

The sourdeline of Manfredo Settala, a Milanese inventor in 1640.

Eric Montbel



1. Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan. Cortile degli spiriti magni.

If there is one place I love above all in Italy, it is the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan. People come from around the world for the famous paintings of Leonardo, Caravaggio and Boticelli, but also for the strange and fascinating wonders gathered in this venerable house which was established by Cardinal Borromeo in 1611. Here there is a shrine enclosing a lock of

blond hair from the beautiful Lucrezia Borgia as well as shells, beads and curious objects : this museum keeps the spirit of the «cabinets of curiosity» (or *wunderkammer*) of the Renaissance. I also like the Ambrosiana because it preserves some objects from the collection of Manfredo Settala, the awesome Milanese inventor who manufactured and perfected the sourdeline.

The sourdeline, *sordellina* in Italian, was a bellows blown bagpipe whose complexity was taken to the extreme by the canon Manfredo Settala of Milan, between 1630-1660.

I spent time in Italy last summer, trying to gather some evidence or concrete facts to establish the link between Zampogne and the «Grandes Cornemuses à Miroirs»¹, the beautiful bagpipes that are the origin of the «*chabrettes* of Limousin». If the relationship between these two types of bagpipes is evident by the shape, sound, reeds and symbols, we still lack all the historical facts to complete the puzzle. And I still believe strongly that this connection lies somewhere between Milano, Padova, Ferrara, Mantova ... and the Louvre, in Paris, together with a few scattered clues from the distant past.

I was researching in a library of Ferrara, one of the most beautiful cities of North Italy, leafing through an art book about painting² in Lombardy, when I discovered, amazed, the painting attributed to Carlo Francesco Nuvolone³ showing Manfredo Settala with his sourdeline. This was an original depiction of

this exceptional instrument, known only by rare references and literary descriptions (fig. 2). Settala and his bagpipe were only known by a rather poor quality, clumsy engraving, which had been over-reproduced, contained in the Courtault Institute of Art in London⁴ (fig.3).



2. Ritratto di Manfredi Settala fra alcuni strumenti scientifici e musicali e lavori al torno di sua invenzione, Carlo Francesco Nuvolone (1608-1662), 1640. location unknown. Photo Alessandro Morandotti.



3. John Vendramini (1769-1839), « Manfredi Settala. G. B. Crespi Pxt – J. V Sct », extract from *Select engravings from a collection of pictures, by the most eminent italian, flemish, and dutch masters, exhibiting at the saloon of arts [...]*, London, J. Moyes, 1818, p. 31.

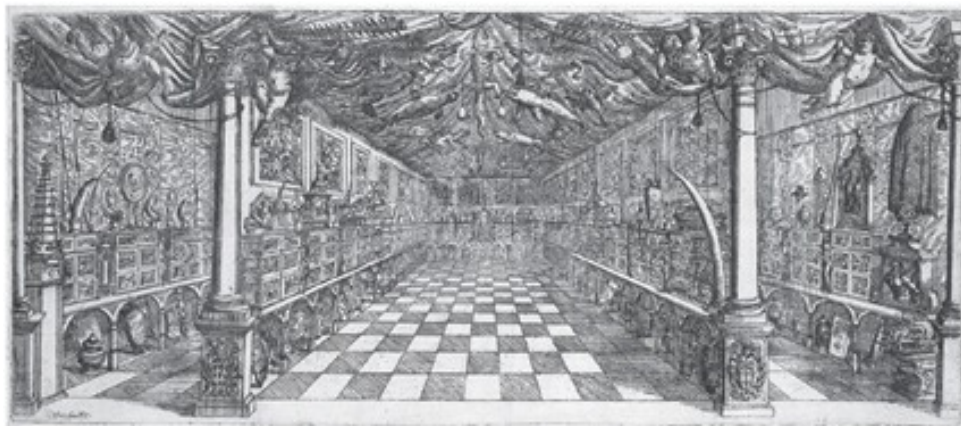
Manfredi Settala
1608-1662

Manfredo Settala (1600-1680)

Manfredo Settala was an amazing man, an adventurer, scholar and a gentleman, an intrepid traveller in his youth, a collector and inventor, an artist and musician, who founded a remarkable museum in Milan. He was the son of a renowned scientist, Ludovico Settala (1552-1633), an author of books about medical sciences as well as a philosopher⁵ who was called "the Aesculapius of his time."

