

“Ingrandire la famiglia”:
Ambrogio Spinola on Honour, War,
and Money in his Flanders Correspondence
with the Women of his Family*

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The economic and social capital of a closely-knit family

On 10 July 1600, Polissena Spinola Grimaldi wrote to her son Federico, the younger brother of Ambrogio Spinola, who was then sailing the galleys he had been placed in command of from Spain to Flanders. She sent the letter to Brussels so Federico would have it on arriving there. Meanwhile Ambrogio was supporting his brother's enterprise in recruiting soldiers and sailors between Liguria and Lombardy, but the letter does not have much to say on that. Polissena is delighted: her daughter Maria has just given birth, and many other births are to follow. In September it will be her daughter-in-law Giovanna, Ambrogio's wife, and the next month it will be her daughters Bettina and Maddalena.¹ Three years later Federico will be dead and Ambrogio will have left Genoa, but in that summer of 1600, Polissena's children, young and strong through marriages that had brought them money and prestige, were at the summit of their

* I would like to thank John Cronin for his help with the English translation of this article.

¹ Archives générales du Royaume de Belgique (AGRB), Secrétarerie d'État et de Guerre (SEG), reg. 133, fols. 248–50, Lettre  Polissena Spinola Grimaldi to Federico Spinola, Genoa, 8 and 10 July 1600.

wealth – and arrogance. Indeed, only the Dorias were powerful enough in the Republic to be adversaries worthy of the name for the alliance between the Grimaldi, Spinola and Pallavicino families; in fact, one good reason had Ambrogio entered the king of Spain's service was to counter the Dorias' supremacy. Twenty years later, the Spinolas of San Luca, of whom Ambrogio and his children were heirs, would ultimately settle in Spain, following a path similar to that of other big families in what was a polycentric Spanish Europe.² Yet their ties with Genoa remained important, particularly through Ambrogio's sisters, who mobilized his renown in constructing a common and transnational identity, fashioned by way of all their financial, military, and political prowess – between Genoa, Flanders, and Madrid.³ Ties remained strong between these siblings, orphaned early on by their father and possessing a mother able to act as a true *mater familias*. Maria, eight years younger than Ambrogio, would remain very close to him until the last days of his life in the castle of Castelnuovo Scrivia, after the shameful resolution of the siege of Casale.⁴ Her marriage to Giovanni Battista Spinola was the only one to be celebrated in her brother's house, the *palazzo* della Ripa in San

² *Génova y la Monarquía Hispánica (1528–1713)*, ed. by Manuel Herrero Sánchez, Yasmina Rocío Ben Yessef Garfia, Carlo Bitossi and Dino Puncuh (Genoa: Società Ligure di Storia Patria, 2011); Davide Maffi, 'Cacciatori di gloria. La presenza degli italiani nell'esercito delle Fiandre (1621–1700)', in *Italiani al servizio straniero in età moderna*, ed. by Paola Bianchi, Davide Maffi and Enrico Stumpo (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2008), pp. 73–104; *Italian Merchants in the Early-Modern Spanish Monarchy. Business Relations, Identities and Political Resources*, ed. by Catia Brillì and Manuel Herrero Sánchez (London–New York: Routledge, 2017). Ambrogio's rapprochement with the Spanish aristocracy via his own children is already quite visible at their baptisms. This was, for example, Agostino's case, born in Genoa, 21 May 1595: his father asked Pedro de Mendoza, Philip II's ambassador, to be the godfather, whereas the baptisms of the children of Ambrogio's sisters in the same parish were the occasion to further strengthen bonds with other Genovese families. Archivio Storico della Chiesa di San Luca, Genoa (ASCSL), Battesimi, 1581–1651, fol. 10^r.

³ Carlos Álvarez Nogal, Luca Lo Basso and Claudio Marsilio, 'La rete finanziaria della famiglia Spinola: Spagna, Genova e le fiere di cambio (1610–1656)', *Quaderni Storici*, 124, 1 (2007), 97–110; Carlos Álvarez Nogal, 'Las compañías bancarias genovesas en Madrid a comienzos del siglo XVII', *Hispania*, LXV, 1 (2005), 67–90; Manuel Herrero Sánchez, 'La red genovesa Spínola y el entramado transnacional de los marqueses de los Balbases al servicio de la Monarquía Hispánica', in *Las redes del Imperio. Élités sociales en la articulación de la Monarquía Hispánica, 1492–1714*, ed. by Bartolomé Yun Casalilla (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2009), pp. 97–133.

⁴ *El Piamonte en guerra (1613–1659). La frontera olvidada*, ed. by Bernardo J. García García and Davide Maffi (Madrid: Doce Calles, 2020); Gregory Hanlon, *Italy 1636. Cemetery of Armies* (Oxford–New York: OUP, 2016). See also the contribution of Luca Lo Basso to this volume.

Luca, Genoa, in 1596.⁵ When she dictated her will in 1608, she specified that, in the event of the death of her husband and their children – girls and boys – the legitimate and natural children of Ambrogio were her heirs.⁶ From the 1620's on, the war in Flanders and her brother were the subjects of several frescoes ordered by Maria and her husband for their residences in Genoa and 'in villa', particularly in Sampierdarena. In the salon of Villa Spinola, Andrea Ansaldo painted the cycle on Ambrogio's victories in the Eighty Years' War, beginning with Ostend (1604).⁷ A few years later that same Maria commissioned Giovanni Carlone to do a similar cycle for the gallery – today destroyed – of Ambrogio's Genovese *palazzo*, with Federico Spinola commanding the Spanish Armada and with Ambrogio as victor of Breda (1625).⁸

The correspondence this contribution is constructed around also shows Ambrogio's strong ties with Lelia, his elder sister.⁹ She would marry Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi and, at the age of twenty-six, this woman energetically proceeded to restore and aggrandize her husband's ancestors' prestigious residence: Palazzo Gerolamo Grimaldi (fig. 3.1) – part of a veritable war of urban competition between the most important families of *La Superba* to ensure themselves the richest residences of Strada Nuova.¹⁰ In doing so, the cooperation from Ambrogio – who at the time had been married for five years, and quite *richissime*, thanks to his wife's

⁵ ASCSL, Matrimoni, 1581–1805, 1 January 1596, fol. 7r.

⁶ Archivio di Stato di Genova (ASG), Notai Antichi, 4551, 17 December 1608.

⁷ José Luis Colomer, 'Ambrogio Spinola: la fortuna iconografica di un genovese del Seicento', in *Genova e la Spagna. Opere, artisti, committenti, collezionisti*, ed. by Piero Boccardo, José Luis Colomer and Clario di Fabio (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editore, 2002), pp. 177–205 (pp. 178–83); Ezia Gavazza, 'La committenza dell'affresco nelle dimore genovesi', in *L'età di Rubens. Dimore, committenti e collezionisti genovesi*, ed. by Piero Boccardo (Milan: Skira, 2004), pp. 94–5; Andrea Lercari and Roberto Santamaria, 'La dimora di villeggiatura dei duchi di San Pietro', in *Palazzo Doria Spinola. Architettura e arredi di una dimora aristocratica genovese*, ed. by Roberto Santamaria (Genoa: Provincia di Genova, 2011), pp. 407–42. On the importance of the Sampierdarena villas in illustrating the power of the Genovese elites, see Piero Boccardo, 'Antoon van Dyck nelle reggie repubblicane di Genova', in *Van Dyck pittore di corte*, ed. by Anna Maria Bava and Maria Grazia Bernardini (Rome: Arthemisia Books, 2018), pp. 47–53. See the Laura Stagno's contribution in this volume.

⁸ Margherita Priarone, *Andrea Ansaldo. 1584–1638* (Genoa: Sagep, 2011). On the frescoes of the Palace Doria Spinola, see pp. 73–7; Boccardo, 'La decorazione', in *Palazzo Doria Spinola*, pp. 103–27 (pp. 122–4).

⁹ Lelia was baptized in the Parish of San Luca, 16 June 1567, ASCSL, Battesimi, matrimoni, morti, 1562–1581, fol. 225.

