


Economy and Networks of Rural Elite Families in a Manufacturing Area: Schio in the Republic of Venice between the Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries

Giulio Ongaro

University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy

Edoardo Demo

University of Verona, Italy

 © 2025 Giulio Ongaro and Edoardo Demo
<https://doi.org/10.26493/978-961-293-486-6.7-46>

The Case Study: A City or a Rural Village?

Schio è medesimamente terra grossa situata a piè del monte Summano e pien di populo che negotia in lane, seda e biava per grossa summa di capitale [...] si governa con magistratti simili a quelli della Città di Vicenza, con la quale continuamente litiga non volendo in conto alcuno cedergli

Nicolò Pizzamano, Captain of Vicenza, 1603
 (Istituto di Storia Economica 1976)

Schio is a rural village (or, at least, *formally* a village) located in the northern part of the province of Vicenza, on the border of the Republic of Venice, connected with the Imperial territories (the cities of Rovereto and Trento) thanks to the Pian delle Fugazze and Borcola passes (figure 1.1).

Schio was annexed to the Republic of Venice in 1406, two years after the annexation of the provincial capital, Vicenza, being a private domain of Giorgio Cavalli (Mantese 1969; Ongaro 2008). After its inclusion in the Venetian State, Schio became one of the eleven *vicariati* (administrative districts) of the province of Vicenza, maintaining during the entire Venetian period the legal status of ‘rural village’: this meant that a Vicentine *vicario* resided in Schio – often a member of the Vicentine families with relevant economic interests in the area, such as the Magrè family – even if



Figure 1.1 Territory of Vicenza, Atlas Van der Hagen, 1624

Notes Schio is circled; adapted from Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Atlas_Van_der_Hagen-KW1049B12_069-TERRITORIO_DI_VICENZA.jpeg)

the inhabitants of Schio frequently asked to be ruled by a Venetian *podestà*, like the Vicentine cities of Lonigo and Marostica. Besides the political implications of being a *vicariato*, the failure of the petitions to be considered a *podesteria* (i.e. a city, a title that Schio achieved only in 1817) meant associated limitations and subordination to Vicenza in jurisdictional and economic terms. The words used by the Captain of Vicenza, Francesco Michiel, in 1621 are quite suggestive about the importance of being considered a city. Indeed, referring to Schio he wrote: ‘the most relevant people [of Schio] are respectable people, with virtuous qualities and urban habits, and they do not forget to demonstrate to the public official how much they want to be considered as such’ (Istituto di Storia Economica 1976, 270). Focusing on textile manufacturing, being a *vicariato* meant it was impossible to produce high quality clothes (the so-called *panni alti*) until 1701, when

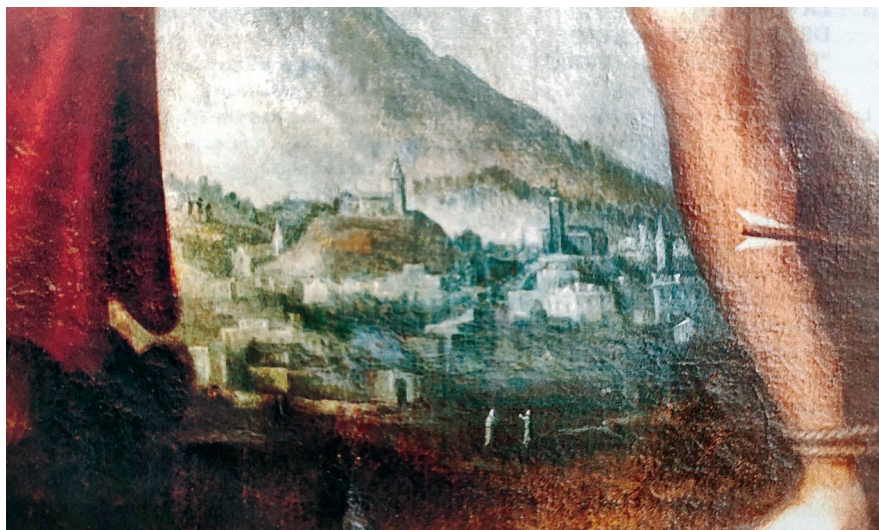


Figure 1.2 Schio at the End of the Sixteenth Century

Notes Detail of the altarpiece ‘Virgin between the Saints Rocco and Sebastiano,’ by Alessandro Maganza, in the church of San Pietro in Schio (Snichelotto 2007, 14).

the decline of the woollen sector in Vicenza and, in contrast, the evident dynamism of the same sector in the area of Schio, led the Vicentine councillors (the *Deputati ad Utilia*) to grant this privilege, which until that point was given only to the two *podesterie* of the province, Marostica and Lonigo (Panciera 1988, 20; Vianello 2004a, 228).

The ‘urban’ pretensions of Schio were supported by the fact of its being, still in 1534, a village ‘surrounded by walls and with many beautiful houses and palaces’ (Savio 2017, 306, n. 3), and with gates at the four sides of the settlement, an architectural characteristic that actually called to mind more a city than a rural village (figure 1.2). During the Venetian period, the walls were likely just the rests of the Medieval defence structure: indeed, according to Fontana, Schio in 1492 asked the Venetian authorities to rebuild the city walls, to be considered a city and to be allowed to produce high-quality clothes, but the request was denied (Fontana 1985, 82). Moreover, within the walls there were two hospitals, the San Giacomo hospital, established in the fourteenth century, and the Baratto hospital, created at the beginning of the seventeenth century (Snichelotto 2007), and various churches and religious and secular brotherhoods. A description dated 1532 lists ‘eight churches with many priests, a monastery of *Zoccolanti* [Francis-

Table 1.1 Population of Schio 1472–1764

Year	Inhabitants	Source
1472	2,300	ASCS, b. 19, Estimi 1472, 1557–1567, 1567–1573*
1534	4,500	Savio 2017, 360
1546	4,958	Ongaro 2021, 29
1558	4,292	Valseriati 2018, 71
1579	4,200	ASCS, b. 21, Estimo 1579–1582
1616	4,115	ASCS, b. 22, Estimo 1616–1628
1621	4,545	Snichelotto 2007, 23
1651	4,400	ASCS, b. 24, Estimo 1643–1655
1700	4,700	ASCS, b. 27, Estimo 1700–1710
1764	6,000	Pancieria 1996, 178

Notes *The estimates using the *estimi* (fiscal surveys) have been done, calculating the number of *fuochi* (residing family units) and suggesting an average of five members per unit. Indeed, this is the estimate proposed by the historical demographers for the early modern Italian countryside (Delille 1990), and a comparison between this estimate and, when available, the figures proposed in the archival documents, confirm the validity of this theory.

can] friars, and a cloister of Observant nuns' (Savio 2017, 306, n. 3), while a century later the *Podestà* of Vicenza, Alvise Bragadin, wrote that the parish church of Schio (San Pietro, the church on the right on the hill in figure 1.2) was a collegiate church with six canons, and many altars built by the richest local families, that paid the salaries of the canons themselves (Istituto di Storia Economica 1976, 361).

Besides the architectural and urbanistic aspects, it is important to underline the relevant demographic level that Schio had already reached at the end of the fifteenth century, and that it maintained during the entire Venetian domination. Broadly, the province of Vicenza, especially in its northern part, was scattered with villages that by the mid-sixteenth century already had thousands of inhabitants. For example, in 1546 Brendola had 4,700 inhabitants, Montecchio Maggiore almost 3,200, Thiene more than 2,000, Lonigo around 2,900, Valdagno more than 3,000, and Arzignano more than 4,800 (Ongaro 2021, 29). This important demographic level clearly played a relevant role in the economic characterization of the Vicentine countryside, especially if we consider the morphology of the area: indeed, nowadays, as in the early modern period, 40 per cent of the territory is mountainous, 30 per cent hilly, and just 30 per cent plain (Ongaro 2021, 29).

Table 1.1 summarizes the population of Schio, showing a relevant de-

mographic increase until the mid-sixteenth century, a small decline and then a certain stability until the end of the seventeenth century (despite the 1630s plague), and then a relevant increase in the century before the collapse of the Venetian Republic.

In the Italian area, there is a well-known debate about the demographic level that a centre should reach in order to be considered a city: on the one hand, for example, Paolo Malanima (1998, 91–3), recalling De Vries (1984) and Bairoch et al. (1988), suggests that a city should have at least 5,000 inhabitants, also proposing a differentiation between the urban centres under and above 10,000 inhabitants. On the other hand, Guido Alfani underlined the inadequacy of such a clear division, given that in the Italian area there are many relevant centres, often with a little less than 5,000 inhabitants, that cannot be defined as ‘rural’ *tout court* (Alfani 2010, 224–55). Therefore, he proposes to use the limit of 4,000 inhabitants in order to identify the urban centres. If we use this reference value, Schio can already be considered a city at the beginning of the sixteenth century, even if, as we anticipated, from an institutional, political (and, therefore, in a certain way, economic) point of view it was formally a rural village.

Moving from the architectural and demographic aspects to the institutional ones, the ‘almost urban’ (Chittolini 1990) character of Schio is demonstrated also by the presence of councils and officials that trace the Vicentine ones: the *Deputati ad Utilia* (a sort of assessor) were present both in Schio and in Vicenza, with the same name, and while in Vicenza the narrowing of the urban council produced the creation of the *Council of 100*, in Schio a similar process led to the creation in 1493 of the *Council of 32*, granting a sort of political supremacy to the growing local elites (Ongaro 2011; Di Tullio and Ongaro 2020).

Finally, the number of notaries who resided and practised in Schio is another clear indicator of the economic dynamism and relevance of the village: in 1635, the *Podestà* Bragadin, for example, wrote that in an attempt to calculate the number of notaries in the province of Vicenza, it was not enough to skim the list of the members of the College of Notaries of Vicenza, ‘given that in the cities and villages in the countryside there are a high number of notaries that are not members of the College’ (Istituto di Storia Economica 1976, 360). Figure 1.3 proposes an estimate of the notaries who resided in Schio from looking at the archival collections that are preserved in the State Archives of Vicenza: it is clearly an underestimate, given that it includes only those resident in Schio, and is based solely on the archival collections that have been gathered in the State Archives. Therefore, al-

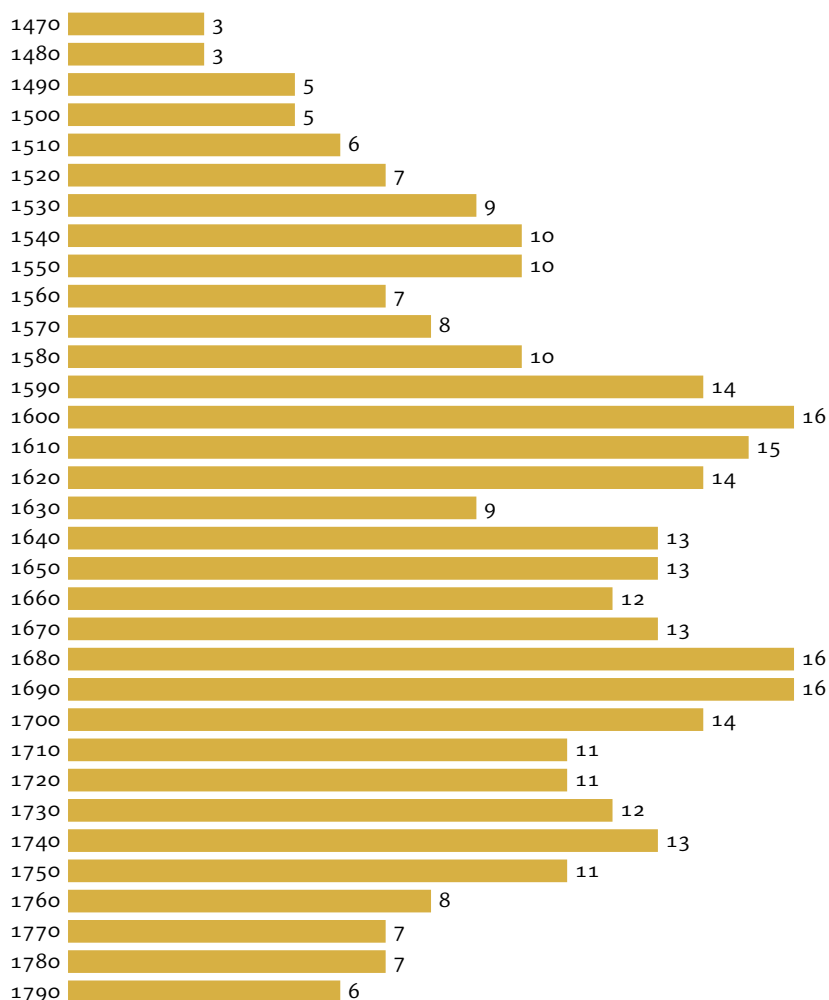


Figure 1.3 Number of Notaries Residing in Schio (1470–1800)

Notes Based on data from ASVi, Notarial archives.

most certainly many other notaries practised in Schio, considering that Lucien Faggion wrote that around 23 notaries worked in the village in the sixteenth century (Faggion 2017, 57, 59).

