

FROM THE FORTIFICATIONS TO THE STRONGHOLDS: THE MODIFICATIONS OF THE DEFENSIVE CULTURE OF THE “ANCIENT RÉGIME” CITY IN RELATION TO THE BIRTH OF THE MODERN GOVERNANCE OF THE TERRITORY

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ABSTRACT

The plan attached to the text of Ambrogio Leone (1514) is a precious statement about the evolution of the Campania Felix between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. On the occasion of the V centenary from the publication of *De Nola* and of the recent publication in a modern version of the *De morbo epidemiali nolano* by Giovan Battista Cavallari, is proposed an analysis of the two works in relation to the transformations happened in a vital area of the Mediterranean, the so-called Terra di Lavoro. Through a synoptic comparison with the previous Aragon maps, it is possible to capture the proposing of the system of the hill castles in the plain; the development of the castra on the border of an area constantly threatened by natural disasters; the alterations after the introduction of the gunpowder, with the cultural and the social-economic transformations of the dynamic of the arms industry's preparation; the relations among the climate, the shape of the city and the territory's morphology.

Keywords: forma urbis; strongholds; castles; Campania felix; topographic map

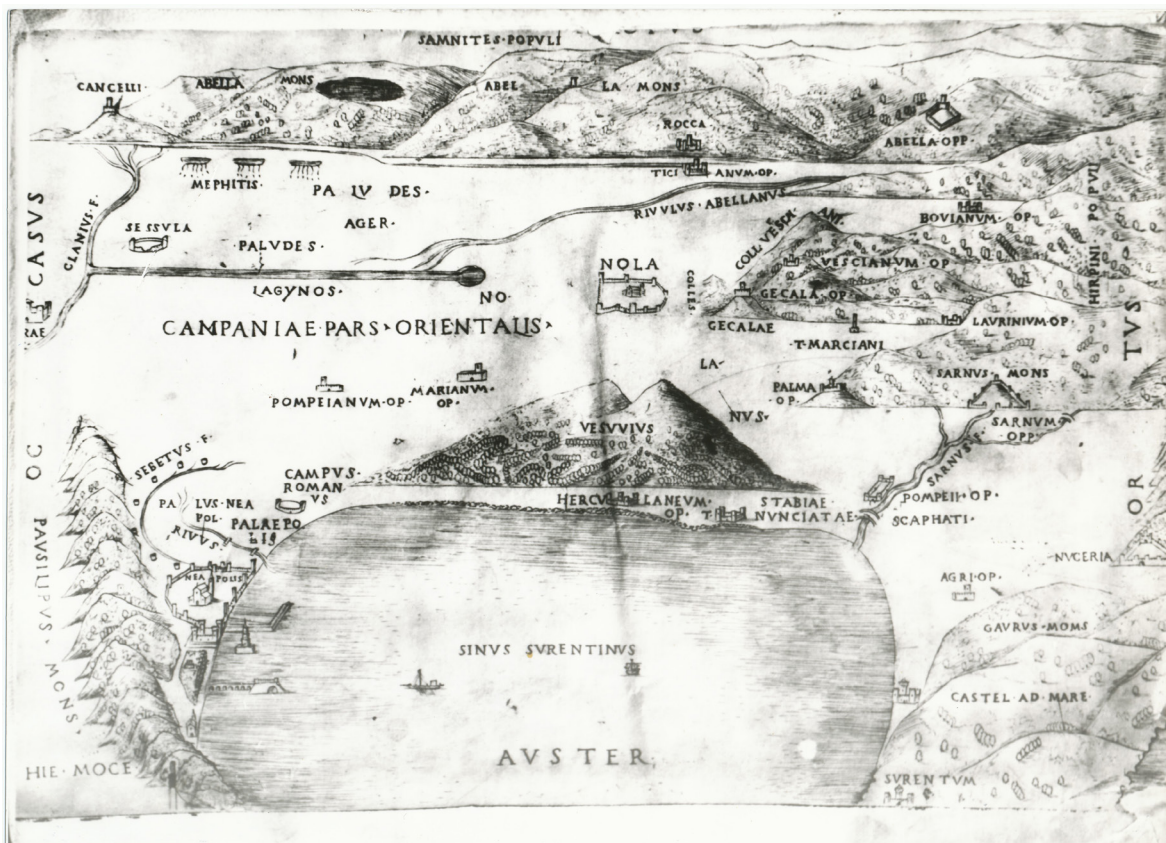
The ager campanus in the De Nola

Among the European cities, Nola, the birthplace of the philosopher Giordano Bruno, is an emblematic case, in the culture of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance, thanks to the specific framework of its territory and its monumental emergencies, traced out in a series of momentous cartographic documents.

