iacentem intus ad Drazam in Toyo» (the cross marking the entrance to Valdidentro); ³⁵ and movement towards a village in the same valley was expressed as follows: «ire intus ad Premadium». ³⁶ The words «venire foras de Livigno» were instead used to describe the opposite movement converging towards the town. ³⁷

As already mentioned, the shift between altitudinal levels is described as occurring “up” and “down”. The preposition “above” was usually used to express the elevated position of a place with respect to a settlement or landscape markers such as a landslide. ³⁸ After an accident in the mountains, compensation was paid to those who had been engaged in recovering the corpse of a man «qi erat derochatu<s> supra Morignonum»; ³⁹ in times of plague, an open-air location was sought for the «locus torture positus supra Premadium». ⁰ “Above”, “up”, or – with a more complex prepositional phrase – “up in” are all used to describe the position of the Braulio Valley as a pasture, border, and road area. The commune of Bormio sent its representatives «supra alpem Numbralii in societate» with the «ambaxiator» (ambassador) of the Duke of Milan and those of the Duke of Austria. ⁴ A personal quarrel also flared up «sursum in Numbralio». ³ The route along the southern valley connecting the Bormio area to the Valtellina was envisaged as extending in the opposite direction. One went “down” towards the fortified passage that divided the two jurisdictions, as in the annotation to the payment for clearing the local road of snow («pro eius mercede rompendi viam infra ad Seram»). ³ Instead, one went up from Cepina, the main centre of Valdisotto, even to the intermediate stop at Fumarogo, or present-day Santa Lucia – the village immediately downstream from Bormio. ⁴

The need for a deictic component was also felt in relation to the internal articulation of the town, which converged on the square. The communal officials in charge of the main tavern (*taberna maior*) could not impose tariffs on the sale of wine (*bziare*) «in infrascriptis confiniis, videlicet incipiendo a domo Francisci qser Iohannis de Albertis iacente in Subripa in citra versus plateas communis et

34 QC, 1497:06:08

35. QD, 1491-192, s .h

36. QC, 1522:09:09.

37. QD, 1499, s.e.

38 QD, 154 153, s .h

39. QC, 1490:03:19.

0. QC, 1522:09:18

4. QC, 148 01:03.

2. QI, 1502:02:05.

3. QD, 154 153, s .h.

4 QI, 1502:02:11 («veniendo de Cepina sursum, qando fuerunt ad Fumarogum»).

a banno infra et a cruce Dorsi Ruayne in citra versus plateas» (the cross of Dossorovina was intended to mark the town's northeastern boundary), or from two other private dwellings, which were evidently located in the inhabited area's opposite sector, «in supra versus suprascriptas plateas».⁵

The space organised in this way radiated beyond the borders of Bormio's jurisdiction, northwards and southwards, along major routes which were important for trade, political relations and cultural transmission, but also for the polarisation of linguistic identities, and is well understood in the light of other Alpine cases.⁶ People would “go down” to Valtellina: the podestà of Bormio was assigned seven imperial liras «pro eundo infra ad Li Prexis conferendo cum magnifico d. capitaneo Vallistelline pro negotiis communis».⁷ Conversely, the people of Valtellina would “go up” to Bormio: a perspective reflected in the deposition given in Bormio by a man from Grosio who was involved in a brawl between wine porters in Cepina, which lay halfway between the two centres. «Dum ipse Iacobus [].. veniret sursum de Cepina», a quarrel broke out between the porters of Bormio and those of Grosio. A physical confrontation ensued and threats were made to the Bormio men, who were warned not to go “down” to Valtellina: «audivit ex dictis bubulcis [].. qui dixerunt: “si aliis ex dictis burminis venient infra per vallem [Tellinam] fatiemus etiam nos eis parere signum”».⁸ The outlets to the north were located “inside”; so if the Umbrail was “above”, what was transported across the Umbrail would go “into” the valleys of the Engadin or Tyrol: this was the case with Valtellina wine, a fundamental export for Bormio, carried «intus per montem Numbralii».⁹ In the opposite direction, people would come “out”⁵⁰ or at any rate – as in the case of salt, an equally important import for Bormio – “into here”, an expression evidently enriched with a deictic component.⁵¹

The jurisdictional distinction, within the League of God's House, between the upper Val Venosta and the Val Monastero – “above” and “below” the Calven gorge – was familiar to the people of Bormio. Sometimes the two were combined, as when the «homines Cadey habitantes subtu Chalavena et supra Chalavenam» were forbidden to send horses, mules, oxen, and cows «ad pasculandum [].. super aliqui bus paschulis, alpibus et possessionibus communis Burmii».⁵² At

5. QC, 193: 01:18

6. Paolo Benedetto Mas, Gianmario Raimondi, *Variabilità diatopica, costruzioni culturali, convergenza linguistica: per una ridefinizione del continuum dialettale della Valle d'Aosta*, in Massimo Cerruti et al. (eds.), *Continuo e discreto nelle scienze del linguaggio*, Milano, Officina-ventuno, 2025, pp.133-153.

7. QC, 1521:09:19.

8. QI, 194 01:17.

9. QR, 1500-1501, s.h

50. Compensation was given to those who «conduxerunt extra Valem Venostam» a man taken prisoner «in Fraelle» by the sons of the castellan of Rotund (Tubre, Val Monastero, which is today on the border between the province of Bolzano/Bozen and Canton Graubünden): QD, 199, s. e.

51. A penalty was foreseen for the «persona conducens sal ab Honodrio citra Burmium», i.e. from Nauders in the upper Inn Valley (QC, 1510:01:21).

52. QC, 194 05:22.

other times, however, a distinction was made, as when – a few years later – it was established that the «pecus hominum Vallis Venoste supra Kalavenam tantum non paschulent in Numbratio super terrenum burminum», tacitly permitting it to the other community.⁵³ The same geographic evidence marked the itineraries for reaching Bormio: a merchant was issued a remission «*qi a venit de Honodrio Burmium per viam supra Calavenam dummodo iret sine aliqa solutione pedagii de Clurno*»; thus it was an itinerary that was eventually allowed as long as he did not pay the duty of Glurns, which the commune of Bormio forbade to acknowledge and pay.⁵⁴ Without jurisdictional implications, it accompanied the dedication of a church-sanctuary: twenty men were sent with a cross «*ad ecclesiam Sancte Marie supra Kalavenam*» for a vow made by the commune.⁵⁵

These trajectories extended from the town to the area under its jurisdiction and then further into an outer space, making it legible, but which was still within the perimeter of the neighbouring valleys, without reaching the cities and the Po Valley: I am not aware of any record of the commune sending messengers “down” to Como or “down” to Milan to confer with the bishop or the duke, or even “into” Chur.

3. *Social and political experiences of space: institutional conflicts and ecological transformations*

Michele Prandi has distinguished between ground-oriented deixis and subjective deixis. In speaker-oriented deixis the *orig*, i.e. the point of orientation, «is mobile in that it coincides with the contingent position of the speaker at the very moment of the speech act», whereas in the ground-oriented deixis «it does not coincide with the contingent position of the speaker, but with a fixed point, typically located in the centre of the village».⁵⁶ In the documents we are examining, the *orig* coincides with the commune’s capital, the *terra* of Bormio, which is also where this written documentation was produced. If the *orig* refers to the space within the town, it is located even more precisely in the square and the public buildings.

These definitions suggest a range of explanations for the change we have recorded. First of all, it should be noted that the introduction of these forms does not depend on the activity of a particular scribe and his idiosyncrasies. They can be found in accounting records as much as in judicial records as Council minutes which were written down by several scribes. The Bormio administration was

53. QC, 1498:06:11. Cf. Paul Eugen Grimm, *Val Mü tair (valle)*, in *Dizionario storico della Svizzera*, 2013, available online at <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/00074> 2013-02-21/; Martin Bundi, *Venosta, Val*, in *Dizionario storico della Svizzera*, 2014, available online at <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/00710/> 2014-01-22/.

54. QC, 1510:10:12. See QC, 1510:10:15.

55. QC, 1501:08 04

56. Prandi, *Ground-oriented Deixis*, p. 62.

made up of several local notaries, who were among the owners of the rooms (*stazone*) which were rented by the commune itself: they held the office of scribes two at a time, who periodically abandoned and resumed their duties, alternating in changing pairs. During their *qa* trimester shifts, these pairs would either work together, taking turns to compile the same Council register, or they would divide the work; for example, one scribe would fill in the expenditure book and the other the revenue book. Moreover, these individuals' backgrounds were very diverse: the first significant spatial references we have, dating from the 1480s and 1490s, were recorded by members of the longest-lived local nobility (Leonardo and Giovanni Battista Marioli; Giovanni Alberti), and less prominent representatives of the elite who belonged to notarial dynasties and were very active in the communal offices (Pietro Sermondi). Other scribes and notaries were members of a family from outside Bormio who had settled in the town through the teaching and practice of the notarial profession (Taddeo and Filippo de Piro). It is therefore necessary to identify some horizons that were shared by those who recorded and handled these files in various capacities. There is also the figure of the chancellor, which is quite different from that of the two scribes: he was mainly responsible for the commune's epistolary output, and his background also varied considerably, as we shall see in some cases.

