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editors

D-SITE

Drones - Systems of Information on Cultural Heritage
for a spatial and social investigation



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INDEX

PREFACE

SANDRO PARRINELLO, ANNA DELL'AMICO

Drones and Digital Innovation: a new scenario in Digital Dimension

16

CONFERENCE PAPERS

CATERINA PALESTINI, ALESSANDRO BASSO, MAURIZIO PERTICARINI

3D modeling from UAV for the reconfiguration of oxidation systems in Abruzzo.

The case of the tower of Forca di Penne, an immersive archival resource for the lost Historical Heritage

28

RAMONA QUATTRINI, RENATO ANGELONI, BENEDETTA DI LEO

Data integration and optimization for Cultural Heritage fruition. The case study of the Rail to Land Project

38

ANDREA PIRINU, RAFFAELE ARGOLAS, NICOLA PABA

Design models and landscape form of Sardinian IIWW Heritage. The Simbirizzi Lake in territory of Quartu Sant'Elena

48

MARCO SACCUCCI, VIRGINIA MIELE, ASSUNTA PELLICCIO

UAVs for the analysis of geometrical deformation of fortresses and castles. The case study of Sora Castle

58

RITA VALENTI, EMANUELA PATERNÒ, GRAZIELLA CUSMANO

UAS applications for the protection of archaeological heritage. From the interpretative complexity of the absence to 3D visualization of euryalus castle

66

GIOVANNI PANCANI, MATTEO BIGONGIARI

The aerial photogrammetric survey for the documentation of the Cultural Heritage: the Verruca fortress on the Pisan Mountains

76

ELENA MADALINA CANTEA, ANNA DELL'AMICO Application of fast survey technologies for knowledge, valorization and conservation: the case study of Rondella delle Boccare	84
PIETRO BECHERINI, ROLANDO VOLZONE, ANASTASIA COTTINI A 3D model for architectural analysis, using aerial photogrammetry, for the digital documentation of the convent of Santa Maria da Insua, on the northern boarder between Portugal and Spain	94
ALBERTO PETTINEO Videogrammetry for the virtual philological reconstruction of the Scaliger fortifications in the territory of Verona. The case study of Montorio Castle	104
GIULIA PORCHEDDU, FRANCESCA PICCHIO Close-Range Photogrammetry for the production of models and 3D GIS platform useful for the documentation of archaeological rescue excavations	112
FABRIZIO AGNELLO, MIRCO CANNELLA Multi sensor photogrammetric techniques for the documentation of the ruins of Temple G in Selinunte	122
GIANLUCA FENILI, GIORGIO GHELFI Conservation and enhancement of Cultural Heritage using UAVs. New perspectives for the preservation of some case studies	130
CATERINA GRASSI, DIEGO RONCHI, DANIELE FERDANI, GIORGIO FRANCO POCOBELLI, RACHELE MANGANELLI DEL FA' A 3D survey in archaeology. Comparison among software for image and range-based data integration	138
GIORGIA POTESTÀ, VINCENZO GELSOMINO Experience of integrated survey by drone for archaeological sites. Documentation, study, and enhancement of the Italic Sanctuary of Pietrabbondante	146
CÈLIA MALLAFRÈ-BALSELLS, DAVID MORENO-GARCIA, JORDI CANELA-RION Photogrammetric comparison between different drone survey methodologies: dry stone as a case study	156
DIEGO MARTÍN DE TORRES, JULIÁN DE LA FUENTE PRIETO, ENRIQUE CASTAÑO PEREA Scars in the landscape: photogrammetry and analysis of the trenches of the Spanish Civil War	168
SALVATORE BARBA, ALESSANDRO DI BENEDETTO, MARGHERITA FIANI, LUCAS GUJSK, MARCO LIMONGIELLO Automatic point cloud editing from UAV aerial images: applications in archaeology and Cultural Heritage	176
CORRADO CASTAGNARO, DOMENICO CRISPINO Drone flight as a knowledge tool for Cultural Heritage	184
ELENA GÓMEZ BERNAL, PABLO ALEJANDRO CRUZ FRANCO, ADELA RUEDA MÁRQUEZ DE LA PLATA Drones in architecture research: methodological application of the use of drones for the accessible intervention in a roman house in the Alcazaba of Mérida (Spain)	192

