

THE BOUNDARIES OF URBAN HEALTH POLICY: LOCAL POWERS, *CHOLERA MORBUS* AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN SICILY IN 1837. THE PROJECTS OF THE STRANGE “REORDER” OF THE *CIVITA* DISTRICT IN CATANIA¹

LES LIMITES DE LA POLITIQUE DE SANTÉ URBAINE: LES POUVOIRS LOCAUX, LE CHOLERA MORBUS ET LES DYNAMIQUES SOCIALES EN SICILE EN 1837. LES PROJETS DE LA “RÉORGANISATION” ÉTRANGE DU QUARTIER CIVITA À CATANE

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RÉSUMÉ

Le but de cet article est de mettre en évidence les événements historiques d'une ville du Royaume des Deux-Siciles dans les premières décennies du XIXe siècle, face à la réalisation de certaines interventions urbaines visant à améliorer les conditions de santé publique au sein d'un quartier avec beaucoup de risques sanitaires. Le cas d'étude que nous avons pris en considération est le conflit politique entre le gouvernement municipal et la *Intendenza* de Catane sur l'approbation des projets sanitaires pour rétablir les conditions du quartier “malsain” de la *Civita* face à l'urgence de choléra de 1837. Dans ce contexte, devant la gestion du financement du projet, les pouvoirs locaux, urbain et provincial, commencent une confrontation compliquée qui subvertit la typologie sanitaire du projet et se termine avec l'approbation de certaines interventions qui ressemblent plus à des œuvres de réorganisation urbaine que sanitaire. En ce sens, cette enquête se concentrera sur la façon dont les conflits et les tensions créées par l'administration de la ville finalement désavantagent la véritable urgence sanitaire et la sauvegarde de la population du quartier.

Mots-clés: Histoire Urbaine; Institutions de Santé Publique au XIXème siècle; *Cholera Morbus*; Sebastiano Ittar; Mario Musumeci; Cartographie digital; Royaume des Deux-Siciles; Catania.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to highlight the historical events of a city of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in the first decades of the nineteenth century, when some urban interventions aimed at improving the conditions of public health within a district with health risk. The case study here is the political conflict between the municipal government of Catania and the *Intendenza* on the approval of health projects to restore the conditions of the “unhealthy” *Civita* district with the emergency of cholera in 1837. In this context, before the management of the financing of the project, the local city planning and provincial powers started a complicated contrast subverting the type of the project, ending up with the approval of some interventions that look more like works of urban rather than health reorganisation. In this sense, this research will focus on how the conflicts and tensions created by the city administration ultimately hindered the real health emergency and the safeguarding of the population of the district.

Keywords: Urban History, Public Health Institutions in 19th century, *Cholera Morbus*, Sebastiano Ittar, Mario Musumeci, Digital Cartography, Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Catania.

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In the first decades of the nineteenth century, when the spread of *Cholera Morbus* in European territories was already unstoppable, most of the States elaborated preventive countermeasures to contain the health emergency. In the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, besides the creation of special structures with special powers, these measures involved almost all traditional institutions that were usually responsible for the government of extra-urban and urban areas (SHEARD, POWER, 2000; LOPEZ, 2012). About the latter, to better understand the scope of the interventions that in those years local governments decide to apply within their urban space, we will try to reconstruct the political events and the different project ideas implemented to prevent the epidemic spread of cholera in the “unhealthy” *Civita* district in Catania (CALABRESE et al., 2005; RESTUCCIA, PALUMBO, 1999). This city, geographically located on the eastern side of Sicily, in the third decade of the nineteenth century has already a population of 52,433 inhabitants (LONGHITANO, 1989). Its urban area consists of a large residential complex adjacent to the sea that stretches to North towards Mount Etna (AYMARD, GIARRIZZO, 2007; SCALISI, 2009; IACHELLO, 2010; GIARRIZZO, 2012) (fig. 1).



Figure 1. The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (1816-1861) is located in the southern part of Europe and occupies a large part of the southern territory of the Italian peninsula.

As for the dynamics of local powers applied to the space management in Sicily, the methodological premises underlying this survey are represented by Enrico Iachello’s reflections (IACHELLO, 1994, pp. 241-266) With regard to the studies that put the centre of their attention in the historical facts related to the issue of *Cholera Morbus* in the modern age, the most authoritative researches must include those of Michel Vovelle (1961), Paolo Preto

(1988) and Charles Rosenberg (2012); within this context, we must also remember another research by Iachello that pays special attention to the dynamics of Sicilian administrative powers dealing with health emergencies (2000).

In our case, after a brief historical contextualisation of the events and the administrative framework of urban space governance, we will investigate the different interpretations of the general interventions made to prevent the spreading of the cholera epidemic in the district facing the area of the new port of the city. These aspects will also be investigated using a tool which is not frequently used for reading the urban space: thematic cartography (BAVOUX, 2010; ARNAUD, 2008; ZANIN, TREMELO, 2003).

1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

With the beginning of the new century, once Napoleonic destabilisations were put to an end, the ruler Ferdinand I, who with the Constitution of 1812 had made the Kingdom of Sicily independent, leaves Palermo and moves to Naples. There he abrogates the rights granted to the Sicilians and aggregates the two realms in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies³. One of the first measures that the “new” sovereign emanates, in order to consolidate the royal absolutism and to secure his control of Sicily, is that of October 11th 1817 which reforms the administration of the island (TORRISI, 1985; SPAGNOLETTI, 1985; PEZZINO, 1998; IACHELLO, 2010). Set aside the ancient division into three valleys, the new tool divides the island's space into seven *Intendenze* (County Councils) (Palermo, Catania, Messina, Siracusa⁴, Girgenti, Trapani, Caltanissetta), governed by an *Intendente*⁵ (County Councillor) appointed by the government, in a devolution of functions, aimed at an extensive process of control over municipal activities (CASAMENTO, 1986, p. XIII).

With this reform, the authority in charge of the municipal administration is entrusted to the Mayor, assisted by the “elected” and a *Decurionato* (City Council). All the members of this body come from the lists of those eligible (made by the *Intendente*); these, after taking the oath, have the task of designating the heads of the city government. The difference between these new charges and the old Civic Councils is the disappearance of their “elective nature”, they are in fact now all appointed by the King (DI MATTEO, 2006, p. 430). With this new system the positions are chosen with the system of triads, that is for each position to be

³ The legal unification of the two kingdoms is sanctioned by the decree of December 8th 1816 (GIARRIZZO, 1989; SPAGNOLETTI, 1997).

⁴ As a result of the political events of 1837, with the Royal Decree of August 23rd, the Capital City of the *Intendenza* is moved from Siracusa to Noto.

⁵ In the administration of the *Intendenza*, which is the seat of the Provincial Council, there are also a General Secretary, a council and a Secretariat of the *Intendenza*. In turn the *Intendenze* are divided into districts guided by a *Sotto-intendente* with its own secretariat and District Council (*Collezione*, 1818, pp. 245-290).

filled (Mayor, Elected, Chancellor, archivist, Treasurer) each *Decurione* (City Councillor) proposes to the *Intendente* three names; the *Intendente* then gives the names to the general lieutenant in Palermo who later proceeds to the appointment (DE SIMONE, 1817).

