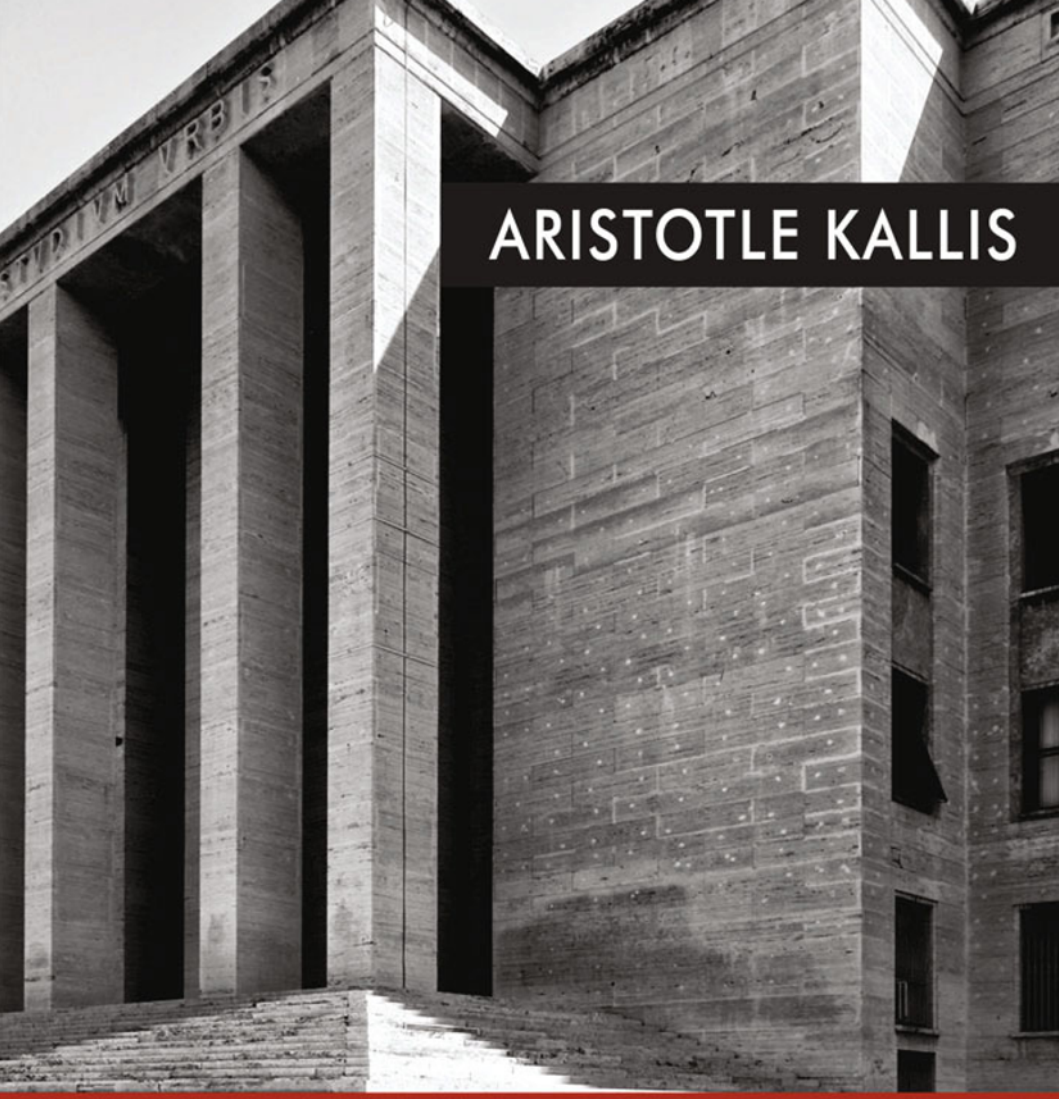

ARISTOTLE KALLIS

THE THIRD ROME 1922–1943

THE MAKING OF THE FASCIST CAPITAL

The Third Rome, 1922–1943

Also by Aristotle Kallis

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The Third Rome, 1922–1943

The Making of the Fascist Capital

Aristotle Kallis
Professor of Modern and Contemporary History,
Lancaster University, UK

palgrave
macmillan

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2014 978-0-230-28399-2

First published 2014 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

ISBN 978-1-349-32918-2 ISBN 978-1-137-31403-1 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137314031

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kallis, Aristotle A., 1970–

The third Rome, 1922–43 : the making of the fascist capital / Aristotle Kallis (professor of Modern and Contemporary History, Lancaster University, UK)

pages cm

Summary: "Rome underwent a spectacular transformation under Fascist rule; a transformation that was visual and topographical but also deeply symbolic. The 'third Rome' that Mussolini envisioned and sought to realise in the 1920s and 1930s was partly a new city, expanding in all directions from the historic centre, and partly a new vision for an ideal city that emerged from within a cityscape forged across millennia of history. This Rome was intended to be both the capital of a regenerated Italy and the sanctuary of a new international fascist political religion. Aristotle Kallis traces the plethora of visions and projects that sought to reimagine, reinvent, and reshape the city as a 'fascist capital' over the course of twenty short years. Extensive demolitions, reconfigurations of sites and monuments, as well as ambitious new constructions designed by an array of architects in wildly different styles, chronicle a fascinating story of conquering drive, ruthless appropriation, and interrupted ambition"—Provided by publisher.

1. Fascism and architecture—Italy—Rome—History—20th century. 2. Architecture—Italy—Rome—History—20th century. 3. Public buildings—Italy—Rome—History—20th century. 4. Monuments—Italy—Rome—History—20th century. 5. City planning—Political aspects—Italy—Rome—History—20th century. 6. Social change—Italy—Rome—History—20th century. 7. Rome (Italy)—Buildings, structures, etc. 8. Rome (Italy)—Politics and government—1870–1945. 9. Italy—Politics and government—1922–1945. 10. Capitals (Cities)—Political aspects—Case studies. I. Title.
NA1121.R66K35 2014
720.9456'3209042—dc23 2014019312

Typeset by MPS Limited, Chennai, India.

Contents

List of Illustrations

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Maps

The maps and diagrams featured in the book are for illustrative purposes. The source data for the main background scans of Rome used in the diagrams are derived from OpenStreetMap and made available at http://www.openstreetmap.org/relation/41485 under the Open Database License (ODbL). See more at http://opendatacommons.org/licenses/odbl/1.0/#sthash.gPUEK5Jc.dpuf. All other aspects of the maps and diagrams constitute original artwork.

Acknowledgements

They say that a book starts with a quasi-epiphanic moment and ends with compiling the 'acknowledgements' section. I do remember the moment that I first entertained the idea of writing a book on interwar Rome. It is one of those moments that is, to use a phrase that occurs regularly in the following pages, a moment (and a memory) *rooted* in space – the corner of Via del Viminale and Via Torino in the central Monti district of Rome, to be precise. I have strolled past it on numerous occasions since then, during my increasingly longer and more frequent stays in the city, for research and pleasure, and most often both. Until now, this wholly unremarkable spot in the Roman cityscape reminded me of a project born out of love for the city but still hanging over me like a suspended sentence. Next time I pass by, I will at least recount the moment of this book's inception without the dread of *non-finito*.

I will always recall what a close friend once said to me: 'you never *finish* a book; you just find what seems like a good moment to abandon it'. Over the years since that moment in Monti, I have spent so many incredibly enjoyable months in Rome, hidden inside archives and libraries but always finding the time to get immersed in the city's majestic palimpsest. This quickly became a solitary game – to spot as many of these hidden spots where the tectonic plates of history collided, revealing the most unexpected traces of the past – of different pasts, in fact. In the process, I think I have earned the privilege of a special relationship with the city – one no longer based on the intensity of the early encounters but on a deeper intimacy with, and appreciation of, what Rome is.

The subject of the book has redirected my gaze away from the grand monuments of the city's past and towards a far more recent 'layer' in its long and vicissitudinous history. I ended up being the one who photographed a small, inconspicuous column with his back turned on the Colosseo; the one looking at the inscriptions of modern buildings in the opposite direction of St Peter's basilica; the one stopping to observe obscure mosaics in bustling railway stations; the one staring at faded insignia carved on walls that flanked Augustus' Mausoleum; the one surveying inconspicuous streets, trying to imagine how they must have looked like before the demolitions of the 1930s or how they would have looked like if the designs I had encountered during my research in the archives had been realised. No two people's Rome is the same of course. But mine is perhaps a little bit more offbeat than most.

Researching and writing this book has been a long, adventurous journey. It has spanned nearly a decade that started, in academic terms, at the Department of Historical Studies of the University of Bristol, then passed

through the Department of European Languages and Cultures at Lancaster University, and now finds me at the Department of History of the same institution. The journey has produced many lasting memories but also debts, again rooted in place and space: the Archivio Centrale dello Stato, the Archivio Storico Capitolino, the Museo di Roma, and the various branches of the Biblioteca Nazionale in Rome; the Fondo Marcello Piacentini in Florence; the library of the Triennale in Milan; the library and archive of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris; the Bodleian Library in Oxford; the National Libraries in London and Edinburgh; as well as numerous university libraries in Italy and the UK. So many people working in these institutions went out of their way to help me with locating material, suggesting resources, and making special arrangements for consulting documents. I thanked them at the time and I am renewing my thanks to them now.

For so much contained in this book I am indebted to the intellectual work of others before me, in the fields of fascism studies; the history of architecture, modern urban planning, and modernist aesthetics; as well as of the history of Rome and Italy. But I am particularly grateful to a number of fellow researchers, colleagues, and friends with whom I exchanged ideas during the process of writing this book and whose feedback shaped crucial aspects of its content and analysis. Their input inspired and motivated me more than they can possibly imagine. It would be impossible to list them all here but it would also be tremendously unfair not to try: Roger Griffin (as ever), Charles Burdett, Terry Kirk, Matthew Feldman, Lesley Caldwell, David Rifkind, David Roberts, Jan Nelis, Joshua Arthurs, Lutz Klinkhammer, Gustavo Corni, Luigi Monzo, and Deborah Sutton. It goes without saying that, my intellectual debts to them and others notwithstanding, I alone am responsible for the content of (and any potential errors in) this book.

Research for this book was funded by a project grant from the British Academy, and two smaller research grants from the Research Fund of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Lancaster University. Taken together, these funds allowed me to spend more time in Italy and benefit from the wealth of resources located there. I have always been tremendously envious of those researching the history of Rome and living there. Thanks to the generous support of the aforementioned institutions, I was able to indulge the illusion for considerable lengths of time. At both Lancaster and Bristol, I have been privileged to work with colleagues who continue to value interdisciplinary research and supported my work in intellectual, moral, and – when needed – financial ways. I am also deeply grateful to my students (particularly those who attended my courses on 'totalitarian cities') for their tremendously constructive engagement with a great deal of the material and ideas presented throughout this book.

For the kind permission to use photographic material from their collections in this book, I am indebted to: the Documentation Centre of the Museo di Roma; the Archivio Antonio Cederna (Rome); the Archivio

della Etnografia e Storia Sociale (Milan); the archive of the Museo Storico Capitolino (Rome); and the Casa dell'Architettura di Latina. The rest of the photographic and illustrative material featured in the book is my own work. I owe a very big thanks to Lindy Crewe, whose encouragement and guidance convinced me that it was a good idea to master Illustrator and produce the diagrams of this book. I never achieved the former but I did manage the latter (I think), however deficient the outcome undoubtedly is.

Last but not least, I am immensely grateful to Palgrave for accepting the book, waiting patiently for its completion, and then steering it with efficiency through the labyrinth that is the production process. Michael Strang, then editor of the History catalogue at Palgrave, supported the book at the early stages and was terribly kind in granting my wish to include a significant amount of illustrative material in it. But it was Clare Mence and Emily Russell who saw it through during the final, long, tortuous stretch: always available, always supportive, always willing to help me overcome the various obstacles to completion (production details, image copyrights, but above all my impressionistic attitude to timeframes and deadlines). I am also grateful to Eric Christianson for his meticulous proofreading of the manuscript during the final stages of production.

I know of many people who will be pleased to hear that I have completed this book – my parents, my colleagues at work, and my close friends with whom I discussed it at various stages and lengths (among them Mark and Tobi McBride, with whom I have always shared a unique appreciation of 'being in Rome'). I also know of just a few people who will be especially relieved, having been forced to 'live' with this book longer and closer than they had ever imagined. Well, it is over. I thank them for their unconditional support, encouragement, and inexhaustible forbearance.

Aristotle Kallis
December 2013

List of Abbreviations

ANMIG	Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra
AOI	Africa Orientale Italiana
BNL	Banca Nazionale del Lavoro
BUF	British Union of Fascists
CAUR	Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalità di Roma
E42/EUR	Esposizione Universale di Roma 1942
FIaE	Fasci Italiani all'Estero
GDAFA	Direzione Generale per le Antichità e Belle Arti
GIL	Gioventù Italiana del Littorio
GUR	Gruppo Urbanisti Romani
ICP	Istituto Case Popolari
INA	Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni
INAIL	Istituto Nazionale per l'Assicurazione contro gli Infortuni sul Lavoro
INCIS	Istituto Nazionale per le Case degli Impiegati dello Stato
INU	Istituto Nazionale dell'Urbanistica
ISR	Istituto di Studi Romani
MAdR	Mostra Augustea della Romanità
MAMI	Mostra Autarchica del Minerale Italiano
MCE	Mostra delle Colonie Estive e Assistenza all'Infanzia
MCP	Ministero di Cultura Popolare
MD	Mostra del Dopolavoro
MdCI	Mostra della Civiltà Italiana
MdR	Mostra della Romanità
MdRF	Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista
MIAR	Movimento Italiano per l'Architettura Razionale
MTN	Mostra del Tessile Nazionale
MVSN	Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
ONB	Opera Nazionale Balilla

ONC	Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti
OND	Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro
ONMI	Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia
PNF	Partito Nazionale Fascista
PRG	Piano Regolatore Generale
RAMI	Raggruppamento Architetti Moderni Italiani

Introduction

Lanciani's Roman Palimpsest

At the turn of the twentieth century, the professor of Roman topography and head of the Municipal Archaeological Committee Rodolfo Lanciani was close to completing two of the most important projects of his career. The first was a reconstruction of the third-century Forma Urbis Romae – a giant marble relief showing the plan of the imperial capital that had been completely destroyed but whose fragments (both known and subsequently discovered) Lanciani and his team had painstakingly pieced together. The partially reconstructed ancient plan was presented to the public in 1903 at a special conference held in the headquarters of the municipality on the historic Campidoglio hill (Palombi 2006: 284). Lanciani's second project was a set of 46 detailed maps of Roman topography, indicating the presumed location of long-forgotten ancient monuments (from the foundation of Rome until the fourth century CE) against the visible surface of the contemporary city. The illustrations were published in serial format between 1893 and 1901 under the title *Forma Urbis Romae*, offering an incredibly detailed two-dimensional reconstruction of the imperial city on a 1:1000 scale (Lanciani 1893–1901).

At the time Lanciani was the de facto authority on Roman topography and archaeology. He supervised almost every excavation in Rome and the surrounding region of Lazio, recording meticulously every detail concerning the findings and imputing every new fragment of information into his already vast knowledge of Rome's history. The two Formae Urbis Romae that he presented – one as an archaeologist and historian, the other as an expert topographer and cartographer – shaped a detailed mental image of a city that no longer existed, having vanished across centuries of decay, neglect, and wanton destruction. With his own *Forma*, however, Lanciani achieved something that went far beyond a detailed reconstruction in two dimensions. He crafted a composite image consisting of two flattened layers – one contemporary indicated in blue colour, the other ancient and largely obscured

or faded in red. By making the contemporary map of the city opaque, he delivered a vivid snapshot of Rome as an urban *palimpsest* that linked spatially the stratigraphy of the ancient city-legend with the modern visible layer of the capital.

Initially a literary term derived from the ancient and medieval practice of erasing and reinscribing parchment, the trope of the **palimpsest** (Fig. 1.1, 1.2) has been fruitfully applied to urban history by approaching the city as a field of multiple inscriptions, erasures, and emendations. The urban palimpsest is the product of *polychronicity* – that is, of change over time inscribed on space, creating a layering of space that both reveals and obscures fragments of the past. The palimpsest is a record of accumulation over time and on the actual physical surface of the space of inscription – some visible, others faded or truncated, many hidden or lost. It delivers fragments of the past, of different, often fiercely competing pasts; but it also reveals stories about the natural forces and human agencies that have shaped it. The palimpsest is both a rich, yet incongruous literal record of a city's sedimented history and a metaphorical register of memories, scars, and ambitious visions (Huyssen 2010: 74–5). But it is not a passive record of history, just like the city itself is far from a homogenous, static space. Rather, the urban palimpsest is a laboratory of a multitude of very different temporal effects, waiting not just to be revealed but also to be invented, crafted, and reinscribed on the city's contemporary space and memory. As visible and obscured/erased record, it

Figure 1.1 Palimpsest: San Nicola in Carcere, with remnants of ancient temple (Via del Teatro di Marcello, ex-Via del Mare)

Figure 1.2 Temple of Hadrian (Piazza Petra) incorporated into an eighteenth-century building

contains the raw materials of the city's pasts but can also re-imagine and re-create the past in the present (Harris 2009: 97–101).

That Rome is one of the most complex and fascinating urban palimpsests is of course beyond doubt (Jenkyns 2013: 259). Nearly three millennia of history have left behind a prolific archive of material traces and metaphorical memories, scattered across (or beneath) the urban space. The layering effect is nothing short of fascinating, especially since it captures trails from conflicting visions and agencies over a period in which the city was considered, in different ways, a kind of global epicentre. Like every other location of long-term continuous settlement, Rome features a multifaceted visible layer that captures incongruously evidence from diverse human agencies over time – echoes from realised visions, accidents, victories, failures, and disasters. This visible layer, however, also reveals and obscures a rich array of buried layers that echo a far more eventful historical record of spatial and symbolic battles – whether as a struggle against nature or as relentless contestation by different rulers who aspired to make the city their own. All these battles – and, above all, their deliberate or unwitting outcomes – were inevitably inscribed on the city's physical environment, leaving unmistakeable traces of intention and choice, of creative contribution as well as of alteration, appropriation, and erasure. The visible layer is thus neither linear nor homogeneous in any topographical or temporal sense. It is rather like an incongruous collage that disrupts stratigraphy and time – the sediment of a multitude of vastly asynchronous efforts to contest and change the city's environment over nearly three millennia of habitation (De Certeau 2002: 201). At any point in its long history, Rome's visible layer appeared as an

incongruous archive of its fortunes, past and present, that both revealed and obscured (i.e. fused, buried, or erased) evidence of earlier human agencies.

As both a historian and an archaeologist, Lanciani studied the city as a fascinating horizontal sediment *and* a multi-layered vertical section (Kavanagh 1998: 1). The sediment included a rich visible record of human interventions over time that had to be recorded in their fascinating textured forms, linkages, and juxtapositions. The section, on the other hand, revealed multiple strata of the chronotope that had to be classified, analysed separately, placed on some sort of hierarchy, and recovered where possible and desirable. Lanciani's *Forma*, however, also appeared in a deeply charged political context that involved the entire kingdom of Italy but had a special resonance in and for Rome. On 20 September 1870 the troops of the fledgling Italian kingdom breached Rome's ancient Aurelian walls at Porta Pia and marched into the city as victorious conquerors. In so doing, they completed in the most emphatic way a process of national unification that had started 11 years earlier. The Risorgimento had already delivered an Italian nation-state in 1861; but it was a state that did not satisfy the dreams of its leaders and supporters in one crucial respect, leaving Rome and its surrounding territories under papal rule. The dramatic conquest of Rome in September 1870 signified the fulfilment of a symbolic dream – to make Rome the political and spiritual fulcrum of Italian national life – whose origins stretched further back than 1859–60 – to the ill-fated Roman Republics of 1849 or even 1797 (Giardina and Vauchez 2000: 170–7; Weigel 1990: 18–1).

The year 1870 also closed a millennial chapter in the history of Rome and marked a new beginning. It took until February 1871 for the decision to transfer the capital from Florence to Rome to be taken and a few more for the move to take effect (Lasansky 2004: 30). As a modern national capital, Rome had to host the new structures of national power – the head of state, the government, ministries, and multiple bureaucracies (Hall 2006). It also had to prepare for a demographic boom, not only because of the expected influx of labour into the capital city but also because its development had been previously stifled by the anachronistic structures of the Papal States (Hall 1997: 290–8). Above all, however, the city had to devise ways to communicate clearly its novel status, functions, and aspirations as a truly national capital, worthy of the legacy of the Risorgimento (Gentile 2009: 11). This meant that Rome had to be *recoded* – visually and symbolically, both in its individual components and as a city-symbol – in order to reflect a new urban legibility that could not have been more different to the one that it had until 1870 (Kallis 2012: 44–7).

The enormity and complexity of this task was revealed to the new Piedmontese rulers of the city only in the wake of their triumph. By the time that the Italian troops made their way through the ancient city walls towards the centre, the city's ruler that they had defeated, Pope Pius IX, had already fled his official residence at the Quirinale palace to the Leonine city

across the river – a resentful and frustrated 'prisoner' in his erstwhile sacred capital, refusing to grant even a shred of recognition to the 'usurpers'. Thus, on this date of national jubilation, the so-called 'Roman Question' was also born inside Rome itself – a clash of two sovereignties and figureheads over the ownership of the city, its erstwhile territories, and above all its huge symbolic estate. There would be no 'sack' of the city in 1870, even if violent clashes between supporters of the papacy and the king did occur for months after the annexation of Rome and anti-clerical mobs caused damage to church property (Kertzer 2006: 112–17). Against the counsel of some of his own advisors, Pius IX never left the Leonine city. King Vittorio Emanuele II never truly settled in the new capital either. Both died within a month of each other in 1878, bequeathing the bitter legacy of the 'Roman Question' to their successors and beyond.

Even without the 'Roman Question', transforming Rome into a national civic capital after so many centuries of strong association with Christianity and the papacy was no mean task. The Rome of 1870 was a diminished city of just over 225,000 inhabitants (smaller than Naples, Milan, Genova, and Palermo), with a strikingly under-developed socioeconomic profile largely at odds with the other established modern European metropoles (Casciato 2002: 127; Pagnotta 2002: 203–9; Archibugi 2005: 1–16). It was also an alien and incongruous space, replete with discordant imagery and symbols, that was difficult to 'occupy' and re-signify (Giardina and Vauchez 2000: 178, 193; Bosworth 2011). It featured a bewildering assortment of monuments from across two millennia, as well as the traces and scars from earlier efforts to 'conquer' and appropriate it – all inscribed on (or buried just underneath) the modern cityscape (Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azeryahu 2010). Rome was no stranger to the kind of visual, topographic, and semiotic recoding that its post-1870 rulers embarked on as soon as they annexed the city into the Italian kingdom. Imperial rulers had done so to the earlier Republican city (e.g. Ruff 2012). Then came the gradual but profound reimagining of Rome as a universal Christian centre, driven by the papacy throughout medieval and early modern times (Goodson 2011: 17–34; Curran 2002). The post-Risorgimento recoding of the city as a modern national metropolis was the third major such project – but with the added burden of 15 centuries of accumulated, contradictory histories (Agnew 2002: 49–52). Over centuries the 'Christian' Rome had emerged as a city with a unique spiritual and universalist physiognomy roughly on the location of the old imperial capital that it had superseded. Now its newly arrived Italian rulers would have to do the same for their national capital – but under the far more unfavourable and fraught conditions generated by the shadow of the 'Roman Question' and the belated state formation (cf. Wise 1998: 14).

In the intervening three decades between the momentous events of 1870 and the publication of Lanciani's *Forma*, Rome's visible layer had already

changed to reflect the city's new status as national capital with a unique historical significance. Apart from archaeological excavations and restorations of landmark buildings across the historic centre, a new national **monument** to the king of the Risorgimento, **Vittorio Emanuele II** (Vittoriano), was being constructed next to the Campidoglio, dramatically transforming the look and feel of the area around it. The city had also expanded towards the northeast, with new traffic arteries connecting the new and old centre. The visible changes effected during the first three decades since its annexation by the Italian kingdom, significant though they were individually, had not fundamentally altered Rome's visible layer by the turn of the century. And yet, at the turn of the twentieth century Rome *appeared* and *felt* like a very different city to the pre-1870 one. Its visible layer had been superimposed with a very different filter – of the national capital and hub of a new Italian secular identity – that had started to supplant the earlier one associated with the 'second Rome', the 'city of the popes' and spiritual centre of universal Christianity. The national filter forced a new legibility onto the old, mostly familiar components of the city's visible layer. Meanwhile, after centuries of neglect and destruction, the city's ancient heritage (the 'first Rome') had started to receive fresh attention, not only because it desperately needed conservation but also because it served the contemporary narrative of a homogeneous, diachronic national identity and accentuated the departure from the 'confessional' city that the national capital had replaced but not fully eclipsed.

This was the political and cultural atmosphere in which Lanciani's work was conceived, carried out, and effusively praised at the turn of the twentieth century. His maps of the ancient city were a captivating simulacrum of a mythical space and time – both a scientific representation/reconstruction of something that allegedly was and a powerful statement of intent for the city that would be. The maps reminded the contemporary viewer of the glory of a bygone era and the effects of prior destruction; but they also produced a near-complete mental image of a previously invisible heritage that was portrayed as central to the new collective national identity of modern Italians (Harding 2003: 1–3). In these highly charged political circumstances of nation-building amidst the ripple effects from the 'Roman Question', Rome's palimpsest offered the possibility of a novel, powerful alternative signification, with new relations unearthed and invented to support the national and anti-clerical discourse of national unification. The city had already become an arena of political conflict for power over space and time, like so many times in its long history.

The history of Rome, as well as of Italy, would enter a new dramatic phase in the months between the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 and Italy's decision to join the conflict in May 1915. During these nine tumultuous months, a popular coalition in favour of Italy's immediate intervention (*intervento*) brought together wildly disparate forces – old and new nationalists, dissidents of the left and the right, political and intellectual

radicals. The main target of the *intervento* movement was the political elites and institutions of Liberal Italy – allegedly corrupt, timid, and lacking in national vision, they were now also accused of condemning the country to the sidelines of what was seen as an epoch-defining pan-European conflict (Griffin 2008: 206–9; Roberts 2005: 15–17). Rome, therefore, became a de facto enemy of the movement as the city that epitomised the putative flaws of the 'official' Italy – the *paese legale* as they referred to it, in stark contrast to the *paese reale*, the 'real' Italy still motivated by the mythology of the Risorgimento (Vivarelli 1976). The city also became a physical battleground, where the forces of the *intervento* challenged the ailing 'official' Liberal Italy. By early May 1915 Rome was witnessing big popular rallies in favour of intervention with distinguished speakers who had come to the capital for the final showdown with the Liberal government. Piazza Venezia and the Campidoglio (not Piazza Colonna, site of the parliament building) became the chosen backdrops to the *intervento* rallies that gathered momentum during what the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio described as the 'radiant days of May (1915)' (Knox 2007: 177). It was there that D'Annunzio invoked the whole mythology of ancient Rome, the 1848 Republic, and the Risorgimento, declaring that the only legitimate parliament of the country was made up of its people (Isnenghi 1979: 83). When the decision to enter the war was finally announced on 24 May 1915, the *intervento* movement celebrated the moment as a symbolic watershed – a victory of the 'real' Italy over its decaying 'official' counterpart.

The war proved a rollercoaster for Italy – from the disaster of the battle of Caporetto in 1917 to the victory of Vittorio Veneto in 1918 and from the anticipation of territorial rewards to the frustration-ridden mythology of a 'mutilated victory' in the wake of the Versailles negotiations that delivered only modest territorial gains for Italy (Bonadeo 1995: 125–32). In hindsight, the post-First World War return to a semblance of normality proved a short and uneasy hiatus. In an atmosphere of deepening crisis – economic, political and institutional, but to a large extent psychological (Payne 1997: 87–94) – the city came to be viewed with hostility as the seat of a haggard political class that had seemingly exhausted its course. At the same time, however, another Rome – a mythical symbol of fierce discipline and dedication, of national renewal, universalist import, and civilisational primacy – was rapidly taking shape in the imaginary of new radical nationalist political forces consumed by the sense of a new beginning in the history of modern Italy (Giardina and Vauchez 2000: 215–19; Griffin 2008a: 211–13). One of these forces was Fascism – the movement founded by the dissident ex-socialist Benito Mussolini in March 1919. The choice of location for this founding event – the Piazza San Sepolcro in the centre of Milan – reflected a conviction widely shared among radicals that the northern metropolis, rather than Rome, was the 'moral' capital of the country, untainted by the decadence of the *paese legale* (Rosa 1982;

Agnew 1998: 230). Indeed, Rome remained largely marginal to the early history of Fascism, as it had done in relation to other radical movements that appeared in the effervescent atmosphere of the prewar years (Adamson 1992; Gentile 2003: 27–76). Yet, three years later, in his speech for the celebration of the city's 'birthday' (21 April 1922), Mussolini proclaimed that it was the very 'myth of Rome' that had shaped Fascism as a movement and underpinned its most cherished beliefs. Reclaimed from its disgraced rulers and liberated from the spirit of mediocrity that had marked its history since 1870, Mussolini argued, the city could be reconnected with its own supreme destiny and thus lead the way to a profound national reawakening (*Opera* XVIII: 160–1; Giardina and Vauchez 2000: 212–20).

In this sense, when the Fascists organised their 'March on Rome' in late October 1922, they were joining a long list of conquerors and self-professed liberators who sought in Rome a prized possession – territorial, political, and symbolic. The 'March' was a nakedly hostile gesture against what Rome represented at the time but also an act of putatively restoring the 'myth' to the city that gave birth to it – 'to make Rome Roman again' (De Marsanich 1942: 336). To conquer this city was regarded as the highest symbolic prize for a movement whose ambition was to usher in a new, epoch-defining beginning in the history of the Italian nation. The dramatic events of 26–8 October 1922 may have been largely invisible to the inhabitants of Rome, unfolding elsewhere in Italy or behind inaccessible official doors. Strictly speaking, Rome capitulated to Fascism without much of a fight; the 'March' of the numerous but poorly equipped Fascists expired in the outskirts of the capital, drowned in uncertainty, lack of coordination, and torrential rain (Segre 1988: 91; Baxa 2010: 47–54). Even so, when the Fascist columns were allowed to enter the city on the morning of 30 October and marched on the streets, neither they nor the few onlookers, who greeted them coldly and often with outright hostility, could fail to register the sheer symbolic significance of the Fascist squads' presence in Rome, as the closest equivalent to modern-day conquerors.

The Faces of the 'Third Rome': 1922, 1932, 1942

Fascism arrived in Rome nearly two decades after the publication of Lanciani's *Forma*. Although it did not seem like it at the time, this event marked the beginning of yet another dramatic new phase in the history of the city. Mussolini entered Rome as the figurehead of a self-proclaimed 'revolution'. But this was a peculiar 'revolution', built on a discursive paradox: a force of rupture with the recent past that was nevertheless in thrall to its myths of national palingenesis and historical lineage from Roman antiquity (Kallis 2012: 57–8). As much as it was viscerally opposed to the preceding Liberal Italy and the 'legal Rome' of the bourgeois political class, it was also captivated by the dream of Italian nationalism that had animated the Risorgimento and shaped the national imaginary after 1870.

Both before and after the March on Rome in October 1922, the Fascists had tried to appropriate landmark places from both the ancient, Renaissance, and the Risorgimental history of the city. They had claimed Julius Caesar and Augustus, Dante and Michelangelo, Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi, as their spiritual ancestors and sources of inspiration. When Mussolini and his officials spoke admiringly of the Rome that they were dreaming of, they referred to a 'third Rome' (*terza Roma*) as both a new and an iterative city that would subsume a long lineage of its glorious predecessors – the imperial and the medieval/Renaissance (papal) cities – but would equally expunge other periods from the city's mythology. This would be a city both in rupture with its perceived contemporary decadence and one whose timeless, heroic quintessence already inhered within the urban palimpsest of contemporary Rome but had to be 'reclaimed' from the ravages of time, 'liberated' from degrading accretions, and complemented by new constructions worthy of the city's vast, momentous symbolic estate (Baxa 2010: 10–12). This 'third Rome' was believed to be a city invested with a renewed epoch-defining mission like its illustrious ancient and medieval predecessors. It also promised to become the harbinger of a regenerated Italy and the vanguard of a new universal civilisation, tapping unashamedly into the unfulfilled mythopoeias of the Risorgimento (Giardina and Vauchez 2000: 238–41; Manacorda and Tamassia 1985: 158).

It took more than two years for Mussolini to take the step and proclaim a genuine Fascist dictatorship in January 1925. But the symbolic consecration of the Fascist 'revolution' came a further seven years later – in 1932, on the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome that had propelled Mussolini to power. Marking the occasion with a lavish, superbly choreographed exhibition dedicated to the Fascist 'revolution' that was held in Rome, the Fascist regime constructed a visual spectacle that sought to confirm its place of honour in the national historical imaginary. Rome, the resurgent national capital, hosted the most daring statement of Fascism's historical self-legitimisation as the culmination of a distinct historical lineage that led from the legends of Romulus and Remus to the Risorgimento and finally to Mussolini. By focusing the exhibition on the period between 1914 and 1922, Fascism located its rupture with Liberal Italy against the backdrop of the revived Roman *lictor*, the gigantic Latin numeral X that crowned the entrance to the exhibition, and the national *tricolore*. It moved its sacred symbols, the archive of its struggles, and the memory of its 'martyrs' to the heart of Rome, even if the movement's spiritual and historical cradle had been identified with the northern metropolis of Milan, where Mussolini had launched his movement in 1919. The festivities of 1932 (Decennale) covered Rome in a Fascist cloak and celebrated 1922 as a putative watershed moment of unparalleled *national* historic significance.

During its first decade of its rule, the Fascist regime authorised and carried out significant interventions inside Rome. A large part of these had

either been already envisioned in previous years or followed organically from norms and priorities firmly established before 1922. The city of 1932 retained all the landmarks – ancient, medieval, modern – that it had back in 1922, with only few additions, most of which were situated in the city's peripheral zones. Seismic changes were nevertheless on the horizon. A few years earlier, in 1929, the Fascist regime had signed a series of accords with the Vatican church that had laid to rest, in theory at least, nearly six decades of bitter conflict between the Italian state and the papacy. Solving the 'Roman Question' that had scarred the city since 1870 and cast a shadow on its role as the cradle of a unifying diachronic identity for all Italians afforded a new meaning to the Fascist discourse of the 'third Rome'. While before 1929 Fascism had carved its own place in Italian history in relation to the myth of *romanità* and the spirit of the Risorgimento, bypassing (like its Liberal predecessors had done) vexing associations with the city's papal past, now the 'third Rome' could tap into the arsenal of potent millenarian myths associated with both the imperial and the Christian cities of the past.

The second important change had not happened in Italy. By the time that the 1932 Fascist exhibition in Rome closed its doors to the public on 28 October 1934, Adolf Hitler had been appointed Chancellor, entrenched his personal power, and used his authority to consolidate the National Socialist regime in Germany. Initially greeted in Italy as a victory of 'fascism', Nazi Germany was soon to be viewed by Mussolini as a threatening competitor on the international scene. By the summer of 1934, a new organisation with the name Action Committees for the Universality of Rome (Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalità di Roma, CAUR) had been established. Its primary aim was to promote Italian Fascism's international profile as the political centre of a 'third way' ideological paradigm that had already been 'exported' and could become a truly transnational alternative to either liberalism or socialism. CAUR aspired to become the nervous centre of a global alliance of kindred forces under the political and spiritual leadership of Fascist Italy. However, both the timing of the initiative and CAUR's networking strategy (not least the deliberate exclusion of Hitler's movement/regime from the alliance) divulged a deeper goal – namely, ensuring the primacy of Italian Fascism vis-à-vis the resurgent National Socialism in Germany. The chosen discursive platform for the *internationalisation* of (Italian) Fascism was the idea of Rome's universality, as the organisation's title stated – yet another eloquent statement that both served the idea of an alleged Italian custody of f(F)ascism and emphatically ostracised the Nazi regime.

Thus, in 1932–33 one cycle in Fascism's history came to a climactic end and another started. With the publication in 1932 of the official *Doctrine of Fascism* (allegedly authored by Mussolini himself but actually the intellectual product of the philosopher Giovanni Gentile's thought), Fascism acquired a programmatic statement of its origins and futural vision that would support the political project of its internationalisation. Consolidated

at home and with its place of honour in the national historical narrative secure after the 1932 exhibition, Fascism reimagined itself as a regenerative force of the whole of western civilisation and the dominant doctrine of the twentieth century on a global scale. In this vision, the universal heritage of the 'third Rome' was both the key spiritual driver and its most sacred asset; while Nazi Germany was regarded as an alien newcomer and dangerous adversary.

The state of Italian–German relations throughout the rest of the 1930s proved critical not only for the Fascist strategy of internationalisation but for the fate of Italian (and international) fascism itself. The escalating suspicion and hostility of 1934–35 gave way to a steady rapprochement from 1936 onwards (especially after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia) that delivered a strong Fascist–Nazi alliance, a military pact (Pact of Steel in 1939, solidifying the Rome–Berlin Axis), and eventually a catastrophic joint military campaign. But as relations between the two regimes continued to improve in the second half of the 1930s, the symbolic competition between Fascism and National Socialism as the international driving forces of a new radical political paradigm intensified, as a subtle antagonistic undercurrent below a surface of friendship. The resurgent Nazi Germany of the late 1930s gradually established Berlin rather than Rome, Hitler rather than Mussolini, and National Socialism rather than Italian Fascism, as the de facto points of reference for the 'third way' political paradigm and its rapidly growing constituency of followers. As more and more radical movements in Europe and elsewhere came to recognise Nazi Germany as the source of an epoch-defining transformation or even shifted their allegiance from Mussolini's to Hitler's regime, the Duce witnessed with covert frustration the steady decline of his own project of Fascist international primacy (Kallis 2014b). His own regime could no longer compete with Nazi Germany on the military, political, ideological, or economic fronts, increasingly becoming a junior partner in a Germany-led and formidable international block (Kallis 2009: 227–35).

When it came, however, to historical and cultural capital, Fascist Italy still possessed a prime, unsurpassed asset – the 'myth of Rome', with its millennial historical associations and imposing visual reminders of a glorious past dotting the contemporary city. The second Fascist cycle that had started in 1932–33 was marked by expanding interventions inside the capital – new restorations, new anniversary celebrations and grand exhibitions, new monumental streets, new spatial reconfigurations that necessitated more and more invasive demolitions, as well as new constructions, some of which involving 'signature' buildings that sought to articulate architectonically, visually, and spatially the essence of Fascist values. The visible layer of the city continued to change throughout the 1930s but at a pace that far exceeded anything previously undertaken by the regime or indeed any ruler in the city's modern history. Yet the most significant change that touched on individual projects and the city as a whole concerned the Fascist regime's

concerted efforts to imbue the entire city with a new form of symbolic legibility. Existing, recently recovered, and newly constructed elements of Rome's visible layer were wrapped in a cloak of *Fascist universality* that lent a very different meaning to each of them and cumulatively to the city as a whole. The 'universality of Rome' may have failed as a political project by 1937–38 (and the CAUR were officially disbanded in the autumn of 1939); but it was enacted unashamedly on the very grounds of the Eternal City, through both new projects and new superimposed connections between the diverse layers of the urban palimpsest. The Fascist regime celebrated ad nauseam the alleged 'regeneration' of the city by drawing attention to its numerous interventions that had restored and 'liberated' monuments, cleared whole areas from unsightly constructions, sanitised conditions of living for the population, improved traffic across the historic centre, and constructed new landmark edifices and monumental complexes. But by far the most portentous Fascist intervention in Rome consisted in using all these interventions to advance cumulatively a much broader symbolic re-signification of the city as the spiritual cradle of a new global order and 'civilisation'.

The Fascist cloak of universality invented a host of new connections between the ancient 'city of the caesars', the medieval and Renaissance 'city of the popes', and the visible layer of the modern city. Back at the turn of the century, Lanciani had published his *Forma Urbis Romae* as a reminder of the city's palimpsestic stratigraphy and as a statement of the ancient layer's importance for the construction of a modern national identity. Now the Fascist regime saw the 'third Rome' as a re-engineered visible layer that not only wove selective connections across the earlier layers but also flattened them into a new visible layer-discourse and transformed them into a tangible experience of a new Fascist temporality. New constructions or reconfigurations came hand in hand with extensive demolitions that expunged time from, and thus also flattened, Rome's complex chronotope. The record of Fascist interventions in Rome featured many ambitious visions and plans but few additive landmark elements in the historic centre of the capital; instead the bulk of the 'third Rome' consisted either of demolitions/reconfigurations in the centre or new constructions in the periphery of the capital. Yet the discourse of universality superimposed on the 'third Rome' invested the entire urban palimpsest with a wholly different meaning and feel that exuded an unmistakeable Fascist creative agency and communicated a sense of wholesale Fascist appropriation.

The second cycle in the Fascist regime's history was meant to come to its climactic conclusion in 1942, with the celebrations of the twentieth anniversary (*Ventennale*) of the Fascist 'revolution' coinciding with a world fair hosted in Rome. The Fascist regime spared no expenses in planning and constructing a new dedicated exhibition quarter in the southern periphery of the city – a veritable new city, a simulacrum of the *ideal* 'third Rome'

made up from permanent monumental constructions and a meticulously crafted plan. The theme of universality was inherent in the Fascist vision for the world fair from the first moment that Giuseppe Bottai, then head of Rome's municipal administration, petitioned Mussolini with the idea. But the rapidly changing geopolitical context in the late 1930s eventually produced a different symbolic framing of the event. The chosen subtitle for the 'Universal Exhibition of Rome' (Esposizione Universale di Roma, E42) would be the 'Olympic Games of Civilisation' (Olimpiadi della Civiltà). The grounds of the new exhibition city would function as both the arena of this competition (a competition that, the organisers believed, Fascist Italy and the 'third Rome' were sure to win triumphantly) and a 'sacred' place of symbolic pilgrimage – along with the monuments of the historic city – to the timeless universality of Rome itself, past and future. This was a highly symbolic contest from which Fascism too would emerge victorious, without serious competition (not least from Nazi Germany), thus giving a new lease of life to its vision of a new universal civilisation with the 'third Rome' as its indisputable centre. In 1942 the intention was to proceed with the most fulsome celebration of Rome as the 'sacred' capital of a universal f(F)ascism, stealing the limelight not so much from Paris and New York (seats of the 1937 and 1939 world fairs respectively), London or Moscow, but from Berlin and National Socialism.

Rome's Palimpsest and the 'Fascist Layer'

In spite of advanced preparations, the E42 was eventually cancelled because of the global military conflict that was in full swing in the early 1940s. The new exhibition quarter was abandoned half-completed – an eloquent reminder that the second cycle in Fascism's history never reached its intended climax. And yet, by the time that the Fascist regime had collapsed and lost Rome forever in the summer of 1943, it was hard to escape from the city that it had envisioned and sought to realise. Under Fascism, the urban palimpsest of Rome was subjected to a relentless, active reordering that went far beyond anything envisaged in the five decades after the city's annexation by the Italian kingdom. The most obvious transformation involved the city's expansion towards the periphery, masterminded by a succession of regulatory and ad hoc plans. But even within the city's historic core, and in spite of the dearth of major new additions during the Fascist period, Rome's visible layer had changed dramatically. Fascist-era projects may have followed to a large extent from the same logic that had underpinned Lanciani's *Forma Urbis Romae* – namely, promoting a deferential dialogue with the city's historical past, both already present on the visible layer of the modern city and waiting to be recovered from within the tangle of invisible historic layers that made up the city's unique urban palimpsest. Nevertheless, deference belied an ambitious, sweeping conquering spirit (Kallis 2012).

Restorations, demolitions, spatial reconfigurations, and new additions were all strategies geared towards forcing the urban palimpsest as a whole to conform to an overriding Fascist legibility. The visible layer of the 'third Rome' was broken up, edited, and reassembled through new enclosing 'frames' and scenic sequences that, while spatially arranging places of historical significance, subsumed them in a Fascist hegemonic discourse of Rome's (and Fascism's) universality. Meanwhile, the complex stratigraphy of the capital was disrupted by grafting carefully selected layers of the past onto the present surface, while obscuring or erasing other, carefully selected, elements of the palimpsest. Overall, it felt as if many familiar elements of the historic cityscape had been reinserted on it, woven liberally together, and associated with new elements (both discovered and constructed) in novel, unfamiliar, yet symbolically powerful intended configurations (Baxa 2010: 63–6).

As a result, by 1945 Rome and 'third Rome' were inextricably linked. The city as a whole appeared and felt disproportionately more 'Fascist' than the sum of new additions to the urban palimpsest would have suggested. In the course of twenty short years the Fascist authorities practised a series of deliberate schemata on the city's palimpsest and invested selected buildings, particular places, and wider spaces with a new overriding Fascist signification. *Romanità* and *universalità*, already inherent in the city's heritage and arsenal of myths, would be reclaimed, set free from within a tangled chronotope, reassembled, and experienced in their most authentic form in the present tense, on the very grounds of the city that had given birth and timeless meaning to them. Excavations selectively revealed such traces and forced them onto the visible layer. Demolitions were deployed as a form of creative destruction – erasing other unwanted ('parasitical', as Mussolini famously said) traces, thereby creating pockets of empty space for a more powerful synapsis between the (Fascist) present and the city's idealised past. 'Systematisations' disrupted the inherited layering of the palimpsest and produced new visual, spatial, and symbolic connections. New additive elements – mostly in the periphery but occasionally in the dense historic centre, with many more envisioned but never implemented – were not antagonistic to their surrounding setting – like in Soviet Moscow – but rhetorically benevolent, intended as contemporary markers that served Fascism's apotheosis of the myth of Rome (Kallis 2012: 56–61). Exhibitions and other public events served as dynamic 'museums in motion' (Schnapp 1992), which either enacted a carefully edited image of the past as present experience or deliberately collapsed the temporal distance into an ideal future by recreating it as an allegedly authentic simulation. It is no coincidence that the climactic event of Fascism's second decade in power – the E42 – would be a hybrid of all these strategies: a gigantic world exhibition, served by a newly constructed ideal city on a veritable *tabula rasa* but still in syntactical dialogue with the historical city in the horizon, made up of a series of new buildings that nevertheless 'excavated', captured,

reformulated, and eventually transcended the universalist heritage of Rome's urban palimpsest.

The engineered visible layer of the 'third Rome' featured the outcomes of all these processes of reconstruction, deconstruction, and re-signification undertaken during the two decades of Fascist rule. Strictly speaking, only what the Fascist regime added to the city's surface constitutes its own 'layer': individual buildings in the centre; monumental complexes rising in previously empty locations flanking the historic city; new housing estates and suburbs (*borgate*) in the periphery, catering for both the city's demographic expansion and the knock-on effect from the demolitions in the historic centre and in the peripheral shanty towns; finally, entire 'new cities' in the reclaimed lands of the Agro Pontino to the south. To these realised or at least initiated projects one could add the numerous ideas and plans for various interventions in the historic centre that were seriously entertained but never implemented or completed by 1945, for a variety of reasons though rarely due to lack of desire or ambition (Kallis 2011a). Yet, to confine the 'third Rome' to this relatively modest, dispersed, and truncated register would do very little justice to Fascism's inventive (and often invasive) appropriation of the city's urban palimpsest. The Fascist appropriation of Rome's urban palimpsest, the wilful and precise ways in which Fascism disrupted and reconfigured it – obscuring or erasing some parts, revealing others, and rendering parts of the surface opaque to enable the flattening of time and the interpenetration of symbolism – produced a visible layer with an unmistakeable and fulsome Fascist creative authorship.

This book examines the ideas, principles, and strategies through which Rome was re-imagined, re-shaped, re-signified, and eventually appropriated during the two decades of Fascist rule over the city (1922–43). The book's subtitle (*The Making of the Fascist Capital*) indicates its primary interest in how Italian Fascism envisioned Rome as the 'sacred' locus where its desired status as a *national and universal* historical force would be enacted and celebrated. Thus the regime's heavy investment in the architectural, cultural, and symbolic estate of Rome, particularly in the 1930s, should be understood on these two levels of intention: first, shaping Rome into an ideal capital of Italian Fascism, regenerated, restored to a status of unsurpassed glory, and worthy of the regime's mental image of the city as living incarnation of its own millenarian myths; and second, transforming the 'third Rome' into the 'sacred' locus of an international, universalist Fascist 'political religion' that would radiate across the world, inspiring awe in its followers and recognised by them as their undisputed spiritual beacon. The Fascist regime spared no energy or cost in order to ensure that the 'third Rome' would emerge on the same grounds of the fated Eternal City, as both its worthy heir and as the repository of – primary or even exclusive – spiritual allegiance from adherents across Europe and the world.

The analysis of (Italian) fascism as a 'political religion' owes an incalculable debt to insights offered by the pioneering work of George L. Mosse (1980), Emilio Gentile (1990, 1996, 2004) and Roger Griffin (1991, 2007). Mosse broke new ground in the field of fascism studies when he detected in National Socialism a new kind of politics that sought to emulate, or even replace, traditional religion with a powerful 'modern' and secular alternative, based on new, radical ideological doctrines and liturgies. Gentile approached Italian Fascism as a distinct modern form of such a *political* religion – a sacralised variant of totalitarian politics that sought to imbue its political, social, and cultural practices with a 'sacred' signification and rituals borrowed and adapted from traditional religion (Gentile 2000). The regime's horizon of revolutionary change involved the regeneration of the human condition, both individually and in its collective societal form, under the auspices of a new, all-encompassing 'ethical' state. It was Griffin (1991: 26) who first defined generic fascism as a form of 'palingenetic, populist ultra-nationalism', drawing attention to the centrality of the idea of 'national rebirth' in fascist politics during the interwar period. Both Griffin (2007) and Gentile (2007) acknowledged the significance of the 'myth of Rome' (and, by implication, of the city itself) in Fascist Italy, as one of the primary sources of, and inspiration for, the regime's rich mythopoeia of regeneration. Rome was recognised as the unsurpassed historical archive of both *romanità* and *universalità*, as well as the living inspiration for a modern Fascist *civiltà* (civilisation) capable of recapturing, translating, and re-presenting the timeless essence of this very spirit for the modern world.

Part of this book rests on this premise – that Italian Fascism sought to appropriate the city of Rome and present it as the 'sacred' locus of its status as a *national* political religion. However, the book also draws attention to Fascist ambitions to promote an *internationalisation* of Fascism, especially in the 1930s, with Rome appropriated this time as a fountain of timeless universalist values that only Fascism was capable of capturing and expressing in their most authentic form. Thus, in imagining itself as the primary driver of an international, indeed universal alternative paradigm for the human condition, politics, and civilisation, the Fascist regime aspired to appropriate Rome – both its space and myth – as the 'sacred' centre and spiritual capital of an *international* F(f)ascist political religion. The transformation of the Fascist discourse from palingenetic ultra-nationalism to epoch-defining universalism was inscribed on the urban palimpsest and symbolic legibility of the 'third Rome' in the 1930s. It also established a very different relation between the Fascist regime and its city-capital that underpinned a kaleidoscope of Fascist-era interventions in the fields of archaeology, architecture, and urban planning in and around Rome.

These interventions that cumulatively shaped and signified the Fascist 'third Rome' were implemented on a uniquely rich and dense urban palimpsest. As discussed earlier, the modern city that Fascism inherited in 1922 was

an inverse sedimentation on the surface level of a plethora of past human agencies – additions, erasures, modifications – by different authors and forces over millennia of history, that told a multitude of partial stories but also obscured other, destroyed or covered layers from the city's past (Crang 1998: 22). Rome's rich urban palimpsest invited what Sarah Dillon (2005: 244; 2007) has called a 'palimpsestic' reading that separates the various layers and places them into a temporal hierarchy. A different kind of reading, however, for which Dillon has coined the adjective 'palimpsestuous', involves a more disruptive and inventive process of making connections across diverse chronological layers, liberally adjusting their opacity to reveal or forge new, previously invisible or unintended genealogies. This creative reading was not unknown to the city; in fact, it had been practised ever since ancient times and refreshed by new conquerors and rulers to reflect their own political intentions. Indeed, such a wholesale palimpsestuous reading had already been in full swing across Rome ever since its dramatic annexation by the Italian kingdom in 1870; and Lanciani's *Forma Urbis Romae* was perhaps its most authoritative canon. It involved a deliberate strategy of bringing more and more remnants of the ancient layer to the surface and investing in deliberate connections between the imperial city and the modern (national) capital. In many ways, the Fascist regime built on this earlier paradigm of locating the modern city and the fledgling national state at the end of an allegedly continuous historical lineage whose origins lay with the founding of the ancient city. However, in hindsight, it also subjected Rome's urban palimpsest to a far more ambitious, invasive, and con-structive treatment. The Fascist regime combined a uniquely inventive 'palimpsestuous' reading of the city's stratigraphy with the systematic inscription of a host of new spatial practices that disrupted and transformed the overall order of the city's visible (horizontal) layer. The goal was not simply to make more of the obscured layers of the city's past glories visible on the surface but also to integrate them fully into the visible layer and then wrap them with a distinct Fascist legibility, infused with the imagery of a reinvented *romanità* and infused with the myth of an Italian *and* Fascist *universalità*. Restorations, excavations, systematisations, demolitions, and additions shaped the 'third Rome' into a city with many acknowledged historical contributors but a single contemporary (Fascist) heir and author, bent on transforming the city into a 'sacred' centre of its aspired universalist dominion. In this process, Fascism and Mussolini as its figurehead acted like conquering, triumphant subjects even as they claimed to be Rome's deferential custodians.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part (Chs 1–2) addresses the historical, political, and cultural context of the Fascist 'conquest' of Rome. The second part of the book (Chs 3–6) examines the strategies that shaped the visible 'Fascist layer' of the 'third Rome' in the 1920s and 1930s. Chapters 3 and 4 analyse how the Fascist regime appropriated selected

existing aspects of the imperial and medieval-Renaissance layers and transformed them into constitutive elements of its own 'third Rome'. Chapters 5 and 6, on the other hand, are devoted to the analysis of new Fascist additions to the urban visible layer during the 1920s and 1930s. The third and final section of the book (Chs 7–8) examines the efforts of the Fascist regime to reimagine and re-present Rome as the ideal national, Fascist, *and* universal capital. Apart from actual interventions on the visible urban layer, the Fascist regime produced a number of 'other spaces' (*heterotopias*) that either embodied and communicated the essence of Fascist values, or compensated for the slower-than-desired process of making reality conform to the vision. Exhibitions proved a highly effective medium in this respect – and one that the regime proved particularly adept at exploiting in novel, highly imaginative, and effective ways. In many respects, the theme of exhibition connects both chapters in the final section.

1
The Fascist Conquest of Rome

(Re)Claiming Rome

Benito Mussolini entered Rome on the morning of 30 October 1922 – not 'marching' like his followers but arriving by train (Parkins 2002: 145). He presented himself to king Vittorio Emanuele III at the Quirinale Palace and was sworn in as prime minister – an office that he held until his dismissal on 25 July 1943. He was placed in charge of a broad coalition government consisting of Fascist, liberal, conservative, and Catholic members (Lyttelton 2004: 79–80) – a victory of sorts that was celebrated by his supporters but remained a far cry from the 'revolutionary' takeover that would 'take by the throat' the hated *paese legale* (*Opera* XVIII: 460). The facade of constitutional propriety and continuity survived until January 1925, when Mussolini finally proclaimed a single-party Fascist dictatorship and signalled the beginning of the 'totalitarian' transformation of state and society.

After the announcement of Mussolini's appointment as prime minister, the March on Rome was followed by a triumphant March *in* Rome, something akin to a victory parade borne out of a political fait accompli (Payne 1997: 110). It was also an act of revenge against a city that had troubled the Fascists in so many ways in the past. Marching through the narrow streets of the capital on the 30th and 31st of October, the Fascists exorcised the ghosts of their previous hostile encounters. They made a point of entering the San Lorenzo quarter – a new working-class neighbourhood close to the railway station, traditionally a hotbed for the revolutionary left – where in November 1921 they had encountered outright hostility from self-organised groups made up of locals, particularly in the aftermath of the murder of the railway worker Guglielmo Farsetti by the Blackshirts (Portelli 1999: 64–70). The organised active resistance lasted for days and underlined how alien and viscerally inhospitable Rome was to early Fascism. Similar scenes were repeated in the spring of 1922, on the occasion of the internment of Enrico Toti's body (a heroic figure of the Italian effort in the First World War that the Fascists were quick to appropriate as a symbol of dedication to the nation) in his native city (Dickie,

Foot, and Snowden 2002: 29). When the Fascists entered San Lorenzo again on 30 October 1922, they did so from a position of strength, following the capitulation of the state to Mussolini's aggressive blackmail. This did not stop the 'sanlorenzini' from fiercely resisting them once again. But it was clear this time that Fascism had overwhelmed Rome; and the Fascist victory parade was the highly symbolic, choreographed manifestation of the transfer of power that the dramatic events of late October 1922 had triggered (Atkinson 1998: 15). The following morning, led by the young Fascist leader Giuseppe Bottai, the Fascist squads wreaked havoc in the neighbourhood, leaving behind 13 dead and hundreds injured. Mussolini, who had so skilfully earned on behalf of the mobilised squads and their local supporters the right to have their victory parade inside Rome (Lyttelton 2004: 80), could now order them to disperse and go home.

In spite of the subsequent Fascist mythology woven around the 'March on Rome', the presence of Mussolini and his Fascist supporters in Rome in 1922 as triumphant conquerors and suitors seemed even to many Fascists at the time more like a 'photo opportunity' than a climactic moment of destiny (Berezin 1997: 77). The city that the Fascists entered in October 1922 was an alien place – not only unwelcoming but also unpalatable to them. Back in 1910, a young Mussolini, then a prominent and still promising revolutionary socialist leader, had written disparagingly about the city for what it was and for what it represented for the entire country, calling it

> a parasitical city of bedsits, of shoe-shines, of prostitutes, of priests and bureaucrats, Rome – city without proletariat worthy of its name – is not the centre of national political life but rather the centre and the hearth of infection of our national political life. Enough, then, with the stupid superstitious belief that everything, everything, everything must be concentrated in Rome: in this huge vampire of a city that sucks the best blood of the nation. (*Opera* III: 190)

The contrast between the message of this early article and Mussolini's subsequent adulation of Rome is indeed striking (Salvatori 2006b). By 1921 the Duce was speaking about a sense of historical 'destiny' that would see the Mediterranean 'become ours' and Rome rising once again as 'the leading city of civilisation in the whole of western Europe' (*Opera* XVI: 158; cf. *Opera* XVIII: 143–4). The Fascists could be viscerally opposed to the city as a political container of everything they disdained and opposed, especially the old Liberal political class and the parliamentary system; but at the same time they could also pay their tribute to the 'myth' of the city – an ideal, universalist vision of what Rome represented in spite of its perceived contemporary state of disintegration.

Mussolini's dubious feelings about the city faded away only gradually. In the build-up to the third Fascist congress in November 1921 (whose main

objective was the conversion of the movement into the National Fascist Party – Partito Nazionale Fascista, PNF), the Duce had sought to avert the prospect of holding the event in Rome (after the first congress in Milan in 1919, followed by the second in Florence the following year). Yet such was the symbolic attraction of staging the transformation of Fascism into a national party against the backdrop of the city's imperial ruins that he eventually relented. Rome, Mussolini now announced, was 'the ultimate destination of our impetuous march … now and forever' (*Opera* XVI: 315). A few months before the March on Rome, the Fascists celebrated in style the anniversary of the city's founding (Natale di Roma) on 21 April 1922 with a mass gathering on the Campidoglio. Mussolini addressed the crowd with words that betrayed the ever-closer identification of the movement with the city's mythical qualities, but at the same time continued to echo a disdain for *passatismo* (the cult of past):

> It is certain that the Rome that we honour is not only the Rome of monuments and of ruins, the Rome of glorious remnants … The Rome that we honour, but above all the Rome that we envision and prepare for is a different one: it is not about stones [insigni], but living souls; it is not about a nostalgic contemplation of the past, but about an enduring preparation for the future. … We dream of a Roman Italy, that is wise and strong, disciplined and imperial. (*Opera* XVIII: 160)

Barely a month before the March on the Rome, Mussolini spoke with unmitigated admiration about this latter, ideal Rome that had yet to be reclaimed – 'disinfected and liberated', as he put it – from the contemporary decadent city:

> Rome has always performed an essential function of the highest order in the history of the Italian Nation … [It is] one of the very few cities of spirit in the world, because in Rome, amidst these seven hills so loved in history, operated one of the greatest spiritual prodigies that history has ever recorded. Here an oriental religion … was transformed into a universal one that has revived in another form that [other] empire that the consular legions of Rome had spread to the extremities of the world. And we think of making Rome the city of our spirit, a city, that is, *purified, disinfected and liberated* from all those elements that denigrate it; we think of making Rome the pulsating heart, the enthusiastic spirit of the imperial Italy that we are envisioning. (*Opera* XVIII: 412, emphasis added)

With these words, Mussolini awarded his movement a momentous historic role – not simply to rescue Rome from alleged parliamentary corruption and bourgeois stasis but to forge a new spiritual connection between the city's past and the nation's future. Fascism was presented as the history-making

agent that would regenerate the eternal capital in order to give the Italians a new spiritual blueprint for greatness. The mythical Rome that Mussolini evangelised would have to be reclaimed, little by little, only after the city had been fully conquered, physically and politically, by the Fascists. In essence, October 1922 was recast by the Fascists as a momentous rerun of the dramatic entry of the Italian troops into the city in September 1870 (Giardina and Vauchez 2000: 219–20). Such a historic event, 'an insurrectional act [and] a revolution' as Mussolini described it, symbolically marked a new temporality – the beginning of the 'Fascist era', celebrated retrospectively with the official introduction of the Fascist calendar in 1926 (Falasca-Zamponi 1997: 1–2).

Inevitably then, the successful outcome of the March on Rome in late October 1922 was a portentous milestone that placed Fascism unequivocally at the heart of the capital (*Opera* XIX: 288). But this was only the first step in the direction of transforming it into the ideal 'Fascist' city. For this to happen, both the institutions and the symbolic spaces of the capital – the same ones that had been so closely associated with the old liberal-bourgeois established order – would also have to be conquered and 'fascistised'. In the turbulent years between Mussolini's appointment as prime minister and his declaration of the Fascist dictatorship in January 1925, the streets of Rome became the theatre of Fascist revolutionary activism. Fascist squads conquered the streets and squares of the city, intimidating their opponents, assaulting their critics, and carefully associating their numerous rituals with the city's most symbolic and sacred locations. Their marches became more ubiquitous, their songs grew louder, the performance of a Fascist 'purging' and conquest of the city took on both physical (intimidation and attacks) and deeply symbolic forms (ubiquitous banners and uniforms, bonfires fed by oppositional material, etc.) (Atkinson 1998: 13–18; Falasca-Zamponi 1997: 37). Their increasingly frequent congregations in front of the Campidoglio and the Vittoriano, in Piazza del Popolo, at the Mausoleum of Augustus and the Pantheon, communicated a growing sense of Fascist ownership of Rome's physical space but also a powerful message that this erstwhile hostile city had finally been tamed by Fascism.

Just as the Fascist squads were conquering the physical space of the capital, Mussolini took a series of decisive steps to strengthen his grip over the institutional apparatus of Rome's municipal administration. In one his first major initiatives as prime minister, he brought to an abrupt end the post-unification norm of a democratically elected municipal administration. In March 1923 he appointed the recently elected mayor (sindaco) of Rome, the conservative nationalist Filippo Cremonesi, Royal Commissioner for the city as the first step towards a major administrative reorganisation of the capital's governing structure. Cremonesi rose to the occasion. He spared no words of praise for the Duce, whom he often compared to the Roman emperor Augustus and with whom he credited the 'rebirth … and

spring' of Rome.[1] But Cremonesi was no mere sycophant. He also seized the opportunity that his sweeping mandate offered to him in order to prepare a detailed report that contained both a diagnosis of the city's administrative dysfunctionalities and a set of ideas for the forthcoming sweeping reform. He described the present state of the *Comune* in sombre terms, highlighting the challenges posed by 'bureaucratic hypertrophy', financial dependence on the state, and political powerlessness. For him, the solution rested on the formal and enduring recognition on part of the central state of Rome's extraordinary needs as both fledgling modern metropolis and national capital. His vision rested on two fundamental preconditions: a state commitment to increasing and stabilising financial support for the municipality; and measures aimed at strengthening the institutional powers of the city's government, granting it full jurisdiction over key decisions such as the drafting and implementation of regulatory plans, the execution of public works, and the management of social housing. With a series of proposals and ad hoc reforms during 1923–24, Cremonesi promoted a new organisational model for the 'third Rome' that was leaner, more efficient, more rational, and more powerful vis-à-vis local private interests (SPQR 1925: 44; Salvatori 2006a: 9–23).

Cremonesi's proposals paved the way for Mussolini's landmark decision to replace the old municipal council (Comune) with the new institution of the Governatorato di Roma in 1925. On the third anniversary of the March on Rome (28 October 1925) the government published a special law (n. 1949) with which the Royal Commissioner Cremonesi took over as governor (Governatore), supported by two deputies, and a new consultative body (the 12-member Consulta, to replace the previous Giunta) – all appointed by the state and accountable directly to Mussolini (Vannelli 1981: 77). The new institutional arrangement for Rome came with promises of increased financial help by the state (a much-needed assurance for a municipality already heavily in debt), the prospect of a privileged relation between the governor and the Duce, as well as a strong verbal commitment to regenerate the capital as a showcase for the 'rebirth of Italy' under Fascism. However, it was piecemeal and fraught with unresolved contradictions – a far cry from the more coherent and ambitious vision echoed in Cremonesi's earlier report. Gains in prestige, stability, and (relative) autonomy from local interests were severely mitigated by the fuzzy institutional parameters of the relationship between the Governatorato and the Duce. The financial settlement offered by the 1925 law was far from satisfactory, subjecting the funding of the municipal authority to the sanction of the Ministry of Finance. Moreover, the Governatorato failed to safeguard full powers for the execution (and revision) of the regulatory plans. Consequently, the new Fascist administrative framework for Rome was far less accountable, somewhat less bureaucratic and better funded than its predecessor but significantly less robust and autonomous than originally envisaged by Cremonesi.

For Mussolini the establishment of the Governatorato represented a significant personal victory. The new administrative structure reflected his determination to play a primary role in the future transformation of the capital and to treat Rome as a privileged domain of his charismatic authority. The Duce may have still lacked a coherent, fully-fledged vision for his 'third Rome' at that stage (and, as we will see later, this remained the case for most of the 1920s) but he was eager to impart a sense of a new, bold beginning for the city under the new Fascist regime. In April 1924 he received the honour of Roman citizenship by Cremonesi at the Campidoglio, reiterating his love for the city – a love that, he claimed rather disingenuously, had stayed with him since the days of his youth. His acceptance speech, suitably titled 'The New Rome', contained a series of programmatic statements about the future of the capital:

> I would like to divide the problems of Rome, the Rome of the twentieth century, into two categories: the problems of necessity [*problemi della necessità*] and the problems of grandeur [*problemi della grandezza*]. We cannot address the latter, if the first are not first resolved. The problems of necessity stem from the development of Rome and relate to this binomial: houses and communications. The problems of grandeur are of a very different nature: it is necessary to liberate all of ancient Rome from the mediocre and disfiguring accretions, but, alongside the ancient and medieval [city], we must [also] create the monumental Rome of the twentieth century. (De Nicolo 2002: 91–4; *Opera* XX: 235)

Here was the most concise list of priorities that would inform decisions for the capital of Fascist Italy in years to come: on the one hand, new roads and improved traffic access, better housing, expansion of public transport and other services; on the other hand, demolitions and restorations in the historic centre, plus a new urban core, modern but also suitably monumental. Interestingly, in 1924 the Duce appeared to give priority to solving the 'problems of necessity' before proceeding to the 'problems of grandeur'. Eighteen months later, in his December 1925 speech with which he marked the formal establishment of the Governatorato, Mussolini gave a far more detailed and urgent mandate to the new municipal authorities. Prefacing his instructions with an over-optimistic assessment of what had been achieved by the city authorities in the preceding three years, Mussolini noted that 'the problems of necessity have been confronted energetically and already solved to a large extent'. He gave full credit for this purported transformation to Cremonesi, who was now being asked to complete the second stage of the Duce's prodigious vision for Rome on the basis of an unforgiving timetable:

> My ideas are clear, my orders are precise and I am sure that they will be realised. Within five years Rome must appear marvellous to all peoples of the world; vast, ordered, powerful, as it was at the time of the first empire

> of Augustus. You will continue to liberate the trunk of the great oak from everything that still overshadows it. You will provide access around the Theatre of Marcellus, the Campidoglio, the Pantheon; everything that grew up around [those monuments] during the centuries of decadence must disappear … You will also free the majestic temples of Christian Rome from parasitical and profane constructions. The millenarian monuments of our history must rise again in befitting solitude. Then the 'third Rome' will extend on other hills, along the banks of the sacred river, up the shores of the Tyrrhenian Sea … A rectilinear pattern that will be the longest and widest of the world will bring the breath of the [Mediterranean] *mare nostrum* from a reborn Ostia to the heart of the city. (*Opera* XXII: 47–9)

Such was Mussolini's mandate to Cremonesi and the Governatorato; and along with praise came mounting pressure for spectacular, immediate results. The bar for the rebirth of the capital was set high: the 'third Rome' would rival in grandeur, order, and power the ancient imperial city in its heyday while at the same time honouring the spiritual power and grace of its medieval and Renaissance monuments. He dictated extensive demolitions in order to 'isolate' the great buildings of the past and thus reverse a centuries-long process of decay in the historic centre. He dreamt of a dynamic, rapidly expanding city that would radiate across the world a newfound sense of prestige and power. Such an ambitious programme required unprecedented levels of state investment in the city for many years. However, in June 1926 came the sobering news that the state would only provide 50 million lire a year to the Governatorato – half of what Cremonesi had originally asked for. Six months later, the first governor was forced to resign, less than a year into his term. A vocal, ambitious, divisive, allegedly corrupt, and not always diplomatic figure, Cremonesi had become a nuisance for the Duce, who replaced him with the more malleable figure of Ludovico Spada Potenziani (Caracciolo 1933: 39–40; Salvatori 2006a: 26–9).

'Fascistising' the Plan: From the PRG1909 to the 1925 Variante Plan

Before departing from the Governatorato, Cremonesi had managed to oversee a substantial revision of the city's regulatory framework. The *Piano Regolatore Generale* 1909 (PRG1909), the work of engineer Edmondo Sanjust di Teulada, had been drafted in a very different political constellation and with a very different city in mind. In 1907, the municipal elections had brought for the first time a progressive coalition to power under the mayor Ernesto Nathan. At that point Rome's population had just past the 500,000 mark – more than twice the figure of 1870 (Archibugi 2005: 18; Sonnino and Parmeggiani 2002). Liberal Italy was preparing for 1911 – a year that marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Risorgimento that was to be celebrated with the inauguration of

the **monument to Vittorio Emanuele II** and was made to coincide with the prestigious activities of the world fair hosted by the Italian kingdom (Tobia 2003). Rome was one of the three centres for the fête (Turin and Naples being the other two chosen in a careful geographic balancing act), organising three high-profile exhibitions: one dedicated to art, another to ethnography, and a third to Roman archaeology (Arthurs 2007: 27–35; Mancioli 1983). But, in addition to preparing the city for its share of the 1911 celebrations, the PRG1909 emerged as a response to four major challenges: promoting Rome's status as a booming national capital of a confident country; managing sensitively demographic growth; fostering socioeconomic modernisation; and shaping rationally the city's geographic expansion for the next 25 years (Cassetti 2002: 29–38; Piacentini 1952: 77–86).

In theory, the PRG1909 was Rome's third regulatory framework since 1870. A special committee for the 'Amplification and Embellishment of the Capital' had been set up in September 1870 under Pietro Camporesi to draft the capital's first such plan that would set out binding norms, directions, and principles for every future intervention in the city (Testa 1932: 173–9; Kostof 1976: 6–7). The committee's recommendations formed the basis of the PRG1873, drafted by the municipal engineer Alessandro Viviani but never formally approved or put in place. In 1883, Viviani saw a modestly revised version of his earlier plan finally coming into effect, following a decision of the central government to contribute generously to the funding of projects of 'national significance' in the capital (50 million lire over twenty years). Viviani's new plan (PRG1883) remained in effect until it had completed its full 25-year cycle in 1908. In practice, however, it was serially undermined by ad hoc initiatives outside the framework of the regulatory plan – a practice that had grown in the 1870s in the absence of a regulatory plan but continued unabated after 1883 (Casciato 2002: 143–5; Cassetti 2002: 28–9).

In line with its predecessor, the PRG1909 had sought to promote a balance between respect for the historic centre of a 'heritage' capital city and care for the rapidly expanding urban periphery. It promoted the eastern direction of urban expansion, with a new modern centre growing around the **railway station** and linked to the city's historic core via new arteries already constructed under its predecessor PRG1883 (**Via Nazionale**, **Via XX Settembre**, **Via Nomentana**). Further afield and towards the urban periphery, the PRG1909 promoted a framework for 'multi-directional' future expansion of the city, towards the south (Appio-Tuscolano) and north (Flaminio) of the historic centre. It also broke further the taboo of adding new constructions to the west of the river, in an area wrapped in the dispute of the 'Roman Question'. A new model quarter (**Milvio**), just to the north of the Vatican complex, was planned for the 1911 jubilee celebrations, renamed Della Vittoria after the First World War. Its neutral topographical arrangement belied its wholly intended juxtaposition of historical imaginaries, as streets in the new quarter were given names that often invoked strong anti-clerical/republican, Risorgimental, and imperial memories (Atkinson and Cosgrave 1998: 32).

2 ROME'S PALIMPSEST: THREE LAYERS

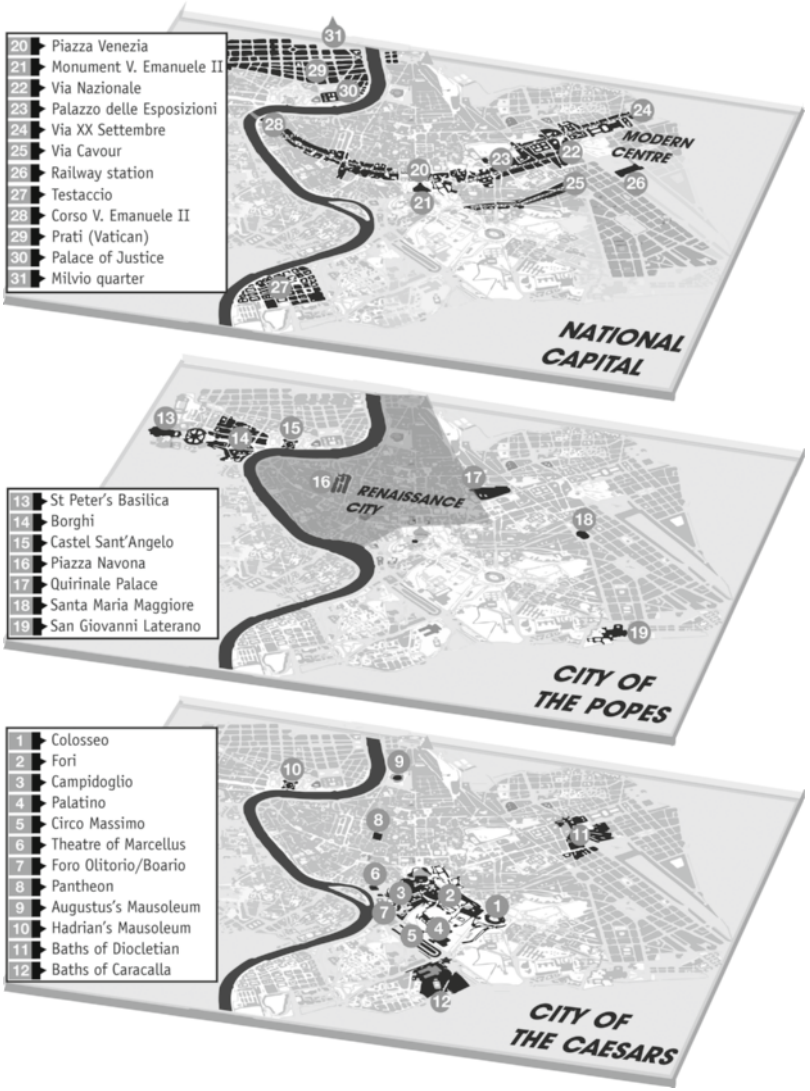


Figure 2 Diagram: Rome's palimpsest – the three major layers of the city

Inside the historic centre, the PRG1909 envisaged the restoration of major ancient monuments, including the 'isolation' of the **Mausoleum of Augustus** along the river and of the **Theatre of Marcellus** that lay to the west of Piazza Venezia. The earlier idea of transforming the ancient core of the city into a vast archaeological park (part of the Camporesi Commission's recommendations) also gained further traction, even if the area destined for excavation and preservation was reduced in size. A special plan for the zone between the Colosseo/Palatino, the Baths of Caracalla, and the city walls was drafted in 1908, with its first phase completed by 1914 (Palombi 2006: 69–74). The plan also revived the debate about a road connection between Piazza Venezia and the Colosseo through a densely built and populated quarter with highly irregular topography. In the context of a lively debate involving engineers, architects, conservationists, and the city authorities, it was Corrado Ricci – a renowned archaeologist – who made the most convincing case in favour of preserving as much from the ancient ruins and existing residential areas as possible, even if this meant abandoning the idea of a wide rectilinear road connection between Piazza Venezia and the Colosseo (Insolera and Perego 1999: 15–30; see also Ch. 4).

Ambitious, far-reaching, and controversial, Sanjust's plan for Rome had an even more turbulent history than its 1883 predecessor. Efforts to undermine or even annul the PRG1909 started almost immediately after the demise of Nathan's administration in 1913. In 1916 the municipal government appointed a special committee to assess the impact of the plan, particularly in the area of the historic centre (Consoli 2003: 204–5; Caracciolo 1993: 19–26). The committee's report came two years later, suggesting the reversal or substantial modification of the PRG1909's stipulations for the historic centre as detrimental to the integrity of the city's ambient qualities. New quarters were authorised in areas that were either not included in the 1909 plan or lay altogether outside its territorial limits (Testa 1932: 182–4). Building norms and regulations too were violated or formally revised to allow for more intensive and cheaper constructions in areas earmarked for urban expansion.

The pressure for change increased dramatically after Mussolini's early programmatic statements about the future form of the 'third Rome'. Predictably, in one of his early initiatives as Royal Commissioner for the city, Cremonesi instituted a new committee with the mandate to produce a systematic revision of the 1909 plan. The committee, headed by Manfredo Manfredi, produced a detailed report, published in 1924 and sanctioned in the following year (Consoli 2003: 204–6; Rossi 2003: 40). The report identified three major priorities for future planning in Rome: gradual decentralisation, preservation of the integrity of the historic centre, and decongestion of the centre with a modern urban transport network. Its recommendations were extensive and sufficiently divergent from the spirit of PRG1909 to point to a de facto new regulatory framework. Yet, with Sanjust's plan still nominally in

force (until, theoretically, 1934), the new blueprint was presented as a variation or revision (Variante). Although never officially acquiring the status of law, the 1925 plan effectively guided the transformation of the city during the rest of the 1920s and sent out an unmistakeable signal that the earlier regulatory framework had become irrelevant (Piacentini 1952: 99–106).

The Variante reflected much more ideas formed in the pre-Fascist period rather than any coherent Fascist vision and programme of urban management for the capital. It was largely the result of a synergy and compromise between two renowned Italian architects that would dominate urban planning throughout the Fascist period – Gustavo Giovannoni and Marcello Piacentini (Ciucci 2002: 9–21; Cederna 1979: XVII–XXII). Giovannoni had already been central to the deliberations for the revision of the 1909 plan, criticising Sanjust for delivering the historic centre to insensitive demolitions and increased traffic, suggesting instead a more sensitive approach to the conservation of old quarters based on the principle of *noli me tangere* (do not touch). His recommendations derived from his distinctive theory of modern urban management, propagating a holistic approach that would resolve the contradictions between planning as an aesthetic pursuit and planning as a purely technical enterprise. His solution (what he called *diradamento* – literally 'thinning out') was based on a new sense of aesthetic, ambient, and functional integralism between the old and the new. In an attempt to reconcile and synthesise seemingly opposing theoretical trends (conservation versus modernisation, form versus function, centre versus periphery), Giovannoni (1945: 117–42) envisioned the city as an organic synthesis between a sensitively preserved historic centre and a separate new hub that would take on most modern functions of a city and thus relieve the old quarters from the pressures of forced modernisation. To achieve this, he argued, a new kind of urban expert was needed – what he called an 'integral architect' (*architetto integrale*) – who would embody this fusion of 'art and technique for the realisation of the built environment' (Zucconi 2002: 58). Giovannoni maintained that modern Rome would particularly benefit from this new approach to urban planning, balancing the needed expansion and modernisation of the capital with the vital task of conserving the old city's ambient integrity. For him, Rome's historic centre possessed qualities of utmost significance for the collective identity of the city's inhabitants and as a visual record of historic heritage for the entire nation (Giovannoni 1925). Through minimal, sympathetic interventions intended to sustain and enhance the ambient character of the old quarters (with as few demolitions as possible), the city's historic core would not only be conserved but remain central to the modern form of the city (Giovannoni 1931; Bottini 1988: 209).

Marcello Piacentini, on the other hand, emerged as the major proponent of creating a new 'directional' centre away from the old historic core. This would form a new complementary *para*tactical element in the overall urban

configuration, involving a transfer of tertiary functions and activities away from the old centre to the new node, with necessary provisions for new traffic and transport connections between the two hubs (Piacentini 1925–26). In comparison to Giovannoni's scheme, the original Piacentinian formula came to a similar conclusion (namely, respect for the historic centre through minimal demolitions) from a very different premise: it was the visual-artistic 'beauty' and 'character' that Piacentini valued most, in contrast to Giovannoni who saw the old centre as the sum of buildings *and* people living inside and amidst them, in the context of a wider, ever-expanding urban organism (Barbieri 1925; Giovannoni 1928). Yet, in spite of such fundamental differences of outlook (which would resurface dramatically in the discussions that preceded the Fascist 1931 regulatory plan and divide them once again – see below), agreement on the basis of minimal alternations in the historic centre united the two architects in common opposition to Sanjust's earlier plan.

The 1925/26 Variante was a full regulatory plan in all but name. It did confirm a few of the key interventions in the historic centre contained in Sanjust's plan: new east–west arteries traversing the Renaissance quarter around **Via del Corso** and **Corso Vittorio Emanuele II**; the restoration and 'isolation' of ancient monuments, including the Theatre of Marcellus and the Mausoleum of Augustus; the opening of a new traffic avenue on the eastern side of **Piazza Navona**; and the construction of the new university campus in the area of **Castro Pretorio** on the northeastern edge of the city. It also confirmed the area around the railway station as the new 'directional' centre, with new plans for peripheral traffic rings and the expansion of the city's public transport network. But the plan also contained a subset of new ideas, offering a first glimpse into the more far-reaching transformations that would set the tone for Fascist regulatory planning in years to come (Consoli 2003: 204). It proposed far more extensive demolitions around Piazza Venezia than the PRG1909, especially on the southwest side of the square, in anticipation of the opening of a new street 'towards the sea' (the future Via del Mare – see Ch. 3) that Mussolini had already spelt out as a priority in his instructions to Cremonesi in December 1925. Furthermore, it made a vague but significant reference to plans for the 'systematisation' of the **Borghi quarter** in front of **St Peter's basilica** – not a novel idea, to be sure, but one that underlined Mussolini's determination to extend planning into the sensitive area of the Leonine city (see Ch. 4). Lastly, it identified an empty area on the northern edge of the city, on the foot of Monte Mario, as suitable for a massive sports complex, again anticipating the construction of what came to be known as **Foro Mussolini** in the following decade (see Ch. 6). With regard to the expansion of the city towards the periphery, the Variante stipulated provisions in the areas of housing, infrastructure, and transport for a future city of 1.3 million inhabitants – a figure revised upwards by a quarter in comparison to the projections of the PRG1909. New

residential quarters were envisaged – not just in the eastern direction promoted by Sanjust's plans but also to the north and the south of the centre, shifting the focus of construction to a new, high-density 'intensive' type (De Nicolò 1996: 187; Rossi 2003: 41).

