

# MODERN AGE FORTIFICATIONS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN COAST: EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

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EXHIBITION CATALOGUE**

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# Discovering old places, referring new ideas

Giorgio Verdiani

“The only true voyage of discovery, the only fountain of Eternal Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to behold the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to behold the hundred universes that each of them beholds, that each of them is”

*Marcel Proust*

The Built Heritage of the Mediterranean coasts offers a rare and complex system of traces, of relevant elements, of rich constructions embedded in a wonderful landscape.

The intense feelings procured by the sea, the strong fascination raised by the historical and legendary stories, create a very specific and irresistible mood. The mix of many traces may look, sometimes chaotic, the recent expansion of the townscape, the saturation of large areas and the poor architectural beauty of many new buildings seem to greatly reduce the possibility of having a clear perception of the original value of this territory. But the powerful message of a tower, the majestic presence of a fortress, are often capable to protect the beauty of place, apparently keeping away improper transformations and preserving a wonderful environment made of human and natural transformations. Like it may be seen for the St. Nicholas fortress in Sibenik, Dalmatia, built in the middle of the XVI century. Or at least this feature seems to exist just for the most robust and large and, in the end, lucky of these structures. It happens, just to extract some examples, for the Fortress of Taranto Aragon in Italy, developed starting from 1486 and still in place, or the Fort of San Lucian in Marsaxlokk, Malta, built from the 1610. At the same time there is a large set of fortifications and settlements that have to left their original asset after a rapid or slow siege of new constructions and new urban and/or touristic needs. The many towers incorporated in new urban blocks or even changed into apartments are a clear sign of this defeating of the ancient defensive system. Torrenostroa in Torrenostroa, Castellón, Spain is a clear sample of this odd conversion and transformation, of this living a previous condition to move into the new urban fabric and being transformed. A large number of samples

from Italy and Spain shows these behaviour that somehow “preserve” the building keeping it alive, avoiding its destruction, but at the same time transforms and obliterate many specific aspects. A significant case can be found in the lighthouse of the *Cabo de Santa Pola*, former the Atalayola tower, near Alicante, Spain, changed into a lighthouse and still working at the safety of the maritime routes. For sure a better destiny for these architectures than been used as a quarry of materials and then falling into pieces.

Discovering back the value of these buildings is always worth the effort, understanding the importance of those signs is a significant passage, it teaches about architecture, it teaches about landscape, it teaches about how to create relationship between two very complex design environments.

Approaching a tower, a fortress, a defensive settlement, is a learning experience, it can be done in place, on books and online, using the articulated set of digital resources and always developing a better knowledge about a place, an architecture, a relationship between defensive aims and construction science.

The subject of the defensive architectures is always fascinating, the strength of the story, of the reason why these architectures have been built, capture the attention and promise a special satisfactory price to all the scholars, students and researchers involved in their personal encounter with this particular built heritage. For this reason the experience presented here, with its selection of architectural wonders from so many places around the Mediterranean, is not only a catalogue of interesting and rich pieces, but it is a set of meaningful steps in the fields of our past and in a very specific understanding of architecture and its



The lighthouse of the *Cabo de Santa Pola*, former the *Atalayola* tower, Spain.

relationship with the environment. So, it may not be very important how complete, how detailed and accurate, or based on absolutely original representations are the drawings, the models, the texts, the operation of entering the “discover” of a place is a first and important step toward the understanding of architecture of building construction and of defensive techniques. To go in depth in the knowledge of places like those presented in these studies, it is asked to understand the robust link between the needs, the technologies, the social and cultural behaviours of their time, it is asked to completely realize that each architecture is first of all an expression of its own time. And obviously this is not an exclusive of the ancient times, it is a continuous rule. In a certain sense, an architecture of the past, an architecture of the future really do not exist, the only existing architecture is the architecture of the present time. A manifestation of layered decisions of articulated mix of choices, a set of opportunities and twists of fate. An architecture can start in its own environment, it took parts from it, it exploited it and changed it, but it will be changed by the changes, it will face fast transformations, but to the eyes of an acute observer it will show the rich articulation of all the events. It will demonstrate how variable and everchanging is

the landscape and the environment in itself, an island can be changed into peninsula, like it happened in Tabarka, along the Tunis coast, with its Geonan walled city, destroyed in 1741 after an order by the Tunis Bey in the try to avoid any further stranger presence after the Tabarkinian diaspora. A small river or a source of fresh water can get dry, or the seaside can extend its border where before there was only the sea. The towers and the castels show now themselves in the environment of our time, the capacity to recognize the original asset of the territory, the possible changes happened in the surrounding area, are a way to investigate and better understand not only the past story of an atea, but also to have some suggestion about what will be its future evolution.

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