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THE PURCHASE OF THE MONASTERY
AND CHURCH OF SAN GIULIANO BY THE REDEMPTORISTS

The little church of San Giuliano ai Monti on the Esquiline has strong claims on the affection and veneration of the Redemptorists. It was there that St. Clement Hofbauer and his lifelong friend, Father Thaddeus Hübl, discovered the Congregation towards the end of 1784. They made their novitiate in the small monastery nearby and took their religious vows in the church on 19th March 1785. Their coming on San Giuliano, their few months of novitiate and their return across the Alps are naturally important events, and for that reason may have become a little clouded by sentiment as they have passed into Redemptorist folklore. Some facts, therefore, concerning the occupation of San Giuliano by the Congregation of St. Alphonsus must hold some interest, even if it should be merely to dispel a little of that atmosphere of mythology that so often seems to gather about important scenes.

Their first Roman house proved for the Redemptorists almost from the start a most unhappy venture. It was small and incovenient and never really satisfied the high hopes that had prompted its acquisition. And to make things worse, the purchase imposed on the Congregation a burden that impoverished the other houses in the States of the Church even long after they had lost ownership of San Giu-

liano. Within a few years superiors were looking for someone to blame for the disastrous transaction. There is, in fact, only one good thing that can be said about the foundation. It was in San Giuliano that St. Clement became a Redemptorist. For all its woes, and they were numerous enough, the house and church may claim this as their justification.

The sorry tale of San Giuliano can be discovered principally in two manuscripts in the general archives of the Redemptorists in Rome ¹. The community in the little monastery experienced a long trial of insecurity and poverty as a result of the purchase, which humanly speaking was utterly imprudent. That is the burden of the account that emerges from these sources. We shall add a little information about the church and monastery before their being acquired by the Congregation and their subsequent fate. The narrative is dominated by the figure of Father Francesco De Paola ². It is impossible to avoid emphasising the decline of this extraordinarily gifted character, but that should not be allowed to obscure the fact that his all too human mismanagement provided the occasion for the coming of St. Clement and the marvellous expansion of the institute.

The Church of San Giuliano

The early history of San Giuliano is clouded by legend ³. It was said to have been the first residence of the Carmelite Friars in Rome, in the time of St. Angelo, who suffered martyrdom in Sicily at some time in the 1220's ⁴. Here we are still in the realm of fable, since the story of St. Angelo is, to say the very least, extremely dubious. The most we can draw from scanty information is that the church and its little monastery were occupied by the Carmelites during

¹ One of the manuscripts used in this short study is: F. Kuntz, Commentaria de vita D. Alphonsi et de rebus C.SS.R., futuro eiusdem annalium scriptori diligenter praeparata. It is in twenty folio volumes, and from vol. XII the title becomes Commentaria de hominibus et rebus C.SS.R. The other manuscript used is M. A. Hugues, Additamenta quae spectant ad historiam Congregationis Sanctissimi Redemptoris a prima schismate a. 1780 usque ad perfectam unionem sub Rectore Majore residente Romae, anno 1869, Both manuscripts were compiled towards the end of the nineteenth century.

² For biographical data see F. Minervino, Catalogo dei Redentoristi d'Italia 1732-1841 e dei Redentoristi delle provincie meridionali d'Italia 1841-1969 (Bibliotheca historica C.SS.R. VIII), Rome, 1978, 60-61; Spic. hist., 2 (1954) 18, 22, 245.

³ Information concerning the church and monastery has been drawn from Mariano Armellini, *Le chiese di Roma dal secolo IV al XIX*, ed. Carlo Cecchelli, Rome II, 1940. Armellini was a pupil of the great archeologist, G. B. de Rossi.

⁴ Armellini, II, 1002.

the thirteenth century, probably indeed their very first residence in Rome. They continued to maintain a community there until about 1675, when it was rented by the confraternity of innkeepers and coachmen ⁵. By that time the church had become the focus of a popular devotion. On 7th August each year there was a blessing of water which had a special power against fevers of all kinds. A writer of the seventeenth century offers an explanation of the practice. Among the many relics venerated in the church particular honour was paid to those of St. Julian and St. Albert, to whose prayers was attributed the miraculous appearance of a spring of pure, clear water, whose curative powers healed not only fevers but many other diseases ⁶.

