

Towards a history of the castle complex of Campriano

Paolo Neri

1. Origins and nature

Today, Campriano is an agricultural enterprise in the territory of the municipality of Murlo. It hosts the remains of very old fortifications, a church (which was once a parish seat), a villa that was renovated in the 1920s, and several rustic outbuildings.

It stands on a crest at the edge of an expanse of woods, at the convergence of two small streams, the larger of which (the Stile) empties into the Arbia river at Buonconvento.

From a geological point of view, the site is a sloping tract of cavernous limestone, at the foot of which lies an expanse of Pliocene clay. (fig.1)

As we know, over time, rain erodes the calcium carbonate in limestone and, penetrating into the rock, creates water reservoirs that come to the surface in the form of perpetual springs in contact with the impermeable clay. The coexistence in the same area of dense woods and agricultural terrain constitutes an ideal resource, for the cultivation of grain, grapes and olive trees and, if there is abundant water as in this case, for pasturing and breeding, as well as hunting and wild stock farming.

Campriano has thus always been attractive to settlers seeking to practice agriculture and sheep-farming. The availability of water is certainly one of its most favorable characteristics; in fact, there are several perpetual springs near Campriano. Two of them - 'i Pozzini' and 'la Vena', are still used today; the former emerges just below the area where the buildings stand, and the other a very short distance away, while a third, not far from the first, until recently fed a basin for watering livestock and washing laundry.

Just over a kilometer away, still at the edge of the cavernous limestone formation, on the side overlooking the Sorra valley, is the Pociano spring, below the aptly-named "Fontanella" (Little Fountain) farm. About the same distance away in the opposite direction is the "Pozzino" or Little Wellspring of Osannella, on the road that leads from Campriano to Santo Sano and to the three water mills powered by the Fusola perpetual spring-fed canal. At a higher elevation, halfway between these two sites, is a very interesting continually-flooded miniature marsh known as 'I Fangacci'.

There are numerous documented mentions of Campriano over the centuries. The oldest is an October 21, 943 certificate in which the King of Italy, Hugh of Provence, confirms its ownership by Bernardo II, one of the "Counts of Siena"¹; an 1081² document substantiates a shift of ownership to the monks of S. Eugenio in Pulosiano³ authorized by Emperor Henry IV, and the same monastery's ownership is reconfirmed in 1185 by Federico I⁴.

¹ G. Merlotti in: "Memorie storiche delle parrocchie suburbane della Diocesi di Siena"

² Metropolitana, June 3

³ Today 'Munistero', outside the Porta S. Marco gate

⁴ E. Repetti, vol. A-C pag. 439

All of these dates have led scholars who study Campriano to affirm its truly ancient origins. The documents are particularly important in that they set Campriano within the milieu of historic events between the 11th and 16th centuries, and establish it as a community under the Republic of Siena, specifically verifying the presence of a Vicar until 1342, and expenses for securing its walls disbursed by the Consistory in 1425 and 1447⁵.

But these documents tell us nothing about the *why* of Campriano's existence, and its denomination varies from castle, to castle compound, to court, to *rocca* or more generically fortress, to mere village (1821)⁶.

This latter, least-martial term may be the one that can best help us try to answer the question of the importance it surely must have had, given that it appeared on one of the geographical maps painted in the homonymous Vatican gallery between 1580 and 1585 commissioned by Pope Gregory XIII, and at least two others: one associated with the *Historia* by Orlando Malavolti (1599) and one dedicated to Pandolfo Savini⁷.

In addition, documents from the Leopoldine Land Registry show that in 1825, Campriano was still the hub of a network of roads – minor roads, of course, but certainly well-used at the time, linking the village with the above-mentioned springs of Osannella and Santo Sano towards Siena, and in the other direction with Fontazzi (another name that suggested a 'fount' or spring), where the main road led down to the Macereto Bridge over the Merse⁸. This was in fact the route that circumvented the Rosia marsh (until its 19th-century reclamation), which Repetti reports began at Porta S. Marco and continued to Costalpino, where, at Pian delle Fornaci, in the Sorra creek valley, there is another spring documented by Bargagli Petrucci. Further along the creek valley was the ancient Pieve di Corsano parish church, below which runs the Fusola stream, with the tower of Santo Sano standing guard over its three above-mentioned mills. From there, one can easily imagine that the road continued towards Campriano (or at least passed nearby), due to the above-noted availability of water. A fount or spring was indispensable for travel on horseback, since a good drink can completely revive a horse exhausted by a long and arduous trek, as well as animals tired after a long leg of the transhumance. Thus we can compare a chain of perpetual springs to modern gas stations along a highway, and, extending the metaphor, Campriano to a motel or a large rest stop.

