

ITALIANS NEW TOWNS AS AN EXPERIMENTAL TERRITORY FOR THE MODERN MOVEMENT IN ITALY.

The case study of Oriolo Frezzotti and his architecture for public facilities in Littoria, Sabaudia and Pontinia.

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Abstract

During the 30's, the Fascist Party achieves its most significant territorial project: the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes and the construction of New Towns.

In the same years starts the debate between modernity and tradition, that will characterize the whole history of modern Italian architecture, and the Fascist party obtains its highest approval trying to breathe life into a new Italian society full of new behaviours. This opens a new parenthesis within the debate of modern Italian architecture that not only has to find its own definition but must also be translated as State's art. In this scenario, the founding cities of the Agro Pontino became the experimental territory for the Italian architects of the Modern era. The pivotal architect of the New Towns was Oriolo Frezzotti, chosen directly by Mussolini to build in 1932 the first new town, Latina, with a rural character and then in 1935, Pontinia where the architect abandoned the vernacular style to leave space to pure geometric shapes. So Frezzotti, in just two years, changed his language almost drastically, abandoning the architectural forms linked to the traditional rural style and approaching the "horizontal lines", symbol of architecture for human, and the "vertical lines" symbol of dictatorial monumentalism (Zevi 1950, 167) that will characterize the modern Italian architecture. To give the impetus for this transformation was the experience that Frezzotti made in 1934 collaborating on the project for Sabaudia known as the city of Italian rationalism. In light of this, this paper intends to analyse these urban artefacts understood as a tool capable of returning a material history of modern Italian architecture. So, through the urban and architectural analysis of the New towns, so through the study of the debate between rurality and monumentality, this paper intends to give a generic picture of modern Italian architecture.

Keywords: Oriolo Frezzotti; Public Buildings; Modern architecture; Fascist New Towns; Fascist Architecture

Introduction

The modern Italian architecture evolves into an environment full of contradictions due to a policy aimed to acquiring the maximum consensus ¹. Architecture therefore becomes the political means used by Mussolini to involve and impress the people. What is in fact well known within historiography, and according to P. Nicoloso, is how the architecture is able to set in motion *formative processes of identity* ² (2011: XVI).

However, we are witnessing to another step forward made by fascism with compared to contemporary totalitarian regimes: architecture is not used by the Regime only as an instrument to attract consensus, (since it is capable of shaking the economic system and solving some of the main social problems such as the urbanization and the displacement due to the lack of housing) but becomes the tool used by Mussolini to educate the mass. So, architecture becomes *a totalitarian experiment* ³. (Nicoloso, p. XXVII) It doesn't matter therefore if the architecture is modern or traditional. It is important that it is Italian and in which Italians can see their ideals mirrored. To reflect these ideals will be able once the rationalist architecture - to such an extent that Pagano

¹ Not unlike what happens in other European nations under totalitarian regime, even in the Italian case it is fundamental to retrace the history of modern architecture and urban planning, focusing in particular on the debate and the relationship between architecture and politics. That it means focusing on the relationship between architects and fascism.

² *"Architecture has always played a fundamental role in the formative process of identity. The architectural monument has the ability to transmit meanings capable of reaching a whole community, which in it then comes to be recognized. [...] This determines the transition from an architecture instrument of consent to an instrument of education. An architecture that educates the masses must have clear forms, understandable by everyone. It is therefore necessary to "invent" a style that, without renouncing the characters of modernity, speaks to the memory of the nation, which is a synthesis of that classical tradition that had its original splendour in ancient Rome. [Architecture] must be able to unite all Italians, now in the present, but also in a historical perception. In which the reference to classicism, a common feature of Italian art, will have to highlight its eternal character and universalistic vocation. Again, as in the past, through architecture we want to affirm the primacy of Italian civilization in the world."* (Nicoloso, p. XV)

³ *"It is Mussolini's will to let architecture participate in the totalitarian experiment. To educate the people more dramatically, to involve them in the new mysticism, the architectural symbols of the secular religion of fascism must have some common artistic traits. [...] A complex strategy, a skilful and political management of architecture is outlined, which does not lose sight of the ultimate goal, which is not the destiny of the discipline, even if more and more organic to the regime. It is only a means, however essential, to realize the construction of a "new civilization" and of the "new" fascist man, which will have to establish itself in the West."* (Nicoloso, p. XXVII)

himself, in one of his articles G. (Pagano, 1934) would designate the Duce as the saviour of modern Italian architecture - and in another time will be the traditionalist architecture, made of arches, *static and trumpet* symbolizing a *return to "Romanity"* (Zevi, 1950, p. 167). Therefore, architecture isn't important as it is itself, but is important as an instrument capable of transmitting the sense of fascist power in the present and in the future.⁴

