

The Founding of New Cities in Sicily between the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Architecture, Urban Models and Rural Infrastructures in the Study of the Town of Delia

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Abstract

This article deals with the study of newly founded cities in Sicily between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This phenomenal rise in the number of new cities occurred in most of the inland areas of the island and was affected by extensive transformations financed by the nobility during that period. Within this study, the theme of building new cities is addressed with reference to the political and cultural scenarios and as related to the space-time coordinates of the physical and social transformations. To develop a general framework, the founding of the city of Delia, in which the visible elements remain useful for grasping most of the aspects related to the development of this city, is adopted as a case study.

The specific reference to the founding of a city is crucial to understand the birth of a new urban center. Three aspects should be considered in that development: its architectural dimension, its urban characteristics and its relationship with the surrounding environment characterized by cereal production.

My analysis, distinguished from all previous works published on the history of Delia, concentrates on these three specific aspects. Therefore, this research highlights the existence of shared architectural and urban planning principles that arose between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. On a methodological level, it was necessary to adopt one Sicilian city that was founded in the 16th century as a model in order to compare it with other examples of the same period. The proposed case study reveals the existence of urban and social planning procedures and practices that are reflected in all the other centers. However, it remains necessary to extend the study to the construction of a new city and its diffusion of new architectural ideas through the circulation of workers, artists and architects.

Key words:

Landscape, Sicily, Moncada, Mediterranean, colonization, urbanization, settlement, territory, architecture, watermill

1. Introduction

Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Sicily saw the emergence of a large number of newly founded cities, especially in the internal areas of the island.¹ The urban planning principles carried out in the newly inhabited centers radically changed the appearance of the island, known until then only for its agricultural production. The role played by the great feudal families was fundamental in the process that led to the construction of these new urban centers.² Where appropriate, a new historiographic approach has been applied to the analysis of the Sicilian hinterland in conjunction with a systematic research on the new construction methods developed in the sixteenth century. After consultation with Sicilian and Spanish archives and through extensive archival investigations, recent historiographical contributions have highlighted the existence of common phases in the rise of these urban centers. During the Renaissance, these new towns showed the existence of common architectural models in the buildings that arose in the cities. This new evidence has opened up an interesting field of research on the cities built in Sicily, previously not addressed by researchers.

In fact, rural regions, known only for their cereal production and not for the urban transformations implemented in the sixteenth century, envisioned a new type of city.³ In particular, in western Sicily, 59 new towns came into existence between 1570 and 1650; moreover, 37 new towns were established between 1580 and 1663.⁴ This phenomenon is explained, on the one hand, by the social and economic rise of nobility, and, on the other hand, by the collapse of the state financial institutions. In fact, the monarchy sold more and more privileges, noble titles, land and permits for new cities to heal the finances of the state.⁵ This mechanism allowed for nobility to acquire social prestige and economic power through the acquisition and exploitation of new agricultural lands. Unsurprisingly, the intensification of the founding of new cities was directly proportional to the increasing internal demand for grain that occurred on the island between 1590 and 1670. In those

¹ This article constitutes the revision, enrichment and extension of a previous contribution on the subject published in the volume Giugno, G., 2019. *Fondazione e Rifondazione di una città d'età moderna. Delia dai Lucchesi ai Gravina di Palagonia (1596-1812)*, Lussografica, Caltanissetta. This new work extends the previous publication to the reading of the effects on the vast territory of the foundation of a new city. I thank Prof. Sheri Mignano Crawford for reviewing the text in English.

² Garufi, C. A., 1946. *Patti agrari e comuni feudali di nuova fondazione in Sicilia*, in «Archivio Storico Siciliano», s. III, I, pp. 31-111; Klapisch-Zuber, C., Day, J., 1965. *Villages désertés en Italie*, Esquisse, in AA.VV., *Villages désertés et histoire économique, XI^e-XXVIII^e siècle*, S.E.V.P.E.N., Paris; Giuffrè, M., 1969. *Miti e realtà dell'urbanistica siciliana*, Palermo, pp. 19-21; Mazzamuto, A., 1974. *Sull'architettura degli insediamenti siciliani nei secoli XVI, XVII e XVIII*, in «Nuovi Quaderni del Meridione», 46, aprile-giugno; Aymard, M., 1975. *Sicilia: sviluppo demografico e sue differenziazioni geografiche, 1500-1800*, in AA.VV., *Demografia storica*, Il Mulino, Bologna, pp. 195-226; Fagiolo, M., Madonna, L., 1977. *Sicilia, la ristrutturazione del territorio: una realpolitik feudale*, in AA.VV. *San Leucio. Archeologia, storia, progetto*, Il Formichiere, Milano, pp. 205-219; Guidoni Marino, A., 1977. *Urbanistica e «Ancien Régime» nella Sicilia barocca*, in «Storia della città», 2, pp. 3-84; Casamento, A. ed., 2012. *Fondazioni urbane. Città nuove europee dal Medioevo al Novecento*, «Forma urbis» 1, Kappa, Roma.

³ Benigno, F., 2003. *Visioni e revisioni della storia di Sicilia*, in *Rappresentazioni e immagini della Sicilia tra storia e storiografia*, F. Benigno, C. Torrisi (a cura di), Salvatore Sciascia, Caltanissetta-Roma, p. 8; Giarrizzo, G., 1987. *Introduzione*, in Aymard, M., Giarrizzo G. (ed), *Storia d'Italia. Le Regioni dall'Unità ad oggi*. La Sicilia, Einaudi, Torino, p. XXV.

⁴ TRICOLI, G., 1966, *La deputazione degli stati e la crisi del baronaggio siciliano*, Palermo, pp. 9-12.

