



TIEPOLO IN MILAN

The Lost Frescoes of Palazzo Archinto

THE LOST FRESCOES OF PALAZZO ARCHINTO

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Death usually has to take life away. I don't know if that's just the animal. I don't know if it's not braver to die, but I recognize the habit; the addiction to being alive. So we live past hope. If I can find hope anywhere, that's it, that's the best I can do. It's so much not enough. It's so inadequate. But still bless me anyway. I want more life.

—Tony Kushner, *Angels in America*, 1992

In 1737, the bookseller and publisher Giuseppe Cairoli, whose shop was under the arcade of the Coperto dei Figini, in Piazza Duomo, published *Descrizione di Milano*, a guidebook to Milan by abbot Serviliano Latuada (1704–1764). The book's five volumes were one of the most important sources on the monuments of eighteenth-century Milan (fig. 1), which had only recently come under Austrian rule, after the Peace of Utrecht in 1713.¹ For most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the capital of Lombardy had been a Spanish city, ruled by governors and heavily influenced by Iberian culture. The most important local figures of that time were two cousins who were the archbishops of the city: Carlo (1538–1584) and Federico (1564–1631) Borromeo. The Borromeo and the Spanish rulers of the city, together with many of the aristocratic families, transformed the architecture and urban fabric of Milan with its artistic heritage and the religious fervor of its citizens uppermost in their minds. Encircled by city walls built by the Spanish between 1546 and 1560—the so-called Mura Spagnole (today renamed the Cerchia dei Bastioni)—Milan grew around important civic and religious buildings, especially the Castello Sforzesco at the northern end of the city's perimeter and the medieval Duomo at its heart. A dense amalgamation of churches, noble palazzos, and more modest houses, Milan had enjoyed substantial growth in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries only to be severely halted by the plague that hit the city and parts of northern Italy in the early 1630s. The beginning of a new century also saw a major

political crisis. With the death of King Charles II of Spain, in 1700, came the end of the Spanish Hapsburg dynasty and the beginning of the War of Spanish Succession between France and the Austrian Empire, both of which claimed the throne in Madrid and all Spanish territories. In 1706, Milan was taken by the Austrian army led by General Eugene of Savoy (1663–1736), and by the end of the war, in 1713, the peace treaty saw Spain being ruled by a new French king, Philip V, a Bourbon, and Milan was an Austrian territory. Until the unification of Italy, in 1861, Milan remained Austrian, and its families aligned themselves closely with the empire and Vienna.

Latuada's *Descrizione di Milano* provides a vivid picture of imperial Milan, of its monuments and artistic treasures. Among the large number of splendid aristocratic dwellings Latuada described was one near the church of Sant'Alessandro: the palazzo of the Archinto, one of Milan's most celebrated families.² The Archinto descended from a certain Manfredo, who had been a benefactor of the Cistercian Abbey of Chiaravalle, on the outskirts of Milan, in 1171, and is recorded in an inscription there. Documented from at least the twelfth century in Lombardy, the family claimed descent from a mythical Lombard, Archinto, son of Duke Romualdo of Benevento and Teodorata. In the late fifteenth century, with the death of Giuseppe Archinto in 1476, the family was divided into four branches, one for each of his four sons. Of these, the two main branches were those celebrated in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Milan: the Archinto counts of Tainate





FIG. 1
 Marcantonio Dal Re (1697–1766)
Plan of Milan, 1734
 Etching, 30 1/8 x 31 1/4 in. (765 x 795 mm)
 Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milan
 (P.V. f.s. 2–8)

and those of Barate. It was only in 1741, when the Barate line came to an end and its possessions passed to Filippo Archinto of Tainate, that the two branches reunited.

Palazzo Archinto (fig. 2) on Via Olmetto (named after a large elm tree on the street), near Porta Ticinese, had recently become a possession of the Archinto of Tainate family. It had been inherited by Camilla Stampa in 1671, when her mother Anna Visconti Stampa entered the convent of San Paolo Converso. Camilla moved into the palazzo about 1674 with her husband, Filippo Archinto, and for the next one hundred and fifty years, the Archinto owned it.³ In 1730, following his travels around Europe between 1720 and 1722, the Englishman Edward Wright wrote *Some Observations Made in Travelling through France, Italy &c.*, in which he recollected his visit to the palazzo of Count Carlo Archinto, who was a “Grandee of Spain ... a very obliging courteous Person.” Wright described paintings in the house by Raphael, Correggio, Titian, and Giulio Cesare Procaccini, as well as “a very handsome Library.”⁴ Only a few

years later, Latuada described the same palazzo. He wrote that a visit “would be rewarding for foreigners, if they would be admitted inside” and listed tapestries following the designs of Raphael, Giulio Romano, and Teniers.⁵ Like Wright, Latuada stressed the importance of the Archinto library:

