

Porters in the Eighteenth-century Port City of Trieste: A Special Group Within the Working Population of a Free Market Economy

Aleksej Kalc

*ZRC SAZU, Slovenian Migration Institute
University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities*

Porterage and porters

Porterage was one of the most popular occupations in the past. Before the modernization and mechanization of the transport sector, all the operations related to loading, unloading, delivery, and all kinds of movement of goods depended on animal and, largely, human physical strength. This was especially the case in cities, where narrow street systems restricted access for draught animals and loads had to be delivered to the upper floors of buildings. A good example is Genoa, which in the modern era grew in height without significantly changing its medieval urban plan, interspersed with a custom-made street network. Because of this, and because the narrow streets were also an extension of trade, craft, and other workspaces, the entry of carts into the city was even forbidden. Thus, until urban restructuring, which began in the 1840s, freight and passenger urban transport were almost exclusively under the control of the porters (Piccinno 2005). With the spread of urbanization in the eighteenth century, many towns and cities acquired a planned appearance, with a rational road and street network designed to ensure the smooth movement of traffic. Porterage, however, retained its role, since the demand for porters' services increased with the quantities of exchanges and the movement of goods. At the same time, the market for unskilled labour did not lack for the urban and rural proletariat, which struggled to offer only its physical strength. In this way, supply and demand grew with a strict parallelism. Porterage was, of course, always widespread in port cities, where

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it played a key role in maritime or river and lake transport, or other trade activities.

Porters were usually organized by companies, in a corporate way. The Companies based their structures on statutes or contracts with the city administrations, which determined the internal legal order for members and the public position of the company, and its economic relationship with the labour market. The roles of the companies and the types of carrier services were different. One company might have a locally defined scope, such as a city district, a port area, or a transshipment route. Others were specialized in the type of cargo, such as the transport of water, oil, coal, meat products, or people and their luggage, and still others were tied to both the local type of work and cargo. The scope, specializations, and all the rules were set by the local authorities according to the needs of individual carrier services and the availability of labour. Porterage rights were usually exclusive and frequently monopolistic. This was sometimes due to security reasons or trust. One such example was the port customs porters, who had to guarantee that no irregularities occurred when goods crossed the customs border. Therefore, in some cities the customs granted a monopoly position to companies of foreigners, whose members were not allowed to have relatives or other interests inside the city (Orelli Vassere 2000, 227–8).

Private privileges and monopoly positions sometimes depended on the type of goods or service. Local administrations allocated them on the basis of permanent contracts, and companies managed to obtain them by taking over from other companies. They could also derive from other privileges, such as concessions granted by city administrations to certain bearer companies in recognition of special public benefit. Such were the accolades in some northern Italian cities for taking away the sick and dead during the plague (Piccinno 2002, 4–5). On the one hand, the administrations demanded a rigid and precisely regulated structure of porter work, in order to meet the needs and ensure the appropriate quality of porter services. On the other hand, regulations and monopolies prevented the overcrowding of workers and their falling below the subsistence limit. They also enabled the sustainability of companies through the generational renewal. Some retained distinct ethnic features and other forms of identity. This was particularly the case for companies formed by immigrants who, operated as migratory work systems. An example of such a company is the *Caravana del portofranco* in Genoa, which consist-

ed exclusively of porters from the Bergamo area (hence also the name of *Caravana bergamasca*) and had the exclusive right to transport certain goods in the port of Genoa. That right was acquired as early as the fourteenth century, and it was maintained continuously for 500 years until the liberalization of transport, in the first half of the nineteenth century (Piccinno 2002, 4; Massa Piergiovanni 2011). Examples of ethnically defined monopoly companies are the oil carriers (*Camalli da olio*) in Genoa and the customs carriers (*Facchini di dogana*) in Florence and Livorno, which originated in the Swiss Canton Ticino.¹ In Livorno, the Swiss porters succeeded the Bergamaschi (who were granted a private privilege in the seventeenth century) because of the excessive annual fee demanded by the public administration for the contract. The ethnic connotations of both companies, however, stemmed from the privilege itself, which provided for the transfer of rights to the relatives of its members (Panattoni 1863). Similarly, although in peculiar forms, porters experienced very different organizational systems in other European and Mediterranean cities, often differentiating groups of local and immigrant workers (Belfanti 1994, 69–70 for Mantova; Levi 1985, 89 for Cadiz; Kaplow 1982, 62 for Paris; Stern 1960 for London; Eyal 2002 for the Turkish migration).

