

Civic towers in medieval urban landscape in Northern Italy: architectures as urban identities

Original

Civic towers in medieval urban landscape in Northern Italy: architectures as urban identities / Beltramo, Silvia. - In: EIKONOCITY. - ISSN 2499-1422. - ELETTRONICO. - 1:anno V, n. 1(2020), pp. 31-45. [10.6092/2499-1422/6341]

Availability:

This version is available at: 11583/2866532 since: 2023-03-21T23:39:03Z

Publisher:

FeDOAPress Napoli

Published

DOI:10.6092/2499-1422/6341

Terms of use:

This article is made available under terms and conditions as specified in the corresponding bibliographic description in the repository

Publisher copyright

(Article begins on next page)



e ikonocity

Publisher: FeDOA Press- Centro di Ateneo per le Biblioteche dell'Università di Napoli Federico II
Registered in Italy

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.serena.unina.it/index.php/eikonocity/index>

Civic towers in medieval urban landscape in Northern Italy: architectures as urban identities

Silvia Beltramo

Politecnico di Torino - Dipartimento interateneo di Scienze, Progetto e Politiche del territorio

To cite this article: Beltramo, S. (2020). *Civic towers in medieval urban landscape in Northern Italy: architectures as urban identities*: Eikonocity, 2020, anno V, n. 1, 31-45, DOI: 10.6092/2499-1422/6341

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6092/2499-1422/6341>

FeDOA Press makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the “Content”) contained in the publications on our platform. FeDOA Press, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Versions of published FeDOA Press and Routledge Open articles and FeDOA Press and Routledge Open Select articles posted to institutional or subject repositories or any other third-party website are without warranty from FeDOA Press of any kind, either expressed or implied, including, but not limited to, warranties of merchantability, fitness for a particular purpose, or non-infringement. Any opinions and views expressed in this article are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by FeDOA Press. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. FeDOA Press shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.serena.unina.it>
It is essential that you check the license status of any given Open and Open Select article to confirm conditions of access and use.

Civic towers in medieval urban landscape in Northern Italy: architectures as urban identities

Silvia Beltramo

Politecnico di Torino - Dipartimento interateneo di Scienze, Progetto e Politiche del territorio

Abstract

Extensive literature has investigated the institutional tools with which municipal governments between the 12th and 13th centuries modelled the shape of public spaces and buildings. In the face of debated historical knowledge mainly focused on municipal buildings, studying civic towers seems to have been less detailed. The buildings considered here concern the western and eastern subalpine region: Cuneo, Fossano and Cherasco are new towns, Saluzzo and Pinerolo are towns related to the foremost noble dynasties, and Savigliano.

Torri civiche nel paesaggio urbano medievale del Nord dell'Italia: l'architettura come identità urbana

Una vasta letteratura ha indagato gli strumenti istituzionali con cui i governi municipali tra XII e XIII secolo hanno definito la forma degli spazi e degli edifici pubblici. A fronte di una conoscenza storica principalmente incentrata sui palazzi comunali, lo studio delle torri civiche sembra essere stato meno approfondito. Il campione di edifici qui considerato riguarda la regione subalpina occidentale e orientale: Cuneo, Fossano e Cherasco sono borghi nuovi, Saluzzo e Pinerolo sono borghi il cui sviluppo è strettamente legato alle principali dinastie signorili, e Savigliano.

Keywords: Civic Towers, Architectural and Urban History, Urban Iconography, Topography.

Torri civiche, Storia dell'architettura e della città, iconografia urbana, topografia.

Silvia Beltramo, assistant professor and researcher in History of architecture at the Politecnico di Torino; she received a PhD in History and Critic of Architecture in 2004. Since 2007 she has taught the courses of History of Architecture and urban history at the Politecnico di Torino. Her researches focus on history of the architecture and the city in medieval and modern era; cultural heritage, cultural routes and tourism itineraries, territorial analysis and cultural identity.

