

The town of Collodi: the vernacular heritage

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Abstract

The town of Collodi consists mainly of two parts, the ancient village perched on the hill and a settlement in the valley. The ancient castle, of which we have accurate information only after the twelfth century, still retains many of the characteristics of a medieval village. The planimetric development of this small settlement is highly interesting: both the main roads and the building aggregates follow the lines of the maximum slope of the hill, giving the entire skyline a cascading pattern. In the past two centuries, the castle of Collodi has not seen significant expansions beyond the perimeter of its ancient walls. Only the external roads have been adapted to the traffic of cars while movement inside the walls has remained exclusively pedestrian. For this reason, the structure still retains, for the most part, the vernacular features of the small settlements of northern Tuscany. These characteristics can be traced back using both the construction techniques and the typological elements. Through a careful study and an in-depth analysis of the buildings that characterize its typical elements, the vernacular architecture of the town can be both safeguarded and valorised. This paper means to illustrate the first results of the study on the entire vernacular heritage of Collodi, both the materials used and the architecture, which resulted in the identification of the unchanged parts of the buildings and the distinctive features that have been preserved, as well as the definition of the necessary guidelines for their restoration.

Keywords: *Castle of Collodi, small settlements, medieval village, valorisation.*

1. Introduction

In order to correctly recover and valorise the cultural heritage, it is important that the guidelines for their protection and safeguarding, as expressed by the scientific community, both national and international, be underlined for each specific case study.

With regards to vernacular architecture, the Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage which was adopted by ICOMOS in 1999 must be made binding. This can be made possible via an attentive analysis of the characteristics of the specific structure, both as singular units and as a whole.

A study of the forms and structures that characterize the vernacular architecture of Collodi have never before been carried out.

The present analysis has collected data and information directly *in situ*. It is the result of an in-depth study of the constructions and the materials used to build them, a careful analysis of the archival and bibliographic sources, and finally a critical evaluation and comparison of both.

Thus, deciding on a course of action for the town of Collodi has meant carefully retrieving all the historical-critical materials and the archival sources required for the reconstruction of the architectural events of the complex. Next, the morphometric evaluation was attained with the support of the Department of Architecture of the



Fig. 1. Collodi, Pistoia, view of the town of Collodi, (Source: Francesco Pisani, 2020)

University of Florence¹, and realized using the combined action of the photometric and direct survey of the principal geometries, which was preceded by an urban topographic overview. Finally, the metric geometric datum, the architectural critical descriptive datum (with an indication of the materials, the masonry compositions), and the level of deterioration was acquired by carefully comparing the print sources and a direct survey of the artefacts. The data was collected by the research team in a series of graphs with plans and elevations which were complete with legends for the identification of the materials and the state of the degradation using international glossaries.

2. Historical evolution

The town of Collodi is, today, a composite centre, composed mainly of two parts, the ancient hamlet perched on the ridge of the Battifolle mountain range (Fig. 1), and the settlement in the valley. The latter, built in more recent times, developed along the Pescia Minore torrent, also known as the Pescia di Collodi. Along with the houses, factories and, since the end of the 1950s, the *Parco di Pinocchio*, are also located here.

While numerous different studies, which include the production of an extensive reference bibliography, have been carried out on the Villa and the historical Giardino Garzoni – among the first texts to mention the Villa and Giardino Garzoni, we must remember the book by Sbarra (1652), to

¹ The Fondazione Nazionale Carlo Collodi, with the intent of carrying out a series of actions aimed to valorize Collodi, has stipulated a convention with the Department of Architecture of the University of

Florence for studies on: Villa Garzoni, the historical Giardino Garzoni, and the town of Collodi. The scientific director of the project is Professor Susanna Caccia Gherardini.

which other 18th century travel guides would be added, like, for example the one by Ansaldi (1772), which would be followed by 19th century studies on the territory, for example, the Repetti dictionary (1833) or the Tigri dictionary (1853), and a series of other, more exhaustive texts in the second half of the 20th century (Fagiolo, 1995; Cazzato et al. 1992; Cazzato et al. 1997; Bechini, 2001; Giusti, 2001; Valentini, 2004; Martelli, 2002; Giusti, 2015a; Giusti 2015b) – research and publications on the town of Collodi are rather limited. Collodi, which is situated on the western border of Valdinievole, mid-way between Florence and Pisa, is an ancient settlement, but, as already noted, documentation on the town is limited. According to tradition, the name derives from a distant *Forum Clodii*, which can be found on the *Tabula Peutingeriana*. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that there are numerous toponyms of sure Roman origin in the area, and that the ancient Cassia or Clodia road, which linked Florence and Lucca, ran near there.