It is no coincidence then if the architects who are going to build in this period will be almost exclusively Italians. Even Le Corbusier, who in the 1930s already enjoyed a particular reputation, failed to leave his mark in Italy. In fact, he tried several times to get in touch with Mussolini presenting also some personal projects for the realization of Pontinia without obtaining any success.⁵

It is in this climate that the need to define an architecture as state's art should be defined. To this end, a series of articles are published in the most important architecture magazines, where the architects try to give a precise definition not of modern architecture but of Fascist architecture. But what were to be the main characteristics of fascist architecture?

To understand its reasons and significance it is necessary to analyse the value of rationalist architecture and traditionalist architecture from a political point of view. On the one hand the rationalist architects line up with the modern architecture made of mass-produced reproduction, made up of canons, fixed and repeatable elements, which precisely because of their ability to grow mechanically and independently risked to escaping from the totalitarian control

⁴ Cfr. P. M. Bardi (1931) "Rapporto sull'architettura per Mussolini" in *Critica Fascista*, p. 131 *"Building for Fascism means "to stay". A fortunate effort awaits the generation of today, in all the pictures of national activity: but it is certainly to the builders that the most delicate task is entrusted: forming with the consistency of stone, cement, steel and the noblest and most enduring elements of nature and ingenuity, with a breath of Italian art, the gigantic footprint of Mussolini, so that posterity will be amazed"*

⁵ *"In light of this failure to meet with Le Corbusier, it is then to mark not only the divergence of the Duce from the most conservative and intransigent positions supported by Farinacci, but also to indicate his clear opposition to a modern architecture not due to a political discourse nationalist type. He is not in favour of modern architecture, which is a supranational phenomenon. On the other hand, it is willing to support architecture that is figuratively referring to the values of Italianisms, which lends itself to the needs of its politics. It uses architecture if it assigns a national face to modernity, if it is useful for consolidating the identity of Italians. It is not therefore within a stylistic question that its action is placed, but within an instrumental use of the discipline. Thus, after having exalted its modernity, it uses it - on the opposite side - to give vigour and extension to the myth of Romanity."* (Nicoloso, p. 85)

of the State and consequently it's sort of frowned upon. On the other hand, we find the supporters of traditional architecture, who proposed an architecture rich in classical references. These references are, however translated into an almost total abandonment of modern efficiency, a detail that could not be neglected since the regime had to prove its own power and modernity.

So we are witnessing to the rise of an architecture based mostly on a political rather than ideological vision, on a communicative rather than functional vision; an architecture where the hierarchy of spaces and the treatment of facades has nothing to do with the intended use (it is no coincidence that they are found on buildings written as "school" or "power plant" that clarify the intended use); an architecture where the vernacular is reinterpreted in a monumental key to become itself the *mausoleum of the state*. (Mariani, 1976, p.132); an architecture capable of representing the State through the definition of its own style: The Eclectic Monumentalism⁶.

Propaganda, Architecture and Urban Design

One of the greatest propaganda interventions carried out by the Fascist regime, using architecture and urban planning as tools for involving the masses, was the reclamation of the Agro Pontino. The construction of the new towns and the construction of the villages, within the reclaimed territory, becomes crucial as formal experiments carried out by the architects and the State. The E42 in Rome, and the national planning law will be born from this experimental experience. It is therefore easy to understand the importance of these urban artefacts that today represent an open-air tale of the history of modern Italian architecture. The new towns and the villages connected to them, are the

⁶ "Their result [of the traditionalist architects] came much closer to what Mussolini meant by architecture, by city, than moderns proposed; his biological reading of his history, his adherence to the criterion of the cycles of civilizations, ended when alienated from the earth, imposed on him considerations and parameters much more sensitive to the idea of the great style intended as an element of growth like a plant, which not for a more or less articulated, but intellectual and cumbersome system.