¹⁰ Ennio Poleggi, *Una reggia repubblicana. Atlante dei palazzi di Genova* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 1998).

dowry – was particularly helpful. In 1593, wanting to enlarge the *palazzo*'s garden at the expense of the Theatines, Lelia got her brother to threaten these priests' representative with death. On that occasion, Ambrogio's armed men knocked the wall between the two gardens down and partied for days with women of dubious virtue to intimidate the Theatines.¹¹ In only a few years the fountains and grottos of Lelia's new garden were well-known, and even Archdukes Albert and Isabella, passing through Genoa in 1599, spent most enjoyable times there.¹² For his part, Ambrogio, who would have liked to buy the magnificent Grimaldi residence on the Strada Nuova, belonging to his maternal grandfather Nicolò Grimaldi (fig. 3.2), settled for the current Palazzo Doria Spinola – also known as “all'Aquasola” – (fig. 3.3). It was a *palazzo* that, according to Genoa's system of ‘*Rolli*’, could accommodate popes, their nuncios, and emperors. From 1598–99 on, he rented it from Antonio Doria, who owed him of a good sum of money. Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini stayed there in 1601 and spoke of it as the most beautiful – and most comfortable – *palazzo* of Genoa.¹³ When Ambrogio left Genoa for Flanders a few years later, his mother and his wife Giovanna remained in the residence, a symbol of the family power. Guido Bentivoglio, nuncio in Brussels and Spinola's friend, had no doubt: he who on his departure from Genoa had an income of 100,000 *scudi* and 400,000 in hard currency, in 1611 “was ruined by the excessive expenditures he had made”. And his three houses had something to do with it: in Madrid, he maintained his two sons in luxury, *meninos* of Queen Margaret of Austria; in Genoa, he kept “a house [that] his wife and mother live in, which cost him a lot. [...] while in Brussels he spent even more”.¹⁴

¹¹ Roberto Melai, ‘Il palazzo di Girolamo Grimaldi Oliva a san Francesco di Castelletto, genesi urbanistica e modello tipologico’, in *Palazzo Grimaldi della Meridiana. Una dimora aristocratica genovese*, ed. by Gianni Bozzo, Lauro Magnani and Giorio Rossini (Genoa: De Ferrari, 2010), pp. 31–61 (pp. 32–3).

¹² Marzia Cataldi Gallo, ‘Il lusso e la moda: simboli di status di appartenenza politica negli affreschi del salone’, in *ibidem*, pp. 111–118 (p. 111).

¹³ Roberto Santamaria, ‘L'edificio e i suoi proprietari’, in *Palazzo Doria Spinola*, pp. 35–71.

¹⁴ “[...] se halla arruinado por los excessivos gastos que ha echo [...] una casa donde habitan su muyer y su madre, que le produce muchos gastos. [...] en Brusselas gasta todavia mas”, in Guido Bentivoglio, March 1611. Quoted in Antonio Rodríguez Villa, *Ambrosio Spinola, primer marqués de los Balbases. Ensayo biográfico* (Madrid: Fortanet, 1904), pp. 277–8.

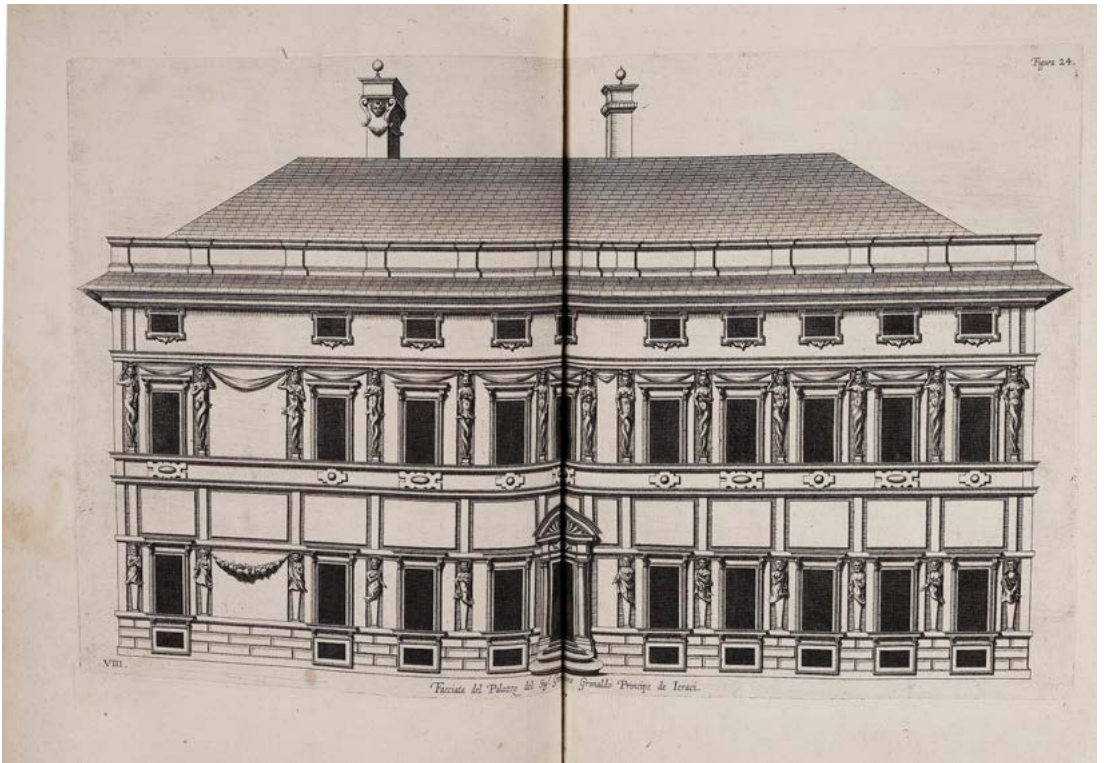


Fig. 3.1. Palazzo Gerolamo Grimaldi, in Peter Paul Rubens, *Palazzi di Genova* (Antuerpiae: Rubens, 1622), Vol. II, Fig. 24 (Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg).



Fig. 3.2. Palazzo Tursi, in Peter Paul Rubens, *Palazzi di Genova* (Antuerpiae: Rubens, 1622), Vol. I, Fig. 67 (Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg).

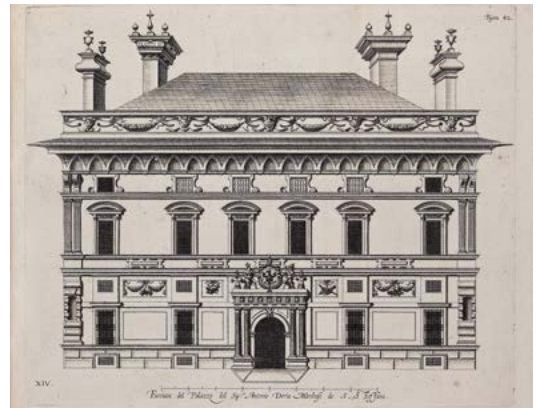


Fig. 3.3. Palazzo Doria Spinola, in Peter Paul Rubens, *Palazzi di Genova* (Antuerpiae: Rubens, 1622), Vol. II, Fig. 42 (Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg).

The letters at the origin of this contribution were written or read in the salons, loggias, and gardens of these *palazzi* palace, forging a strong clan identity in one and all, obliging both women and men to play their part. These letters allow us to anchor Ambrogio's life in his close-knit family, dominated by female figures who represented at the same time both limits and resources, a network of affections and interests. This correspondence was exchanged between Ambrogio, his mother, his siblings, his wife, and his children essentially between Genoa and Brussels – and Madrid, for the last years – between 1600 and 1629. It is preserved in the ten volumes collecting the letters of Ambrogio Spinola, among the documents of the Secretariat of State and War, preserved at the National Archives of Belgium in Brussels.¹⁵ The fact that this private correspondence is mixed with the – much more numerous – letters dealing with exclusively military and financial questions shows the permeability of these spheres for the elites of the Ancien Régime, as well as the relevance of a gendered analysis. Indeed, this approach allows us to point to relations between the sexes which had consequences on the level of constructing an identity common to the family group. These are relations which were constructed from different positions of power – think, for example, of the ease of travel for Ambrogio and the men of the family, as well as the legitimate use of their wives' dowries by these princes of modern finance, but which at the same time had consequences for the men, women and their children.¹⁶ Consequently, this analysis of the gendered relations between Ambrogio and the women of his family will not only allow us to point out the intensive moments of interaction between the sexes, but also to outline the profile of the masculinity portrayed by Ambrogio, a masculinity built around reference to the *pater familias*. In this respect, Ambrogio finds himself at a crossroads between the Italian humanistic tradition inaugurated by Leon Battista Alberti's *I libri della famiglia* and the model of the

¹⁵ AGRB, SEG, reg. 124–133, doc. 133 contains the letters to Federico Spinola, 1599–1601. For a historiographical treatment of the construction and preservation of family identity at a distance, notably by correspondence, see *Eloignement géographique et cohésion familiale (XVI^e–XX^e siècles)*, ed. by Jean-François Chauvard and Christine Lebeau (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2006).

