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# **EVOLUTION**

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## EDITORIAL

### Mediterranean

As Braudel indicates in his masterpiece “The Mediterranean. Space, history, men, traditions”, the Mediterranean Sea, contrary to what we might think, does not begin with the sea: it is, first of all, land. A land made up of hills and terraces, mountains overlooking the sea and deep waters, but also plains, low and sandy coasts and much more: it is “a thousand things at once. Not one landscape, but countless landscapes. Not one sea, but a succession of seas. Not one civilization, but a series of civilizations piled on top of each other.”

The land of Italy and the land of Albania are bathed by the same waters and are united by a historical and cultural event that, though varied and multiform, has the same framework and a common destiny. Inevitably.

So what better theme around which to develop a research center if not that of the Mediterranean?

For this reason, the Faculty of Applied Sciences of the Catholic University “Our Lady of Good Counsel” of Tirana has recently established a research center that places at the center of its scientific interests the Mediterranean understood as a profound entity that characterizes Western civilization in its stratified composition and, particularly, its architecture.

When I was asked to edit the second issue of the journal *Evolution* dedicated to the Faculty of

Applied Sciences, I had no doubts in proposing the theme of the Mediterranean as the *fil rouge* of the essays that would make up the edition.

Precisely the symbolism that this theme holds.

Thus, the essays, reflecting the inclinations and different interests of their authors, dealt with different themes, travelling from north to south and from east to west along the shores of the Mediterranean, highlighting, as one might expect, profound differences but also extraordinary elements of continuity.

If at first glance everything seems to be clustered around the root of classicism, at a closer look everything then finds different echoes on distant shores, transforming and explaining the specificity of places and cultures.

Magic of the Mediterranean.

Around its waters everything looks the same and, at the same time, everything is different.

Predrag Matvejević, in his “Mediterranean. A new breviary” writes about it: “When we enter the Mediterranean, we first choose a starting point: shore or scene, port or event, navigation or story. Then it becomes less important where we started from and more important how far we have come: what we have seen and how. Sometimes all the seas seem to be one, especially when the crossing is long; sometimes each of them is a high sea”.

**Fabio CAPANNI**

Dean of the Faculty of Applied Sciences  
Catholic University “Our Lady of Good Counsel”

## EDITORIALE

### Mediterraneo

Come ci indica Braudel nel suo capolavoro “Il Mediterraneo. Lo spazio, la storia, gli uomini, le tradizioni”, il Mar Mediterraneo, contrariamente a quanto potremmo pensare, non inizia con il mare: esso è, prima di tutto, terra. Terra composta da colline e terrazzamenti, monti a picco sul mare e fondali profondi, ma anche pianure, coste basse e sabbiose e molto altro ancora: è “mille cose insieme. Non un paesaggio, ma innumerevoli paesaggi. Non un mare, ma un susseguirsi di mari. Non una civiltà, ma una serie di civiltà accatastate le une sulle altre.”

La terra d'Italia e quella di Albania sono bagnate dalle stesse acque e sono accomunate da una vicenda storica e culturale che, seppur variegata e multiforme, ha la medesima cornice ed un destino comune. Inevitabilmente.

E allora quale tema migliore attorno al quale sviluppare un centro di ricerca se non quello del *Mediterraneo*?

Per questo motivo, la Facoltà di Scienze Applicate dell'università Cattolica “Nostra Signora del Buon Consiglio” di Tirana ha recentemente istituito un centro di ricerca che pone al centro dei suoi interessi scientifici il *Mediterraneo* inteso come entità profonda che caratterizza la civiltà occidentale nella sua stratificata composizione e, particolarmente, la sua architettura.

Nel momento in cui mi è stato proposto di curare il secondo numero della rivista *Evolution* dedicato

alla Facoltà di Scienze Applicate non ho avuto dubbi nel proporre il tema del Mediterraneo come *fil rouge* dei saggi che sarebbero andati a comporre l'edizione.

Proprio la simbologia che questo tema custodisce.

Così, i saggi, rispecchiando le inclinazioni e i diversi interessi dei loro autori, hanno affrontato tematiche differenti, percorrendo da nord a sud e da est a ovest le sponde del Mediterraneo, mettendo in luce, come ci si poteva aspettare, profonde differenze ma anche straordinari elementi di continuità.

Se ad una prima impressione tutto pare agglutinarsi attorno alla radice della classicità, a veder bene tutto poi trova eco diverse su sponde lontane tra loro, trasformandosi e rendendo ragione della specificità dei luoghi e delle culture.

Magia del Mediterraneo.

Attorno alle sue acque tutto appare uguale a sé stesso e, al contempo, tutto è diverso.

Predrag Matvejević, nel suo “Mediterraneo. Un nuovo breviario” scrive a tal proposito: “Accedendo al Mediterraneo, scegliamo innanzi tutto un punto di partenza: riva o scena, porto o evento, navigazione o racconto. Poi diventa meno importante da dove siamo partiti e più fin dove siamo giunti: quel che si è visto e come. Talvolta tutti i mari sembrano uno solo, specie quando la traversata è lunga; talvolta ognuno di essi è un alto mare”.

**Fabio CAPANNI**

Preside della Facoltà di Scienze Applicate  
Università Cattolica “Nostra Signora del Buon Consiglio”



# EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ARCHITECTURE: THE RUMELIAN HOUSE TYPE AND ITS WAY TOWARD MODERNITY

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## ARCHITETTURA DEL MEDITERRANEO ORIENTALE: LA CASA DELL'ANTICA RUMELIA NELLA SUA RICERCA DELLA MODERNITA'

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### Abstract

*The term Rumelia initially meant “Land of the Romans” in Turkish and referred to the lands conquered by the Ottoman Turks of the Byzantine Empire. Later on, the expression came to signify the Balkan provinces of the Empire, but after 1885 it ceased to indicate any geopolitical division. However, a shared tradition of vernacular housing - the so-called sofa house - continued to exist as an important element of the architectural culture of this region.*

*Since the 1930s, in the new nations emerging across what was once referred to as Rumelia from the collapse of the Ottoman empire, a group of architects (namely Dimitri Pikionis, Henrietta Delavrancea, Sedad Hakki Eldem, Dušan Grabrijan, Branislav Kojić, and later Boris Čipani) have promoted the study of civil architecture as a fundamental source for the development of their modern architecture, making treasure of the housing tradition of this ancient land.*

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*Il termine Rumelia significava inizialmente “Terra dei Romani” in turco e si riferiva alle terre dell’Impero Bizantino conquistate dagli ottomani. Col tempo, l’espressione venne a significare le province balcaniche dell’Impero, ma dopo il 1885 cessò di indicare qualsiasi divisione geopolitica. Tuttavia, una tradizione abitativa condivisa - la cosiddetta “casa a sofa” - continuò ad esistere come elemento comune della cultura architettonica di questa regione. A partire dagli anni Trenta del secolo scorso, nelle nuove nazioni che emersero dal crollo dell’impero ottomano, alcuni architetti (Dimitri Pikionis, Henrietta Delavrancea, Sedad Hakki Eldem, Dušan Grabrijan, Branislav Kojić, e più tardi Boris Čipani) promossero lo studio dell’architettura civile vernacolare come fonte d’ispirazione per lo sviluppo dell’architettura moderna facendo tesoro della tradizione abitativa di questa antica terra.*

**Keywords:** Transnational heritage 1, ottoman europe 2, modern architecture 3, eastern mediterranean housing 5

## Introduction

The Ottoman past remains one of the most controversial historical, and therefore also architectural, subjects across much of the Balkans.

The topic of this paper examines the spread of the traditional *sofa* [1] house in the lands of the former Rumelia and how modern architects reinterpreted this cultural heritage during the 20th century. The term *Rumelia* means “Land of the Romans” in Turkish and refers to the lands conquered by the Ottoman Turks of the Byzantine Empire: in time, the expression came to signify the Balkan provinces of the Empire, but after 1885 it ceased to indicate any political division. However, a shared tradition of vernacular housing - the so-called *sofa* house - continued to exist as an important element of the architectural culture of this region. Since the 1930’s, in the new nation states emerging in old *Rumelia* from the collapse of the Ottoman empire, a group of architects: Dimitri Pikionis, Paul Smarandescu, Henrietta Delavrancea, Sedad Hakkı Eldem, Dušan Grabrijan, Branislav Kojić, and later Boris Čipan, have promoted the study of civil architecture as a fundamental source for the development of their modern architecture making treasure of the housing tradition of this ancient land. These architects had a relevant role in the formation of cultural awareness of traditional housing heritage in their own countries.

This vernacular house type created a strong connection and common interest in the architecture in today’s Greece, Romania, Turkey, Bosnia, Serbia, and Macedonia.

This phenomenon had its roots in de-Ottomanization (TODOROVA, 1995) of the Balkan cities between 1820 and 1920 i.e. the tremendous change where cities break with their “Oriental”/Ottoman past in favor of Westernization, and Europeanisation. In the 1930s, leaving the blanket of the Ottoman Empire behind, the idea of having a “national identity” became extremely important in the newly formed countries of the Balkans, as did the idea of a “national home”: but paradoxically, modern architects from different countries in this area were inspired by the same *type* [2] of house the so called *sofa* house.

The current debate on this subject has been particularly developed by MARINOV’s (2017) essay on the symbolic use of this cultural heritage as shared by the different countries of the Balkan Peninsula. He highlights the construction of national interpretations based on the vernacular residential architecture in question, meaning symbolic appropriations or “nationalizations” of a common cultural heritage.

PINON (2018) instead provides a full understanding of the origins, the studies, the evolution of the Ottoman cities and houses, while ERARSLAN (2019) examines a particular variant of the *sofa*-house i.e. the *hayat* house based on Eldem’s studies on the archetype of the Turkish house.

HARTMUTH (2006) gives a first glance of the contemporaneous developments across the borders of the modern nation-state in the Balkans. But was CERASI (1998) that asserted that “not very significant” differences in the housing tradition are registrable in the core area of the Empire – the Balkans and Western Anatolia – as due to epoch and social class rather than to region, climate or ethnic group.

BERTRAM (1998, 2008) is one of the first authors that pays close attention to the significance of the Ottoman house concept “after the Ottomans are gone”, by pointing out how this housing tradition, in time, become a specific visual image that carried the symbolic weight of Turkey’s cultural heritage. BING’s (2019) book fills the gap in the field of comprehensive research on the vernacular architecture in the Balkans, by a 30 years-long study on the *çardak*, a structure widely known in the Balkan region. All these fundamental studies do not deal with the transnational vernacular typological elements that are at the basis of modern housing languages and results in the lands of ancient Rumelia. Being aware of the current debate on the subject, this work is thus intended to shed light on the architectural aspects of the deeper transformations of the cultural contexts within Balkan countries since the XX century: a phenomena that have rarely been studied together and in terms of their interactions and transnational relevance.



**Figure 1**  
Sedad Hakkı Eldem's sketch of the Rumelian territory.

## Outline

The well-known Turkish architect Sedad Hakkı Eldem (1908-1988) is the author of the most comprehensive typological study on the traditional Turkish house. In his work entitled *Türk Evi Plan Tipleri* [3] (1954), Eldem clearly identified the constitutive elements of the Turkish house type spread throughout the ancient territories of Rumelia and Anatolia. My research begins by examining Eldem's observations—that throughout the 500 years of its existence, the Turkish house type has undergone many developments while, at the same time, maintaining its characteristic elements. The plan of the house is the most important of these elements. Eldem observed that:

*"The Turkish house is the type of house found within the boundaries of the Old Ottoman Empire, in the territories formerly called Rumelia and Anatolia. It is a striking fact that houses which are hundreds of miles distant from each other, which have been built under greatly differing conditions, have a plan which in its main lines, is the same for all".*

Eldem defined typology based on the role of the *sofa* in the house plan. In 1936, Dimitris Pikionis [4] (1887-1968) professor of the National Technical University in Athens supervised the project on the analysis of the traditional housing architecture in Greece. The study focused particularly on the areas of Western Macedonia, Epirus, Thessaly, Pindos, and the Cyclades.

In 1932, the *Seminars on the National Architectural Style* [5] at the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul, Turkey, were instituted thanks to the joint efforts of Sedad Eldem (1908-1988) and Ernst Egli. These seminars had the merit of forming a generation of architects that were aware of the architectural value of the traditional Turkish house.

Branislav Kojić (1899-1987) was Professor at the Faculty of Architecture of Belgrade and a regular member of SASA (Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts). His research succeeded in filling gaps in the literature on rural settlements and architecture. He was able to study the way of living and to analyze rural settlements [6] in the territory of Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Slovenia.

Dušan Grabrijan (1899–1952) was a Slovenian-Bosnian architect, architectural theorist, and professor. Grabrijan was a student of Jože Plečnik [7]. During the 1930s, he worked as a professor at Secondary Technical School in Sarajevo, where, during the 1930s, he authored several publications on a variety of topics, including the Oriental House [8], adapted to the demands of Bosnian culture.

Boris Čipan (1918-2012) was a Macedonian architect. He was a prominent figure of Macedonian modern architecture after World War II. He attempted to define the nature of ancient housing architecture of the Balkan regions [9].