⁵ PINZARRONE, L., 2013, *Tra feudo e demanio. La politica delle fondazioni nella Sicilia del XVII secolo*, in Casamento, A. (ed.), *Atlante delle città fondate in Italia dal Tardomedioevo al Novecento*. Italia centro-meridionale e insulare, Kappa, Roma, pp. 127-134.

decades there was a drop in exports of cereal products to foreign countries from Sicily, due to the serious crises that hit the island's economy at the end of the sixteenth century.⁶

Alongside the opportunities for economic well-being deriving from the intensive exploitation of territories in which no residential neighborhoods existed before, the feudal lords benefited greatly from political advantages bestowed upon them by government. On a political level, the exercise of feudal power was linked to the privilege called 'mere and mixed imperio', wherein the administrators imposed civil and criminal justice on its inhabitants. In addition to this legal imposition, feudal lords acquired a new urban status through their new privileges, including the right to vote in the Sicilian Parliament, the seat of the baronial power.⁷ It was necessary, however, to guarantee a minimum number of one hundred families in each town. For this reason, not infrequently, the feudal aristocracy in its social and political ascent decided to support the establishment of new cities on the island, in accordance to a provision by King Alfonso.⁸ A document issued in 1452 highlighted that the political prestige of the aristocracy could increase due to the possession of fiefdoms marked by the presence of new cities.⁹

2. Method and analysis of the phenomenon of new cities – Delia as a case study

Delia offers a quintessential example on how cities was established at the end of the sixteenth century. In order to support this point of view, it was necessary to access certain archival sources, mainly notary public materials. In particular, documents confirmed the construction and location of the fountains and houses of the inhabitants of the new urban center. Additional archival sources indicate specific guidelines that the feudal lord issued to govern the new city.¹⁰ This evidence provided for a strong historiographical analysis for the thesis.

The detailed reading of the archival sources, accompanied by their cultural interpretation, has made it possible to understand the early phase of the city's development.

The urban center of Delia was established in the vicinity of the existing cities of Canicattì and Sommatino, and was founded in 1468 by Andrea Crescenzo. It was nearly a century later, 1570-1580, when the urban center actually began to appear as a bonafide city. The will of Baron Mariano Lo Porto, owner of the fief of Delia, dictated how it would be built.

⁶ TRICOLI, G., 1966, La deputazione degli stati e la crisi del baronaggio siciliano, Palermo, pp. 9-12.

⁷ Mineo, I., 2001. Nobiltà di Stato. Famiglie con identità aristocratiche nel tardo Medioevo: la Sicilia, Donzelli, Roma; Laudani, S., 2008, Lo Stato del Principe, Salvatore Sciascia, Caltanissetta-Roma, p. 25.

⁸ Mineo, I., 2001. Nobiltà di Stato. Famiglie con identità aristocratiche nel tardo Medioevo: la Sicilia, Donzelli, Roma; Laudani, S., 2008, Lo Stato del Principe, Salvatore Sciascia, Caltanissetta-Roma, p. 25.

⁹ Mineo, I., 2001. Nobiltà di Stato. Famiglie con identità aristocratiche nel tardo Medioevo: la Sicilia, Donzelli, Roma; Laudani, S., 2008, Lo Stato del Principe, Salvatore Sciascia, Caltanissetta-Roma, p. 25.

¹⁰ State Archive of Palermo (ASPal), Palagonia Archive, reg. 875.

