

Part One

The Jesuits
and Their College
in Genoa

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Giuseppe Castiglione in Genoa: The Work of a Jesuit Artist for the Global Culture of Images during His Chinese Mission

The artistic training of the young Giuseppe Castiglione still needs to be explained. In 1707, he was already working with the Jesuit Order in Genoa: he chose and was chosen for the Chinese mission, since his name was already mentioned in the Catalog of the members of the Society of Jesus, on January 16th, 1707 in Genoa, and next to his name, the following specification was mentioned, *pro Prov. Sinensi*¹. He was still at the beginning of his novitiate and his Scholastic studies, a very clear and specific training, even though he still lacked enough religious experience and made a great effort to learn, before starting his journey through that distant land. A number of paintings — that could be found in Genoa — were ascribed to Giuseppe Castiglione. They had already been mentioned by Ratti in the 18th century, most likely on the basis of a piece of information passed on within the Society, and they represent the strong link connecting the painter to Genoa. His role was essential for the communication methods based on images that stemmed from the well-pondered policies developed by the Society for its missions. Castiglione must have been really determined and deemed the role of the images essential, for he was able to understand the many methods that could be used to artistically interpret the ideas. Between 1729 and 1733, after having been recognized as an accomplished painter at the Chinese court, he wrote a number of letters to the Society in Rome and strongly

¹ Roma, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), MED 7, f. 45: *Joseph Castilionus pro Prov. Sinensi 16 Januari 1707.*

suggested a printed edition of his drawings. These letters were accompanied by “a weird stone plate, a vein running through it, that looks like a pyramid, and is characterised by various veins [...] Chinese use similar framed stones, laid on their two feet and left resting on tables, so that both sides can be seen”². This is a “shangshi”, a marble plate with natural patterns, which was a decorative object often used in rich Chinese households. Castiglione depicts these objects when painting home interiors in a few of his paintings³. The painter suggests to position the stone plate in the Gallery of the Collegio Romano — that had recently been renovated — together with other weird objects. This is an interesting suggestion made by the artist, who experienced two very different methods and traditions to create images and communicate by images, i.e. what the Chinese court used and the prevailing methods used in the West in the first half of the 18th century.

Castiglione was an excellent and lucky interpreter of this phase, because his work was really successful at the Imperial court and he became famous. His fame has been recently confirmed by the People’s Republic of China⁴, in addition to a number of critical studies dealing with his works, especially those works painted during his stay in China between 1715, when he arrived in Macao, and his death in Beijing, in 1766⁵. During those years, Lang Shih-ning — the Chinese name that the artist used in Beijing — successfully worked for the Chinese court, especially during the reign of Yongzheng and until the reign of Qianlong. Even lately, on the occasion of the centenary of Andrea Pozzo, his Chinese work has been highlighted, since the Jesuit artist managed to start an important debate — by means of treaties on perspective — that involved the way the depicted space was treated within ancient Chinese tradition. What has been especially pointed out, is the great interest of Castiglione for the dissemination of the Western perspectival convention not only in the spatial construction of his paintings, but also as for the development of a general theory, which becomes apparent upon partially translating the *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* by Pozzo (1729 and 1735), but also when teaching and creating a “great decoration”, since he worked at the paintings to decorate the Church of Saint Joseph in

² ARSI, sign. Jap. Sin. 184.

³ Please see Giuseppe Castiglione, *Offerta di un tributo di cavalli all’Imperatore*, 1757, Musée National des Arts asiatiques Guimet, Paris, sign. inv. MG 17033.

⁴ In 2003, a TV show was dedicated to the painter, 24 episodes: *Giuseppe Castiglione, the Court Painter*, produced by Wuyi for Tianyi Movie & TV Co., Ltd.

