

The Civilization and the Journeys of Paper in the Medieval and Modern Ages: Some Remarks for a History on the Side of the Papermakers

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I have taken the opportunity of the conferences and initiatives of *Paper in Motion* to go back and reflect on the issues relating to the history of paper: first, the culture of work handed down through the centuries: and now, with this work, the need to enhance – admittedly in new ways – the centrality of human labour in manufacturing and marketing paper, to keep the “micro historical” and the broader European and global horizon of interconnections closely linked.¹

I would like to start with a couple of preliminary remarks, without any intention to analyse deeply the various historiographical positions on such wide-ranging issues. First of all, the reference I made to “microhistory.” The use of superscripts is meant to underline that I do not intend to take up a paradigm that has certainly produced remarkable results but which has also provoked varied and sometimes divergent reflections among the scholars who have resorted to it. Let us think about, on one hand, the innovative contributions in the 1970s and 1980s by Carlo Poni, Carlo Ginzburg, Giovanni Levi, Edoardo Grendi (just to mention the most famous ones);² volumes and essays that on the other hand will be comple-

¹ Renzo Sabbatini, “La cultura del far carta a mano, un viaggio nella storia”, in Livia Faggioni, Mauro Mussolin (eds.), *La carta e il Mediterraneo: produzione, commercio, comunicazione*, Fabriano, 2022, pp. 29-47.

² “L’analisi microstorica è [...] bifronte. Da un lato, muovendosi su una scala ridotta,

mented by their reflections developed starting from the 1990s up to recently.³

The second instance, in the light of the very terms I have chosen to indicate it, that is to say a global horizon of interconnections, aims at avoiding on the one hand, the flattening on an increasingly rarified and trivialized *Global History* and on the other hand wants to recover a kind of drive for the factual concreteness of *Connected Histories*.⁴

A decade ago, in her dense and insightful essay that drew on the work and theoretical approach of Ginzburg and Levi,⁵ Francesca Trivellato already questioned the future of compatibility between the *Italian Microhistory* and the *Global History*. The two authors have recently returned to reflect, through essays and interviews, on the respective declinations of micro history.⁶

Without subscribing to any schools⁷ (not least because of the risk

permette in molti casi una ricostituzione del vissuto impensabile in altri tipi di storiografia. Dall'altro, si propone di indagare le strutture invisibili entro cui quel vissuto si articola. [...] Per questo proponiamo di definire la microstoria, e la storia in generale, scienza del vissuto: una definizione che cerca di intendere le ragioni sia dei sostenitori sia dei nemici dell'integrazione della storia alle scienze sociali" (Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, "Il nome e il come: scambio ineguale e mercato storiografico", in *Quaderni storici*, vol. 14, n. 40, 1979, pp. 181-190, p. 188; Carlo Ginzburg, "Microstoria: due o tre cose che so di lei", in *Quaderni storici*, vol. 29, n. 86, 1994, pp. 511-539; Edoardo Grendi, "Ripensare la microstoria?", in *Quaderni storici*, vol. 29, n. 86, 1994, pp. 539-549.

³ Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory and World History", in Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (eds.), *The Cambridge World History*, Cambridge, UK, 2015, pp. 446-473; Islam Dayeh, "Philology and Microhistory: A Conversation with Carlo Ginzburg", in *Philological Encounters*, no. 7, 2022, pp. 197-232; Giovanni Levi, *História global, história conectada, micro-história*, interview of December 5th 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtmITnHCeZk>, accessed on 07/05/2023.

⁴ Reference is made to the works and methodological remarks of Sanjay Subrahmanyam.

⁵ Francesca Trivellato, "Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?", in *Californian Italian Studies*, 2(1), 2011, <https://doi.org/10.5070/C321009025>; Francesca Trivellato, "Microstoria, storia del mondo e storia globale", in Paola Lanaro (ed.), *Microstoria. A venticinque anni da L'eredità immateriale*, Milan, 2011, pp. 119-131.

