

The von Paar Project. The Origins of Another European Postal Family

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ABSTRACT

English

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Basing on documents in local archives, mainly in Bergamo and Parre, we have tried to reconstruct the rise and growth of the Belleboni family, particularly the branch coming from Grazio (son of Giovanni) called "Barone", and from his son Martino and his descendants.

Through contacts with, and the later transfer to, the lands of Ferdinand of Habsburg, some members of this family of merchants were able to organize a working and powerful postal service in those lands. For such activity they were granted titles of nobility, reaching the title of Princes of the Holy Roman Empire. In their name "von Paar" they always kept a direct link with their place of origin: Par – that is, Parre.

Italiano

Il progetto von Paar. Le origini di un'altra famiglia postale europea

Sulla base di documenti tratti da vari archivi locali, soprattutto quelli di Bergamo e di Parre, si è inteso ricostruire l'insediarsi, l'affermarsi e l'espandersi del ramo Belleboni discendente da Grazio, figlio di Giovanni, soprannominato "Barone", e particolarmente di suo figlio Martino e dei suoi discendenti.

Alcuni membri di questa famiglia di mercanti, mediante contatti e poi il trasferimento nelle terre di Ferdinando d'Asburgo, vi seppero organizzare un efficiente e potente servizio postale e per questa

attività acquisirono titoli nobiliari, fino a quelli di Principi del Sacro Romano Impero, conservando nel nome "Paar" il legame diretto con il paese di Par, cioè Parre.

Deutsch

Das von Paar-Projekt. Die Ursprünge einer weiteren europäischen Postfamilie

Auf der Grundlage von Quellen aus regionalen Archiven (Bergamo, Parre) werden die Geschicke des Belleboni-Zweigs dargestellt. Dieser nahm seinen Ausgang von Grazio, Sohn des Giovanni/Johann, genannt „Barone“, und seinem Sohn Martin.

Einige Mitglieder dieser Kaufmannsfamilie verstanden es, durch den Aufbau entsprechender personeller Beziehungen und durch die Verlegung ihres Wirkens in die österreichischen Erbländer unter Ferdinand I. einen gut funktionierenden Postdienst aufzubauen. Sie erwarben auch Adelstitel – bis hin zu „Fürst des Heiligen Römischen Reichs“. Im Familiennamen „Paar“ blieb der Nexus zum Ort der Herkunft, Parre, erhalten.

CONTRIBUTO

English

Through this paper we try to prove another hypothesis, different from the one we will later refer to, on the origins of the noble von Paar family, some members of which became protagonists of postal history as Post Masters of Ferdinand of Habsburg and his successors in the Habsburg Hereditary Lands.

Evidences of the link between the village of Parre (near Bergamo) and the members of the princely von Paar house are centuries long: besides oral testimonies, well known to local historians are documents like the plea Registrar Cominelli sent on July 21 1799 to the noblewoman marquise Terzi of Bergamo, a relative of the von Paar family, on behalf of the community of Parre. Cominelli asked her to protect Parre, *quel paese in cui ebbero la culla i loro benemeriti Antenati* (that village that was the cradle of their well-deserving Ancestors), maybe against possible retaliations from Austro-Russians.

Antonio Tiraboschi, a famous scholar from Bergamo, who studied Parre and its traditions for a long time, in 1881 tried unsuccessfully to get in touch with the archivist of the von Paar family in Vienna. Later, in 1930s, many a local witnesses saw Prince Alfons, father of the late, homonymous, Prince, visit the house Cominelli, in lower Parre (Parre Sotto), long considered his family birthplace.

The inspiration to resume our research on a wider and more precise scale came from an article Roberto Bassi-Rathgeb. His study offered interesting elements regarding the genealogy of the Belleboni family from Casnigo and Parre, a family he clearly indicated as the ancestors of the von Paar family (1). Relationship between Parre and the von Paar was again looked for and restored, and on May 2002 prince Alfons, with his brother count Karl and his sister countess Eleonora were happily received by the inhabitants of Parre.

After such successful approach with the von Paar, we started looking for historically reliable contributions in order to better understand the migration of such noble merchants from Parre at the

Austrian imperial service. Yet in German, Italian, local books, articles, and quotations on the *Origines* of the von Paar family the “BARONI BELLEBONI” were always described as having been given a *castellum et arcem cum oppido* by Frederick I, Barbarossa, in the 12th century. According to these texts, Parre for centuries was a feudal domain of the Belleboni family.

On the contrary, systematic researches, strictly referring to archival documents kept by different institutions from Bergamo and the Council of Parre, lead us to take a different path.

