

# Italian Newspaper Article on the Guadagni Family 11/19/01

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This is an article written by a famous Italian journalist, Ettore Vittorini, on the Guadagni Family history and precious archives. It was published by one of the most important Italian newspapers, the "Corriere della sera" on November 19, 2001. The author mentions Carlo Guadagni, also known as Charles Migliore Guadagni, as the last and only descendant of the family. He does not seem to know of the existence of many other Guadagni, living in Italy, Canada, United States and New Zealand. He talks about the Guadagni Archives kept in the villa of Masseto, still owned by the Guadagni Family in 2001. A few years later, the last owner, Charles Migliore, sold Masseto, and it is now a villa hotel. Masseto has belonged to the Guadagni family for many centuries and many of us, me included, have visited it as a Family house. All of our grandparents were raised in it. If you are interested you can look it up at Villa Di Masseto in internet. The site offers several pictures of it. The outside of the villa, with the Guadagni family crest still painted on the front wall, and the surrounding park are still the same as when the Guadagni owned it. Obviously the inside has been modernized. The Archives are now kept in a library in the city of Florence.

Francesco

Dear Daniel and Guadagni,

I want to add my personal reflection to Vittorini's remark at the beginning of the enclosed article. He states: "In Florence, many streets and squares are named after the great and noble families that contributed in the making of the history of the city. However none is named after the Guadagni...". I insist these are just my personal reflections. Usually in Florence the streets named after famous historical families contain a palace of the family in it. This palace is often the largest building of the whole street or square by far. Examples that come to mind are Guicciardini Street, Pucci Street, Ginori Street, Antinori Square, Lungarno Guicciardini, Lungarno Corsini, etc. Often if there is a church in the street, even though there is a large noble palace, the street is named after the church, like Borgo Santi Apostoli, even though the church Santi Apostoli is a lot smaller than the neighboring palace. According to Ginori's book on the palaces in Florence, there are only twelve very large and grandiose palaces in Florence, maybe also because Florence was never the capital of a large kingdom. In the 17th century the Guadagni owned four of the twelve huge palaces, all at the same time (i.e. they owned one third of the largest palaces of Florence, more than any other Florentine family has ever had). However, the Guadagni did not pick little unknown streets to build their palaces in, but two of the largest and most important squares of the city. One is "Piazza del Duomo" the square where the internationally famous Cathedral of Florence is located, the other is Piazza Santo Spirito, the most beautiful and famous square on the other side of the Arno River. You could not expect either of the squares to change their name in Piazza Guadagni. The third Guadagni palace is along the Arno River and that "Lungarno" (i.e. street along the Arno) should rightfully be called Lungarno Guadagni. However a few years before they started to name the "streets along the Arno" the Guadagni branch that owned the palace changed their name in Torrigiani to inherit the Torrigiani fortune and so that palace became known as Torrigiani palace and the street was called Lungarno Torrigiani.

The fourth Guadagni Palace, famous also because of its daring and innovative architecture (for the 16th century), is in via Micheli (if I remember the name well). Via Micheli is a very short street, one side of which is entirely taken by the Guadagni palace facade and part of its garden. Why is it called Micheli? Who are the Micheli by the way? I do not know. An explanation I can think of is that that branch of the Guadagni was extinct at the beginning of the 19th century, and their palace was owned by several other families afterwards including an heir to the Kingdom of England, and that that street was named in the 19th century. Maybe by then they had forgotten that the largest and most beautiful palace of it was built by and used to belong to the Guadagni Family, and so they named the street after somebody else.

Francesco

# CORRIERE DELLA SERA

## CULTURAL PAGE

Monday November 19, 2001

### MAZZARINO RECOMMENDS ME

By Ettore Vittorini

In Florence, many streets and squares are named after the great and noble families that contributed in the making of the history of the city. However none is named after the Guadagni, one of the most ancient Florentine families, whose power started in the 1200s and who is nowadays almost extinct. The only direct descendant, Carlo, was born in the United States and is now a farmer in Vermont. In Tuscany, Carlo still owns the property of Masseto, near the town of Pontassieve, behind the hill of Fiesole. Masseto includes a villa of the fifteenth century and 90 acres of land. However the Guadagni used to be great merchants and bankers, even more powerful than the Medici, before the latter gained political control of the Republic of Florence. From the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Guadagni were eleven times Gonfaloniere of Florence, which means head of the Florentine State.