Author: silvia.beltramo@polito.it

Received Novembre 11, 2019; accepted March 29, 2020

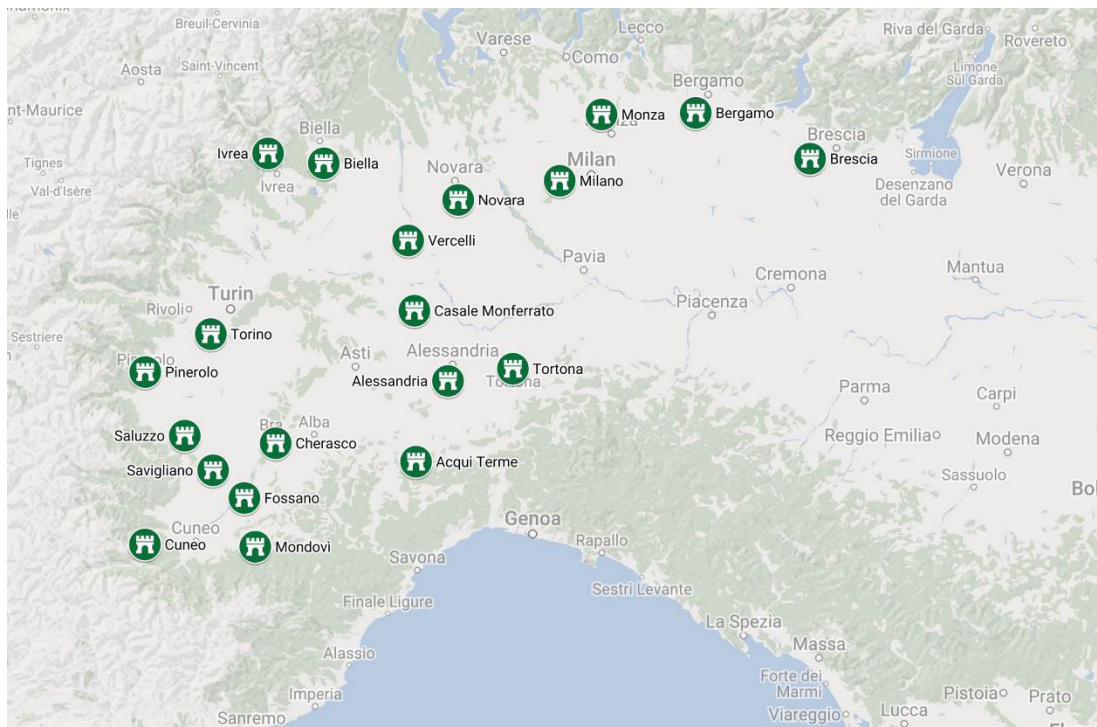
1 Introduction

Extensive literature has investigated the institutional tools with which municipal governments between the 12th and 13th centuries modelled the shape of public spaces and buildings. The design, construction and continuous transformation of the *domus* and municipal *palacia*, especially after the peace of Constance (1183), were decisive moments of ideological construction of power, diversified expressions of the institutional solidity of ordinary citizens. In the face of debated historical knowledge mainly focused on municipal buildings, studying civic towers seems to have been less detailed. Many of the links between the building and the tower slip away. Not always concomitant building sites, towers in many cases are a re-use of pre-existence construction and, in others, are completely detached from the municipal building. Research on municipal towers, starting with the analysis of the original and 13th-14th century phases, attested by sporadic documentary sources, cannot overlook the study of the transformations of the buildings. It is also essential to consult iconographic sources and analyse the material consistency of the architectural artefacts.

The buildings considered here concern the western and eastern subalpine region (current Piedmont and Lombardy): three of the localities examined - Cuneo, Fossano and Cherasco - are new towns, founded between the end of the 12th and the first third of the 13th century through municipal initiatives and by local aristocrats Savigliano was also a protagonist of significant urban transformation processes during the 13th century [*Borghi nuovi* 2015].

Saluzzo and Pinerolo are towns whose development is closely intertwined with the foremost noble dynasties and with the formation of the regional principalities, of which they became

Fig. 1: Municipal buildings in the western and eastern subalpine region, current Piedmont and Lombardy (by the author).



in fact ‘capitals’ (Saluzzo of the eponymous marquisate, Pinerolo of the Savoy-Achaia). The interesting cases of Alessandria and Novara in the eastern area have been considered, where, following recent restoration in the first case, in-depth studies have reconstructed the history and architecture of the municipal building, while Novara preserves the structure of the perfectly interpretable Broletto. In addition, comparisons have been made with Lombard cases in Milan, Bergamo and Brescia [Andenna 1994; Andenna, Bordone, Somaini, Vallerani 1998; Rao 2015].

2 | Civic towers between documentary sources and building site

If, as stated, historiography has made important contributions in the study of the municipal building, the theme of the tower has remained less investigated – towers that in most cases still outline the skyline of northern Italian centres with the transformations and elevations of the modern age.

In some cases, the construction of municipal buildings increased at the end of the 12th century, while private or religious spaces were used in others; a new pole of political power was affirmed, often re-qualifying an area of the city, placing it at the centre of significant transformations. Examples are in Verona, Vicenza, Pavia, Bergamo, Padova, Parma, Siena, Rome, Urbino, Orvieto and Assisi [Soldi Rondinini 1984; Uberti 1995; Racine 1980; Pistilli 1992, 1994; Gargiulo 2007; Diacciati Tanzini 2014; Tosco 2018; *Il Palazzo della Ragione di Padova*, 2008].

Innovative urban creation differentiates northern and central Italy and part of southern France from the rest of Europe, distinguishing three different areas where, on the Italian territory, community settlement aspects can be interpreted: Italian Po Valley (Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia), central Italy (a well-known category of civic buildings), and western Piedmont [Rao 2015].

Fig. 2: Bergamo Alta (upper city), Piazza Vecchia with the civic tower between the Palazzo della Ragione and that of the chief magistrate (photo by the author).



In the Po Valley the oldest municipal buildings favour a model that provides a large open space with a loggia, freely accessible to citizens, where commercial activities, city assemblies and justice take place. The upper floor above the loggia is used for consul or chief magistrate meetings. If a compact parallelepiped block scheme prevails in the Lombardy area, divided into two or three floors above ground with large multi-mullioned windows, it is certainly not a single solution. This scheme is applied in Piedmont in the oldest phase of the Broletto of Novara and also in the original parts of the *palatium vetus* of Alessandria. The tower supports the complex, and its height symbolizes its dominion over the city [Tosco 2000].

In the case of Bergamo, the ancient stone civic tower is still preserved between the Palazzo della Ragione and that of the chief magistrate. As often happens, it uses a pre-existing tower house owned by the Suardi family in the 12th century and was enlarged in the 14th century; sources remember it as the tower of the *hospicio magno comunis bergami*, where municipal prisons were housed on the lower floor [Buoniconti 2005; Petro 2008]. A rare contemporary description, contained in the *De magnalibus civitatis Mediolani* by Bonvesin de la Riva, is preserved of the *palacium communis* of Milan, built in 1228, representing the entire municipal buildings as a true ten perches wide municipality courtyard, including the civic palace, the chief magistrate edifice with its chapel, and two other structures closing the courtyard. To the south is a loggia, where the sentences of the convicted were read out publicly and «in the same court there is also a tower, with four bells of the municipality» [Bonvesin de la Riva (1288) 1974, 38-39; Romanini 1989; Grimoldi 1983; Grillo 2001].