⁶ Pan Wenije, "Carlo Ginzburg: Scrivere di storia significa 'Tartufi per tutti'", in *Doppio zero*, 2, 2021; Giovanni Levi, "La storia. Scienza delle domande generali e delle risposte locali", in *Psiche*, no. 2, 2018, pp. 361-377.

⁷ "Una 'scuola' che non è stata una scuola", Grendi, "Ripensare la microstoria?", p. 547.

of ending up embracing a trend), I simply wish that on the wave of initiatives such as *Paper in Motion* a new season of research on paper civilization will see the light with new and stimulating perspectives and a general rethinking of what we are supposed to continue to call “Paper History”, always bearing in mind the need to give it new methodologies, objects of study and contents. New or at least capable of taking up in an innovative way issues that were already presented or at least had been hinted to some decades ago, trying to fill that kind of historiographical continuity gap that in my opinion characterizes temporary research activities (to be completely true, not only relating to paper studies).

One cannot but positively welcome the results of the conferences organized by the International Association of Paper Historians, both in the area of the increasingly technologically advanced study of the watermarks and in the analysis of paper as an object with the help of highly advanced scientific instruments, and also in the review – with a global vision – of the most varied uses of paper products, and finally in the adoption and study of the latest production processes.

Nevertheless, for the medieval and modern age, let’s say for the age of handmade paper, I personally feel a sense of dissatisfaction because behind the technical or historical and economic aspects as well as behind the commercial flows, I don’t always see the decisive presence of the human factor: the culture of work, the gender division, the migration of the masters, the relationship between the papermakers and the community at first small (and then increasingly larger) where paper mills were located, the attitude towards technical or process innovation, the transmission of know-how from one generation to the other. In short, the presence of subjectivity – individual and collective – embedded in the sheet of paper.

This is why I’m particularly fond of a photo, that I have reproduced several times,⁸ portraying the central moment in the activity of a hand-operated paper mill, the one that sets the pace of production and involve three of the leading characters: the actual paper

⁸ Sabbatini, “La cultura del far carta a mano”, p. 39.

maker, who shapes the sheet, the “ponitore” and the “levatore.” But, in the other rooms of the paper mill there are some women, other grown-up men and some young boys and girls. The photo, courtesy of the Magnani Archives and the Museum of Paper of Pietrabuona di Pescia, cannot be precisely dated, but it seems taken in the 1940s. Handmade paper was still manufactured following the ancient techniques for a market that was certainly smaller, but that wasn’t yet the niche it is today, fuelled by an activity that has nothing to do with the past, neither regarding raw materials nor the production times.

The civilization and the journeys of paper between the Middle Ages and the Modern Age: I have chosen a very general title that can allow just for a few considerations, perhaps trivial, but often times neglected by a historiography that is getting more and more specialized and focused on the quantitative aspects.

The journeys of paper, then. Real and long-distance journeys of paper as a support for handwritten and printed words: books and lighter and more flexible instruments of communication such as notices, gazettes, newspapers, posters. Long journeys of paper as a packaging material for colonial products; and also much shorter journeys for the several uses of paper as wrapping material in everyday life, because the value of waste paper makes transport over long-distances quite expensive (and because the lower quality paper sheets are the first ones to be manufactured in the countries that are still obliged to import white paper). Not to mention the use of paper and cardboard in manufacturing activities (let us think about the packaging of pieces of fabrics to be shipped to the international markets) up to the use of special, large, perforated sheets to improve the hygienic conditions in silkworm nurseries during the peak of Italian silk production in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But the journeys of paper also in a broader sense, as the movement of men, skills, *know how*, information, culture as underlined by the recent exhibit at the Riccardiana library.⁹ And as illustrated by the archival

⁹ Giovanni Tarantino, Giorgio Riello and José María Pérez Fernández (eds.), *Encounters*

exhibition opened in Prato (and in other related European archives) during the meeting focused on the journeys of paper seen as a commercial and financial tool.¹⁰ Paths that historians can reconstruct because after the journeys the papers rest in the archives.

