

## “FROM IULM TO CASCINA MONCUCCO: A MULTI LAYERED STORY”

SEMINARIO - 16.10.2019

Barona is a district in the southwest of Milan, inhabited by about 100,000 people.

Barona, compared to other districts of Milan, is in a very special position: it is located in the middle of a slice of pizza with Porta Ticinese at the top and the two Navigli at the sides.

Finally, it marks the city border with the neighboring municipalities of Buccinasco, Assago and Rozzano.

Until the beginning of the last century, this whole area was considered Barona, since it was the largest settlement and the oldest in the area.

Then, in the 60s of the last century, it became the main of the neighborhoods that were created all around. And urban expansion integrated it into the city context.

This is the area where the IULM is located, in the northeast of the district.

It will be the area that we will analyze in more detail, because it will be the one that you will deal with for your work.

It will be the area occupied by the IULM Campus, the bus terminal and metro station Romolo M2, the area of Via Moncucco and Via Russoli, up to Viale Famagosta.

I will tell you about the history of three places in particular: Cascina Ranza, Mulino Ceresa and Cascina Moncucco.

We will also mention the two main waterways of the area: the Lambro Meridionale and the Roggia Boniforte with the Foppa Regina fountain.

I will first of all try to intrigue you by giving you some ideas and news from which to start your work.

Thick glaciers from the Alps reached Milan, carrying with them debris and continuously eroding the rocks as they passed through. The landscape was similar to that of Siberia in winter.

At the end of the last ice age, with the increase in temperatures and the consequent retreat and melting of the glaciers, enormous quantities of gravel and clay have accumulated, two materials that have made the Barona rich and famous for thousands of years. The remains of Mammoth have also been trapped in the sediments....

The territory of Barona became a wild and rich habitat for plants and animals, rich in water.

Despite the man, a part of this virgin territory survived until the Middle Ages and was preserved in the toponymy of some places that still exist today.

The name Barona comes from a Celtic-Ligurian word "*bar*" which indicates a place rich in vegetation and water. The Celtic-Ligurians were the first people to live in the area: here they found virgin land just like the one in this picture.

"Cantalupa" recalls the howling of wolves in these woods.

"Moncucco" (from the Latin *mons cuscus*) recalls the small post-glacial reliefs on which the first human settlements were born in the Po Valley.

"Monterobbio" (from the Latin *mons rubrum*) recalls the presence of dense oak forests.

"San Marco al Bosco" is a splendid little rural church once immersed in the woods and which today seems to float on the rice fields...

There is nothing left of the virgin forests of these places after 2500 years of anthropization. On the one hand, however, there are still some rare and ancient landscapes that remember the millenary agricultural tradition that has always characterized the human presence in these places. On the other hand, the inexorable and modern advance of the city and the progress of the times.

The Romans conquered the Celtic citadel in 225 BC, probably coming from the south-west and then crossing the Barona.

It is possible that traces of that conquest have remained in the toponymy of the area.

The Roman besiegers camped in two places in today's municipality of Buccinasco (from "*bucine*", the Roman war trumpets): Buccinasco Castello (usually where there is a castle there may have been a Roman *castrum*) and then, a little further north, at Romano Banco.

Finally, they entered Barona through the present district of Tre Castelli, which takes its name from the three farmsteads that may have been originally three camps (*tria castra*): Cascina Castel Solaro, Cascina Castel Vismara and Cascina Castel Roma.

Now I will show you the photo of where it all began... also to show you how far and difficult it was to reach the Barona from the first settlements that founded Milan.

The Celtic citadel - *Medhelan* - was a little bigger than Piazza della Scala, the Roman citadel - *Mediolanum* - at the maximum of its expansion arrived at the end of Via Torino... then miles of thick woods, swamps, rivers and their dangers.

The first to construct buildings and modify the landscape with hydraulic works were the Romans. The lands and buildings in the area of today's Barona were grouped in a sort of rural village called *Vicus Baronis*.