Henrieta Delavrancea [10] (1897-1987), one of the most important voices of architectural modernity in Romania, made full use of the housing tradition of Ottoman origin to conceive a new idea of “house” in her own country.

Thus, over time, many scholars defined the same house type with various, different names, referring to the regions or ethnic groups of the inhabitants. This house type has been called “(Northern) Greek house,” “Bulgarian (National) Revival house,” and “Macedonian traditional house” (MARINOV, 2017), Bulgarian National Revival (HARTMUTH, 2006). Another renowned Turkish architect, Dogan Kuban [11] employed a typological concept, speaking of this housing tradition as “the *hayat* house” (ERARSLAN, 2019). Dušan Grabrijan and Juraj Neidhardt [12] described the presence of the “*divanhane*” (receiving room) as a “proto-modernist” feature of the traditional house. Again Grabrijan, noticed how the “*čardak*” (wooden veranda) was the core room of any “Macedonian house [13]”. The “*čardak*” is yet another variation of the essential *sofa* space. Dimitri Pikionis referring to the houses of Kastoria, Kozani, Siatisia (villages of former *Rumelia*), defined this housing tradition as the “*art of the Greek people* [14]”. Branislav Kojić [15] named the local traditional house type “*Balkan profane architecture*”; while Aleksandar Deroko, another leading Serbian architect, used the term “*urban house of Oriental type* [16]”. Boris Čipan preferred to not give a national definition to the houses in Orhid, Macedonia. He referred to the architecture of his city as “*our ancient urban architecture*” [17].

Furthermore, the Balkans have been a source of inspiration for the emerging modernity as well in the West: it suffices to think of Le Corbusier’s formative journey into East. That experience has been read [18] as fundamental for the development of Le Corbusier’s *Five Points of Architecture*.

## Methodological approach

Concerning the methodological approach, I will try to handle transfer aspects, such as the similar housing tradition, the similar terminology in names of some parts of the house, and the similar way of life, over a transnational territory. Regarding the building types that have contributed to the housing culture of the Balkan Peninsula, we can highlight how the boundaries of these ways of life have perhaps been more transient than one could have considered a century ago, in the fundamental Jovan Cvijić’s *La Péninsule balkanique* [19].

Currently, this first inventory of the Balkan vernacular house types appears negatively affected by nationalistic speculations and suggestions. The same applies to other studies [20] of this field.

Quite the opposite: the tool of typology which has been read as a process from the Venetian school of architecture, it is the right key to identify the persistency of some housing elements over time and beyond national borders.

It is thanks to Aldo ROSSI [21] (1966) that we know the importance of the use of case studies in the field of typological analysis [22]. He asserted that “without analyzing case-by-case the type that constitutes the urban tissue of a city, it is impossible to say something about the development of the city itself”. He defines “*type as the very idea of architecture, that which is closest to its essence. In spite of changes, it has always imposed itself on the “feeling and reason” as the principle of architecture and of the city*”.

I will identify specific examples from the above-mentioned architects’ buildings and projects. A theoretical analysis will compare them by underlining the various figurative results obtained by Eldem, Pikionis, and the other architects who worked with a common cultural housing heritage.

Indeed, in the Balkans, one recognizes a shared way of life that originates by inhabiting the same type of space. Based on typological studies, I will be able to distinguish each formative element [23] of a building and evaluate their persistence and transformations over time and space.

The methodological approach used in this study is an innovative mix of typological and historical analyses, which are inseparable from their social context. The typological analysis focuses on the formative elements of a building, whereas the historical analysis helps to contextualize them.

### The study of civil architecture as a source for the development of modern architecture

Looking at the built architecture of the above-mentioned architects, we see a similar methodological procedure and strong analogies of architectural languages. The reinterpretation in a modern key of vernacular housing architecture has led to different figurative solutions, which are very similar to what we can imagine if we consider their typological value. The most important theme of the work of Sedad Eldem was the study of the Turkish-Ottoman house and its modern reinterpretation utilizing an updated technological system with the use of modern materials. In particular, the ancient wooden frame system of the Ottoman houses was re-proposed by Eldem but using a reinforced concrete frame system. Sedad structured his work starting from the base module of the window (of proportions 1:2 between height and width) and of dimensions between 120 and 150 cm. Also, the standardization concept could be found in the structural system of these dwellings. The base module of the window was for Eldem the most important element of standardization of Turkish-Ottoman civil buildings: the number of windows [24] in traditional architecture defined the dimensions of the room and this consequently defined the house itself according to the distribution of various rooms and the dividing space (*sofa*). Each of these architects commented in their own work about the intrinsic modernity of the *sofa* house. Grabrijan and Čipan found that similarities between the Macedonian and the modern house lie in the up-to-date relationship between the ground plan and the elevation, in the independence of the inner disposition of rooms from the wall structure, in the architecture of the outer rooms, in the plastic modeling of the house above its supporting walls, in the harmony of architecture with nature, in the desire for a view and, in the built-in furniture. Furthermore Grabrijan [25], highlighted that the human scale of the rooms in these houses is expressed by the changing of floor levels, which achieve varying heights in the rooms. Rooms gain life only with the presence of man. Everyone, in this house concept, has a right to a view. This is an old right of Oriental origin. The women, who were secluded in their homes, had to be given as wide a view as possible from the upper floors while the ground floor with its rough masonry presented a threatening front toward the street. In their fundamental book [26], Grabrijan and Neidhardt published a photo of an old *konak* (Musaybeg Babich's mansion) in Bosnia, reporting (as a German architect had already published it in a magazine with the same caption): "*Alt oder modern*"? (is that already modern?). They also added that they felt the similarity between the above-mentioned *konak* and the Le Corbusier house for Stuttgart is impressive. In the same book the authors explained that the "oriental/ottoman" house is almost empty. the only pieces of furniture are : a built-in bench also used as a bed, a table, a chair, a built-in wardrobe, and a stove.



**Figure 2**  
*Old konak (Musaybeg  
Babich's mansion) in Bosnia.*

Such minimal furniture goes a long way toward making a clean and spacious living space. Since the house does not develop vertically, it remains slow and flat. It represents a synthesis of hundreds of different factors, all of which are based on the basic, every day, living requirements of man. Should we call this then an anthropocentric house? Sedad Eldem, in an unpublished writing for *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* [27] wrote that the Turkish house amazes for its modern spirit. Eldem paused when it came to the large horizontal lines (so dear to Frank Lloyd Wright), to the abundance of glass walls or to the presence of *pilotis* that characterize these houses. He also shows how these houses, over time, have never lost their functionalistic and practical character. For instance, in Dimitri Pikionis' work, we find a refined "transposition" of traditional elements of the houses he studies on the Greek mountains: in the Potamianos Residence (1954-1955) elevation, there is an evident echo of the houses-facades in Kozani: a one-story high basement with a second floor on thin pillars. A modern example of *çardak* very similar to the portico of the Faculty of Arts and Natural Science is in Istanbul, designed by Sedad Eldem, (1944-48). Another relevant sample by Pikionis is the City Hall's in Volos, realized in 1961. A large *konak* (mansion) built in front of the sea, the City Hall's is a perfect sample of a modern sofa house. Exploring the interiors and starting with the ground floor plan, we see a division of spaces. In the same manner as the traditional Rumelian house, one can see a division in *haremlik* (for women) and *selamlık* (for men). This latter was the public receiving



**Figure 3**  
*Dimitri Pikionis, Potamianos residence, Athens 1953-55.*

room of the house. Also, this building in Volos can be read by highlighting the relations of the central hall (sofa) and the private offices on left and right. The main sofa locates the monumental staircase and shows a sort of *raumplan* at its center. Even this element refers to the Rumelian house type. In the workers housing in Zenica [28] (Bosnia) Neidhardt make reference to the formal qualities of the traditional house's spaces. In order to provide a place for gathering and reception, a *divanhana* [29]—a wide, semi enclosed entry space in the traditional house described in Grabrijan's earlier writings—formed the first point of contact and an entry point to the house. In the housing proposal for Zenica, this space took the shape of an open veranda. Henrieta Delavrancea, between the two World Wars, designed a lot of villas on the shore of the Black Sea at *Balchik*; this experience is an essential step toward the search for a modern architectural language in Romania. On the Black Sea, Delavrancea



**Figure 4**

*Dimitri Pikionis, City Hall's in Volos, 1961.*

realized a synthesis between the Mediterranean myth and the lesson of the Rumelian house. In the Constantiniu villa in *Balchik* (1935 now sadly demolished), she expertly plays with the dynamism of the architectural composition over a delicate portico: so similar to the Le Corbusier's lesson of Villa Savoy. Moreover, was Le Corbusier himself, one of the first Western architects to noticed the fitting bond between architecture and nature in the village of Tarnovo. Delavrancea in *Balchik* reached the same fitting bond between modern architecture and natural site-specific. Later, even at the time of Brutalist architecture one can find an echo of this fruitful bond between modernity and tradition. Speaking of his Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences MANU (1976), Boris Čipan said that



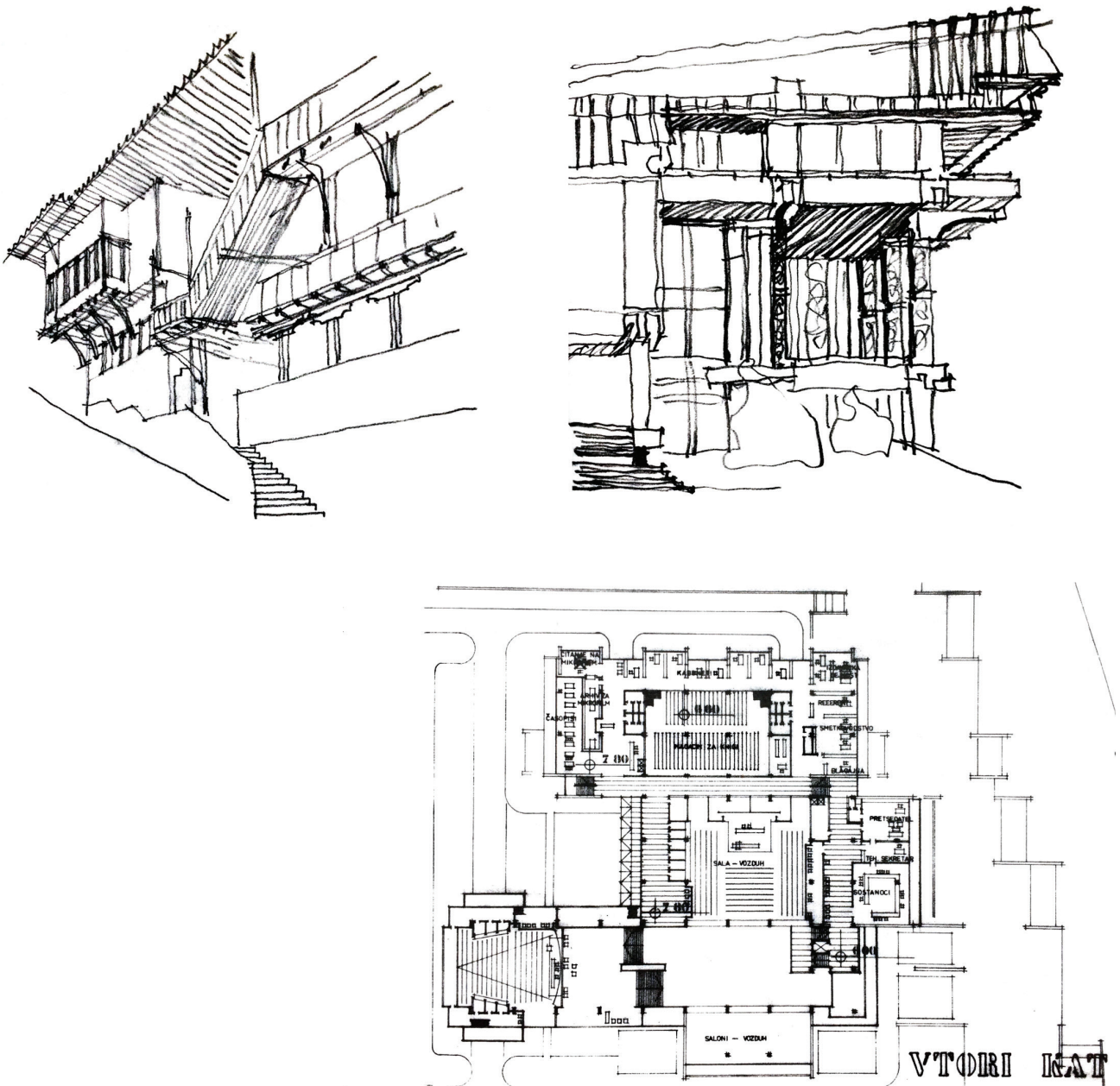
**Figure 5**

*Henrieta Delavrancea Villa Constantiniu in Balchik 1935.*

he had gleaned a lot from the encounters with the historical architecture [30] in Macedonia. The reference to the coalescence of volumes of the traditional house is evident in the external aspect of this representative public building for Modern Art. The plan of the ground floor is composed again around the central *sofa* hall which, gives access to the other spaces.

