



# THE CRACO SOCIETY

## ITALIAN SURNAME ORIGINS

After learning about the historic surnames from Craco it became obvious understanding their origins would be important.

**Onomatology** is the study of the origins and history of proper names. There are two works that help us identify the roots of the Cracotan names. **Prof. Joseph G. Fucilla** wrote *Our Italian Surnames*, in 1949 and has been in print since then because of its extensive coverage of the subject. In 1985, **Gerhard Rohlf** wrote, *Dizionario storico dei cognomi in Lucania*, an Italian language publication containing an extensive listing of regional surnames. Fucilla and Rohlf explain Italian surnames came from several sources and that they were adopted in the last 400 years.

Through most of history a single given name was the standard. The Romans began adding a "**gens-name**" derived from the founder of the family tree. The early Christians and Germanic tribes, both used single given names and they caused the collapse of the Roman naming system. However, between these two groups the hereditary surname system universally used today slowly emerged.

Starting with the patricians in Venice about the 9th century it took another 800 more years for surnames to take root.

The pattern of Italian surnames originally relied on expressing paternity (for example, Giovanni di Alberto representing Giovanni son of Alberto). These were influenced over time by various factors. For example the singular surname became plural reflecting the family that the surname came from (Alberto becomes Alberti.) Another way of expressing "son of" (figlio) also emerged by using the prefix — Fi or Fili (examples, Fittipoldi, Filangieri).

The many groups who invaded Italy also added to the surname development process. Greek, Roman, and Germanic influence are seen as the major source of Italian surnames with a secondary set attributed to Hebrew names.

Greek roots are seen in names like Alessandri, or Greek with the Christian influence like Basilio. Roman examples are numerous and include classical names like Caesar. The Germanic Franks and Lombards while abandoning their native language retained their Teutonic names. These can be recognized with surname endings like -aldo (example Rinaldi), or -mano (Germano). Hebrew names derived from the Bible include Salomone and Vitelli (from David).

Adding to the complex evolution of surnames were other elements that became name sources including desirable or undesirable qualities, botanical, topographical, geographic, animal, anatomical, objects and occupations. Also, in the regional areas of rural Italy each family had a nickname which was transmitted to subsequent generations. Over centuries and generations additional modifications give us the names we recognize today.