There is in existence a description of the church and monastery shortly before they were occupied by the innkeepers and coachmen. They had probably very little changed by the time, a hundred or so years later, when they passed to the Redemptorists. The description is by the Carmelite Superior General, Matteo de Orlandis, in his report on the *status temporalis* of the year 1662 ⁷.

The church has a choir, a campanile with one bell, sacristy and only one altar. It serves as a cemetery for the religious. The monastery has a courtyard with a little garden and a well. In addition it possesses vineyards and revenues amounting to 140 scudi.

Purchase by the Redemptorists

This property, no longer used by the Carmelites, caught the eye of Father De Paola, President of the Congregation in the Papal States ⁸. The purchase, concluded on 23rd March 1783, was greeted with jubilation even in the Kingdom of Naples, where the Redemptorists were separated from those of Rome. Father Tannoia, biographer of St. Alphonsus, records the event in a mood of evident euphoria ⁹.

The Holy Father Pius VI, knowing what benefit the Congregation brought to the State and how useful it was to the Church, to his own

⁵ ibid.

⁶ The author was a certain Martinelli, whose Roma ex ethnica sacra, published in Rome in 1653, is quoted in Armellini, II, 1316.

⁷ Armellini, II, 1002.

⁸ By a Papal rescript dated 25th September 1780 Father De Paola had been given that title *usque ad exitum causae* on account of the division in the institute occasioned by the *Regolamento* imposed by the Neapolitan court.

⁹ Antonio M. Tannoia, Della vita ed istituto del Venerabile Servo di Dio, Alfonso M. Liguori, vescovo di S. Agata dei Goti e fondatore della Congregazione dei preti missionari del Santissimo Redentore, Naples, Book IV, ch. XXVII, p. 133.

great satisfaction brought our Fathers to Rome, to be exact, to the church of San Giuliano in the neighbourhood of St. Mary Major.

A much less exalted account of the purchase can be gathered from a decision of the Sacred Roman Rota less than a decade after the sale ¹⁰. It seems from the report of the case heard on 6th June 1791 that the Carmelites had been in need of ready money; and the Fathers of the Most Holy Redeemer wishing to have a residence in the city, they discussed the sale of San Giuliano. Two competent assessors were appointed, one by each of the contracting parties, to decide on the price and terms of payment. In this way it was decided that the price for church and monastery with their actual contents together with all the property, garden, vineyards and the rest, should be 7, 175.12 scudi ¹¹.

Terms of payment were similarly decided. Since the buyers did not have on hand the purchase price, it was agreed that they owe the money to the Carmelites of Traspontina at an annual interest of three per cent. The Fathers of the Most Holy Redeemer were to enjoy the benefits of the sale, such as the revenue from the vineyards and other property, but the actual ownership was not to be transferred until the Carmelites were fully satisfied both as to the purchase price and the interest ¹². Each party then approached the Holy Father Pius VI ¹³. The « President of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer » was assured by the Pope that the price and conditions of sale were fair; and the Superior, probably the provincial, of the Carmelites was informed that the contract was duly approved. The instrument of sale was accordingly signed on 23rd March 1783.

Father De Paola at once put to use the house he had been so eager to acquire. The novitiate was at once brought to San Giuliano. In the following year, 1784, Father Giuseppe Landi was appointed novice master, and in October he received the two candidates from northern Europe. Fortune seemed to be smiling on Father De Paola.

¹⁰ The decision in the process for nullification of contract before R.P.D. de Gardoqui on 6th June 1791 was published in Rome in 1792. The report of the decision is of only three pages, which are not numbered. It will be quoted as *Decision of the Rota*.

¹¹ Kuntz, X, 446 also describes the sale, giving the price as 7, 175.07 scudi. Cf. also R. Pittigliani, *Litterae annales de rebus gestis Provinciae Romanae C.SS.R.*, where it is said that the house and church, «abandoned by the Carmelite Friars», was bought by Father De Paola for the «enormous sum of 40,000 lire».

 $^{^{12}}$ Santa Maria in Traspontina, now fronting on the via della Conciliazione, was the principal house of the Carmelites in Rome. The terms of the contract are quoted by Kuntz, X, 446.

¹³ Decision of the Rota.

