Topographical art, travel accounts and the landscape history of viticulture in 18th and 19th-century Italy

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In this chapter we consider the way in which the drawings and paintings that travellers and visitors made when visiting Italy, together with their written accounts, can provide useful insights to the history of viticulture. Landscape historians and geographers have long used landscape and topographical art to understand the social and historical implications of past land management practices on current landscapes[1]. Several authors have stressed the advantages of topographical art in understanding changes in agriculture, gardening, forestry, historical ecology and urbanisation[2].

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[1] P. Howard, *Change in the landscape perception of artists*, in «Landscape Research» 9(3) (1984), pp. 41-44; J. Bonehill, S. Daniels, *Paul Sandby, Picturing Britain*, Royal Academy of Arts, London 2009; P. Piana, C. Watkins, *Questioning the view: Historical geography and topographical art*, in «Geography Compass» 14(4) (2020), https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12483

[2] J. Barrell, *The virtues of topography,* in «London Review of Books» 35(2013), pp. 17-18; S. Daniels, *Mapping the metropolis in an age of reform: John Britton's London topography 1820–1840*, in «Journal of Historical Geography» 56 (2017), pp. 61-82. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2016.12.010; L.

In Italy Emilio Sereni made use of paintings and drawings to illustrate and explore the history of Italian agriculture as has Ambrosoli in his study of agricultural botany[3]. Landscape and topographical views of the Alps and the Apennines have been used to date and map landscape changes. Zumbhül, Steiner and Nussbaumer analysed topographical views of the Mer de Glace by the Swiss painter Samuel Birmann (1793-1847) to assess the glacier's fluctuation since the 1820s and Giardino *et al.* examines historical iconography for the study of past geomorphological processes such as landslides, floods and avalanches. Nesci and Borchia examined paintings by Piero della Francesca (c. 1415-92) to interpret the geological landscape of the Montefeltro (Central Italy) and link landscape dynamics with climate change and geomorphological processes[4].

McLoughlin, *Vegetation in the early landscape art of the Sidney region, Australia: accurate record or artistic licence?,* in «Landscape Research», 24(1) (1999), pp. 25-47, https://doi.org/10.1080/01426399908706549; P. Piana, R. Balzaretti, D. Moreno, C. Watkins, *Topographical art and landscape history: Elizabeth Fanshawe in early nineteenth-century Liguria*, in «Landscape History», 33(2) (2012), pp. 65-82. https://doi.org/10.1080/01433768.2012.739397; P. Piana, C. Watkins, R. Balzaretti, *Saved from the sordid axe: Representation and understanding of pine trees by English visitors to Italy in the eighteenth and nineteenth century*, in «Landscape History», 37(2) (2016), pp. 35-56, https://doi.org/10.1080/01433768.2016.1249723; R. Bruzzone, C. Watkins, R. Balzaretti, C. Montanari, *Botanical relics of a lost landscape: herborising 'upon the Cliffs about the Pharos' in Genoa, March 1664*, in «Landscape Research», 43(1) (2017), pp. 20-36. https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2016.1274966; P. Piana, C. Watkins, R. Balzaretti, *Rediscovering Lost Landscapes, Topographical Art in North-West Italy, 1800-1920*, Boydell Press, Woodbridge 2021.

[3] E. Sereni, *History of the Italian Agricultural Landscape*; translated with an introduction by R. Burr Litchfield (Princeton, NJ, 1997); M. Ambrosoli, *The Wild and the Sown: Botany and Agriculture in Western Europe 1350-1850*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997.

[4] H.J. Zumbühl, D. Steiner, S.U. Nussbaumer, *19 th century glacier representations and fluctuations in the central and western European Alps: An*

Grape vines are depicted in many drawings and paintings, and some early paintings, such as Lorenzetti's fresco *Effects of Good Government in the City and the Country*, Siena c. 1337-40, show vineyards as part of the landscape background of the city. Tim Unwin in his important historical geography of viticulture and the wine trade examines several drawings and paintings of wine making[5]. In this paper we focus on the drawings and descriptions of Italy made by visitors, mainly English, in the 18th and 19th centuries. Vines were grown in 18th-century England, but overwhelmingly in the hothouses of the rich, rarely outside[6]. It is unsurprising therefore that northern travellers in southern Europe often commented on vines, which to locals must have seemed a normal part of the landscape. Many travellers made general comments about the importance of viticulture and the appearance of vineyards but several also gave precise descriptions of the modes of cultivation. Some of their drawings provide valuable evidence for the pattern and distribution of vineyards, surrounding land uses and varied growing methods. Many 18th-century travellers to Italy noted that vines were trained up trees and

interdisciplinary approach, in «Global and Planetary Change» 60(1-2) (2008), pp. 42-57. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloplacha.2006.08.005; M. Giardino, G. Mortara, L. Borgatti, O. Nesci, C. Guerra, C.A. Lucente, *Dynamic geomorphology and historical iconography. Contributions to the knowledge of environmental changes and slope instabilities in the Apennines and the Alps*, in G. Lollino, D. Giordan, C. Marunteanu, B. Christaras, Y. Iwasaky, C. Margottini (eds.), *Engineering geology for society and territory,* Vol. 8, Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London, New York 2015, pp. 463-468; O. Nesci, R. Borchia, *Il contributo della geomorfologia allo studio di alcuni paesaggi in opere pittoriche del Rinascimento Italiano: un esempio dai quadri di Piero della Francesca*, Proceedings of the International Conference *I paesaggi del vino* (Perugia, 8-10 May 2008).