But the crowning magnificence of the whole House, revealing the principal genius of its master, is the distinguished Library, collected by His late Excellency Signor Count Carlo, Knight of the Golden Fleece and Grandee of Spain, who with his fine discernment in the Sciences infinitely enriched it with rare books in all languages. It is decorated with charm appropriate to such a precious selection, and the collection is enclosed behind glass in large walnut bookshelves with gilt decorations and crystal wall lamps, which light it up at night with such a joyful sparkle of reflections that it makes the noblest scene one ever saw.⁶



FIG. 2
Facade of Palazzo Archinto, photographed 1934

FIG. 3
Unknown artist
Carlo Archinto, ca. 1730s
Oil on panel, 5 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 4 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (15 × 11 cm)
Private collection

According to Latuada, Carlo Archinto's library was opened to scholars, as was the count's nearby *gabinetto* (small room), where he kept mathematical instruments, including a telescope and a microscope.⁷ Describing this building bursting with books, mathematical instruments, and tapestries, Latuada also remarked on the collection of paintings and the frescoed decoration:

[foreigners] will be able to enjoy the beauty of many paintings by a number of excellent masters in that art, as well as the others in fresco, created in the ceilings of the new apartment, by the celebrated Signor Tiepolo from Venice, and by Signori Bigari, and Orlandi from Bologna, both most talented, the first for figures, and the second for architecture.⁸

Latuada is the first, as far as we know, to mention the fresco decoration at Palazzo Archinto by Giambattista Tiepolo, Vittorio Maria Bigari, and Stefano Orlandi.

In subsequent guidebooks to Milan, throughout the eighteenth century, the descriptions of Palazzo Archinto tend to be similar, with only minor differences. In 1752, Nicolò Sormani wrote: "here also the Palazzo Archinto with its sumptuous library, with paintings in fresco by Lanzani, Tiepolo, Bigari, Orlandi, and with tapestries in silver, and gold, with designs by Giulio Romano, Raphael, and Teniers."⁹ This is a condensed version of Latuada's description, with the addition of the name of a fourth fresco painter, Andrea Lanzani (1641–1712). By the time Carlo Bianconi described the palazzo, in 1795, a fifth painter was added: Giovanni Battista Piazzetta (1682–1754), who, in fact, had never worked in the palazzo.¹⁰ Nineteenth-century guidebooks to Milan tended to publish variations of Latuada's, Sormani's, and Bianconi's descriptions of the palazzo.¹¹

The "obliging and courteous" Carlo Archinto (1670–1732) (fig. 3) described by Edward Wright was responsible for both the creation of the library and the decoration of the palazzo. Carlo

was born to Filippo Archinto (1644–1712) and Camilla Stampa on July 30, 1670, most likely in the family palazzo.¹² His parents had begun the building of an enormous (and never completed) palazzo on the Naviglio Grande at Robecco (see fig. 28). Carlo studied with the Jesuits at Brera and remained close to the order. In his will, he asked to be buried in the Jesuit church of San Fedele. As a young man, he studied philosophy and mathematics—in which he remained interested for the rest of his life—at the University of Ingolstadt and subsequently traveled through Europe, to Germany, France, and Belgium, before spending time in Rome. In January 1690, he married the Milanese aristocrat Giulia Barbiano di Belgiojoso; after her death, in 1729, he married Faustina Mattei di Paganica. He died in the palazzo on December 17, 1732.

Carlo Archinto's life seems to have been split between public duties and private intellectual pursuits. He served in a number of prestigious civic roles, as would have been expected of a man of his social rank. He joined the Consiglio dei Decurioni della Città on March 26, 1691, and became a member of the Tribunale di Provvisione and a Conservatore dei Patrimoni on December 23, 1696.¹³ He was nominated *giudice di strade* on January 1, 1699. Archinto was also on a number of committees of Milanese aristocrats sent on diplomatic missions. In 1696, he was among those designated to welcome Federico Caccia (1635–1699), the new archbishop of Milan; in 1702, he was one of the aristocrats who received the new king of Spain, Philip V (1683–1746). In May 1708, in the middle of the War of Spanish Succession, Archinto welcomed, in Brescia and in Milan, Elisabeth Christine of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel (1691–1750) on her way to Barcelona to marry the future Emperor Charles VI (1685–1740), who was fighting in Spain as the self-styled King Charles III of Spain.¹⁴ Archinto received titles from both the emperor and the king of Spain. He was a Gentleman of the Bedchamber of Emperor Leopold I (1640–1705), and the king of Spain awarded him the Order of the Golden Fleece on August 15, 1700, and made him a Grandee

