



REVIEW ARTICLE

AN ITINERARY OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE TERRITORY OF CAMPANIA: AVERSA, NORMAN CITY

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ABSTRACT

In this text I will focus on the study of the city of Aversa, a small town of 53080 citizens situated in the province of Caserta, in the region of Campania. It will be the opportunity to give prominence to a place that has a great artistic, cultural and architectural heritage, too often forgotten. The city is placed in the middle of a flat territory known as "Agro Aversano", a great rural area of the ancient "Land of work", also known as "Campania Felix". The city was given by the count of Naples Sergio IV to the Norman Rainulfo Drengot and it was the first norman county in Italy. It had an interesting territory development thanks to different dominations by the Normans, the Aragonese, the Angioini and the Borbonics. The city had an interesting urbanistic implant, with a radiocentric scheme that connected the preexistent and the new villages into four mural circles inserted into a part of the centuriation of the Ager Campanus. Its artistic heritage has a great monumental relevance. It is currently the second most populous city of the province and the 17th of the region.

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INTRODUCTION

Aversa is located between the ancient river Clanio, nowadays known as "regi Lagni" and "Lago Patria" just before the Phlegraean area. The origin of the name "Aversa" is associated with its volcanic nature: from the Greek "*phlegraios*", i.e. *burning and* from the Etruscan "*vers*", i.e. "*earth of fire*". Over the centuries the name has changed from *Verzelus* to *Versaro* and *Aversa* in the end. The city was built by a Norman prince (from Alencon), Rainulfo Drengot who took part in the war between Lombard and Byzantine in the southern area of Italy. After few battles in Apulia, Rainulfo set his basis in the crossroad between Campana and Cumana streets, a strategic geographic position to control the whole territory. This is where probably the first Norman city in Italy comes from. The reputation of the city grew even bigger when Rainulfo, in 1030, was given the ex byzantine fortress as a reward for his services to Sergio IV, from Naples. Rainulfo was named first count of the city of Aversa, that became at the same time the capital city of the county. The city plan started to change into a radio-centric setting, of French inspiration, a radiate outward from a common centre represented by the cathedral. The original city plan changed due to the construction of long trenches and hedges, as it is still visible in the streets of S. Marta, S. Nicola, S. Domenico e S. Gennaro. S. Andrea, Castello, S. Maria and

S. Nicola's doors gave access to the city, as they were linked to the main roads. It was in 1135 that Ruggero II laid siege the city of Aversa and became the new count. He expanded the original city plan, adding the growing districts to the new trench: S. Maria a Piazza, S. Nicola, S. Giovanni Evangelista, S. Andrea. Five more doors were built close to the main traffic roads and located around S. Maria, S. Giovanni, S. Nicola, S. Andrea e Portanuova. It was in 1195 instead, when Henry IV gave permission to build them that they became the main points of the city, called "I Sedili". "I Sedili" worked as administrative centre of the city where all the nobles met together to discuss the citizen's interests. The most important ones were Seggitiello di Piazza, il Seggio di San Luigi e il Seggio di S. Antonio, exempted from taxes. "Seggitiello di Piazza" was connected with the north-west door; San Luigi one with the north door of the trench built under Rainulfo whereas the "Seggio di S. Antonio" was linked to the Saturday Market door. The Angevin dynasty took over after Ruggero II's death. A new asset was given to the city, started with the building of "New Road", nowadays known as "via Roma". The new linear structure of the road improved the connection and the traffic with the cities of Naples and Capua. The consolar road structure and Borgo san Lorenzo were now abandoned in favor of a new asset of the city. Ruggero's castle, very strictly linked to via Seggio, where all the most powerful families in Aversa used to live, like Giovanna I became relevant for the economic development of the city. Very little we know at the moment of these buildings. It is worth mentioning "Palazzo Fulgore",

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completed around 1500 by Giovanni Francesco Mormando, probably the one who built the trachytic rock door. It was under the Angevin dynasty that the northern area of S. Biagio and oriental part, Mercato vecchio, were included in the original city plan. Furthermore, lots of religious orders started to flourish, thus becoming representative parts of the city: Dominican, Franciscan and Agostinian. The laic institution, called Annunziata, was founded to look after abandoned children and sick people. Annunziata has still got the Angevin walls and the ancient guard towers along the trenches. The Angevin walls were originally created from S. Giovanni door but they were then demolished and moved up north in connection with Ruggero walls.

