

THE HERALDRY REVIEW

ON THE ROYAL AND ARAGONESE ORIGINS OF THE PATERNÒ OF SICILY

In the last years of the reign of King Frederick III and under King Martin the Younger, there lived in Catania a man who by his learning and his power stood out among the courtiers who at that time thrived in that most distinguished of cities, the tutor of the Kingdom. He was none other than Giovanni de Paternoy the feudal lord of the baronies of Murgo, Nicchiara and Burgio and indeed of many other lands. From the time of King Frederick he was styled a *Familiar of the King* and he was charged with the most important offices of the Court; but his greatest influence was only revealed in the time of King Martin. No honour, no privilege was enough for Giovanni: diploma after diploma showered on him: today it was a castle, tomorrow a gift of lands, that the generous Queen Maria and her happy consort Martin bestowed on their favourite.

The chronicles relate that Giovanni had his palace in the Foro Lunare¹ which as everyone knows was at that time an open space used for games and tournaments and it is said that the King and his Court would watch these spectacles from the terraces of his home.

One hundred years later, Alvaro Paternò, who lived at the Court of Ferdinand the Catholic, related these facts and presented to the King an enamelled medal on which figured King Martin, saying that it had been a present given by Queen Maria to his great-grandfather Giovanni. It is certain that in the first years of the Fifteenth Century² Giovanni died, laden with honours and riches and leaving very numerous descendants.

In later times the first person who attempted to relate the historical genealogy of the Paternoy family was the Alvaro already mentioned, who was claimed by some authors to have been a Roman Senator (though there appears to be no evidence that he ever took up such a role), who in his Will of the year 1522 detailed all his relatives and ancestors and went as far as the aforementioned Giovanni (whom he called the Elder) as the earliest person from whom the family descended.

¹ This house continued to stand until the earthquake of 1693 and was adjacent to the Collegiate Church. It was thus the possession by inheritance of the family of Valle, the Barons of Miraglia, who later sold it to the Stella family, the Barons of Annunziata. The arms of the family were to be observed in many parts of the house (Vide : Gioeni - The History of the House of Paternò, XVII Century, Codex Raddusa).

² According to some, 1401.

When later historians came to delight in research into the origins of their heroes and when it became the fashion for every great Sicilian family to be obliged to descend from the Normans, the same was done for the House of Paternò as was for other great families : a Norman origin was fabricated with the apparent weak support of some very dubious documents.

To discover such an origin for the family of Paternò was not in fact difficult: the diplomas of the Counts of Paternò always bore at the bottom of the page the inscription *de Paternione*, a fairly common surname at that time. They were to be found as witnesses to public contracts³, or as notaries at the court of Manfred Maletta⁴ or as judges in Catania⁵.

Thus it was concluded that the family of Paternò descended from the Normans and that lying knight Mugnos was in complete agreement in his book "*The Glories of the Lords Paternò*". He certainly did not abandon the notion of their Norman descent but, as he had been struck by the identity of the arms of the Paternò with those of the House of Aragon, he related how a certain Paternò after prolonged struggles against the Angevins in Sicily fled to Aragon where he received in gift from the King the Kingdom of Minorca⁶. Yet meanwhile in Catania at the beginnings of the Fourteenth Century there is no longer to be found a single *Paternione* but fifty years later appears that Giovanni whose origins are unknown !

Mugnos declared that it was obvious that this Giovanni, a descendant of the Kings of Minorca, came to Sicily where having established a connection with the already extinct and highly important Paternò himself became rich and re-established the House !

In his day Mugnos imposed his genealogical dreams on a credulous public and he duly confirmed this origin. The House of Paternò, like an infinity of others in Sicily⁷, accepted it unquestioningly.

In the mid-Eighteenth Century, when in Catania and indeed throughout Sicily there began to be cultivated a passion for archaeology, stones and inscriptions were discovered everywhere which bore witness to a *Gens Paterna* in Sicily in Roman times. Father Lupi⁸, an expert on the Catacombs in Rome, discovered innumerable Paternò and displayed them in his many published works, debating whether they belonged to the Gens Julia or the

³ Catania, Benedictine Archive (1122, I, 63, G 1) etc.

⁴ Ibid. (1294, I, 63, E 20), (1297, I, 60, H 27), (1298, I, 63, E 21) etc.

⁵ Ibid. (1304, I, 60, H 37) etc.

⁶ It would have been too cheeky to say the Kingdom of Minorca, because this all too obviously belonged to James, the second child of the Conqueror !

⁷ Vide Portal, Noble Sicilian Families of French Origin, 1892, Bari.