The meaning of an architecture that was not in fact neither classical nor really traditional, nor national, but only Monumental Eclectism or better Eclectic Monumentalism, gave Mussolini the possibility of creating spaces in which to gather that "rural civilization" that was partially building. " (Mariani, pp. 132-133)

calligraphic evolution of Italian architecture. They are precise signs, recognizable but variable at the same time, each one different from the other. And it is precisely through the reading of this diversity and this variation in the architectural production of the public buildings of the Fascist New Town, which is intended to describe the birth and evolution of modern Italian architecture.

The collective building within the newly founded cities and rural villages is particularly important because -in addition to demonstrating the difficulty of reinterpreting the urban projects of fascism⁷- the foundation of the new towns takes place through their realization. Residential buildings are in fact, for most, excluded⁸.

In all the fascist new towns, therefore, are the collective building which dictates the volumetric conformation of the urban project, and not the residential one⁹. So, it becomes fundamental to analyse the architecture of these urban buildings by observing their formal and stylistic evolution.

The architect of Fascist New Town: Oriolo Frezzotti

The hand that will guide most of the projects of the newly founded cities is the one of Oriolo Frezzotti ¹⁰. He, after the construction of the city of Littoria, took

⁷ Cfr. Pennacchi in *"Fascio e Martello. Viaggio per le città del Duce:"*. He makes a critique of D. Ghirardo's interpretation of the role of some public collective buildings within the city and the rural village, p. 138

⁸ Looking at the original drawings of the urban planning for all the new towns we can easily see that most of the building projected were the public facilities. The houses were just for people who works for the administration. Also, during the opening day there were only the public building.

⁹ This is clear if we look the third fascist new town: Pontinia. Especially in this city, the one destined to have the most rural character of all, in the main square overlook the cinema-theatre, the after-work, the hotel, the post office and the Town Hall; on one of the two main axes, that connect the city with the Via Appia, there are in succession the Casa del Fascio and the military barracks, and in the background the imposing Church acts as a scenic backdrop closing the city towards the countryside and river Sisto. Therefore, are public and collective buildings to build the city and its main cornerstones.

¹⁰ Oriolo Frezzotti was born on 7 September 1888 in Rome. He trained and graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts as a pupil of Cyril, firm supporter of traditional architecture, dedicated to the care of detail and architectural interpretation of Italian architecture of previous centuries.

Frezzotti will then be formed on this imprint and enrolled in the Order of Architects in 1928. His first works took place in Rome mainly in urban planning. In fact, he collaborated on the urban layout of the Sebastiani district, creating his own building: Villa Valeria

Not surprising, given its formation, its adhesion to the Barocchetto style characterized by the use for decorative purposes of the architectural motifs of the Baroque style, which developed mainly in

care of the design of some of the most important buildings in Sabaudia and Pontinia. Furthermore, he also actively collaborated on the Aprilia and Pomezia projects. Despite the clamour, he remained mostly outside the debate on modern architecture that took place in those years, remaining always faithful to the academic teaching received. He participated with Luigi Moretti in the competition for the Palazzo del Littorio in Rome.¹¹ It is with this contest that his name begins to have that minimum of notoriety among the colleagues that allowed him to be indicated by Calza Bini when Cencelli, president of the ONC, asked for an architect not too well known¹² and unrelated to the polemics between the various architectural trends. Frezzotti, not being part of the group of the known architects of the time turned out to be the perfect person to design the first "agro-city" in the reclaimed Pontine marshes: Littoria

Littoria

Built in a few months, from April to December 1932, contrary to what is written in many fictional news articles of the time, Littoria¹³ was not designed by Frezzotti in a single night and without any reference to previous urban experiences. In fact, one of the references for the architect was the book

Rome in the 20s. He always made some public buildings in the capital, one in particular it is the Passenger House, built in 1920, near the Termini station. From this building, today in total state of decay it is possible to see the architect's academic style. The references to Renaissance architecture make the whole building a reinterpretation of the fifteenth-century palaces, with the three superimposed orders and the large decorative cornice.

Between the Twenties and Thirties, he participated in numerous competitions for the regulatory plans including Bisagno in 1923, Faenza and Grosseto in 1931, and finally winning the first prize for urban planning of Brignole in Genoa.

¹¹ The competition for the Palazzo del Littorio in Rome was one of the most important in the history of modern Italian architecture since it consecrates, for the first time, the transition from the conflict between modern architecture and traditionalist architecture, showing the so-called "Littorio" style, that is the eclectic monumentalism characteristic of fascist architecture.

