

The fortifications on a Citizen scale. Analysis of visual storytelling in “Supplemento mensile illustrato del SECOLO” (1887-1902)

*Original*

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# 4 DEFENSIVE ARCHITECTURE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN XV to XVIII Centuries

Giorgio VERDIANI (Ed.)



PROCEEDINGS of the International Conference on Modern  
Age Fortifications of the Mediterranean Coast

FORTMED 2016

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Giorgio Verdiani

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## The fortifications on a Citizen scale. Analysis of visual storytelling of Ligurian cities in “Supplemento mensile illustrato del SECOLO” (1887-1902)

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### Abstract

This paper deals with the analysis of the themes and codes characterizing the graphic/textual description of the cities and their fortifications, as well as narrated in *The Hundred Town of Italy, the illustrated monthly supplement of the “Il Secolo”* (*Le Cento Città d’Italia, supplemento mensile illustrato del Secolo*). Published in Milan by Sonzogno, between 1887 and 1902, the 192 four sides supplements still provide a vivid descriptive picture of the nation, at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Despite the poor quality of most of the illustrations in these sheets, they have acquired, over time, an appreciable documentary value. Therefore, a critical reading is capable of giving a new knowledge about the systems of fortifications in Italy. The performed analysis of places and cities is characterized by a descriptive storytelling of the fortifications, highlighting the specificity of communication and perception. What emerges is a strong landscaping connotation given to the city-fortification system in a socio-political reality, during a historical phase of transformation. The survey highlights how this architectural heritage can still be valuable cultural element, not only for the territory.

**Keywords:** Country System, Visual Communication, Storytelling, Cultural Enhancement

### 1. Introduzione

This paper combines a critical reading of the available artworks and the analysis, just as critical, of the fortifications, the strongest signs on the land<sup>1</sup>. The documentary corpus of *Le Cento Città d’Italia*, an illustrated monthly supplement of *Il Secolo*<sup>2</sup> (Sonzogno, from 1887 to 1902, hereinafter *CC*) was chosen for an exploration of built heritage as well as visually narrated with textual and graphical descriptions in the intention of a cultured popular literature. In fact, the 192 issues of the *CC* provide an interesting insight into the Italy ‘under construction’ during the XIX and XX centuries.

This documentary series covers the entire Italian territory. It promotes the major centres of economic development as well as smaller towns rich of ‘goods’ in the fullest sense of the term. For this particular study, the authors compare *The Hundred Town of Italy* to historical maps and/or contextual sources similarly aimed at sharing and communication of fortified structures, stratified and transformed over time.

To better recognize the cross-cutting methodological approaches we provide a systematic analysis of the narrative handouts of the Liguria region.

