

# **Embriaco or Biblio? The Heritage of the Franks in Outremer**

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A person's heritage informs a great deal about how they view and interact with the world. From a local Briscola game club to the Daughters of the American Revolution, there are many ways that groups of people might utilize their own cultural heritage to align with and differentiate themselves within a broader community. As a new and distinct group in the Levant, the Franks of Outremer faced the challenge of negotiating between their western roots and their new life in the East. How did the Franks of Outremer view their own heritage, and in what ways did that heritage influence their history?

To answer this question, let us examine history of one family in particular, the Biblio family of the County of Tripoli. The Biblios provide one of the best examples in this respect. They were not only important members of Tripoli's nobility, but unlike many other noble families of Outremer such as the Ibelins, their Western origins are very well-documented in the primary sources. The Biblios were descended from the Embriaco line, a prominent sea-faring family from Genoa whose most famous member, Guglielmo "Hammerhead" Embriaco, assisted crusaders in capturing multiple cities along the coast of the Levant from 1104-1109, including the port town of Byblos (In modern-day Lebanon, sometimes referred to as Gibelet in French sources). Byblos was given to the Genoese by Count Bertrand of Tripoli in exchange for their assistance. In 1127, the Genoese leased the town to Hammerhead Embriaco's youngest son, Ugo, for a period of twenty-nine years.

Neither Ugo, nor any of his descendants, ever set foot in Genoa again, and the sources show that soon their relationship to the city of their ancestry began to change. After only two generations, Ugo's grandson, Hugh, had dropped the Embriaco name entirely, styling himself "Hugo de Biblio" on an 1163 grant of properties and privileges in Tripoli. No member of this branch of the family would ever use the name "Embriaco" again. What was the reason for abandoning the Embriaco name? Essential to understanding this change is the dispute over ownership of the territory of Byblos itself. From as early as 1144, there are signs that the Biblio family were attempting to break away from Genoa. Senior members of the family styled themselves as lords in their own right of Byblos, rather than stewards of Genoese property in the Levant. The clearest sign of separation comes in 1168, when the Genoese felt it necessary to send a delegation to Byblos in order to confirm their mercantile rights in the port from Hugh of Biblio. On this document, Hugh abandons any identity as subordinate to Genoese authority, styling himself "Lord of Gibelet (Byblos) by the grace of God."

At about this time, it seems the Biblio family stopped paying their lease to Genoa for Byblos, and the Genoese exerted pressure on the family to pay up by getting the papacy involved. Two popes, Alexander III and Urban III wrote letters to the lord of Byblos (in 1181 and 1186, respectively) in which they demanded the payment of the annual lease owed by the family to the city and church of Genoa, which by that point had not been paid for many years. Fortunately for the Biblios, this issue was dropped after Saladin's 1187 campaign significantly reorganized the priorities of Western Christendom.

It is not clear from the sources why the Biblio family decided to break with Genoa. However, it is clear that Ugo's descendants were becoming more deeply enmeshed with the local aristocracy of Outremer through marriage. This served to increase their patrimony in Tripoli and strengthen their position against Genoa. The lords of Byblos and their cadet branches secured a number of critical alliances to powerful Frankish families, such as the wealthy Porcellet family, and even the ruling dynasty of Antioch-Tripoli through Prince Bohemond IV and his sister, Alice. The Biblio family would also forge a connection to Cilician Armenia by marriage to King Leo I's sister, Doleta, and in the late thirteenth century they solidified an alliance with the powerful Ibelin family in the Kingdom of Jerusalem. The importance of this new matrilineal Frankish heritage becomes apparent when one considers the naming patterns among the Biblios born after 1160. Ancestral Genoese names such as Nicola, Guglielmo, and Ugo all but disappear from the family in favor of French names such as Bertrand, Guy, and Raymond.

The Biblio family continued to adopt a hostile posture toward Genoa into the mid-thirteenth century, aligning themselves against the Genoese and their Ibelin allies during the Lombard War, from 1229-1243. However, it is clear that they never forgot their Italian heritage. The Biblio family's posture toward their ancestral home shifted once they came into conflict with their feudal overlords, the Princes of Antioch-Tripoli. They fought alongside the Genoese in three separate rebellions from 1258 until 1288. Since the origins of the conflict lay in the favor shown by the Prince of Antioch-Tripoli toward his new wife's relatives, heritage was an important thread in the rhetoric surrounding those rebellions. One of the rebels, Lord Guy II of Biblio, stressed his own personal connection to the dynasty of Antioch-Tripoli through his grandmother, Alice of Antioch, as a way to legitimize his rebellion. The same Guy also took his mother's last name and took to calling himself Guy of Ibelin while in Acre as he sought support from the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Templar Order in 1280.

In a particularly dramatic episode during the War of Saint Sabas in 1258 which began the series of rebellions, Prince Bohemond VI ordered Bertrand II of Biblio to attack a force of Genoese in Acre. Bertrand was left with a difficult choice - to honor his heritage or obey the orders of his overlord. The Templar of Tyre records:

*"Bertrand prayed to be excused from this order, because he was once one of them [the Genoese]. But the prince insisted that he go anyway. When he [Bertrand] had gone out toward them, he raised the point of his lance, saying to the Genoese as he approached them: 'I am Bertrand de Gibelet!'"*

In the end, Bertrand lost his life for his defiance, but that episode in Acre sparked a series of rebellions which saw the Biblios reunited in friendship with Genoa. Despite several failures, the Biblios finally succeeded in their fight against the princes of Antioch-Tripoli, and Bertrand's son Bartholomew was appointed leader of the new commune of Tripoli in 1288.

To conclude this brief look at the Biblio family and their relationship to heritage, consider the lead seal belonging to Bertrand II of Biblio attached to a 1248 document in the Calvet Museum in Avignon. On the obverse side stands the arms of the French Porcellet family, a boar walking toward the left. This symbol is a representation of Bartholomew's matrilineal heritage from his mother, Marie de Porcellet. On the reverse is a shield bearing a twelve-pointed star, the arms adopted by the Biblio family. As this dual representation shows,

the family was torn between the memory of their Western lineage and their new ties to the East. The way the Biblios negotiated this dichotomy tells us a great deal about how the Franks of Outremer may have understood their composite heritage. This heritage not only shaped the way they viewed their past, but forged the path to their future.



Lead seal belonging to Bertrand II of Biblio, affixed to a document dated 1248. Photo in Schlumberger, Gustave, *Sigillographie de l'Orient latin* (P. Geuthner, 1943).