

Fruition and valorisation of disused manufacturing settlements: the “tonnare” of the Gulf of Castellammare case-studies

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1. The Gulf of Castellammare: spread, decay and typological analysis of local “tonnare”

The issue about enhancement, fruition and management of manufacturing settlements - obsolete in relation with technological developments - is not new and stands still at the centre of a heated debate, full of causes for reflection. The topic becomes more complex when it deals with artifacts related to activities which have roots in centuries-old traditions and which therefore are testimonies of different periods both in building techniques, often stratified, and in typological peculiarities of the structure, which has often been reshaped and tailored to the evolution of industrialization process. In this sense buildings assigned to fishing, processing and conservation of tuna (called tonnare) - which are almost regularly distributed along the coast of the Italian territory - are emblematic. The traditional activities related to tuna fishing, largely productive between the fourteenth century and the sixties of the twentieth century, have been in fact completely abandoned to make way for industrial technologies which are now almost entirely transferred to new settlements. This process of decay involved Castellammare territory, in Sicily, which is characterized by the presence of many artefacts (Fig.1). In Sicily the Tonnare's tradition date back long time ago, some historical researches show that tuna fishing was introduced by Phoenician¹, even if Greek writers - such as Eliano, Ateneo e Plinio – attributed tuna fish techniques to Arabs. The spread of tuna fishing activities increased in the Middle Ages. Tuna fishing set in motion a mechanism involving production and sales for at least three months a year and ancient privileges were imposed: a part of the fish would go by right of advantage to the group engaged in tuna fishing, and another part to the local Diocese. From this agreement we know that in the seventeenth century the Diocese of Mazara Del Vallo had already 14 tuna-traps, including those of the Gulf of Castellammare. In fact since the end of the fourteenth century and the early decades of the seventeenth century the number of tonnare continued to increase and from last decades of seventeenth century they became private properties, as in the 1629 Filippo IV put them on sales. Focusing on Sicilian tonnare located in Gulf of Castellammare, it's not so easy to confine a period of foundations, as consequence of the complex history that characterizes these artefacts. In fact if we consider the primitive systems, often realized with mobile structures, the period of tonnare's productivity goes from the fourteenth to the twentieth century. The artifacts were built to handle all the procedures relating a trap, the part of tonnara located in the sea (Fig.2), therefore the buildings were strongly related to all the productive operations which belong to the processing of tuna. Despite the presence of recurring elements - such as towers, chapel, houses of tuna fishermen, manor house, and warehouses - it is not so easy to define a specific and connotative formal language for this type of buildings because

