

Project : 'A tale of two twinned cities: Corato and Grenoble '

**Webinar organized by the association Atelier Généalogique on
September 24, 2021:**

“Where do we go from here ?”

"How can descendants of emigrants contribute to the documentation of emigration history, by collaborating in migration studies ?"

(Numbers below correspond to the timing of the webinar recording)

Communication by **James Smith**, president of the Association Atelier Généalogique

00.50.50 Is it possible in 2021 to write the history of Coratini migration? and how might genealogical studies make a relevant contribution to this end?

The answer to the first part of this question seems obvious. However, if we limit ourselves to consider even just the area of Grenoble and its surroundings, we quickly realize that there is presently very little in the literature on migration specifically from Corato. So it is surprising to hear the opinion of those who affirm that the Coratini have "built Grenoble". Yes, it is true, the Coratini have worked hard for the good of the city that has welcomed them and are proud of it. They have integrated perfectly in their new country, even if many of them, even among the younger generation, have maintained a strong bond with their city of origin. It is disconcerting, instead, that the twinning between Grenoble and Corato, made official in 2002, is limited to a superficial meeting between political notables, sporadic in nature, interspersed with long periods of silence.

A relationship of exchange that seems to us insufficient, and which, if it were cultivated with more assiduity, could generate in Corato a "return" of the prosperity acquired by the emigrants from Corato in the various host locations, including Grenoble. In other words, positive economic spinoff for the city of Corato....

The purpose of this webinar is to examine how the Coratini themselves can contribute to writing the history of their emigration. Let's see what role genealogical research could play in this.

The contribution of genealogy in the study of Coratino migration and its current limits

In the 6 years that we have been researching Coratino genealogy, aimed at building the family tree of someone's family, we have discovered first of all that the family history of Coratino people and emigration are inevitably linked. In the past of every family there is always some relative who has emigrated to improve his/her standard of living. The absence of a marginal note on the birth certificate regarding the marriage of a subject is a sign, an initial difficulty that makes one presume, either that he/she died young, or that the person moved abroad.

However, at the genealogical level, the Coratini have a wealth of information, which is their Civil Status Archives, generally well done and very orderly. With errors and inaccuracies, of course, very often due to illiteracy, but with few gaps.

The sore point is that the records of the Civil Archives (*Stato Civile*) published online, begin in 1809 and stop in 1910!

If there were no such interruption of data, it would be possible to build a more accurate and complete family tree, going back as far as possible in time, which would be helpful in piecing together a more satisfying family history. Then, the descendant would be encouraged to find answers to questions about what migration has meant to the family. Unfortunately, today he or she will find many obstacles to finding data or documents. How can the history of Coratino migration be based on memory and testimonies, on the insertion of a particular family history within the overall History, if the descendants of emigrants are frustrated in the realization of their family history?

Our association, l'Atelier Généalogique is a French non-profit genealogical association founded in December 2015. We have put online a public, almost entirely Coratino and Apulian family tree, which currently includes more than 22,000 people. We have also created a database containing more than 20,000 photos of authentic records, which can be consulted online, free of charge (as with the family tree itself). Through this work, we are helping many descendants of Coratini emigrants, especially Americans and French, to build their family trees...and, for some, to produce testimonies of their family's emigration.

During the almost two years of "lockdowns" that we have endured, we put together a 70-page dossier on behalf of the Lyon section of the COM.IT.ES (Committee of Italians Abroad) - an official body under the authority of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In August 2021, this dossier was sent to Archbishop Leonardo D'Ascenzo of the Archdiocese of Trani, to ask for authorization to digitize and put online the entire parish archives of Corato.

As we pointed out, the current online access to the *Stato Civile* archives stops at 1910, while the period up to 1921 (covered by the parish archives) - i.e. within the 100-year limit allowed by law - is crucial to identify emigrants. The Parish Archives - which date back to around 1580, as in France, or in England - allow for research further back in time, but are almost inaccessible.

In a long conversation on September 22nd 2021 with the priest in charge of the parish archives, Don Peppino Lobascio, he assured us that "sooner or later we will do this project", that he would defend it through the decision-making structures of the Church: 'Colegio Capitolari', 'Beni Culturali', and finally the Archbishop himself. Perhaps a long journey? COM.IT.ES has asked the Archbishop to make a first gesture : to put online the part of the archives already digitized in 2008 (baptism and marriage registers) so that it can be made accessible to the public, possibly with a password. This would mean having an additional tool to safeguard this precious resource: paper archives, digital archives on hard disk and online archives (as many dioceses in Italy have done). Unfortunately, the parish archives in Corato are currently preserved in extremely precarious conditions, without air conditioning: a treasure at the mercy of a spark, in summer, at 40°C.

The digitization of the remaining parish registers can be done at very low cost, limited to the purchase of the appropriate tool. As was the case in 2008, volunteers could be asked to do the work, which would not affect the coffers of the diocese or of the Chiesa Matrice.

Undoubtedly, however, the resources needed to write a rich history of migration from Corato are there. On September 23, our delegation was very well received by the Mayor of Corato, Prof. Corrado De Benedittis. The COM.IT.ES requested his authorization to have the passport applications of the candidates for emigration digitized and put online. We are happy that the mayor's positive decision will be confirmed in the report of the meeting that the Municipality has committed to send to this official institution.

The departmental archives of Isère have also kept many expired residence permits and naturalization files... but these archives are only accessible to those who go there in person to consult them. For this reason, an identical request was made by our association, with the support of the COM.IT.ES, to digitize and publish these data on the web. But we think that it would be the expression of the interest of academics that would allow this goal to be reached.

There is a real complementarity between the Parish Archives and the *Stato Civile* Archives. Publishing them online together would give professionals the best chance of success in their academic research on the transnationality of families, wherever they live in the world. This is a real opportunity not only for them but also for university students and researchers, who will be able to carry out studies on the phenomenon of migration from Corato, which deserves to be the subject of theses that can reconstruct its entire history.

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