PLANNING OF GRAMMICHELE AND AVOLA
Ideal City or a Model Agrarian Community

In January of 1693, a powerful earthquake struck Sicily's southwestern coast, destroying many towns in the Catania Province. The most severely affected towns were Chiaramonte Gulfi, Adrano, and Avola. Small towns of only few thousand inhabitants, Avola was situated in the southeastern mountains, facing the sea in a hilly area where the sea coast formed a promontory. The damage was so severe that the preservation and rebuilding of towns after such an event was not even considered. A new, possibly safer location was chosen outside the town, on a more level site as land allowed. This was Grammichele, where the town of Occhiola and Avola was planted near the road to Palermo, the main road, accessible to Avola town. The plans of these two towns followed the ideas of planning theories of ideal city featuring clean polygonal layouts.

The initiative, financing, and concepts for the two towns came from the proprietors of the estates: Carlo Maria Carafa, the Prince of Butera, owner of Occhiola and adjoining lands, and responsible for Grammichele, and the Duke of Syracuse, Don just. Jesuit priests, Michele di Folco prepared the plan for the new town, designed primarily for peasants. At the time of the Enlightenment, Vecchior, the historian of Palermo, wrote about the functions of the town. As built, the town was planned out in four plans, a typical square: absence of the main house, evidence of the original town plan, stating that conceptual inventories, summary and idea of elements of the urban fabric were modified by the agrarian practices that increased wealth and poverty of the respective groups. When earthquakes took towns away it was natural only for the owners of the estates to provide for the stricken population. Yet the plans were so orderly, so clean and well designed and prepared so quickly that this question arises: if the ideas of model farming community that took its origin in Ideal City planning were not nurtured ahead of time? If such idea, dream of a new, model agrarian community existed before, it would explain not only speedy conceptualization and execution of plans but also the plainness of town appearance. Anna Mutin