

Racconigi: the reasons of the silk

by Gian Luca Giordano

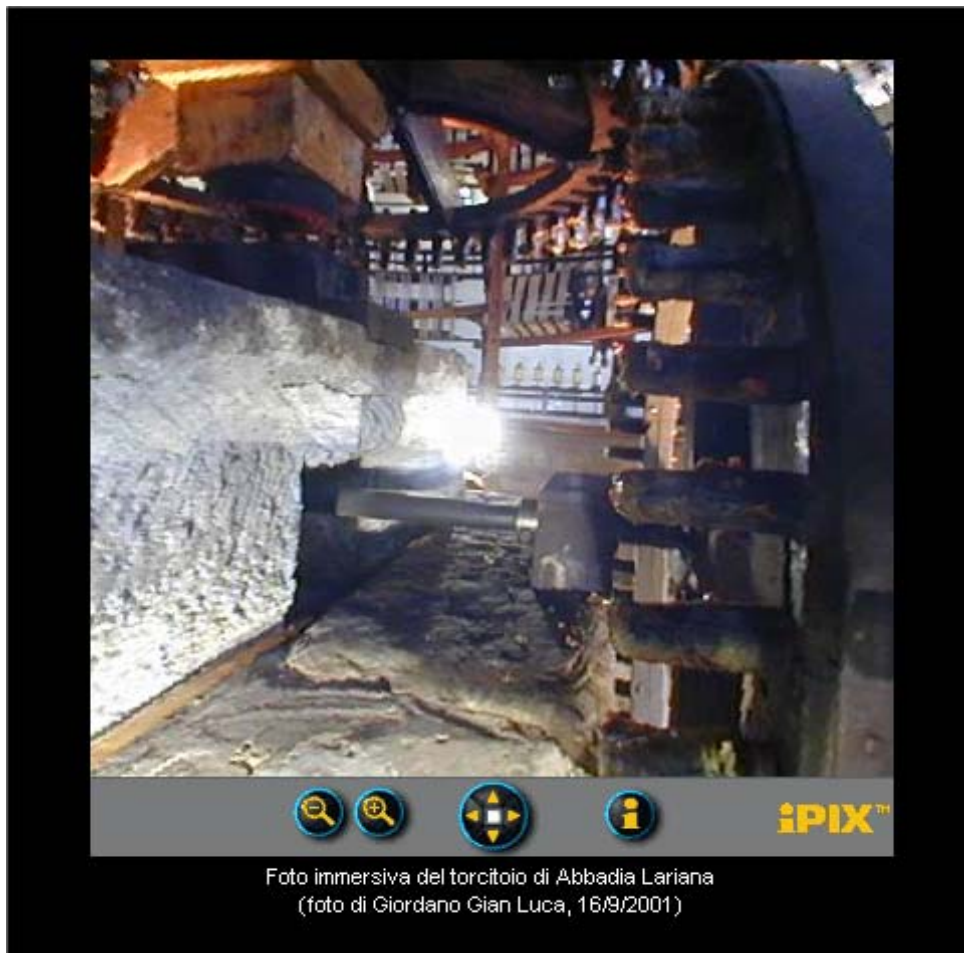
Tutors: Vittorio Marchis, Laura Palmucci

This thesis has been developed through the creation of a web site and gives a historical overview of the town of Racconigi. It details the main reasons why this small town in the province of Cuneo became a leader in silk production during the XVIII and XIX centuries. All the findings are presented in a multimedia text, using HTML.

The research begins with a chapter dedicated to silk technology and covers the full range of processing phases - from silkworm farming to mill twisting. Each phase is examined within its specific physical environment. This is followed by a glossary of key words used in the trade and is presented in the form of a word tree showing how each word is related to one another.