[5] T. Unwin*, Wine and the vine. An historical geography of viticulture and the wine trade,* Routledge, London 1991.

[6] J. Robinson (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Wine,* Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006, p. 253.

then «festooned» between them. The regularity with which this observation was made by travellers with very different interests suggests that this was indeed the preferred mode of training vines at this time. «Festoons» became a cliché but there were also references to other training methods, and often authors commented that these were characteristic of particular regions, reinforcing their sense that they were travelling across a locally diverse and politically divided peninsula, not unified until the 1870s.

Alexander Drummond, travelling in the middle of 1744 in the vicinity of Lake Garda, described vines being supported by mulberry trees which were planted in regular rows with grain planted in between[7]. He sketched this arrangement on the 'Monte Provizano', and this was engraved as a large plate which showed vines 'festooned' between the trees. The image appears stylised and it has proved impossible to locate this hill using map evidence. Drummond was travelling south between Rovereto and Peschiera del Garda along the road which follows the River Adige, passing through Borghetto. According to Sereni wine in the Verona area never lost its fame, «not even in the dark centuries of the Middle Ages»[8]. Sereni uses Domenico Veneziano's *Adorazione dei Magi* to show the rational and well-organized vineyards of the Verona hills with sheep grazing between the vines. Wine is still made in this area (*e.g.* Tenuta San Leonardo, founded 1724, one of the best 'Bordeaux style' wines in Italy)[9]. The *Travels* was prepared for publication by Tobias Smollett who appears to have had a considerable input to the form and content of the final text[10], and this influenced his own,

[7] A. Drummond, *Travels through different cities of Germany, Italy, Greece, and several parts of Asia, as far as the banks of the Euphrates,* Strahan, London 1754, pp. 19-20. Drummond was British consul at Aleppo (1754-1756).

[8] Sereni, *History of Italian Agrarian Landscape* cit. p. 189.

[9] http://www.sanleonardo.it/en/

[10] K. Turner, *Drummond, Alexander (d. 1769), traveller*. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2004-09-23). Retrieved 7 Dec. 2017, from http://www.

much more famous travel book, published in 1766[11]. Smollett, travelling from Genoa to Rome in January 1765 noted that

> The country from Sarzana to the frontiers of Tuscany is a narrow plain, bounded on the right by the sea, and on the left by the Apennine mountains. It is well cultivated and inclosed, consisting of meadow-ground, corn fields, plantations of olives; and the trees that form the hedge-rows serve as so many props to the vines, which are twisted around them, and continued from one another[12].

Occasionally, specific types of local wine (and by implication grape varieties) were noted by travellers. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, one of the most famous travellers of the age, writing to her daughter Lady Bute on 10 July 1748 from her house in the country near Gottolengo south of Brescia, stated that «they make a very good sort of Wine they call Brusco»[13]. This came from «a great number of wild vines which twist to the Top of the highest Trees». Lady Mary used the vine stems to make bowers with turf seats from which she could view the landscape, as befitted an aristocrat of high status[14]. This 'brusco' was conceivably like the modern Lambrusco made further east around Modena, Parma and Reggio Emilia. Lady Mary lived in this area effectively as an exile for twenty years and her estate was quite large. In this letter she described it in detail:

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oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-8062 and J. Ingamells, *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800,* New Haven and London 1997, p. 314.

[11] *Travels through France and Italy,* London 1766.

[12] T. Smollett, *Travels through France and Italy*, ed. F. Felsenstein, Oxford 1979, p. 213.

[13] *Brusco* can mean 'sharp' or 'rough' which may suggest what the wine tasted like.

[14] Lady M.W. Montagu, *Selected Letters*, ed. I. Grundy, London 1997, p. 332.

> My Garden was a plain vineyard when it came into my hands not two year ago, and it is with a small expence turn'd into a Garden that (apart from the advantage of the climate) I like better than that of Kensington. The Italian Vineyards are not planted like those in France, but in clumps fasten'd to Trees planted in equal ranks (commonly fruit trees) and continu'd in festoons from one another[15].

Here she produced «a variety of wines».