¹² Cfr.: Mariani, R. (1976) *Fascismo e Città nuove*, pp. 87-90 "Cencelli expressly asks a professional who is not a "character" and who isn't even less involved in any way in the polemics which are already filling the Italian newspapers. The attempt is to get the construction of the new towns pass silently, also because strangely Littoria is still considered a large service village, almost a corollary to land reclamation that remains the true great work. In other words, they don't want to overshadow a rural work with an urban intervention. About Frezzotti as an architect it hasn't been heard much". See also: Muntoni, A. (1990) "Il Piano di Oriolo Frezzotti" in *Atlante storico delle Città Italiane. Latina* pp: 10-16 and Cefaly, P. (1984) "Littoria 1932-1942. Gli architetti e la città" p. 34.

¹³ "Littoria is particularly significant, as it was the first to develop a completely new settlement strategy, in which the urban center can only be seen within a widespread territorial system, according to a narrow network of roads, canals and farms. service equipment. A model theorized later by V. Testa is able to project some of his most interesting portraits into the urban planning law of 1942." (Muntoni, 1990, p.7)

published in 1931, by G. Giovannoni: "Old towns and new buildings where was collecting a series of his writings published in 1913 and which will have a strong influence on the generation of professionals to whom also belongs Frezzotti¹⁴. So we can say that he didn't take a totally counter current road, but was part of the lively national and european debate on urban planning. It should also be stressed that the radiocentric system was the one that best suited the pre-existing areas such as working villages, service roads, but also archaeological sites.

Thus, keeping faith with the Italian town planning tradition and the territorial needs dictated by the pre-existences, Frezzotti develops a radiocentric plant that branches off starting from the rectangular central square. From it start also the main axes that connect Littoria with the sea, the Appian Way and the surrounding rural villages. At first glance these main axes are connected to each other through a system of concentric circumferences, but this is not the case. Looking closely at Frezzotti's drawing, drawn up in 1932, these rings develop following a kind of spiral growing, whose increase is dictated by the system of satellite squares in which the main public buildings overlook. Frezzotti gives life therefore to an extremely dynamic urban system that misidentifies itself with traditional and academic urban experiences. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that in Italy the most important artistic and architectural movement of those times was Futurism, a strong supporter of modernity and of the dynamism it provoked. In the Frezzotti plan everything is dynamic. In the 1932 project the rectangular square is symmetrically cut only by one of the five road axes, and the other four axes are never the diagonal of the rectangle, so they also transmit the sense of dynamism. The search for this continuous movement is "formalized" with the expansion plan of 1935 where the main square, while maintaining its rectangular shape, is transformed, making the only orthogonal axis no longer corresponds to the symmetry axis. Analysing this continuous search for dynamism it would be possible define Littoria as an eccentric more than a concentric city. Eccentric as it is also the layout of the buildings facing the

¹⁴ Frezzotti, in collaboration with Ing. Savoia, will dwell several times on the radial-concentric city system, a model of city that, in the thirties, was internationally recognized as one of the possible choices to be implemented to improve the conditions of the industrial city.

main squares, such as the town hall that is not placed in the middle of the square but in the middle of one of the two halves of the square itself. The town hall building is also only apparently symmetrical. Its bell tower, symbol par excellence of Littoria, in fact, isn't placed at the centre of the large longitudinal element. It should also be remembered that in those years two criteria have been defined: the use of vernacular elements of the past and their monumentalization as a symbol of fascist power and supremacy. The extraordinary nature of Littoria lies in being the framework capable of describing the evolution of these two criteria in a plastic way. We only have to cast our minds back to the Municipal building¹⁵ (Fig. 1) or to the Financial building built only in 1935.

Monumentalizing archetypes was the fundamental element to give life to fascist architecture. In 1932, when Frezzotti designed Littoria, he carried out one of the first experiments in the monumentalizing of traditional archetypes. The portico, which acts as a common thread throughout the project, finds its monumentalizing through horizontal development; arches and friezes are dilated and transformed into decorative elements, finally the tower of the Town Hall becomes the real direct representation of the monumental ruralism of the entire city. In it, Frezzotti inserts typically civic symbols, such as the arch, the bell, the clock and the sculptural decorations to celebrate the birth of the so-called "urban ruralism". And it will be precisely the theme of urban ruralism, declined in a different way, to characterize three main squares: the administrative political centre (Piazza del Littorio), the religious and educational centre (Piazza San Marco); the agricultural centre (Piazza del Quadrato). In all of these three plazas, in fact, the rural tone predominates through the presence of

