

## Note on Domenico Vigni and the origin of the generic name *Vigna* (*Leguminosae-Phaseoleae*)

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**Summary** : Biographical information is given concerning Domenico VIGNI, usually latinised Domenicus VIGNA (? 1577-1647) after whom the genus *Vigna* was named.

**Résumé** : Informations biographiques concernant Domenico VIGNI, usuellement latinisé Domenicus VIGNA (? 1577-1647), auquel le genre *Vigna* a été dédié.

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The genus *Vigna* is now the object of study by numerous botanists and agronomists due to the actual or potential value of many of the species as field crops and as sources of genetic diversity for transfer to already well known species of *Vigna* long in use as crops. I have been asked on several occasions whence the name was derived and it seems worthwhile to give a brief note of what little is known about the man after whom the genus was called.

SAVI (1824 : 113) named the genus *Vigna* after Domenico VIGNI (? 1577-1647) latinised as Domenicus VIGNA which spelling has always been used. A scion of the noble and ancient Prosperi family, he was born in Florence, son of a father named Hercules but I have been unable to ascertain when. CALVI (1777 : 104) stated "ceteris vero annis fuisse numerum plus minus 70" which would make it 1577 or thereabouts. One eulogy reads "*Vigna* senex obiit, cultor notissimus Horti, in quo plantarum conditur omne genus" which confirms that he was fairly old when he died in Pisa on 10 January 1647. It is not known when he moved to Pisa from Florence (certainly before 1601) but he was evidently already a doctor and became a physician well known to Pisan families of the day — "clarioribus multis Pisanis Familiis medicabatur" (CALVI, 1777 : 105). He was also a professor at the Gymnasium. The Grand Duke COSIMO II (1590-1620) (COSIMO DI FERDINANDO DE MEDICI) best known for his encouragement of that most famous of all Pisans, Galileo GALILEI (1564-1642) was also eager to encourage the study of botany in the Universities of Pisa and Florence and apparently had something to do with the appointment of VIGNA to the Chair of Botany at Pisa in 1609 made vacant in 1608 by the death of Horatio (Orazio) CORNACCHINI who had followed his brother Marcus in 1606 (famous or rather infamous for promoting a diabolical purgative powder bearing his name which was supposed to cure everything). VIGNA occupied the chair until his death and from 1614 was the ninth curator of the Pisa Botanic Garden. This garden is the oldest in Europe having been founded in 1543 by Luca GHINI two years before those at Padua and Florence (see CHIARUGI, 1953). CALVI also mentioned that, as well as curating the Botanic Garden, VIGNA also superintended the Natural History Museum and Chemical Laboratory



presumably in the grounds. VIGNA continued to care for the garden and its adjuncts until they were taken over by a Scot, James McCALL (Giacomo MACOLO SCOZZESE), who became professor of Medicine at the Pisa Lyceum; a brother, John McCALL (Giovanni MACOLO), became director of the Chemical Laboratory at the same time. SAVI stated “but when they saw that the rewards of the job were not commensurate with this [their great reputations] they were allowed to leave in 1617”.

VIGNA learnt his botany from Giuseppe ROVEZZANI (?-1601) and Francesco MALLOCHI (Franciscus MALOCCHIUS) (?-1613) who were respectively Prof. of Botany (before M. CORNACCHINI) and Curator of the Botanic Garden. MALOCCHI is credited with being probably the first person to establish a chemical laboratory although later writers scorned him as merely a hunter after “the universal remedy” in imitation of PARACELUS (1493-1541). No record has come down to us concerning ROVEZZANI’s scientific activities which presumably did not amount to much (SACCARDO does not mention him) but VIGNA commends him as an enthusiastic man who taught with great care. It was ROVEZZANI and MALOCCHI who recommended VIGNA to COSIMO II as being “steeped in botany at Pisa Lyceum and Garden”. Although VIGNA held the chair from February 1609 he was not made “Master of Botany and Natural History extraordinary” until October 1620; quite what this entailed is far from clear — if it merely means being confirmed in the post then 11 years is an excessive time for this. It is known that he gave 86 public lectures in 1618 and about 70 in other years.