A remarkable album of 232 drawings made by the painter, poet and naturalist George Keate (1729-97) survives from his travels through France, Italy and Switzerland 1754-6. Three of these topographical drawings focus specifically on viticulture. There are two from France: *The Method of Cultivating the Vines in Burgundy* and *The Method of cultivating the Vines in DAUPHINY* (now the departments of Isère, Drôme, and Hautes-Alpes) and one from Tuscany[16]. These show very effectively the different modes of growing vines. In Dauphiny all the lower growth was trimmed from the vines allowing movement of air through the vineyard. The vines are trained along a trellis system, while in the Burgundy example the vines are grown up individual poles, and the lower foliage is retained. In both cases, there is no evidence of other crops being grown between the closely spaced rows of vines. The third drawing by Keate shows a vintage in Tuscany

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[15] Montagu, *Selected Letters* cit., p. 333.

[16] G. Keate 1754-6 'The Method of Cultivating the Vines in Burgundy'. 'http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3473810&partId=1&searchText=vines+italy+&images=true&page=1; 'The Method of cultivating the Vines in DAUPHINY.' http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?assetId=1266433001&objectId=3473814&partId=1; 'A Vintage in Tuscany Oct 1754' http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?assetId=1266595001&objectId=3474405&partId=1.

and was made in October 1754. This depicts a very different form of vineyard, and shows the vines carefully trained from tree to tree, as described by Drummond and Montagu in northern Italy. The species of tree is not identifiable, but they are likely to be elms, mulberries or poplars, the latter being particularly common in the Val d'Arno, where vines were «maritata ad altissimi pioppi» (trained to very tall poplars)[17]. It is a very different image from the two French ones as it shows the vineyard at the season when it is full of activity. The grapes are picked by men and women. The higher growing vines are picked from ladders leant against the trees and full, small baskets are handed down to someone standing below. These small baskets are used to fill larger baskets nearby. On the left a donkey is loaded up with two of these baskets ready to be taken from the vineyard. The distance between the rows of trees and vines is significant and there is plenty of room for intercropping.

The traveller William Beckford (1760-1844) witnessed the vintage near Mantua in September 1780. He saw peasants «mounted upon elms and poplars, gathering the rich clusters from the vines that hang streaming in braids from one branch to another»[18]. Visiting the castle of the Garzoni family near Lucca he «took refuge under a continued bower of vines, which runs for miles along its summit»[19]. Beckford «fell upon the clusters… like a native of the north». In this scene grapes and wine are associated with luxury, one of Beckford's favourite subjects (he was one of the richest men in England at this period). Later Beckford and his companion (the opera singer Gaspare

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[17] E. Repetti, *Dizionario Geografico Fisico Storico della Toscana*, Firenze 1833, p. 64.

[18] W. Beckford, *Italy, with Sketches of Spain and Portugal,* Bentley, London, 1834, p. 78. The original version of this book, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents* (ed. R.J. Gemmett, Stroud, 2006) was published in 1783 and soon suppressed. This sentence is the same in both versions.

[19] Beckford, *Italy* cit., p. 89.

Pacchierotti) drank the wine made there which «defied the richest wines of Constantia to exceed it»[20].

Many travellers were aiming to reach Rome, and they often stayed there for several months. There was a lively resident community of English artists in the 1770s and 1780s and Richard Stephens (2016) points out that compared to earlier artists who preferred to paint street scenes, palazzi and Baroque churches, artists such as Francis Towne and John Robert Cozens «focused less on its modern splendour than on its ancient remains» and frequently emphasised the rural scenery around Rome.[21] Francis Towne's pen, ink and watercolour 'View near Rome, two miles from the Porta Salaria' of 1780 shows a fork in the road, with an ornamental gateway as the focus. This is the gateway to Signor Martinelli's vineyard; like many vineyards near cities and alongside main roads it is walled to protect the grapes from theft. Signor Martinelli provided lodgings at his farmhouse for many visiting artists, including John Robert Cozens, Thomas Jones and John 'Warwick' Smith. This was an early from of agritourism where artists and other visitors could stay and enjoy the scenery and wine away from the bustle of the city.

One of the best known and documented travellers to Rome, Naples and Sicily was Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832) who wrote a full account of his Italian travels of 1786-8. He was astonished by the fertility and productivity of the Italian agricultural landscapes and was fascinated by the vineyards. On 11 September 1786 he noted near Bolzano that the «foothills are covered with vineyards. The vines are trained on long, low trellises and the purple grapes hang gracefully from the roof

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[20] *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, p. 136 «defied Constantia and the Cape to exceed it». Beckford was making a big claim as the sweet Constantia was the most famed 'new world' wine of this period: Robinson, *The Oxford Companion* cit., pp. 192-193.

[21] Richard Stephens, written label for the exhibition *Light, Time, Legacy: Francis Towne's Watercolours of Rome* (British Museum, 21 January -14 August 2016), https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_Nn-2-10

and ripen in the warmth of the soil so close beneath them». He pointed out that although there was much meadowland in the valley bottom, even there «vines are grown on similar trellises, which are placed closely together in rows, between which maize is planted»[22]. Some of the vineyards next to the road were protected by high walls.

