

CONSTRUIR E RECONSTRUIR NA EUROPA URBANA MEDIEVAL

*Construction and Reconstruction
in Medieval Urban Europe*

Amélia Aguiar Andrade
Gonçalo Melo da Silva (eds.)



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AMÉLIA AGUIAR ANDRADE
GONÇALO MELO DA SILVA
editores

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Tuscany's minor centers: *a complex history through the archaeology of architecture*^{*}

Giovanna Bianchi¹

Abstract

The article will address the theme of the study of the so-called minor historic centres through the tools of the archaeology of architecture.

The case study presented here focuses on a large area located in south-western Tuscany, a territory that today lies on the fringe of major tourist flows but that in the Middle Ages was at the heart of a great political and economic network, thanks to the presence of strategic resources. The study of the architecture of dozens of historic centres has taken place over the last twenty years thanks to specific research projects or as a result of work connected to master's or PhD theses. The article is divided into three parts: a historical-geographical introduction; a methodological premise; and finally a reflection on the significance of the archaeology of architecture for understanding the history of a territory.

In the latter part, individual case studies will be presented in order to retrace the intense building history of an area that saw its apex between the late 12th and 13th century, linked to the political strategies of feudal lords, towns politics and the new rural communal institutions.

Keywords

Minor centres; Archaeology of architecture; Archaeology of building production; History and economy of the Middle Ages; Small towns.

^{*} Translation by Gavin Williams.

¹ Università di Siena.

Centri minori della Toscana: una storia complessa attraverso l'archeologia dell'architettura.

Abstract

L'articolo tratterà il tema dello studio dei centri storici cosiddetti minori attraverso gli strumenti propri dell'archeologia dell'architettura. Il caso studio che sarà presentato riguarda un ampio territorio collocato nel sud-ovest della Toscana. Si tratta di un'area oggi posta ai margini dei grandi flussi turistici che però nel Medioevo fu al centro di una grande rete politica ed economica grazie alla presenza di risorse strategiche. Lo studio delle architetture di decine di centri storici è avvenuto negli ultimi venti anni grazie a specifici progetti di ricerca o come risultato di ricerche collegate a master o tesi di dottorato. L'articolo è suddiviso in tre parti: una introduzione storico-geografica; una premessa metodologica; una riflessione sul significato dello studio archeologico architettonico per la comprensione della storia di un territorio. In quest'ultima parte saranno presentati dei singoli casi in modo da ripercorrere l'intensa storia del costruito di un territorio che ebbe il suo apice tra fine XII e XIII secolo, collegandosi alle strategie politiche delle signorie feudali, delle politiche delle città e dei nuovi organismi comunali rurali.

Parole chiave

Centri storici minori; archeologia dell'architettura; archeologia della produzione edilizia; storia ed economia del Medioevo; piccole città.

1. Historical minor centres and the archaeology of architecture.

In one of his most famous writings, Italo Calvino, the well-known Italian writer, noted that the city is made up of "relationships between the size of its space and the events of its past", which "it contains like the lines on one's hand"². These events are distinguished by sequences of constructions and reconstructions of the buildings that make up the genetic code of the urban space, continuous sequences often connected to complex historical dynamics. These considerations, which are even more applicable to larger cities, are equally valid in the case of 'centri minori', minor centres namely those permanent nuclei in Italy that feature a limited collection of historic buildings that are often delimited by stone-built outer walls. This physical

² CALVINO, I. – *Le città invisibili*. Milano: Mondadori, 1993, p. 10.

boundary itself, capable of defining an internal space, lending it some form of topographical coherence, represents one of the primary parameters for recognising small urban centres, irrespective of their possible type (castle, borgo etc).

Studies of these are not new, and differing definitions have been used to refer to the subject in the various contexts of Europe, ranging from small towns, to *petites villes*, *pequeñas ciudades*, or *pequeñas villas*. In Italy, since the 1970s, the term minor centres (*centri minori*), has become consolidated, despite the fact that this definition, being linked to classificatory criteria often drawn up on the basis of the modern-day geographical and architectural context, may in many cases not fully reflect the real importance enjoyed in the historical era by many of these towns, which today are described as minor centers.

In much of Europe, attention has been paid to small towns especially since the 1980s in countries such as Britain and France and, more recently, Portugal and Spain³. In Italy, for the later medieval period, studies have been conducted on many of those minor centres that can be defined as new foundations (*villenove*, *borghi nuovi*, *terre nuove*...), especially for the context of central and northern parts of Italy. In this respect a very large bibliography has been produced, the result of a series of conferences and monographic works produced especially in the last 30 years⁴. The attraction felt by scholars toward this area of research derives both from the links between this kind of site with expansion policies on the part of cities into the *contado* (rural areas), which encouraged their foundation, and from the rigorous planning and development schemes of these towns between the 13th and 14th centuries, a new element that contrasted with the spontaneity seen in urban development in previous centuries.

On the other hand, less attention has been paid to those minor centres that were the result of more complex transformations (destructions and reconstructions) which, from the original castle built between the 11th and 12th centuries, often on top of early medieval features, led to the formation of larger *borghi*, which in many cases were destined to have more continuity of habitation up until the contemporary era⁵. It is on these latter sites that I will mainly focus.

³ POUSSOU, Jean Pierre; LOUPÈS, Philippe (ed.) – *Les petites villes du Moyen-Age à nos jours*. Paris: CNRS, 1987; DYER, Christopher – “Small places with large consequences: the importance of small towns in England, 1000-1540”. *Historical Research*, 75, Issue 187 (2002), pp. 1-24; DYER, Christopher – “The Archaeology of Medieval Small Towns”. *Medieval Archaeology*, 47 (1) (2003), pp. 85-114; COSTA, Adelaide Millán da; ANDRADE, Amélia Aguiar; TENTE, Catarina (eds.) – *O papel das pequenas cidades na construção da Europa Medieval*. Lisboa: IEM - Instituto de Estudos Medievais, 2017.

⁴ For a recent summary of studies, see GINATEMPO, Maria – “Lo stato degli studi sui centri di nuova fondazione nell’Italia centro settentrionale del basso Medioevo”. In BUSINO, Nicola; PROIETTI, Domenico (ed.) – *Città di nuova fondazione e (ri)fondazioni di città fra antichità, medioevo ed età moderna. Atti del Convegno di Studi, Capua, 29-30 maggio 2019*. Roma: Aracne Editrice, 2022, pp. 161-193.