¹⁵ "The two-storey building, a portico, with a roof covering, is marked along the central axis by a 32-meter-high tower. At the top of the civic tower an 8 m high bell tower is surmounted by a travertine drum that holds a flagpole. At the top of the tower is accessed by a cantilever staircase in reinforced concrete or by elevator. The entrance to the Town Hall, surmounted by the loggia, is in the body of the tower covered in travertine like the porch ground floor. The façade on the square, regularly marked by 6 windows on each side, is instead treated with brightly coloured plaster. The timbers of the windows that take on a somewhat refined and uncertain aspects do not correspond to the linearity of the central arcade and the ground portico. (Shwartz architecture review year v n 2 February 1933 - XI). On the walls of the antechamber on the first floor, "two tombstones with the speeches of Mussolini and Hon. Cencelli held on the day of the inauguration. From the antechamber leads to the Sala Sella Consulta hall, which was created with marble floors and brown-painted walls, while the ceiling was decorated with a banner depicting the town's coat of arms". (Muntoni, 1990, p. 75)

predominantly linear buildings, with a maximum of three floors, with a pitched roof and the prospectus marked by a uniform rhythm exceptionally interrupted by the monumental element¹⁶.



Figure 1 O. Frezzotti Littoria, 1932. The Town Hall.
Contemporary photo by the author

Littoria, as already mentioned, undergoing a process of expansion in 1935 and administrative transformation (from rural centre the city becomes provincial capital) gathers in itself buildings that show not only the artistic and stylistic evolution of the architect, but also the stylistic evolution of fascist architecture¹⁷. The search for a refined style within the architectural language of those years is answered by the use of the giant order. The same monumental archetypes used for the projects of the buildings in 1932 are now so overboard that they look, at a first glance, very far from the rural tone of the city. Rural tone that seems to

¹⁶ This “monumental element” could be the civic tower as in the case of the town hall, the entrance arch to the residential buildings or the O.N.B portal; all elements that insert important contrasts within the apparent normality and traditionalist is through the exceptional elements that characterize the public-recreational buildings that it is possible to read the growth and evolution of modern Italian architecture.

¹⁷ As we can see looking the Town All and the near Financial Building: the first one built according to the first urban project is more related with the tradition; the second one, the financial building, belongs to the whole school of the Monumentalismo Eclettico.

be sacrificed in favour of a marked monumentality. Although we witness a clear linguistic transformation, we can also see that these interventions *reveal a remarkable professional capacity and a uniformity of language in the volumetric articulation underlined by the wise use of materials* (Angelucci, 1990. P. 34). To represent this professional skill is, once again, the main square of Littoria. With the expansion project of 1935, the Piazza del Littorio is officially completed with the Financial building (Fig.2). The choice of Frezzotti is to achieve once again a building with a longitudinal plan and only apparently symmetrical. The stylistic evolution of the architect is well represented, however, by the façade solutions and the monumentalization of the portico¹⁸.



Figure 2 O. Frezzotti Littoria, 1935. The Financial building. Contemporary photo by the author

¹⁸ "The building, which completes the construction of the Piazza del Popolo, in 1936, is affected by the new role of Littoria now elevated from rural Borgo to the provincial capital. The project is part of the square with a monumentality that contrasts with the architectural tone of the pre-existing buildings, bringing the high marble colonnades occupying the central part of the building to the low plastered porticoes. The portico continues lower on the sides of the building surmounted by two floors covered in brick and punctuated by a regular rhythm of windows." (Muntoni, 1990, p. 76)

Once again, Frezzotti creates a lexical continuity through a calligraphic discontinuity. The archetype element is the same: the portico; the interpretative act of tradition is the same: monumentalization. Only formal expression changes. The portico that in the two side wings is reposed according to the same proportions of 1932, in the central part is extremized, exasperated. The vertical elements developed according to the giant order give life to a solemn and symbolic architectural element, able to communicate solidity and firmness. Moreover, the gigantic size of the columns allows the construction of a new perspective axis that scenographically opens onto Piazza del Littorio. But what happens between 1932 and 1935? What professional experience will this change the stylistic language of Oriolo Frezzotti? In those years, Frezzotti collaborated in the realization of two other fascist new towns: Sabaudia, in 1934, and Pontinia in 1934-35. In particular, it will be the collaboration with the group of winners of the Sabaudia¹⁹ project that will mark the turning point in the architect's dialectic.