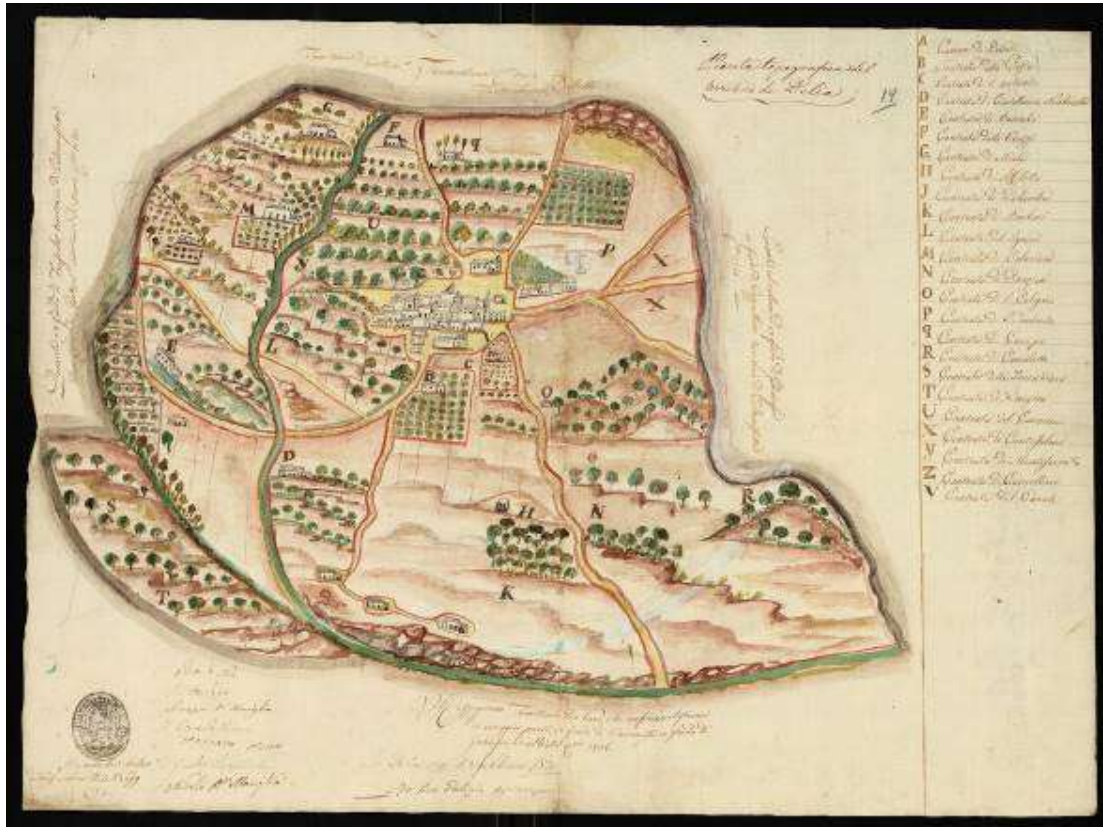


Illustration 1. Topographic map of the territory of Delia, Felice Pulizia, 1830 (ASPa, Direzione Centrale di Statistica, reg. 158, n. 19), published in CASAMENTO, A., 1986. *La Sicilia dell'Ottocento*, Palermo, pp. IX-XXIII, 1-293, fig. 65, pp. 144-145.

The founding of Delia was therefore part of the vast plan for the construction of new cities that involved the inland areas of Sicily in the sixteenth century. It was a vast phenomenon that was recorded not only in Sicily but also in many regions of southern Italy and Spain.¹¹

One of the fundamental questions guiding this research is concerned with the reasons that determined the construction of a new city. Fundamentally, they were rooted in the necessity to increase agricultural production of grain to export to other territories of Sicily and the Mediterranean.

On a methodological level, it was also necessary to identify the regulatory instruments that legitimized the planning of a new city. In this regard, it should be emphasized that the approval of a new city was linked to the issue of a permit called *licentia populandi*. The request for permission was forwarded by the feudal lord to real estate court, who owned the fief on which he intended to build the new center. In Delia, the foundation request was sent on March 23, 1596. It was forwarded by Gaspare Lucchesi to the tax lawyer of the real estate court, who was responsible for

¹¹ Casamento, A., 2013. *Atlante delle città fondate in Italia dal Tardomedioevo al Novecento*. Italia centro-meridionale e insulare, Kappa, Roma.

carrying out its instructions. Before granting the building permit for the new city, it was necessary to verify which advantages were guaranteed to the State, and it was also necessary to verify whether the proposed area for the new city met with the conditions of habitability.

In the bureaucratic process of approval, the involvement of the authorities of the state-owned cities near the new urban center was crucial. In the case of Delia, the authorities of Agrigento, Naro and Licata were consulted. These officials had to answer the questions posed by the viceroy or its representative - at that time Giovanni Ventimiglia. In addition, they had to ascertain the noble's right of ownership on the fiefdom by requesting a founding license and to know the effective extent of his jurisdiction over the fief. To this it was also necessary to add information about the territories that made up the fiefdom and about the number of arable lands and the acreage destined for grazing animals. It was also necessary to clarify the distance of Delia from the Licata grain "loader" and to indicate the existence, or otherwise, of woods, rivers and water sources: all fundamental conditions for being able to populate a territory and to allow for the production of surpluses of wheat to be allocated mainly for the needs of the Sicilian internal market. Finally, it was asked if there were ancient buildings in the area. From the revealed answers, it emerged that the fiefdom enjoyed its own jurisdiction; that it was of no interest to state authorities' lands; that the new city would not have caused damage to the nearby urban centers and that the territory was characterized by a large number of fertile and arable lands. This last requirement is particularly interesting because it seals the link between the founding of a new urban center and the production of surplus wheat achievable through the concentration of more farms to be allocated.¹²

When the Lucchesi family decided to found the city of Delia, the development of the grain market in Sicily represented an incredible opportunity for the feudal class, not only to accumulate new wealth due to the fertility of the soil, but also to provide for the need for cereal in the territories of north-eastern Sicily. In fact, in those areas, many nobles were forced to import wheat from other parts of the island at prices that often exceeded those from the most fertile areas by 30 percent.

For this reason, the settlement of the feudal system undoubtedly represented a source of economic advantages not only for its owner but also for the crown. In fact, to this was added, as required in the foundation request, the fiscal benefit enjoyed by the royal tax authorities guaranteed by a greater wheat production. In the specific case of Delia the cereal production was transferred to the nearby "loader" of Licata and Agrigento.¹³ It was a warehouse where the grain was stored and then loaded into ships.

Perhaps Baron Lucchesi thought about allocating part of the cereal production of the new city of Delia to the territories he owned in the north-eastern part of the island. Moreover, the existence of a baronial "loader" near the Cannameleto of Acquadolci represented a distinct advantage and enhanced the profitability of exporting of wheat to other internal and external markets on the island.

¹² Davies, T., 1985. La colonizzazione feudale della Sicilia nella prima età moderna, in *Insedimenti e Territorio*, C. De Seta (ed.), in *Storia d'Italia, Annali*, VIII, Einaudi, Torino, pp. 419-427.

¹³ ASPa, Conservatoria di Registro, reg. 234, f. 291r.

The answers to the questions about ancient buildings on the site of the new city highlighted the existence of an old medieval castle in the area. This was undoubtedly the "Castellaccio", whose abandonment was documented at that time. Around the castle, at the end of the sixteenth century, traces of ancient buildings were still visible, probably bearing similarities to medieval farmhouses.¹⁴ In the same area there was also an ancient church, perhaps a private chapel inside the castle or a sacred building probably dedicated to St. Nicholas of Mira or Bari, as suggested by a document of 1308-1310 in which there was a reference to a Greek priest Joannes Sutor who presided in the fief.¹⁵

In February 1597, after having collected the necessary documentation on the fief of Delia, the king's procurator, Don Giovanni Ventimiglia, prince of Castelbuono and Marquis of Geraci, approved the founding of the city with a specific decree enforced in April of the same year.