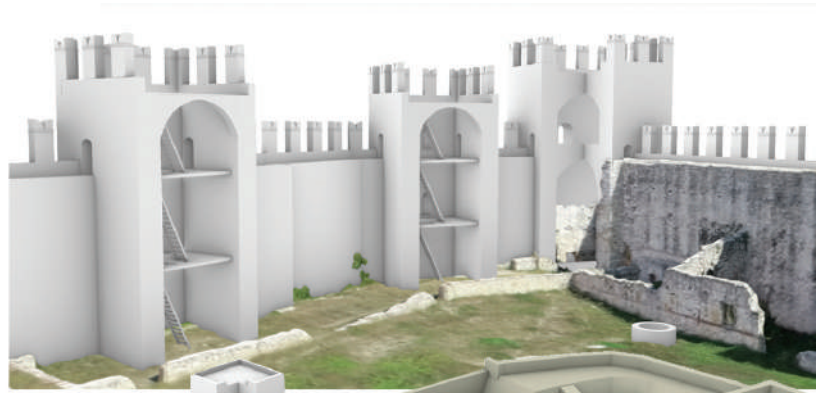
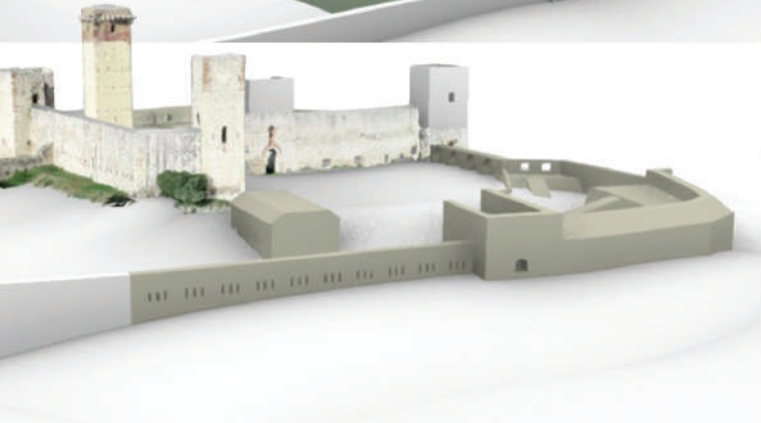
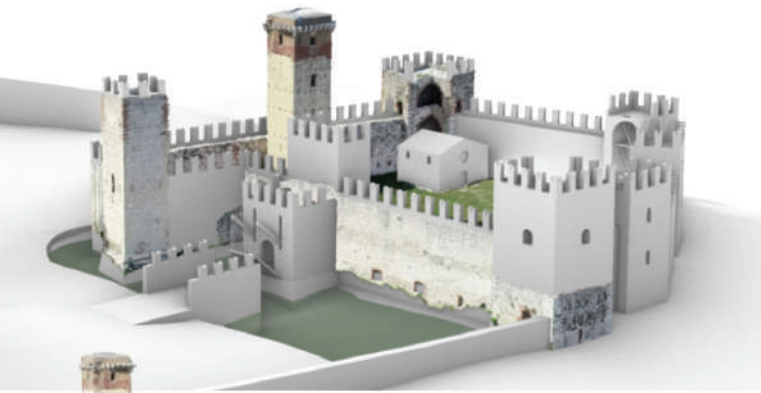
LORENZO TEPPATI LOSÈ, FILIBERTO CHIABRANDO, ELEONORA PELLEGRINO UAS photogrammetry and SLAM for the HBIM model of the Montanaro Belltower	202
FABIANA GUERRIERO Methodologies for the protection of the Portuguese architectural heritage	212
CARLO COSTANTINO, ANNA CHIARA BENEDETTI, GIORGIA PREDARI UAV photogrammetric survey as a fast and low-cost tool to foster the conservation of small villages. The case study of San Giovanni Lipioni	220
LUCA VESPASIANO, LUCA CETRA, STEFANO BRUSAPORCI Experience of Indoor Droning for Cultural Heritage Documentation	232
RICCARDO FLORIO, RAFFAELE CATUOGNO, TERESA DELLA CORTE, VICTORIA COTELLA, MARCO APREA Multi-source data framework: integrated survey for 3D texture mapping on archaeological sites	240
VALERIA CERA, MASSIMILIANO CAMPI Evaluation of unconventional sensors for the photogrammetric survey of underwater historical sites	250
DJORDJE DJORDJEVIC, MIRJANA DEVETAKOVIC, DJORDJE MITROVIC Regulatory and controlling mechanisms on UAV/UAS that influence efficient architectural heritage praxis: actual situation in Serbia	260
ANTONIO CONTE, ANTONIO BIXIO Privileged documentary observations of surveying of “fragile heritage” in emergency conditions: the case studies of Pomarico landslide and of Montescaglioso abbey	270
MARCO CANCELANI, MARCO D’ANGELICO A methodology for survey, documentation and virtual reconstruction of historical centers in a seismic area: the case study of Arquata del Tronto	280
RAISSA GAROZZO, DAVIDE CALIÒ, MARIATERESA GALIZIA, GIOVANNA PAPPALARDO, CETTINA SANTAGATI Integration of remote surveying methodologies for geological risk assessment of masonry arch bridges	294
FAUSTA FIORILLO, LUCA PERFETTI, GIULIANA CARDANI Aerial-photogrammetric survey for supervised classification and mapping of roof damages	304
RAFFAELLA DE MARCO, ELISABETTA DORIA The processing of UAV 3D models for the recognition of coverages at the technological scale: opportunities for a strategy of conservation monitoring	314
QIUYAN ZHU, SHANSHAN SONG, LINGYUN LIAO, MARIANNA CALIA, XIN WU UAV survey for documentation and conservation of Han City in the UNESCO mixed heritage site of Mount Wuyi, China	324

