

LANDSCAPES OF TRANSHUMANCE: 'TRATTURI' AND FORTIFIED SETTLEMENTS IN MOLISE FROM PROTOHISTORY TO MIDDLE AGE

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Abstract: *Landscapes of Transhumance: 'tratturi' and fortified settlements in Molise from protohistory to Middle Age.* It is well known that Molise is from all time a pastoral region. Using the valleys that run through the mountains of the South Apennines of Italy, people and animals used the roads of transhumance, 'tratturi'. Following the manner of the ancient topography, with the contribution of the regional cartographic heritage and the toponomastics, this research confirmed the partial reuse of these 'grassroads' in the Middle Age during the 'incastellamento'.

Rezumat: *Peisaje ale transumanței. 'tratturi' și așezări fortificate în Molise din proto-istorie și până în Evul Mediu.* Este cunoscut faptul că Molise a fost întotdeauna o regiune pastorală. Folosind văile pentru a traversa munții Apenini, oamenii și animalele au urmat permanent rutele transumanței. Urmând maniera vechii cartografii alături de moștenirea cartografică regională și de informațiile provenite din domeniul toponomastic, lucrarea de față confirmă re-utilizarea drumurilor ierbi în Evul Mediu pe tot parcursul procesului de fortificare din regiunea analizată.

Key words: *transhumance, 'tratturi', fortified settlements, economy, 'incastellamento'.*

Cuvinte cheie: *transumanță, 'tratturi', așezări fortificate, economie, fortificare.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Molise has always been a pastoral vocation due to its orographic and widely mountainous geography, along the Central-Southern Apennines. The ability to reach mountain areas coming from the coastal area within the season limits and abundance of waterways accounted for the two factors, which are the base of that kind of culture well-



known as the Apennine civilizations¹. The prevalence of grazing on agriculture was a matter essentially linked to geomorphological and environmental situation difficult to change so that seasonal movement of animals from the mountains to the plains, and vice versa were essential to survival in proto-historical age.

Exploiting the low passes crossing the South central mountain range of the Italian peninsula and that still represent fixed routes, for centuries men and herds walk along the wide grassy guidelines on which in historical times will develop the well-known phenomenon of transhumance².

2. METHODOLOGY

The historical-topographical research that we made in the last decade on the territory of Molise allowed to track many aspects and learn more about the evolution of ‘incastellamento’ also in this small part of Italy; several elements were identified that characterize the distribution of the fortified settlements, first of all the prevalent location along the main roads of long duration, the tracks ‘tratturi’³. In the absence of archaeological diggings, the evolution of a walled village, a castle, emerges from the written sources and from toponomastic; historical maps and aerial photographs help us to recognize the succession of the settlements and the internal structure.

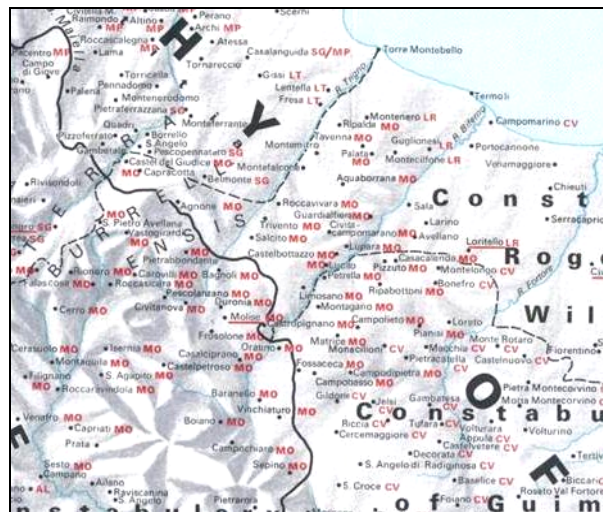


Figure 1: *The County of Molise (by Catalogus Baronum, ed. Jamison)*

¹ Puglisi, 2005.