The centrality of the figure of Baron Giuseppe emerged again in the following October when he decided to take care of the first phases of the formation of the new city. It is known, in fact, that it was necessary to record a population census of the fiefdom to guarantee the minimum number of inhabitants required by the legal statutes of the Spanish-ruled province of Sicily. The license was definitively approved by King Philip II on 24 December 1597, thus determining the immediate start of the settlement of the fief. This operation had to be completed within 10 years of the license issue date.¹⁶



Illustrations 2-3. On the left: a view of the medieval castle. On the right: a detail of the interior of the fortress (Ph. Giugno, G.).

¹⁴ Fiorilla, S., Scuto, S., 2010. Delia. Il Castellazzo, Lussografica, Caltanissetta.

¹⁵ ADAMO, G., 1986. Storia di Delia. Dal 1596 ad oggi, Palermo, p. 42.

¹⁶ ASPa, Conservatoria di Registro, reg. 234, f. 290r.

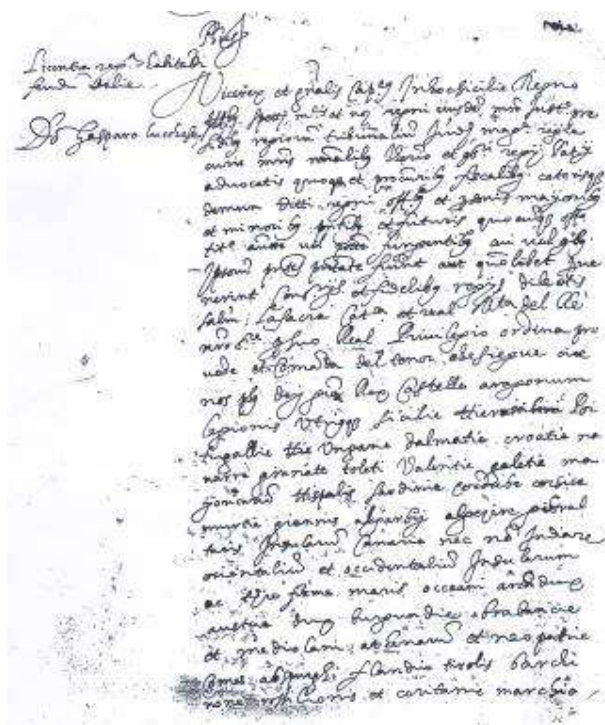


Illustration 4. Licentia populandi of Delia, excerpt, (ASPa, Conservatoria di Registro, reg. 234, f. 290r).

In these new cities, population growth took place through the definition of safeguard pacts, which consisted of rules that exempted the new settlers from paying the debts incurred in their places of origin. It was a real debt moratorium, which usually covered periods between five and ten years and was included in codes stipulated by the feudal lord and the first immigrants.¹⁷ Furthermore, the right to collect wood in the lands of the fief was guaranteed as well as to graze the cattle. Within the new city, the rules provided for the granting of lots of land on which to build homes and land on which to plant a vineyard.¹⁸

Lifestyles were codified by norms. Such norms also indicated the powers of the municipal authorities and the rights and limitations of the powers of the feudal lord. In addition, provisions related to building regulations were also included in the rules. For this reason, both those who intended to build a new house and those who were paid to build it had to respect precise urban planning rules and carry out the work according to a pre-established design.

The conditions offered in the new centers, namely the moratorium on debts and the exemption from municipal taxes, known as *refugio domus*, also became a model for the repopulation of the ancient cities in the kingdom, affected by the drastic reduction in their population due to the

¹⁷ Davies, T. op. cit., p. 442.

¹⁸ Romano, A., 1992. Stranieri e mercanti in Sicilia nei secoli XIV-XV, in Romano, A. (ed.), Cultura ed Istituzioni nella Sicilia medievale e moderna, Rubbettino, Messina, p. 100.

relocation of inhabitants to the newly founded cities.¹⁹ Also in the legislative districts there were indirect taxes established by the baron on consumer goods. In Delia, among the taxes documented in 1623, a flour tax appeared.²⁰

3. *The administrative and social organization*

In the administrative organization of a city, the power of government was exercised by the feudal lord. But in his absence, an agent was appointed with the role of governor of the city.²¹ The governor lived in the baronial house and appointed several public officials such as the public notary of the jury and *capitaneal curia*. Often his prominent public role coincided with that of conservator of public acts.

The establishment of a new city followed a rigid bureaucratic process in all of the newly established towns that arose in Sicily between the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century. The existence of an administrative and organizational apparatus was well codified in other feudal cities. In particular, the functioning of the organizational machine was substantially based on offices that dealt with the social aspects of the city, such as the education of young people and public safety, and with the physical transformations of the urban space.

The first office of municipal power was called the judicial curia. It consisted of two feudal-nominated jurors, who were in office for two years. The jurors were responsible for the active administration of the barony through the promulgation of notices and regulations collected in each "neighborhood of the city". In urban planning, the operations to control the territory (such as the construction of new roads and the subdivision of agricultural land or the design of a new water source) were entrusted to the public master architect, in Latin *caput magister maragmatum*. In Delia that title was first documented in 1708.²² However, the civic office also played a key role in social matters. For example, it provided the payment for the nurses who cared for abandoned or orphaned children.²³

The education of young people, entrusted to ecclesiastical masters salaried by the jurors, was another of the obligations that the baronial town could not escape during the times of the Viceroy of Aquino, Prince of Caramanico. In fact, around 1788, he had promoted the establishment of normal schools in Sicily, according to the study plans defined by Giovanni Agostino de Cosmi, in the light of his experience gained in Naples at the normal schools of the Celestines of Germany. The lessons were held in real private schools and provided for study courses on two levels. The

¹⁹ This was the case of Caltanissetta, whose jurors in 1614 prepared a series of rules with tax advantages for those who decided to return to the city. State Archive of Caltanissetta (ASCI), Municipal Historical Archive, (ASC), reg. 173, ff. 4r-4v.