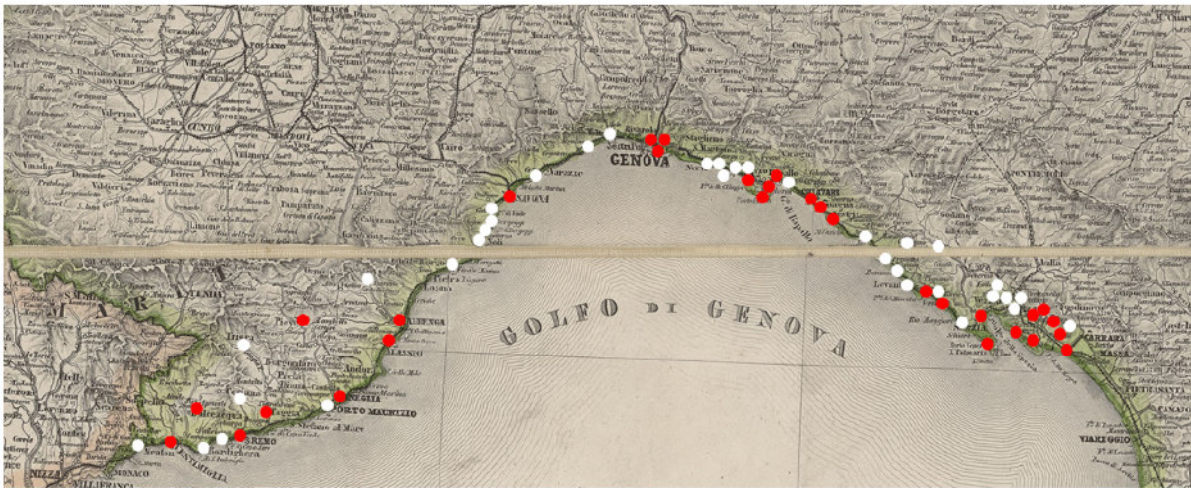


Fig. 1– The places described and/or mentioned in handouts.

This area is ideal for a test because of widespread and diverse heritage of existing buildings as well as lands being under architectural renovation by that times. In fact, together with the construction/expansion of the railway network<sup>3</sup>, the Italian Government, upon the Franco Prussian War (1870-1871), began a massive work for modernizing the defences on the French border and major ports. In this way, being near to the war theatre (1859)<sup>4</sup>, the area became the dam for the inland flood defence<sup>5</sup>. It is interesting to note in Fig. 1 the existence of clusters within the analysed fortified systems. Starting from West it is possible to identify: the ‘spread’ system between Ventimiglia and Albenga, Savona, the nucleus of Genoa, the forts around Portofino, and finally a large concentration around the city of La Spezia. This particular distribution could be linked to historical events narrated (and not) in the alred of mentoned issues of *Il Secolo*. For example, the first system seems to evoke those of restoration operations and expansion of Italian strongholds performed after the Franco Prussian War. On the contrary, the concentration of forts around La Spezia, would recall the ancient conflict between the Republics of Genoa and Pisa, emphatically described in the history of Castruccio Castracani (1898, XII, 134, p.10).

## 2. The fortifications at Citizen’s measure

Using a language capable of mediating technical information and not, the *CC* dossiers

present the daily life that takes place in the study area. Regarding the fortifications, the handouts logic does not offer any monographs strictly linked to the territory<sup>6</sup>. However there is a declined information referred to fortifications provided in different graphic/text modes. The specific paragraphs, nods or references evidence the permanence of all pre-existing fortifications embedded with other themes - mostly historical, costume or descriptive of the new buildings projects. The dedicated images, often with generic inside recognizable elements, are only occasionally part of the narrative plot. The critical analysis of the entire work suggests a use of images to complement the textual narrative. There is plenty of space for personal foreshadowing of what is described. The reader is involved in an active way since the *CC* is a forerunner of the recent interactive communication. The current attitude of accessing a database (geo-referenced and not) leads today to a random consultation of the handouts under analysis, promoting a reading by location, issue, and narration mode, declined to object. In view of this, the comparison to the end of the century illustrated postcards, is a great opportunity for evaluation of this heritage. The postcards describe Italy’s early years and remain in popular culture a representative symbol not only of the ‘visible’ but also the ‘memory’ of places. Therefore these images rise to the status of documentary sources<sup>7</sup>. The evidence of the role of the fortifications in the collective memory is not just a persistence of a

military background, but the track of social events that go far beyond the practical reasons. Upon completion of this study, some more recent works have been examined: the project of development of natural and cultural resources (Asse 4 del POR FESR 2007-2013), *Liguria Heritage*<sup>8</sup>, the *List of emerging products and emerging systems artefacts* drawn up by the Department of Urban and Regional Planning Region Liguria within the landscape territorial coordination Plan (1999), the map *Castelli Aperti of the Genova Province*<sup>9</sup> and the publications of *Liguria a volo di drone*<sup>10</sup>, which allow the reader to complete and constructively interpret what emerges from the systematic analysis of *CC*.

