

NOTE: CHRONOLOGICAL MARRIAGE PATTERNS IN RESIA

As part of an ongoing study of the 18th- and 19th-century marriage registers of Resia, Giovanni Rotta¹ has given us a valuable quantified account of the incidence by time of year of marriages over two centuries in Resia as a whole and in the four separate (and dialectally discrete) parent villages (as opposed to the half-dozen additional scattered hamlets) of the valley *commune*.² Rotta's work constitutes a valuable contribution to the body of comparable study of such small populations in the eastern Alps, and of recent haemotypological analysis of minorities and isolated regions of Italy; his bibliographic references (125-26) include useful items on these subjects from the recent literature, embracing his own work of the last decade. Rotta is an enthusiastic scholar who has made his local demography a lively subject and a central topic of his own research.

Sad to say, the number of Resian inhabitants reported by Rotta for the end of 1987 amounts to only 1477, a number that shows not only a steady decline due to emigration (there was also earlier a history of seasonal emigrant work and employment for this valley) but also the further diminution caused by the ruinous and discouraging earthquake of 1976. In fact, the improved reconstruction and tasteful rebuilding that has taken place, once things got going, throughout the entire region is impressive and encouraging to the outsider; but the outsider has not slept for a decade in tents at first and then in barracks, trembling at the thought of every tremor.

This year³ there are about 120 pupils in the one elementary school in the valley. I am told that there is one child entering school from Osojani/Oseacco, where in 1908 33 children were born. There are still men in their thirties in the bar who speak Resian naturally, but the decrement with youth (which I have not studied) is probably drastic. A few families now live in Korito/Coritis (a settlement high above Solbica/Stolvizza, and a dialect and familial colony of Oseacco) in the summertime only, and my visit this summer to Učja/Ucea (the most distant village, the other side of a high 1000-meter pass, another colony of Oseacco) revealed that the resident population there now numbers about 30, whereas 40 years ago there were about 400 residents. Resia is, of course, a kind of Alpine paradise: it has a culture and gastronomy of its own, with interesting elements of Italian, Venetian and Friulian provenance to season and further individuate it. Italy is a teeming, busy, commercial, imaginative country making its way powerfully in the West European and Atlantic community—there is nothing stagnant here, not like Eastern Europe—and maintains a strong living tradition for localism, which is not suppressed as in France or Greece. What then is wrong? It seems the great sin is that Resia has not (yet) become a “Silicon Valley” with characterless fabrication; the peace, which does have television and other amenities, is not yet invaded by decibels; good eating has not yet been replaced by Macdonald's; value persists where junk has not moved in—and the children move out.

A new race of children must grow up, if Resia's individuality is to be retained. Workers of the tasteful and productive world, unite! Meantime, linguists and anthropologists can have a field-day studying culture-change. Some of us will have to line up good contacts among aged émigrés to finish laying the basis for a refinement and elaboration (with an occasional correction) of the base-line that Baudouin de Courtenay drew, and that the writer of these lines persists at.

Rotta has totalled, by months, for each of the four villages the 3610 Resian marriages from 1722 to 1901. An interesting sidelight is that before making his analysis Rotta asked elderly natives what had been, in the old days, the favorite time of year for marriages; the reply was that it was winter, because in spring and summer the men were away from Resia

at work, and women and children were up in the mountains at their alpine duties. This response is interestingly inaccurate both in fact and alleged reason, and is a wholesome warning to collectors of folklore and folklore-based history; yet it carries a different truth, to which I shall return.

Basing himself always on statistical tests, Rotta gives data, graphs, and commentary on observed variations between the four villages (on which I will not attempt to comment here), between the four seasons of the calendar year (on which I will simply remark that perhaps these are not very relevant to an agricultural, ecclesiastic, and traditional alpine year), between isolocal and heterolocal marriages, between decades, and between thirty-year periods. The results are highly interesting.

Resia showed 18th- and 19th-century minima for marriages in March and December; this agrees with what has been observed in Bosco-Turin (Ticino), and reflects the Church prohibitions of Lent and Advent. The traditional maxima in Resia were August and February. As Rotta points out, and contrary to the folk explanation attributing behavior to the economics of males, the August maximum is correlated with the 15th August feast of the patron of Resia, Santa Maria Assunta (Assumption Day, *Smarnamissa* [šmarnam'išʌ] "Holy Mary's Mass"), and this is emphasized by the fact that only once in two centuries, in 1730, was a wedding celebrated on 15th August itself. The peak in February shows a concentration before Lent, a sort of "Mardi Gras." The annual incidence therefore reflects the local church calendar.

I now permit myself a couple of observations to bring out in suggested relief the data presented by Rotta. His analysis shows, as we see, a peak in February, before Lent. His tabulations also show a strong peak over the whole 180 years in February for non-isolocal marriages. I suggest that the two facts support one another: i.e., nearly everyone in Italy subscribes to Lent. December and March are dramatically low also for heterolocals.

Rotta's tabulations are informative also over longer time-spans. We note that the February and August peaks invert themselves in precedence between the 18th and 19th centuries. This seems to point to a fundamental and stable historical change. It appears that in the 19th century the Lenten factor had become stronger than *Smarnamissa*. Does this reflect a turning of Resia outward, a cultural reorientation of the valley towards Catholic Europe and national Italy?

Finally, the old people were partly correct in their recollection that the "old timers" married in winter, but for the wrong reason. We must never ask a data-source for an analysis—or, better, we must never use the analysis as other than data.

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NOTES

1. Giovanni M. Rotta, "La stagionalità dei matrimoni nella Valle di Resia (Udine) (XVIII e XIX sec.)," *Quaderni di Scienze Antropologiche* (Padova) 13 (1987) 110-45. Rotta is a resident of Njiva/Gniva.
2. The place-names, in their Standard Italian and Standard Slovene forms and in the Resian pronunciation, are as follows: San Giorgio/Bíla [tuɣb'ile]; Gniva/Njiva [ɲ'ɯɲʌ]; Oseacco/Osojáne [osɔ'anœ]; Stolvizza/Sólbica [s'ubitsʌ]; and Ucceja/Učjà [tanuɣuč'i].
3. This note was written in October 1988.