

6 DEFENSIVE ARCHITECTURE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

XV to XVIII Centuries

Ángel Benigno GONZÁLEZ AVILÉS (Ed.)



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Ángel Benigno González Avilés
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Before and after Ribera. Coastal defenses of Northern Capitanata in the early modern age

Michele Coppola^a

^a University of Florence (DIDA - Department of Architecture), Florence, Italy, michele.coppola@unifi.it

Abstract

In the studies of the coastal defenses of the Kingdom of Naples, there is a widespread tendency to focus attention on the viceroy phase, extending its unitary nature, which in some cases does not correspond to what really happened. Some of the results of the survey on the "defensive minorities" of the north coast of the Capitanata, from the mouth of Fortore to Peschici, are presented in this paper. In particular we have investigated two towers of the Viceroy's period, which don't look to follow the standard architectural model provided by the decree of Pedro Afán de Ribera: the Tower on the Fortore (Lesina, Italy) and the Tower of San Menaio (Vico del Gargano, Italy). The investigation covered the digital documentation of these two buildings and a preliminary analysis from a typological, stratigraphic and conservation point of view. Some interesting aspects emerged about material history and the transformations of the structures over time, but also significant relationships with buildings of the same period.

Keywords: Ribera, Fortore, San Menaio, Capitanata, Camilliani.

1. Introduction

In the studies on the coastal defenses of the Kingdom of Naples, there is a tendency to focus on the unitary character of the viceroy phase, which in some cases does not correspond to what really happened.¹ In addition to placing the "anomalies" in the background, the typological homogeneity of the viceregal towers often creates generalizations also on the constructive technologies adopted. The organization and the foresight of the defensive programs of the sixteenth century, was facing the fragmented reality in which the expansion and contraction of the defensive network were linked to several factors: the magnitude of the threats, the financial resources, the commission, the natural changes of the territory and the anthropic contexts to defend. Between the unifying meshes of the viceregal achievements, there are many anomalies before or after the government initiative, especially the edict of Pedro Afán de Ribera of 1563. Minor

fortifications along the North Coast of Puglia bear witness to a complex defensive history, of which Ribera's initiative highlighted gaps and fragmentation. However, viceregal actions, by joining, incorporating or erasing existing towers were neither concurrent nor complete, and left place for integrations in subsequent decades. Here are the preliminary results of a survey of "defensive minorities" on the North coast of Capitanata, from the mouth of the Fortore river to Peschici. Two towers are distinguished from the standard architectural model provided by Ribera: the Tower on the Fortore (Lesina) and the Torre dei Preposti in San Menaio (Vico del Gargano).

2. Medieval heritage and modern emergencies

The historic northern border of Puglia is an uninterrupted "water line", made of the Fortore

Valley and the Gargano coast. Until Peschici the

coastline is sandy, with swampy areas which



Fig. 1- General map of the Northern Coast of the Capitanata

changed their extension over time. Moving eastward from the Fortore mouth we can find: the mouth of Lake Lesina (S. Andrea), the rocky hills of Monte d'Elio, the mouth of the lake Varano, the spur of Rodi, the mouths of canals coming from Vico innerland (Fig.1). Around these nodal points defensive settlement have taken place over time, more or less close to the coastline. The modern defenses inherited the network of Longobard and Byzantine settlements, consolidated since the 10th century. Monasteries were entrusted with the control of the marshland areas on the coast and

around the lagoons (St. Andrea, St. Clemente, Caldoli, Lauro). The Fortore mouth was for a long time controlled by Lesina, along with all the northern border territories. At the beginning of the 11th century, the defensive program of Bojoannes added a fortress on the right branch of the mouth, perhaps the same so-called *foce vetere* in 1005 [Di Perna, 2008, p. 59]. The foundation of Civitate on the heights of *Teanum Apulum*, facing an ancient bridge [Calò Mariani, 1998] created a new control center for the river border, leaving to Lesina the North Coast until the Angevin age.

