

# Communication Maintenance in *Longue Durée*

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## 5 Power and Maintenance in the Alpine Middle Ages A Long-Term View

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# 5 Power and Maintenance in the Alpine Middle Ages

## A Long-Term View

*Roberto Leggero\**

### Introduction

The question at the basis of this chapter concerns the existence of “maintenance cultures”, the definition of which is discussed in the first paragraph, and the possibility of identifying historical pivots that determine the transition from one maintenance culture to another via interruptions and reactivations of maintenance activities. While considering a long time span, between the 9th and 14th centuries, I would like to particularly highlight a phase of transition between two different maintenance cultures in Northern Italy at the end of the Middle Ages. This case is particularly evident and well-documented and so serves as a clarification for the reflections contained in these pages. With the birth in 1416 of the Duchy of Savoy, which extended from the territory of today’s Piedmont and Valle d’Aosta across the Alps to Savoy, some important maintenance activities became the exclusive preserve of the “State” inasmuch as they were essential to its very existence. The maintenance practices that concerned the management of fortresses, bridges, and public roads – communication and transport infrastructures that were indispensable for the movement of people and goods (Van Laak, 2023), and also to convey the existence and efficiency of ducal power, which defines the dual communicative nature of infrastructures, as a “medium” and as “information” – responded to different objectives and purposes than in the past and were functional to the activities of the “prince”. The chapter examines the statutes issued by the Savoys in 1430, the *Decreta Sabaudiae Ducalia*.<sup>1</sup> In the *Decreta*, the maintenance regulations concerning roads overlapped with the local regulations but did not annul them and did not intervene in the maintenance of minor roads, which remained the responsibility of the rural communities. Finally, the last paragraph will briefly analyze a tangible case of maintenance management in the Duchy, looking at the accounts of the castellan who ruled the castle of Cly (Valle d’Aosta) on behalf of the Duke.

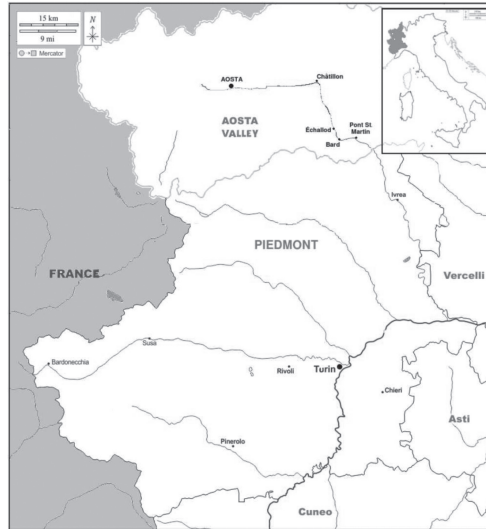


Figure 5.1 Areas and localities mentioned in the text, current Piedmont and Aosta Valley regions.

### Maintenance and Centers of Power

Borrowing the words of the two landscape historians and geographers, temporality “gives an account of the formation of a particular rural landscape and its evolution, perhaps through to the shaping, in the same space, of a different landscape” (de Santi & Rossi, 2023, p. 555; but Krebs & Mossop also address the subject in this volume). Concerning oneself with the history of maintenance inevitably means taking this point of view into consideration because, if the agrarian landscape is the form that man consciously and systematically imprints upon the natural landscape during and for the purposes of his agricultural production activities (Sereni, 1984, p. 21), it is unthinkable without infrastructure and infrastructure is unthinkable without maintenance.

The idea that maintenance must also be understood in temporal terms implies that – as with any long-lasting social phenomenon – “maintenance cultures” are formed. However, what exactly is a “maintenance culture” and what does it consist of? As already mentioned in the introduction to this volume, maintenance can be defined as the act of keeping an object, regardless of its complexity, in good working order so that it can fulfill the purpose it was created to serve for as long as possible. Maintenance culture encompasses both a *desire for* and a *practice of* maintenance, both of which are closely linked to a political dimension. Maintenance is expensive

and time-consuming and is therefore subject to political decisions that precede all intervention on public infrastructure or of public use, such as bridges, roads, crossings, harbors, city walls, public fountains, aqueducts, riverbanks, canals, and so on. Very few extensive economic activities can be undertaken without the land being subjected to maintenance activities, and these include neither agriculture nor trade. Maintenance also ensures the communications necessary to manage both.

Politics, economics, and technology are the three fundamental factors that generate maintenance practices. One may possess the technology but not the political willingness or economic strength to apply it. Otherwise, while politics may be favorable the necessary expertise may be lacking. Also with regard to the Alpine Middle Ages, we should

replace the notion of autonomous populations . . . with the model of a complex economy in motion, in which people are constantly seeking the most efficient means to obtain the benefits they require.