On 4th July 1783 a rescript of the Holy See appointed him Rector Major and Superior General of the Congregation in the Papal States ¹⁴. Then a brief of Pius VI dated 17th December 1784 assigned to the Superior General a residence in Rome, describing San Giuliano in a lengthy document as the proper seat of the Rector Major and his curia and « head of the Congregation » ¹⁵.

By the time St. Clement and Father Hübl made their profession even Father De Paola had become disillusioned with San Giuliano. He was beginning to look for a scapegoat to carry the blame for what he now recognised was an extremely ill-advised transaction. So much is evident from a statement made to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in February of 1792 by Father Pasquale Lacerra, Father De Paola's Procurator General ¹⁶. According to Father Lacerra the Superior General had unjustly claimed that responsibility for the purchase had rested entirely on the shoulders of Father Isidoro Leggio, Procurator General at the time ¹⁷. This had been as early as 1785, and Father Lacerra suggested that the occasion for this attempt to shift the blame was the General Chapter to be held later in that year, to which Father De Paola did not wish to be answerable for the purchase of the house in Rome.

The most urgent problem and the reason why a scapegoat was needed was that the price of the house and church was clearly beyond the resources of the Congregation. It is hard to render in terms of modern currency that 7, 175 scudi, but it was probably in the vicinity of \$ US 100,000 in money more familiar to the late twentieth century. That does not seem excessive for a monastery and church with vineyards and garden; but the levy imposed on the houses in the Papal States had proved unable to meet even the annual interest ¹⁸. To make things worse, it was no longer a question of dealing with the Fathers of Traspontina. The Carmelites had been in debt for a

¹⁴ Spic. hist., 2 (1954) 19.

¹⁵ ibid., 20. Kuntz, XI, 59-60 quotes the Papal brief.

¹⁶ Father Lacerra made the statement at the request of the Sacred Congregation which had received a complaint from Father De Paola concerning the decline of religious observance among the Redemptorists. The document is reproduced in Hugues, Additamenta, 357 & following. Concerning Father Lacerra biographical data may be found in Spic. hist., 2 (1954) 254; F. Minervino, op. cit., 96-97; S. Schiavone, Biografie dei Redentoristi più ragguardevoli per santità, dottrina e dignità, Pagani, 1938, 215.

¹⁷ For biographical data concerning Father Leggio see *Spic. hist.*, 2 (1954) 19, 254; F. Minervino, *op. cit.*, 101-102. Father Leggio was blamed by Tannoia for supporting the ambitions of Father De Paola. There seems to be some case for reassessing the evidence.

¹⁸ Kuntz, XVIII, 411.

similar amount to a man named Dionigi, and at the time of the sale with his consent they had transferred to him the debt of the Redemptorists to themselves ¹⁹. Understandably enough, Dionigi and his family continued to press for payment until the debt was finally cancelled some forty or so years later.

That diligent chronicler, Father Kuntz, described the purchase of San Giuliano as an act of « extraordinary imprudence and rashness » ²⁰. Nothing seemed to be right about the whole sorry affair. It needed no more than a short experience to show that the house was not really suitable in any case. The half dozen cells could not have provided adequate quarters for the Superior General and his four consultors as well as for the novitiate. Father Landi took his novices to Scifelli in 1786 ²¹, and within a few years Father De Paola himself was living in Benevento before he finally settled more or less permanently in Frosinone. A small community was left in San Giuliano to live in poverty. When the sale was challenged in the Rota it was said that dissatisfaction with the contract had been expressed as early as 1788 ²². Father De Paola was, in fact, soon reduced to the extremity of attempting anything to be freed of his burden of debt.

Process against the Carmelites

In the beginning of 1791 the Carmelites were charged by the Fathers of the Most Holy Redeemer that the sale of San Giuliano had been usurious. This unpleasant accusation was considered in meetings of their general consultors on 7th and 10th February 1791 ²³. The decision was that the case be referred to the Rota and an advocate be briefed to defend their interests.

When the case was heard on 6th June 1791 the charge was no longer usury; but the Redemptorists argued a case which was described in the report as *odiosa quidem et aspera*. The charge now was that the contract was invalid from the beginning and that the Fathers of Traspontina had imposed terms that were excessively harsh. The process was heard by the Spanish *auditor*, Antonio Francisco Gardo-

¹⁹ ibid.