After inheriting his father's library, Manfredo accumulated strange objects, paintings by great masters, and surprising *naturalia* and *exotica*. His collection of paintings was exceptional and included some 85 works including some by Raphael, Tintoretto and Leonardo da Vinci. More than just a creative collector of «Wunderkammer», Settala was also a skilled craftsman, and had great expertise as a wood and ivory turner. He invented flutes with several pipes (and some *ocarina* made from a lobster claw), and he perfected the most complex bagpipe of his time, the *sordellina* (or «sourdeline» in French).

He installed his gallery (Fig. 4) in a new palace in Via Pantano in Milan, where he exhibited both his treasures and items he had made. He received there the most famous inventors of his time, such as Athanasius Kircher, who was also a philosopher and a musical instrument collector⁶. The museum of Via Pantano aroused great admiration among his fellow citizens, and two scholars drafted a comprehensive catalog of this «*Galeria*». Paolo Maria Terzagio prepared the first version in Latin, printed in 1664, while Pietro Francesco Scarabelli gave an Italian translation in 1666.⁷



4. Cesare Fiori (1636-1702), *La galleria Settala*, engraving in Paolo Maria Terzagio, *Museo, ò Galleria adunata[...]*, Tortone, per li figliuoli del E. Viola, 1666. Several pieces can be identified, for instance the pyramidal «moto perpetuo» on the extreme left, and the mechanical «devil», with the Armillary Sphere on top, on the extreme right.

The young years of Manfredo

We know about the picaresque youth of Settala through the writings of Filippo Picinelli, a seventeenth-century author who wrote portraits of illustrious men of Milan.⁸ Settala had been a traveller in his younger years : at the age of fifteen he visited the Palazzo Ducale, in Mantova, where he discovered "the rarest wonders"⁹, the collection of fishes and exotic birds, fabulous minerals, exceptional paintings of Raphael, Tintoretto and Rubens collected by the Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga and his wife Eleonora de' Medici. In Pisa that he became acquainted with mathematics, legal sciences and art of wood-turning, prompting admiration and the benevolent protection of the Duke of Mantova and his wife.



5. *Ritratto di Manfredo Settala*, Daniele Crespi (1597-1630), ca 1622, oil on canvas, 60 x 45 cm. (Inv. 492). Copyright Veneranda Biblioteca

The young Manfredo wanted to follow in the footsteps of Ulysses and travel in the Mediterranean. A few months before this Odyssey (1622-1628) began, the first portrait of Manfredo was¹⁰ painted by Daniele Crespi¹¹ (1597-1630), it still hangs in the Ambrosiana in Milan (fig. 5).

Settala wanted to discover the highlights of the Mediterranean. His travels take him to Sicily, the Levant, Cyprus and Gaza as well as "Nogroponte" (the Greek island of Evia) and Kandia (Peloponnese) where he "passed through the greatest dangers" including an attack of "Barbarians" and the Turkish fleet. He stays for two months in Constantinople, "observing the mosques, markets, and other more worthy curiosities". Finally, with stops in Livorno, he returned to Milan.

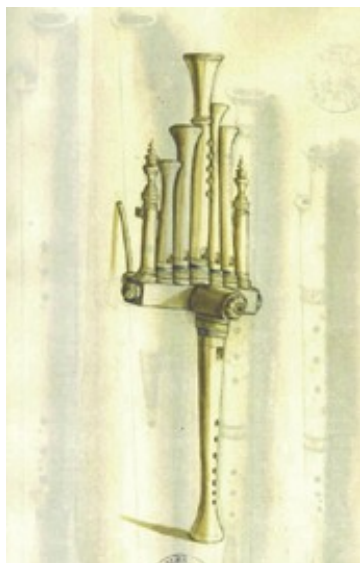
The second life of Settala, the collector, the dilettante craftsman and scholar, begins on his return in 1628. Having attracted the attention of Cardinal Federico Borromeo (founder of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana of Milan) due to his knowledge of mathematics and history as well as his craft skills, he was appointed « Canon of the basilica San Nazaro » in 1630, situated at a few steps from the family home. Attached to the Accademia in Florence, he was received among the nobility of London, where he attended "the princes and high line characters." He travelled extensively through Italy including many trips to Rome