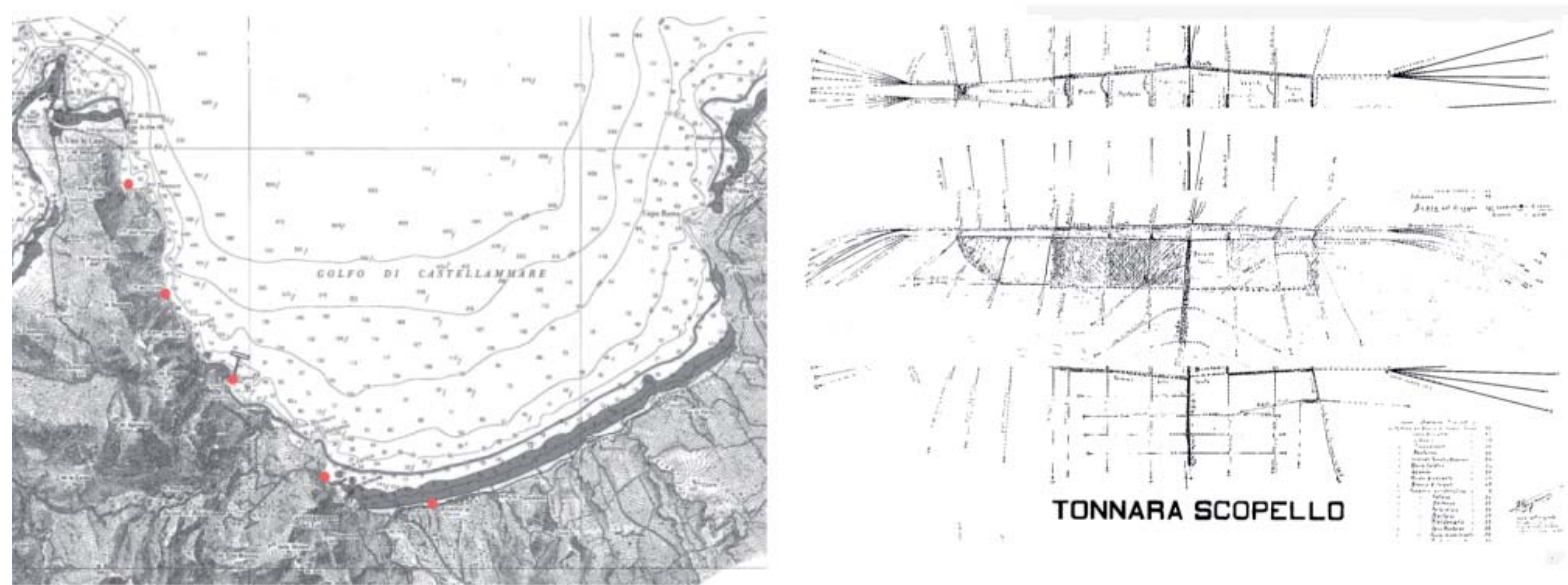


Fig.1 – Castellammare Gulf and its tonnare; Fig.2 – Tonnara of Scopello's trap

the structure is different from case to case. And the last statement became true and true as the tonnare were born as places shared by all, and therefore a sort of collective ownership: entire families were involved in and committed throughout the year to support themselves economically and socially. This issue became more evident for the wide span of time in which these artifacts spread in the territory.

Dealing with stratified artifacts often ancient centres and buildings of more recent creation coexist in the same path, combined in a more or less respectful way. Starting from the choice of the site, every part of the complex was related to tuna fishing, as in the first place was important to find an appropriate site next to the tunas itinerary – so we can identify at least two categories of tonnare: traps of “gone” and “race”.

So even if the term “tonnara” (generally “trap” in English) in a strict sense includes exclusively the gear or the system of nets used to capture tuna, it is also used to identify the system of accessories (boats, stores, houses for crew and ground staff) called “marfaraggio”. For instance specific spaces are requested for the “marfaraggio”, but despite the single elements and functional spaces required for the tonnare typology are wide clear, in the Gulf of Castellammare it's more complicated to identify a typological assessment reiterated. The principal technical spaces required are connected to the tuna processing, such as the gallow-space (called “impiccatoio” or “appenditojo”) in which the tuna fishes were literally hanged, gutted and left to drain for 24 hours. The “appenditojo” could be realized in wooden truss or in masonry. Often this space consisted of a series of juxtaposed arches, a sort of porch located on a decline to facilitate the operations of slaughtering and then the cleaning of the compartment.

The compound of Castellammare is characterized by a large use of arches and vaults, which can be found in the storehouse and in the “trizzane” (warehouses for the boats). The trizzane are characterized by large spans and openings that were needed to allow the storage of specific boats (so called

“palaschermo”) and rigging. To these simple spaces correspond an architectural and constructive language which is essential, in opposition with the manor house one. Manor houses and representation buildings are very different for case to case, as they become mirror of their age both from technical and aesthetic point of view.

2. Case-studies and actual fruition

The Gulf of Castellammare is characterized by the presence of many tonnare. It is a landscape which is rich of extremely different realities, respectively: neglected ones, sustainable enhancement or not fettered reutilization, sometimes ended in a series of interventions which have left precious little of the original settlement. A very emblematic case is the so-called “Tonnara dell’Orsa” (or Ursa) case-study. As its name shows² this artifact (Fig.3) is characterized by a particular position, near the sea as usual, but very advantageous for sailing: this characteristic became a prejudice, in a paradoxical way, creating occasion for different exploitation. Dating back to 1382, when the property belonged to the Order of Saint Benedict which realized the court and the tower at the end of sixteenth century. The Tonnara was signed by many different utilization, for instance in the second half of the seventeenth century the tower was used as a prison. With the suppression of the Orders, in 1866, the tonnara became a State Property and after that was granted in “gabella”. The artifact was converted to different function and during the Second World War, was converted into military purposes, as usual. The small adjacent buildings were probably used to shelters.

In the early ‘90s the refurbishment of the whole complex began, the architect P. Giannola (Fig.4) was charged by Government Department responsible for the environment and historical buildings.