Thus, fragmented and incomplete though it was, the Variante functioned as an interim statement of Fascist programmatic intentions vis-à-vis the city capital. In addition to a set of specific planned interventions in the historic centre and to a more ambitious strategy of urban expansion, it also sketched the image of a new, regenerated *Fascist* Rome, alongside and in the midst of the historic (ancient, medieval, and Risorgimental) core of the city. On the fourth anniversary of the March on Rome (28 October 1926), Mussolini spoke in front of a large crowd from the balcony of his office in Palazzo Chigi. He declared that the hated city of 'tired bureaucrats' had already been consigned to the past; from then on, he predicted, a new, resurgent Rome would start once again to radiate glory and grandeur to the world, like it had done so magnificently in the past. But he also stressed, 'I have wished that, *alongside* ancient Rome, which should rise in all its splendour because it is unique in the whole world, there should also be the modern Rome, alive, energetic, vibrant, the worthy capital of the great Fascist state' (*Opera* XXII: 243; emphasis added). This 'alive, energetic, vibrant' Rome that Mussolini envisioned as the capital of the 'great Fascist state' would not be a separate new Fascist city but a fundamental, wholesale re-signification of the existing one. A new, modern centre would be allowed to grow 'alongside' the historic city – not in opposition or antagonism but in a rational division of functions that would benefit both components and the city as a whole. But the 'third Rome', Mussolini added, was also to be 'a city of all times and people for three thousand years'. It would envelop the restored monuments of the past, the reconfigured historical locations, and the new constructions of the Fascist era, transforming them into a new single layer of perception that was as contemporary and futural as it was steeped in the city's history. What Mussolini implied with the word *alongside* was a new, all-embracing reading of the city – one that would subsume the urban palimpsest into the mental image of the Fascist 'third Rome', meticulously grafted on the space-time of the existing city. Thus the Fascist vision for the 'third Rome' went beyond a mere addition or iteration (the 'third' Rome as a linear development after the 'first' and the 'second', side-by-side). It also sought to promote a novel, more profound experience of the urban space consisting of a continuous flow between restored/rediscovered monuments of the past and new Fascist landmark constructions, resituating them in a new spatial order that allowed deliberate temporal interpenetration and eventually an experience of simultaneous presence (Schnapp 2006: 20; Fogu 2003a: 257; cf. Maier 1987: 161–5).

Therefore, the Variante marked a new phase in the Fascist 'conquest' of Rome. This would be a conquest of urban space in both its physical (spatial)

and symbolic (temporal) dimensions, carried out through three different strategies: first, symbolic appropriation and 'recoding' of existing monumental buildings and spaces; second, conquest of new, previously unordered space; and third, selective 'creative destruction' in order to either 'make space' in the dense palimpsest of the centre for new constructions or to edit unpalatable aspects out of the urban text. The new Fascist Rome needed both new space and new visual 'wrappers' for what was already there in order to confer upon the city a wholesale Fascist legibility. The heterogeneous, non-linear, and truncated mythical space of Rome, consisting of detached historic sites scattered across the modern urban tissue of the capital, could be reconstructed as an ideal(ised) continuous space through extensive – and often aggressive – editing out of the 'profane' subsequent elements (Baeten 1996: 123–5). By both phasing in Fascism's 'new ideal and material edifices … that would defy time' (*Opera* XVII: 188) and editing out differences through demolitions, the spatial register of Rome would embody a sense of mythical time – the magical 'now' that levels out the differences of conventional time and reunites segments of past, present, and future into a symbolic concurrent experience (Gordon 2010: 234–6).

Architects and Early Visions for the 'Third Rome': The Path to the 1931 Regulatory Plan

That the 1925 Variante never gained the status of a full regulatory framework betrayed the Fascist regime's intention to treat it as a partial, non-binding statement of intent and a provisional set of guidelines that could also be expanded, amended or discarded in the process. While the city continued to expand towards periphery, often in contravention of the regulatory framework, most of the high-profile projects envisaged by the Variante in the historic centre (among them, the 'isolation' of the Mausoleum of Augustus, new arteries slicing through the Renaissance quarters of the historic centre, and the 'systematisation' of the Borghi quarter in the Vatican) did not materialise, at least until well into the 1930s and in different forms. But the protean nature of Mussolini's pronouncements on the 'third Rome' during the 1920s signalled a window of opportunity for architects and urban planners to think imaginatively about the future shape and form of the 'third Rome'. On its part, the Fascist regime – and the Duce personally – courted visionary input from the widest possible gamut of creative talent in interwar Italy. In this effervescent atmosphere, diverse ideas and visions about the future transformation of the capital came to the fore, punctuating a series of professional and public debates that eventually led to the formulation of a new regulatory plan for Rome in 1931.

The year 1925 saw the articulation of two very different architectural visions for the future transformation of the capital. The first bore the signature of Marcello Piacentini under the title *La Grande Roma*. Largely based on

ideas that the architect had already published back in 1916, his vision for the future capital rested on a passionate plea in favour of rescuing the historic and ambient character of the old centre from further demolitions like the ones envisaged in the PRG1909 (Vannelli 2003: 171). Instead, Piacentini proposed a recentring of the modern capital along a new monumental rectilinear boulevard (in 1925 bearing the name Foro Littorio) that would connect Porta Maggiore (where he envisaged a new railway hub) to the existing train station. From there, a reorganised network of streets (Piacentini called it a new 'spine') would lead via Piazza Barberini under Pincio hill to the northern edge of the historic city at Piazza Flaminio. Although Piacentini suggested new ways to connect the new central axis with the historic centre (for example, more direct links from Via Nazionale and Via Cavour to Piazza Venezia), he also intended the new 'spine' as a solution that bypassed the historic centre and thus relieved it from traffic congestion. In order to enhance the viability of the old quarters, Piacentini also suggested an array of modest interventions, many of which echoed his subsequent proposals for the new regulatory plan: 'isolation' of the Mausoleum of Augustus, of the Baths of Diocletian, of the area around Piazza Navona, and of the Foro-Campidoglio zone that was destined as an archaeological park (Piacentini 1925–26; Nezi 1926: 257–8).

The second large-scale reflection on the future form of the 'third Rome' could not have been more different from Piacentini's functional and decidedly modern vision. Armando Brasini, one of the most controversial figures of the architectural profession in interwar Italy, petitioned the Governatorato and Mussolini directly with a plan for the reorganisation of a vast area in the medieval/Renaissance centre of the city, stretching from Piazza Venezia northwards up to the Mausoleum of Augustus. At a time when the Fascist regime seemed to lack a fully formed vision for the 'third Rome', Brasini was bold enough to singlehandedly suggest new, radical parameters for the style and form of the Fascist capital – first amongst his peers and on a scale that nobody seemed able to entertain at any point during the 1920s (Rossi 2003: 39–41; Insolera 2001: 116–18). He thus became the first architect to attempt to interpret and translate Mussolini's generic pronouncements into a concrete uniform architectural-urbanistic vision for Rome's historic centre and to imprint this very 'sign of the Fascist epoch'[2] with his own creative signature (Nicoloso 2008: 36). His close friendship with the art critic Margherita Sarfatti (who was involved in a long and intimate relationship with the Duce that arguably had a significant formative influence on him – Dulio 2004) offered Brasini an early channel of privileged access directly to Mussolini.

Brasini had already put his signature on an important national architectural project – the Italian pavilion for the 1925 Paris Exhibition of Decorative Arts (Nebbia 1925; Pisani 1996). His preference for a heavily monumental style inspired by an eclectic mix of (neo)classical architectonic principles

and the Roman baroque style of the seventeenth century had already been subjected to criticism and often derisory comments. This, however, did not prevent Brasini from appealing directly to the Duce with his detailed vision for the complete reorganisation of Rome's Renaissance quarter. This area, he proposed, would form the fulcrum of the 'new imperial Rome', paying tribute to the city's glorious past but also 'making space' for a celebration of Fascism and its leader. In its initial form, the plan envisaged extensive demolitions around the Italian parliament on Piazza Montecitorio (Anon. 1925) and the Pantheon, in order to 'liberate' ancient monuments (beyond the Pantheon itself, the column of Marcus Aurelius on Piazza Colonna and Hadrian's temple on Piazza Petra) and create new dramatic vistas in an area where the 'city of the caesars' co-existed, often incongruously, with the 'city of the popes' (Delli Santi 1928: 642–5). Armed with the Duce's initial wholehearted support,[3] Brasini continued to flood the authorities with more and more detailed and expansive plans. The topographical scope of his project gradually extended beyond the initial zone around the Pantheon – westwards towards Campo Marzio, northwards up to the Mausoleum of Augustus, and finally southwards, along the Foro and all the way to the Colosseo.

Most of these ideas eventually came together in a single **large-scale plan** (Fig. 3), presented to governor Spada Potenziani in 1928 and enthusiastically forwarded to Mussolini for approval. The final plan entailed a breathtaking number of demolitions and invasive reconfigurations in the triangular zone between Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, Piazza del Popolo, and Via del Corso. Brasini envisaged three new streets converging on an amplified piazza in front of the 'isolated' Pantheon. Two of them would be arranged on a south–north axis starting from Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, splintering into two parallel streets before the Pantheon, and finally merging into one monumental avenue in front of it (Via Imperiale). The third street would have an east–west orientation, connecting Piazza Colonna and Piazza Montecitorio into one vast square dedicated to the Duce (Foro Mussolini), before joining the other two streets again at the Pantheon. From the Pantheon the Via Imperiale would snake its way northwards to a similarly 'isolated' piazza around the Mausoleum of Augustus and finally to the northern entrance to the city through Piazza del Popolo.[4] A series of new monumental buildings would complement the dramatic vistas opened up through the demolitions: a new national theatre, a commercial gallery to host vendors and small shops, another covered public market, and a monumental building commemorating the ancient Roman baths (Terme Littorie) (Kallis 2011a: 64–71).

When it became public, Brasini's project was greeted with almost universal hostility by local politicians, archaeologists, cultural critics, and architects. The prefect of Rome criticised it as an unprecedented in scope and seriousness 'plan of demolitions'.[5] Others ridiculed it as a fantasy on paper, a product of unacceptable favouritism towards the architect,[6] or an exercise in

Figure 3 Diagram: Armando Brasini's project for Rome. **3.1** with the kind permission of **© Archivio Cederna**, No. 4: 'Due versioni del demenziale progetto di Armando Brasini per lo sventramento del centro di Rome (1925–26)', 296 Mussolini Urbanista.

'proportional, topographical and ambient absurdity' (Consoli 2003: 207–8). The art critic and later vice president of the 1942 Rome universal exhibition, Cipriano Efisio Oppo, launched a very public vitriolic attack on Brasini's regressive monumentalism, accusing him of sponsoring a 'faux ancient Roman … and baroque style', not only at odds with the character of Rome's historic centre but also inappropriate as an aesthetic idiom for Fascist architecture.[7] Brasini tried to defend his plan, shore up his professional reputation, and rescue his privileged access to Mussolini. In his correspondence with the Duce, he presented himself as a humble 'executor of the genius of the Duce', translating the alleged essence of Mussolini's expressed wishes into suitable architectonic and symbolic form.[8]

But, in spite of the Duce's and the governor's initial support, the plan was eventually shelved in rather mysterious circumstances. The official reason quoted for the deferral 'for a future, more auspicious time' (*in miglior tempo*)[9] was financial – a plausible explanation given the mounting pressures on the budget of the Governatorato in the late 1920s (Salvatori 2006a: 42). Yet, behind Mussolini's apparently sudden decision to withdraw his support for the plan lay a further important shift. The de facto supersession of Sanjust's PRG1909 plan was now a certainty; the 1925/26 Variante had illustrated the Duce's determination not to wait until the plan's formal expiry in 1934. After the Variante's publication, Mussolini seemed for a time unsure as to whether he should rely on individual architects to devise ad hoc plans for the transformation of particular areas of the historic centre or proceed with a full revision of the regulatory framework for the capital through open consultation with a broad constituency of experts. Brasini had chosen to vie for Mussolini's patronage directly and thus pre-empt his numerous opponents by presenting them with a fait accompli bearing the Duce's all-important sanction (Kallis 2011a: 60–1). By 1928, however, the tide appeared to have turned decisively against this form of personal, direct, and speculative approach. The discussion about the future form of 'Mussolini's Rome' had already entered a new round of consultation that was conducted in full public view and with wide input from a large number of architects. In 1929, at the International Exhibition of Housing and Regulatory Plans held inside the Palazzo delle Esposizioni on Via Nazionale, a specially configured room exhibited two fully formed new plans for the reorganisation of the city's historic centre. One was signed by a group of Roman architects (graduates of the newly established School of Architecture in Rome) under the collective name Gruppo Urbanisti Romani (GUR) and sponsored by Marcello Piacentini. The other plan was presented by another team of architects – mostly from northern Italy – with the title La Burbera and headed by no other than Giovannoni (Baxa 2004: 4–5; Calabi 1988: 131–3; Piacentini 1952: 133–56).[10]

Each of the two plans exhibited in 1929 represented a rather different vision for the future (Fascist) 'third Rome'. Giovannoni, the most

authoritative and consistent spokesperson of leaving the old city to breath and recapturing/preserving as much of its ambient qualities as possible, had now signed a plan that envisaged two large traffic arteries traversing the centre in a cross-like pattern – mirroring the ancient Roman pattern of *decumano-cardo* – and inevitably necessitating substantial demolitions in the historic quarters at the point of the two arteries' intersection. By contrast, Piacentini appeared more consistent with his earlier advocacy of *spostamento* – the transfer of the modern functions of the centre to a new, modern hub alongside the city's historic centre. The GUR plan that he sponsored provided a larger-scale model of urban management for the entire region of Rome, leaving the historic centre largely untouched, supporting the idea of a fully fledged new 'directional' centre to the east (with a new railway station moved towards or even outside the Aurelian walls as the hub of a future, extensive system of over- and under-ground public transport), and then linking the two zones with both the sea to the west and the hills to the south of the city (Cederna 1979: 113–19).

In the autumn of 1929 Piacentini wrote repeatedly to the Duce outlining the merits of the GUR plan and invited him to come to the exhibition to observe what was on display.[11] Giovannoni, on the other hand, asked for his own Burbera team to be granted an audience with the Duce in order to present their plan to him.[12] Mussolini politely declined both requests.[13] Instead, he asked the new governor Francesco Boncompagni Ludovisi (who had succeeded Spada Potenziani in September 1928) to appoint an expert committee with the urgent task of drafting a new regulatory plan for the capital that reconciled the different visions articulated in the late 1920s.[14] The committee brought together Giovannoni, Cesare Bazzani, Piacentini, and Brasini, alongside representatives from the Governatorato, the Ministry of Public Works, the syndicate of architects, and the archaeological profession. Although Brasini saw his appointment to the committee for the new regulatory plan as an opportunity to resuscitate his earlier plan, Piacentini had made clear that he would rather resign than authorise what, to his mind, amounted to a 'crime' due to its extensive demolitions and 'suffocation' of the Pantheon with so many new monumental buildings.[15] Aware of Piacentini's fierce opposition and Mussolini's diminishing interest in his earlier project,[16] Brasini decided to turn his attention elsewhere. To an extent, some of his ideas for the Renaissance quarter had already found their way into the Burbera draft plan (Sica 1996: 399). But he also used the remainder of the time until the final decision on the new regulatory plan to present new fanciful ideas directly to Mussolini, this time for the 'liberation' of the area around the Campidoglio (a more legitimate concern, given his role as architect of the Vittoriano) and the 'systematisation' of the archaeological zone of the Foro with a new monumental avenue running from the eastern side of the Vittoriano southwards to San Giovanni in Laterano and then joining Via Appia.[17]

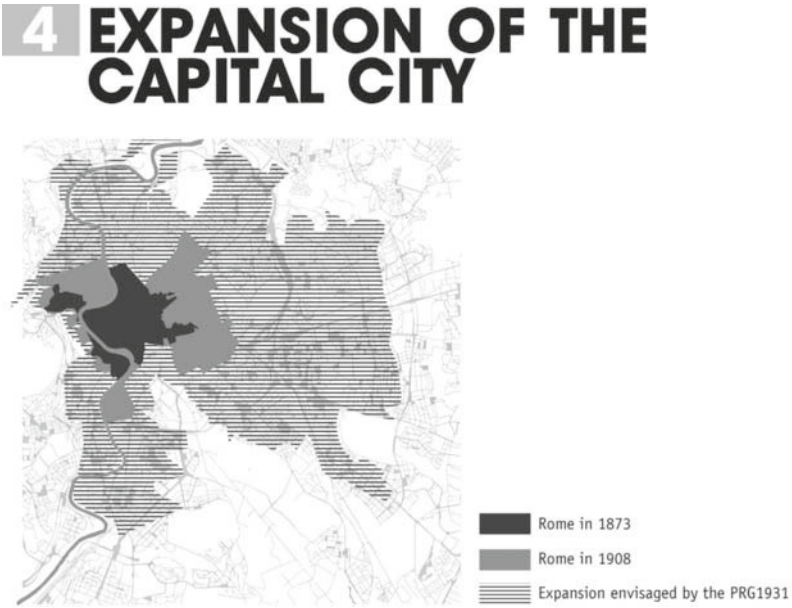


Figure 4 Diagram: regulatory plans and urban expansion

The final scheme of what eventually became the **PRG1931** was presented to Mussolini on 28 October 1930 – the eighth anniversary of the March on Rome – and was formally approved the following July (Rossi 2003: 63–73). In its initial form, the plan appeared to endorse fully Piacentini's ideas for a shift of the city's modern centre to the east, through the construction of a new railway station just outside the ancient city walls. The plan offered a new blueprint for the city's expansion towards the hill and the sea, in accordance with Mussolini's wishes and earlier pronouncements to that effect. New quarters and suburbs would extend the urban territory in all directions, dwarfing the area regulated by the PRG1909 and the 1925/26 Variante (Fig. 4). The main area of expansion was to be towards the east, starting from the new 'directional' centre of the city around the railway station and radiating along the major road arteries to the periphery. New quarters were also planned for the north and the south of the centre – the former destined for middle-class housing, the latter of a predominantly working-class character, featuring intensive and dense construction. Finally, the plan approved an extensive array of interventions in the historic centre that went further than what the GUR team had proposed back in 1929 but fell short of the extensive demolitions proposed by La Burbera and were a far cry from the ideas of Brasini's earlier plan. It confirmed and took even

further the ongoing transformation of Piazza Venezia into the indisputable geographic and symbolic centre of the 'third Rome', with extensive demolitions on both sides of the Vittoriano that would swallow up whole residential quarters (Cederna 1979: 167–94). Two new avenues were planned on each side of the Vittoriano: one in a southwestern direction towards the sea (the future Via del Mare), the other addressing the long-standing problem of connecting Piazza Venezia with the Colosseo (initially known as Via dei Monti but renamed Via dell'Impero in 1932 – Insolera and Perego 1999: 77–129; see Ch. 3). By contrast, more limited demolitions were proposed for the areas around the Pantheon, the Mausoleum of Augustus, the Castel Sant'Angelo, and the Borghi. Old ancient and medieval monuments would continue to dominate their respective areas, with interventions aimed at enhancing their visual, spatial, and symbolic effect. A very limited number of new constructions in the old centre were destined to function as Fascist-era 'frames' and symbolic wrappers, annotating rather than antagonising (as in the case of Brasini's earlier plan) the historic character of the area. The capital was also set to acquire an impressive university campus in the San Lorenzo area (east of the railway station), a massive sports complex at the foot of Monte Mario to the north, two new overground railway stations in addition to the existing one opposite the Baths of Diocletian, and a host of new or enlarged/streamlined traffic arteries. Finally, it would at last feature a completed archaeological park extending from the back of the Vittoriano across the Foro all the way southwards to the Baths of Caracalla.

Between its first presentation to Mussolini in the autumn of 1930 and its official approval in July 1931, the PRG1931 underwent significant modifications. No new network of railway stations was stipulated in the final scheme; ideas about a new transport infrastructure linking the new centre with the historic core of the capital were also dropped. The vision of a multi-nodal city with two major centres, a clear division of functions between them, and a network of transport hubs dotting its perimeter that had underpinned the original GUR plan was replaced by a recentring of Rome on Piazza Venezia. In essence, the final version of the regulatory plan put an end to the discussion about the merits of decentralisation that Piacentini had championed since the 1910s (Muntoni 2010: 54; Sica 1996: 402). Piacentini justified this change of course by suggesting that the Fascist regime had instilled a new vitality to the historic centre of the capital and made it possible to balance conservation and modernisation without the need for a paratactical new modern centre (Muñoz 1937: 25). Still, the dilution of the proposals for decentralisation paved the way for more invasive interventions in the historic centre that would become evident throughout the rest of the 1930s.

The PRG1931 also introduced a procedural innovation in contrast to Sanjust's plan that it had replaced. Its execution would depend on the approval of a series of ad hoc 'particular plans' (*piani particolareggiati di esecuzione*) for each of the proposed interventions. As such, the regulatory framework that

came into effect in 1931 did not so much provide exhaustive guidelines with regard to the transformation of Rome's historic centre; instead, it identified and classified areas of future transformation, provided some broad guidelines or interim scenarios, and essentially solicited a more detailed discussion of possible solutions to be decided on an ad hoc basis in the future. Anything from the specific topographical studies to the necessary expropriations and funding of each project to future revisions necessitated by changing circumstances would be determined through these 'particular' plans (Ceci 2000: 165–8; Cassetti 2002: 49). Thus the regulatory plan became a project in the making, 'in continuous development … [and] motion' (Muñoz 1937: 24–7). Hundreds of revisions to, and even transgressions of, the PRG1931 would be authorised in the course of the 1930s by using this new flexible norm. As the horizon of Fascist planning in Rome expanded dramatically in the years following the publication of the plan, the PRG1931 was constantly being adjusted to cater for new ideas rather than the other way round.

Therefore, the 1930s began with the approval of the first wholly 'Fascist' regulatory plan for Rome and its periphery that brought together a host of ideas and ongoing projects incubated in the second half of the 1920s. Mussolini played a critical role at all stages of the process, from the early consultation to the finishing touches to the PRG1931 (e.g. Colini 1928); no wonder then that he claimed to be its spiritual father (Nicoloso 2008: 38–40). His 'third Rome' was already a city of almost one million inhabitants in 1931. Within the PRG1931's anticipated 25-year timeframe, the metropolitan population was expected to double and its regulated area expand substantially with a host of new residential quarters to a territory of 14,500 hectares – three times larger than the city envisaged by Sanjust back in 1909. In the following years, Mussolini made numerous periodic visits to the works in progress, intervened repeatedly with amendments, provided feedback on the various proposed 'particular' plans that elaborated on (and often exceeded) the directives of the regulatory plan, and kept abreast of developments through the privileged channel of the governor's regular progress reports. Initially intended to last until the mid-1950s, the PRG1931 was considered superseded by the early 1940s (primarily because of the plans for the construction of the new city for the 1942 Rome world fair – see Ch. 8) and underwent a substantial revision with the 1942 Variante, a plan-'phantasm'[18] that envisaged the directional expansion of the capital via the new E42 exhibition quarter all the way to Ostia – almost twice the size as that of PRG1931 and five times that of PRG1909[19] – but never became a law (Rossi 2003: 150–4). Ironically, the combined 1931/1942 regulatory plan (with a host of subsequent piecemeal additions and revisions) outlived Fascism by more than two decades and remained nominally in force until a new framework was finally approved and came into effect in 1965 (Cassetti 2002: 51–68).

The scope and underpinning vision of the plan itself, but also the relentless drive towards its execution in the course of the 1930s, opened the way

for the symbolic conquest of the capital's urban space by Fascism. The main focus of Fascist-era interventions in Rome's historic centre had been the 'city of the caesars', with its extensive fragments scattered around the cityscape and providing the all-important lynchpin for the Fascist discourse of *romanità* (see Ch. 3). Meanwhile, the resolution of the 'Roman Question' with the signing of the Lateran accords in 1929 also unlocked the 'Rome of the popes' and made it accessible to the Fascist urban fantasies for the 'third Rome' (see Ch. 4). To demolish and remodel so many slices of the historic centre, to 'liberate' and 'frame' so many significant monuments of the city's history, to carve new monumental streets and redraw others, these were creative, hostile, and violent acts that underlined the regime's (and Mussolini's) conquering power over Rome (Benton 1995).

With the approval of PRG1931, the new 'Rome of Mussolini' would start emerging gradually, in a piecemeal but dizzyingly fast manner, inside the historic centre and in the periphery, by exercising a combination of real and symbolic conquest. Mussolini's intention of enacting his 'ideal' capital city *in* Rome may have appeared as a deferential, subtle, and visually harmonious co-existence with (indeed, even subsumption under) the existing symbolic arsenal of the city; but, as we shall see, the Fascist strategies of redaction, emendation, and annotation (both literal and symbolic) of the urban palimpsest involved a strongly invasive strategy of spatial and symbolic appropriation. Fascist-era planners would create new, empty containers through the rubble of demolition that would be filled by new Fascist constructions. They would bring to light long-forgotten fragments of the ancient city, 'frame' existing monuments, and create new visual narratives within the urban palimpsest with a Fascist legibility. They would also 'tame' new spaces beyond the existing city. But above all, the Fascist regime would force on the 'third Rome' a new kind of relational reading that first charted and then reconfigured and fused its topographical layers and symbolisms in order to control the reading and perception of the entire urban space (Dillon 2007: 4; cf. Allen 2000: 97–107). However respectful and deferential to its history and heritage it claimed to be, the new urban order envisaged by the PRG1931 thinly disguised a conquering spirit that identified urban planning with a different kind of power – not only over space but through it over time as well (Kallis 2012). The expanding scope of demolitions, reconfigurations, and new constructions authorised by the Fascist regime in the 1930s communicated a growing sense of Fascist ownership of Rome – over its space and architectural palimpsest, but also over its fascinating yet often incongruous histories and myths.

2
Fascism and the City: Architecture and Urban Eutopia

Debating the Future City

Fascism left a virtually omnipresent legacy in Rome. Mussolini's unquenchable appetite for ambitious plans and landmark projects created a genuine Fascist 'layer' (a kind of '(Fascist) city within the city') whose imprint on contemporary Rome is as unmistakeable as it is ineluctable. The 'third Rome' that he envisioned never materialised in full: first the war and then the collapse of the regime in 1943 arrested the frenetic pace of demolition and (re)construction in the city that had gathered a seemingly unstoppable momentum in the 1930s, especially since the publication of the PRG1931 (Ch. 1). By the time of the regime's collapse, however, more than enough had been demolished, 'systematised', reconfigured, and built in the centre and its environs to remind of the two dense decades of Fascist rule.

It is indeed impossible to escape the perspective of the 'Fascist filter' in and around Rome (Whitling 2007). Completed buildings, complexes, and quarters, as well as dramatically reconfigured heritage sites punctuate the cityscape as sporadic apparitions of the ideal Fascist city-capital that would never be. Unlike Hitler's Berlin, however, Fascist Rome was not conceived as an ideal metropolis on paper, by one architect, and in broadly uniform aesthetic-architectural style. In Nazi Germany, Hitler's fascination with the future form of Berlin took the form of a private fanciful contemplation relying on the ability of his chosen architect, Albert Speer, to translate the Führer's vision into a perfect, full model that was to be realised only after a German military victory. By contrast, Mussolini was particularly eager to open matters of urban planning and architectural design to public discussion, court different cultural trends and architects, express often contradictory opinions on particular projects, and intervene in major and minor projects alike in the process of realising, little-by-little, his dream of an ideal 'fascist' capital city. The hybridity and volatility of Mussolini's pronouncements on the Fascist

capital reveal an inconclusive and often contradictory image of what his ideal 'third Rome' was meant to look like in the end. Such contradictions, as Roger Griffin argued, sealed the history of the Fascist regime, not only 'synchronically' (in the sense of conflicting currents coexisting under the aegis of Fascism) but also 'diachronically' (involving constant shifts in the regime's efforts to integrate them into its official discourse – Griffin 1998: 7; cf. Roberts 2000: 208).

More broadly, the Fascist regime seemed uncharacteristically eager for, or tolerant towards, debates on major architectural matters; some of these turned out to be surprisingly open, public, wide-ranging, and acrimonious (Ben Ghiat 2004: 20–9). Most of these debates involved concerns that originated elsewhere (mostly in northern/central Europe and the USA) and reached Italy roughly at the same time that the Fascist regime was embarking on its own project of remaking Rome (Sica 1996: 1–91). Some touched on the overall *function* and *context* of modern urban life: for example, how the rapidly increasing trend of urbanisation should be managed in relation to the interests of the countryside, of economic development, and of social harmony; how the expanding city impacted on its surrounding region and thus necessitated new, broader, and more sophisticated central planning instruments; and how matters such as population density, housing, public hygiene, leisure, and transport should be mediated with the help of new professional expertise, again in the context of central management (Calabi 2008: 1–153). Other debates concerned the search for the optimal *form* of the city – and in particular architecture as the most powerful mediator between style, function, and symbolism. Architects and urban planning experts who participated in all these debates during the 1920s and 1930s produced an exciting array of responses that claimed to have successfully negotiated the challenges of the modern experience, on the one hand, with the particular characteristics of Italian tradition and the Fascist 'revolutionary' conception of politics, on the other. Each also claimed to have better understood the essence of the Duce's pronouncements, offering a tangible translation of his ideas into concrete spatial and/or built form.

The result was a very particular kind of pluralism – not in the democratic sense of open, level-playing expression but in a 'hegemonic' sense that encourages diverse interpretations of an otherwise dominant (if vague) set of ideological and cultural principles (cf. Mouffe 1979: 14–15). This model was firmly rooted in Fascism's overall totalitarian paradigm: the state assumed the role of the single powerful patron, offered 'incentives, flexibility and coercion' to artists and professional experts in return for consensus, and maintained its privileged position as the final arbiter of cultural orthodoxy and taste (Stone 1998; 1997: 207–9; Griffin 2007: 227–33). The Fascist authorities did encourage public debates and diversity of expression; but they did so in an otherwise rigidly institutionalised and supervised system of (state and leader) sanction. Mussolini applauded very different projects

by artists and experts who sought to present convincingly their respective visions as authentic expressions of Fascist ideology (Lasansky 2004: 32–3), and claimed in the end the spiritual ownership of the widest gamut of cultural production (Adamson 2007: 229). During his two decades in office, he was happy to attend (or at least send an official greeting to) art and architectural exhibitions organised by very different groups, invite designers of diverse aesthetic persuasions to his office for a private audience and publicly applaud the most bewilderingly eclectic range of cultural output. The result was a deliberate 'overproduction' in the artistic and aesthetic fields in order to 'compensate for, fill in, or cover up [Fascism's] unstable ideological core' (Schnapp 1992a: 88). Even after 1936 – following the proclamation of the empire (*impero*) that is considered a turning point in the cultural history of Italian Fascism towards a more restrictive aesthetic framework (Stone 2008: 272–3) – the Fascist regime continued to seek and promote a synthesis of hugely diverse responses, albeit in an increasingly more rigid and prescriptive context.

On their part, artists, architects, and other professionals responded to – or sometimes even precipitated – the Fascist call for regenerative agency by offering their services and ideas to the Fascist state. Why such a significant number of highly gifted practitioners were attracted to Fascism (and, more broadly, to totalitarian regimes – Griffin 2008: 231) in the interwar years is a question that continues to fascinate and bewilder. While it is true that the attraction of ample funding and unique opportunities for personal kudos may have prompted an opportunistic switch of loyalties for some, it has also been argued convincingly that many of these gifted artists and practitioners were motivated by a genuine enchantment with Fascism – or rather, for what they wanted to see in it (Firchow 2008: 159), namely a unique, history-making regenerative experiment in avant-garde totality and a genuine 'new beginning' (Roberts 2005: 79–91; Ghirardo 1980a: 126). As the Italian architect Ernesto Rogers – member of the prolific BBPR group that competed for the Fascist regime's patronage in numerous projects during the 1930s – admitted, the attraction of Fascism for its contemporary artists stemmed from an exhilarating and plausible delusion: 'Fascism is a revolution; modern architecture is revolutionary; therefore, it must be the architecture of Fascism' (De Seta 1998: 220–1). Indeed, Fascism's genuine appeal to many of its contemporary intellectuals, artists, and professionals may be impenetrable to us today without a strong dose of 'methodological empathy' (Mosse 1999: x–xi) – attempting to understand what all those who placed their work at the regime's service saw or wanted to see in Fascism. For someone as genuinely and unwaveringly committed to the Fascist regenerative and hyper-nationalist project as the painter Mario Sironi, Fascism uniquely offered the path to a revolutionary break with bourgeois 'decadence' that led to a profound 're-enchantment' of the world (Braun 2000: 8–9; Griffin 1995; cf. Koepnick 1999: 210–12).

All these different debates about modernity, urban space, culture, and aesthetics touched on the management of Rome-as-city and on the future form of the 'Fascist capital'. Indeed, Fascism approached Rome as both an urban phenomenon and a very special case of a city. The Fascist discourse of *urbanistica* (the science and art of urban planning) reflected at once a strong fascination with, and a negative attitude towards, the city in general. On the one hand, *urbanistica* was hailed as the optimal strategy for a new urban *eu*topia – a place of realised perfection, in which an anthropological revolution would lead to a new, optimal balance between urban life, countryside, and national life as a whole. On the other hand, many Fascists believed that unplanned and unbridled urbanisation nurtured the very forces of alleged 'degeneration' that Fascism sought to eradicate. In this respect, for Fascism the city was both a problem to be addressed with new radical prescriptions and the privileged scene on which the new Fascist conception of life could be enacted.

At the same time, however, Rome was not just like any other city. It was the historic and the modern capital of the Italian nation, as well as the seat of the Fascist state and the stage of the dramatic events of October 1922. It was regarded by the regime as the fount of the most important Fascist myths – the living epitome of *romanità*, of modern integral national identity, and of timeless universality. This unique status of Rome called for very different solutions and special remedies. This was partly acknowledged by the Fascist regime when it was agreed that a special funding formula would be put in place for the capital, consisting in two separate components – one relating to municipal issues in general and another focusing exclusively on those works necessitated by its capital status as part of the regulatory plan (Salvatori 2006a: 42). In addition, Rome would be allowed to grow – both demographically and territorially, through planned expansion in the context of the regulatory plan – and acquire a modern infrastructure alongside its extensively restored and enhanced historic centre. After a centuries-long legacy of under-development and the more recent challenges of unmanaged modernisation, the 'third Rome' would become the privileged showcase of Fascist achievement in all fields – from technological investment to improved housing, from extensive excavations/restorations to new landmark constructions, from improved living standards to an optimal model of economic development for the city and the countryside (Griffin 2007: 242–5).

Therefore, the prodigious task of constructing the ideal 'third Rome' as the ultimate Fascist urban *eu*topia touched on much wider Fascist-era debates about both the context (urbanisation versus ruralism, modernity versus tradition) and the aesthetic content (modernism versus classicism, internationalism versus 'Italian-ness') of the city. In this chapter, I first explore the Fascist debates on urban planning as a symbolic 'culture war' between contradictory perspectives that were embedded in Fascism's unstable ideological and cultural mix (Stone 1997: 222; Koon 1985: 145; Schnapp 2007: 78). I then

review the major cultural/aesthetic debates on architecture and the volatile responses that they generated at different stages during the two decades of Fascist rule, earning the Fascist regime the title of a pluralistic 'patron state' in contrast to its 'totalitarian' contemporary counterparts in (Nazi) Germany and the (Stalinist) Soviet Union (Gaborik 2003: 93).

The City as Fascist Dystopia and Eutopia

From its early days during and immediately after the First World War, the Fascist movement in Italy hosted an array of wildly diverse intellectual and political currents. As an ideology, Fascism emerged as a powerful revolt against the perceived disenchantments and disembeddedness of 'western' modernity. This, as Roger Griffin (2007: 116–17) has illustrated, did not mean that Fascism was an anti-modern movement that harked back to a putative golden age untouched by unbound modernisation, materialism, and individualism. It was rather a programmatic, action-oriented response to the perceived impasses of modernity, motivated by a powerful history-making mentality that sought a novel meaning of human salvation and rebirth through a radical revision of the modern deployment itself. George Mosse (1980: 195) described fascist ideology in its generic form as a 'scavenger' in the sense that it 'scooped up scraps' from intellectual currents that until that point were seen as dichotomous and incompatible: modern and anti-modern, left and right, nationalist and universalist, revolutionary and traditionalist. Fascism did not seek to resolve its intellectual contradictions, either before or after coming to power. Instead it absorbed all these legacies like a 'voracious amoeba' (Etlin 1991: 387–9; Griffin 2007: 227–33), cultivated them, gave them a generous but essentially controlled space to express themselves, and in the end harnessed a particular, ever-changing, subset of them on an impromptu basis, without alienating other alternatives.

The cultural matrix of the Fascist regime was as broad and diverse as the intellectual components of the Fascist movement itself. Once consolidated in power, Fascism established the general political direction of its hegemonic project but then invited a theoretically open and sincere debate on which particular ideas, forms, and arrangements could best translate the Fascist vision into a new, superior conception and experience of life. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat (2004: 22) has noted, hegemonic pluralism served the goal of a broad ideological synthesis and, through that synthesis, 'total' unity under the aegis of the Fascist state. Internal contradictions and conflicts were more than apparent but they were not resolved in a heavy-handed, top-down manner. Instead, the Fascist regime pursued a culturally integrationist agenda, mediating between often conflicting prescriptions that claimed to have profoundly understood and authentically translated the essence of the Fascist revolutionary vision. Ironically, the bulk of the creative agencies that sought to influence the official Fascist cultural domain aspired to full

hegemony and exclusive regime sanction – triumphing over, and eliminating in the process, rival visions once and for all. In spite, however, of intense pressure to take sides unequivocally, the Fascist regime (and Mussolini personally) avoided categorical or lasting commitments to one side or the other, preferring the path of mediation and synthesis.

The city proved to be one of the most intriguing but also contested and divisive subjects of debate during the Fascist years. On the one hand, it was associated with the historic production of civilisation and universalist culture, as well as with the most appealing features of modernity. On the other hand, it was perceived by many Fascists as a deeply pathological and threatening legacy of the 'decadent' past – cluttered, unhygienic, unproductive, sterile, the cradle of a detested bourgeois, individualistic, and cosmopolitan mentality. Thus, the city was perceived as both a pressing problem of the highest order for the future of the nation and as a privileged space for staging a new Fascist *eu*topia as a concentrated living experience.

Inevitably, this ambiguity divided intellectual currents within the Fascist movement. The Futurists eulogised the hyper-modern urbanism of speed, unstoppable human motion, and technological advancement at the same time that they attacked viscerally the cities of heritage and tradition (Pizzi 2011: 41). They glorified the immense generative power of a destructive rebellion that would obliterate the stasis of place and time, liberate life from the smothering grip of tradition, and hurl them into a dizzying future of unbound opportunity, where the 'praxis of life' would triumph over the gravity of history (Somigli 1999: 271 and 2003: 15–20). By contrast, Rome and other historic cities of the Italian peninsula epitomised for them the 'eternal and futile worship of the past' (Caws 2001: 188; Rainey, Poggi, and Wittman 2009: 55–6, 218), the archetypal hostile place that invited an inexorable desire to wipe out history in order to reach a genuine point of origination, 'a true present, a point of origin that marks a new departure' (De Man 1983: 148; cf. Marinetti and Bertoni 1997: 402).

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the members of the *Strapaese* ('hyper-village') group launched a concerted attack on modern urban life as part of their counter-vision of a return to a more rural, more traditional, more 'Italian' way of life. They organised themselves around the cultural review *Il Selvaggio* (founded in Tuscany in 1924), which attracted a significant number of Fascist thinkers, such as Mino Maccari, Ardengo Soffici, Curzio Malaparte, and Leo Longanesi, who shared an intense disdain for the onslaught of western modernity. For them the city represented the ultimate *dys*topia, threatening not only the future of the Italian nation but Fascism as a revolutionary force (Adamson 1995; 2001: 241–4). The antidote, they claimed, was a shift away from modern urban life and towards the rural countryside as the source of the most authentic national traditions. Maccari, who became editor in 1926, stressed that *Strapaese*'s anti-urban vision was not intended as an outright negation of modernity itself; it was rather an

expression of maturity that would allow the Italian nation to define and populate its own modern national identity without slavishly emulating putatively alien foreign influences (in Luti 1995: 157; Baxa 2010: 86–7; Biccari 2001: 151–4; Burdett 2003: 218). The proposed return to the countryside was justified as a strategy for re-appreciating the unique defining characteristics of *italianità* (the landscape, the traditional mentality, the village, the climate and all customs produced organically over time around such specificities). It was also sold as a historically necessary defence against the invasion of foreign elements that, it was thought, were rapidly corroding and eventually destroying the characteristics of the Italian people (Brunetti 1998: 218).

Il Selvaggio attacked with equal hostility the Futurists (whom it accused of having embraced the aesthetic 'barbarism' and hegemonic cultural media of 'western' modernity) and the views of the so-called *Novecento* group. The *Novecento* (the title referring to the 1900s) was a loose cultural grouping featuring prominent figures of the Fascist intellectual and artistic scene under the enthusiastic sponsorship of Margherita Sarfatti (editor of the influential cultural journal *Gerarchia*) and Massimo Bontempelli (who founded the literary review *900* in 1926). They sought to provide a corrective to both the perceived growing influence of the Fascist intransigents in the mid-1920s and the performative excesses of the avant-gardes exemplified by Futurism. Instead, they proposed a balanced, sensitive mediation between national cultural tradition and international aesthetic inspiration (Cucciolla 2006: 11–13). *Strapaese* and *Novecento* diverged fundamentally when it came to their understanding of how a distinctly national culture, associated with the notion of *italianità*, would be allowed to flourish and reinvent itself under the banner of Fascism. For the *strapaesini* foreign influences represented a lethal menace that had to be aggressively resisted or filtered out. By contrast, for the *novecentisti* Italian tradition was not static but dynamic, enriched rather than threatened by external influences, porous, open, and geared toward synthesis (Casoli 2002: 399). It is not a coincidence that the *Novecento* circle became also known as *stracittà* ('hyper-city'). Against the visceral attacks of the *strapaesini* against the city as a corrupting agent that diluted *italianità* (Malaparte 1927), *stracittà* proposed the city as the appropriate milieu in which Fascism's synthesis of classicism, *italianità*, and modernism could be achieved (Adamson 2007: 241–60).

The *strapaese–stracittà* polemic exposed some of the most striking unresolved dichotomies at the heart of Fascism's ideological mix. Urbanism was called upon in these debates in order to evoke very different panoramas for the future of the very Fascist 'revolution': on the one hand, the countryside with its authentic distillation of national history and tradition, unique customs and natural beauty, agriculture, community and humanity, distinct identity and 'voice'; on the other hand, the urban

environment with its raw energy, tension, speed and the cult of technology, industry and modern efficiency, progressive ideas, and worldly openness. A satirical woodcut by Maccari that appeared in *Il Selvaggio* in 1929 captured these opposed panoramas eloquently. The idyllic landscape of the countryside on the one side of the image, dotted with instances of happy family life, was juxtaposed to modern urban life on the other side, replete with caricatured modernist architecture, industry, and the figures of Marinetti, Bontempelli (whose trademark FIAT car had crashed into a tree), and the conservative academic art critic Ugo Ojetti (in Pucci 2012: 178). The two spaces were divided by a river, and the caption reminded readers about those 'undecided [who] drift aimlessly in leaking boats'. Marinetti responded with trademark Futurist flair by rejecting both *strapaese* and *stracittà* in favour of his own vision of *stracielo* ('hyper-sky') – a violent celebration of speed and technology with a decidedly futural and unconventional thrust (Salaris 1997: 263–5).

Mussolini had already taken sides with regard to the city–countryside debate, throwing his weight heavily behind the critics of urbanisation. With his May 1927 'Ascension Day' speech in front of the assembled parliamentary deputies, he professed strong support for population expansion (*Opera* XXII: 360–90), criticising the neo-Malthusian arguments in favour of birth control and calling for a drive towards pro-natalism (Quine 1996: 33–5). The ensuing policy of 'battle for births' (*battaglia delle nascite* – a set of policies encouraging higher birth rates) coincided chronologically with, and was linked politically to, the 'battle for wheat' (*battaglia del grano*) and the reclamation of land (*bonifica integrale*) – the latter two aimed at increasing productivity and thus supporting the anticipated growth of the Italian population (Pollard 1998: 79; Absalom 2009: 137–8; Maiocchi 1999: 33–40; Frandsen 2001). By associating demographic strength with national rebirth and power, Mussolini transformed the question of population management into a primary domain of state action, in sharp contrast to earlier 'liberal' attitudes that viewed population growth and migration as predominantly individual (that is, private) choices (Ipsen 1996; Kallis 2009: 160–2). But he also used his pro-natalist discourse as a direct criticism of urban life and a eulogy for 'rural' values. He noted that, while overall national population figures had started to slow down in the 1920s, they showed an alarming decline in certain industrial cities of the north, such as Turin and Milan (Caprotti 2007a: 72–5). This led him to the conclusion that urban conditions and mentalities were not conducive to population growth, due to a combination of poor urban hygiene, 'bourgeois' individualism and materialism, as well as lack of productivity. He explained that

> There is a type of urbanism that is destructive, that makes the population sterile – this is the industrial urbanism … that results in the sterility of the population; and that the situation is different in the small rural

> properties. One may add to these two economic causes the infinite moral cowardice of those social classes considered superior … Industrial urbanism brings about demographic sterility. (*Opera* XXII: 366–7)

Eighteen months later, the Duce made another important contribution to the population debate. In an article published in *Popolo d'Italia* on 22 November 1928 under the title 'Empty out the cities' ('Sfollare la città'), he linked the earlier discussion of population decline and urbanisation to the question of internal migration (Zamagni 1993: 312–13). He stated unequivocally that he considered the mounting inward migration to the cities to be a sign of continuing 'decadence' that had to be eradicated. Unhindered urbanisation, he argued, was a disaster for both the inhabitants of the city and the future of the nation as a whole:

> More houses [are built] and more people move to the cities; more people move and [the pressure for] more houses occurs. Until when are we going to continue expanding the perimeter of the cities, consuming with reinforced concrete ever more vast areas of extremely fertile soil? … Facilitate with any means and, if necessary, with coercive means, the exodus of the population from the urban centres; impede with any means and, if necessary, with coercive means, the abandonment of the countryside; obstruct with every means the immigration in the cities. (*Opera* XXIII: 256–8)

The 'pernicious seduction of urbanisation' (*Opera* XVII: 266–8) remained a central theme of Mussolini's rhetoric until well into the 1930s. A series of measures aimed at increasing demographic fertility was implemented to advance the goal of population growth, in the form of both positive incentives and negative sanctions or later bans (P. Albanese 2006: 52–7; Ipsen 1996: 73–5; Treves 1976: 76–7). The goal, as the Duce had repeatedly stated, was an overall increase of Italy's population to at least sixty million by 1950 (twenty million higher than its figure in the late 1920s), overwhelmingly directed at the countryside, in conjunction with a systematic policy to increase agricultural production and productivity (Musacchio 2005: 146–7). But the Fascist regime's policy of *ruralismo* (Falasca-Zamponi 1997: 146–62) was situated on a rather different discursive terrain to that of a nostalgic and regressive celebration of rural life per se sponsored by the *strapaesini*. As Per Binde has noted, the Mussolinian vision of 'ruralisation' was underpinned by the notion of a 'tamed' nature and countryside – ordered and subjugated through Fascist agency, scientifically managed, technologically advanced, 'conquered' and 'colonised' rather than allowed to flourish on its own devices. As a domain of state action, the countryside offered a far more malleable space for the enactment of Fascist creative and regenerative myths than the already structured – and thus harder to reshape – urban environment (Binde 1999; Caprotti 2007a: 62–4).

The Debates on *Urbanistica*

In 1928 Mussolini's brother Arnaldo, then editor of the official Fascist newspaper *Popolo d'Italia* and always a strong intellectual influence on the Duce, intervened in the city–countryside debate to make a critical clarification:

> Are we … against the city? No. The villages and the large [urban] centres are equally essential organisms for the development of our effort … The cities are a necessary complex phenomenon, civil and vital, for the rural world. But … we are forced to balance all the necessities of life, with our own possibilities … setting in harmony the regime's rural policy with a sane policy towards the city.[20]

Arnaldo's last phrase in the above quote illustrates the discursive ambiguity of the regime's accent on *ruralismo*. Neither the countryside nor the city in their contemporaneous state possessed the ideal qualities for the Fascist anthropological revolution. They both represented very different hybrid spaces where the encounters between modern life and natural environment had generated suboptimal, muddled conditions in each of them that bore the imprint of their particular historical, social, and geographic relations. Therefore, the countryside was as much in need of 'purification' and new 'creation' myths as the modern urban environment, albeit in fundamentally different ways. If the perceived Fascist critique of the city had an aggressive, almost warlike ring, so did the Fascist project of 'ruralising' Italy. In this latter context, the celebration of purity and fecundity was interspersed with imagery of forced domestication through technology and central planning, paving the way to planned internal colonisation. Ironically too, urban metaphors occupied a central place in this new vision of *ruralismo*. The new province of Littoria (now Latina) that was created on the reclaimed lands of the Agro Pontino outside Rome and celebrated by Fascist propaganda as the pinnacle of the Fascist regime's rural policy would be dotted by what the authorities described as 'new cities' (*città nuove*) (Frandsen 2001: 75–8). These 'cities' were intended as ideal creations on a blank canvas (*ex nihilo*) (Ch. 6) and integral components of a new model for the management of the city–countryside problem on a regional and national scale. Expunged from the excesses of 'western' modernity and then placed – alongside a regenerated countryside – in the context of a holistic, modern regional and national management of material and human resources, the urban environment continued to occupy an eminently important place in the Fascist eutopian imaginary (Caprotti 2007a: 44).

It is thus not surprising that the Fascist policy of *ruralismo* unfolded alongside a rich debate on new strategies for urban planning and management known in Italy as *urbanistica*. The term had a broad historical meaning, encompassing the study of city planning across the ages and civilisations.

In the Italian context, it also referred particularly to ancient Graeco-Roman and Renaissance contributions to the development of a planning sensibility that continued to possess a diachronic value for 'western' civilisation. But Italy was a late-comer to the modern debates on urban planning that had been raging across northern and western Europe since the eighteenth century. When such a debate started in the country during the last decades of the nineteenth century, it was already heavily influenced by theories and mentalities produced elsewhere – whether in France (the pioneering work of Georges-Eugène Haussmann in Paris – White 2006: 38–42), Britain (e.g. Ebenezer Howard's 'garden cities' and Patrick Geddes's emphasis on the diagnosis of unique problems in specific urban environments – Sica 1996: 6–29), Spain (Ildefons Cedra's innovative ideas for the new plan of Barcelona – Aibar and Bijker 1997), Germany (Josef Stübben's radial plan for Cologne's new city in the 1880s – Sica 1996: 34–6) or Austria (Camillo Sitte's concern for the aesthetic qualities of urban planning or *Stadtbaukunst*, the art of constructing the city – Sonne 2009; Calabi 2008: 79–88).

The Italian debate on *urbanistica* gathered momentum from the second decade of the twentieth century onwards. This was to a large extent the outcome of the pioneering work of Gustavo Giovannoni. Widely regarded as the patriarch of Italian *urbanistica*, Giovannoni spoke passionately about the need for a wide-ranging synthesis of professional expertise at the service of managing the modern city (Giovannoni 1931, chs 4–12; Giovannoni 1913a and 1913b; Zucconi 2002). He felt that it was time for a prolific fusion of academic and technical/scientific knowledge, of aesthetic and technocratic sensibilities, into the new figure of the 'integral architect' (*architetto integrale* – Ciucci 2002: 9–13). His own profile of interests and activities seemed to corroborate his concept of 'architect-urbanist': professor of architecture and *urbanistica*, co-founder of the Institute of Roman Studies, protagonist of the debate that led to the formation of the National Institute of Urban Planning (Istituto Nazionale dell'Urbanistica, INU, 1930). The landmark creation of a Faculty of Architecture at the University of Rome in 1919 – a dream of an entire generation of architects and engineers headed by Giovannoni, Cesare Bazzani, Marcello Piacentini, Arnaldo Foschini, and Enrico Del Debbio (Spagnesi 2003: 363) – set the foundations for the production of a new generation of practitioners well versed in the modern aspects of urban planning (Nicoloso 1999: 33–40). It was from here that a team of young architects, under Piacentini's tutelage but with such rising stars of the profession as Luigi Piccinato, Gino Cancellotti, and others, formed the Gruppo Urbanisti Romani (GUR; see Ch. 1). They, along with their Milanese counterparts of the Club degli Urbanisti di Milano (with the participation of Giovanni Muzio and Gio Ponti – Brunetti 1998: 39–72), would play a critical role in the redefinition of the entire science of *urbanistica* during the 1930s and in the execution of landmark urban planning projects in Rome and elsewhere.

The first tentative steps towards the establishment of *urbanistica* as a discrete field of expertise and activity were made at the same time that Mussolini was formulating the Fascist regime's policy of *ruralismo*. At the 1st International Congress of Urbanisation held in May 1926 at Turin (Falco 1988: 199), the secretary of the municipal administration of the Piedmontese town of Vercelli, Silvio Ardy (Ardy 1926: 3–4), presented a detailed proposal for the establishment of an Italian Institute of Urban Planning and Municipal Studies:

> In fact, the science of urban planning [*urbanistica*] values all other sciences: from hygiene to political economy, from engineering to law … But it is not simply a mosaic of other disciplines: because it separates them, it elaborates them, and it amalgamates them in a new synthesis inspired by one sole condition: urban life.

Ardy's proposal reflected a municipal sensibility that borrowed heavily from the French model of civil servant training. In fact, he envisaged the expertise in urban planning offered by his proposed institute as an invaluable add-on for a large number of municipal officers working in a wide range of fields relevant to the management of the urban environment (Dogliani and Gaspari 2003: 49–54).

Yet, although greeted as a breakthrough in the Italian discussion on *urbanistica*, Ardy's proposal also came under sustained attack by engineers and architects who considered themselves better equipped to populate the new specialist field of responsibility in urban planning. Like in many European countries, the relationship between these two professional groups in Italy had been fraught with antagonism and mutual suspicion. Traditional perceptions of a schism between 'aesthetic' and 'technical' competencies, between design and construction, as well as between academic and practical domains, had been so deeply entrenched that any allusion to synthesis ran the risk of either being derided as nonsensical or raising suspicions of professional imperialism (Kirk 2005b: 44). Under Fascism, however, the two professions were gradually forced to come together under the Fascist Syndicate of Architects and Engineers and open up their respective professional registers to members of the other group (Iazzolino 1998: 221–3). In 1928 the secretary of the syndicate Alberto Calza Bini proposed the creation of a 'Corporatist Union of Urbanistica' as a (better) alternative to the fragmentation of responsibility for urban planning suggested earlier by Ardy. He presented the Union as a 'living organism … above the various individual competences', bringing together architects, civil engineers, artists, archaeologists, and intellectuals (Calza Bini 1998). Calza Bini's rationale was clearly reflecting the notion that the problems facing the modern city had become far too big and complex to be treated in a traditional, fragmentary manner. Instead, he urged a form of integral intervention, appealing

both to beautification and to utility, in search of a sustainable 'equilibrium': between the particular and the panoramic, the artistic and the technical, the beautiful and the functional.

Calza Bini's initiative opened the way for the establishment of the INU in 1930 – the first official recognition of *urbanistica* as a discrete and increasingly significant professional expertise in Italy. A tireless campaigner, parliamentary deputy, and practitioner, Calza Bini enjoyed the privilege of excellent relations with Mussolini throughout the Fascist period and used that to promote an ambitious agenda in urban planning and architecture across Fascist Italy. In the following year, the INU published the first authoritative treatise on *urbanistica* by Giovannoni (1931) with the title *Old Cities and New Construction* (*Vecchie Città ed Edilizia Nuova*). Meanwhile, the pace of interventions in urban centres authorised by the Fascist authorities accelerated dramatically. As Virgilio Testa (Testa 1932: 174) – then secretary of the INU and expert on matters of urban planning in Rome's Governatorato – noted in 1932, out of 93 provincial capitals 32 had already compiled a regulatory plan and another 47 had one under consideration – a huge increase when compared to the dozen or so cities that had produced such a plan in the previous fifty years. More and more municipal administrations recognised the special significance of expertise in local urban planning by instituting dedicated offices (*uffici urbanistici*). With more universities following the example of Rome by introducing the subject of *urbanistica* in their curricula, the new generation of experts in urban planning that Giovannoni had envisaged was fast becoming a reality by the mid-1930s. In addition to new regulatory plans for big cities (many of which, including the draft plans for Rome, were presented at the 1929 12th Congress of the Housing and Town Planning International Federation in Rome – see Ch. 1), a number of landmark urban interventions were carried out in the early 1930s across Italy (Ciucci 2002: 9–76; Mioni 1980). Concenzio Petrucci's 1931 plan for the old centre of Bari and Piacentini's 1929 equivalent for the historic core of the northern town of Brescia (Vito 2000: 180–1; Corvaglia and Scionti 1985: 91–2, 147–58) illustrated the influence of Giovannoni's thinking on the development of *urbanistica* in the 1930s. Petrucci had initially been called on to devise a regulatory plan for the entire city of Bari; but the initiative was thwarted by powerful coalitions of local landowners and the economic crisis. He did, however, design a special *piano di risanamento* for the old centre of Bari that was approved in 1931 and subsequently executed. Petrucci approached the historic core of the city with the sensitivity dictated by his teacher's theory of *diradamento*, rejecting extensive demolitions and opting instead for more organic street trajectories and limited interventions to improve the visual and hygienic aspects of the quarter (Piccinato 1934b). In Brescia, Piacentini used demolitions more extensively but even in his case the overall goal was to maintain as much as possible the ambient qualities of the old centre while enhancing its living conditions and providing organic connections with the new 'modern' centre (Nicodemi 1934; Sica 1996: 473–5).

In spite of these positive developments, however, *urbanistica* continued to generate polemics during the 1930s. Mussolini used the word infrequently in his public statements; when he did, sometimes it was in a thoroughly negative context (as a synonym for 'urbanisation' and usually associated with the word *decadenza* – e.g. *Opera* XXVIII: 87–8), while on other occasions it had a more neutral hue or was linked to the idea of 'urban reclamation' (*bonifica urbana* – e.g. *Opera* XXIX: 338; see Ch. 6). After the rapid progress made in 1926–30, the proponents of *urbanistica* suffered a number of setbacks. The defeat of the first attempt to introduce a legislative framework for urban planning was perhaps the most serious among them. In 1932, a commission headed by the minister of Public Works, Araldo di Crollalanza, produced the first full draft of a law that would guide all aspects of urban planning, including the execution of the regulatory plans and the expropriation of properties. The law tried to introduce the idea of a 'regional' plan (*piano regionale* – covering multiple municipalities and their surrounding areas on a larger territorial scale) that would allow greater coordination of resources and at the same time break down the grip of powerful local interests on the urban and suburban territories. Predictably, these same local interests greeted the draft law with hostility and convinced di Crollalanza that the time was not right for such a decisive step (Massaretti 2004: 34–6). After a concerted campaign against the law by both property groups and the Ministry of Corporations, Araldo di Crollalanza's project was shelved for the rest of the 1930s (Conti 2007: 32–3).

Meanwhile, the very energetic and prolific INU published its own journal (*Urbanistica*) in 1932 but five more years passed before organising its first national congress. When they gathered in Rome, in April 1937, to debate the future of their trade, the members of the INU did everything they could to promote the ideological alignment of *urbanistica* with the Fascist regime's political priorities. First, they heard Giuseppe Bottai deliver the inaugural address. The choice of Bottai was a fully justified one. In all his previous roles (minister of Corporations, governor of Rome, then governor of the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, and finally minister of Education) Bottai had been a consistent advocate of a modern, technocratic but also aesthetically literate framework for urban planning (De Angelis 2011: 11–12). He came to the congress with impeccable credentials as someone who appreciated the value of history and tradition but also wished them to inform a decidedly modern sensibility. Nevertheless, his address did not depart from the official Fascist canon that the modern city was a sick organism in need of remedial treatment. He noted,

> I would say that urbanisation [*urbanesimo*] is to the city [*urbs*] what infection is to the healthy human body; but the science of urban planning [*urbanistica*] is to urbanisation what medicine is to infection. This means that *urbanistica* is not urbanisation but the antidote to urbanisation; it should be the remedy used against the desire for urbanisation and the

> pathological expansion of the city. … We need therefore to establish, clearly and explicitly, … *urbanistica* as anti-urbanisation [*antiurbanesimo*]. (Bottai 1937a: 4)

The 1937 congress thrived on such self-contradictory discourses. In addition to the notion of '*urbanistica* as disurbanisation', it also addressed in-depth the idea of a 'rural *urbanistica*' (*urbanistica rurale*). Interestingly, even in the context of debating rural life, the starting premise of the presentations at the congress was a negative one – namely, that the existing conditions of rural life in Italy were suboptimal and were in need of remedial intervention. The proposed solutions – redevelopment and recovery (*risanamento*) of rural centres, new types of rural residential architecture, new patterns of socioeconomic organisation based on the 'fully Italian' corporatist doctrine, extension of the norm of regulatory planning to the countryside – pointed not to a nostalgic return to country life but to a 'new beginning', informed by a decidedly modern planning mindset. The other main theme of the 1937 congress – colonial planning (*urbanistica coloniale*) – resonated with the same desire to design on a blank canvas. While the planned regeneration of urban or rural settlements in Italy had a remedial and circumscribed character, the conquest of 'new lands' in Africa provided a vast *tabula rasa* for enacting the new Fascist visions of both urban and rural *eu*topia. The opportunities for large-scale planning from scratch (*ex nihilo*) on the putatively chaotic and unordered colonial terrain fired the imagination of the Fascist authorities precisely because it involved a symbolic act of conquering nature and invited the wildest creation myths. In this respect, colonial planning shared with the various 'reclamation' projects of the 1930s in metropolitan Italy a similar mythical element of cosmogony – as projects of taming nature and then transforming it into an ideal 'quasi-divine' product of creation, where Fascism could 'make history' freed from the unwanted weight of the past (Frandsen 2001: 75–81; Burdett 2000: 17–19).

By 1942, the regime had at last produced the first elaborate legal framework for urban planning – nearly a decade after Araldo di Crollalanza's abortive initiative (Mariani 1976: 93–4). The law introduced norms of coordination between an overarching 'regional plan' and the various municipal plans within its territorial remit. It also formulated principles for the execution of the latter through the (so often abused in the past) medium of 'particular' plans (Bottini 1988: 213–16). This was a belated vindication of the input made by the fledgling science of *urbanistica* in local and regional planning, unifying jurisdictions over city, periphery, countryside, territory, and landscape. The key principle that underpinned Fascism's seemingly self-contradictory approach to urban and rural life was their subjugation to the most rigorous *modern* central and unifying planning, whether this involved a remedial strategy vis-à-vis inherited conditions or an *ex nihilo*

enactment of a Fascist anthropological revolution. Amidst the ponderous rhetoric of *ruralismo* and *disurbanesimo*, implicit in the official discourse of the city as dystopia, lay the premise of a Fascist *eu*topia – the 'good space', real, experienced, created, perfectly structured. Through concerted regenerative action and revolutionary agency the infested modern cities could be transformed, in tandem with the rural landscape, into integral components of a holistic *eu*topian space and a template of collective life that befitted the Fascist imagery of regeneration and starting anew.

The Fascist-Era Debates on Architecture

In one of his writings on the 'new city' (*nuova città*) of Sabaudia in the 'reclaimed' Agro Pontino, whose regulatory plan he had authored (see Ch. 6), the architect Luigi Piccinato (1934a: 10, 13) explained that the city was not simply a response to the search for 'a new form of construction … [but a solution to] the question of collective life'. His primary intention was not just to provide a 'purely formal' expression to such a new ideal of collective life but to redefine urban planning as a blended ideal enterprise covering all aspects: 'politics as well as construction and development, economy as well as hygiene, technical as well as aesthetic aspects'.

The Sabaudia project was hailed at the time as one of the most innovative and authentic expressions of new architecture and urban planning in Fascist Italy (Briani 1989: 56–61). It coincided with a string of other landmark modernist projects that were taking shape across Italy – among them, the new Florence (Santa Maria Novella) railway station designed by Giovanni Michelucci's Gruppo Toscano (1933), Giuseppe Terragni's hugely influential ***Casa del Fascio* in Como** (1936, Fig. 5), as well as the new post offices (1932) and the Città Universitaria (1935) in Rome (Ch. 6). At the same time, however, all these projects generated new debates, controversies, and acrimonious exchanges. In a heated parliamentary debate held on 26 May 1934 to discuss the plan for the new party headquarters in Rome (*Palazzo del Littorio*) that was to be constructed at the heart of the Foro Colosseo zone (see Ch. 5), a loud constituency of the so-called 'intransigent' Fascists spearheaded by the former secretaries of the PNF Roberto Farinacci (1925–26) and Francesco Giunta (1923–24) used Sabaudia alongside the Florence railway station as examples of an unwanted (both aesthetically and ideologically) and 'un-Italian' kind of architecture (De Seta 1998: 165–71).

This kind of critique of modernist architecture had already generated a public, bitter exchange between Piacentini and the conservative critic Ugo Ojetti in the previous year (1933). Ojetti published an open letter to Piacentini which accused him of promoting 'modern' forms at the expense of native architectural traditions from the ancient Roman and Renaissance register. Piacentini responded, again publicly, censuring Ojetti for fetishising Roman

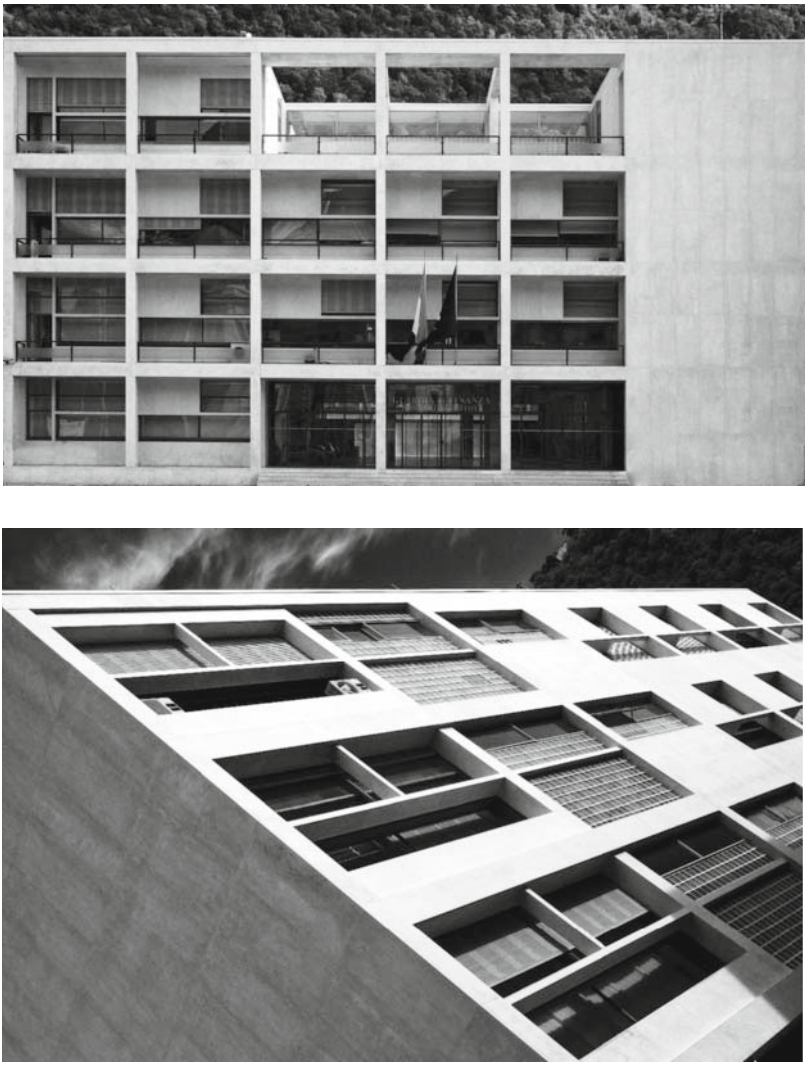


Figure 5 Casa del Fascio, Como (Giuseppe Terragni)

columns and arches as essential aesthetic-decorative elements of Italian architecture without realising that both had originally emerged as solutions to functional-structural challenges (Fuller 2007: 101–2). He identified concrete and iron as the primary construction elements of contemporary architecture and defended the primary use of new structural and formal elements that related to them. In this contemporary context of construction, he argued,

columns and arches had lost their function and meaning (Ghirardo 1980a: 116). The Ojetti–Piacentini exchange soon erupted into a full-scale public *polemica* on the merits or otherwise of modernist architecture in Italy. The time between Ojetti's attack on Piacentini (February 1933) and the parliamentary debate on the Palazzo del Littorio competition (May 1934) was punctuated by an outburst of passionate articles and debates on architecture. To the already well-populated field of architectural journals (Marcello Piacentini's *Architettura*, Giuseppe Pagano's and Edoardo Persico's *Casabella*, Gio Ponti's *Domus* – Miodini 2001: 63) a new publication was added, directed by the combative art critic Pier Maria Bardi and the renowned *novecentista* Massimo Bontempelli, with the title *Quadrante* (Rifkind 2007: 81–108). *Quadrante*'s first issue (May 1933) coincided with a renewed attack on modern(ist) architecture by the usual suspects of the *strapaesini* camp (Mino Maccari, Leo Longanesi) through the pages of *Il Selvaggio* (Patetta 1972: 337–62; Marziliano 2010: 52–5).

In hindsight, 1933–34 represented the vertex in the Fascist regime's parabola of aesthetic/cultural pluralism, with a series of pre-existing polemical debates intersecting and clashing in the open. The battle lines had already been drawn since the late 1920s: on the one side, the increasingly combative (but divided) constituency of modernist architects that called themselves 'rationalists', even if they did not agree on the precise meaning and content of the term; on the other side, conservative cultural critics and architects who rejected modernism as alien and detrimental to the Italian context on aesthetic and historical grounds. Yet, the debates *on* architecture were not just *about* architecture. While matters of material construction, design, the social and political functions of buildings, and spatial/territorial planning provided the impetus and focus for debates, they also referenced profoundly symbolic visions of wider social, political, cultural, and anthropological transformation (Marziliano 2010: 23–5). Architectural debates in Fascist Italy were rich in theoretical substance, sweeping in visionary terms, and invested with an epochal significance that transcended their professional context. Like in other countries during the interwar period (under liberal, revolutionary, or totalitarian regimes), they reflected the growing belief that modern architecture was a privileged medium of expression that was best placed to drive the project of cultural and historical renewal in close alliance with political discourse and action. Modernist movements across interwar Europe were very often polemical, expansive, alert to architecture's capacity for transcending physical form and expressing the values of a 'new order'. They sought to develop and articulate radical ideological projects, positioning architecture as the most privileged arena in and through which modern tensions would be resolved (Tafuri 1976: 48). What was rather unique, however, in the Italian case was that the 'modernists' sought a preferential, even exclusive relationship with a political regime of the radical, hyper-nationalist right rather than the progressive or revolutionary left, as was the case in central/northern Europe

and the Soviet Union respectively. In particular, the so-called 'rationalists' of the 1920s and 1930s in Italy combined cosmopolitanism and a progressive artistic outlook with profound authoritarian and nationalist tendencies that brought them into the orbit of Fascism and convinced them that their architecture should express the authentic values of the 'Fascist revolution' (Rifkind 2007a: 1–3).

The first milestone in the debate on architecture under Fascist rule came in late 1926. Seven graduates of the Milan Polytechnic in their mid-twenties published four articles that amounted to a manifesto announcing a new wave of modernism in Italy (Schapiro 1976 and 1978). The authors – Ubalbo Castagnola, Luigi Figini, Guido Frette, Sebastiano Larco, Gino Pollini, Giuseppe Terragni, and Carlo Enrico Rava, now collectively known as *Gruppo 7* – produced their texts in a very different political and cultural environment after the declaration of the Fascist dictatorship in January 1925. Aware of the peripheral position of Italy in the modern architectural and aesthetic debates but eager to register their new voice in a milieu of effervescent anticipation, the Gruppo 7 endeavoured to produce the first articulate synthesis of diverse modernist currents in (Fascist) Italy (Etlin 1991: 224–54). The young architects were averse to the conservative spirit of *accademismo* with its historicist obsessions. But they were also highly critical of the Futurists' violent rejection of tradition or disdain of fundamental, diachronic norms. They made their first bold steps as professionals in the cultural environment of Milan, in the shadow of charismatic professional role models such as the architect Giovanni Muzio with his eclectic neo-classical style typical of the *novecento* attempts at synthesis (Boidi 1994; Burg 1991; Kirk 2005b: 69–73); yet they also announced the 'birth of a new spirit', more attuned and receptive to the explorations of the international modern avant-gardes. Their goal, as they stressed, was to inspire this 'new spirit', to 'bring it to its most extreme consequences, until it dictates to the other nations a new *style*, just like in the great periods of [the Italian] past' (emphasis added). For the Gruppo 7, the main challenge was to locate this 'new spirit' within a sensitive, but not unqualified, dialogue with the past:

> our [new] generation, the so much attacked [post-First World War] generation, is so far away from its precedents … Now, the youth of today follow a wholly different route: we all fell the great necessity for clarity, for revision, for order … [Our] prerogative … is a desire for lucidity and reason. … Between our past and our present there is no incompatibility. We do not wish to break with tradition; it is tradition that transforms itself, that assumes new forms and aspects, through which only few recognise it … We have a sincere admiration for the architects that immediately preceded us and we extend our gratitude because they were the first to break with a tradition of superficiality that reigned supreme for so long. We too have followed in part the example of our predecessors. But no more. Their architecture has given what it could give … [and] we cannot and will not

> contend ourselves with this … We have to convince ourselves that at least for a time the new architecture will be based partly on rejection and singularity … and only through [the] fusion of all the tendencies into a new tendency our new architecture, truly ours, can be borne …

And what of the 'new style' that the young architects of the Gruppo 7 evangelised? Again, the first article published in December 1926 attempted a precarious synthesis:

> The new architecture … must result from a strict adherence to logic, to rationality. A rigid constructivism must dictate the rules. The new forms of architecture will have to receive an aesthetic value only through the requirements of necessity, and only then … will the new style be borne … [T]hrough the constant use of rationality, of perfect connection between the structure of the building and the functions/goals that it suggests, the style will come about. We must succeed in this – give dignity to the simple construction with the impalpable, ageless and abstract perfection of pure rhythm. (Gruppo 7 1926: 850–3)

The first article was followed in rapid succession by three more in early 1927. The second text (Gruppo 7 1927a) reviewed the international currents of the 'modern movement', while the third (1927b) reflected on the reasons behind the difficulty Italian architects faced in responding to, and being part of, these exhilarating developments. Finally, with their final article titled 'Architettura IV', the members of the group proposed a 'new archaic period' in architecture, characterised by the 'new aesthetic of reinforced concrete', the rejection of 'useless decoration' and the use of 'a few materials … worked to perfection' (Gruppo 7 1927c). Only through the embrace of these new values, they argued, could Italian architecture 'arrive at a new *classic* monumentality … derived precisely from rationalism [*razionalismo*]' (Perna 2007: 26).

The Gruppo 7 had all the characteristics of a radical 'new beginning' in Italian architecture (De Simone 2011: 1–12). It was brimming with youthful energy and anti-status quo ambition, bent on single-handedly changing aesthetic sensibilities across the country before launching itself on the international scene. What the seven young architects proposed was by no means revolutionary in the history of architecture (Henket and Heynen 2002: 86–8); but it had a particular resonance in an Italy emerging from a tumultuous decade and steered by Mussolini through a fresh, unprecedented radical political experiment in an exhilaratingly uncharted direction. With Futurism severely depleted (the movement's architectural genius, Antonio Sant'Elia was killed in action in the First World War; the same fate awaited another prominent figure with architectural interests, Umberto Boccioni, while Marinetti was seriously wounded in battle – Somigli 2003: 161) and lost in its translation into a cultural current of the Fascist regime, the Italian

architectural landscape of the mid-1920s seemed ready for a fresh injection of creativity. The Gruppo 7 manifesto became the starting point of the chequered history of *razionalismo* in Italy, radiating in an array of different, often contradictory directions during the following decade.

The Milan-based initiative of 1926–27 soon developed a national momentum, resulting in the gradual shift of the rationalist movement's centre to Rome and the founding of the Italian Movement for Rationalist Architecture (Movimento Italiano per l'Architettura Razionale, MIAR) in 1928 (De Simone 2011: 21–4). Instrumental in this extension of the geographical and organisational scope was Adalberto Libera – not an original member of the Gruppo 7 but a later substitute for Castagnola in 1927. Although a northerner by birth, Libera studied in Rome and, together with Mario Ridolfi, formed a conduit of rationalist influences on the capital's more conservative architectural milieu (Garofalo and Veresane 2002: 6–16). He and Gaetano Minnucci played a key role in organising the first exhibition of rationalist architecture in Rome (March–April 1928 – Mariani 1989: 83–122), inside the neo-classical Palazzo delle Esposizioni on Via Nazionale that would later host the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (Ch. 7). With Libera in the position of secretary, MIAR expanded both organisationally and in terms of membership to become a truly vibrant national movement (Kirk 2005b: 74–83).

The success of the first rationalist exhibition soon resulted in a second, far more ambitious and controversial one in 1931. The venue this time was the Galleria di Roma, curated by Pier Maria Bardi. It was within the few months during and immediately after the exhibition that the rationalist movement went from near-triumph to near-obliteration. The events surrounding the second MIAR exhibition are well documented. Bardi's *Tavola degli Orrori*, a polemical collage that ridiculed some of the most established names in the Italian architectural profession, including Piacentini, caused bitter recriminations, generated a public controversy, and forced Libera to disband MIAR (Ciucci 2002: 99–104). What came out, however, from this particular polemic was a definition of the context of many future debates on architecture under Fascism. On the one hand, Bardi and the leading figures of the rationalist movement conceived of the second exhibition as an opportunity to launch a daring bid for cultural hegemony under the auspices of the Fascist regime. In different publications, both Bardi (1931a) and Giuseppe Terragni (1931) sketched a future for rationalist architecture as an official 'art of state' (*arte di stato*). While Bardi (1931b) petitioned Mussolini directly (first, by inviting him to inaugurate the exhibition on 30 March 1931; and second, by preparing a series of writings that appealed directly to the Duce), Terragni envisioned a new relationship between architecture, the state, and public sentiment that was not strictly identified with the state but nevertheless fulfilled a moral and political role of the first order (Cuomo 1987: 80–1). Yet, both Bardi and Terragni agreed on a fundamental

premise – namely, that rationalist architecture, freed from the straightjacket of *accademismo* and formally endorsed by the state, could become the fullest and most authentic expression of a new Fascist cultural and political vision.

On the other hand, the second rationalist exhibition unfolded against the backdrop of yet another debate, this time on the relation between the 'modern movement' and Italian national/historical identity. The articles published by the Gruppo 7 in 1926–27 had already addressed this complex dimension by suggesting two paths of synthesis: a recovery of the ineliminable, ageless core of tradition, freed from the fetishism of 'fixed ideas' about the past; and a return to the purity and dignity of simple forms, associated with the *classic* spirit. It was this word – 'classic' (*classico*) – that invited the most disparate and often contrasting interpretations in subsequent years. Though etymologically related, derivatives such as *classicità* and *classicismo* possessed significantly divergent meanings for the participants to the architectural debates of the 1930s (Ciucci 1988: 23–9; Zevi 1992: 98–102; Cavallo 1992). For the members of the Gruppo 7 and MIAR, *classicità* was the expression of this timeless, authentic *classic* spirit – a spirit rooted in the most celebrated traditions of ancient Graeco-Roman architecture but then transformed and reinterpreted through different visual forms and materials throughout the centuries, reaching new expressive levels with the international 'modern movement'. This position was vulnerable to attacks by those who equated a modern Italian architecture with a more direct inspiration from forms, construction techniques, and materials with a distinct Italian historical provenance – whether from ancient Rome, from the medieval and Renaissance city-states, the traits of the Italian baroque, or the revival of an Italian style of *classicismo*. Unlike the Futurism of Sant'Elia that had sought to obliterate traditional architectural elements and to demolish the monuments of the past (Sant'Elia 1914; Arata 1914), the Gruppo 7–MIAR current converged with more conservative opinions on the need to envision a new architecture of *italianità*, not only distinct from other international styles but positively identifiable as 'Italian' (Patetta 1972: 34–5). This was not enough, however, to avert bitter exchanges as to who was better placed to curate this new synthesis. The discursive balancing act performed by the Gruppo 7 and the MIAR rationalists was greeted with suspicion and mounting hostility by more conservative constituencies.

It was not just the usual critics – proponents of historicism like the art critic Ugo Ojetti; traditionalists like the *strapaesini* Maccari and Soffici; or even intransigents, such as Farinacci and Giunta – who led the polemic chorus against rationalist architecture as 'un-Italian', 'Bolshevik', and even 'Jewish' (Pagano 1941a: 5–6). More alarmingly for the MIAR movement, figures such as Giovannoni and Piacentini were also distinctly unconvinced. Giovannoni was not averse to fresh approaches to modern architecture but was unimpressed by the modernist styles proposed in the early twentieth century. He thus warned against the threat of 'standardising and replacing

our sense of art and Italian individualism' by allowing influences from Germany and Russia to shape the character of modern architecture in Italy (Rifkind 2007a: 231–2; Fuller 2007: 90). In anticipation of a truly distinct, fluent synthesis of Italian tradition and modern sensibility, he argued, it was wiser to stick with the neo-classical style that allowed a direct rapport between an Italian present and the rich national past (De Simone 2007: 72). Piacentini too was unsympathetic in the beginning. In 1930–31 he entered into a series of exchanges with Libera and Pagano about the relevance of the rationalists' aesthetic canon to the Italian cultural and natural milieu (Patetta 1972: 275–313). For Piacentini, the kind of modernism that MIAR espoused was too profoundly rooted in the sensibilities of northern Europe and did not match the ambiental and historical characteristics of Italy (Kruft 1994: 410–11). MIAR members responded quickly, rebutting the public criticisms of Piacentini, Ojetti, and others through a series of articles in both popular and professional publications (e.g. Terragni et al. 1931a and 1931b). But a combination of threats (Libera, for example, faced the prospect of being removed from the official register of architects – Libera 1959) and rewards (the promise of high-profile commissions, including the then planned new university campus in Rome – see Ch. 6) divided MIAR and the entire rationalist camp. Then, on 5 May 1931, the daily *La Tribuna* published the proclamation of the newly instituted Grouping of Italian Modern Architects (Raggruppamento Architetti Moderni Italiani, RAMI) – an initiative headed by the Roman architect Arnaldo Foschini but enjoying the full support of Piacentini, Giovannoni, and the Fascist syndicate of architects. Among the signatories of the RAMI proclamation, the names of Carlo Enrico Rava and Sebastiano Larco (original members of the Gruppo 7, though not of MIAR) signalled the extent of the fissure within the rationalist camp. By the autumn of 1931, Libera had decided that MIAR's time was up (Doordan 1983: 130).