2. Campriano in History

Obviously something more than a rest stop, given that the assessment⁹ cited by Vincenzo Passeri reports that it had not only the church and two palazzos, but also a village of 70 houses - at an average of five or six inhabitants per house, around 350-420 residents. Other assessments¹⁰ always

⁵ V. Passeri: "Documenti per la storia delle località della provincia di Siena", Eduzioni Cantagalli

⁶ Catasto leopoldino

⁷ Collezione Ettore Pellegrini, Siena

⁸ Repetti vol., S-Z pag. 394

⁹ Estimo n.71

¹⁰ Estimi n. 71/ 81

mention a ‘platea’ (that is, a piazza or court) and identify Campriano as a ‘castle compound’, or ‘fortified village,’ which, based on what I have said up to this point, appears to be the most appropriate denomination. Moreover, Campriano appears as both a ‘castle compound’ and as a village in the 1318-1320 land registry¹¹. The village had 90 houses, more than the 70 in the assessments cited by Passeri, perhaps because other settlements were included in the same area as Campriano (La Pigna, Usannella, Barottoli and Pietramonti).

No trace of the village remains, except for the ruins of a small construction known as the ‘House of the Lamberta’, clearly of medieval origin. It stands in a corner of a flat plot of land long used as a vegetable garden, open to the southwest (and thus sheltered from the cold northeasterly winter winds) and surrounded by carefully-constructed, three-meter-high walls of local cavernous limestone that would not have constituted a military defense but would have hindered intruders. Outside these walls, a steep road, still in good condition, leads to the waters of the Vannona channel. In addition to being near the quarry from which all the stone used to build Campriano was drawn, it is also close behind the castle compound wall, just a few steps away from the arched entrance to the fortifications. These characteristics make the site an excellent candidate for the location of the vanished village.

The castle compound itself is surrounded by high walls – up to twelve meters high at one point, and arranged in two circles made of rows of square-hewn blocks, masterfully built. The stone is typical of the area, extracted from the above-mentioned quarry, which was still in use until the 1930s. The stone from the quarry is easy to cut, being saturated with water, but hardens quickly once it is exposed to the air, thus it was a considerable resource, easily available and low-cost, which explains its extensive use throughout the hamlet.

What we can see today (fig.3) is just a part of Campriano’s original defensive structure. For example, there is now no trace remaining of the ‘carbonaia’ (a ditch just outside the wall), cited in all of the documents, nor of the towers and battlements. The reasons behind the fortifications are one of the mysteries of Campriano. Considering the cost of building them, even with the abundant available stone material, they must have been intended to defend not only the residents, but also goods or resources of greater importance than those of the tiny community itself.

And yet, notable as they are, the fortifications do not appear to have been the result of an implanted military sort of plan, but rather to have coincided with and enhanced the natural protections of the terrain, compensating for weaknesses where necessary – a type of response typically adopted after the fall of the Roman Empire by villages left vulnerable to barbarian incursions. We cannot rule out, however, that the walls may have been erected, perhaps in successive stages, to limit the effects of erosion of the cavernous limestone. Over time, the site became more level, accumulating loose soil against containment walls, but conserving more solid terrain within them. A partial exception are the walls of the ‘platea’, which may have been built later against a less-steep slope. The ‘platea’ (the current ‘Piazzone’ or large piazza) is repeatedly mentioned in historic documents, and measures 1,500 square meters overall. It is enclosed within an approximately pentagonal wall, and its ground level is six meters above that of the fortification below. More than an artificial fill to make up the difference in level, it is thus likely that the upper ring corresponds to the original summit of the first site, on which the church was built. In fact, unlike those below, the Piazzone’s

