

BORDER, NOMOS, IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

The so-called *carta lapidaria*, or “stone tablet”, dated about 1118 B.C.E, with which Bernardino Conte, son of Bernardo degli Ardengheschi, bequeathed all his lands and property to his son Rustico so that he would transfer them to the church of Sant’Antimo is the “contract” carved into a stone altar through which was sanctified a border, an actual margin within *Siene* territory; one that identified, for the first time, the substantial “form” of territorial dominions within medieval Tuscany.

The culture of the “fragment” – understood as independent, legal, and physical – produced a magnificent wealth of singular examples that helped to develop the beauty of the Italian landscape.

This condition – archetypal within relationships between human beings and things – led to the creation of Castelnuovo dell’Abate, a village beside Sant’Antimo that developed around the “castle” serving the abbey below it.

Corte Francigena is a residential expansion project adjacent to the village, which assembles the principles that generated local tradition by translating into substance the memory that conveys it.

Keywords: Montalcino, Sant’Antimo, Castle, Architecture, Stone.

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“Il conte Bernardino, figlio del conte Bernardo, diede e confermò a Ildebrando, figlio di Rustico, tutto ciò che aveva, o altri avevano per lui in tutto il regno italico e in tutta la marca di Tuscia e i suoi beni mobili e immobili, che doveva in qualche modo avere o altri o chi per lui nei suddetti (...) luoghi cioè tanto quelli che hanno la facoltà di riflettere quanto quelli che ne sono privi...” Ildebrando poi, come ricevette tutti i beni dal suddetto Bernardo così diede alla Chiesa di Sant’Antimo in questo monastero tutti quanti gli stessi con diritto di proprietà per sempre.

Fine dello scritto su una colonna.

Per l’affare scritto sopra la chiesa spende 1000 libbre in parte volendo e in parte no, in per ciò che il fratello germani di Bernardo, di nome Fortisguerra, o altri per lui, ha sottratto con violenza. Ella diede inoltre 110 libbre per il privilegio concesso a questa chiesa per i beni suddetti dall’imperatore Enrico, per volontà di Rabodo, marchese della Tuscia. Ciò è stato fatto nel luogo di Torricchio.”

"Count Bernardino, son of Count Bernardo, gave and confirmed to Hildebrand, son of Rustico, everything he had, or that others had for him, throughout the Italian kingdom and the March of Tuscany and its movable and immovable properties, which either others or those on his behalf had to have in the aforementioned (...), namely, places, both those with the faculty to reflect and those without..." Having received all the property by the aforementioned Bernardo, Hildebrand thus gave the Church of Sant’Antimo in this monastery all of the same, with right of property, for all time.

The end of an inscription on a column."

For the deal referred to above, the church spent 1000 libras, not entirely wilfully, since Bernardo’s full brother, named Fortisguerra, or others on his behalf, extracted it with violence. The church also gave 110 libras for the privilege granted by Emperor Henry to this church for the aforementioned property, by the will of Rabodo, Margrave of Tuscany. This took place in Torricchio.”

(Una pietra che canta, Abbazia di Sant’Antimo, Edizioni Sant’Antimo, Castelnuovo dell’Abate, 1995).

This is part of an inscription carved into the altar stairs of the Abbey of Sant’Antimo, legendarily founded in the late

8th century by Charlemagne on his way back from Rome along the Via Francigena. Located south of Montalcino in the Starcia Valley in south-east Tuscany, this monastery became a hub around which developed the area between Monte Amiata and the sea.

Count Bernardino, son of Bernardo degli Ardengheschi, used this so-called *carta lapidaria* (“stone tablet”) dated circa 1118 B.C.E. to bequeath all his lands and property to his son Rustico, who would then transfer them to Sant’Antimo. The church in turn was to pay 1000 libras to Fortisguerra in exchange for not disturbing the monks, and 110 libras to Emperor Henry V to guarantee their legitimacy and rights over the new properties recently received and defined.

The “contract” carved into this stone altar – and recorded on paper – helped sanctify and delineate a border, an actual margin within Sienese territory; one that identified, for the first time, the substantial “form” of the territorial dominions managed by the Abbot of Sant’Antimo.

The Abbot would remain the uncontested head of this physical, legal structure until the early 13th century when, on 12 June 1212, after defeat in battle, the Abbot and the people of Montalcino came to an agreement with the Sienese Republic regarding the jurisdiction of the possessions they had theretofore managed, after which the history of these lands is well known.