¹⁶ Yasmina Rocío Ben Yesséf Garfía, 'Lazos sociales, estrategias de linaje e identidad "nacional" en el siglo XVII: el caso de la familia genovesa de los Serra en perspectiva de género', in *En tierra de confluencias: Italia y la monarquía de España, siglos XVI–XVIII*, ed. by Cristina Bravo Lozano and Roberto Quirós Rosado (Valencia: Albatros, 2013), pp. 157–72.

father in Catholic Counter-Reformation culture.¹⁷ In these letters, to be sure, much more than a warrior masculinity, the hero of Ostend and Breda portrays a masculinity revealing it is up to the father to preserve and increase the family honour, in relying on the collaboration of his siblings – female and male – and in demanding the unfailing obedience of his own children.

Ambrogio left Genoa and Italy for Flanders in spring 1602 at the head of nine thousand men recruited at his expense between Liguria and Lombardy.¹⁸ Thus it is not surprising that, from the very start, war stands out as the fundamental experience defining family relations in renegotiating the spaces and margins of action and interaction of the sisters and brothers alike. That same war was also the cause of constant tension over money: the impressive sum of 5,000,000 guilders Ambrogio lent the king in 1603 to support the war – thanks to his fortune and the mobilization of his financial networks between Genoa, Naples, Flanders, and particularly Antwerp – gave the Spanish crown a favorable outcome for the siege of Ostend (1604) and, more generally, for appeasing the troops, finally paid, not to mention for developing a genuine strategy of war.¹⁹ At the same time, though, it kept Ambrogio's whole family in a state of permanent tension. Indeed, Ambrogio would only recover part of his investment – and not before 1619, at that. This tension was destined to worsen in the face of the crown's impossibility of honouring its debts, such that ruin and dishonour were for many years an altogether real possibility for Ambrogio and his family entourage. Even so, these letters help us see how the ties created by money gradually transformed themselves into a capacity, on Spinola's part, to exert a great deal of pressure for obtaining from Philippe III, and then Philippe IV, advantages of a different nature for himself and three of his four children: Agostino, Filippo, and Polissena.²⁰ Alicia Esteban has shown quite clearly the effectiveness

¹⁷ Leon Battista Alberti, *I libri della famiglia*, ed. by Ruggiero Romano and Alberto Tenenti (Turin: Einaudi, 1994), I, pp. 143–53.

¹⁸ Juan Carlos Domínguez Nafra, 'Spinola y Grimaldi, Ambrosio de', in *Diccionario biográfico español* (DBE) (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2009), 47, pp. 284–91. See also Rodríguez Villa, *Ambrosio Spinola*; and Filippo Casoni, *Vita del marchese Ambrogio Spinola, l'espugnatore di fortezze* (Genova: Casamara, 1691). On this, see also Carlo Bitossi, 'Storiografia civile genovese: l'opera di Filippo Casoni dai manoscritti alla stampa', in *Erudizione e storiografia settecentesche in Liguria*, ed. by Carlo Bitossi (Genova: Accademia ligure di Scienze e Lettere, 2004), pp. 444–83.

¹⁹ Domínguez Nafra, 'Spinola y Grimaldi, Ambrosio de', p. 286.

²⁰ Herrero Sánchez, 'La red genovesa Spinola', pp. 110–7.

of the military power – not to mention political and financial as well – exercised by Ambrogio in Brussels between 1605, when he was nominated *Gobernador de la Hacienda del Ejército de Flandes* (governor of finance of the Army of Flanders), and 1621, when his ally Archduke Albert died. No general would thereafter ever enjoy such room for maneuvering, the result of the various but convergent interests of the archdukes and the king. Everyone involved saw in Ambrogio the guarantor of effective military action but, more important, he could ensure the fidelity of the Low Countries aristocracy, thanks to a policy of *ventajas extraordinarias* (extraordinary grants) on a large scale.²¹ It was a policy Luc Duerloo has defined as characterized by “calculated ambiguities” and a capacity for managing consent.²²

Throughout the thirty years of Ambrogio’s Flemish adventure, in both Genoa and Spain, his family tried to extract a maximum of profit in political and social terms from the state of affairs by manifesting an effective internal solidarity in facing financial emergencies. Ambrogio having opted for a gradual but irreversible move towards Spain, it was his sisters who benefited from the symbolic capital generated by Ambrogio in the Genovese context.

War, finances, and family honour

The years that followed the victory of Ostend seem more distressing for the family’s finances. Certainly, in passing through Valladolid before the 1605 campaign, Ambrogio was named *maestre de campo general de los ejércitos de Flandes* (general field marshal of the Army of Flanders) and *superintendente general de la Hacienda* (general superintendent of finance), while also receiving the Golden Fleece, but not all of those recognitions were to have immediate economic impacts. In June 1607, when the military architect Ludovico Biglia wrote Spinola several letters to update him on advancements in projects and completion of various fortifications and the relative costs, Ambrogio’s representative in Genoa, Andrea Spinola, was categorical: the Spinolas were incapable of contracting any new debts “which should it be necessary, would require paying off the old [debts]”.²³

²¹ Alicia Esteban Estríngana, *Guerra y finanzas en los Países-Bajos católicos: de Farnesio a Spinola (1592–1630)* (Madrid: Laberinto, 2002), pp. 129–204.

²² Luc Duerloo, *El archiduque Alberto. Piedad y política dinástica en la época de las guerras de religión* (Madrid: CEEH, 2012), pp. 185–225.

²³ “[...] qua in casa è necessario che si vadino estinguendo li vecchi [debiti]”, AGRB, SEG, reg. 128, Letter of Andrea Spinola to Ambrogio Spinola, Genoa, 11 June 1607, fol. 201.

Andrea is aware of the pressure exerted on Ambrogio by other bankers of his entourage, particularly in Antwerp, but he cannot agree to take on further debts based on Genovese resources. Obviously, the petition Spinola addressed to the king in April of that same year to at least pay back part of his debt had not had the hoped-for effect: "I can't be like that, and I've resolved to give orders to sell the things I have in Genoa", he had told Philip III.²⁴ The Spinolas' serious concerns were well founded. In November 1607, Philip III declared the suspension of payments: the royal treasury was unable to refund its debts and declared itself insolvent. The news arrived in Genoa at the end of November, even though just a few months earlier the king had assured the Republic that he would honour his debts.²⁵

By 1608, the tensions running through the Spinolas' international financial network connecting Madrid, Antwerp, Genoa, and Naples had reached a zenith. The creditors of some were the debtors of others, and a solution seemed impossible without royal reimbursements. The honour of the general of the Army of Flanders was in danger. Financial representatives of Ambrogio in Madrid – notably Carlo Strata – demanded to be reimbursed with money freed up in Genoa, but Andrea Spinola could only repeat to Ambrogio that that was strictly impossible.²⁶ By year's end, Ambrogio's mother Polissena, who kept up a very intense relationship with her eldest despite the distance, took advantage of her letter of Christmas wishes to share her concerns: "Here, however, we are anxious [...] For the moment, I can't see a solution to our worries coming from Spain." Too absorbed in his service to the king in the field in Flanders,

²⁴ "[...] yo no puedo estar así, y me resuelvo a dar orden que se vendan las cosas que tengo en Génova", quoted by Domínguez Nafria, 'Spínola y Grimaldi, Ambrosio de', p. 286, Letter of Ambrogio Spinola to King Philip III, 18 April 1607.

²⁵ Carlos Javier de Carlos Morales, 'Entre dos "bancarrotas": los asentistas genoveses y la real Hacienda de Castilla 1607-1627', in *Centros de poder italianos en la Monarquía hispánica (siglos XV-XVII)*, ed. by José Martínez Millan and Manuel Rivero Rodríguez (Madrid: Polifemo, 2010), Vol. 2, pp. 1053-94. See also Alicia Esteban Estríngana, *Guerra y finanzas en los Países Bajos católicos: de Farnesio a Spinola, 1592-1630* (Madrid: Laberinto, 2001), and Yasmina R. Ben Yessef Garfia, 'Confianza e interdependencia en el sistema de crédito hispánico a finales del siglo XVI: un análisis a través de las cartas de Génova del Archivo Simón Ruiz', in *Más que negocios: Simón Ruiz, un banquero español del siglo XVI entre las penínsulas ibérica e italiana*, ed. by Juan Ignacio Pulido Serrano (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2017), pp. 167-207.