² Pasquinucci, 1979; Paone, 1987; Petrocelli, 1999; Van Worther Ghem, 2006: 281-295.

³ Di Rocco, 2007; EAD. 2009 - 2014.

3. THE TRANSHUMANCE IN MOLISE BETWEEN PROTOHISTORY AND MIDDLE AGES: HISTORICAL NOTES

For Molise archaeological finds show that at the end of the Second millennium B.C. the pastures of the Matese were certainly frequented by shepherds of the Biferno valley⁴. As for the archaic period, examining circulation of the Daunian ware⁵ it has been ruled out the existence of systematic relations between the Dauni territories and those of the Italian Apennines.

The Sabelli-Samnites, forced off their land because of population growth and limited grazing land, that had brought them into conflict with the Umbrians, pushed southward, according to a ritual that the tradition handed down as the *Ver Sacrum* through the basin of the Sangro river and they arrived in the area of Boiano, where the Matese area pastures and the rich sources of the Biferno offered them better living conditions⁶.

It was clear that the paths opened by the flocks represented the main roads through the Sannio just before the annexation of the latter by the Romans who skillfully knew how to exploit the system of grassy protohistorical slopes when they designed their own road system⁷. The first documented activity of transhumance refers to the Apulian area⁸. Strabo wrote that, after the Second Punic War, vast areas of Puglia, first considered fertile, were depopulated⁹. Rome he carried out experiments to recover those areas draining marshes and repopulated them¹⁰. After The Gracchi tried to reform¹¹, the latifundium promoted expansion of sheep-breeding in the *ager publicus*. Varro reports that it was divided into *saltus* of 800 jugers each and the streets of public transit were called *calles publicae*¹². Describing the organization of the *familia pastoralis*, he also dwells on issues about the stops of transhumant flocks, when he describes the journey of the farmers, through the *calles*, led the animals into the woods of Sabina¹³.

As known, Romans made of transhumance one of the main sources of income; Roman large confiscations carried out the detriment of Italic communities with a sizable enlargement of the *ager publicus* and this became a source of discontent for the Samnites who had paid tribute to the great Roman landed aristocracy to graze the cattle¹⁴.

⁴ Barker, 2001.

⁵ Capini, 1999: 183.

⁶ Salmon, 1985: 33-46. The origin of this practice was in the ceremonies connected with the seasonal migration of herds (Puglisi, 2005: 96-97). The real reason for the *Ver Sacrum* was, in any case, overpopulation: '*propter multitudinem liberorum*' (Var., *De Re Rust.*, III, 16, 29).

⁷ Archaeological findings prove that the Sannio already in prehistoric times had an economy based on sheep farming (Albore Livadie 1991: 33-39).

⁸ Puglia was the main, but not the only one, destination: there were pastures in the Metaponto area and in the *ager Bruttius* (VAR., *De Re Rust.*, II, 9, 6; LIV., XXIV, 20, 16). There are many references on transhumance in ancient literature: CIC., *Pro Cluentio*, 59, 161; LIV., XXII, 14, 8; SIL. ITAL., VII, 365; VAR., *De Re Rust.*, I, 10; II, 2, 10; III, 17, 9.

⁹ Strab., VI, III, 11.

¹⁰ CICER., *Epist. ad Att.*, VIII, 3, 4.

¹¹ The oldest organization of public system of transhumance is that contained in the *lex agraria* on 111 b.C.

¹² VAR., *De Re Rust.*, I, 10; II, 2, 10.

¹³ VAR., *De Re Rust.*, III, 17, 9. See: Gabba, Pasquinucci, 1979; Corbier, 1991: 149-176.

¹⁴ Gabba, 1985: 373-389.

Epigraphy proves, as well as the sheep, the oxen were moved¹⁵; it remains, however, unclear how the sheep constitute the main protagonists of these movements¹⁶. The inscription '*de grege ovarico*' of the second half of the II century A.D., on the right side of the door of *Saepinum*, witnesses of violent clashes between the local authorities of *Bovianum* and of *Saepinum* and *conductores*, private contractors of the imperial flocks and, at the same time, the government will protect the sheep from abuse of local populations¹⁷.