As we will observe in the following pages, the high number of notaries was due to the relevant number of economic transactions that took place in Schio: the leasing of fields and buildings, loans, the creation of business companies, besides the stipulation of acts related to dowries, wills, and so on.

The Economic Stratification, the Rural Elites, and Their Economic Activities

The Estimi and the Agricultural Sector

Given the context recalled above, it is not surprising that in Schio there was a strong social and economic stratification: this is a long-run characteristic of the local society, at least from the end of the fifteenth century onward, as is testified by the local *estimi* (fiscal surveys). Looking to the surveys dated 1579, 1643, and 1700 (ASCS, b. 21, Estimo 1579–1582; b. 24, Estimo 1643–1655; b. 27, Estimo 1700–1710) we can observe that at the end of the sixteenth century the richest 30 families of the village (around 480 families) hold more than 46 per cent of the total wealth, 48 per cent in the mid-seventeenth century (around 517 families), and more than 51 per cent in 1700, when the total number of families exceeded 580.

In the following pages we will observe the economic context in which these families strengthened their position and their assets, through investments in the primary sector, in the credit market, in the creation of trade companies, and in the production of textiles. Here, we want only to underline the strong continuity in the socio-economic structure and the fact that many families maintained their economic predominance, together with the political one (Ongaro 2011; Di Tullio and Ongaro 2020), for more than two centuries.

Table 1.2 summarizes the names that appear in the various tax surveys; the same names will recur frequently in the following pages, being the main protagonists of the manufacturing development of Schio, from the sixteenth until at least the beginning of the nineteenth century. The table clearly shows the continuity in the names of the urban and, mainly, rural families that had relevant properties in the village: among 30 families, 10 appear in a more or less continuous way in the three surveys – or, at least, both in 1579 and 1700.

The surnames will appear frequently in the following pages: Toaldo, Zamboni, Baretta, Nicoletti, or Bologna, just to name some examples. Other families in the table strengthen their position during the seventeenth century, being the protagonists of the manufacturing development of Schio in the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries. This is the case, for example, of the Capra or Folco families. Finally, other families appear in the sixteenth century survey and then disappear: in many cases, such as the Lodi family for example, this is not the result of an economic downturn, but of the urban drift of these families and of their capital, even if many

Table 1.2 *Quote d'estimo* (wealth evaluation, expressed in *lire*) of the 30 richest families in Schio (1579–1700)

1579		1643		1700	
Name	Estimo	Name	Estimo	Name	Estimo
Baratto	17	Baretta	36.357	Baretta	24.52275
Pellizzari	13.45	Dal Ferro	17.625	Canneto	15.633
Toaldo	12.5	Baratto	17.125	Folco	12.6625
Grandi	10.2	Zambon	16.7415	Alberti	11.279
Baretta	9.25	Nicoletti	16.174	Schio	9.175
Bologna	8.65	Rossi	14.0375	Ferro	8.225
Zambon	8.55	Schio	12.675	Zambon	5.948
Brentan	8.125	Canneto	12.084	Bonapace	5.2625
Di Marco	7.875	Gandin	10.55	Di Marco	5.1865
Tessaro	6.675	Folco	9.4	Scorlon	5.1585
Sanpaolo	6.5	Bonapace	9.375	Persenti	4.675
Finetti	6.25	Alberti	8.55	Pandolfi	4.5925
Nicoletti	5.625	Baldi	8.425	Capra	4.2405
Lovo	5.625	Capra	7.95	Dal Brun	4.0615
Gardelin	5.625	Bottaro	7.279	Rossi	3.8625
Lodi	5.5	Toaldo	7.15	Toaldo	3.517
Cappellaro	5.5	Di Marco	7.0375	Bologna	3.417
Montebello	5.2	Bigotta	6.78	Marostica	3.375
Bottaro	4.75	Piovene	6.65	Fantinello	3.358
Giacobbe	4.5	Scorlon	6.6075	Gardesani	3.3375
Di Vegna	4.5	Bombacino	6.225	Tamburin	3.183
Stefanin	4.375	Pierobon	5.679	Dal Molin	3.0275
Scorlon	4.375	Grandi	5.575	Nicoletti	2.954
Schio	4.375	Ganzega	5.4	Vivaro	2.945
Ruaro	4.349	Ruaro	5.1745	Volpe	2.8
Dalle Aste	4.075	Gardelin	5.1705	Ruaro	2.778
Baldi	4.025	Libba	4.9375	Saccardo	2.539
Crestana	3.9	Dalle Aste	4.933	Garofalo	2.3425
Rossi	3.875	Reghellin	4.9085	Gonzo	2.329
Vanzo	3.625	Righi	4.475	Gandin	2.2625

Notes The *lire d'estimo* are not real currencies; they are a sort of index number that summarize the wealth of each family. A certain amount of ducats or *lire* corresponded to one *lira d'estimo*, and this correspondence changed from *estimo* to *estimo*. This is to say that the data listed in the table cannot be used for comparisons between the three *estimi*.

ASCS, b. 21, Estimo 1579–1582; b. 24, Estimo 1643–1655; b. 27, Estimo 1700–1710.

‘former-rural’ families maintained strong investments in their native villages.

What were the economic bases of the wealth of the families recalled above? Before dealing with the long-term evolution of the manufacturing

sector in Schio and with the role played in this process by the wealthiest families of the community, a short reference to the agricultural sector is needed, for two reasons. Firstly, the families that led the manufacturing development of Schio were at the same time largely involved in the land market, in the trade of agricultural products and in the exploitation of local raw materials, especially the ones coming from the mining industry. The land market and, especially, the use of the land in credit-debit relationships between the great merchant-entrepreneurs and the small proto-industrial producers, was crucial in the construction of economic and social bonds within the community (Ramella 1997, 928), as is very well demonstrated by the case of the Toaldo family (Savio 2017, 316).

Secondly, but not in importance, the structure of the agricultural sector and the availability of raw materials could have relevantly affected the development of the secondary sector. Even if Mendels' theory on proto-industry (Ciriaco 1983) has been recently discussed (Panjek et al. 2017), especially because of its determinism in the connection between the characteristics of agricultural production and the growth of proto-industrial activities, it is undeniable that in the broad economic structure of an area the various productive sectors are not separate components. Quoting Panciera (2017, 208) on the Vicentine context, 'the interrelation between industry-agriculture-livestock or, in other words, the strong agricultural foundation of the manufacturing activities, should be always kept in mind in the history of the industries in the province of Vicenza during the entire early modern period.'

However, there is a lack of research on the characteristics of the agricultural sector in the area of Vicenza in the early modern period, on the distribution of the landed properties and the way they were managed (directly cultivated, the rent of large plots, short- or long-term rents to small farmers, etc.), and on the products cultivated (Pezzolo 2011; Knapton 2010; Ongaro 2017a). Therefore, we can only make some hypotheses, that should be confirmed by future archival research. On the distribution of the landed properties, it is established that between the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries in the province of Vicenza – as was happening in the entire Republic of Venice and abroad – there was a notable transfer of properties from the rural owners to urban ones. This was due partly to the purchase of plots by the urban families and partly to the urban drift of some rural owners, members of the local rural elites. This process produced relevant consequences, especially in fiscal terms, because of the inadequacy of the fiscal surveys to pick up on these changes (Grubb 1984). The urban activism

in the land market in the first half of the fifteenth century was characterized by ‘a widespread lack of aggregation of plots and [by] a relevant fragmentation of the estates’ (Bianchi and Demo 2014, 107). This partially changed – but without a real turn – in the second half of the century, when a ‘clearer logic of aggregation’ occurred, a logic that continued in the first decades of the sixteenth century (Bianchi and Demo 2014, 107).

However, this change of approach by the urban families did not lead to a modernization of the agrarian contracts; the landowners continued to avoid direct participation in the cultivation of the plots, and they usually rented out the properties to medium-small farmers, resorting to long-term contracts (Bianchi and Demo 2014, 107). It seems that this pattern endured in the following decades (Ferrarese 2008, 289; Ongaro 2020); in the proceeding centuries the *estimi* of Schio still show a strong fragmentation of the plots. Indeed, even if because of the absence of specific research on this topic using the *estimi*, it is difficult to characterize the distribution of the properties, given that the tax surveys recorded only the *availability* of the land (owned or rented) and not just the *ownership*, a rapid look at the *estimi* suggests that almost all the rural families had at their disposal at least a small plot for self-sufficiency, while only the richest urban and rural families declared larger properties, sometimes with houses where ‘the worker lives’ (as is frequently written in the tax surveys). This suggests the existence of some plots directly cultivated by the landowners through waged workers. Further, this kind of management of the properties was not a trait only of the urban estates; looking to the *estimi*, it seems that the wealthy rural landowners also used the same approach, renting out their properties to medium-small farmers, who were often also employed by the landowners themselves as workforce in the textile sector. In this sense the land market, together with the credit market (Corazzol 1979), was a crucial instrument for the urban families to tie themselves to the rural elites, and, in turn, for the latter to create strong bonds – also of patronage – with the other rural families.

The hypotheses on what was produced on the farms are even more fragile than the ones on the structure of the agrarian properties: on the one hand, if we consider the morphology of the territory (as anticipated, mainly hilly and mountainous), it is difficult to hypothesize a strong market-oriented agricultural production. Quoting Francesco Vianello, in the area close to the mountains of the province the terrain is ‘composed of a thin layer of rough and melted sediments on a bottom of sterile gravel, it is very permeable and, therefore, quite arid’ (Vianello 2004a, 34). That is, a terrain that

is not suitable for the cultivation of wheat, as is testified by the fact that at the end of the sixteenth century the local population chronically relied on the import of wheat for its subsistence (Vianello 2004a, 34). A *bocche e biade* (literally, ‘mouths and cereals’) survey, dated 1545, ordered by the Venetian authorities to quantify the food needs of the population, confirms this picture, revealing that in the piedmont villages, between 70 and 90 per cent of the agricultural production was composed of minor cereals, while the percentages were notably lower (between 40 and 50 per cent) in the southern part of the province (Ongaro 2021, 29–31). In summary, in the Vicentine area the agricultural sector was quite differentiated, and in the villages close to the mountains it was strongly linked to manufacturing development: indeed, the agricultural downtimes allowed a shift of the workforce to the domestic manufacturing or centralized industries (in the few cases in which there was this kind of organization of production), while the low incomes coming from the backward and low-production agriculture would have stimulated the workforce itself to be engaged in the manufacturing sector. This formed a strong bond between agriculture and industry that for a long period characterized the secondary sector in Schio, long after the end of the early modern period (Pancierà 1988, 66, 99–100; Fontana 1985, 84).