### 3. The Ligurian heritage

Since the times of the Republic of Genoa, Ligurian human settlement has developed on the base of geomorphology. The fortifications were the most obvious track of social events on this land. Access from the sea to the various ports was always in balance with the land routes. These land routes linked the coast to the hinterland in a valley size and then at right angles to the coast. The distribution of watchtowers along the valleys to ensure the security of the population from pirate raids coming in from the sea along the ridges of the mountain valleys, for example in the towers that are situated from the coast along the Prino valley in the interior to Dolcedo and beyond. Moreover, even the fortifications that were built to defend the most important urban centres such as Ventimiglia stretch perpendicular to the coast up to the heights which by their nature become natural defence. Iconographic collections that tell the area history, in this case the Liguria, may well find a document in the *Theatrum Sabaudiae*, an important courtly publication of the end of XVII century. Without expanding the investigation into the details of a bibliography, which falls outside the scope of this significant work now no longer Savoy level but Italian, is the *Corografia fisica, storica e statistica dell'Italia e delle sue isole* (1837-45) by Attilio Zuccagni Orlandini who has had a national hit and especially for the three volumes

of engravings. Even if the fortifications pictures are not so numerous, the text descriptions are deeply detailed. So the *CC* may be assumed as a new 'theatre' to illustrate to the public the 'Hundred Cities'. Furthermore, the railway line on the Liguria coast has changed not only the transport, but it has initiated the modern tourism.

### 4. The fortifications in Liguria within *Le Cento Città d'Italia*

The fortifications, in an imaginary journey<sup>11</sup> from the West to the Levante, appear for the first time in Ventimiglia. A long curtain wall, which extends from the sea to the hills on the east side, across the image size (1889, III, 36, p. 93) and, although it has no analogue in the text, in the caption «from railway» almost remembers how new infrastructure interact with the past. A very useful comparison comes from a postcard published in 1898 in Milan. Being very similar to the above-mentioned recovery, it puts in full evidence the bridges over the river and the walls that go up to the mountain (Fig. 2, 3).



Fig. 2, 3— *Ventimiglia dalla ferrovia* in *CC*, *Ventimiglia* in a postcard of 1898.

The photographic image indeed gives a more complete view of the city, instead incision is deformed in favour of a clearer representation of the defensive wall. Just east appears «il castello di Dolceacqua [che] benché in progressiva rovina, è sempre un cospicuo monumento dell'era feudale: ed in esso, fra i trabocchetti, le mude, le fosse e l'altre cose, si mostra ancora al visitatore l'alcova ova il signore esercitava lo scellerato *jus primæ noctis!*» (1889, III, 36, p. 90). There is an immediate comparison with the engraving of *Castrum et Oppidum Dulcis-Aquae* Last but not present in the work of Borgonio (Pl. II, p. 68), a bird's eye pattern in a blaze of glory in the

representation of the Turin colours copy kept at the Historical Archive of the City of Turin, in the *Simeom Collection*. Zuccagni Orlandini (Vol IV, p. 53) also describes the Castle. Even without the accompanying picture, it is possible to read that «le antiche mura castellane furono in gran parte demolite, e cadde in ruina anche la fortificazione, ma resta in piedi la torre su cui sventolava la bandiera collo stemma dei D'Oria, già padrona del marchesato», There's also a brief reference to Borgonio.

The tower can still be seen in the postcards of *fin-de-siècle* that open constantly supplies the same glimpse of the medieval bridge in the foreground (Figg. 4, 5, 6).

