

DESCRIPTION

Torre Guglielmi, also known as Torre Saracena, is a quadrangular building probably dating back to the XIV century and restructured in the XVI century; it is part of the fortification system in the city of Ventimiglia.

The Tower, belonging to the Guglielmi family since the XIX century, was recognized as a National Monument in 1933, though it had been oftentimes rehandled in order to be reused as a farmhouse and employed by those living in the wide country area extending towards the mounts.

The works for the Ventimiglia railway station, which was built facing the sea and adjoining the Tower, took place at the end of the XIX century, after the intermelia marsh had been reclaimed. The railway, together with the Via San Secondo to the North, built in the 1940's and parting the countryside in two, further wounded the Tower.

Thanks to the work of Pietro Guglielmi (Peo), born in Ventimiglia and very fond of his city, though living elsewhere (thus a "spantegau"), the Tower has been completely restored, eliminating all superfetations and bringing all interiors back to their original ornamentation. Though having to maintain the three wide windows realized in the XIX century on the top floors, the "military" features of the Tower, such as the two sentry boxes in the North-East and South-West corners, the stone rams supporting the outer guarding footbridge and the loopholes facing the covered terrace have all been restored. The works also entailed the rehabilitation of the rather wide country area still appertaining to the Tower as a botanic garden, with the addition of autochthonous and Mediterranean essences and plants and the restoration of the ancient cistern which still gathers the wellspring waters flowing underground from the Manure Hills.

The Tower consists of three wide habitable floor areas (plus a covered terrace), linked together by indoor stairs: bathrooms, kitchen, wood oven and barbecue cooking grid are all on the first floor. Ample terraces and dehors covered by "paiassui" have been created in the garden.

HISTORICAL HINTS ON THE CITY OF VENTIMIGLIA

Altura degli Intemeli, or Intemeli Hill (as we learn by its Roman-Ligurian name, *Albinitimilium*) developed in Nervia, on a hill of *Colla Sgarba*.

After the Roman conquest, a square city surrounded by walls was built on the Nervia mouth (the Nervia is a huge stream which formed a canal-harbor for ship mooring, before entering the sea). With the integration between Ligurians and Romans, the city became chief town of the Albinitimilium imperial municipality, and it hugely developed, with inhabitants and suburbs extending towards Sanremo and Mentone.

Villas, apartment buildings, aqueducts and fountains, a public forum, a theatre and a bath complex were built then.

During the Dark Ages people abandoned the Roman city, which ended up being buried underneath the Aeolian sand, and they took refuge on the well-sheltered hill of the medieval city (the current *Ventimiglia Alta*): these feudal times were characterized by the hegemony of the Counts of Ventimiglia, until the city was conquered by Genoa and became its boundary base, in the XIII century.

During this period afflicted by wars and invasions, some of which were brought on by the Saracens, the city became “Captaincy of Ventimiglia and district” within the domain of Genoa, and the upper classes of local noblemen or “*Magnifici*” dwelt in the neighborhood called “*Piazza*”, which later became a *sestiere*. The local Parliament, essential for the economic administration of the territory, was often in contrast with the “*popolari*”(common people) and especially with the “*rustici*” (peasants) of the “*ville rurali*” : they would obtain their economic and fiscal autonomy from the Genoese Senate by the end of the XVII century, since the administration itself was then considered too expensive.

The fate of Ventimiglia almost always depended on Genoa’s, with wars, hard times and good ones: it would become an autonomous city-state after the “*Rivoluzione Ligure*” (“Ligurian Revolution”) of 1797 and, after Napoleon’s defeat and the suppression of the Republic of Genoa following the Congress of Vienna (1815), its territory was given to the Sabaudian Piemonte.

During the XIX century we have a great urban and demographic development of Ventimiglia, in the plain between the Nervia stream and the Roia one (this one had become an important “canal harbor” in the meantime), especially during the second half of it, after the “*Strada della Cornice*” (today called “*Aurelia*”) and the “*Strada ferrata*” together with the “International Great Railway Station” had been built and had intensified traffic and potentiated the boundary role of the city.

In 1860, when Nice and Savoy passed to France according to the Treaty of Plombières, Ventimiglia, which belonged to the County of Nice Maritime, province of the Sabaudian Reign, together with Sanremo and Porto Maurizio, maintained its Italianness, saving it even after the peace treaty of 1947, with the cession of Brigue and Tende to France.

ACCESSIBILITY

The Tower is in *Via San Secondo*, 26, in the homonymous city area, situated to the north of the railway, on the slopes of the Siestro Hill. From the West, it can be reached from the city centre through the level-crossing in *Via San Secondo* (which will be substituted by a pedestrian and carriageable subway by 2012/2013) and from East through the modern pedestrian and carriageable overpass (that was built thanks to the determination and the professionalism of the fore-mentioned Peo, who graduated in 1953, at the University of Genoa, in Transportation Engineering), which leads you to *Corso Genova*, right where the crossroad with *Via Chiappori* is. A private parking has already been opened in *Via San Secondo*; with regard to the works for the building of a street crossing the whole city, a wide public access parking is on schedule, whose connection to the station subway has already been predisposed, in the railway area below the Tower’s eastern garden.