Some of the reasons for these new trends were undoubtedly cultural. In the Sforza era, the vernacular *acqi* red a new prestige as a documentary language through its use in political correspondence, which may have encouraged scribes to open up their Latin to dialectal forms. In Bormio, moreover, the classicist taste does not seem to have *acqi* red the paradigmatic value that it had elsewhere in the same period. This is suggested by onomastics, which is a strong indicator of cultural trends. The elite largely shared the repertoire of saints' names with the rest of the population, if anything using the double name as a mark of distinction: Nicholas and his son Gian Francesco were the two primary representatives of the Alberti family between the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. In their rival family, the Zenoni, who were suspected of having a pro-Tyrol orientation, the name of Duke Sigismund of Habsburg was adopted for a family member who was active in the second half of the fifteenth century, along with other more common names (Nicolino, Pietro). The Germanic tradition was not completely abandoned (Egano Grassoni), while the penetration of the ancient world by its example remained negligible (although an exception is Troilo Marioli). Bormio had a grammar school supported by the commune, and some rudiments of Latin could be learnt even in smaller centres: in 1521, the community of Cepina entrusted the education of its children to the curate.⁵⁷ The town school was well-known locally: Filippo Rumoni, the curate of Grosio, sent two of his children to study there in 1519.⁵⁸ Apparently, however, this educational milieu, to which the

57. Archivio di Stato di Milano (ASMi), Comuni, 12, Bormio, 1521:11:13.

58. Archivio storico del comune di Grosio, Beni comunali e ecclesiastici, 11, fasc. 1, f. 73v, 1516:07:09.

sons of notables and future notaries and scribes would have mostly belonged, did not cultivate or nurture purist sensibilities. There were close links between the town school and the notarial class: Antonio de Piro taught there for several years, and his son Taddeo worked as a notary, scribe, and procurator for the commune. Both of Taddeo's sons were notaries: Antonio was a scribe and a prominent politician in the commune; Filippo was less prominent as a representative of the community, but continued to specialise in writing as a teacher; he was temporarily employed in Montagna in 18 and then hired by the Council of Bormio, which appointed him scribe and sub-chancellor.⁵⁹ Despite their non-local origins, both Taddeo and Filippo fully shared the peculiar Latin of their colleagues. The double role of teacher and chancellor was also entrusted to Lazzaro Nigro of Piacenza⁶⁰ and Giuseppe Sermondi, who likewise held positions of great responsibility, such as mediating a dispute over the possession of tithes. The latter, unlike Lazzaro Nigro, was additionally a communal scribe.⁶¹

One factor that I would like to explore in more detail is that of territorial relations.⁶² First of all, we can consider political tensions because of their closer chronological relevance: precisely in the years in which this language was characterised in the way we have seen, the relations between the centre and the peripheries of Bormio changed. The territory's fundamental division was between the town – a monumental centre with high-quality private buildings where an elite of landowners, merchants, and notaries resided – and the valleys, which were highly dependent on those social functions which had been monopolised by the larger

59. Here I will limit myself to some evidence regarding their professional careers, while this profile of the Bormio ruling class is based on the available documentation: Massimo Della Misericordia, *La disciplina contrattata. Vescovi e vassalli tra Como e le Alpi nel tardo Medioevo*, Milano, Unicopli, 2000, p. 28; Archivio di Stato di Sondrio (ASSo), Archivio Notarile (AN), 47, f. 14r -v, 18: 03:19; QD, 190, s.e.; QD, 191- 192, s.h; QC, 193: 11:12 (on this occasion, in confirmation of the roles he already held, Filippo was appointed teacher and *sub ancularius* for one year; the commune provided him with the house in which he taught as well as 60 imperial liras, in addition to the wages he would have received from his pupils).

60. QC, 190: 07:09.

61. As we have seen, there was an organic relationship between the notarial profession and basic education: Marta L. Mangini, *Il notariato a Como. Liber matricule notariorum civitatis et episcopatus Cumarum (12 165)*, Varese, Varese University Press, 2007, p. 50. On the Po Valley area's rural context, see Christopher Carlsmith, *A Renaissance Education. Schooling in Bergamo and the Venetian Republic, 1500-1650*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2010, pp. 279, 28; Federico Del Tredici, *Maestri per il contado. Istruzione primaria e società locale nelle campagne milanesi (secolo XV)*, in Maria Nadia Covini et al. (eds.), *Medioevo dei poteri. Studi di storia per Giorgio Chittolini*, Roma, Viella, 2012, pp. 275-299; David Salomoni, *Scuole, maestri e scolari nelle comunità degli stati gonzagheschi ed estensi tra tardo medioevo e prima età moderna*, Roma, Anicia, 2017, chapter 4; Paolo Buffo, «Pregando che ay se debiaset scriver»: società, alfabetismo e mediazione grafica nella Bergamo tardomedievale, in «Studi di Storia Medioevale e di Diplomatica», n.s., 7, 2023, pp. 179-210: 18. For a more general overview, see Paolo Rosso, *La scuola nel medioevo. Studi VI-XV*, Roma, Carocci, 2018pp. 210-212.

62. For recent comparative research, see Francesco Panero, Giuliano Pinto (eds.), *Insedimenti, economia e società in aree di montagna. Appennino settentrionale - Alpi occidentali (secoli XII-XVI)*, Cherasco, Centro internazionale di studi sugli insediamenti medievali, 2023.

villa, although even the poorer villages had the capacity for autonomous economic activity. Livigno possessed a community and juridical life whose partial independence was recognised, but it was not represented in the communal bodies, as were the three *Montes* or valleys (Valdidentro, Valdisotto, and Valfurva), which were mediating bodies that represented the interests of the various inhabited villages which formed them. This complex configuration was characterised by centuries of tensions between the town and the hinterland, and it was exactly during the decades in question that small but not insignificant shifts in the local balance took place. Until 1465, the Ordinary Council was composed of 13 men from Bormio and three from the valleys. In 1483, the People's Council elected 13 councillors from the town and six from the *Montes*, which was an important step in a rebalancing that the valleys were also seeking in other judicial and executive bodies, but which they never fully achieved.⁶³

At the same time, transformations in the processes of settlement and the environment were underway.⁶⁴ Taken together, these are a myriad of minute actions

63. Massimo Della Misericordia, *Paesaggio, istituzioni, identità locali di una valle alpina nel tardo medioevo. Elementi per una storia sociale della Valfurva*, in «Bollettino della Società storica valtellinese», 60, 2007, pp. 27-69: 54-55, with the relevant references, as well as the essential data on the ecological context that follows.

64. Francesco Palazzi Trivelli (ed.), *Storia di Livigno. Dal medioevo al 1797*, Sondrio, Società Storica Valtellinese, 1995; Riccardo Rao, *Economic Sustainability vs. Environmental Sustainability: The Commodification of Environmental Resources in the Central Alps in the Late Middle Ages and the Animal Crisis (Upper Valtellina, 1300-1500)*, in «Journal of Interdisciplinary History», forthcoming. On Valtellina, see Guglielmo Scaramellini, Diego Zoia (eds.), *Economia e società in Valtellina e contadi nell'età moderna*, Sondrio, Credito valtellinese, 2006; Rita Pezzola (ed.), *Tracce minime. Le radici del medioevo nel territorio di Sondrio*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2022. For similar contexts, see Ross Balzaretto, Mark Pearce, Charles Watkins (eds.), *Ligurian Landscapes. Studies in Archaeology, Geography and History in Memory of Edoardo Grendi*, London, Accordia Research Institute, 2004; Paolo G. Nobili, *Vertova. Una comunità rurale nel Medioevo*, Fidenza, Nerbini, 2009; Alma Poloni, *Castione della Presolana nel Medioevo. Economia e società nella montagna bergamasca dal XII al XVI secolo*, Castione della Presolana, Comune di Castione della Presolana, 2011; Pierre Dubuis, *Aspetti della vita rurale (secoli XIII-XV) and Risorse, popolazione e congiuntura economica (secoli XII-XV)*, both in Ostinelli, Chiesi (eds.), *Storia del Ticino*, pp. 291-320, 581-586; Prisca Roth, *Korporativ denken, genossenschaftlich organisieren, feudal handeln: Die Gemeinden und ihre Praktiken im Bergell des 14.-16. Jahrhunderts*, Zürich, Chronos, 2018; Italo Franceschini, *Un'azienda agricola alpina del XV secolo: Santa Maria di Campiglio. Prime annotazioni*, in «Studi Trentini. Storia», 99, 2020, pp. 427-440; Jacopo Sasseria, *Un patrimonio signorile: il caso dei Federici di Valcamonica (secoli XIV-XV)*, in Federico Troletti (ed.), *Storia, arte e archeologia in Valcamonica, Sebino e Franciacorta. Studi in onore di don Romolo Putelli*, Capo di Ponte, Edizioni del Centro, 2021, pp. 35-44. For comparison, see for example the socio-economic examination of the late medieval Po Valley's landscape by Enrico Roveda, *Uomini, terre e acque. Studi sull'agricoltura della "Bassa lombarda" tra XV e XVII secolo*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2012; Matteo Di Tullio, *La ricchezza delle comunità. Guerra, risorse e cooperazione nella Geradadda del Cinquecento*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2011; Potito d'Arcangelo, *Anatomia di un territorio. Pizzighettone nel secondo quattrocento*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2012; Maria Nadia Covini, *Potere, ricchezza e distinzione a Milano nel Quattrocento. Nuove ricerche su Cicco Simonetta*, Milano, Mondadori, 2018; Federico Del Tredici, *Una terra senza nome. Sviluppo economico e identità collettive nella bassa pianura milanese (tardo medioevo-prima età moderna)*, in Paola Guglielmotti, Isabella Lazzarini

which highlight the pressing need for clarity regarding the spaces where they occurred, and that are reflected in the peculiar lexicon of the population settled in the mountains. Indeed, there is undoubtedly a way of experiencing all high-altitude places, the activities that take place there, and of the events – including tragic ones – that are linked to them which seems to remain constant throughout the centuries.⁶⁵ This suggests a particular emphasis on the positioning of things and people. Thus, communal documentation recorded typical mountain accidents in which it seems to have been urgent to characterise what happened both above and below the body. «Est storpiatus unius brachi propter unum lignum quem cecidit supra eum»;⁶⁶ «Tonius infirmatur ob unam lavinam que ruit supra eum»;⁶⁷ wine was poured «certis hominibus de Burmio qui iverunt quae stum cabalarios qui iverunt subtus lavinam [avalanche]».⁶⁸

On the other hand, certain communication needs are the result of more specific and determined conditions as well as the peculiar changes that have made this environment so diverse, with characteristics that are not necessarily common to all high valleys throughout the ages. Between the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern Age, new small, permanent settlements were established, as for example on the sunny slopes of Valfurva up to an altitude of about 1,700 metres; the temporary settlements in the high mountains reached an altitude of around 2,200 metres, while an underlying positive demographic trend can only be guessed at, even if it is not documented. The commune was at least partly responsible for these changes due to its control of natural resources, which placed it in constant interaction – and potential conflict – with small landowners and minor village communities. The commune sold *terre gas tive* (waste land) to private individuals for cultivation and authorised canalisation. Meanwhile, it protected the forests by issuing logging licences and fining offenders. It also levied taxes on the activities of kilns and smithies and granted permits for the construction of lime kilns. A particularly sensitive issue in the years when the language of the communal registers was changing was the leasing of pastures to outsiders, with the resulting delimitation of grazing rights for neighbouring communities of the valleys, which were in turn very unhappy with these conces-

(eds.), *Fiere vicende dell'età di mezzo*. *Studi per Gian Maria Varanini*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2021, pp. 111-128; Franco Cazzola, *Uomini e fiumi. Per una storia idraulica ed agraria della bassa pianura del Po (1450-1620)*, Roma, Viella, 2021; Attilio Stella, *Ai margini del contado. Terra, signoria ed élites locali a Sabbion e nel territorio di Cologna Veneta (secoli XII-XIII)*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2022; Tommaso Vidal, *Grano amaro. Lavoro contadino nell'Italia nord-orientale (secoli XIII-XV)*, Udine, Forum, 2023; Luca Zenobi, *Borders and the Politics of Space in Late Medieval Italy. Milan, Venice, and their Territories*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023; Franco Cazzola, Matteo Provasi, Rossella Rinaldi (eds.), *Contadini e comunità. Costruzione e difesa del territorio (secoli XIII-XVIII)*, Bologna, Clueb, 2024.