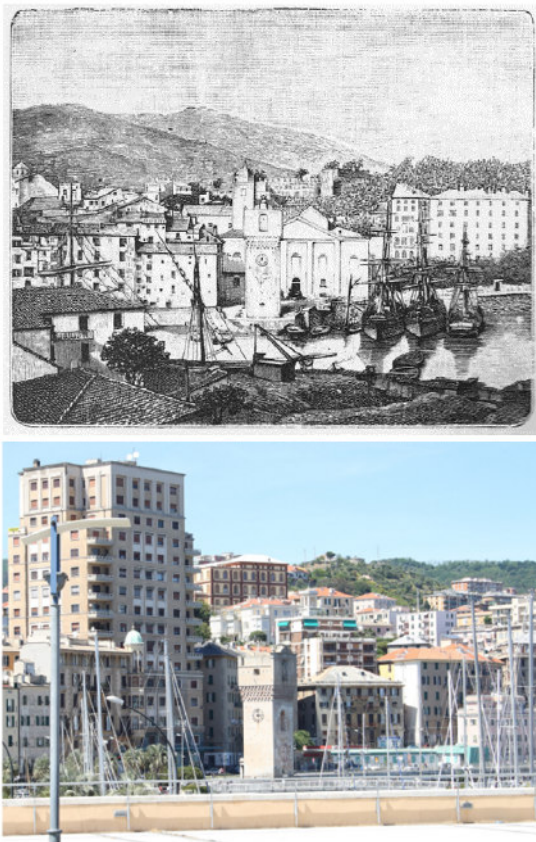


Figg. 4, 5, 6 – *Theatrum Sabaudiae - Dulcis-Aquae, Dolceacqua* in CC and postcard.

Although the images of the CC (1889, III, 36, p. 96) and those of the postcards come in monochrome form it is the engraver's ability to bring the hatch, from a photographic original, the types of building facades. Subsequently you get to San Remo. Its fortifications attend the engraving of «very ancient port of St. Joseph - the garrison of San Remo feudal» with trap doors and slits (1889, III, 36, p. 92). In the description are not, however, mentioned the structures of the Forte Santa Tecla of which rather recently *Liguria Heritage* provides the city the ancient fortifications on horseback between the Middle Ages and Modern Age.

A special area is dedicated to the fortifications of the city of Oneglia, former port of the Duchy of Savoy from Piedmont time connected to the Impero river valley. «[...] attraversando l'antichissima ed ancora medioevale cittadella della Pieve di Teco». (1889, III, 36, p. 94). In particular, of this city, which appears with its fortified wall on the *Theatrum Sabaudiae* but not in the CC illustrations, the story will be featured in one of the files of the twentieth century (1900, XIV, 162, p. 42) :«[...] Oneglia cadde in potere degli Spagnuoli i quali in molti modi straziandola e danneggiandola la terrero fino al 1623 nel qual anno i Genovesi e gli Spagnuoli alleati, la cinsero d'assedio, la presero, la persero e la ripresero, [...] però uscendone distrussero tutti i castelli fortificati della regione e ne trassero un ricco bottino, [...]». Proceeding towards Levante it reaches the Centa river that appears prominently in the engraving of the *Panorama of Albenga* (1889, III, 36, p. 93) where the walls overlooking the river bed, leaving glimpse inside the city's medieval towers. Instead these rise majestically beside the Cathedral in another image dedicated in the same issue. Along the coast you come to Bergeggi where the Romans «vi stabilirono una colonia e vi fabbricarono un castello che sorge sul promontorio denominato Santo Stefano, nonché una batteria a fior d'acqua, che è detta di San Lorenzo» (1888, II, 19, p. 50). Then you reach Savona and its fortifications are ample space both the text and the illustrations (1888, II, 19, p. 50). The section dedicated to the city of the Piamar fortress opens with two views, *Nuova darsena Vittorio Emanuele* and *Darsena vecchia*, the latter, an incision in the foreground with a ruin of the fortifications on the hills and in the background, to the left of urban development, the fortress Priamar. The page is illustrated by engravings of the two towers. «Ed era a ricordo di quell'epoca (quella delle crociate) la torre di Sant'Erasmo, oggi demolita, che si scorgeva lungi dal mare ed era il faro di Savona repubblicana. [...] Noi qui riproduciamo l'antica torre del Brandale, che viene sempre citata nelle storie savonesi, quale si trova oggi colle modificazioni apportatevi dagli uomini e dal tempo». and also with

reference to the same tower «anteriore al secolo XII, sulla quale sta la campana del comune [...] L'antico porto, distrutto dai genovesi, giungeva sino ai piedi della torre stessa la quale subì pure la mutilazione cu soggiacquero tutte le altre principali torri della città». These two images, included in a column of the text body, give weight to the documentary value iconography that represents on the one hand a now non-existent architectural specimen and the other to a tower that has undergone the inevitable transformations as yet visible (Figg. 7, 8)<sup>12</sup>.



