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ARTICLE

Genoese Migration and Technology Transfer in the Early-Modern Spanish Monarchy

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Abstract

The paper highlights the importance of Genoese migration in the manufacturing system of Spanish monarchy during the 18th century by focusing on the port of Cadiz, which was the main hub of the Spanish colonial trade, and the city of Buenos Aires, on the monarchy's southern frontier. The Genoese migration found favourable conditions towards its settlement in Spain. In the Andalusian region in particular, the Genoese not only maintained a role in trade intermediation, but were also at the core of the local production of manufactures for the Spanish and American consumption. The Spanish institutions fostered immigration of foreigners who practiced a craftsman or mechanic profession. During the eighteenth century, the reforms aimed at strengthening the Spanish industry in Cadiz offered new prospects to the craftsmen specialized in the production of paper, silk textiles, and ships, while the Crown's policy encouraged Genoese businessmen to relocate their production plants to Spain. In Buenos Aires, on the contrary, the case of the shoemaker's guild's failure helps to explain how the Spanish mercantilist policies and the characteristics of the local market impeded the foreigners to play a significant role in local manufacturing until the wars for emancipation.

Keywords: Spanish monarchy; Genoese migration; paper and silk industry; craft guilds

Introduction

This paper examines the significance of market conditions in shaping innovation trajectories, using the case of Genoese emigration as a lens to understand knowledge and technology transfer within the Spanish kingdoms during the early modern period. The Genoese played a particularly prominent role in Andalusia, contributing to advancements in trade, navigation, and various manufacturing sectors. During the eighteenth century, the decline of Genoa's manufacturing system compelled craftsmen to emigrate, and the Spanish industrial sector provided new opportunities for these skilled workers. Concurrently, Spanish Crown policies actively encouraged Genoese entrepreneurs to relocate their production facilities to Spain. More broadly, Genoese migration benefited from the Spanish guild system's relaxation of entry barriers. A comparative and relational analysis with colonial Buenos Aires reveals that, in frontier societies where corporate structures were traditionally weaker than in Spain, efforts by Genoese and other immigrant craftsmen to prosper in the host society largely failed.

The Genoese case highlights artisan mobility within a framework where guilds were minimally effective in either hindering or promoting knowledge transfer. In early modern Genoa, the corporate world did not have rigid barriers to entry and was unable

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to retain skilled workers, who often sought opportunities abroad. Similarly, in Spain, the guild system posed limited resistance to the establishment of foreign masters, and when such resistance occurred, it was frequently overridden by central authorities. In the Spanish monarchy's frontier territories, the relatively weak corporate structures failed to attract and retain skilled foreign labor. When guilds did exist, they functioned less as communities fostering product quality and knowledge exchange and more as legal instruments to secure individual privileges. In colonial Buenos Aires, the commercial exploitation of the viceroyalty, ethnic tensions among artisans, and widespread reliance on enslaved labor undermined attempts to assert these privileges. Despite their reputation as knowledge workers, Genoese craftsmen in late colonial Buenos Aires struggled to achieve social status. As in medieval and early-modern Europe, distinctions between low- and high-quality products were not necessarily decisive for the acceptance of new products or processes; instead, labor availability and market conditions played equally critical roles.[1]

The transfer of production technology and tacit knowledge in the Spanish monarchy was not solely contingent on local guilds and their regulations. As in other European contexts, state intervention and support often acted as significant drivers of skilled migration.[2] The presence of a "facilitating environment," characterized by favorable fiscal policies and market regulations, was an essential precondition for the transfer of knowledge and technology. However, the economic, social, institutional, and cultural conditions of the receiving country were equally pivotal for ensuring the successful implementation and sustainability of such innovations.[3]

The Genoese Manufacturing System

The republic of Genoa's productive system was mainly export oriented and heavily depended from the investments of the great noble families.[4] The development of the silk and paper industries in particular was greatly affected by the allocation of profits from the economic activities of the aristocracy, whose preference towards financial speculations in times of crisis ended up determining the sectors' progressive decline. From the end of the seventeenth century, both silk and paper manufactures lost their traditional quality and remained competitive thanks to the wage compression and the decentralisation of production to the countryside. Silk production, from a predominantly

[1] Karel Davids and Bert De Munck, eds., *Innovation and Creativity in Late Medieval and Early Modern European Cities* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014).

[2] Alida Clemente, "Innovation in the Capital City: Central Policies, Markets and Migrant Skills in Neapolitan Ceramic Manufacturing in the Eighteenth Century," in ibid., chap. 14. Both labourers and entrepreneurs exercised substantial agency within this process; see in particular the contributions of Corine Maitte, "The Cities of Glass: Privileges and Innovations in Early Modern Europe," Andrea Caracausi, "Textiles Manufacturing, Product Innovations and Transfers of Technology in Padua and Venice between the Sixteenth and Eighteenth Centuries," and Daniele Andreozzi, "Innovations, Growth and Mobility in the Secondary Sector of Trieste in the Eighteenth Century," in ibid., chap. 2, 7, 15.

[3] José M. Lopes Cordeiro, "A Technology Transfer in Portugal's Late Eighteenth Century: The Royal Silk Twisting Mill of Chacim," *Textile History* 23:2 (1992), 177–88; Karolina Hutková, "Transfer of European Technologies and Their Adaptations: The Case of the Bengal Silk Industry in the Late-Eighteenth Century," *Business History* 59:7 (2017), 1111–35; Mark Steele, "The Comparative Economics of Government and Guild Regulation in the European Silk Industry in the Early Modern Period," in *La seta in Europa, secc. XIII–XX*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Florence: Le Monnier, 1993), 193–206; Karel Davids, "Shifts of Technological Leadership in Early-Modern Europe," in *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic in European Perspective*, ed. Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 338–65.

[4] Paola Massa, "Tipologia industriale e modelli organizzativi: la Liguria in età moderna," in *L'impresa: Industria commercio banca, secc. XIII–XVIII*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Florence: Le Monnier, 1991), 481–502.

