



Palazzo Roccabruna and the Council of Trento: the dream banquet of the Count of Luna

One late afternoon, **Claudio Fernandez Vigil de Quiñones Count of Luna** left the **church of Santa Maria Maggiore** and walked briskly toward Trento Cathedral. The December sun was already hiding behind the crown of mountains, and high piles of snow hampered his step. But he liked that city, had liked it from day one. He had arrived a few months earlier, in April. Trento had welcomed him with its understated but elegant architecture, its wonderful frescoed palaces, the towering mountains all around, and the rough but genuine hospitality of its inhabitants. Not to mention the cuisine, hearty and at the same time refined. And then the wines! He had already made a good stock of them for his personal cellar. Modestly speaking, he was a connoisseur of such things. Like all nobles of the time, he loved good living as well as art and culture. **Far more serious matters had led him to Trento**, however. **As ambassador of Spain he was charged with representing King Philip II at the Council of Trento**, the Catholic Church's response to Luther's Protestant Reformation.

The Council of Trento had begun many years earlier, in 1545, and had gone through several phases not without jolts. The one attended by the Count of Luna was the third. "And perhaps it will also be the last," thought the diplomat. Indeed, the following day, **December 3, 1563, a new council session, the 25th, would begin**. But everything suggested that the game was now over. Which worried the Count of Luna not a little because the King of Spain's order had been clear: prevent the closing of the Council. And he had failed. He feared the reaction of his sovereign. Philip was as pious and correct as he was shady and incapable of forgetting. So, in doubt, the **Count of Luna had extended the lease on the Roccabruna Palace** for a few more months.

Speaking of which. In the meantime, he had finally arrived at **his abode in Trento**. The austere elegance of the facade, which recalled the artistic canons typical of those years, instilled in him a sense of order and serenity. And he needed order in the midst of all this confusion. The Council had gathered cardinals, bishops and theologians from all over the world in Trento to recompose the rift between Catholics and Protestants. But the results were far from the original purpose. After 18 years, the Council had effectively sanctioned an irremediable division. Had religious conflicts not been enough, there were temporal ones too. Spain, France and the Holy Roman Empire: each ruler saw the Council as a tool to influence the Church and to increase their own power. In addition to the Count of Luna, ambassadors from twelve states were present in Trento. It was too much even for him, he who had diplomacy in his blood!

The cathedral bells rang the Hail Mary: better hurry up, thought the count. He still had several things to write before the next day's session. **He passed through the sturdy ashlar doorway of Palazzo Roccabruna and crossed the long hallway, casting a glance at the busts of the Roman emperors who looked sternly at him from above**. Surely they, too, must have faced some strife, the Count of Luna told himself as he climbed the stairs and entered the apartments on the second floor where he was staying. His eyes burned and there was a





painful emptiness in his head: he did not even want to think about all he had left to do before he could finally go to bed.

He entrusted his servant with his cloak and shoes, removed his ruff and walked to the reception hall, where he sank down on a sofa while unbuttoning his vest. Of the entire palace, this was undoubtedly his favorite room. **The Master of the house Girolamo Roccabruna knew his business and had surrounded himself with a wealth of fine art.** Of course, enjoying the favor of Prince-Bishop Cristoforo Madruzzo had made things easier for him, but Roccabruna had played his cards well, and with an unquestionable taste for beauty. Fifty gold scudi a month in rent was no small thing, but Palazzo Roccabruna was worth it all. The Count of Luna liked to notice the admiring glances of the prelates and orators he invited to his abode to discuss the line to be taken at meetings of the Holy Council. After all, a diplomat of his importance - the ambassador of the Catholic King! - deserved the best. Much more than the French ambassadors.

At first there had been some misunderstanding, but now everyone treated him with due respect. They had him up front in official ceremonies, festivals and processions. Even during Council meetings. At the first session, in the cathedral of Trento, they had reserved a seat for him on the same level with the ambassador of France. He had raised a ruckus. Then, he had taken a chair and gone to sit right in the middle of the cathedral, in front of the secretary. "Dispute for precedence" they had had the audacity to call it!