Porterage was a less simple profession than we can imagine at first glance. In addition to physical strength, it required the skill of properly handling different types of cargo, organizational ability, and responsibility. It was not enough to carry many goods; they also had to be manipulated, measured, sorted, flowed, arranged and properly stacked in warehouses, etc. On several occasions, the companies were also entrusted with supervisory tasks. Reliability and the company's good name were important in all this. Customer trust was generally one of the main assets of the companies' existence and operation. Species of carrier were also socially stratified according to the different economic situations of individual companies.

Despite the recognition they received for their economic role,² the porters were nevertheless among the least reputable professions and occupied positions at the bottom of the social ladder (Garzoni 1585, 346;

1 For more information on these cases and the differences between monopoly companies and those operating in the free market, see Orelli Vassere 2000; Orelli Vassere 2004; Orelli Vassere 1996.

2 Due to their flexibility in taking on other jobs, and contributing to solve some conundrums and labour needs, some considered them the 'ointment' of the city's economic wheels, Mocarelli 2007, 643.

Heerma van Voss 2006). In the eyes of the urban elites, who nurtured prejudices against all the mechanical or physical occupations, they were considered the most trivial forces, just useful and therefore barely tolerated. Such an image was also associated with the fact that many porters came from hilly areas, where the cultivated urban populations usually located the underdeveloped and even wild world (Garzoni 1585, 346; Belfanti 1994, 67–70; Mocarelli 2005; Zannini 2000; Mocarelli 2009). The organization habits of the porters and the workers themselves, with their rude and vulgar manners, also contributed to spread this image. The companies were cohesive groups with a strong sense of belonging and solidarity. In conflicts between companies, with the authorities but also with the social environment, they proudly defended their interests and their honour. The problem, however, was that many porters flirted with poverty and could become a social burden or even offenders in times of crisis.³ Because of all this, they received special attention from the elites and the authorities, who considered them a potentially subversive and dangerous category for public order. In the eighteenth century, when in their pursuit of the conquest of society, in accordance with the principles of the good and useful, the social élites began to treat marginals in the same way as criminals, porters also became subject to special security norms (Mocarelli 2007).

Porterage in Trieste: peculiarities and dilemmas

During the eighteenth century, when Trieste became the main Austrian port,⁴ the market for porters grew rapidly. The importance of the por-

3 We can highlight the point looking at the various names given to the porters. Thus, for example, in Naples they were called *lazzaroni* because, with their tattered attire, they were similar to Saint Lazarus, symbolizing extreme poverty. *Lazzarone* was the name for a member of the lowest Neapolitan people, and in the wider Italian area it established itself as the name for unpreparedness (De Bourcard 1858, 7). Even the general Italian term for the porter, *facchino*, is still used today in connection with rude and vulgar behaviour.

