

STATE OF THE ART

The study of religious orders in early modern and modern Piedmont reflects the more general trends of historical research on the topic. That is, a great number of studies which are related to very restricted topics and which a very narrow focus, which can usually be found in the historical journals of these orders. As far as the Piedmontese religious orders are specifically concerned, the only work generally devoted to religious orders is Erba (1979), who tried to provide a brief institutional outline, based on 1650s Papal surveys.

Furthermore, a bias of gender separates the study of nunneries from male abbeys and convents. The former have been studied from very important but very specific points of view. Historical studies on nunneries and monasteries have focussed on endowment and the family patrimonial dynamics of nuns to reconstruct the social process of **vocation**. Other scholars have dealt with subjective motivation of nuns and their culture, and have produced important studies on art patronage and internal organization of convents in early modern times; on a different level, there has been research on mystics.

As far as male orders are concerned, our knowledge is centred almost exclusively on the Jesuits' world (reflecting in the ideological disputes of the Age of Enlightenment. The study of other orders is centred mainly on hagiography and the production of sanctity (for Italy: Pellegrino; there is no general study on Piedmont). Some new studies are focussing on the creations of new orders after the council of Trent, antiquarianism in the age of Counter-reformation, but the study of social and material aspects of the orders are underestimated: for this reason we are still lacking studies on abbeys in early modern period, on orders' landed estate management, etc.

A number of substantial topics have not yet been addressed. At the institutional level, the administrative boundaries and organization of each regular family are still unexplored, as well as their divergence with state and bishopric administrative districts, and the long and hard struggle which Savoyard dukes and kings undertook to hold them in control. Another basic question remains unanswered: the degree of separation, and of distinction, between the regular clergy and the laity. The broad picture of the orders as "corporate bodies" seems now clear, but some important elements (e.g., the so-called "third orders") require further research. The religious orders' art patronage itself has attracted a lot of research on Rome (Connors), Florence (Goffen) and even Turin (Dardanella), but their results need to be generalized and compared with other situations. With the exception of certain social and religious centres (e.g., Bosco Marengo and, once again, the Jesuits), our knowledge is restricted to a few case studies, which should be extended. Moreover, we still lack a study of the orders' contribution to Piedmontese learning and antiquarian culture (along the lines of Barzani's study of Veneto), and even of devotional activities of specific orders (along the lines of Bernos's study on Provence *servites*).

Apart from Beales and Notario, the topic of the Secularization of orders has been studied mainly in the 1960s and 1970s in the perspective of XIX century State and Church relationships by Jemolo (1974), Traniello (1977) and Verucci (1981), leaving aside two main levels of analysis. On one side, a historical and institutional analysis in order to assess the influence of these topics on the formation of Italian unitary state. On the other side, a "spatial" perspective which fills the gap which studies on urban landed property (e.g. in Turin), which focussed exclusively on the state property of the army and which ignored the orders' role in landed and estate property. Our perspective will instead allow to intersect these two levels by analysing the strategies and influence **of actors** on the urban land market by carrying out very detailed case studies.

Scientific and technical objectives.

The first objective is to acquire a clear and precise description of the orders existing in Piedmont between 1560 and 1860 and to place them in the general context of Piedmontese society. We are therefore planning to establish a general registry of the Orders taking the individual convent as the basic unit: it contains those elements of human society, male or female, following a Rule, with the availability of material resources connected to **possessions**; it is active in terms of ceremonies, spirituality, education and culture, and it promotes to these ends patronage in the field of arts and architecture. This is a qualitative registration, based on the model of the *Schedario storico-territoriale dei comuni piemontesi* [Historical and geographic registration of Piedmontese municipalities], which has proven its worth. This first series of data will be geo-referenced via GIS, creating a map of the presences and of the activities of the Piedmontese Orders between the XVIth and XIXth centuries, on the basis of the various work-packages. We believe that this first phase of the project can have a strong impact not only in terms of diffusion of knowledge (identified by the open-source presence on the web), but also in terms of promoting a detailed knowledge of the present territory, and therefore for administrative and tourist purposes.

The project will also –literally – shed light on religious orders which have been long forgotten, despite the presence of material and documentary materials.

The data which the project will also contribute to shed light on the following topics in the social, cultural history of the region:

- a re-examination of the problem of the boundaries between clergy and laity between 1560 and 1860: the stage of the “Third Orders”, of spirituality, of devotions and of the **estates**, which will demonstrate the porosity between clergy and laity;
- the re-examination of the categories through which laity has looked at the clergy, their development in the specified period (from the age of Jurisdictional conflicts to the age of anticlericalism): these are all crucial aspect in scholarly research, as a revision of categories which have been taken for granted, once and for all;
- in this perspective, the pinpointing of the role of the Regular Orders in the culture of Piedmontese (or Savoyard) society will provide a crucial element in reconstructing the intellectual history of the region;
- the connection with localities will enable us to establish the social profile of the Regular clergy, and its relationship with the society which surrounds each convent;
- the definition of the modalities of the circulation of men, styles, forms of religiosity and spirituality, of concrete and abstract knowledge, will enable us to re-examine critically the role of local realities, and more generally the function of the Regular clergy in regional and extra regional historical contexts:
 - in particular, the study of artistic patronage of the orders will allow us to shed light of the diffusion of styles, ornaments and objects which so have appeared in a casual manner in individual researches;
 - the dynamics of substitution and transformation of ornaments in connection with the affairs of the various orders (e.g., the *Umiliati*, Augustinians at the end of the XVIth century) will allow us to identify models of behaviour at a time of great changes (such as the post-tridentine period);
 - furthermore, the study of the building of the convents will allow us to shed light on the functionality which can provide new data in terms of technological knowledge, and in terms of the patterns of socialization within an individual building;

