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The false Orsini from over the Alps: Negotiating aristocratic identity in late medieval and early modern Europe*

With 16 figures

It is a truism that the ideas of family, house and dynasty combined with the notion of ancestry and ancient origin formed central elements of the European nobility's culture. It is no less self-evident that aristocratic identities emerging from these values rested upon specific (both fragmentary and glamorized) perceptions of one's own family's past. Invented pedigrees, origin myths and legends of genealogical descent were key features of aristocratic identities and their importance for understanding aristocratic society can hardly be overestimated. They established both distinctiveness and distinction, and also legitimized social and political aspirations. As this case study suggests, they could even provide more, namely to create a sense of kinship where none existed.

Attempts to establish an extended descent from prominent ancient or contemporary aristocratic and ruling houses were frequent among the medieval and early modern nobility, but one is particularly fascinating. From the

* Abbreviations used in this article:
SOA Třeboň/JH Třeboň, Státní oblastní archiv v Třeboni (Regional Archives in Třeboň), oddělení v Jindřichově Hradci (branch in Jindřichův Hradec)

An early draft of this paper was presented at the 1st Arenberg Conference for History which took place in Amsterdam in October 2011 under the title: "Dynastic Identity in Early Modern Europe. The Dynamics of Aristocratic Identity Formation in Comparative Perspective: Actors, Motives and Strategies". This essay would not have been written without the kind invitation and vital encouragement from both organizers Dr. Liesbeth Geevers and Dr. Mirella Marini. Due to its length, the text could not be published in the conference volume, but it remains closely linked to its topic and to the other contributions. I am greatly indebted to Professor Hamish Scott who provided valuable comments and helped turn my draft into proper English, and to Dr. William Godsey who helped with some last-minute additions.

fourteenth to the late seventeenth century, several noble families from Central, Western and South-Eastern Europe claimed to be descended from the Roman princely house of Orsini. The attraction of this idea is self-evident: the Orsini were not only one of the leading families in Italy, but their lineage was believed to date back to ancient Rome and thus to one of the main reference points for noble values. The Orsini origins thus established a connection to what was regarded as the very cradle of noble culture.

The Orsini claim certainly had many parallels. The legendary kinship with the house of Colonna, another Roman aristocratic family which was a rival of the Orsini, is surely the most similar and most famous of them – not only because the Habsburg dynasty adopted it too for several decades but also due to its remarkable spread within the late medieval nobility in the Holy Roman Empire and beyond. The Hohenzollern family, the Counts of Henneberg, the Counts of Stolberg, the Counts of Oldenburg, the lords of Reuß, the Tyrolean Vögte von Matsch and the lords of Völs (renaming themselves as Colonna von Fels) – all claimed to originate from the house of Colonna[1]. Around 1700, genealogists constructed the picture of an extended lineage with the centre in Italy and branches in Germany, Spain and Russia[2]. Cardinal Ernst Adalbert of Harrach, dwelling in Rome in 1637, was amazed when Filippo Colonna showed him "two large genealogies of his family, one of the Roman branch, the other one of the line dispersed over Germany which, beginning with the Barons of Völs and Counts of Zollern, embraces nearly all princes of the Empire, especially the house of Brandenburg"[3].

Yet the Orsini claim, the subject of this essay, was equally widespread and complex. Moreover it was perhaps even more effective in changing the identity of noble families that embraced it and in establishing relations between

[1] A. Lhotsky, Apis Colonna. Fabeln und Theorien über die Abkunft der Habsburger. Ein Exkurs zur Cronica Austrie des Thomas Ebendorfer. *MIÖG* 55 (1944), 171–245, at 173–194; V. Czech, Legitimation und Repräsentation. Zum Selbstverständnis thüringisch-sächsischer Reichsgrafen in der Frühen Neuzeit. Berlin 2003, 32–40, 47–57, both texts with further references.

[2] For instance J. Ch. Iselin, Neu-vermehrtes Historisch- und Geographisches Allgemeines Lexicon …, vol. 1. Basel 1726. Professor Werner Paravicini to whom I owe thanks for an informative discussion on this topic is preparing a study comparing the Colonna and the Orsini myth.

[3] "Il contestabile m'ha mandato a vedere due gran alberi della sua famiglia, l'uno della linea romana, l'altro di quella dispersa per Germania, che incominciando dalli baroni di Fels e conti di Zolleren abbraccia quasi tutti i principi dell'Impero, massime la casa di Brandeburg. Io per spasso cominciai a cavarne copia." Die Diarien und Tagzettel des Kardinals Ernst Adalbert von Harrach (1598–1667), ed. K. Keller–A. Catalano, VII vols. Wien–Köln–Weimar 2010, at II, 202.

them. The geographical extent of the Orsini myth is also remarkable. As will be shown in the following, the claim first appeared in the 1350s in relation to the Counts of Mark in Westphalia, but it entered several other German aristocratic houses before 1500. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the newly established noble family of Jouvenel adopted the Orsini ancestry in France. Some decades later, the claim was advanced by the Counts of Blagaj in Croatia and somewhere around that time by the lords of Rožmberk in Bohemia[4]. Since the mid-sixteenth century, signori di Rivalta from Piedmont joined the clan. In the seventeenth century another Rosenberg family that gained wealth and influence in Carinthia embraced the legend.

In reality, none of these families were descended from the house of Orsini, nor were they genealogically interrelated. Several nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century historians, archivists and librarians who explored the individual cases such as the Czechs Theodor Wagner (1818–1892) and František Mareš (1850–1939), the Austrian Leopold von Beckh-Widmanstetter (1841–1903), the Hungarian Lajos Thallóczy (1856–1916), the Frenchman Louis Batiffol (1865–1946) and the Croatian Milan Šufflay (1879–1931)[5] convincingly demonstrated that the Orsini claim in all its variations was the product of what they viewed simply as genealogical myth-making, and as such something that only needed to be disproved. I do not intend to contradict their findings. Yet the question of why these families thought it worthwhile to create such ancestry was not amply investigated.

The present article approaches this subject from another point of view, that of why such claims were created and embroidered. The historians mentioned above, partly trained in prominent seminars of source criticism such as the *Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* in Vienna and the *École des chartes* in Paris, shared another approach. Although living in distinct national

[4] I use the Croatian form (Blagaj) and the Czech form (Rožmberk) although different spelling (Blagay, Rosenberg) is common in German, Hungarian and Latin sources and literature.

[5] T. Wagner–F. Mareš, O původu Vítkovců. *Český časopis historický* 25 (1919), 213–235; L. v. Beckh-Widmanstetter, Grabsteine der christlichen Zeit zu Friesach in Kärnten. *Mittheilungen der k. k. Central-Comission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der kunst- und historischen Denkmale* N. F. 8 (1882), 39–53, at 43–49; A Blagay-család oklevéltára. Codex diplomaticus comitum de Blagay, ed. L. Thallóczy–S. Barabás. Budapest 1897; L. Thallóczy, Historička istraživanja o plemenu goričkih i vodičkih knezova. *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni i Hercegovini* 9 (1897), 333–397; L. von Thallóczy, Die Geschichte der Grafen von Blagay. Wien 1898; M. Šufflay, Iz arkiva Blagajskoga. *Vjesnik kr. hrvatsko-slavonsko-dalmatinskoga zemaljskoga arkiva* 8 (1906), 213–234, at 213–226; L. Batiffol, Le nom de la famille Juvénal des Ursins. *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 50 (1889), 537–558; id., L'origine italienne des Juvenel des Ursins, *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 54 (1893), 693–717.

and social environments, they were all preoccupied with purifying the genealogies from legends und other uncritical elements and with separating myth and fabrication from verifiable fact: They tried to show how things had actually happened, in the Rankean phrase. As typical for the historiography around 1900, their main approach consisted in careful distinguishing of primary sources with proven authenticity from later legends, inventions and forgeries. But searching for historical truth, we necessarily adopt this modern point of view that distinguishes true charters from false charters and true kinship from false kinship. My approach is slightly different. I am less interested in how things actually were, but rather in how the kinship was perceived and how and why these legends first emerged and then disappeared. No matter whether real from the modern point of view, the kinship mattered if it was believed or at least perceived as credible. If we want to learn and understand the identity of the early modern aristocracy, it is exactly the perception of the kinship and of the past that deserves our attention[6].

In fact, the title of my article is misleading because it also reproduces this modern point of view. The Jouvenels, the Blagajs, the Rožmberks, the Rosenbergs and others did not represent themselves as false Orsini, but as legitimate members of a large, ancient and illustrious Italian house. And they were perceived as such by contemporaries as well. Francesco Sansovino (1521–1586), a versatile Italian polymath who first provided the house of Orsini with a complex family history and genealogy in 1565[7] (fig. 1), could say little about them (and most of what he wrote about them was wrong), yet he took them into account as ordinary members of the house. From the Italian perspective, the purported branches from over the Alps were perceived as somewhat peripheral, but their claim of being legitimate Orsini was usually recognized. Even in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, many historians and genealogists were convinced of the validity of at least some of these genealogical claims. Reference compendiums such as the handbook of Francesco Zazzera and the œuvre

[6] I follow the revealing studies by R. Bizzocchi, La culture généalogique dans l'Italie du seizième siècle. *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 46 (1991), 789–805, and id., Genealogie incredibili. Scritti di storia nell'Europa moderna. Bologna 1995, owing both references to Professor Hamish Scott. Regarding one of the families in question, the relevance of the contemporary perception was discussed by P. S. Lewis, La noblesse des Jouvenel des Ursins, in: L'Etat et les Aristocraties (France, Angleterre, Ecosse). XII^{e}–XVII^{e} siècle, ed. Ph. Contamine. Paris 1989, 79–101.

[7] F. Sansovino, L'historia di casa Orsina. Venetia 1565; id., Degli huomini illustri della casa Orsina. Venetia 1565. These were the only commissioned histories among about eighty books Sansovino wrote, translated or edited. P. F. Grendler, Francesco Sansovino and Italian Popular History 1560–1600. *Studies in the Renaissance* 16 (1969), 139–180, at 142.

of Benedictine monk Eugenio Gamurrini (1620–1692) in Italy[8] and Zedler's encyclopaedia in Germany[9], created a picture, in which the families in question were treated as branches of a complex and much wider dynasty, the domus Ursinorum. And it was not until the nineteenth century that modern historical scholarship with its emphasis on source criticism re-examined the facts and reorganized the genealogical connections according to the new dispensations.

Besides suggesting that the Orsini claim, though undoubtedly fabricated, still merits more attention than a simple rejection, this essay has still another agenda. Although there has been some useful recent research (particularly on the Rožmberks) approaching the topic from a similar point of view, it has always addressed the individual cases thus failing to notice to what degree they were parallel and even interlocking. By contrast, drawing upon the scholarship to date on the individual cases and providing a lot of fresh material in addition, this article is the first attempt to unfold the whole intricate and fascinating story of appropriating Orsini kinship in late medieval and early modern Europe. In the following, I will examine how this notion of the Orsini kinship – plausible in the early modern period though absurd from the modern point of view – was constructed and negotiated among half a dozen families, including the 'true' Orsini themselves. Many historians have already explored how individual dynasties constructed and re-shaped their identities. This essay will illuminate how several noble families that were, in fact, unrelated and lived in different ethnic, political and social environments developed a sense of belonging to one large aristocratic house.

The Counts of Mark and the numerous Orsini in Germany

In his chronicle of the Counts of Mark (in French: La Marck), composed in the 1350s, Levold of Northof (1279–1358/59) included a short story explaining the origin of the family. According to him, two wealthy brothers from the illustrious house of Orsini ("that until today has been regarded the most noble and powerful one in the city of Rome") accompanied the Emperor Otto III over the Alps. They settled down in Westphalia where they bought

[8] F. Zazzera, Della nobiltà dell'Italia I. Napoli 1615, chapter "Della famiglia Orsina" (no pagination); E. Gamurrini, Istoria genealogica delle famiglie nobili toscane et vmbre II. Fiorenza 1671, 2–58.

[9] The articles "Ursini von Blaggay", "Ursini von Rosenberg" and "Ursini (Jouvenel des)" in: J. H. Zedler, Grosses Vollständiges Universal-Lexikon Aller Wissenschafften und Künste …, vol. LI. Leipzig–Halle 1747, 549–563.

land from the Emperor, built up the castles of Altena and Altenberg and fought off the attacks of a rival Count of Arnsberg[10].

This is the earliest instance of a Central-European family tracing its ancestry back to the Orsini. Using the familiar topos of the Roman nobility's offspring departing for various reasons to the northern regions of Europe to cultivate the unsettled landscape and to build up their own dynasties, it provided the house of Mark with a founding myth that corresponded to its remarkable social ascent and territorial expansion achieved and still awaited at that time: the five-fold nomination to the bishoprics in Liège, Münster and Colonia between 1313 and 1364, the succession in the domain Arenberg (where a junior line was founded in 1328) and the succession in the County of Cleves at the lower Rhine in 1368[11].

Levold of Northof, the canon of Liège, was in close touch with members of the house of Mark as their protégé, councilor, tutor and finally chronicler[12]. Admittedly, the legend emerged under the direct influence of the Counts of Mark and it continued to surround them even later. At their courts, this founding myth seems to have been re-narrated – and re-shaped – over decades. Quite remarkably, after the house of Mark succeeded in Cleves in 1368 and after the County was elevated to Duchy in 1417, the legend of Orsini kinship was extended to the original family of Cleves (which had become extinct in 1368) as though both houses, Mark and Cleves, would have shared the Italian descent. According to the Wisseler Grafenreihe, a brief genealogy from the early fifteenth century, it was Elias, the legendary Knight of the Swan, who married a certain noble virgin, lady of the whole province of Cleves and from whom the original Counts of Cleves descended[13]. In the final decades of the same century, Gert van der Schuren (1411–1496), the secretary of Johann I, Duke of Cleves, attempted to specify the origin of Elias' bride. In his chronicle

[10] "Duo igitur erant fratres Ottoni imperatori tercio specialiter cari ex nobili et illustri Romanorum prosapia et progenie procreati, videlicet Ursionorum, qui usque in hodiernum diem inter nobiliores et potenciores in urbe Romana reputantur. Hii duo fratres cum predicto imperatore ad partes citramontanas venerunt. Qui … terram emerunt et dominium …". Die Chronik der Grafen von der Mark, ed. F. Zschaeck (*MGH SS rer. Germ.* N. S. VI). Berlin 1929, 13, 100.

[11] S. Rabeler, Der Geschichtsschreiber, die Dynastie und die Städte. Städte als Objekte, Akteure und Antagonisten dynastisch orientierter Politik in der Chronik Levolds von Northof (1279–ca. 1359). *Jahrbuch für Regionalgeschichte* 27 (2009), 15–40; J. de Chestret de Haneffe, Histoire de la maison de la Marck y compris les Clèves de la seconde race. Liège 1898.

[12] S. Pätzold, Immer ein warmherziger Förderer der Grafschaft Mark. Levold von Northof (1279–1358/59). *Concilium medii aevi* 14 (2011), 319–336.

[13] "quaedam virgo nobilis, totius prouincie Cliuensium domina". J. S. Seibertz, Quellen der Westfälischen Geschichte III. Arnsberg 1869, 330.

he argued, that the original Counts of Cleves used the red rose in their coat of arms and descended from the Roman Orsini[14]. A somewhat later chronicle of both houses (Cleves and Mark), written in the early decades of the sixteenth century and entitled in one of its manuscripts *Origo ac genealogia Clivensium-Ursinorum*[15], then presented two different stories of the Orsini arrival to Germany. Whereas Levold of Northof's narration was reiterated to explain the beginnings of ancestors of the Counts of Mark in Westphalia in 1000[16], a new story was invented to describe how two other brothers Orsini left Rome as early as 300 BC in order to remove the shame for the defeat of Romans in the battle of Caudine Forks (321 BC). On the lower Rhine they founded the castle of Cleves ("Clivensium Ursinorum castrum")[17]. The Orsini origin of the house of Mark-Cleve thus became validated twice over.

Admittedly, the milieu of the Mark-Cleves courts encouraged the emergence and development of the Orsini myth. But unlike similar cases discussed in other chapters below, there seems to have been no further attempts to prove the legend beyond the chronicles mentioned. No durable adaptation of coats of arms was undertaken[18], no further evidence beyond historical accounts

[14] "want die alde ind alre irste wapen van Cleue bis an Elyas toekompste was geweest eyn gulden schilt ind dair mydden inne eyne roide rose, dat die alde wapen is van den vrsinen, den edelen geslecht van Romen, vyt Troyen gespraiten, dair dese Edele Cleefsche heeren van aldes afgekomen sint". R. Scholten (ed.), Clevische Chronic nach der Originalhandschrift des Gert van der Schuren. Cleve 1884, 42.

[15] J. S. Seibertz, Quellen der Westfälischen Geschichte II. Arnsberg 1860, 114.

[16] "Anno ab incarnatione domini 1000 clarissimus Marchiae comitatus orsus est a duobus nobilissimis Romanorum consularibus, alto Ursinorum sanguine cretis, a quibus et Clivensibus origo est." Ibid., 152.

[17] "Anno ac vrbe condita quadringentesimo quadragesimo secundo, ante Christi ex virgine incarnationem trecentesimo, temporibus Alexandri magni … duo illustrissimi romani fratres de Vrsinis, quatenus ignominiam Samniticae cladis apud caudinas furculas a Romanis acceptae diluerent, florenti relicta Italia, alpibusque transcuris ad Rheni fluminis fontes … peruenerunt. Inde flexuosos Rheni meatus descendendo comitantes, ad locum, quo Walam ed Jssulam flumina a se rejicit … deuenerunt; vbi … arcem extruere …, quae … Cliuis hodie nuncupatur." Ibid., 121–123.

[18] This point would yet deserve further examination. The coat of arms the Counts of Mark used in the fourteenth century did not resamble the Orsini one. But the heraldic rose was used by their distant cousins Counts of Altena-Isenburg in the thirteenth century and occasionally the early Counts of Mark might have even used it as reverse as well, Th. Ilgen, Die ältesten Grafen von Berg und deren Abkömmlinge, die Grafen von Altena (Isenburg-Limburg und Mark). Ein Beitrag zur Legendenbildung. *Zeitschrift des Bergischen Geschichtsvereins* 36 (N. F. 26) (1902/1903), 14–62, at 54–62. Interestingly, Adolf of Mark († 1344), the bishop of Liège and Levold of Northof's main patron, used a devided coat of arms whose heraldically right part was wholy identical with the Orsini arms (a rose above red-white bends), see de Chestret de Haneffe,

was produced and no attempts to get an authentification from the Orsini are known.

The case of the Counts of Mark is the earliest but far from being the only example. On the contrary: in late medieval German chronicles, the Orsini ancestry was put forward with regard to many other families. In the "Chronicon Holtzatiae" from 1448, an anonymous presbyter of Bremen linked the Orsini with the family of Schauenburg, Counts of Holstein[19]. Peter von Andlau from Basle († 1480) registered the origin "de genere Ursinorum" in the case of the Marggraves of Baden and of the Barons from Rappoltstein (in Alsace)[20]. In the late fifteenth century, the secular priest Johannes Nuhn, historiographer of the Landgraves of Hesse, established a kinship between the Orsini and the Princes of Anhalt[21]. The descent of the Counts of Lippe from the Orsini was suggested by the Benedictine monk of Liesborn Bernhard Witte († ca. 1520), an author of a chronicle of Westphalia composed between 1495 and 1520[22]. The house of Mecklenburg might have established this kind of myth too, though we know it only from a short (and already critical) mention in the funeral sermon on the Duke Magnus II of Mecklenburg (1441–1503), delivered by Albert Krantz (ca. 1448–1517) and posthumously published in 1519[23]. Some of these interpreta-

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Histoire (as in note 11), 18, and tab. 1, no. 3. In literature at disposal, I found no explanation, though the coincidence is evident.

[19] Adolf I of Schauenburg, the founder of the family, "semper de illo sanguine et domo Vrsinorum referuntur habuisse". Quellensammlung der Schleswig-Holstein-Lauenburgischen Gesellschaft für vaterländische Geschichte I: Chronicon Holtzatiae Auctore Presbytero Bremensi, ed. J. M. Lappenberg. Kiel 1862, 25; M. Olivier, Le prince et l'histoire dans le comté de Holstein, au miroir du Chronicon Holtzatiae auctore Presbytero Bremensi. *Médiévales* 48 (2005), 99–122.

[20] P. von Andlau, Kaiser und Reich. Libellus de Cesarea Monarchia, ed. R. A. Müller. Frankfurt am Main/Leipzig 1998, 160–163.