## CRACOTAN SURNAME ORIGINS

**Avena**— botanical, representing oat farmer (Fucilla)

**Basilio**—of Greek origin (Rohlf & Fucilla)

**Benedetto**—compound surname (Fucilla)

**Bentivenga**—from Moliterno, indicating good feelings (Rohlf); may good befall you (Fucilla)

**Branda**—French origins (Rohlf)

**Camberlengo**—French origins (Rohlf)

**Colabella**—attractive physique (Fucilla)

**Conte**—reflecting a title (Rohlf); titular name origin, count (Fucilla)

**Cotugno**—botanical name, quince (Fucilla)

**DeCesare**—from Roman, of Cesear (Fucilla)

**Dolcemiele**— compound surname, sweet honey (Fucilla)

**Donadio**—indicating good feelings (Rohlf); biblical origin, given by and to God (Fucilla)

**Episcopio**—from ecclesiastical name, bishop (Fucilla)

**Gallo**—Spanish origins (Fucilla)

**Grieco**—Greek nationality (Rohlf)

**Laino**—geographic origin (Rohlf)

**Lorubbio**—from Craco, Montalbano Jonico, Policoro (Rohlf); derived from hair color, red (Fucilla)

**Lospinuso**—from Craco, Montalbano Jonico (Rohlf); originated as a nickname, full of thorns, harsh (Fucilla)

**Magistro**—name for learned men, teacher (Fucilla)

**Mastronardi**—reflecting a title (Rohlf); formed from master of and the baptismal name (Fucilla)

**Muzio**—from Sala Consilina, Salerno (Rohlf); derived from Spanish, stable boy (Fucilla)

**Pignataro**—from Potenza, (Rohlf), occupation name, potter (Fucilla)

**Pirretti**—from Ferrandina Matera (Rohlf); derived from the given name Pietro (Fucilla)

**Ragone**—Spanish origin (Rohlf)

**Rocanova**—from Potenza, Matera derived from agriculture (Rohlf)

**Rinaldi**—Germanic origin (Rohlf), from the legendary knight Roland (Fucilla)

**Salamone**—reflecting a distinguished person (Rohlf); from the Bible, Solomon, a wise person (Fucilla)

**Spera**—from Matera, person which raises hope (Rohlf)

**Tuzio**—from Lagonegro, Montalbano, Sapri, and Senise, from medieval name Tutius (Rohlf)

**Veltri**—derived from the dog breed of greyhounds (Fucilla)

**Viggiano**—from Matera, Montalbano, Potenza, Stigliano (Rohlf)

**Vitelli**—derived from the Biblical name David (Fucilla)

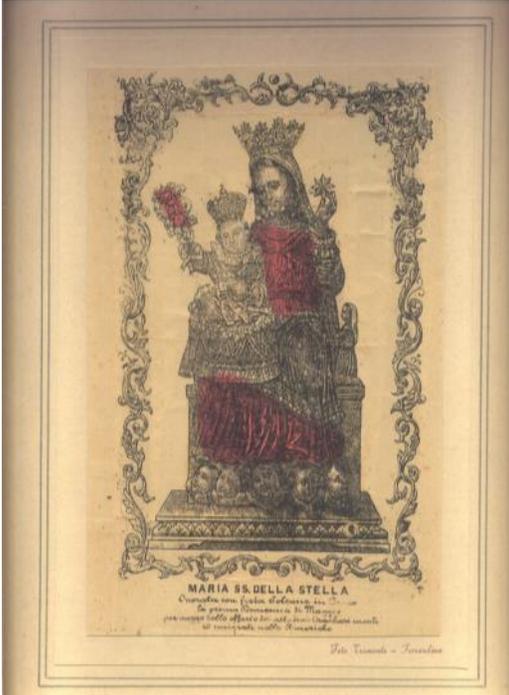
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An online source of Italian surname history is available at: [ORIGINI DI COGNOMI ITALIANI](#)

**IMAGES OF CRACO-MADONNA DELLA STELLA**



**Statues Over Time**—The colored woodcut (left) shows the original figure while the black & white image (right) shows one of the two infants that replaced those that were stolen along with the golden ornaments. Below is a photograph showing the statue when the Infant was missing and also with a different paint scheme. The color photograph (bottom right) shows the statue today.)



**Processions Over Time**— Time has changed the way the statue is processed.

The photograph below shows a scene from the 1962 procession in Craco Vecchio taken in the Piazza Largo Vittorio Emanuele II.

The color photograph to the right shows the adjustment made to the procession after Craco Peschiera was established with the route between the town and the Chapel traversed by the procession using a motor vehicle to carry the "cirio" or candle house.



**SUPPORT SAVING THE MADONNA DELLA STELLA**

## GAETANO GRIECO AND THE TWIST OF FATE

Last month's Newsletter article triggered a memory from another Society member that shows us how a twist of fate can impact us and influence generations.

The amazing story from Joe Rinaldi of Rhinebeck, New York, adds depth to our understanding of how and why Gaetano Grieco was aboard the SS Utopia when it and he met tragic ends 130 years ago in Gibraltar Harbor

Joe Rinaldi related the following story.