²⁰ ASPa, Tribunale Real Patrimonio, Riveli, reg. 337, I, f. 121r.

²¹ ASCI, Not. D. Lo Cicero, reg. 4938, f. 163r.

²² ASCI, Not. G. Cacciatore, reg. 536, f. 29r IV.

²³ Castiglione, P., 1982. Settecento siciliano. Città e terre feudali tra malessere e riformismo, Prisma, Catania, pp. 230-231.

first of which was a preparation for high school studies. The second level concerned higher education and was entrusted to the school master.²⁴

The second key office in the administration of finances of the feudal city was the curia of affairs, presided over by the figure of the secretary, an administrator of economic affairs. He was appointed by the feudal lord and had to deal with the recovery of credits and the leasing of the baronial lands.²⁵

The administration of civil and criminal justice belonged to the feudal lord due to the privilege of the “mere and mixed empire” obtained in 1604. His coadjutor in civil and criminal cases was in that year the consultor Hernandum de Contarino of Naro. However, this figure was subsequently replaced by that of the captain of justice and judge of the earth. The captain was also appointed by the feudal lord.

The role of the captain of justice was fundamental in the fight against banditry and in the preservation of order and public safety in the city. He was also, together with the baron, required to pay a compensation for damage caused by thieves perpetrated in the territory of his jurisdiction, as set out in the 1707 notice of the Viceroy Spinola and Colonna, and was obliged to draw up the list of thefts committed to be sent to the competent authorities, as required by the proclamation of Viceroy Fernandez Portocarrero of 1722. For this reason, in the cities, notices were published to mandate that incoming merchants declare which merchandise they transported. In addition, ordinary wayfarers were required to deposit the sums they were in possession of in the court of the captain of justice, to avoid episodes of theft and robberies.

Linked to the exercise of civil and criminal justice within the city was the presence of a baronial prison, housed in the feudal palace-castle. The prison was divided into the civil section for all minor offenses, a second section for criminal offenses and a separate third section for women.²⁶

Finally, in addition to the three main offices, the institutional framework was completed by the civic council. As a rule, it consisted of jurors, judges and the mayor, who had the right to vote. To these were added the parish priest or vicar and the curate of the city, who did not have the right to vote, and representatives of the population. The council was chaired by the captain who oversaw the city budget and approved the imposition of new taxes.

4. The organization of the urban space in comparison to other cities

To read and fully understand the spatial, administrative, and social organization of cities built between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is necessary to make comparisons with other cities that arose during the same time period. A primary useful element for determining the parameters used in selecting a specific area for building a new city, is the relationship of the new town with the medieval pre-existing ones. In particular, in the study of Delia, the city was built near the old castle just as other urban centers sprung up in the vicinity of pre-existing buildings.

²⁴ Castiglione, P., op. cit., pp. 369-370.

²⁵ State Archive of Agrigento (ASAg), Not. S. Sordo, reg. 38, f. 1r.

²⁶ ASCI, Not. F. Meo, reg. 184, f. 260r.

For example, this was also the case in Santa Caterina Villarmosa, built near a royal road and a baronial farmhouse, and in Villalba, founded in the vicinity of an abandoned farmhouse.²⁷

Furthermore, similarities and analogies can be identified by comparing the urban schemes of the centers that arose in Sicily between the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Analyzing and comparing the urban model of Delia with other cities highlights the existence of a shared design matrix in the organization of the different urban schemes. It is identifiable in the checkerboard pattern of orthogonal streets, marked by a main crossing axis around which the city districts are connected. In Delia, in particular, the major road axis can be identified in 'Via Petilia'. As a rule, as exemplified in the seventeenth-century center of Menfi, the existence of such axis, as well as the positioning of the mother church, played an integral part in the founding act of the town.²⁸



Illustration 5. Painting of Saint Rosalia preserved in the mother church of Saint Maria of Loreto with detail of the urban view of the city of Delia (Ph. E. Brai).

²⁷ Cardamone, G., 1981. Note a margine di una esperienza di ricerca storica, in Giuffrè, M., Cardamone, G. (ed) Città nuove di Sicilia XV-XIX secolo. Per una storia dell'architettura e degli insediamenti urbani nell'area occidentale, vol. II, Vittorietti, Palermo, pp. 41-42.

²⁸ Vesco, M., 2010. Viridaria e città. Lottizzazioni a Palermo nel Cinquecento, Kappa, Roma; Scoccianti, M. M., 2003, La "Strata Magna". Urbanistica nelle Marche tra Medioevo e Rinascimento, Bonsignori, Roma.

The town developed along the axis of the main road with the tracing of the secondary roads. Along the secondary road axes, the urban alignment of the buildings on the roads was respected. The design of the founding nucleus in the cities became the model from which the expansion scheme of the urban center developed over the centuries.

Particular attention should be paid to the implementation methods of the subdivisions that lead to the formation of the residential districts. Although in the absence of documentation on the construction of the houses and streets of the new center, it is only right to mention the techniques, tools and workers employed between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the construction sites of these 'new cities'.

