

The role of the Clients

First buyer Nicolosio Lomellino

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The residence that today towers over the road, from the research point of view, forces me to repeat, in the presence of today's apparition, what I wrote more than three decades ago, perhaps even with a collection of cold data. Today, as all the most important *Rolli Palaces* have had their appearance redone, surrounded by many less important ones, the quality and the dating of Palazzo Nicolosio Lomellino (Centurione in 1609, Pallavicino in 1711, Raggio in 1800, Podestà in 1865, then Bruzzo) can be better placed in a new frame of dates.

The building, constructed just after the first four built in 1558, is the first Lomellino residence situated in Strada Nuova (1563-1565, 485 square metres), on land bought by Gentile in 1559, constructed before the likewise interesting house of his brother Baldassarre (1560-1564), today almost unrecognisable.

Nicolosio, son of Agostino Lomellino, son-in-law of Adamo Centurione and member of the family of the Admiral and Prince Andrea Doria, was first and foremost an agent for the profitable coral fishing on the Tunisian island of Tabarca, together with his brother Francesco. In 1540 the great investment was made with the first expedition of two ships, fifty boats, 500 men and an extra galley, this worried Ferrante Gonzaga, viceroy of Sicily, who immediately imposed a short term licence as in two months they would have fished the amount taken in one year¹. We know nothing of his role in politics in the period that would have fallen between *Garibetto* and the *Leges novæ*; he was certainly one of the noble Elders.

At the outermost western lot on Bernardo Cantone's plan, Nicolosio asked in vain in 1566 to construct an alley

to the east of Nicolò Grimaldi's work site, with the purpose of being able to go to San Francesco di Castelletto more easily. Grimaldi had arrogantly got in beside the official plan, and had the not very secret intention of blocking any other presence between the streets and walls of the city. Practically a century long war started using high walls for defence against the neighbours' curiosity, as had been promised by Grimaldi to the minor Franciscans; all the walls are faithfully illustrated by Bordoni's view (1616).

As Peter Paul Rubens writes to justify the absence of names in the first edition of his book, "permutat dominos et transit in altera jura", on the other hand posterity is always interested in following almost forgotten events but which bring about changes. In the 1614 list the residence went to Luigi Centurione, Marquis of Morsasco, who embellished the decorations, around 1711 it went to Carlo and Stefano Pallavicini, who partially modified it to lengthen a second stair: in 1865 it was bought by Baron Andrea Podestà, three times mayor of Genoa, who presided over a period of reorganisation in the city and the demolition of the external dividing walls.

In the three etchings in Rubens' second edition the coherent simplicity of a plan can be perceived, which adapts itself to the slope, already tried by the nearby buildings, it almost seems to be a giant stairway which starts at the rigid window at ground level, goes over the small nymphaeum, to appear at the light gallery on the first floor and at the drawing rooms in a row towards a long garden and the wall ramparts.

To this delicate spatiality, where the light found walls and

loggias capable to generate a limited landscape but extremely pictorial, the following operation would gain a higher perception by widening the section of the stair from the first floor to the second, but especially by enlarging the nymphaeum and the lower rampart with Baroque scenes (*the myth of Phaeton*) by Parodi which would close the court instead of preparing oneself for the surprise of a garden which by now could be found at the level of the attic cornice.

In Strada Nuova, an advanced logical model between Renaissance geometry and that slightly sloping, this residence became a model for internal finishing as said and repeated in contracts for numerous other buildings in the city.

In reality the oval plan of the hall stuccoed with *Roman scenes*, the first sign of foreign mannerism, is enough to explain two special components that reveal how many influences appear in this residence.

From afar the intention of a virtual architecture can be perceived, one which cancels order, throwing onto the whole object the manifesto of an imagination that can really turn to the right of the main facade.

It does not respect the material edge of the volume of the building and throws on to the alley an entire vertical axis with holes so the stranger coming up the road from the Marose fountains could see it straightaway. It is a network of symbols that transforms the facade into a tapestry where the imagination agitated of that time embroiders a web that rises and grows to high symbolism, meant only for the initiated, up until the filmed sequence of the masks concluded with a sneer: a mystery of signs and symbols or a practical joke? As the only human face on the turning of the eastern wall suggests.

¹ Peter Paul Rubens, *Palazzi Antichi e Moderni di Genova raccolti e disegnati da Pietro Paulo Rubens*, Genoa 1652: IX Palazzo del sig. Luigi Centurione Marchese di Morsasco. E. Poleggi *Strada Nuova, una lottizzazione del Cinquecento a Genova*, Genoa 1968, pages 245-267; L. Muller Profumo, *Le pietre parlanti* pages 401-423; C. Bitossi, *Il governo dei magnifici. Patriziato e politica a Genova fra Cinque e Seicento*, Genoa 1990, page 167; E. Poleggi (by), *Una reggia repubblicana: Atlante dei palazzi di Genova (1576-1664)*, Turin 1998, page 177; C. Bitossi, *Per una storia dell'insediamento genovese nell'isola di Tabarca*. Unpublished sources (1540-1770), in "Atti della Società Ligure di Storia Patria", XXXVII, 2, 1997, pages 213-278.