*Sabaudia*²⁰

What is still today recognized as the city of Italian Rationalism, was one of the most successful projects of Fascism. The national debate between modern architecture and traditional architecture seems to have ended thanks to Sabaudia's rationalist project, acclaimed by the leading journalistic publications in the sector. Even Pagano, who will never talk too much about the newly founded cities in his own magazine, will use the Sabaudia project to invoke the victory of the architecture of Italian rationalism.²¹ It is therefore in the city of rationalism, between metaphysical architectures, that fit the three buildings designed by Frezzotti for Sabaudia (the water tank, the elementary school and the O.N.B. Building). The architect's language apparently seems to have changed

¹⁹ Gino Cancellotti, Eugenio Montuori, Luigi Piccinato e Alfredo Scalpelli, members of the M.I.A.R., the Italian movement for Rational Architecture.

²⁰ "Sabaudia, among the new cities was undoubtedly the most interesting from an urban and architectural point of view. [...] A true modern "historical centre" of the new city, the complex of squares and buildings that enclose the various public functions still express today, at best, that urban idea so typical of Italian culture of the 1930s. Echoes of De Chirico's metaphysical painting, we re-read together with the desire for a rationalization of spaces and functions that are not the same in other Italian cities of the same period. The particular and sought-after relationship with the natural dimension of the place has then found the possibility of an insertion of various buildings in that unique landscape context [...]" (Muratore, 1999, p. 35)

²¹ Cfr.: "Mussolini salva l'architettura italiana" in *Casabella* n. 78, 1934; and "Architettura italiana dell'anno XIV" in *Casabella*, n. 95

completely. The linear building, linked to the rural tradition, is almost completely abandoned in favour of a more complex planimetric and volumetric composition. The play of volumes is emphasized by the use of materials and façade decorations.

Moreover, unlike what happens in Latina, the facades and the elevations are not treated as two-dimensional elements and completely unrelated to the plan, intentionally designed to draw only a specific set design. In the buildings designed by Frezzotti for Sabaudia, the façade takes shape through the different volumetric development of the geometric figures that make up the plan. A clear example of this is the building of the primary school²² (Fig. 3), today a forest rangers barracks and the one designed for the O.N.B.²³ (Fig. 4).

The Rationalist experience of Frezzotti, however, remains perhaps enclosed in the building of the elementary school of Sabaudia where it will not include, apart from the portico, any stylistic and formal reference to the architectural elements of the past. A completely opposite language is the one used by the architect for the construction of the water tank. In this case the limit between architecture and sculpture becomes very thin.

²² In the case of the elementary school, the large porch with portico is denounced in the elevation by raising a large prismatic volume materially treated with bricks arranged diagonally, interrupted only in one of the four corners that is emptied and closed with a curtainwall. This large parallelepiped rises above a portico, an architectural element that could be understood as the architect's signature, which will never give up one of their projects. The portico and the prism are in sharp contrast to the rest of the building which, except for the grey stone plinth, develops through pure, rigid and static volumes. The sharp cuts of the windows, the curb that closes the elevation in height, the flat roof and the plaster treatment of the façade give back the prefabricated flavour that is well associated with modern international rational architecture. This characteristic makes us understand how Frezzotti was not completely extraneous to the international debate of modern architecture. And they almost certainly looked at their foreign colleagues, much more than they looked at. The work of Frezzotti in Sabaudia is its clear demonstration.

²³ For the O.N.B. Building, the architect, though articulating the composition of the geometries in the plan and playing skilfully with the volumetric development, will insert some elements much more linked to tradition. The main entrance volume is nothing but a monumental closed portico. The strong and static lines, given by the structural element brought to the façade, are contrasted with the rounded corners of the linear body where the service entrance and the library are housed. Finally, the tower which has an exclusively aesthetic value is also inserted in this case. The tower that rises above the caretaker's room is not habitable but constitutes a volumetric element capable of breaking the horizontality of the entire building, and also assumes the symbolic role representative of the new efficiency and power of the fascist regime. The symbolic and purely aesthetic character of the tower is emphasized by the presence of a monumental arch that develops throughout its height. The arch, also treated physically in a different way from the tower, covered with bricks, is the architect's return to a language more linked to tradition, and to the modern current of eclectic monumentalism.