What would the last centuries of the Middle Ages and the entire Modern Age have been in Europe (and even in the New World) without paper? How is a paperless world still thinkable today, even in this process of dematerialization (moreover, more announced than realized)? It is not out of place, then, to give paper the praise it deserves. «Mille all'huomo arrear commodi suole», says the lyrics by Francesco Stelluti, (hidden in a note of his translation of Persio) one of the founders dell'Accademia dei Lincei.¹¹ From his native Fabriano, though now in decline as the capital of paper, Stelluti draws the image of the formation of the sheet; the essential elements are present: the rags, the milky suspension of the pesto in the vat, the master hand. And the verse I quoted completes the first quatrain, probably the best one even from the poetic point of view. The rest of the sonnet is dedicated to delineating the literary, educational and cultural use of paper and to glorify its capability to triumph over time and to give immortality to human being. These are strenuous and scholastic verses.

And certainly even more strenuous are the verses on the use of paper published in 1630 in the anthology of his works by John Tay-

at Sea. Paper, Objects and Sentiments in motion across the Mediterranean. An intellectual journey through the collections of the Riccardiana Library in Florence, Pontedera, 2020.

¹⁰ José María Pérez Fernández, Giovanni Tarantino, and Matteo Calcagni (eds.), *Paper in motion. Information and the Economy of Knowledge in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, Siena, 2021.

¹¹ «Questa, di bianco lin candida prole, / Ch'in grembo a torbid'onda ad uso humano / Nacque formata da maestra mano, / Mille all'huomo arrear commodi suole. // Spiega con muto suon l'altrui parole, / E vien da presso udità, e da lontano: / Apprende ogni idioma ancorch'estrano, / E degli studi è madre, e delle scuole. // Quanto avvien mai quaggiù, tutto n'addita. / È fragil sì; ma più de' marmi vale / In donar lunga a' nostri detti vita. // Con l'oblio pugna, e n'ottien palma; assale / Morte, e la vince, e ne trionfa ardita, / E fa mal grado suo l'huomo immortale". (Aulo Persio Flacco, *Persio Tradotto in verso sciolto e dichiarato da Francesco Stelluti Accad. Linceo da Fabriano*, Roma, 1630, p. 83).

lor, who used to call himself «The water Poet». The poem, *The praise of Hemp-Seed*, had already appeared in 1620, in one of the publications that the peculiar individual followed personally and that were extremely appreciated by a large popular public.¹² The use of paper, not only to write – as Taylor claims – is universal: it regards everybody, regardless of age, sex or social condition. After four centuries, the whole path of “Paper in Motion” sounds as a confirmation of this statement.

It would be out of place to do a kind of bibliographical review of the studies carried out in the last decades. But, I wish to take this opportunity to remember – certainly not out of a mere duty of gratitude to Prato – the volume of the proceedings of the 23rd Week of the International Institute of Economic History “Francesco Datini”, dedicated to paper and books: with its more than one thousand pages, it described the relationships, the communications and the debate that had animated an extremely rich Week so much so that thirty years later the volume is still an unescapable reference.¹³

On that occasion, the prologue was entrusted to such an eminent historian like Jean-François Bergier. I summarize his closing remarks, which are still extremely relevant: Which are – he asked – the merits of paper? Stimulating new uses and behaviours; contributing to the management of enterprises and states favouring a quality leap of bureaucracy; supporting accounting, commercial letters, letters of exchange; the scriptural material facilitating the development of the activities of the notaries and that offers a new dimension to the ad-

¹² “But Europe, Asia, Sun burnt Affrica, / *America, Terra incognita*, / The Christians, Heathens, Pagans, Turkes & Iewes, / And all the world yeelds matter to my Muse: / No Empire, Kingdome, Region, Province, Nation, / No Principality, Shire, nor Corporation: / No Country, County, City, Hamlet, Towne, / But must use Paper, eyther white or browne. / No Metropolitane, or gracious Primate / No Village, Pallace, Cottage, function, Climate / No age, sex, or degree the earth doth beare, / But they must use this feed to write or weare” (John Taylor, *All the Workes of Iohn Taylor, the Water Poet. Being 63 in number collected into one volum by the Author. With sundry new Additions, Corrected, Revised and newly imprinted*, [London], 1630, Fff1-Ggg3, Ggg1r.