Of the 700 years of Roman domination of the Barona, there remain some settlements, but especially the extraordinary ability to exploit the large amount of water and distribute it everywhere through a dense network of irrigation ditches. The ability to manage the land also remains: the Roman centuriation was applied in many vast flat areas, including here.

This mechanism helped the owners to divide the land, but also the travelers to orient themselves in search of shelters and destinations.

The main farmhouses of Barona, as well as Cascina Ranza, are usually located at the junctions of the centuriation grid.

Some rural roads in the area still follow the boundaries of the Roman centuria.

The inhabitants of the area of the future Barona lived in the Vicus Baronis, an aggregate of land and rural buildings governed by a magister, a Roman patrician who resided in the city. So in Roman times there was a close connection between the city, which at the time ended just beyond via Torino, the Carrobbio, and the countryside.

The Western Roman Empire fell in 476 A.D. and the meshes of the empire widened, leaving vast areas defenseless and subject to anarchy or external invasions.

The future Barona isn't an exception. The inhabitants of the Vicus Baronis began to self-regulate and evolve, also thanks to the arrival of the Longobards.

The Lombards can be considered the link between Romanity and the Middle Ages, in fact they maintain much of the Roman law and organization although they evolve towards medieval feudalism.

The Roman *villas* of the Vicus Baronis, summer and productive residences of the Roman patricians, became Longobard *curtis*, a sort of small rural village ruled by peasants. Then buildings and lands became part of a feudal estate owned by an aristocrat or a Milanese monastery: a primitive version of our current farmsteads, as we know them today.

The first document that speaks of the Barona is a Longobard document of 973 A.D. in which reference is made to the Vicus Baronis.

But, beyond the events of history, we begin to have an idea of the situation at the Barona after the year 1000 A.D..

From that moment on, we begin to have documents for the transport of goods, notarial deeds, and other documents that allow us to know the first people and much more about the real context in which they lived.

It is interesting to note that a man named Ottone della Barona already appears in a deed of sale, indicating the importance of his place of origin and the fact that by the year 1100 this place was already known as Barona and no more as Vicus Baronis.

For over a century before the fall of the Western Roman Empire, Christianity had already been widespread in society, thanks also to the Edict of Milan of 313 A.D. of Emperor Constantine, with whom freedom of worship was affirmed in the empire.

The Christianization of the Barona area dates back to the fourth century (if not earlier).

In Barona there was a small country chapel for the main religious services, apparently from the dawn of Christianity.

The church quickly gained a lot of power and powerful monasteries were founded in Milan. They acquired and maintained for more than a thousand years most of the land around the city, including the area of Barona.

With the fall of the empire, the community of Vicus Baronis had to organize itself and the "Consiglio dei Capifamiglia" was born, constituted by the heads of all the family that were part of the community. This institution of self-management lasted for more than 1000 years, until the Austrian domination in 18th century.

In the Middle Ages, the increasing power of the Milanese monasteries also came from the widespread control of their possessions. In the thirteenth century all the water that passed through the irrigation ditches was counted and divided with a very accurate system of locks and detours. Everything was taxed or directly bought by monasteries: some of them bought from the owners the mouths for irrigation that brought water to their properties.

There are numerous rental and usufruct contracts, deeds of ownership and management of the irrigation mouths, which give an idea of how complex the system was.

But the church also brings some innovation: the *marcite*.

The Benedictines introduced this ingenious system to obtain 2-3 more forage harvests: this during the winter, when the field was normally impractical due to the frost. Taking advantage of the natural slope of the fields to the south and the abundant presence of fountains, during the winter months they broke the upstream bank of the field and flooded the fields with a thin layer of running water at a constant temperature of 14°C. In this way it was possible to obtain 2-3 crops of forage for the animals (which in this way could grow in health and produce more milk).

Another important milestone in the thirteenth century was the construction of the Naviglio Grande, a work unique in the world for the time, which was to connect Milan to Ticino.

Its construction began in 1177 and lasted over thirty years, ending in 1211.