Under the Aragonese dynasty (142) Aversa had a new fortified structure; a new castle in the northern area to control Capua. It was a privilege given by Alfonso I in 1440 and extended by Ferdinando to celebrate with a market 8 days per year. The market would take place on Strada Reale between the Conservatorio and the door of Mercato Vecchio, best known as Vittorio Emanuele square. In 1519 the Annunziata acquired a land called Limitone, between via della Lava and the southern walls of the city. The land was divided into 8 lots all connected between each other in order to support the Market celebration. This area was full of workshops and courtyards surrounded all around by deposits. Lateral ladders gave access to the first floor merchants' rooms, in Aversa for the Market event. The whole area has always been used by private and never committed to



Fig. 1. Planimetric evolution of the city of Aversa



Fig. 2. The historic centre of the city of Aversa

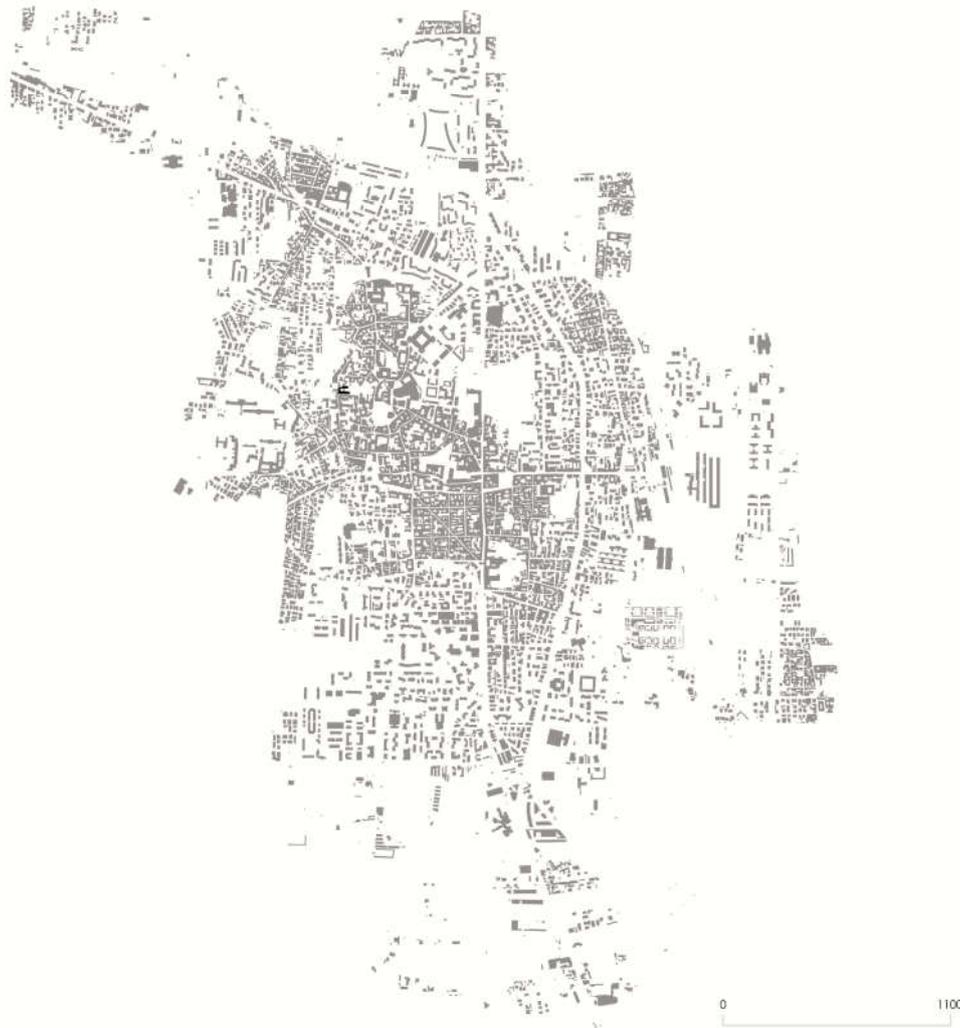


Fig. 3. The town of Aversa on the current shape

the public affair. In the second half of the 16th century, more and more religious institutions were founded in line with the standards given by the Council of Trent. In the same year the Aragonese castle had to face lots of transformation as it was no longer considered suitable for the court. It was in this same year that most of the people moved from the centre to the outside, especially to Limitone. That's why it was decided to create a new door, a triumphal arch to the city to include the new developing areas and the Annunziata work area. "Porta Napoli" was an attempt to unify the medieval part of the city with the open city of the 18th century. But the city plan would soon face a new change, in line with the needs of the new developing classes. Walls would soon be considered an obstacle; more and more space would be required, with a linear style and to claim better life conditions: Porta del Mercato Vecchio and Porta di Capua were demolished and the whole city of Aversa was subjected to the French urban structured, divided into provinces and districts and most of the religious institutions were abolished. Further institutions were founded where women and sick people would soon benefit: Convento dei Cappuccini and the Franciscan institute of Maddalena. Worth mentioning the Montevergine convent and S. Agostino degl Scalzi to follow. Despite the limitless changes the city of Aversa has gone through over the century, it remains a proof of how rich and beautiful the area was in the past.

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