In this context, it has been noticed that, in the territory of Nola, is evident a presence of energies aimed to illustrate the city, as the main theme of the dissertation (Carillo, 1996). In fact, the *De Nola*, published in the 1514 in Venice, surely the first study, in a modern sense, of the built-up area, inaugurates an ample wake of the essays of the sixteenth century, dedicated to the urban aggregates, but at the same time, accepts the medieval culture about the study of the territory, of which constitutes a fundamental testimony. The work is dedicated to the homeland of the humanist, a friend and a correspondent of Pontano and of Erasmo da Rotterdam, which *universitas*, during this period, saw the growth of its benefits thanks to the fidelity demonstrated during the invasion of Carlo VIII, which compensation was the reward of ample fiscal and judiciary privileges to Nola (Campone, 2001).

The work of the doctor-philosopher sanctions a clear characteristic all over the Middle Ages and in the aftermath, the

Figure 1. Ambrogio Leone, *De Nola*, 1514, map of the ager nolanus.

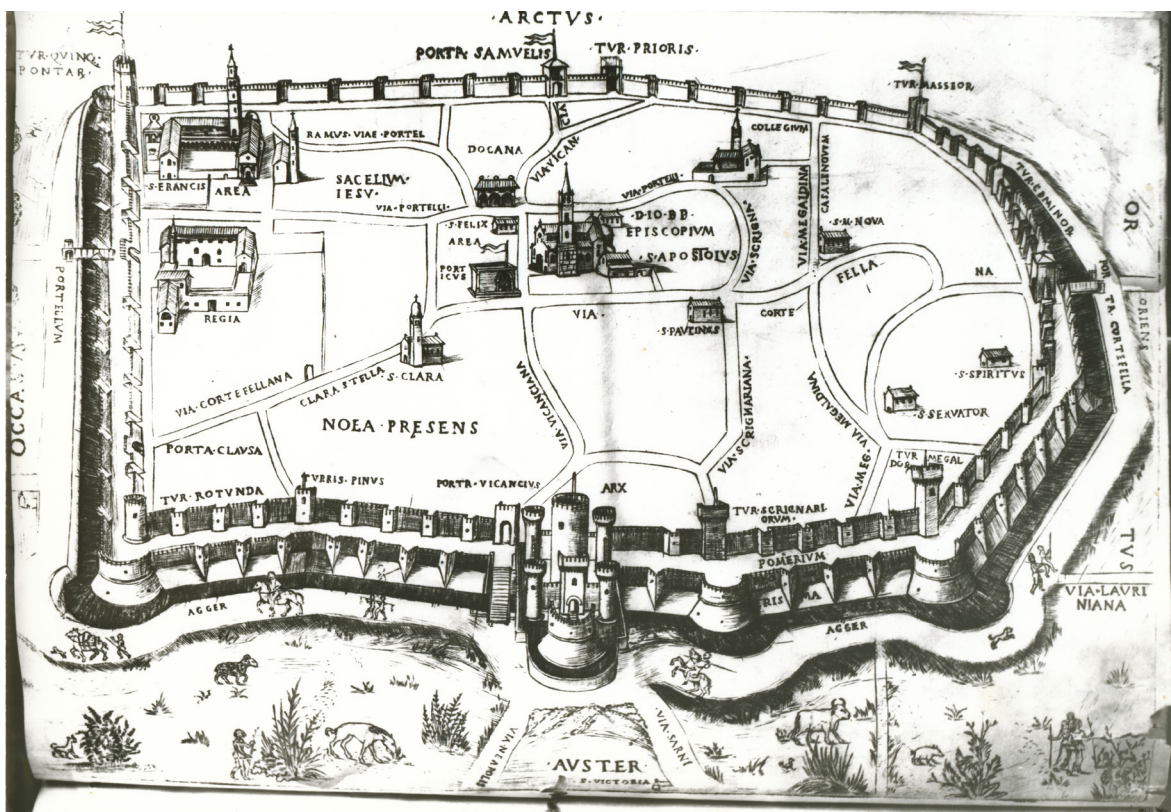


need that the contemporaries had to classify and understand the various shapes of the built-up area where they lived; this justifies that “terminological redundance” which has been related to the craving of a lexical precision, able to designate the things with their specific names (Toubet, 1978). So, the constant distinction made by the author among *castrum*, *castellum*, *oppidum*, *vicus* etc..., in addition to the help of its sources, can be explained by the comparison with the precise cartographic relief attached to the text, where the single housing units are distinguished by the different definition, fitting with the drawing which identifies them.