*"...this story was told to me by my {maternal} grandmother Anna (DiDonato) Miele (1897-1986).*

*Anna's parents, Antonio DiDonato (1869-1917) and Giuseppina (Brescia) DiDonato (1872-1951) [who were from Avellino, in the Campagna Region] were to travel in 1891 from Avellino with a friend who was a businessman, dealing between Italy and the US, who would help settle my great grandparents in New York City when they all arrived.*

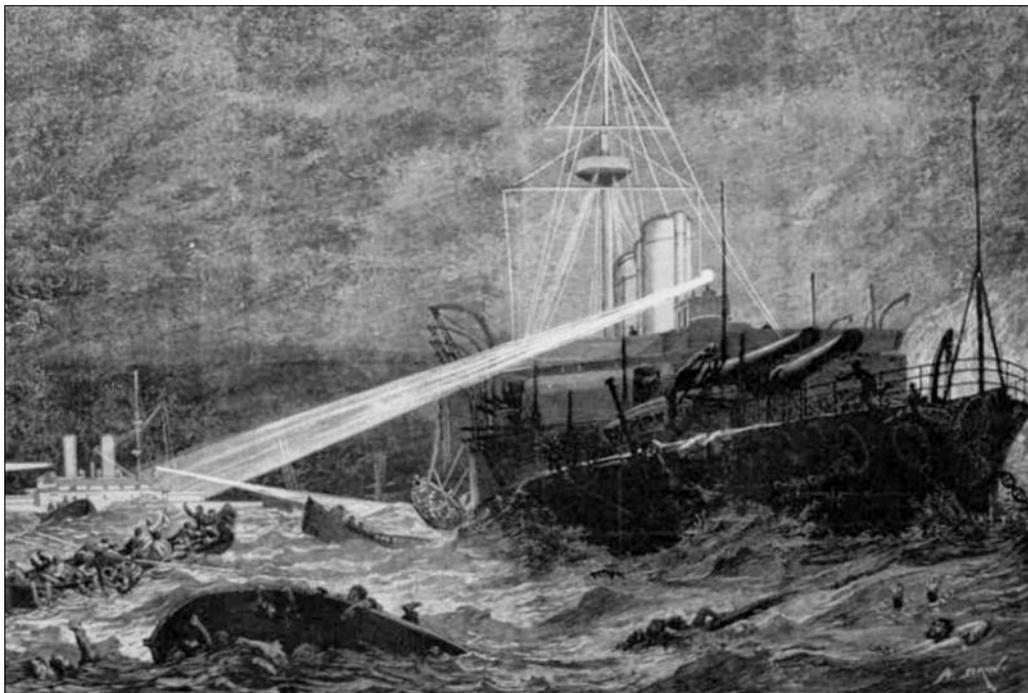
*Just before they were to board the ship, the friend had a business situation come up, so he told my great grandparents to go ahead and he would take the next ship and meet them in New York.*

*Either while still making the passage or once arriving in New York, Giuseppina and Antonio learned of the sinking of the SS Utopia at Gibraltar and the loss of their friend.*

*Fortunately for my great grandparents, they knew the name of their friend's business contact in New York City, so they got in touch with him and he was able to help Giuseppina and Antonio get a place to live and a job for Antonio, who was a carpenter."*