The first news about the municipal tower of Brescia dates to 1187-1189, when the *liberi homines* decided to build a wooden *domus* flanked by a tall stone tower next to the cathedral of San Pietro de Dom; during the reconstruction of the new stone building between 1223 and 1227, another



Fig. 3: Milan, the municipal palace, Palazzo della Ragione or Broletto in the Piazza dei mercanti (photo by the author).



Fig. 4: Brescia, old town hall Broletto, Torre del Pegol, Loggia delle Grida in the piazza del Duomo or Paolo VI (photo by the author).

tower, the Poncarali, was incorporated into the structure. In 1236, the new *militum* cast bronze bell by Bartolomeo Pisano was positioned on the Torre del Popolo [Volta 1987; Andenna 1994; Coccoli, Scala, Treccani 2009; Rossi 2009; Rapaggi 2012].

In western Piedmont, in Turin, Asti and Alba, municipal buildings were built late and, with a few exceptions, had limited monumental impact as they were included in the urban fabric, while the municipal meetings and the city's governance functions took place for a long time within ecclesiastical areas or in other places. The types adopted for the municipal buildings are not so characteristic and tend to follow private construction on the foundation, often opening mostly on the ground floor. The civic tower that often emerges from a building often becomes the most distinctive sign of the municipal building and still characterizes the outline of cities throughout the modern age. The chronological attestation of the municipal *domus* in the territory of today's Piedmont is concentrated between the end of the 12th and the first half of the 13th century: in Novara, a *domus consulum* appears early in the documentation from 1178, in Vercelli, a municipal building is testified in 1190, in Ivrea in 1202, in Tortona in 1218, in Alessandria, a *palacium communis* is recorded in documents from 1241 and in Cuneo from 1249 [Tosco 1999]. The choice of model to be adopted for the main communal seat reflects political and cultural dependencies: the western area shows an articulated presence of different solutions, while the eastern sector from Novara to Alessandria is closer to the Lombard Broletto.

3 | Ancient municipal houses and towers: a contemporary construction site?

Several examples of ancient civic palaces created with a tower have been attested by documentary sources: in Vercelli the building takes shape on the grounds of houses acquired by the consuls in 1190 [Gullino 1987; Ordano 1988; Rao 2005; Rao 2018; Dell'Aprovitola 2010; Pistan 2018]. From 1203 to 1208, the public authorities resumed work for the settlement of the area, buying a *casamentum* with a tower located in front of the church of Santa Maria Maggiore from various representatives of the Guidalardi family. The presence of the tower is indirectly testified during the 13th century when the presence of a *hostiario* assigned to the ringing of the bell is mentioned in the three sections dedicated to the building in the municipal statute (1241) [*Statuti del Comune di Vercelli*, rub. CXV, col.1137; rub. CCCXLV e CCCXLVI, col.1223].

The case of Turin is known for its anomaly: a partially autonomous municipality, placed firstly under the protection of an emperor and a bishop and then of Marquises of Monferrato and Savoy, is hosted by the imperial *palacium* in the first half of the 13th century. References found in documentary sources state that from the end of the 12th century the place presented elements normally encountered in many of the municipal buildings of the Italian Po Valley: a portico on the ground floor, an upper loggia, and a tower (1199). These architectural structures could have been added to the old building because of adaptations to new municipal functions [Cognasso 1914, 55, 147; Bonardi 1987; Comba 1987; Comba 1993].

In 1335 the Savoy princess Caterina di Vienne granted an expropriated *domus*, placed at the intersection of the main road, subtended by the ancient urban gates. This was, however, brief: the municipality passed it by, using a noble tower, and only in 1375 did it acquire a house a few blocks further east from the merchant of Giovanni da Rivalba, in the urban fabric centre and on the edge of the commercial area, soon to be equipped with a tower, clock, and bell. To modernize and restore the city, which became a university and Savoy administrative centre, the municipality acquired a private palace in the heart of the market in 1472 from which the modern Palazzo di Città was developed. From the mid 14th century, the municipal tower became the



Fig. 5: Novara, the municipal palace or Broletto (photo by the author).

symbol of the municipality, so much so that it was reported on the frontispiece of the *Ordinati comunali* (minutes of the City Council meetings). The bell tolling marked the rhythms of the community: the clock struck the hours; the study bell announced university lessons; the large bell started the guards' shifts, summoned the councillors to meetings, announced bad weather and concluded the day.

The tower was also a city checkpoint to report fires and riots. At the end of the 12th century in Ivrea, the consuls and the chief magistrate hold their established offices in the bishop's palace opposite the cathedral church, on the south side of the square where the baptistery of San Giovanni stood, which on special occasions assumed civil functions [Benvenuti 1976; Tosco 1999; *Statuti del Comune di Ivrea* 1968, 27, 81, 97, 146, 149, 334, 335, 352]. From 1202, the civic documents were written within a *domus credentiae*, while in 1221 an autonomous *palatium communis* appeared. In the 1329 statutes, a section was dedicated to the construction of a bell tower. A few ruins of architectural structures remain today, but it is evident the town hall was annexed to the western perimeter wall of the bishop's residence. The building was distinguished by a quadrangular tower at the side of the entrance, which connected the government area of the upper city with the sector of the burgs. These buildings are still visible in the *Theatrum Sabaudiae* image of 1682 [*Theatrum Sabaudiae* 2000, I, tav. 63]; at the top of the tower there is a cornice with corbels, made of bricks placed at the head, while the arch has maintained its functions of entry to the episcopal hall.