At present it is difficult to reconstruct the exact situation of the transhumance after the fall of the Roman Empire, since its documentation is rather poor¹⁸. Except for the inscription found near the Adriatic city of Termoli dating to age of Goths, there aren't other documentary evidence of the presence of transhumance in late antiquity¹⁹. The text says that the shepherds abandoned their transits established, swerving at will and grazing in cultivated areas, and they led a greater number of animals than that declared, this was a sign of the inefficiency of the central government.

Even for the late Middle Ages the absence of specific sources relating to the continuation or less of transhumance makes it difficult to trace elements that are of a some support to the identification of the road network of this phase. However, an analysis of the topographical arrangement of medieval fortified settlements in Molise, placed mostly behind the herds ways or in their immediate vicinity, provides evidence that, although in a state of partial abandonment and in the form of simple paths free of any kind of state rules, the tracks, or segments of them, they have continued to be in the Middle Ages the main communication system in the region²⁰.

After the year 1000 Normans inherited tutelage and services of the transhumance lands and sanctioned rights and privileges in favor of the shepherds. The *Assise De animalibus in pascuis affidandis* of Wilhelm II, dated 1172, which concerns the grazing in Puglia, ruled the behavior of *forestarii* toward the shepherds, often blackmailed and harassed; this law also banned landowners whose lands were crossed, to levy tolls: these arrangements show, therefore, the recognition of the system of transhumance tracks as public roads and the establishment of a royal duty. Regarding this, is emblematic the text in which "if in the transhumance the flock had benefited for one night in the pasture of someone, it would not be lawful for the owner of that land or the *baglivo* claim any

¹⁵ *CIL* I, 585.

¹⁶ Virgilio (*Georg.*, III, 339-348) describes a flock of sheep along a path.

¹⁷ *CIL* IX, 2438. See: LAFFI 1965: 177-200.

¹⁸ About the end or the continuity of transhumance between the fall of Rome and the Norman (VI - XII century) opinions do not agree. J.M. Martin (*La Pouille du VI^e au XII^e siècle*, Roma 1993: 378 ss.) assumes an interruption of that practice in southern Italy and its recovery only with the advent of the Normans; A. Clementi (*La transumanza nell'alto Medioevo*, *Bullettino della Deputazione Abruzzese di Storia Patria*, LXXIV, 1984: 31-47) pays attention on the fact that the terrible destruction that followed the Greek - Gothic war narrated by Procopius, increased the already precarious economy in those territories where the war was fiercer as Puglia and Campania, but not touched the lands of Abruzzo and Molise. Gabba is in favour of a continuation of transhumance in the mentioned contribution published in the Proceedings of the CISAM (1985: 384-389).

¹⁹ *CIL* IX, 2826

²⁰ Our analysis is confirmed by the reflections that Emilio Gabba proposed about the continuation of the public nature of the *calles* of Southern Italy even in the early Middle Ages when, albeit with the dismemberment and fragmentation of state power, the use of the 'tratturi' continued because "connected to specific methods of land use has always been linked to the geomorphological conditions of the Apennines" (GABBA 1985: 385). This is mostly evident in Molise.

payment, but he would had to leave freely pass the flock"²¹. Later, Federico II razionalized the exploitation of the land for grazing and cultivation when he established the *Mena delle pecore di Puglia*, a judiciary with fiscal tasks, but not independent²².