and Venice as well as becoming very skilled «He does what he wants with his hands. He became the Archimedes of our century, both in cutting subtle things, in the manufacture of flat mirrors, concave incendiary mirrors of enormous size, and musical instruments of all wonderful shapes¹²».

A "Book of Secrets" (*Libro di Secreti*)

«Our Manfred, with many languages, is awaiting the translation and printing of his trips to Loiré (in France), to England, and many others. He is ready to print 'A Book of Secrets', filled with mysteries and curiosities¹³ ».

This book has been preserved. Composed originally of seven parts, three parts of the *Codice Settala* are in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, and two of the others are in the Biblioteca Estense of Modena.¹⁴ The two missing parts are lost for now. Each of these wonderful «books of secrets» consists of a collection of coloured drawings made from his museum (fig.6), some with a comment by Settala himself. Several of his instruments are depicted but the *sordelline* are missing (perhaps in the lost books).



6. *Harmonia di flauti*, one of the multiple flute made by Settala, drawing in the Settala Codice, GAMMA.H.1.22, Biblioteca Estense of Modena. Notice the same endings in form of rose as in the painted sordelline.

7. Multiple flute from Settala's collection, today in the Museo Civico of Bologna.

How does a wealthy young man become a gentleman of fortune and then a man of the church, an inventor, a collector, an artist ... here truly is a picaresque novel yet to be written.

Some objects from Settala's collection still survive in various museums including a mechanical devil, a spiky fish, a multiple flute and frightening shell masks as well as the armillary sphere depicted in his portrait.

The portrait of Settala by Nuvolone, and its three symbolic objects.

Settala is surrounded by three objects that he had made: an ivory chalice, an armillary sphere, and the sordellina. Each of these objects has its own symbolical meaning.



8. On left the armillary sphere made by Settala, drawing in the «Book of Secrets» with a written comment of Manfredo, and on right as it is conserved today in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana. The same object figures on the painting by Nuvolone.

The sordellina remains a mythical bagpipe, mainly famous until now by the writings and drawings of Mersenne in his *Harmonie Universelle* (1636), and by two portraits of François Langlois, a famous virtuoso of this time. But here we can study a more accurate depiction in the portrait of Manfredo Settala by Nuvolone (fig. 2)¹⁵. None of the Milanese art historians had alerted musicologists about this painting of Settala with his *sordellina* or realised its importance.

The Sordellina figures prominently in the centre of the painting, the pride of the inventor. If we observe carefully the drawing of sordellina depicted twice by Mersenne¹⁶ (fig. 9) and compare it to the one by Nuvolone (fig. 10), it

shows that these two instruments are almost identical, probably both made by the Canon of Milan.



9. Marin Mersenne, « Sourdellina Neapolitanam », engraving in *Harmonicorum Libri*, Paris, G. Baudry, 1636, Instrumentorum. Liber secundus, Propositio X, p. 97.

10. The *surdellina* in the portrait of Settala by Nuvoione, 1640, detail.

We know another representation of Settala's sourdeline. It appears in his funeral tribute that was printed after his death, February 6, 1680. It is an engraving by Cesare Fiori (1636- 1702). The instrument, with its bellows placed on a table, is presented as an allegory of the breath of life. The epigram says : "Meus defecit Spiritus", (My spirit fails) (fig. 11). Other allegories depicting objects invented by Settala are used in this booklet, as this perpetual movement (fig 12), also visible in the engraving of the Museum Septalium, here accompanied by the epigram : "Nihil Perpetuum" (Nothing is eternal). (See next page.)