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urban corporate art nurtured by contributions of capital and skilled labour from other Italian cities such as Milan, Lucca, and Florence,[5] became a sector dominated by the figure of the merchant-entrepreneur, supported by large portions of Liguria's rural population, and mainly devoted to the production of niche products, such as black velvets and damasks, which were not subject to fashion changes.[6] This organisational evolution spread the "prescriptive knowledge" (knowing what without necessarily knowing why)[7] linked to the production process of highly sought-after goods but only generated meagre incomes to the workers, who in many cases went in search of better conditions abroad.[8]

The paper industry, although less decentralised, also underwent progressive control by great investors from the seventeenth century onwards, obliging the masters to piece working and increasing the number of women employed – with notably lower salaries – in the sector. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the city of Voltri, the main centre for paper production in the republic, saw the emergence of the figure of the master merchant, who enjoyed merchant positions as owner or tenant of paper mills. In general terms, the sector remained competitive thanks to the segmentation of the production process and the salary compression.[9] What had started as a family business, where the householder involved women and children in paper production, reached an exemplary level of division of labour.[10] In this context, the phenomenon of indebtedness of the master to the merchant-entrepreneur became generalised in the republic, leaving the indebted with little alternative but to flee.[11]

To a great extent, the preference of Genoese capitalists towards secure financial employment led to the rejection of new technologies and innovations in manufacturing. This is why, by the end of the eighteeenth century, the Ligurian production system centred on the silk and paper industries was downsized and not much more efficient than that of the previous decades.[12] Despite these limitations, the Spanish monarchy continued to be the main end market for Genoese manufactures and one of the main recipients of the Genoese technological transfer through skilled migration.

[5] Giacomo Casarino, "Tra 'estranietà' e cittadinanza: mercato del lavoro e migrazioni a Genova (secc. XV–XVI)," *Revista d'Història Medieval* 10 (1999), 85–121; Luca Molà, "Oltre i confini della città: Artigiani e imprenditori della seta fiorentini all'estero," in *Arti fiorentine: La grande storia dell'artigianato*, vol. 2, *Il Quattrocento*, ed. Franco Franceschi and Gloria Fossi (Florence: Giunti, 1999), 85–108.

[6] Carlo Poni, "Moda e innovazione: le strategie dei mercanti di seta in Lione nel secolo XVIII," in *La seta in Europa, secc. XIII–XX*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Florence: Le Monnier, 1993), 17–58.

[7] Joel Mokyr, *The Gifts of Athena: Historical Origins of the Knowledge Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[8] The north Italian cities (Pisa, Siena, Mantova, Vicenza, Reggio Emilia) competed among themselves to attract Genoese velvet weavers. Paola Massa, "Tipologia tecnica e organizzazione economica della manodopera serica in alcune esperienze italiane," in *La seta in Europa, secc. XIII–XX*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Florence: Le Monnier, 1993), 207–28, 217.

[9] Also Great Britain kept importing large quantities of printing paper from the republic throughout the eighteenth century. Leonard N. Rosenband, "Becoming Competitive: England's Papermaking Apprenticeship, 1700–1800," in *The Mindful Hand: Inquiry and Invention from the Late Renaissance to Early Industrialisation*, ed. Lissa Roberts, Simon Schaffer, and Peter Dear (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 2007), 379–401, 381, 386.

[10] Renzo Sabbatini, "L'occupazione femminile in cartiera: tra manifattura e industria," *Società e storia* 49 (1990), 547–65.

[11] Manlio Calegari, "Mercanti imprenditori e maestri paperai nella manifattura genovese della carta (sec. XVI–XVII)," *Quaderni storici* 20:59 (1985), 445–69.

[12] Paola Massa, "Una economia di frontiera fra terra e mare," in *Storia della Liguria*, ed. Giovanni Assereto and Marco Doria (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2007), 115–31.

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Genoese Skilled Migration in the Spanish Monarchy

The Genoese participated in the development of the Spanish manufacturing sector with capital, technology, and manpower since the fifteenth century, being particularly relevant in the production of paper and silk. The migration of Genoese masters followed the greater migration generated by the merchant privileges the Genoese obtained in Castile and especially in Andalusia, where they represented the largest foreign group even before the reconquest of the region.[13] Such privileges went hand in hand with the substantial favour with which the host society looked at "competent" or particularly deserving foreigners, who could follow integration rationales based both on the endorsement of local community and on the obtention of a Crown privilege.

By virtue of these favourable conditions, the Genoese gave a relevant contribution to the development of the silk industry in Valencia by introducing the North Italian technology for the production of velvet and more aggressive entrepreneurial techniques.[14] Towards the mid-sixteenth century, while Charles V implemented a policy of curtailing guilds' power, along with the power and independence of cities,[15] some opulent Genoese businessmen established in Spain managed to displace the local silk production inherited from the Muslim tradition.[16] They also contributed to the silk production's expansion in Castile, particularly in Toledo, but their presence ended up limiting the development of the Spanish production in favour of foreign manufactures. At the end of the seventeenth century, the silk imported from Italian states represented 60 per cent of the total silk exports from Spain to the Indies and were largely commercialized by Genoese intermediaries. Some exponents of these commercial dynasties prospered by integrating themselves in the host society and commercial élite: from importers of foreign manufactures, they became owners of productive plants in Valencia and also leaders in the technological innovation related to the Industrial Revolution.[17]

The same can be said about the paper industry. The presence of Genoese paper masters in Spain is attested from the fifteenth century. During the early modern period, migrations of Genoese paper masters throughout Europe became increasingly worrying, but the problem remained unsolved even after 1770, when a special magistrate was established for the census and control of the artisans operating in Voltri, Pegli, Arenzano, and Varazze. In parallel, the Spanish monarchy became the main end market of the Genoese paper, which was appreciated for its quality and widely used both in Spain and in the Indies. In the 1630s, Genoese manufacturers monopolised the supply of sealed paper in Spain and controlled

[13] Gabriella Airaldi, "Modelli coloniali e modelli culturali dal Mediterraneo all'Atlantico," in *Gli orizzonti aperti: Profili del mercante medieval* (Turin: Paravia Scriptorium, 1997), 199–206.