4 After the proclamation of free navigation in the Adriatic Sea in 1717, the Austrian Emperor Charles VI in 1719 granted the port cities of Trieste and Rijeka the status of free ports, and promoted their maritime trade specialization through a purposeful policy. After decades of uncertainty and the administrative reorganization of the Adriatic coastal region, during the time of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, in the second half of the century, Trieste developed economically, and attracted an increasing number of immigrants from the wider hinterland and the entire eastern Mediterranean. In 1735, the city had a population of about 5,000, and by the end of the century, more than 20,000. Alongside the medieval town centre,

ters, or in Italian, *facchini*, for the development of maritime and commercial activities is attested by the explicit instructions for these workers in the free-port patents (Kandler 1848, 68). Their numbers rose sharply over the decades. The 1758 census counted 119 of them (Mainati 1818, 286), in 1775 more than 400 (BCT, AD, CG, 1775), and 745 in 1792,⁵ considering only the Old Town, and without women, who were present in large numbers among the bearer workers. The figures also refer to the city's permanent residents, but in addition we have to consider the temporary porters, who appeared in large numbers seasonally or occasionally. The Trieste market of porter labour was economically attractive because it offered an opportunity to earn more than in other heavy labour or agricultural work (Apih 1957, 81). This created problems in the Trieste agrarian economy, which adapted to the growth of the urban food market and represented an important source of income for both the peasant population of Trieste and the agrarian and urban landowners. City owners of vineyards in the suburban area thus complained because they had difficulty in finding workers for seasonal work among local farmers, as well as those from neighbouring districts, and they had to overpay the manpower (Kalc 2005, 293). Professionals also became porters, although this was often a form of 'emergency exit', in the absence of more suitable employment opportunities.

Porterage in Trieste had a number of unique features and differed in many ways from the organizational forms of porterage and the legal position of porters in other cities. Two reasons could explain this peculiarity: the sudden appearance and rapid growth of employment opportunities in this sector, which met with a great workforce availability in the nearby countryside, and the free-port legal order and economic policy. In Trieste, even before obtaining the status of free port, we do not find guild institutions or something recalling the medieval corporative system. With the free port status, however, all forms of corporative amalgamation were banned, because every economic activity had to be free and develop on the basis of supply and demand. Every local or newcomer in the city was allowed to engage in every profession or activity, if they demonstrated appropriate professional skills, self-sufficiency and

which was named the Old Town (*Città vecchia*), a new, rationally designed urban agglomeration extended, for which the name New or Teresian City was established (*Città nuova* or *Città Teresiana*), Kalc 2008.

5 AST, CRG, b. 876, Tabella Sommaria Della popolazione Stabilita nel Distretto della Città Vecchia di Trieste coscritta nell'Anno 1792, 4 January 1793.

honesty, and behaved in accordance with prescribed social norms. The same was true for porters and other unskilled labourers. Although in some areas and in specific cases there were private entrepreneurs holding monopoly privileges, the free port authorities used them and limited participation in the urban economy only in order to satisfy everything that could promote successful development and prevent the most disruptive social phenomena.⁶

Due to the openness of the labour market, and the absence of formally organized companies based on exclusive rights and professional orders, among Trieste porters we cannot find groups that are as clearly defined by ethnic or local origin, as in the aforementioned cases. The urban *facchini* were mostly immigrants. Among those registered in the 1775 census just over 10 percent were born in Trieste (Table 1). They came mostly from the Slovenian hinterland, mainly from the area of Postojna, the surroundings of Ljubljana, the Karst, and the Vipava Valley (Carniola and Gorizia region), and Friuli (Venetian republic). However, there is no example of strategic alliances between them, connecting the urban labour market and the workers' place of origin into a complementary economic system, with recognizable links like family chains or circular migration. Such forms of economic behaviour are more characteristic of porters coming seasonally from Friuli and Istria (Venetian republic), and then returning to their native places with the earnings. In this way, they complemented the agriculture-led economic resources and contributed to the family income in the place of origin. However, their status and work logic were not comparable to the formally organized companies as in the other cities, as they entered the labour market as individuals, unrelatedly, and in free competition with everyone else. The censuses of the population did not count these workers, because they did not permanently live in the city and were not treated by the city authorities as members of the urban population. Many returned to work in the city regularly year after year, as temporary employees. Others appeared on an occasional basis, as they easily found employment from spring to winter, when maritime traffic was at its busiest peak and construction and other works were underway. Some, however, hurried to Trieste for other reasons, or were travelling through the city, and they took the opportunity to earn some money along the way by temporarily

6 Concerning the demography, immigration, and immigration control in eighteenth-century Trieste, see Kalc 2012.

becoming porters. All this was evidenced by Trieste police officers, who kept records of newcomers and issued residence and economic permits in the city. These records, which were quite approximate due to the high mobility of the population and the insufficient police apparatus, have not been preserved in the police archives. Therefore, at the moment it is not possible to estimate the numerical extent of these temporary presences (Čeč and Kalc 2010; Kalc 2008).