65. Jon Mathieu, *The Third Dimension. A Comparative History of Mountains in the Modern Era*, Cambridge, The White Horse, 2011, chapter 3.

66. QC, 195: 02:13.

67. QC, 199: 03:29.

68. QR, 199, s. p.

sions. An interesting degree of complementarity between general rule and political measures was accomplished with regard to the agricultural calendar: while it was largely fixed by the statutes, it was also subject to exceptions that took specific conditions into account, such as whether the year had been a good one or not. Thus, the Council's decisions made the *leg s* more flexible, for example by extending grazing, either generally or in specific areas, beyond the prescribed periods when the month of September was particularly mild, as happened at the end of several summer seasons in this warm climatic phase.⁶⁹ It is precisely from the exercise of this role as arbiter of the ecological balance that some of the records we have reported on arise.

The parcelling out of land also left room for autonomy for the expanding peasant holdings on new land; their daily activities gave rise to other significant records. The demarcation of land took the form of hedges and fences, with the whole family obliged to keep a close watch on crops and livestock, so much so that the owner of a horse kept within a fence met a neighbour «*qi conduxerat eqos extra cluxuram suprascriptam et dixit "qod vis facere de meis eqi s? Dimitte mihi eqos !"*».⁷⁰ A woman complained in court that her stepchildren «*posuerunt eqos suos supra fenum ad comedendum ad despetum et contra voluntatem suprascripte Iacobe*».⁷¹ This world of mountain farmers should not be reduced to the stereotype of a mere defence of poor and parcelled land, however, since it proved capable of innovations that led to the development of the available environmental resources. Examples include terraces and canalisation works, which, as we have already seen, now makes it possible to trace an "outside", a "below" and an "above", and an "inside" and a "beyond" (fig. 3).⁷²

Because of the practical need to ensure the coexistence of undivided land, private estates, and collective rights of use over the same land while respecting variable time limits and taking care of the various crops, local institutions established numerous boundaries that economic actors had to respect, further multiplying the circumstances in which it became necessary to specify the limits of "inside" and "outside", "between" and "beyond". Firstly, the commune drew the broadest boundaries "between" its own territory and that of its neighbours, which had to be respected by those who felled wood or took livestock to pasture.⁷³ The commune itself divided the countryside into micro-environments where, for example, grazing was allowed at certain times, or where it was reserved for local

69. «*Quod pascua debeant prolongari per octo dies et plus etiam ad voluntatem officialium, et hoc intelligatur etiam tam in montibus quam in plano*» (QC, 1505:09:25). Exceptions were made to the statutory law (Lyde Martinelli, Sandro Rovaris [eds.], *Statuta seu leg s municipales communitalis Bormii tam civiles quam criminales - Statuta ossia leg s municipali del Comune di Bormio civili e penali*, Sondrio, Piccolo credito valtellinese, 1988 pp. 196-199, chapters 196-198 and to customary practices, for example with the extension of eight days «*post solitum*» (QC, 1533:09:15).

70. QI, 188 09:16.

71. QI, 194 02:21.

72. QC, 198 06:15.

73. Inventario dei beni del contado di Bormio, f. 4 and further, 1553.



Fig. 3. Terraced slopes in Valfurva (photo: Massimo Della Misericordia).

farmers or outsiders, such that the latter were not allowed to «transire aut transgradire (sic) ultra eorum confinia sibi data et assignata per dictum commune». ⁷⁴ It also distinguished between economic transactions: it allowed and forbade them, depending on where they took place, within or outside the *sqa re*, or within or outside the perimeter of the town. It did so with the sale of certain products, such as chestnuts and wine «ultra confinos (sic) platee», ⁷⁵ or else the wine sold to the «homines de Monasterio et de Sancta Maria extra terram mastram Burmii». ⁷⁶

Although less concretely visible on the ground, these lines specified the conditions under which imports, exports, and other activities carried out by the inhabitants could occur. Thus, in one of potentially countless cases, someone was condemned for selling cows «extra territorium Burmii», ⁷⁷ while a special licence from the Duke of Austria authorised the commune to «conducere extra Vallem Venostam» a large amount of rye. ⁷⁸ These limits were likewise relevant to the state, as for example when the unauthorised armed engagement of subjects was prohibited: «quod nulla persona de Burmio nec in eo habitans [...]. audeat nec presumat ire cum armis nec sine armis extra territorium Burmii in favore nec in detrimento aliqua rum personarum sine licentia dominorum Trium Ligarum et communitatis Burmii secundum dispositionem statuti». ⁷⁹ Given this project's

74 QC, 1522:07:21.

75. QC, 1493:05:13. «Extra plateis» in QC, 1485:05:25.

76. QC, 148: 05:26.

77. QC, 1509:01:02.

78 QC, 1466:02:14

79. QC, 1515:12:31.

specific focus, I have favoured Council documentation for these quotations, but obviously a close equivalent to this set of rules is to be found in the statutes. More generally, the whole legal system, both civil and criminal, was a major determinant of space. Location qualified a crime and contributed to the degree of its punishment, not to mention the weight of boundaries in the attribution of disputed rights of ownership. A dense network of boundaries, both private and institutional, appears in all its relevance in the Bormio judicial document as a great incubator of frictions and, at the same time, as a criterion for their resolution, as we have partially seen when speaking of the culture of small property.⁶

Again, what leads to the development of cognitive abilities enabling a more attentive and complex orientation is a space dense with symbolic elements, often due to the initiative of communities operating at different settlement levels. The church of San Gallo, under the patronage of the villages of Premadio, Molina, and Turripiano,⁷ as well as those crosses sacralising the transition into the Valdidentro and the north-eastern boundary of the village, acquired a directional significance. Even aside from the sacred buildings or the more modest devotional markers in which the local communities invested, the Bormio commune's commitment to monumentalisation was quite impressive. The square was already saturated with eloquent corners: someone admitted to illegally selling hides «in plateis, super lapidem grossum».⁸ The square was framed by public buildings, most notably the tower, the palace, and the *Copertum*. This last structure has survived to the present day, albeit in a modified form, and is known as the *Kàrc*.⁸ It was a large canopy that housed the court, when the season permitted, and exceptionally, the Council itself.⁸ Its function as a shelter inspired a vivid account of an ambush which was laid by some assailants «evenientes de subtu Choperto».⁸

The important role played by private and collective rights in the definition of these spaces helps explain the overlap between the language of Council registers and that of demarcation, patrimonial inventory, and the notarial registration of cultivated plots, which I will examine here on the basis of the Bormio documentation.⁶ The acts of demarcation of communal territories and resources involved

6. Giulietta Gavazzi, *Giustizia e conflitto nel contado di Bormio. Onore, identità sociali e ruoli familiari nella seconda metà del Cinquecento*, Sondrio, Società storica valtellinese, 2025.

7. QC, 150: 01:19 («ad viam de intus de Sancto Gallo»).

8. QI, 197: 04 13.

8. Liliana Martinelli Perelli, *Bormio medioevale. Vie di comunicazione e strutture urbane*, in «Nuova rivista storica», 56, 1972, pp. 315-335.

8. Inventario dei beni del contado di Bormio, f. 2v, 1553 («habet Copertum unum supra dictam plateam sub quo redduntur iura tempore estatis»); QC, 1522:09:30 («convocatum et congregatum fuit de novo Consilium dicti communis ordinarium seu asentatum sub Coperto iurium dicti communis»).

8. QI, 197: 05:15.

8. See Rita Pezzola, *Rappresentare i paesaggi delle Alpi. Le scritture del notaio Ruggero Beccaria per l'ospedale di S. Romerio di Brusio e di S. Perpetua di Tirano*, in Marina Gazzini, Thomas Frank (eds.), *Ospedali e montagne. Paesaggi, funzioni, poteri nei secoli medievali (Italia, Francia, Spagna)*, Milano-Torino, Pearson Italia, 2021, pp. 133-179.

observation and movement in the directions described so far.⁸ In the *Inventarium* compiled by Giuseppe Sermondi and Nicola Fiorini, which monumentalised Bormio's topography from the square to its borders with the neighbouring communes, a boundary marker was placed between two bridges, «subtus viam per quam m itur ad Sernez».⁸ From its position the same marker would guide the gaze to recognise the boundary lines, itself "looking" up and down. One of the markers which divided the territories of Bormio and Sondalo, «in Plagera inter comune Burmii et comune de Sondalo», was placed «in monticulo sive dorso cui dicitur Stemon sive lo Dos delli termini, qui terminus respicit in sursum versus sumitatem montium».⁹ The communal territory was also articulated internally: in 1309, the commune commissioned the compilation of a *Quaternus confinium* to divide the area of summer mountain pastures from that of spring and autumn pastures (*sentiti*) in the strip where there were private properties and interspersed settlements. As points of orientation, the surveyed valley neighbours adopted buildings, watercourses and springs, bridges, and so on from which they moved *infra/inferius*, *supra/superius*, *intus/interius*, *extra* (sic), and *ultra*.¹⁰ The statutes in turn incorporated this design, for example in the division of the areas of alpine pastures which were reserved for the local population and those leased to shepherds from outside the commune, as starting from a stream and moving «intus».¹¹

The notaries often struggled with the task of detailed localisation when it came to demarcating tithe rights or identifying individual parcels of land that had been sold or leased. With regard to the former, I would like to mention that in order to trace the boundaries of the tithes of Molina, Gian Battista Marioli, who repeatedly served as a scribe as well as a communal magistrate, used markers that also feature prominently in the communal documentation (the «crux de Toyo», the «ecclesia Sancti Iohannis de Molina», the «via mastra communis», the «pons de Premadio», a «flumen aque», a «fillum saxorum»), with respect to which one moved «a meridie», «a sero», «sursum recte» «usque ad [...]».¹² The same

8. Massimo Della Misericordia, *I confini dell'economia. Dividere le risorse e delimitare il possesso nella montagna lombarda del tardo medioevo*, in Giorgio Chittolini, Elisabetta Conti, Maria Nadia Covini (eds.), *Nell'età di Pandolfo Malatesta. Sgor e a Bergamo, Brescia e Fano agli inizi del Quattrocento*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 2012, pp. 24-324 also for the bibliography available on the subject at that date. On a nearby border area, see Marta L. Mangini, *Le pergamene degli archivi parrocchiali di Val San Giacomo (1216-1567)*, in Guido Scaramellini (ed.), *Il comune unico di Val San Giacomo*, Chiavenna, Centro di studi storici valchiavennaschi, 2007, pp. 135-275: 234-236, doc. 6. On the relationship between mountain practices and boundary markers, see Osvaldo Raggio, *Immagini e verità. Pratiche sociali, fatti giuridici e tecniche cartografiche*, in «Quaderni storici», 36, 2001, pp. 3-36. In general, see Luigi Provero, *Contadini e potere nel medioevo. 8 secoli IX-XV*, Roma, Carocci, 2020, pp. 62-67.