[21] "ein edeler Römer Ascanius genandt, von dem Geschlecht der Vrsiner, das ist von dem Beeren, der suchte Fug, und verkauffte so theuer er mocht, alles sein guth zu Rhom, und schickte sich füglich von dannen mit weib und kindern … und zogen in teutsche Nation, auffs letzt kamen sie in Sachsen, da liessen sie sich zu bauen nieder … zu der zeit, vor Christi geburt 73. Jahr, da sind die Anhaltische Fürsten herkommen … und der Beer ist ihr Wappen &c". Chronicon Thvringicvm et Hassiacum sub titulo: Chronica und altes Herkommen der Landtgraven zu Döringen …, in: Selecta Juris et Historiarum III, ed. H. Ch. Senckenberg. Frankfurt am Main 1735, 301–514, at 305s.

[22] According to Witte, the town and house of Lippe was founded by "vir quidam nobilis admodum ex generoso Romanorum stemate, Ursinorum scilicet familia ortus apud Westphalos sedem sibi inter mediocres collocaverat". B. Wittius, Historia antiquae occidentalis Saxoniae, seu nunc Westphaliae … . Monasterii Westhpalorum 1778, 394.

[23] "Domus ac familia Magnopolensium principum, quam habeat radices altissimas, necdum satis inclaruisse multis autumo, qui magnam sibi fecisse rem sunt arbitrati,

tions were grounded in similar heraldic symbols (the Counts of Lippe), other in ethymological arguments (the Princes of Anhalt whose venerated progenitor was Albertus Ursus – Albrecht I the Bear – in the twelfth century). But both the degree of involvement of the respective families in the emergence of these myths and the importance these legends had for the identity of the respective house cannot be retrieved from the obscurity which surrounds them.

At all events, the German humanist historiography of the sixteenth century – from Albert Krantz to Caspar Peucer – by emphasising the autochthonous German past[24], not only hindered any further inflation of the Orsini myth in Germany, but undermined most of the existing genealogical implications. With the exception of the Anhaltines (whose dynastic conception is further discussed below), the Orsini ancestry became increasingly questionable. A critical distance from or downright refutation of these legends became common place. A good example is Heinrich Piel († 1580), the chronicler from Minden in Northern Germany, who flaunted the alleged descent of the Counts of Hoye from the Orsini that was based upon the bear's paw in their coat of arms. There were, according to Piel, Counts of Hoye long before the Orsini family emerged. If they should have been Romans because of their arms, than all other families using the eagle, the sign of the city of Rome, must have been Romans too[25].

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si ad Vrsinorum vrbe ab Roma familiam praeclaram, illam ducant referendam. Amant hoc in laudibus suis proceres memorati, si magni per Germaniam principes de illorum origine glorientur. Sed inclytae Magnopolensis domus, & maior est antiquitas, & longe prouectior nobilitas. Trecentum necdum anni sunt, quod in vrbe Roma primum est auditum nomen Vrsinorum. At ego a mille annis, & longe supra, hanc nobilitatem, & domum principalem, optimis & certissimis documentis affirmo". A. Krantz, Wandalia. Coloniae 1519, lib. 14, cap. 33. U. Andermann, Albert Krantz. Wissenschaft und Historiographie um 1500. Weimar 1999, 206.

[24] J. Garber, Trojaner – Römer – Franken – Deutsche. "Nationale" Abstammungstheorien im Vorfeld der Nationalstaatsbildung, in: Nation und Literatur im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit, ed. K. Garber. Tübingen 1989, 108–163; J. Helmrath, Die Umprägung von Geschichtsbildern in der Historiographie des europäischen Humanismus, in: Von Fakten und Fiktionen. Mittelalterliche Geschichtsdarstellungen und ihre kritische Aufarbeitung, ed. J. Laudage. Köln–Weimar–Wien 2003, 323–352.

[25] "Und schreiben etzliche, daß die ersten grafen aus Italien von den Ursinerengeslogten ihren ursprunk haben sollen, darumb daß sie den barenclae im waffen haben. Das ich fur nichtes erachte, nachdeme das Ursinergeschlechte die zeit noch nicht gewesen, dan man weiß von dem geschlechte bei dero zeit nichtes zu sagende. Und ist auch ein los argument, daß die heren von der Hoie solten Romer sein, darumb daß die des geschlechtes wapen furen eder in stucklein davon, so mußten jo viele mehr Romer sein, die fursten und stede, so den adeler furen. Dan denen haben die Romer in ihren heubtbanneren im streite gefuret." Das Chronicon domesticum et gentile des Heinrich Piel, ed. M. Krieg. Münster 1981, 46.

The Orsini legend lost its credibility even for the house of Cleves-Mark, who had been the first in Germany to adopt it. Doubts were raised already in Levold of Northof's lifetime – thus the Dominican chronicler Heinrich von Herford († 1370) was not convinced[26] – but the open criticism prevailed after the house of Cleves-Mark died out in 1609. For the early seventeenth century-historians such as the first editor of Levold's chronicle Heinrich Meibom (1555–1625)[27] or the Lutheran parson Johann Pideritz (1559–1639) who refuted the Lippes' Roman ancestry in 1627[28], the Orsini claim was nothing more than a discredited and so ridiculous illusion – and it remained so until the thorough deconstruction of these myths in the eighteenth century, which was carried out by the Westphalian historian Johann Dietrich von Steinen (1699–1759)[29]. Ironically, this critical revision since the sixteenth century occured in the same time, as other variations of the Orsini kinship were still being claimed or even newly emerging in other parts of Europe.

Jouvenel des Ursins (France)

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, a supposed Orsini branch appeared in France. It was founded by Jean Jouvenel († 1431), an important jurist and social climber from a relatively humble background (he was probably a son of Pierre Jouvenel, a drapery merchand in Troyes, though the parentage is more than a little obscure). As *prévôt des marchands* of Paris from 1388 till 1400, then king's advocate in the Parlement of Paris and finally president of the Parlement of Toulouse and the exiled Parlement in Poitiers, Jean Jouvenel rose into prominent noble circles and sought to guarantee the acquired rank for subsequent generations. His sons enjoyed successful careers as *parlementaires*, clerics and important advisors in the entourage of the Valois kings. Two of

[26] "Quidam fabulantur, duos fratres nobiles Romanos ante hos duos primos fuisse et castra in Altena et in Aldenberch construxisse; sed nec nomina dant eis, nec tempus adventus et cursus eorum assignant". Liber de rebus memorabilioribus sive Chronicon Henrici de Hervordia, ed. A. Potthast. Gottingae 1859, 148.

[27] "Generosa & illustris familia … sine dubio fuit ex nobilitate Saxonica … Facessant igitur ociosae & friuolae assertiones de Romana ista principum nostrorum origine. Nescio, quid superioris aeui scriptores impulerit, quod illos ex Italia, quam patriis regionibus arcessere maluerint". H. Meibomius, Levoldi a Northof … Origines Marcanae: Siue Chronicon Comitvm de Marca et Altena, a quibus descendunt Illustrißimi et Generosißimi Duces Iuliacenses, Cliuenses et Bergenses, etc. Quorum familia nuper in Ioanne-Wilhelmo desiit. Hanoviae 1613, 40.

[28] I. Piderius, Chronicon Comitatus Lippiae, Das ist: Eigentliche Und Außführliche Beschreibunge Aller Antiquiteten und Historien der Uhralten Graffschafft Lipp … II. Rinteln 1627, 217f., 260f.

[29] J. D. von Steinen, Westphälische Geschichte I. Lemgo 1755, 74–92.

them achieved prominence: Jean II (1388–1473), bishop of Beauvais and Laon, and then archbishop of Rheims, best known to historians as a chronicler due to his "Histoire de Charles VI", and his brother Guillaume Jouvenel (1400–1472), who was an important politician and Chancellor of France after 1445[30].

There has been a debate among French historians whether Jean I's early seals from the late fourteenth century, bearing a bear though not wholy identical with Orsini arms, already pointed to the supposed kinship[31]. In any case, the Orsini claim must have been debated as late as in 1410. In this year the new Antipope John XXIII flattered Jean I Jouvenel by appointing his son Jean II as apostolic notary. The bull addressed the young cleric as "Johanni Juvenalis de Ursinis" which allows the conclusion that a kinship pretension was not only existing, but even known abroad[32]. Indeed, other letters addressing Jean II and his brother Guillaume as "Juvenalis de Ursinis" or simply "de Ursinis" were issued in 1414 from the French royal chancery and by a papal legate in France[33].

Jean II, Guillaume and their brothers took the decisive steps to assert the claim. Since the mid 1430s, they themselves regularly began to annex "des Ursins" to their family name[34]. In his chronicle, Jean II included a short account on the origin of his house, affiliating it to certain Napoleone Orsini, a supposed bishop of Metz. The plebeian origin of the family was covered up by a fabricated story of Pierre Jouvenel's military achievments including participation in a crusade against the Saracens and a struggle for a restitution of his grandfathers's estates in the Kingdom of Naples[35].

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[30] L. Batiffol, Jean Jouvenel, prévôt des marchands de la ville de Paris (1360–1431). Paris 1894.

[31] P. Durrieu, Le Nom, le blason et l'origine de famille de l'historien Juvénal des Ursins. *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de France* 29 (1892), 193–221; Lewis, La noblesse (as in note 6), 83 and 98 (pictures at 84).

[32] Batiffol, L'origine (as in note 5), 713–715; N. Valois, L'origine de la famille Jouvenel des Ursins. *Mémoires de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France* VI/9 (1900), 77–88.

[33] A. de Boüard–Ch. Hirschauer, Les Jouvenel des Ursins et les Orsini. *MEFRM* 32 (1912), 49–67, at 57, 61–63.

[34] Batiffol, Le nom (as in note 5), 540–542, 555; Lewis, La noblesse (as in note 6), 97f.

[35] "Es estoient ses predecesseurs extraits des Vrsins de deuers Naples, & de Rome du mont Iourdain, & furent amenez en France par vn leur oncle, nommé Messire Neapolin des Vrsins, Euesque de Mets. Et fut son pere Pierre Iuuenal des Vrsins, bien vaillant homme d'armes, & l'vn des principaux, qui resista aux Anglois auec l'Euesque de Troyes … Et quand les guerres furent faillies en France, s'en alla auec autres sur les Sarrasins, & là mourut …". I. Ivvnal des Vrsins, Histoire de Charles VI. Roy de France, et des choses memorables aduenuës durant 42. années de son Regne, depuis 1380. iusque à 1422, ed. D. Godefroy. Paris 1653, 70. According to a discourse Jean II dedicated to his brother Guillaume after he was appointed a Chancellor of France in 1445, Pierre Jouvenel "s'en alla aprés que les guerres furent faillies, à Naples

The next stage was that the Jouvenels sought to have their pretention authenticated by the Orsini themselves, with whom they had established contacts during previous decades. In 1445, Latino Orsini (1416–1477), bishop of Trani, issued a charter confirming and specifying in detail the affiliation of the Jouvenels from the Orsini[36]. Interestingly, this fabricated genealogy – allegedly drawn from the Orsini archives in Rome ("ab Archiuis eiusdem Domus ac generis Vrsinorum in monte Iordano vrbe Roma existentium") – departed from the version produced by Jean II Jouvenel or rather it combined its elements differently. Thus the participation in a crusade against the Saracens was no longer ascribed to Pierre Jouvenel but to Jean I.

While communicating with the Roman curia, the Jouvenels employed the Orsini kinship[37]. Finally, they assimilated the Orsini coat of arms and presented it, often accompanied by heraldic bears, on numerous occasions: in Guillaume's famous portrait by Jean Fouquet, in the great family portrait in the Jouvenel chapel in Notre-Dame in Paris (painted between 1445 and 1449; fig. 3), in the *livre d'heures* of Michel Jouvenel (1408–1470/71) produced in the late 1460s and in two double representations of Guilluame as both a Chancellor and a Knight (dressed in clothes with Orsini symbols), the first in the stately manuscript *Mare historiarum* dating from the late 1440s (fig. 4), the second on his tombstone in Notre-Dame[38]. The tombstone of Guillaume's nephew Eustache († 1483) in the St. Peter in vincoli church represented the claim to the Orsini kinship by means of both the inscription ("Evstachivs Ivvenalis Vrsinvs …") and the Orsini coat of arms in the very city of Rome[39] (fig. 2).

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vers la Reyne de Naples pour sçauoir s'il pourroit recouurer des terres de Iuuenal des Vrsins son ayeul, & en porta les lettres & titres qu'il auoit deça. Et au pays auoit guerre, & y fut quatre ans au seruice de ladite Dame en armes, & depuis y eut accords. Et fut en vn voyage dessus & contre les Sarrasins, & là mourut". Ibid., 564; Batiffol, L'origine (as in note 5), 695, 702f.

[36] Published in Ivvnal des Vrsins, Histoire (as in note 35), 673f. The oldest existing copy – a double 'vidimus' from 1447 and 1464 in a copy from the seventeenth century – was identified by Lewis, La noblesse (as in note 6), 87f.

[37] Thus Guillaume in a letter composed soon after October 1446: "… solum Ytalicum inclitumque genus Ursinorum, unde traximus originem …". H. Müller, Die Franzosen, Frankreich und das Basler Konzil (1431–1449) I. Paderborn etc. 1990, 406.

[38] N. Reynaud, Sur la double représentantion de Guillaume Jouvenel des Ursins et sur ses emblèmes. *Revue de la Bibliothèque Nationale* 44 (1992), 50–57; F. Avril–N. Reynaud, Les manuscrits à peintures en France, 1440–1520. Paris 1993, 104, 109–113, 185; Jean Fouquet. Peintre et enlumineur du XV^{e} siècle, ed. F. Avril. Paris 2003, 110–117, 414–417; W. Paravicini, Le parchemin de Montpellier, une image troublante du règne de Charles de Téméraire. *Journal des savants* (2010), 307–370, at 328f.

[39] A reproduction by P. Litta, Famiglie celebri di Italia, vol. Orsini di Roma. Milano 1846–1848 (no pagination).

Thus two generations of the Jouvenels were able to build up and to assert a new identity. The alleged kinship, underpinned by a unique iconographic programme, took firm roots: Among all of the 'false' Orsini mentioned in Sansovino's books, the Jouvenels des Ursins – "gli Orsini di Francia" – received the most attention, perhaps while their affiliation to the Orsini lineage appeared the clearest one of all. Thus Sansovino included their genealogy, commented on the career of Jean I and other family members and even edited a letter addressed to Guillaume Jouvenel – "al Signor Guglielmo Orsino Gran Canceliero di Francia"[40]. Only after the Jouvenels – Barons (after 1587 Marquises) of Trainel – died out in 1650, the Orsini parentage was cast in doubt and soon refuted[41]. Despite that, the predicate "des Ursins" was, along with the marquisate of Trainel, adopted by the great-nephew of the last Jouvenel, François Harville des Ursins († 1701), and the kinship was later recognized by the Orsini pope Benedict XIII[42].

The Counts of Blagaj (Croatia and Carniola)

Exactly around the time the Jouvenels were fabricating documents to support their affiliation from the Orsini, another pretender to kinship appeared on the other side of the European continent: in the Kingdom of Slavonia that formed, together with the Kingdoms of Croatia and of Dalmatia, an autonomous part of the Kingdom of Hungary. The family in question can be traced to the beginning of the twelfth century in present-day central Croatia. Since the fourteenth century when the family adopted the name of the castle of Blagaj, its own foundation (in the north-western part of present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina), it ranked among the leading noble families in Slavonia.

The Blagajs witnessed and experienced the Ottoman expansion into the Balkans as well as the fall of the significant part of the medieval kingdom of Hungary in Ottoman hands after the battle of Mohács (1526). During the en-

[40] Sansovino, L'historia (as in note 7), fol. 8^{v}–9^{r}, 78^{v}–80^{r}; id., Degli huomini illustri (as in note 7), fol. 6^{v}, 16^{v}, 18^{v}, 20^{r}, 30^{v}.

[41] François du Chesne, Histoire des Chanceliers et Gardes des Sceaux de France distingués par des Regnes de nos monarques … . Paris 1680, 492; Lewis, La noblesse (as in note 6), 88–91.

[42] "Le cardinal des Ursins ayant esté éleu Pape sous le nom d'Innocent XII [!] … M. de Traisnel luy écrivit comme ayant l'honneur de luy appartenir; et le bon Pape, ou dans l'ignorance du fait, ou dans le dessein de mesnager la France, luy fit une réponse qui reconnoist cette parenté et qui sera produite quelque jour comme un tiltre." Écrits inédits de Saint-Simon V/1: Nottes sur tous les duchés-pairies, comtés-pairies et duchés vérifiés depuis 1500 jusq'en 1730, ed. P. Faugère. Paris 1883, 393f.; Lewis, La noblesse (as in note 6), 82, 90, 93. Saint-Simon obviously confused Innocence XIII de' Conti (1721–1724) with Benedict XIII Orsini (1724–1730).

during conflicts which followed, the properties of the Blagajs were devastated and successively lost. Exactly like other Hungarian and Croatian magnates, the Blagajs withdrew from their homeland. By the mid-sixteenth century, they found their new home in the neighbouring province of Carniola, one of the Habsburg hereditary territories. The Blagajs smoothly integrated into the local noble elite and, although less wealthy and less influential than they had been before, they still ranked among the prominent families of this small mountainous province. In Carniola, the Blagajs retained important local offices well into the nineteenth century. The family died out only in 1897[43].

The claim of being Orsini by origin was developed at some point around 1430. In 1432, the Blagajs produced (apparently with support of the Hungarian royal chancellor who was their relative) a set of forgeries: a special privilege allegedly issued by the king of Hungary for the benefit of the family in 1218 and its purported later confirmations. These charters were intended to strengthen the position of the Counts of Blagaj within the Croatian aristocracy and to make their status more independent: the Blagaj ancestors, brothers Baboneg and Stephan, were declared, with regard to their undisputable ("verilocax preconii fama et veritatis experientia") origin "from the genuine house and illustrious lineage of Orsini, senators of Rome" ("de originali domo et stirpe generosa Ursinorum, Romane urbis senatorum"), free counts ("comites liberos") and the king endowed them with freedom from taxation together with judicial exemption, "with regard to the fact that they too descend from the mentioned family of Orsini" ("considerantes etiam ipsos de predicta nobili Ursinorum prosapia propagatos fore"). Carefully analyzing these forgeries, Milan Šufflay was able to illuminate their purposes: The privilege of 1218 was forged in reaction to the rise of two rival families. The princes of Krk, the rival house in Croatia, began to pretend to kinship with the Roman patrician family of Frangipani at the very same time. In 1430, a charter issued by the pope recognized their claims. The Counts of Celje, on the other hand, a princely house of the Holy Roman Empire, acquired large possessions in Croatia at the beginning of the fifteenth century, thus becoming a major rival of the Blagajs. Clearly, the Blagajs were interested in not falling behind the pretensions of their domestic and foreign competitors. As Orsini by origin and as free counts by privilege they sought to counterbalance both rival families[44].

[43] The history of the Blagajs after they moved to Carniola is little investigated. The uncritical and superficial book by H. Adolph, Geschichte der Familie Ursini Grafen von Blagay. Wien–Graz 2007, is barely relevant except for genealogical data and illustrations from the author's family collection. For the earlier period see the works by Thallóczy (as in note 5).

[44] Šufflay, Iz arkiva (as in note 5), 213–226.

The forgeries from 1432 opened a series of acts by which the Blagaj family identified itself with the Orsini. The similarities to the strategy adopted by the Jouvenels a few decades earlier are striking. At some point in the fifteenth century, the Blagajs altered their coat of arms, replacing the demi-lion with the heraldic rose: From now on – the oldest evidence dates from 1492 – they employed the same coat of arms as the Orsini[45]. Stephan Count of Blagaj († 1547) was the first of his family who changed his predicate and began to use the name 'Ursin(us)' in his signature, thus calling himself "Ursinus comes perpetuus de Blagay" and in German "Ursin Graf von Blagay". The earliest signatures of this form (employed by his descendants as well) which I have been able to identify date from 1530[46].

The earliest recorded attempts to have the kinship recognized by members of the Orsini house seem to have been undertaken during the 1540s, probably by Stephan himself. Valerio Orsini (1504–1550) from the Monterotondo branch, the Venetian governor in Dalmatia, was visited by supposed relatives from Croatia in his seat in Zadar and was asked to validate the kinship. Coats of arms and other symbols from both families were compared, and it seems that the Blagajs were received sympathetically[47]. The contact was renewed a generation later: In 1564, Stephan's son Franz Ursin of Blagaj († 1576) addressed Giovanni Battista Orsini († 1566), the archbishop of Santa Severina in

[45] Thallóczy, Geschichte (as in note 5), 135–150.