¹³ Simonetta Cavaciocchi (ed.), *Produzione e commercio della carta e del libro. Secoli XIII-XVIII*, Florence, 1992.

ministration of justice. Paper conveys information, collects the memories of scribes, businessmen, companies and the State.¹⁴ And, we can add pushing our look beyond economic history, paper keeps track of family and personal memories, of creative and literary writing.

For the Italian historiography, the Datini Week dedicated to paper and books arrived after a season of innovative works such as those by Ivo Mattozzi in 1975, who emphasised both the production and the trade of paper from Veneto,¹⁵ or those by Manlio Calegari, who started the research on the Genoa paper manufacture intertwining the technological aspects of a more functional working process and the ownership and lease relationships of the paper mills, as well as the outlets on the European market.¹⁶

As for me, in the volume of 1990,¹⁷ and in my speech at the Datini Week,¹⁸ I had tried to outline some peculiarities of the manufacture of paper and the typology of the building, trying to imagine a kind of caesura between paper production and trade in the Middle Ages and those in the first half of the modern age: not a substantial technological difference but rather a more efficient organization of the production cycle in response to a new growing demand of paper following the development and the dissemination of printing. And I had also started

¹⁴ "Ici, c'est le papier, d'abord, qui propose ses avantages et induit dès le XIV^e siècle des usages et des comportements neufs. Car sans lui, toute la gestion des entreprises, comme celle des Etats, par l'écriture, et toute les bureaucraties ne seraient pas devenues possibles. Il est support des comptabilités, des correspondances d'hommes d'affaires, des écritures bancaires, des lettres de change, etc. Il développe l'institution notariale, donne une nouvelle dimension à l'administration de la justice. Bref, il porte l'information, retient la mémoire, celle du scribe et homme d'affaires, celle de l'entreprise, celle de l'Etat". (Jean-François Bergier, "Production et commerce du papier et du livre", in Cavaciocchi, p. 42).

¹⁵ Ivo Mattozzi, *Produzione e commercio della carta nello Stato veneziano settecentesco. Lineamenti e problemi*, Bologna, 1975.

¹⁶ Manlio Calegari, *La manifattura genovese della carta (sec. XVI-XVIII)*, Genoa, 1986.

¹⁷ Renzo Sabbatini, *Di bianco lin candida prole. La manifattura della carta in età moderna e il caso toscano*, Milan, 1990.

¹⁸ Renzo Sabbatini, "La manifattura cartaria in età moderna: imprenditorialità, rapporti di produzione e occupazione", in Cavaciocchi, pp. 99-142.

to lay the foundations for an analysis that had to keep together the articulation of production cycles (organized in phases envisaging some interruptions during the process) and employment (with a special attention to gender division) as well as the ownership relationships showing a variety of regulatory instruments. I was also posing the problem of the public intervention in a production that we could define as strategic. Finally, I had also drawn the attention on the relationship between innovation, quality and market as well as on the aspects of everyday life of paper craftsmen in the early modern age, starting from the peculiarity of the presence at the paper mill of the entire family and the phenomenon of migrations that led to the complex issue of the attitudes of the community, swinging from acceptance to isolation, with some peaks of xenophobia.

