

## **Context and prospects of the request to digitise and put online the parish archives of Corato**

The request to the Archbishop of Trani to have the parish archives of Corato digitised and put online is being made by the Comitato degli Italiani all'Estero (COM.IT.ES) of Lyon on the advice of the priest in charge of the archives, Don Giuseppe Lobascio, in October 2019. The latter advised those gathered in his office in Corato to make the request through an official body.

The meeting in Don Giuseppe's office followed the handing over by the representative of the *Atelier Généalogique* Association of a new copy of the marriage and baptism registers which had been digitised by Pierre Marzocca in 2008, at the request of the then head of the archives, Don Gino Tarantini. It is hoped that the archbishop will authorise the putting online of these already digitised archives (the inventory of which is included in the request dossier), and that the digitisation of the rest of the parish archives can be carried out at a later date. We are aware of a joint project of the Chiesa Matrice of Corato and the Corato branch of the Archeo Club to ensure the digitisation of all the archives of the Church of Corato in order to protect them from possible deterioration. To date, we do not know what is planned with respect to putting the archives online as part of the Church project, as this virtual backup offers an even greater guarantee of data preservation than digitisation alone.

The *Atelier Généalogique* has been engaged for some years in a search to find or identify the biological parents of a member of the association, who was an adopted child. In the context of the search for the origins of this person, the importance of the phenomenon of emigration in any genealogical research concerning the inhabitants of Corato was very apparent. Therefore, in June 2019 a bilingual Italian/French version of the book by the historian Pasquale Tandoi entitled "Quando i clandestini eravamo noi" (When we were the illegal immigrants), originally produced by the Santarella Secondary School in Corato in 2011, was translated and published.

The re-publication of the book, with a print run of 500 copies, was made possible thanks to funding from the Fondazione Vincenzo Casillo in Corato and Rocco Forte Hotels in London (owner of the Masseria Torre Maizza in Puglia). The book provides an overview of the migration of the *Coratini* between 1902 and 1959, with a special focus on the story of migration to the United States. It became very clear that the story of the migration of the *Coratini* to France, which is not much dealt with in the book, deserved to be given greater prominence.

It was therefore decided to compile a dossier to accompany the COM.IT.ES's request to the Archbishop of Trani. The file contains letters of support for the COM.IT.ES initiative, as well as articles :

• **3 letters of support written by academics.** These include the former director of the French School in Rome (2011-2019), Mrs Catherine Virlouvét, Professor Emeritus of the University of Aix-Marseille, Mr Biagio Salvemini, Professore Ordinario di Storia Moderna at the University of Bari, and Mrs Anne-Marie Granet-Abisset, Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Grenoble, Deputy Director of the LARHRA (Laboratoire de recherches historiques Rhône-Alpes).

The academics support the request to put the parish archives online:

- due to the notification of filiations in the parish archives, this would facilitate the identification of transnational families who can testify on their experience of migration, by ensuring that errors be avoided;
- by making these data accessible worldwide, it would advance studies in the field of migration, promoting cooperation between universities, both in Italy and in the host countries;

- in a fundamental way, the request responds to a need to better understand and value the contribution of migration to civilisation and development, a very topical subject, since Italian migration has a particular importance in the history of France and Italy, and very specifically in the development of the Isère department.

● **11 letters of support from genealogists from France, Italy, the United States and Singapore:**

- the Association des Coratins de Grenoble emphasises the fact that the efforts made by its members to trace their origins are constantly increasing, but are quickly frustrated by the fact that requests to the civil registry in Corato are rarely successful, and that the resources available online do not go beyond 1809 (whereas the parish archives date back to around 1580) ;
- members of the same family having been forced to leave their native land by poverty, there is often a strong emotional demand to know where they came from, to discover or revisit the land of their origins, to find landmarks in their family history (for example, places of residence, baptism and burial) and sometimes even to reconnect with the family left behind;
- all expressed the wish that the Church would allow them to go back to their roots by putting the parish archives online, which would make it possible to overcome the problems of research due to distance, while respecting the law concerning privacy for acts less than 100 years old.

● **3 articles written by the president of the Genealogical Workshop:**

● *'The genealogical role of the Church of Corato (Puglia, Italy)'*

Pierre Marzocca discovered that there are specific registers in the parish archives which attest to the important social role played by the Church in genealogical terms. In preparation for marriages, the Church had to check the degree of consanguinity of the betrothed by establishing their pedigree. In carrying out this task, it was necessary to remove ambiguities characteristic of an endogamous society such as that found in Corato: the existence of numerous homonyms, as well as errors due to widespread illiteracy. The article examines the genealogical work of the Church for the preparation of two marriages of the family of Pierre Marzocca in 1910 and 1919.

● *'How the Corato parish archives compensate for the limitations of the Stato Civile'*

While being a generally well-made archive, the registers of the *Stato Civile* of Corato present numerous errors, limitations, and imprecisions. The article reviews these (highlighting in particular the absence of indexes or the lack of filiations in the indexes), pointing out how the parish archives could help to avoid misidentifications, which is relevant for genealogical and historical research today as these possible errors occurred at a time when migration was in full swing. The article includes several detailed appendices, including a list of Italian dioceses that have put their archives online.

- *'Bibliographical note on the beginnings of coratino immigration to France'* (for references, see the text of the note)

In reviewing existing publications, the author notes a certain consensus in favour of the beginning of the 'first wave' of Coratino migration to France around 1920; at the same time, there may have been some occasional migrations of workers before this date, as it is recognised that Corato exported skins for the Grenoble glove industry before the First World War (R. Juillet 2011, E.Vial 2001, ed. L. Teulière 2011). These migratory beginnings undoubtedly remain to be documented, as does the contribution of the Coratini to the development of Isère, even if some authors suggest it (François 2015): '... (the Coratini) participated strongly in the development of Isère' and '...it was they who, to a large extent, built Grenoble' (Réseau des Observatoires de l'Agglomération grenobloise, 2016).

- 1 copy of Pasquale Tandoi's book: 'Quando i clandestini eravamo noi/When we were the illegal immigrants'.

## **Conclusions**

The request addressed to the Curia of Trani is made in the context of a desire to liberalise resources of all kinds that can be used for genealogical and historical research with Coratino migration as a background (genealogy) and subject (history). In addition to digitising and putting online the parish archives, the same request is planned for the passport applications kept in the archives of the Comune; the outdated residence permits and the naturalisation files kept in the Departmental Archives in Grenoble; and the archives of companies that employed Coratini immigrants.

Our project 'A Tale of Two Twinned Cities: Corato and Grenoble' - which is not for profit - seeks to stimulate the writing of testimonies on migration, helping university students to access them and to make contact with people willing to become witnesses. Our website [www.emigrazione-corato.org](http://www.emigrazione-corato.org) is designed to do just that, making our genealogical database available to all and serving as a tool for searching for people worldwide, including those who are still alive.

In the context of the twinning between Grenoble and Corato, we are also asking the Archives Départementales de l'Isère to give greater prominence to the significance of Coratino immigration in the development of the Isère Department, particularly in its section reserved for private archives.

James Smith, Marseille, March 2021  
Atelier Généalogique,  
18b rue Jules Moulet,  
13006 MARSEILLE.  
ateliergenealogique@gmail.com  
++33689434343