In Casale Monferrato the first consular seat does not seem to assume characters of obvious monumentality. From the first appearance of the municipal bodies, here again the custom diffuses in different cities of the Po valley: the most important church of the city, the parish church of Sant'Evasio, has a seat for the people's assembly in front of the façade. The civil functions of the building were recalled by Aldo A. Settia [Settia 1978]: the bell tower constituted a valid sighting point for the civic guards, while the separation line between the Brignano and Vaccaro districts corresponded with the longitudinal axis of the basilica. Only from the 13th century did the *platea communis* appear in documents. It was located to the west of the cathedral, in correspondence with the church of Santa Maria, where there was a larger area for the people's assemblies, directly connected with the new seat of civil power. The civic seat is spread throughout differentiated buildings, always near the *platea communis*, which still maintains its functions in the statutes drawn up in the mid 14th century.

The civic tower is located next to the church of Santo Stefano and, thanks to its 60 metres of height, dominates the whole Piedmontese town. Dating back to the medieval period (11th-12th century?) and built for other functions, it has a brick wall and a square plan with small single-langet windows. In the 16th century, the tower was raised by the Marquises of Monferrato, with a new loggia-shaped crowning, a square plan, surrounded by four mullioned windows, surmounted by an octagonal loggia and ending with a colonnade covered with a small dome decorated with dolphins.

In the first half of the 13th century in Piedmont, the *broletti* were subjected to different events relating to the political life of the municipalities that hosted them. In the first quarter of the century the buildings of Vercelli, Novara, Tortona, and Ivrea were built with the aim of replacing the first, modest government seat. The Broletto of Novara, entirely preserved and ascribable to the 13th century, is an important reference point for research in the sub-alpine area. The new seat of municipal power was born without any continuity with the old one, the already testified *palacium de civitate* in the 11th century. The first testimony of a *domus consulum* or *domus credentiae* was found

in 1178, referring to a building facing the northern entrance hall of the cathedral, then demolished in the 19th century. In Novara, documentation allows us to establish the chronology of the new municipal building, active since September 1208, when a sentence of the consuls «sub palacio communis Novariae» was issued. It was built at the northern end of a market square, which skirted the perimeter portico of the cathedral, delimiting the empty area in front and enclosed by a fence wall. An external staircase accessing the upper floor and attached to the southern side is still preserved today (with additions in the 1929-1930 restoration) and was cited in 1225 [*Il complesso del Broletto di Novara* 2011; Donato 2011].

The civic or clock tower is now part of the Palazzo Natta, not far from the Broletto. Mentioned from 1268, it still maintains a distinct structure with brick masonry denoting its medieval construction phase. It is of probable private origin, as it is what remains of the so-called district of the long towers, the ancient noble district of the city.

The recently discovered Broletto of Alessandria in front of the cathedral shows an articulated and complex history; the restoration has revealed a large building with a portico on the ground floor and a large hall on the upper floor that seems to correspond to the *palatium communis* structures documented from 1242, including the functions previously carried out inside the San Pietro Cathedral, understood as a civic temple [Perin, Livraghi 2016; Tosco 2016].

A few years after the first attestation of a *palatium novum*, which appears from 1260 and then in subsequent documents, the building of the palace is attested on the southern side of the square where the town hall currently stands. The material structures seem to be in keeping with the architectural type of the buildings of the municipality built in northern Italy between the end of the 12th and the first half of the 13th century, which had a portico on the ground floor and a large room on the upper floor accessible by one or more external staircases. The wall-enclosed area, the so-called *broletum communis*, was dominated by the bulk of the tower building on which the bells were placed. The presence of a tower is attested since 1270, when the inhabitants of the city raised the banner of King Charles of Anjou.

The Statute of Alessandria makes clear references to the public space of the Broletto in relation also to the municipal building: the fenced area was accessible during the day through doors opened in the morning and closed at sunset by the *bicocchiere* (in charge of the tower, or *biboca*), who controlled the *portas brolieti* and the entrance to the portico and doors of the stairs and building. The municipal building of Alessandria had a portico on the ground floor and access stairs to the upper floor that rested on the fenced courtyard area. Another element found in the statutes is the presence of the *bivocca*, then a tower, in a space next to the building. The 15th and 16th centuries sources recall the permanence of the 15th century loggia overlooking the square and the tower, called the governor's tower or *torrazzo* (1580, 1607-1608, 1625). It remains to be understood whether it is the same tower mentioned in the 13th century that seemed to be pertinent to the new building, or, as it seems to emerge from these documents, from a structure relevant to the *palacium vetus*, not found in the restoration site.

4 | The communal seats of new towns and in the contexts of urban renewal

The *platee* – and, in the case of Cherasco, Cuneo and Fossano, the *vie-platee* – in a central position in the medieval town were the areas along which public buildings for exercising communal government were erected, and along which the residences of the families in power were built. In numerous towns in south-western Piedmont (Fossano, Savigliano, and Cuneo), the first early citations of a communal house were followed by documentations of real palaces (*palacium comunis*)



Fig. 6: Panoramic view of the historical centre of Savigliano with the civic tower in the piazza Santarosa (photo by the author).