Table 3.1: *Facchini* in the 1775 Trieste census, by gender and origin

Origin	Male		Female		Together	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Trieste	35	11.2	13	13.1	48	11.7
Immigrants	277	88.8	86	86.9	363	88.3
Carniola	118	37.8	42	42.4	160	38.9
Gorizia region	75	24.0	36	36.4	111	27.0
Friuli	38	12.2	3	3.0	41	10.0
Veneto	14	4.5	0	0.0	14	3.4
Istria	6	1.9	4	4.0	10	2.4
Other	26	8.3	1	1.1	27	6.6
Total	312	100.0	99	100.0	411	100.0

Source: BCT, AD, CG, 1775

On the one hand, the number of porters housed in the city was the result of the growing attractiveness and receptivity of the city's unskilled labour market. Secondly, their arrival was the result of the stratification of peasant society in the urban hinterland, and the fragmentation of families whose individual members separated themselves from the domestic economic environment, searching for alternative life paths in the city. At the same time, they were the result of a tendency towards individual economic independence which, through urbanization and integration into the urban economy, wore away the social marginalization in the places of origin. These processes have led to more or less successful, and not always stable, rooting inside the urban environment. Most immigrants initially set foot in the city's labour market temporarily or occasionally, and in time they settled in the city. The transition was mostly individual and, unlike the aforementioned city examples, systemically uncon-

nected. It meant a cut with the economy of the place of origin, where the sons of small farmers and cottagers had no opportunity for family reproduction and were bound for social marginalization.⁷ When entire families immigrated, they usually first tried their luck in the agrarian suburbs of Trieste, where they settled as tenants or workers on the estates of the city landowners. Many then decided to move to the city, where they multiplied the ranks of the urban proletariat, making money only through unskilled wage labour (Kalc 2004, 361).

Resident porters showed a high average age (over 40 years) as a consequence of their long stay in the city. Barely 20 percent were under 30 years of age, and more than 16 percent were over 50 years of age. As many as 64 percent of them were between 30 and 50 years old (Table 2). Gender differences are evident in the segment up to 30 and over 50 years of age. They are associated with the earlier entry of men into the profession and the longer life expectancy of women, many of whom made a living in widowhood through carrying services. In other cities, the members of various foreign caravans and companies of porters were usually younger. In Mantua, for example, ten-year-old boys were introduced to the profession (especially the ones from the Trento area) by delivering suitable loads and goods, and 70 percent of porters from this area first went to work in Mantua before the age of 20, while about a quarter of them immigrated to Trieste at the same age (Belfanti 1994, 75). It is worth noting, however, that the former figure includes those who came to the city seasonally, while for Trieste we do not have this kind of information. It is also characteristic that the vast majority of porters listed in the Trieste census registers were married, and it was with marriage and the formation of a family that a more permanent settlement took place in the city. Being married to a local woman, most often to an immigrant, and having a family in the city, was also considered a statement for maintaining a permanent residence, and therefore a form of belonging to the urban population. This was very important from the point of view of social status, because these families, in case of need, received the same treatment as the city natives, with further advantages in the labour market in comparison with the precarious newcomers.