¹¹ V.Passeri, L. Neri: “ Gli insediamenti della Repubblica di Siena nel catasto 1318-1320”

walls rise about a meter out of the ground. The function of the ‘platea’ is another mystery to solve, as is that of the shortened turrets, the military usefulness of which is not immediately clear. Recently, we have discovered, through a crack in the wall, that the base of the western one is hollow, although with no sign of any entry doors, and its vaulted ceiling structure supports the upper part, which plays host to an olive tree. It is likely that the eastern one also has a hollow base, as suggested by the opening of an arquebus embrasure, the presence of which would place the construction of these defensive works in the 15th century, when gunpowder first came into use.

As far as we know from documents, during its centuries of history, Campriano was attacked only three times. In 1246 it was assailed by about twenty residents of Crevole, resulting in a scrap that left no damages. In 1266, on the other hand, Ranuccio Tolomei was forced out of Campriano by the Republic of Siena, and the fortifications were dismantled, although probably only partially. The reason for the episode, attributed to Tolomei’s Ghibelline leanings, raises some doubts. In fact, if that had been the sole reason, why would a government that was solidly Ghibelline until 1269 (the year of the Battle of Colle, in which Provenzano Salvani was killed) have bothered to send an army to dispel a member of the same party? Recently, however, the stability of the Guelph or Ghibelline identities of Italian *comuni* and their relative notable families has been very much brought into question¹². The very terms ‘Guelph’ and ‘Ghibelline’, borrowed from the struggle for the imperial crown between the Bavarian and Saxon houses, were adapted in Italy in the 14th century to indicate adherence to the imperial or papal side, depending more on circumstances of temporary convenience than on any enduring ideology. So, it is also possible that Ranuccio Tolomei took refuge at Campriano for reasons of personal rebellion, although the sending of a Siennese troop, albeit a small one, and the dismantling of the defenses lead us to imagine a political motivation as opposed to a simple law enforcement action.

In any case, the fortifications were later rebuilt, and in 1368 were dismantled a second time, again by the Republic of Siena. The reason in this case was the need to drive out a group of noblemen who had taken refuge there and were blocking food supplies to Siena. The episode, described by Malavolti¹³, took place during the period in which Emperor Charles IV of Luxembourg was in Siena and backed the revolt fomented by the Salimbeni clan against the Government of the Nine: there appeared to be an attempt on the part of some noblemen to regain power, exploiting the Nine’s moment of weakness.

This is what Malavolti wrote about the affair: “*While the Florentines were negotiating a peace between the Nobles and Commons of Siena, Odoardo di M. Niccolò Mariscotti, thinking the proceedings too slow, and desirous to hasten them, began, from a castle of his, to infest the roads with his masnadieri (thus are they called by he who wrote of this affair), robbing and assassinating the merchants and others who travelled that way, which incited the magistrates to send out an army, and, by order of the Senator who led it, to take and demolish his castle, destroying many of his people, and bringing Odoardo prisoner to Siena. The same army, the day after, marched to Campriano, where they subdued another band of the Nobles, employed in intercepting provisions on their way to Siena. Campriano they took by force, and destroyed the fortress, after having slain*

¹² P. Grillo: “La falsa inimicizia. Guelfi e ghibellini nell’Italia del Duecento”. Salerno editrice.

¹³ O. Malavolti: “Dell’historia di Siena”, eighth book, second part

in the action three of the house of Tolommei, three of the Piccolomini, two of the Scotti, and one of the Mariscotti, with many others.”

The specification of the nature of Odoardo Mariscotti's *'masnadieri'* belies the legend that portrayed Campriano, centuries later, as a den of brigands who robbed travelers on the Francigena road. The origin of that myth seems to lie in the distorted manner in which both Pecci¹⁴ and Merlotti drew on the passage from Malavolti, which gave rise to the ubiquitous legend of a bandits' treasure (the dry-land equivalent of pirates' treasure) believed to be hidden in some hidey-hole along the walls. The misconception was generated by the fact that the term *'masnadiero'* had come to have a pejorative meaning synonymous with *'bandit'* or *'highwayman'*, while in Malavolti's day it meant simply *'bodyguard'* for a feudal lord.