Nevertheless Piacentini's fallout with the MIAR rationalists did pave the way for a broader synthesis between his own brand of 'historic modern' (Fuller 2007: 100–3) and some strands of rationalist architecture. Following the dissolution of MIAR, he re-engaged rationalists, offering much-needed publicity for their work through the pages of his journal *Architettura* and ensuring that former members of the discredited organisation would still receive important architectural commissions. Rationalists played a significant, sometimes even central role in most landmark projects of the first half of the 1930s – from the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution to Rome's university campus (Città Universitaria), the 'new cities' of the Agro Pontino (see Ch. 6), the Florence railway station, numerous Case del Fascio across the country, and other important commissions in and outside Rome. Piacentini also forged strong professional partnerships with members of the rationalist camp (among others Pagano, Libera, and Minnucci) and ensured a consistent, yet 'quiet promotion of rationalism in the regime's official architecture' (Rifkind 2007: 235–6). His attempts at synthesis, both of architectural styles

and on the level of professional partnerships, exposed him to the critique of Fascist conservative and intransigent circles without winning him any lasting favours from within the rationalist camp. His central role in the 1931 regulatory plan for Rome made him an easy target for *Il Selvaggio* (Soffici 1931), at roughly the same time that he was exchanging bitter articles with MIAR's protagonists (Brunetti 1991: 200). When all this tension erupted into open conflict during the 1934 parliamentary debate about the Palazzo del Littorio, the target of Farinacci and Giunta was not so much the actual rationalist architects of Sabaudia and the Florence railway station but those who, like Piacentini and Bottai, were adjudicating in different capacities what constituted a suitable and successful form of 'Fascist' architecture.

Criticism of the MIAR-sponsored rationalist architecture came also from within the ranks of the progressive modernist movement in Italy. The co-founders of *Casabella*, Persico and Pagano, gradually distanced themselves from the increasingly politicised discourse of their MIAR colleagues. Both saw themselves as sympathetic but fiercely independent voices of architectural modernism in Italy. Persico, however, went as far as declaring rationalism 'dead' in 1933, due to its lack of authentic values and its tendency towards opportunistic ideological alignment with official Fascist discourses. His assessment was as depressing as it was scathing for the rationalists:

> Born in the form of an artificial need for novelty or imitation of foreign trends, [*razionalismo*] never presented any particular interest beyond it being a document of spiritual restlessness that never managed the terms of the problem with any coherence. … The polemic between rationalists and traditionalists resulted in a dialogue of the deaf, empty and inconsistent, a battle in which the various interlocutors displayed the same theoretical unpreparedness and the same incapacity for answering the call for a [new] architecture. (Persico 1933)

Pagano, on the other hand, never ceased to argue in favour of an honest, authentic modernist architecture in Italy that was at the same time cosmopolitan, rooted in timeless design values, consonant with an ethical conception of life, fiercely anti-monumental and anti-academic, *and* appreciably Italian (Sabatino 2012: 130–7; Pagano 1931). He was at the forefront of the MIAR agitation in the early 1930s, fully endorsing the idea of a rationalist architecture as 'art of the state' and defending the organisation against Piacentini's accusations (Rifkind 2007: 103). Nevertheless, he showed remarkable realism and flexibility (De Simone 2011: 25), collaborating with Piacentini in 1932–38 and defending him against the accusations of Ojetti and the *strapaesini*, before turning decidedly against him with repeated attacks on what he called 'rationalised monumentalism' (Brunetti 1998: 189–202; 1991; see Ch. 8). Yet his support for rationalist architecture was inconsistent. He praised Michelucci's Florence railway station, Piccinato's Sabaudia, and Terragni's early architecture

in Como. But he also picked a number of public fights with the *Quadrante* circle from 1936 onwards. Pagano's desire for a new, non-monumental/non-academic modernist authenticity made him the most enthusiastic sponsor of modernist vernacular architecture (De Simone 2011: 103–26); in 1936 he organised an influential exhibition on rural architecture in the context of the Milan Triennale exhibition (Sabatino 2004: 172–3; 2009: 35, 40–4). His fascination with the rural vernacular had nothing to do with the nostalgic, ultra-conservative obsessions of the *Strapaese* for him, rural architecture epitomised modesty, idealism, and pragmatic adaptation, an austere and dignified correspondence between function and form that, in his opinion, should inform the modernist spirit in Italy.

Pagano's love for an 'honest' modern architecture clashed repeatedly with the more ambitious – in scale and style – projects of key members of the rationalist camp. One of the stars of Italian rationalism in the 1930s, Giuseppe Terragni, embarked on a series of highly individualistic experiments with international influences filtered through an idiosyncratic understanding of *italianità* and *classicità* (Cuomo 1987: 20–1). His first landmark project, the ***Novocomum*** block of flats in Como (Fig. 6), was widely praised by modernist architects and journals but provoked outrage in the local community, not least because Terragni had produced a building that was wildly different to the one shown to the authorities during the approval process two years earlier (Cavadini 2004: 42–9, 114–16; Ciucci 1996: 315–21; Schumacher 1991: 74–5).

Figure 6 The Novocomum building in Como (Giuseppe Terragni)

Pagano did not shy away from celebrating the building as 'an anti-romantic, anti-decadent, anti-evanescent … masterpiece' (in Kirk 2005b: 78; Schumacher 1991: 77–8). Then came his Casa del Fascio project in Como, inaugurated in 1936, again amidst controversy (Poretti 2008: 64–81; Zevi 1980: 70–83; Eisenman 2003: 261). The local community refused to attend the inauguration ceremony, in protest of the radical design of the building; the local PNF branch also objected to Terragni's idea for a Mussolini-themed photomontage on the facade (Ghirardo 1980b: 467). Traditionalists derided the building as either soulless (Ojetti 1937) or unduly cosmopolitan and 'un-Italian' (Rocchi 2000: 81–3). But it was fellow travellers like Pagano (Pagano 1937: 2–5; Cuomo 1987: 23–4), Persico (Folli and Purini 1991: 33), and *Quadrante*'s co-founder Massimo Bontempelli (Rifkind 2007: 314–17) who furnished the most surprising criticism of the building as pretentious, un-original, dishonest, and narcissistic. Terragni rigorously defended his design choices in an article published in *Quadrante*. He explained that his design privileged the notion of a 'house' for the local people over the bureaucratic qualities of an 'office'. He defended his controversial aesthetic idiom by celebrating the 'poetic' qualities of the building. Finally, he underlined how references to Italian tradition, classical legacies, Fascist political ideas, and Mussolini's programmatic declarations could be articulated through an architecture of connotation and metaphor, avoiding bombastic historicism or literal references on the 'surface' of the building (Terragni 1936; cf. Eisenman 2003: 9–11). For Terragni, pure form and spatial distribution were the unmistakeable markers of a timeless *Mediterranean* sensibility – rooted in the architecture of the ancient classical world but authentically reinvented and abstractly represented in the functionalist experiments of Italian interwar *razionalismo*.

Terragni's efforts to invest his architectural work with the aura of Italian and Mediterranean cultural specificity unfolded against a broader resonant political and discursive backdrop. As the Fascist regime embarked on restoring Italian colonial control over Libya (1928–32) and embraced the imaginary of imperial *romanità* (Ch. 3), the Mediterranean *mare nostrum* weighed more and more heavily in official discourse as a symbolic referent of Fascist ideology. At the same time, Italian anthropologists like Giuseppe Sergi fleshed out the scientific foundations of the theory of a 'Mediterranean race' as the most significant historical agent in the production of European civilisation (Kallis 2009: 69–70, 222–7). Although very different in their theoretical constitution, these two notions of *mediterraneità* shared a competitive streak that would become more and more useful in the 1930s: by redirecting the Fascist gaze to the south, towards the Mediterranean and its rich history, they drew a wedge between (Fascist) Italy and the north of Europe. For its architectural proponents, *mediterraneità* was the uniquely distinguishing attribute of Italian architectural culture in contrast to the more austere modernist paradigm north of the Alps. For anthropologists like Sergi, the 'Mediterranean race' was a counterbalance to the expansive 'Aryan' racial theories emanating from northern

Europe that attempted to own the most creative historical forces in European civilisation, including in some cases the Romans and the Renaissance. Both variants represented different strategies for re-appropriating a legitimate claim to Italian primacy, rooted in the country's 'Mediterranean' past but reborn in Fascist guise, vis-à-vis the northern half of the continent.

Mediterraneità became a central trope of Italian interwar *razionalismo*, particularly as a defensive strategy against the accusations of 'internationalism' coming in different forms from both traditionalists and dissident modernists like Pagano in the 1930s (Pellegrini 2002; Danesi 1976: 21). It featured prominently in the manifesto presented by MIAR on the occasion of the second exhibition in Rome in 1931. The *Quadrante* also paid tribute to both *mediterraneità* and *classicità* in its first issue in 1933, juxtaposing these to the principles that underpinned the modernist movement in northern Europe. But the concept continued to invite divergent interpretations and to divide even rationalist architects. It was another original member of the Gruppo 7, Carlo Enrico Rava, that doggedly claimed spiritual ownership of the concept of *mediterraneità* in architecture, even when the term had become standard fare in the rationalist mainstream in the early 1930s against accusations of 'internationalism'. Rava, arguably the principal author of two of the four original Gruppo 7 'manifesto' articles back in 1926–27, emerged as an extraordinarily prolific and vocal contributor to the architectural debates in Fascist Italy. He left the Gruppo 7, however, in the aftermath of the first exhibition of rationalist architecture in 1928, criticising his collaborators for wanting to suffocate individual expressions in favour of an 'intransigent' hyper-modernist style devoid of 'Italian' roots (Gravagnuolo 2010: 27–8). In the early 1930s, he developed the idea of a 'Mediterranean spirit' in rationalist architecture in an attempt to anchor modernism in a national cultural and historical context. For Rava, the spirit of *mediterraneità* offered the most credible platform for an unmistakeably Italian – national, contemporary, *and* universalist – modernist architecture that was also germane to Fascism's ideological and political discourse in the 1930s. He was increasingly drawn to colonial architecture, as the opportunities and demand for construction expanded dramatically in Libya, Rhodes, and later Italian East Africa (Africa Orientale Italiana, AOI), which was created from the merge of Ethiopia, Italian Somaliland, and Eritrea (Fuller 1995). He published extensively on the subject (Rava 1931a, 1931b) and addressed the 1937 Congress of Urbanistica in Rome as an expert on colonial architecture (Perna 2007: 60–5). His sponsorship of *mediterraneità* glorified the cultural achievements of the ancient Romans on both shores of the Mediterranean but also drew attention to the purity and diachronic relevance of the architectural vernaculars across the region. The 'Mediterranean spirit', he argued, was at the heart of all vernacular architectures that appeared on the shores of the Mediterranean – and thus combined Graeco-Roman, Byzantine, Maltese, Arab, and Turkish architectural variations. These vernaculars encapsulated a simplicity and functionalism, distilled through millennia of habitation and cultural cross-fertilisation; they were thus 'modern' in the purest, diachronically 'classic' sense of the word

(McLaren 2002). But, Rava argued, they were also derivations of the ancient Roman *force civilisatrice* and therefore legitimately 'Italian' too.

The quest for a fluent fusion of 'Mediterranean spirit' with architectural rationalism and Fascist political discourses in the 1930s produced a kaleidoscope of interpretations, rationales, and hybrid-built outcomes, both in the colonies and in metropolitan Italy. While artificially united through the use of the terminology of *mediterraneità*, architects such as Terragni, Rava, Larco, Luigi Piccinato, Giovanni Pellegrini, and Florestano di Fausto brought to the discussion significantly divergent aesthetic sensibilities and programmes (Fuller 2007: 115–29; Anderson 2010). The outcome was muddled: *mediterraneità* proved useful in terms of 'posit[ing] autochthonous and exclusive origins for Italian modernism' (Fuller 2007: 106); but it also obfuscated theoretical explorations and gradually limited the horizon of artistic autonomy. Maybe Persico's critique (1933: 4–5) of the entire debate captured its fundamental weakness – namely, that it was impossible to construct a robust expression of a distinctly Italian rationalist architecture on such flimsy rhetorical foundations as *mediterraneità*, *italianità*, or *romanità*.

The Fascist 'Layer' in Rome

The teeming debates on architecture and urban planning during the Fascist years, which formally began with the Gruppo 7 'manifesto' articles in 1926–27 and reached a fascinating climax in 1931–36, lost their momentum after 1936. The emergence of a kind of 'Fascist' official architectural language – in the form of the *stile littorio* of the late 1930s (see Ch. 5) – and the increasingly more rigid requirements of autarchy and imperial *romanità* – stifled the earlier spirit of adventurous innovation and limited the horizon of opportunity for architects to make their mark. And yet, such debates on modernist architecture functioned at least as symbolic proxies for the culture wars that raged in Italy during the 1930s and reached deeper than architecture or planning. The underlying tensions between city and countryside, tradition and modernity, between *romanità* and a futural thrust, as well as between *italianità* and Fascist universality, invested individual debates on architecture with an ideological and political import that radiated from, and was echoed back to, Rome.

Let us go back now to that infamous 1934 parliamentary debate on the competition for the Palazzo del Littorio in Rome. The vocal objections of Farinacci and Giunta divulged a profound resentment at the then growing presence of *razionalismo* in the architectural panorama of Fascist Italy during the early 1930s. However crass and overblown, the critique touched on issues and debates that had occupied and animated architectural professionals in the previous years but had arrived at a symbolic showdown in 1928–32. Yet the 1934 parliamentary exchange also broached a more specific and highly sensitive question – namely, What was considered appropriate and worthy new architecture *for Rome*, a city with such a long register of historical legacies and primary significance for the Fascist

discourse of *romanità*. Farinacci and Giunta not only disputed the programmatic cogency of *razionalismo* for Fascism, they also rejected even more categorically its appropriateness as an architectural medium for the 'third Rome' and, in particular, its symbolic 'centre', amidst some of the most illustrious monuments of the city's past. This line of attack was in many ways consonant with the Fascist regime's treatment of Rome as an exceptional case – as capital of Italy and fountain of *romanità*, as a city that would be allowed to grow in spite of the central Fascist tenet of *disurbanesimo*, as the sanctuary of the Fascist revolution itself and the 'sacred' space of its universalist political faith. Thus, when it came to the Palazzo del Littorio as both building and location, the symbolic stakes were far higher than in the case of any other building, however stylistically controversial.

In his inaugural address to the first congress of urban planning in 1937, Bottai explicitly presented Rome as an exception to the overall Fascist canon of anti-urbanisation. As a capital city but also as the symbolic cradle of Italian unity and identity, he noted, Rome would be allowed to grow, in space and population, in accordance with Mussolini's declared wishes:

> This is because we recognize in the city of Rome a function of capital, which is also reflected in the growth of its population. So while we may wish that the phenomenon of rampant urbanisation is reversed in the case of certain urban centres of our country, we cannot but wish that the city of Rome also acquires … that weight in the national life that will allow it to fulfil its function of capital. … The urban policy determined by the Fascist regime demands that special importance be given to the city of Rome … [so] that Rome – as capital – has all the requirements of a large modern city, because [only in this way] can it fulfil its function of modern capital and, tomorrow, as we all hope, its function of the capital of the modern world. (Bottai 1937a: 5)

Bottai recognised that the ongoing debates on urban planning and architecture posed unique dilemmas in relation to the capital. What was potentially acceptable or appropriate for expressing 'Fascist' values in aesthetic terms on the generic level or in other urban settings did not automatically mean that it was considered befitting the 'third Rome' – or particular locations/functions thereof. Rome was viewed as a special case in every respect and called for different remedies in order to fulfil its perceived mission as a national and then universal centre.

In the end, Farinacci and Giunta need not have worried. Although the parliamentary debate did conclude with an uneasy 'decision' to go ahead with the competition, the Palazzo del Littorio was never built opposite the Foro and the Colosseo (see Ch. 5). With few notable exceptions, the rationalists failed to penetrate the daunting palimpsest of Rome's historic centre. Terragni tried repeatedly but failed to get a commission for a high-profile

building in or near the capital. Figini and Pollini entered with Terragni the Palazzo del Littorio competition but lost in the second round. Pagano decided that no meaningful 'modern' architecture could be built inside Rome, limiting himself – like Ponti – to his contribution to the new university campus. Rava and Larco aligned themselves with colonial architecture and sought in faraway lands a less daunting or limiting stage for the enactment of their architectural projects. Of the Gruppo 7 members, only the always politically more astute Libera left an architectural legacy in Fascist Rome, albeit either in the form of minor buildings (the post office on Via Marmorata in the Aventino quarter – Ch. 5) or in the periphery (the Palazzo dei Ricevimenti e dei Congressi in the E42 quarter – Ch. 8). Other architects who joined MIAR's rival organisation in 1931 (RAMI) fared better under the official Piacentinian aegis: among them Luigi Moretti (the future architect of the sports complex to the north of the centre, known as Foro Mussolini – Ch. 6; also co-winner of the competition for the E42's Piazza Imperiale), Mario De Renzi (co-designer of the Via Marmorata post office and later winner of a competition for the Palazzo Mostra dell'Autarchia e del Corporativismo in the E42 quarter), and Giuseppe Samonà (another post office in the Appio quarter). Piacentini's volatile preferences largely determined who would be allowed to build in Rome and with what degree of artistic licence. His closest collaborators, such as Giuseppe Vaccaro and Arnaldo Foschini, were rewarded with commissions – inside Rome, in the urban periphery, and in the E42 project. Others who were willing to go along the conduit of Piacentini and the Fascist syndicate of architects in the 1930s saw their fortunes rise – among them even ex-MIAR members such as Pietro Aschieri and Mario Ridolfi, and the members of the Milanese BBPR group (Banfi, Belgioioso, Peressutti, Rogers). But the historic centre of Rome eluded them all. Enrico del Debbio, the winner (with Aschieri) of the competition for the Palazzo del Littorio, saw his diminished winning design exiled to the periphery, alongside the sports complex that he had originally designed before Moretti replaced him. The panorama of architectural styles offered by the Città Universitaria was enclosed in its own self-contained space, again in a semi-peripheral location. The imperviousness of Rome's historic centre to new architecture during the Fascist years was in fact non-discriminatory vis-à-vis aesthetic movements and architectural styles, swallowing projects by Brasini and Palanti as well as by Pagano and Terragni.

The following four chapters (Chs 3–6) explore the different architectural and planning strategies employed by the Fascist regime in order to imagine, plan, and realise the 'third Rome'. This Rome was envisioned and produced as the materialisation of a distinct Fascist political vision. A series of powerful imagined geographies, steeped in the Fascist myths of Roman-ness, Italianness, and universality, were systematically forced onto the physical urban palimpsest, intervening on the visible (surface) level. These geographies disrupted its sedimented stratigraphy, but also effected cumulative changes on

immaterial (more subtle and intuitive) relations and experiences. As a result, during the two decades of Fascist rule, the capital changed dramatically in every possible direction: the urban morphology of the centre underwent spectacular transformations at the same time that the city was expanding at an unprecedented pace and scope towards the periphery in every possible direction. Yet, the paradox of the Fascist regime's legacy in Rome lay in the cumulative production of a new, extensive 'layer' that was unmistakably 'Fascist' and yet involved only few new (and even fewer landmark) constructions in the historic centre. Instead, three very different strategies, both subtractive and additive, were combined to shape the Fascist 'third Rome'. First, extensive demolitions were used to reveal or visually 'isolate' important monuments of the city's past, and 'cleanse' unwanted elements of the urban palimpsest – a kind of Fascist 'filtering' and selective erasure practised on the existing urban palimpsest of the capital. Second, selected monuments of the past were 'framed', re-signified with new buildings, and reordered into new spatial and symbolic arrangements, thereby deliberately blurring categories of authorship and imposing new patterns of spatio-temporal legibility on familiar components of Rome's cityscape. Third, a genuine *ex nihilo* additive Fascist 'layer' was indeed produced on empty spaces in the immediate urban periphery or further afield. Each of these three strategies touched on issues that had already been mooted by the fascinating debates of the 1920s and 1930s. Demolitions invited reflections on the priorities of urban planning and on the value of preserving ambient qualities against pressures for modernisation. 'Framing' strategies, on the other hand, posed complex questions regarding how they could promote a closer symbolic dialogue between the city's myths and the new Fascist values. Finally, the additive elements of the new Fascist layer involved complex judgements about what was the most fitting new architecture for the city, where it should be situated, and how it could best promote the Fascist vision of turning the 'third Rome' into a showcase of a Fascist *eu*topia.

In analysing this Fascist 'layer' in Rome, I am approaching the Fascist *terza Roma* as the product of all these interventions (subtractive and additive) carried out across the capital during the 1920s and 1930s. At the same time, however, I am especially interested in how they engaged in a 'palimpsestuous' negotiation between the city's visible layer, on the one hand, and the remnants of the 'first Rome' (the ancient city of the emperors) and the 'second Rome' (the city of the popes), on the other. This temporal dimension, already explicit in the appellation of the Mussolinian city as a third iteration, determines the structure of the following section of the book, with Ch. 3 focusing on the remnants of the ancient city; Ch. 4 on the monuments and sites of the Christian (medieval and Renaissance) one; and Chs 5–6 on the modern additions planned in the 1920s and 1930s.

3

Fascism and *Romanità*: Framing the Ancient Imperial City

The relation between Italian Fascism and the myth of *romanità* appears at first sight deceptively uncomplicated. From its early days as a radical movement the Fascists deployed a language that borrowed heavily from, and hinted at, the Roman past. Although the relationship between the early Fascist movement and Rome was fraught with contradictions (on the one hand, admiration for the values of the ancient Roman Empire; on the other hand, profound disdain for the city's recent state of perceived political and moral decadence – see Ch. 1), the movement that Mussolini officially founded in 1919 paid the most emphatic tribute to the Roman past in its title and official emblem. Its first name (Fasci di Combattimento) invoked the imagery of the Roman *fasces* – a symbol made up of a bundle of wooden rods with a protruding axe that was carried by a special group of official protectors of the magistrates in ancient Rome (*lictores*) as a sign of unity, sovereign authority, and military might (Consolato 2006: 189). In modern times, the symbol had been widely used by a number of radical organisations, ranging from French revolutionaries in the eighteenth century to peasant organisations in Sicily to labour groupings of the socialist left in the nineteenth century (Giardina and Vauchez 2000: 224–7). Thus, for Mussolini the use of the word and emblem of the *fasces* exemplified two fundamental ideological facets of the fledgling movement: on the one hand, its derivation from the political and military traditions of the Roman Empire that it subsequently claimed to incarnate; on the other hand, its physiognomy as a radical revolutionary movement charting a new political path that identified its roots in a dissident synthesis of left radicalism and hyper-nationalism (Sternhell 1994: 1–7). From the *fasci* of 1919 the movement adopted the appellation *fascismo* in 1921 and used the *fasces* as its official party (and later regime) symbol. The early driving force of Fascist street activism, the *squadri* (action squads), also made direct and deliberate references to the Roman past. The term had its origins in the internal organisation of the imperial armies indicating a particular size and pattern of military formation in the overall army hierarchy, alongside terms such as 'legion' and 'zone' that were also adopted

in the organisation of the Fascist combatants (Muravchik 2003: 153–4). During the March on Rome, the Fascists squads were reorganised according to the ancient imperial model, adopted symbols from Roman legions, and were headed by a joint command of four Fascist *gerarchi* that was termed *quadrumvirate*, again in direct reference to models of collective leadership used in ancient Rome (Payne 1997: 106). In addition, the symbolic connection with the *lictores* became central to the regime's official discourse, to the point that it was elevated to the status of a synonym for the entire Fascist period in Italy. Especially during the 1930s, anything from the regime itself to its ideology and official architectural style became associated with the epithet *littorio*. As for Mussolini himself, he was identified in the 1920s with the title *dux* – an appellation that he appeared originally to dislike and adopt only reluctantly, but which he fully embraced from the mid-1920s onwards as his official and ceremonial title in a way that allowed him to claim a position alongside figures of the Roman past that he deeply admired – most notably Julius Caesar and emperor Augustus (Nelis 2007: 405–7; Consolato 2006: 190–1).

The connection, however, between Fascism and the myth of *romanità* increasingly touched on the regime's relation with the city of Rome itself. Starting from the second half of the 1920s, the Fascist regime sought to remake Rome by restoring landmark monuments of the imperial period and bringing to light lost fragments of the ancient urban layer. Key locations with historical references to imperial Rome, such as the Campidoglio, the Foro-Colosseo zone, and the Mausoleum of Augustus, were 'systematised', 'isolated' from what Mussolini had described disparagingly as 'parasitical' subsequent constructions (Ch. 1), and seamlessly integrated into a visual narrative of 'regeneration' under Fascist rule. The same locations were widely used to stage a host of new Fascist rituals (e.g. the yearly celebrations for the anniversary of the March on Rome on 28 October) or 'fascistised' events (e.g. the 'birth of Rome' – Natale di Roma – festival every year on 21 April; Falasca-Zamponi 1997: 90–9). In these opened-up spaces, under the shadow of glorious millennial symbols of imperial power, Fascism sought to present itself as the epoch-defining agent of the rebirth of Rome and – through it – of the entire Italian nation. Although the official Fascist discourse paid tribute both to the imperial and to the Christian Rome (Ch. 4) as manifestations of the city's diachronic universalist 'mission', *romanità* was regarded as the city's spiritual cornerstone that subsequently infused other historical forces (including Christianity and, more recently, the Risorgimento) and transformed them into genuine universalist events by virtue of their association (physical and spiritual) with the city itself.

And yet, the relation that Fascism forged with *romanità* was far more complex and ambiguous. There were intellectual currents inside the early Fascist movement that rejected the use of the past as a matrix for imagining and experiencing the present, let alone as the primary guiding principle for the

future. When Mussolini stressed his desire to revive the spirit of *romanità* not just as a celebration of 'dead stones' but as a full experience involving 'living souls' (Ch. 1), he also rejected the conventional notion of the Roman past as a static template of reference, as a 'historic' time confined to the past tense, finite and expired. Instead, he invoked the imagery of a vibrant *romanità* as the timeless essence of collective national – and indeed universal – human life. Rather than experiencing the legacies of ancient Rome in terms of a heritage trapped in a different dimension of a time that 'has been', Fascism endeavoured through its own myth of *romanità* to construct a new, futural temporality (Griffin 2008a, 2008b, 2007: 232–43; Antliff 2007: 52–4).

The sense of temporal rupture, of starting anew freed from the ravages of time, relied heavily on the notion of a 'new (Fascist) man' living in the midst of a regenerated, ideal nation, and 'making history' through a new template of collective action. The vision of the 'new man' borrowed heavily from the imagery of *romanità* – strong, committed, and disciplined, an integral part of a united society living in a 'heroic' dimension of time. Yet this kind of connection with the Roman past involved a new, fuller, and deeper experience and understanding of *romanità* rather than a tendency towards nostalgic, passive reminiscing (Nelis 2007: 407). In other words, it was about once again producing history in the present tense rather than simply celebrating and reliving 'historical' time (Fogu 2003a: 20, 33–51). The introduction of the Fascist new calendar that marked October 1922 as the beginning of *Anno I* declared Fascism's ambition to regenerate time and established a point of temporal rupture that renewed the cycle of 'historic' agency (Cappelli and Viganò 1998: 131; Antliff 2007: 54). The discursive constructions of the 'century of Fascism' (quoted in the 1932 *Doctrine of Fascism*, authored by the philosopher Giovanni Gentile – Schnapp, Sears, and Stampino 2000: 46–71) and of a 'third Rome' communicated both a sense of timeless universality (derived from the essence of a *romanità* recaptured authentically by Fascism) and a notion of cyclical temporal regeneration (hence, a 'new beginning' and a 'new order').

Thus, the new Fascist temporality willed both backwards and forward in terms of conventional linear time but in an attempt to overcome this very distinction between past, present, and future. Through the annulment of time and the appropriation of 'historic' agency in the present tense, Fascism lionised *romanità* as the mould of the Fascist 'new man' (Griffin 2007: 74–9, 221). Periodic rituals of commemoration, millenarian anniversary celebrations, and the very emphasis on the annual celebration of Rome's birthday provided the symbolic, cyclical markers of such a temporal annulment by reconnecting the present with 'the mythical time of the beginning of things' and transforming it into an eternal act of fundamental creation (Eliade 1959: xi; Masuzawa 1993: 27). As Mussolini noted, 'for us, Julius Caesar was stabbed yesterday. It is the characteristic of the Italian people that everything is eternal and everything is actual' (*Opera* XXXI: 49). The Fascist temporality was

rooted in an 'eternal present', intersecting with the 'time-less presence' of *romanità* as its ineliminable essence; even Fascism's rupture with the (recent) past was posited as a necessary strategy for rejoining 'historic time', so that 'history itself can start again and fulfil its meaning' (Bozarslan 2004: 147). This 'actualist' foundation of Fascist *romanità*, according to Claudio Fogu (2006, 2003b, 2003a: 40–50), underpinned the Fascist drive for expunging and then restructuring time itself, marking a 'new beginning' of creation but also destroying/effacing what stood in the way of an authentic understanding and experience of *romanità*.

But the myth of Fascist *romanità* was not simply an abstract receptacle of universal, time-less values; it also possessed a powerful, indeed all-essential physical-spatial dimension. *Romanità* mapped the city of Rome as a space that was both symbolic and real. Indeed the 'myth of Rome' inhered in its most authentic and full sense within the physical space of the city. It was enacted, and its timeless spirit captured, on the physical terrain of what became the city of Rome, making the one inextricably linked to the other. The connection between physical space and spiritual essence was not an accidental one; the 'myth' was from the beginning, and has always been, the exclusive preserve of the city. The revered monuments of the past captured its essence in visual and symbolic form. Mussolini frequently quoted Theodor Mommsen's dictum that 'one cannot stay in Rome without a universal idea' (in Gramsci 2011: 288). He attributed the transformation of Christianity into a universal spiritual force to its contact and 'synthesis' with the city, the latter immersing and 'assimilating' the former into its vast universal(ist) pool (*Opera* XVII: 292; XVIII: 318–20). For the Duce the 'small [and] brief' space of Rome was both the origin of the myth of *romanità* and its most 'sacred' sanctuary; it produced it but also held the key to its fullest, most authentic experience across history and in the present. That same Rome, he noted in 1921, that had given two universal civilisations to the world, would now become the source from which a third one would radiate across the world, universal in scope and universalist in its core values (*Opera* XVI: 244–5).

For this to happen, however, Rome had first to be expiated. The Fascist discourse of rebirth and regeneration projected the vision of a city 'expunged, disinfected from all the elements that have corrupted it' (*Opera* XVIII: 412). On the political and symbolic levels, this task commenced with the October 1922 March on Rome, when 'fifty-two thousand Blackshirts, armed, arrived in Rome [determined] to bury the past'. Immediately afterwards, these same Fascists took up 'the task of sweeping and cleansing … that is not finished and must be continued' (*Opera* XIX: 288). The institutions of the *paese legale* (to which in the past Mussolini had previously referred disparagingly as 'the government of Rome') were disrupted, dismantled, and finally swept away with the declaration of dictatorship in January 1925 and the subsequent construction of the Fascist state. Yet, the 'elements that have corrupted

[Rome]' also referred to the ravages of time on the city's 'sacred space(s)'. Extricating the timeless essence of *romanità* from time in order to experience and understand it fully involved annulling not only time but also space; indeed, it meant expunging time through and in space. Mussolini's professed dream of a city dotted with glorious monuments resplendent in their spatial 'isolation' and cleansed from 'parasitical' accretions emphasised the importance of deliberate erasure from the city's visible layer as part of the process of recapturing the timeless essence of *romanità within* Rome. As a result, demolition (*sventramento*) was seamlessly incorporated into a standard ritual of Fascist creation. It marked the ceremonial beginning of the act of creation itself – its first, indispensable act that erased the old territorial nomos and generated a primordial blank canvas for a new cosmogony. This quest for a blank canvas was ritualised through the ceremony of the 'first stroke of the pickaxe' (*primo colpo di piccone*; Manacorda and Tamassia 1985; Baxa 2010: ch. 3; cf. Cederna 1979: ch. 2). Demolition was the first act of the drama of creation – in itself 'sacred', in itself constructive and constitutive of a 'new order' (Kallis 2012: 40–3). It marked the beginning of a powerful liturgy that led from the violent annulment of time to the visual enactment of a new beginning, and from destruction to (re)consecration. That this ritual was performed in the most high-profile cases by the Duce himself, in well-publicised and deliberately charged ceremonies, is emblematic of its integral relationship with the creative act that followed it. The demolition act glorified 'cleansing' in both its *de*structive and *con*-structive dimensions, as regeneration and cosmogony, violent effacement and the necessary fodder of creative licence (Griffin 2012: 60–3).

The programme of interventions in Rome's ancient imperial layer was undoubtedly the most prolific facet of the Fascist regime's activities in the capital's historic centre. Extensive excavations that brought to the surface long-forgotten parts of the ancient city were accompanied by a series of 'systematisations' (spatial reorganisations) of archaeological sites and 'isolations' (restoration work that involved 'liberation' from subsequent accretions) of important monuments – the latter two strategies often resulting in substantial demolitions of more recent elements of the cityscape. Most of the individual Roman monuments earmarked for 'isolation' in the 1925/26 Variante and the PRG1931 had already been identified and prioritised by the pre-fascist regulatory plans of 1883 and 1909 (Ch. 1). The Theatre of Marcellus featured prominently in both plans, as did the Mausoleum of Augustus. The case of another mausoleum, that of emperor Hadrian across the river (referred to by its medieval name as Castel Sant'Angelo), had also been extensively debated from the 1870s onwards, often in conjunction with the 'isolation' of St Peter's basilica from the urban ramble of the Borghi quarter. Meanwhile, the fate of the Pantheon had already been linked to a wider discussion involving the opening of new east–west arteries traversing the heart of the Renaissance quarter

(Kallis 2011b: 132–9). In addition, however, to projects featured in the official pre-1922 regulatory plans, a series of further interventions were planned separately by Liberal-era governments and municipal authorities, whether in response to changing circumstances (e.g. the need to reorganise the entire area of Piazza Venezia after the construction of the Monument to Vittorio Emanuele II – see Ch. 1) or as initiatives of exceptional historical value (such as the idea of an archaeological park involving the most important ancient monuments to the south of Piazza Venezia). The meticulous mapping of ancient Rome at the turn of the century – the result of a lifetime project by the archaeologist Rodolfo Lanciani, published under the title *Forma Urbis Romae*; see Introduction) – fuelled a desire to bring to light as much as possible from this perceived lost cultural heritage, even if this involved the comprehensive destruction of medieval or more recent 'humble' buildings (Gilkes 2004: 35). As a result, excavations and restorations in areas of archaeological significance across Rome's historic centre came to be seen as indispensable for the creation of a unifying national historical imaginary that focused heavily on the legacy of Rome as the basis of modern Italian collective identity.

By the time that Mussolini came to power in 1922 the majority of these and other similar projects either remained on paper or proceeded at an agonisingly slow pace. Different factors had impeded progress – disagreements as to the optimal form of restoration and integration into the modern urban tissue, chronic lack of funds made worse by cyclical economic crises, complications involved in the process of expropriation of land, the sensitivity of the 'Roman Question' that had cast a shadow on the jurisdictional status of monuments in many areas of the city, as well as the First World War. So, when Mussolini spoke of his determination to see the most glorious monuments of the city's ancient Roman layer excavated, restored, and 'isolated' by the end of the 1920s, he evinced both his frustration with the state of the city's historic centre and his determination to force the pace of work. Given the enhanced significance of the area around Piazza Venezia after the inauguration of the Monument to Vittorio Emanuele II in 1911, it is barely surprising that the first extensive demolitions carried out under Fascist rule took place there. Even before the transfer of Mussolini' office to Palazzo Venezia (this happened only in 1929), the area's function as the meeting point of so many historic imaginaries from ancient Rome, the Renaissance, the Risorgimento, and the 1914–15 *intervento* movement (Ch. 1) established it as the indisputable fulcrum of the 'third Rome'. In spite of nearly four decades of extensive interventions, the area remained visually cluttered and largely incongruous, not least because of the new monument's awkward position vis-à-vis the adjacent Campidoglio and the ancient Fori behind it. On each side of the Vittoriano lay densely built and populated quarters, traversed by narrow alleyways snaking their way through the maze of mostly humble housing. Just beneath the current urban layer, however,

there existed substantial and potentially important remnants from the ancient republican and imperial periods (Cardilli and Alloisi 1995: 30). Unearthing them required the obliteration of entire neighbourhoods on either side of the Campidoglio. This situation posed complex questions about the 'picturesque' historical-aesthetic value of this kind of vernacular architecture and of the vibrant anthropological networks that these humble quarters contained (Glendinning 2013: 204–6). Experts had battled for decades with this complex dilemma, trying to balance demolition and preservation but making inevitable compromises in the process.

In the end, demolition won a resounding if predictable victory. Starting in 1924 with the destruction of a large residential zone lying between the eastern side of the Piazza Venezia and Trajan's market (at that time, only partly uncovered), and moving two years later to the other side of the monument towards the Theatre of Marcellus, this gargantuan exercise in spatial annulment at the heart of Rome's historic centre continued (and continued to expand) almost until the collapse of the Fascist regime in 1943 (Baxa 2010: 58–66). In order to trace this process of progressively deeper and broader appropriation of the ancient Roman layer by Fascism, this chapter analyses four interventions carried out in the historic centre of Rome from the second half of the 1920s to the late 1930s. The 'isolation' of the **Theatre of Marcellus** was the first such project executed by the Fascist authorities in 1926–32, gradually extending over the entire zone from Piazza Venezia westwards to the bank of the river Tiber. Meanwhile, excavations on the other side of the piazza, inside and around the area of the Fori, developed into a debate about the reconfiguration of the entire zone from the imperial Fori to the Colosseo and the Circo Massimo. As a result, by the early 1930s the Fascist regime had moved beyond the limited horizon of individual monuments and areas, envisioning two monumental avenues radiating from Piazza Venezia (**Via del Mare** to the west; **Via dell'Impero** to the east) and subsuming a series of individual historic monuments and spaces along their way. Finally, while preparing for the celebration of the two-thousand-year anniversary of the birth of emperor Augustus, the Fascist regime fused two separate projects (the 'isolation'/'framing' of **Augustus's Mausoleum** and the reconstruction of the temple of **Ara Pacis**) into one by physically relocating the latter in the reconfigured space of the former. This was to be the last major project involving Roman monuments in the historic centre of Rome; but it was also the boldest, underlining the growing sense of Fascist ownership and appropriation of *romanità* in both spatial and temporal terms.

Joining the Dots: Via del Mare, Via dell'Impero, Via dei Trionfi

The history of the Fascist regime's interventions in the centre of Rome started as an assortment of limited, disjointed projects focusing on the embellishment of specific landmarks and interventions and aimed at

improving the flow of traffic across the city's historic centre. However, by the end of the 1920s, many of these early projects had been joined together in the context of increasingly more ambitious plans, whether emanating from the regulatory plan, extending it or consciously deviating from its provisions. This gathering pace and scope of demolition – rather than any new additive Fascist-era constructions – was the Fascist regime's first legacy in Rome, practised from 1924 onwards in an ever-expanding register of locations across the historic centre. High-profile demolition projects were made to coincide with the regime's three most important calendar dates: the anniversary of the March on Rome (28 October), the city's birthday (21 April – and from 1923 an official holiday), and the anniversary of Fascism's founding in Milan (23 March). The choice was of course both deliberate and eminently symbolic: if the Fascist new 'revolutionary' calendar marked a force of expunging time, the timing of the inauguration of demolition projects marked the coincidence of the processes of emptying both time *and* space through Fascism's history-making actions.

One of the first Fascist-era interventions in the historic centre of Rome pitted the desire for conserving fragments of the Roman past against the 'necessity' (in Mussolini's words) of improving conditions of life in the city centre. In the course of 'systematisations' along the path of Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, the focus shifted on the area around **Largo Argentina** (Fig. 7), where the street met with Via Arenula. Plans to demolish the convent of San Nicola dei Cesarini, which occupied an awkward corner position at the intersection of the two avenues, had already been discussed extensively and incorporated into the PRG1909, in the context of a project to facilitate the circulation of traffic between Corso Vittorio and Trastevere on the other side of the river (Messa 1995: 77–8). The archaeological significance of the area earmarked for demolition, however, cast a shadow on the viability of a project that involved not just demolition and reconfiguration of street lines but also modern constructions and extensive reconstructions of existing buildings. The existence of a sacred complex on the site dating from the republican Roman era had already been charted by Lanciani around the turn of the century. When, however, the first phase of demolition took place between 1926–28, traces of four republican-era temples came to light, underlining further the archaeological integrity and importance of the complex (Mancioli 1995; Marchetti-Longhi 1927). This led to a vivid debate as to the final configuration of the zone involving archaeologists, architects, the relevant authorities of the Governatorato, and a large section of the daily press (Messa 1995: 80–1). While there was substantial pressure to carry on with the original plan of exploiting the 'liberated' space on which the church of San Nicola stood before – with the added proviso that assurances as to the preservation of the archaeological area's integrity be built into any future construction, the voices in favour of fully excavating the sacred zone and rejecting any new constructions were steadily gathering momentum

Figure 7 The excavated temples of Largo Argentina, looking towards Corso Vittorio Emanuele II and the location of the (demolished) church of San Nicola dei Cesarini

and support (Marchetti-Longhi 1941). Given the significance of the finds, it is not surprising that the matter was referred to Mussolini himself. During a lengthy and highly publicised visit to all major Fascist-era projects across the centre of Rome in October 1928, Mussolini made a lengthy stop at the 'sacred area' of the Largo Argentina, where he reiterated his determination to halt any modern project of construction that would jeopardise the process of recovering the fragments of the ancient city.

On that very day, the Duce's visit schedule also included inspections of excavation works across the Fori Imperiali (Trajan's Market and Caesar's Imperial Foro), Piazza Venezia, and the Theatre of Marcellus, finishing with a visit to the site of the once-imposing Circo Massimo. Unwittingly, Mussolini's itinerary traced the contours of the two major avenues that would take shape in the early 1930s – the **Via del Mare** to the west and the **Via dell'Impero** to the east of Piazza Venezia – Muñoz 1932a); however, in October 1928 the Duce could only supervise an array of seemingly independent projects of 'isolation' interrupted by areas whose fate was yet to be determined (Colini 1928). Important monuments and locations such as the Colosseo, the main area of the Foro and Palatino, the western slopes of the Campidoglio, the area between the Theatre of Marcellus and the river to the west, as well as the incongruous remnants of the **Foro Boario**, **Foro Velabro**, and **Foro Olitorio** leading to the Circo Massimo, all still awaited their final systematisation (Delli Santi 1928). The fate of the populous residential quarters – and of the

anthropological networks that they contained – scattered around the ancient monuments of the historic centre also remained uncertain at that point.

The pace, ambition, and scope of interventions in the centre of Rome increased in the last years of the 1920s. This undoubtedly had something to do with the rapidly expanding operations undertaken by the new municipal authority, the Governatorato (by that time under intense government pressure to fund more ambitious projects; see Ch. 1). Yet, the momentum was also sustained by a palpable 'spill-over' effect from a particular project to its surrounding area. The early project of 'liberating' the **Theatre of Marcellus** (Fig. 8) – a striking palimpsest of a monument, featuring a Renaissance villa grafted onto the remains of an ancient amphitheatre and surrounded by subsequent popular housing – that commenced in 1926 underwent a striking progressive transformation in the following years that would be repeated in many other later similar projects elsewhere (Rossetto 1995). Originally conceived as a restorative initiative focusing on the monument itself (demolition of 'parasitical' later buildings appended to its external structure), it gradually encompassed more extensive excavations in the surrounding area (the area to the north and west of the theatre brought to light a series of important archaeological finds, including the so-called Portico of Octavia and the remains of the Foro Olitorio). At the same time, the **demolition** of adjacent housing (Fig. 11.1) led to a wider topographical reorganisation of the entire zone, necessitating further demolitions, reconstructions, and ever-wider topographical reconfigurations across the zone, eventually swallowing the vibrant quarter around Piazza and Via Montanara that lay in front of the residential nucleus appended to the theatre. As the

Figure 8 The 'liberated' Theatre of Marcellus on ex-Via del Mare

Figure 9.1 Demolitions for the opening of Via del Mare. With the kind permission of © **Museo di Roma**, 'Lavori di isolamento tra Via Tor de Specchi e Via Montanara', AF 8077

theatre stood almost equidistant to both the Vittoriano and the eastern zone of Foro Boario (where in 1925 work began on the restoration and 'isolation' of the republican-era temples of Hercules Victor and Portunus), the 'spill-over' effect would soon transform the entire space between the two zones of intervention into a single project of invasive spatial reconfiguration and of reimagining the cityscape. The theatre also occupied a special position, directly opposite the western slope of the Campidoglio, which had been earmarked for 'isolation', in fact since the PRG1909. In this case too, the demolition work that began in 1928 soon stretched all the way to the Foro Boario, the Circo Massimo, and the back of the Palatino hill.

Thus, by the late 1920s an array of originally autonomous, location- or monument-specific projects to the west and south of Piazza Venezia had

been de facto joined in discussions concerning the systematisation of the entire area from the Vittoriano to the river and the Circo Massimo. As at the same time the Fascist regime was inaugurating with great fanfare the new motorway between Rome and its ancient port in Ostia (a project that, however evidently modern, also claimed to trace the ancient Via Ostiense), the eventual name of Via del Mare (Street of the Sea) came to encompass and connect all these interventions into one scenic itinerary that began from the 'centre' of Fascist Rome (Piazza Venezia) and snaked its way around the Campidoglio, offering new dramatic and largely uninterrupted vistas on the gloriously 'isolated' ancient monuments and complexes along the way to the river (Bianchi 1930; Mulè 1930). By the time that the new PRG1931 came into force, work had already begun, first in the cramped area in front of the Campidoglio staircase, and second along the narrow Via Tor de'Specchi that led from there to the Theatre of Marcellus (Fig. 9.1).

The extended **Via del Mare** was the first major monumental avenue in the centre of Rome that was envisioned and executed by the Fascist regime. The growing scope of demolitions that the project came to involve was justified on three, rather contradictory, grounds: visibility of ancient monuments, public hygiene, and traffic flow. The notion of 'parasitical' elements earmarked for demolition did not just include buildings that obscured the visibility of selected monuments; it also extended to those that stood in the way of distant vistas or interrupted the new 'framing' of the 'isolated' monuments. Archaeologists in situ, and experts working for both the Governatorato and the Ministry of Public Education, were called to make choices that determined what should be preserved and what could be sacrificed. As each of the 'isolation' projects soon became part of a wider reorganisation of the surrounding area, the scope of potential demolition increased dramatically, often leading to a stretching of decision-making criteria and more controversial choices. Typically, areas of high density (overwhelmingly made up of haphazardly arranged 'vernacular' housing and busy market areas such as the one on Piazza Montanara) were also considered both unsightly and a danger for public hygiene, not befitting the image of a regenerated capital – and thus expendable. This was an ominous turn that did not stop with the demolitions of popular housing around the Theatre of Marcellus but set a precedent that would be followed elsewhere. With few exceptions, every medieval or more recent structure situated in the vicinity of 'isolated' ancient monuments, the path of the Via del Mare or the intervening space between the zone of the Theatre of Marcellus and the river was either flattened or substantially remodelled to fit the new topographical arrangement. The constantly expanding scope of demolitions prompted the (Fascist) former minister of Education, Pietro Fedele, to protest directly to the governor Boncompagni Ludovisi at the obliteration of the area's 'picturesque' medieval houses. But Mussolini's swift intervention in the dispute left no doubt about the regime's priorities – 'continue to demolish

and, if necessary, demolish the melancholy of Mr Fedele, who is ridiculously moved by [the destruction] of a pile of lavatories' (in Consoli 2003: 208).

Meanwhile the demolition net was cast even further. If a building stood in the way of a wider reorganisation or new planned space (street or piazza), then its potential historical significance was not enough to exclude it from the demolition shortlist, especially if other buildings in its vicinity had already been earmarked for destruction. In the case of the work around the Theatre of Marcellus and the Campidoglio, the church of **Santa Rita da Cascia** (awkwardly wedged between the Campidoglio and the Vittoriano) was dismantled and reconstructed on a different location, adjacent to the Theatre of Marcellus (see also Ch. 4).[21] An even more bizarre fate awaited the remains of Michelangelo's house in the same area. Originally situated on the opposite side of Piazza Venezia, it had already been demolished in 1902 to make space for the Vittoriano, reconstructed on the side of the Campidoglio, then once again destroyed in 1930 but finally rebuilt in 1942, this time in the completely different location of Gianicolo hill, on the western edge of the city. Even parts of the Renaissance Palazzo Orsini, which was structurally embedded into the remains of the ancient theatre, had to be sacrificed following an agreement between the Governatorato and the owners of the property (Salsano 2009: 147–8).[22] Further down the road, the only buildings that were spared (the **Casa dei Crescenzi** and **Casa dei Pierleoni** towards the **Piazza Bocca della Verità**) owed their survival more to considerations of symmetry and 'framing' of the new road than to their arguable artistic or historical value. Their incorporation into the new systematisation of the Via del Mare resulted in an incoherent arrangement, with the Casa dei Crescenzi awkwardly connected to a newly constructed edifice (the Palazzo dell'Anagrafe, where the offices of the Governatorato moved; see Ch. 5) and the Casa dei Pierleoni reconstructed in a different location where it served as facade for new constructions along the avenue, again constructed for the Governatorato (Cardilli and Alloisi 1995: 64–5). Only a day after the inauguration of the Via del Mare, on the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome (28 October 1932), the Duce paraded on a horse a few hundred metres away, along the path of a newly opened avenue running from Piazza Venezia in a southeastern direction until the edge of the Colosseo. On that most symbolic day of the Fascist calendar marking the conclusion of *Anno X* (tenth year) of the 'Fascist era', just after having officially opened the landmark Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista, MdRF; Ch. 7), Mussolini also inaugurated the second new avenue. Its name – **Via dell'Impero** (Street of the Empire) – apparently changed at the last moment from the originally intended Via dei Monti (Street of the Mountains). Just like the case of Via del Mare, the new avenue subsumed a number of separate projects – executed, underway, or planned – in a meticulously assembled and symbolically powerful urban scenography.

The Via dell'Impero completed the symbolic and topographical recentring of Fascist Rome on Piazza Venezia that had started with the construction of the Vittoriano and had been confirmed with the opening of Via del Mare. It also marked the resolution of arguably the most complex riddle in the topography of the modern city that had its origins more than a century earlier and had confounded experts ever since (Arthurs 2012: 53) – finding the optimal balance between heritage conservation and modern life in this most significant zone of the ancient city. During their brief spell in the city at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Napoleon Bonaparte's architects and engineers had produced a dizzying number of plans for the reorganisation of the city's ancient hub, including ideas for extensive excavations and topographical reconfigurations, with a view to reversing the centuries-old trend of neglect and deliberate destruction (Ridley 1992). Following the proclamation of Rome as capital of the fledgling Italian kingdom, the discussion acquired fresh momentum that also linked heritage conservation to national identity. The 1870 Camporesi Committee (see Ch. 1) earmarked the entire zone from the Campidoglio to the southern section of the Aurelian Walls (Porta San Sebastiano) for a vast 'archaeological promenade'. Meanwhile, the two new major streets that were designed to connect the city's planned modern centre in the northeast with the historic city (Via Nazionale and, shortly afterwards, Via Cavour) reached the zone in question at different points – the first close to Piazza Venezia, the other at the Foro itself. The first regulatory plan of 1873, designed by Alessandro Viviani, prioritised the connection between Via del Corso/Nazionale with Via Cavour through a redesigned Via Cremona; from the point of intersection with Via Cavour the plan envisaged two further new streets: one running elevated above the Foro and leading to the west towards Bocca della Verità, the other connecting Via Cavour with the Colosseo as a tree-lined avenue (Insolera and Perego 1999: 1–13).

Viviani's plan remained an empty letter. Decades passed with a plethora of ideas and debates but little progress. The separate decision to construct the enormous Monument to Vittorio Emanuele II (1885–1911) on the southern side of Piazza Venezia did result in a series of significant interventions on and around the square; but gradually the future arrangement of the zone became a subordinate consideration to the completion of the monument. At the turn of the twentieth century the discussion on the future of the Campidoglio–Foro-Colosseo zone entailed two rather different and to a large extent separate components: the need for extensive excavations of the area inside and around the Foro – a task made difficult by the density of popular housing in the area; and the reorganisation of the road network in the city centre starting from Piazza Venezia and continuing towards the city walls to the south, cutting through the area earmarked for the archaeological park. A host of new projects by the civil engineers Tolomei, Bruno-Moretti, Facini-Remiddi, Ceas, and Crimini-Testa were published in 1903–06, rehearsing

innovative scenarios that balanced in different ways modern considerations of traffic flow with the desire for a systematic exploration of the archaeological zone and the preservation of the anthropological profile of the densely populated residential quarters that surrounded the ruins. Most plans abandoned the principle of a rectilinear arrangement between the end of Via Cavour and Piazza Venezia, opting instead for more organically designed routes that allowed for a future, more systematic archaeological exploration of what lay beneath the surface. Still, once again no definitive decision came out of these deliberations.

Then in 1911 the archaeologist Corrado Ricci, taking advantage of the insights offered by Lanciani's *Forma Urbis Romae*, produced the first unified plan for the excavation and 'liberation' of the entire zone of the imperial Fori. For him the fundamental criterion for intervention was the rediscovery and integration of the fragments of the ancient city that lay beneath its visible layer. Demolitions would be inevitable as part of this task; however, Ricci offered a compromise solution that at least preserved some of the anthropological and ambient qualities of the residential quarters that obscured the archaeological findings, keeping at the same time to a minimum the destruction of medieval monuments that dotted the area. To that effect, he rejected the idea of a fully rectilinear connection between Piazza Venezia and the Colosseo, focusing instead on the sector between the Vittoriano and the intersection with Via Cavour (Ricci 1913; Lecis 2009: 73). The Ricci plan was put on hold during the First World War but formed the point of departure for the postwar debates on the future form of the archaeological zone at the heart of Rome.

Mussolini's advent to power in October 1922 did not signify a rupture in this respect; in 1924 Ricci was put in charge of the first phase of work to the east of the Vittoriano, excavating the zone between Nerva's imperial Foro and Trajan's Market. But the need for an integrated proposal for the entire zone resurfaced during the deliberations for the revision of the PRG1909. The Variante of 1925/26 resuscitated the earlier idea of a two-street connection between Piazza Venezia and the Colosseo meeting at the foot of Via Cavour in the middle, loosely based on Ricci's earlier plan. But the plan was soon to be superseded by a much wider debate about a new regulatory plan for the Fascist 'third Rome'. With the official transfer of Mussolini's office to Palazzo Venezia in September 1929 the piazza became the spatial, political, and symbolic umbilicus of the emerging Fascist city. Starting from the eastern flanks of the Vittoriano in 1924, a wave of demolitions swept east of Piazza Venezia, swallowing entire historic neighbourhoods, creating new empty spaces, and bringing to light the long-forgotten remnants of ancient Rome that Lanciani had plotted on Rome's modern urban map. A large part of these demolitions had already taken place (albeit as discrete projects) before the PRG1931 was even approved; but the new regulatory plan incorporated the new expunged spaces into a much bolder vision for the historic centre,

in which wide, rectilinear avenues would traverse the city and open up dramatic vistas on existing and newly uncovered fragments of the Roman past. In fact, the PRG1931 joined the longest sequence of dots in the centre of Rome: had it been fully realised, it would have created a new avenue starting from the northern entrance to the walled city (Piazza del Popolo), turning into a parallel avenue to the medieval Via del Corso, eventually joining Via dei Monti and finishing on the other side of the city walls, at the basilica of San Giovanni Laterano, by tracing the existing course of Via Labicana.

The final impetus for the systematisation of the archaeological zone of the Fori came from the Fascist calendar itself. As October 1932 marked the tenth anniversary of the March of Rome (Decennale), the Fascist authorities embarked on a fittingly extravagant programme of celebrations that would last for the entire year but predictably focus on the 28 October anniversary itself. The celebrations would be national in scale; but Rome would feature most prominently – not only due to its function as capital but also because of its dual significance as theatre of the dramatic events of October 1922 and spiritual home of the spirit of *romanità* so strongly exalted by the Fascist regime. Together, the publication of the new regulatory plan and the celebrations for the Decennale provided the final decisive momentum to the work already underway in the archaeological zone. A wave of new, far more extensive demolitions joined the dots of earlier pockets of intervention, creating a vast empty area to the southeast of the Vittoriano and destroying the complex architectural and anthropological record of the popular residential quarters dotting the archaeological zone. By the end of 1932, more than 5000 rooms had been destroyed across an area totalling 40,000 square meters,[23] its inhabitants (the estimated figure ranges from 4000 to 5000 people) given very short notice to abandon their properties and hastily relocated to new satellite towns (borgate) in the periphery of the city (Salsano 2009: 134–7, 164–200; Arthurs 2012: 58–60). As Ricci's 1911 plan for limited demolitions and more organic connecting roads was replaced by a vision of straight roads, empty spaces, and ' liberated' monuments, the earlier idea of a two-street solution to the connection between Piazza Venezia and Colosseo gave way to the plan for a single, wide, perfectly rectilinear street running through the Fori, past the already isolated edifice of the Basilica of Maxentius to the tip of the amphitheatre. What stood in the way of the new, direct connection (including the entire Velia hill that visually obscured the Colosseo) would be entirely flattened on condition that preliminary excavations would not unearth finds of exceptional value, which they apparently did not (Muñoz 1932b: 535; Marchetti-Longhi 1934; Insolera and Perego 1999: 146–7; Figs 9.2, 11.1).

Thus, when Mussolini descended upon the Via dell'Impero on 28 October 1932 for his inaugural parade, he could indulge in the thought that his earlier directives about the 'third Rome' had finally come to a resplendent visual and symbolic enactment on the most celebrated grounds of the historic centre (Bianchi 1933a: 137). The festive crowd that had lined up both sides of the avenue and the strictly choreographed

Figure 9.2 Demolitions for the opening of the Via dell'Impero. With the kind permission of © **Museo di Roma**, 'Via dell'Impero. Via Marforio. Imbocco della strada del Colosseo durante i lavori', AF 24824

ceremony celebrated the creative 'genius' of Fascism and its leader, who in the course of just a few years had transformed the most complex archeological area of Rome's centre into an unprecedented in scale and grandeur window on the city's most glorious past. The new avenue offered a breathtaking vista from an elevated plateau on the remains of the main Foro on the one side, and of the newly excavated imperial Fori on the other; it allowed both previously buried and suffocated monuments to become integral parts of a new, unfamiliar cityscape (Fig. 11.2). Contemporary observers, so used to the dense, chaotic urban tissue of this zone, now waxed lyrical about the avenue's dramatic scenography; some, however, also went beyond the visual aspects, focusing instead on the symbolic function of the street that collapsed the distance between antiquity and the present in the course of a few hundred metres – a 'point of reunion (between past and present) and a point of new departure [towards] a great future' (Marchetti-Longhi 1934: 56).

As Mussolini made his way through the Via dell'Impero atop a horse, it was clear that the project was still a long way from being completed in any meaningful sense of the word. The sector closer to Piazza Venezia, Trajan's Market, and the imperial Fori appeared more polished, featuring ample gardens and the platforms that Corrado Ricci had originally suggested (Insolera and Perego 1999: 86–8). Beyond the junction with Via Cavour, however,

there were still clusters of buildings that had temporarily defied the demolition fever of the 1930–32 period. The volume of the medieval **Torre dei Conti** rose incongruously in the middle of a once densely inhabited area, in desperate need of structural restoration. The avenue expired awkwardly around the Colosseo, with still undetermined plans to extend it further to the southeast until it joined the old Via Appia. As for the excavations on the recently 'liberated' areas along the Via dell'Impero, they appeared like a work-in-progress, incomplete but hastily embellished for the occasion of the Decennale celebrations.

Once the dust from the celebratory parades had settled, the debate about how to complete the Via dell'Impero began in earnest, involving regime and city authorities, all sorts of technical and art experts, journalists, and many ordinary people who were often invited by newspapers to express their ideas or preferences (Insolera and Perego 1999: 162–70). While few insisted on leaving the archaeological zone intact, without new visual or symbolic markers, even fewer argued in favour of extending the excavations, suggesting instead the completion of work already underway and the graceful enclosure of the exposed areas.[24] For a regime obsessed with bringing to light as much of the ancient Roman layer as possible at any cost, the decision not only to restrict further excavations along the Via dell'Impero but also to cover a significant part of the archaeological findings across the imperial Fori was at first sight surprising (Calza 1934). It was, however, a pragmatic one. After eight years of continuous excavations, the opened space enclosed some of the most significant remains of ancient Rome and enabled a wholly new relation with the Roman monuments, both existing and newly unearthed. Yet the vastness of the new space lacked narrative rhythm or new visual anchors. The excavations had unearthed a tangle of ruins but few imposing structures. In addition to directing the gaze to the 'isolated' remains of the Roman past (Baxa 2010: 81), the Via dell'Impero also dispersed it amidst them. In contrast to the Via del Mare, whose irregular, snaking path produced unexpected panoramas and constantly changing perspectives, the Via dell'Impero sliced its way through an open, relatively sparse landscape dotted by fragmented and often incongruous ruins. Therefore, in 1932 the zone between Piazza Venezia and the Colosseo may have appeared like a spatial container of the very essence of Fascist *romanità* in visual terms, but – in contrast to the Via del Mare – it failed to integrate the significant and extensive remains of the ancient city into the contemporary visible layer. As the expert committee of the General Directorate for Antiquities and Fine Arts noted, emphasis should better be placed on making the most of the antiquities already unearthed, displaying them in a dignified and instructive manner, rather than digging up more areas.[25]

In many ways, the focal point of the entire project was the avenue itself – traversing the vast archaeological zone and effectively being 'framed' by it in a visual narrative based on motion, not static contemplation of the

archaeological features. What the avenue lacked, however, was a strong *Fascist* legibility that communicated the historic significance of the regime's palingenetic agency in the city – new, eloquent markers that collapsed the distance in time between the 'first' and the 'third' Rome. Most of the ideas proposed at the time for the decoration of Via dell'Impero focused on adding such visual signposts: a set of twenty statues representing Roman emperors; or a series of sculptures dedicated to the provinces of the Roman Empire.[26] One further proposal that was discussed at length and seriously considered by the authorities involved an inscription taken from a twelfth-century travel guide (Colella 2008: 165) – 'Roma vetusta fui sed nunc nova Roma vocabor' ('I was the old Rome but now I will be called new Rome').[27] Meanwhile, between 1934 and 1936, plans for the construction of the new headquarters of the Fascist party (Palazzo del Littorio) on Via dell'Impero captured the imagination of the authorities, the architects, and the public (see Ch. 5). This landmark project – the boldest attempt to add a Fascist-era component to the avenue that would have altered dramatically the visual balance of its elements – convinced many that no definite decision about the final form of the avenue should be taken before the completion of the competition and the construction of the new edifice.[28]

Other kinds of 'embellishment' work along the Via dell'Impero continued to take place throughout the 1930s. Interventions on both sides of the street added a plethora of new features, such as access points to the antiquities, more elegant supporting or 'framing' structures, better enclosures, and lighting.[29] New walls decorated with fascist insignia appeared close to the Colosseo. A set of signposts in the form of small columns made from travertino marble dotted the avenue, featuring commemorative inscriptions that bore the names of the king Vittorio Emanuele III, Mussolini, and the governor Boncompagni Ludovisi. Then, on 21 April 1934, four **maps** were placed on one of the newly built framing walls of the new avenue (against the backdrop of the Basilica of Maxentius), chronicling the expansion of the Roman Empire from the foundation of the city to the maximum territory attained under the reign of Marcus Aurelius (Muñoz 1935: 219–21; Fig. 10). The importance that Mussolini attached to this particular project – both in propaganda and popular didactic terms – was underlined by his decision to entrust responsibility for the visual choices to Antonio Muñoz. What was merely a connotative message of continuity between the ancient Roman civilisation and Fascist Italy became blatantly denotative in October 1936, when a fifth map was added to the wall, showing the recently proclaimed Italian *impero* (Bottai 1936; see Fig. 38). Libya, Eritrea, Somalia, and of course Ethiopia (which had been invaded in October 1935 and annexed in June 1936) appeared shaded on the map.[30] Yet, the fifth map differed from the previous four in other ways too. Its framing was different, focusing on the Mediterranean, Africa, and the Middle East but cropping out anything north of the Alps, perhaps in an effort to illustrate in visual terms the notion that

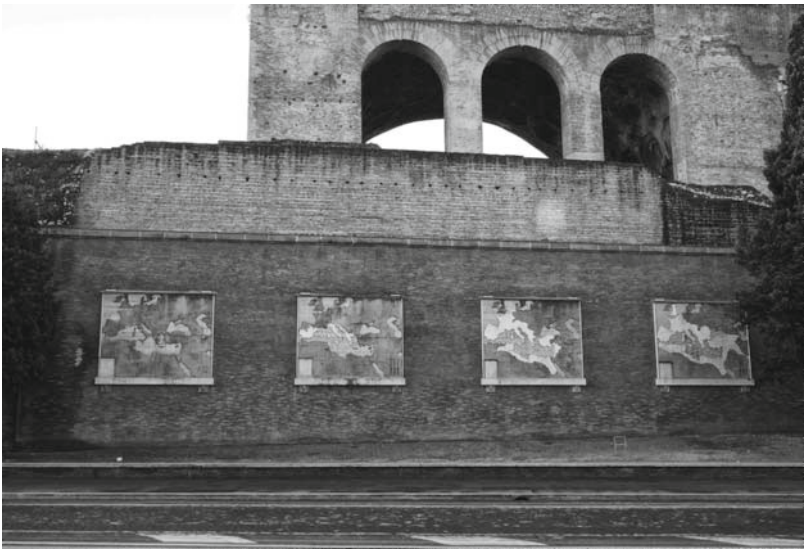


Figure 10 The four maps of the Roman Empire on Via dell'Impero, designed by Antonio Muñoz

Fascist Italy's further ambitions for 'living space' lay outside Europe (Hyde Minor 1999: 153–8). In addition, the decision to append a further illustration to an already symmetrical arrangement of the four earlier ones betrayed an intention to continue adding maps in the future, in the expectation that the contemporary Italian *impero* would continue to grow as a mirror image of the spectacular ancient Roman expansion illustrated in the sequence of the first four maps.

Although the original idea of extending the Via dell'Impero beyond its 1932 terminus at the Colosseo to the city walls until the Via Appia never materialised, Mussolini very soon spotted a new opportunity for 'joining the dots' between his two major avenue projects in the historic centre. In 1933 he entrusted Muñoz with the responsibility for enlarging the existing Via San Gregorio (Fig. 11.3) – a historic street that began in the corridor between the piazza of the Colosseo and the southern entrance to the Foro (just beyond the Arch of Constantine), skirted the southern slopes of Palatino hill, and reached the vast expanse of the **Circo Massimo** (Muñoz 1935: 214). Muñoz's project involved extensive demolitions of more recent buildings along both sides of the street in order to double its width. The new avenue connected the traffic flow with Via dell'Impero through an elliptical road that circumvented the oval of the Colosseo (Giovannoni 1937). It was (re)named **Via dei Trionfi** in an eloquent illustration of its intended function as a modern version of the imperial triumphal route and was

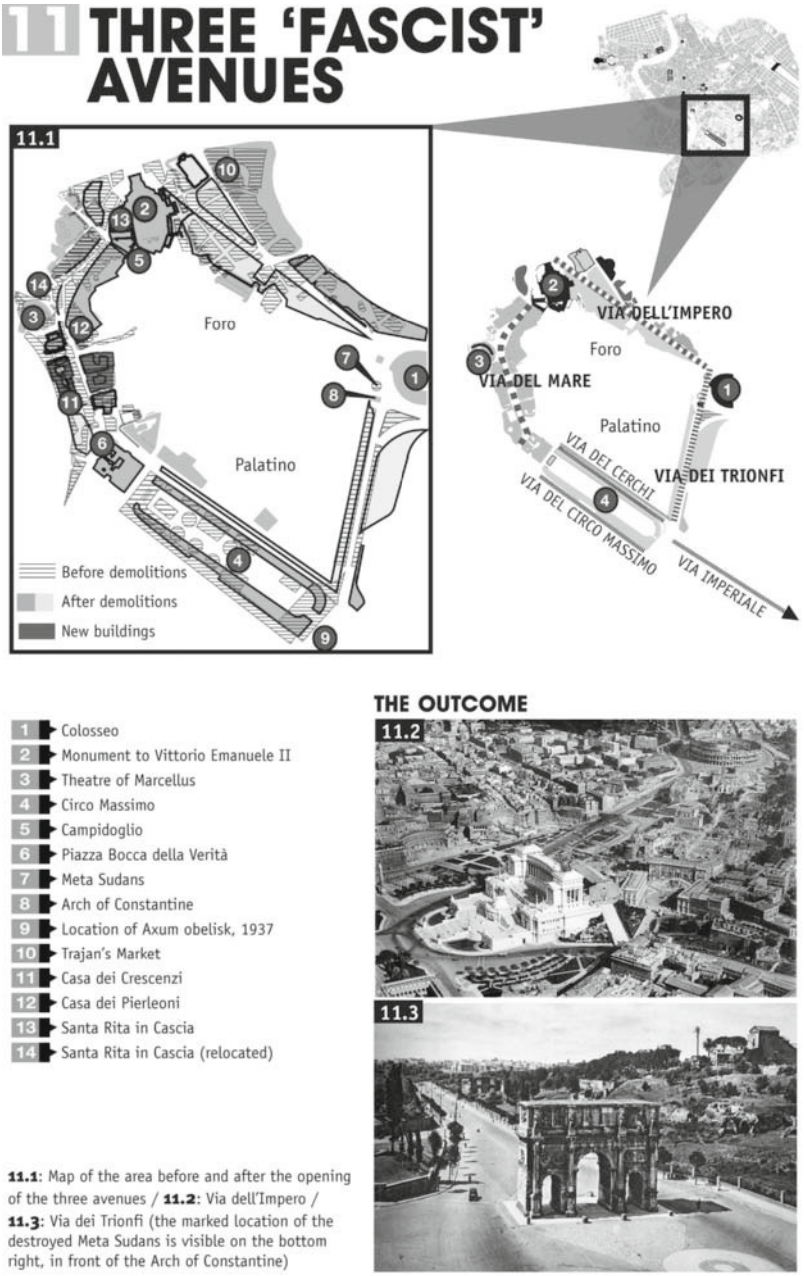


Figure 11 Diagram: the three Fascist avenues in the historic centre. **11.2** with the kind permission of © **Museo di Roma**, 'Veduta aerea del Vittoriano, dei Fori Imperiali e del Colosseo', AF 6701-03. **11.3** with the kind permission of © **Archivio di Etnografia e Storia Sociale, Regione Lombardia**, 'Roma. Via dei Trionfi – Arco di Costantino', Fondo Scrocchi, Album SCR_66, p. 33

inaugurated with a suitable military parade on 28 October 1934. During the excavations for the Via dei Trionfi and the 'systematisation' of the space around the Arch of Constantine, archaeologists researched two important remains in the area: the **Meta Sudans** (a ceremonial fountain erected by emperor Constantine in front of his own arch) and the pedestal of the (destroyed) colossal status of emperor Nero. Both were removed in 1936, as little more than irksome obstacles standing in the way of the new triumphal route that traversed the corridor between the Foro and the Colosseo before joining the Via dei Trionfi (Marlowe 2004: 49–51; Albertson 2001).[31]

And the domino did not stop there. During 1933–34 the area of the Circo Massimo, at the bottom of Via Dei Trionfi, was completely cleared from the assortment of houses and industrial buildings that occupied four-fifths of its surviving area.[32] Excavations already authorised back in 1924 were now carried out in the 'liberated' area and lasted until 1938 (Delli Santi 1928: 644).[33] In addition, a new street was opened, running along the side of the arena and Aventino hill and mirroring the (existing) **Via dei Cecchi** on the foot of the Palatino. The street, named **Via del Circo Massimo**, was inaugurated by Mussolini on 28 October 1934. Semi-elevated, it offered impressive vistas over the ('liberated' of course) remains of what used to be the largest open ceremonial space in ancient Rome (Kallis 2014a). But it also functioned as the final link between the three Fascist-era avenues in the historic centre: after the opening of the Via del Circo Massimo, the Fascist version of the triumphal march in the historic centre of Rome became a circular sequence of adjoining grand boulevards, meeting at the Piazza Bocca della Verità (Muñoz 1934). Three years later to the day, the Fascist authorities erected the **obelisk of Axum** (a high-profile trophy from the successful Italian invasion of Ethiopia, transported with great fanfare all the way to Rome) at the foot of Via dei Trionfi (Piazza Porta Capena) (Bracco 1983: 92).[34] Finally, on 28 October 1938 Mussolini inaugurated the first sector of the future **Via Imperiale**, running from the end of Via dei Trionfi along the Baths of Caracalla to the southern periphery. This avenue formed an integral part of the preparations for the 1942 Universal Exhibition (Esposizione Universale di Roma, E42 – see Ch. 8), linking the historic centre of Rome with the location of the new exhibition city in the southwestern periphery and along the road to Ostia (Corsetti 1939; Sicut 1939).[35]

The parallel histories of the Via del Mare, Via dell'Impero, and Via dei Trionfi illustrate the growing scope, boldness, and ambition of the Fascist appropriation of *romanità* in the historic centre of Rome. Demolitions expunged space from the multiple accretions of time and opened up a host of creative opportunities. They did not simply conserve and 'liberate' monuments but reintegrated them in new spatial-visual containers that denoted a strong symbolic synapsis between the Fascist present and the Roman past. The rubble of demolition was cherished as the symbolic

trademark of regeneration. The pickaxe was celebrated as an instrument of creative power – 'the sanitizer' of life (Bianchi 1930: 576), 'the benefactor' of the people of Rome (Mulè 1930: 232), and 'the best architect of our time'.[36] Whether in 'liberating' specific monuments or 'making space' for new enclosing spaces around them, the ceremonies of the *primo colpo di piccone* were first and foremost liturgies of a much wider cult of Fascist regeneration that invited and projected utopias onto the expunged space of the city (Kostof 1994; Kallis 2012: 41–2). Similarly, the carving of a new street involved an act of cathartic, order-producing violence over the city itself; an act of conquest that communicated a message of full ownership of the urban landscape. Together, these three major interventions in the historic centre of the capital formed a timeless triumphal circuit – a rapid, dramatic succession of vistas over splendid monuments of the Roman past with Piazza Venezia as its topographical and symbolic fulcrum. Through selective erasure and with very few and minor additive elements, Fascism reinvented space from within the urban palimpsest, forged new powerful connections between Fascism and *romanità*, disrupted the sequence of the urban components but also liberally erased (and reinvented) time itself.

The Mausoleum of Augustus and the Ara Pacis

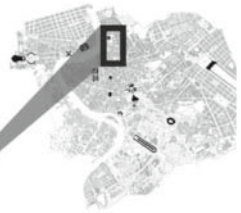
The strategy of disrupting and redacting the layers of Rome's palimpsest in order to engineer new visual, spatial, and symbolic relationships between past and present was practised with increasing boldness on other sites of the historic centre during the rest of the 1930s. The project of opening the **Via delle Botteghe Oscure**, linking the site of Largo Argentina with the Campidoglio, involved substantial demolitions but also some notable archaeological findings. The most significant discovery – the Theatre of Balbo, constructed in 13 BCE – was found submerged underneath a maze of medieval and Renaissance buildings and was excavated without disrupting the enclosing subsequent constructions. Across the street, however, demolitions of popular housing unearthed the remains of an extensive ancient temple that were considered important enough to be reinserted into the city's visible layer. There, at the corner of Via Celsa with the Via dell Botteghe Oscure, the three Romes were brought into an unexpected, visually incongruous but symbolically dramatic accommodation. Against the backdrop of a surviving nucleus of papal-era houses and a network of buttresses constructed in the 1930s in order to give structural integrity to the partly demolished block, the revealed ancient Roman ruins lay well below the contemporary level of the street and were framed by a complex of two newly constructed buildings in the typical official *stile littorio* of the late 1930s (Fig. 12).

It was another major project, however, that pushed this trend of disrupting the urban palimpsest and forging arbitrary spatio-temporal encounters to extremes. The 'liberation' of the **Mausoleum of Augustus** and the

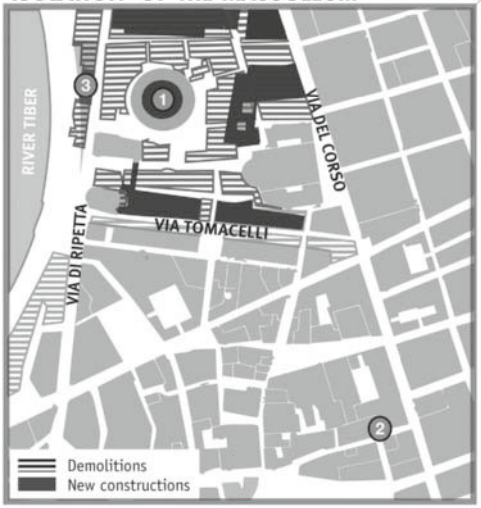
Figure 12 The 'systematised' Via delle Botteghe Oscure: three layers of Rome side by side

transfer of the newly excavated Ara Pacis (Altar of Peace) to the new Piazza Augusto Imperatore around it involved not only excavations, demolitions, and reconstructions but also an audacious technique of topographical relocation of an ancient, previously submerged, monument. The 'liberation' of the mausoleum and the excavation-reconstruction of Ara Pacis were initially conceived as separate components of the programme for the 1937–38 celebration of the two-thousandth anniversary of the emperor Augustus's birth on 23 September 63 BCE (Bimillenario di Augusto). The Fascist regime never squandered an opportunity to celebrate lavishly millenarian anniversaries – the Bimillenary of Virgil was observed in 1930, followed by another dedicated to Horatio (1935) (London 1999: 52; Cagnetta 1990). But the Bimillenary of Augustus supplied a privileged commemorative canvas for enacting a host of connections between (Roman) past and (Fascist) present. The anniversary also offered a genuine opportunity to recast the 'third Rome' as the cradle and continuous 'beacon' of a universal civilisation, emitting a deliberate message with multiple recipients, both within Italy and across the world. It constituted the pinnacle of Fascism's identification with *romanità* that had been given new meaning and impetus after the triumphant proclamation of the *impero* in May 1936. In addition, the focus on a particular personality as the kind of rare 'genius', embodying the spirit of an entire historical period, served the Fascist regime's growing investment in the propaganda image of the 'genius' of the Duce (Cagnetta 1976; Manacorda and Tamassia 1985: 195–205).

13 MAUSOLEUM OF AUGUSTUS



'ISOLATION' OF THE MAUSOLEUM



1 ▶ Mausoleum of Augustus
2 ▶ Original location of Ara Pacis
3 ▶ New position of Ara Pacis (1938)

DEMOLITIONS

13.1

THE PIAZZA AUGUSTO IMPERATORE

13.2

Figure 13 Diagram: Piazza Augusto Imperatore. **13.1** with the kind permission of © **Museo di Roma**, 'Demolizioni per la realizzazione di Piazza Augusto Imperatore', AF 20989. **13.2** with the kind permission of © **Archivio Cederna**, 1206.5 'Retrospettive', 'Roma Fotografie/Sventramenti'

The origins of the idea for the celebration of the 2000-year anniversary of Augustus's birth can be traced to the late 1920s. At the second congress of the Institute of Roman Studies (Istituto di Studi Romani, ISR) held in 1931, the expert on Roman archaeology Giulio Quirino Giglioli suggested the idea of an extensive programme of celebrations to commemorate the event. A student of Rodolfo Lanciani and an archaeologist who had largely made a name for himself during the Liberal period, Giglioli became one of the chief archaeological experts of the Fascist regime, and – along with Antonio Muñoz – an official authority on everything that involved the cult of *romanità*. His proposed list for the Bimillenary celebrations included a number of scientific and educational activities, such as a country-wide programme of excavations/restorations, conferences, special publications, and public exhibitions. Predictably, however, the celebrations would be centred on the connection between Augustus and Rome. Thus, the centrepiece of the anniversary was reserved for the capital, consisting of three, initially separate, projects. The first was the staging of a special Augustan Exhibition of Roman Civilisation (Mostra Augustea della Romanità, MAdR), which would be directed by Giglioli himself and was to remain open throughout the period of the Bimillenary celebrations (see Ch. 7). The second involved the reconfiguration of the area around the degraded Mausoleum of Augustus in Rome with a view to representing the monument in a more dignified and legible way. Finally, the occasion would be marked by the 'reconstruction' of Ara Pacis, consecrated in 9BCE in order to commemorate Augustus's military victories and the onset of *Pax Augusta* (Giglioli 1931). According to the original plan approved by Mussolini in 1934, everything had to be in place by 23 September 1937 (the official start of the year-long Bimillenary).[37]

Each of the two restoration projects had its own separate lineage in ideas and proposals that predated the Fascist period. The Mausoleum of Augustus was situated inside the Renaissance quarter of the city and showed its fair share of the 'ravages of time', already well documented and censured by Lanciani (1899: 192–3, 199). In addition, what remained of the original structure had been swallowed by a series of unplanned constructions (mostly houses, many of them directly attached to its external walls; a typical fate of previously neglected monuments of the Roman period across the city, such as the Theatre of Marcellus discussed above). To make matters worse, since the beginning of the twentieth century the Mausoleum had been used as an auditorium, with a new purpose-built layer and a roof grafted onto the surviving ancient structure. The first systematic ideas about the restoration of the monument and the reconfiguration of the area appeared in the PRG1909 (see Ch. 1) but were abandoned due to the complexity of the proposed topographical arrangement, particularly with regard to the considerable difference in height between the original level of the monument and the contemporary surface of the surrounding area. The zone of the mausoleum was included again in the

1925/26 Variante, with modest excavations carried out between 1926 and 1930 under the supervision of Giglioli himself and with vague plans to extend work on the outside of the monument (Insolera 2001: 116–18). A detailed proposal submitted by the architect Enrico Del Debbio envisaged a quiet square around the mausoleum, with vast open vistas and a veritable 'zone of silence' made possible by diverting transport through a tunnel. Such proposals, however, required extensive demolitions of housing in one of the most densely populated areas of the historic centre and were abandoned because of their cost and inability to come to an agreement with the proprietors. The area of the Mausoleum occupied a place of honour in Armando Brasini's abortive 1925 plan for the reorganisation of Rome's historic centre, as part of a long monumental avenue leading from there to the Pantheon and the Corso Vittorio Emanuele II (see Ch. 1).

