ROMEO AND JULIET
THE MONTAGUES AND THE CAPULETS IN HISTORY

In 1930 I wrote: “The powerful families of Montague and Capulet, who figure in Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, never resided in Verona, and in fact never existed at all. Contrary to the general impression, the term Montecchi—the Italian equivalent of ‘Montagues’—like the term Cappelletti (Cappellini), meaning ‘Capulets,’ was the nickname of a political band or faction, not the name of a private family.” Today, I should like to modify my statement regarding the Montecchi (Montagues) to this extent: The Montecchi did exist as a family during the twelfth century. From 1207 on, however, the term Montecchi, like the term Cappelletti, seems to have been applied only to a political party, the best evidence going to show that the Montecchi family had disappeared entirely.¹

According to Luigi Simeoni, the Montecchi were originally bourgeois enemies of the noble Veronese house of the Conti, having begun as negotiatores. The first of the Montecchi family


Cf. C. Cipolla, Compendio della storia politica di Verona, Verona: R. Cabianca, 1900, pp. 130, 131: “parte dei Montecchi, famiglia potente, la quale (per quanto sembra) ricevette il suo nome dal grosso villaggio di Montecchio Maggiore, che trovasi tra Verona e Vicenza.”

Cf., however, A. M. Allen, A History of Verona, edited by Edward Armstrong, London, 1910. On p. 45 the writer says: “no family called Montecchi ever lived in Verona. It is more probable that the leaders of the party came in the first instance from Montecchio, a hill-fortress in the Vicentine district.”

Miss Allen, while in my judgment more accurate than most writers on this point, is incorrect regarding the Montecchi of the twelfth century, as demonstrated by L. Simeoni. As for the later status of the Montecchi, she does not clearly state that they were not a family, but merely says that the alleged family did not reside in Verona. She seems misleading, moreover, in suggesting apparently that the leaders of the Montecchi party resided originally in Montecchio Maggiore. It would seem, as we shall find presently, that during the early part of the thirteenth century the castle was in the hands of the de Pilio (Pilio, or Pio) family, and that it was used by the heterogeneous Montecchi faction merely as their first recruiting station.
recorded in any document was Giovanni Monticullo, reported as living in 1136, 1140, 1145, 1146, and 1177. Documentary evidence is found also of the activities of his brother Gomberto in 1146 and 1157, and of his son Giacomo in 1177. Giacomo's son Zanino is mentioned as living in 1206.

Let it be repeated, however, that at the turn of the century, the Monticolo (Monticoli) (Montecchio) (Montecchi) family disappears so far as authentic records go. On the other hand, the chronicles of this period are replete with references to the Montecchi party or faction. Of these chronicles, probably the most reliable is that of Rolandino, the Paduan notary (died 1276), who records the career of the da Romano family, with especial reference to Ezzelino III. The notary's work was regarded by contemporaries as so authoritative that it served as a model for several later chronicles, notably the "Annales S. Iustinae Patavini."

According to Rolandino, the thirteenth-century term Montecchi arose in the following manner. Azzo Marquis of Este became podesta of Verona in 1207. Ezzelino da Romano was violently opposed to such political preferment for his personal enemy. He therefore called a gathering of his followers—from Verona, Vicenza, and elsewhere—in the castle of Montecchio.


Ibid., p. 93.

Ibid.

Ibid.


This circumstance served as a sort of christening for Ezzelino’s followers, who were thenceforth known as Montecchi (Monticli or Monticuli).

In another passage, Rolandino repeats his assertion that the name Montecchi belonged properly to a political band. He states that Azzo VI, Marquis of Este, had forced an alliance with Bonifacio, Count of S. Bonifacio, and that his faction came to be known as the party of the Marquis. Members of the rival party of Salinguerra Torelli and Ezzelino II da Romano, he says, were known as “Montecli.” In partial confirmation of this statement, Parisius de Cereta calls Ezzelino da Romano the head of the Montecchi “party.” According to Luigi Simeoni, Rolandino’s assertion is also supported by firsthand documents.