The damage resulting from this battle does not, in any case, seem to have involved the sturdy bastion or two of the four towers, which remained perfectly conserved. It is thus likely that the destruction was limited to the naturally weakest part of the defensive structure, namely the eastern side, from which the villa is entered today.

During the war (1552-1559) in which the Republic of Siena was targeted for having heedlessly sided with France in that country's greater conflict with the Hapsburg Empire, Campriano seems to have been ignored by the Imperial corps sent to take possession of lands and castles in the countryside following the French-Sienese defeat at Scannagallo (August 3, 1554). In fact, Duke Cosimo's secretary, Bartolomeo Concini, chose Campriano as the site from which to write¹⁵ to his lord about the outcome of what was a remarkable undertaking at the time: the November 16, 1554 capture of the nearby stronghold of Crevole, after three days of bombardment. That fortress, defended by 300 mercenaries under the command of captain Giulio Thiene, blocked the road towards the Maremma coastal area, and thus could not simply be left to the enemy. Nor could it be attacked, due to the craggy terrain and the arquebusiers ready to shoot from their post on the high turret. Having rejected the idea of a long siege due to the approaching winter season which troops at the time normally rode out in winter quarters, the only remaining solution was to haul eight cannons up to the top of an equally steep hill in front of the contested fortress. All that remains of the space where the artillery was positioned is the name, *'l'Aiola'* (the lawn), of a spot near the Cucculeggia farm.

So while Campriano's fortifications do not seem to have had any military value in terms of control of the territory, they may have served primarily for the safeguarding and defense of agricultural resources and stores of provisions. This would appear to be confirmed not only by the just-cited text (*'employed in intercepting provisions on their way to Siena'*), but also by the brief existence in the 15th century of a grange pertaining to Santa Maria della Scala. A recent essay¹⁶ highlighted Siena's importance in the 14th century as a regional hub for the importation and sale of meats, many of which came from the Maremma zone, as did salt. Campriano was (and is) surrounded by acorn-producing woods (just the thing for raising semi-wild pigs, a common practice in the Middle Ages),

¹⁴ G.A. Pecci: *Lo Stato di Siena antico e moderno*, vol. I, parts I-II

¹⁵ R. Cantagalli: *"La guerra di Siena"* chapt. 7, note 86. Accademia senese degli Intronati

¹⁶ V. Costantini: *"Carni in rivolta. Macellai a Siena nel Medioevo"*. Pacini editore

and has ample sheep pastures along its borders. Could it not have been a transhumance stop? And even a center for the breeding and fattening of livestock for meat?

3. Campriano's owners over the centuries

Another point to clarify is the ownership of Campriano over the centuries. After the monastery of S. Eugenio, which was suppressed in 1786, documents mention the Tolomei family beginning in the 13th century, and the Spannocchi family from the 16th century on. But then there was also the Church, the Spedale (Hospital) of S. Maria della Scala, and a certain Benedetto di Neroccio, who in 1453 declared that he owned 'a dismantled palazzo' at Campriano. Moreover, there were municipal properties, like the 'Caggio' farmhouse, which the men of Campriano sold to Checco Cinughi on June 20th, 1476¹⁷; the same farm was sold in 1556 by Valerio di Antonmaria Cinughi to Ambrogio di Antonio Spannocchi, whose family would remain the principal owners of the castle complex until the mid-19th century. Nevertheless, in 1689 Campriano was the object of a fideicommissum, a sort of trust bestowed by Giulio di Pandolfo Spannocchi on Agostino Bartolini, although the Spannocchi family regained ownership once again in 1777 through a donation on the part of the last Bartolini to one of his grandsons, also named Giulio.

4.. The Church of S. Giovanni Decollato

The church is a very old edifice in Romanesque style, all in local *pietra da torre* stone, with a three-lobed apse entered through an original Syrian arch (tapering at the base), the tops of the supporting columns of which are carved with paleo-Christian symbols. "*The altar on the left conserves late-16th-century wall paintings, in which we can discern the fresh narrative tones of Ventura Salimbeni, especially in the jaunty poses of the female figures, sketched with verve in quick brush strokes. The church once held a lovely Madonna and Child by Pietro Lorenzetti, today at the Museo di arte sacra della Val d' Arbia in Buonconvento*"¹⁸; its place atop the altar is now filled by a copy. In the left-side exedra is a large majolica nativity scene by the ceramicist Marco Bonechi (Florence, 1944).