⁸ Lupus, Epitaphium Severae Martyris, illustr. - Chap. III

Gens Nonia or even the Gens Ovinia. Then the Prince of Biscari in Catania discovered yet more stones on which was mention of the Paternò as consuls or praetors. Suddenly archaeologists and historians tried to out-do each other. The Prince of Torremuzza⁹ wrote about the Paternò family; just as did the Abbé Sestini¹⁰ and Count Caetani, curators of the Biscari Museum; Lombardo-Buda¹¹, the Prince of Biscari's librarian, drafted a paper on the subject; Abbé Amico, Giacinto Paternò and yet many more spoke of it and wrote of it in their works.

Thus you would think that Mugnos had been dethroned : but not a bit of it ! There was yet some kind soul that concluded that there had been a *Gens Julia Paterna* which had travelled from Rome into Gaul¹². This sorted out the whole problem ! The House of Paternò of Sicily and Naples, after having lived in Rome in the first years of the Empire, then divided itself into two branches, one in Gaul and the other in Sicily. At the time of the Normans the branch in Gaul came to reconnect itself once more with that in Sicily and so on and so forth, as has already been said, until our own times.

About the origins of the Family of Paternò this much has always been believed and in fact it is believed to this day. Yet this fantastic edifice crumbles at the slightest whiff of critical review.

Last year, having undertaken studies relating to this subject, we noticed that this claim to Norman origins fell apart. As we have already said, these people called *de Paternione*, instead of being *blood relatives* and *familiars of the King*, were witnesses and notaries in private documents of a Count of Paternò, a most powerful lord but nevertheless himself a mere vassal of the Crown. Thus having to set aside whatsoever Norman origin and only having now to establish the source of these *de Paternione*, we set to work with all speed : yet we could find not a single document that was earlier than the Fourteenth Century. We know precisely the descent of the Paternò of today from that *Giovanni the Elder*, their common source. Between him and the last of the *de Paternione* there is a gap of fifty or more years that we have not been able to bridge. The documents identify to us no progenitor for this person.

But one thing does stand out in our researches: the arms of the House of Paternò are in every respect identical with those of the House of Aragon with the addition of the azure bendlet. But must

⁹ Castellus, *Siciliae etc. veterum inscript.* - Cl. VII, n. XII.

¹⁰ Sestini, *Letters written from Sicily*, (Florence 1779-84), *Descriptions of the Museum of H.E. the Prince of Biscari*, etc. (Florence 1776 and Leghorn 1787).

¹¹ Lombardo-Buda, *Eulogy on Ignazio II P.C. Prince of Biscari* (Catania 1787).

¹² Fleetwood, *Inscript. Antiq. Sylloge.*, Scaliger, p.229; Graevius, tom. II, p. 608-609-632; Pliny, bk. III, ch. 4; Strabo, *Geograph.*, Bk. IV; Ptolemy, *Geograph.*, part II.

we content ourselves with the banal logic set forth by the never too praised Chevalier Mugnos in order to explain this ?

We were in this state of uncertainty when arose the opportunity to consult Zurita's Annals of Aragon¹³; in this book is quoted a passage from the Aragonese Chronicles of Jerome Alonia in which he tells that in the year 1287 the Infant Don Miguel (a son of Pedro, Lord of Ayerbe) had acquired various castles, amongst which that of Paternoy.

We had already known, thanks to many authors¹⁴ and above all from the writings of the learned Ferdinando Paternò, Court Orator of Philip II, that in Aragon from 1300 to 1600 a family called *de Paternoy* had flourished. This family laid claim to descent from the reigning house and knew that one of its members, in the second half of the Fourteenth Century, had travelled to Sicily and had there established his family¹⁵.

Moreover one Giacinto Paternò y Miravella Gravina y Jurado in his petition to be admitted to the Order of Alcantara (1617) gave proof of his descent from the House of Paternoy (State Archives, Madrid - Proofs of Alcantara, no. 147).

In respect of this family Paternoy, once very well known in Spain, we have found the assertion of the *Real Academia de la Historia*¹⁶ that it is by now extinct.

Intrigued by the matter indicated above of the purchase of Paternoy made by Don Miguel, we consulted various history books on this matter and were able to discover as follows :

James the Conqueror, King of Aragon, of Valencia (1238) and of Majorca (1239), had three wives. The first was Eleanor of Castile, by whom he had no heirs; the second was Yolanda of Hungary by whom he had : Peter (who became King of Sicily), James (who became King of Majorca) and four daughters, one of whom became Queen of Castile and another Queen of France. The third wife was morganatic although of the most noble blood: she was called Theresa de Vidaure. By her he had two sons, James and Peter¹⁷. The King also had various natural children of whom the most important were Pedro-Fernandez, Lord of Hajar¹⁸, and Fernan-Sanchez de la Aubillona¹⁹.