[14] Germán Navarro Espinach, *Los origenes de la sederia valenciana (siglos XV-XVI)* (Valencia: Ajuntament de València, 1999), appendix 1 and 4; Ricardo Franch Benavent, "El papel de los extranjeros en las actividades artesanales y comerciales del Mediterráneo español durante la edad moderna," in *I Coloquio internacional "Lo extranjeros en la Espana moderna,"* vol. 1, ed. María Begoña Villar García and Pilar Pezzi Cristóbal (Malaga: Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación, 2003), 39–71.

[15] Christopher R. Friedrichs, "German Town Revolts and the Seventeenth-Century Crisis," *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 26 (1982), 27–51; James R. Farr, *Artisans in Europe, 1300–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 164–89.

[16] Ramón Carande, *Carlos V y sus banqueros* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1990), 477.

[17] Ricardo Franch Benavent, "Dinastias comerciales genovesas en la Valencia del siglo XVIII: los Causa, Batifora y Ferrano," in *La documentación notarial y la historia: Actas del II Coloquio de metodología histórica aplicada*, ed. Antonio Eiras Roel, vol. 2 (Santiago de Compostela: Secretariado de Publicaciones de la Universidad, 1984), 295–316; Ricardo Franch Benavent, "La comercialización de la seda valenciana a finales del antiguo régimen: el 'contraste' de la ciudad de Valencia," *Revista de Historia Económica* 8:2 (1990), 271–304; Pere Molas Ribalta, *La burguesía mercantil en la España del Antiguo Régimen* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1985), 213, 227.

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the supply of paper for the Spanish tobacco industry. In the second half of the century, large shipments of Genoese paper left the port of Cadiz to the Indies, where New Spain alone absorbed around 65 per cent of these exports.[18] In 1673 the Genoese aristocracy with powerful entanglements in Spain attempted to consolidate its dominant position in this trade by proposing to the Court the granting of a paper supply monopoly in return for the organisation of a special armed fleet to counteract privateers in the Mediterranean. The proposal, which established a fixed price for the paper and limited the freedom to trade a highly demanded good, was rejected and negotiated under other terms by the Spanish merchant corporation.[19]

In synthesis, for a long time Spain depended on foreign technology and manpower, and the Genoese contributed to meeting the productive needs of the monarchy in the most strategic and lucrative sectors. A reversal of the trend was only possible with the bolder mercantilist policy adopted in the last years of Charles II's reign, which began in 1699 with a decree prohibiting export that, however, was subsequently softened through numerous exemptions. As the Italian peninsula turned from being an exporter of silk fabrics into an exporter of raw silk, Spain and other countries in Europe such as England, France, and Portugal devoted more effort to the production of silk fabrics.[20] During the eighteenth century, Spain became a major importer of raw silk from northern Italy.[21] At the same time, European states strengthened their interest towards the import of the northern Italian silk reeling system, which, at the time, was considered as the most advanced technology of reeling silk.[22] In this context, Genoese merchants and artisans were able to take advantage of the spaces generated by the Spanish mercantilism by inserting themselves at various levels in the enterprises created in the monarchy, particularly in the bay of Cadiz, for the production of import substitutes.

The Bourbon Reforms and the Genoese Contribution to the Industry of Cadiz

In the eighteenth century, with the emergence of Cadiz as new hub for the Spanish trade to America, Spain's economic élite put up a struggle against the competition of foreign manufacturers, especially those from Genoa, by employing Genoese embodied skills and tacit knowledge to foster the production of the same goods in the port. These were generally privately led initiatives taken from merchants of Spanish but also Genoese origin, and supported from local authorities.

Cadiz's population underwent an almost uninterrupted growth and foreign emigration to the port followed the same trend. Among the Italians, the largest foreign community, the

[18] José Carlos Balmaceda, *La contribución genovesa al desarrollo de la manufactura papelera española* (Málaga: Imagraf, 2005), 69–71, 100.

[19] Archivo General de Indias, Consulados, 87, Copia del Memorial que se dio a S.M. sobre estancar los Ginobeses el papel, en los Reynos de España, y de las Indias, 17 June 1673.

[20] Giorgio Riello, "Textile Spheres: Silk in a Global and Comparative Context," in *Threads of Global Desire: Silk in the Pre-Modern World*, ed. Dagmar Schäfer, Giorgio Riello, and Luca Molà (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2018), 323–41; Carlo Poni, "Comparing Two Urban Industrial Districts: Bologna and Lyon in the Early Modern Period," in *Knowledge, Social Institutions and the Division of Labour*, ed. Pier Luigi Porta, Roberto Scazzieri, and Andrew Skinner (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2001), 199–228; Cordeiro, "A Technology Transfer."

[21] Ricardo Franch Benavent, "El comercio y los mercados de la seda en la España moderna," in *La seta in Europa, secc. XIII–XX*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Florence: Le Monnier, 1993), 565–94.

[22] Giuseppe Chicco, *La Seta in Piemonte 1650–1800: Un Sistema Industriale D'Ancien Regime* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1995), 288–94; Claudio Zanier, "Pre-Modern European Silk Technology and East Asia: Who Imported What?," in *Textiles in the Pacific, 1500-1900*, ed. Debin Ma (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 2005), 105–91, 131–9; Hutková, "Transfer of European Technologies."

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Table 1. Genoese Artisans in the 1794 Census of Cádiz

	Masters (18.6%)	Workers (81.4%)	Total
Average age	46.6	41	42.2
Average years of residence	28	19.5	21.2
Age at arrival	18.6	21.5	21
Literacy	46.1%	41.4%	42.2%
Married	73%	59.9%	62.3%
Widowed	8.1%	7.4%	7.5%
Unmarried	18.9%	32.7%	30.1%

Source: Carlo Molina, "L'emigrazione ligure a Cadice (1709–1854)," *Atti della Società Ligure di Storia Patria* 34:2 (1994), 285–377, 336.