The church also has a perfectly-functioning 18th-century organ (fig. 3) used for exceptional concerts, the construction of which is attributed to the Venetian master craftsman Gaetano Callido. The church of S. Giovanni Decollato was long a parish church, but over the centuries it lost importance, and was recently suppressed. However, it has been a Patronato (Patronage) of some important Sieneese families, namely the Spannocchi, Venturi Gallerani, De' Vecchi and Manetti families.

The expedient of the Patronato was widely adopted to 'set up' in ecclesiastic careers young men who were of noble birth but lacked the wherewithal to succeed in other fields. In fact, a Patronato guaranteed the right to give title to the chapel (or the parish) to the family that had built it, by merit of having conferred some asset sufficient to ensure a comfortable life for the priest. Patronati were passed down from one generation to the next, or in some cases from one family to another, as an inheritable or transferable asset, ensuring a sort of everlasting 'permanent employment' for the founder's descendants with a one-time bestowal of capital.

¹⁷ Contract in the Spannocchi Collection, State Archive of Siena

¹⁸ From Wikipedia

In 1866, the law that suppressed religious communities allowed those who were able to demonstrate their right to recover the assets the Patronati benefited from. Those assigned to the church of S. Giovanni Decollato in Campriano were not impacted by the law; in fact, the Curia of Siena had declared its collation, as it had been without a Rector for many years, having been supplanted by the parish of Crevole.

This may explain why the properties attributed to the Church by the Leopoldine Land Registry (1825) were those of the suppressed Patronato: assets that provided little income, like bits of land just outside or inside the walls (a few artichoke beds, one row of grapevines, a tiny hay field), and the meager harvests from two farms (in particular ‘Cucculeggia’, which was all rocks and woodland). The title-holders of the Patronato may thus have been unable to find a priest willing to content himself with the paltry income, and effectively let it lapse. The Land Registry, however, attributes the more substantial part of the property to the Spannocchi family, including one of the two palazzos, which, many years later and with significant renovations, was used as the main villa. This attribution is corroborated by what we see in figure 2, in which the pieces of Church property are marked in orange, and those of the Spannocchi family in blue.

It should be noted that the buildings in this land registry correspond fairly well to those in Figure 4. The designation of parcel 30 is interesting: a cemetery, the existence of which was already known, but not the location. It is very small, which may be explained by the fact that only a few years passed between the Napoleonic laws that sanctioned the creation of cemeteries outside of churches and the significant reduction in the number of inhabitants at Campriano. The presence of the cemetery may also explain the as yet unclear function of a pair of walls, the tops of which can be seen emerging from the ground at the edge of the parcel: if they are the remains of a low boundary wall, then the tops of the tombs would be about a meter below the current surface of the soil, more or less on the same level as the Piazzone.

The earliest presence of the Spannocchi family at Campriano dates back to 1502, according to Gerolamo Gigli, according to whom it seems to have been a gift to them from the Republic of Siena. However, Gigli is not a particularly reliable author, at least as far as historical facts regarding Siena’s aristocratic families are concerned. Furthermore, his information is not consistent with the 1556 sale by Lodovico Tolomei to Ambrogio Spannocchi of a palazzo in Campriano with two ‘hostis’ (perhaps ‘ostis’, or doors). If the Spannocchi family already owned Campriano, why would they have bought a palazzo there, the most noble element of the entire complex? Finally, said gift does not appear in V. Passeri’s examination of acts regarding Campriano.

Having outlined the possible justification of Campriano’s existence as a fortified village (or castle complex) located on the road along which provisions traveled from the Maremma to Siena and inhabited by a community of free men, I shall now take a look at its owners, who, in more recent times, progressively transformed the castle complex into the agricultural enterprise it is today.

In the 19th century, the Spannocchi family had three branches, two of which died out, the first with the death of Baron Girolamo, and the second with that of Giulia (married name Biringucci) in 1881. The third branch still exists today, in Austria, with the name ‘von Spannocchi’; it is surely that of Francesco Spannocchi Piccolomini, who in 1796 was named governor of Livorno, and who is still said to haunt Campriano in the form of a ghost.