The relevant relationship between the agricultural sector and the manufacturing one is testified, besides the characteristics of the workforce, by the widespread cultivation of mulberries in the province. Already, by the beginning of the fifteenth century, these trees had spread, especially in the piedmont area of the Vincentine district (Demo 2001b, 5; Bianchi and Demo 2014, 111), and their expansion continued in the following decades, as was happening in the other territories of the Republic of Venice (Zannini 2010, 149); indeed, if we look to the tax declarations in Schio, especially the ones dated 1541–1565 (ASVi, Estimo, bb. 26, 28), almost all the plots are described as *piantà de morari*, i.e. planted with mulberries. The diffusion of these trees is clearly linked to the crucial role that their leaves played in the breeding of silkworms (Demo 2001a, 117), an activity that was widespread among rural families and that was essential for the development of the urban and rural silk industry.

The Mining Industry

Still looking to the primary sector, besides agriculture, the mining industry also, as anticipated, played a crucial role as an investment field of the wealthy families from Schio, Vicenza, and Venice. In the area of Schio-

Tretto, Torrebelticino-Valli del Pasubio, and in Recoaro (in the bordering Agno Valley) we can roughly identify three stages of the mining activities (Demo 2004a, 73–81; 2012, 39–40; Panciera 2004, 300–4; 2014, 148; Vianello 2004a, 263; Vergani 1997, 467; 2003, 124–5); if the extraction and processing of iron has been testified to since ancient times (Migliavacca 2021), from the fifteenth century, silver in particular became the fulcrum of the investments of the local families. For this reason, in the same period, significant migrations of specialized German workers took place (Ludwig and Vergani 1994, 419), strengthening the relationship with the Imperial territories, which became one of the main trading trajectories for the merchants from Schio and Vicenza. Between the second half of the sixteenth century and the first decade of the following one there was a real boom in investments in silver extraction, involving the most important families from Venice (Morosini, Grimani, Donà, Bollani, Trevisan) and Vicenza (Civena, Schio, Angarano, Piovene). The wealthy families in Schio recalled above (Toaldo and Zamboni, for example) actively participated in this ‘silver rush,’ establishing mining companies together with the Vincentine and Venetian families. However, from the second decade of the sixteenth century the deposits of silver began to run out, and the euphoria that characterized the previous years turned into a slow decline of mining activities: silver gave way to the traditional iron industry, which had never ceased throughout the entire early modern period, and to the extraction of kaolin. The so-called ‘white terrain’ became a relevant part of the investments of the local families, with huge amounts being sold to the *boccalari* (pottery producers) in Vicenza and Venice, and to the *vendecolori* (literally, ‘colours sellers’), including Alvise Della Scala, the supplier of the painter Tiziano, but also exported to the Church State, especially in Faenza, supplying the local pottery production (Demo and Ongaro 2023).

The Wool Processing

As anticipated, however, the wealthiest families in Schio invested mainly in the secondary sector, and specifically in textile manufacturing. Quoting Savio (2017, 308–9) who, in turn, quotes a document produced by the Venetian *Savi del corpo del Senato* in the mid-sixteenth century, the inhabitants of Schio were involved ‘more in breeding *cavalieri* [silkworms], producing clothes, breeding livestock, producing wood for constructions and firewood, and in other trades, than in agriculture.’ Indeed, if the mining industry was a relevant field of investment around Schio, and it allowed the rise of important families of rural entrepreneurs, the textile sector made

the fortune of the Vicentine village and of its elites. The trajectory, even if far from being linear, moved at least from the fifteenth century up to the first decades of the nineteenth century, when the Rossi industry, one of the most important (and precocious) woollen factories in the entire Italian area, was established. An extraordinary continuity, that is intertwined to the analogous continuity of the economic and social importance of the families recalled in the previous lines.

A description of the importance of the secondary sector in the area can be gleaned from a dramatic event that happened in Schio at the end of the sixteenth century, an episode that allows us to grasp both the relevance of the textile sector in the village, and the relationships between the local entrepreneurial families and the urban ones (ASVi, Magrè, b. 4, fasc. 76): on 29 August 1595, the brothers Ettore and Camillo Beffa, residing in Magrè (a village adjacent to Schio), were entering Schio from the southern district, *Oltraponte*, together with their friends Orazio Gardelin and Augusto Pellizzari. When they reached the palace of the Vicentine noble family Magrè, they were ambushed by Stefano Magrè, son of Giacomo, and some other men. The reason seems to be the fact that some days before, Riccardo Beffa, a cousin of Ettore and Camillo, killed a member of the Magrè family, and for this reason he was imprisoned in Verona. The Beffa brothers, Gardelin and Pellizzari, were armed (being members of the local rural militia), and the subsequent shooting led to the death of Camillo Beffa and to the wounding of Orazio Gardelin and of Isabella Beffa, sister of Camillo and Ettore, who was on her doorstep, close to the firing.

The depositions collected by the Venetian officials who investigated the event draw a very interesting picture of the society of Schio and of the characteristics of the village. They describe the district *Oltraponte* as studded with workshops of tailors, furriers and cobblers: the witness Domenico Pilati, son of Francesco, a merchant from Torrebelvicino (Demo and Ongaro 2023), for example, described himself as an apprentice in the workshop of the tailor Bartolomeo Penzato (ASVi, Magrè, c. 62 r.), while Cristoforo di Nicola dale Pozze, from the Tretto upland, was a *peliparius* (furrier) and declared that while the shooting was happening he was ‘in the workshop of my employer and I was working,’ and that ‘there was just a colleague with me’ (ASVi, Magrè, cc. 108 r.–v.). Further, Prudenzia, daughter of Pierobon Tamburini, said that she was ‘in my house, in the workshop,’ together with Giustina Verona, and ‘we were spinning [...] and talking, and laughing’ (ASVi, Magrè, c. 146 v.). This last deposition testifies that wool spinning was widespread not only in the peasant houses around Schio (Pancieria

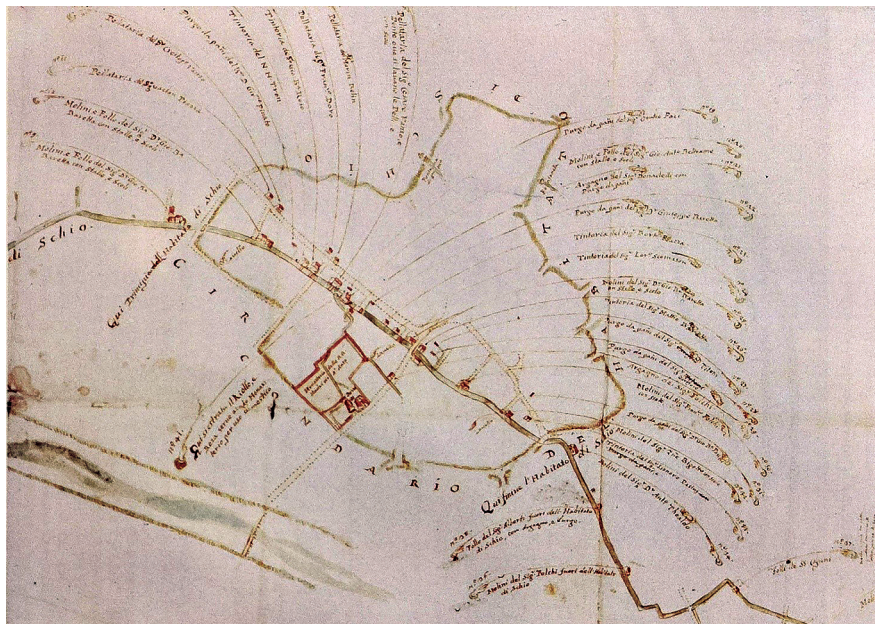


Figure 1.4 The Sareo District in 1737

Notes Map by G. B. Molin; the arrows indicate the dyeing plants, the structures for the fulling and purging of the wool, the mills, and so on (Bertoli and Ghiotto 1985, 23).

1985, 405; 2004, 261), but also inside the village, even if still in a context of home industry, without a centralization of this first step of wool processing. Spinning remained located in the peasant houses during the mid-eighteenth century as well, when other parts of the wool processing (such as weaving) were centralized, ‘because of technological limits.’ In contrast, the dyeing and fixing of the clothes were already located in the centre of the village ‘because they required [...] high skills and the use of machineries’ (Pancieria 2004, 261).

Therefore, even if *Oltraponte* was not the district where the main production buildings were located, it was in any case an area full of manufacturing structures; however, the heart of manufacturing in Schio was the *Sareo* district, where the main millrace (the *Roggia maestra*) flowed (figure 1.4). According to these descriptions, the economy of Schio appears to be far from ‘rural,’ at least if we intend this word as a synonym of agriculture, and the inhabitants of the Vicentine village were widely employed as artisans and apprentices, such as in the urban workshops.

The secondary sector was so important that another trial, dated 1586,

includes the declarations of a *garzatore* (raiser),¹ of some *verzeghini* (wool beaters), and of wool combers from Schio, who declared that they had been always employed in the textile sector, without any involvement in land cultivation (Vianello 2004a, 243). Further, another trial, dated 1561, involving Vincenzo Lenzo, from San Vito di Leguzzano, and the merchant from Schio, Amedeo Rigobello, includes even more interesting declarations;² indeed, all the witnesses were workers of Rigobello himself, who explained that the first steps of fleece processing (first of all the combing and the beating) took place in the workshop in the merchant's house, with many workers employed simultaneously (at least two or three men), together with the sons of Amedeo. The workers were paid by the piece, usually on Wednesday and Saturday, and while some of them were employed permanently, the most part were hired according to the merchant's needs. When the wool was ready, it was then brought to the *purgo* (the structure where the wool was washed and scoured) owned by Gian Battista Vanzo where, using the wood procured by Amedeo Rigobello himself, it was washed in hot water in *caldiere grande* (literally, 'large cauldrons') and then left out to dry. The following steps – the spinning, weaving, and finishing of the clothes – took place in the workers' houses, for example, 'the sons of Giangiaco­mo Fusiniero, weaver in Schio' (and they were paid on Wednesday and Saturday).

Besides these evocative descriptions, more quantitative sources confirm this picture in the long run, both in regard to the presence of workshops, and to the importance of the textile sector and of the families we have recalled many times in the previous lines. Regarding the woollen industry in the fifteenth century, the scant information at our disposal confirms the presence of relevant activities of woollen textiles production in the northern part of the province of Vicenza, particularly in Arzignano, Cornedo, Marostica, Thiene, Valdagno, and Schio (Demo 2001a, 82–3, 113, 188–9; 2004, 34, 39). Low-quality clothes were produced, both aimed at satisfying a local demand and to be sold in the Venetian and international markets, from the Middle East to the German area (Demo 2004, 34). As anticipated, only the urban woollen industry could produce high-quality clothes, and this sector was the centre of the economy of Vicenza in the fifteenth cen-

¹ For a description of the various steps in silk and wool manufacturing see the Glossary by Andrea Caracausi in Lanaro (2006, 383–9).

² The trial is recalled in Demo (2004, 36). Documents are preserved in ASVi, Banco del Sigillo, b. 49, fasc. 2.

ture (Demo 2001a, 191; 2001b, 4–5; 2012, 21–7; Bianchi and Demo 2014, 108–11; Panciera 2017, 208–10). Between 1412 and 1494, in the *Vicariato* of Schio 38 companies for woollen manufacturing were established, around one third of the 104 established in the entire province of Vicenza, excluding the city (Clerici 2004, 176).

From the sixteenth century onward information is more abundant, and allows for sketching a clearer picture of the evolution of woollen manufacturing in Schio and the profile of its protagonists: after the War of the League of Cambria (1509–1517), that notably affected the Vicentine secondary sector, the production of woollen clothes recovered its pre-war levels, both in the city and in the countryside, and in Schio in 1528 around 2,000 low-quality garments were produced yearly (Demo 2001a, 188, 191–3; 2004, 24, 28; 2012, 25–6; Vianello 2004a, 227–31; Panciera 2017, 211–12). It should be underscored that at least until the mid-sixteenth century the goods produced were sold both in the Republic of Venice and abroad (Demo 2001a, 303). The relevance of the woollen production in Schio is confirmed in the following decades: the tax survey of the province of Vicenza dated 1541 notes that in Schio there were two *chiodare da panni*,³ six fulling mills, a *purgo*, and two dyeing plants, while eight people are defined as ‘finishers’ of clothes. Finally, it seems that the production of clothes was the main economic activity for at least ten people (ASVi, Estimo, b. 26.). Their names sound familiar, and we already came across them in table 1.2: Zamboni, Baretta, Pellizzari, Rossi, Vanzo, Canneto, and Bologna. According to Panciera (2004, 239), each fulling mill could serve 15 looms, and this means that in the area of Schio there should be at least 90 looms in use – without considering the fulling mills in the bordering villages, as the sources attest at least from the end of the sixteenth century. Besides these structures clearly linked to the woollen production, the tax survey lists around 30 mill wheels and almost 170 workshops, including the food and hardware shops, and the apothecaries, in addition to the real manufacturing structures (shoemakers, tailor’s shops, leather shops, dyeing plants, and so on).