4. TRATTURI AND FORTIFIED SETTLEMENTS: AN 'INDIVISIBLE ALLIANCE'

Although the awesome phenomenon of fortifications had strongly characterized the Middle Ages and profoundly marked the anthropic European landscape - most villages and historic towns in which we live are in fact the product of precise choices made between the tenth and thirteenth centuries: In the past a castle was mostly seen, read and studied as a structural element that certainly was predominant in the urban pattern of a territory, but detached from that context so that any studios have almost paid attention exclusively on historical and/or architectural themes, on the planimetric structure, obsidional techniques to investigate only the most recent and late stages of the fortified sites. Therefore inevitably, our ability to understand and analyze the phenomenon more disruptive and peculiar of the Middle Age has been reduced.

For some decades the situation has happily changed. The archeology and medieval topography revealed - and continue to unravel - peculiars facts to this phenomenon, otherwise unknowable, having in this way a synchronic and diachronic point of view on the castle development. Thanks to archaeological investigation is now possible to identify different historical phases of defenses: the last period of the Byzantine, the Longobard period, the early Medieval period and the late Middle age period, while thanks to the topography we can recover connections, in the past unfairly left out, between the castle and the surrounding area, including the fortification and the habitat in which it is located, among the surviving architectural structures and landscapes.

The territory of Molise, as known, is a mostly mountainous, rugged and morphologically unstable: from the West to the East marl and clay reliefs of the Sub-Apennines are divided into a series of hilly masses, which occur with gradients decreasing until sea. The peaks of Mount Capraro (1730 m) and Mount Campo (1746 m) in the area of Capracotta mark the northern boundary of the County of Molise, while to the west the massif Mainarde is the natural barrier between the Molise and Abruzzo with Mount Cavallo (2039 m) and Monte Mare (2020m); the Northern slope of the mountains of Matese towards the South with Mount Miletto (2050m) separates the region from the province of Caserta; the eastern border of the County consists of a rich system of hilly heights, whose peaks are in the South Mount La Rocca (1000 m) in the area of Vinchiaturu and in the North Monte Mauro (1025 m) near Castelmauro.

²¹ «*Si oves vel alia animalia alicuius de una contrata in aliam ducta fuerint in transitu, si una die tantum vel una nocte et non ultra in terra alicuius pascua sumpserint, non liceat domino ipsius terre, vel baiulo eius aliquod accipere, sed sine impedimento vel datione aliqua animalia ipsa dimittat transire*» (Clementi, 1988: 219).

²² Gabba, 1985: 383-384; Paone, 1987: 21.

About the western sector of the Norman County of Molise, as illustrated in previous contributions, from the analysis of the cartularies of San Vincenzo al Volturno, of Monte Cassino and Santa Sofia in Benevento can be deduced for the pre-Norman period a form of sparse fortification of the territory, the most in the upper valley of the Volturno, where a small number of castles were identified dating to the second half of the tenth century. Therefore the presence of the Benedictine monastery has affected the development of feudalism in Molise until the arrival of the Normans. The constant work of repopulation conducted by the monks marks a turning point in promoting the process of fortification in a region characterized, by the abandonment following the Saracen invasions and also from small rural settlements sometimes centralized, of which still it is known too little to draw up a balance.



Figure 2: *Cerro al Volturno: one of the fortified settlements of the S. Vincenzo Abbey (Source: G. Di Rocco)*

From the XI century there was, however, a substantial increase in the number of fortified settlements; these castles were among the donations to the abbey of Montecassino by several members of the laity and clergy. It is reasonable to think that for the starting process of fortification of the western territory of Molise was relevant the contribution of the monks of San Vincenzo and, on the other hand, that the local aristocracy contribution. The earls Oderisio, Borrello e Randisio Borrello were rooted in the *Terra Burrellensis*, with the strategic locations of Pietrabbondante, Carovilli, Roccasicura, at the northern border of

the region and close to the upper valley of the river Trigno, while the earls of Isernia controlled the rough territory of Sannio with Bagnoli del Trigno, Carpinone and Frosolone. Further south Baranello, San Polomatese Campochiaro and are important hubs of the County of Boiano along the upper valley of Biferno. The earls of Venafro, Paldo and Morino, held outposts of Roccaravindola, Roccapiprozzi and Sesto Campano on the border with the Campania area ²³.

