Exchanges, Mobility and Collaborations (Besançon, 22 Nov 24)

Université de Franche-Comté, Besançon
Deadline: Jun 30, 2024

Moïra Dato

Call for papers for the conference "Exchanges, Mobility and Collaborations. The World of Silk between France and Italy, 16th-19th Century", Université de Franche-Comté, Besançon, November 22th, 2024.

Organisers:
Moïra Dato (Universität Bern)
Jean-Baptiste Vérot (Université de Franche-Comté)

Silk has been approached in recent historiography as a material whose production and consumption played a crucial role in the formation of the modern world, notably due to the multiplicity and complexity of the exchanges this precious fibre gave rise to.

The topic of Franco-Italian relations around silk brings us to explore the multi-faceted issues — socio-economic, political, environmental, artistic and cultural — that underlie these exchanges. These relations between two neighbouring spaces, among the main producers and consumers of silk and silk fabrics in early modern Europe, have been the subject of significant studies which have highlighted their importance in the history of trade and manufacturing.

Building on this research, this conference aims to continue the exploration of the silk relations between France and Italy through a different lens, by fostering a dialogue between studies that have hitherto often been separated by historiographical traditions. Indeed, this topic raises questions pertaining to a variety of fields, such as the social and economic history of both urban and rural areas, political and institutional history, the history of science and technology, environmental history, gender history, as well as art history, history of fashion, and museum studies.

This conference therefore wishes to engage with this multiplicity of perspectives through an interdisciplinary approach. Analysing the entire supply chain (from mulberry cultivation to fabric consumption, including yarn production and preparation, pattern creation, and weaving process) through the same set of questions will also help unveiling the interplay between the different stages of production and consumption.

This conference aims as well to examine the manufacturing and commercial relations between France and Italy through the viewpoint of the actors and their collaborations. The goal is to explore these exchanges beyond their competitive and conflictual nature, which, while certainly present, is not fully representative of the Franco-Italian silk world. By focusing on the actors of

this industry, it becomes possible to approach it from the perspective of connections, networks, and collaborations.

A broad chronological perspective, from the 16th to the 19th century, also allows for an understanding of the evolution of these relations. The aim is to move beyond traditional chronological divisions that tend to present the major stages of the silk industry without studying its continuity or highlighting the developments leading to these different phases.

We invite contributions that address, but are not limited to, topics such as:

- The scientific collaborations that developed between France and Italy around the cultivation of mulberry trees and sericulture. These exchanges, structured from the 18th century by economic periodicals and agricultural societies, reveal that the actors in the nascent agronomy, far from adopting a competitive approach in the service of a mercantilist economic policy, sought to put their work at the service of the entire supply chain. In this regard, the case of the Franco-Piedmontese agronomist Matthieu Bonafous is most representative.

- The artistic relations between France and Italy, which have been the subject of numerous studies in art history, question the impact of these artistic connections on textile production. This could be about stylistic/artistic influence, the role of painters, of their travel and training in the creation of the designs for silks, the circulation of patterns, and the training of designers. Similarly, it would be fruitful to delve into artists' networks and art academies and how they intertwined with merchant networks. This would lead to the study of artistic exchanges from the perspective of the textile world, of its actors, and of the objects themselves, by starting, for instance, from the history of techniques.

- In terms of the history of the circulation of techniques, some studies have shown, beyond the major merchants and bankers, the importance of highly skilled artisans in the Italian population present in France during the early modern period. In this regard, the question of specialised technical mobility — especially of women — would warrant broader investigations by fostering a dialogue between the history of techniques and gender history.

- Gender history could also shed light on the role of women beyond that of consumers. What roles could they have played as merchants, artists, heads of workshop...? What was the place of women within the Franco-Italian mercantile networks?

Submission:
Proposals (3,500 characters, including spaces), along with a short biography, should be sent by June 30th, 2024 to Moïra Dato (moira.dato@unibe.ch) and Jean-Baptiste Vérot (jean_baptiste.verot@univ-fcomte.fr). Early-career researchers are particularly encouraged to participate.

Reference:
CFP: Exchanges, Mobility and Collaborations (Besançon, 22 Nov 24). In: ArtHist.net, May 4, 2024 (accessed Nov 23, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/41807>.