

Borders that did not coincide with the trades

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The region that exported builders did not coincide with the political frontiers that were drawn across it between 1512 and the nineteenth century. After the cession of Lugano, Mendrisio and Locarno to the Confederates, described in Chapter A.II, the Luganese and Mendrisiotto villages became subject territories of the twelve cantons, whereas the Val d'Intelvi, the Valsolda and the lake shore around Como remained within the Duchy of Milan. The enclave of Campione, whose masters had worked on the cathedrals of Modena and Milan, stayed Milanese and is today the Italian municipality of Campione d'Italia.¹ The masters themselves crossed these lines within their own families. Workshops recruited from neighbouring villages on both sides of the frontier, marriages linked families of Bissone, Campione and Intelvi. As a result, the same surname can appear in documents as *luganese*, *comasco* or *lombardo* depending on who was writing.

For this reason the modern literature has moved away from national labels. Research in Ticino and Lombardy now uses the common heading of *artisti dei laghi*, which the Department of Education, Culture and Sport of the Canton of Ticino adopted for its publication *Artisti dei Laghi. Itinerari europei*.² This book follows that usage. When it calls a master "Ticinese", it means that he came from a place now within the Canton of Ticino, without implying that he or his contemporaries thought of himself in those terms. Many of the most famous names of the Central European Baroque, such as the Carlone of Scaria or the Lurago of Pello, came from villages that are Italian today. They are mentioned here because they belonged to the same networks.

1 The calendar of departure and return

The two emigrations also ran on opposite calendars. Builders and stucco-workers worked through the building season from spring to autumn,

because mortar and stucco could not be worked in frost and most building sites north of the Alps closed in winter. Many of them returned home every winter, while others came back only every two or three years or when a death in the family required them to settle an inheritance. Chimney-sweeps followed the reverse rhythm. In the nineteenth century the children who worked as sweeps were normally away from the end of October until April, when the cities heated their houses, and came home in spring for the agricultural season.³ In both cases the winter or summer at home was used for marriages, contracts, the purchase of land and the settling of accounts, which is why the notarial registers of the villages are densest in the months when the men were present.

Long-distance emigrants to Rome, Central Europe or Russia could not return each year. They stayed for several years, sometimes for decades, and came back for marriages, for the death of a parent or to retire. Domenico Trezzini, the architect of early St Petersburg, spent the last thirty years of his life in Russia, whereas many stucco-workers in German lands worked there for twenty or thirty seasons while keeping their households in the Luganese villages.⁴ The distinction between seasonal and permanent emigration was therefore fluid. The typical career combined years of apprenticeship abroad, a period of seasonal work as a journeyman or master and a final return to the village with savings, which were invested locally.

2 Notes

1. On the separate history of Campione, which remained under the abbey of Sant'Ambrogio of Milan after 1512, see Wikipedia, "Campione d'Italia", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campione_d%27Italia (used as a last resort); on its masters see Chapter A.I. ↩
2. Repubblica e Cantone Ticino, DECS, Divisione della cultura e degli studi universitari (DCSU), publications page "Artisti dei Laghi. Itinerari Europei", <https://www4.ti.ch/decs/dcsu/pubblicazioni/artisti-dei-laghi-itinerari-europei>, consulted 5 October 2026, which describes the series, a joint initiative of the Canton of Ticino and the Regione Lombardia, as an account of artistic emigration reconstructed through the working itineraries of the masters across Europe. ↩
3. Laura Damiani Cabrini, "Maestranze artistiche", Dizionario storico della Svizzera (DSS), version of 20 March 2015, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/047823/> (German version <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/047823/>), on returns that were

seasonal, every two or three years or occasioned by deaths and inheritances; on the season of the chimney-sweep children see Wikipedia, "Spazzacamini", <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spazzacamini> (used as a last resort), citing Rolf Wenger (2010). ↩

4. Mario Redaelli and Pia Todorović Redaelli, "Trezzini, Domenico", Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz (HLS), version of 10 April 2014, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/019162/>. ↩

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