The construction of the town was entrusted to the building master and began with drawing the new roads on the ground. The houses of the new inhabitants overlooked these roads, according to a design agreed upon with the baron. The drawing represented, in fact, a useful tool for controlling the project and its correct execution. It was especially beneficial in order to carry out complex and extensive urban interventions such as the urbanization of an entire urban center. In Sicily, particular similarities emerge between the land division procedures, as happens with the subdivisions implemented in Palermo in the sixteenth century, and those proposed in the architectural treaties.²⁹ In these texts, the land surveying practices for the measurement and division of land are codified. This strategy is specifically mentioned in *Dell'arte del misurare (On The Art Of Measuring)* by Girolamo Cataneo, published in Brescia in 1584, a treatise on how to measure and divide the fields according to simple geometric shapes.³⁰

As part of the calculations allowed the tracing of the orthogonal chessboard with rectilinear streets parallel to each other and rectangular blocks, the scale drawing on paper was transposed on the ground through the use of wooden poles and other poles tied to ropes placed in relation to the square: this was an instrument derived from the 'groma' of the Roman age, fundamental for guaranteeing the perpendicularity of two axes and aligning several elements between them.³¹ The use of the square and wooden poles, as shown in the treatise by Perini, also took place along sloping land where distances were measured, arranging the pole horizontally and perpendicularly. As for the design of the blocks that make up the urban space, some of these were characterized by large courtyards that nowadays are partially occupied by new buildings. The past presence of such courtyards, as perhaps the legacy of a remote living culture, is now documented by the numerous patios and gardens that are positioned inside the blocks of the neighborhoods. The houses were mainly on two levels, called 'solerate', with direct access from the street.

²⁹ Vesco, M., 2010. Viridaria e città. Lottizzazioni a Palermo nel Cinquecento, Kappa, Roma; Scoccianti, M. M., 2003, La "Strata Magna". Urbanistica nelle Marche tra Medioevo e Rinascimento, Bonsignori, Roma.

³⁰ Cataneo, G., MDLXXXIII. Dell'arte del misurare, Thomaso Bozzola, Brescia, p. 14; Casamento, A., 2014. Dall'idea al tracciamento. Relazione introduttiva, in Casamento, A. (ed.), Il cantiere della città. Strumenti, maestranze e tecniche dal Medioevo al Novecento, "Forma urbis" 2, Kappa, Roma, pp. 5-22.

³¹ Perini, L., MDCCXXXIX. Trattato della Pratica di Geometria in cui oltre i principj di essa vi sono molti insegnamenti intorno alle varie misure di terre, acque, fieni, pietre, grani, fabbriche ed altro, secondo l'uso di Verona, e di altre Città d'Italia, raccolti dalle Opere di molti Autori, e dall'Esperienza a comodo degli Studiosi di tal Professione, Per Pierantonio Berio Stampatore e Librajo nella Via de' Leoni, Verona, pp. 24, 29.



Illustration 6. One of the entrances to the courtyards of the seventeenth-century city blocks (Ph. Giugno, G.).



Illustration 7. Two-story house with internal staircase published in Valussi, G., 1968. La casa rurale nella Sicilia occidentale, Leo S. Olschki, Firenze, p. 33.

In addition to the courtyard blocks, in the center there are also perfectly rectangular plug blocks, made up of units juxtaposed back to back. Their longitudinal development depended on the number of modules repeated side by side.³²

The *licentia populandi* contained important information on the urban and architectural works that the founder was required to carry out in the town. The main achievements to be carried out were houses, streets, squares and sacred and civil architecture. The mother church and the baronial palace were located in the main square. It is interesting to note the link between the city scheme codified in Sicily in the sixteenth century and the urban models codified in the 'Instructions' issued by King Philip II in 1573 for the construction of 'new cities' in the American territories of the Conquest.³³