²⁶ AGRB, SEG, reg. 129, fols. 85-7, Letter of Andrea Spinola to Ambrogio Spinola, Genoa, 27 September 1608.

Ambrogio is not seeing to his business in Genoa as he would normally have to, and that is becoming worrisome.²⁷

Only a year later, after ratification of the Twelve Years' Truce in accordance with Spinola and the archdukes' wishes, a moderate optimism appeared in Genoa, in connection with the truce's consequences on royal finances and, hence, on the possibility of being reimbursed. On that occasion Andrea Spinola recalled that it was thanks to Ambrogio's initiative that many of his banker friends had agreed to lend the king large sums, in considering Ambrogio the guarantor of the sovereign's solvency.²⁸ Yet that did not entirely resolve the situation: even in 1612, Ambrogio had to ask one of his richest sisters, Lelia, to reimburse certain Madrid creditors in his stead. She agreed to do so, while also maintaining a regular correspondence with Carlo Strata to verify that he was, in turn, demanding the reimbursement of credits on the part of Spanish nobles.²⁹ Lelia knew she could count on her brother. A few years earlier, in 1610, Ambrogio had for example taken the necessary steps with Cardinal Borja to successfully support one of Lelia's children, Carlo Grimaldi, in entering the papal court.³⁰

In any case, between 1609 and 1610, at the beginning of the Twelve Years' Truce, Ambrogio showed a renewed interest in his finances. He wrote to Genoa to order investments in the production of silk, oil, and soap.³¹ Above all, he engaged in negotiations via correspondence for the marriage of his eldest daughter, Polissena, who was then about fifteen. At the time, Polissena was living with her sister Maria at the Clarisse Convent of San Leonardo in Genoa. Following Ambrogio's departure, their mother, Giovanna Baciadonne, had decided to place them there. They had an apartment with maidservants and a priest – who was paid by Giovanna and celebrated mass every day for the young girls. The nuns, who had in exchange received generous and perpetual donations

²⁷ "Qui stiamo tuttavia ansiose [...] Di Spagna non si vede che per ancora quelli dispiaceri restino accomodati", AGRB, SEG, reg. 129, fol. 95, Letter of Polissena Grimaldi to Ambrogio Spinola, Genoa, 22 December 1608.

²⁸ "V.E. fece istanza a tutti gli amici che agiutassero – come fecero molti –, che volsero però obbligo di V.E.", AGRB, SEG, reg. 129, fol. 111, Letter of Andrea Spinola to Ambrogio Spinola, Genoa, 16 May 1609.

²⁹ AGRB, SEG, reg. 130, fol. 16, Letter of Carlo Strata to Ambrogio Spinola, Madrid, 26 May 1612.

³⁰ AGRB, SEG, reg. 129, fol. 145, Letter of Ambrogio Spinola to his sister Lelia, 1 August 1610.

³¹ AGRB, SEG, reg. 129, fol. 145, Letter of Ambrogio Spinola to Quilico Spinola, 1 August 1610.

for the community, took charge of Maria and Polissena's education, and their maidservants knew that in doing their work diligently, they too would be rewarded with a dowry enabling them to marry or take the veil.³² The girls wrote regularly to their father from the convent, and he was quite faithful in answering, even when on a military campaign: "If I am on campaign, I won't stop writing and you'll do the same", he reminded Maria in summer 1610.³³ These young people were aware of the matrimonial negotiations in progress, and their father shared with them his preferences of the moment for the prince of Boboli, rather than the prince of Avellino. Meanwhile, from Flanders, the general unceasingly gathered information through his network of men and women from the high Genovese aristocracy, while insisting Andrea Spinola verify the financial aspects of the arrangement. Indeed, for a man obsessed with honour, weighty comparisons with the preceding generations were called for: his father Filippo had married his five girls, and each with a dowry of 50,000 *scudi*.³⁴ None of them had had to be sacrificed to a convent to limit expenditures, and each marriage had guaranteed the family important alliances. Ambrogio's wife, the only daughter of the *richissime* Giovanni Baciadonne and Pellina Doria, had, in 1587, brought a dowry of over 90,000 *scudi* – "the best dowry that was ever given to an heir",³⁵ as it was put in Genoa. Orphaned from birth, Giovanna had turned over the entire patrimony inherited from her ancestors – and particularly from her uncle Giacomo Pallavicino Baciadonne – to her husband, who had pledged to preserve it all: the dowry money, patrimony, and feudal possessions.³⁶ That, however, was not at all what happened.

Ambrogio would never have dreamt of marrying both his daughters, and his projects were consequently concentrated on Polissena. Since the winter of 1607, his correspondence with his sisters – and especially with his mother – attest to his plans, which were to remain futile for over ten

³² Rodríguez Villa, *Ambrosio Spinola*, p. 16.

³³ "Sebene mi troverò in campagna, non lascerò di scrivere, come potrete far voi ancora", AGRB, SEG, reg. 129, fol. 145, Letter of Ambrogio Spinola to his sister Maria, 1 August 1610.

³⁴ Rodríguez Villa, *Ambrosio Spinola*, p. 13.

³⁵ "[...] la miglior dote che si sia mai data a erede", ibidem, p. 15; Andrea Lercari, 'Famiglia Basadonne', sheet 45, in Soprintendenza Archivistica per la Liguria, *Repertorio di fonti sul patriziato genovese*. I would like to thank Andrea Lercari for send me this information.

³⁶ Rodríguez Villa, *Ambrosio Spinola*, p. 12. Casoni, *Vita del marchese Ambrogio Spinola*, p. 19, taken up by Villa, refers to an implausible dowry of 500,000 *scudi* without references to specific documents, unlike Lercari.

years. Since his investments in the war in Flanders, Ambrogio's financial availability no longer matched the scale of his ambitions, and after 1610 matrimonial negotiations came to a standstill until the 1620s.³⁷ 1610 ended on a very sad note for Ambrogio: his mother Polissena died after a short illness in December. She was born seventy years earlier, daughter of Nicolò Grimaldi, called "il monarca" for his influence and enormous wealth, the fruits of banking activity between Emperor Charles V and the Roman papacy, which had enabled him to diversify his investments in the Spanish possessions of Italy. Thirty-six years a widow, Polissena had placed her intelligence and intellectual subtlety at the service of what was truly a family project, whose lines she had defined with her father and then her husband. "From both she had learned most noble traits and sentiments, making her superior to her own sex, with a certain genius, mixed with piety and a virile spirit", was how she was described by Filippo Casoni – lawyer, historiographer, and Ambrogio's first biographer.³⁸ She had seen to providing her two boys the education most suited to her projects: mathematics – quite obviously! – but also, letters, fencing, and horsemanship and, for Ambrogio, history and the art of war, a discipline that had always fascinated him. Polissena had nourished a feeling of responsibility in her eldest who, despite his desires, did not go off to war before having ensured the continuity of his lineage and having positioned his family as the direct rival of the all-powerful Dorias. Yet this mother, both a strategist and determined, also showed a certain flexibility in dealing with her children. Federico, who had been sent to study in Salamanca for an ecclesiastical career he had no interest in, was able to return to Genoa and embark on a military career.³⁹ Hence they had to wait for Lelia and Ambrogio's children – particularly Agostino (fig. 3.4) – for the Spinola-Grimaldi clan to produce two princes of the church between Rome and Seville.

³⁷ See, for example, AGRB, SEG, reg. 129, fol. 9, Letter of Polissena Grimaldi to Ambrogio Spinola, Genoa, 12 February 1607. This dossier figures at the centre of this period's correspondence (1607–1610) with Andrea Spinola.

³⁸ "Aveva da ambi appresi tratti e sentimenti nobilissimi, che la facevano superiore al sesso stesso, con un certo genio, misto di pietà e di spirito virile", in Casoni, *Vita del marchese Ambrogio Spinola*, p. 11, quoted by Blythe Alice Raviola, 'Spinola, Polissena (nata Grimaldi)', in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (DBI), 93 (2018), online: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/polissena-spinola_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/ (last access on 15 November 2020).

³⁹ Rodríguez Villa, *Ambrosio Spinola*, p. 14.



Fig. 3.4. Portrait of Agostino Spinola, Cardinal Archbishop of Granada, by Pedro Raxis el Mozo (Granada, Arzobispado de Granada).