The *De Nola*, which, a decade after its publication in Venice, was recommended by Summonte to his lagoon colleague Marcantonio Michiel, appearing among the official bibliographies which showed the territory of Campania (Nicolini, 1925), exquisitely adhering to the Italian culture of the late XV century and the early XVI century, is characterized by the edit aimed to illustrate the objective features of the urban structure and of the whole area of the *ager nolanus*, so that its three books, describe the development of the contemporary city, the hygienical-sanitary situation of the territory, the referential geographical context.

Leone’s greater nag is identifiable in the expression which he gives a larger space in the initial pages, the “portrait” of the city, so much to write, in the *incipit* of his story: «ipse

Figure 2. Ambrogio Leone, *De Nola*, 1514, Nola.



imagine atque aspectus proprii similitudine tanta produxi in medium adiutus opera Hieronymi Moceti pictoris, ut oculis omnium atque ubique terrarum perquam facile possit esset conspicua»¹ (Leone 1514).

The author, with a systematic approach, programmatically declares the modalities to present the history and the evolution of the site, making use of the canonical model region-territory-city, appealing to the collaboration of an artist, the Moceto, who produced the two plans, the one of the *Ager* and the one of the city; thanks to these maps Leone accomplishes an action decisively innovative and forerunner (Defilippis, 1991), but it is still waiting to be completely illustrated.

It has never been recorder how the two engravings allow to read a peculiarity of the medieval development of the built-up area, the presence of the surrounding wall with features similar to the ones of the surrounding castles. If, in fact, the masti (fortified towers), inserted as a corollary to the *ager nolanus*, are immediately recognizable in the spelling, according to the walls and the presence of the control towers, a similar procedure can be identified in the surrounding walls of Nola. The urban site, which rises in the plain, surrounded by the castles of Cancellio, Avella, Roccarainola, Baiano, Cicala, Lauro, Palma Campania, is held in a curtain wall system, propped by angular semi-towers and a powerful *arce*, destined to be downsized in the following viceroy's intervention and already transformed during the XV century with the demolition of the mastio, the central fortified tower, but still present in a nineteenth-century reproduction (Carillo, 1993).

The importance of this stronghold is so much that the writer dedicates a long passage to it, where he describes it as «insula quaedam quadriquetra, cuius latera singula ad octogenos pedes longa sunt, quamque undique circumdat fossa altitudinis XX pedum, latitudinis prope totidem excaepa meridiana parte quae arctior quam caetera est, erismatibus et anteridibus utrinque firmata [...] Ferunt eam fuisse altiozem quadraginta pedibus cum pinnis moenianis super mutulis stantibus, sed ab Urso Ursino minutam ea celsitudine fuisse»² (Leone, 1514).

The following arrangement derives from the drawing that accompanies the essay printed in the 1602 by Giovan Battista Cavallari, the *De morbo epidemiali nolano*, published recently in a modern version (Campone, 2013), which shows the topographic model inaugurated by Leone, with the Vesuvio to the south, the hills of Cicala and Visciano to the east, Napoli to the west and the “Mephites paludes” to the north.

¹ “I, with the help of the painter Girolamo Moceto, I pictured and designed [i.e. the city] with so much similarity that can be very easily visible to the eyes of everyone and in every part of the earth”.

² “Almost square-shaped island, whose sides are about eighty feet long and from every part the ditch deep of twenty feet it surrounds, and nearly equal width, except the southern part that is narrower than the others, reinforced by both sides by buttresses and barbacani [...] it is said that it was more than forty feet high with the wall merlons resting on shelves, but was lowered to that height at the behest of orso Orsini”.

³ “*The most beautiful and excellent region among all other the world, because it has the most moderate and temperate air and is a very fertile country*”.

