

The Origins of the Ardizzone Caito Surname

by Paul Caito

There are almost one million different surnames in Italy today but, when considering the actual roots of these surnames, we find that they derive from only a few thousand names. Although names have been used throughout history to identify people, a family surname was rarely included. In earliest history, for instance in the times of Christ, Jesus was known simply as "Jesus of Nazareth" or "Jesus, son of Joseph." No surname was ever attributed to Christ. And while he might have been known as "Jesus of the lineage of David," the use of a surname was not routinely used until well into the Middle Ages. However, during Charlemagne's rule in Europe and the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, names became more standardized. At the time, with the advent of the Noble Class, there became a need to distinguish family lines both for inheritance and for the transfer of ruling power. So, in the 1400's when written documents began to be created, such as parish records, tax records and judicial records, the naming of family lines became important, not only for the noble classes, but also for the common people. As record keeping became more widespread, family names became permanent and remained from one generation to the next.

Family surnames generally belong to one of four major categories: surnames that originate from **personal names - patronymic** - (such as di Blasi - son of Blasé (named after St. Blaise), or De Matteo - son of Matthew), **from nicknames** (such as Rossi - meaning "red" usually referring to the color or one's hair, Grosso - fat, Bevilacqua -drinks water), **from localities** (such as Romero - from Rome) and **from vocations** (Sartori - tailor, Ferrari - a smith, Marchese - a Marqui {nobility}). A more in-depth discussion of surnames can be found in the book: Italian Genealogical Records by Trafford R. Cole (Salt Lake City, Utah:Ancestry Incorporated □1995) in the Chapter: *Meaning and Origin of Italian Surnames*.

Ardizzone is of patronymic origin. In a discussion of the origins of the Ardizzone surname from the Historical Research Center, the name is described as "following the most basic type of surname in which it derives from the personal name of the father of the original bearer. In this case, the personal name is Ardizzo, a name of Germanic origin. The augmentative suffix "-one" of the surname "Ardizzone" is one of those suffixes such as "-ino," "-etto," and "-ello," which give a particular flavor and meaning to nouns and adjectives in which they are attached. Since the Middle Ages, they were, and are, used with first names to indicate size, age, affection, physical and moral qualities, and have...developed inside the family circle as pet names. The names Ardizzo and Ardizzone are documented in Italy starting from the eleventh century in the Latin and Latinized form of Ardicio, Ardizio and Ardizionus. Even then, the custom (of surnames) was first instituted only amongst the patricians and it took another eight hundred years for it to become an all-pervasive institution. Many surnames originated in central and northern Italy during the democratic Communes period and in Venice after the creation of the Grand Council. With the growth of the need of documentation in the later Middle Ages, such names became essential, they started passing from father to son, and so became hereditary."

The report goes on to say, "As the closest variant to the surname Ardizzone, the "Dizionario Storica Blasonico," a compilation of the Italian nobility, mentions a family by the name of Ardzzoni or Ardisone of Casalmonferrato. One "Cesare Ardizzoni" from Piacenza, after fighting in France, was the first to move to Piemonte. He married Lady Anna Galli of Volongo and was endowed with the title of "Count."

There is no published history of the origins of the Caito surname. It could possibly be derived from a location, as I believe there is a town of Cato or Catto in Italy (there is definitely a town of Cato in New York State!). On the other hand, perhaps Caito is derived from a first name with "-ito" as a diminutive form. In researching the records of Termini Imerese, the surname Ardizzone Caito is found together in the earliest record of Giovanni Battista Ardizzone Caito in 1770. So, the combining of the two names had to occur prior to 1770. When the names are combined, it is found as Ardizzone Caito, never as Caito Ardizzone and the name is never hyphenated.