Genoese were the most numerous over the course of the century.[23] A 1794 census of the city shows that 42 per cent of Genoese householders were employed in commercial enterprises at different levels, and 37 per cent were craftsmen (either masters or workers, Table 1).

Although not statistically accurate, a list elaborated in 1771 by the Genoese consulate in Cadiz allows us to look into the variety of professions of this expatriated community lead by merchants and retailers, in which shoemakers stood out among craftsmen (Table 2).

The Genoese entered some of the main craft guilds of the city at a very early stage. They were particularly influential in the production of shoes, which were sold both in the local and the American markets. In this sector, they achieved such a prominent position that in 1723 they obtained the control of some of the guild's executive offices after threatening the creation of a separate guild along with the French masters.[24] This evidence confirms the marked openness of shoemaker guilds to foreign elements – observed in other case studies[25] – and their capacity to reform and adapt themselves to the market needs.

The available sources don't allow us to assess the importance of the artisans installed in the surrounding manufacturing centres[26] and particularly the Genoese presence in the shipbuilding industry, which represented one of their main fields of expertise. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Genoese were key providers of vessels for trade, communication, and the safe transportation of financial and military resources along the Mediterranean routes.[27] They also made a relevant contribution to the development of the shipbuilding sector in Spain, being responsible of the construction of the arsenal of Seville

[23] In 1791 the city counted 2,012 Genoese out of 5,020 foreigners. Pedro Collado Villalta, "El impacto americano en la bahia (1709–1819): La inmigración extranjera en Cádiz (1709–1819)," in *Primeras Jornadas de Andalucía y América*, vol. 1 (La Rábida: Diputación Provincial de Huelva, Instituto de Estudios Onubenses, 1981), 49–74, 64–5.

[24] José María Rodríguez Díaz, "El final del Gremio: Cofradía y la secularización del mundo laboral gremial en Cádiz," in *Lecturas del pensamiento filosófico, estético y político, XIII Encuentro de la Ilustración al Romanticismo 1750–1850. Cádiz, América y Europa ante la Modernidad*, ed. María del Carmen García Tejera, Isabel Morales Sánchez, Fátima Coca Ramírez, and José A. Hernández Guerrero (Cadiz: Universidad de Cádiz, 2007), 349–56, 351.

[25] Giorgio Riello, *A Foot in the Past: Consumers, Producers and Footwear in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 152–3.

[26] Puerto de Santa Maria, San Fernando, and Puerto Real.

[27] Geoffrey Parker, *El ejército de Flandes y el Camino Español 1567–1659: La logística de la victoria y derrota de España en las guerras de los Países Bajos* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2006); Maria Sirago, "I Doria, signori del mare, ed il sistema dell'"asiento' nella costituzione della flotta napoletana all'epoca di Carlo V," in *Carlo V e il Mediterraneo*, ed. Giuseppe Galasso, Aurelio Musi (Naples: Società Napoletana di Storia Patria, 2001), 665–704; Luca Lo Basso, "Una difficile esistenza: Il duca di Tursi, gli asientos di galee e la squadra di Genova tra guerra navale, finanza e intrighi politici (1635–1643)," in *Génova y la Monarquía Hispánica (1528–1713)*, vol. 2, ed. Manuel Herrero Sánchez, Yasmina

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Table 2. Individuals Registered in the Genoese Consulate of Cádiz (1771)

Profession	Number	Profession	Number
Traders	18	Masons	3
Retailers	35	Caulkers	1
Silversmiths	4	Sailors	5
Balers	4	Fishermen	1
Tailors	12	Coalmen	1
Button manufacturers	2	Egg sellers	1
Hat makers	1	Confectioners	11
Gilders	1	Innkeepers	9
Stocking weavers	1	Carpenters	9
Coral makers	2	Market gardeners	30
Brass workers	3	With a trick-taking game	3
Comb makers	2	Shoemakers	33
Hairdressers	1	Chocolate millers	10
Musicians	4	Mattress makers	13
Butlers	2	Pasta makers	11
Pastry chefs	1	Errand boys	25
Coppersmiths	1	Cooks	50
Bakers	3	Wine retailers	37
Coffee makers	1	Waiters/porters	143
Chair makers	2	Barrel makers	1
Blacksmiths	1	Butchers	3

Source: Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, Estado, 629 (3), Exp. 58.

during Alfonso X's reign and helping to fill the voids left by Islamic workforce for the renovation of the Castilian navy under the Catholic kings.[28] Similar initiatives followed at the end of the Habsburg rule. In order to solve Spain's chronic lack of vessels, the Bourbons invested more heavily in the local shipbuilding industry by setting up the Carraca arsenal in the bay of Cadiz; in 1752, the Genoese consul in Cadiz reported on the arrival of 120 Genoese shipwrights and caulkers in the arsenal to build vessels for the Crown, many of

Rocío Ben Yessef Garfia, Carlo Bitossi, and Dino Puncuh (Genoa: Società Ligure di Storia Patria, 2011), 819-46; Benoît Maréchaux, "Los asentistas de galeras genoveses y la articulación naval de un imperio policéntrico (siglos XVI–XVII)," *Hispania* 80:264 (January–April 2020), 47–77.

[28] Geo Pistarino, "Presenze e influenze italiane nel sud della Spagna (secc. XII–XV)," in *Presencia italiana en Andalucia: Siglos XIV–XVII. Actas del I Coloquio Hispano-Italiano*, ed. Bibiano Torres Ramirez and José Hernández Palomo (Seville: CSIC, EEHA, 1985), 21–51.