Apart from being an important junction and terminal of the French TGV travelling to Marseille, Lyon and Paris, Ventimiglia can be reached by car on the A10 motorway –the so-called *dei Fiori* (“motorway of the Flowers”)- with exit at the Ventimiglia toll, just a few minutes away from the Tower. A huge touristic seaport is being built, paying much attention to the values of ecosustainability, on the *Marina San Giuseppe* coast, only a few minutes’ walk from the tower.

HISTORICAL HINTS ON THE SARACEN – GUGLIELMI TOWER

GUGLIELMI

The historical surname *Guglielmi* originated of old in the Calvo area. The name GUGLIELMI, widely used through all western Liguria, belongs to the Franconian tradition, and it is an adaptation from a WILLIHELM deriving from WILLAHELM, composed of WILIA, that is “will”, and of HELMA, that is “fairy helm”, a name widely spread in the intemelia area since the year 1000, also because of the great prestige of the “*Guglielmi, marchesi del Monferrato*”.

THE SARACEN TOWER: A DEFENCE SYSTEM AGAINST THE WESTERN IMPERIAL TURKISH FLEET

Even though parts of the coastal fortifications built in Liguria, Corsica and in smaller islands such as Capraia have been attributed to the ancient times of conflict between Catalans and the Republic of Genoa by scholars, forts and towers guarding and defending the sea, which are still characteristic of the Ligurian landscape, were mostly raised, or at least restructured, when the French King Francis I (first half of the XVI century) was contending with the power of Charles V, King of Spain and Emperor of Germany, for control over Europe.

In order to compensate for his military inferiority compared with Charles V of Spain, with whom he was at war for the European supremacy, Francis I King of France asked the Turkish empire for help, since it had achieved its grandest glory and greatest expansion with Suleiman the Magnificent.

The sultan, or, as he was called then, the Grand Turk of the Sublime Door, sent to his aid his powerful “western” fleet, sometimes called “Turkish” and sometimes “Barbaresk”, for it mostly included non-turkish crews, subjects of the Empire (especially North Africans) and renegade Christians. The Muslim troops aiming to besiege Nice landed on the harbor of Villafranca, finding no hindrance on their way: the expedition caused such a sensation that the duke of Savoy, Emanuele Filiberto, resolved to fortify the area in order to protect his harbor at Nice.

The fortification works began in 1566, a project of the architect Andrea Provana of Leini, at the same time as the Genoese works for the *Antiturtesche* Towers began [the stations of Sainte-Elme and Mont Alban were also fortified then, and given a better artillery].

Between 1533 and 1565 the “Turkish” fleet, counting more than 200 warships, joined the smaller French group of galleys at the siege of Nice. The great naval army was lead by different admirals. In 1533 its supreme captain was Khair El Din, whose name was changed into Ariadeno in Europe, but who was dubbed *Barbarossa* by the people, surely because of the glorious apprehension vaguely justified by some cultural consonances, using the attribute of another legendary and more illustrious terminator, the Swabian Emperor Frederick I.

Presumably, the “Father of the Homeland” Andrea Doria should have fought on the Genoese lines: however, historiographic studies demonstrate that *Barbarossa* and Andrea Doria tried not to damage each other. According to reliable sources, in fact *Barbarossa* did not act against Doria’s naval troops in 1543, while they were still in front of Villafranca, in order to return a similar favor received near Ippona, whereas

Andrea Doria tried to maintain the other's friendship and sodality, also allowing him to ransom the famous pirate Dragut for the relatively cheap price (if we consider its object) of 1500 scudi.

After the death of *Barbarossa* in 1546 his role was assumed by the renegade Charo Mustafà, also known as "the Lame", and chiefly by the Muslim Taurghut, fore mentioned by the name given him by his people, i.e. Dragut, operating on the Ligurian coast at least until 1560. Another renegade, of Calabrian origin, became then admiral of the "Barbaresk fleet", Ulugh Ali, with the name of Chiali, who kept on banefully ravaging with his troops at least until 1566. With the valuable help of renegade Christians, he brought about many ravagings on the Ligurian coast, from the country of Intemelio to Sanremo, and also to Taggia and Santo Stefano, in order to get provisions and slaves to be sold at the Algeri "slave market" or to be released after the payment of a high "ransom".

A well-known page with regard to the connection of the *ville intemelie* with the Turkish is the one about Vallebona, where, in the mid-XVI-century the imperial "Barbaresk" fleet, hindered by the stubborn defense they found in Nice, sent their galleys to destroy the Ligurian coast, included the Captaincy of Ventimiglia and the *ville*, so that they could attain supplies.