The castle of Montecchio Maggiore was situated in the neighborhood of Montebello Vicentino, in the foothills of Vicenza, and is the only authentic landmark for the story of the Montagues and the Capulets. As indicated by the Latin form of its name—Monticulus, “little mountain”—it was built upon a small eminence. It matters little that eventually the name of the castle seems to have been adopted by members of the family resident there—“Marchixius and Confortus de Monticulo”—just as the family of Ezzelino da Romano itself derived its name from...
the ancestral castle of Romano. The fact remains that from 1207 to the end of the thirteenth century we have no authoritative mention of a da Montecchio family. For instance, in the year 1239, according to Rolandino, the castle of Montecchio belonged to Ugucio de Pilio (Piio, or Pillio), and was captured by Emperor Frederick II. In 1242, it appears, Ugucio surrendered his castle to Ezzelino da Romano.

It is perhaps noteworthy also that the Monticuli are at first invariably referred to in the plural, as if indicating their conglomerate nature, recruited as they were from all parts of northeastern Italy, or undecunque, as Rolandino significantly observes. On the other hand, the twelfth-century Monticolo family name studied by Luigi Simeoni was usually employed in the singular, although occasionally the plural form was used. Thus we find on the one hand mention of the family founder’s name, Giovanni Monticoli, but on the other hand such forms as Giacomo Monticoli and Liazarii de Monticulis.

Not only was the term Montecchi reserved during the thirteenth century for a political band in Verona, but the term Quattuorviginti (Italian Quattroventi), applied to the chief allies of the Montecchi, was apparently also the nickname of a faction. Quattuorviginti seems to have meant originally the eighty followers of the Count of S. Bonifacio who were bribed by Ezzelino da Romano and Salinguerra Torelli to become renegades. While this theory rests on no more secure basis than a marginal note in one of the manuscripts of the “Annales S. Justinae Patavini,” it

34 Maurusius, Gerardus. “Historia.” L. A. Muratori, old edition, op. cit. VIII, col. 148. The da Romano family formerly went by the name of da Onara. Cesare Foligno writes: “The founder of this powerful family was probably Ezzelo, a knight in the army led by the Emperor Conrad II. (1036). Being endowed with the feudal possession of Romano and Onara, two castles in the neighborhood of Bassano, not far from Padua, he and his descendants were called, as was usual at that period, by the name of their possession.”—Foligno, Cesare. The Story of Padua. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1910, p. 43. Cf. also W. F. Butler, The Lombard Communes, New York, 1906, p. 207.
35 “Et (imperator) stans ibidem Vicencie, fecit sibi Monteclum maiorcm  dari, castrum scilicet Ugucionis de Piio Vicentino districtus, et positis ibi custodibus Sarracenis, fecit ipsum ultenus per imperium custodiri.”—Rolandino, in Monumenta, op. cit., XIX, p. 72.
36 Parisius de Cereta, op. cit., p. 12.
38 Simeoni, Le origini del comune di Verona, op. cit., p. 92 and passim.
40 Ibid., p. 125.
41 Allen, op. cit., p. 51, and note 2.
affords nevertheless the most plausible explanation offered for the source of the name.  

On the other hand, the Counts of S. Bonifacio—the chief antagonists of the Montecchi and the Quattroventi—represented a real family, descended from Milo, Count of Verona, who ruled from 930 to 950, and from his brother Egelric. The story goes that a certain Tiresio killed Count Sauro, of this family, on the hill of S. Bonifacio. Tiresio left for the Orient after the homicide, but his brothers made peace with the heirs of Sauro by ceding to them the site of S. Bonifacio near Verona. Thereafter the Counts of Verona took the name of S. Bonifacio.

