The foundation, planning and building of new towns in the 13th and 14th centuries in Europe: an architectural-historical research into urban form and its creation

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Appendix A

Description of the Project for the New Town of Giglio Fiorentino, 19 May 1350

This document is very important because it gives a good insight into the project for this town in the stage after its plan was designed but before it was built. In fact, the town was never actually built, because the project was aborted for reasons that are not precisely known. The document is all the more important because it is the only clear source providing solid and detailed information about the spatial planning of a town that was to be newly created in Europe before the 15th century. The document also contains important information on other aspects of the planning of the new town, such as the forced population of the settlement, the ritual of invoking the proper saints and the apparent importance of the proper denomination of the gates.

The document was drawn up on 19 May 1350 by the Ufficiali della Castella, a committee which, only a short time before, was made responsible for the fortifications in the Florentine countryside.1 It is kept in the Archivio di Stato in Florence, in the archive of the Ufficiali della Castella (Uff. Cast.) under the code Roche 1, fol.s 15v.-18r. The document was published by David Friedman (1988, pp.337-343) in its original language (Italian and the final sections in Latin) with a translation in English. The text below is largely copied from Friedman’s translation, but some sentences have been slightly changed in order to stay closer to the original Italian/Latin text as published by Friedman.

“And the said officials, establishing in the Valdambra where would be a site that would be most useful, appropriate and ample for the placement of the town which has been ordered for them to delineate, place the said town in the Valdambra on the site which is called Selva Piana. They place it, and mark it, and fix the stakes and organize it in this way: so that it shall have a length of 470 braccia and a width of 246 braccia. And that the said town shall have four gates of which one will face towards Florence and be called Porta Fiorentina, another shall face towards Arezzo and be called the Porta San Pietro, another shall face towards Siena and be called the Porta San Quiricho, and another which shall have to face towards Laterina and it shall be called the Porta San Giovanni.”

[In the margin opposite the preceding sentence: “The commune of Florence will help to build these gates and the officials of the city shall pay that amount which shall be established by the office of the Signori and the officers of the Castella.”]

“And the said town shall be surrounded by ditches and for the present be enclosed with palisades and turrets and a the right time be walled.

“And at the said place [are] invoked the name of God and of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the glorious apostles Saint Peter and Saint Paul, the blessed Saint John, Saint Zenobius, Santa Reparata and the other saints of paradise. In honor and celebration and support of the popolo and commune of Florence and the Parte Guelfa and for the honor and growth and maintenance of the said town [the officials] they gave it a name and they called it Giglio Fiorentino. And the device and the arms of the said town shall be a blue lily on a yellow ground with a rastrello above and on one side of this lily shall be a shield with the arms of the popolo of Florence and on the other shall be another with the arms of the commune of Florence.

“And in the middle of the town shall be a piazza 90 braccia long and 70 braccia wide. And in this piazza shall be a well. And flanking this piazza, on one side, shall be a house of the commune with a loggia in which the official of the town shall reside for the commune of Florence. And on the other side, flanking this piazza, on the upper side, shall be and will be built the church of the parish of Saint Peter. Above the corner of the town facing Montuotii [castello di Montozzi] shall be built a tower high 40 braccia, with a projecting machicolated gallery of stone at its summit and the tower shall be solid for four braccia above the ground. And the said tower shall have two vaults, the one at a height of ten braccia and the other in the upper part of the tower. The tower shall have a length *including the walls* along the length of the town ten braccia and along the width of the town eight braccia wide. And it shall have a battered base all around and [*"lat..." = canceled*] And the walls of the tower shall be as wide as the walls of the tower of the keep at Laterina, and the tower shall be surrounded by a ditch and moat inside and outside of the town with a drawbridge and a small doorway which provide an entrance and an exit to the town.

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“And inside the tower there shall be two floors of wood, covered with brick as is appropriate. The tower shall be well founded and at the foot of the tower a well shall be made. And around the tower there shall be made a walled enclosure wide and spacious ten braccia all around the tower with a small gate toward the town and another toward the countryside. And the ditches of the town shall be 20 braccia wide at the mouth and 10 braccia deep. And at the bottom the ditches shall be ten braccia wide.

“Inside the said town there shall be nine streets. One shall be inside along of the walls of the town, 10 braccia wide ["above..." = canceled] alongside this street and flanking it shall be houses 10 braccia wide and long. Then there shall be another street eight braccia wide and alongside and flanking that street shall be houses long 20 braccia and ten wide. And subsequently there shall be another street ten braccia in width on which shall be houses 20 braccia long and 10 braccia wide. And then there shall be another street ten braccia wide, which runs into the piazza of the town and on this street shall be houses twenty-eight braccia long and 10 braccia wide which extend to the main street. And subsequently there shall be made a main street which will be fourteen braccia wide and subsequently in the other part of the town houses and streets shall be made just as it is designated and written above. *And this main street shall run the length of the town. And another street similar to the said street shall be made in the middle of the town across it.

“And on each corner of the town shall be made a false tower [this is a tower that is open at the backside].

“And outside the town the market shall be held on the Saturday of every week.”* [In the margin, next to the sentences between the asterisks: “If all the houses which are built on the main streets shall have at least one enclosed upper storey when they are finished, covered with stones and tiles. And that the front walls shall be of stone or brick and shall rise 10 braccia above ground.”]

“And in the said town must come and live permanently all the men and persons of these communities and places with all of their families, houses, equipment and things ["below..." = canceled] by ["the middle of August" = canceled] “this coming September” [in the margin: “note concerning extension of deadlines”] “or face a fine of C/V [= five hundred] lire; and so [the officials] command. That is: the men and persons of Castiglione Alberti with their possessions; the men and persons from the Badia of Agnano with their possessions; the men and persons from the Pieve a Prisciana [in the margin: “note about the establishment of prices, note about the distribution of lots of land”]

“And by the end of this coming November these men and persons will similarly come to live in the said town, as said and with the same penalties, that is:

“the men and persons of the village of Campanolle and of San Lorentino

“the men of the commune of Monte Lucci

“the men of the commune of Cacciano

“the men of the commune of Cornia

[in the right-hand margin next to this list: “This deadline may be extended by the lords priors and the officers of the Castella”]

“And the houses of these villages shall be dismantled.

“And the bell tower of the Badia of Agnano shall be reduced in height.

[The following is an addition in another hand:]

“And whoever moves into the town within these deadlines, if he is from one of the above places, shall have a [tax] exemption for five years. And if he is from outside the contado and distretto of Florence he shall have that exemption once he had lived in the town III -n/I- [=years].

[The following is added on a separate page in Latin]

“And the land for this town shall be bought for the commune of Florence for a price not exceeding ["CC lire" = canceled] C florins by the aforesaid officials or any of them or anyone appointed by them; which price be paid as above.

“And anyone who receives permission ["vol..." = canceled] to build [in the town] shall have a perpetual rent of one ["denari" = canceled] chicken annually ["dando" = canceled] to the officials of the lords priors on the feast of Saint John. And it is sufficient when one man presents (the chickens) of all. And he may bring them (into the city) without paying the gate tax.

“And the [houses before the streets and squares = canceled] may be

“And those who shall make these front houses must raise them at least one story above ground by the first day of May [1351] or be penalized XXV lire.

“And the podestà and vicarius of the Valdarno with -1- man from each of the said communes, shall distribute the aforementioned lots. And the podestà shall see that this is done and punish disobedient persons [with fines] of up to X lire.”