The death of she who personally signed her weekly letters to Ambrogio by adding, in her own hand, “Your Mother, with love”, left a painful emptiness in him. On 8 January 1611, from Brussels, he shares his distress with his sisters

on the loss that we have suffered of our mother, who I felt was greater in being the thing that I most loved and revered in this world. And though we must conform with the supreme will, I nonetheless remain quite inconsolable in not having been able to see her as I hoped.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ “[...] della perdita [che] abbiám fatto di nostra madre. Che l’ho sentito quanto è maggiore per essere la cosa che più amava e riveriva in questo mondo. E se ben bisogna conformarsi con la volontà suprema, tuttavia resto sconsolatissimo per non haverla potuta vedere come sperava”, AGRB, SEG, reg. 129, fol. 178, Letters of Ambrogio Spinola to Battina Pallavicina, Lelia Spinola, Maria Spinola et al., Brussels, 8 January 1611.

On that occasion, Ambrogio received many letters of condolence, and his secretary did what was called for to ensure a response. Nevertheless, at the end of the list of the closest recipients, who included the general's siblings, he notes: "to our Lady the marquise Juana, his Excellency responded in his own hand".⁴¹ Ambrogio had thus answered his wife directly in demonstrating his attention, a sense of intimacy that was the consequence of a precise hierarchy in his familial relations, which we also find elsewhere. It is not surprising that the couple's letters are very limited in the collection: at least over the 1603–11 period, in the rare testimonies we have at our disposal, Giovanna refers to a correspondence that seems regular but which, unlike that with other family members, does not touch on questions of clan management of human and financial resources. It manifests, rather, a private correspondence that does not involve Ambrogio's personal secretary. In any case, at the time of Polissena's death, it was Giovanna who wrote first to her husband, on 23 December 1610. The two women lived together at the *palazzo* of Acquasola, and Giovanna writes the letter in her own hand, quite simply signing it with her first name: "I didn't love her as a mother-in-law but as a mother and, further, I assure you that she too loved me as a daughter and showed me that clearly in the five days she spent in bed".⁴²

Though she had no time to write her will, Polissena asked her daughter-in-law to see to her religious bequests: 500 *scudi* for various religious institutions in the city and a thousand masses for her soul. Giovanna thus informed her husband that the only thing left to do was distribute a little money to the personnel of the house staff. She was aware of the pain the news would cause Ambrogio – "the torment this new woe of mine will give you" – but she could not help referring to her own malaise: "I think it would be good if I asked my mother, so as not to be so alone, to come and stay with me a few days".⁴³ That letter is not the

⁴¹ "A nostra Signora la marchesa Juana respondió S.E. de sua mano", AGRB, SEG, reg. 129, fol. 179.

⁴² "Non l'amava da socera ma da madre e vi assicuro che lei ancora mi amava come figlia e ben me l'ha mostrato in questi cinque giorni che è stata in letto", AGRB, SEG, reg. 129, fols. 174–175, Letter of Giovanna Baciadonne to her husband Ambrogio Spinola, Genoa, 23 December 1610.

⁴³ "[...] il travaglio che vi averà dato questa mia mala nuova [...] penso che sarà bene che preghi mia madre, per non star così sola, a venir a star qualche giorni con me", AGRB, SEG, reg. 129, fol. 174, Letter of Giovanna Baciadonne to Ambrogio Spinola. Regarding the role of women in Genoa in maintaining the familial presence, see Ben Yesséf Garfia, 'Lazos sociales, estrategias de linaje e identidad nacional', pp. 157–72.

only time Giovanna brings up her loneliness. From 1602 on, her husband only very rarely returned to Genoa, until his wife's death around 1618. In spring 1611, two months after Ambrogio's passing through Genoa before his departure for Madrid,⁴⁴ she wrote him three letters in a few days, insisting on having news from him, as Ambrogio had not written for some three weeks. It is impossible to know if, following Polissena's death and being reunited with Ambrogio, Giovanna had dreamt of a more important place in her husband's life. What is sure is that she expressed her desire for a more personal relationship with him, even at a distance. Having left for the thermal baths at Acqui, near the family fiefdoms between Liguria and Piedmont, Giovanna ordered that she be immediately brought any letter from her husband: "[A]fter yours of the seventh, I've had no other. I look forward to it with great anticipation; therefore, I left orders in Genova that should a messenger come, they should send a man to me immediately".⁴⁵

Giovanna notes that in Acqui she was greeted by a delegation of city notables and by the council president of the town of Casale Monferrato, who had come from the city to welcome her. She was an important woman who was used to being looked up to, and who describes the attention her family receives to her husband.⁴⁶ Even on that occasion, though, she mentions having asked her sister-in-law Lelia to accompany her, so as not to be alone. This loneliness in all likelihood weighs on her and, unlike Polissena, she does not manage to take advantage of it by becoming essential to the men of her family entourage. In addition, also in May 1611, Giovanna expresses her financial concerns to Ambrogio and implores him to take stock of the critical situation they are in. They cannot settle for honorary titles alone. It is urgent that the royal recognition manifest itself in a concrete way:

You write to tell me that you still cannot tell me anything about what you are negotiating there. I therefore remain most desirous of knowing what is to be done. I would not like the reward to

⁴⁴ José Benavides, *Spinola, capitán general de los tercios. De Ostende a Casal* (Madrid: La Esfera de los libros, 2018), pp. 143–4.

⁴⁵ "[...] dopo la vostra delli 7, non ne ho più avuta altra. Ne sto aspettando con grandissimo desiderio, perciò ho lasciato ordine in Genova che sempre verrà corsiero, che spediscono homo a posta", AGRB, SEG, reg. 129, fols. 195–196, Letter of Giovanna Baciadonne to Ambrogio Spinola, Acqui, 31 May 1611.

⁴⁶ AGRB, SEG, reg. 129, fols. 193–194, Letter of Giovanna Baciadonne to Ambrogio Spinola, Acqui, 31 May 1611.

be solely of honour, but also of utility, our house now being in such a state of need.⁴⁷

The year after, in April 1612, Ambrogio would be named “Grande de España” by Philippe III, but even a partial recovery of his finances only came upon his return to Flanders. From spring 1611 on, it becomes impossible to follow the relationship between Ambrogio and his wife based on the Brussels Archives. They contain just one last letter from Giovanna, dated July 1614. In it, she solicits Ambrogio’s favour for the Jesuit College of Cambrai. The tone is respectful, if somewhat formal: “From my heart I kiss your hand. Giovanna Spinola”.⁴⁸

These few features in the history of a couple remind us of the lived experiences of many women, from every social status, who lost everything they had to war. The petitions to the king of Spain and the Council of State preserved at the General Archives of Simancas, relate the course of their lives and the practical consequences of the legal and financial powerlessness of women in the Ancien Régime. War for them did not just mean losing their men but also giving up their dowries, regularly committed for raising troops, equipment for their husbands, and all manner of military expenses.⁴⁹

While Genoa was known as “a paradise for women” due to the freedom of action they are said to have enjoyed, the reality of men, members of the financial and commercial oligarchy, constantly travelling, certainly had consequences on the women’s room to maneuver freely. Wives very often became their husbands’ business partners. Yet the fact remains that, according to the city statutes, even if a woman was the owner of her dowry, she could not do what she wanted with it. It amounted to a

⁴⁷ AGRB, SEG, reg. 129, fol. 189, Letter of Giovanna Baciadonne to Ambrogio Spinola, Genoa, 23 May 1611.

⁴⁸ “Di cuore vi bacio le mani. Giovanna Spinola”, AGRB, SEG, reg. 130, fol. 140, Letter of Giovanna Baciadonne to Ambrogio Spinola, Genoa, 12 July 1614.

