

Settlement in the “Salinae area” (Calabria), from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages: an example of sovereignty changes in Southern Italy

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Calabria (Italy); settlement; sovereignty

Introduction

The main goal of this paper is represented by the evaluation of the settlement in the *Salinae* area from Late Antiquity to the end of the Middle Ages. The study is connected with the doctorate thesis in “Archaeology and Post-Classical Antiquities (III–XI centuries)” of the first University of Rome.

Notwithstanding the fact that few archaeological evidence has yet been unearthed, different written sources prove the importance of the *Salinae* in the early part of the Middle Ages. In fact, it was a fertile area and important people lived there. The productive role of Southern Calabria in Late Antiquity for Keay 52 *amphorae* was already evident.

In Late Antiquity, the *Bruttium* economy was connected to the *annona*. Evidence is shown in the production of meat (especially bovine and pig), wine (probably for the *titulus canonicus vinarius*), wheat (from the 4th–5th century for the *annona*, especially after 430 A.D.) and pottery above all for wine (Panella 1993, 647–648; Noyé 1994, 699–700; Pacetti 1998, 189; Raimondo 1998, 541; Panella 1999, 183). We have to consider also fishing (with the production of *garum*), timber from Sila and the Aspromonte mountains and the working of glass and metals (Noyé 1991, 520; Cuteri 1994, 350–353; Raimondo 1998, 540–541).

I. Geographic area

This paper is about an area that corresponds to the present Plain of Gioia Tauro (in the province of Reggio Calabria), on the Tyrrhenian coast of Southern Calabria (fig. 1). It is one of the few level areas of the region and, only a few kilometres from the coast, there are the mountains of Aspromonte. The origin of the

toponym “*Salinae*” is connected to the presence of stagnant water along the Petrace river, between the present-day towns of Palmi and Gioia Tauro (Rossi-Taibbi 1962, 206; Guillou 1971, 23).

In ancient times, it was called the “*Salinae* area”. The first mentioning of this toponym seems to be in the *Vita Tauri* (8th century A.D.), a legendary story, in the biography of Saint Pancrazio of Taormina (Saletta 1963, 44; van Esbroek/Zanetti 1988, 167; Angiò 1994, 123; Minuto 1999, 319–320). Then, the same toponym was used to identify the place where St. Elia, the Young, built his monastery (Rossi-Taibbi 1962, rr. 595, 762, 782, 1157, 1166, 1403, 1607). In the collection of the 47 deeds of gift to the cathedral of Oppido (dated between 1050 and the 1064/1065 A.D.), there is the first mentioning of the *Salinae* as a “*turma*”, a Byzantine district (Guillou 1971). This Greek collection was written on the verso of the *Brebian* of Reggio, where the toponym *Salinae* is often mentioned (Guillou 1974, 507–511). In the same period, the *Salinae* are mentioned in the biography of St. Luca, the bishop of Isola Capo Rizzuto (Schirò 1954, 84).

At the beginning of the Norman age, the toponym was connected to the level aspect of the area and the expression “*vallis Salinarum*”, was used as described Goffredo Malaterra in the main events of the period between 1057 and 1059 (Rossi-Taibbi 1962, 205–206; Pontieri 1964, 157, 181; Guillou 1974, 62).

II. The Roman heritage and the Late Antiquity: towns and *villae*

In the Roman age, the settlement was located most of all along the coast with a few *Municipia* and *Coloniae*, rather small towns and big

villae (Grelle/Volpe 1999, 89–98). The main roads in Late Antiquity and in the Early-Middle Ages are the same as the Roman period and, sometimes, the same pre-Roman ones. They are streets, rivers and sea routes connected to ports. In the *Salinae* network of roads, one can distinguish coastal and interior streets or water-ways. The *via Annia* or *Popilia* was the main Roman street of Calabria and ran along the Tyrrhenian coast. It was built in the second century B.C. and was an extension of the *via Appia* to Reggio (Givigliano 1994, 243–362, 287–290). Also, along the coast, there was another street that reached Tauriana.