8. ASCB, *Inventario dei beni del contado di Bormio*, f. 5v, 150: 10:17.

9. *Ibidem*, f. 6r, 154: 07:18

10. Remo Bracchi, *Divisione tra alpi e «enti» a Bormio nel 1309*, in «Bollettino della Società storica valtellinese», 51, 1998pp. 31-94

11. Martinelli, Rovaris (eds.), *Statuta seu leges municipales*, p. 278c chapter 305.

12. ASSo, AN, 602, ff. 347v-348r, 1507:07:03.



Fig. 4. The Ceisa di Sopra area (1,961 metres above sea level) (photo: Massimo Della Misericordia).

markers were used to locate properties, such as those bequeathed to the Consorzio di Santa Maria di Marzo «sub ecclesia Sancti Petri de Castello», «in contrata de Via Maiore [... apud crucem de Via maiore]», or «in contrata de Dosso Rovina [... apud crucem de Dosso Rovina]».⁹³ Having to ensure the unambiguous recognition of sometimes quite parcelled-out properties, notaries often had to specify an overly broad toponymic referent according to the coordinates “above” and “below”: Lazzaro Marioli, Gian Battista’s father, wrote «in Vale Resumbii, supra pontem de Maliavacha, ubi dicitur ad Ceysam» (referring to a locality roughly at the height of the Magliavacca/Santa Caterina bridge in terms of the valley’s depth, but above it in altitude, with a difference in height of about 200 metres) (fig. 4).⁹⁴ A mill that another communal scribe, Giacomo Fogliani, had inaccurately located «in Valle del Sevruiio seu ad Furvam» was better located, in the same document, «in Valle del Sevruyo, modicum de supra pontem de Furva Plana», i.e. in all likelihood in the same nucleus of *Furva Plana* (present-day Sant’Antonio) along the course of the Zebrù stream.⁹⁵ Considering the different rates of occurrence of the terms used, it seems that it was more common to fix a point and then go up rather than to go down, probably because, in practice as well as in people’s minds, one started from the settlements and infrastructures at the bottom of the valley

93. Documenti medioevali, 1, fasc. 14 f. 4, 1362, f. 4, undated (the date of the testamentary will is not given, but it must have been drafted before 1375, when the inventory was drawn up); f. 15r, undated.

94. ASSo, AN, 27, f. 391r, 162: 12:15.

95. ASSo, AN, 570, ff. 270v-271r, 1519:01:04.

(the village of *Furva Plana*, the Magliavacca bridge). There was no shortage of alternative options, however: Gian Battista Marioli again placed the *novus* land, i.e. land to be cultivated, sold by the commune, «in Burmio, ad Furvam, videlizet subtus pontem de Carantano, propter presuras del Pantanazio», near the course of the Frodolfo stream.⁹⁶ In Valdisotto, in the late eleventh century, the property of the monastery of Sant'Abbondio in *Profa* included a «Profa de Meço», and in the fifteenth century it was said to extend between a «Profa de Campo» and a «Profa de Subtus».⁹⁷ Again, one of our notary-scribes, Gian Antonio Bonizi, when trying to locate a meadow in a valley outside Bormio which was mortgaged in favour of an inhabitant of Valfurva, referred to the “inside/outside” trajectory: the meadow was said to be located in the territory of Ponte di Legno, in the district of Precasaglio, «ubi dicitur ay Pra' de Intus».⁹⁸

In short, the mountains' socio-economic context, although clearly a more long-term chronological factor than political conflicts, nevertheless presents well-defined and dated trends. The legal framework in which these processes unfolded is that of a combination of communal property (and authority), the collective rights of minor valley communities, and medium-small private property. The sometimes tense coexistence between them characterises this context in the historical period under investigation with respect to other political and socio-economic forms – both earlier and later, coexisting and competing – which operated in the same spaces and explored other altitudinal levels with their respective territorial *nomos*: the royal/imperial demesne in the early Middle Ages, then the conspicuous patrimony of an urban monastery, and in the last century and a half, the mountains' tourist infrastructure, the area's hydroelectric exploitation, and the state's militarisation of the border.⁹⁹ Late medieval Bormio reflects – in

96. ASSo, AN, 602, f. 267r-v, 1507:03:02.

97. Liliana Martinelli Perelli (ed.), *Carte del monastero di S. Abndio di Como. Dalla fondazione all'anno 1000*, Milano, Unicopli, 2009-2011, pp. 31-33, doc. 14 Archivio storico della diocesi di Como, *Bonorum ecclesiasticorum*, I, f. 25r-v, 14: 02:23.

98. ASSo, AN, 999, ff. 114v-115r, 1531:05:10.

99. For different types of medieval organisation of this territory during the medieval period, see Liliana Martinelli Perelli, *Possedimenti del monastero comasco di S. Abbondio nel Bormiese da un inventario del 1316*, in «Rendiconti dell'Istituto lombardo. Accademia di scienze e lettere. Classe di lettere», 108, 1974, pp. 861-917; Liliana Martinelli Perelli, *Ancora sui possedimenti bormiesi del monastero comasco di S. Abbondio (sec. XIV)*, in «Studi di storia medioevale e diplomatica», 4, 1979, pp. 17-44; Liliana Martinelli Perelli, *Alle origini della proprietà fondiaria di S. Abbondio (secoli XI-XIII). Primi rilevamenti. La Valtellina*, in *S. Abbondio. Lo spazio e il tempo. Tradizione storica e recupero architettonico*, Como, New Press, 1984, pp. 146-169. Elsewhere, in the Adda Valley, proper seigniorial developments have also been studied in a classic text: Cinzio Violante, *Un esempio di signoria «territoriale» nel secolo XII: la «corte» di Talamona in Valtellina secondo una sentenza del Comune di Milano*, in Christine Renardy (ed.), *Mélanges Labande. Études de civilisation médiévale (XI^e-XII^e siècle)*, Poitiers, Centre d'études supérieures de civilisation médiévale, 1974, pp. 739-749; as well as in a very recent study by Ross Balzaretto, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose. Monks and Society in Early Medieval Milan*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2019. See also Rita Pezzola, *Cosio e le terre-cerniera tra alto Lario, Valtellina e Valchiavenna: protagonisti e poteri (secc. IX-XII)*, in Rita Pezzola, Alessandro Rovetta (eds.), *La chiesa di San Martino di Cosio Valtellino. Storia, arte, vita religiosa*, Morbegno,

some ways, to a higher degree – the characteristics that define the central Alps' development during the same period. Here, communities with very different aims and resources – including towns, large villages, and small hamlets – managed collective assets, safeguarded and regulated tenaciously enduring smallholdings, shaped economic activities in accordance with the needs of social integration, and at the same time invested in symbols of collective identity by building churches or erecting simple crosses that became landmarks,¹⁰⁰ or by establishing structural elements within the built fabric ranging from palaces to meeting halls.

A territory more finely articulated and traversed by political tensions, and which required constant institutional mediation, thus fostered the kind of sensitivity for qualitatively richer locations that appears in the public documentation, together with a more descriptive approach to actions in space that drew on the expressive resources of everyday language. A solid confirmation of these hypotheses is the change – which is recorded in the Council documents – in the place names themselves, which began to stabilise for the valleys precisely during the period in question.

In the Bormio area, toponymy seems to indicate a greater permanence in the names of agricultural estates than in those of the villages and valleys. This phenomenon can be understood on the one hand as the result of an attempt to make the most of a rather infertile soil by differentiating between crops depending on variations of altitude and sunlight exposure, leading to the parcelling out of the land. In short, the economic strategies of diversification as well as the tenacious socio-cultural rootedness of micro-ownership led to the designation of almost every corner of the land which was handed down from generation to generation. On the other hand, the shaky identity of those settlements controlled by Bormio stands out: it is as if they were swallowed up by the *terra mastra* (the main centre), to the point that an autonomous rural commune did not emerge in the countryside until the administrative reforms of the Napoleonic era. Even important symbolic markers such as churches, with their benefices, were subject to the powerful appeal of the vast territorial system's pivot, as is shown by the fact that the curate of the Valdidentro area closest to the town was identified as the rector of the church «Sancti Gali de Burmio».¹⁰¹

It is therefore revealing that, as we have seen, many village names from the sixteenth century onwards were replaced by those of the saints to whom the local churches were dedicated, and thus faded into oblivion. Similarly unstable are the names of the valleys or *Montes*, which were meant to fulfil the challenging task of providing unity – by mediating political representation – to fragmented territories scattered with villages and which were internally divided, even from a geographical perspective. Smaller valleys opened up in

Ad fontes, 2018, pp. 13-35. On the historical uses of different mountain altitudes, see most recently Andrea Zannini, *Controistoria dell'alpinismo*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2024.

100. See Paolo Ostinelli, *Il governo delle anime. 8 rotture ecclesiastiche nel Bellinzonese e nelle Valli ambrosiane (XIV-XV secolo)*, Locarno, Dadò, 1998p. 302.

101. ASSo, AN, 251, f. 8v, 18 :03:29; Archivio di Stato di Como, Atti dei notai, 106, f. 87r, 1528 05:22.

the major valleys. What was lost was the very sense of the location of these sub-units within a whole that was evidently weak from an institutional and perceptive point of view. The upper part of Valfurva, which was only inhabited in the summer months, was identified by means of a special macro-toponym that has also been lost in the course of the Modern Age: the valley or even district (*contrata*) *de Resumbio*.¹⁰² Contrary to geographical reality, notaries did not place it *in Vale de Furva* but directly within the territory of Bormio. In Valdidentro, unlike in Valfurva, the division affected permanently inhabited areas, thus acquiring greater institutional significance. At the entrance to the valley there was a unified area consisting of the villages of Premadio, Molina, and Turripiano, which had been consolidated as a parish community. The more distant sector was called Valle di Pedenosso or was otherwise identified through a reference to Pedenosso. These two poles required a balancing of resources and political representation in the valley. In some cases, on the other hand, *Vallis de Pedenosso* seems to have been a way of referring to the whole of Valdidentro, thus placing it on the same level as Valfurva and Valdisotto in terms of the allocation of offices or the distribution of taxes. In the same way, the uncertain unity of Valdisotto – which was populated by several villages that carried out a variety of activities, from trade to the commissioning of sacred art – is revealed by the competition between the general toponym and the one based on the primary centre: «Vallis de Suptus» was already mentioned in 1309, in the aforementioned division between summer alpine pastures and *sentiti*, but in medieval times the most common designation was *Vallis de Cepina*, or an even more generic one (*in partibus de Cepina*).¹⁰³

A point of arrival was the territorial grid underlying the cover of the Council minutes for the summer of 1533. The representation of the village and the valleys was, and would be, normally schematised within the same graphic space according to the usual hierarchical principles (first on the list were the titled councillors) and a simple territorial division of the list: «in Burmio» and «in Montibus» (fig. 5). On this occasion, however, the place of residence was expressed as «ad Furvam», «in Valata Inferius», and «in Valata de Intus» (fig. 6). For this representation of the community, toponyms were therefore adopted for the three valleys that have remained unchanged to this day. No less than two of these toponyms were based on the appropriate directional element according to the aforementioned way of orienting oneself in the mountain space. Only Valfurva continued – and would continue – to be named after the main village, but the popular name for its inhabitants, *furic(h)*, was probably derived from the valley's position, which was perceived to lie “outside” of Bormio (*foris*).¹⁰⁴

102. For this circumscriptional designation, see QD, 1375, s.e.

103. Ilario Silvestri, *Cenni sulla storia della Valdisotto*, in Gruppo toponomastico di Valdisotto (eds.), *Territorio comunale di Valdisotto*, Sondrio, Società Storica Valtellinese, 2003, pp. 14-22: 15.