⁵ A full dissertation, and its corresponding bibliography, has been written by Michelle Pizzoli, Alberti T’Serstevens, *Giuseppe Castiglione 1688–1766, peintre et architecte à la cour de Chine*, Paris 2007. The book is completed by two writings of M. Musillo on the training of Castiglione and his stay in Genoa (pp. 19–25). Among the studies on the Genoa Jesuit College, please see Serena Bonaso, *L’importanza della sede gesuitica genovese nella mediazione culturale tra Oriente e Occidente nel XVIII secolo nella figura di Giuseppe Castiglione*, Corso di Laurea in Conservazione dei Beni culturali, Anno accademico 2007–2008, supervisor Lauro Magnani.

Beijing⁶. It has been lately thought that he might have been trained as a perspectival artist and worked as such in Milan — however, proof cannot be furnished; Andrea Pozzo might have been a friend of his and he might have practised as a quadraturist in Coimbra, during his stay in Portugal, just before leaving for his mission⁷. His training still needs to be reconstructed, since Castiglione came from Milan, stayed in Genoa and later in Portugal, and what still needs to be understood is how he learnt such a refined pictorial technique and those techniques that he used to depict space, which were the starting point for his ability to develop an innovative artistic language that was greatly appreciated by the court during his years in China. This is the beginning of his career, and his stay in Genoa — which was definitely a short stay, but it deeply affected his training as an artist, since he was around 18 to 20 years old — sees the artist blooming, and he was immediately asked to work for the decorative projects of the Society. This what Jesuits used to ask their artistically talented brothers.

In the last decades of the 17th century, the Genoa Jesuit College in Strada Balbi was still being built, and, at the end of the 1680s, the great hall of the College had been fully decorated⁸. At the same time, the precious paintings that were to decorate the Church of Jesus had already been hung from its walls. Andrea Pozzo had been involved in both projects⁹. The new Novitiate building was also being built and from its ancient Paverano location, it had been moved to Carignano¹⁰. The Society bought one of the villas of the De Franceschi family in 1659, extensions to it had been built during the 1670s and, in the 1680s, the western wing and the new double height refectory had been fully completed (Fig. 1), it was inspired by the great hall of the Strada Balbi College; however,

⁶ See Mirabili *disinganni*. Andrea Pozzo (Trento 1642–Vienna 1709) *Pittore e architetto gesuita*, ed. by Richard Bösel, Lydia Salviucci Insolera, *Exhibition catalogue*, Rome 2010; see information sheet no. 06.00, pp. 176–181 and the paper by Elisabetta Corsi, “La fortuna del Trattato oltre i confini dell’Europa”, [in:] *Mirabili Disinganni... [disinganni?]*, pp. 93–100.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁸ *Il Palazzo dell’Università di Genova. Il Collegio dei Gesuiti nella strada dei Balbi*, Genova 1987, especially Graziella Colmuto Zanella, Emmina De Negri, *L’architettura del Collegio*, pp. 209–275 and Federica Lamera, *L’apparato decorativo del Collegio — Secoli XVII–XVIII*, pp. 335–355 and Giacomo Montanari, “Palazzo dell’Ateneo ex Collegio della Compagnia di Gesù”, [in:] *Città Ateneo Immagine*, ed. Lauro Magnani, Genova 2014, pp. 133–155.

⁹ Lauro Magnani, “Andrea Pozzo a Genova e in Liguria. Contatti, relazioni, esperienze artistiche intorno alla sede genovese della Compagnia”, [in:] *Andrea Pozzo, International Conference Proceedings Valsolda, September 17–18, 2009*, ed. by Andrea Spiriti, Varese 2011, pp. 129–138. Andrea Pozzo stayed in this area between 1671 and 1674.

¹⁰ A number of writings have been dedicated to the Saint Ignatius complex, which is now the *Archivio di Stato di Genova* (Genoa State Archives), in *Spazi per la memoria storica. La storia di Genova attraverso le vicende delle sedi e dei documenti dell’Archivio di Stato, International Conference Proceedings, Genova 7–10 giugno 2004*, ed. by Alfonso Assini, Paola Caroli, Roma 2009, especially the writing by Emmina De Negri, *Di una villa e di un noviziato. Vicende di un complesso architettonico*, pp. 81–97.