Difficulties and frictions, however, did not frighten him. They were his bread and butter. Or rather: they whetted his appetite. And he was a mightily hungry man. **Ecclesiastics and diplomats had to eat well while debating theological issues! There was no shortage of good food in Trento:** simple but nutritious and tasty. Like those delicious dumplings of bread and spinach, topped with butter and cheese -- "Strangolapreti" (i.e. 'priest stranglers') people called them. But with him, there was no danger of suffocation, he could eat them by the ton. Not to mention pasta in meat broth, roasted meats and game, and fish from Lake Garda. **Immersed in these delicious thoughts, the Count of Luna slipped into sleep.**

He dreamed of the enchanting decorations of the reception hall: the marvelous octagonal wooden coffered ceiling with flower-themed reliefs, the details of the frescoes above the windows, the coats of arms of the Trentino families related to the Roccabruna family, impassive caryatids, garlands of leaves and fruit, chimeras and fantastic creatures. And then, further down, hundreds of human-faced suns staring at him with mute serenity. His gaze stopped, finally, above the imposing fireplace, where stood an indomitable Perseus with sword in one hand and in the other the severed head of Medusa under the eyes of the Muses and the winged horse Pegasus.

A delicious fragrance made him get up from the sofa. What marvel was this? **In the center of the room towered a table set with dishes and wines of all kinds.** The Count of Luna had never seen anything like it in his life. He walked over and began to fill his plate. First the cheeses: **Trentingrana made with raw milk and aged for 36 months, Casolèt from the Val di Sole scented with alpine herbs, Spresa delle Giudicarie from an ancient recipe.** Then the cured meats: **Lucanica of Trentino, Ciuiga of Banale and Carne Salada.** What scents, what flavors! He would have done an encore, but he didn't want to spoil the sequel. He continued





by tasting the **polenta made from Storo flour and smoked char fillet**. As a side dish, **mountain potatoes and broccoli from Torbole, dressed with extra virgin olive oil DOP from Garda Trentino**. But more than anything else, he was enraptured by the incredible variety of wines: **Teroldego Rotaliano, Marzemino, Nosiola...** And then the bubbly aromaticity of the **Trentodoc**. The bottle he uncorked indicated on the label an aging on the lees of no less than 60 months! The Count of Luna found it sublime: as light as the flight of a dove, as seductive as a melody, as harmonious as the contrast of the marvelous Dolomites. The **beers** were no less impressive. Satisfied and a little tipsy, the Count of Luna concluded his banquet with a glass of **Grappa Trentina**, still pondering in disbelief the delights he had just tasted. It was the voice of his servant tugging at his sleeve that brought him back to reality. **He realized then that he was still lying on the couch and had been dreaming the whole thing. Or rather, a formidable time paradox had fast-forwarded him into the early twenty-first century, during a dinner party.** There was no table set in the room, no bottles of wine and no delicious dishes. And yet, he still thought he could feel the bubbles of that - what was it called? Ah, yes, Trentodoc - tickling his palate. Only slightly disappointed, he stood up and still dazed looked around. "Fortunate are the inhabitants of the future, who will be able to feast on these delicacies that I have only dreamed of," he thought. He fixed his gaze on the fireplace, where Girolamo Roccabruna's motto stood out: "NEC SORTE MOVEBOR" (*not even fate will move me*). He gave a half smile and said to himself, "What a wonderful land this is! I think I will stay here for a while longer. In fact, maybe I will stay here forever."

The Count of Luna died in Trento on December 28th of that year, a few days after the Council closed. **Apparently, indigestion proved fatal to him**. He was buried in the old convent of San Bernardino.

Owned by the **Trento Chamber of Commerce**, since 2007 **Palazzo Roccabruna has housed the Enoteca Provinciale del Trentino and is a place for tastings and a showcase of local wine production, as well as of the main gastronomic excellences**. A must if you want to get up close and personal with the products and taste the wines tasted in the Count of Luna's dream!

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