

POLITECNICO DI TORINO  
SECOND SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE  
Master of Science in Architecture Heritage Preservation and Enhancement  
***Honors theses***

**Land studies of the villages in Messina in 2009: from traumas for the calamitous events to the rediscovery of the urban architectural heritage**

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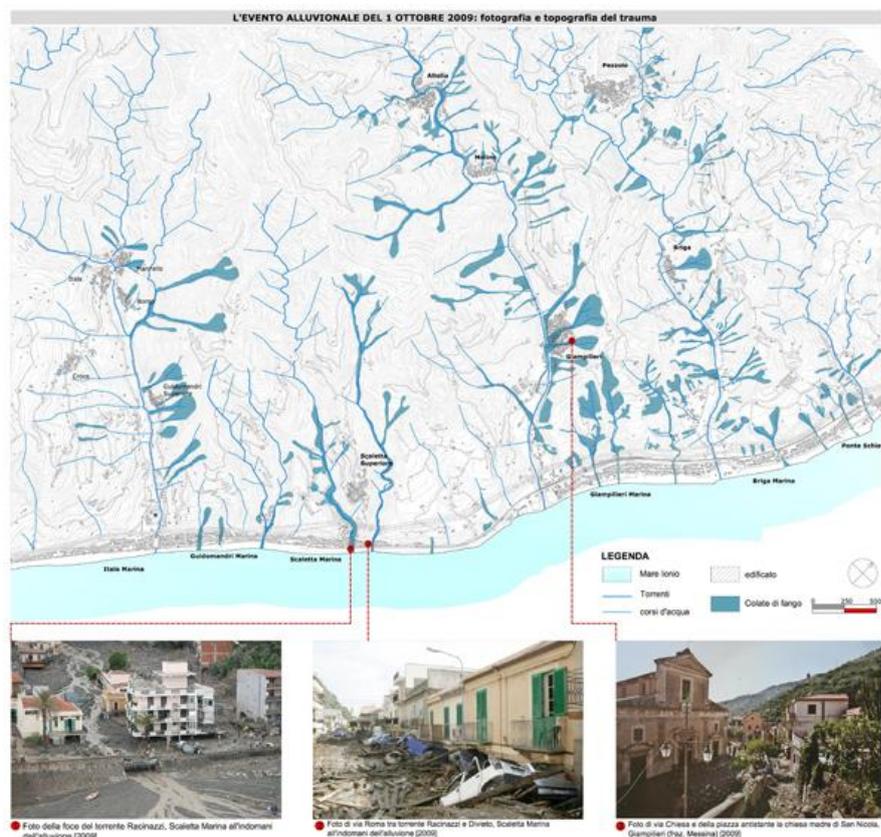
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Four years after the flash flood that hit the territory just south of Messina, this study wants to take us again in those places that were marked by sorrow, despair and destruction during the night of the 1<sup>st</sup> October of 2009.

An exceptional meteorological event gave rise, in only six hours, to a natural mechanism that of vital had nothing. An exceptional meteorological event gave rise to a catastrophic natural mechanism in only six hours.

The water that generally gives life took it away that time, the water that generally has no color turned gray that night, the water that generally is odourless stank of death in those hours.

Rivers of mud filled every space of some villages of Messina share among the coast and the hills. Those hills decided to go downstream, to visit the inhabitants of those old villages, to enter without permission in their houses, that are the result of architectural and historical stratifications, and to break 37 lives.



The day after the flash flood, for reasons of safety, those villages were evacuated, some partly and others entirely. The inhabitants left their homes, keeping in the depths of their souls the hope of returning safely to those roads and squares that had lulled and housed them since that moment. So the centuries-old history of those villages has stopped.

Today, in 2013, many inhabitants have returned in their homes, some of whom have been secured as the hills on the villages, others houses have been *demolished or delocalized*, using frequent words in the legends of the "Zoning": the new planning instruments that have been taken by the Sicily Region and by the Civil Protection the day after the flash flood. So, after the execution of the works of limitation of the hydrogeological risk, the villages can return to repopulate, they can return to live and their history can finally restart.

