

INFOLIO 40

RIVISTA DEL DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN ARCHITETTURA, ARTI E PIANIFICAZIONE
DELL'UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PALERMO - DIPARTIMENTO DI ARCHITETTURA

INNER AREAS

INFOLIO

RIVISTA DEL DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN ARCHITETTURA, ARTI E PIANIFICAZIONE

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**DOTTORATO DI RICERCA
IN ARCHITETTURA,
ARTI E PIANIFICAZIONE**
DIPARTIMENTO
DI ARCHITETTURA DI PALERMO

La Rivista

In folio è la rivista scientifica di Architettura, Design, Urbanistica, Storia e Tecnologia che dal 1994 viene pubblicata grazie all'impegno dei dottori e dei dottorandi di ricerca del Dipartimento di Architettura (D'ARCH) dell'Università di Palermo (UNIPA).

La rivista, che si propone come spazio di dialogo e di incontro rivolto soprattutto ai giovani ricercatori, è stata inserita dall'ANVUR all'interno dell'elenco delle riviste scientifiche dell'Area 08 con il codice ISSN 1828-2482. Ogni numero della rivista è organizzato in cinque sezioni di cui la prima è dedicata al tema selezionato dalla redazione della rivista, mentre le altre sezioni sono dedicate all'attività di ricerca in senso più ampio. Tutti i contributi della sezione tematica sono sottoposti a un processo di *double-blind peer review*.

Per questo numero il tema selezionato è:

"Inner Areas"

Inner areas, as defined in the Italy's National Strategy (SNAI), are part of the territory that plays a central role in the cultural and social fabric of our communities, are an essential component of our society, economy, and environment. However, they are still often neglected and overlooked, resulting in deterioration, abandonment, and social exclusion. For this reason, it is crucial that the fields of architecture, restoration and architectural history and urban and territorial planning are committed to revitalizing and enhancing inner areas. These disciplines have the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to create sustainable and innovative solutions that can transform these territories into vibrant and liveable communities. Moreover, inner areas are an excellent laboratory for innovation in these disciplines. These areas provide a unique opportunity to experiment with new approaches and techniques that can then be applied to larger-scale urban and territorial planning projects. The challenges posed by inner areas require innovative thinking and creative solutions, making them an ideal testing ground for new ways. The papers presented in this special issue of *Infolio* are the result of the conference "Inner areas' cultural, architectural and landscape heritage: study, enhancement and fruition. Potential driver for sustainable territorial development?" held in July 2022 at the University of Palermo. The conference brought together experts in the fields of architecture, restoration, and urban planning to discuss the central role of inner areas in our society and the need for innovative and sustainable solutions to revitalize and preserve them, being sometimes critical and some other prepositive. The papers explore a range of topics, including the use of technology in restoration, the importance of architectural history in urban planning and the role of

community engagement in revitalization projects.

The reflections that emerged at the conference highlighted how inner areas are a crucial part of our territory and society, and their revitalization is essential for the well-being of our entire community and the preservation of our cultural heritage.

DOTTORATO IN ARCHITETTURA, ARTI E PIANIFICAZIONE (XXIX-XXXVII CICLO)

Coordinatore del Dottorato: Marco Rosario Nobile

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Docenti stranieri

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Opening image: view of Alcará li Fusi (photo by A. Antista).

Renaissance Itineraries between Nebrodi and Peloritani Architectural Heritage, History and Technology¹

Architectural Heritage & Design

Emanuela Garofalo, Armando Antista

Within the general framework of a research Project of Relevant National Interest (PRIN 2017), entitled “The Renaissance in Southern Italy and the Islands: Cultural Heritage and Technology”, the research unit based at Palermo University focused on the inner area that includes Nebrodi and Peloritani mountains, as a quite unexplored and stimulating environment in the specific field of investigation. The scientific relevance of the investigation on “Renaissance itineraries” in this territory, for a deeper understanding of the overall cultural phenomenon in the island, guided this choice, as well as the opportunity to create cultural networks among small local communities, encouraging their sustainable development. This aim will be pursued by exploiting the relations between cultural heritage and new smart technologies, developing the prototype of an App facilitating the actual possibility of visiting monuments and sites.