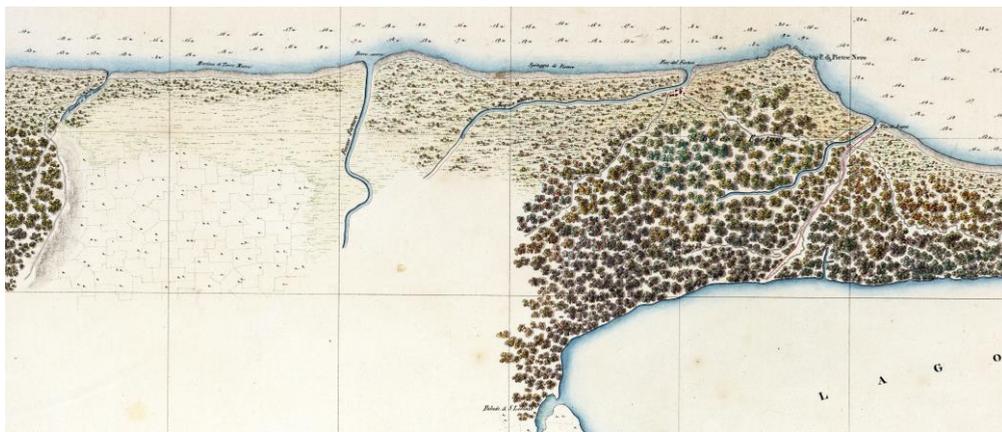


Fig. 2- The coast around the Fortore mouth in a map of 1817-19 (Regio Officio, 1830, sheet 13).

The Ottoman threat (the fall of Otranto dates 1480) and the 1456 earthquake were decisive in reorganizing the coastal settlements. The attention to the fortifications reached its peak with the program of Pedro Afàn de Ribera in 1563 [Starace, 2010, 45]. After Lepanto (1571), the Ottomans focused their efforts on the

Balkans, granting robbery freedom to North African regiments [Mauro, 1998, p. XIII]. One of the many attacks on Capitanata definitely destroyed Civitate in 1571 [Piemontese, 2011, p. 112]. In this changed scenario, took form the Sicilian anti-corsair defense program committed by Colonna (1577) to Tiburzio Spannocchi, with

the codification of the rules (1594-95) for the construction and management of the towers. From the pure survival of the inhabitants the function of the towers was aimed at the protection of coastal economic activities (es. tonnare) with an organic conception of the territory. The towers combine military and residential features [Mazzamuto, 1986, p. 15].

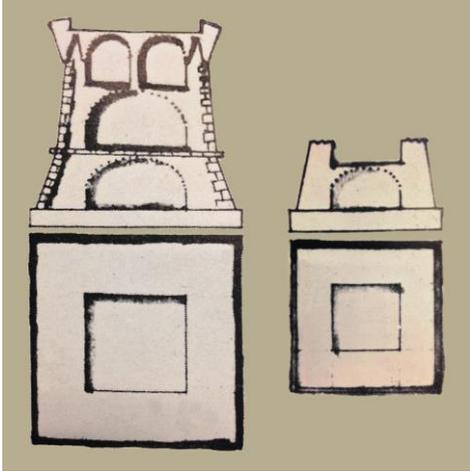


Fig. 3- Torre Fortore and Torre Mozza in the Gambacorta drawings (Faglia, 1977)

3. Torre Fortore and the control of the mouth

Fortified settlements at the mouth of Fortore have adapted over the centuries to variations due to the torrential regime of the river. In medieval times the mouth had two branches, with two ports: the NO with the city of Guadia (Civita a Mare) [Russi, 1985, p. 212] documented until the 17th century [Almagià, 1922]; the eastern one (Acquarotta) controlled by Lesina, was probably replaced at the beginning of the 11th century by the mouth today called "Fiume Morto". Here, from the Swabian age a port is documented with cereal stores, active throughout the 15th century [Faglia, 1977 p. 43]. Here our tower was built. The story of the building is believed to begin with a concession by Ferdinand of Aragon (1485) that allowed Riccardo d'Orefice to build a tower to defend the port. In 1519 Charles V extended the concession to Antonio de Francesco, with the right to open a tavern and the obligation to finish the tower

