

Communication by James Smith at a CRIAT conference in Bari on March 17th 2023¹

« *One hundred years on : could an international database help to assess what the massive emigration of Coratini to the Grenoble area has contributed to the latter's socio-economic and cultural development ?* »

My name is James Smith. I'm the president of a French association called Atelier Généalogique. I am of British origin, but I am an immigrant in France. My everyday language and my principal working language is French. So I will read my communication in French.

I would like to thank Professor Biagio Salvemini as well as Dott.ssa Angela Barbanente for inviting me to present the project "*A tale of two twinned cities: Corato and Grenoble*". **My purpose in doing so is to ask whether an international database on migration from Puglia could be set up at CRIAT.** The subject of my communication is « *One hundred years on : could an international database help to assess what the massive emigration of Coratini to the Grenoble area has contributed to the latter's socio-economic and cultural development ?* »

So I will describe 4 aspects of our project.

The first is that it was set up four years ago with a view to helping the descendants of immigrants to discover their origins through genetic genealogy. As you know, genetic genealogy, as a science, has been developed essentially in the United States. The Atelier Généalogique has been researching *coratino* genealogy for six years and has built up a family tree of almost 25,000 interconnected people, the large majority being from Corato. But our strong point here is that we have a partnership with Wikitree, which is an American mutual help genealogical society that has done a lot of work to ensure that genetic genealogy is considered a science.

In the course of our research, we have come across the problems posed for this research by endogamy. We found that Corato, in the middle of the 19th century, was 97% endogamous, with the result that it was often very difficult to distinguish between the myriad of cousins and namesakes. Fortunately, we found in Wikitree a partner that could develop an application to help overcome this problem.

At Wikitree, we have set up a 'Corato One Place Study' that can enable us to remain focused on our main purpose - helping the descendants of immigrants to discover their origins, including through the use of genetic genealogy – while at the same time we address the phenomenon of migration, which has affected a large majority of *coratini* families. We expect to be able to identify transnational families.

The second aspect of our project concerns the discovery that the immigration of people from Corato has hardly been documented at all in France. The history of this migration remains therefore to be written. So we are fortunate now to have a scientific monitoring committee, composed of historians, some of whom are among the best specialists of migration in France and in Italy.

¹ The conference "Polycentric Settlements. Transformations, Scenarios and Prospects," will be organized in Bari on March 17 and 18 by CRIAT (Interuniversity Research Center for Territorial Analysis), a coalition of four universities in Puglia.

We believe that since at least 7450 coratini emigrated to France (not counting illegals***), and that the majority settled in the Grenoble area and have been said to have contributed greatly to the social, economic and cultural development of this major French city, it would be important that the descendants of these immigrants make their own contribution to the history of how their families were affected by this migration. This assumes that these descendants of émigrés can constitute their family history. My own experience is that if people from all walks of life collaborate with academic researchers, social change can result.

I'm happy to say that we have the support of the city of Grenoble for this endeavour. With our scientific monitoring committee, we have planned a series of animations over the next 18 months, which include the organisation of a Day of Study, public meetings, and the showing of an exhibition produced by the Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, called '*Ciao Italia*'. We plan to show this in French for Grenoble, and in Italian for Corato (and perhaps for other places in Puglia). The purpose of this exhibition is to record how Italian immigrants have made France. Cooperation on migration from Corato between a school in Corato and another in Grenoble is a distinct possibility.

The third aspect of our project is that, about 100 years after emigration to foreign lands began from Corato, the writing of the history of it could contribute scientific evidence to the debate on worldwide migration. In our particular case, we want to see how the migration of *coratini* has impacted both Grenoble and Corato – in the building industry, for instance, to which a sizable proportion of the *coratino* workforce belonged. On a wider level, the migration has surely been relevant to the construction of Europe. We hope CRIAT will join the university of Grenoble in the organisation of our planned Day of Study on *coratino* migration and its place in the wider context.

The fourth, and not the least important aspect of our project, and perhaps what could be the key role of a possible international database at CRIAT, is the need to conform with European and Italian laws on privacy. *We need to become experts in this domain, and be recognized as such*, to ensure that the interpretation of these relatively new laws does not unduly restrict access to primary sources required for the writing of the history of migration. In practical terms, this means that the descendants of emigrants must be able to access the data of the *Stato Civile italiano* in order to build their family history.

In this area, there is an immediate objective, which is to digitise four registers kept at the municipal archives in Corato which contain the passport applications of emigration candidates from 1920 to 1960. This digitization has been requested by the Lyon branch of the COM.IT.ES (*Comitato degli Italiani all'Estero*). I feel the municipality officials need to be reassured, and the setting up of an international database at CRIAT - which could concern not only Corato, but the rest of Puglia - would probably do so.

I would take this statement one step further. There is clearly a need to digitise primary resources, which are often in a poor state of maintenance in the existing archives. If it is recognised that the descendants of migrants from Puglia could contribute themselves to the writing of the history of their ancestors' migration, then there is no practical reason why they should not participate on a

*** Figures taken from "*When we were the illegal immigrants*", by Pasquale Tandoi, cf : <https://www.emigrazione-corato.org/medias/files/summaries-submitted-for-publication-on-the-compas-blog.pdf> (page 5). Original publication in 2011 under the title '*Quando i clandestini eravamo noi : l'emigrazione dei Coratini nel mondo 1902 – 1959*'. Italian/French version in 2019. In English translation (by Gina Tarantini of Pennsylvania, herself a descendant of a *coratino* emigrant) : <https://www.emigrazione-corato.org/medias/files/when-we-were-the-illegal-immigrants2.pdf>

voluntary basis in the digitisation process -which is a simple action, technically speaking -, thus overcoming what is usually put forward as the reason for the absence of digitisation, which is the lack of funds.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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