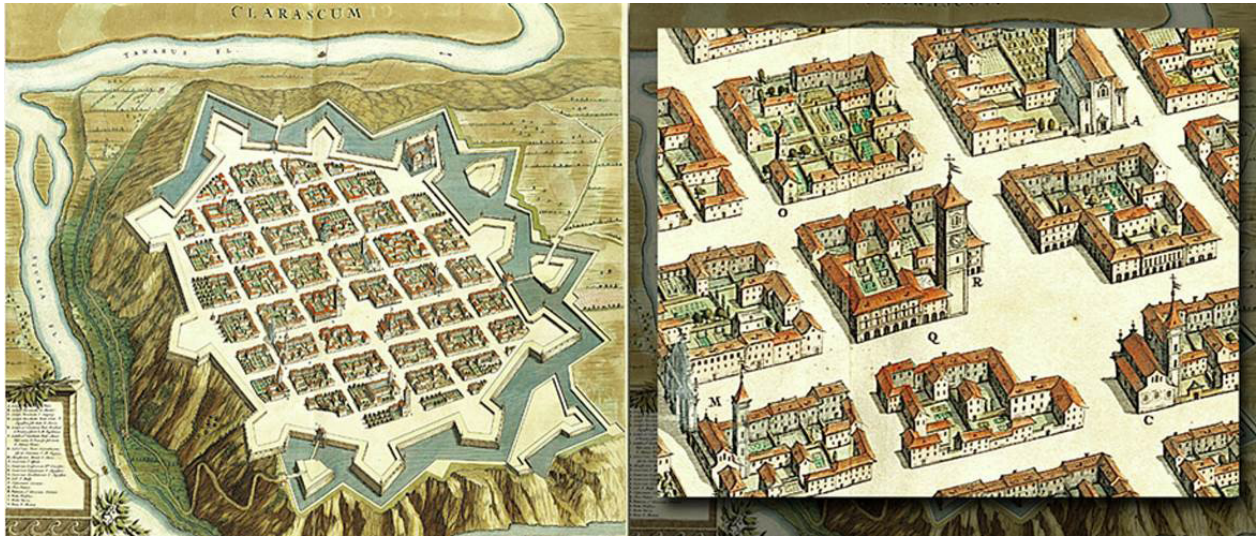


Fig. 7: Joan Blaeu, *Clarascum*, view on the left and detail on the right of Cherasco, in *Theatrum Sabaudiae*, 1725 (1682, first edition).



Fig. 8: Cherasco, civic tower (photo by the author).



Fig. 9: *Salutarum - Civitas vulgo Saluzzo*, view on the left and detail on the right in *Theatrum Sabaudiae*, 1725 (1682, first edition).



Fig. 10-11: Saluzzo, civic tower with municipal palace in Salita al castello (photo by the author).

in the final quarter of the 13th century, and these seem to suggest a plan for the expansion of the seats of communal power [Longhi 2010; Longhi 2011; Bonardi 2003]. Following are two case studies, of Savigliano and Cherasco, which still conserve their civic towers. The *domus comunis* of Savigliano has the oldest documentary attestation in south-western Piedmont, since 1224. Only in 1319 did the term *palacium curie* appear, currently used to indicate the seat of civic power. During the Angevin dominion, the palace remained the main place of civil power [Garzino, Olmo 1987]. The building is on the road intersection that joins the *platea* – central market area of the city – with the Sant'Andrea parish, ecclesiastical pole of the settlement expansion of the communal age. In the first two decades of the 13th century the *platea* was already established as a reference point for the municipality, which had convened its meetings in the church of Sant'Andrea (1205) and in the market (1217). The area in front of the town hall required a larger opening towards the *platea*, progressively saturated by the expansions of the housing complex of the Galatari family.

The current municipality tower on the north-eastern side of piazza Santarosa, emerges through its dimensions on the urban landscape, and probably built in the 15th century (attested from 1411), must be identified with the private *della Casana*. The tower would seem the same as the one indicated in 1447-1448 as the *Torre dell'Orologio*, in which the community clock had long been housed. The community, thanks to a donation, received the porticoed shopping area below the tower, destined for the municipal massaro activities in 1448. The municipality investment in the civic tower as the new fulcrum of the municipal area – compared to the ancient *domus*, more central than the square and next to the residence of the prince – strengthened starting from 1462; the plastered cell was rebuilt in 1644.

After Cherasco's foundation in 1243, the municipal deeds were stipulated inside different religious buildings for a while: both the parish churches of San Pietro (1259) and San Gregorio (1277), as well as the monastery of Santa Maria *fratrum de Sachis* (probably the preachers' monastery at the entrance to the village). The first attestation of a *domus comunis* took place during the second Angevin dominion in 1309: the building was permanently used as the seat of civil power and was named in the books of the *palacium comunis* accounts (1328). The building is in the southwest corner of the San Martino district, where the two roads meet. From 1339, arcade spaces below are documented, which the town hall rented out for commercial activities. The tower's presence is indirectly documented from 1328 through the municipal payments for the *super palacium comunis* custody, which certifies its use as a lookout post, also confirmed by the expenses in 1339, for purchasing the *covi* to communicate with signals and for the construction of a wooden *bivocca*; in the Visconti age, the tower was used as the chief magistrate's residence [La costruzione di una Villanova 2004].

The civic tower (the only tower allowed in the burg) is located outside the built-up area on the supporting axes of the village. Its original isolation can be hypothesized, preceding the construction of the building. The tower has a total height of 36 metres; we know from sources that it underwent several interventions in the 16th-17th centuries, including the remodelling of the four pillar bases, forming its base.

5 | Civic towers in seigniorial urban centres: an example

The public presence on the *platea* of Saluzzo, capital of the homonymous Marquisate, is testified by the impressive size of the communal palace with the civic tower. It stands alongside the double curtain of buildings erected by the noble families, in addition to the castle and several other

properties also belonging to the Marquises of Saluzzo. The lack of a religious presence along the main road of the burg – only the parish chapel was recorded in 1253 – has been noted as an anomalous element compared to other situations in Piedmont towns. We must remember that the religious institutions did have their own assets along the *platea*, as well as the presence of the preachers' monastery from 1281, in an outlying position, with the tall campanile offsetting the civic tower [Gullino 2001; Rao 2011].

