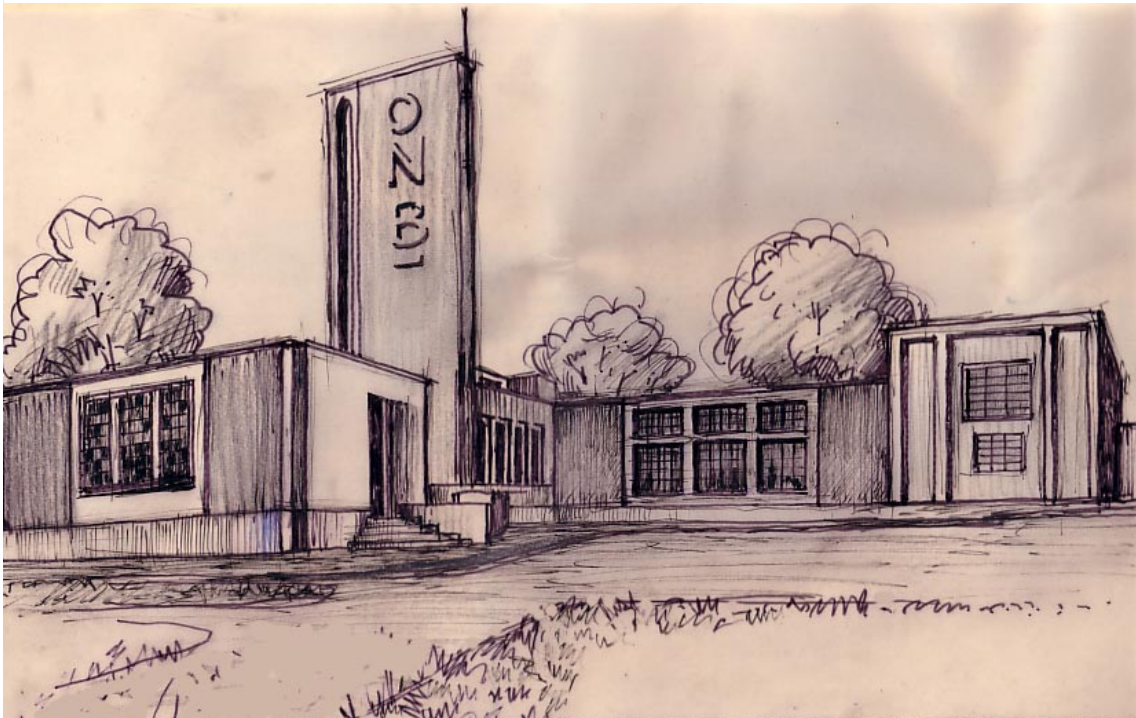


SABAUDIA 1934

materializing the fascist, corporate town



By Hanne Storm Ofteland

Thesis—Advisor: Einar Petterson

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VOLUME 2: PLATES

Abstract

The following dissertation looks into the town planning carried out by the Fascist regime in Italy during the 1930s, using the village of Sabaudia as its case study. Italian Fascist cultural policy was from the beginning marked by a strong dualism, a “pluralistic hegemony” as Marla Stone has called it. Thus both the past and the future were embraced by a regime eager to position itself as a system that suited everybody—both the old bourgeoisie and the brutes of the Fascist “revolution.”

According to the propaganda, Sabaudia—together with the other new towns, hamlets and farms in the Pontine Marshes—was an important brick in the government’s internal recolonization project. After World War I, the country was very much in need of new, hygienic dwellings for the people. The older housing was decaying, the population booming, and internal migrations from the countryside to the large cities was becoming an ever more pressuring problem that needed to be dealt with. The regime strongly promoted anti-urbanism as the way to go, wanting to move people back to the countryside, out of the enormous, polluted cities where too large crowds of unemployed workers were considered a menace to society and order.

Sabaudia was intended as an example of how living should be in the *stato nuovo* that the Fascists were constructing. The new town would be a rural town, or really a rural center, co-dependent on other structures (hamlets and farms) within its own closed economic and social system—a model town for the corporate state. To inhabit the area, the Fascists wanted war veterans, but very many of the new colonists were in reality troublesome anti-fascists, nominated to be sent south to a new destiny in the Pontine Marshes by local authorities in the north, grasping the opportunity to get rid of unwanted elements in their own society.

The main problems discussed here are: First, the negotiation between an avant-garde group of architects (representants of the rationalist style, an Italian version of functionalism), eager to test out new ideas regarding town planning, buildings, dwellings, etc., and a more complex patron, the Fascist state, here represented by the *Opera Nazionale dei Combattenti*, in search of an expression that at the same time would emanate tradition (*Italianità* and *Romanità*), be a modern town of the 20th century, as well as fulfill all the functions demanded of it within its own socio-economic system. The Fascists also meant for Sabaudia to be a show case, both for the Italian people, as well as for foreign countries. Even though the architects gave the town a modern appearance, a closer look at the system reveals many similarities with the *latifundium* and *colonia* systems of Ancient Rome. Secondly, the dissertation looks into the question of how the town was received by the public, both at home and abroad, and by the government.

This is the first comprehensive art historical study of Sabaudia, and a lot of work has been done to correct faulty information found in different sources, to ensure a reliable work that can be consulted by those who want a reliable, complete text on the topic.

Preface

“The great moment is not sounded at all hours or on all clocks. The wheel of destiny turns. The wise man is the vigilant man who grasps the moment as it passes before him... If I succeed, if Fascism succeeds, in molding the character of Italians as I wish, you may rest easy in the certainty that when the wheel of destiny is within grasp of our hands, we will be ready to seize it and bend it to our will.”

– B. Mussolini, address on the seventh anniversary of the founding of Fascism, March 26, 1926.¹

Art and architecture have always been used as political tools, to emphasize the ruling class and its wishes, to sell its dreams and visions to a people. To see art and architecture simply as beautiful objects made just for pleasure is, mildly put, quite naïve. In these forms of expression the values of either artist or the one commissioning the artwork (or both at the same time) can be traced. Artworks are traditionally and since ancient times carriers of deep symbolic and spiritual meanings. In architecture, in addition to the architect’s ideas, the buildings will always express something on behalf of the client or patron, and, if this is a very powerful man, party, or group, they will normally express some kind of power and prosperity. This is traditionally done by simple features like size, symmetry, axuality, and ornament, and it is a practice that can be traced back to ancient civilizations.

My special concern in the field of art history is the study of art and power, urban planning and architecture—the manifestations of power through art, as well as the question of to what degree an artist submits to his patron, and how large degree of freedom he has in the execution of his works. Architecture, and to a greater extent city planning, is a costly artform requiring a patron—an artform that controls the lives of of a third party, ordinary people. This constitutes the more or less hidden agenda of the patron where he seeks to subjugate art for his own purposes. The political relevance of the control of the public space is particularly interesting in the study of Fascist town planning projects. This relevance reveals the Fascist building activities in Italy as a gigantic undertaking of class control through relocating whole groups of people. A macabre attempt to erect a neo-feudal society with its corporations controlling all

¹ Cited in: Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996) 79.

trades and state union activity was undertaken. The development of the towns in the Pontine Marshes is a suitable study illustrating this project as it plays out in the relationship between the patron and the architect.

The Pontine Marshes constitute one of the major land developments carried out by the Fascist regime. The town of Sabaudia, one out of five “rural centers” (i.e. towns) to be erected in the Pontine Marshes, is particularly interesting because this town holds in its aesthetic present space the paradoxes of the Fascist regime’s reluctance to choose a party architectural, monumental style. These paradoxes are: 1) The tension between historical styles resulting from a rationalist style being superimposed on a quasi-Roman structure. The regime’s adaptation of both modernism and Italy’s ancient history as means of creating a new art, an “art of our time” as Mussolini put it at this turning point in Fascist history. After the regime consolidated its powers, it no longer needed the support and energy of the anarchist, futurist front guard. Instead they sought support from the former “enemy”, the Italian bourgeoisie and upper classes with their “Roman” taste (industrialists, factory owners, and old families). 2) Also interesting is the construction of several new towns under the guise of an anti-urban ideology. The regime had proclaimed the large metropolises the root of all evil, the place where moral decay began, and wanted to idyllize life in the countryside, blending arcadian Roman farming patterns with the rhetoric of futurism. The Pontine towns therefore were consistently, on Mussolini’s direct order, referred to as “rural centers” and no industry was planned—something that was to bring about an economical disaster, and which led to a later militarizing of Sabaudia to re-energize the failed projections of the planned modernist “garden-city-fascist-idyll-tourist-leisure-rural” center.

No exhaustive art historical study on Sabaudia has been brought forward. This study attempts to survey a large portion of the available material scattered around in other contexts pertaining to Fascist studies and art history. In addition I wish to contribute to the Sabaudia studies what I consider long overdue; the strong currents of cross-breeding modernist and Roman ideas all the way from the planning stage to the guiding principles of the competition text, and thereby hoping to correct the underestimation of the concept of Sabaudia as in continuity with Ancient Rome.

In addition to the thesis proper I have constructed a homepage presenting some of the results from my work on the architecture of Sabaudia. It was published on Internet in August

1999, my goal was to see if it might be possible to communicate my work and get in touch with other people interested in the same subject, with the intention of sharing information.² It seems to have been well received. Responses and questions have come in from people (mostly students and scholars) from Norway, Italy, Canada, Poland, Sweden, UK, Greece, South-Africa, the U.S.A., Denmark, Israel, and the Netherlands, and the counter on my page shows that it has been accessed more than 3,200 times since it was put on the Internet. In connection with the works laid out on this page, in February 1999 a database was constructed for the purpose of making available my extensive bibliography on the subject “*Italian Fascist Art and Architecture*.” At the present time it numbers hundreds of entries, sorted alphabetically after author. It has been available as a text file on the WWW since June 1999 and is continuously updated.³

² URL: <<http://welcome.to/Sabaudia>>.

³ Since it is too big to be published as an appendix, I will just give the URL:
<http://www.geocities.com/stormhouse.geo/litt_ref.htm>.

Acknowledgments

As we all know, Rome was not built in one day. And it certainly was not built by one woman alone. Neither was this thesis. During my work on it many people have assisted me in different ways, and I wish to thank the following:

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My dear, loving husband, Professor *Jan Valentin Sæther*, has been by my side through every phase of this work. He has done most of the photographing, helped me with the English whenever that was required, and being an artist, seen and pointed out artistic aspects that I as a layman would not have thought of.

Since Norwegian library collections are limited in this scope of studies, the access to literature and primary sources has proven both difficult and at times expensive. In addition, I would therefore like to thank the following for providing me with useful information, articles, and books: *Gianbattista Ciccotti* (Rome), *Enrico G. Botta* (architectural student, University of Venice), Signora *Maria Luisa Iodice* (Sabaudia), Professor *Mario Tieghi* (Sabaudia), Cand. Philol. *Elin Kristine Haugdal* (Tromsø), *The Italian Cultural Institute in London*, and *The Institute for Aesthetics, NTNU* (Trondheim).

Professor *Mario Tieghi*, Councillor for Culture, Sabaudia Town Council, and the Director of the Sabaudia Civic Library, Dr. *Daniela Carfagna*, and the rest of the staff there have been most helpful, granting me the privilege of being the first to go through their collection of newspapers from the period, keeping the library open for me alone, and otherwise assisting me in my research.

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1. Introduction

*“Crederè!
Obbedire!
Combattere!”⁴*

1.1 Disposition

In chapter 2 Italian Fascism is contextualized and explored together with the ideas about the *corporate state* and its foundations. I also give a brief introduction to the cult and the myths of the regime.

Chapter 3 begins with a brief outlining of the reclamation and resettlement of the Pontine Marshes, hereunder also a short description of the hierarchical infrastructure in the marshes, with its farms, hamlets, and towns. Then follows a presentation of Sabaudia’s history from architectural competition to inauguration before the town plan and different buildings are presented. I will undertake an art historical analyzis and presentation of each building type, as well as the whole town structure. This is the first complete survey of the original Sabaudia, presenting every edifice, and I have therefore included an extensive picture catalogue with plan drawings, project drawings and photos of each building (when available).⁵

The architects’ relation to the regime—and their different motives—is the main topic for chapter 4. Here I will first argue that the architectural project of Sabaudia—like so many other of the regime’s urban projects—was a tool for manipulating and controlling the new settlers of the area. In Sabaudia were to live the party functionaries and others providing necessary services to the local population. Thus, it would be the perfect display of a functional, modern town to show the world. Architecture was an excellent means to promote Fascism. Two of the regime’s main ideas, were the historical idea about the rebirth of the Roman Empire, and their seductive futurist visions. Through city planning these ideas could be carried out in practice and disseminated to the people. Forming a townshape *ex novo* provided the regime with the possibility to control the movements and actions of the town’s inhabitants, e.g. by locating the regime’s own buildings alongside the squares. The corporate town was furthermore organized in a strict hierarchical way, the

⁴ “Believe – Obey – Fight!” was the motto of the Fascist youth organization, the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*.

⁵ Unfortunately, not all images are of the high quality I would have liked to present here. I have retouched

placement of the buildings following their degree of importance. The patron's demands can be read out of the guidelines provided in the competition brief. Second, I will discuss the relationship between the patron and architects; in what ways did the ideas diverge or converge? Hereunder I will also take a closer look at Sabaudia as a town, both modern and "Roman" at the same time. I will point out the Roman aspects of Sabaudia and the whole area, as well as in the society that was to function there. The town's place in a modern European architectural debate will also be investigated. What architectural and urban theories did the architects draw on? The architects working for the regime were deployed to carry out a propagandic linking between the Roman grip, modernism, and social politics including housing issues. Were they working to realize the same goal? And what was that goal?

The reception Sabaudia got, abroad and at home, in the ranks of government and among the architects, will be discussed in chapter 5. The architecture of Sabaudia provoked strong feelings and a lively debate in which both members of parliament, Mussolini himself, and the Italian architects participated. An attempt at fitting the town into contemporary European architectural theories will also be carried out here.

Chapter 6 sums up and tries to give a conclusion on the different paths followed in this dissertation.

1.2 Research History

The architecture and city planning of the Fascists were long neglected as research topics. Not too proud of the recent past, subjects related to Fascism were ignored, and the monuments were left to decay. No doubt is this historical past a part of the inaccuracies in a field of conflicting information that makes research surveyable only with some difficulty. How to sort the apologetic from the historical facts. How to know what sources are derived from other sources that again are built on these inaccuracies and augmented by well-wishers out to whitewash the architecture clean of the politics. On the particular subject of Sabaudia it can hardly be said that a standard of high scholarship has been established, although comments and original observations is found here and there among writers researching Fascism, power, patronage and architecture in this Italian era. Though the general tendency to view the town of Sabaudia from an architectural perspective and paring this up with the general functionalism and modern architecture of Europe in general

some of them digitally, but some of the "originals" I have used are of poor archive quality.

has interesting facets, it nevertheless misses the point that this modernist current is merely an appropriation limited in scope and time to suit some more august underlying currents: neo-feudalism implemented by way of the corporate community, expropriation of vast land areas, and control over the movements and way of life of the population.

In order to clarify the particular field of study regarding Sabaudia it might be helpful to the reader to present a survey of existing elements of its research history.

Not until the late 1960s did researchers start investigating themes related to Fascism.

There are no major satisfying works about Sabaudia from an art historical point of view. With the exception of the contemporary architectural criticism of the 1930s, no real indications of these underlying intentions emerge clearly from later writings on the topic. Most of the research are only partially covered and are missing the pieces required to state some suggestions as to Sabaudia's relationship to ideology, phenomenology, and its social history interpreted through the buildings such as it emerges in its early, pre-war stages. In the following I will present a systematically organized catalogue of existing research. Titles marked with an asterisk (*) are unavailable through the normal university library systems and would require access to library collections in Italy which lays beyond time and means considered appropriate for the task of this scope.

Contemporary Press Coverage (Newspapers and Scholarly Press)

From competition to inauguration, the press reported to the Italian people every little bit of information that the government released regarding the new town of Sabaudia. The regime's propaganda machinery did a thorough job, starting with the competition text, "Bando di concorso del piano regolatore di Sabaudia," published in *L'Architettura* May 1933. This was followed by numerous articles about the exhibition of the competition entries, about the laying of the foundation stone, and in the winter of 1933 reports came as *il Duce* visited the construction site. The press also covered the inauguration, as well as the first threshing later in the summer of 1934 when Mussolini again visited Sabaudia, so to speak with his blessings on the town. The last wave of propaganda and news coverage came around the completion of the last public structures, including the church in February 1935. These were very important events in the regimes eyes, and it is apparent that there were both a central strategy involved and a willingness to meet the expenditures of the coverage.

During this period Sabaudia was also discussed in different Italian architectural fora. They featured long articles by Marcello Piacentini (“Sabaudia,” *Architettura* June 1934), Luigi Piccinato (“Il significato urbanistico di Sabaudia,” *Urbanistica* January 1934⁶; and “Nuovi edifici a Sabaudia,” *Architettura* Sept. 1935), and * Giuseppe Pensabene (“Il piano regolatore di Sabaudia, come nasce un centro abitato,” *Tevere* 27 July 1933; and “Sabaudia,” *La Casa Bella* Oct. 1933). Piacentini’s article mentioned above is by far the most exhaustive treatment of the town’s architecture, discussing in detail both the town’s composition of architectural elements and the style of buildings (the Town Hall, Fascist party headquarters, Offices for workers’ club, unions, Cinema/Theater, Hotel, Religious Complex, Covered Market, MVSN and Carabinieri Barracks, as well as Housing). He particularly contextualized Sabaudia in relation to the demands for a Fascist modern town, – the “rural center”:

“Cities must not be allowed to grow into enormous and absurd enclosed mechanisms surrounded by uninhabited landscapes: the surrounding countryside must itself become more populated and fertile, filled with small urban settlements. For this reason a different form of urban planning – a rural planning – has developed, whose open and linear morphology is rightly contrasted to traditional city planning. Sabaudia is in fact an excellent example of modern rural planning.”⁷

Furthermore, foreign press as well as architects showed interest in the project.⁸ As early as in 1930 the Rumanian *Cuvantul* reported on the “Miracle of Littoria.” Other parts of the Rumanian press (the *Universul*, the *Lumea Noua*, and the *Calendarul*) the same year, reported on the new town which was impressively constructed in one year. How 30,000 hectares of land were reclaimed and converted into arable land.

In 1931 the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* published the first foreign press article known on the inception of the draining of the Pontine Marshes. On November 2 the same year, the little Parisian newspaper *Temps* printed an article on the scientific aspects of the draining project. Once again, in 1932, *Temps* returned to the theme, and impressed by the spectacular land reclamation reported on the enormous work force and high cost invested in the project by the Fascist regime. This by and large sums up the major themes reported in the foreign press in the years 1930–33: The science, the land reclamation, the cost, the magnitude, the miracle, the modern, the labor, new living patterns, and the inauguration of the new town of Littoria, named after the lictors (magistrates’ bodyguards and carriers of

⁶ An English translation of this article is to be found in the exhibition catalogue *Sabaudia 1933: Città nuova fascista*, ed. Richard Burdett (London: Architectural Association, 1981) 13–15.

⁷ Marcello Piacentini, “Sabaudia,” trans. Richard Burdett, Burdett 20.

⁸ This information is taken from: Vittorio Briani, *Sabaudia da plaga malarica a città giardino* (Latina–Cori: Ed. Etic Grafica, 1989) 56–61.

fasces) of Ancient Rome, and constructed in such a short timespan.⁹ An overview of locations and their point of origin is listed in appendix V.

Sabaudia was also thoroughly covered by articles in *The Times*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Express*, just to mention a few.¹⁰ The French journalist Pierre Vago published the article, “Sabaudia: Cancellotti, Montuori, Piccinato et Scalpelli, architectes” in *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui* 7 (1934). The typical article told the public about the new, Fascist tourist attraction situated in picturesque environments, about the realization of Mussolini’s agrar politics, and about the speed with which the town was constructed. Le Corbusier visited Littoria and Sabaudia in 1934, and published his impressions and criticisms in the article “La ferme radieuse,” *Prélude* 14 (1934).

Local History

* G. Fichera wrote *Venticinquesimo della città di Sabaudia, 1934–1959* (Sabaudia: n.p., 1959) on the occasion of the town’s 25th anniversary.

* In 1975 F. Ianella wrote *Il Territorio pontino e la fondazione di Sabaudia* (Lazio ieri e oggi: Rome).

G. Fichera published the booklet *Sabaudia... primo amore*, a book of more value for the local historian than for the art historian (Latina: n.p., 1984). It outlines events in the town’s history from the foundation to the 1980s, with introductions of some of the local dignitaries.

Sabaudia nella storia by Katia Franchini and Feliciano Ianella (Rome: n.p., 1984) gives a short description of the draining of the Pontine Marshes as well as brief texts on some of the buildings in Sabaudia, and a one page essay on Italian rational architecture. The main value of this publication is its inclusion of rare illustrations and photos from the 1930s, and it is therefore quite useful since this information is hard to find in other sources.

R. Nicolini and T. Mirabella’s book, *Architettura delle ‘Città Nuove’* (Latina: L’Argonauta, 1989) is also interesting for containing good photographs, new and old, both from Littoria and Sabaudia.

Vittorio Briani’s *Sabaudia da plaga malarica a città giardino* (Latina–Cori: Ed. Etic Grafica, 1989) is another brief history summing up the events regarding the construction and inauguration of Sabaudia, as well as some of its prehistory. It is valuable for its thorough

⁹ After the downfall of Fascism, Littoria was renamed Latina.

¹⁰ Briani 57.

documentation of the press coverage in the foreign press in the 1930s. (See Appendix v for a summary.)

The most recent contribution to the field is Mario Tieghi's collection of interviews with original inhabitants of both Sabaudia, the *borghi* (hamlets) and the farms, *Sabaudia: storia viva di una città nei racconti dei protagonisti* (N.p.: Il Gabbiano, 1999). Tieghi's contribution is unique to his position as a local historian with an overview and access to a generation that is dying out. His interviews were perhaps the last chance to capture these testimonies.

Local antiquarian in Sabaudia, Alfredo Urbinati has, together with Marcello Trabucco, published an entire book reproducing postcards of the town throughout history—an excellent and very useful review of pictures with a historical coloration (*Saluti da Sabaudia: La cartolina come memoria storica* [Latina: Arti Grafiche Archimio, 1999]).

Art Historical Surveys

Except for an entry in the * *Dizionario di Architettura e Urbanistica*, 1969 ed. and a brief mention in * L. Benevolo's *Storia dell'Architettura Moderna* (Bari: n.p., 1960) little research was published on Sabaudia in the 1960s.

Enrico Mantero and Claudio Bruni discusses the new towns in the Pontine Marshes, among other projects, briefly in their article “Alcune questioni di pratica professionale nel ventennio fascista” (published in: *Il razionalismo e l'architettura in Italia durante il fascismo*, ed.s Silvia Danesi and Luciano Patetta [Venice: Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia, 1976]). The article investigates the building projects of the regime, and points out two important informations regarding the Pontine Marshes and Sabaudia; First, the Opera Nazionale Combattenti's expropriation of huge land areas (60% of the land) from small farmers, and second, by examining the composition of the jury for the architectural competition for Sabaudia (with Giovannoni, Fasolo and La Padula) that the regime actually intended for this town to have a modern, rationalist look.

The most thoroughgoing text on Sabaudia from the 1970s, however, is R. Mariani's *Fascismo e Città nuove* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976) in which the author critically examines the policy of demography by the Fascist regime, outlining the motives for its antiurban politics (intellectual sources of inspiration such as Oswald Spengler's and Gustave Le Bon's anti-urban ideas, and the close connection between high disoccupation and the draining and building projects). Several pages are dedicated to Sabaudia. However, the book's scope

tends more towards sociology than art history—even though it provides the art historian with vital information.

* R. Martinelli and L. Nuti wrote an article on the new towns of the 1920s: “Le città nuove del ventennio da Mussolinia a Carbonia,” *Le città di nuova fundazione*, ed.s R. Martinelli and L. Nuti (Venice: n.p., 1978).

Another important article on the new towns from 1978 is Henry A. Millon’s “Some New Towns in Italy in the 1930s.” (*Art and Architecture in the Service of Politics*, ed.s, Henry A. Millon and Linda Nochlin [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press].) It illustrates the effect which changing political conditions had on architecture and urban planning, using the Pontine towns for its case study. Millon examines the difference the architectural character made on the town planning in Littoria, Sabaudia, and Pontinia, compared to the noticeable change in building form in the later towns of Aprilia and Pomezia seen in parallel with “*an alteration in official policy that can be traced in Italian architectural publications.*”¹¹

In *Urbanistica fascista: Ricerche e saggi sulla città e sulle politiche urbane in Italia tra le due guerre*, edited by Alberto Mioni (Milan: Franco Angelli, 1980), various aspects of Italian Fascist urban politics are elucidated, e.g. legislation, and administration.

* Cesare De Seta wrote the article “L’ambiguità del regime e la nuova committenza: Sabaudia e la Stazione di Firenze” published in: *L’architettura del Novecento: Storia dell’Arte in Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981) 70–74.

In Giorgio Ciucci’s essay “Il dibattito sull’architettura e le città fasciste,” published in *Storia dell’arte italiana: Parte seconda: Dal Medioevo al Novecento*, ed. Federico Zeri, vol. 3 (Turin: Einaudi, 1982), the regulation plan and spatial articulation in Sabaudia is mentioned briefly.

The German art historian Margrit Estermann-Juchler compares the housing projects of the regime to its official prestigious monuments in terms of economy and dimensions in her doctoral dissertation from 1980, *Faschistische Staatsbaukunst: Zur ideologischen Funktion der öffentlichen Architektur im faschistischen Italien*, diss., U Zürich, 1980, *Dissertationen zur Kunstgeschichte* 15 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1982). Through a close scrutiny of these two different building categories Estermann-Juchler uncovers a regime not by far as willing to solve housing for the people, – as the social profile and propaganda of the Fascist state indicate. Most housing programs were of base standards, one of the very few exceptions being Sabaudia. However, she does not examine *what* segment of the population was to

¹¹ Henry A. Millon, “Some New Towns in Italy in the 1930s,” *Art and Architecture in the Service of Politics*, ed.s Henry A. Millon and Linda Nochlin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978) 332.

inhabit the town—a very important factor in explaining its high quality standard, as I shall attempt to demonstrate in this thesis.

* K. Forster and D. Ghirardo published the essay “I modelli delle città di fondazione in epoca fascista” in *Storia d'Italia – Annali 8 Insediamenti e territorio* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985).

Giorgio Ciucci's book *Gli architetti e il fascismo: architettura e città 1922–1944* (Turin: Einaudi, 1989) draws heavily upon his essay from 1982, mentioned above. Regarding Sabaudia, the interesting information here is his point about a close relationship between Piacentini and the architects who won the competition for Sabaudia (especially Piccinato and Montuori).

Diane Ghirardo has written an outstanding contribution to the Sabaudia studies, *Building New Communities: New Deal America and Fascist Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989). The chapter “Italian New Towns” investigates Mussolini's urban politics, and its historical context to a survey of the different projects discussed. She points out the usage of history through particular historical references, such as Roman and medieval, both evident in the Fascist New Towns. Ghirardo's most valuable contribution is perhaps to have pointed out how the Fascist government controlled the population by means of the architecture, e.g. by omitting to provide spaces for spontaneous, unmonitored gatherings of people.

Lars Marcus makes use of Saussure's semiotic model *S/s* in “Sabaudia i det modernas skugga” (*Arkitektur* 8 [1995]). His point of departure is reality and picture, or rationality and rhetorics:

“Thus we have two towns, representing two sides of the modern: we can call them the rational and the rhetorical, originating from the same time, but constituting two varieties of built reality. The rational views itself as having unveiled the pictures and the appearances and succeeded in reducing the town to manageable units and quantities that can be reshaped and put together in new and more expedient structures. The rhetorical side instead looks at the picture and tries to improve it and render it suitable for achieving premeditated effects.”¹²

It is interesting that he applies Saussure's semiotics, as in where “S” is the signifier (*signifiant*), and “s” is the signified (*signifié*). All signs consist of two parts, the signifier or the one we see and perceive as the sign, but to be significant it needs to describe something, that something is the signified. Thus the letter “A” signifies the sound *A* that we use in our everyday speech. The sign “A” would not be understandable unless we had the habit to put it together with the signifying sound *A*. The two parts of the sign do not make sense before they are put together. According to Marcus then: “*What separates Sabaudia from*

¹² Lars Marcus, “Sabaudia i det modernas skugga,” *Arkitektur* 8 (1995): 8.

modernism's other towns then, would be an accentuation of the S instead of the s; the signifier (signifiant) before the signified (signifié)."¹³ He then goes romantic and compares Sabaudia to De Chirico's metaphysical paintings (*plate 97*)—something Giuseppe Pasquali did some fifteen years earlier than him, but without any reference to Pasquali—and reaching the same conclusion; that Sabaudia, like De Chirico's paintings, is a dream landscape or a metaphysical or surrealist town. He rounds it off with perceiving Sabaudia and the surrounding towns as expressions of their goal: "*in every detail they were to look like towns, but not to function as such. The town as scenography, and the regime as director, it only remained for the inhabitants to play their parts as best they could.*"¹⁴

Eva Nodin also dedicates a couple of pages of her doctoral dissertation on children's colonies in Fascist Italy, *Estetisk pluralism och disciplinerande struktur*, diss., U Gothenburg, 1999, Gothenburg Studies in Art and Architecture 5 (Gothenburg: Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1999), to Sabaudia. Here she briefly summarizes the research on Sabaudia up to the present date. In an article the year before her dissertation, "Erövringen av jorden – nyanlagda städer i Italien under fascismens era," *Humanistdag-boken* 11 (1998): 311–319, much of the same information is referenced.

Two unpublished essays, both titled "Sabaudia," by Enrico G. Botta, in a course on architecture at the University of Venice, Italy, in 1994/95 and 1995/96 to be highly valuable as Botta attempts to unmask the intention underlying the whole Pontine project, pointing out how the new farmers were actually treated more or less like "serfs" by "feudal lords" (my expressions). Unfortunately he did not include neither bibliography nor notes in his text.

Exhibition Catalogues

In the 1980s and '90s an ever increasing amount of publications on Italian Fascist architecture was published, among these several exhibition catalogues. G. Pasquali and P. Pinna edited the very useful catalogue *Sabaudia, documenti di una città fondata* for an exhibition arranged by the Comune di Sabaudia in 1980 (Sabaudia: Comune di Sabaudia). Here articles and parts of articles from the 1930s are reprinted, as well as several of the blueprints for the buildings.

¹³ Marcus 9.

¹⁴ Marcus 13.

Another little exhibition catalogue, this one from 1981, *Sabaudia 1933: Città Nuova Fascista* (London: Architectural Association), contains essays by both Pasquali (“Notes on Rationalism and Metaphysics”) and Pinna (“Rationalism and Building Typology in Sabaudia”), as well as an introduction by Richard Burdett, and small excerpts from Italian articles about the town (from Piacentini’s article from 1934 to Giorgio Ciucci’s article from 1976). Burdett gives a brief overview of the Italian situation in the 1930s, putting Sabaudia into context as both a propaganda act, but also as an expression of the regime’s intention of de-urbanization and the ideal of ruralization, as they believed in “*the moral degradation caused by urbanisation and a need for the rebirth of traditional ethical and racial values based on the patriarchal family and an attachment to the productive soil,*” inspired as they were by the ideas of among others the influential German philosopher Oswald Spengler.¹⁵ Pasquali in his essay presents the Roman architectural milieu of the 1930s, showing the power of the architects connected to the political establishment of Italian state architecture (Giovannoni, Piacentini, Del Debbio, Fasolo, Foschini, Calza Bini, Morpurgo, and Brasini), and how they oppressed the young rationalists who took part in MIAR. Regarding Sabaudia, he sees the presence of two markedly different architectural trends:

*“On the one hand the typological, structural and formal characteristics of the main buildings are clearly influenced by ‘rationalism’, on the other hand, its ‘novecento’ influence reaffirms the original values of Italian art and experiments in the use of modern forms as an interpretation of the age. It is a process of understanding tradition in order to reestablish permanent values. This duality is one of the most interesting and original architectural features of Sabaudia.”*¹⁶

Pasquali finds that “*the spatial quality of the major public works is fundamentally ambiguous and formally enigmatic recalling the ‘metaphysical city of De Chirico and Carrà which refers to a form of rationalism out of all proportion with time and space’.*”¹⁷ Sabaudia embodies both the rationalist and the metaphysical “spirits” of the age, “*blended in such a way that the rationalist spatial organisation is permeated by the dreamlike images of De Chirico, Carrà, Savinio and Sironi.*” And Sabaudia’s spatial organization is characterized precisely by this “*abstract and complex beauty, both rational and metaphysical, which permeates the built environment expressing a feeling of serene tranquility.*”¹⁸ Pinna’s article, as the title indicates, looks at Sabaudia as a rationalist town. He compares Sabaudia to the architectural program of the *Gruppo 7*, the founders of Italian rationalism. In the period 1926–27 they presented their ideas for the new architecture:

¹⁵ Richard Burdett, “Sabaudia: an introduction,” Burdett 2.

¹⁶ Giuseppe Pasquali, “Notes on rationalism and metaphysics,” Burdett 7.

¹⁷ Pasquali, “Notes,” Burdett 7.

¹⁸ Pasquali, “Notes,” Burdett 8.

“claiming an ‘internationalisation’ for industrial buildings types such as workshops, silos and dockyards, but that ‘other architectural elements must retain a national character regardless of the most absolute modernity of architectural form.’”¹⁹ He then examines the different buildings in Sabaudia and concludes that “*Sabaudia’s* rationalist layout therefore faithfully reflects the theoretical principles of the ‘Gruppo 7’.”²⁰

Another exhibition catalogue on Sabaudia was published a few years later, also this one edited by Giuseppe Pasquali and Pasquale Pinna, is *Sabaudia 1933–34* (Milan: Electa, 1985). In addition to the reprinting of several of the articles on Sabaudia, blueprints and photos, are two essays: The first, “L’architettura di una città fondata” by Giuseppe Pasquali examines Sabaudia from a stylistical and ideological point of view, and sees the town in its contemporary context. He also provides some background information about the architects. The other essay, Alfredo Passeri’s “Le case di Sabaudia” presents the different types of housing in Sabaudia to the reader.

In 1994 the Österreichischen Bundesministeriums für Wissenschaft und Forschung published a two volume catalogue on the occasion of the exhibition *Kunst und Diktatur* in the Künstlerhaus Wien. In it, among several articles on different topics relating to the theme, is published Riccardo Mariani’s “Littoria, Sabaudia, Aprilia...: Die Stadtgründungen im faschistischen Italien,” *Kunst und Diktatur*, ed. Jan Tabor, vol. 2 (Baden: Grasl Verlag, 1994). The essay examines the Italian Fascist government’s urbanism—their words and actions—by using the example of the draining and resettling of the Pontine Marshes. Mariani finds this to be a total fiasco and a project that devastated many lives: The government wanted to resettle loyal Fascist war veterans on the newly constructed farms in the area, but what they got were unwanted antifascists from the north, and hardly any of them had any farming experience whatsoever. In this thesis I will argue against this point, as I find the new farmers to be made up of exactly the group of people the government wanted there: Thus they could transfer unwanted groups (often socialist) to remote areas where they were fooled into unfair contracts and more or less placed in isolation. He also calls attention to the area’s original population: Somewhat 20,000 people were driven out of their homes in the swamps, and also lost their source of income without any alternative solution being planned for them. The article also discusses Italy as a part of an international trend at the time, as the ideas of Agricultural Reform and giving the land to those who

¹⁹ Pasquale Pinna, “Rationalism and Building Typology in Sabaudia,” Burdett 9.

²⁰ Pinna, “Rationalism,” Burdett 11. The Gruppo 7 consisted of Ubaldo Castagnoli, Luigi Figini, Guido

would work it was a slogan embraced by almost all economically developed countries finding themselves at the time in a crisis. Mariani also poses the question to what degree the Fascist ideology really is recognizable in the urban shapes of the first two towns, Littoria and Sabaudia. Structurally seen, there is an element of absolute consensus as both plans takes into consideration the same set of ideological rules, that can be transmitted to the functional plan through the clear placing of squares and thus also the towns' traffic. The ideological pretext is the use of corporatism as economical and political system, and from this the reproduction of the medieval town models can be derived, using architectonical features such as the medieval tower for instance. Regarding Sabaudia's rationalist coating, he finds it to be a surface rationalism, since the town hall tower is the key to the town plan, and windows are not proportionated according to function. However, as I suggest in chapter 5.1.3, the statements of Gruppo 7 regarding rationalism as a style are wide enough to incorporate both functional and strictly aesthetical features.

Eugenio Lo Sardo edited the bilingual exhibition catalogue *Divina geometria: modelli urbani degli anni trenta: Asmara, Addis Abeba, Harar, Olettà, Littoria, Sabaudia, Pontinia, borgbi*, 2nd ed. (Siena: Maschietto&Musolino, 1995) together with Maria Luisa Boccia. The exhibition was organized by the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali and the Ufficio Centrale per i Beni Archivistici and shown both in Italy and in some of the former Italian colonies. Of importance to the study of Sabaudia in this catalogue, is first and foremost a reprint of engineer and director of the works on Sabaudia, Dino Malossi's account for the town, "Progetto del centro comunale di Sabaudia – relazione dell'ing. Dino Malossi del 1 gennaio 1934" (unfortunately only in Italian). It is a detailed report on different structures realized, materials used, etc.

In 1998–99 the Comune di Sabaudia organized an exhibition on the town's 65th anniversary. It has been shown in London, France, and Sabaudia so far, and a large catalogue was published on the occasion (*Sabaudia, 1934: Il sogno di una città nuova e l'architettura razionalista*, ed.s Giorgio Muratore, Daniela Carfagna, and Mario Tieghi (Sabaudia: Comune di Sabaudia, 1998).²¹ The essays in it are published both in English and Italian.

Frette, Sebastiano Larco, Gino Pollini, Carlo Enrico Rava and Giuseppe Terragni.

²¹ The renowned Fascist historian, Roger Griffin writes a both thought-provoking and at the same time amusing comment to the exhibitions of Sabaudia's town plan and buildings: "Yet ... there are signs that the Fascist past has still not been 'mastered' (or in recent studio terms, 'remastered') sufficiently to allow a steady gaze to be trained on its cultural legacy. Otherwise why should the exhibition called 'Sabaudia Città Nuova Fascista' when it was held at the Architectural Association's London headquarters in 1982 have become 'Sabaudia, Dream of a New City' when it was restaged

Reprints (articles, letters, etc.)

Claudio Galeazzi's *Sabaudia: Quando la cronaca diventa storia* (Latina: Novecento, 1998)—a collection of newspaper articles from the 1930s, as well as some other materials from the period, among other things the letters from the architects to Mussolini regarding the height of the Town Hall tower, is priceless as a source.

A book that I unfortunately have not been able to lay my hands on, is * Alessandra Muntoni's *Sabaudia (Latina): Atlante storico* (1988). From what I understand, it too reprints some original materials from the 1930s. The exhibition catalogues for Sabaudia mentioned above, also reprint several articles and parts of articles from the 1930s.

Where Now? A Few Words on Scope and Methodology

My own contribution to the research field is tripartite: 1) I have collected the material available, synthesized the information and made a complete presentation of Sabaudia as it was originally planned and carried out in 1933–35, something that has never been done before. Errors I have found in other texts have been corrected. Thus this dissertation is a reliable source. 2) I have tinted my “art history glasses” with a sociological coloring and looked at the power relationship between the patron (the state) and the client (the architects), as well as between the state and the new inhabitants in the area, and 3) I have looked at the town plan with buildings and surrounding area, trying to find its sources of inspiration in modern and ancient town planning and history of ideas—with emphasis on the Roman Empire, as I have become convinced that Mussolini actually intended to build an ancient Roman town in modernist wrapping, (and launched with a futurist flurry of showmanship). Thus, the influence of the Roman Empire may be established, not just through the obvious use of a *cardo* and *decumanus*, but also through numerous more or less subtle borrowings from his distant Roman ideals. This again, is an attempt at realizing the corporate state, by means of specialized corporate towns and areas. This is a new approach to the town and the area, and it has not been discussed in earlier research.

a few miles away by the Italian Institute of Culture later? Its lavishly produced catalogue displayed a remarkable reticence about how deeply not just the aesthetics of the town's lay-out and architecture, but the very conception of building the town from scratch on reclaimed land, were rooted in the Fascist vision of the New Italy.” Roger Griffin, Notes towards the definition of fascist culture: the prospects for synergy between Marxist and liberal heuristics. 3 June 2001
<<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/schools/humanities/Roger/Synerg~1.doc>>. (Article for *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 1 [2001].)

