

## The Italian case of *Leopoldine* in Tuscany: methods and issues for the cataloguing of rural building heritage

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**Topic:** T1.1. Study and cataloguing of vernacular architecture

### Abstract

*The Val di Chiana is characterised by a dense rural building heritage, which differs according to its mountain, hill and plain areas. Among the houses on the plains, there is an elegant model called 'Leopoldina', which can be considered an exemplary case of vernacular architecture: indeed, such a farmhouse, built on the occasion of the land reclamation initiated during the Grand Duchy of Pietro Leopoldo of Lorraine (1765-1790), presents local materials and building techniques and, moreover, it was designed to meet the precise economic, agricultural and lifestyle needs of the peasant families of sharecroppers. Although the Leopoldine refer to a repetitive typological model, there are many singularities that can be found in the Val di Chiana area, both from the formal and constructive point of view. For this reason, it is indispensable to have a thorough knowledge of them, based on cataloguing. The Landscape Project entitled "Leopoldine in Val di Chiana" (Tuscany Region, 2021) proposes cataloguing the Leopoldine, while in the past, certain municipalities in the Val di Chiana had already carried out a survey of these abodes. However, from a critical analysis of the various files, certain critical points have since emerged. Thus, the present contribution introduces a new tab model of Leopoldine, taken from a PhD Research Project, based on both the richness of information and on an inter-dimensional reading between architecture and landscape: the purpose is to allow an exhaustive knowledge of the factories within the Lorraine area aimed at restoration and re-use projects compatible with the value of the houses, as well as with the development needs of the territory involved. For this reason, the tab has become a valid tool, even to be adopted in agricultural territories, through which it is possible to address, the challenge proposed by the Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro, 2005) of heritage conservation in a sustainable way, as an opportunity for the recognition and strengthening of social cohesion.*

**Keywords:** rural heritage; agricultural landscape; Leopoldine; cataloguing.

### 1. Surveying *Leopoldine*: a specific Vernacular Architecture

The Leopoldine are the farmhouses that identify the "*Paesaggio Storico della Bonifica Leopoldina in Valdichiana*"<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1). They date back to the

end of the 18th century, when, on the occasion of the rehabilitation of the swamped countryside, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Pietro Leopoldo of Lorraine, also worked for the progress of the sharecropping community, which from that moment onwards could avail itself of houses that had been rationally designed to be safe, healthy

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<sup>1</sup> Since September 2020, this landscape has been included in the *Registro Nazionale dei Paesaggi Rurali delle Pratiche Agricole e delle Conoscenze Tradizionali* (See <https://www.lanazione.it/arezzo/cronaca/leopoldine-il-paesaggio-volano-per-la-vallata-1.5497337>).

and functional to the productivity of the farm<sup>2</sup>; it is known that, already in the first half of the 19th century, the land in the valley furrowed by the *Canale Maestro della Chiana* was managed by thirteen Gran Duchy Farms, each consisting of a villa-farmhouse and dozens of *Leopoldine*<sup>3</sup>.

The latter, precisely because of the history linked to the physical transformations and socio-political events of this area of central Italy, clearly reflected in their construction features, are a phenomenon that has been widely studied over time from various perspectives. Since the end of the 19th century and throughout the following century, numerous studies examined both its historical and typological aspects, as well as its socio-anthropological aspects<sup>4</sup>. The first surveys were carried out to identify the different types of rural buildings. In fact, these studies, resulted in publications that are still a point of reference today for those who approach the study of rural architecture<sup>5</sup>, particularly in Tuscany, have identified the *Leopoldine* 'model' on the plains. Although the research was not systematic, and, in fact, reported on a 'sample' basis, it had the merit of highlighting the main characteristics of each type: the *Leopoldine*, for example, distinguishes itself for being an isolated block on a quadrangular plan, with internal or external staircase, superimposed portico and loggia, pavilion roof and central dovecote tower; the material-constructive peculiarities and the

variants, related to the different geographical areas and to the new uses of the farms during the 20th century and also to the advancement of building techniques, have, on the other hand, been little explored<sup>6</sup>. However, the value of such research also remains in guiding subsequent cataloguing. Indeed, on the basis of these publications and under the impetus of regional legislation, which in those years was trying to safeguard the agricultural heritage by appealing to sampling as an essential tool for protection itself<sup>7</sup>, the municipalities of the Val di Chiana launched various survey campaigns.