The communal palace was subjected to complete reconstruction in the mid 15th century, reusing the ancient *domus*, redefining the overall volume of the building and the decorative elements inside and outside the palace. The major impact of the building on the *platea* indicates recognition of communal power by the Marquis and the desire of the communal government to control the city, testifying the progressive emancipation of the *homines* from the Marquis. The palace overlooks the ancient *platea* and has three floors above ground. The ground floor opens with three slightly acute arches. The element that best identified the mid 15th century site was undoubtedly the richness of the terracotta decorative elements, typical of the culture of many towns in Piedmont and Lombardy. The construction of the tower does not seem to have taken place at the same time as the reconstruction of the adjacent building: the single-lancet windows have older figurative characteristics than those on the main prospect, the putlog holes are out of line and the masonry work and frieze are interrupted next to the building. These aspects lead us to believe that it was built before the mid 15th century and the expansion of the palace. In the 15th century, the communal tower looked very different to today, ending with crenellations, bartizans and machicolations, as testified by two historical iconographies. Despite there being no privately-owned towers standing today in the urban fabric of Saluzzo, certain documental mentions in the 15th century land registers remind us of their sporadic existence. The towers in Saluzzo seem to have been used mainly to defend the walls, castle and campaniles of the numerous religious complexes, including the civic tower, rather than the privately-owned structures [Beltramo 2015].

6 | Conclusions

This first phase of the research on the municipal towers of north-western Italy highlights some recurring situations and opens further questions for development of the study. Urban areas dedicated to administrative functions in Italian municipalities are multi-functional, have intense exchange in using space and wide interaction between religious and civil power. In the early days we witness the reuse of pre-existing buildings and towers, acquired or simply used for civic functions.

In some municipal cities, the construction of a civic palace did not occur for the entire first half of the 13th century. The traditional places of administration of justice, the meeting of the Council of Credenza, and the people's assembly maintain provisional seats, devoid of architectural structures conceived for the government function. In most cases, it is religious bodies that offer a temporary congregation space, inside large urban churches or in the same cathedral in cases where the municipality was founded as an episcopal city.

This occurs not only in bishop seats, such as Alba, Asti and Acqui, but also in mercantile cities like Chieri and in rural towns like Biella. Generally, the main square hosts the public assembly of citizens, while the restricted governing bodies, such as the council of Credenza, meet in smaller rooms. In these cases, the bell of the bell tower marks the town's activities and the control and reception of small assemblies and the drawing up of deeds.

The example of Casale, where the bell tower of Sant'Evasio was a valid sighting point for the civic guards, is symptomatic of widespread use in the cities of northern Italy. Even where the tower and the building stand as autonomous buildings, the connection with a religious body is highlighted on the urban plan, and the Broletto is situated overlooking the parvis of a church (whether it is a cathedral or not), perceived as the 'chapel of the city'. Examples of this include: Santa Maria Maggiore in Vercelli, the cathedral of Santa Maria in Ivrea, San Secondo in Asti, the cathedral of San Pietro in Alessandria, where the mention of «actum in Alexandria, in maiori ecclesia Sancti Petri, in pleno consilio, campana more solito convocato» recurs in several documents, and in Alessandria in 1228, where the agreements with Milan also stipulated in the bell tower on the northern side of the façade. In Chieri, the council of Credenza usually meets inside the San Guglielmo de Banchetis church, and since there is no municipal tower, it is the church bell that generally calls the council for the meeting [*Statuti civili del Comune di Chieri* 1913, 109].

It thus finds confirmation of a link between the municipal magistracies and the most revered sacred spaces, which is also found in other towns of the Italian Po Valley.

Another important aspect that seems to emerge from the early research stages is the reuse of towers belonging to private individuals that are incorporated into the new structures of the municipal buildings or acquired to transform them into civic towers. In the case of Brescia, while the Torre del Popolo was already erected, dating from the end of the 12th century, between 1223 and 1227, the *palatium Novum Maius* was rebuilt in stone with larger dimensions, also incorporating the tower of the Poncarali family. In Bergamo, the *ospicium magnum* of the municipality with the related tower was acquired by the Suardi family in 1251, and similar practices were found in Vercelli, Turin and Novara. This could also confirm the numerous cases in which the tower is detached from the municipal building and not exactly located in its proximity. Similarly, the civic tower of Padua belonged to the leader Tiso VI from Camposampiero who, in 1215, ceded it along with the nearby palace to the community.

The civic towers are an architectural heritage resilient to changes in the urban fabric, although it must be emphasized that many were destroyed by war events or damaged by earthquakes that particularly hit the south of Lombardy, Brescia, in 1159 and 1222; many have been restored in the modern age to make the main symbol of the city more monumental.

Thus, the iconography of the modern age and the images of contemporary cities offer a panorama where the civic towers stand next to the bell towers or the domes of the main religious buildings, mute evidence of civic power and the symbol of contemporary municipalities.