Keywords: Southern Renaissance, Cultural itineraries, Architectural heritage, Nebrodi, Peloritani

History, technology and communities

In January 2020, a research project entitled *The Renaissance in Southern Italy and the Islands: Cultural Heritage and Technology* began, funded by the Italian Ministry for Universities as a part of the 2017 call for “Projects of Relevant National Interest” (PRIN), in the action line dedicated to the South. The project’s partnership includes four universities in the main cities of the South of Italy and its larger islands, namely Naples, Cagliari, Messina and Palermo². The overall project intends to pursue two main objectives, which are on the one hand addressed to the national and international scientific community and on the other hand to local communities, trying to establish connections between them. As a first instance, the research aims at investigating the diffusion and interpretation of classical models in art and architecture within this large territory, as a complex cultural phenomenon that could be defined as a Southern Renaissance [de Divitiis, 2020]. New perspectives in the study of Renaissance have been largely explored in recent decades, also focusing on the wide range of “antiquities” that inspired artists, architects and their clients between the end of 15th and the 16th centuries, sometimes also including medieval

heritage [Ottenheim, 2021]. As had already been done by scholars in recent decades for Southern Gothic or Mediterranean Gothic [Zaragozá, Mira, 2003], the general aim is to go over the usual historiographical approach, according to which the definition of Southern Renaissance was used to indicate backwardness and a cultural gap with the Italian Renaissance courts. What we are trying to do is substantially redefine the concept of Southern Renaissance by developing the idea of another Renaissance [Nobile, 2002], changing the evaluation parameters used until now. This approach is also important for a better understanding of the cultural network linking Southern Italy with other European areas³. The other main goal pursued by the project - equally important to the first one - goes to the heart of the topic addressed in the seminar *Inner Areas’ Cultural, Architectural and Landscape Heritage: Study, Enhancement and Fruition*, trying to answer the question posed by the seminar’s subtitle, that is: *A potential driver for sustainable territorial development?* The interaction and the dialogue with local communities have been a constant during the fieldwork, with the aim of also stimulating a collaboration among them in a systemic perspective. In our opinion, the creation of a network, resulting from the collaboration among local

communities, is a fundamental step towards driving a sustainable territorial development, with a pivotal role of cultural heritage, especially the architecture. Technology helps to achieve this goal, especially exploring the potential of digital tools to reach a wide audience. The most innovative research results will be disseminated through digital tools, designed with the aim of contributing to enhancing a network of the small towns investigated. Besides the creation of an online database, the prototype of an App will be developed that gives all users the possibility of generating their own itineraries and of making appointments to visit monuments and cultural sites. The fruition of cultural heritage in small towns in Southern Italy, especially in inner areas, is often made uncomfortable by the difficulties of visiting (eg. many churches and other historical buildings are usually closed to the public; it is difficult to establish who the contact person is; there are no guides available). The App will make it easier to overcome such difficulties by creating a direct interaction with local communities, also contributing to increase the attractiveness of the individual locality. In this general framework, the research team based at Palermo University identified a stimulating and challenging field of investigation in the inland area including Nebrodi and Peloritani mountains [Fig. 1], where both the main aims of the overall project could be verified and pursued. To date, this area has been little studied by Renaissance scholars, also because

of logistical problems due to its complex morphology, in addition to the limited availability of archival sources [Paolino, 1995; Accascina, 1996; Scaduto, 2008]. Despite this neglect, distributed among the small towns in this difficult area, there are numerous valuable architectural and artistic works, especially in the religious sphere and dating back to the 16th century, reflections of a past prosperity related to the lucrative silk production industry concentrated in this very area during that century [Laudani, 1996; Ciolino Maugeri, 2002; Monreale, 2018; Sutera, 2020]. In our research, we try to reconstruct the relations among these architectural and artistic works (investigating their authors and clients, but also the construction characteristics and the building sites) and between them and the main coastal cities from where models, master masons, architects and artists hailed (namely Messina and Palermo).

From a scholarly point of view, interest in the study of this cultural heritage is enhanced by the extensive destruction experienced by the coeval architectural heritage in Messina, for which it could provide important insights. The Nebrodi and Peloritani districts also offer appropriate ground for experimental research linked to the project's second general objective, that of involving local communities to make them more aware of the cultural heritage that they are 'keepers' of, and of the possibilities for interaction that can be activated from it, including the use of technology.