This opened a florid period for the artifact that was finally open to the public but, in spite of further refurbishment action, the complex has not yet found a proper function that could be able to preserve its integrity and it’s currently in a state of neglect. This state it’s actually dammed by citizens’ initiatives aimed to find new suggestions ad purposes for the site.

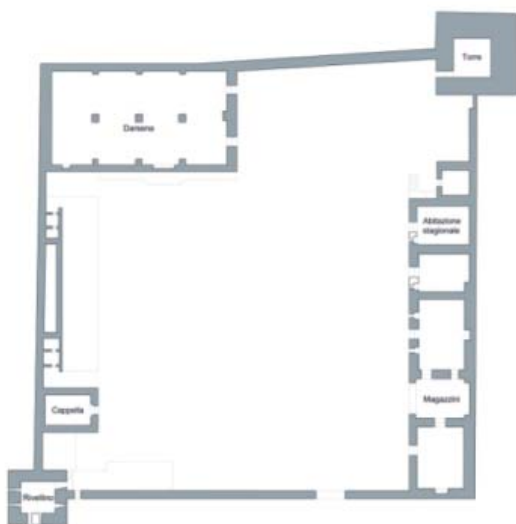


Fig.3 – Tonnara of Orsa: scheme and actual state

Continuing in the territory between Alcamo and Castellammare, along the coast of Partinico, between Calatubo river and the mouth of the St. Bartholomeo river there is the so-called tonnara of Magazzinazzi (Fig.5), named from the valley at the foot of the city of Alcamo.

The complex includes a twentieth century manor house, the preexisting locals of “Marfaraggio” and the tuna fishermen’s homes. These ones probably date back around 1634, when the family of the Specchi barons from Naro left the ownership in the hands of Lo Giudice and Fardella’s family.

The manor house of the complex consists of a two-level building with an observation tower incorporated in the building itself. From the tower, which stands out from the pavilion roof, it was possible to monitor with the telescope all the tuna traps. The lower floor was dedicated to warehouses for equipment and storage of boats. Some boats are still located there and in fairly good condition, the upper floor instead was dedicated to the offices of the administration. The building is made in masonry with square blocks of sandstone and wooden floors, sometimes these are reinforced with steel I-beam coupled with concrete to form a cross-piece. The intervention was performed at the intrados of the floors, to keep untouched the main floor. While the manor house is in a good state of preservation, the trizzane and the fishermen’s houses³ show on the contrary the signs of an improper use. Although these functions kept “alive” the artifact, they were too invasive. In particular, the old court which gave access to the tuna fishermen’s houses, now used as storehouses, has been heavily altered with the construction of a metal roof and a perimetral walls. Other significant intervention (Fig.6) are also in the system of openings and access, reduced to a schedule of closed arches, wooden and concrete architraves, in opposition with traces of majolica that recall the crowning of the manor house. The latest tuna fishing dates back to 1963, when the tuna trap concluded its activities. Thanks to the diligence of the owners the artifact is well maintained, despite this a new destination is required to return it to the collective fruition. From this point of view the cases of Castellammare and Scopello are interesting. It’s about two different cases, both oriented on preservation and sustainable management. The tonnara of Castellammare



Fig.4 – Tonnara of Orsa: set for social events after intervention (1990); Fig.5 – Tonnara of Magazzinazzi: Manor house



Fig.7 – Tonnara of Scopello: Warehouses (on the left side) and Marfaraggio (Archifiusis Archive);
Fig.8 – Tonnara of Scopello: the court with its baroc church and on the right the so-called “appenditojo” (Archifiusis Archive)

was one of the most ancient of whole Sicily⁴, in fact the Arab Edrisi described tuna fishing in Castellammare territory during his sicilian journey. As in the other cases the property of this building has a complex development, today the artifact is absorbed into a new complex of building. The complex is very different from other cases in the gulf, because is located in an urban context. From outside it's not so easy to identify the originary tonnara that today hosts an hotel, despite this nearby the complex the signs of old storehouses and trizzane are readable.

At about five kilometers from the Castellammare del Golfo tonnara, in a rocky cove between the Guidaloca and Uzzo towers and in front of the stacks, there is the Tonnara of Scopello (Fig.7). This one can undoubtedly be counted among the bestpraticce regarding fruition and use. The tuna trap of Scopello is located precisely in the western part of the Gulf of Castellammare and falls under the category of the traps of “gone” and “race”.