In closing, I will comment the latest contribution dedicated to paper trade in the early modern age: the “journeys of paper”, precisely. But first, without any claim to exhaustiveness, I will do an overview of some texts that I deem significant, each one in its own way, because of the issues they touched upon. I would like to start underling the contribution made by the Fabriano conferences and the publications of the Fondazione Fedrigoni, for which you can refer to the volumes written or edited by Giancarlo Castagnari¹⁹ and to the recently published essays by Emanuela Di Stefano,²⁰ Livia

¹⁹ See monographs such as Giancarlo Castagnari, *Carta cartiere cartai. La tematica storica di Andrea Gasparinetti*, Fabriano, 2006; also by G. Castagnari, *Augusto Zonghi matematico umanista. Le carte antiche fabrianesi nell'era del segno*, Fabriano, 2018. Several volumes curated by Castagnari with proceedings of conferences held at Fabriano include the following: *Contributi italiani alla diffusione della carta in Occidente tra XIV e XV secolo*, Fabriano, 1990; *L'opera dei fratelli Zonghi. L'era del segno nella storia della carta*, Fabriano, 2003; *L'impiego delle tecniche e dell'opera dei cartai fabrianesi in Italia e in Europa*, Fabriano, 2006; *Le cartare di Fabriano. Società Donne Lavoro nei tempi della città della carta*, Fabriano, 2013; see also G. Castagnari, E. di Stefano and L. Faggioni (eds.), *Alle origini della carta occidentale: tecniche, produzioni, mercati (secoli XIII-XV)*, Fabriano, 2014; G. Castagnari (ed.), *La forma. Formisti e cartai nella storia della carta occidentale*, Fabriano, 2015; G. Castagnari and L. Faggioni, *Il patrimonio industriale della carta in Italia. La storia, i siti, la valorizzazione*, Fabriano, 2017.

²⁰ Emanuela di Stefano, “Dalle Marche all'Europa: produzione e diffusione della carta occidentale. Dinamiche commerciali e meccanismi di rete nel basso Medioevo”, in Faggioni and Mussolin (eds.), pp. 65-79.

Faggioni²¹ and Giovanni Luzi.²²

Internationally, the synthesis volume by Richard Hills,²³ that is nowadays a classic, certainly deserves to be quoted; even though, we should not forget the pioneering study by Donald Coleman, who in 1958 started from the observation that “much has been written about paper, and very little about paper industry.”²⁴ Fortunately, in the following decades, research has expanded toward the desired direction even though the risk of focusing more on paper as an object leaving behind the history of paper production and trade is still lingering.

The monography by Judith McGaw is extremely interesting; in her book, the author examines with great acumen the development of Berkshire paper industry in the nineteenth century, intertwining the process of mechanization of paper mills with social developments and changes.²⁵ Structured as a technical manual, the book by the leading expert Peter Tschudin, was published in 2007 and translated into Italian in 2012.²⁶

An excellent contribution regarding the use of the paper machine in France comes from the monography by Louis André, published in 1996.²⁷ A French scholar who died prematurely, and who was for a long time the director and animator of the Musée des arts et métiers, André has been at the centre of two intense days of study, organised in memoriam, regarding the French paper industry “between history and industrial heritage.”

²¹ Livia Faggioni, “Corpus Chartarum Fabriano: il database delle filigrane fabrianesi”, in Faggioni and Mussolin (eds.), pp. 81-96.

²² Giovanni Luzi, “Lo stato degli studi sulle origini della carta occidentale e la diaspora dei cartai fabrianesi, in *La carta e il Mediterraneo*”, in Faggioni and Mussolin (eds.), pp. 49-63.

²³ Richard L. Hills, *Papermaking in Britain 1488-1988. A Short History*, London, 1988.

²⁴ Donald C. Coleman, *The British Paper Industry 1495-1860*, Oxford, 1959, preface, p. i.

²⁵ Judith A. McGaw, *Most wonderful Machine. Mechanization and Social Change in Berkshire Paper Making, 1801-1885*, Princeton, NJ, 1987.

²⁶ Peter F. Tschudin, *Grundzüge der Papiergeschichte*, Stuttgart, 2007; Federica Peccol (ed.), *La carta. Storia, materiali, tecniche*, Roma, 2012.

²⁷ Louis André, *Machines à papier: Innovation et transformations de l'industrie papetière en France 1798-1860*, Paris, 1996.