Bibliography

- ANDENNA, G. (1994). *La simbologia del potere nelle città comunali lombarde: i palazzi pubblici*, in *Le forme della propaganda politica nel Due e Trecento*, edited by P. Cammarosano, Roma, École Française de Rome, pp. 369-393.
- ANDENNA, G., BORDONE, R., SOMAINI, F., VALLERANI, M. (1998). *Comuni e signorie nell'Italia settentrionale: la Lombardia*, in *Storia d'Italia*, vol. VI, Torino, Utet.
- Annales Placentini Gibellini*, (1863), in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica (MGH)*, SS 18, XVIII, edited by G.H. Pertz.
- BELTRAMO, S. (2015). *Il marchesato di Saluzzo tra Gotico e Rinascimento. Architettura città committenti*, Roma, Viella, pp. 147-157.
- BENVENUTI, G. (1976). *Istoria dell'antica città di Ivrea dalla sua fondazione alia fine del secolo XVIII in sei libri divisa*, Ivrea, Fratelli Enrico.
- BONARDI, C. (2003). *Il disegno del borgo: scelte progettuali per il centro del potere*, in *La torre la piazza il mercato. Luoghi del potere nei borghi nuovi del basso medioevo*, edited by Ead. Cuneo, Centro internazionale di studi sugli insediamenti medievali - Società per gli studi storici, archeologici ed artistici della provincia di Cuneo, pp. 39-67.
- BONARDI, M.T. (1987). *Torino bassomedievale: l'affermazione della sede comunale in un tessuto urbano in evoluzione*, in *Il Palazzo di Città a Torino*, vol. I, Torino, Archivio della Città di Torino, pp. 21-42.
- Borghi nuovi. Paesaggi urbani del Piemonte sud-occidentale. XIII-XV secolo*, (2015), edited by R. Comba, A. Longhi, R. Rao, Cuneo, Società per gli Studi Storici, Archeologici ed Artistici per la Provincia di Cuneo.
- BONVESIN DA LA RIVA (1974). *De Magnalibus civitatis Mediolani*, trad. it. di G. Pontiggia, Milano, Bompiani, pp. 38-39.
- BUONICONTRI, F. (2005). *Scultura a Bergamo in età comunale. I cantieri di Santa Maria Maggiore e del Palazzo della Ragione*, Bergamo, Biblioteca civica Angelo Maj.
- Cartario Alessandrino fino al 1300*, (1930), Biblioteca Società Storica Subalpina, 115, vol. II, edited by F. Gasparolo, Torino, Deputazione subalpina di storia patria.
- Codex Statutorum magnificae communitatis atque dioecaesis Alexandriae, Franciscus Muschenus et fratres Bergomates*, Alessandria, 1547, (1969), rist. anast. Torino, Bottega d'Erasmus.
- COCCOLI, C., SCALA, B., TRECCANI, G.P. (2009). *Stratigrafie e restauri al Broletto di Brescia*, in «Archeologia dell'Architettura», XIV, pp.105-138.
- COGNASSO, F. (1914). *Documenti inediti e sparsi sulla storia di Torino*, Pinerolo, Regia Deputazione Subalpina di Storia Patria.
- COMBA, R. (1987). *Le "domus comunis Taurini": frammenti di storia delle sedi comunali fra XII e XVI secolo*, in *Il Palazzo di Città a Torino*, vol. I, Torino, Archivio della Città di Torino, pp. 13-20.
- COMBA, R. (1993). *Lo spazio vissuto: atteggiamenti mentali e "costruzione" del paesaggio urbano*, in *Torino fra Medioevo e Rinascimento. Dai catasti al paesaggio urbano e rurale*, edited by Id., R. Rocca, Torino, Archivio della Città di Torino, pp. 26-28.
- DIACCIATI, S., TANZINI, L. (2014). *Uno spazio per il potere: palazzi pubblici nell'Italia comunale*, in *Società e poteri nell'Italia medievale. Studi degli allievi per Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur*, edited by S. Diacciati, L. Tanzini, Roma, Viella, pp. 59-80.
- DELL'APROVITOLA, V. (2010). *La forma urbis di Vercelli nel XIV secolo: edifici pubblici e religiosi dalla fine dell'esperienza comunale alla signoria viscontea*, in *Vercelli nel secolo XIV*, edited by A. Barbero, R. Comba, Vercelli, Società Storica Vercellese, pp. 553-586.

- DONATO, G. (2011). *Arte pubblica a Novara: dall'arengo al palazzo del Podestà*, in *Il complesso del Broletto di Novara e la nuova Galleria Giannoni*, Celid, Torino, pp. 39-61.
- GARGIULO, M. (2007). *Programmi politici dei palazzi comunali in Italia settentrionale*, in *Medioevo: la chiesa e il palazzo*, Atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Parma, 20-24 settembre 2005) edited by A. Quintavalle, Electa, Milano, pp. 350-356.
- GARZINO, O., OLMO, A. (1987). *Storia di Savigliano scritta sui muri. Il "Palagio del Comune" (1200-1929)*, Savigliano, L'Artistica, pp. 35-49.
- Gli Statuti di Casale Monferrato del XIV secolo*, (1978), edited by P. Cancian, G. Sergi, A. Settia, Alessandria, Società di storia arte e archeologia.
- GRILLO, P. (2001). *Milano in età comunale (1183-1276). Istituzioni, società, economia*, Spoleto, Fondazione CISAM.
- GRIMOLDI, A. (1983). *I luoghi dell'autorità cittadina nel centro di Milano. Il Palazzo della Ragione*, Milano, Arcadia.
- GULLINO, G. (1987). *Uomini e spazio urbano. L'evoluzione topografica di Vercelli tra X e XIII secolo*, Vercelli, Biblioteca della Società Storica Vercellese.
- GULLINO, G. (2001). *Gli statuti di Saluzzo (1480)*, Cuneo, Società per gli studi storici archeologici ed artistici della provincia di Cuneo.
- Il complesso del Broletto di Novara e la nuova Galleria Giannoni*. (2011), Unità Tecnica di Missione per le celebrazioni del 150° anniversario dell'Unità d'Italia, Torino, Celid.
- Il Palazzo della Ragione di Padova. La storia, l'architettura, il restauro*. (2008), edited by E. Vio, Padova, Signum Padova Editrice.
- La costruzione di una Villanova. Cherasco nei secoli XIII-XIV*. (2004), edited by C. Bonardi, Cuneo-Cherasco, CISIM.
- LONGHI, A. (2010). *Cantieri e architetture*, in *Storia di Fossano e del suo territorio*, vol. II: *Il secolo degli Acaia (1314- 1418)*, edited by R. Comba, Roma, CORE, pp. 45-89.
- LONGHI, A. (2011). *Presidio e rappresentatività. Il palazzo sabauda nel castello di Fossano*, in *Storia di Fossano e del suo territorio*, vol. III: *Nel ducato sabauda (1418-1536)*, edited by R. Comba, Roma, CORE, pp. 43-72.
- ORDANO, R. (1988). *Le più antiche torri di Vercelli e la torre del Comune*, in «Bollettino Storico Vercellese», 17, Vercelli, Società Storica Vercellese, pp. 44-49.
- PERIN, A., LIVRAGHI, R. (2016). *Il palazzo pubblico del Comune di Alessandria: fonti e problemi di interpretazione del costruito*, in *Palatium Vetus. Il broletto ritrovato nel cuore di Alessandria*, edited by A. Marotta, Roma, Gangemi, pp. 55- 64.
- PETRÒ, G. M. (2008). *Dalla Piazza di S. Vincenzo alla Piazza Nuova. I luoghi delle istituzioni tra l'età comunale e l'inizio della dominazione veneziana attraverso le carte*, Bergamo, Sestante.
- PISTAN, F. (2018). *Gli assetti urbanistici fra medioevo ed età moderna*, in *Vercelli fra Quattro e Cinquecento*, edited by A. Barbero, C. Rosso, Vercelli, Società Storica Vercellese, pp. 509-628.
- PISTILLI, P. F. (1992). *Broletto*, in *Enciclopedia Arte Medievale*, vol. III, Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, pp. 765-766.
- PISTILLI, P. F. (1994). *Comune. Edifici pubblici*, In *Enciclopedia dell'arte medievale*, IV, Treccani, Roma, 1, pp. 246-253.
- RACINE, P. (1980). *Les palais publics dans les communes italiennes (XXI-XIII siècles)*, in *Le paysage urbain au Moyen Age*, Lyon, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, pp. 133-154.
- RAO, R. (2005). *I beni del comune di Vercelli. Dalla rivendicazione all'alienazione (1183-1254)*, Vercelli, Società Storica Vercellese, 2005.