The organisation and control of the apparatus lost their “centrality” in front of the emergencies that required a quick execution. At the beginning of the third decade, with the arrival of the first information on the presence of the epidemic of cholera in Europe, one of the themes that change the dynamics of the State, of Local Authorities and of society is the health emergency (ALIBRANDI, 2012, pp. 116-149; 2013). In this contest, the institutions directly related to health (the Magistrate of Health and its Deputations), together with the social groups close to it (the physicians), redefine the power relations to their advantage (IACHELLO, 2000, p. 55). Facing this emergency, healthcare in Sicily «becomes the category of favourite appropriation of political space»⁶. In this background, on October 8th 1832, they launch a regulation establishing in each *Capo-luogo di Valle*⁷ a provincial Commission of Public Health under the chairmanship of the *Intendente*⁸. The attempt to redefine the control and defence of the territory from this terrible disease is entrusted to this commission with the establishment of *cordons sanitaires* aimed at monitoring goods and people in transit. In addition to this organ, local commissions are also provided in each city hosting an *Intendenza* (County Council) «according to the number of sections or parishes, which will be built up of two *Decurioni* (County Councillors), two Notables of the town and one or two physicians. The respective parish priest will rightfully attend it. If necessary in every section, or parish, one or more commissions will be elected under the dependence of the commissions of the sections»⁹. Eventually, there are also commissions in each municipality composed by «Mayor president, by three notables, by the first ecclesiastical authority, by priests, or chaplains of the urban areas and by two physicians»¹⁰.

With this new organisation the *Intendenti* (County Councillor) recover an important role, even if they have to accept a partial compromise with municipal authorities and local notables (PEZZINO, 1998, pp. 25-35). These in turn, traditionally competing with the

⁶ Ivi, p. 56 «diventa la categoria di appropriazione privilegiata dello spazio politico» (IACHELLO, 2000, p. 56). In this essay we decided to keep the original text in the endnotes, translating it into English in the paragraphs.

⁷ Administrative centre of the *Intendenza*.

⁸ A separate discipline, however, states that in Palermo, which reaffirms its role as capital, a Central Commission is established under the direct control of the *Magistrato Supremo* bypassing *de facto* the control of the *Intendente*.

⁹ «secondo il numero di sezioni o parrocchie; le quali saran composte di due Decurioni, due Notabili del paese, e uno o due Medici. Il Parroco rispettivo vi assisterà di diritto. Quando la necessità lo esiga saranno eletti in ogni sezione, o Parrocchia una o più commissioni sotto la dipendenza di quelle sezionarie» (*Giornale Intendenza Catania*, 1832, p. 179).

¹⁰ «Sindaco presidente, da tre Notabili, dalla prima Autorità ecclesiastica, da' Curati o Cappellani de' quartieri, e da due Medici» (Ibidem).

ordinary police, finally have way to overturn the previous balance and to intervene directly on the control of urban space¹¹.

2. THE URBAN ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION

In the aftermath of the devastating earthquake of 1693, once the phase of the rescue and accommodation of the surviving population is faced, the plan for the reconstruction of the city of Catania starts from the streets that will now be «wide, long and straight» (DATO, 1983, p. 29). The new network of roads which in most cases are orthogonal, is constituted by axes that divide the space in large regular urban areas; within these the soil is divided into building lots, which were initially conceived as quick tools for reconstruction, but that eventually created a strong diversification in building typology. During the eighteenth century, the palaces of the nobility and of public and religious institutions were built mainly in the lots on either side of these axes; while behind these streets, in most cases, the model of settlement is popular and “irregular” and characterized by poor sanitary conditions.

In Catania, as in other cities of the Kingdom, the measures to prevent the spread of cholera are linked to the new organization of the urban space. Two years after the reform of 1817, along with the other two largest cities of the island (Palermo and Messina), the urban space of Catania is divided into six administrative sections, each headed by a *Senatore*.

Through the graphic restitutions obtained using as a cartographic basis the *Pianta topografica della città di Catania* engraved by Sebastiano Ittar around 1832¹² (fig. 2), we note that this administrative division emphasizes the dynamics imposed by the urban scheme, giving, to the road Stesicora-Etna the role of central axis of the town; in our case the city is cut into two main areas: a western one facing inward and the other one overlooking the eastern coast, within each of the two areas there are three equally distributed sections (fig. 3).

¹¹ In this context it is better to specify that the municipal police, for reasons of public order, and the local authorities, for reasons of “urban decorum”, were continuously fighting for the control of urban space (IACHELLO, 2000, p. 64).

¹² We refer to the *Pianta topografica della città di Catania* by the architect Sebastiano Ittar from Catania dating around 1832. About this author see the contributions BUSCEMI, 2008 and SCAGLIONE, 2011.



Figure 2. S. Ittar, *Pianta topografica della città di Catania*, Paris 1832 ca., engraving on copper, cm 78,5x53,4. Source: Biblioteche Riunite Civica e Ursino Recupero, Catania.

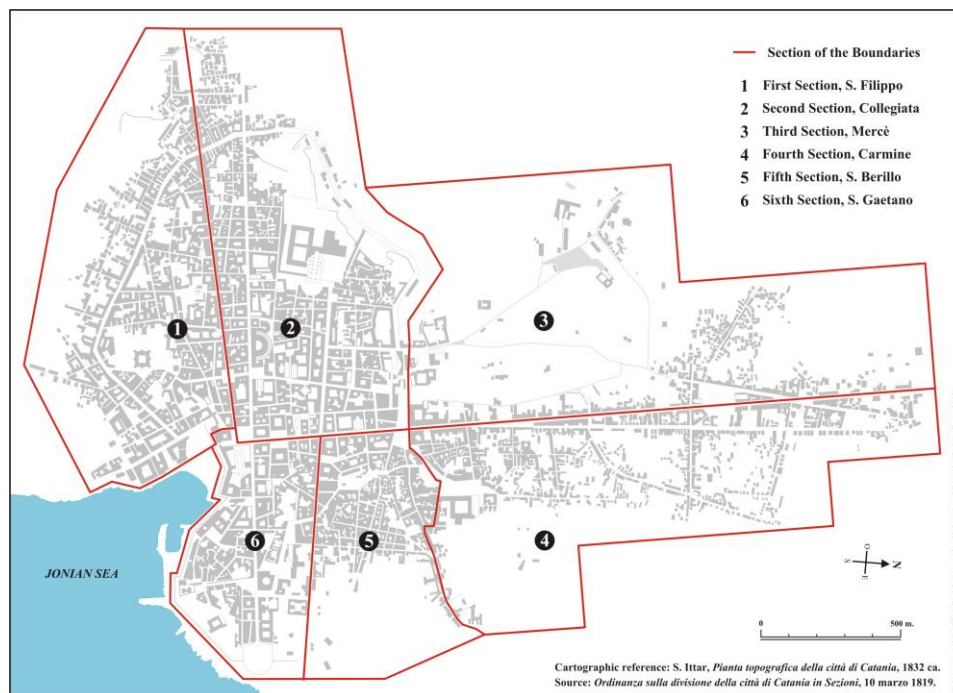


Figure 3. Map of the administrative sections of Catania (1819).