The fate of the Mausoleum and its surrounding area was revisited in the PRG1931. The architect Vittorio Morpurgo designed the 'particular plan' for the zone and was placed in charge of its execution. Morpurgo's vision for the mausoleum and the new square surrounding it involved a space dominated by the 'liberated' ruin of Augustus's tomb at centre stage and 'framed' by a series of new constructions clad in travertino or brick in a toned-down architectural style that also evoked the classical narrative of *romanità*. In subsequent iterations, Morpurgo's plan changed to a more open and wide arrangement, with direct views from the side of the river (Cambedda and Tolomeo Speranza 1995: 93; Morpurgo 1937a, 1937b). Demolition work started in October 1934, with Mussolini giving the 'first strike of the pickaxe'[38] – and praising the project as both a landmark archaeological initiative and a decisive step towards improving public hygiene in the historic centre (*Opera* XXVI: 367; Muñoz 1938a: 491). All in all, the final project envisaged the demolition of more than 120 houses and the 'liberation' of a total area of 27,000 square metres around the mausoleum (Virgili 1995: 100).[39] Demolitions proceeded at a slow pace until well into 1938, causing constant delays and piling pressure on Morpurgo (Fig. 13.1).[40]

Ara Pacis, on the other hand, presented the authorities with an array of unprecedented problems. The monument lay in a ruinous state submerged under the foundations of a private building (**Palazzo Fiano** or **Almagià**) on **Via in Lucina**, as Lanciani (1899: 256) had indicated but was not in a position to confirm at the turn of the century. Thus, it was not clear to archaeological experts whether complete excavation was feasible in technical terms or whether the recovered remnants would permit a viable reconstruction of the monument. Furthermore, important fragments had been extracted from the monument in the past and were scattered in very different collections – from the Villa Medici and the Vatican Museums in Rome, to the Uffizi museum in Florence, the Louvre in Paris, and even a private collection in Austria (Lugli 1938). Lastly, even if the excavations were successful and the missing fragments repatriated, a reconstruction in situ was not an

option, given the absence of space in the monument's original location. Therefore, a potentially reconstructed Ara Pacis had to be either displayed in a museum or physically moved to another site.

All these problems had been well documented by the turn of the twentieth century, thanks primarily to the interest of an Austrian archaeologist, Eugen Petersen, who in the 1890s compiled the first systematic study of the remains (albeit with many misattributions). Petersen approached the Italian state in 1896 with his plan and seven years later elicited the official authorisation to proceed with his survey. Together with archaeologists Mariano Cannizzaro and Angiolo Pasqui he drafted the first coherent programme that involved both extensive excavations inside the foundations of Palazzo Fiano and ideas about a future reconstruction. Cannizzaro supervised the first phase of excavations that started in 1903 but was suspended a year later due to technical difficulties (Pasqui 1903; Cannizzaro 1907).[41] After the end of the First World War there was renewed interest in the resumption of the excavations. In December 1918 the President of the Piedmontese Society of Archaeology and Fine Arts, Oreste Mattirolo, presented a plan for the complete extraction and reconstruction of the monument, noting that such a project involving the 'crown of Roman civilization and power [was] a sacred duty' of the Italian state to itself and to the rest of the world.[42] By 1926, the then minister of Education Pietro Fedele was speaking of the need to expedite the return of the monument's fragments held in different museums across the country. In February 1929 the project received a much-needed boost with the decision to proceed with the necessary expropriations and provide guarantees to the owners of the Palazzo Fiano-Almagià, who since 1928 had renounced in favour of the state their rights over the fragments that lay amidst the foundations of their property.[43] The project, however, remained on paper without any formal commitment by the state authorities until the ISR entered the discussion with its programme of celebrations for the Bimillenary in the early 1930s. Under pressure from the institute, a special Committee for the Ara Pacis project was nominated and met in October 1934. By that time the fate of the reconstruction of Ara Pacis had become thematically linked to the programme of the Bimillenary of Augustus and thus invested with a sense of urgency, given the looming 1937–38 deadline for the celebrations.

The final step towards the complete fusion of the two projects was undertaken in early 1937. The director of the MAdR, Giglioli, and the president of the ISR, Carlo Galassi-Paluzzi, discussed the subject of the optimal location for the reconstructed Ara Pacis in a series of meetings between 1935 and 1937. It was Giglioli who suggested for the first time a possible spatial connection between the reconstructed Ara Pacis and the 'liberated' mausoleum. Among other options that included both museum (Museum of the Baths of Caracalla) and open-air display (Campidoglio, Via dell'Impero, Via dei Trionfi, Circo Massimo),[44] he also proposed the possibility of placing the

altar *inside* the restored mausoleum. The discussion divided the experts of the Ara Pacis committee. The idea of a museum presentation was supported strongly by the Ministry of Education and Giuseppe Moretti, the archaeologist put in charge of the entire process of the monument's reconstruction. By contrast, both Giglioli and Antonio Muñoz argued that Ara Pacis 'possessed a significance that was not simply archaeological … [and therefore found] the idea of a clinical presentation in a museum unacceptable'.[45] In the end, those advocating the open-air option won the argument. At this point, Mussolini's expressed preference for a spatial-visual connection between the altar and the mausoleum determined the outcome of the committee's deliberations: Morpurgo was asked to present a new version of his plan for the zone of the mausoleum that somehow included the Ara Pacis. Although Morpurgo initially suggested a mere exhibition of the fragments in an adjacent new building framing the square, the Duce once again intervened to demand the full reconstruction of the monument to the west of the mausoleum, adjacent to Via Ripetta and the river.

At last, in February 1937 the Council of Ministers authorised the resumption of the excavations in the foundations of Palazzo Fiano-Almagià, in tandem with a serious pursuit of the repatriation of the missing pieces from Florence, Paris, Vienna, and the Vatican. Time, however, was running out and there were growing doubts that the joint project of 'isolating' the mausoleum and transferring Ara Pacis to its new location could be completed in time. The deadline had to be moved from January 1938 to the latest possible date for the Bimillenary – the closing date of the celebrations on 23 September 1938.[46] In response to the enormous technical difficulties inherent in the excavation task, an extraordinary experiment took place that involved freezing of the water around the remnants of the monument in order to avoid the occurrence of deeper infiltration under Palazzo Fiano-Almagià, and a gradual process of demolition and reconstruction of the palazzo's foundations in order to safeguard the stability of the building during the excavation phase. The results were extremely satisfying, with the extraction of all remaining pieces completed by the end of 1937 (Moretti 1938: 482–4).

Meanwhile, the recovery of the documented missing fragments proceeded at an even slower pace, causing further delays to the project. The authorities of the Uffizi eventually obliged, preparing the requested fragments for transport to the National Roman Museum of Rome in late autumn 1937. As the pieces extracted from the foundations of the Palazzo Fiano-Almagià were also transported to the same location, and the process of restoration and reconstruction acquired the maximum possible international publicity, the pressure on the French, Viennese, and Vatican authorities for the return of fragments still in their possession intensified. The process of reconstruction at the National Roman Museum proceeded with meticulous attention to detail but also mounting delays and difficulties. But it was the looming

deadline of the Bimillenary that forced a series of further pragmatic revisions of the original plan. First, the Moretti team opted for a full reconstruction of the Ara Pacis with many added elements that would be produced by the archaeological experts on the basis of existing historical studies and drawings. Significant parts of the original monument had been lost altogether, necessitating educated hypotheses and many instances of artistic licence on part of the teams working on the project at the National Roman Museum under Moretti's guidance (Arthurs 2012: 72–4). Second, given the lengthy process of transporting fragments from their collections, both the Louvre and the Vatican museums agreed to send copies of the original fragments in their possession (Kallis 2011: 819–21). Moretti and his various sub-teams worked incessantly during the summer of 1938, commissioning pieces to complete the reconstruction at the shortest of notices, assembling elements from so many different sources at the museum, supervising numerous expert teams, and planning the details of the final transport.[47] Guglielmo Gatti designed a larger than originally anticipated set of pieces to complete the restoration, as did the designer Odoardo Ferretti and the architect Guido Caraffa, both of whom had worked in earlier excavations and restorations in the city's historic centre. Interest in the progress of the restoration intensified during the first half of 1938, marked by a series of high-profile visits to the museum by the king, the governor Piero Colonna, and a procession of ministers (Dolari 2010).

It took a final race against time to bring both elements of the project together – literally in this case.[48] In order to supervise the archaeological and architectural reconfiguration of the new Piazza di Augusto Imperatore, a new special committee was formed in June 1938, headed by the new minister of Education Giuseppe Bottai. The systematisation of the new square, the completion of its surrounding new buildings, and the organisation of the new street system around the mausoleum proceeded at a frenetic pace in August and early September 1938. At the same time, the transport of the Ara Pacis fragments to the new piazza and their reconstruction in situ, inside a glass-clad stand-alone building, proved a formidable task under such pressure of time. In the end, however, deadlines were met – just: the restored Mausoleum and the fully reconstructed/transported Ara Pacis were inaugurated on 23 September 1938 by Mussolini himself on the grounds of the newly 'liberated' and reconfigured Piazza Augusto Imperatore (Fig. 13.2), its new **pavilion** perfectly visible from the west side of the city (Fig. 14).[49] The meticulously choreographed inauguration ceremony was intended to be a suitably lavish consecration of a new 'palimpsestuous' space bearing the unmistakeable creative signature of Fascism. The square functioned as the visible threshold into a different dimension of time in which past, present, and future interpenetrated. This was arguably the most deliberately ambiguous of spaces manufactured by the Fascist regime in Rome's historic centre: neither a container of monuments in situ nor a

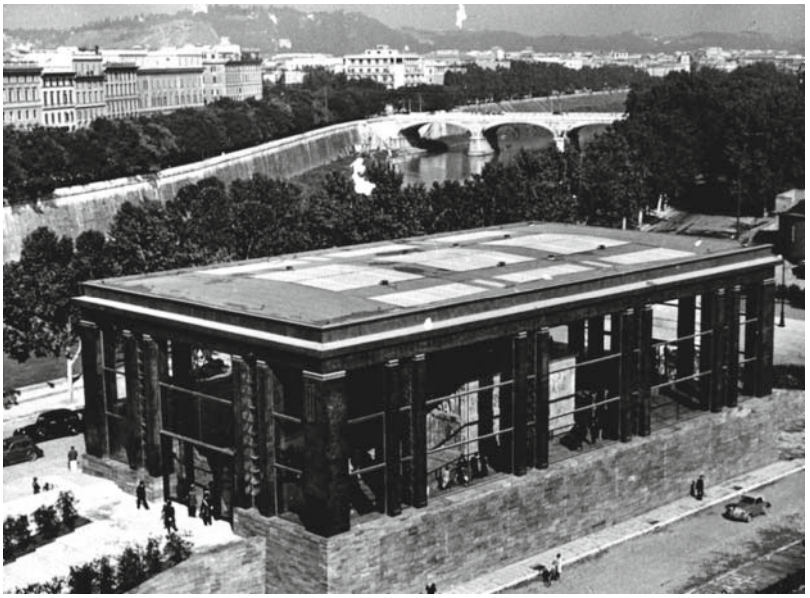


Figure 14 The pavilion for the reconstructed Ara Pacis on the new Piazza Augusto Imperatore. With the kind permission of © **Museo di Roma**, 'Ara Pacis sulla Piazza Augusto Imperatore', AF3799

construction *ex nihilo*, it offered the backdrop for the most scenic visual and symbolic enactment of *romanità* that purported to be authentic but was also aggressively mediated and inventive, 'straddl[ing] time and space, past and present, the realm of ideas and material culture' (Arthurs 2012: 3). The site was produced through liberally editing the urban palimpsest – subtracting components, erasing selective legacies of history, furnishing only modest, subtle additional 'frames' that nevertheless articulated very different relations between past and present. Unlike, however, all other similar projects carried out by the authorities during the two decades of Fascist rule, the new Piazza Augusto Imperatore was designed and assembled as a condenser of disparate spaces and layers into a new, *invented palimpsest*. It was not simply about staging the visual and symbolic synapsis between *romanità* and Fascism, the 'first' and the 'third' Romes, but also about communicating a deliberate personal association (Augustus–Mussolini) and articulating visually a new complex political narrative (mausoleum = empire, Ara Pacis = peace) – all on a single, heavily mediated 'palimpsestuous' location. The new piazza transformed itself into an 'other space', a heterotopia in Foucault's term (Ch. 6), in which the tomb of Augustus met for the first time with a monument that belonged to the same historical era, attributed to the same emperor, but had been transported from a different part of the

city and recreated 'as new' (Burdett 2000: 10–13). This 'other space' encapsulated a new sense of time-lessness – not in the sense of being emptied of all time but rather of being infused with a new quality of time that resolved the arbitrary tensions between past, present, and future. Deliberately visible, opulently presented, and demarcated by new constructions that attempted to supply new, authoritative legibility to that Fascist notion of '*romanità* of the modern', the new Piazza Augusto Imperatore functioned as a gateway to a new collective experience of time, with visitors-pilgrims ushered into a sacred dimension where conventional time and space were suspended. In this respect, the Piazza Augusto Imperatore project enacted a fuller, more aggressive appropriation of the myth of *romanità* in a way that no other similar Fascist-era intervention in the centre of Rome ever attempted.

On one of the newly constructed edifices framing the Piazza Augusto Imperatore, an **inscription** (still visible today; Fig. 15) leaves no doubts about the claimed authorship and ownership of the new site: *Mussolini dux … ad humanitatis mores aptis ornandum censuit …* ('Mussolini the Duce, demolishing the old narrow alleys, decreed [that this space] should be embellished with even more splendid streets, buildings, and temples befitting the character of humanity'). The burgeoning programme of archaeological, architectural, and topographical interventions on the remnants of the

Figure 15 The 1940 inscription on one of the newly constructed buildings framing Piazza Augusto Imperatore

'first' Rome created a radically new chronotope of *romanità* inside the capital that bore the unmistakeable marks of Fascist appropriation. Relatively limited in scope and seemingly deferential to the monuments of the ancient past, these interventions undertaken in the 1920s and 1930s nevertheless triggered a disproportionately wider Fascist infiltration and appropriation of the urban palimpsest. Gradually, the Fascist 'framing' of the fragments of *romanità* in the city became bolder – in function, spatial scope, and intention alike. At first, it involved specific monuments largely in isolation from each other, with the focus being on emptying space around them and thus producing a more immediate visual rapport with the contemporary observer. Starting from the late 1920s and gathering pace in the following decade, however, 'framing' extended to wider surrounding areas, linking existing 'isolation' projects (completed or underway) with an ever-expanding list of new ones in the form of a visual and spatial unfolding narrative. References to monuments were gradually replaced by the notion of 'systematisation' of 'zones' and then of entire sequences of such zones. Similarly, spaces emptied through demolition were integrated far more organically into large-scale urban planning, as receptacles of new Fascist constructions and points of visual or physical access to the 'isolated' monuments. Thus the Fascist strategy of 'framing' ceased to be about simply earmarking what was being 'framed'; instead it became a strategy of manufacturing new spatial and temporal relations between the elements that were being 'framed'. By authorising erasures, alterations, disruptions, additions, and arbitrary relocations of elements of the urban palimpsest, the Fascist authorities excavated and forged new stories from the archive of the city's past that communicated in the strongest possible sense the conquest of Rome's time and space.

4
Fascism and the 'City of the Popes'

The 'Roman Question' and the Difficult Road to 'Reconciliation'

In 1933, *Anno XI* of the new Fascist calendar, Rome was still basking in the glory of the spectacular celebrations for the tenth anniversary of the 'March on Rome'. Numerous visitors were still crossing the entrance of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni to see the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (see Ch. 7), the centrepiece of the festivities. In the historic centre of the city, inhabitants and visitors were enjoying the spectacular display of Roman ruins, strolling or driving along the recently inaugurated avenues of Via dell'Impero and Via del Mare (Ch. 3). In fact, the entire capital was beaming with energy: new construction projects were underway in the centre and the periphery, while many more ambitious ideas that formed part of the PRG1931 were on the horizon.

Anno XI, however, also witnessed a spectacular Jubilee celebration, organised by the Catholic Church to mark the 1900th anniversary of Christ's passion (Bosworth 2010). Pope Pius XI had taken this decision in spite of the long-standing tradition of holding Jubilee celebrations at 25-year intervals. As the Vatican had already observed another, rather subdued Jubilee in 1925, and held a 'sacerdotal' Jubilee in 1929 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the pope's investiture, the decision to announce a third such celebration within a period of just eight years was without precedent in the history of the Catholic Church (Casmirri 2003: 114–15).

Of course, so much had changed between 1925 and 1933. On 11 February 1929, after years of complex and far from uncontroversial negotiations, Mussolini and Pope Pius XI signed a series of accords at the sumptuous Lateran palace that put an end to nearly six decades of bitter conflict surrounding the question of sovereignty over the city of Rome – the so-called 'Roman Question' (Ch. 1). The signing of the Lateran accords had thus transformed the occasion of the 1929 sacerdotal Jubilee into a celebration of the Vatican church's re-established sovereignty and international standing,

as well as of the purported restoration of social harmony across Italy, after years of bitter internal division. It was also the source of a new discourse of *reconciliation* between state and church that paid tribute to the two leaders who had set aside their differences to resolve the vexing 'Roman Question'.

The 1933 special Jubilee was marked by a show of pageantry that had not been seen in the city for more than a century and would have been unimaginable even four years earlier (Bosworth 2010: 447). It marked a year of pilgrimage (Easter 1933–Easter 1934), shortly after the celebrations of the Fascist *Decennale* that had seen the Fascist regime portraying itself as a worthy guardian of the millenarian patrimony of Rome. Its lavishness contrasted sharply with the two preceding Jubilees (1900 and 1925) that had been relatively subdued affairs. The Catholic Church in Rome had not held Jubilee celebrations in either 1850 (following the revolutionary upheaval of 1849) or 1875 (when the trauma of 1870 was still too recent). In 1900, however, Pope Leo XIII decided that, in spite of the ongoing conflict between state and church, the Jubilee year would be observed according to custom, after a lapse of 75 years. The 1900 event was unsurprisingly muted from an organisational point of view. It was also met with unabated hostility by anti-clerical forces. An alternative 'secular' Jubilee and 'pilgrimage' organised by opponents of the church unfolded as a relatively minor aside to the religious mainstay, exposing two very different, bitterly opposed imagined geographies of the city that still co-existed on the same space of the modern capital. It involved 'pilgrimage' to four alternative 'sacred' locations – the Porta Pia, the Pantheon, Gianicolo hill, and the Campidoglio – all with blatant anti-church connotations. At the Pantheon, the alternative 'pilgrimage' involved paying tribute to the tomb of the king of Italian unification, Vittorio Emanuele II, and to the creative genius of the Roman Empire, whose crowning achievement the austere, enduring volume of the Pantheon was. At the Campidoglio, the tribute involved the 'sacred' hill of the ancient city and the fourteenth-century anti-clerical figure of Cola di Rienzo, whose statue and monument had been erected there shortly after the 1870 annexation of Rome.

Twenty-five years later, Pius XI marked the beginning of the Jubilee year in a very different political and social climate. Relations between state and church had improved significantly in the years leading up to 1925, even if the 'Roman Question' remained formally unresolved. Meanwhile, Italy was governed by a very different kind of political leader since 1922 – more radical and less predictable, heading a party with strong anti-clerical sentiment and associations with violence, but also presiding over a government that evangelised the restoration of internal order and unity after years of social and political strife. In contrast to the 1900 Jubilee, this time the city's authorities proved especially accommodating to the Vatican requirements for the 1925 Anno Sancto, taking active steps towards the improvement of access and public services for the benefit of the religious visitors

(Czarniawska-Joerges, Mazza, and Pipan 2001: 81–2; Militello, 1925). For the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who converged on St Peter's basilica in 1925, Rome remained a 'sacred city', the universal capital of Christianity, and the millenarian seat of a global spiritual kingdom (Carassai 1925: 127–9). There would be far fewer anti-clerical provocations in 1925 when compared to the polarised atmosphere of the 1900 event. The state, the municipal administration, and the church had learnt a lot about accommodation in the intervening quarter-century between 1900 and 1925.

Yet the city that Mussolini and his followers had symbolically conquered back in October 1922 was still a visibly truncated one. The 'second Rome' remained a powerful, yet refractory presence inside the capital. For over fifty years, it had co-existed with the national capital in an awkward, ill-tempered, and often hostile arrangement alongside the secular national capital – diminished and isolated but defiant. The prolonged clash of the two sovereignties had been inscribed spatially at the heart of the city, generating gaping grey zones that were always rife with potential contestation. Rome continued to have two symbolic 'centres' (a new civic one around Piazza Venezia and the Monument to Vittorio Emanuele II; and another, very different one around St Peter's basilica) mirroring the bitter contest of sovereignties and versions of history. The first three regulatory plans for the fledgling Italian capital (1873, 1883, 1909 – Ch. 1) delivered significant transformations across the city; yet the spiritual and topographical heart of the 'second Rome' – the Vatican zone that had grown over the centuries around St Peter's basilica – remained untouched by the chorus of demolitions and embellishments that continued to unfold across the rest of the city, as state and city authorities refrained from implementing significant urban changes in the area. This inadvertently reproduced the 'Roman Question' as a topographical anomaly on the contemporary city's visible layer.

But the 'Roman Question' involved much more than formal exercise of dominion over territory and people; it was also about ownership of the city's symbolic legacy, in place but also in time (Arthurs 2012: 41–2). In essence, this was an acrimonious and protracted conflict between two very different narratives of *exclusive* historical entitlement to the city of Rome. The post-unification Italian state saw the Vatican church as a mere custodian and transmitter of Rome's millenarian treasures and myths, whose creative role in history – important though it was in centuries bygone – had expired. The church, on the other hand, exalted Christianity as the universalising force that gave a unique and enduring meaning to the city through the centuries and continued to underpin it spiritually. The post-1870 battle for sovereignty over the city of Rome involved a bitter dispute over the definition of the meaning of 'Roman-ness' as a reservoir of myths with contemporary resonance. Ironically, neither side questioned the premise that history had a unique and momentous relation with the space of the city. 'Roman-ness' was not simply an abstract receptacle of universalist values but one that

drew its special enduring power from its millennia-long synapsis with the geographic space of the city. What bitterly divided church and state was their differing narratives regarding the historical indebtedness of the contemporary city. For the church it was religion that had made Rome a mighty universalist force; for its secular opponents it was the diachronic (Latin) values that were forged during the centuries of the Roman Empire and continued to animate the city's special role in history through subsequent millennia.

This fierce battle for exclusivity over Rome had brought state and church into a contest over the same – physical and symbolic – real estate. The 21 April anniversary (the city's foundation by Romulus and Remus, known as Natale di Roma) provided a symbolic example of this. The observance of the anniversary had begun in 1834, courtesy of the activities of the Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia (Bosworth 2011: 78–9) under the papacy of Gregory XVI. The occasion continued to be marked by Gregory's successor, Pius IX, who tapped even more decidedly into the city's ancient history and related sites. The celebration of 1847, observed with uncharacteristic sumptuousness (Spada 1868 I: 207), was followed by a very different kind of event held on the grounds of the Foro on 21 April 1849, during the short-lived Roman Republic. The same historical occasion supplied symbolic substance to two fiercely opposed versions of Rome's history and significance: while in 1847 emphasis was on the city's universalist mission of leading humanity into spiritual salvation, in 1849 the Natale di Roma was appropriated by revolutionary nationalism and anti-clericalism in bitter opposition to the centuries-long rule of the papacy. The location for the 1849 event was deliberately shifted to the Colosseo (in previous years the anniversary involved mostly banquets in prominent Roman villas) and culminated in a solemn procession through the ruined Foro that brought the assembled crowd to the Campidoglio (Giardina and Vauchez 2000: 173–4). Upon the restoration of papal rule over Rome in 1850, the anniversary was revived by Pius IX and continued to be observed yearly by the papal authorities until months before the annexation of the city into the kingdom in 1870. Appropriated by the post-unification state authorities as an anniversary dedicated to *national* historic and cultural events, the post-1870 celebrations for the Natale di Roma coincided with a series of symbolic gestures, such as the inauguration of important public works across the city and tributes to such popular anti-clerical figures as Galileo Galilei and Giordano Bruno (Kirk 2011: 113–15; Bosworth 2011: 109–12).

By contrast, the anniversary of the capture of Rome by Italian troops on 20 September 1870 involved not only symbolic contestation but a powerful and raw anti-clerical memory. The marking of the occasion offered multiple opportunities for publicly celebrating the victory of the state over the church (Porciani 2012: 87–8). The twenty-fifth anniversary in 1895 was the first to be fully celebrated as a *national* event (Tobia 1991: 169). The then

prime minister Francesco Crispi inaugurated a monument to Garibaldi and Cavour on Gianicolo hill, uncomfortably close to the Vatican complex (Francescangeli 1997; Bosworth 2011: 83–7). Fifteen years later, the then mayor of Rome Ernesto Nathan, heading a progressive but strongly anti-clerical administration, used the 1910 anniversary to fan the flames of the 'Roman Question'. He spoke of 1870 as a glorious victory against 'another Rome … [resembling] the embalmed cadavers of [ancient] Egypt, fortress of dogma … [determined] to perpetuate the reign of ignorance' (Iozzelli 1985: 304–5; Bosworth 2011: 144–5). The marking of the fiftieth anniversary in 1920, on the other hand, was somewhat less polemical, setting the tone for the gradual rapprochement between state and church that would deliver the compromise agreement nine years later (Fumagalli 1989: 298).

Even the burial of the two protagonists of the 'Roman Question' forced the bitter memories of 1870 back to the fore. The funeral of Vittorio Emanuele II in 1878 turned out to be a peaceful but not uncontroversial affair. The Vatican authorities refused to grant permission to intern the monarch in one of the major basilicas according to his original wishes. They did, however, allow for the body of the king to be entombed inside the Pantheon – not only one of the most cherished monuments of the Roman period but also a church since the seventh century. By contrast, the reburial of Pius IX's body (he too had died in 1878, barely a month after the king, his body provisionally placed inside the grotto of St Peter's cathedral) in the basilica of San Lorenzo Outside the Walls three years later provoked violent anti-clerical demonstrations and had bitter recriminations for both sides (Kertzer 2006: 179–97). The drama in the very early hours of 13 July 1881 unfolded across a route that led from St Peter's basilica, via the **Borghi**, then across the river and to the east, through the city's Renaissance quarter and Piazza Venezia, along the newly opened Via Nazionale, and finally past the railway station, traversing the San Lorenzo quarter before crossing the walls and arriving at the burial site. Most parts of that route had either already been implicated in the battle of spatial ownership or were soon to be. The Borghi neighbourhood would live precariously on the cusp of demolition until the 1930s. The itinerary across the city's Renaissance quarter up to Piazza Venezia would soon be implicated in discussions for the carving of a new street (Corso Vittorio Emanuele II) that was part of a strategy of stamping the memory of the Savoy dynasty on the topographical core of the capital. At the foot of the Campidoglio, adjacent to Piazza Venezia, the subsequent construction of the Monument to Vittorio Emanuele II saw religious buildings and entire residential quarters reduced to rubble. Further along, the opening of Via Nazionale in the 1880s as the first post-unification main avenue at the heart of Rome, connecting the railway station with the heart of the historic centre, had involved extensive demolitions along the way, including a number of churches.

Nevertheless, the hostility of state officials to the Catholic Church and the anti-clericalism of large sections of the population seemed to co-exist with a renewed appreciation of the medieval and Renaissance cultural heritage of the Italian peninsula. The chronological categories of *medioevo* and *rinascimento* represented different components of an otherwise continuous historical imaginary that was invaluable to the Italian kingdom in the first decades of its existence (Beales and Biagini 2002: 8). Although Rome had been eclipsed during this period by other cities (notably Florence but also other cities in Tuscany and elsewhere in the north), such an appreciation proved a highly convenient strategy for appropriating selectively the 'second Rome' while minimising its vexing papal associations. Francesco Crispi had made that clear in the 1890s when he spoke of a 'synthesis [in Rome] of two eras, one greater than the other', that reminded contemporary Italians of the momentous task to prove themselves worthy of this historical heritage (in Kirk 2011: 103). In his reference to this shared *Italian* past, he carefully edited out the role of the popes, focusing more on the civic traditions of the medieval and Renaissance city-states. Even when referring to the 'second Rome', the role of the papacy was acknowledged on the spiritual level but criticised or ignored on the temporal one.

The rulers of Liberal Italy saw no contradiction in this very selective appropriation of medieval and Renaissance historical legacies *without* or even *against* the popes. The construction of the new **Palace of Justice** (Palazzo di Giustizia) between 1888 and 1910 marked the first official test for such an appropriation. The chosen location – on the left bank of the city, just north of the Vatican complex – underlined the intention of the Liberal regime to contest the memories of papal temporal (and juridical in this case) domination over the city by erecting a monument to the primacy of the Italian state in an area that still retained its liminal topographical status, betwixt the bitter clashes of the Roman Question. When it came to the architectural design, a competition was announced that produced a range of aesthetic solutions, ranging from clear emulations of ecclesiastical features to historicist articulations of the Renaissance and baroque secular architecture of the Italian peninsula. Predictably, it was the latter that the judging committee chose over the former, awarding the construction of the palace to the Perugian Guglielmo Calderini (Kirk 2006b: 100–1). The new building, situated on the side of a new piazza dedicated to Cavour, provided an eloquent reminder that there *was* a *usable* 'second Rome' that post-Risorgimental Italy could proudly appropriate while at the same time emphatically rejecting its papal temporal associations.

Nevertheless, over the years, the rulers of the national capital had started to forge an accommodation of sorts with the guardians of the 'second Rome', in spite of the pervasive anti-clerical sentiment of the post-1870 period and the divisive backdrop of the 'Roman Question' until 1929. State and city

authorities had gradually come to realise that the 'Rome of the popes' was an awkward, often hostile, but also potentially usable resource for their efforts to revive the modern (national and international) mythology of the city. Even at its most antagonistic, the attitude of Liberal authorities vis-à-vis both the papal history of the city and its most cherished monuments gradually developed a pragmatism that set the foundations for an eventual accommodation. On and around the Campidoglio, which became the new symbolic 'centre' of the national capital, the discordant historical imaginaries of the city clashed symbolically – and found a de facto way to co-exist: the ancient mythology of the city of Romulus and Remus at the nearby Palatino hill; the glories of the imperial capital epitomised by the remains of the Foro; the impressive monuments of medieval and Renaissance Christianity on the Campidoglio hill as a reminder of its enduring power over the centuries; the memories of medieval and modern anti-clerical republicanism captured by the recently erected statue of Cola di Rienzo; finally, the consecration of an 'Italian' national history and the celebration of the Savoy monarchy, both embodied in the Vittoriano. Meanwhile, across the river, the towering basilica of St Peter with its Vatican adjunct seemed to co-exist with the ancient (but repurposed and remodelled in medieval times) Mausoleum of Hadrian (**Castel Sant'Angelo**) and the new Palace of Justice, symbol of the national capital. In this overloaded spatial container, Fascism also added its own historical claim and eventually subsumed, selectively as ever, the discordant historical narratives into its own version of the 'third Rome'.

The Fascist Appropriation of the 'Second Rome'

In December 1925, at a solemn ceremony that took place on the Campidoglio, Mussolini introduced the first appointed governor of Rome, Filippo Cremonesi, with a powerful message of intent: 'within five years', he stressed, 'Rome must appear marvellous to all the people of the world; vast, ordered, powerful, as she was in the times of the first empire of Augustus'. The 'third Rome', the Duce continued, must reappear over the hills and along the river, restored to its full glory as the capital of two marvellous civilisations – one classical and the other 'Christian' (*Opera* XXII: 48). The Fascist discourse of the 'third Rome' confirmed a long-term trend in the symbolic representation of the city as both the beacon of Italian unity and the source of a diachronic universality. It was precisely this function of unity that necessitated, in the eyes of the Duce, the integration of the 'second' city (the 'Rome of the popes') into the political, symbolic, but also topographical narratives of the 'third Rome', as part of Fascism's own historic legitimisation (Giardina and Vauchez 2000: 212–95).

The Fascist regime, like its Liberal predecessors, practised restoration of medieval and Renaissance heritage as a means of recapturing its 'authentic' form by editing out subsequent modifications and erasing the signs of time.

The significance of this heritage as living evidence of the enduring qualities of *italianità* was as indispensable to Fascism as it had been to the Liberal state-builders of the post-Risorgimento period. Yet, as Medina Lasansky has shown, gradually the Fascist regime asserted an unprecedented level of centralised dominion over Italy's medieval-Renaissance heritage (Lasansky 2004: 11–14). The trope of 'authenticity' that underpinned these restorations belied the intention of ideological appropriation. In various locations across the country (but primarily across Tuscany), the Fascist regime created instances of real-life re-enactment of a medieval past that served both in-situ mass cultural consumption and ideological narratives of a putatively diachronic national identity (Lasansky 2004: 253–8). The newly created Centro di Studi sul Rinascimento was inaugurated in Florence in 1937 under the directorship of Giovanni Papini, in recognition of the city's symbolic status as the cradle and creative hub of the Renaissance. In the following year, when Adolf Hitler visited Florence as part of his official trip to Italy (see Ch. 8), he was exposed to a dizzying medieval- and Renaissance-era spectacle inside the city, just as he had been greeted with an extravagant display of *romanità* during his sojourn in Rome.

Medieval and Renaissance heritage also dotted Rome's palimpsest; but it was truncated, largely eclipsed by the city's ancient ruins, and wrapped in direct political controversy as a result of the 'Roman Question'. The architect Antonio Muñoz oversaw the 'restoration' of a series of medieval structures – mostly churches such as **San Giorgio in Velabro** and **Santa Sabina** (Muñoz 1938b) but also surviving medieval towers in the historic centre, such as the **Torre dei Conti** or the **Torre delle Milizie** (Bellanca 2003: 30, 280). Muñoz's approach to restoration typically rested on the principle of recuperating the 'authentic' form and appearance of the building by stripping down subsequent layers of modification and by completing – structurally and stylistically – the building through the addition of new, visually distinguishable materials. His work derived from an already established practice in Rome (Dyson 2006: 177). The golden standard of restoring early medieval churches was considered to be the work carried out by Virginio Vespignagi on Santa Maria in Trastevere and San Pietro in Vincoli; and by Andrea Busiri Vico on San Atanasio dei Greci – all in the course of the 1870s. In 1894–99, Giovanni Battista Giovenale altered one of the earliest churches, Santa Maria in Cosmedin on **Piazza Bocca della Verità**, by removing its baroque-era facade to reveal the earlier layer, which he subsequently restored and completed (Racheli 2000: 46–8).

But the 'second Rome' was more than just individual monuments of historical and/or religious significance; it also involved an entire topographical and anthropological layer that had developed in a piecemeal manner over the course of many centuries and formed a distinct presence on the city's modern visible layer. Over the centuries of papal rule the city had expanded through a series of new neighbourhoods and quarters that reflected the

qualities of pre-modern urban growth – organic, largely unplanned, tightly knit, teeming with life, and increasingly deemed as either unsightly or unsuitable for the requirements of modern living. These quarters had partly been built over earlier urban layers and partly enveloped them, producing bizarrely incongruous but also fascinating combinations of palimpsestic topography and stratigraphy. Every intervention inside the historic centre necessitated prolonged discussions and difficult choices with regard to what to preserve and what (and how much) to sacrifice. When it came, however, to a clash of priorities between upgrading the appearance of ancient monuments and preserving the picturesque elements of this humble 'second Rome', with few exceptions the former trumped the latter. In the areas of extensive demolition carried out in the late 1920s (principally around Piazza Venezia) numerous churches were ruthlessly edited out of the cityscape. Even when far-from-humble religious buildings stood in the way of Fascist 'systematisation' plans, they were often sacrificed. The complex of San Nicola Cesarini in the archaeological zone of Largo Argentina was destroyed during the excavations of the late 1920s (see Ch. 3). A similar fate awaited the small church of Sant Andrea in Vincis, near Piazza Montanara.[50] **Santa Rita da Cascia** in Campitelli, the seventeenth-century church designed by Carlo Fontana to the left of the bottom of the staircase that led to Santa Maria in Aracoeli, next to the Campidoglio, disappeared along with the entire quarter that surrounded it in 1928–30. What is more, the demolition of the church had been authorised in spite of the advice of an expert committee that had been set up back in 1920 and had suggested a sensitive preservation of selective ambiental qualities of the entire area around the Campidoglio (Affanni 2000; Vannelli 1998: 160).

The church of Santa Rita da Cascia was eventually reconstructed from its original stonework in a new location nearby, at the beginning of Via Montanara, just off the 'liberated' Theatre of Marcellus, in 1938–40. The campaign for the reconstruction of the church was led by Gustavo Giovannoni, who had argued publicly and consistently in favour of its preservation (Giovannoni 1929). For Giovannoni, the rescue of original structures from the urban past was hugely significant – both as a matter of rescuing important monuments from all periods and as a strategy for preserving the character and visual record of entire neighbourhoods, regardless of the individual artistic significance of particular structures. With his theory of *diradamento* (see Ch. 1), Giovannoni championed the more sensitive principles of restoration and preservation that shaped the 1931 Carta del Restauro, produced by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (Glendinning 2013: 199–206). He was particularly interested in, and wrote extensively on, the fate of the city's extensive Renaissance quarter that occupied an extensive area to the north and west of Piazza Venezia. As a densely populated, chaotic old quarter, with unhygienic pockets and difficult access, this area of the historic centre had attracted the attention of

urban planners ever since the late nineteenth century. The perceived need to integrate the quarter into the city's traffic network and to improve living conditions inside it often produced plans for extensive demolitions that, in Giovannoni's eyes, would jeopardise the ambiental and anthropological character of the affected neighbourhoods. For him, 'chirurgical' demolitions were necessary to reveal the original urban tissue of old quarters and make them more suitable for modern life; but emphasis should be placed on preserving as much of the old city's intimacy, through structural interventions of 'nude simplicity' and by resisting the temptation of imposing a new topographical or architectural order to old urban elements (Sabatino 2012: 70–2; Racheli 2000: 105–12).

In the end, Giovannoni towed the regime's line with regard to demolitions necessitated by the opening of new roads or by the 'isolation' of important monuments. While he continued to object to particular ideas and projects involving the wholesale destruction of 'picturesque' quarters, he defended demolitions as a kind of lesser evil when they enhanced the aesthetic qualities of the city as a whole and improved the viability of the historic centre. At any rate, by the early 1930s it had become clear that Mussolini had little time or respect for ambientalist sensitivities and the values of the historical 'picturesque'. In one of his oft-quoted speeches to the Senate in March 1932, the Duce spoke in no uncertain terms about the future of these quarters:

> the monuments, Gentlemen, is one thing, the ruins is another, and the picturesque and so-called 'local colour' is another … All this grim picturesque is entrusted to its Majesty the pickaxe; all this picturesque is destined to vanish, and must vanish, in the name of decency, of hygiene and … of the beauty of the city. (*Opera* XXV: 86)

As the Fascist interventions across the historic centre of Rome steadily gathered momentum in the 1930s, reaching deeper and deeper into the city's old popular neighbourhoods, Giovannoni's counsel against insensitive interventions that threatened the topographical integrity of the 'second Rome' was being increasingly ignored (Fano 1974: 36–48). In 1936–38, the Fascist authorities embarked on a major project of 'systematisation' on the northern and eastern side of Piazza Navona, at the heart of the city's Renaissance quarter. The construction of the new **Corso del Rinascimento** involved the construction of a wider street running from the church of Sant'Andrea della Valle on Corso Vittorio Emanuele II north, skirting the baroque square until it connected with Via Zanardelli and led to the Palazzo di Giustizia on the other side of the river. The project was assigned to Arnaldo Foschini and bears his unmistakeable visual signature, courtesy of a complex of modern buildings that lined the southern and eastern side of the street, with the **Palazzo INA** prominent on the southern tip (Kostoff 1973: 32; Fig. 16).[51] The Corso del Rinascimento was the only completed segment of a much

Figure 16 Palazzo INA and Corso del Rinascimento (Arnaldo Foschini)

wider project that involved cutting a semi-regular vehicular vertical path across Rome's Renaissance quarter, leading all the way to Trastevere on the left side of the river. The street's semi-rectilinear shape was made possible after extensive demolitions and reconstructions along two destroyed narrow streets, including a building at the northernmost section of Piazza Navona that was sacrificed (and then partly reconstructed) in order to reveal the remnants of the Roman Domitian circus that lay underneath the square. In addition to numerous houses that were destroyed in the process of opening the new street, other important buildings had to undergo modifications, including the sixteenth-century church of San Giacomo dei Spagnoli, whose transept and apse were shaved off to make way for the new street (Cecchelli 1936; Villani 2012: 226–8).[52]

Although such projects that affected buildings of the 'second Rome' and parts of the city's 'picturesque' old residential quarters had been possible even before 1929 (and some were carried out in the 1920s or even earlier), the signing of the Lateran Accords expanded dramatically the opportunities for intervention in the 'city of the popes'. The agreement signed by Mussolini and Pius XI granted the Fascist regime unprecedented access to a treasure chest of powerful myths about the city that were of critical significance for its emerging discourse of Fascist universality (see Ch. 8). It unlocked, at least in principle, previously sensitive or even inaccessible areas to urban planners and opened the way for the integration of the 'second Rome' into the narrative of the national capital under the banner of reconciliation.

Once again, architecture captured and expressed the essence of the 1929 historic accommodation beyond its strict political context. The construction

of a new basilica, dedicated to Sacred Heart of Christ the Redeemer (Sacro Cuore di Cristo il Re) in the post-1870 neighbourhood around Piazza d'Armi northeast of the Vatican, rehearsed a bold stylistic fusion in ecclesiastical architecture between traditional and modernist elements that would set the tone for other similar projects in the 1930s. The church had originally been commissioned as a temple dedicated to peace, commemorating the dead of the First World War. Marcello Piacentini produced a design for the building in 1920 according to a historicist style that referenced the ubiquitous Roman baroque and echoed the architectonic elements of Michelangelo's dome for St Peter's basilica. However, work had not proceeded much by 1929, when the new spirit of state–church relations opened the way for a radical overhaul of the original design. Piacentini then produced a second, very different plan, breaking with the revivalist canon of church architecture in Rome and subsuming powerful insights from Italian *razionalismo* that had gained prominence during the late 1920s (Ch. 2). The church was completed and inaugurated in 1934, infused with a kind of classicist simplicity (especially its facade that took direct cues from an ancient Roman triumphal arch) that set it apart from any other similar building inside Rome (Piacentini, Prandi, and Zambetti 1961; Pisani 1994; Scarrocchia 1999: 58–9). Soon afterwards the groundbreaking design by Piacentini inspired other architects to build on the new modernist style of ecclesiastical architecture. The 'new cities' (*nuove città*) of the Pontine Marshes (Ch. 6) provided a new backdrop for articulating the new relations between state, church, and modern society in both aesthetic and spatial terms. Especially in the new model-city of Sabaudia, the **church of Santissima Annunziata** (designed by Gino Cancellotti, Eugenio Montuori, Luigi Piccinato, and Alfredo Scalpelli in 1934–35; Fig. 17) echoed Piacentini's earlier stylistic experiment and was widely praised as an even bolder synthesis of traditional spiritual function with a modernist functional form. In fact, both the design and the topographical arrangement of the church complex within the centre of Sabaudia communicated the new pattern of accommodation between civil and religious authority that the 1929 Lateran pacts symbolised. The church complex formed a second centre to the city, parallel and complementary to the civic hub dominated by the town hall and an assortment of new civic buildings. The (Fascist) state and the Catholic Church could now co-exist, harmoniously in theory, even in the context of the most ideologically driven expression of Fascist urban planning in the 1930s.

The new spirit of historic 'reconciliation', however, was destined to be celebrated (and tested) on the most contentious ground of the 'Roman Question' itself – in front of the basilica of St Peter at the heart of the Vatican quarter. To mark the occasion of the historic compromise of 1929, plans took shape in 1936–38 for a new monumental avenue linking in a straight line the river bank with the entrance of Bernini's monumental square in front of Michelangelo's church. The idea followed organically from an earlier project

Figure 17 Church of Santissima Annunziata in Sabaudia

of topographical 'liberation' around the adjacent Castel Sant'Angelo, carried out by the architect Attilio Spaccarelli. The project involved large-scale demolitions and other modifications in the historic neighbourhood of the Borghi that occupied the intervening space between the two monuments. This was a radical topographical solution that had been entertained in the context of all previous regulatory plans for the capital but had always been dropped from the final version. It was supported by Marcello Piacentini (who collaborated with Spaccarelli in the design and execution of the plan) and enthusiastically endorsed by Mussolini; but it also provoked bitter protests by proponents of ambientalism who objected vehemently to the amputation of one of the city's most distinctive medieval popular quarters. Yet, what makes this project even more exceptional was its eventual chosen name – **Via della Conciliazione** (Street of Reconciliation). The project was not initiated consciously as a topographical monument to the 1929 'reconciliation', yet it was from the beginning charged with a symbolic significance that went much further than a mere topographical intervention in the area close to St Peter's basilica. This was to be a landmark scheme that touched upon all aspects of the historic settlement between state and church, matters of spiritual and territorial jurisdiction over Rome, as well as the very integration of the 'second Rome' into the new 'Fascist layer'. More 'conquest' than 'reconciliation', the Via della Conciliazione performed in relation to the 'city of the popes' what the Via dell'Impero and Via del Mare had achieved with regard to the 'city of the caesars' – the symbolic flattening

of the urban chronotope and the appropriation of a very different past by the Fascist 'third Rome'.

The Project of the Via della Conciliazione

The project that led to the opening of the Via della Conciliazione touched on complex topographical and aesthetic issues, many of which had occupied urban planners for decades or even centuries before. It concerned the future of the **Borghi** as a living neighbourhood with its unique ambiental character but also chronic problems of viability. The name *Borghi* referred to the area to the east of St Peter's basilica marked by seven streets (each prefixed by 'Borgo', meaning village) running in parallel on an east–west axis towards the river. The two central arteries, **Borgo Nuovo** and **Borgo Vecchio**, and the buildings that they enclosed constituted the 'spine' (*spina*) of the quarter that stretched to the entrance of Bernini's piazza, coinciding with the space that was created for the Via della Conciliazione in the late 1930s (Fig. 18). Furthermore, the project raised questions of optimal architectural proportion and topographical balance. A product of medieval urban expansion, the neighbourhood had been allowed to grow after the 1527 sack of Rome (Hook 2004) as a kind of symbolic diaphragm – a second, organic line of defence against enemies, in addition to the Leonine walls that enclosed prohibitively the Vatican complex, protecting and concealing it from the outside world (Cambedda 1990: 17–27; Benevolo 2004: 40–84; Fig. 18.2). However, the construction of the new basilica of St Peter by Bramante and Michelangelo produced a building much bigger in proportions and more monumental in character than its predecessor and placed the Borghi in an awkward aspect to the new building. If now the Borghi gave way in one sense or another to a more open approach to St Peter's square and basilica, a new, much broader perspective had to be taken into account – one that would make the monument once again visible from the river bank but also transform the way in which approaching visitors and pilgrims would experience the first sight of one of the most sacred monuments of Christianity.

But above all, the opening of the Via della Conciliazione entailed a complex symbolic dimension in the wake of the 1929 Lateran Pacts. The area occupied by the Borghi constituted a 'liminal' space – both a bridge and a border between two symbolic and real entities. It marked the physical space where tectonic plates collided: the 'city of the popes' and the national civic capital; the two separate states created after 1929; and the two personal (though different) dominions of Mussolini and Pius XI over the city. With the final settlement of the territorial delineation of the new Vatican city-state in the early 1930s, papal territorial jurisdiction ended on the threshold of Bernini's grand piazza, with the exception of a few buildings scattered around the city that were granted extra-territorial status – some of which were situated in the spine of the Borghi area itself.[53] In 1933 Pius XI let it

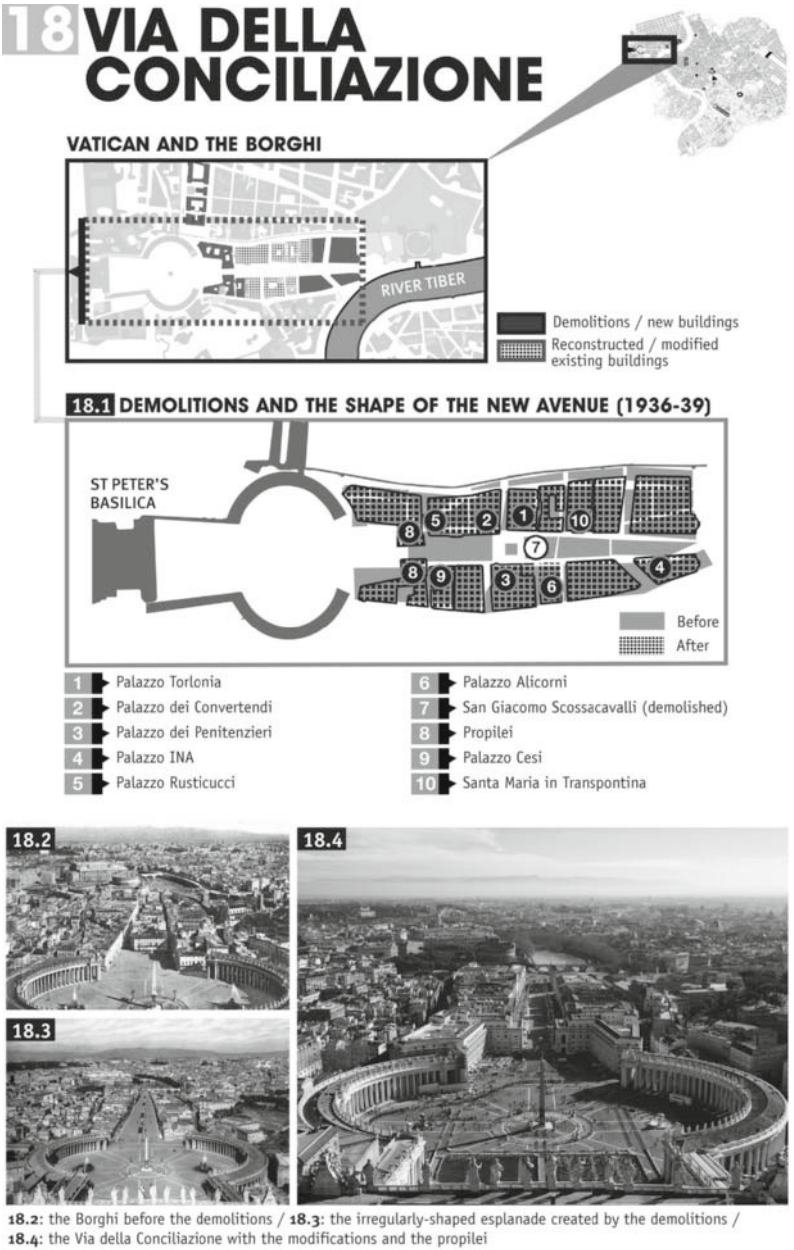


Figure 18 Diagram: the Borghi and the Via della Conciliazione. **18.2** with the kind permission of © **Museo di Roma**, 'Panorama di Roma dalla cupola di San Pietro con Piazza San Pietro e la spina di Borgo', AF 4345. **18.3** with the kind permission of © **Archivio di Etnografia e Storia Sociale, Regione Lombardia**, 'Veduta cupola S Pietro', Fondo Scrocchi - Album SCR_66, p. 9

be understood that he would no longer oppose the proposed intervention in the Borghi, which after all lay almost entirely within the territorial jurisdiction of the Italian state. As the architect responsible for the systematisation of Castel Sant'Angelo in the early 1930s, Attilio Spaccarelli noted to Mussolini that the clearing of the quarter and the creation of a monumental approach to the basilica of St Peter was a unique opportunity to bring the Pope closer to the Duce (Kirk 2006a: 762).

The idea of 'systematising' the Borghi, including the prospect of extensive demolitions along the 'spine' of the neighbourhood, was not new. During the seventeenth century, the completion of the new basilica's facade by Carlo Maderno in 1612 and the reorganisation of the square in front by Bernini (1656–67) accentuated the visual dissonance between the monument and the Borghi, reducing the 'spine' to a visually disagreeable barrier. Bernini himself had initially envisaged a third colonnade (*terzo braccio*) placed at the front of the square in order to separate the 'sacred' from the 'profane' city. Neither his plan, however, nor subsequent similar ideas by Giovanni Battista Falda and Carlo Fontana were ever realised (Hager 1997). During the Napoleonic occupation of Rome a number of ideas concerning the embellishment of the Vatican area were circulated – in particular the 1811 plan proposed by Giuseppe Valadier proposing the demolition of all buildings between Borgo Nuovo and Vecchio, and the opening of a grand artery running eastwards from the basilica to the Castel Sant'Angelo; but the short-lived Napoleonic administration of the city chose to prioritise projects on the other side of the Tiber instead, leaving the area of the Vatican virtually unaffected (La Padula 1958: 77–9; Ceccarius 1937). Thus, the dense quarter remained untouched until September 1870, when Rome was incorporated into the new Italian kingdom and the pope retreated inside the Leonine walls.

The 'Roman Question' reduced the neighbourhood to an even more 'liminal' existence than before – not just as a slowly decaying, unhygienic quarter on the cusp of papal and municipal jurisdictions but also as a buffer zone between the Italian capital and the confessional city of the popes. Alessandro Viviani, who headed the committee for the first and second regulatory plans for Rome (PRG1873 and 1883), proposed the demolition of the 'spine'; but the idea was eventually rejected by the municipal administration as less significant or urgent when compared to other systematisations proposed for the historic centre and the expansion of the (modern) city. Another study presented by the city administration in 1887 backed the idea of extensive demolitions along the 'spine' but was fiercely opposed by those who saw in the Borghi a unique archive of the city's architectural and social history. Similar ideas for demolition resurfaced in the 1910s. The study conducted by the American architect Eric Gugler envisaged the creation of a symmetrical rectilinear garden-space over the demolished 'spine' but was never seriously considered by Rome's planners as it was deemed alien to the topographical landscape of the city (Yegül 1991: 48–9). A similar

fate awaited the study carried out by Armando Brasini during the First World War, which – apart from the destruction of the heart of the Borghi – involved the creation of a new, overbearing architectural complex extending from the entrance to Bernini's piazza all the way eastwards to Castel Sant'Angelo (Vannelli 1997).

It was only in the 1920s that the idea of 'systematising' the area around St Peter's basilica gathered momentum. The fate of the Borghi featured in the deliberations of the special committee for the PRG1931. The demolition of the 'spine' was strongly supported by the then governor Francesco Boncompagni Ludovisi but the idea was once again rejected in the end, pending a final settlement with the Vatican on the sensitive matter of territorial jurisdiction between the two states (Piacentini 1952: 166–72). By contrast, the adjacent area of the Castel Sant'Angelo did feature in the final draft of the PRG1931. Attilio Spaccarelli began work on the project in 1933 and completed the 'liberation' of the monument after extensive demolitions in the surrounding area. As he stressed to Mussolini, the liberated mausoleum would be at last visible from the other side of the river and create a monumental space that would 'surpass [in grandeur] the [adjacent] area occupied by the basilica of St Peter' (Neri 1997: 435).[54] But Spaccarelli's ambitions exceeded the original strict parameters of the project awarded to him. Already in March 1933 he had intimated directly to the Duce how he perceived the 'systematisation' of the Castel Sant'Angelo area as the first major step towards the larger transformation of the entire zone from the river bank to St Peter's basilica. He underlined the organic and symbolic connection between the two projects and emphasised the opportunity for creating a topographical monument of universal significance, 'offered by you, Duce, to the admiration of the masses of pilgrims' from all over the world.[55] Given that the final draft of the PRG1931 did not include any further interventions in this zone beyond the systematisation of the Castel Sant'Angelo, Spaccarelli invoked the initial verbal support for his idea from Gustavo Giovannoni – one of the principal authors of the regulatory plan. Spaccarelli's outline project submitted for approval in July 1934, was much closer to Giovannoni's principle of *diradamento*. It envisaged modest 'chirurgical' interventions in the area covered by the 'spine'; reconstructions of spaces and buildings in order to bring the Borgo Nuovo and the Borgo Vecchio into symmetry to each other; but it rejected the solution of full demolition.[56] Once the Italo-Vatican Technical Commission had come to an agreement on the issue of territorial jurisdiction,[57] Mussolini eventually gave his authorisation for a feasibility study, inviting architects to submit a 'particular plan' and models (Vannelli 1990).

Marcello Piacentini, by that time the chief architect of the Fascist regime, made a forceful entry into the debate surrounding the future form of the Borghi with an article published in *Messaggero* on 21 November 1934, in which he indicated his strong support for the full demolition of the 'spine'.

Meanwhile, another plan came to the fore, signed by architects Mario Gai, Ermanno Natale and Carlo Cecchelli, as an alternative to Spaccarelli's initial study and in opposition to Piacentini's suggestion of full demolition. The Gai–Natale–Cecchelli plan rejected the solution of a 'monumental' approach to the basilica in favour of a solution that rested on the 'integral conservation of the two axes of the Borgo … and the preservation of the *spina*'.[58] It also attempted to displace traffic as far away from the basilica as possible, with the creation of a modest road artery to the north of the 'spine', hidden from St Peter's square by the medieval wall constructed by the popes as a secret passage from the Vatican to Castel Sant'Angelo.

Spaccarelli and Piacentini eventually decided to join forces and draft a single plan that won the approval of the Governatorato and the blessing of Mussolini. The partnership sealed the fate of the Borghi neighbourhood, which would have to be partially demolished and extensively remodelled in accordance with Piacentini's original proposal. From the first moment the two architects were faced with a series of dilemmas and difficult choices – most of which were of an aesthetic, architectural, and topographical nature but some also touching on matters of territorial jurisdiction and of symbolic representation. The demolition of the 'spine' involved a number of historic buildings scattered amidst the residential labyrinth of the Borghi, some of which were to be sacrificed (e.g. **Church of S. Giacomo a Scossacavalli**) while others deemed significant enough to be either preserved or remodelled 'organically' (e.g. **Palazzo dei Convertendi**, **Palazzo Rusticucci**, and **Palazzo Cesi** – Matera 1995; Fig. 18.1). In addition, even after the demolition of the 'spine', the architects would have been left with a large but asymmetrical and irregularly shaped esplanade (Fig. 18.3). The facade of the basilica was deemed to be both overpowering and imbalanced in architectural terms, finding itself in an awkward aspect to both Michelangelo's imposing dome and the Berninian piazza itself. Finally, there was the problem of how to integrate the monumental square in front of the basilica with the new space opened on the ruins of the demolished 'spine' – in particular, whether the project would involve a contemporary rendition of Bernini's original idea for a *terzo braccio*, some other form of separation (*nobile interrompimento*) or completely open access to the square.

In order to address these issues, in June 1936 the two architects submitted to the Duce a detailed study comprising different scenarios for the new monumental access to St Peter's basilica. A total of ten solutions were proposed – all taking for granted that the 'spine' would be completely flattened. One plan tested the possibility of having a single open and irregularly shaped access to the entrance of Bernini's square without any form of visual separation. Another proposal involved the construction of two new buildings at different parts of the new opened space, forming a new piazza in the centre of the demolished 'spine' formally dedicated to the 1929 'reconciliation' (Lago della Conciliazione). Three ideas shared the element of a

new *nobile interrompimento*, constructing it at different positions (closer to St Peter's square or further down the new avenue) and with different proportions (running along the full width of the new access or occupying only a central part of it, allowing for access on either side). Two further proposals entertained an open, almost rectilinear access without any separation but involved a narrowing of the street closer to St Peter's square, with the creation of a separate large square to the front of the colonnade. The last two proposals featured the addition of a further symbolic element: the two symmetrical short colonnades (*propilei*) flanking the entrance to the new piazza in front of the mouth of Bernini's existing colonnade. Of these two proposals, one maintained semi-open access to St Peter's square while the other combined *propilei* with the *nobile interrompimento* (thus creating a de facto *terzo braccio* with columns, albeit further eastwards than the one originally envisaged by Bernini – Rivolta n.d.; Gigli 1990).

At the viewing meeting of June 1936 Mussolini expressed his satisfaction with the overall parameters of the project and gave the authorisation for the demolition of the 'spine'.[59] Now the main stumbling block was eliciting the approval of Pius XI. The Vatican authorities had initially been rather tepid about the prospect of significant interventions in the Vatican zone and had resisted the idea of sacrificing the Borghi. In their view, the PRG1931 contained enough interventions in the area between the basilica, the Leonine wall, and the adjacent river bank for the first time since the capture of Rome in 1870. With the 'liberation' of the Castel Sant'Angelo completed in 1934, the Holy See authorised the publication of a 'plan' for the area through the pages of the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* (December 1934). Significantly, this plan mentioned the Borghi only with reference to the need for 'restoration', not demolition (Kirk 2006a: 768). In defending this conservationist stance the newspaper invoked both complex issues of territorial jurisdiction and the possibility of negative international repercussions in the event of an insensitive intervention (Neri 1997: 437). But between 1934 and 1936 objections were eliminated. Pius XI was shown the plans six days after Mussolini's final approval and expressed his overall satisfaction without any objections. The erstwhile 'diaphragm' that had protected, literally and symbolically, the church from its perceived outside enemies would now be sacrificed with the Vatican's approval. A 'particular plan' for the area was approved swiftly, with the Governatorato allocating the lavish sum of 1.4 million lire for the necessary expropriations and demolitions.[60] Predictably, it was Mussolini himself who gave the 'first strike of the pickaxe' for the demolition of the 'spine'; the date, carefully chosen, was 28 October 1936, the fourteenth anniversary of the March on Rome, and not 11 February, the anniversary of the signing of the Lateran Accords. The demolition project proceeded swiftly and was completed less than a year later. In all, 729 buildings were demolished, leading to the eviction and displacement of nearly 5000 inhabitants (Lerza 1997: 449).[61]

With the demolition of the 'spine' completed, the two architects' attention turned to the vexing issue of shaping and demarcating the new avenue. The space that emerged from the debris of the demolished old quarter was a blank canvas that was both inviting and daunting. It traversed a new boundary between two 'reconciled' but also confirmed as separate sovereign powers. It was meant to respect and mediate the boundary, not efface or challenge it, by communicating a sense of voluntary contract between two equal parties. Throughout 1937 the Piacentini–Spaccarelli team published a series of memoranda and articles outlining their final thoughts on the future shape of the Via della Conciliazione and its connection with St Peter's square.[62] The new street would be narrower and more symmetrical, with new edifices constructed on the side of Borgo Nuovo replicating the shape of Borgo Vecchio. Meanwhile the two architects had reached the decision that the separation between the street and the existing Berninian piazza would be highlighted through the construction of two *propilei* on either side of the road, thus leaving an open space/piazza in front of St Peter's square. The last major decision to be made concerned the nature and degree of the separation between the street and the basilica/square – whether to connect the two *propilei* (in effect, a 'closure' through a *nobile interrompimento*) or to leave them separate with open access in the middle. Piacentini and Spaccarelli now appeared to favour a limited separation solution – through the two *propilei* – that created a partial *terzo braccio* without, however, cutting off the basilica from the new street. In their opinion, a 'closure' of the Via della Conciliazione with a full colonnade would not only create a harsh delineation but also impair visibility of the basilica. Nevertheless, they appeared willing to rehearse the scenario of a full *nobile interrompimento* on-site, with temporary materials and on a rolling platform that would enable its repositioning for testing purposes.

In May 1938 Mussolini visited the site once again and observed the tests carried out by the architects.[63] The significance of this visit cannot be exaggerated at a time when criticisms of the project were becoming increasingly vocal. When the scale of the approved interventions in the Borghi became known, some voiced their opposition publicly – among them the earlier supporter of the plan Giovannoni (1956: 147–56). Giovannoni was against the idea of a grand rectilinear approach to the basilica, which appeared to him not only ill-suited to the area but also outdated in terms of urban planning and certainly not appropriate for a city such as Rome and a dense living quarter such as the Borghi (Semini 1988: 224–7). Criticism also came from architects who had worked extensively on new projects inside Rome during the Fascist period. Among the most vociferous critics was Giuseppe Pagano, editor of the journal *Casabella*, who had cooperated with Piacentini in the construction of Rome's new university campus only a few years earlier (Ch. 6). In an editorial published in May 1940, Pagano singled out the Via della Conciliazione as a primary example of what he perceived as Piacentini's

ill-guided sponsorship of the most pompous, megalomaniacal classicist monumentalism in Rome. Antonio Muñoz (1937), the archaeologist-architect behind an array of excavation and restoration projects during the Fascist period, also criticised the plan, warning that the proposed width and shape of the avenue would dwarf St Peter's basilica and thus minimise its visual impact (Muñoz 1937). A significant section of the international press was also critical of the project.

Piacentini and Spaccarelli fought back. In a jointly authored article published in January 1937, they invoked 'spiritual, historical, artistic, political but also urban planning' reasons in support of their project. They also defended the demolitions in the Borghi, rejecting arguments in favour of conservation for 'ambiental' reasons by pointing out that 'access to the grandest temple of Christianity … [could not] be through the *colore locale* of the Borghi', with its narrow, unhygienic, and disorderly lanes, constantly overcrowded with pilgrims (Piacentini and Spaccarelli 1937: 17). During a meeting with the two architects in early April 1937, Mussolini renewed his support for the project and demanded an acceleration of the works. A significant further vote of confidence came in the following October, when the Pope visited the area and expressed his overall satisfaction.[64] It thus came as a complete shock to Piacentini and Spaccarelli when they were informed of rumours that the project was about to be halted indefinitely and that Mussolini favoured a new competition on the basis of very different ideas.[65] Eventually, the rumour proved unfounded and work continued throughout 1937. However, in February 1938 Mussolini's erratic decision-making caused another crisis of confidence in the two architects. This time, the Duce appeared ready to authorise a separate competition for the reconstruction of one of the important buildings lining up the Via della Conciliazione (the seat of the magistrate's court); a decision that, as Piacentini and Spaccarelli pointed out to Mussolini, would compromise artistic integrity and delay the completion of the project.[66] Therefore, Mussolini's May 1938 visit to the site and his public authorisation to complete the project was greeted by the architects as the end to all discussions and acrimonious debates.

The final decision to construct the two *propilei* but retain open passage from the avenue to St Peter's square through them is the most difficult to fit into the jigsaw of the Via della Conciliazione. The story surrounding the testing of the visible 'diaphragm' is shrouded in mystery. While it is clear that the full rectilinear scenarios were quickly rejected, the 'interruption' of the Via della Conciliazione by a new building at its westernmost tip appears to have been seriously entertained by the architects. Had this solution been approved (and it appears that the church authorities favoured it – Neri 1997: 438), it would have created a spatial-visual separation between the street and the piazza that in many ways echoed the medieval distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'profane' parts of the city. But the apparent dilemma had further, very significant symbolic connotations in the 1930s that touched

on the very political subtext of the 1929 compromise. The solution of a full closure of the St Peter's square would have highlighted topographically the separation between the two states, authorities, and sovereign powers. In this respect, it would have mitigated and qualified the intended narrative of 'reconciliation' that the avenue was meant to celebrate. It is difficult to see how this solution could have ever appealed to Mussolini, who had interpreted the 1929 pacts as a licence to mine (however implicitly) the universalist myths of the 'second Rome' and fuse its monuments into the new Fascist 'layer' (Pollard 2009: 170–1; Fogu 2003b: 211–14). To make the new, officially recognised dividing line so visible would have replaced the function of the 'diaphragm' previously performed by the Borghi with a new, very visible fault line that would have emphasised the limits of the 'reconciliation' rather than celebrating the symbolic message of unity that underpinned the signing of the 1929 accords. By contrast, the solution that was eventually realised (a slightly narrowing street after the addition of symmetrical propylaea but no 'third arm' or diaphragm) could be read as a compromise: the sense of an invisible border between states, sovereignties, and histories was alluded to through the propylaea but the narrative of the historic compromise was also underlined through the avenue's visual effect of bringing St Peter's basilica closer to the rest of the city (Civico 1937; NdR Urbanistica 1937; Fig. 18.3).

The construction of the Via della Conciliazione was the symbolic epilogue to a chequered chapter in the city's history that had started with the dramatic events of 1870, followed the ebb and flow of the 'Roman Question', and come to a climax with the signing of the 1929 Lateran Accords by Mussolini and Pius XI. The new avenue joined a distinguished register of Fascist-era monumental street projects that had already been constructed (Via del Mare, Via dell'Impero, Via dei Trionfi) or were well underway (Via Imperiale) in the 1930s. Through all these projects the Fascist regime embarked on an aggressive reorganisation of urban space on a massive topographical and symbolic scale, reordering the city's visible layer, flattening time, and forging new connections that served Fascism's myths and rituals (Vidotto 2001: 178). But the Spaccarelli–Piacentini project for the Via della Conciliazione fulfilled a much more profound political and symbolic function. What the Fascist regime lacked before 1929 was access to the universalist assets of the 'second Rome', which remained off-bounds under the shadow of the 'Roman Question'. Unlike the silent, truncated presence of the 'first Rome' on the city's visible layer, the 'city of the popes' had its own rival historical custodian still very much present and, post-1929, formally recognised as such by the state as a sovereign entity. In this crucial respect, the Via della Conciliazione not only bridged but also traversed (and thus, in a different way, reinstated) subtle historical and contemporary fault lines. Such a project, agreed by two sovereign entities over deeply symbolic space to celebrate 'reconciliation' *on equal terms*, meant that the authorial licence of the Fascist regime was far more restricted here than in similar projects executed elsewhere in the city.

Yet, even before the completion of the project (interrupted by the Second World War and completed by the two architects only in 1950, for the occasion of another major Jubilee year; Fig. 18.4), the Via della Conciliazione ended up resembling a Fascist 'conquest' of space previously considered inaccessible and prohibitive. Work had advanced sufficiently by the spring of 1938 to tempt those in charge of the preparations for Hitler's visit to Rome (Ch. 8) to include it in one of the vehicular itineraries criss-crossing the historic centre of the capital that they had prepared in order to impress the German delegation. Upon hearing the intentions of the Fascist regime, Pius XI immediately registered his angry opposition. The Fascist authorities did relent, removing the Via della Conciliazione from Hitler's ceremonial parade in Rome; but they insisted on an alternative route that would bring their high-profile guest close to St Peter's basilica and then all around the walls of the Vatican city.[67] The result was more akin to a draw that left neither party satisfied. Yet, Pius XI did make a further point by arranging to be absent from Vatican City during the entire duration of Hitler's visit (Baxa 2010: 145–8).

This telling episode underlines the ambiguous liminality of the Via della Conciliazione and the limits of its putative *syn*tactical function. That the Fascist regime intended to use the street as part of a triumphal procession across the city designed to impress Hitler without consulting first with church authorities exuded a definite sense of symbolic ownership of the space directly in front of St Peter's basilica. As a result, even before it had been completed and officially inaugurated, the ostensible 'bridge' of reconciliation had once again become a fuzzy and contested space. Through this bitter incident, it became clear that the Fascist regime treated the Via della Conciliazione as a 'Fascist' street, largely on a par with Via dell'Impero (Etlin 1991: 394) and an integral component of the new triumphal itineraries of the 'third Rome'. Meanwhile, the Vatican authorities had to accept a secondary role in the deliberations for the final shape of the avenue. Piacentini and Spaccarelli sought papal approval for the final plan in June 1936; but the mere sequence of events suggests that the Vatican was confronted with a virtual fait accompli. The meeting with Pius XI took place only after Mussolini had repeatedly been consulted and given his final approval to the project. Even the courtesy of prior consultation with the Vatican authorities was deemed unnecessary on the occasion of Hitler's visit.

There is, however, an even more tangible and unmistakeable statement of the Fascist intentions to appropriate the Via della Conciliazione. On the corner of the **INA building** constructed to frame the eastern entrance to the avenue, one can find even today a **relief** depicting the legendary werewolf suckling Romulus and Remus, framed by the trademark three-lined emblem of the Fascist regime at the top and the marking for the year 1941 at the bottom (Fig. 19). This blatantly denotative statement of Fascist appropriation told a very different story about the Via della Conciliazione: conceived as

Figure 19 Fascist insignia on one of the new buildings along Via della Conciliazione

a monument to 'reconciliation', it now seemed to serve primarily a function of topographical and symbolic annexation. It reunited topographically the 'second Rome' with the rest of the city but also turned it into an integral part of the 'third Rome' by symbolically 'framing' its most cherished and significant monument within a cadre of Fascist visual/aesthetic and political values (Kirk 2006a: 770). This was not an isolated incident either. At around the same time of the opening of the Via della Conciliazione, the Fascist regime organised the 1937–38 Augustan Exhibition of Roman Civilisation (Mostra Augustea della Romanità) in Rome as the pinnacle of the year-long celebrations dedicated to the Roman emperor Augustus (Ch. 3). The exhibition included a special room dedicated to the alleged spiritual link between the Roman Empire and the rise of Christianity as a universalist creed, with Rome as its geographic and spiritual epicentre (Ch. 7). The imposing presence of a Latin cross in the middle of a room otherwise honouring the most distinguished figurehead of a pagan empire forged a deliberate historical connection between the 'first' and the 'second' Rome, and then subsumed it symbolically into the Fascist discourse of universality that underpinned the

entire exhibition. In this single room, as on the wall of the building framing the entrance to the Via della Conciliazione, the 'second Rome' had been appropriated by the regime's historical imaginary, allowing the production of a single universalist narrative that linked imperial Rome with Christianity and Fascism. That such a narrative of appropriation could also be visually reproduced on the deeply symbolic grounds surrounding the spiritual hub of western Christianity left little doubt about the broader subjugation of the 'city of the popes' to the conquering drive of the Fascist 'third Rome'.

5
The Fascist Layer (I): The Quest for 'Signature' Buildings

Fascism left a rich legacy on the cityscape of Rome. Mussolini's unquenchable appetite for new plans, new interventions, and new landmark projects created a genuine Fascist 'layer' – a kind of '(Fascist) city within the city' – whose imprint on contemporary Rome is as unmistakeable as it is ineluctable. What was added to Rome's visible layer between the mid-1920s and the early 1940s is sufficiently revealing about Fascism's intention to transform the capital into the paragon of a new Fascist *eu*topia (Ch. 2). Yet, at the same time, it is an essentially incomplete, partial, incongruous, and potentially misleading snapshot of this very vision – a veritable Fascist *non-finito*. This is because a large part of this ideal 'third Rome' remained on paper – whether because time or funds ran out, because it was defeated in competitions, sidelined by various more pragmatic considerations or thwarted by Mussolini's volatile judgements. Some of the most fascinating insights into the very essence (and often conflicting or shifting interpretations) of this *eu*topian vision may be found not only in what was built but also among plans and models of transient ideas that may have been often strongly desired and considered but that never materialised. Had they too been realised, Fascism's architectural and planning legacy in the centre of the city would have been profoundly different to what we recognise today (Kallis 2011a).

The *additive* Fascist layer in Rome was not conceived as a single, extensive project of *creatio ex nihilo*, like the monumental new centre of Berlin designed by Albert Speer on Hitler's instructions. The necessary blank canvas did not exist inside the old city, apart from relatively few and fiercely contested spaces, most of which had at any rate been produced through the demolitions of the 1920s and 1930s. Even in those few cases, questions about the most appropriate aesthetic form, spatial location, and symbolic subtext of new planned landmark constructions proved far more vexing and formidable than anticipated. More opportunities for *ex nihilo* projects (and fewer challenges from the surrounding urban environment) did exist in the immediate urban periphery – outside the historic centre, outside the

ancient Aurelian walls, and even more in peripheral zones that lay outside the scope of earlier regulatory plans. Finally, there was the untapped reservoir of Rome's untamed rural periphery – especially the underdeveloped, infested Agro Pontino to the southwest of the capital that ticked the boxes of an extensive blank canvas but posed gigantic technical and logistical challenges relating to large-scale draining, land reclamation, human settlement, infrastructural work, and transport connection. Taken together, the additive Fascist layer would emerge gradually, over the two decades of Fascist rule, partly in opposition to the existing form of the city (through demolition and forcible relocation of communities, and removal of the slums from either the centre or the urban periphery), partly in deliberate *syn*tactical dialogue with it ('framing', and being 'framed' by, the ancient and medieval layers – Chs 3 and 4), and partly as extensions of the existing urban core (new buildings, complexes, suburbs, or even 'new cities' on previously empty space) (Kallis 2012: 45–7).

This additive Fascist layer in and around Rome is bewildering in its variety of scale, function, location, and above all architectural style. In terms of scale, it encompassed anything from individual buildings to extensive complexes to quarters and finally to entire 'new cities'. In terms of function, new Fascist-era constructions (or seriously considered plans to that effect) can be broadly categorised under the two headings used by Mussolini himself in his December 1925 speech (*Opera* XXII: 47–9; Ch. 1): those in response to questions of *grandeur*, destined to serve the regime's monumental and self-celebratory objectives (what I call 'signature' buildings); and those that address questions of *necessity*, produced as solutions to perceived problems of urban over-crowding, deprivation, social 'decadence', and lack of hygiene. While 'signature' constructions addressing questions of 'grandeur' inside and around Rome were built with ample public visibility in mind, projects conceived under the category of 'necessity' (primarily forms of social housing grouped into new suburbs constructed to absorb those affected by the demolitions in the centre and to relocate the city's unemployed and immigrant *declassés*) were mostly situated in peripheral and thus deliberately less prominent areas, away from the important monuments and arteries of the historic centre. With regard to location, the spaces on which these new additive elements emerged were scattered around the city and the periphery, reaching all the way out to previously unused and unordered land. Given that space was at a premium inside the historic centre, large-scale/monumental developments tended to be located either in the periphery of the centre or outside the city. In contrast, inside the historic centre, the majority of Fascist-era interventions were either subtractive (demolitions, 'isolations', 'systematisations') or modestly additive (in the form of individual buildings, often 'framing' monuments of the past or lining newly opened avenues). Finally, in terms of architectural styles, after a short-lived phase of experimentation with more modern architectural vocabularies in the early

1930s, a more conservative aesthetic outlook gradually took hold in relation to the historic centre, ensuring that only low-profile new constructions could appear, broadly consonant with the regime's official architectural canon (*stile littorio* – AAVV 1936) or otherwise emulating older historicist prototypes. Opportunities for more experimental modernist architecture continued to exist in peripheral locations or on previously empty space further afield; but even in these areas, diversity gradually gave way to the more and more prescriptive stipulations of the *stile littorio* towards the end of the 1930s.

This chapter and the following (Ch. 6) examine the constructive agency of the Fascist regime in and around Rome that produced not only the additive Fascist layer that one can witness even today but also a number of other projects that, while seriously considered or even initiated, did not materialise in the end. The next chapter is focused on larger-scale *ex nihilo* projects, executed on a blank spatial canvas that was found in the urban periphery or further afield, as part of the city's planned expansion. In this chapter, I examine projects in the centre of the city, conceived as individual additions to the urban palimpsest, mostly on space 'liberated' through demolitions and 'systematisations'. I explore the Fascist quest for individual high-profile buildings in the centre of the capital, as visual and symbolic simulations of the spirit of the 'Fascist revolution'. It was in this field that the Fascist regime entertained some of the boldest aesthetic and symbolic ideas but also recorded some notable failures (or underwhelming partial successes) in realising such projects. I begin with an examination of a number of projects that sought to envision and realise the most ambitious Fascist 'signature' building of the 'third Rome'. The Palazzo del Littorio, the Mole Littoria, and the Danteum projects possessed this quality, even if they sought to express it in very different visual and discursive ways. They also shared a common destiny: they were never built, either because they were abandoned in the process or because – as in the case of the Palazzo del Littorio – they were eventually dislocated to the periphery and realised only in a diminished form. Then I proceed to examine a number of other individual buildings – either actually constructed or designed on paper but not realised – inside the city centre. This category included mostly public buildings, often selected through high-profile architectural competitions; but it also featured some notable edifices commissioned by powerful private-sector patrons, such as the Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni (INA). The chapter concludes with the examination of a unique – but not realised – 'signature' construction in the new exhibition quarter designed for the 1942 world fair (Ch. 8): the gigantic E42 'monumental arch', designed by Adalberto Libera, that was to crown the most ambitious additive project of the Fascist era. More than any other 'signature' project conceived and planned during the Fascist period, it was Libera's arch that captured both the sense of exhilarating ambition and the *non-finito* reality of the 'third Rome'.

The (Failed) Quest for the Fascist 'Signature' Building in the Centre of Rome

During the 1920s and especially the 1930s, the Fascist regime expended significant amounts of energy, time, and funds for the construction of high-profile public buildings across the country. New ministries, local and regional administration buildings, railway stations, schools, hospitals, sporting and recreational facilities, youth complexes, post offices, as well as various PNF-related edifices (most notably among them, the ubiquitous Case del Fascio) emerged at a frenetic pace that only seemed to gather momentum with time (Portoghesi, Mangione, and Soffitta 2006; Lasansky 2004: 7). The Fascist public building programme unfolded against the backdrop of an 'aesthetic pluralism' that marked particularly the first decade of Fascist rule, producing a rich panorama of creative agencies that operated at the service of the regime (Stone 1997; 1998: 65–79; Ben-Ghiat 2004: 20–9; see also Ch. 2). Through an over-production of ideas, plans, and constructed edifices, officially encouraged by the Fascist authorities through public competitions (*concorsi*) or direct commissions, many architects suggested a bewildering array of visual translations of the putative 'spirit' of Fascism. Inevitably then, ideas, plans, and executed projects tended to differ substantially in aesthetic style and representational content. Even in the second half of the 1930s, when ever-stricter guidelines were imposed by Fascist authorities on public architecture (Mangione and Soffitta 2006: 19–23), the door to aesthetic and symbolic freedom of interpretation still remained partially open to architects who were otherwise prepared to court the regime's official patronage for high-profile projects. Different opinions and interpretations were negotiated dialectically in the process, resulting in a kind of aesthetic unity that may have appeared more inclusive in stylistic terms but was nevertheless strictly curated by regime and party institutions (Ben-Ghiat 2004: 20–2).

Designing and constructing public buildings for Rome was of course a very different matter. As we have already seen in Ch. 2, the Fascist regime ascribed to the capital a set of unique qualities that rendered it both an exhilarating and a daunting backdrop for new architecture. The imposing remains of the city's ancient past were ubiquitous in the city's historic centre, often oppressively so, making the task of envisioning – let alone realising – new constructions exceptionally difficult and almost invariably controversial. At the same time, however, the opportunity to populate the visible layer of the 'third Rome' with a new public building guaranteed a degree of exposure and kudos that was unmatched by any other urban space in Fascist Italy – and one that many architects often found impossible to resist. No wonder, then, that every major public project in Rome was invested with a symbolic significance that usually far transcended the purpose of the building itself.

And yet, the Fascist quest for new 'signature' constructions in the centre of Rome involved a hard lesson for the regime authorities and the architects alike. As the opening of the Via dell'Impero in 1932 (Ch. 3) demonstrated, it proved far easier to demolish and reconfigure than to fill the voids with new 'worthy' buildings. When demolitions at the heart of Rome started in earnest towards the end of the 1920s, they produced new empty spaces that invited new, sometimes wildly creative ideas but eventually confounded the Fascist authorities and the architects. The long and vicissitudinous saga of the most ambitious 'signature' Fascist project in the historic centre of Rome – the Palazzo del Littorio – in the 1930s captured this paradox fully: initially planned as the building-symbol of the Fascist era in Rome to be constructed along the Via dell'Impero in close proximity to the Colosseo and the Foro, it involved two of the most high-profile competitions of the entire Fascist period, more than a hundred submissions, and a distinguished, eclectic shortlist of architects and plans.