> Other walls which were not high enough had been built up with stones, brambles and so forth to prevent passers-by from picking the grapes». In addition many «vineyard owners spray the vines nearest the road with lime. This makes the grapes unpalatable but does not spoil the wine, since it is eliminated during fermentation[23].

Goethe was fascinated by the way that vines were trained from tree to tree. On 19 September 1786 he noted that the road from Verona to Vicenza was «wide, straight and well-kept» and went «through fertile fields. There trees are planted in long rows upon which the vines are trained to their tops. Their gently swaying tendrils hung down under the weight of the grapes, which ripen early here. This is what a festoon ought to look like». The ground between «the vine rows is used for the cultivation of all kinds of grain, especially maize and millet». The grapes were being harvested and he was

> delighted to see carts with low wheels shaped like plates and drawn by four oxen carrying large tubs in which the grapes are bought from the vineyards to the wine presses. When the tubs are empty, the drivers stand in them. It reminded me very much of a triumphal Bacchanalian[24].

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[22] J.F. von Goethe [1786–1788] *Italian Journey*, translated by W.H. Auden and E. Mayer, London 1962, p. 37.

[23] Ivi, p. 40.

[24] Ivi, p. 63.

A few months later near Capua (25 February 1787) while travelling through fields of wheat

> Rows of poplars are planted in the fields and vines trained between their widespreading branches. It was like this all the way to Naples […]. The stems of the vines are unusually strong and tall and the tendrils sway like nets from one poplar too another[25].

While at Naples on 17 March 1787 he noted that «Every time I wish to write words, visual images come up, images of the fruitful countryside […].» He went on «Here the soil produces everything, and one can expect three to five harvests a year. In a really good year, I am told, they can grow maize three times in the same fields»[26]. The artist Wilhelm Tischbein acted as a companion and guide and introduced him to many other artists. Tischbein was resident in Italy and was appointed director of the Naples Art Academy in 1789. In the 1790s he made a series of etchings as illustrations to Homer and in a letter of 8 November 1796 describes his etching intended to illustrate the story of Odysseus and Polyphemus in some detail (Fig. 1). It was to show how Polyphemus wanted to keep the superabundant productivity of his land to himself [27]. Tischbein emphasised that no one could 'gain any conception' of the «fruitful location» who «has not seen Italy». The picture shows «on one small piece of land everything needed for man's nourishment and sustenance: corn for bread, wine for drinking, flax for clothing, wood for building, meat for eating». It is «a forest of grapes, where the garlands of vines stretch from one tree to another and are lost in the shadowy distance. The heavy, full grapes hang down to touch the ripe corn, and the sun shines on these

[25] Ivi, p. 184.

[26] Ivi, p. 209.

[27] *Odyssey* IX, lines 106-111.

Fig. 1 Wilhelm Tischbein: Ideal view of Polyphemus's island based on the countryside around Naples; frontispiece for Heft IV of *Homer nach Antiken gezeichnet*, Göttingen: Heinrich Dieterich, 1801-5 and Stuttgart: J G Cotta, 1821 Etching (Wikimedia Commons)

clear containers of must and distils the dew they have sucked up into heavenly drink; some glisten like purple, others like gold, others are covered with a soft blue haze. The place is filled with a cloudy mist, which soaks the fruit, and the sun rises behind and warms and ripens it»[28]. His description shows how the popularity of classical authors with many northern visitors and how their classical knowledge informed the way that they appreciated the Italian landscape. Goethe

[28] A. Griffiths, F. Carey, *German Printmaking in the Age of Goethe,* London 1994, no. 86 (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1993-0509-1-39)

himself noted on 12 September 1786 at Lake Garda, when reading Virgil's description of the lake, that «This is the first line of Latin verse the subject of which I have seen with my own eyes»[29]. It also shows how the contemporary Italian agricultural landscapes influenced their readings and understanding of classical authors[30].

The agronomist Arthur Young, who was rather more sober and practical than Beckford or Goethe both in his habits and as a writer, travelled across northern Italy in the autumn and winter of 1789. He published an account of this trip in 1794[31]. In this lengthy work there is a short but interesting section on vines[32]. Earlier in the work he had noted that in the region of Parma, which suffered from bad frosts, in November the vines are «turned down, and the end shoots buried in the earth to preserve them; yet in a wet season they suffer by this treatment, as well as in all seasons, by being stript from the trees, in order to undergo this operation»[33]. Given the purpose of his work and his deep knowledge of farming in England, it is not surprising that Young was much more precise in his descriptions than Drummond, Smollett, Montagu and Beckford. Like them, he noted that for the most part vines were trained up trees. In Piedmont, up willows with vines «fastened from mulberry to mulberry»[34]. Around Brescia ash and maple with mulberries at the ends of rows «but not trained up». Near Vicenza up pollarded trees «with three or four spreading branches» and

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[29] Fluctibus et fremitu assurgens Benace Marino [*Georgics* II V 159-60], Goethe, *Italian Journey* cit. p. 42.