104. Remo Bracchi, *Segestioni toponimiche in Valfurva (una terra di santi)*, in «Bollettino della Società storica valtellinese», 60, 2007, pp. 83-101: 84-85. See also Elio Bertolina, Mario Testorelli (eds.), *Territorio comunale di Valfurva*, Sondrio, Società Storica Valtellinese, 1978

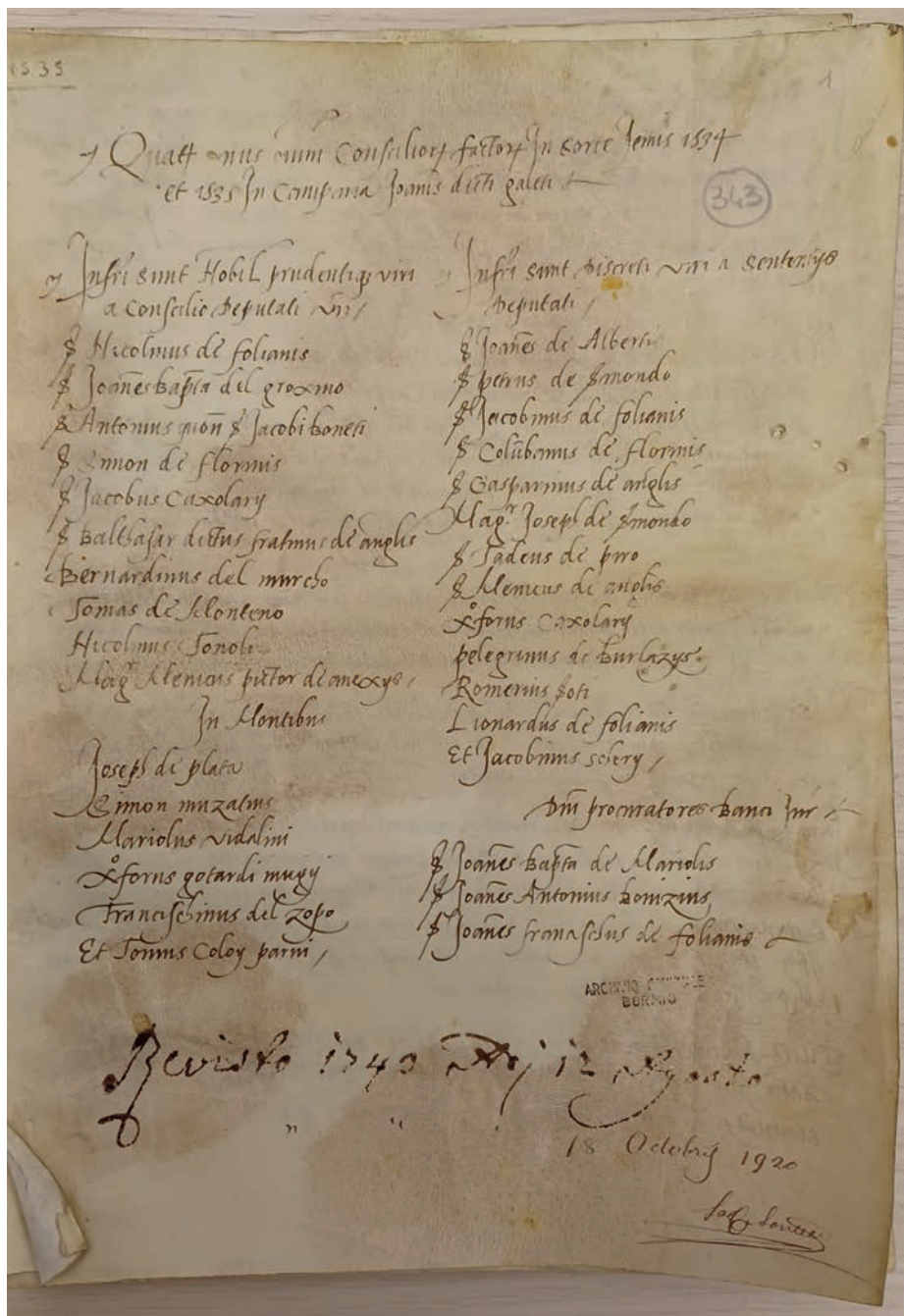


Fig. 5. Archivio storico del comune di Bormio, Quaterni consiliorum, 1534 sors hiemis, cover.

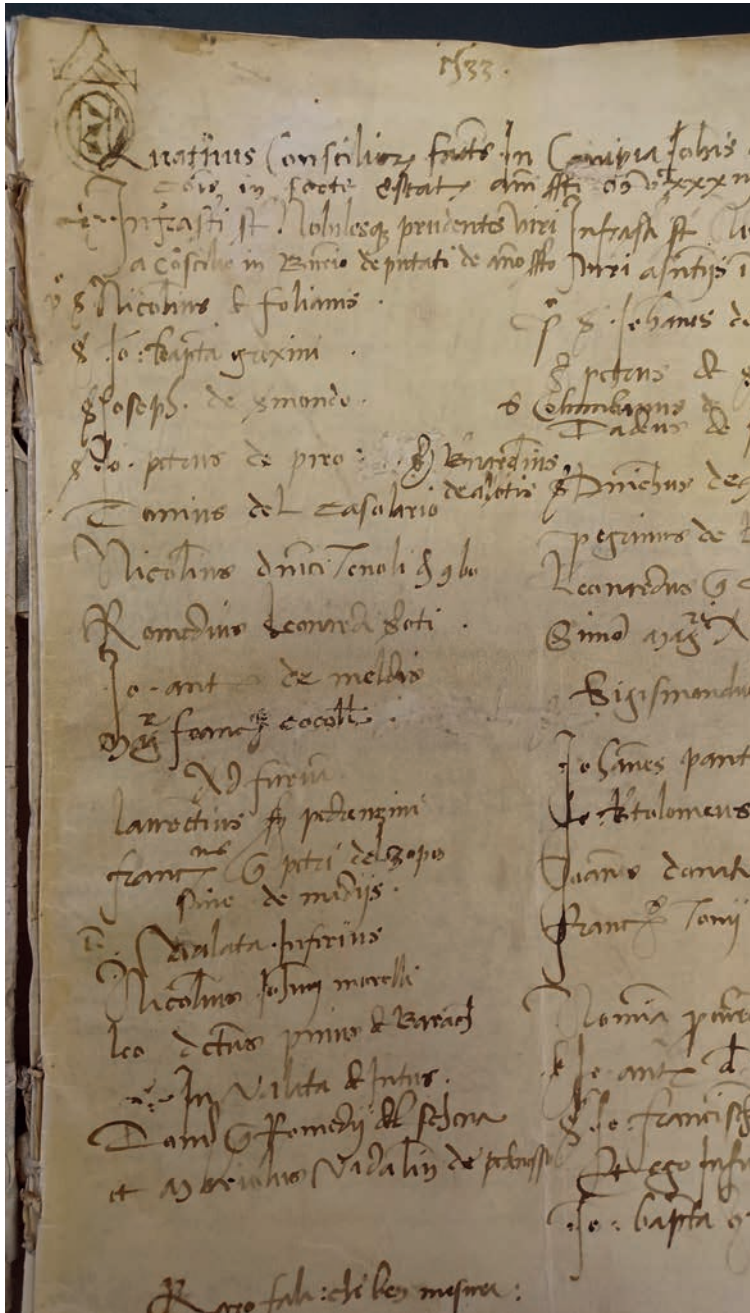


Fig. 6. Archivio storico del comune di Bormio, *Quaterni consiliorum*, 1533, *sors estatis*, detail of the cover.

Once again, a point of comparison is provided by the notarial documents, which also changed between the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries to give these articulations of the territory the visibility that their inhabitants in some way demanded politically. In 1477 a place deep in Valfurva, on the left slope of the valley and more than four kilometres away from the town, was directly connected to it and was recorded as «in Burmio, ad Calveranam». As early as 1497, a multi-level way of locating places was established which also used the valley and the village as reference points: «in Burmio, in Valle de Furva, in cultura de Surdo, ubi dicitur ad Planum» (today, the village *de Surdo* is called San Gottardo, while the micro-toponym *Plan* *de* *t* survives). Personal places of residence underwent a similar development: in 1422, an inhabitant of the same valley was registered as Antonio «de Blancho de Burmio». In 1520 Giovannina was instead called – again by Giacomo Fogliani – «de Foledralio [present-day San Nicolò] de Burmio sive de Vale de Furva communis Burmii».¹⁰⁵

4 *Changes and comparisons: representations of the mountain environment*

The expression of spatiality is particularly substantial in this documentation. For both Sondrio and Chiavenna, a single communal register has been preserved for the period in question, but it is much more heterogeneous than the Bormio *quarta* *terreni*. Political decisions are essentially formalised by recording those present and the expenses approved, together with the taxes to cover them, but other material is also included, such as tenders for the collection of customs duties (in Sondrio), correspondence with the Duke, and tax rolls (in Chiavenna). These documents, which were written in rather unsophisticated Latin, are not constrained by rigid formulas, so they could have provided rich references regarding location and descriptions of movement, like the Bormio material. Instead, they offer very few interesting occurrences for our purposes. Leaving aside the vernacular letters preserved in Chiavenna, I have only noted the expense recorded in Sondrio «pro emendo unum scripnum cum duabus saraturis et glavibus supra pro reponendo et gubernando intus scripturas et iura communis».¹⁰⁶ Evidently, Chiavenna's more urban profile, as well as the weaker connection of Sondrio's elite to a truly Alpine context (although the commune included Valmalenco), did not impose the same communicative needs on the compilers of these registers.