As for Spain, I would like to pinpoint two volumes dedicated to very different aspects and moments of the Spanish paper manufacture and industry. José Carlos Balmaceda, a restorer, paper historian and leading expert in watermarks, in his book of 2004, investigates with acuity the contribution of the Genoa papermakers to the development of the Spanish paper manufacture starting from the fifteenth century.²⁸ The study by Miguel Gutiérrez Poch, published in 1999, starting from an extremely rich and skilfully used archival materials, follows the evolution of paper industry in the Anoia area, analysing the transition from hand manufacture to the introduction of machines.²⁹ A professor of economic history at Barcelona University, Gutiérrez has later expanded his research field to the entire Spain covering a time span going from 1750 to 1936.³⁰

Finally, I would like to mention two interesting Italian contributions. The collection of essays *Cinque secoli di carta*, edited by Renzo Corritore and Luisa Piccinno in 2005, dedicated to paper manufacture in the area of Lombardy over a long period of time.³¹ The volume contains, among the others, the paper by Ivo Mattozzi on the dissemination of the Dutch cylinder and its social implications.³² And the monography by Augusto Ciuffetti that analyses the markets and the smuggling of paper raw materials in the Pontifical State between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries is also worth of attention.³³

²⁸ José Carlos Balmaceda, *La contribución genovesa al desarrollo de la manufactura papelera española*, Málaga, 2004.

²⁹ Miquel Gutierrez i Poch, *Full a full. La indústria paperera de l'Anoia (1700-1998): continuïtat i modernitat*, Barcelona, 1999.

³⁰ Miquel Gutierrez i Poch, *La industria papelera española: entre la tradición y el cambio técnico (1750-1936)*, PhD dissertation, U. of Barcelona, 2005.

³¹ Renzo Paolo Corritore and Luisa Piccinno (eds.), *Cinque secoli di carta. Produzione, commercio e consumi della carta nella "Regio Insubrica" e il Lombardia dal Medioevo all'età contemporanea*, Varese, 2005.

³² Ivo Mattozzi, "Alle soglie di una ricerca: il cilindro olandese fra cartiere pontificie, "venete", Piemontesi e lombarde (secondo '700-primò '800)", in Corritore and Piccinno (eds.), pp. 171-195.

³³ Augusto Ciuffetti, *Carta e stracci: Protoindustria e mercati nello Stato pontificio tra Sette e Ottocento*, Bologna, 2013.

I would like to conclude my article with some broader and more precise remarks regarding the recently published collection of essays investigating paper trade in the early modern age, edited by Daniel Bellingradt and Anna Reynolds.³⁴ The volume stems from a conference held in Erlangen in February 2019 and has the well-deserved merit to put at the centre of the research the essential and often understudied topic of the trade of such a strategic material: “Early modern Europe was a paper age – an age of paper production, of paper usage, of paper consumption, and also of paper trading.”³⁵ And it fulfils its task with varied and diverse contributions both geographically and chronologically and with relevant first-hand case studies. We would have expected a greater attention to the Italian case, even in the bibliographical references, which has not always been inattentive to the aspects of the European paper market produced in Italy.

The real strength of this scientific operation is undoubtedly its very broad disciplinary spectrum: the history of books, literature, the history of science, the history of communications, digital humanities, library sciences.³⁶ And, in the pages of the *Introduction*, the economic history.

Only the history of paper was excluded from this list. And it is on this topic that Bellingradt focus his attention on the *Introduction*:

All'interno della storia della carta, tuttavia, l'industria della carta [...] viene solitamente descritta concentrandosi esclusivamente sulle complessità della produzione del materiale. Nell'evidenziare le complessità di questa arte, e in particolare per quanto riguarda le mutevoli tecniche di produzione e ge-

³⁴ Daniel Bellingradt and Anna Reynolds (eds.), *The Paper Trade in Early Modern Europe: Practices, Materials, Networks*, Leiden and Boston, 2021.

³⁵ Daniel Bellingradt, “Introduction”, in Bellingradt and Reynolds (eds.), p. 1.