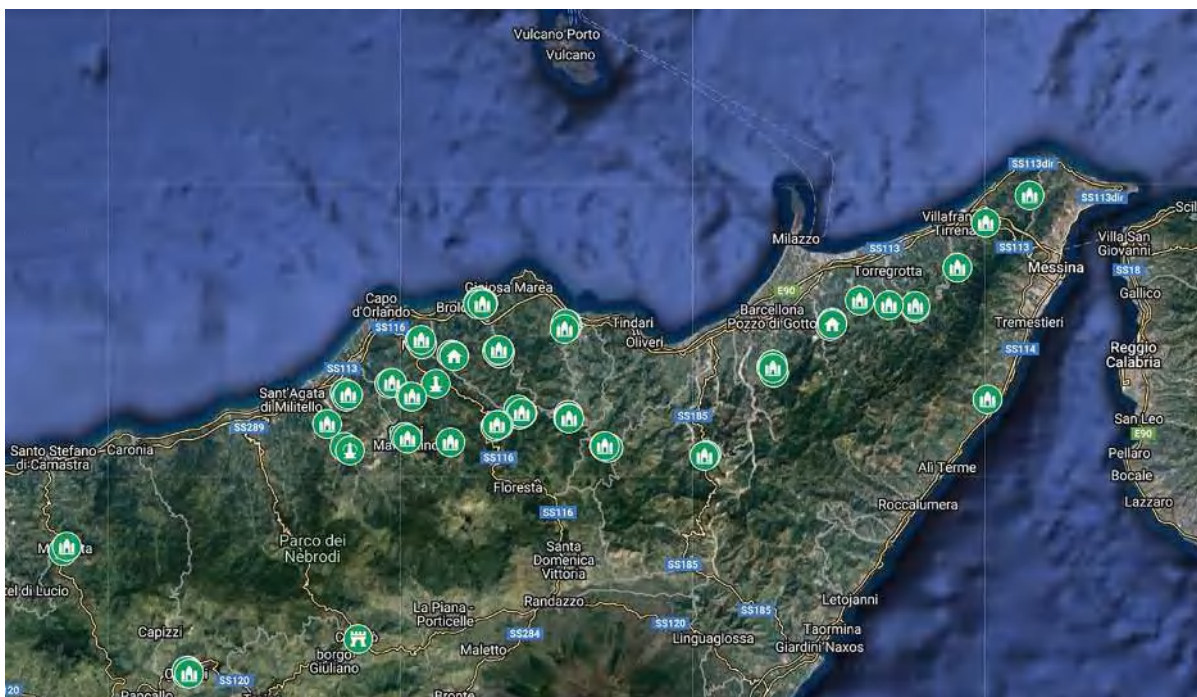


Fig. 1. Map of the inland area including Nebrodi and Peloritani mountains, in evidence the visited towns (<https://www.google.it/maps>).

Heritage and rooting

The work of mapping the historical-architectural and artistic heritage of the centers that fall within the district of the Nebrodi and Peloritani mountains, dating back to the 15th and 16th centuries⁴, was based on preliminary research, carried out by starting from the available bibliographic information⁵ and from data found on the institutional websites of the municipal and provincial administrations, and of the dioceses. The social pages of local cultural and tourism promotion organizations, such as the so-called “Pro Loco” and other associations, have also proved to be surprising sources of information, useful for enriching the analytical database used to catalog the monuments and artifacts. On-site inspections, and contextual photographic campaigns aimed to complete a systematic recognition of the architectural emergencies and of the numerous traces often found in profoundly transformed building contexts. The attempt, therefore, was to map architectures and fragments as far as possible, which is useful for constructing comparisons and reasoning. There was also the hope that, over the years, they may become the object of attention and vertical insights through educational experiences and research. A documentary research campaign has also been launched⁶, limited so far to preliminary surveys carried out in many parish archives⁷, the Diocesan Archive of Patti, the State Archive of Messina, the Municipal Archives of Patti and Santa Lucia del Mela, to be followed by further investigations in the State Archives of Palermo. In the documented towns, ecclesiastical architecture constitutes by far the largest group of buildings. Each of them has, in fact, a mother church of considerable size and often also a second parish church, buildings that strongly characterize the urban scenario with their masses and bell towers, often crowned by spires. As can be expected, the presence of religious orders is widespread, (the most numerous are the Franciscan and Carmelite complexes) and is linked to the close alliances with feudal families, and to the subsidies these families gave to the churches where they would be buried. These were mostly built in the 16th century, sometimes modifying, or expanding pre-existing architectures, whose traces is however possible to recognize, also dating back to the previous century, consisting above all of portals and windows. The identified buildings, which offer a surprising sequence of Renaissance projects, have some constant features in common, such as the use of columns to articulate the naves – a precise choice that falls within the Sicilian tradition that favors column

supports over pillars [Nobile, 2010; Piazza, 2021; Garofalo, 2021] – and an inclination towards *varietas* in the use of architectural orders, sometimes even within the same building. The constructive implications of the columnar system, linked to the slender proportions of the supports and to the alternatives for their construction – in drums or with monoliths – suggested paying particular attention to the construction techniques, with the aim of improving knowledge of the materials used,