The history of this artifacts is very elaborate, as the sequence of owner⁵, between them we could remember the Jesuit fathers that brought several changes and transformations to the building. For instance the construction of

the baroque church within the court and the “trizzane” in 1760, as the inscription on one of the arches at the entrance shows.

The artifact results complex and layered and varied are the events affecting the different buildings. The original nucleus of the Marfaraggio coincides with the juxtaposed building to the rocky ridge, on which stands the contemporary watchtower of the trap. The buildings that constitute the court originally counted only the caretaker’s house, the so-called “bagghieri”, and warehouses for small tools and small parts. On the ground floor there were also the local cooper and joinery. These places were on the sea front, nearby the so-called anchors place. Despite not active since 1985 the complex still preserves intact the places and the coastal landscape, thanks to a careful and respectful administration of this important historical heritage.

In order to keep in good condition the artifact was found a compatible use, which exploits the structure by serving as a microcosm for residential accommodation. The choice was made respecting the specificities of individual buildings and preserving the original structures and functions. A different situation characterizes the ancient trizzane, that today keep unchanged their original function (to store the equipment and palischermi used for tuna fishing), but are closed to public.

With the aim to make available to the public these testimonies of the fishery has been suggested an arrangement of these rooms, simulating the realization of a “Museum of the sea.”

This would complete the path between the museum located near the of tonnara of Castellamar, which exhibits some equipment, and the museum of Maritime Activities of little tonnara Uzzo, once known as the “annex” the same Tonnara of Scopello: in this is shown the scheme and the model of the plant to the sea of Scopello’s traps.

This new site would show the impressive boats, the so-called palischermi (including the Florio boat), and also the equipment that have accompanied over time the activities of the Scopello’s trap. The focus of the design is to use the old openings, today closed, which once connected the storehouses