The water tank's is nothing more than a gear symbol of the exaltation of modern mechanics that has made possible the whole work of reclamation. In its vertical development the building reserve some interesting elements describing a strong propensity for what will be defined later eclectic monumentalism²⁴.



Figure 3 O. Frezzotti Sabaudia, 1934. The primary school.
Contemporary photo by the author



Figure 4 O. Frezzotti Sabaudia, 1934. The O.N.B. Building.
Contemporary photo by the author

²⁴ The water tank grows in height by 25 meters, and clearly resumes the figure of the fascist beam. Also, in this case the structural element is brought outwards, leaving the curved walls free to hold decorative elements. The latter are none other than the grooves signalling the façade vertical development of the silos and that they stop where the water tank begins. The clear reference to the figure of the fascist beam establishes not only a turning point in the architect's formal style but also marks, once again, a state of advancement of theories on fascist architecture within the national debate. It is in these years that the need for architecture is not only functional and modern, but symbolic and able to express the new power.

Pontinia

Inaugurated on 19 December 1934²⁵, Pontinia²⁶ was directly designed by the O.N.C offices. At the base of the choice there was the strong controversy that was raised on the definition of these cities. In fact, following the policy of dis-urbanism, they should not be identified as cities but rather as agro-city.²⁷ To avoid the media clash, which could have highlighted the problems related to the implementation of the full reclamation project, the same Mussolini decided to avoid the instrument of public competition²⁸.

Oriolo Frezzotti once again took part in the project of a Fascist New Town collaborating with Ing. A. Pappalardo for the city of Pontinia in particular taking care of the water tank and the church. Once again, eclecticism will characterize the architect's production, thus returning to a more traditional style, even if embracing the current style of the monumental Littorio's architecture²⁹.

²⁵ The day after the administrative transformation of Littoria that from the Rural Commune becomes a Province. il giorno dopo la trasformazione amministrativa di Littoria che da Comune Rurale passa ad essere una Provincia.

²⁶ See the article "Ruralità in Pontinia" published in "La Tribuna" December 20, 1934: *"Pontinia will be the town that will have no bellury, on the occasion of friezes, statue, columns, is not a game sale, and night spots. The story is like that, it has never been like that, it has never been so beautiful, it has never been so easy, perfumes and exotic lipsticks: the country has arisen on the assumption that no one would buy this piece of junk, the reaffirmed rurality of Pontinia, symbolic and external to all the Agro Redento, it represents the gray-green habit that must still dress without frenzy of urban dressings, because, as we said at the beginning, the battle continues and it is hard."*

²⁷ Was Mussolini itself to clarify, with a telegram, the point about the difference between the City and the Agro City: *"All that rhetoric about Littoria simple rural commune and nothing at all east city in absolute contrast with the anti-urbanistic policy of the Regime. Stop. Even the ceremony of the laying of the first stone east a relief of other times. Stop. Not return to the subject."* ACS, Segr. Part. del Duce. Autografi del Duce, 7.X.D (29 June 1932)

²⁸ *"At the" modern "Sabaudia di Piccinato is therefore followed by the" rural Pontinia "designed by an anonymous designer (Ing. Pappalardo) with the advice of Frezzotti. His purpose expressed after the inauguration of Sabaudia was put into practice. Then, not satisfied by the architecture of Piccinato and colleagues, the same, mind you, of which he publicly praises the praises - he had decided to do without architects. Turning to Cencelli he would have said: "Enough of this rational and monotonous architecture. Once again, we design the projects with her and with the designers on our orders ". And at the ONC he gave orders not to ban any competition. "* (Nicoloso, pp. 125-126)

²⁹ After Sabaudia's project, Mussolini, realizing how much the rationalist architecture was not representative of Italian values and much more predisposed to the creation of a single international style that is the same for everyone, he decided to drastically change course and start a decisional process that gave life to Italian neoclassicism. Once again, the architecture of the newly founded cities provides the concrete document of the evolution of the architectural research of the '30s in Italy.

The case of Pontinia is also particularly interesting for its media response. Suffice to say that Pagano, while not paying too much attention to the project of the new towns, took care of Pontinia for a critique of national architecture (Pagano, 1935).