⁴⁹ *Le ricchezze delle donne: diritti patrimoniali e poteri familiari in Italia (XIII-XIX secc.)*, ed. by Giulia Calvi and Isabelle Chabot (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1998); *Femmes, dots et patrimoines*, ed. by Angela Groppi and Gabrielle Houbre in *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, 7 (1998); Simona Feci, *Pesci fuor d’acqua. Donne a Roma in età moderna: diritti e patrimoni* (Roma: Viella, 2004); Isabelle Chabot, ‘Richezze femminili e parentela nel Rinascimento. Riflessioni intorno ai contesti veneziani e fiorentini’, *Quaderni storici*, n. s., 40, 118 (1) (2005), 203–29; *Construire les liens de famille dans l’Europe moderne*, ed. by Anna Bellavitis, Laura Casella and Dorit Raines (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2013); Paola Lanaro, ‘Les stratégies patrimoniales familiales de l’élite vénitienne au XVIII^e siècle’, *Annales de démographie historique*, 134 (2017/2), 151–72.

kind of loan to her husband that she could only lay claim to in the event of her husband's death, imprisonment, or banishment. This imbalance was partially offset by the permission of wives whose husbands had been absent for over six months to act as an individual power in the couple's interest, with the agreement of the husband's potential representatives. In the event of prolonged absence (i.e., more than six years), the woman could even demand restitution of the dowry.⁵⁰ Giovanna never did that. It is not insignificant that, devoting a few pages to Giovanna in his biography of Ambrogio, Filippo Casoni underlines her detachment from money and the nobility of heart of a wife who defended her indebted husband's honour to the point of putting her jewels up as collateral. In the civic religion of money and honour, Giovanna thus becomes the model of a devoted wife. According to Casoni she never complained yet rejoiced at Ambrogio's victories, which she much appreciated:

victories that were useful to religion, and triumphs for the cause of God. [...] Seeing her husband go into debt daily for the very large sums the war of Flanders engulfed, never bothered her but, rather, with a generosity exceeding her sex – sometimes to compensate for the expenses imposed on him or else cash advances she had to insure by her husband's order, she managed too at the risk of her jewels, and the most precious things in the House.⁵¹

That was not all that self-evident for someone who had brought a stupendous dowry. Through her detachment from money, too, Giovanna distanced herself from the attitudes of her sisters-in-law in embracing the long tradition of Genovese aristocrats committed to lives of devotion and active engagement in charity in "hospitals and charitable trusts".⁵² Since Caterina Fieschi Adorno (d. 1510), director of the Hospital Pammatone and founder of the Confraternity of Divino Amore, the major Mediterranean port of Genoa had experienced the development of

⁵⁰ Mita Vellutini, *L'albergo Spinola nel "secolo dei Genovesi". Una strategia di potere tra Genova e l'Europa*, typewritten copy, 2002, pp. 4–5. I would like to thank Mme Orsi of the Fondazione Spinola of Genova for having permitted me to consult this work.

⁵¹ "[...] che riuscissero utili alla religione, e che vincesse per la causa di Dio. [...] Vedendo il marito indebitarsi quotidianamente di somme relevantissime, assorbite dalla guerra di Fiandra, non ne prese mai fastidio, anzi con generosità superiore al sesso talvolta per supplire alle tratte, che li venivano fatte, & alle rimesse, che li conveniva fare d'ordine del marito, compiva anco con lo riguardo delle sue gioie, e delle cose più preziose della Casa", in Casoni, *Vita del marchese Ambrogio Spinola*, pp. 220–1.

⁵² "[...] ospitali et luoghi pii", *ibidem*, p. 221.

a spirituality that was at once mystical and extremely concrete, perfectly aligned to a community of merchants, which often saw couples making a commitment together.⁵³ In fact, unlike what occurred in other spaces of Italian Catholicism of the time, married status for the women of Genoa did not distance them from holiness. Conjugal love and concrete charity towards the poor and sick were central in devout and hagiographical discourses. That, for example, was the case of Geronima Spinola, active in Genoa in the same years as Ambrogio and Giovanna: a loving wife, a housewife attentive to the material and spiritual needs of her children and their staff, a spiritual guide for several young aristocrats, Geronima had her own motto, a quite intelligent adaptation of the Benedictine's injunction, "Who works, prays".⁵⁴ She embodied an intelligent and serene spirituality, nonchalantly distancing herself from the arrogance characterising her milieu for concrete action which found its resources in marital love and contempt of money. It was a model ringing true for Giovanna as well.

"Ingrandire la famiglia": a father and his children

Giovanna died at the end of 1614.⁵⁵ Her husband was at that moment caught up in his responsibilities in military administration at the court of Brussels, as well as with remedies for his family finances. His correspondence with the women of his house gives an account of his progress. It is moreover clear that support for his children is thenceforth part of the methods the crown chose to reimburse in part its debts to the banker/general. As mentioned earlier, Filippo and Agostino were children when they were sent to the court of Madrid as *meninos* of the

⁵³ Silvia Mostaccio, *Osservanza vissuta, osservanza insegnata. La domenicana genovese Tommasina Fieschi e i suoi scritti* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1999), pp. 38–68; Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci, *I devoti della carità: le confraternite del Divino Amore nell'Italia del primo Cinquecento* (Napoli: La città del sole, 2002), pp. 57–94. Regarding the dissemination of the model of charity active in the seventeenth century, see Barbara Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity. Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris* (Oxford–New York: OUP, 2004).

⁵⁴ "Chi lavora, ora  Francesco Antonio Massola, *Vita e virtù di Geronima Spinola de' signori di Campolungo*, ed. Isabella Spinola Colonna duchessa di S. Pietro (In Tortona: per Nicolò e fratelli Viola, 1678), p. 54.

⁵⁵ Thank you to Luca Lo Basso, who shared with me documents about Giovanna's death: ASG, Notai Antichi, notaio Gio. Francesco Valetaro, 3129; ASG, Notai Antichi, notaio Gio. Batta Cangialanza, 4714; ADAC, Los Balbases, leg. 91 (1), doc. 4, 4 September 1661. From Madrid, the condolences were sent to Genoa on 18 February 1615, Archivio General de Simancas (AGS), Estado, leg. 1933, doc. 169.

Queen Marguerite of Austria (1607). Some ten years later, in 1613, the Council of State granted them an income of 4,000 *scudi* in gold per annum, even if Ambrogio had to remind the king a few times before it was deposited.⁵⁶ At the same time, correspondence with Carlo Strata, his agent in Madrid, testifies to how attentively Ambrogio followed the steps of his children in building a solid career course – by them and for them. For Filippo, it may have been a question of choosing the moment most propitious for endeavoring to receive, for example, “the habit of Alcantara or another if it’s better”, while navigating between the wishes of the count-duke of Olivares and the sovereign’s.⁵⁷ For Agostino, however, it was his cultural and moral capital that had to be highlighted first and foremost.⁵⁸ Ambrogio wanted all the details of the subjects studied by his son at Alcalá de Henares, where the young man was refining his education before studying at Salamanca, and any changes had to be approved by his father.⁵⁹ The years 1618-19 marked an important watershed in the general’s consolidating his plans: as concerns Filippo, who followed his father in a military and political career (fig. 3.5), what counted was bolstering his prestige by increasing his financial resources. Ambrogio demanded of Andrea Spinola, who was managing his business in Genoa, that his son be able to count on 3,000 *scudi* of gold a year, to be added to his 400 *scudi* monthly pension; that being “to meet his household

⁵⁶ Rodríguez Villa, *Ambrosio Spinola*, p. 291.

⁵⁷ “[...] el habito de Alcantara o altro se fosse meglio”, AGRB, SEG, reg. 130, fols. 126-129, Letter of Ambrogio Spinola to Carlo Strata, 1 February 1614. See also Giampiero Brunelli, ‘Spinola, Filippo’, in DBI, 93 (2018), online: [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/filippo-spinola_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/filippo-spinola_(Dizionario-Biografico)) (last access on 20 November 2020); Manuel Herrero Sánchez, ‘Spínola, Felipe’, in DBE, online: <http://dbe.rah.es/biografias/8401/felipe-spinola> (last access on 20 November 2020); Manuel Herrero Sánchez, ‘Génova y el sistema imperial hispánico’, in *La Monarquía de las naciones. Patria, nación y naturaleza en la Monarquía de España*, ed. by Antonio Álvarez-Ossorio Alvariano y Bernardo J. García García (Madrid: Fundación Carlos de Amberes, 2004), pp. 528–62.

⁵⁸ Ofelia Rey Castelao, ‘Spínola, Agustín’, in DBE, online: <http://dbe.rah.es/biografias/21124/agustin-spinola> (last access: 20 November 2020); Diego Pizzorno, ‘Spinola, Agostino’, in DBI, 93 (2018), online: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/agostino-spinola_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/ (last access on 20 November 2020); Fernando Quiles García, ‘*El arzobispo Agustín Spínola, promotor de las artes sevillanas del barroco (1645–1649)*’, in *Génova y la monarquía hispánica (1528–1713)*, ed. by Manuel Herrero Sánchez, Yasmina Rocío Ben Yessef Garfía, Carlo Bitossi and Dino Puncuh (Genova: Società Ligure per la Storia Patria, 2011), 2, pp. 731–52.