Between the Tyrrhenian and Ionian coasts, there was a network of roads, probably with pre-Roman origins, set out in an “herring-bone” pattern: the road from present-day Gioia Tauro to Bovalino, the road between the ancient *Medma* and Locri and the one that started at Rosarno and reached Melicucco, S. Giorgio Morgeto and the Ionian coast (Settis 1972, 45–49). Tauriana was a coastal town, between *Scyllaeum* and the *Metauros* river (the present Petrace river). This town has pre-Roman origins and was the main settlement in the *Salinae* area. In fact, it was one of the oldest seat

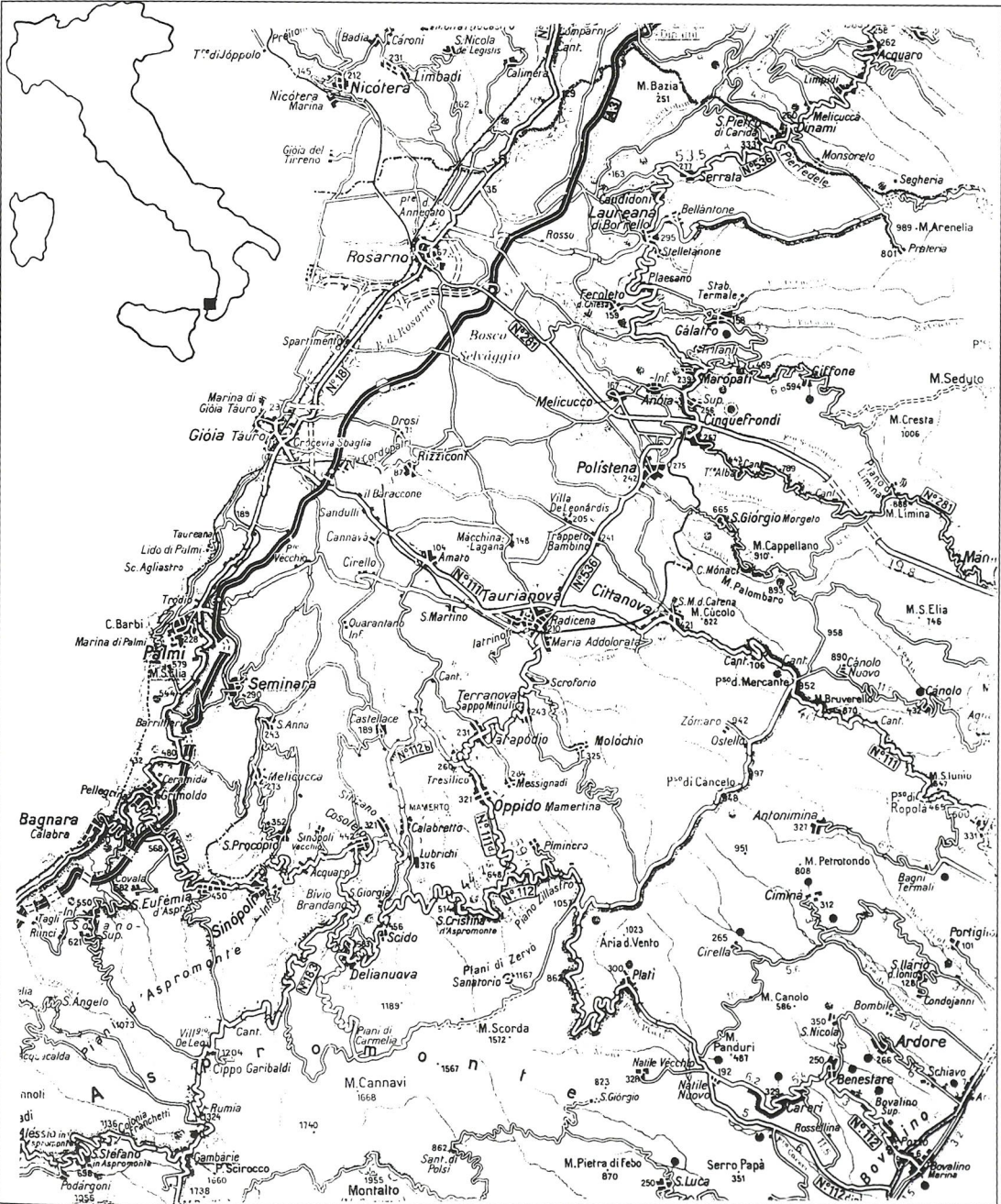


Figure 1.

of the bishop in Calabria. The importance of this town is based also on the connection with the *via Popilia* and the presence of one or two ports, used in the Middle Ages too. In fact, they were mentioned in the *Tabula Peutingeriana* and in the Early-Medieval written sources (De Salvo 1886, 63–64; Rossi-Taibbi 1962, 116–119; Settis 1987, 63, 70; Zinzi 1999, 22–23).

