

**PORTO LONGONE, TODAY PORTO AZZURRO,  
AT ELBA ISLAND.**

*A Spanish Stronghold in Tuscany,  
to be recovered in the new environmental context.*

**Giampaolo Trotta\***

During the XVI century, the Spaniards, who had colonized a large zone of the New World, gaining from it large riches, were engaged in the tiring long religious war in the Flanders, which was slowly absorbing as in an eddy a good part of the accumulated fortune "recycled" through the Genoese bankers, a war which will be one of the causes of the decay of the Spaniards' imperialism. As the contacts with the Flanders, could no longer be kept through the English Channel, supplies passed through the earth-course, through Genoa, Milan and then followed the river Rhein. At the beginning of the XVII century, to protect the sea-courses of the Tirreno Sea which linked Naples (under the Spaniards' dominion) and Genoa, passing through the Piombino channel, the Spaniards founded the stronghold of Longone at Elba Island, where, in another area, already existed the Medicean fortifications of Cosmopoli (Portoferraio), wanted by the Grand-duke of Tuscany, Cosimo I, in 1548, to protect the coasts from the Saracen pirates, but which, in fact, were possible bases for the French power.

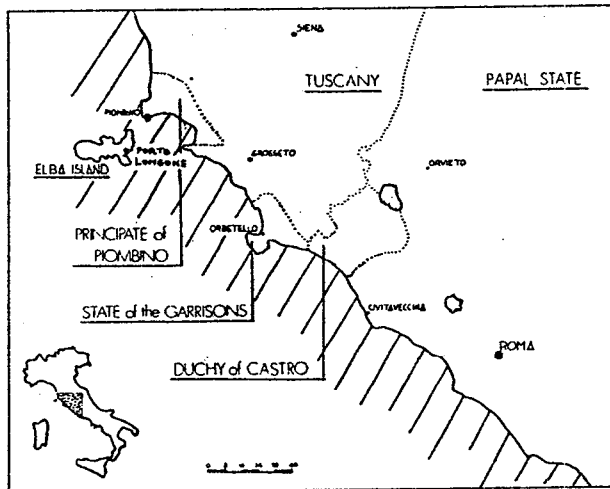


Fig. 1 - Map of the central tirrenic coasts (presently Tuscany and Lazio) showing the ancient borders and the location of Porto Longone at Elba Island.



Fig. 2 - An old map of Tuscany, with the Medicean Cosmopolis and with Spanish Porto Longone at Elba Island (partial reproduction).

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The long gulf of Longone was then still a "virgin" area, almost uninhabited, rich of woods which alternate with naked and rocky areas and coast marsh, without many connections with the rest of the island.

The *modus aedificandi* of the fortress of St. James at Longone partly reflects the Spaniards' "colonial" tactics, that is to say that of occupy new still wild lands and let the military genius quickly build there a first immediately defendable stronghold. Even afterwards, Longone had an independent story from the other more ancient communities of Elba Island, maintaining with them extremely rare and difficult relations.

The fortress, in the shape of a pentagonal, irregular, slightly lengthened star (with a maximum width of about 400 meters between the two opposite bulwarks) was built between 1603 and 1605 by Don García de Toledo and by the militar engineer Pietro Castiglione, following the fortifications of Antwerp in the Fländers (designed by Francesco Paciotto between 1567 and 1569) and the Italian school typology, by then codified in the treatises and in the practical realizations.

In the meanwhile, since the years immediately after the foundation, a little group of civil people has been formed, who then went to live along the coast below the fortress and who "lived with the garrison and for the garrison" (see bibliography 3). The little village organized itself as a typical Spanish and mediterranean coast settlement, with low houses which had plasters painted of light colours, little lanes, kitchen gardens and little gardens, churches and oratories (among the holy buildings of Spanish age at Longone, it is enough to remember St. James Church within the fortress and Mary's Holy Heart Oratory near the shore).

In 1759, the stronghold passed, with the Reign of Naples, to Ferdinand IV, continuing to maintain tight relations with the ancient motherland, Spain<sup>1</sup>. The



Fig. 3 - Map of the gulf of Longone, with the fortresses of St. James and Focardo, drawn up in the first half of the XIX century (Rome, I.S.C.A.G.).