My methodology is based on criticism of ideology, social history, and a phenomenological analysis of the architecture. This allows for a focus on the specifically ambivalent relationship between Fascist art and power, and on the co-dependent relationship between the patron, his architects, and the third party, presented by the people. The underlying platform upon which this thesis is constructed, are the ideas Michael Baxandall outlines in his book *Patterns of Intention*.²² Baxandall emphasizes the obvious questions any serious historian should always ask: “*Why at all, and why thus?*” He operates with the concepts of a *client* (the Fascist patron ONC) in need of something; of an *artist* (the architects) bestowed with certain qualities that makes him suitable for the task, both technically and aesthetically; of a *market* (or the French term “*tracé*” that he choses to use), and included in this market a *cultural setting* (the two last can be fused into the third party in this work: the Italian people, represented both by the general audience and by the new settlers that were to inhabit the new land). Due to the Fascists’ attempt to create a sacred state by making Fascism into a substitute for an ordinary religion, it is also necessary to look further into some questions concerning Fascist ideology of the sacred and architecture.

²² Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

2. Italian Fascism: Political and Ideological Context

On 28 October 1922 a new era began in Italy. A group of violent rebels from the north took control over the state, led by a man known as *il Duce*²³, Benito Mussolini. They called themselves Fascists.²⁴ What Fascist mythology later would refer to as the “March on Rome”²⁵ thus marked the beginning of a more than twenty year long dictatorship—a dictatorship that would in many ways radically transform Italy.

Mussolini had his background from the Socialist party. As the son of a socialist blacksmith and a schoolteacher in Predappio—a town close to Milan notorious for its rebelliousness and left-wing politics—there was nothing that indicated that he was destined to play such a fatal and devastating role in European history. The socialist Mussolini believed in revolutionary violence, antipatriotism, anticlericalism, and antimilitarism, and this put him squarely in the party’s left wing, and he soon became the editor of the socialist newspaper *Avanti!*. However, the outbreak of World War I was a major turning point in his political philosophy. He resigned from his post as editor after failing to influence the party’s policy of neutrality.²⁶ Somewhat later he was expelled. In 1914 Mussolini founded the newspaper *Popolo d’Italia*, in which he agitated for intervention on the *Entete* side, against Austria, and violently attacked neutralists. During the period 1915–17 he served as a draftee in the Italian army.

²³ “Duce” is Italian for “leader,” and the word was “one of the Roman neologisms ever more popular in the [Fascist] movement, derived from the Latin *dux*.” (Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–45* [Madison: Wisconsin UP, 1995] 102.) According to the Latin-Norwegian dictionary, “dux” means 1) “leader”; 2) “field commander,” and when used about the Caesar, it means “imperator.” (“Dux,” *Latinsk-norske ordbok*, 1998 ed.)

²⁴ The term “fascio” (plural “fasci”) has a history throughout the late 19th and early 20th century Italy. According to Payne it means band, union, or league, and different *fasci* had been organized by trade unions, middle-class radicals, or reformist peasants—in short, by radical sectors—since the 1870s. (Payne, *History of Fascism* 81.)

²⁵ But the so-called “March on Rome” was neither glorious nor bloody, as Simonetta Falasca Zamponi has shown. The take-over was peaceful, and the Fascists would never have succeeded had it not been for the King voluntarily bestowing Mussolini with the mandate to become the new prime minister of Italy. The blackshirts were few, and the leaders of the march held their headquarters in Perugia, one hundred miles away from Rome. “The fascist regime never accepted this historical account of its ascent to power. On the contrary, it elaborated its own interpretation of the march and always called the events of late October 1922 a ‘revolution.’” (Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997] 1–2.)

²⁶ Bruce F. Pauley, *Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini: Totalitarianism in the Twentieth Century* (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1997) 57.

After the end of the war Italy was not satisfied with the land settlements, as they thought Italy deserved a larger piece of the cake than what they had been offered.²⁷ On 12 September 1919 the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio, one of the leaders of the “glorious May days” and a man Mussolini admired strongly, took action: With the help of rebelling military units he invaded and occupied the city of Fiume, proclaiming Italy’s annexation of it (at that time part of Yugoslavia).²⁸ In Italy rebellions were breaking out. The country faced a social and political crisis: While Italy’s debit balance had been at ITL 214 million in 1913–14, after the war it had risen to the enormous amount of ITL 23,345 million. The factory workers had managed to keep their wages at a decent level during the war, but this was not the situation for the major part of Italian workers, that is small farmers, owners of small enterprises, and farm workers. These last groups had formed the soldier mass during the war, and in 1917 the ruling class had promised them land reforms. Naturally the workers were anxious to see that these promises were fulfilled.²⁹ Another problem steadily increasing was that of strikes. In 1919 there were 1,663 strikes in the industry and 208 in the agricultural sector (or 22 million work days lost).³⁰ With weak governments and a socialist movement steadily gaining ground among the factory workers, bourgeoisie Italy was ready for a “strong” man. On 23 March 1919 Mussolini founded the *Fasci di combattimento* (action union) in Milan. They declared war on the neutralists, and claimed the reintroduction of the republic, the right to vote for both sexes, the eight hour working day, and universal disarmament, among other things. But through their deeds the *Fasci di combattimento* soon showed their true colors. During a general strike in Milan on 15 April 1919, a column of Fascists set fire to the headquarters of the socialist newspaper *Avanti!*. Mussolini immediately took all responsibility for the fire.³¹ In the years 1920–21 the Fascist *squadristi*, financially supported both by the large industrial enterprises and by the agrarian sector, committed bloody massacres in Bologna, Ferrara, and Florence among other places. The socialists were their main enemy. During the elections in May 1921, 35 Fascists were elected. And in November 1921, the Fascist movement, consisting of 2,200 *fasci* and of

²⁷ Italy was offered Trentino and Trieste, something the “democrats” (represented by Bissolati and Salvemini) were content with, but the left-wing imperialists (represented by Orlando and Sonnino) claimed large areas in Dalmatia, in Fiume, in Anatolia, as well as colonies. (Massimo Salvadori, *La storia: 1870–1995* (Turin: Loescher, [1995]) 1164.)

²⁸ The illegal occupation of the city lasted until December 1920/January 1921, when Giolitti had D’Annunzio thrown out. Many of the “legionaries” that had assisted D’Annunzio later joined the Fascists. (Fiume finally became Italian in 1924.)

²⁹ Salvadori 1164–65.

³⁰ Salvadori 1170.

300,000 other members, transformed itself into the *Partito nazionale fascista* (The National Fascist Party). In October 1922, the definitive crisis of the liberal state was a fact. With an extensive, paramilitary organization, guided by a *quadrumvirato*³², and with the support from both the state bureaucracy and the military, Mussolini's followers gathered in Naples on October 24. The Prime Minister Luigi Facta resigned on October 26, and the March on Rome on the 28 was just a performance, as there never was any doubt that the King, Victor Emmanuel III, would accept Mussolini's demand to become the next Prime Minister of Italy. The Fascists were in charge.

2.1 Italian Fascism: Political and Ideological Context

Throughout the twentieth century, the terms "Fascist," and "Fascism" have come to signify a lot of different things. Originally used when talking about the Italian government in the period 1922–43, or about the Italian Fascist party, the *Partito nazionale fascista*, the term was broadened to include France and the Vichy regime, Franco's Spain, Nazi-Germany, and in some cases (now we have left the domain of the serious historians, though) even describing the governments of South-America, and the Communist regimes of Soviet Russia and China. And today, anything that is undemocratic, or totalitarian may be described as "Fascist." It is therefore necessary, I think, to do some tidying up in this confusing mess and describe what most historians today agree upon as being essentially "Fascist."

Stanley G. Payne is the author of one of the larger modern studies on Fascism, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945*. In the introduction chapter he comments on the research that has been carried out in this field. He closes this chapter with an attempt at synthesizing the different definitions into a meaningful, valid definition, writing that based upon the material discussed there, defining Fascism as "*a form of revolutionary ultranationalism for national rebirth that is based on a primary vitalist philosophy, is structured on extreme elitism, mass mobilization, and the Führerprinzip, positively values violence as well as means and tends to normalize war and/or the military virtues.*"³³ In this dissertation the words "Fascist" and "Fascism," if nothing else is written, refers to the politically and ideologically based movement and government in Italy, represented by the *Partito nazionale fascista*, under the direction of Benito Mussolini. Italian

³¹ Salvadori 1169.

³² From the start, the Fascists were very occupied with Roman history. The Italian term *quadrumvirato* is a direct reference to the two *triumvirates* (or council of three) in ancient Rome; the first consisting of Caesar, Crassus and Pompeius (60 BC), the second consisting of Octavianus, Antonius, and Lepidus (43 BC).

³³ Payne, *History of Fascism* 14.

Fascism was positive to modernizing the country. To a certain extent the citizens were granted rights and liberties, and the state administration was responsible for its actions. The view of man was also rather positive (unlike the German Nazi-Socialism's): Man can be changed and improved through education and information. Gradually a new man, "*l'Uomo Nuovo*" would appear, strong, heroic, with stamina and fighting spirit. "*This also meant that sickness and weakness, both physical and moral, can be cured, unwanted behavior can be corrected, and it is the state's responsibility to provide for education, care and social aid for the needy.*"³⁴ As a part of their social political engineering the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* (OND) or "The National Afterwork Foundation" was founded, a "*huge national organization grouping the associations of workers' and clerks' unions.*"³⁵ The OND offered different leisure time activities, such as sports, recreation, cultural events, and cheap travel.³⁶ It was established in 1925. In the year XVI – E.F. (that is, in 1938), a national exhibition, *la I Mostra del Dopolavoro* was held in the ancient ruins of the Circus Maximus in Rome. All the different activities of the OND were laid out for public view, and the whole area was adorned by Fascist symbols and slogans. There were folk dances, competitions in type writing (!) and hair dressing, and an extravagant multilingual catalogue was produced for the occasion, demonstrating that this was a show to impress the nation as well as the world.³⁷ The introduction to the catalogue declares:

*"The Fascist State, which watches over and protects citizens throughout their lives (from pre-maternity assistance through youth to married estate and on to old age benefits) could not fail to be interested in the leisure of the worker, which constitutes an extremely important period from a political as well as from a social point of view, on account of the pathological effects caused in the individual by the using up of energies which reacts physically and morally on his well-being, particularly in the case of mechanical labour."*³⁸

Even though the Fascists came to power in 1922, the government did not turn dictatorial until January 1925, when Mussolini took all responsibility for the abduction and murder of socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti.³⁹ In 1926 several new laws aimed at securing the power were ratified. Freedom of press, political organizations and trade unions other than the

³⁴ Eva Nodin, *Estetisk pluralism och disciplinerande struktur: Om barnkolonier och arkitektur i Italien under fascismens tid*, diss., U Gothenburg, 1999, Gothenburg Studies in Art and Architecture 5 (Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1999) 18. My translation.

³⁵ Pierre Vago, "Sabaudia: Cancellotti, Montuori, Piccinato e Scalpelli, architectes," *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 7 (1934): 18. My translation.

³⁶ Ottar Dahl, *Fra konsens til katastrofe. Kapitler av fascismens historie i Italia* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1996) 62.

³⁷ Partito nazionale fascista, *Prima mostra nazionale del Dopolavoro* (Rome: PNF, 1938).

³⁸ Leonardo A. Spagnoli, introduction, *Prima mostra nazionale del Dopolavoro*, by Partito nazionale fascista (Rome, PNF, 1938) n. pag.

³⁹ Matteotti spoke up and complained about the doubtful circumstances around the elections of April 1924, and also pointed out how small a victory the PNF had actually won.

Fascist ones were outlawed. In 1928, the *Gran Consiglio* (or the Grand Council) of the PNF were bestowed with extraordinary constitutional powers. The Lateran treaty was signed in 1929, meaning that the Catholic Church and the Italian state finally acknowledged each other. Italy attacked Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1935, and proclaimed its Empire in 1936. Then, step by step, the Fascist government tightened its bonds with Nazi Germany, ratifying racial laws in 1938, and entering World War II on 10 June 1940 as Germany's ally. The African empire was lost one year later, and in 1943 allied troops forced the Fascists out of most of the Italian territory. What remained was the Salò republic, with Mussolini as a sort of “puppet on the string”-leader, obeying Hitler's every little whim. And, on 28 April 1945, the Fascist epoch in Italian history ended: Mussolini was executed and hung upside down from the ceiling of a gas station in Milan—for everyone to see.

2.1.1 Fascist Syndicalism, Corporatism, and the Arts

An important aspect of the Fascist state's organization, was its implementation of corporatism as a tool for governing. In March 1923 the *Partito nazionale fascista* merged with the *Partito nazionalista*. The new party kept the name *Partito nazionale fascista* however. This fusion is important, as the nationalist party's ideological heritage provided the Fascist Party (until then a very eclectic party) an official ideology of statism, corporatism, and imperialism.⁴⁰ But what exactly is corporatism? I find Philippe Schmitter's definition of *corporatism* to be a good definition of the term:

*Corporatism can be defined as a system of interest representation in which the constituent units [i.e. social and economic sectors] are organized into a limited number of singular, compulsory, noncompetitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognized or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls.*⁴¹

According to Payne, “‘corporations,’ partly autonomous and partly state-regulated, dates from Roman times.” Further, he writes that “various partial systems of limited autonomy and self-regulation within a broader framework of civic authority and limited representation were a common feature of the Middle Ages.” He traces the beginnings of modern corporatism back to the early nineteenth century, when it appeared to be a reaction towards individualism, the social fabric atomized and a wild array of experimentation with different forms of central state power as a legacy

⁴⁰ Salvadori 1198.

⁴¹ P.C. Schmitter, “Still the Century of Corporatism?,” *The New Corporatism*, ed.s F. Pike and T. Stritch (South Bend, IN: n.p., 1974) 85–131, qtd. in Payne, *History of Fascism* 38–39.

of the French Revolution and the models of the Republic.⁴² In 1926 a law was ratified, laying the foundations for a “corporate” restructuring of the relations between capital and work, prohibiting strikes and lock-outs. The same year *il Ministero delle corporazioni* (the Ministry of Corporations) was founded.⁴³ Bruce F. Pauley points out the fact that Fascist economics with its corporatism (i.e. Italian Fascism) differed from both Nazi and Communist economics. Designed to settle occasional concrete problems arising from dissatisfied industry workers, the idea of corporatism was broadened with the issuing of the work charter (*Carta del lavoro*) in April 1927. In 30 articles this programmatic manifesto outlined the general principles of corporatism, viewing corporatism as Fascism’s answer to the individualism of liberal capitalism and the class warfare of Marxism.⁴⁴ In Fascist corporatism economic life was perceived as the nation’s need to be arranged vertically. Members of trades and professions, from the factory floor up and including the management, were organized together in the corporation. Professional interests were managed from within the profession and not according to class. This arrangement of corporations “negated and superseded the class struggle, creating class collaboration in labor and with labor.” The Fascist corporative promise was to negotiate conflictual relationships between labor, management, and state.⁴⁵ But it lasted until the financial crisis of 1929 had hit Italy too, before the corporate system was put into a law in 1934. Then twenty-two corporations were established, bringing together employees and management in related industries, so that “their interests could be harmonized under the joint auspices of labor courts, which would settle disputes without resorting to strike.” The idea was that “each corporation should act as a small parliament with nominal powers to set wages and conditions of employment. It was supposed to be a reversion to medieval guilds, which had comprehended all classes within a single vocation.” Thus were stationed in each corporation Fascist officials representing the Ministry of Corporations who negotiated with the representatives of labor and management.⁴⁶ But, Pauley continues, in reality corporatism was nothing but a fraud: The corporations had little authority and were not autonomous. Rules drawn up by the respective corporations were valid only if approved by Mussolini. “The big beneficiaries were Fascist party members for whom a great many jobs were created, and businesspeople and landlords who continued to make their own decisions and who no

⁴² Payne, *History of Fascism* 38; Salvadori 1219.

⁴³ Salvadori 1219.

⁴⁴ Pauley 86.

⁴⁵ Marla Susan Stone, *The Patron State: Culture & Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Harvard University Press, 1998) 25.

⁴⁶ Pauley 87.

longer had to fear strikes.” In 1939 the Lower House of the Italian Parliament (*Camera degli deputati*) was abolished. The Chamber of Fasces and Corporations (*Camera dei fasci e delle corporazioni*) replaced it. However, it could only make proposals to Mussolini, not pass legislation.⁴⁷

So, what about corporatism and the arts? How did this all-including system of corporations influence the lives, careers and art of artists and architects? Marla Susan Stone investigates these issues thoroughly in her book *The Patron State: Culture & Politics in Fascist Italy*, seeing the *Sindacato fascista delle belle arti* (Fascist Syndicate of the Fine Arts) and the *Confederazione nazionale dei sindacati fascisti dei professionisti e degli artisti* (National Confederation of Artists and Professionals) as products of Fascist syndicalism. The artist movements were organized accordingly and vertically within the same structure of state-run corporations. “In the arts, Fascist corporatism held out the promise of mutually productive cooperation between cultural producers and the state. Artistic production would be subsumed within state structures and aesthetical realization achieved through the state.”⁴⁸ In the corporatist discourse state patronage had removed the problems of the old antagonistic relationship between the state institutions and the culture. The Fascist Syndicate of the Fine Arts organized artists in eighteen provincially run syndicates, with a national syndicate composed of provincial member syndicates on top. This national syndicate was represented on all levels of local and national fine art commissions, and furthermore on the National Council of Corporations and in Parliament. It was administered under the control of the National Confederation of Fascist Syndicates of Professionals and Artists, an umbrella syndicate consisting of twenty-one syndicates, among them one each for architects and engineers, writers, artists, and musicians, as Stone explains.⁴⁹ The Fascists even wanted to include the historically “free” profession of the artist in its corporate reorganization of society, something they succeeded with. Choosing to stand outside, meant exclusion from official assignments, competitions, etc., and due to the financial crisis the private market was virtually nonexistent at the time. Thus there was a steady increase in the number of card-carrying members of the artists’ syndicates: from 1,865 members in 1933, to 4,526 in 1939.⁵⁰ The incentives were many: members of the artists’ syndicates were offered material assistance in the form of loans,

⁴⁷ Pauley 86–87; Salvadori 1220.

⁴⁸ Stone, *Patron State* 25. Pauley shows how this utopian vision of corporatism never worked: “The corporative goal of social harmony was admirable, but the big industrialists prevented any meaningful implementation of the program.” And: “Even class antagonisms were not reduced; they were merely driven underground.” Pauley 86–87.

⁴⁹ Stone, *Patron State* 25–26.

⁵⁰ Stone, *Patron State* 27.

relief payments, old-age pensions, and retirement homes. Stone emphasizes that “*the focus on professional rather than aesthetic regimentation encouraged artists who were not politically committed against the regime to join the syndicate.*”⁵¹

Corporatism was also important in the project of getting Italy back on its feet after the economic backlash. Especially Rome, but also other cities and towns acted as “*a showplace of the great public works program launched in 1926 to alleviate a serious crisis of unemployment,*” as Spiro Kostof explains.⁵² He points out how “*the prohibition of strikes and virtual disappearance of labor unrest began to encourage private investment in the building of la grande Roma, as it was now called.*”⁵³ Building trades were also put under state control, as one of the twenty-two above mentioned corporations. Major institutions were forced to support public works, and monies were pooled into credit foundations, such as the *Consorzio di Credito per le Opere Pubbliche* or the *Istituto di Credito per le Imprese di Pubblica Utilità*. Loyalty to the regime ensured faithful firms with building contracts, expropriation programs, the construction of streets and residential complexes. Kostof mentions the firms Tudini Talenti, Vaselli, and Speroni as examples.⁵⁴

2.1.2 “Romanità,” “Futurismo,” and “Razionalismo”: The Signs of the Times

Roger Griffin, expert on different forms of Fascism, concludes that the Italian Fascists were working to achieve the *palingenesis*, or rebirth, of Italy.⁵⁵ The old, liberal government had not been able to solve the different problems the young state faced, and socialism was not an option with its international profile. In addition, socialism wanted to take the land from private owners—not a very popular solution among the many small farmers in Italy. So the Fascists found that a totally new system of government and politics had to be constructed. One that welcomed the future, and honoured the great past. One that could fuse the different regions with their inhabitants into one country beating with one heart, into a new, reborn Italy. And the most effective way to glue together the Italians, in the eyes of the regime, would be through a common myth. As has been pointed out by several historians and researchers, the Fascists chose to approach their task chiefly through culture.

The regime’s cultural policy was marked by a strong dualism. On the one hand you had

⁵¹ Stone, *Patron State* 27.

⁵² Spiro Kostof, “The Third Rome, 1870–1950: An Introduction,” *The Third Rome. 1870–1950. Traffic and Glory*, ed. Spiro Kostof (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1973) 29.

⁵³ Kostof, *Third Rome* 29.

⁵⁴ Kostof, *Third Rome* 29. Tudini Talenti was hired to do the construction work in Sabaudia.

⁵⁵ Roger Griffin, *The Sacred Synthesis: The Ideological Cohesion of Fascist Cultural Policy*, 21 March 2001

a strong futuristic urge, with Fascism embracing the future and all sorts of modern devices. Fascism and Italian futurism were firmly tied together in the early years. The futurists raged against the consisting society, preaching speed, war, machines, future. In the founding manifesto of Futurism, published on the frontpage of the leading Parisian conservative newspaper *Le Figaro* (20 February 1909), Filippo Tommaso Marinetti wrote: “Come on! Set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums! ... Take up your pickaxes, your axes and hammers and wreck, wreck the venerable cities, pitilessly!”⁵⁶ The futurists saw war as hygiene, and wanted to start afresh; tear down the old cities, and build new ones. In the future each new generation would build its own city, suited to its needs. Antonio Sant’Elia⁵⁷ and Mario Chiattone were among the imaginative futurist architects who never got to see their visionary projects realized. They drew strange, gigantic buildings housing the most diverse functions, e.g. Sant’Elia’s “Airport and Railway Station with Elevators and Funiculars over Three-levelled Street” of 1914 (*plate 1.B*). Then World War I broke out, and took some of the air out of the whole movement.⁵⁸ In a Europe shattered by the cruelty and bloodiness of the war, the idea of war as a solution was not so attractive anymore. But the most ardent of the futurists still championed their vision about modern times and a new society, and saw in the newly founded Fascist party a collaborator.⁵⁹ Cars, airplanes, speed, and movies were also major symbols in featuring Mussolini as a modern man and politician. Rational and effective solutions were sought in questions such as housing, government, leisure time activities, child care, and so forth.

The futurists’ architecture was a dream architecture that still lives on in the science fiction sceneries of Hollywood and in marvel heroes cartoons like Spiderman or Batman (*plate 1.C and D*). However, in the mid-twenties a new architecture was born in Italy too. Deriving from the avant-garde European architecture now known as the Modern Movement or the International style, the *stile razionalista* came into existence in 1926 with the founding of the *Gruppo 7*. Rationalism, “a term intended to convey the values being championed by the architecture and polemics of Le Corbusier’s *Vers une architecture* (1923) and Walter Gropius’s *Internationale Architektur* (1925),” became a national movement in 1928. The same year this modern architecture was displayed in Italy for the first time at the *Esposizione di Torino*.

<<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/schools/humanities/Roger/fasart.htm>>.

⁵⁶ Richard Humphreys, *Futurism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 6.

⁵⁷ Ironically, Sant’Elia, the pet architect of the futurists died in the war.

⁵⁸ Truly, there was a second wave of Futurism in the early 1930s, often referred to as “futurism II.” However, it never gained the popularity and intensity of the first one. Its main achievement were the *aereopittura*, or paintings depicting cityshapes and landscapes as seen from an airplane, with parts of the plane visible in the picturefield.

⁵⁹ However, Marinetti, the founder of futurism, was a sworn Fascist till the bitter end.

The rationalist architecture consisted of “*pure prismatic forms devoid of applied ornamentation*” and was “*free of stylistic reminiscences.*” This was an architecture that was intended to express “*the spirit of a new machine civilization... Anti-historicist but not anti-historical, Italian Rationalist architects used abstract geometrical forms to root their buildings in the past.*”⁶⁰

On the other hand the Fascists cultivated the idea of the cult of Rome, or the concept of “*Romanità*,” the sinister admiration of Ancient Rome and a long lost imperial grandeur. As the Fascists gradually tied their connections with more conservative forces in Italian society, and as they increasingly promoted Ancient Rome and with time stopped speaking out in favor of the modern art and architecture, many futurists withdrew from the cooperation since they no longer found the support they wanted there. The regime was also more cautious with giving futurism their full support, afraid of offending their bourgeois partners. However—and this is important if one is to understand why the regime was so popular in both camps—the Fascists never went out *against* modernist trends in art and architecture. It supported both the *razionalismo* and the *Romanità*. Mussolini maintained that it was necessary for Fascist Italy to create a new art for our times, a Fascist art.”⁶¹

Thus two strongly contradictory tendencies existed side by side in Italy throughout the Fascist era, in politics, life, art, and architecture. But even though some researchers find good evidence for the classicizing “*Romanità*” steadily gaining ground from the late 1930s onwards, the futuristic, rationalistic vein was never cut off. The two elements are often intertwined.

It is a well known fact that Mussolini admired the Roman Empire, and especially the Emperor Augustus immensely.⁶² It is also widely acknowledged that he copied both the Roman Antiquity, borrowed features from medieval and Renaissance Italy—and loathed the architecture of the 1800s (*plates 2.D and 3.A*). But the range of his admiration for the Romans and the direct manifestations of this adoration—also in the earlier phases of the regime—have perhaps not always been emphasized enough in art historical analyses. Rome was the seat of government he sought to capture, and the idea of Rome possessed a mystic and mythical power around which he sought to forge the new order. “*On this issue Futurists and Fascists, closely linked at first, parted ways.*”⁶³

⁶⁰ Richard A. Etlin, *Modernism in Italian Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991) XVII.

⁶¹ Benito Mussolini, speech in Perugia on 5 October 1926, qtd. in Gentile 102.

⁶² In the inaugural address of the Augustan Exposition in 1937 (ratified by Mussolini himself), Giulio Quirino Giglioli turned to il Duce, calling him a *civis romanus*, and saying that Caesar and Augustus were “*symbolically conjoined in the figure of Mussolini*,” qtd. in Gentile 76.

⁶³ Kostof, *Third Rome* 30.

Refusing to choose *one* official style is another feature that perhaps can be traced back to ancient Rome. The Romans were highly eclectic, mixing Greek orders with Asian grandeur and mannerism, or their own traditional atrium with the Greek peristyle. When thought of in this way, maybe the eclectic manner of the Italian Fascists was not so surprising after all? Not seeking to impose an official “state art” was a conscious choice, as Gentile has shown: “*Nothing could be further from my thoughts,’ said Mussolini at the Twentieth Century Exhibition on March 26, 1923, ‘than to encourage anything like a State art,’ for art ‘is individual.’*”⁶⁴ But it was necessary to integrate art within the corporative, totalitarian state so that it could serve the purpose of educating the masses. Gentile finds that “*in art as in politics, the enemy was individualism, which opted out the fusing of the ‘collective harmony.’*”⁶⁵

2.1.3 The Fascist Cult

One of Fascism’s most ingenious inventions was the development of a new sort of political religion, or a state cult. Gustave Le Bon’s writings taught Mussolini just how important myths and rites were: “*A religious or political belief is based on faith, but it would not last without ritual and symbolism,*” Le Bon wrote in his *Aphorismes du temps présent* in 1919.⁶⁶ As many intellectuals of the time noted, the materialistic, decadent Italian society needed a unifying, regenerating religion. Inspired by the myths and rituals developed by the creative poet D’Annunzio during his occupation of Fiume, the Fascist liturgy and style was developed in 1920–21. Acting as a “*prophet, bard, and high priest of a renewed ‘patriotic religion’*” he created religious metaphors derived from Christian tradition, from classical mythology, and from the cult of the trenches.⁶⁷ He defined new “sacred spaces” such as the Piazza Campidoglio, where he celebrated his nationalist ritual, and he “*revitalized the myths of the civil religions of the Risorgimento and ‘Roman pride,’*” syncretizing “*these two concepts into a new political theology that celebrated the dogma of the nation.*”⁶⁸ The Fascists believed in revolution as regeneration. They introduced elaborate ceremonies, “*decorated by innumerable flags and special new visual symbols, accompanied by mass chants. Frequent and large-scale public marches were a common feature.*”⁶⁹ (Plate 3.A.) The cult of the fallen spread across the whole country as monuments were erected everywhere by local authorities, patriotic and veterans’ associations, or by groups of citizens to commemorate the fallen. These “funeral services” for the fallen became a centerpiece of

⁶⁴ Qtd. in Gentile 102.

⁶⁵ Gentile 103.

⁶⁶ Qtd. in Gentile 84.

⁶⁷ Gentile 17.

⁶⁸ Gentile 17.

Fascist ritual, “uniting the living and the dead in a tribute to courage and the overcoming of mere mortality. The massed response of ‘Presente!’ to the calling of the slain comrade’s name expressed the new Fascist cult of transcendence through violence and death.”⁷⁰ The climax of this cult was the train transport of the Unknown Soldier through Italy, the final destination being the Altar of the Fatherland on 4 November 1921.⁷¹ Payne notices how two major new myths had emerged in Fascist thinking by 1922: the myth of ancient Rome emerging in a new Rome, and the idea of the *Stato Nuovo*, “the new Rome to be crystallized in a new kind of nationalist state that would play the central role in the revitalization of the nation.”⁷² He also points out how the militia was reorganized “into units based on the ancient Roman designations of legions, cohorts, and centuries, with Roman emblems and Roman titles for the commanders.”⁷³ (Plate 86.B.)

Key elements in the Fascist cult were youth, death, martyrdom, aggression, the worshipping of *il Duce*, and the veneration of Ancient Rome, the founding of the new Italian state in 1871, the martyrs of World War I, and the martyrs of the “Fascist revolution.” Lavish monuments were erected to celebrate their revolution, and according to Emilio Gentile, each *Casa del Fascio* or Fascist Headquarters was provided with a *sacratio*, a sanctuary where the martyrs of Fascism could be remembered. The *Partito nazionale fascista* was “a revolutionary militia placed at the service of the nation,” and its three main principles were: order, discipline, and hierarchy. The party’s structure consisted of cadres of members, the *squadre*, and of the Fascist trade unions.⁷⁴

2.1.4 Demographics and The Regime’s Anti-Urbanism

What shaped the regimes ideas in building matters such as urbanism, architecture, and housing? Even though the Fascist regime was heavily involved in city planning and the alteration of already existing city cores, the policy of the government and Mussolini promoted a strongly anti-urbanist policy. The means with which the government tried to keep the population in rural areas were many—and highly inefficient.

Italy, like so many other European countries in the early 20th century, benefitted from the open borders of the United States. Booming populations made it necessary to move from the home villages, to the big cities in the home country where industrial enterprises

⁶⁹ Payne, *History of Fascism* 105.

⁷⁰ Payne, *History of Fascism* 105.

⁷¹ Gentile 18. The “altar” was placed at the foot of the Victor Emmanuel II monument (constructed 1884–1913 by Giuseppe Sacconi), on the Piazza Venezia Rome.

⁷² Payne, *History of Fascism* 106.

⁷³ Payne, *History of Fascism* 106.

⁷⁴ Payne, *History of Fascism* 102.

needed their manpower, or abroad in search of a better, but highly uncertain, future. And *l'America* was the dream and goal for many an Italian. But in 1921 the U.S. government put restrictions on the annual numbers of new immigrants, and new ways of dealing with the problem of overpopulated cities in Italy had to be sought. For many years the Fascist regime halfheartedly tried to keep the population in the countryside. This was done mainly by means of propaganda, informing the Italian people of the advantages of the rural lifestyle, coining different kinds of slogans, one of the more famous being Mussolini's "*By remaining rural, you remain closer to my heart,*"⁷⁵ in addition to building and resettlement projects like the draining of the Pontine Marshes. On 22 November 1928, Mussolini published an article in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, outlining the role of the city in the regime's new industrial and agricultural politics. The title *Sfollare le città* (Empty the cities) cannot be misunderstood.⁷⁶ According to Giorgio Ciucci *il Duce* here outlines a politics of institutional control, a basis for realizing a control over the workers that the industry, in a phase of restructuring, was not capable of applying.⁷⁷ But also in this area, the Fascists were highly ambivalent and inconsistent, and they did not always practice what they preached. Three laws meant to prevent the drifting to the cities, were passed by the regime, the first one dating from 1928. The law of 1928 was extremely vaguely formulated: It bestowed upon the prefects the right to "*issue decrees that have obligatory force with the purpose of limiting the excessive increase in the populations residing in the cities.*"⁷⁸ The prefects were given unlimited powers to adopt any measures, also more drastical ones, to carry out the task. Treves points out that this law had an enormous potential, but being so unclear in its formulations, not dictating any norms or precise actions to be taken, it did not have any direct consequences for the population. The prefects could act as they found opportune against the urban expansion—or they could choose to do absolutely nothing. So, nothing happened. The law remained a dead letter. The second law passed concerned the regulation of the movement of *seasonal* workers, not people wanting to move to another place permanently.⁷⁹ Not until the last law of 1939 inhibiting people from buying houses in "cities" (that is: in centers with more than 25,000 inhabitants) without having a job in that city (and vice versa: making it impossible to get a

⁷⁵ "*Resterete rurali, resterai più vicini al mio cuore!*" My translation.

⁷⁶ Giorgio Ciucci, *Gli architetti e il fascismo: architettura e città 1922–40* (Turin: Einaudi, 1989) 26.

⁷⁷ Giorgio Ciucci, "Il dibattito sull'architettura e le città fasciste," *Storia dell'arte italiana: Parte seconda: Dal Medioevo al Novecento*, ed. Federico Zeri, vol. 3 (Turin: Einaudi, 1982) 279.

⁷⁸ Law of 24 December 1928, no 2961, qtd. in Anna Treves, "La politica antiurbana del fascismo e un secolo di resistenza all'urbanizzazione industriale in Italia," *Urbanistica fascista: Ricerche e saggi sulla città e sulle politiche urbane in Italia tra le due guerre*, ed. Alberto Mioni [Milan: Franco Angeli, 1980] 323). My translation.

⁷⁹ Law of 9 April 1931, no 358.

job if you did not live in that “city”), did the regime’s antiurbanism really start to affect the lives of the citizens.⁸⁰ Before Mussolini started his campaign against urbanism in 1926, the Fascists, too, exalted the race among the big cities to be the first to reach a million inhabitants.⁸¹ From 1927 on the government takes on the task of keeping the unemployed from drifting to the industrial cities, in search of jobs that simply did not exist due to the crisis. But since the Fascists needed the support from powerful factory-owners among others, and these again profited from cheap manpower in the areas around the factories (a way of keeping the wages down), and since there was no consensus on this matter among the Fascists, the situation did not change too much until the above mentioned law of 1939 was passed.

So why this hostile, or at least *seemingly* hostile, attitude to urbanism? Falasca-Zamponi, among many others, points out the great influence of the French psychologist Gustave Le Bon (1841–1931), author of the widely read *La psychologie des foules* (1895)⁸² in early twentieth century Europe. Le Bon explored the dynamics of large masses of people—and caused a lot of fear among the European bourgeoisie for the large, unemployed masses of the bigger cities, and the possibility of riots. Mussolini was an eager student of Le Bon. According to Falasca-Zamponi Le Bon was Mussolini’s “mentor,” and they kept a correspondence going.⁸³ As a counter-action the benefits of country life was preached: Idealized country life was part of the ruling health ideals. The so called “internal colonization,”—including cultivating areas that had not until then been used as farming land, and the building of the new towns, or the “rural centers” to use the Fascist terminology—were among the strategies to empty the old, unhygienic overcrowded cities.

The population just in Rome totally exploded in the sixty years between 1870 (a population of ca 250 000) and 1930 (counting a population of over one million! That gives an increase of 400%!). In 1928, the construction of the town Mussolinia on Sardegna began.⁸⁴

On the pretext of improving social welfare and living conditions for the people Mussolini carried out many building projects and alterations in already existing towns and

⁸⁰ Law of 5 July 1939, no 1082. Just a year later Italy was drawn into the second World War, and thus exceptions had to be made to adjust to this situation.

⁸¹ Treves 327.

⁸² English title: *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*.

⁸³ Falasca-Zamponi 20–21.

⁸⁴ As early as in 1924 the regime tried to build its first *borgata* (or village) in Sicily. This was also to be named Mussolinia, but poorly planned, the project soon went bankrupt, and Mussolini withdrew his name from it (Nodin, *Estetisk pluralism* 229).

cities in addition to constructing twelve new towns in the motherland⁸⁵ and a large number of various *borghi* and towns in the colonies (Libya, the Dodecanese islands, Rhodes, Eritrea and Ethiopia (then: Abyssinia)).⁸⁶

To what extent were the architects informed about the underlying ideas of the government and Mussolini? Were they aware that Mussolini was trying to construct a new Roman Empire and that these towns and their layout were part of the project? Many rationalist architects were active members of CIAM and participated in CIAM meetings where the urgent problem of housing was among the hot issues in the 1920s and '30s. Costs, size, hygiene, light, and air, as well as solutions to the requirements of leading a modern life were all of concern to the architects of the day. In addition to the problems of increasing traffic, and the organizing of the different parts of the city for it to be functional. European architects of the day were eagerly occupied with solving the enormous housing problem; the ideas of “*Die Wohnung für das Existenzminimum*” (low-cost housing), *Siedlungs*, etc. were attempts at solutions to this problem. Riccardo Mariani is perhaps—in addition to Margrit Estermann-Juchler—the author that has treated the question of the regime’s pretenses and actual actions most thoroughly.⁸⁷ As an example he traces the events that took place when the center of Rome was “sanitized” (as the regime put it) and shows how the original population was driven out of their homes and local milieu, and forced to move to new suburbs on the outskirts of the city. The quality of the new housing was really poor, and transport to the city center, where most people worked, equally so. Luxurious apartment houses with expensive shops on the first floor were erected on the vacated premises in the center. Thousands of people lost the local environment in which they had been brought up. Family businesses that had been handed over from father to son for generations, and a large part of Rome’s history (i.e. “everything” erected between 476 AD, the dating of the downfall of the Roman Empire, and the Fascist era)—were brutally demolished. And the rich and wealthy moved in.

⁸⁵ These twelve towns being: Mussolinia (Arborea) 1928, Littoria (Latina) 1932, Sabaudia 1934, Pontinia 1935, Guidonia 1935, Aprilia 1936, Fertilia 1936, Arsia 1937, Carbonia 1938, Pomezia 1938, Torviscosa 1938, and Pozzo Littorio 1940. The two last ones were built in Istria that today is part of Croatia.

⁸⁶ For further reading on the topic of the external colonization and town building, I recommend the exhibition catalogue *Divina geometria: Modelli urbani degli anni Trenta: Asmara, Addis Abeba, Harar, Olettà, Littoria, Sabaudia, Pontinia, Borghi*, ed.s Eugenio Lo Sardo and Maria Luisa Boccia, 2nd ed. (Siena: Maschietto&Musolino, 1997); and Peter Mandal Hansen’s short but informative article “Fascistenes bygging på Rhodos, Kos, Leros,” *Sfinx* 22 (1999): 91–95. In addition there is also Enrico Mantero and Claudio Bruni’s article for the Fascist architecture exhibition shown in connection with the Venice Biennial in 1976, “Alcune questioni di pratica professionale nel ventennio fascista,” *Il razionalismo e l’architettura in Italia durante il fascismo*, ed.s Silvia Danesi and Luciano Patetta (Venice: Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia, 1976) 31–38.

As for the capital, Rome—the *Third Rome* as the city was often referred to—large changes had to be made from 1870 on. Rome once again became the Italian capital on 1 July 1871, after centuries of functioning as the Papal capital. Works on Rome began already then, but due to an economic crisis in the 1890s, much was left unfinished or unattended to, until the Fascists came to power. For a long time, the officially accepted approach to changing Rome was that of *diradamento* and *ambientismo*, “diradamento” explained by Spiro Kostof as “i.e., the repair and regularization of the existing fabric,” as opposed to what came to be the Fascist signature: *sventramento*, or “abstract surgery”⁸⁸ (that is: demolition of huge chunks of the city so that one could build *ex novo*). And even though such authorities as Gustavo Giovannoni advocated the first way of shaping the citycore, Marcello Piacentini—the period’s most influential architect—soon changed his position towards the *sventramento* way of total remodelling. The capital’s antique monuments were excavated and isolated, tearing down the fabric around. Many other historical centers were radically altered too, e.g. Brescia, and Genoa, but none at the same extent as Rome. What to keep and what to demolish was often tough to decide upon, considering that Rome with its more than 2,000 year old history had such a prominent place in European memory and history, first as the Rome of the emperors, and then as the home of the Holy See and the papal authority.