[46] Monumenta Habsburgica regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae. Habsburški spomenici Kraljevine Hrvatske, Dalmacije i Slavonije, ed. E. Laszowski, in: Monumenta spectantia historiam slavorum meridionalium XXXV. Zagreb 1914, 322 (1530). Magyar országgyűlési emlékek történeti bevezetésekkel II (1526–1536), ed. V. Fraknói. Budapest 1874, 622 (1535). In 1540 at latest, this form entered royal letters: Monumenta ecclesiastica tempora innovatae in Hungaria religionis illustrantia III: 1535–1541, ed. V. Bunyitay–R. Rapaics–J. Karácsonyi. Budapestini 1906, 505 (1540); A Blagay-család oklevéltára (as in note 5), 467 (1542), 468, 473 (1549).

[47] In his letter to Francesco Sansovino dated in Brescia on 8 April 1564, Valerio's son Giordano (1526–1564) recalled how this happened: "Oltre a cio mi gioua auuertire V. S. che anco in Crouatia, o luoghi conuicini, si troua un Ramo della notra casa, & quando il S[ignor] mio padre di bo[na] me[moria] fù Gouernator Generale in Dalmatia per seruitio di questo Sereniss. Dominio, mandorno sin'a Zara alcuni di detti S. Orsini, a presentare, et uisitare esso S[ignor] mio Padre come parente, & riconoscer seco l'Arme, & l'insegne de nostri maggiori, a che mi trouai presente …". Del secretario di M. Francesco Sansovino libri VI … . Venetia 1580, fol. 172^{r}. On 2 September 1564, Giordano turned back to this matter: "che quelli di Crouatia fussero supposti, non ne hò notitia nessuna, nè di loro so altro, se non che a Zara uennero alcuni a riconoscere il parentado con mio Padre". Ibid., fol. 174^{v}. Valerio was governor of Dalmatia from 1540 until his death. This attempt must have been made by Stephan of Blagaj who at that time was the only adult male member of his family.

Calabria and one of Valerio's sons, and he once more asked him to acknowledge the kinship[48]. The request did not reach the archbishop, but his brother Giordano (1525–1564), the Venetian governor in Brescia, who, confused by the letter and supposing the request had not come from Croatia but from another alleged Orsini relatives in Bohemia, had to ask the family historian Sansovino for his advice[49]. Whether Giordano still managed to respond to Franz Blagaj, is not clear (he died three weeks later). Sansovino, lacking any knowledge about the precise form of the kinship, then published Franz Blagaj's letter in his work, thus giving it the status of a piece of evidence[50].

Under Franz Blagaj, finally, another charter, allegedly issued by the king of Hungary in 1200, was forged that described the kinship in still more precise terms. Here, the Blagajs were linked to a certain Nicolotto Orsini who had to leave Rome due to squabbles between the Orsini and the Senators of the city[51]. Franz produced this forgery to the Emperor Maximilian II who allowed it to be confirmed through the Hungarian chancery in 1571. On this occasion, the Emperor amended the Blagaj coat of arms by quartering it and adding one lion and – as another allusion to the Orsini family – one bear[52] (fig. 5). Within no more than one generation, the new piece of evidence reached the Italian Orsini themselves. Thus Alessandro († 1604) from the Pitigliano branch who visited Graz in 1598 as Grand Duke of Tuscany's legate, received a copy, obviously

[48] "… sappia la V[ostra] Illustriss[ima] Sig[noria] che anco noi habbiamo hauuto origine dalla genealogia de gli Orsini; onde udendo noi le degnißime lodi della virtù di V. S. Illustr. per le bocche di molti, non ci habbiamo potuto a modo alcuno tenere di non dar notitia di noi, come seruidori, et consanguinei uostri, per lettere nostre, & nostri seruitori a V. S. Illustriss. Habbiamo adunque mandato a V. S. illustr. i nostri egregi seruidori, Andrea Braimanich, et Pietro Vrsich, affine di riconoscer la parentela, et fare amicitia con lei. Onde preghiamo la V. Illustr. Sig. che uoglia a predetti dar quella fede indubitata, che ella darebbe a noi se fossimo presenti: pregandola che da quì in poi ne comandi come a suoi seruidori, essendo noi sempre pronti et apparecchiati a ogni comandamento di V. S. Illustr … ." The letter, dated in Kočevje in Carniola on 9 May 1564, was edited by Sansovino, L'historia (as in note 7), fol. 13^{v}.

[49] "Questo Principe alli giorni paßati ha mandato dui sui a ricognoscere i parenti di Roma, et fra gli altri hà scritto una lettera a Monsig. mio fratello … ma per eßere mio fratello in Calauria, non li hà potuto fare risposta … per il che lo prego a darme piu particolare notitia che può della sua origine, & per quanto di Roma mi hanno scritto, par che egli mostri di esser disceso da Monte Rotondo." Sansovino, Secretario (as in note 47), fol. 174^{v}–175^{r} (2 September 1564, Brescia).

[50] Sansovino, Degli huomini illustri (as in note 7), fol. 13$^{r–v}$.

[51] "propter quandam seditionem atque tumultum inter ipsos comites et senatores urbis Romane suscitatas." A Blagay-család oklevéltára, 1–4. No such Nicolotto seems to be mentioned in Sansovino's volumes from 1565 cited in footnote 7.

[52] A Blagay-család oklevéltára (as in note 5), 513–516.

from Stephan II of Blagaj († 1598), Franz's son. The document was later found by Gamurrini and published by him in his treatise about the Orsini house[53].

Information about the concrete motivations that fuelled this continuous assimilation of the Blagajs with the Orsini family is very hard to find. Only hypothetically we may admit that the emergency that the Blagaj possessions in Croatia suffered under the Ottoman threat and, subsequently, the withdrawal of the family from Croatia into Carniola (where Franz was admitted as *Landmann* in 1582) challenged the established position of the family and might have created a need for legitimization that resulted in the struggle for even closer association with the internationally respected aristocratic family. Little more is known about how this new identity was cultivated by later Blagajs. It seems that the privilege of 1571 based on the forgery of 1200 provided the family with a credible affiliation that did not require any further reasoning. Thus family members continued to assimilate with the 'domus Ursinorum' through their signatures, calling themselves consequently 'Ursinus', 'Ursin' ('Urschin') or 'Orsini', as the linguistic context required[54] (fig. 6). Eulogizers such as the Jesuit Johann Ziegelmiller, professor at the Jesuit university in Graz and a teacher of Franz Adam of Blagaj (1641–1716), or a Capuchin friar who in 1680 composed a funeral sermon on the occasion of the death of the latter's father, Eberhard Leopold Ursin, Count of Blagaj could simply portray the family members against the glory of the large Orsini house that, resembling a big rose-shrub ("diser Ursinische Rosenstock"), had been giving flowers – saints, popes, cardinals and dignitaries of all kind – to the whole of Europe[55].

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[53] "… apparisce tra le scritture de' Signori Orsini pubblica attestazione … dell'anno 1200 … la quale scrittura fu donata l'anno 1598. da vno descendente di esso Stefano al Sig. Conte Alessandro Orsini Marchese del Monte S. Sauino, quando si ritrouaua nella città i Gratz Ambasciatore di compimento in nome di Ferdinando Gran Duca di Toscana alla Regina Margherita di Austria, moglie di Filippo III. Re di Spagna, aggiungendo, che quel Signore, che la donò, s'intitolaua Conte di Plagai … ." Gamurrini, Istoria II (as in note 8), 13.

[54] On 31 December 1614, Georg Andreas of Blagaj contributed to the *album amicorum* of Ernst Brinck in Vienna as *Giorgio Andrea Orsini, Conte di Blagay, Signor in Gotsche, Fridrichstain et Weixelburg*. Den Haag, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, national library of the Netherlands, KW 135, K 4, fol. 54^{r}.

[55] Amandus von Grätz, Nachklang der Tugend. Das ist Leich: und Ehren-Predig Über Das Tugendsahme Leben und aufferbaulichen Todt deß Weilland Hoch und Wolgebornen Graffen und Herrn Herrn Erberhard Leopold Ursini, Graffen von Blaggay … . Laybach 1680. The only copy I was able to locate can be found in Ljubljana in Semeniška knjižnica, Miscelanea P II, 3. I am grateful to Dr. Sašo Jerše for providing me with a photocopy. The collection of Latin rhymes published on the occasion of Franz Adam of Blagaj's graduation (Illustrißimus Comitatus Laureatae Philosophiae Graecensis Honori Illustrißimi Comitis Ursini Adami Francisci a Blaggay, &c., prima

The lords of Rožmberk (Bohemia)

Unlike the Jouvenels who were apparently social climbers and unlike the Blagajs whose social position was challenged, when the lords of Rožmberk began to invoke the Orsini kinship they were already a well-established aristocratic house – the wealthiest, the most illustrious and the most powerful noble family in the Kingdom of Bohemia, dominating its southern part[56]. The notion of a common origin with the Orsini was grounded in the similar coat of arms the Rožmberks employed since the Middle Ages: a red five-petal rose in a silver field. Given the prominence of the Rožmberk house, it may seem surprising that we possess no unequivocal records about when the claim emerged. The earliest indisputable testimonies that the Rožmberks invoked the Orsini kinship date from about 1460, which has led most historians to suppose that the genealogical fiction was invented by Oldřich II of Rožmberk (1403–1462). Oldřich was an important figure during the Hussite era and the fact that he produced multiple forgeries to assert or extend his family's property rights during his lifetime has made him appear the most likely inventor of the myth[57].

It is striking, however, that in sources which are available the claim appears rather inconspicuously. Thus a redaction from 1459 of an anonymous Czech medieval chronicle in verse (the so-called Dalimil-chronicle, dating from the beginning of the fourteenth century) brought an interpolation according to which the Rožmberks derived from the Orsini, "the Roman princes"[58]. In 1460, Oldřich's agent named Kozlovec put down a *pro memoria* concerning his mission to the Archdukes Albrecht and Sigmund of Austria to Vienna in summer 1458. Kozlovec was entrusted to express Oldřich's regret regarding the failure of the Austrian candidature for the Bohemian throne after George of

philosophiae lavreola donati oblatus, quando svb avspiciis Leopoldi Caesaris conclvsiones ex vniversa Philosophiae propvgnavit, Ab eodem Caesare avrea torqve oblata, praeside Rev. P. Ioanne Zieglmiller … . Graecii 1660) follows the same logic, enumerating the dignitaries of all kinds from the Orsini family, including "Quinque supra 30. Cardinales" and "4 Pontifices maximi", and even "Duo gloriosi Martyres". As early as in 1659 Ziegelmiller edited another record on the Blagaj family (Ver purpureum in Rosa ursina, seu Elogia familiae Ursinae. Graecii 1659) but I could not locate a copy. See J. N. Stöger, Scriptores Provinciae Austriacae Societatis Jesu I. Viennae 1855.

[56] For deep traces the Rožmberks left in the history of Bohemia see the recent exhibition catalogue: Rožmberkové. Rod českých velmožů a jeho cesta dějinami, ed. J. Pánek. České Budějovice 2011; R. Lavička–R. Šimůnek, Páni z Rožmberka 1250–1520. Jižní Čechy ve středověku. České Budějovice 2011; V. Bůžek et al., Světy posledních Rožmberků. Praha 2011.

[57] A. Kubíková, Oldřich z Rožmberka. České Budějovice 2004.

[58] "z Uršinóv … římských kniežat … ." P. R. Pokorný, K tak zvanému posunu fikce o italském původu Vítkovců. *Erbovní sešit* 1/3–4 (1968/69), 23s.

Poděbrady, Rožmberk's main rival who was also part of the local aristocracy, had been elected king of Bohemia in early March, with even the vote of Rožmberk's own son in his favour. In Vienna, Kozlovec met French ambassadors who, disappointed that not even their king was remembered in the election, incited Rožmberk against the new monarch and intimated that the French king has military power at his disposal through which he would be able to elevate Oldřich or his son to a much higher position than any other "de Ursinis" has yet enjoyed[59]. Provided that this *pro memoria* itself is genuine, the Orsini claim of the Rožmberks must have been already established by 1458 if it was familiar to French diplomats visiting Vienna. This raises an interesting question: Was it merely a coincidence that another respected man "de Ursinis" – Guillaume Jouvenel des Ursins – was the Chancellor of the French king at that time[60]?

These puzzling documents confused hyper-critical historians who, unaware that there were other noble families claiming the kinship much earlier, have been mostly overcautious to admit that the legend might have existed long before it first entered written records. But should we really believe that the silence of the sources excludes the possibility that the claim emerged decades earlier? As early as in 1437, Oldřich II addressed the Cardinal Giordano Orsini († 1438) as a relative (*Reverendissime pater consanguinee*). Was it simply for the sake of courtesy, as historians have supposed so far[61]?

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[59] Archiv český čili staré písemné památky české i moravské … VII. Praha 1887, 234; F. Beneš, Oldřich z Rožmberka tvůrcem fikce o původu Rožmberků z rodu italských knížat Ursínů. *Jihočeský sborník historický* 38 (1969), 181–190, at 182. On the legacy of Jean de Champdenier and Jean de Fenestranges to Innsbruck and Vienna and its political background see R. Urbánek, České dějiny, vol. III/3. Praha 1930, 288s. and passim; W. Maleczek, Die diplomatischen Beziehungen zwischen Österreich und Frankreich in der Zeit von 1430 bis 1474. Diss. Innsbruck 1968, 164–170.

[60] Guillaume himself was obviously well informed about Bohemia. In December 1457, he himself negotiated in Tours with noble diplomats sent by Ladislav, king of Bohemia, to arrange his marriage with a French princess. Yet the young king died before the legacy was over, Urbánek, České dějiny, vol. III/3, 217. Obviously there were multiple occasions on which the false Orsini could get in touch: "Messire Adolf de la Marck, Chevalier", from a family that once too invoked the Orsini kinship, took part in the French mission to Vienna in 1458 and communicated between the ambassadors and the dauphine: (Ch. P.) Duclos, Recueil de piéces pour servir de suite a l'histoire de Louis XI. La Haye 1746, 169f.; de Chestret de Haneffe, Histoire (as in note 11), 296s.

[61] Prague, National library, ms. I E 40, fol. 64^{r}; T. Wagner–F. Mareš, O původu (as in note 5), 213–235, at 221. J. Truhlář, Humanismus a humanisté v Čechách za krále Vladislava II. Praha 1894, 73, casted doubt about the original wording of the letter which we know only as a later copy. B. Rynešová, Kdy vznikla fikce o italském původu Vítkovců, in: Sborník prací věnovaných prof. dru Gustavu Friedrichovi k šedesátým narozeninám. Praha 1931, 369–373, at 371s., and all later historians have supposed, the address was a pure courtesy with no genealogical implications.

Although there has been a thorough debate since the nineteenth century about the Orsini legend within the Rožmberk family, historians have overlooked an interesting piece of evidence which might allow us to locate its emergence even earlier, prior to Oldřich of Rožmberk. Yet this testimony is at least as confusing as that already mentioned: In 1411, Sigismund of Luxemburg addressed the representatives of the city commune of Trogir in Dalmatia regarding the Blessed "Johannes Traguriensis", the first bishop of the town († 1111). The Hungarian and Roman king required from the Trogirians further documents which would permit the claim of the barons "de Rosenberg" that the venerated bishop "descended from the family of their blood relatives, namely the Orsini" to be confirmed[62].

This letter certainly raises doubts. While there is no evidence that the Rožmberks would have been in any touch with Dalmatia, how would they come to the idea to search for the kinship with a local saint from Trogir? Another doubt emerges from the fact that the letter surfaced at a rather late point. It was first published in 1657 in the remarks to the medieval hagiographic reports on "Johannes Traguriensis" edited by the Dalmatian savant Giovanni Lucio (1604–1679)[63]. Lucio, born in Trogir from a patrician family but frequently dwelling in Rome (continuously after 1655) was in touch with Francesco Orsini (1600–1667) from the Bracciano line. Francesco, a Jesuit himself, was informed about Lucio's work and as early as in 1634 had provided the scholar with epigrams concerning the venerated bishop of Trogir. Francesco too received six copies of Lucio's edition[64]. Thus a suspicion emerges, whether

[62] "Accepimus quas nuper a dominis baronibus de Rosenberg, nostris dilectis, requisiti, a sinceritate fidelitatis vestre publicas memorias S. Joannis, episcopi olim Vestri, ad nos transmitti postulauimus; ex quibus quum iuxta eorumdem Dominorum placita idem Sanctus Episcopus, ex suorum consanguineorum, Vrsina nempe familia ortus, non obscure cognoscatur; ideo rogamus, fidelitatis vestrae promptitudinem, relinquas quoque scripturas, que de hoc facto apud vos extant, ad nos pro gloria sancti viri et splendore eius familiae opportuna occasione dirigatis … ." Codex diplomaticvs Hungariae ecclesiasticvs et civilis X/5, ed. Gy. Fejér. Budae 1842, 151.

[63] Vita B. Ioannis confessoris episcopis [!] Tragvriensis, et eivs miracvla, ed. I. Lucius. Romae 1657, annexed are (pp. 23–56) "Ioannis Lvcii Notae Historicae ad vitam B. Ioannis confessoris episcopi Tragvriensis", 47. I am indebted to Dr. Jadranka Neralić for providing me with a photocopy of this rare print. See M. Kurelac, Bibliografija o Ivanu Luciusu-Lučiću i njegovu djelu. Opis djela I. Lučića i literatura o njemu. *Zbornik Historijskog instituta Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti* 6 (1969), 169–180, at 169. Next edition of the letter provided D. Farlati, Illyrici sacri tomus quartus. Venetiis 1769, 329, and S. Katona, Historia critica regvm Hvngariae stirpis mixtae V/12. Budae 1790, 67.

[64] M. Kurelac, Ivan Lučić Lucius. Otac hrvatske historiografije. Zagreb 1994, 31–58, especially at 33–35, 39–43, 52f., 58.

Lucio did perhaps intend to improve the genealogy of his noble friend with the addition of a saint while simultaneously providing the saint of his home town with a prominent aristocratic pedigree. On the other hand, such a blatant forgery (Lucio announced the published letter "ex originali") would certainly run counter to recent interpretation of Lucio as a critical historian whose advanced methodology and technical skills resembling those of the Bollandists. Moreover, Lucio was much less enthusiastic about the Orsini kinship of John of Trogir than his followers. In another context, he even ridiculized the search for alleged Roman kinship[65]. Naturally, the letter might have been fabricated in Trogir much earlier and Lucio, who temporarily served as *operarius* of the cathedral of Trogir, could have found the forgery while assembling the material for his own works. But what would have been the purpose and how could a local scholar in Croatia learn about the Rožmberks in Bohemia and their kinship claims? And would even aristocrats from remote Bohemia provide the necessary credibility for such a forgery[66]? Until much more detailed investigation has been carried out, we need to admit that the letter could even be genuine and that the Rožmberks really might have claimed kinship with the Orsini even before 1411.

Be that as it may, the claim had been established by 1460 and, like the Jouvenels and the Blagajs, the Rožmberks too secured supporting authentification from the Orsini themselves. In 1469, the cardinal Latino Orsini (1416–1477) from the Bracciano line issued a charter that confirmed the common origin of both families and contradicted those who would call into question the kinship with the Orsini of Oldřich's son, *Iohannes de Vrsinis alias de Rosembergh nuncupatus* (fig. 7). In 1481, two more charters with similar content were issued by two other Roman prelates, both nephews of Latino Orsini[67]. Apparently there

[65] Ibid., 149f., interprets Lucio as the father of Croatian historiography and the founder of written history based on scientific principles who applied "brilliant scientific methods … reasoned out soberly and with restraint bringing into full relief his scholarly and critical approach".

[66] No historian has yet casted doubt about the authenticity of the letter in question which appears among the modern abstracts of Sigismund's charters and letters: Zsigmondkori oklevéltár III (1411–1412), ed. E. Mályusz–I. Borsa. Budapest 1993, 253, no. 912.

[67] Třeboň, Státní oblastní archiv v Třeboni (State Regional Archives in Třeboň), Cizí rody, z Rožmberka, listina 28/1, 28/2 and 28/3. *Cosmus … Cardinalis de Ursinis* was in fact the Cardinal Cos(i)mo Migliorati († 1481), son of Gentile Migliorati and Elena Orsini, though he used to call himself Orsini. The third of these charters was issued by the papal legate Orso Orsini († 1495) when he visited Vok of Rožmberk in Český Krumlov. Orso was a son of Clarice Orsini (another sister of Cardinal Latino Orsini), and of Lorenzo Orsini from the Monterotondo branch. For exact quotations of these charters see below.

was even a fourth charter, the earliest of all, issued by Latino Orsini for Jan's brother Jošt of Rožmberk († 1467), the bishop of Wrocław in Silesia[68].

