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 **Biagio Salvemini,** full Professor of Modern History, Aldo Moro University, Bari

00.06.10 ***"From where did the Coratini migrate? a note on the Apulian socio-economic context"***

Thank you. I think I need to say a few words about the Apulian context, since colleagues will be talking about Italian migratory phenomena more generally.

A few words to avoid approaching this issue from the wrong foot. According to a widespread view, the Corato of the past, the one connected to Grenoble by the emigration flows that are the subject of this seminar, would be a village inhabited by peasants consuming what they cultivated, oppressed by misery and backwardness and cut off from the ways and events of the world. All this is absolutely untrue. Corato is part of a powerful territorial, economic-social, anthropological and institutional configuration, that of central-northern Apulia, which we find in other areas facing the Mediterranean. I list here some of the distinctive features of this configuration.

Firstly. Corato is an agro-town, one of the nodes of a settlement structure characterized by predominantly agricultural centers but of impressive demographic size, which stand, with their compact building masses surrounded by walls, on the deserted countryside. The countryside has no permanent inhabitants: everyone is concentrated in these large conglomerations of buildings. As I was saying, we find this phenomenon in other Mediterranean regions; but in central-northern Apulia the concentration of housing in a rural context reaches paroxysmal levels.

Some numerical data. In France, over the long term and even today, the largest settlements are those facing the Mediterranean. In 1836, apart from the Seine, in which Paris is included, the departments in which more than half of the population lives in centers of more than 1,500 inhabitants are only Bouches-du Rhône, Vaucluse, Var and Hérault. Out of the 1,189,600 inhabitants of these four departments, 41.6% live in places with a population of less than 1,500: a figure far below the average figure for the French population, distributed among its 36,000 villages of a few hundred inhabitants each. In the same year, 1836, 1,107,036 people lived in the three provinces of Apulia (Terra di Bari, Terra d'Otranto and Capitanata), of which only 5% lived in towns of less than 1,500 inhabitants. The marked difference between the figures for Puglia (5%) and those for the more urbanized France (41.6%) is a quantitative illustration of the strangeness felt by observers of these environments,

travelers and geographers alike: in their eyes, this form of settlement, which separates the farmers from the land they work on and imposes time-consuming and resource-intensive daily movements between the places where they live and those where they work, appears "paradoxical".

Corato is one of these giant peasant towns. In the mid-fifteenth century it had only partially recovered the losses caused by the terrible plague of a century earlier: it had about 1,200 inhabitants, a size far greater than that of the typical rustic village of central and northern Europe at that time, and similar to that of many "cities". In the mid-sixteenth century, the number of inhabitants had reached about 4,000, and, after the decline caused by the economic crisis and the plague of the mid-seventeenth century, an impressive demographic development began, connected to the expansion of crops, especially cereal crops, at the expense of pasture: from about 6,000 individuals recorded in the land registry of the mid-eighteenth century, the population increases to 10,000 at the beginning of the nineteenth century, to 25,000 at the time of the Unification, to 31,000 in 1881, to 42,000 in 1901, up to over 50,000 recorded in the census of 1921. Then begins a long demographic decline in which emigration plays a central role, first to foreign countries and then, especially since the second half of the 1950s, to northern Italy (Corato had 45,000 inhabitants in 1931, 38,579 in 1971). Only in the last few decades is the trend inverted, with the recent recovery of the peak reached in the period following the First World War.

Secondly. Agro-towns such as Corato are inserted in an agricultural landscape with high productive specialization, organized according to homogeneous areas strongly characterized by prevalent forms of fields and production: in our case the cereal-pastoral area extended towards the hinterland of the Murgia, characterized by large farms structured around *jazzi* and *masserie* (the only important building structures found outside the city walls), which contrasted with and juxtaposed the olive-growing area of the coastal strip, fragmented into small plots. The large farms of the interior and the olive-growing micro-farms are marked by a high level of mercantilization and monetization, exporting to distant markets and, at the same time, are linked by strong functional short-range connections. From the cereal-growing area of the interior they export to the coast wheat, meat and labor which, at the time of the olive harvest, supplements the local supply of labor; the olive-growing area exports to the interior oil, fish and fruit and vegetables and, above all, labor for sowing and harvesting cereals, which is absolutely essential since the workers settled in the cereal-growing centers are totally insufficient to meet the demand for labor at times of acute activity during the agricultural year.

Third. The social landscape of these agro-towns, strongly projected onto markets both near and far, is marked by the presence of individuals and institutions that oversee the mercantile intermediation and transformation of agro-pastoral products - among others, the tanners, whose skills, transmitted from generation to generation, will probably have a role to play in the migrations towards Grenoble. In the marketplace of the agro-towns, news, products, and men from exotic places circulate; and rustic society also gravitates towards it. The functioning logic of the typical agricultural worker's family is far removed from that of the "peasant" - the very lemma of "peasant" being long absent from the vernacular language. The *"bracciale",* according to the denomination we find in the documents, obtains income by selling the strength of his arms for cash on the nearby market or on that of the contiguous areas, and cultivates on his own account tiny fragments of land, either rented or his own property, not for self-consumption of what they produce but to bring it to market. Rural micro-property, when it exists, is transmitted between generations along the female line as a dotal asset, and not along the male line. Since

the age at marriage is low for both men and women, demographic rates are extraordinarily high: birth and death rates are between 40 and 50 per thousand, ten points higher than the rates prevailing in "normal" European rural areas. Finally, the habit of mobility - daily mobility from the places of abode to the places of work within one's own city limits, as well as seasonal mobility for agricultural work outside one's own area, and finally long-distance mobility towards the destination markets of the goods, wheat and oil in particular, practiced by merchants and transport workers along land routes and above all along sea routes - is deeply rooted in these societies, and arouses astonishment in 'external' observers, particularly those of the 19th century. Apulia, for them, is the seat of an inferior civilization because it is not entirely settled. The rustic economy is not in the hands of "peasants" who work fields contiguous to their homes, but in the hands of semi-nomadic "day laborers".