On the basis of a PhD Research carried out in recent years<sup>8</sup>, this essay analyses the cataloguing of the *Leopoldine* in the Cortona area as well as the contribution provided in this field by the Tuscan Landscape Project entitled "*Leopoldine in Val di Chiana*".

## **2. Comparing Classifications for an integrated methodology of Cataloguing *Leopoldine***

Among the *Leopoldine* in the Val di Chiana, those situated in Cortona, in the hamlets of Fratta-Santa Caterina, are definitely one of a kind; their good state of conservation has made it possible to survey them and, in many cases, even re-use them<sup>9</sup>.

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2 Within the vast bibliography on Pietro Leopoldo's 'enlightened' government, see, in particular, Listri P.F. (2016), Wandruszka A. (1968).

3 Contributions made by Bigazzi A. (2008) and Orefice G. (1979-1980) on the history of the Gran Duchy farms are particularly significant. A more recent survey on physical consistency is, however, contained in Di Pietro G.F. (by) (2009).

4 The bibliography on Tuscan rural architecture is extremely vast. The first essential studies include: Biasutti R. (1935); Pagano G., Guarniero D. (1936); Tinti M. (1935); Biasutti R. (1938); Biffoli G., Ferrara G. (1966); Gori Montanelli L. (1964).

5 The examinations contained herein are worthy of note: Aa. V.v. (1988); Barzanti R., Biffoli G. (1984); Aa. V.v. (1983); on the other hand, the research carried out by Di Pietro is more recent (2009, 2006).

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6 A first "appendix of constructional characters" is contained in the text by Aa. V.v. (1983), in which photographs for each building type show a series of construction solutions for "walls, openings, ceilings, chimneys and chimney pots, dovecotes".

7 Reference is made, in particular, to the 'lists' provided for by: "Norme urbanistiche transitorie relative alle zone agricole"; L.R. n.59/1980 "Norme per gli interventi per il recupero del patrimonio edilizio esistente"; L.R. n. 52/82 "Norme per la formazione del sistema delle aree protette dei Parchi e delle riserve naturali in Toscana".

8 The results of the research were incorporated into the dissertation entitled "*La Materia del Paesaggio. La Conservazione dell'Architettura Rurale delle Leopoldine in Val di Chiana*" (supervisor: Prof. Bianca Gioia Marino, 2021).

9 See Nocerino I., Marino B.G. 2019.

The survey relating to the *Leopoldine* in Cortona is listed in the *Piano Strutturale* (2000). More specifically, an initial “*Analisi del patrimonio edilizio rurale di valore*”, which includes five hundred and sixty-four buildings, contains ninety-five of “exceptional value”: of these, seventy-two are located in the valley area and include no less than thirty-six *Leopoldine*. On the other hand, the “Repertorio *Leopoldine*” is an excerpt of the previous map, which shows only the thirty-six buildings “attributable to the *Leopoldine* ‘type’” (Fig. 2). All the rural buildings are subsequently collected in the “*Schedatura degli edifici di valore*”: the first tabs date back to 2003, followed by a renewal in 2008, the latter being part of the *Regolamento Urbanistico*.