ZHUOWEI LIN, MARIANNA CALIA, LINGYUN LIAO, XIN WU Digital survey of the Cliff-Burial sites with consumer-level UAV photogrammetry: a case study of Mt. Wuyi	334
ANNA SANSEVERINO, CATERINA GABRIELLA GUIDA, CARLA FERREYRA, VICTORIA FERRARIS Image-based georeferenced urban context reconstruction in a BIM environment: the case of the Crotone Fortress	344
ANDREA ARRIGHETTI, ALFONSO FORGIONE, ANDREA LUMINI The Church of San Silvestro in L'Aquila. An integrated approach through TLS and UAV technologies for the architectural and archaeological documentation	356
SILVIA LA PLACA, FRANCESCA PICCHIO Fast survey technologies for the documentation of canalization systems. The case study of the settlement "Il Cassinino" in the Naviglio Pavese surrounding	366
TOMMASO EMLER, ADRIANA CALDARONE, MARIA LAURA ROSSI Fast assessment survey for protected architectural and environmental site	376
MASSIMO LESERRI, GABRIELE ROSSI Salento baroque spires survey. Integrating TLS and UAV photogrammetry	386
SARA ANTINOZZI, ANDREA DI FILIPPO, ANGELO LORUSSO, MARCO LIMONGIELLO Toward a virtual library experience based on UAV and TLS survey data	396
GENNARO PIO LENTO UAS applications for the survey of monumental architecture. The case study of the Royal Residence of Aranjuez in Spain	404
ORNELLA ZERLENGA, GIANFRANCO DE MATTEIS, SERGIO SIBILIO, GIOVANNI CIAMPI, VINCENZO CIRILLO, ET AL. Open source procedure for UAV-based photogrammetry and infrared thermography in the survey of masonry bell towers	412
TOMÁS ENRIQUE MARTÍNEZ CHAO, GIUSEPPE ANTUONO, PEDRO GABRIEL VINDROLA, PIERPAOLO D'AGOSTINO Image-based segmentation and modelling of terraced landscapes	422
ALESSIO CARDACI, PIETRO AZZOLA, ANTONELLA VERSACI The Astino Valley in Bergamo: multispectral aerial photogrammetry for the survey and conservation of the cultural landscape and biodiversity	432

RAFFAELA FIORILLO, ANGELO DE CICCO The Port of Fiskardo: architecture, history and innovation	442
GIUYE LIN, PABLO ANGEL RUFFINO, LU XU, ANDREA GIORDANO, LUIGI STENDARDO, RACHELE A. BERNARDELLO Application of UAV photogrammetry technology in the process of architectural heritage preservation	450
EMANUELE GARBIN On phenomenology of remote vision: the panoramas of the first lunar probes	458
FRANCESCA GALASSO, ALESSIA MICELI The documentation of the decorative system of the Ark of Mastino II in Verona. Comparative analysis of photogrammetric data obtained from UAV systems	468
VALENTINA CASTAGNOLO, ANNA CHRISTIANA MAIORANO, REMO PAVONE Immersive environments and heritage digitization. The virtual image of a medieval cathedral	478
LUCA FORMIGARI, VERONICA VONA, MARCO ZUPPIROLI Towards an “allround” control of the restoration project: 3D modelling as a real-time monitoring system for the design outcome	488
DAVIDE CARLEO, MARTINA GARGIULO, GIOVANNI CIAMPI, MICHELANGELO SCORPIO, PILAR CHIAS NAVARRO Immersive virtual model accuracy and user perception: preliminary results of a case study with low cost photogrammetric survey method by drone	500
HANGJUN FU UAV survey for 3D printing digital modeling for the representation and enhancement of Nativity Church on the urban and architectural scales	510
CHIARA RIVELLINO, MARCO RICCIARINI Testing the reliability of mini-UAVs acquisition campaign on detailed bas-reliefs. The case study of sculpturing elements of Donatello’s Pulpit	518
ANDREA CAMPOTARO Documenting the evolution of a Lilong neighborhood in contemporary Shanghai through mini-UAV-based photogrammetry surveys	528
CRISTIANA BARTOLOMEI, CECILIA MAZZOLI, CATERINA MORGANTI The Woodpecker: virtual reconstruction of an abandoned discotheque in the Adriatic Coast	536
YLENIA RICCI, ANDREA PASQUALI From UAV photogrammetry to digital restitution, new process for the preservation of Cultural Heritage	544

REMOTE SENSING IN AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY	556
CLAUDIO SPADAVECCHIA, ELENA BELCORE, MARCO PIRAS, MILAN KOBAL Forest change detection using multi-temporal aerial point clouds	558
RAMIN HEIDARIAN DEHKORDI, MIRCO BOSCHETTI Exploring the relationship between soil organic carbon and crop water stress across century-old biochar patches within agricultural fields by combining UAV thermal, multispectral, and RGB images	564
GIORGIO IMPOLLONIA, MICHELE CROCI, ANDREA MARCONE, GIULIA ANTONUCCI, HENRI BLANDINIÈRES, STEFANO AMADUCCI UAV-based remote sensing to evaluate nitrogen and irrigation effects on LAI and LCC dynamics combining PROSAIL model and GAM	570
CARLOS CARBONE, MULHAM FAWAKERJI, VITO TRIANNI, DANIELE NARDI Photorealistic simulations of crop fields for remote sensing with UAV swarms	576
BIANCA ORTUANI, ALICE MAYER, GIOVANNA SONA, ARIANNA FACCHI Use of vegetation indices from Sentinel2 and UAV in precision viticulture applications	582
FILIPPO SARVIA, SAMUELE DE PETRIS, ALESSANDRO FARBO, ENRICO BORGOGNO MONDINO Geometric vs Spectral content of RPAS images in the precision agriculture context	588
GIOVANNA SCARDAPANE, FEDERICA MASTRACCI, ANTONELLO CEDRONE, LILIAN VALETTE T-DROMES®, Drone-as-a-Service solutions for Smart Farming	596
FRANCESCA GIANNETTI, GIOVANNI D'AMICO, FRANCESCO CHIANUCCI, GHERARDO CHIRICI UAV forest application supporting sustainable forest management	602
GEOLOGY AND UAV: RESEARCH, EXPERIENCES AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES	608
ALBERTO BOSINO, NICCOLÒ MENEGONI, ELISA FERRARI, CLAUDIA LUPI, CESARE PEROTTI Art and Drones: retracing the paths of Torquato Taramelli 100 years later	610
NICCOLÒ MENEGONI, DANIELE GIORDAN, CESARE PEROTTI, ENRICO ARESE Uncrafted Aerial Vehicle-based rock slope stability analysis of Baveno granite quarry area: the tailing and waste rock extractive site of Ciana-Tane Pilastretto (Montorfano)	614
DAVIDE FUGAZZA, MARCO SCAIONI, VALERIA BELLONI, MARTINA DI RITA, FABIANO VENTURA, FABRIZIO TROILO, GUGLIELMINA ADELE DIOLAIUTI UAVs in cryospheric studies: experiences from Alpine glaciers	620