⁵⁹ AGRB, SEG, reg. 130, fol. 124^r, Letter of Carlo Strata to Ambrogio Spinola, Madrid, 12 December 1613.

expenses”.⁶⁰ The correspondence of those years reveals tensions between Ambrogio’s two boys over money. Their father seemed to turn a deaf ear to Agostino, who resents the money granted to Filippo since 1618 to provide the latter a lifestyle suited to his rank.⁶¹ Still, Ambrogio does not forget his youngest son’s ecclesiastical career in that period. Whereas Agostino would like to return to the court of Madrid, his father prevents his doing so, sure that to do so he had to wait to have a precise role to play there.⁶² In September 1619, following Ambrogio’s request, the king names Agostino as his confessor. Ambrogio sees that act as a promise of other favors on Philippe III’s part: “Procuring it is very much up to me and I hope that you will be deserving of it and oblige me with your good behavior. God keep you as I wish”.⁶³ The switch from Italian to Spanish in the father and son correspondence will prove a clue to definitive changes in references to geography and identity between Genoa and Madrid.

In November 1620, Ambrogio rejoiced at the benefice granted to Agostino in the kingdom of Naples, with the archbishopric of Matera.⁶⁴ In the meantime, he had mobilized his contacts to obtain from the pope the cardinal’s purple for Agostino (1621): “So that His Holiness would be pleased to honour my house with this cap in the first elevation that will take place to the cardinalate”.⁶⁵ It is particularly thanks to pressures Philippe III exerted and the negotiating conducted by Carlo Grimaldi, Ambrogio’s nephew, with Cardinal Sauli and other members of the Roman Curia, that they arrived at the nomination of Agustin as cardinal deacon in 1621.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ “[...] per supplire alle spese di sua casa”, AGRB, SEG, reg. 130, fol. 297, Letters of Andrea Spinola to Ambrogio Spinola, Genoa, 24 November 1618 and 1 December 1618.

⁶¹ AGRB, SEG, reg. 131, fols. 26–27, Letter of Ambrogio Spinola to his son Agostino Spinola, 14 January 1619.

⁶² AGRB, SEG, reg. 131, fols. 7–8, Letter of Ambrogio Spinola to Carlo Strata, 14 January 1619; AGRB, SEG, reg. 131, fols. 26–27, Letter of Ambrogio Spinola to Agostino Spinola, 14 January 1619.

⁶³ “El procurarlo queda muy a mi cargo y espero que vos lo yreis meresciendo y obligandome con vuestro buen proceder. Dios os guarde como yo desseo”, AGRB, SEG, reg. 131, fol. 181, Letter of Ambrogio Spinola to Agostino Spinola, Mariemont, 11 September 1619.

⁶⁴ AGRB, SEG, reg. 131, fols. 41–43, Letter of Ambrogio Spinola to Andrea Spinola, Wallerstein, 15 November 1620.

⁶⁵ “Acciò Sua Santità si compiacchia honorare la mia casa con questo cappello in la prima promotione che si farà del cardinalato”, *ibidem*.

⁶⁶ AGRB, SEG, reg. 130, fols. 301–303, Letters of Ambrogio Spinola to several recipients in Rome and Genoa involving Agostino’s cardinalate, 22 December 1618.



Fig. 3.5. Portrait of Filippo Spinola, 2nd Marquis of the Balbases, by Anthony Van Dyck, c. 1622-27 (private collection).

Faced with the representation expenses of the boys, the girls wait their turn: by means of Andrea Spinola, Maria begged her father to pay her the much more modest sum of 500 *scudi* a year that her mother had left her. Giovanna's attention to her younger daughter, conscious of her husband's practices, would not necessarily be enough to protect her.⁶⁷

Two years later, in 1620, Ambrogio felt that he was strong enough to return to Polissena's marriage dossier. Due to his achievements in the first phases of the Thirty Years' War, he had been named *mayordomo mayor* of Archdukes Albert and Isabella, and in September 1620 his sister Maddalena wrote to him to congratulate him on his nomination as "Capitan General in Germany!"⁶⁸ This assignment was sought after and coveted with extraordinary diligence by the first lords of Italy and Spain". Maddalena is also delighted by the meritorious actions accomplished by Filippo in Valtelline.⁶⁹ All of these elements would weigh favorably in the negotiations for Polissena's marriage: they are interconnected, but the requests of applicants in terms of dowry are still too high.⁷⁰ Maria and Polissena still lived together in Genoa, and Ambrogio's sisters unceasingly write to him describing interesting widowers.⁷¹ From her apartment in San Leonardo, Maria keeps an eye on all her siblings. She is concerned about intermittent fevers afflicting Filippo, the exchanges involving Polissena's marriage and, above all, her father's life. Now that the war has flared up again, she no longer has regular news, and that worries her.⁷² Ambrogio answers as soon as he can in thanking her for her affectionate and regular letters, "which have been dear to me as usual. [...] but do not stop ever writing to me".⁷³

⁶⁷ AGRB, SEG, reg. 130, fol. 297, Letter of Andrea Spinola to Ambrogio Spinola, Genoa, 24 November 1618.

⁶⁸ As for the Spinola's appointment as "mayordomo mayor", see the contribution of Dries Raeymaekers in this same volume.

⁶⁹ "Capitan Generale in Alemagna. Questo incarico è stato ricercato e ambito con diligenze extraordinarie dai primi signori d'Italia e di Spagna", AGRB, SEG, reg. 132, fol. 26, Letter of Maddalena Spinola to Ambrogio Spinola, Genoa, 19 September 1620.

⁷⁰ AGRB, SEG, reg. 132, fol. 27, Letter of Andrea Spinola to Ambrogio Spinola, Genoa, 3 October 1620.

⁷¹ AGRB, SEG, reg. 132, fols. 3–4, Letter of Maddalena Doria Spinola to Ambrogio Spinola, Genoa, 28 March 1620.

⁷² AGRB, SEG, reg. 132, fol. 31, Letter of Maria Spinola to Ambrogio Spinola, Genoa, 17 October 1620.

⁷³ "[...] che mi sono state al solito carissime. [...] Non lasciate però di andarmi scrivendo sempre", AGRB, SEG, reg. 132, fols. 41–43, Letter of Ambrogio Spinola to Maria Spinola, Wallerstein, 15 November 1620.

In late 1621, the new king, Philippe IV, bestows the title of marquis de Los Balbases on Ambrogio, as well as naturalization of the kingdoms of Castille. Shortly thereafter, we find Polissena in Madrid, among the ladies-in-waiting of Queen Elisabeth of Bourbon. Ambrogio seems to have applied the same strategy here as with Agostino: the court is for those who enter it with a specific function. The few letters Polissena addressed to her father testify to her awareness of being his representative in Madrid: she tells of the queen's sadness at having just lost yet another child at birth, of the king's carefree voyages, of aristocrats thanking Ambrogio for the favors he granted their children in Flanders, of visits with influential people or with their wives to thank them for favors granted the Spinolas.⁷⁴

In autumn 1625, the victor of Breda was invited by his Genovese entourage to profit from his strong position to conclude a marriage without delaying.⁷⁵ In 1627, in fact, Polissena married Diego Mejía Felípez de Guzmán, a cousin of the very powerful Olivares and comrade-in-arms of Ambrogio, who had just been appointed 1st marquis de Leganés, and who had entered the Council of State of Madrid the year before. Polissena's dowry hearkens back to her mother's and her grandmother's and amounts to 200,000 ducats.⁷⁶ The family honour was saved (fig. 3.6).

⁷⁴ AGRB, SEG, reg. 132, fol. 169, Letter of Polissena Spinola to Ambrogio Spinola, Madrid, 9 February 1624; *Early Modern Habsburg Women: Transnational Contexts, Cultural Conflicts, Dynastic Continuities. Women and gender in the early modern world*, ed. by Anne J. Cruz and Maria Galli Stampino (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); *The Politics of Female Households: Ladies-in-waiting across Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Nadine Akkerman and Birgit Houben (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2014).

⁷⁵ AGRB, SEG, reg. 132, fol. 261, Letter of Giovan Battista Spinola to Ambrogio Spinola, Genoa, 6 September 1625.

⁷⁶ Gregory Hanlon, *Italy 1636. Cemetery of Armies* (Oxford–New York: OUP, 2016), pp. 48–54.



Fig. 3.6. Portrait of Polissena Spinola, Marchioness of Leganés, by Anthony Van Dyck, c. 1622-27 (private collection).

Conclusions: A masculinity built around paternity?