On 5 September 1543 Vallebona, together with Seborga, la Colla, Bordighera and Ospedaletti, was looted by Turkish sailors and soldiers for the first time.

Nevertheless the village ran its greatest risk when it was attacked, with a landing on the "*Piani di Vallecrosia*" of more than a thousand soldiers coming from seven "galliot" anchored on the sea lough close by: even so, a servant of captain Giulio Doria had come across the plans of that operation at Antibio by a Turkish slave born in Dolceacqua, in attendance on Ulugh-Ali's flagship. Thus, being warned in advance, the villagers of Vallebona safely sent their families to the most sheltered *villa* of Sasso, and a group of heads of family, chosen as village soldiers, waited for the Turkish troops to arrive, safe within the fortified church of S.Lorenzo: the invaders were welcomed to Vallebona by heavy fire, and they retreated towards the sea, only ravaging scattered farmhouses or groups of villagers they found on their way.

The Genoese defense system of Towers against pirates and Turkish soldiers, cleverly spread over the whole Ligurian coastal bow, was polyvalent and rich in strategic and military variants: Towers were generally quadrangular and circular.

Quadrangular Towers were conceived with sighting purposes, and in order to give shelter to the people in case of a Turkish pirates' landing: the besieged defended themselves throwing boiling oil and pitch from above, together with other blunt instruments, usually big stones, which were hoisted up with pulleys along with their victuals. You could enter the tower using rope ladders that were triced up at the beginning of the hostilities, thus completely isolating the small defense garrison.

These towers (partly realized thanks to tax exemptions approved by Genoa, partly thanks to the "*Sequella*" system) were connected by way of beacon fires, stretching from the coast to the hinterland villages and thus forming a luminous communication ring: with a clear and distinct gleam, the so-called neat lights, people were informed about the arrival of allied vessels and friends, while intermittent lights or fire indicated enemy ships, so that the number of intermittences would inform about the number of sighted vessels and the smoke direction would indicate, if possible, the way they came from.

Because of the greater resistance of their surface, armored by masonry more resistant to the enemy's artillery, circular Towers were mainly built on the coast or next to it (as "*il Torrione*" of the *Piani di Vallecrosia*), and on the surface of the roof, between the battlements, weapons were to be used against the

invading enemy: they also had sighting and signaling purposes, of course. This system of defense was built by Genoa with great difficulty, in the midst of an economical crisis, overtaxing the population and requiring the less wealthy to take part in the building of the defensive structures for free. The great enterprise was just partly brought about and could not thoroughly hinder the Turkish: the tower screen would be better used after some decades, and then again in the midst of the XVII century, as a system of control and isolation against the plague (because of the quarantines) and against infected people, who were often in disarray and desperately escaping by sea.

Pirates, not only Turkish or Barbarek ones, and corsairs were actually a long curse for the Ligurian *Ponente*, and also for the rest of the region. Still during the XVII century there was risk of pirates and corsairs: Aproso himself, a famous erudite of Ventimiglia, was sometimes prevented from travelling by sea because of these pirates' raids.

Nicolò Cavana, a noble Genoese friend of his, wrote to him in a letter from Genoa, on May 20th 1673 [the letter is now kept in the *Biblioteca Aprosiiana* of Ventimiglia]: *"...When your Paternity Much Reverend is on a journey, I always wait for the notice of your arrival with that good health I wish for you: I hope to hear as soon as possible of your arrival at Ventimiglia, and to learn from your graceful person what you saw in Savona, and what you heard from the corsairs..."*

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY REFERENCES

Foscolo, the Poet soldier who can be considered as the last ancient wayfarer, allegedly marched from Bordighera or even yonder just using the military cartographic indications which were so common then. The sublitoral track which had always served as an alternative to the coastal road is recorded by an anonymous map.

By travelling on this path, the Poet almost certainly got to Dolceacqua from the valley of the Crosa, following the deviation already described in a Genoese public report of 1629.

After passing easily by the massive Nervia bridge, he probably went from the Borgonuovo of Dolceacqua to the Convent of la Muta, whence he would climb up a mule-track and get to a hill path: along this track, in the XVIII century, during the War of Secession, a fortification system had been built as a means of defense against Ventimiglia, integrating medieval forts too, from Cima Tramontina, Arcagna (the Convent area), Forte Aurino (*Cima d'Aurin*), Forte Lutrum (headquarters for the concentration of troops), Testa de Magaudi, Forte Monte Patino, Fortificazioni di Siestro, S.Secondo till the boundaries of the Convent of Sant'Agostino; this last garrison controlled the road to Ventimiglia and the roundabout over the medieval Roia bridge; thence Foscolo would reach Nice, in France.

Besides, according to local historical sources, after the failure of the Carbonari Movement in 1833 in Genoa and Alessandria, and during an extraordinary flight to France (and then to Switzerland and England) , Giovanni Ruffini, supporter of the *Giovine Italia* and brother of Jacopo, who committed suicide in prison, took refuge in Torre Guglielmi.