



APPENDIX

Genealogy: stories and History A “Case Study”

Nazzareno Vasapollo

Associated partners



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In elementary and middle school, I was fascinated by what were called “Ricerche” (Researches), also of History. We used to make drawings, cards with boxes and collages of image clippings. Encyclopaedias such as “Conoscere” (Knowing) and “I Quindici” (The Fifteen) were used. And then, even the toy soldiers of the Romans, Cowboys and Indians, the comics like “War of Heroes” ... Well! A bit of history also passed on from there.

Then came the Scientific High School and, especially in the last years, with a rebellious spirit as an end in itself, I stubbornly refused to study Italian and History. “*What's the use?*” I asked, and I wondered. I took everything radically to the extreme and at the final exams I frowned to the members of the Commission: “*I haven't studied all year, why do I have to come here to make fun of you? History and Italian are of no interest to me and I do not see their usefulness*”. (Christmas in the Cupiello house, by Eduardo De Filippo: “*I don't like the nativity scene ...*”)

My first travels were at the age of 20 and I learned that as a tourist you have to read something to understand what you are seeing ... Interesting ...

I graduated in Geology and for about ten years I worked as a seismologist. But not the instrumental seismologist, the historical seismologist. I was in research groups belonging to the National Research Council for the revision of news on past earthquakes. I had to do bibliographic and archival research on documents as contemporary as possible that dealt with a given seismic event to review and map the known information and, using special formulas, assign physical parameters such as magnitude, hypocentral depth etc ... The oldest document found was a parchment that dealt with the reconstruction of a castle after the 1279 earthquake in Camerino. All this would subsequently serve to update the CNR (Research National Council) earthquake catalogue, which in turn would have influenced the anti-seismic legislation. It is fascinating to see History transforming into Science transforming into Laws and, invisibly and imperceptibly, perhaps even saving human lives in the medium and long term.

Then came November 3, 1993 and my mother died. From the city of Vibo Valentia, Calabria, where I was born in '56 and where we rarely returned, we had moved to the Marche region in '74. My sister wanted her to be buried in our hometown and we organized the funeral ceremony in the Cathedral of San Leoluca. Almost 20 years had passed. I thought the Church would be half empty and my family would be forgotten. It was touching; surprisingly the church building was half full!

All this reconciled me with my land and my history to which I had no longer paid much attention, as I was aimed at building a future in a distant region and with a very different culture.

The death of my mother, that image of the people of my land that tightened around us and had not forgotten us was the trigger. “*But... I am the product of all this... and how does this human being fit into Time and History? They are the fruit of coincidences, loves, passions, lives, deaths, work, migrations... They are the fruit of stories and Stories?*”

Thus, was born my passion for genealogy and onomastics.

I began to apply the archival and bibliographic investigation skills that I had developed in the field of Historical Seismology to research in these two fields. I studied some texts to guide me on how to do it and then set off to plunder data in historical parish, municipal and state archives.

Going back to 1806, the year of the constitution of the Napoleonic civil state, I consulted the civil registers together with the parish ones, looking especially for birth, baptism, marriage and death records. For the period prior to 1806, however, mostly only the parish documents could give indications on the matter.

The research perspective was based on the reconstruction of ancestry by quarters. This, practically unique, method involves starting with the four grandparents and searching for their parents, the parents of the parents and so on, backwards as far as possible.

In my case, I had an advantage as my grandmothers were sisters and therefore, I only had three branches to rebuild.

I was thus able to define my family tree with over sixty ascendants going back in time to the end of the 17th century.

And before ...?

Well! Here genealogical research in the strict sense has, for the moment, stopped and has given way to other lines of investigation in which onomastics (or anthroponymy) have entered the field, which studies the meaning of names and surnames, and genetics.

Although someone has catalogued my surname, Vasapollo, as of sarcastic origin (in the southern dialects it could sound like “kiss the chicken”), it is of Greek origin, Βασόπουλος - Vasopoulos, composed of the root Vaso, truncated form of Vassiliki (Basil), and from the suffix *poulos* (son). It

is therefore a patronymic, a surname, that is derived from a progenitor father who had his descendants defined as “son(s) of Basilio”.