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whom had been hired in Genoa, while others had volunteered.[29] Equally important was the Genoese presence in the great Mediterranean shipyard of Cartagena, where in addition to a considerable number of immigrant workers employed in port activities,[30] a Genoese military officer, Benito Antonio Spinola, was in charge of the Maritime Department.[31]

Besides playing a major role in the Bourbon's projects for the construction of a competitive Spanish navy, the Genoese contributed to the development of a private shipbuilding sector in and around Cadiz, either as owners of shipyards or as workforce. In parallel, the chronic shortage of seamen to support colonial trade led the Crown to enact successive laws that progressively opened transatlantic shipping to foreign sailors, captains, shipwrights, and caulkers; these regulations, which all but recognised a much wider de facto reality, allowed the Genoese seamen to make extensive contact with the colonial world and in some cases to settle there on a more or less stable basis.[32] The role of these "organizational migrants"[33] and their embodied expertise in knowledge and technology transfer across the Atlantic basin is still poorly investigated and would require a systematic research.

The Genoese migrants also contributed to the development of Cadiz as a manufacturing centre in the sectors – paper and silk – at the heart of the Genoese export-oriented industry. Around 1750 Spain and the Indies still consumed between half and two thirds of the paper produced in Genoa. To cope with competition, in the light of the setting up of royal factories and privileged manufactures, a group of merchants from Cadiz conceived the idea of setting up a large manufacturing centre in El Puerto de Santa María for the production of paper. In 1751 they established the Cossío, Arco Company and entrusted Luis de Armelín y Barsi, a technician from Valencia with clear Italian origins and owner of two paper mills in El Puerto de Santa María, with the project to build six new paper mills.[34] For the recruitment of foreign skilled workers, the company received a key support from the Spanish authorities: Joseph de Carbajal y Lancaster, the president of the Real Junta de Comercio (the institution responsible for the encouragement of commerce and industry in the Spanish monarchy), asked Luis Martínez Beltrán – the secretary and general commissioner to His Majesty's armies with a long-established experience in Genoa[35] – to find a paper mill master who would be willing to relocate to Spain. After waiting in vain for a

[29] Archivio di Stato di Genova, AS, 2673, Montesisto, Cadiz, 27 November 1752. Merino Navarro reports on the arrival of fifty-five shipwrights in the mid-1750s: José Patricio Merino Navarro, *La armada española en el siglo XVIII* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1981), 70, 103.

[30] The Genoese builders played a prominent role in local shipbuilding especially since the accession to the throne of Charles III, which led to closer relations with the Italian peninsula: in the 1760s, merchants Marcenaro, Monticeli, and Rati signed privileged contracts for the supply of wood and construction of vessels in Cartagena. To this purpose, recruited shipwrights came from the republic, while the Genoese consul in Cartagena acted as a broker and manager for transactions and payments. The predominance of the "Italian" and particularly Genoese contingent among the immigrant population of the port is reflected in the local censuses. María Teresa Pérez Crespo Muñoz, *Cartagena en el siglo XVIII: el arsenal y su influencia en el desarrollo de la ciudad*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Editorial de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1991), vol. 1, 182–3, 246–51, and vol. 2, 721–3.

[31] Juan Antonio Gómez Vizcaíno, "El teniente general Benito Antonio Spínola y Moro, marqués de Spínola: Su período al frente del departamento marítimo de Cartagena de Levante (1753–1761)," *Revista de Historia Naval* 32:126 (2014), 23–52.

[32] Catia Brilli, *Genoese Trade and Migration in the Spanish Atlantic (c. 1700–1830)* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 43–6. On the use of Genoese contracted seafarers for the Spanish army, see also Archivo del Museo Naval, Madrid, 0774/001, f. 442; 0071; 0070/302, f. 324 (year 1793).

[33] Leo Lucassen and Aniek X. Smit, "The Repugnant Other: Soldiers, Missionaries, and Aid Workers as Organizational Migrants," *Journal of World History* 26:1 (March 2015), 1–39.

[34] Juan José Iglesias Rodriguez, *Una ciudad mercantil en el siglo XVIII: El Puerto de Santa María* (Brenes, Spain: Muñoz Moya y Montraveta, 1991), 209.

[35] Raquel Gallego García, "'Don Isidoro el del Coreo': alcune notizie su un contatto di Goya annotato nel Taccuino italiano," *Atti della Società Ligure di Storia Patria* 60:134 (2020), 157–74, 158.

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contact from Voltri, Beltrán found a master who was born in Voltri but worked in Finale[36] and was ready to negotiate his collaboration. The master took it upon himself to find the necessary workers of both sexes, established their payment method,[37] prepared a quotation for the production of a bale of ten reams, and demanded the payment of the workers' journey from Genoa to Spain. He also dictated the time frame for closing the deal, which would not exceed two months, so that he could, if necessary, renew the lease on the mill he was running in Liguria.[38] These negotiations attest to the role of master papermakers not only as repositories of technical knowledge but also as experts in production organization and management.

Having reached an agreement, in 1752 two paper mill masters and fourteen women left Genoa to work in the Spanish company's existing mills and instruct other workers in view of the project completion, which devised the construction of thirty buildings. The project's magnitude, of which the Genoese Senate was informed by its consular agent in Cadiz, led to fears about new possible outflows of manpower and a competition that would seriously harm the paper production in the Republic.[39] This ominous prediction did not come true, certainly not because of the intervention of the Senate – who had no choice but to wait helplessly for its development – but because of internal issues: Luis de Armelín, who had designed the paper mills and therefore joined the company without putting up any capital, was not content with the lavish earnings he received but appealed to the Real Junta de Comercio for an exclusive privilege, preventing the company from manufacturing other mills without his permission;[40] this conflict, combined with an even more decisive lack of funds, led one of the most ambitious industrial projects registered in the bay of Cadiz in the eighteenth century to stall.