The *villae*, dating most of all from the Roman-Imperial age, were built along the coast, near the streets and along the rivers. They seem to be connected to the cultivation of wheat, vine, olive-tree and the cattle-breeding. In fact, the ruins of them are all between the Tyrrhenian Sea and the *Popilia* street or along the roads that ran coast to coast, as the one that connected the Plain of Gioia Tauro to Locri-Gerace, on the Ionian coast (Guillou 1971, 18; Ficcardori 1994, 73).

The *villae*, identified in the *Salinae* area, are in the territory of Rosarno (Calderazzo, Massaro Nino and Croce di Tronco), in the territory of Gioia Tauro (Pietra and Terra della Chiesa) and in the territory of Palmi (Scinà and S. Fantino). Only the *villae* of Palmi lasted to the 5th century A.D., and they were used also as cemeteries (Costabile 1976, 83–89; Jorquera-Nieto 1991, 5–58, 197–199; Acconcia-Longo 1999, 534; Accardo 2000, 167–169).

The period between the first century B.C. and the first A.D. seems to be very important for the *Salinae* settlement: a first group of *villae* was abandoned (for example, the ones of Calderazzo and Croce di Tronco) and new ones were built along the coast (*villae* of Pietra, Scinà, S. Fantino). Moreover, in this period the first inland town of Oppido was founded (between the first and the second quarter of the first century B.C.), linking the coastal settlement of Tauriana (Costamagna, Visonà 1999, 256).

III. Early-Middle Ages, Byzantine period: *Salinae* settlement

On the basis of written and archaeological sources, this part of the research investigates the different typology of the *Salinae* settlements in the first part of the Middle Ages: towns, *villae*, rural villages, strongholds, caves and monasteries.

The main sources for this period are the “Lives” of Early-Medieval Saints that lived

there, deeds of gift to the cathedral of Oppido (or to monasteries) and archaeological data. On the basis of these sources, an interior network of roads with extreme points in Tauriana, Sinopoli, Delianuova, S. Cristina, Oppido and Radicena was identified. Important crossroads were at a place called “Ponte Vecchio”, on the Petrace river (where the *Popilia* street ran), the area of the present village of Castellace and that one of Radicena (ancient Byzantine rural village or *chorion*) (Saletta 1960, 86–90). In the *Bios* of St. Elia, the Young, and in the *Bios* of St. Elia from Reggio (or the “Speleota”), both coastal and interior settlements are mentioned. It seems that they belonged to the same organization of the territory, where the mountain settlements had a defensive aspect, as S. Cristina.

Thus, in the middle of the Middle Ages, the defensive settlement in the *Salinae* area is dated. It concerned the interior and mountainous part of the region and was based on numerous rural villages (*choria*), connected by roads to few strongholds (*kastra* and *kastellia*). In this period, it seems to be a close connection between the network of roads and some kind of settlements of the *Salinae* area: most of all, churches and monasteries, both for the spreading of worship and for the position of the buildings. Moreover, some interior roads linked *choria* and strongholds. Numerous inland roads had a very old origin and they ran on slopes of inner plateaus to reach the numerous streams of this area. In fact, these roads had also a productive connotation, as the presence of mills and water-mills along them shows. This network brought about the foundation of new villages too (Costamagna, Visonà 1999, 139–153, 177–183).

The settlement of this period was spread over three large areas, that lay parallel to the coast: a coastal zone, an intermediate hilly zone and an interior one, mountainous most of all in the Southern part (fig. 1).

