

Germanasca valley mills; written sources and testimonies still present

by Cristina Bosio

Tutor: Patrizia Chierici

This thesis comes into the wider project of preservation and valorization of the Chisone and Germanasca valleys environmental and cultural estate. In this sphere a peculiar characteristic interest has developed, in local seat, for the molinary activity that produced a collection of oral sources and testimonies still present in the territory published in “La Draja” volume, and for the identification of a tourist cultural itinerary named “The wheel and the water” that develops in Massello town, and allows to visit existing mills.

Starting from these preliminary introductory statements, a real project of knowledge applied to the others Germanasca valley towns had been conceived in order to identify the historical-documentary value of the lasting mills. Strictly tied to their environmental and social context, these mills are very similar to other factories placed in the Piedmontese alpine valleys. They are one floor buildings made of elementary and economical techniques, and the utilization of local materials: stone, river pebbles and wood. They have a very simple technological device often made up of a couple of millstones, usually extracted from the same area, moved by a wooden horizontal hydraulic wheel, supplied by a derivation canal usually obtained from a dug trunk.



Gros Passet mill couple of millstones (Massello town)



Piccolo Passet horizontal hydraulic wheel (Massello Town)

Analyzing and explaining the characteristics of these mills and the reason that differentiated them – from both a structural and technological point of view – from those of plain, the inquiry field enlarged to other geographic areas in our region, which offered useful comparing elements from this point of view. The analysis and the interpretation of the collected data offered a lot of starting points for a deep consideration, giving prominence to some lasting traditional working criteria in relation to the environment and those life styles that distinguished, here as everywhere else, the productive history of the alpine valleys unlike the plain areas, where the improvement of molinary activity represented a considerable income source.

Documentary sources are very rare, but the cadastres of the 18th and 19th century have provided important elements of knowledge which allowed the identification and the location of the building. Pieces of informations about the type of used plant in the studied territory deduced from these sources, had been compared with others contemporary documents and with the still existing testimonies through a surveying and direct inquiry. In this way it had been possible to give prominence to the productive continuity of the horizontal wheel system of which we keep significant examples on the area.



An example of Rabbini cadastre (middle of 19th century)

Written and iconographical documents and information about val Germanasca building had been organized in synthetical files divided per town. The elaboration of these files (50 at all) developed in two different parts: the 1st contains the photographic documentation, the cartography of two historical cadastres, the Piedmontese one of the middle of 18th century, and the Rabbini one of the middle of 19th century; a territorial map, going back to the beginning of the last century, and the I.G.M. (Military Geographic Institute) cartography to indicate, if still existing, the place in which the building is situated.

In the 2nd part documentary sources or oral testimonies had been analyzed and, in case of still existing buildings, it had been included a description of the them and of the molinary plant.

For further information, e-mail mauroecri@dag.it