⁵ See, in this connection, some of the articles in the monographic section, “Contributi sull’archeologia dei centri storici”. *Archeologia dell’Architettura*, XIV (2009), pp. 106-250.

The methodological tools often used to analyse both new foundations and those whose origins date further back in the past have been the preserve of historians of written sources, and historians of art and architecture, although often adopted for the analysis of individual buildings regarded as most representative of the history of the built environment. Accordingly, this has often involved a reconstruction of a partial history of the town, somewhat divorced from the more global history connected to construction processes, technical aspects of building, and the economic history of the various authorities that commissioned the work, which is in turn bound up with the general history of settlement dynamics, geographic aspects of population, and the evolution of landscapes through time.

In this article, I will seek to show that an analysis of material features using the tools of the archaeology of architecture may contribute to an understanding of these processes, which may well leave a deep impression on the history of a minor centre. To do this, I will refer to specific case studies, since, in order to thoroughly analyse the complexity of the world connected to building, it is necessary to use a magnifying glass that corresponds to a territory that is not too large, with the aim of reconstructing a micro-history that can subsequently be compared to other contexts, also thanks to comparisons and cross-references between several types of source, on top of material sources.

As regards the archaeology of architecture, I believe a brief methodological description is necessary.

To this end, it is advisable to note that in Italy the current, original codification of the data collection tools and objectives of this discipline dates back to the second half of the 1970s. The identification of construction and destruction actions, relating to a stratigraphic palimpsest capable of narrating the historical diachrony of a building, was first applied systematically, no less than 50 years ago, with the pioneering investigations in the castle of Genoa, published in the first ever edition of *Archeologia Medievale*, which appeared in 1974⁶.

The reference to this specific journal is significant. Indeed, the discipline that today we call the archaeology of architecture in Italy was formed in close association with modern medieval archaeology. Moreover, many of those researchers who played an important role in this new, fertile period of innovation were at work in those same years, in the same fields of research, and using the same methods.

These were the years that saw the larger-scale use of the new stratigraphic method, both in relation to horizontal deposits and to vertical deposits. The field of application of these methodologies was mainly directed at rural contexts; indeed, abandoned fortified sites were the first and most important object of study of this

⁶MANNONI, Tiziano; POLEGGI, Ennio – “Fonti scritte e strutture medievali del ‘Castello’ di Genova”. *Archeologia Medievale*, I (1974), pp. 171-194.

new school of medieval archaeologists, in the wake of events taking place in the same period in Britain and France⁷.

One important consequence of the great attention to material culture, which at the time was seen as the study of material aspects of activities involving production, distribution and consumption, was the inclusion in investigations of every kind of built structure. This thereby abolished the very frequent dichotomy between larger/monumental buildings and smaller buildings, examples of the latter being residential dwellings, production facilities, service buildings etc. The direct result of this new interpretive key was that study methods were perfected that were suited to all forms of built features. In the earliest, pioneering handbooks of the archaeology of architecture the stratigraphic method applied to vertical features, and the parameters of analysis of techniques of wall construction, were the main subject of discussion. In this initial, complex period of investigation, which also saw an intensely multidisciplinary approach, the first research hubs were formed in Liguria, Tuscany, Lombardy, Veneto, and Lazio, with important scholars who were leading figures in their field: Tiziano Mannoni, Riccardo Francovich, Roberto Parenti, and Gian Pietro Brogiolo⁸.

Ever since then, these considerations constituted a common ground for discussion, with a number of architects working in the field of the consolidation and restoration of historic buildings. Over time, this link has become ever stronger, even though still today it involves too few architects, especially on ministerial bodies. For that matter, this close association is reflected on the editorial committee of the *Archeologia dell'Architettura* journal, which first appeared in 1996 as a supplement to the *Archeologia Medievale* journal, to underline the strong links between the two disciplines as mentioned above.

The differing processes of gathering information, and their associated methodologies, have thus expanded the research aims of this discipline, ultimately leading to a dynamic conception of the life of a building, within the framework of an approach that is as multidisciplinary as possible, for an understanding of the various sequences of construction, destruction and post-deposition, and of the differing masonry and construction techniques that can be related to the various kinds of technical knowhow, and to the extent to which these spread. In Italy today the research studies by *Archeologia dell'Architettura* include studies of individual buildings, monumental complexes, and large and small historic towns. In this field various

⁷ BROGIOLO, Gian Pietro; CAGNANA, Aurora – “Storia e sviluppo della disciplina”. In BROGIOLO, Gian Pietro; CAGNANA, Aurora – *Archeologia dell'Architettura. Metodi e interpretazioni*. Firenze: All'Insegna del Giglio, 2012.

⁸ For a recent overview of the archaeology of architecture in Italy: BIANCHI, Giovanna – “L'enseignement de l'Archéologie de l'Architecture en Italie”. In SAPIN, Christian; BULLY, Sébastien; BIZRI, Mélinda; HENRION, Fabrice (ed.) – *Archéologie du bâti. Aujourd'hui et demain*. Dijon: ARTEHIS Éditions, 2022, pp. 347-354.

technological applications are explored, relating to: surveys; data processing; specific and increasingly sophisticated archaeometric analyses; and archaeoseismological and geomorphological analyses. If one looks not only at the articles contained in the journal ever since the earliest editions, but also at the monographic sections contained in them, we see how far research processes have evolved in the last 25 years, often being interlinked with areas of investigation, in the framework of a multidisciplinary research strategy.