Initially it was conceived as a defensive work against the people of Pavia, then its great economic potential was foreseen and it was decided to make it navigable, a work that ended in 1271-72. The Naviglio shipyard arrived in Barona between 1205 and 1210.

The large and perennial quantity of water allowed the proliferation of *Folle*, i.e. mills driven by the current that shredded rags and vegetable fibres to produce sheets of paper. For centuries the Barona has supplied the libraries of Milanese monasteries with paper.

Even today there are places that remind us of this activity: Cascina and Mulino della Folletta, Cascina Follazza...

Between 1200 and 1700 Barona cultivated all kinds of fruit and vegetables, vineyard, cereals, rice, and several times was crucial to the survival of Milan.

The fifteenth century saw the beginning of the construction of the Naviglio Pavese, a project that have suffered almost 500 years of troubled history and that ended only on August 16, 1819 during the Lombard-Venetian Kingdom.

1482-1499 / 1508-1513: Leonardo da Vinci was in Milan.

At the church of San Cristoforo he carried out a study on a spillway for the Naviglio Grande. This work is present in the famous *Codex Atlanticus*.

Since the dawn of Christianity in the area, there has always been a church in the place where there is now the church of SS Nazaro e Celso.

However, it has always been a small country chapel, which later became a small church for Sunday celebration.

The council took advantage of the opportunity offered by the pastoral visit of archbishop Carlo Borromeo to request in a determined way the elevation to parish church of the rural chapel of the Barona, now insufficient for the growing population. The risk and difficulty of moving through the woods and rivers to the distant churches of Cesano Boscone or San Lorenzo for baptisms or other important religious services was also pointed out.

In a few days the archbishop agreed and from August 1567 Barona, now very populous with its hundreds of residents, had his parish church.

The council was also allowed to elect the parish priest from a list of names proposed by the curia. In 1592-93 the church was completely rebuilt, larger and painted in white.

The 18th century was the century of the Austrian domination. With some reforms they abolished the Consiglio dei Capifamiglia in favour of a *Convocato degli Estimati*, obviously more faithful to the Austrian crown.

Towards the end of the century, Emperor Joseph II established the *Comune dei Corpi Santi*, a donut-shaped municipality that included all the urban suburbs outside the medieval walls. The Barona was included in the *Corpi Santi di Porta Ticinese e Porta Ludovica*, according to the relative city's medieval gate.

Factories were born and developed that produce terracotta and porcelain of the highest level, but the area also brings excellence in leather goods (thanks to the many tanneries).

Agricultural production is always the flagship of the Barona.

Between 1718 and 1760 the first land registry was drawn up, the *Teresian Land Registry*. The Barona is included and therefore we have a very faithful snapshot of the Barona from 1720.

Thomas Jefferson, the future third president of the United States, sent to France as a diplomat and observer of the current Revolution, crossed the area between 20 and 23 April 1787. In his travel diary we read the great interest for the agriculture of the area, for the machines and their operation, for the milk and its derivatives.

He carefully noted everything he saw, including the fact that there were also olive trees before 1709, when a great cold killed them all and it was decided not to replant them again.

He went up to Rozzano to see the preparation of the Grana cheese. Back in America, he will try to replicate much of what he saw here.

The nineteenth century was the century of the Industrial Revolution and urban expansion outside the medieval walls, even if in the early years the beauty of the previous centuries remained unchanged, as Stendhal recalls in his travel diary.

Milano, which now no longer fears invasions or conquests, leaves its medieval walls for the first time and begins to expand along the main communication routes and waterways.

In 1819 the Darsena was also created, demolishing a section of the Spanish walls, giving Milan a port that could compete with the main maritime cities for the traffic of goods on the Navigli.

