

# Healthcare-related Itinerary in a Multicultural City in Northern Italy

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**Abstract.** The presence of great figures, their meaning and implications in the history of a community can also be measured by the works they have left in the service of people and their cities. This article examines two important Italian aristocrats: Maria Brignole Sale, Duchess of Galliera, and Gerolamo Gaslini. Thanks to their philanthropy, two world-famous hospitals of excellence have been built, that bear their names. Through their life histories, the greatness of their coats of arms or entrepreneurial success, achieved during their lifetime, can be matched with their remarkable actions as patrons of the arts and philanthropists. Interestingly, an itinerary of 'city philanthropy' can also be outlined: from east to west, 'Gaslini's' and 'the Duchess's' works indelibly characterise Genoa, a multicultural city in northern Italy. With their invaluable social, cultural and artistic heritage they have left behind, the two patrons have promoted the creation of a ubiquitous museum, whose role local institutions have committed to safeguarding and enhancing for the memory and identity of the city.

**Key words:** culture, hospital, history, philanthropy, ubiquitous museum

## Introduction

The contribution a city makes to culture can be measured in many ways, not least by its museum heritage (1).

A city's wealth and relevance are associated with the munificence of great patrons, who link their names to the genre or content of museums, and, more rarely, to the city itself.

The case of Genoa is quite unique, a town in Northern of Italy.

Of all the philanthropists who have left their mark well beyond their time, the city of Genoa every day pays its grateful tribute to at least two of them, since two hospitals of excellence – the Galliera and Gaslini – bear their names.

However, there are many other, less well known specimens of their philanthropic work to be enjoyed in the city, making it almost an example of 'ubiquitous

museum'. By retracing the history of these two great figures, an itinerary, almost a virtual visit of what could be defined as 'city philanthropy' can be outlined.

## The Duchess of Galliera

Maria Brignole Sale De Ferrari Duchess of Galliera (Genoa, 5th April 1811 - Paris, 9th December 1888) is a descendant to the Brignole Sale family, being the daughter of Antonio Brignole Sale, the last Marquis of Gropoli, and Artemisia Negrone (Fig. 1).

She was one of the most illustrious personalities in 19th century Genoa, while she also belonged to one of the most prestigious Genoese families (2).

Due to her father's diplomatic activity, Maria grew up in many European capitals, in constant contact with the most important people of her time, and under strict Roman Catholic upbringing. All this fashioned



**Figure 1.** Maria Brignole Sale De Ferrari Duchess of Galliera

her cosmopolitan and moral character, which became particularly evident when, having no heirs of her own, she had to decide how to dispose of her huge estate.

Married at the age of 17 to the Marquis Raffaele De Ferrari, she got the title of Duchess of Galliera (from the Pope in 1837) through him, and of Princess of Lucedio (from the King of Italy in 1875), through the purchase of lands and titles. The couple's life was initially marked by a dramatic event occurred to her husband, who, while cleaning his gun, accidentally shot and killed one of his servants. Subsequent investigations established that it had been a mere incident. However, the Marquis was so upset, that he resolved to fully immerse himself in his work, which is why he decided to move to Paris.

It was in the French capital that Raffaele made his second fortune, by hugely increasing his and his wife's already considerable assets by investing in banking businesses and in the then nascent railway industry. The Marquis did not like Paris, but remained there encouraged by his wife, who instead would love the brilliant life of the French capital.

Following the 1848 uprisings and the death of King Louis Philippe of France, to avoid bankruptcy the royal family had to sell several properties. In 1852, the Marquis De Ferrari bought the old Hôtel Matignon, at 57, rue de Varenne, a beautiful 18th century building with the largest private park in the capital and the former residence of his own ancestress Maria Caterina Brignole-Sale (1737-1813), Princess of Monaco. The palace had been gradually embellished with masterpiece paintings that the Brignole family had acquired over the centuries, starting with the portraits of their *Doge* ancestors painted by Van Dyck. A personal friend to the Bourbon-Orléans family, during the difficult years of the Second and Third French Republic, Maria assigned part of the palace to some of their family members until all the descendants of the former royal family had to leave France. Before leaving Paris for good, Maria bequeathed the elegant building to the Austro-Hungarian Emperor who turned it into his embassy. The building was later confiscated as spoils of war by the French government and has been the official seat of the Prime Minister since 1933.