VIGNA is unquestionably best known for his work containing corrections and additions to the *Historia Plantarum* and *De Causis Plantarum* of THEOPHRASTUS (b. 370 BC) (the pupil and successor of ARISTOTLE (384-322 BC) and inheritor of his library). His work is now very rare and present in only very few botanical libraries. It is not at Kew and LINNAEUS had no copy. A fairly full collation based on a xerox of the first pages of the Pisa University Library copy and one recently offered for sale (J. HILL, 1988 : 55) is worth giving — *Animadversiones sive Observationes in Libros de Historia et de Causis Plantarum. Theophrasti..... Factae & Observatae Circa Arbores, Frutices, Subfrutices, Stirpes, Plantas & Herbas, quibus omnibus difficile nomen fit, & ad Nomen Italicum, & vulgatum Pro viribus redactae*. Woodcut device on title. 24 p.l., 117, [1] pp., 1 leaf. 4 to. Pisa : S. Marchetti & C. Massini, 1625. □ Pritzel 9203. Wellcome, 1, 6608.

This book was dedicated to FERDINANDO II, Fifth Grand Duke of Etruria (1610-1670) son of COSIMO II who had helped obtain the Chair for him. It was not well received and Judge CELLESI said of it “it is a very superficial work with odd and inaccurate explanations which does not show any great scholarship”. However, it does contain much information on VIGNA’s predecessors and on the Museum Superintendents as well as many vernacular names of indigenous plants, where they are to be found, who discovered them and, in the case of exotic species, their place of origin (SAVI, 1828 : 19).

He made many botanical journeys in Tuscany and left unpublished notes in the Pisa University Library which were later published by TARGIONI TOZZETTI in 1754-Catalogi di Piante e Droghe, descritte da esso Vigna, e delle sue Lezioni sopra le Gomme e le Resine &c e dei suoi Viaggi Botanici per la Toscana. This contains many original field observations gathered during his extensive journeys in Tuscany.

It is clear that VIGNA continued acting as a medical practitioner, in fact in 1625 he was chief of the doctors at Pisa Hospital and doctor at the Franciscan Convent and made enough money to buy and restore several properties in Pisa. It is in fact from title deeds and



inscriptions on two of the buildings that some of the biographical information concerning VIGNA is derived.

One house in Via Tavoleria bore (and perhaps, still bears) over the door an inscription in Latin which translates approximately as follows "This building fallen down from old age D. Vigna son of Hercules of the old Florentine family of the Prosperi Phil. & Med. Doctor, Gilden Knight and Count Palatinate public professor of simples at Pisa in the time of Cosimo II Fourth Grand Duke of Etruria rebuilt and looked after 1613". Another inscription in marble found in the public wall of the Convent of "shoeless or naked-footed Fathers who are called Carmelites" dated 1636 reads "In the time of Cosimo II Fourth Grand Duke of Etruria this tower about to fall from old age and the square ugly from neglect D. Vigna ..... decorated with this building in 1616 and added to what he had undertaken in 1636 when Ferdinando II Fifth Duke of Etruria was ruling".

Many students must have passed through his hands during the 38 years he held the Chair of Botany but virtually nothing is known of them. The most celebrated seems to have been Francesco REDI (1626-1698) from Arezzo in the years 1645-46. VIGNA had a son Constantinus on whom was conferred on 21 October 1638 the extraordinary Chair of Herbal Science for Jove's Day and Festival which carried no stipend but some privileges.

BAILEY (1939 : 3468) referred to him as the Paduan Commentator on Theophrastus but I have found nothing to connect VIGNA with this city and it must be a slip.

SACCARDO (1901 : 112) mentioned an oil painting of VIGNA in the Pisa Botanic Gardens.

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