In the second half of the sixteenth century the evolution of the urban and rural woollen industry changed significantly: from around the 1560s woollen production slowly declined in the city, experiencing a real collapse from the 1570s. The spread in the market of Dutch light draperies and the crisis of the commercial routes to the Middle East because of the loss of

³ The *chiodare* were wooden structures for the tenting of the woollen clothes after the washing, the scouring, and the fulling (Demo 2001, 98–100).

Cyprus (Zannini 2010, 147), together with the growth of the woollen industry in Venice, caused a downfall of the Vicentine woollen production. While in 1530 the city of Vicenza produced yearly 2,000 high-quality garments and even 3,000 in 1550, this became 1,700 in 1569 and 200 in 1596 (Demo 2001a, 192–3; Panciera 1996; 2014, 140–1; 2017, 212–13). In the countryside the situation was more complicated, even if, broadly, the woollen sector resisted the crisis better (Demo 2001a, 193). First, during the sixteenth century the traditional production of low-quality clothes experienced a technological development, allowing the production of *cotonati* (literally brushed) clothes and of the so-called *mezze lane*, produced using the scraps from the wool shearing and raising and other products (coats of dead sheep, flax, hemp, or tow filaments). These were extremely low-quality products, that spread among the poorest strata of the population (Demo 2004, 34). Together with the crisis of the urban woollen industry, the production of low-quality clothes in the countryside also contracted and was partially substituted, such as in the city, by the development of the silk industry (Demo 2004, 50; Panciera 1996, 15; 2014, 140–1). Exportations diminished, ‘especially in Alemagna’ (Panciera 1996, 24) and in some villages, such as Marostica or Arzignano, the woollen industry was substantially downsized; however, Schio seems to be a (partial) exception (Panciera 1996, 25), probably thanks to the development of the production of the *mezze lane* for the internal market. Moreover, Schio also maintained a reasonable production of low-quality clothes, which was flanked in the following century by the production of high-quality ones that were no more a prerogative of the city, where their production almost disappeared. Vianello (2004a, 230) notes that in 1564 in Schio there were three raisers, three dyers, and four *apparecchiatori* (clothes finishers); moreover, the tax survey of that year notes that around 70 people were involved in manufacturing, of whom 13 were in wool processing. In a tax survey of Schio dated 1579 (ASCS, b. 21.) there is other information confirming the partial downsizing of the manufacturing structures in the village; indeed, there were only ten mill wheels, around forty workshops, just one *chiodara*, five fulling mills (serving, therefore, around 75 looms), a *purgo*, and one dyeing plant. This reshaping of the productive potential could be linked to the parallel partial downsizing of the population of Schio (4,300 inhabitants in 1558, 4,200 in 1579, and 4,100 in 1616), and to the general critical economic conjuncture of the woollen industry in the Venetian area. According to the Venetian officials, between 1569 and 1596 the Vicentine yearly production decreased from 14,000 to 8,000 garments (Vianello 2004a, 231). However, we can al-

so hypothesize an underestimation of the manufacturing structures, given that the tax surveys must be always carefully pondered (Alfani and Di Tullio 2019, 47–56). According to Panciera (1996, 24; 2004, 239, 309), already at the end of the sixteenth century the local woollen manufactures were recovering. Indeed, in the area of Schio there were five fulling mills, three inside the village and two in the countryside. Therefore, according to this estimate, there should be again be around 90 looms working in the area.

It is interesting to observe that the ups and downs of the sector between the 1540s and the 1580s did not alter the names of the main protagonists in the local woollen manufacturing: in 1579 the Zamboni family owned the *chiodara*, the Pellizzari family one of the fulling mills, and the Vanzo family the *purgo*, while among the workshop owners we find the Baretta, Zamboni, Bologna, Pellizzari, Canneti, and Rossi.

In the seventeenth century, the process of ‘ruralisation’ (Corritore 1993) of the Venetian woollen industry was at an advanced stage and after the 1630 plague, wool manufacturing was almost entirely localized in the countryside. It was still a low-quality production, sold within the Venetian state and in the bordering countries (Demo 2012, 27–8; Panciera 2014, 148; Vianello 2004a, 169, 231–8). However, as anticipated, not all the villages in the Vicentine countryside reacted positively to the crisis of the end of the sixteenth century, and the hierarchies in the production of wool clothes notably changes. Arzignano, for example, lost its leadership that had endured since the fifteenth century; at the beginning of the seventeenth century just 2,000 garments yearly were produced, compared to the 5,000 garments in 1563 (Vianello 2004a, 232). Moreover, in Marostica wool production completely disappeared. In contrast, Schio was ‘already before the 1630–1632 plague [...] one of the most active centres, the only one where the [wool] manufacturing resumed quickly immediately after the infection’ (Panciera 1996, 24–5; 2004, 253–4). The archival sources confirm this picture: in 1616 in Schio there were 30 mill wheels, 55 workshops, 16 *chiodare* and six fulling mills (therefore, for around 90 looms) (ASCS, b. 22.). Again, looking to the owners of these structures we find the same surnames recalled above, mainly Zamboni and Baretta, together with Canneti, Toaldo, and Pellizzari. After the plague, as anticipated, the recovery was very fast: between 1648 and 1652, 18 people residing in Schio were enrolled in the wool guild of Vicenza, and 12 more residents in the bordering villages; in total, almost one fourth of the 121 peasants enrolled in the entire province (Vianello 2004a, 232). The tax survey dated 1643 again records 30 mill wheels, more than 20 *chiodare*, a *purgo* and seven fulling mills, for

around one hundred looms (ASCS, b. 24.). The owners were the same as in the 1616 tax survey, and this means that the plague did not modify – or, at least, not relevantly – the economic equilibria within the village. On the contrary, the economic position of the leading families seems to be strengthened.

Moving forward in time, according to the historiography, a strong growth of the woollen industry in Schio happened at the end of the century, when the local manufacturers started to produce high-quality clothes (at the beginning illegally, then, from 1701, legally), before the real boom that took place in the eighteenth century (Panciera 1985, 403; 1996, 25; 2004, 255–6; 2014, 148). However, looking to the archival sources this growth appears less pronounced: if in 1665, 39 local producers were enrolled in the wool guild of Vicenza – that is, nine more compared to the period 1648–1652 (Vianello 2004a, 235) – the investitures for fulling mills by the Venetian *Provveditori Sopra i Beni Inculti*, together with the data recorder in the 1700 tax survey, indicate a moderate increase of the productive potential compared to the 1640s.

Indeed, according to Panciera (1988, 18), between 1670 and 1679 the *Provveditori* released eight grants (including both the new and the renewed investitures), then two confirmations in 1687 and one in 1694. The 1700 tax survey (ASCS, b. 27.), in contrast, indicates a slight decline of the mill wheels (28, compared to 29 in 1643), 43 workshops (41 in 1579), 19 *chiodare*, and five fulling mills (Fontana 1985, 78), a figure that suggests around eighty looms functioning, and a *purgo*. In summary, if we exclude the high number of *chiodare* and, partially, the increase of the dyeing plants – according to Fontana (1985, 78), five at the beginning of the eighteenth century – we can say that at the beginning of the century the number of manufacturing structures was almost the same as that of 1541, after the downsizing experienced in the 1570s and the slight growth in the first half of the seventeenth century (figure 1.5). Moreover, if in the sixteenth century and in the first decades of the following one the selling of the clothes produced in Schio reached markets abroad, at the beginning of the eighteenth century ‘there are no signs of a commercialization outside the borders of the province of Vicenza’ (Panciera 1988, 19).

The graph, however, shows that the turning point of the woollen industry in Schio was in the 1760s; until the 1750s there were no relevant changes, with only three confirmations of investitures for fulling mills by the Venetian *Provveditori*, and around a thousand low-quality garments produced yearly between 1711 and 1716, and in 1730 (in 1528 the produc-



Figure 1.5 Manufacturing Structures in Schio (1541–1794)

Notes Variations on the index (= 1) corresponding to the average value of each item over the period 1541–1794. ASVi, Estimo, b. 26; ASCS, b. 21, 22, 24, 27, 28; *Anagrafi di tutto lo Stato della Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia* 1786; Fontana 1986; Panciera 1988; Panciera 1996.

tion was 2,000 yearly), which estimates at around 30 looms in activity in the period 1740–1746, 55 in the mid-eighteenth century and 80 in 1758 (Panciera 1988, 18, 34–6, 52; 2004, 258). As anticipated, the relevant change was the production of *mezzetti alti* (medium-quality clothes that imitated the Flemish ones) and of the *tessuti ad uso estero* (literally, ‘clothes like the ones produced abroad’) (Panciera 2004, 256–8): around fifty *mezzetti alti* were produced between 1711 and 1716, 250–350 in the 1730s, and 900–1,000 in the period 1740–1746, reaching 3,400 garments in 1758 (Panciera 1988, 34–5, 48; 2004, 258). This significant increase in production was due to the creation of the ‘privileged industry’ of the Venetian entrepreneur Nicolò Tron, established in 1718, who in the first years of activity of the factory already employed more than 600 workers and some English technicians (Tron had been the ambassador of the Republic of Venice in England). The Tron industry, which from 1739 also involved Novello Alberti from Schio, the Venetians Tavelli and Pezzi, and the Germans Conigh and Stahl in a society, introduced relevant innovations in the local woollen industry, first, as anticipated, the production of the *tessuti ad uso estero*, then, at the end of the century, the use of the Kay’s shuttle (Panciera 1988; 2004,

256–8; Fontana 1985, 91–7). In 1749, together with Giorgio Stahl, Nicolò Tron also took over a woollen factory in Follina, in the province of Treviso, where they introduced the same technological innovations (Gasparini and Panciera 2000).

According to Panciera (2004, 258), in the second half of the eighteenth century ‘the growth rate of the woollen production became insistent.’ Actually, the 1762 tax survey (ASC S, b. 28.) does not show (so far) this trend: it lists 19 *chiodare*, 29 mill wheels (as in 1700), four fulling mills (one less than in 1700), two *purghi* (one more than in 1700), and also two *argogli* (combing structures) for the *cotonatura* (brushing) of woollen clothes (as in 1700). Certainly, however, the number of manufacturing structures is not an accurate measure of the productive capacity of an area, given that it does not consider the number of workers employed in each structure, the productivity, the machinery used, and so on. Indeed, looking at the amount of *mezzetti* produced it seems that there was a notable increase in production, from 3,400 garments in 1758 to 5,104 garments in 1762 (Panciera 1988, 48).