In the French capital the life of the couple was shattered again, this time by the death, still at a young age, of their second son, Andrea (1831-1847), after their first daughter, Livia (1828-1829), had lived only a few months. Their third son, Filippo (1850-1917), known for having an eccentric personality, was put to test by his mother's yearning for her other prematurely deceased son, as well as by his own sympathies for then new socialist politics. Filippo was a famous stamp collector; he chose to become an Austrian citizen – he was adopted by an Austro-Hungarian Empire's officer – and renounced most of his parents' wealth and noble titles, dying without descendants.

Actually, the very choices made by his son Filippo urged Raffaele De Ferrari, who in the meantime (1858) had become Senator of the Kingdom of Italy, to get involved in charity and social work in Genoa, by donating twenty million Lire to upgrade port facilities. With this money, several infrastructures could be built, most importantly the Galliera, Lucedio and Giano quays.

Maria was widowed in 1876 and carried forward the philanthropic activity started by her father Antonio and further pursued by her husband Raffaele.

## The Duchess Itinerary in Genoa

This was the starting point of what we have defined as Genoa's 'ubiquitous museum'. It all began with the donation (in 1874) to the Municipality of Palazzo Rosso, where she had been born over sixty years earlier, and with the bequest of Palazzo Bianco (1889), the main seats of the Strada Nuova Museums (3).

However these containers still lacked their contents: Maria had had a palace built in Paris that was intended to host her family's remarkable art collection. However, when the French government decided to confiscate all properties belonging to the Orleans family, their friend the Duchess decided to leave the building to the city of Paris, as already agreed. This building, which today houses the museum of costume and fashion, had been emptied of all works of art, which she had moved to Palazzo Rosso in Genoa.

The first two components of this itinerary had thus been laid down.

In the meantime, the Duchess had founded "Galliera", "S. Andrea" and "S. Filippo" Hospitals, located around the ancient Poor Clares' Monastery. Soon afterwards she also founded another hospital, "San Raffaele" in Coronata. At the centre of the city's health care system for over a century, these hospitals and social assistance facilities are also outstanding architectural and artistic buildings.

The Duchess continued her philanthropic and charitable work in France, which would include an orphanage and a retirement home in Meudon near Paris, whose construction cost 47 million francs. Still in operation, they are an example of the noblewoman's enlightened civic sense.

Maria died in Paris on 9th December 1888. She had decided to complete her 'Genoese itinerary' that had begun with the donation of the palace where she had been born. Her body was transported by special train to Genoa Voltri to be buried, together with her husband, in the crypt of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Grace, which she had purchased from the State in 1864 and then returned to its original owners, the Capuchin friars, who under the Savoy Kingdom had been expropriated of all their properties.

At the same time, she bequeathed Villa Brignole Sale Duchessa di Galliera in Voltri, adjacent to the