[Slide 2] Parre/Par is a small village on a wide, sunny plateau on the right bank of the river Serio, near Bergamo, at 650 mt above sea level. It has a thousands-year-long history, dating as back as the bronze age. Archaeological remains (and Roman texts) tell us of Parra, a small yet lively community, involved in sheep farming, mining, metallurgy, and commerce. In a notarial deed written in 928 we read *In vicis et fundis Parre* (in the village and lands of Parre). *Villa di Parre* is mentioned in two decrees (1156 and 1183) of Frederick I, Barbarossa, in which the Bishop of Bergamo was granted (and later confirmed) concession of territories, including the Seriana valley.

[Slide 3] In the middle ages Parre was a small community of shepherds and farmers, a parish in the *plebania* of Clusone, the main town of the area. With a 12th century Romanic church, and formally raised to Commune in the early 1200, Parre depended on big Bergamo families of landlords, mainly the Bonghi, or Bonghi, family. Many were the troubles, mainly caused by debts or non-payments. Yet in the town there were examples of distinguished people from Parre: among them, “Giovanni Gatussi de Parr”, living in the *vicinia* of San Lorenzo, the founder of the medieval hospital of Sant’Antonio, as well as notaries and important priests.⁽ⁱⁱ⁾

The borders of the Commune, as well as those of the whole territory of Bergamo, were defined during the rule of Gian Galeazzo Visconti through surveys made in the presence of the consuls representing the communities and the appointed notaries. The borders of Parre were defined on November 9, 1392.⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ Such borders lasted until 1927. During the Domain of the Serenissima, the population remained between 700 and 800 souls.

After the 14th century struggles between Guelphs and Ghibellines, and the continuous rivalries among the Seignories, Parre, as well as all Communes of the Seriana valley, in 1428 voluntarily submitted to the Most Serene Republic of Venice. Yet, such submission would not avoid troops passing through the territory of Bergamo, alliances being destroyed, new balances being established, new personalities emerging: some of them would gradually attain power and prestige inside the Commune and the territory.

As far as we have so far discovered through thorough research, the name Bellebon or Belliboni, ancestors of the von Paar family, appears in Parre in a deed drawn up on August 11, 1245, with which Peterbono Belliboni and others pay a rent to the Bonghi brothers ^(iv) – many Belliboni are again mentioned in other documents of the late 1200 and of 1300 in Vertova, Gazzaniga, Gandino, and Clusone. ^(v)

Some members of the Belleboni family were active merchants trading woollen clothes, cereals, wine, livestock and pasture, buying and selling landed properties – merchants with wide interests and important relationships with other rising families.

[Slide 4] Around 1440 Grattus or Gratius, i.e. Grazio Belleboni, stated as son of the late Giovanni, and known as BARONE ^(vi), took up permanent residence in lower Parre with his emancipated son Martino. ^(vii) On August 28, 1452 Grazio, a.k.a. Barone, emancipated the other sons as well: Ambrogio, Galeazzo and Giovanni (names which seem to show solid relations with the Milan sphere), and shared his

properties with a formal public deed. Yet in almost all documents (account books, minute books) the names of these sons are not followed by the patronymic Grattii or Grati, but by the nickname Baroni.^(viii) We have to remember that the nickname *Barone* has the same meaning of the German *Freiherr* (baron, but also free man) and was often used for the members of other local families, for example Gandino. But in the case of the Bellebonis of Parre a simple nickname, *dicti Baroni*, was considered as a title of nobility and as such was handed down to Martino, his brothers and their descendants – in some cases, even as a first name.^(ix)

Martino was a businessman: contracts, deals, important connections. From 1450 on, first with his father and then alone, he became an important member of Parre. He had a role in Councils and meetings of the Commune^(x), he had connections with local and Bergamo merchants.^(xi) In 1468 he took as his second wife Antonia, daughter of Ser Cristoforo Scarpa Noris of Gandino. The couple had various daughters and at least four sons: Pietro, Mondino, Giovanni, and Zenino. Zenino died around 1483, having three sons. In the documents we examined, one son of his is mentioned: his name was Barone, he was a counsellor of the Commune and was a businessman in the village.^(xii) Yet, the other three sons of Martino's, the full-brothers Pietro, Mondino, and Giovanni, were those who carried out Martino's heritage, after his death around 1474. The three sons *Martini olim Baroni* followed their father's footsteps: wise landowners, active merchants as well as *virii discretos et prudentes* in public relations.