However, a few years later, in 1766, the situation seems to be drastically changed in the number of manufacturing structures in the area as well: the fulling mills increased from four to 11, a figure that, according to the *Anagrafi Venete*,⁴ remained unvaried until 1775, and which increased in the 1780s and 1790s, thanks to the new concessions granted by the *Provveditori sopra i beni inculti* (Panciera 1988, 18), reaching 22 structures at the end of the century (Fontana 1986, figure 34 A). Around 200 looms were working between 1766 and 1775, increasing to almost 300 at the end of the 1770s, and 464 at the end of the century (Panciera 1988, 52). A similar growth is seen in the other manufacturing structures – along with the population level, as we observed in table 1.1: if in 1564 there were just three raisers in Schio, between 1766 and 1775 there were a dozen mill wheels for the raising of woollen clothes, becoming 23 in the 1790s (Fontana 1986, figure 34 A). Moreover, in 1789 there were 13 garment finishers (in 1564 there were just four of them), while the increase of dyeing plants was more contained: they remained five at least until the end of the 1770s, increasing to six at the end of the century (Fontana, 1986, figure 34 A). However, as anticipated, it would be belittling to limit the analysis on the evolution of the woollen sec-

⁴ The *Anagrafi di tutto lo Stato della Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia* are statistical surveys produced by the Republic of Venice between 1766 and 1795 in order to register the population level in each village and town of the state, the composition of the families, and the number of ecclesiastics, together with the number and the type of animals and manufacturing structures. On this extraordinary source, see Ferrari (2011).

tor just to the quantification of the manufacturing structures, especially in the eighteenth century, when the technological evolution of the plants and their dimension changed rapidly – unlike the relative stability experienced by the productivity of the sector in the previous centuries. Therefore, the data on the production of clothes in Schio takes on even more importance, emphasizing the growth in the eighteenth century that we described in the previous lines: the 5,000 *mezzetti* produced in 1762 became 7,500–7,700 between the end of the 1760s and the beginning of the following decade, and 10,000–12,000 between 1780 and 1789, reaching 15,000–16,000 units by the beginning of the 1790s (Panciera 1988, 48). Some years later, in 1817 to be precise, the establishment of the Rossi Woollen Industry by Francesco Rossi would confirm the solidity of this productive sector for the long run.

Who were the protagonists of this relevant (and long-lasting) manufacturing development? It has been widely demonstrated that only from the mid-eighteenth century – therefore, during the expansive phase described above – did a truly ‘woollen’ elite develop in Schio. In this group we include families that set aside a strong economic and professional diversification to focus on the woollen industry, then reinvesting the earnings in real estate. At the same time, between the 1740s and the 1780s the various steps of the weaving process were centralized in Schio in vast structures, suggesting a relevant change toward a more ‘industrial’ characterization of the sector (Panciera 1985, 405–9; 1988, 35–6; 1997, 484; 2004, 261–5). Moreover, Panciera underlines that in the eighteenth century a merchant could manage, ‘even if in separate places, the weaving and the dyeing, or the weaving and the finishing of the clothes,’ and that ‘in Schio the clothes producers owned or rented many fulling mills’ (Panciera 1996, 306; Fontana 1986, figure 34B and 41). Without questioning the general trend described in the previous lines, we want to underline that the fragmentation of woollen production (from the weaving to the washing and scouring, fulling, dyeing, raising, up to the finishing of the clothes) in the previous centuries can be partially debated, at least for the first half of the sixteenth century. Indeed, as Panciera himself suggests, the dyeing of the clothes had ever been a separate procedure, given the high level of specialization required, but already before the eighteenth century there were examples of concentration of the ownership of *purghi*, fulling mills, and *chiodare* in the hands of a single family of merchant-entrepreneurs, suggesting the coordinated management at least of the working cycle that modified the internal structure of the clothes before their finishing. For example, in 1541 the Vanzo family (Giovanni son of Bernardino, Giulio son of Francesco, and Geroni-

mo) owned, besides three workshops, a *purgo* and a fulling mill, both in the Sareo district on the main millrace (ASVi, Estimo, b. 26, cc. 142 v.–143 r., 146 r.), and a spinning plant in the same area; for this last building Geronimo Vanzo paid a rent to the Vicentine nobleman Giacomo Magrè (ASVi, Estimo, b. 26, cc. 142 v.–143 r., 146 r.). In that year, the other manufacturing structures – the *chiodare*, the fulling mills, or the dyeing plant – were owned separately by different families. The brothers Gian Stefano and Giacomo Tessaro owned the *chiodare*, Biasia, widow of Ludovico Calderin, Paolo son of Bernardin Stecco, Rocco son of Giacomo Marangon, the brothers Gian Battista and Giacomo Grisolfo, and the brothers Aleardo owned the remaining five fulling mills, and Gianpiero son of Gianantonio Tintore (literally ‘Dyer’) owned the dyeing plant.

However, the case of the Dal Soglio family is also interesting; in the same years, they owned a fulling mill (co-owned by the brothers and members of the family) and at the same time one of the brothers, Paolo, was a clothes finisher. Therefore, this family managed both the first steps – immediately after the washing and scouring – of the wool processing, and the final ones (ASVi, Estimo, b. 26, c. 63 r.). These are peculiar cases, given that even by the 1579 tax survey there are no similar examples of concentration of the ownership of manufacturing structures and of this kind of ‘control of the supply chain,’ such as in the 1616 (ASCS, b. 22.) tax survey and in the following ones. The Baretta family, one of the wealthy and enduring families of Schio, is an exception in this sense. As we observed in the previous pages, the Baretta family had been for a long time among the main wool merchants in Schio; already in July 1557, for example, the merchant Baldassarre Baretta was involved in the buying and selling of various types of wool (ASVi, Banco del Sigillo, b. 41, fasc. ‘Liber actorum primus mei Pauli de Plovenis notarii sigilli’). In 1563, Sante Baretta was already labelled as a ‘clothes finisher,’ while Geronimo Baretta was a merchant of wool clothes and silk (Fontana 1985, 89). In 1616 the Baretta family owned a fulling mill, three mill wheels and five *chiodare*; in 1643 its members owned six among the 20 *chiodare* that existed in Schio and three fulling mills among six existing in the village. The situation endured without notable changes (just the rise of other families, such as the Folco family, besides the Baretta) until the end of the eighteenth century. Then, in 1800, Teresa Baretta married Francesco Rossi, the father of Alessandro and the founder of the Rossi Woollen Industries (Panciera 1988, 159; 2004, 263; Fontana 1986, figure 44D). This is a clear example of merchants that already by the beginning of the seventeenth century, together with the trade in textiles managed the

production of woollen clothes, from the first steps (the fulling process) to the finishing and the selling. A similar case is the one of the Folco family, that arose in the second half of the seventeenth century: Ludovico Folco was the rural merchant who in 1665 earned the highest sum in the province from his trades (Vianello 2004a, 259). Moreover, in the 1643 tax survey Pietro Folco is the seventh wealthiest inhabitant of Schio. He owned five houses with storehouses and 26 fields (around 10 hectares). In 1700 Ludovico and his brothers, sons of Pietro, were the wealthiest inhabitants of Schio; they owned around 20 houses, two workshops, some *chiodare*, a mill with three wheels, a structure for the *cotonatura* (combing) of the clothes and countless hectares of land (ASCS, b. 24, cc. 61 r.–v.; b. 27, cc. 54 r.–58 v.).

The Silk Manufacturing

Moving to silk processing, the second pillar of the textile sector in Schio, in the previous lines we recalled the presence of spinning plants with mill wheels in the main millrace of the village in the *Sareo* district, at least from 1541. Until now historiography ignored the existence of such structures in the area, appointing the local merchant and entrepreneurs as mere producers and traders of raw silk. Actually, the information about the number of structures, their ownership, and functioning is scarce, but the archival sources suggest the existence of two spinning/throwing structures in 1541, one used by an Adan ‘Spinner’ (as he is called in the documents), who paid a rent to Ambrogio Lodi for the building, and one owned by Geronimo Vanzo (ASVi, Estimo, b. 26, cc. 19 v. and 142 v.). At least one of these structures remained in activity until 1579, for use by Giuseppe Lodi, who paid a rent to Giacomo Magrè (ASCS, b. 21, c. 141 v.). The 1616 tax survey also refers to a house in the *Sareo* district ‘called the spinning building,’ owned by Andrea Baretta, who purchased it from Pietro Magrè and Francesco Lodi. In 1624 the building was owned by Silvestro Baretta (ASCS, b. 22, cc. 31 r. e 69 v.) and in the 1643 tax survey Ludovico Baretta appears as the owner of the house, again ‘called the spinning building,’ owned in the past by Giuseppe Lodi, located behind a building belonging to Lodi himself (ASCS, b. 24, c. 52 r.). The 1700 tax survey confirms this information (ASCS, b. 27, c. 47 v.), as does the 1762 survey, but in the latter the Scapin family owned the building ‘that was owned previously by Ludovico Baretta’ and ‘formerly by Lodi’ (ASCS, b. 29, c. 116 r.). These references suggest that the words used by the inhabitants of Schio in a petition to the Venetian *Provveditori sopra i beni inculti* (dated at the end of the sixteenth century; ASCS, b. 57, fasc. 167, c. 59 v.) are not an exaggeration. Indeed, they wrote: ‘al-

ready many years ago [. . .] many watermills, fulling structures, and many silk spinning buildings have been built [on the millrace],’ and Giacomo Pozzolo, the archivist of the municipality of Schio, in his *Notizie della terra di Schio* (written between 1712 and 1714) also confirms that on the local millrace ‘there were two spinning structures for the silk processing’ (Bologna and Rossi 1876, 1; Fontana 1985, 82). Concerning the characteristics of the spinning structures themselves, beyond the fact that they were activated by mill wheels, we do not know if they were the so-called ‘alla bolognese’ (i.e. that used an advanced technology introduced in Bologna in the sixteenth century), given that currently the research on the topic is limited to the seventeenth century and mainly to the area around Bassano del Grappa and Marostica, in the north-eastern part of the province of Vicenza (Pancieria 2004, 240, 271–81; 2014, 144; Demo 2012, 31; Demo and Vianello 2011, 37; Vianello 2004a, 88–99; Poni 2009, 266–7). However, it is interesting that the 1579 tax survey mentioned a spinner named Giulio ‘Bolognese [i.e. from Bologna], spinner of [Giuseppe] Lodi’ (ASCS, b. 21, c. 91 r.), suggesting the presence of a specialized worker from Bologna who was employed in the spinning plant. The son of Giuseppe, Lorenzo, was still residing in Schio in 1616, according to the tax survey produced in that year (ASCS, b. 22, c. 16 v.).

Before going on to observe the protagonists of the development of the silk sector in Schio it is important to sketch a general picture of the trajectories of this branch in the province of Vicenza. Already from the first decades of the fifteenth century, the plantation of mulberries, the rearing of silkworms and the production of raw silk was a dynamic sector, especially in the villages close to the mountains in the northern part of the province. To give an example, in 1418 around 300 *libbre* (a hundred kilograms) were produced yearly (Demo 2001a, 47–8, 117; 2001b, 5; 2004, 51; 2012, 28–9; 2014, 111). By the mid-century in Schio there were traders of *gallette* (the cocoons of the silkworms to be reeled), such as the Zamboni brothers, already mentioned in the previous pages as investors in the silver mines in the Tretto upland together with the Toaldo family and some Venetian noblemen, or Gualtiero da Schio, who in 1482 received a certain amount of cocoons for the women he employed for the silk reeling (Demo 2001a, 120–1). If this step of the silk processing took place in the rural areas, especially where there was a specialization in the rearing of the silkworms (Demo 2001a, 119–20), within the urban walls, in Vicenza, since the first half of the fifteenth century there were spinning structures actioned by human energy or by water wheels (Demo 2001a, 127–32). By the mid-

century there were at least eight plants (Demo 2001a, 207), increasing to 13 in 1507, at least 29 in the 1560s, then growing exponentially at the end of the century, exceeding a hundred (Demo 2001a, 208).

The growth of the silk sector in the city was flanked by a similar growth in raw silk production in the countryside, especially in the northern part of the province (Vianello 2004b, 188–94): in 1504 in the province of Vicenza 60,000 *libbre* (around 20 tonnes) of raw silk were produced (Vianello 2004b, 50; Demo 2004, 57), and in this sense Schio played a crucial role, as is testified by the recurring reference to the village in the sixteenth century trials on the selling of raw silk or on the renting of the mulberries (ASVi, Banco del Sigillo, b. 5, fasc. 1, trials dated 12 February 1516, 28 February 1516, 8 April 1516; b. 14, fasc. ‘Testium mei Joannisbatiste de Abrianis notarii ad officium Sigilli,’ 3 April 1527).