Carolina di Brunswick, wife of the future King of England George IV, after the union with her husband decided to escape from court life by traveling around Europe since 1814. When she arrived in Italy she took Bartolomeo Pergami into her service. He immediately entered the queen's graces thanks to his kind soul and his beauty. The Queen, a lover of simple and carefree life, was very appreciated by the inhabitants of the Barona and when she organized dances and parties she opened the gates of her villa to ordinary people. She was a sort of Lady Diana of the times...The attention to Pergami, who in the meantime was appointed knight (and many other things) and with whom she spent much of her free time, together with her simple lifestyle generated a great scandal at the court of London. Such a scandal that in 1820, in an attempt to repudiate her, the king instituted a trial against her, in which the Barona was painted in to the eyes of the world as a place of perdition. Obviously, the real scandal was the trial, based on rumours and with the only purpose of driving away a queen with an inconvenient lifestyle according to the canons of the English court.

The industrial revolution in Barona is represented by the Richard factory, which produced porcelain and terracotta for every type of customer, both Italian and foreign. Richard's management, which succeeded that of the Tinelli brothers, brings new machinery for large-scale production, product innovation and a very modern vision. The company became an excellence in Italy and abroad thanks to exhibitions and Italian ceramics and terracotta began to be appreciated. That happened also thanks to a dedicated platform of the railway, the presence of the Naviglio Grande and the great capacity for innovation and management of the workers: it was able to provide a pension and health insurance for its workers decades before this happened by law.

Equally important were the laundry workers, with their powerful syndicate.

During the nineteenth century Richard was not the only boast of the area. An art chemicals company, a tannery, was also mentioned for important awards. A doctor was also awarded for the excellent vaccination campaign conducted the year before.

The hundreds of workers who came to work here from all over the country, together with their families, started the process of industrialisation of the area. For them and for the other factories that opened later, it was necessary to think of a new working-class building to be able to accommodate them all. This opened up a virtuous economic circle that changed the Barona forever.

In the first half of the twentieth century, in fact, the Barona could be considered a working-class district.

In Barona a strong and participated movement of Resistance to Nazi-Fascism was organized. There were many partisans, many women who acted to support them and to spread the news.

The local church also supported the Resistance, for example by taking care of the wounded and hiding the fighters.

In Barona, the resistance was organized in the factories, farmsteads and houses of Piazza Miani, through acts of sabotage and information.

There were heavy bombings in the area that caused dozens of victims, all civilians.

A tragic attack was carried out by a Brazilian squadron that missed the fuel deposit in front of the church of SS Nazaro and Celso and hit a hundred meters before a part of the Barona farmhouse, killing 8 people in a shop.

Also an allied plane fell 1 km southeast of the Cascina Moncucco, it seems because of a bomb dropped by mistake from an aircraft of the group placed at a higher altitude.

At the end of the war 30 partisans died, deported to concentration camps or shot in reprisals and raids.

The most important phenomenon after the Second World War was the great economic growth and massive immigration from the south and the depressed areas of the north. The first post-war generation was made up of workers and peasants. The second generation, the result of the economic boom, diversified the professions and worked in the nascent service sector. With the great immigration to the north, the Barona increased its residents by ten times in a few years, becoming a substantially working-class area and no longer an agricultural one. Entire districts were built for the workers and their families. Together with the population and the new districts, the city's services also arrived in this suburb: shops, hospitals, schools, tram and bus lines, the underground...

The Baron was not exempt from the tragic events related to the Years of Lead: 5 policemen were killed by extremist fringes.

The 70s and 80s were very complicated years for crime, murder, mafia and drugs issues.

## CASCINA RANZA

Its fields extended as far as the Cascina Maggiore and the railway to the north, the Lambro Meridionale to the west and south, the Boniforte ditch and the Mulino Ceresa to the east.

During the 20th century it housed a blacksmith with a foundry, a tavern with bowls and a popular dancing-room, apartments and stables for cows, pigs and horses (which the City of Milan used as "stradini", joining them to a cart with the necessary equipment to plug holes in the streets).

During the 80's the inhabitants received the eviction, the last ones left the farmhouse just before its demolition in 1987. Many remained in the area, moving into adjacent houses.

At the end of the 90's work began on the construction of the IULM campus and during the excavation work a powerful bomb from World War II was also found. Today, instead of the

farmhouse, there is Building 1 of the IULM and in its fields there is the rest of the campus, the subway Romolo M2 with the terminal for buses and Via Russoli.

