

A Brief History of Early Malans

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I am astonished at how widespread the Malans are. Of course, those of us at the International Reunion represent branches of the family from many diverse areas, and there are others not represented here. But I am also astonished at how they dispersed so widely so early in their history.

We have not yet finished abstracting the relevant genealogical information from the surviving notary records, but in every locality we have searched, we have found Malans. By early in the Seventeenth Century when the surviving notary records begin, there were Malans in each of the Valleys, and in several of the towns on the plains. And in some of the Valleys, Malan was also used as a first name.

I am also intrigued by the will of Pietro Malan, dated 12 March 1643 at Angrogna. Pietro mentions Carlo, his natural son by “madonna Cesenina di Monti Comino” of Grenoble.¹ I don’t mention this to offend anyone; rather, I do so because it shows that he traveled rather far from home. Why did he go to Grenoble —primarily for business, or was there an early family connection in that region?

For now, let’s try to trace the family in earlier documents in the Valleys.

When the Waldensian Valleys were divided among the heirs of the lord of Luserna in 1232, the heads of all families were required to swear allegiance to their lord, a standard feudal practice (despite Waldensian preference to avoid oaths of all kinds). It is significant that the name Malan does not appear on the list, so we can safely conclude that there were no Malans in the Valleys at that time.²

According to Coisson, the first mention of the surname in surviving documents is “Meylan” in 1261 at Molines, a town in the Queyras valley, in France but with an early Waldensian influence.³ However I have searched the printed *Inventaire sommaire des Archives départementales* for that area without success. I then asked a local researcher to check the archives in person, and she also could not find the record.

Coisson also indicates that the name appears in 1415 at Torre Pellice. A search for that record was also unsuccessful.

The next mention occurs on 5 February 1481. I have both a photocopy and a translation of this document. It is a safeguard granted by Duke Philibert of Savoy to several inhabitants of Angrogna. The purpose was to protect them and their properties from the excesses of the local lords, in exchange for payment of a pound of wax each year. The inhabitants, including a Giovanni Malan and a Gerardo Malan, had gone to the ducal palace at Chambéry to “complain that they suffer many oppressions.” The Duke’s message then continued, “I order therefore the lords of Pinerolo, Luserna and Angrogna to execute this decision of mine and to condemn to the whip those who transgress it...” —a rather severe penalty to our sensibilities today.

Coisson also cites a 1503 mention of the name, but I have not yet succeeded in finding that document. But on 2 May 1519, we find at San Giovanni a Costanzo Malan.

Audisio mentions Antoine Malan, of Luserna, who crossed the mountains in 1520 to witness a marriage at La Motte-d'Aigues in the Luberon (Provence).⁴ Based on other evidence Audisio cites, one branch of the family left the Valleys between 1480-1520 to settle (or resettle) this region. The wedding Antoine came for would undoubtedly have been that of a younger son who had emigrated or of a grandchild.

I also have a copy of a 9 November 1594 document listing heads of families in San Giovanni and also in Angrogna. The following Malans are included: Girardo, Giovanni, Michaele, and Paulo.

We can conclude from these documents that (a) there were no Malans in the Valleys in 1232, but (b) by the Fifteenth Century, there were apparently several branches of the family. Can we find some clues as to their origin?

In another, more recent work, Audisio traces the early Waldensian movement. When Valdès and his companions were expelled from the area around Lyons, they went elsewhere to preach. They figured prominently in southwestern France, where they engaged in numerous public debates with the Cathars (also known as Albigensians).

But once the Cathars were effectively destroyed, church and political powers both focused on persecution of the Waldensians, who fled eastward.⁵ Some Waldensian surnames reflect a distinctively Southern French origin (for example, Jordan).

Waldensian settlements soon appeared in other places, including Franche-Comté. It is interesting to note that two towns in Franche-Comté were named "Malans."⁶ Audisio notes that in the Inquisition registers compiled by Jacques Fournier, bishop of Pamiers and later Pope Benedict XII, half of the Waldensians mentioned come from Burgundy (which would include Franche-Comté). The registers contained evidence given between 1318 and 1325 and reported on Waldensian activity between 1275 and 1320.

It is possible, therefore, that some Malans from one or both towns of that name in Franche-Comté became Waldensians. They may have either fled southwest to escape persecution or volunteered to go preach to the Cathars. If so, they would have left with the others when persecution became intense in the southwest.

But there are other intriguing possibilities. Early cartularies from the area around Lyons contain references that may include members of the family. For example, about 1195, Garamburge, abbess of St-Pierre, confirmed to a man named Malleno a vineyard near the fountain of Bellebarbe. In November 1263, a Johannem Malian of Lanieu, with his daughter Johanna, donated a vineyard to the chartreux of Portes. That vineyard was adjacent to another owned by Girardo Malian and to land owned by this Girardo and his brothers, not named. (The Girardo mentioned at Angrogna above was more than 300 years later, but the first name is striking.)

On 26 July 1270, Agnes de la Vavreta made her will. She mentions her children, including Blanchiam, wife of Petro Malien, and a son Guillelmum.