2.1.5 *Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti*

In a decree of 10 December 1917, the *Luogo-tenenziale*, the first steps were taken towards securing the rights and financial future of the Italian soldiers in the still ongoing war. The *Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni* (National Insurance Institute) was authorized to give out special insurance policies for the benefit of the the creation of a special agency responsible for economic and financial matters, the *Opera Nazionale Combattenti*.⁸⁹

The Fascist government gave the *Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti* (ONC, or War Veterans’ Association), founded 1918, the responsibility of carrying out the “internal colonization” of the peninsula with Sicily and Sardinia, in addition to some work in the North-African colonies. When Italy joined World War I, the soldiers were promised land on their return, and in line with the anti-urban, pro-rural ideals of the Fascist government, decisions were made to confiscate and/or buy vast land areas to establish new rural (in some cases, industrial or military) communities in the country. This soon came to be

⁸⁷ Riccardo Mariani, *Fascismo e “città nuove”* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976).

⁸⁸ Kostof, *Third Rome* (1973) 18.

⁸⁹ Vanessa Mucaria, *O.N.C.: Strumento fascista o Ente autonomo?* Fondo Storico, Comune di Pomezia, February

connected with the demand of *autarchia* (autarchy), as the international society in 1936 laid an embargo on Italy for the country's aggressive attack on Abyssinia: Italy had to be self-sustained! The ONC functioned as patron—and *padrone*: Patron in the building matter, and *padrone* to all the new settlers in the areas.

3. The New Province of Littoria, and Sabaudia

*Pigra, limosa, fetente, coperta di densa gramigna,
La vasta palude sogghigna in faccia a 'l sole.
Il sole rifulge cocente tra le candide nubi:
Sol pochi alberi in cerchio stendono un'ombra ignava.
A stormi innumeri su' turpi carcami marciti
Con larghe ruote calan gracchiando i corvi:
Il bufalo guata muggendo a' rossicci orizzonti:
Ne 'l volo audace toccan le nubi i falchi.
Unica dea, la Febbre, su l'ali giallastre gravando,
Va lenta lenta giù pe' lugubri piani.*

– From Gabriele D'Annunzio's poem "Palude," *Versi d'amore e di gloria*.

3.1 Agro Pontino: The Hierarchical Divisions into Farm, Borgo, and Town

E' questa la guerra che noi preferiamo.

– Benito Mussolini about the reclaiming of the Pontine Marshes

Since Caesar's time several attempts had been made by various parties to drain the Pontine Marshes. Gradually during the time of the Roman Republic, the area had deteriorated due to neglect. This was the direct consequence of the Roman system of rewarding war veterans with land. Thus the Romans settled conquered land with their own people, turning the soldiers into settlers, *coloni*. When warlords during the time of the Republic again needed their soldiers, the land was left, and gradually returned to wilderness. In addition, since the areas in southern Latium were attractive for farming on a grand scale, large chunks of the *ager publicus* (or state property) around Rome were rented out to wealthy farmers. As time went by and the soldiers did not return home, little by little the big farmers expropriated the smaller farms. The land was often used for grassing the herds and otherwise neglected, and by Caesar's time it had turned into swampy, unhealthy marshes. By the 1920s 10–20,000 people lived in the marshes, mainly shepherds and seasonal coal miners. The land was privately owned—partly by rich families, partly by the church—complicating the project of draining the marshes. The mosquitos spreading

malaria did not make the area attractive. So it remained a mythical, enchanting dream—until the Fascists took action.⁹⁰

With the draining of the Pontine Marshes, a mythical, almost magical area that for centuries, if not millennia, had been of crucial importance to the European imagination, was forever lost. A few kilometers away from the center of Sabaudia, Ulysses of The Odyssey had his famous encounter with the witch Circe on what was then an island, today the *Monte Circeo* (or Circe's Mountain). In the same area, a neanderthal skull was discovered in a cave in 1939. And the little church of the Sorresca (first mentioned in a bull by Saint Gregory the Great in 594), on the outskirts of Sabaudia, was long kept by the Templars (they sold it in 1202, but were back in the area in 1240, when pope Gregory IX needed their protection, and then built the tower raging over the town of San Felice Circeo, 14 km.s away from Sabaudia.) On the top of the Monte Circeo, there are remnants of an ancient acropolis. This was also an area where wealthy Romans in Ancient Rome built summer villas. The villa of the Emperor Domitian is twenty minutes by car from the center of Sabaudia. In the contemporary newspaper articles about the construction of Sabaudia, all this is often mentioned. In the beginning of the 1920s, the area is still connected with magic, witchery, and with the lethal malaria that infested the Pontine Marshes.

In 1928 land and farming development underwent regulation, and laws were passed for the great improvement project.⁹¹ This was referred to as the *Bonifica Integrale*, it meant draining of the land by means of ditches, but it also referred to building canals, pump stations, roads, and forestry. Thousands of dwellings were erected during a short period of time in the recently recovered swamplands of the *Agro Pontino*. Each of these farmsteads, intended for so-called “colonists,” had a small piece of farmland. The area's regulation plan was adopted in 1930: A street grid consisting of a mixture of main streets and side streets intersecting at right angles, and a street pattern consisting of more curved lines. The Pontine Marshes were drained to make room for almost 4,000 farmsteads, thirteen *borghi*⁹² (hamlets) and five towns, or “rural centers” as the state propaganda insisted on calling them. (*Plate 5.A.*) These units were to function as parts of an interdependent system,

⁹⁰ It is not entirely fair to give all the credit for the draining and resettling project to the Fascists, the legally elected government that had been overthrown by the Fascists were also working to realize these plans, but they never got the chance to carry them out.

⁹¹ Nodin, *Estetisk pluralism* 228–29.

⁹² In most cases these *borghi* (or *borgate*) were named after “glorious war sites.” The borghi founded by the ONC in Littoria were: Bainsizza, Carso, Colonia Elena, Ermada, Falti, Grappa, Isonzo, Montello, Montenero, Pasubio, Piave, Sabotino, and Vodice.

organized in a strict hierarchy—a realization of the corporative idea. The War Veterans' Association, from here on called the ONC (*Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti*), was in charge of both draining, building and the resettlement of the area, as well as daily administration. Veterans from the first World War, and now unemployed landworkers, essentially from Northern Italy, were picked out to settle this “new” land. They were sent by train to the stations in Littoria or Fossanova where they were served a hot meal. Then they went on foot or were transported in big lorries to their new homes. The size of the farm each family was assigned, was calculated according to the number of grown-ups in the family. The next day was a wake up call. The contracts they were presented with were tough. Each family was provided with a manual of operations and responsibilities; they were liable to report to the ONC. In addition each family was given a constricting downpayment plan for all the work that had been done to prepare for, build and equip each of these small farms. All credits and debits were meticulously entered into the colonist's *libretto* (account book). In most cases the soil was of poor quality, another factor that complicated life for the new farmers, and the ONC decided upon what crops the farmers could grow. The ONC functioned as administrator and supervisor for the whole area—and many other areas like this in Italy. An ONC headquarter was therefore set up in every *borgo* and town; they were omnipresent and always watching.⁹³

The regime used this draining and resettlement project for what it was worth, presenting it as a glorious work done by strong men. The people were fed with illustrated articles in the newspapers, showing thousands of men at work, machines and plowed land, while, as Mariani pointed out, the costs of this work, in human lives being lost to the malaria, was never mentioned.⁹⁴ The workers' barracks were actually fenced in, and contact with the local population was not allowed. They worked under harsh climate conditions, with the *zanzare*, feared carriers of the malaria, constantly attacking them. The barracks housing them were unhygienic, the food was poor, as was the payment. In addition the workers' freedom was non-existent as long as they worked on the projects: They were locked up at night, and it was illegal for the workers to visit the farmers' homes.

⁹³ This was true also literally: In Mario Tieghi's book of interviews with the first settlers in the area, one can read stories about ONC officers riding around in the morning, waking the farmers at 6:00 AM. (Mario Tieghi, *Sabaudia: storia viva di una città nei racconti dei protagonisti* [n.p.: Il Gabbiano, 1999].)

⁹⁴ Mariani, *Fascismo e città nuove* 90. – Daniela Carfagna presents the death counts in her article “Dai guitti ai coloni”: 73 deaths by work accidents (1929–37), and 160 deaths resulting from malaria (1929–35). (Printed in: Daniela Carfagna, Clemente Ciammaruconi, and Augusto Martellini, *La Ss. Annunziata tra palude e città: Fatti, documenti, immagini e testimonianze per la storia di Sabaudia* [Sabaudia: n.p., 1996] 70.)

The region was strictly ruled. Once assigned an apartment in one of the towns, or a farm, one was expected to stay there. If one family wanted to move to another dwelling in the area, they would have to apply to the ONC. Private initiatives were not welcomed either. As part of a larger corporative unit, each individual had been assigned a role by the system. To us today, the price one had to pay to live in the Pontine Marshes—giving up much of the control over one’s own life—may seem too high. At that time, many people had no real choice.

3.1.1 *The Farm*

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there were to be approximately 4,000 farmsteads laid out in the reclaimed areas. These consisted of quite modest houses, two stories high, often with an external staircase, a traditional architectonic feature in the Italian farm house (*plate 6.C and D*). The shape was that of a traditional Italian farm. In an article in *Urbanistica*, January 1934, Luigi Piccinato, one of the designers of Sabaudia, writes about the program for the area: “*To each farm will be given a plot of land varying from fifteen to thirty hectares (37–75 acres). The size will be different in accord with the crop to be grown and the economic potential of the colonist.*”⁹⁵ Eighteen different house models were designed, and each of the models could have either flat or pitched roof. Somewhere on the outer walls two lines with big letters, painted or in relief, (approximately 35–40 cm high) stated the ownership (i.e. O.N.C.), and the farm’s number, for example “O.N.C. 2296” which was within walking distance from Sabaudia on the way to San Felice Circeo (*plate 6.D*). (Surprisingly, several of the farms have kept these reliefs to this day.) The newly consigned farmers, many of which were without any farming experience, were handed over fully equipped homesteads, with tools, domestic animals, and tool sheds, the minimum being “*a cart, two animal-drawn plows, and a scraper, a fodder-cutter, and two harrows.*”⁹⁶ Indoor floor areas ranged from 128 to 213 square meters, with four or five bedrooms upstairs (in the cases of the two-story dwellings). The kitchen, storeroom, and stables for cows and horses were downstairs. Materials used were brick, in addition to “*local calcareous and tufaceous rock, with lime and pozzuolana for mortar, and with chestnut framings and fixtures.*”⁹⁷ Northern Italian engineers had pointed out, to Mussolini’s discontent, that the materials used to build the farms were of very poor quality: Especially had they sounded a warning bell as to the unsound and poorly seasoned wood which had

⁹⁵ Luigi Piccinato, “Sabaudia,” *Urbanistica* 1 (1934): 10–12, qtd. in Millon, *Some New Towns* 335.

⁹⁶ Ghirardo 50.

⁹⁷ Ghirardo 49.

been used.⁹⁸ Contrary to housing in the towns, the farms had outdoor toilets and lacked running water. Sanitation facilities such as e.g. sinks also lacked in most cases. The cooking was done on wood-burning stoves. Set in relation to the discussion about different types of housing in Sabaudia (in chapter 3.2.3), the undemocratic way of differentiating living standards according to class so typical for this regime becomes apparent.⁹⁹ Looking at the plan drawings for one of the farm models (*plate 6.D*) I am struck by the fact that living rooms are not included. Was this an extreme result of the regime's fear of crowds gathering without any controlling unit monitoring them? Add to this the fact that movement from the farmsteads to the Pontine towns was virtually impossible for the settlers as each family had been assigned a specific farm, and the neo-feudal aspects of the ONC-run project of developing a so-called "interdependent" new way of life become clear. On short notice the ONC could transfer settlers from one farm to another. Thus they would lose all their crops and the work they had invested in their little home. In this system they were near totally deprived of rights, and could even be thrown out of the area, should they be perceived as troublemakers.

In the hierarchical structuring of these communities, homesteads constituted the smallest organizational units. Successively from the bottom rung of the ladder came the *borghi*, then the towns, and finally the province capital of Littoria.

3.1.2 The "Borgo," or "Borgata"

Different sources give different numbers for the *borghi*¹⁰⁰ (or hamlets) laid out in the Pontine Marshes. This is because some authors count all the *borghi* in the area, while others, like Diane Ghirardo, only count the *borghi* constructed by the Fascists in the province of Littoria. According to Ghirardo, thirteen new *borghi* were founded in this province, whereof two in the new municipality of Sabaudia; *Borgo San Donato* and *Borgo Vodice* (*plate 6.A*).¹⁰¹ Piccinato in his article from 1934 (see note 93, previous page), describes the functions of the *borgo* in the following way: "Each group of farms has a 'Borgo' (the elemental urban unit) as their head, in which there was to be an office of the Agricultural Concern (*Azienda agraria*) of the *Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti*, chapel, first aid station, school, post office, and grocery store. The office of the

⁹⁸ Ghirardo 49–50.

⁹⁹ See pp. 94–95 for more information on the Fascists' different housing projects.

¹⁰⁰ The terminology here is not consistent in the literature. Some writers, such as Millon, uses the term "borgata" (this translates something like "village." A "borgo" is a smaller unit, a *suburb*, or *quarter*. ["Borgata," and "Borgo," *Italiensk-norsk ordbok*, 1981 ed.].) Since Piccinato refers to them as "borghi," that is the term that will be used here.

¹⁰¹ Piccinato mentions four *borghi* in the Comune di Sabaudia, but two of these are older.

*Agricultural Concern was to oversee the direction, administration and assistance of their group of farms.*¹⁰² The image of a strong hierarchy, organized and systematised all through the community, and where nothing is left to chance, starts to materialize itself like a crystal. The Fascist government, here represented by the ONC, is omnipresent, monitoring—or, as I am sure they themselves sported: caring for—their citizens. According to Piccinato: “*The various concerns (businesses) of the Borgbi (including that of Sabaudia) report directly to Rome to the headquarters of the Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti. For matters concerning their urban life (commerce, exchange, political and administrative life) the farmers were to come to the communal center of Sabaudia.*”¹⁰³ (Plate 5.B.)

3.1.3 The Five Pontine Towns¹⁰⁴

“*Le nuove città*” in the drained and reclaimed Pontine Marshes have been given much attention, both in the 1930s, and later. As early as in 1928 Mussolini made a public statement about these five new towns to be built. Whether they had the size of a *città* (or city) or not, can be discussed. The biggest town was Littoria, planned for a population of 6,000 inhabitants, and the only one intended from the beginning to increase in size. At the inauguration on 18 December 1932, Mussolini said that its population was to rise eventually to 40,000–50,000.¹⁰⁵ Both Aprilia and Pomezia are even too small to fall into the category “town.”

Littoria was the premier town to be constructed in the Pontine Marshes (plates 7 and 8). Valentino Orsolini Cencelli, the first president of the Opera Nazionale Combattenti aired the idea to Mussolini that it might be useful to construct a town on the site of the older, small center Quadrato.¹⁰⁶ Thus, with *il Duce's* eager approvement, Littoria was both designed, built and inaugurated in 1932. On suggestion from Alberto Calza Bini the architect Oriolo Frezzotti was chosen for the design of both the regulation plan and the buildings. Regarding the town's layout and street system, Frezzotti thought it best to employ a radiating, concentric plan—inspired by Gustavo Giovannoni's *Città vecchie ed edilizie nuove*.¹⁰⁷ The point of departure was the rectangular shape of Quadrato. Five of the

¹⁰² Qtd. in Millon, *Some New Towns* 335.

¹⁰³ Qtd. in Millon, *Some New Towns* 333–334.

¹⁰⁴ Actually, Pomezia was built outside of the *Provincia di Littoria*, in the *Agro Romano* (or Roman Marshes), closer to Rome.

¹⁰⁵ Eugenio Lo Sardo, “Divine Geometry,” Lo Sardo and Boccia 70.

¹⁰⁶ Maria Luisa Boccia, “Littoria,” Lo Sardo and Boccia 209.

¹⁰⁷ Giovannoni's book from 1931 was an important source of inspiration for architects of Frezzotti's generation.

seven streets radiating out from the main square lead out of town (*plate 7.A*). He inserted a series of ring roads connecting the radiating streets.¹⁰⁸ Giovannoni in his book, discusses among other things the radiating plan, illustrated by the example of Renaissance ideal cities, not unlike the layout Frezzotti chose for Littoria. Altogether three major squares were laid out in the center; one for the ONC, one for the combined Town Hall/Fascist Headquarters, and one for the church. In addition there were two smaller squares and the sports field. With its distribution of *piazze* throughout town and the rather traditional architectonic style employed in several buildings, Littoria repeats several themes rooted in the Italian town tradition. Due to the swampland Littoria was built on (and the unwillingness to invest in fundamentals for higher edifices), a two story limitation was put on all buildings, with a few exceptions. Even though it was said to be the most Fascist town, the “*città del Duce*” (or “Il Duce’s town”), it did not get its own *Casa del Fascio* or *Casa Littoria* until 1939.¹⁰⁹

One year later, on the day of the first threshing in Littoria, August 5, 1933 (Anno XI – EF)¹¹⁰ work on *Sabaudia* began. Sabaudia is further treated in chapter 3.2.

After Sabaudia’s inauguration in 1934, the province of Littoria was established. Then followed the inauguration of *Pontinia* on December 18, 1935 (*plate 9*). The regime desired its completion by 1935. There was no time for a competition and the assignment was given to the young engineer Alfredo Pappalardo, an employee at the ONC’s technical office. This caused quite a heated discussion among the rationalist architects. Artistic consultant on the project was Littoria’s architect, Oriolo Frezzotti. Like Sabaudia, Pontinia was planned for 5,000 inhabitants. Nine blocks were laid out around a square, the *Piazza XXVIII Ottobre*, the administrative center. As is the case with Sabaudia, a short broad avenue leading west connects the main square with another somewhat smaller square upon which the church is placed at the furthest end of the axis. Even though somewhat more symmetrical, Pontinia’s layout resembles that of Sabaudia, as to the placement and divisions of different zones in town (e.g. public gardens, the *campo sportivo*, *prato della fiera*, and *zona industriale*). However, the architecture in Pontinia is marked by a more austere simplicity and ascetic moral. An institutional style with the uninviting, more closed surfaces in disciplined symmetry. This aesthetics reflects perhaps also the defiant show-off of the regime towards the isolation that caused the *autarchia* to respond with a stricter control of party and people.

¹⁰⁸ Boccia 209.

¹⁰⁹ Nodin, *Estetisk pluralism* 233.

¹¹⁰ The Fascists started a new era, counting the date of the “March on Rome” (28 October 1922) as the first day in the first year, using Roman numbers when counting the years.

At the day of the inauguration it was emphasized that this was the thirtyfirst day of the “siege,” as the regime used to call the economical sanctions.¹¹¹ Pontinia did not nearly receive the same attention as Littoria and Sabaudia.

The fourth town with the romantic name *Aprilia*, evoking spring and fertility, was founded on 25 April 1936—“*on the 160th day of the sanctions*,” as is written on the relief placed below the Town Hall’s rounded speech balcony.¹¹² (*Plate 10.*) The “sanctions” referred to were the sanctions placed upon Italy by the League of Nations after Italy’s invasion of Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) in 1935. After a competition, the architects Concezio Petrucci and Mario Luciano Tufaroli together with the engineers Riccardo Silenzi and Emanuele Paolini were chosen for the project. Aprilia was to be a rather small town, planned for 3,000 people only. Through its construction the regime wanted to show the outside world its strenght and insuperability: 160 days into the sanctions Italy still had the strenght to erect a new town! Local materials were used, as a part of an emerging nationalistic symbolism: tuff stone, brick, travertine, and stucco. As in Sabaudia, three towers, all of different size and expression, were erected. Numerous arcades frame the central square (a traditional Italian townscape) around which the Town Hall, Fascist Headquarters and church is situated. On 29 October 1937 Aprilia was inaugurated. The architectural magazine *Quadrante* criticized the new town with its use of rustic features for being “*a mean polemics against modernity.*”¹¹³

Pomezia was actually constructed outside the province of Littoria, in the *Agro Romano*, or Roman Marshes, closer to Rome (*plate 11*). The same design team was used as in Aprilia: Petrucci, Paolini, Tufaroli and Silenzi. The competition for thee fifth town was held in 1937, with the inauguration in 1939. Pomezia has an oblong, narrow plan (*plate 11.A*). Its center is clearly defined with certain administrative and representative functions, while the dwellings are arranged according to social categories. The town is held in a neo-feudal style reminiscent of rustic medieval surfaces. Local materials are used: Tuff stone, bricks, and travertine all have absorbant properties, and the painted surfaces reflecting the sun, color, and giving off a sense of lightness in Sabaudia particularly is lacking. Instead the buildings are darker, more solid, and uninviting as texture.

All these new towns had a political function as service centers within the Fascist district control. They were to provide all the necessities of political and social life in the towns, and

¹¹¹ Nodin, *Estetisk pluralism* 240.

¹¹² The main source for the paragraphs on Aprilia is: Nodin, *Estetisk pluralism* 241–42.

to supervise the social life of the surrounding borghi and farmsteads. The Province of Littoria was founded in 1934, and on that occasion the town Littoria was given the status of provincial capital, and thereby served an additional function, being the administrative center for the whole region.

Constructing a body of symbols that could express the new state, the Fascist state, was of the utmost importance to the Fascists. They used ancient Roman symbols (*plate 86.B*), architectural features from the glorious past (Antiquity and the Middle Ages), and of course important concepts, words and names meant to instill in the people strong feelings of pride and nationalism. The names of the five towns were also symbolic, pointing either towards a glorious past—or towards an even more glorious future. Thus, *Littoria*, is named after the Fascist organization itself, the word *littorio* almost synonymous with *Fascist*, and in addition pointing backward in history, to the *littorio*, or the lictor—the *magistrate's* private body guard, who carried the *fascies* (*plate 2.A*), a symbol of the power bestowed upon the magistrate, i.e. the right to sentence people to the capital punishment.

It was important to the Fascists to be on good terms with the royal family of Savoya. (The King being the only one who could threaten Mussolini as his only superior.) So *Sabaudia*, the second town to be built, was named after this royal house. *Sabauda* being an adjective, “of the House of Savoya.” *Aprilia* has a more romantic flair of spring. It symbolized a new beginning for the Italian people, a fertile spring with the country growing and blooming. *Pomezia* was one of the most important cities of the *Volsci*, an Italic people that occupied the area of southern Latium in the time of the Roman republic. (Sabaudia has streets named after the Volsci people too.) The origins of the name *Pontinia* is more uncertain. *Pontus* is Latin for *mare*, or sea. The Italians wanting to once more make the Mediterranean into their territory—maybe it was a play on the Roman “*Mare Nostrum*” (our sea), as they called it?¹¹⁴ There is also the theory that the name may be derivated from Pomezia.

It is important to realize that the emerging architects of the time found themselves in the middle of an important shift. If one follows the progress done by different Italian architects in the period from the 1920s to the 1930s, a common denominator seems to emerge: From a more openly classizising decorative architecture and city planning to a modern look following the new principles for architecture where function is put in the high

¹¹³ Alfredo Giarratana, “Inchiesta su Aprilia,” *Quadrante* 33 (1936), qtd. in Nodin, *Estetisk pluralism* 242.

seat, mass production is at the starting point, allowing for completely new ways of building, and the focus (at least among the architects if not for the regime) shifts from that of the grandiose, symmetrical plans towards a more human scale.

3.2 Sabaudia

The Competition for the Design of Sabaudia. Criteria

COMPETITION BRIEF 1933

“The Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti (ONC), with headquarters in Via Ulpiano 11, Rome, proclaims a nationwide competition open to all registered architects and engineers for the design of a development plan for a new communal centre of Sabaudia to be built in the reclaimed Pontine Marshes.

Plans of the location for the communal centre and its surrounding area will be provided by the ONC.

The designers are given a free hand as long as the development plan responds to the functional needs of a fundamentally agricultural centre and to the requirements of hygiene, the market economy, traffic circulation, land allocation, building layout and of aesthetics—for a municipality of 20,000 people with 5,000 inhabitants in the centre itself.

The development plan must provide all the necessary public services for the efficient functioning of the new agricultural centre, and must include all the typical institutions of the Fascist Regime (which must be constructed before other buildings) such as; the town hall with its tower, the Fascist Party headquarters, a workers’ club, barracks for the Fascist Militia, the Carabinieri (military police), and the Pubblica Sicurezza (police); the headquarters for the Balilla (Fascist youth league); a church with bell-tower and rectory; a nursery; a primary school; a hospital; a maternity and infancy centre; veteran’s clubs; the local ONC offices; a post office; a sports field; a covered market; a hotel; a cinema; an abbatoir; public housing with sixty apartments and thirty shops; and, a cemetery.”¹¹⁵

The competition brief for Sabaudia was issued 21 April 1933. The preferences of a protective, nationalist, and corporative regime are clearly visible in it: The competition was nationwide, and only registered architects could participate.¹¹⁶ The new town was not to be called a “town,” but a “communal centre” (*centro comunale*), or an agricultural center. This to be in line with the Fascist anti-urbanism policy. And, of course the Fascist buildings had to be constructed first. First and foremost it was the Fascist structures the regime wished to show the world on the inauguration day 360 days later. The drawings were due on May 25,

¹¹⁴ The idea of the *Mare Nostrum* appealed to the Fascists, the two words are often to be found inlaid in floor mosaics, etc.

¹¹⁵ Burdett 12. (My underscorings.) The competition brief in Italian can be found in *Sabaudia: 1933–34*, ed.s Giuseppe Pasquali and Pasquale Pinna (Milan: Electa, 1985) 22.

¹¹⁶ That is, one had to be a registered architect in a Fascist organization of architects (as all trade unions were Fascist at this time).

which meant that thirty-three days only were allowed for preparations and designs. The jury consisted of the architects Gustavo Giovannoni, Ernesto La Padula and Vincenzo Fasolo, and they examined the entries in fifteen days.¹¹⁷ The winner was announced in June of 1933, and Mussolini laid the cornerstone for the Town Hall on August 5 the same year. The next year, in 1934 on April 15 Sabaudia was inaugurated by King Victor Emmanuel III. Originally the inauguration was planned on April 22, Rome's birthday, but Mussolini realized that it was better to inaugurate the town on a more neutral date, and thus have two glorious opportunities for pomp and nationalism instead of just one. Thus the inauguration was advanced with seven days, to April 15.

3.2.1 “*Si fondano le Città*”: From Exhibition to Inauguration

“Exhibitions are particularly revelatory forms by virtue of their ability to attest to shifting patterns of spectatorship, patronage, and cultural consumption. [...] national and international exhibitions as sites for the identification and deconstruction of cultural exchange and ideological transmission. [...] exhibitions introduced many people to the dominant narratives of their respective societies. In both Europe and the United States, the 1920s and 1930s were decades in which exhibitions played a central cultural and ideological function, as they offered messages of national unity and strength in a time of social, economic, and political crisis.”¹¹⁸

On 25 July 1933, the ONC exhibited the thirteen different drafts for Sabaudia in their vast offices in Via Ulpiano 11, Rome. The exhibition got immense coverage in the press. Here were exhibited both the thirteen entries from the first round of the competition, as well as the four from the second, where only Oriolo Frezzotti (1888–1965), Angelo Vicario, and the team of Gino Cancellotti (1896–1987), Eugenio Montuori (1907–1982), Luigi Piccinato (1899–1982) and Alfredo Scalpelli (1898–1966) were invited to participate from the entries from the first round. Cancellotti, Montuori, Piccinato and Scalpelli won the competition and were rewarded with the first prize of ITL 20.000,-. Vicario came in second, and Frezzotti got third prize.

According to *Il Popolo d'Italia* Vicario was “*inspired by the criterium to give Sabaudia a large panoramic square opening up towards the Lago di Paola... genuinely Italian, and quadrangular, with buildings bordering on three sides of the square, and one open towards the solemn Circeo.*”¹¹⁹ (Plate 12.) Vicario's project is the favorite of *Il lavoro fascista's* reporter who praises his lightly colored

¹¹⁷ “Costruttività del regime fascista: Sabaudia, Comune pontino, si avvia verso la sua realizzazione: gli architetti d'Italia al lavoro nella terra redenta,” *l'Impero* 28 July 1933: 5.

¹¹⁸ Stone, *Patron State* 17.

¹¹⁹ “Come sorgerà Sabaudia: la mostra dei progetti del nuovo Comune Pontino,” *Il Popolo d'Italia* 27 July 1933: 6.

entry drawings “given a character of airy, Mediterranean elegance, rather countryside-like, to the different heights of the buildings.”¹²⁰

Frezzotti suggests a division into several distinct centers in his competition entry (*plate 13*); A center for the ONC’s agricultural agency (the largest); a political center; a welfare center; two sports centers; one industrial center; one center for sanitation; and one for bathing. In connection with the bathing center, he foresees the construction of a bridge over the lake (as does the project of the *Gruppo del Quattro*) to connect Sabaudia directly with the sea.¹²¹ The author using the signature “a.n.” points out the same aspects in his article.¹²²

The winning team competed under the name of *Gruppo del Quattro*, or “Group of four.” Their project was reported to be “inspired by the concept of arranging the populated areas of Sabaudia round about two airy squares; one destined for the civil life of the municipality (public offices, shops, coffee bar, gathering places, etc.), and the second for the big rural and political rallies.”¹²³ (*Plate 14.*) On the same day the *Corriere della Sera*, *Il Piccolo* and *Il Messaggero* repeats almost verbatim the words of this article. One suspects they are merely repeating the text of a press release (or a dictate by the state?). The projects for the buildings were described as being “inspired by a grand sense of modernity without losing out of sight the practicality.”¹²⁴

The regime thought the construction of the new town a most important event, disseminating information through the newspapers every step of the way, from the competition to the inauguration, and the first threshing in Sabaudia a couple of months later. The whole nation and many people abroad knew about the calculated marvellous work being done in the Pontine Marshes. On August 4, Victor Emmanuel III signed the *relativo Decreto-Legge* no 1771. And the next day, at 3:00 PM, the ceremony of laying the foundation stone was begun (*plate 15.A and B*). Mussolini, Achille Starace (the party secretary), Cencelli, and *Monsignor* Pio Leonardo Navarra, bishop of Terracina, were among the prominent participants at the ceremony. The parchment was signed by Mussolini and Cencelli, and read aloud to the public by Starace, before it was deposited in the foundation stone together with two coins (one of the kingdom, and one of the Vatican State) minted the same year.¹²⁵ Navarra sanctified the foundation stone. The ancient Roman tradition of

¹²⁰ a.n. “La mostra dei progetti per il nuovo Comune di Sabaudia,” *Il lavoro fascista* 30 July 1933: 3.

¹²¹ *Come sorgerà Sabaudia* 6.

¹²² a.n. 3.

¹²³ *Come sorgerà Sabaudia* 6.

¹²⁴ “L’Italia di Mussolini: un comune modello: Sabaudia,” *Corriere della Sera* 27 July 1933: 5.

¹²⁵ Katia Franchini and Feliciano Ianella, *Sabaudia nella storia* ([Sabaudia]: n.p., 1984) 100.

ploughing a fur indicating the boundary of the town (*pomerium*), and thus sanctifying the area, was reinvented using a tractor. The church's participation in these endeavors is a study in itself, but one should perhaps not be surprised as the church often through history maintained an active role with different regimes and powers. The church itself also being an extension of the Roman Empire entitled it to a ceremonial role in the Fascist rule.

According to one contemporary newspaper reporting on the new town, 6,000 workers were employed to complete the town before inauguration on 15 April 1934.¹²⁶ The workers were engaged in three shifts of eight hours.¹²⁷ Another source states that in the end as many as 14,500 workers, “called in from all parts of Italy,” were working on the construction site to complete the most important buildings in time.¹²⁸ However, church, school, covered market, water tower, or Balilla building were either not completed or even begun at this date. Several of the buildings facing the main square had only the façades rigged for the inauguration.¹²⁹ On 18 December 1933 Mussolini visited the construction site and gave a speech to the workers (*plate 15.C*):

*“I am pleased to to speak to you from high up on this scaffolding that has been constructed to make your toil easier. You have been granted a grand privilege, that of constructing a new town. I have been informed of your work conditions, and decided that your work will be justly compensated, both for you and your families. When all these buildings are finished, when people live in these houses, when all the territory is populated by farmers, you will be able to say: we, with our work, have been the founders of your town.”*¹³⁰

The town was named after the royal family, the House of Savoya. The name “Sabaudia” is derived from the adjective “sabaudo,” that translates “Savoyan” or “of the House of Savoy.”¹³¹ King Victor Emmanuel III and Queen Helen of Montenegro naturally attended the inauguration ceremony. The inauguration was a big day in Italy, with both the national and the international press reporting from the new town. The regime loved to orchestrate statements including numbers and figures, phrased in such a way as to be impressive. Thus, on April 13 the first previews hit the newspapers: “Sabaudia rises between the sea and the parc of Circe” wrote Marco Franzetti for *La Tribuna*:

¹²⁶ Marco Franzetti, “Tra il mare e il parco del Circeo è sorta Sabaudia,” *La Tribuna: l'idea nazionale* April 13 1934: 3.

¹²⁷ Franchini and Ianella 108.

¹²⁸ “Il Re soldato fra i coloni combattenti,” *Il Popolo d'Italia* 17 April 1934: 1.

¹²⁹ Clemente Ciammaruconi, “L'erezione della parrocchia di Sabaudia,” Carfagna, Ciammaruconi, and Martellini 178, note 25.

¹³⁰ Qtd. in Franchini and Ianella 110.

¹³¹ “Sabaudo,” *Italiensk-norsk ordbok*, 1981 ed.

“Sabaudia ... has arisen in 250 days, and is still today a larming construction site where as many as 6,000 workers ... in the end will have put in 1,200,000 work days.”¹³²

Another aspect of all the propaganda emerging in relationship to the Pontine projects was the panegyric and turgid poetic manner employed to evoke idylls, bucolic and heroic impressions:

“This one understands today, rushing across the Marshes towards Sabaudia the New, risen as a myth between the forest and the sea, where it seems as if the millennia should have forgotten a shred in the chaos of the creation.”¹³³

And:

“Thus, Sabaudia possesses a particular exquisite beauty of its own that stands out with a harmonious composition of natural elements, in which the most stupendous classicism melts together with the dreamiest romanticism. Because of these qualities it is certainly destined to become, in rapid order, a fantastically frequented tourist resort, and for that reason be added to the necklace of Italic cities and landscapes in which sparkles superiorly the august and divine face of this our immortal Fatherland.”¹³⁴

Another major peg the system hung their strategy on was the magic of futuristic expectation. Newspapers, posters and paintings commemorated the events of the inauguration with airplanes flying over this town of rationalist modern architecture:

“The earth, ever more irascible and swollen with a vengeance, accelerates the rhythm of its detonations baptizing with clangs of war the glass and reinforced concrete in the new edifices. These, vibrating, stir the human foliage on the balconies and terraces that call on the aeroplanes. The motors of the air swoop down at low altitude skimming the cubic forms of the architectural energy, and thereafter in squadron, turning, already entering into the smoke spreading off the shores from the fireworks down at the lake. Down below, between the flashing cores of dynamite rush workers (ex-gunners) devil-black, resembling pyrotechnic artists in a celebrative mode.”¹³⁵

20,000 people attended the solemn festivities. (Plates 16.A and 73.B.) There was a dominating presence of uniforms and helmets as the “soldier-farmers” from the surrounding farms and *borgbi* were wearing the black party shirt, and helmet from the great war. The young were dressed in their Balilla-uniforms. Battalions from the marine were also present at this very austere moment in Fascist history. They were crowding on balconies and rooftops, and the streets were covered with regimented crowds and motorcars. In this crowd was a little speck of feminine presence in Her Majesty Queen Helen and a few

¹³² Franzetti 3.

¹³³ Luigi Freddi, “Nascita della nuova città,” *Il Popolo d'Italia* 17 April 1934: 1.

¹³⁴ V. Patti, “Sabaudia,” *Sabaudia: Quando la cronaca diventa storia*, ed. Claudio Galeazzi, Quaderno del Novecento 3 (Latina: Novecento, 1998) 11–12.

¹³⁵ F.T. Marinetti, [untitled], ed. Galeazzi 109.

flower girls. From the images I have seen it does not seem like the farmers' wives attended this momentous occasion.

Mussolini was not present at this occasion, but on the 9th of July he participated in the first threshing¹³⁶—as he had done in Littoria the year before (plate 16.C). He returned to Sabaudia on September 22 the same year to reward the workers, who for a long period had hired themselves out to the work in the Pontine Marshes. They received a set amount of money and a diploma. The eloquent orator Mussolini gave yet another one of his nationalist speeches:

“In thirty years time, when the sons of your sons ask you what the document signifies that you have put in a frame in your house, you will answer like this: In the first decennium of the revolution of the blackshirts I was engaged in a grand battle to redeem from the waters and from death a vast zone of territory of the Italian fatherland. All the will of the regime, enormous mediums, a large organization and an impressive army of workers were engaged in this battle. You will remember this with a sensation of pride and honor, because you with your shovels, with your spades, with your sweat have given a new province to Italy.”¹³⁷

After the inauguration there was still more work to be done in the streets and on the lots of Sabaudia. But by 1935 the township of Sabaudia started to function as a rural center for the ONC and other party activities. The town with all its buildings, such as they were drafted, was now changing from a construction site to a busy little rural center.

3.2.2 The Town Plan and Structure

“The integrated scheme for the functioning of the reclamation agricultural center demonstrates, therefore, how the agricultural life of the farm develops independently from its political and administrative activity, which takes place in the communal center. The latter (communal center) combines in itself all the institutions necessary to life: communal offices, Fascist party headquarters, church, hotel, market, theater, schools, gymnasium of the Opera Nazionale del Balilla, hospital, lying-in and infant care, playing fields, cemetery.

The building of these institutions should be proportioned to the needs of the entire agricultural center and not only to those of the communal town center itself: this explains the apparent disproportion between the size of the public buildings and the number of houses that, together with the public buildings, comprise the true and characteristic urban aggregate: naturally, one should not tire of repeating it. Sabaudia is seen comprehensively in its territory, or rather as a strongly decentralized building pattern that has its center in a large central district.”¹³⁸

¹³⁶ This moment in the history of Sabaudia is forever fixed in the mosaic on the façade of the town's church, depicting Mussolini and Valentino Orsolini Cencelli taking part in this first threshing in Sabaudia, while the Annunciation take place in the foreground of the picture. More about this mosaic can be found on pp. 71–72 and 98.

¹³⁷ Franchini and Ianella 166.

¹³⁸ Millon, *Some New Towns* 335.

Two main roads lead in to the town center—one from Rome, the other from Terracina—like the *decumanus* and *cardo* of an antique Roman city or military camp. Dominating the region of Sabaudia the impressive Monte Circeo (Circe’s mountain) rises to the southwest—a breathtaking vista of the mountain from the ceremonial square southside of the Town Hall. The integration of the town with the surrounding landscape is well considered, harmonizing ocean and wilderness and fields and parks with the town. From the town all these varied environments seem to border on its outskirts, as if the urban little sprawl was a gem set inside a necklace of shifting sites. The town seems healthy and vital as it is accompanied by the verdant nature and opalescent light—both greenery, light, and air were important issues in modernist architectural theory. (*Plate 14.*)

The town centre is easily accessible from the outside with the major road Corso Vittorio Emanuele II (the *decumanus*) taking off 90 degrees from Via Appia (from Littoria and Rome) and leading straight to the Town Hall tower on the main square, which is discernible at a great distance.¹³⁹ The other axis, Corso Vittorio Emanuele III (the *cardo* heading towards Terracina) intersects with the *decumanus* in the civil part of the main square, the Piazza della Rivoluzione (*plate 17*). The civil part of this L-shaped square is surrounded clockwise from southeast by an apartment house, the hotel, Town Hall, Party Headquarters, and Cinema/Restaurant complex with a portico completing the “circle”. The ceremonial part is situated between the Town Hall to the northwest and the Militia to the southeast. Running along the northeast side is the hotel again and an apartment house (type C), both facing the public garden on the opposite side of the square. The second major square, with the religious complex, is tucked away from the civic center, but in the extension of Via Oddone which becomes Largo Giulio Cesare before it leads out to the Piazza Regina Margherita and the church. This axis presents the most impressive view through town with the three towers (of Town Hall, Party Headquarters, and Church) lining the short boulevard. The streets and buildings in Sabaudia are laid out in a grid around these two main squares. However, the town plan has been given an asymmetrical, rhomboidal shape, extended by a rectangular core in the east. This lines the periphery of the grid system with curved, organic roads tying in the landscape. The town plan was rather easy to expand, if necessary. In the many euforic reportages about Sabaudia, the town’s measures are often

¹³⁹ Burdett 3.

reported: “Sabaudia covers a surface of 60 hectares (148.2 acres). There are 51,600 m^2 of green zones; 13,400 m^2 of squares; 5,000 m^2 of avenues.”¹⁴⁰

Wherever one looks in the direction of the center, either the Town Hall tower or the tower of the SS. Annunziata, seem to crown the building(s) in sight, in such a manner as to make it seem like tower and building(s) fuse into one and the same building mass. The architects were very concerned with the aesthetic aspects of Sabaudia: Many streets end or make a bend in front of some landmark building, such as is the case with the town hall, the church, or the Balilla building, to mention some. The different vistas through porticoes, of walls and pilasters in red brick, dark and lighter travertine, peperino stone, red and yellow stucco bordering on each other, in different geometric constellations, always with the blue sky right over your head, green trees and lawns and maybe a glimpse of glittering sea, make for a very pleasant environment.