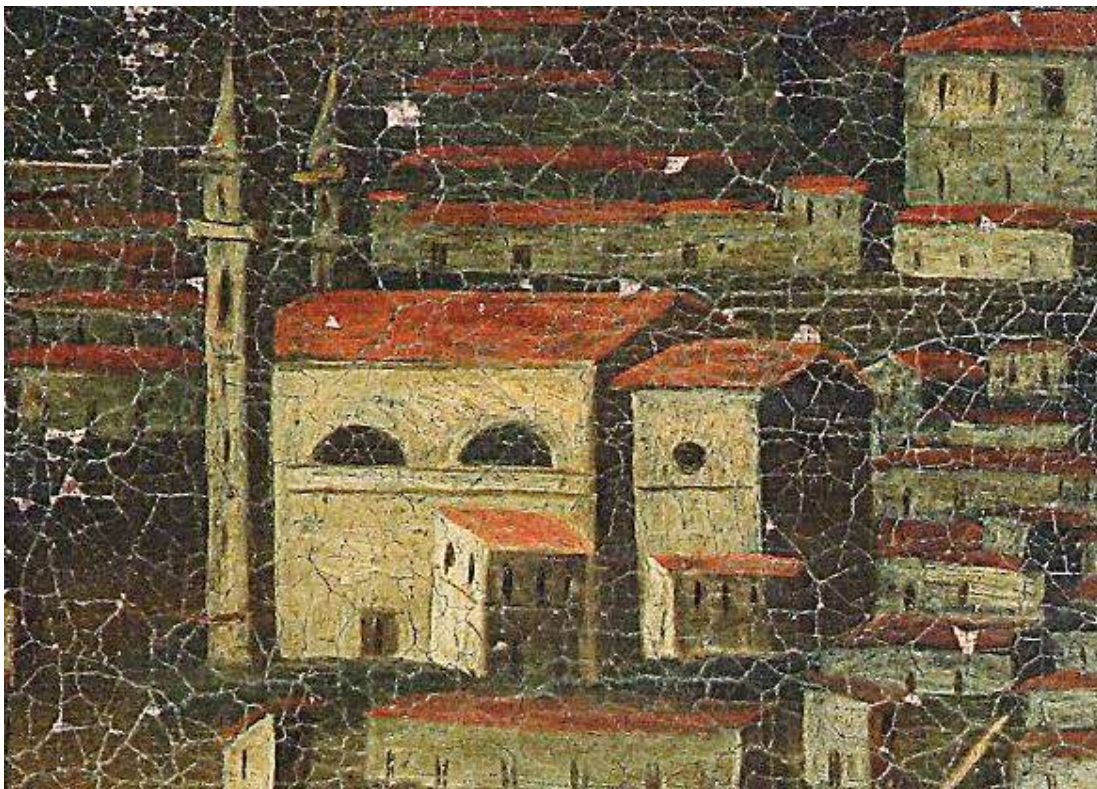


Illustration 8. The representation of the mother church in the eighteenth-century view of Saint Rosalia (Ph. Brai, E.).

The construction of the baronial palace in Delia took place in 1605.³⁴ It was distinguished from the rest of the building typologies of the inhabited area because it had a quadrangular structure isolated on two levels built by Pietro Cali of Pietraperzia and Giovanni Di Genua of Canicattì. In

³² Valussi, G., 1968. La casa rurale nella Sicilia occidentale, Leo S. Olschki, Firenze, pp. 32-33.

³³ Renda, M., 1962. La Sicilia nel 1812, Salvatore Sciascia, Caltanissetta, pp. 58-59.

³⁴ Historical Archive of Agrigento (ASAg), Not. S. Guardacascio, reg. 14977, f. 90r.

many newly founded cities, the baronial palace was also called the 'Castle'.³⁵ It is a ubiquitous definition in urban centers, probably due not only to the conception of the building as a bulwark of the baronial authority, but to the need to assimilate it to a real fortress, through the insertion of architectural elements that represented an apparent reference to the Middle Ages.³⁶

However, in baronial architecture the presence of the battlement structures transformed into a purely decorative propagandist symbol. They lost all defensive significance to become purely a reflection of the power of the feudal class rulers, an emblem of social prestige. In this way, the feudal building was differentiated from the rest of the town. The battlements could only be used with a special viceregal license, as documented in 1624 in the land of Santa Caterina of the Grimaldi family.³⁷ Together with the definition of the general urban plan, in which the positioning of the churches was predetermined, the baron also commissioned the construction of houses, which were then rented to the inhabitants of the new city.

5. *Consequences of the new cities on the landscape*

The establishment of the new cities, connected to the need to promote the intensification of crops in the fiefdoms, brought about a profound and radical change in the organization of the Sicilian interior. In fact, before the establishment of new towns, only small communities of farmers lived in the territories engaged in the cultivation of the fields. In some cases, as happens in the nearby fief of Fiumesalato belonging to the noble Galletti family, a castle or tower were built to oversee the fiefdom. Later, with the construction of the new towns, the compact block of stone cities was marked only by small gardens located within the courtyards of the quadrangular sections. This architectural arrangement was contrasted by the agricultural infrastructures (farms and watermills) situated outside the city perimeters.



³⁵ Lombino, S., 2002. Il grano, l'olivo e l'ogliastro. Gli abitanti del nuovo paese nei documenti del '600 e '700, in Congregar gente: S. Maria dell'Ogliastro e le città di nuova fondazione nella Sicilia moderna, Atti del Convegno, Bolognetta, p. 75.

³⁶ Marino, A., 1997. Architettura civile del cinquecento in Calabria, un'ipotesi di via "Mediterranea" nel Rinascimento, in Simoncini, G. (ed.), Presenze medievali nell'architettura di età moderna e contemporanea, Gangemi, Milano, p. 194.

³⁷ Davies, T., 1985. Famiglie feudali siciliane. Patrimoni, redditi, investimenti tra '500 e '600, Salvatore Sciascia, Roma, p. 67. Rotondo, C., 2006, La baronia di Risichillia. I Grimaldi e la fondazione di un paese feudale della Sicilia centrale: Santa Caterina. Ricerche, memorie storiche e considerazioni fra '500 e '600, vol. I, Symbiotic, Roma, pp. 110-111, 131.

Illustrations 9-10. On the left: one of Delia's watermills. On the right: detail of the mill barrel, where the rotation of the wheel for grinding the grain was activated thanks to the water inlet (Ph. Giugno, G.).

In Delia, the development of the cereal economy clearly defined the leading cultivation purpose for the lands located near the new town. It constituted the response to the severe crisis that gripped Sicilian agricultural cereal production between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is therefore no coincidence that in that context the territory of Delia was equipped with fundamental equipment to allow the conservation of wheat and barley in private grain pits.³⁸ In addition to the pits, the city had a granary, protected by guards, built by the feudal lord in 1698, where wheat and barley were transported.

The conservation of the cereals was followed by the ubiquitous watermills introduced in 1569. In fact, their presence is recorded in the Corricchi, also known as Cornici di Gaetano. Two such structures, owned by the 'State' of Caltanissetta, were attested in that same year.³⁹ In addition to that watermill, the Drogo watermill was also active in the territory, and three other ones nearby in the upper, middle and lower levels of Tingharo.