within two years. Owned by the Duchess of Torremaggiore, the tower was completed around 1540, but confiscated for debts by the Royal Court in 1560 [Pasanisi, 1926, p. 426]. In the atlas of Stigliola & Cartaro (1590-97) [Calò Mariani, 1998, p. 55] this mouth is indicated as the only active one. At that time the mouth of Civita a Mare, equipped with a new tower (Torre Mozza) from the Ribera's program (1563), had to run out. It is unclear whether the mouth has run out before or during the construction of this tower. In the list of completed towers, made by Alfonso Salazar in 1569, there is neither Torre Mozza nor Torre Fortore [Pasanisi, 1926, p. 431]. During his general survey of 1594 the marquis Gambacorta records that the tower is unfinished [Faglia, 1977, p. 48] and stands on a dead branch of the river [Starace, 2010, p. 56]. Curiously however, several guardians are documented from 1583 and throughout the 17th century, while at Torre Fortore, in 1577 is attested the presence of the guardian Pietro Hernandez [Cisternino, 1977, p. 12]. Gambacorta emphasizes the defensive importance of the port that manages the exchange of goods between the Tavoliere plain and the ports of the Adriatic sea, but subject to frequent looting and robberies. The tower was struck by the earthquake that destroyed Lesina in 1596 and by the great one of 1627. It was guarded until 1777 [Faglia, 1977, p. 43-44]. At the end of the century, a new flood opened the present mouth of the Fortore, leaving the tower and its port to a gradual abandonment. The 1805 earthquake damaged the annexed warehouses, at that time operated by the monks of Ripalta [Troccoli, 1975, p. 142]. At the beginning of the 19th century the tower was a headquarters of telegraph guards. After several decades in use at the Financial Guard, it is now closed to the public.

3.1. The architectural investigation

Torre Fortore is just a few meters south of the old mouth. With a square plan, it consists of a sloped base (with no access) overlaid by a parallelepiped body that houses the two upper floors. All the surfaces are plastered except stone cornices (round section for the lower and square for the upper one) and the rusticated blocks of corners and openings. The first two floors are covered

with barrel vaults. The only access on the south side of the first floor is an arched rusticated stone gate. Today it is accessible by a brick masonry staircase with double arch that replaced the original retractable devices. Each of the other three sides has a window in the centre. The second floor cover is flat. Unless further investigation it may have been replaced two barrel vaults (Fig. 3). The second floor is completely plastered, but a regular thickness change suggests

the presence of corner rustication also at this level. The traces in the upper parts indicate that the top was completely different from the machicolations represented by Gambacorta. On the south side, above the entrance, two stone brackets are the remains of a bretèche. At the same level two stone-decorated elements on the edges of the western side, probably supported some other missing brackets.

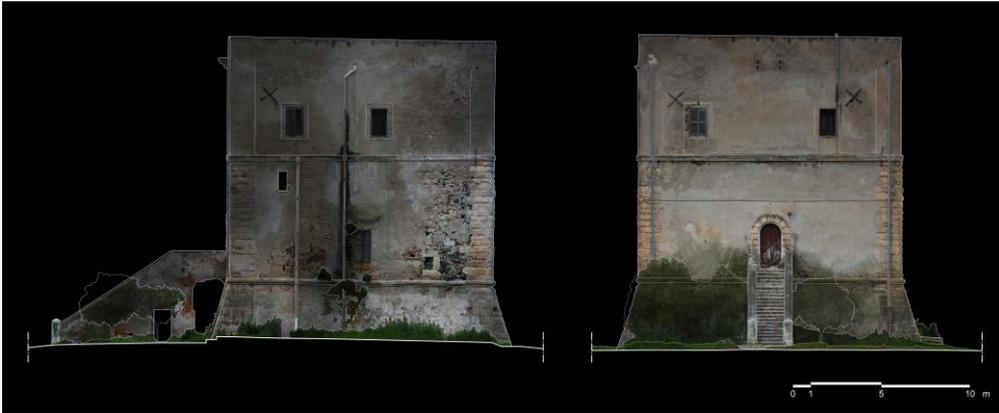


Fig. 4- Elevations of Torre Fortore sides S and E.