[30] The title given to etching is 'Oenotria tellus' which is a term referring to the promised land of Italy towards which the Trojans and Aeneas were heading (Virgil Aeneid I, line 532; VII, line 85).

[31] A. Young, *Travels, During the Years 1787, 1788 and 1789,* London 1794, in two volumes (Volume Two on Italy). Ingamells, *Dictionary*, p. 1036.

[32] Young, *Travels*, pp. 238-242.

[33] Ivi, p. 149. He cited references to this practice in the Roman author Strabo.

[34] Ivi, p. 238.

around mulberries hanging «in festoons from tree to tree». A similar practice was adopted around Padua but there vines were more valued than mulberries despite richer soil giving bad wine[35]. Bologna was similar with most vines on the plains rather than the hills. One landowner (Signor Bignami) trained his vines «in the French way» with poles (*echalats*) «four or five feet square» because «he finds that these always give better wine than the vines trained to trees»[36]. Tuscany was different with some vines espaliered and others trained to «small posts» on lines in arable fields. Near Modena, large trees supported the vines which gave «the appearance of a forest»[37]. Around Piacenza, rows of vines up long poles but not up trees. Near Pavia «a new method, a single row of vines, with a double row of poles, with others flat so as to occupy four ridges»[38]. Young also included the interesting detail that grape pips were used to produce lamp oil, at Lainate near Milan[39]. Throughout his *Travels* Young referred to farmers he had met giving his work more authority than most. Unfortunately, his book was not illustrated which makes it sometimes hard for the reader to visualize the exact way in which vines were trained.

Young's account can usefully be compared with that of the Swiss agronomist Frédéric Lullin de Chateauvieux (1772-1842) whose *Travels in Italy* was published in English translation in 1819[40]. Chateauvieux

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[35] Ivi, p. 239.

[36] Ivi, p. 240.

[37] Ivi, p. 241.

[38] Ivi, p. 242.

[39] Ivi, p. 238.

[40] *Italy, its Agriculture, &c. from the French of Mons. Chateauvieux*, trans. E. Rigby, London 1819. References to the edition published in Norwich, 1839. A different translation appeared as F. Lillin [sic] de Chateauvieux, *Travels in Italy, Descriptive of the Rural Manners and Economy of that Country,* London 1820. It was quite widely and positively reviewed at that time. The work first appeared in French (*Lettres sur l'Italie*) before 1820 (date of the second edition) with a revised and expanded edition issued 1834.

travelled more widely than Young, reaching as far as Montecassino in the south and commented on vines as he went. Like our other travellers he noted vines growing up trees in Lombardy, especially poplars and oaks[41], maples or cherries in Santena (TO)[42], but mulberries and poplars in Val d'Arno, Tuscany[43]. In contrast, in Lazio the vines were not trained over trees but against *treillages* (trellises) of reeds[44]. This was so at Velletri described as having a more excellent wine culture than anywhere else in Europe,[45] which continues to be an important wine country ('Colli Romani', mostly white wine) today:

> The environs of this city are planted with vineyards, admirably well managed, The vines, in regular lines, are skilfully tied to *treillages* made of large reeds, thus presenting suites of espaliers as far as the eye can reach. There are pretty houses in every vine field, and the whole country exhibits the most chearful and active exertions[46].

Further south in Campania vines climbed up notably tall trees (forming «a sort of natural vineyard») near Posillipo. These elm trees were «large enough to admit vines growing upon their branches, and to pass from tree to tree, so as to produce many rows of garlands, laden with bunches of grapes hanging one, above another»[47]. Near Montecassino the vines were not «tied in festoons to the elm trees, nor in lines near

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[41] *Italy, its Agriculture* cit., p. 21.

[42] Ivi, pp. 21-22.

[43] Ivi, p. 76.

[44] Ivi, p. 110.

[45] Ivi, p. 156.

[46] Ivi, p. 168.

[47] *Italy, its Agriculture* cit., p. 194. «Under this shade I noticed some young bean plants, growing very vigorously, and which were sown after harvest; this nascent vegetation reminded me of the spring in my own country».

Fig. 2 Anonymous, c. 1820 Roman vineyards

the ground, as near Albano, but supported on large trellises, formed of large branches». The vines «grow twelve or fifteen feet high, and spread in bowers, from which the grapes are pendant. This shade is so thick that nothing vegetates under it; but the air is always temperate, and the long vine branches preserve the richest verdure during the summer»[48]. Another way of growing vines depicted in an anonymous topographical drawing of the early 19th century Rome is in rows of tripods of wooden poles (Fig. 2).

As the customary Grand Tour was transformed into something more like modern tourism in the 19th century, visitors to Italy continued to notice vines in their descriptions, published or not. They continued to find much picturesqueness in the vineyards they saw, in part because they were perceived to be 'traditional', with vines trained up trees and other crops grown underneath, as 18th-century visitors had described. Both authors and readers were familiar with earlier accounts, in what was an increasingly saturated market. A good example of this can be found in Leitch Ritchie's *Heath's Picturesque Annual for 1832* whose readers were advised that

[48] Ivi, p. 236.

