

**Carmelo Currò Troiano  
&  
Don Salvatore  
Ferdinando Antonio  
Caputo**

# The Bentivoglio Family of Bologna

A mythical origin and imaginary

Originally from the castle of that name in the neighborhood of Bologna, Italy. They claimed descent from Enzo (c. 1224-72), King of Sardinia, a natural son of Frederick II. During the fourteenth century the family belonged to one of the workingmen's guilds at Bologna, where it became all-powerful in the fifteenth century. It contracted alliances with the Kings of Aragon, the Dukes of Milan and other sovereigns; and in its later history, became one of the prominent families of Ferrara.

Above: Group Portrait with the Bentivoglio Family (Lorenzo Costa Ferrara, circa 1460 Mantua, 1535)

Countless legends were born on the origin of royal families, nobles and aristocrats. In times when a painter, an architect, a sculptor, were able to pass on or magnify the glory of a line projecting in diplomatic relations, in the accounts of merchants, travelers' tales in the image of an ancestor or the beauty of a residence, a genealogist at his service was not a trivial matter.

That before the Italian historian notable leading scholar of his age, Ludovico Antonio Muratori (21 October 1672 – 23 January 1750) was unusual to control the sources and verification of names and dates the launch of improbable ancestries, mythical and pompous could last for centuries without any critic dreamed of denying, some for good education, some because for a writer (living often at the expense of the client) would be inconvenient to intervene in such a sensitive subject. How can we forget that even Torquato Tasso<sup>1</sup> was summoned to write the Genealogy of [House Gonzaga](#) and his father Bernardo in the poem of Amadigi<sup>2</sup> famous in his day, he tried to link the ancestry of the nobles of the time to the heroes of his Work?

And can you imagine for a house like Bentivoglio how many allegations have been made? You play a lot on the meaning of surnames without, of course; know the customs and tastes of the past centuries. How to explain that names like *Flordelalpe* and *Asainavemo* or nicknames like *Malaclavello* and *Losco* (cross-eyed) or diminutives as *Zeza* (Lucrezia) were names that appealed much to our ancestors, so that sometimes the bishops had to recommend the imposition of the names of saints and martyrs during Baptism?

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<sup>1</sup> **Torquato Tasso** (11 March 1544 – 25 April 1595) was an Italian poet of the 16th century, best known for his poem *La Gerusalemme liberata* (Jerusalem Delivered, 1581), in which he depicts a highly imaginative version of the combats between Christians and Muslims at the end of the First Crusade, during the siege of Jerusalem. He suffered from mental illness and died a few days before he was due to be crowned as the king of poets by the Pope. Until the beginning of the 20th century, Tasso remained one of the most widely read poets in Europe.

<sup>2</sup> **Amadigi** is an incomplete epic poem written in Italian by Bernardo Tasso and first published in 1560. It was inspired by the Amadis de Gaula of Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo. The work was completed by Bernardo's son Torquato and published as *Floridante* (sometimes misspelt as *Florindante*) in 1587.



Bentivoglio of Bologna, noble ancestors and why not call him royal? According to family tradition, the lineage that for over a century tried to lord the Romagna town, was descended from the love between the king Enzo<sup>3</sup> (titular sovereign of Sardinia and the son of Frederick II), and a peasant beautiful woman named Lucia born in Viadagola who was imprisoned in Bologna with her beloved, King Enzo of Swabia, and was the mother of the founder of the Bentivoglio family, Lords of Bologna in the XV century. King Enzo has always said to the damsel: “*Amor mio **ben ti voglio***” (I love you my beloved), the name given to the child born to them.

(Picture: Enzo imprisoned taken from a Medieval Manuscript)

For a family recently arrived to current political and stately of Romagna, the offspring of a king was a very serious point of strength in front of lineages as the Gonzaga, the Este or Malatesta. Giovanni I was indeed the only Bentivoglio to bear the title of Lord of Bologna (1401-1402); others had only the supremacy of fact over the city although married into princely families, often destined to rise to the pinnacles more and more important, as the Este, the Visconti, the Sforza, the Pious, Malatesta, Manfredi. Giovanni II, son of Lady Visconti, had a prestigious court from the artistic point of view, exceeding those of Este or the Montefeltro. So, as part of the conquest of the local and national prestige, the Bentivoglio could only look favorably on those who did filter out most glorious legends about their alleged ancestors.