By taking a look at the two tabs, it is possible to notice that they differ in both structure and content. The 2003 tab is structured as follows: the first part contains information on the toponymy and location of the farm, then cartographic extracts and references to previous plans and surveys; the second part concerns the main building, for which an assessment is requested of its state of conservation and typological-architectural value, followed by the inclusion of photographs and the indication of sources; finally, a final section regards valuable annexes, for which typological specifications and assessments of the state of conservation are required. As can be seen, the architectural specifications of the *Leopoldine* are lacking. On the other hand, the 2008 tab has four differently composed parts: although the first part includes exhaustive photographic documentation, it contains only the main identifying information, omitting certain data; the second part adds to the cartographic extracts of the 2003 tab also the orthophotos and the *Leopoldine* land register; the third part analyses the main building, requesting its morphological and typological characteristics, as well as a number of evaluation judgements, while only images of the annexe are requested; finally, the last section contains references to the Technical Intervention Regulations. From a critical

examination of the two tabs: both appear to be lacking in the architectural aspects; for this reason they are insufficient for an exhaustive knowledge of the building; the 2003 tab appears to be better structured than the 2008 tab, although it lacks the building construction specifications, which the second one tries to recover, however still in a superficial manner. Furthermore, both appear to be lacking in the peculiarities of the landscape in which the *leopoldina* is located: instead, this type of architecture has a precise dialectic with its agricultural surroundings, as the Regional *Piano Paesaggistico* states in *Area 15 Piana di Arezzo and Val di Chiana*; therefore, the two spheres, architecture and landscape, must necessarily be analysed simultaneously.

The cataloguing proposed within the framework of the “*Leopoldine in Val di Chiana*” Landscape Project<sup>10</sup> (*PdP Leopoldine*) is different. In the spirit of safeguarding the historical identity of this specific landscape, the project aims to guide its transformation in a sustainable manner, including the *Leopoldine*; as well as providing indications for restorations, it also proposes a Type Tab. From the evaluation of the latter, several doubts arose as to the comprehensiveness of the required content. As far as the farm is concerned, although it appears to be well identified in terms of ownership, dimensional and cadastral data, as well as constraints, there are limited indications of location, cartographic extracts, references to previous censuses and technical regulations; contextual information is completely lacking. In the section relating to the *Leopoldine* - whose annexe has been neglected - there is an assessment of the state of the site, yet not the construction characteristics of the building, nor references to historical sources; the photographic equipment required is minimal.

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<sup>10</sup> This is the first Landscape Project to be implemented in Tuscany, approved by D.C.R. 25 febbraio 2020 n.13 (BURT 11.03.2021 n.11), provided for under Art.37 of the PIT-PPR “*Disciplina*”.

The aforementioned Phd Research, which focused precisely on the conservation of the 'matter' of the landscape of the reclaimed land, was also an opportunity to experiment with a different method of understanding the rural building heritage. To this end, an emblematic case has been selected from among the *Leopoldine* in Cortona<sup>11</sup>: the farm has been analysed in terms of its contextual and historical-transformative aspects, while the architecture has been investigated in terms of its construction and conservation peculiarities and, on the whole, reflections have been made on the material-constructive aspects to be taken into account during restoration work. This type of approach to the farm has provided the tools for setting up a new Tab Model of the *Leopoldine*, referring, moreover, to the possibility of extending the minimum contents of the *PdP Leopoldine*<sup>12</sup>: the contents of the previous tabs have been studied in depth, filling in the gaps.

The proposed tab<sup>13</sup> (Fig. 3) consists of four parts, preceded by an introductory section. The latter contextualises the farm through: image, location, dimensional data, ownership and intended use, cadastral data, dated cartographic extracts (including at least the *Catasto Leopoldino*, *Carta Tecnica Regionale*, *Mappa Catastale*, an orthophoto). Following this section, the first part deals with the regulatory sources (town planning instruments, previous surveys, constraints, technical regulations for interventions) as well as those of a historical-archival nature; furthermore, reference is made to a desirable digital archive, which could contain the 'historical memory' of the farmhouses: a collection of photographs, films, texts and graphs concerning the farm as well as the families who lived there. The second part of the tab focuses on the context of the farm, identifying a landscape "unit" for analysis. After having framed the historical Gran Duchy farm as