Even in the Bormio documents the phrasal verbs and deictic terms we have been considering probably experienced a partial decline in the registers that continued to be written in Latin. In any case, the window that has opened up in this documentation over several decades is extremely significant, not least for

105. ASSo, AN, 112, f. 34, 122: 12:28 Della Misericordia, *Paesaggio, istituzioni, identità locali*, pp. 9–52.

106. ASSo, Fondo Romegialli, 33, fasc. 1/3, f. 14r, 19: 12:12; Archivio capitolare di Chiavenna, Consigli comunali di Chiavenna, 166–19.

the methodological insights it can provide. I would argue that a multidisciplinary reading of these languages allows us to reach dimensions rarely explored by historical research, both through the predominantly institutional approach to “territorial organisation”, which is attentive above all to the structures of its stabilisation, and through the microanalysis of the “local space” traversed by tensions and shaped by the actions of individuals, groups, and communities.¹⁰⁷ Thanks to the tools of linguistics and ethnography, it is possible, in a broader sense, to address a spatial behaviour that was concretely enacted, ritualised in ceremonial events such as processions, and expressed through spoken and written words, proxemics, and gestures, with their whole bodies conveying the positions of things or the routes taken by people.¹⁰⁸ This communicative precision, attentiveness to the spoken word, memory, and care for and personal interest in detail were necessary to operate effectively in a field where no patch of land – because of its cultivation or legal classification, which was sanctioned not only by written documents, but also by actions and traditions – seemed equal to another. The same orientation criterion extended to neighbouring valleys connected by busy roads, but – significantly – not to the more distant regional centres of Como, Milan, and Chur, which were outside the local territorial system.¹⁰⁹

On the other hand, it is true that, in the field of linguistics or ethnography, one can run the risk of overestimating the sharing of mental maps of places and the continuity over time of what is treated as an expression of the culture of those populations which were settled in the mountains, as detected in the present or in the last years of the life of traditional peasant society and projected backwards, while disregarding possible discontinuities that may have occurred. Historical investigation, then, can complement the insights I mentioned with the specific contribution represented, as in our case, by the verification of how much one of the languages of a territory – here the language of Bormio’s communal documentation – can change over a circumscribed period, and by the reconstruction of a specific juncture and context in order to explain the change. Over a medium to long period of time, at the end of the Middle Ages, as the pressure on natural resources intensified, the morphology of these mountains was enriched with articulations, from new settlements to property delimitations, which were reflected in a finer toponymic mesh and in more deeply rooted ways of expressing orientation and movement. Local identities became more precise, fostering demands for recognition as well as parochial rivalries,

107. See Giorgio Chittolini, Dietmar Willoweit (eds.), *L’organizzazione del territorio in Italia e Germania: secoli XIII-XIV*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1994; Renato Bordone et al. (eds.), *Lo spazio politico locale in età medievale, moderna e contemporanea*, Alessandria, Edizioni dell’Orso, 2007.

108. Specifically, see Elwys De Stefani, *Per un’analisi del parlato-in-movimento. Aspetti interazionali e multimodali del riferimento deittico in conversazioni tra partecipanti mobili*, in Pettorino, Giannini, Dovetto (eds.), *La comunicazione parlata*, pp. 34- 362.

109. Oliviero Franzoni, *Segni di confine. Gli eventi*, Breno, Banca di Valle Camonica, 1996, p. 133.

while also creating social frictions and forcing the negotiation of new territorial balances, even over short periods of time. This analytical path can thus reconstruct the dynamics by which the human transformation of an ecological framework, changes in political representation, and visions of space interact in a local culture.

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Beat Küin in

Transalpine Perspectives

The special issue *Collective Voices in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Alps. Council Proceeding of Mountain Communities (1300-1530)* presents important new insights gained from a remarkable set of sources: minutes of thousands of local political meetings with tens of thousands of attendees. By zooming in on exchanges beyond courts, capitals and social elites in the Western Alps, the authors pursue the kind of «history from below» pioneered by E.P. Thompson in Anglophone historiography and Peter Blickle in the German-speaking world.¹ Once focused on «great men», affairs of state, written norms and learned discourses, the study of premodern government has since expanded in terms of arenas (towns, villages, parishes, households), agents (burghers, peasants, women, marginals), occasions (rituals, processions, resistance), records (petitions, grievances, popular print) and spheres (metaphysical, public).² Rather than «merely» going micro, moreover, these tendencies have helped us to understand macro transformations such as the Reformation or the emergence of the modern state, both now perceived as processes of multilateral negotiation involving local stakeholders rather than just impositions from above.³ And while premodern Europe was dominated by monarchical regimes, we now recognize republican alternatives not just in the *comuni* of medieval Italy and treatises of Renaissance thinkers (with repercussions as far as the American revolution), but also other contexts such as imperial cities, villages and highly autonomous towns in the

All the websites were last accessed on 20.12.2025.

1. Seminal works include E.P. Thompson, *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century*, in «Past and Present», 50, 1971, pp. 76-136; Peter Blickle, *Obdient Germans? A Rebirth*, Charlottesville-London, University of Virginia Press, 1997.

2. Wayne te Brake, *Shaping History: Ordinary People in European Politics 1500-1700*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998; Samuel K. Cohn Jr, *Lust for Liberty: The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1200-1425*, Cambridge-London, Harvard University Press, 2008.

3. C. Scott Dixon, *The Reformation and Rural Society: The Parishes of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach 1527-1635*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996; Wim Blockmans, André Holenstein, Jon Mathieu (eds.), *Empowering Interactions. Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe, 1300-1900*, Farnham-Burlington, Ashgate, 2009.

German lands, rural and urban cantons of the Swiss Confederation and the Dutch provinces following their independence from Spain.⁴

The Alpine world, with its relative distance from centres of power, challenging climate and terrain, territorial fragmentation, distinct socio-economic profile and multicultural influences, has emerged as a particularly fertile ground for “bottom-up” historical investigations over recent decades. Apart from comparative anthologies on late medieval local religion and early modern points of conflict,⁵ there have been monographic studies on “democratic” political language, premodern notions of fundamental rights, religious change, “scattered” forms of organization, variants of communal government, fractious social relations and resistance to external lordship, with the Grisons, Valais and Ticino in present-day Switzerland, Bavaria in Germany and the Austrian Tyrol among areas attracting closer attention.⁶

The ERC funded DEMALPS project, conceived and directed by Marta Gravela at the University of Turin, represents fresh departures in terms of transnational perspectives (across French, Italian and Swiss regions), source type (council and assembly minutes from local communities) and its distinctive (born digital) methodology.⁷ Having gone through the preceding contributions, readers will likely marvel at the sheer volume and wide distribution of archival materials (surveyed here for the first time), grasp the diversity of the records (reflecting variables such as constitutional structures, formal presentation, notarial involvement

4 John G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003²; Martin van Gelderen, Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Republicanism: A European Heritage*, 2 vols., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002; André Holenstein, Thomas Maissen, Maarten Prak (eds.), *The Republican Alternative. The Netherlands and Switzerland Compared*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2008; Beat Kün in, *Imperial Villages. Cultures of Political Freedom in the German Lands, c.1300-1800*, Leiden, Brill, 2019; Philip Haas, Martin Schürer, *Die Autonomiestädte der Frühen Neuzeit*, in «Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung», 50/1, 2023, pp. 1-60.

5. Simona Boscani Leoni, Paolo Ostinelli (eds.), *La chiesa «dal basso». Organizzazioni, interazioni e pratiche nel contesto parrocchiale alpino alla fine del Medioevo*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2012; Marco Bellabarba, Hannes Obermair, Hitomi Sato (eds.), *Communities and Conflicts in the Alps from the Late Middle Ages to Early Modernity*, Bologna-Berlin, Il Mulino-Duncker & Humblot, 2015.

6. Randolph C. Head, *Early Modern Democracy in the Grisons. Social Order and Political Language in a Swiss Mountain Canton, 1470-1620*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995; Renate Blickle, *Politische Streitkultur in Altbayern. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Grundrechte in der frühen Neuzeit*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter-Oldenbourg, 2017; Caroline Schnyder, *Reformation und Demokratie im Wallis (1524-1613)*, Mainz, Philipp von Zabern, 2002; Sandro Liniger, *Gesellschaft in der Zerstreuung. Soziale Ordnung und Konflikt im frühneuzeitlichen Graubünden*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2017; Prisca Roth, *Korporativ denken, genossenschaftlich organisieren, feudal handeln. Die Gemeinden und ihre Praktiken im Bergell des 14.-16. Jahrhunderts*, Zürich, Chronos, 2018; Marco Polli-Schönborn, *Kooperation, Konfrontation, Disruption. Frühneuzeitliche Herrschaft in der alten Eidgenossenschaft vor und während des Leventiner Protestes von 1754/55*, Basel, Schwabe, 2020; Maria Heidegger, *Soziale Dramen und Beziehungen im Dorf. Das Gericht Laudegg in der frühen Neuzeit – eine historische Ethnographie*, Innsbruck, Studien-Verlag, 1999.

7. The homepage is located at <https://demalps.com/>.

or storage solutions), benefit from an enhanced understanding of their contents (relating to e.g. distribution of political rights, patterns of representation, preservation/extension of communal privileges, balancing of contrasting interests, search for internal consensus, optimizing of external relations and mitigation of crises) and know more about the existing historiography on this source type.

These brief remarks, formulated from a transalpine – especially Germanic and Anglophone – perspective, build on observations made during a project workshop held in Turin in July 2025, where drafts for the special issue were first discussed. Some – relating e.g. to terminology and illustrations – have fed into the revised versions published here, others have emerged since. The following reflections are structured in two parts, starting with personal impressions gained from the articles and concluding with perceived implications beyond the Western Alps alongside suggestions for further development. Rather than as points of critique, the latter should be taken as evidence for the stimulating nature of the DEMALPS agenda.

1. *Comments on individual contributions*

The project director's *Introduction* sketches the general context (of growing engagement with popular politics), the relative neglect of rural areas (not least in the Western Alps), the wealth of surviving records of political meetings (foregrounded by all authors) and the themes of the ensuing articles by DEMALPS researchers. While the issue title encompasses the whole late medieval and early modern period, the papers zoom in on the centuries between 1300 and 1530.