Inside the sixth administrative section is located the district of the *Civita*. In this particular case the preventive measures adopted by the Commission of the section have crossed, overlapped and collided with the needs of the local elite. The inhabited area of this

urban space is composed mainly of houses “terrane” and “solarate”¹³ one leaning against the other, in many cases on different levels, overlooking narrow courtyards or narrow, unpaved and poorly ventilated roads (DATO, 1983, p. 143). This image contrasts strongly with what this area was before the earthquake of 1693, a district «populated by almost the whole nobility of Catania», as it is described by Francesco Ferrara around the end of 1820s in his *Storia di Catania* (1829, p. 189).

What are the sizes and especially the boundaries of this district in the early decades of the nineteenth century? Although in later years the term *Civita* identifies the entire urban area next to the coast and placed in the southeast of the town, in the mid-thirties of the nineteenth century the same local elite in a report by the *Commissione sanitaria della sesta sezione*¹⁴ specifies that

under this denomination is meant not only the residential area that from East to South is closed by the old bastions of the town, by the bastion S. Agata and from North to West by the noble houses Mangialardo, Bonajuto, Anzalone, S. Lorenzo, Biscari, Boccadifuoco and furthermore by all the houses located in the East area of the S. Agata fort and the S. Francesco di Paola convent walking towards North until the area behind the house of the baron Pedagoggi and of the baron Pappalardo as well as all those lateral to the house of the marquis Sorrentino¹⁵.

Together with the definition of the district of the *Civita*, through the detail obtained from the *Pianta* by Ittar (fig. 4) we also have the opportunity to see the extent and the planimetry of this urban area.

¹³ “Casa solarata” refers to a house with a floor slab, while “casa terrana” is a house having only the ground floor.

¹⁴ The town is administratively divided into six sections (1st S. Filippo, 2nd Collegiata, 3rd Mercè, 4th Carmine, 5th S. Berillo, 6th S. Gaetano) each headed by a senator (*Ordinanza sulla divisione della città di Catania in Sezioni*, Catania 10 marzo 1819, in *Giornale Intendenza di Catania*, n. 28 (1819), vol. II, pp. 77-79).

¹⁵ *Verbale della Commissione sanitaria della sesta sezione*, 16 settembre 1836, in Archivio di Stato di Catania (now, ASC), *Fondo Intendenza Borbonica*, b. 1283 «sotto tal denominazione [si] intende non solo quel compreso di abitato che da levante e mezzogiorno è chiuso dagli antichi forti della città e dal forte S. Agata dello bastione, e da tramontana e ponente dalle case magnetizie Mangialardo, Bonajuto, Anzalone, S. Lorenzo, Biscari, Boccadifuoco, ma ben anco tutte quelle case che esistono dalla parte orientale nel forte S. Agata e Convento di S. Francesco di Paola camminando verso tramontana sino dietro le case del barone Pedagoggi e barone Pappalardo non che quelle tutte laterali alla casa del marchese Sorrentino».



Figure 4. [Detail] S. Ittar, *Pianta topografica della città di Catania*, Paris 1832 ca.

By making a cartographic translation of the information contained in the report of the Commission, on a computerized restitution of the urban detail (fig. 5), we can reconstruct the size and boundaries of the district.



Figure 5. The borders of the Sixth administrative section.

Observing the thematic map, as described by the commissioners, we see that actually the *Civita* urban agglomeration is surrounded by several noble houses developing to the east and west around the bastion of St. Agata¹⁶.

How does the district housing look like inside this space? The Baron Bernardo Gentile Cusa describes it as an «an unshaped jumble of small houses of one, two, three floors that leaning badly one against the others constitutes the district, already famous for its terrible conditions»¹⁷; moreover Gentile Cusa states that the roads inside it have a disordered structure, none of them completely crosses the agglomeration being narrow and ending in blind alleys (1888, p. 236).

Especially in those decades there is the strong belief that the non-ventilation of the streets together with the low penetration of sunlight are ideal conditions for the spread of epidemics. In Catania various “renewal” interventions are made such as the construction of sewers and the expansion or opening of roads designed to increase air circulation inside the district; after all, the issues linked to the «the cleaning of the roads and the healthiness of the spaces become since the Thirties the most disquieting topics of the urban imagination, destined to reach dramatic dimensions with the cholera of 1837»¹⁸.

In the *Civita* area, the *Intendenza* manages to achieve an intervention plan facing the spread of the disease; among the measures planned there is the construction of sewers and latrines. Already in 1833, after receiving a petition written by the residents of the district, the *Intendente*, Prince Manganelli¹⁹, urges the *Patrizio*, Prince Giovanni Grimaldi, and the Senator of the Sixth Section, Don Giovanni Paternò Castello of Bicocca, to take action in favor of such works. After this instruction, the Commission of the section informs the *Intendente* to have approved «the building of the sewers in the most narrow alleys»²⁰. Unfortunately once the emergency stops the works are soon stopped.

In 1835, with the arrival of cholera in Italy (PRETO, 1988, pp. 122-166), the *Intendente* returns to renewal projects and writing to the *Patrizio* (Mayor) Mario Gravina²¹,

¹⁶ About the fortification of the town of Catania see PAGNANO, 1992. For a graphic reconstruction of the ruins of the sixteenth century city wall in the first half of the nineteenth century see the thematic map n°14 in SCAGLIONE, 2012, p. 87.

¹⁷ «informe accozzaglia di casupole ad uno, a due, a tre piani, che malamente addossate tra loro, costituiscono il quartiere, ormai famoso per la sue pessime condizioni» (GENTILE CUSA, 1888, p. 243).

¹⁸ «“nettezza delle strade e salubrità delle aree” diventano a partire dagli anni '30 i temi più inquietanti dell'immaginario urbano, destinati ad assumere con il colera del '37 dimensioni drammatiche» (IACHELLO, 2010, p. 185).

¹⁹ Giuseppe Alvaro Paternò and Paternò Castello prince (since 1831) of Sperlinga and Manganelli (1784-1838), already Intendant of Messina, moves on September 1828 to Catania where he holds after the death of the marquis Giuseppe Palermo the same position until February 1838.

²⁰ *Lettera del Presidente della Commissione di Salute della sesta sezione all'Intendente*, 18 settembre 1833, in ASC, *Fondo Intendenza Borbonica*, b. 1283 «la costruzione delle fogne nei vicoli più angusti».