Fig. 5- Torre Manfria (Gela).

A significant parallel seems to be with some towers made in Sicily² within the programme promoted by Colonna, with numerous recurring features: square plan with sloped base, stone cornice between floors, regular stone blocks on

corners and openings, first floor entrance, bretèches on consecutive or opposite corners and above the entrance. Their corner position on decorated brackets instead of all around the perimeter is typical of Sicily [Mazzarella, 1985, p. 110]. The indications of Camillo Camilliani and G. Battista Fieschi refer to a tower model widespread in the contemporary technical environment (Italian and Sicilian), but they are also considered to be the implementation of the design criteria set forth by Spannocchi [Giuffrè, 1980, p. 80]. However, the same architectural features are also present in pre-existing towers (Torre Bonagia) [Polto, 2001, p. 106]. Analyzing the tower based on the measure units used in the Kingdom of Naples (1 canna = 2,10936 m; 1 palm = 0.26367 m), its general design seems to follow the indications of Camilliani and Fieschi [Gazzè, 2012], in particular for the largest tower type (a side of 7 canne) [Mazzamuto, 1986, pp. 66-76]. The base scarp should be sloped 1 palm per each length unit (canna) of the total tower height, but this ratio is not respected in the portion actually

out of the ground. Assuming that the scarp runs up to 3 canne below ground level, we obtain a 1 canna (8 palm) slope that does not follow the Camilliani instructions but does not seem random (the tower is 9-10 canne high, considering that the current position of the parapet may have changed, while disassembling the bretèches for example).

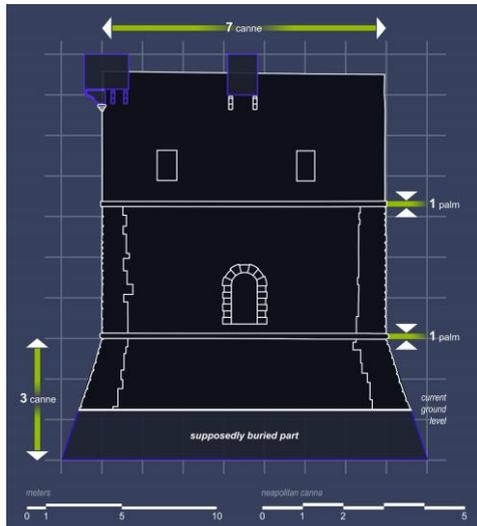


Fig. 6- Torre Fortore architecture compared with the biggest model suggested by Camilliani.

The scarp might have been partially buried in time and never unearthed because it has no access (Fig. 6). Even the size of some elements is significant: the width of the main openings is 1 canna, while the cornices are 1 palm high. The comparison with the Sicilian towers [Dotto, 2012, p. 1190] opens interesting research directions. When Spannocchi worked in Sicily (1578), the program of the Kingdom of Naples was largely implemented [Mazzamuto, 1986, pp. 18-19] and Torre Fortore must have been completed for over 40 years. The case of Torre Pietra adds interesting elements to the matter. It follows a "Camilliani" model (bretèches are missing or lost), but its construction (1568) was led by the same superintendent than Torre Rivoli [Pasanisi, 1926, p. 431] which follows the standard Neapolitan model. With the necessary cautions, there seems to be a coexistence in the Kingdom of Naples of the two models (Camilliani and Ribera). Bretèches approach Torre Fortore to the Sicilian

towers, marking a difference from the towers of Salento, with machicolations all around the top.

The masonry is made of irregular stones (10-35 cm) limestone and lava stone (Punta Pietre Nere), with abundant lime mortar and fragments. Isolated brick masonry portions (such as the access stairs) appear to be related to modification and/or repair work. Limestone regular blocks (corners and openings) are between 25 and 55 cm high. No distinct dimensional groups emerge but only one more frequent class (30-40 cm). In general, the size of the blocks is greater in the lower parts, decreasing upwards. This is much more accentuated on the entrance side (South), with greater dimensional variety. On the opposite side (North) the height of the blocks is more homogeneous. This difference between the two sides is also observed in the presence of fairly straight horizontal alignments which are not as clearly legible on the back side.

