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From a Single Name - Beginnings of an Italian One-Name Study

by Julie Goucher, Member 3925)

Growing up I became very aware that my family history was a bit like a see-saw bearing non-equal weight. Heavy at one end representing my maternal side, about whom I knew huge amounts whilst details from my paternal side was short on data. Of course, as a child I never questioned it, it was simply the way it was, but as I got older and more curious I began to question and question. Eventually I really wanted to understand my identity and explore that non-British element of my life and that of my heritage.

To do this I needed an understanding of researching Italian ancestry and the importance of knowing the actual town: knowing that is vital to research success. Luckily, I knew the town and without it I would have been totally snookered. I asked family members questions and more questions and gradually I scoped out a family tree. There were branches of the family that had left Sicily and migrated, not just as my Dad did when he came to England in the early 1960s but earlier and some of those lines went to the United States. There was also not just those that migrated, but those who migrated for a period and then returned home. Even when they had left Sicily with plans of never returning the ties with the family remained. As I established those facts I found myself continually asking the question "Why?" Suddenly I was hooked on understanding that half of me. It wasn't until years and years later when I was involved in an exchange with a colleague that someone said to me, "You are not thinking with your English Brain!" They suggested I read "*Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour*" by Kate Fox. I had been on many management courses and undertaken the Myers-Briggs understanding of oneself and became aware that my Italian heritage had defined me. In a room of English folk, I can feel very Italian and yet in a room filled with Italian family I feel very Anglo.

In those early days, long before Google and the Internet, accessing Italian records was problematic. There was a huge lack of availability of records. To feed my genealogical habit I focused on the Italian surname of Orlando in the UK. There is a large Italian community of around 4,000 people in Woking, Surrey. I was curious as to what the catalyst was for the formation of that community. Were the Italians there from one region or an assortment? By 2002 I had collated a mass of Italian and Orlando material. I was already in discussions with several others about the formation of the Anglo Italian FHS (<http://anglo-italianfhs.org.uk/>) and as I was sure that I was always going to have an interest in the Orlando name. I joined the Guild and registered the surname.

The town where my Sicilian family has lived for generations is Sutera in the Caltanissetta region of the island. I soon realised that whereas my maternal side had roots deeply in the area where Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire meet with the same surnames appearing repeatedly, the same had happened in Sutera. I drew the conclusion that the similarities were

because of rural communities, where the pool of suitable people to marry is greatly reduced. Of course when you have lived in a narrow geographical area then you are likely to be connected to everyone else. As there was such a problem obtaining records I started mass extractions from the Sutera records when the opportunity presented itself. As we all know, there is nothing more frustrating than needing to see a record that you cannot access or having to be patient until you can do so.

My One-Place Study of Sutera and One-Name Study of Orlando are hugely connected for all the reasons I have already raised here. Now, a good 25 years on, I need to organise the material into a more robust system. In the early part of 2017 I added Orlando to the Members Website Project, opting to use TNG (The Next Generation). As part of that, I will be merging sections of the two studies because of the severe, almost chronic, amount of overlapping in my personal family history. In fact, there is so much overlapping and repeating of the same surnames that I get quite excited when a new one enters my research! Essentially my personal Italian family history is only to be found in Sutera with some strands that went to the United States, especially Louisiana, Alabama and New York; and of course, England and several other European countries.

Naturally the Orlando study is so much more than my family history. Clearly there is a huge amount of data in Italy and as you might expect, given the amount of migration to the United States, there are many, many references there. Orlandos can be found across Europe and there is also a large Italian community in Argentina. I discovered quite recently Orlando material in both Tunisia and Algeria which were French colonies, not too surprising given their geographical closeness to Sicily.

As a Guild member I commit to making my study global and for me it has been that way since the very beginning because of the nature of the surname, and the geographical location of myself and migration of my personal family.

If I reflect, the Orlando Study began from a single name as indeed most of our studies did. I am currently working back on my own family so that I can upload to TNG my Italian line with all the certificates and other evidence. That will probably take another three months or so, then I will begin focusing on the material in my One-Name Study, that currently sits in two drawers of my filing cabinet because not all my records are currently computerised. The aim is to make the complete study available via the website and I finally, truly understand the statement made by Mike Spathaky from his Journal article, "The website IS the One-Name study" which appeared in the Volume 12, Issue 1, January-March 2015 (<http://one-name.org/members/journal/pdfs/vol12-1.pdf>). The reality is that I shall have joined my ancestors before the study is even

remotely “finished” and I used that word loosely as it will of course never be finished.

To research in Italy in addition to knowing the exact place the family came from I recommend several things to bear in mind, all of which build solid foundations for Italian ancestry.