²¹ *Giuramento di Mario Gravina a Patrizio di Catania*, 13 gennaio 1834, in ASC, *Fondo Intendenza Borbonica*, b. 131.

suggests that «deep and well closed latrines and sewers are provided to those houses of the *Civita* which are unprovided»²². Aware of the threat and facing the local immobility, the *Intendente*, towards the end of the same month, draws the attention of the *Patrizio* to whom he asks why the health commission of the sixth section didn't proceed in the execution of the construction of necessary sewers for the area of the *Civita* as it was decided²³.

Once the works on the external sewer system started, a few months after it is the *Patrizio* who invites the *Intendente* to issue the provisions to oblige all «the owners of the houses to build the latrines»²⁴. By the end of August the *Intendente* gives the orders to force the owners of the houses in the *Civita* district to «build the latrines, since every public or private building have to be supplied with the necessary sewers with the respective channels well closed and built in depth in order to avoid the spreading of the dirty substances, harmful for the breathing, in the populated area»²⁵.

3. THE URBAN PROJECTS AND THE SOCIAL CONFLICT

As we already said, one of the measures to allow the ventilation of the space is the opening of new roads in the middle of the urban area through expropriation and subsequent destruction of houses in order to reduce the dense network of buildings (SALVEMINI, 2000). According to a letter written by the *Patrizio* to the *Intendente* dated July 1832, we learn that such a solution had also been scheduled for the district of *Civita*; from the letter we also know that the provincial engineer Mario Musumeci plans to open two roads crossing each other within the district «in order to give to those houses the necessary ventilation»²⁶.

Once the project of the “crossroads” is abandoned, in February of the following year the engineer presents a «report of the expenses needed for the opening of a road in the area of the *Civita*, from East to West, starting from the courtyard behind the houses of Spanò to the

²² *Lettera dell'Intendente al Patrizio*, 3 ottobre 1835, in ASC, *Fondo Intendenza Borbonica*, b. 1283 «si forniscano di latrine o fogne, alla profondità e ben chiuse [...] le rispettive case della Civita che ne sono sprovviste».

²³ *Lettera dell'Intendente al Patrizio*, 28 ottobre 1835, ivi «[perché] esecuzione non si è data sinora alla commissione della salute interna della sesta sezione all'incarico [...] per la costruzione delle fogne necessarie nel quartiere della Civita».

²⁴ *Lettera del Patrizio all'Intendente*, 26 aprile 1836, ivi «i rispettivi proprietari delle case a costruirvi le latrine».

²⁵ *Lettera dell'Intendente al Patrizio*, 30 agosto 1836, ivi «voler costruire le latrine dovendo ciascun edificio pubblico o privato essere fornito delle necessarie fogne coi corrispondenti condotti ben chiusi, e profondamente costruiti per non vedersi gittare per mezzo l'abitato le materie immonde che potran divenire nocive ed immonde alla respirazione».

²⁶ *Lettera del Patrizio all'Intendente*, 5 luglio 1832, in ASC, *Fondo Intendenza Borbonica*, b. 1314 (also in DATO, 1983, p. 131) «per dare a quelle abitazioni la necessaria ventilazione».

South corner of San Tommaso church»²⁷ with a cost of about 735 *onze* and 15 *tari*²⁸. The project is considered too expensive, so, about two months later, the same designer draws up a new expertise with less destruction and a smaller expense (596 *onze* and 26 *tari*). This new resizing passes the initial doubts of local authorities, but before the drop of the emergence in 1833-34, the bureaucratic process is blocked stopping *de facto* the works.

How the construction of this road would have changed the planimetry of the district? Without any graphic representations attached to the projects, through the cartographic translation of the descriptive elements contained in the report (list of owners and number of rooms to be destroyed), conveniently crossed with those found in the records of the *Contribuzione Fondiaria del Comune di Catania*²⁹ in 1843, we are able to reconstruct with a good approximation the graphic pattern of the road designed by Musumeci (fig. 6). Looking at this graphic rendering we see that actually the planned intervention cuts in two areas, from west to east, the western part of the agglomeration of the *Civita*.

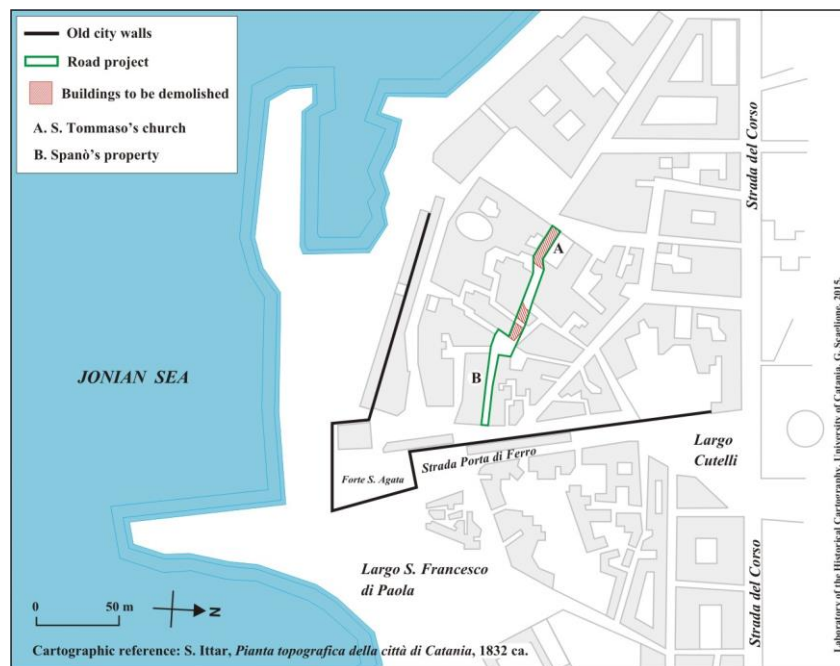


Figure 6. The road projected in 1832 by Mario Musumeci, engineer of the province.

As mentioned above, in 1835, with the arrival of the epidemic cholera in the Italian territories, the project to thin out the urban area of the district becomes relevant and in August of that year the *Intendente* writes to the *Patrizio* asking about the decision concerning

²⁷ *Lettera dell'ingegnere Musumeci all'Intendente*, 8 febbraio 1833, ivi «relazione della spesa occorrente per aprirsi una strada nel quartiere della Civita, da levante a ponente, cominciando dal cortile dietro le case di Spanò, e che termina alla cantonata di mezzogiorno della chiesa parrocchiale di San Tommaso».

²⁸ The Sicilian monetary system in force provides that an *onza* is equal to 30 *tari*, one *tari* to 20 *grana* and one *grana* to 6 *piccioli*.

²⁹ *Sommarioni della Rendita Fondiaria del Comune di Catania* (1843), in ASC, *Fondo Cessato Catasto Terreni*, voll. 2010 e 2011.

the approval of the costs of Musumeci's work³⁰. The local official replies that unfortunately the cost required «for opening a road in the area of the *Civita* of 596.26 *onze* further the expenses for the work of the engineer was approved by the *Decurionato*, but once the emergency stopped this work was not ratified»³¹. The *Intendente*, stressing the urgency of the present case, invites the *Patrizio* of the city not to waste time and to hold an extraordinary session of the *Decurionato* to vote in favor of the work³².