³⁶ “Working across the fields of book history, literature, the history of science, the history of communication, the digital humanities, and library science, the speakers shared their geographically and chronologically wide-ranging research into the evidence supplied by watermarks, archival records, bookbindings, and large-scale databases” (Daniel Bellingradt and Anna Reynolds, “Preface” to Bellingradt and Reynolds, p. ix).

stione della produzione, è stata creata la conoscenza di un impressionante universo di cartiere, filigrane e formati di carta, e continua ad essere creato all'interno di una vivace comunità accademica. Ma queste attività di ricerca sono diventate scientificamente e accademicamente isolate negli ultimi decenni; il risultato è una sottodisciplina ausiliaria incentrata sulla tecnologia che, nella migliore delle ipotesi, afferma che la carta viene ovviamente venduta dopo la produzione.³⁷

The perspective from which Bellingradt looks at *paper history* is undoubtedly that of paper trade, which is the topic of the volume. Nevertheless, we can only be fully and totally in agreement with the characteristics and the overall limits of studies like this. It is exactly the dissatisfaction I have personally expressed at the beginning of this article. As a scholar of history who is also interested in paper, rather than as a "paper historian" in the common and traditional sense of the word, I welcome the stimulus coming from these remarks and I do wish for a new paper history, revitalized by the historiographic sensibilities that animate – in interrelated research fields – the project "Paper in Motion", that in turns could be further enriched.

I am comforted in this belief by the considerations of an historian like Margaret Jacob:

Il volto umano dell'innovazione industriale è stato oscurato dalle condizioni materiali, ritenute sufficienti a spiegare il progresso dell'economia. Riporta il capitale umano nella storia e improvvisamente menti, libri, conferenze, programmi scolastici diventano centrali nella storia dello sviluppo economico

³⁷ "Within paper history however, then paper industry [...] is usually described by solely focusing on the complexities of the material's manufacture. In highlighting the complexities of this craft, and especially concerning the changing techniques of production and production management, knowledge of an impressive cosmos of paper mills, watermarks, and paper sizes was created, and continues to be created within a lively scholarly community. But this research activities have become academically and scholarly isolated over the last decades; the result is a technology-focused auxiliary sub-discipline that, at best, mentions that paper is of course sold after production". (Bellingradt, "Introduction", in Bellingradt and Reynolds (eds.), pp. 13-14).

occidentale. Ci sono mancati per troppo tempo, e senza attori umani scompaiono la vitalità, la creatività, le domande incessanti e il ragionamento sperimentale di tentativi ed errori. Perché dovremmo impoverire così tanto le nostre storie e renderle molto meno interessanti? Perché trasformare qualcosa di così complesso come lo sviluppo industriale in un'astrazione?³⁸

This is the very question, referred to the object of our study, that I want to repeat in the conclusion: why should we impoverish this history and making it less interesting? Let us bring the human subjectivity back at the centre of the history of paper, making it a *real* history.

In order to proceed in this direction, it could be interesting to carry out a critical analysis of the various “museums of paper” both Italian and European;³⁹ an analysis investigating the documented historical basis used to make choices regarding the staging that must have certainly resorted to oversimplification and spectacularization in order to please a larger number of visitors. An approach to the museum form going beyond the purely aesthetic and artistic aspects, such as showcasing an activity of the past in a purely emotional form.

A more direct contribution to this breakthrough can come from a new season of archival works. If in the past the papers in the archives – both public and private – have been used essentially to

³⁸ “The human face of industrial innovation has been obscured by the material conditions deemed to be sufficient to explain economics progress. Put human capital back into the story and suddenly minds, books, lectures, school curricula become central to the story of Western economic development. We have missed them for far too long, and without human actors the vitality, creativity, relentless questioning, and experimental reasoning of trial and error disappear. Why would we want to so impoverish our histories and make them so much less interesting? Why turn something as complex as industrial development into an abstraction?” (Margaret C. Jacob, *The first Knowledge Economy. Human Capital and the European Economy, 1750-1850*, Cambridge, UK, 2014, p. 224).