MARCO LA SALANDRA	
Application of UAV system and SfM techniques to address the hydro-geomorphological hazard in a fluvial system	622
DANIELE GIORDAN, MARTINA CIGNETTI, DANILO GODONE, ALEKSANDRA WRZESNIAK	
Structure from motion multi-source application for landslide characterization and monitoring	626
FABRIZIO TROILO, NICCOLÒ DEMATTEIS, DANIELE GIORDAN, FRANCESCO ZUCCA	
UAV observation of the recent evolution of the Planpincieux glacier (Mont Blanc)	628
MARCO DUBBINI, CORRADO LUCENTE, GIACOMO UGUCCIONI	
Photogrammetric monitoring by drone of San Leo landslide (Rimini)	630
AERIAL, GROUND AND UNDERWATER ROBOTICS FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE	632
MATHEW JOSE POLLAYIL, FRANCO ANGELINI, MANOLO GARABINI	
UAV for environmental monitoring	634
DANILA GERMANESE, DAVIDE MORONI, MARIA ANTONIETTA PASCALI, MARCO TAMPUCCI, ANDREA BERTON	
Exploring UAVs for structural health monitoring	640
BENEDETTO ALLOTTA, ALESSANDRO RIDOLFI, NICOLA SECCIANI	
Autonomous Underwater Vehicles for Underwater Cultural Heritage: some experiences from the University of Florence	644
FABIO BRUNO, ANTONIO LAGUDI, UMBERTO SEVERINO	
Autonomous Surface Vehicles to support underwater archaeologists in survey and documentation	648
FABRIZIO GIULIETTI, EMANUELE LUIGI DE ANGELIS, GIANLUCA ROSSETTI, MATTEO TURCI	
High-range/high endurance rotary wing aircraft for environmental protection and Cultural Heritage valorisation	652
AFTERWORD	658
SALVATORE BARBA, ANDREA DI FILIPPO	
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SPONSOR	664



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ABSTRACT

The submitted paper deals in a research that concerns documentation systems for the Scaliger fortifications in the Verona area by using a case study: the Montorio Castle. The research aims to analyze the possibilities offered by drones for the creation of 3D models using frames exported from video footage. This activity creates a groundwork for the philological reconstruction of the military structures through its main construction phases. Accordingly, a possible development is to begin a process to enhance and preserve the historical knowledge of these fortifications through studying and describing them.

VIDEOGRAMMETRY FOR THE VIRTUAL PHILOLOGICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SCALIGER FORTIFICATIONS IN THE TERRITORY OF VERONA. THE CASE STUDY OF MONTORIO CASTLE

1. INTRODUCTION

Fortification is an element that identifies the territory; its presence has always shaped and characterized the development of the surrounding space (Creighton, 2002). This connection between the fortress and the territory is clearly noticeable in Veneto. In this area, mainly in Verona province, there are many castles built between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries during the Scaliger domination period. Part of those castles have reached the present day in an excellent state of conservation, such as Soave and Sirmione, others have come to us as ruins or partially modified, in such a way that the original conformation and its relation with the territory is no more easily understandable. For this reason, representing military architecture is a complicated process: it concerns understanding the territory that affects the characterization of the design of a particular defensive structure, but also documenting how much of these structures has been preserved. (Parrinello 2019). In order to do that, the research presented in this paper aims to analyze the possibilities offered by drones for the creation of 3D models using frames exported from video footage. The application of this method can help to start a process in order to enhance and preserve the historical knowledge of these fortifications. Various documentation activities on Scaliger castles have been promoted as a part of the collaboration agreement between the Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture of the University of Pavia and the Unesco Relations Office of Verona Municipality for the documentation of historical city walls. This actions aimed at the protection and enhancement of the fortified heritage in order to promote the strong cultural identity of

the territory. Especially, the Montorio castle proved to be an excellent case study for test out of different steps of the research: from the documentation to the development of 3D models describing the different transformation phases the castle has gone through.

