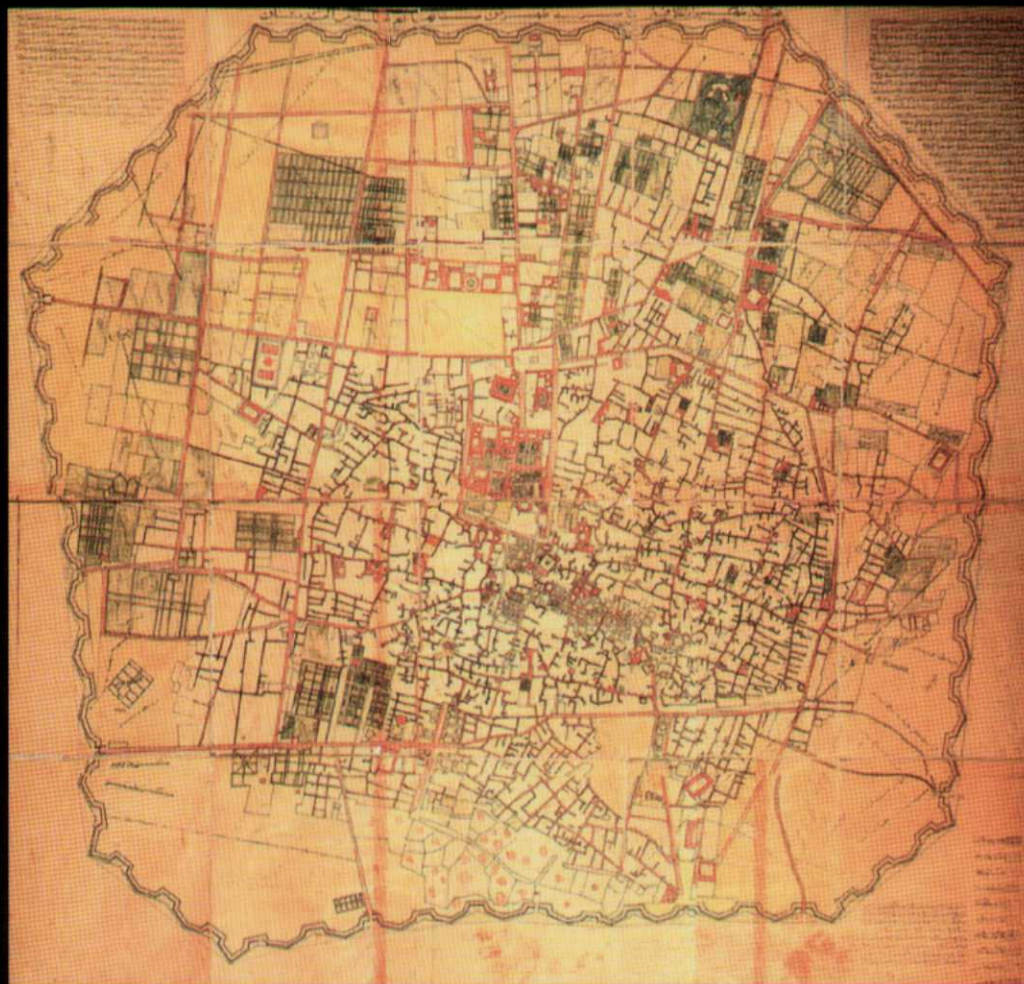


THE PLANNED CITY?

ISUF International Conference

Edited by Attilio Petruccioli, Michele Stella,
Giuseppe Strappa



VOLUME I

UNIONGRAFICA CORCELLI EDITRICE - BARI

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**Edited by Attilio Petruccioli, Michele Stella,
Giuseppe Strappa**

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Pienza, a Planned Vicus Transformed in a Town *Before Pienza, Corsignano*

Giancarlo Cataldi, Fausto Formichi, Alessandro Merlo, Laura Visentin

Few settlements have been founded twice in history. None as small as Pienza, a unique case in understanding and discovering mechanisms that triggered off the most sensational urban phenomenon in history.

Its extraordinary environmental and architectural qualities – due to the unusual circumstances that made Pope Pius II materialise the new humanistic idea of a town in his birth place, Corsignano, during the early fourteen sixties – drove the Siena provincial administration and Pienza municipality to establish the new town and territory Museum in Pienza.