Streets¹⁴¹ are important architectonic features in any cityscape. Kostof sees the street as an *institution*: “Beyond its architectural identity, every street has an economic function and social significance.” He continues, quoting Joseph Rykwert, writing that the street “is human movement institutionalized—and human intercourse institutionalized.” Thus, “the history of the street is about both container and content.”¹⁴² The urban street is a complex, civic institution—always having to cater to contradictory functions and activities depending on *what* is to be contained and *when* to be the backdrop of a controlled content, as well as to be the context for the civic life’s unpredictable unfoldments of moving cars and carts, human interaction, shopping, etc. Walking about in Sabaudia it quickly becomes apparent that great consideration was given to the public spaces occurring in the streets, on the corners and the spaces opening to major piazzas the architecture always includes perforations of the structures in the form of sidewalks receded under the upper storys with pillars and shaded areas. Looking from these colonnades into bright sunlight and across the street into another shaded area opening again into a regular street lined with trees, makes spending time in Sabaudia a varied visual experience. However, one cannot help noticing the political intentions in the way this

¹⁴⁰ Vago 18. My translation.

¹⁴¹ Piacentini describes the street system in Sabaudia thoroughly in the June edition of *Architettura* 1934: “The following road divisions exist: internal main roads of first class, 18–20 meters wide; main roads of second class, 14–16 meters wide; secondary internal streets, 8–10 meters wide; roads subdivision and residential 4–6 meters wide. . . ., the subdividing streets [make up] 4,000 m^2 . . . The streets are constructed with roadbeds made of stone from Circe and with crushed tarred stone; curbs of travertine, sidewalks of bricks made of concrete and ceramic stone . . . ” (Marcello Piacentini, “Sabaudia,” Galeazzi 132.) My translation.

¹⁴² Spiro Kostof, *The City Assembled: The Elements of Urban Form through History* (Boston: Bullfinch Press, 1999) 189.

arrangement also makes it easily able to survey movements of people as all these public spaces, including coffee bars, cinema and other leisure activities, are mixed with ever present Fascist institutional buildings. As Richard Burdett observes: “*The dominant position of the Fascist institutions and the provision of a piazza for political rallies clearly reflect the Fascist spatial rhetoric.*” But in all fairness to Sabaudia and its architects these spaces do not feature the “*cold and calculated stage-like scenarios of grandiose Fascist schemes, such as the E.42 (EUR) project in Rome.*”¹⁴³ It makes for a strange blend this concoction of contemporary notions of garden cities and the looming weight of a monumental political intention, probably unlike any other building development done by the Fascist regime.

The town plan’s capacity to distribute people and traffic are immanently present upon visiting. No traffic need to go through the center if no business there is intended, because the town is lined in by a ring road which can distribute the traffic from any direction past the town and beyond.

Public Gardens, Squares, and Parks

One of the many charming features of Sabaudia, is the distribution of nature and a feeling of greenery and oxygen permeating the town. There is no strict border, closing off the town from the surrounding nature. On the contrary, the architects have done an extremely good job at integrating both. One of the features advancing this, is the distribution of piazzas and parks in the little town, in addition to the planting of trees and palms in virtually every road. However, piazzas and parks are also important tools for controlling people, and for demonstrating power. The 14th century French mythographer Petrus Berchorius’ words on piazzas are well worth remembering in this context: “*Since piazzas are areas in villages or cities, empty of houses and other such things and of obstructions, arranged for the purpose of providing space or set up for meetings of men, it should be remarked that in general through piazzas the condition of man in this world can be discovered.*”¹⁴⁴ Public space is a universal urban trait, “*cities of every age have seen fit to make provision for open places that would promote social encounters and serve the conduct of urban public affairs.*” While the street is a public place of transit, the square or park are public places that function as a destination; “*a purpose-built stage for ritual and interaction.*” Kostof finds two justifying aspects to the concept of the public place, one being “*freedom of action—and the right to stay inactive. The second aspect is a ritual one. Public places host structured or*

¹⁴³ Burdett 3.

¹⁴⁴ Petrus Berchorius, qtd. in Kostof, *City Assembled* 123.

*communal activities—festivals, riots, celebrations, public executions—and because of that, such places will bear the designed evidence of our shared record of accomplishment and our ritual behavior.*¹⁴⁵ The different public spaces in Sabaudia serve both these purposes.

The PIAZZA DELLA RIVOLUZIONE was planned as one L-shaped piazza, but the Town Hall tower stands so far out in the corner, that it is often thought of as two different *piazze* (plate 17).¹⁴⁶ According to Enrico Guidoni the notion of a diagonal view of a public building with two sides visible at once influenced the design of integral L-squares, and especially those of churches. *“The difference here is that the space fixes a particular view of the public building in a premeditated way, rather than being an accident of urban development. The corner of the L-shaped square becomes a critical point of emphasis for the visual cohesion of the space.”*¹⁴⁷ Pierre Vago in his article on Sabaudia from 1934 emphasizes the importance of such a square to the Fascists—as well as pointing out its connotations: *“This L-shaped square, develops in a way ‘around’ the bell tower. From high up on a balcony, the ‘chief’ Fascists can preach to the crowd gathered on the two esplanades; one, closed in, in the fashion of the old Italian squares; the other open towards the sea. A splendid picture!”*¹⁴⁸ The northeastern part of the square functioned as the town’s civic square, while the southwestern part was intended for political rallies.

Southwest of the War Veterans’ Building, Town Hall and the Piazza della Rivoluzione, down towards the lake, are situated the GIARDINI COMUNALI (municipal gardens); a big, cool, green park for everyone to use, with palms and other types of trees (plate 18). The park is laid out geometrically, with grids, semi-circular and other sections of the circle. In the middle, a broad avenue with midsections (the Corso Umberto I^o) divides the park into two, running from the Piazza to connect with the ring road surrounding town.

PIAZZALE ROMA is a huge, cool green lung in the northern part of town (plate 19). With a stupendous view over the lake it was planned as a picnic-spot with a café-restaurant. The design of the square and adjacent areas is in the style of an Italian garden. However, it was not completed according to plan: Over the neo-baroque grid with its little geometrically shaped lawns 165 palm trees were later planted in rows. The colonial style that characterizes the square became established during the Imperial period.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Kostof, *City Assembled* 123.

¹⁴⁶ And today each part of the piazza is named separately; *Piazza del Comune* and *Piazza Circe*.

¹⁴⁷ Enrico Guidoni, qtd. in Kostof, *City Assembled* 150.

¹⁴⁸ Vago 18. My translation.

¹⁴⁹ “From the foundation to the construction of the town,” *Sabaudia 1934: Il Sogno di una Città Nuova e l’Architettura Razionalista = The Dream of a New Town and Rationalistic Architecture*, ed.s Giorgio Muratore, Daniela Carfagna and Mario Tieghi (Sabaudia: Comune di Sabaudia, 1998) 207.

The Largo Giulio Cesare, connects the PIAZZA REGINA MARGHERITA with the main square, the Piazza della Rivoluzione (*plate 20*). The Piazza Regina Margherita has a rectangular shape. It is completely dominated by the church, frontally placed in the far end of the piazza (northwest) and constructed on a low plateau. To the church's right are the other religious structures with a freestanding baptistery, and to the left is the slender belfry. On the southern side are apartment blocks, while the western side is finished off with a small green park. The Via Principezza Clotilde leads out from the square's northwestern corner, connecting it with the ringroad. The entire square is covered with tiles. Piacentini writes thus about the church square:

“The arrangement of the church square has been influenced by the spatial ambience of our typical medieval ‘piazza’; the atmosphere is created by a purity and lightness of elements, characteristically mediterranean in their spiritual intensity and poetic intimacy. The few, simple volumes are harmoniously distributed according to a conventional theme, but in their geometric clarity they express the desire for a return to a more serene and simple way of life and faith. The free-standing masses of the baptistery and the church, within the piazza, create a series of attractive views and spatial effects surrounded by the more regular minor buildings which enclose the open space. The proportions of these buildings and their balanced relation to the larger urban structure recreate the simplicity and intimacy of the traditional village environment.”¹⁵⁰

Piazza Regina Margherita's main function is giving an air of dignity and distance to the church of SS. Annunziata and the rest of the religious complex, as well as providing for a good view of the church complex.

The center of communication, the PIAZZA OBERDAN is situated alongside the main road leading in to the center from Rome, the Corso Vittorio Emanuele II. It is almost square in shape, and the bus station is placed in its middle. Viale Regina Elena, a broad road, leads out from it and ends in the Balilla building.

Toponymy

As mentioned earlier, the Fascists often used important names and concepts from history when naming their towns. Of course this also applied to the naming of streets. Sabaudia being named after the royal family, it is therefore not surprising that several streets are named after members of the royal family, 33 as a matter of fact. Other streets are named after the Fascist heroes: the “martyrs” of the Risorgimento, after mythological concepts/names, Romans, and Dante. Sabaudia's *cardo*, the street that has the most

¹⁵⁰ Piacentini, Burdett 28. My underscorings. However, there are several mistakes in this article, especially regarding materials used in the different buildings.

ceremonial, axial look, passing by the Militia barracks, through the ceremonial and civic parts of the Piazza della Rivoluzione, by the town hall, the Fascist headquarters, and the war veterans' building, before ending at the front port of the church, is from the Fascist headquarters and to the church, named Largo Giulio Cesare.

In a map from 1933, I find drawn in: Viale Emanuele Filiberto, Via Principezza Lodovica, Viale Conte Rosso, Viale Conte Verde, Viale Principe Eugenio, Via Duca degli Abruzzi, Via Duca del Mare, Via Principezza Clotilde, Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, Corso Vittorio Emanuele III, Viale Principe Amedeo V, Via Principe Biancamano, Piazza Regina Margherita, Via Duca della Vittoria, *Piazza 28 Ottobre*, Viale Regina Elena, Via Amedeo Cencelli, Viale Carlo Alberto, Via Pietro II, Viale Principezza Maria, *Via Odone*, *Via Cesare Battisti*, *Via Dante*, *Piazza Oberdan*, *Piazza della Rivoluzione*, Via Tomaso I, *Piazza Roma*, *largo Giulio Cesare*, *Via Verbania*.¹⁵¹ The names put in italics are the only ones not taken from members of the royal family. Among the few non-royal historical persons worthy of the honour of a street name, are *Dante* and *Julius Caesar*. It is a bit peculiar that there is no *Via Garibaldi* or *Via Cavour* in the town. However, the Triestan patriot and Fascist “martyr” Guglielmo Oberdan¹⁵² is honoured with his own square, as is the hero of World War I, Cesare Battisti¹⁵³ with a street. Important places, events and dates are other categories used for naming the streets after; *28 ottobre* and *Rivoluzione* (after the Fascist takeover and the March on Rome 28 Ottobre 1919), and, of course, *Roma* – one of the most important symbols in the Fascist empire and faith. *Via Verbania* is named after the old, Roman name for *lago Maggiore*; *Verbanus lacus*.¹⁵⁴

3.2.3 *The Buildings of the Official Commission*

In compliance with the text of the competition, the buildings analyzed and documented in this chapter are those commissioned by the regime.¹⁵⁵ Sabaudia was actually not built on the drained swampland so often associated with the Pontine region, but on sandy dunes.

¹⁵¹ Muratore, Carfagna and Tieghi 103.

¹⁵² Oberdan was hanged in Trieste in 1822 after an assassination attempt on the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz Joseph. The *Museo del Risorgimento* in Trieste, containing a sanctuary to Oberdan's memory, was constructed in 1934 by the architect Umberto Nordio.

¹⁵³ Battisti was captured by the Austrians on July 10, 1916 and executed after a quick trial in the early morning of July 13. He cried out the words “Viva l'Italia” with his last breath, and thus with his martyrdom and cry inspired new courage in the Italian warriors. Mariella Mazzi, “Cesare Battisti,” Istituto Tecnico Statale Commerciale e per Geometri – Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, Montefiascone, March 3 2002 <http://www.itcgmontefiascone.it/asiago/cesare_battisti.htm>.

¹⁵⁴ According to Norse mythology the giant snake Verbanus resided in it.

¹⁵⁵ Actually, the bus station, *Marina Militara*, and race course were not mentioned in the competition brief, but

Due to the dangers of building on such ground special precautions needed to be taken and thus among other things the height of the buildings—as in the other towns—was restricted to two stories. Furthermore were the foundations of all the buildings made on top of plattings of reinforced concrete (as were many of the mural frameworks). Three years before the restrictions on the use of scarce materials was imposed on pre-war Italy,¹⁵⁶ the construction of Sabaudia could be carried out since modern materials and techniques were part and parcel of modern architecture. The masonry is in tuff stone or limestone from Circe.¹⁵⁷ Other building materials continuously used are bricks, different types of travertine stone. Iron, marble, and glass were used to accentuate different building parts. The walls are mostly covered in a yellow or warm orange colored stucco, but on the more official buildings, parts of the brick walls are often left uncovered. The regime tended to use travertine to emphasize important public buildings, often, as is the case in Sabaudia, only covering parts of the walls with it. In Sabaudia, the church's front façade, the baptistery, the first floor of the Town Hall, in addition to its tower, parts of the school's and the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* building, the War Veterans' club, in addition to the hospital, the maternity and infancy center, and the porticoes around the main square, the Piazza della Rivoluzione are covered with travertine.

The different building types are placed according to their function. The Slaughterhouse complex, the Cemetery, the Water Tower, the Hospital and the Maternity and Infancy Center, as well as the Sports Field were all placed on the outskirts of town, not being institutions one necessarily frequented every day.¹⁵⁸ Residential areas are placed around the center core, combined apartment and shop edifices in the center proper, and in the heart of town, bordering on the main square, you find both the Town Hall with its tower, the *Casa del Fascio*, the Unions, the National Afterwork Foundation, the War Veterans' Club, in addition to the Hotel, Restaurant, Bar, Cinema/Theater, and Shops. The Religious Center is put in a smaller square, the Piazza Regina Margherita, somewhat withdrawn from the center proper, but still visible, and connected with the main square by the broad avenue

as they were realized within the same period as the other buildings I have chosen to include them.

¹⁵⁶ As the national economy steadily grew worse, partly as a result from the international embargo on Italy from 1936 to 1937 (due to the occupation of Ethiopia—or Abyssinia as it was then called), and as the concept of “autarchia” (self-sustainment) became important to the regime, a new type of thriftiness was emphasized. The regime had always spoken out for a modest, no-luxury line, now even the use of modern building materials were prohibited as the regime e.g. needed the steel/iron for its war industry.

¹⁵⁷ Piacentini, “Sabaudia,” Galeazzi 132.

¹⁵⁸ That is, the outskirts of town in 1934. Today these structures have been swallowed up by the residential areas.

Largo Giulio Cesare, creating an impressive view from the ceremonial part of the Piazza della Rivoluzione, with three towers—that of the Town Hall, the Fascist Headquarters, and the Church belfry lined up along both sides of an axis.

Some of the town's openness is due to the restriction on height. Actually there is only one tall building in Sabaudia, the *Azienda Agraria*, or ONC headquarters. The consistent use of flat roofs throughout town also adds to this openness. (The buildings in the three first Pontine towns are all with flat roofs.) The green lungs connect the town to the surrounding landscape.

I have chosen to follow Spiro Kostof's four categories proposed in *The City Assembled*. Here different urban sectors are grouped according to specialized civic functions: The administrative district, "where the ruling authority resides"; the religious district; the district of business and commerce; and, the residential component of the urban structure.¹⁵⁹

Category A: Administrative Buildings

The Town Hall with its Tower (*plates 22–24*)

Architects: Cancellotti, Montuori, Piccinato, Scalpelli

From the distance, approaching Sabaudia on the ancient Via Appia by car or bus, and then turning on the Migliara 53, the Town Hall's tower rises from the extended axis of the road. From its central location in the grid of streets it hovers over the little town of Sabaudia, as did the belfry in the Middle Ages. No matter where you stop on a walkabout and take in the views, the slender tower in shining white travertine seems to rise over the flat roofs and makes itself a part of the buildings at hand. The building itself, nevertheless, is only a two story high edifice. The freestanding 42 m high tower is linked to the building proper by a large balcony intended for addressing the people during Fascists holidays and rallies. The building is U shaped and arranged around an inner brickfaced cortile as in a Renaissance palace. A bridgelike *loggia* on level with the second floor connects the two wings of the building in the back and frames the landscape. Underneath this terrace the building opens up, offering a view originally through a low iron fence to the public gardens and the lake

¹⁵⁹ Kostof, *City Assembled* 72–73. He recognizes the fact that this system of four categories is not "quite as satisfactory for the modern city" with regards to the religious component which is substantially diffused, as well as to the commercial and business district which is "more complex and compartmentalized" than in earlier periods. However in respect to the somewhat medieval character of Sabaudia it seems a sensible way of classification for the present purposes.

below in the distance, like a “metaphysical window.”¹⁶⁰ When the entrance gate to the building was open one could see from the Piazza della Rivoluzione through the cortile all the way down to the lake, adding a very sophisticated touch to the building. And once inside the cortile one was “permitted a view of the Piazza della Rivoluzione on one side and the lake and sea on the other.”¹⁶¹ A travertine portico runs along the southern façade wall on the ground level with steps leading to the ceremonial part of the Piazza. There are two rows of windows in flight with the main façade. The first story is faced with Roman travertine and has wide horizontal windows, whereas the second story, clad in brick, is styled with vertical windows. A darker travertine variety frames the doors and windows. Most of the building is constructed in ordinary masonry technique. Hardly any reinforced concrete is used, – the exception being the tower’s corners. The freestanding tower is in reinforced concrete covered with travertine slabs and is completed with an internal staircase, clock and housing a municipal bell. The tower dominates the characteristic L-shaped Piazza della Rivoluzione.

Interior: The large wings hold the upper drawing rooms and galleries on the south side, and the lodgings of the municipal secretary and caretakers apartments on the north side. The south aisle also houses the official reception area, the mayor’s office, some other offices and a big banquet hall with the large vertical windows adding a cool feeling to the room as they also open up towards the public gardens, the lake Paola, and *Monte Circeo*. The floors are covered with concrete tiles in grey and white, laid out in a line pattern. In the south aisle a broad ceremonial staircase—another Renaissance feature—leads up to the large second floor gallery off which are placed the ceremonial chambers. The staircase is in red marble from Monte Amiata, with skirtings in stalactite and handrails in black Carrara marble (*Nero Reale Nord Carrara*).

Sculpture and decoration: Above the main entrance to the building and its main cortile is placed a travertine relief by Francesco Nagni and A. Vecchi titled “Victory Marching.”¹⁶² It is ca 250 cm high and dated 1934. It depicts a rather bumpkin looking Victory with her right arm raised in the greeting style of Ancient Rome (*plate 24.A*). Originally, in her left arm (but now chiseled away), close to her body, she carried the Fascist symbol par excellence, the lictor’s ax, or *fascis*. Crowning above this relief again, were the coat of arms of Sabaudia, the province and the Italian state. The motive of the winged female Victory

¹⁶⁰ The expression is taken from Giorgio Muratore’s essay “Sabaudia and the Italian ‘new towns’.” (Muratore, Carfagna and Tieghi 35.)

¹⁶¹ *From the foundation* 130.

¹⁶² The motive was also used by other Italian artists in the Fascist era, e.g. Marino Marini depicted Italy in the

was taken from Roman triumphal arches where reliefs of Victories decorated the spandrels surrounding the main portal (*plate 88*).

The large doors in the gateway are in massive wood with protective bronze plating covering the bottom. Its case is clad with dark travertine.

THE ARGUMENT ABOUT THE TOWER'S HEIGHT

*“The order of a unique figure
and the harmony of a unique number
give rise to all things.”¹⁶³*

The Town Hall's tower—42 meters tall, soaring tapering towards the sky—is the aesthetical key to the entire town plan. Borrowed from medieval architecture, it is a structure typical of the new towns and one of the oldest symbols of power. Thus it was of the utmost importance both to the regime and to the architects. During the construction period the tower became the subject for a strong argument between the architects and commissary Cencelli when the latter decided that Sabaudia's Town Hall tower could not be higher than the tower of the Town Hall in the province capital, Littoria. He wanted to reduce its height to 32 meters. The architects had planned the tower to be 42 meters high, and they conceived of the tower as the key to the whole town plan—aesthetically speaking. A tower reduced to 32 meters, as Cencelli suggested, would ruin the whole town design, they wrote in a letter to Mussolini. *Il Duce* then intervened in person—and the tower height was set to 42 meters.¹⁶⁴ This is just one example of how Mussolini dealt with the young Italian architects and won their favor. In their letter to Mussolini the four young architects wrote: *“The regulation plan, the winner of a public contest, is worked out with the urbanistic acknowledgment of the axial positioning of the tower in respect to the principal access roads.”¹⁶⁵* They continue by pointing out that if not built 42 metres high, as planned, it will be seen from the Via Appia, and that the town hall building too will be less harmonic as the tower also is planned to harmonize with the building's body. Thus both building and environments will suffer. What is somewhat more confusing is their claim that it should be organically and strictly connected with the proportions of and in equilibrium with the buildings around it,

shape of a winged genius in his sculpture “Italy in Arms” from 1933.

¹⁶³ Giordano Bruno, *About the Monas* (1591), qtd. in Alexander Roob, *The Hermetic Museum: Alchemy & Mysticism* [Cologne: Taschen, 1997] 623).

¹⁶⁴ The correspondence between the architects and the regime can be found in Appendix III. More reading about this special incident can be found in Galeazzi, 136–38.

¹⁶⁵ See Appendix III for the entire letter.

an equilibrium that does not bear random alterations. The first two arguments seem plausible enough, but to find some hidden key to explain what calculations have been done to achieve the so-called equilibrium with the other buildings in the center seems rather impossible. None of the other buildings' measurements seem to be mathematically calculated from the tower's height. The length of the buildings vary rather much, and from the few heights I have been able to read out of the elevation drawings (the school building and one of the villas) it is not possible to find any mathematical relationship to the Town Hall tower either. If one takes into consideration the extremely short period the architects had for preparing their project (three weeks for designing an entire town), it seems even more unlikely that they should have found the time necessary for any sort of "divine geometry" or other harmonical calculations based on this. It therefore seems safe to conclude that the aesthetic aspects of the Town Hall would suffer from a reduction of its tower's height, and also that its relationship to the main roads leading into the center would be somewhat less harmonious. Probably a lower tower would also destroy some of the town's overall aesthetic. But this would not be due to a thorough scheme where the tower holds the "key" according to advanced mathematical formulas, but more likely to the architects' eye measurements.

The Combined Fascist Party Headquarters, Trade Unions' Offices, and "National Afterwork Foundation" (Plates 25 and 43.B and C)

Architects: Cancellotti, Montuori, Piccinato, Scalpelli

On the northern side of the Piazza della Rivoluzione a multifunctional building was erected, housing both the Fascist party headquarters, the trade unions, and the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*, OND (the National Afterwork Foundation¹⁶⁶). It is a two story high edifice in yellow stucco masonry, with structural parts in concrete. The building structure is loadbearing except for the concrete frame of the meeting hall.¹⁶⁷ Door and window cases are in travertine. On the roof there is an additional room, recessed from the edge. Seemingly to avoid monotony the front of the façade is broken up on the second floor by three small loggias off center, only separated by narrow dividers. The western part of the building is finished off with a travertine portico leading to the four story red brick tower, the *torre littoria*. The tower is set back on the Largo Giulio Cesare in relation to the façade

¹⁶⁶ I have used the regime's own translation of the term "Dopolavoro", *The National Afterwork Foundation*, used in a multilanguage exhibition catalogue from 1938 though this is a peculiar translation.

¹⁶⁷ Piacentini, Burdett 24.

onto the square. An external, low travertine staircase leads up to the portico and tower. From the back of the building an entrance leads into the courtyard which facilitated outdoor activities.

THE OPERA NAZIONALE DOPOLAVORO

The entrance to the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* was through the portico on the western side. As can be read out of the plan for the first floor (*plate 25.A*). The OND occupied the first floor. Only members could make use of the premises, much like a British club would create an inside sense of belonging. Besides the few opportunities for entertainment such as the cinema, coffee bar, restaurant and dancing restricted to the hotel, this was the place, obviously, the party preferred people to congregate in. It contained an assembly hall with gallery and a small stage, a library, bar, and a courtyard for games, in addition to offices and storage rooms. The trapezoidal hall was of a concrete construction, and had the capacity of seating approximately 300 persons. It was shared by all the three Fascist organizations mentioned above. The entrance was at behind the building. Underneath the small stage were rooms for dressing. The assembly hall also contained a machinist room for the cinema, and there were four emergency exits. Finally, some smaller stores occupied the first floor facing the Piazza della Rivoluzione.

The OND must have been an attractive organization as it offered the members an exclusive opportunity to watch films, read, listen to the radio,¹⁶⁸ play games, relax in the bar, or participate in arrangements created by the OND. This, no doubt, helped to increase the memberships of Fascist organizations all over Italy as it had no real affordable competition.

THE FASCIST PARTY HEADQUARTERS (CASA DEL FASCIO)

The Fascist party headquarters were situated together with the Unions on the second floor of the building, but with separate entrances. The entrance to the party headquarters is through an internal staircase in the *torre littoria* (the Fascist tower). The tower is a robust construction in brick, almost square and four stories high. The top story housed the Fascist bell with a relief depicting *il Duce*. It was rung during important Fascist holidays.¹⁶⁹ The bell tower's sound-loop is horizontal—whereas the sound-loops in the other two towers in the

¹⁶⁸ Membership in the OND gave a large discount if one wanted to buy a radio. Still many could not afford one, so listening to the radio in the club was a popular activity.

center are vertical. The top story opens up towards the sky. The tower is reminiscent of those in Roman or medieval fortifications, and the connotations are those of strength, solidity, and historical continuity. Over the tower's entrance were originally placed a lictor's ax, surrounded by the letters P and N placed horizontally on its left side, and F to the right, the acronym for the *Partito nazionale fascista*.¹⁷⁰ According to the Italian expert on Italian Fascist history, Emilio Gentile:

“The party ascribed considerable cultural value to the Casa del Fascio, or local headquarters. As the center of party life it contained a sanctuary dedicated to Fascists who had died in action; in this ‘mystical temple’ these were venerated and ‘glorified in mutual meditation.’ Every local party felt it necessary to have a headquarters adequate for party functions, and worthy to host religious ceremonies, for, as the federal secretary of Turin put it, ‘A Faith needs a Temple.’”¹⁷¹

On the account of this, in addition to necessary party offices, one would expect to find such a sanctuary in the *Casa del Fascio* in Sabaudia, as this was indeed a prestigious Fascist project. Nevertheless, from the blueprints I surveyed there is no apparent trace of such a sanctuary in all of Sabaudia.¹⁷² There are all the rooms one would expect to find in an executive headquarter; meeting room for the executive board/leaders; local party secretary; administrative secretary; Young Male Fascists; Female Fascists; a storeroom, even 2 WC's. But no sanctuary. There is a room on the third floor inside the tower and connected to an auxiliary room on the roof, which are not designated on any drawings as rooms for any specific use. But a possible location for a sanctuary in these spaces seem very unlikely given their unprestigious spaces and somewhat inaccessible placement. Furthermore, they are too small for any ceremonial gatherings. No other rooms are undesignated and thus are not candidates for locating any sanctuary. Conversations I have had with local historians in Sabaudia confirm this as none of them had ever heard of such a room.¹⁷³ Thus it seems pertinent to state the question; Was there no sanctuary in Sabaudia's *Casa del Fascio* contrary to other such structures? Looking at a blueprint for the *Casa del Fascio* in Littoria, designed by Oriolo Frezzotti in 1939, a Fascist sanctuary is given a prominent place: Central to the giant “M” that the building was shaped in, is drawn a spacious room designated “*Sacrario*”

¹⁶⁹ The bell disappeared in the confusion following from the American invasion during the war.

¹⁷⁰ Later in the 1930s this acronym and the small fasces was replaced with a sign, ‘*Fascio di Combattimento*,’ over the entrance gate, and three much larger fasces on a row higher up.

¹⁷¹ Gentile 124.

¹⁷² According to Nodin the *Casa del Balilla* too had such sanctuaries. (Nodin, *Estetisk pluralism* 257.) But as shown, Sabaudia presents none, neither in the Casa del Fascio, nor in the Casa Balilla. One cannot find a single still existing sanctuary anywhere in Italy in such buildings today, and the only sanctuary in existence today is in the *Museo del Risorgimento* in Trieste.

(plate 8.C). The record insists that this was not unique to this building. Could the explanation be that these sanctuaries were not so widespread prior to Italy becoming an imperial power? To solve this issue one would need to investigate several Fascist headquarters in the early 1930s, but this clearly falls outside of this thesis.

UNION HEADQUARTERS

The Trade Unions' headquarters have a separate entry from the Piazza della Rivoluzione. An internal staircase leads up to six offices, waiting room, storeroom, depot, and a W.C. Two of the loggias facing onto the square belongs to the Unions. In addition there is a spacious balcony running parallel with Largo Giulio Cesare, constituting the roof of the portico beneath.

The Local ONC Offices (Agricultural Concern) (Plates 26–27)

Architect: Angelo Vicario

Each ONC *Azienda Agraria*, or Agricultural Concern, was led by a director with a staff of agents and under-agents. Its main task was to provide technical assistance for the settlers. Each agent was responsible for the supervision of ca. 30 farms. The settlers received their pay at the Headquarters. The *Opera Nazionale Combattenti* possessed modern agricultural equipment (165 tractors and 1,452 farm implements of various types¹⁷⁴) the settlers could borrow when needed. The settlers delivered their crops to the Agricultural Concern, and the grain produced was stored in premises belonging to the *Opera Nazionale Combattenti*. Contrary to what Tieghi writes, when taking into consideration the whole idea behind the project of resettling the Pontine Marshes, I do not find it surprising that during the early years of Sabaudia the Director of the *Opera Nazionale Combattenti*'s political power could be compared to that of the *Podestà*¹⁷⁵ or the Prefectorial Commissioner, charged by the government with administering the town's assets.¹⁷⁶

Vicario's Agricultural Concern is a complex consisting of six buildings. The complex is situated on the Via Emanuele Filiberto di Duca dell'Aosta, vis-à-vis the school and Balilla-

¹⁷³ Conversations with Cultural Councillor prof. Mario Tieghi on the 20th of July 2000, and with book antiquarian Mr. Alfredo Urbinati on the 28th of July 2000.

¹⁷⁴ Ghirardo 50–51.

¹⁷⁵ The *Podestà* was the Fascist mayor of a town. It is an antique and medieval Italian term re-used by the Fascists instead of the word used now (and earlier): *sindaco*. Actually, the first *podestà* of Sabaudia is the regional commissioner of the ONC, Valentino Orsolini Cencelli the most important man in Sabaudia's early history.

block. It is dominated by the main office building—the only four story high building in Sabaudia, called *il grattacielo*, or “the skyscraper” (*plate 26.A*). Its height and narrowness makes it easy to conceive of as a tower. It was crowned by the letters “ONC” and a flagpole. Its red ochre façade, pierced by a few narrow windows and French balconies on one corner, has an ominous, authoritative look—as if somebody behind those windows were watching your every move. This is the only building in Sabaudia that radiates a feeling of power. The *grattacielo* is extended at ground level out to the northeast with terraces running all the way above the first floor. To the southwest it is connected to another building by a gateway with a “gangway” on top. Underneath these terraces are colonnaded walkways with walls adorned with broad horizontal stripes in a dark and somewhat lighter stone—a pattern we see applied often in late medieval churches in northern Italy. The railings for the roof terrace, French balconies and the connecting terraces are all iron railings, reminiscent of boats, and akin to the balcony railings common to much modern architecture. Behind the *grattacielo* are placed the stable, barns for the grain crops, tool sheds, and some residential buildings (villas and semi-detached houses) for the ONC employees, situated around a large service yard for grain deliveries and other agricultural products (*plate 27.C*). In front of the combined stable/grain storage building is a large, yellow stuccoed drinking basin for the horses. It is a fairly plain L-shaped utility building, the stable is one and a half story high and the grain storage approximately two stories high. There are no pictures of its original state available to the public. Today the building is no longer used for agricultural purposes. It is restored and houses the library, local historical archives, and the marine archaeological museum. The ONC residencies are treated in category D, “Housing.”

The War Veterans’ Clubs (ONC) (*Plates 28–30*)

Architects: Cancellotti, Montuori, Piccinato, Scalpelli

The *Palazzo delle Associazioni Combattentistiche* is the War Veterans’ Clubs. It housed several different organizations for the war veterans and surviving relatives. These enjoyed general esteem in Fascist society. Situated on the northwestern corner of the main square, the Piazza della Rivoluzione, with the Town Hall on one side, it commands an important position in the hierarchies of buildings. Vis-à-vis, across the Largo Giulio Cesare, is the

¹⁷⁶ Mario Tieghi, “La vita della ‘nuova città’ attraverso la lettura dei primi atti amministrativi,” Muratore, Carfagna and Tieghi 64.

Casa del Fascio. The building is two stories high. Originally a big *solarium*,¹⁷⁷ which is a sort of open terrace or “sunroof,” opened up to the sky. It stretched across the width of the building, with apartments on both ends. Instead of the walls, the solarium had boundaries of vertical pilasters above the sill and framing the terrace. These solariums became quite fashionable in Italy in this period. They were thought to have a recuperating and preventing effect on the much feared tubercle bacteria. As mentioned earlier, health issues were of the utmost importance to the Fascist government, as to so many other European governments of the time.¹⁷⁸

On the left side of the entrance, a huge relief with text stretches from ground level to the top of the building. It quotes the entire text of Major General A. Diaz’s “*Bolletino della vittoria*”¹⁷⁹ (or Victory Bulletin) from 4 November 1918, “the day on which King Victor Emmanuel III presented [Major Diaz] with the collar of the Supreme Order of S.S. Annunziata, to whom the parish church is dedicated.”¹⁸⁰ (Plate 30.) Could this be an indication of why the church was dedicated to the S.S. Annunziata? The first floor (plate 29) contained a common assembly hall for the different associations, a lecture room, offices for the *Associazione Mutilati* (war cripples’ association), *Associazione Combattenti* (war veterans’ association), and *Associazione Famiglie Caduti in guerra* (families of the fallen in war’s association). It also contained storerooms and WC. On the second floor were situated the lodgings for the employees. In early drawings several sculptural reliefs were intended for the front façade. However, these were never carried out.

Barracks for the Fascist Militia (M.V.S.N.) (Plate 31)

Architects: Cancellotti, Montuori, Piccinato, Scalpelli

La Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale (MVSN), or the Fascist Militia, was the party’s military structure. It recruited its members from the members of the PNF, between the age of seventeen and fifty. It had its own chain of command, directly authorized through Il Duce. This organization was originally established in 1923 to take control over the somewhat anarchistic action groups. With the establishment of the MVSN, the armed

¹⁷⁷ According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary from the Latin, meaning “porch exposed to the sun,” either “a glass-enclosed porch or room,” or “a room (as in a hospital) used especially for sunbathing or therapeutic exposure to light.” (“Solarium,” Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 1998 ed.)

¹⁷⁸ The solarium has later been built in and no longer exists today.

¹⁷⁹ The entire bulletin text is quoted in Appendix II.

¹⁸⁰ From the foundation 142.

party—something characteristically new in Fascism—is manifested.¹⁸¹ From the beginning, the members of the MVSN made an oath of allegiance to Il Duce, and from 1924 onwards to the King as well.

*“The barracks for the Fascist militia are situated in the south-eastern corner of the Piazza della Rivoluzione so as to enclose and frame the views from and into the square.”*¹⁸² Like many of the buildings in Sabaudia, the different parts of the Militia barracks are clad with different materials. Thus, the three story high street façade facing the Via Oddone is in bricks (*plate 30.C*), while the low one story wing behind (bordering on the Via Dante and the ceremonial square, vis-à-vis the Town Hall) is given a finish in yellow stucco (*plate 30.A and B*). The building is a rather dull but sinister appearing L-shaped edifice, like the Carabinieri barracks. The three-story block is in reinforced concrete with steel doors, while the low-rise block has loadbearing walls. In the main section’s façade walls bands of windows stretch from one side to the other. *“One section is three storys high and houses the residential accomodation and refectory for 40 soldiers, an officers’ mess and prison cells at ground floor level. On the upper floors there are dormitories, officers quarters and armouries. The dormitories are well-lit and ventilated with windows placed two metres above floor level in order to maximise the use of the floor area. The balconies which open out toward the lake and sea offer a distraction to the residents and further improve the environmental properties of the dormitories.”*¹⁸³ The other section has a ceremonial entrance in travertine and peperino stone at ground floor level. It contains *“the offices of the militia staff, a waiting room, an orderly room and a meeting hall.”*¹⁸⁴ Behind the building is a large square for assemblies.

In addition to the barracks, a residence for the Commander (*Casa del Comandante*) was planned. The blueprints, axonometric drawings and drawings of different views of it are frequently shown in exhibition catalogues, but it was never constructed. It was planned as a two-story house, to be situated vis-à-vis the MVSN barracks, near their training field, on the corner of the *Mercato coperto* (Covered Market). Photos from the construction period of Sabaudia show something that looks like the foundations for a small building in this spot, but then all traces of it disappear. Did they run out of money? Another residential building was erected on the other side of the training field, close to the Agricultural Concern. However, it was not constructed according to the drawings for the *Casa del Comandante*.

¹⁸¹ Dahl 30.

¹⁸² Piacentini, Burdett 32.

¹⁸³ Piacentini, Burdett 32.

¹⁸⁴ Piacentini, Burdett 32.

Barracks for the Royal Carabinieri RR.CC. (Military Police) (Plate 33)

Architects: Cancellotti, Montuori, Piccinato, Scalpelli

The barracks for the Royal military policeforce, the *Carabinieri*, were “*proportioned for the headquarters of a lieutenancy with thereto belonging lodgings.*”¹⁸⁵ It is one of the few buildings still used for its original purpose as the *Carabinieri* still exist. This two-story, L-shaped edifice is situated vis-à-vis the Post and Telegraph Office, on the corner of Corso Vittorio Emanuele III and Viale Principe di Piemonte, one block away from the main square. The structure is loadbearing and it is provided metal windows. The front facing the *corso* is organized around a central axis; the middle party of the first floor, surrounding the entrance and windows is covered with travertine tiles, while the remaining wall is clad in yellow bricks (*plate 33.A*). The door and window cases are in peperino. Over the entrance a loggia is recessed into the wall, under the loggia is a flag pole and the emblem of the *Carabinieri*. This façade clearly communicates a solemn expression common in military, police and prison buildings as it is closed, uninviting and powerful. Its strict symmetry is unusual in Sabaudia. The other wing is partly in brick, partly in a warm yellow stucco. This side of the building seems much more modern than the austere front. It is asymmetrical, with approximately one fifth to the right clad in bricks, and cut through by a vertical band of door and windows running from the street and up to the window of the second floor. The stucco-clad part has a recessed portion to the left. The rear courtyard was to be used for garages and stables. The section bordering on the *corso* was occupied by the commanders’ offices and living quarters, while the second section contained a refectory, officers’ mess, kitchen, service rooms and security cells on first floor, with dormitories above.¹⁸⁶

Barracks for the Pubblica Sicurezza (Police)

I have not found any drawings for these barracks, or any further mentioning of the Pubblica Sicurezza. They are not drawn in on the original plan either. They are requested in the competition brief, but after that I cannot find any mentioning of them whatsoever.