2. The case study: from investigative strategies to field research.

The built landscape that I will put forward as a case study is situated in south-central Tuscany, comprising a large part of the territory known as the Maremma (Fig. 1). This landscape is certainly less well-known than other parts of Tuscany, such as the Chianti region, but it still holds a great attraction. Located in it, between flat coastal areas and extensive woodlands on the inland hills, both small and large, are many of the minor centres that are the subject of this investigation. In some of these areas there are important geothermal phenomena, but its main source of wealth in the medieval

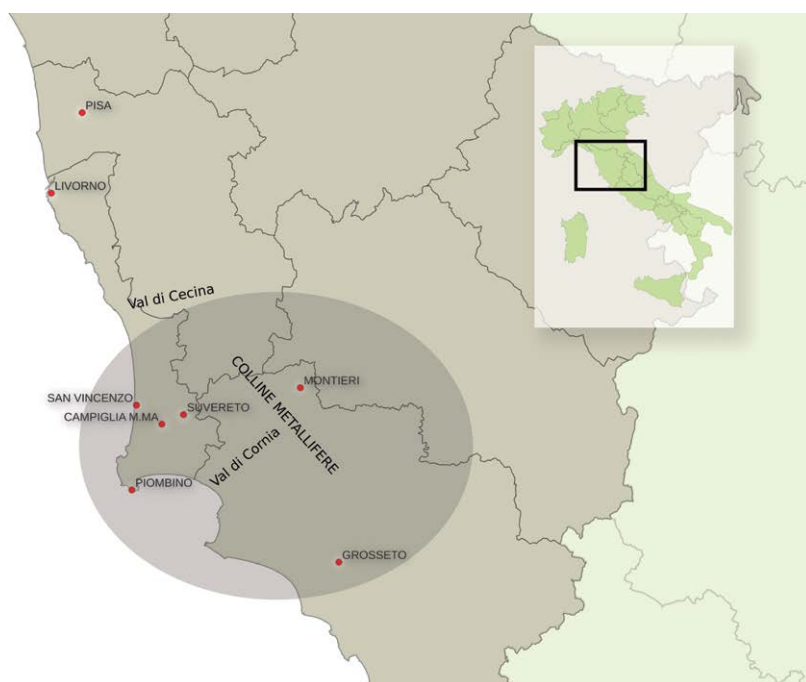


Fig. 1 – The territory analysed, showing the locations referred to in the text.

period were its underground resources: iron, copper, lead and silver. Alongside these resources there was agriculture, and saltworks in the original coastal lagoons. Between the early and late medieval periods these resources attracted the interest of important political figures and institutions: kings and marchesi up until the 11th century; between the 11th and 12th centuries high-ranking and middle-ranking exponents of regional and local aristocracies; eminent religious institutions; and from the end of the 12th century and throughout the 13th century, the new Commune bodies of cities such as Siena and Pisa⁹. The result of this political situation was an intense period of building activity, concentrated especially between the 12th and 13th centuries, which led to the construction or reconstruction of monasteries, churches and castles. This area, still today, retains striking remains of this important period of building activity. These can be seen in the many abandoned castles and in those fortified centres that continued to be inhabited, and that were transformed into those picturesque *borghi* that now make this landscape the subject of picture postcards.

Compared to other parts of Tuscany, this area corresponds to one of the best-studied territories in Italy, from the point of view of archaeology. Indeed, ever since the 1980s, coinciding with the birth of 'modern' medieval archaeology, Riccardo Francovich began an intense programme of investigations into many castles, which have later continued up until the current day¹⁰.

The study of built features in smaller historic centers thus developed within this stimulating context of research, with a view to producing findings that help towards a general understanding of the historical dynamics in a long time period between the time when local seigneuries became established, and the strategies for dominating the *contado* on the part of cities. The first experience of a global study that brought together in a single 'container' excavation findings and data from buildings in an entire historic centre took place when the excavation within the monumental complex of the Rocca di Campiglia Marittima (LI) made it necessary, for a proper understanding and historical contextualisation, to focus attention on a systematic study of the medieval buildings that could still be clearly identified in the inhabited *borgo* below¹¹. Subsequent projects led to an expansion of the field to the whole territorial area of the Val di Cornia, to include in the analysis not just Campiglia itself but also new

⁹ BIANCHI, Giovanna – "Recenti ricerche nelle Colline Metallifere ed alcune riflessioni sul modello toscano". *Archeologia Medievale*, XXXXII (2015), pp. 9-26; BIANCHI, Giovanna – "Analyzing fragmentation in the Early Middle Ages: the Tuscan model and the countryside in North-Central Italy". In GELICHI, Sauro; HODGES Richard (ed.) – *New Directions in Early Medieval European Archaeology. Essays for Riccardo Francovich*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2015, pp. 301-335.

¹⁰ Worthy of note among recent overviews include FRANCOVICH, Riccardo – "The beginning of hilltop villages in early medieval Tuscany". In DAVIS, Jennifer R.; MCCORMICK, Michael (ed.) – *The Long Morning of Medieval Europe*. Ashgate: Routledge, 2008, pp. 55-82.

¹¹ BIANCHI, Giovanna (ed.) – *Campiglia. Un castello e il suo territorio*. Firenze: All'Insegna del Giglio, 2004.

towns that have since been continuously inhabited, such as Suvereto, S.Vincenzo and Piombino¹².

These initial experiences led to an awareness of two sets of problems. Firstly, that an analysis of techniques of masonry construction alone, and also of certain architectural elements, such as windows and doorways, applied up until that time in studies of residential contexts including large-scale contexts, was a fundamental point of departure for a reconstruction of the technical sphere, and of the skills and knowhow of builders at the time, and for a recognition of the economic value of the tangible product, but that this was not sufficient for understanding larger-scale dynamics having to do with the overall development of a residential complex, dynamics that are the result of a complex series of factors determined by the economic, social and political contexts; and secondly, that the initial results obtained from the research pointed to the need for all architectural remains to be recorded in a global, all-inclusive survey, regardless of a priori theoretical decisions that might lead attention to be focused only on some aspects of the built environment, with the aim of securing a diachronic view of construction events¹³. The need to view a complete chronological database of medieval buildings stemmed from the further awareness that a survey based only on a macro-analysis of a particular nucleus, generally aimed at locating its position in space, at identifying the size of the area it occupied, and at an analysis of its form, as a result of the latest building interventions occurring in the late medieval era, even if combined with the earliest documentary attestations, may indeed have been able to answer important questions concerning maps of power, and the distribution logics of these sites in space and the interconnections between them, but at the same time it did not make it possible to grasp fundamental internal transformations connected with specific chronological problems, which were in turn a reflection of changes on a larger historical scale. Hence the decision to operate at the micro-territorial scale, which, starting with the Val di Cornia, led us to move on to the neighbouring area of the Val di Cecina, to the north (**Fig. 1**), before then expanding the field of inquiry to include the northern part of the province of Grosseto, eventually extending into its south-eastern part. Attention to these geographical areas was not always bound only to specific research projects, instead it evolved and spread over the years, thanks to the contribution offered by work produced in the context of Master's degrees, as well as PhD projects. In some cases, additions to the database proceeded hand-in-hand with

¹² BIANCHI, Giovanna – “Dalla progettazione di una chiesa alla definizione degli assetti abitativi della Val di Cornia tra XIII e XIV secolo”. In BIANCHI, Giovanna; BERTI, Graziella (ed.) – *Piombino. la chiesa di S. Antimo sopra i Canali. Ceramiche e architetture per la lettura archeologica di un abitato medievale e del suo porto*. Firenze: All'Insegna del Giglio, 2007, pp. 385-412.