(Kaiser, 1995, p. 188)<sup>2</sup>

Once we have clarified how the practices of maintaining objects of public use are generated by political stakeholders, who determine and regulate them, and how a maintenance culture is identifiable and recognizable through them, we can understand why maintenance is a fundamental aspect of governance. Here is an example: on July 7, 1294, at the city gate of Sant'Orso in Aosta, there was a meeting between the representative of the Count of Savoy, Guglielmo *Filius Dei* castellan of Bard, a town and fortress located at the entrance to the Valle d'Aosta, and the lords of *Valesia* Arduccio, Ardrico, Guglielmo, and Pietro, whose estates bordered on those of the castellany (Figure 5.1). The Valle d'Aosta and its capital, the city of Aosta, were among the Alpine areas controlled by the Savoys and the castle of Bard represented a key point of access to the valley in which various aristocratic families controlled side valleys or fortifications in agreement, but often in tension, with the Savoys. On July 7, 1294, in addition to the parties, three notaries were present as witnesses and one of them drew up a final document. There was a dispute going on because the castellan of Bard had made or attempted to make improvements to the road to Échallod, a village near Bard but on the domains of the lords *de Valesia*. The latter protested that this was an action aimed at subtracting a part of the territory under their rule. The castellan of Bard stated publicly, also on behalf of his lord the Count of Savoy, that he had no such intention and the notary put this statement in writing. A few days later, on July 24, the castellan of Bard declared that, in the future, there would be no more taking of hostages to the detriment of the jurisdiction of the lords *de Valesia* (Rivolin, 2021, pp. 166–167).

It is evident from the first text, preserved as part of the documentation of the castellany of Bard,<sup>3</sup> how the management, maintenance, and improvement of a road had direct political consequences, as it could weaken the right of a local lord to govern a certain portion of land. However, the concatenation of the two documents (which, as we learn from the editor, were written by the same notary on a single piece of parchment, albeit with *signa tabellionum*, distinct chronical and topical dates) is also interesting because maintenance and abduction are similar and related, in that they describe actions both capable of casting doubt on the *de Valesia*'s control of the territory.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the communicative function of maintenance should be emphasized, especially where it is exercised simultaneously on a road infrastructure, characterized, by its very nature, by flows of communication, on a border between jurisdictions as a place of *accumulation* of information (e.g., relating to transit, payment of duties, etc.) and in conjunction with the *communicative nature of political power*,<sup>5</sup> which must constantly assert its existence (as it "is an empty thing", Canfora, 2010).

This example prompts us to state that, as political arrangements change, maintenance operations may be interrupted, postponed, increased, or entrusted to different managers and specialists than in the past. The same happens when economic systems or technologies change. When major transformations of this kind take place, a change in maintenance culture can often be observed. However, this does not exclude that different maintenance cultures may coexist in complex political contexts subject to frequent changes such as those of the Middle Ages.

Remaining with the first case, that of political change imposing a change in maintenance, the most important example is related to the rebirth of the empire in Europe in the 9th century. One of its consequences was the decline in the maintenance of bridges and roads, without diminishing the need for efficient communication routes (Szabò, 1992). Indeed, until the 6th century and beyond, following the tradition inherited from Roman times, roads and bridges were considered public assets and their maintenance was entrusted to local communities, with no exemptions or immunities from this obligation.<sup>6</sup> For various reasons, the Carolingian Empire relinquished the exclusive management of maintenance. Roads in lowland areas did not require constant maintenance, except in wetlands or areas subject to flooding, but bridges did.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, roads were left to themselves, or rather, to the spontaneous management of those who used them, subject to donations or exemptions obtained by monasteries and local authorities. For example, in 915, Berengar I granted the bishop of Padua the rights over the public roads in the Solagna valley (Castagnetti, 1996, p. 175) and judicial power over the *arimanni* – extremely important people for maintenance purposes – and other freemen living in the valley (Schiaparelli, 1903, pp. 264–265).

Bridges were donated to private individuals or granted to them under license together with the accompanying rights, that is, the possibility of charging tolls, and the construction of private bridges and their economic management was also authorized.

In many cases, the emperor merely accepted situations that he did not have the strength or the desire to change, regularizing them through a posteriori negotiation and formal recognition. For example, although the 9th-century capitularies had reiterated the obligation to maintain bridges, which “by justice and ancient custom” were repaired “by the ecclesiastics and the people”, what could happen was that the rector of a monastery could ask freemen who provided the emperor with military service (the *arimanni*) to repair a bridge on behalf of the monastery if they had placed their property under the latter’s protection. As the duties of this particular category of individuals, which will be addressed again, also included the custody and maintenance of bridges, the monastery effectively shirked the obligation established by imperial decree, and the obedience owed by the *arimanni* to the emperor was transferred to the monastery (Tabacco, 1966, pp. 103–106). The understanding of this expedient – due to the ingenious interpretative skill of one of Europe’s great medievalists, Giovanni Tabacco – which seems to concern a maintenance problem, actually reveals one of the mechanisms of power.