In the 1530s production was around 74,000 *libbre* (around 25 tonnes), and by the mid-century the province produced between 30 and 40 tonnes of fine silk (Demo 2001a, 50–1; 2001b, 6; Panciera 2014, 141; 2017, 213). These figures increased until the end of the century and then stabilized at the beginning of the following one. The relevant growth of silk processing in the city meant that the raw silk produced in the countryside was not enough to supply the urban spinning plants, and the Vicentine merchants started to purchase the raw materials in the bordering provinces. However, despite this situation, the increase in raw silk production also produced an increase in the export of this product and of the semi-finished silk products. While at the beginning of the sixteenth century the trajectories of the silk trade were directed toward other Italian cities, over the years they also reached other foreign markets, and in the 1570s the Vicentine merchant-entrepreneurs produced mainly *ormesini* (plain, light, and inexpensive silk clothes) that were particularly appreciated in the German area (Demo 2001a, 210–11; 2004, 57; Panciera 2014, 141–2; 2017, 215). The relationship between the province of Vicenza (including Schio) and the German area was not one-way; if the *ormesini* were heading north, the specialized silk workers came precisely from the Trento area – besides the ones coming from Venice and Grisons (Panciera 2017, 215). The growth of silk weaving in Vicenza produced contrasts with Venice, given the competition between the two productive areas; this happened especially in the 1560s and 1570s, and ended with formal permission from the Venetian authorities to produce *ormesini* in Vicenza in 1581 (Panciera 2017, 215; Zannini 2010, 147–8). Meanwhile, however, the workforce from Rovereto, in the Trento area, that supported the growth of the silk industry in Vicenza, al-

so became the reason for the crisis of the sector; indeed, between the 1570s and the 1580s the competition of the silk industry in Rovereto and Trento produced a crisis in silk manufacturing in Vicenza, with a collapse in the number of active looms and the resorting, once more, to the export of yarns (Panciera 2014, 142; 2017, 143; Vianello 2004a, 53–64).

Focusing on Schio and on its merchant-entrepreneurs, the history of the spinning buildings recalled above again underlines the long-lasting permanence of some families (above all, the Baretta) at the top of the local economic landscape, also with reference to the silk sector. Moreover, it indicates the importance of the role played by urban families (especially the Magrè family) in the growth of the rural village and of the local elites.

Already by the fifteenth century the rearing of silkworms and the production of raw silk (that was then thrown within the urban walls) were crucial sectors in the economy of Schio, and this centrality continued in the following centuries. The merchants involved in this trade belonged to the families that we have recalled frequently in the previous pages; Bartolomeo Zamboni, for example, in 1541 ‘commissioned clothes and silk’ (ASVi, b. 26, c. 10 r.), but the Toaldo family, who in the sixteenth century competed with the Zamboni in terms of political, military, and economic predominance in Schio (Savio 2017), also flanked investments in land ownership with investments in the credit sector, in the grain trade, in the cultivation of mulberries and in the trade of silk cocoons. While Bernardino Toaldo mainly managed the family lands, credits, and the grain trade, his brother Giovan Battista managed the investments in the silk sector at least from the 1540s (Savio 2017, 316, footnote 21; Demo and Ongaro 2023, 10). The involvement of the Toaldo in this sector continued in the following decades, even if it was never preeminent compared to the incomes coming from land ownership and the credit market; an accounting book dated 1541–1615, written by Giovan Battista and by his son Cesare, shows that in the decade 1594–1604, of the almost 1,300 lire earned yearly (on average), only around 160 came from the selling of the mulberry loaves and, mainly, of the silk cocoons. It is also interesting that in some years it is specified that they sold not the cocoons but the reeled silk, indicating that year by year the merchants decided which kind of product to place on the market (ASCS, Archivio Ospedale Baratto, b. 19, cc. 187 v.–197 r.⁵). However, it was not just the main families that belonged to the economic and political elite of Schio, and, mainly, not just the ones traditionally at the head

⁵ I wish to thank Andrea Savio for advising of the existence of this accounting book.

of the village (such as the Zamboni and the Toaldo), who were involved in silk reeling (as commissioners) and in the cocoons trade; between 1541 and 1563 in Schio there were 31 people who carried out these activities, without considering the peasants who in practice reeled the silk or bred the silkworms. It is interesting to note that for many of these 31 people, silk was just one of various economic activities practised. For example, Biasia, widow of Ludovico Calderin, in 1541 owned a fulling mill, and 'last year produced 50 *libbre* of silk.' Moreover, Francesco Casolin 'has a sewing shop and usually commissions silk,' as the shopkeepers Bergamasco, who in 1563 commissioned the reeling of around 200 *libbre* of silk. Gianpiero Tintore 'is a dyer' in his workshop, and his nephew in 1563 produced 43 *libbre* of silk, as did Giorgio, son of another dyer and owner of a dyeing plant. The workers in the tanning sector were also involved in silk production and trade. For example, Geronimo Montebello 'is a leather goods manufacturer and usually commissioned the reeling of silk,' Geronimo Penzato in 1563 'has a small leather shop [...] and produced 58 *libbre* of silk,' and Gian Nicolò Pellizzaro 'is a leather goods manufacturer and a butcher, with his own shop' but in 1562 'produced 38 *libbre* of silk.' Moreover, Giovanni Calegaro 'is a leather goods manufacturer and a cobbler [...] and last year, 1563, produced 60 *libbre* of silk,' while Piero di Pellizzari 'is a shoemaker and usually produces silk and clothes.' The list goes on, including salt and food traders, even workers employed in meat and fish salting, besides the merchants in the woollen sector that were usually also involved in silk production and trade. Among the latter we certainly find the most relevant families of Schio, both the ones already made wealthy in the fifteenth century and the ones recently arrived in the village; besides the Zamboni and the Toaldo, the archival documents refer to the Baretta, especially Geronimo, who 'usually commissions clothes and the reeling of silk,' or to Giovanni Vanzo, Amedeo Rigobello, Battista Fontana, Giuseppe Canneto, and Mattia Folco – all names that we already mentioned in the previous pages.⁶ Finally, the case of the Lodi family is particularly interesting: Ambrogio Lodi in 1541 'is a haberdasher,' besides being the owner, as anticipated, of the spinning structure in which Adan 'Spinner' worked. In 1563 Ambrogio 'is no more a haberdasher. Iseppo and Francesco, his sons, commission the reeling of

⁶ The tax declarations are in ASVi (b. 26, cc. 8 r., 10 r., 12 r., 13 r., 14 v., 16 v., 18 r., 21 r., 23 r., 25 r., 26 r., 27 r., 42 v., 43 r., 45 v.–46 r., 50 v., 57 v., 59 v., 103 v., 107 v., 146 r., 160 r., 171 v., 174 r., 193 v., 196 v., 214 v.; b. 28, c. 7 v.). We should also consider that the self-declarations on the amount of silk produced and on the earnings from the trading activities probably abundantly underestimate the figures.

silk and trade in grains and in other products for a [yearly] earning of 100 ducats' (ASVi, b. 26, c. 28 r.). The characteristics of the Lodi's business are particularly relevant, both because they intersect with the development of the silk sector in Schio, and because they are emblematic of the strong connections between the rural families and the urban noblemen; as anticipated, Giuseppe Lodi was the tenant of the spinning plant described in the 1579 tax survey (probably the same building that in 1541 was owned by his father Ambrogio), and he paid a rent for it to the Vicentine nobleman Giacomo Magrè. But the relationship between these two entrepreneurs was not just a credit-debit one. Indeed, on 18 July 1575 the notary Gian Battista Dal Ferro drew up an agreement for a trading company between Giacomo, son of Stefano Magrè, and Giuseppe Lodi, son of Ambrogio. The company was supposed to last three years, but it broke up after just two even though 'this company and business of silk and other products has been very productive and lucrative for both the contractors.' Because of the dissolving of the company, Giuseppe Lodi should have refunded 3,000 ducats to Giacomo Magrè, but the contractors agreed that this capital would remain as a support for the Lodi trading activities, in exchange for the payment of yearly interests to Giacomo Magrè (ASVi, Notarile, b. 866, 5 July 1575). Subsequent documents drawn up by the same notary demonstrate the emergence of disputes about the refunding of the debt, at least until the 1580s. Besides this, it is important to underline that the involvement of Giuseppe Lodi in the silk sector – an activity probably inherited from his father – was supported by the capital of a Vicentine nobleman with relevant economic and political interests in the area, as the shooting event described in the previous pages testifies.

Another deed dated 5 June 1574 leaves no doubt that Lodi was involved in silk spinning and twisting in Schio. On that day, indeed, the notary Dal Ferro drew up an agreement between Giuseppe Lodi, 'merchant in Schio,' and a representative of Aquilina, widow of the Venetian nobleman Alvise Boldù. Aquilina asked for permission for her and her sons and nephews to build a mill wheel in the millrace of Schio in a place 'in front of the building where Giuseppe practiced silk twisting in the *Sareo* district' (ASVi, Notarile, Notaio Dal Ferro, b. 8683, 5 June 1574). Furthermore, when Giuseppe Lodi asked in 1581 to become a citizen, in the request for citizenship he wrote that he and his father Ambrogio, after their arrival in Schio at the beginning of the century, 'practiced honourably various trades, [...] without ever being involved in mechanical activities, but being honourable merchants.' In that manner, Lodi goes on, 'I settled in that place [Schio] the

silk twisting and the production of many *ormesini*, and on various occasions I imported foreign grains in periods of famine,' grains that fed both the rural villages in the northern part of the province, and Vicenza itself (Savio 2017, 312, n. 16). Besides their involvement in the silk sector at least from the 1540s, the Lodi also had relevant interests in the woollen sector; in a deed dated 11 April 1575, the brothers Giuseppe and Francesco Lodi completed a division of the goods co-owned, begun in 1568. The 1575 document recalls also the previous ones, and the 1568 deed lists all the goods involved: a house 'with an oven [...] and a dyeing plant,' a *chiodara* in the garden, while 'all the clothes that are in the house, all the things related to the dyeing plant, and all the *fileselli* [second-quality silk yarns]' would be allocated to one of the brothers (ASVi, Notarile, Notaio Dal Ferro, b. 8683, 11 April 1575). The reference to the *fileselli* is also particularly interesting because the 1579 tax survey of Schio mentions 15 *samitari* – i.e. weavers of second-quality silk – who worked in the village; the majority of them came from the Trento area and we can hypothesize that they were employed, even if not exclusively, by the Lodi brothers. The presence of the silk weaving in the Vicentine countryside is confirmed also by Panciera (2017, 215), who wrote that after the Venetian authorization to produce *ormesini* in 1581, 'the silk weaving flourished for some years in Schio, Valdagno, and Arzignano.'

A final consideration is needed: why did a Vicentine nobleman, already well established in silk production and trade in the city, create a company with a rural merchant? First, we should take into account that the Magrè family obtained citizenship in 1466 (ASVi, Magrè, b. 9, c. 19 r.), coming from a small community (Magrè) close to Schio, and its members were deeply rooted in the village; in the description of the shooting above, we referred to the palace owned by Stefano Magrè in the *Oltraponte* district, a palace with a garden that faced the millrace toward *Sareo* street. Moreover, they owned buildings with mill wheels in the millrace itself. The family was so important in Schio that when the brother of Camillo Beffa, Ettore, was interrogated by the Venetian authorities about potential witnesses of the shooting, he answered: 'I think that you can interrogate all the inhabitants of that district, but you would hardly know the truth, because Giacomo Magrè is the owner of many of the houses, and all the inhabitants are, we can say, his slaves, and Giacomo himself made with them relevant pacts, so they don't tell what they saw' (ASVi, Magrè, b. 4, fasc. 76). The continuation of the trial seems to confirm this declaration, given that the Venetian officials admit the difficulty of proceeding because of the *omertà* on the event.