Both the maps catch the situation of the territory before the regimentation of the *Regi Lagni* by the Spanish viceroyalty, when the constant and cyclic overflowing of the waters of the Clanio caused an high mortality in that area. The recurring pestilences, mentioned by Leone, are the subject of the essay of Cavallari, who identifies the cause of the decline of what used to be the *Campania felix* with the inadequate maintenance of the Clanio's riverbed.

The situation in the Middle Age, the Aragon maps and the Regi Lagni.

The problem of the bogs, already indicated by the sources during the Augustan age (Campone, 2013), suggested, with the beginning of the reign of Alfonso I (1442-1458), a specific plan of intervention on the territory, where was primary the realization of an efficient hydro-road network and of an effective defensive system, based on the reutilization of old structures transformed in development and coordination centers for the rural provinces (Jacazzi, 2007). The reinforcement of the confines, a critical element for the Aragon regency, caused the reorganization and the increase of the viability, through the creation of ship canals and the reclamation of ample wetlands, in a plan aimed to give again dignity to the *Campania felix*, «la più bella et eccellente Regione di tutte l'altri del mondo, conciosia cosa che ha temperatissima et delicatissima aria et tanto fruttifero paese»³ (Alberti, 1596).

The consequent reclamation of the Neapolitan swamps, started during the XV century, it is, in this framework, the first intervention aimed to a rationalization of the Reign, it can be linked to the problem of the hydro procurement to the capital and to the valorization of the river harbors (Jacazzi, 2000).

To the intervention of reclaim is connected the production of a series of parchments with the depiction of Naples and its inland, recently published (Jacazzi, 2011), surely belonging to a greater group of Aragon maps, copied by Galiani during the XVIII century in Paris (Jacazzi, 2008). Here, it is reported the Clanio's flow, recognizable thanks to the famous quote by Virgilio (*Talem dives arat Capua, vicina Vesevo/ Ora iugo, et vacuis Clanius non aequus Acerris*), before the viceroyalty reclamation by Domenico Antonio Fontana (Fiengo, 1985; Fiengo, 1988): still, although the wave to his hostile character toward the residential area (*non aequus*), the reported situation seems to be different. In the territory, in fact, there isn't the presence of marshes and swamps, but the river's course is linear, its canals enclose ample woodlands and the

to the following map of Cavallari, it is possible to capture some particulars, which give the idea of the progresses of the reclamation works which had to turn the area, such as the construction of a second bridge on the river Sarno, the transformation of Nocera and Sarno, in the Salernitano, and Baiano (*Bovianum oppidum*) in province of Avellino, no more simple centers surrounded by walls, but densely populated built up areas with their numerous constructions; the development of Lauro (*Laurinum oppidum*) identified by its castle; and, in general, a major significance of the cities interpreted as towns, recognizable by the number and the consistency of the inhabitants more than for the architectural ruins. Once again, about the city of Nola is underlined the solid presence of a compact city walls, which defends it by the external calamities, in this case it concerns the widespread pestilence, according to an iconography present even in a series of coeval pictorial artifacts (Campone, 2013).

The difference is explained by the changes occurred during the XVI century: Leone reports the situation during the fifteenth century, faithful to an humanistic taste for the antique, which leads him to register the shape of the walls of Avella, Roccarainola, Sarno, Cicciano, Nocera, Angri with their respective castles, proving the evolution of the territory in the course of the Middle Ages. A synoptic view at his map and to the Aragon maps, approximately coeval, shows a different way to perceive the reality of the *ager*, which he examines with the eye of the humanist, where the reproductions wanted by Alfonso, according to a perspective of the control of the territory, faithfully computed the difference among *vici*, *oppida* and *castra*, identified by the respective captions. Cavallari, instead, reports the development of the built up areas in relation to the sanitary emergency, connected to the flooding of the canals, for which he had been sent to Nola, following one of the many malaria contagions that damaged