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-Historical and architectural research, in particular, will enable us to reformulate on a concrete basis basic elements of urban history (at least at a regional level), which will emerge especially in examining the XVIIIth and XIXth century suppressions, and to re-examine urban development in the XIXth and XXth centuries.

-At the same time, the institutional, political and intellectual creation of the unitary state will be shown in a new light.

ORGANIZATION

The various research units will proceed in a parallel fashion and will co-ordinate the collection of data relevant for the mapping process. There will therefore be no need to set a series of dates for starting the various work packages, since the scholars involved have already co-operated in a series of research projects, thus ensuring an inter-disciplinary exchange.

Meetings are envisaged every six months to evaluate the advancement of the work on the project and the results obtained. External consultants will be charged with the responsibility for the IT design of the database, the georeferentialization of data for the mapping process, the IT reconfiguration of data and the digitalization of documents and pictures. These consultants will be met on a more frequent basis, to define the structure of the registration model, the modalities of input and the circulation of data between scholars **involved in the project**.

There will be an annual report on the state of advancement of the project and an annual financial report.

Dissemination

Content dissemination is a must in a spatially-based research. In our case the infrastructure will be developed following our experience in the *Schedario storico-territoriale dei comuni piemontesi* [Historical and Geographical Register of Municipalities of Piedmont] and *Flanders Road: History, Archaeology and Society of War from XVIth to XIXth Century* [See Angelo Torre, *Loans*] with several objectives.

Content will be provided by several means, in particular through the web database/geo-database with direct access for scholars, web pages to document and show the research achievements, but also web content accessible as a service and which could be included in local webpages by public administration, schools, and publishers.

This content providing should substitute traditional sources of information provided for tourists and local authorities (usually unreliable), complementing the Guarini regional projects at two levels: **firstly**, structured information, developing connections between heritage units; and **secondly**, descriptive pathways of interpretation for historical data.

Diffusion

The heritage **derived** from the regular clergy is somehow not perceived. Being primarily an "immaterial heritage" can mean that it is vaguely defined and it is perceived as a **general framework** and not as the *raison d'être* of jurisdictions, landscapes, cultivated property, buildings, mills, factories, *granges*, all gradually fading from our view as the **management** of these properties loses its reasons and diminish its strength.

Understanding the places is the first necessity: revamping this fading public awareness is a goal in itself, but it is also the means for focussing research and activity around this heritage.

Diffusion is ensured by providing new content. This content is first of all presented as geographic knowledge. Presenting the size and frequency of this heritage could be established through geographic content. This is powered by a data organization which is built and delivered inside a geographic conceptual framework and a geographic information system.

The geodatabase is directly tied to the content management system, which in turn is designed to give direct access to sources for the scholars and to narrative pathways for the public at large. This multi-path system may in the future be useful to different kinds of users: content providers for tourists, tourism managers, tour operators (especially incoming operators, but also local users), teachers, university students and public administration.

IMPACT

The project may be appraised in two aspects.

(i) *Knowledge*. The competencies which each unit will bring to the project enable us to widen the knowledge of an important historiographical problem and to address it in all its complexity. The common basis of the project will be the mapping of sites and sources, through the exchanges between the different disciplines. The topic of religious orders, when analysed properly, offers an interesting perspective for analysing territory (relationship with laity, the production of knowledge and figurative arts, landed property and **buildings**) and allows experimentation and methodological exchanges.

The database will enable us to start the creation of a collection of Piedmontese sources, easily accessible through the web. Furthermore, the collection of data concerning figurative heritage will enable to set up a regional heritage map which will be essential for future research and the reconstruction of territories which are now impoverished, and to verify the present use of sites which have often been abandoned by the clergy and left to be managed by public bodies.

(ii) *Territory*. The desire to progressively make public the results of our research is related to the objective of involving in the project public bodies: municipalities, archives, libraries, museums, which are all already custodians of part of the religious orders' heritage of documents, books and pictures. The abandonment of convent buildings, the dispersal of the figurative heritage (which is the result of the growing crisis of monastic orders) determines a whole series of problems for the management of spaces, sites and objects. This problem requires planning at a regional level. A meticulous survey at grassroots level is essential for planning the protection and promotion of an important regional heritage. Mapping the use of buildings which still exist will enable us to estimate the size of the architectural heritage. In many cases the convent complexes (usually small- or medium-sized) nowadays belong to municipalities, which are often short of funds and planning capacity. Putting on the web the data collected during the research and the experience of discussing these issues at a local level will facilitate an appropriate designing of models for managing these sites. Leaving this process to purely voluntary and unplanned initiatives runs the risk of irredeemable **damage to knowledge and historical memory**.