2. THE HISTORY OF THE MONTORIO CASTLE

Over the centuries the castle became strategically very important due to its privileged position in the surrounding area, and because of that has gone through several transformations. The territory on which the castle of Montorio stands is an area inhabited since ancient times. Thanks to numerous archaeological excavations begun in the 80s till nowadays, traces have emerged dating back to the Neolithic period (4000- 2200 BC) or the Copper Age (2400-1800 BC). The traces of the first castelliere date back to the VIII BC, when the ancient Venetians settled in the area where the Reti would have settle about a century later. Later on, was also proven the presence of the Cenomanian Gauls and the Romans (Alloro and Pasa, 2003). Anyway, the construction of the fortress on top of the ancient castelliere remains dates back to the beginning of the 10th century as a response to the frequent raids of the Hungarian populations (Simeoni, 1953). The current castle ruins date back no earlier than 1117, the year in which an earthquake seriously damaged the city of Verona. This event probably also has affected the Montorio castle. Infact, from the stratigraphic analysis on the walls it emerges that the current castle is dated after 1117 so the earthquake must have destroyed the old fortification on Montorio hill and due to that it was completely rebuilt after that event¹.

Acquisition methodology

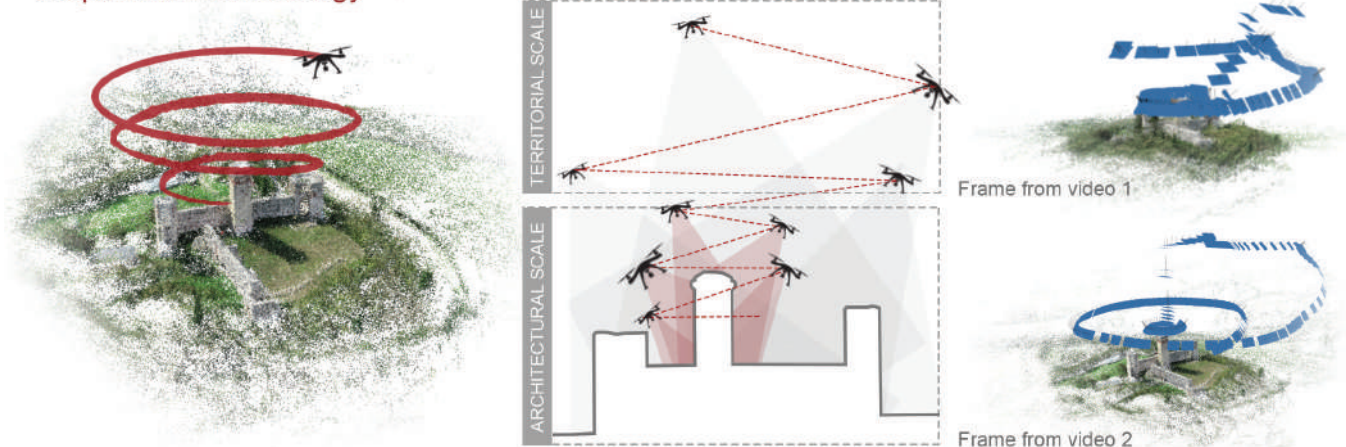


Figure 1. Flight-paths for drone's video registration and results from the frame alignment of the two video used. It is also noteworthy the camera position for each frame exported in the video sequence.

During the years of Federico Barbarossa's empire (1155-1190), the castle played a strategic role controlling a vast territory near the city of Verona and important communication routes. For this reason, Montorio has become the point of contention between the most powerful Veronese families, such as the Sambonifacio and the Crescenzi. When in 1262, Mastino della Scala was elected "Perpetual captain of the people of Verona", the castle passed under the Scaliger dominion. In 1313 when the castle was set on fire by the Paduans (in war with Cangrande Della Scala) it has been subsequently restructured. With the fall of the Della Scala family, the castle passed into the hands of the Visconti and later of the Venetians. In this period, the castle slowly loses importance with long and dusty periods of neglect² until the advent of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Indeed, after defeating the Napoleonic army in 1814, the Austrians understood the strategic importance of the area of the Preafitta ridge and decided to convert the castle into a large defensive battery. During this period the castle underwent significant interventions, including the demolition of some towers and the removal of the crenelated wall. The documentation of these transformations have come to us thanks to several historical reports that described the castle³.

3. UAV SYSTEM: SURVEY METHODOLOGIES FOR THE DEFENSIVE SYSTEM AND DATA PROCESSING

The digitization of the fortified heritage through the creation of 3D databases is a process that requires preliminary assessments of the methodologies and an accurate selection of tools to best represent the objects of study. Furthermore, it is critical to evaluate the timing, the morphology and the territorial extension of the data, especially the purposes that must be achieved (Parrinello et al. 2020). The trial on the castle of Montorio through video frame processing techniques taken with UAV equipment, was born with the idea of acquiring a great number of data covering large territorial portions for the digital representation of the fortified heritage through 3D models. Images captured for photogrammetric modeling can be taken with either a still camera or a moving camera. In this case study it was decided to use video sequences⁴. During the survey phase, two high-resolution videos (about four minutes each) were made with a DJI Phantom 4 Pro UAV⁵. The video shootings were carried out working on two different scales: a punctual one aimed at the most valuable elements of the castle such as the dungeon; and a territorial one that involved the castle, the

Frames sequence



Frames quality



Figure 2. Frames sequence and quality.