In 1939 the architect Enrico Del Debbio – in partnership with Arnaldo Foschini and Vittorio Morpurgo – won the second stage of the competition for the construction of the landmark **Palazzo del Littorio**. Yet, in spite of the fanfare, the conclusion of the competition was rather anti-climactic. This had partly to do with the diminished function of the chosen project itself. When the competition was first announced in December 1933, it envisaged the construction of a 'signature' building that would hypostasise the very idea of the 'third Rome', its symbolic stature comparable only to the Colosseo, St Peter's basilica, and the Monument to Vittorio Emanuele II. The accompanying text of the official call for submissions stated that 'the grand edifice should be worthy of handing down to future generations, with an enduring and universalist spirit, the epoch of Mussolini'. The building would host Mussolini's extensive new offices, an impressive maze of functional spaces to be used by the PNF, a library, a party archive, and various rooms for sports activities. In addition to its primary function as national party headquarters, it would also become the permanent home of the hugely successful 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (MdRF – Ch. 7) with its unashamedly sacralising imagery and symbolism, featuring a separate building replicating the original *Sacrario* of the 1932 exhibition (a 'chapel' dedicated to the fallen 'martyrs' of the Fascist movement) (Leach 2005: 64–7; Gentile 1990: 243). By comparison, the winning project that began to take shape in 1939, while still enormous in size and impressive in its monumental characteristics, appeared as little more than an oversize Casa del Fascio (the standard designation used for local party headquarters across the country) for Rome (Kirk 2005b: 109); in fact, the word *casa* had by then substituted *palazzo* in the official appellation of the building (now Casa Littoria).

There was another reason, however, that underlined the diminished stature of the winning project in 1939. The initial location chosen for the

complex – a large, irregularly shaped plot of recently 'liberated' land on the eastern side of the Via dell'Impero, at the point where the avenue intersected with Via Cavour, opposite the Basilica of Maxentius (part of the Roman Foro) and diagonally across the Colosseo – touched on an ongoing (since 1932) publicly conducted debate about the most fitting uses and architectural decorum for the avenue (Ch. 3). Some, particularly archaeologists and conservationists, objected from the very beginning to plans for new constructions on Via dell'Impero, advocating instead the virtues of empty spaces that would leave the remnants of the imperial past to breathe and tell their powerful story to the visitors without any unwanted distractions. Yet, the idea to use the space opposite the Foro and the Colosseo for the Palazzo del Littorio – originally a suggestion from the pages of the daily newspaper *La Tribuna* – took shape in 1932 and was confirmed by the Duce himself.[68] The competition for the architectural design was published a year later, fixing the deadline for the submissions in April 1934. Between, however, the completion of the first (1934) and the second (1937) stages of the competition, the original location was changed twice: first, to a more spacious plot along Viale Aventino, to the southwest of the historic centre; and later, to an even larger area adjacent to the Foro Mussolini (Ch. 6), north of the city's centre (Fig. 20.1).

The authorities' volte-face regarding the location for the Palazzo del Littorio remains an unsolved mystery. When, in May 1934, the competition brief was officially presented to the Fascist deputies by the secretary of the Fascist syndicate of architects, Alberto Calza Bini, it generated a tempestuous, ill-tempered discussion (Ch. 2). Weighty figures of the Fascist party (among them the ex-party secretaries Francesco Giunta and Roberto Farinacci) protested strongly against the idea of a 'modern', 'foreign' (in stylistic provenance), and 'monster' in proportions building for the Fascist party at the heart of Rome's historic centre (De Seta 2008: 10–12). The debate raged in a bizarrely public fashion for weeks following the parliamentary debate, with articles appearing in national and regional newspapers and architectural journals (Rifkind 2007: 232–7). As the editor of *Casabella* and respected architect-critic Giuseppe Pagano correctly observed, at the heart of this debate lay the notion of stylistic 'harmonisation', particularly in an area so close to the most renowned archaeological heritage of ancient Rome and the focus of the modern Fascist myth of *romanità* (Pagano 1934a). While Giunta's and Farinacci's vitriolic attacks at the 1934 parliamentary debate on the Palazzo del Littorio did focus on 'modern' architecture as a whole, their primary objection emanated from the particular choice of location. Generic aesthetic gripes with modern(ist) architecture aside, it was the Via dell'Impero that rendered the 'modern' style of the planned edifice especially offensive to them. In contrast, the editorial team of *Casabella* saw the Via dell'Impero not as 'archaeological reconstruction' but as a 'living and agitated' street, the unique setting of 'a picturesque disorder of architectural

memories'. It was there that 'life and history intersected, in the most disparate forms, against a [majestic] scenographic backdrop that only Rome could ever provide' (Argan 1934: 6–7). Supporters of the project celebrated it as a unique opportunity for visually enacting a *syn*tactical dialogue between a decidedly 'modern' Fascist monumentality and the austere, timeless rationality of the Colosseo and remnants of the Foro. Marcello Piacentini (1934: 3), head of the judging committee for the competition, appeared to subscribe to this view, noting that the 'new architectural movement' in Fascist Italy was 'more sane, more self-confident and on course to representing with clarity and dignity the spirit of our [Fascist] epoch'.

Judging by the high number of entries, the 1934 **competition** captured the imagination of Italian architects and temporarily silenced its opponents. It produced a veritable sample catalogue for the entire gamut of architectural groupings and styles still vying for control over Fascist culture in the early 1930s. Many of the participants understood the 'sacred' context and symbolism of the landmark building – albeit in very different stylistic and spatial terms. As an oversize Casa del Fascio for the capital, political hub, exhibition space, civic church, and Fascist 'archive', the complex would embody the pyramidal structure of the new Fascist society, with Mussolini directing the complex state-party organism and at the same time engaging with the 'new (Fascist) man' in the space outside the building through the explicitly stipulated balcony/speaking platform (*arengario*).[69] The interpenetration of functions, spaces, and time was thoroughly intended from the outset, resulting in an edifice that would be both heavily representational and functional, open and restricted in different areas, 'modern' and deliberately timeless, maintaining a dialogue with its illustrious surroundings but also translating their symbolism into contemporary formulations.

Not surprisingly it was projects submitted by broadly defined as 'modernist' architects that captured and articulated most imaginatively the project's prismatic character – at the same time open and closed, hierarchical and 'sacred', local and national, in dialogue with the past and looking decidedly towards the future (Marcello 2007: 147–59; see Fig. 20). The two submissions of the Gruppo Milanese (headed by Giuseppe Terragni and featuring the collaboration of the painter Mario Sironi) defined the external surroundings of the Palazzo del Littorio as a quasi-religious liturgical space ('an eternal construction: a temple' – in Dal Fabbro 1994: 134), where the amorphous mass would be transformed into an ordered crowd with a distinct new collective identity. The transparency of the gigantic exhibition building proposed by the second submission, with its imposing elevation from street level, flanked by the two distinct volumes of the Sacrario and the party offices, appeared to make oblique visual references to the surrounding 'sacred' spaces of the Foro and the Campidoglio. But it was the group's first submission (Fig. 20.7), with its towering curved frontal elements and oblique references to the volume of the Colosseo in the background, that evinced most powerfully

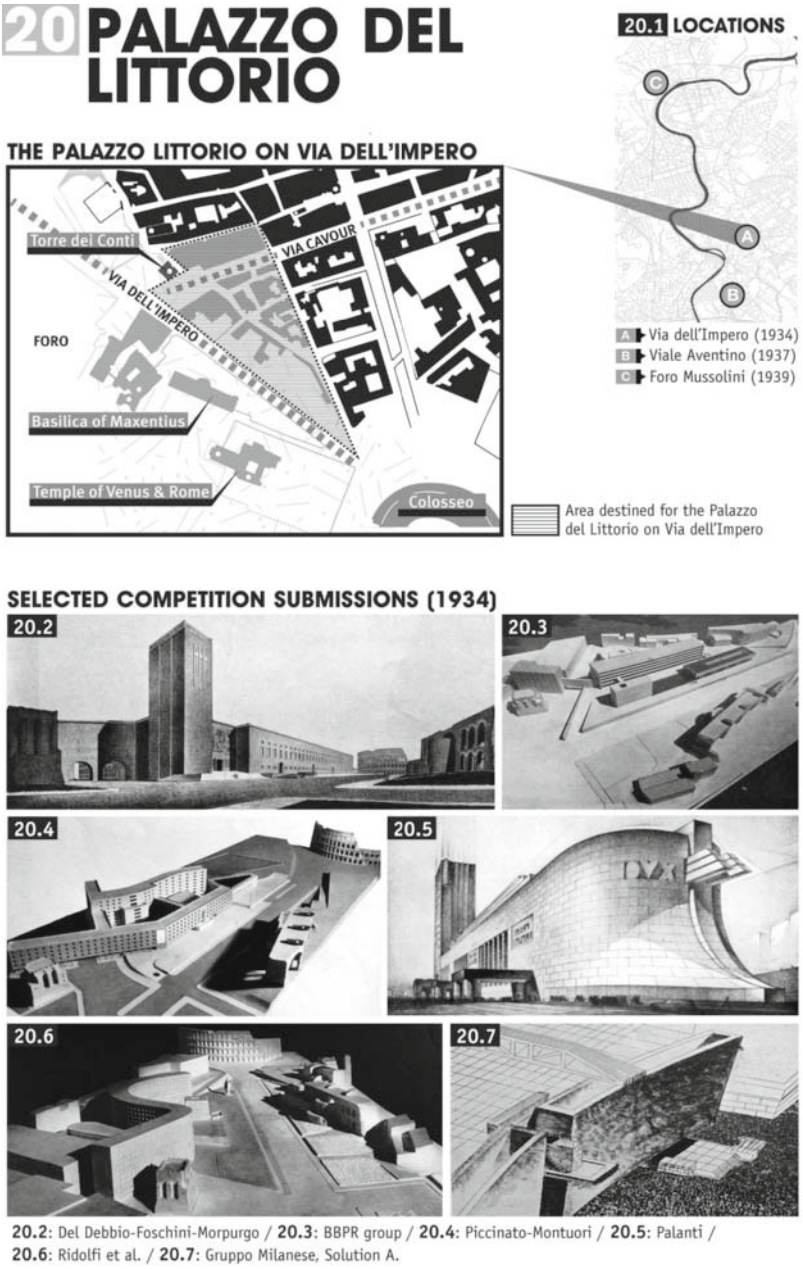


Figure 20 Diagram: the Palazzo del Littorio. **20.2–20.7:** *Architettura, Rivista del Sindicato Nazionale Fascista Architetti*, 13, Special Issue (1934): 19, 58, 88, 11, 25, 37 (from the collection of Casa dell'Architettura di Latina)

the sacredness of the most important Fascist liturgy: against a massive wall gleaming in porphyry (historically associated with imperial rule), with Mussolini's voice reverberating in the open piazza and amplified by the sheer volume of the vertical wall,

> [the Duce] is like a God, against the sky. There is nobody above Him. The entire façade exalts His force, His genius. From all parts of the great street that is the heart of Rome, the pulse of the world, from Piazza Venezia, from the arches of the Coliseum, high, alone, in the light. He will be before the cheering crowds: before everybody, with everybody. (in Rifkind 2007a: 253–7)

Other projects by teams of modernist architects referenced in different, yet more or less fruitful ways an ambitious visual and symbolic fusion of ancient *romanità* with the spirit of modernism. Adalberto Libera's gigantic inwardly curved symmetrical block, the ear-shaped slender front building of the Gruppo Universitari Fascisti (GUF) project (Petrucci–Muratori–Tedeschi), and Mario Ridolfi's S-shaped structure engulfing the separate exhibition building fronting the avenue replicated an effect similar to Bernini's seventeenth-century design for St Peter's square – demarcating the 'sacredness' of the edifice behind but also symbolically embracing the space (and the people) at the front (Fig. 20.6). Together with Terragni's first variant and Luigi Moretti's also curved (albeit outwardly) plan, this subset of submissions echoed the shape of the nearby Colosseo but departed from slavish stylistic emulation, opting instead for a 'vivisectional' approach that reassembled the components of Roman classicism into modern interpretations (Lecis 2002: 19; 2009).

The competition's judging panel comprised not only famous architects from all aesthetic trends but also representatives from the city's administration and from the leadership of the PNF. When the results were announced in December 1934, there was no winning project but a shortlist of 14 submissions, whose authors were invited to the second-degree competition (Muntoni 2010: 679). The shortlist itself was by all standards an eccentric patchwork (Abbate 2004). In addition to Terragni's, Libera's, and Ridolfi's submissions, other projects that made it to the second round ranged from Enrico Del Debbio's and Pietro Aschieri's more syncretic and mildly traditionalist readings of the competition brief (Fig. 20.2) to Vincenzo Fasolo's Babylonian composition; and from Giuseppe Vaccaro's heavily decorated rectilinear frontal volume to Mari De Renzi's more austere triangular block with pronounced vertical lines (Rossi 2003: 104–8). There were some further inexplicable inclusions in the shortlist (e.g. Mario Palanti's almost universally derided boat-shaped building; Fig. 20.5) as well as some sensational casualties (e.g. the BBPR's anti-rhetorical abstract modular composition, praised by many modernist critics at the time (Fig. 20.3); and Gio Ponti's fanciful reimagining of the building as a model 'living city', complete with a tribune,

monument, and 'temple', as 'the sanctuary and theatre of the [Fascist] regime's supreme solemnity'). While the moderate architectural journal *Architettura* directed by Piacentini praised the quality of the competition as an indication of the alleged dynamism of the 'new' Fascist architecture, *Casabella* criticised most projects for succumbing to a grandiose rhetorical monumentalism, plagiarising the site's archaeological remnants (Etlin 1991: 426–38). Even more verbal in its criticism of the jury's shortlist was the 'rationalist' journal *Quadrante*. The sight of Palanti's project on the shortlist produced a convulsive response by the journal's editor, Pier Maria Bardi. Both journals apportioned a large share of the blame for the perceived failure of the competition to the jury itself. As Pagano noted indignantly, instead of being a truly 'open' competition that would give expression to a genuinely 'Italian' modern architecture, the judging process became the spectacle of a shameful 'lottery' supervised by a jury of 'academic' architects who posed as august defenders of the 'true' *romanità* (Pagano 1934a; Marcello 2007: 166). The editorials of *Quadrante* went even further, censuring both the jury of architectural 'dinosaurs', who had repeatedly shown no understanding of modern architecture, and the sycophantic timidity of most of the participants (Rifkind 2007a: 265).

Before launching his diatribe against the projects submitted to the competition for the Palazzo del Littorio (he spared only one project, designed by the young 'rationalists' Luigi Piccinato and Eugenio Montuori that had not been selected for the second round; Fig. 20.4), Pagano had also changed his mind about the competition itself and the original location for the edifice. His initial enthusiasm for participating in the project soon gave way to scepticism, then despair, and finally hostility. For him the site itself was suffocated – by its restricted surface and awkward shape, as well as by the absence of ample space around it that would allow the spectator to appreciate the bold visual and symbolic statements of the new building. Even worse, the area was visually dominated by the imposing volumes of the Colosseo and the basilica of Maxentius. Although Pagano confessed that he started drafting his own submission in an ebullient mood, he soon felt intimidated by the surroundings of the site. In his opinion, it was impossible to conceive of an honest, decidedly 'modern' building worthy of the symbolism of a Palazzo del Littorio for Rome without full creative and spatial freedom; but the Colosseo and the 'cadavers' of the Roman past 'sneered' at him and oppressed him constantly. What had started as the most emphatic, yet subtle statement of a 'victory of the living over the dead' and as a 'revolutionary intention' to communicate aesthetically the spirit of 'our time', Pagano noted, now threatened to become a farcical 'game of cards over the belly of a corpse'. His eventual decision not to submit a project to the competition stemmed from his conviction that the chosen site would relegate any modern building, however bold or well designed, to 'the background' of a false, grotesque monumentalist scenography (Pagano 1934b; Cuomo 1987: 62–3),

where the old and the new could never be visually balanced, let alone reconciled (Baxa 2010: 106–9).

The decision to change the project's location to the site on Viale Aventino was announced suddenly by Piacentini, who rather cryptically explained that 'after mature reflection … it was ruled out that [the Casa Littoria] could appear on Via dell'Impero' (Piacentini 1937: 700). This signalled an opportunity for others to come up with fresh alternative ideas as to how to best utilise the vintage real estate on Via dell'Impero that had been 'liberated' for the winning project of the competition. In early 1937 Armando Brasini submitted a proposal for a Mole Littoria – a truly 'pharaonic' skyscraper 200 metres high and resting on a square platform of 250 metres. The proposed monument was intended to eclipse any other high-profile building inside Rome, its dome being higher than Michelangelo's masterpiece on St Peter's basilica and that of the Pantheon. Brasini did nothing to conceal his competitive intention to claim authorship of the most gargantuan monument in Rome: his submission, submitted directly to the Duce, included a drawing that showed how the Mole Littoria would be large and tall enough to swallow St Peter's basilica.[70] But it seems that his project was also intended as a response to Albert Speer's recently publicised plans for Hitler's Berlin as Welthauptstadt Germania – in particular the plan for the gigantic *Volkshalle* (People's Hall); and to the earlier design for the new Palace of the Soviets in Moscow that was under construction in the late 1930s (Nicoloso 2008: 98–9).

The idea of constructing a dedicated monument celebrating the era of Fascism at the heart of Rome was not new. Piacentini had included a version of such a monument (in a heavily neo-classical style) in his 1925 vision for the Grande Roma (Ch. 1), to be built in the new modern metropolitan centre that would rise to the east of the city's historic core, close to the railway station. A year earlier Mussolini himself had praised another, very different design for a Mole Littoria. This had been designed by Mario Palanti, an Italian-born architect who had spent his most productive years working in South America. An earlier exhibition of his project, titled L'Eternale, captured the imagination of the Duce who signed a personal autograph to the architect with the words 'A la Mole Littoria Alala'. The design showed a gigantic tower-like construction featuring an incredible 4500 rooms and 100 function spaces, rising to 340 metres and resting on a monumental platform of 130 metres length. Two years later (1926), Palanti visited Rome again to resubmit the details of the plan that he had been elaborating further in the intervening period. In his detailed report to the Duce, Palanti underlined the dual significance of the proposed monument: not only would it celebrate 'the most significant historical event of the century – Fascism', but it would also capture the universal and eternal significance of Fascism as a national phenomenon with a decidedly international import (Palanti 1926).[71] The building would be crowned with a beacon – a symbol of the 'eternal

light radiating from Rome', according to the architect – that was to unite symbolically the building's modern international aesthetics with its tribute to millennia of Rome's history and the sacralisation of the Fascist 'revolution' itself (Gentile 1996: 127; Giannantonio 2006: 138).

Subsequently Palanti's project underwent a series of extensive redesigns, bringing the building's height down to about 130 metres and reducing the proportions of the supporting structure accordingly, in order to reduce expenditure and elicit broader support (Nicoloso 2008: 136). The revised plan was praised by the leadership of the PNF but was criticised by various expert committees of the state and the Governatorato. Still, the idea gained fresh traction when Palanti visited Italy again in 1931 and in late 1932, at which point the architect submitted yet another (and even more modest in proportions and cost) version of the project. This time he was also confident enough to suggest a suitable location for the monument: following the inauguration of the Via dell'Impero in the previous October, Palanti now saw the new avenue as the perfect setting for his building. So much had changed, however, between 1924 and the early 1930s. If the proposal had appeared from the beginning as somewhat quixotic, it was now deemed almost irrelevant, given the advanced plans for the Palazzo del Littorio and the Fascist regime's soft spot for the instrument of architectural competition. Soon Palanti himself acknowledged the diminished chances of his project and decided to turn his attention elsewhere, participating in the competitions for the Palazzo del Littorio (as we saw, he made it to the second round but did not win) and for the Torre Littoria in the Piazza Duomo of Milan (in which he was also unsuccessful).[72]

Armando Brasini joined the discussion regarding the Mole Littoria in the effervescent atmosphere generated by the proclamation of the Italian *impero* by Mussolini in May 1936. After Palanti's failure to convince the authorities about the merits of his Mole Littoria, and the decision to relocate the Palazzo del Littorio away from the Via dell'Impero, Brasini presented his own 1937 idea for a Mole Littoria as a credible response to the increasingly daunting and unrewarding search for a Fascist 'signature' building at the heart of the capital. His design was not fundamentally dissimilar in terms of scale and form to a much earlier (1917) drawing of a similar monument that had appeared in the *Urbe Massima* publication presented by Paolo Orano, the later assistant editor of *Il Popolo d'Italia* (Orano 1917). In addition to the main tower of gigantic proportions, the Mole Littoria would feature an internal aula measuring nearly 4000 square metres, space for a triumphal arch, and a special party room with 4000 seats. Outside four statues would communicate a narrative of historical continuity from the Roman republican and imperial times through the Renaissance to the Risorgimento and eventually the Fascist *impero*, with a fifth big statue of Caesar invoking historical parallels with the role of Mussolini in turning Italy into a world imperial power. Brasini's project proposed a genuinely iconic monument situated at the heart of the historic centre (and conceivably even on the

Via dell'Impero), spectacular in size, lavish in decoration, rich in Fascist legibility, that would also eclipse anything comparable on a global scale. The architect estimated that the project would require four years of intensive work (and 115 million lire) before it could be inaugurated – significantly timed to coincide with the opening of the 1942 universal exhibition in Rome (E42).

The project remained on paper, bringing the entire chapter of a Mole Littoria for Rome to an anti-climactic conclusion. Yet the failure of a long list of architects to realise 'signature' Fascist-era buildings at the heart of Rome's historic centre did not dissuade others from trying to capture this coveted prize. In 1938 Rino Valdameri, a Milanese lawyer who was also passionate about Dante's literature, suggested the idea of constructing a monument to the celebrated Italian poet in Rome in order extol the visionary significance of his *Divine Comedy* for modern Italian identity. Valdameri enlisted the financial support of a steel industrialist from Milan and – through his links with the *Quadrante* circle (Rifkind 2007a: 120) – the professional expertise of the Terragni–Lingeri team. The two architects, who had worked together in the competitions for the Palazzo del Littorio in Rome a few years back, secured the collaboration of the famous painter Mario Sironi for the execution of the building's external decorative features and drafted a detailed plan by late 1938. An initial meeting between the project's financial and professional team took place in Palazzo Venezia in November 1938, during which Mussolini gave his enthusiastic endorsement. The chosen location was Via dell'Impero – in fact, the same empty space that had been originally earmarked for the planned Palazzo del Littorio but had remained in an awkward limbo following the decision to shift the project's location.

Valdameri ensured that the list of the project's official supporters (including as diverse names as Giovanni Gentile and the usually unforgiving critic of modern architecture Ugo Ojetti) served to shield the Danteum from possible attacks concerning the 'modernist' credentials of its two architects (Schumacher 2003: 37–8). Meanwhile, for Terragni and Lingeri this was a second opportunity to leave a lasting architectural legacy at the heart of the 'third Rome', after their failure in the second stage of the competition for the Palazzo del Littorio in 1937. A modest box-like unitary construction from the outside, their design for the Danteum resembled a visual journey across four rooms organised on two levels, emulating the structure of Dante's literary work (entrance–inferno–purgatory–paradise). In the detailed documentation accompanying the plan, Terragni presented the building not as a monument or a cenotaph but as a 'temple' – a sacred space, not dissimilar in function and symbolism to their earlier projects for the Palazzo del Littorio, in which time and space would be suspended in deliberate transparency and interpenetration (Schumacher 1977: 89–107; Lecis 2002: 18). The Danteum was conceived not as a *u*topia but as an *omni*topia, not as a linear historical narrative but as a constant merging of past and present, culminating in an image showing the transformation of the letter 'M' into the form

of an eagle (as per Dante's text) but also inviting contemporary reference to Mussolini (Jenner 2007: 509–17; Schumacher 2003: 38).

The Danteum project marked the last attempt of the Fascist regime to introduce contemporary content into the architectural-visual narrative of the Via dell'Impero. It appears that, after the initial euphoria following the Duce's declaration of support in November 1938, there was little tangible further progress, in spite of Valdameri's incessant efforts and the two architects' advanced preparation of the drawings. By early September 1939 Valdameri had received from the Duce's secretariat a response similar to the one given to Brasini regarding his plans for the historic centre ten years earlier – 'for a better time' (*in miglior tempo* – Schumacher 2003: 38). But what linked the failure of the Danteum project with the similar fate of the original Palazzo del Littorio and the Mole Littoria was the same eventual admission that the already dense and over-signified palimpsest of the Via dell'Impero was suffocating and inhospitable to additive architectonic elements that sought to express a new 'revolutionary' Fascist temporality. The overbearing presence of such powerful architectural elements from the city's past, combined with the regime's overriding deference to *romanità*, restricted the margins of innovation and the horizon of ambition. In response, the Fascist regime would not abandon the quest for signature buildings; but it would redirect this quest to the more ample extra-mural space of the city's periphery, less burdened by weighty historical associations.

Individual Buildings

Notwithstanding the abandonment of many 'signature' architectural projects, the 1930s did witness the construction of a number of important **public buildings** in or in close proximity to the historic centre. The majority of these buildings served administrative purposes (either state or regional/local) and service functions (police offices, courts, postal services, railway stations). In addition, public organisations that acquired greater significance and roles during the Fascist period – among them the Instituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni (INA), the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro (BNL), the Istituto Nazionale per l'Assicurazione contro gli Infortuni sul Lavoro (INAIL), and the Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra (ANMIG) – worked closely with distinguished architects to construct new high-profile buildings across the city. The INA in particular developed a strong property arm during the 1920s and functioned as a hub of building activity in regenerated urban centres across the country. Its partnership with Marcello Piacentini (which dated back to INA's involvement in the regeneration of the historic centre of Brescia supervised by Piacentini in the late 1920s) continued with the execution of a series of key projects featured in the PRG1931 for Rome (Scarrocchia 1999: 57–8). Two such projects of urban regeneration in the capital's centre stand out: first, the opening of the

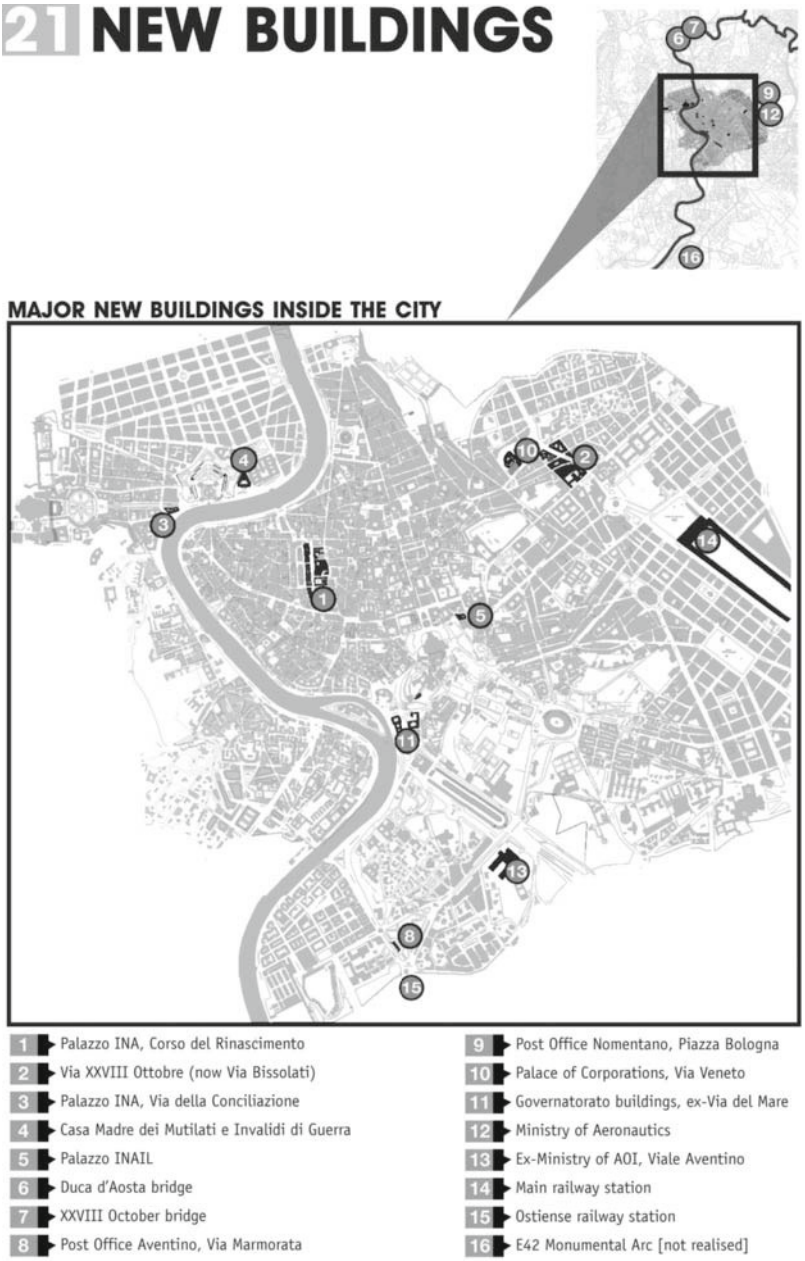


Figure 21 Diagram: Fascist-era individual buildings in central Rome

Corso del Rinascimento near Piazza Navona (1935–38) that was discussed in Ch. 4; and second, the construction of **Via XXIII Marzo** (now Via Bissolati) in the thoroughly reorganised zone between Piazza Barberini and Via Veneto. Each of the two projects was marked with a signature INA edifice, on Corso Vittorio Emanuele (by Arnaldo Foschini, 1937) and on Via Bissolati/Via Umbria (by Piacentini, 1939–40) respectively.[73] In addition, the opening of **Via della Conciliazione** (1936–39; see Ch. 4) was marked by the construction of yet another INA building, placed on the left side of the entrance to the monumental avenue (Nicoloso 2001: 85–6; 2008: 100).

The new quarter that emerged from the rubble of the demolitions along the new Via Bissolati and the reorganisation of the entire zone between Via Barberini and Via Veneto (1931–43) provided other public organisations with opportunities to construct 'signature' buildings in the centre. During the late 1930s and the war years Piacentini left his creative stamp throughout the area, designing buildings also for the BNL (1936) and the FIAT company (completed after the war – Lupano 1991: 189–201). For Piacentini, this zone was pivotal to his programme for a new, modern 'directional' urban centre that had formed the backbone of his vision for Rome throughout the 1920s and had been partly embedded into the Fascist-era regulatory plans for the capital. The demolitions authorised by the 1925/26 Variante and the PRG1931 swallowed entire blocs of pre-existing public and residential architecture, opening the way for a fundamental aesthetic and spatial reimagining of the area as a modern administrative and commercial urban centre. The new 'signature' buildings of the zone that were executed just before and during the Second World War echoed the later Piacentinian trademark style: slabs of stone alternated with concrete and large blocks of travertino marble and decorative reliefs referencing the mythical foundations of the city (Mazzoni 2010: 225–6).

Piacentini's star also shone on the other side of the river, in the area close to the Vatican complex. Long before leaving his mark there with the opening of the Via della Conciliazione (Ch. 4), he had been commissioned directly by ANMIG to design a building dedicated to the injured veterans of the First World War. The construction of the **Casa Madre dei Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra** began in 1925, its first phase inaugurated three years later to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the end of the Great War; but the building was substantially enlarged and remodelled in 1934–36 (Fig. 22.1). Built in limestone and travertino marble, the building occupied a location between the austere (though dilapidated in the 1920s) volume of the Castel Sant'Angelo and the late nineteenth-century decorative excess of the landmark Palace of Justice – after the Monument to Vittorio Emanuele II, perhaps the most significant monumental building of the Liberal era in Rome. Thus, the initial construction performed a visual balancing act between the two adjacent 'signature' buildings from two very distant phases

Figure 22.1 Casa Madre dei Mutilati (Marcello Piacentini)

of the city's history. Working closely with a team of sculptors and interior designers, Piacentini opted for a rich decorative programme, appropriate for the Casa Madre's sombre tributary function. The extension of the mid-1930s saw the initially modest building grow in size and monumental proportions, with a new layer of exterior and interior decorative elements but also with a number of additional architectural features (especially the tower) that betrayed its stricter aesthetic alignment with the *stile littorio* of the 1930s.[74] The result of Piacentini's typically eclectic choices proved controversial. Some contemporary critics praised it for its 'honest simplicity' and austere function as a 'civic temple' (Pigafetta, Abbondandolo, and Trisciuoglio 2002: 237; Di Castelnuovo 1932: 160) while others did not shy away from including it in the list of architectural mishaps of the Fascist period (Regni and Sennato 1973: 23; cf. Pagano 1941c: 3).

Less controversial – if only by virtue of its almost unanimous condemnation by contemporary professionals and critics – was Armando Brasini's work in the centre of Rome. In spite of a catalogue of notable earlier failures (e.g. his plan for the Renaissance quarter in the 1920s – see Ch. 2 – and his abortive Mole Littoria – see above), Brasini continued to exercise a significant influence on architectural developments in the capital. In addition to having being appointed to almost every expert committee for regulatory planning in Rome and many judging panels for high-profile competitions in the 1930s, he also continued to receive direct commissions for high-profile projects in Rome. One of his buildings, the **Palazzo INAIL** on Via IV Novembre, allowed him to boast that he was the only contemporary architect who could build at the heart of the historic centre (Spagnesi 1992: 276).

Constructed between 1929 and 1931 on a narrow space 'liberated' by the demolition of the National Theatre behind Piazza Venezia, Brasini's edifice exuded his trademark monumental neo-baroque historicism and was predictably greeted with derision for its excessive, incongruous aesthetic choices (Procida 2009).[75] Even Mussolini added his own censure by calling it 'an error … [and] an authentic accident [*infortunio*]' (*Opera* XXV: 88).

Nevertheless, Brasini seemed unfazed by such ridicule and determined to solder on, seeking and sometimes receiving new commissions. In 1932 he was awarded the project of constructing a new bridge on the northern edge of the city, to the east of the historic location of Milvio bridge. The bridge was to be named **XXVIII October Bridge** – a tribute to the date of both the March on Rome and the vision of the cross seen by the Roman emperor Constantine in 312 CE. Brasini's initial plan had been approved by the then minister of Public Works, Arnaldo di Crollalanza. But when Di Crollalanza was replaced in 1935 by Luigi Razza, a series of further modifications to the original design was demanded that infuriated Brasini. In the meantime, the architect had been publicly attacked both for his proposed design of the bridge and for the direct nature of his commission instead of an open competition (as happened, for example, in the case of the nearby **Duca d'Aosta Bridge** leading directly to the monumental complex of the Foro Mussolini – see below). The latter criticism was perhaps unfair; as Brasini himself pointed out, he could not be singled out for preferential treatment at the same time when Piacentini, Enrico Del Debbio, Luigi Moretti, and others had been directly commissioned by the state, party, or municipal authorities to design and execute landmark projects in Rome.[76] Work on the bridge did eventually start in 1939, after Mussolini had intervened to confirm Brasini's stewardship of the project and determine the definitive design in a manner that appeased the architect.[77] In the meantime, Brasini managed to execute a number of other minor projects in Rome, including the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (1923–54) in the neighbourhood of Parioli and the Buon Pastore complex in the western outskirts of the capital (1922–43).

On the opposite end of the aesthetic spectrum, 'rationalist' architects too seized every opportunity to leave their mark on the privileged canvas of the 'third Rome'. While such opportunities were de facto limited, coming inside the historic centre (and all but disappeared with the relocation of the Palazzo del Littorio to the northern outskirts of the city and the abandonment of the Danteum project), a number of spaces in the surrounding metropolitan area and the suburbs were made available to architects in the 1930s, usually in the form of competitions. The most prestigious and highly publicised such competition was announced in 1932 and involved the construction of four new post offices in the suburban quarters of Appio to the west, Aventino to the south, Nomentano to the east, and Milvio to the north (Minnucci 1933; Poretti 1990; Muntoni 2010: 277–80). The timing of the competition was particularly interesting, coming in the wake of the most heated phase of the debates

on Fascist architecture that marked the 1931 Second Rationalist Exhibition in Rome and the bitter fallout between Piacentini and MIAR that followed it (Ch. 2). Yet 1932 marked the beginning of a new, short-lived phase that saw many ex-MIAR architects reinstated at the forefront of official Fascist architecture, with projects such as Florence's new railway station, the new university campus in Rome, and competitions for the regulatory plans of the 'new cities' of the Agro Pontino (Ch. 6). In this respect, the 1932 competitions for Rome's new post offices came at a propitious moment, attracting many entries from frustrated 'rationalists' and producing some of the boldest modernist buildings constructed inside Rome during the two decades of Fascist rule (De Simone 2011: 174). Each competition received in excess of 20 submissions, with those for Milvio and Nomentano surpassing 40 – a total of 136 projects. The results were announced in June 1933. Giuseppe Samonà won the competition for Appio with an elegantly prismatic triangular structure. Mario Ridolfi's design (Fig. 22.4) – a complex, sculpted 'expressionist' building in an impressive curvilinear shape – was chosen for **Nomentano** (Bracardi 2008: 7–9). Adalberto Libera, the erstwhile leading force behind MIAR, emerged victorious from the competition for the **Aventino** post office (Fig. 22.3) with a symmetrical, yet deliberately heterogeneous edifice contradictory in shapes and materials (Grundmann 1998: 313–16; Poretti 2005; Rivalta 2000). Only Salvatore Titta's more conventional winning project for the Milvio post office building departed from the 'rationalist' canon. At the time of their inauguration (28 October 1935), the three modernist postal buildings were greeted with mixed reactions, particularly as they now appeared far more dissonant with the official *stile littorio* than at the time of the competition three years earlier (Munafò and Tassi 2009: 34–7). Still, as an ensemble they came to epitomise both the opportunities for, and the limits of, the Fascist regime's patronage of modernist architecture in Rome: situated in an intermediate suburban zone between the historic centre and the periphery, the post offices attested to the willingness of the Fascist authorities to solicit innovative modernist projects for individual public buildings with a 'modern' function (communications, transport, education and youth facilities) while sticking to more syncretic or conventional designs when it came to commissioning either important public edifices in the centre or large-scale monumental projects in the periphery.

Government and administration buildings fell into the latter category. Until the late 1920s the official architectural style for this category of buildings had not changed significantly in comparison to that of the preceding Liberal period. Two new ministerial edifices, of Education in Trastevere and of Communications in Via Nomentana, were completed by 1930, both in eclectic neo-classical style. By contrast, in the early 1930s a very different kind of landmark government edifice for the new **Ministry of the Corporations** (Palazzo delle Corporazioni) was constructed in the centre of Rome (Fig. 22.2). This building, designed by Piacentini and Giuseppe Vaccaro, was inaugurated

Figure 22.2 Ministry of Corporations on Via Veneto (Marcello Piacentini and Giuseppe Vaccaro). *Edilizia Moderna*, 12/13 (1934): 2 (from the collection of Casa dell'Architettura di Latina)

Figure 22.3 Aventino post office, Via Marmorata (Adalberto Libera and Mario De Renzi)

Figure 22.4 Nomentano post office, Piazza Bologna (Mario Ridolfi)

in November 1932 and is widely recognised as a landmark construction that set the tone of official public architecture in Italy for the remainder of the decade (Pigafetta, Abbondandolo, and Trisciuoglio 2002: 241). Occupying a large curved plot on Via Veneto, the building ushered in a decade of dramatic transformations in the entire zone that was earmarked by the PRG1931 as a gateway to the new modern centre of the capital. Piacentini's partnership with the young Vaccaro for the Palace of Corporations produced an austere monumental construction of concrete and marble that was nevertheless highly untypical and original in terms of decoration and materials (Pensabene 1934). A team of notable artists (among them the sculptors Giovanni Prini and Antonio Maraini, and the painter Mario Sironi) came together in a creative partnership under Piacentini's direction to execute an extensive decorative programme for the new ministry building. These decorations, and the highly innovative use of functional features and materials in its interior, transformed the building from a cold bureaucratic institution into a symbolic exaltation of Fascist social and economic policy, at a time that marked the peak of the Fascist corporatist parabola in the wake of the publication of the 1927 Labour Chart (Carta del Lavoro).

When it was completed in 1932, the Palazzo delle Corporazioni suggested an architectural compromise between modernism and classically inspired monumentalism that divided the opinion of critics (Coccia 2008a: 151). While projects by other architects had been submitted for consideration for the ministry building, including a bolder modern interpretation by a team

headed by Pietro Aschieri, the Piacentini–Vaccaro plan was adopted as a more appropriate solution for the function of the building and its central location (Marconi 1928: 398–401). A similar rationale prompted the authorities of the Governatorato to model the **new municipal buildings** along the lines of the new official style of Fascist-era public architecture that had been rehearsed on the Ministry of Corporations. The project took shape in wake of the opening of Via del Mare, as part of the wider reorganisation of the zone between the Campidoglio and Piazza Bocca della Verità (Ch. 3). It involved two large office buildings occupying opposite plots along the new avenue, in an area with important archaeological remains from the classical and medieval periods. The responsibility for the design of the two buildings was entrusted to two architects of the Governatorato – Cesare Valle (a member of Piacentini's GUR team) and Ignazio Guido. The first edifice – Palazzo dell'Anagrafe – situated towards the river and appended to a medieval building that was earmarked for preservation (Casa dei Crescenzi) – was easier to construct due to the absence of important archaeological finds in the area, and was completed by the summer of 1936. By contrast, the plot identified for the second building – on the opposite side towards Piazza Consolazione – was closer to two important archaeological zones that were being excavated in the 1930s (the Campidoglio and the Foro Boario) and raised doubts among conservation experts about its suitability for modern construction.[78] In the end, objections were overruled and the construction of the second Governatorato building – more modest in height and style due to its proximity to the Campidoglio – began with considerable delay in 1937 (Villani 2012: 218–19).[79]

Four further ministry buildings were commissioned by the Fascist regime in the 1930s. Two of them were situated in the zone to the northeast of the railway station that underwent fundamental transformation and expansion during the Fascist period: the **Ministry of Communications** (1930) and the **Ministry of the Air Force** (1931). The latter was designed by Roberto Marino as a celebration of both military might and the modernising spirit of Fascism, its construction coinciding with Italo Balbo's transatlantic flight that was commemorated with the choice of an airplane as the dominant decorative figure crowning the facade.[80] The other two ministry buildings – for the **Ministry for Italian East Africa** (Africa Orientale Italiana, AOI) and for the new seat of the Foreign Ministry – were commissioned in the late 1930s to reflect Fascist Italy's enhanced status as an imperial and international power. Both projects shared key similarities. They were both to be situated in the zone south of the Colosseo, following the track of the new Via Imperiale that would connect the historic centre with the new quarter of the 1942 world fair (Sicut 1939; see also Ch. 3). They were also expected to follow in stylistic terms the far more austere form of the late official *stile littorio*, echoing Del Debbio's winning design for the Palazzo del Littorio. The AOI Ministry edifice would be situated at the beginning of Viale Aventino

(Piazza di Porta Capena), in front of the space where the Obelisk of Axum had been reassembled in 1937. The competition for the project began in 1938, went into two stages but resulted a year later in the unprecedented decision to ask two winning teams to work together on the basis of a redesigned hybrid model. Construction began in 1939 under the overall supervision of Vittorio Cafiero (one of the authors of the Fascist regulatory plan for the Ethiopian city of Asmara) and Mario Ridolfi, but progress was interrupted by the war (it was completed in the early 1950s and offered to the United Nations). By contrast, the project for the new Foreign Ministry building was abandoned by the Fascist authorities, in spite of the announcement of a high-profile competition for the building that attracted submissions by important architects such as Gio Ponti and Luigi Moretti (Spagnesi 2010: 365–7). Its location had been fixed further south along the Via Imperiale, in a controversial position at the southernmost point of the archaeological park, where the avenue cut through the city walls via a recently opened monumental entrance (Muntoni 2010: 296–300; Miodini 2001: 24, 202). Even the best submissions that were praised by the competition's judging committee featured grotesquely monumental solutions, with the most literal references to the city's classical architectural heritage (symmetry, arches, colonnades).[81] In the end, the Foreign Ministry did acquire a new, suitably monumental seat – but not in the city's historic centre. Following the decision of the PNF to relinquish possession of the Casa Littoria in the Foro Mussolini (deemed too extravagant and provocative a project for party headquarters during a period of war), the ill-fated ex-Palazzo del Littorio became the future home of the ministry.

A gradual sense of 'fatigue' with architectural competitions in the second half of the 1930s (Muntoni 2010: 290) combined with a growing pressure for architects and judges alike to conform to a prosaic interpretation of the *stile littorio* that often produced disappointing entries or bizarre decisions. The quality of the submissions was less of an issue in the 1936 competition for the **Duca d'Aosta Bridge** in the northern sector of the city. The bridge's function of connecting the historic centre through the Flaminio quarter to the constantly expanding Foro Mussolini meant that it was conceived and presented as a landmark project that caught the attention of a significant number of architects and resulted in a strong field of submitted plans (Santuccio and Cristallini 2005: 144). The judging panel awarded the construction to Vincenzo Fasolo, whose heavy, austere monumental design prevailed over more innovative designs (Rossi 2003: 110–12). On this occasion, the competition resulted in a winning project that was completed by 1940. By contrast, a string of other competitions for important public buildings in the course of the 1930s were annulled in the process. The four urban quarters of Aventino, Nomentano, Milvio, and Appio were identified by the Ministry of Public Works as hubs for the planned decentralisation of administrative functions that became in vogue during the mid-1930s. In addition

to acquiring a new post office (see above), each of the four quarters was to host a magistrate's court (Pretura) or a police department (Vicequestura) – Appio and Nomentano would feature both – with the relevant competitions announced in 1933 and 1934 respectively. Neither selection process, however, produced a shortlist whose quality could be compared to the earlier, hugely successful and highly publicised competitions for the new post offices. It was thus not surprising that both projects were eventually abandoned, the one involving the police headquarters extending to a second phase and even then not making a complete selection (Muntoni 2010: 277–80, 288–90).

A similar fate awaited the competition for the new seat of the National Health Insurance Fund for Tradespeople (Cassa Malattie per gli Addetti al Commercio, 1937). The location for the building could not have been more spectacular or privileged: directly opposite the imposing volume of the Colosseo at the intersection between the two landmark avenues of the Fascist period (Via dell'Impero, Via dei Trionfi), it represented the boldest attempt of the Fascist regime to install its own architectural legacy in direct visual and spatial dialogue with the most cherished monument of classical *romanità*. Yet, in this case the rigid stylistic guidelines of the competition brief (a perfectly symmetrical edifice, divided into two lateral wings with an open space in-between, porticos, and rhythmic square windows on the facade, in an awkward trapezoid shape that was determined by the irregular plot) and the difficult location amounted to a daunting, thankless task. The judging committee, headed by Gustavo Giovannoni, received a relatively small number of submissions, the majority of which were predictably quite similar in their rigid visual interpretation of the late *stile littorio*. The winning project, signed by Costantino Vetriani and Alfredo Energici, pushed the joint submission of Mario De Renzi and Giorgio Calza Bini to second place in an otherwise strikingly uninspiring competition that failed to capture the imagination of experts and the public alike before becoming officially annulled (Muntoni 2010: 290).

The extent to which the official Fascist architecture of the late 1930s in Rome had become creatively strangled by the rigid stylistic requirements of the late *stile littorio* is further illustrated by the saga of Rome's **new railway station**. The original building had been commissioned by Pius IX shortly before the annexation of Rome into the new Italian kingdom. It was completed in 1874 by Salvatore Bianchi in the area close to the extensive ruins of the Baths of Diocletian following a Beaux-Arts style that reflected the aesthetic sensibilities of its time. Rome's post-1870 rapid demographic expansion and modernisation had rendered the original building unsuitable for its function as the primary transport hub of an expanding capital. Ideas about extending the existing station building and diverting the bulk of its functions to a new underground level were abandoned in the process because they clashed with the topographical and stratigraphical peculiarities of the area. Meanwhile, the busy Jubilee years of 1925 and then 1933 (Ch. 4) exposed the inadequacies of

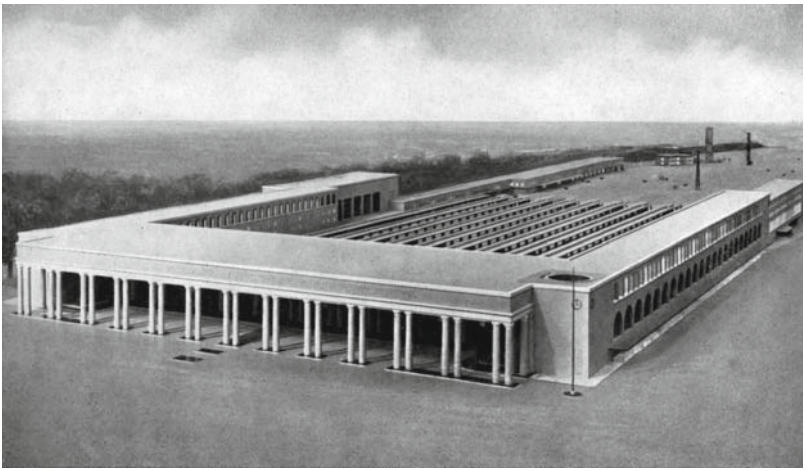


Figure 22.5 Design for the new railway station (Angiolo Mazzoni). **Wikipedia Commons**, Plastico Stazione Termini di Roma, http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/it/7/7e/Terminiplastico.jpg

the station even further. From the mid-1920s onwards the idea of demolishing the old railway station and replacing it with a new, much larger modern one gathered steady momentum. It featured prominently in the 1929 GUR plan for Rome (together with the suggestion of a new location further to the east) but was subsequently excluded from the PRG1931, only to resurface – as a certainty this time – after the decision to award the 1942 world fair to the city of Rome. By that point the authorities had decided that the original station building was more than functionally inadequate; it was also aesthetically dissonant with the new 'third Rome' that the E42 was meant to celebrate. As the railway station would be the primary gateway to the city for many visitors (the 'ante-chamber of the city', as Piacentini noted), the project was invested with a new, more powerful symbolic significance that the original building could not possibly cater for.

The design of the new station building was awarded directly to Angiolo Mazzoni. Appointed Inspector of Public Works for the Italian railways in 1922, Mazzoni was an architect with a long pedigree in similar projects across the country (railways stations of Siena, Montecatini, Trento, Reggio Di Calabria, Messina; numerous post offices, including the ones at Trento and Sabaudia). His architectural style was very original and eclectic, with a blending of rationalist sensibilities, Futurist ideas, and a personal aesthetic interpretation of *romanità*. The opportunity to design such a significant, high-profile functional building inside Rome captivated Mazzoni, not least because it seemed to offer a kind of redress for his exclusion from the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (MdRF) and his thwarted bid

for Florence's Santa Maria Novella railway station (Kirk 2005b: 105). He produced a series of drawings outlining different visions for the building, starting with a bold interpretation featuring a massive glass facade in order to make the circulation of trains and travellers visible from the outside (Rossi 2003: 160–1). Mazzoni's design, however, underwent substantial modifications before it was officially approved by Mussolini in early 1939. The glass facade would be hidden behind a monumental colonnaded portico of stripped-down neo-classical character, flanked by two long galleries decorated with a simple motif of marble arches running rhythmically along the platforms. Far less original, the revised plan was nevertheless highly praised for its resourceful response to functional monumentality by no other than Piacentini (1939: 80–3), who applauded its combination of 'modern, living, dynamic [spectacle]' and 'the grandeur and majesty of the great ancient compositions' across the city (Fig. 22.5). Construction began in 1939 and continued until its interruption in 1942, by which time only the two side galleries and parts of the main concourse had been completed.

When Hitler arrived in Rome by train in early May 1938 (Ch. 8), the only available suitable gateway for his reception was the (much smaller and humbler) **Ostiense station**, in the southern zone of the Aurelian walls. Given the magnitude of the occasion and the importance of the visitor, it was decided that the alternative station would be upgraded to host the arrival ceremony. The project was awarded to architect Roberto Narducci, who designed an austere monumental building with a marble colonnaded facade and sumptuous interior decoration. When Hitler, Goebbels, and the other Nazi dignitaries set foot on the Italian capital on the evening of 3 May 1938, Narducci's plan was far from finished (it was completed only in 1940); but the combination of new and temporary structures, dramatic illuminations, an imposing Nazi eagle adorning the external portico, a gigantic purpose-built pavilion executed by the architect in little over a month, and the renaming of the piazza in front of the Ostiense station after Hitler, created a suitably impressive backdrop for the meticulously choreographed arrival ceremony. On the floor of the portico, a programme of floor mosaics provided an impeccable narrative of historical continuity between the ancient origins of the city, its imperial grandeur, its medieval civilisation, and the contemporary militaristic spirit of the Fascist 'revolution' (Bennett and Graebner 2009: 65–7).

The designs for the two railway stations of the 'third Rome' addressed in somewhat different ways the formal requirements of the late *stile littorio* that would find its fullest visual expression in the buildings of the new E42 quarter in the southern periphery of the city. In fact, by the end of the 1930s the bulk of the creative and financial resources at the disposal of the Fascist regime had been diverted to the completion of the new exhibition quarter and to the necessary upgrades inside Rome that were linked to the impending world fair. The story, as well as individual components

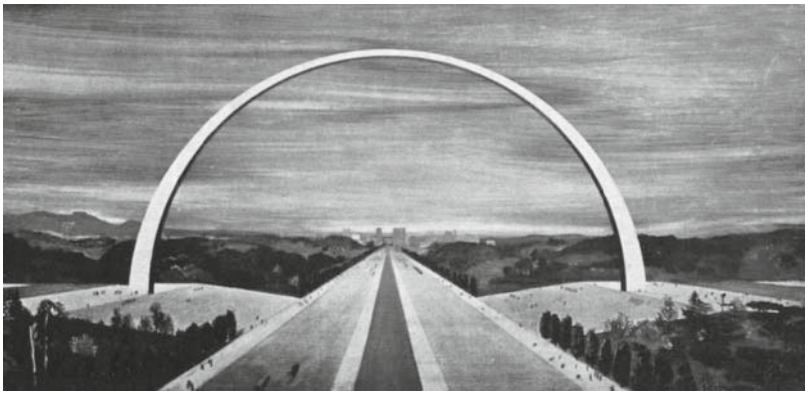


Figure 23 E42's 'Monumental Arch' (Adalberto Libera). *Architettura* 17, Special Issue (1938): 821 (from the collection of Casa dell'Architettura di Latina)

of the E42 quarter, will be discussed in more detail in Ch. 8. It is, however, a fitting epilogue to a chapter that deals with individual 'signature' buildings of the 'third Rome' to discuss briefly a unique construction feature of the design for the E42 quarter. The idea of a gigantic **arch structure** (Arco Monumentale; Fig. 23) to be situated at the southern gateway to the E42 quarter originated in 1937, when the first project for a metal arch extending to an incredible 600 metres was presented by Cesare Pascoletti and Dagoberto Ortensi. An unprecedented venture in every architectural and engineering sense, the project underwent numerous transformations in the subsequent four years. Adalberto Libera proposed a different structure made of simple concrete that was substantially smaller (though, even at circa 200 metres high, still without parallel at the time) (Nervi 1942; Polin and Marzari 1989: 162–3).[82] Later, the alternative idea of an aluminium construction, entirely sourced within Italy for 'autarchic' purposes, gained ground with two possible scenarios about the height (200 and 300 metres high, requiring 300 or 600 tonnes of material respectively).[83] However, after various engineering and logistical feasibility tests, the final plan approved by Mussolini in early 1941 envisaged a (non-autarchic) steel structure with only the merest aluminium cladding that remained on paper along with much of the new quarter by the time that the Fascist regime collapsed (Welge 2005: 90–2; Poretti 2008: 130–3; Tarozzi and Pezzotti 2007; Nervi 1942: 23–5).

The E42 arch, widely recognised internationally as the most impressive, futuristic feature of the new quarter prepared for the 1942 world fair, was perhaps Italian Fascism's most poignant architectural *non-finito*. The choice of such an unflinchingly futural hyper-modernist – in both form and execution – structure as the most dominant feature of a quarter that was

otherwise conceived and designed as the fullest tribute to the universalist spirit of Fascist *romanità* may appear at first bewildering. Although it was intended from the outset as a non-permanent structure to be recycled after the end of the exhibition, had it been constructed, it would have changed dramatically the visual physiognomy of the E42 quarter – and, with it, the architectural legacy of the Fascist period in Rome. However, by 1942 it had become yet another high-profile entry into the long list of unrealised or unfinished Fascist-era projects in and around Rome, very much like the exhibition quarter that it was meant to crown so spectacularly and the world fair that it would celebrate. The quest to hypostasise and immortalise the spirit of the Fascist era with one or more suitably grand 'signature' architectural works ended there, in the distant southern periphery of the capital, amidst the tragedy of the Second World War and the collapse of the Fascist regime. In hindsight, it would have been impossible to construct anything like Libera's monumental arch inside the city, let alone within the historic centre. Already in the 1920s but more consistently in the following decade, modern(ist) architecture was displaced from the crowded palimpsest of the centre to the increasingly more distant urban periphery. By the late 1930s, the zone of the historic centre had been rendered de facto inaccessible to experimental additive architectonic elements – whether because the Fascist regime or the competition panels opted for more conservative (in style and size) solutions or because the architects themselves decided that it was impossible to construct a modern building against the backdrop of such important monuments of the past.

What started, however, as a displacement of *modernist* architecture from Rome's historic centre ended up as an almost complete dislocation of Fascist 'signature' architecture as a whole from the central areas. Spaces 'liberated' for new landmark constructions remained stubbornly vacated, in spite of the best intentions and strong central will of the Fascist regime to leave its own additive architectural legacy amidst the historic layers of the city. Even those iconic projects in the centre that went past the stage of fanciful conception, were either abandoned, transferred to the periphery, or scaled down. The architectural valediction of the Fascist regime – the E42 project – divulged the conviction that the new additive Fascist layer could only find its most meaningful space in a blank canvas, away from the dense palimpsest of the historic centre and its environs – not as direct dialogue in situ with the haunting remains of *romanità* but as a liberating *creatio ex nihilo* appended more cautiously and subtly to the city's visible layer. To these projects – in the outskirts and the periphery of the capital – we will turn now.

6
The New Fascist Layer (II): Building for Grandeur and Necessity

The Discourse of *Bonifica* and the New Fascist 'Layer'

The failed Fascist quest for inserting its own 'signature' monuments in the historic centre of Rome (Ch. 5) was compensated by a prodigious register of interventions in peripheral, suburban, and even more remote areas. Taken together, all these interventions amounted to the most extensive component of the Fascist additive 'layer' in the capital. In terms of function and purpose, these *ex nihilo* constructions (executed on a spatial blank canvas) had very different characteristics. Some (predominantly monumental complexes constructed in the urban periphery) performed a crucial 'representational' function, embodying and encoding complex ideological references on their built form and space (cf. Lefebvre 1991: 33–9). Other additions (mostly new residential quarters and suburbs, including the rapidly expanding peripheral suburbs in the late 1920s and 1930s) derived from the Fascist regime's attempt to address mounting problems of overpopulation, unhygienic living conditions in dense neighbourhoods, and urban slum clearance. Many of these new suburban/peripheral areas of expansion were also used as temporary or permanent containers for the large number of families displaced from the demolitions inside the historic centre.

The *creatio ex nihilo* element of the Fascist 'layer' in Rome combined the regime's discourse of redemptive rebirth, as a process of reclaiming a higher essence from an alleged decadent reality, with the aspiration of a much wider sacred cosmogony, of creating a new universalist 'civilisation' and forging a new human condition out of chaos (Griffin 2007: 126, 139, 182). The tension between re*birth*/re*vitalisation* and *creation from nothing*, between the redemptive and the cosmogonic horizon, echoed Fascism's own ambivalent ideological formation as both 'revolution' and radical 'restoration'. It is far from a coincidence that all Fascist *ex nihilo* architectural projects were linked – more or less directly and convincingly – to the official discourse of *bonifica* (reclamation). *Bonifica* referenced the regime's determination to force a new beginning; to re-create (and, through it, renew) its natural,

anthropological, and cultural elements, by force if necessary, defeating the perceived forces of decadence and reversing their claimed detrimental effects on individual and collective life. But the official use of *bonifica* deliberately traversed boundaries. It referred to both 'the soil and the souls', nature and culture, technology and myth, the part and (cumulatively) the whole (Ben-Ghiat 2004: 80). Every single category and project of reclamation was both revitalisation/renewal and a crucial component of a broader 'new beginning' without precedent (Griffin 2007: 224; 2012: 10–12). The landmark policies of *bonifica integrale* that began in the mid-1920s as a set of local-regional campaigns of environmental, agricultural, and socioeconomic regeneration fall in this category. The complexity of this particular project is in itself indicative of the expansive horizon of the Fascist regenerative vision. 'Reclaiming' space involved a colossal technological effort to subjugate natural forces, to defeat disease, and generate new productive opportunities. This would, in turn, fulfil the Fascist dream of colonising space with a new anthropological template based on a fecund ruralised society as an antidote to perceived urban degeneration. The reclamation of space as a natural productive resource marked the symbolic beginning of a much wider regenerative chain reaction that was capable of transforming the lives of the settler units, the region, and the nation as a whole.

Bonifica, however, went far beyond the environmental-agricultural projects that transformed conditions of life in the notorious Agro Pontino and in other, equally inhospitable parts of the country. The vision of 'reclaiming' an ideal condition by peeling off layers of degenerative accretions touched on a much broader Fascist vision of renewal and recreation. *Bonifica della lingua* (language) sought to remove grammatical and vocabulary components deemed alien to, and unsuitable for, the Italian language. *Bonifica della storia* (history) became a campaign of rewriting the history of the Italian nation in a way that corresponded to the Fascist discourses of *romanità*, *universalità*, and national rebirth. *Bonifica della cultura* (culture) came to be identified with a crusade against 'international' (meaning cosmopolitan, communist, or 'Jewish') influences on Italian culture (Bonsaver 2007: 172). But it was the campaign for a *bonifica umana* ('human reclamation') that captured the full gamut of the Fascist ambition to both renew the human condition and re-engineer a new conception of life. The scientific foundations of this approach were particular neither to Fascism nor to interwar Italy. The Fascist *bonifica umana* developed against the backdrop of a more general concern with human degeneration in modern societies, whose origins lay deep in the nineteenth century (Pick 1989). The idea that natural, social, and even 'racial' forces had a critical effect on national development had already attracted the attention of authorities in democratic states (including progressive social democracies of northern Europe) and authoritarian states alike. In the 1920s the term gained traction in Italy through the work of the leading racial anthropologist (and close ally of the

Fascist regime) Nicola Pende, who propagated the idea of improving the 'racial stock' of the nation through concerted state action. Pende's *bonifica umana* prioritised three groups, identified as the most important for the cumulative improvement of the nation – youth (the pool of 'the [future] biological and moral aristocracy of the nation', as he stressed), women (as 'reproducers' of the nation), and workers (due to their perceived vulnerability to 'degenerative' forces) (Cassata 2011: 192–221). The Fascist regime developed a systematic strategy of diagnostic and 'corrective' education with regard to all three groups that was aligned to the main premises of Pende's 'human reclamation'. New social institutions, such as the Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB) for the youth, the National After-Work/Recreation Organisation (Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro, OND) for the workers, and the Women's Leagues (Fasci Femminili), all became increasingly important drivers of Fascism's biopolitical project, expanding in significance, membership, and institutional design throughout the 1930s.

The importance that the Fascist regime placed on these institutions was also reflected in their enhanced physical presence and visibility. The OND was meant to find its place of honour at the symbolic heart of the Fascist regime's and party's civic temple, the Palazzo del Littorio (Ch. 5). Meanwhile, two of the most lavish, high-profile architectural projects executed by the Fascist regime in Rome were dedicated to the youth: the ONB/sporting complex that took shape in the late 1920s at the northern edge of the city, in an empty area between the river and Monte Mario hill that would later form the so-called **Foro Mussolini**; and the new **university campus** (***Città Universitaria***), constructed in 1932–35 to the east of the railway station. The chosen peripheral locations for these two projects provided a veritable blank spatial canvas in the capital for articulating new architectural representations in a way that the dense (topographically but also symbolically) historic centre could never do. While the university campus took shape in an area of extensive construction in the 1930s that stretched further and further to the east, the sporting complex run by the Fascist youth organisation Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB) was conceived as a genuine 'new city', with its own constantly expanding regulatory plans shaping a space that was previously considered detached from the city itself. In both cases, the trope of spatial and anthropological *creation* was combined with powerful *ex nihilo* fantasies of 'taming' and 'ordering' space to produce two signature architectural complexes for the Fascist 'cult of the youth' (Ben-Ghiat 2000: 157–8).

The Fascist horizon of *bonifica umana* continued to expand in the 1930s, touching on debates about urban regeneration and social improvement. In this respect, the Fascist regime stood at the receiving end of a series of efforts to alleviate perceived urban problems, starting with the 1865 general law for the regulation of urban development and followed by the special 1885 law of *risanamento* in the cholera-hit southern metropolis of Naples (Crespolani 1929; Snowden 2002: 191–5; Ranisio 2003: 103–26). In 1903 the Liberal state

had founded the Institute of Popular Housing (Istituto delle Case Popolari, ICP) and passed law 254 in order to coordinate the efforts of improving conditions of workers' housing on a national basis, with regional branches appearing in all major urban centres across the country. Further laws stipulating stricter norms for social housing were introduced by the government of Giovanni Giolitti in the first decade of the century to complement the 1903 legislation (Calabi 2004: 42–3). The Fascist regime intervened from a very early stage in this domain, legislating either substantial modifications to its existing framework or new initiatives that expanded and modified its original remit. In 1923 Alberto Calza Bini (the future president of the Fascist syndicate of architects) became the new president of the ICP – a position that he held until his resignation in 1943. Following the reform of Rome's municipal administration in 1925 (Ch. 1), the institute was placed under the control of the Governatorato*, effectively becoming an executive instrument of Fascist housing policy (Sinatra 2006: 28–9). The regime also expanded the provision of social housing to civil servants with the formation of the National Institute for the Housing of State Employees in 1924 (Istituto Nazionale per le Case degli Impiegati dello Stato, INCIS).

The link between *bonifica umana*, urban regeneration, and social housing was a central concern of the Fascist regime, especially since urban life was considered by Mussolini to be the source of many social ills that had to be eradicated in the new Fascist epoch (Ch. 2). Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, state and municipal authorities embarked on multiple ambitious programmes of urban regeneration/reclamation (*bonifica urbana*) in a number of cities across the country. Old, unhygienic urban neighbourhoods underwent significant modifications in order to offer improved conditions of life for their inhabitants. Urban slums (the notorious *baracche*) were targeted as part of a high-profile regime 'battle' against the growing problem of shanty towns, many of their inhabitants rehoused in new, specially built complexes (*alberghi*) or purpose-built **suburban villages** (*borgate*). Further 'housing nuclei' were constructed to provide solutions to the demographic expansion of cities and the chronic shortage of good-quality, affordable housing.

Renewal (*ex novo*) projects and wholly new constructions (*ex nihilo*) constituted two discrete but also ideologically interrelated facets of the Fascist overarching vision of *bonifica*. Whereas the former celebrated rebirth through corrective intervention, the latter communicated a far more radical vision of ideal Fascist creation on a *tabula rasa*. The pinnacle of the Fascist regime's *ex nihilo* programme came to be identified with the foundation of a series of **new cities** (*nuove città*) across the Italian peninsula (from the south to Sardinia to the industrialised north – Kargon and Molella 2008: 50) and in the newly acquired lands of the Fascist *impero* in Africa. This radical vision of *creatio ex nihilo* found arguably its most celebrated expression in the **five 'new cities'** (*pentapolis*) constructed on the grounds of the 'reclaimed' Agro Pontino to the south of the capital. Littoria, Sabaudia, Pontinia, Aprilia, and

Pomezia were invested by Fascist propaganda with a mythical, cosmogonic quality. They were both ideal expressions of a Fascist conception of collective life (a kind of realised *eu*topia) and 'miraculous' creations that transcended life itself (Burdett 2007: 109–10).

Taken together, the projects of 'renewal' and 'creation' mentioned above made up the most extensive *additive* Fascist 'layer' in and around Rome. Very different in scale, function, and location, they were nevertheless pivotal facets of the 'third Rome'. But they also shared a deeper crucial quality that became more and more pronounced in the course of the 1930s: they were new spaces conceived in radical opposition to their surrounding reality. Their fundamental, deliberate *alterity* transformed them into 'countersites' that reimagined, contested, disrupted, and often inverted elements of the world around them (Tonkiss 2005: 132). Even if they were imagined as leitmotifs for future sweeping transformation, they came to resemble what Michel Foucault called *heterotopia*. Unlike *u*topias (etymologically denoting a non-space due to its essentially unrealisable qualities) or *eu*topias (optimal, ideal space), heterotopias (literally, 'other spaces') are concrete, realised spatial and visual practices that embody and communicate an ideal condition in miniature and in difference to their surrounding 'real' spaces; real and at the same time unreal, rooted in their surrounding physical space yet strangely spaceless in their difference and departure from conventional reality (Defert 1997). Of the various types of heterotopias that Foucault identified, heterotopias of *illusion* and *compensation* form a unique subset that is of particular interest to the subject of this chapter. He explained the function of the former as enacting fully an alternative social order as real; and of the latter as 'creat[ing] a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled' (Foucault 1984: 48). Allusions to difference but also alterity (otherness) render these two 'heterotopias' especially useful for analysing Fascism's kaleidoscope of *ex nihilo* spaces in and around Rome (Dehaene and De Cauter 2008; Hetherington 1997: 46). In different ways, all projects examined in this chapter – from the monumental 'cities' of the Foro Mussolini and the Città Universitaria to the new peripheral *borgate* to the *nuove città* of the Agro Pontino – were Fascist heterotopias that captured and simulated a Fascist alternative future order in fundamental difference to their surrounding space and time.

Cities for the Youth: The Foro Mussolini and the Città Universitaria

It is highly symbolic of the importance that the Fascist regime ascribed to the political socialisation of the youth that the two most extensive *ex nihilo* projects executed in Rome during the two decades of Fascist rule involved in different ways the education of the younger generation. The **sports complex** that emerged on the northern edge of the city, in an area of green

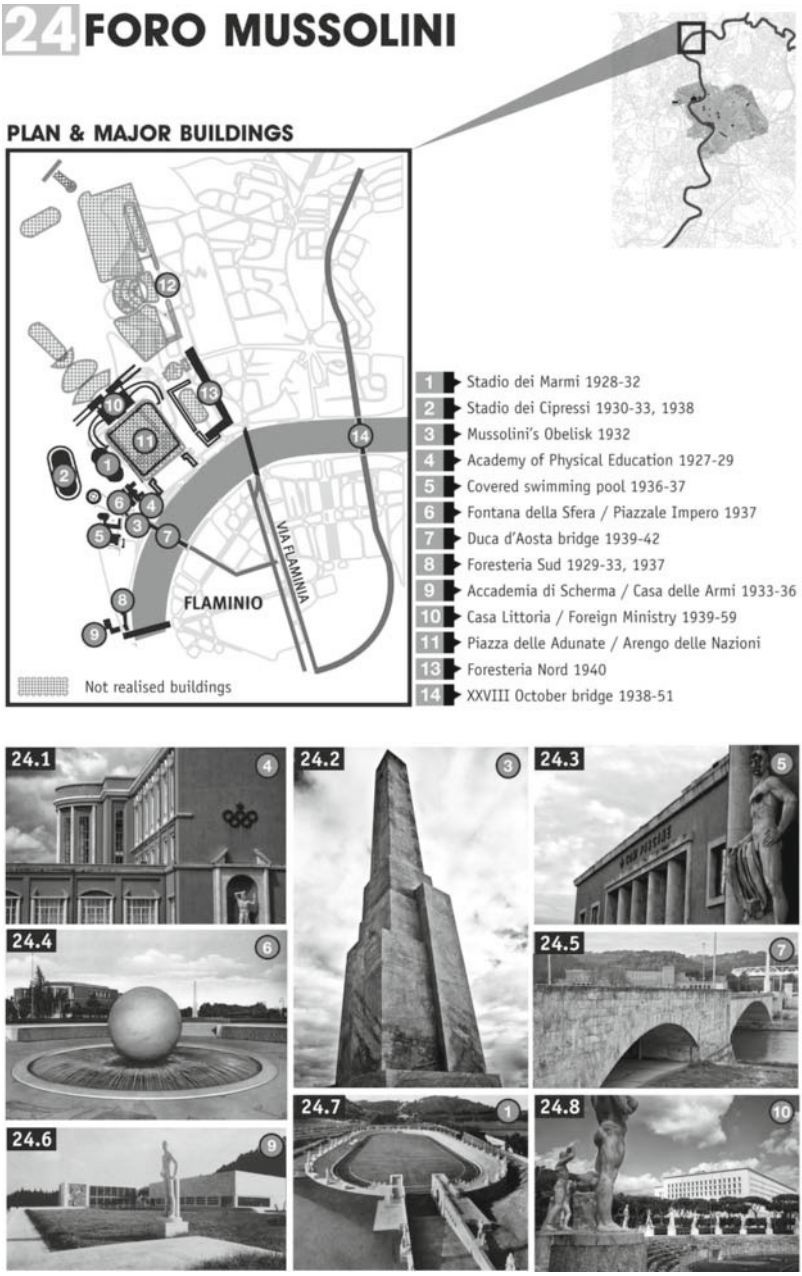


Figure 24 Diagram: Foro Mussolini. **24.4** with the kind permission of © Archivio di Etnografia e Storia Sociale, Regione Lombardia, 'Fontana della Sfera, Foro Mussolini', Fondo Scrocchi, Album SCR_66, p. 62. **24.6**: *Edilizia Moderna*, 15/24 (1937): 23. **24.7**: *Edilizia Moderna*, 12/13 (1934): 36 (from the collection of Casa dell'Architettura di Latina)

between the river Tiber and the foot of Monte Mario, was commissioned for the Fascist youth organisation Balilla (Opera Nazionale Balilla, ONB) as a model space for the physical education of the future Fascist generations but also as a monumental representational space befitting the importance of the 'third Rome'. From its inception the project bore the signature of Corrado Ricci. Ricci was a true *fascista della prima ora* with very close personal ties to Mussolini who served as undersecretary of education, agitated successfully for the creation of a single Fascist youth organisation (as a separate institution with a degree of autonomy vis-à-vis both the state and the party), and was appointed first president of the ONB in 1926. Under his guidance, the organisation grew in membership and stature, constantly amalgamating new functions and competences in the broader field of youth education. The ONB's growing penetration of youth socialisation in the late 1920s and particularly 1930s was mirrored in, and aided by, an equally impressive geographic expansion, with more than 45 dedicated facilities (generically called Case Balilla) constructed across the country, along with many more gymnasia, swimming pools, camping sites, and other types of sports facilities (Koon 1985: 94–104; Capomolla, Mulazzani, and Vittorini 2008).

Ricci took advantage of his unique position of heading an organisation that was greeted as 'the most fascist of fascist institutions' (Ponzio 2009: 280), with substantial political autonomy and financial resources, to implement an extensive building programme that combined his specific pedagogical ideas about youth education with a distinctly modern architectural vocabulary. To do so, he appointed the respected architect Enrico Del Debbio as head of the ONB's Technical Office, with responsibilities that ranged from developing concrete guidelines for the organisation's building programme (Del Debbio 1928) to supervising the construction of new facilities to designing the ONB's 'signature' facilities in Rome. This phase formally ended in 1937 with the amalgamation of all youth organisations under the PNF institution of the Italian Youth of the Lictor (Gioventù Italiana del Littorio, GIL) and Ricci's dismissal. However, in his 11-year tenure as the head of ONB, Ricci succeeded in entrenching his organisation's presence – physical and social – in almost every part of Fascist Italy (Gentile 2008).

The Ricci–Del Debbio partnership left behind an impressive register of functional architecture largely executed by mostly younger modernist architects co-opted deliberately by the ONB. This legacy outlived Del Debbio, who left his post in 1934 and was replaced by Luigi Moretti. At a time when the Fascist regime was facing its version of 'culture wars' with regard to official architecture (Ch. 2), the ONB opted for a highly legible modernist architectural idiom that was praised by Giuseppe Pagano as the expression of a genuine 'revolutionary spirit', so desperately lacking, in his opinion, in other official architectural projects (Neri 2003: 353). In particular, ONB projects executed between 1932 and 1937 – the most productive and experimental period in the organisation's architectural activities – were

characterised by originality and experimentation that often departed even from Del Debbio's guidelines for the ONB's architectural canon. Across the country, younger architects like Mario Ridolfi, Gaetano Minnucci, and later Moretti designed and built youth facilities that took Del Debbio's guidelines for a simple, functional, neither excessively decorative nor unduly abstract architecture in new, bolder directions (Munafò and Tassi 2009: 8–12).

Nevertheless, it would be misleading to view the ONB's transition from Del Debbio to Moretti in terms of a fundamental shift from 'academic' monumentalism to a 'purer' form of modernism. Del Debbio was a distinguished member of the academic architectural establishment of Rome, well connected with Marcello Piacentini. He partnered with Vittorio Morpurgo and Arnaldo Foschini in the competition for the Palazzo del Littorio (a competition that he won in the second round; Ch. 5) and eventually saw his winning design realised in an area adjacent to the Foro Mussolini. Yet, Del Debbio was also capable of suggesting bolder readings of modernism, as evidenced in his Colonia Elioterapica building and the design for the Casa Madre del Balilla in the area of the Foro itself (both 1934; the latter never executed). Moretti, on the other hand, championed a modern, fluid abstraction that sought to recapture classical forms as timeless, universalist spiritual expressions of the whole of western civilisation (Moretti 1936; Casciato and Viati Navone 2010). In Rome, though not in the historic centre but in the quarter of Trastevere to the west of the river, he executed the impressive Casa GIL between 1933 and 1937, which encapsulated a personal alternative vision for Fascist official modernism to that of Del Debbio (Storelli 2007: 47, 51). What really distinguished the two architects was not adherence to the classical spirit (they both rejected the earlier cult of excessive decoration and called for a return to pure, 'classical' elements serving functional goals) but their different translations of this principle into specific architectonic and visual form.

Both Del Debbio and Moretti outlived the Fascist regime by three decades. Yet their most important legacy of the Fascist period coexists in, and determines in intriguingly complementary ways, the ONB sports complex in the northern periphery of Rome. This zone had already been identified by the *Variante* regulatory plan of 1925/26 (Ch. 1) as the optimal area for the construction of new athletic facilities for the capital. In 1927 Del Debbio compiled the first ad hoc plan for the zone for a dedicated landmark ONB complex, featuring the new building of the **Fascist Academy of Physical Education** (Accademia Fascista di Educazione Fisica; Fig. 24.1) and a series of other sports facilities along the river, framing his landmark classicist **stadium** decorated with 60 marble statues, each representing an Italian province (Stadio Mussolini or Stadio dei Marmi; Figs 24.7, 25).[84] The plan went through multiple iterations: in 1928 and again in 1930 to accommodate the complex's expansion; in 1932 as a result of the zone's incorporation into the PRG1931 (Piacentini 1933a); in 1934 after Moretti succeeded Del Debbio as

chief architect of the project; in 1936 in preparation for Rome's (unsuccessful) bid to host the 1944 Olympic Games; and finally in the late 1930s as dictated by the eventual transfer of the Palazzo del Littorio to an adjacent area. In the process, the sports facilities also expanded, with two stadia, dedicated facilities to a wide array of sports activities, and hostel facilities. The cumulative product of all these modifications was a mega-complex that gradually became a landmark representational space of Fascism in the capital, on a par in terms of scale and symbolic significance with the later E42 quarter (Ch. 8).

The evolution (and extension) of plans for the complex by Del Debbio and then by Moretti reflected its growing political significance for the Fascist regime (Rusche 1995). In 1928–29 Del Debbio had called the zone a *foro* dedicated to athletic activities (Foro dello Sport), thus claiming its spiritual and architectural lineage from ancient Rome. By 1930 the official appellation included the name of Mussolini but still privileged the complex's original athletic function for the youth (Foro Sportivo Mussolini). It was only in 1932 that the name changed to the more political appellation Foro Mussolini. The accumulation of symbolic capital was reflected in the zone's spatial expansion – at the expense of the public park area originally envisaged by the general regulatory plans of 1925/26 and 1931.[85] Ricci encouraged Del Debbio and later Moretti to produce plans on a constantly larger and more ambitious scale, putting pressure on the city authorities to allocate increasingly larger slices from the park to the ONB.[86] But what transformed the site into a unique representational space was the decision to transport the 20-metre-high marble **monolith** dedicated to Mussolini all the way from the northern town of Carrara (birthplace of both Ricci and Del Debbio) to Rome and install it at the heart of the Foro (Fig. 24.2). A massive undertaking that had started with quarrying the marble block in 1927 and sculpting it into the shape of an obelisk by the winner of a competition for the design, Costantino Costantini,[87] it was completed with the arrival of the monolith at the Foro in the early autumn of 1932 and its inauguration on 29 October – a day after the tenth anniversary from the March on Rome (Caffarelli 1935; D'Amelio 2009; Collotti 2009). Its insertion into the existing plan of the Foro changed dramatically the spatial balance of the entire zone, creating a new monumental axis marked by the obelisk on the river side and the **Fontana della Sfera** of Mario Paniconi and Guilio Pediconi (1933–34; Fig. 24.4) at the other end, where a new sports stadium (**Stadio dei Cipressi**) had been constructed between 1928 and 1932. The representational arrangement was completed in 1937 with Moretti's **Piazzale dell'Impero** – an expanse paved with Gino Severini's unashamedly connotative mosaics (a combination of classical Roman style and Fascist symbols, often accompanied by the word 'Duce' and political slogans of the regime – Benton 1995, 2000; Canniffe 2008: 195–204; Collotti 2009: 310–14). The new monumental entrance to the complex was framed by 28 marble

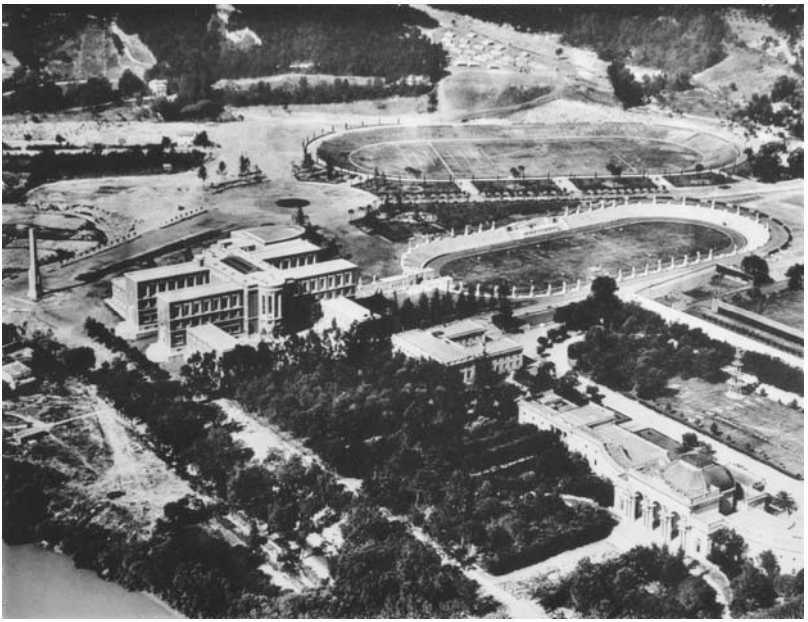


Figure 25 Aerial view of the Foro Mussolini, with the Academy of Fascist Physical Education, Mussolini's obelisk, and the Stadio dei Marmi (Enrico Del Debbio). With the kind permission of © **Museo di Roma**, 'Veduta aerea del foro Mussolini, oggi foro italico', AF 6701–30

plaques with inscriptions that provided a sequence of important events in the recent 'Fascist' history of Italy. Starting with Mussolini's founding of the newspaper *Popolo d'Italia*, the plaques celebrated Italy's entry into the First World War, and the March on Rome all the way to the proclamation of the Fascist *impero* in 1936 (Montorsi 1995: 87–94).