The construction of the town of Collodi in walled lands was also said to date back to the Goths, and some thought the settlement had continued to maintain a strategic and military importance under the Lombards (Andreini Galli, Gurrieri 1975). More recent studies (Pescagli Monti, 1990) explain how a small, ancient settlement, called Debbia, was once found at the foot of the hill on which Collodi now stands.

While the first attestations of the *castrum* of Collodi date back to the end of the 12th century, information relative to the church of San Bartolomeo dates back to the beginning of the following century. From the 14th century onward, the small fortified settlement, situated at the border between the lands of Lucca and those of Florence, became, given its dominant position, an important military centre and was often involved in diverse armed battles fought by both factions (Pedreschi, 1993).

From the second half of the 15th century, factories for the production of paper were constructed along the Pescia di Collodi torrent; this would favour the development of a second nucleus of dwellings at the foot of the hill. The walled town, on the other hand, would only undergo major changes starting at the beginning of the 17th century thanks to the Garzoni family, who had received the patent of nobility from Carlo IV in the 14th century, and possessed almost the entire valley. It was Romano di Alessandro Garzoni who initiated the construction of Palazzo di Villa (Fagiolo 1995; Giusti 2001; Giusti 2015b) on the south side of the town, constructing the building on the pre-existing structure at the front of the walled town, towards the valley, where the Garzoni family already had their noble residence.² The state of the structure, until the 1630s, is also well documented in the *veduta* of Collodi (Fig. 2),³ which is conserved in the archive in Lucca. Along with the Palazzo in construction, in the *veduta* there is a very clear image of the walled town with its characteristic construction on the slopes of the hills (Pedreschi, 1993).

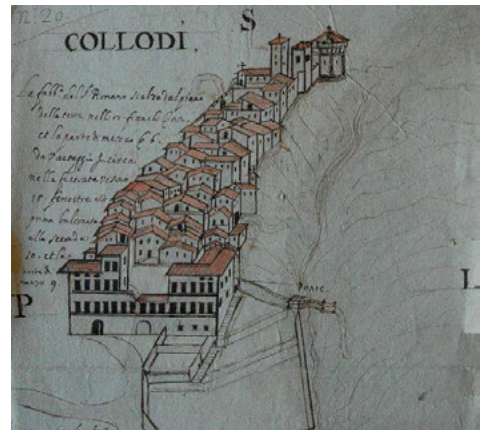


Fig. 2. Drawing with the representation of Collodi in 1633, (Source: ASL, Cons. Gen., Scritt. Segr. n. 673, p. 1584)

In the 17th century, along with Palazzo di Villa, Romano di Alessandro Garzoni began the construction of the Giardino (Cazzato et al. 1992;

² Cfr. Martilogio dei Beni dello Spettabile Romano Garzoni, 1550, ASL, Fondo Garzoni, filza n. 27, c. 1, in (Martelli S. 2002)

³ Cfr. ASL, Cons. Gen., Scritt. Segr. n. 673, p. 1584. in (Pedreschi 1993).

Cazzato et al. 1997; Bechini, 2001); but it was only in the 18th century that the Palazzo and the Giardino took on their present-day appearance, with the definition of the southern facade of the Palazzo.

Still in the 18th century, Filippo Juvarra designed the *palazzina dell'orologio*, which would be constructed on the northern side of the courtyard by Ottaviano Diodati, to whom the current plan of the Giardino must also be attributed. (Valentini, 2004; Giusti, 2016).

3. The urban layout

In addition to the 17th century *veduta*, which offers a view of the underlying plains, the most ancient iconographic documentation existing today of the town of Collodi is the cadastral map of 1836, in which the entire town is at scale 1:1000 (Fig. 3). This document facilitates the comparison with existing maps and, consequently, the study of the transformations that have taken place in the settlement.

The urban layout of the town of Collodi (Fig. 4) runs along an axis that goes north to south, following the lines of maximum slope of the ridges, the *costone*, on which it rises and which, still today, encloses it within its medieval perimeter.

The remains of the fort are still present at the highest point; they occupy the northern side of the settlement. The ruins of an angular, cylindrical tower, easily recognizable in the 17th century *veduta*, are still conserved there, as is a tower with a square base inside the structure.

Another angular tower with a square base has, through the centuries, become the bell-tower of the ancient church of San Bartolomeo, which was constructed just below the military structure. It is important to note that a cluster of houses has risen in the centre of the ancient fort.