There is no trace of the farmhouse or even of its famous Ripostiglio.

The Celtic-Ligurians were the first inhabitants of the Barona, according to current knowledge. They were Ligurian expanded throughout the western Po Valley then got in touch with the Celts coming from central Europe. They created a dense network of trade with the populations of the Alps and beyond as evidenced by some findings made right in the place where we are now. The trace of their passage is also found in the names of many places around here, recognizable by the suffix -ago, -asco, -engo, etc.. Over the centuries these Celtic and Ligurian populations merged into the Insubri, who founded Medhelan, the first settlement of modern Milan.

In December 1887, right here, at Cascina Ranza, a "*ripostiglio*" of weapons and artifacts from the Bronze Age (about 1500-1800 BC) was discovered. In other words, it is about the period in which Hammurabi created the first code of written laws in history, many centuries before the Trojan War. Axes, daggers, spear heads, pottery of Celtic-Ligurian origin were found. The first objects were found by chance by the workers of a clay quarry during excavation work, at a depth of about 1.5 metres. Many were thrown away or destroyed because they were considered to be waste of some kind. Others were kept and the news reached the palethnologist of the Museum of Natural History of Milan, Pompeo Castelfranco. He materialized at the quarry and obtained with difficulties the stop of the work for just 3 days: he had to recover the possible and make the surveys on the site before it was inexorably destroyed. What he found can be seen exhibited at the Archaeological Museum of the Castello Sforzesco. In a second visit the archaeologist finds other objects in the area, but any other attempt to study the site was useless because of the damage caused by the quarry activity.

## MULINO CERESA

Already reported by the Teresian Land Registry of 1720.

Between 1854 and 1856 there were 13 people living there and there was a laundry.

The canal Boniforte, derived from the Naviglio Grande, served the mill, just north of which branched off into a series of secondary channels.

The millstone had a diameter of 1.337 metres and rotated at 114 rpm. These performances were used for comparisons with other mills in Milan or other Italian cities.

With the closure of the Boniforte canal, in the 70's of the 20th century, the mill ceased its agricultural and laundry activities, becoming a residential complex.

Unlike the nearby Cascina Moncucco, the complex was inhabited continuously.

The massacre of Via Moncucco has been one of the most violent criminal action of recent decades in Milan. Even if the objective was only the owner of the restaurant, all those present, as witnesses were killed.



## CASCINA MONCUCCO

Ancient farmhouse, perhaps one of the first settlements in the area.

Its fields extended to those of Cascina Ranza and Mulino Ceresa to the north, to the east with those of Cascina Torretta, to the south with those of Cascina Monterobbio and to the west were bordered by the Lambro Meridionale.

In December 1887, in its fields was found a " storage room " of weapons of the Bronze Age (XV century BC), during the work of extraction of a clay quarry. The finds that have been saved are now shown at the Archaeological Museum of the Sforzesco Castle.

In 1906, along the banks of the Lambro Meridionale, some remains of Mammut (teeth, tusks and femur) were discovered, preserved in some sandbanks.

The farmhouse was part of a real rural village (PHOTO), with a small square and activities related to those of the farmhouse.

In the farmhouse there was a blacksmith, stables with pigs, chickens and roosters, horses, cows and veals.

The apartments of the residents and the workers faced the street.

Around the farmhouse there were vegetable gardens, especially on the south side, which disappeared in recent years in favor of a single large garden in the central courtyard.

Where today there are the tower buildings between via Russoli and via Moncucco there was the rest of the village: the cereal mill on the Pila, the laundry and tannery on the Lambrett, a mechanical factory that made bolts , the tavern with garden and ballroom (for a year it was also called Moulin Rouge, and was very popular).

A hundred metres south of the farmhouse was the origin of the Foppa Regina fountain, which then flowed south to the Chiesa Rossa.