bastia and a part of the surrounding space. Unlike some case studies carried out on fortified elements⁶ realized using SfM techniques through static images, where generally for each punctual element is planned radial flight-path while for the territorial elements a grid, in this case study both videos were made by performing a manual flight following a radial path with heights variations for both detail scales, architectural and territorial ones (Figure 1). During the post-production phase, the videos were processed by exporting each frame (VLC Media Player) in sequence, creating two distinct photographic datasets. As in the case of traditional

close-range photogrammetry, processed from cameras, the frames were extrapolated sequentially trying to have sufficient overlap between them (Figure 2). The exported frame format is the same of the shot video, 4k quality, 3810x2160 pixel, with 96ppi resolution. For the first video, lasted 4 minutes and 44 seconds has been created a 182 frame dataset, while the second video, 4 minutes and 12 seconds, the dataset is 172 frame. For each video, a dataset containing the generated frames was created and imported into an image processing software (Agisoft Metashape), generating a sparse cloud (for each dataset) representing the result of the alignment

Elaboration process

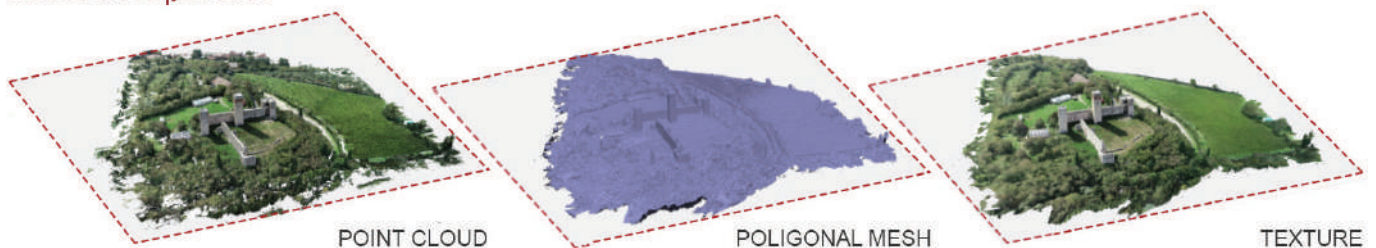


Figure 3. Following steps of photogrammetric elaboration (after alignment) and final textured model.

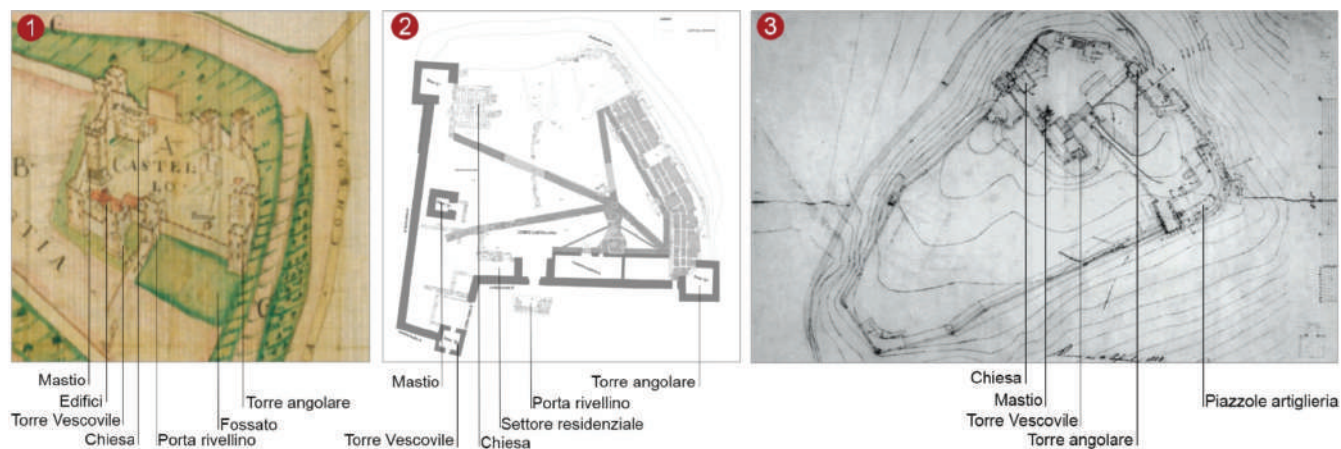


Figure 4. Representations of the castle: 1- Drawing made by Iseppo Cuman in 1663 (details); 2- Plan of archaeological excavations carried out in 2013; 3- Austrian survey dating back to 1859.

of the cameras. For the first dataset the generated sparse cloud contains 499,523 points, while the second dataset a sparse cloud of 477,729 points. Then, the two sparse clouds were aligned (automatic alignment by points) and joined, generating a unified cloud. The dense cloud was first processed and then elaborated into a polygonal mesh (19,821,151 polygons). Following this step the texture was generated, to emphasize the material characteristics (Fig.3). In the last phase, the model was scaled on the reference of the existing plan⁷. The final model has enough resolution for visualization purpose and virtual fruition.

4. STUDY OF HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION FOR A PROCESS OF PHILOLOGICAL RECONSTRUCTION

The following philological reconstruction, carried out by consulting archival records provided by the Municipality of Verona, was structured based on the two main historical phases that changed the castle image. The two historical periods taken into consideration are the Scaliger period and the phase of Habsburg domination. During this later one, the castle has suffered several changes whit the aim to reconvert it into a defensive battery. In order to digitally reconstruct the elements that no longer exist, an important amount of broad

spectrum information was used. In the development of the Scaliger phase, the historical drawings were essentials; among them was of the utmost importance the one created in 1663 by Iseppo di Cuman⁸. In his representation, it is possible to identify the presence of a moat in the south-eastern portion of the wall with a drawbridge that led to the entrance of the castle. Moreover, in the forepart of the currently existing portal there was a rivellino gate system of which it is still possible to see the foundations recovered following numerous archaeological excavations (Figure 4). Likewise for the portion of the north-eastern wall, no longer existing (as it was demolished and replaced by a series of embankments used as defensive spots during the nineteenth century), the archaeological evidences and the map of Cuman have allowed to reconstruct the perimeter layout of this portion of the boundary. On the city walls there were also towers that articulate the ring path. To find out in what number and in what position they were, numerous historical sources⁹ were used, integrated with the representation of Cuman. Similar structures from the castles of Soave and Sirmione were taken as a model for the architectural characteristics of the towers (Calisi, Cianci 2018). For the philological reconstruction of the Habsburg period, various survey made on the castle by the Austrian Military Engineers were used, in particular one made