At this stage local authorities, influenced by the health emergency, are forced to endorse the resolution of the project. The costs that the administration has to bear are very high; this involves strong reticence and resentment to accept “unconditionally” to fund a project unrelated to the expectancy of the local authority. In this context, in an attempt to avoid such costs, the City Council in the resolution approving the project puts a clause specifying that the funds needed for the project should be «deducted from 600 *onze* which have to be received by the provincial fund for the street outside the Ferdinanda street»³³. Briefly, the city authorities agree to fund the work, but also specify that such payments must come from a previous loan that the province has yet to pay to the municipality for the construction of a road. Once the municipal resolution is forwarded to the *Intendenza*³⁴, the fact does not go unnoticed and the reaction against the *Patrizio* and the *Decurionato* is fast. In the first case, the *Intendente* orders the *Patrizio* that such costs must be charged at municipal expense, in particular they should rely «on the fund for the public works or on the one for the unexpected costs»³⁵; in the second case, the *Intendenza* asks the municipality to produce a new resolution, whereas «for these expenses the *Intendenti* are authorized to use the town funds and those for the unexpected expenses»³⁶.

After failing in the attempt to avoid expenses on the funds of the municipality, the town authorities, financing actually the work, set in motion a mechanism to enter into the

³⁰ *Lettera dell'Intendente al Patrizio*, 20 agosto 1835, in ASC, *Fondo Intendenza Borbonica*, b. 1283.

³¹ *Lettera del Patrizio all'Intendente*, 24 agosto 1835, ivi «per aprirsi una strada nel quartiere della *Civita* ascendente onze 596.26 oltre le vacanze dell'ingegnere fu passata in decurionato, ma cessata [...] l'urgenza non si è deliberato tuttora per tale opera».

³² We read in the letter: «mi affretto a rispondere a lei sul suo rapporto del 24 corrente, interessandola a convocare in straordinaria seduta il decurionato affinché in vista di questo pressante bisogno ed in adempimento degli ordinamenti del governo di mettersi in pratica tutte le misure di pubblica igiene con maggior rigore adempirsi alle preferizioni de' regolamenti di servizio sanitario interno del 1° gennaio 1820 approvato da S.M. approvato da S.M. e del 5 ottobre 1832, deliberi esso collegio senza perdita di tempo sù i fondi cò i quali farsi pronti alla spesa già relazionata ai termini dell'art. 13 dell'ultimo dei suddetti regolamenti. Si compiacerà Ella poi di rimettermi immediatamente la deliberazione pel dippiù di legge» (*Lettera dell'Intendente al Patrizio*, 27 agosto 1835, ivi).

³³ *Delibera del Decurionato di Catania*, 29 agosto 1835, ivi «ripiarsi colle onze seicento che debbasi esigere dalla cassa provinciale per la strada fuori la strada Ferdinanda».

³⁴ *Lettera del Patrizio all'Intendente*, 30 agosto 1835, ivi.

³⁵ *Lettera dell'Intendente al Patrizio*, 1 settembre 1835, ivi «sul fondo delle opere pubbliche, o su quello delle imprevedute».

³⁶ *Lettera del consigliere dell'Intendenza Amato Barcellona al Consiglio Decurionale*, 1 settembre 1835, ivi «per tali spese sono autorizzati gli Intendenti d'avvalersi dei fondi comunali e delle imprevedute».

project in order to manage all the constructive phases and especially the costs. The accomplished operation, at first, challenges the examination reliability of Musumeci and, subsequently, it offers the authoritative technical opinion by the municipal architect Sebastiano Ittar, who, more than anyone else, produced numerous projects of urban reorder in those years³⁷. The *Decurionato* knows that the municipal engineer is much appreciated for his professional skills by the *Intendente*, who hardly would oppose to his evaluative judgment. In this regard, for a greater understanding of the relationship between the two authorities, a few years later, the same *Intendente* will delegate to Ittar the very important task of managing the construction of the new port (PATERNÒ CASTELLO, 1830).

In this context, the new *Patrizio*, Mario Gravina, apparently in full agreement with the *Intendente*, writes to the health commission of the sixth section stating that, in accordance with the directives issued by the *Intendenza*, the work report for the road construction was approved urging the start of the works³⁸. But if on the one hand the *Patrizio* is collaborative and follows literally the directives of the *Intendente*, on the other, he begins a delicate work of persuasion, made by apparent responsible advices for the common wealth, but that throw some shadow on the project plans by Musumeci. According to Gravina, the budget specified by the engineer in his report might be considered unreliable because of the time passed since the date it was drafted; for that reason Gravina considers it subject to significant variations in costs³⁹ and suggests a new technical opinion, that of the municipal engineer. In fact, in consideration of the financial uncertainties that the City might soon face, the *Intendente* is increasingly aware that any increase in costs would lead to the failure to complete the work and accepts the advice of the *Patrizio* to «give to the municipal architect the expertise written by the engineer Musumeci to verify it on the site, in which they specify the prices of the houses that have to be demolished»⁴⁰.

After having controlled the provincial engineer's expertise, the municipal architect starts an inspection of urban areas concerned⁴¹ together with the members of the Health Commission of the sixth section⁴² and reaches the "predictable" conclusion that, because of

³⁷ To have a wider view on the public works during the third decade of nineteenth century (DATO, 1983, pp. 129-131).

³⁸ *Lettera del Patrizio al Presidente della Commissione di Salute della sesta sezione*, 14 settembre 1835, *ivi*.

³⁹ *Lettera del Patrizio all'Intendente*, 14 settembre 1835, *ivi*.

⁴⁰ *Lettera dell'Intendente al Patrizio*, 18 settembre 1835, *ivi* «passare in vista all'architetto della comune la perizia formata dallo ingegnere Musumeci per verificarla sul luogo, nella quale nella parte dello apprezzo delle case di particolari che devono demolirsi».

⁴¹ The members of the commission are: the president, Giuseppe Zappalà Finocchiaro, the physicians Ferdinando Cosentino and Carmelo Russo and Corrado Reguleas, the priest Michele Ardizzone, the *Decurioni*, Nicolò Barbagallo and Michele D'Amico La Piana and the notables Antonino Cerami, Michele Tedeschi Francica (*Verbale della Commissione sezionaria della sesta sezione*, 29 settembre 1835, in ASC, *Fondo Intendenza Borbonica*, b. 1283).

⁴² *Lettera dell'Intendente al Patrizio*, 24 settembre 1835, *ivi*.

the time passed, the costs provided by the expertise are no longer reliable. The report in which the architect explains his motivations, states that

1st this road is [...] profitable to a very small part of the district, moreover it does not fulfil the aims of public health because of its position, its width and its length; 2nd that it is not in the direction of the cardinal winds heading from mistral to sirocco, neither of these two winds being healthy; 3rd that it remains from both its entrance and its end occupied, and covered [...] and that therefore it does not enjoy a free stream of air; 4th that ending on a courtyard known as courtyard of the olive tree it forms an obtuse angle and therefore it does not form a straight line, as a new designed street should do; 5th that [...] more than three quarters of this narrow and populous district, not taking into account the other half of the district close to San Francesco di Paola bordering the houses of the barons of Pedagaggi and Pappalardo, remains hampered by small buildings without the advantage of a wide road [...]; 6th that the houses to be demolished are not those that more than the others need to be demolished [...] as it was pointed out by the list of the deliberation⁴³.