It will be impossible to follow in detail here the fluctuating fortunes of the quarrelsome Montecchi during the first third of the thirteenth century. After 1236, mention of the Montecchi becomes much rarer, but apparently their power, as well as that of their allies the Quattroventi, still continues in 1245, when a distribution of booty was made in their favor.

Under the date of 1252 occurs what is apparently a new and unauthenticated attempt to use the term Montecchi as a family name. Parisius de Cereta, who seems to have had a fondness for adding titles to proper names, makes a bare reference to a certain

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23Allen, op. cit., pp. 11, 45.
24Cipolla, Compendio, op. cit., p. 131.
25The anonymous author of the "Ricciardi Comitis Sancti Bonifacii Vita" (Muratori, old edition, op. cit., VIII, col. 122) makes the murder occur in 1184, the victim being "Alexandrum Comitem San-Bonifacium" and the murderer a member of the Montecchi family," Ceresius "Monticulus." This utterly unreliable chronicler, who is undecided about the Trojan origin of the S. Bonifacio family, makes Bonifacio the son of Sauro, and the nephew of the murdered "Alexander" (ibid.). According to him, Ludovico was the son of Bonifacio, and Rizarde the son of Lucidio.

As a matter of fact, Ludovico was the son, not the father, of Rizarde, whose biography this anonymous chronicler essays to write. "(Ricardus) . . . Reliquit autem unicum filium parvulum nomine Ludovicum . . ."—"Annales S. Iustinae Patavini," op. cit., p. 162. Rolandino refers to this son as "Leoitus." (Monumenta, op. cit., XIX, p. 81.)

It might be noted also that Parisius de Cereta makes Bonifacio the son of Sancius (= Sauro) of San Bonifacio. (Op. cit., p. 6.)

The date of the death of Sauro is given in the "Annales Sanctae Trinitatis" as 1189. (Monumenta, op. cit., XIX, p. 5.)

Carnarolus de Monticulis as one of the numerous victims put to death of Ezzelino da Romano in that year. Rolandino, however, who gives a detailed account of this affair, mentions no connection between Carnarolus and the Montecchi. According to his version, "Domnus" Carnarolus, as well as his brother, Friar Felisius, of Padua, were victims of Ezzelino III da Romano. He calls Carnarolus a prominent citizen—"potentem virum et divitem"—of Verona. His brother, on the contrary, seems to have been a humble priest, and a teacher of the Germans in Padua: "Præceptor sive magister Alemanorum in Padua." Carnarolus was imprisoned, compelled to do menial service in the house of the tyrant, and then publicly flogged in the streets of Verona.

While it does not seem, consequently, that the title de Monticulis given by Parisius de Cereta was well established, there appears nevertheless towards the end of the century to have been a gradually increasing tendency to use this term as a sort of sobriquet. For example, on September 23, 1279, one of the signers of the peace between Brescia, on the one hand, and the allied citizens of Verona and Mantua, on the other, was the Mantuan Astolfinus qui dicitur Monteclus. Again, in 1324, according to an unedited chronicle, Crescimbene de' Monticoli with his two sons was expelled from Verona by Can Grande della Scala, and finally took refuge in Udine. Perhaps this gradual application of a party nickname to private families may be compared with such expressions as "Gypsy" Smith, "Silver Dick" Bland, or

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26 Parisius de Cereta, op. cit., p. 14. Parisius de Cereta not only gives a title to all the other persons mentioned in this passage, but bestows the title of comes Sancti Bonifaci upon Marcus Regulus, who died in 1142, and is referred to in the "Annales Breves" simply as comes Malregulatus (Monumenta, op. cit., XIX, p. 2). The best evidence would indicate that the title of comes Sancti Bonifaci was not adopted by the family until the latter part of the twelfth century. See Cipolla, Compendio, op. cit., p. 131.


28 "Supra dictus siquidem dompnus Carnarolus in plathea Vérone est dilaceratus per frusta . . . "—Rolandino, new Muratori ed., loc. cit. See also Monumenta, op. cit., XIX, p. 99.