The position of each of the wheat milling plants was determined by the need to use the nearby Gibbesi river and high falls, through which the mechanism that allowed grinding was operated. In this regard, this arrangement was a strictly followed regulation in the kingdom of Sicily and it required the payment of a fee to the royal tax authorities for use of the water jump. The payment was ordered by King Frederick II. Moreover, the Norman legislation had already established that springs and rivers, even if they were intended for public use, could be granted in property to the feudal lords. In this way, the right to build a watermill on a jump, in Latin *saltus*, was transmitted.⁴⁰

Due to landslides and flooding of the rivers' banks, the mills that used hydropower were repeatedly repaired between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by Sicilian experts skilled in the construction of aqueducts and military fortifications. These professionals often came from other cities such as Palermo, Agrigento and Licata. Antonino Lo Maltisi was among the workers who intervened in the repair of the watermills in 1710. It was probably the architect Antonio Casanova of Maltese origin, who worked for the feudal lord of Delia also in the city of Palagonia, in the construction of the mother church of San Pietro.⁴¹

The involvement of highly skilled experts with specialized knowledge in solving construction site problems is a fairly well-known fact in Delia as in the rest of Sicily. For example, the arrival of a master-builder in 1806. The royal master-builder of the military fortifications of Licata, Cipriano Di Cipriano, was called in to supervise the repairs carried out in the three watermills belonging to the princes of Palagonia. Di Cipriano also possessed skills in hydraulic engineering. Probably linked to

³⁸ ASCI, Not. G. Cacciatore, reg. 535, f. 343r.

³⁹ Giuffrida, A., 1973. Permanenza tecnologica ed espansione territoriale del mulino ad acqua siciliano (secoli XIV-XVIII), in «Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale», LXIX, pp. 193-215; Tramontana, S., 1988. Mulini ad acqua nella Sicilia Normanna, «Studi per Paolo Brezzie», in «Studi Storici», n. 188-192, Roma, pp. 811-824.

⁴⁰ Bresc, H., Di Salvo, P., 2001. Mulini ad acqua in Sicilia, L'Epos, Palermo, p. 28.

⁴¹ Giugno, G., 2019. Maestranze e modelli culturali negli "Stati" feudali dei Gravina di Palagonia dopo il terremoto del 1693. Alcune note sull'operato dello scultore architetto melitense Antonio Casanova, in Agora, n. 70, pp. 24-27.

the repair of the milling plants was the arrival in Delia in 1820 of Emmanuele Ponticello, Architect and Royal Surveyor of the Kingdom of Sicily.⁴²

6. Discussion

The phenomenon of the establishment of the new cities represented, in short, an extended era of radical transformations for Sicily and its interior towns. Territories previously dedicated only to the cultivation of wheat were, between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, significantly altered by the formation of new kind of cities. The evidence points to signs of a common process. Procedures to build new cities seemed to follow a regular pattern and required nearly identical permit requests. With those restrictions in place, these towns dictated a minimum number of families to start the population.

Also on the administrative and urban dimension, Delia's foundation set a standard by which other cities followed in suit.

The organization of the administrative structure, divided into three offices with well-defined responsibilities and the presence of well-codified urban regulations, underlines the importance of the urban experience as conducted on the island in the sixteenth century.

The real key to fully explain the establishment of these new cities, is the political and feudal rise of the Sicilian aristocracy. Since the feudal lords were responsible for the cultural investments and the improvements in the quality of life, this privileged class was forced to guarantee that the architecture of the urban space efficiently served the entire town. Thus, these towns exhibited a physical form characterized by a planning model codified throughout the island. The builders worked to ensure that each town enjoyed a congenial relationship with its surrounding agricultural environment.

Overall, the interior parts of Sicily dramatically transformed between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries not only due to the construction of new cities and new connecting axis roads, but also in terms of cultivation techniques. The crop productivity was, in fact, intensified with the increase of the wheat crop.

From the analysis of the case study of the city of Delia, fundamental urban planning rules and practices emerge about the construction of many newly formed cities. They created a real urban network at the service of the economic development of the territory and of the cereal sector.

The impact of innovative urban planning in conjunction with an increase in agricultural production led to a whole new development. In this sense, water mills have considerable importance because they continue to represent an important infrastructure in the landscape. These improvements remain linked to the spatial, economic and social reorganization process in central Sicily.

Today, the vast interior of the island is undoubtedly useful for planning the recovery of many urban centers. The 21st century's demographic decrease and the gradual abandonment of cities

⁴² Di Paola, F., Pizzurro, M. R. (ed), 2010. *Insedimenti rurali a corte nella Sicilia occidentale. La tenuta dello Zucco di Henri d'Orléans, duca d'Aumale*, Kappa, Roma, p. 145.

highlights the opportunity for architects and landscape architects to return to planning the future of the internal areas of Sicily. Therefore, this study may be useful to identify regulatory tools that reignite the return of the population to depopulated urban centers through the design of resilient urban regeneration strategies. These more traditional approaches to urban planning may help to build the future of the internal territories of Sicily. In this sense, we could think of recovering the rules used at the end of the sixteenth century to encourage the repopulation of rural towns. If administrators introduced debt moratoriums and tax exemption, it might attract more residents.

7. Conclusion

The theme of older, successfully founded cities with particular reference to the case study of Delia presents a question that must undoubtedly be deepened through a continued examination of how these towns survived. This abbreviated examination of public records has shown that the expansion of cities in the central areas of Sicily arose as a result of a continual supply of indentured laborers, and as a consequence of highly educated itinerant apprentices and journeymen; in addition, master architects, sculptors, carvers, engineers, plasterers, supervised them as they were assigned to various centers as they worked on the construction of new cities.

These experts anticipated how agricultural activity and the importance of wheat would transform the wealth of the city and the prosperity of its citizens.

The interrelationship, highlighted between new cities and their surrounding environments, is completed by the public works carried out to support cereal production. For this reason, there are still existing farms characterized by rich granaries that testify to the abundance of wheat produced from an earlier time.



Illustrations 11-12. On the left: the grain warehouse of the Annaliste farm in the Caltanissetta area; on the right: an opening to introduce the grain into the granary of the same farm (Ph. Giugno, G.).

Biography

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