²⁰ ibid.

²¹ Kuntz, X, 447.

²² Decision of the Rota.

 $^{^{23}}$ The Book of Consultations is in the general archives of the Carmelites, Rome, II, c. o., II, 2(2) f. 322 r&v.

qui 24, and it does not seem to have greatly exercised the court in coming to a decision.

The first point made by the Redemptorists was that the church, being a sacred place, should not have been included in the sale. The simple reply to that claim was that Pius VI had approved the sale, and it was unthinkable that he should have countenanced simony. Then the assertion that the Carmelites had imposed excessively harsh terms was summarily answered by pointing out that the terms had been decided by the two assessors, one of whom had been appointed by the purchasers. The final attack also failed. Two new assessors were produced, who had a new sale price to propose; but their criteria were unacceptable to the court, the report of the case remarking with evident astonishment that they had even tried to put a price on the cement in the building. The decision was unanimous that there were no grounds for the contract to be annulled.

Subsequent History of San Giuliano

The futile attempt to upset the contract of sale had been a move dictated by desperation. The houses in the Papal States were in dire poverty, in no small measure on account of the purchase, and it seems that the little community in San Giuliano itself suffered more than most. Father Hugues, when he came to live in Santa Maria in Monterone, discovered among other interesting documents an appeal addressed to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars by the Fathers of San Giuliano early in 1792. It included a complaint against the Superior General ²⁵.

After Father De Paola, in his own name and with money belonging to the Congregation, had bought two vineyards, this house, which was suffering grave poverty, wished to have their revenues assigned to it, but in vain. For that reason the members of the house of San Giuliano apply to the Sacred Congregation for assistance.

This pitiful plea moved the Sacred Congregation to apply to Father Lacerra as Procurator General for clarification. His reply identifies the two vineyards in question ²⁶. One was situated on Monte Ma-

²⁴ For information concerning Gardoqui see Emmanuele Cerchiani, Capellani Papae et Apostolicae Sedis auditores causarum sacri palatii apostolici, Rome, II, 1920, 269-270.

²⁵ Hugues, Additamenta, 363.

²⁶ ibid., 363-364. Unfortunately, Father Hugues does not quote the dates of the

rio and had been bought for 1000 scudi: the other had been purchased by Father Leggio for the Superior General from the house of San Giuliano itself.

One reason for the extremely eccentric behaviour of Father De Paola (to put it as kindly as possible) was that he had become unsure of his future in view of the fact that it was expected that the houses of the Papal States would soon be reunited with those of Naples. That is why, in Father Lacerra's opinion, after the San Giuliano community had complained he had sold the vineyard on Monte Mario ²⁷. It would appear that the Superior General was badly shaken at the prospects of losing his authority and being made answerable to somebody else.

The Redemptorists were, in fact, reunited by a General Chapter held in Pagani in 1793 ²⁸. The new Rector Major elected by the Chapter was Father Pietro Paolo Blasucci, a cousin of Father De Paola ²⁹. Under the new regime the former superior in the Papal States was kindly treated. A Papal brief of 1794 gave him the title of Exgeneral with the right to vote in future General Chapters, and in 1797 a rescript of the Holy See named him Vicar of the Roman province ³⁰. By that time more trouble was imminent, and the unfortunate house of San Giuliano was to suffer rather more than the others, one has reason to suspect.

The troops of the new and aggressive French republic invaded Italy, and in 1798 marched on Rome. The communities of Gubbio and Spello, both foundations made by Father De Paola, sought refuge in San Giuliano. Their respite was brief, since when the French occupied Rome with little opposition the monastery and church were confiscated ³¹. This first contact of Rome with the Revolution, which was changing the face of Europe, did not last long. After the arrest and death in exile of Pius VI the new regime of Napoleon was conciliatory towards the Church. Pius VII, elected in Venice, was al-

documents, but it is easy enough to identify them as in 1792, in which year there was considerable correspondence between the Redemptorists and the Sacred Congregation concerning the poverty of the houses and the behaviour of the Superior General.

²⁷ ibid., 366,

²⁸ Acta integra Capitulorum Generalium C.SS.R. ab anno 1749 usque ad annum 1894, Rome, 1899, p. 85-186.

