

Images from territory, imaginary as a way of territory structuration in a part of Cuneo countryside (Italy)

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This thesis is part of a research called 'IMAGES FROM TERRITORY, IMAGINARY AS A WAY OF TERRITORY STRUCTURATION' that professor Alberto Borghini guide since some years at Politecnico of Torino and University of Pisa proposing to collect stories, legends, uses and popular beliefs of Italian territory. Best instrument for this kind of work is an enquiry on the field foreseeing a sharp and capillary survey of the oral sources. Final purpose is to try to understand the structural principle below the series of the variants, with the help of semiotic instruments such as metaphor and metonymy.

Our contribution is in part a research on the field but also a first analysis of recurrent fantastic figures and emerged symbolic elements more linked with some elements of territory and landscape, proposing in this way to try to outline a sort of geography of the imaginary in our survey area: Cuneo countryside.

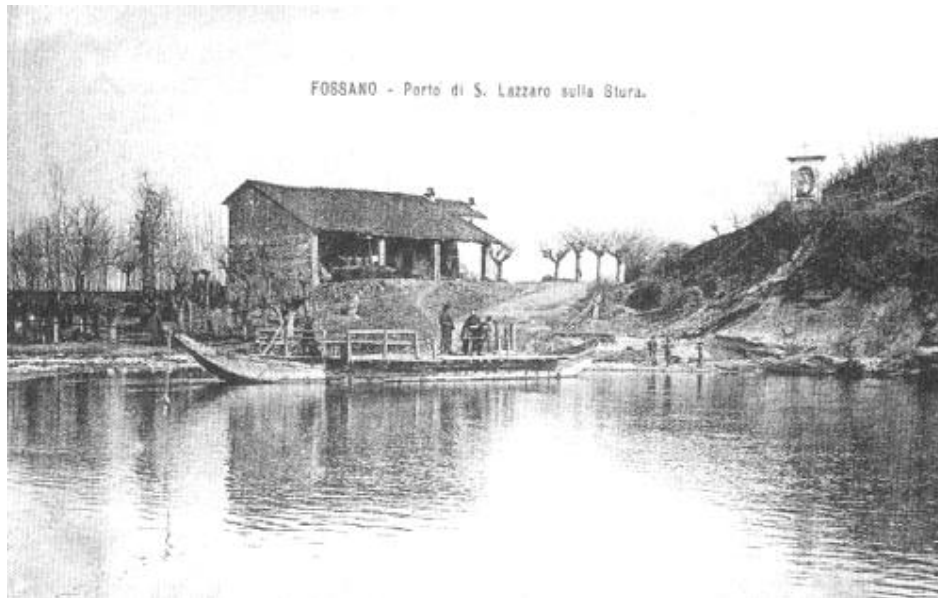


Research on the field.

Many of the collected information, analysed from the landscape point of view could give interesting considerations. An example could be the net of underground secrets passages many informers spoke about: they're a real hidden net connecting architectural sites.

According to versions “masche” (witches or spirits), noblemen or monks pass through these passages but also dangerous animals, such as in some testimonies from Centallo connecting different places and their legends, for example “Cascina dei Frati”, an old farm-monastery and “Rocca ‘d Belin”, a big solid stone: who tried to move this stone was attacked from dangerous bees coming out from underground: if the “real” underground link between two places is not always sure, the “imaginary” one surely exist, those places are linked by their outfits of legends.

Our two-years work, saving testimonies of a certain number of important informers, adds to the contribution of other researchers and local writers working seriously from years - even if from a point of view more sociological than structural - with more respect of the oral sources than in the past.



The “ciòt del diaul”, near San Lazzaro, Fossano, before building of the bridge in 1911. You can see the cobbled paving slope to Salmour and pillar (now disappeared) both linked to local tales and legends.

From all these researches is finally coming afloat, Borghini says, a real and complete mythological system – about a coherent territorial area – linked with landscape and territorial representations and with what Borghini calls “diachrony of symbolic”, understanding the “historical thickness (historical-symbolic) of territory”.

Has been finally possible, even with a not complete pattern but looking at the symbolical elements, to recognize some laws and rules repeating sharply through their “nearness” (for example dead man/wood log, “culais”(ignis fatuus)/soul in purgatory...) evincing in folk tales with transformation or substitution between ‘similar’.

What’s finally clear is that landscape elements in folk tales are not marginal notes with simple description value.

How all these facts are connected with architecture was a recurrent question during our work: the heart of the matter is, our opinion, how to frame the imaginary net with the analysis of territory.

Landscape is significant: always says something more, something else returning to another semantic knot.

Landscape influences imaginary: a ruin, a lake, a village, an underground passage is always fitted out with at least an eziological tale.

Imaginary influences landscape: the built of church - to baptize children - or a cemetery - to banish dead men - are modifications of territory based upon imagination: essentially they are tricks to protect alives from the world of the spirits.

Maybe is the link between the reality and the simbolicity of a place to complete function of that place in a certain society, as in the exemple to avoid communication between alive and dead inhabitants.

In this case there's no dubt: architects must probe into question.



“Teitasso” farm, San Sebastiano, Fossano: hay-loft. You can see cobble-walls typical of the region linked with tales of “ciapè”(cobble- heaps near houses) as a place of fear but also with legends of hidden treasures into walls and below cobbled paving. Barn is also considered a place of fear linked (particularly in dreams) with demoniacal world. Informers often describe the logs and the cover of the roof as a place of display of “sarvàn” and “masche”. Old monastery-farm “Teitasso” is a famous bewitched house in the region, knew also from informers of other villages, linked with many tales of “masche”, “sarvan” and “culèis”. It is also linked with the underground passages net.

You can often hear an architect describing his work: “More than a project is a sign... a way... an idea...”. If we don’t want to accept these words in a vague way may be useful to search these signs, ways and ideas in the imaginary of those men really structuring territory from centuries through a thick net of myths, tales and beliefs inspired from nature of places (as many eziological tales we found) or superimposed with deep identification permitting to recognize places (in particular places of fear) through those links our informers usually cover through “nearness” ways with great familiarity.

For further information:

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All the thesis “IMAGES FROM TERRITORY”, Alberto Borghini’s works and much other unpublished material can be consulted at “Centro di documentazione della tradizione orale” in Piazza al Serchio (LU) Italy (<http://www.centroventurelli.org>)