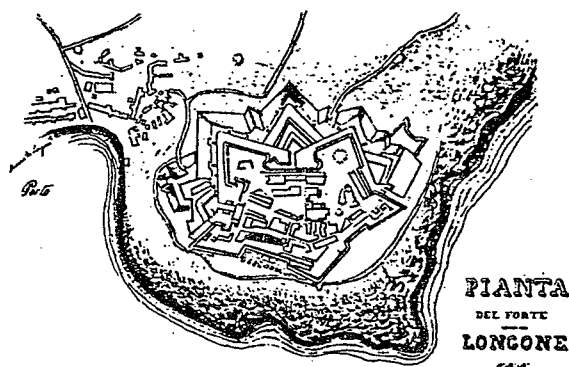


Fig. 4 - Map of the fortress of Longone towards the half of 1800 (Rome, I.S.C.A.G.).

1) In the stockyard of the National Museum of St. Martin Chartusian in Naples Monastery there is a wooden model of the fortress of Longone, dating back to the second half of 1700 and belonging to a series of models of strongholds of the Reign of Naples.

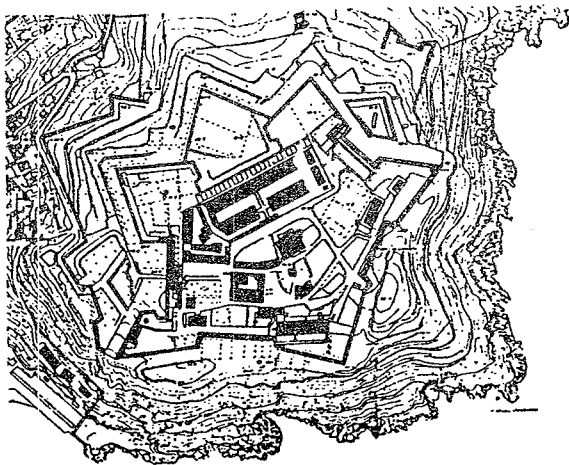


Fig. 5 - Present planimetry of the fortress-penitentiary.

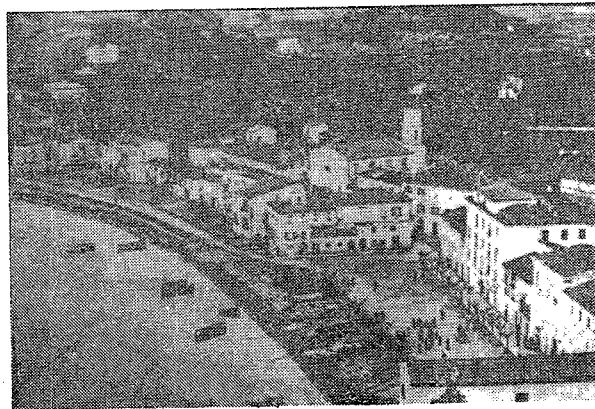


Fig. 6 - Porto Longone in an ancient picture.

Borbons restructured part of the fortress (which in the meantime had lost a good part of its strategical importance) and the coast village was enlarged by adding a group of Neapolitan fishermen, reaching an extension almost equal to the most internal one of the fortress.

During the napoleonic period, the Emperor ordered the demolition of the stronghold, become useless, but this was interrupted because of the Waterloo defeat.

After the annexation of Elba Island to the Grand-duchy of Tuscany (1815), the fortress was garrisoned by a little group of soldiers; in 1849, a *Punishment Company* for insubordinate soldiers was instituted within the fortress, whereas in 1858, one of the building was used as a prison.

But the radical change came about only with the serious economic crisis occurred after the annexation to the Reign of Italy. During the 80's, the community of Longone itself suggested to the Italian Domestic Ministry the transformation of the whole fortress into a penitentiary. The agreement was signed on November 4, 1890. For the fortress a new life began, disjoined from the village and from the context where it has been founded, but not yet antithetic.

It was only after the Second World War that, once the iron industrial activity of Elba Island disappeared and consequently the digging out industry in the mines near Longone decreased and once the activities linked to fishing, agriculture and to the presence of the penitentiary became unsufficient, the new route of the turistic activity was undertaken. As if to "disown" the by then uneasy presence of the penitentiary, in 1947 the Commune turned its name from Portolongone into Porto Azzurro. The prison became a "fraction....overlooking the village and....from this absolutely secluded" (see bibliography 5): the old and historical fortress begins in this way to live its own life in antithesis with the new world all around it.