Marta Gravela and Jean-Paul Rehr then reflect on the methodology of the project. Its «native digital» approach emerges as an innovative attempt to deploy technology not just as a preconceived framework or medium of dissemination, but to mobilize it at all stages, from the conception of the original application via the successive programme phases to the interpretation of results. Aptly described as a «living infrastructure», digital components like the master database and homepage are set to continuously evolve, allowing for modifications prompted by archival discoveries, unexpected thematic extensions, the fruits of ongoing scholarly exchange and possible dead ends. The driving forces, in other words, are the historian's need and ethical principles of verification, transparency and accountability rather than just what advanced software renders feasible. Yet, high flexibility and agile workflows come with their own challenges, especially in a scenario where multiple researchers engage with varying source materials from distinct contexts at different points in time. As the co-authors recognize, «[r]eorganizing data “on the fly” requires rebuilding parts of the corpus whenever the database model evolves», which – over the lifespan of the project – may result in a highly complex architecture. These, and related risks of working with movable parts, need to be borne in mind. Various safeguards and quality controls have thus been put in place.

Chiara Corradini opens the presentation of project results with a survey of relevant source types identified in archives along the edge of the Piedmontese Alps. First, readers gain insights from a relatively coherent sample of no fewer than 81 sets of council minutes, primarily from south-western areas of the province (see her map in fig. 1), then from a comparative glance at Cuornè in the Canavese region (where the records appear much more heterogeneous) and finally from Aosta (with no minutes at all preserved in the communal archives, due to the fact that they were drawn up and subsequently stored by various notaries). This essay also reproduces one of the – apparently very rare – visual features, namely a bell with Savoyard crest found on the cover of Barge's first book of council minutes dating from the mid-fifteenth century. What exactly caused the variety of record formats across this region remains a task for further investigation, as there seems to be no straightforward correlation to e.g. particular forms of lordship.

With Clément Carnielli, the spotlight moves to the French Alps. Evidence for assemblies, involving neighbourhoods, guilds and religious fraternities as well as communes, goes back a long way here. At Couloubroux, for example, pasture rights were formalized in the presence of two consuls in June 1300. The author pays particular attention to when, how and why recording took place, tracing evidence from as early as the mid-thirteenth century (whereas most German/English examples date from the fifteenth), noting a fairly regular document structure (preambles followed by ordinances, without signatures) and discussing the relationship between loose sheets and bound registers (the latter often including other source types like accounts). His frank admission that the volume of material can be «intimidating» is backed up by the figures contained in the tables, all the more so because «non-registration does not mean, by far, the absence of political activity in the communities». Another prominent message emerging from these case studies is the coexistence of limited local autonomy with extensive seigneurial interaction. Assembly members wanted to practice good governance, while paying due respect to their superiors.

Returning to the Piedmontese context, Davide Morra examines the council minutes in the Cottian, Graian, and Pennine Alps before zooming in on Luserna San Giovanni in the Pellice Valley. Helpfully combining municipal and seigneurial archives, the author can supplement the one preserved register (18 1507) with loose documents drawn up by notarial families working for the lords (documenting assemblies from at least 148 e.g. general meetings on tax involving several dozen *populares*) as well as the 126 book of a confraternity (which shouldered «public duties» like maintaining the church, where the commune met and may have kept a chest with its records). Over the fifteenth century, population figures and social mobility both increased, particularly in the San Giovanni area beyond the town wall, which «fostered the consolidation of municipal institutions cooperating with the seigniorial clan». By 1497, meetings with well over a hundred attendees prompted the creation of a council body comprising twenty elected *adjuncti*, but some larger assemblies continued to be held when controversial

matters arose (fig. 4 nicely showing marks alongside those heads of households temporarily added to the smaller body in the same year).

Elisabetta Canobbio next leads us into the religious sphere, an area of vital and growing concern for late medieval communities all across Europe. Drawing on council minutes from Lugano and Bormio on the northern edge of the Duchy of Milan in the fifteenth century, the essay surveys proposals and resolutions relating to worship, church property, building maintenance and furnishings. Although the respective ecclesiastical topographies varied (Lugano's co-existing focal points of parish, religious houses and a hospital contrasting with the predominance of the collegiate church of Saints Gervasio and Protasio in Bormio), there was a common political will to engage with the sacred, to the point of insisting that ceremonies and liturgies had to be conducted appropriately and reliably by clergymen prioritising the spiritual needs of their flocks. In many ways, these endeavours "sacralized" the communes and neighbourhoods (hence Bormio's reference to «ecclesia nostra plebana» and mottos invoking divine justice on the covers of its minute books), with the collective quest for salvation mirroring the struggle for consensus in the secular realm.

In the final essay, Massimo Della Misericordia highlights another aspect of Bormio's documentary culture. Examining its council minutes between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, he notices the intriguing intrusion of oral colloquialisms into the standard notarial/chancery Latin. By the end of this period, we find a growing range of contextual spatial references, e.g. phrases such as «went out/down» (instead of the more standard/neutral «exited»), «taking in» (of something as mundane as tax payments) or «in-/outside». Increasingly, scribes integrated geographical toponyms as well as popular designations inspired by the mountainous surroundings. As evident from the illustrations (map, landscape and list of attendees), describing and navigating such environments required sensitivity to differences in altitude, location relative to prominent landmarks, position within/beyond valleys as well as along major routes, inclination of terrain or directional expressions. Comparison with the Sondrio/Chiavenna regions, where the trend was much less apparent, may indicate the latter's greater focus on towns. Reinforcing suggestive work conducted as part of the recent emotional, performative and material turns,⁸ Della Misericordia reminds us that, if examined perceptively, written records allow us glimpses into wider communal experience.

Taken together, the articles left me with two major insights. Naturally, council and assembly minutes tell us first and foremost about premodern politics. If the project homepage asks whether the people of this region were «savage mountain men» or «political actors», then the evidence advanced here unmasks it as a rhetorical question. The cumulative takeaway from all the communal, seigneurial, notarial and ecclesiastical repositories scrutinised by the researchers is the truly astonishing spread and depth of grass-roots involvement in gover-

⁸ Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: New Orientations in the Study of Culture*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2016.

nance throughout the Western Alps. Second, though, the documents also shed light on social organization (Carnielli), economic developments (Morra), religious affairs (Canobbio), communication media (Corradini) and cultural landscapes (Della Misericordia), underlining future research opportunities.

2. Wider implications and potential development

In this second part, the focus shifts from individual contributions to general repercussions. Five areas shall be briefly touched upon: the emerging DEMALPS database as a research resource, terminological coherence, wider regional comparison, ecclesiastical communities and further conceptual perspectives.

Beyond the team's formal presentations and publications, many scholars working in related fields may be interested in the underlying data on archives, sources and thematic concerns collated by the project. Inevitably at the present stage, they will find a work in progress. The map on the database homepage shows all communities of the Western Alps within the boundaries of the Alpine Convention, but neither are they all relevant for project purposes nor has the processing of cognate materials been completed. Still, the volume of available information is already very impressive. At present, in December 2025, it stretches across hundreds of locations, particularly in present-day France and Italy; the colour intensity of the community markers reflects the respective depths of archival holdings, while various filters and subpages allow users targeted access to specific details.⁹ It is hoped that processing and online presentation of research results will continue apace. There might also be scope for greater use of illustrations (of loose sheets/parchment rolls/book covers and bindings, source types, document layouts, headings/preambles/key phrases, seals/crests, notarial markers, signatures, decorative elements, perhaps even associated sites of political exchange, including churches, archival chests/material culture, landscapes etc.), as selectively featured on homepage and associated social media so far.

Second, picking up on an issue already alluded to, there is in my view a case for yet more terminological consistency right across publications, papers and online presentation. While the team's resolve to record and reflect regional and linguistic varieties deserves to be applauded, further standardization remains desirable in two respects, particularly when operating at a more general level and engaging with international audiences. On the one hand, with regard to its

9. The database is located at <https://www.demalps.com/db>. Once uploaded, information on individual communities, archives/sources and selected topics can be obtained via the respective tabs at the top of that page. The team also plans to publish updates on data processing. In contrast to south-eastern France and north-western Italy, coverage of Switzerland was by that point rudimentary: 8 of 113 communities with 13 archives in the Canton of Ticino were marked as «of interest» to the project, among which the «Archivio patriziale di Ascona», for which there is an online inventory. At the time, no details had been entered for the Valais and Vaud, where 300 and 122 communities await scrutiny.

key source type, the project originally used «deliberation registers», i.e. a literal translation of the French/Italian technical terms. The phrase dominated at the July workshop, appears across the database and «deliberations» still features in the Carnielli article above, albeit alongside «proceedings» (as in the issue title/introduction), while Morra/Corradini prefer «registers» and Della Misericordia «minutes». According to the authoritative Oxford English Dictionary, «deliberation» in the sense of a «written record of a resolution reached by a governing body» is now considered obsolete and rare.¹⁰ «Minutes of proceedings» seems to me a better and more current designation for the kind of official records of attendees and transactions examined here, arguably more so than «registers», which is more typically applied to listings or compilations of various sorts, e.g. financial dues, houses/inhabitants, baptisms/marriages/burials («parish registers»), contracts, volumes of mixed content etc. On the other hand, I would welcome consistency with regard to attendees, especially distinguishing between meetings of the representative bodies of – urban or rural – communes in charge of judicial/regulative/administrative affairs (i.e. «councils») and formal gatherings of a greater number of – if hardly ever all – enfranchised members/burghers of a village or town («assemblies»). As congenial English umbrellas for the many local/regional/dialect variants found in the documents, I thus propose to settle on «minutes of [town/village] council proceedings» (for the former) and «minutes of [town/village] assembly proceedings» (for the latter). For convenience's sake, once the respective contexts have been clarified, these phrases could then be abbreviated to «council minutes»¹¹ and «assembly minutes», the two phrases used in this comment. While both convey the right associations, «minutes» seems preferable to «proceedings» as a shorthand for these sources, since the former unambiguously designates a written record of past interactions, while the latter can additionally refer to ongoing/imminent transactions («today's proceedings») or indeed full-text renderings («conference proceedings»).

Similarly, there might be merit in agreeing a project-wide definition of the meeting minutes at the core of DEMALPS research. In their respective articles, Clément Carnielli proposes «deliberative writings which have in common their *auctoritas*, an *universitas* or its elected representatives, and their purpose, registering a public intervention», Davide Morra writes of «documentary units designed from the outset for the sequential recording of documents that [...] summarise the proceedings and results of community assemblies according to formulas roughly inspired by those of the influential *Summa totius artis notariae* by Rolandino de' Passageri». Ideally, such a formulation would cover participants, political bodies, contents and formal presentation, also with a view to demarcate this source type from others found in local archives of the region, i.e. (to name some featured in

10. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. «deliberation», at <https://www.oed.com/dictionary>.