Figg. 7, 8– Savona in CC and in 2016.

Moreover, «*Oppido alpino Savonae* ricorda Tito Livio nelle Storie: era il più forte fra i castelli che già sorgevano in Liguria quando Roma e Cartagine si contendevano sul suolo italico il primato del mondo, avanzi di più antiche civiltà, etrusca, fenicia e greca. Fu presso quel forte che Magone, figlio d'Amilcare cartaginese depositò il ricco bottino di Genova. [...] i romani vi crearono fra i liguri sabazi una importante stazione militare, fortificandone tutto il territorio con torri,

baluardi e castella, i cui avanzi sono tuttora oggetto di studio per gli archeologi. Allo sfasciarsi del colosso romano, il castello savonese fu come ogni altro della Liguria devastato dalle irruzioni barbariche. È nell'anno 967 che appare la figura del marchese d'Aleramo [...] Intorno al prisco e diruto castello si stringono gli abitanti delle valli [...] dando origine ad una città importante per commerci e industrie. [...] Costruito in un punto militarmente importante, il castello dei Del Carretto fu spesso teatro di lotte sanguinose per la libertà del Comune. [...] La storia elenca vari passaggi di proprietà [...] finché nel 1528 ricevè il colpo di grazia da Genova che, impadonitasene dopo lotta accanita, ne colma il porto, la distrugge nei porti più antichi, erigendo sull'altura quell'enorme fortilizio che ancor oggi le contende la vista del mare» (Figg. 9, 10).



Figg. 9, 10 – Savona: *fortress Priamar* in CC and in 2016.

It is funny how in a monographic article of a 'port city' like Genoa, despite the cover image is a panorama seen from the sea, the performances are almost all in support of the descriptions of churches, palaces and villas. In one of these, *Villa Pallavicini* (1887, I, 7, p. 52, and 1900, XIV, 162, p.47), there are few graphic elements related to the fortifications, of which are however many references, and also a dedicated section, within the textual descriptions. By comparing the two representations (fig. 11, 12), we note that probably the same point of view was for the input representation to the Fortress. The images have a very specific nature, in the series, is a fully graphical page, in the XIV series is inserted into a column of text in the paragraph dedicated to Pegli. In the first it is visible an illuminated area on the ground behind the shadow.

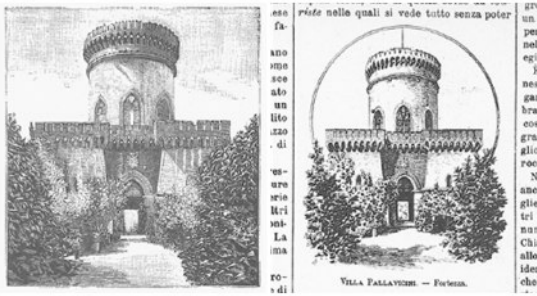


Fig. 11, 12 – Genova: Villa Pallavicini in CC

This area is not visible in the XIV table, but it is conceivable because in the description of the 'villa' there is a reference to «un castello medioevale con relativa torre e ponte levatojo con scala di accesso elicoidale» (1900, XIV, 162, p. 47).

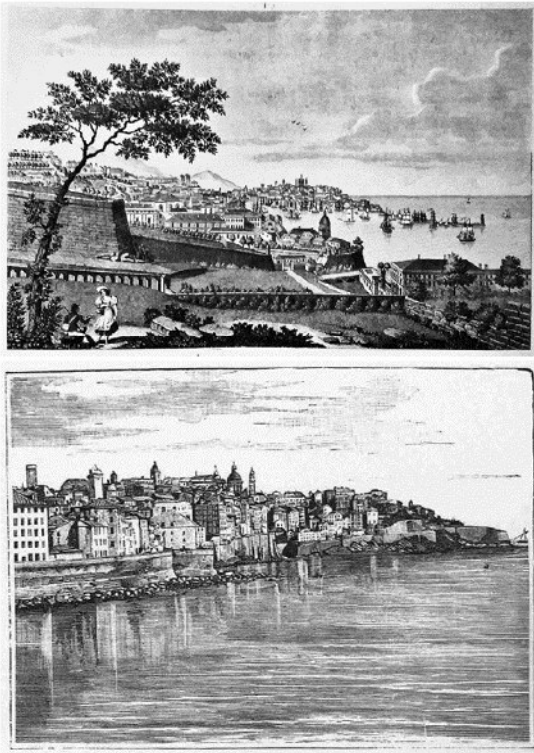


Fig. 13, 14 – Port View of Genoa in Zuccagni Orlandini and in CC.