At the beginning of the Middle Ages, the coastal zone was still characterized by settlements (towns and *villae*) and a network of roads founded in the Roman age, however a lot of *villae* were deserted or re-used. This zone was the centre and most important area of the *Salinae* up to the 10th century A.D. for the presence of Tauriana, an ancient seat of the bishop, from the 6th or even from the middle of the 4th century A.D. From the middle of the

11th century, Tauriana had only a devotional role, connected to the presence of the church of St. Fantino (De Salvo 1886, 80–96; Costabile 1976; Buonocore 1987, 13–14; Settis 1987, 83–84; Falcone, Minuto, Oliva, Venoso 1998, 1233–1235).

On the basis of the *Bios* of St. Fantino the Old, written by a bishop called Pietro, we know that Tauriana existed in the 8th or 9th century A.D., even if it was lately put to sack. Moreover, Tauriana spread out to the North (perhaps at the beginning of the Imperial times) because Pietro wrote that its ruins were on both the banks of the *Metauros* river (Saletta 1963, 105–106; Acconcia-Longo 1999).

There are different traditions associated with the end of Tauriana: it was abandoned after a lot of Arab sacks in the Early-Middle Ages (most of all after that one of 951 A.D.) or it was deserted only in the second half of the 11th century A.D., together with the dissolution of its episcopate and the foundation of the Mileto one (De Salvo 1886, 107–113; Guillou 1971, 28).

It is possible that the concentration of caves between the present town of Palmi and Tauriana dates back just to the period soon after the desertion of the ancient town. It should be another example of a “rupestrian district”, perhaps connected to seasonal rural frequentation, as the ones identified near the Byzantine *kastra* of Santa Severina, Rossano, Gerace and Stilo (Cuteri/Iannelli 2000, 216).

The first mentionings of the monachism in the *Salinae* area are in the letters of St. Gregorio the Great (end of the 6th century), regarding the flight of monks from Tauriana to nearby Sicily because of a “Barbarian” invasion (Fiacadori 1994, 728–730). More numerous are the written sources about the Byzantine monachism between the 8th and the 10th century: the Greek *Bios* of St. Fantino the Old, the *Bios* of St. Elia from Enna (or the Young) and the *Bios* of St. Elia the “Speleota”. They describe the spreading of monachism from the coast (above all St. Fantino at Tauriana) to the inland and mountain areas, where a large network of subordinate monasteries (*metochia*) is mentioned, placed along the streets and with an important agricultural role.

The intermediate zone is 3.5–5.5 kms away from the present-day coast and it is 250–300 m above sea level. In the Early-Middle Ages, it was characterized by the presence of

rural villages (*choria*) and big monasteries. The *choria* mentioned are not very numerous, but the monasteries of this zone are the most important ones in the *Salinae* area: in fact, the monastery of St. Elia the Young and that of St. Elia the Speleota were between Seminara, Melicuccà and the present mount of St. Elia, South of Palmi.

The *Salinae* monachism was coenobitical and was connected to the two Saints called Elia. In fact, this kind of monachism resulted from the organization of different spontaneous hermit experiences in Calabria of the 10th century A.D. The rupestrian character of the *Salinae* monachism is connected to the life of St. Elia Speleota that founded his monastery in caves near Melicuccà (A.S. Sept. III 1750, 865 A–B; Morini 1999, 285–298).

The *choria* origins are connected to the Byzantine Reconquest, when there was a new organization of the territory: from the 9th century A.D. we have evidence of this kind of settlement, often with older churches or monasteries. In the first part of 11th century, the fortification of the settlement, by Byzantine Authorities, seems to put the *choria* in crisis (Guillou 1976, 251–253; Arslan 1990, 88).

At the end of the Byzantine age, the *Salinae* area was very fertile. The production of cereals, vegetables, wine, oil, fruits and the exploitation of the mountain resources of the Aspromonte (pasture, timber and resins) and of the abundant water (salt pans and water-mills) are mentioned. This fertile picture was connected to the truce in the fight against the Arabs, for the troubles in the Sicilian Emirate and by Byzantine military successes, just before the Norman Conquest (Guillou 1971, 18; Guillou 1972, 30; von Falkenhausen 1978, 64–65; Zinzi 1999, 35).

