

Historical summary

Resumu istòricu (LSC) Sintesi storica (IT)



Under Pisan, Genoese and "Giudicati" (independent states) rule, the island of Sardinia was famous for its abundance of lead and silver mines. It was also renowned for its wool and leather production, cattle breeding, vegetable gardens and orchards. It used to export milk, cheese, wine, salt and wheat.

The Aragonese conquest of the island of Sardinia started in 1323. After a seven-month long siege, the Catalans under King Giacomo [James] I of Aragona occupied Villa di Chiesa (Present-day town of Iglesias). The Pisans were defeated in Santa Igia (Present-day Santa Gilla, a Cagliari's suburb). The city of Alghero was forced to surrender in 1354. There after Sardinia was subdivided into several fiefs

and only the Giudicato di Arborea managed to retain its independence until the beginning of the 15th century.

In the middle of the 14th century, Sardinian countryside experienced wars and revolts. Rural life in the small villages was difficult and affected by several food shortages, drought and theft. Land used to remain uncultivated and grazing was mostly wild.

In order to regulate agricultural production, judge Mariano IV, father of Eleonora di Arborea, in 1347 enacted the "Codice rurale". The Rural Code ruled for compulsory fencing of vineyards, vegetable gardens and orchards. In accordance with the Rural Code each village local authorities (*majores de sa villa*) appointed rural security guards to patrol the countryside and ensure rule of law. The patrolling prevented theft and malicious damage to farming. The work undertaken by the rural security guards was vital. It became an inspiration and a model for the creation of the "barracellato" (*Barracelli Corps*) which officially took place towards the end of the 16th century.

Through the constitutional act of 25th June 1597, the royal city of Sassari entrusted to 16 "barracelli" and two captains, for the period of one year, the task of keeping watch on property, fighting theft and damage caused by wild grazing. In 1609 the General Council of Alghero appointed 8 "*barranchelos*" to prevent theft, apprehend lawbreakers and fine ("*facultat de tenturar*") horses, oxen and donkeys found in vineyards, with the exception of work oxen ("*bous de la jua*") which had to just compensate any damages created. Starting from the 17th century, many Sardinian villages and towns experienced a slow but widespread growth of "compagnie barracellari" (Barracelli units) whose main role was the defense of agricultural fields, protection of peasants property and animal herds with compulsory financial compensation for any damages suffered due to lawbreakers, fires and illegal grazing.

In 1799, during Savoy Age, the "barracelli" received the first regional code of operations and the "barracelleria" (*Barracelli Corps*) overlapped and operated in parallel with the Militia Corps. Conscription was introduced. In 1853, under Vittorio Emanuele II King of Sardinia rule, the "compagnie barracellari" were reorganized in accordance with Law No. 1533 which established voluntary enlistment. In 1898, "barracellato" (*Barracelli Corps*) underwent extensive reform through Royal Decree No. 403, leading a century later to Regional Law No. 25 of 15 July 1988. The latter is still in force, and disciplines the formation, functions and responsibilities of the "compagnie barracellari".

Over the last 150 years numerous authors, historians and jurists have taken interest in the origins of the "barracelli"¹. Numerous written works have covered the subject and each piece of writing adds to knowledge about the "barracelli". Thanks to its specificity, origin and extensive use, this old rural policing institution stands as unique from a historic, cultural and juridical standpoint. Any new historic "discovery" or personal evidence from living former barracelli² adds further knowledge on old Sardinian way of life and provides food for thought.

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2 Gathered in Gadoni (Sardinia) from a former "barracello" and published on Sardegna Digital Library <http://www.sardegna.digitallibrary.it/index.php?v=9&s=17&xsl=2435&ric=2&c1=ex+barracello&c=4459&ti=>