But this is not the only sign of the strong relationship between the Magrè and the families of Schio: when Giacomo Magrè escaped together with his companions after the shooting, seeking refuge in the San Pietro church, his father Stefano fetched Tranquillo Toaldo, who went with him to his son and suggested he move to the more peripheral church of San Francesco. This event testifies to the friendship between the Magrè and probably the most important family in Schio in that period. However, among the families of the elite of Schio, not just the Toaldo were strongly connected with the Magrè; indeed, after the shooting Giacomo Magrè was joined in the San Francesco church by Giovan Battista Moscatello, member of another relevant family of Schio, who, armed, accompanied him to Vicenza. Then, the day after, they came back to Schio escorted by 15 henchmen (ASvi, Magrè, b. 4, fasc. 76).

Therefore, it is not a coincidence that after the failure of the company with Giuseppe Lodi, Giacomo Magrè, on 22 July 1578, established a 'silk and *doppi* trading company'⁷ with a member of the Moscatello family, Andrea, together with Cristoforo Baratto (the founder of the homonymous hospital in Schio), and Giorgio Canneto and his brothers, 'all merchants in Schio' (ASvi, Notarile, b. 8686, 4 July 1584). The particularity of this company, that it should last five years, is that the starting capital was almost equally divided among the contractors (1,000 ducats each, with the exception of Andrea Moscatello, who supplied 500 ducats), whether urban or rural, and that the company was specifically aimed at the trade 'of silk and *doppi*, and nothing else.' Within the company, Giacomo Magrè was in charge of 'the buying and selling of the merchandise, being the most confident and informed about the merchants' (ASvi, Notarile, b. 8686, 4 July 1584). Moreover, Andrea Moscatello was until 1584 also the business partner of Magrè in a contract on the salt tax and in the grain trade, even if at the end of the cooperation he had to cede to Giacomo Magrè a house and some landed properties because of the debts he incurred (ASvi, Notarile, b. 8582, 9 July 1584).

This last episode confirms that Giacomo Magrè was involved both in the silk and in the grain trade, as was his father Stefano before him (Vianello 2004a, 108; 2004b, 194; Demo 2004, 38; Demo 2012, 74), and the same fields of investments characterized the merchant-entrepreneurs in Schio. Clearly, the fact that the northern part of the province of Vicenza bordered with

⁷ The *seta di doppi* (literally, 'double silk') or *doppi* was a low-quality silk, obtained from cocoons with two silkworms inside (Demo 2004, 52).

the German area was a key element of this economic inclination. The Baratto family, for example (that also came from the village of Magrè), made a fortune trading with the bordering area of Trento, and in a 1541 tax survey the sons of Francesco Baratto – including the abovementioned Cristoforo – besides owning two shops in the main square of Schio, ‘trades with horses *per tedesca* [i.e. in the German territories]’ (ASVi, Estimo, b. 26, c. 223 v.). Cereals were certainly among the products they traded, given that in 1557 Francesco himself proposed to the municipality of Vicenza to supply the city with 1,500 *staia* (more than 400 hectolitres) of wheat to be purchased ‘in the German territories’ (Snichelotto 2007, 79). The Toaldo family and the Lodi, too, were involved in the cereals trade, besides the silk one; as anticipated, in his petition for obtaining citizenship Giuseppe Lodi affirmed that he supplied the province with foreign grains (almost certainly coming from the German area), ‘especially in 1560 and in this year [1581], when I supplied the city [Vicenza] with 12,000 *staia* of wheat [around 3,245 hectolitres] from foreign countries’ (Savio 2017, 312, n. 16). Moreover, similar businesses were the basis of the wealth of the Zamboni family, or of the Pilati from Torrebelticino, bordering Schio, that amassed their first fortunes smuggling cereals in the Trento area at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and then reinvested them during the century in lands, metalworking, wool manufacturing, and in the reeling of raw silk that was then exported to Genoa and Milan (Demo and Ongaro 2023, 7–8). Using a metaphor, we can say that the classical organization of the plots in the Venetian countryside, the *piantata*, with the mulberries that divided the fields cultivated with cereals, is a perfect image of the entrepreneurial strategies of the merchant families in Schio and in Vicenza.

Returning to Giacomo Magrè, it seems that his relationships with the merchants of Schio were not lucrative, given that from being one of the most relevant silk merchants in Vicenza (Demo 2004, 38), he became saddled by debts, probably thanks also to the huge number of overdue debts of the merchants from Schio, and he experienced a downward spiral. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that even if in the 1616 tax survey Pietro Magrè was still one of the main landowners in the area of Schio, all the manufacturing structures owned in the past by the family in the *Sareo* district have been sold: the spinning plant, as anticipated, was sold to the Baretta family, while the two mills, with six wheels, were sold, one to the heirs of Bartolomeo Ganzega, and one to Giuseppe Dalla Fina (ASCS, b. 22, cc. 42 r., 63 r.). Regarding Giuseppe Lodi, his petition for citizenship was approved in 1581 and he moved his spinning plant within the urban walls,

on the Retrone river. In 1616 his son Ventura still resided in Schio with his grandchildren, in the *Oltraponte* district, in a palace that was valued at 350 ducats (a notable value for a building in Schio), owning lands and cattle and being one of the wealthiest inhabitants of the village (ASCS, b. 22, cc. 54 v.–56 v.).

The silk production, processing, and trade remained in the following decades a crucial sector in the economy of Schio. Especially from the 1630s the spinning plants *alla Bolognese* spread in the province of Vicenza, particularly in the area of Bassano and Marostica, where all the new licenses for the construction of these structures issued between 1670 and 1730 were concentrated. In Vicenza there remained many spinning and throwing plants driven by human energy, but the relevant growth of the sector between the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the following one took place in the countryside (Panciera 2014, 144; Vianello 2004a, 56–71). Focusing on Schio, in its *Vicariato* in 1687 there were 162 *fornelli* (basins for silk reeling) working, and 123 in 1694 (Vianello 2004a, 80–1). In the 1616 tax survey there was still a *samitaro*, Cristoforo son of Giacomo Berlato, indicating the persisting of the silk weaving, even if considerably more limited compared to 1579 (ASCS, b. 22, c. 328 v.).

The eighteenth century experienced a strong growth in the production of raw and semi-finished silk both in the city and in the countryside, with a recovery of silk weaving. Vicenza remained among the most important European cities in silk production, with between 500 and 700 looms working during the century. The situation drastically changed when the French army entered the city at the end of the century and the silk sector, at least in the city, collapsed (Panciera 2014, 145–6). In the countryside, silk spinning in the area of Bassano continued its growth in the eighteenth century, at least, again, until the arrival of the French troops, while sericulture and silk reeling grew in the rest of the province, with the creation also of centralized plants where dozens of *fornelli* worked simultaneously (Panciera 2014, 269). In the 1780s the province of Vicenza produced around 90 tonnes of raw silk, i.e. 12 per cent of the production of the Republic of Venice and 3 per cent of the European one (Panciera 2014, 268). Obviously, this meant a relevant growth in the number of *fornelli* working in the province: from around 474 in the 1730s, they became 745 in the 1760s, and 921 in the 1780s (Panciera 2014, 266). A relevant part of the raw silk was then processed in the spinning plants in the Bassano and Marostica area, on the Brenta river – there, in 1718, there were 45 spinning plants *alla Bolognese*, and 49 in 1762 (Panciera 2014, 275, 280). In Schio there still remained the Lodi's structure

‘called the spinning building,’ and in 1762 it was owned by the Scapin family, but we do not know if it was still used for silk processing. Certainly, Schio remained at the centre of the raw silk trade, given also its being at the border of the Imperial provinces of Rovereto and Trento, where during the entire eighteenth century, tonnes of Vicentine raw silk were smuggled (Pancierà 2014, 144; 2004, 266; Ciriaco 1983, 68; Fontana 1985, 83).

Some Final Remarks

In the previous pages we described the dynamism of the economy of Schio during the early modern period, from the first decades of the fifteenth century up to the birth of the modern woollen industry between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the following one. We also showed that the long manufacturing tradition, which culminated in the first decades of the nineteenth century when Schio became one of the first (and very few) examples in the Italian area of industrialization of the textile sector on the British model, was strongly intertwined with a correlated long-lasting importance of the entrepreneurial families that led this economic evolution. The Toaldo, Zamboni, Canneto, Vanzo, and Baretta families went through the various steps of the economic development of the village, some of them from the fifteenth century to the era of industrialization, maintaining their leadership within the community. These families were able to preserve their political and economic power across the centuries, adapting their entrepreneurial activities to the evolving economic situation of the area, diversifying their investments at least until the second half of the eighteenth century; they accumulated the starting capitals thanks to the land ownership and the cereals trade (and smuggling) directed toward the Imperial territories, then flanking these activities with the participation in mining companies (first for silver mining, then for kaolin), especially between the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the following one. Then, they consolidated their position and economic relevance thanks to the trade of raw silk, and woollen yarn and clothes. In this sense, they were able to occupy the economic space freed by the city, taking advantage of the crisis of the woollen production within the urban walls during the sixteenth century. This adaptation and diversification of the investments of the rural entrepreneurial families did not mean an abandonment of the interests in the mining sector and in the agricultural one, when wool and silk became the fulcrum of their trade; they continued to operate in these fields as well, often taking advantage of the same trading routes, in a context of a strong integrated peasant economy. Certainly, at least in

some cases the primary sector lost part of its importance: for example, the earnings from the selling of the kaolin and the agricultural products received from the lands that they directly cultivated or that they rented out, could be used by the local merchant-entrepreneurs for the payment, often in kind, of the workforce employed in the textile sector (Demo and Ongaro 2023). Similarly, the renting out of the lands and the credit-debit relationships with the peasant families were a way to strengthen the bonds with their workers.

The strong bonds that linked the rural entrepreneurial families – consolidating and, at the same time, being consolidated by, their economic, social, and political position – with the peasants that worked in their fields, supplied them with raw silk, and weaved their wool, were flanked by analogous bonds with the urban merchant entrepreneurs, who supplied them with capital and international market connections. The noticeable continuity of the rural ‘manufacturing lineages’ was, therefore, financially supported – besides the political connections – by the urban (often former rural) families; indeed, the strong diversification of the investments, divided especially between the grain commerce, the mining activities, and the production and trade of textiles, was typical not just of the rural entrepreneurs, but also of the urban ones. The rural and the urban families often participated together in trading companies that took advantage of the urban capital, of the knowledge of the international markets, and of the trading networks of the urban merchants. This intersection between the rural and the urban families not only fostered the growth of the economy of Schio, but it was a key element in assuring the many-centuried economic and political predominance of some rural families. This is not surprising, given that, as anticipated, many of the urban families came from the rural communities, where they maintained a pivotal role both in political terms (being often the Vicentine officials in charge of administrating the *Vicariati*), and in patronage and economic ones. Urban surnames like Schio, Magrè, Trissino, Piovene, Caldogno, Angaran, Barbaran, and Chiuppani, clearly recall the rural villages where these families emerged and strengthened their assets before moving into the city – a trajectory that many families of Schio also followed in the centuries of the early modern period, such as the Lodi, Conte, and Bonagente (Ongaro 2017b).

The reason why some families, such as the Toaldo, remained for centuries in their home village, even maintaining a strong economic standing, while others asked for citizenship, is of now without an answer. What we can say is that the urban-rural relationship is considerably more com-

plicated than the cliché of rural dependence from the urban noblemen and landowners; certainly, often the power equilibria were in favour of the city, and the rural factions and patronages were an extension of the urban ones (Savio 2017), but in the previous pages we underlined also the common economic interests, investments, and trades, up to the similar choices in terms of land management. This in a context of strong continuity in the names of the rural families that stood out especially in the textiles market, from the establishment of the first companies for the trade of woollen clothes and raw silk, up to the first industrialization in the nineteenth century. This clearly does not mean that the rural society was static: new families conquered their economic, political, and social space (the case of the Folco family recalled above is emblematic); other lineages obtained the long-overdue status of citizens and moved at least part of their interests within the urban walls. However, if the newcomers often solidified their position through the construction of economic and social bonds (not least with marriage policies) with the local wealthy families, when moving into the city the rural families that obtained citizenship maintained strong connections – for centuries – with their home village, thanks to the conservation of large landed properties and/or to the management of manufacturing and trading activities in the area. These bonds with the countryside could be so strong that the newcomer urban families could maintain permanently their actual residence in the rural villages, even if they formally should have lived in the city.