Fig. 3 William Brockedon (1828) Bordighera

> The vines are here as much for ornament as use; the poetical taste of the Italian displays itself in the thousand forms they are made to assume. The orchards are hung with these beautiful festoons (again!); the corn grows under their rich canopy, that float high above the field.

Here Ritchie's romantic imagination seems to have got the better of him for surely the vines *were* grown for their grapes and wine. But he persisted: «Nowhere do we see, as in France and Germany, a *field of grapes* – vying in elegance with a field of potatoes»[49]. He was referring to the landscape around Domodossola, the sub-alpine valleys north of

[49] L. Ritchie, *Travelling Sketches in the North of Italy, the Tyrol and on the Rhine*, *Heath's Picturesque Annual for 1832,* London 1832, p. 87 original italics. In a copy of this book someone (possibly a 19th-century reader) has written 'Yes they do near Florence.' The volume was illustrated with engravings from drawings by Clarkson Stanfield but none of these show vines.

Lago Maggiore, and the comparison with other viticultural landscapes is interesting both for what it says about the various ways grapes were grown across Europe but also for its stress on Italy's poetic landscape and, by implication, its southern backwardness.

The painter and writer William Brockedon (1787-1854) made many visits to Italy in the 1820s. His view of the coastline looking towards Ventimiglia from Bordighera (1828) carefully depicts a small vineyard with low growing vines between the road and the shore line (Fig. 3). To the right of the road is a patch of *Arundo donax* reeds the stems of which were frequently cut to help form the trellis work along which the vines were trained. Domenico Monterumici, who was sub-prefect of Sanremo between 1877 and 1880 noticed that vines in Sanremo were kept low and they were supported by poles or reeds[50]. During the 19th century, vineyards at low altitudes in the area were progressively abandoned in favour of higher locations[51]. In the late 19th century 70% of the grape production in the Western Riviera was around Bordighera and Ventimiglia, mostly red wines (Rossese) with a little white (Massarda). Bordighera and the Sasso Valley were also the only areas where the dessert grape *uva da tavola* was produced.

A watercolour by Luigi Garibbo (c. 1825) of a similar date shows dense vines on a set of terraces in the Bisagno valley at Staglieno, where no vines grow today[52]. The watercolour shows vines planted along the edges of the terraces, and near the houses they are supported on stone

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[50] D. Monterumici, *Notizie statistiche – geografiche ed agricole sul circondario di Sanremo,* Treviso 1881, from A. Carassale, A. Giacobbe, *Atlante dei Vitigni del Ponente Ligure,* Arma di Taggia 2008.

[51] Carassale, Giacobbe, *Atlante dei Vitigni del Ponente Ligure* cit.; A. Carassale, *Problemi e prospettive della vitivinicoltura nella provincia di Porto Maurizio (1860-1923)*, in A. Carassale, A. Lo Basso (eds.) *In terra vineata. La vite e il vino in Liguria e nelle Alpi Marittime dal Medioevo ai nostri giorni*. Studi in memoria di Giovanni Rebora, Philobiblon, Ventimiglia 2014, pp. 109-131.

[52] Centro DocSAI, Collezione Topografica del Comune di Genova.

pillars to provide shady arbours a technique that was particularly common near Savona[53]. Vineyards are frequently mentioned in contemporary written documents. The agronomist Girolamo Gnecco argued that in Genoa and the surrounding areas vineyards were only profitable on infertile slopes whose soils were too poor to support olive or mulberry plantations[54]. He noted that peasants planted cereals and cabbages on the terraces with the vines. Luigi Maineri, argued on the contrary that the lands surrounding the city of Genoa, especially the Polcevera and the Bisagno Valleys, were well suited for viticulture[55].

John Ruskin celebrated the landscape of the Val d'Aosta in a poem of 1835:

> Fortresses arising round;
> Rocks, with ruined castles crowned;
> Vineyards green with trellised rail[56].

In 1851 he told his father that he had travelled «some fifty miles through scenery of continually increasing magnificence». He enthused over the 'huge chestnut trees, springing out four or five trunks in a cluster' and described the valley as «literally roofed over with continuous trellises of vines»[57]. Wine production was of enormous importance to the economy of the Val d'Aosta in the 19th century as it is today (Fig.

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[53] M. Quaini, *Per la storia del paesaggio agrario in Liguria,* Savona 1973, p. 117.

[54] G. Gnecco, *Riflessioni sopra l'agricoltura del genovesato co' mezzi propri a migliorarla, e a toglierne gli abusi, e vizi inveterati*, Stamperia Gesiniana, Genova 1770, pp. 154-155.

[55] L. Maineri, *Seguito de' Pensieri patriottici sopra l'Agricoltura,* in Avvisi, 18 April 1778, p. 350, from Quaini (1973).