Italy as we know it today grew from the foundations created by the conflicts between the great Northern European empires and the management of lands in the south, especially those in Italy subdivided among nobles.

The culture of the “fragment” – understood as independent, legal, and physical – produced a magnificent wealth of singular examples like the Italian city-republics, which, in an effort to assert themselves, and opposing each other sometimes violently, helped to develop the beauty of the Italian landscape. Certain physical and simple but effective elements helped form the knowledge, identity, and sense of belonging of those who lived in and developed these places, such as the walls defining the city’s form, and the flag or standard, which sanctioned law and order. Though small, these villages contained all the representative characteristics of an ancient city, and the people recognized themselves in the buildings of the institutions that brought about their independence.

Every medieval city contained a concentration of all the symbolic principles used to confer it with managerial and political independence. Defence through fortification therefore became the first tangible sign of the medieval *forma urbis* upon which cities were, in a general sense,

reborn. The early decades of the 11th century witnessed not only the alteration of these places, but also the birth and transformation of “defence castles”, which had been strategically vital for the development of this part of Tuscany, not to mention the Italian territory in general.

The legal, political condition established by the fragmentation of territories and their consequent management by the great noble families of the day hence became a concrete, comprehensive way to administer and control those possessions and thereby increase their wealth; a condition that would ultimately determine the entire development of medieval Italy.

The geographic environment was therefore subject to a sort of dovetailing of these various physical entities, which sought amongst themselves better, more advantageous spaces and conditions. The conflicts that erupted were palpable and impossible to avoid. Land management in the Middle Ages was therefore the result of this comprehensive “organization” of imperial endowments and social conquests that, through various power struggles, developed the forms that would come to define the landscape.

Out of this socio-political situation emerged cultural identities that shaped town centres and produced urban agglomerations – with everything from defensive castles strategically positioned nearby to important pilgrimage posts – that would later become independent, autonomous towns in both form and substance. Hence the proliferation in this area in the first decades after the year 1000 of small, independent “comuni” defended as whole political entities. The physiognomy created by this self-determining will could be seen in the earliest fortifications, which, along with being constrained by the morphology of the land and dictated by strategic opportunities, defined a precise identity-based architectural space.

The Abbey of Sant’Antimo would come to subjugate many castles in the decades around the turn of the 11th century, a time when the ecclesiastical power represented by the Abbot was in increasing competition with the nobility over control of political and social life. The abbey’s possessions – ratified in stone – extended from Montalcino to the sea, at Castiglione della Pescaia, and even beyond that both southwards and northwards. The Abbot was a decisive man who managed life on these lands in conflict with the Principles that alternated with his attempts to subject others with force.

Sculpted into the stairs of Sant’Antimo’s altar is therefore the birth of this particular form of territory; and its most profound character is described in an indissoluble way by

engraving, in the same locally sourced onyx with which the church was built, the connection between those who conquer a land and the rule imposed to manage it.

This “pact” – archetypal within relationships between human beings and things – led to the creation of Castelnuovo dell’Abate, a village adjacent to Sant’Antimo that developed around the “castle” serving the abbey below it. The small hilltop town is located south of the church in the Starcia Valley, just west of the Orcia River.

Tied to the site’s morphology, the town’s plan is oriented from south to north, ending in a small 15th century parish church. A single city gate stands at the base of a steep hill to the south, at the end of the main street, which organises the entire centre and onto which face palazzi once belonging to the Piccolomini Family and a small piazza with a still-functioning well. The entire village was built using exposed local split stone and its small buildings are close together, thus leaving open passageways – alleyways, streets – that engrave this hillcrest and distribute its functions. The whole structure is compact and solid, and the urban space is determined by small adjacent constructions whose presence was dictated by the condition common to all medieval architecture: necessity. As Aristotle wrote in *Metaphysics*, “necessity is a condition without which one cannot not live”.

The early 11th century city defined itself on this condition of necessity. What resulted was a marvellous “organised chaos”, a vision bestowed to us of these towns, with their solid/void relationships, that reveals their truest, most profound character. Their typically hillside placement even allows us to see them from a unique perspective in which the pitch of the rooves plays an active role in the visual scene. In fact, their morphological sloping reveals complex dynamics created by

*Figure 1. Carta Lapidaria 1118
D.C. ‘Una pietra che canta’,
(edizioni Sant’Antimo, Siena).
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the difficult planimetric aggregation imposed precisely by the necessities of those building their own homes.