well as the landscape-territorial area (PIT-PPR Tuscany) to which the *Leopoldina* belongs, the physical references of the space that interacts aesthetically, historically and functionally with the farm was examined, recognising, by carrying out both a synchronic and diachronic analysis of mutations and permanences<sup>14</sup>: in this way, it has been possible to cut out a 'slice of the landscape' corresponding to a radius measured in metres from the main building<sup>15</sup>. An interpretative analysis of this unit is required: after describing the morphology of the built-up area and its relationship with the landscape, the characteristics and integrity index of the historical farm system are specified, following a cartographic and/or photographic comparison; the "matter" of the unit is then discussed, i.e. all the "natural", urban, architectural and other elements of which the landscape- space considered consists, including a description of the treatments of the farm margin, the crops and the plant species present in the unit. The third and fourth parts of the tab, structured in a similar way, deal in depth with valuable rural architecture, respectively the *Leopoldine* and subsequently the annexe: after indicating the type of building and the state of the site (dimensions, age, description of the building complex and internal distribution, state of conservation and level of historical integrity), the construction details of the vertical and horizontal load-bearing structures (masonry, floors, arches and vaults), of the openings (doors, gates, windows), of the connections, finishings and historical furnishings must be specified. These two sections are enriched by an extensive collection of dated photographs.

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14 In order to see an approach to the rural landscape of this kind, see SCAZZOSI L., BRANDUINI P. (2014). See also: Mileto C., Vegas F., Garcia-Soriano L., Cristini V. (ed. by) (2020); Schittich C. (ed. by) (2019); Mileto C., Vegas F., Garcia-Soriano L., Cristini V. (ed. by) (2018).

15 In the case of Paterno II, for example, a landscape 'unit' has been proposed for analysis that stretches for approx. 400 m from the Leopoldine farmhouse itself, thus including the *Canale Maestro della Chiana* and a small portion of the Poggio Bello hill on the opposite side, beyond the carriageway.

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11 This is the "Paterno II" farm in Chianacce.

12 This possibility is mentioned in the *Relazione Generale* of the *PdP Leopoldine*, p. 25.

13 The completion of this tab has been simulated in the dissertation.

Composed in this way, the tab represents a multi-dimensional analysis of both the *Leopoldina* as well as the surrounding landscape. This approach takes into account all phases of the life of the farm, from its origin to the present day, and it also identifies the transformations it has undergone. Emphasis is placed on the material and constructive value of the farmhouses, which is primarily responsible for their image and typological identification and must therefore be safeguarded; attention is also paid to the compositional elements of the landscape, so that their relationship with the factory can be identified and all the necessary elements for future planning of the revitalisation of this space as a whole are available, in harmony with the context.

### 3. Conclusions: the operational validity of Tabs for the restoration of *Leopoldine*

It is agreed that cataloguing is the primary fundamental tool required in order to understand a historical artefact. Not only, the completeness of the historical-constructive and aesthetic information on the building - which also includes its dialectic with the landscape - is indispensable for a compatible design of restoration work, which also includes its re-use, as also asserted by the *Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage* (1999) and the *Icomos-Ifla Principles Concerning Rural Landscapes as Heritage* (2017), including cataloguing among the first lines of action for the transmission of this heritage. For this reason, it is clear that, although the model tabs presented are suitable for an initial approach to the building, they do not go into detail on the construction and landscape aspects, making it difficult to apply the technical standards drawn up by the regional legislation in a consistent manner. Instead, it is indispensable to carry out an inventory, such as the one proposed, to examine historical architecture in its current context, in order to compose an exhaustive framework of knowledge upon which to base future *Piani Operativi Comunali* and discerning programmes to enhance the value of

the territory through its resources, in compatibility with the '*genius loci*'. Moreover, a multi-scalar study of the factory, such as the one suggested, lends itself to being an experimental model on which to apply, on the one hand, the technical prescriptions dictated by the regulations (in this case the *PdP Leopoldine*) and, on the other, a lexicon of materials for restoration that responds to the peculiarities of the landscape under examination.