Imperatore Basilio I (811-886)




I found the earliest news about it in an investiture diploma from Queen Maximilla d'Altavilla, sister of King Roger II, thanks to whom we know that in Oppido Mamertina (in the province of Reggio Calabria) in April 1137 there were peasants who were sons of a certain Basiliopollo (“filii Basiliopoli”/“*υασιλειοπόλλου*”) who were subject to the taxes of the local lord.

It is therefore plausible that in the medieval period, following the second Byzantine colonization (9th-12th centuries), an individual (or more than one) with the name Βασιλειόπουλος / Βασιλοπουλος / Βασοπουλος / υασιλειοπόλλου, a direct descendant of a progenitor named Basilio, came from the East (now Greece, probably) to southern Italy. Later (between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries?) this name would be Latinized into Vasapollo and, adapting to the needs of comprehensibility of the new reception area (Calabria and/or Sicily), would have assumed a sarcastic connotation.

Vasapollo, therefore, would carry within himself two distinctive characters: one originally Byzantine of patronymic derivation (Son of Basilio) and one subsequently acquired in Southern Italy (Bacia il Pollo, i.e. Kiss the Cichen).

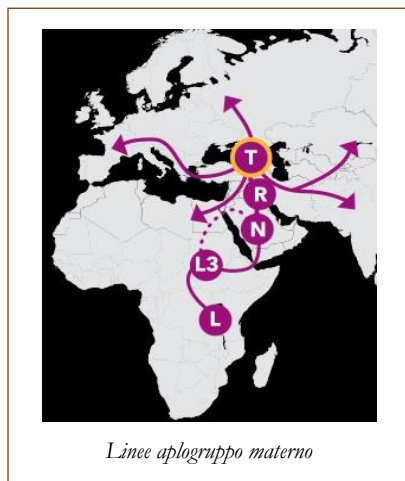
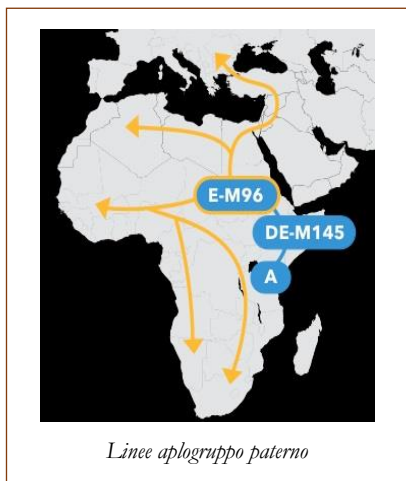
The genealogy therefore merges with the onomastics such as to make plausible the hypothesis that a very ancient progenitor of mine by paternal line was called Basilio.

And the genetics confirm that my origin is Greek. Of the three DNA analyses I performed, two give a percentage of belonging to the Greek-Balkan area equal to about 5% and the third indicates 34% of Greek and southern Italian origin.

													
POPULATION		CONFIDANCE			POPULATION				POPULATION				
		50% Speculative	70% Intermediate	90% Conservative									
EUROPEAN		79.40%	71.00%	54.20%	75.70%	EUROPEAN				98.00%	EUROPEAN		
Southern European		79.4%	71.0%	54.2%	72.2%	Southern European				98.0%	Southern European		
Italian		72.1%	62.9%	44.5%	38.3%	Italian				93.0%	Southern Italy (Calabria & Sicily)		
Greek & Balkan		5.7%	4.8%	4.0%	33.9%	Greek & South Italian				5.0%	Greece & Albania		
Sardinian		0.6%	0.5%	0.2%									
Broadly Southern European		1.0%	2.8%	5.5%									
Central-Eastern European		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%	Central-Eastern European							
Ashkenazi Jewish		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%	Ashkenazi Jewish							
Northern European		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%	Northern European							
British & Irish		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%	Irish, Scottish and Welsh							
WESTERN ASIAN & NORTH AFRICAN		20.5%	15.7%	7.3%	24.3%	WESTERN ASIAN & NORTH AFRICAN				2.0%	WESTERN ASIAN & NORTH AFRICAN		
Northern Western Asian*		17.5%	10.8%	3.7%	2.8%	Western Asian*							
Iranian, Caucasian & Mesopotamian		8.4%	6.3%	2.4%									
Cypriot		2.4%	0.7%	0.0%									
Anatolian		0.7%	0.6%	0.2%									
Broadly Northern West Asian		6.0%	3.2%	1.1%									
Arab, Egyptian & Levantine		1.0%	0.4%	0.0%	6.4%	Middle Eastern*				2.0%	Middle Eastern*		
Coptic Egyptian		0.5%	0.0%	0.0%									
Broadly Arabian, Egyptian & Levantine		0.5%	0.4%	0.0%									
North African		0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	15.1%	Jewish-Sephardi - North African*							
Broadly Western Asian & North African*		1.6%	4.5%	3.6%									
UNASSIGNED		0.1%	13.3%	38.5%									