Apart from these charters, little is known about contacts between the Rožmberks and their supposed Italian relatives in the fifteenth century. Yet it seems that both sides were interested in the kinship. After the Hussite wars (1419–1434) that divided Bohemia and its population – including the nobility – by faith, the Rožmberks belonged to what was now the Catholic minority. Given their wealth and influence, they were crucial political figures and the Roman curia, struggling to bring about the suppression of what was viewed as heresy, needed them as powerful allies. Thus there was an interesting synergy between the Rožmberks, looking for international recognition of their pre-eminence, and the prelates of the Orsini house, pursuing what were clear papal goals in Bohemia. In fact the authentification of the kinship by cardinal Latino Orsini on 22 March 1469 fits perfectly with the political involvement of Jan of Rožmberk († 1472), who in August 1468 was forced to end his support of George of Poděbrady and to join other Catholic magnates, in rebellion against the Hussite king since 1465. In that same autumn of 1468, Jan sent an agent to the curia who stayed in Rome until late March of the following year[69]. Was the kinship recognition, issued by one of the most important cardinals of that period, a reward for Jan's involvement in the papal case or perhaps an attempt to keep the vacillating Rožmberk on the pope's side? Given this temporal coincidence, it would be hard to believe that the charter was issued without any regard to the political and military struggle in Bohemia.

The Rožmberks themselves had a good reason to be interested in this kinship, namely the precedence over the whole nobility of Bohemia claimed by the head of the house. Occasionally, this ambition was challenged by other aristocrats who possessed and employed higher titles, such as the numerous dukes of Silesia (a dependency of the Kingdom of Bohemia), or, in the sixteenth century, by families raised to princely rank by the Emperor. In such contests over status, it was clearly advantageous for the Rožmberks to refer to their origins in a Roman senatorial house which became princes. Although

[68] Thus A. Kubíková, "Výpověď krále Jana" z jiného úhlu pohledu, in: Sto let od narození profesora J. Šebánka. Brno 2000, 129–136, at 131, referring to the charter of Carlo Migliorati who recalled that "Dominus Latinus bonae memoriae … habuit pro consanguineo suo et familiae nostrae Reverendissimo in Christo Patrem Dominum Jodocum de Rosis … et ita appellavit, et reputavit, et per suae Reverendissimae Dominationis patentes litteras suo pontificali sigillo munitas fidem fecit universis et singulis, recognoscens praedictum Dominum episcopum in consanguineum suum et familie et domus suae …".

[69] F. Beneš, Zradil Jan z Rožmberka krále Jiřího Poděbradského? *Jihočeský sborník historický* 35 (1966), 115–137, at 131.

they did not employ the princely dignity, they represented themselves as being of princely blood.

Around 1500, the Rožmberks fabricated a document supposed to be a royal decision in a dispute about rank between a duke of Silesia and a lord of Rožmberk in 1341: According to this forgery, the latter, allegedly supported by his Italian cousins Gabriele de Ursinis and Prince Giordano de Hanibalis, succeeded in proving his family's origin from Rome and based his claim on the argument that Roman princes were more ancient and more noble than Silesian dukes. The king, while avoiding a definite decision, acknowledged the princely quality of the Rožmberk family[70].

The fictitious kinship could thus be easily employed to defend the family's rank. It does not seem, however, that the alleged kinship would have been systematically propagated by the family at that time. References to it seem to have been rare, though those that survive are interesting. Thus Filippo Beroaldo (1453–1505), a renowned Humanist and a teacher of Oldřich III of Rožmberk (1471–1513) who studied in Bologna in 1487, dedicated one of his works ("Annotationes centum") to his ex-student in 1488 with an appeal referring to the Italian origin of the Rožmberk house[71]. A decade later, in 1497, a Dutch humanist Jacob Canter (1459–1529) who spent some time in Bohemia as court poet of the Rožmberks praised the family in a Latin poem "Rosa rosensis". Here he traced the origins of the Orsini house and of the heraldic rose back to Aenaeas and the goddess Venus. The poem survived in form of a small illuminated manuscript, whose illustrations make the continuity ("Aenaeas heros Troianus" – "Ursini principes Romani" – "Rosenses proceres Bohemi") explicit[72] (fig. 8). But all things considered, the awareness of the kinship seems to have long reposed in the arsenal of family prerogatives but only rarely was it pulled out and employed in the public arena.

It was only in the very last generation of the Rožmberks that the Orsini claim was revived. Once again this deployment was triggered by another, po-

[70] J. Pánek, "Výpověď krále Jana" – odraz politického programu české šlechty z poloviny 16. století, in: Historia docet. Sborník prací k poctě šedesátých narozenin prof. PhDr. I. Hlaváčka, CSc., ed. M. Polívka–M. Svatoš. Praha 1992, 341–355; Kubíková, "Výpověď" (as in note 68). The wording of the forgery is known only from a later German translation: Norbert Heermann's Rosenberg'sche Chronik, ed. M. Klimesch. Prag 1897, 51–55.

[71] "Non vis tu quidem degenerare a maiorum tuorum nobilitate, quae talis ac tanta est ut non solum in latissimo Boemiae regno transalpinisque nationibus familia Rosensis sit memoratissima, sed etiam in Italia, unde oriunda esse traditur, clara sit". F. Beroaldo the Elder, Annotationes centum, ed. L. A. Ciapponi. Binghampton–New York 1995, 53–56, at 55; Truhlář, Humanismus (as in note 62), 101.

[72] J. Šimek, Básnické zpracování orsiniovské fikce. Dramatická báseň Rosa rosenis od Jacoba Cantera, in: Rožmberkové (as in note 56), 266–269.

litically important dispute over rank between Vilém of Rožmberk (1535–1592) and the lords of Plauen, after the latter had been raised to princely status. During this controversy, Vilém not only referred to the kinship with the Orsini, but he even threatened to withdraw back to Italy if his family's privileges would have been violated – an interesting but hardly realistic gesture. The dispute was decided in his favour in 1556, and thereafter Rožmberk systematically sought to reinforce and propagate his princely-like identity. Thus he married serially three princesses from prominent dynasties of the Holy Roman Empire[73]. In this endeavour, the Orsini kinship became quite central to his campaign. As early as in 1558, Vilém contacted Franz of Blagaj – the first recorded contact between both families – and asked him for assistance so that he could reconstruct the missing link between his family and the Italian Orsini with more precision[74].

[73] J. Pánek, Poslední Rožmberkové. Velmoži české renesance. Praha 1989, offers the best overview.

[74] Vilém's interesting letter has been overlooked by recent historians though it was published already by M. M(illauer), Der böhmische Reichs-Baron, Gubernator seines Hauses, Oberst-Burggraf und Ritter des goldenen Vließes: Wilhelm von Rosenberg. *Archiv für Geschichte, Statistik, Literatur und Kunst* 1826, Nr. 5–10 (January 11–23), 25–31, 42–47, 49–55, at 49f. Rožmberk addressed Count Blagaj – "veluti ignotum et nunquam mihi antea visum" – as "amicum et consanguineum suum, who was recommended to him as antiquitatis studiosissimus". He remarked that "illustres praedecessores Tui, principes Ursini, multis jam elapsis temporibus, majores meos pro hominibus ex illorum genealogia ortis habuerunt et recognoverunt, quod non solum armorum et clypeorum, quibus iidem majores mei ab antiquis ad haec usue tempora sunt usi, conformitate probari, sed etiam amplissimarum literarum fide et testimonio ipsorummet principum uberrime doceri potest adeo, ut in nullam neque apud me, neque alios veniat dubitationem". The memory of the Orsini origin faded out ("propter bellorum et incendiorum incommoda, quae illustres majores mei, magna nimis jactura suarum arcium, oppidorum, atque castrorum sunt oppressi, multarum rerum quae chartaceis monumentis continebantur, memoria interiit, sic et hujus quoque rei, magna ex parte intercepta est recordatio"), so that "ego in meis archivis hac de re … non plene doceri possum and non certo inveniam, qua tempestate et quo Imperatore Romano, aut quibus de causis, antiquissimi illi Ursini, ducendae forte alibi coloniae causa – antiquo Romanorum more – in diversas orbis regiones ex Italia sunt profecti". Rožmberk was asking Blagaj, "ut libros memoriarum, quos habet, revolvere, et in bibliothecis cancellariae suae quaerere jubeat, ac si quid ejusmodi, quod ad ejus rei memoriam investigandam pertineat, inveniret, mihi communicet, ut et ego collatis cum his, quae adhuc post tot olim perpessas ruinas apud me integra remanent, pleniorem desiderii mei notitiam habeam". He promised to reciprocate Blagaj's "diligentiam … ad communem nostram Ursinorum domum et familiam illustrandam" with his own services, as someone, "qui Tui ac totius nostrae communis familiae est studiosus et amans consanguineus".

We do not know, whether Rožmberk received any concrete information. Yet he subsequently aped the Blagajs by amalgamating the Rožmberk and Orsini coats of arms and by adopting the name Ursinus. Unlike the Blagajs, Vilém and his younger brother and successor Petr Vok (1539–1611) used the name Ursinus only on certain occasions, retaining the traditional simple form "of Rožmberk" ("z Rožmberka") in every-day communication. This might have expressed the self-confidence and esteem for their own's house, recognizable in the frequent salutation of its chief as "administrator and ruler of the house of Rožmberk" ("správce a vladař domu rožmberského"). Yet the new, Orsini-like coat of arms (amended to incorporate red-white bands and two bears as supporters) as well as the name Ursinus were disseminated by both Vilém and his younger brother on all possible ocasions: in predicates, signatures, charters, on monuments, coins, commemorative coins, seals, funeral monuments, funeral banners, arms, inscriptions, dedications and so on[75] (fig. 9, 10, 12). Thus the two final members of the house of Rožmberk represented the lineage also as a legitimate part of the domus Ursinorum.

The lords of Rivalta (Piedmont)

In the absence of relevant scholarship, the following case is difficult to untangle. The signori di Rivalta, vassals of the dukes of Savoy, belonged to the most ancient families in Piedmont[76]. Established in the early twelfth century, the family branched out but the individual lines remained closely bound to their feudal possessions at Rivalta, Orbassano and Trana west of Turin. There is no evidence of the Rivaltas claiming the Orsini kinship prior to the mid-sixteenth century. All we can say for sure is that the earliest recorded association of the family with the Orsini appeared on the occasion of the investiture of Risbaldo di Rivalta with his fiefs in 1552. Unlike his predecessors, who were addressed simply as "domini Ripaltae" in the charters issued by the Savoyard souverains, Risbaldo was designated "Ursino" in addition. Clearly, this did not happen by chance, because this association with the Roman princes became common in the following years. In 1560, Risbaldo's brother Nicolò († 1583)

[75] The exhibition catalogue Rožmberkové (as in note 56) provides many examples and references to further literature.

[76] Unless stated otherwise, the following account is based on the older work by G. Claretta, Sugli antichi signori di Rivalta e sugli antichi statuti nel secolo XIII da loro accordati a Rivalta, Orbassano e Gonzole. Torino 1878. Claretta has obviously been the only historian to address the Orsini claim of the Rivaltas, but he did not succeed in clarifying it in depth. The genealogy of Rivalta and basic data on the family's members were published by Litta, Orsini di Roma (as in note 39), tab. I–IV, though he already casted doubt on the kinship.

too was called Orsini in his charter of enfeoffment and Gian Giacomo, a cousin of Risbaldo's and Nicolò's father and forebear of further Rivaltas, appeared as "Ursinus ex dominis Ripaltae" in another Piedmontese document issued in the same year[77]. An anonymous contemporary chronicler from Rivoli (near the town of Rivalta) described the participation of the above-mentioned "Risbaldo Orsino de' signori di Rivalta" in the assault on Turin (captured by French troops) in 1537[78]. These examples from the second half of the sixteenth century certainly could be multiplied.

The notion of the Rivatas' new identity soon spread beyond Piedmont. The above-mentioned Niccolò, a Maltese Grand admiral and one of the most notable figures of his family, was addressed as "Nicolò Orsino di Riualta" both in internal Maltese documents[79] and in the Order's historiography beginning with the œuvre of Giacomo Bosio (1544–1627), himself a Milanese nobleman[80]. Niccolò was burried in the newly built St. John's cathedral in Malta where an inscription characterized him as "non levis Vrsinae splendor et avra domvs"[81].

All things considered, the Rivaltas displayed a pronounced claim to being members of the Orsini clan by the mid-sixteenth century and great energy in propagating it, with individual members following a common stategy of adopting the Orsini name. Moreover, there is evidence of a more systematic identity policy. A narrative explaining the Orsini extraction emerged and fabricated artefacts were produced as well, though it is not possible to date their origin and to attribute them to individual family members. In any case, the castle chapel in Rivalta had by the mid-seventeenth century been turned into a memorial of the family's Orsini origins. It hosted a sepulchre of an alleged progenitor Orso Orsini and his picture (a wall painting?) under which an in-

[77] Claretta, Sugli antichi signori (as in note 76), 938. I have found no clue as to whether another branch of the Rivaltas which became extinct in 1638 adopted the Orsini name as well.

[78] Memorie di un terrazzano di Rivoli dal 1535 al 1586, ed. D. P(romis), in: Miscellanea di storia italiana VI. Torino 1865, 559–674, at 591.

[79] For instance in a statut of 1574: Nova Statvtorvm Ordinis Sancti Ioannis Hierosolymitani aeditio, cui addita sunt statuta & ordinationes in Capitulis generalibus promulgatae ab anno 1555 vsque ad vltimum Capitulum generale Melitae celebratum Anno 1574. Madriti 1577, 49 ("Nicolao Vrsino de Riualta").

[80] I. Bosio, Dell'istoria della Sacra Religione et Illustrissima Militia di San Giovanni Gierosolimitano III. [Roma] 1602, 224: "Nicolò Orsino, de' Signori di Rivalta Piemontese", cf. 243, 706, 800, 813, 820, 830, 842, 940.

[81] M. L. de Mas Latrie, Épitaphes et inscriptions de l'église cathédrale de Malte à Cité-de-Valette. *Archives des missions scientifiques et littéraires* 6 (1857), 50–240, at 80; A. Ferris, Memorie dell'inclito Ordine Gerosolimitano esistenti nelle isole di Malta. Malta 1881, 272.

scription was placed explaining the kinship[82]. According to this story, Orso Orsini, a Roman nobleman and widower, departed northward in the year 1000 leaving in Rome two sons from his first marriage. In Piedmont, he married a local proprietress, lady Atalasia of Pinerolo, with whom he had three other sons who then inherited both his and his wife's properties in Piedmont and beyond. Thus the story located the Orsini origin of the Rivaltas and explained the division of the Orsini house into a Roman and a Piedmontese branch[83].

Unfortunately, the motives and claims behind this effort as well as the wider context are utterly unknown and trying to explain them only from the troubled times in the Duchy of Savoy under the French occupation between 1536 and 1559 would be pure speculation. More likely, there might have been local contests which drove the lords of Rivalta, Savoyard vassals, to claim that their house was established in Piedmont through marriage and inheritance instead of enfeoffment and even before the ruling dynasty seized control over the territory[84].

Nothing is known about whether and how the domini Ripaltae approached the true Orsini. Interestingly, there is no mention of them in Sanso-

[82] All this according to Gamurrini, Istoria II (as in note 8), 12, who refers to "vn'antichissima Cappella, doue stà il medesimo Orso sepolto" and to "sua immagine iui dipinta". Moreover, a portrayal of the Blessed Giovanni di Rivalta (1333–1411), bishop of Turin from the Rivalta family – later named Giovanni Orsini – with Orsini coat of arms was installed in the castle chapel as well, G. F. Meyranesio, Pedemotium Sacrum, ed. A. Bosio, in: Historiae Patriae Monvmenta, tom. 11. Scriptores, tom. 4. Avgvstae Tavrinorvm 1863, 1669.

[83] The inscription is recorded in two similar but not identical formulations. It is not clear which is the more authentic. The first one was published by Gamurrini, Istoria (as in note 8), 12, in 1671: "Anno Domini millesimo Orsus Vrsinus miles Romanus duobus susceptis Masculis, & prima vxore ea defuncta Attalasia Domina Pineroli in Vxorem duxit, ex qua tres habuit filios Americum, Amadeum, & Pantaleonem, quos vltimo suo testamento instituit sibi Heredes aequalibus portionibus. Domina Atalasia ibidem condito postea testamento ipsos quoque filios aequaliter instituit Haeredes in suis bonis vniuersis. Aliorum priorum filiorum Vrsi hic non sit mentio, quia Romae, non in hac Patria praedicti Vrsi hereditatem positi sunt". Claretta, Sugli antichi signori (as in note 76), 577, found a slightly differing version transcribed in "una genealogia in pergamena, … compilata nel febbraio 1648": "Ursus Ursinus miles romanus duobus susceptis masculis ex prima uxore existens in hac patria Pedemontium pro militia duxit uxorem Atalasiam dominam Pinerolii ex qua habuit tres filios Amalricum Amedeum et Pantaleonem, quos in suo testamento constituit heredes in bonis universis quae habuit in patria Pedemontana et in continenti provincia. Domina Atalasia condito postea testamento ipsos quoque universales haeredes equaliter reliquit. Duo seniores ex primo matrimonio nati instituti fuerunt haeredes universales in veteri patrimonio patris".

[84] Interestingly, the fictitious figure of Atalasia of Pinerolo resembles Adelaide of Susa, Marchioness of Turin and the last scion of the Arduinici dynasty whose third marriage brought Piedmont into the hands of the Savoyards.

vino's two volumes on the "casa Orsina" from 1565, which may indicate that their claim was still viewed as suspicious. But later, the Orsini origin of the Rivaltas (Counts since 1621) appears firmly established and was embraced by the Orsini to the extent that Domenico I Orsini (1652–1705), from the Gravina line, facing the danger of his family's extinction, provided in his will, drawn up in 1705, for the succession of the alleged Piedmontese relatives: If there were no male heirs the property should be inherited by a female offspring provided that she married the first-born of the Orsini, Counts of Rivalta[85].

The response from the Orsini

How did the 'real' Orsini react to these claims from alleged relatives from Germany, France, Croatia, Bohemia and Piedmont? Key features of the family are first worth considering. During the thirteenth century, the Orsini had risen to become one of the most distinguished houses in the Roman nobility. Their success was rooted particularly in skillful penetration of the Roman curia and on collaboration with the Angevin dynasty that took over the Kingdom of Naples. This enabled them to build up large family possessions in Italy, especially in the papal state and in the Mezzogiorno. The links they established with the curia were of striking duration. Apart from two popes – Celestine III (1191–1198) and Nicholas III (1277–1280) – the family produced about 20 cardinals in the Middle Ages alone and were a nearly permanent presence in the sacrum collegium from the mid-twelfth till the early sixteenth century and again in the seventeenth century. This made the house famous throughout the Catholic world. Thus the Orsini claim surely could be – beyond the prestige generated from the affiliation to Rome as the purported cradle of aristocratic values – of practical importance for those who needed to negotiate with the papal court. Beyond the cardinals and other clerics, the family produced many other significant personalities, including several dozen Roman senators and, after the fourteenth century, numerous *condottieri*.

A second dimension: Even in the Middle Ages, the Orsini were becoming an immense and multi-branched family, whose members ranged from simple noblemen to magnates and even ruling princes. The house was divided into several lines named after the main fiefs such as Bracciano, Pitigliano, Monterotondo, Gravina, Mugnano and Manopello. Each of these then was further

[85] For a copy of Domenico's last will see Klagenfurt, Kärntner Landesarchiv, Familienarchiv Orsini-Rosenberg, box 6: … *con espressa condizione però e non altrimente … che la detta femina … chiamata alla successione abbia e debbia maritarsi col figlio mascolo primogenito, che all'ora si trovarà della fameglia Orsini della casa del Conte di Rivalda del Piemonte, quale chiamo alla successione di detto fideicommisso.*

divided into other branches including several bastard lines. Hence, whereas some members of the Orsini house ranked among the main feudatories in Italy, others were dependent on service to various rulers in the Italian Peninsula. Both the vastness of the Orsini clan, developing into what has been called "un organismo assai complesso" (F. Allegrezza), and its labyrinthine genealogy certainly facilitated the promotion and recognition of false kinship claims[86].

Thirdly, the image the Orsini had of their own past was very much in flux – a circumstance that made confabulations of all kinds possible. Sansovino, whose volumes from 1565 became the family's official history for decades thereafter and itself facilitated pretended kinship, mentioned four theories regarding the origin of the Orsini, declaring the Gothic leader Alduin the most probable progenitor. But as early as in 1615, Francesco Zazzera was able to set out additional information on their supposed descent[87]. A decade later, in his funeral sermon for the cardinal Alessandro Orsini (1593–1626), the Jesuit Giovanni Battista Ferrari (1584–1655) suggested a certain Vipius Ursinus as progenitor, whose name he found in the inscription on a marmoreal vase in the collections of the cardinal's brother, the Duke of Bracciano[88]. Accordingly, Gamurrini in 1671 replaced Sansovino's Gothic theory with an autochthonous one, deducing Orsini descent from the dynasty of Flavians and thus from ancient Rome[89]. Thus both 'false' and 'real' Orsini were in fact involved in inventing their own past in a paradigm in which the real origins of the respective families, as they have been reconstructed by critical historians since the nineteenth century, cannot be seen and in fact did not matter greatly[90]. In consequence, the antiquity of particular noble families was relative and could be easily extended if this proved necessary. Ironically, some of those families claiming kinship can be traced further into the past than the Orsini themselves, whose origins lay no further back than the twelfth century.