During the same meeting the municipal architect «after the request of the municipal engineer received today dated September 22nd 1835 informs the central commission that the houses to be demolished in the designed road in the *Civita* district are 20, the families 26 and the people 122»⁴⁴. Of course because it is just an opinion, Ittar simply lists the reasons that make it unnecessary to open the road designed by the provincial engineer, and he does not propose corrections, variations, or at least an alternative project that could make the urban agglomeration more ventilated. The position of the architect is clear: he judges but he does not plan. In fact after reading the report the *Intendente* writes to the President of the Commission asking why, given Ittar's negative opinion, he did not ask the municipal architect to specify «the convenient direction and width of the road to be opened»⁴⁵. Of course the local official knows that the architect can propose one of his projects, but he avoids it without any official awarding by the *Intendente* who holds the command. Having to face the health

⁴³ *Verbale della Commissione sezionaria della sesta sezione*, 29 settembre 1835, in ASC, *Fondo Intendenza Borbonica*, b. 1283 «1° detta strada è escentrica e quindi proficua ad una piccolissima parte del quartiere, oltrechè non soddisfa alle mire di pubblica salute tanto pel sito quanto pella larghezza e lunghezza della medesima; 2° che non è diretta ai venti cardinali dirigendosi da maestro a scirocco niun di questi due venti salutare; 3° che resta tanto dall'imboccatura che dal suo termine occupata, e coverta [...] e che quindi non gode di una corrente d'aria libera; 4° che sboccando in un Cortile su detto dell'olivo forma un angolo ottuso e che quindi non forma una linea retta, pregio che dovrebbe avere una strada di nuova pianta; 5° che [...] più di tre quarti di questo distretto e popoloso quartiere, non tenuta ragione dell'altra a San Francesco di Paola confinante con la case di baroni di Pedagaggi e Pappalardo, intralciato di piccolissimi palazzi resta sempre pel medesimo stato senza poter neanche godere il vantaggio che una larga strada [...]; 6° che le case da demolire non sono quelle che più delle altre meritano l'atterramento [...] come si fece rilevare dall'elenco rimesso coll'enunciata deliberazione».

⁴⁴ *Ibidem* «Fa conoscere alla commissione centrale dietro ufficio del signor ingegnere comunale ricevuto oggi stesso datato il 22 settembre 1835 che le case da demolirsi nella strada progettata nel quartiere della Civita sono n°20 le famiglie 26 e gli individui 122».

⁴⁵ *Lettera dell'Intendente al Senatore presidente della Commissione di salute della sesta sezione*, 1 ottobre 1835, ivi «per quale altra direzione e di quale ampiezza sia conveniente aprirsi la strada».

emergency, the *Intendente* invites the members of the Commission and the municipal architect to “deal with” the project, specifying the direction and the width of this new road, or if «it would be better to open squares, to enlarge alleys or to extend existing streets and to demolish walls both of public property or privately owned in order to give the ventilation which is necessary for the health of the inhabitants»⁴⁶. Through this letter it is clear that the *Intendente* implicitly gives the duty of the new planning to the municipal official. In fact, a few days after this letter, the inspection is carried out and the considerations are provided in a special report⁴⁷. In that report Ittar explains that in order to promote air circulation in the *Civita*, rather than opening a road, they could “open” a few backyard through targeted less expensive interventions, create small squares and widen some already existing roads⁴⁸.

Unfortunately we do not know in detail the project interventions proposed by the municipal architect, but after reading the correspondence between the managers of the various organs, we can know some of these suggestions. The first of these involved the demolition of some sections of the walls built in the sixteenth century, then still passing through the central portion of the district, but not interesting the most critical areas of the town. From the resolution of the *Consiglio dell’Intendenza* of May 24th 1836, where reference is made to the previously mentioned letter of December 12th of the previous year, we learn of the opening of the eastern part of the walls placed following «the garden of Mr. Mancialardo in its south part, in the direction of the road to the square of the *Colleggio Cutelliano*, [doing so] it will improve the ventilation of the *Civita* district in its east side»⁴⁹; another opening, wide indicatively from 20 to 30 *palmi*, concerns the stretch that goes from Mangialardo’s properties of up to Spanò’s ones⁵⁰; eventually, parts of the southern walls opposite the great bastion, the one «where there is a sacred image that will be kept sideways»⁵¹, attached to the small bastion or “bastione di Don Perruccio” will also come down (FERRARA, 1829, p. 519).

⁴⁶ *Lettera dell’Intendente al presidente della Commissione della salute della sesta sezione*, 3 ottobre 1835, ivi «convenga piuttosto aprirsi de piani e largare de’ vicoli o prolungare delle esistenti strade e demolirsi muri siano di proprietà privata, che del demanio pubblico, onde dare la ventilazione dove sia necessaria alla salute di quegli abitanti».

⁴⁷ *Verbale della Commissione sanitaria della sesta sezione*, 7 ottobre 1835, ivi.

⁴⁸ *Lettera del Presidente della Commissione di Salute della sesta sezione all’Intendente*, 14 ottobre 1835, ivi.

⁴⁹ *Delibera del consiglio dell’Intendenza*, 24 maggio 1836, in ASC, *Fondo Intendenza Borbonica*, b. 1283 «al giardino del signor Mancialardo della parte di mezzodi, da cui va ad incontrarsi la strada di comunicazione pel gran largo del Colleggio Cutelliano, [così facendo] vantaggerà colla ventilazione del quartiere della Civita della parte di levante».

⁵⁰ *Verbale della Commissione sanitaria della sesta sezione*, 5 novembre 1836, ivi.

⁵¹ *Lettera del Senatore presidente della Commissione di salute della sesta sezione all’Intendente*, 9 novembre 1836, ivi «ove esiste una sacra immagine che sarà conservata lateralmente». In the same letter we read that «i lavori saranno affidati a Vincenzo Costantino per un compenso di tari 13 e grana 15 per ogni canna reale di taglio incluso il trasporto del materiale».

According to what Luigi Barbagallo⁵², the president of the Commission of the section, wrote to the *Intendente* on September 18th 1836, where he writes about the «arrangement given in the past year for the opening of new roads, or similar, in the *Civita* district»⁵³ probably another measure proposed by the architect from Catania concerns some targeted interventions, such as the destruction of parts of town to transform the courtyards into roads or the demolition of portions of houses that fall on areas bound to become road in order to widen the existing ones. This view is supported by the fact that in October 1836 the *Intendenza* asks the Commission of the sixth section to draft a list

of the people living in the *Civita* with their families not belonging to the sailor class, and he drew up a separate notation so that if they have to close or demolish the houses of sailors they can live in the houses marked above providing the first (the non-sailors) with the houses that may be empty in other districts⁵⁴.