Thanks to the analysis of these examples, one can highlight the persistence in the modern architecture of the most important compositional elements of the traditional Rumelian house.

Based on these case studies: we find, over an ample territory and over national borders, the persistence of ample windows, overhanging rooms, modern reinterpretations of the *çardak* and, *divahane* spaces and the maintenance of an architecture with the main characteristic of the human scale.



**Figure 6**

*Comparison between the coalescence of volumes of the traditional Macedonian house and the elevation of MANU building in Skopje, 1976 by Boris Čipani. Below plan of the ground floor.*

## Conclusions

This paper fits and enhance the current debate giving an *architectural reason* to the so-called *regionality* of modernity in the Balkans. This research identifies the architectural basis of the process that Hartmuth (2006) defines “*the similar paths for emancipation from the Ottoman models in the Balkans*”. Indeed, the “Balkan City” did not discontinue its existence as a “common regional type” after the end of the Ottoman rule and produce analogous modern architectural languages. Based on this paper, I have demonstrated how the modern house concept, in the Balkans, cannot be defined as “Serbian”, “Bosnian”, “Greek” or “Romanian”: because this is something more complex, more regional, something permeated with a subtle sense of “*horizontal identities*” (E. ELDEM, et al. 1999) and is based on the same *type* of house. It is clear to me that in Turkey, Greece, Bosnia, Macedonia, Romania, as well as in the whole Balkans area in the XX century, thanks to the work of a group of architects, elements of ottoman housing persisted over a wide territory. Beyond nationalistic tendencies, these lands share what for architects is the primary reason for their work: the idea of home.

## Notes

- [1] The house type defined due to the dividing space (sofa) in the house plan.
- [2] Since the 1800s, many scholars have discussed the topic of type in architecture: For a first definition of type see Quatremere de Quincy (1825).
- [3] Eldem, S. H. (1954). *Türk Evi Plan Tipleri*, Istanbul: Istanbul Teknik University.
- [4] A. Ferlenga, Pikionis (1887-1968), Electa, Milano, 1999.
- [5] S. Bozdogan, et. al., Sedat Eldem: Architect in Turkey, Concept Media, Singapour, New York, NY 1987 (Architects in the Third World).
- [6] M. Drobnjaković, Z. Vuksanović-Macura, A. Spalević, J., Todorčić, Researching and Planning the Rural Space: the Work of Branislav Kojić, Journal of the Geographical Institute “Jovan Cvijić” SASA, Vol 67, No 2, 2017, 195-211.
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# IMPERSONAL CONSTANTS THE CONSTRUCTIVE LESSON IN PORTUGUESE ARCHITECTURE

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## COSTANTI IMPERSONALI LA LEZIONE COSTRUTTIVA NELL'ARCHITETTURA PORTOGHESE

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### Abstract

*The Inquerito sobre a arquitectura popular portuguesa, conducted since 1955 reflects on the identity of portuguese architecture investigating the character of anonymous architecture in the different regions. Fernando Távora observes the presence of a richness of the constructive lesson dictated by impersonal constants: the architecture is closely linked to the context, adapts to the orography, uses local materials and construction techniques, takes on simple spatial configurations thus expressing the essence of mediterranean building. Tradition is assumed by the portuguese architects as the foundation of the invention; tradition as a shared discipline that guides architectural design: the design attitude of mediterranean living. Dialogue with the existing leads to solutions that are mindful of traditional ones and strongly identifying.*

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*L' Inquerito sobre a arquitectura popular portuguesa, condotta a partire dal 1955 riflette sull'identità dell'architettura portoghese investigando il carattere dell'architettura anonima nelle varie regioni. Fernando Távora osserva la presenza di una ricchezza della lezione costruttiva dettata da costanti impersonali: l'architettura si lega strettamente al contesto, si adatta all'orografia, utilizza materiali e tecniche costruttive locali, assume configurazioni spaziali semplici esprimendo così l'essenza del costruire mediterraneo. La tradizione viene assunta dagli architetti portoghesi a fondamento dell'invenzione; tradizione come disciplina condivisa che guida la progettazione architettonica: attitudine progettuale dell'abitare mediterraneo. Il dialogo con l'esistente porta a soluzioni memori di quelle tradizionali e fortemente identitarie.*

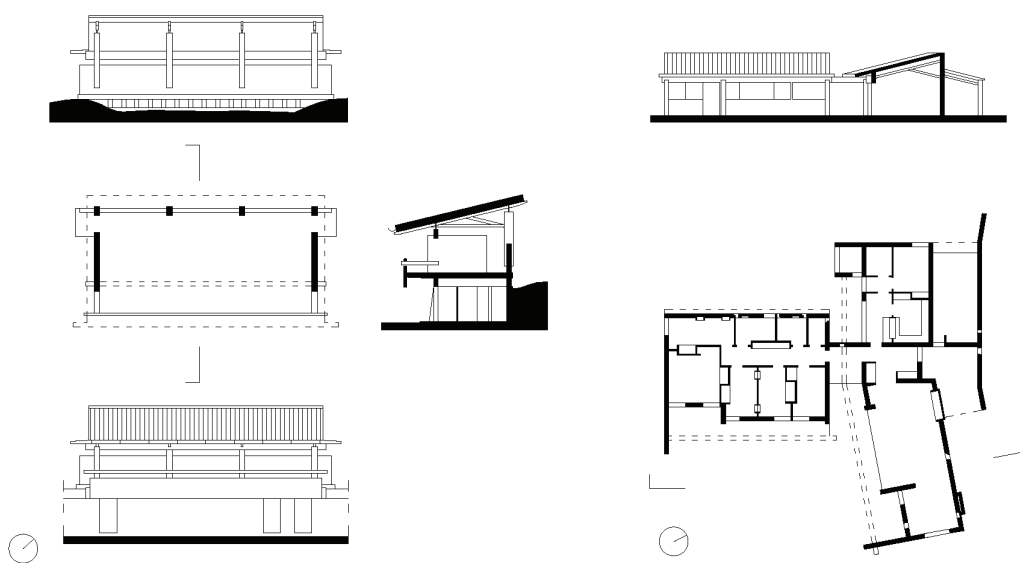
**Keywords:** Impersonal constants, constructive lesson, context, identity, tradition

## Introduction

*“What really interests us is to investigate, in each region, the ways in which the inhabitants have managed to solve the various problems that the climate, materials, economy and living conditions of the area have imposed on the buildings” [1].*

The *Inquerito sobre a arquitectura popular portuguesa*, conducted starting from 1955 under the guidance of Francisco Keil do Amaral, modelled on the 1936 work of Pagano and Daniel, reflects on the identity of portuguese architecture by providing for the cataloguing of the anonymous architectural heritage of entire national territory. Fernando Távora, strongly interested in traditional architecture, actively participates in the investigation by researching its character, sure of the fact that *“history has a value to the extent that it can solve the problems of the present, to the extent that it becomes an aid and not an obsession” [2].* Francisco Keil do Amaral argues for the non-existence of *“a portuguese architecture or a “portuguese house”. Between a Minhota village and a Monte Alentejano there are much deeper differences than those that distinguish certain portuguese architecture from greek architecture [...] We believe [...] that there are constants, subtle distinctive elements [...] something of the character of our people, revealed in the buildings they built, a component that is difficult to define with rigor ” [3].*

The research aimed to counter the traditionalist architecture propagated by the regime - which completely misunderstands the intentions of the architects and considers the research as a support - and reflect on modern architecture. Eight working groups deal with cataloguing the housing forms with photographs, reliefs and typological observations. Fernando Távora who deals with the study of the Minho region, observes the absence of a national character expressed by imitable language rules, but the presence of a richness of a constructive lesson dictated by impersonal constants. He identifies a method that, starting from the knowledge of traditional architecture, learns from its teachings and adapts them to contemporary needs. The architecture is closely linked to the context, in a broad sense, adapts to the orography, uses local materials and construction techniques, assumes simple spatial configurations, thus expressing the essence of mediterranean construction. As he states *“The popular house, duly studied, will provide us with great lessons, since that is the most functional and the least imaginative, it is in short, the one closest to the new intentions” [4].*



**Figure 1**

*Fernando Távora, Tennis Pavilion, Quinta da Conceição, Matosinhos \_scale 1:500*

*Fernando Távora, House in Ofir \_scale 1:500.*

## Materials and methods

Távora combines the research on traditional architecture with the participation in the culture of the Modern by identifying what is stated a “third way”, a design method based on tradition and coherence with the context, a method that Távora himself defines: *“a modern evolution of architecture founded on the identity of a tradition”* [5]. According to Távora *“modernity is manifested in the quality, in the appropriateness of the relationships between building and life. Since the conditions are different, the solutions will be different, but the nature of the relationships must be common. [...] The formal aspects according to which they manifest themselves are a direct consequence of the variety of environments and conditions of each order, but it is precisely the different formal aspects, in their diversity, that allow the deduction of that constant which is called modernity”* [6].

Portuguese architects consider architecture as a collective dimension in which tradition can be assumed as the foundation of invention. The attention to the context and its history owes a lot to the post-war Italian experiences with which Távora comes into contact during trips to Italy, the CIAM and international conferences. He observes how *“In great works there is much of a single person but also much of many others. And it is this much of many others - pasts and presents, in a subsequent assemblage - that gives to the work a more than individual character, a character, let's say, integral, because it is a conception of one, but based, founded, on the work of many and having as its purpose to serve the whole”* [7].

The planimetric articulation defined by the composition of simple volumes and sloped roofs adapts to the ground; traditional construction techniques leave room for reinforced concrete construction: the teaching of popular architecture permeates in the contemporary architecture. The roof as an element that envelops and defines the space represents the main element in the definition of some works such as the Tennis Pavilion in the Quinta da Conceição in Leça da Palmeira, Matosinhos, the House in Ofir, the tea house and restaurant Boa Nova in Leça da Palmeira, Matosinhos and the House Alves Costa in Moledo do Minho. The theme of traditional sloped roof architecture represents one of the fundamental compositional themes from which tavorian architecture develops, influencing Siza's early works. The articulation of the roof defines the various spaces, separates the inside from the outside and shields the strong sunlight by identifying pauses, thresholds and shelters in the permeability of their path. The buildings recline on the ground until stuck in it, the dialogue with the existing leads to solutions that are mindful of traditional ones and strongly identitary.



**Figure 2**  
*Fernando Távora, Tennis Pavilion,  
Quinta da Conceição a Leça da  
Palmeira, Matosinhos.*

## Results

### *Tennis Pavilion*

The Tennis Pavilion built by Távora in 1956 within the larger project of the Quinta do Conceição Municipal Park is defined by a sloping roof overlooking the playing fields. The constructive tradition of popular architecture is combined with that of the modern, the sloped roof defines the space by elevating the structure to a decorative element.

*“The problem arose of marking the park with a building, creating an object with presence, which would affirm the axis of the tennis courts and which would serve as a reference point” [8].*

The pavilion, taking advantage of the height difference of the ground, fits into it, becoming a focal point from below and a panoramic point from above. Due to its position, the rectangular pavilion is able to organize the space, transforming the steep terrain into a design value. A single sloped roof supported by a series of elements, pillars, septa, beams that bring to memory the traditional construction, rests on the volume against the ground facing the valley - like a terracing (stone wall). The use of modern techniques makes it possible to reduce the supports towards the valley from four to two, looking out the playgrounds framed by the large beam. The structure (wooden half-trusses, granite pillars, concrete beam, plastered septa) sincerely expresses the tectonic nature of the construction, in an elegant balance between the main elements and the elements brought that qualify and decorate the space in a simple but powerful way. There is the coexistence of tradition and modern, the free plan and compositional simplicity are combined with the constructive tradition. Different materials match together showing their structural role and the power of technique.



**Figure 3**

*Fernando Távora, Tennis Pavilion, Quinta da Conceição a Leça da Palmeira, Matosinhos.*

## House in Ofir

The popular tectonic constructive tradition of the sloping roof is combined with a continuous spatiality and a composition of the modern space in the House in Ofir (House dr. Ribeiro da Silva), built by Távora in 1958 on the north coast of Portugal. The holiday home is organized, in the plan composition, by parts: the sleeping area and the living area, in its turn consisting of a public area and a service area. The different volumes approach each other in an articulated way, adapting to the orography and context. The volume of the sleeping area, separated from the living area, is connected to it through the distribution space, of lower height and width, expressly declaring the compositional hierarchy between the elements. The living area rotates opening towards the landscape through a large window. The entrance to the building, therefore, takes place gradually, a covered area and the actual entrance, then directly connected with the living area, the corridor of the sleeping area, with the kitchen area and with the outside.

The space, in the simplicity of the plan composition, is articulated by defining itself through the roof, in fact, is this one, that has a traditional character and is composed of wooden half-trusses (similar to Tennis Pavilion ones) and sloping flaps, that gives continuity. Resting on the plant it defines intermediate spaces, such as the loggia of the living area, that of the kitchen and that of the entrance. The compression of the roof directs the gaze to the landscape and the light. The relationship between inside and outside is continuous but reserved, in fact the building appears closed towards the street and open towards the garden.