7 In relation to this transition in the context of migratory movements, compare Rosental 1990.

Table 3.2: *Facchini* in the 1775 Trieste census, by gender and age

Age	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
-15	2	0.6	0	0.0	2	0.5
21-25	16	5.1	2	2.0	18	4.4
26-30	53	17.0	9	9.1	62	15.1
31-35	49	15.7	12	12.1	61	14.8
36-40	86	27.6	18	18.2	104	25.3
41-45	25	8.0	11	11.1	36	8.8
46-50	40	12.8	22	22.2	62	15.1
51-55	8	2.6	7	7.1	15	3.6
56-60	20	6.4	10	10.1	30	7.3
61-65	8	2.6	5	5.1	13	3.2
66-	5	1.6	3	3.0	8	1.9
Total	312	100.0	99	100.0	411	100.0

Source: BCT, AD, CG, 1775

In Trieste too, the porters formed a layered and autonomous occupational and social category of workers. 30 percent of the men (and just under a quarter of the entire workforce) settled in the city were private porters, permanently employed in wholesale and forwarding firms, in stores, and in various private companies (Table 3.3). Less than 14 percent of men were public *facchini*. These were the customs porters (*facchini di dogana* and *facchini della muda*) - there were 26 of them in 1775 - who served in the free port customhouse. They were subject to special obligations laid down in the rules of 1754, and were therefore the only ones recognizable as a formally constituted group. They were in charge of bringing the goods to the customs scales and of delivering them outside the port. They were paid by drivers or cart owners at certain rates, and when there was not enough work at customs, they could join the free market (AST, CRS, b. 457, doc. 15-16, 31 January 1754). Sanitary porters in charge of quarantined goods (*facchini di sanità*) worked in the infirmary, and postal porters (*facchini di posta*) worked at the post office. A few porters specialized in carrying oil (*facchini di olio*), salt (*facchini di sale*, at the public warehouse and salt administration), wine (*porta vino*) and flour and cereals (*facchini di farina e di grani*).

Table 3.3: *Facchini* in the 1775 Trieste census, by gender and employment

Kind of <i>facchini</i>	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Market <i>facchini</i>	155	49.7	93	93.9	248	60.3
Private <i>facchini</i>	94	30.1	0	0.0	94	22.9
Public <i>facchini</i>	43	13.8	0	0.0	43	10.5
Specialized	20	6.4	6	6.1	26	6.3
Total	312	100.0	99	100.0	411	100.0

Source: BCT, AD, CG, 1775

The market porters were the most numerous. They freely offered themselves on the market day by day. There were 248, or 60 percent, of them. As many as 37 percent of these were women. They appear in the archival sources with the terms *facchino*, *facchino di piazza* (market porter), *facchino di giornata* (daily porter), and *porta sacco* (sack porter). The latter name refers to a sack that was used to carry various bulk goods, and was usually carried with them as a working tool together with a kind of apron or harness. Sack porters, or *porta sacco*, were mainly women (three-quarters of all sack porters and 87 percent of all female porters) who had an advantage over men in grain transshipment (BCT, AD, AP, Giornali di Polizia, 19 December 1774). Certain goods were transshipped in baskets and these workers were called *porta cesto*. Although the data collected do not provide elements for defining more precisely the differences in the position of these workers, there is a clear line between the permanent employees of the companies and private individuals or those who served public institutions, and those whose earnings depended on the daily labour market. This last category of porters was numerically the most variable and socially fragile. During the months of busiest port traffic, it multiplied with the arrival of temporary porters. At times when there was a shortage of work, however, the livelihood of this kind of workforce thinned, and in many cases fell below the subsistence. During the winter months, as the police administration pointed out, the delay of ships, which could not land at the piers due to bad weather, could mean starvation for many porters' families (BCT, AD, AP, Giornali di Polizia, 1 December 1774).