It would seem the most that could be squeezed out of research, right ...?

And instead I will tell you that 65,000 years ago my ancestors even more remote ruled East Africa!



Also, in this case the DNA that indicates the maternal haplogroup L3 and the paternal DE-M145, both coming from East Africa, says so. Haplogroups can be pictured as the large branches of the Homo Sapiens family tree from which we all descend. A sub-category of my paternal haplogroup would testify that Napoleon Bonaparte and I have a common ancestor! Wow!

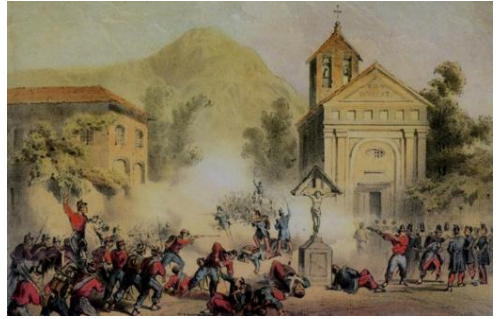
Returning to Genealogy, there are countless stories that I learned during my research, such as...



That of a Simone Vasapollo, corporal in the prisons of Catanzaro, who, during the period of famine that struck the whole Kingdom of Naples in the two-year period 1763-1764, procured to go to the " ... houses where bread was dispensed, and ... for each morning to cut each piece of bread into very small pieces, and thus deliver it to tax prisoners, so much so that it can be truthfully asserted that if the aforementioned Simon had not concurred with his charity and assistance, certainly most of the prisoners would have lost some hunger".

That of a Raffaele Vasapollo who, at the passage of Garibaldi from Vibo Valentia, enlisted as a volun-

teer to follow him up to the battle of the Volturno and then became effective in the Piedmontese army as a “low-strength hunter” (simple soldier) in the 17th Medici Division.



The story, reported by a newspaper of the time, of my great grandfather Ignazio who in March 1891 “found the lost wallet of Mr. Domenico Pileggi di S.Onofrio , which contained the respectable sum of 80 lire (current € 340.00, Author's Note), handed it over to the director of the institute cav. Casablanca”.

And again: earthquakes, loves, hunting for brigands ...

The stories... are the ones that intrigue and fascinate you, and History itself includes and in turn permeates the stories. And what are the most accessible stories? Those that are closest to us. So why not start from the ones that helped generate us?

Genealogy, onomastics, and genetics have made the haughty eighteen year old reconcile with History, (re)discovered through the his own history, the history of his ancestors, of the city and region in which he was born.

This testimony shows how the interest in identity elements such as family and territory can represent one of the levers on which to act in order to grasp a better awareness of oneself and of the usefulness of coming into contact and exploiting History, that great catalogue of events that it makes us understand how we are made and how we could behave in the future in similar situations that have already taken place in the past. It is evident that this can be of great use at a young age, a crucial period of life in which the individual's growth process begins to accelerate.

It is equally understandable how to use story telling in this perspective (writing, theatre, music...) is winning, both to establish the acquired heritage within oneself, and to transmit it to one's surroundings with beneficial effects on one's sense of identity and self-esteem.