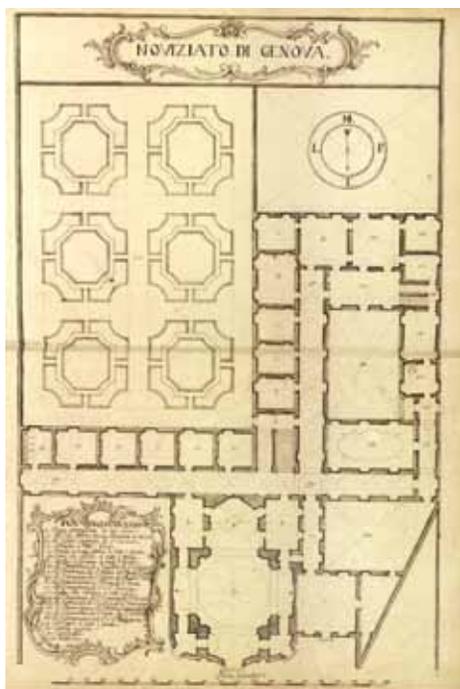


Fig. 1. *Pianta del Noviziato di Genova* from the manuscript: *Case dei Gesuiti in Lombardia e Piemonte*, c. 1760, Biblioteca Braidense in Milano, Ms. XV. 62, c. XXXIII

the “abundance of decorations”¹¹ and frescoes were omitted.

The Genoa College was enriched by the presence of many important personalities governing the Society, and often members of Genoa’s ruling aristocracy, and, at least until the mid-1700s, it had the special talent of being able to grasp the extraordinary abilities of those artists who worked for it¹². The presence of the young Castiglione, who stayed in that Novitiate building — which was completed by the purchase of the estate and new buildings being built at the beginning of the 1700s — persuaded the Jesuit Fathers to entrust him with the painting of oil paintings, seven or more of which were hung in the refectory. Six of them had most likely been hung from the walls in-between the windows. In 1766¹³ Ratti admired them in the refectory, and he erroneously attributed them to a “French Venghier”, “a mistake due to a wrong suggestion”

as he already stated in 1780, and later again in 1797, by correcting himself while writing a short paragraph on what was then known of Castiglione’s biography, which was published along the more detailed biography of Andrea Pozzo¹⁴. Ratti also attributed the painting of the church main altar to the young Jesuit, added that Castiglione “has recently died in the capital of China as a very old man” and he had painted in “both Americas”¹⁵. Such a confusion was likely due to the fact that Castiglione was not clearly remembered in Genoa by late 1700s sources, and he was remembered to an even lesser extent in later documents, often imprecise, and because of the difficulties that the Carignano Jesuit College had to face: these events still affect what the critics say about Castiglione’s work in Genoa.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 90–91.

¹² L. Magnani, *Andrea Pozzo a Genova...*, pp. 129–132 and in the introductory essay.

¹³ Carlo Giuseppe Ratti, *Istruzione di quanto può vedersi di più bello in Genova in pittura, scultura ed architettura*, Genoa 1766, p. 59.

¹⁴ Carlo Giuseppe Ratti, *Delle vite de’ pittori, scultori ed architetti genovesi*, Genoa 1797, p. 330.

¹⁵ Ibid.

In 1773, the Jesuit Order was abolished in Genoa too. The Novitiate building was emptied, but the paintings that hung from the refectory walls were still there, at least in the years during which the Convent and the church had been acquired (1793) by the order of the *Monache Convertite di S. Maria Maddalena*. The nuns were made to leave the buildings in 1809 because of Napoleonic suppression. In 1818¹⁶, the paintings were still in their original location. Alizeri is thought to have seen those same paintings in the *Casa per gli Esercizi Spirituali* of the Jesuit Fathers in 1846¹⁷. The place was close to the Carignano church, and eight paintings decorated its main hall. The eight paintings — seven of which had been painted by the same artist, i.e. Castiglione — were then moved to the Istituto Martinez.