The construction tradition of the tiled roof with wooden half-trusses and the load-bearing walls in granite are combined with a spatiality, which although in the compositional simplicity, it appears articulated and continuous adapting itself to the context with which it establishes a clear relationship of closure-opening.

The functional division of the modern is combined with the popular construction tradition in the roof element that envelops the space giving continuity, accentuated in turn by the covering of the intrados in Omenilite (influence of Alvar Aalto's architecture).

The entrance/lobby is no longer just a technical or connecting element but becomes a space that keeps the other areas in tension. The articulation of the volumes and the overall shape, in fact, is not an aesthetic question but an adaptation to the place and the way of living spaces, internal, external and intermediate.



**Figure 4**  
*Fernando Távora, Tennis Pavilion,  
Quinta da Conceição a Leça da  
Palmeira, Matosinhos.*

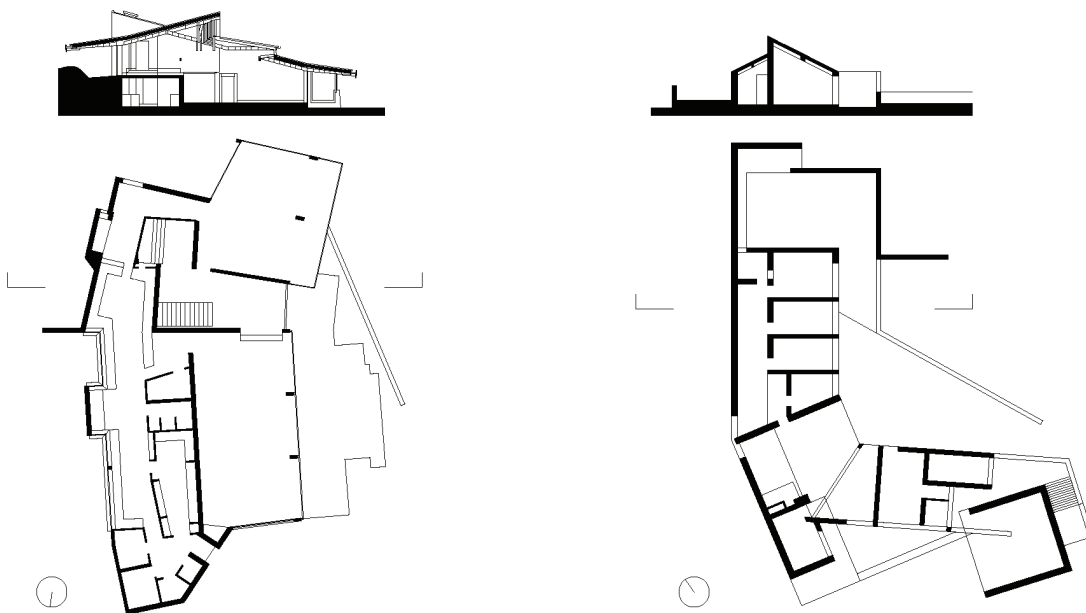
## Tea house and restaurant Boa Nova

In the tea house and restaurant Boa Nova (1958-1963) by Távora and Álvaro Siza in Leça de Palmeira, the roof is the element that identifies the building and at the same time defines the interior space; there is the reinterpretation and updating of traditional portuguese techniques in relation to a continuous spatiality underlined by the wooden cladding. The large roof with staggered flaps of tiles is supported by concrete elements facing the sea and by plastered partitions towards the shore. The restaurant is in an acropolic position on the rocky boulders overlooking the Ocean, adapting to the slope and nestling in it.

The narrative sequence proceeds along a path that starts from the outside, crosses the building and then reopens onto the landscape. The initial protagonist is the horizon that can be seen above the external flight of steps lying on the cliff, walking along it opens up the view of the entire coast, and then find the building wedged between the rocks; it is the sloped roof, which defines a large shadow, to suggest the entrance to the upper level of the building. Upon entering, the contact with the till now immanent landscape is cancelled, the wood fragments the view. The entrance is a small compressed space that produces tension and induces the visitor to continue further downstairs where the large windows reveal the landscape again, this time framed by the roof itself. The entrance/hall/stairs is a space that in itself expresses the narrative character of the building and connects all the rooms.

The basis of the design is the model of a popular architecture that articulates its plans according to practical needs, defining a continuous spatiality. Although the use of traditional construction techniques is progressively abandoned, what remains is the teaching of popular culture. The closing of the building towards the coast and its opening towards the landscape makes it similar to the House in Ofir, like the sheltered entrance, covered and hidden in the shade and like the proceeding inside the building towards the light and the landscape. It is the roof that bends to capture the light, to compress the space and then open onto the Ocean.

In *Controspazio* Vittorio Gregotti, describing the nearby Marés swimming pool by Siza, underlines how the project is closely related to the place, “*to its ties, its adjacencies, the sequence of events that lead to that experience, to the memory of previous experiences*” [9]. The building in imposing a modification of the context strengthens it as an identity expression of the place.



**Figure 5**

Fernando Távora, Álvaro Siza, tea house and restaurant Boa Nova, a Leça da Palmeira, Matosinhos \_scale 1:500.

## House Alves Costa

*“The notion, so often forgotten, of a space that separates and binds forms, but forms itself, is a fundamental notion, because it allows us to become fully aware of how isolated forms do not exist and how a relationship always exists” [10].*

The attention to the composition of the space in its form and perception characterizes Siza's architecture; in House Alves Costa in Moledo do Minho (1964-1971) the small rooms, built around the inhabitants and family habits, relate to the context. This house marks an important step in Siza's research: the construction techniques look to tradition, but the continuous spatiality takes on an almost plastic character. The main volume is articulated by bending to embrace the internal garden overlooked by all the rooms. In the rotation, the volume breaks up and stretches, defining the entrance to the house. The planimetric articulation thus defines a series of irregular courtyards on which the rooms overlook, always seeking a high degree of intimacy (the bedrooms and the living area overlook a courtyard, the entrance overlook another and the servants' room overlook still another). The internal space is accompanied in its continuity by the roof that folds towards the garden compressing the space towards the light, the flap in fact follows the trend of the plant welcoming, under a single element, all the spaces. The entrance and corridor of the bedrooms are instead covered by another flap inclined towards the street, of lower height, to hierarchically denounce its function as a serving space. The space of the living area holds together the various elements of the composition, becoming the fulcrum of the house and the pivot around which, the various elements revolve (cp. House in Ofir and tea house and restaurant Boa Nova).

The relationship with the context is measured in the adaptation to the orography and the views, the building closes almost completely towards the outside, even the entrance is hidden, and then opens in a measured way towards the garden, thus establishing a constant visual relationship with the context from inside the house.

The overall shape and planimetric articulation are the result of the composition of the interior and exterior spaces according to the life that will take place there. The building establishes a close relationship with the place *“the result of a (difficult conquest), [...] conducted with two different and convincing strategies: an immediate intuition of the right location of the building and the patient construction of a system of relationships between what is being planned and what exists, in an alternation of domination and subjection, of interpretation reinvention” [11].*



**Figure 6**  
*Álvaro Siza, House Alves Costa,*  
*Moledo do Milho \_scale 1:500.*

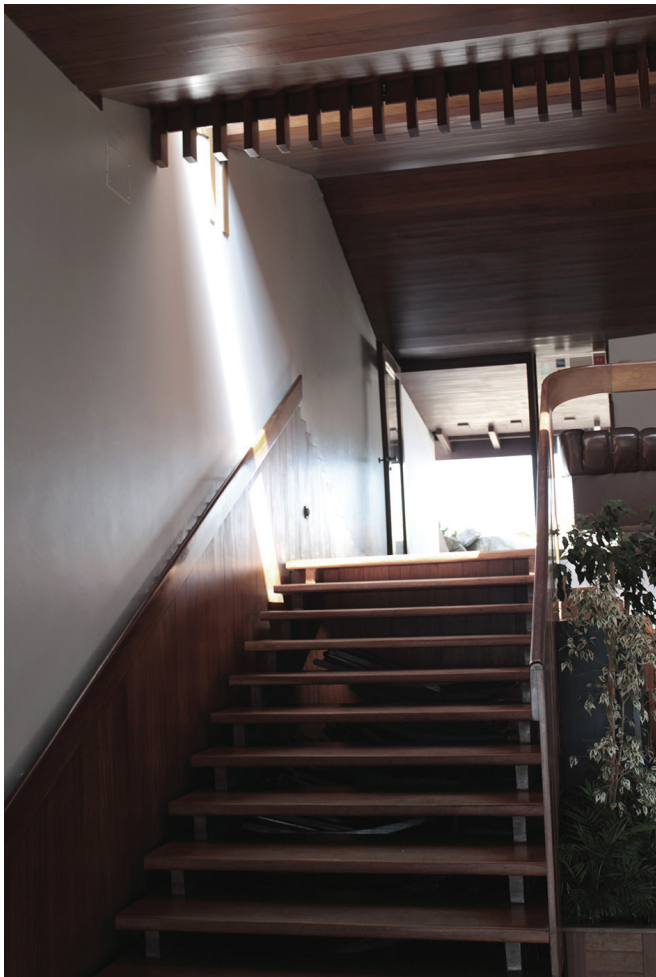
## Discussion

The sloped roof theme, typical of traditional architecture, finds different declinations, highlighting a design attitude that, regardless of the form itself, is linked to the context in which it is inserted. All the works, considering the place, the construction tradition and the culture from time to time, adapt to the context in the planimetric articulation, in the sequence of spaces, in the proportions, in the views despite the difference of language.

A compositive volumetric simplicity is observed, closely linked to the construction and its techniques. Simplicity that is combined with the adaptation to the place, the orography, the materials and the colours. Knowledge of the place and the right location of the building in it. Constant relationship between building and context, between inside and outside which translates into closure and opening to and from the landscape.

The continuous spatiality that characterizes these works goes beyond popular tradition by defining other solutions, where the serving rooms (atrium/entrance/corridor) are transformed into spaces around which the whole composition revolves. The continuity is in turn underlined by the roof, often covered with a single material, (like the aaltian works) that projects or bends to screen or capture light and landscape, compresses and decompresses to define different spatialities.

Távora's teaching through Siza first and Eduardo Souto De Moura then, is found in many Portuguese architects; the attention to the context, understood in a broad sense to the materials, to the construction techniques, and above all to the space, represent the essence of the method which is difficult to codify a priori. It is not the forms or the language itself; think for example of Souto de Moura's architecture



**Figure 7**

*Fernando Távora, Álvaro Siza, tea house and restaurant Boa Nova, a Leça da Palmeira, Matosinhos.*

mainly composed of regular volumes, lexically very different from Távora's works but in the same way very similar, there is the same attention to the right placement of the building in the context and to the adaptation to the orography. In the House in Serra d'Arabida in Setubal (1994-2002) the volumes, that make up the house, fit into the steeply sloping ground, defining differentiated views of the surrounding nature. The house in Moledo do Minho (1991-1998) (not far from the Alves Costa di Siza house but located on the slope) reinterprets a theme always belonging to tradition, the terracing: a sequence of straight walls mark the slope where the last step is the house. There is continuity in the design attitude of simple elements that conform in and with the context.

## Conclusions

*"Always being me, always being circumstantial, always equal to myself and always different according to the circumstance - a kind of definition of tradition according to António Sardinha - 'tradition = permanence in continuity'" [12].*

Tradition which as Rogers (cp. Rogers, 1997) states is the coexistence of experiences: validation of permanent emergencies and energy of mutations. Experiences that, in relation to each other, establish in the historical process *"continuity or crisis depending on whether you want to accentuate permanence rather than emergencies [...] the concept of continuity implies that of mutation in the order of tradition"* [13].

In the sense conferred by Rogers, there is continuity in portuguese architecture, which, from popular tradition, learns the teachings and takes them on in modern architecture. This leads to the definition of a simple architecture, that identify and express the character of the place. Attitude that belongs to mediterranean cultures and to the simple constructions of Italy, studied by Pagano and Daniel in 1936, strongly expressive of the adherence to reality - climate, agricultural economy and known construction techniques - (cp. Daniel, Pagano, 1936).

Already in 1837 John Ruskin with reference to the italian rural house, exalted its simplicity of form: *"And this is perhaps the main attribute for which the italian rural house reaches the grandeur of character [...] there is in its air a general dignity, which harmonizes beautifully with the nobility of the neighbouring buildings and with the glory of the surrounding landscape"* [14].

Simplicity that is closely linked to constructive sincerity, practical needs and real possibilities,



**Figure 8**

*Fernando Távora, Álvaro Siza, tea house and restaurant Boa Nova, a Leça da Palmeira, Matosinhos.*

independent of aesthetics and shaped around the daily habits of life and work, “*but it is not free from external causes. It is linked to the geological, climatic, agricultural and economic conditions of the environment*” [15].

