

ASPECTS OF ECONOMIC LIFE IN FRANCOLISE DURING THE MIDDLE AGES

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Abstract

Francolise is a small farm and thermal town that rises on the right bank of the river Volturno, in the territory of Calvi Risorta, in the province of Caserta. It is well known above all for its embattled castle dating back to about the thirteenth century and for the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie where the wooden sculpture of the Madonna del Castello (fourteenth century) and the painting of the Madonna del Cardellino (fifteenth century) are kept. Among the past evidence, there are the ruins of two Roman Villas inhabited from the second century B.C. to the second century A.D. In 787 Charlemagne, king of the Franks, passed near the ancient town leading his mighty army to Capua. The presence of farmers mainly specialized in cereal growing has been important in the territory since the second half of the fifteenth century.

Keywords: urban, land use, planning, economy, farm, grain, olive, wine, macaroni.

1. INTRODUCTION

Francolise is a wonderful suburb, situated in the territory of Calvi Risorta, in the Province of Caserta, located at about 40 km northwest of Naples. The little farm and thermal town rises not far from the canal Agnena, on the left bank of the stream Savona, and on the right bank of the river Volturno. It is well known above all for its embattled castle dating back to about the thirteenth century and for the Church of Santa Maria della Grazie (Holy Mary of Grace) where a fourteenth-century wooden sculpture, representing the Madonna and Her Child on the throne (Madonna del Castello, Madonna of the Castle) and a fifteenth-century painting of the Madonna del Cardellino (Madonna of the Goldfinch) are kept. At the foot of the hill where the little town rises, at Bagno Locality, flows a thermal spring water, called Calena, cited by Pliny, with a temperature of 22° C that is rich in bicarbonate and carbon dioxide, and beneficial, among other things, for eczema treatment. The feast day in honour of *the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Castle*, is celebrated on 8 September. Francolise is linked to the hamlets of Sant'Andrea del Pizzone, Montanaro, and Ciamprisco. Nearby there is also the archeological area of Scarasciano (Bova, 2010).

2. ANTIQUITY

Francolise has been populated since antiquity, as the discovery of tombs and tangible traces of settlements may testify. Among the testimony to the past, there are the ruins of two Roman Villas,

located on the hill of Saint Rocco and at Posto Locality. The excavations were carried out under the direction of Dr M. Aylwin Cotton between 1962 and 1964, on behalf of the British School of Rome, and funded by the Batchelor Foundation and the University of New York. They are typical countryside Villas of the late Republican period inhabited from the last decades of the second century B.C. to the second century A.D. The Villas included a group of rooms divided into a *pars urbana* and a *pars rustica*, while water was insured by storage tanks (Mercato, 1990).

3. THE MIDDLE AGES

In the Middle Ages the history of the little town may be confused with that more general of the County, later Principality of Capua (Cilento, 1971). The modern built-up area of Francolise probably expanded only in the late Longobard era. Let us remember that the place-name means “belonging”, from the Christian name *Franculus*, subject to the near Monastery of Saint Vincent at the Voltorno in 787 (Federici, 1925). In the same year Charlemagne, king of the Franks, also passed near the ancient town while leading his mighty army to Capua.

The first information about the place dates back to a document of 987, whose authenticity is disputed, that speaks about: *de loco Franculisi*. Reliable historical information about the area dates back only to 1027, when Giovanni, the Earl of Teano, gave the Church, with the name of Saint Mary and Saint Angel, *constructa in loco Franculis*, to the Monastery of Saint Salvatore, situated on the mount Cucuruzzu. After that date it is easy to follow broadly the historical evolution of the suburb (Bova, 2010).

4. FARM

Flat land with immense meadows, Francolise presents a Medieval landscape characterized generally by the presence of walnut trees, hornbeams, vineyards, high quality lands, shrubs, meadows, cultivated lands.

The first productive structures called *domus seu maxariae*, which we know in the territory of Francolise, date back to the second half of the fifteenth century. They are firms mainly specialized in cereal growing and destined to enter the basic structure system of Mediterranean mercantile farming.

The farm rises most on the area once occupied by the Roman *villa rustica*, but even on the ruins of ancient farm-houses, settlements, and abandoned churches. The farm broadly took care of cereal growing, above all grain and sheep breeding, while the *villa* favoured vine and olive oil growing.

This return to the late Medieval farming was facilitated by an immense land availability, probable consequence of the Famine in 1426 and of the Plague in 1449 documented in the territory of Francolise.

From a social point of view, farm system achievement coincided not only with the consolidation of town's leading class, sometimes of minor aristocratic rank, but also with the one of native families of other places, such as Aversa, Capua, Conca, Naples, Teano. Let us see now some typical examples of *domus-maxariae*.

Particularly, in reading a document dated 30 October 1465 (*but* 1464), we have known of the existence of two *domus* belonging to the brothers Cobello and Pietro de Carlo, situated 'in territorio dicte Turris, in villa Piczoni, 'una coperta et alia discoperta, cum curti et antecurtis, orto et medietatis *torculari*' (olive press). The *domus* were located 'iuxta curtim, ortum et *torcular* Bice Cafarello'. So we have a type of farming complex, reputedly, made up of more farms, interested above all in oil production, but certainly also in that of wine.

In reading an important document dated 16 December 1743 (*but* 1472), we learn that the Archiepiscopal House of Capua gave Luca Cafarello, so called Bag, *in perpetuum de casale Puczoni*, 'integras *domos*, consistentes in duobus membris (*rooms*), duobus videlicet inferioribus et uno superiori, cum curti, in qua sunt puteus (*well*), et cantarus (*pot*) dicte archiepiscopalis camera Capuane [...]. Site sunt indicto casali Puczoni, [...] iuxta palmentum (*for grape treading*) et curtim dicti Cobelli de Carolo'.