A vast parvis rises in front of the church. It, too, is overlooked by SS. Sacramento oratory. Today, this open space offers a view of the valley below. The only road on this side of the town descends steeply from the parvis towards the valley below, running along the walls of the western perimeter of the *castrum*. Maintaining the volume of the rectory on its left, the road bends sharply

towards the centre of the cluster of buildings and then turns outwards again, past the steep incline of what is a proper hairpin bend. At the end of this road, in a tract that coasts the remains of the western walls, an entrance gives access to the town. It is framed by a door in moulded and embossed ashlar—illustrated in a document dated 1633 (Fig. 5).

Moving downwards, the road divides in two: the first tract of road continues along the western border of the town and delimits, together with the second tract, a cluster of houses at the centre of the settlement; the second tract goes on to delimit another cluster that stretches along the eastern perimeter of the castle. Continuing on, the two roads become one again and, for a brief tract, coast the remains of the western wall, leaving the constructed nucleus to the east. It then bends towards the centre of the settlement, surrounded by buildings on both sides, and ends its course at a large square: this is located halfway into the settlement, on the side that faces the valley, and its planimetry is fairly quadrangular with the main axis running east to west.

The square, piazza Della Fontana, as the name implies, houses a public fountain and wash-basin. From this square two parallel roads descend steeply through the rest of the town to the valley below, delimiting two continuous districts that run along the outer limits of the *castrum* and a *spina*, a block of houses, at the centre of the residential area that is subdivided into four blocks by a succession of roads that run perpendicular to the main two.

At the end of the second crossroad, on the eastern side, another entrance leads to the *castrum* of Collodi: it, too, is framed in stone with moulded elements. The two main roads of the town end their course inside the courtyard of Palazzo Garzoni, just after crossing Piazza San Martino.

In the 1940s, a road was opened here for access to the town by car. Until that date, the only entrance on the southern side was through the gates of Palazzo Garzoni and across the courtyard.



Fig. 3. Detail of the 1836 cadastral map, (Source: SASPE, Vecchio Catasto Terreni, Pescia, sezione L, foglio 3)

4. The road network inside and outside the walls

From an analysis of the historical cadastral maps, it is obvious that—in addition to the southern road that leads to Palazzo Garzoni— various other roads reached as far as the castrum. In fact, two lead to the already-mentioned historical entrances: one is on the eastern side in the lower part of the town, and another is west, on the upper part of the town.

It is also interesting to note that by widening and lengthening a road that already existed, and which stretched almost to the town walls, the entrance at Piazza San Martino was created in the 20th century. Using this same method of lengthening and adapting the road for vehicular traffic, another entrance to the fort was created where a “breach” was opened to allow access to the town in that area.

The changes made to meet the needs of road traffic, saw, along with the upgrading of ancient passageways for motor vehicles, the creation of parking areas near the gates, making Collodi easier to access.

Movement within the town has remained solely pedestrian, because the planimetric conformation, but above all the elevation difference, prohibits the use of cars.

In a few particularly steep parts of the town, the lanes become graded ramps or even flights of steps. The pavement in stones is one of the town’s most precious elements and characterizes the urban setting of Collodi. It has remained almost unvaried both in the general configuration and in the materials. In fact, some of the stones still bear the incisions made for playing games like *triplice cinta*, a sort of tic-tac-toe. Thus, the pavement, too, has become the object of an attentive geometric and photogrammetric study.

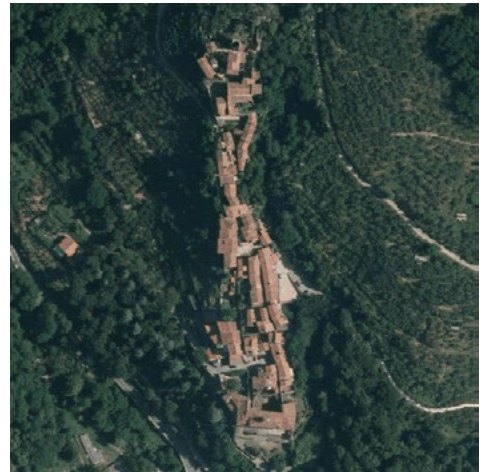


Fig. 4. Collodi, Pistoia, orthophoto of the town of Collodi © AGEA, 2013, Geoscopio, (Source: <http://www502.regione.toscana.it/geoscopio/fototeca.html>). CC-BY-SA.

5. Building morphology

Again, a comparison of the archival documents and the artefacts underlines the fact that, in addition to being enclosed within the perimeter of the medieval walls, the town of Collodi has not undergone significant modifications in its planimetric configuration.