So, the *super-gothic organ pipes that would decorate the exterior of the new church of Pontinia, a rural town for antonomasia and not much in tune with such shenanigans*. (Pagano, 1935) are nothing more than the umpteenth representation of the political contradictions of the regime, which reflect in the variation of style of architecture produced in the Thirties. (Fig. 5) But not only: architecture becomes metaphysics. Even in Pontinia the architectural elements belonging to a repertoire of the past are no longer important, but they are the symbolic instruments of the Regime.³⁰ The subtle difference between architecture and sculpture is increasingly imperceptible, but it is not surprising knowing that it is precisely in this period that we can witness to a total separation between the shape of the building and its function.³¹



Figure 5. O. Frezzotti Pontinia, 1934-35. The Prospective axes. At the end of the main street we can see the church. Contemporary photo by the author

³⁰ In Sabaudia the Fascist beam for the tank and, in Pontinia, the organ pipes for the façade design of the church.

³¹ One of the main characteristics of Fascist architecture will be the impossibility of understanding, through direct observation of the building, its intended use. Each building is a monument and every monument is a building. Symbolism invades architectural production in all its forms: starting from the plan (the Littoria's station is in turn the representation of a fascist beam) up to the façade solutions, where in some cases it is impossible to understand where architecture ends and where the decorative sculptural element begins.

The same kind of process is described by Le Corbusier in *Verso an architecture* in 1921. In his text he explains how architectures, formally inspired by new machines, are the best tool for the exaltation of technical progress and modernity. Producing a building that looks directly like an airplane or a steamer is no different from producing an architecture formally inspired by the lictorian beam or an organ of a church. So are the references that is changed and not the method. This concept is put into practice by Frezzotti, who will use the symbolic elements of the Regime as formal references for his buildings.

The importance of these urban and architectural artefacts as real documents of the evolution of the history of modern architecture is also, in the case of Pontinia, perfectly understandable for the impact they had in the scientific debate. It is not a coincidence that the rationalist Sabaudia, modern and beautiful is praised, while the rural Pontinia, *demonstration of how we should not make a regulatory plan and how we should not build* (Pagano, 1935), is severely criticized. Sabaudia and Pontinia, therefore represent directly and physically the debate between rational architecture and traditional architecture that will characterize the definition of a modern Italian architecture, which is the fascist architecture, and which will find its definition only in eclectic monumentalism. Eclectic monumentalism that will characterize, not by chance, the projects for the 1935 Littoria's buildings.

Conclusions

What is clearly visible then from the examples shown here is like Littoria, Sabaudia and Pontinia, are the physical laboratories where the research of the canons of modern Italian architecture is carried out. To better understand the process of definition of a national modern style we can't forget that the strong political influence of the Regime did not allow the development of a sufficiently clear and defined architectural current. There will be very few architectures that will directly refer to a more international style. But it must always be remembered that even those architects who proposed a more "contemporary" style aimed at defining the fascist architecture, rather than defining an Italian

rational modern architecture. Moreover, the difficulty of foreign influences also derives from the net closure of politics in favour of a nationalist imprint.

Despite the heated debate and the contrasting achievements of the first years of the 20th century in Italy - Before the architectural realizations assumed a common figuration under the guidance of Piacentini - it is possible to clearly read the evolution of modern Italian architecture in the projects of the city of foundation.

Vernacular elements reworked and proposed first in an eclectic and subsequently in a monumental key are all collected in the great book written by Littoria, Sabaudia and Pontinia. The architecture that characterizes these buildings, despite being the symbol of a political ideology, assume their value not as representative of it, but as physical documents that bear witness to the historical evolution of Italian architecture.

The architecture of Frezzotti is therefore the testimony of how modern architecture has evolved within a heated debate between modernity and tradition; and it is the result of the strong political influence applied by Fascism.

What we wanted to determine with this text is the importance that the architectures of the city of foundation have and assume over time. They would therefore require a new critical re-reading, not influenced by current or past political conditions. Only through an objective reading of its physical elements and their variations, in fact, will it be possible to identify within these artefacts the role of architecture in the years of Fascism.

Finally, these architectural products assume even more value today because they represent, in their current conformation, the approach to the "modern" historical heritage influenced by the current political perception of the story.

Acknowledgments

This paper was produced in the framework of MODSCAPES - Modernist Reinventions of the Rural Landscape, a collaborative research project funded under the HERA – Humanities in the European Research Area III Joint Research Programme - “Uses of the Past” (2016-2019). This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement n°649307

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