We can suggest an interpretation of the musical system of this sourdeline, through comparison of various sources, including Mersenne and Trichet, and also by the analysis put forward by Van der Meer¹⁷, Barry O'Neill¹⁸ and Frank P. Bär¹⁹. This will be the aim of my next article.

Eric MONTBEL



11. C. Fiori, the sordeline of Settala exposed to his funerals, «Defecit Spiritus Meus», engraving in G. M. Visconti, *Exequiae in Templo S. Nazari Manfredo Septali patritio Mediolanensi*, Milan, Stamperia Arcivescovile, 1680, p. 6.

12. C. Fiori, the perpetual machine of Settala («Nihil Perpetuum»), engraving in the same booklet, p. 8.

TO BE CONTINUED in the next ISSUE of «Chanter»...

Notes:

¹ Eric MONTBEL, *Les Cornemuses à Miroirs du Limousin (XVII^e-XX^e siècles). Essai d'anthropologie musicale historique*. Dvd inclus. Chemins de la Mémoire - Ethnomusicologie et Histoire, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2013.

² Alessandro MORANDOTTI (ed.), *Il ritratto in Lombardia da Moroni a Ceruti*, Skira, Milano, 2002, p. 166, reprod. p. 25. I thank Alessandro Morandotti for allowing me to use that photograph of the painting, that he got in 1960.

³ On the attribution of the painting to Nuvolone, Crespi or another painter, see: Eric MONTBEL, «Le portrait de Manfredo Settala par Carlo Francesco Nuvolone. Un hommage au collectionneur et facteur de la sordellina», *Musique-Images-Instruments*, 15, 2015.

⁴ I thank Alain Framboisier and Florence Gétéreau, who found the origin of this engraving.

⁵ Silvia ROTA GHIABAUDI, *Ricerche su Ludovico Settala: Biografia, bibliografia, iconografia e documenti*, Biblioteca bibliografica italica. vol. 18, Sansoni, Florence, 1959.

⁶ See Antonio AIMI, Vincenzo DE MICHELE, Alessandro MORANDOTTI, *Museum Septalianum, una collezione scientifica nella Milano dei seicento*, Florence, Milano, Museo Civico di Storia Naturale, 1984, p. 29-30.

⁷ Paolo Maria TERZAGO, *Musaeum Septalianum, Manfredi Septalae... Industriosi labore constructum...*, Dertona, typis Filiorum qd. Elisei Violae, 1664. BnF S. 5536 et J. 5333; Paolo Maria TERZAGO, Pietro F. SCARABELLI, *Museo, o Galeria adunata dal sapere, e dallo studio del Sig. Canonico Manfredo Settala nobile Milanese...*, Tortona, per li figliuoli del E. Viola, 1666, 1677. BnF, S. 5338 et FB. 22136.

On the collection of musical instruments and the catalogues printed by Terzago and Scarabelli, see Franck P. BAR, «Le Museo Settala à Milan au XVII^e siècle: une collection d'instruments de musique à l'esprit français», *Musique-Images-Instruments*, 2, 1996, p. 58-87; *id.*, «Museum oder Wunderkammer- Die Musikinstrumentensammlung Manfredo Settala im Mailand des 17. Jahrhunderts», *Für Aug' und Ohr. Musik Kunst- und Wunderkammern*, Wilfried Seipel (ed.), Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien – Skira, 1999, p. 58-71.

⁸ I translated the youth of Manfredo from D. Filippo PICINELLI, *Ateneo de I Letterati Milanesi*, 1670, p. 406-408.

⁹ D. F. PICINELLI, *Ateneo de I Letterati Milanesi*, *op. cit.* p. 406.

¹⁰ In the catalogue by P. M. TERZAGO et P. F. SCARABELLI, *Museo, ò Galeria*, *op. cit.* p. 236 we can read: «7. Ritratto del Sig. Manfredo, mano di Daniello Crespo».

¹¹ Daniele Crespi died from the plague in 1630. His master and parent was Giovanni Battista Crespi *Il Cerano* (1573-1632).