The painting hanging from the main altar of the Saint Ignatius church — which depicts Saint Ignatius and is attributed to Castiglione — had been modified to fit that location since the church was completed in 1724 and the altar in 1735, when the artist had already moved to China. Today the building is the new *Archivio di Stato*, and what is left is an oval stucco decoration where the painting was. Roberto Santamaria¹⁸ found the painting in the parish church of Casella, Genoa's hinterland (Fig. 2). The Saint is depicted in all his glory, and the image is foreshortened from below, characterized by a strong chiaroscuro, and certainly influenced by the works of Andrea Pozzo that Castiglione might have seen during his stay in Genoa.

What should be done — after elaborating the catalog of the works painted by Castiglione in Genoa and Coimbra — is studying the first “western” phase of his work: the paintings he painted in Genoa, were followed by the Portugal paintings, before leaving for his mission in the years between 1710 and 1714. In addition to the work he did for the Chapel of the Coimbra College¹⁹ — “the work in the Coimbra Chapel has been completed and everyone is happy” — he painted a number of portraits and Castiglione himself wrote about them: “I have to please the Queen who wanted me to paint the portraits of her little children” before leaving for “my much wanted mission”²⁰. This is interesting news, since it

¹⁶ *Descrizione di Genova da un anonimo del 1818*, ed. by Fiorella Caraceni Poggi, Ennio Poggi, Genova 1974, p. 267.

¹⁷ Federico Alizeri, *Guida artistica perla città di Genova, presso Gio. Grondona*, vol. I, Genova 1846, pp. 277–278.

¹⁸ I wish to thank Roberto Santamaria for telling me about the information on Castiglione's work that was about to be published in a new book.

¹⁹ Cécile Beurdeley, Michel Beurdeley, *Giuseppe Castiglione. A Jesuit Painter at the Court of the Chinese Emperors*, Rutland (Vermont) 1971, p. 187: the letter might have mentioned the fresco decoration of the chapel dedicated to Francesco Borgia in the Coimbra Jesuit College “destroyed in the last third of the eighteenth century”.

²⁰ Roma, ARSI, Sinensis: Letter by Giuseppe Castiglione to Michelangelo Tamburini, General Superior of the Society of Jesus, Lisbon, February 22nd, 1714.



Fig. 2. Casella, Parish Church of St. Stefano: *Glory of St. Ignatius*, Giuseppe Castiglione (painting from the former Church of St. Ignatius in Genoa)



Fig. 3. Genoa, Ricovero Martinez, *Second promise of Isaac's birth*, Giuseppe Castiglione

tells us that his capabilities as a portraitist were already there before his Chinese stay, during which this ability was much appreciated by the court.

More paintings have been identified as Castiglione's work, a few of them were painted for the Novitiate Chapel — now the Chapel of the Coimbra Hospital²¹, — and they were connected to Castiglione and compared to two Genoa paintings that have been attributed to the Milan painter by Loehr²², and which were painted in the years just before he left. First, this was due to the wrong interpretation by Ratti and, second, to stylistic reasons. The two paintings are now kept in the premises of the Superintendence for the Historical and Artistic Heritage of Liguria. A few works have not yet been attributed to the artist; however, after finding the main altar painting, it is safe to say that all works that were kept at

²¹ C. Beurdeley, M. Beurdeley, op. cit., pp. 187–188 and Fig. pp. 91–92.

²² George Robert Loehr, "Giuseppe Castiglione Missionary-Painter in the Service of Three Manchu Emperors", *The Emory Univ. Quarterly*, XVII (1961), no. 3, pp. 176–184 and idem, "Castiglione, Giuseppe (in Cina, Lang Shih-ning)", [in:] *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 22 (1979 [place of publication?]). The paintings are shown in Cécile Beurdeley, Michel Beurdeley, op. cit., pp. 91–92, with pictures.

the Novitiate premises, between the Saint Ignatius church and the refectory²³, and that had been mentioned by Ratti in his 1700s writings, have been fully identified.