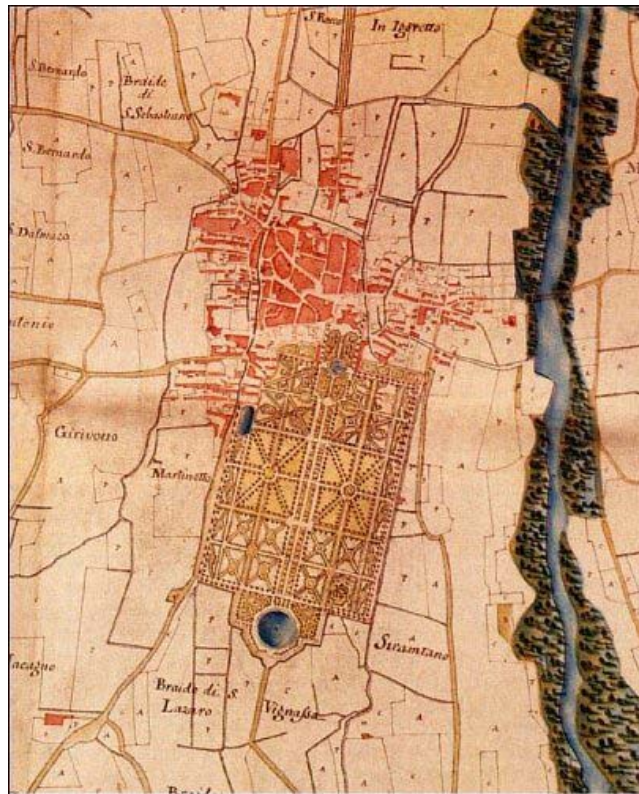
After examining these aspects of terminology and techniques, the chapter offers a historical view on silk technology, outlining the developments which occurred in the industry up to the introduction of the first steam-driven machines and highlighting the impact that the changing technology, working environment and working practice had on the local community.

Finally the chapter ends with a survey of tools and machinery that are technologically similar to those present in Piedmont during the period under discussion and also dedicates some space to the machinery used in Racconigi in particular. Of note in this section is the special full immersion visual effect obtained through the 3D digital image (image no.1) of the Abbadia Lariana (Lecco) twister.



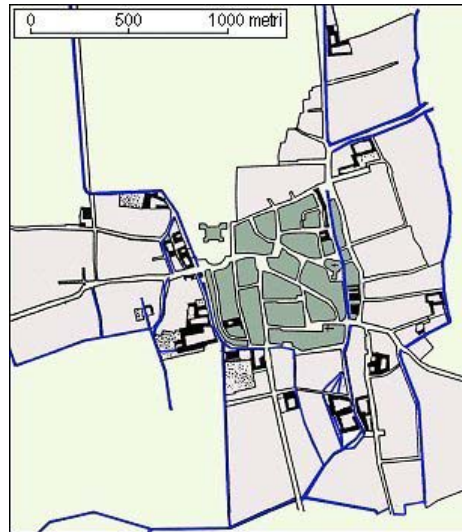
1. Abbadia Lariana (Lecco) twister. 3D digital image

The thesis goes on to study the township of Racconigi. An analysis is made of its historical development through the use and illustration of the most important city maps throughout the ages. The study begins with the most ancient ones (image no.2), which date from the 13th century and goes up to the 1813 plan belonging to the French land public registry introduced during the Napoleonic period.



**2. The 13th century city map
(A.S.T., Ministero delle Finanze, Tipi sez. II n. 381)**

Following the historical development of the town the work enters the silk world proper through an exhaustive study of the history of silk in Racconigi. This is presented on a time-line illustrating the possible factors that influenced the birth, growth and decline of the local silk industry. A further stage deals with the silk mills in existence up to the beginning of the 19th century shown on local maps (image no.3). Reference is also made, in each case, to information and data obtained through a search at the township public registry concerning plant size, production processes and property changes through the years.



3. The 19th century city. The mills in Napoleonic period

At this stage, the survey also introduces the major personalities that had significant roles in the Racconigi area such as the influential family members of the reigning House of Savoy as well as silk mill owners and workers.

The last chapter begins with a detailed survey of waterways in the territory and canals in the township. A historic outline covering their course, characteristics and features in different periods is given and concludes with an in-depth study of the Maira river and the two major canals flowing through the town, called “bealera di Macra” and “bealera di San Giovanni”.

To complete this section on waterways, the work presents the full text of two historically important documents, dated 1769 and 1821, transcribed at the public registry in Racconigi, which illustrate the expertise present in the silk mills and the management of the water canals.

All subjects are organized on two complementary levels: from each topic submitted in the text, a corresponding file, complete with documents, illustrations and detailed information is provided.

For further information: Gian Luca Giordano, e-mail giogilu@hotmail.com