¹⁸⁵ Dino Malossi, “Progetto del centro comunale di Sabaudia – relazione dell’Ing. Dino Malossi del 1 gennaio 1934,” *Lo Sardo* and Boccia 244.

¹⁸⁶ Piacentini, Burdett 33.

The Headquarters for the Opera Nazionale Balilla (Fascist Youth League)

(Plate 34)

Architect: Oriolo Frezzotti

The *Opera Nazionale Balilla*, from hereon called the ONB, the Fascist youth organization, was established in 1926. It took its name from G. Battista¹⁸⁷ Perasso, the boy that in 1746 initiated the Genovese revolt against the Austrian occupants.¹⁸⁸ The organization was led by Renato Ricci. The ONB played an important part in the fascistification of the Italian society, constantly expanding throughout the 1930s. Children could join the ONB, or the Balilla as it was also called, at age 6.¹⁸⁹ (Plate 2.B.) Girls and boys were divided into two groups, and these again into groups according to age:

Age	Boys	Girls
6–8	Figli della lupa (Sons of the she-wolf)	Figlie della lupa (Daughters of the she-wolf)
8–14	Balilla ()	Piccole italiane (Italian girls)
14–18	Avanguardisti (Vanguards)	Giovani italiane (Young Italian women)

It soon came to be the only organization with the right to engage children and youth in groups. The only exception was Catholic youth organizations because the Fascists were interested in staying in good relations with the church. All activities related to children and young people (with the exception of schools) were gathered together under the controlling umbrella organization GIL (*Gioventù Italiana del Littorio*, or “Italian Youth of the Lictor’s Sign”) in 1937.¹⁹⁰ In the Pontine Marshes 100% of the children were members of the ONB.¹⁹¹

The most important service provided by the ONB was physical exercise (fencing for the boys, gymnastics for the girls). The gymnasium was crucial, and was the hub of the

¹⁸⁷ “Balilla” is a pet name for “Battista.”

¹⁸⁸ “Balilla,” *Lo Zingarelli Minore*, 1994 ed. The Austrians were traditionally the main enemy of Italy, and thus this young boy’s name being used for the Fascist youth organization is not in the least strange.

¹⁸⁹ As Bruce F. Pauley points out, the acceptance of members as young as six years, is one of the main differences between the youth organizations of the totalitarian regimes and of more the democratic countries. (Pauley, 118.)

¹⁹⁰ Nodin, *Estetisk pluralism* 49.

¹⁹¹ This was done in spite of the fact that most of the homes they came from were families of communist and other oppositional backgrounds.

organization. Furthermore, children were instructed in hygiene, the Fascist faith, and other matters important to the regime. The ONB also provided free schoolbooks and meals for children from poor households. The children were taught patriotic songs, went on excursions (and probably had a good time after all). Being a member of the ONB gave the child credits if he or she wanted to go to a summer colony. For the boys the ties to the MVSN, the Fascist militia, were tightened as they aged.

Being an organization directed towards children and young people, one often sought to give the architecture a “youthful” appearance, “*something that also corresponded with fascism’s sublimation of and will to be connected with the youth ideal.*”¹⁹² While the *Case Balilla* and childrens’ colonies in Italy often were constructed in an imaginative, playful, futurist fashion, e.g. taking the shapes of boats or planes, the German *Hitler Jugend Heimate* (or “Hitler Youth Homes”) were old-fashioned and patriotically Germanic in style, often supplied with turf-covered roofs.¹⁹³ Enrico Del Debbio in 1926 wrote a manual on the designing of *Case Balilla*. It presented suggestions on how Balilla buildings could look. It had guidelines for floor coverings, with plans for different sized buildings according to the size and budgets of the towns in question.¹⁹⁴ Thus it is only natural that the different Balilla buildings resemble each other quite a lot. E.g. Sabaudia’s Balilla building and the *Casa Balilla* in Belluno (*plate 92.C*) have many details in common.

Frezzotti’s one story Balilla building is perhaps *the* most interesting building in Sabaudia, in spite of the later downgrading of his reputation. It is kept in a sober size, but nevertheless monumental in style. Its clean geometrical shapes are articulated in an ochre yellow brick, with travertine details and generous amounts of glass. Looking at other works by Frezzotti, such as his Balilla building in Latina (*plate 7.B and C*), or his sports field in Latina (*plate 7.E*), one clearly sees the development. From the ominous style in the two earlier edifices to this elegant little building, there is a clear progress. The Sabaudia Balilla building is well proportioned, and it is also well situated on its premises. With its glass corridor, semicircular apse, stele-like flagpole in brick reminiscent of a small tower with the letters “ONB” placed vertically along one of the sides—all these features adds to the building’s sophistication and modern expression. It consists of two wings (with separate entrances) connected by a stylish corridor with glass on both sides so that one could look

¹⁹² Nodin, *Estetisk pluralism* 253.

¹⁹³ Hanne Storm Ofteland, “Balillaer og småulver. Oppvekst i tyvetallets fascist-Italia,” *Filologen: Historisk-filosofisk fakultetsmagasin* 30.4 (2001): 43.

¹⁹⁴ Enrico Del Debbio, *Progetti di costruzione di Case Balilla, palestre, campi sportivi, piscine, etc.* (Roma: n.p., 1926).

from the street to the garden behind. On the right side of this corridor is a foyer, and behind a large gymnasium constructed according to ONB regulations, with floors in cork and linoleum, and the washboards made of masonite. To the right of the foyer were the showers, W.C.s, and room with wash basins. To the left of the foyer there was a first aid room. A storage room for exercising apparatus was placed at the far end of the gymnasium. The garden behind and around the gymnasium bordered on the school building facilitating safety and convenience for after school activities. The wing displaced parallel to the gymnasium wing contained a combined library and assembly room. Here, in the apse was the fencing hall. Other rooms in this wing were rooms for shower and dressing for the instructors, three offices, as well as a custodian's quarter.

Nowhere is there any sanctuary to be found. That means that there were no Fascist sanctuaries in Sabaudia. Nodin, after having studied Gentile, writes: "*Sanctuaries in Casa del Balilla ... were ... an important supplement to Casa del Fascio, regarding the fact that children after a while were to become full members of the party, and then were expected to have deep knowledge about fascism, including faith and ritual.*"⁹⁵ The literature states that Balilla buildings as well as Fascist Party Headquarters both contained sanctuaries for the commemoration of "the martyrs of the revolution." From the available data and sources listed in the bibliography regarding sanctuaries, it may seem that they were contemporaneous with the tradition of Balilla buildings and Fascist Headquarters. But the material is not accompanied by reliable dates, and it may be interesting to suggest that the extended use of sanctuaries was enforced only at a later date. Nevertheless, they seem to never have been present in Sabaudia.

Category B: Religious Buildings

The Religious Center: The Church of the SS. Annunziata with Bell-Tower and Baptistery. The Rectory. The Convent & the Nursery (*Plates 35–40*)

Architects: Cancellotti, Montuori, Piccinato, Scalpelli

Inaugurated: February 1935

The Fascist Party was strongly dependent upon the support of the Catholic Church (Italy's population being Catholics). The party therefore dared not ignore it. Actually the Fascists managed to solve the delicate issue of balancing power between the Vatican and the Italian state, after the Pope had spent around sixty years as a selfdeclared "hostage of war" inside the Vatican. In 1929 the parties signed the Lateran Treaty after some two years of secret negotiations.

On the inauguration day of Sabaudia, work on the church complex was barely begun. All the visitors could see were scaffolds for the belfry and piles of building materials. In the text of the competition brief from 1933 it is clearly stated that “*all the typical institutions of the Fascist regime ... must be constructed before other buildings.*” However, even the hotel was finished at the inauguration date (probably because the main square with the important Fascist buildings would otherwise look as a construction site—not because of its importance to the regime, beyond the possible lodging of dignitaries). The signals this sent out is that the church was of minor importance. It should even take another ten months before the church was sanctified on 24 February 1935.

The group with church and attached buildings closes the Piazza Margherita on two sides. The square is arranged partly with gardens, and partly with pavement, “*to give the maximum prominence to the main building.*”¹⁹⁶ The church is flanked by other religious structures to the right, comprising the rectory with cloisters, and a nun convent with a nursery.¹⁹⁷ On axis with the church’s front porch, in the middle of the paved area between the church and the convent/nursery, stands the freestanding centralized baptistery building.

THE CHURCH WITH FREESTANDING BAPTISTERY

The church in Sabaudia is quite big, compared to the towns population.¹⁹⁸ It was not given the prominent place churches until then had occupied in the cities, but was relegated to a minor location away from the dynamic heart of the town. It is situated on the Piazza Regina Margherita, laying on an axis with the Town Hall. The French journalist, Pierre Vago writes in his 1934 article about Sabaudia: “*In Sabaudia, the symbol of the central power is on display; the ‘religious center’ (church, baptistery, annex buildings) is exiled to the second plan, it constitutes a sort of decoration behind the ‘Revolution Square’.*”¹⁹⁹ Piacentini on the other hand, of course explains the positioning of the church in a more positive way: “*The ceremonial role and positioning of the church within the planning framework of Sabaudia have determined the development of its architectural forms. The church stands at one end of the avenue which lies perpendicular [sic!] to the main*

¹⁹⁵ Nodin, *Estetisk pluralism* 257.

¹⁹⁶ Malossi 243–44.

¹⁹⁷ Piacentini, Burdett 30.

¹⁹⁸ Piccinato in his article from 1934 explains this with Sabaudia’s function as a center for the farms in the area. Thus the church had to be big enough for a larger assembly than just the inhabitants of the center of Sabaudia. (Qtd. in Millon, *Some New Towns* 335.)

¹⁹⁹ Vago 17–18. My translation.

east-west axis of the tower; at the other end in the Piazza della Rivoluzione, the avenue is terminated and framed by the militia barracks.’²⁰⁰

The Exterior: “The main facade of the church and bell-tower are clad in light and dark strips of travertine, while the side elevations are finished in red brick. The rest of the building is rendered in a light colour and the window surrounds are everywhere in travertine.”²⁰¹ (Plates 35.A and 38.B–D.) The bell tower is situated on the left side of the church, and the circular Baptistery to the right of the entrance. The church is raised on a low platform with two stairs leading up to a small square in front of it. The front is accentuated by a small fountain in the middle of this square. Just like in the Town Hall building, the bell tower is also here separated from the main building, only connected to the church through a low corridor clad with bricks. The exterior is in some ways quite similar to that of a grain elevator. “The building’s structure is in reinforced concrete; the roof is purely in reinforced concrete, resting on two longitudinal trusses, supported by pillars. ... The bell tower, 45 meters high over the ground, is of a reinforced concrete structure, and it is dressed with travertine slabs...”²⁰² The façade has three portals, with the central one set in a recessed “channel,” running the whole height of the building with a monumental mosaic rising from above the entrance.

The Mosaic on the Façade: On the façade placed “in a large niche with a curved section so as to improve visibility from below”²⁰³ is placed a mosaic by Ferruccio Ferrazzi (1882–1978), depicting the “Annunciation” (plate 39.A). Floating on a small cloud, high up in the Sabaudian sky, stands the Virgin, head raised, looking at the Archangel Gabriel approaching her. Underneath, in the real world, Mussolini and the commissary Cencelli take part in the threshing, with Sabaudia in the background. The relief measures approximately 15 x 4 metres. It was not installed until April 14, 1935.

The Church Interior: The church follows a traditional Italian plan: a one-aisled ship with three semicircular sidechapels in each side wall, and with a semicircular apse at the end. (Plates 36, 37.A and 39.B–D.) Three portals open onto the aisle. “The crypt is made by using the natural depression in the terrain, declining in the back of the building. Inside, the floor and altars are in Repen-marble, clouded black (nero nube), Polcevera-green (verde Polcevera), with washboards in bright shiny travertine.”²⁰⁴ The interior of the church is characterized by a strict, elegant simplicity and coolness that still is the dominating impression, even after typical Catholic features

²⁰⁰ Piacentini, Burdett 28.

²⁰¹ Piacentini, Burdett 30.

²⁰² Malossi 243–44.

²⁰³ Piacentini, Burdett 30.

(such as glossy, strongly colored plaster sculptures of different saints and other characteristics of the Counter-Reformation) have invaded the architects' clean, almost protestant space. In a soft, light yellow, projecting and withdrawn sections of the wall define the side chapels and constitutes niches where the tall, vertical crossbarred windows are placed. The ceiling is painted white, with a recessed light grey "channel" in its middle. The architects have achieved an exceptional acoustic quality in the church space which was experienced by the present writer at a concert there the summer of 2000.

Inside, the single nave of the church is lined with three semi-circular chapels, on each side, with a choir and organ placed above the entrance porch. The flat roofs of these chapels are lit from little windows in the ceilings. Each contain an altar and the walls were to be adorned with frescoes depicting religious images and scenes from the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes. However, this was never done—probably because they ran out of money.²⁰⁵ The nave itself leads up to a raised side-lit platform with two pulpits under which are found the stairs leading down to the crypt. The pulpits are in travertine, with railings in grey marble. To the side of the raised sanctuary stands a middle-sized chapel donated by the Confederation of Agriculture to the memory of the piazza's namesake, Queen Margaret, and beyond, through a short corridor the bell-tower can be reached.²⁰⁶

The Royal Chapel: Stylistically seen the Royal Chapel, donated by Queen Helen in 1935, must be said to be highly inappropriate for this minimalist church that is (as mentioned above) more northern than catholic in design and decoration. The chapel was originally built in the 1910s by artists Vincenzo Cadorin (1854–1925) and Giovanni Piancastelli (1845–1926).²⁰⁷ It is a rather awful neo-baroque pastiche in strong red and dark brown colors, accentuated by gilded decorative elements. This appendix to the church seems quite odd in the context of the Ss. Annunziata, and one cannot but wonder how and why anyone would ever get the idea of merging these two styles. It is a bizzare anachronism, perhaps of no issue to the church.

In 1934, the four architects of Sabaudia also designed a project for a small church of a Pontine *borgo*, the Borgo Ermada (sometimes referred to as the Borgata Hermada). (*Plate 6.D.*) This is very similar to the original drawings for the Ss. Annunziata, but of course

²⁰⁴ Malossi 243–44.

²⁰⁵ Daniela Carfagna and Clemente Ciammaruconi, "La chiesa della Ss. Annunziata e la sua architettura," Carfagna, Ciammaruconi and Martellini 99.

²⁰⁶ Piacentini, Burdett 30.

considerably reduced in size. It has only one entrance gate, and the bell tower seems from the drawings to be clad with bricks and situated on the church's right side instead of the left. Here, too, a few steps leads up to the church.²⁰⁸

The Baptistry: The Baptistry of the SS. Annunziata follows the ancient tradition: It is an autonomous centralized building, and it is given a cylindrical shape.²⁰⁹ (Plates 37.B and 38.A.) On top is a band of rectangular, horizontal windows somewhat recessed from the façade. The building is clad in travertine slabs which gives the external surface a porous finish. A baptismal font was placed at the center of the circular room chamber, and the walls were to be decorated with frescoes. “*The main doors of the church and the baptistry are lined with bronze sheeting; the floor of the church is finished in ‘lipos’ slabs while the baptistry and front porch floors are finished is [sic!] quartz-rock.*”²¹⁰ Today, unfortunately the baptistry functions as a tool shed.

THE RECTORY WITH CLOISTERS

The rectory is connected with the church. It is provided with both cloisters and study rooms, “*keeping in mind that the services will be officiated by a confraternity of Franciscans.*”²¹¹ On the first floor are situated the vestry, a dressing room and halls for marriage ceremonies, parish offices and a classroom for religious education. The upper story contains the monks' cells, studies, a refectory, and associated facilities. “*At the garden level more service facilities and storerooms can be found.*”²¹² In the back is situated a pleasant cloister garden, surrounded by simple two story high porticoes on all sides, with a small, rectangular basin in the middle, clad with turquoise and blue tesserae. (Plates 36 and 40.) The ambulatorium on the first floor has round, sturdy columns, while the loggias on second floor have slender, square pilasters. Walls, columns and pilasters are clad in a light yellow stucco, and together with the small green lawns and different types of trees and bushes, the impression is tranquil and meditative. On the flat roof is a terrace, and parts of it is covered with a third story. Again we find an old tradition in modern minimalist clothing. The cloister itself is set against the

²⁰⁷ Its earlier location was in the Villa Ludovisi, Rome.

²⁰⁸ For more information about the Borgo Ermada and its church, see the sources reprinted in Lo Sardo and Boccia 249-255.

²⁰⁹ From Antiquity on there is a custom of giving martyrums, grave chapels, and baptisteries a centralized form. The most common shapes are the circle and the octagon, but also the square is used.

²¹⁰ Piacentini, Burdett 30.

²¹¹ Malossi 243-44.

²¹² Piacentini, Burdett 30.

mass of the central apse of the church—something that allows for a nice view with the rounded brick-clad building mass with its vertical, narrow windows as a backdrop.

THE NUNS' CONVENT AND NURSERY

The religious complex is finished off with the nuns' convent and nursery to the furthest right, closing in the second side of the square. Both structures open towards the patio courtyard and a garden in the rear. This spacious enclosed courtyard completed with small decorative works, offered a pleasant environment for the children.²¹³ (*Plate 41.*) The nuns' quarters consisted of a small chapel, workshops, meeting room, director's office and storerooms on the first floor, together with the refectory and associated services for the infant school. On the upper floor the sisters' bedrooms, a communal living room, guest rooms and a linen room were situated.²¹⁴ The adjacent nursery school was made up of two halls and a workroom and related services. Today this part of the complex is radically rebuilt.

A Cemetery with Chapel (*Plate 42*)

Architect: Angelo Vicario

The cemetery is placed outside the north periphery of the town. It is surrounded by a rectangular, plain stucco retaining wall with a rounded rustic gateway in peperino.²¹⁵ Set in the wall, to the left of the gate is a garage, and on the right of the gate is a gate house with office and an apartment for the custodian. To the right, on the apartment side is a single window unsymmetrically set in the wall. Axially placed in relationship to the gate, is a small, geometrical, unadorned chapel with a side building in similar stucco. In keeping with ancient grave chapel tradition this is also a centralized round building. Its circular first floor is divided in two, the front half being exposed with the entrance in the axis of the diameter. This part constitutes the front porch with two sleek and plain pillars holding up its flat cemicircular roof, the other half contains the chapel room. On top is placed a narrower cylindrical tier topped by a flat roof and crowned by a small cross. In the cylindrical wall, right above the entrance, rises a narrow, crossbarred, vertical window all the way up to the roof. A small sidebuilding to the right is intended for services, and equipped with a

²¹³ Malossi 243–44.

²¹⁴ Piacentini, Burdett 30.

²¹⁵ *From the foundation* 218.

morgue.²¹⁶ The side building has a portico in front as well a porthole window placed off center. The tedious symmetry of this complex is redeemed by the accents of the side wing and the asymmetrically placed windows.

Category C: Business & Commerce

For a modern town, i.e. the town after the Industrial Revolution, trade was no longer the central economic concern. Instead manufacturing and service activities became increasingly important. New towns after 1800 are often born out for a specific industrial or manufacturing purpose, e.g. mill, mining, and other types of towns.²¹⁷ As Sabaudia was constructed as a service center for the whole area, without any industry, excluding the slaughterhouse,²¹⁸ the center consists only of public institutions aside from a few shops and entertainment premises. In addition, the regime sought to promote Sabaudia as a tourist resort and to that end constructed a small hotel and a race course. This with two other attractions, the splendid national park and the sea, should secure the tourist a great holiday. (How anyone could find a dominantly military town attractive as a holiday destination must be chalked up to the Italians' enthusiasm for the Fascist regime.)

The Multi-functional Building Housing Cinema–Theater / Restaurant and Shops²¹⁹

(Plates 43 and 44)

Architects: Cancellotti, Montuori, Piccinato, Scalpelli

In the 1930s the multifunctional building in Europe grew out of a demand for several activities under one roof. This was due in part, probably, to the functionalist imperative to cut costs and rationalize space. Edifices providing for this multipurpose usage were to give a dynamic role to the concept of modernity. In addition an idea about social unity seems plausible. Thus “*Folkets Hus*” (People’s Buildings) were erected all over Sweden, containing dance halls, cinema, library and other cultural institutions. Similar edifices were also being constructed, among other countries, in Great Britain, f.ex. Eric Mendelsohn’s and Serge Chermayeff’s masterpiece the *De La Warr Pavilion* on Bexhill-on-Sea from 1934–35, a

²¹⁶ *From the foundation* 218.

²¹⁷ Kostof, *City Assembled* 92.

²¹⁸ The only industry in town was the slaughterhouse, and that was never completed according to its plans.

²¹⁹ Most of the information here, is taken from Marcello Piacentini’s article “Sabaudia,” *Architettura* June 1934: n. pag. It is reprinted in several secondary sources, among these in Claudio Galeazzi’s selection of contemporary newspaper and magazine articles (Piacentini, Galeazzi 134–35), and in the London catalogue from 1981 (Piacentini, Burdett 19–35.)

building that combined theater, restaurant with a dancefloor, and a public library.²²⁰ And Denmark's Arne Jacobsen at the same time (1932–35) constructed the combined theater/restaurant complex *Bellevue* for the residential area “Bellavista” in Klampenborg, just outside of Copenhagen.

Cinema/Theater: Sabaudia's cinema/theater building was constructed along the northwestern side of the Piazza della Rivoluzione, bordering on the *Casa del Fascio*. The two edifices are constructed so that to appear as one (as is also case with the Hotel and the apartment building across the square: It looks like one building, but is actually two.) The Cinema/Theater Hall proper is made in reinforced concrete “with the primary curved roof beams spanning upto 22 metres forming five portal frames which support the roof structure on secondary beams.”²²¹ The hall with upper and lower gallery had 600 seats,²²² and according to an article in the June 2000 edition of *Wallpaper*, it was the largest movie theater in Italy at the time.²²³ The plan was modelled on a sector of a circle to “maximise visibility ... while in section the ceiling slopes towards the stage to improve the acoustic performance of the hall. The lower gallery also slopes down towards the stage and is divided into three sections each of which is inclined at a gradient of 9%, 6% and 2%.”²²⁴ Above the foyer is placed the projection room. It could be reached through a service staircase. Two staircases, placed to the side of the main entrance, lead to the the upper gallery. The stage was provided with all facilities necessary for theatrical productions, as well as “backstage facilities, an electricity control room and 16 artists changing rooms.”²²⁵ The entrance to the cinema was off center with a few commercial premises to its left. A travertine-cased portico faced the main square. Above the entrance was a horizontal ribbon of windows, giving light to the second story lobby. Today this movie theater is divided into several theaters and it is no longer possible to conceive of the original grandeur.

Bar/Restaurant with Shops: On the right side of the two-story structure, a recessed portico covered with travertine facing runs the length of the building. It provides shade and shelter, in front of the commercial premises on the first floor. On the corner there is a bar which is connected by a staircase to a restaurant on the second story. The portico extends out from

²²⁰ Alan Powers, “Modernism before 1945,” *Architecture: The critic's choice: 150 masterpieces of Western architecture*, Dan Cruickshank, ed. (London: Aurum Press, 2000) 264.

²²¹ Piacentini, Burdett 25.

²²² Piacentini, Burdett 25; and Luigi Bottazzi, “Il saluto di Sabaudia, che sorge al suo fondatore,” *Corriere della Sera* December 19 1933: 1.

²²³ Laura Houseley, “Hard lines,” *Wallpaper* June (2000): 82. I have not been able to verify this information in any other source, though.

²²⁴ Piacentini, Burdett 25.

²²⁵ Piacentini, Burdett 25.

the building proper as a freestanding structure with a roof-terrace which encloses the east-side of the Piazza della Rivoluzione, and it is covered by the second story of the building.

The Bus Station (*Plate 45*)

Architect: Unknown

By 1935 a *stazione autolinee* (bus station) is seen to have been constructed in the middle of the Piazza Oberdan.²²⁶ The fact of this structure not being included in the competition brief further indicates the restriction of movement and public transportation underlying the original intentions of the town plan. It is also unclear which architect designed the depot. This building in many ways more modern than much of Sabaudia's structures, was a true child of the 20th century and of functionalism. The design is typical of gas stations and auto-repairs constructed in much of the Western world at that time. Two rotundas, one with two garages radiating at 180 degrees, were connected by an elongated, oval and flat roof, and the garage section penetrating the roof with a circular window section above. The curvatures dynamically echo the loop of the end-station. Large window areas open up the walls in the two sections. Though not mentioned anywhere in the literature, a closer scrutiny of an unclear photograph from 1941 indicates the placement of a gas pump in the covered space between the rotundas.

The stylish initial design of this building was clearly violated by later modifications. On a photo from the '50s one can already see a lot of damage done. Window areas filled in with bricks and stucco. Today it is almost unrecognizable.

The Covered Market (*Plates 46 and 47*)

Architects: Cancellotti, Montuori, Piccinato, Scalpelli

The covered market is an ancient building structure in the Mediterranean area. A Roman precursor is to be found in the Markets of Trajan (*plate 87.B*). In Belvez, Languedoc, the town's medieval covered market, restored through history, is still in use today—a structure that is remarkably similar to the covered market in Sabaudia.

²²⁶ In a photograph showing the camp of the visiting 221st legion *Fasci all'estero* (Fascists abroad) of the MVSN (September–November 1935), there is barely visible in the lower corner, a part of the *Autostazione linee*. No earlier picture of this structure exists. However, it must have been completed around the same time as the town. Neither a plan nor any specific mention of this bus depot is to be found in the literature. However, it is safe to assume, the construction time considered, that it must have been completed prior to the event recorded in the picture. Considering the logistics of transporting a whole legion of soldiers it seems feasible to assume, as this must have been planned over a period of time, that a bussing and filling station would be

The covered market was located in a separate space, between the hotel and the militia's training field. Its structure consisted of a *“large overhanging roof carried on columns whose central portion [was] raised so as to allow light and air... The structural elements [were] in exposed reinforced concrete with a light-coloured finish to the large ceiling.”*²²⁷ It covered an area of 1,460 m². Underneath the market floor was a basement for cold stores and general storage. It could be reached through a series of pedestrian subways under the ground level shops of the surrounding buildings, as well as normal street level access.²²⁸ The basement floor was in beaten cement, while the first floor was in small tiles of pure cement.²²⁹ Contemporary photographs show a visually interesting building, permeated by fine aesthetic details, such as e.g. the “clerestory” distributing light down through a latticework window. The whole building was simple, functional and elegant, one of the most modern looking edifices in Sabaudia (next to the bus station, water tower, and the never completed sports field). One would think this would have been a popular, much used design, knowing how hot it gets in southern Latium in summertime, but this cannot have been the case: Maintenance through the years was poor, and unfortunately the building is now demolished. In 1987 the Piazza Santa Barbara took its place.

The Water Tower (Plate 48)

Architect: Oriolo Frezzotti

Preparing for a new town and a municipality coming into existence, many infrastructures had to be provided for, such as: water, electricity, roads, sewers, and drains. An important feature in the town and landscape was Frezzotti's water tower. It measures 24 meters high and 7.8 meters wide. Placed on a small height on the outskirts of town it has been given a highly original design. Instead of the usual mushroom-like shape, this tower is shaped like a slim, tall cylinder, with a balcony running around the circumference 20 meters above the ground. One way to read this architectural form could be as a gigantic fluted Tuscan column with a capital on top. It still stands, and is a landmark, but since then the town has built a new water tower.

A Primary School (Plate 49)

required for this undertaking.

²²⁷ Piacentini, Burdett 31.

²²⁸ Piacentini, Burdett 31.

²²⁹ Malossi 244–45.

Architect: Oriolo Frezzotti

Oriolo Frezzotti was awarded assignments for both the primary school, the water tower and the Casa Balilla. The school is situated on the same block as the Balilla building, and connected by a wide garden/playground. Even though Frezzotti's work in Littoria has been severely criticized for several reasons, his buildings in Sabaudia are interesting and of a high aesthetic quality—even though some sources consider his architecture rather mainstream.²³⁰ The school, situated a few hundred meters away from the center proper, is two stories high. It is stuccoed on the surface—the color used, as so often in Sabaudia, is this soft light yellow tone. The entrance segment is a story higher than the rest of the building, and slightly protruding from it. It is in yellow brick of a shifting fitting so as to create a play of light in a recessed and protruding rectangular pattern.²³¹ This segment is provided with a broad corner window running the height of the building. In front of the entrance is a covered porch.

The entire building is in reinforced concrete. There are ten classrooms, distributed on the two floors. Other rooms on the first floor are the lobby (with waiting room for parents), janitor's offices, W.C.s, dressing rooms and showers, and lodgings for the janitor with separate entry, kitchen and combined lunch/assembly room, medical doctor's office, direction (incl. secretary and waiting room), pantry. On second floor were the remaining six classrooms, the workshop, and two lodgings for the teachers. An external, separate staircase behind the building lead up to these lodgings. Since the ONB had a gymnasium available to the school, no gymnasium was planned.²³² In 1936 the school was moved from the premises, and the building taken over by the *Scuola Marinara "Caracciolo,"* or the Marine College "Caracciolo".²³³ Today this building houses the School for N.C.O.'s and State Foresters (*Scuola Allievi Sottufficiali e Guardie Corpo Forestali dello Stato*).

²³⁰ Mariani, *Fascismo e "città nuove"* 88–89. Mariani describes how Frezzotti, after finishing his collaboration with the regime on Littoria—following the designs of the ONC—is given several commissions in the new towns as a reward, being an architect without too strong an ego, willing to cooperate with the regime without having to flaunt his own ideas all the time. One must surmise in the case of Sabaudia that he adapted rationalist ideas, though perhaps superficially, and perhaps we here see an architecture closer to Frezzotti's own heart.

²³¹ Frezzotti's buildings in Sabaudia deviate from the general treatment of surfaces in Sabaudia. Frezzotti displays a preference for channels, recessed and protruding areas that function decoratively in relationship with the light.

²³² The information about the rooms are taken from the ground plan drawings in *From the foundation* 172; and Malossi 244. My translations.

²³³ Amedeo Gabrielli, "Valli addio, addio bei monti, per andare a Littoria siamo pronti," Carfagna, Ciannaruconi and Martellini 134.

The Hospital (*Plate 50 and 51*)

Architect: Angelo Vicario

The Hospital is situated on the corner of Via Conte Verde and Via Conte Rosso, which constitutes a section of the town limits. It was built close to the lake, on the northwestern outskirts of town, a somewhat desolate area at that time. (Today the residential area has grown substantially and borders on the road that separates it from the hospital.) It consists of a series of two- and three-story sections, clearly rationalist in style. The structure is partly in reinforced concrete, partly in loadbearing walls. The entrance porch and some details are in travertine. The building is made of rectangular forms, with one exception: a two-story high apse in the main section with large, vertical windows running from floor to ceiling, allowing for a broad view, and letting in an abundance of light.²³⁴ Surrounding the hospital building is a large green, cool park, with a small sitting garden and many trees. The area is fenced in by a low wall in the same light yellow stucco that covers the hospital walls. Both a staircase and a wheelchair ramp lead up to the entrance section. Here was located a lobby, emergency ward²³⁵ with doctor's office, a waiting room and a consultation room, clothes storages, and offices for the janitor. (*Plate 51.A.*) Three spacious wards with a capacity for forty beds were planned for the main section with the apse. An additional twenty beds could be found in the isolation chambers and other specialized wards. There was an operating theater with all necessary utilities (including hot water), a kitchen, rooms for laundry and ironing, a mess, pharmacy, a morgue and a round chapel included in the plan. The chapel was never realized. Two small villas (*plate 81*) were erected across the road, "*with lodgings for four families of sanitary staff and nurses.*"²³⁶

To the left of the main entrance in the hospital's front facade is placed a travertine relief, measuring 250 x 160 cm. and dated c. 1936.²³⁷ (*Plate 51.C.*) The artist is unknown. The relief shows several women taking care of children and other women. In the upper right corner, a woman is reclining on a bed, pose and size resembles a demi-god or hero from a Greek votive relief of the *necrodeipnon* type. She is approached by a woman coming in from the upper left. The other four women in the relief's foreground are occupied with one child each.

²³⁴ This was a very popular feature in American and European architecture from the 1920s and '30s. Antonio Sant'Elia made much use of it in his drawings from the 1910s, as did Eric Mendelsohn, e.g. in his 1926 Schocken department store, Stuttgart.

²³⁵ *From the foundation* 197–99.

²³⁶ Malossi 244.

²³⁷ According to the information given in *From the foundation* 251.

The hospital was dimensioned to serve both the municipality of Sabaudia, some neighboring municipalities, and other towns in the area that was “*lacking suitable sanitary services.*”²³⁸

The Maternity and Infancy Center (*Plate 52*)

Architect: Angelo Vicario

Motherhood and health were issues invested with great importance by the Italian Fascist regime. From childhood onwards, girls were to be brought up to become good, loving mothers and wives through training in the Balilla (later GIL) organizations for girls. The children’s health was handled by organizing them in children’s colonies where they were exposed to fresh air and exercise, and they were served nourishing food and given “spiritual” (read: doctrinal) training. In the maternity and infancy centers, the organization *Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia* (ONMI) gave advice on how to be a good mother, in addition to health care.

The Maternity and Infancy Center too is situated on the Via Conte Verde, a few hundred meters to the east of the hospital. It is kept in the same style as the hospital, with a slight variation in the design. This building consisted of one-, two- and three-story sections as well, though on a smaller scale. The refectory repeats the semi-circular forms used for the hospital, with a large picture window looking onto the surrounding countryside.²³⁹ Porthole windows, boat railings, and a balcony framed with the same sort of square “pilasters” as is seen in many other buildings in Sabaudia, add a maritime modern look. The building consisted of two departments, one for mothers and the other for children. In addition to the *Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia*, the building contained a day nursery, refectory, dormitory, bathrooms, rooms for the medical consultations, and an apartment for the staff. It was “*completed with hot water facilities, and with an appropriate kitchen.*”²⁴⁰ In 1936, during the redistribution of functions in and of the public buildings in Sabaudia, the ONMI were moved out of the premises and parts of the Militia were relocated to the building. Today the building has been rebuilt and now houses the *Scuola Medica Statale “G. Cesare.”*²⁴¹

The Post and Telegraph Office (*Plate 53*)

²³⁸ Malossi 244.

²³⁹ *From the foundation* 197-99.

²⁴⁰ Malossi 244.

²⁴¹ *From the foundation* 197-99.

Architect: Angiolo Mazzoni

A large number of post offices in Italy were built by the Fascist regime.²⁴² Angiolo Mazzoni (1894–1979) and Roberto Narducci were chief engineers at the federal office *Ufficio V – Costruzioni edilizie e stradali*, and these two engineers designed most of the Italian post buildings, in addition to other federal constructions. During his career Mazzoni thus designed a large number of post offices, as well as a section of the *Stazione Termini* in Rome, the children’s colony *Rosa Muntoni*, and many other large buildings. Mazzoni was a highly eclectic architect, in one instance suddenly traditionalist in his language, then suddenly more “futuristic.” In 1932, a short time before he designed the Sabaudia post office, there had been a national competition for the four new main post offices in Rome. Mazzoni, a natural choice one would think, suffered a bitter defeat; All the four assignments went to other architects.²⁴³ When a short time later he was given the commission for the post office in Sabaudia, he came up with his most exquisite work, a little azur-blue building that adds a fresh dash of color and modern texture to the town. It is almost as if he wanted to confirm his position as the number one post office designer of the regime. While the rest of the town has a rather monotone color scale; pale yellow, warm red ochre, light and dark brick, and travertine, Mazzoni’s building is a feast, an orgiastic splurging in complimentary color and materials—at the same time as being kept in a modern, stringent style: The entire building is covered externally with tiny azur-blue ceramic tiles. The stylish, undecorated high entrance doors are in bronze with high, narrow windows. In front of the window ribbons, steel cases painted signal red frame the mosquito gratings. The staircase and railings are finished with a beautiful, warm red marble. The interior is a bit more pale, but not the least less stylish: the walls are clad with tiny light grey ceramic tiles, the doors are in bronze. The rooms are large and cool. On the first floor were situated the functions necessary for a well-equipped modern post office: A large hall for the public, writing room, resale counters, two telephone booths, and different offices. On the second floor, accessed by the monumental staircase, the postmaster’s apartment was situated.

The use of geometrical shapes, asymmetry, lively curves, and the enormous monumental staircase leading up to the tiny apartment on top, gives witness of a playful architect

²⁴² According to Nodin, 54 new post offices were built in Italy in the period 1926–35. (Nodin, *Estetisk pluralism* 223.)

²⁴³ Nodin, *Estetisk pluralism* 238. Giuseppe Samonà won the assignment for the Via Taranto post office; Mario Ridolfi that for Piazza Bologna; Armando Titta that of Viale Mazzini; while Adalberto Libera and Mario De Renzi won the assignment for the post office on Via Marmorata.

wanting to experience, and to impress. Italy's most famous spokesman for the futurist movement, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti writes about the Sabaudia post office:

“Angiolo Mazzoni, like Antonio Sant’Elia²⁴⁴ convinced of the importance of color, and sensing its infinite efficacy for ‘lyricising’ the geometry, has designed a post-telegraph building covered with ceramic tiles whose dominating color, a Savoy-blue, harmonizes with the vermilion red of the windows with their grating against malaria, and their respective frames in red stone from Siena. . . .”²⁴⁵

Michael McNamara sums it all up in an article: *“Mazzoni’s influences, which include Italian Futurism, Garnier, Mendelsobn, and Wright, reveal a formal language emphasizing assymetry, motion, curving masses and planes and an inventive use of bold colors and material palettes simultaneously ancient and modern.”²⁴⁶*

A Sports Field (Plate 54)

Architect: Oriolo Frezzotti

The sports field, designed in a more bombastic style than most of the purer buildings in town, was never completed. Only its surrounding walls were erected and are now in poor condition. It was planned with stucco covered surrounding walls and with one ceremonial entrance featuring seven gates, crowned by travertine reliefs depicting athletes performing different kinds of sports. Furthermore the stadium was to be equipped with four minor twin gates. The gates are designed with curving “columns,” resembling the many flagpoles designed for Fascist buildings (compare with the flagpole of the ONB and of the post office). The stadium swing faces the Via Carlo Alberto, one of the main roads out of Sabaudia, heading southeast towards San Felice Circeo, on what was in 1934 the border of town. This resembles Frezzotti’s earlier sports field for the town of Littoria (plate 7.E). This structure gives an indication of how the sports field would have been had it been completed.

But as Maldossi says: *“Regarding the Sports Field: For now only the installation of the field and of the track will be provided for, and the fencing with a part of the boundary wall planned in . . . The main part of the bleachers, of the locker rooms, etc. will be postponed, as will the rest of the boundary wall, to*

²⁴⁴ Unlike Sant’Elia I would not say that Mazzoni was a true futurist. At times Mazzoni is also somewhat futuristic, and he actually joins the neo-futurist/futurist II-movement in 1934. But looking at his architecture, the futurist aspect is not always so visible. For his different commissions, he uses different styles, sometimes emphasizing the classical, something the modern.

²⁴⁵ Filippo T. Marinetti, *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, 17 April 1934. Partly reprinted in Franchini and Ianella 128.

²⁴⁶ Michael McNamara, “Sensuous motion, sensuous boundaries, sensuous place: Angiolo Mazzoni’s blue building,” *Oz: Journal of the College of Architecture and Design* 19 (1997), 5 Sept. 1999, <<http://aalto.arch.ksu.edu/Oz/>>

*another time and to the initiative of other institutions.*²⁴⁷ After the completion of the first phase, the works stopped. The planned sports field was actually never carried out. The structure that stands there today is only a rudimentary semblance to the original plan.

A Hotel (*Plates 55 and 73.B*)

Architects: Cancellotti, Montuori, Piccinato, Scalpelli

Sabaudia was planned to function as a tourist resort in addition to being an agrar center, something that explains a hotel in a rural center with 5,000 inhabitants. The hotel “Albergo Ristorante del Circeo” is situated on the south-eastern corner of the L-shaped Piazza della Rivoluzione, with façades facing towards both parts of the square. It is not a very large hotel, which indicates perhaps a modest expectation of tourist business. The yellow stuccoed edifice is three storeys high, with two wings. It is partly constructed in loadbearing walls with reinforced concrete structure in the larger halls.²⁴⁸ On the back is a service wing somewhat recessed from the street. The classical rhythm of the different intervals in the two main façades—between the loggias, in the columns of the portico, as well as in the equal distance between the windows—adds a monumental aspect to the building, *“even though its dimensions are more than modest (30 rooms).”*²⁴⁹

The main entrance to the hotel was under the portico on the southern side of the square. The hotel bar was on the corner of the building. Other rooms to be found on first floor were a shop, the lobby, offices, and three dining halls *“linked by an internal glazed gallery which leads to the garden and dancing platform.”*²⁵⁰ (*Plate 55.A.*) A separate staircase lead up to the director’s apartment situated among the eighteen guest rooms on second floor (twelve single and six double rooms). Some of the rooms had separate bathrooms, others shared bathrooms in the hall. The ten rooms facing southeast towards the ceremonial part of the Piazza della Rivoluzione had separate balconies. In addition there was a common loggia where the guests could have breakfast. The southeastern wing has a third floor, somewhat recessed from the rest of the façade. Here were twelve additional guest rooms with bathrooms and balconies. A common loggia was to be found here too.

