

Guilds, privileges and competition with local masters

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Foreign masters were not always welcome. In many cities of the Empire the local guilds of masons and plasterers held monopolies and regarded the Italian teams as competitors. The lake masters met such resistance in part by their own organization. At their places of work they formed schools, companies or confraternities whose purpose was mutual help among members and the defence of their rights against the local authorities and communities. They also formed closed groups, united by common origin, that were little inclined to admit outside workers or to pass on their technical knowledge to them.¹ Where they worked for princes, bishops or abbeys, they could rely on the protection of their client, and where they settled in a town, some of them joined the local guild. The reluctance to train local workers could not last indefinitely, and the local masters trained in Italian workshops eventually replaced the Italian teams.

In Italy the situation was different, because the lake masters were part of the Italianspeaking world and the building guilds of Rome, Genoa and Venice were accustomed to masters from Lombardy. There the guild rules applied to them as to other members, with admission fees, rules on apprentices and the obligation to accept the guild's jurisdiction in disputes. Masters who rose to become architects of princes or popes usually stood outside the guild system, because their appointment came directly from the ruler.

1 Confraternities abroad

The religious confraternity was the most important institution of the lake communities abroad. In Rome the confraternity of the *nazione lombarda* at San Carlo al Corso, in Naples the Lombard church of Sant'Anna, and in Venice the Scuola dei Milanesei at the Frari gathered subjects of Milan and neighbouring territories, including the masters from the Swiss bailiwicks.

In Vienna an Italian congregation was established in the seventeenth century. In St Petersburg the Catholic church of St Catherine on the Nevsky Prospekt, completed in the 1780s, became the religious centre of the Italian and Ticinese community.

These confraternities provided much more than worship. They buried their members and said masses for their souls, which mattered to men who might die far from home. They cared for sick members and for widows. Some of them may have administered legacies for dowries of poor girls from the community, a form of charity that was also a form of social insurance for families whose breadwinners died abroad.² They lent money to members, stored documents and offered a setting in which disputes could be settled by respected members of the same community. In this sense they acted as an early form of trust company and mutual society for the emigrants.

2 Notes

1. Laura Damiani Cabrini, "Maestranze artistiche", *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz* (HLS), version of 20 March 2015, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/047823/>. ↩
2. Literature on the Roman national confraternities. ↩

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