Conditions that can be summarized in the concept of context from which mediterranean and portuguese architecture cannot ignore in the definition of the project, which over time can vary the forms, the construction techniques, the language while maintaining the design attitude unchanged in the definition of organized spaces as needed. Constants of making architecture, defined by Távora as impersonal, which belong neither to the designer nor to a style but to the place, to the inhabitants, to the traditions, to the customs and to the needs.

*“Nobody can deny the persistence of the phenomenon: in Architecture it is the elementary hut of the savage or the refined Parthenon, in Urban Planning the incipient agglomeration of buildings or the complex metropolis. Different in volume, in shape, in degree of delicacy, but united by the manifestation of a common need to organize space. [...] Universality of the phenomenon, permanent and incalculable variety in the achievements”* [16].

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# VILLA LATINA

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# VILLA LATINA

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## Abstract

*The Milanese architect Piero Bottoni, on the occasion of an architectural competition held for the IV Esposizione Triennale Internazionale delle Arti Decorative e Industriali Moderne di Monza in 1930, designed Villa Latina, a private residence conceived for the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea. The article is a critical reading of this youthful project, which for Bottoni's work and for the spread within the Italian architectural culture of the theme and myth of 'Mediterraneanness' is one of the first and most important contributions.*

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*L'architetto milanese Piero Bottoni, in occasione di un concorso indetto della IV Esposizione Triennale Internazionale delle Arti Decorative e Industriali Moderne di Monza del 1930, progetta Villa Latina, una residenza privata pensata per la costa del Mar Tirreno. L'articolo è una lettura critica di questo progetto giovanile che per l'opera di Bottoni e per il futuro diffondersi all'interno della cultura architettonica italiana del tema e del mito della 'mediterraneità' applicata alla nuova architettura razionale rappresenta uno dei primi e più importanti contributi.*

**Keywords:** Architecture, Rationalism, Mediterranean Sea, Piero Bottoni, Villa Latina

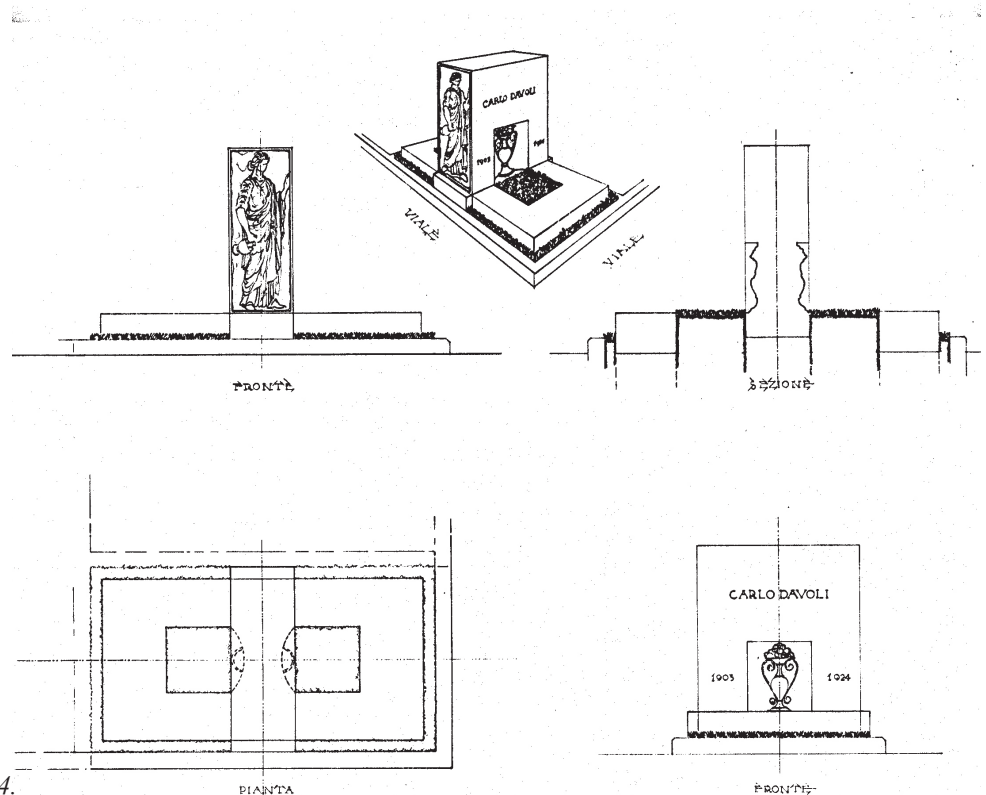
## Introduction

Piero Bottoni is one of the major representatives of Italian Rationalism, and a leading figure in the reconstruction and critical revision of Modernism.

He graduated in architecture at the Milan Polytechnic in 1926, he participated in the First Italian Exhibition of Rational Architecture in 1928 with a series of watercolours entitled *Architectural Cromatisms* that brought the acclaim of Le Corbusier. Around the same time he was one of the founders of the Italian Movement for Rational Architecture (MIAR) along with people like Adalberto Libera, Mario Ridolfi, Luigi Figini, Gino Pollini, Ignazio Gardella, Giuseppe Pagano and Giuseppe Terragni. From 1930, he was a member and delegate of the CIAM and throughout his career played a leading role in the national panorama of Italian town planning and architecture.

Piero Bottoni was one of the first among the promulgators and one of the first among the critics of the modern movement, two conditions that at the same time are two seemingly irreconcilable roles that Piero Bottoni held thanks to his moral yet not dogmatic adherence to the principles introduced by modernism. In fact, from the beginning, his stance was always quite deaf “to the cries of the strapaesan fanatics” and much more sensitive to a congenital “Mediterraneanism, intended in the spirit, and not in the forms or in the folklore” [1].

The first project by Piero Bottoni dates back to 1924. He was still a young student at the Polytechnic of Milan when his friend Carlo Davoli passed away and Bottoni dedicated the drawing of a tomb to him. In retrospect, this debut project allows us to see an extreme synthesis of the essence of many architectures by the Milanese architect. For his friend and high school classmate, Bottoni thought of a tombstone in the centre of a rectangular base, a parallelepiped whose thick sides are inhabited by a draped figure in bas-relief, while the two symmetrical facades, in the lower part in contact with the base, hold two central niches bearing the bas-relief of an amphora.

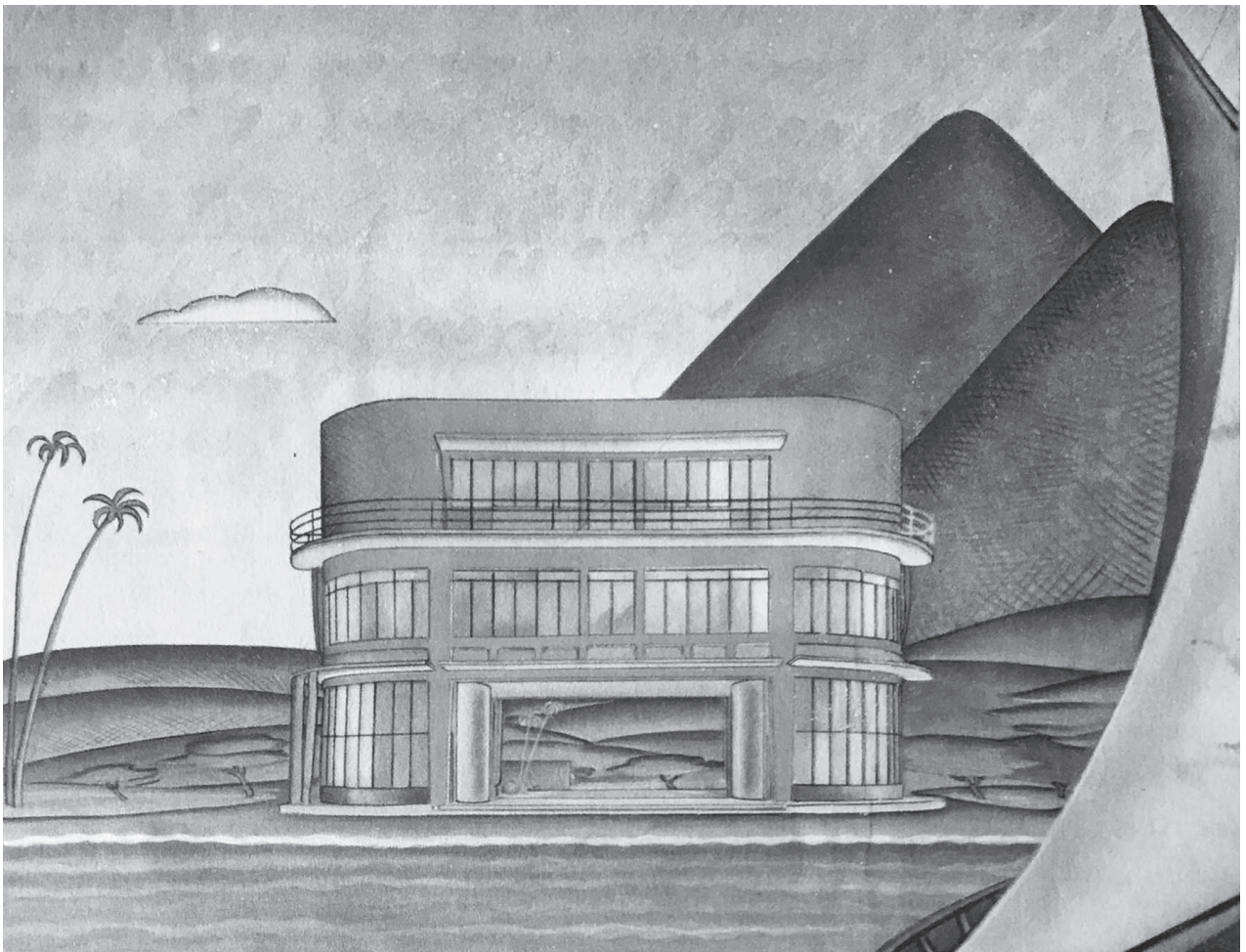


**Figure 1**  
*Tomb of Carlo Davoli, 1924.*

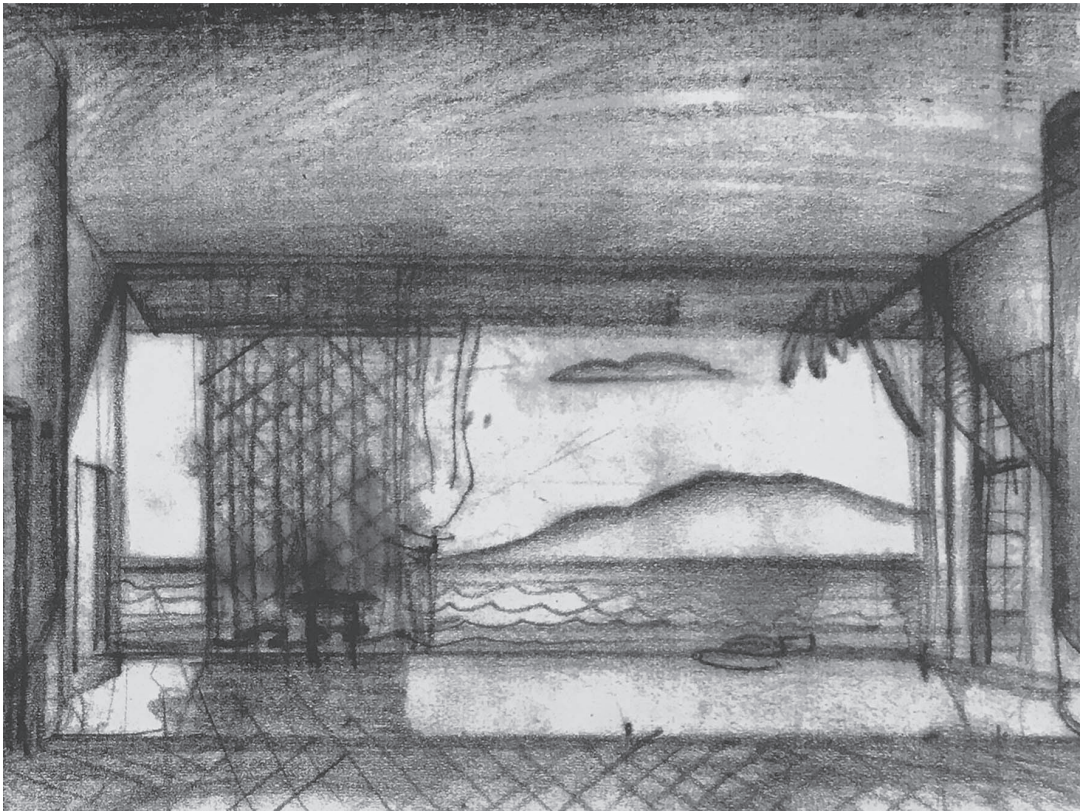
On the occasion of the IV Esposizione Triennale Internazionale delle Arti Decorative e Industriali Moderne di Monza, in 1930, a national architectural competition was launched for the design of a “villa moderna per l’abitazione di una famiglia, escludendo gli estremi della villetta economica e della villa sontuosa, lasciando libere, entro ragionevoli limiti, l’ampiezza e la destinazione” [2]. There were many participants besides Piero Bottoni: Franco Albini, Giuseppe Pagano, Gio Ponti, Piero Portaluppi, Mario Ridolfi, Alberto Sartoris... Bottoni presented the project of a villa by the sea, and his proposal, together with a few others, was part of the fringe of the new architecture within a large number of projects still in the twentieth century style.