The turistic development, more and more a mass tourism, caused the chaotic rising of a new village of villas, hotels, residences, which has sometime compromised the delicate environmental balance of which the fortress was anyway

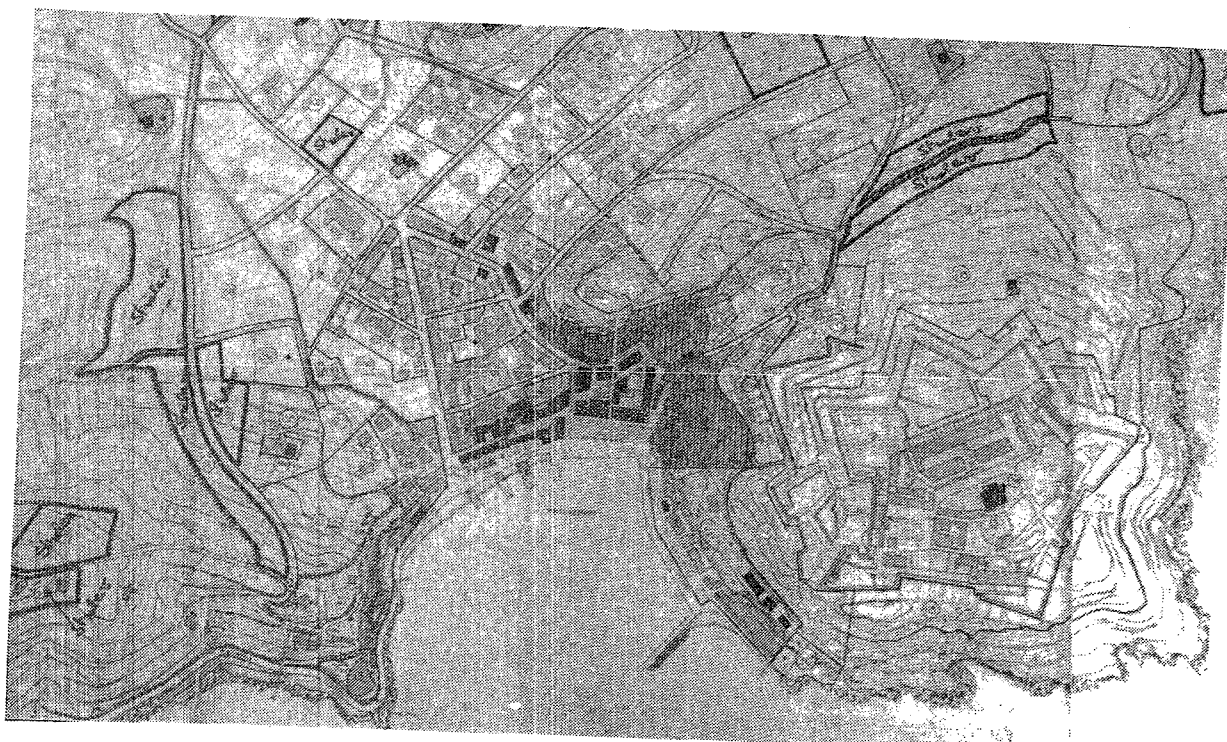


Fig. 7 - The General Regulating Plan for the historical center and for the area around the fortress of Longone (Technical Offices of the Commune of Porto Azzurro).

a part. While new buildings have also attacked a part of the promontory on which the fortress is placed (in some cases almost reaching the external bulwarks), some typical buildings of the old historical village have been distorted by destinations of use that deeply altered them, such as modern self-services, canteens, pizza's houses, souvenir shops.

In the same way, the physical deterioration of the ancient buildings has increased: degradation of plasters and stone elements in houses, water infiltrations, marcescence of wooden structure of roofs and degradation of decorations in the Spanish oratories, static settling, detaching and loss of wall material in the external curtains of the fortress.

The progressive mass tourism occurred in the last years has made the Communal Administration face serious problems, particularly as far as the creation of the necessary services and equipment is concerned, without further altering the historical and environmental context. With the *General Regulating Plan* adopted in 1986 (for which various changes are already under discussion) have been singled out, within the historical center, those buildings to be safeguarded as belonging to the first unit of the settlement and for those buildings a recent ordinance of the Mayor imposes the restoration of the faces again using painting of the 1700/1800 (colours as brick red, yellow and ochre with white mouldings). A large area of the village is then subject to a recovery plan. For the whole historical center a more careful control is anyway to be hoped, also on the mechanisms that bring to transformations of use that, as we have seen, are not always compatible with the buildings.