The refectory paintings — now at the Ricovero Martinez — are large paintings: 264–266 cm height, 182–195 cm width. They were most likely hanging from the spacing between the refectory beams, a double height hall, illuminated by three windows on each side — north and south sides — and whose entrance was on the western side. Biblical scenes are depicted: *La seconda promessa della nascita di Isacco* (Fig. 3): three angels are sent by God to visit Abraham, he welcomes them and gives them food and lets them rest; the angels tell him that Sara will bear a child (Genesis 18, 1–15); *Mosè che fa scaturire l'acqua dalla roccia a Massa e Meriba* (Exodus, 17, 1–16) (Fig. 4); *Elia sul monte Oreb nutrito da un Angelo* (I Kings, 19, 3–8) (Fig. 5); *L'Angelo comanda a Tobia di catturare il pesce* (Tobias 6, 1–9) (Fig. 6) and three stories from the New Testament: *Gesù tentato una prima volta nel deserto* (Luke 4, 1–4; Matthew 4, 1–4) (Fig. 7), *Cristo e la Samaritana* (John 4, 5–26) (Fig. 8), *Gesù si rivela ai discepoli ad Emmaus* (Luke, 24, 13–35) (Fig. 9). Water and food, and their symbolism, are depicted in these works.



Fig. 4. Genoa, Ricovero Martinez: *Moses brings forth Water out of the Rock at Massa and Meriba*, Giuseppe Castiglione



Fig. 5. Genoa, Ricovero Martinez: *Elijah fed by an Angel*, Giuseppe Castiglione

²³ In the volume M. Pirazzoli, A. T'Serstevens, op. cit.: three pictures of the seven paintings kept at the Ricovero Martinez.



Fig. 6. Genoa, Ricovero Martinez: *The Angel order Tobias to capture the fish*, Giuseppe Castiglione



Fig. 7. Genoa, Ricovero Martinez: *Jesus tempted in the Wilderness*, Giuseppe Castiglione



Fig. 8. Genoa, Ricovero Martinez: *Jesus and the Samaritan woman*, Giuseppe Castiglione



Fig. 9. Genoa, Ricovero Martinez: *Jesus revealing himself in Emmaus*, Giuseppe Castiglione

Castiglione is a talented artist, even if he is deeply linked to the experiences of the previous century: he was deeply influenced by the apprentice years he spent in Milan and the main artists of the first half of the 1600s: Camillo and Giulio Cesare Procaccini, Giovanni Battista Crespi and Daniele Crespi. However, paintings such as *Cristo e la Samaritana* show that the spatial organisation and the iconographic invention are based on a pictorial culture where the acquired Baroque style helps the artist to depict what he learnt during his training years according to a more mature Baroque style. In such a case, space and the artistic expression include those topics that are closest in time and were used by Gaulli when he approached this subject and depicted it by a majestic space organisation that may have been influenced by his experiences in Genoa, or even by Rubens's work. In such a personal interpretation — which is still developing — a few special attitudes are clear: objects and plants are carefully depicted by effective and precise brush strokes. The artist's brush strokes — that are sometimes applied one next to the other to highlight the way the light falls — point out metal (Fig. 10) or ceramic objects, or special fabrics, and he also seems to appreciate the naturalistic aspects (Fig. 11). This influence may be due to his knowledge of the Genoa paintings of the previous century, and especially the works of Gio Benedetto Castiglione. The landscape details, such as the background of the painting depicting Tobias and the angel (Fig. 12), seem to show his interest



Fig. 10. Genoa, Ricovero Martinez: *Second promise of Isaac's birth* (detail), Giuseppe Castiglione



Fig. 11. Genoa, Ricovero Martinez: *Jesus and the Samaritan woman* (detail), Giuseppe Castiglione

for portraying landscape and natural elements, which would be emphasized by Castiglione during his successful career at the Chinese court (Fig. 13).