[56] J. Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, vol II, George Allen and Unwin, London 1903-4, p. 432.

[57] Ruskin, *The Works,* vol. XIV, p. 236, fn 1 Ruskin to his father, 26 August 1851.

Fig. 4 Traditionally trained vines at Morgex 7 August 2018

4). The principal grape was Torrette[58], the name of the hill above the village of Saint Pierre, and the vineyards were planted in rows, supported by poles and kept low to take advantage of the sun and heat from the rocks[59]. The soil is very poor and rocky and the vines grow through the rocks, supported by narrow dry stone walls[60]. The wine was sweet and the artist John Brett appears to have appreciated it as he recorded the name and location of the vineyards on a written note in one of his Aosta sketchbooks. The Rev. S. W. King noted that the «grapes were nearly ripe in the continuous vineyards» at Torrette which «are the most celebrated in this district, producing a good sound wine

[58] Rev. S.W. King, *The Italian Valleys of the Pennine Alps,* John Murray, London 1858, p. 109. Torrette is a red wine made using Petit Rouge grapes, indigenous to this valley: J. Robinson (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Wine,* Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006, p. 515.

[59] L.F. Gatta, *Saggio sulle viti e sui vini della Valle d'Aosta da vendere,* ed. R. Sandi, Aosta 2014, pp. 42-44.

[60] A. Zuccagni-Orlandini, *Corografia fisica, storica e statistica dell'Italia e delle sue isole*, R. Società Agraria, Firenze 1838, p. 265.

of a light claret quality» clearly a comparison which King's middle-class Victorian readership was expected to understand[61].

King noted that the grapes were supported on trellises «on a sort of elongated battlement like pillars, built on neat rough cast and white-washed walls». These presented a «charming» sight from the road. These structures can still be seen today in some places notably in the vicinity of Chambave and Nus, but the vineyards in this area are generally trained low up wires in straight lines now (i.e. the classic French technique). He reported, however, a «mysterious wine disease» which had affected plants for «some years» and was «still on the increase»[62]. This was probably *oidium*, a type of powdery mildew[63]. Crucial to the success of these vineyards was, and is, an efficient irrigation system. Droughts were frequent in the 19th century and Casalis argued that the countryside of Saint Pierre would be more productive if irrigation was improved[64]. The importance of viticulture is also shown in Edouard Aubert's drawings of narrow terraces so characteristic of the area[65].

Some travellers commented on their own involvement in local harvests. In the 1870s and 80s a small number of British women who had settled in and around Florence wrote about the local agriculture, including viticulture. Tuscany had long been a significant producer of

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[61] King, *The Italian Valleys* cit., p. 109

[62] *Ibidem.*

[63] J. Robinson (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, Third Edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006, pp. 543-544. First recorded in the United States in 1834, and then in France in 1845. It could not have been phylloxera as this disease only arrived in Italy around 1870: G. Gale, *Dying on the Vine: how phylloxera transformed wine,* Berkeley 2011, p. X.

[64] G. Casalis, *Dizionario geografico storico-statistico-commerciale degli stati di S.M. il Re di Sardegna,* vol. 19, Gaetano Maspero Librajo, Torino 1849.

[65] E. Aubert, *Vallée d'Aoste,* Amyot, Paris 1860; D. Moreno, *Valle d'Aosta*, in M. Agnoletti (ed.), *Italian Historical Rural Landscapes,* Springer, Dordrecht 2013, pp. 167-174.

wine and the Grand Dukes had taken some interest in regulating the production and sale of Chianti as early as 1716[66]. British visitors tended once again to romanticise wine in this region. Janet Ross (1842-1927) and 'Leader Scott' (pseudonym of Lucy Baxter, 1837-1902), two of the leading lights of the 'Anglo-Florentines', wrote about peasant viticulture as practised on their own and neighbouring estates. Although both were sincere in their efforts to portray local peasant life and their own roles in it because both were outsiders, fairly well-off and, in the case of Ross, imperious, their descriptions have to be treated with a degree of caution. Ross got into print first with an essay called 'Vintaging in Tuscany' published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1875[67]. This described a «vintage party» in 1874 (the best vintage for twenty six years) at a local villa in the lower Val d'Arno opposite Monte Morello, where Italians and British collaborated in harvesting. The vines were grown on *pergole* (trellises)[68]. However, the 78 year-old retired estate manager (*fattore*) kept an eye on «his especial pets, the vineyards *alla francese* (vines cut low in the French fashion, and not allowed to straggle from tree to tree as is the Tuscan usage)»[69].

Various grape varieties were mentioned: Sangiovese, Aleatico, Colorino and Occhio di Pernice, all still grown here today. Ross also mentioned that in the two decades prior to this vintage the «iodium» disease (*oidium*) had significantly reduced the grape crop.

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[66] Robinson (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Wine* cit., pp. 162-63.