The main problem remains, however, that the equipment. If the problem of "bipolarism", which came out with the break between the fortress-prison and the turistic village, has not yet been formally stated, it is anyway clear that only getting

over this binomial Porto Longone-Porto Azzurro the village can obtain the necessary equipment without the creation of new large complexes, that, without doubt, would further alter the landscape and the environment with their inevitable remarkable cubage.

The removal of the penitentiary from Longone, besides, would not involve the economic problems that would occur for other prisons in the Tuscan Archipelago (as, for example, that of Capraia Island), because, by now, the flourishing activity of Porto Azzurro is no longer substantially linked to the penitentiary. Undoubtly such an operation, which needs a very long political and technical period, cannot be suggested "tout-court". At this regard the Plan provision is interesting: it destines to green equipped spaces and public park the areas around the old external curtain of the fortress, foreseeing also spaces for "water games"<sup>2</sup>. In this way the "riappropriation" of the old fortress could occur gradually, preventing at the same time that, in the future, within the fortress itself, something again secluded from the village below come out.

Among the structures which Elba Island mostly needs and that could be put in the fortress, there is first of all the congressional one (presently congresses of doctors, lawyers or turistic operators take place in various hotels of the Island), linked with adequate receptive structures (Porto Azzurro presently lacks a first-class hotel). This utilization would allow to enjoy the complex also in periods different from summer, thus avoiding a only seasonal use of the buildings, where during the mid-season, old people coming from all Europe could spend their holidays (Elba Island is particularly known and appreciated, above all in Switzerland and Germany and enjoys the financing of a E.E.C. special provision). In summer, theatre performances and shows in general could take place in the fortress (both indoor and in the open air) as well as sport activities (good equipment already exist, among which a regular football ground) and exhibitions. The existing gardens, created in this century, and the large non-built-up area (most of all inside some bulwarks towards earth) could be equipped as public green spaces (using the various specimens of the mediterranean vegetation) and linked to the

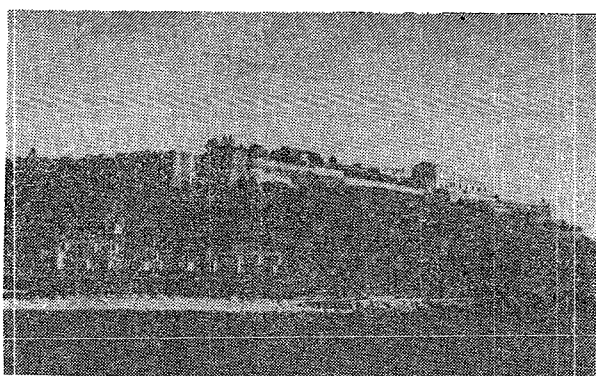


Fig. 8 - The fortress in a modern picture (March 1987).



Fig. 9 - The new building expansion has in some cases "choked" the ancient structures of St. James fortress (picture of March 1987).

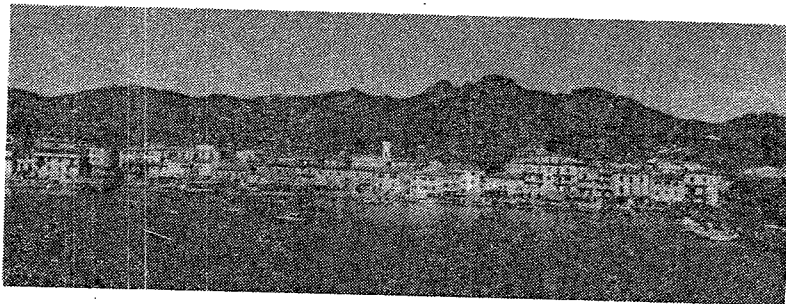
2) In a shorter time, the other Spanish fortress, the Focardo, built in 1678 on the opposite side of the Gulf and with more modest dimensions, could be recovered for the public enjoyment.

external equipped park mentioned above which represents a "trait-d'union" with the village.

