

Contents liste available at Cib.Unibo

AlmaTourism

homepage: almatourism.cib.unibo.it

**Stefano Piastra, *La casa rurale nella Vena del Gesso romagnola*,
Quaderni del Parco 1, Carta Bianca Editore**

Curiazi, R.*
University of Bologna (Italy)

This work, resulting from a deep research in the Vena del Gesso, represents an important attempt of historical and geographical reading about this portion of Apennines. The area covered by the investigation, which stays between the provinces of Bologna and Ravenna, is a site of great value from an environmental and cultural point of view. For this reason, since 2005 it is protected and promoted within the Regional Park of the Vena del Gesso Romagnola.

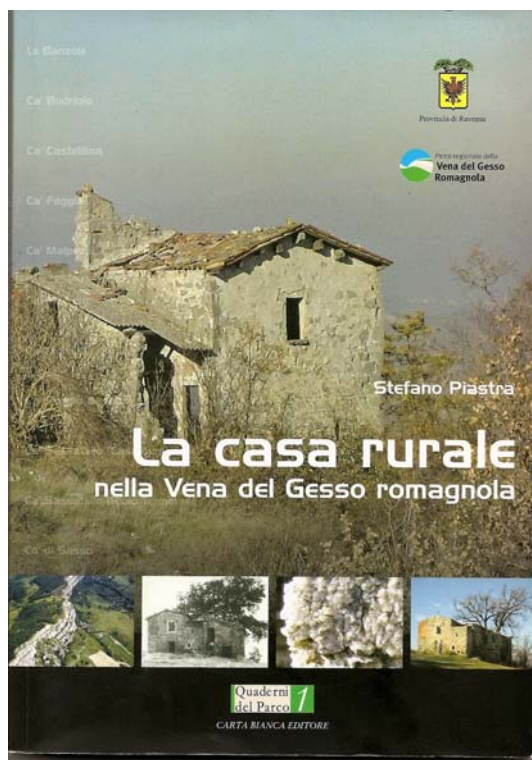
The history of these places begins six million years ago, and “speaks” about a deep bond between humans and natural environment. Here, the dynamics of survival and interaction with the land have shaped, over time, suggestive landscapes, which are made by cultural and natural elements representing its intrinsic characteristics. The Author deals with a classic theme of Human Geography: the rural house. This traditional house is part of the evolutionary process experienced by the territory, as a “witness” of humans/environment relationships which characterize this part of Romagna Apennines. But it also stands as “guardian” of tangible and intangible cultural values, which recall to mind the ancient process of human adaptation to an area affected by particular environmental conditions, which helped to forge the popular culture and the history of these places over the centuries.

Thus, the rural house plays an important role as a meaningful example of rural historical housing in the Apennines. It still represents a tangible testimony of a peasant culture that is disappeared in the last few years, under the pressure of a globalizing modernity, which seems to be hardly compatible with the survival of such heritage. However, this heritage, considered as “minor” for a long time, in recent years has become element of renewed interest, especially in terms of potential recovery, conversion and re-qualification of still existing original structures for recreational and, in general, touristic aims. Hence, the need to retrace the history of the Vena del Gesso by addressing attention to the rural heritage both in terms of environmental preservation, and of its future conversion for economic aims. In particular, the renewed economic interest in the building heritage of the Vena del Gesso can be ascribed to the recent creation of the Natural Park, which has increased the demand for second houses and buildings for accomodation/leisure uses within the protected area.

For these reasons, it is needed to rethink about the rural house, starting from the ranks of Gambi's studies, and retracing the issue from an historical perspective by using all sources available to the “modern” researcher, with a twofold purpose: on the one hand, the knowledge and the disclosure of very peculiar features of local settlement, which are at the

* E-mail address: roberta.curiazi@unibo.it, Mobile : + 393392455414

basis of what the Author calls an “architectonic dialect” related to the Gessi; on the other hand, the elaboration of a record which could be used to better manage the project about the Spatial Plan of the Park.



The Author's project, considered from a broader perspective, aims to encourage a proper programmatic management of the territory, which has, as its priority, the rediscovery of the deep roots of human settlements in the Vena del Gesso, with the aim to recreate the “sense of belonging to these places” that has weakened in recent decades.