Nothing more than inventions, very easily removable with simple reading of texts also printed. The famous book of the famous Tiraboschi<sup>4</sup> does justice to every invention, mentioning unequivocal ancestors of the Renaissance and shining Bentivoglio; not yet masters of important territories or holders of prestigious positions; but certainly well-liked and respected personalities of the country in the Middle Ages. Oddo de Bentivoglio in March 1163 was among the witnesses that are called to countersign the granting of a vineyard in [Old court of Nonantola](#), by the abbot, Radoaldo, son of Albert of other Radoaldo Nonantola. (Cf. G. TIRABOSCHI, History of the august Badia's Eve Nonantola, adding the Diplomatic Code, II,

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<sup>3</sup> **Enzo** (or **Enzio**) (c. 1218–1272) was an illegitimate son of [Emperor Frederick II](#), who appointed him [King of Sardinia](#) in 1238. He played a major role in the wars between [Guelphs and Ghibellines](#) in northern Italy, and was captured by his enemies in 1249. He remained imprisoned in Bologna (with full honor) until his death.

<sup>4</sup> Girolamo Tiraboschi S.J. (18 December 1731 – 9 June 1794) was an Italian literary critic, the first historian of Italian literature.

Modena 1785, p. 281). King Enzo (n.1220-m.1272), of course, at that time was not yet born.

One could argue instead of ancestries of this Oddo, a man carrying a Germanic name but in its name refers to the name stylish of his father. In fact, the Bentivoglio (BENTIVOLIO) who gave birth and the name is certainly that other character that is always mentioned in the Work of Tiraboschi in 1145 when countersigning the grant of another land Abbey Andrea Pagano in 1145 (Id., p.257), and in February of 1130 remembered always as a witness, for a concession to agricultural Albertino di Pietro della Porta (Id., p.241). Germanic names that find their origin in the language commonly spoken are now used without reference to ethnicity of the lineage, which is often forgotten in the reference.

### **THE POWERFUL FAMILIES OF RENAISSANCE ITALY**

At the time of [Alexander VI's](#) papacy, Italy was ruled by several types of government: territorial overlords called *signori*, marquises (counts appointed by regional bishops or the German emperor), dukes, princes, and kings - as in the case of Naples. The powerful and wealthy Republics of Venice and Florence were oligarchial republics ruled by the *doge* (military duke) and the *signoria* (council) respectively. Some 'princes' were technically papal or imperial vassals - often hereditary rulers who received the right (were invested) to own and inherit immovable property and revenue. They owned their lands under two major conditions: 1. They must send annual tribute to the granter, and 2. They must defend and protect the interest of the granter. These interests were sometimes circumvented or abandoned depending on the balance of power in Europe and among the Italian states.

The Kingdom of Italy, when it was a satellite of the [Holy Roman Empire](#) under Frederick I (Barbarossa), was ruled by imperial vassals who held northern Italian lands in fief for the Holy Roman Emperor. Gradual changes in the makeup of the Holy Roman Empire led to the deterioration of its control in much of northern Italy and Sicily. Some of these lords and princes gradually asserted their authority and maintained their independence from the Empire. At the same time, they were alternately free, papal, and conquered realms until the [Italian Wars](#) (1494-1550s) and later Unification of Italy (1859).

1492, many important cities in [Renaissance Italy](#) were ruled by hereditary noble families, elites in control of independent communes, republics, and former imperial fiefs that were at war with one another throughout of the 13th and 14th centuries. The borders of 1492 Italy were continually being shaped by some of these powerful ruling dynasties.