Compared to market porters, the privately employed ones seemed a kind of professional elite. Their stronger economic and social position

also stemmed from the reputation and protection of employers, and the consideration they received on this account. Good examples are the unanimous actions of Triestine traders against the return of military conscripts, which were demanded by the authorities in the immigrants' districts of origin. This was advocated by the police themselves, who took care not to flee abroad, as this would be detrimental to the state and the urban economy (AGCT, MC, b. 29, 22, 1, 1779; Dorsi 1989, 149). There was also no sympathy among the private porters for joining some undisciplined or even rebellious associations, as the nature of their work was different and under the control of employers. Differences are also noticeable in family situations. A characteristic of the urban proletariat was that families tried to compensate for low and precarious earnings by the gainful engagement of all able-bodied members. Porters were the most prominent examples of such an economic strategy, which is particularly clear among general market porters. According to the 1775 census, in more than 80 percent of cases, porters' wives were also busy in a job. The wives of porters regularly employed by companies and private individuals worked in about 45 percent of cases, while the wives of customs porters worked in barely 15 percent. The porters' wives performed various activities, most often being washers or even porters themselves, serving in homes and engaged in retail sales. Although the term 'housewife', used by the census source to describe married women who do not pursue a profession, does not exclude some form of gainful employment, it nevertheless draws attention to the different economic situations between the categories of porters. Many indications also reveal that market porters helped themselves by performing other heavy jobs, so that in many cases porterage was only their primary activity. Female porters, who accounted for 37.5 percent of the market and nearly a quarter of all porters, are a somewhat special case. They were generally at the bottom of society, and their lucrative activities were often the only source of income. Many were, as mentioned, the wives of porters, but many were the wives of peasants and other unskilled workers. Moreover, many were widows and therefore single women who had to take care of themselves and often of the family. If they really have preceded in transshipment of grain, what offered them the opportunity to earn, many also competed with men and adapted to the lowest tasks.

In short, market porters represented a particularly endangered and problematic segment of the urban society. This is highlighted by the re-

cord of the police officer in charge of counting the population in 1775. Regarding the *Rena* neighbourhood in the Old Town, he pointed out that 'poor people without a profession' live there, 'earning a living as general porters or peasant day labourers. Their wives carry sacks or serve around the houses. They are all full of children they do not care about, letting them wander around the city. These children harass people, beg in churches and houses, and feed only on *minestrone*⁸ shared by Capuchin priests at the monastery doors on certain days.'⁹ Similar warnings can be read in police files and reports of school inspectors who complained because child porters and other lowly people did not go to school; they walked around the streets and multiplied the incidents of road rage. Their parents had no control over them because they had to earn hard bread and many sent them to beg instead of school (BCT, AD, AP, Giornali di Polizia, 19 December 1774).

This was only one of the aspects inconsistent with the principles of good policing and a productive and virtuous society advocated by enlightened absolutism. However, other problems harmful to public order also arose. Due to the lack of earnings on the labour market, various illegal practices and forms of delinquency were born in the porters' ranks, from vagrancy to petty crime. This was due to temporary and occasional porters staying in the city regardless of work opportunities, wanting to settle permanently (BCT, AD, AP, Giornali di Polizia, 12 December 1774). When they lost their jobs, they automatically became vagrants and, according to the law, ripe for deportation to their homeland. In the lists of arrested persons, we can find many such cases as well as persons who have been caught in begging, idleness, or some other offense, and have apologized by declaring themselves as porters (BCT, AD, AP, 15 August 1768). Looking from this perspective, we understand how blurry the boundary between work and non-work was, between legality and illegality, and how employment as a porter was actually a two-way path, sometimes leading to marginalization, sometimes allowing a return to an honest life.¹⁰

8 Soup.

9 BCT, AD, AP, Continuazione del Protocollo de' rimarchi sopra li mancamenti trovati nella visita delle Case fatta in occasione della coscrizione generale, 26 February 1775.

10 As we can see in other cities. In Italy, even the verb *camallarsi* came into use, which derives from the name for the porter, *camallo* (of Arabic origin), and is meant to regain the reputation and honesty lost through the portering (Piccinno 2005, 19).