Figure 5. Modeling phases of the Scaliger reconstruction.

in 1859¹⁰ and one dated 1860 in which the detailed plan of the castle and the wall of the *bastia* is combined with a series of sections of the newly constructed defensive works. To support the cartographic information, photographs and historical memories were used too.

5. DIGITAL RECONSTRUCTION: OPERATIONAL PROCESS AND RESULTS

Once generated the textured model, it was imported for the digital reconstruction of the castle within the mesh management software, Rhinoceros. For the reconstruction of the castle, in the texturized model, only the portion of the wall that currently exists was maintained as the modifications that took place over the centuries have also affected the conformation of the land in a conspicuous manner. In fact, in the reconstruction of the Scaliger period, the riverbed of the ditch was modeled, while in the Austrian reconstruction all the shooting ranges within the walls and in the north-eastern portion of the fortress were rebuilt. In the reconstruction of the medieval period, following the modeling of the terrain, the volumes of the towers and the missing perimeter of the wall were extruded. In the last phase, the elements inside the parade ground (such as the church and the houses, found in the 1664 drawing) were modeled¹¹ (Figure 5). The changes in the conformation of the fortification that occurred during the Asbrugic period were recreated in the second reconstruction, thanks to the inclusion of the 1859 relief within the software. After being scaled on the textured model, it was used as a reference for the extrusion of volumes. The result is two models that frame the historical moments of the fortress and in which it is possible to observe and analyze the changes

that have occurred over the centuries.

To highlight the existing castle from the historical reconstruction, the model was treated and highlighted with chromatic differences to distinguish the existing (textured portion) and the reconstruction operation (Figure 6).

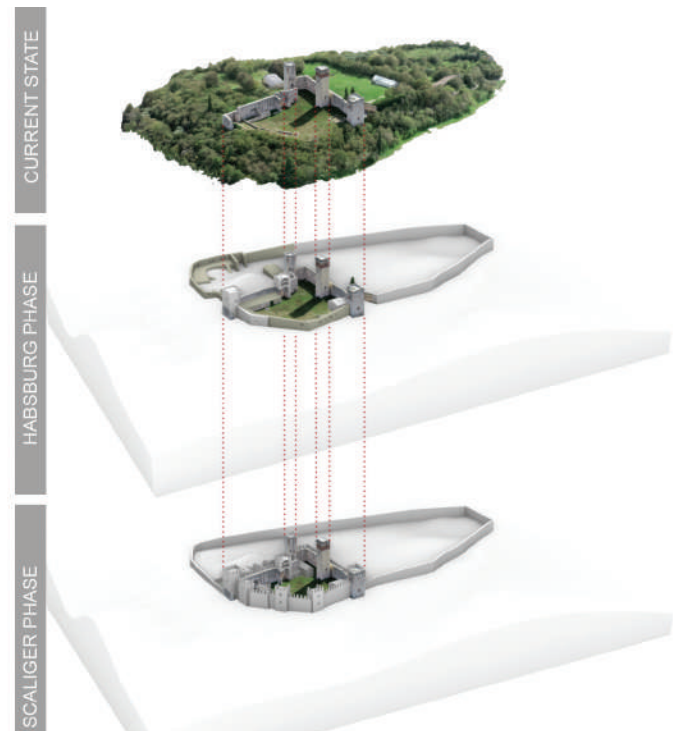


Figure 6. Reconstruction phases, results.

