

“Genoa, the “City of Miracles” between the Old and the New World. Routes of the past for future development.”



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“Poderoso Caballero /Es don Dinero. / Nace en las Indias honrado, / Donde el Mundo le acompaña; / Viene a morir en España, / Y es en Génova enterrado”¹.

Thus Francisco de Quevedo, in 1605, metaphorically described the moving of capital in the *Siglo de Oro* of the Spanish empire, a century that Fernand Braudel defined - suggestively - as the *Siglo de los genoveses*. A financial and political triumph was that of Genoa, which bore the name of the *asiento* signed by Carlo V and Andrea Doria in 1528, redefining the role of the newly formed Aristocratic Republic in relation to the Hapsburg superpower, following the resounding victory of the Emperor against Francis I of France in Pavia (1525) and against the Pope with the Sack of Rome (1527). It onto this new arrangement that the state reform proposed by Andrea Doria is grafted, bringing into the ranks of the aristocracy a whole new class of aristocrats from families of popular ancestry, eager to become recognized with an innovative way to confront their own European sparring partners.

And then in the mid-sixteenth century, the new model of residential architecture and urban reasoning was born, which is Strada Nuova: a road axis that leads nowhere, but which aims to show through the palace the political and economic strength of the owners. The palace system, that is, the combination of architecture, decorative images, art collections, music, libraries, wonderful baths (even described by Giorgio Vasari) determine a new cultural model of European significance, recognized early by the brilliant mind of Peter Paul Rubens, in his visits to the Ligurian city in 1604, 1605/1606 and 1607 in the wake of the Duke of Mantua. This is how the *Rolli degli Alloggiamenti Pubblici* were born, that is those lists of extraordinary quality buildings belonging to private individuals, which the Republic used to perform the service of the public “Hospitaggi” for visitors of rank: the political role which was played in Madrid or Paris by the Royal Palace and the palaces of the court. In the words of the architectural historian Ennio Poleggi, who discovered these documents, unique in the world, among the records of the State Archive of Genoa (one of the richest for documentation), Genoa had become a “Republican Royal Palace”. A *unicum*.

What is the role of this immense heritage - which included 163 aristocratic buildings - and which has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2006?

¹ Quevedo, F. (1605), *Poderoso Caballero es Don Dinero*.

It is to contribute to telling the story of a city stratified between the centrality of Mediterranean trade in the centuries of the Crusades, the financial one of the 15th to the 17th century and the industrial one of the nineteenth century, up to the present day, in the complexity of regaining a true and proper identity of the role of Genoa as a midpoint - for example - between the Mediterranean and Northern Europe. It was able to do this culturally and financially, by importing the powerful language of the Flemish painters of the sixteenth century such as Jan Massys and Joos van Cleve and perfecting the letter of change (which has become very similar to the current check, in effect the *asiento*, as the Spanish called it) and the control of the Money Exchange Fairs of the whole European chessboard.

Today the *Palazzi dei Rolli* tell of Genoa as it was, through a powerful language of images that peep from the frescoed vaults narrating stories taken from the classics, but also projecting it as it might be in the future: a European city of culture, a central hub between the north and the south of Europe and between the east and the west of the World, an effective “mediator” of both languages, from the 10th to the 19th century. These things refer today, to those palaces preserved and covering the whole area of one of the most important historical centres of the Mediterranean: they say that there is a need to re-read the cities through their history from a political, economic, artistic, urban, financial, linguistic perspective. And that the ideal tool is the reading of the Monumental Heritage, capable of weaving this extraordinary network that holds together the Old and the New World, from Europe to the Americas.

An eventuality with an underlying extraordinary artistic heritage: the imaginary *Indios* by Bernardo Strozzi, painted on the vaults of the Centurione family’s building, frame the economic vicissitudes of a family that in the exploitation of the silver of the Americas had made its own fortune at the end of the 16th century. In addition, the *Diaries* of Christopher Columbus, evoked in a monumental format and - to date - unique in the artistic panorama of the 17th century in the palace of Raffaele De Ferrari, highlight the role of self-made man of the owner: like Colombo, the design capacity, the ability to take calculated risks, the hazard of not only considering the “known” roads, become actualized features in a new aristocratic class that wants to send a message to the world. And it does so through its palaces. As Fernand Braudel wrote: “*Cette ville dévorant le monde est la plus grande aventure humaine du XVIIe siècle. Gênes est la ville des miracles*”².

² Braudel, F. (1967), *La Méditerranée et le Monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, I, p. 354.