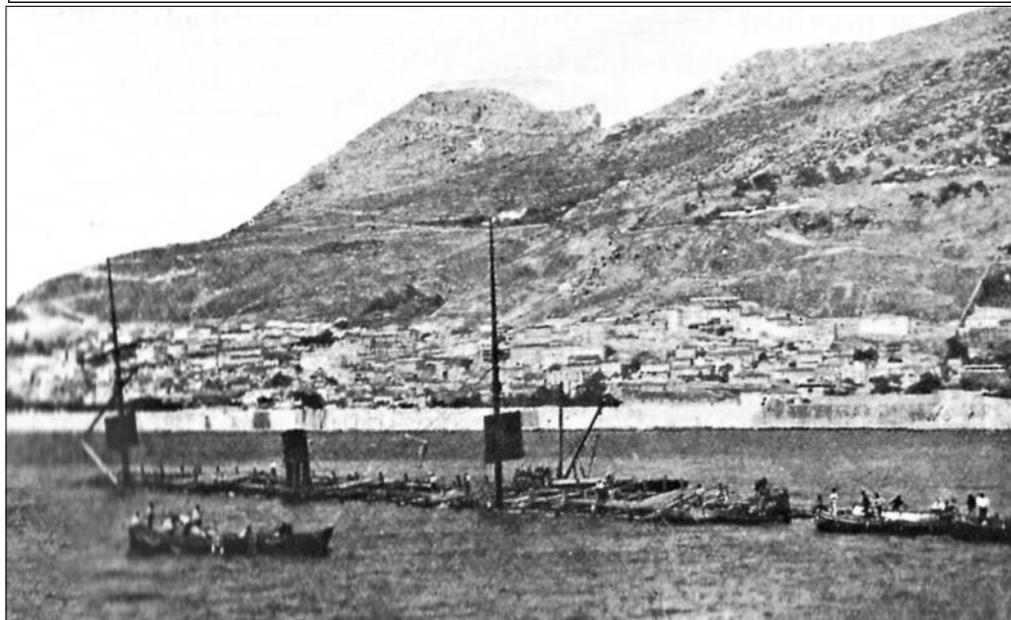
So, we now know that a simple thing like the innocent business meeting Gaetano attended was the twist of fate that changed his destiny.

Che sarà sarà.



**HMS Anson and SS Utopia**—The contemporary sketch above, shows the HMS Anson (right) using a searchlight to illuminate the sinking SS Utopia (left). The HMS Anson, had a battering ram in her bow, which was struck by the Utopia as she passed the ship at 6:36pm during the stormy night of March 17, 1891. The Utopia, with a 16 foot wide gash in her hull sank within 20 minutes. Of the Utopia's 880 passengers, mostly Italian immigrants, 562 were lost. The Utopia's captain, John McKeague was found guilty of grave errors in judgement: "firstly, in attempting to enter the anchorage ... without having first opened out and ascertained what vessels were there" and "secondly, in attempting to turn his ship out across the bows of HMS Anson.

**Sunken Utopia**— shown below is the sunken SS Utopia in Gibraltar Harbor. This contemporary photograph . Work crews, barges and lighters are visible on the wreck. The square objects on the masts were markers to help prevent other ships from colliding with the wreck. The Utopia was raised in July 1892 and brought to Scotland where the hulk was scrapped in 1900.



## SUPPORT SAVING THE MADONNA DELLA STELLA



Saving the historic Madonna della Stella Chapel and statue, which are important parts of Craco Vecchio’s history, culture, and traditions is a significant and worthwhile objective for all members. The Board of Directors encourages members to contribute to the Madonna della Stella Restoration. All funds collected will be sent to Craco for use in preserving the chapel and statue.

Generations of Crachesi will thank you for your donation.

PLEASE SEND YOUR DONATIONS TO:  
 The Craco Society  
 14 Earl Road  
 East Sandwich, MA 02537

Or by

PayPal to: [memberservices@thecracosociety.org](mailto:memberservices@thecracosociety.org)  
 Questions: contact us at 774-269-6611 or by email at:  
[memberservices@thecracosociety.org](mailto:memberservices@thecracosociety.org)

Those supporting the preservation effort by contributing so far are:

- Karen Bennett
- Patrick Colabella
- Leonard Francavilla Family
- Salvatore Francavilla Family
- Angela Gallo
- Richard Gorgoglione
- Damiano Greci
- Alfred Grieco

- Isabelle Grieco
- Janis Grieco
- Lee Anne Infantino
- James Mastronardy
- Leonardo Modena
- Isabella Pause
- Ann Pirozzi
- Rinaldi Family (Canada)
- Prospero & Sue Rivielli
- John Sarubbi
- Spero Family
- Ugenti Family

## NEW MEMBERS

Brian (Viggiano) Connelly—Chapin, SC  
 Lynn (Viggiano) Connelly—Chapin, SC  
 Kathryn (Viggiano) Crumbly-Knoxville, TN  
 Marie (Viggiano) Meszaros-Hyattsville, MD

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