³⁹ See the website of the International Association of Paper Historians (<http://www.paperhistory.org/Museums/>, accessed on 07/05/2023); the leading Italian museums include those of Toscolano Maderno, Mele, Pescia, Pioraco, Ascoli Piceno, and Amalfi.

prove the existence of the paper mills, possibly discovering the date of birth and the transfers of property over the years, the time has come to find paper mill archives that allow us to get inside the buildings, to study the manufacturing process in all its scientific, technical, social, human aspects as well as those related to the culture of work. As of today, the archives that allow us to document hand paper manufacturing are not so many: generally, some traces still remain in the production sites that have gone on with machine paper production until today,⁴⁰ or have stopped some decades ago.⁴¹

Two fortunate exceptions, which will enable fruitful research, are the *Archivio storico Magnani*, and the *Archivio Cartiere Miliani Fabriano*, among the leading Italian company archives. The first is kept at the Museum of Paper of Pietrabuona-Pescia (waiting to be definitely moved to the old paper mill Le Carte) and its inventory should be completed by the end of 2023, offering scholars an extremely rich research material starting from the last decades of the eighteenth century up to almost the end on the twentieth century.⁴² An even more relevant new research opportunity is offered by the Miliani papers, an asset inherited and handled by the Fondazione Fedrigoni Fabriano, whose documents starts from 1782. Needless to mention once again the well-known scientific activity of the Fon-

⁴⁰ See for example the recent and innovative volume by Giorgetta Bonfiglio-Dosio and Ilaria Montin, *Carte Fedrigoni. Inventario*, Padua, 2021. Also interesting is the *Archivio delle Cartiere*, which is part of Apice. Archivi della Parola, dell'Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale at the Università degli Studi in Milan (<https://www.apice.unimi.it/collezioni/archivio-delle-cartiere/>, accessed on 07/05/2023).

⁴¹ This is the case of the plants of Cini on the Pistoia mountains (the description of the papers can be found at <https://www.sa-toscana.beniculturali.it/fileadmin/risorse/inventari/CiniPistoia.pdf>, accessed on 07/05/2023). The company history is sketched by Sabbatini, *Di bianco lin*, pp. 352-359. There is also space for an in depth study, not always exhaustive but certainly acute, by Angelo Nesti, *La Cartiera Cini de La Lima (PT): Uno studio archeoindustriale*, Florence, 2005.

⁴² I have personally had the opportunity to experience, some years ago, even though exceptionally and marginally, the potential of the Magnani documents; see Renzo Sabbatini "Donne in cartiera", in *Il lavoro delle donne: Attività femminili in Valdinievole tra Ottocento e Novecento*, Lucca, 2004, pp. 127-152.

dazione in the field of watermarks and of the artistic use of hand-made paper.⁴³ I deem it useful to wish for a new investigation campaign regarding the culture of work. Evidences of the extraordinary potentials of the Fabriano documents were given, at the time, by Andrea Federico Gasparinetti in his bibliographical study on the protagonist of the relaunch of paper making in Fabriano, Pietro Miliani.⁴⁴ As well as by the recent republication of that volume, enriched by an essay by Marianna Astore and the bibliographical notes on Gasparinetti by Giancarlo Castagnari.⁴⁵ Yet, a lot remains to be done and the Archives could give many interesting answers to the questions of scholars studying hand paper-making and the work in the paper mills, researchers who see history as the *science of life lived*.

⁴³ See the essays already quoted, and included in Faggioni and Mussolin (eds.), 2021.

⁴⁴ Andrea Federico Gasparinetti (ed.), *Pietro Miliani fabbricante di carta*, Fabriano, 1963.

⁴⁵ Marianna Astore, *Pietro Miliani mercante e imprenditore della carta*, Fabriano, 2017; see also Giancarlo Castagnari (ed.), *Biografia di Andrea F. Gasparinetti*, Fabriano, 2017.