Let us consider an important issue. Historians who have researched the cases in question have mostly supposed, that the supposed descent from over the Alps was first developed by each family independently and only subsequently foisted upon the members of the Orsini house and recognized by them. But did it really emerge independently? Or was it rather an interaction

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[86] F. Allegrezza, Organizzazione del potere e dinamiche familiari. Gli Orsini dal Duecento agli inizi del Quattrocento. Roma 1998, 197. The genealogy of Litta, Famiglie celebri (as in note 39), is still fundamental.

[87] Zazzera, Della nobiltà (as in note 8), chapter "Della famiglia Orsina".

[88] I. B. Ferrarius, Orationes. Romae 1627, sermon "Rosa sepvlchralis", 265–284, at 266. Ferrari's sermon became a frequent reference for those who wrote on the family later.

[89] Gamurrini, Istoria II (as in note 8), 2–9.

[90] Bizzocchi, La culture (as in note 6), 789–805; id., Genealogie (as in note 6), passim.

with members of the house of Orsini that provoked and encouraged the idea of common kinship? The fragmentary evidence does not permit an unambiguous answer, but arguably many of the families in question were in touch with members of the Orsini house at about the time that the first evidence for the pretended kinship appear. Thus the brothers Adolf (1278–1344) and Konrad († 1353) of Mark – and the chronicler Levold of Northof himself – encountered at least three members of the Orsini house while pursuing their clerical careers in Liège where Napoleone Orsini was archdean of the local chapter[91]. Here, as subsequently, important members of the Roman Catholic Church provided an important conduit.

Still more conspicuously, two members of the Orsini operated north of the Alps in the early fifteenth century, passing between rulers and courts in exactly those regions where the Orsini claims emerged. In service of the Antipope John XXIII, Bertoldo Orsini († 1420), a condottiere from the Pitigliano branch, operated in Hungary in 1412/1413 as negotiator of the peace between the king of Hungary, Sigismund of Luxemburg, and Venice. In autumn 1414, Bertoldo accompanied the Antipope to the Council of Constance and functioned as its protector ("custos concilii") for several months. Later he entered the service of Sigismund and acted between Italy and the Central Europe till at least the end of 1418[92]. Bertoldo certainly had numerous opportunities to meet the Croatian magnate Ladislaus of Blagaj, who himself fought for Sigismund of Luxemburg against Venice in 1411/1412 and who subsequently appeared in Sigismund's entourage at Constance[93]. But Bertoldo was in touch with other supposed relatives too. In spring 1416, he accompanied Sigismund to Paris where Jean I Jouvenel held a special feast in his honour, as was right and proper for a blood relative[94].

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[91] N. Reimann, Konrad von der Mark († 1353), Kanoniker, Ritter und Franziskaner. *Franziskanische Studien* 54 (1972), 168–183, at 169, 172f.

[92] Litta, Orsini di Roma (as in note 39), tab. XVI; W. Brandmüller, Das Konzil von Konstanz 1414–1418, vol I, II. Paderborn etc. 1993–1997, passim; Zsigmondkori oklevéltár III–V (1411–1416), ed. E. Mályusz–I. Borsa. Budapest 1993–1997, passim; Regesta imperii XI: Die Urkunden Kaiser Sigmunds (1410–1437), ed. W. Altmann. Innsbruck 1896, passim.

[93] Thallóczy, Geschichte (as in note 5), 27, 93–98. In Constance, Blagaj's presence is witnessed between January and May 1418 at least: Zsigmondkori oklevéltár VI (1417–1418), ed. E. Mályusz–I. Borsa. Budapest 1999, no. 1433, 1491, 1691, 1862, 1865.

[94] "Et mesmement ledit Iean Iuuenal de Vrsins Seigneur de Traignel, festoya ledit grand Comte de Hongrie, le Comte Bertold, & tous les autres … . Et combien qu'il eust accoustumé de festoyer tous Estrangers, toutesfois specialement il les voulut grandement festoyer, en faueur dudit Comte Bertolt des Vrsins, pource qu'ils estoient d'vn nom, & armes." Ivvnal des Vrsins, Histoire (as in note 35), 329.

Besides Bertoldo Orsini, the activity of the cardinal Giordano Orsini († 1438) from the Bracciano line, "known in nearly all parts of the world"[95], could have provided numerous opportunities to stimulate awareness of kinship north of the Alps. From 1414 till 1418, Giordano attended the Counil of Constance. In 1418/1419, he was a papal legate in France, negotiating the peace between France and England, and in 1426 he spent several months in Germany, attempting unsuccessfuly to arouse opposition against the Hussites[96]. Indubitably, there was clear if circumstantial evidence of close contacts between the cardinal Giordano Orsini and the second generation of the Jouvenels. As early as in 1417, Guillaume Jouvenel chose the cardinal among the procurators who should put forward his claims to a canonate in Orléans. When appointed to the bishopric of Beauvais in 1432, Jean II Jouvenel allowed himself to be ordained in the Orsini palais in Rome by cardinal Giordano[97]. No doubt, Giordano acted as a protector of the young Jouvenels. Oldřich of Rožmberk was informed about Giordano's mission in 1426[98] and as late as in 1437, he was in touch with him as his letter of recommendation issued for the benefit of the newly elected bishop of Brixen testifies[99]. The cardinal himself seems to have been well aware of the opportunities provided by the putative kinship. In 1420, he addressed Heinrich IV of Holstein (1397–1427) – as we have seen, the Schauenburgs claimed kinship too – as a relative. This was far more than a mere courtesy. A generation later, Giordano's letter was interpreted as recognition of the kinship[100]. Should we then admit that the cardinal was building up and exploiting a network of virtual relatives among the leading aristocratic families and dignitaries in France, Bohemia, Germany, and even beyond? As a major patron of artists and humanists, Giordano Orsini certainly was the kind

[95] "fu conosciuto quasi in tutte le parti del Mondo": Sansovino, Degli huomini illustri (as in note 7), fol. 4^{v}.

[96] E. König, Kardinal Giordano Orsini († 1438). Ein Lebensbild aus der Zeit der großen Konzilien und des Humanismus. Freiburg im Breisgau 1906.

[97] Boüard/Hirschauer, Les Jouvenel (as in note 33), 57–59, 64.

[98] Listář a listinář Oldřicha z Rožmberka I (1418–1437), ed. B. Rynešová. Praha 1929. 84.

[99] As in note 61. With regard to the puzzling testimony about the Rosenbergs inquiring the kinship with the bishop of Trogir in 1411, we should mention that nine revolting cardinals – including Giordano Orsini – informed Oldřich's father Jindřich or Rožmberk († 1412) about their secession from Lucca to Pisa in Mai 1408: Regesta Bohemiae et Moraviae aetatis Vencslai IV. (1378 dec.–1419 aug. 16) III, ed. B. Kopičková (*Fontes archivi publici Trebonensis*). Pragae 1977, 231.

[100] "Et visa est hic in patria Holtzacie missiua a nobilissimo et solempni cardinali Vrsinensi, que data millesimo cccc vicesimo, vltimo Hinrico comiti Holtzacie directa, in qua consanguinium eius ipsum commendauit." Lappenberg, Quellensammlung I (as in note 19), 25.

of ambitious personality used to thinking in broad dimensions, as the extraordinary fresco cycle of around 300 heroes and famous men in his palace at the Monte Giordano in Rome testifies[101].

Finally, cardinal Latino Orsini (1416–1477), nephew of cardinal Giordano, also acted as a contact person of 'false' Orsini. It was he who – beyond addressing the Chancellor Guillaume Jouvenel des Ursins as "consanguineo nostro carissimo" in 1458[102] – first confirmed the kinship of two pretenders: the Jouvenels (1445) and the Rožmberks (1469 and possibly earlier). To sum up: there were numerous contacts between the Orsini house and its supposed relatives from over the Alps during the fifteenth century. By 1500, the Orsini must have been well aware of several alleged branches living in different territories north of the Alps. More than this, they readily accepted the pretended kinship as true and cooperated to construct the image of a large Orsini house.

Historians have often made the family historian Francesco Sansovino responsible for the uncritical popularization of the supposed kinship. But in fact, Sansovino devoted only a few words on this subject. Remarkably enough, it was the Orsini themselves who provided him with information and who even encouraged him to include additional arguments. Especially Giordano Orsini (1525–1564), the Venetian governor in Brescia who read the draft of both volumes of the family history before they were published, gave Sansovino several suggestions that were later included in his work. Thus he encouraged Sansovino to restrict the circle of the family members addressed in the dedication in favour of those with princely titles, a few military commanders and "those from the house who built up their states outside of Italy": thus incorporating into the lineage those supposed blood relatives from north of the Alps[103]. At the same time, Giordano informed Sansovino on his own accord about the existence of additional branches outside the Italian Peninsula, thus himself perpetuating the notion of a large Orsini house: He had (he claimed) personally witnessed Croatian relatives visiting his father in Zadar in the 1540s[104]. He knew that one of his distant relatives was the most distinguished nobleman in Bohemia, who was fabulously wealthy, and whose coat of arms was identical to that of Giordano. He even owned a coin minted by this wealthy cognate[105]. Giordano was puzzled when he tried to distinguish the Blagajs from

[101] A. Amberger, Giordano Orsinis Uomini Famosi in Rom. Helden der Weltgeschichte im Frühhumanismus. München–Berlin 2003.

[102] Lewis, La noblesse (as in note 6), 83.

[103] "quelli della casa che hanno stabiliti li stati loro fuori di Italia", Sansovino, Secretario (as in note 47), fol. 171^{v}.

[104] See footnote 47.

[105] But Giordano Orsini, at the same time, did not know that the gentleman he was writing about represented the family of Rožmberk (and not that of Blagaj): "Da Roma

the Rožmberks, but he believed the actual kinship to be probable. Why? – as he explained, "because the coats of arms and the names are exactly the same as ours"[106].

Other members of the many-branched Orsini house were also aware of their 'cousins' and they seem to have acknowledged the imagined kinship as easily as Giordano did. The participation of the 'true' Orsini in the construction of the myth has never been researched in the Orsini papers, nor even satisfactorily taken into consideration, but as fragmentary evidence suggests, it was surprisingly important. As mentioned above, both the Jouvenels and the Rožmberks achieved a formal authentification of their pretensions in the fifteenth century, the latter four times over and by members of different branches of the Orsini house. The Blagajs, after they were recognized as relatives in the sixteenth century, occasionally made contact with the Orsini. Alessandro Orsini († 1604) from the Pitigliano line met Stephan of Blagaj in Graz in 1598[107]. In the mid-seventeenth century, a correspondence took place between Eberhard Leopold Ursin Count of Blagaj (1614–1680) and Paolo Giordano II Orsini di Bracciano (1591–1646) in which the latter addressed Blagaj as "cognatus"[108].

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hò riceuuto da M. Aurelio la inclusa di V. S. alla quale dico per information di questa cosa che il Conte dei Blagaij è il primo Barone di Boemia doppo il Re, di dignità, & richezza, & dicono hauere d'entrata centouenti mila tolleri, & io ho una delle monete che batte, & sono molti anni che l'ho, & l'arme sua è totalmente come la uostra". Sansovino, Secretario (as in note 47), fol. 174^{v} (2 September 1564); the last word should have apparently sounded "nostra". Giordano's mistaking of Rožmberk and Blagaj confused Sansovino who then attributed Rožmberk's wealth and prominence to Franz of Blagaj, while confusing Rožmberk's Bohemia (or Blagaj's Slavonia/Croatia/Carniola) with Poland: "Ma molto honorato è al presente Francesco Orsino Polono Conte perpetuo di Blagai, & che per nome del suo Re, si truova hoggi nella Lituania con grosso essercito contra i Moscouiti. Questo Signore, la cui entrata passa C.X.X. mila ducati l'anno, possedendo una gran Provincia in quel Regno, è de' principali huomini che ui si truovino". Sansovino, Degli huomini illustri (as in note 7), fol. 13^{r}. Sansovino certainly used still other sources. In 1562, he asked Vilém of Rožmberk for documents regarding the kinship with Orsini, Millauer, Der böhmische Reichs-Baron (as in note 74), 49^{b}. Rožmberk's answer is not recorded, but the Venetian ambassador at the Imperial court provided Sansovino with some information from autopsy. Nevertheless, the picture of the Rožmberks Sansovino patched together was full of errors. Petr Vok of Rožmberk for example appears as "Arrigo Orsini", ibid., fol. 9^{r}.

106 "… di che non ho per cosa impossibile hauer notitia particolare, perche le Armi & li Cognomi sono totalmente come li nostri". Sansovino, Secretario (as in note 47), fol. 172^{r}.

107 As in footnote 53.

108 J. L. Schönleben, Rosa Ursina in provinciis Austriacis florens, sive illustrissimae et antiquissimae familiae romanae Ursinae, Traduces in Slavoniam, Carnioliam, Carinthiam, Styriam, Bohemiam propagatae. Labaci 1680, 9: "Vidi etiam ego plurimas

Vilém of Rožmberk's adoption of Orsini heraldic symbols and his political career within the emerging Habsburg monarchy facilitated these contacts. When representatives of the Orsini house visited the Habsburg courts in Central Europe, they used to call on their influential Bohemian cousins[109]. In 1591, Tomaso Costo († ca. 1613), a Neapolitan writer, was looking for a person to whom he could dedicate the first volume of his edition of Pandolfo Collenuccio's history of the Kingdom of Naples. It was Lelio Orsini († 1603), one of the cadets from the Gravina branch with possessions in Southern Italy, who recommended Vilém of Rožmberk from distant Bohemia to him[110]. The dedicatory epistle, recalling the conversation of Costo with Lelio, reveals that the latter was surprisingly well informed about his alleged relative from over the Alps whom he had met in Prague four years earlier. He knew that the Rožmberks had resided in Bohemia for more than 400 years, he was aware of both Vilém's dignity of grand burgrave of Bohemia, his alliances with German princely houses, his allegiance to the Catholic church and his fabulous income. Finally, Lelio showed Costo coins minted by Vilém of Rožmberk, decorated with the

familiares Epistolas Pauli Jordani Ducis Bracciani Vrsini ad Illustrissimum Dominum Eberhardum Leopoldum Vrsinum Comitem de Blagay, in quibus eum semper nominat cognatum suum."

[109] In 1565, a visit of Paolo Giordano I Orsini di Bracciano (1541–1585) in Prague was being prepared, but was not realized, though certain members of the family visited Vilém in Třeboň and Český Krumlov in the following year. In 1587, Lelio Orsini († 1603) from the Gravina branch got in touch with Vilém during his visit at the Imperial court in Prague. In 1597 Fabio Orsini from the Mentana branch visited Petr Vok. In 1609, brothers Paolo Giordano II (1591–1646) and Ferdinando († 1660), both from the Bracciano line, visited Petr Vok in his residence in Třeboň and were than accommodated in the Rožmberk palace in Prague. Wagner–Mareš, O původu (as in note 5), 226–231; V. Březan, Životy posledních Rožmberků, ed. J. Pánek. Praha 1985, 214f., 339, 528, 531, 535f., 605, 716; Diarien und Tagzettel II (as in note 3), 180, 203.

[110] "Ora io trauandomi in procinto di mandar fuora il Compendio dell'Istoria di detto Regno … pensai li giorni passati … d'intitolarlo à vn personaggio de' maggiori, e più meriteuoli d'essa. Il qual pensiero communicato da me allo Illustriss. Signor D. Lelio Orsino … cagionò subito vna manifesta letizia in lui, il quale doppo hauermi mentouati alcuni Orsini, tutti in vero soggetti meriteuolissimi, terminò il suo parlare in V. Eccell. de' meriti, della quale mi ragionò buona pezza, quasi dicendomi in cotal modo: Se siete risoluto d'intitolar cotesta opera ad un di casa Orsina, per ogni rispetto vi dico, che la dedichiate al Signor di Rossimberg, perche sarete almen sicuro di due cose, l'vna di gratificaruigli molto dedicandogli un'Istoria, nella qual vengono cosi notabilmente menzionati tanti di coloro, de' quali egli hà gran piacere d'esser chiamato parente; e l'altra di dedicarla à vn Signore, e meriteuole d'assai più". T. Costo, Del compendio dell'istoria del Regno di Napoli I. Venetia 1591, dedicatory letter to "il Sig. Gvglielmo Orsino signor di Rossimberg", dated in Naples on 10 March 1591 (no pagination).

Orsini coat of arms[111]. Even if the conversation might have been amended for rhetorical reasons, it still reveals the persuasiveness of heraldic symbols but also, once again, the media through which the awareness of the kinship spread and petrified. It is worth emphasizing, that neither Giordano of the Monterotondo branch in 1564, nor Lelio of the Gravina line in 1591 ranked among the leading figures of the Orsini clan. Yet they knew about their supposed relative and even had samples of his coinages at their disposal.

In view of this state of affairs, it is not surprising that poor and indigent members of the Orsini family occasionally tried to profit from the kinship. By the end of the sixteenth century, as it began to be obvious that the Rožmberk family would soon become extinct, an interesting attempt to establish a member of the Orsini in predominantly Protestant Bohemia was undertaken. The plan, supported by the Roman curia as well as by local Catholics, supposed that the last of the Rožmberks would adopt a 'real' Orsini, thus qualifying him to participate in the inheritance of at least a part of his Bohemian patrimony. The plan failed, but Petr Vok of Rožmberk, though himself (despite his family's tradition) a Protestant, still received two adolescent members – Francesco (1585–1630) and Livia – of the bastard (though legitimized) Mentana branch in 1595 and allowed them to be educated for a year at his own expenses in Český Krumlov and Prague. Before they returned to Italy, Rožmberk promised to provide them with a generous subsidy, and although he later became reluctant, he was forced to pay a significant portion of what he had promised to escape the risk of a court battle against the assertive mother of both orphans[112]. Thus the Orsini kinship finally became burdensome for the last lord of Rožmberk. This, of course, does not invalidate the notion that the idea of a large Orsini family and the interest in the common kinship were mutually shared.

[111] Ibid.: "… e fa batter moneta da se, di che ui posson far fede questi scudi d'oro (e mostrommeli) che han da vna banda il suo nome, con l'arme di casa Orsina".

[112] Wagner–Mareš, O původu (as in note 5), 228s. (with many interesting details). Francesco and Livia were children of Virginio Orsini (1567–1596) who fought in the Imperial army in Hungary in the 1590s. The 'true' Orsini later believed, Rožmberk was disappointed having received bastards instead of members of the prominent Bracciano line – or this was at least, what cardinal Harrach was told by Paolo Giordano II Orsini di Bracciano while visiting Rome in 1637: "Havevano gli Orsini, ad instanza de' signori di Rosenberg olim, inviato ad essere educati là un giovane et una figliuola naturali de' Orsini della Lamentina, ma non diedero sodisfattione al Rosenberg che gli rimandò in breve in dietro, poiché havria voluto più presto qualcheduno del ceppo primario de' duchi di Bracciano". Diarien und Tagzettel II (as in note 3), 181.

The Counts Slavata

Besides the Orsini claim, the Rožmberks referred to still another origin myth – a heraldic legend explaining the common descent of five noble families of Bohemia that employed the same heraldic symbol (a five-petal rose) in different tinctures. According to this legend that apparently arose from the real kinship, the progenitor Vítek (Witigo/Vitigo) distributed his castles and other possessions among his five sons, one of them illegitimate, and gave to every one of them a distinct coat of arms. Thus five distinct noble families arose, the Rožmberks being simply the most prominent of them. The other four families, of which the clan of Witigons (Vítkovci) was composed, were: Hradec, Stráž, Landštejn and Ústí.

Little is known about how this origin myth, competing with that of Orsini kinship, was propagated before the families in question all became extinct at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In the mid-sixteenth century, a large painting consisting of three canvases was executed that represented the legend of the 'distribution of roses' by the progenitor Vítek, but it is not certain whether it was commissioned by the Rožmberks or by the second important branch of the Witigons, that of Hradec (fig. 11). Anyway, there is no evidence that the Orsini claim was shared among these families[113]. Rather it seems to have remained bound exclusively to the Rožmberks at whose court we find initial attempts to amalgamate both myths by identifying the progenitor Vítek with an Orsini-member who first came to Bohemia or by linking them together in another way[114].