We have little information about the material aspects of these settlements. On the basis of the written sources, the *choria* of the inner part should be only about 2 kms away each other. It is not known if the *choria* estates had a concentric disposition around these villages, as Guillou supposed, or if the villages were founded along the roads and their estates were expanded instead inland (Guillou 1971, 11–12).

Written sources and archaeological findings show some concentration of rural villages on the plateaus of Castellace, Tresilico, Oppido and Varapodio and in the mountainous and



Figure 2.

inland areas of the Southern *Salinae*, with the *choria* of Sinopoli, Cosoleto, Sitizano, S. Giorgia, Scido and Pedavoli (village of the present-day Delianuova). Among the *choria*, Buzzano was bigger and more important than the other ones because it was mentioned as the seat of a *drungos* (another Byzantine district, smaller than the *turma*) and with a “tower” (*purgos*).

Other rural settlements smaller than the *choria* are also mentioned. They were called *topoi* and were perhaps subordinate to the *choria* and connected to caves, like at Stilo. It is possible that funerary findings in the inner plateaus (dating from 6th/7th – 9th century A.D.) belonged to this kind of rural settlement (De Franciscis 1957, 189–190; Guillou 1974, n. 6; Costabile 1976, 117, fig. 17; Iacoe 1984, 97–102; Sabbione 1986; Lebole-Di Gangi 1991, 575–598; Paoletti 1994, 492–493; Costamagna, Visonà 1999, 122–123, 131, 135–136; Cuteri, Iannelli 2000, 218).

In the Byzantine period, the most numerous information is connected to the inner zone of the *Salinae*. It is a mountainous area, that was characterized, between the 9th and the 11th century, by the presence of the same kind of settlements we have seen above in the

intermediate zone. The differences are in the large group of *choria* and about the subordinate nature of the monasteries. The Early-Medieval settlement of the intermediate and inner zones of the *Salinae* is traditionally connected to the arrival of fugitives from Tauriana, but also from Ionian settlements, from the half of the 10th century.

The growth of agricultural production of the *Salinae* seems also to be connected to the presence of *metochia*, small subordinate monasteries that administered the monastic estates. At the end of the Byzantine age, there was a close network of *metochia* in the inner part of *Salinae*, along the roads that ran to the outskirts of Seminara, where the most important *Salinae* monasteries were founded (Morini 1999, 295; Cuteri/Iannelli 2000, 217).

The interior area was both characterized by a clear agricultural connotation and some settlements with a natural defensive aspect. These elements are part of a territorial organization that dates back perhaps to the Late-Hellenistic time. The written sources mentioned *choria* together with Early-Medieval strongholds, like the *purgos* of Buzzano or the fortress of S. Cristina (Rossi-Taibbi 1962, 65). Moreover, in this area, at the end of the Byzantine age,

the town of S. Agata-Oppido was founded, the new seat of the bishop in the *Salinae*, near the Italic settlement of Mella, then turned into a Roman stronghold. The defensive nature of S. Agata is clear, built in an inland and mountainous area, really different from Tauriana, a coastal town, strictly connected to a network of streets with pre-Roman origins. From the first half of the 11th century, Oppido was the main settlement of the *Salinae*, when Tauriana was almost all deserted. The Medieval Oppido was besieged in 1060 by Earl Ruggiero and the city surrendered to the Normans, with good terms of surrender (Frasca 1930, 18–19; Guilhou 1971, 24–28; Rullo 1995, 49; Costamagna, Visonà 1999, 256–257).

IV. Norman and Swabian age

The Norman age in Calabria is mentioned as a very rich period, both for agriculture and for trade. According to the “Book of Ruggero”, an Islamic source written in Palermo by Idrisi (from 1139 to 1154), the towns were small (Zinzi 1999, 41). The organization of the territory looked like the Byzantine one, however the Normans arranged a more centralized settlement with a network of important strongholds, often towns with cathedrals, and smaller fortresses on the coast (like Scilla) (Zinzi 1999, 38–39). We have little archaeological data for the Norman *Salinae* settlements and the only written sources are the “Cronaca del Malaterra” (end of the 12th century) and the “Calabria” by Idrisi (in the times of the Kingdom). Still in the 16th century, one can distinguish the main network of streets on the Tyrrhenian coast and mountain roads in the inner and Southern area. In particular, some streets reached the Ionian coast and an inner road ran northwards. An important coastal road junction of this period was Bagnara, a big medieval harbour in the Southern Tyrrhenian coast of Calabria (Minuto 1999, 324).