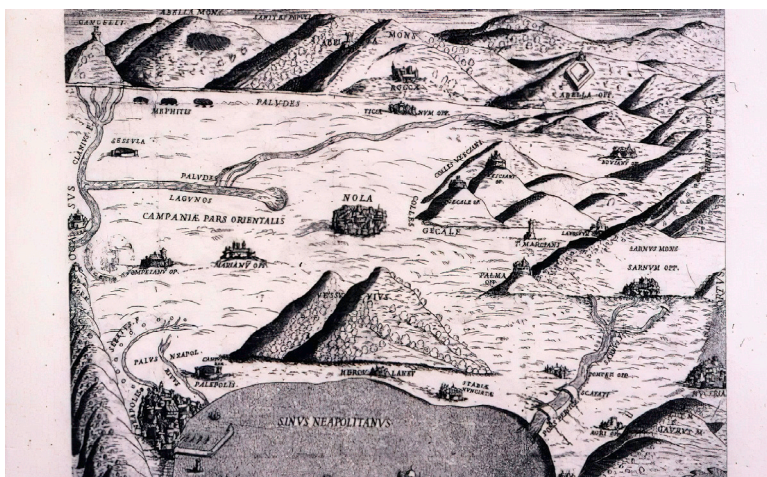


Figure 3. Giovan Battista Cavallari, *De morbo epidemiali nolano*, 1602, map of the *ager nolanus*.

plain appears regulated by a rational arrangement of the water resources.

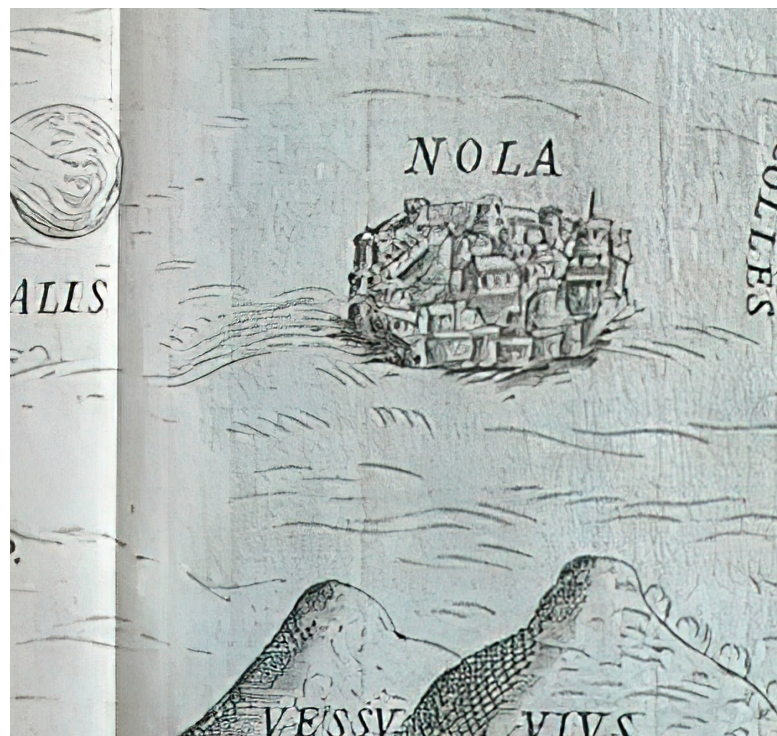
This feature suggests that the original draft of the parchments was to connect to the security plan for the territory expected by Alfonso d'Aragona, aimed, on the one hand, to reinforce the confines, even by the construction of new fortresses, and on the other hand, to increase the viability, through the safety measures of the swampy areas around the Capital.

In the four Neapolitan documents –which probably are part of the original Parisian documents of the Eighteenth century and which represent the northern territory of the Terra di Lavoro, the Gargano's promontory, the islands of Ischia and Procida and the south-east area of the mentioned province, included among Nola, Acerra and Maddaloni– the urban built up area and the religious foundations, identified by clear indications, are graphically translated by a series of symbolic elements (groups of houses and campaniles), while particular attention is paid to the presence of towers, castles and structures fortified before the reorganization of the sixteenth century, defining an image of the territory in the second half of the fifteenth century afoot of interesting notations.

In relation to this reproductions, the peculiarity of Leone and Cavallari is the interest focused on the Terra di Lavoro, delimited, to the east, by a swampy area (*Mephites paludes*), which, during the early years of the seventeenth century, had to be reclaimed with the construction of the *Regi Lagni*.

In the passage from the map by Leone of the sixteenth century

Figure 4. Giovan Battista Cavallari, *De morbo epidemiali nolano*, 1602, Nola.



the city. The precedent of Leone is recalled in the VI chapter, talking about the natural causes which produce the persistence and the diffusion of the epidemics in the territory, when, to illustrate the orographic and the hydrographic situation of the area, is explicitly reported the second part of the I book of the *De Nola*.

The “incastellamento”: relationships between climate, territorial morphology and city form. The “vascularized” city and geological emergencies.