"Texas" Rickard, as an indication of the alleged tribal, political, or geographical connections of the individual. It may even be conceivable that the twelfth-century Montecchi family continued to exist in obscurity during the thirteenth century, only to receive chance notice by late chroniclers. Nevertheless, the fact remains that so long as the Montecchi were active and famous during the thirteenth century, they were invariably referred to by chroniclers as, apparently, a faction. In particular, let it be repeated, the reliable chronicler Rolandino over and over specifically calls the Montecchi a political party, not a family. This situation was of major importance in the early development of our legend, as we shall see in the next chapter.

If the historical development of the term Montecchi has been little understood in the past, we have been more fortunate with regard to the term Cappelletti. The Guelf Cappelletti, far from being a family living in Verona, were a faction associated with the political affairs of Cremona. Their Ghibelline opponents were known as Barbarasi, according to reliable chroniclers, or Troncaciuffi, according to the Dante commentator Peter Alighieri. Obviously the nicknames Barbarasi and Troncaciuffi referred to the practice of shaving their beards, as a mark of distinction. In fact, they have been compared appropriately to "the Roundheads and the Croppies of English and Irish history." The Cappelletti, or Cappellini, for their part, evidently wore small hats or caps as insignia. Later, history repeated itself, and the name was adopted by a troop of Venetian light horsemen—a fact which may have had its weight with Luigi da Porto, author of the first novella concerning Romeo and Giulietta.

The fortunes of the Cappelletti may be traced briefly, if only

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86 For Cappellini, the alternate form for Cappelletti, see Salimbene, *Cronaca di fra Salimbene Parmigiano dell'ordine dei minori*, translated by Carlo Canturelli, Parma, 1882, I, p. 264: "In Cremona, che' che parteggiavano per la Chiesa si chiamavano Cappellini, o Cappelletti; que' che tenevano per l'Impero, si nominavano Barbarasi."
to establish further the parallel with the fate of the Montecchi. In 1249, taking advantage of the declining authority of Emperor Frederick II, the Cappelletti attempted an uprising against the Barbarasi, without success. The insurgents were banished from Cremona, together with their leader Amadinus de Amatis.39

The following year, a band of some two thousand Barbarasi attacked the Cappelletti in their place of refuge. After a long siege, Amadinus de Amatis was captured. By a stroke of good fortune, the prisoners were all permitted to escape by their custodian Marquis Lancia, podesta of Lodi. The cause for this leniency remains a disputed point—whether bribery, or sympathy with the Cappelletti faction, or jealousy of the podesta of Cremona.37

In 1259, we find the combined authorities of Verona, Mantua, Ferrara, and Padua making an alliance with the podesta of Cremona, by the terms of which they agree to consider the Barbarasi party as being one and the same thing as the commune of Cremona, and promise to give neither aid nor counsel to the Cappelletti banished from that city.38

In 1267, it would appear, the Cappelletti had recovered some of their lost power. Through the intercession of a legate of Pope Clement IV, they were allowed to return to Cremona,39 where they seem to have caused few disturbances worth recording. The last reference to them by a contemporary occurs in Dante's Purgatorio.

Finally in 1427 we find the name Cappelletti going through a cycle similar to that of the name Montecchi, authentically applied to a family. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, or nearly three hundred years too late, a member of this family is called Giulia.40

As far as authentic records go, the Montecchi of Verona never seem to have come into conflict with the Cappelletti of Cremona. The history of the twelfth century, however, furnishes a curious parallel for the formation of their names. In that century, the mercenary troops commonly known as Brabançons derived their names from the duchy of Brabant, where they were first recruited,
much as the thirteenth-century Montecchi were named for the castle of Montecchio Maggiore, first recruiting station of Ezzelino II da Romano. The antagonists of the Brabançons were called Caputii, from the linen hoods which they wore, just as the Cap­pelletti were named also for their characteristic headgear. Ap­parently, no claim has ever been advanced that the Caputii were a private family.