The network of roads in the *Salinae* area still exists today, as the settlement organization: the present motorway called A3 has the same lay-out of the ancient *via Popilia*; the N. 111, from Gioia Tauro to Locri or Oppido Mamertina, the N. 112, Bagnara-Bovalino Marina and the N. 112bis, in the Castellace area are very similar to the ancient roads that ran from coast to coast (fig. 1).



Figure 3 and 4.



For the *Salinae*, the mentioned fortresses in the Norman age are the town of Oppido and S. Martino, in the Northern part of the area (Zinzi 1999, 40). The history of Seminara, mentioned as *chorion* in the second half of the 10th century, seems to be more complex. It had big growth in the Norman age. In this period, the area called "Borgo" was fortified, a present-day Southern suburb of the town. The written sources mentioned also important monasteries in the Norman *Salinae* area. They were strongly organized and looked like real towns with churches and productive structures. Among the Norman monasteries, the one of St. Maria and 12 Apostles was prestigious. It was founded between 1082 and 1083, on the hill called "Martorano", near Bagnara. This monastery was included in the Norman Latinization of the Greek regions of Southern Italy. At the end of the 12th century to the half of the next century, the "Florense" branch moved away from the Cistercian monachism, that probably included the monastery of Bagnara (Zinzi 1999, 47–48).

V. Angevin period

The Angevin period in Calabria was disreputable: it was mentioned as "*mala signoria*", considering the fights and political instability that characterized this period of more than 170 years. In 1266 A.D., Carlo d'Angiò ascended the throne of Sicily. Therefore, the Southern part of Italy was unified until the conquest of Sicily by the Aragoneses (1282 A.D.). In this period, the settlement was militarized and the centralized organization of the territory, that was a characteristic of the region until the Swabian age, ended (Zinzi 1999, 58–59).

At the beginning of the 14th century, 35 deserted settlements are mentioned in the area between Mileto and Oppido, due to tax pressure and the war. The former network of roads continued to be used in the Angevin period, even if the roads and the sea routes were insecure for the continuous state of war. Rosarno and Seminara were the main road-crossings of the *Salinae* area. The harbours of *Ioiam* (the present-day Gioia Tauro) and Bagnara were also mentioned. The coast defence of the *Salinae* area was divided in two zones: the first one was that of S. Martino and the second one

was a Southern area, between Bagnara and S. Fantino (Zinzi 1999, 64–70). In a written source of 1269, the *castra* of S. Giorgio and of S. Cristina are mentioned. At S. Cristina, there are remains of a fortress, dated between the end of the 13th century and the 14th century (Martorano 1996, 111).

Between 1269 and 1284, several Angevin documents mentioned works in State castles, by noblemen and ecclesiastic foundations of Bagnara, Scilla, Seminara, Oppido, Sinopoli, the abbeys of St. Bartolomeo, St. Lucia, St. Filarete, St. Fantino and St. Giovanni in Lauro. On the basis of a 1276 document, the main settlement of the *Salinae* in this period was Seminara, where an important Jewish community is mentioned at the end of the 13th century (Zinzi 1999, 60–63). Seminara was occupied by Pietro d'Aragona in 1283 and enfeoffed by Duke Carlo Spinelli. Moreover, in the Franciscan province, Seminara is mentioned in the 14th century as an important seat, with a monastery built "*ad urbi ingressum in publica platea*". In Oppido, the remains of an Angevin tower are still seen (Liberti 1978).

In 1999, archaeological excavations took place in the monastery of St. Marina, near the Byzantine *chorion* of Pedavoli, by the Archaeological Soprintendenza of Calabria and by the first University of Rome (Guillou 1972, nn. 7, 9; 38, 5; 43, 4; 44, 13; Minuto 1999, 429–431; Zagari 2000, 270). This monastery was probably built in the Byzantine period, but was still around the 18th century. In particular, the excavations unearthed findings dating between the second half of the 13th century and the 14th century. Remains of glass production were also identified probably dating back to the second half of the Middle Ages. So, the Norman Conquest seems not to have been so destructive for the Byzantine settlement.

