

Two Original Manuscripts on Early-Modern Genoese History by, and
a Short Biography of, the local historian Severino D. Dolente
(1909-1993)

Severino was born in Genoa on 12th April 1909. He was raised by his paternal grandparents until he was ten years old, his father Giuseppe working outside the home and his mother Maria having emigrated to Argentina, whence she eventually returned in order to marry Severino's father. Severino had a younger sister, four years his junior, and a younger brother, seven years so, who died of pneumonia at five years of age. Severino was shocked by this loss, which wounded him deeply. Nevertheless, he had quite a reputation as a lively boy, while his sister grew up quiet and introverted.

Since childhood, Severino displayed considerable intellectual gifts, and he was known as keenly and uncommonly curious about the details of all matters. Despite his poor family background and thoroughly working-class milieu, Severino completed a full cycle of secondary-school studies at the professional institute "Galileo Galilei" in Genoa and qualified as an industrial mechanic. This was far from common in Italy back in those days. At seventeen years of age, he got formally engaged to Caterina Canepa, also born in 1909, whom Severino had met in the local Catholic youth association, to which they both belonged. As Severino liked to recall, Caterina, who worked in her uncles' fruit and vegetable shop, had signalled her interest by giving him regularly far more fruit than he paid for. For his part, Severino would write her daily letters and poems, in a display of his romantic personality and culture. Caterina, far more modestly, would stick to those local events that she deemed worthy of mention. As apt and proper for a young woman at that time, and in line with her reserved character, Caterina was far less expansive and far less open about her own feelings than Severino. After qualifying as an industrial mechanic, Severino fulfilled his compulsory duties in the Italian army, lasting two full years. At twenty-three, Severino, having passed an admission test, was hired as a clerk at the municipal offices of the City of Genoa. Then, Caterina and Severino got married the same year. They had a daughter in 1935, Marisa (*née* Maria Luisa), and another two years later, Rosa (known as Rosetta).

In 1940, Mussolini's Italy having joined into the fray of the ongoing world conflagration, Severino was conscripted into the nation's army. Despite living in a convenient location in Genoa with Severino's own parents, he deemed it wiser to relocate his family by his in-laws' countryside home. Severino fought in Albania and in Yugoslavia, where his chief duties consisted in driving lorries for the Italian Army, carrying ammunitions and supplies. Following Italy's unilateral armistice in 1943, he was deported to Germany, where he spent about two years in a labour camp, together with Italian and Soviet prisoners, suffering deprivation and hunger. Upon the cessation of hostilities in 1945, he walked back to Genoa from Wurzburg, hitching the occasional ride along the way. Upon his return, Caterina underwent a major surgery for a tumour, which did not prove fatal. In 1946, a third

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daughter was born, Francesca, whose presence helped Severino to recover from the scars of wartime and from the traumas of prolonged imprisonment, which had brought about a nervous breakdown and an unhealthy fondness for the bottle.

Severino went back to his old job for the City of Genoa, he and his family still living in the countryside. In 1951, the whole family moved once again into the city. He had many hobbies, which included painting, mechanical invention and bocce. Above all, first as a clerk and then as a municipal policeman, Severino had ample opportunity to cultivate one of his many interests, namely local history. Having easy access to the municipal libraries and to the archives of the defunct Republic of Genoa, he gathered information on the most influential families of 15th-century Genoa and on the most famous Genoese man of that time, i.e., Christopher Columbus. In particular, Severino, anticipating later academic historians, highlighted the connections between Columbus' famed voyages "to the East by way of the West" and the aims of the Genoese Pope Innocent VIII, born Giambattista Cibo. Also, he sought out interesting specimens of local oral history.

Severino's forays into early-modern Genoese history were much more than a mere pastime. Significantly, in 1950, Vittorio Pertusio, Mayor City of Genoa, assigned Severino as a formal collaborator to a pre-eminent Ligurian Columbus scholar, Dr. Antonio Castelli, in view of the celebrations that were to be held in honour of the great—and, of late, even controversial—Genoese explorer, who, among other things, is believed to have visited Iceland in 1477, choosing the farmstead at Inghjaldshóll as his place of residence like many other seafarers of that age setting sail from England (on that occasion, Columbus was sailing from the port of Bristol). Severino continued his researches on his retirement, leaving behind only two known well-drafted manuscripts, which are now being published in *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* for the first time. They are:

[01 Francesco di Rivarolo](#)

(On the role and relevance of the little-known Genoese galley-builder Francesco Oberti from Rivarolo in determining Christopher Columbus' birthplace.)

[02 La Strega](#)

(On the origins of a legendary "witch" around the year 1492, as recounted by the Genoese dock workers in 1950. The last sentence on page 4 of the text ends with the words: "da dissesti finanziari.")

Severino died in 1993, following a surgical intervention.

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