The architecture of medieval villages was produced by an indomitable demand inspired by the necessity of a physical space intended for the functions that served the human beings of the time, and this characteristic is the rule that makes these spaces unique and identity-based.

It is, however, clear that organized town-planning associations started appearing as early as the 8th century. By the early duecento there even appeared an “Embellishment Plan” in Siena, whose urban design is surely one of the most important examples of medieval architecture. With their professional guilds and new independent governments, medieval cities like Siena put their political power on display, thus revealing the organisation of architectural space as an evolution of current political thought. In fact, Siena’s town hall is home to Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s depiction of Good and Bad Government (Siena, Palazzo Pubblico, 1338-1339), which portrays the qualities and virtuous traits of the Sienese Republic.

During this historic period, as part of the process to identify the dichotomy between inside and outside the city walls, form became substance. The city does not appear in a certain form, it is its form, since the meaning of the border marked by its wall transcends the value of the wall itself.

Therefore, regardless of its size, the medieval city takes on its identity-based values not only through the configuration conceded to it by the relationship between the walled border and the land’s morphology, but also by the necessity contained within the compact nature of its internal space.

Even the architectural structure of buildings is affected by this cultural passage, uniting the traditional defensive configuration of the first municipal buildings – crowned by battlements – with the various private structures that found their architectural possibility within the necessity of the spaces available. We can see the same principle at play in the solid/void relationships, since the size and placement of windows was based on need and possibility, and there was no rational, ordered logic behind the design of façades.

These are the principles that inspired the evolution of small towns in Italy, especially in Tuscany where this kind of culture was more established than elsewhere. The territorial fragmentation due to the intense socio-political activities of the Middle Ages produced a narration that still survives in the memory of these places.

This is the tradition behind the Corte Francigena project, a southward expansion of the small town centre of Castelnuovo dell’Abate facing Monte Amiata and overlooking the Val d’Orcia.

As the completion of an urban development plan begun in the 1990s and part of an apportionment required to satisfy the need for residential buildings, the project is set on a tract of land that slopes in two directions. The marginal plot is bordered to the south by the Via delle Cave, which represents the insuperable limit, the border of the new settlement, a sort of new fortification wall that divides “inside” and “outside”. Beyond this street extends an agricultural landscape of vineyards and olive groves typical of the Val d’Orcia.

The plot’s configuration and the streets crossing it guided the project, which follows the principles mentioned earlier by maintaining the dense nature of the old town centre. In accordance with the norms regulating settlements and therefore distances, in addition to those already required for compliance, the plot was occupied and subsequently “cut” into blocks that follow the slopes of the land by graduating the units at six different elevations and thus providing each one with a view of the Val d’Orcia.

The project therefore appears as one block of stone cut by small orthogonal streets crossing a central, distributive spine whose pre-existence generated the division between hill and valley. The transversal cuts function as connecting stairways between the floors and are only some two meters wide, which

Figure 2. Castelnuovo dell’Abate and Sant’Antimo Abbey, aerial view.



also contributes to the compact appearance of the blocks.

The general dimensions of the project conform to the average heights of the village of Castelnuovo, whose buildings are no taller than three floors. The general form, particularly of the blocks, has no specific geometric reference, conforming instead to the only consideration tied to local tradition, i.e., necessity, the need to adapt to the slopes of the land and to respect the morphology of the hillside that generates the living space in a territory like this.

The pitched wood and copper roofs blend in with the rooftops of the old town centre that rises above the new construction, forming a complex, inclined plane that follows both the graduated placement of the buildings and the body of the historic town centre. The homes appropriate the space they need from the crest, invading the hillside where possible. This flow of stone is a strongly identity-based feature of Tuscan hill towns whose apparent complexity belies the tranquillity one feels walking through these villages.

The façades overlooking the street and the valley are

Figure 3. The project in a perspective drawing.



Figure 4. Study drawing for a front.



delineated by openings recalling those of other small historic towns in the Val d’Orcia. The windows are positioned in an apparently casual way and their size is a wise agreement between the dimensions of the façade and the necessity of light. The openings are framed by pale travertine slabs – like all windows on exposed stone walls – because this material is ideal for finishing squared-off corners and edges and can be seen on the façades of all the local homes.

The Corte Francigena project therefore becomes the margin, the border, the last lyra (line) defining the new shape of Castelnuovo dell’Abate; the city walls beyond which a traveller leaves and embarks for Rome.



Figure 5. The project fitting in the landscape.

Figure 6 - 7. The project’s south front.



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Figure 8. Views of the landscape between the blocks.