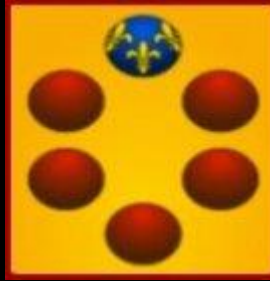
## Renaissance powerful Families



The House of Este  
Dukes of Ferrara



The House of Sforza  
Dukes of Milan



The House of Medici  
Citizens of Florence



The House of Gonzaga  
Marquises of Mantua



The House of Orsini  
Lords of Bracciano



The House of Montefeltro  
Dukes of Urbino



The House of Aragon  
Kings of Naples



The House of Colonna  
Lords of Palestrina



The House of Bentivoglio  
Lords of Bologna



The House of Baglioni  
Lords of Perugia



The House of Malatesta  
Lords of Rimini



The House of Petrucci  
Lords of Siena

## RENAISSANCE BOLOGNA



The earliest settlement at Bologna emerged by the 4th century (500) B.C. as a prosperous Etruscan settlement known as Felsina. The Celtic tribes of Boii people invaded and were absorbed into the Etruscan population. The area was conquered by the Romans sometime before the 2nd century (189) B.C. The Romans renamed the city Bononia. The Roman period saw the population of Bologna grow to 30,000 and it became the second most important city of the empire (and later republic) after Rome. The patron saint of Bologna, Bishop Petronius, made several necessary improvements for the defense of the city after the fall of the Roman Empire in 476. He raised public buildings and restored the city to some of its former magnificence.

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the city was conquered by the Ostrogoths during the Gothic-Byzantine Wars, and then by invading Lombard (Longobards) kings in the 8th century, who periodically lost control to the Byzantine Empire centered at Constantinople. After the 8th century, the short rule of the Lombards was ended as they were pushed north by the military advances of Pope Adrian I. Bologna was thereafter ruled as a Papal State. Aside from its fame as a city of many artistic splendors, heroic history, and ancient buildings, Bologna was known as "the fat" (la grassa) for its excellent cuisine and agricultural wealth. Bologna was one of the leading cities in Italy; a magnificent city of beautiful religious architecture and grand civic buildings.

Bologna became a most important city for trade and commerce in medieval times. The proto-Renaissance flourished in the city of Bologna, home to Europe's oldest university - then called the Studio - the University of Bologna was founded by 1088. Petrarch studied law at Bologna in 1320, Dante and Manuel Chrysoloras also attended. Leon Battista Alberti, Nicholaus Copernicus, Albrecht Dürer, and Pico della Mirandola studied here in the 15th century. After the long, armed struggle for control of the city between supporters of the Guelph (pro-pope) and Ghibelline (pro-emperor) parties, the city again resisted aggressive conquest by the Holy Roman Empire under Frederick Barbarossa. The city of Bologna and its

surrounding territory then found itself alternately under the rule of the Visconti of Milan and then the Bentivoglio as papal vicars. Under the powerful condottieri family of Bentivoglio, the city's wealth and importance grew over the next few hundred years, resulting in it becoming one of the largest quasi-independent cities in early modern Italy.

During the 15th century Bologna was ruled by the House of Bentivoglio as papal vicars. Although legally under papal authority, these princely nobles managed to create a wealthy, populous, and strong independent city-state. The Bentivoglio family, much like the Medici of Florence, was Signori (overlords of the city) and functioned as de facto dukes or princes, but were technically private citizens ruling on behalf of the Church. To combat territorial disputes from beyond the Romagna and to protect their dynastic interests (much like other noble families of the day) the Bentivoglio concluded marriage alliances with neighboring ruling families of Italy such as the Gonzaga. Giovanni II, Lord of Bologna and his wife Ginevra had sixteen children, eleven of whom survived. One of their daughters, Francesca was married to Galeotto Manfredi, Lord of Faenza. She had him murdered in his bed for being unfaithful. Legend states that the servant didn't handle it quickly enough so she stepped in and finished him off herself.

## THE HOUSE OF BENTIVOGLIO



Bentivoglio was an Italian family of princely rank, long supreme in Bologna and responsible for giving the city its political autonomy during the Renaissance.

