

The Tuna-fishing Structures in Sicily: an Identitarian Architectural Heritage

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After one thousand years, the tuna-fishing in Sicily is definitively declining. This particular kind of fishing, up to the first half of the XXth century, was carried on with fixed nets in the form of chambers, great submarine traps, according strategies and techniques which were different from those normally used to capture in the open sea the ichthyic varieties. Great buildings still remain along the coasts to take care of the fishing boats, of the nets and the equipments for the handwork of the tunas, and to lodge the workers.

To synthesise, it's possible to assert that the Golden Age of the tuna-fishing in Sicily was the period between the XVIIth and the second half of the XIXth centuries and that, consequently, the maximum development of the specific architectures has been registered from the XVIIth century. There is a mutual relation between the construction of towers and coastal defences and the expansion of the fishing structures; but the product increase has not been caused by remarkable investments; these latter brought about the conditions encouraging a large number of tradesmen to safely set up tuna-fishing nets. On the basis of the archival sources, of the most reliable authors and of the historical cartography it's possible to point out about 85 toponyms concerning places along the perimeter of the Island in which - from the Middle Ages to the XIX century - tuna-fishing nets and the relative buildings were established.

The numerous architectural structures still visible, in spite of the wear and tear of time and of human negligence, stir up emotions and give evidence to the wealth and the material culture produced. It is indispensable that each community and territorial jurisdictions promote every initiative to preserve this precious heritage, expression of working civilization evolving over the centuries. After the recent restoration of the old factory for the handwork of the tunas built in the XIXth century by the banker and entrepreneur Ignazio Florio of Palermo on the island of Favignana (a few miles from the western coast of Sicily), this aim can be pursued using a part of the large available area to create a museum of the Sicilian tuna-fishing history. This is the best way to reconstruct the different fishing places of the Island and to call attention on the buildings still in ruins.