[67] Reprinted several times including J. Ross, *Old Florence and Modern Tuscany*, J M Dent, London 1904, pp. 119-130 the version cited here. Mrs Ross's involvement with the vintage at Poggio Gherardo is described by S. Benjamin, *A Castle in Tuscany. The Remarkable Life of Janet Ross,* Murdoch Books, Millers Point 2006, p. 105 with photographs at p. 138.

[68] Ross, *Old Florence and Modern Tuscany*, p. 120.

[69] Ivi, p. 121. A vine climbing up a tree is shown in the engraving by Adelaide Marchi (facing p. 120).

Lucy Baxter also wrote about one vintage party (in either 1886 or 1887) hosted by Countess Benveduti in her 'Tuscan Sketch' called 'The Vintage' set on one of the Benveduti estates also in the southern Val d'Arno[70]. Here «festoons» of vines were grown with olives and peaches in between and corn underneath. Their vines were trained traditionally not in the «straight, low espaliers of the French viticulture»[71].

At the vintage the Countess and her guests (including a party of English girls who «really worked» unlike the local aristocratic youth) were involved to a degree in the actual harvest. At the dinner the guests had to taste all the wines made on the estate which were: red, *vino stretto* (first fermentation without the must), white, *vin santo* and Aleatico. Most interesting was a new wine made from the «uva Isabella», «strawberry grapes, an American variety recently introduced»[72]. The wine was here made in a «primitive» way rather than the «more scientific French manner» adopted by some local landowners in recent years.

Both of these accounts shed some light on Tuscan viticulture in this period, although local sources are obviously more detailed. However, the impression they gave of 'Italian' viticulture was rather one-sided. The local peasants seem to have done the hard work at vintage time, and the British 'helpers' had the luxury of a better lunch eaten away from them afterwards. Class and ethnic boundaries were maintained, as was necessary given that the intended readership was a middle-class British one which regarded Italian peasants as inferior. A perhaps more objective view was taken by Helen Zimmern (1846-1934) writing in 1906[73].

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[70] L. Scott, *Tuscan Studies and Sketches,* T Fisher Unwin, London 1888, pp. 161-180.

[71] Ivi, p. 170, plate on p. 169.

[72] Robinson, *The Oxford Companion* cit., p. 363 a *Vitis labrusca* hybrid developed in South Carolina in 1816.

[73] H. Zimmern, *Italy of the Italians,* Pitman, London 1920, the updated fifth edition which is cited here. C. Creffield, (2004-09-23). Zimmern, Helen

In her chapter on *Agrarian Italy,* Zimmern – a liberal journalist who wrote an important biography of Schopenhauer and knew Wagner and Nietzsche – pointed out that wine production was the most profitable of Italy's agricultural activities[74]. It was especially important in the hills as only olives and vines would grow there. To counteract their many diseases the peasants sprayed the plants with sulphur-dust from a «queer tin apparatus»[75], something which was apparently not done in the Aosta valley twenty odd years before when that disease had been, in the words of the Rev. King, «mysterious». Zimmern stated that Chianti was the best wine of Italy and, interestingly, that wines in Italy were not «doctored» as French, German and Spanish vintages were: «It is hardly likely that the making of wine in the French sense will ever take root in Italy. The Italian has too great a horror of falsified wine»[76]. Once again, the sense that Italians were innocent, traditional and romantic about their viticulture comes across even in this deliberately more neutral account. Evidence from accounts of Italian viticulture written by Italian travellers shows otherwise. For example, Giacomo Navone and Davide Bertolotti who both travelled in across Liguria in the early 19th century were much less romantic in their descriptions of viticulture, especially Bertolotti whose work bristles with statistics and apparent objectivity[77].

Travellers' accounts of viticulture in Italy therefore reveal some useful information about styles of cultivation in the 18th and 19th centu-

(1846–1934), translator and author. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Retrieved 14 Dec. 2017, from http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-55284.

[74] Zimmern, *Italy of the Italians* cit. p. 251.

[75] Robinson, *The Oxford Companion* cit. p. 666 used against powdery mildew.

[76] Zimmern, *Italy of the Italians* cit. p. 254.

[77] G. Navone, *Passeggiata per la Liguria occidentale fatta nell'anno* 1827, Ventimiglia 1832; D. Bertolotti, *Viaggio nella Liguria Marittima*, 3 vols, Eredi Botta, Turin 1834.

ries. The drawings and accounts provide clear evidence that viticulture was widespread, including in places where it is now less common (*e.g.* the flat plain of Lombardy and the suburbs of Genoa). The drawings, paintings and travelogues created expectations of what Italian viticulture was meant to look like. The methods of training varied but were almost always unlike modern practices or, apparently, contemporary French practice (with the odd exception). The 'wild' nature of Italian viticulture and the 'picturesque' nature of all the festooned vines helped to shape ideas that Italy was an exotic and romantic land, which helped in turn to attract readers for travel writing. However, they also provide evidence of local innovation with the importation of American varieties, of the use of sulphur and increasingly it would seem of the adoption of French methods, perhaps diffused via agricultural schools.