The family history is kept in the villa of Masseto in a big living room on the second floor. Majestic and large bookcases, eaten by bookworms, contain hundreds of ancient binders, corroded by time. These binders are full of thousands of letters, documents, diplomas, political and commercial correspondence that the family had with the powerful people of Tuscany, Italy and the whole of Europe. On the long tables you can see master registers, covered with old Florentine leather, witnessing the trade of many centuries. In one of them, for example, there is an order for uniforms for the servants, written at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Muzio Attendolo Sforza, (Duke of Milano and one of the greatest generals in Italian history). If you open one of the binders containing documents of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, you can find two letters from 1646, coming from Paris, and addressed to the Grand Duke of Tuscany. One of them is signed by Louis the 14<sup>th</sup>, King of France, still a child at that time, and the other by Cardinal Mazzarino, his prime minister. They are letters of recommendation for a member of the Guadagni Family, the "Gentleman Francesco". In a binder containing papers of the following century, we find a document signed by Maria Theresa, Empress of Austria, that gives Ascanio Guadagni the title of Marshall of the Empire and Governor of Tyrol. This was to

recompense him for having fought against the Turks and for having helped her to become Empress during the war for the succession to the throne of Austria.

The Guadagni were well known in all of Europe, especially in France, where part of the family emigrated in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In 1434 Simone Guadagni decided to escape to France with his family to avoid the vengeance of Cosimo dei Medici, the “old”, who had just come back from exile. Cosimo had been forced into exile the year before by Bernardo Guadagni, Simone’s uncle, who was at that time Gonfaloniere of Florence. While Gonfaloniere, i.e. head of the Republic of Florence, Bernardo had adhered to the plot against the Medici, organized by the Albizi, the Alberti, the Gondi and other noble Florentine families, to block the dangerous political growing power of the Medici. By order of Bernardo Guadagni, Cosimo was imprisoned in a cell at the top of the tower of Palazzo Vecchio. However Cosimo was not killed, but only exiled. Macchiavelli (author of the “Prince”) wrote in his History of Florence:” Thus the plotters prepared their own ruin, by being moved by the prayers, tears and money of their enemies (i.e. the Medici; Cosimo offered Bernardo large sums of money to be freed from jail and sent into exile and Bernardo accepted); Macchiavelli concludes:” Don’t bother with the powerful people, or, if you do, kill them”. Thus the Guadagni moved to Lion where they became even wealthier. The fame of their fortune was so great that when someone is very rich in France they still say “He is as rich as a Guadagni”. After less than a century these rich Florentine immigrants were invited to the King’s palace and became his friends. This happened thanks to an act of great generosity, certainly with a goal in mind, that Tommaso Guadagni did towards the King Francis the First.

In 1525 King Francis the First was defeated and taken prisoner by Charles V king of Spain in the battle of Pavia. The King of Spain asked a ransom of 50,000 ducats, an enormous sum for those times, to free the King of France. The French government was not able to come up with so much money. Tommaso Guadagni then paid it himself out of his own money and Francis the First compensated him by nominating him “Financial Adviser of the King”. Later, part of the Guadagni family returned to Florence and reunited with the Guadagni who had already accepted the Medici power. Francesco, the one who was recommended by Cardinal Mazzarino, was given by the Medici the title of Marquis of San Leolino. The decline of the family started in the Nineteenth Century, when the Guadagni, who had abandoned all their financial activities long before, were still able to survive pretty well thanks to their farming income and the sale of the properties they owned in Florence and on the surrounding hills.

The last descendant of the main branch, Carlo, is the son of Guadagno Guadagni, who moved to the United States in 1924, because he couldn’t stand the “arrogance and the abuse of the Fascists”. Carlo is an American citizen and doesn’t know a word of Italian. He gave the administration of the Family Archives to the Florentine lawyer Anton Luigi Aiazzi, who also takes care of Masseto for him. Aiazzi loves History and was able to interest another Historian, Riccardo Nencini, President of the Regional Council of Tuscany, to the Guadagni Archives. Nencini decided to make of the villa of Masseto with the Guadagni Archives a Cultural Center for the Conservation of the History of Florence and Tuscany.

We publish here part of the letter written by Cardinal Mazzarino (who spells his name “Mazzarrino”) to Ferdinand II Grand Duke of Tuscany, that we found in the Villa of Masseto of the Guadagni Family.

“ To the most Serene and most deserving of respect my Lord the Grand Duke of Tuscany

Your Very Serene Highness might think it strange that I recommend you the Gentleman Francesco Guadagni [...] but as this Gentleman came to France to renew the servitude that his Family has always offered to our Crown [...] he has proved himself so worthy that I thought it right to tell Your Highness about it, so that You might deem it rightful to justly approve of a claim he has against the heirs of the late Cardinal and of Mister Giovanni Bandino. I assure you that this Gentleman will prove himself worthy of Your Highness’ help and I of the favors I will receive from Your infinite goodness, and I conclude by humbly kissing your hands.

Given to Your Serene Highness

Paris, October 1646

Very affectionate servant

Cardinal Mazzarrino