Acknowledgements

This chapter is the result of research carried out in the context of the PRIN 2022 PNRR project 'P2022MBB3N – Political Inclusion and Inequality in Preindustrial Italian Alps (1500–1800),' financed by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (CUP master H53D23010250001, CU H53D23010250001).

Archival Sources

ASCS: Historical Archives of the Municipality of Schio.

ASVi: Archivio di Stato di Vicenza.

References

Alfani, G. 2010. *Il Grand Tour dei Cavalieri dell'Apocalisse: l'Italia del «lungo Cinquecento» (1494-1629)*. Marsilio.

Alfani, G., and M. Di Tullio. 2019. *The Lion's Share: Inequality and the Rise of the Fiscal State in Preindustrial Europe*. Cambridge University Press.

- Anagrafi di tutto lo Stato della Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia*. 1786. 5 volumes. Pinelli.
- Bairoch, P., J. Batou, and P. Chèvre. 1988. *La population des villes européennes de 800 à 1850*. Droz.
- Bertoli, P., and E. Ghiotto. 1985. *La fabbrica di panni alti di Nicolò Tron a Schio: note di storia e archeologia industriale*. Satigraf.
- Bianchi, F., and E. Demo. 2014. 'Economia, demografia, società.' In *Storia di Vicenza dalla preistoria all'età contemporanea*, edited by G. Gullino. Cierre.
- Bologna, G., and F. Rossi, eds. 1876. *Schio e territorio: tre cronache*. Prosperini.
- Chittolini, G. 1990. '«Quasi-città»: Borghi e terre in area lombarda nel tardo medioevo.' *Società e Storia* 47:3–26.
- Ciriaco, S. 1983. 'Protoindustria, lavoro a domicilio e sviluppo economico nelle campagne venete in epoca moderna.' *Quaderni Storici* 52:57–80.
- Clerici, L. 2004. 'Fiere e mercati: geo-economia degli scambi nel Medioevo e in Età moderna.' In *L'industria vicentina dal Medioevo a oggi*, edited by G. L. Fontana. Cleup.
- Corazzol, G. 1979. *Fitti e livelli a grano: un aspetto del credito rurale nel Veneto del '500*. Angeli.
- Corritore, R. P. 1993. 'Il processo di «ruralizzazione» in Italia nei secoli XVII–XVIII: verso una regionalizzazione.' *Rivista di Storia Economica* 10 (3): 353–86.
- De Vries, J. 1984. *European Urbanization 1500–1800*. Methuen.
- Delille, G. 1990. 'La famiglia contadina nell'Italia moderna.' In *Storia dell'agricoltura italiana in età contemporanea: uomini e classi*, edited by P. Bevilacqua. Marsilio.
- Demo, E. 2001a. *L'«anima della città»: L'industria tessile a Verona e Vicenza (1400-1550)*. Unicopli.
- Demo, E. 2001b. 'Mercati e manifatture nel Veneto tardomedievale.' *Reti Medievali Rivista* 2. <http://www.rmoa.unina.it/1826/1/225-1281-1-PB.pdf>.
- Demo, E. 2004. 'Le manifatture tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna.' In *L'industria vicentina dal Medioevo a oggi*, G. L. Fontana. Cleup.
- Demo, E. 2012. *Mercanti di terraferma: uomini, merci e capitali nell'Europa del Cinquecento*. Angeli.
- Demo, E., and G. Ongaro. 2023. 'Rural Merchants in the Early Modern Republic of Venice.' *Business History*. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2022.2159624>.
- Demo, E., and Vianello, F. 2011. 'Manifatture e commerci nella Terraferma veneta in età moderna.' *Archivio Veneto* 142:27–50.
- Di Tullio, M., and G. Ongaro. 2020. 'Gaining Power: Rural Élites in Northern Italy during the Early Modern Period.' *Journal of European Economic History* 1:75–109.

- Faggion, L. 2017. 'Il notaio di vicariato nel territorio vicentino nella prima età moderna.' In *Uomini del contado e uomini di città nell'Italia settentrionale del XVI secolo: atti del convegno internazionale di storia, arte e architettura*, edited by E. Demo and A. Savio. New Digital Frontiers.
- Ferrarese, A. 2008. 'Il territorio vicentino nel Cinquecento: contesti agrari e assetti protoindustriali.' In *Palladio 1508-2008: il simposio del Cinquecentenario*, edited by F. Barbieri. Marsilio.
- Ferrari, M. L. 2011. 'Aspetti del rapporto tra città e suburbio attraverso le Anagrafi Venete (1766-1795).' *Popolazione e storia* 12 (1-2): 135-70.
- Fontana, G. L. 1985. 'L'industria laniera scledense da Niccolò Tron ad Alessandro Rossi.' In *Schio e Alessandro Rossi: imprenditorialità, politica, cultura e paesaggi sociali del secondo Ottocento*, edited by G. L. Fontana. Storia e Letteratura.
- Fontana, G. L., eds. 1986. *Schio e Alessandro Rossi: imprenditorialità, politica, cultura e paesaggi sociali del secondo Ottocento*. Storia e Letteratura.
- Gasparini, D., and W. Panciera, eds. 2000. *I lanifici di Follina: economia, società e lavoro tra medioevo ed età contemporanea*. Cierre.
- Grubb, J. S. 1984. 'L'economia rurale e gli estimi del territorio di Vicenza (1519-1606).' *Annali Veneti* 1 (1): 97-109.
- Istituto di Storia Economica. 1976. *Relazioni dei rettori veneti in terraferma: podestaria e capitanato di Vicenza*. Vol. 7. Giuffrè.
- Knapton, M. 2010. 'Le campagne trevigiane: i frutti di una ricerca.' *Società e Storia* 130:771-800.
- Lanaro, P., eds. 2006. *At the Centre of the Old World: Trade and Manufacturing in Venice and in the Venetian Mainland, 1400-1800*. Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies.
- Ludwig, K., and R. Vergani. 1994. 'Mobilität und Migrationem der Bergleute vom 13. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert/Mobilità e migrazioni dei minatori (XIII-XVII secolo).' In *Le migrazioni in Europa (secc. XIII-XVIII)*, edited by S. Cavaciocchi. Le Monnier.
- Malanima, P. 1998. 'Italian Cities 1300-1800: A Quantitative Approach.' *Rivista di storia economica* 14 (2): 91-126.
- Mantese, G. 1969. *Storia di Schio*. Comune di Schio.
- Migliavacca, M. 2021. 'Il paesaggio minerario alto-vicentino: una riconsiderazione.' In *Traces of Complexity: studi in onore di Armando de Guio*, edited by L. Magnini, C. Bettineschi, and L. Burigana. Società Archeologica.
- Ongaro, G. 2008. *Località minori, centri urbani e Venezia dagli albori del Dominium Veneciarum alla metà del XVI secolo: il caso di Schio nell'ambito del Vincentini districtus*. Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia.
- Ongaro, G. 2011. «Pro bono et utilitate Comunis Scledi» *Equilibri familiari e magistrature Comunali a Schio tra il XV e il XVI secolo*. Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia.

- Ongaro, G. 2017a. 'Storia economica delle campagne venete in età moderna: nuove prospettive di ricerca.' *Archivio Veneto* 14: 67–87.
- Ongaro, G. 2017b. 'Famiglie del contado in città: il caso scledense dei Bonagente e dei Dal Conte.' In *Uomini del contado e uomini di città nell'Italia settentrionale del XVI secolo*, edited by E. Demo and A. Savio. New Digital Frontiers.
- Ongaro, G. 2020. 'Famiglia, agricoltura e manifattura nel Vicentino di età moderna.' In *La famiglia tra mutamenti demografici e sociali*, edited by A. Samoggia and F. Scalone. Forum.
- Ongaro, G. 2021. 'Maize Diffusion in the Republic of Venice: The Case of the Province of Vicenza (Sixteenth–Eighteenth Century).' In *Maize to the People! Cultivation, Consumption and Trade in the North-Eastern Mediterranean (Sixteenth–Nineteenth Century)*, edited by L. Mocarrelli and A. Panjek. University of Primorska Press.
- Pancierera, W. 1985. 'Articolazione della produzione e livelli tecnologici delle manifatture laniere di Schio nella seconda metà del XVIII secolo.' *Quaderni storici* 59:403–26.
- Pancierera, W. 1988. *I lanifici dell'alto Vicentino nel XVIII secolo*. Stocchiero.
- Pancierera, W. 1996. *L'Arte matrice: i lanifici della Repubblica di Venezia nei secoli XVII e XVIII*. Canova.
- Pancierera, W. 1997. 'Il distretto tessile vicentino (secc. XVII–XVIII).' In *Le vie dell'industrializzazione europea: sistemi a confronto*, edited by G. L. Fontana. Il Mulino.
- Pancierera, W. 2004. 'La formazione delle specializzazioni economiche territoriali nel Sei e Settecento.' In *L'industria vicentina dal Medioevo a oggi*, edited by G. L. Fontana. Cleup.
- Pancierera, W. 2014. 'L'età moderna.' In *Storia di Vicenza dalla preistoria all'età contemporanea*, edited by G. Gullino. Cierre.
- Pancierera, W. 2017. 'Le attività manifatturiere del Vicentino nel XVI secolo.' In *Uomini del contado e uomini di città nell'Italia settentrionale del XVI secolo*, edited by E. Demo and A. Savio. New Digital Frontiers.
- Panjek, A., J. Larsson, and L. Mocarrelli, eds. 2017. *Integrated Peasant Economy in a Comparative Perspective: Alps, Scandinavia, and Beyond*. University of Primorska Press.
- Pezzolo, L. 2011. 'La storia agraria veneta: risultati, ipotesi, prospettive.' *Archivio Veneto* 6 (1): 79–110.
- Poni, C. 2009. *La seta in Italia: una grande industria prima della rivoluzione industriale*. Il Mulino.
- Ramella, F. 1997. 'Protoindustria e regole del gioco: l'area laniera di Biella in una prospettiva comparativa.' In *Le vie dell'industrializzazione europea: sistemi a confronto*, edited by G. L. Fontana. Il Mulino.
- Savio, A. 2017. 'Rogge di sangue in una «quasi città» del Cinquecento: I mer-

- canti scledensi promotori del Corpo Territoriale vicentino.' In *Uomini del contado e uomini di città nell'Italia settentrionale del XVI secolo: atti del convegno internazionale di storia, arte e architettura*, edited by E. Demo and A. Savio. New Digital Frontiers.
- Snichelotto, P. 2007. «Voglio che sii erretto un hospitale qui in Schio»: l'ospedale Baratto dalle origini al primo '900. Centrostampa.
- Valseriati, E. 2018. 'Descrizioni, cronache, diari di viaggio: le testimonianze scritte.' In «Bellissimo per le doti della natura e per l'industria umana»: immagini e descrizioni del territorio vicentino tra medioevo ed età moderna, edited by F. Bianchi and W. Panciera. Viella.
- Vergani, R. 1997. 'Industria rurale, protoindustria o industria ante litteram? L'argento alto-vicentino tra Quattro e Cinquecento.' In *Le vie dell'industrializzazione europea: sistemi a confronto*, edited by G. L. Fontana. Il Mulino.
- Vergani, R. 2003. 'Lavoro e lavoratori nelle miniere venete dei secoli XV e XVI.' In *Miniere e società nella montagna del passato: Alpi venete, secoli XI-III-XIX*, edited by R. Vergani. Cierre.
- Vianello, F. 2004a. *Seta fine e panni grossi: manifatture e commerci nel Vicentino 1570-1700*. Angeli.
- Vianello, F. 2004b. 'Mercanti, imprese e commerci nel Cinque e Seicento.' In *L'industria vicentina dal Medioevo a oggi*, edited by G. L. Fontana. Cleup.
- Zannini, A. 2010. 'Sempre più agricola, sempre più regionale: l'economia della Repubblica di Venezia da Agnadello al Lombardo-Veneto (1509-1817).' *Ateneo Veneto* 9 (1): 137-72.