



A LOCAL STORE IN PEACEFUL TIMES,
A REFUGE IN WARTIME

THE “RICETTO” OF CANDELO

A possession and a symbol of the local community since the 14th century, the "Ricetto" of Candelo is the best preserved example in Piemonte, in the province of Biella, and still holds a place in the population's memory

The "Ricetto" of Candelo, a late medieval general defence fortress, was established at the local population's will, without any feudal intervention, with the aim of preserving the community's most valuable goods: the produce of the land, especially wine and corn. In fact the name "ricetto" is a derivation from the military Roman term "receptum" that means a defended and fortified place.

In the Middle Ages it became a place for the defence of the population, agricultural produce and livestock. Some ancient documents about Candelo mention a "castrum munitissimum", where every local man had his own hut, built by the community, to take shelter in, in times of war.

THE RICETTO AND ITS HISTORY

Candelo, that stands at 340m a.s.l. and has 7,804 inhabitants, is 6 km from the chief town of the area, Biella. Its

name, perhaps also connected with the pre-Celtic origins of the place, lets us suppose that a population of Liguri settled in its hill or near its streams in ancient times. The establishment of the "ricetti" in Piemonte dates back to the 12th up to the 14th centuries, together with the growth of the autonomy of the region; in the district of Biella they were still built even during the early years of the 1400s.

The Ricetto of Candelo was built by the inhabitants to protect their goods, on the local Lord's land, between the end of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th century; later it became the property and the symbol of the autonomy of the local community. In 1360 the Ricetto included 157 huts where the population could also take shelter from danger. However, even if they were used many times in case of danger or in wartime, they were almost never regularly inhabited.

The history of the Ricetto of Candelo is troubled: it passed from the rule of the Savoias to the Ferrero-Fieschi dynasty (1496-1785); in the 16th century it was involved in the fights between the French and the Spanish and underwent various fires and destruction. Then Napoleon's occupation modified the political-administrative structure of the place. The Ricetto of Candelo, the best preserved among the ones built in Piemonte, still holds an important place in the memory of the local population. The quiet and noiseless atmosphere of its "rue"(narrow streets) is the same even today. The Ricetto, that has often been used as the background for some TV programmes, now hosts national events such as "Candelo in Fiore" taking place at the beginning of May every two years: during the celebration, among the "rue" enriched with flower decorations, some exhibitions and concerts are organized, in cooperation with the "Associazione Florovivaisti di Biella". Inside its walls it also houses a Ceremony Hall, the Municipal Library and the first wing of the Eco-Museum of the cultivation of grape-wine as well as various artists' craft workshops and assemblies of local Associations.

THE RICETTO TODAY

Thanks to its rural origins, the Ricetto of Candelo has preserved, until very recent times, its original structure as "fortified silos" and "public winery"; even now it is partly used for making wine and conserving the produce of the land. The Ricetto has an apparently pentagonal layout, with a perimeter of about 470m and an area of 13000sqm; it is 110m wide and 120m long. Inside it there are 200 cells almost all privately owned. The boundary walls run all along its perimeter except for the southern side where there is the Town Hall, built in the neoclassical style in 1819, in striking contrast with the medieval architecture of the Ricetto. The defensive walls are made with river stones, set in a herring-bone pattern, and have a battlement which surrounds it all. The corners are protected by circular towers, originally open towards the interior to favour the needs of defence. The only entrance, on the southern side, was protected by a massive tower-gate, a brick structure with a carriage gateway and a postern for people closed by a drawbridge; at the center of the northern side, between two round angular towers, there is still a curtain-tower, almost exclusively built with big square blocks. After passing through the tower-gate, you enter a small square paved with the round stones of the stream running nearby. The road network is formed by five axis, intersected by two orthogonal roads and features the typical "rue", roads with big pebbles sloping south-north towards the curtain-tower to favour the draining of the surface water. The buildings, grouped into nine blocks, consist of a range of cells, not connected to each other in order to reduce the temperature range to the minimum rate possible. From the road, through a gateway, you can enter the ground-floor with an un-surfaced floor, used for the wine-making.

From the "rua", through a wooden balcony ("lobbia"), you can reach the solarium at the upper floor, a room suitable for the conservation of the corn. It is worth noting that the best preserved balcony is situated near the Council Hall. All the "lobbie" used to be covered by steeply sloping roofs to protect the corn from rain. Inside a private cellar, it is still possible to see a big winepress of 1763 that is 10m long: set in action by a screw, originally made of wood (now made of iron), the base pressed the grapes put in a stone tub below.

The Palace of the Prince, built at the will of Sebastiano Ferrero in 1496, when he became the Lord of Candelo, is the most impressive construction and is characterized by a donjon: it was altered more than once, since its origin it has always been bigger than the other units and could also benefit from an external free space. On the left side of the small square there are the Council and Ceremony Hall of the Commune of Candelo, where exhibitions regularly take place, and the Library-Historic Archives. The big stone dating back to 1749, placed nearby the well, was the counter balance of a press that in ancient time was located in the Ceremony Hall.