5. From Castle complex to villa and sharecropping estate

In 1846 the Spannocchi Piccolomini family sold Campriano to the Bonaiuti family. The property is documented to have changed hands again in 1882, passing from the Cassa generale di Risparmio di Firenze bank (which had come into possession of it by means of a forced sale) to Bernardino Sammiccheli of Chiavari. The Sammiccheli family was certainly not as famous as the Spannocchi family, although the latter's appellative "Lords of Campriano"¹⁹ does not appear to be justified based on what we have seen so far.

In any case, it is interesting to recount the unusual events that led the Sammiccheli (or Sammichele) family from Liguria to Campriano. Bernardino was the grandson of Bernardo Sammiccheli, who lived in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and moved to papal Ancona, where his son, Carlo Bernardo, was born. Returning to Liguria, Bernardo was named vice consul of the Papal State for the Riviera di Ponente.

Carlo Bernardo emigrated to Brazil in 1839, specifically to Bahia, on a brigantine he owned with a Portuguese business partner. In Bahia he launched a commercial business which, albeit not without difficulties, eventually earned him an appointment as Papal vice consul to Brazil. Financial troubles forced him to move to Rio de Janeiro, where he apparently recovered well enough to obtain an appointment not as vice consul, but as Papal State consul for Brazil. Carlo Bernardo Sammiccheli's diplomatic career was certainly favored by the benefaction of an important Papal State personage: Commander Cialdi, who Carlo Bernardo had helped out of a perilous situation into which the former had fallen while transferring a group of politicians sentenced to exile in a Brazilian emigrant colony. Nonetheless, Sammiccheli's business went into decline again, and in 1845 he was forced to send his family back to Italy to reduce his expenses. Finally, ruined and without alternatives, he went into the slave trade and ran off to Africa to manage what was known as a "Farm."

Bernardino was Carlo Bernardo's repatriated son. Bernardino had two sons, Carlo and Mario, who later divided up their inheritance; Campriano went to Mario, who used it mainly as a hunting lodge, renting out the agricultural lands, as farming evidently did not interest him.

On October 30th, 1911, Mario sold the property to Paolo di Dario Neri (who acquired it in partnership with its renter Giuseppe Muzzi, whose 50% he later purchased on December 30th, 1919); the estate included the Villa Bellavista, a small, vaguely Ligurian-style building in an area called La Busca, the use of which Sammiccheli reserved for the duration of his life, as he did not wish to give up his passion for hunting. In fact, Sammiccheli preferred to stay near the town of Vescovado, rather than in the larger palazzo at Campriano, which had long stood empty, if not derelict.

Paolo Neri was born on August 13th, 1864 to a small-town middle-class family that had resided for centuries²⁰ in the external bishopric of Murlo (a fief of the Curia of Siena). Paolo had come up in the world, greatly improving his social status thanks to the astuteness of his wife and first cousin, Gioconda Bandini of Vagliagli. The acquisition of Campriano allowed him to rise from smallholder and merchant to landowner. He had four sons, Dario, Antonio, Giovanni and Giuseppe; the latter two died young.

¹⁹ In: 'Famiglia Spannocchi'. Heraldry Institute

²⁰ Attachments 1 and 2: Neri family genealogy

When the Neri family acquired it, Campriano covered about 325 hectares, mainly of woodland, which at the time was an excellent resource, not only for hunting but also for the charcoal that could be produced from trees. It included the long-empty Rectory annexed to the church of S. Giovanni Decollato, rented from the Curia of Siena.

Widowed and with his children grown, Paolo Neri divided up his inheritance while he was still alive, giving Dario bare ownership of the estate, except for the Busca farm and the little Villa Bellavista, which he gave to Antonio, along with other real estate in Siena and Murlo.

Dario, a famous painter of the 'Crete senesi' and a well-regarded engraver who learned the craft from Adolfo De Carolis, completely restored the old Siennese vicar's palazzo in the 1920s, adding the two characteristic loggias (fig.6), copying those of Palazzo Piccolomini in Pienza. Then, with his wife Matilde Sclavo - the daughter of scientist, entrepreneur and father of Italian Public Health Achille Sclavo - transformed the spaces adjacent to the fortifications into gardens.