It would be wise to avoid considering the attention paid to bridges as a lack of interest in roads. The systematic attention of the Carolingians to care facilities (hospices), especially those located near Alpine passes (Sergi, 1994), demonstrates considerable investment in the efficiency of communication routes. One does, however, get the impression that these investments were focused on single critical points and not on the entire road infrastructure. For reasons that included economic matters, the political exploitation of religion, and the regulation of the flow of people and goods, the aristocracy invested in the foundation of monasteries that made it possible to exploit agricultural resources, govern populations, and *channel traffic and communication flows*, even without total control of the road networks, by means of landmarks that provided multiple services for travelers (Bianchi, 2022), including banking, finance, and insurance.<sup>8</sup>

The loss of the empire’s direct protection over the roads meant not only that maintenance commitments but also the control of the road system itself passed into the hands of local forces, either collective or seigniorial, but as long as they were loyal to the empire this was not a problem. Otherwise, it was. For example, it is surprising to note how, with the Treaty of Constance (1183), Emperor Frederick I obtained from the Italian urban communes the willingness to repair the road network for his journeys south into Italy (Von Appelt, 1990, p. 74). These were mostly routes in Alpine areas, where not only bridges but also roads required frequent maintenance.

It was indeed an “upside-down world” insofar as the communes guaranteed, with their own forces and by contracting it (Szabò, 1992, p. 43, no. 128), a function that was theoretically the preserve of the imperial power, the safety of travel on the roads. However, this was nothing more than “the adaptation of an ancient custom of imperial power to the changed political conditions of northern Italy” (Szabò, 1992, p. 43). If, indeed, it is true that the emperors had always tried to impose the maintenance of the routes traveled by themselves and their armies, Frederick I was fresh from the harsh defeat of Legnano (1176) by the league of some Italian cities and was therefore in a position of weakness. It is not wrong to point out that a simple act of maintenance was clear evidence of the changing balance of strength between centers of power.

### **Infrastructures and Maintenance in the Duchy of Savoy**

The relationship between political power and communication routes is “a problem to be dissected”. The importance and characteristics of the routes must be taken into consideration, along with

the varied nature of the powers that intervened in the territory, the road policy they pursued . . . Moreover, the relationship was not unambiguous. Not only did medieval powers act on the road network; the road network also conditioned those powers, shaping them and changing their features in more than one case.<sup>9</sup> This was particularly evident in the central centuries of the Middle Ages, when the seigniorial powers assumed various transitory structures in rapid succession. The modern state, with its high political, economic, and military initiative, was still a long way off.

(Sergi, 1986, pp. 33–34)

However, if this is true, we should also encounter changes in maintenance policies, as indeed happens.

This brings us to the examination of the birth of the Duchy of Savoy, a transalpine state located between France and Italy founded to control the routes across the western Alps. It has been written (Castelnuovo, 2018) that many specialists of medieval Savoy have adopted a long-term perspective, studying centuries that are relatively distant from each other from a chronological point of view because, in the analysis of the formation and birth of the Savoy State, “the mastery of the *Longue Durée* can both reduce the risks of historiographical over-interpretations . . . and favour critical reinterpretations of social and political experiments in the long term” (Castelnuovo, 2018, p. 22). This author too intends to avoid the risks of identifying “historiographical overinterpretations and presumed

modernities”, offering instead a critical reading of the experiments and experiences of power over the territory in terms of the maintenance of the infrastructures essential to its consolidation.

The origin of the dynasty that gave life to the Duchy dates back to the 11th century, when a certain Umberto, a trusted man of the king of Burgundy Rudolf III, obtained from the sovereign, with the support of the emperor Conrad II, “a vast area between the Rhone, the Jura and the Alps” (Barbero, 2002, p. 6). Count Umberto’s sons, Amedeo I and Oddone, extended their dominions to Aosta, Turin, and other places in Piedmont via marriage.

This was followed by a phase of contraction of the areas under the control of the Savoys also because, between 1111 and 1116, the urban commune of Turin succeeded in obtaining recognition by Emperors Henry V and Lothair III of its having attained a capacity for self-organization and control over an important section of the road from the Alpine passes to the city. The city of Turin exercised its dominion over it, also taking care of its maintenance.

