

# The *Vendramin* family, the construction of the Teatro di San Luca and the relationship with Carlo Goldoni

Over the centuries, the archives of Venice's historic theatres have been almost entirely destroyed or lost. One fortunate exception is the Teatro di San Luca (also known as di San Salvador, due to its position on the boundary between the two parishes of the same names), which from its foundation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the 1930s belonged directly to members of the noble Vendramin family or to branches of their heirs.

The archive became a part of the city's assets thanks to the donation made in 1938 by its last owners, and those documents that particularly concern the management of the theatre are today conserved in Carlo Goldoni's House. The fund includes notarial deeds, registers of administration, bookings of boxes, documents on the organization of performances and relations with theatre companies.

Between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, in fact, Venice became a theatrical centre of great importance thanks to the rapid increase in its performance spaces. Many patrician families invested in the construction of theatres and the Vendramin family followed this trend. Already the owners of a piece of land between San Luca and San Salvador, after a fire in 1595 destroyed the dwellings and warehouses that stood there, they decided to have a drama theatre built there. In 1622 the Vendramin of San Lunardo therefore signed an agreement with their relatives of Santa Fosca for the construction of the theatre, which was completed in the autumn of the same year, and from that moment on the family remained sole owners of the building.

In 1833 the Teatro San Luca was renamed Teatro Apollo, and subsequently, in 1875, it was named after Carlo Goldoni, as it is still known and active today. The ownership of the Vendramin was concluded in 1937 when the theatre was acquired by the lawyer Giacomo Baldissera, Baron Treves de' Bonfili, while the management responsibilities were taken on by the ICSA (Cinematographic Enterprises and Similar Spectacles).

Carlo Goldoni worked for the Teatro San Luca from 1753 to 1762, the period during which the theatre became a point of reference on the city's theatre scene. The letters exchanged between Goldoni and Francesco Vendramin that document this decade offer precious insights enabling us to understand his work as a playwright and an artistic director.

The contracts signed between Goldoni and the family of entrepreneurs were particularly significant. The first, from 1752, reveals the strategy of Antonio Vendramin, who, before the expiry of Goldoni's contract with the Teatro San Angelo, succeeded in obtaining the author's services for his own theatre, with an exclusive commitment for ten years. This agreement was renewed, with more favourable conditions for Goldoni, in 1756 by Francesco Vendramin, after the death of his brother Antonio. In 1762, Goldoni, flattered by the request received from the *Théâtre-Italien* and excited by the idea of a new professional adventure, decided to move to Paris for a two-year period, and Francesco Vendramin, even though unaware of the negotiations for a long time, signed a new agreement with the author to continue the collaboration in this period, albeit from a distance. However, what was initially to have been a temporary move actually became a definitive stay. Venice's greatest playwright would in fact die in Paris in 1793.



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