

Coltivare la terra, abitare la città. Fondazione e costruzione di Leonforte nel Seicento

Abstract

This essay presents the results of an interdisciplinary investigation into the foundation and development of Leonforte, a town established in 1610 by Nicolò Placido Branciforti within the broader framework of settlement initiatives in the feudal territories of inland Sicily during the early modern period. Situated on the slopes of Mount Cernigliere, Leonforte exhibits a dual urban configuration: the lower Granfonte district, characterized by modest houses on a slope, and the upper town, laid out on a plateau with an orthogonal street plan and a monumentality that recalls certain features of Palermo. While previous scholarship has primarily focused on the monumental architecture of the upper town and has addressed the city's foundation chiefly through historical and economic lenses, the material and spatial processes underlying its construction have remained largely unexamined.

Drawing on newly identified archival sources and direct spatial analysis, this study explores how the foundation of Leonforte was integrated into the pre-existing territorial context and examines the transformations it produced in the local landscape and in the town's relationships with neighbouring urban centres. Particular attention is given to the ways in which the layout of the new town responded to the morphological conditions of the site, both in its final configuration and through its incremental development. The analysis foregrounds the construction of peasant houses, which constituted a central objective of the town's foundation. Finally, this research considers the political strategies employed by the Branciforti family to encourage long-term settlement, the ideological ambitions underpinning the project, and the structural limitations that ultimately constrained its realization.