What is of particular interest is that many of the Termini records identify our ancestors sometimes as

"Ardizzone Caito," just "Ardizzone" or just "Caito." There appears to be no consistency, even for one individual, as there are instances where one individual uses all three variations throughout the years. However, the majority of our ancestors are identified as "Ardizzone Caito." It is believed that the combination occurred during a marriage whereby the woman brought her maiden name with her and the two names were combined. If the origin of our "Ardizzone" surname was truly from the "Count Cesare Ardizzone" then it could be imagined that a lady with that well known and noble name of "Ardizzone" may have not wanted to leave the name when she married, and therefore a combined name was created. Or, if the noble line of "Ardizzone" had no male heirs, perhaps it was combined with "Caito" so as not to lose the Ardizzone name and lineage. Further light may be shed on the subject if we can access records prior to 1770. At the present time (January 2000), no access has been given to anyone to examine any church or *Commune* records prior to the 1770-1820 time frame. There is hope that we may gain access to these records in the future.

The Ardizzone Caito surname is still prevalent in the Sicily and is found only in the city of Termini and city of Palermo, both in the Province of Palermo. It is interesting to see that it is not found in any other section of Italy.

Meanwhile, here in the United States, the Caito surname has been spread around the country due to migration of various immigrant Caito families.

There is the highest concentration of Caito's in the Rhode Island area (the descendants of Margherita Caito and Gian B. Caito.), as well as in Ohio (Gaetano Caito and Maria Morello as well as Gaetano's brother, Agostino Caito and Antonina Morello) and Missouri (the descendants of Salvatore Caito and Angela DiMercurio), with lesser, but significant, numbers in Indiana (Indianapolis - Filippo Caito and Michela Miceli) and Nebraska. The research continues to find the genealogical connections between all of the families.

Pronunciation of the Caito surname

When an individual who is not familiar with the Caito surname tries to pronounce it for the first time, any Caito descendant will usually prepare themselves for an interesting "verbal assault" against the name and a questioning, if not contorted, look to the face of the person attempting to pronounce the name! Not only do people have difficulty pronouncing our name, we can also attest to the fact that it is the rare person indeed who can correctly spell it after they have heard it spoken for the first time. Personally, when someone asks my name for informational purposes, such as placing an order over the phone, etc., I no longer say the name, I always spell it slowly, because if I just say the name, the individual in question usually starts to spell it with a "K." And....if the individual asking for the name does start with the letter "C," they will invariably leave out the letter "I" and/or place the "I" after the "T". It is not unusual to see our name (mis)spelled as "Cato," "Catio," "Caeto," "Kato," "Kayto," "Katio," "Keto," "Ceto" or "Cetio." (Have I missed any possible contortions that you have seen?)

So...just exactly how is the name supposed to be pronounced? The "ai" vowel combination after the "C" really throws everyone. One could either concentrate on pronouncing the "A" vowel or concentrate on pronouncing the "I" vowel. A third option is to try to pronounce both vowels and try to slur them together.

Here in the United States, one pronunciation would phonetically sound like "Kae-toe" where the "Kae" rhymes with "hay." This pronunciation appears to be prevalent in the families in Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, California and some of the Indiana families. The second form of pronunciation would phonetically sound like "Kite-oh" where the "ai" vowels rhyme with "Eye" or sounds like the "I" in "kite." This pronunciation is prevalent in the Indiana families and is the pronunciation used in the Caito Wholesale Foods that is widely distributed in the Mid-West

If the "slur together" technique is not the one used in Termini, then I suspect that the original pronunciation was with the form where the middle vowels rhyme with "Kite" or "Eye." Part of my sense of this is that early city directory listings of a family of Caito's in Geneva, New York in 1905 actually have the name listed as "Kito," (in with other names beginning with the letter 'K,' not with names beginning with the letter "C"). So, phonetically, people must have been using the "Kite-oh" pronunciation in

order to come up with that type of misspelling. And, in general, most European languages pronounce the second vowel, or at least put more emphasis on the second vowel, when there are two vowels listed together - this is commonly found in German and French.

In March of 2004, Jo Ann Caito Miles, of Richmond, Virginia traveled to Termini and was determined to meet some Caito descendants and ask them how our name is pronounced by a true Termitani (a resident of Termini Imerese). Here is her description:

"Dear Paul,

...We must have asked 10 to 15 people how to pronounce our name and everyone said the same thing: "Kieto"- long "I" long "E.""

So now we know!!!!

The correct way to pronounce our name in Termini is KI-EE-TOE !!!