In the following years, the crown persisted in its attempts to foster skilled migration to Spain. In 1757 it went as far as to ban the import of Genoese paper, but the measure was withdrawn in 1760. Twenty years later Charles III offered fiscal exemptions to strengthen the Spanish paper industry, but the mills it managed to see spring up in Andalusia, Catalonia, and Valencia were never enough to cover the monarchy's needs.[41]

In 1778 the commercial reform of the Comercio Libre[42] gave the Genoese the opportunity to set up their own factories in Spain, especially those devoted to silk manufactures. In an attempt to stem contraband and to develop local production, the Bourbons abolished a number of taxes levied on transoceanic shipping and on the exports of Spanish textiles. While duty thresholds on foreign manufactures were kept high, the law prescribed that textiles produced by foreign merchants and craftsmen who had immigrated to Spain should be treated as local products; foreign merchants were solely forbidden from exporting goods to America on their own account (art. 23). The reform also prescribed that even textiles that had been spun abroad but were subsequently dyed or otherwise modified in Spain could be considered as Spanish goods once they had been introduced into the monarchy's territories. These regulations supplemented others that aimed to boost foreign productive ventures in Spain, such as the obligation imposed on the artisan guilds to admit foreign Catholic masters (1777), a greater tolerance in the regulation of textile productive processes, and, above all, the liberalization of the number of looms that each entrepreneur was allowed to possess (1787).

[36] A Spanish enclave in Liguria until 1713.

[37] A lot per bale of paper produced, rather than a daily wage.

[38] Archivo Histórico Nacional, Estado, Legajo 3215-1, n. 217, *Fábrica de papel en el Puerto de Santa María*, 1752.

[39] Brilli, *Genoese Trade*, 41.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Balmaceda, *La contribución genovesa*, 101.

[42] *Reglamento y Aranceles Reales para el comercio libre de España a Indias, de 12 de octubre de 1778*, en la Imprenta de Pedro Marin, Madrid, 1778.

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On the strength of their experience, Genoese traders and producers secured a dominant place for themselves in the silk industry of Cadiz. The main textile production centre in the bay was Puerto de Santa María, which mainly produced for the American market. As is made clear in the memoir of the Economic Society of Cadiz redacted by Gaspar Procurante in 1784, the Genoese owned most of the textile plants in the port. Procurante himself was a leading figure in the Genoese community of Cadiz: along with other Genoese associates, he owned the largest silk stocking and belts factory of the area. The factory had 80 looms, employed 203 workers, and produced 55,000 units per year. The company's associates Josef Alberti and Vico-Conti in 1791 enlarged the enterprise by opening a factory with 101 looms for the production of silk stockings in Puerto Real. The factory of José Pedemonte, a member of an important family of Genoese traders, stood in second place after Vico-Conti, with its looms producing 8,000 units of stockings, trousers and gloves in 1798. The Pedemonte family also established a company in Genoa for the import of raw silk from southern Italy.[43] Other minor stocking factories[44] cooperated among them and with Spanish entrepreneurs. By virtue of such collaboration, the factory of the Spanish trader Rafael Vicario de Íñigo employed 54 specialised workers of both sexes who had been hired in Genoa.[45]

The enduring competition of goods imported from abroad and the fall in sales which occurred in the 1780s due to the saturation of the colonial markets and to the crisis provoked by the war against England prevented any form of consolidation in the bay of Cadiz's textile industry. As shown above, paper production suffered a similar fate, and the paper manufactured in Genoa continued to be shipped to Spain and to the Americas by widely resorting to contraband.

In summary, the upcoming industry in Bourbon Spain offered new prospects to the workers and craftsmen who were ready to leave the republic in search of better opportunities; the Crown's policy also encouraged Genoese businessmen to establish their own production plants in Spain, which further stimulated migration of skilled workers. On the one hand, the corporate and manufacturing system in Genoa was traditionally open to the foreign contribution and generally unable to prevent – or, as in the case of glass industry,[46] not interested in limiting – migration of specialised manpower; on the other hand, the barriers to entry of the Spanish productive system were low and further relaxed under the Bourbon kings in order to attract foreign skilled migrants. These initiatives had more modest results than expected due to the lack of capital in the hands of the Spanish economic élite and the unbeatable competition from foreign goods, including those that were produced in the republic.

Genoese Craftsmen in the Monarchy's Frontier

Although historical studies of technology, exchange, and innovation during the early modern period have traditionally overlooked the Americas,[47] emerging literature on

[43] Catia Brilli, "Evolución de las redes comerciales genovesas a partir del nudo gaditano: Las familias Pedemonte y Malagamba Vallarino," in *En torno a la Primera Globalización: circulaciones y conexiones entre el Atlántico y el Mediterráneo (1492–1824)*, ed. José Manuel Díaz Blanco, Juan José Iglesias Rodríguez, and Isabel María Melero Muñoz (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 2022), 341–63.

[44] As those of Montesisto, Fascie, Cerruti, and Roccatagliata.

[45] Brilli, *Genoese Trade*, 41–2.

[46] Corine Maitte, "Artisan Mobility and the Circulation of Knowledge in the Glass Industry in Early-Modern Europe," in *The Republic of Skill: Artisan Mobility, Innovation, and the Circulation of Knowledge in Premodern Europe*, ed. David Garrioch (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 65–89.

[47] Dagmar Schäfer and Marcus Popplow, "Technology and Innovation within Expanding Webs of Exchange," in *The Cambridge World History vol. 5: Expanding Webs of Exchange and Conflict, 500 CE–1500 CE*, ed. Benjamin Kedar and Merry Wiesner-Hanks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 309–38.

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the topic increasingly aligns with observations made in other geographical and political contexts. Specifically, it demonstrates that imperial entities did not facilitate a seamless and universal diffusion of science and technology from the "centre" to the "periphery."[48] For instance, the introduction of European technology for extracting silver from low-grade ore using mercury amalgamation was crucial to the development of the mining economies in New Spain and Peru.[49] However, other strategic industries failed to consolidate due to overwhelming foreign competition. This was the case with silk production: despite initial successes in transplanting sericulture to New Spain, the abundance of European and Chinese silks ultimately thwarted efforts to establish an American silk industry.[50] Similar failures occurred in the British colonies, where attempts to establish silk production in early eighteenth-century Georgia using Piedmontese mills and skilled labour failed.[51] These failures underscore the dependence of such industries on legal and economic systems that were difficult to replicate in colonial settings.