In the group of these families, thus, the ones not belonging to the sailor class are distinct from those that belong to it. Almost certainly the principle of this distinction is linked to the existence of a social identity of the district and to the will to maintain it. In this context, if the houses are to be allocated inside the district, they must firstly be given to the families of sailors, mariners, fishermen, fishmongers, but also *pontonieri*, *camalli* or *bracciali*. (boatman and longshoremen). The decision that aims to keep the identity of the urban space, in some way creates inequality between the families linked to the sailor class and those who do not belong to it. In favour of the latter they provided a financial help based on municipal funds for the refund of the moving costs and the payment of the «difference of the rent of the new house if it is higher»⁵⁵ than that spent for the previous house.

Ittar's involvement for the redevelopment of part of the district, from which we deduce the awareness of the identity of this urban space, is shown by the development of a residential building project «pelle genti di Mare» (for the people of sea) (fig. 7). Giuseppe Dato states that this never realized intervention of reorganisation was conceived also in view of the increase in maritime activities that will result from the construction of the pier. In this

⁵² *Nomina di Luigi Barbagallo a Presidente Senatore della sesta sezione di Catania*, 2 febbraio 1836, in ASC, *Fondo Intendenza Borbonica*, b. 129.

⁵³ *Lettera del Presidente della Commissione di Salute della sesta sezione all'Intendente*, 18 settembre 1836, in ASC, *Fondo Intendenza Borbonica*, b. 1283 «disposizione datasi nell'anno passato per l'apertura di nuove strade, o altro simile, nel quartiere della Civita».

⁵⁴ *Verbale della Commissione sanitaria della sesta sezione*, 22 ottobre 1836, ivi «delle persone che abitano nella Civita colle rispettive famiglie non appartenenti al cetto marinaresco e ne redasse distinto notamento onde in caso che debbano demolirsi o chiudersi delle case di marinari possono costoro abitare le case segnate nello stato surriferito destinandosi ai primi delle case che possono esistere vuote negli altri quartieri».

⁵⁵ *Lettera della Deputazione del Molo al Patrizio*, 9 novembre 1836, ivi «differenza del fitto della novella casa, ove sarà maggiore».

case the architect's attention is focused on the area between the convent of San Francesco di Paola and *piano della Statua*, within which they planned to build three blocks of houses with common courtyards and supplied with fountains and latrines, and in line with the road (DATO, 1983, p. 148).



Figure 7. S. Ittar, *Progetto Pella costruzione d'un nuovo quartiere d'abitazione pelle genti di Mare*, s.d., cm 25x47. Source: Museo Civico Castello Ursino, Catania.

After more than a month from the “administrative provisions”, the Commission of the section deliberates the «required expense for the opening of a road in the southern part of the *Civita*, and for the demolition of several small houses and external stairs»⁵⁶. After the publication of the report, there will be many protests from the owners of the houses who consider the proposed reimbursement inappropriate⁵⁷.

Less than a month after the publication of the decision the demolition begins in the southern part of the *Civita*. Among the first ones to be demolished there are two rooms

⁵⁶ *Verbale della Commissione sanitaria della sesta sezione*, 28 ottobre 1836, in ASC, *Fondo Intendenza Borbonica*, b. 1283 «spesa necessaria per l'apertura di una strada nella *Civita* della parte di mezzogiorno, e per la demolizione di varie casette e scale esterne».

⁵⁷ *Supplica di Rosario Spanò per una giusta indennizzazione della sua casa da demolire nel quartiere della Civita*, 10 novembre 1836, *ivi*; *Supplica di Matteo Ruggeri per una giusta indennizzazione della sua casa da demolire nel quartiere della Civita*, 11 novembre 1836, *ivi*.

owned by the priest Matteo Ruggeri, the same man who initially complained vigorously against the authorities managing to get a higher compensation for the buildings demolished to give way to a road⁵⁸. From the archive documents we received, we know that the buildings of the district which were demolished are all limited in the surroundings of the church of Graziella and the homonymous alley. These properties are those of Rosario Spanò, Nunzio Puglisi, Antonio Ursino, the brothers Pietro and Gaetano Ursino “marinaj”, Calcedonio Arrigo, donna Eleonora Consoli⁵⁹, donna Felicia Puglisi⁶⁰, a part of Filadelfo Licciardello’s house⁶¹ and two houses owned by mastro Carmelo Platania⁶².

After completing these demolitions, the new president of the Section Giuseppe Cordaro⁶³ communicates to the *Intendente* that the commission has wisely accomplished with the utmost zeal the dispositions received concerning the placement of the mariners’ families in other houses of the *Civita* district, managing to host in other houses of the same district the families whose houses were gradually demolished⁶⁴.

About these interventions we know the documentation related to the owners or to the type of building demolished, but we know little about the real space changes produced inside the urban area of the district.

To better understand what the morphological changes produced by these demolitions were, we will try to identify, in a separate graphic rendering, the portions of town missing between two cartographic documents, through the comparison between the *Pianta* by Ittar of about 1832, on the one hand, and the cadastral map of 1876 (figs. 8 and 9), on the other.

⁵⁸ *Lettera del presidente della Commissione di Salute della sesta sezione all’Intendente*, 24 novembre 1836, ivi.

⁵⁹ *Lettera dell’Intendente al Patrizio*, 28 novembre 1836, ivi.

⁶⁰ *Lettera del presidente della Commissione sanitaria della sesta sezione all’Intendente*, 13 gennaio 1837, ivi.

⁶¹ *Lettera del Patrizio all’Intendente*, 12 gennaio 1837, ivi.

⁶² *Lettera del Senatore all’Intendente. Esecuzione dei lavori di demolizione di due case di mastro Carmelo Platania*, 1 maggio 1837, ivi.

⁶³ *Nomina di Giuseppe Cordaro a Presidente Senatore della sesta sezione di Catania*, 4 novembre 1836, in ASC, *Fondo Intendenza Borbonica*, b. 129.

⁶⁴ *Lettera del Presidente Senatore della sesta sezione all’Intendente*, 2 giugno 1837, in ASC, *Fondo Intendenza Borbonica*, b. 1283.



Figure 8. [detail] cadastral survey of 1876.