- RAO, R. (2011). La ‘domus comunis Saluciarum’: *spazi pubblici e comune nella Saluzzo medievale*, in *Saluzzo. Sulle tracce degli antichi castelli. Dalla ricerca alla divulgazione*, edited by R. Comba, E. Lusso, R. Rao, Cuneo, Società per gli Studi Storici, Archeologici e Artistici della Provincia di Cuneo, pp. 51-62.
- RAO, R. (2015). *I paesaggi dell'Italia Medievale*, Roma, Carocci, pp. 175-199.
- RAO, R. (2018). *I beni comuni di Vercelli fra Quattro e Cinquecento*, in *Vercelli fra Quattro e Cinquecento*, edited by A. Barbero, C. Rosso, Vercelli, Società Storica Vercellese, pp. 133-144.
- RAPAGGI, A. (2012). *Il Broletto di Brescia*, Brescia, Grafo, pp. 39-61.
- ROMANINI, A.M. (1989). *Arte comunale*, in *Milano e il suo territorio in età comunale (XI-XII secolo)*, Spoleto, Fondazione CISAM, pp. 23-52.
- ROSSI, M. (2009). *Il centro del potere e i luoghi del popolo: le cattedrali e il Broletto di Brescia (1187-1308)*, in *Commentari dell'Ateneo di Brescia*, Lonato, Fondazione Ugo da Como, pp. 87-118.
- SETTIA, A.A. (1978). *Sviluppo e struttura di un borgo medievale: Casale Monferrato*, in *Gli Statuti di Casale Monferrato del XIV secolo*, edited by P. Cancian, Alessandria, Società di storia arte e archeologia Accademia degli Immobili, pp.73-75.
- SOLDI RONDININI, G. (1984). *Evoluzione politico-sociale e forme urbanistiche nella Padania dei secoli XII-XIII: i palazzi pubblici*, in *La pace di Costanza 1183 - Un difficile equilibrio di poteri fra società italiana ed Impero*, Bologna, Cappelli, pp. 85-98.
- Statuti civili del Comune di Chieri*, (1913), edited by F. Cognasso, Biblioteca Società Storica Subalpina, 76, Torino, Deputazione subalpina di storia patria.
- Statuti del Comune di Ivrea*, (1968), edited by G.S. Pene, Biblioteca Società Storica Subalpina, 185, vol. I, Torino, Deputazione subalpina di storia patria.
- Statuti del Comune di Vercelli*, (1877), edited by G. Adriani, Torino, Stamperia Reale di G.B. Paravia.
- Theatrum Statuum Regiae Celsitudinis Sabaudiae Ducis Pedemontii Principis*, (Amstelodami 1682), (2000), edited by R. Rocca, Torino, Archivio Storico della Città di Torino.
- TOSCO, C. (1999). *Potere civile e architettura: la nascita dei palazzi comunali nell'Italia nord-occidentale*, in «Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino», 97, Torino, Deputazione subalpina di storia patria, pp. 513-545.
- TOSCO, C. (2000). *I palazzi comunali nell'Italia nord-occidentale: dalla pace di Costanza a Cortenuova*, in *Cultura artistica, città e architettura nell'età federiciana*, edited by A. Gambardella, Roma, De Luca, pp. 395-422.
- TOSCO, C. (2016). *I palazzi pubblici e l'architettura di rappresentanza nei comuni dell'Italia Settentrionale*, in *Palatium Vetus. Il broletto ritrovato nel cuore di Alessandria*, edited by A. Marotta, Roma, Gangemi, pp. 47-54.
- TOSCO, C. (2018). *L'architettura delle repubbliche nel tardo Medioevo italiano*, in «Studi e Ricerche di Storia dell'architettura», n. 4, pp. 8-43.
- UBERTI, C. (1995). *I palazzi pubblici*, in *Architettura civile in Toscana. Il Medioevo*, edited by A. Restucci, Siena, Monte dei Paschi di Siena, pp. 45-77.
- VOLTA, V. (1987). *Il palazzo del broletto a Brescia*, Brescia, Banca San Paolo di Brescia.