But it is necessary to stop and reflect about this re-starting, it's necessary to go back and to investigate the rich and complicate past of this territory, where both the nature and the man are protagonists. As two good actors on the stage, the first is the stooge of the other. Sometimes the nature emerges with such natural disasters as this flash flood or the terrible earthquake of 1908, that hit those same places. Other times the man emerges, because he transforms the nature by building their villages near the streams, by taking from pebbly river banks the stone material for the construction of buildings that, thanks to the historical stratification, survive until today, perpetuating their beauty.

This is not the remote history of a past time; these "flooded" villages still collect many historical buildings, both civil and religious, that unfortunately are often badly protected and valued. It's essential to restart by them, thanks to them the inhabitants can re-know their past and reacquire their identity.

This study investigates with the magnifying glass the rich architectural-urban heritage of each of these "flooded" villages that are all marked by the fragility of the territory. There are a lot of historical and artistic surveys about these villages and many of them were realized before the beginning of the XX century. In fact, before the notes of Francesco Mazziotta or the bibliographic texts of Salvatore Vernaci (for the territory of Itala) and Franco Chillemi (for the territory of Messina), there were many academics that were represented cartographically these villages, probably for military reasons, from XVI to XIX century. These maps are sometime unknown and often their notes are scattered among the State Archives of several and distant cities like Palermo, Messina and Turin. For example, Camillo Camilliani's work, that is a rich cartographic and documentary collection made in XVI century, is kept in the National Library of Turin; this manuscript gives us a beautiful and original view of Scaletta. Moreover, there are the unpublished Cavaliere Castelfiore's notes, that were written in XVIII century and are kept in the State Archive of Turin; in his description of the coast Castelfiore documented analytically the condition of the properties in 1714, so he offers us an unexpected look at the life and at the architectural-urban and military reality of the settlements.

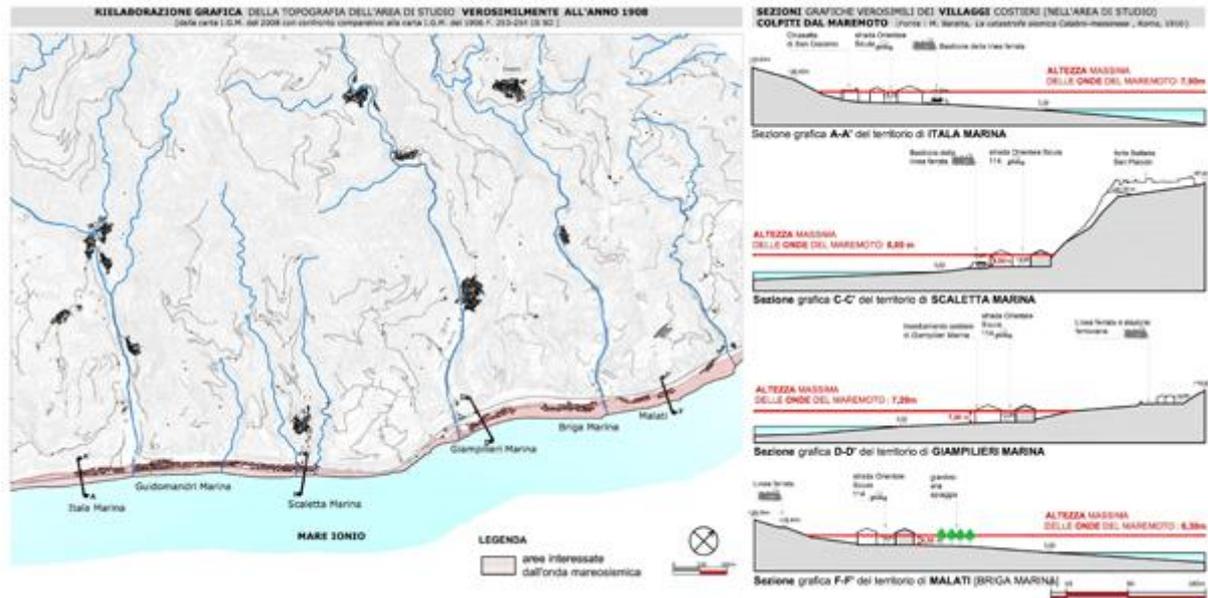
In addition to these manuscripts and historical representations, we have analyzed the contemporary maps and instruments of planning and defense of territory. For example, the maps of I.G.M. in Florence, the P.R.G. of several municipalities, and the thematic maps of the Piano Paesistico Territoriale Regionale of Sicily, that are often incomplete and deficient.