The farmhouse was a fervent centre of the Resistance of the area and for this reason it also suffered a roundup in which, in different moments, 3 partisans of the Moncucco were killed.

The aerial bombardments of the Barona came up to a few tens of meters from Moncucco.

After the liberation, there were many repressions of the partisans against the fascists and collaborators in the area of Moncucco.

In 1967 the residents were evicted from the City of Milan, but the last left the farmhouse in 1988, now without fields and without the opportunity to continue farming. The village in front of the farmhouse was gradually erased between the 70's and 90's.

This was followed by decades of neglect and abandonment, which ended with the acquisition of the farmhouse by IULM (2016?), which restructured the complex and made it an integral part of the university campus.

In 1509 Leonardo designed and built a system to divert the excess water at the "Naviglio di San Cristoforo": the excess water flows into the spillway now called Lambro Meridionale.

The Lambro Meridionale, which originates at the church of San Cristoforo from the confluence of the waters of the river Olona with those of the spillway of the Naviglio Grande, follows the natural bed of the ancient Pudiga torrent.

The Roggia Boniforte is derived from the Naviglio Grande and ends in the Lambro Meridionale.

El Sassè, so called by the inhabitants, generated a dense network of secondary canals crossing the Mulino Ceresa and the Cascina Moncucco, and then reunited just before entering the Lambro Meridionale.

In front of the Cascina Moncucco there were two branches of the Boniforte canal that the inhabitants called "la Pila" and "Lambrett", used respectively to operate the mill for the husking of cereals and by the laundry.

The fountain of the Foppa Regina originates in via Moncucco and continues to the Pavese canal up to the area of Chiesa Rossa. According to the inhabitants' testimonies, around the place of origin of the Foppa Regina, there was a beautiful pond with water lilies, a thick reed bed and shrimps were fished there. Today in its place is this orange brick house at the beginning of Via Moncucco.

The industrialisation also affected the Moncucco area from the end of the 19th century onwards. Initially with a gravel and clay quarry, then in the 20th century with the bolt factory, a mechanic and a series of works in the surrounding area such as the small railway track that connected the Richard company to the Binda paper mills, and modern industries such as Vedani s.p.a. (which processed and recycled aluminium) and Sicpa (which produced inks for Italian and foreign banknotes and also food colouring).

The attraction generated by a safe working day and a guaranteed salary, together with the possibility of growth and the comfort of life lived in the urban fabric, quickly took the new generations away from rural life. Life in the farmhouse became increasingly problematic also because of the urban advancement: new roads, infrastructures and residential buildings that made the fields for the cultivations and for the pastures of the cattle disappear.

Between 1986 and 1989, Cascina Ranza and Cascina Moncucco were definitively abandoned. At the Mulino Ceresa, a conversion of the complex into a residential area had already been underway for years.

Cascina Ranza was demolished while Cascina Moncucco remained in a state of neglect and degradation for over two decades.

In 2016 the Iulm University annexed Cascina Moncucco to the campus after having completely restructured it and made it a student residence. The work was carried out by IULM with the clear intention of maintaining the memory and the original shape of the place, as evidenced by the many initiatives aimed at promoting the local history of the area in which it is located.

Today, the Barona is a district closely connected and integrated with the city of Milan, representing the closest periphery to the center. At first glance, especially for those not born there, this area looks like a modern suburb without many stories to tell. And yet we have seen that it is not exactly so...Walking through the Barona, however, it is still possible to come across medieval landscapes (such as in the Parco delle Risaie), visit buildings with a history of more than a thousand years (such as the Cascina Barona), read about the wonder of many who are stopped here over the centuries (Joseph II, Jefferson, Stendhal ...), discover works that made history (Leonardo) ... It is also possible to live the comforts of a modern city, like going to the hospital, take the bus or the subway or the train to come to school or university, take the highway to go to the sea ...

We can finally say that today Barona has all the possibilities to become a sort of Milanese future experiment and, according the sensibility of the residents, can have the rare and precious opportunity to coniugate it with all the treasures that - as we've seen - its past has left us.

Stefano Tosi