The comparison between the map of Leone and the one of Cavallari - faithfully recalled by Cluverio, father of the historical geography, in his fourth book of his work *Italia antique*, published posthumously in the 1624 - allows to recreate the evolution of the *ager campanus* through an analysis of the connections among the climate, the territory's morphology, the social structure and the shape of the cities. The presence of castles, faithfully reproduced in both maps, suggests that these, at least the ones placed close to the wetland and never mentioned by the two historians among the centers damaged by the recurring epidemics, had worked in defense of the inhabitants, regulating the transit of the visitors and establishing a bulwark for the well-being of the citizens.

Otherwise it is necessary to notice how the castles appeared, starting from the Lombard age, as the crown of a territory that had been abandoned for a long time, starting from the end of the V century, as damaged by a series of “plinian” eruptions of the Vesuvio, which already had required special legislative interventions in favor of Nola and its hinterland (Mastrolorenzo-Palladino-Vecchio-Taddeucci, 2002).

It is no accidental that the two writers were doctors and both (especially the second one) claimed their professional *status*, since the urban interest, joined by the attention for the hygienical condition of the territory, finds an illustrious predecessor as Leonardo da Vinci, with his popular knowledge of the Galeno's texts and knowing that «i più interessanti studi urbanistici [...] si situano tutti tra la *princeps* aldina del *corpus* galenico (Aldo Manuzio, Venezia 1490) e la grande Papiensis universitaria edita da Rustico Placentino»⁴ (Borsi, 2007: 120).

Starting from the end of the Middle Ages and then during the fifteenth century, developed the idea of an exchange of experiences between the anatomical research and the reading of the urban system, then culminating, in the late sixteenth century, with the cardio-centric planning of a pulsating and “vascularized” city.

⁴ “The most interesting urban studies [...] all are dated between the princeps aldina of the Galenic corpus (Aldo Manuzio, Venice 1490) and the great Papiensis of university edited by Rustico Placentino”.

⁵ Marc. Chronicon; Cass. Variae; Paol. Diac. Hist.Lang.

The map of Leone and the one by Cavallari are a unique statement about the evolution of a geographical area marked by recurring natural disasters during the historical epoch – from the eruptions of the Vesuvio to the flooding of rivers and canals– furnishing precious indications to get the connection between the shape of the built up areas and the morphologic and sanitary situation of the territory.

If the shape of a city is the result of the sedimentation of a series of interests, activities, needs, economic and political relations, and, as has been pointed (Braunfels, 1976), each city shows, in its plan and in its shape, who rules it and under what government it is, the structure of Nola, one of the first urban built up areas provided with a precise drawing of its *facies* –calculated on the basis of a geometric demonstration of the dimensions between the medieval city and the ancient city– tells about the protection implemented during the Middle Ages to save the cities by the recurring epidemics and by natural events and repeated during the following centuries.

It is necessary to remember that the process of encastellation in the area was consecutive to a period of retake of the volcanic activity by the Vesuvio, which particularly implicated the *ager nolanus* and persisted from the V century to the VII century, with plinian and sub-plinian eruptions which involved the same referential area of the eruption of the “pomici di Avellino” (Sampaolo, 1986; Soricelli, 1997). As happened in that situation, even interesting a large territory, which included the Irpinia, the greater damages occurred in the plain of Nola, as proved by a passage of Marcellino Comes, one of Cassiodoro and one of Paolo Diacono⁵. At the time, the inhabitants, as happened during the eruption of the Bronze Age, tried to reach the close hills to escape from the fluid products which combined with the event (Santacroce, 1987; De Simone-Macfarlane 2009).

To face the continuous sanitary and geological emergencies, were adopted defensive strategies, such as the fortified castles guarding the plain of the Campania felix, born, from the Lombard age on, along the strategically decisive passes of the Appennine, hand over the model even to the urban built up area and reinforcing the defensive system in a territory of plain, thanks to the adoption of strongholds.

Conclusions

Nola's case can be considered emblematic, because of the presence of representations of its territory, of evolution of forma civitatis between the Middle Age and Renaissance.

The maps of Leone and Cavallari are an extraordinary visual

document about the concentration made to safeguard the *ager campanus*: recording, in fact, particularly the first one, the situation precedent the age of the humanist, significantly explain how the later transformation happened with the magnificent hydraulic work of the *Regi Lagni* meant a decisive modification in the medieval *forma urbis*.

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