Among the porters, we can also find the hiding of lawbreakers and illegal business. As the porters were recognizable by their special clothes, criminals disguised themselves as porters (with a harness and a sack) in the city. Unhindered and with the helplessness of the police, they engaged in theft, fraud and other prohibited activities (BCT, AD, AP, 30 August 1768). The *facchini* and their families were, above all, very mobile and it was very difficult to control them. From year to year, with the maturity of housing leases, they moved within the city from apartment to apartment. It happened that many dropped out of the census records because they did not know if they would keep their apartment, so they declared to the enumerators that they would leave Trieste (Breschi, Kalc, and Navarra 2001, 185, 190, 192). Issues like the growing number of *facchini*, the strong sense of professional affiliation and social identification developed in their ranks despite the absence of corporate organizations, the poor life, and perhaps the resistance they faced in other cities, all raised concerns for security and dictated special attention in relation to this category of workers. They were necessary for the development of the port and the city but, at the same time, they were a problematic and potential threat to public order. The functioning of a free port and the development of the maritime and trade activities also depended on ensuring a good level of public order and security. Therefore, from the middle of the eighteenth century, Trieste, together with Vienna and some other major Austrian cities, was considered a laboratory for the development of the so-called police sciences and police practices (Čeč and Kalc 2010, 518–20).

The long way to regulating the porters' work

The porters thus became the subject of special attention for the free port administration and the trading elite, especially the stock exchange wholesalers who, with their views and interests, strongly influenced the economic policy and administrative policy choices in the city. At the end of the 1760s, the idea arose to introduce a register of porters in order to systematize the position of workers and to control all those who might join this profession. The initiative came in 1768 in the form of a part of the police administration reform, with the introduction of a new system for police operations. Antonio Pittoni, the police commissioner at the time, had the final word (Čeč and Kalc 2010, 534). The register of porters (*Rollo dei facchini*) should also serve to rationalize the porterage services by regulating the number of workers according to the market demand or

the employment opportunities, in a way so as not to increase the number of poor people during the idle seasons for port traffic. The initial regulatory plan introduced two separate matrices, one for company and private employees, the other for porters offering themselves freely on the market. For the latter, the reform envisioned the distribution by the different companies and the appointment of foremen to deploy workers as needed by the clients. Payment was assessed on the basis of the weight of the goods carried, the distance, and the method for the delivery, as in the cases of manual transshipment. The chiefs were personally responsible for every inadequate performance of the work done by each subordinate member of the group. Porters and those who wished to join them had to be registered with the stock exchange deputation and entered themselves in the register, so the workers' register could be properly compiled and maintained. Without this prior procedure and admission to the register, no one would be allowed to offer porter services. The guards were tasked with controlling the species of porter and punishing every violator of the rules.¹¹

However, despite the compilation of the register, everything remained the same, because everything got stuck when it came time to set the official price for the services. According to wholesalers, the tariffs for porter labour were in conflict with the principle of a free economy, and thus with free port legislation (BCT, AD, AP, *Giornali di Polizia*, 9 May 1774). The need to regulate porter work re-emerged in the mid-1770s, with population growth and increasing breaches of public order which, according to police experience, stemmed mainly from uncontrolled access to the porter labour market. However, trade operators again did not tolerate any interference, not only because of the issue of tariffs but also over the concern that the port would be left without a sufficient number of workers. The renewed plan, drawn up by Police Director Pittoni, therefore provided that the temporary workers from Friuli and Istria (foreigners from the Venetian republic) were allowed to provisionally enter the porter labour market during favourable seasons. Permanently resident porters certainly retained an advantage, especially those who negotiated lower prices for services, which the chiefs were obliged to take care of when deploying workers. Merchants retained full freedom in hiring pri-

11 BCT, AD, AP, 30 August 1768; *Giornali di Polizia*, 20 January 1769; *Giornali di Polizia*, 18 April 1769.

vate and market porters. Again, reserves prevailed, while regulations remained once more deadlocked.