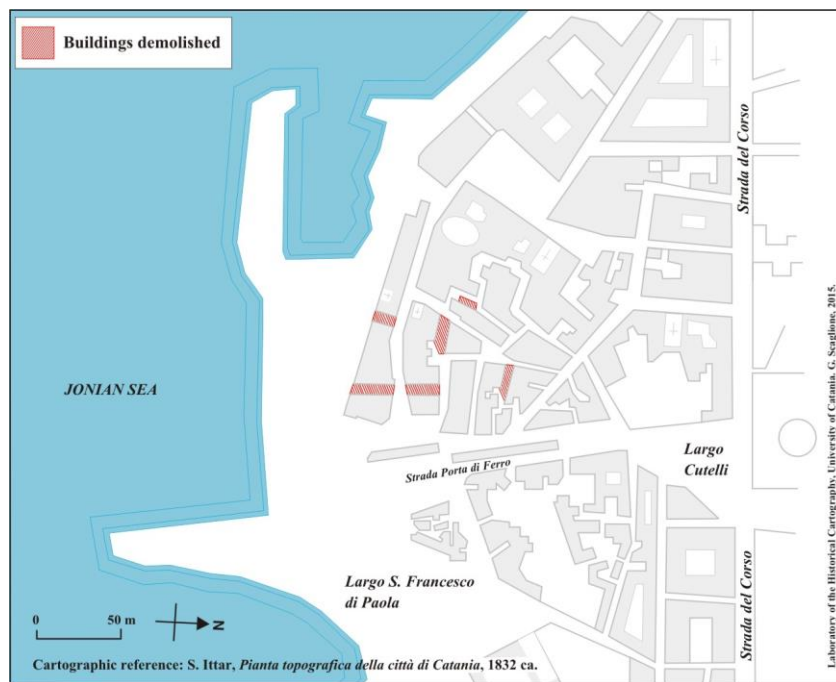


Figure 9. Portions of town demolished inside the *Civita* between ca. 1832 and 1876.

Looking at the map, we see that the missing parts of the urban area compared to the layout of 1876 are mainly in the south central part of the district (fig. 9). Many of these demolitions recall the interventions found in archival documents, thus most likely attributable to Ittar's choices. According to these cartographic results the perimeter layout of the buildings in most of the district is still unchanged at the time of the cadastral survey.

The demolitions in this space were few in the central and midwestern blocks of the district, while they were absent in the eastern area beyond where once there were the old city walls. Compared to the road designed by Musumeci, that effectively cuts the town in two, the municipal official interventions seem to be needed to open the district to the area in front of the port. The small size of the interventions also suggests a relatively small financial commitment for the municipal funds. Moreover, these choices, seen in an urban-architectural perspective, give the impression of not favouring an urban reorganization coherent with the health emergency.

In early June 1837 the first case of cholera is certified in Palermo; with the arrival of the terrible disease in Sicily everything changes: the planned measures and the financial dynamics planned for the *Civita* change their reason.

Due to the new needs, the families living in *Civita* district whose houses were demolished have all to move into huts instead of being host in new buildings. Meanwhile the terrible disease is getting closer and closer to the east side of the island and to Catania. In our case the first families to be moved out of this urban space stay in fourteen huts built on the property of don Carlo Crispo next to *piano della Statua*, having a total cost of 350 *onze* (25 *onze* each)⁶⁵; the following families, in the following thirteen huts built: three under the Convent of S. Francesco di Paola on the south side, four inside the garden of this Convent and finally six next to *casa della Deputazione del molo*⁶⁶. These accommodations are totally made of wood and have a two-pitched roof 30 *palmi* long and 15 *palmi* wide with an average high of 12 *palmi*⁶⁷ and they occupy a space of two *canne*⁶⁸.

When summer begins the disease shows his real terrible potential. In spite of the fact that many families were forced to move from certain areas of the district to huts in a programmatic way, according to daily mortality data published by Gentile Cusa, during the period between August 11th and October 10th 1837, more than 25% of almost 4000 people killed by cholera in Catania lived in the sixth administrative section (1829, pp. 304-305). Aware that the *Civita* district did not represent the entire surface of the section, its well known health issues made it one of the districts into which the epidemic violence was stronger. It is not by chance that still in 1880s Gentile Cusa, referring to the *Civita* district,

⁶⁵ *Progetto e note spesa per la costruzione di 14 baracche*, 17 giugno 1837, *ivi*.

⁶⁶ *Progetto e note spesa per la costruzione di 13 baracche*, 11 luglio 1837, in ASC, *Fondo Intendenza Borbonica*, b. 871.

⁶⁷ *Progetto e note spesa per la costruzione di 14 baracche*, 17 giugno 1837, in ASC, *Fondo Intendenza Borbonica*, b. 1283 «a due pendenze della lunghezza di palmi 30, larghezza palmi 15 ed altezza media palmi 12». The units of measurement mentioned are the *canna* equivalent to 2,064 meters. One *canna* was 8 *palmi* and one *palmi* 12 *onze*.

⁶⁸ *Progetto per la costruzione di baracche*, 1 luglio 1837, *ivi* «uno spazio di canne due».

writes that «for the unanimous opinion of the municipal organs and of the citizenship, it still holds the unenviable record of meanness and dirt» (1829, p. 336).

CONCLUSIONS

Of course the reconstruction of these events can not show how and how much mortality statistics would have changed inside the section if different urban planning choices were put into practice. What is sure is that during the years and especially during the months preceding the arrival of cholera in Catania the local authorities use the health emergency as a tool to realize some interventions that in our opinion were not sufficient to face the emergency.

Adding to this consideration the reflections arising from the thematic rendering of the comparison between the two urban plans of ca. 1832 and 1867, it is clear that Ittar's demolitions leave roughly unchanged the urban area, maintaining, therefore, the financial commitment of the City relatively small. Moreover, the type of these interventions suggests that the openings realized in the urban space more than giving a better air circulation to the district aim at creating communication routes that better connect the district to the port area in front of it. To these observations, we must also add the will of the municipality to maintain the integrity of the identity of the "sailor class" in the district, which will be shortly thereafter vital for the establishment of a port hinterland for the construction of the new pier that in those years is positively considered by the engineers of the sovereign (CRISTINA, 2010).

These conclusions should also be read in the light of Principe di Manganeli's behaviour, *Intendente* of Catania; for him that of the port is a beloved project, if we consider that already in 1820, when he was a provincial councillor⁶⁹, he included the project in the infrastructure plan for all the necessary public works to the province of Catania (PATERNÒ MANGANELLI, 1820). Such a behaviour was kept even after his appointment as *Intendente* with the writing of a plan for financing the work, approved subsequently by the Royal Secretariat of Palermo (July 10th 1834) which ordered the construction of the pier (PATERNÒ CASTELLO, 1830). Once the construction was approved, the Secretariat entrusts the direction of work to the hydraulic engineer Carmelo Lanzerotti and, as already said, to the architect Ittar. Therefore, this is another reason that lead the *Intendente* to hold in such high regard the hypothesis proposed by the municipal architect who in these years is the leading expert and connoisseur of the future plans and projects of the city.

⁶⁹ He was *Decurione* already in 1818, then he will be a member of the provincial deputation from 1820 to 1821 and *Patrizio* between 1824 and 1827.

Finally, it seems appropriate to highlight how these conclusions were just the results of a cartographic translation of the information on special computerized graphic restitutions that allowed a different interpretation of urban space. This interpretation, properly prepared on the basis of documents both from archival and cartographic research, shows all its interpretative and heuristic potential, opening, in our opinion, new perspectives in the field of digital tools applied to historical research.

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