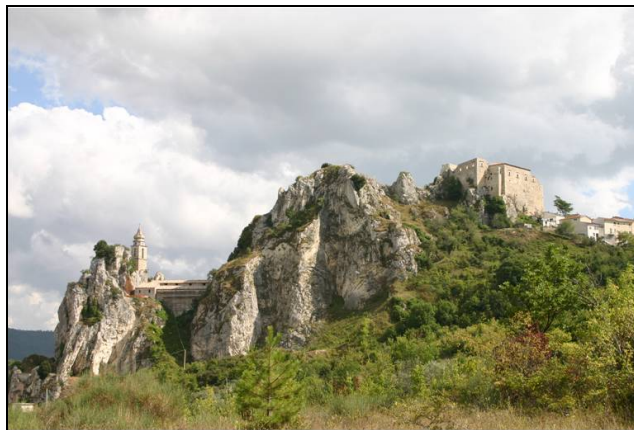


Figure 3: *Bagnoli del Trigno: castle (on the right), S. Silvestro Church (on the left)*
(Source: G. Di Rocco)

Longbard settlements, in the absence of a central power, had a character of independence that will be passed by Norman architecture with an extended domain and thorough defense on the territory, and these kind of data are perfectly provided by the *Catalogus baronum*, which delineate the new territorial organization accomplished by the Normans in Molise and all over the south of Italy from the first half of the XI century and shows how the castles constituted real checkpoints of the entire territory of Molise.

The topographic survey has cleared that many castles and fortified sites of the Middle Ages are in relationship with *oppida* of pre-Roman period. Some are directly set on the ancient Italian site, exploiting mostly the wall structures with additions and elevations. These settlements are: Santa Maria dei Vignali, Rocca di Oratino, The walls of Mennella, Valleporcina, Riporso, Monte Vairano, Boscoredole, Castelvecchio Sepino.

Other sites are at a short, often very short distance from the *oppida*: San Pietro Avellana is located two kilometers north-west of the fortified walls of Monte Miglio (1350 m), a complex structure with a small fort on the top of the mountain and a great circuit that partially encloses the underlying slope; Pietrabbondante whose castle is located about one kilometer north-east of the fortification of Monte Caraceno (1,212 m); at one kilometer on the north of Montalto, at Castello (1199 m), there is a fortified enclosure in polygonal works; there are the ruins of a pre-Roman *oppidum* at two kilometers north-west of Castiglione of Rionero Sannitico, in the area La Montagnola (1065 m); Carovilli built a few

²³ Di Rocco, 2009.

hundred meters north of the fortification of Monte Ferrante (1051 m); nearby Torre della Castagna on the Hill Casarine (888 m) there is part of a small *oppidum*; Montenero Valcocchiara located three kilometers north of the city walls of Monte Castellano-Cannalona (1,000 m); Rionero Sannitico at a short distance from the fortifications of La Montagnola (1065 m) and Montalto (1199 m); Forlì del Sannio at three kilometers south-west from the pre-Roman site of Castel Canonico (1078 m); Chiauci two kilometers north-east of Civita di Monte Sant'Onofrio (951 m); Civitanova del Sannio near the fortress of Civita; Duronia just north of the fortress of La Montagnola; Castel San Vincenzo located a few kilometers south of the site of Monte Portella (1053 m); Cerro al Volturno between the two enclosures of Monte Santa Croce (1124 m) and Monte della Foresta (994 m); Pesche on the slopes of Monte San Marco (920 m), where on the top there are the ruins of a polygonal complex; Frosolone in relation to the fortification of Colle dell'Orso (1393 m); Colli al Volturno just one kilometer north of the fortified area of Monte San Paolo (672 m); Sant'Agapito in relation to the polygonal walls of Monte Longo-Civitella (710 m); Longano in relation to the polygonal walls of Monte Longo-Civitella (710 m); Busso not far from the well-known Sannio settlement of Monte Vairano (997 m); San Polomatese located at a short distance from the pre-Roman structures in La Codarda (900 m); there are the polygonal walls of a fortification about two kilometers south of Campochiaro, at Le Tre Torrette, at an altitude between 1,375 m and 1290 over sea level walls; Guardiaregia in relation with the *oppidum* Colle di Rocco (1072 m); Sepino three kilometers south-east of *Saipins*-Terravecchia (953 m).