The adoption of a new protocol did not take place until 1792 with the introduction of a new police order, when efforts were renewed to improve 'public education' and control over the increasingly 'disbanded low people'. This time, the merchants agreed to the introduction of a policy for porters because, at that time, they were paying for porter services at three times the usual price due to the lack of manpower. The rules provided for obtaining a written permit and a special tin badge issued by the police administration, on the basis of evidence of 'impeccable moral, honourable, and fair conduct' for each worker. This had to be listed in the general population register and recorded in a separate protocol with the name, surname, age, house number of the address in the city, the place of origin, and the personal description. In this way, the police obtained the necessary information to prevent the 'spilling' of unwanted people, and to avert the possibility that the label necessary for practicing the profession might be passed into the hands of unauthorized persons. Private porters were also obliged to adapt to the system, without having to show their goodwill to the police because they were subject to a guarantee from their employers. The authorities managed this system quite flexibly and did not 'excessively make it difficult to accept new people into the register' so that 'the lack of a porter workforce would not make their services more expensive and burden the merchants too much'. A significant change occurred at the request of the merchants to control the internal organization of the porters, especially regarding the chiefs and their supervisory duties. The merchants wanted to prevent this category from self-electing its leaders, and thus becoming too independent and corporately cohesive. Therefore, they demanded that the role of leaders be assigned to persons of other social status, who were appointed from among the chiefs of neighbourhoods (*Capi contrada*). These, in turn, were among the auxiliary police staff.¹²

Conclusion

The regulations for porters (*Regolamento per i facchini*) came into force in early 1793 (AST, CRG, b. 547, 27 June 1794). Its adoption coincided with the tightening of security measures against external threats and internal political ferment, adopted by the state at the time of the spread of

12 AST, CRG, b. 545, 8 October 1792, 7 December 1792; b. 546, 27 December 1792.

the revolutionary spirit and the events of the war. The rules had a two-fold purpose: to maintain public order and to control and regulate the immigration of the common people. In both tasks, its effects were only partial, as the priorities of the trading elite and the state itself remained the growth of the port and the smooth strengthening of the economy. When he was drafting the rules for porters, Trieste Police Director and District Chief Antonio Pittoni received a recommendation from the government to work closely with the stock exchange deputation, and not to take any decision beyond the views of the 'mercantile community' (BCT, AD, AP, 4 February 1775). Following the adoption of the rules, which provided for the protection of merchants' interests regarding the prices of portage labour, the main aim should have been that 'the market will not suffer from the lack of such an important labour component' (AST, CRG, b. 545, 15 December 1792).

During the following years, inside the police documents we can continue to find references to porters from Austrian Lands and foreign countries who did not register, who did not obtain the prescribed permits to live and work in the city from their homeland, and mentions of registered porters who were not wearing a badge among other violations of the rules and police orders. Warnings that violators would be expelled under a speedy police procedure and conscripts would be enlisted in the military were implemented, but not too strictly (AST, CRG, b. 547, 27 June 1794). They were periodically announced by the police from the 1770s, giving the impression that they threatened more than they acted, despite the fact that security regulations were further tightened in the second half of the 1790s, before and after the French occupation. During the nineteenth century, porters continued to play an important role in the urban society, and benefited from regulatory measures that had long been rooted in the system established in 1793. The increase in the number of porters was associated with the growth of the city's port role in the second half of the century, with the accelerated process of urbanization and modernization, opening new questions, no longer only in terms of social management and organization of this work category but also in terms of labour law, health, education, and housing. As the final and important chapter of this history, along with the liberalization and politicization of the society, the Trieste porters, as in other ports, entered the trade union and political scene as a special segment of the urban proletariat, within which, until recently, they played an influential role.

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- AGCT, MC: Archivio Generale della Città di Trieste, Magistrato Civico.
- BCT, AD, AP: Biblioteca civica di Trieste, Archivio Diplomatico, Atti di Polizia.
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