Along with maintaining the original alignment of the street fronts, some of the medieval “individual units” are still visible, those in which there is a smaller street front development with respect to the length of the house within the district. It is,

thus, comprehensible how, in some cases, these “individual units” have been incorporated, in time, to create larger buildings.

Some housing units actually maintain, in their entirety, the original, private spaces in front of them: this makes for pleasant urban settings, created with green spaces, which give a particular character to the town.

By comparing the town today to the 17th century *veduta*, it is apparent that the skyline of the Castello di Collodi has maintained its typical cascading pattern: in fact, the buildings, standing one next to the other, in line with the orographic layout of the land, create a series of *gradonate*, terraces, covered in layered brickwork. These give the hamlet a distinctive air.

The majority of changes and alterations to the buildings are evident in the outer front of the town, the one facing east. These include, for example, the introduction of protrusions and overhangs for the addition of bathrooms and balconies. These alterations—both for the fact that their structural features are unrelated to those of historical buildings, and for the fact that they use technologies and materials that are anything but compatible—are elements that diminish the quality of both the individual buildings and the environmental context (Fig. 7).

Using a direct and photogrammetric survey of the street fronts of Collodi, it was possible to carry out further analyses of the elevation of the morphology of the buildings and the materials used to construct them.

Studies show that the majority of the buildings in the town are made up of three above-ground floors and that they are gabled with ledges that usually hold the eaves-trough. The distribution of the openings is very regular with alignments along the vertical axes, while horizontally the alignment is irregular from unit to unit, especially when the steep land has made it necessary to regulate the height of the adjacent building.

When the plaster is lacking, the curtain walls are made of mixed masonry—with stone ashlars placed haphazardly, and elements in brick—with carefully placed square stone blocks at the wall

joints, for example, the corners. Brick was, for the most part, used in the construction of door and window frames—even though in some buildings, the use of stone is evident—or in the case of restorations and repairs to parts of the wall (Fig. 6). Almost all the openings are rectangular; windows or doors with arches are rare, and where present, the arched frame is in brick. Plaster has been used on the buildings that have undergone restorations and maintenance work in recent times.



Fig. 5. Collodi, Pistoia, remains of the western walls, entrance to the town, (Source: Pisani, 2020)

6. Degradation of the materials and the urban layout

After having identified the materials of which the facade is made, an analysis was carried out on the main phenomena of degradation. The degradation of the materials is, for the most part, due to their exposure to atmospheric elements combined with an insufficient and, in some cases, a total lack of maintenance. The parameters of the facades, which are, for the most part, devoid of plaster, present more or less accentuated incidents of erosion, pulverization, and disintegration, which interest, in particular, the mortar joints. Over time this may also lead to the instability of the walls. In some cases, there is evident sagging/buckling or even damp patches due to the inefficient draining systems of rain water, on which biological colonization has developed.



Fig. 6. Collodi, Pistoia, glimpse of a street of the town, (Source: Pisani, 2020)

Along with exposure to atmospheric elements and neglect, the other causes of ruin can be attributed to the actions of man, for example, the introduction of incompatible architectural elements like balconies with slabs in concrete, iron railings, or small plastic awnings. There has also been a usage of construction materials and technologies that are incompatible with traditional construction methods, for example, the application of cement mortar-based plaster, or the repointing of the joints in the wall face—also carried out using cement mortar (Fig. 7).

It is, finally, important to underline the fact that the installation of necessary utilities was not carried out in an organic and adequate manner, lessening the overall wealth of the urban environment.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, given the expansion of the housing units in the valley and the particular orthography surrounding it, the Castello di Collodi continues to present the characteristics of a walled medieval town, characteristics that must be preserved and valorised. The many critical issues encountered in the town are attributed to the underutilization of the existing

architectural heritage as well as a lack of a full understanding of the typical features, both distributive and constructive, of these vernacular architectures.

These initial studies and graphs (plans, prospectuses, identification of the materials, construction techniques, and the levels of degradation) clearly underline the particular vernacular wealth of Collodi. As of today, the study has been conducted on the external parts of the buildings. In order to outline the actions needed to correctly protect and safeguard the town, further studies must be carried out. These must include morphological surveys of the interiors, to be carried out both in the laboratory and *in situ*, on the materials used and the construction techniques applied.

A detailed record of the data collected will, therefore, be needed to carry out the most appropriate restoration interventions on the structures within the town.



Fig. 7. Collodi, Pistoia, eastern front of the town, (Source: Pisani, 2020)

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