19mcnam.html>.

²⁴⁷ Malossi 244.

²⁴⁸ Piacentini, Burdett 27.

²⁴⁹ Vago 18. My translation.

²⁵⁰ Piacentini, Burdett 27.

The service wing is also three stories high. (*Plate 55.A–C.*) It is given a much more modest look. On first floor a kitchen, pantry, and other service rooms were situated. The four dwellings for the servants were situated on second floor, to be reached through the service stairs. Here was also a drying ground. There is no information about the third story, but it probably contained other rooms necessary for the daily management of the hotel.

A Slaughterhouse (*Plate 56*)

Architects: Cancellotti, Montuori, Piccinato, Scalpelli

The slaughterhouse complex was the only planned business in Sabaudia reminiscent of an industry. It was planned as a ca. 2,450 m² big structure, whereof only ca. 140–150 m² were erected: “*The slaughterhouse in the part foreseen for now, contains the slaughter hall, and the shop where tripe is sold. The part of enlargement contains the other services and lodgings for the custodian; this will postponed to another period and to the initiative of the municipality.*”²⁵¹ In the blueprint are the following sections: a cashier; toolshop; dressing room; an apartment for the custodian (2 rooms, kitchen and garden); canopy; quarantine; pork, sheep and cattle compartments; pork, sheep and cattle slaughterhalls; a shop selling tripe; boiler room; coach sheds; veterinary; open courtyard; and a slaughterhall for quarantined livestock. The part of the building that had been erected during the first phase of Sabaudia was later somewhat rebuilt, however not according to the original plans. Today, oddly enough, the slaughterhouse functions as Sabaudia’s kindergarden.

The Marina Militara (*Plate 57*)

Architect: Unknown

On the shores of the lake a tiny building can be seen in photos from the 1930s, as well as in the town plan. This construction was intended for the *Marina Militara*, or Navy. Somewhat different from the rest of the edifices, this building has a slightly pitched roof, – a feature that makes me wonder whether it was designed a little later than the rest of the buildings, and by another architect. It is not mentioned in the competition brief or in any sources from the time either, and I cannot locate any drawings of it. It adds to the image of Sabaudia as a military center.

The Race Course (*Plate 58*)

Architect: Unknown

Like in any good Roman town, entertainment was important. In addition to the more modern feature of the cinema theater (that also allowed for a regular theater), a race course was constructed in 1934.²⁵² It was situated between Lago di Paola and the public gardens.²⁵³

The Romans were wild about sports—and Sabaudia was also to function as a sports center. With the sea, the national park, hotel, sports field, and the race course you would think the staging was ideal for the touristic center and sports center Sabaudia. However, these dreams quickly fell to the ground, and the race course never became a Circus Maximus (*plate 87.A*) of southern Latium. After the inauguration it seems like some of the air went out of the balloon, and among many other things that were never completed as planned was the race course. Thus there never were any dolphins counting the rounds of the fours pans in Sabaudia. Neither could you find any tribune worthy of an Emperor there. The Sabaudia race course was a very modest structure, surrounded by a low wooden fence. There were neither built-in tribunes, hotdog stands or ticket offices there. Looking at the photo from the 1930s you have to look hard even to discover it in the surrounding lawn.

Category D: Housing

Public Housing with Sixty Apartments and Thirty Shops

Architects: Cancellotti, Montuori, Piccinato, Scalpelli

In his book on modern architects and the future city, John R. Gold writes:

*“Municipal housing schemes might seem modest undertakings when measured against the lofty ambitions of ideal city plans, but they represented valuable opportunities to make a statement when the only other commissions available were for private villas or showpiece exhibitions. ... Above all, they provided a valuable pretext for architects to stake an ideologically inspired claim for extension of their involvement in the wider realm of town planning.”*²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ Malossi 245.

²⁵² When it comes to the race course, the information is a bit confusing. According to Franchini and Ianella it was inaugurated on September 17, 1934. (Franchini and Ianella 168.) Mario Tieghi, on the other hand, writes that due to Sabaudia’s gradual change from a rural center to a fashionable tourist resort, in 1935 the Town Council began to construct “a horse riding track which led to the establishment of a permanent race course.” (Mario Tieghi, “Life in the ‘new town’ from a study of the first administrative records.” Muratore, Carfagna and Tieghi 165.)

²⁵³ The *Milizia Portuaria* building was erected on its spot in 1938, and thus the race course does not exist anymore.

²⁵⁴ John R. Gold, *The Experience of Modernism. Modern Architects and the Future City, 1928–53* (London: E & FN Spon, 1997) 48.

In the 1920s and '30s cheap, hygienic housing was one of the main issues European and American architects tried to problematize and solve on a large social scale. An article about the Stockholm exhibition in 1930 sums up the challenges to be taken on: First, the leap from the 19th century “housing barracks” to the modern home made it necessary to improve the standard of living with technical commodities (central heating, W.C., bathrooms, elevators), building techniques (reinforced concrete, multistory buildings), and city plans (the demand for air and light). This resulted in increased building costs, something which meant that the size of the home had to be downsized, and functionality and rational use of the space became more urgent. Thirdly, an aesthetic for the modern building tying together all these demands, was required. After a thorough investigation into these matters, the organizers of the Stockholm exhibition concluded that it was impossible at that time to provide decent dwellings at a price the average man could afford.²⁵⁵

Several architecture exhibitions were organized, showing different attempts at working out this problem, e.g. the *Weissenhof Siedlung* exhibition in Stuttgart, Germany in 1927, organized by the *Deutscher Werkbund* (officially titled “*Die Wohnung*”), where a small neighbourhood of houses was constructed on a permanent basis (the houses still exist today, and function as homes), or the temporary exhibition in Stockholm 1930, under the motto “*Acceptera!*” (Accept!). In Norway three national newspapers in 1930—independent of each other—launched contests for modern, single unit housing.²⁵⁶ These nationwide competitions resulted in several proposals for the new home, while the capital of Iceland, Reykjavík, constructed almost all its domestic buildings in the same period (*plate 90.E and F*). The CIAM II meeting in Frankfurt-am-Main in 1929 resulted in the serious report “*Die Wohnung für das Existenzminimum.*”

Sabaudia was no regular housing project of the Fascist regime’s. It was planned for war veterans (the proclaimed martyrs of the Fascist regime), and furthermore Sabaudia was also of enormous importance as a public relations stunt both at home and abroad. Thus spending the extra money on these homes was rationalized and affordable. As I will show, the Sabaudian homes were rather spacious, with commodities such as bathrooms, W.C.s, kitchen gardens, etc. This was however not the case with other projects the regime planned and carried out. If we take a closer look at some of the other homes that were constructed

²⁵⁵ Peder Figenbaum, “Stockholmsutställningen 1930 – da Sverige ble moderne,” *ARR – Idehistorisk tidskrift* 7.3–4 (1995) 63, and notes 32 and 35.

²⁵⁶ The newspapers were *Aftenposten*, *Arbeiderbladet* and *Tidens Tegn*. 200 architects participated with 529 entries! (Wenche Findal, *Norsk modernistisk arkitektur: om funksjonalismen* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1996) 59.)

in the 1930s in Milan and Rome, a completely different story emerges. In 1933–34 three new precincts were constructed in the periphery of Milan: Baggina, Trecca, and Bruzzano. Here families consisting of as many as six members were stuffed into 30 m² apartments without running water or w.c.s. And in 1936 the *Istituto Autonomo per le Case Popolare* planned the scandalous project later referred to as the “*Villaggio Duce*.” This village was intended for the outskirts of Milan with the intention of isolating people sick with tuberculosis and their families. Thus they would be segregated from the rest of the population, and the state could save the cost to treat these people in sanatoriums.²⁵⁷ Likewise, in Rome twelve *borgate*, or “scraps of town” as Kostof translates the term, were constructed to house the Roman population that had been evicted from their homes as large chunks of the city core were demolished. These ersatz communities were constructed in open country ten miles or more to the east, away from the city proper, the only connection being railroad lines. These working-class suburbs “*consisted of rows of plain single-family dwellings which, at least in the beginning, shared communal services such as water and sanitation facilities.*”²⁵⁸ Many of the borgate lacked a proper infrastructure. For instance the Borgata Gordiani between Via Prenestina and Via Casilina consisted of different barracks that lacked both water and w.c. In fact, 25 w.c.s were installed to serve a population of 5,000 people.²⁵⁹ To use Estermann-Juchler’s expression; in the cases of these two large cities the rationalist postulate of the “*casa minimum*” (minimum house) was perverted to “*minima spesa*” (minimum cost) under the aegis of the Fascist housing institute.²⁶⁰ But there were a few decent exceptions. In addition to Sabaudia, there was for instance the Fabio Filzi precinct in Milan. Here two-, three- and four room flats were constructed, all with their own w.c., kitchen, and balcony. Separate buildings contained bath tubs, showers, laundries and drying rooms. The exception was the three room apartments with their own bathrooms. This new residential district housed 1,488 inhabitants, something that gives 1,67 persons per room. Rents were calculated from the total costs, and were so low that a worker with his family actually could afford to live there.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Margrit Estermann-Juchler, *Faschistische Staatsbankunst: Zur ideologischen Funktion der öffentlichen Architektur im faschistischen Italien*, diss., U Zürich, 1980, Dissertationen zur Kunstgeschichte 15 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1982) 162–64. Massive protests against the project prevented its construction.

²⁵⁸ Kostof, *Third Rome* 19.

²⁵⁹ Estermann-Juchler 163.

²⁶⁰ Estermann-Juchler 162.

²⁶¹ Estermann-Juchler 165.

SABAUDIA

Three basic housing types were designed for the development plan of Sabaudia: single family or semi-detached houses, two-story apartment blocks, and terraced housing. The last type was never built. Six different versions of semi-detached units were designed and built alongside one of the main streets, the Corso Vittorio Emanuele III, between the post office and the Piazzale Roma—*“to provide a model for future upper-market development.”*²⁶² Several different apartment blocks line the central streets with first floor shops and workshops and dwellings above. The architects intended *“to avoid the monotony of industrialised housing which characterised many Italian and European rationalist housing schemes and neighbourhoods”* by providing different typological solutions.²⁶³

THE APARTMENT BLOCKS

The housing in Sabaudia mainly consisted of fairly spacious apartments, approximately 80–90 m² (*plates 59–74*). Two and three story buildings were scattered throughout the center containing apartments, and in many cases with shops on the first floor. Seven different models were designed (types A–G), as well as an apartment block bordering on the hotel designed to make it seem like the two buildings constituted one structure. (Type B [*plates 61–62*] was never realized.) The apartments constructed in 1933–34 featured a high standard, with facilities such as running water, w.c., bath tubs, and modern kitchens. In addition each apartment contained two to three bedrooms, a living/dining room, entrance, and occasionally even a small balcony. On roof terraces washing and covered laundry drying facilities were provided. In addition each apartment house had a large garden and play area.²⁶⁴ The architects designed eight different types of apartment buildings to avoid monotony. They are all kept in a light yellow or red ochre stucco, sometimes with details in travertine or, more common, bricks. On some façades small protruding balconies with iron railing rhythmically breaks up the wall (*plates 63.A, B and D*), on others the balconies are used as a modelling feature, as they are withdrawn and thus make deep shadows in the wall (*plates 59 and 69*). Different types of windows are also used in the different buildings to variate the façades: window-ribbons, bigger and smaller windows, all set at equal distance from each other ensuring a symmetrical balance. Type F and G each consists of two different blocks linked together on ground level by low porticos (*plates 69–72*). On top of

²⁶² Pinna, *Rationalism* 11.

²⁶³ Pinna, *Rationalism* 11.

type E (*plate 68*) we find the solarium construction with thin, plain pilasterlike concrete beams framing in a terrace open to the sky in the middle. The use of porticoes and arcades provided informal meeting places in front of the shops and cafés.²⁶⁵ The impression is a very harmonic, symmetrical town, of a controlled, classifying modernity. Only one of each type was initially constructed, as was the case with all the other housing types designed for the town.²⁶⁶

THE SEMI-DETACHED HOUSES AND VILLAS

For people with more important positions in Sabaudia, semidetached houses and in some cases even small villas were constructed (*plates 75–86*). Six designs for semidetached housing were made (*plate 75–80*), and in addition five different semidetached houses were made for the ONC as well as two different villas (*plates 82–85*). Two types of villas were also designed for the medical staff at the hospital and maternity/infancy center (*plate 81*). One villa was designed for the commander of the Fascist militia, although this building was never erected. Each of these blueprints was only used for one building each.²⁶⁷

Piacentini wrote in his 1934 article about the villas and semidetached houses:

*“Each household is supplied with an allotment of about 250 square metres... The two-family detached houses are distributed along an avenue which leads to a public garden. Even though there are a variety of house types they all tend to be of a constant size, containing a large garden with washing facilities and a chicken coop... The low-density houses in the peripheral areas are best suited to the professional classes, and contain two apartments per story, and are surrounded by spacious gardens.”*²⁶⁸

Stylistically these little houses differ quite a lot. In Vicario’s villas we find porthole windows and boat railings on the roofs—both stylistic features quite popular at the time, e.g. semidetached house type no. 4 and hospital villa type B (portholes) or hospital villa type A and ONC villas (boat railings). The ship iconography was considered suitable for modern man, symbolizing the *nouveau nomadisme*, a new man in constant movement and speed.²⁶⁹ His semidetached houses for the ONC are on the other hand much more rustic in style with large outdoor staircases in his types no. 4 and 5. The winner team’s six different types of

²⁶⁴ Piacentini, Burdett 35.

²⁶⁵ Piacentini, Burdett 35.

²⁶⁶ A second building phase where the rest of the residencies including terraced housing would be constructed, was foreseen. However, it was never initiated.

²⁶⁷ The competition brief requires the drawing of 60 apartments. As the town was intended for 5,000 inhabitants it seems plausible that these blueprints would be used more than one time each. However, it is hard to find any information about the Fascists further plans for Sabaudia after 1934.

²⁶⁸ Piacentini, Burdett 35.

²⁶⁹ Figenbaum 61. The ship was a central metaphor in early functionalism. To Le Corbusier it was an example

semidetached houses, on the other hand, are in a more rigid modernist style with their pilasterframed balconies and strict geometric symmetry. Only in one of these houses (type 4) are there porthole windows.

In addition there were the farmsteads outside town where ten variations of roughly similar blueprint schemes were used, all kept in a strict traditional style (*plate 6*). The residences in town were considerably more modern. Even though the Fascists emphasized time and again that Sabaudia was a rural center and not a city or town, they decided to build two-story apartment buildings and semidetached housing for the inhabitants, instead of separate small villas with gardens.

The designer team created several different houses which were variations over the cube and the rectangle to avoid monotony. These houses are of course simple in design, with small decorative details such as doors, doorknobs, different types of verandas, etc. There are lots of green areas around. The apartment buildings follow the ancient Roman and Italian/Mediterranean tradition with rooms for shops on the first floor, facing the street, and living quarters in the stories above as seen in e.g. reconstructions of apartment blocks in Rome's port town Ostia, ca. 2nd century A.D. (*plate 87.C*). Thus even though it is given a modern design, Sabaudia's blocks rooted as they are in ancient traditions and stylistic features, never get quite as "modern" as Oud's housing project Kiefhoek in the Netherlands (*plate 90.B*). The classical in the architecture can still be sensed. The detached houses also have small kitchen gardens, or proper gardens with a drying ground and a chicken coop. The penchant for architectural reliefs and details, and the proportions and symmetries of the façades in Sabaudia still carry strong references to classical architecture.

An elitist thinking and class structuring is clearly visible in the dwellings: The higher officials are given small villas, while the ordinary person was assigned more modest accommodations. Piccinato also expresses this view in his article from 1934, where he ponders the question of how ordinary people should best lead their lives, and what they should do for a living, – showing the architect the role of social planner as we also meet in many of the modernist architects.²⁷⁰

Dwellings Intended for the Civil Servants and Other Specialized Staff

of rational and engineer-effective architecture, focusing more on problem solving than on style.

²⁷⁰ Luigi Piccinato, "The Importance of Sabaudia," trans. Richard Burdett, Burdett 13–15.

In addition to the apartments and houses for rent, several apartments and houses were built to house personnel at the different institutions, then on the premises of the institution. Thus, we find apartments for the teachers in the school building as well as in the War Veterans' Club. The post office has a small apartment for the postmaster on the top. There are apartments in the Town Hall, and a house was planned (but never erected) for the Commander of the MVSN, the *Casa del Comandante*. Furthermore, the cemetery complex contained dwellings for the janitor, and the slaughterhouse too would have housed its janitor had it been completed according to plan. There are small housings for the staff of the hotel inside the hotel proper, as well as an apartment for the director. Next to the hospital two houses were built for high ranking members of the staff.

3.3 From Tourist Idyll to Military Camp: Sabaudia 1936–41

Shortly after the completion of the town large changes were implemented. With the departure of the construction workers in 1936 came economic disaster.²⁷¹ Except for the few party officials and the staff working in the few institutions in Sabaudia there were now no one to buy the goods in the shops. As the settlers only got a token pay from the ONC, and with the lack of industry in town and thus also of workers, little money was in circulation and the shops were close to bankruptcy. However, since Sabaudia was meant to be a showcase and a quiet settlement for the petty bourgeoisie, and faithful party members and officials, the ONC was not interested in placing any industry in or near the town.²⁷² With factories comes a working class, and it does not seem to have been very welcome in Sabaudia. A thorough rearrangement of the areas of application was necessary following the economic miscalculations. For this reason, and conveniently, because Italy was gradually beginning to prepare for war, several military and para-military structures were moved to Sabaudia and its vicinity. This meant new building projects, and the relocation of several organizations and public facilities from their original edifices. In 1936 the Marine School “Caracciolo” was founded. It was assigned the militia barracks, elementary school building and the premises of the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*. A ship-school (the brig) was constructed in the middle of the Militia's earlier training field for the instruction of the *marinaretti*.²⁷³ The other functions of the Militia were relocated to other buildings in town: It

²⁷¹ Gabrielli 134.

²⁷² In the winning scheme from 1933, curiously enough the southern section of town is labelled “*zona industriale*.” But with the exception of the slaughterhouse, there was not planned any industry in the town. It was meant to function as a strictly rural center.

²⁷³ Gabrielli 134.

was given some rooms on the first floor of the Town Hall and in some of the buildings of the maternity and infancy center, after a shorter stay in the *Casa del Fascio*. The elementary schools were altogether moved to the maternity and infancy center.²⁷⁴ Where the Balilla-organization—or the *Gioventù Italiana del Littorio* as it was renamed in 1937—was moved to is unclear from the available material. In 1937 the foundation stone of the *Scuola della Milizia Portuaria* (School of the Port Militia) was laid. The race track was demolished, and in its place the *Caserma Piave*, or the Piave Barracks were built for the school. It was inaugurated in 1938.²⁷⁵ In 1941 construction of the *Scuola di Artiglieria Contraerea* (the Anti-Aircraft Artillery School) was begun just outside Sabaudia. Italy was now at war, and the party's intentions for Sabaudia had shifted from leisure towards a military strategic center.

Considering the size of the cinema in Sabaudia, being the largest movie theater in Italy in its time, it seems strange that it should have been built for such a small population. The surrounding farms and *borghi* had great difficulties in moving around, as I have shown previously. So for who was this large cinema really built? Did the regime already from the start know that the town would function as a military center? Was the movie theater expected to be such a formidable novelty that it would be an extra attraction drawing tourists to Sabaudia? — Or was it intended all along for entertaining large numbers of soldiers?

²⁷⁴ Mario Tieghi, *Sabaudia* 73, note 12. Interview with Riccardo and Giuliano Cudicio.

²⁷⁵ The Port Militia was established in 1925 “to control all passenger and goods traffic, carry out investigations to prevent and repress all common and political crimes, and fight illegal immigration and fishing, etc.” (From the foundation Muratore, Carfagna and Tieghi 201.)

4. The Regime and the Architect: Patron and Client

The judicial distinction between contract and institution is well known: the contract presupposes in principle the free consent of the contracting parties and determines between them a system of reciprocal rights and duties; it cannot affect a third party and is valid for a limited period. Institutions, by contrast, determine a long-term state of affairs which is both involuntary and inalienable; ...it tends to replace a system of rights and duties by a dynamic model of action, authority and power.

– Gilles Deleuze, “Coldness & Cruelty”²⁷⁶

In Fascist Italy consensus reigned for a long time. Most architects were members of the PNF, and many of them—rationalist as well as academist and novecentist—were eager Fascists, agitating for Mussolini to choose their style as the official Fascist style. Mussolini never did make such a choice. At times he defended the rationalist architects from fierce criticism by the parliament, but he never decided that only one style was appropriate for representing the Fascist state. On the contrary, he embraced both the new and the old. Like Janus he looked into a bright future with airplanes, modern technology, and means of communication—and back to a distant, glorious past of monumental symmetry. *Il Duce* understood how to incorporate and make use of both styles to suit his propaganda purposes. That he realized the importance of getting as many Italians as possible on his team, is clearly visible in a speech he made at La Scala in Milan on 28 October 1925: “*La nostra formula è questa: tutto nello Stato, niente al di fuori dello Stato, nulla contro lo Stato.*” (Our formula is this: Everything within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state.) The strategy worked: During the years of intense building activity a numerous and varied flock of architects tried to concretize the spirit of Fascism.

The Fascists did not force workers into the different unions, but those standing apart found life to be very problematic. E.g. any architect that decided not to join the union was excluded from getting commissions, and he could not take advantage of the membership

²⁷⁶ Gilles Deleuze, “Coldness and Cruelty,” trans. Jean McNeil, *Masochism*, by Deleuze and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (New York: Zone Books, 1991) 77.

benefits in the unemployment and social security system. Thus he would not be able to support himself and his family.²⁷⁷

According to Stone, “Fascist culture originated in a contest for control over the structures of representation,” with the main struggle being over who controls the means of representing.²⁷⁸ She points out how “official power over the means of representation meant access to display and exchange and, thus, was integral to a developing Fascist patronage style,” seeing “‘who’ is allowed to display art and ‘where’ ” as the basis of the patron-client relationship.²⁷⁹ Through architectural contests, art biennials and other exhibitions the Fascist dictatorship offered access to the best places of displaying ones work. Surely they wanted something in return.

4.1 The Regime’s Demands and Intentions

The ideological foundation of the Fascist government was, as demonstrated in chapter 2.1 (and esp. 2.1.3 and 2.1.4), based on a mixture of different components. The four main ingredients being: 1) History; 2) The nine months dictatorship of charismatic poet Gabriele D’Annunzio in Fiume; 3) Modernity/technology; and 4) A stew of ideas from different 19th and 20th century thinkers (Georges Sorel, Gustave Le Bon, and Oswald Spengler being by far the most important ones). In addition Mussolini’s years as a young radical frequenting the circles of the cultural futurist Florentine magazine, *La Voce*, also played an important role. This chapter will point out in what ways the different aspects of Fascist ideology is reflected in the foundation of the new towns in general—and Sabaudia specially. (Points 1, 3, and 4 have direct consequences for the construction of Sabaudia.)

Historical Influences. The Fascists made good use of their ancient past, both in their rhetoric and state administration. To some extent they looked to medieval and Renaissance Italy, and to the glorious *risorgimento* of the 19th century when Italy was finally united to one kingdom. But the most important source of inspiration was the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire. The connotations that spring to mind when thinking of Ancient Rome are such as: order, control, domination, centralization, expansion, undemocratic hierarchies and slavery, and the Empire (in Latin *imperare* means “to rule”). The strong leadership and obedience to the state were two qualities that the Fascists would like to implement in Italian society. To take Italy to a new level where it would be able to compete as a ultra-modern society with other states it was natural to compare itself with, the Fascists used

²⁷⁷ Nodin, *Estetisk pluralism* 68.

²⁷⁸ Stone, *Op. cit.* 23.

²⁷⁹ Stone, *Patron state* 23.

tactics and elements from their great forefathers. The military structures and warfare of the Romans appealed immensely to the bellicose, violent Fascists. The Romans' expansions and successes were even greater than the short triumph of the Macedonian Alexander the Great. And it was Italian! Ways of administering and organizing Fascist Italy, "internal colonization", and symbols were borrowed from the Romans and adapted to suit the needs of a country in the 20th century.

But how does the Fascist fascination for the Roman past show in Sabaudia, a town that was both celebrated and detested because of its modern flair? I would like to start with a somewhat broader scope: How did the Fascists carry out their "internal reclamation and resettlement" plans? For a start, they frequently referred to the work being done as that of an internal colonization—preparing the land for the war veterans, turning Italy into a proud, self-sustained agrarian country. From the time of the Republic and on, Roman military leaders made extensive use of land rewards for their veterans. This served two purposes: it secured the loyalty of the soldiers, and it was a means of keeping peace in the new provinces or colonies. Thus, after the Punic wars, the Romans planted military colonies in the north and south of the peninsula to protect their newly won areas, and poor citizens were given land here. Later on, after the Iugurtha war (107 BC), veterans were granted land in the area of Carthago, and Marius' veterans from the Germanic war (102–01 BC) were to be rewarded with land in southern France.²⁸⁰ This practice continues with Pompeius, Caesar, Octavianus, and so forth. Of course, during the first fourteen years of the Fascist regime Mussolini could not give the veterans from World War I land in any recently conquered colonies abroad. What he could do, however, was to offer them land in the new province he was planning south in Latium. And to ensure that everybody understood this to be a glorious event, like the Romans' achievements, what could be better than to name the whole reclamation project *La Conquista della Terra* (The Conquest of the Earth), and to call the new farmers *coloni* (a word that in addition to meaning "farmer" also carries the meaning of "coloner" or "settler"). Slogans coined in connection with the Fascist "colonization" were such as "*La battaglia per il grano*" (the battle for the grain), "*È questa la guerra che noi preferiamo*" (This is the war we prefer), and "*Si rinnovano gli istituti, si redime la terra, si fondano le città*" (Institutes are renewed, land is reclaimed, towns are founded), to further emphasize the warrior aspect of the reclamation project. The colonies

of Ancient Rome were meant as military outposts, and as shown in chapter 3.3, the tourist resort Sabaudia ended up being a “military camp” not long after its inauguration. The visit of the African batallion in Sabaudia in 1935, with approximately a hundred military tents put up next to the Piazza Oberdan, like a Roman camp, further underlines the town’s military aspects (*plate 18.C*). By letting the *Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti*, or the War Veterans’ Organization administer the whole project its solemn military aspects were emphasized. In addition all the images and speeches were angled to show the workers as soldiers, the veterans as Roman veterans.

The five new towns with *borghi* and farms were set up as a severely monitored community (*plate 5.B*). And the community’s main purpose was grain production. Here too the idea of Ancient Rome springs to my mind as so much of Roman history evolves around the grain supplies.

As shown in chapter 3, the structure was hierarchic. With the central administration and the prohibition of free initiative in the area, the whole co-dependent system can perhaps be compared to the Roman *latifundium* system developed in the second century BC. The Roman war veterans who had been given land for services always risked being conscripted into service again whenever needed. Given the many protracted wars in which the Republic increasingly engaged, much of the veteran farmland was thus left to decay in their owners’ absence and eventually was sold to rich landowners. In this devious manner landowners appropriated more and more land, and wealth and property was siphoned from the poor to the rich. As new land was conquered this also fell into the hands of the rich for menial prices. All these estates (*villae*) were left to be administered by a manager who had to his disposal a large number of slaves, who also were in abundance due to the wars. In the course of this process of conversion of property the usage of the land was also changed, now to the raising of cattle, which had a devastating effect of destroying the delicate balance of the arable land, and slowly decaying it into swamps.²⁸¹

The Fascists thinly disguised the project in the Pontine Marshes as that of a corporate community, structured to serve veterans and giving the impression of fulfilling the promise—like the Romans—of *giving* to the glorious veterans, and not taking. However, it was in fact the opposite that happened as the farmers functioned, actually, more like the

²⁸⁰ However the veterans from the Germanic war were let down as Marius failed to fulfill his patron obligations to his soldiers.

²⁸¹ “Latifundium,” *Antikkleksikonet*, 1999 ed.

slaves of the Roman landowners with their *latifundi*, rather than as independent agricultural operators.

Each farm, as mentioned in 3.1.1, was marked with its designation number in huge writing on the façade. Every morning the farmers were woken up at 6:00 AM by ONC officials, riding around to make sure they would work and not sleep. Even though the farmers were promised that they could buy their farm, their financial situation was so restrained that this remained impossible for the duration of the Fascist regime.

Mussolini founded twelve new towns in the motherland. That is the same number as the famous League of twelve Etruscan city states founded in the Po valley (*XII populi Etruriae*). Probably the Etruscans copied a similar alliance in ancient Greece, namely the Ionian Union of Hellenic city states.²⁸² It could be a coincidence, but I am inclined not to think so as there are many other similarities. While many of the other new towns were given names indicating their function, e.g. Torviscosa and Guidonia, the five new towns erected in what used to be the Pontine Marshes, were given names that much stronger connected modern Italy with its past. This is also true for the new borghi constructed in the province of Littoria. This wild area in southern Latium was firmly tied to the country's historical and mythological past as shown in chapter 1, with the witch Circe's cave where Ulysses was kept prisoner, and a cyclop fortress/sanctuary on the Mountain of Circe, Domitian's summer villa, and the church of the Sorresca dating from the 400s. The Knight Templars had a fortress in the area in the 1200s, and—most important to the Fascists, I think—the draining of the area was a project Caesar himself had failed to complete.²⁸³ Documentation from the period too shows that the Pontine towns (and Sabaudia in particular) were something special, the jewel in the regime's anti-urbanist, corporative politics:

*“After the miracle of Littoria, Sabaudia, just to show that it is not a question of miracles, but of tenacious human will ... In this mythical, luminous April the new city rises, a marvellous assertion of the life that is revived on the thousand year old lethal marshes...”*²⁸⁴

“Sabaudia is about to reveal itself in the Pontine Marshes. The name of the newborn Italian municipality already has universal fame, equal to Littoria, and the absolutely modern and current

²⁸² The Etruscan league, like the Ionian, actually consisted of more than twelve member towns – and not less than seventeen. The *XII populi Etruriae* was a sort of amphictyony, like its Greek predecessor, and it is proved to have existed also among other tribes, e.g. among the Israelis. (Hermann Bengtson, *Republik und Kaiserzeit bis 284 n.Chr.*, 3rd ed. [Munich: Beck, 1982] 38.)

²⁸³ Of course, Caesar did not get much time to try as he was killed only a year after grasping the dictatorial powers. And it was the Romans in the first place that ruined the area, making it into desolate land with their military politics and the introduction of the *latifundi*.

²⁸⁴ E. Nazzaro, [untitled], ed. Galeazzi 29.

*mystery of the sudden blossoming of a center to live in, causes astonishment and inexpressible emotions.*²⁸⁵

Sabaudia was also a recurring theme in art exhibitions on both a national and regional scale, as Massimiliano Vittori has shown in his article “An artistic iconography of Sabaudia.”²⁸⁶ (Plate 96.)

Whenever the Roman military founded a new camp in the empire, the same pattern was followed more or less:

*“Walls with watchtowers surrounded a tightly packed compound that contained the commander’s quarters, a treasury, a shrine, rows of barracks, quarters for centurions, granaries, kitchens, ovens, horse stalls, latrines, cells for punishing offenders, a hospital, shops, and a parade ground; if times were peaceful other houses and buildings might be built outside of the walls, such as baths, an amphitheater, and merchant areas. Settled by legions on the borderlines of the empire, they were under the direct authority of the emperor...”*²⁸⁷

With a few exceptions it is not hard to fit Sabaudia into this description of a Roman military camp (plate 86.A). The town did not have walls as this of course was not necessary, but the *pomerium* that was drawn up follows the roads encircling Sabaudia and functioned as its physical border. The town should not grow larger than this. Adhering to the ancient customs of the Romans, the cemetery was placed outside the *pomerium*. Even though the borders are asymmetrical, the street system follows the grid of the Roman military, with a *cardo* and *decumanus* meeting at the main square in Sabaudia. The *cardo* bends in front of the Town Hall tower, while the proper intersection between the two roads is the Casa del Fascio. Ghirardo writes: “The Fascists followed the pattern established by the Romans in their planning and use of local materials. The cities were laid out on modified orthogonal grids, normally with four quadrants, with a central *piazza*, rectangular and usually at least partially porticoed, serving as the civic center.”²⁸⁸

Before founding the *Partito nazionale fascista* Mussolini was an outspoken opponent of the church. He modified his extreme views to be able to take power. I do not doubt, however, that he never changed his mind about the church. He just silently tried to work against it. Since Sabaudia is one of *il Duce’s* towns, looking at the work on the church is interesting. It was dedicated to the SS. Annunziata, or the Annunciation, and not to any specific Catholic saint. There are guidelines that should be followed when choosing a patron saint for a

²⁸⁵ F. Maratea, [untitled], ed. Galeazzi 50.

²⁸⁶ Massimiliano Vittori, “An artistic iconography of Sabaudia,” *Muratore*, Carfagna and Tieghi 237–50.

²⁸⁷ William H. Stephens, *The New Testament World in Pictures* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987) 35.

²⁸⁸ Ghirardo 65.

church. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, there is a ranking list of what patrons a new church should be dedicated to:

1. to God and the Sacred Humanity of Christ or its emblems;
2. to the Mother of God;
3. to the Angels;
4. to the holy personages who introduced the New Law of Christ;
5. to the Apostles and Evangelists;
6. to other saints.²⁸⁹

The ranking order is correctly followed in Sabaudia, dedicating the church to an event featuring the Virgin Mary, Mother of God. But from here on its iconography gets interesting. When looking at the façade mosaic representing the Annunciation taking place in the sky above Sabaudia, with Mussolini and Cencelli doing the harvest in the fields underneath, or reading about the wall paintings originally planned for the church's interior, depicting scenes from the draining and resettling, I get the impression that the Fascists are trying to steal the show. How are we to read the mosaic (*plate 39.A*)? As God's Annunciation of the coming of the Fascist state, lead by the divine Mussolini with his faithful servant and leader of the ONC, Cencelli by his side? Are the paintings inside God's blessing of Mussolini by ensuring the fertile land? And Mary, what role could she possibly play in this scenario? With the church's shape resembling a grain silo, and the crops and draining work displayed in the fine art decorating the church—should we perhaps read Mary as a modern Demeter? Demeter was the goddess for birth, fertility, and growth. These are just some possible interpretations.

The second point important to the design for Sabaudia was the regime's attempt to pose as a *modern, technologically advanced state*. Thus the choice of a rationalist plan²⁹⁰ is a deliberate choice. A town constructed in a more traditionalist style would probably not have caused any protests in parliament, but as it was of great importance to Mussolini that Sabaudia was constructed in a rationalist style, and by young architects, he was willing to take the risk. (See chapter 6.1.1.) The whole draining and resettlement project was also done with modern technology of the day, and the efficiency with which the whole area was laid out seemed to promise a brilliant future. The inauguration of the town, with airplanes flying above, celebrated the idea of the modern with fireworks and explosions ripping the sky.

²⁸⁹ "Patron Saints," *Catholic Encyclopedia*. 24 Sept. 2001 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11562a.htm>>.

²⁹⁰ See quotation, chapter 1.1, p. 13.

Thirdly, the thinkers that influenced the regime's ideological views the most on urbanist matters (including the appearance and functions of the new towns) were Georges Sorel (1847–1922), Gustave Le Bon, and Oswald Spengler (1880–1936). The French psychologist Le Bon's studies of the dynamics ruling large masses of people (rather peculiar to citizens in the Western world today) was viewed as a serious contribution at the time.²⁹¹ He had a remarkable influence on politicians such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Georges Clemenceau, and Aristide Briand,²⁹² and with his psychological methods he conceived of the crowd as “female”; irrational, illogical and instinctive—not to mention hysterical (another “invention” of the nineteenth century). The qualities to be found in a crowd were the same as the ones to be found in “*beings belonging to inferior forms of evolution*”: women, savages and children.²⁹³ The causes were thought to be of a biological nature. Furthermore, crowd behavior was believed to be criminal and evil if it was not guided by a strong leader. This listing of qualities attributed to the mass surely points to all social architects playing with these ideas, as having an innate fear of the uncontrollable and irrational forces adrift in the masses, which would make the cities very dangerous places indeed. (As mentioned in chapter 2.1.4, Le Bon became Mussolini's own mentor, and *il Duce* studied all his books meticulously.)

The French philosopher Sorel's theories about how myths were images and symbols “*capable of producing in the masses, feeling, enthusiasm, and the will to act*”²⁹⁴ were also an important part of the building projects in the Pontine Marshes. According to Sorel, “*important ideas were allowed to triumph in the world thanks to the mythical power they exercised over the people.*”²⁹⁵ He found the most distinctive characteristics of the myth to be its irrefutability as it is neither right nor wrong and does not promise an immediate reward. “*Myth is a motivating force expressing a determination to act, a demonstrable example of ‘sublimity’.*”²⁹⁶ In the period when Mussolini frequented the Florentine futurist review *La Voce*, while still being a socialist, he was an eager student of Sorel's ideas. His learnings were put to good use later, when constructing the Fascist mythology in the 1920s and '30s. Thus, concerning the Pontine towns, the propaganda disseminated was written in an epos-like style, loaded with

²⁹¹ See chapter 2.1.4, p. 37 for more on Le Bon's anti-urbanism.

²⁹² Falasca-Zamponi 20.

²⁹³ Falasca-Zamponi 20 and 21.

²⁹⁴ Gentile 82.

²⁹⁵ Falasca-Zamponi 30.

²⁹⁶ Falasca-Zamponi 30.

references to the past and the future, reporting on the struggle, sacrifices, conquests and regeneration—totally in line with Sorel’s ideas.

From Spengler, a German philosopher and the third of these thinkers so influential to the Fascists, came the idea of the Motherland and a quasi-religious view on nature, perfectly expressed in the “*symbolic figure of the farmstead*.”²⁹⁷ Civilization with its gigantic cities, despises the spiritual roots—it erases and scatters them. The reason is the civilized man, the *intellectual nomade* who becomes a microcosm, without fatherland, spiritually free as a hunter or a shepherd.²⁹⁸ With the new rural centers and farmsteads the regime hoped to tame this nomade, to make him obedient. Another idea of Spengler’s that Mussolini adapted to suit his own agenda, concerned demographics: According to Spengler civilized man was moving towards sterility—Mussolini interpreted it thus: “*The progressive sterility of the citizens can be seen in direct relation to the fast monstrous augmentation of the city*.”²⁹⁹ Italy’s plans for a great new empire could not be realized without enough brave warriors, another reason for the anti-urban politics.³⁰⁰

4.2 The Architects’ Understanding of the Task

Unlike the regime, the young architects did not consider the re-establishment of the grandeur of Ancient Rome to be a task of high importance. At least not by using the architecture of Antiquity. The young designers were eager to make an architecture and a town worthy of Fascism, all right, but they wanted a *new* town, built in the style of the modern age, of the twentieth century that is. They wanted to show the world and the Italians that they were capable of undertaking the enormous challenge it was to construct a *modern* town plan, suited to all the needs of the new age, solving the problems of housing, traffic, the distribution of the different functions, etc. Piccinato and the others responded to the call for a new corporate town/rural center, to function as a Fascist nucleus. They were eager to build the new Fascist society, both practically and ideologically. And they were eager to attack the social problems that both Europe and the U.S. were facing at that time; that of housing the population, constructing new, healthy, practical dwellings and tearing down the old. And of constructing the scenery for modern life—a lifestyle that

²⁹⁷ Mariani, *Fascismo e “città nuove”* 76.

²⁹⁸ Mariani, *Fascismo e “città nuove”* 76.

²⁹⁹ B. Mussolini, qtd. in Mariani, *Fascismo e “città nuove”* 82.

³⁰⁰ Several other measures were taken to increase the population: punitive taxes on bachelors (inspired by a similar law issued by the Emperor Augustus), baby bonuses, special benefits for families with more than six children, etc. More on this in Pauley 130–32.

included going to the movies, going for a ride in the automobile, dancing in the restaurant ballroom, and other such leisure time activities.