These societies, exposed to domineering and fluctuating markets that they had no control over, managed for centuries to function by maintaining institutions of compensation and mitigation of the precariousness typical of the world of the ancient regime: common and uncultivated lands, ecclesiastical bodies, ration policies, the limitation of price fluctuations of essential goods were, of course, areas of acute conflicts, but, to some extent, they managed to preserve balances in both the social sphere and land use. With the end of the ancient regime, the liberalization of markets, the generalization of absolute property, the attack on ecclesiastical possessions and on common goods, resulted in further mercantilization of the countryside, with an even tighter correlation between cultivation choices and market demand, and expanded cultivated areas to the detriment of the "marginal" lands, those that were wooded and pastoral areas in particular. Population and production grew impetuously, but, at the same time, the threats to these social structures increased. A typical example is the story of wine production in the second half of the nineteenth century. The explosion of French demand for wine used for blending in the 1850s led to a tumultuous transformation of the agrarian landscape of these areas: thousands of hectares of cereals and pastureland were transformed into vineyards, responding passively to foreign demand, and when France closed its markets at the end of the 1880s, the crisis was dramatic. The demographic expansion of Corato, as we have seen, continued inertially for a few decades, but the social balance, which had always been precarious, was now compromised, with worsening living conditions of workers in the fields leading to the explosion of social tensions. It is in this context that long-distance migratory phenomena, including the flows towards Grenoble, began.

As the promoters of this seminar point out, it will become possible to investigate this history thoroughly by making available the sources and combining the practices of academic historiography with those of genealogists, in particular via the descendants of the protagonists of the migratory flows, some of whom - an example may be that of Attilio Mastromauro, outlined in a recent book - are the protagonists of lively entrepreneurial initiatives that have contributed to enlivening the economy of Corato in recent decades and to reversing the demographic downward trend.

The point that I would like to emphasize in conclusion is that the new migratory mobility that began in the decades straddling the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did not impact on societies that were closed in on themselves; it affected social structures that, like that of Corato, had functioned for centuries by enabling the circulation of men and goods in spaces that went far beyond the confines of the village walls. The people of Corato who emigrated to Grenoble brought with them an aptitude for exploring the ways of the world that is embedded in the shapes of their landscape, in their society, and in their culture.

I thank you and pass the floor to Catherine Virlouvet.

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01.05.34 Biagio Salvemini
I read a question from Mr. Tondo: "I am a Corato citizen who lives abroad. Why did thousands of people emigrate from Corato between 1920 and 1935?" This seminar is also aimed at finding an answer to his question. Colleagues will be able to make hypotheses about it. I would like to emphasize, however, that this is not a phenomenon limited to Corato, that it involves vast areas, and certainly not only those of Puglia, and therefore it should be studied in a comparative way. Obviously, migrations present local specificities and their spatial geographies are also defined in terms of migratory chains. The initiative of this project can bring valuable cognitive elements in this regard.

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01.08.18 Biagio Salvemini
Mr. Ugolini asks us why we have not talked so far about migration towards South America, which, in the experience of his family from Basilicata, is of great importance. Is the situation in Basilicata, he asks, different from that in Puglia?

01.08.38 Matteo Sanfilippo.
Okay, I can do that. So, in answer to everyone, on Calabrian emigration there are many studies, as well as on emigration from Basilicata. They are mostly in specialized journals, such as *"Studi Emigrazione", "Altreitalie"* and *"Archivio storico dell'emigrazione italiana"*. On the other hand, the documentation is generally about emigration from a specific town and is therefore restricted to a small proportion of the departures. Moreover, it must be taken into account that the patterns of departures from southern regions are quite different from each other and very often respond to subdivisions. For example, in Calabria, people emigrate from Cosentino in a different way than from Reggio. According to some observers, there are even historical regions that do not respect administrative boundaries. An historical region would thus reunite Cosentino, Basilicata and the south of Campania and would share the same pattern of departures. According to others, Basilicata must be considered as divided into two parts and the flows departing from the Tyrrhenian shore of the region follow Sicilian and Calabrian patterns. They head, for example, towards Latin America. On the other hand, from internal Basilicata, in particular that facing the Murge, the flow corresponds more to the Apulian model. In short, we are faced with many different situations that only allow us to describe what is happening in a restricted area. I don't know if Stéphane Mourlane wants to add something.

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01.12.36 Biagio Salvemini
Mr. Tondo asks if there are any studies on the impact of immigration from Corato on the local culture of Grenoble, for example on language or cuisine. Maybe James can provide some points in answer to this question.

(*see the communication by Jean-Philippe Di Gennaro)*

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01.20.34 Biagio Salvemini
Dr. Labartino points out that her 2014 dissertation addresses some of the issues we are discussing here. It will therefore be important to read it.