¹³ BIANCHI, Giovanna – “Centri abitati e comunità rurali basso medievali della toscana sud-occidentale. Percorsi interpretativi attraverso l'archeologia delle architetture”. *Archeologia dell'Architettura*, XIV (2009), pp. 189-198.

archaeological excavation projects, and overall, whilst concentrating on towns, it also included more isolated surviving architectural features present in the local area, such as baptismal churches, other churches, and other buildings, in an awareness of their full meaning in the formation of the system of inter-relationships between the space outside the built agglomerations and the space concentrated in the minor centres. The level of micro-analysis imposed by the goals of this survey, and the human and financial resources available to us, lay behind the decision to focus our attention only on remains datable to the medieval period, although after targeted research aimed at identifying the entire sequence through time of construction interventions.

So far in our archive we have mapped almost 30 minor centres situated across the modern-day provinces of Pisa, Livorno and Grosseto. In almost all cases these are nuclei situated on hilltop sites featuring an average or strong gradient, the end result of a process of centralisation that dated back to the early medieval period¹⁴.

Since the prime goal was to identify the ways in which spaces for living in were built, inhabited and planned in the medieval period, our research process gave precedence to an initial phase aimed at reconstructing the production processes of these features. Subsequently, on the back of a solid factual base regarding the end results of the material 'products', this made it possible to trace the associated historical processes, and the symbolic effect linked to these aspects, in order to successfully determine the historical, economic and social identity of these same communities in relation to their place of residence, and the surrounding territory.

In order to fulfill these objectives, it was vitally important to have a wealth of information available formed by a complex series of findings from previous or contemporary investigations involving various different disciplinary fields. First, the 30-year-long archaeological research in the Maremma, mentioned above, including extensive subsoil and surface investigations, has allowed us to make use of a database that was already large, and which was compiled during the 1990s. This enabled a precise diachronic survey of masonry techniques between the 11th and 14th centuries, which are well dated thanks to archaeological sequences. In some cases, excavations inside architectural complexes also yielded information regarding the chronology of a number of specific building types, and studies of material culture, connected to the analysis of the archaeological sequences, proved to be a vital interpretive tool to be linked to construction processes.

At the same time, the way the research was formulated, in close contact with a number of architectural and art historians, very attentive to the material aspect of architectural and art historical features, made it possible to integrate the findings made regarding the construction process with findings relating to the project of the

¹⁴ FRANCOVICH, Riccardo – "The beginning of hilltop villages..."; BIANCHI, Giovanna – "Recenti ricerche nelle Colline Metallifere..."; BIANCHI, Giovanna – "Analyzing fragmentation..."

whole building and its decorative features. The contribution of epigraphical studies was important, not just in order to secure an absolute dating element, but also so as to benefit from findings relating to the political context in which these pieces of writing on display were produced. Also essential was the contribution of scholars of documentary sources who, for more than 20 years, have systematically concentrated their attention on a significant sample of the areas looked at, allowing us both to better understand the historical scenarios surrounding building policies themselves, and to circumscribe the territorial areas on the basis of their original political strategies¹⁵.

On the basis of these assumptions, for each minor centre we proceeded to conduct a detailed survey of all the built structures present, datable to the medieval period, extending our analysis, where possible, to an investigation also of the interiors of these same built features.

The objectives of our research were to reconstruct the four main sequences, already mentioned in the previous literature¹⁶, namely: the construction sequence; the sequence of production cycles; the sequence of building types (public and private civic buildings, residential buildings, defensive buildings, and religious buildings); and the sequence of urban layouts.

For the *construction sequence*, the first phase of the analysis involved a detailed survey of the towns examined, with the identification of the main builds¹⁷ on the basis of the presence of breaks, protruding features, and relationships between doors and windows. The individual builds, also comprising parts of the outer walls and associated town gates, were then recorded and numbered on a cadastral map using conventional symbols representing stratigraphic relationships, to indicate and make immediately legible the macro-sequence referring to the whole town. Later, the individual builds identified were subjected to detailed stratigraphic analysis, accompanied by a survey drawing, to scale or otherwise. This then made it possible to associate the elevations analysed with a relative initial chronology, and it is on these sections that the analysis was conducted that was aimed at clarifying the sequence of *production cycles*. This was carried out by analysing the four main indicators that are part and parcel of this discipline, and that are necessary for a reconstruction of the organisation of the construction process: *masonry techniques; doors and windows; decorative elements; and architectural elements*.

¹⁵ For the most important overviews, see COLLAVINI, Simone M. – “*Honorabilis domus et spetiosissimus comitatus*”. *Gli Aldobrandeschi da “conti” a “principi territoriali” (secoli IX-XIII)*. Pisa: ETS, 1998; CECCARELLI LEMUT, Maria Luisa – “La Maremma popoloniese nel Medioevo”. In BIANCHI, Giovanna (ed.) – *Campiglia. Un castello e il suo territorio*, Firenze: All’Insegna del Giglio, 2004 pp. 1-116.

¹⁶ BROGIOLO, Gian Pietro – “Prospettive per l’archeologia dell’architettura”. *Archeologia dell’Architettura*, I (1996), pp. 11-15.

¹⁷ For the determination of the various “Unità di Riferimento” (Reference Unit), reference was made to the consolidated methodology already set out in BROGIOLO, Gian Pietro – *Archeologia dell’edilizia storica. Documenti e metodi*. Como: New Press, 1988.