Beyond the dedication of the complex to Mussolini, however, there was a second reason behind the spectacular symbolic inflation of the Foro Mussolini in the 1930s. The success of the Italian team at the 1932 Olympic Games of Los Angeles and the award of the 1936 Games to Berlin convinced the Fascist regime to bid for the award of the 1940 or 1944 event. This decision motivated the further expansion of the athletic facilities in the Foro Mussolini, along with the enlargement of the Stadio dei Cipressi into what eventually became the Olympic Stadium of Rome. In 1936 Moretti completed the building dedicated to fencing (**Accademia di Scherma** – better known as Casa delle Armi; Fig. 24.6) – a beautifully measured edifice covered in marble with crisp rhythmic volumes, successfully negotiating a 'classical' purity of forms and geometry of shapes with an abstract modernist visual and functional sensibility (Muntoni 2010: 319–60; Kirk 2005b: 131; Marconi 1937). This building, along with Del Debbio's earlier **Foresteria Sud**

(completed in 1929 but re-clad to match Moretti's nearby building in the late 1930s), completed the reorganisation of the southwestern sector of the Foro Mussolini.

Moretti, however, had more ambitious plans for the complex and this ambition matched both Ricci's grandiose vision for the zone and the regime's focus on the political significance of sports for domestic and international reasons alike. In 1933–34 Ricci had asked Del Debbio to extend his earlier regulatory plan for the Foro to include an 87-metre high bronze statue of Mussolini standing atop the hill on an elevated platform that would host a museum dedicated to the ONB. Del Debbio worked closely with Moretti, Paniconi, and Pediconi to reimagine the area with such a visually and symbolically dominant addition. While originally Del Debbio's plan envisaged the colossal statue in separation from the main area of the Foro, Moretti suggested a new arrangement that melded the two parts, based on the use of terraces that tempered the steep incline of the hill. The idea was soon abandoned, though not due to want of ambition. For the young Moretti had set his eyes on surpassing Speer's Nazi party complex at Nuremberg as a space for rallies with his idea for an enormous 'balcony' for mass events at the foot of the colossal statue (**Piazzale delle Adunate – Arengo delle Nazioni**). Had it been realised, Moretti's plan would have completely shifted the balance of the complex from the functional (athletic) to the political-representational, just as in the case of the Nuremberg Party Grounds.

Although Moretti continued to work on new buildings with a sports theme (apart from the Casa delle Armi, in 1936 he executed the covered swimming pool – Terme – with the **Palestra del Duce** inside it (Gambarella 1994; Fig. 24.3).[88] Ricci's dismissal in 1937 and the failure of the bids for the 1940 and 1944 Olympic Games did arrest the momentum for expanding the athletic facilities in the area of the Foro. After the decision to relocate the Palazzo del Littorio in the area immediately to the east of the complex in 1939 (Fig. 24.8), Moretti produced yet another plan to accommodate the arrival of the new landmark building. Meanwhile, as the plans for the E42 quarter started to take concrete shape and somewhat diverted the regime's attention, the Foro Mussolini was reconceptualised as the modern northern entrance to the 'third Rome', mirroring E42's similar function in the south. Once again Moretti redrew the regulatory plan for the zone: covering an area nearly ten times larger than his earlier plan, he conceived a new axis that led from the Foro via the core of the historic centre of the city – from Corso Francia and across Brasini's 28 October bridge, along Via Flaminia, Via del Corso, Via dell'Impero and Via Imperiale, all the way to the E42 quarter (Ferrari 2010: 20).

All these and some other plans (including a gigantic new on-site Casa GIL by Moretti) either remained on paper or were stopped by the advent of the Second World War. Only the completion of the Duca d'Aosta bridge (Fig. 24.5) – aligned with the axis of the Piazzale dell'Impero – and of the 28 October bridge (Ch. 5) –with the axis of Via Flaminia and the historic centre – hinted at the intended spatial rapport between the Foro and the city.

Following the decision of the PNF to relinquish the Casa Littoria in favour of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the party headquarters were moved to the far less imposing building of **Foresteria Nord**, which had originally been designed as a hostel by Costantini in 1934–37. Moretti expanded the original design and also added to it the superbly elliptical new chapel dedicated to the 'fallen' Fascists in 1941 (Cella Commemorativa).[89] The last plan for the zone designed by Moretti in 1941 attempted to balance the four rather contradictory components of the complex (state, party, youth, leader) with its new symbolic and territorial function as a monumental entrance to the 'third Rome'. Moretti did not shy away from naming his Foro 'the new monumental *centre* of the Mussolinian Rome' (Santuccio and Cristallini 2005: 165; Gentile 2007: 104; emphasis added); and had the project not been interrupted by the war, it could have performed this function better than the E42 quarter, especially with the planned vast Arengo, where the Duce could address a crowd of two or even three hundred thousand against the spectacular backdrop of the entire city of Rome (Gentile 2007: 105; Setta 1986: 162–4).

Città Universitaria

In contrast to the Foro Mussolini that grew in a piecemeal manner over a long period of time, the other major complex dedicated to the youth executed by the Fascist regime in Rome – the new university campus of Rome commonly referred to as **Città Universitaria** – was the product of central political will and was conceived as a single (albeit not strictly unitary in style) project within a short period of time. When, in April 1932, the decision was finally made to proceed with the long-planned construction of the campus in the area to the northeast of the central railway station (in a zone between the San Lorenzo and the Nomentano quarters), Mussolini entrusted the realisation of the landmark project to Marcello Piacentini. The area chosen for the university campus was broadly the same as the one that Sanjust had suggested in the PRG1909. Piacentini resuscitated the idea in the 1920s, seeing the university campus as an integral part of the new 'directional' centre that was to be located in the area of the railway station and further east towards Via Tiburtina (Ch. 1). It was thus surprising that the final draft of the PRG1931 did not contain specific provisions for the university campus, earmarking the originally designated zone for moderate residential development. The plan resurfaced in early 1932, when Piacentini put forward the idea of a completely new 'city of study' (Città del Studio) to complement symbolically Del Debbio's 'city of sport' (Ciucci 2012: 220–36). With the eventual approval by Mussolini in April 1932 and the award of overall responsibility for the project to him,[90] Piacentini moved with exceptional skill and efficiency towards transforming the Città Universitaria into the first landmark collaborative project of the Fascist period in Rome. By 1933 he had drafted the overall plan for the campus, making deliberate allusions

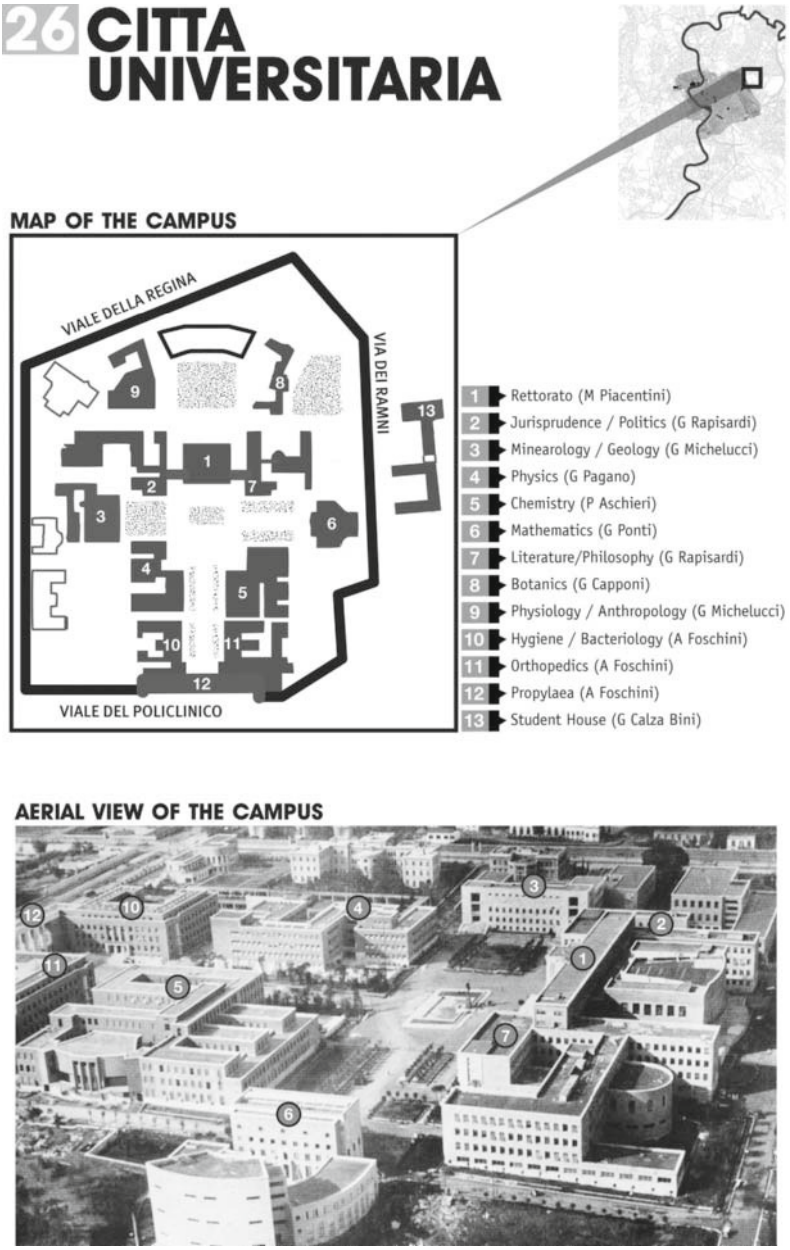


Figure 26 Diagram: Città Universitaria. *Architettura,* 14, Special Issue (1935): 4 (from the collection of Casa dell'Architettura di Latina)

to the spatial and stylistic practices of ancient Rome. Individual buildings dedicated to specific academic disciplines would be arranged around a central square, whose shape resembled the form of an ancient circus. Like Del Debbio, Piacentini envisioned the central node of the campus as performing the function of an ancient forum at the intersection of two axes that echoed the *cardo–decumanus* pattern of imperial Roman urban planning. Unlike the 'city of sport', however, Piacentini ensured that the Città Universitaria would engage from the first moment a multitude of architects from almost all aesthetic persuasions and areas of the country to work on individual buildings under a tight deadline for completion set by Mussolini (October 1935) – all at the service of the Fascist vision of turning Rome into a universal cultural and scientific beacon (Ceccherini 1933; Lupano 1991: 90–1).

The decision to turn the Città Universitaria into a kaleidoscopic collaborative project is of particular significance. It rehearsed a model for the execution of large-scale projects that would be used a few years later (with some modifications) as the basis for the construction of the E42 quarter (Lupano 2012: 33–5; Kallis 2011a: 60–1; see Ch. 8). It also established Piacentini's credentials as a powerful and supremely effective curator of 'aesthetic pluralism' in architecture and urban design. Piacentini used the opportunity offered by the landmark project to heal divisions and restore bridges with the rationalist constituency of architects while also rewarding some of his longest local collaborators (Gaetano Rapisardi, Arnaldo Foschini). His call was heeded by many prominent architects of the time, including the Milanese Giuseppe Pagano and Gio Ponti, the Tuscan Giovanni Michelucci, the former head of the dissolved MIAR Adalberto Libera, and the young Neapolitan member of the group Giuseppe Capponi. Piacentini's gamble paid off handsomely. He skilfully oversaw a project of exhilarating aesthetic diversity and delivered – in time! – an impressive in scale, highly syncretic in style *ex nihilo* 'city' in the vicinity of Rome's historic centre.

Still, a closer look at the way in which Piacentini distributed and arranged spatially the individual components of the project divulges strong assumptions and priorities that would continue to inform the canon of official Fascist architecture for the rest of the 1930s (Fig. 26). Piacentini assigned responsibility for the buildings framing the two sides of the central quad to his closest colleagues Foschini and Rapisardi. The only building that Piacentini executed at the Città Universitaria – the main aula, library, and seat of the university's Rector (**Rettorato**) – was framed on either side by two buildings by Rapisardi (**Jurisprudence** and **Philosophy**), while the opposite side of the quad consisted of the entrance **Propylaea** and the two buildings that framed it on either side (**Hygiene** and **Orthopedics**), all designed by Foschini. These six edifices constituted an ensemble that set the tone for the entire 'city of study', not only in the sense of their central symmetrical arrangement but also in terms of mediating the other buildings that departed in varying degrees from the Piacentinian architectural style.

The contributions of Pagano (**Physics**) and Pietro Aschieri (**Chemistry**) were situated on more neutral points of the central quad; while the buildings designed by Giovanni Michelluci (**Minearology**) and Ponti (**Mathematics**) were recessed along the lateral axis of the central square (Purini 2012: 241–8). Meanwhile, one of the most interesting buildings of the complex (**Botanics** and **Pharmaceutics**, designed by Capponi) occupied a peripheral and less visible location at the back of the Rettorato, opposite another edifice designed by Michelucci (**Physiology**).

With its bold use of glass surfaces and its articulated volumes, Capponi's building was the only structure that markedly departed from the theme of 'abstract (or purified) classicism' that Piacentini managed to infuse into the complex (Lupano 2012: 29; Etlin 1991: 422). Ponti's Institute of Mathematics did succumb to the homogenising classicist trend of the central quad/'foro' with its rather schematic central building; but it also introduced more articulated elements in the structure of the rear and the side parts. By contrast, Pagano's Institute of Physics suggested a unitary conception based on the interplay between simple, functional parts and clever use of space, avoiding the solution of a rigidly symmetrical plan (Saggio 1984: 56–67). For the buildings of the new student village (**Casa dello Studente**), a mini-complex located across the street from the main university campus, Piacentini decided to invite graduates of Rome's Architectural School to submit plans. This was the only component of the Città Universitaria that was offered to competition – and the winning submission by Giorgio Calza Bini (son of the president of the Fascist syndicate of architects) in association with Francesco Fariello and Saverio Muratori proposed a strongly modernist interpretation, making excellent use of low-rise buildings and ample space, even if in the end the winning team was asked to execute a diluted (and less original) version of the original submission.[91] As for Piacentini's *Rettorato* with its strong vertical lines and empty walls clad in travertino marble, its design underwent multiple transformations. The original idea for a blocky tower rising above the rest of the building gave way to a more balanced, fully symmetrical composition distinguished by its frontal staircase and elevated porch with simple columns (Saggio 1984: 56–7; Lupano 2012; Purini 2012: 248–55).

At the time of its inauguration in October 1935 the Città Universitaria complex received predictable praise not only from Mussolini (Nicoloso 2008: 201–2) but also from most professional architects across the country (Nezi 1936; Pagano 1935). In hindsight, however, the Città Universitaria was the product of a felicitous but short-lived phase of both aesthetic pluralism and professional synergy that had in practice already expired by the time that the landmark complex was shown to the world. Even before the inauguration of the university campus, Piacentini had been accused by the conservative critic Ugo Ojetti of having betrayed the architectural legacy of ancient Rome by inviting so many modernist architects to work on the project (Ojetti 1933; Brunetti 1991). In his response, Piacentini

fiercely defended his choice of style and the broad base of his collaborators by accusing Ojetti of inventing dichotomies between the 'classical' and the 'modern', the 'national' and the 'foreign', where they did not exist in the first place (Piacentini 1933b; Barocchi 1990: 227). The irony of his own position did not escape Piacentini: reviled by Bardi in 1931 for his monumental neo-classicism and accused by the painter Carlo Belli in 1932 of being 'the man of one hundred opinions, of two hundred styles, of three hundred manners [and] … monster with seven heads', he was now censured by Ojetti for 'deleterious avant-gardism' (Rifkind 2007a: 235–7; Brunetti 1991: 200). Pagano continued to defend Piacentini for a few more years after their collaboration on the Città Universitaria. Although the two architects were still divided by different aesthetic beliefs, they continued their unlikely professional collaboration (they designed together the Italian pavilion for the 1937 Paris world fair; and they participated in the initial steering group for the E42 project – see Ch. 8). Pagano praised Piacentini for his crucial role in solidifying a broad front against modernism's reactionary critics. Yet, Piacentini's balancing act shifted markedly towards monumentalism by the end of the 1930s, in a climate of inflated imperial imageries and nationalist fervour fuelled by the policy of *autarchia* (Muntoni 2012: 65; Lupano 1991: 151). Ojetti and Pagano, as it turned out, constituted a zero-sum ensemble: by the time that the former had reconciled himself with Piacentini, the latter had turned into one of his fiercest critics, retreating into an increasingly pessimistic prognosis for the future of modernism in Italy (Pagano 1938).

But, perhaps more importantly, the Città Universitaria project was a bold modern experiment in deliberate dialogue with, and close proximity to, the historic centre; a new layer carefully negotiated with, and inserted into, the city's millennial palimpsest. Although nowhere near as extensive or ambitious as the fantasies of Piacentini and Brasini for a 'new Rome' in the mid-1920s (Etlin 1991: 391–3; see also Ch. 1), in hindsight this was the closest that Fascism ever came to imagining a landmark modern monumental complex inside the city as an *ex nihilo* project. It was the direct precursor of the E42 project – in terms of scale, unitary character, representational function, executive structure, preference for aesthetic compromise, and celebration of collaborative work. While, however, it was conceived in 1932 as the first coherent expression of the Fascist architectural and urbanistic vision that would set the tone of subsequent *ex nihilo* creative projects in the capital, it remained the only one attempted inside the core of the city during the entire Fascist period.

The New *Borgate* of Fascism

The two Fascist 'cities' for the youth, along with the E42 quarter that was to become the unfinished swansong of Fascist *ex nihilo* urbanism in Rome,

comprised a fragmented layer of 'representational spaces' in the capital that promoted Mussolini's vision of a city of universalist 'grandeur' (*grandezza*). Yet, even if the Duce had declared as early as 1927 that the other major category of essential urban interventions (namely, 'of necessity' – *necessità*) had been largely completed, by far the most extensive product of the Fascist *ex nihilo* constructive agency in Rome continued to involve housing projects on the outskirts and periphery of the 'third Rome', which overwhelmingly responded to social problems. This category of Fascist additive interventions in and around Rome included new quarters and suburbs that sought to absorb the city's future expansion, both demographic and topographical; new peripheral residential units (***borgate** periferiche*), made up of social

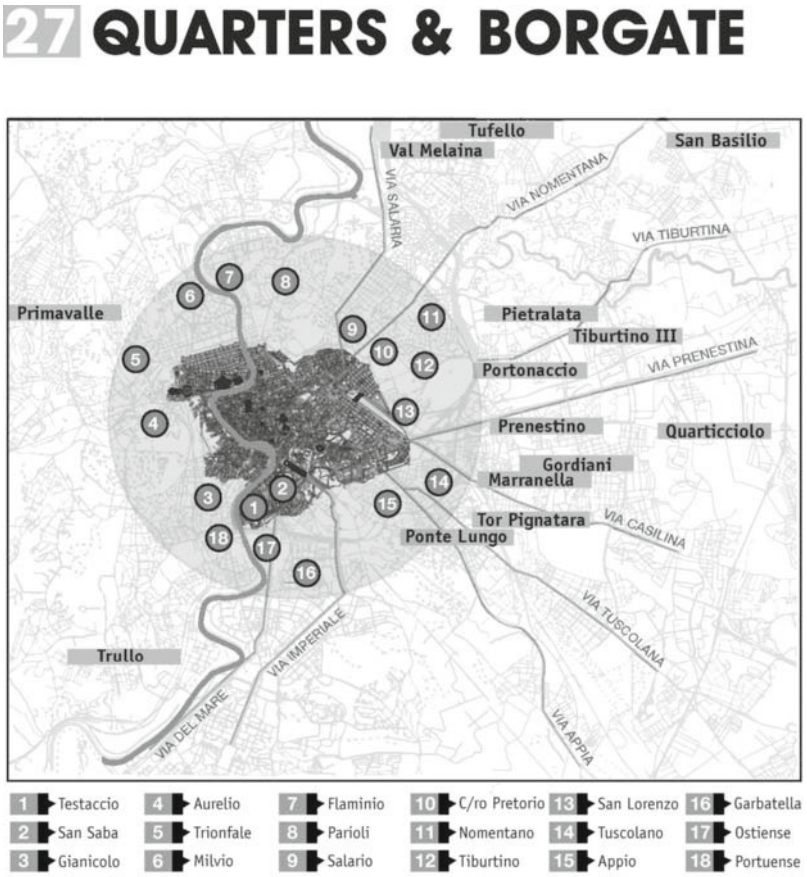


Figure 27 Diagram: suburban quarters and new *borgate*

housing even further away from the centre (Fig. 27); and finally wholly 'new cities' (*città nuove*, as they were officially called) constructed in the 'reclaimed' Agro Pontino to the south of the capital. Some of these projects (typically quarters and suburbs closer to the city centre) had started during the last years of the Liberal period and been completed (albeit usually with substantial modifications) by the Fascist regime. Others were linked to ideas and norms already developed by the time that Mussolini came to power as part of the city's projected expansion in a radial and zonal pattern towards its immediate periphery. But a significant number of these *ex nihilo* projects were both conceived and executed during the Fascist period and reflected more accurately the regime's deeper ideological fixations with de-urbanisation, socioeconomic transformation, and population management (Ch. 2). A further distinction should be made between projects that were conceived and promoted by the regime as partly representational spaces that communicated an 'ideal' model of future urban life (for example, the 'new cities' of the Agro; or a few 'landmark' borgate distinguished by a high level of attention to their architectural features, plan, and infrastructure) and those that functioned as temporary or knee-jerk solutions to pressing social problems, such as internal migration, unemployment, homelessness, and social deprivation.

As we have already discussed, a number of key Fascist campaigns on demographic management, racial hygiene, *bonifica*, and ruralisation seemed to converge on a decidedly negative perspective on modern urban life. Mussolini favoured strongly the rapid expansion of the national population; but he expected this growth to come from the countryside, in parallel with a controlled depopulation (*sfollamento*) of major urban centres (Gini 1930). Therefore, the 1931 national population census contained two pieces of alarming news for the Fascist regime. First, the rate of population increase in large urban centres picked up dramatically (on average above 2 per cent annually), well above the levels recorded by the two previous surveys of 1911 and 1921. Second, the proportion of those living in cities with a population larger than 10,000 surpassed for the first time the equivalent figure for rural communities (from 49 per cent in 1921 to 55 per cent in 1931). The data for Rome in particular confirmed both these trends even more emphatically. The population of the capital grew at a pace of 3 per cent per year between 1921 and 1936, surpassing the one-million mark in the early 1930s and reaching 1,155,722 at the time of the 1936 census – nearly double that of 1921 (691,661) (Salvatori 2006a: 33–4; Maroi 1937a; 1933: 184–7). That such an upward trend was registered at the same time that thousands of the city's residents had been forced to move out of Rome – whether as the result of the demolitions in the historic centre or due to the regime's changing housing policy – was evidence of a depressing overall policy failure. In addition, the fact that the growth of urban populations far outstripped the equivalent national figure betrayed a more

fundamental failure to address the problem of inward migration from the countryside to the cities, in spite of numerous initiatives to encourage the exact opposite trend (Caprotti 2007a: 65–74).

However, the census figures disguised a more profound transformation of the entire anthropological map of the capital. Between 1921 and 1936, while increasing inward migration was absorbed almost exclusively by the suburban areas (Maroi 1933: 186–7), the population of the historic centre and the main metropolitan zone contracted (M. 1929; Maroi 1927). This contraction can be attributed partly to the demolition projects executed by the Fascist regime in different parts of the historic centre. But it was also strongly affected by one of the earliest decisions of the Fascist administration – namely, to phase out the restrictions on rent prices that had been imposed by the Liberal governments in an effort to arrest the dizzying rise of the cost of housing in the capital. The liberalisation of the rents that began gradually in 1923 and was completed four years later caused a rapid increase in the cost of property rental and forced a large number of city inhabitants to seek cheaper housing alternatives in the periphery (Villani 2012: 27–9).

In addition, the Fascist regime embarked on a series of – largely unsystematic and reactive – attempts to rationalise housing in the periphery of the capital and deal with the effects of unplanned, low-quality illegal construction (generally referred to as *abusivismo*). The campaign against the slums (*baracche* or *villaggi abissini*) began in 1926, with extensive demolitions in the northern and western outskirts (Ponte Milvio and Prati Strozzi) (Sanfilippo 1992: 131). In September of that year, Mussolini wrote directly to the president of the ICP, Alberto Calza Bini, demanding concerted, visible action against the slum settlements and an increasing supply of adequate housing for those already affected. He also set a deadline (28 October 1927, the fifth anniversary of the March of Rome) for a public ceremony to celebrate the regime's progress towards destroying the city's unsightly shanty towns (a campaign known as *sbaraccamento*).[92] The ICP – which until that point had concentrated the bulk of its activities on the supply of the relatively more high-quality and expensive *case economiche* and *popolari* – duly obliged, making available at very short notice 2000 new rooms in a number of peripheral locations to the south and east of the city. The celebrations for the 1927 anniversary of the march were made to coincide with the destruction of *baracche* in the neighbourhood of San Lorenzo, immediately to the east of the railway station. The demolitions were carried out by soldiers while the MVSN supplied 80 trucks to transfer the people to their new homes.[93] In the following year, Mussolini also demanded the destruction of the slum settlements around the eastern suburb of **Portonaccio** and their replacement with an extensive ICP quarter that would receive subsequent flows of homeless families, be it from the demolitions in the historic centre or the destruction of other *baracche*. A new wave of *sbaraccamenti* began in earnest in 1931 on explicit instructions from Mussolini,[94]

followed by another in 1935 reaching further afield to Ostia and Fiumicino (Isola Sacra).[95] Meanwhile, the Fascist authorities also targeted slum settlements in and closer to the historic centre: apart from the extensive demolitions in the vicinity of ancient monuments earmarked for 'liberation', other visible areas were targeted, such as Campo de'Fiori and **Porta Metronia** (near the Circo Massimo).[96] All these interventions led to a forced redistribution of populations within the peripheral zone of the capital from the makeshift *baracche* to purpose-built (and usually cheap and hastily constructed) popular housing nuclei, or to temporary accommodation.

The story of the suburb of **Garbatella**, to the southwest of the centre, exemplifies the reactive and haphazard character of Fascist housing policy in Rome. The idea for constructing a new suburb in this peripheral area emerged during the Liberal period, not just as part of a strategy of planned urban expansion but also in the context of a project for the creation of an industrial peripheral zone that would eventually link the city to the port of Ostia. Garbatella was intended to be the first major such initiative, originally conceived as an industrial workers' suburb (in the tradition of the earlier Testaccio quarter closer to the city centre). Nevertheless, its first housing nucleus was constructed only in 1921, on the basis of a plan developed by Gustavo Giovannoni and Massimo Piacentini (brother of Marcello), and included a relatively small number of houses for both middle- and working-class families, conceived as a version of the 'garden city' model that had already gained popularity in the north of Europe (Sinatra 2006: 13–26; Lasansky 2004: 197; Carpaneto et al. 2006: 308). During the Fascist years, Garbatella expanded through a series of initiatives that did not follow an overall plan but changed significantly the originally intended character of the quarter. The first addition came in 1923–26 and involved cheaper housing constructed by the ICP to absorb those who could no longer afford the rising rental prices in the centre. Then, in 1925–26, more economical houses were constructed, specifically for those who had been rendered homeless as a result of the demolitions in the historic centre. Finally, in 1927 a third group of houses and purpose-built 'hostels' were completed to accommodate those who were directly affected by the regime's first campaign against the *baracche* in Milvio, Portonaccio, and Porta Latina, as well as smaller-scale 'clearing' operations closer to the centre, around Testaccio and Trastevere (Sanfilippo 1993: 349–50).

The ways in which Garbatella expanded in the second half of the 1920s and throughout the 1930s illustrate the inherent dysfunctionalities of the regime's broader attitude to housing policy in Rome. A cursory glance at the figures regarding the pace of construction of social housing by the ICP and other relevant associations during the Fascist years illustrates a serious lack of continuity of thinking and forward planning, as well as an uneven pace of supply. Periods of intensive construction (1924–24, 1929–30, 1934–35, 1938–39) were bracketed by years of severe slump in production (1926–27

and 1931–32 due to broader economic factors; 1936 due to the League of Nations' sanctions against Italy in the wake of the invasion of Ethiopia). Throughout the 1920s and even during the first half of the 1930s, when average yearly construction of social housing did increase significantly in comparison to the previous decade, population growth due to inward migration alone outstripped the supply of new houses/rooms (Maroi 1934: 558; 1939: 270–2). When the combined effects of other key Fascist policies in the capital (destruction of the *baracche* and eviction of families from the areas of the historic centre in order to execute the projects included in the PRG1931, or other ad hoc interventions) are factored in, it becomes evident that the Fascist regime produced a vicious circle in Rome that kept generating escalating numbers of homeless and impoverished inhabitants but was ill-prepared to absorb them into the city's infrastructure of social housing. All in all, Fascist urban and economic policies in Rome forced a number of people into either homelessness or involuntary movement before either the Governatorato or the ICP had produced workable plans and the necessary infrastructure for their permanent relocation in the urban periphery (Ciucci 2002: 80–8). By the time that the Governatorato authorities had come to realise this, it was already too late to avert a grave housing crisis.[97]

Thus the failure of Fascist housing policy in Rome was not just a problem of supply, whether of funds or houses. It was also the result of chronic systemic problems of management and resource allocation caused by a reactive policy that prioritised short-term remedies at the expense of long-term vision and problem-solving. When the social housing system reached a crisis point in 1927–28 and again in 1933, in each case the problem was caused only partly by a slowdown in the construction of new houses;[98] the two crisis periods were also caused by artificially created demand in the wake of an intensification of demolitions in both densely populated old quarters of the city centre and in the peripheral shanty towns, as Mussolini had repeatedly demanded. In order to deal with the crisis, the Governatorato in association with the ICP authorised a programme of constructing large suburban housing blocs (hostels or dorms) destined for temporary accommodation (the so-called *alberghi suburbani*). Four of them were constructed in 1929 in Garbatella – though in relative isolation from the rest of the existing settlements in the area – by the ICP chief architect Innocenzo Sabbatini, who had also built the first nucleus of houses in Garbatella in the early 1920s). The idea behind the construction of these suburban 'hostels' was to provide temporary relief for the poorer homeless but only on a rotational basis and for as long as it was necessary for them to find a more permanent residence, whether in the private market or through the Governatorato's future social housing schemes (Sinatra 2006: 39–43; Villani 2012: 32–44). By 1933 the situation had reached a new low, again partly due to a significant slowdown in ICP-housing supply in the early 1930s but mainly because of the

intensification of demolitions in the centre and a new wave of destruction of *baracche* in the periphery without adequate contingencies for absorbing those affected by forced homelessness.

At that point, the governor Francesco Boncompagni Ludovisi admitted that Mussolini's professed policy target of eliminating the *baracche* from Rome could not be met due to the enormous logistical and financial overheads of the relocation project. In fact, the number of *baracche* around Rome continued to rise: in 1928 there were 4500 of them, inhabited by 22,000 people; by 1932 the number of such settlements had climbed to more than 6000 (Salsano 2009: 209). As an alternative, Boncompagni Ludovisi suggested a very different use of the finite financial and housing resources – expanding the provision of social housing mainly for those affected by the execution of the PRG1931; converting a significant part of the suburban 'hostels' (whose quality was considered relatively high) into permanent social housing; expanding the provision of temporary dormitory accommodation (referred to as *ricoveri*); demolishing only 'visible' *baracche* while allowing the more distant or less accessible ones to continue to exist in the short term, with a more systematic provision of basic public services such as running water;[99] and finally, creating a number of new quarters in the urban periphery to absorb the growing number of those affected by the demolitions in the historic centre (Salvatori 2006a: 56–7). Those directly affected by the demolitions in the historic centre were initially encouraged to find their own alternative housing – and, given the full liberalisation of the rents by 1930, this meant an exodus towards the more affordable urban periphery. Nevertheless, the ICP had made a significant investment in *case economiche* and *popolari* and could thus absorb a number of lower middle-class families in areas relatively close to the centre. The remaining homeless inhabitants would be either directed to the temporary accommodation facilities or offered an alternative permanent residence in the (lower-quality and -cost) *case rapide/rapidissime* that started mushrooming in the suburbs (Milvio, Nomentano) and later the periphery of the capital (Monte Sacro, Val Melaina). As the demolitions in the historic centre escalated in the 1930s and resulted in a growing number of families rendered homeless, the Governatorato and the ICP rebalanced their expenditure, prioritising cheaper housing for those who could not afford private rents over the more costly *case economiche* (Villani 2012: 88–90). They also concentrated their activities on the construction of a network of peripheral towns (*borgate*) that dotted the distant periphery of the capital. Most of these (e.g. Pietralata, **San Basilio**, **Quarticciolo**, **Gordiani**) were situated in the eastern extremities of Rome, in desolate landscapes where the generally poorly constructed *case rapidissime* emerged as little islands amidst a desert of undeveloped land, with minimal infrastructure and virtually no connection to either the urban centre or the rural economy (Villani 2012: 70–82, 141–278; Viccaro 2007).

In many cases new *borgate* were established and grew around existing smaller suburbs or settlements. The example of **Pietralata** (in the northeastern periphery) is typical of this trend. Its lands had been originally distributed to a relatively small number of veterans from the Libyan War (1911–12) under the auspices of the National Veterans Organisation (Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti, ONC) but subsequently expanded with migrant families, either from the villages of Lazio or from southern Italy. It was designated as 'official' *borgata* in 1925, expanded with *case rapide* to house the evicted inhabitants from the ongoing excavations around the Foro, the Campidoglio, and the area of San Giovanni in Laterano (Camarda 2007: 14–15). In the zone along Via Casilina to the southeast, a network of *borgate* emerged in the 1920s and continued to expand in the following decade, fed continuously by those evicted from the demolitions in the historic centre. **Marranella** and **Tor Pignattara** began their life at the turn of the twentieth century as private developments but were significantly expanded with basic services by the ICP during the Fascist years (Ficacci 2007: 9–37).

The increasing tendency towards social 'zonalisation' is confirmed by the statistical information of the Governatorato concerning the types of edifices constructed in each quarter or suburb. The more expensive, spacious, lower-rise, and better-constructed *villini* dominated quarters such as **San Saba**, **Aurelio**, and **Ostiense**; by contrast, 'intensive' constructions were to be found overwhelmingly in the popular quarters, such as **Nomentano**, **Tuscolano**, **Tiburtino**, as well as in the new, more distant *borgate*. Only a few quarters – such as **Flaminio** and **Gianicolo** – displayed mixed zones of all types of housing but again the tendency was to group each category and separate it from other groups of construction within the same quarter (Maroi 1934). Meanwhile, urban quarters and suburbs registered dramatic demographic changes during the Fascist *ventennio*. The example of Tiburtino is indicative of the increasingly complex population flows in the capital during the 1920s and 1930s. While the population of Tiburtino grew by a modest 22 per cent between 1921 and 1931 (a figure that was in fact substantially lower when compared to other quarters such as Nomentano, Appio, and even Flaminio – Maroi 1937a), this figure disguised a much wider shift of population within the urban territory of Rome. The overall effect was a flight towards the periphery: of all new inhabitants in Tiburtino during the 1921–31 period, more than half came from the central quarters (due to either the rise in rental prices or the demolitions); of those who left during the same period, more than two-thirds moved further away from the centre or to the rural periphery (Protrasi 2002: 586–8).

The experience of population dislocation towards the periphery of Rome witnessed in Tiburtino mirrors the fate of thousands of families in and around the capital during the Fascist years. Whatever the reason for their eviction from the initial location of their residence, the recorded movement

was overwhelmingly towards more distant new settlements, without consideration for salvaging community or socioeconomic networks. Arbitrary social and behavioural criteria determined to a large extent the temporary or permanent destination of those evicted, dispersing families that had previously lived in closed-knit established communities (Cuccia 1991: 125).[100] Even in the case of inhabitants from demolished neighbourhoods of the historic centre (the group that Fascist authorities viewed more positively and had often singled out for preferential treatment), entire old communities had to be dispersed across the city and its outskirts without any care to maintain at least some aspects of their destroyed communal life (Villani 2012: 17). In addition to using social and behavioural criteria when considering applications for social housing, the authorities also distributed the homeless of the demolished neighbourhoods of the centre across a large number of disjointed new quarters, *borgate*, and temporary facilities. New quarters (such as **Ponte Lungo**, to the southeast along Via Appia Nuova and Via Tuscolana) were expanded precariously to house small groups of families evicted from demolished homes in the areas along the new Via del Mare; however, some of the homeless families were also sent to other, more salubrious quarters, such as the extended Flaminio (to the north of the city walls) and Tiburtino (east of the railway station in the direction of the new university campus) (Salsano 2009: 191–3). Those affected by the demolitions of Via Tor de'Specchi (between the Campidoglio and the Teatro di Marcello) were again distributed to very different locations (Piazza d'Armi/Milvio to the west, Tiburtino to the east, and again Ponte Lungo) on the basis of socioeconomic criteria and the availability of supply. The borgata of **Val Melaina** was constructed in the second half of the 1930s in the northeastern periphery of the capital and received a number of families affected by the extensive demolitions of the period in different areas of the centre, such as the Pantheon, the Mausoleum of Augustus, and the Vatican area. As for those affected by the demolitions in the area of Circo Massimo during the 1930s, some opted for a state subsidy to seek private accommodation, while the rest were dispersed across a number of peripheral settlements, such as **Primavalle**, Garbatella, and Pietralata.[101] When some families attempted to return to the area of Circo Massimo, the authorities took action and explicitly banned any construction that could 'impede the view of Palatino [hill]' from the new Piazza Romolo e Remo on the south side of the Circo.[102]

On average, two-thirds of those affected by the demolitions in areas of the historic centre were able to find alternative housing independently (meaning they had the adequate financial means to do so), leaving one-third in the hands of the Governatorato and the ICP (Salsano 2009: 178–200). Of this latter category, those who could afford the rental prices charged by the ICP (significantly lower than current market prices but rising steadily to make up for the shortfall in ICP funds) could move to new flats or houses

in peripheral quarters. By contrast, those unable to meet the costs were left at the mercy of the authorities and distributed randomly to the suburban hostels, the various temporary *ricoveri*, or new, hastily built *case rapidissime* in the distant periphery. Some were lucky: while before they lived in decrepit houses in the most degraded neighbourhoods of the historic centre, their absorption into the ICP network of social housing could on occasion amount to an overall improvement – as far as the quality of their abode was concerned at least (Salsano 2009: 22). For the majority of the evicted residents of the historic centre, however, the move entailed a significant decline in living standards – not just in terms of housing and services but also as a consequence of social dislocation, distance from employment, and destruction of anthropological networks. In addition, while the first borgate constructed in the 1920s and early 1930s (e.g. San Basilio, Prenestino, Gordiani, Pietralata) were overwhelmingly of poor quality, a number of 'official' borgate (such as Tiburtino III, designed by Giuseppe Nicolosi; Figs 28.1–28.3) were constructed from 1935 onwards that did feature somewhat better-constructed houses, improved infrastructure, and basic services, although they were still segregated and suffering from poor integration into the wider urban economic and social life (Sica 1996: 413–17; Insolera 2001: 139). Attempts to improve living conditions in the borgate after 1935 had some positive impact but serious problems persisted well into the 1940s, generating a constant stream of complaints to the Governatorato.[103]

When Calza Bini stood down from the ICP in the spring of 1943, he provided a robust defence of the institute's activities over the previous 20 years. Under his stewardship, the ICP had constructed more than 30,000 houses,

Figure 28.1 Tiburtino III: popular housing. With kind permission from © **Casa dell'Architettura di Latina**, Collezione Nicolosi

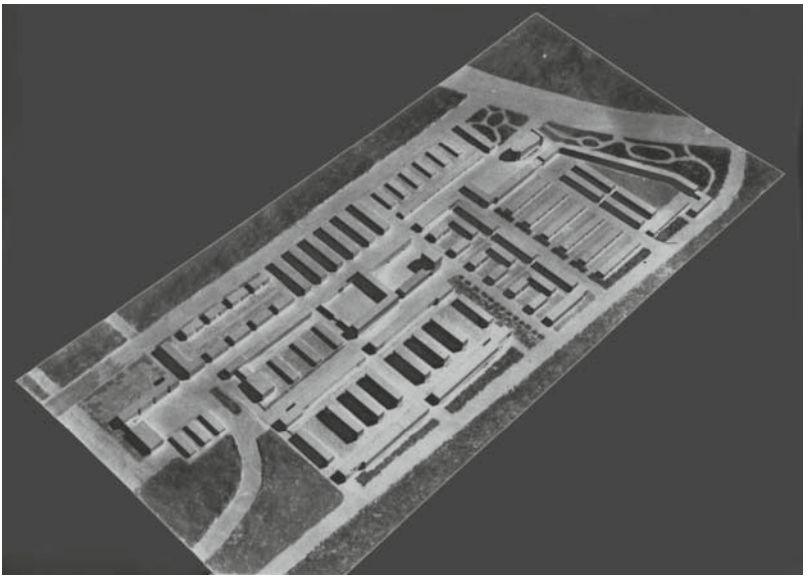


Figure 28.2 Tiburtino III: model of the regulatory plan (Giuseppe Nicolosi). With kind permission from © **Casa dell'Architettura di Latina**, Collezione Nicolosi

Figure 28.3 Tiburtino III: aerial view (with Pietralata in the background). **Wikipedia Commons**, 'Veduta della borgata Romana Tiburtino III (c. 1940)', http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/it/2/24/Roma_Tiburtino_III.jpg

providing nearly 100,000 rooms that accommodated around 150,000 people.[104] A smaller number of houses had also been made available directly by the Governatorato (through INCIS) and by other cooperatives (such as the state railways in the San Lorenzo district). Criticisms concerning the quality of the new settlements were often voiced publicly (Zucca 1931), in addition to mounting complaints by inhabitants about lack of services, delays in provision of infrastructural work, and rising rental prices. At some point in 1935, the ICP even considered introducing a more comprehensive system of means-testing to ensure that only those who really needed social housing (i.e. those who could not afford to pay market prices for rental) did receive cover by the Institute.[105] Meanwhile, as rental prices continue to rise in the 1930s, so did the (lower) rates charged by the ICP for its housing, thus generating new complaints and forcing some of the inhabitants to move further and further into the periphery.[106] Given the ICP's persistent financial problems, as Calza Bini noted on numerous occasions, the increase in the supply of good-quality social housing depended on the modest income from rents and thus ruled out a freeze, let alone a reduction, in charges. The battle against the *baracche* was of course never won – although the ICP accelerated the process of constructing intensive social housing from 1935 onwards (to coincide with the last wave of *sbaraccamenti* in the centre and the wider periphery of the capital), a combination of financial difficulties, administrative delays, and subversion by private interests meant that supply never came near the demands for new housing generated by the campaign or the continuing flow of inward migration to Rome. Yet, the paradox of the Fascist campaign against the *baracche* lay in the fact that the majority of those affected by the demolitions did not possess the financial means to either afford market prices or meet the demands of the ICP (deposit and monthly rent) for the provision of social housing. When, for example, one large *baracca* near Porta Metronia was demolished in 1935–36, the ICP became aware of the fact that many of the former inhabitants could not even afford to pay the deposit for securing a new ICP house in the (peripheral) borgata of Pietralata and of the Tiburtino III popular quarter.[107] Some new *borgate* and temporary 'camps' attracted further *baraccanti*,[108] while on other occasions some of those evicted had no other alternative than to return to the same place shortly afterwards and set up new shanty settlements. As for improvement work in the existing 'official' *borgate*, the pace was painfully slow, often leaving entire communities without water, street lighting, or connections to the road arteries of the capital.[109]

But there was a further irony regarding the Fascist regime's programme of housing in and around Rome. The combined effect of extensive demolitions (of both peripheral *baracche* and popular residential quarters in the historic centre), of forced relocations of the evicted residents, and of the overwhelmingly outward (towards the increasingly more distant periphery) flow of the urban population meant that the most extensive slice of the Fascist 'third

layer' in Rome was conceived mostly as a strategy of making people (and their new settlements constructed by the Fascist authorities) invisible. With few exceptions, the majority of these new additions to Rome's visible layer emerged as stop-gap solutions to mounting 'problems of necessity', many of which were side-effects of the merciless execution of projects of *grandezza* in the centre. The focus remained largely on demolition – ceremonially destroying *baracche*, 'upgrading' conditions of living in previously unhygienic neighbourhoods, 'thinning out' the urban areas, 'making space' for the glorious past to shine through. With the exception of some new quarters that featured prominently in regime propaganda (e.g. the early phases of Garbatella; selected housing projects by Innocenzo Sabatini and Innocenzo Costantini in Piazza d'Armi, Gianicolo, and Trastevere; Mario De Renzi's and Alessandro Limongelli's houses in Flaminio; and the never-executed Quartiere dell'Artigianato by Pietro Aschieri – Zucca 1927), the rest were either failed experiments or deliberately concealed containers for displaced communities – situated away from the metropolitan area and its major vehicular arteries, poorly equipped and disjointed from urban life. As Fascist Rome inexorably expanded towards the periphery and the 'reclaimed' Agro Pontino, a large segment of its population (whether originally residing in the city or arriving there as migrants) eventually found themselves living in new 'Fascist' towns, quarters, and neighbourhoods; yet this *ex nihilo* Fascist additive layer in and around Rome was more often than not a silent, concealed insertion that never lived up to its ideological and propaganda billing.

Bonifica Integrale, the Agro Pontino, and the 'New City' (Nuova Città)

In addition to the neighbourhoods of the centre (*rioni*) and the suburban areas (*suburbio*), the 1931 and 1936 population surveys contained information on one more zone – the vast 'reclaimed' lands of the Agro Pontino that extended to the south of the Lazio region. While in the five decades following the proclamation of Rome as the national capital population increase in the centre far outstripped that in the two peripheral areas (130 per cent compared to just over 50 per cent, equally distributed between the *suburbio* and the *Agro*), the situation was dramatically reversed in the decade prior to the 1931 census. During that period, all three zones registered increases but the *suburbio* grew nearly fourfold (from 29000 to 134000), compared to a modest increase for the central *rioni* (627000 to 783000, or 24 per cent) and a more significant one in the *Agro* (from 35000 to 91000, or 158 per cent).[110] Even within the central area, increase was driven by modest demographic expansion in the 'peripheral' neighbourhoods of Testaccio, Esquilino, and Trastevere, as well as a significant increase (exceeding 100 per cent) in the more recent quarters flanking the historic centre (e.g. Flaminio, Gianicolo, Tuscolano, Ostiense, etc.) disguising a slight decline (2 per cent) in the older central *rioni*. As for the *suburbio*, the spectacular expansion during the first decade of Fascist rule

dwarfed even the significant increase in the 1911–21 period (96 per cent – the first time when peripheral demographic expansion substantially outstripped the growth in the centre – Ficacci 2007: 37). When it came to shifts between the 1931 and 1936 data, the overall population rise of 170,000 was equally distributed among the quarters, the *suburbio*, and the *Agro* (each registering a *c*.33 per cent increase), with the central *rioni* contracting further by about 2 per cent (Maroi 1937a).

The data relating to the demographic profile of the Agro Pontino are particularly interesting since they reveal a story of both unprecedented ambition and only partial success in the Fascist regime's demographic and rural policies during the 1930s. The vast, inhospitable swampland extending southwards from Rome had for centuries proved stubbornly resistant to all sorts of efforts to promote systematic human settlement and productive transformation. Infested with malaria, predominantly barren, and with agriculturally usable land still at the hands of a few large feudal proprietors (*latifundisti*), it remained inaccessible to central economic planning and threatening to potential settlers.[111] Since the annexation of Rome in 1870, the Italian authorities had introduced a series of legislative arrangements aimed at land reform and infrastructural improvements in the area but with very limited success, owing to the resistance of the proprietors and the objective technical difficulties of the project.

The challenge to succeed where so many others – emperors, popes, kings – had failed (Mulè 1929: 624; Pacces 1936) and to transform the untamed land into productive agricultural space fit for human settlement captured Mussolini's imagination. The metaphor of 'conquering'/'taming' space was an invaluable propaganda asset for Fascism's discourse of national rebirth (Frandsen 2001; Caprotti 2007a: 17–23). In addition, the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes was to provide a unique opportunity to enact and celebrate a triumphant Fascist *eu*topia that epitomised the very notion of *bonifica* on all possible levels – agricultural, hygienic, economic, anthropological, and social (Snowden 2006: 143–52). Finally, the tacit, if grudging, admission that urbanisation could not be easily reversed established the Agro as an alternative area for absorbing over-population and inward migration in a new – and above all economically productive – peripheral rural space within Rome's periphery (Caprotti 2007a: 69–78).

The area of the Agro entered the equation of Fascist demographic and economic policies from the late 1920s, upon completion of the first phase of infrastructural work that involved draining of the swamps, improvements in overall hygienic conditions, and major hydraulic projects (Serpieri 1934; Briani 1989; Pecori and Escalar 1930). A special 1928 law for *bonifica integrale* identified the area of the Agro Pontino as one of the two projects of 'national significance' (the other involved the zone close to the delta of River Po in the north Adriatic). The Fascist commitment to *bonifica integrale* had a long-term horizon: the plan envisaged a 15-year period of gradually increasing investment, projected to reach a guaranteed 325 million lire in 1943 and

to remain at that level for a further 15-year period (Mariani 1976: 65). The scale of the operation was staggering by any standards: by 1933 more than four million hectares had already been identified for transformation, of which nearly two-thirds involved lands earmarked for future cultivation and settlement (*bonifica di trasformazione*), with the remaining one-third relating to land defence initiatives (*bonifica di difesa*). Nearly half of the latter had been either 'reclaimed' or were nearing completion by the mid-1930s[112] – a veritable feat much publicised by the Fascist regime that also attracted ample favourable international attention. Upon completion of the first phase of infrastructural work in an area, families of agricultural workers were settled in newly created farmsteads (*poderi*), on land that was previously considered unsuitable for cultivation. They were then grouped into small rural hamlets (*borghi*) that started dotting the 'reclaimed' territories and established rural networks of social, economic, and civil life. Each of these *borghi* was typically equipped with a school, a church, administrative offices, and support services for the local agricultural economy (Caprotti 2006: 150; Piccinato 1934a).

The Fascist state took a holistic interest in the operation, embarking on a major programme of investment for the realisation of important public works in the areas of the *bonifica*. A formal partnership between the state and those proprietors willing to invest in their own lands created a formal *consorzia di bonifica*. However, in those cases where the owners either could not afford or did not wish to participate in the programme, the new legal framework enshrined the principle of expropriation of their lands and redistribution among small farmers. In the case of the Agro Pontino, the regime entrusted the distribution of lands and the organisation of life in the 'reclaimed' territories to the National Organisation of Veterans (Opera Nazionale dei Combattenti, ONC), an organisation created in the final stages of the First World War that early on took an active interest in the problem of land redistribution for war veterans. The ONC played a key role in organising the settlements in the Agro, being fully in charge of supplying the settlers, distributing farmlands and houses for families, providing basic services to the settler communities, determining types of cultivation, and controlling the collection and redistribution of all produce (Caprotti 2007a: 169).[113] Predictably, the entire operation was run in quasi-military fashion by the ONC, with little or no margins for manoeuvre left to individual settlers (Gaspari 2001: 334–42), some of whom protested and even requested their release from their *poderi* (Mariani 1976: 237). The majority of the new inhabitants came from the north of Italy, arriving in a land that was unknown to them in order to engage in activities that very often had nothing to do with their previous experience. Nevertheless, the number of settlers and settlements across the Agro grew steadily in the late 1920s and particularly in the 1930s, as state projects came into full swing and Fascist propaganda invested heavily in the success of the operation. The

entire operation was deliberately couched in the language of a colonial war, whereby settlers were portrayed as soldiers engaging in an all-out battle against the ferocious forces of nature, bestowed with the mission to regenerate the land and, through it, the life of the entire nation (Burdett 2000: 18). Analogies with the 'civilising mission' and order-producing knack of the ancient Romans were also extensively deployed by the Fascist regime's propaganda apparatus (Caprotti 2007: xxii–xxiv).

But the project of the *bonifica integrale* in the Agro Pontino became inextricably linked with the regime's much broader discourse of *bonifica umana*. The connection between physical and human nature was evident from the very outset in the Mussolinian rhetoric about the *bonifica*. In 1928 the Duce had ordered, 'redeem the land; and with the land, man; and with man, the race' (in Millon 1978: 326). Little by little, the reclaimed lands in the periphery of Rome came to represent a realised alternative to bourgeois 'decadence', demographic decline, and social 'degeneration' – all largely associated with 'parasitical' urban life (Ch. 2). The new settlements of the Agro were intended to be ideal *ex nihilo* realisations of a novel relation between the individual, the community, and the state. The individual settler would master the land and transform it into a productive resource not just for their own family and local community but for the nation as a whole. Family life would be organised on the basis of rural principles, celebrating hard work and discipline, economic self-sufficiency, corporatist values, and demographic fecundity. But this new template of communal life also needed a new, propaganda-friendly focal point that communicated a putatively perfect new socioeconomic order and underlined the difference with what preceded or surrounded it.

It was against this backdrop that the concept of the 'new city' (*città nuova*) was born and promoted as the next, decisive stage in the transformation of the Agro Pontino. Between 1932 and 1939 a network of five 'new cities' emerged across the Agro, executed with much-praised efficiency by the ONC[114] and inaugurated with suitable fanfare by either Mussolini or the king. The 'pentapolis' of the Agro began with **Littoria** (founded in 1932 – now Latina), reached its creative apex with **Sabaudia** (1933), continued with the cities of **Pontinia** (1934) of **Aprilia** (1936), and concluded with **Pomezia** (1938). As Luigi Piccinato – one of the architects in charge of Sabaudia's regulatory plan – noted, the Fascist 'new city' was neither a proper ('closed' and self-referential) city in the conventional sense of the term nor a 'garden city' or suburb dependent on a nearby urban settlement; it was instead destined to function as a rural centre of services and activities that provided an organic point of reference for nearby productive settlements (Piccinato 1934a: 10, 13). Originally conceived and planned for a population that did not exceed 6000 (even in the case of Littoria that was meant to function as a regional centre for the entire new province of Latina), the 'new cities' of the Agro were meant to expand modestly in the near future, reaching in some cases forty or fifty thousand inhabitants – but only through the proliferation of

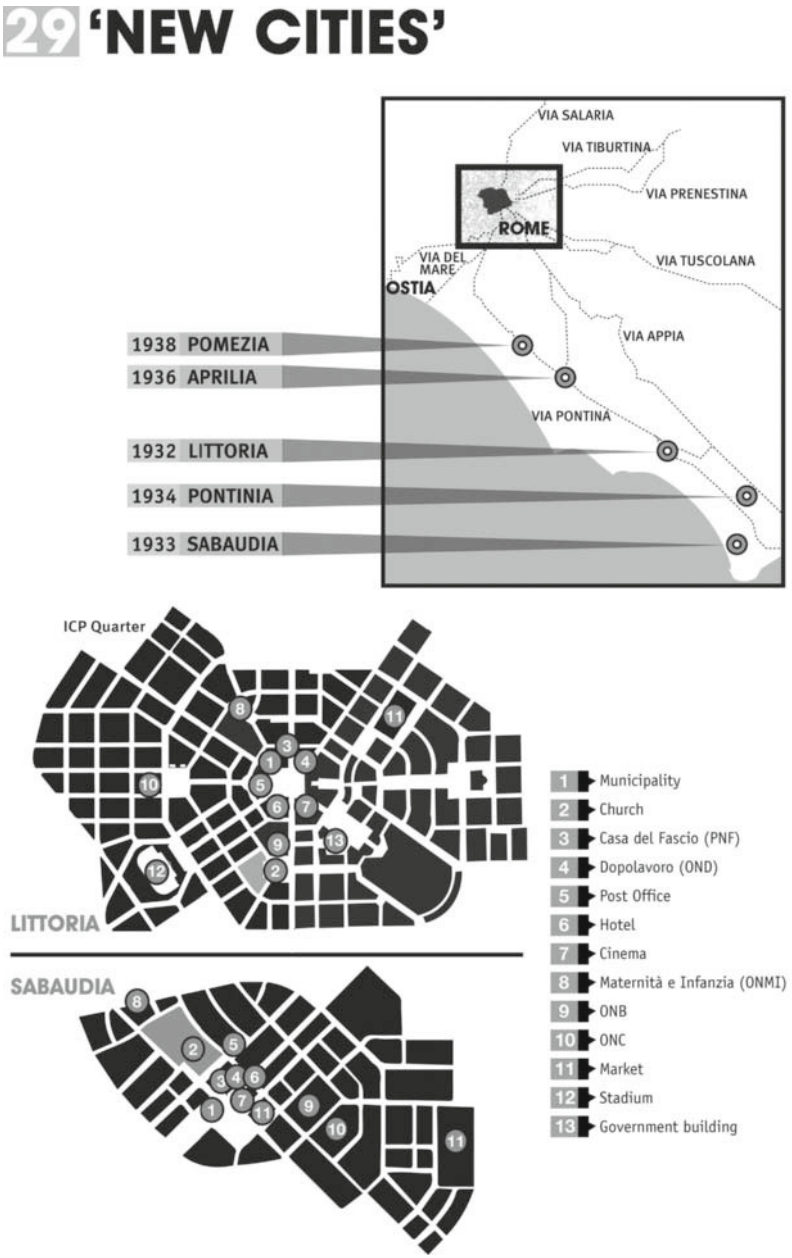


Figure 29 Diagram: the 'New Cities' of Agro Pontino

the organic model of productive *poderi* and *borghi*. In essence, they were 'cities' in a decidedly new sense of the word[115] but 'non-cities' in terms of their opposition to conventional modern patterns of urbanisation (Corni 2003: 110; see also Ch. 2). Each of the five cities was destined to perform a single function for the entire province: Littoria as an administrative centre, Sabaudia as a recreational area due to its spectacular location close to the sea and the Circeo national park, Aprilia and Pomezia as agricultural market hubs for their respective local communities, and Pontinia as a model settlement for workers linked to nearby industry. Over the 20 years of Fascist rule, more than 50 other 'new cities' – closely linked to nearby productive and/or professional activities – emerged across Italy, including some close to Rome but outside the confines of the Agro Romano (e.g. Maccaresse in the vicinity of Fiumicino, the military settlement of Guidonia to the northeast of the capital, and the industrial centre of Breda to the southeast – Lejeune 2008).

'New cities' celebrated Fascism's spirit of adventurous innovation and wholesale renewal. From the regime's point of view, their *ex nihilo* construction on previously unusable land warranted two liturgies of 'cosmicisation' that were conceived as the mirror image of the rituals of demolition practised widely in urban centres (Burdett 2000: 17). While the urban *primo colpo del piccone* marked the beginning of a cycle of destructive creation as the necessary step towards 'making space', the *prima pietra* (foundation) and the inauguration rituals performed in the 'new cities' celebrated the pure act of creation through a victory of the collective human spirit and civilisation against unruly nature. Between 1932 and 1939, Mussolini made numerous visits to the ongoing works in the Agro, inspecting the progress of major projects but also celebrating the initiation or the completion of landmark new developments – whether infrastructural work (canals, irrigation systems, drainage, and eradication of malaria – Caprotti 2006) or the five 'new cities' of the *bonifica integrale*.[116] In the carefully choreographed show staged for the inauguration of the first 'new city' of Littoria on 18 December 1932, the Duce presented the completion of this landmark communal centre as the précis of *bonifica integrale* in the Agro and a showcase for the regime's rural-corporatist utopia, with the promise of more to follow. And follow they did: on that same day, from the balcony of Littoria's town hall, the Duce announced a relentless timetable for the construction of the next two *città nuove* – Sabaudia and Pontinia, the latter built entirely during the period of international sanctions following the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 and inaugurated proudly by Mussolini 'on the 160th day of sanctions'. They were both executed on, or (in the case of Sabaudia) ahead of, schedule by the ONC, although in all cases only the representational spaces (central squares with municipality, PNF headquarters, ONB, ONC, agricultural banks, leisure and sports facilities, and churches) were ready, with much of the housing and subsidiary buildings yet to be finished. The date of 18 December (founding of the new province of Littoria) joined other important yearly

events in the Fascist calendar and was marked with pageantry throughout the rest of the 1930s.[117]

For different reasons, only the first two 'new cities' – **Littoria** (Fig. 30.1) and **Sabaudia** (Figs 30.2–30.4) – came close to matching the Fascist regime's rhetoric of anthropological renewal and *ex nihilo* creative genius. In the case of Littoria, the sheer novelty of the experiment was enough to sustain the imagery of revolutionary rebirth and 'new beginning' (Griffin 2007: 325). The creative licence offered by the blank canvas of the Agro had an intoxicating effect on Mussolini, who envisioned Littoria as a 'sacred' centre of Fascism, complete with a 'temple', an archive of Fascism's 'creative genius', and a 'museum' to the 'miracle of Littoria' (Burdett 2000: 18).[118] The ONC chose not to follow the path of a competition for the city's regulatory plan and landmark buildings, offering instead the project directly to a single person (Oriolo Frezzotti). The approved plan featured a network of central squares, flanked by key representational buildings and radiating towards the agricultural periphery along established and new routes of vehicular traffic (Caprotti 2007a: 131). By contrast, the design of Sabaudia a year later did emerge from a public competition; the winning plan by the team of Cancellotti, Piccinato, Montuori, and Scalzelli was chosen from among 13 submissions and was widely praised for its bolder spatial arrangements and architectural style. In contrast to Littoria, Sabaudia's regulatory plan

Figure 30.1 Aerial view of Littoria. With kind permission from © **Casa dell'Architettura di Latina**, Collezione Consorzio di Bonifica

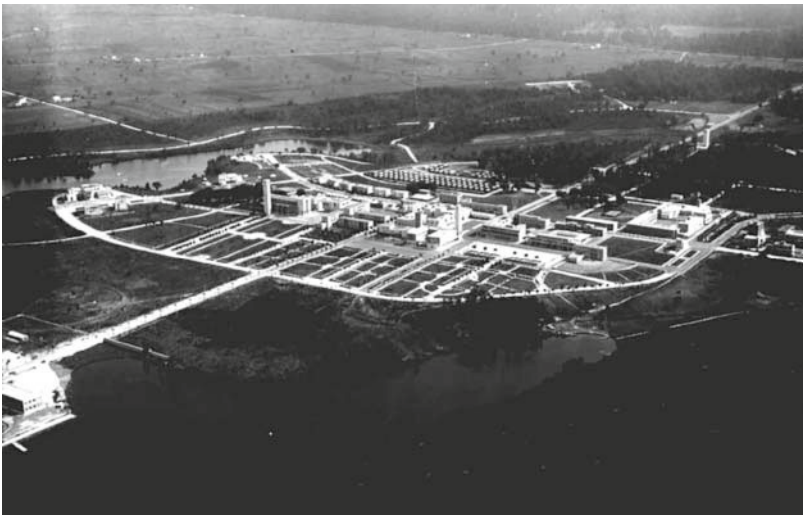


Figure 30.2 Aerial view of Sabaudia. With kind permission from © **Casa dell'Architettura di Latina**, Collezione Consorzio di Bonifica

organised the life of the community around three squares – one for the civil and recreational functions, another for ceremonial and congregation purposes (political rallies, celebrations, and markets), and a third dedicated to religious life centring on a monumental church building (Fig. 29). While the plan ticked all the right boxes with regard to denotative architectural features (the *torre littoria* with its inevitable balcony, the classically inspired colonnades, the decoration of civic buildings with *fasci* and travertino cladding, etc.) and spatial organisation (following the *cardo–decumanus* pattern of ancient Roman towns), the overall effect was bolder, deliberately asymmetrical, and dynamic (Canniffe 2008: 203). The major civic buildings were arranged cleverly around the network of squares providing visual variety and constantly changing vistas (Mariani 1976: 254–8). Unlike the other Pontine 'new cities', Sabaudia was inaugurated by the king – a concession that was justified on the basis of the city's name that paid tribute to the Savoy royal family.

Sabaudia was celebrated at the time – and is considered even today – as the apex of the regime's modernist urbanistic and architectural phase, at a time when other bold initiatives were also underway or being considered across the country (Führ 2007: 102–5). Piacentini described it as a city 'effervescent with Italian life, warm and flexible … while at the same time rigorously rational … unparalleled in Europe's urban history'.[119] It is not a coincidence that Mussolini invited the architects of Sabaudia, along with those of the new Florence railway station, to a private audition in June

Figure 30.3 The civic centre of Sabaudia, with the Torre Littoria, the Casa del Fascio, and the church in the background. With kind permission from © **Casa dell'Architettura**, Collezione Consorzio di Bonifica

1934.[120] The meeting took place in the middle of bitter recriminations from party intransigents regarding 'modern' architecture that had come to the fore during the discussion about the proposed Palazzo del Littorio at the Chamber of Deputies but soon touched on Sabaudia and the Santa Maria Novella train station in Florence (Ch. 2). At the meeting, Mussolini praised the invited architects for their work, indirectly defending them against the increasingly loud accusations from within the Fascist party and conservative critics. However, once again he stopped short of providing that elusive vote of confidence to rationalist architecture that Italian modernists had so desperately sought since the late 1920s. Soon afterwards, the climate had turned decisively against them, crystallising into the progressively more

Figure 30.4 Sabaudia's post office (Angiolo Mazzoni). With kind permission from © **Casa dell'Architettura di Latina**, Collezione Mazzoni

rigid *stile littorio* of the mid-1930s that stifled further experiments with novel architectural and spatial forms. The changing tides were inevitably reflected in the visual character of the subsequent three Pontine 'new cities'. Pontinia was conceived from the beginning as a far more modest 'rural' centre to the first two 'new cities', the design awarded directly to the young engineer Alfredo Pappalardo with a special role given to Frezzotti for aesthetic matters. Aprilia and Pomezia, on the other hand, did generate national competitions but the same 'competition fatigue' that was observed at the time with regard to all projects under construction inside Rome (Ch. 5) affected both the number and the quality of submissions for the later *nuove città*. The same team (Petrucci, Paolini, Silenzi, Tufaroli – or 2P.S.T. from the initials of their names) was awarded the responsibility to design both Aprilia and Pomezia. On either occasion, the choice was far from uncontroversial. The judging committee for the plan of Aprilia was headed by the new president of the ONC (and ex-minister of Public Works), Araldo Di Crollalanza, and featured no other than Gustavo Giovannoni; but the selection of the 2P.S.T. project was publicly criticised by Marcello Piacentini, who described it as unduly conservative and 'a step backwards' compared to Sabaudia (Piacentini 1936: 201). When it came to the selection of the plan for Pomezia, Piacentini (along with his close collaborator in all major projects of the late 1930s Pietro Aschieri) was invited to join the judging panel. It soon became clear that there would be no unanimous decision: while the majority of the panel's members seemed to favour the 2P.S.T. submission,

Piacentini threw his weight behind the plan of Giorgio Calza Bini (Cucciolla 2006: 247–55). A final judgement was reached in February 1938, in favour of the 2P.S.T. team but with the explicit (and noted) dissenting opinion of Piacentini, giving rise to a modest new settlement that – like Pontinia and Aprilia before it – paled in comparison to the first two *nuove città* (Mariani 1976: 122). By the time of the inauguration of Aprilia (1937), it seems that both the propaganda capital and the available resources had been largely exhausted; predictably so perhaps, since by the late 1930s the regime's focus had shifted to the preparation for the 1942 world fair and the construction of the E42 model 'city'.

Nevertheless, the 'new cities' of the Agro Pontino – individually and in their intended function as complementary landmark components of a much wider *eu*topian project – occupy a distinct position in the history of the Fascist regime's efforts to transform the wider region surrounding the capital. Although *bonifica integrale* was from the outset a project with national reach, unfolding in a host of locations across the Italian peninsula, the significance of the land reclamation and productive transformation in the Agro Pontino was directly linked with the regime's rhetoric of turning the 'third Rome' into a dynamic showcase of the Fascist anthropological, cultural, and social 'revolution'. The 'new cities' hosted some of the boldest experiments of the entire Fascist period in modern architecture, spatial planning, and social housing – experiments that could not be fathomed inside the dense urban palimpsest of the capital. For a short time in the mid-1930s, the regulatory plan and architecture of Sabaudia were hailed as perhaps the most authentic and effective expressions of the Fascist futural spirit (Pensabene 1933: 30). The futurist architectural fantasies of Angiolo Mazzoni found productive outlets in the unique buildings that he designed for Littoria (railway station and post office – Fittipaldi 2009) and Sabaudia (again post office; Fig. 30.4) (Kirk 2005b: 125; Prisco 2008). In addition, the model ICP quarter of Littoria, designed in 1934–36 by Nicolosi in three zones with more than 400 houses, was instrumental in the planned expansion of the city's population, approved in June 1935 (Colosanti 2008; Coccia 2008a: 82–3) and carried out on the basis of a new, expanded regulatory plan by Frezzotti. As a result, Littoria grew to nearly 20,000 inhabitants by the end of the decade (still falling well short of the 50,000 target envisaged by Mussolini – Maraini 1976: 252–3), unlike the other 'new cities' of the Agro that never quite lived up to their demographic and economic billing. All in all, the 'new cities' came to host some of the most interesting, successful, and complete additive components of the Fascist 'third Rome' – not *in* Rome but as a condensed programmatic statement *for* an ideal 'Fascist' city that would stand in deliberate dialogue with the historic city, as its most genuine 'Fascist' extension and an optimal bridge between urban and rural life.

Of all projects examined in this chapter, the *nuove città* of the Agro came the closest to the illusory and then compensatory function of Foucault's 'heterotopia'. They were conceived as *ex nihilo* miniature statements of a different, indeed deemed perfect, social and aesthetic order that stood in sharp opposition to the surrounding model of urban and agricultural life, but in the end could not be realised on the scale originally desired by the Fascist regime. Opposed to the 'closed', 'bourgeois', and unproductive city of the past, the Pontine 'new cities' of the 1930s (and the Littoria–Sabaudia subset, in particular) announced the arrival of an alternative, better future, and underlined their alterity in relation to the rest of reality. They were designed as interstitial spaces where the duality of urban (*urbs*) and rural (*rus*) was meant to be reconciled, transcended, and transformed into a new singular experience (Stackelberg 2009: 50). Yet, by the end of the decade, they still remained isolated and dissonant exceptions – a simulation of a future utopia that bore little relation to the rest of the country. In this respect, they functioned more and more as 'heterotopias of compensation' for the otherwise limited success of the Fascist project of socioeconomic and anthropological 'reclamation' and regeneration.

But the catalogue of Fascist heterotopias in Rome would be incomplete without discussing another form of heterotopia that the regime used extensively and imaginatively in the 1930s – the *exhibition*. Unlike the 'other spaces' discussed in this chapter, exhibitions were illusory *un*real spaces, temporary enclosures and containers of enacted Fascist fantasies with all the characteristics that Foucault attributed to heterotopias. The second decade of Fascist rule opened with a landmark exhibition (Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, MdRF), whose extraordinary success prompted an array of further similar thematic events until the outbreak of the Second World War. In hindsight, it was another exhibition that became the valedictory statement of the Fascist regime itself – the 1942 Universal Exhibition of Rome or E42 (Ch. 8). In its multidimensionality, the E42 encompassed illusion and compensation to the extreme, fusing many of the examples that Foucault used to differentiate types of heterotopia – a theme park, a mega-museum, a colony (built of a spatial *tabula rasa*), and – as it turned out – a haunting cemetery of Fascism's universalist dream.

7

Fascism in *Mostra*: Exhibitions as Heterotopias

During the 21 years of Fascist rule in Italy, the catalogue of exhibitions organised by the regime was dizzyingly long and intriguingly rich in themes, aesthetic forms, and symbolic functions. As Jeffrey Schnapp has noted, in Fascist Italy exhibitions (*mostre*) replaced museums as the primary institutions and spaces where national historical myths were enacted, disseminated, and consumed by the wider public. Unlike the nineteenth-century museum, which was a predominantly scientific and elitist institution offering a permanent, serial, and static historical narrative, exhibitions were dynamic and time-limited 'events', far more accessible by the wider public, far more focused on emotion, and far more experimental in their aesthetic forms. Schnapp describes the *mostre* of Fascism as eminently '*political* exhibitions' – modern mass 'events' that functioned as 'impermanent sites of volatile memory … [or] agitatory instantiations of counter-memory' for everyone, not just for the scholar or the aesthete or the tourist (Schnapp 2007: 78). Audaciously modern in their techniques of representation (combining painted and photographic images, words, sounds, and collages) and in their unabashed ideological goals, Fascist-era exhibitions were both didactic and emotional, populist and 'sacred', ephemeral and timeless (Werner 1999: 12–18). By rehearsing disruptive readings of the past and by presenting narratives in highly visual, dynamic formats, they served the self-representation and celebration of Fascism's political authority and agency even when they seemingly referenced the more distant past.

To approach the Fascist *mostre* as heterotopias ('other spaces', perfect and meticulously arranged in deliberate contrast to their surrounding world – see Ch. 6) entails an understanding of their dual temporal function as markers of difference to the past and signifiers of a novel future path, only accessible from within the Fascist 'revolution' as well as because of it. The exhibitions staged by the Fascist party/regime celebrated the alleged genius of Fascism in a condensed spatial and temporal form, as a spectacle of revolutionary transformation that could be experienced in the present tense as if it were unfolding in front of the visitor's eyes. They were enacting a world in

dynamic creative flux, a revolution that 'is becoming' (Cruillas 1934: 518). They underlined the growing difference of what was being exhibited to the 'decadent' past whose remnants could still be witnessed once outside the exhibition; but at the same time they offered to the viewer a privileged view of a future that had allegedly already begun. They were functioning at the same time as 'spaces of experience' (where aspects of the past were incorporated and remembered) and as 'horizons of expectation' (where a different future, 'not yet' experienced, was made present – Koselleck 1985: 272).

Still, while disrupting both space and time, exhibition events also maintained a strong attachment to their actual temporal and spatial context. The choice of an exhibition theme performed a specific function in direct relation to its specific moment in time. Often exhibitions were organised as centrepieces of anniversary celebrations; or they referenced indirectly the political subtext of their time. Similarly, an exhibition event was deliberately situated in a particular space – a city, a location, a venue. From the intriguingly long catalogue of Fascist-era *mostre*, a large number of events (and arguably the most significant) took place in Rome. This was a conscious choice. It was conventional practice, in Italy and elsewhere, to hold major commemorative and celebratory events of national import in the capital city. In addition, a large segment of Fascist-era exhibitions touched on the theme of *romanità*, making the city of Rome their de facto most appropriate backdrop. More importantly, however, many Fascist *mostre* deliberately mined the physical and the symbolic space(s) of Rome in order to bestow 'sacred' and timeless meaning to what was being represented in the exhibition. If, for example, Rome was the natural setting for the exhibition commemorating the 2000-year anniversary of the birth of Roman emperor Augustus organised in 1937–38 (Mostra Augustea della Romanità, MAdR), the eventual choice of Rome for the most high-profile exhibition of the Fascist period – the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista, MdRF) in 1932 – was a calculated (and not uncontroversial) decision with rich political significance. The four PNF exhibitions hosted on the grounds of the recently excavated Circo Massimo in 1937–39 invested a lot of their representational capital in their chosen location at the heart of Rome's historic centre and on the grounds of such an important ancient site. As for the final episode, the 1942 Universal Exhibition of Rome (Esposizione Universale di Roma, E42) that was also intended as the apex of the celebrations for the twentieth anniversary of the March on Rome, the significance of the location was manifold: a specially *ex nihilo* constructed monumental 'city' in the shadow of the historic city, as well as a permanent, heterotopic space hosting numerous individual *mostre* that captured the entire gamut of the regime's activities and futural aspirations.

In what ways, however, were the Fascist *mostre* that took place in the capital an intrinsic *additive* part of the 'third Rome' itself? After all, the bulk of these events were temporary instantiations, leaving little or nothing

behind once they had ended. And yet, for all their transience, Fascist exhibitions held in the capital were staged as *syn*tactical components of the emerging new 'third Rome'. They imprinted on their physical exhibition venues a host of new spatial practices and alternative memories that both outlasted the events themselves and had a deeper cumulative effect on the city's transformation into an ideal Fascist capital. For example, the four PNF *mostre* organised in rapid succession inside the Circo Massimo invested in a spatiotemporal disjunction – the perfectly enacted/exhibited present/future against the physical backdrop of the remnants of a heroic and cherished past – that communicated a novel synthesis between a diachronic *romanità* and its putative modern revival by Fascism. The 1932 MdRF and the 1937 MAdR referenced an ideal space and time that had little to do with their venue (both were staged inside the neoclassical Palazzo delle Esposizioni, a monument with strong attachments to the Liberal era); instead, they both invoked the mental image of a mythical Rome as a transformative agent of history in both past and present tense (Harkins 2012: 114–17). On both occasions, however, the venue also underwent spectacular external transformations (especially on the facade) that created the illusion of an *ex nihilo* creation – even before stepping into the visual avalanche of the exhibition itself! The facade of the 1932 MdRF in particular is probably one of the most powerful and memorable images of the entire history of the Fascist regime – even if it depicted a transient optical illusion that faded away once the exhibition had closed its doors in 1934.

The apex of the Fascist exhibition repertoire was of course the ill-fated 1942 Esposizione Universale di Roma (E42). This was to be a temporary event with global reach, hosted in a specially constructed *permanent* 'new city' and bequeathing most of its buildings and artefacts to a string of future museums and exhibitions. The E42 was to function as the ultimate, most authoritative and complete statement of Fascism's (and the 'third Rome's') universalist horizon. The deliberate disjunction between the exhibition and its surrounding time-space that was the trademark of other Fascist-era exhibition events in Rome was no longer there, for the emplacement of the various exhibition events inside the *ex nihilo* constructed 'new city' cancelled out all other points of spatial reference. Yet, the permanent exhibition city was unintelligible without its Roman spatial and mythic backdrop. Conceived as the ultimate and most ambitious in scale enactment of the 'third Rome', the E42 quarter became Fascism's ultimate heterotopic space – both a permanent simulation of an ideal spatial order and a floating island, neither *in* the 'third Rome' nor intelligible without its spatial and symbolic invocation.

In this chapter I explore the Fascist *mostre* that took place in the capital as both heterotopias and heterochronies of the 'third Rome'; in other words, I approach them as spatial-temporal practices whose power derived as much from *what* they represented (theme) as from *how* (visual and narrative

techniques), *where* (choice of location, venue), and *when* (importance of timing) they were staged. I focus on the three most important and high-profile exhibitions of the 1932–42 period (MdRF, MAdR, and E42); but I also discuss other such events, such as the Fascist party's *mostre* of the Circo Massimo, the subsequent (intended as permanent) iteration of the MdRF, and some of the special exhibitions that would be hosted in the programme of the E42. Rather than analysing them as 'political' propaganda events or purely didactic practices for the masses, I examine them as deliberate, if mostly transient or incomplete, extensions of the Fascist 'layer' in Rome – as heterotopias *of* the 'third Rome', marking special spaces of self-celebration, sacred ritual, illusory simulation, and (increasingly) compensation from their messy, fragmented surrounding world (Muzzio and Muzzio-Rentas 2008: 146).

Exhibiting Fascism in Rome: The 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (MdRF)

As we saw in Ch. 1, Fascism was a belated and rather unlikely suitor of Rome's symbolic aura. For years after the March on Rome, the Fascist regime and party continued to oscillate between, on the one hand, its historical and spiritual home in the northern metropolis of Milan and, on the other, its conquered political base and symbol of success in Rome. This clash mirrored another, even more profound one – between a Fascist 'revolution' as radical constituent power driven primarily by the dynamism of the party/movement and a Fascist constituted political order embodied by Mussolini's regime (Woodley 2009: 78–87, 126–7). These contrasting visions continued to generate tensions within the Fascist constituency, producing contradictory assessments of Fascism's own place in history and of its debts to Rome (Gentile 2007: 66). Not surprisingly then, tensions came to the fore in the build-up to the first major milestone of the Fascist era. The tenth anniversaries of both the foundation of the Fasci di Combattimento in 1919 and the March on Rome in 1922 held immense symbolic capital for the Fascist regime. The occasion of *a* Fascist *Decennale* provided the regime with a unique opportunity to devise and tell its very own narrative of historical vindication – from its intellectual and political genesis during the First World War to its official foundation in 1919 to its political triumph in 1922 and to its institutional consolidation ever since.

But *Decennale* of what? The question of which of the two foundation myths (1919 or 1922) to mark as the apex of Fascism's trajectory to victory produced very different premises with regard to the timing, the exact location, and the actual form of the *Decennale* celebration. The year 1919 epitomised the rise of the revolutionary movement on the humble grounds of the Piazza San Sepolcro in Milan that went on to propel Mussolini to power and continued to be the driving force of the Fascist 'permanent revolution'. By contrast, 1922 celebrated the regenerative political force that swept away

the last vestiges of the old Liberal system and produced a 'revolutionary' new political order in its wake (cf. Fogu 2003a: 154–7). In early 1928, the president of the Fascist Institute of Culture (Istituto Fascista di Cultura), Dino Alfieri, proposed a retrospective exhibition scheduled to take place in Milan in 1929. His proposal echoed a thoroughly legitimate view that Fascism's historical self-representation was principally linked to its origins as a radical political movement born and bred in the northern metropolis during the turbulent years of 1918–19. In the original plan for the exhibition that Alfieri presented to Mussolini and the PNF in March 1928, he chose the title 'Exhibition of Fascism' (Mostra del Fascismo) and defended rigorously the pivotal significance of the period from the *intervento* to the foundation of the *Fasci* (23 March 1919) for the formation of Fascism's subsequent identity. Predictably, then, he proposed the 23rd of March 1929 as the date for the opening of the exhibition, hosted at the museum of Castello Sforzesco in Milan. The plan clearly interested Mussolini, who offered his wholehearted support and authorised the party to appoint a special committee in charge of organising the landmark event.[121]

Then, the momentum lapsed rather inexplicably. The year 1929 came and went, marked not by the celebrations of the 'anniversary X' of San Sepolcro but by a landmark (and resented by some within the party) agreement between the state and the Vatican church (Ch. 4). By that time it had become evident that the focus of the celebrations would shift to the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome, pushing the timeline to 1932. Celebrating 1922, rather than 1919, paid tribute to the March's historical significance as the pivot between a revolution (going back to 1919 or even 1914) completed and the 'epiphany of a new era' (Salvatori 2006a: 441). When the preparations resumed in the spring of 1931, the planned commemorative event had mutated into an Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista, MdRF) and its location moved irreversibly to Rome (Fogu 2003: 134–5). The change in name and time reflected the event's deliberate appropriation by Mussolini on behalf of the Fascist regime, even if the PNF retained a strong presence in the exhibition's new organising committee. It also divulged an equally deliberate shift of the narrative arc: although the overall structure and historical coverage of the exhibition remained essentially the same between Alfieri's original 1928 plan and its 1931 iteration, the founding of the Fasci in March 1919 was no longer considered the symbolic catalyst of the Fascist 'revolution' but rather the beginning of a critical period of political, social, and intellectual gestation that reached its climax in the October 1922 March on Rome (Fioravanti 1990: 19).