A similar implement, still working and perfectly preserved, is now housed in a private cellar of the Ricetto. For guided visits, lasting about one hour, please contact the Pro Loco tel. 015 2536728.

THE RICETTO AND ITS HISTORY

At Candelo and in its surroundings you can see some important traces of past times: the old laundry where women used to wash clothes, the pit for retting the hemp whose cultivation continued up to the beginning of 1900, the "Ghiacciaia", the intersection of the "Bocca del Lupo", the Isangarda Fortress and the plateau of Bellaista, from which you can see all the western Alps from Mount Monviso to Mount Rosa and the Prealpi Orobiche in the area of Bergamo. The Isangarda fortress was always considered a strategic point: in fact German

settlements transformed the holy enclosure "Ysr-Ysam Garda" (isr=holy and gard=enclosure) into an independent inhabited settlement. Unfortunately today nothing of it has been preserved, apart from the place-name.

VISITING CANDELO AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

The places of worship represent the spiritual refuge of the inhabitants of Candelo and also help the tourists to understand the real character of the local population. We would suggest that you visit, besides the Chiesa Parrocchiale di San Pietro and the Oratorio di Santa Croce, the Chiesa di San Lorenzo and the Chiesa di Santa Maria Maggiore.

Chiesa di Santa Maria Maggiore

From the Ricetto, in a few minutes, you can reach the Chiesa di Santa Maria, mentioned for the first time in some documents of 1182. Actually its origin dates back prior to the year 1000 but there are very few remains of the original medieval aisle-less church. Now you can admire its beautiful Romanesque facade built with river stones, set in a herring-bone pattern and, inside, some remarkable capitals of 1400 above the stone columns separating the nave from the aisles, some frescoes dating back to the end of the 15th century and a pulpit of the middle of the 17th century.

Connected to the church, there is the Oratorio dei Confratelli di Santa Maria.

La Baraggia di Candelo

Leaving Candelo, you can drive towards the wild plateau of the "baraggia" (moor), about 5000 hectares of which, called "Baraggione" and which is triangular in shape, belong to the Commune of Candelo. The place presents very peculiar geological and botanical characteristics. You can see the geological history of the area in its eroded slopes marking the boundaries, a panoramic terrace hundred and hundred metres long, falling sheer down to the banks of the River Cervo. The ground of the moor is clayey, hard to cultivate, with slimy material carried here by the wind. The local vegetation includes fields of grass mixed with bushes whose colours remind you of the African savannah. In Spring the broom colours the fields with a golden yellow, at the end of the Summer the heather turns them pink, while in Autumn the bracken gives them warmer tones.

On the plateau there are the Alpine flowers: the gentian, the arnica, the small red carnation; everywhere you can see violets, red cardoons, bluebells. The trees grow naturally: the oak, the white hornbeam, the birch, the black willow, the trembling poplar, the chestnut tree.

In the scrub you can meet the badger, the hedgehog, the fox, the squirrel, the wild boar, the pheasant and also birds of prey, while the viper and the tortoise are quite rare. The rich variety of birds favours the exciting practice of bird-watching.

TYPICAL FOOD AND DRINK

● Salam'd Candii o 'dl'ula

This is a homemade sausage with lean, minced shoulder and lard pork meat, mixed with salt and natural flavours.

It is dried under fat for at least three months.

● The special dish of the village

The "paletta candelese" is a salami made of shoulder meat of local pork, degreased, salted and hand prepared, following the tradition, in small quantities.

● Clavarin

These are the typical crisp sweets of the Clavarin.

● Grappa Receptum

These two versions of the Grappa Receptum, are produced by a traditional distillation in discontinuous alembics: one vine of Grignolino, dry but soft and one softener vine of Nebbiolo, aged in oak barrels for a year.

THE INDUSTRY IN THE BIELLESE AREA

Biella, one of the most productive centers in the wool sector, includes various areas such as the Valsessera, Valstrona and the low Valsesia. The textile industry, developed at the beginning of the last century, also thanks to the abundant water available in the territory, has undergone lots of changes in methodology since the beginning of the 1970 and each section of manufacturing: spinning, weaving, dying, represent important factors in the specialization of these techniques for new enterprises connected with the foreign market.

GETTING TO CANDELO

By car: From Milano/Torino: A4 motorway Carisio exit, then highway 230 intersection to Candelo.
From Genoa: A26 motorway exit Vercelli, highway 230 intersection to Candelo
(or exit Santhià highway 143 towards Biella).

By plane: Biella-Cerrione Airport 12 km.

By train: Biella-Santhià.

By bus: Biella-Vercelli bus route.