¹³ Tom. I, bk. IV, ch. 126.

¹⁴ Minutolo, Grand Priory of Messina, bk. VIII, p.246; Abela, Description of Malta, bk. IV, not. III, pp. 449-548; Mugnos, *Theatro geneal.* etc.

¹⁵ Paternò Ferdinando, *Raddusa Codices*.

¹⁶ Letter of the 11th April 1908 to Marchese G. Paternò di Sessa.

¹⁷ Le Sage, *Atlante cronologico*, transl. Albrizzi, 1843, pp.43 & 98, only refers to a single son of Theresa de Vidaure of whom he does not know the name and of whom he say "founder of the Houses of Xerica, Paternoy, Ayerbe, of the Counts of Simari, the Marquises Grotteria, Princes of Cassano and Dukes of Alessano".

¹⁸ Zurita, *Annals*, bk. IV, ch. 123 - This Peter was the ancestor of the Dukes of Hajar and Counts of

By his Will *signed by his own hand and sealed with his seal*²⁰, King James declared the two sons by Theresa de Vidaure to be in the line of succession to the Throne and awarded to James, the elder of them, *the town of Xerica with its fortress and barony in the Kingdom of Valencia* and to Peter *the town, castle and barony of Ayerbe with other places in the Kingdom of Aragon*.

Undoubtedly their two elder brothers can have been scarcely content with these provisions which virtually created two further sovereigns within their states which were already the matter of sufficient contention between them.

When King Peter died in 1285, both James just as much as the Lord of Ayerbe began to put up active resistance to their nephew Alfonso. In 1287 together with a brother of the King, Blasco de Alagon, and many other nobles, they threatened an uprising but were defeated and various concessions made to them were revoked²¹.

Thus the King gave the barony of Ayerbe to Blasco Ximenes, Lord of Acheblas, *from whom descend the knights of the line of Ayerbe, who are not of the Royal Family*²².

A son of the Lord of Xerica married Beatrice de Lauria, daughter of the famous Admiral Roger, and their son married Mary of Anjou, a daughter of Charles II, herself widow of the King of Majorca²³.

Peter, son of the Baron of Ayerbe, married Yolanda a granddaughter of the Emperor of Greece and they had two daughters, Constance and Mary; but in 1313 he sought a divorce in order to have an heir²⁴.

This is what we know in respect of the origins of the Paternò in the House of Aragon. We shall now consider the arms of the House of Paternò. These are : Or four pallets gules (namely, of Aragon) a bendlet azure.

What meaning has this bendlet on the arms ? All heraldists²⁵ are in agreement that the bendlet serves to indicate a mark of cadency. It is for this reason that the Kings of Majorca, an offshoot of the House of Aragon, placed on their shield a bendlet azure²⁶, and for

Belchite.

¹⁹ Miedes, History of Don James King of Aragon, etc. 1, XX, ch. XV.

²⁰ Montpellier, the 26th August 1272 - Vide Miedes, op.cit. id.

²¹ Zurita, op.cit., p.304.

²² Zurita, op.cit., p.311, the 21st January 1287 - It is not improbable that these are the same *Ayerbe de Aragon* who would later be ennobled in Messina and who became the Princes of Cassano, Dukes of Alessano etc.

²³ Zurita, op.cit., 1, IV, ch.104.

²⁴ Zurita, op.cit., 1, IV, ch.105.

²⁵ Vide Crollanza, Heraldic Encyclopaedia - "Filetto" - ... "it indicates a junior branch of a family".

²⁶ Larousse, Encyclopaedia - "Balearics".

this reason also the families of Ayerbe, Xerica, Paternoy, indeed, used the Aragonese arms distinguished by the bendlet !

Otherwise, would it have been conceivable that the Kings of Sicily and Aragon would have tolerated at their Court that other people bore their own arms who had no right to them ? All the more because the arms of Paternò cannot be arms of *augmentation*, because arms of augmentation never occupy the whole field, but only a quarter of the same. And yet if they were able to take up the whole shield, we must always exclude the possibility that they were an augmentation since the Kings of Sicily would not have been able to allow that their own arms²⁷, or a part of their arms (Aragon or Swabia), however, never that used contemporaneously by another family and yet indicative of a particular mark of consanguinity.

From this we conclude therefore that the arms used by Giovanni Paternò and by all his descendants are arms *by right*, true arms, *inherited arms*, and not a grant.

Perhaps over time new studies will give us the chance to document this hypothesis: we hope so.

In the meanwhile we shall be grateful if students of our paper, particularly in Spain and Sicily, are able to help us at all in our undertaking.

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²⁷ Quarterly per saltire Aragon and Swabia.