²⁹ For biographical data on Father Blasucci see Spic. hist., 2 (1954) 26-27; F. Minervino, op. cit., 26; S. Schiavone, op. cit., 216-226.

³⁰ Spic. hist., 2 (1954) 21-22.

³¹ R. Pittigliani, op. cit., 9.

lowed to return to Rome, and the confiscated properties were restored to the Redemptorists. The community of San Giuliano returned to their life of poverty and the ever-pressing debt to Dionigi. It was not long before they were once more rendered homeless. During the first years of the new century relations between Napoleon and Pius VII became increasingly strained until with a great show of defiance by a decree of 17th May 1809 the emperor annexed what little remained of the Papal States. Once again San Giuliano was confiscated and its long suffering community evicted, this time never to return ³².

The government lost no time in disposing of the property by auction ³³. The purchaser of the monastery and church, presumably with what was left of the vineyards and gardens, was Giovanni Pelucchi. He in turn sold the property to Canon Marziano Manfredi, from whom it passed as a bequest to a certain Signor Michelotti. Finally, in 1848 Michelotti sold the venerable buildings to the Princess Odescalchi, who installed in them a community of Basilian nuns from Poland. The story of San Giuliano ends in 1874, when the church and monastery were destroyed in the process of constructing the present Piazza Vittorio Emmanuele. For the Redemptorists nothing was left of the Roman house, founded with such high hopes, but that miserable debt to Dionigi.

The last few years before the Redemptorists lost San Giuliano saw the rapid decline of Father De Paola. On the whole his confreres, and in particular those of the Papal States, had been heroically patient with the growing eccentricities of the Exgeneral. His conduct in the end became intolerably irrational; and unhappily it added to the trials of the small community of San Giuliano.

The change for the worse became more marked after the General Chapter convoked according to the constitutions by the Rector Major, Father Blasucci, in 1802. It was in this context that Father Hugues remaked that Father De Paola never really accepted the authority of Father Blasucci ³⁴. During the Chapter he had been quite acquiescent, making no difficulty about signing the *Acta*; but immediately afterwards he returned to his previous ways of buying up properties in his own name. His conduct became at length so outrageous that Father Lacerra, now consultor to Father Blasucci, once

³² ibid.

 $^{^{33}}$ The subsequent story of San Giuliano is taken from Armellini, op. $\it cit., 111, 1002.$

³⁴ Hugues, Additamenta, 12,

again approached the Holy See, this time in a *supplica* addressed to Pius VII in the name of the Fathers of the Congregation ³⁵.

The burden of the complaint, naturally, was that the behaviour of the Vicar had become quite scandalous. One point was singled out as particularly offensive to the petitioners, namely a sworn declaration made by Father De Paola to the effect that revenues from his various properties were his own personal income and should not be used by the house of Frosinone to pay the debt owing to Dionigi ³⁶. This was particularly odious, as it was pointed out, since the community of Frosinone had been for some time providing for Father De Paola and for the Brother who was his personal attendant. Father Lacerra had earlier informed the Holy See that the debt, which figured so prominently in all these complaints, was entirely due to the fact that in the first place Father De Paola had acquired San Giuliano without the required consultation ³⁷.

The outcome was inevitable and followed quickly. On 26th December 1807 Father Blasucci formally expelled his cousin from the Congregation, a decision which was confirmed by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on 11th February 1808 and even by the royal court of Naples a few days later ³⁸.

Poor Father De Paola, now quite beyond the reach of reason, refused to acknowledge the sentence of expulsion so solemnly promulgated or to leave Frosinone. His personal friend, the Bishop of Veroli, asked the Fathers not to disturb him, and he continued to live in Frosinone until his death on 8th November 1814. Father Blasucci showed himself compassionate, writing to Father De Paola's confessor that he was not to disturb the old man's conscience by insisting that he was no longer a Redemptorist ³⁹. The final commendably humane gesture was to bury the Exgeneral with all solemnity in the church of Santa Maria della Grazia.

The End of the Debt

By the time Father De Paola died at the end of 1814 many things had changed. Napoleon had been defeated; Pius VII was back

³⁵ The supplica is given in Hugues, Additamenta, 373-379.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 377.

³⁷ ibid., 357.

³⁸ Spic. hist., 2 (1954, 22.