Fig. 2. San Marco d'Alunzio, church of S. Maria in Aracoeli, view of the naves (photo by A. Antista).



Fig. 3. Cesarò, Colonna castle, remaining of the main portal with flanking herms (photo by A. Antista).

the extraction and transport systems, and their trade. The widespread use of monolithic columns [Fig. 2] is, in fact, inevitably linked to the availability of quarries in the area from which blocks suitable for their packaging, or for their importation, could be extracted.

Evidence of civil architecture is rarer, most often annexed to military complexes which are only integrated into the urban fabric in a few cases. The most conspicuous exception is the castle of Roccavaldina, one of the most refined examples of Sicilian Renaissance civil architecture, transformed between the end of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by an ambitious project and maybe the involvement of famous architects such as Giacomo del Duca and Camillo Camilliani [Paolino, 1990, 55-78]. Palazzo Valdina also stands out due to the close link it maintains with the small, inhabited center, founded with a privileged reference to the palace: the access portal to the palace, in fact, is positioned at the bottom of the spine axis, the current Via Umberto Primo. On the other hand, also due to its nature as a fortress, Palazzo Branciforte in Raccuja is more isolated. It was the seat of an active court during the 16th century, to which the substantial surviving portions of the building can be referred today. In other centers, more isolated but interesting traces are found, such as the beautiful 16th-century portal flanked by herms of the Colonna residence in Cesarò [Fig. 3]. The urban contexts examined are characterized by transformations, often due to traumatic events such as landslides or earthquakes, as well as the abandonment and neglect that have increasingly characterized the internal areas since the last war. The isolated architectural elements that have been cataloged enrich the knowledge of the widespread heritage, reveal new pieces that are useful for understanding the integration of these territories with the wider regional historical-architectural events, and for this reason they perhaps constitute one of the most intriguing leitmotifs of the Renaissance itineraries in northeastern Sicily. Inspections revealed doors and windows, uncovered staircases, inscriptions, vaults, and decorative elements reused in different contexts, fragments that can be grouped together in sequences united by typological and formal characteristics, establishing many connections between the centers that were examined. See the case of the twin aedicules found in Ficarra and Raccuja [Fig. 4], which testify to the circulation - among the small mountain towns - of models, solutions, decorative repertoires and, inevitably, workers.

There is no lack, albeit in an episodic manner, of cases of reuse of architectural elements that seem to testify

attention to the local antiquity. One case of long-term building continuity is the church of All Saints in San Marco d'Alunzio, built on the structures of a temple [Miracola, 2008, 145], while a more evident symbolic character is covered by the fragments of columns and the capital, probably ancient ones, positioned at the corners of two buildings of Alcara li Fusi, clearly visible below facades that also mercilessly testify to the most recent building events in these historic centers [Fig. 5].



Fig. 4. Raccuja, church of San Nicolò del Fico, pieces of an aedicula (photo by A. Antista).



Fig. 5. Alcara li Fusi, fragments of a column and a capital (possibly ancient ones), reused in a corner (photo by A. Antista).

Further ideas come from buildings that have disappeared, witnessed only in photographs, such as the one that portrays the portal of the Franciscan church of San Piero Patti preserved in the sacristy of the Mother Church in the same town, and published in a volume with limited circulation, therefore almost unknown [Pintabona, 1965, 63; Antista 2021]⁸. The recovery and return to communities of the memory of partially or completely disappeared architectures are, on the other hand, central objectives of the work. In some cases the remains of ruined buildings, even of considerable size [Fig. 6]⁹, are sufficient to hypothesize possible virtual reconstructions using 3D-technology tools, useful for enriching the historiographical investigation and returning pieces of the lost heritage to the communities, to which the PRIN project “The Renaissance in Southern Italy and in the Islands” intends to address a large part of the impact of the activities. The visits and photographic campaigns, for example, were organized trying to involve not only the institutions, whose representatives in many cases responded with enthusiasm and willingness, but also the “third sector” entities, in addition to the inhabitants,