The result of this process of semantic mutation was that the 1932 exhibition was planned and staged as an eminently 'Roman' event. In fact, 1932 witnessed not one but two landmark exhibitions in the capital. A few months before the inauguration of the MdRF, in April 1932, the regime staged an exhibition marking the fiftieth anniversary of Garibaldi's death

(Mostra Garibaldina). The idea for a commemorative event dedicated to the hero of the Risorgimento originated in 1929, at a time when the Fascist regime had achieved its historic compromise with the Catholic Church. In this context, the anniversary provided a dual symbolic opportunity for the Fascist regime – to pay tribute to the heroic events of the Risorgimento by honouring its most celebrated personality; and to use the occasion in order to highlight Fascism's spiritual links with the nineteenth-century civic struggle for national unification as a symbolic counterbalance to the controversial 1929 agreement with the church (Fogu 1996: 319). While the Garibaldian exhibition was hosted inside the rooms of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in the capital, the most powerful rituals linked to the anniversary unfolded on the streets of Genova and Rome in June 1932. On the former occasion, the body of Garibaldi's wife Anita was exhumed from Genova, paraded across his city of birth, and embarked on its final journey to Rome – an event that was carefully staged as a solemn, heroic conclusion. By contrast, the second parade that took place in Rome on the following day involved Anita's coffin traversing 'in triumph' the capital to find its final resting place at the bottom of a specially designed new monument dedicated to her on Gianicolo hill. The performance of the ritual of the Fascist roll-call as part of the parade in Rome contrasted sharply and deliberately with the silent ritual performed in Genova. It was as if, by being transported to Rome, Anita's coffin had undergone a spectacular mutation – from a solemn fragment of the past to a pulsating experience in the present tense (Fogu 2005: 36–40). On 4 June Mussolini marked the climax of the commemorative event with the inauguration of Anita's monument and tomb on Gianicolo. His reference to the spiritual continuity between Garibaldi's Redshirts and the Fascist Blackshirts was intended not just as a historical analogy (past and present; Risorgimento and Fascism; Garibaldi and Mussolini) but also as an immanent process, tied to its present space and time, and centred (both literally and symbolically) on the 'third Rome' (Fogu 1996: 327–37; Baioni 2006: 180–3).

Transporting Anita's body to, and entombing it in, the capital seemed to echo Fascism's own journey from Milan to Rome between 1919 and 1922. The catalogue of similarities between Garibaldi's anniversary events and the celebrations of the Fascist *Decennale* of 1932 is long. They both departed from the norms of conventional historical commemoration in favour of dynamic, living 'experiences' engaging mass crowds not as passive spectators or silent witnesses but as active spiritual participants (Stone 1993: 216; 2009). They also involved audacious strategies of encoding Fascist political and aesthetic values on collective national memory. Finally, they followed similar spatial-temporal practices that both mined, and fed into, the Fascist myth of Rome. On both occasions, the city was not just the backdrop of the celebrations but the all-important stage of their historical consecration. Even the coincidence of the two exhibitions inside the Palazzo delle Esposizioni, in rapid and deliberate succession, underlined the dynamic

volatility of the Fascist history-making project. It was as if the timing, the narrative and aesthetic encoding, and above all the actual emplacement (*in* Rome) of the two 1932 celebrations revealed for the first time the fullest and most authentic meaning of the events being commemorated.

With the celebrations for the anniversary of Garibaldi's death concluded, the Fascist regime's attention turned once again to the MdRF, scheduled to open on 28 October 1932. Alfieri – by that time undersecretary of the Ministry of Corporations – was summoned to head the organising committee, flanked by three other important figures of the regime: the former secretary of the PNF (1924–25) and subsequently party undersecretary (until 1930) Alessandro Melchiori; the Futurist, former follower of Gabriele D'Annunzio in Fiume (1919–20) and loyal Fascist journalist, Luigi Freddi; and Cipriano Efisio Oppo, a man of multiple artistic talents and a respected cultural critic of the Fascist period who had already developed an expertise in designing cutting-edge exhibitions. It was especially Oppo who established a wide, deliberately eclectic partnership of high-profile architects, painters, scenographers, and sculptors to work on the decorative elements of the exhibition. Work began in earnest immediately after the closing of the Mostra Garibaldina. The nineteenth-century Palazzo delle Esposizioni – the crowning architectural achievement of Marcello Piacentini's father, Pio – would have to be suitably transformed in order to accentuate the documentary core and agitatory staging of the exhibition. Accordingly, the building's heavily decorative features would be masked by a layer of dynamic modernist compositions, evocative of the 'revolutionary' spirit of the event. The cladding of the Palazzo's Beaux Arts-inspired facade was awarded to the rationalist, ex-MIAR architects Mario De Renzi and Adalberto Libera. Their solution to the monumental entrance of the Mostra – a gigantic cube with four symmetrically arranged and protruding *fasci* made of concrete, two imposing 'X' symbols on each side of the facade, and the title of the exhibition running along the bottom of the fasci and above a rectangular archway in imperial red – was chosen from among the widest variety of aesthetic interpretations submitted to the organising committee (Fig. 31). Carefully avoiding either an excessive *romanità*-inspired monumentalism or an avant-garde 'originality dotted with bizarre elements' that would render the work unintelligible to the contemporary mass audience (Alfieri and Freddi 1933: 65), De Renzi and Libera designed one of the landmark architectural artefacts of Fascist modernist aesthetics that was as powerful in its visually communicative tactics as it was captivating in emotional terms and unashamedly sacralising (Garofalo and Veresane 2002: 53–7; Stone 1993: 219–21; Gentile 2007: 169).

The two architects responsible for the new facade also designed the interface between the outside world and the interior of the exhibition. Ascending the steps to the entrance door, the visitor was greeted by an arrangement of five red arches, framing another huge triple-X (in the colours of the Italian flag) that stood above the entrance. Once inside, the building's interim spaces (the atrium, the internal staircases, and the other 'neutral' spaces between

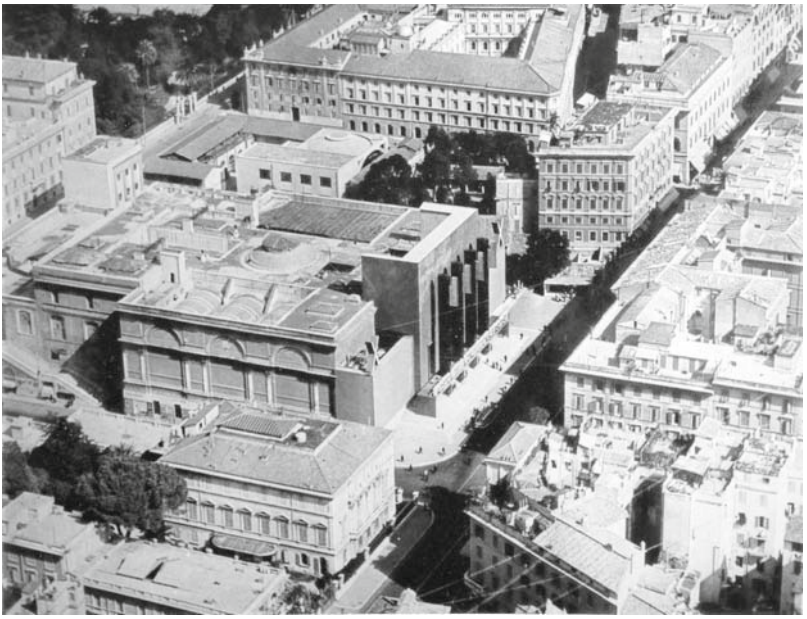


Figure 31 The Palazzo delle Esposizioni on Via Nazionale in 1932, revamped for the occasion of the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (MdRF). With the kind permission of © **Museo di Roma**, 'Veduta aerea del Palazzo delle Esposizioni durante la Mostra Della Rivoluzione Fascista', AF 6701–23

the exhibition rooms) had also been re-clad to ensure the visual congruence of all of the exhibition events. The 15 rooms of the ground floor formed a narrative and spatial arc, starting with the period between the *intervento* movement and the declaration of war on 24 May 1915, continuing in quick succession through the First World War, the immediate postwar crisis, the year 1919, the occupation of Fiume by Gabriele D'Annunzio and his 'Legionaries', and concluding with spaces dedicated to the years 1920, 1921, and finally 1922. The last two rooms of the 'historical' section of the exhibition (P and Q) marked the first of the two intended 'transitions' awaiting the visitor. Room P was dedicated to the final dramatic mobilisation of the Fascist movement in the last days of October 1922, culminating in the March on Rome. Room Q (Fig. 32.1) marked the transfiguration of the exhibition from an avant-garde documentary historical narrative (Rooms A to Q) into a plane of mystical experience and of a 'new beginning', also marked by the transition from 1922 to '*Anno I*'. The central axis of the ground floor, made up from Rooms R to U, formed – spatially and symbolically – an inner sanctuary to Fascism itself. Together they constituted a separate narrative of dramatic culmination from the 'Room of Honour' to the 'Gallery of the

Fasci', then to 'Mussolini's Room', and finally to the most heterotopic of the Mostra's rooms, the 'Sanctuary of the Fascist Martyrs' (**Sacrario;** Fig. 32.2).

The experience of a constant narrative crescendo was complemented by an impressively rich, though deliberately disjointed and fragmented, decorative programme. The mounting visual and emotional tension that characterised the visitor's itinerary through the '1922' room (Room O, designed by the rationalist Giuseppe Terragni – Rocchi 2000: 19–22) to the subsequent four spaces decorated by the celebrated painter Mario Sironi (Rooms P, **Q**, R, and S) was only briefly interrupted by the penultimate, documentary-like 'Fasci' room of the ground floor (designed by Leo Longanesi) before the final opening into the Sacrario (Room U) (Capanna 2004: 68–70). The circular room, evoking at the same time the Mausoleum of Augustus in Rome and the architectural form of the Christian rotunda church, was designed by Libera and the scenographer Mario Valente. Its centrepiece was a huge metallic cross in the middle, framed by six luminous rows repeating without pause over three lines each the response to the Fascist roll-call ('Presente!') and filled up with the sound of the popular Fascist tune of *Giovinezza*. This was an unashamedly mystical and sacred room – the nave of a true 'Fascist cathedral' (Gentile 2007: 170–2) that obliterated both conventional time and physical space. Inside it, Fascist 'martyrs' were transformed into eternal national heroes (a connection underlined by the inscription 'For the eternal Fatherland' on the cross).

Figure 32.1 MdRF, 1932: Room Q, dedicated to the March on Rome (Mario Sironi). *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, ed. D. Alfieri, L. Freddi. Rome: PNF 1932, p. 32

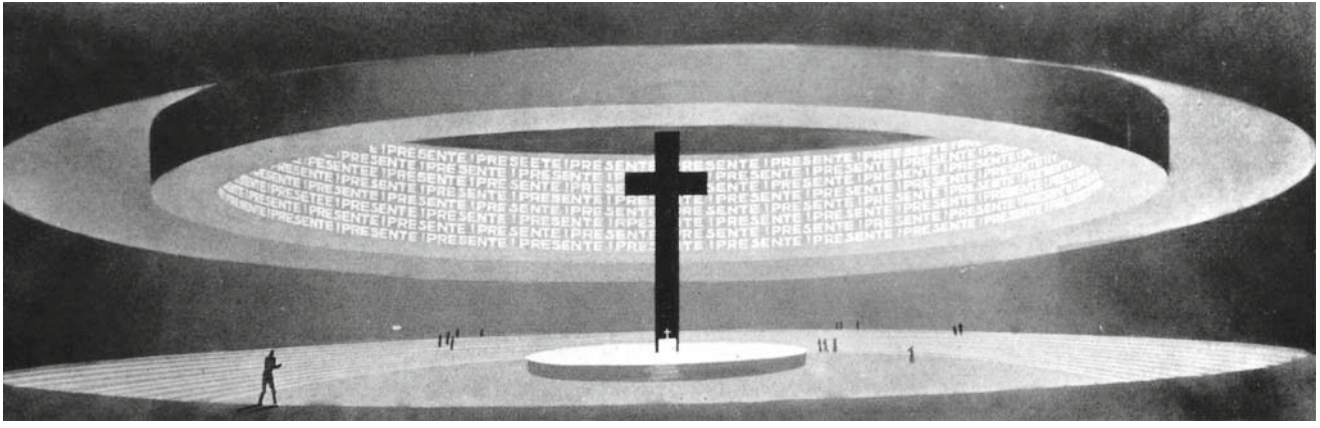


Figure 32.2 MdRF, 1932: *Sacrario* room (Adalberto Libera, Mario Valente). *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, ed. D. Alfieri, L. Freddi. Rome: PNF 1932, p. 49

By comparison to the powerful visual and emotional experience of the ground-floor rooms, the first floor of the exhibition functioned as a postscript, albeit one that resembled more strongly a conventional Mostra del Fascismo. With rooms dedicated to the state, the party, the foreign Fascist organisations (Fasci all'estero), and the landmark achievements of the Fascist regime (labour, agriculture, industry, transport, *bonifica*, corporatism), the first floor communicated the kind of 'heterotopia of illusion' that announced the format and tone of some of Fascism's subsequent exhibitions. Taken as a whole, however, the MdRF celebrated Fascism's privileged relation with Rome. It was through the historic coincidence of the movement's regenerative élan with its political vindication in Rome – first as 'revolutionary' event with the October 1922 March and then as 'revolutionary' regime – that Fascism graduated into a national force and 'a historic event incommensurable to all others historical events' (Fogu 1996: 337). Sironi's grand murals that depicted this transfiguration of Fascism into a national and imperial force (through the visual fusion of the *fascio* with the eagle, the *tricolore*, and the Roman sword) celebrated the transition from the preceding drama of escalating crisis and oppositional conflict to a more stable and futural narrative of 'redemption and resolution' (Stone 2009: 33). Rome, the physical space of this intersection and the spiritual force that underpinned the historic synthesis, was the invisible but omnipresent dramatic fulcrum of the entire exhibition.

Beyond the act of locating the MdRF in the capital, the celebrations for the Fascist *Decennale* pursued a wider strategy of symbolic *syn*taxis with Rome. In preparation for the 1932 exhibition, the organising committee invited all regional and local Fascist organisations to submit all sorts of artefacts relating to the history of the Fascist movement. More than 18,000 items (photographs, newspapers, autographs, pamphlets, and other relics) were dispatched to Rome in a spectacular operation of Fascist self-archiving designed to underline the credentials of the exhibition as a genuine popular mass event (Berezin 1997: 112). The emergent new 'Fascist mass subject' (Schnapp 1993: 89; Fogu 2003a: 94) – active participant in, and collective maker of, history – flooded the rooms of the MdRF, both symbolically (as the purveyor of the exhibited artefacts and collective protagonist of the Fascist triumphal narrative) and literally (over three million people visited the exhibition between 1932 and 1934). Another Fascist crowd, 25,000-strong, had already descended on the capital nearly two weeks before the opening of the MdRF. On 16 October, Fascist dignitaries from across the country, a large contingency of the youth organisations, and families of the Fascist 'martyrs' gathered on Piazza Venezia to listen to Mussolini. The event perfectly prefigured the soon-to-be-opened MdRF. On the one hand, the commemoration of the 'fallen' functioned as a prelude to the dramatic representation of Fascist sacrifice inside the Sacrario room of the exhibition. On the other hand, the concurrence of three generations of Fascists (the

'martyrs', the regime/party dignitaries, and the youth) communicated the unbreakable continuity between the past, present, and future of Fascism itself. From the familiar balcony of his office overlooking Piazza Venezia, under the shadow of the Vittoriano and the Monument to the Unknown Soldier, the Duce invoked the imagery of the March on the capital ten years earlier to underline how the triumphal conclusion of one chapter in Fascism's history heralded the beginning of a new one, in which the eternal spirit of Rome would propel Fascism and Italy, as a new single historical subject, to the forefront of world history (*Opera* XXV: 134–6). A week later, this time speaking in front of a large crowd in Milan, Mussolini went even further, announcing the beginning of the 'Fascist century' that would sweep away 'old' Europe and witness the triumphant rise of Fascist Italy to the status of a universal 'director of civilisation' (*Opera* XXV: 145–8; Berezin 1997: 112–14). Finally, on the morning of 28 October 1932, the ceremonial parade from the Colosseo to Piazza Venezia that marked the inauguration of the Via dell'Impero (Ch. 3) followed the official opening of the MdRF. Rome was the unifying feature of the two climactic events, effectively fusing the heterotopic internal space of the exhibition with the external scenery of the new avenue at the heart of the capital's historic centre. In contrast to the first commemoration of the March on Rome in 1923, which had consisted of a series of local events in nine Italian cities that re-enacted the alleged itinerary of the mobilised Blackshirts and their leader all the way to the capital (Berezin 1997: 70–100), the 1932 event was an unabashed celebration of the 'third Rome' as the fulcrum of the new Fascist temporality.

Viewed from this angle, the debate that started as early as November 1932 about turning the MdRF into a permanent venue of the 'third Rome' was perfectly congruous with the symbolic context of the October 1932 celebrations of the *Decennale*. The original closing date of the exhibition (21 April 1933) was moved, first, to October 1933 and then a full year later, making the MdRF both the longest and the most popular exhibition ever held in Rome. By then, the pressing task of moving the documentary and artistic artefacts to another location in the capital had become a logistical nightmare, given that the Palazzo delle Esposizioni could not maintain the collection while being used for other exhibitions. Various ideas as to the future permanent home of the exhibition ranged from the Monument to Vittorio Emanuele II to the future Palazzo del Littorio on the Via dell'Impero (Ch. 5). The former idea was quickly dismissed as both impractical and symbolically unsuitable – linking the history of Fascism to the Risorgimento and the Savoy dynasty under the roof of the landmark monument of the Liberal period ran against the intention to present Fascism as a force of revolutionary rebirth. By contrast, the idea of the Palazzo del Littorio was seriously entertained for some time, given the intention of using the building as the unitary administrative and spiritual hub of Fascism. Yet, the 1934 competition for the Palazzo dell'Littorio envisaged only a partial resurrection of the

MdRF, focusing on two elements: the reconstruction of the Sacrario and the hosting of some of the archival holdings relating to the PNF's history. The bulk of the material exhibited in the MdRF was moved instead to the Gallery of Modern Art in Valle Giulia, where it could be revived as a dynamic and constantly expanding 'archive in motion' of Fascism (Fioravanti 1990: 36–7). Occupying 30 rooms inside the gallery – which was expanded and acquired a redesigned facade, both works of the building's original architect, Cesare Bazzani – the follow-up exhibition took shape between late 1934 and 1937. In comparison to the original MdRF, the second iteration was meant to be notably more dispassionate in tone and function, mutating into a centre for the study of Fascism and a living, constantly unfolding record of the Fascist 'revolution', both at home and abroad. Alfieri (by then minister of Popular Culture) and Melchiori remained in charge of the new exhibition, expanding the focus on the 1922 events but also strengthening the post-1922 coverage with substantially more material on the 'cult of the Duce' and the putative achievements of the Fascist state (Talarico 1937; Insolera and Perego 1999: 173; Salvatori 2003: 444–59).

The new exhibition was inaugurated on 23 September 1937. It temporarily closed in November 1938 but reopened the following March. As new material continued to be gathered and appended to the content of the original exhibition, the Fascist authorities decided to convert it again into a permanent archive, library, and documentation centre of Fascism. With the envisaged transfer of the party's seat to the new Casa Littoria in the Foro Mussolini (a move that, as we saw, never actually took place, following the PNF's decision to relinquish the building in favour of the Foreign Ministry) and the preparations for the celebration of Fascism's *Ventennale* in 1942, a final phase of reorganisation took place in 1940–42. When the exhibition was inaugurated for the third time by Mussolini (28 October 1942), it formed the hub of a future study centre, library, and (expanded) archive dedicated to Fascism. By that time, the Sacrario had become an autonomous project, realised by Luigi Moretti at Foro Mussolini, inside the remodelled Foresteria Nord building (Spagnesi 2011: 336; Ch. 6). The exhibition itself had also grown in size, with new material chronicling the regime's activities in the late 1930s and Italy's participation in the Second World War. Yet, amidst the growing uncertainty of early 1943, the Fascist authorities decided to transport the bulk of the documentary and celebratory material away from the gallery – and, as it transpired, eventually to the north of Italy, where a reconstituted Fascist regime under a diminished Mussolini ruled from the autumn of 1943 to the end of April 1945 (Fioravanti 1990: 48–50). The exhibition itself struggled along, a shadow of its former self, through the volatile political climate of 1943–44, before being finally suspended after the liberation of Rome.

The MdRF was destined to be the only detailed self-representation of Fascism. It also turned out to be the only permanent liturgical space dedicated

exclusively to Fascism, given the abandonment of the Palazzo del Littorio project and the eventual cancellation of the E42/*Ventennale*. In the second decade of the Fascist regime that the MdRF panegyrically ushered in, a long list of Fascist exhibitions created transient heterotopias across the capital, invariably picking up the thread from where the MdRF had left it – from the idea of a dramatic, epoch-defining fusion of Fascism with Italy and the myth of Rome, *in Rome*. In this crucial respect, all other Fascist exhibitions held in the capital during the rest of the 1930s were narrative descendants of, as well as appendices to, the 1932 landmark exhibition.

The 1937 Mostra Augustea della Romanità

Exactly five years after the inauguration of the MdRF – and on the same day that its second (permanent) iteration in Valle Giulia opened its doors – the regime marked the beginning of the year-long celebrations for the two-thousand-year anniversary of emperor Augustus's birth (Bimillenario di Augusto). Along with the restoration of Augustus's Mausoleum and the excavation/reconstruction of Ara Pacis in Rome (Ch. 3), the centrepiece of the Bimillenario celebrations was the exhibition dedicated to the history and achievements of the Roman Empire, titled Augustan Exhibition of Roman Civilisation (Mostra Augustea della Romanità, MAdR). Curated by Giulio Quirino Giglioli (the person in charge of the entire Bimillenario celebration), in collaboration with the Institute of Roman Studies (Istituto di Studi Romani – ISR) and opened by Mussolini at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni on 23 September 1937, the MAdR appeared on paper as a more conventional 'historical' exhibition, building on themes, narratives, and exhibits from its direct predecessor – the 1911 Mostra Archeologica held in Rome as part of the celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of the Italian kingdom. Giglioli's presence, in fact, bridged symbolically the two events: he was a student of Rodolfo Lanciani, the renowned archaeologist and expert on Rome's antiquities who had supervised the 1911 exhibition, and curated the Museum of the (Roman) Empire (Museo dell'Impero) in 1926 that was created to house the collection put together for the 1911 Mostra, before he was placed in charge of the Bimillenario Augusteo in the early 1930s.

Yet, on closer inspection, the MAdR was intended from the outset to be a meticulously planned exercise in serial synecdoches, very much along the experience of the MdRF. Both Giglioli and Carlo Galassi Paluzzi (president of the ISR) arrived at the idea for such an exhibition only in mid-1932 – nearly two years after the inception of the Bimillenario celebratory event (Scriba 1995: 52–60). Between 1932 and 1934 the exhibition was transformed from an afterthought to an event with both national and international resonance that deserved to be the centrepiece of the entire Bimillenario programme (Kallis 2011b: 812–16). This would be no simple presentation of the

marvels of the Augustan era inside the static environment of a conventional museum; instead, it would 'embrace the entire gamut of manifestations of a great civilisation, the greatest of the ancient world and foundation of the modern world' and seek to produce 'the most convincing and authentic reassessment of *romanità*' (Pallottino 1937: 527–30; cf. Scriba 1995: 96–8). The chosen title for the exhibition divulged the first instance of synecdoche – rather than focusing exclusively on the era of Augustus, the MAdR would present the imperial era as the pinnacle of a civilising force that 'extended over two millennia', bridging the spiritual legacy of *romanità* with the universal creed of Christianity and the modern resurgence of the myth of Rome through the Risorgimento and finally the victory of Fascism. If the era of Augustus was the climax of ancient *romanità* and the historical crossroads that witnessed its spiritual reloading through Roman Christianity, the exhibition celebrated a narrative of putatively unbroken continuity – of the creative force of Rome and of 'the greatness of the Italian nation' from antiquity all the way to the present (Pallottino 1937: 527; De Francisci 1935).

That the MAdR was conceived and staged as an event with international significance is also underlined by Giglioli's early proposal to use the Bimillenario as a propaganda counterpoise to the 1937 Paris world fair (Ch. 8), whether by constructing a dedicated pavilion inside the Italian section of the exhibition in the French capital or by situating the most impressive parts of the MAdR inside a new archaeological park in Rome. The idea was discussed in 1934–35 but was eventually rejected by the Fascist authorities as too expensive and impractical (Scriba 1995: 127–30; Marcello 2011: 228). Yet, dramatic international events in the mid-1930s supplied the exhibition with further opportunities for synecdoches. The Italian invasion of Ethiopia and the proclamation of the Italian 'Empire' in May 1936 gave the Bimillenario's buzzword of *impero* a new, contemporary narrative dimension. The MAdR's focus on the genius of Augustus also promoted a reading of history as the creative canvas of great personalities whose extraordinary vision and epoch-defining determination expanded the horizons of their own people and of humanity as a whole. The relevance of this discourse to the celebration of the Italian and Fascist 'genius' introduced the figure of Mussolini into the synecdoche: the politician who allegedly saved Italy from internal strife, the author of the modern Italian *impero*, the aspiring architect of a new universal civilisation, the visionary transformer of the city of Rome, the man of both war and peace, was indirectly referenced in every representation of emperor Augustus during the celebrations of the Bimillenario (Notaro 2002: 60–7; Arthurs 2012: 91). A number of publications signed by prominent personalities of the time, such as Giuseppe Bottai (1937a, 1937b) and the historian Emilio Balbo (1937), appeared concurrently with the MAdR, seeking to mine further this personal historical analogy.

More than a celebration of any particular personality or historical period, however, the MAdR was a powerful synecdoche for the millenarian myth

of Rome, viewed through the ideological and aesthetic filter of mid-1930s Fascism. That such an exhibition could only take place in Rome was a certainty from its inception. All other events of the Bimillenario outside the capital – excavations and restorations, publications, lectures – were regarded as significant in their national didactic function but were intended as appendices to the main programme reserved for the capital. The decision to stage the exhibition inside the Palazzo delle Esposizioni was reached at a very early stage, establishing a powerful symbolic connection with the 1932 MdRF. Ample time was given to the Bimillenario organisers to adapt the Palazzo for the occasion, expanding its exhibition space by converting the basement into usable rooms and adding a new **facade** to the nineteenth-century exterior (Fig. 33), just like in the case of the MdRF. The architect Alfredo Scalpelli was offered the all-important brief, responding with a monumental, austere construction replete with architectural references to ancient *romanità* but also a broad repertoire of denotative elements that served and accentuated the intended synecdoches – between Augustus and Mussolini, between the Augustan Empire and the recently proclaimed Fascist *impero*, between classical *romanità* and its modern revival by Fascism, but above all between ancient and Fascist Rome (Marcello 2011: 224). In Scalpelli's original design for the facade, the word 'Dux' would be carved rhythmically on

Figure 33 The facade of the 1937–38 Augustan Exhibition of Roman Civilisation (Alfredo Scalpelli). **Capitolium**, *Rassegna Mensile del Governatorato di Roma*, 12/10 (1937): 519

both wings of the facade, crowning diverse panels with inscribed excerpts from famous ancient Roman authors. Yet, in its final iteration, the word 'Rex' replaced references to Mussolini on the left side, creating an equilibrium between the visual exaltation of the Duce and the celebration of the king's title as 'emperor', following the annexation of Ethiopia in 1936 (Liberati Silverio 1990). Having climbed the entrance steps and passed under the imposing facade through the central monumental arch, the visitor was greeted by an impressive 'Atrium of Victory' – a representational space that was as much dedicated to the triumphant military might of the ancient empire as it exalted the diachronic victory of the 'idea of Rome' itself, represented by the original sculpture of the 'Capitoline Wolf'. The Atrium functioned as the spatial and narrative hub for the entire exhibition; from there the visitor would be directed to the four separate segments of the MAdR. The peripheral rooms of the ground floor formed a narrative sequence dedicated to Rome itself, taking the visitor in an anti-clockwise direction from the 'Origins' of the city (a plough plunged into a tray of soil was the main exhibit, referencing the ritual of conquest and 'cosmicisation' of space) to the republican and imperial periods, the public institutions of the empire, its most celebrated emperors, and concluding with the 'Defence of the Empire' until the reign of Constantine (Marcello 2011: 231–43).

The following two rooms (to the left of the Atrium) functioned as hybrid spaces, combining chronological continuity with the preceding historical section of the MAdR and the celebratory rooms situated in the central axis of the exhibition hall. The first was dedicated to the links between Rome and Christianity, mapping the victory and extraordinary spread of the new religion onto the notion of yet another universal 'empire' radiating (territorially and spiritually) from Rome across the world. The second room, titled the 'Immortality of Rome' but also referred to as 'Room of Fascism', engaged in a pandemonium of narrative synecdoches that were underpinned by the grand narrative of the ostensible continuity of the 'idea of Rome'. At the centre of the room, flanking a modern statue of winged Victory, the visitor could see the busts of Mussolini and Vittorio Emanuele III, united through the proclamation of the *impero* (the Duce's relevant speech of May 1936 was recorded on the pedestal of the main statue). On either side of the room, two dramatic photomontages ran along the walls: one celebrating the resurgence of the 'idea of Rome' in medieval Christianity and the Risorgimento; the other exalting the 'rebirth' of Rome under Fascism – in itself, a heavily redacted mini-narrative of the MdRF, updated with allusions to the recent *impero* and then linking these back to ancient times. One section of the composition was particularly telling, depicting in succession the transfer of obelisks from Egypt to Rome by Augustus and other Roman emperors, their relocation across the city by Pope Sixtus V, and the transfer on Mussolini's orders of the obelisk of Axum from Ethiopia to Rome, placed on the edge of the Circo Massimo and inaugurated on 28 October 1937 (Wilkins 2005: 61–2).

Exiting the room of the 'Immortality of Rome' through the Atrium, the visitor would now enter the second thematic layer of the MAdR – dedicated to Augustus's empire and running along the central axis of the ground floor. Immediately next to the Atrium was the 'Room of the Empire' – a theme that brought together thematically Julius Caesar (with his own dedicated room) and Augustus (the climactic space of the exhibition's ground floor). Caesar's room was justified in the context of the narrative trajectory that led from the republic to dictatorship and finally empire. In this respect, as Giglioli noted, it was an indispensable narrative and thematic bridge to the Augustan/imperial era. However, the figure of Julius Caesar was also exalted as a political and military genius, as a charismatic dictator who imposed order on the perceived chaos of the ailing Republic by resolute force, and as the first visionary builder of Rome – all of which were qualities that could be directly transplanted into the contemporary cult of the Duce (Wyke 1999: 172; Dunnett 2006: 247–52). Finally, the itinerary led the visitor to the exhibition's dramatic fulcrum and apogee (Pallottino 1937: 522–23) – emperor Augustus as a person, military leader, man of peace, arch-priest, god-like figure, visionary constructor of imperial Rome, and embodiment of the eternal spirit of *romanità*. The main room dedicated to the emperor was flanked by other spaces that contained reconstructions of his villa in Campania and other monuments of his era; celebrated his influence on cultural production, military power, and public life; and chronicled the story of his family. Bizarrely at first sight, there was a tribute to Jesus inside Augustus's main room; yet, this choice echoed and reinforced the message of the spiritual continuity and universality of Rome that formed the basis of the 'Immortality' room (Scriba 1996: 21–5). Even at the centrepiece of the entire exhibition, amidst the most effusive celebration of the personality of Augustus in whose name this event had been conceived and organised, it was Rome that seemed to stretch and load the bow of history.

Back into the Atrium, the visitor could be directed to either the upper floor or to the extensively redesigned basement of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni. The upper floor fulfilled the organisers' intention to use the MAdR as a 'living' experience of life in the Augustan and imperial era. It contained reproductions of a dizzying number of Augustan-era artefacts, covering aspects of both private and public life, as well as of the full gamut of human activity (arts, science, society, youth, agriculture, commerce, religion). It also exhibited an impressive giant model of imperial Rome in the early fourth century CE (Pavia 2006; Rossetto 1991; Pisani Sartorio 1991: 263–71). The model had been commissioned by the Governatorato and was donated to the MAdR in order to be exhibited in the grandest room of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni.[122] The work brought together numerous artists, architects, and archaeologists who worked on individual aspects of the model under the supervision of the archaeologist Italo Gismondi.[123] Gismondi was also responsible for the transformation of the basement into an extension of the exhibition, displaying an

impressive array of reconstructed architectural monuments – anything from temples and houses to bridges and aqueducts, from fori to basilicas, from city walls to fountains. The lower hall made perhaps the boldest claim about the timeless universality of Rome and its role as the beacon of 'western' culture than any other part of the exhibition. Through a series of maps showing the ancient road network (radiating from the capital in all directions) and celebrating the foundation of cities across Europe by the Roman Empire (Pallottino 1937: 524–6), the exhibition effortlessly shifted the focus from Augustus to Rome, from the specific to the universal, from the city to the empire, from the past to the present and back (Marcello 2011: 231–5).

More importantly, however, the title of the MAdR belied and disguised the intention to use the exhibition – as well as the entire Bimillenario celebrations – as a primary tribute *to* Rome. With only very few exceptions, the objects amassed for the exhibition were contemporary reproductions, however scientifically accurate and faithful to the represented original they were or not (Schnapp 2007: 66). This decision was taken very early by Giglioli and his team, not only in order to save money and time but also to have more creative freedom as to what would be featured inside the exhibition. The selection was made from a vast pool of ancient fragments situated across the world, capturing elliptically the extraordinary productive diversity of the Roman world and providing the visitor with a powerful experience of tactile re-enactment that evaded the danger of museum fatigue. These reconstructed objects, unlike museum exhibits, had very little intrinsic value; their real significance lay in capturing the memory and essence of what they represented. Like the seemingly mundane objects amassed from across the country for the 1932 MdRF, collectively they triggered a powerful spiritual rapport between the elusive historic(al) force that had produced them and the present-day visitor – in the case of the MAdR, the timeless spirit of Rome, originating in the city and rekindled only there, at critical points in history. In this respect, while the MdRF may be seen as Fascism's heavily redacted panegyric autobiography (cf. Ciucci 1982), the MAdR was the rapturous, adulating Fascist biography of Rome.

In hindsight, the universalist subtext of the entire 1937–38 Bimillenario formed the bridge between the 1932 MdRF and the E42 (Notaro 2002: 64–7). The bridging function manifested itself on multiple levels. The three exhibitions were held in five-year intervals, coinciding with important anniversaries of the March on Rome. They were also a priori intended as, or chosen to become in the process, permanent exhibitions. The theme of *romanità* was transformed from a growing echo across the rooms of the 1932 exhibition to the main theme in the two later ones. Symbolically, too, the MAdR was chosen to form the backbone of the new Exhibition of Roman Civilisation (Mostra della Romanità, MdR) that would be hosted inside a dedicated building of the new E42 quarter.[124] A mere look at the facades of the main exhibition buildings used in the three events is telling of the profound

transformation that Fascist aesthetics and culture was undergoing during the second decade of Fascist rule. The audaciously modernist cladding of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni by Libera and De Renzi in 1932 gave way to Scalpelli's equally dramatic but more monumental and denotative version of the '*romanità* of modernity' in 1937 (Nelis 2007: 408). As for the Palazzo Mostra della Romanità in the E42 quarter (see Ch. 8), the design of the architectural team led by Pietro Aschieri exuded a sense of imposing classical austerity with its tall white pillars and long, empty walls (Fig. 36.3), in a pattern that was repeated across the entire zone of the new E42 quarter. Still, what appeared to have been lost to the requirements of the official *stile littorio* of the late 1930s on the outside was compensated for by a series of bold experiments in the interior. Inventive narrative techniques, powerful use of synecdoches, disruptive perceptions of time and space, and a deliberate yet subtle blending of reality with simulation – all referenced experiments rehearsed in MdRF but taken in different directions with the two subsequent exhibitions. It is thus impossible, as Jeffrey Schnapp (2007: 82) has stressed, to appreciate the visual fluidity and narrative dynamics of both the 1937 and the (planned but never staged) 1942 exhibitions without referring to the bold techniques pioneered in the 1932 MdRF.

The PNF Exhibitions at the Circo Massimo (1937–39)

In contrast to the mythical, intangible subtext of the 1932 MdRF and the 1937 MAdR, the quartet of exhibitions organised by the PNF on the grounds of the Circo Massimo in 1937–39 celebrated ostensibly concrete achievements in specific fields of social, economic, and scientific activity under Fascism. The titles of the four events – Exhibition of Summer Camps and Assistance to Children (Mostra delle Colonie Estive e Assistenza all'Infanzia, MCE, 1937), Exhibition of National Textiles (Mostra del Tessile Nazionale, MTN, 1937–38), the Exhibition of After-work (Mostra del Dopolavoro, MD, 1938), and Autarchic Exhibition of Italian Minerals (Mostra Autarchica del Minerale Italiano, MAMI, 1938–39) – suggested a direct link between Fascist agency and the putative achievements on display. In this respect, they functioned as thematic extensions of, and updates to, the MdRF. They picked up the thread of history-making achievement from where this was left on the upper floor of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in 1932 and transformed it against the dramatic backdrop of the Circo Massimo into a tangible celebration of the alleged Fascist genius.

On the other hand, the choice of Circo Massimo as venue for the exhibitions was rather surprising. The ancient circus occupied a vintage position between Palatine hill, the Baths of Caracalla, at the point where the Via dei Trionfi met the Via Imperiale and the Via del Mare before directing the visitor towards the future model-city of E42. From the autumn of 1937, it also featured an updated connection to imperial imagery, courtesy of the

relocation of the obelisk of Axum at the nearby Piazza di Porta Capena. The site had been recently (1934) excavated and substantially remodelled for mass public usage under the supervision of Antonio Muñoz (Kallis 2014a: 28–9).[125] Yet, as a non-standard exhibition venue, the Circo Massimo seemed to have no connection whatsoever to the exhibitions' themes. This was of course not the first time that Fascism had deliberately sought to stage its own events against the backdrop of ancient monuments and celebrated sites inside the capital. The Fascists had descended on Rome to hold their third national congress in November 1921, making deliberate use of the dramatic backdrop of the Mausoleum of Augustus to transform their movement into a political party. In October 1932, the ceremonial parade through the Foro (on the grounds of the new Via dell'Impero) had marked the climax of the *Decennale* celebrations. Meanwhile, in the second half of the 1930s Fascist organisations found it easier to gain permission to hold their celebratory events in ancient sites across Rome's historic centre.[126] With its vast space, resplendent location, and unrivalled imperial symbolism, the Circo Massimo too could not escape its destiny as a premium space for open-air Fascist mass events. Almost immediately after the completion of the first wave of restoration work in 1934, requests to use the grounds for ceremonial purposes flooded the Fascist authorities and the municipal administration. The newly systematised area was seamlessly incorporated into the ceremonial itinerary of the parades for the twelfth anniversary of the March on Rome (1934).[127] Although the site underwent successive restoration and 'clearing' work in 1935–37 (also in connection to the regime's campaign against the *baracche* – Ch. 6), it was often used for highly publicised Fascist events with military, sporting, or youth participation. Its vast, unordered, and unassuming space was the ultimate blank canvas in the midst of the city's historic centre – loaded with imperial memories but at the same time fluid and pliable enough to fit a host of diverse Fascist rituals and futural projections (Stone 1999: 274).

This must have been the main reason that prompted the PNF to approach the authorities of the capital and request the use of the Circo Massimo for the first exhibition (MCE). The request was made by the PNF in late 1936 but was challenged by archaeological experts, not least because the timeframe of the exhibition coincided with plans to continue the excavations in the zone, as Mussolini himself had demanded during one of his frequent supervisory visits to the area a few months earlier.[128] Yet, it was predictably the Duce who overruled his earlier directive, granting the party permission to use the site for its maternity and summer-camp exhibition. The MCE opened its doors on 20 June 1937 and remained open for more than three months. Its apparent success prompted Mussolini to change his mind one more time: the usage of the Circo Massimo as exhibition space, initially intended as a one-off event, gave way to the other three exhibitions, in rapid succession (Kallis 2014a: 39–40).[129]

The overall responsibility for the reorganisation of the site and its transformation into a modern exhibition space was assigned to the same

two architects who had caused a sensation with their temporary facade for the MdRF back in 1932 – Adalberto Libera and Mario De Renzi. Together with the painter Giovanni Guerrini, the two architects transformed the vast, only partly excavated oblong expanse of the ancient site into a perfectly ordered ideal city in miniature, with an ample avenue leading the visitor from the new entrance through the perfectly arranged thematic pavilions (particular to each exhibition) to the other side of the Circo (where the imposing structure of the Padiglione dei Congressi stood) and back (Neri 1992: 126). The austere classicist perspective of the exhibition complex was nevertheless juxtaposed to the bold appearance of individual structures, innovative use of modern 'autarchic' materials (combinations of timber, glass but mostly metal), and cutting-edge construction techniques (Mucelli 2009: 111). The ephemeral architecture designed for the MCE was subsequently adapted to suit the specific requirements of the subsequent exhibition events (Stone 2008: 277), but the overall spatial and visual concept executed by Libera and De Renzi remained in place throughout the 1937–39 exhibition quartet (Garofalo and Veresane 2002: 93–8). Against the unique backdrop of the remains of the ancient metropolis, the temporary arrangement of the site enacted an ideal and illusory, yet bizarrely tangible and 'real', present of hyper-modern achievement, projecting into the future a miniature image of a perfectly ordered, regenerated, prosperous, and innovative society.[130]

Connections between the four exhibitions extended beyond their venue, timeframe, and their status as PNF events. Two of them – MCE and MD – formed a discrete subset that paid tribute to years of Fascist activity in two areas (infancy/youth socialisation and leisure) that were considered central to the Fascist socially regenerative project of *bonifica umana* (Ch. 6). With pavilions spanning the entire spectrum from protection of maternity, infancy, and childhood to all stages of education (child-care facilities and schools of all levels; summer camps and other state- and party-sponsored leisure activities for the youth) and the entire gamut of socialisation structures (through Fascist organisations such as ONB, GIL, and Gruppi Universitari Fascisti), the MCE projected an unashamedly idealised picture of life for the youth in Fascist Italy. The 12 pavilions were arranged along the central axis of the Circo Massimo, amidst sumptuously designed gardens, colourful flower beds, and impressive water fountains (Calcagno 1937). The MD seemed to pick up the thread of spiritual re-education and anthropological rebirth from where the MCE had left it. Its pavilions were dedicated to diverse forms of cultural activity (from music and opera to theatre and cinema; and from new OND leisure events to popular fairs and traditional festivities), OND-sponsored sporting events, and the organisation's programmes of social welfare. As in the case of the MCE, the MD celebrated both putative present achievements and an ideal futural vision of social transformation. The perfectly ordered space and impressively showcased

exhibits created a simulated experience of a perfect future that was claimed to be underway outside the heterotopic grounds of the exhibition venue, following years of Fascist transformative agency (Magi-Spinetti 1938).

The other two events of the Circo Massimo exhibition subset (MTN and MAMI) were dedicated to two very different areas of production – textiles and mineral industry – that nevertheless functioned as synecdoches of the same broader political campaign – economic autarchy. In the aftermath of the League of Nations' sanctions imposed on Italy as a result of the invasion of Ethiopia (1935), Mussolini had declared 'autarchy' (*Autarchia*) the highest political priority of his regime. The ensuing mobilisation in this direction, capitalising heavily on the other major experiment of the Fascist regime in the 1930s – corporatism – opened up a new privileged sphere of propaganda activity for the regime in the 1936–40 period. The two exhibitions paid tribute to recent achievements in autarchic production within their respective fields. They blended seamlessly native raw materials, traditional techniques, and cutting-edge innovation but essentially enacted in the present tense a future of both national independence and global leadership (Paulicelli 2004: 110–12). Particularly the 1939 MAMI, with its broader scope of 'autarchic' research/production and focus on heavy industry, functioned as a spectacle of triumphant vindication for Mussolini's entire 'autarchic' vision and policies since 1936 (Russo 1999: 122; Longo 1938). A new narrative of 'Fascist revolution', leading from the dramatic events chronicled in the MdRF through the experiment of corporatism to the dynamism invested in the project of *autarchia*, had found its tangible expression inside the splendidly remodelled space of the Circo Massimo, effectively collapsing for the benefit of the spectators the 'revolution that *is becoming*' into the illusion of the 'revolution that *is*' (Cruillas 1934: 518).

With the conclusion of the MAMI in May 1939, the PNF reached an agreement with the Governatorato to return the site of the Circo Massimo to the municipal authorities. Occasional use of the site for military and party purposes continued during the summer but the exhibition facilities were dismantled and the area was cleared for further development. A new 'seaside village' (*Villaggio Balneare*), complete with swimming pools, artificial forests, and a theatre, proved a spectacular success in the summer of 1939, with half a million visitors. Part of the success of the themed village had to do with the use of the occasion by the state broadcaster EIAR for experimental television transmissions (Verdegiglio 2003: 189–203). As winter approached, the area underwent yet another transformation, this time to resemble a 'winter village' with a skating rink and a large 'attraction park'. The last recorded use of the space for exhibition purposes was for the Exhibition of Hotel Owners (Mostra Alberghiera), which closed in April 1940. By that time, the city authorities had taken the decision to completely dismantle the entertainment village and return the site to the archaeologists for its final reorganisation.[131]

In terms of both space and usage, the transformation of the Circo Massimo in the 1930s from a decaying landmark monument to exhibition space and then to recreational facility echoed in a unique way the spectrum of Fascist interventions and campaigns in Rome. From the quest to unearth the forgotten layers of *romanità* to the invasive 'systematisation' of ancient sites that sought to simulate their past glory, from the war against the *baracche* to the uprooting of entire anthropological networks from the historic centre of Rome, and from deference to the landmark sites of the imperial past to a growing sense of Fascist appropriation and ownership, the solemn site of the ancient circus reached the end of the 1930s resembling a Fascist 'theme park' (Stone 2008; 1999: 217–18; cf. Berezin 2006). As an exhibition venue between 1937 and 1939, it was gradually transformed into a space of 'hyper-reality' – not so much a condensed, idealised *representation* of Fascist reality as its *simulacrum*, unchained from reality, disguising itself as the 'real' thing, masking the absence of the 'reality' that it allegedly represented (Baudrillard 1988: 406; Ellin 1997: 40). The buildings of the exhibition village were transformed into the projection scene of successive 'ideal (Fascist) cities' – not static but perfectly three-dimensional, not as symbols but purporting to be material simulations. The organisers' choice of an open-air exhibition setting, as opposed to an enclosed hall or museum, aimed to foster the illusion of an alternative real-life experience; and each of the four PNF exhibitions highlighted this tendency further by reconstructing entire ideal sites ('villages', houses complete with rooms, gardens, theatres, camps, etc.) on the grounds of the circus (Kern 2008: 106). In these 'other spaces', the simulacrum preceded and de-temporalised reality. When one considers that only half a decade earlier the Circo Massimo was described as 'a truly miserable site … [and] a receptacle for the worst eyesores' (Arthurs 2012: 75), its transformation into the most effective factory of Fascist dreams and illusions was as spectacular as it was unnerving (Kallis 2014a: 42–5).

But it was the deliberate interplay between the particular site and the exhibition content that invested the simulated spectacles with the mythologies of *romanità* and then inscribed them on the space of the 'third Rome'. Cumulatively, the spatial practices embedded in the Circo Massimo as a result of the four PNF exhibitions generated a unique opportunity for celebrating the rapidly advancing fusion between Fascism and Rome. The ancient site – with its visual remodelling as an ideal micro-city, a hybrid of classicism and modernity – condensed the universalist essence of Fascist *romanità* and then injected it into every single artefact, experience, and narrative that it exhibited. More than any other new, 'framed', or 'systematised' site inside the capital, the Circo Massimo of the late 1930s became the ultimate Fascist 'heterotopia of *illusion*' – a huge *tabula rasa* amidst the most glorious ruins of *romanità*, on which the Fascist regime projected an avalanche of redacted, time- and space-less images and enacted a spate of illusory experiences that purported to be real. This was the space that supplied form and narrative

coherence to disparate Fascist myths. More importantly, however, it was the site that gave those myths a tangible emplacement, where they could be captured, consumed, and experienced as the *axes mundi* of a new Fascist order (Young 2006: 6–8). In this rapid succession of manufactured images, sensations, words, and indeed memories generated through the space of the 1937–39 exhibitions, the Circo Massimo became something akin to a vast magic mirror (cf. Foucault 1984: 47), on the prismatic surfaces of which all other heterotopias were pieced together, simulated, and inscribed on the time-space of the 'third Rome'.

The Universalist Subject: The E42

By the time that the last major Circo Massimo exhibition closed its gates, the Fascist regime was already heavily absorbed in the preparations for the 1942 Rome world fair. The site stood at the beginning of the new Fascist ceremonial road (Via Imperiale) that was designed to connect the historic centre of the capital with the heart of the new exhibition city then in construction to the southwest of the capital, on a previously empty location known as Tre Fontane along the way to the ancient port of Ostia. The fate of this major exhibition event is well known: the outbreak of the Second World War and Italy's eventual participation in the conflict (1940) led to the 'postponement' (permanent, as it turned out) of the E42 world fair. The last major Fascist national exhibition (Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare) was held not in Rome but in Naples, inaugurated on 9 May 1940 but terminated prematurely four weeks later due to Italy's entry into the Second World War (Fogu 2008: 35–8). As a result of these dramatic external circumstances, the regime's prodigious exhibition record was cut short at a moment when it was approaching its most spectacular climax.

The ambitious project for the E42 quarter (which will be discussed in more detail in Ch. 8) was eventually abandoned. Had it been completed and used according to the original schedule, the new city with its mostly permanent structures would have emerged as the ultimate and most comprehensive Fascist heterotopia – a vast, prismatic urban theme park, subsuming and articulating the regime's most cherished architectural, cultural, political, and social values. The fact, however, that the E42 new city was also intended as the receptacle of a deluge of thematic exhibition events casts the cancellation of the 1942 world fair in a very different light. Indeed, the 'Olympic Games of Civilisation' (Olimpiadi della Civiltà) – as the regime decided to call its world fair – was intended to become the follow-up, extension, and culmination of the 1932 MdRF, heralding in spectacular fashion the beginning of another decade of Fascist transformative agency. Unlike the celebrations for the *Decennale* a decade earlier, the 1942 *Ventennale* had no need for a special exhibition dedicated to the anniversary of the 'Fascist revolution' or to the symbolic rapport between Fascism and the myth of Rome; for the

E42 the Fascist mass historic(al) subject basked in the glory of an already accomplished perfect *syn*taxis with *romanità* and *italianità*. The long catalogue of special exhibitions devised for the dual occasion of the world fair and the *Ventennale* referenced the Fascist subject without the need for narrative synecdoches or denotative statements. Nearly every exhibition event that had been held during the 1930s would find its place of honour inside the space and narrative of the E42. Apart from the advanced preparations for a revamped Mostra della Romanità based on the material of the MAdR (see above), the list also featured exhibitions dedicated to autarchy and corporatism, agriculture and *bonifica*, all forms of science and industrial activity, housing and urban planning, public hygiene, the new Italian *impero*, ancient and modern art, and popular culture and ethnography (Gregory and Tartaro 1987: 105–40). In planning the world fair, the organising committee (headed by Vittorio Cini and Cipriano Efisio Oppo)[132] headed the Duce's early call to make the event an undisputed Mostra del Ventennale but opted for a more subtle and connotative referencing of Fascism as the regenerative force behind all exhibited achievements. This complete fusion of the Fascist, the Roman, and the national subjects in E42, to the point that the one was inseparable from the other, combined the narrative threads of the 1932 MdRF and of the 1937 MAdR: if the former marked the birth of Fascism as a truly national historical subject in Rome, and the latter set the foundations for its diachronic association with the myth of *romanità*, the E42 was intended as the landmark celebration of Fascism as a truly universal force.

Aspects of the MdRF and the MAdR did find their place in the E42 project – inside the most celebrated new building of the exhibition city, the (completed) Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana. The impressive construction was to host the most ideologically charged exhibition event of the world fair – the Exhibition of the Italian Civilisation (Mostra della Civiltà Italiana, MdCI). This was intended as the narrative culmination and the spiritual centre of the entire world fair, dedicated to the chronological presentation of the 'genius' of the Italian people from prehistory to the twentieth century (Garin 1987: 5–16). The MdCI was conceived as the most authoritative synthesis and emplacement of all other E42 exhibition activities, under an overarching narrative of the diachronic 'idea of Rome'.[133] The danger of overlap with other parallel exhibition events (e.g. the MdR and the Mostra Cattolica, but also the other thematic exhibitions dedicated to putative achievements of the Fascist regime) was evident to the organisers, who decided to keep references to Imperial Rome, Christianity, and the 1930s to an indicative minimum inside the MdCI.[134] At the end of a spectacular list of cultural achievements – referencing the rise of the 'idea of Rome', Roman Christianity and its art, the history of the Eastern (Byzantine) Empire, the contact with Islam, the Renaissance (with special attention to the figure of Dante as the 'prophet' of modern Italian identity) and baroque periods, as well as the struggle for national unification – the MdCI concluded with

a section titled 'War and Fascism'. A parallel narrative based on a hagiography of historical personalities guided the visitors from Constantine and Justinian to Dante, then to Mazzini, Cavour, and Garibaldi (the symbolic nodes of the previous section dedicated to the Risorgimento), to Francesco Crispi (prime minister in the 1890s and celebrated as the 'father' of modern Italian imperialism), directly to Gabriele D'Annunzio (leading avant-garde artist and political agitator, star of the *intervento* movement and figurehead of the short-lived occupation of Fiume in 1919), and finally to Mussolini. Intervening periods and most figures of the Liberal period were carefully redacted. 'Victory' in the First World War and 'Empire' occupied the central part of the last section; surrounding (smaller) rooms provided a thematic presentation that first reprised the historical narrative of the MdRF (*intervento*, war, March on Rome) and then updated it through a series of 'themes' dedicated to the alleged achievements of Fascism (political reform, social policy, education, *bonifica*, corporatism, autarchy, public works, armed forces, etc.). The word – and symbolism of – 'revolution' that had underpinned the narrative and aesthetic choices of the 1932 MdRF was also to be conspicuous by its absence inside the rooms of the MdCI. Instead, the room dedicated to Mussolini, featuring an imposing equestrian statue of the Duce as its centrepiece, was both the beginning and the end of the entire exhibition – a 'logical conclusion and a synthesis' of the entire genius of the Italian people throughout history, as evidenced across the rooms of the MdCI.[135]

The MdCI headed one of the six Italian sections of the E42. The rest of E42 was to be divided into different units, either thematic (art, science, economy/industry) or simply separating the international from the national pavilions and exhibitions. The three major objectives of the E42 were defined by the organisers as the 'affirmation of the power and prestige of Fascist Italy in all fields'; the 'realisation of the Mussolinian project of the "Rome of the sea" (*Roma del mare*, meaning the expansion of the capital to the port of Ostia)'; and the 'creation of a new monumental quarter'.[136] The meaning of 'universality' in the official title of the fair was also determined at an early stage by the organisers, referring to both the full participation of all countries of the world and the symbolic tribute to the universality of the 'idea of Rome' in the past, present, and future (*ieri, oggi, domani*, as the exhibition's subtitle stated). The staging of the world fair *in* Rome but also in newly constructed monumental and permanent premises in the outskirts of the historic city was intended to offer the principal idea of *universalità di Roma* the 'most positive and realistic expression'. Consequently, the new monumental constructions would only reference the 'eternal and universalist … spirit of Rome' in a style that would ensure their diachronic aesthetic and symbolic value (Lazzaro 2005: 30). As Roger Griffin has observed, the construction of the E42 quarter involved a full visual and spatial semiotic translation of the Mussolinian vision of *terza Roma* (Griffin 2007: 236). It was a gigantic in ambition and scale simulacrum of the Fascist ideal capital

that 'framed' the eternal city while enacting – in tandem with the existing city – the fantasy of a new era of Roman–Italian–Fascist universality. Twenty years after the establishment of Fascism as political regime and five years after the declaration of the new Italian *impero*, the E42 would be the most 'Fascist' of all events ever organised by the regime – a landmark, permanent, triumphal monument to 'the eloquence of [Fascism's] acts and the grandeur of its realisations'.[137]

One of the sketches appended to the documentation for the MdCI bore the heading '*L'Italia irradiatrice*' (Italy irradiating) and showed a map of Europe with Rome as the starting point of numerous arrows that extended all over the continent in all directions, pointing to the most important urban and cultural centres of medieval and modern European history.[138] Although referring explicitly to the diffusion of Italian baroque art across the continent, the sketch captured the fundamental symbolic intention behind the MdCI and the entire E42 world fair – namely, the 'idea of Rome' as present-past but also (Fascist) present-future, as the beacon of world civilisation in all its facets.[139] The chosen overarching theme of the 'Olympic Games of Civilisation' betrayed the intention to turn the event and space of E42 into a fiercely antagonistic field in which national histories and cultures, contemporary countries, and even political doctrines would compete and clash for primacy. The athletic analogy may have appeared noble, but the notion of a 'contest' (*gara*) also pointed to one indisputable winner. As the organisers themselves professed,

> in this contest … [the result can be no other than] the victory of [Fascist] Italy. … Victory not in words and without showing it. Here is the programme [of E42] – one that the other countries could not possibly compete with on this terrain.[140]

8
Rome and the Dream of Fascist Universalism

Branding the 'Idea of Rome' as a Universalist Asset: CAUR

In the build-up to the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome, Fascism's ideological profile was taking shape. In 1932, Mussolini allegedly co-authored the official entry for 'Fascism' in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* – a text that constituted the first systematic attempt to describe the ideological foundations of the movement and regime that had come to power in Italy a decade earlier. Among its many stipulations, the text noted that Fascism 'is a new style of *Italian* life'. However, in the document's appendix, there was a reference to an earlier speech (Milan, October 1930) by Mussolini, with a rather different message:

> Today I hold that Fascism as an idea, a doctrine, a realization, is universal; it is Italian in its particular institutions, but it is universal in the spirit … Therefore anyone may foresee a Fascist Europe – a Europe inspired for its institutions from the doctrine and practice of Fascism; a Europe that solves, in a Fascist way, the problems that beset the modern [twentieth-century] State. Today Fascism responds to universal requirements; Fascism solves the threefold problem of relations between State and individual, between State and associations, between associations and organized associations. (*Opera* XXIV: 283)

National or international? *Italian* or *universal*? Until 1932 Mussolini had sent out contradictory signals about the relevance of Fascism – as ideology and political system – beyond the borders of Italy. On the one hand, even in the 1932 encyclopaedia entry for 'Fascism' he referred to his regime as a uniquely Italian solution, capable of reversing the perceived decline that had been caused by liberal-democratic rule and socialist agitation in the country. The notion of a 'Fascist export' – as an *international* ideological and political alternative to both the liberal-capitalist 'west' and the socialist Soviet Union – was largely absent from official Fascist discourse until at least 1928.

In fact, even in June 1930, when the journal *Critica Fascista* (edited by Giuseppe Bottai) published a special issue with the eloquent title 'Fascism [as] Export Article', it echoed faithfully the Duce's prior postulate that the movement and regime that he had founded 'is not a commodity for export' (Scholz 2001: 188–90). Disparaging as 'parrots' those abroad who were imitating various organisational, stylistic, or ideological elements from Italian Fascism out of their spiritual and national context, the journal did praise Fascism's *universal* foundations that explained the success and dynamic of the entire Fascist phenomenon (Pellizzi 1925: 156); but such a universality – spiritual and cultural rather than political, it was stressed – did not seem to entail an acceptance of internationalism.[141]

On the other hand, the successful domestic consolidation of the Fascist regime in the second half of the 1920s fuelled ambitions among PNF officials for a 'third (revolutionary) wave' (after the seizure of power in 1922 and the declaration of the dictatorship in 1925) that would enable Fascist Italy to establish an alternative paradigm in European politics – a genuine 'third way' programme beyond liberal democracy and socialism that could replace both and usher in a new chapter in the continent's political history (De Caprariis 2000: 166). Mussolini too seemed increasingly more willing to entertain the prospect of Fascism's ideological-political 'universalism' as a vehicle for its diffusion abroad and certainly encouraged fellow travellers in other countries – usually in a clandestine way – to pursue such ideas more energetically. In the 1930 Milan speech quoted above, he denied that he had explicitly ruled out 'exporting' Fascism in the past. This is to an extent true. Back in 1925, he had officially endorsed an article by the diplomat and deputy Roberto Cantalupo, in which the author stated that

> Fascism is not the mere temporary expedient of a political party, nor is it a worldwide political movement. It is the right solution of some of the fundamental problems of Italy today. It does not profess to be a formula applicable to the needs of all nations. Whether we look upon it as a party policy or as an historic movement, it remains a thing Italian, *not incapable, however, of affecting the mentality of other European peoples*. (Cantalupo 1925: 71; emphasis added)

In addition, Mussolini had also tolerated the activities of the Italian Fasci Abroad (Fasci Italiani all'Estero, FIaE – Santinon 1991) in the mid-1920s with a mix of subtle encouragement and noncommittal vagueness. As a predominantly party-led organisation, the FIaE was established and directed by Giuseppe Bastianini, then under-secretary of the PNF, under Bottai's ideological tutelage. The organisation expanded significantly in the following five years, establishing Fascist 'cells' in many places where Italian expatriate communities existed in Europe, Asia-Africa, and the Americas. By 1925 Bastianini was petitioning Mussolini with a programme of action

for the FIaE that echoed the discourse of the 'universality of Rome' but linked it to the proposal to set up a 'Fascist international' as a prelude to a new global revolutionary order led by Fascist Italy (De Caprariis 2000: 167). The Duce played for time, officially discouraging any expression of Fascist 'internationalisation' but stopping short of thwarting the ambitions of the FIaE, in spite of their increasingly troubled relationship with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, by 1928 the foreign Fasci had been absorbed by the ministry and lost their ideological-political autonomy (De Caprariis 2000: 175–83). The baton of 'Fascist export' now passed to a small circle of Fascist intellectuals led by Camillo Pellizzi and Asvero Gravelli, who nevertheless conceived of Fascism's 'universalism' and 'internationalisation' from within the prism of the Fascist *regime* and *state* – not the revolutionary spirit of the party, as Bastianini had done before them. By the time that Mussolini subscribed to a 'universal Fascism' in October 1930, the very idea of Fascist *universalità* had been largely accepted as a key *spiritual* and *civilisational* attribute of the regime's discourse (Baldoli 2003: 2–3); internationalism, on the other hand, was still a fledgling and fiercely contested programme, more attuned to practical matters of *political* diffusion, organisational links, and alliances with other kindred forces in Europe and overseas.

The years 1932–33 proved the decisive turning point for Fascism's embrace of the vision of universalism. The lavish celebrations for the *Decennale* of the 'Fascist Revolution' in 1932 (Ch. 7) provided the spectacular backdrop for articulating the idea that October 1922 was a watershed moment not just for the rebirth of Italy but for the renaissance of all of human civilisation. At the same time, the world economic crisis had cast a grave shadow on the future of 'western' democracies as dominant powers on the international scene, capable of steering the people of the continent to political stability, social harmony, and prosperity. Speaking in Milan in October 1932, Mussolini predicted that

> the twentieth century will be the century of Fascism, will be the century of Italian power, will be the century during which Italy will return for the third time to become the leader of human civilisation … Within ten years Europe will be fascist or fascistised. (*Opera* XXV: 147–8)

But it was the appointment of Adolf Hitler as German Chancellor on 30 January 1933 that proved the most significant driver of the regime's universalist-internationalist programme. Initially greeted by the Fascist leadership as a victory of a kindred political force and as proof of Fascism's growing influence on international politics, the establishment of the National Socialist regime in Germany nevertheless ushered in a period of instability that soon complicated German–Italian relations. In the summer of 1934, a chain of events – the first official meeting between Mussolini and Hitler in June that exposed differences between the two leaders; and

the Nazi-led coup in Austria a few weeks later that claimed the life of Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss and brought the two countries on the verge of a military showdown – opened up a political chasm between Rome and Berlin (Knox 2000: 139; Payne 1997: 231). Suspicion and competition remained the determining features of Fascist–Nazi relations until at least 1936 (Kallis 2000: 138–58). In the aftermath of the 1934 Austrian coup, an Italy-led 'Fascist international' campaign already in progress received a powerful political boost from Mussolini and reached a more definite political milestone. By the time that representatives from carefully selected 'fascist-like' parties and movements from across Europe met at the Palace Hotel in Montreux, Switzerland on 16–17 December 1934, it had become apparent that the Fascist regime was eager to solidify a permanent international front of kindred forces under the tutelage of Rome. Underpinning this initiative was as much the traditional Fascist opposition to the 'liberal west' and communist 'east' as the growing fear of a resurgent (Nazi) Germany.

An *international* fascism was in so many respects a bewildering contradiction. As an ideology, Fascism was inherently ultra-nationalist and enthralled by the project of regenerating the Italian nation in the context of a fierce competition with other countries for supremacy (Griffin 1991: 36–8; Payne 1997: 464). Asvero Gravelli, author of the 1931 influential treatise *Towards a Fascist International*, had attempted in 1930 to reconcile Fascism with the idea of creating a pan-European fascist front by coining the phrase 'International of Nationalisms'. Gravelli envisaged a new powerful bloc of nationalist forces throughout the continent, united in their opposition to both liberalism and communism, aligned with Italian Fascism's corporatist experiments (at the time a highly publicised and heavily promoted Fascist initiative), egalitarian and collaborative but nevertheless under the guidance of Fascist Italy (Santoro 2005: 173–4; Cuzzi 2005: 54–5). By the time that Mussolini had come to endorse fully the idea (1933–34), Gravelli's internationalist project had mutated into a far more bureaucratised, state-led campaign. Gravelli himself had also fallen out of grace and been replaced by the man who would lead the Fascist international network from its rapid rise (1934–35) through to its slow demise (1936–39) – the Florentine lawyer Eugenio Coselschi.

Unlike the *fascista della prima ora* Gravelli, Coselschi had joined the PNF in 1924 and did not share the radicalism of the party's militant faction. He did, however, bring to the internationalist project a more streamlined organisational approach and a very different ideological perspective. For Coselschi, Fascism represented a universalist force of both spiritual and political renewal, rooted in the (revived) traditions of ancient Rome. The centrality of Rome's mythology to Coselschi's international project was unmistakeably echoed in the title of the new organisation, Action Committees for the Universality of Rome (Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalità di Roma, CAUR). Against the backdrop of a resurgent Fascist cult of *romanità* in the early

1930s, Coselschi portrayed the idea of Rome as the diachronic foundation of European civilisation and as the spiritual cradle of the most creative energies that shaped the continent's history. For him, the idea of Rome was more than the single most important inspiration for Italian Fascism; it was a force much bigger than any single historical agency, which had given Fascism an inter-national, pan-European, and indeed universalist thrust (Cuzzi 2005: 85; Scholz 2001: 287).

The political usefulness of this vision for the Fascist regime in the circumstances of the early 1930s cannot be exaggerated. After the presentation of Aristide Briand's (abortive) plan for a federal Europe in 1929 (Hewitson 2012; Bariéty 2007), the 'Fascist international' project received a fresh momentum, in direct opposition to what the Fascist authorities perceived as France's hegemonic ambitions; and to the liberal institutionalism epitomised by the League of Nations (Cuzzi 2005: 18–20). More importantly, however, Hitler's appointment as German Chancellor in January 1933 confronted the Fascist regime with a new political variable that was destined to dominate – in a variety of ways – Fascist policy until 1945. Initially Mussolini and other leading Fascists were eager to cultivate the impression that Hitler's victory was both a continuation and a resounding confirmation of a broader ideological-political trend first set by the Fascist movement in Italy. It has been well established that Mussolini and the PNF exercised a crucial formative influence on Hitler and his movement during the early 1920s, both in organisational-liturgical terms and as a (successful) model of radical political strategy. From 1924 onwards the Fascist regime had also provided the NSDAP (along with other kindred anti-system parties across Europe) with financial subsidies (Alexander 1998: 91). The Fascist intellectual Sergio Panunzio had also greeted the electoral rise of the NSDAP in 1930 as a decisive step in the 'inexorable march of *international fascism*' (Panunzio 1930; emphasis added). Giuseppe Renzetti – the Italian who acted as liaison between the two leaders and movements in 1922–33 – frequently conveyed political advice from the Duce to Hitler (Weinberg 1996: 45–6). In the early 1930s, Renzetti communicated at least twice Hitler's strong desire to visit Rome and 'pay tribute' to Mussolini[142] – a request that was not granted until 1938 (see below). Others, like the German nationalist Kurt Luedecke and later Hermann Goering (who visited Rome in 1931), acted as informal intermediaries between the two leaders. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that Hitler's appointment in January 1933 and the NSDAP's final electoral victory the following March were greeted with suitable fanfare in Italy. The Italian press did not shy away from calling the new regime 'German *fascism*', portrayed as a triumph of 'Fascist civilisation, a reincarnation splendidly young and vital of the civilisation of [ancient] Rome … advancing with its proud banners to conquer the hearts and minds' of others across the continent.[143] Mussolini applauded Hitler's appointment in the belief that he had acquired a *junior* partner in his quest for reshaping European politics. Beyond Italy, other ultra-nationalist

movements echoed a similar sentiment. The leader of the British Union of Fascists (BUF), Oswald Mosley, was quick to hail the victory of National Socialism as the confirmation of a Europe-wide trend involving 'fascism' as the 'saviour' of western civilisation (Thurlow 1980: 109–10). Many other radical ultra-nationalists from across the continent came to a similar conclusion retrospectively during the rest of the 1930s.

Very soon, however, Fascist enthusiasm gave way to scepticism and then consternation. It was no secret that the Fascist leadership – not least Mussolini himself – held conflicting views about National Socialism. Italian support for German revisionism as part of an attack on the legitimacy of the entire Versailles settlement had potentially negative ramifications for the future of the South Tyrol/Alto Adige region, with its sizeable German-speaking minority, which Italy had annexed post-First World War (Kallis 2000). Furthermore, Nazi biological racism and 'Aryan' supremacism recast Italians (as part of the wider 'Mediterranean' race) as inferior vis-à-vis the Nordic/Germanic people of the north. No wonder then that Mussolini had publicly ridiculed Hitler's racialist ideas on numerous occasions in the first half of the 1930s (Gillette 2002; Kallis 2009). But it was the threat of a resurgent National Socialist Germany as an international political-military power and a mighty political competitor to Fascist Italy that galvanised Mussolini into a more resolute course of action. Coselschi's plan to hold a series of international conferences under the aegis of CAUR was aligned with the Duce's growing ambition to lead a transnational group of 'fascist' forces in opposition to both socialism and liberalism before a resurgent National Socialist Germany had stepped in to claim this very role and steal the political limelight.

For all these reasons, a closer alignment of the Fascist universalist project with the 'myth of Rome' became a far more attractive and urgent proposition for Fascist Italy in 1933–34. Indeed, 'Rome' became a powerful and politically more useful metonymy for Fascism. The official discourse of CAUR deliberately conflated Fascism with Rome, shying away from describing the initiative as a 'Fascist' international and opting instead for the platform of Rome's universality. This was a premise that appeared both less troubling to non-Italian movements and potentially more inclusive. Coselschi used the time between the official inauguration of CAUR (July 1933) and the Montreux conference (December 1934) to travel extensively in various European countries in order to forge links with kindred movements, and to organise the meeting with the maximum possible participation and publicity. The organisers of the conference invited representatives from political movements from every European country (with the exception of Yugoslavia) and some extra-European ones, as well as from authoritarian regimes (Lithuania, Portugal) to attend the proceedings at Montreux (Ledeen 1972: 128; Cuzzi 2005: 327–46; Longo 1996).[144] In the end, 14 movements from 12 countries sent delegates; among them, Vidkun Quisling

(co-founder of the Nasjonal Samling in Norway), Ion Mota (leading figure of the Romanian Iron Guard), Ernst Rüdiger Camillo Starhemberg (leader of Austria's Heimwehr and of the Fatherland Front in 1933), Léon Degrelle (from the Belgian Rex), Eion O'Duffy (Irish Blueshirts), and some representatives from obscure and inconsequential groupuscules. Some important invitees, like the delegation of the Spanish Falange and the representative of Salazar's regime in Portugal, did attend but as observers. Meanwhile, the BUF turned down altogether the invitation to participate (Baldoli 2004: 155–6).

Whether the conference could be called a success or not depends on the choice of yardstick. Not surprisingly, the participants disagreed on almost everything of ideological substance – on the centrality of Fascist corporatism, on race and the 'Jewish question', on the role of Christianity, on the theme of the 'universality of Rome', and eventually on the very balance between national independence and international collaboration (Cassels 1996: 158). The CAUR organisers did their best to ensure compromises, where these could be achieved; one such compromise was even forged with regard to the troublesome 'Jewish Question' that had divided the delegates into two irreconcilable camps. In spite of their fundamental differences of outlook, however, the delegates at Montreux reaffirmed their commitment to the CAUR initiative and paid the obligatory homage to Mussolini as the 'creator of fascism' (Cuzzi 2005: 146). A permanent executive committee with broad international representation was also established at the conference that met regularly in the following two years. A new statute for CAUR was approved soon afterwards, symbolically coinciding with the yearly celebrations of the birth of Rome (21 April 1935). The new statute invested heavily in the idea of Rome's universality as a spiritual compass for contemporary Europe and its peoples. It also attempted a delicate balancing act between a discourse of voluntary peaceful cooperation among 'young' European forces and a far more hegemonic subtext that exalted the '*new* Rome' and the '*Mussolinian* thought' as motors of pan-European cultural and political regeneration. In all, 1935 represented 'the apex of CAUR's parabola' (Cuzzi 2005: 154) – a year of organisational and membership expansion, to Coselschi's and Mussolini's evident satisfaction. Further meetings of the executive committee were also held during 1935 in Paris, Amsterdam, and again Montreux with a longer list of delegates and wider participation of kindred movements (Baldoli 2003: 56).[145]

Yet, there were ominous signs on the horizon. The efforts of the CAUR leadership to promote a de facto 'fascist international' on the premise of the 'universality of Rome' while excluding National Socialism was fraught with contradictions. What troubled Coselschi was the growing threat of a fundamental realignment of radical, ultra-nationalist forces across Europe with the Nazi regime. Quisling had used his presence at the Montreux proceedings to criticise the organisers for marginalising National Socialism,

arguing that 'Hitler was as much an exponent of fascism as Mussolini'.[146] The expansion of CAUR's membership register in 1935 (temporarily) alleviated such fears. However, the very premise of the 'universality of Rome' proved as much a limiting factor as a stepping stone for the initiative's expansion. For some movements the ideological platform of the 'universality of Rome' remained an alien and unsatisfactory premise for the international front. This was certainly the case for the BUF; in fact, this was the reason officially used to justify the party's absence from the 1934 conference (Baldoli 2003: 57–8; 2004: 155–6). Similarly, more and more fellow travellers from German-speaking countries, such as Austria and Switzerland, saw in CAUR's insistence on the ideological centrality of the myth of Rome an unacceptable snub to Nazi Germany that cast a shadow on the future of cooperation between the two principal radical nationalist states in 1930s Europe.

In addition to ideological and political differences, the trajectory of the CAUR initiative in 1935–38 was subjected to forces beyond Coselschi's control, both inside Italy and in international relations. The Italian invasion of Ethiopia in the autumn of 1935 and the ensuing sanctions imposed on Fascist Italy by the League of Nations paved the way for a diplomatic rapprochement between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. This rapprochement that would eventually lead to the establishment of the so-called Rome–Berlin Axis a few years later produced a number of political shifts that precipitated CAUR's decline. The rise of the pro-German faction within the Fascist regime signalled the embrace of ('Aryan'-based) racialism and anti-Semitism as official policy by 1937–38 (Gillette 2002: ch. 4). It also heralded profound transformation in the regime's foreign policy, with Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law and a long-time sceptic vis-à-vis the Montreux front, taking over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the summer of 1936 as a champion of the Italian–German alliance. Ciano succeeded in blocking Coselschi's earlier privileged channel of access to Mussolini and ensured that a diminished organisation would continue to operate only through the Ministry of Popular Culture (Ministero di Cultura Popolare, MCP) as one of many instruments of Fascist propaganda overseas (Scholz 2001: 342–6). Moreover, as Fascist Italy subscribed to a *sui generis* 'Aryanist' variant of racialism in the late 1930s (Kallis 2009: 222–7), Coselschi was forced to tone down the erstwhile central premise of Rome's universality and to embrace the regime's new racialist discourse – this from the person who in 1935 had declared racism incompatible with the 'idea of Rome' and the CAUR initiative![147] Both the international and the domestic tide had turned decisively against Coselschi's initiative. Three weeks after the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, the CAUR operation was formally suspended, with only a few of its functions absorbed into the existing structure of the MCP (Cuzzi 2005: 328–62).

The demise of CAUR did not, however, entail the abandonment of the Fascist discourse of universality based on the 'idea of Rome'. Rather it resulted in its

recalibration as a political tool *alongside* the pursuit of the Rome–Berlin Axis. In fact, the discourse of universality, infused with the 'idea of Rome', would feature even more prominently in the language of the Fascist regime from 1936 onwards than it had even at the peak of the CAUR initiative two years earlier, reaching a new climax with the preparations for the 1942 world fair in Rome (E42; see below). There was a good reason for this. In spite of the overly amicable and expansive rhetoric that surrounded the forging of the Italian–German diplomatic and military alliance, Mussolini came to view Hitler's regime with a mixture of growing admiration and resentment – at the same time a model for political dynamism and an increasingly dangerous competitor in terms of international prestige. To be sure, his earlier fears that Nazi Germany would surge ahead and dominate European politics, eclipsing Italy as the political centre of a new radical inter-national political creed, proved well founded. Ironically, something that we nowadays identify with 'fascism' in generic and international terms did spread across Europe, albeit in many different forms and national contextualisations (Kallis 2014b). Yet, this was an 'international fascism' increasingly shaped by the ideas and practices of Nazi Germany – even to the point that Fascist Italy, the earlier source of inspiration for Hitler's movement, felt the need to subscribe to peculiarly Nazi platforms such as biological racialism/Aryanism and anti-Semitism. By 1936–37 the Duce was trying to put on a brave face, presenting these and other Nazi-inspired initiatives as organically linked with the origins of Fascist ideology; but he never overcame an inferiority syndrome vis-à-vis his new ally from the north. As a result, the Italian–German alliance was a strange one from the very outset: widely resented and criticised within both the PNF and the NSDAP (Kallis 2010: 81–4; Zuccotti 1987: 172), it oscillated between declarations of mutual admiration and private (indeed growing, particularly after the outbreak of the Second World War) misgivings on both sides. In this context, the discourse of universalist *romanità* continued to hold significant political capital for the Fascist regime, albeit more as a defensive counterpoise to National Socialism than as a positive rallying platform for the internationalisation of F(f)ascism that had underpinned the earlier activities of CAUR.

Therefore, the demise of the CAUR initiative in 1936–39 was partly administered by the Fascist regime itself. It was a pragmatic – if unwelcome by some leading Fascists at least – choice in response to the rapidly changing geopolitical context of the 1935–39. It was part of a new strategy that aimed to reverse the decline of Fascist Italy's international standing and respond to the seemingly inexorable ascendancy of Nazi Germany while at the same time fostering ever-closer ties with Hitler's regime. The gradual abandonment of the CAUR project did not mean that Mussolini renounced the premise of 'Fascist universalism'; quite the contrary, in fact. The change of Fascist strategy in this domain reflected the desire for a new platform of universalism through which Fascist Italy could rebuild its international

profile and on which it could compete more effectively with Nazi Germany. In the context of this new strategy, the symbolic significance of the 'idea of Rome' actually increased. Rather than being a synecdoche for the international primacy of Italian Fascism *in direct opposition to* Hitler's regime (as it had been in 1933–35), it mutated into a privileged domain of Italian *and* Fascist prestige *in veiled competition to* Nazi Germany. What is more, the *idea* of Rome's universality became far more closely and literally related to the city itself – its physical space, its (meticulously restored by the Fascist regime) ancient ruins, its medieval treasures, and its contemporary Fascist 'layer'. By heavily investing in the most impressive representation of the city itself, the Fascist regime defined a new field of symbolic competition with Nazi Germany by which it could prevail, unlike in the geopolitical, military, and political arenas.

Fascist Rome as Space of Political Pilgrimage

That the majority of kindred ideological and political forces across Europe were now turning decisively to Nazi Germany for political inspiration and leadership was a harsh blow to Mussolini's ambition for leading a 'Fascist international' front. During the 1920s, the Duce had been accustomed to frequent expressions of effusive praise or even adulation for his regime from a wide gamut of international observers. Different political constituencies looked admiringly at the seismic events of the 1920s in Italy and drew fundamentally divergent political 'lessons' from each of them. On one level, the Fascist experiment was perceived as a successful prototype for a new breed of radical, ultra-nationalist anti-system forces in many other countries. The French author Robert Brasillach – like his mentor, Georges Valois, the founder of Action Française – saw in the Fascist 'totalitarian' state a fascinating experiment with 'Latin' roots that combined the political with the dramatic and the aesthetic (Witt 2002: 149). The leader of the radical Romanian movement Iron Guard, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, spoke and wrote of the spiritually transformative effect that the March on Rome and the successful consolidation of the Fascist regime had on him, heaping praise on Mussolini as an agent of historic change (Codreanu 1936: 52):

> I heard the news of the huge Fascist eruption: the March on Rome and Mussolini's victory. I rejoiced as much as if it were my own country's victory. There is, among all those in various parts of the world who serve their people, a kinship of sympathy, as there is such a kinship among those who labor for the destruction of peoples. Mussolini, the brave man who trampled the dragon underfoot, was one of us, that is why all dragon heads hurled themselves upon him, swearing death to him. For us, the others, he will be a bright North Star giving us hope … proof of the possibilities of victory.

The appeal of Italian Fascism also reached beyond the circle of radical political start-ups. The American poet Ezra Pound invoked the imagery of Mussolini as the modern embodiment of the 'enlightened soul' and artifex (constructor) who would spearhead with his personality and determination the revival of a historic(al) epic (Feldman 2013: 13–14, 25–6; Tryphonopoulos 1992: 102). On another level, however, what happened in Italy in the 1920s appeared to address a broader political demand for a post-liberal alternative to parliamentary democracy. Some with deeply conservative beliefs, such as the Spanish general Miguel Primo de Rivera who headed a dictatorship in Spain in 1923–30, saw in Mussolini's regime a novel political and constitutional arrangement, freed from the limits of political liberalism and controlled tightly by a single figurehead from above – in other words, a blueprint for a populist, charismatic dictatorship as an infinitely more preferable and viable alternative to either parliamentary democracy or revolution from the left (Tusell Gómez and Saz Campos 1982: 482). Others – including prominent western conservative politicians such as Winston Churchill and the British Foreign Secretary in the 1920s Austen Chamberlain (Neville 2006: 50; Bosworth 1970), as well as businessmen on both sides of the Atlantic (Baldoli 2003: 117; Rosenbaum 2010: 50–8), admired Mussolini's resolute approach to domestic order (and particularly his crackdown on the organised left) as a political recipe suited to Italian or 'southern' conditions but not the more advanced liberal countries of the north and west.