They were given more and more responsible and relevant assignments: auctions of Communal properties (pastures, waters, the inn in Ponte Nossa, the furnace, the old and the new mill, the *ponte Fontanellarum*); they often acted as auditors of the Commune of Parre and of the Upper Seriana Valley; they periodically travelled to Bergamo and Clusone to collect or deliver letters, and to bring messages; they escorted important guests who were visiting the village.

Pietro was a merchant mainly working in Parre: married to Giovanna, daughter of Antonio Andreani of Gandino, had no children. On August 19, 1519, a few days before his death, he drew up his will in lower Parre with the notary Giov. Giacomo Bonicelli. From this document, and from the account book of the Commune^(xiii), we can understand how rich and influential this son of Martino's had been.

[Slide 5] Parre owes him the building of the Oratory of San Rocco, in lower Parre, through a special everlasting legacy granted to a group of local laymen. He also gave a decisive contribution as "general treasurer" to the building of the Marian shrine in Ponte Nossa, after the miracle of June 2, 1511.^(xiv) The other two brothers, Mondino and Giovanni, were very close to Pietro because of their common interests as landowners and as merchants etc.

Compared to his brothers Pietro and Giovanni, Mondino seems to have had a more important role in public life. For example, he settled a dispute by umpirage between two brothers of the noble family Borromei of Gandino^(xv), signed deeds as a notary, represented the Commune versus Bergamo Authorities and Law court, he was a councillor and also the one who recorded the proceedings of the meeting of the Council of Upper Seriana Valley. He often loaned money to the Commune, which often needed money, especially during the hard years 1512/1513, when the territory experienced the occupation of the Spanish then the French then again the Imperial army. Apart from the plague, mainly due to the presence of soldiers, all villagers had also to pay heavy tributes. Mondino was the one who had to pay the highest sum.^(xvi)

When, in June 1520, Bishop Lippomano came to visit Parre, he dined *domibus Domini Mondini*^(xvii). *Domibus*, that is, houses, not house, as Mondino and his brother Giovanni offered lodgings and services to soldiers in different occasions, even during disorders and dramatic occasions, for example

during the epidemic typhus in 1529. [Slide 6] During the same year 1529, Mondino bought a piece of land from the Commune in the area Castèl [Slide 7] and with his son Zinino bought the so-called "Castello Rependino" ^(xviii). [Slide 8] This building would become the abode of the "Baroni" Belliboni-Par, having a loggia decorated with the family coats of arms. The building is still partially preserved and was acknowledged as the "cradle of the von Paar's ancestors".

[Slides 9/12] Mondino (married to Francesca de Boromei de' Castelli of Gandino, as written in many a source) and his three sons Marco, Zinino and Martino, *nobili signori mercanti*, through more and more important affairs came to be known as the "da Pare" family ^(xix). Mondino died around 1530 ^(xx). His sons inherited credits from the Commune, as well as prestigious positions and offices. The most prominent heir was Martino: he was appointed the office of Delegate for the building of the church of the Holy Mary in Ponte Nossa. The deed also declared that in case of his absence, he would be replaced by his brothers ^(xxi).

[Slide 13] Actually, in 1532 Dominus Marco was entrusted with the office of collecting what was due after the closure of the Communal balance, officially entrusted to his brother Martino ^(xxii). Actually, Dominus Martino was often away from Parre: in 1545 he had to return the pay as *credendero* (councillor), because "he was not home" (*per non esser sta a casa*) ^(xxiii).

At this stage, many a clue suggest that this Martino, son of Mondino, is the very one some German sources mention as the founder of the Parre family – unfortunately dates do not always agree. Or, could this founder also be one of his brothers, Marco and Zinino, as they were often away from Parre as well?

We must pay particular attention to a certain Pietro da Parre: already active in 1545 in the Counsel of Bergamo ^(xxiv), he promoted the claim for regaining parts of the territory of Parre, i.e. mount Leten, which had been unexpectedly sold to private citizens in 1529 and was regained by the Commune through a petition to the *Rettori* of Bergamo. ^(xxv) Yet, a certain Pietro *di* (and later *fu*, that is, son of the late) Giovanni Baroni is mentioned in documents kept in Parre. He was in connection with the Commune of Parre ^(xxvi). Later, albeit through proxy holders, and at different times, he sold some of his properties in Parre ^(xxvii). Such elements suggest that Pietro *di fu* Giovanni Baroni is the very "Pietro da Parre", who was indicated as *Post Master of Ferdinand of Habsburg*, and who in 1558 was charged with heresy by the Bergamo Inquisition. In those years the Inquisition was acting even against the will of the Venetian *Rettori*, and accusing prominent citizens, *delli primi della città* ^(xxviii).