³⁹ Hugues, Additamenta, 384.

in Rome after his long exile; and the Redemptorists were putting themselves into better shape after the turbulent years of the *Regolamento* followed by the French occupation. Along with the other signs of change, in 1815 there was a new Roman foundation. The annalist of the Roman province says that the church of Santa Maria in Monterone was acquired « in place of San Giuliano, which had been sold by the Franch government » ⁴⁰. The vice-procurator general, which meant in effect the man who was doing all the business of the Congregation, had been since 1803 Father Vincenzo Giattini ⁴¹. Since the loss of San Giuliano he had been living for the most part in rented lodgings. It was at the direction of the Holy See that the former Mercedarian house and church were purchased as a more suitable dwelling for the procurator.

One of the most urgent matters facing Father Giattini, especially after he became Procurator General in 1817, was the debt still owing on account of the lost house. Father Kuntz relates that the Dionigi family were pressing for a final settlement 42. And who could blame them? They had surely been waiting long enough — since 1783 for payment by the Redemptorists and for some time even before that by the Carmelites. Father Giattini arranged things very much in the way attempted in Father De Paola's time, but this time much more efficiently and more rationally administered. Each of the houses in the States of the Church was assessed for its share in the payment. By November 1820 all except the houses of Scifelli and Gubbio had met their commitments. The diligent procurator set about making up what remained, some 1515.50 scudi, by sales and a generous contribution by the house of Monterone. The Dionigi family were at last satisfied, and all that remained was for the houses of Scifelli and Gubbio to settle their more fraternal debt to Monterone 43. A marginal note to Father Kuntz's account of the purchase of San Giuliano states that the debt was not finally paid until Father Adam Pfab was the Roman provincial, which would have been well after the middle of the century 44. One may be sure that Father Kuntz was echoing the

 $^{^{40}}$ R. Pittigliani, op. cit., 10. Concerning the foundation of S. Maria in Monterone see Spic. hist., 8 (1960) 40-65.

⁴¹ Biographical data on Father Giattini in *Spic. hist.*, 2 (1954) 250-251; F. Minervino, op. cit., 86.

⁴² Kuntz, XVIII, 411.

⁴³ ibid., 412.

⁴⁴ Kuntz, X, 446. Father Adam Pfab, a Bavarian by birth, had been in Italy since 1847, when he was appointed to teach theology in the studendate in Modena, then subject to the Austrian province. He was Roman provincial from 1865 to 1887.

thoughts of his earlier confrères when, after relating how the Dionigi family had been finally paid, he added a fervent *Laus Deo!*

For those who had to live there or carry its burdens the house of San Giuliano could scarcely have held many happy memories. From the start it had not been a success, either as a novitiate or as the residence of the general curia. And it had always been desperately poor, overwhelmed by debt. Most of all, the Redemptorists of the Papal States must have carried sad recollections of the seemingly endless bitter disagreements with their superior, leading to repeated recourse to the Holy See. It is only from a comfortable distance that one can appreciate the one immense blessing that compensates for so much heartache. It was in San Giuliano in October 1784 that St. Clement Hofbauer and Father Thaddeus Hübl were admitted to the Congregation; and it was there on 19th March 1785 that they made their religious profession.

Perhaps the most regrettable aspect of the affairs of San Giuliano was the sad decline they occasioned in Father De Paola. Father Kuntz shows admirable humanity when he reports the Exgeneral's end; and his remarks fittingly sum up what San Giuliano means to Redemptorists ⁴⁵. After a detailed account of the obsequies and of the tributes paid to Father De Paola he summarises the merits of the deceased as a preacher and writer ⁴⁶, and declares that Father De Paola remains « one of the greatest ornaments of the Congregation ». And he concludes: « To his honour it must be said that he was the instrument used by the Lord to carry the standard of our institute beyond the limits of Italy [...] by the hands of Blessed Clement Hofbauer and Father Thaddeus Hübl ». It was in San Giuliano that the *insignis propagator* received the banner of the Most Holy Redeemer.

⁴⁵ Kuntz, XVII, 354-361.

⁴⁶ He commends especially Father De Paola's *Grandezze di Maria*, 2 volumes, published in Foligno in 1803 and several times reprinted in the course of the nine-teenth century.