

Report on a webinar organized on September 23rd 2025 by Atelier Généalogique

Introduction

The webinar organized by the **Atelier Généalogique** brought together potentially complementary partners sharing a practical ambition: to reconstruct and transmit the history of emigration from **Puglia**, particularly the **Alta Murgia**, and to link this knowledge to emerging opportunities in **Roots Tourism**.

Participants included representatives of the Atelier Généalogique as organizers of the webinar (**James Smith** and **Catherine Virlouvet**), **Cristian Mannino** (FamilySearch), **Annastella Carrino** (University of Bari), **Mariella Tarricone** (independent researcher, Corato), and **Donato Tondo** (Torino and Corato descendant of emigrants). **Carl Scaringelli (USA)**, **Vincenzo Catalano (ANPI, Corato)**, **Annabella De Robertis** (not indentified) also attended. The discussion demonstrated how local archival initiatives, academic research, and international technical networks can converge to form a sustainable framework for cultural cooperation.

As co-organizer representing the Atelier Généalogique, Catherine Virlouvet introduced the webinar entitled “Could the indexing of the 1754 Corato land registry (*catasto onciario*) be a first step towards changing the way emigration from Puglia is perceived?” with the following statement : « *It is not enough to write the history of emigration at a macro level, as historians often do. The latter is very important and must be done, but it must also be complemented by a micro-historical approach based on individual life stories. I believe that a very important contribution of this research is that it makes us reflect on certain essential values at the societal level. The right of everyone to know their roots. The notions of welcome and integration by the countries of arrival, etc. Unfortunately, all of these values are often compromised today. For all these reasons, we must join forces to improve the tools available to individuals searching for their families and to historians studying emigration.* »

1. Common Ground: History, Identity, and Access

All contributors agreed that any study of migration must be based on **documentary accessibility** and **community participation**.

- The **Atelier Généalogique** presented concrete progress in digitizing and indexing civil and ecclesiastical records and emphasized open access for both researchers and descendants of emigrants.
- **FamilySearch**, represented by Cristian Mannino, confirmed the platform’s technical capacity in digitizing and indexing and interest in partnerships that ensure long-term preservation and global dissemination of local archives.
- **Annastella Carrino** reminded participants that archival work must be integrated into its social and territorial context, supporting both education and regional development.
- **Mariella Tarricone** insisted on the importance of visibility and usability, so that digitized sources can reach a wider public and encourage participation.

Together, these interventions defined archives as living instruments of memory and development, not passive repositories of information.

2. Digital Cooperation and Archival Synergies

The central operational discussion focused on partnership opportunities for digitization and indexing.

The Atelier Généalogique proposed a threefold framework:

1. A **cooperation agreement with FamilySearch** to index the Corato *Catasto Onciario* of 1754 and, at a later stage, the indexes of parish registers for Corato, as well as the *catasti* of neighbouring towns.
2. Collaboration with the **Archivio di Stato di Bari (Trani section)** for the digitalization of selected municipal archives from the Alta Murgia.
3. A link with **CRIAT – University of Bari** for training students and involving descendants of emigrants in archival work.

Cristian Mannino confirmed that these directions align with FamilySearch's mission of access and preservation through local partnerships. These complementary inputs outline a cooperative digital ecosystem, where each partner contributes its expertise: technical (FamilySearch), academic (University of Bari), local (Atelier Généalogique), and user-centred (independent researchers).

3. Ethical and Human Dimensions

Beyond the technical agenda, participants stressed the human meaning of genealogical research.

The Atelier Généalogique emphasized inclusion and accessibility, notably for volunteers with disabilities, advocating open and barrier-free participation. Cristian Mannino described FamilySearch's inclusive volunteer network, illustrating how global collaboration can strengthen local heritage. Annastella Carrino underlined the educational value of such initiatives, while Mariella Tarricone highlighted the importance of designing digital tools that are intuitive for all users.

This shared concern for respect, participation, and civic value anchored the project in a humanistic vision that sees archives as bridges between generations and cultures.

4. The Human Continuum of Migration – Reflection by Donato Tondo

Donato Tondo, a participant with family roots in Corato and personal experience of migration, offered a broader reflection on the historical and moral dimensions of human mobility.

He recalled that migration is a constant in human history, shaping civilizations from antiquity to the present. From the movements of ancient peoples to the modern diaspora, migration has always been a driver of social, cultural, and economic transformation.

Tondo emphasized that the phenomenon should not be viewed with fear or defensiveness, but rather with awareness of the fraternity and interdependence it reveals. Migrants, past and present, contribute decisively to the development of the societies that welcome them, as Italian emigrants once did abroad and as new workers now do in Italy.

His intervention reminded participants that behind every record or document lies a personal story of resilience and belonging, and that this moral dimension must guide any archival or genealogical initiative.

During the webinar, an image of the Tondo family's *masseria* was briefly shown to illustrate local heritage connected to migration histories. It was presented only as an illustrative example of cultural patrimony and potential inspiration — not as an active or committed project, since ownership is shared among multiple family branches and no decision has yet been taken about its future use for Roots Tourism .

5. From Archival Work to Roots Tourism

Several speakers discussed how research on emigration could, in the long term, support Roots Tourism in the Alta Murgia. The idea is to make historical documentation a living resource for community identity and intercultural dialogue.

At this stage, this remains a conceptual horizon rather than an operational plan. The immediate focus is to build a solid documentary foundation — through digitization and indexing — that could later enable educational and cultural activities linked to family history.

6. International and Interdisciplinary Perspective

The webinar also confirmed the European and transnational dimension of the initiative.

Collaborations with historians and joint exhibitions linking Corato and Grenoble exemplify how regional studies of migration resonate across borders. FamilySearch's global platform, the University of Bari's academic framework, and the Atelier Généalogique's coordination of local actors all contribute to a coherent international approach to heritage research.

7. Emerging Recommendations

From the discussions, the following priorities were identified:

1. Formalize a partnership agreement among the **Atelier Généalogique**, **FamilySearch**, **Archivio di Stato**, and **CRIAT**.
2. Launch the **indexing of the Corato Catasto Onciario (1754)** as a pilot project, ensuring methodological transparency and volunteer training.
3. Develop a **communication and visibility strategy** (metadata, outreach, and user engagement).
4. Strengthen **inclusion and accessibility** in archival environments.
5. Plan a **follow-up workshop in 2026** to align academic and institutional calendars.

Conclusion

The webinar successfully transformed dialogue into a shared agenda. The Atelier Généalogique provided the framework and coordination; FamilySearch brought technical capacity and international scope; the University of Bari ensured methodological rigor; Mariella Tarricone contributed practical experience; and Donato Tondo offered a reflective perspective that re-centred the initiative on the human story behind every archive.

His reminder that *migration is part of the human condition and a source of mutual enrichment* resonates with the project's ethical core. The immediate objective is concrete and focused: to open the archives of the Alta Murgia to broader, accurate use through indexing, collaborative digitization, and inclusive participation — ensuring that the memory of emigration becomes a shared cultural resource for present and future generations.