So, thanks to these documents, the territorial study moves toward an analytical and sectorial survey with the purpose to verify and to update the cartographic, bibliographic and archival findings.

Thank to a long search of the calamitous events that historically and recently have plagued this territory, we considered important first to intervene in the integration of the analysis of territorial risk and vulnerability with the help of cartography. According to the purposes of the P.A.I. it is made the perimeter of the hazards, but without defining precisely levels of risk and/or to give trends for the adoption of prevention standards.

In more detail, it is made a graphic art by adding up the P.R.G. of the three districts involved in the flash flood. The last one is an original urban instrument, that neither the technical-office of the Province of Messina, nor the S.T.R. of the same Province have available. For the "Mosaicking" of the P.R.G. of Itala, Scaletta Zanclea and of the old First District "Pilieri" of the territory of Messina, it was necessary to define a unique legend for making easy the reading and the definition of the "Territorial Zoning" (the areas are grouped in macro-categories). Afterwards it is integrated the legend of this new urban instruments with the "red areas", the "Zone d" of the Zoning revised in October 2012, areas of "*relevance fluvial or of landslide where buildings must be delocalized or pulled down*".

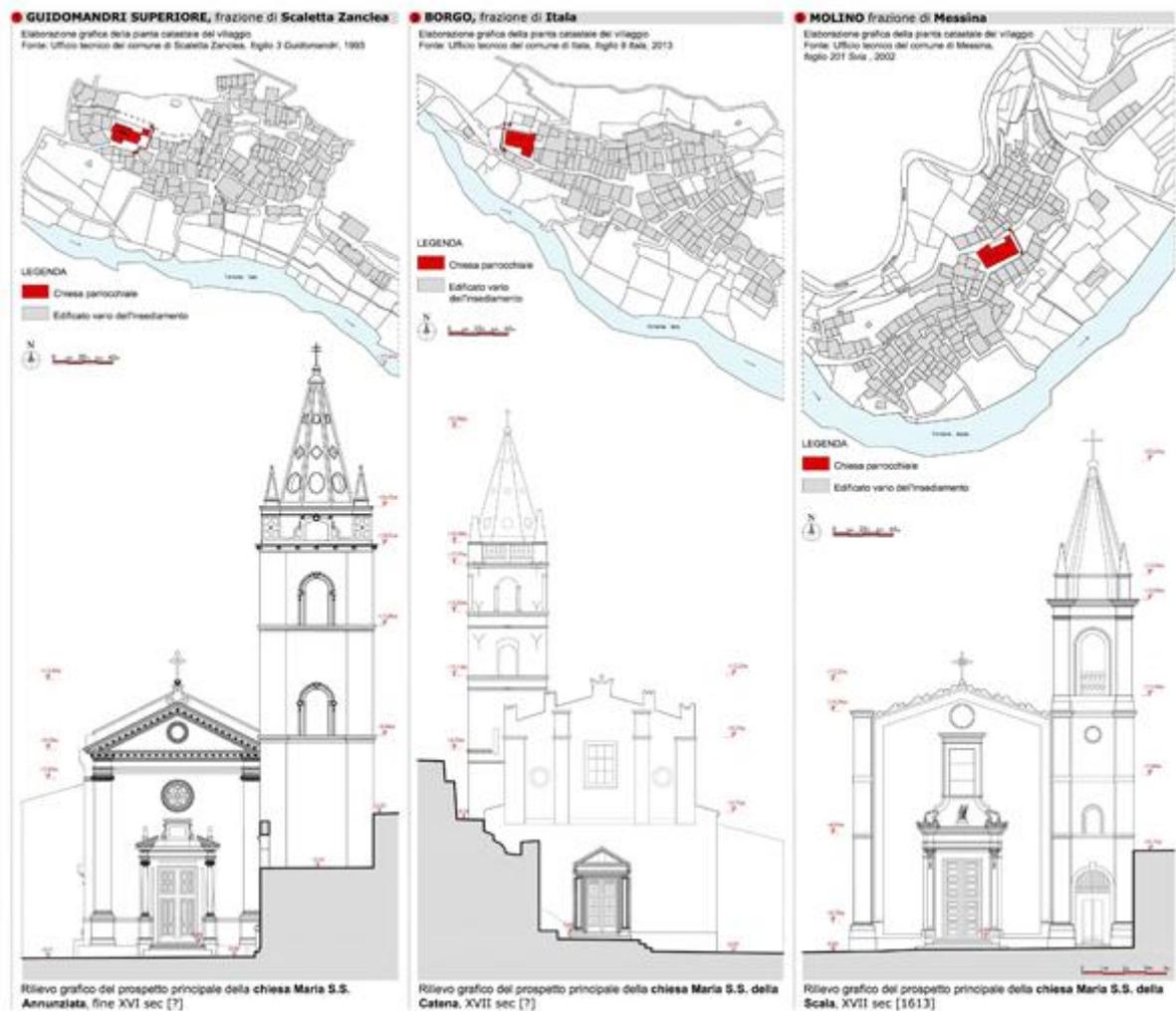
Another important and original report originates from an in-depth analysis and juxtaposition of the graphic arts that were made for the seaquake in 1908 and for the flash flood, that we have described previously. Particularly the graphic arts of the seaquake want to represent the development of the anomalous systems of the waves in the territory. This development is defined by the historical elements produced by Engineer Mario Baratta after the earthquake.