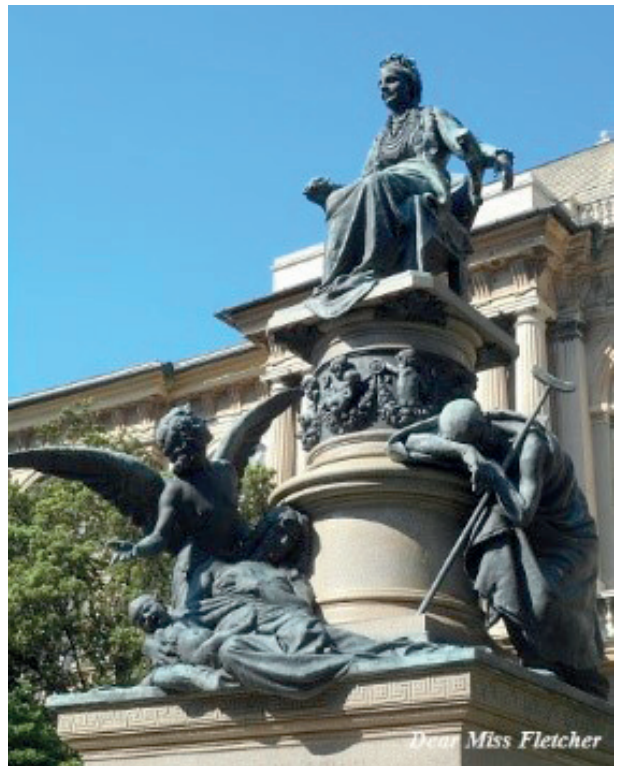


Figure 2. Duchess Galliera statue, hospital entrance

Sanctuary, to the Opera Pia, which bears the name of the Brignole Sale family. Since 1931, the Villa, with its significant historical-natural trails, has been used and partly owned by the Municipality of Genoa (4).

Finally, she also left the title of Duke of Galliera to Prince Antonio d'Orléans, Duke of Montpensier, a childhood friend of her son Andrea and the last son of King Louis Philippe I. The Orleans of Spain still bear this title.

But until today she has maintained the title of 'Duchess', which the Genoese have always associated to her works: the Duchess's Hospital, the Duchess's Palace, the Duchess's Villa... (Fig. 2).

## Gerolamo Gaslini

Gerolamo Gaslini was born in Monza in 1877 from Pietro Gaslini, a small artisan belonging to a family with a seed-oil processing business, and Bambina Baggioli, daughter of oil merchants (Fig. 3). After finishing his schooling, he worked as a delivery boy for



**Figure 3.** Gerolamo Gaslini

a retailer and then joined his father's company, Gaslini and Rizzi, as a worker (5).

In 1896, following a quarrel with his father, he moved to Genoa, at that time a city full of industries and financial enterprises. At nineteen, after pursuing various unsuccessful business ventures, he asked his uncle Emilio Gaslini for help, who lent him 50 thousand lire: this was the beginning of his dynamic and tireless life. With this small capital, he engaged in several port trade businesses, with varying results.

In May 1905, he married Lorenza Celotto, from whom he had two daughters: Germana (1903-1988) and Giannina (1906-1917), who died of appendicitis and peritonitis at the age of 11 (5).

In 1907, together with his brother Egidio, he founded Fratelli Gaslini, a general partnership company, working as an agent and trader in vegetable oils (5). Ravaged by the untimely death of his daughter Giannina, Gerolamo Gaslini resigned from his position

as managing director of the company, to resume it back again in 1918, when one of Egidio's three sons died. In 1927 he had a fight with his brother who had accused him of selling his shares to a competing group. Since the latter had different objectives in mind for their company, Gerolamo managed to acquire also his brother's shares (5) becoming the sole owner of the company. The business kept growing and in 1941 he would own or control a whole network of companies all over Italy. The group did not only include firms related or complementary to the vegetable-oil business (such as Oleifici Gaslini), but also companies in real estate, food (Biscottificio Wamar and Genepesca), finance (Banca Belinzaghi) and agriculture (Fondi Rustici, in charge of managing and farming the lands owned by Gaslini).

Gaslini's entrepreneurial venture also had several controversial features. As an entrepreneur he would often exploit his monopoly position. He did business with Comit through Banca Belinzaghi, and some of his enormous fortune was made with disputable deals, in terms of taxes, exchange rates, and raw materials.

Regarding his relations with government institutions, in 1928 he joined the National Fascist Party, supporting some of the regime's social initiatives (5), and establishing closer relations with Mussolini in the period between the two wars. In 1932, he received the title of Knight of Labour and seven years later he was appointed Senator of the Kingdom. He was later granted the title of Count of San Gerolamo by King Vittorio Emanuele III. Like other industrialists in the North of Italy, during the Resistance he took sides with partisans, and after the war he joined De Gasperi's Christian Democrats (5).

When he was almost eighty years old, Gaslini was tormented by the thought of his will: there being no direct male heirs, after changing his mind many times, he decided to appoint his wife and daughter as his heirs, on equal terms. After their deaths, his estate was to be bequeathed to the Archbishop of Genoa, Giuseppe Siri, with whom he had established a close friendship.

Between 1960 and 1963, during Italy's economic boom, he suffered heavy losses, incurred for substantial investments to upgrade or even rebuild some plants, but also related to operating costs and bank debt.