The experiences of Genoese migrants to the Indies further illustrate these dynamics. Spanish mercantilist policies and the structure of the Atlantic economy discouraged the establishment of large expatriate communities and manufacturing enterprises, but such policies did not prevent individual Genoese migrants from prospering. Those who crossed the Atlantic in search of fortune were generally welcomed by host societies. Throughout the eighteenth century, colonial authorities issued repeated expulsion decrees targeting foreigners in the Indies, often under pressure from local merchant guilds. Nevertheless, the recurrence of these decrees highlights the lack of consensus needed for their enforcement. This explains why late colonial Lima – despite intense campaigns against contraband trade in imported goods and silver – remained a hub for Genoese expatriates, many of whom were active in trade.[52]

Similar patterns were evident in the Río de la Plata, a frontier region deeply involved in the Atlantic exchange system due to Portuguese, Dutch, and English activities in the slave and silver trades.[53] Throughout the eighteenth century, municipal authorities in Buenos Aires often supported foreign merchants against opposition from governors and

[48] Simon Werrett, "Technology on the Spot: The Trials of the Congreve Rocket in India in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Technology and Culture* 53:3 (2012), 598–624.

[49] Arnold Pacey, *Technology in World Civilization: A Thousand-Year History* (Oxford: Basil Blakwell, 1990), 69.

[50] José L. Gasch-Tomás, "The Manila Galleon and the Reception of Chinese Silk in New Spain, c. 1550–1650," in *Threads of Global Desire. Silk in the Pre-Modern World*, ed. Dagmar Schäfer, Giorgio Riello and Luca Molà (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2018), 251–64.

[51] Paola Bertucci, "Spinners' Hands, Imperial Minds: Migrant Labor, Embodied Expertise and the Failed Transfer of Silk Technology across the Atlantic," *Technology and Culture*, 62:4 (2021), 1003–31. On the conditions that favoured the development of silk industry in northern Italian cities, see Carlo M. Belfanti, "Corporations et brevets: Les deux faces du progres technique dans une economie preindustrielle (Italie du Nord, XVIe–XVIIIe siecles)," in *Les chemins de la nouveauté: Inventer, innover au regard de l'histoire*, ed. Liliane Hilaire-Pérez and Anne-Françoise Garçon (Paris: CTHS, 2004), 59–76; and Carlo M. Belfanti,, "Guilds, Patents, and the Circulation of Technical Knowledge: Northern Italy during the Early Modern Age," *Technology and Culture* 45:3 (2004), 569–89.

[52] Sandro Patrucco Nuñez-Carvallo, "Inserción italiana en el Perú virreinal del siglo XVIII," in *Génova y la monarquía hispánica (1528–1713)*, vol. 2, ed. Manuel Herrero Sánchez, Yasmina Rocío Ben Yessef Garfia, Carlo Bitossi, and Dino Puncuh (Genoa: Società Ligure di Storia Patria, 2011), 965–79; Catia Brilli, "The Scope and the Limits of the Genoese Persistence in the Atlantic Economy," in *Atlantic Italies: Economic Entanglements between Africa, the Americas, and the Mediterranean (15th–18th Centuries)*, ed. Roberto Zaugg and Silvia Marzagalli (Rome: Viella, 2025), 443-460.

[53] Zacarías Moutoukias, "Power, Corruption, and Commerce: The Making of the Local Administrative Structure in Seventeenth-Century Buenos Aires," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 68:4 (November 1988): 774–5; Cátia Antunes, ed., *Pursuing Empire: Brazilians, the Dutch and the Portuguese in Brazil and the South Atlantic c. 1620–1660* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

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viceroys, emphasizing their contributions to the public good.[54] This favourable disposition, particularly following the creation of the Río de la Plata viceroyalty in 1776, enabled a small but socially recognized group of Genoese migrants to prosper in Buenos Aires. These migrants engaged in diverse sectors such as food production, construction materials, river navigation, and, most notably, retail trade.[55]

Several factors impeded the consolidation of regulatory systems governing access to productive and mercantile professions in this region. These included the delayed establishment of the viceroyalty, the limited scale of local manufacturing, ethnic tensions among artisans, the growing presence of enslaved urban workers, and divergent interests between wealthy and less affluent producers and vendors.[56] While Genoese immigrants benefited from the relative openness of the Río de la Plata market, they did not entirely oppose regulatory organizations. In the shoemaking sector, for example, they advocated for the establishment of guilds. In 1788 some Spanish and Genoese masters sought to control the production and sale of shoes in Buenos Aires, where the constant population growth guaranteed a high demand for footwear,[57] citing the need to protect the profession and product quality standards from competition posed by unskilled local artisans, many of whom were enslaved Africans. Their petition, inspired by Spanish guild systems, proposed differentiating members by expertise while avoiding other forms of discrimination, apart from excluding "low-rank" masters from access to the guild's offices.

The city council endorsed the petition, recognizing the utility of foreign expertise, while local artisans vehemently opposed it. The council also expressed a desire to regulate foreign skilled labour in other sectors and encouraged immigrants to marry locally, linking their presence to population growth and economic development. Despite these endorsements, ethnic tensions and economic rivalries led to a 1794 royal decree denying the guild's establishment.

Local artisans successfully opposed the guild by aligning with retailers, offering them access to the footwear trade – a sector the proposed guild sought to monopolize.[58] Genoese shoemakers, as they had done in Spain, allied with other foreigners to leverage the favourable disposition of local authorities. However, their efforts failed due to resistance from local artisans and merchants, who viewed the guild as a threat to their economic interests. The support of local authorities and the expertise of foreign masters proved insufficient for the successful dissemination of technical knowledge. As observed in other geographical and productive contexts, technology transfer depended on multiple intermediaries, and the absence of connections with local merchants, artisans, and practitioners could significantly impede the diffusion of knowledge between regions.[59]

The failure of the shoemakers' guild highlighted broader changes in labour organization in late colonial Buenos Aires. Skilled workers lost control over recruitment, training, standards, and prices, while enslaved individuals increasingly participated in various professions. In Europe, by the mid-eighteenth century, guilds had undergone processes of

[54] Victor Tau Anzoategui, "Una defensa de los extranjeros en el Buenos Aires de 1743," in *VI Congreso Internacional de Historia de América*, vol. 4 (Buenos Aires: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1982), 275-83, 277–9.