So thanks to the juxtaposition of the “submerged areas” by the anomalous waves in 1908, with the “red flooded areas” it is defined a more analytical map of the risks and of the natural dangers.

Our hope is that the methodologies we have used together with the graphic arts we have produced can become instruments that make the protection more accessible. However apart from the several integrations and critical analysis, we tried to give prominence to the architectural emergencies that characterize our flooded places, thanks to a complex topographic mapping and photographic relief. These architectural emergencies architectures often are not located in the maps of P.P.T.R of Sicily and they are not protected neither by the municipal planning instruments, nor by restrictive clause of the Soprintendenza , so they are in danger of irreparable impairment and/or breakdown.

In the end, it was unavoidable to close this “territorial study” without decreasing the focus of research on some of the more representative and symbolic buildings of the architectural heritage of each village: the churches. They actually result the biggest manifestation of the historical events, including traumas, that characterized each settlement; they are treasures of art and devotion, symbols of the community, mostly in the moments of the most agonizing discomfort. The area of study presents many religious architectures. Some of them are inserted in the complex urban fabric of the villages, others are more isolated; some of them are principal churches or “mother churches”, others are “secondary churches”. This last appellation is maybe a bit forced, but chosen because these buildings actually have lost the religious and liturgical centrality of yore, because of the strong demographic declaim that characterized many hilltop villages in the previous century (for example Borgo and Mannello, villages in the territory of Itala). Moreover this investigation stage provides for a tired activity of take-over and graphic rendering of the main fronts of the churches under consideration; this activity is also indispensable for the knowledge of the artifacts.



Together with the main prospects of the churches, also the belfries of the churches have been object of relief and graphical rendering. Despite their historical, visual and material importance, these architectural elements are never interested by studies and specialist researches.

Therefore we have used the occasions to offer to the reader an original reading of these buildings, above all thanks to many reliefs, with plants and sections, that are made for rendering the complex actual state of these edifices, that too often are signed by degradation and inattention.

Only with this point of view the flood can be considered not as a break in the historical-artistic-civil continuity of the communities, but as an incentive for rediscovering the rich architectural-urban heritage of this territory.

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