The presence of the Bentivoglio family is first recorded in the city in 1323. Originally from the castle of that name in the neighborhood of Bologna, the family claimed descent from [Enzio](#), King of [Sardinia](#), an illegitimate son of [Federick II, Holy Roman Emperor](#).

During the fourteenth century, the family belonged to one of the workingmen's guilds at Bologna, and the family had gained power as pro-papist [Guelph](#) leaders in the fourteenth century. Amid the faction-conflicts of the commune [Giovanni I Bentivoglio](#), with the help of [Gian Galeazzo Visconti](#), declared himself *signore* and [Gonfaloniere di Giustizia](#) on 14 March 1401.



When the Visconti turned hostile, Giovanni was defeated and killed on 26 June 1402 at the [Battle of Casalecchio](#) and was interred in the church of [San Giacomo Maggiore](#). During the next few decades, the city's political status - and the family's fortunes- remained unpredictable. The son of Giovanni I, [Anton Galeazzo](#) (or Antongaleazzo, c1385-1435), was a lecturer in civil law who assumed power in Bologna in 1420, but was quickly overthrown. Anton Galeazzo became a condottiero, and was assassinated by papal officials on 23 December 1435 due to fears over his growing power (he had returned to Bologna on 4 December).

During his reign the Bentivoglio received the fief of [Castel Bolognese](#). [Annibale I](#), a putative son of Anton Galeazzo (his mother, Lina Canigiani, was said to be uncertain of the boy's paternity and the matter was decided by dice), led a city revolt against the Papacy in 1438. He tried to make peace with the Visconti family and to convince the Pope not to place Bologna under his dominion. In 1442, the Visconti condottiere [Niccol Piccinimo](#) imprisoned Annibale and his supporters at Varano; Annibale was freed by Galeazzo Marescotti in 1443. When Annibale returned to Bologna, the powers of government were confirmed upon him, a sign that the city recognized the family's political importance. Annibale, however, was assassinated by his rival Battista Canneschi, with the support of [Pope Eugene IV](#), on 24 June 1445.

He was succeeded by [Santa I](#) (1426-1463), also of uncertain paternity and origin, but alleged to be a son of Ercole Bentivoglio, a cousin of Annibale I. Originally an apprentice of the wool guild of Florence, Sante ruled as *signore* of Bologna from 1443. Sponsored by [Cosimo de Medici](#), Sante Bentivoglio ushered in a brief period of political tranquility.

### **Sante I Bentivoglio**

Sante I Bentivoglio (1426–June 24, 1462) was an Italian nobleman who ruled as tyrant or de facto prince of Bologna from 1445 to 1462. Officially the son of a poor blacksmith, he worked as a youth in the wool industry in Florence under another name, until he was alleged to be a natural son of Ercole Bentivoglio.

Alleged to be a natural son of Ercole Bentivoglio, Sante was a cousin of Annibale I Bentivoglio. He was educated at [Florence](#) in the court of Cosimo de' Medici the Elder. When Annibale was killed in an ambush by the rival family of the Canteoli, Sante succeeded him in the rule of Bologna with the title of gonfaloniere die guistizia. He was also named as tutor of Annibale's son [Giovanni II](#). In 1454 he married [Ginerva Sforza](#), then fourteen-years old, the daughter of [Alessandro Sforza](#), lord of [Pesaro](#). The two had two daughters: Costanza (1458–1491), who married to Antonmaria brother of [Giovanni Pica della Mirandola](#), and Ercole (1459–1505), a condottiero. In 1460 Sante started building a palace, which was

destroyed in 1507 after the Bentivoglio were ousted from Bologna. He obtained from the popes autonomy of government over the city and established a communal senate including local nobles and Papal representatives. He allied with the Republic of [Venice](#), the [House of Sforza](#) and the [House of Medici](#). He died in Bologna in 1462 due to illness, being succeeded by Giovanni Bentivoglio, who later remarried Ginevra.