As of the final years of the 12th century, the Savoys’ control over Piedmont and the lands beyond the Alps began to extend again. By the middle of the 13th century, the Savoys had compacted their dominions, consolidating control over the Val di Susa and the Valle d’Aosta. In 1242, the acquisition of the *domaine direct* of the castle and seigniorship of Bard, which they had previously been unable to control, delivered them access to the entire Aosta Valley. Bard, in fact, was and is located right at the entrance to the valley, built in a narrowing between the mountain and the River Dora Baltea.

Thanks to a shrewd marriage, in 1272, Amadeus V of Savoy gained a large part of the ancient French province of Bresse and also the prestigious title of “imperial vicar” granted to him by Emperor Henry VII. Between 1313 and 1382, important pre-alpine Piedmontese towns such as Ivrea, Biella, and Cuneo submitted to Savoy rule and, in 1388, also Nice and its committee (urban district). Finally, in 1416, Amadeus VIII of Savoy was granted the title of duke by Emperor Sigismund.

There was little talk of a “State” before that year when referring to the Savoy dominions and, even after the birth of the Duchy, it did not possess all the characteristics of modern states, although the bureaucratic and court structures did become consolidated over time. What is striking is the fact that the Duchy was not a top-down organization in which power descended from the duke, but rather an aggregation of local administrative structures which, while being autonomous, were “subject in a sometimes uniform, sometimes arbitrary manner to the political, military and financial control” of the duke and his officials (Barbero, 2002, p. 6).

The pillars of this structure were the *bailiffs and castellans*, also known as *podestà*, that is, ducal officials who owned a castle and were appointed



either by the local lords with the approval of the duke or by the duke himself. Their tasks were the military defense and administration of the *castellany*, which was the jurisdictional district revolving around a castle entrusted to them. This entailed the maintenance of the castle, the management of civil and minor criminal justice, the collection of fines, tolls, and taxes, the farming of the ducal lands, and, in agreement with the local communal councils, the management of administrative activities (Barbero, 2002, pp. 10–21).

The *castellany* was a vital garrison over the territory also because the castellan was required to check and restore the conditions of the main public roads. Consequently, two essential maintenance activities became the exclusive responsibility of the Duchy insofar as they were pertinent to the existence of the State itself: the repair and maintenance of the fortresses and the verification of the conditions of the public roads, also used by the Duke's personal postal service. In fact, the *Decreta Sabaudiae Ducalia* contains a specific article addressed to the court secretaries, emphasizing the importance of the rapid transcription and dispatch of all ducal documents (Ammann-Doubliez, 2019, pp. 52–53).

The practice of maintaining the public roads seems to echo the older one, as the local communities continued to be engaged in the practical performance of maintenance. In actual fact, it was no longer a service performed by the rural communes for their own exclusive benefit, but it was the ducal power that operated, through the castellans and using local labor, to ensure quick routes for its communication services<sup>10</sup> and its armies. That this also benefited the economy and communications of the ducal inhabitants was an important and useful consequence, but secondary to the primary purpose for which the castellans acted: the protection of the integrity of the ducal state.

These maintenance practices, apparently similar to other older ones, reveal a different “maintenance culture” in that it was in the hands of a representative of the central power. As long as a city such as Vercelli, which only became part of the Duchy of Savoy in 1427, had exercised its authority as “collective ruler” over the territory, maintenance action was carried out for the benefit of the city, its markets, and the entire countryside. With the incorporation into the Duchy of Savoy, the main role performed by the fortresses and public roads, and therefore all the maintenance actions associated with them, was to defend and protect the ducal government. The provision of services to the entire community was only secondary. Another Piedmontese urban commune located in the pre-Alpine area and at the entrance to the Valle d'Aosta was Ivrea. Brought under the rule of the Savoy dynasty in 1313, it had founded the *castrum* (fortified village) of Quassolo along the road leading to Aosta at the beginning of the 13th century. As a powerful collective ruler, it had obtained the support of the

lords of the Canavese region for the completion and maintenance of the fortress (Sanna, 2021, p. 235, n. 20).

To explain the complexity of maintenance acts in urban communes, we can cite a case from outside the area examined, that of Bologna. A study of the city's accounting registers shows how, at the end of the 13th century, the maintenance responsibilities of the two highest executive bodies, the *Podestà* and the *Capitano del Popolo*, were particularly limited, regulated, and controlled. The two officials were, in fact, elected by the *Consiglio del Popolo*, the commune's most important legislative body, and replaced every six months by professionals chosen from outside the town. Therefore, any spending on maintenance decided by the *Podestà* or *Capitano del Popolo* had to be authorized and the work had to be assessed. The city's trade organizations provided labor for the work in return for payment, as in the case of the large tower defending the gate of Bologna castle, which had to be reinforced in 1288. The Elders and Consuls of the commune could authorize considerably larger maintenance expenses than those commissioned by the *Podestà* and *Capitano del Popolo*, concerning centers and fortifications in the county, repairs and construction work, or the rebuilding of bridges and roads (Conti, 2020, pp. 203–219). It is clear, even from these few considerations, how Bologna's political structure, which involved substantial participation by the urban population in the management of the city and the county, produced very different maintenance practices from those ordered by the Savoy.