Archaeological features (dating back from prehistory to the Etruscan, Roman and Middle Ages), historic and photographic documentation and surveys, drawings and models accompany three decades of international findings using the first scientific building-structure survey (Cataldi, Formichi et al, 1977).

Scholars previously focused on the square and its monumental buildings, neglecting how the Renaissance plan fitted into the pre-existing stratified urban system. In fact “Corsignano before Pienza” presumably resulted as the product of different phases of development, started from an original indistinct nucleus. At the beginning of Pius’s papacy, it must have resembled the numerous medieval castles in the Siena countryside painted by Lorenzetti in his famous frescoes in the Siena town hall.

Reading the territory throughout the methodology of the planning typology identified, on top of its natural ridge top route network, an ancient planned Etruscan-Roman substratum web of tissues set at various angles in the prevailing straight-line directions of major consular roads. Within this complex land-grid adaptation system, original *vicus* were identified in eastern Pienza, near the promontory “brow” overlooking the Orcia valley. It is an aggregate whose plan resembles other centres in nearby towns: a squarish 300 x 350 Roman foot rectangle, consisting of a series of *domus* facing in the same direction on two parallel streets, slightly divergent from the outer two-hundred juger grid to use the site’s entire flattish summit.

The second medieval phase likewise typifies fortification: the *vicus* becomes a *castrum* for defence purposes by building a stronghold with its adjoining wall enclosure and “doubling” dwellings in its original centre (whose *domus* were steadily clogging) along the only possible ridge top axis. Closing the western front and barring this route, building tissue interpretation reveals a rectilinear cross wall, roughly coinciding with the side view alignment of the Piccolomini and Ammanati palaces,

between which the main entrance gate to the castle opened up along its current *corso*.

Together with the building in front of it, this wall enclosed a public square ("*platea comunis*"), which not only served defence manoeuvres but also as a market place and, on its southern side, as a pertinent area of San Vito and Modesto suburban parish.

The third and last medieval phase is typified by further late 14th century Siena Republic border fortification, extending its walls to its current entrance gate to include the hamlet around the convent of S. Francesco. Therefore, Corsignano, before Pienza, must have resembled a castle, founded ex-novo ("*Castelnuovo*"), consisting of three distinct parts, whose topographical and place-name references, deducible from the "*Estimo*" (Register of Landed Property) dated 1320 ("*Castelnuovo al Ciglio*", "*Monte Picone*", "*Castenuovo al Murello*") and that spatially coincided with the progressive growth phases, confirm interpretation data. Its wall enclosure replaced its existing one, except for the south-western "*Gozzante*" district, whose inclusion arose from the need to accommodate the papal palace's handing garden.

In val d'Orcia, as in other Italian areas, topographical and morphological surveys of settlements, farm tissues, routes and precincts confirmed widespread Roman territorial planning (Cataldi, Lavagnino, 1987; Cataldi, 1989; Cataldi, 1993-a; Cataldi, 1993-b; Cataldi, Iacono, Merlo, 2000; Cataldi, 2001). Their extent, typological homogeneity and technical accuracy led us to think that individual colonial plans were devised theoretically with technically advanced maps (*formae*) corresponding to groundwork. Hence the idea of searching on the modern topographical maps the points essential to such complex operations, presumably based on the graphic *quadratura* method, always used by artists, geographers and architects to enlarge (or diminish) naturalistic skyline drawings.

After various attempts, hypotheses, checks, inductions and thoughts about Roman metrology and their survey and geometrical knowledge (basically founded on straight-line, right-angled cross and square figures), the geodetic system – still partially reconstructable on Italian Military Geographic Service maps to 100,000 – was verified. It is virtually a cardinal decuman system of parallels and meridians, comprising large 12 mile (*ager*) squares *secundum coelum* split up into submultiples of 5 (*saltus* and *centuriae*). It centres around the Roman area of ponte Milvio, whence via Flaminia spins off northwards as far as Rimini.