## **Giovanni II - Ruler of Bologna**

In order to secure the support of the other powerful families of Italy, Giovanni fought personally as *condottiero* (leaders or warlords of the professional, military free companies or mercenaries contracted by the Italian city-states and the Papacy, from the late Middle Ages and throughout the Renaissance). In 1467 he was at the service of Florence, [Milan](#) and Naples against [Bartolomeo Colleoni](#), and in 1471 again for Milan, but his first military deeds occurred only in 1477 when he besieged [Faenza](#) for the Sforza. In 1482, during the [War of Ferrara](#), he helped [Ercole d'Este](#) against [Pope Sixtus IV](#) and [Venice](#). He later fought in small struggles for the Kingdom of Naples, but his personal interventions were always limited by the Bolognese institutions. In 1488 his daughter Francesca killed her husband, [Galeotto Manfredi](#), ruler of Faenza. The latter's citizens considered the feat as an occult move to conquer the city, and rebelled. When Giovanni reached the city to suppress the revolt, he was captured. He was freed only through the intercession of [Lorenzo de Medici](#). In the same year he was made Capitano Generale (Chief of Staff) of the Milanese army, but this was an almost honorific position as Giovanni left the command duties to his sons. In 1488 Giovanni had also to crush a plot against him, led by the Malvezzi family, whose members were almost all hanged or exiled. In 1501 the same fate struck the Marescottis. Bentivoglio had managed to resist the expansionist designs of [Cesare Borgia](#), but on 7 October 1506, [Pope Julius II](#) issued a bull deposing and excommunicating Bentivoglio and placing the city under interdict. When the papal troops, along with a contingent sent by [Louis XI of France](#), marched against Bologna, Bentivoglio and his family fled. Julius II entered the city triumphantly on 10 November Giovanni moved first to Busseto, host of the [Pallavicino](#) family. An attempt led by his sons [Annibale II](#) and [Erme](#) to reconquer Bologna in 1507 failed. The Bolognese subsequently rioted against his possessions in the city, destroying the palace. Excommunicated, Giovanni ended his days as prisoner of Louis XII in Milan. He died in 1508 in the [Castello Sforzesco](#) of that city.

A son of Giovanni II, Annibale II (1469-1540), married [Lucrezia d'Este](#), an illegitimate daughter of Duke Ercole I of [Ferrara](#), in 1487. He served as a *condottiero*. In rebellion against Julius II, he re-entered Bologna in 1511 with the

help of the French and ruled for only a year. He was hated by other rival families, such as the Ghisilieri and the Canetoli, and was subsequently assassinated.

The Bentivoglio Family, expelled from Bologna in 1506, established themselves in [Ferrara](#), where they produced some important prelates, such as:



Cardinal Guido Bentivoglio d'Aragona (4 October 1579 – 7 September 1644) was an Italian cardinal, statesman and historian. A member of the Ferrara branch of the influential Bentivoglio family of Bologna, he was the younger son of marchese Cornelio Bentivoglio and Isabella Bendidio. After studying at the universities of Ferrara and Padua, where in 1598 he received a doctorate *utroque jure*—in both civil and canon law— he returned to Ferrara, to the humanistic studies that honed his elegant writing style. There Pope Clement VIII, on a visit to the city that had recently fallen under direct papal control, made him his private chamberlain, and he returned with Clement to Rome.

Though a disciple of [Galileo](#), was one of the Inquisitors-General who signed his condemnation. Papal diplomat and historian of the [Flanders War](#) in his work *Della Guerra di Fiandra*.

Cardinal Cornelio Bentivoglio (1668–1732) was an Italian nobleman and cardinal. Born at Ferrara to the powerful Bentivoglio family, he went to Rome at an early age and was appointed Archbishop of Carthage.

In 1712, he was appointed nuncio to Paris. He locked horns with the Jansenists and was recalled at the death of Louis XIV of France in 1715. He became cardinal in 1719, and Spanish Minister Plenipotentiary at Rome in 1726, a position which he held until his death.



CORNELIO BENTIVOGLIO D'ARAGONA



The third son of Giovanni II, Alessandro Bentivoglio, who had married [Ippolita Sforza](#), became a counselor of the last duke of Milan and later governor of the town (1525), giving origin to a Lombard branch of the family.