## Discussion

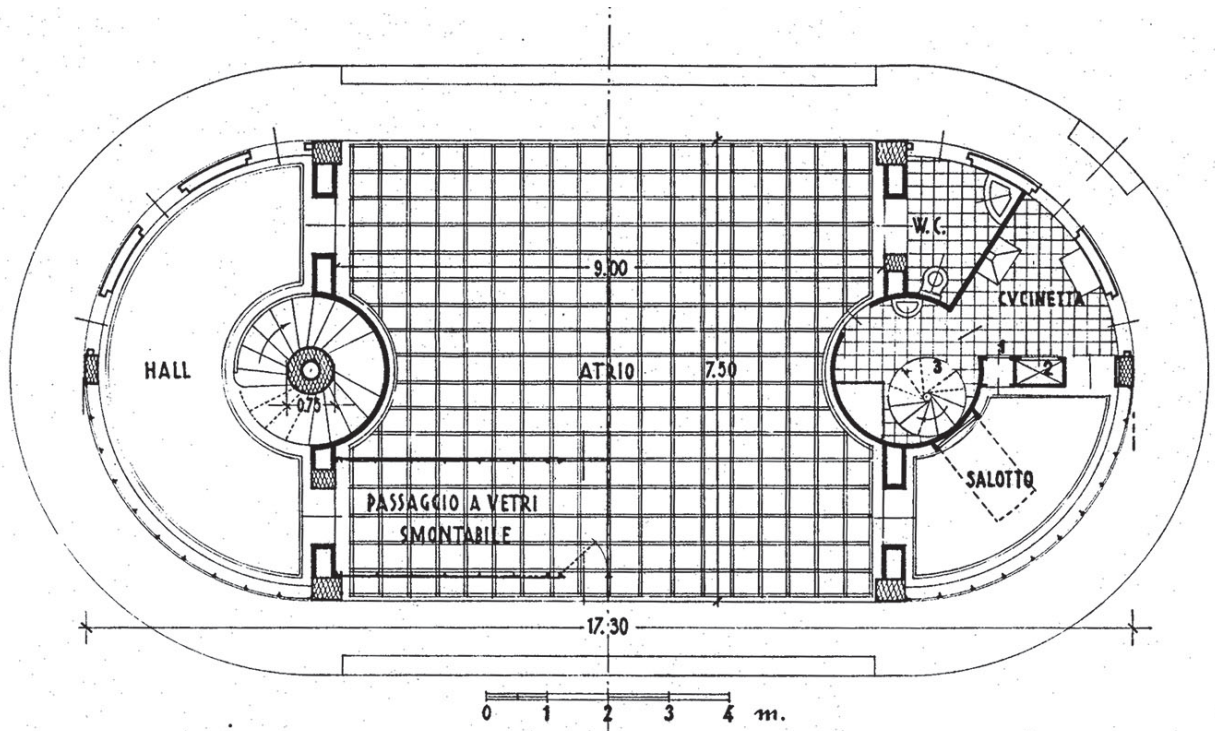
The title of the work, *Villa Latina*, and the first part of the project report, is a very clear declaration of intent: “This villa wants to reclaim, from the spirit of Latin constructions the balance of the volumes, from the outdoor life customs of the Mediterranean peoples, the loggias, the atria and terraces, from the houses of the Tyrrhenian coast the colour, from the technical possibility that belongs only to today and its structure. It rises in a garden, on the edge of a pine forest by the sea. It does not block off the landscape but is crossed by it” [3].



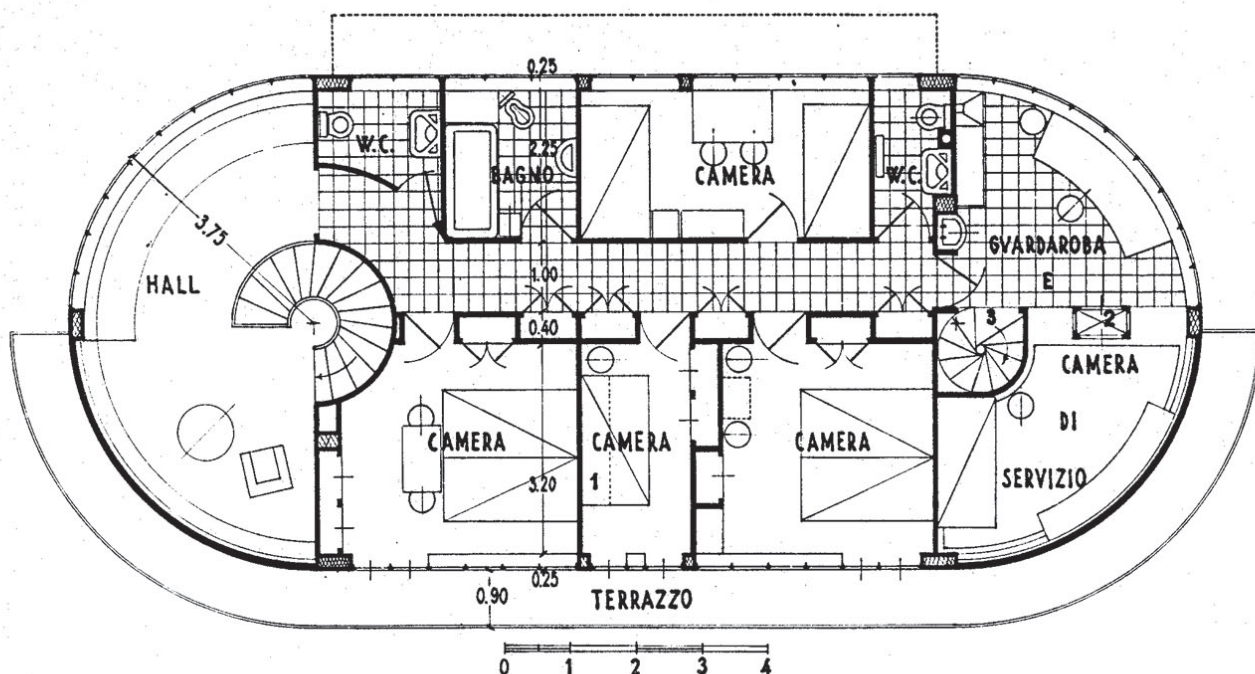
**Figure 2**  
*Villa Latina, 1929-1930. External view.*



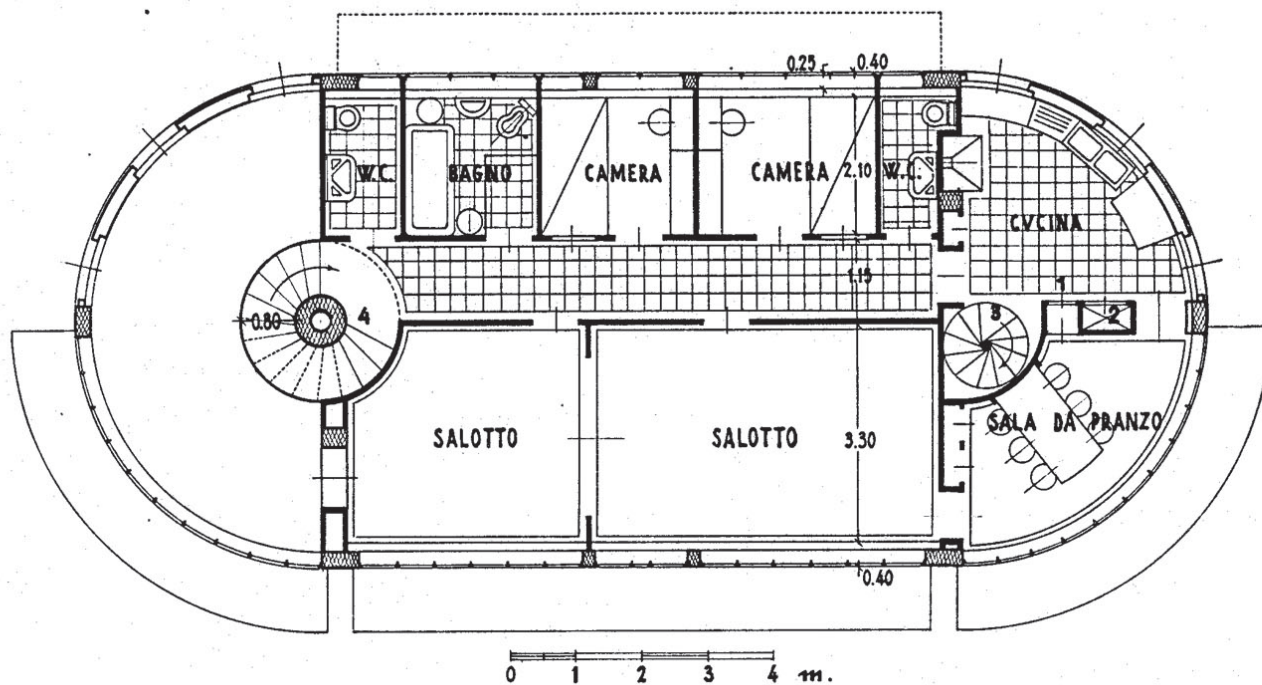
**Figure 3**  
*Villa Latina, 1929-1930. The view from the loggia.*



**Figure 4**  
*Villa Latina, 1929-1930. Ground floor.*



**Figure 5**  
*Villa Latina, 1929-1930. First floor.*



**Figure 6**  
*Villa Latina, 1929-1930. Second floor.*

It seems that Bottoni does not want to invent anything, he openly stated four sources: Roman constructions for the volumes, Mediterranean domestic architecture for “the loggias, the atria and terraces”, local architecture for the colours, and contemporary technology for the construction techniques.

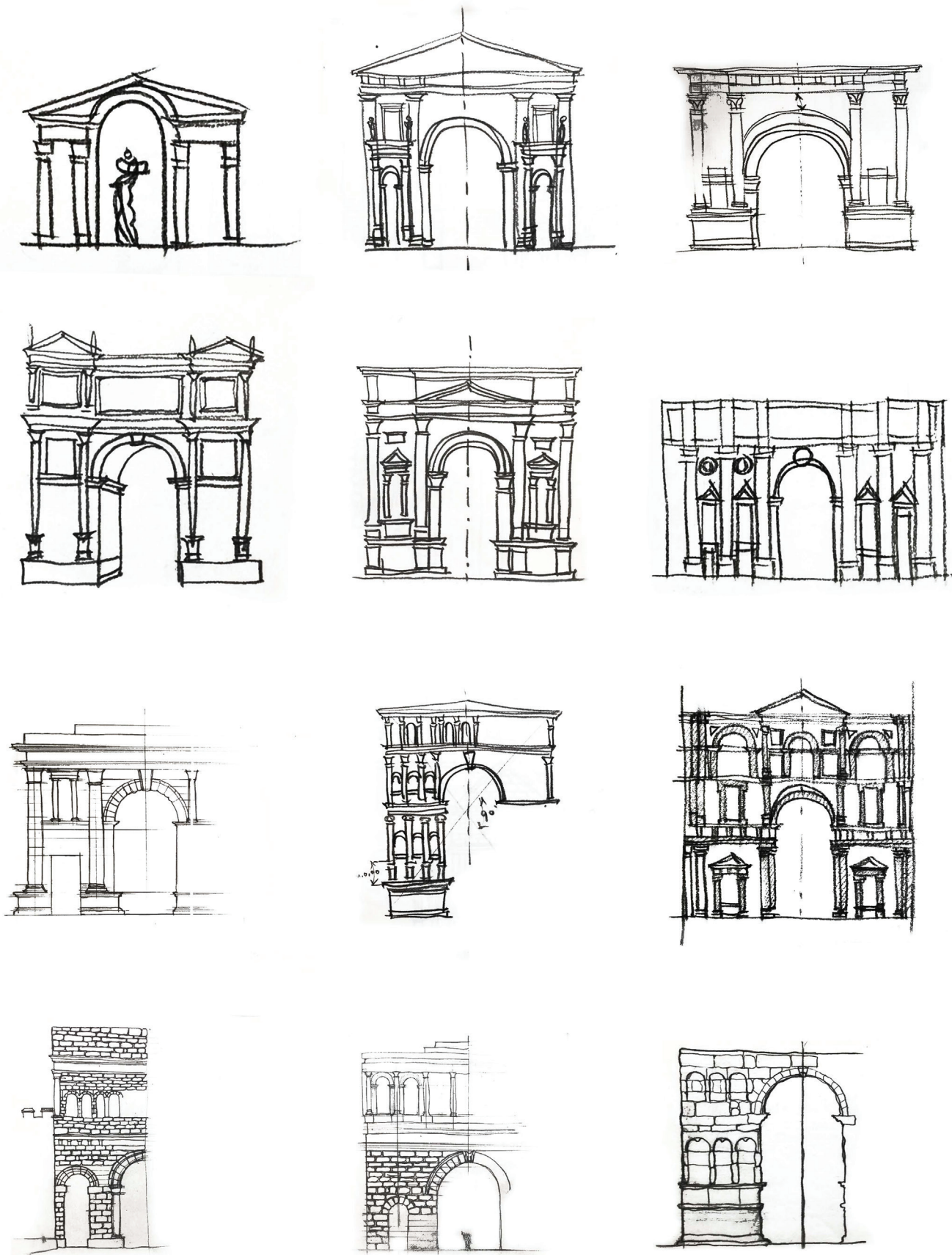
The idea of a “modern villa”, which belongs to its time, is developed from a search for continuity with the classical and rural architecture of the past and with a strong desire to be rooted in its cultural and physical setting.