11. As for example in Christian D. Liddy, *Who Decides? Urban Councils and Consensus in the Late Middle Ages*, in «Social History», 4/4 2021, pp. 06-34. Similarly, the equivalent German umbrella terms «Ratsprotokolle/Gemeindeversammlungsprotokolle» can cover local variants like *Manuale* (manuals), *Erkenntnisse* (findings), *Bücher* (books) etc.

the July workshop) statutes and ordinances, charters/privileges, judicial proceedings, accounts, fiscal records, inventories, notarial registers, correspondence and administrative files.

Third, provided time and resources (perhaps in a follow-on project), it would be desirable to widen the regional horizon further north and east, for example into the Central Alps, the heartland of the premodern Swiss Confederation. In contrast to the noble and princely domains investigated by DEMALPS to date, this loosely integrated political organism rooted in a network of alliances of urban and rural republics. Some of them were tiny (like Zug), but others commanded extensive territory (especially Bern, the largest city state north of the Alps). Here, given that ruling councils usually allowed localities – even those conquered and treated as subjects – considerable autonomy, researchers might find multiple layers of minutes: from meetings of neighbourhoods and communes via those of valleys/districts to multi-lateral leagues and federal bodies.¹² Starting at the base of the pyramid, one might try Gersau on Lake Lucerne, arguably «Europe's most autonomous village community» (given its own legislative/tax-raising powers, law courts, patronage rights and military forces). Strictly speaking, this one-parish land was an independent ally of the Forest Cantons Uri, Schwyz, Nid-/Obwalden and Lucerne rather than a full or associate member of the Confederation, but it ran a comparable constitutional system at a micro scale. Unfortunately, while the existence of communal assembly and council are documented from the 1430s, neatly bound records of their minutes can only be found from the mid and late eighteenth century, pointing to the lasting prominence of oral exchange in such settings (fig. 1).¹³ Within the Confederation proper, however, there are medieval council minutes for urban cantons (Bern from 1465) and, on the whole later, rural republics (Schwyz from 1548).¹⁴

Arguably of particular interest, given that they belong to the opposite (federal) end of the scale, are the so-called «recesses» (*Ab chiede*) of the Swiss Diet (*Tag atzung*), which share many characteristics with the minutes examined here. Offering substantial coverage from the fifteenth century, they record dates/locations of meetings (in places such as Aarau, Brunnen, Frauenfeld, Lugano etc.), participants (chiefly delegates of various combinations of cantons plus occasionally foreign envoys), brief notes on each item of discussion (often matters relating to external relations or joint *condominia* [*Gemeine Herrschaften*], including the lordships successively acquired between 1403 and 1515 in present-day Ticino) and any resolutions made, although the latter required separate approval by the

12. A stimulating survey of the widespread formation of federations and leagues can be found in Duncan Hardy, *Associative Political Culture in the Holy Roman Empire: Upper Germany, 1340–1520*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018. For DEMALPS, the Valais – where the seven «Zenden» districts developed local and regional republican structures – promises to be an interesting case study in this respect.

13. Bezirksarchiv Gersau, Bühler, RB1 and LG1 respectively; the quote in Beat Küin, *The Communal Age in Western Europe, c. 1100–1800: Towns, Villages and Parishes in Pre-Modern Society*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 32.

14 The respective series of *Ratsprotokolle* start with: Staatsarchiv Bern, A II 1 (10 June 1465– 31 December 1466) and Staatsarchiv Schwyz, HA.III.5 (April 1548 to January 1556).



Fig. 1. The first surviving volume of Gersau's assembly minutes, labelled the «book of findings» of the *Landes Gemeind*, was started in 1784 by the scribe of what was by then widely acknowledged as a sovereign «republic», hence the Phrygian hat, while previous crests had carried the Holy Roman Emperor's crown and double-headed eagle (source: Bezirksarchiv, Bü her, LG1, pictured by the author and reproduced with kind permission by Gersau District Council).

ruling authorities of the respective capitals, since ultimate power in the Confederation rested with individual members. Recent research has demonstrated that the Diet lay at the heart of a highly differentiated communication matrix, which included preparatory liaisons between cantonal councils, instructions for delegates, draft resolutions, oral reports on proceedings, supplementary documents and protracted dealings over controversial matters which could stretch over many meetings and years, sometimes without reaching a binding conclusion.¹⁵ One area

15. The State Archives of Lucerne hold an extensive range of original recesses. The standard, if problematic, print edition is: Jakob Kaiser *et al.* (eds.), *Amtliche Sammlung der öffentlichen Eidgenössischen Abschiede*, 29 vols., Luzern etc, Meyer, 189- 56, now available online at <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb11177393>. On associated late medieval communication structures see Michael Jucker, *Gesandte, Schreiber, Akten: Politische Kommunikation auf eidgenössischen Tagatzungen im spätmittelalter*, Zürich, Chronos, 2004 for a long-term overview Andreas

for fruitful comparison might thus be this meta-level of oral and written interactions that preceded, accompanied and followed individual meetings.

A fourth area of interest might be possible equivalents or points of contact in the ecclesiastical sphere. Religious confraternities, parishes and discussions about church affairs make appearances above, e.g. in the articles of Carnielli, Canobbio and Morra, so the team could draw on internal expertise as well as specialized scholarship on the Alpine situation.¹⁶ How exactly did councils and communal assemblies hear about, make inquiries on and come to decisions in spiritual matters or issues relating to church property and clergy? It may well be that, as the *Introduction* states, there are few traces of «independent» parochial bodies, meetings and officials in these areas of strong lordship and/or expansive urban influence (as has also been argued for the Holy Roman Empire), but targeted research in local and diocesan archives might yet prove worthwhile.¹⁷ In England, where parishes acquired official local government responsibilities from the sixteenth century, the most immediate – if chronologically later – source equivalent are the so-called «vestry minutes», which could relate to both smaller representative bodies of elected or appointed representatives (in «closed» communities) as well as large – and sometimes turbulent – meetings of all parishioners (in «open» ones). Early sets occasionally date back to the mid-sixteenth century but most typically start post-1600, with particularly dense survival for the City of London.¹⁸

Fifth and finally, there would be mileage in somewhat more extensive embedding of DEMALPS findings into current international debates in the historical disciplines. Just a few possibilities shall be suggested here. A project closely reliant on source repositories, credited by Gravela and Rehr with holding key clues about community formation/endurance more generally, could profitably partake in the recent surge of dedicated studies on archives.¹⁹ Given the prominence of numerous

Wü gler, *Die Tag atzung der Eidg nossen: Politik, Kommunikation und § mbl ik einer reprä entativen Institution im europü schen Kontext* (17- 18), Epfendorf, Bibliotheca academica, 2013.

16. Paolo Ostinelli, *Il gv erno delle anime. § rature ecclesiastiche nel Bellinzonese e nelle Valli amb osiane (XIV-XV secolo)*, Locarno, Dadò, 1998; Massimo Della Misericordia, *Divenire comunità comuni rurali, poteri locali, identità sociali e territoriali in Valtellina e nella montagna lombr da nel tardo Medioevo*, Milano, Unicopli, 2006; Elena Corniolo, *Chiesa locale e relazioni di potere nel XV secolo: § nt 'Orso d'Aosta tra il 146 e il 15* , Milano, Franco Angeli, 2019; for wider comparative perspectives cf. Nathalie Kruppa (ed.), *Pfarreien im Mittelalter: Deutschland, Polen, Tschechien und Ungr n im Verh eich*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008; and Beat Kün in, Arnd Reitemeier (eds.), *A Companion to Premodern Parish § udies*, Leiden, Brill, forthcoming. See also the printed/digital resources at <http://go.warwick.ac.uk/my-parish>.

17. For highly institutionalized and independent parochial structures in England see e.g. Clive Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls': The Parish of All § ints' Bristol on the Eve of the Reformation*, Woodbridge, Boydell, 2018; for strong interference by urban councils in the Holy Roman Empire: Arnd Reitemeier, *Pfarrkirchen in der § adt des spü en Mittelalters: Politik, Wirtschaft und Verwaltung*, Stuttgart, Steiner, 2005.

18. Beat Kün in, *Vestries*, in *Digital Encyclopedia of British § c iab lity in the Long Eigh -teenth Century*, 2022, available at: <https://www.digitens.org/en/notices/vestries.html>.

19. Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters, Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *Archives & Information in the Early Modern World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018; Randolph C. Head, *Making*

types of councils throughout the essays here, a second field is that of the history of representative institutions, which has long moved beyond sole concentration on Parliaments and other high-level contexts.²⁰ No doubt that the respective scholars would be keen to hear about this exciting new and early evidence from the Western Alps. Last but not least, there is spatial theory. Readers will have noted the many references to mountains, distances, peripheries, areas above/below certain landmarks or on the edge/inside of valleys, most explicitly in Della Misericordia's article, so value added might derive from engagement with concepts like central places, front/back areas and – above all – the social construction of space alongside more critical voices lamenting the often metaphorical uses of spatial vocabulary and calling for greater attention to actual physical landscapes.²¹

To conclude, this special issue offers most welcome first fruits of the DEMALPS programme. The project's systematic approach to the region's vast reservoir of council and assembly minutes opens windows onto an astonishing depth of political activity in the late medieval countryside. As things stand, probably reflecting widely shared ideals and scribal conventions, the impression is one of concerted efforts at good governance, careful mediation of contrasting interests, targeted identification of issues to be resolved and much deference to lords and central authorities. By contrast, to quote Carnielli, there are at best «echoes» of intractable conflicts, concerted resistance and alternative political visions. As always, historians have to look beyond one type of sources (to petitions, rebel articles, evidence for physical violence etc.) and try to find ways to interpret archival silences as well as embed ephemeral media such as emotions, gestures and rituals. A second long-term ambition, again requiring sustained geographical and chronological comparison, is to pinpoint what exactly is distinctly (Western) «Alpine» about the findings presented here, what can be more broadly associated with «pre-modern» or «peripheral» contexts and what might possibly be seen as characteristic of «bottom up» politics in general.

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Archives in Early Modern Europe: Proof, Information, and Political Record-Keeping 1400-1700, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019.

20. See the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions, with its conferences and journal «Parliaments, Estates and Representation» as well as – for new global perspectives from e.g. New Spain and Brazil – the special section Paulina Kewes, Jim van der Meulen, Paul Seaward (eds.), *Parliamentary Culture and Indigenous Traditions of Assemblies in the Americas and Asia 1500-1700: Comparative Perspectives*, in «Transactions of the Royal Historical Society», 3, 2025, pp. 49- 77.

21. The classic formulation of a constructivist approach is Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1991; for a recent survey of the field in English see Susanne Rau, *History, Space and Place*, London, Routledge, 2019; a critical discussion in Angelo Torre, *Un «tournant spatial» en histoire? Paysages, regards, ressources*, in «Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales», 63, 2008pp. 1127-114

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