For a study of the techniques, the parameters already identified during the 1980s and 1990s were adopted. These defined the distinctive elements as being technique, the construction material, how these materials were obtained, how they were worked and finished, their size, how they were laid, the bonding agents used, the type of masonry core, and the type of corners¹⁸. Meanwhile the analysis of the doors and windows gave consideration to the elements defined in the past by Tiziano Mannoni's group in Genoa, as identified in the characteristics of door-jambes, architraves and arches¹⁹. In the case of pointed arches, as found at church of S. Antimo in Piombino, reference was made to the descriptive fields applied by Gabbrielli in the examples of stereotomic analysis of medieval Siennese doors and windows²⁰. As regards the study of architectural and decorative elements, we made use of art historians and architectural historians, who are constant members of our research projects. This shows that an interdisciplinary collaboration that rests on solid methodological foundations can lead to a continual and profitable osmosis of information, with the objective of a converging historical result.

The determination of the *sequence of building types* involved a global analysis of the vertical structures covered in the survey, analysed and interpreted on the basis of parameters that were often common to other disciplines, such as the history of architecture. Linear sizes, volumes, heights, types, and numbers of internal floors, load-bearing masonry structures, the position and function of doors and windows, the type of flooring, the presence of external architectural annexes made of perishable or non-perishable materials, stone or brick ledges, the size and type of holes to hold wooden construction scaffolding, and the presence of interruptions in construction corresponding to pauses in the construction process itself, are just some of the main parameters considered in our survey. However, these parameters are essential for defining classes of buildings and later kinds of building, and for making the interpretive shift from the specific production process, relating to some parts of the structure, to a more general vision, having to do with the planning skills of individual master builders, the financial resources that were invested, and the wishes of the authority that commissioned the work, in relation to the specific functions. This information is necessarily to be placed in connection with, and compared with, the information inferred from the sequence of production, for a global analysis of the built environment that is as complete as possible.

¹⁸ PARENTI, Roberto – “Sulla possibilità di datazione e di classificazione delle murature”. In FRANCOVICH, Riccardo; PARENTI, Roberto (eds.) – *Archeologia e Restauro dei monumenti*. Firenze: All'Insegna del Giglio, 1988, pp. 280-304.

¹⁹ For the pioneering methodological foundations, see the article by FERRANDO CABONA, Isabella; MANNONI, Tiziano; PAGELLA, Rosa – “Cronotipologia”. *Archeologia Medievale*, XVI (1989), pp. 647-662.

²⁰ GABBRIELLI, Fabio – “La cronotipologia relativa come metodo di analisi degli elevati: la facciata del Palazzo Pubblico di Siena”. *Archeologia dell'Architettura*, I (1996), pp. 17-40.

Dating of these builds on the basis of both indirect dating elements, inferable from parallels in terms of comparable techniques, doors and windows, structural architectural features or decorative features, and direct dating elements, as deduced from the presence of inscriptions, precise documentary references, or ceramic finds contained in stratigraphy that is in phase with the buildings themselves, also enabled a chronological mapping of the various building types.

The following phase, including the creation of diachronic plans and layouts of the town in the various different historical periods, with the precise identification of the individual builds, led to the determination of the final sequence, namely the sequence relating to the *urban layout*. In this final phase of analysis, one essential exercise proved to be a study of the relationship of these builds, and their location, with the characteristics of the empty spaces in the layout of built structures (squares, major thoroughfares and secondary roads), as well as a study of the dimensions for the various built features (the perimeter of outer walls, and the internal surface area). Indeed, these elements had already been considered, and turned to good account, in previous and more recent urban planning studies. However, at times they were kept separate from studies of walled structures. By contrast, such studies enable diachronic maps to be drawn up that include classes and types of buildings that were contemporaneous with the overall urban layout.

The identification of the various urban layouts, viewed through time, was thus the point of arrival of the research, covering all the other, aforementioned sequences. It was also vital for attempting to put forward a more complex historical interpretation.

The computerisation of the findings also facilitated the various research procedures, as well as representing a potential informational tool for future urban development plans. In many cases, this global analysis resulted in the production of illustrations reconstructing the towns analysed, or 3-dimensional models of particular buildings, which were subsequently often used in the context of visitor information systems by local authorities, with a view to making our research available to the public (Fig. 2).

3. From the archaeology of architecture to historical complexity.

Most of the minor centres analysed stand on hilltop sites, or are situated on hillsides. Exceptions are centres close to ports that are crucial for trade. The hilltop position is the result of their first phase of formation, despite the fact that the most recent research studies have shown that, in the early medieval period, this was not the predominant form of settlement site in this area. Towns were found both on low-lying flat areas, especially those near the coast, and on hilltops. Recent studies themselves, which have investigated sites in low-lying areas in detail, identify the end of the

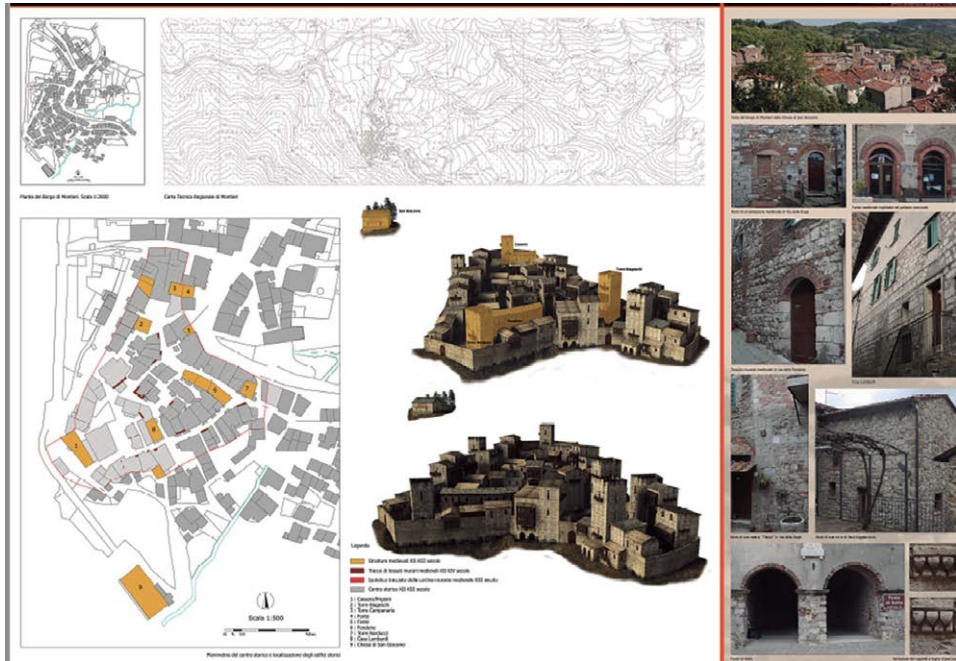


Fig. 2 – Example of illustration summarising the study of Montieri's old town centre.