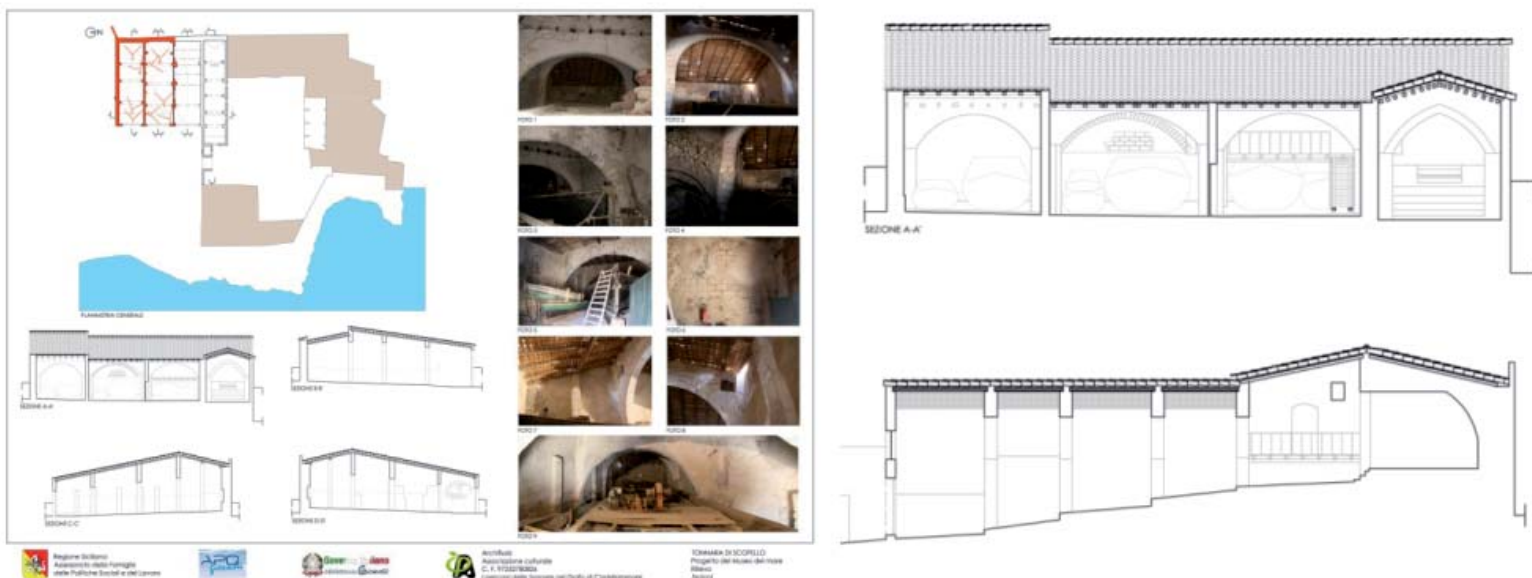


Fig.9 – Tonnara of Scopello: studies for a Sea Museum in the Trizzane – designed by arch. L. Foderà with the collaboration of the authors and of Archifusius Organisation



Fig.10 – Tonnara of Secco, San Vito Lo Capo; Fig. 11 – Tonnara of Secco: a collapse on the trizzane, with the ancient boat, and a view on the internal court

and consolidate the existing loft, to allow access to and fruition of trizzane from a single compartment. Without requiring the displacement of the boats become possible to access the storage loft, where should be placed the small equipment. From this place opening the gates and building of small wooden overhangs extending the loft, the user could look out on the adjacent rooms. The gates would allow to partially release the arcs previously walled, without causing damage to the wall structure and also allowing a reading related with the history of the building.

The intervention (Fig.9), which does not deals with the museum set-up, consider natural lighting systems, making the micro-replacements of tiles of the roof. It's a sort of acupuncture in which the intervention is on elements that requires maintenance, and in addition inserts some transparent elements-tile. A project of action made by simple little steps that give back to society a part of Sicilian history.

The case of the trap of Scopello, widely experienced by the community, although well protected in the typological and morphological characters, is almost unique in the area investigated.

In contrast to this reality is the state of the Tonnara of Secco (Fig.10). The building is part of a real industrial complex that included all those premises and equipment useful in fishing, processing and preserving of tuna fish such as: Marfaraggio, the cauldron, storage for coal, oil and salt, the factories for the processing of the so-called “barilai” and tinsmiths, the earthenware tubs

for cleaning fish, etc. After the suppression of the orders, in 1866, the trap was acquired by the State property until 1872, when it was sold to Vito Foderà who kept it alive until 1960, when the artifact finally ended its activities.

Currently the complex is completely abandoned and many original parts are in a serious danger of collapse (fig.11): this is the case of the trizzane, which still retain within them the ancient fishing boats, but despite this are overloaded with heavy reinforced concrete beams in place of the original arches.

Inside the factory itself the chimney for cooking fish is almost intact and placed in the center of the court. All around there is what remains of the places delegated to the fish processing, as the traces of the ancient paths for drainage water disposal and water tanks to wash the fish. Other detached buildings, nearby the factory were dedicated to the shelter of boats and fishing equipment, as well as the homes of the tuna fishermen.

During the summer full of tourists, the site shows definitively the state of abandonment in which are some of these artifacts: beyond the charm of a melancholic "Poetry of Architecture", catalyzed by the nature of the places, these artifacts have furthermore to offer. A virtuous cycle of development is required and could be pursued with a sustainable use such as that experienced - and still developing - in the site of Scopello. The collective vocation of the places, that are shaped on times and spaces of small households, is a resource and a benefit for the re-use of these artifacts.

However it should be recovered first morally, in terms of memory: this is a prerequisite both to identify new roles for these architectures and to start the drafting of guidelines for intervention, aimed at an aware refurbishment.

Notes

¹ Consolo V., *La pesca del tonno in Sicilia*, Sellerio, Palermo, 1987.

² The name "Tonnara dell'Orsa" derives from the Arab term "Irsa", that means dock.

³ Heavily remodeled in the late '80s and early '90s to accommodate a nightclub.

⁴ The information dates back to 1466, when Antonio Luna, Count of Caltabellotta ceded it to Ferdinando Lucchese of Sciacca for 600 ounces, under the rule of King Giovanni D'Aragona, and only two years later, in 1468, passed to Alliata. After that, in 1519, the owners became the Fardella family.

⁵ In 1441 the Royal Court gave it to Simone La Mammina and in 1580 Allegranza Sanclemente sold it to the Jesuits since 1860. Since 1874 the trap was taken over by Ignazio Florio, in the late 1800 and passed to the family Foderà that even today, along with other co-owners, administers its activities.

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