Pietro *di* Parre was accused of having delivered heretical books and of having unorthodox religious opinions. In that occasion he could evade justice, yet he was again arrested ten years later, in Bergamo. In that case as well, friends and supporters rescued him by force ^(xxix).

[Slide 14] On this problem, mainly on Dominus Martino and his sons, researches are still actively carried out on documents kept in the Council Archive in Parre and on documents in Austrian archives as well – in order to obtain historically consistent data regarding the events that turned the family Belleboni-da Parre into the princes von Paar.

FONTI:

A MIA BG: Archives of Misericordia Maggiore of Bergamo in A. Maj Library, Bergamo

AC BG: Archives of the Council of Bergamo

AC P – AR: Council Archive of Parre – Ancien Régime

ACV BG: Archives of the Bishop's Court of Bergamo

AP C: Parish archives of Clusone

AP PN: Parish archives of Ponte Nossa

APG: Personal archives of prof. Pietro Gelmi – Gandino

AS BG FN: State Archives of Bergamo – Notary Fond

AVAO: Old Archives, Orphanage Administration. Bishop's Court of Bergamo

GENERAL NOTE: the names of the various members of the Belleboni family are quoted dozens of times in the Council registers, and always for the same reasons – we therefore decided to point out only some important passages. The same methods is used for the dozens of MIA parchments, whose summaries were systematically consulted from the year 1171 to the year 1424.

ⁱ "I Principi di Parre nella Stiria", published in the review *Bergomum* (XLIX - 1955 - n. 4 - pagg. 9-17).

ⁱⁱ Conference of M. Teresa Brolis. Archivio Bergamasco 2007 and acts kept inside parchments in A MIA BG.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fonti per lo studio del territorio bergamasco – XIII – *I confini dei Comuni del Territorio di Bergamo 1392-1395 (Codice Patetta n. 1387)* edited by Vincenzo Marchetti. Edizioni Provincia di Bergamo, Bergamo 1996 – pag. 247.

^{iv} A MIA BG – Parchement n. 6430/B

^v APG.

^{vi} A MIA BG – Cf. agreement of May 30, 1469 in Upper Parre – parchment n. 3266.

^{vii} AS BG FN – Deed drawn up by the notary rogato Taddeo Cattaneo – c. 272.

^{viii} AS BG FN – Deeds of notary Venturino Scano – box 370.

^{ix} AC P – AR – Cf. Account book n. 21

(The group of consulted books covers the period from 1466 to 1557).

^x AC P – AR – Parchment fond.

^{xi} AVAO – Parchment n. 579.

^{xii} AC P – AR – Account book n. 18 – c. 70 v.

^{xiii} AC P – AR – Cf. Account books, already quoted.

^{xiv} AP PN – Codex of the notary Guerinoni. On June 2, 1511, in a small chapel in Santa Maria in Campolungo di Ponte Nossa, a miracle took place, the so-called "Weeping Madonna": the central wall of that chapel was covered with an old fresco representing the Virgin Mary near the Crucified and St. John. On that day, the image of the Virgin Mary wept blood tears from one eye of hers. A young girl witnessed the miracle: she wiped the tears with her apron, and she was recommended by the Virgin to build a church in that very place.

^{xv} APG.

^{xvi} AC P – AR – Cf. Account books, already quoted.

^{xvii} ACV BG: Minutes of the Pastoral visit by the Bishop Lippomano on June 9, 1520 in Parre (vol. I pag. 53).

^{xviii} AC P – AR – Account book n. 21, c. 39 r.

^{xix} AC P – AR – Account book n. 20, c. 336.

^{xx} AC P – AR – Account book n. 21.

^{xxi} ACV BG: From the transcription of a deed kept in the folder "Ponte Nossa" – edited by Rota Giuseppe.

^{xxii} AC P – AR – Account book n. 21.

^{xxiii} AC P – AR – Account book n. 22, c. 87 r.

^{xxiv} AC BG: Series 4, acts of the Councils, f. 22 f. 20 v.

^{xxv} The event is told through a public act, April 20, 1554, draft in Bergamo but kept in the Parchment fond A.C.P. – AR.

^{xxvi} AC P – AR – Account book n. 22.

^{xxvii} AP C: Sales of September 13, 1563 and April 9, 1573. Deeds draft in Clusone by the notary Evangelista fu Pecino de Fugacis of Clusone.

^{xxviii} *Collectanea Archivi Vaticani – 53 – Massimo Firpo – Sergio Pagani: I processi inquisitoriali di Vittorio Soranzo 1550-1558 – critical edition – Tome II - Città del Vaticano – Arch. Segreto del Vaticano, 2004 – pag. 961 and fol.*

^{xxix} *Ibidem.*