11th century, and especially the 12th century, as the moment when there was a fairly abrupt change in population strategies²¹. Indeed, this is the time range during which hilltop sites became the preferred location for settlement sites. For some time now this part of Tuscany has been identified as a territory where strong feudal seigneuries exercised their power, the rise of which dated back to the early medieval period²². These important aristocratic families had built up their power thanks to their close links with the central powers, represented by the Empire and by the marchese of Tuscia, which was the territorial district that took shape in the course of the 9th century. Following the weakening of these central powers, the result especially of the 'Investiture Controversy', and also following the Gregorian reform, representatives of the leading aristocratic houses located their interests more in rural areas, defining more clearly and evidently the districts that belonged to them²³. This process of location and reorganisation of policies for controlling rural areas was in parallel with the definition of the castle as the most meaningful symbol of their renewed powers.

²¹ BIANCHI, Giovanna – "Recenti ricerche nelle Colline Metallifere..."; BIANCHI, Giovanna – "Analyzing fragmentation..."

²² WICKHAM, Chris – "La signoria rurale in Toscana". In DILCHER, Gerhard; VIOLANTE, Cinzio (ed.) – *Strutture e trasformazioni della signoria rurale nei secoli X-XIII*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996, pp. 343-409.

²³ CORTESE, Maria Elena – *L'aristocrazia toscana. Sette secoli (VI-XII)*. Spoleto: Edizioni CISAM, 2017.

Thus, the castle became the dominant form of architecture in the seigneurial language of the time, to manifest the economic and political powers. It was necessary in order to stand out in the new climate of competition, when territories were broken up into a great many seigneurial districts, and struggles for control over them became fiercer²⁴.

Key features of these early castles were the seigneurial residence or residences, always situated in the highest area of the hill, and the fortified boundary, namely the outer walls. Between the end of the 11th and the beginning of the 12th century the tower was the preferred building type, and its size could vary in terms of its perimeter and height. Recently it has been suggested that this choice was closely linked to a phenomenon involving imitation of fortifications that formed part of regal possessions, where, already between the end of the 10th and the 11th centuries, this building type was adopted²⁵. In the course of the 12th century, alongside towers, we start to see more complex buildings such as lower, defensive towers that were more developed in width, often having several floors, or buildings identifiable as fully-fledged palaces (**Fig. 3**).

Stone was the most used construction material, and, among the indicative parameters of this specific historical moment the use of stone itself, and above all how it was worked, were one of the most important elements in seigneurial architectural language. Since the end of the 11th century, and especially during the 12th century, stone began to be attentively worked to make regular stone blocks (ashlars) with well-made corners, and facing surfaces dressed by chiselling or cutting. Experimental archaeology first identified some time ago how long it took an experienced stonemason to make a well-dressed, average-sized or large ashlar: from five to seven hours, depending on how easy it was to work the material. Subsequently, the new stone walls, which were laid in regular courses, were bonded by mortar having a high percentage of lime. These details suggest that the process of producing the bonding agent was somewhat complex, necessitating further skilled labour (**Fig. 4**). Taken together, these features, showing more than any other features, in their tangibility, the scale of the financial investment in terms of the time and the human resources required, made the walls of the new fortifications the most important political manifesto of the seigneurial powers, and this was further highlighted by the absence of any plaster covering the facing surfaces²⁶.

²⁴ BIANCHI, Giovanna – “Archeologia della signoria di castello (X-XIII secolo)”. In GELICHI, Sauro (ed.) – *Quaranta anni di Archeologia Medievale in Italia. La rivista, i temi, la teoria, i metodi*. Firenze: All’Insegna del Giglio, 2014, pp. 157-172

²⁵ BIANCHI, Giovanna – “Dalla pietrificazione dei poteri alla pietrificazione della ricchezza. Uso funzionale e simbolico della pietra tra Toscana e Centro-Nord della penisola (X-XII secolo)”. In GIOVANNINI, Fabio; MOLINARI, Alessandra – *Il paesaggio pietrificato. La storia sociale dell’Europa tra X e XII secolo attraverso l’archeologia del costruito*, Atti del Convegno (Arezzo 7-8 febbraio 2020), *Archeologia dell’Architettura*, special issue XXVI (2021), pp. 97-118.

²⁶ BIANCHI, Giovanna – “Dalla pietrificazione dei poteri alla pietrificazione...”



Fig.3 – Reconstruction drawing of the seigneurial buildings in the Rocca (castle) of Campiglia Marittima (illustration by Ink-Link, Firenze).

Carefully laid courses, and stone-dressing without plaster, were thus a distinctive feature of this historical phase, which saw a general adoption of these masonry techniques, marking a major break with the technical context of previous centuries, which tended to display more irregular techniques.

As regards building types, a detailed analysis of material remains has succeeded in yielding unexpected results in some contexts. This is the case with the various strategies for choosing seigneurial residences made by two different aristocratic families that had dominion over large neighbouring territories. The first of these, corresponding to the Aldobrandeschi family, was definitely older, and more powerful



Fig. 4 – Castle of Rocca San Silvestro. The outer walls.

thanks to its long-standing connections with the Empire. It was also economically predominant. The second aristocratic house, corresponding to the Della Gherardesca family, boasted more recent dominion over these territories, and a greater degree of dynastic fragmentation. What we find here is that choices involving residences were inversely proportional to their political profile. The desire of the relatively less strong family to assert itself led to the early construction of many residences that were more sumptuous and complex, connected to the different branches of the aristocratic house. For the family that was stronger, and that could rely on an absolute dominion in its own territory, the chosen buildings were generally important but more modest in their architectural forms, usually corresponding to towers²⁷. The seigneurial residence was also a means for self-assertion, and thus, at least for this territory, its size and scale was not always directly proportional to the power associated with it, but was closely

²⁷ BIANCHI, Giovanna; FICHERA, Giuseppe; PARIS, Francesca M. – “Rappresentazione ed esercizio dei poteri signorili di XII secolo nella Toscana meridionale attraverso le evidenze archeologiche”. In VOLPE, Giuliano; FAVIA, Pasquale (ed.) – *Atti del V Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Medievale*. Firenze: All’Insegna del Giglio, 2009, pp. 412-416.

connected to dynamics involving the representation and perception of powers.