The parallel existence of these two different myths became important after the Rožmberks died out in 1611. Whereas their property soon ended up in the hands of unrelated families and their wealth mostly came to be dispersed during the Thirty Years War, their social capital passed to a successor. Vilém Slavata (1572–1652), the man who succeeded in usurping this legacy, is well known as one of the three Catholic members of the Habsburg government who were thrown out of the window of the Chancery at Prague Castle in 1618 by members of the Protestant nobility, during the well-known political coup that launched the Thirty Years War. Before he became a prominent Catholic

[113] Yet in the casually preserved letters from 1598, Stephan Ursin of Blagaj († 1598) addressed Joachim Oldřich of Hradec († 1604) as cousin (*vetter*) and was addressed by him in the same way. This may however reflect the fact, that latter's mother came from Styria. SOA Třeboň/JH, Rodinný archiv pánů z Hradce, box 45, fol. 99–102.

[114] P. Maťa, Zrození tradice. Slavatovské vyústění rožmberského a hradeckého odkazu. *Opera historica* 6 (1998), 513–552; J. Hrdlička, Jak se utváří paměť? Legenda o dělení růží a její proměny na počátku 17. století, in: Paměť urozenosti, ed. V. Bůžek–P. Král. Praha 2007, 68–87.

politician, Slavata had married the heir of one of the Witigons branches (Lucie Otýlie of Hradec) in 1602. Two years later, his wife's family died out in the male line and Slavata was catapulted to the status of one of the greatest landowners in Bohemia. Later, during the 1620s, he developed a further ambition: to appropriate and to monopolize the social capital of the Rožmberks (by far the most important of the five branches) for the benefit of his and his wife's posterity. In order to achieve this goal, he made recourse to the Witigons kinship by means of the legend of the 'distribution of roses'. This allowed him to present his wife as the only heir not just of the Hradec family, but of the whole house of Witigons, including the Rožmberks. This claim, of course, included descent from and kinship with the Orsini.

The new identity of the Slavata family was evident in various manifestations. In the castle of Jindřichův Hradec that became Slavata's main country seat after his wife inherited her brothers's property, he build up a kind of a 'hall of tradition', decorated by copies of the paintings that represented the Witigons legend. He added an explanatory text in three languages that declared the Slavata family to be the exclusive heirs of the Witigons. In 1627, the Emperor transferred one of the main prerogatives of the vanished Rožmberks – the precedence over the nobility of Bohemia – to Slavata and his heirs by primogeniture. Slavata's coat of arms was amended in several stages too, thus mirroring the transformation of dynastic consciousness which was under way. In 1616, it was combined with that of his wife's family and in 1629, as a result of his struggle for a new identity, the Orsini-bears were added as supporters[115] (fig. 13).

The identification with the Witigons and, consequently, with the Orsini continued even after Vilém Slavata's own death in 1652. A particularly nice example is an opulent engraving of a thesis sheet completed in 1655 and dedicated to one of Vilém's grandsons. Its author was a student of law who subsequently, thanks to the patronage of the Slavatas, became an influential official in Prague. The impressive engraving (fig. 14) develops the legend of the Witigons and its transmission to the Slavata family. In the foreground of the temple of glory, we see the forefather Vítek, represented asleep, and behind him, in the niches of the temple, four of his five alleged sons, founders of four family branches, all of them by then extinct. Each is holding a standard with

[115] P. Maťa, Von der Selbstapologie zur Apologie der Gegenreformation: Konversion und Glaubensvorstellungen des Oberstkanzlers Wilhelm Slawata (1572–1652), in: Konversion und Konfession in der Frühen Neuzeit, ed. U. Lotz-Heumann–J.-F. Missfelder–M. Pohlig. Gütersloh 2007, 287–322; id., Zrození tradice; M. Starý, Rodový erb, jeho přejímání a dědické právo v 17. století, in: Symbol a symbolika v právu, ed. K. Brzobohatá–T. Tyl. Praha 2006, 63–84; Hrdlička, Jak se utváří paměť (as in note 114).

the symbol of rose. Above the niches, pictures of their main castles and tablets with their names can be recognized. The alleged founder of the Rožmberk family is on the left side. Instead of the fifth son, Jindřich, founder of the Hradec branch, the architecture opens out to reveal a view of Jindřich's castle of Jindřichův Hradec, by that time already the residence of the Slavata family.

The scene in the upper part of the composition explains why Jindřich's line, unlike other branches, is not presented as extinct: On the left side, medieval-looking knights, symbolizing the lords of Hradec, are handing over roses to Baroque-styled young gentlemen on the right side. The old man on the horse, wearing the Order of the Golden Fleece, doubtless represents Vilém Slavata himself. The female figure seated under the canopy, pulling the roses out of the vase with the amended Slavata coat of arms, symbolizes Vilém's wife Lucie Otýlie, the last member of the Hradec branch and the female transmitter of the glory of the entire Vítek's house to Vilém Slavata's posterity. The inscriptions explain the scene: "Aurea florebit" – "hac traduce" – "in illis": the golden rose (the heraldic symbol of the Hradec branch) will flourish in them (i. e. in the heirs of Vilém Slavata).

The reference to the Orsini kinship may not be apparent at first glance, but it is, in fact, very central. The small inscription in the middle of the composition, over the castle of Jindřichův Hradec, expresses the quintessence of the whole engraving: "In uno Henrici Gloria burgo Vrsinae perstat gentis". Jindřich's branch – the Hradec family, now represented by Vilém Slavata's posterity – will carry on the glory of the golden rose, and thus of the Orsini house, propagated in Bohemia by the progenitor Vítek[116].

The Rosenbergs of Carinthia

Proceeding to the final case, we move from Bohemia to Carinthia, one of the Austrian Alpine provinces, where yet another claimant to the kinship with the Orsini appeared during the seventeenth century. The family in question called itself Rosenberg and used the same coat of arms as the Rožmberks in Bohemia (red rose in white shield)[117]. Unlike the Rožmberks and unlike the Counts of Blagaj in Croatia that both were prominent and long-established houses, the Rosenbergs, originally from Styria, were a family in the petty nobility. Their advancement after 1600 is a fascinating example of social climbing. In the early part of the seventeenth century, Johann Andreas of Rosenberg (1600–1667) moved from Styria to Carinthia, where he was admitted into the

[116] P. Zelenková, Barokní grafika 17. století v zemích Koruny české. Praha 2009, 36.
[117] H. Pawlik, Orsini-Rosenberg. Geschichte und Genealogie eines alten Adelsgeschlechts. Klagenfurt 2009.

corporation of local Estates in 1621. As late as in 1630, he still ranked among the least prominent nobles in Carinthia[118], but thereafter he enjoyed a rapid career, rising into the highest offices of the province, accumulating property and turning his family into the wealthiest noble house of all Carinthia. In 1633, he was raised to the rank of Baron (Freiherr), in 1648 to that of Count (Graf) and when the new Emperor Leopold I visited Klagenfurt in order to receive homage from the Carinthian Estates in 1660, he lodged in the Rosenberg's new palace in the main square[119]. The Rosenberg family's rise to prominence continued during the following generation, in the persons of Georg Niklas (1623–1695) and Wolf Andreas (1626–1695), and it all but monopolized the highest positions in Carinthia. Moreover, Wolf Andreas was called to the Imperial court in 1682 to become the President of the Aulic Chamber.

It was only around 1680 that the Rosenbergs began to claim kinship with the Orsini. So far, the family's vision of its past was much less ambitious. In 1625, Johann Andreas still had to defend his descent from the Styrian Rosenbergs against sceptical contemporaries[120]. In 1660, when he applied for admission into the 'Herrenstand' in Lower Austria, no arguments regarding the Orsini kinship were presented, obviously because no such claim existed yet[121]. It was the next generation that, while entering among the established aristocratic houses of the Habsburg monarchy and the Holy Roman Empire and integrating into the court society of Vienna, established a more prominent ancestry.

But the situation of Georg Niklas and Wolf Andreas was slightly different than that of the other families whose kinship with the Orsini had already been proclaimed since the late Middle Ages: The Rosenberg brothers not only needed to legitimize their claim, but they had to explain their relationship to the Counts of Blagaj, resident in the neighbouring province of Carniola, and to the extinct family of Rožmberk in Bohemia. On the other hand, the Carinthian Rosenbergs could exploit the already established links between the Orsini and the Central European nobility: Instead of establishing a direct connection to

[118] In a list of all Carinthian *Landleute*, containing five pages and more than 100 noblemen, his name appears in the last dozen. Klagenfurt, Kärntner Landesarchiv, Ständisches Archiv, C 445, fasc. 3, fol. 113–119.

[119] J. W. Valvasor, Topographia Archiducatus Carinthiae antiquae & modernae completa … . Nürnberg 1688, enumerates not less than 21 seats and other objects belonging to the Rosenberg family that had to be by far the wealthiest family in Carinthia at that time. The princes of Portia, the next in sequence, owned only 10 seats displayed in Valvasor's work.

[120] Pawlik, Orsini-Rosenberg (as in note 117), 236.

[121] He was then – not without reservations – placed in a less distinguished rank among new lords. St. Pölten, Niederösterreichisches Landesarchiv, Herrenstandsarchiv, IIIb, p. 16–20.

the Orsini, they sought to connect their lineage to that of the extinct Rožmberks of Bohemia.

Once again, a forgery played a pivotal role. In the St. Bartholomew's church in Friesach in Carinthia, a medieval tombstone of an unknown nobleman who died in 1231 was discovered. The inscription and the coat of arms were no longer very clear but the Rosenbergs believed (or, at least, they struggled to prove) that the tombstone marked the grave of one of their alleged ancestors from the thirteenth century. In order to turn this artefact into a major piece of evidence, the Rosenbergs allowed it to be 'restored', carving the inscription and the coat of arms more clearly. The original shape of the tombstone cannot be reconstructed anymore, but, as modern palaeographers have proved, the restoration changed it significantly. The anonymous stonecutter succeeded in turning it into a tombstone of a Christian, son of a Heinrich of Rosenberg, and he even put the abbreviation "Urs." on it, so that the artefact combined all the important symbols the Rosenbergs needed: the heraldic rose, the predicate "Rosenberg" and the Name "Ursinus"[122] (fig. 15).

Shortly later, the Rosenbergs entrusted Johann Ludwig Schönleben (1618–1681), a respected Jesuit historian from Ljubljana, with the task of proving the connection between the tombstone and their family, and thus to link their lineage with that of the Orsini, the Rožmberks and the Blagajs. Schönleben did a good job and as far as we know, there were two products of his efforts: First, a treatise in Latin that examined the genealogical connections between all the families in question[123], and secondly a large family tree that represented the Rosenberg lineage graphically[124] (fig. 16). Schönleben introduced the Carinthian Rosenbergs into the Orsini lineage and provided a general solution of the relationship among all four families. His interpretation became canonical for more than a century. Besides that, he elevated the ranking of the Rosenbergs by declaring Carinthia the base for the further expansion of the "Ursini" to Bohemia and Croatia. Thus the Bohemian Rožmberks were even downgraded to a less distinctive secundogeniture.

By 1680, the Rosenbergs were in possession of both a piece of evidence[125] and scholarly support, but they still had not secured acceptance. This was why

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[122] F. W. Leitner, Inschriftendenkmäler als historische Quelle für die Landesgeschichtsforschung, in: Epigraphik 1988, ed. W. Koch. Wien 1990, 27–56, at 49–53; A. Zajic, "Zu ewiger gedächtnis aufgericht". Grabdenkmäler als Quelle für Memoria und Repräsentation von Adel und Bürgertum im Spätmittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit. Das Beispiel Niederösterreichs. Wien–München 2004, 69–71.

[123] Schönleben, Rosa Ursina (as in note 108).

[124] St. Pölten, Niederösterreichisches Landesarchiv, Herrenstandsarchiv, Große Lade 1.

[125] Interestingly, documents produced by the Rosenbergs to support their claim tended to post-date the discovery of the tombstone. See (1) the arguments of Wolfgang Andreas

Wolfgang Andreas of Rosenberg, at about the time he became the President of the Aulic Chamber, asked the Emperor to formally confirm his family's kinship with the Orsini and to allow the Rosenbergs to use the name 'Ursinus'/'Orsini'. At this moment, an objection was put forward, though it came neither from five ministers who were charged by the Emperor with investigating the claim, nor from the Italian Orsini, but from the head of the Slavata family in Bohemia. Johann Joachim Count Slavata (1637–1689) felt uncomfortable with the realisation that there might be another branch of the long-extinct Rožmberk house. He was obviously concerned that the Carinthian Rosenbergs, if acknowledged as Orsini, could put forward a claim to those possessions that had belonged to the Rožmberks and to other branches of the house of Witigons, and consequently to those lands now in the possession of the Slavata. Here, again, the forged Orsini identity seemed to turn against the heirs of those who had constructed it.

An interesting correspondence between the two leading figures now ensued. Count Rosenberg declared his family the *Carinthian branch of the Orsini* but he assured Slavata at the same time he had no claims on the lands and other possessions enjoyed by other branches of the same house[126]. These, he

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compiled in 1684 (*antequam dictus lapis sepulchralis repertus fuisset, quod ante 3ennium primo factum est*), SOA Třeboň/JH, Cizí rody, box 52; (2) his short curriculum, apparently written by one of his offsprings (*Anno 1683 wurde zu Friessach in Chärnthen ein epitaphium gefunden von einem Rosenberg, so sich auch Ursin benamet, welches ihm den anlaß gegeben, anno 1684 … von benanten commissariis … ungezweifflet zu zeigen, daß die rosenbergische famille von der romanischen Ursinischen sein ursprung habe*), Klagenfurt, Kärntner Landesarchiv, Familienarchiv Orsini-Rosenberg, box 7; and (3) a Rosenberg chronicle (*Archivum Ursinorum Sac. Rom. Imp. Comitum a Rosenberg in Charinthia …*) compiled in 1718 (*Anno 1683 ist zu Friesach in Kärndten ein grabstein wieder zu augen kommen*), ibid., box 7. The earliest reference to the tombstone, however, was made already in 1675 by Schönleben, who at the same time first presented his view regarding the Orsini kinship with the Rosenbergs: J. L. Schönleben, Horae subsecivae dominicales sive discursus sacri de tempore In Dominicas totius Anni. Pars hyemalis et verna Ab Adventu Ad Pentecosten. Salisburgi 1676; the dedication dates from November 1675.

[126] *… auf geneweres untersuchen meiner familiae alter documenten ich befunden, daß sich selbige hiebevor neben deß Rosenbergischen nahmen auch der Ursinorum gebraucht habe, wie solches unter anderem dergleichen instrumentis auß ainem grabstein der khirchen Sancti Bartholomaei zu Friesach erhellet, in deme dasselbst zu lesen: Nonas 8bris 1231 obiit Christianus filius domini Henrici de Vrsinis et Rosenberg. Undt wie nun ich hierüber Ihro Kayserliche Mayestät allergehorsambst ersucht, ain legale commission zu verordnen, bey welicher ich zu erweisen verlange, daß sich meine familia hiebevorn auch Vrsinos geschrieben, und nun aber höchstgedachte Ihre Mayestät hierzu die capita der 3 löblichen canzlayen … verordnet, also haben dise alle nach auf- und genaue durchsehung meiner alten documenten und acten ganz indubitabl befunden, daß meine jezige familia eben die*

continued, are without any doubt safe because neither the Italian Orsini, nor the Blagajs advanced any claim to the inheritance after the Rožmberk house had become extinct[127]. The Rosenbergs only wished to demonstrate, once and for all, that they too belonged to the Orsini lineage. This is the only way to dispel doubts that appeared over this issue[128]. Slavata replied by reiterating that his family was the only successor of the lords of Rožmberk in Bohemia. His grandfather Vilém Slavata could too have acquired the right to call himself Ursinus, if he had wished to claim it[129].

This discussion resulted in mutual recognition. In July 1684, the Emperor issued the requested privilege in favour of the Rosenbergs (including a clause regarding the Slavata possessions[130]). This charter gave birth to the family Orsini-Rosenberg, whose puzzling name has often evoked false images as if the

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jenige seye undt zwar der ramus Ursinorum Carinthorum, die sich hiebevorn Ursinos undt Rosenbergios geschrieben haben, undt nachdem ich solichen namen auch izo wiederumb undt auf alzeit mit meiner posteritet undt agnatis führen wolte, mir soliche unverwaigerlich zugelassen werden solte. Undt wie ich aber hierdurch denen anderen ramis huius familiae quoad mutua pacta successionum oder deren gemachter dispositionum im geringsten zu praeiudiciren verlange, also habe ich auch ainiges bedenkhen nit gehabt, daß es per expressum in die Kayserliche resolution undt indultum inserieret werde … . Wolf Andreas Count of Rosenberg to Johann Joachim Count Slavata, 15 June 1684, SOA Třeboň/JH, Rodinný archiv Slavatů, box 39, fol. 6$^{r–v}$.

127 *… also habe auch gern geschehen lassen, daß ad finem des indulti die gewönliche clausula salutaris baygesezt worden, undt zwar umb so merers, alß nach ableiben des leztern von Rosenberg bömischer lineae weder die Ursini Romani, weder auch die Ursini graffen von Blagay in Crain sich zu ainiger succession vermutlich darum nit angemeldt haben, daß wie ich undt meine linea also auch sye a primo aquirente selbiger gieter nicht herstamen, auch daß selbige nit stamm- oder fidecommiss-, sondern allodialgieter gewesen seindt*. Rosenberg to Slavata, 28 June 1684, ibid., fol. 12^{r}.

128 *Undt hätte mich übrigen meines von vielen seculis wol hergebrachten rosenbergischen nahmens auch fernershin undt alzeit ohne zuesatz deß Ursinischen wol betragen khönnen, wann nit eben deshalber, so in iusta ignorantia meines herkhommens gewest, undt etwan auch etwelicher malevolorum bewogen worden wäre, umb die sinistram opinionem ex radice zu heben, mit darthuung, daß ich ein Ursinus saye, den splendor undt alter meiner familiae undt mithin die wahrheit zu verthaidigen.* Rosenberg to Slavata, 28 June 1684, ibid., fol. 12^{v}.

129 *Daß aber durch meine ahnfraw die böhmische rosenbergische lini in mein geschlecht ist versezet worden, erhellet nicht allein dahero, daß meine lini deß abgestorbenen wappen durch allerdnädigste verwilligung Ihro Mayestät Ferdinandi 2di glorwürdigsten angedenkens führet, sondern auch mit allen praerogativen und privilegien vermög der Vernewerten königlichen landtsordnung der eltiste von meiner lini ist begnadet worden, und zweifle nit, daß mein ahnherr, wann er darumben angehalten hätte, auch den nahmen Vrsini zu führen gnädigst erlanget hätte*, Slavata to Rosenberg, 8 July 1684, ibid.

130 *Comitibus Sclavata utpote haeredibus Rosenbergicorum lineae Bohemicae in suis bonis et praerogativis … nullo modo praejudicare intendimus*. Privilege dated on 6 July 1684, St. Pölten, Niederösterreichisches Landesarchiv, Herrenstandsarchiv, Große Lade 1.

family have been of Italian origin, though, in fact, it was not. The Slavata family, however, remained vigilant. Several months later, they sent an agent to Friesach to examine the adapted tombstone[131]. They also waited to see whether the Rosenbergs would be accepted as relatives by the Italian Orsini[132], and they considered asking another Jesuit historian to produce a refutation of Schönleben's treatise[133]. In the end, however, the Slavatas accepted the Rosenbergs and they even helped them to begin a correspondence with the 'true' Orsini[134].

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[131] Wagner–Mareš, O původu (as in note 5), 218.

[132] … *de la lettre de Madame de Brachana* [Anna Marie de La Trémoille, the wife of Flavio Orsini]*, vous veries, comme elle me traitte obligeamment en qualitè de son cousin, je ne say, si elle fera le mesme avec M. le Comte de Rosenberg, bien qu'il se soit taché legitmer d'estre des vrays M.s Orsini de Rome*, Johann Karl Slavata to his brother Johann Joachim, 15 June 1684 (Linz), SOA Třeboň/JH, Rodinný archiv Slavatů, box 34. Johann Karl (1640–1712), a Carmelite friar (as Karl Felix of St. Theresa), was an 'intimus' of the Emperor Leopold I and the General of Discalced Carmelites from 1680 to 1683. He spent many years in Rome and in Carmelite monasteries in Lazio and kept correspondence with Flavio Orsini from the Bracciano line, who subscribed his letters to Slavata as *servitore e parente*, ibid., box. 57; P. Maťa, Leopold I. a poslední Slavata. K osobní korespondenci panovníků raného novověku, in: Facta probant homines. Sborník příspěvků k životnímu jubileu prof. Dr. Z. Hledíkové, ed. I. Hlaváček–J. Hrdina. Praha 1998, 245–257; M. Cermakian, La princesse des Ursins. Sa vie et ses lettres. Paris 1969, 120.