The presence of that illuminated area leads the reader to assume the element untied tower from the building perimeter. Among the other views of the water front, the Punta di Carignano (1887, I, 7, p. 53) allows a parallel comparison to the Port View of Genoa in Zuccagni Orlandini (*Corografia dell'Italia. Stati Sardi Italiani di Terraferma. Vedute Pittoriche* - Tavola 17, N.2 - G. Maina inc.): both useful to

identify the «molte altre torri trovavansi anticamente sparse per la città» (1887, I, 7, p. 54). The images have obviously different communicative purposes, the first focusing on the architectural front of the sea and the second on the city / sea ratio, placing in the foreground elements of the substructure, mitigated by the human presence in his daily life, as if a framing guide (fig. 13, 14). It is remarkable the case of Villa Brown Portofino, described as «a paradise» (1889, III, 31, p. 55), seems to lose its connotation of Fortress (perhaps following the restoration and extension of Alfredo d'Andrade, a few years earlier), which instead maintains the image into text (1889, III, 31, p. 55). In other centres, such as Chiavari and Sestri Levante, the presence of fortresses is underlined in the text, but amended by the representations of urban agglomerations. On the contrary, the castle of Rapallo is never mentioned in the description of the country, but the subject of the accurate representation of *The Castle* (1889, III, 31, p. 56). Finally, after the Cinque Terra, we arrive in La Spezia where the towers that characterize the city views are not represented in the general panorama. The Castle of Saint George, the subject of a specific paragraph, otherwise mentioned only once in the text, is never explicitly represented, but it is possible to see its 'towering' volume in the City of La Spezia views - Piazza Vittorio Emanuele (picture off the cuff, 1889, III, 31, p. 52) and at the end of Spezia - Via Dapassano (image to text, 1889, III, 31, p. 54).

In the first case, seen from the west, the square profile of the castle is distinguished by contrast from the organic volume of the hill, while in the second case, from the South, he sees the articulated volumetric compendium stranded on the steep hill. The articles do not make any reference to the above pictures. Interestingly however as the point of view of image presentation of the City, one can almost certainly be placed on the current Via XXVIII March, at the foot of the Castle. Now on the border the Lunigiana valley opens with a view of the citadel in Sarzana, simply named *The Citadel* (1898, XII, 134, p. 9). The complex benefits from a paragraph monograph (1898,

XII, 134, p.11-14). Another representation of *The Citadel outside* the text input (1898, XII, 134, p.12) relates the "form of the door" to the real object, implicitly referring to the image of openness. Among other notable buildings stood still, in a paragraph on, the Fortress of Sarzanello, which rises "on the top of Sarzana" (1898, XII, 134, p.14). It is significant that the image of the Fort (1898, XII, 134, p.12) suggests the triangular shape of the same, characteristic element highlighted in the text description. A second image, *Fort of Sarzanello*, said Castruccio Castracani (1898, XII, 134, p.16), in parallel to what happens to the Citadel of Sarzana, resumes input description to the complex, without, however, calling out the portal. In both cases, text descriptions place the emphasis on the size of the buildings, putting it briefly in connection with the major transformations experienced over time by highlighting the historical and architectural structures by the authors.