- Understand the history of the country and the culture, especially during the period when your ancestors were there.
- Why migration from some areas was the only means of sustaining a reasonable way of life.
- Understand the importance of religion and religious festivals to Italian communities.
- Become familiar with the naming patterns, because whilst it is not absolute, it can help if you are looking for a record on FamilySearch and are not having success. Typically, the first son is named after the paternal grandfather, the first daughter the paternal grandmother, the second son the maternal grandfather and the second daughter after the maternal grandmother.
- Then there is the language, early church records are written in Latin and civil records are written in Italian. The Italian alphabet has fewer characters with the letters I & J interchangeable, but it is still possible, even with zero Italian to understand the basic facts of a document. Family Search has some rudimentary Italian language guidance and practice material on their website <https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/87>

A single man migrating to the United States and planning to settle there longterm typically entailed that a marriage took place in the United States with the bride probably of Italian descent, potentially from another part of Italy, or was another immigrant from countries such as Ireland where there was perhaps also a shared religious faith. Otherwise they married in Sutera and took their bride with them or sent for them later. Those who established themselves in the United States typically had the intention of naturalising which was costly, but to do so gave them more rights. Many men married and left their wives behind and sent money home, eventually rejoining the family in Sutera. This was discussed in a thesis by Linda Reeder, who subsequently published her research in, *Widows in White*, published by the University of Toronto in 2003 (ISBN 0802085253). What is worth mentioning is that when the United States began restricting migration from southern Europe from about 1919 many Italians (and Greeks) looked to Australia. I have two family members who migrated to the United States. A younger brother had his plans interrupted by the first world war. By the time he could join his brothers he was unable to. The options were to stay in Sutera or look elsewhere: the younger brother migrated to Australia.

Italian records provide a great deal of information. One key piece of information is that women retain their birth name, even after marriage. Records show not just the details relating to the event, but also as you might expect the parents, including full names of both parents. Depending on how prevalent a name is, the record might also include other information as a way of providing clarity to the overall record. That information might be a place or the name of the father, especially if it is used to distinguish one person apart from the

rest of an extended family group, perhaps there are four men with the same first and surname in the same generation due to the naming patterns. Also, a ‘detto’ might be used. A detto is more than a nickname. It is a name that is used in addition to the main surname, but is not a hyphenated name. Dettos are used in official records which is not typical of nicknames and a detto is often used across more than one generation. As migration occurs what was a Detto in Italy potentially can be either seen as a middle name or is even become hyphenated.

We have moved a long way in the accessibility of records for Italy and Sicily and it occurs to me that it might be useful to explain what material is online and how I use a combination of those locations. FamilySearch <https://www.familysearch.org> has the records indexed but none of the digitised documents, for at least for the region I am working with which is Caltanissetta. There are digitised copies at this excellent site, Antenati, which translates as Ancestors <http://antenati.san.beniculturali.it> so with the help of FamilySearch which gives you the certificate number it is possible to obtain the actual record. You can search by surname and town. If you use Google Chrome and have it set to translate it does something very strange to the translation so switch back to the original and you will be able to spot the Communi easily. Some records are also online at ancestry.com and depending on the province, the dates for the records vary. For Caltanissetta they begin at 1866 and are not indexed and there only a basic search function, so again use a combination of Ancestry and FamilySearch. You do need access to a world account with Ancestry, but the records display whether you, login via Ancestry.com or Ancestry.Italia <https://www.ancestry.it/> I tend to use the Italia site because it’s search function is better displayed. If you are interested in seeing some of the Orlando figures at Ancestry, you can see some at this webpage <http://one-name.org/getting-started-with-a-one-name-study/> which several of us worked on in the Spring of 2016. The figures are not exact but they are indicative of the scale of the study and reflect migration patterns.

I keep my Study in two parts. I have my raw data such as GRO material from FreeBMD and wills from The National Archives in an Excel spreadsheet. What took me three years to download from St Catherine’s took about five minutes from FreeBMD! At the point of processing the material I add it to my genealogical software, which is Roots Magic. Uploading the material to the website is easy; it is the simple download of a GEDCOM and the upload of the same GEDCOM to the website which sits on the Guild servers. I keep my photographs and certificates in separate folders and then upload the media separately, choosing to make the links from the image or certificate to the individual in the database manually.

If the individual is in the database then I have either a certificate, genealogical record, photograph or a screen capture to accompany the individual. In some cases, if I don’t have a certificate or the documentation, but one is now available, I can easily obtain one to include. At that point the individual is added to the database. Source citations are not always listed in the database, but I do have a note of where the material came from. I am gradually making sure that there is a citation either in the database as a source or the source is recorded with the image. In some cases, the citation is in both places. The important thing is that if someone had to follow the evidence they could easily do so.

I have a set way of working that is easy for me to follow, but other Guild members work in different ways. This is not a case of one size fits all! What I personally struggled with was having unconnected people in my database, a series of random Orlandos if you will. This is why part of my study is not in the database and some material is still in paper format. Overtime, it became more comfortable and I am gradually working my way through the body of data built up over the years. Ultimately the entire study will be on the website with regular updates and I can reclaim those two drawers in the filing cabinet!

My study has evolved over time; from the pre-internet days with notebooks filled with transcriptions along with notes of what to look for and pencil drawn trees which helped me think, to the modern internet era. I do still routinely make notes, transcriptions, record ideas and pencil draw

genealogical trees. Revisiting the earlier obtained material means that I can establish that I have not overlooked any snippet of information.

Have you researched in Italy? If you are interested in Surnames in Italy, then please feel free to get in touch. Perhaps you have an Italian or other European surname in mind but always thought it was going to be difficult. Begin, because once you do, the rest is easy. ■

Julie is studying the surnames Butcher, Orlando (with variants Orlanda and Orlande) and Worship (with variants Worshipe, Worships and Wurship) and can be contacted at orlando@one-name.org