In val d'Orcia this polar function was fulfilled by the 1738 metre a.s.l. summit of Amiata (*mons Tuniatus*) with an all-round scenic view, stretching as far as the Tyrrhenian coast on clear days. Therefore, an ideal observatory for sighting and measuring territory in both cardinal directions with the Indo-

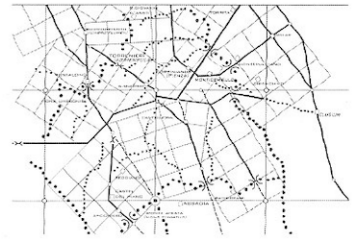


Fig. 1 - *Forma Quadrata Italiae* theory applied to Roman planning of val d'Orcia

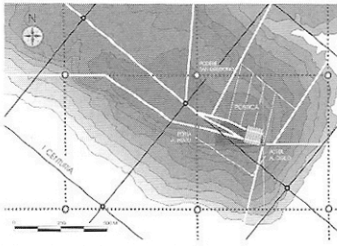


Fig. 2 - Pagus Corsinianus

European *mundus-māndala* orientation technique (Ryckwert, 1976).

These maps served not only military purposes but also individual colonial plans along consular roads, branching out from Rome into various parts of the peninsula *secundum naturam* along routes choosing two grid vertices basically oriented not only on the ground but also on large map scales and graphically resembling a modern underground or railway map. Major straight lines usually formed the geometric planning axes of sidetracks, farm tissues and precincts (also measured in *saltus* and *centuriae*) of various rural districts (*pagi*) with a central settlement (*vicus*), generally controlling major road junctions.

A *pagus* legally represented a district of scattered houses (*villae rusticae*), territorially and administratively correlated to a *vicus*, typified by continuous *domus* building tissue. Therefore, each district had its own territory, confined to its general “celestial” coordinate system. Primary grid centres (such as Amiata) largely corresponded to secondary datum points, pinpointed for *Corsinianus* in San Gregorio farm (a former Roman villa) and porta al Ciglio, on the eastern edge of the Pienza promontory. These vertices presumably triggered off triangulations essential to laying out farm lots (*centuriatio*) and settlement plans, which abnormally diverged. In fact, the two hundred-juger division of Pienza’s vast plain is oriented differently from its *vicus*, which tends to fill the contour line on its eastern promontory head. Tissue webs mainly follow ridge top routes and the corresponding parallel straight line of the Cassian way, where the road spanned the Orcia letting in the valley bottom caravan route, connecting Chiusi and val di Chiana to the Tyrrhenian ports of Vetulonia and Roselle.



Fig. 3. - Vicus Corsinianus

According to metrological and typological checks in Pienza building surveys (Cataldi, Formichi et al 1977), the original planned centre of *Corsinianus* lay to the east in the porta al Ciglio area, where building tissue features a system of parallel cross streets (“vicoli”) with in between brief wall detachments (“*ambitus*”) marking the borders of *domus* lots (Caniggia, 1976) and indicating the plan, largely oriented according to sighting (*spec-tio*) with Montertine and Spedaletto castles emerging from the Orcia valley bottom. “*Postica*” significantly indicates on cadastral maps farm tissues north of Pienza, evidently an extension of building tissues of its *vicus*, whose squarish plan (300 x 350 Roman feet) resembles the original centres of nearby towns (Torrita, Chianciano, Asciano, Abbadia San Salvatore, etc.), with two parallel routes serving *domus* tissue. Their courtyard building typological transformation process (Caniggia, 1976; Caniggia, Maffei, 1979) features cells around an enclosure with major residences facing south. The settlement’s carrying axis coincides with the end of Pienza’s *corso*: its 1:4 ratio with its basic celestial grid (partially following southern walls) reveals that it was technically traced through “sight” triangulation between three station points that are still highly topographical – porta al Ciglio, the outer corner of the priest’s house and the town hall.

