**October 31st webinar on a collective approach to improving access to genealogical records in the Parco dell'Alta Murgia area of Puglia, Italy**

**Participants**

Damien de Virgilio is from Jersey City, first generation immigrant from Molfetta. Has been doing genealogy for 15 years ('mostly Molfettese tree' - 17,923 people).

Thomas Martellone's great grandparents were from Corato, other ancestors from Terlizzi and Piedmont ; he's been researching for 41 years ('Thomas Martellone Ancestry 1'- 3,192 people).

Carl Scaringelli, whose paternal ancestors were from Corato, leaves on Tuesday for Italy, has worked with me on Wikitree since 2021.

Giancarlo Mainardi is 23 years old ; his maternal grandfather came from Corato : with Rafael Caterina of Sao Paolo, Brazil, did some fine analytical work on the 1754 Corato *catasto onciario* and on the Corato parish archives indexes.

Gabriele Marzano is from Andria, 21 years old, qualifies himself a professional genealogist ('Genealogia dei Marzano di Andria dal XVII al XXI Secolo', 1714 people).

Judy Tavano Gardner has family members from Andria, as well as from Corato. She has a degree in Italian. Familysearch volunteer in Washington DC.

Kelvin Brewer (Familysearch missionary) mentions Debbie Hunt, who is the Italian specialist in Oakland. He says the Family History Centre in Oakland would welcome the presentation of our project. He says the conferences and lessons are well advertised.

James Smith began his Corato research 9 years ago to help a friend, Francine, to know who her birth parents were. My hunch is that Francine's mother emigrated to the US, and returned to Europe to give birth secretly. The *albero genealogico coratino* presently has 28,683 people. We were impressed by the fact that no in-depth history of emigration from Corato exists despite the emigration of thousands of people from Corato to Grenoble and its region.

**Contacts**

Damian and Tom mention their contacts : in particular, Roberto Pansini in Molfetta and Alessandro LaVopa in Bari. The latter often visits archives throughout Puglia. I'm hoping they will be able to greet Marina Labartino and Vincenzo Tota when they visit their towns to arrange for the showing of the *Ciao Italia* exhibition, owned by the French National Museum of Immigration History. In 2025, the Museum authorized the Atelier Généalogique to add 3 panels (see attached) on Coratino emigration and participation in the French Resistance, in both French and Italian versions of the exhibition. Both versions were shown in May 2025 : the French version by the City of Grenoble, the Italian version at the Corato municipality by the ArcheoClub, of which Marina (our project partner since 2018) is a member. Mariella Tarricone is my genealogical correspondent in Corato.

The mayor of Andria, Giovanna Bruno, may be interested in working with us because of her interest in Roots Tourism.

Tom mentions a man called Cifarelli working for Coratolive.

I mentioned Antonio Carlos Carbone and my contact with the Greater Miami Genealogical Society. I also mentioned the proposed trip to Miami by Gina Tarantini to meet Antonio Carlos. I mentioned that he has a tree with 63,000 people in it ('Carbone Family Minervino Murge'). His family has a travel agency that may be interested in promoting Roots Tourism.

**Digitization and indexation, with a view to promoting the writing of the history of emigration**

On May 31st 2025 I spoke for an hour in a video conference with Joel Cole, Familysearch coordinator for Italy. He said FamilySearch intended to digitise the registers of all 11 towns of the Alta Murgia area that are kept at the Trani branch of the State Archive and that it would take a year and a half to do that. Corato, Molfetta, Andria, Terlizzi and Minervino Murge are all among the 11 towns.

In the short term, we hope that Familysearch will index the 1754 Corato Catasto Onciario and also the indexes of the Corato Parish registers, to put them both on the Familysearch website. This would be a game-changer and could be followed up by the indexing of the Catasti Onciari of all the 11 towns. We will need to approach the Naples branch of the State Archive (director : Ferdinando Salemme) in order to have all the Catasti indexed.

I emphasise that historians can only work with genealogical records if they are indexed. The Atelier Généalogique started digitising in the Trani archives in October 2024.

Kelvin explains that the Familysearch indexation with artificial intelligence develops full text search capabilities. So far Familysearch has indexed 7000 collections. In particular, it has indexed all the Corato Stato Civile records from 1809 to 1900.

Judy wonders whether it would be possible to know which towns' archives Familysearch will be digitising and indexing. Kelvin mentions that we should consult the Familysearch blog in order to inform ourselves about the collections that are being digitized and indexed. He mentioned that many Catholic Parish records from Latin America are being indexed, such as those from Mexico.

Giancarlo wonders about access to records considering privacy laws: hopes that new records may be available each year.

**Parish records**

I mentioned the encouraging attitude of the Vicar general at the Trani diocese, to which Corato is attached. The Vicar General said he didn't mind on which website we put the indexes.

Molfetta, Terlizzi, and Andria are attached to different dioceses. Damian says the Molfetta parish records are well maintained but inaccessible. Gabriele says the Andria parish records are managed by the diocesan archive and are accessible, but not digitized. Any records prior to 1799 are missing because they were burnt during the French invasion.

I mentioned the fact that Pierre Marzocca (see photo) digitised the baptism and marriage registers of the Corato parish archives in 2008.

*Pierre Marzocca in the State archives in Trani*

There seems to be a consensus that the Catholic church's attitude regarding giving access to parish records is very variable according to the wishes of each diocese. Tom in particular thinks the way forward would be their indexing after digitization of all the parish archive indexes. Damian mentions that Findmypast is working on the digitisation of parish records.

The late Pope Francis's visit to Marseille probably initiated a change in the church's attitude towards making information available for research on the family histories of migrants.

**The way forward via a collective approach**

I emphasise the need to present our collective approach in an orderly fashion.

Kelvin explains his suggestion to get a policy exception with regard to the possibility of exporting to Excel the full results of a Familysearch search. FamilySearch limits the visibility or availability of any record search to 4,900 results. Atelier Généalogique is particularly interested in the full 201,000 results for people born in Corato. He confirms that he was able to download ~~all~~ the available 4,900 results out of the total 201,000 entries for people born in Corato~~, b~~ut he suggests that Joel Cole is probably the person to take this policy exception forward through the partnership division of Familysearch to get access to the full 201,000 results – especially if Joel is working with that same division to advance further digitalization and indexation efforts for Atelier Généalogique.

Judy and Damian mention the possibility of presenting our project at Rootstech in March 2026, since it is organised by Familysearch.

Judy reminds me that Joel Cole mentioned 'the Corato effort' during a conference that he gave to the Washington family History Centre Italian interest group.

Tom emphasises that the way forward should be in preserving Italian history and culture. I emphasise that our work in a collective approach regarding the Alta Murgia towns could be seen as an interesting case study. I reminded participants that the historians of CRIAT, a coalition of Pugliesi universities, decided in March 2023 to set up an international database on emigration from Puglia, following the suggestion we made at a conference in Bari.

James Smith, Atelier Généalogique, Marseille, November 2025