

Baroque Noble Palaces In Turin. Architectural façade design

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Turin is famous for being a baroque town. Its Roman and medieval origins, to be found in the so called “Città Quadrata” (the Squared Town), fade into the background compared to the baroque evolution which took place between the XVI and XVIII centuries and produced the “almond-shaped town”. Buildings become more and more important in defining the urban structure of the town, and as a consequence the “façade problem” become one of the main concerns of baroque artists.

I will therefore focus on this theme, in particular on the mansions, which become a status symbol of the noble families which followed the Savoy dynasty out of the country manors to town.

Is it possible to draw a paradigm of façade design in baroque noble mansions in Turin?

The first part of this work will present an historical and urbanistic introduction and a description of the different types of buildings in this context: *basic residential building* and *specialized building*, religious, public, militar and prestige.

In addition to these Turin presents an exclusive and peculiar feature, unknown to other realities, called “nobiliar and income architecture”, consisting in leasing an entire floor or wing to bourgeois families.

The second part is dedicated to detailed analysis of nine of the most representative mansions of the town, and in particular of their façades. The mansions have been chosen among those presenting eleven windows- façades, that being the most frequent pattern.

The third part consists of a comparative study of the nine mansions in relation to same type and different type buildings. A definition of some façade design patterns is finally proposed.

Between early seventeen and early eighteen centuries, façade design experienced a deep evolution. While the first seventeen century examples were characterized by three superimposed strata- normally without pilaster strips – among which the piano nobile was strongly differentiated, and by the prevailing of the horizontal element by the use of layers for both floors and window sills, and also by completion cornices, the late seventeen and early eighteen century examples were by contrast characterized by two superimposed strata, one of which was giant, comprising two floors structured in a secondary strata, and by the loss of ‘visibility’ by the piano nobile, which is no more perceived as the most important floor in the building, even if it is still differentiated by height and plastic treatment.



Fig. 1. Palazzo Birago di Borgaro (F. Juvarra 1716).
Example of façade with giant strata

This evolution parallels the change in the use of this kind of buildings. While in the beginning they were mostly nobiliar palaces, by the end of the century most of these buildings comprised a part which was rented or owned by bourgeois people. The giant strata, with secondary strata, allow to emphasize the façade even when floors start becoming more.

It is possible to recognize some 'tendencies' which are recurrent, let alone typical. Among them it must be noted that façades do not correspond to rear structures and the "prevailing of the wrapping on structure". This prevailing often determined in Turin the presence of façades with single end bays, i.e. with only one window layer, not corresponding with the rear cell.



Fig 2. Palazzo Birago di Borgaro, Prospect. (original scale 1:200)

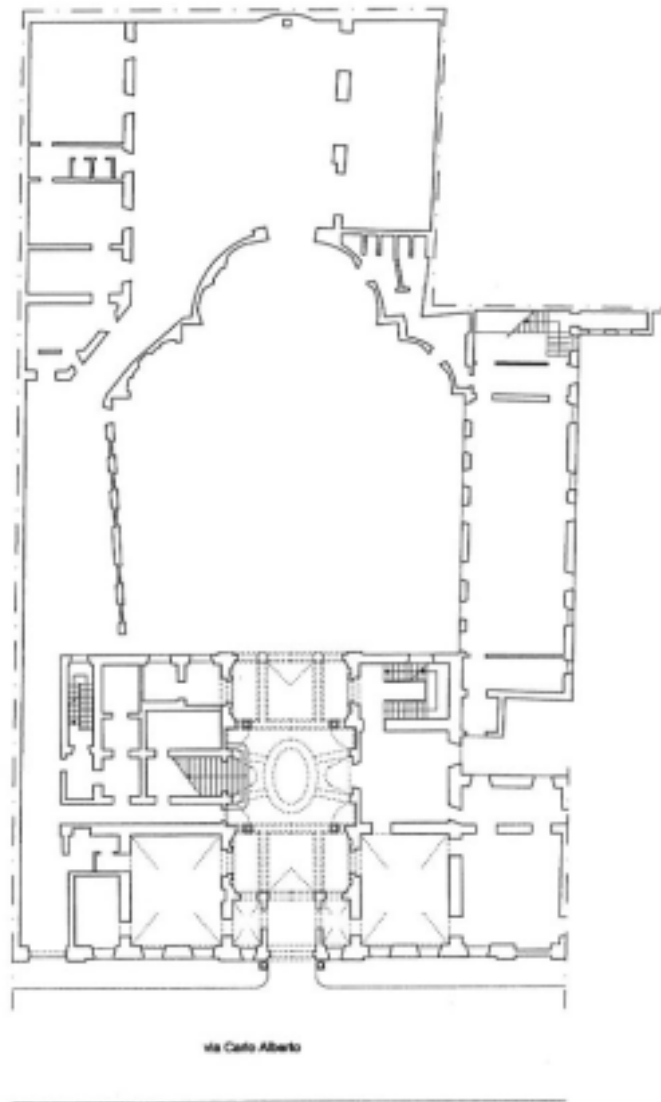


Fig 3. Palazzo Birago di Borgaro. Ground Floor Plan (original scale 1:200)

This is the only example, among the ones we analyzed, in which the single end bays are coherent with a circular way for the charriots.

Another recurrent pattern is simplification of order, in the classical meaning, in which upright and horizontal elements cross without other mediating elements, bases or capitals. But there are also cases in which order does not only follow its classical rules but it is also reinterpreted and enhanced (for example in the Palazzo Provana di Collegno, Birago in Borgaro, Cacherano in Mombello).

It must also be noted that all buildings are made of 'poor' materials (plaster and stucco), which thanks to particular façade patterns, nonetheless achieve valuable results.