Although the scarcity of information, comparing the topographic data and the historical documentary has allowed us to find confirmation on the use of the *tratturi* in Molise during the Middle Ages.

In the Carovilli archive are preserved three letters, dated March 6th, 1340, March 23rd, 1344 and October 2nd, 1352, in which the earls of Durazzo denounced to Giovanni di Tauro from Naples, captain and vicar of Venafro and other lands of Abruzzo and Molise, that *homines castri de Piczis* had complained of some misappropriations of land by the inhabitants of the *castrum Calvelli*, after recalling to the memory of their vassals the letters containing the provisions on their lands taken in favour of Pietro di Cornay, lieutenant and vicar at the *castrum de Calvellis* (Carovilli). The judge and the notary, verified the lands, put new boundaries: «*Territorium autem predictum contemnosum per predictam inquisitionem compertum est infrascriptis finibus designari videlicet: prima finis dicti territorii protenditur usque ad locum qui nominatur Lo Stafele et deinde proceditur usque ad locum qui nominatur Le Prete Sancto Angelo et descendit ad locum qui dicitur Rivus Campani/nus qui Rivus Campaninus dividit territorium Castris Rocce Ciconis a dicto territorio; deinde protenditur dictum territorium descendendo per predictum rivum Campaninum usque ad Vallonem qui dicitur Vallonem de Piczis et ascendit dictum territorium per predictum vallonem usque ad locum qui dicitur Malapar/tire et per predictum Vallonem de Piczis protenditur dictum territorium castris de Piczis usque ad locum qui dicitur Lanconi et deinde protenditur dictum territorium a capite ipsius vallonis usque ad vicendam ecclesie Sancti Leucii et terram monasterii Sancti Petri de Casso et a predicta terra et vicenda Sancti Leucii et Sancti Petri protenditur / dictum territorium usque ad quendam locum qui dicitur Collis Iohannis de Rocca et a predicto Colle protenditur dictum territorium descendendo ad quendam stratam publicam itur a partes Apulie et a predicta strata protenditur dictum territorium descendendo ad quendam fontem qui nominatur Fons de Burrellis et a predicta fonte protenditur / ipsum territorium*

usque ad quendam alveum aque que decurrit et vadit ad flumen qui dicitur Trigno et ipsum territorium decurrit usque ad dictum flumen Trigni et usque ad flumen quod dicitur Rio Alvo quod flumen dividere dicitur dictum territorium et territorium castri Vinealium»²⁴.

Of all the places mentioned there is also 'one public road leading to Puglia', certainly a 'tratturo'. The territory of Carovilli was, and still is crossed by two major 'tratturi': the localization of some toponyms mentioned in the documents allow determining the 'public road' as the 'tratturo' Celano-Foggia. Indeed, there is at Monte Pizzi (1313 m above sea level) overlooking the valley of Trigno and is located north-west of Carovilli and north of the 'tratturo' Celano-Foggia; also the Stafele, now Staffoli, is located north of Carovilli; the toponym San Leucio remains just north of Celano-Foggia, at Colle Taverna, contiguous to that 'tratturo'; this church is mentioned by Sella for a tithe paid to the diocese of Trivento for the year 1309: *Ecclesia de S. Leuci Piczis*²⁵. We can confirm that, in the first half of the 14th century, there was a public road going through high Sannio up to Puglia; this way reused part of one of the ancient transhumance routes.