Remains of these early seigneurial residences are still partially present in urban centres, often being incorporated within slightly later buildings, in common with parts of earlier outer town walls.

Moreover, in abandoned castles we can observe the characteristics of stone houses, usually consisting in just one storey, with roofs made of slate, and the interior space divided between dwelling-space and a shelter for animals. A debate has begun recently, for Tuscany, over whether these stone castles, from the late 11th and the first half of the 12th centuries, were already developed population centres, or whether they became such later on, at the end of the 12th century. The question arises from the dating that is attributed to houses in the borgo within the castles walls, with date ranges that are often extensive, owing to a relatively brief chronology of pottery itself in this phase. A project that has just started, using a large number of archaeometric dates for mortars, will seek to get a better understanding of whether, at the time of the construction of the outer stone walls, and of the seigneurial residences, a large section of the dependent populace still lived in the pre-existing nuclei outside the castle itself²⁸.

A possible reason for this misalignment would in part be due to the rates of growth of the economic powers of the seigneuries themselves which, between the end of the 11th and the start of the 12th centuries, were reorganising their wealth, and perhaps investing only in the symbolic parts of their castles (seigneurial residences, and town walls), with less concern for attracting the population within the castle itself.

In any event, the situation saw a drastic change between the end of the 12th and the start of the 13th century itself.

In the last decade, in Italy, archaeology and material sources in general have been vital for suggesting the rate of economic growth, which was obviously reflected in investments in buildings, which are one of the main manifestations of it. Although some rates of this growth are yet to be determined with precision, especially for the period bridging the 10th and 11th centuries, it is nevertheless undeniable that, for Tuscany and other parts of Italy, the moment of great acceleration was especially in the final decades of the 12th century, and not in earlier centuries, as has often been suggested²⁹.

²⁸ This is the project entitled: *THE TIMES OF CASTLES. Multidisciplinary researches for a new chronology of the building sites of incastellamento (XI-XII centuries)*, host Institution University of Siena, www.castles.unisi.it.

²⁹ Regarding the economic contribution of the 12th century, as seen by means of archaeology, a valid reference still consists in the articles in the monographic edition of the journal *Archeologia Medievale*, MOLINARI, Alessandra (ed.) – “Mondi rurali d’Italia: insediamenti, struttura sociale, economia. Secoli X-XIII”. *Archeologia Medievale*, XXXVII (2010), Special Issue, pp. 11-284, especially the introduction by Molinari and the conclusions by Chris Wickham and Sandro Carocci.

This chronology coincides with the time of greatest development of many seigneuries, and with the contemporaneous formation of the first Communes (as in the case of Pisa), and of their strategies for asserting their presence in the *contado*.

This historical context, closely linked to the desire to exploit the resources of this territory, in particular mining resources, led to a series of greater investments in building. It was precisely at this time that many original castles were expanded, becoming important population centres, thereby taking on that complex appearance that is still clearly recognisable today in many smaller historic centers.

The presence of many more political players in the field – seigneuries, towns expanding into the rural areas, and the presence of the first rural Commune bodies – gave greater political complexity to this phase, which can clearly be seen in the built environment. On the basis of our large-scale survey, it is possible to sum up what we can see as the main changes that marked a clear divergence from the previous phases of building activity.

As regards the original seigneurial areas, we often see an expansion of them thanks to the construction of new defensive towers, or palaces, which were added to the original (vertical) towers. In many castles that were later abandoned at the end of the medieval period, new dwellings were built at the same time. However, these were laid out within the space contained inside the original, existing outer walls, without these being enlarged in any way. The new houses often had two storeys, with a greater distinction between residential spaces and spaces set aside for domestic activities.

On the other hand, in other castles the expansion or construction of the new seigneurial residences occurred at the same time as the inhabitable space was doubled, thanks to the construction of new outer walls that increased the previous circuit of fortified walls.

These transformations are, as stated, indicative of more complex political contexts, given that most of them took place in those fortified centres where, in parallel to the presence of the seigneuries, rural Communes had also developed. The formation of these was often supported by the large cities which, via control of them (often by means of their own representatives on some political bodies), managed to more easily acquire responsibility for managing large parts of rural areas, very often to the detriment of the seignury itself. Thus, in the expansion of these centres, the seignury was not the only authority behind building projects. Instead, as was first suggested some time ago, the support of cities was crucial. In many cases, cities sponsored these large-scale operations financially, the costs of which could not be borne by the newly-established rural Communes³⁰. This interpretation of events is not so evident from documentary sources, in which the most pertinent references

³⁰ BIANCHI, Giovanna – “Centri abitati e comunità rurali...”

to urban building strategies in the countryside are for the new *borghi*, founded ex novo, referred to in the first paragraph above. However, the material evidence in this connection is very clear.

Some examples are worthy of mention. In the *contado* controlled by the city of Pisa, a common feature in house types present in these late 12th-13th century expansions of *borghi*, which often involved no less than a doubling of the habitable space, is the frequent presence of a specific house consisting in several floors. A particular feature of this house has to do with its facade. Unlike the other three perimeter walls, the facade was not built of stone, but consisted of wooden boards attached to the internal floors, and above all to corner brackets, made of stone, which were sometimes found all the way up to the top of the roof, or else were topped at the upper levels by relieving arches (Fig. 5). Numerous examples of this kind of building are present in the urban centre of Pisa, some of which are still well preserved³¹. In the literature of architectural history, this type of home, associated with the middle and upper classes, depending