VI. Aragonese period

The Aragonese period lasted from 1442 to 1503. In this period, the Kingdom of Naples had more activity in the Western part of the Mediterranean Sea, because the dynasties of Italy and Spain were connected. Under the Aragoneses, the middle class was formed in Calabria, with the *Universitas Civium* and there was a new organization, both of monasteries and strongholds (Zinzi 1999, 70–73).

Moreover, an increase in economic and trade activities was reported, also connected to the market culture. The revolts against the Aragoneses, the war between Ferrante the 1st and Giovanni d'Angiò and the French invasion damaged the economy of the region (Zinzi 1999, 74–77).

In two battles (1495 and 1503) at Seminara the French were defeated by Consalvo of Cordova and by Ugo of Cardona (Caligiuri 2001, 339). In the *Salinae* area, the written sources of this period mentioned the settlements of S. Cristina, Plaisano, Sinopoli, Terranova, Seminara and Oppido. In this last town, there is an Aragonese tower, near the Northern gate of the city (Frasca 1930, tav. IV).

In the middle of the 16th century, the coastal settlement returned in the *Salinae* area, deserted in the Early-Middle Ages. A network of fortresses was built and promoted by the Spanish viceroy, Don Pedro of Toledo, to defend the Tyrrhenian coast. The *Salinae* is said to have a stronghold, built by the duke of Seminara Carlo Spinelli, in 1564, to enclose the settlement in the place called "*ad palmas*" (the present town of Palmi). In fact, it was damaged by numerous Arab raids, most of all the one of 1549. "(Duke Carlo Spinelli) ...fece riedificare secondo una pianta regolare, e designata da uomini di guerra, la terra di Palma nel sito stesso ove sorgeva, e che allora trovavasi in gran parte diruta per le devastazioni sofferte da Dragut; ed intorno alla piccola città, in forma quadrata, fece edificare le mura, ben alte, con a ciascuno dei quattro angoli, una torre pure quadrata e attaccata alle mura di cinta: le quali si scorgono ancora, ove più ove meno rovinate, e confuse in più parti, con case ad esse addossate, o che sorgono su di esse. Da ciò poi, col volere del popolo riconoscente e col consenso di questo munificente feudatario, provenne il

nome di Carlopoli alla rinnovata Palmi, in omaggio al nome che questi aveva, e in memoria di lui" (De Salvo 1899, 158–159).

This fortress was called "*Cittadella*" or "*Carlopoli*", after its founder. It is represented in a bas-relief with the entry of Carlo the 5th in Seminara and in a bronze medal (De Salvo 1886, 1–15). At the same time, on the coast sighting towers were built: the tower of St. Francesco (no longer existent) was built on the headland of Capo Barbi, in front of the *Cittadella*, and the one of Pietrenere was built in 1565 on S. Fantino plateau.

The *Cittadella* had a rectangular plan, with a tower on each corner. We can only see the remains of the N-W tower. The S-E tower was in the area of the present Rimembranze avenue and was demolished in 1921. Ruins of the other towers were between the present-day Rosselli street and Pizi street and in the Irrera garden. Part of the Southern wall was used as the basement of Suriano's palace (fig. 2). All the houses on the Western wall were built on the Western side of the present-day *Cittadella* street. A gate (*Portello*) was on the Western side of the fortress facing the ancient port of Palmi (*Marinella*). Other gates are mentioned on the Eastern side (near the present-day church of Soccorso and near Manfroce street) and beside the apse of the church of Crocifisso. The latter was opened to the ancient village, in the area of the present church of Carmine.

The building technique on the surface of the walls was based on the use of blocks and little and irregular splinters of local granite, bonded together with mortar (fig. 3). The core of the walls is made of the same materials of the faces, but they are arranged with less regularity and larger use of mortar. The *Cittadella* was built on the natural rock and walls and towers have externally a scarp profile (fig. 4).

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