In fact, it is the physical setting that determines the design of *Villa Latina*, which creates and comes alive in the central loggia on the ground floor. In the atrium, “the sea” and “the mountain” stand personified as the inhabitants of the Villa themselves, chosen companions -by man and for man- that pass through the architecture and at the same time are framed by it.

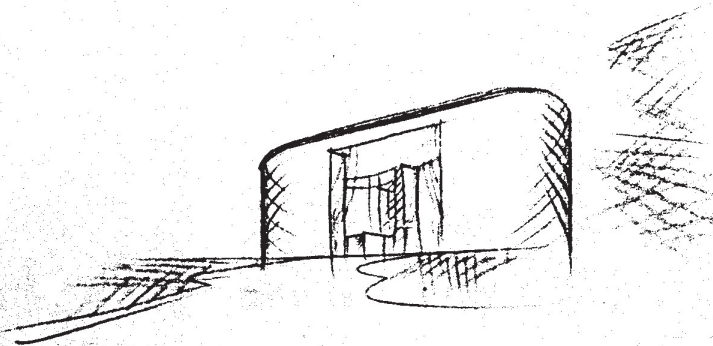
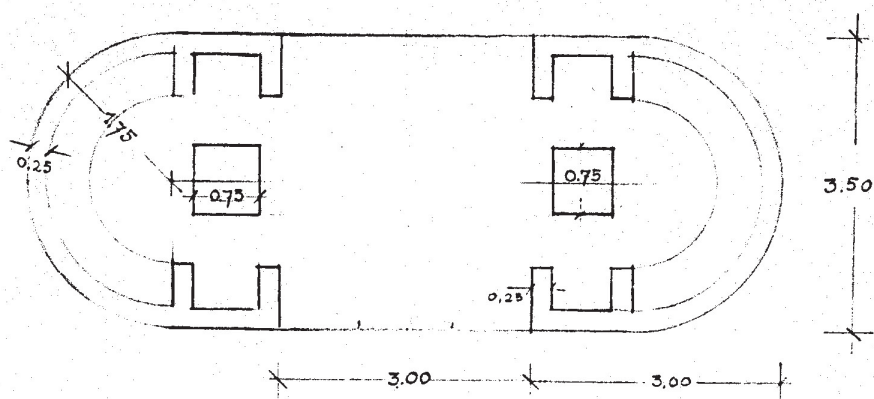
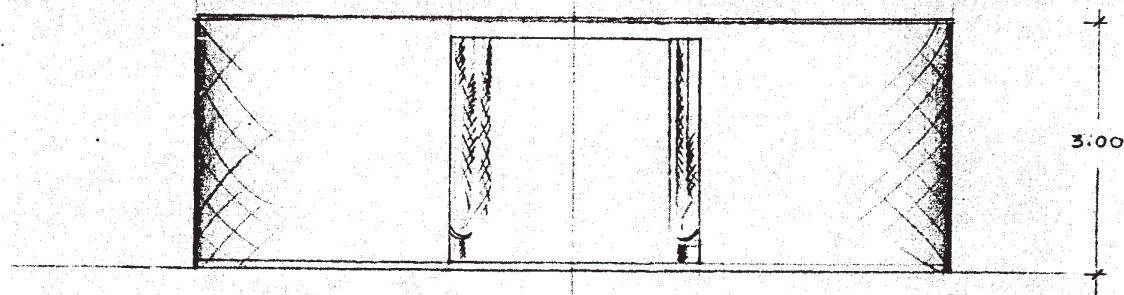
“At the edge of a pine forest by the sea” is a precise indication that expresses the precise desire for a positioning that strengthens the bipartition of the natural presence in a front and a back, one Sea and one Land, with respect to which the Villa constitutes the ‘pivot’. The atrium of *Villa Latina* is a “threshold between the sea and the pine forest”, a threshold from which “the whole building appears to have been generated” [4]. Precisely this void, this Mediterranean loggia inside the body of the building itself, seems to contain the essence of the building: the desire for a strong link between the internal and external space, between man, architecture and place.

Based on these observations and the author’s declared intention of recovering the Latin “balance of the volumes”, it is possible to hypothesise that the architectural type of the triumphal arch could represent a precise reference. The numerous drawings of arches and city gates that abound in the notebooks of the young Bottoni (and in which a first sketch of the Villa appears) are very significant for this hypothesis.

That the volumetric result of *Villa Latina* is not the result of some sort of occasional creativity, but rather a step along a precise research path, is demonstrated also by the contemporary designs of the pavilions for the Indanthren company, from the study of another *Villa by the Sea* and especially from the drawings for an *Hotel by the Sea*. Furthermore, some of Bottoni’s posthumous statements also seem to confirm these interpretations: “Ricordo i manifesti del Gruppo 7, in cui questo problema [della tradizione] era chiaramente indicato, anche se non se ne dava una soluzione. Allora si parlava di tradizione mediterranea e si cercavano nell’architettura del passato analogie di forma con l’architettura moderna, con l’ansia di trovare un collegamento non accademico col passato” [5].



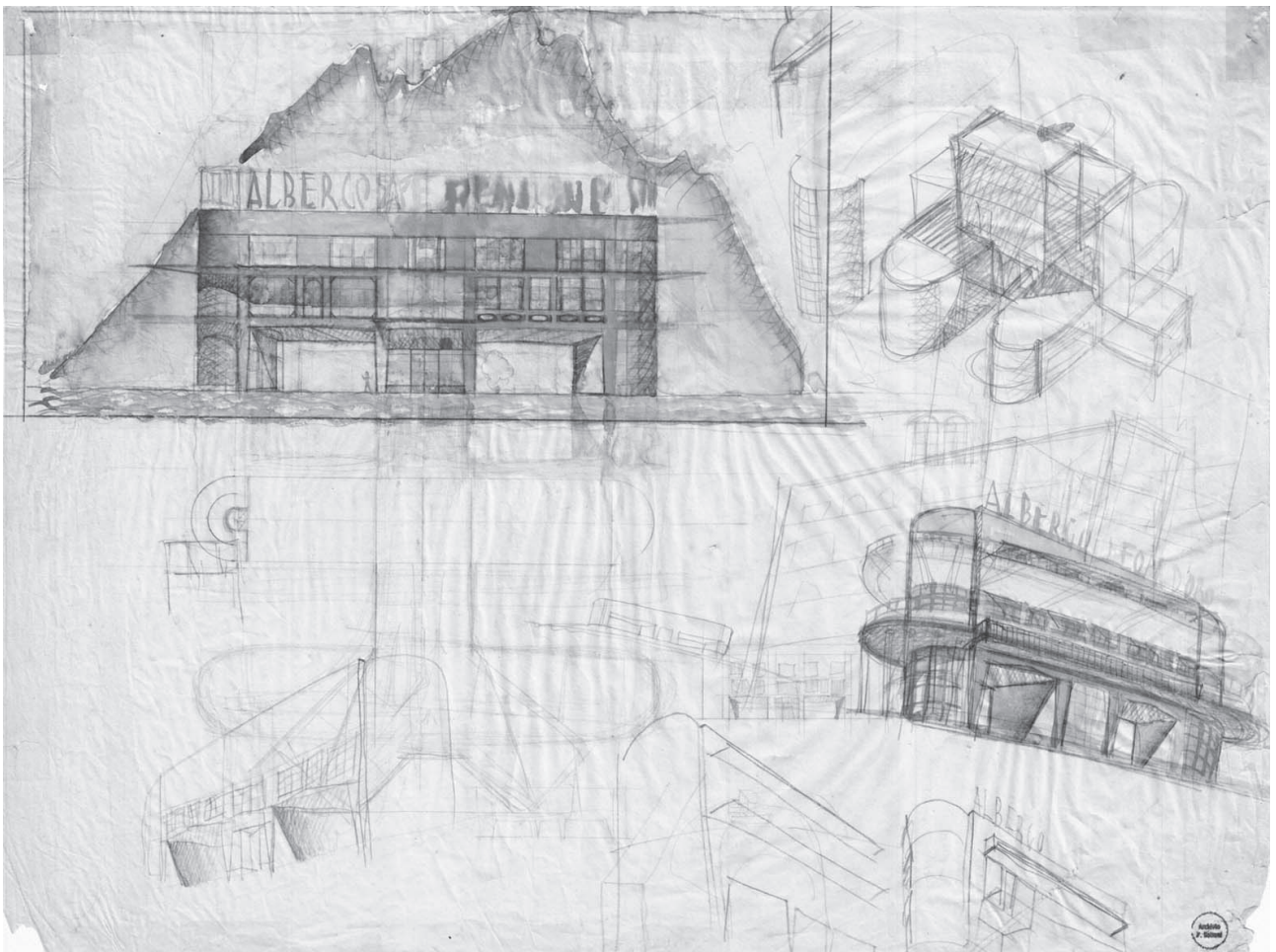
**Figure 7**  
*Drawings from notebooks of the young Bramante.*



1523

1:50

**Figure 8**  
*Pavilions for the Indanthren company, 1929-1930.*



**Figure 9**

*Project for a Hotel by the Sea, 1929 ca.*

Truth is that the word “Mediterranean” does not appear in any of texts of Gruppo 7, nor in *Vers une architecture* by Le Corbusier; and only from the years 1929-1930 to 1933 did the concept and the myth of ‘Mediterraneaness’ become more and more widespread within the Italian architectural debate, and in this, the *Villa Latina* was certainly one of the first and most important contributions. Compared, for example, to the *Casa Elettrica* by Gruppo 7, designed for the same Triennale, it is clear that the *Villa Latina* demonstrates that it was tackling the theme of ‘Mediterraneaness’ with much more conviction and awareness.

Furthermore, *Villa Latina* seems to refer to a plurality of projects that were undoubtedly known at the time, for example the *Alberghetto di mezza montagna* by Adalberto Libera, the *Factory and Office Building* by Gropius designed for the 1914 Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne (of which there are several sketches in the early notebooks of Bottoni), *Villa Vaucresson* by Le Corbusier and also *Villa Verdier* by Adolf Loos.

Bottoni seems to look around himself in time and space without distinction, from the humblest architecture of the Mediterranean to the great examples of classicism, including the new international architecture; he is devoid of immature pride and convinced of the need to find a ‘common language’. Notwithstanding Bottoni does not want to make of all this a formal issue but a matter of spirit’, the facade’s solution, the strongly geometric approach of the volume, as well as the rigidity of a quite immature development of the plans, demonstrate how the project of *Villa Latina* is still anchored to a bitter reception of the new European modernist influences. Nevertheless words and drawings

of the young architect strongly transcend the ‘arid’ architecture of certain international exhibitions, aiming straight at what really seems to count: “giving a moral ease to our life itself and a safe, lasting hospitality to our spirit and sensibilities, so that culture and experience have nobly enriched us”, as Gio Ponti wrote in the introduction to the catalogue of the competition.

## Conclusion

In the end, *Villa Latina*’s deepest and most direct link seems to be with the very first project of Bottoni’s career: the tomb designed for Carlo Davoli in 1924. Where the tombstone rises symmetrically with its two niches facing the base to form a ‘threshold’ between two worlds, here the open loggia on the ground floor that makes the villa as one big ‘threshold’ between the Mediterranean and the mainland. In the end, *Villa Latina* is the conception of a void that the landscape can cut across, it possesses the archetypal strength of the ancient temples of Janus Bifrons: one face facing the sea, the other the mountains. In its ‘cell’, namely in its Mediterranean loggia, namely a meeting place between earth, water and man, burns the flame for which this architecture was formed, and which ignited in Bottoni a sensitivity that would accompany him throughout all his life.

**All the images are by kind concession of Archivio Piero Bottoni, Dastu, Politecnico di Milano.**

## Notes

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# THE UNEXPECTED MEDITERRANEAN. THE THEATRE OF OLBIA BY GIOVANNI MICHELUCCI.