Michèle Pirazzoli wrote a monograph on Giuseppe Castiglione, and pointed out that during the first phase of the artist's stay in China "les années Yongzheng (1723–1735)", he paid special attention to the depiction of natural elements, where

ces touffes de végétaux, traitées avec la précision de nature morte, constituent, au même titre que l'utilisation des ombres portées et le travail sur l'écorce des troncs, l'une des signatures de la première manière de Castiglione en Chine, le souvenir encore vivant de sa formation lombarde²⁴.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 37.



Fig. 12. Genoa, Ricovero Martinez: *The Angel order Tobias to capture the fish* (detail), Giuseppe Castiglione



Fig. 13. Taipei, National Museum: *A Hundred horses* (detail), Giuseppe Castiglione (Lang Shining)

The great tradition of “portraying” nature — exactly as it is — which was typical of Lombard painting of the late 1500s and was applied by the painter Figino, already suggests how to depict the natural elements that can be observed in

the early works of the artist's Chinese years²⁵; however, what is also true is that thanks to his Baroque training in Genoa and to the paintings by Gio Benedetto Castiglione, *Grechetto*, and his collaborators, Giuseppe Castiglione could have verified that careful attention was given to natural elements. *Grechetto's* peers — the scholar Luca Assarino for instance — pointed out that “the leaf's veins, body and tip are carefully depicted, as well as the unevenness of a tree trunk” or the “heaps of furniture”²⁶. As for the careful depiction of nature, Castiglione's attitude towards the portrayal of animals may be seen as part of it, and thus he was able to fit into the tradition of the Chinese court as a great horse portraitist. The Jesuit painter may have seen a number of paintings characterised by these features in Milan, e.g. the extraordinary depiction of animals in the so called *Sala del Grechetto* at the Palazzo Sormani. It is still not clear who the painter of this scene was, and it is still debated and studied²⁷.

The works painted during his European phase are still being studied, and interesting suggestions may help identify the cultural and technical improvements acquired in Italy (Milan and Genoa) that characterized his Chinese works. What is still unclear is how such a specialized painter achieved such significant results as for the imitation quality and the drastic change of the relationship between space and objects. The technical tools and the colors, the silk and the colorful inks change the paintings, but what determined the development of a new visual illusion based on methods that pointed out the universal artistic language, is the ideological effort needed to address a different client, and the wish to meet their needs by supplying products that combine the innovative western concept with tradition. Such an important result could be achieved only by the Society, thanks to its ability to combine ideology with those instruments needed to promote it, which was also applied to art, and whose motto was *docere, delectare, movere*, based on their 200-year experience.

At the end of his brilliant career, Castiglione's humble suggestion of publishing his drawings — the *Perpectiva Pictorum* by *Fratel Pozzo* had already been published and had been a global success — show that the painter was aware of having achieved results that might be just as useful, *ad maiorem Dei Gloriam*. His work was politically important and this is shown by the interest that the French court — via the Academie royale de Peinture — paid to the publication of his drawings (1765–1771) that depicted the victories of the Emperor and that

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32 stated that a few paintings taken from an album of the Taipei National Museum (*ibid.* Figs. 18–21) and the images characterized by strong naturalist features, close-ups of flowers, plants and animals, that were typical of Castiglione's first works, could mean that the artist was familiar with Caravaggio's work: the *Fiscella*, Borromeo collection, Milan, today at the Ambrosiana.

²⁶ Luca Assarino, *I giuochi di fortuna*, Venezia 1655.

²⁷ Please see the recent essay by Vittoria Orlandi Balzari, “Il Palazzo Visconti Lunati Verri”, [in:] *Lo spazio del collezionismo nello Stato di Milano*, ed. by Andrea Spiriti, Roma 2013, pp. 61–113.

Qianlong wanted to have printed. The Jesuit artist and a few collaborators were also involved in the design of palaces and European gardens at Yuanmingyuan, thus establishing another link between two different cultures that the Society really encouraged.

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