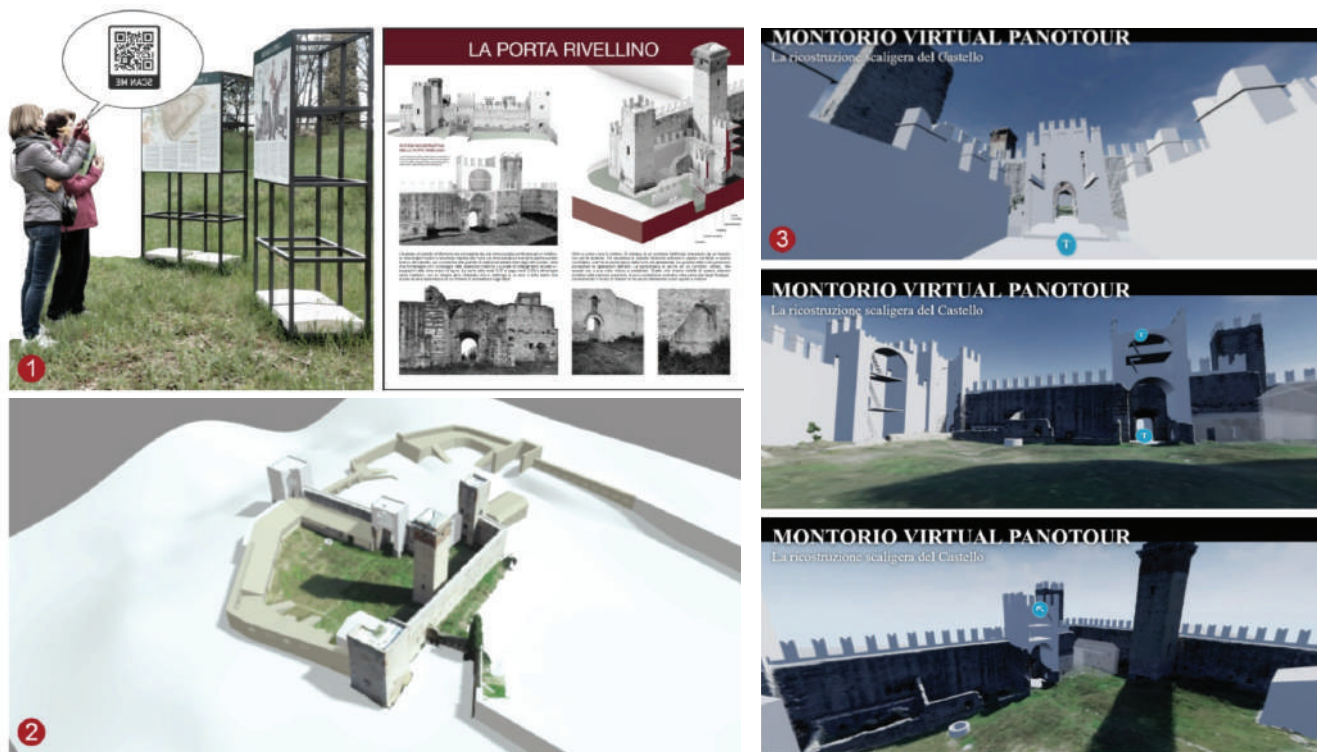


Figure 7. Fruition opportunities: 1 – Graphic reconstructions for exhibitions; 2 – Models available online; 3- Creation of virtual tours (panotour).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The 3D model developed can serve many purposes: its use can help to understand and study the Scaliger defensive systems and to comprehend the changes the castle has undergone over time. In a museological perspective, the potential of a 3D reconstruction can be exploited by the creation of virtual and augmented reality systems.

Within the framework of exposition, it can be viewed through digital devices scanning a QR Code printed on the exhibition panels (Figure 7). Otherwise, through the potential of 3D printing, it is possible to create a physical model to give the possibility of use to all age groups and people with disabilities. In this way, the municipality of Verona promoted an exhibition inside the Montorio Castle aiming to explain the cultural relations and historical events that have gone through these defensive systems. 3D models of

the philological reconstructions were used in various ways: for the creation of 2D drawings explaining the architectural elements, for virtual tours and online models that can be used by scanning the QR code.

In conclusion the application of this type of methodology is successful for the creation of 3D models suitable for online use. Furthermore, the rapidity of acquisition allows it to be extended to a territorial study of the castles in order to better understand the role, as a defensive spots, that they have played over the centuries, especially during Della Scala government. Clearly an increasing interest in studying the castles from a territorial scale can lead to a broader understanding of it. The enhancement of the landscape and its stone architectures allow the creation of cultural paths that can favour tourism and the rediscovery of these architectures often forgotten by history.

NOTES

1 L. Alloro, M. Pasa, 2003, p.43.

2 Ivi, p.58.

3 One of this description is provided by Carlo Belviglieri in Grande illustrazione del Lombardo-Veneto, 1859: "...bello e pittoresco fino a questi ultimi giorni né quali venne brutalmente mutilato dagli austriaci".

4 For more information about projects that used documentation methodology with video frames see: Croce V., Martínez-Espejo Zaragoza I. (2018).

5 Drone's characteristics: video resolution 4K/60fps, camera sensor: CMOS 1", pixel: 20M, focus: 8,8 mm/24 mm (format 35 mm) f/2.8 -f/11 autofocus. The video shooting quality is 4k, frame width 3810, frame height 2160, 29.97 fps.

6 To compare different SfM methodology applied to fortification documentation, see: Picchio F., Pettineo A. (2019); De Feo M. (2020); Liuzzo M. et al (2020); Versaci A. et al (2021).

7 The plan, attached in the archeological report and drawn after the excavation of 2013 realized by Thompson Simon - scavi e rilevamenti archeologici and kindly shared by the municipality Verona.

8 Drawing realized by Iseppo Cuman in 1663, taken from Alloro L., Pasa M. (2003). Il castello di Montorio. Analisi storica, socio-economica e architettonica, p. 69.

9 Among the historical sources need to be mentioned the one written by G. Orti Manara in 1824: "Esso... ha sette torri nel su recinto, ed una nel mezzo"; and the one date back to 1854 included in the poem Invito a Montorio: "L'attuale castello di Montorio [è] cinto da sette torri con una nel mezzo".

10 Habsburg survey date back to 1859, taken from Alloro L., Pasa M. (2003). Il castello di Montorio. Analisi storica, socio-economica e architettonica, p.79.

11 Luisi R., (1996), pp.42-45, the author describes the residential aspect inside the castle. Generally, the castle enclosure contained houses, stables, warehouses and vegetable gardens. In the case of Montorio, the representation of Cuman is confirmed by traces of buildings that emerged during the archaeological excavations.

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