[133] *M. le Breitenbucher me fut revis le livre de la Rose, avant de l'envoyer à V. E., je jugerois bien à propor de le monstrer au R. Pr. Balbin, de mesme il se pouvoit bien prendre la peine d'en escrir un autre avec plus de fondement, et avec plus de fermetè, il n'en aurà plus à craindre, lapis offensionis est remotus*. Johann Karl Slavata to his brother Johann Joachim, 29 March 1685 (Vienna), SOA Třeboň/JH, Rodinný archiv Slavatů, box 34. Bohuslav Balbín (1621–1688) SJ was a Czech patriotic historiograph and genealogist who stood in close connection to the Slavata family.

[134] *La gentilissima lettera di Vostra Parentà Reverendissima con l'inclusa fauoritissima del Signor Conte di Rosembergh accresce in tal guisa le mie obligationi che non già con le linee, ma solo con l'opere esecutrici de' suoi comandamenti potro in qualche parte sodisfarne un debito cosi moltiplicato. Riconosco il mio obligo non meno alla gentilezza del Signor Conte nello scriuermi che all'efficacia e compitezza della Parentà Vostra Reverendissima nell'insinuare e compartirmi nel medessimo tempo le sue gratie, alle quali io procurerò di corrispondere, quando la fortuna mene porgerà il campo. Con mia particolar sodisfattione attendero i fauori del Signor Conte per poter serbare una memoria così insigne della passata uittoria*. Flavio Orsini to Johann Karl Slavata, 15 March 1685 (Rome), SOA Třeboň/JH, Rodinný archiv Slavatů, box 57, fol. 87r. The gift presented by Rosenberg to Flavio Orsini was purportedly a Turkish harness. In his letter to Slavata from 19 August 1684 (Rome), Flavio expressed *il desiderio che hauerei di poter hauere per collocarlo nell'Armeria della fortezza di Bracciano qualche arnese militare come sarebbe sciabla o sella o baston di comando tolto à qulche ufficiale nemico nell'ottenute vittorie di Sua Maestà Cesarea o nella rotta sotto Vienna o in altre fattioni … desiderando fra gli altri armi de' nemici che in detta mia fortezza si conseruano cosi depredati o da miei antenati in guerra, o d'altri*

The Rosenbergs, on the other hand, made good use of the Imperial privilege. In February 1687, their rank within the 'Herrenstand' of Lower Austria was reassessed and they were promoted into the old lords[135]. In 1688, the family acquired a vote and seat in the 'Grafenkollegium' of Franconia[136]. The new distinctions were incorporated into the family's coat of arms and thus proclaimed to the world at large. In 1633 and 1648, when Johann Andreas of Rosenberg had been raised to the status of Baron and then Count, his coat of arms was amended to add heraldic symbols of families into which the Rosenbergs had married. Ironically, these amendments that in fact marginalized the traditional symbol of the rose appeared inconvenient since the family simultaneously began efforts to strengthen the Orsini identity, and they were soon tacitly abandoned. Instead, the Orsini-Rosenbergs turned back to their previous coat of arms (red rose in white shield) and began to annex two bears as supporters in an allusion to the Orsini kinship[137].

During subsequent decades, the new identity of the Rosenberg family found even more interesting outlets for their claims, such as the richly illustrated manuscript with the family history, completed in 1718[138]. The invented kinship generated further ambitions that culminated in plans to transfer the property of the Orsini branches in Italy that were dying out or were at least seriously threatened by extinction to the Orsini-Rosenbergs. Wolfgang Andreas himself seems to have prepared a contract of reciprocal inheritance between the Rosenbergs and the childless Flavio Orsini, Duke of Bracciano (1620–1698) but his death in 1695 and Flavio's bankruptcy killed the idea[139]. In the 1720s, similar arrangements were being prepared between the next generation of the Rosenbergs and Filippo Orsini (1685–1734), the 14th duke of Gravina[140]. But

capitani celebri d'aggiungere in tempo mio qualche galanteria tolta nelle presenti contingenze, che per la consideratione delle vittorie saranno eterne nella memoria de' posteri. Ibid., fol. 85r.

[135] St. Pölten, Niederösterreichisches Landesarchiv, Herrenstandsarchiv, XXII, p. 5f.

[136] Pawlik, Orsini-Rosenberg (as in note 117), 240.

[137] Ibid., 52–55, 65, 71, 100, 124.

[138] *Archivum Ursinorum Sac. Rom. Imp. Comitum a Rosenberg in Charinthia* …, Klagenfurt, Kärntner Landesarchiv, Familienarchiv Orsini-Rosenberg, box 7.

[139] … *et quam maxime recentiori Ducis Flavii Ursini in Bracciano et Comitis Wolfgangi Ursini de Rosenberg, qui simile pactum mutuae invicem successionis anno 1695 iniissent, nisi inexpectata hujus mors eodem anno factum praevenisset* …, a marginal note on the older one of both contrats quoted in the next footnote.

[140] For drafts of two contracts aiming *ad maximum utriusque familiae nostrae Vrsinae Ducum Gravinae et Comitum a Rosenberg incrementum et splendorem,* see Klagenfurt, Kärntner Landesarchiv, Familienarchiv Orsini-Rosenberg, box 6. Both drafts are very dissimilar and as names of participants witness they were compiled in different time. The older one dates from 1719/1720, the younger must have been written between

exactly as in earlier cases, these attempts to integrate the separate lines of the family, both real and imaginary, brought no tangible results.

The Orsini claim between dynastic strategy and erudite myth-making

There is one dimension that distinguishes the previous cases from that of the Rosenbergs. When first claiming kinship with the Orsini in the fifteenth century, the Blagajs and the Rožmberks were not much concerned to present plausible genealogical arguments. A profound knowledge of the family's pedigree was not necessary to make its claims acceptable. There was no better proof than family tradition and the identity or similarity of the coats of arms. As we have seen, when Stephan Blagaj approached Valerio Orsini in Zadar in the 1540s, he merely had to present his heraldic symbols (assimilated with those of the Orsini only few decades earlier). In charters issued to confirm the kinship with the Rožmberks in the fifteenth century, the Orsini prelates could simply refer to the oral tradition: Latino Orsini confessed in 1469 that he had heard older members of his own house frequently claiming that the Rožmberks in Bohemia were of the same stock. He received the same information from his predecessors as they had received in their turn. The kinship between the Orsini and the Rožmberks at this period always rested upon "public fame"[141]. Cosimo Migliorati detto Orsini and Orso Orsini[142] employed similar words in 1481. The first referred directly to what he was told by the cardinal Latino Orsini, namely that the "house of roses" – the Rožmberks – were "of the same blood

1723 and 1733. The issue would merit further examination. Filippo was the only secular nephew of the Cardinal Pietro Francesco Orsini (1649–1730) who was elected Pope Benedict XIII in 1724. It was not the first attempt in the Gravina line: Filippo's father Domenico I provided in his testament the succession of the lords of Rivalta if there was no male heir. Eventually, even Filippo's son Domenico II (1719–1789) was able to continue the Gravina branch.

[141] *… quod sepe, ac sepius a quam pluribus et diuersis antiquis dominis et Illustribus viris maioribus nostris de prefata progenie et domo nostra de Vrsinis publice dici et pro re uera ac indubitata teneri audiuimus et intelleximus, quod prenominatus Illustris et magnificus dominus Johannes est de domo et stirpe de Vrsinis et quod ab ipsius domus prosapia siue progenie ortum et originem habuerit … . Que omnia ita semper et perpetuo fuisse, quod progenitores Illustris et Magnifici domini Iohannis prenominati pro hominibus et dominis de domo et genere Vrsinorum tenti, habiti et reputati fuerint, prefati maiores nostri, a quibus nos ea audiuimus, afferebant atque affirmabant se a progenitoribus et antiquioribus suis sepe et sepius audiuisse et intellexisse. Et ita semper de tempore in tempus hec publica fama viguit … .* SOA Třeboň, Cizí rody, z Rožmberka, listina 28/1.

[142] Ibid., listina 28/2 28/3.

and real cognates of our family and house"[143]. Admittedly, the Jouvenels with the support of the Orsini archives fabricated a more concrete genealogical link invoking the prelate Napoleone Orsini as the individual who transplanted the house to France, but nobody seem to have been puzzled that the alleged 'bishop of Metz' never actually existed.

In the 1680s, as the Carinthian Rosenbergs announced their claim, everything was very different. Now it was necessary to make any claim plausible employing genealogical arguments in order to make it compatible with what had been written previously on the descent of the Orsini and other families by historians and genealogists. By the seventeenth century, historians carried the power to destroy any claimed descent and the Rosenbergs obviously did not want to risk their pretensions being demolished by an erudite analysis. Thus they encouraged Schönleben to write a learned account to support their case. This was a fortunate solution for Schönleben was not only higly competent for such a task, but there was a synergy between the concern with the alleged origins of an Orsini branch in Inner Austria, and his own scholarly agenda that was much broader and included, for example, the ambition to illuminate the origins of the house of Habsburg itself[144].

But while pushing through their claim, the Rosenbergs referred to works by two more renowned scholars: the Benedictine Gabriel Bucelin and the Protestant theologian (the 'Father of Pietism') Philipp Jakob Spener[145]. This involved a deception. Although both Bucelin (1678)[146] and Spener (1680)[147] published their opinions on the Rosenbergs' descent from the Italian Orsini simultaneously with Schönleben (1680) or even earlier and put forward identical views, they did not reach their similar conclusions independently. On the contrary: Bucelin drew the information solely from Schönleben with

[143] *Nos itaque cum tam a praedicto Reverendissimo Domino Domino Cardinalis de Ursinis bonae memoriae, quam etiam a aliis de Familia nostra et domo intellexerimus, Magnificos Dominos et generosam Familiam et domus de Rosis esse de sanguine et veros consanguineos familiae et domus nostrae …* . Ibid., listina 28/3.

[144] P. von Radics, Der krainische Historiograph Johann Ludwig Schönleben. *Mittheilungen des Museal-Vereines für Krain* 7 (1894), 1–72.

[145] See one of the arguments Wolfgang Andreas of Rosenberg presented to the Emperor 1684: *Authoritate celebrium huius seculi genealogistarum, ac inprimis Domini Ludovici Schönleben, P. Bucillini, et Jacobi Spenneri, quorum duo posteriores familiam Vrsinam in 3 ramos utpote Romanum, Bohemum et Carinthum, prius vero et merito in quartum Blagaianum scilicet etiam, q*[uid] *olim in Croatia, nunc in Carniola viget, dividunt, hi omnes vero familiam meam pro ramo Carinthiaco … indubitanter dessignant*. SOA Třeboň/JH, Cizí rody, box 52.

[146] G. Bucelin, Germania topo-chrono-stemmatographica sacra et profana …, pars IV. Ulmae 1678, 232.

[147] P. J. Spener, Historia insignium illustrium seu operis heraldici pars specialis. Francofurti ad Moenum 1680, 157–160.

whom he maintained a learned correspondence[148] and Spener drew his information and arguments entirely from Bucelin. The genealogical construction that transformed the Carinthian Rosenbergs into Orsini-Rosenbergs was both constructed and disseminated primarily by Schönleben.

But Schönleben, on the other hand, was not the only early modern historian who addressed the issue of the kinship between the Orsini and their alleged relatives in Central Europe. In fact, men of letters played a significant part in the construction of the kinship from the sixteenth century onward. Surprisingly, the role of the main historian of the Orsini family, Franceso Sansovino, was less prominent in this regard than might seem likely at first sight. The information he provided regarding the supposed Orsini branches beyond the Italian peninsula was brief, general and unreliable and it could be read as only a simple acceptance of the claims on the Italian side. The question of how exactly the many Orsini were inter-related, remained a challenge confronting other scholars.

The search for clarification was not being pursued in Italy, but in Central Europe. It was energized by the paradigmatic changes that humanist historiography in Germany underwent, together with the widespread search for autochthonous development of the territories and the local aristocracy. Against this background, most of the founding myths based on the Romans and Trojans were either refuted or began to be treated more or less openly with scepticism. Yet in one case – that of the Princes of Anhalt – the Orsini kinship continued to be proclaimed, though in a notably recast form.

Mentioned for the first time in the late fifteenth century by the historiographer of the Landgraves of Hesse (see above), the link between the Anhalts and the Orsini was also cast in doubt in 1519 by Heinrich Basse, a Benedictine monk from Ballenstedt and the first in a series of genuine dynastic historiographers of the house of Anhalt[149]. Basse's scepticism was in keeping with wider trends, but the dynasty was apparently unhappy at forfeiting the prestigious kinship. Thus the anonymous manuscript entitled *Anhaltische Chronica* from

[148] C. M. Neesen, Gabriel Bucelin OSB (1599–1681). Leben und historiographisches Werk. Ostfildern 2003. Schönleben himself (Rosa Ursina [as in note 108], 16) touched upon suggestions he gave to Bucelin. As demonstrated above, the core of Schönleben's interpretation was on hand as early as in 1675.

[149] "Sane & hoc discutiendum occurrit, quod de eadem familia vaga & incerta famatur Relatione, quod scilicet prefati Principes in Anhalt primevam suam traxerint originem ab illa insigni Romanorum Principum Familia, que Ursinorum appellatur, maxime quia Dominus Adalbertus, primus de ista familia Marchio habuerit nomen Ursi. Sed hoc rei soliditate non subsistit …". H. Basse, Panegiricus Genealogiarum Illustrium Dominorum Principum in Anhalt, in: Accessiones Historiae Anhaltinae …, ed. J. Ch. Beckman. Zerbst 1716, 4–26, at 4.

the late 1530s, decorated with more than 500 coats of arms, embraced the Orsini kinship again, introducing a Roman Prince "Aribo" or "Aribertus" Orsini, an alleged Roman governor in Saxony around 669, at the beginning of the Anhalt genealogy[150].

It was Ernst Brotuff (1497–1565), however, a writer from Merseburg in Saxony and a significant figure within dynastic historiography, stimulated, co-ordinated and supervised by the Anhalt family, who, – attempting to reconcile recent opinions on the extraction of German nobility with the dynastic concern of his patrons – brought about a significant shift in perspective. Brotuff, whose history of the Princes of Anhalt was first published in 1556, advanced the idea that the Orsini themselves were not of Roman or Italian, but of German (Saxon) origin. He suggested that the Orsini descended from the Saxon clan of Bärs (Beringer) and shared the origin with the German 'domus Ascaniae', including the princes of Anhalt. He presented a complicated story of how the house developed and how both branches emerged between Germany and Italy under the Merovingian kings. This allowed him to retain the figure of Aribertus, who, according to Brotuff, was a son of a Beringer family member who left for Italy to receive the "Principality of Ursin" in fief. But Brotuff did not hurry to divide both dynasties too early. After returning to Saxony as Roman governor, Aribertus, the "Prince of Ursin", inherited the property of his childless Saxon relatives. Only his grandsons, the brothers Aribertus III and Vitello, became representatives of both houses, that of Orsini and that of Anhalt. Thus Brotuff turned the myth upside-down, without however abandoning the notion of the kinship itself[151].

Brotuff's 'German' theory, deriving the Orsini from Saxony and combining them with the Anhalts and (although only en passant) with the Rožmberks from Bohemia[152], became broadly accepted among German historians. It found echoes in aristocratic circles as well. It was exploited by Christian of Anhalt-Bernburg (1568–1630), an ambitious Calvinist politician who formed an alliance with Petr Vok of Rožmberk at the beginning of the seventeenth

[150] M. Hecht, Die Erfindung der Askanier. Dynastische Erinnerungsstiftung der Fürsten von Anhalt an der Wende vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit. *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 33 (2006), 1–31, at 16; id., Hofordnungen, Wappen und Geschichtsschreibung. Fürstliches Rangbewusstsein und dynastische Repräsentation in Anhalt im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert. in: Die Fürsten von Anhalt. Herrschaftssymbolik, dynastische Vernunft und politische Konzepte in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit, ed. W. Freitag–M. Hecht. Halle 2003, 98–122.

[151] E. Brotuff, Genealogia Und Chronica / des Durchlauchten Hochgebornen / Königlichen und Fürstlichen Hauses / der Fürsten zu Anhalt / Graffen zu Ballenstedt / und Ascanie / Herrn zu Bernburgk und Zerbst … . Leipzig 1556, fol. 1^{r}–3^{v}, 7^{r}–15^{r}.

[152] Ibid., fol. 13^{v}.

century and sought to involve him in an anti-Habsburg alliance[153]. In 1629, Vilém Slavata combined the founding myth of the Witigons with the genesis of the Ascanians and Orsini as suggested by Brotuff in the text he displayed in his 'hall of tradition' in Jindřichův Hradec. In Slavata's exposition, it was not the progenitor Vítek anymore with whose departure from Italy to Bohemia the story began, but it was Aribertus and his alleged departure from the Empire to Italy in 641 that provided the first act[154]. The Rosenbergs from Carinthia, once acknowledged as members of the Orsini house in 1684, promptly established connections with the Anhalt family and discussed the mutual kinship[155].

The 'true' Orsini also accepted this supposed kinship with the Ascanians, though it could not be reconciled with the expertise of Sansovino (who nevertheless suggested the extraction of the Orsini from Northern Europe, proposing a descent from the legendary Gothic leader Alduin[156]). A family tree displayed during the seventeenth century in the family's central palazzo at the Monte Giordano in Rome included the Anhalts[157]. In 1681, Flavio

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[153] See the preface in the alchymic treaty of Anhalt's agent in Prague, O. Croll, Tractatus, De Signaturis Internis Rerum, seu de vera & viva Antomia majoris & minoris mundi, annexed to his work Basilica chymica … . Francofurti 1609: "… Antiquissimus ille Inclytae Domus Rosenbergicae Ramus, à primo originis suae Trunco Vetutissima videlicet ac Laudatissima Anhaltinorum & Ascaniorum Prosapia exortus & prognatus …". On Anhalt's pretensions regarding the inheritance of the Rožmberk patrimony see Pánek, Poslední Rožmberkové (as in note 73), 315f.

[154] *Historie latinská, česká a německá, která se nachází na tabuli malované v zámku Hradci Jindřichovém, strany pojití rodu ursinovskýho a rozdělení erbu a panství rožmberskýho*, SOA Třeboň/JH, Rodinný archiv pánů z Hradce, box 2, sign. I A 4.

[155] Victor Amadeus Prince of Anhalt-Bernburg (1634–1718) to a Count of Rosenberg (probably Wolfgang Andreas), 25 August 1687 (Bernburg), extract: *Die verwantnuß des gräf. alten hauses Rosenberg mit unserm fürst. hause Anhalt ist schon richtig, ob aber Ihre Ex. von ermeltem uhralten hause in gerader linie abstammen, wird mich vergnügen zu wißen. Es descendiren auch die alten graffen zu Ascanien, von welchen die fürsten zu Anhalt continua serie abstammen, von einem Vitello des Ariberti Ursini, welcher anno 669 kaysers Constantii stadthalter in Sachsen gewesen, Enickel, der im 8ten seculo ohngefehr gelebet hat. Im übrigen ist ein curioser stammbaum des hauses Ursini, anfangende von C. Flavio Ursino, so umbs jahr Christi 540 ohngefehr den so genanten öehlthurn zu Spoleto erbauet, alhier in meinen handen, und ist dieser C. Flavius Ursinus obbemelten Ariberti Ursini großherr vater und zugleich unseres stammes anherr gewesen. Den Vitellum Ursinum aber, so umbs jahr 1155 in Cärndten geheyrahtet, finde ich nicht darinnen, obwohlen sonster die anhaltische chronica der herren graffen zu Rosenberg meldung thut, gestalten auch unser hauß vor alters nebst dem gekröhnten bähr der Ursiner zugleich eine rosen in wapen geführet hat.* Klagenfurt, Kärntner Landesarchiv, Familienarchiv Orsini-Rosenberg, box 6.

[156] Sansovino, L'historia (as in note 7), fol. 2[r]–8[v].

[157] Gamurrini, Istoria II (as in note 8), 10, commenting on Orsini branches that flourished in Germany "sotto nome de' Principi d'Anhalt, & altri nella Sassonia inferiore, e

Orsini (1620–1698), the last offspring of the Bracciano line, was searching for commemorative coins of his distant relatives (the Rožmberks, the Slavatas and the Princes of Anhalt) to ornate his studio. Flavio was even informed that the house of Ascania had produced no fewer than eighteen electors of the Holy Roman Empire and that at one point two Ascanians were even electors simultaneously[158]. This was a remarkable ancestry for a by then already bankrupt Italian prince.

Side-by-side with such affirmation, sceptical opinions were also expressed. Bartosz Paprocki (1543–1614), a Polish author who published extensive works (written in Czech) on the genealogy of the Bohemian, Moravian and Silesian nobility, was suspicious of the idea of the Italian descent of the Rožmberks and other Witigons. Instead, building on a Polish tradition, he linked the Witigons with the many-branched Polish clan of Poraj that also employed the heraldic rose and believed its own origins were in Bohemia among the brothers of St. Adalbert[159].

