

MORPHOLOGICAL READING AND NOTES ON TARANTO 'S LANDSCAPE OF THE JONIC BOW

The territory of the province of Taranto is characterised by a development of the coastal strip with a wide arch all around Mar Jonio. The altimetry of the territory goes, in the internal part, rising softly in an amphitheatrical way and forming the plateaux of the Murge. In this following one another of amphitheatrical archs, we can altimetrically distinguish a first arch formed by the low coast and characterised by sandy (Dune) rocky stretches, as the gorges and the dolines generated by the karstic ground.

Inside such a system, situated in the previously described, intermediate stretch, there is the Mar Piccolo of Taranto, that gets the valence of a coast lake.

Its denomination comes from the contraposition to Mar Grande, a large open roadstead South of the Pugliese coast, West from the Cheradi Isles.

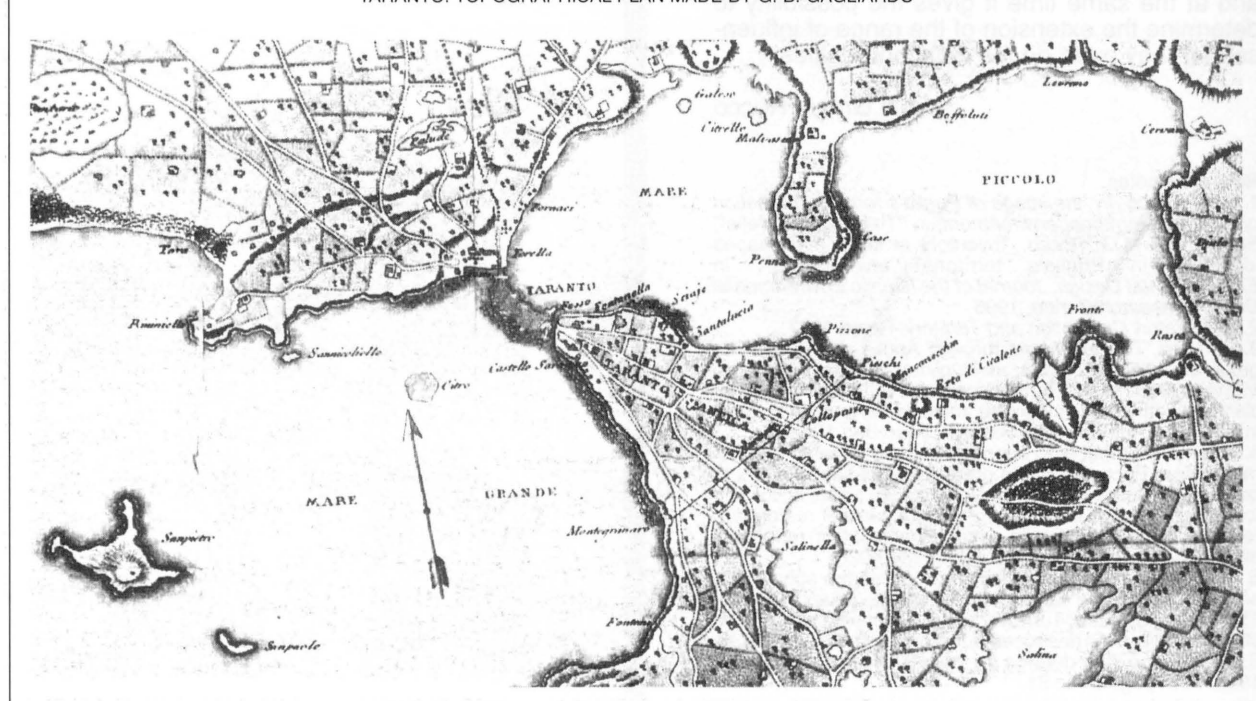
The two seas communicate through two canals that delimit the historical centre of Taranto making an island from it.

They are respectively, East the navigable canal, West the Canal of Porta Napoli. Actually, in ancient times, the place on which the ancient centre is now, was a peninsula and the Spartans decided to found their colony because they thought that the place could be easily

defended, because it was astride two water mirrors, protected and linked by an only canal, the actual Porta Napoli.

At present, the territory North-West of the town has been strongly modified and endangered by the building, during 1960s, of the 4th steelcentre and by the oil refinery by AGIP. Both industries, produce a strong environmental pollution through the discharge of dusts in the atmosphere and waste matter in the sea-water. The Mar Piccolo is all that remains of a larger gulf than the actual one and whose limits spread until the present Murge and whose bottom takes its origins from a probable doline conformation. It is articulated in two basins, one which is external and is directly linked to Mar Grande, the other which is internal and communicates only with the external basin. The two basins are separated by the promontory of Punta Penna and are called First and Second inlet. The shores of Mar Piccolo are mostly low except for the for the promontories of Punta Penna and Pizzone which represent the limits of the two internal basins, and the one of the Fronte, situated inside the second inlet. At present, between the two promontories previously named, the Mar Piccolo is crossed by a viaduct that serves as an outlying bypass whose function is to reli-

TARANTO. TOPOGRAPHICAL PLAN MADE BY G. B. GAGLIARDO



ve the traffic of the town. The basin of Mar Piccolo has a 20.7 sq. Km extension, because of the presence of the two canals, the first inlet enjoys a better water changing, such a changing is assured by the navigable Canal because of its direct opening towards the Gulf, unlike the Canal of Porta Napoli which opens inside the mercantile harbour, the average depth inside the basin is of 7.30 m

Another particularity of Mar Piccolo is represented by the Citri that are springs of underwater freshwater whose supply is directly connected to the nature of the amphitheatrical of the Murge.