It is clear, therefore, that the value of heritage records includes both the cognitive and operational aspects. On the other hand, if knowledge is an essential part of restoration, since it is the historical-critical foundation that ties in with the technique, allowing the latter to be confronted with the 'values' of which the monument is the bearer<sup>16</sup>, it follows that the tab can be a very useful tool: a presentation of the architectural heritage in its twofold aesthetic and historical, physical and immaterial polarity, also including the data functional to the technical restoration operations.

Therefore, just as the importance of taking a census of rural architecture was understood at the end of the last century, so it is important today to ensure that these operations are carried out with scientific criteria, so that they are not a mere bureaucratic practice, but a valid cognitive tool, indispensable to public and private bodies that need to work on this heritage and - as far as possible - a guarantee of respect for the values of the heritage itself.

It is only by pursuing respect for cultural heritage that a sense of belonging and social inclusion can be cultivated, as well as co-responsibility by communities to look after their roots, on which to

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16 Giovanni Carbonara has repeatedly stressed the importance of the knowledge phase of the asset; see "Per una definizione attuale del restauro", in Carbonara G., *Avvicinamento al Restauro. Theory, Storia, Monumenti*, Liguori, Naples 1997, pages 23-33, in particular pages 31-33.

base a sustainable future, preventing conflicts (Faro Convention, 2005).



Fig. 1. A Leopoldina in Cortona.

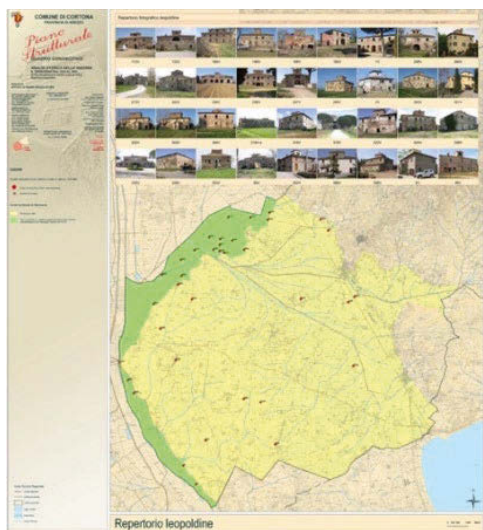
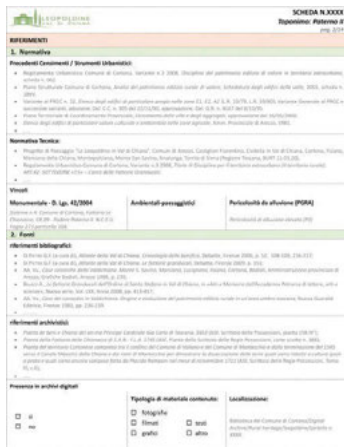


Fig. 2. Repertorio Leopoldine, Cortona 2003.



a



b



c

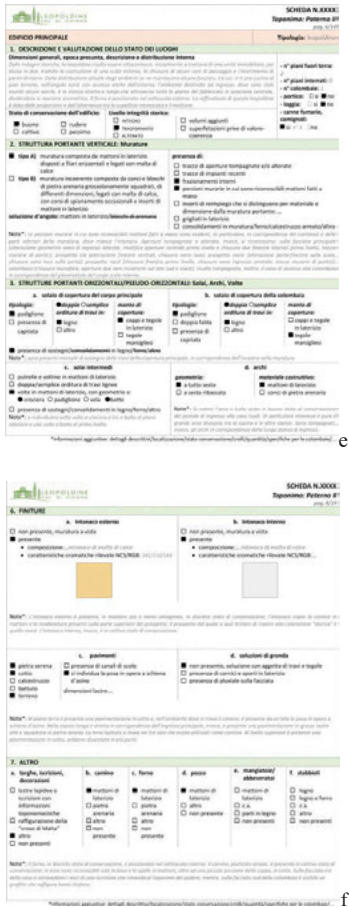


Fig. 3. Six pages (a-f) of The model of the Leopoldine Tab elaborated within the context of the PhD Research dissertation ("La Materia del Paesaggio. La Conservazione dell'Architettura Rurale delle Leopoldine in Val di Chiana", 2021).

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