who often play a fundamental role in the keeping and ordinary maintenance of heritage, even if only by holding the keys to a church and offering to open it to the visitor who knocks on their doors. This strategy has given us a measure of the degree of awareness and affection that communities have for their heritage, a fundamental ingredient of local roots. The third sector entities constitute the most promising incubation reservoirs of energies within the communities. Generally speaking, to these realities the inner centers owe the activism, the stimulus to the institutions so that they facilitate the organization of festivals and cultural activities, entry into wider networks and territorial promotion initiatives which are largely based precisely on collaboration with local groups, and sometimes even attempts to manage common goods, which is a very problematic challenge for collaboration between public and private. With the ultimate common goal, to which we hope to contribute to some extent, to counteract the depopulation that threatens the entire hilly and mountainous territory of Sicily. In this regard, one of the most striking and painful cases concerns the very small towns of Giampilieri, Molino and Altolia, devastated by the flood



Fig. 6. Ucria, ruins of the church of Santa Maria delle Scale (photo by A. Antista).

of October 2009, which swept away entire portions of those historic centers, as well as spaces, heritage and memory. Here the phenomenon of abandonment is even stronger, and many associations are fighting it, working, for example, to animate community life, to promote heritage and to recover paths and trails between the tiny villages perched along a fragile valley of the Peloritani mountains. Thanks to the help of these community actors, we have carried out the richest and most in-depth inspections, we have met local history experts, and we have been granted access to generally closed or private places. These are the subjects that we intend to involve in the network generated by the application designed to improve the usability of places. Our work, therefore, tries to intercept the most fertile energies, drawing from them the advantage of a more agile and complete current knowledge of the territories, useful for historiographical research, and proposing to offer intellectual and technological tools in exchange, for a better awareness of the cultural, historical-artistic and architectural heritage, and for its effective promotion. Since the research work, therefore, heritage and community have been held together, with the ultimate aim of stimulating the territorial roots of the latter.

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Notes

1. This essay is a product of the combined work of the authors, however the first paragraph, entitled *History, technology and communities*, is by Emanuela Garofalo, the second one, entitled *Heritage and roots*, is by Armando Antista.
2. The Principal Investigator of the national project is Professor Bianca De Divitiis, historian of art and architecture working at the University of Naples Federico II. The other three research units, one at the university of Cagliari, one at the University of Messina and one at Palermo University, are respectively lead by Professors Marco Cadinu, Roberto Cobianchi and Emanuela Garofalo.
3. The Iberian Peninsula is the main comparison context, but you can also find similar dynamics for the spread of Renaissance artistic language in the 16th century in many regions of France.
4. The chronological margins of the research actually extend up to the first decades of the 17th century, to include buildings whose construction events began in the previous century
5. Among the numerous volumes and essays consulted we indicate, without any claim to exhaustiveness, only a few texts that offer a privileged view of the architecture of the inner towns between Nebrodi and Peloritani mountains: Samonà, 1931-32, 517-524; Basile 1942; Boscarino, 1961; Accascina, 1966; D'Amico, 1978; Novarese, 1986; Foti, 1992; Di Bella, 1993; Paolino, 1995; Aricò, 1999; Scaduto, 2008; Aricò, 2013.
6. The activity was strongly affected, especially in the first year, from September 2020 to the summer of 2021, by the limitations imposed by the health measures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic.
7. Reconnaissance mainly aimed at taking account of the consistency of the funds, and was carried out at the mother churches of San Piero Patti, Castoreale, Galati Mamertino, Sant'Angelo di Brolo.
8. The portals, on the other hand, outline one of the most fertile sequences, on which it is possible to build comparative reasoning on the circulation of architects and design models.
9. They lend themselves to studies to be conducted also with the aim of elaborating surveys of the existing buildings and reconstructive hypotheses such as the churches of Santa Maria delle Scale in Ucria, San Sebastiano in Raccuja, San Michele Arcangelo in Monforte San Giorgio.

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**DOTTORATO DI RICERCA
IN ARCHITETTURA,
ARTI E PIANIFICAZIONE**
DIPARTIMENTO
DI ARCHITETTURA DI PALERMO

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