In the first chapter the Author introduces the geographical significance of rural buildings, recalling the main elements of the history of these places, and the existing intertwining between human presence and environment. A topic, the latter, which is element of a renewed scientific interest by researchers in the Human Geography field, as above underlined. In fact, after a decline of interest in the rural house at the turn of the period of industrialization between the late Seventies and the early Eighties, the scientific community began to associate these traditional buildings to the concept of “cultural heritage to be preserved”, in other words as an element characterizing the anthropogenic component of the landscape. Hence, the recognized need to “properly manage building restoration and conversion of use”, by facing the perils of a real estate speculation, that is fueled by an increased demand for second houses.

In recent decades, the need to diversify investments in financial terms, and also to escape from the congestion of urban and metropolitan areas, has brought a new discovery of the rural environment as a place to live in, and as a recreational destination. The Vena del Gesso, because of being affected by considerable environmental influences by its own conformation, it has been historically considered as an marginal and isolated area, and dedicated to an almost-subsistence economy. But, because of the now-in-place proliferation of traditional houses recovered for tourist-recreational aims, the existing building stock, that is still largely in state of neglect, has suddenly become object of wide economic interests

which are now threatening its conservation. Thus, it makes it urgent to think about measures to keep down the problem.

In the second chapter the Author presents a detailed historical and geographical excursus, from which a fascinating evolutionary picture of rural population of the Vena del Gesso emerges. Since the moment of maximum ascent, during the Nineteenth century local population experienced a decline due to the improved communication and the industrial development in the Po Valley, which encouraged migration from the Apennines to the plains. The temporary setback of the phenomenon, which occurred during the Fascist period, failed to stop the ongoing process of marginalization, which had its peak during the Italian economic boom, in the late Fifties and Sixties of the last century. As pointed out by the Author, this joint action of depopulation, abandonment of fields, and reduction of timber harvesting practices, inevitably brought a considerable change in the environmental assets of the area, with a modification of landscapes in favor of a decisive return of the forest on the rock faces of the Vena.

Having the Author provided, in the third chapter, a toponymy mapping of these places, which closely represents the peculiar features of this territory, in the fourth and fifth chapters he offers a description of the most common sites of settlement in the Vena, emphasizing the local environmental features, and the predominant building types. So, among the many present, it strongly emerges in the territory the coexistence of a type of building linked to the Mediterranean world, such as the "peninsular" one, and a type linked to the Po area, such as the one involving the Imola and Faenza Apennines. Thus, the Vena plays the role of "hinge" between continental world and Central-southern Italy in environmental and natural terms, but also in terms of settlement and lifestyle.

After the sixth chapter, that describes the characteristics out-buildings of rural houses, it follows a detailed description of construction materials used in local settlements, which comply with explicit "economic requirements" remarking themselves, together with the approximate building techniques, the condition of isolation and underdevelopment of the Vena del Gesso. As outlined in chapter eight, we can find the same "tendency" in the finishes, which are extremely modest and of secondary importance in the everyday local routine.

In the ninth chapter the Author tackles the problem of water supply, typical of karst areas such as the one here considered, where the absence of surface drainage network has always influenced the organization of settlements and the conformation of the Vena. Finally, the tenth chapter presents a reflection about the creation of the Regional Park of the Vena del Gesso Romagnola, and on the goals related to the requalification of the traditional housing stock within the protected area.

Thus, if the creation of the Park has "forced" to protect this rural heritage, however it has lead to an increase in economic interests directed to the many structures still largely abandoned, mainly scattered along the evaporitic dorsal of the Vena. Therefore, looking ahead, "the governing bodies of the Park will have to ensure an harmonization between local economic development and preservation of natural and cultural heritage of the Vena del Gesso". In other words, they should assure the preservation and enhancement of this uniqueness element of the Romagna Apennines.

In this monograph, that is full of recent and library pictures collected by the Author, the reader is conducted on a fascinating and deep "path of knowledge" about Gessi Romagnoli, where traditional rural house emerges as a result of a complex adaptive process, strongly connected with the environment, which still today lets us see its evidence on the territory. The rural house, by its very nature, reflects the constraints that environment placed against the humans and their activities over the centuries. Therefore, it stands as an emblem of cultural values, which are deeply rooted in the territory in memory of a past that still survives through this typical and unique heritage.