All these contradictory interpretations represented a puzzling challenge for later scholars. Besides Schönleben, whose 'Carinthian theory', published in 1680, has been discussed above, two attempts to reconcile this confusion

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nel Marchesato di Brandemburgo, i quali tutti sono registrati nell'Albero della Famiglia Orsina nel Palazzo di Monte Giordano."

158 *Mi sovvien di pregarla di diligentiare in coteste parti, se vi trova ne qualche medaglia de nostri antenati, della sua casa, di quella di Rossembergh ò di elettori di altro ramo, mentre la casa n'ha hauuti dicidotto in n*[ume]*ro, anzi due nello stesso tempo come di presente ne ha la casa di Bauiera, mentre desidero ornare il mio studio più che posso …* . Flavio Orsini to Johann Karl Slavata, the General of Discalced Carmelites (who was visiting Vienna at that time), 26 December 1681 (Rome), SOA Třeboň/JH, Rodinný archiv Slavatů, box 57. The request was apparently repeated for Slavata wrote to his older brother Johann Joachim on the 1 August 1682 (Rome): *M. le Duc de Bracciano m'a priè, si je pouvois avoir quelque monnaye de M. le Prince d'Anhalt, s'il vous est possible d'en avoir quelqune, vous m'obligeries de me l'envoyer, il en passionne infiniment, pauvre seigneur est reduist en tal estat, qu'on luy sequesterà toutes les revenuës, et qu'on luy assignerà vinte mils escus de rentes*. Ibid, box. 33.

159 B. Paprocký, Zrcadlo Slavného Markrabství Moravského … . Olomutii 1593, fol. 36r–37r; id., Diadochos id es Successio … . Pragae 1602, here chapter "O panském stavu", 9–13. The earlier of both works still supposed the Italian origin of the Witigons. Later Polish authors such as the Jesuit Kasper Niesiecki (1682–1744) were ready to amalgamate the Poraj tradition with the idea of a large Orsini house, K.Niesiecki, Korona polska Przy Złotey Wolnosci Starożytnemi Rycerstwa Polskiego y Wielkiego Xięstwa Litewskiego Kleynotami … ozdobiona III. Lwów 1740, 653–677. This gave the opportunity to incorporate the legendary extraction of the Lithuanian nobility from the Roman aristocracy (including the Orsini family members), that was suggested by several Polish and Lithuanian chroniclers such as Marcin Bielski (1495–1575) and Maciej Stryjkowski (ca. 1547–ca. 1597) in the sixteenth century.

by re-framing and re-arranging the facts through what we could name 'Slavic' theory deserve attention. They reveal to what extent the early modern historiographical discourse was compatible with the dynastic ideas outlined in this article. Both authors followed their own erudite agendas, namely the issue of the Czech and Slavic ethnogenesis in the early Middle Ages. For Maximilian Rudolf of Schleinitz (1605–1675), the Counter-Reformation bishop of Litoměřice in Northern Bohemia and petty nobleman by origin, the heraldic argument was central. In his challenging and erudite, but extremely uncritical tract entitled *Vandalo-Bohemia*, he linked together not only the Orsini, the Witigons and the Ascanians, but even other aristocratic dynasties that employed the heraldic symbol of the rose, including the Yorkists and the Lancastrians in England, the Trauttmansdorffs in Styria and, revealingly, his own family. Like Brotuff, Schleinitz situated the origin of this wide lineage in Saxony, but unlike Brotuff he supposed the family was of Slavic and not German origin[160].

Schleinitz's work was severely criticised by his compatriot Bohuslav Balbín SJ (1621–1688). Balbín, a fascinating figure among the Central European historians of this period, had been working for many years on an ambitious encyclopaedic project devoted to the history of the kingdom of Bohemia and thus he could build upon extensive research into charters and other documents which he undertook in Bohemian libraries and archives. His approach to the question of the kinship between the Orsini and the Rožmberks was influenced by his effort to demonstrate an autochthonous development of the local nobility and to minimize the impact of foreigners on Bohemia in the past. The myth of the Italian descent of the Rožmberks – the most prominent family among the Bohemian nobility – of course puzzled him. But unlike Schleinitz, Balbín was not ready simply to reject the founding legend of the Witigons. In his interpretation, the Witigons still came from Italy and were the Orsini by origin, but the Orsini themselves were originally Slavs that spread out to Italy from Central Europe some centuries earlier[161].

Although most of these authors followed their own scholarly agendas, they also participated in the construction of the myth, helping to put it into broader historical and genealogical context and making it plausible against the changing paradigm. We can observe at the same time, that the very idea of the common kinship of noble families with the same or similar coats of arms, regardless of the geographical distance which separated them, remained highly

[160] *Vandalo-Bohemia* was never printed, but it circulated in manuscript copies until the second half of the eighteenth century. Praha, Národní archiv, Dobnerova pozůstalost, sign. XVI, 1st part, pp. 216–233, 457–482; 2nd part, pp. 627f., 663–752.

[161] B. Balbinus, Epitome historica rerum Bohemicarum seu Historia Boleslaviensis … . Pragae 1673–1677, 141–146, 186f., 313.

relevant in this learned debate. Even authors like Paprocki, who were critical of the notion of any kinship between the Rožmberks and the Orsini, were not able to escape the persuasiveness of heraldic arguments. In fact, they simply replaced one genealogical construction with another that was – from a modern point of view – at least as problematic if not absurd.

Conclusion

The striking divergence between what was regarded as the 'domus Ursinorum' by 1700 and how we define the Orsini family nowadays reveals to what extent an aristocratic family in the late medieval and early modern period was – to borrow the famous term of Benedict Anderson – an "imagined community": a constructed and reified idea which came to be perceived as the reality[162]. When analyzing the emergence of the Orsini family legend in Westphalia, Champagne, Croatia, Bohemia, Piedmont, Carinthia and beyond we encounter strikingly similar strategies of self-identification and assimilation with the Roman house. They comprised the alteration of names, signatures and heraldic symbols, they were frequently underpinned by inventions or forgeries, and they frequently secured formal authentification by members of Orsini house themselves. These and similar claims of kinship were in fact a common feature of European aristocratic culture[163].

It is worth emphasising, that the construction of the manufactured kinship was not a one-way-process, pushed through and exploited simply by the family branches anxious to claim it. Instead, the 'true' Orsini actively participated in the process. Awareness of the kinship might even have been stimulated or encouraged by them, or it may have emerged from the interaction of the two or more families. In any case, the invented kinship did more than simply provide the particular family with a distinguished ancestry. It produced a connectedness, thus helping to create and strengthen a virtual family. Interconnections emerged not only between the 'true' Orsini and their alleged relatives from over the Alps, but even between the Central European lineages involved, as the exchanges between Vilém of Rožmberk and Franz of Blagaj in 1558 and between the Slavatas and the Rosenbergs in 1684 reveal. We still do not know enough about mutual contacts, but the exchange clearly ranged from symbolic cooperation up to ambitious projects of inheritance (the Rožmberks in 1590s, Rivalta and Rosenbergs in the early decades of the eighteenth century), even

[162] B. Anderson, Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London, 1983.

[163] W. Paravicini, Gab es eine einheitliche Adelskultur Europas im späten Mittelalter?, in: Europa im späten Mittelalter. Politik – Gesellschaft – Kultur, ed. R. C. Schwinges etc. (*Historische Zeitschrift*, Beiheft 40). München 2006, 401–434.

when such attempts were – for different reasons – always unsuccessful. Yet the anxiety of the Counts Slavata regarding the safety of their rights of possessions in Bohemia, after the Rosenbergs from Carinthia had announced their claim of being Orsini in 1684, reveals that the feeling of belonging to the same family was strikingly effective. Similar clashes of interest between 'false' Orsini were however rare. Given their residence in different areas and provinces, the families in question rarely became rivals. The Orsini claim provided many more opportunities than risks.

The link within the prestigious Orsini house was far from the only benefit. There were distinct social aspirations behind these claims in the respective local contexts as well. Those who claimed to have Orsini ancestors and relatives frequently aimed to legitimize their own rise, increase their social status, safeguard their prominent rank or challenge their social rivals in their own region: aims that did not involve directly the 'real' Orsini. We could observe that the Orsini claim helped the Rožmberks to legitimize their special precedence in Bohemia, the Blagajs to counterbalance the claims of their rivals in Slavonia, the Rosenbergs to enhance their status among the aristocracy of the wider Habsburg monarchy and the Holy Roman Empire, and so on.

Analyzing the invented kinship, we should avoid the danger of over-interpretation. The sense of belonging to one house certainly created links that occasionally could have been utilized by individuals. But for much of the time they probably remained latent. We can certainly assume a basic awareness of the kinship among members of all families in question but rather than being a permanent and omnipresent preoccupation, cultivating these myths often depended on a few personalities and mostly occurred in particular situations in which the appeal to the Orsini-myth appeared to be profitable.

In the late Middle Ages, the kinship claim, if underpinned by a similar coat of arms, could easily create credibility – or at least be difficult to refute. But the assertion of the Orsini family fiction was a process in which chroniclers, historians and men of letters were involved as well. Especially after the sixteenth century, an inter-play occurred between symbolic dynastic strategies and changing historiographical paradigms. Newly invented claims needed to take into consideration scholarly opinions on the origin and ramifications of the Orsini, if the proposed affiliation was to appear plausible. But the established claims had to react to the changing vision of the past too, as was the case of the Anhalts who, unlike other German lineages, skillfully reclaimed the kinship with the Orsini while reshaping the family's past according to the new dispensations. Without such intellectual support, the kinship was in danger of deconstruction as happened to the Jouvenels soon after the family became extinct in 1650. The fact that their heirs still invoked the kinship reveals, however, that historians did not yet exert a hegemonic voice.

Far from being always an instrument of dynastic myth-making, the learned debates regarding the ramifications of the Orsini north of the Alps developed their own dynamics. Historians who entered these debates often followed their own scholarly agendas. After the sixteenth century, the issue of ethnogenesis and the search for an autochthonous past for the nobility increasingly dominated the debate, calling the Orsini kinship in individual cases into question. But at least until the eighteenth century, there was no general attempt to demolish the Orsini family fiction as such. Instead, attempts to integrate the different claims and to provide a general explanation for what was seen as the ramifications of the family continued to appear.

Upon closer inspection, the families in question developed somewhat different degree of concern for the manufactured kinship. There were attempts at uncompromising assimilation (Orsini-Rosenberg) but in other instances the self-identification of the alleged Orsini leant on the idea of an autonomous house – extracted from or related to the Orsini, but based on its own distinctiveness. This was so in the case of the Anhalts who retained (or, rather, were constructing) their own dynastic identity without abandoning the kinship with the Orsini. The Rožmberks in Bohemia, who shared a competing (though compatible) origin myth with four other branches of the Witigons, also represented a self-reliant house, provided with its own chief, though their identification with the Orsini lineage went far beyond what can be observed in the case of the Anhalts.

We will of course hardly ever know, to what extent the claims of kinship were really believed by those who advanced them. Inventions and even clear forgeries certainly played an important role in the process of construction. Thus a suspicion of fully deliberate falsification arises. But it is indeed difficult to say, whether such forgeries were intentional counterfeits, or whether they simply aimed at providing better proof of what was already believed within the family anyway[164]. Similarly, it is often difficult to tell whether the silence of records – as for instance in case of the Rožmberks until the 1460s – reveals the absence or weakness of the Orsini claim, or rather its self-evident presence. There were many ambiguities of this kind. Yet given the vision of the past perpetuated by early modern historiography, we would surely be wrong in supposing that any certainty about the kinship was feasible. As Giordano Orsini put it in a letter to Francesco Sansovino in 1564: "I believe it is impossible to

[164] U. Eco, Tipologia della falsificazione, in: Fälschungen im Mittelalter I: Kongreßdaten und Festvorträge – Literatur und Fälschung (*Schriften der Monumenta Germaniae Historica* XXXIII/1). Hannover 1988, 69–82.

get a perfect knowledge of so many Princes and Grandees who have belonged to our house in Italy and beyond"[165].

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[165] "…credo che sia impossibile il poter hauere perfetta notitia de tanti Principi, & gran Signori che sono stati in casa nostra in Italia, & fuori… ." Sansovino, Secretario (as in note 47), fol. 174v.

L'HISTORIA
DI
CASA ORSINA
DI FRANCESCO SANSOVINO
Nella quale oltre all'origine sua, si contengono molte nobili imprese fatte da loro in diuerse Prouincie fino a tempi nostri.
Con quattro Libri de gli huomini illustri della famiglia, ne' quali dopo le vite de Cardinali & de Generali Orsini, son posti i Ritratti di molti de predetti,
Done si ha non meno vtile che vera cognitione d'infinite Historie non vedute altroue.
CON PRIVILEGIO PER ANNI XX.
IN VENETIA,
Appresso Bernardino, & Filippo Stagnini, fratelli.
M D L X V.

Fig. 1: The title page of Francesco Sansovino's "L'historia di casa Orsina" (Venetia 1565), the first thorough history of the Orsini house, showing the family's coat of arms: a red rose above red-white bends

Fig. 2: The tomb of Eustach Jouvenel des Ursins († 1483): *Evstachivs Ivvenalis Vrsinus Parisiensis nobilis a vetvsto genere ortvs* (Rome, San Pietro in Vincoli)

Fig. 3: Jean I Jouvenel des Ursins († 1431) and his family – lay men dressed in clothes with Orsini symbols. Oil on panel, between 1445 and 1449, originally in the family chapel in Notre-Dame

Fig. 4: Guillaume Jouvenel des Ursins (1400–1472), double-represented as Chancellor of France and as Knight dressed in clothes with Orsini symbols. The illustration in the manuscript of Giovanni Collonna's "Mare historiarum" (1440s)

Fig. 5: The new coat of arms of the Counts of Blagaj in the privilege issued by the Emperor Maximilian II from the Hungarian royal chancery for the benefit of Franz of Blagaj (1571)

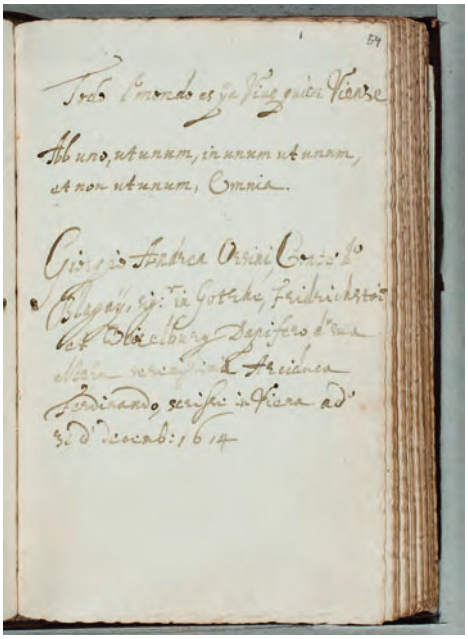

Fig. 6: The contribution of Georg Andreas of Blagaj (*Giorgio Andrea Orsini, Conte di Blagay, Signor in Gotsche, Fridrichstain et Weixelburg*) in the album amicorum of Ernst Brinck (Vienna, 31 December 1614)

Fig. 7: Cardinal Latino Orsini confirms the descent of Jan of Rožmberk († 1472) from the Orsini family, 22 March 1469

Fig. 8: Jacob Canter, *Rosa Rosensis* (1497)

Fig. 9: A Taler minted by Vilém of Rožmberk (1587), with Orsini-like coat of arms

Fig. 10:
The Orsini-like coat of arms of the lords of Rožmberk over the entrance into the castle of Třeboň, the main residence of Petr Vok of Rožmberk (1539–1611), with the identification of the proprietor: *Petrvs Woko Ursinvs Senior vltimvs domvs rosenbergensis Gvbernator*

Fig. 11: The legend of progenitor Vítek distributing the heraldic symbol of rose among his five sons, thus creating the families Rožmberk, Hradec, Stráž, Landštejn and Ústí. Oil on canvas (sixteenth century)

Fig. 12: The bookplate used by Petr Vok of Rožmberk (Aegidius Sadeler, 1609) with four-fold allusion to the Orsini claim: the name "Ursinus" in Rožmberk's title, two Orsini coat of arms and two bears

Fig. 13: The Slavata coat of arms with of the Orsini-bears as supporters over the entrance into the castle of Jindřichův Hradec (1644). The inscription commemorates the Chancellor Vilém Slavata

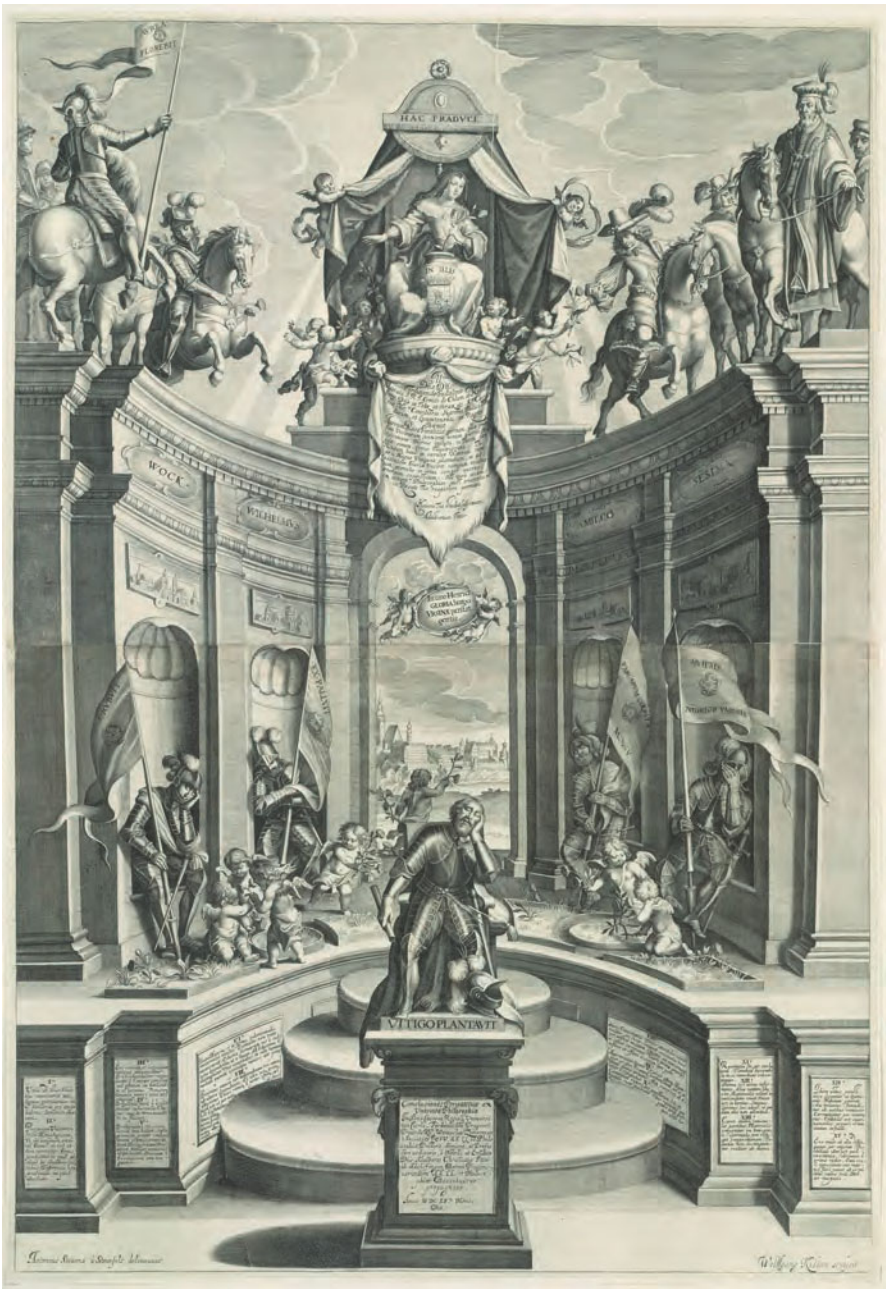

Fig. 14: The thesis print dedicated to Ferdinand Vilém Count Slavata († 1673)
by Adalbert Christian Itter von Adelsfingen
(Anton Stevens von Steinfels/Wolfgang Kilian, 1655)

Fig. 15: The putative funeral monument of Christian, son of Heinrich of Rosenberg (Friesach, St. Bartholomew's church)

Fig. 16: *Rosa Ursina Rosenbergica* – the family tree of the Carinthian Rosenbergs compiled 1678 by Johann Ludwig Schönleben (the detail showing the putative founder of the house of Rosenberg: *Vitellus I. Ursinus Romanus, a Slavis dictus Viteck, Roma in Carinthiam venit anno 1155*)