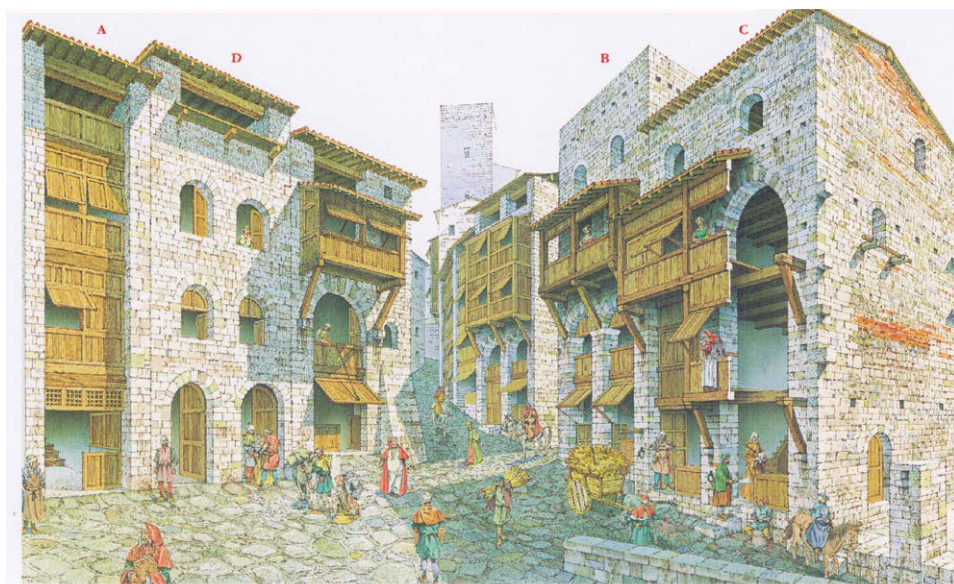


Fig. 5 – Reconstruction of the main square in the borgo of Campiglia Marittima in the 13th century, showing the various different kinds of pillar houses (illustration by Ink-Link, Firenze).

³¹ REDI, Fabio – *Pisa com'era: archeologia, urbanistica e strutture materiali (secc. V-XIV)*. Napoli: Liguori, 1991.

on its variant forms, has been called a 'casa a pilastri angolari' (corner pillar house) due to the presence of these pillars of stone along the edges of the facade. Given its characteristics, namely greater vertical development and the presence of a certain number of storeys within it, this type of house was suited to expansions of the original castles which, precisely owing to their transformation into larger settlement, required residential dwellings able to accommodate more than one family group. The presence of these 'pillar house' is thus indicative both of a need connected to more complex population strategies, and of the extent to which the technical field of construction was closely connected to cities themselves, and to the architectural models found in them³². This latter aspect reflects the fact that the construction of pillar houses' is a sign of the skills and knowhow of master-builders from the urban construction sector (also attested to by epigraphic evidence), thereby bearing witness to the city's involvement in the building policies of these fortified minor centres, which is never expressly attested to by documentary sources. At the same time, the adoption of this building type reflects the strong links with the city also in the choice of an architectural form that was representative of a socio-economic context that was undergoing major change, especially in the 13th century, in these rural settlement contexts. Indeed, the establishment of the first rural Communes was linked to greater social complexity found in these small rural societies, which, in a more or less definitive way, by forming connections with the cities, began to emancipate themselves from seigneurial power.

Indeed, in what is no coincidence, the expansion of these original castles coincided in many cases with the crisis of the seignury itself. Many of the stone-built castles that took shape at the start of the 12th century were abandoned in this very same phase, and the start of the 13th century, in the Maremman countryside in Tuscany, was marked by population shifts from abandoned castles to other, successful castles, which for political and economic reasons continued in existence, surviving down to the present day. Often in these very cases the aristocratic families themselves abandoned their own seigneurial residences, which were later occupied by military garrisons sent out from the cities (for example Pisa, as well as Siena).

Every historical and cultural landscape is the product of a long sequence of transformations, which are in turn the result of specific historical and economic contexts. In our case study, the survey of the buildings found in several minor centers made it possible to highlight the various sequences of habitation in a long diachrony made up of constructions, reconstructions, or enlargements. This enables us to state that the modern-day landscape is, for most of the towns investigated, the fruit above all of building periods in the 12th and 13th centuries, when the economic investment in these territories reached a peak. Indeed, barring rare exceptions, the modern era

³² BIANCHI, Giovanna – "Dalla progettazione di una chiesa..."

was characterised by only modest investments, often owing to wars and epidemics, and these investments mostly involved the construction of small fortifications, and the maintenance of existing structures.

It is only in the contemporary era that, in these *borghi*, the first buildings began to be built outside the medieval town walls, often with disastrous results, as they were not subject to precise planning schemes and criteria.

Helping local communities to acknowledge and re-appropriate an important history, in which these minor centres were at the centre of a greater political and economic network, is one of the fundamental tasks facing we researchers. Tracing the history of each of these *borghi* means reconstructing an important cultural identity, especially in areas such as those we have examined, which are often economically more depressed than others, and situated on the margins of more developed zones that are better known to cultural tourism.

The history of this complex and large-scale series of constructions and reconstructions may transform itself into a fascinating and unexpected story. This is what we have been trying to do for some time in this area, by fostering the opening of archaeological areas and museums. An emblematic case in this connection was research conducted in the old town centre of Piombino³³. This coastal town was known especially for the presence, since the start of the last century, of the local iron and steel industry, which has largely altered the landscape, obliterating its history from view. In the Castle and Medieval Ceramics Museum, opened in 2013, the main cornerstone of the visitor experience, backed up by information panels and multimedia installations, is the town's medieval history itself (**Fig. 6**). This was a discovery: for we researchers, but above all for the modern-day inhabitants of Piombino, a town able to attract even casual tourists who find themselves passing through Piombino only so as to board a ferry to the nearby island of Elba.

This is the first step to ensure that a cultural landscape may be seen as an economic resource for these territories. This is the path that we researchers must never tire of following.

³³ BIANCHI, Giovanna – “Piombino, porto e città: una lettura archeologica”. In CECCARELLI LEMUT, Maria Luisa; GARZELLA, Gabriella; PETRALIA, Giuseppe; VACCARI, Olimpia (ed.) – *Il porto di Piombino tra storia e sviluppo futuro*. Ospedaletto-Pisa: Pacini, 2014, pp. 11-28.



Fig. 6 – Reconstruction of the original town of Piombino during the 13th century enlargement of the previous castle (illustration by Ink-Link, Firenze).