The Citri of M. Piccolo are about thirty, among those the most conspicuous are the citro Galeso, the Citrello and the citro Le Kopre. Beside the rivers Galeso and Cervano that are originated by karstic springs in Mar Piccolo flows the river Rasta near a wet and marshy oasis that actually the WWF protects as an oasis (Oasis Marsh). Together with these contributions of fresh water of karstic origin, there are the ones of antropic origin coming from 14 urban drains. So the water system therefore would result endangered but thanks to the contributes previously described, and thanks to the recycling of sea water through the canal that

connects Mar Piccolo, the environmental system rides out the pollution attacks. The relations that Taranto has with its sea have been uninterrupted and distinguished in the time.

During the Greek-Roman period, Mar Piccolo became a sure and well protected inner port. At the same time along the coasts facing the polis flower laboratories which are specialised in the production of a cloth that was appreciated very much in ancient times : the wool-pinna. Such a cloth was got by the spinning of the byssus, a bivalve mollusc named "piunna-nobilis" and by the fishing of another mollusc the "murex brandaris" from which was obtained the scarlet, through a series of operations. The clothes previously described were dipped in scarlet assuming colours that ranged from pink to violet according to the time they were lie out to the sun.

This balanced link between the town and its inner sea that is a source of richness, has it recognition through the institution of the custom in the 13th century. The custom was instituted by Philip, the son of king Charles II of Napoli, when he decided to live in Taranto and moved with him a brilliant and magnificent court. The place where the custom was instituted was the main place of the town that was situated on the

TARANTO. VIEW OF THE SWING BRIDGE





TARANTO. VIEW OF THE CITY MADE BY PACICHELLI (NAPOLI, 1703)



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sea at the end of the court and that after was called Piazza Fontana. The custom was a state office whose task was to inspect the industries and to collect the baronial rights. One of the most conspicuous sources of the finances under the rule of the Angioine was Mar Piccolo with the numerous fishponds that were rent there. In that period Mar Piccolo was literally lotted out and became an ideal projection of the town on its inner sea. It became an ideal extension of its own territory. The genius loci is better expressed thanks to its being two-faced and thanks to its transfiguration. Along Mar Piccolo one watches a progressive discoloration of the surrounding country which gradually leaves the colours of the deep green of the olive-trees and the geometrical lines of the vineyards until to change face in the water mirror whose coast line is never so distinct and exact, in some lengths marshy and evanescent, so it is difficult to understand if it is the country that has turned into the sea or viceversa.

Mar Piccolo therefore is not a sea, it is not a lagoon, but it becomes an abstraction, a spirit of the place, an ambiguous and bivalent spirit. It is interesting to note how such a bivalence can be found in the terminology itself that is still contained in the numerous notarial documents and judicial arguments of the time such as : to divide, to rent, to sell, to confiscate. In its inland areas people plant, plow, harvest, seed, spread out the mussels that they could get dry, draw parallel lines, identify passages, draw square fields and the formal analogies with the vineyards that stretch into the near countries, are clear.

The landscape that the place offers to the people that observe it from North-West is similar to a large degrading amphitheatre in whose centre stretches the water mirror whose back stage is represented by the outline of the town which is far. So noting how the place was described by the voyagers of the end of the 19th century becomes very interesting.

Gregorovius for example described it, in his work "Nelle Puglie", as follow : "Its surface is like a bright mirror which in the warm season sparks as purpurin as the colour that the ancient people obtained from the shell that lays on its bottom. Now, in May, it has a serene and suble enamel, a clear glass and brilliant blue that cannot be described. The tones and colours are of a such ideal beauty that sometimes seem flows of melted ether and sometimes they seem flows of music which vibrate producing harmonious sounds. And the person who is there on the shore and watches it, feels inebriated. How natural seems here the tale of Airone on the dolphin of Taras, the founder of Taranto. The sea gleaming of light and melody has beggoted such poems."

By reading Gregorovius one realises how much charm the place gave off and how much it still gives off, in spite of all what we have said before concerning the endangered environmental situation. When one goes along the coasts of Mar Piccolo, he is struck by the continuous changing of the relation existing between the sea and its coastal strip, that is sometimes of urban nature (the town, the historical centre) and sometimes of fluvial nature (the river Galeso and its mouth, the Rasca and the Cervano) and sometimes Marsh (the Marsh the Sail). As regards such environmental changes, the Tarantine Murge and, intermediate strip, the pugliese country, play the role of a frame towards north. It is just in the synthesis of such a landscape that I want to conclude quoting a passage by R. Pane "The land hat during this century has undergone the deepest environmental changes of which, therefore, more pressing would be to portray the actual images, especially in the survival of its ancient spaces, only to prepare a document of its passage to the history.

In order to understand, in its most general aspect, the peculiar suggestion of the Pugliese territory it is sufficient to deserve it in the way contrary to the Calabro-Lucano one. This last is conditioned by a uniform nature in comparison with which the essential component is represented by the work of the stratification and culture.

The image of an environmental relationship in which, as concerns the small quantity of earth and endless stones through a long and patient effort the work of man has been successful, has proved to be positive.

It is just such a thing that inspires assent and approbation, the fact that such a beauty is completely due to the human work.

Aldo Galasso

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