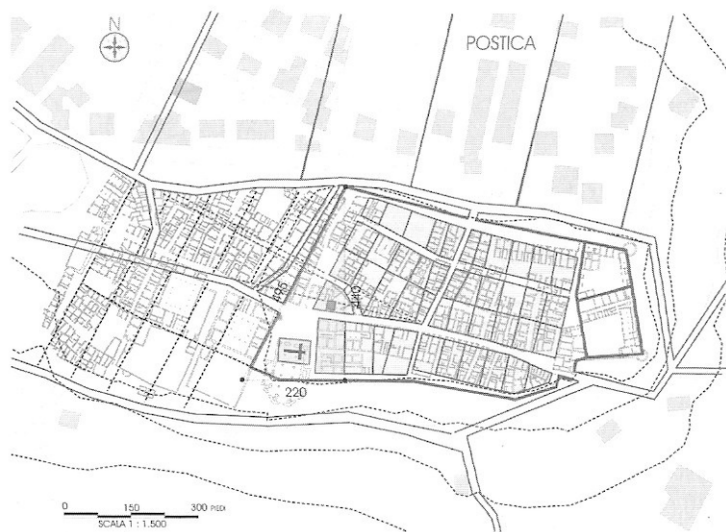


Fig. 4 - Castrum Corsinianus

In the late antiquity, with the fall of the Roman Empire, the countryside abounded with parish churches controlling the territory: they replaced ancient “pagan” administrative structures, in which locals were born, married and died; they recorded population changes by collecting tithes on crops and landed estates. San Vito and Modesto parish was first mentioned during the 8th century: it was situated a few hundred metres southwest of *vicus Corsinianus* on a pre-historic mountainside plain, occupied from pre-historic times, near a perennial spring and a plotting cross.

With the barbarian invasions, town depopulation meant doubling hamlets and clogging existing *domus* (Caniggia's "Medievalisation") presumably leading to the joint use of courtyards and their transformation into alleys ("*vicoli*"), according to the need of disposing of common defence structures such as wall enclosures and strongholds. *Corsinianus* was therefore turned into a *castrum* by cutting back on entrance gates and adapting previous routes, some of which fell away while others joined onto its *Corso* connecting its main gates. The settlement type is still Roman *castrum* as can be seen from the settlement-inversion decuman axis, significantly the only thoroughfare.

The major subsequent development is the wall defending the western front abnormally featuring a narrow block between two side-by-side routes, one of which is evidently a "swerwe" street. Geometrically its alignment proportionally follows the southern wall section (*ratio* 2:1) making way for its square ("*platea comunis*") serving the parish church of Santa Maria.

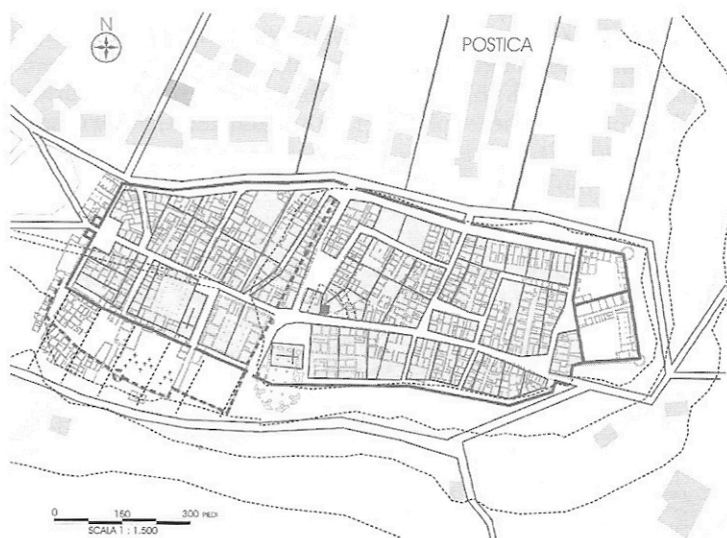


Fig. 5 - "Castelnuovo" of Corsignano

14th century Corsignano must have resembled the numerous castles in the Senese countryside portrayed in Lorenzetti's famous Good Government frescoes. Its strategic defence of southern borders made Republican rulers focus on fortifications, whose radical renovation at the beginning of the century is suggested by its "Castelnuovo" place-name mentioned in the 1320 cadastral survey ("*Estimo*") to indicate wall-enclosed properties and houses often at opposite ends of the settlement ("Castenuovo al Ciglio", "Castelnuovo al Murello": Visentin, 2000-2001). The survey reveals that the existing wall was not only strengthened but also extended (a second "doubling" of the settlement, following the new axis of the previous phase) to include inside the wall the hamlet developed around the church and convent of San Francesco, outside the previous *castrum*.

New building tissues are prevalently built in the direction of the Roman division, still modularly interpretable in the building survey revealing its new southern walls, built back from its current 15th century ones, not by chance including the former convent cemetery further downstream.

The Pienza building type is the raised (lacking in pertinent area) pseudo-single cell medieval row house with its steps on the alley, according to which the "twelve new houses" were built in 1463 by Pius II against the northern walls to compensate for expropriations to build his new palace (Formichi, 1978).

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