Piccinato, the leader of the architect team and a member of CIAM, had taken as his point of departure the regime's rural policy. His writings on urbanism, on town and regional planning shows an architect eager to reshape a society he believed had outlived its role:

*“With the establishment of Sabaudia a gigantic step towards the achievement of a new socio-economic reality in the agricultural life of the Nation: not only as a result of the vast scale of the reclamation and resettlement enterprise but also because it represents a concrete and tangible achievement of the new national spirit. The head of the Italian government (Mussolini) by realising the importance of this spirit, by outlining its lines of development and by insisting on its immediate realisation, – while in other countries the will to start afresh was wasted in simple research – has in effect pointed the Italian nation in the right direction; this will allow the design of our environment to progress in such a way as to ensure a safe future for our society.”*³⁰¹

Having studied the town planning and architectural theories of influential architects such as Sitte, Howard, Unwin, and especially Wright, Piccinato was well informed about the events in Europe and the United States. The main problems architects of the younger generation in Europe and the U.S. were occupied with in the 1920s and '30s were the the same issues as mentioned above; decent, hygienic, economic housing; traffic solutions; and a better utilization of the new technologies and materials available. The design team for Sabaudia was no exception. In the introduction to the catalogue for the first rationalist exhibition, *Esposizione Italiana di Architettura Razionale*, held in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome in 1928, a definition of rationalist architecture was offered for the first time:

*“Rational architecture, as we understand it, rediscovers harmonies, rhythms and symmetries in new schemes of construction, in the nature of the materials, and in a perfect response to the requirements for which a building is intended.”*³⁰²

Hanno-Walter Kruft points out that *“this international-sounding definition was given a national slant by the addition of a reference to Roman principles and by the equation of the ‘rational’ quality of architecture with its ‘national’ quality, so that, ‘in the true Fascist spirit’, rational architecture could regain for Italy the glory that it enjoyed under the Romans.”*³⁰³

The young architects drew upon many sources for their town project; contemporary theories as well as historical ones. They probably studied Gustavo Giovannoni's *Città vecchie ed edilizia nuova* (1931) thoroughly. It is a collection of his articles on the subject of town

³⁰¹ Piccinato, Burdett 15.

³⁰² Qtd. in Hanno-Walter Kruft, *A History of Architectural Theory: From Vitruvius to the Present* (London: Zwemmer; New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994) 410.

³⁰³ Kruft, *History of Architectural Theory* 410.

planning and urbanism. Giovannoni, an architect inspired by Camillo Sitte's ideas, was a very important protagonist on the Italian architectural stage between the two wars. Among other things, he held for a period the position of Dean at the Roman architectural school, where Piacentini was a colleague, and from which the architects of Sabaudia had graduated. Concerning Sabaudia he played an even more important role: Together with La Padula³⁰⁴ and Fasolo, he represented the architectural expertise in the jury for the competition.

In his article "The Importance of Sabaudia" from 1934 Piccinato elaborates his ideas regarding twentieth century town planning. He has studied the major 19th and 20th century models, but boldly exclaims that the goals of modern town planning have not been reached—until the construction of Sabaudia:

"The agricultural and industrial regional plans in England, and Germany, the urban mining centres of the Ruhr and the industrial town of Antosroy in Russia can be seen as initial attempts at urban decentralization: but Sabaudia and Littoria are a first fundamental step towards a new form of urban life. The problem of collective living, and not simply the question of building typology as in the German Siedlungen for the unemployed, is tackled and resolved in these Italian examples.

*Littoria and Sabaudia live a life of their own and their existence as urban centres is fully justified. They are in fact not towns but communal rural centres inextricably tied to their surrounding territory and their productive soil. Their purpose is not to live off the reclaimed land but, on the contrary, they were founded as a service to the reclaimed zone. It is therefore clear that the basic socio-economic system is radically different from that of a traditional city."*³⁰⁵

In the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959), we find the main source for Piccinato's anti-urbanist ideas. Wright's studies for the Broadacre City (1924–'30s), and his ideas from 1928 for an egalitarian culture in a future American society that he coined "Usonia" (a word quite similar to "Utopia"!) both explores new, anti-urban ways of living for modern man (*plate 91*). The two concepts were inseparable to him. Wright intended a grass-root individualism, as well as the realization of a new, dispersed form of civilization.³⁰⁶ The rationale of his low-density decentralist scheme "*rested on three innovations – the car, electrical intercommunication and standardised machine shop production.*"³⁰⁷ In the Broadacre City concept the concentration of the 19th century city was to be redistributed over the

³⁰⁴ According to newspaper articles from 1933, the jury consisted of Giovannoni, La Padula and Fasolo. ("L'Italia di Mussolini: un comune modello: Sabaudia" *Corriere della Sera*, 27 July 1933: 5; and "L'aspetto architettonico e il Piano regolatore del nuovo Comune di Sabaudia" *Il Messaggero* 27 July 1933). However, Pasquali Pinna mentions *Libera* in stead of La Padula (Pinna, *Rationalism* 10); as does Carfagna and Ciammaruconi 82.

³⁰⁵ Piccinato, Burdett 14.

³⁰⁶ Kenneth Frampton, *Modern architecture: A critical history* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) 187.

³⁰⁷ Gold 29–30.

network of a regional agrarian grid.³⁰⁸ Usonian (American) families would construct their homes on basic housing plots, choosing from prefabricated components.³⁰⁹

Wright first spoke out against the traditional city in the last of his Kahn Lectures presented at Princeton University in 1930, which began: *“Is the city a persistent form of social disease, eventuating in the fate all cities have met?”*³¹⁰ Piccinato was familiar with these lectures. In his article from 1934, the Italian architect even used the arguments put forward as a point of departure for his own platform. The growing world-wide urban crisis had to be analyzed and met with a new way of thinking about these problems, with a new type of town.³¹¹ According to Wright *“the city-dweller had become a machine and a parasite.”*³¹² This is directly echoed in a speech Piccinato gave at the 14th International Congress on Housing and Regulation Plans in London in 1935 where he said: *“It is the economic life of towns that must be changed. To-day many towns depend on the country and do not serve: they are a liability, not an asset, and are expensive administrative organisms that could be reduced by one half.”*³¹³ Wright referred to his little towns as “country seats” while the Fascist architects called the Pontine towns “rural centers.” – But this is as far as the likeness between Wright’s Broadacre City/Usonia and Piccinato’s (and the other architects’) Sabaudia goes. In creating his ideal society, Frank Lloyd Wright drew on Henry David Thoreau’s transcendentalist individualism, Thomas Jefferson’s naturalism and concept of self-government, and Henry George’s ideas about the right to land ownership.³¹⁴ Broadacre City corresponds *“more closely than any other form of radical urbanism to the central precepts of the Communist Manifesto of 1848, advocating ‘the gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country by a more equable distribution of the population over the land.’”*³¹⁵ In Fascist Italy, on the other hand, what was sought was redemption through the collective. The suppression and sacrifice of the individual for the benefit of the nation was requested. As for the urban cores, Wright imagined his centers to possess banks and public buildings while large institutions such as universities and factories would be broken up and located among the houses. In the center of Sabaudia, however, no factories would

³⁰⁸ Frampton 187.

³⁰⁹ Gold 30.

³¹⁰ Frampton 187.

³¹¹ Piccinato, Burdett 14.

³¹² Lo Sardo 67.

³¹³ Luigi Piccinato, “Planned rural development and the preservation of the countryside in Italy,” *Scritti vari: Saggi, articoli e interventi*, by Luigi Piccinato vol. 2, (Roma: L. Piccinato, 1977) 508.

³¹⁴ Gold 30.

³¹⁵ Frampton 187.

be constructed, and Fascist organizations and military/police structures made up a large portion of the public buildings permeating the town.

4.3 The Result: Tug of War or Smooth Collaboration?

Curiously enough the two different points of departure seem compatible at first glance. Both regime and architects apparently were interested in an anti-urban demographic policy. But perhaps this is as far as the agreement goes. While an utopian vision permeates the ideas of the architects, the regime's agenda, as I have shown, seems to have been a much more practical one: To exile unwanted opponents and at the same time to score points by apparently giving the war veterans the land they had been promised. However, as Sabaudia was never meant as a town for the war veterans to live in, it is of a much higher standard than the farmsteads and cannot be said to be representative of the new settlements' social ideology.

This resettlement project was an enormous social political project from the regime's side. And as such, it is tempting to say that it failed from a humanistic point of view. Before the draining of the area could take place, some 10,000–20,000 people already living in and getting their income from the Marshes were forced off the land. And with them, disappeared an ancient local culture of fishermen, shepherds, coal workers, hunters—and a whole folklore that had enchanted European minds for centuries and centuries. On these new farmsteads were to live veterans from World War I, mainly from Emilia Romagna in the north,³¹⁶ while ONC functionaries and specialized personnel inhabited the *borghi* and towns. As Mariani has argued in his article, “Sabaudia, Littoria, Aprilia...: Die Stadtgründungen im faschistischen Italien,” the northern local governments used this occasion to get rid of unwanted elements in the population. Thus large numbers of “social misfits,” among these many anti-fascists, were nominated for moving south and becoming farmers on the new farms—the majority of these without any farming experience whatsoever.³¹⁷ The original population of the area was long neglected. They were thrown out of their cabins (*lestre*), and only a few of the native families were offered to inhabit the new farmsteads. The government did not deal with the matter properly until 1940, and first at that point did they offer the native population compensational homes.

³¹⁶ During the second wave of immigration to the area in the 1960s, large numbers of people from the south moved in.

³¹⁷ Riccardo Mariani, Littoria, Sabaudia, Aprilia...: die Stadtgründungen im faschistischen Italien,” *Kunst und Diktatur: Architektur, Bildbauerei und Malerei in Österreich, Deutschland, Italien und der Sowjetunion, 1922–1956*, ed. Jan Tabor, vol. 2 (Baden: Verlag Grasl, 1994) 651.

With no industry in the area, just farmers and a few shopkeepers in addition to the ONC employees and other necessary staff in the towns and *borghi*, the new population naturally was extremely poor. There was little money in circulation; the farmers were given a meager income from the ONC—after the expenses and mortgages on their loans had been subtracted—and as a consequence the shops had no customers. Private initiative were not appreciated or allowed for either, obstructing the creation of additional jobs and businesses.

The farmsteads in the Pontine Marshes were laid out along a simple grid, “*echoing the pattern established in imperial Roman coloniae.*”³¹⁸ (Plate 5.A.) Even though the grid was non-hierarchical, it was far from neutral: “*Its assertion of the designer’s power over the vagaries of topography corresponded to the government’s implied assertion of power over the lives of the future settlers.*”³¹⁹ Still, the simple facilities and lack of living rooms in the houses certainly signaled the farmers’ position in the hierarchy: on the bottom. Variations in the placement of houses, the somewhat different designs of the farms with both pitched and flat roofs helped avoid monotony.³²⁰

Mariani questions to what extent the Fascist ideology can be traced in the urban forms of Littoria and Sabaudia. The second town being the result of a nationwide competition, “*it was immediately celebrated as the depiction of Fascism in its modern, even revolutionary shape.*”³²¹ By examining the structural aspects of both town plans, he finds that they honour the same ideological rules—transmitted through the distinct positioning of squares and from the solution to the traffic management. Corporatism as economic and political system constitutes the basis for the ideological specifications, and “*out of this emerges the recreation of the medieval town model,*” the Italian *comune*, in which the worldly, civic activities are clearly separated from the religious sector.³²² Numerous towers rise, whenever possible, as the tower is one of the main symbols of the medieval *comune* (plate 89.D), and thus a carrier of suitable connotations for the Fascist corporation.³²³

There are several traditionalist, classical architectural features to be found in the buildings. Until quite recently the architects had employed a rather traditional style, called the Roman academic style. Looking at the drawings Cancellotti, Piccinato and Scalpelli had

³¹⁸ Ghirardo 165.

³¹⁹ Ghirardo 165.

³²⁰ Ghirardo 165.

³²¹ Mariani, *Littoria, Sabaudia, Aprilia* 649. My translation.

³²² Mariani, *Littoria, Sabaudia, Aprilia* 649–50.

³²³ Mariani, *Littoria, Sabaudia, Aprilia* 649–50.

made for the regulation plan of Foglia together with Emilio Lavagnino, Luigi Lenzi, and Cesare Valle under the name *Gruppo Urbanisti Romani*³²⁴, only five years earlier, in 1928, we see an architecture much more in line with the prevailing Academic style—building on tradition, classicism and symmetry—than with the rationalist vogue (*plate 93*). Theirs was very close to Piacentini’s architecture of the time (*plate 94*). Centralized, ornated buildings with thermal windows, architectural sculptures, cupolas, and so forth were dominant. Remnants of the classically trained architects can still be found in Sabaudia: Buildings and windows are often divided into tripartite divisions, perhaps not arranged around a totally central axis, – but close enough not to disturb our sense of symmetry (e.g. Fascio/cinema, or façade hotel/apartment building). The architecture thus follows a very old Italian pattern found in the architecture of both Ancient Rome, the Renaissance, Baroque and all the way up to the shift of paradigm in the 1910s and ’20s.

No where to be found are any objections or questioning of the regime’s intentions from the architects, – if we ignore the request to keep the planned height of the Town Hall tower (a rather insignificant matter, it might seem, when planning an entire town).³²⁵ One may ask to what extent the architects were familiar with the social and economic structures of the *borghi* and farmsteads. Had the corporative system of unions already successfully obliterated critical thinking, in favor of competitive scrambling for employment?

The architects of the winning team had all graduated from the *Scuola superiore di architettura* in Rome, founded only three years before the Fascist takeover. The trade union architects had to be members of if they wanted to work, the National Union of Architects, was founded in 1925. Thus, the modern Italian integral architect,³²⁶ “*a true architect, at the same time artist, technician and well cultivated,*”³²⁷ was developed in a predominantly Fascist environment. The architectural student was educated by teachers approved by the regime, – and he was most certainly a member of the party-run union. Ciucci finds the integral architect to be “*the son of a chameleon, able to wear the clothes of tradition and seem modern, or vice*

³²⁴ G.U.R. was founded in 1926 by Gaetano Minnucci and Luigi Piccinato. In addition it originally consisted of Eugenio Fuselli, Emilio Lavagnino, Luigi Lenzi and Cesare Valle. Later Eugenio Faludi, Gino Cancellotti, Alfredo Scalpelli, Giuseppe Nicolosi and Eugenio Montuori joined the group. (Ciucci, *Gli architetti e il fascismo* 23.)

³²⁵ Even though all four architects participated in numerous competitions organized by the regime, answering to its architectural demands, Scalpelli’s relatives remember how the joy of winning the contest for the façade of the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* in 1937 was somewhat ruined by a letter ordering the architect to wear the blackshirt at the inauguration of the exhibition. (Mauro Bernoni, *Alfredo Scalpelli: architetto e urbanista [1898–1966]*, [Rome: Studio Tre B, 1998] 53.) Looking at this monumental, totalitarian design promoting Fascism, his complaint does not really make much sense.

³²⁶ A term coined by Giovannoni.

*versa to wear modern clothes to respect tradition; in every situation ready to adapt to changing conditions.*³²⁸ And, indeed, in the 1920s the idea of the town as a synthesis between tradition and the modern gained terrain.³²⁹

In his article of 1928 Mussolini explained the role attributed to the city in the new industrial and agricultural politics of the regime.³³⁰ The city was the axis around which the different territorial structuring should revolve; the problems of agriculture, industrial location, internal migrations and disoccupation were the themes of the debate. Increasingly the discussion settled around the role of the “architect-urbanist” and his urbanistic discipline. The architect in the focal role as urbanist about the task of planning the emerging problems of the city and the territory, became, according to a favorite image of Piccinato, the “director of the orchestra”, able to control the contributions of several specialists in diverse intervening sectors.³³¹

A proposal made by Piccinato in the 1920s for a regional plan to organize the urban development according to, and a national plan to realize the “dis-urbanization,” is the natural development of the hypotheses of the urbanistic politics put forward by Fascism. At the same time, the *Gruppo Urbanisti Romani*, constituted by young graduates from the new school of architecture in Rome—the first “integral architects”—led by him, may be regarded as the perhaps most representative fruit springing from the theoretical and practical engagement of the “masters.”³³² According to Piccinato’s writings in the mid-thirties, the city ought to be organized with “*the urbanistic composition represented by the regulation plan*,” edited by the architect to make the “*urban life at once both beautiful, healthy, comfortable, and economic.*”³³³

Like with Piccinato, also Scalpelli’s favorite activity was urbanistic planning. His aesthetical principles were influenced by Siegfried Giedion’s ideas on how the new house should meet modern man’s needs: It should be economic, open, and relieving our existence. The beautiful house meets these demands, as it is light, airy and open. It promotes free movement. This house responds to the terrain and allows for contact with the sky and the canopies of leaves in the trees. It replaces shadows with light (walls

³²⁷ Ciucci, *Gli architetti e il fascismo* 9. My translation.

³²⁸ Ciucci, *Gli architetti e il fascismo* 22. My translation.

³²⁹ Ciucci, *Gli architetti e il fascismo* 23.

³³⁰ “Sfollare le città.” More on this article in chapter 2.1.4, p. 36.

³³¹ Bernoni 43.

³³² Ciucci, *Op. cit.* (1989), 23.

³³³ Luigi Piccinato, qtd. Bernoni 42. My translation.

completely in glass). It is the perfect, functional house.³³⁴ The characteristic elements of Sabaudia, born after the intentions of the designers in the reclamation's service, is the relationship between dwellings and countryside, between residencies and public spaces, the low density; the public edifices that mark the principal square and are visible from every place, representing the city as urban community. For all these reasons, Sabaudia gave high merits to the architects, and constituted perhaps the most important realization for the Fascist regime.³³⁵ For most of the construction time, the architects were on the site, making the executive detail drawings.

In the aftermath of Sabaudia examples of their work indicate that they had no problems with indulging the regime. E.g. Scalpelli's design for the façade of the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* three years later in no way indicates a problem with adapting to the regime's request for "Roman" architecture (*plate 95*). An austere, bombastic wall. A Roman triumphal arch, stylized with highly modern geometrical lines. Fake pillars and moulded sculptures, "*an architecture made up of elements outside of time, metaphysical (as in some of De Chirico's paintings) that defines an abstract idea of 'romanità'.*"³³⁶

³³⁴ Siegfried Giedion, qtd. in Bernoni 35.

³³⁵ Bernoni 52–53.

³³⁶ Bernoni 53. My translation.

5. Acclamation and Condemnation: Public Reception

“One day in the month of April 1933, we left the cartroad [‘carreccia’] that led to the small church of S. Maria of the Sorresca and turned south on a path. But little by little, as we advanced, the path became narrower and narrower, so that we had to proceed really with difficulty between the dry twigs, the bramble plants that were higher than our heads. ... I raised myself standing in the stirrups and in front of my eyes appeared a breathtaking view: in front of me was all a vast expanse of flowering heather that went all the way to the lake; on my left side the [mountain] Circeo sparkled in the sun in all its stateliness and in front, in a fracture in the dunes, one could see the ocean. ... And right there, I thought, could a new city rise.”³³⁷

The construction of Sabaudia was presented to the Italian people as a both romantic and somewhat futuristic event. The enthusiasm in contemporary articles is clearly visible. At the same time Sabaudia symbolized both efficiency and visions for the future, as well as the agrar romanticism so important to most Europeans at this time. Poems, paintings, and newspaper articles praising the new town in the Pontine Marshes are abundant. Mussolini made several sudden incognito appearances both in Sabaudia and in the areas around several times, *“in the guise of city founder or simple mower or thresher.”*³³⁸ (Plate 16.C.) At the inauguration of the town, a special medal was coined by Giuseppe Romagnoli, bearing the portrait of *il Duce* and the writing “A – XII” on one side, and on the other a wreath of grain into which a soldier’s helmet and the year XII is intertwined, framing the Fascist eagle resting on three *fasci*. It is surrounded by the writing: “Opera Nazionale Combattenti – Sabaudia – 15 aprile” (plate 16.B). The desolate, malaria-infested wasteland of the Pontine Marshes had been a source of inspiration for artists, both Italian and foreign, poets and painters, for a long time. The poem by Gabriele D’Annunzio cited at the beginning of chapter 3 is but one example of their infatuation. Count Valentino Orsolini Cencelli—extraordinary commissioner of the ONC in Littoria, and later to become the first mayor (*podestà*) of Sabaudia—adds to the romantic weave his description of how he found the spot on which Sabaudia should be situated (cited above).

³³⁷ Valentino Orsolini Cencelli, “Un quadro di incomparabile bellezza” (1959), Galeazzi 9. My translation.

³³⁸ Gentile 148.

5.1 Controversial Architecture: Contemporary Praise and Condemnation

However, it was not all just one long sweet song. Sabaudia was also a shock to many Italians, and especially to the ruling upper class. It was modern, “ugly,” and un-Italian stripped of stucco moldings, putti, flower ghirlanders, ornamented balustrades, etc. Here were only sleek stuccoed walls, partially clad with brick or plain travertine, and with an occasional *fascies* or edifying text relief. On the other hand, the modernist architects cheered. Giuseppe Pagano wrote his euforic article, “Mussolini salva l’architettura italiana,”³³⁹ and even the opposite camp, the neo-classicists, were quite satisfied. Their most distinguished architect, Marcello Piacentini published a long, indepth article on Sabaudia.³⁴⁰ To the Italian architects, then, Sabaudia was both modern and classical, governed as it is by simplicity, symmetry, and harmony.

In a section of his book, *Art as Experience* from 1934 the renowned art philosopher John Dewey investigated “the relationships between a civilization’s art and its culture—construed broadly in terms of its morals.”³⁴¹ His reflections upon this subject may serve as a partial explanation to why the opposition to new art and architecture was so fierce in certain fields of Italian Fascist society.

5.1.1 “We have had enough of Sabaudia”: On the Heated Debate in Parliament and Mussolini’s Response to it

By 1934 the revolutionary, futurist phalanx of the Fascist party had split. Left were the more conservative forces with their background in the bourgeoisie and upper classes. Sabaudia was, together with the Florence Railway Station project (*plate 92.A*) and the competition for the national Fascist headquarters in Rome (the *Casa Littoria*), among the most debated architectural projects of the regime. “Everyone” seemed to have an opinion on this little town, and many got carried away with their feelings. A famous argument in parliament on May 26, 1934—during the discussion of the projects for the new *Casa Littoria* in Rome—is forever written into the architectural history of this period, and so are some of the most loudvoiced comments.³⁴² The national party headquarters were to be constructed on the Via dell’Impero (today Via degli Fori Imperiali), on an empty site with the Maxentius Basilica and the Colosseum as its closest neighbors. Worried about the

³³⁹ Casabella 78 (1934): n. pag.

³⁴⁰ Marcello Piacentini, “Sabaudia,” *Architettura* June 1934: n. pag.

³⁴¹ John Dewey, “Art and Civilization,” *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern*, Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1995) 522.

prospect of having a modernist building next to these national “sanctuaries,” several of the deputies left no doubt about how inappropriate such a decision would be as, in the words of Francesco Giunta, “*On the Via dell’Impero it is necessary to tread very carefully, because there the entire history and entire civilization of Rome has taken place.*” Giunta and Attilio Terruzzi made their famous comment, “*We have had enough of Sabaudia!*” But it was not only Sabaudia that was attacked as an excited Giunta then added: “*The Florence Station!! Remember it, and be ashamed!!*”³⁴³

The debate was heated and the attack on the young architects of Sabaudia and the Florence Railway Station fierce. In the end Mussolini thought it necessary to intervene himself. Thus, in July 1934, the architects of both Sabaudia and the Florence Railway Station were invited to his headquarters in Palazzo Venezia where he told them (and the entire population through a press release of the meeting) that he considered the architecture worthy of expressing the Fascist faith and state. Of course this made Mussolini immensely popular among the young rationalist architects. *Il Duce* took their side, as he had also done in the argument about the height of the Town Hall tower in Sabaudia earlier the same year. This is in line with Mussolini’s policy of inclusion—“*everything within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state*”—tempting people to join the party and trade unions by offering benefits they would not else receive.

This is the usual version of this story: Parliament protesting and Mussolini taking the architects under his wings. However, in a note in Carfagna and Ciammaruconi’s article “*La chiesa della SS. Annunziata e la sua architettura,*” an intriguing piece of information is revealed: Already on 30 April 1934—only fifteen days after the inauguration, and almost a month before the debate in parliament—Mussolini told Cencelli that he had had enough of the rationalist architecture. Next time they were to use one of their own.³⁴⁴ Viewed in the light of the discussion on whether the regime approved of rationalist architecture or not, of whether it was an architecture suitable to express the Fascist state this is highly interesting. Normally the change of paradigm, from the including art view to the more conservative, is dated to 1936 when Italy becomes a colonial power, using the example of Sabaudia to prove the regime’s favorable view on rationalism. This information, however, shows another Mussolini, the pragmatic politician willing to employ all means necessary to unite

³⁴² The discussion is reproduced in Italian in its entirety in appendix VI.

³⁴³ “Dalla seduta del 26 –5 – XII,” *Architettura e città durante il fascismo*, by Giuseppe Pagano, ed. Cesare De Seta (Roma: Laterza, 1990) 12–13. My translation.

³⁴⁴ Carfagna and Ciammaruconi 85–86, note 10.

his people—but nonetheless not the least interested in the new architecture. My guess is that Mussolini at this point realized that the prize of favoring avant-garde architecture was too high as it brought him a lot of trouble from the bourgeoisie and conservative members of parliament and party. This standpoint was never leaked to the public audience, and, as mentioned above, Mussolini held his reception to defend the young, rationalist architects three months after this date, hiding his true opinions on the matter. Maybe the cockiness of the young architects, daring to complain about the decisions superimposed by the ONC about the Town Hall tower's height, also added to his change of mind—even though he held the cards close to his chest, putting a good face on things by letting them have their way.

The commissioning of pure rationalist architecture came to a halt shortly afterwards. The rationalists still got commissions, but there was one important difference: They got them through cooperating with the novecentists, and neo-classicists (or representatives of the *stile littorio* as it was also to be called). Thus rationalist architects like Giuseppe Pagano could still get commissions under the leadership of e.g. Marcello Piacentini.³⁴⁵

To understand the ruling class' fierce resistance against modern architecture, we return to Dewey. He finds that: "*The first stirrings of dissatisfaction and the first intimations of a better future are always found in works of art.*"³⁴⁶ While the Fascists were in position they embraced futurism for exactly these reasons. However, after a long period in position (somewhat fifteen years at the time of Sabaudia's inauguration) this was no longer the case. Most futurists had left the party, disappointed with the reactionary, conservative wing steadily gaining ground. Dewey continues: "*The impregnation of the characteristically new art of a period with a sense of different values than those that prevail is the reason why the conservative finds such art to be immoral and sordid, and is the reason why he resorts to the products of the past for esthetic satisfaction.*"³⁴⁷ Thus the unfamiliar, the new becomes something threatening carrying with it the seed to change. To a collective Fascist government, trying to repress individual will, "*creative intelligence*" and "*the innovations that are the essence of individuality*" were probably deeply distrusted.³⁴⁸ Seen this way, the protests against the rationalist architecture was not simply just a question of taste, but something much deeper: They were an attempt to keep the

³⁴⁵ Thus Pagano designed the *Istituto di Fisica della Città Universitaria*, Rome (1932–35). He also was part of the team designing the plan for E.42 (EUR) together with Piacentini, Piccinato, Ernesto Rossi, and Luigi Vietti (1937).

³⁴⁶ Dewey 523.

³⁴⁷ Dewey 523.

³⁴⁸ Dewey 525.

status quo. “Because art is wholly innocent of ideas derived from praise and blame, it is looked upon with the eye of suspicion by the guardians of custom, or only the art that is itself so old and ‘classic’ as to receive conventional praise is ... admitted.”³⁴⁹ Adding to this the importance the Roman past played in the mythology of the Fascists, it is no wonder that the little modern town of Sabaudia was hard to accept for many of the party officials.

5.1.2 “*Miracolo della terra fascista*”: Reports from the National and International Press

The Fascist propaganda apparatus did a thorough job on Sabaudia. The town got immense press coverage, both during the construction period, its inauguration, and throughout the 1930s. The phrasing in the numerous newspaper articles on Sabaudia from 1933–34 is strikingly similar, disseminating the exact same information—and the same errors. Thus certain features are emphasized from article to article: The romantic background history of the Pontine Marshes; the regime’s efficiency; statistics regarding the amount of stone, square kilometers drained, etc. This is also typical for the international press coverage. E.g. the Frenchman Pierre Vago’s article on Sabaudia contains the same information as the Italian articles.³⁵⁰

Only a few rationalist projects, like the Florentine railway station and the town of Sabaudia, were covered by nationwide press campaigns, centrally controlled. But most journalists in general treated rationalism with ignorance and indifference.³⁵¹ From the middle of the 1930s the situation got even worse for the rationalist architects as the system grew more conservative and less capable of fusing the conservative idea of Fascism with modernist, liberalist ideas, essentially of a leftist origin.

Throughout the 1930s the ONC published a monthly magazine, *La Conquista della Terra: Rassegna dell’Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti*, its main purpose to keep the public posted about how the giant, national program of reclamation and town building was progressing. On the covers were reproduced brightly colored, dramatic paintings by Duilio Cambellotti, designed specifically for the magazine. He depicted sturdy workers and farmers in the Pontine Marshes, romantic views of the landscape, symbolic *tableaux* showing foundation stones with fasci and shovels, or maps of the Italian Empire with tools, just to mention

³⁴⁹ Dewey 525.

³⁵⁰ Briani gives a thorough overview of the international press coverage in the chapter “Le ripercussioni nella stampa estera.” (Briani 56–61.)

³⁵¹ Estermann-Juchler 155.

some motives (*plate 4*). These paintings were kept in a rather minimalist style, often with a cubist stamp.

In addition to numerous articles, Sabaudia was presented at several international conferences and exhibitions in the 1930s—a fact that strengthens my suspicion that one of this town’s primary functions was to promote the modern Fascist Italian state. Thus the choice of a rationalist design makes more sense. In July 1934, the town plan was shown in an exhibition accompanying the 2nd International Conference on Works of Public Hygiene, held in Geneva. Then one of the designers, Luigi Piccinato, presented a paper, “Planned Rural Development and the Preservation of the Countryside” at the XIV International Congress of Housing and Regulation Plans held in London, 1935. Not surprisingly, he uses the Pontine Marshes and Sabaudia for his case study. The documents and projects of Sabaudia were also exhibited at the 11th Tripoli Trade Fair³⁵², and at the International Exhibition in Paris, 1937.

5.1.3 With one Foot in History and Myth, and the Other Firmly Placed in the Vortex of Modernism

As I have argued in this thesis, Sabaudia is a strange creation: a hybrid of Ancient Rome and modern life, a fusion of rationalist architectural features with some typical marks of neo-classicism: Symmetry, axiality, hierarchy—truly enough on a small scale, but still impressive. But the sinister mark that surely characterized e.g. Forum Romanum or Lepcis Magna of the glorious past, or the EUR complex as well as the Città Universitaria (*plate 92.B*) in Mussolini’s Rome of the 1930s, is nowhere to be found in Sabaudia. The little town with its warm pastel colors, open streets, flowers, palms, surrounding landscape and lagoon, looks nothing but idyllic. Not even the military structures ruin this impression.

In an article on Littoria, Sabaudia and Pontinia from 1994 Mariani questions exactly *how* rationalist Italian Fascist architecture could really be, as there “*was neither a modern working class, nor a new middle class putting pressure on*” the modernization of Italy in the inter-war period. Indisputably the Fascists imposed a sort of modernism on the country, but the Italian Fascist modernism reacted to quite different demands than those of the German social democracy. In Italy “*one could only find paternity and a lot of sentimentality.*”³⁵³ He continues, posing two questions: “*How is it possible for an architect to evoke il Duce as if he were a god, and at the same time develop a rationalist architecture?*” And: “*How can one declare that the height of*

³⁵² Unfortunately, I have not been able to find the date.

³⁵³ Mariani, *Littoria, Sabaudia, Aprilia* 650. My translation.

a tower is the key to a town planning concept?" Still this happened, "day by day, in every area of the artistic expressions."³⁵⁴ With his chain of reasoning he really rules out the possibility that totalitarian regimes can produce an architecture that is "rationalist" or "functionalist." This poses two somewhat difficult questions: Are the rationalist and functionalist architectural styles pure styles meeting demands of functionality and simplicity, or are they the style of democratic western countries in the first half of the twentieth century? Cannot a totalitarian regime, because of its very nature as undemocratic, produce rationalist buildings? Following Mariani's argument, I get the impression that the white knights of rationalism (and functionalism) must not get their armors stained by association with the Fascist regime.

The founding group of Italian rationalism, the *Gruppo 7* laid out the theoretical principles for the movement in four articles published in the *Rassegna Italiana*, December 1926—October 1927.³⁵⁵ According to Ciucci, the group "passed from a 'neo-classical' to a 'classical' order, a 'true classicism' based on pureness, the absolute, proportions, mathematics, and on the Greek spirit."³⁵⁶ They considered it the architect's task to add a fundamental tone to this new geometry present both in the mechanical and the Greek spirit. Thus architecture could be reduced to a few, fundamental "types", derived from an adherence to the logic and the rational. As the Gruppo 7 saw it, every aesthetic value springs out of this, as it "ennobles with an indefinable and abstract perfection of pure rhythm, the simple construction that would not be beautiful alone."³⁵⁷ This new aesthetics, derived from the use of reinforced concrete, allowed for the establishment of several absolute forms to be found in all countries. As some of these forms represented the perfect and only solution to the demands made, they had to be considered international property.³⁵⁸ Their "international-sounding definition was given a national slant by the addition of a reference to Roman principles and by the equation of the 'rational' quality of architecture with its 'national' quality, so that, 'in the true Fascist spirit', rational architecture could regain for Italy the glory that it enjoyed under the Romans."³⁵⁹ By comparing this manifesto to Sabaudia's layout with the architects using the height of the Town Hall tower as an architectural, mathematical and aesthetic key to the whole town, Mariani's argument falls flat. An aesthetic for the modern edifice in reinforced concrete, based on rhythm, intervals, basic

³⁵⁴ Mariani, *Littoria, Sabaudia, Aprilia* 650. My translation.

³⁵⁵ See also pp. 19–20.

³⁵⁶ Ciucci, *Gli architetti e il fascismo* 71. My translation.

³⁵⁷ Ciucci, *Gli architetti e il fascismo* 71–72. My translation.

³⁵⁸ Ciucci, *Gli architetti e il fascismo* 72.

³⁵⁹ Krufft, *History of Architectural Theory* 410.

forms, and mathematical calculations is what the *Gruppo 7* outlined—and it is exactly what Sabaudia’s architects delivered.

Giuseppe Pasquali, another author in the last quarter of the 20th century, sees in Sabaudia’s architecture “*the presence of two markedly different architectural trends. On the one hand the typological, structural and formal characteristics of the main buildings are clearly influenced by ‘rationalism’, on the other hand, its ‘novecento’ influences reaffirms the original values of Italian art and experiments in the use of modern forms as an interpretation of the age.*”³⁶⁰ Exactly what these *novecento* influences consist of is not further elaborated. As shown in the paragraph above, reaffirming “the values of Italian art” by using modern forms are also congruent with the rationalist theories and do not necessarily express the *novecento* style.

5.2 Sabaudia in the European Architectural Picture

How did Sabaudia fit in with contemporary European urban theories? Let us start by examining it in light of the Frenchman Tony Garnier’s *Cité Industrielle*, 1901–08.³⁶¹ (*Plate 90.C and D.*) Garnier was convinced the industrial city would be predominant in the 20th century, and his revolutionary urban vision (partly realized in Lyon) is a forerunner for the Modern Movement. It contains in essence its fundamental planning principles: “*clear distinction between various functions – residence, work, recreation, and transportation; division of vehicular and pedestrian traffic, with a further distinction between through and local traffic corridors; decentralized layout, though based on an urban grid system to guarantee orientation and still permit expansion.*”³⁶² Garnier’s town was planned for a population of 35,000. He envisioned “*a residential quarter, city centre, industry, a railway station and all the requisite public buildings,*” omitting, however, “*barracks, police stations, prisons and churches, all of which he considered would be unnecessary in the new socialist society.*”³⁶³ The buildings would be primarily in reinforced concrete. While Garnier’s town was thought of in connection with industry and the city, the Fascists were strongly opposed to the very same solutions. The tiny center of Sabaudia did not necessitate decentralization. Neither did the architects have to distinguish between vehicular and pedestrian traffic by separate systems of roads. Resemblances between the two different town plans were the low, modernist architecture and the greenery in their open setting. But while the socialist Garnier applies a Marxist analysis of the role of the worker and trusts this role to it by omitting barracks, police stations, prisons and churches, in stark contrast

³⁶⁰ Pasquali, *Notes* 7.

³⁶¹ His plans were not published until 1917.

³⁶² “Garnier, Tony,” *The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of 20th Century Architecture*, 1996 ed.

corporate Sabaudia has inflated buildings of these sorts, out of proportion with the rest of the small town. Furthermore, Garnier planned an industrial center, while rural Sabaudia was to have no industry.

The second plan it would be necessary to compare Sabaudia to is Ebenezer Howard's ideal Garden City: "*a self-sufficient Garden City for some 32,000 inhabitants, consisting of rural-like, residential neighbourhoods, extensive cultivable areas, cultural facilities, a central park for community and recreational activities enclosed in a crystal palace.*"³⁶⁴ (Plate 90.A.) Neither railways nor highways were to pass through the green, open Garden City area.³⁶⁵ Like Sabaudia, the Garden City was conceived of as an organic whole, interacting with its surroundings: Sabaudia had its surrounding farms and *borghi*, the Garden City was related to a large town. The Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin's work, which influenced Howard, was based on the idea of cooperation being the human expression if allowed to do so, and thus this is reflected in the varied and inclusive way his town is laid out and envisioned. In spite of Howard's anarchist leanings he nevertheless took on the dubious task of envisioning a whole city for people to live in, where everything was arranged according to a plan.

Le Corbusier's town plans seem like another theoretical source it would be natural to compare Sabaudia with. He designed several (rather unrealistic at the time) total plans for cities "*with a centre of identical skyscrapers, symmetrically arranged in a park setting, with lower building and complex traffic routes between,*" e.g. *Ville Contemporaine*, 1922; *Plan Voisin*, 1925; *Ville Radiouse*, 1935; and the *plan for Algiers*, 1930.³⁶⁶ As these gigant projects were intended to house hundreds of thousands of people, however, I find them to be rather irrelevant in the case of Sabaudia. Still, Le Corbusier knew about the Fascist government's resettlement project in the Pontine Marshes. In 1934 he even wrote an article about it, "La ferme radiouse," in which he examines the plan and buildings of Littoria and Sabaudia. According to Le Corbusier, Sabaudia was a beautiful dream constructed on a marvellous site, but he sure did not think it fulfilled the requirements of a modern town—that was something he advocated for *his* plans for the next town, Pomezia: With the construction of Sabaudia "*a sweet poem is erected, a bit romantic, tasteful, an evident sign of love. How different the atmosphere is here.*"

³⁶³ "Garnier, Tony," *The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of 20th Century Architecture*, 1996 ed.

³⁶⁴ "Howard, Ebenezer," *The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of 20th Century Architecture*, 1996 ed.

³⁶⁵ The first Garden City, planned by Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin in 1903 at Letchworth, near London, diverged considerably from Howard's ideal conception. ("Howard, Ebenezer," *The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of 20th Century Architecture*, 1996 ed.)

³⁶⁶ "Le Corbusier," *The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture*, 1991 ed.

³⁶⁷ But, he continues, “in spite of the beautiful efforts, one has not created the village of modern times; one has made a dream, a bucolic dream – like Marie-Antoinette’s bucolic dreams of the Petit Trianon.”³⁶⁸

In his radiant village, Le Corbusier’s reply to what a village like Sabaudia ought to be, prefabricated architectural elements would be used—there would be no room for any ingenuities. However, even though the renowned architect showed interest in the building projects in the Pontine Marshes and even made a design for Pomezia, he never stood a chance to win the commission in the nationalist, Fascist Italy.