Unfortunately, also because of the decision-making process strongly centralised in the hands of the elderly entrepreneur (5), all these problems confronting the company (5) became clear only in 1962, when the by then elderly and sick Mr Gaslini was ready to resign. Recovery measures were soon implemented. All his companies reacted well and succeeded in consolidating his considerable financial and real estate assets.

### Gaslini Itinerary in Genoa

Gaslini lived a simple life devoid of luxuries and comforts, characterised by thrift that had become legendary. It was thrift, for sure, and not avarice, because we must not forget that he did not only donate his entire estate to Gaslini Children's Hospital, but was also engaged in various other altruism and social solidarity activities.

As a matter of fact, art and culture patronage had always been an important element in Gaslini's private and entrepreneurial life. For example, he bought the *Pietà Prenestina*, a sculpture by Michelangelo, to ensure that it would not be taken out of Italy, and which he then donated to the Italian government. He also presented the Library of Genoa University with two lots of 15th century books, manuscripts, and printed editions (6-8).

Gerolamo Gaslini was not only a successful entrepreneur, with all his various businesses, but also an innovative philanthropist, who has left his remarkable footprint in Genoa (9,10).

Indeed, Gaslini's philanthropic work is inextricably linked to this city, where since 1917 he had decided to build a new large children's hospital – Istituto Giannina Gaslini – dedicated to his daughter who had prematurely died in the same year. His decision was not motivated by economic reasons, but it was his “unerasable affection for his daughter Giannina, who died because medical science was unable to cure her”, that drove Gerolamo to this altruistic gesture aimed at preventing other children from suffering the same fate (11).

The Hospital was founded in 1931 and opened in 1938 (Fig. 4). Running costs were considerable. Gaslini clearly stated that his legacy was to be used

to take care of the facilities, to provide hospital services and promote scientific research, while all running expenses were to be covered by the hospital fees paid by health insurance companies or the municipalities of residence of the patients.

In order to ensure an everlasting organisation, in 1949 he established the Gerolamo Gaslini Foundation, which was endowed with all his financial and corporate assets to guarantee a secure future to the hospital.

Both the Foundation and the Hospital that bear his name were destined to last well beyond his death in Genoa on 9th April 1964 (Fig. 5).

### Conclusion

From the hill of Quarto, with the twenty pavilions of the children's hospital built on a gradual slope overlooking the sea, to the park with the Foundation's villa on the seafront in Corso Italia, and the buildings in Piazza della Vittoria and Piazza Dante in the city centre, Gaslini's presence marks the first part of this itinerary. Continuing in the memory of the Duchess of Galliera, the itinerary then reaches the hill of Carignano, where there is the monumental hospital bearing her name (Fig. 6), and then the two white and red palaces (Palazzo Bianco and Palazzo Rosso) in Via Garibaldi, now museums, where the Duchess was born, and farther on to the west of the city of Genoa, with Istituto San Raffaele on the hills and the villa in Voltri, with the sanctuary of NS delle Grazie behind it, where she is buried.

Many decades after their death, the memory of these two great benefactors is still alive and relevant through their charitable works.

However, retracing their lives is not only a fitting tribute to their memory, but also helps to understand the evolution of philanthropy and charity towards a modern form of social security.

The study of their history and their works is a well-timed reminder of the criteria that should guide the management of heritage entrusted to the public purse, as well as an appropriate enticement and example for new forms of social solidarity.

In other words, learning about the life and work of the great patrons means raising awareness of the