A donation made by Durand de Vindry on 5 January 1272 mentions a piece of land located “super Malani Tabernam” (“above the Malan inn”).

And in December 1284, the goods of the Malent family were divided. Johanne Maalent, a citizen of Lyons, was son of deceased Petri Maalent. Johanne’s nephew Johannino, son of Johanne’s deceased brother Bernard Maalent, also had an interest in the lands.

Even earlier, in February 1239, a Guichard de Miolans, knight, and his brother Jacques, raised a question about a previous donation to the Templars by Antelme de Miolans. The next month, March, Guichard de Miolans ceded a vineyard below Monbruson.⁷ The context of these records from the Lyonnais shows clearly that these people were Catholic.

There are other possible origins, as well. In the Comtat-Venaissin (now department of Vaucluse), where Waldensians were known to be at an early date, we find a Pierre Maillan and a Raymond Malhon taxed in 1414. That same year, we find a “noble Louis, son of Pieyre, of Molans” mentioned in the land-census of the community of Faucon; also, in 1414, we find that Antoine Milon had been elected to carry out the land-census.⁸

Perhaps relating to the will, previously mentioned, of Pierre Malan who had been to Grenoble, is the following information. The cartulary of the Cathedral Church of Grenoble mentions a number of people with names that may be forms of Malan. At this early date, the name is a given (Christian) name, rather than a surname. Because cartularies were written in Latin, the names appear in their Latin forms. One “Mallenus” was a bishop (1030 A.D.), and others were monks or other members of Catholic orders. The bishop replaced Burchard, who was a member of the House of Savoy (counts and later dukes over the Waldnesian Valleys). In addition, there is a Mallenus, son of Acelene (1069); another, son of Arnulf (1095-1110), of Mura; another who was son of Bernard Garcin; another, son of Gaufred; one, son of Guigon de la Mota; a Rainon Mallen (about 1080); and finally a Petrus Mallenus (1124).⁹

In addition, two locations in Provence may be the cradle of the family. Both of these general areas had Waldensians among the populations. One is Melan, near Digne, in the department of Basses-Alpes. It had 29 homes in 1315, was uninhabited in 1471 (due to war, plague and natural disasters in the whole area), and with 195 inhabitants in 1765.

The other location is Meolans, also in Basses-Alpes, in the valley of Barcelonnette, near Embrun. It had 175 homes in 1316 and 1,114 inhabitants in 1765. In the earlier period, this area was within the domain of the counts of Provence; from 1388 until 1715, it belonged to the dukes of Savoy.¹⁰

Given the variations in spelling surnames in those early times, all of these are plausible early relatives. Our surname may originally have been a patronymic (derived from the first name of an ancestor) or may have been taken from the name of the family’s locality. Unless additional early records are found for the Waldensian Valleys, however, we cannot be sure when our ancestors came to the Valleys, nor precisely where they originated.

Footnotes

¹Angrogna notary records, volume 141 year 1642 page 19R; State Archives, Torino, by correspondence.

²Rivoire, E. "Storia dei Signori di Luserna." *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire Vaudoise*, number 11 (1894) page 27.

³Coisson, Osvaldo. *I Nomi di Famiglia delle Valli Valdesi* (Torre Pellice: Subalpina, 1975) page 104.

⁴Audisio, Gabriel. *Les Vaudios du Lubéron, Une minorité en Provence (1460-1560)* (Gap, 1984), page 104.

⁵_____, *The Waldensian Dissent, Persecution and Survival c. 1170-c. 1570* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), translated from the French, *Les 'Vaudois' Naissance, vie et mort d'une dissidence (XIème-SVIème siècles)* (Turin, 1989).

⁶Malans in the department of Doubs, canton of Amancey; and Malans in the department of Haute-Saone, canton of Pesmes. There is also a Myolan/Miolans in the department of Savoie, canton of Saint-Pierre-d'Albigny. Calmette, Joseph and E. Clouzot. *Pouilles des Provinces de Besançon, de Tarentaise et de Vienne* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1940) pages 2, 31-2, 42, 50, 73, 82, 606, 630.

⁷Guigue, M.-C. (comp.) *Cartulaire Lyonnais*, volume 2 (1255-1300). (Lyons, 1893), pages 98, 178-179, 291-292, 305, 410, 412, 505-508.

⁸Duhamel, L. (comp.) *Inventaire-sommaire des Archives Départementales de Vaucluse*, Series C and D (Avignon: François Seguin, 1913) pages 135, 138, 143.

⁹Marion, M. Jules. (comp.) *Cartulaires de l'Eglise Cathedrale de Grenoble*. (Paris: Imprimerie Imperiale, 1869) pages LXXXI, LXXXII, 23, 27, 62, 77, 94, 102-104, 107, 112, 152-153, 201, 203, 225.

¹⁰Baratier, Edouard, et al. *Atlas historique: Provence, Contat venaissin, ...* (Paris: A Colin, 1969) page 185.