Figure 4: *Tratturo Castel di Sangro-Lucera and the hilltop of Pescolanciano with his castle (by G. Di Rocco)*

²⁴ Borri, Carnevale Caprice, Chierici, Vincelli, 1991.

²⁵ Sella, 1936: 336.

We have seen several examples of the connection between fortifications and 'tratturi' in Molise. It has emerged as the system of the 'tratturi', which is still peculiar of the regional landscape, is very articulate; here are some examples of the territory under investigation:

- The settlements of San Pietro Avellana, Vastogirardi, Carovilli, Pietrabbondante, Bagnoli del Trigno on the 'tratturo' Celano-Foggia;
- The settlements of Rionero Sannitico, Forli del Sannio, Roccasicura, Carovilli, Pescolanciano, Chiauci, Civitanova del Sannio, Duronia, Molise, Torella del Sannio, Oratino are on the 'tratturo' Castel di Sangro-Lucera;
- Rionero Sannitico, Forli del Sannio, Isernia, Miranda, Pettoranello of Molise, Castelpetroso, Sant'Angelo in Grotte, Cantalupo del Sannio, San Massimo, Boiano, San Polomatese, Campochiaro, Guardiaregia, Sepino are on the Pescasseroli-Candela;
- On the 'tratturello' Castel del Giudice-Sprondasino there are the settlements of Sprondasino and Bagnoli del Trigno;
- On the 'tratturello' Pescolanciano-Sprondasino there are the settlements of Pescolanciano, Chiauci, Civitanova del Sannio, Bagnoli del Trigno and Sprondasino;
- Vinchiaturro and Campochiaro are on the 'tratturello' Cortile-Matese.



Figure 5: *Pietrabbondante: the rock and the modern village (Source: Di Rocco)*

For the orography of the territory of Molise and the topographic, it is therefore clear that distribution of fortified settlements, the protohistoric 'tratturi' have continued to

represent the major ways of connection along the Middle Age. What was the geopolitical situation of Molise in the late Middle Age and how it was handled the complex economic system linked to the transhumance²⁶?

It is well known that in the Angevin period the neapolitan barons had secured substantial feudal estates in Molise. The long war of the Vespers between Angevins and Aragoneses, the need of the Anjou to keep weapons for a powerful army, the continual sale of land, are the factors that contributed greatly to empower the barons in the south to strength their positions and extend their incidence in the state apparatus.

Feudalism established itself in the local environment as the most powerful class succeeding in its hegemonic role, to give new impetus to the economy of many centers. For example since the first half of the 14th century, Campobasso, the regional capital today, saw a remarkable urban transformation, a major expansion into the valley and a big boost merchant under the pressure of his vassals.

However, at the same time the regional economy mainly based on agriculture and sheep farming registered some progress and this is clear thanks to the involvement of Molise in the rich markets and fairs in the whole south during the middle of that century. This phase of economic viability underwent an abrupt halt due to the severe demographic crisis that followed the pest of 1348, which was followed by numerous and catastrophic earthquakes²⁷.

These negative facts in the difficult economic situation contributed to accentuate the general discontent, provoke social conflict and encourage the depopulation of many towns and villages up to total dereliction of minor centers that in previous centuries were cultivated and new land was furrowed improving a restart in the transhumance²⁸.

Between the 14th and 15th century the territories of the area between the Trigno and Fortore had been included in the large estates of powerful local families whose main exponents were famous soldiers of fortune, the most famous were Riccardo Gambatesa, Giacomo, Antonio and Raimondo Caldora, Paolo di Sangro, Francesco Montagano, Nicola Monforte, Matteo di Capua. While, the Pandones had extended their own feud from Venafro to the whole western Molise area including the upper valley of the Volturno and Boiano, the Caldoras occupied the entire coast of Molise from the northern side of the valley of the Sangro until Manfredonia²⁹.