### **Maintenance of Infrastructures and Communities: The *Decreta* of 1430**

The situation in the territories under Savoy rule was quite different, at least as far as “public” infrastructure was concerned. The *Decreta Sabaudiae Ducalia*, the important collection of laws issued by Amadeus VIII in 1430 (Caesar & Morenzoni, 2019), highlight the Duke's maintenance concerns. It should be emphasized that this regulatory text and also the acts relating to the accounts of the castellanies and those of the House of Savoy itself are both management documents and texts that communicate a specific maintenance culture. The *Decreta* also have a specific political communication function.<sup>11</sup>

The *Decreta* contain three fundamental articles. The first, entitled *De visitatione castrorum, villarum, locorum necnon inquisitione secreta super regimine castellanorum et aliorum officiariorum per bailivos fiendis*<sup>12</sup> (Ammann-Doubliez, 2019, pp. 93–95), ordered that the bailiffs, castellans entrusted with supervisory duties over their colleagues, go and inspect the fortifications in the territories under their jurisdiction, and, at the same time, secretly inquire<sup>13</sup> how the local castellans carried out their duties.

This is a very interesting article because it combines concerns related to the maintenance of military structures for the defense of the territory with political concerns related to controlling the quality of government activity. The bailiffs were required to personally visit the castles, *villas*, that is, the major settlements, and other minor localities “on the frontiers” at least once a year or more frequently. They were to check the state of the artillery and other defense equipment, including walls and buttresses, and then send their reports to the Duke. In the course of such journeys, while passing through and stopping at various locations, the bailiffs were required to conduct secret inquiries (Ammann-Doubliez, 2019, p. 94) into the way the castellans or their lieutenants handled power. What emerges, then, is the connection between the maintenance of physical structures and the management and maintenance of the communities that resided on that territory. Evidently, there was a connection between the maintenance of infrastructures and the “maintenance of local communities” insofar as the same official was entrusted not only with the control of the former but also with the verification of the proper management of relations between the representatives of power and civil society. The castles served not only to defend the State from external and internal enemies but also to discipline the population and, therefore, it was crucial that those who controlled these fortifications did not themselves cause discontent or, worse, revolts. Let us not forget that the *Decreta* were issued just 14 years after the birth of the Duchy.

Probably, the aim was to push the bailiffs to consider the fact that local sources had to be protected in order to get reliable information from them, something that would have been difficult to achieve in the case of a public inquiry.

The second important article on maintenance concerns public streets, *De reparacione et manutencione viarum*<sup>14</sup> (Ammann-Doubliez, 2019, pp. 116–117). It establishes that the duties of the castellans or their lieutenants included maintaining the streets, the main thoroughfares through a territory, “well and decently”. It has been written (Perrillat, 2004) that by favoring major communication routes, the dukes had to forcibly establish an administration and agents responsible for their construction, maintenance, and control. The results were not uniform also because the Savoy did not have a de facto monopoly on the roads. Lay lords, abbey, and communities also exercised this right, as administering roads meant monitoring, controlling, and judging (Perrillat, 2004, p. 191). The latter is an important point in our discussion. The slow establishment of the ducal state meant, for the dukes, the consolidation of the right to judge, which was implemented through maintenance acts.

According to the *Decreta*, at the beginning of March and September, the bailiffs and castellans, or their lieutenants, were obliged to travel the public streets and roads within the territories entrusted to them, ensuring that

there were no impediments, obstructions, or narrowing. They also had to check that the straight stretches of the roads maintained a width of at least 8 feet (about 4 m), with at least 16 feet in bends. The ducal officials had to request the maintenance of damaged routes by the owners of properties overlooking the stretch of road to be maintained or by the communities in whose territory they were located. Naturally, fines were imposed if the owners defaulted. It is worth emphasizing that if, on the one hand, the major road was of great importance in political, strategic, and military terms, on the other hand, for the central power, the most financially interesting function was the possibility of exacting tolls and duties directly but also indirectly, as a consequence, for example, of the influx of people and goods to market towns (Perrillat, 2004, p. 191). The economic utility of maintenance is (still today) often underestimated because it is not always immediately apparent.