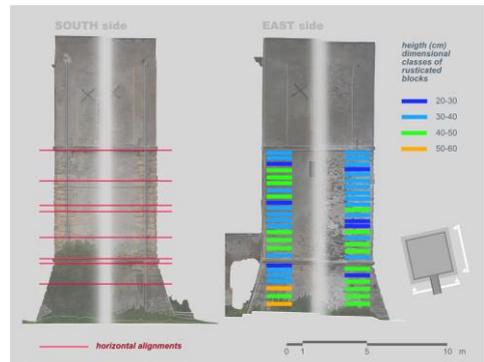


Fig. 7- Analysis of some construction features of Torre Fortore (blocks size and alignments).

4. Torre dei Preposti at San Menaio

The historical events of the Torre dei Preposti at San Menaio are closely connected with the town of Vico. Documented at least since the 10th century, it was included into the county of Lesina in Norman and Swabian times. In the Angevin era Garganic feuds were subdivided between local families, leading to a power fragmentation [Piemontese, 2011, p. 141]. Some valleys, such as Asciatizza to the west and Ginestra (Vallazzo) to the east, are natural connections between Vico and the sandy coast from Rodi to Monte Pucci. In

medieval times, these valleys, often rich in settlements (mills, churches, etc.) had to be equipped with smaller defensive structures on the heights (S. Biagio) back from the coastline [D'Addetta, 1947, p. 37]. The St. Menna valley represents the Vico preferential access to the sea. A first form of settlement in this valley would be connected to a pirate attacks, evaded by the appearance of St. Menna, to which a church was dedicated on a high between the valleys of St. Menna and Ginestra [Vivoli, 2007, p. 9]. The quick access to the coast through this valley consolidated the presence of a more and more

stable port at its mouth. San Menaio is totally absent from 16th-century documents and cartographies [Cisternino, 1977, p. 140], such as the Cartaro atlas of 1597 [Calò Mariani, 1998, p. 55] or the Gambacorta report [Starace, 2010]. A private ownership of the tower or its poor strategic value don't seem to be sufficient reasons [Faglia, 1977, p. 50]. Ribera's 1563 instructions prevented building initiatives unauthorized from the government and provided the expropriation of pre-existing towers, considered to be of public utility [Pasanisi, 1926, p. 423].



Fig. 8- Torre di San Menaio. Architectural survey of the elevations

It is difficult to think that the presence of a tower in this place was not considered strategic, although Torre Monte Pucci and Rodi were able to cover the visual control of this long coast. In some 19th cent. budgets of the Vico municipality, there is the payment of a debt contract with the Barons Cessa from Manfredonia in 1605 for the construction of the Tower. With reference to these debts, in a resolution of 1877, the town council of Vico claimed the ownership of the tower, which had been seized by the Bourbon government (by placing a garrison of custom officers) and which had been inherited unknowingly by the new Italian government [D'Addetta, 1947, p. 35].

According to these information, the tower would then be built in the first decades of the 17th century by the community of Vico, to protect its port. The proliferation of piracy at the end of the 16th century must have imposed a definitive

solution, in addition to what planned by the Ribera edict. The dating to a pre-viceroyal stage does not seem to be supported by proper evidence. The earthquake of 1627 could be the first test dealt with by the building, during or after its construction, of which would be interesting to read any traces on the masonry. Of course the building was full of its functions during the invasion of corsairs at Vico in 1674. At that time there are documented at least two churches beyond the tower and any service port facilities. A 1675 document (the visit of the Cardinal Orsini), explicitly indicates the [...] *Turrim S. Mennae, vulgo S. Menai nuncupatam, in litore maris Ex.m D.ni Marchionis oppidi Vicj [...]*" [D'Addetta, 1947, p. 19]. Pacichelli describes Vico and its commercial port of San Menaio: "[...] *L'eminenza del sito, la temperie del clima, la delitia dei giardini e la copia delle acque la*