5.3 The Game of the Name: How (not) to Classify Sabaudia

Rêve de bergerie, scandal, rationalist with a dash of neo-classicism, garden city, urban center, Fascist, Bolshevik, corporate—the terms used to describe Sabaudia are many and diversified, even contradictory. But then Sabaudia was a highly debated town. In the field of urbanism, Sabaudia was considered “the most important example of its time,” and the architectural magazines *Casabella* and *Quadrante* singled it out as a model of town planning.³⁶⁹ As demonstrated above, information about the town was disseminated on a large scale both at home and abroad, and its plan and drawings were shown in different international exhibitions. Sabaudia was often referred to as the *modello di città nuova* (model for the new city),³⁷⁰ and even as an example of the corporate city.³⁷¹

As I have established in the preceding text, Sabaudia’s *formal* features are in line with the rationalist manifesto outlined by the *Gruppo 7*, as this opens up for the use of traditional architectonic elements and materials, as well as for classical rhythm, symmetry and harmony. At the same time the town with its surrounding hierarchy draws upon Roman and medieval influences. But perhaps it is necessary to explain what its *ideological* models are. The keyword is “corporate.” An article published in *Quadrante* in 1934 defines the corporate city thus: “A city is corporate to the extent that it is an integral element of the organisation and a structure of the corporate state. A city is fascist to the extent that it houses the institutions of the corporate state and adopts its political and aesthetic conventions.”³⁷² To speak of Fascist urbanism

³⁶⁷ Le Corbusier, “La ferme radieuse,” *Prélude* 14 (1934), qtd. in Silvia Danesi, “Aporie dell’architettura italiana in periodo fascista – mediterraneità e purismo,” *Il razionalismo e l’architettura in Italia durante il fascismo*, ed.s Silvia Danesi and Luciano Patetta (Venice: Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia, 1976) 28, note 45. My translation.

³⁶⁸ Le Corbusier, “La ferme radieuse,” qtd. in Danesi, *Aporie* 28, note 45. My translation.

³⁶⁹ Zeno Birolli, *Verso Un’Estetica del Fascismo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1974), qtd. in Burdett 41.

³⁷⁰ Mariani, *Fascismo e “città nuove”* 90.

³⁷¹ Enrico Peressutti, “La città corporativa,” *Quadrante* (1935), qtd. in *Sabaudia: documenti di una città fondata: mostra antologica sulla costruzione della città*, ed.s. G. Pasquali and P. Pinna (Sabaudia: Biblioteca Comunale, 1980) n. pag.

³⁷² Qtd. in Burdett 41. (Originally printed in *Quadrante* 15–16 (1934). Neither author nor title is given.)

then, could in many ways be likened to Sabaudia.³⁷³ But exactly how does one classify this new town, so full of paradoxes? Modern, yet still medieval and Roman. Town, but still rural center. The new town programs “involved the government in the lives of the citizens to an unprecedented degree.”³⁷⁴ The Pontine towns had dual roles, acting both as “true towns” (cultural, political, social, and business centers), as well as “part of an administrative network to link individual farmers or workers to Fascist organizations and, through them, to national Fascist policies.”³⁷⁵ The strong presence of party, union, and corporative government, as well as of military and police in Sabaudia rules out the town as garden city (more of a suburb, set in the countryside near to a city) or *cité industrielle* (no military, police or prisons, cf. chapter 4.2). What it has in common with the two ideas, however, is the importance attached to greenery and light permeating the town, and the rather small populations. As pointed out in chapter 4.2, Sabaudia also deviates from the most fundamental issue in Wright’s utopian Broadacre City project (the anti-urbanist aspect not included) as it does not really give the inhabitants much free rope. They are bricks in a machinery, working together to achieve the New Fascist Italy, sacrificing their own individuality to the greaser cause: the collective. In the new towns “each little part was considered a brick in a future corporative state.”³⁷⁶ Thus it seems like Sabaudia can be likened to the garden city, *cité industrielle*, and Broadacre City/Usonia only in the most superficial aspects: It is anti-urban, green and hygienic, and clad in a modernist language.

Diane Ghirardo points out how “Mussolini’s New Towns were ... models for the future, especially for the corporate or Fascist city—based upon agriculture or one of a few major industries.”³⁷⁷ However, the modest scale upon which new cities were constructed is perhaps an implication that it was not really the intention of the regime to relocate the entire population and empty the cities as Mussolini so boldly (and somewhat exaggeratedly) had proclaimed in 1928 (see chapter 2.1.4). The government of course never meant to empty the bigger cities (Rome, Milan, Turin, Naples and Venice) of their populations—only of *segments* of the populations: workers, poor, and other potential troublemakers. And only to a reasonable extent as the factory owners still were in need of cheap labor, often on short notice.

³⁷³ Mariani, *Fascismo e “città nuove”* 90.

³⁷⁴ Ghirardo 20.

³⁷⁵ Ghirardo, *Op. cit.* 25.

³⁷⁶ Nodin, *Op. cit.* (1998) 319.

³⁷⁷ Ghirardo, *Op. cit.* 20.

6. Conclusion: Materializing the Fascist, Corporate Town

“...foreboding and mysterious perspectives of buildings, secrets concealed behind corners. Art is no longer an isolated event, a scene limited by its depicted characters, it is a vital and cosmic tragedy which envelopes man and draws him into its spiral – a spiral which fuses past and future, where existential mysteries, consecrated by artistic inspiration, strip the intricate and fearful veil imagined by man beyond the world of art, only to create once again the tranquil and comforting external appearance of the inspired building.”

– Giorgio De Chirico³⁷⁸

Some attempts have been made to draw a comparison between the piazzas and structures of Sabaudia with the paintings of Giorgio De Chirico.³⁷⁹ On the surface of it De Chirico's paintings contains images (as in f.ex. the “*Piazze d'Italia*” paintings, (plate 97)) that resemble early photographs of Sabaudia (e.g. plate 23). But these comparisons are really only pointing out similarities that rise from what is *not* there, namely people. Comparing a tower to a tower will always fall out on the side of major similarities, and empty buildings are empty buildings. Their eeriness and surreal air is derived from a shared emptiness, a sense of agoraphobia which makes Sabaudia related to De Chirico's metaphysical cities. What is very different, on the other hand, between De Chirico and the architecture of Sabaudia, is that De Chirico's emptiness is that of dreams, and Sabaudia's emptiness is a result of an architectural photoshoot intended to feature the rationalist architecture in its purest form devoid of its political associations. But they hardly cover up the reality of Sabaudia as a monumental, solid, political instrument of oppressive governance, – or is this reading the political history into the rationalist aesthetics?

In the construction of the new Fascist state, the extensive building programs carried out were of quintessential and central importance as propaganda strategy. With its political agenda, the state interfered with every aspect of the citizens' lives through the practical instrumentality of architecture. This shines through in the disguised form of the catalogue text for the 1938 *Dopolavoro* exhibition:

³⁷⁸ Giorgio De Chirico, “Architectural meaning in painting,” qtd. in Pasquali, *Notes* 6.

“The problem of organisation of leisure time in Italy is to be considered closely linked to the reduction of working hours and discussed as one of the problems of labour. In applying the fundamental corporative programme which places Italian labour on a spiritual, national and humanitarian basis, the Fascist regime, which is the regime of the people, realised immediately the needs of the labouring classes by the adoption of the forty hour week, preceding by several years the so-called democratic States which, in the grim background of Geneva discussed and deliberated the improved regulation of labour.”³⁸⁰

In order to manipulate the people’s leisure time and the general control of the social activity that emerge from this official quote, the party required the construction of new buildings in practically every town, to house the different organizations founded to carry out specific tasks within the overall Fascist structure. Mussolini and his men were eager to renew the state and build an efficient, modern nation. In addition to the development of a complex, highly eclectic Fascist mythology and cult, the idea of the corporate state was borrowed from medieval Italy (though, originating in ancient Rome) and adapted to suit the regime’s demands.

As demonstrated with another citation from the *Dopolavoro* catalogue³⁸¹, the state conceived of itself as the guardian of the Italian people, from the cradle to the grave. The state would provide the citizens with work or unemployment benefits, organizing their leisure time, – and the children’s, too. The state built hospitals, child care centers, post offices, railway stations, and children’s colonies. It also constructed Fascist party headquarters, Balilla buildings, and militia barracks. According to Hannah Arendt: *“Mussolini’s interpretation of the corporate state idea was an attempt to overcome the notorious national dangers in a class-ridden society with a new integrated social organization.”³⁸²* By incorporating society into the state, he hoped to *“solve the antagonism between state and society, on which the nation-state had rested.”³⁸³* From the beginning the Fascist incursion had pretended to be representing a new idea of the nation as a whole and on behalf of the Italian people. Having seized the state machinery, they preceded to pass themselves off as the highest authority. In this manner the people was integrated into the state, which thus controlled the social life of the people. *“As regards the Fascists, their movement had come to an end with the seizure of power, at least with respect to domestic policies; the movement could now maintain its motion only in matters of foreign policy, in the sense of imperialist expansion and typically imperialist adventures.”³⁸⁴* This did not only

³⁷⁹ For more on rationalism and metaphysics, see Pasquali, *Notes* 6–8.

³⁸⁰ Spagnoli n. pag. My translation.

³⁸¹ Chapter 2.1, p. 27.

³⁸² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (2nd. ed. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973) 258.

³⁸³ Arendt 258–59.

³⁸⁴ Arendt 258–59.

apply to the Fascists' intentions and motions outside of the borders, in their imperialist aggression, but also inside the national borders as the management of the Pontine Marshes by the ONC, demonstrates.

In this thesis I have tried to recover the underlying patterns of intention in the phenomenon of Sabaudia by looking at different Fascist ideas regarding social politics; organization of society and corporate state expressed by new town planning ideas and modern architecture; specialized architectural structures for the regime's institutions and the ideological foundations (with mythology, ritual, and cult) of Fascism with its goals and propaganda. Of course one cannot expect to recover in any objective sense the absolute facts of Sabaudia, but by this methodology one can present a number of ideas in this field of study that seem to interlock in some pattern and which ties the patron and the architect up with intentions issuing from higher political agendas where the patron experiments by applying various talents to his own ends.

Sabaudia was not built for the average worker and was therefore not of the same base standard as in most other housing projects of the Fascists. It was apparently important to the regime that this town—and *especially* this town—was modern, light and sunny so as to convince the world and Italy of the grandeur of the coming future typified by the Pontine draining and resettling project. The high living standard may have been intended to function as a double smoke screen. On the one hand it showed a glossed new town, an exhibition window to the world, – a museum piece promising wealth and health for the citizens of the region. On the other hand it drew attention away from the real conditions on the farmsteads and the *borghi*.

The style of modernist architecture is no guarantor for democracy. In this case it was used to embellish a rather austere project with a face of modernity. *“The towns were to manifest the will to action and ideological goals of the regime; such as materialized meeting grounds between vision, symbolism, will and reality, through man’s place in nature, production, family and state. The architectural appearance accentuates both tradition and modernity in a dialectic team play, where the future is built on historical ground.”*⁸⁵

According to many reports the new towns are in general exhibiting features that place them as future-oriented Fascist programs. On a closer look, however, they appear to be fraught with ambiguities typical of Fascism itself. *“Mussolini’s speeches and Fascist propaganda emphasized references to the bond between modern Fascist Italy and ancient imperial Rome: here is one of*

*the first clues to a fundamental ambivalence that surfaces in the New Towns.*³⁸⁶ Ghirardo further states that both architecture and planning for the region are “*tethered to forms and urban schemes*” which can be clearly seen as drawn from medieval and ancient types of architectural precedents.³⁸⁷ Mussolini’s re-use of these forms were of course not museum replicas, and though apparently modern they carried in their bosom political ideations suitable to his Fascist ends. The whole development programs as well as the individual buildings in Sabaudia are demonstrably related to Italian history in spite of their simplified formal expressions.

Fascism was founded on, and employed, ideas from different eras and camps in the construction of their new, corporate utopian state. A cocktail of ideas put together as if one could borrow from any given period whatever seemed like a good idea and pretend to serve this up as congruent with an understanding of the concept of history. To mold the new Italy, the corporate idea was conceived. This retained a society constructed to stabilize the class differences instead of levelling the classes. All parts of society were to cooperate in the struggle for and adapt to, the project of building the nation. To inspire in the population the necessary will to sacrifice and participate in the common goal, the Fascists invented a new “religion” and way of life, built on the Romans’ civic and military structure and trappings. Roman mythology, however, was not to play a central role since Mussolini had his own agenda and replaced old myths with a concoction of nationalism, modern social trends and futurism to construct a religion based on the “revolution” and a contemporary heroic behaviour which is enshrined, so to speak, at the heart of all the different Fascist organizations. These “mythic” ingredients were the sources for the nationalistic processions and rallies that constituted the public contact with the sacralization of politics³⁸⁸ through religious pageantry. This display of theatricality in the urban space had had its mastery in D’Annunzio’s self-established but shortlived regency in the city of Fiume (1919–20) on the Adriatic coast. He created a unique experiment in political rule that became a model for anti-liberal politics. With an oratorial mastery he conducted dialogues with the crowd and exalted idealism and heroism, spiritual values and aesthetic gestures, and enthusiastically exhorting social renewal and political rebirth. The songs, processions, meetings, military celebrations, and ritualistic occasions that

³⁸⁵ Nodin, *Erövringen av jorden* 319. My translation.

³⁸⁶ Ghirardo 25.

³⁸⁷ Ghirardo 25.

³⁸⁸ Term borrowed from Emilio Gentile.

characterized D'Annunzio's style of dictatorship were later clearly echoed by Mussolini and the way he staged his own rallies.³⁸⁹ Sabaudia, as well as all other cities constructed by the Fascists sported towns arranged around public spaces ingeniously designed for such oceanic public assemblies.³⁹⁰ (For the theoretical alibi Mussolini added Le Bon, Spengler, and Sorel to the mixture in his construction of the modern corporate state.)

Under a thin veneer of humanism Fascism's true face appears undemocratic, anti-individualist, and party elitist. If Sabaudia was the corporate city incarnate, it means there was to be no room for the working class and the benefit claimants in the ideal corporate state. People without means were on their own, and the conclusion would seem to be that the corporate city was an *over-idealized* and simply *malfunctional* idea from the beginning. The relationship between farmsteads, borghi and towns as economic structures never had a chance to create an economy of growth. Seeing how soon the military structures moved in and redeemed the economy from this lack of circulating currency in the so-called self-sustainable interdependent area, is a clear indication of how little consideration was given to this problem both by the patron and the architects themselves.³⁹¹ Not before the construction of the *Caserma Piave* (the marine school from 1938) and the *Scuola di Artiglieria Contraerea*³⁹² (Anti-Aircraft Artillery School) from 1941, just outside of Sabaudia and strikingly similar, does the region become integrated with the general Italian economy.

The resettling of the Pontine Marshes, as we have seen, was a giant social experiment, with human beings for guinea pigs, as thousands of people from various desolate social classes were moved together. *“Despite the declared aim of drawing volunteer colonists for a social experiment, all too often those who answered the call ended up conscripts sent to what amounted to an internal exile. ... at every point in the physical and social organization of the towns hierarchy emphatically prevailed.”*³⁹³

Mariani, among others, points out that *“it is rather easy to talk about the Mesopotamian city, of the Greek and Roman city, of the Italian early or late medieval city; it is rather easy to talk about the industrial city... but regarding the fascist city everything is complicated by a continuous cross-reference between politics, ideology, strategies and tactics of the regime, personal interventions, – yes, almost about*

³⁸⁹ Falasca-Zamponi 6.

³⁹⁰ See also chapter 2.1.3, p. 34.

³⁹¹ See chapter 4.3.

³⁹² This military campus echoes the arrangement of spaces, street grid, piazzas, tower and building masses, slightly more in line with Piacentini's academic style of the late 1930s.

³⁹³ Ghirardo 25.

*systematic contradictions.*³⁹⁴ Even though complicated, the aesthetical guidelines of the regime were not quite as confusing as often implied. It is not unusual to see commentators preface how the Fascist regime failed to select an “official style,” but after all the first half of the twentieth century was influenced by several different styles co-existing side by side, overlapping, mixing and borrowing from each other. This is particularly true for architecture which was more profoundly and directly connected to power structures and big capital. But it would all be so much simpler if we could single out the “bad guys” by style alone. Furthermore, functional architecture was employed in totalitarian regimes such as Soviet Russia, Nazi-Germany, and Fascist Italy in the early years, just as in the democratic countries. Young idealistic architects of Italy built on the same ideas, studied the same architects, and dreamed the same dreams as the heroes of functionalism, – the ones designated the right position by the history of the victorious. Thus e.g. Giuseppe Terragni’s functional architecture (*plate 92.D*) is just as modern and functional as the Bauhaus of a Walter Gropius or a Mies van der Rohe. And thus the architects of Sabaudia pursue the same dreams as the Dutch J.J.P. Oud (*plate 90.B*). Their goal was perhaps also a new society, a new way of living. Even though the theories of how to achieve this differed, it was all about the pursuit of happiness and the construction of a bright future. It is very difficult to isolate the works of the Fascist architects of the rationalist school outside of the dialogue of city planning and architectural theory in general that engaged all the countries of the West during this period.

The big paradox is not to be found in a totalitarian regime’s use of modern technology and style, but rather in the underlying Roman and medieval structures. While democratic countries attempted to build “democratic” buildings for modern man, focusing on the problem of cheap, convenient housing for the new era and looking for economic solutions, the Fascists employed architecture solutions to also express ideology, power and heritage. But I surmise it would not be difficult to assign ideology and aesthetic languages of power to the so-called democratic architecture of functionalism and the International style. It is further difficult to dis-associate the early twentieth century architecture from the imperatives of emergent technologies and the particularly effective results achieved by the propaganda machinery arising from this technological revolution. But, nevertheless, it is hard to perceive Italian architects of the rationalist school as not being colored and seduced

³⁹⁴ Mariani, *Fascismo e “città nuove”* 195.

to some extent by their own entanglement in Fascist social speculations about the importance of (anti)urban planning.

Future Research

There are still several research topics that could be analyzed by applying the model developed for this thesis: The North African colonies of the Fascists, the Balilla buildings and PNF headquarters with their sacred shrines, and (maybe most exiting) the memorials to the Fascist martyrs would further test this position vis-à-vis the relationship of the patron and architects/artists. In a comparative study such as I am suggesting, a new understanding of Fascist Italian art may be gained. Until the present, the art historical research in this field has perhaps not emphasized strongly enough the eclectic, history oriented manners of the Fascist patrons. The corporate collectivity in which artists and architects had to work, and the ideological frames forced around them, produced unique results: Like the the Rome of the Caesars, or the Catholic Church through the centuries, the Fascists actually managed to create an indelible identifiable trait in symbolism and iconology in spite of employing many different styles. Exploring these related areas of research, compared to many other art historical topics, is virtually still a virgin field, full of unexplored interrelations produced during the Fascist era.

Appendix I: Photographic Credits

Covers:

Vol.1: Sæther, Jan Valentin, *Drawing of Oriolo Frezzotti's Opera Nazionale Balilla building, Sabaudia*. Oslo, 2002.

Vol.2: Sæther, Jan Valentin, *Drawing of Cancellotti, Montuori, Piccinato and Scalpelli's Town Hall, Sabaudia*. Oslo, 2002.

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1.B. Sant'Elia, Antonio. *Main railway station of the "città nuova."* 1914. Kruft, *History of Architectural Theory* ill. 188.

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2.A. *Fasces*. "Fascist propaganda," *Italian Life under Fascism: Selections from the Fry Collection*, 1998, Department of Special Collections, Memorial Library, U of Wisconsin-Madison, 13 Dec. 1999 <<http://www.library.wisc.edu/libraries/dpf/Fascism/Propaganda.html>>.

2.B. *Balilla boy presenting the Town Hall key of Sabaudia*. 1934. *Sabaudia... primo amore*. By Giuseppe Fichera. Sabaudia: Comune di Sabaudia, 1984. 89.

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5.A. (+ background image, plates 7–11): *Survey of farmsteads in the Roman and Pontine Marshes*.

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94.A. Piacentini, Marcello. *Piazza della Vittoria*, Brescia. 1929–32. Ciucci, *Gli architetti e il fascismo* ill. 5.

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95.B. Scalpelli, Alfredo. *Mostra Augustea della Romanità, detail of façade*, Rome. 1937. Bernoni 149.

96.A. Tato. *Sorvolando Sabaudia*. 1934. Trabucco and Urbinati 115.

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Appendix II: Text Reliefs on the Buildings in Sabaudia

The Text on the Pergament in the Foundation Stone

Regnando Vittorio Emanuele III
Duce Benito Mussolini

Commissario del Governo dell'Opera per i Combattenti Valentino Orsolini Cencelli
Qui, sul mare di Roma - su una terra già maledetta nei secoli, restituita ora all'umano lavoro - l'Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti - "forza mobilitata per la ruralizzazione d'Italia" quasi rinnovando un simbolico rito il gesto di Romolo, pone oggi V agosto dell'anno XI E.F. - le fondamenta di Sabaudia, nome squillante di glorie regali - seconda tappa della conquista dell'Agro segnata dal genio di Benito Mussolini, pegno di fede e promessa che non fallisce prova mirabile della italica volontà rifoggiata dal Duce sulle orme di Roma.³⁹⁵

General A. Diaz' Victory Bulletin on the Associazione Combattentistiche

"BOLLETTINO DELLA VITTORIA"
4. NOVEMBRE 1918

LA GUERRA CONTRO AUSTRIA-UNGHERIA CHE SOTTO L'ALTA GUIDA DI SM IL RE DUCE SUPREMO L'ESERCITO ITALIANO INFERIORE PER NUMERO E PER MEZZI INIZIO IL 24 MAGGIO 1915 E CON FEDE INCROLLABILE E TENACE VALORE CONDUSSE ININTERROTTA ED ASPRISSIMA PER 41 MESI E VINTA LA GIGANTESCA BATTAGLIA INGAGGIATA IL 24 DELLO SCORSO OTTOBRE ED ALLA QUALE PRENDEVANO PARTE 51 DIVISIONI ITALIANE, 3 BRITANNICHE, 2 FRANCESI, 1 CZECHOSLOVACCA E UN REGIMENTO AMERICANO, CONTRO 73 DIVISIONI AUSTRO-UNGARICHE E FINITA.

LA FULMINEA ARDITISSIMA AVANZATA DEL 29 CORPO D'ARMATA SU TRENTO, SBARANDO LE VIE DELLA RITIRATA ALLE ARMATE NEMICHE DEL TRENTO, TRAVOLTE A OCCIDENTE DALLE TRUPPE DELLA VII ARMATA E AD ORIENTE DA QUELLE DELLA I, IV, E VI, HA DETERMINATO IERI LO SFACELLO TOTALE DEL FRONTE AVVERSARIO DAL BRENTA AL TORRE L'IRRESISTIBILE SLANCIO DELLA XII, DELL'VIII, DELLA X ARMATA E, DELLE DIVISIONI DELLA CAVALLERIA RICACCIA SEMPRE PIÙ INDIETRO IL NEMICO FUGGENTE.

NELLA PIANURA S.A. IL DUCA D'AOSTA AVANZA RAPIDAMENTE ALLA TESTA DELLA SUA INVITTA III ARMATA ANELANTE DI RITORNARE SULLE POSIZIONI DA ESSA GIÀ GLORIOSAMENTE CONQUISTATE E CHE MAI AVEVA PERDUTE.

L'ESERCITO AUSTRO-UNGARICO È ANNIENTATO. ESSO HA SUBITO PERDITE GRAVISSIME NELL'ACCANITA RESISTENZA DEI PRIMI GIORNI DI LOTTA E NELL'INSEGUIMENTO, HA PERDUTO QUANTITÀ INGENTISSIME DI MATERIALE DI OGNI SORTE E PRESSOCHE PER INTERO I SUOI MAGAZZINI ED I DEPOSITI HA LASCIATO FINORA NELLE NOSTRE MANI CIRCA TRECENTOMILA PRIGIONIERI CON INTERI STATI MAGGIORI E NON MENO DI CINQUEMILA CANNONI.

³⁹⁵ Qtd. in Galeazzi 96.

I RESTI DI QUELLO CHE FU UNO DEI PIÚ POTENTI ESERCITI DEL MONDO
RISALGONO IN DISORDINE E SENZA SPERANZA LE VALLI CHE AVEVENO
DISCESO CON OROGLIOSA SICUREZZA.

DIAZ

The Text on the Town Hall Tower

REGNANDO VITTORIO EMANUELE III
BENITO MUSSOLINI CAPO DEL GOVERNO
QUESTA TERRA VOLLE REDENTA
DAL MILLENARIO LETARGO DI MORTIFERA STERILITÀ
E PRESSO LE VESTIGIA DI RIMOTE CIVILTÀ
DIEDE VITA
A
SABAUDIA
CHE PORTA NEL NOME GLI AUSPICI DEI I AUGUSTA DINASTIA REGNANTE
—
EDIFICATA IN 253 GIORNI
DALL'OPERA NAZIONALE PER I COMBATTENTI
PRESIEDUTA DA
VALENTINO ORSELINI CENCELLI
INIZIO LA SUA MISSIONE CIVICA
IL XV APRILE MCMXXXIV ANNO XII E.F.

Appendix III: Correspondence Between the Architects and the Regime

A.S.E. il Cav. Benito Mussolini
Capo del Governo
ROMA

I sottoscritti, architetti del piano regolatore e degli edifici pubblici di Sabaudia, hanno ricevuto dall'Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti disposizioni affinché la Torre della Casa Comunale di Sabaudia, in corso di costruzione, sia ridotta dall'altezza di metri 42 a quella di metri 32.

Le conseguenze dell'attuazione di tale ordine sarebbero così gravi dal punto di vista urbanistico, da quello costruttivo e da quello estetico da ritenere necessario ed urgente segnalare con franchezza considerazioni ed elementi che si oppongono decisamente a tale mutilazione.

Sia consentito anzitutto ai sottoscritti ricordare le fasi che hanno preceduto la progettazione e la esecuzione della Casa Comunale e degli altri edifici di Sabaudia.

Il piano regolatore, che riuscì vincitore di un pubblico concorso, è impostato già nella sua concezione urbanistica sulla posizione assiale della torre rispetto alle principali strade di accesso.

Ottenuto l'alto onore di essere ricevuti dall'E.V. i sottoscritti sottoposero al Vostro eminente esame i vari progetti tra i quali quello della Casa Comunale in cui la torre figurava alta metri 38.

Vostra Eccellenza si degnò di esaminare attentamente i progetti che confortò della Sua alta approvazione.

In particolare V.E., informata che la torre civica era alta metri 38, richiese di proposito che essa fosse stata visibile dalla via Appia e a lungo si soffermò a considerare l'importanza della sua visibilità e le proporzioni rispetto all'ambiente ed al significato dell'edificio e ne approvò le dimensioni. Nello sviluppare il progetto in forma esecutiva, onde ottenere più perfetto proporzionamento della torre sia con l'edificio comunale sia con l'ambiente fu precisata in metri 42.

Nella visita ai lavori del giorno 18 dicembre, V.E., verificando l'esecuzione dei progetti, a tutti i sottoscritti confermò il Suo vivo compiacimento ed in particolare lodò il modello plastico dell'edificio comunale, nel quale la torre figurava appunto di tale altezza.

Il giudizio dell'E.V. ci conforta e ci concede di aggiungere argomenti d'ordine estetico e tecnico i quali militano contro la mutilazione dell'opera.

E', anzitutto, ovvio che la ideazione di un edificio risponde nel suo insieme ad una concezione costruttiva ed estetica profondamente organica e strettamente connessa alle proporzioni delle sue varie parti ed in equilibrato rapporto con gli edifici circostanti; equilibrio che non ammette arbitrarie alterazioni.

E tanto più è valido questo principio elementare della architettura in un edificio quale quello la parola, dove è stato nostro sforzo quello di armonizzare in ritmi composti le varie parti per esprimere nel rapporto tra la torre e gli altri fabbricati quasi la sintesi della vita civica.

Oltre a tali considerazioni di carattere urbanistico ed estetico non meno importanti sono quelle di indole tecnica costruttiva.

A tale riguardo si tenga presente che quando è pervenuta la disposizione di modifica, la struttura della torre era già fuori terra per un buon tratto, e che per tale ragione non era e non è oggi possibile senza ingente dispendio restringere il perimetro di base onde proporzionare la larghezze con la nuova misura ridotta dell'altezza. D'altra parte ci sia consentito affermare che una diminuzione d'altezza non può essere portata comunque senza richiedere di conseguenza una variazione nelle misure della base, sottopena di avere per risultato goffo e sproporzionato. Ciò è mostrato all'evidenza dalle fotografie dei disegni e dei modelli che si uniscono, raffiguranti, in reciproco confronto, l'edificio come è stato e come lo si prevede.

L'errore a noi sembra evidente ed esso ripugnerebbe alle nostre responsabilità di architetti.

Ossequianti alla disciplina fascista a cui i sottoscritti ispirano ogni loro atto, mentre dichiarano di essere disposti a dare esecuzione alle direttive che al riguardo l'Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti credesse, sperando tuttavia che per la riuscita estetica della torre e della casa civica, nonché del complesso urbano non si insista nella prospettata soluzione.

Con la speranza che queste nostre franche considerazioni siano accolte con benevolenza, i sottoscritti si pregiano unire alla presente i loro devoti ossequi fascisti.

Roma, 19 febbraio 1934—XII

Gino Cancellotti

Eugenio Montuori

Luigi Piccinato

Alfredo Scalpelli³⁹⁶

³⁹⁶ Qtd. in Galeazzi 136–38.

OPERA NAZIONALE PER I COMBATTENTI

N. 11403 di Prot. Pos.2.6.22/
Risposta a nota N. 598/3/1/1/
del 28 – 2 – XII

Roma, li 9 mar. 1934 Anno XII

OGGETTO Casa Comunale di Sabaudia.
Riduzione dell'altezza della torre

ON. PRESIDENZA DEL CONSIGLIO
DEI MINISTRI
(Gabinetto)

ROMA

L'ordine cui accennano gli Architetti progettisti nell'esposto unito in copia al foglio cui si risponde era stato impratito da quest'Opera in seguito a disposizione pervenuta dall'On. Ministero dell'Interno (Gabinetto) che la torre comunale di Littoria dovesse restare la più alta in Agro Pontino. Esso è poi stato revocato, poiché S.E. il Capo del Governo, nella Sua visita in Agro Pontino del 21 febbraio XII, ha verbalmente comunicato allo scrivente il Suo consenso alla costruzione della torre del Comune di Sabaudia come prevista in progetto.

Con osservanza

IL COMMISSARIO DEL GOVERNO
(On.Dott.V.Orsolini Cencelli)³⁹⁷

³⁹⁷ Qtd. in Galeazzi 140.

Appendix IV: Works Carried out, and Costs

1o) Costruzione del centro comunale:

- a) Stade interne: massicciata e cilindratura compresa cigliatura e marciapiedi mq. 68.282,53, lunghezza ml. 8.228,44;
- b) Strade interne bitumate: massicciata e cilindratura mq. 41.887,06, lunghezza ml. 2.836,91;
- c) Piazze: massicciata mq. 12.262,10;
- d) Fognature: bianca in tubi di cemento, ml. 9.497,25; nera in tubi di gres ml. 8.606,50;
- e) Acquedotto: tubazioni in ghisa ml. 6.892,95;
- f) Linea elettrica: interna ad alta tensione in cavo m. 3.565,30; interna a bassa tensione in cavo ml. 984,84; interna a bassa tensione aerea ml. 6.455,35;
- g) Cabine elettriche di trasformazione n. 3;
- h) Edifici: Comune con torre; Casa del Fascio con torre; Dopolavoro; Sindacati; Associazioni Combattentistiche; Caserma M.V.S.N.; Opera Nazionale Balilla; Caserma Reali Carabinieri; Ospedale; Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia; Scuole; Chiesa e canonica; Asilo con casa per suore; Mercato coperto; Campo Sportivo; Cinema–Teatro; Albergo; n. 6 edifici per la Direzione Aziendale; n. 16 Case di abitazione con 90 appartamenti e 66 negozi; n. 1 serbatoio idrico con impianto di sollevamento – Importo £ 28.000.000.

2o) Strade di accesso al comune di Sabaudia massicciate e cilindrate: lunghezza complessiva ml. 12.711,35 di cui ml. 2.619,40 della larghezza di m. 10; ml. 6.884,10 della larghezza di m. 9; ml. 3.207 della larghezza di 6,5 – Importo £ 3.718.103.

3o) Ponticelli sulle dette strade, luci da m. 0,60 a.m. 3,50: n. 21 – Importo £435.000.

4o) Linea elettrica ad alta tensione: lunghezza ml. 16.500 – Importo £200.000.”³⁹⁸

³⁹⁸ Franchini and Ianella 116.

Appendix V: International Newspapers and Magazines Covering the Story of Sabaudia in the 1930s

SWITZERLAND: *Neue Züricher Zeitung*; *Corriere del Ticino* (1931); *Gazette del Lausanne* (1932 and 1933), *Giornale del Popolo* (Luzern); *Die Weltwoche* (Zürich); *Bund*; *Neue Züricher Nachrichten*

NORWAY: *Nationen* (Oslo, 1932);

CHECHOSLOVAKIA: *Sbírka Prednášek* and *Lidové Listy* (Prague, 1932–33);

SWEDEN: *Svenska Dagbladet* (1933);

FRANCE: *Intransigeant* (1933); *Temps* (Paris, 1933)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: *New York Times* (1934)

GREAT BRITAIN: *Listener* (1933); *News Chronicle* (1933); *Weekend Review* 1933); *Catholic Times* (1933); *Times and Tide* (1933); *Tablet* (1933); *Yorkshire Post* (1933); *The Times* (1933, 1934); *Daily Mail* (1934); *Daily Express* (1934); *The Daily Herald* (1934); *Manchester Guardian* (1934); *Morning Post* (1934); *Daily Mail* (1934); *Reuter Agency*; *The Life of Faith* (London); *Financial News*; *Stock Exchange Gazette*; *News Chronicle*; *Daily Telegraph*; *The Fascist Week*

FRANCE: *Matin*; *Paris Midi*; *Intransigeant*; *Jour*; *Petite Parisienne*; *Temps*; *Aujourd'hui*

POLAND: *Ilustrowany Kurjer Codzienny* (Krakow); *Furjer Polski* (1934); *Gazeta Warszawska*

GERMANY: *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*; *Berliner illustrierte Zeitung*; *Kölnische Volkszeitung*; *Rheinisch Westfälige Zeitung*; *Völkischer Beobachter*; *Westphälische Landeszeitung*; *Ausburger Postzeitung*; *Westermanns Monatshefte*; *Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift*; *Börsen Zeitung*; *Rostecher Anzeiger*; *Germania*; *Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung*; *Bayerischer Kurier*; *Wochenschau*; *Angriff*; *Blätter für Volksgesundheitspflege*; *Düsseldorfer Nachrichten*; *Hannoverscher Kurier*; *Reuter*; *National Sozialistische Scheisische Tageszeitung*; *Ethik*; *Völkischer Beobachter*; *V D I*, *Berliner Zeitung am Mittag*; *Münchener Neueste*; *Nach Richten*; *Kölner Tageblatt*; *Die Welt*; *Bremer Nachrichten*; *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*; *Bremer Nachrichten*; *Berliner Tageblatt*; *Kölnische Volkszeitung*; *Die Woche*; *Münchener Illustrierte Presse*; *Grüne Post*; *Tag* (Berlin); *Niedersächsische Tageszeitung* (Hannover)

AUSTRIA: *Neue Leipziger Zeitung*³⁹⁹

³⁹⁹ The information about the foreign press coverage of the Pontine Marshes and Sabaudia is mainly taken from: Briani 56–61, chapter “Le ripercussioni nella stampa estera..” I have tried to correct the misspelled names of newspapers and magazines wherever possible, but there may still be some errors.

Appendix VI: Architectural Debate in Parliament, 26 May 1934

Dalla seduta del 26 – 5 – XII

La Camera tiene seduta antimeridiana per l'ultimo esame dei progetti di legge iscritti all'o. d. G. Aula e tribune bene affollate.

Approvatosi il verbale, si inizia la discussione della conversione del decreto col quale sono stati dichiarati di pubblica utilità i lavori di costruzione della casa Littoria in Roma: e prende la parola l'on. Calza Bini che sottolinea l'importanza del provvedimento nella sua qualità di capo della classe degli architetti italiani. Occupandosi del concorso indetto per la costruzione della Casa Littoria, rileva la bontà del cammino sul quale è avviata oggi l'arte italiana. Si occupa – suscitando vivi commenti e molte interruzioni – delle moderne tendenze architettoniche.

Giunta: – Non vogliamo la stazione di Firenze su via dell'Impero. (*Viv. appl.*)

Calza Bini: – I giovani tornano allo studio dell'antico...

Voci: – Era ora! (*Applausi*).

Farinacci: – È finita per il novecento.

Oppo: – Non è finita mai per l'intelligenza italiana!

Farinacci: – Non è roba italiana novecento. È bottega!

Giunta e Teruzzi: – Ne abbiamo abbastanza di Sabaudia!

Un vivace dialogo si accende fra gli on. Oppo e Farinacci ed intervengono numerosi deputati. Quando si ristabilisce la calma, l'on. Calza Bini protesta contro talune forme di ostilità preconcepita contro l'architettura di oggi...

Teruzzi: – Noi guardiamo alla realtà: non siamo ostili per partito preso.

Giunta: – La stazione di Firenze!! Ricordatevela e vergognatevi!!!

Calza Bini, conclude fra vivi rumori affermando che la Casa Littoria sarà degna del tempo di Mussolini.

Segue l'on. Gigliolo il quale tratta del lato archeologico della costruzione della Casa Littoria.

Terzo oratore è l'on. Caffarelli, il quale raccomanda che la nuova costruzione non stoni coll'ambiente incomparabile nel quale deve sorgere. Liberatevi e liberateci da esotismi e fate che la costruzione sia ispirata a senso di romana grandezza! (*vivissimi e generali applausi*).

L'on. Maraini, che parla subito dopo, nota come le nuove costruzioni giungano a maturazione di progetti, quando l'arte italiana dopo decenni di smarrimento sta ritrovando il proprio cammino, sta riacquistando la propria linea per merito del Fascismo. Confida che la Casa Littoria sia realizzazione fascista e ivi trovino esaltazione le gesta delle Camicie nere. (*Vivi applausi*). Segue alla tribuna l'on. Iti Bacci il quale esprime il comune desiderio, ormai realizzato, di vedere sorgere la Casa del Fascismo nel cuore dell'antica Roma; ma questa non deve essere costruzione architettonica di natura tedesca che noi non vogliamo perché lontana e contraria al nostro sentimento. (*Applausi*). Non vogliamo una architettura bolscevica! (*Vivi, generali applausi*). Niente ibridi patteggiamenti e congiungimenti fra arte bolscevica e arte nipponica: vogliamo una architettura nostra...

Voci: – Romana! (*Applausi*).

Chiede ora la parola l'on. Giunta. La Camera lo applaude vivamente. Nota che l'attuale discussione era in atto da tempo negli spiriti sia degli artisti che degli spettatori. Erano tutti d'accordo sulla grandiosità e sulla sanità di questa costruzione. Ma non vorrebbe che

qualcuno tentasse di ingenerare equivoci: una cosa è la Casa Littoria come Casa del Fascismo e altra cosa è l'architettura che le darà posto. Su via dell'Impero bisogna camminare molto cauti perché vi è passata tutta la storia e tutta la civiltà di Roma. (*Vivi applausi*). E bisogna dire a tutti che bisogna affrontare l'argomento con molta serietà. Sin qui nessuno si è voluto spiegare con un esempio... Ma bisogna avvertire che non intendiamo vedere sorgere uno dei cosiddetti aborti novecentisti... (*Vivi applausi*). D'accordo con Farinacci per ciò che ha scritto contro il novecentismo e contro la Triennale di Milano...

Farinacci: – Mi hanno qualificato antifascista!

Giunta: – Ero e sono d'accordo con lei! E protesto contro queste tendenze architettoniche teutoniche e contro queste costruzioni stile equalitario. (*Vivi applausi*). Per costruire bene la Casa Littoria basterebbe guardarci nel nostro cuore. (*Vivi applausi*). Ma i membri di certe commissioni giudicatrici... (*Vivi applausi*). La tessera del partito in certi casi non dice nulla. Non dobbiamo finire coll'importare nulla da altri popoli troppo a noi distanti per spirito, per origini, per tradizioni.

L'on. Giunta conclude ripetendo che non si deve fare della via dell'Impero la stazione di Firenze!

(*Vivi, generali, prolungati applausi che si rinnovano e durano a lungo quando l'on. Giunta torna al proprio posto*). La Camera chiede a gran voce che parli l'on. Oppo, ma questi non vuole e la discussione generale è dichiarata chiusa.⁴⁰⁰

⁴⁰⁰ Dalla seduta del 26 – 5 – XII 12–14.

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