However, despite the attention paid to major and public roads, the bailiffs, castellans, and their lieutenants were expressly forbidden from “meddling” with neighborhood roads, that is, with the maintenance of minor and local roads (Ammann-Doubliez, 2019, p. 117) unless a rural community explicitly requested their intervention. Only then could ducal officials intervene to carry out the necessary repairs. Moreover, rural communities had their own charters, which established how and when to intervene to repair roads and bridges that belonged to the community. This is an example of a double level of “maintenance culture”, one of a ducal nature and the other local, evidence of which can be found in the documents of the rural communes. The limit imposed by the *Decreta* on the intervention of the castellans on the minor roads allowed the Savoys to exercise a level of power that was too extensive and expensive in political terms and, at the same time, defined an area of respect for local politics (Provero, 2021), regulations and rural charters which were also subject to the approval of the dukes. This clearly shows the two-way communication flows related to maintenance that existed between the supra-local power and the rural communes.

Similar in content to that relating to roads is the article on the repair and maintenance of bridges, *De refectione et manutentione poncium*<sup>15</sup> (Ammann-Doubliez, 2019, pp. 118–119). In this case too, the payment and performance of maintenance were borne by the local communities or private individuals to whom it had been entrusted, probably as a consequence of the assignment or rental of the bridge or following a license for its construction and maintenance (Ammann-Doubliez, 2019, p. 118). An example of how complex things could be is found in a document dated 1214 in which two eminent citizens of Turin, Ardizzone Borgesio and Uberto Caccia, promoted the construction of a bridge with an adjoining hospital over the River Stura near Turin. Ardizzone and Umberto

then assigned the bridge and all the pertinent buildings and land to the neighboring monastery of San Giacomo. At an unspecified time, the commune of Turin had assigned an entire forest, Stura forest, to Ardizzone for the construction and maintenance of the bridge (Gabotto-Barberis, 1906, pp. 182–184). Ardizzone and Umberto, however, reserved the rights to the bridge and buildings for life, while Abbot Guido of the monastery of San Giacomo undertook to maintain the infrastructure or rebuild it if it was destroyed by water (Casiraghi, 1999).

As can be seen, in such a case, the complexity of the transaction could raise doubts about ownership and maintenance responsibilities. For this reason, the decrees of the Duke of Savoy required investigations to be conducted where the responsibility for bridge maintenance was unclear. The ducal officials were urged to summon the mayors and the oldest and most honest men in order to obtain correct information from them in relation to maintenance responsibilities.

The *Decreta* also inform us of the existence of bridges to be maintained partially or fully by the Duke. In these cases, the ducal officials were advised to intervene and carry out the necessary repairs, unless the expenses were such that they required the prior authorization of the duke or the officials responsible for the ducal budget. The matter of bridge maintenance and restoration and “community maintenance” from a political point of view also emerges in an incident that occurred in 1434. In that year, the governor of the Dauphiné (an area on the border with the Savoy dominions) asked the judge of Briançon on behalf of the community of Exilles in Val di Susa, ruled by France at the time, that the property requisitioned from the “witches” and “sorcerers” who had been burned at the stake in that castellany be made available for the completion of the local stone bridge. In 1436, the judge, after visiting the site, granted his approval. The bridge had been initially and partially financed by the village of Exilles, but now the circle was closing: “in Exilles there have been cases of witchcraft, in Exilles the money has arrived to finish what to all intents and purposes can be defined as the ‘witches’ bridge” (Benedetti, 2023, p. 309). The action of the public officials defined a specific maintenance culture that met local needs with three levels of intervention: maintenance of infrastructure, maintenance in political terms with regard to the community of Exilles, and discipline from the point of view of public order.

### **Maintenance in a Castellany: Cly Castle (Valle d’Aosta)**

Based on the *Decreta*, the bailiffs and castellans were also obliged to take care of the maintenance of the castles in which they resided, as stated in the article *De speciali officio et residentia castellanorum*<sup>16</sup> (Ammann-Doubliez, 2019, pp. 95–96). The presence of power – be it local or central – manifested

itself on the territory, especially in mountainous areas, through the castle or fortress. Therefore, their maintenance could and must be understood as a form of communication, as the visible and constant effort of power to reassert itself locally in terms of control (Balbi & Leggero, 2020; Rospocher 2018; Simons & Al., 2013). What power communicated through the artifacts that attested to its presence was the continuity of its very existence. Power showed itself, communicating itself, through the erection of the castle, which was the seat of its representation, and the maintenance of the castle represented the reiteration of the affirmation of its existence and presence.