## 5. Conclusions

The critical analysis of the presences of the Liguria centres in *CC* highlights a diverse use of graphics support. There is a wide variety of interactions between text and image. In most cases, in fact, the text is lacking specific references to support representations. The same image appears greatly varied communicative value: not always the fortification object was clearly set (by title, caption, text description). However it is still recognizable by interpolating between the text directions and printed signs, such as strong graphic track<sup>13</sup> expressions persistence not only historical and architectural, but also social and cultural. As well as analyzed in this context, the narrative also reveals 'instant representation' of the territorial system of fortifications in Liguria, as well as sharing tool of this heritage of the nation. Words and pictures make it accessible, albeit indirectly, places and contexts seemingly unreachable for the common reader, part of a widespread along the territory. The rediscovery of this heritage is part of a vast panorama of more aware disclosure, where the focus today for the discovery and exploitation of fortifications

throughout the area leads to a layman's critical exegesis. The *CC* will then reveal not only a source for analysis of history, culture and tradition of the places described, strongly characterized by the state of transformation of the newly formed Italy, but also as a source of more or less precise information on the various meanings of heritage.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The analysis presented here is part of a wider research path which has as its object the *CC* and the Hundred Cities Illustrate. The work has highlighted different query possibilities of documentary heritage, focusing on issues from time to time with different landscape values, urban, historical, artistic, ethnography and anthropology, etc. A first outcome: COMOLLO, PAVIGNANO, ZICH, *Torino ne "Le Cento Città d'Italia": rappresentazione e narrazione di una realtà in trasformazione tra XIX e XX secolo dalla casa editrice Sonzogno*, in Marotta, Novello a cura di *Disegno & Città*. Atti 37° convegno internazionale dei Docenti della Rappresentazione, Torino 17-19 settembre 2015. Roma: Gangemi, pp. 1203-1212.

<sup>2</sup> The complete work was consulted, in integral reprinting of 1983, curated by Ugo Badboy (1983). *Le Cento Città d'Italia. Supplemento mensile illustrato del Secolo. Saggio introduttivo di Ugo Bellocchi. Indici a cura di Luciano Brambilla*. International Advertising Co., Bologna. In the text, we refer to the individual handouts reporting only: year of publication, series and number.

<sup>3</sup> *Strade ferrate italiane/tramvie a vapore e navigazione marittima e lacuale/colle distanze chilometriche/Strade ferrate dell'Europa centrale/per Enrico Gambillo e Pacifico Ferraguti[...]Bologna Gennaio 1896*. Sauer&Barigazzi, Bologna. 15<sup>a</sup> edizione. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530291886> (last check: May 2016)

<sup>4</sup> *Teatro della Guerra / in / Piemonte /1859 / Lit. Linassi / Trieste, Colombo Coen editore / A. Marangon*. In Barrera 1988, p. 27

<sup>5</sup> For example, between 1881 and 1897, the Italian government decided to build the complex of fortifications of Rocca Liverna structured in two strong, placed on the rock of

the so-called Barrage Zuccarello, whose function was to block the road to the Piedmont from a possible invasion on the Albenga plain. These works were in defense of the main crossings in the Piedmont High Tanaro Valley along the Neva, the Pennavaire and dell'Arroscia.

<sup>6</sup> The work proposes, within monographic handouts city/place, a few paragraphs with specific titration – for example *La Rocca e la Chiesa di Castell'Arquato* (II, d.20, pp. 59;61), *Pergine (il Castello di)* (VII, d. 76, pp.31-32) – and only one dossier that explicit in the title – *Val d'Elsa e castelli senesi* (XIV, d.161, pp.33-40) - the discussion of fortifications

<sup>7</sup> Empler 2012, p. 20

<sup>8</sup><http://www.liguriaheritage.it/heritage/it/LiguriaTerreDiForti/Imperia.do> (last check: May 2016)

<sup>9</sup>[http://www.castelliaperti.it/pagine/ita/mappa/mappa\\_genova.lasso](http://www.castelliaperti.it/pagine/ita/mappa/mappa_genova.lasso) (last check May 2016)

<sup>10</sup> Jacopo Baccani with photos of Bruno Ravera, *Genova dei forti*, Genova, 2016

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. Gemini 2012

<sup>12</sup> Photographs and comparison with the state of things are by Luca Pipitone, a student of the course of Science in Architettura for Sustainable Project.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. Marotta 2012

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