

POLITECNICO DI TORINO  
SECOND SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE  
Master of Science in Architecture  
**Honors theses**

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**Scarnafigi: evolution of a *ricetto* 'without history'**

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The desire to take an in-depth look at the history of an area was what encouraged me to choose the subject for my thesis, in which I have focused on Scarnafigi, a town not far from Saluzzo.

The first step I took, and which gave me the possibility to establish contact with "the remains" of the past, was the observation and physical analysis of the site. As one approaches the Scarnafigi, it's impossible not to realise that the elements of greatest importance are the castle and the religious buildings in the central part, which have a greater architectural impact than the rest of the town.



View of Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II

However, what really attracted my attention was a group of ruins, which I later discovered to belong to the *ricetto* which once defended the old village.



Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II – Walls of the *ricetto* erected in support of the “Ala del Pellerino”

They are portions of the defensive wall which were swallowed up by urban development.





Church of the Confraternity – Stretch of wall of the *ricetto* on the side overlooking Via Carlo Alberto

Despite being rather anonymous elements, they are no less important and deserving of attention, inasmuch as, like other constructions, they tell a part of the story of the territory.

In order to study the site in detail and reconstruct the events that characterised the evolution of the *ricetto*, I began searching for historical material, discovering documents and maps which enabled me to reconstruct the transformations that took place in the area over the centuries. Examination of the land registers enabled me to gain information on the town's economic, social and territorialization structure. Among the documents consulted, I decided to specifically analyse three registers: the *Registrum hominum Scarnafixii* dated 1416, and the land registers of 1650 and 1741.<sup>1</sup>

The *Registrum* corresponds to the first census of the population. It offered a picture of a town consisting of a central area which housed the *domus*, defended by the walls and by a moat. The external area was characterised by the presence of the *ayrali*, fields and woods.

The 1650 census offers the description of a population which had grown in number despite the recent demographic decimation caused by the plague; the old town had expanded outwards, with the addition of new brick buildings.

The data contained in the 1741 census documented that the site had continued to develop, as proven by a further increase in the population, and had expanded regularly, adapting to the nature of the land, creating a clearly defined urban settlement. Using the information obtained and, particularly, the map dated 1743<sup>2</sup>, I was able to identify the position of the *Ruate* and the *Contrade*, reconstruct the characteristics of the territory, the distribution of the feudal and ecclesiastic properties, and of the commercial<sup>3</sup> and service<sup>4</sup> activities in the area. I compared these discoveries with the present day situation and followed this up by examining the existing buildings to find those that bear witness to the traces of their past.

The resulting image is that of a village which, under the rule of families of feudatories, was transformed into a municipality, improving the quality of life.

I was able to confirm that man has always had to use his initiative to survive: joining forces with others to defend himself from his enemies and settling in proximity to important road junctions to improve trade and communication.

All this is roughly what took place in Scarnafigi, a town which emulated the fortunes of other, bigger, urban centres.

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<sup>1</sup> The first two, considering the historical period of their origin, are of descriptive nature, while the third belongs to the land registers indicated.

<sup>2</sup> Historical Archive of Turin, Combined Sections, Piedmont Land Registers, Annex C, roll no. 65

<sup>3</sup> The shops, the abattoir, the mills

<sup>4</sup> The municipality, the sanatorium, the ovens

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