Based on the *Decreta*, the castellan's duties went beyond repairing faults, which had to be reported to the Duke in writing (Ammann-Doubliez, 2019, p. 95), extending to the management of the "prince's" farming estates and the collection of taxes, duties, tolls, and contributions due to the "State". What the accounting registers of the castellanies in the Valle d'Aosta allow us to point out is that the effort of representation could also be disadvantageous for the duchy: indeed, maintenance costs in an environment like the Alps were considerable. In particular, the wooden parts of the building, such as the outside stairs, roofs, doors, and window casements, deteriorated rapidly due to rain, snow, and frost (Del Bo, 2019, p. 28). With the invention of artillery, costs increased exponentially, both in terms of the tools and equipment needed and in terms of their maintenance and efficiency.<sup>17</sup>

Even in strictly military terms, castles could be a disadvantage if, for instance, they fell into the hands of enemies. In addition to this, defense and maintenance costs could be considerable, particularly due to the need to renovate the curtain walls in defense against enemy artillery. Nevertheless, and also considering the fact that castles stood in sparsely populated places, they represented an advantage from the "prince's" point of view (Del Bo, 2019, p. 28). And not only because.

every great political structure, governed by an efficient central authority, copes with its external enemies by equipping itself with well-placed and manned outer fortifications, which also become a sign of wealth and organisational superiority over potential aggressors.

(Settia, 2002, p. 77)

Along important routes that had few alternative routes, such as those in the valleys of Piedmont and Aosta, castles played a fundamental role in the traffic of goods and people.

The fact that the *Decreta* of 1430 invest the castellan with the authority to order local settlements and private owners to attend to the maintenance of public routes is interesting, especially considering that, a few years before the publication of the *Decreta*, the castellan of Cly (Valle d'Aosta) had

certain individuals referred to in the account books of the castellany by the term *herimandi* at his disposal for the maintenance of public roads (Pession, 2004–2016). The word refers to the Carolingian *arimanni*, that is, to groups and practices almost six centuries old (Tabacco, 1966). Obviously, the use of *arimanni* in the 15th century had a very different meaning to that in use in the 9th century, when it still represented a special bond of military loyalty to the emperor. As can be seen from the accounting registers of the castellany, in which reference is made constantly to road maintenance work carried out by the *herimandi*, the term was now used to identify relations between the local lord and certain consortia or family groups. An accounting register dated 1408–1409, which identifies by name, patronymic, and locality the people, referred to as *herimandi*, who were to carry out the maintenance work, comes to the rescue. The source identifies three groups, one consisting of 15 individuals, one of three sisters, and one of a further 14 men and women, the latter being the wives of the former but perhaps obliged by their father to serve. It would seem that their commitment was not owed to the Count of Challant, who was also castellan of Cly at the time, but to the castellan in charge, whoever he was. In fact, Amedeo and *Allexona* obtained exemption for that year from the maintenance and other obligations, to which they were bound “for their ancestors”, by paying a certain sum of money. The latter was paid to the “lord of Cly” for the “dominion of Cly”, that is, for the castellany of Cly. At this point in time, therefore, the obligation to provide a service was linked to the jurisdictional function performed by the castle within the context of the rule of the House of Savoy and not to the figure in charge of managing it.

One might wonder if the decision of the Duke of Savoy to reiterate in the *Decreta* that maintenance was to be entrusted to the owners of the damaged stretch of road did not imply the need to eliminate services such as that carried out by the *herimandi* who, despite their obligations being related to the physical structure of the castellany, could have been co-opted into personal loyalty to the castellan, especially if he was powerful in his own right.

## Conclusion

The most significant aspect of the preceding pages is the observation of the existence of different levels of maintenance, according to the perspective that we tried to indicate in the preamble, of the simultaneous presence of several maintenance cultures, albeit in the interruption of practices brought about by changes in political-administrative structures. This is not only a model that responds to a logic of relationships between high and low, with centralized practices that impose themselves or with the decline of centralization in favor of a compartmentalization of activities but, above all, of differentiated political structures that generate specific

uses, standards, and practices in a complex relationship between politics and maintenance. As the *Decreta* and the reflections of other scholars show, convergences between local communities and superordinate powers can be seen in the construction and management of road routes (Provero, 2021). It becomes clear how the field of maintenance experiences transformations that may go unnoticed if they are not carefully analyzed. This is an endeavor with which historians of the environment and agriculture are familiar: the “immobile world of the medieval countryside” was anything but immobile in terms of practices, property, and environment. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, maintenance itself coincided with the care given to the land, the environment, the landscape, and the local communities and was indispensable in order to extract the necessary resources from the environment. Political upheavals, which also generated maintenance upheavals, therefore had direct negative effects on the productivity of the countryside and Alpine areas.

Furthermore, maintenance was an integral part of the activities necessary for the management of *commons* (mountain pastures, forests, etc.) of which the roads themselves were part, being indispensable infrastructures for their management and administration at the same time. Whether infrastructures, *communia* (*commons*), and maintenance were *identifying* elements (Alfani & Rao, 2011; Rao, 2008; Leggero, 2020) for local communities or, more simply, *indispensable* tools for the life of settlements is a matter for debate.

