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## **WATER-CULTURES PROJECT – The Water Cultures of Italy, 1500-1900 - ERC-2018-Advanced Grant – 833834 - P.I. Prof. DAVID GENTILCORE**

### **Project Outline**

#### *1. General concept*

What would a history of a society look like with water placed at its core? The Water Cultures concept creates a new holistic approach to the study of human interactions with water over time. It enables us to write the history and culture of a given society, the construction of its identities and forms of self-representation, based on its changing relationships with water: the ways of controlling, using and conceiving it; the religious, symbolic and knowledge dimensions it assumes, and the forms of cultural production it leads to. By 'water cultures', I mean both material aspects (such as hydraulic engineering, water capture techniques, legislation, and management) and non-material features (symbolic responses, beliefs and practices, changing knowledge).

The project focuses on Italy, with its unparalleled wealth and variety of archival resources, combined with Italy's rich print history, which can effectively document the ways in which the history of water is a story of political authority and conflict, social hierarchy and material realities, changing medical and scientific knowledge and technological expertise, and religious beliefs and practices. The project's temporal span is 1500-1900, an extended periodisation, in order to track changes and continuities, local variations and regional patterns.

#### *2. Research design*

The Water Cultures concept consists of five inter-related *Streams*, each of which is sub-divided into *Themes*. The Streams have been chosen because: a) they represent the most important elements, approaches and ways of understanding Water Cultures; b) they can inform and shape one another, as they are taken forward; and c) they constitute innovative subject areas in their own right and fill wide knowledge gaps, where the team can make significant contributions both to the individual Themes and towards the broader Water Cultures concept.

Each Theme is assigned to a different member(s) of the Water Cultures team, which will consist of three-four PhDs and three Post-doctoral researcher assistants (PDRAs). As PI, I will be leading from the front, contributing to each of the Streams and guiding the work of the project team.



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### *Stream 1. Springs: from sacred waters to bottled waters*

Focusing on water sources such as springs, this Stream explores the complex overlap between the sacred, the medical and the commercial. It links closely to Stream 2, as well as the hydraulic cultures to be explored in Stream 4.

### *Stream 2. The science and health of water*

This Stream explores how the science and medicine of water changed over the full period, how this affected water use and consumption, and how both responded to Asiatic cholera. It informs all the other Streams.

### *Stream 3. Supplying Italian Cities: Large-Scale Hydrological Infrastructure and Water Management*

The capacity to deliver water made the city possible, as did the ability to discharge waste. This Stream focuses on the city of Naples, in close comparison to other Italian cities, and on the competing demands put on the urban water supply. It braids with Stream 4, on rural areas, and Stream 5, on occupations.

### *Stream 4. The hydraulic landscape: irrigation, land reclamation and rural water management*

Rural Italy, the subject of this Stream, comprised markedly different hydraulic landscapes, which gave rise to a wide variety of mitigation strategies. This extended to small towns, forced to make the most of the water resources available, often with little assistance on the part of the State. It links with Streams 1, 3 and 5.

### *Stream 5. The occupations of water: skills, status and interactions*

This Stream focuses on the range of actors involved in supplying and utilising water and their social and cultural worlds: how they learnt, how they practised and earned a living, how knowledge and skills circulated. It interweaves with Streams 2, on the science of water, and 3 and 4, on urban and rural water systems, respectively.