[55] Brilli, *Genoese Trade*, 93–7.

[56] Lyman L. Johnson, *Workshop of Revolution: Plebeian Buenos Aires and the Atlantic World, 1776–1810* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011).

[57] Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires, IX, 30-4-2, D. Nicolás Rigui y otros, solicitando establecer un gremio de zapatería, 1788.

[58] Johnson, *Workshop of Revolution.* chap. 3-4; Brilli, *Genoese Trade*, 108–11.

[59] See the discussion reported in Liliane Hilaire-Pérez and Catherine Verna, "Dissemination of Technical Knowledge in the Middle Ages and the Early-Modern Era: New Approaches and Methodological Issues," *Technology and Culture* 47:3 (Jul. 2006), 536–65.

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oligarchization, which marginalized new entrants.[60] By contrast, Buenos Aires lacked the corporative spirit of medieval guilds, and attempts to establish manufacturing hierarchies repeatedly failed. Instead, the region developed a more entrepreneurial economy that continued to view foreign expertise as a resource for economic development. After independence, this openness to foreign labour transformed the Río de la Plata into a destination for large numbers of European migrants.

In 1799, Cornelio Saavedra, an attorney for the city council, criticized guild privileges for exacerbating the region's economic difficulties. A decade later, jurist and political leader Mariano Moreno used the shoemakers' guild failure as an example of the harm caused by such privileges, advocating for the liberalization of trade and the admission of foreign ships to the Río de la Plata as the sole method to enhance economic and demographic growth. Following independence, the removal of Spanish trade restrictions had an immediate impact on technology transfer. Genoese migrants contributed significantly to the development of the local commercial fleet from the 1820s onward, both through the sale of ships from Liguria and the establishment of shipyards for river and sea trade. These enterprises, led by Genoese owners and workers, formed the nucleus of a growing expatriate community that eventually surpassed the one in Cádiz in both size and diversity.[61]

Conclusion

The case examined here illustrates artisan mobility as a complex phenomenon whose dynamics transcend both the well-known advantages and limits of the guild system.[62] In the eighteenth-century Spanish monarchy, as elsewhere in Europe,[63] guild-based artisans did not simply confront elites aiming to abolish their privileges, nor did labourers necessarily encounter economic or juridical barriers that limited their access to skills and knowledge. Within the framework of Spanish mercantilism, the Genoese found an institutional environment conducive to the establishment of commercial and manufacturing activities, which also facilitated the immigration of skilled workers. This process, which influenced the principal industrial activities of the republic and its core foreign exports, ultimately contributed to a decline in the traditional quality of Genoese manufactures. While foreign production discouraged new investments in technological innovation in Genoa,[64] Genoese traditional manufactures managed to remain competitive in the same markets where skilled migrants had disseminated their expertise. The emergence of more

[60] Bert De Munck, "Shared Skills and Technologies of Community Formation: Artisanal Epistemologies, Secrecy and Governmentality in Long-Term Context," in *The Republic of Skill: Artisan Mobility, Innovation, and the Circulation of Knowledge in Premodern Europe*, ed. David Garrioch (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 35–64.

[61] Fernando J. Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2008), 65; Brilli, *Genoese Trade*, chap. 5.

[62] On this topic, see Sheilagh Ogilvie, *The European Guilds: An Economic Analysis* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[63] De Munck, "Shared Skills and Technologies."

[64] Hand mills in Genoa dominated in the local silk production until the mid-eighteenth century. A merchant-producer (owner of commercial houses in Genoa, Milan, and Spain) attempted to install the silk mill's technology in the republic as early as 1674 but received opposition from the mercantile world organised in the Silk Magistrate, which feared excessive price drops for finished goods and unemployment for workers. The spread of the silk twisting mill moved by a waterwheel was due, more than fifty years later, to few patricians, who, however, remained unwilling to invest much in the sector. The production programmes of the new industries remained subject to the prior approval of the Silk Magistrate, who was responsible for the supervision and repression of fraud. Luigi Bulferetti and Claudio Costantini, *Industria e commercio in Liguria nell'età del Risorgimento (1700–1861)* (Milan: Banca Commerciale Italiana, 1966), 44–5, 69. See also Carola Ghiara, "Filatoi e filatori a Genova tra XV e XVIII secolo," *Quaderni storici* 52:1 (April 1983), 135–65. On the technology of silk mill, see Carlo Poni, "All'origine del sistema di fabbrica: tecnologia e organizzazione produttiva dei mulini da seta nell'Italia settentrionale (sec. XVII–XVIII)," *Rivista Storica Italiana* 88:3 (1976), 444–97. A similar decline can be observed in the glass industry of Venice in

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integrated economies in the eighteenth century fostered exchanges between Genoa and the Spain, where the republic exported semifinished goods. Through Genoese contributions, highly lucrative industries in Cadiz – such as shipbuilding, silk, and paper – experienced growth, benefiting both Spanish and Genoese entrepreneurs in the region. However, these ventures failed to consolidate due to a lack of capital, increasing competition from foreign manufacturers, and, at last, the disruption of the Spanish colonial trade, which deprived Spanish production of its primary market.

At the frontier of the monarchy, where Spanish rule and the conditions of the local market offered more limited profit-making opportunities to foreigners seeking to establish themselves within the host society, Genoese immigration and its impact on the local economy remained comparatively modest until the wars for independence, despite the good disposition of local authorities towards the creation of guilds led by foreign masters. After emancipation, the region's opening to international trade, coupled with new policies aimed at attracting skilled labourers, transformed the Río de la Plata provinces into a favoured destination for modern migrations from Liguria. These developments generated significant technological advancements in key economic sectors, underscoring the transformative potential of skilled immigration in shaping regional economies.

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the same period: W. Patrick McCray, "Creating Networks of Skill: Technology Transfer and the Glass Industry in Venice," *The Journal of European Economic History* 28:2 (Fall 1999), 301–34.

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