The bloody fight between Angevins and Aragoneses for possession of the Kingdom had also involved major Molise landowners and some of them took part in the struggle which had set Alfonso of Aragona against Renato Anjou. In the historic battle fought in Sessano of Molise in 1442 Antonio Caldora, heir of his father Giacomo and sided with the Anjou, was defeated and captured. The victory marked the Aragon king, therefore, the start of a policy for the provinces of the Kingdom. The Molise feudal geography was profoundly transformed. For royal decision the huge feud of the Pandones remained intact, while the defeated Caldora lands were divided between those who were pro the Aragonese cause. The Gambatesa family had obtained the lands between Campobasso and Termoli, while the di Sangro extended lands from the bottom Sangro until the Tavoliere, and so the

²⁶ Summary in Di Rocco, 2013.

²⁷ Colapietra, 1986: 20-42.

²⁸ Massullo, 2006: 44-51.

²⁹ Galasso, 1992: 368-387; Morra, 1985.

south of Molise³⁰. We can state that the profile of Molise, in that historical period, is characterized by the presence of small and demographically minor villages where all economic functions, particularly those agro-pastoral, continue to be concentrated in the hands of the great landowners.

These families exercise control on dozens of tiny groups contributing to outline the image of a fragmented area and far from being a compact and autonomous territorial unit³¹. When king Alfonso won, he began a massive political action in order to refound the old and obsolete state apparatus recruiting qualified staff able to streamline the cumbersome and now creaking Angevine administrative system introducing many trustful Catalan elements³². Five large territorial units were created and to the first, the “Terra di Lavoro” with Naples capital town, it was included the ‘Contado’ of Molise instead of the 12 Angevine ‘giustizierati’. In the 1447 the king worked out the *Regia Mena delle pecore di Puglia* with which gave back vitality to the pastoral economy of the Kingdom, with the intent to give new impetus to the transhumance which had been profoundly hit by the landlords oppression on the shepherds.

Under this statute, in fact, the feudal lords had been forced to rent lands to the state, while the ‘armentari’ were guaranteed with the passage of herds in exchange of a tax on each head of cattle. So the king had found clever way to limit the power of the local barons and, at the same time, to guarantee and ensure the Kingdom a huge tax revenue, a systematic, widespread control of the roads and the territory³³.

As soon as on the throne of Naples, King Alfonso, acute intellectual and deeply interested in humanistic culture, he worked on an ambitious renewal of the cultural capital of the Kingdom with some of the greatest exponents of the arts and sciences in Italy in those years; Ferrante, son of king Alfonso and his successor, continued on this line. The echo of this renewal reached the inner peripheral and apparently areas of Kingdom, far from cultural aspirations, including the County of Molise. It was pointed out how the influence on the cities of the Kingdom of Aragon was on the military aspect and as well on the civil, architectural and artistic; to quote Labrot the city became ‘the synthesis of the warrior spirit and the refined intellectualism of the Aragon kings’³⁴.

At the mid-fifteenth century the ‘Contado’ of Molise was totally absorbed by the institution of the ‘Dogana’ with all the economical, social and cultural effects that results; as always along the roads not only people and goods move, but also artistic movements, ideas, cultural ferment. This welfare period was suddenly interrupted by the disastrous earthquake on December 4, 1456, known as the earthquake of Santa Barbara, which swept away much of the Southern Apennines area. In his letter to the duke Francesco Sforza, the ambassador of Milano, Antonio da Trezzo, reported a very detailed picture of the ruins caused by the earthquake in Molise: «...le castella del Contado del Molise sono quasi tute per terra»³⁵.

³⁰ Galasso, 1992: 385-387; Brancaccio, 2008: 46-47.

³¹ Brancaccio, 2005: 124-130.

³² Croce, 1966: 37-88.

³³ Musto, 1964.

³⁴ Labrot, 1991: 235.

³⁵ Figliuolo, 1988: 29-30.



Figure 6: G. A. Rizzi Zannoni, *Atlante Geografico del Regno di Napoli*, 1808, extract.

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