¹² «Viaggiando ha scorso si puo dire tutta l'Italia, condotti cinque volte a Napoli, undici a Roma, dicisette a Venezia, tre nella Sicilia, due in Sardegna, e una volta a Capo Bonifacio, a veder la pesca de i coralli. Egli di sua mano opera cio vuole; divenuta l'Archimede del nostro secolo così nel taglio delle cose sottili, come nella fabbrica di specchi piani, concavi, ustori, di canocchiali di smisurata grandezza, e di strumenti musicali d'ogni forte opera maraviglie.» D. F. PICINELLI, *Ateneo de I Letterati Milanesi*, *op. cit.* p. 407.

¹³ «Il nostro Manfredi, come possessore di molte lingue, attende alla traditione, e stampa di i viaggi del Loiré, di quello d'Inghilterra, ed altri. Havend'egli preparato per dar alle stampe "Un libro di Secreti" d'arcane curiosita ben copioso.» D. F. PICINELLI, *Ateneo de I Letterati Milanesi*, *op. cit.* p. 407.

¹⁴ *Codice Settala* is under the references Z 387, Z 388 et Z 389 in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana of Milan. The two others books in the Biblioteca Estense of Modena, are under the references GAMMA.H.1.21 and GAMMA.H.1.22, and can be read on line: <http://bibliotecaestense.beniculturali.it/info/img/mss-tn.html>.

¹⁵ This painting was published by Alessandro Morandotti for the first time in 1996, then in 1999 and 2002. It then appears in the 2003 monograph on the family Nuvolone by FM Ferro. According to him, the painting was sold at Christie's in London May 25, 1960 under No. 107, and it is no longer located since.

Alessandro MORANDOTTI, «Note brevi per Cerano animalista, Vermiglio pittore di figura e Carlo Francesco Nuvolone autore di ritratti», in Mina GREGORI, *Il Seicento lombardo: giornata di studi*, Torino, Artema Compagnia di belle arti, 1996, p. 68-69, fig. 107; Alessandro MORANDOTTI, in Mina GREGORI (éd.), *Pittura a Milano dal Seicento al Neoclassicismo*, Milano, Pizzi, 1999, p. 271; Francesco FRANGI, «L'età barocca», Milano, Cremona e Bergamo, in Francesco FRANGI, Alessandro MORANDOTTI (ed.), *Il ritratto in Lombardia da Moroni a Ceruti*, Skira, Milano, 2002, p. 466, *reprod.* p. 25.

F. M. FERRO, Nuvolone. *Una famiglia di pittori nella Milano del' 600*, Soncino Editore, 2003, p. 494.

¹⁶ Marin MERSENNE, *Harmonie universelle contenant la théorie et la pratique de la musique*, Paris, 1636; reprint, fac-sim., avec introduction de François Lesure: Paris, Éditions du CNRS, 1986. The «Sourdeline ou Musette d'Italie» is presented pp. 293 and 294. The same study and drawing are in the latin version by Marin MERSENNE, *Harmonicorum libri instrumentorum* IV, Paris, 1636, p. 97-98. The text is quite different, with less details, but the drawing is better.



The Mechanical Devil, one of the objects from the Settala Museum which has been preserved. As seen on the far right of the engraving in fig.4.

¹⁷ John Henry Van der Meer, « La Sordelina : organologia e tecnica esecutiva », *Libro per scrivere l'intavolatura per sonare sopra le sordelline de Giovanni Lorenzo Baldano (1576-1660)* ; reprint, fac-sim. (manuscrit Savona, 1600) : Savona, Associazione Ligure per la Ricerca delle Fonti Musicali, 1995, p. 73-105.p. 92-93.

¹⁸ Barry O'Neill, « The Sordellina, a possible origin of the Irish regulators », *The Sean Reid Society Journal*, vol. 2, Mars 2002, p. 1-20.

¹⁹ Franck P. BÄR, « Le Museo Settala à Milan au XVII^e siècle : une collection d'instruments de musique à l'esprit français », *Musique-Images-Instruments*, 2, 1996, p. 58-87.