In another document dated 22 October 1498 (*but* 1497), we learn that on that date the judge, the notary and the witnesses had gone 'ad villam S. Andree, pertinenciarum Capue, ad *domos seu maxariam* magnifici domini Andree de Arimpio, de eadem civitatis Capue, scitam in eadem villa, iuxta viam publicam, iuxta starciam ipsius domini Andree', and there they had gone upstairs 'in domo superiori ipsarum domorum', to draw up a contract (Bova, 2010).

5. FABRIC DEALER

It seems very probable that, in the hamlet of Sant'Andrea del Pizzone, a production of cordage, sails, sacks, carpets, linen or hemp fabrics and sheets was practised in the Middle Ages, considering, in the territory, the worship of Saint Andrew, Patron Saint of rope makers, of Saint Antony Abate, Patron Saint of weavers, and of Saint Francis of Assisi, Patron Saint of upholsterers and dealers. In this area it is also documented the name of the job *textor*, later become the surname (*Tessitore*). We can also add that one the Patron Saints of the near town of Capua was Saint Agatha (on the 5 February) Patron Saint of cloth makers, activity made by the Jews. Therefore the Patronage of these Saints points to a large

area in Terra di Lavoro aiming at fabric production and trading, favoured by linen and hemp cultivation (Cammilleri, 1998).

6. BREEDING, HUNTING AND FISHING

It is also possible that, in the territory, poultry, rabbit, and pig breeding was practised, protected by the aforesaid Saint Antony Abate, to whom an altar into the Church of Holy Mary of Grace, in the hamlet of Sant'Andrea del Pizzone, was dedicated.

Obviously fishing was practised due to the presence of the stream Savona and of the canal Agnena in the area of the Volturno: Saint Andrew is the Patron Saint of fishermen, to whom a Church was dedicated. Another natural source of sustenance was hunting, due to the presence of a lot of woods around. Saint Eustachio is the Saint Patron of hunters (the feast day is on 20 September), to whom a Church in Sessa Aurunca was dedicated (1047).

7. GRAIN, OLIVE OIL AND WINE PRODUCTION

Then since *torcularia* (olive press) and *palmenta* (treading grapes) are also documented within the territory, we have reason to believe that oil and wine (Falerno?) production and trade were also very active; particularly wine was used not only for personal use, but also for liturgical use. The presence of *domus seu maxariae* with gardens and courtyards, specialized in the production of cereals (wheat, rye, maize, barley and oats), above all grain, and let us suppose a possible trade even in these products of the land.

8. MACARONI

Talking about cereals and grain, two documents about the area of Francolise have a great interest. In a parchment dated 16 January 1477 it is in fact quoted, a 'terram Antonii *Macharoni*, de dicta villa Scarasciani'; in another one dated 9 March 1478 it is mentioned, a 'terram Antonii *Macharoni* et fratrum, de dicta Turri'. For truth's sake we are very interested in the origin of the surname of the Maccarone brothers, who worked between Scarasciano and Francolise. It seems probable in fact that the surnames *Macarone*, *Maccarone*, *Maccherone*, *Maccheroni*, come from the late Latin *maccare* (to grind, to compress, to stack, to knead), referring to the flour milling process.

So we immediately recall that the term *macaroni* – which is present in the 17th century in Ciociaria and became common in the 18th century – had been used little more than a century before compared to the date of our documents, in '*Decameron*' published by Giovanni Boccaccio in Florence in 1353. In Story

III, Day 8, '*Calandrino and the heliotrope*', a delicacy is in fact quoted, 'et eravi una montagna tutta di formaggio parmigiano grattugiato, sopra la quale stavan genti che niuna altra cosa facevan che far *maccheroni* e raviuoli, e cuocerli in brodo di capponi' (Boccaccio, 1902). In that period it seemed to indicate something very similar to the modern gnocchi.

At the dawn of the Modern Age, the probable presence of a sort of pasta factory in a farm in the territory between Scarasciano and Francolise would be at odds with the common thesis – though it is borne out by no document – according to which the spaghetti and the pasta were invented in the town of Gragnano, near Naples, in Campania.

9. ECONOMY TODAY

Although our research is limited above all to the Middle Ages, a period which has almost been entirely unknown till now due to the great deal of unpublished documents, we do think it is appropriate also to hint at some aspects of the local economy today. Particularly today's people of Francolise have shown an openness to change even with respect for multimillion traditions. This attitude has especially promoted the industrial and tertiary sector development, without compromising the importance of the primary industry: in fact agriculture specialized in the production of cereals, fruit, grapes, and hemp, has represented to this day an important source of employment and income for most of inhabitants.

Within such a secondary sector there is a large tobacco manufacturing industry. In particular, on the first three days of July 2008 the first national Tobacco Festival-Fair took place in the town centre. That was solemnized on the 2 July in conjunction with Holy Mary of Grace's Feast Day. In such a sense, it is significant the effort made by the people of Francolise to defend the continuity of tobacco production, the major driving force of their local economy, and at the same time to divulge the world of the sector workers, through the establishment of interesting exhibitions and publications. All other existing handmade firms are active in food, mechanical, metallurgic, building, and wood carving sectors. Even the tertiary sector presents a good level of development and includes qualified services, such as banking and insurance.

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