In 1944, Paolo Neri and his son Dario saved five members of the Jewish Cabibbe family from deportation by the Nazis, hiding them in the Rectory. In appreciation of their action, thanks to the efforts of Mrs. Patrizia Franco, a niece of the Cabibbe family, the Yad Vashem declared Paolo and Dario Neri 'Righteous Among the Nations' (fig. 7).

During the war years, thanks to the Neri family's courage and self-sacrifice, Salò draft dodgers and a group of allied soldiers who had escaped from prison also found refuge and aid at Campriano, as did, on occasion, the Siennese Resistance activist Prof. Mario Delle Piane. To this list of the rescued I feel I should also add a non-human subject much loved by the entire Neri family: the sorrel horse Folco, owned by Paolo Neri, who won the Palio eight times, a record that remains unbeaten to this day. Tied up in a charcoal-pit clearing semi-hidden in the dense underbrush, Folco bore the shrieks of artillery fire for days without so much as a whinny, heartened by the guard Agostino Mancini, who went to feed and water him as often as he could get away.

Once peace was restored, Campriano resumed its activities as an agricultural estate, and the villa was the site of country retreats and encounters with the Neri family's many friends. In fact, shortly after the end of the war, Dario Neri founded the Electa publishing house in Florence, for which Bernard Berenson (like many of his Anglo-Saxon friends) became one of the principal authors, along with Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, Enzo Carli and other authorities on art history, who were often guests at Campriano. On one of his visits, Bernard Berenson wanted to personally meet the sculptor Alberto Sani, about whose work he had published an essay. Sani's story is one worth recalling. He was an illiterate woodsman who amused himself by carving fantastic walking sticks in the shapes of figures from his everyday experience. Dario Neri noticed his hobby, and taught him a few of the rudiments of sculpture so that he could transfer his innate abilities from wood to slabs of easy-to-shape sandstone. The results were surprising, and became the object of numerous exhibitions. **Some of this extraordinary artist's works are on display in the museum contiguous to the church, along with a few of his mentor's paintings.**

Another special guest was Carlo Emilio Gadda, who, before achieving success as a superlative writer, had abandoned his profession as an engineer and collaborated with Dario Neri on Spanish translation of captions for Electa publications. One memorable, starry night, after having seen the July 2nd Palio the day before, in the darkness of one of the loggias animated only by the symphony of crickets and tree frogs, he listened in wonder to the incredible stories of witches and ghosts told by the initially-reticent but ultimately loquacious Campriano dwellers, gathered around the great author, who never stopped taking notes in his notebook.

There were also great musicians among Campriano's illustrious guests (due to Dario's wife Matilde's passion for that art); its loggias hosted many of the eminent maestros from the Accademia Chigiana with their talented pupils. In the peaceful atmosphere engendered by the incomparable view, the sublime art of music was discussed in various languages, and lasting friendships were made. And the conversations were not just about art, but also about science, with great scholars like Ernst Boris Chain (who shared the Nobel Prize for the discover of penicillin with Fleming and Florey), Albert Sabin, (father of the homonymous polio vaccine) and Cho Hao Li (identifier and isolator of the pituitary hormones).

Finally, in 1994, Achille Neri acquired the church and the Rectory.

There is still much to explore, and perhaps many mysteries yet to discover. This text is thus merely a first attempt to outline the long, full history, from 943 A.D. to the present day, of what is a wonderful, fascinating place, not only for those who grew up there, but also for appreciative people who visit it for the first time.



Bozza aggiornata al 23/3/2020



Fig. 2 The walls and the church of S. Giovanni Battista in Campriano
Campriano coat of arms (16th century)

Fig. 3 The

Fig.4 Detail of the Leopoldine Land Registry (1825).

Fig.5 E. Romagnoli: view of Campriano (1835)

Parcels divided between the Church (in orange) and the Spannocchi family (in blue)

Fig. 6 Campriano's characteristic loggias
Vashem certificate

Fig. 7 Yed