In the first pages of his civic hagiography of Ambrogio Spinola, Filippo Casoni recalls the point at which his hero had had to control his desire for military enterprises to fulfill above all his duty as an elder: "As the eldest son of a conspicuous and wealthy house, he was not allowed by custom and his mother's command to risk his life in the dangers of war before having secured his succession."⁷⁷ Accordingly, he only left his city for Flanders after having ensured his succession. As we have seen, his departure in no way resulted in a disinterest toward his sisters or his children. The various acts Ambrogio accomplished to ensure their future and the honour of his family all go to show how, all his life, the 1st marquis of Los Balbases performed his masculinity around a double model: that of paternity – or, rather, the attitudes expected of a *pater familias* – and that of a controlled warrior masculinity. Thus, for his children he was a father, a source of authority and affection, while for his mother and his wife, he was a *pater familias* who was devastated from maintaining three residences between Genoa, Brussels, and Madrid, but who, through those same residences, proved that he knew how to protect his family in guaranteeing them the social place they were due. For the army, thanks to his wealth, he played the role of father provider, in making their pay his priority – at least when it was possible in the early war years. Thus, his warrior masculinity was constructed in conjunction with the social perception of his paternal role, as incarnated in the image of the Catholic captain, celebrated by Giovanni Botero in the figure of Alessandro Farnese.⁷⁸ This is not at all surprising if we think of the centrality of the paternal role in the Protestant spiritual and political vision, which had led to serious reflection on the Catholic side too.⁷⁹ It was also constructed in the complementarity of the male figures interlocking with one another

⁷⁷ "[...] come primogenito di una casa cospicua, e ricca, non era permesso dal costume e dal comando materno d'arrischiare la vita a' pericoli della guerra, prima di avere assicurata la sucession", in Casoni, *Vita del marchese Ambrogio Spinola*, pp. 19–20.

⁷⁸ Giovanni Botero, *I Capitani. Con alcuni discorsi curiosi, cioè Relatione di Spagna, dello Stato della Chiesa, di Piemonte, della Contea di Nizza, dell'isola Taprobana, Saggio de' Principi e capitani illustri, Discorso dell'eccellenza della monarchia, della nobiltà* (Torino: Tarino, 1607); Herman Hugo (S.J.), *Obsidio Bredana armis Philippi III auspiciis Isabellae ductu Ambr. Spinolae perfecta* (Antuerpiae: ex officina Plantiniana, 1626). On Botero, see the contribution of Alice Blythe Raviola to this volume.

⁷⁹ *Masculinity in the Reformation Era*, ed. by Scott H. Hendrix and Susan Karant-Nunn (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2015); *Governing Masculinities in the Early Modern Period: Regulating Selves and Others*, ed. by Jacqueline Van Gent and Susan Broomhall (London: Routledge, 2016).

in the Spinolas' clannish culture. In this perspective, the discourses pronounced in 1613 at the time of the elections of Tommaso Spinola as doge of Genoa are particularly evocative. Ambrogio plays the role of a military champion there, of a Catholic captain:

He who is known for his illustrious works; he who we ourselves saw first as adult – in wisdom, more than in age; he who was so generous, so magnanimous, so strong, so wise; he who tamed the untamed; he who was victorious over the victors; he who conquered impregnable fortresses. He who, in short, simply flashed with a captain's splendor, who shone victorious in just wars, and thundered gloriously with resounding fame.⁸⁰

This is a role we see already in the *Storia degli uomini illustri della famiglia Spinola* (History of the illustrious men of the Spinola family), written by Albert Le Mire (Aubertus Miraeus), historiographer and hagiographer of the Spanish Netherlands, and published in Antwerp in 1607, to glorify the legacy of the conqueror of Ostend.⁸¹ This aspiration to a complementarity of profiles among Spinola men also animated the pages recounting the Spinolas' exceptionality in religious life. In 1624, the Jesuit Francisco Crespo, an important figure in reflection on the bonds between missions and martyrdom outside Europe, wrote a letter to Ambrogio from Madrid to accompany an unusual gift. A few months earlier, upon the arrival of galleons from the Far East, among the other letters of the missionaries was included an account of one such martyrdom. It described the 118 Christians martyred in Japan, in Nagasaki, in 1622 "and among them, the captain of them all was Father Carlos Espinola".⁸² Francisco thus decided to print the account and send it to the general. A few years later, in 1630, Herman Hugo, Ambrogio's confessor and superior of the Jesuit military mission to the Army of Flanders, translated a longer version of the *Vita* of the martyred Carlo into Latin. The dedication to Ambrogio

⁸⁰ "Quel noto a tutte l'opere illustri; quello che noi stessi vedemmo prima adulto di senno che di età; quel sì generoso, sì magnanimo, quel sì forte, quel sì sagace; quel domatore degli indomiti; quel vittorioso de' vincitori; quell'espugnatore delle fortezze inespugnabili. Quello, insomma, il quale appena balenò con splendori di capitano, che fulgorò vittorioso in giuste guerre, e tuonò glorioso con rimbombante fama", in Paolo Fornari, *Oratione fatta in Genova nella chiesa di San Lorenzo per la coronatione del Serenissimo Duce Tomaso Spinola* (In Genoa: presso Giuseppe Pavoni, 1614), p. 34.

⁸¹ Albert Le Mire, *Storia degli uomini illustri della famiglia Spinola scritta da Auberto Mireo, canonico scolastico* (Antwerp, 1607). Dedication to Ambrogio, pp. 3–13.

⁸² "[...] y entre ellos, el capitan de todos fue el P. Carlos Espinola", AGRB, SEG, reg. 132, fol. 195, Letter of Francisco Crespo to Ambrogio Spinola, Madrid, 2 July 1624.

was constructed around the concept of *familia* – obviously the Spinola family, though also the spiritual family of the Jesuits, and that of every Catholic with his father confessor.⁸³ The glory of Carlo and Ambrogio Spinola is accompanied here by the complementarity of functions between soldiers and missionaries for the triumph of the faith: "While you concentrate on steel in the West, his flames illuminate the East".⁸⁴

In looking again at the original Italian version of the same *Vita*, written in 1628 by another Ambrogio Spinola, a Genoese Jesuit, the tone changes and, between the lines, a reflection on the nature, constraints, and limits of families seems in order. The *Vita* is addressed "To the most Illustrious and excellent gentlemen of the house of Spinola". Even if they might get the impression that those who choose the religious life leave a clan logic behind, they too contribute to "aggrandising the family", the dedication argues.⁸⁵ The discourse is further enriched thanks to certain letters of Carlo, integrated into the text. In February 1621, writing to his cousin Massimiliano from his Japanese prison, Carlo speaks of the silence of the men in his family, to whom he had nonetheless written in the first years of his mission: "but getting no reply, I gave up, contenting myself with writing to the father provincial of Milan and the father rector of the College of Genoa".⁸⁶ As he knows that he will soon be executed for not having respected the decree expelling missionaries, and taking leave of a family which seems to have put him aside, Carlo recalls the dignity of martyrdom:

let them esteem this favor much more than the dignity, nobility, and riches they possess, which, if not accompanied by a good life and observance of the divine precepts [...] are a great impediment to salvation.⁸⁷

⁸³ Herman Hugo (S.J.), 'Illustrissimo et excellentissimo principi Ambrosio Spinolae Balbatiae Marchioni', in *Vita p. Caroli Spinolae Societatis Iesu pro christiana religione in Japonia mortui* (Antuerpiae: ex officina Plantiniana Balthasari Moreti, 1630), pp. 2–5.

⁸⁴ "[...] dum tu namque ferro Occidentem, ille flammis Orientem illustrat", ibidem, p. 3.

⁸⁵ "Agli Illustrissimi et eccellentissimi signori di casa Spinola [...] Ingrandire la famiglia", in Fabio Ambrosio Spinola, *Vita del P. Carlo Spinola della Compagnia di Giesu morto per la Santa Fede nel Giappone* (Roma: presso Francesco Corbellotti, 1628). Another undated edition, to be published in Bologna by Benacci, is the one I have consulted.

⁸⁶ "[...] ma non avendone ricevuto risposta, lasciai di farlo, contentandomi di scrivere al padre provinciale di Milano e al padre rettore del Collegio di Genova", ibidem, Letter to Massimiliano Spinola, Omura, 26 February 1621, pp. 155–61.

⁸⁷ "[...] questo favore lo stimino molto più che le dignità, nobiltà e ricchezze che possiedono; le quali, se non si accompagnano con la buona vita, e osservanza de' precetti divini [...] sono di grand'impedimento per salvarsi", ibidem, p. 159.

Beyond all rhetoric, the weight of family judgment is very present. What margins of maneuver remained for the individuals of this big family, engaged in businesses, war, and politics? How could one create his life course between Spain and Italy, Europe and wherever else possible still contributing to the economic and social capital of one's family while embracing a more personal project? Carlo, Ambrogio, and the others, each of them, offered their response.