

Waldensian Compound Surnames

Some Waldensian surnames are *compound* surnames—surnames made up of two names. Examples are **Durand-Canton**, **Durand-Ruet**, and **Gignous-Janavel**. There are several others. Usually in the Waldensian records, the hyphen between them is omitted; but if you do not record the hyphen, Americans will typically misunderstand and think one is a middle name and the other the surname.

Sometimes the two surnames simply follow each other in the records. Other times, the first surname is followed by *dit* ("called") or *alias* before the second surname. The compound surname **Durand-Canton** is occasionally written (in the Italian form of the notarial records) as *Durando del Cantone* (we'd say, "Durand of the West Side").

A compound surname could originate in several ways. Often it's the *maiden surname* of a prominent ancestress, or the last representative of a line that's dying out. Others derive from a locality, such as Durand-Canton. There were so many Durand families at Rorà that compound surnames were used to distinguish among them; the "Canton" branch lived in the western quarter (canton, in the dialect) of the village. Still other compound surnames came from the family's occupation. Durand-Ruet (weaver) is an example of this type.

Finally, a compound surname could describe a distinguishing characteristic of the family. **Gignous-Janavel** describes a branch of the Gignous family. "Gignous" is thought to derive from the root of "ingenious." The compound surname came into being with the famous captain, **Giosuè Gignous-Janavel**. (When the captain made his will, he signed it "Javanel," transposing the *n* and *v*. "Javanel" is the name in the local dialect of a barn owl, whose call the captain is said to have imitated as a signal to his followers.) He is now better known by the last part of the compound surname, Janavel.

If you have not read the review of the historical novel about Captain Janavel, go to:
Waldensian.Info/RoraReview.htm