A rigorous restoration is imperative to maintain the wall curtain, the doors, the bulwarks, the external half-lunettes, as well as the original buildings left, among which the baroque St. James Church, restored in 1720 and still seat of the Parish of Porto Azzurro. But with the transformation into prison, a substantial work of building thinning out and/or replacement has been carried out, and so various blocks, such as the three northern wings of the penitentiary, can be mostly recovered with a valid internal restoration, or, in some cases, only as volumetry, replacing completely new (also technologically) buildings, following a series of coordinated interventions. A very complicated problem between old and new, restoration and replanning, but also a stimulant one, which was already present, for example, within the international competition promoted by the Commune of Florence for the restoration and recovery of the ex-prison "Le Murate" (an ancient convent) for handicrafts activities and public multifunctional spaces, or in the designs of the recovery of St. John Fortress in Florence (XVI century) as exhibition space.

Only in this way the old and historical fortress of Longone can get into the new world of Porto Azzurro, recovering, even if in a different way, the ancient role of vital motor for the village<sup>3</sup>.

Fig. 10 - Modern view of Porto Azzurro from the sea.



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- 3) I wish to thank, for the data and materials given, Dr. Giuseppe Battaglini of the Comunità Montana dell'Elba e Capraia, Colonel Amelio Fara of the Corps of Engineers and the Administrations of the Communes of Porto Azzurro and Capoliveri.  
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## SUMMARY

### PORTO LONGONE, TODAY PORTO AZZURRO, AT ELBA ISLAND

*A Spanish Stronghold in Tuscany to be recovered in the new environmental context*

Giampaolo Trotta

Elba Island (the biggest and most famous island of the Tuscan Archipelago) is, from a cultural point of view, particularly known for its monuments dating back to the Medicean grand-ducal period (citadel of Portoferraio, founded in 1548) and for those of the napoleonic Reign (1814).

Important signes witnessing the architectonical culture of the island are also the fortifications built by the Spaniards in the XVII century, to protect the sea-courses between Naples and Genoa. Among these fortifications, that of Longone (begun in 1603 and solemnly blessed on April 2, 1606) reflects the Italian school typology already used in Antwerp. The village below (Marina di Longone) introduces in this area of the island - still "virgin" - the typology of the Spanish coast built-up area.

At the end of the XIX century, the fortress was transformed into a penitentiary, whereas, after the Second World War, the village (that meanwhile had turned its name into Porto Azzurro) grew chaotically, becoming an international holiday resort. These changes brought to a dichotomy between the new turistic village and the old fortress-prison.

This study aims to give some indications for a recovery of the fortress (that presents also a remarkable physical degradation) and of the village, once more transforming the fortress into a towing motor for the new reality of Porto Azzurro, integrated with the village and with the natural environment and possessing a multifunctional destination of public use.

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## SUMARIO

### PORTO LONGONE, HOY PORTO AZZURRO, EN LA ISLA DE ELBA

*Una plaza de armas española en Toscana para ser recuperada en el nuevo contexto ambiental*

Giampaolo Trotta

La Isla de Elba (la mas grande y afamada del archipiélago Toscano), desde un punto de vista cultural, es particularmente conocida por sus monumentos pertenecientes al periodo Gran Ducal de los Medici (la ciudadela de Porto Ferraio fundada en 1548) y por aquellas del Reinado Napoleónico (1814).

Importantes testimonios de la cultura arquitectónica de la Isla de Elba están constituidos también por las fortificaciones erigidas por los Españoles en el siglo XVII para protección de la ruta marítima entre Nápoles y Génova. Entre estas fortificaciones, la de Longone (iniciada en 1603 y solemnemente bendecida el 2 de Abril de 1606) refleja la tipología de la escuela italiana ya adaptada en Anversa en Flandres. La aldea ubicada en la parte baja (Marina di Longone) introduce en esta zona de la Isla, aún "virgen", la tipología del conglomerado de la costa española.

A finales de siglo XIX, la fortaleza fué transformada en penitenciería, mientras que después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial la aldea (que quiere cambiar su nombre pro el de Porto Azzurro) crece en una forma caótica transformandose en un lugar de exparcimiento internacional. Estos cambios han levado a una dicotomía entre el nuevo lugar turístico y la vieja fortaleza-prisión.

El objeto del presente estudio es el de proponer algunas indicaciones para la recuperación del fuerte (que en la actualidad presenta un notable deterioro físico) y también el de la aldea, transformando la fortaleza una vez más en el motor impulsor de una nueva realidad de Porto Azzurro, integrada a la aldea y al ambiente natural y con un destinación de uso publico multifuncional.