Until the first half of the 1930s, Mussolini had further reasons to entertain the belief that his Fascism was on course to becoming a dominant political creed, not just in Italy but on the international level. During those years, Rome became a major destination for what can be described as *political pilgrimage* for both Italians and international fellow travellers (Roberts 2005: 15). For 'ordinary' Italians who came or were brought to the capital for ceremonial occasions, the trip represented a symbolic moment of confirmation for their identity as both Italian and Fascist citizens (Berezin 1997: 102; Stone 1999: 219). Various state and party organisations organised such trips to attend exhibitions (for example, more than three million visitors entered the rooms of the MdRF; over a million visited the MAdR – Fleming 2010: 345; see Ch. 7), rallies, and other public events organised by the regime. Sometimes, visitors had the opportunity to meet the Duce – and it was far from uncommon to emerge from such an experience with feelings akin to a momentous spiritual transformation (Willson 2002: 155–7). But the 'third Rome' also continued to attract an impressive pedigree of foreign intellectuals, aspiring politicians, radical activists, and influential private visitors. Many of them considered their trip to the capital of Fascist Italy as a profound spiritual experience. They were sympathetic and forgiving observers, alienated from their host 'western' societies and eager to filter reality through their admiring schemata, like their counterparts who chose Moscow as their preferred destination during the interwar years (Hollander 1997: 7). Pound

became a frequent visitor to Italy – and Rome in particular – during the early 1930s. His wish to meet with Mussolini was granted in January 1933, after an unsuccessful attempt nine months earlier. Unsurprisingly, it was also a deeply enchanting experience for Pound, more akin to a profound spiritual 'conversion' (Feldman 2013: 14–16). Undoubtedly, other visitors came to Rome to pay their sycophantic tributes to Mussolini in anticipation of financial subsidies – and a few did succeed in this respect, not least because the Fascist regime had proven from the outset to be a generous source of funding for revisionist, radical nationalist, and often subversive organisations across the continent (Cassels 1970: 394–5; Williams 2006). A few visitors (among them Mahatma Gandhi in 1931, and the future politician and presidential candidate of Colombia, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, back in 1926 – Green 2000: 179–90) left Rome disappointed with either the record of Fascist Italy or with Mussolini personally, having privately met with him or attended his public appearances. But the number of those who arrived in Rome as genuine political pilgrims, awe-inspired and enthralled by the putative achievements of Mussolini's regime, was substantial and growing steadily in the course of the 1920s.

Such a visit-pilgrimage to Rome had both practical and symbolic dimensions. The city was the seat of the Fascist government; this meant that it offered practically the only opportunity to meet with Mussolini and/or other functionaries of the regime or party. For others, however, the occasion of a visit to Rome, accompanied with a meeting with the Duce, resembled an ecstatic engagement with the spiritual and political source of a 'historic' force in-the-making (Burdett 2003: 98). While some visitors scheduled their trip to Rome opportunistically, in the (usually frustrated) expectation that the Duce would grant them an audience, others took advantage of an invitation – whether formally extended by Mussolini or arranged through useful intermediaries. For aspiring radical politicians and formal delegations from kindred European movements, a meeting with Mussolini – however short – was the greatest accolade. The leader of the Spanish Falange, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, went to Rome three times: the first (in 1923) accompanying his father, the dictator of Spain Miguel Primo de Rivera; the second (in October 1933) as a fringe figure of the Spanish radical right on the cusp of launching his own movement and eager to seek inspiration 'like a disciple [visiting] the master' (Payne 1999: 88–9); the third time (in April 1935) as leader of a financially starved Falange and (informal) member of the CAUR project in pursuit of further subsidies. On the first two occasions, the cherished meeting with the Duce was arranged beforehand and did take place; the third (and last) visit of 1935 delivered only a meeting with Coselschi, as Mussolini refused to receive the Falange leader (Rein 1999: 106). Highly critical and suspicious of Nazism until his execution in 1936, José Antonio lavished praise on the Fascist regime and briefly appeared at the second Montreux meeting of 1935, even if he continued to insist that the Falange

was a movement with purely Spanish roots (and thus refused to associate his movement with the word 'fascism') (Payne 1999: 155).

Oswald Mosley, leader of the BUF, also appeared for a time captivated by the magnetic pull of the Fascist capital. Increasingly fascinated with Mussolini's political experiments, Mosley organised a 'study' trip to Rome in January 1932, during which he met the Duce at his office in the Palazzo Venezia. The literature on British fascism has generally considered this occasion as having a deep transformative effect on the future leader of the BUF. He returned full of praise for Mussolini and his regime, founding his own movement (bearing the word 'fascist' in its title) on 28 October 1932 – symbolically, the tenth anniversary of the 'March on Rome'. He did make numerous further visits to Rome in 1933–35 as leader of the BUF and described the city as the 'birthplace of *f*ascism' (Baldoli 2003: 44; emphasis added). On the occasion of his April 1933 trip, he was greeted by Mussolini at the railway station, paid a visit to the MdRF, and shared the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia with the Duce, giving the Fascist salute in the context of the ceremony of the Leva Fascista. In May 1935, Mosley was again in Rome, meeting with Mussolini, accompanied by the philo-Fascist editor of *The Daily Mail*, Ward Price, another frequent visitor to the Italian capital (Cuzzi 2005: 203).[148]

The CAUR network – and Coselschi personally – also functioned as a primary conduit for political pilgrimages to Rome. In the second half of 1933, Coselschi's invitees included the leader of the Austrian Heimwehr (Ernst Rüdiger von Starhemberg), the future leader of the Swiss Fascist Federation (Arthur Fonjallaz), and the head of the Bulgarian National Fascist Union (Aleksandar Staliysky) (Cuzzi 2005: 99). Marcel Bucard, the leader of the French fascist movement Francisme founded in September 1933, was invited by Coselschi to meet Mussolini in Rome in April 1934. This was the prelude to a closer alignment with CAUR, with Bucard becoming a leading figure of the Montreux front and the organisation's executive committee (Sedita 2010: 142). The CAUR office also coordinated numerous visits from international delegations representing kindred radical parties. Between 1933 and 1935, the BUF sent numerous delegations to Rome on further 'study trips' that also took the form of political pilgrimages, with ample propaganda coverage in both countries (Baldoli 2003: 45). As late as 1938, a delegation from the Romanian CAUR (perhaps the most successful national branch of the organisation, bringing together a host of important personalities from the Romanian radical right) was hosted in Rome for a visit that was described as a 'pilgrimage of devotion to "mother Rome"'.[149]

Self-professed pilgrims and high-profile visitors to the Fascist capital were typically treated to a rich visual presentation of the 'third Rome'. The repertoire included anything from subsidised entrance fees for important cultural sites to heavily scripted programmes of official sightseeing hosted by Mussolini himself. From 1932–33 onwards, the official programme for

important guests was expanded with visits to historical (recently 'systematised') sites in the centre, to new Fascist-era projects, to a major exhibition when one was underway, to mass rituals staged against the backdrop of monuments or recently opened avenues, as well a tribute to the king and, where appropriate, a homage to the pope. The regime's techniques of preparation for an important visit were also refined in the course of the 1930s, with more sophisticated organisation, higher expenditure, richer content, and a more heavy-handed presentation of sites and putative achievements to the visitors.

Yet, in the second half of the 1930s, Fascist authorities had many opportunities to be reminded of the regime's diminishing international cachet. Even the CAUR network featured movements that openly courted Hitler's regime, either opportunistically alongside their overtures to Fascist Italy or by abandoning the Montreux front altogether. The leader of the Danish National Socialists was distrusted and frequently referred to by CAUR officials as 'the long hand of Hitler' as early as 1934.[150] Anton Mussert, head of the Dutch National Socialist Movement and for a brief period entertaining a close relation with CAUR, had cut off his links with Rome and aligned his party with Germany by the end of 1935 (Hirschfeld 1988: 254–5). Mosley, initially unimpressed with Hitler and highly critical of his movement's racialist and anti-Semitic obsessions, gradually came to see both the Italian and the German regimes as variants of a single historical force, with the BUF offering a distinct and original (that is, not mimetic of either models) British iteration (Baldoli 2003: 153). His increasingly pro-German overtures had been apparent to the Italians and resulted in a breakdown of the contacts (political and financial) by 1936. Bucard, still serving in a senior capacity on the Montreux coordinating committee, had come to be treated with suspicion for his increasingly pro-Hitler views and activities. Even the Romanian Iron Guard and the country's CAUR network had shown alarming signs of 'Hitlerite infiltration' from 1934–35 onwards.[151]

What happened within the ranks of the Montreux front was symptomatic of a wider – and more alarming for the Fascist regime – Europe-wide trend in the mid- and late 1930s. More and more radical political movements reshaped their ideological profile to include elements directly influenced by the praxis of the Nazi regime – above all the latter's extreme anti-Semitic rhetoric. By contrast, even the extensive Fascist investment in promoting corporatism (perhaps as important an ideological instrument of Fascist internationalism as the discourse of the 'universality of Rome') was running out of steam beyond a dwindling number of countries in southern Europe. The earlier trend of radical leaders visiting Rome as political pilgrims to Mussolini and Fascism did continue, on a somewhat diminished scale, throughout the 1930s; but an alternative flow of deferential visitors to Germany after 1933 grew steadily and eventually eclipsed it (Speer 1971: 195–7). It was telling that a movement as involved originally in the CAUR initiative

and initially suspicious of the Nazi regime as the Falange Española turned into one of the most enthusiastic disciples of Hitler's Germany by the end of the decade (after José Antonio's execution in 1936), dispatching numerous delegations to the Third Reich, particularly in 1937–39 (Bowen 2009). Meanwhile, as a wave of dictatorships swept away democratic regimes in southern, central, and eastern European countries in the course of the 1930s, most of them established close ties with the two 'fascist' regimes but appeared increasingly fascinated with Hitler and eager to court Nazi Germany, even at the risk of alienating Fascist Italy (Mann 2004: 38–43; Lee 2008: 5–22).

Not surprisingly, then, when Hitler – accompanied by a delegation made up of some of the most important figures of the Nazi regime – arrived in Rome at the beginning of a seven-day official visit to Italy in early May 1938, the symbolic stakes were higher than ever. The visit came at a crucial diplomatic moment, when the prospect of a geopolitical and military alliance between the two regimes was drawing closer, in spite of growing disquiet among the ranks of the Fascist regime and party. Only a few months earlier, in September 1937, Mussolini had been hosted by Hitler in Germany and subjected to an awe-inspiring spectacle of Nazi pageantry, military might, and industrial power, against the backdrop of impressive building projects in Munich and Berlin (Burdett 2007: 201–12). What the Duce saw and felt during his short sojourn in Germany had a tremendous effect on his perception of National Socialism and Hitler (Neville 2006: 148). In addition to genuine admiration and a growing belief that Germany would soon emerge victorious on the European stage (a conclusion that justified in his eyes the ever-closer alignment between the two regimes), the seeds of his subsequent jealousy and suspicion vis-à-vis Nazi Germany were planted during that official visit. Almost immediately upon his return to Italy, he extended an invitation to Hitler to visit the country the following year, which the German dictator duly accepted. Immediately the Fascist regime mobilised its full propaganda apparatus for an occasion designed to outshine in every respect the show that the Nazi regime had organised in honour of Mussolini. As early as November 1937 a special committee devoted to the preparation of the visit was put in place, headed by the foreign minister Ciano, the PNF secretary Achille Starace, and the minister of Popular Culture Dino Alfieri.[152] Over the remaining six months until Hitler's arrival, the committee worked incessantly with all branches of the Fascist regime and party, piecing together a rich programme of activities centring on Rome but also extending to Florence, Naples, and indeed to every single facet of Hitler's journey from the moment he would cross the Italian border by train to his return trip (Baxa 2010: 139).

When Hitler and the German delegation arrived in Rome on the evening of 3 May 1938, they were greeted by the Duce at the Ostiense railway station. The reception against the dramatic backdrop of the recently revamped station building (Ch. 6) and its historic surroundings was only

the introduction to a deluge of visual propaganda, deliberately geared to presenting the German delegation with an unrelenting narrative of Rome's universalist import. By the time that Hitler had arrived at his residence at the Palazzo Quirinale and retired after a short introductory meeting with the king, he had already been subjected to a sumptuously choreographed show along some of Rome's most important and impressive millenarian sites. The horse-drawn carriage was directed through the impressive Aurelian walls along the Circo Massimo and Palatine hill, through the Via dei Trionfi, past the Colosseo and the Foro along the Via dell'Impero (specially adorned with candelabras), until Piazza Venezia, before reaching the king's seventeenth-century residence nearby. All along this most impressive itinerary, Hitler was exposed to an overpowering scenery, dramatically lit roads and monuments, and the adulation of enthusiastic crowds lining up both sides of the route (Baxa 2007: 231–2).

The Rome that the Führer saw during his four-day stay at the capital (punctuated by a short trip to Naples and followed by a day-visit to Florence on his way back to Germany – Nicoloso 2008: 66–70) was a heavily redacted and meticulous pieced-together image of a heterotopic 'third Rome'. Through carefully planned itineraries across the historic centre dotted with staged rituals and visual cues (lighting, flags and banners, assembled crowds), the German delegation experienced a city with an imagined geography of grandiose monuments and avenues of the past and the present, ruthlessly redacted and full of deliberate denotative associations that traversed millennia with casual, yet deliberate ease. As Michel Foucault noted, heterotopias also involve heterochronies – temporal disjunctures suggestive of a radically new consciousness of time. On the second day of his visit, Hitler basked in the glory of Risorgimental and national history (a ceremony in front of the Monument to the Unknown Soldier) against a scenery that articulated a fluent dialogue between ancient Rome (Campidoglio) and the Fascist present (Piazza Venezia). He was then taken alongside the famous (and suitably adorned) ancient Via Appia[153] to a nearby airfield to attend an impressive military aviation show. In the remaining days of his visit, Hitler would be driven on numerous occasions along the main Fascist avenues of the historic centre, past the meticulously excavated, restored, and specially prepared sites of the Via del Mare, to museums (for example, the Galleria Borghese and the Museo delle Terme at the Baths of Diocletian to admire the – then in full swing – reconstruction of Ara Pacis – see Ch. 3), exhibitions (a guided visit inside the MAdR and a pilgrimage to the relocated MdRF in Valle Giulia – see Ch. 7), and particular monuments (more notably, the Pantheon that he so admired and visited on two occasions). He watched impressively orderly parades in sites as diverse as the Via dei Trionfi and the (recently expanded) Foro Mussolini. He addressed the German community of Rome against the backdrop of the Roman Foro. He was treated to exquisite receptions at the seat of the city's administration on the Campidoglio, inside Mussolini's

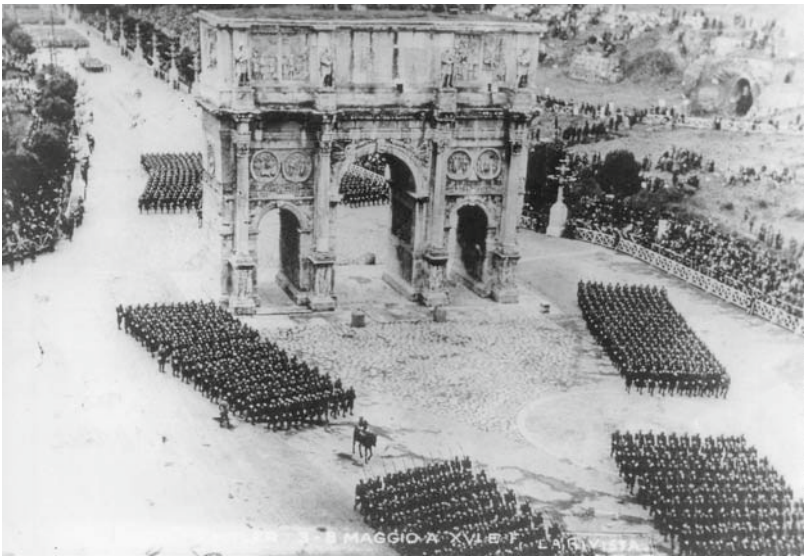


Figure 34 Parade in honour of Adolf Hitler on Via dei Trionfi (May 1938). With the kind permission of © **Archivio Cederna** No. 50: 'Per cosa è stata fatta Via dell'Impero: questa è la parata in onore di Hitler nel 1938', 296 Mussolini Urbanista

official residence at the Palazzo Venezia, and at the Renaissance-era Palazzo Madama, next to Piazza Navona – all according to a painstakingly scripted programme that was only amended once in response to adverse weather conditions. The visual content and pace of the schedule was relentless from the moment the German delegation set foot in Rome to the morning that they boarded the train to Florence six days later. To the frustration of many inside the German delegation – not least the foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, who had expected some kind of tangible diplomatic outcome from the visit – the occasion resembled a spectacular show with very little political substance. Hitler was meant to be nothing but overawed by the experience; and judging by his private comments afterwards (Trevor-Roper 1996: 268–9; Losemann 1999: 221–3), he certainly was.

The standards set for the presentation of the city for Hitler in May 1938 far exceeded anything that the Fascist regime had achieved on the occasion of previous visits by important personalities in Rome. Practices, itineraries, and events developed for the entertainment of the German dictator would be replicated in the case of some subsequent important visits to the capital – but never as near as exhaustively or lavishly.[154] What Hitler saw in May 1938 was a spectacle that had as much to do with the Fascist universalist narrative of the 'third Rome' as with the intention of impressing and

indeed intimidating the Nazi visiting delegation. This renewed, only thinly disguised bid for an Italian Fascist universalist primacy grounded on the city of Rome itself was not lost on the Führer, who seemed to have understood the symbolic significance of Mussolini's heavy investment in Rome and sought to eclipse his ally even on this level (Goebbels 1948 XIV: 6 [1938]). Ideas for the redevelopment of Berlin had been in Hitler's mind for some time, including some projects that he had allegedly envisioned long before he came to power. In the young and fiercely ambitious architect Albert Speer, however, he found someone who not only shared his monumental vision but also was determined to translate it into impressive physical and spatial form. The new Berlin that Hitler dreamt of, and Speer designed in the late 1930s, would be a city that was meant to outshine any other city ever built – not only Rome but the legendary ancient cities of Mesopotamia and Egypt. In his conversations with Speer, the Führer allegedly made repeated references and comparisons to Rome, wishing to replicate but also surpass its landmark ancient and medieval monuments in his new capital. He made an analogy between the projected *Volkshalle* (the gargantuan People's Hall) and St Peter's basilica (Speer 1971: 153), noting with satisfaction that the future Berlin centrepiece would be large enough to accommodate Michelangelo's cupola 'numerous times over' inside its gigantic dome designed by Speer (Balfour 1990: 83); or alternatively to fit both this and the entire Pantheon. Further references to the Colosseo, the Foro, the Arch of Constantine, the Baths of Caracalla, Trajan's Imperial Forum, and other ancient Roman monuments abounded in subsequent conversations and ideas that he shared with his main architect. But it was his alleged reference to 'eclipsing Rome' ('we will eclipse our only rival in the world, Rome … Let [the new Berlin] be built on such a scale and St Peter's and its square will appear like children's toys by comparison' – Trevor-Roper 1972: 81) that divulged the bizarre, suppressed but mounting spirit of antagonism between the two 'ideal' cities, the two leaders, and of course the two regimes.

Yet, the new Berlin was still overwhelmingly an ideal city on paper; its completion was soon postponed until 1950, contingent upon an overwhelming but swift German victory in the Second World War that never came. Meanwhile, Mussolini could claim the ownership of a city legend lavishly managed by the Fascist regime, with an accumulated historical and spiritual capital, its millennia-long cultural legacy and architectural heritage in place for everyone to see and admire. The 'third Rome' was a vibrant capital city that featured a visual avalanche of restored gems of the past alongside new signature constructions of the Fascist era, all in a putatively harmonious spatial and symbolic *syn*tactical dialogue. As a metonymy for both the 'Fascist revolution' and Italian Fascism, it radiated a message of 'sacred' universalism almost effortlessly through its majestic visual form and forged spatial connections. Quite simply, Berlin (or Nuremberg or Munich for that matter) were comprehensively outshone.

Staging the Moment of Fascist Triumph: The 1942 Esposizione Universale di Roma (E42)

The lavish investment of the Fascist regime in the physical and symbolic estate of its capital city that had gathered impressive momentum in the 1930s continued unabated, in defiance of financial or geopolitical adversities, until well into the Second World War. One decision, however, stands out for its significance in the context of the Fascist regime's efforts to transform Rome into the indisputable centre of F(f)ascist universalism – the bid to stage the 1941 world fair in the Italian capital that would lead to the organisation of the 1942 Universal Exhibition (Esposizione Universale di Roma 1942, E42). The original idea belonged to Giuseppe Bottai during his short term as governor of Rome (1935–36), but was enthusiastically endorsed by Mussolini who, after the approval of the application by the International Bureau in Paris, used the event as an opportunity for the most spectacular (and last, as it turned out) project of urban transformation ever undertaken by the Fascist regime. The date of the event was subsequently changed from 1941 to 1942 to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the March on Rome (*Ventennale*). Preparations for the 1942 world fair involved a dizzying number of projects and interventions in and around Rome – among them, a new railway station and a reorganisation of the city's transport network, a new monumental avenue (Via Imperiale) linking the city and the exhibition grounds, the expansion of the Foro Mussolini to the north (Ch. 6), and a revision of the regulatory plan that prioritised southwestern expansion towards the port of Ostia. But its centrepiece was the construction of a new (permanent) model city in the southern periphery of the centre. The new exhibition city would be a perfect statement of Fascism's *syn*taxis with Rome and its arsenal of universalist myths, conceived as an *ex nihilo* creation gigantic in scale and blissfully unencumbered in creative terms. Had it taken place, the E42 would have exorcised the ghosts of dwindling international prestige for the Fascist regime. As it turned out, however, the entire project gradually became an escapist and increasingly inconsequential enterprise that came to function as what Foucault called a *heterotopia of compensation* (Foucault 1984; Johnson 2006: 85; see also Ch. 7) – a kind of contrived over-representation of a perfect 'new order' based on the 'universality' of Rome that became more and more important because of this very growing gap with reality (Nicoloso 2008: xxviii). More and more, the E42 quarter became a haunting counter-site, a space of pure desire, untouched by an adverse or hostile surrounding reality; an un-real and alien simulacrum of an imagined 'third Rome', contrived to entertain the supposed international triumph of Fascism that was quickly slipping away.

In his first report on the idea for a Rome world fair drafted in April 1935, Giuseppe Bottai noted,

> The moment is opportune for an International Exhibition [in Rome] … that would illustrate all progress and all rediscoveries from twenty-seven centuries of human activity, that is, from the moment that Rome shone across the world the light of its genius and might … A Universal Exhibition … will provide a tangible and rightful testimony to the civilisational and revolutionary agency of *Roma Littoria* [that will be admired] by all people and their heads of state (attending the exhibition).[155]

The award of a 'first-degree' world fair (meaning an exhibition covering all aspects of human activity, taking place every six or seven years) to Italy was formally announced in late June of 1936, only days after the triumphant declaration of the Italian *impero*. From the first moment, the Fascist authorities imbued the occasion with precise 'political content'. In the words of the organisers,

> the Exhibition would furnish the most comprehensive and potent consecration to the [celebration of] the *Ventennale* of the Fascist Revolution. But this has to be done in an almost invisible manner … in order to avoid deliberate absences and boycotts on part of governments inspired by different political ideologies, opposed or openly hostile to Fascism … (in Ferrara 1987: 79)

Beyond offering the opportunity for the most spectacular celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the March on Rome, the world fair would also promote concrete political goals through spatial and visual symbolism. Two decisions stand out in this respect. The first related to the choice of a vast, empty zone, 'devoid of history' (Fuller 1996: 413) to the south of the capital and along the way to Ostia for locating the exhibition. The choice to construct the E42 quarter on the empty grounds of Tre Fontane, in the southwestern periphery of the city and along the way to the sea, was a direct realisation of Mussolini's earlier directive (literally and metaphorically) for expansion *verso il mare*, the fated Mediterranean. The second important decision related to the decision to construct a *permanent* exhibition quarter, showcasing the work of the best Italian architects of the time with the intention of formulating

> the definitive (architectural) style of our era … The meaning of Rome, which is synonymous with the eternal and the universal … is destined to endure so that in fifty or a hundred years the style will not have aged or, worse still, degraded.[156]

This style, according to the regime's chief architect Marcello Piacentini, would be analogous to the heart of the ancient capital, 'a classical but also

modern, most modern vision … of the Latin and Fascist civilisation'.[157] It would be characterised by an austere monumentality viewed through the lenses of revived *romanità* and the mediated modernism of the late Fascist *stile littorio* that had set the tone for the regime's most significant interventions in the city during the second half of the 1930s (Ch. 6).

The three years between Bottai's original idea for Rome's world fair in 1935 and the drafting of the complete programme for the exhibition in 1938 were nothing short of tumultuous for Fascist Italy. From the invasion of Ethiopia and the country's international isolation due to the League of Nations' sanctions to the triumphant proclamation of the *impero*, the ever-closer alliance with Nazi Germany, and the intervention in the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), this period confronted the Fascist regime with new challenges and dilemmas that transformed beyond recognition the context in which the Fascist regime 'made history'. Back in 1935–36 the idea for a world fair in Rome appealed to Mussolini as a publicity counter-coup to the Berlin Olympics that had lavished international attention and admiration on Hitler's regime (Ciucci and Levine 1989: 82; Notaro 2000: 17; cf. Nicoloso 2008: 54–5). In contrast, by 1938 the 'universalist' content of the exhibition had acquired a deeper and broader political significance, as a supreme opportunity to reaffirm Fascism's power and prestige in all fields against western democracies, Soviet Bolshevism but also National Socialism. Again, it was the growing competition vis-à-vis Nazi Germany that loomed large in the minds of the organisers. From the highs of the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games (where Italy came second in medals, behind the USA) and the Italian victory in the heavily politicised 1934 Football World Cup in Rome, Italy's relegation to fourth place on the medal board of the 1936 Berlin Olympics was a sombre affair. What, however, made this regression even more painful was the elevation of Germany to the top of the table – from ninth place in the 1932 games (Gordon and London 2006: 41–3). And the situation on the international sports scene was only an eloquent metaphor for the respective fortunes of the two regimes in the international field. In 1936–38 Mussolini had witnessed Hitler single-handedly dismantling one by one the most symbolic military and territorial restrictions of the Versailles system on Germany (Rhineland, Anschluss, Sudetenland), while maintaining a ruthlessly impressive military involvement in the Spanish Civil War. After the embarrassing defeat of the Italian troops at the Battle of Guadalajara in Spain in March 1937, the damage to the prestige of Fascist Italy was even more excruciating, at a time when the star of German military might was in the ascendant (Gooch 2007: 325).

Against this international backdrop, the International Exhibition (world fair) of Paris opened its gates in May 1937. What was in theory meant to be a celebration of economic, technological, social, cultural, and artistic achievements of states became a terrain of visual and symbolic confrontation between the most powerful political forces in late 1930s Europe. The national pavilions illustrated a number of fundamental differences in

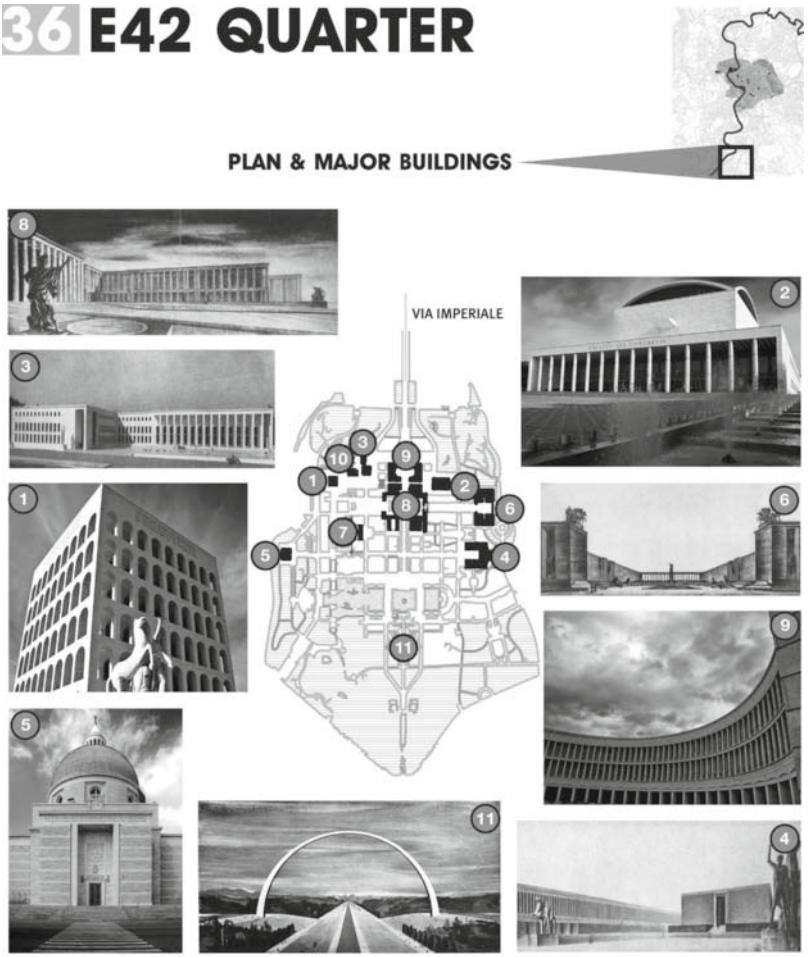
Figure 35.1 German pavilion, 1937 Paris world fair (Albert Speer). © **Bundesarchiv Berlin**, 183/S30757

their communicative practices – differences of architectural style, visual character, intended political message, and overall symbolic representation of authority. A glance at the Italian and German pavilions at the 1937 Paris world fair provides crucial insight into the very different intentions of the two 'fascist' states and regimes in this field. The **German pavilion** (Deutsches Haus; Fig. 35.1) designed by Speer, was the product of a direct commission from Hitler to his favorite architect. In the words of Speer himself, it was a 'guide for future construction in Germany' (Fiss 2009: 66), which had yet to be planned, let alone executed. By contrast, the (far more fluid and less imposing) **Italian pavilion**, designed by Marcello Piacentini and Giuseppe Pagano (Fig. 35.2), was the long-term product of a surprisingly plural and open debate about the form and

Figure 35.2 Italian pavilion, 1937 Paris world fair (Marcello Piacentini and Giuseppe Pagano). *Domus*, 9/12 (1937): 55 (from the collection of **Casa dell'Architettura di Latina**)

meaning of *cultura fascista* that unfolded in the 1920s and 1930s (Ch. 2). While Speer's building was an expansive statement for something that was yet to come, the Italian pavilion celebrated large-scale architectural and urbanistic programmes either already completed or well underway by that time, designed and carried out by numerous architects of different styles across Fascist Italy (Melis 2012).

Inside the 1937 Italian pavilion, a substantial amount of exhibition space was devoted to the presentation of plans and models for the new **E42 exhibition city** yet to be built on the outskirts of Rome for the forthcoming occasion of the 1942 world fair (Zveteremich 1937; Pica 1937). The two architects of the Italian pavilion had already been appointed members of the five-strong architectural committee for the E42 project (the remaining members were Luigi Piccinato, Ettore Rossi, and Luigi Vietti – all affiliated to varying degrees with the rationalist current of Italian architecture). The first full plan for the new quarter, published in April 1937, was the result of a seemingly harmonious synergy between the five architects and a new special organisation dedicated to the preparations for the exhibition (Ente Autonomo Esposizione Universale di Roma), headed by the E42 Commissioner Vittorio Cini (Ciucci and Levine 1989: 82; Mariani 1990: 91–103). Another key figure of the organising committee, the Superintendent for Architectural and Artistic Services Cipriano Efisio Oppo, was also known for his rationalist sympathies that dated back to his involvement in the 1932 MdRF (Ch. 7) and his passionate public defence of modernism against criticism from within the Fascist party (Etlin 1991: 490; Nicoloso 2008: 86–7). Emphasis was placed on the aesthetic unity and complementarity of the architectural elements in E42, and this is why the organising



1 Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana (E B La Paluda, G Guerini, M Romano / 1938-40)
2 Palazzo dei Ricevimenti e dei Congressi (A Libera / 1939-54)
3 Palazzo degli Uffizi (G Minnucci / 1937-40)
4 Piazza delle Forze Armate (M De Renzi, L Figini, G Pollini / 1939-52)
5 Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul (A Foschini / 1939-55)
6 Piazza della Romanità (P Aschieri, D Bernardini, C Pascoleti, G Peressutti / 1939-52)
7 Palazzo delle Poste, Telegrafi e Telefoni (E Rogers, G L Banfi, E Peressutti, L Belgioioso / 1939-42)
8 Piazza Imperiale (L Moretti, F Fariello, S Muratori, L Quaroni / 1938-42)
9 Porta Imperiale / Palazzi INA & INPS (G Muzio, M Paniconi, G Pediconi / 1939-42)
10 Restaurant (E Rossi / 1938-54)
11 Monumental Arc (A Libera)

Figure 36 Diagram: the E42 Quarter. **3, 4, 6, 8, 11:** *Architettura*, 17 / Special Issue (1938): 791, 781, 889, 821 (from the collection of **Casa dell'Architettura di Latina**)

committee chose a hybrid model of overall supervision (Cini–Piacentini) with separate competitions for 'signature' buildings. The combination of the two systems meant that the aesthetic framework for the buildings of E42 would be more restrictive than in earlier competitions: the brief for each *concorso* would have to conform to the overall programme for the quarter and adhere to the stipulated requirement for a uniform 'style' (Kallis 2011a: 60–1, 75).

The pluralistic composition of the architectural team in charge of the E42 project was soon to be tested. Already in 1938, serious disagreements over the direction of the project resulted in the resignation of Pagano, Piccinato, and Vietri from the E42 committee. In the wake of the resignations, a revised overall plan for the E42 quarter was published, this time bearing the sole signature of Piacentini. The fallout between Piacentini and Pagano was bitter, putting an end to an unlikely but fruitful partnership that had dated back to 1932–33 (Muntoni 2010: 176–7). Increasingly disillusioned and resentful, Pagano retreated to his editorial role in his journal *Casabella*, launching vitriolic attacks on the Piacentinian aesthetic stewardship of the project and of Fascist architecture as a whole. Whether or not the reasons behind this dramatic change of attitude were also personal (i.e. resentment for his and other rationalists' exclusion from big architectural projects – De Seta 2008: lxix–lxxii), the premise of Pagano's rebuke was largely understandable: in his opinion, under Piacentini's increasingly intrusive direction of the E42 project, a rigid commitment to 'academic' monumentalism narrowed down the margins for imaginative reinterpretation of the briefs and frustrated many rationalist architects in their efforts to suggest more creative architectural solutions for the quarter (Pagano 1941a: 4–7).

Still, in spite of Piacentini's increasingly heavy-handed control of the E42 project, modernists of varying aesthetic persuasions widely contested competitions, won some of them, and received direct commissions for other buildings in the new quarter. Predictably, the ones who fared better were again those who were flexible enough to make aesthetic compromises in line with the stipulations of the competition briefs and the premises of the revised overall plan for the quarter. Thus, while the exuberant but highly idiosyncratic (and rather loosely based on the associated brief) submissions of the Terragni–Lingeri team were praised but eventually turned down, more complaisant modernist figures did substantially better in the distribution of E42 commissions. Adalberto Libera won the competition for the **Palazzo dei Ricevimenti e dei Congressi** (Fig. 36.7) after two rounds of competitions.[158] In the competition for the monumental entrance to the E42 quarter, the **Piazza Imperiale** (Fig. 36.1), there were two winning projects, one by Luigi Moretti[159] and the other by the well-established partnership between Francesco Fariello, Saverio Muratori, and Ludovico Quaroni (Mariani 1987: 133). Arnaldo Foschini, the long-time collaborator of Piacentini, was commissioned to build the religious landmark of the quarter, the **Church of St Peter and Paul** (Borghi 1966; Fig. 36.6), standing on one of the highest

points at the western end of the E42's main artery. On the opposite end of the axis, the commission for the edifices surrounding the **Piazza delle Forze Armate** (Fig. 36.4) was awarded jointly to Mario De Renzi (chief collaborator in the 1932 MdRF) and Gino Pollini (ex-member of the rationalist Gruppo-7 in Milan and collaborator of prominent rationalists, such as Terragni and Piccinato) (Architettura 1938: 885–905; Muntoni 1993). Another team headed by Pietro Aschieri was entrusted with the responsibility for the buildings framing the **Piazza della Romanità** (Fig. 36.3), including the future permanent home of the MdR itself (Marcello 2011: 243–4).[160] Gaetano Minnucci (another collaborator of Piccinato in GUR and member of MIAR) received the commission to build the **main office complex** of the E42 (Fig. 36.2). Professional and aesthetic proximity to Piacentini and the head of the syndicate of architects, Alberto Calza Bini, often paid handsome dividends when it came to either direct commissions or victories in the competitions for E42. Earlier hopes that the plans for the new quarter would provide the widest possible representation of architectural styles (and collaborators) were sacrificed on the altar of the Piacentinian motto of 'unity of style'. The result was a project far more stylistically uniform than even the previous golden standard, the 1932–25 university campus in Rome that Piacentini had also curated (Ch. 6).

Pagano used the February 1941 issue of *Casabella* to censure the forces of *accademismo* around Piacentini and Oppo for producing a 'memorial (built) from travertino (marble)' that 'monumentalises emptiness'. His list of accusations was long and brutally candid:

> mud of rhetoric and scholastic banality … lack of fantasy on part of a docile clique of functionaries … without taste … fear of barking from a most reactionary critique … decadence of taste, poverty of imagination, incapacity of architectural judgement by those 'authoritative' figures … the pretension of competition (in first and) second degree … the false, useless, most clumsy columns. (Pagano 1941b: 4–7)

The article bore the title 'wasted opportunities' ('Occasioni miste') and exuded a sense of frustration that reached much further than the specific E42 project, important though the latter was for the register of Fascist-era architecture. In hindsight, it is rather surprising that rationalist architects such as Pagano, Piccinato, Rossi, and Vietri thought that they could meaningfully collaborate with Piacentini on such a monumentalist, *romanità*-inspired project as the E42. For Pagano had invested too much in a distinction between 'classicism' (*classicismo* – which he abhorred as a form of regressive historicism) and 'classic form' (*classicità* – which he conceived of in abstract, more spiritual terms that allowed it to be expressed in modernist diction). His hope for a 'fecund marriage … between innate fantasy and respect for new architectural sensibilities' rested on 'the honesty and simplicity of forms, the rhythmic flow of elements, the respect for human proportions, the cheerful

variety of human genius, that very modesty of wooden structures and above all the convergence of artists on the enthusiasm for a collective project'. Yet, as it turned out, this was a conviction that neither Piacentini nor Oppo seemed to share (Muntoni 1995: 133–4).

The February 1941 issue of *Casabella* that Pagano used to launch his attack on Piacentini was officially sequestered by the Fascist authorities. Apart from penning the scathing editorial, Pagano had also selected nine plans that were submitted to three E42 competitions but did not win – from architects who refused 'to dumb themselves down', as he put it. The eclectic list of projects included two for the Palazzo dei Ricevimenti e dei Congressi, and three from the most high-profile – and, as it turned out, contentious – Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana. The outcome of these two competitions illustrated the chasm between the official version of universalist *romanità* promoted by Piacentini, on the one hand, and the far more symbolic, fluid, and connotative rereading of *classicità* envisioned by Pagano, on the other.

The competition for the **Palazzo dei Ricevimenti e dei Congressi** was announced in June 1937. Situated on the northeastern corner of the quarter, on the one end of the axis that led from the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana along Minnucci's main office buildings and the **Palazzo INA e INPS** (designed by Giovanni Muzio, Mario Paniconi, and Giulio Pediconi as part of the quarter's monumental entrance – **Porta Imperiale;** Fig. 36.8), this building was destined to function as the main congress hall of the exhibition. The competition brief for the building stipulated a monumental atrium leading to a grand reception hall and an even-more spectacular congress space for 3000 people. It also defined the stylistic requirements for what was considered a permanent signature building for the entire quarter:

> its architecture must be grounded not only on modern and functional lines but also on a classical and monumental sentiment, in the pure sense of a spiritual achievement that has persevered and been demonstrated throughout the centuries in so many artistic expressions of our country.[161]

The judging panel for the competition decided not to award the commission to any single plan but instead produced a shortlist of six submissions and invited their architects to a second-degree competition. The shortlist itself was suitably incongruous: from Libera's impressive circular construction to Aschieri's gigantic symmetrical cube, and from the heavily classicist suggestion by Gino Franzi and Pietro Lombardi (complete with massive frontal pillars and rhythmic arches on the sides) to the boldly asymmetrical and spatially fluid vision of the Cattaneo–Lingeri–Terragni team. The final verdict was reached in January 1938, with Libera emerging victorious – though not entirely happy as he had to subject his original design to a number of modifications for the second-degree competition (Garofalo and Veresane 2002: 99–106; Ciucci 2002: 188–95). For the Lingeri–Terragni–Cattaneo team

(whose project – again revised for the second competition – received the second prize), the outcome was a bitter disappointment: having been excluded from all other direct commissions (particularly the **Palazzo delle Poste**, which had originally been promised to them but went instead to the BBPR partnership – Mariani 1987: 125), this was their last chance to leave their mark on the most significant architectural project of the Fascist period – and in Rome as a whole (Coppa 2013: 27–8).

Libera's winning project had a mixed reception from contemporary critics. While some criticised it as an awkward, directionless compromise between classicism and rationalism, others praised it as a faithful document of the visual tastes and construction techniques of its time (Muntoni 2010: 189; Etlin 1991: 498). But it was the competition for the Palace of the Italian Civilisation (**Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana**, PdCI), facing Libera's building on the northwestern corner of the new exhibition quarter, that proved by far the most contentious episode of the E42 (Poretti 2002; Muntoni 1987: 89–92). Occupying the other highest point in the entire quarter and destined as the home of perhaps the most significant thematic exhibition for the 1942 world fair (the Mostra della Civiltà Italiana – see Ch. 7), it was considered from the beginning as the 'spiritual centre' of the quarter (Poretti 2008: 163). In an unmistakeable further sign of its significance, the judging committee for the competition, announced in July 1937, was to include Piacentini himself, alongside Oppo and, originally, Pagano.

In hindsight, this particular competition was the final chapter in the regime's quest for the superlative *Fascist* signature building in Rome. The register of failures or near-misses in this domain was long – the recurring ideas for a Mole Littoria, the shelved plans for the Danteum, the thwarted expansion of the Foro Mussolini, and especially the scaled-down (and relocated) Palazzo del Littorio (see Ch. 6). In this respect, the architectural cornerstone of the E42 quarter offered a unique outlet for channelling all these thwarted energies towards the construction of such a genuine Fascist signature building against the most dramatic backdrop of a landmark *ex nihilo* new city in the shadow of Rome. In comparison to most other competitions for buildings in the exhibition quarter, the guidelines of the competition brief for the PdCI were less prescriptive and more amenable to individual interpretation. 'Monumentalism and classicism' were explicitly referenced as the primary inspirations for the building, as in all other competition briefs across the quarter; but the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana was also crowned with the distinction of being 'the most exceptional construction' of the E42. The daunting task confronting the participating architects was to come up with plans for a building that was inspired by, and expressed, the 'spiritual attitude that has manifested itself, and endured, throughout the centuries in all artistic expressions of [the Italian] nation, in more modern and functional form'. *Romanità*, *italianità*, and *impero* would interpenetrate and intersect with *universalità*, in a building that was intended as a monument

to 'the continuity of Italian genius and its incessant contribution to human progress'. The external architectonic form and the exhibition content of the structure would also reinforce each other: the fulsome tribute to 'the synthesis of Italian civilisation from its origins to the present day' would unite the exhibition (and the permanent museum in the future) with the building itself. In theory, the task of translating these ideas into built form was left to the 'absolute liberty of conception' of the participating architects, with no stipulations on the shape and dimensions of the building; the only explicitly stated prerequisite concerned the use of 'autarchic' construction materials, with emphasis on the 'local' elements of stone and marble at the expense of iron and steel.[162]

It was, therefore, not surprising that the judging panel for the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana competition received a high number of submissions – 53 in total – that offered a kaleidoscope of interpretations of the brief, both in architectonic form and symbolic content. Many submissions echoed their architects' previous (frustrated or rejected) engagement with other projects that had sought to express the essence of a Fascist signature building in Rome. A gigantic circular tower formed the centrepiece of the submission by the Ortensi–Pascoletti–Santi team, reminiscent of much earlier ideas for a Mole Littoria at the heart of the historic capital (Nicoloso 2008: 98, 136–7). Another project by Ugo Luccichenti echoed liberally the oval shape and rhythmic vista of the Colosseo (Architettura 1938: 839–40). Bold modernist projects also appeared on the register of submissions. Although Terragni and his collaborators chose not to participate in the competition, their work inspired, and was echoed by, submissions by other architects, including projects by Bianchetti–Pea and by the Albini–Gardella–Palanti–Romano team (both received special mention by the judging committee but were not included in the list of the five prizes). Meanwhile, the submission of the BBPR team (which received the second prize) drew its inspiration and origins from an earlier project for a permanent museum dedicated to Italian civilisation. This plan, enthusiastically supported by Massimo Bontempelli of the *Quadrante* circle, had originally been presented – along with a model for the building by the BBPR team – to Mussolini in 1935, who had endorsed it and even supported the idea of situating the museum on Via dell'Impero (Guidoni 1987: 20–2; Muntoni 1995: 135–8). When the idea for the exhibition was eventually absorbed into the programme for the 1942 world fair and tied to the competition for the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, the BBPR partnership was invited to submit a new plan that featured a tall curved double wall framed by a monumental colonnade-like structure.

The BBPR project was considered by most as the likely winner. It thus came as a surprise that the judges awarded the first prize (and the coveted commission) to the submission by Ernesto Bruno La Padula (also designer of the Italian pavilion for the 1939 New York world fair), Giovanni Guerrini, and Mario Romano (Architettura 1938: 787–9). Although the team had some

strong modernist affinities (and La Padula had been a prominent member of MIAR in the early 1930s), the **winning design** (Fig. 37) was heavily criticised for its over-reliance on rhythmic arches that referenced (or, as some would say, plagiarised) the outer design of the Colosseo. A simple, yet gigantic cube with overpowering vertical lines, the winning plan passed very quickly into construction and generated fierce polemical statements from both supporters and opponents. Colloquially referred to as 'square Colosseo' (*Colosseo quadrato*), the building was ridiculed at the time by respected modernist critics such as Gio Ponti, editor of the architectural journal *Domus*, who described it as an 'architectural phantasm' (Etlin 1991: 498). The criticism was of course heavily conditioned by the rationalist disdain of literal classicism – and, in particular, its equation with copies of Roman arches, colonnades, and surfaces invested in travertino marble. Yet, it was precisely the presence of some of these elements in the winning design for the PdCI that ensured the support of Piacentini and Oppo, in spite of their reservations about the suitability of the internal space for the planned Exhibition of Italian Civilisation (Benton 2001: 105–7).

The Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana was completed in 1940. The axis that connected it to the Palazzo dei Ricevimenti e Congressi, complete with

Figure 37 Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, E42/EUR (Ernesto Bruno La Padula, Giovanni Guerrini, Mario Romano)

Minnucci's administration buildings and the edifices framing the Piazza Imperiale, constitutes the most complete subset in the E42 quarter. Along with the rest of the finished projects (the buildings of the Mostra della Romanità, the Palazzo delle Forze Armate, the Palazzi INA e INPS, and the church), they serve as faithful snapshots of Piacentini's growing sway over the definition of the E42 'style'. The chief architect of the E42 quarter continued to interfere with the construction of the chosen projects until the very end. The original plan for the PdCI depicted a 13 × 8 grid of rhythmic arches on each of the four sides of the building. This choice, however, was criticised by the judging committee because it diluted the visual primacy of the arches and the intervening columns. Thus, in the final design the pattern was reduced to a 9 × 6 grid, resulting in far more dominant arches and more clearly defined classical vertical lines. Adjustments were also made to the height of the building, freeing up space for the inscription of a quote from a 1935 Mussolini speech (yet another stipulation that appeared in a subsequently revised programme for the MdCI in 1939). In addition, the original suggestion of a building structure made up of stone was rejected by the judging committee, not least because it posed serious challenges in terms of supporting the significant weight of the arches over a height of 68 metres. Piacentini's modification to the design (a structure of reinforced cement but clad in big slabs of travertino marble) added insult to injury for modernist critics of the project and resulted in a fresh round of acrimonious exchanges (Poretti 2008: 166–76). Meanwhile, Libera's design for the Palazzo dei Ricevimenti e dei Congressi also experienced the increasingly heavy-handed Piacentinian treatment. The original circular and discrete design for the main congress hall was substituted by a rectangular one integrated into the overall structure of the building. Then the vertical pillars of the mostly glass facade were replaced by granite columns. Apparently, Libera became increasingly disenchanted with the demanded modifications and fought to maintain some of the original stylistic parameters of his project; hence his determination to restrict the width of the columns to what was absolutely necessary in functional-static terms and his refusal to accept the addition of capitals to them (Etlin 1991: 492).

Columns or pillars, arcades, arches, and porticos, all clad in travertino marble or granite (the definitive emblems of Fascist *autarchia* and imperial *romanità*), were still in full swing across the E42 quarter in 1942 (Nicoloso 2008: 75) when the final decision to suspend all work was reluctantly taken. Undoubtedly, from the point of view of stylistic creativity and innovation, the E42 quarter appeared then (and continues to be regarded) as a painful retrograde leap – and an excruciating defeat for the aspirations that had set the Italian rationalist movement ablaze back in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The sense of downfall from the heights of the MIAR, the Casa del Fascio in Como, the Florence railway station, the plan for Sabaudia, and the early intoxicating enthusiasm for the Palazzo del Littorio competition was

particularly harrowing to those within the rationalist camp who had been consumed by the illusion of 'aesthetic pluralism' and had dreamt of single-handedly expressing the universalist Fascist spirit through their spatial and visual imagination. Pagano's sense of 'defeat' was made even more insufferable due to a feeling of betrayal from those, like Piacentini and his collaborators, who had sought to forge a workable synthesis between classicist *romanità* and modernist architecture. If the emerging style of the E42 quarter was supposed to be the final product of this mediation, then it was bitterly rejected as a catastrophic backsliding by the most authoritative rationalist figures such as Pagano, Terragni, and Ponti. The exclusion of other rationalists from the landmark building projects of the E42 quarter must have underlined how dramatically Piacentini had shifted his aesthetic allegiances away from the synthesis of the mid-1930s towards a literal, 'academic', and historicist classicism by the time of the E42 project.

Yet, in many respects such a judgement misses a critical point. In yet another revision to the exhibition programme published in December 1940 (that is, after Italy's entry into the Second World War), Piacentini determined that the supreme objective of the exhibition (and the entire city built to host it) would be 'to reaffirm in a most authoritative, most expressive, most universal manner the power and prestige of Fascist Italy in all fields', highlighting the political significance of the event as 'a courteous competition between the two hegemonic Empires'.[163] *Which* two empires? Piacentini did pay tribute to the alliance between Italy and Germany as a force for 'regenerating and reorganising Europe … in the immediate future', against the old imperialist forces of the continent. And yet, the 'competition' that Piacentini referred to in the 1940 programme was precisely between Italy and Germany, or more precisely between Fascism and National Socialism. This was therefore the most symbolic opportunity to conjugate the superiority (*primato*) of *Italian* civilisation *in* Rome, in past, present, and future continuous tenses; and to celebrate it not only at the expense of the enemies of the Axis alliance but also vis-à-vis Nazi Germany itself (Nicoloso 2008: 110–15). Gio Ponti had made a similar point to Mussolini in 1937 with regard to both the 1937 world fair and the approaching E42.[164] This superiority would be enacted and exalted in the city-myth of history and alleged cradle of the 'Fascist revolution' – under its shadow, heavily influenced by its aesthetic and symbolic legacy, at a moment that was supposed to celebrate the apogee of Fascism's universalist project (the *Ventennale*). Against the backdrop of this supremely political and ideological imperative, it is arguable that the official Piacentinian E42 style constituted a more intelligible visual vocabulary for a Fascist universality heavily indebted to the myth and experience of the city of Rome that stood defiantly in the horizon. However insipid the 'submodern' architectural pastiche of the E42 quarter may have seemed (Lazzaro 2005: 30–31), it was nevertheless far more flexible as a communication tool and accessible to its intended non-expert and international

audiences than the often inscrutable acumen of its contemporary Italian rationalist detractors (Nicoloso 2008: xvii). Besides, the organisers of the Rome world fair were already preparing for a future world dominated by the Axis 'new order' and were eager to shore up the universalist credentials of Italian Fascism in a subtle yet determined competition with Nazi Germany. In this supremely political sense, the unadorned repetitive arches of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, the symmetrical columns of the Palazzo dei Ricevimenti e dei Congressi and the Piazza della Romanità, as well as the ubiquitous travertino-clad buildings, were far more usable markers of the undiminished significance of the 'myth of Rome', propping up far more effectively the universalist imaginary that Italian Fascism had invested in the 1942 world fair and the E42 exhibition quarter (Stone 1999: 220).

Conclusion: The 'Third Rome' as Fascism's *imago mundi*

The **fifth marble map** that was placed along the Via dell'Impero in 1934, depicting the new Mussolinian *impero* in the Mediterranean and Africa (Fig. 38), barely survived the collapse of the Fascist regime. Just like the far-away lands that it depicted as prized possessions of the Fascist imperialist imaginary in luminous white, the map was undone (in fact, defaced, removed, and destroyed, only to resurface half a century later from the basement of the Theatre of Marcellus) and allowed to fade from memory. The other four marble maps depicting the foundation of Rome and the expansion of the Roman Empire (Fig. 10) did survive the watershed, as did the avenue that they decorated and framed symbolically (Hyde Minor 1999: 149, 153–8). Yet, the change of its name into the more utilitarian 'Street of the Imperial Fori' (Via dei Fori Imperiali) in the autumn of 1944 altered the legibility of Fascism's most high-profile work inside Rome's historic centre. Every year, the avenue hosts a ceremonial parade, but the date (2 June) marks a very different occasion – the constitutional referendum that put an end to the rule of the Savoy monarchy and marked the birth of the First Italian Republic. Meanwhile, the other major Fascist-era street project in Rome's historic centre, the Via del Mare, was also renamed into Via del Teatro di Marcello – a more narrowly descriptive toponymy deliberately revising the avenue's original association with empire and Mediterranean expansion. Part of the street was subsequently renamed Via Luigi Petroselli, commemorating the communist former mayor of Rome (1979–81).

For decades, the capital of the postwar Italian Republic has been undergoing a wholesale semiotic 'recoding' – not without contestations, controversial erasures, or much-debated partial rehabilitations of its Fascist past (Arthurs 2012: 155–6; Foot 2009: 70). 'Toponymic cleansing' (renaming of streets and landmarks, very often deliberately using anti-Fascist references) has been one of many strategies employed to negotiate the difficult heritage of Fascism in Rome's cityscape and collective memory. The most drastic approach of outright physical obliteration has been applied only selectively.

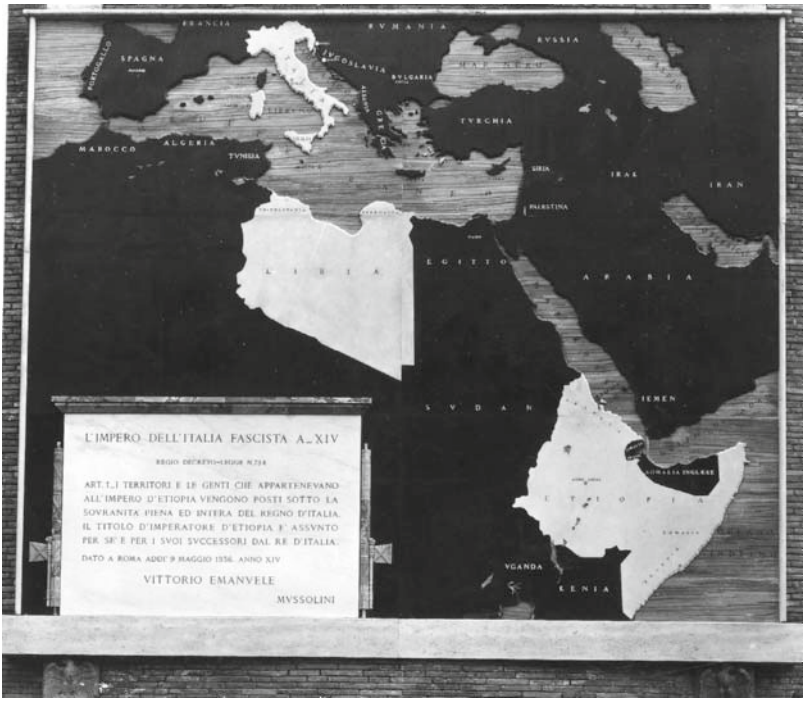


Figure 38 The fifth (now removed and defaced) map on Via dell'Impero. With the kind permission of © **Archivio Cederna**, 'Via dell'Impero', F.33 'Album': raccolta di fotografie provenienti dall'Archivio del Comune di Roma

Instead, a significant portion of the Fascist era-built heritage in Rome has been 'recoded', either aggressively by 'mutilating' it (Macdonald 2009: 52) or by neutralising its troubling Fascist connotations (Benton 2010).

Damnatio memoriae (Wilkins 2005: 64)? Not quite. Apart from the four surviving maps designed by Antonio Muñoz, the commemorative pillars that signposted the avenue (bearing Mussolini's, the king's, and the then governor's names) are still dotting the area around the Colosseo. On the other edge of the historic centre, the **inscription facing the Mausoleum of Augustus** (Fig. 15) also stands; in fact, the partly defaced name of the Fascist dictator has been restored and appears in full a few lines above the marking of the inscription's date (1940) according to the Fascist calendar (XVIII – 18th year). Wandering across the city, one is perhaps bewildered by the number of surviving *littorio* markers – elsewhere the **Piazza Augusto Imperatore** (Fig. 39.2), on **Via della Conciliazione** (Fig. 19), on the **Theatre of Marcellus** (Fig. 39.1), and elsewhere. Meanwhile, the bulk of the mosaic pavements inside the Ostiense Station and the **ex-Foro Mussolini** (nowadays Foro Italico; Fig. 39.3) go largely unnoticed by the hordes of commuters,

Figure 39.1 Surviving Fascist-era insignia on the front of the Theatre of Marcellus

tourists, and football fans that walk over them every day (Canniffe 2008: 201–06). A rather unremarkable bronze statue by Italo Griselli still stands outside the main office building of the E42 complex (Fig. 40.1), its originally intended tribute to the **'Genius of Fascism'** and the depicted Fascist salute overwritten by the addition of a boxing glove on the young man's hand and a new inscription that bears the title 'Genius of Sport' (Malvano 1997: 238). The Mussolinian city has proven rather resilient to the ongoing postwar revision, casting an unsettling shadow on the Republic's founding claim of complete historical discontinuity with the preceding Fascist period. However short-lived in comparison to both its predecessors and successors, the Fascist *terza Roma* continues to be deeply embedded in the chronotope of Rome, even while the master narratives and mental images that underpinned it are fading from memory (Kirk 2011: 123; Arthurs 2010).

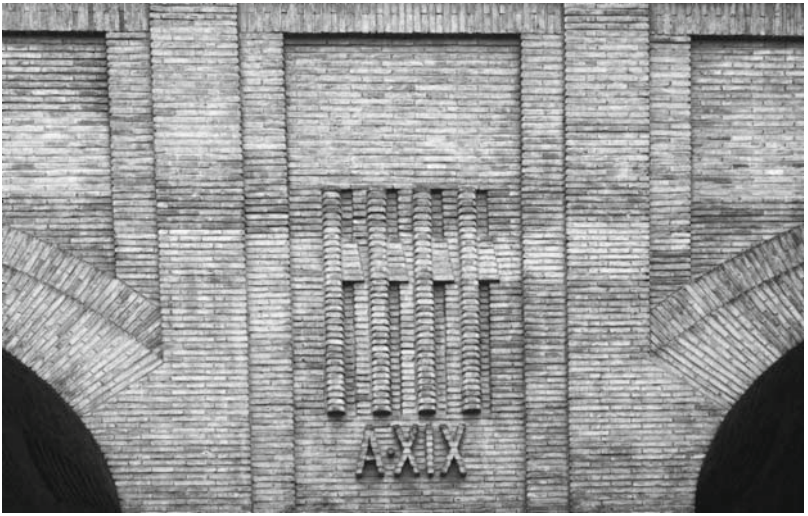


Figure 39.2 Surviving Fascist-era insignia on the side of Piazza Augusto Imperatore

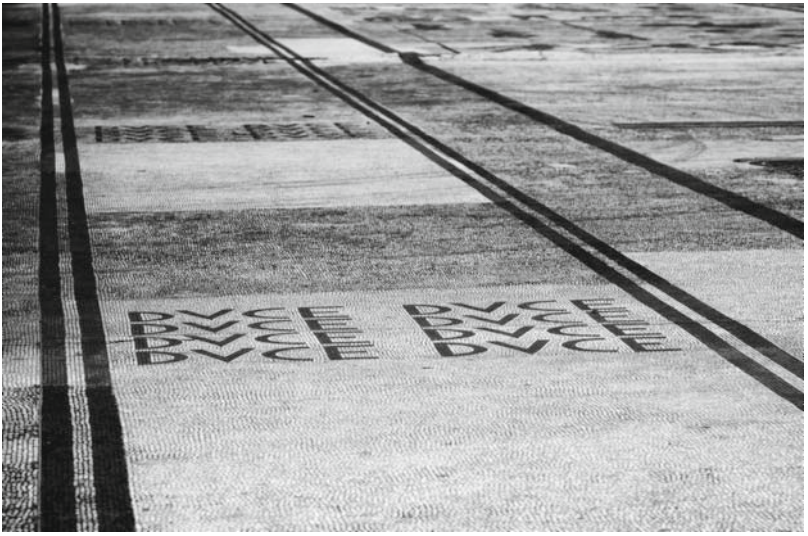


Figure 39.3 Surviving Fascist-era insignia on the pavement of the Foro Italico (ex-Foro Mussolini)

Figure 40.1 Italo Griselli's 'Genius of Fascism', E42/EUR (now 'Genius of Sport')

Of course, the enduring presence of the 'third Rome' in the chronotopic palimpsest of the contemporary city owes a lot to the prodigious register of interventions – additive, transformative, de(con)structive – that were carried out by the Fascist regime in the city during the two decades between the March on Rome and Mussolini's removal from power. Under Fascism, Rome experienced a dramatic shifting of its boundaries and nodes, acquired new paths and flows, and was adorned by an array of new landmarks, whether new or made up from existing components of the urban palimpsest. The changes effected on the cityscape and its spatial practices were tangible, extensive, and fast-paced, substantially disrupting the mental image and symbolic legibility of the entire city. The relative dearth of new Fascist-era signature constructions inside the historic centre belies the regime's

prodigious constructive register in the immediate periphery. But it also masks the profound, wholesale appropriation of a significant section of the city's existing landmarks and spaces. Through its multiple interventions in the 1920s and 1930s, the regime remapped the city's space, reassembled its palimpsest, and re-engineered spatial and temporal relations across the city. In so doing, it also anchored its own image on the city of Rome.

Urban design, we are told, is both a spatial and a temporal art, trading in discontinuities, disrupted sequences of space and time, as well as intersections of space and time, sometimes intended and sometimes inadvertent, but always partial, incomplete, and open to further renegotiations (Lynch 1960: 1). The semiotic resilience of the 'third Rome' in the postwar and contemporary city owes a crucial amount to the Fascist conception of the 'third Rome' as both the historic fount and the contemporary – visual and symbolic – instantiation of its subsequent myth of universality. Fascism borrowed liberally from within the city's palimpsest and myths, dis- and then re-assembled them in new narrative frames, forged new spatio-temporal links, and constructed new sequences from existing, familiar constituent elements. Even when the Fascist authorities were authorising *ex nihilo* constructions on empty land in the urban periphery, their intention was to maintain a seemingly deferential dialogue with the myths of *romanità* and *universalità* that were spatially and temporally rooted in Rome. Even when the regime was approving relentless demolitions across the historic centre, it was also creating new 'frames' that accentuated selected elements of the city's historical chronotope. Even when interventions were paying unabashed tribute to Fascism's 'revolutionary' rupture and the promise of a new beginning, they were tapping deeper and deeper into the arsenal of the city's all-too-familiar millenarian myths.

It was this deliberate practice of (selective) continuity, familiarity, and deference that belied the radical novelty, and disguised the vast conquering ambition, of the entire Fascist enterprise in Rome. Just a few metres away from Griselli's statue, another sculptor, Publio Morbiducci, executed a gigantic bas-relief composition (Fig. 40.2) titled '**History of Rome through Its Public Works**' ('La Storia di Roma attraverso le Opere Edilizie' – Muratore et al. 1992: 177–81). A veteran of the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (to which he had contributed the decoration of the room dedicated to the Fasci all'Estero), Morbiducci deliberately emulated the artistic and narrative techniques of Trajan's column that had stood defiantly on the edges of the Foro since the early second century CE. The composition, completed in 1939, was organised chronologically over successive friezes that blend into each other from top to bottom. The story that the bas-relief narrated was strikingly familiar. In terms of heroic personalities, it led from Romulus and Remus through emperors Augustus and Constantine to the great popes of the Renaissance and then all the way to Garibaldi. With regard to the featured architectural works, it started with

Figure 40.2 Publio Morbiducci's 'History of Rome through Its Public Works', E42/EUR

the Republican temples, glorified the Pantheon and the Colosseo, then paid homage to the first Christian churches and to Michelangelo's masterpieces of St Peter's basilica and Campidoglio square, before reaching the modern Monument to Vittorio Emanuele II. All this was overwhelmingly a visual narrative that would not have been very different even if it had been commissioned by a Liberal government in the wake of the First World War. The composition's temporal structure was also curved in a familiar way, following the trope of a heroic time that was dense with foundation myths, steeped in ancient imperial imagery, and then consecrated in the universalist symbols of the *medioevo* and the Renaissance, before reaching the modern landmarks of the Risorgimento and national unification.

Yet, for all its predictable continuities, Morbiducci's oeuvre was teeming with Fascist polysemy. Unsurprisingly, the final section of the frieze featured Mussolini on horseback, against an architectural backdrop that featured not only the Monument to Vittorio Emanuele II but also the obelisk of Axum (seized from Ethiopia and transferred to Rome in 1937), and finally the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, rising above the E42 quarter only a few hundred metres away from the bas-relief itself. If the first (imperial) and the second (Christian) Rome continued to occupy the bulk of the composition, the appendage of the Fascist imagery at the bottom produced a fundamentally different teleological reading, with the *Fascist* 'third Rome' as both the worthy heir to, and the apotheosis of, the city's millennial history. Time had been curved once again. The 1929 Lateran pacts had allowed the appropriation of the city's medieval and Renaissance Christian heritage by the narrative of Roman universality as viewed through the Fascist contemporary filter. In addition, the Liberal period had been collapsed into a single monument (the Vittoriano) that did not break the suggested link between Garibaldi and Mussolini, the Risorgimento and Fascism. More than a panorama of architectural genius, Morbiducci's composition narrated a tale driven by an elite of heroic leaders (the Duce included) whose memory had been anchored on the space of the city through landmark monuments of their respective times. More than a linear history of the city of Rome, the work exalted the 'third Rome' as the climax of three millennia of universalist history-making, fused into the space of the city and brought back to life through the historical agency of a novel political force.

The Rome that Morbiducci depicted on his bas-relief was the mental image of a perfect *terza Roma* as the terminus of a glorious millennial journey, in time but also in space. The deliberate curving of space and time on the surface of the bas-relief echoed the Fascist practices that had disrupted and drastically reimagined Rome's urban palimpsest. Erasure was practised on marble just as it had been unleashed (as physical demolition and reconfiguration) on the city's physical space during the 1920s and especially the 1930s. Selected monuments that condensed heroic time had been set free from the ravages of time on the surface of Morbiducci's composition, like they had been restored,

'isolated', 'systematised', and wrapped in Fascist frames and narratives on their actual locations inside city. The flat surface of the relief echoed accurately the ambition of the Fascist rulers to rearrange elements of the urban palimpsest on a figurative blank canvas, collapsing time through space and space through time. Palimpsestic (in its separation of epochs and historical agencies) but also palimpsestuous (forging new links and narratives amidst the familiar cherished remnants of the past on the city's visible layer), the 'History of Rome through Its Public Works' exalted two Fascist victories: first, the consecration of Fascism as the driver of modern, post-Risorgimental national history (a project that, as we saw, had been consecrated inside the rooms of the MdRF in 1932); and second, the physical and symbolic appropriation of Rome's multilayered urban palimpsest as the fount of Fascism's own foundation myth and universalist horizon.

Morbiducci's composition was revealing in both what it featured and what it excluded. The Mussolinian *terza Roma* extended well beyond the millennial monuments of the historic centre and the new E42 city-model. One could of course read the inclusion of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana as shorthand for the entire gamut of Fascist-era monumental architecture executed in and around the capital in the 1920s and especially 1930s. However, the most significant – in scope at least – additive contribution of the Fascist regime to Rome's urban palimpsest lay in numerous pockets of new quarters and suburbs in the periphery, most of which featured vernacular architecture as a response to what Mussolini had described back in 1925 as 'problems of necessity'. These more humble, yet gargantuan in scale, additions did not form part of Morbiducci's narrative sequence. They had been redacted and overshadowed by the monumental over-production of the Fascist years. They had been planted on the urban space as patches of a cloak of invisibility that disguised persistent (if not mounting) social problems and redirected the focus to the mental image of a very different 'third Rome'.

In addition, the choice of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana as the landmark building of the Fascist era on the bas-relief underlined the victory of the monumental, *romanità*-inspired late *stile littorio* that had prevailed across the E42 quarter. After an auspicious start in the late 1920s and the moribund illusion of triumph in the early 1930s, the legacy of architectural modernism (and especially *razionalismo*) in Rome had been excised from the most complete ideal image of the *terza Roma*, just like most high-profile rationalist architects had lost out to the Piacentinian monumental eclecticism in the majority of individual competitions for the buildings of the exhibition quarter. Mussolini's earlier praise for the modernist architecture of Sabaudia, of Rome's peripheral post offices, and of many projects for the Palazzo del Littorio mattered little to the 'third Rome's' triumphant self-representation in 1939. Their omission from Morbiducci's composition was the product of a very different cultural milieu to the one that had prevailed at the

beginning of the decade – one that was now notably less pluralistic, less flexible and inclusive, more monumental and denotative of Fascist *romanità*.

The political context of 1939 was also very different. The two works by Morbiducci and Griselli adorned what was intended to become the northern entrance to the E42 quarter, at a time when the Fascist regime was still dreaming of hosting the 1942 world fair as the climactic event of its own *Ventennale* celebrations. In the same year that saw the eventual dissolution of the Action Committees for the Universality of Rome (CAUR), preparations for the 'Olympic Games of Civilisation' (the chosen thematic title for the 1942 world fair) were gathering impressive pace, apparently heedless of the violent storm that was raging in the north of the continent. A stage impressive in scale and inspiration was carefully being assembled on the outskirts of the Italian capital to mark the dual occasion. In September 1934 Hitler had marked the first 'German millennium', promising that his Third Reich was bent on reshaping individual and collective life – and, through them, the course of human history as a whole. Hitler's visit to Rome in 1938 coincided with the marking of two millennia since the birth of Augustus; still, the towering figure of the founder of the Roman Empire stood a further seven centuries after the mythical foundation of the city. Rome effortlessly spanned epochs of universalist greatness, its visible layer seemingly forged from the sediment of millennia of 'heroic' time. The E42 quarter rose from the untamed fields south of Rome as a figurative, ideal, condensed mental image of the historic city and as a visual rubric for its new overarching Fascist legibility. The exhibition content that it was meant to host was designed to foster and communicate the message of a Roman, Italian, *and* Fascist universalist 'primacy' to the broadest international audience of participants, visitors, and observers.

The importance of such a message for the Fascist regime in 1939 cannot be exaggerated. The dissolution of CAUR marked the rather ignominious shelving of the project of Fascist 'export' and internationalisation that had taken shape in the first years of the 1930s and reached its peak in 1934–35. A political project intended to place Fascist Italy at the helm of an international alliance of kindred movements and regimes across Europe that followed the Fascist ideological canon and recognised Mussolini's regime as their political beacon, Fascist internationalisation had invested heavily in the idea of Rome's universality. It had also gathered momentum in direct opposition to, and competition with, the nascent National Socialist Germany. By 1936, however, the tables had been turned: drawn increasingly closer to an alliance with Hitler's Germany against both the west and the Soviet Union, Fascist Italy had witnessed its earlier political momentum as the primary pole of loyalty for radical anti-liberal and anti-communist forces in Europe slip away, hijacked by the seemingly unstoppable dynamism of the Third Reich. An alternative strategy, this time based on the premise of Fascism's spiritual *universality*, involved an even greater investment in the

myth, space, and perception of Rome. The city – de facto capital and cradle of the Italian nation – had been transformed into both the sacred capital of Fascism and the spiritual source of an alternative, history-making project that would again redefine and reanimate the course of human history. In this respect, the *terza Roma* reignited the city's universalist beacon and sought to reclaim its position of undisputed primacy. This Rome, the most spectacular sedimentation of *romanità*, *italianità*, and *universalità*, the unsurpassed gift of millennial history, belonged to Fascism; in fact, it was meant to be the paragon of its regenerative agency and futural thrust. From there, against the backdrop of historic monuments and amidst gleaming new architectural wonders, Fascism was preparing to celebrate its third, most significant victory in 1942 – this time as a universalist conquering creed, with Rome as its sacred polestar.

In the construction of the E42 exhibition city, the Fascist regime sought to consecrate the vision of its universalist political religion and anchor it on the physical space of the city itself. From Piazza Venezia and the Campidoglio, along the Via dell'Impero and Via del Mare, past the Foro, the Colosseo, the Palatino, and the Circo Massimo, under the shadow of the imposing dome of St Peter's basilica and of Augustus's Mausoleum, through the Baths of Caracalla, along the route of the Via Imperiale and all the way to the monumental entrance of the E42, the 'Fascist layer' traced the narrative of Rome's undiminished greatness and primacy, effortlessly linking the past to the present and the promise of an alternative future. This was a supremely sacred city that Fascism had conquered, first politically, then administratively, and finally, little by little, physically and symbolically in the course of a short 20 years. It mattered little in the end that Fascism's bid to appropriate the urban space failed to deliver new landmark buildings inside the historic core of the city. It mattered little that the most cherished monuments of the Fascist epoch dotted the periphery but never entered into a direct visual-spatial dialogue with the glorious ruins of the past. It finally mattered little that a distinct modern aesthetic style gradually faded away in favour of a more and more rhetorical invocation of monumental *romanità*. Little by little, the 'Fascist layer' added unevenly to the city's palimpsest, subtracted relentlessly, carved new narrative flows, tweaked and framed familiar landmarks, disrupted the sense of linear time, and altered its correspondence to a host of spatial markers across the city.

In the end, the 'third Rome' was both iterative and unifying; both spatially rooted and figurative, a product of both accumulated time and *ex nihilo* cosmogony; a new city within (or alongside) the city and a new mental image of an ideal, 'sacred' city as the *axis mundi* of a new Fascist world order. Inside the E42, what Morbiducci communicated on his bas-relief, the Fascist regime sought to consecrate and anchor on physical space: the primacy (both diachronic and contemporary) and centrality (both historical and symbolic) of the 'third Rome' as the foundation myth of a new universal

order. This was a message with immense political capital for Fascism, since it charted an alternative future for the 'fascist epoch' that Mussolini had proudly announced in the early 1930s and pursued with determination – albeit also with diminishing success – throughout the rest of the decade. The E42 world fair would seek to recentre the course of history on Rome, claiming a Roman, Italian, *and* Fascist universalist primacy, and dislocating the rest of the world to the edges of a new epoch. The E42 quarter was meant to host a defiant *simulation* of a 'not-yet' future that was nevertheless increasingly at odds with the political reality of the late 1930s: the dynamism of National Socialist Germany, its growing international recognition as the leader of the 'fascist' block, the relegation of Fascist Italy to a junior partner in the Axis alliance, the loss of face for Mussolini's regime after a series of military setbacks just before and during the Second World War. But the simulation was rapidly turning into a *simulacrum* – not just a pretence of, but increasingly an escape from, reality. The fate of the ultimate Fascist exhibition and its spectacular architectural receptacle – abandoned in a hauntingly incomplete state by 1943 (Fig. 41) – was to mirror the destiny of Fascism's universalist project: slowly turning into a climactic, consuming illusion, it was soon to expire amidst suspended temples, abandoned plans, the carnage of war, and a crushing defeat.

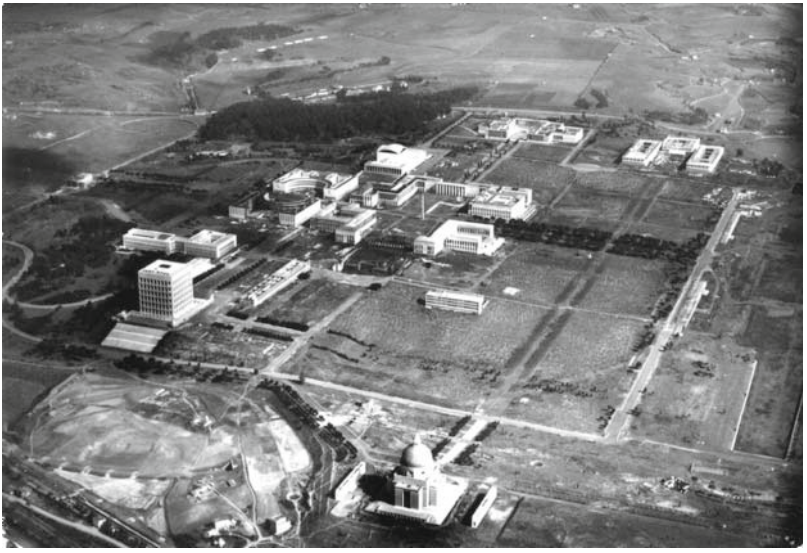


Figure 41 The ultimate Fascist *non-finito*: aerial view of EUR (ex-E42) in 1953, with major structures completed amidst still empty land. **Wikipedia Commons**, 'Veduta della zona EUR di Roma', http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/it/0/0f/Eur1953.jpg

Notes

1. ACS, SPD, 500.018, 838: Cremonesi to Mussolini, 31.12.1922/17.4.1923/21.10. 1925.
2. ACS, SPD, 500.019 I, fascicolo 'Problemi della Capitale, Anno 1928': Mussolini to Spada Potenziani, 14.4.1928.
3. ACS, SPD, 500.019 I, fascicolo 'Problemi della Capitale, Anno 1928': Mussolini to Spada Potenziani, 14.4.1928.
4. The final iteration of the plan can be found in ACS, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione (MPI), Direzione Generale AA.BB.AA, Div II/1929–33, 199.
5. AC, 38/32: Prefect to X Ripartizione, 14.2.1928.
6. AC, 38/32: Rip X to Governatorato, 4.2.1928.
7. AC, 38/32: Oppo's article in the daily *La Tribuna*, 22.1.1926.
8. ACS, SPD, 174.330: Brasini to Duce, 23.10.1927.
9. ACS, PCM, 1930–31, 1595: Giunta to Potenziani, 16.9.1928.
10. La Burbera: Gustavo Giovannoni, Pietro Aschieri, Giuseppe Boni, Enrico Del Debbio, Vincenzo Fasolo, Arnaldo Foschini, Giacomo Giobbe, Alessandro Limongelli, Felice Nori, Ghino Venturi. GUR: Marcello Piacentini, Luigi Piccinato, Gino Cancellotti, Eugenio Fuselli, Giuseppe Nicolosi, Cesare Valle.
11. ACS, SPD, 104.113: Piacentini to Mussolini, 4.10.1929.
12. ACS, SPD, 104.113: Bottai to Chiavolini, 21.9.1929.
13. ACS, SPD, 104.113: Chiavolini to Rossi, 12.10.29; Chiavolini to Bottai, 3.10.1929.
14. ACS, SPD, 104.113: Boncompagni Ludovisi to Mussolini, 22.3.1930.
15. ACS, MPI, AABBAA, II, 1929–33, 86: Piacentini to Ludovisi, 21.10.1930.
16. ACS, SPD, 174.330: Chiavolini to Brasini, 14.4.1930.
17. ACS, SPD, 174.330: Boncompagni Ludovisi to Mussolini, 12.9.1929; Brasini to Mussolini, 31.3.1930.
18. ACS, MPI, 86: Bottai to Borghese, 16.1.1941.
19. ACS, SPD, 500.019 I, 843: Borghese to Mussolini, 26.10.1941.
20. *Popolo d'Italia*, 29.12.1928.
21. ACS, MPI, AABBAA, II, 1940–45, 86: Commissione per l'esame del PR, 24.3.1928.
22. AC, AS2, 2, 12.12.1927.
23. ACS, SPD, 509.428: Boncompagni Ludovisi, 'Appunto per il Duce', 20.7.1934.
24. ACS, SPD, 137.307: Boncompagni Ludovisi to Mussolini, 1.3.1933.
25. ACS, MPI, AABBAA, II, 1929–33, 183: DGABA session, 18.4.1933.
26. ACS, SPD, 137.307: 'Appunto per il Duce', 30.10. 1932; and Minister of Education, Director for Antiquities and Fine Arts to Mussolini, December 1933.
27. ACS, SPD, 137.307: Alfiero to Chiavolini, 28.3.1933.
28. ACS, SPD, 500.019 I, 840: Boncompagni Ludovisi to Mussolini, 2.10.1934.
29. ACS, SPD, 137.037: Boncompagni Ludovisi to Mussolini, 8.7.1936, 26.7.1936, 12.7.1939; SPD, 500.019 I, 841, Colonna to Mussolini, 6.5.1937.
30. AC, Rip X, 147/10, is dedicated to the production of the fifth map of Via dell'Impero; while 136/2 chronicles the earlier four maps.
31. ACS, SPD, 500.019 I, 840: Boncompagni Ludovisi to Mussolini, 30.8.1934.
32. ACS, SPD, 500.019 I, 840: Boncompagni Ludovisi to Mussolini, 3.6.1934.

33. ACS, MPI, AABBAA, II, 1929–33, 183: Report of Superintendence of Museums and Excavations in the Province of Rome, 3.6.1924; Ministry of Finance to DGABA, 10.2.1932.
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35. ACS, SPD, 500.019 I, 840: 'Opere del Piano Regolatore da attuare nel quaddriennio 1936–41', 9.12.1937.
36. ACS, SPD, 174.330: Brasini to Mussolini, n.d.
37. ACS, MPI, 36, Minutes of meeting, 16.5.1935; SPD, 500.019 I, 840: PCM to Prefects, 25.7.1933.
38. ACS, SPD, 500.019 I, 840: Boncompagni Ludovisi to Mussolini, 30.8.1934.
39. ACS, SPD, 509.428: Boncompagni Ludovisi, 'Appunto per il 'Duce', 20.7.1934.
40. ACS, SPD, 509.428: Report by Morpurgo on the progress of demolitions, 1938 (no specific date).
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52. ACS, SPD, 500.019 I, 841: Colonna to SPD, 26.5.1937.
53. ACS, SPD, 500.019 I, 839: Lateran Pacts, Agreement on extra-territorial possessions of the Vatican State.
54. ACS, SPD, 7583: (Spaccarelli to Mussolini, 4.1932); and 7538: (Spaccarelli to Mussolini, 14.7.1934).
55. ACS, SPD, 7583: Spaccarelli to Mussolini, 7.3.1933.
56. ACS, SPD, 7583: Spaccarelli to Mussolini, 16.7.1934.
57. ACS, SPD, 500.019 I, 839: 'Commissione per l'esecuzione del Concordato del Laterano'.
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68. 'La decisione del Duce per la costruzione su Via dell'Impero della sede del Partito e della Mostra fascista', *Popolo d'Italia* 19/287 (2.12.1932): 1.
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