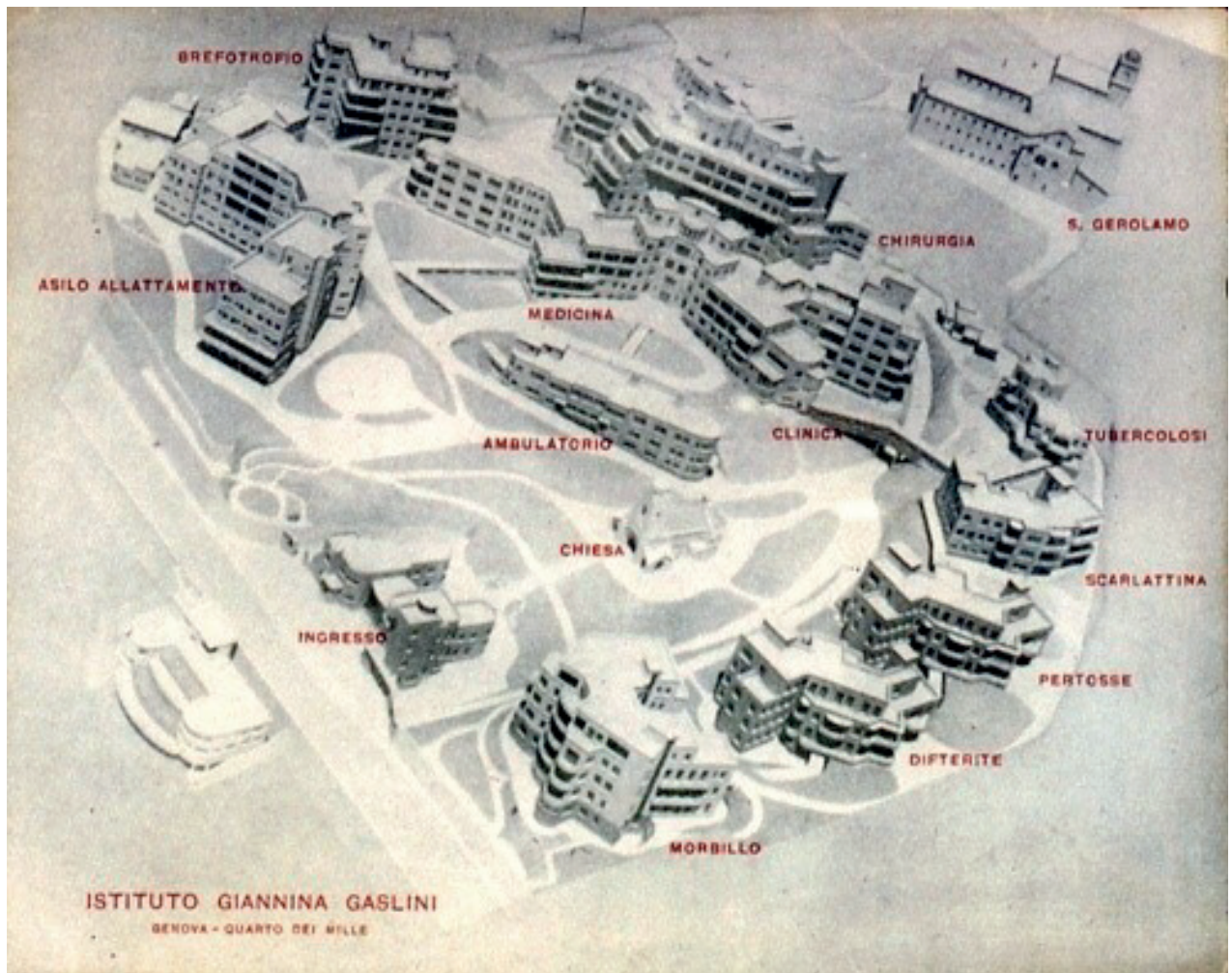


Figure 4. Gaslini hospital plant 1938



Figure 5. Statue Gerolamo Gaslini hospital entrance with Rita Levi

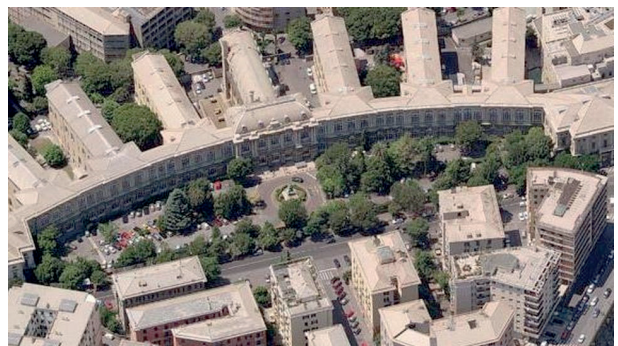


Figure 6. Aerial view of the Galliera hospital today.

places and intangible cultural heritage, as well as offering prospects for forward-looking vision and discernment.

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