Finally, for obvious reasons of space, we have left out the religious significance that maintenance could (and can) assume and also the subject of the bishops’ pastoral visits to the churches in their diocese. The latter were responsible for inspecting and stimulating the maintenance of religious buildings for the dual purpose of keeping the real estate heritage intact and reaffirming the presence of the diocesan see in the territory (Corniolo, 2023). This is a very important aspect of the world of maintenance that was deeply enmeshed with the administration of local communities.

Certainly, opening up these fields of analysis to the reflections of other scholars will allow a better understanding of the multiple political and cultural meanings of the different maintenance practices, as well as a deeper reflection on the forms of power.

## Notes

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1 On the *Decreta*, see paragraph 4.

2 An interesting case, described by Kaiser, is that of the planning, construction, and maintenance of irrigation canals in the mountains, which often required skills not possessed by the local population and which were acquired after the construction of such facilities.



- 3 The document, published by Joseph-Gabriel Rivolin, is deposited in the Archives Historiques Régionales – Région Autonome Vallée d’Aoste, Fonds Valloise, cat. 104, mazzo I, doc. 3.
- 4 Another extremely interesting case occurred in the Pistoia Apennines in 1283: one of the “hamlets” of the municipality of Montevettolini (Pistoia), in application of a rule of the municipal charter, had carried out ordinary maintenance works along the road that led from the village to the place known as Belvedere, which was part of the territory of the municipality of Serravalle Pistoiese (Pistoia). Such an act, in the absence of a dispute, would have meant that Montevettolini would be recognized as holding jurisdictional rights over the territory crossed by that road, which ran throughout the territory of Serravalle (Onori, 2006).
- 5 The relational and communicative notion of power is well known to communication specialists thanks to the works of Hannah Arendt. For Arendt, “Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence” (Arendt, 1958, p. 200), or “Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert” (Arendt, 1970, p. 44). The idea of maintenance proposed here depends on political decision, the economic means available, and technological expertise, in other words, on an already established power. Maintenance is the tool and power is the message. Power communicates its own existence, which can happen because it has already developed as a force (*Gewalt*) and only in the second instance, once it has organized itself as “domination” and “state”, due to its congenital weakness noted by Canfora, can it decide to free up spaces for joint and contractual action, with local communities, for example (Provero, 2021).
- 6 The capitulary of Pippin, son of Charlemagne and king of Italy, between 782 and 786, continued to forbid exemption from the maintenance of churches, bridges, and roads. The sequence could also indicate maintenance priority: “Ut de restauratione ecclesiarum [churches] vel pontes [bridges] aut stratas [roads] restaurandum omnino generaliter faciant, sicut antiqua fuit consuetudo, et non anteponatur emunitas nec pro hac re ulla occasio proveniat” (Boretius, 1883, p. 191).
- 7 The Carolingian *Capitolari* (750–899) contain more than 50 occurrences of the term “pons” (bridge) with reference to their maintenance, restoration, or construction, against fewer than ten occurrences of the term “via” (street) and one of “strata” (road).
- 8 It was common practice for travelers to deposit money at monasteries during their long international journeys to avoid carrying large sums with them and to have a reserve for the return journey. And we must not forget the importance of the royal and aristocratic monasteries along the roads and Alpine passes as places to rest and replenish the Carolingian and Ottonian armies and to accommodate the emperor and his military court (*trustis*) on their constant reconnaissance journeys through the territories of the kingdom and empire.
- 9 Once again, the medium conditions the message if we assume, as is the case in this chapter, that power is the message.
- 10 This was certainly a form of acceleration of the circulation of information – a matter well known to communication specialists – implemented for a single recipient, the Duke.
- 11 On political communication as an instrument of state formation, see Brégaïnt (2016) and Menache (1990).
- 12 “On the inspections to be conducted by the bailiffs at the castles, villages and hamlets, and about secret enquiries into the management of the castellans and other officials”.

- 13 One may wonder what this “secretly”, explicitly stated in the *Decreta*, means.
- 14 “Repair and maintenance of public streets”.
- 15 “On the rebuilding and maintenance of bridges”.
- 16 “Regarding the particular task of castellans and their residence”.
- 17 The problem of *restoring* military infrastructure after the ravages of war, which would inevitably lead us to question whether these are real maintenance activities or whether they should be conceptually framed in some other way, is left out here. Bear in mind that mediaeval armies could have “engineers” at their disposal to build siege machines to demolish city walls or, especially in the case of the most frequent form of military activity, raiding, specialized wrecking units commissioned to destroy what could not be taken away from the enemy, such as fruit trees or vineyards (Settia, 2002).

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