rendono vaghissima. Non meno l'industria degli abitanti, che conferisce alla fertilità della terra, profittando del mare tre miglia vicino, e della Torre di Santo Menna giovevole a custodir le mercanzie. [...]" [Pacichelli, 1703, p. 129]. Between the 18th and 19th centuries the development of San Menaio is linked to the export of citrus fruits (but also olive oil, wine, resin, carobs, timber, barrels) whose cultivations in the Vico area were among the largest in Gargano. The port had connections with Puglia (up to Bari and Taranto) and with the middle and high Adriatic to Venice, Trieste and the Dalmatian Coast [Vivoli, 2007, pp. 9-20]. Documents and cartographies of the 19th century [Ufficio Idrografico, 1879] indicate the existence, in addition to the tower, of citrus warehouses on the west bank of the canal. A real village took form only from the end of the 19th century.

4.1. The architectural features

A knowledge investigation was carried out also for the tower of San Menaio, starting with the architectural survey (Fig. 8). The building reflects the fusion of residential and military architectural features of the contemporary models of port towers. The tower, with a scarp base and parallelepiped body, has side of about 7 canne and develops on three main levels of similar height. The ground floor had to be free of access. The entrance to the first floor, on the East side, was reached by a retractable bridge structure (Fig. 9). The connection between the floors was done by stairs illuminated by small rectangular windows. The building technique consists of four walls connected by corners of limestone blocks. The masonry is made of pebbles (10-25 cm) from the nearby torrent, arranged in approximately regular courses, with abundant mortar and fragments. The use of shaped stone blocks is systematic in all the architectural elements: jambs, lintels, window sills, cornices, brackets, generally about 1 palm thick. Accurate working and finishing of surfaces indicate the presence of specialized stonecutters on site. Numerous stone brackets, composed of two blocks, in excellent condition, supported a line of machicolations on the top. The absence of visible traces of masonry suggests that the structures were ligeneous. The SW corner has been

affected by a structural failure, evident in the deformation of the cornices, in the loss of brackets and in the presence of a massive buttress wall. There are some constructive features such as the use of putlog holes and the partial removal of blocks from the corner to create the right connections. Further investigations can clarify the causes of the damage (technical disadvantages, earthquakes, floods, attacks). The analogies with the Fortore tower are obvious, but can also be found with other buildings of this age, such as the Beltrame tower in Pietrasanta, completed in 1588.



Fig. 9- Detail of the W side with the retractable bridge traces in the wall above the entrance.

5. Conclusions

The ongoing investigation on these two towers can contribute to understand the history of the regional coastal defenses, but also the transfer dynamics of models and knowledge between 16th and 17th century in the technical environment of Italian fortifications. The contemporary presence of different types of towers in the Kingdom of Naples can open interesting research directions regarding the architectural choices, preliminary and consequent to Ribera edict. Reinforcing the documentary value of these artifacts can contribute decisively to their safeguard. Both towers are now largely abandoned and in a state of increasing degradation. The low quality of the masonry can implement risk of partial collapses, already evident in some portions. Basic essential steps could be to secure the parts being detached and to verify the waterproofness of the roof. A

thorough knowledge pathway can raise greater caution and rigor in custody and conservation approaches, and guide better design choices. Further developments in the investigation will hopefully provide the basis for an effective line of aware and responsible conservation actions.

Notes

¹ Emblematic is the unified perception of Sicilian coastal fortifications, that were supposed to allow a hypothetical alarm to take the island tour in a very short time [Mazzarella, 1985, p. 35].

² Towers with these features are spread in the area of Trapani (torre di Mezzo a Marausa, torre di Nubia), S. Vito lo Capo (Scopello, Impiso, Isolidda, Usciore, Pozzillo, Molinazzo, Bonagia), Palermo (Isola delle Femmine, Terrasini), but also along the coast of Agrigento (torre San Carlo, Monterosso) or in Val di Noto (Torre di Manfria) or Torre S. Anna on the east coast. They all date back to the end of the 16th century and the first thirty years of the 17th century.

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