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## MEDITERRANEITA' INATTESA. IL TEATRO DI OLBIA DI GIOVANNI MICHELUCCI

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### Abstract

*The Mediterranean character in architecture is an approach where place and architecture come face to face and give rise to an entity that synthesizes the characteristics of one and the themes of the other. The creative trajectory undertaken by Giovanni Michelucci to design his last work, the Olbia Theatre in Sardinia, is emblematic of an adherence to the Mediterranean character in architecture. The rocks, the sea, the vegetation, the sun and the wind merge with the needs of the theatre, giving rise to solutions that integrate the elements involved.*

*The design trajectory of the Tuscan maestro here succeeds in condensing the facets of his expressive development. Variability, community, interpretation of nature, organicity, happiness and collective response are the aspects of his thinking best encapsulated in this conceptual approach.*

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*La mediterraneità in architettura è un approccio per cui luogo e architettura si confrontano dando origine ad un'entità che riassume in sé i caratteri dell'uno e i temi dell'altra. Il percorso ideativo che Giovanni Michelucci compie per progettare la sua ultima opera, il Teatro di Olbia in Sardegna, si mostra come emblematica espressione di adesione alla mediterraneità. Le rocce, il mare, la vegetazione, il sole e il vento, si fondono alle necessità tipologiche del teatro dando origine a soluzioni che mettono a sistema gli elementi coinvolti. Il percorso progettuale del Maestro toscano, riesce qui a condensare i punti della sua parabola espressiva. Variabilità, comunità, interpretazione della natura, organicità, felicità, coralità, sono gli estremi del suo pensiero progettuale che si concretizzano al meglio in questo percorso ideativo.*

**Keywords:** Michelucci, theatre, Olbia, the Mediterranean, interpretation

## Introduction

The Mediterranean is an ancient womb where numerous histories and cultures have taken shape and been lost.

It is a ring of land with the sea at its centre, the focal point around which differences among three continents circle in their histories and narratives, moving to the rhythm of antinomies arising from the coexistence of transversality and sectoriality, of inclusion and exclusion, of connections and closures, over time giving life to a kaleidoscopic horizon of meaning.

By virtue of its role as a crossroads of possibility, where exchange, migration, reciprocity, but also opposition, are privileged, it would seem problematic to speak of its identity if not as the simultaneity of situations, ties and relationships capable of creating a variegated narrative koine. Only by reason of this evident complexity does it seem appropriate to define the notion of the Mediterranean character in architecture, to be understood as the underlying heritage in design that, based on common assumptions, adapts to the different specificities of place.

The Mediterranean character in architecture is, therefore, something more than mere nuance, just as it certainly is something much broader than a single dominant trait. The trigger for this quality can be traced back to the eighteenth-century rediscovery of Greek mythology brought about by archaeology. This discovery, subsequently given form in design by that architect-traveller Karl Friedrich Schinkel, seemed to anticipate - in a language that is still rigorous and measured to this day - certain characteristics of this approach that more than a century later would be called *organic*, with landscape becoming a true “brick” in the architecture.

From this moment on, numerous other architects would go in search of the eternal principles underlying classicism, subsequently adapting them to interactions with the light of the sun, colour, material as well as with island landscape archetypes, above all the Italian, which was often taken as a model for its picturesque authenticity. Numerous is the group that from John Ruskin, Josef Hoffmann and Joseph Maria Olbrich leads to Gunnar Asplund and Adolf Loos, that from Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier leads to the Italian and primarily local architects Giò Ponti and Bernard Rudofsky, Raffaello Fagnoni and Adalberto Libera, all of whom were engaged in the search for a language expressive of a true Mediterranean myth.

The Mediterranean character in architecture, considering the works of such maestros, is, upon closer inspection, a quality capable of dismantling customary design approaches based on a set of elements and stylistic features that constitute technical and formal practice, instead evolving in favour of the temper and tenor of a composite approach that is viscerally suited to its environment; which is to say, an architecture born out of a place for a place, fusing with its context in a reciprocity that is not only ideal but often also physical, giving rise to a communion between architecture and its surroundings - until then of secondary importance or altogether new - to an architecture composed of built works mainly conceived in a canonical relationship between form and background.

## Methods and materials

Considering Giovanni Michelucci's design and theoretical process falls fully within this approach. Even if Michelucci seems to address the theme of the Mediterranean in a seemingly spurious manner, the entirety of his design process for the Olbia Theatre embodies his adherence to the Mediterranean character that is as unexpected as it is absolute.

The theatre, built in the late 1990s after the death of the architect in the last day of 1990, is in fact Giovanni Michelucci's final work. Although not a testament to his spirit given the number of modifications the theatre has undergone, many of the themes that the Tuscan maestro pursued with tenacity and passion during his long creative trajectory are present here. It was to Michelucci

that in 1989 the municipality of Olbia gave the task of designing a theatre complex overlooking its beautiful gulf. Olbia, in fact, is one of Gallura's most important cities, that is, one of the most beautiful historical and geographical subregions in the north of Sardinia.

If matters of a political nature concerning this theatre are sadly well-known, marked as it was by extensive bureaucratic and economic limitations that changed the dimensions and final appearance of its architecture, the genesis of its design is still to be examined. When delved into, this genesis seems to constitute a real and decisive piece in the development of Michelucci's thinking, thanks to which the groundbreaking and innovative charge of the Modern triggers the need to anchor innovative processes to their ancient roots, as though Michelucci's assertive and unbridled means of expression needed to be linked to memory to find lasting legitimacy, rendering not only the spontaneity but also the lyricism of minor architectural language.

It is unnecessary to enter into conjectures or even interpretative hypotheses to understand the development of the initial inspiration for the Olbia Theatre project, since Michelucci himself, with the poetic air of his final years, informs us. How was the Olbia Theatre conceived?

*It was conceived out of the promptings given by the place to those thinking about the possibilities of a theatre. That is, a new fact that intervenes to enrich the nature of the place. From the rocks and the sea come numerous clues and these create an idea of what a theatre can be. Because if I take a rock and put a man from Olbia to sing a song on it, I have already created a special theatre. Here then is this immense rock and this man who, for example, sings the praises of Ulysses: I am in awe. So I start to develop something inside me that creates in my soul an orientation among the elements around me: the rocks, the sea, the landscape. At a certain point all these elements acquire movement, connecting with each other, connecting with the forest; all these elements enter into the condition of creating a new fact.*

*Now, it's possible to draw; these are drawings that originate from a place and which come into the world above all from what exists inside the soul.*

*Now, I can apply myself to also thinking about a tower of gold!*

*These drawings can evoke everything, since the familiar world has been abandoned in favour of continuous invention.*

*I define forms after drawing them. I don't think about them first; they are born as they naturally gain meaning... So what happens? What happens is that you want to sing, you want to make music, you want to do many things that are the theatre...[1].*

The sea, the rocks, the landscape are, therefore, the ingredients of a fascinating, yet personal, design trajectory which, starting from the vision of a man singing on the rocks, gains clarity sketch after sketch towards the affirmation of a form that, although born free based on its own assumptions, does not seem to attain a pre-established and definitive form. On the contrary, for Michelucci this theatre had an extremely mutable and variable form, since it remained linked to the variability of the numerous relationships underlying it, and therefore, as he himself was able to affirm numerous times with different works, its form is not predetermined a priori, that is, it is not determined by typological, technological or material conditioning, but is rather "found", thanks to the execution of the project articulated through the drawing.

Only after apprehending that the theatre will be an entity capable of bringing together elements of place and functional necessities can it be designed. Not before, but only after having it clear in one's mind that the theatre - but knowing Michelucci's thinking I would confidently add any other work of architecture - is to be understood as a "condenser" of suggestions from disparate fields and that only due to the architect's mediation will these be able to intersect and give rise to a new fact.



**Figure 1**

*Giovanni Michelucci, Olbia Theatre, drawing of theatre in environmental context, 1990. Archivio Fondazione Michelucci, Fiesole, Firenze.*

Therefore, the drawing is only a means of bringing to light not only everything already inscribed in a place but also what already exists in the architect's sensibility, naturally revealing what is already there, what has already been formed and which only needs to be uncovered by envisioning the new architectural space; in this case, in order for the place to express its theatrical vocation and for the theatre to express its sense of the place.

If this approach marks Michelucci's poetics until the immediate, post second world war period, stamping itself on all his projects and all his built works, the creative flow manifested on this occasion in Sardinia reveals something of its emblematic nature, thanks to which, rather than results it is the path taken to obtain them that seems to matter more.

The project was to create an integrated complex consisting of a covered theatre, an open-air theatre, theatre workshops and an area equipped for producing custom-made artefacts that serve the needs of theatre life. The site is Sa Marinedda near the district of Poltu Quadu, a tip of land that extends into the southern part of the clear waters of the Gulf of Olbia to form two opposing bays, together with an infinite series of coves and rocky gulfs where rock and water are in constant play.

## Results

As always in the poetics of the old maestro, rich in evocative power and imaginative ability, a path enabling approach to the final ideas appears. With a now uncertain, now definite line, the various sketches reveal, despite the variety of the numerous visions, certain assumptions held in common. These can be traced back to a double reference to nature evident in the interpretation of the subject of trees and shrubs - certainly the olive and the juniper tree - through the rehabilitation of the root, trunk and gnarled branch; naturalistic references that are transformed into the supporting structure of

the buildings and into the skin of the different volumes, but which are also interpreted through a less direct and more allusive manner and which are therefore capable of structuring the entire essence of the project.

If one considers, in fact, the impressive number of sketches that Michelucci executed for the theatre, one sees how the initial idea of a canonical theatre inserted into a precise, compact volume gradually evolves into the rendering of a more fragmented system, comprising of buildings that by degrees tend to detach themselves from the main body and assume an autonomous life. The result is a porous whole consisting of soft, supple elements, open to the views of the surrounding landscape, to the winds and to the sun; a new landscape of artificial *rocks* among natural rocks, comprised of different pieces that model themselves on nature and the features of the coast, which here also has among its dominant elements, together with the vegetation, granite blocks abraded by wind and water.

Alongside such continual literal and metaphorical references to nature stands the equally constant presence of another polarity revolving around the tower. The “tower of gold” as Michelucci writes [2], which is to say, a tower capable of bringing together the sea, the sky, the rocks, the trees, in essence, the entire landscape into which it is built and of which it is the expression, to transform it into a new entity, “a new fact” continues Michelucci [3], in order to recapitulate to himself its sense of context as well as its sense of function: a sense conceived and desired in continuity with what already exists, so that the building belongs to the place, as though it has always stood there, and the place to the building as though they are one.

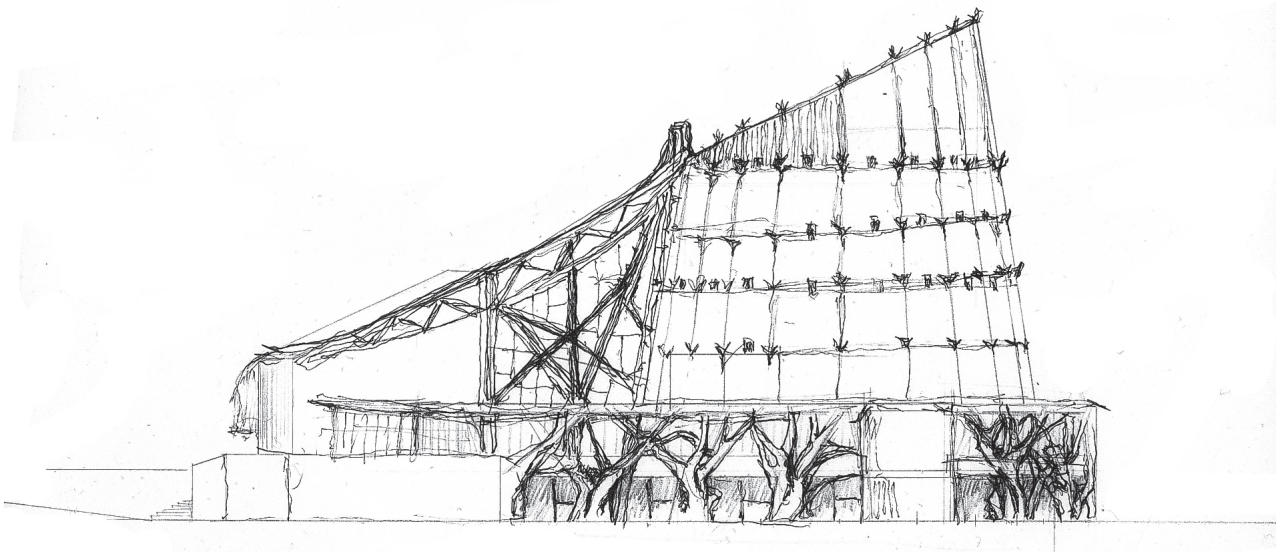
A circular volume, in fact, appears from the very first sketches and is transformed into different visions, in turn assuming the appearance of a cupola, a pavillion with three spires, a spire, a cone, a truncated cone and even a nuraghe, rendering not only the dream but the island’s spatial and building traditions as well.

The context is however further formed by one of the most important ports in Sardinia, the port at Isola Bianca, which the chosen site faces. There are cranes in the dockyards that stand out on the horizon, ships that together with the clouds constitute the area’s moving scenery, along with the outlines of the hills and that of a city that is ever expanding in search of new places where human relationships play out. It is therefore the fragile and changing relationships among these elements that weave the fabric where Michelucci outlines his forms, which on closer inspection at this stage produce, rather than solutions, classes of solutions, variations on the theme as well as simple categories of form that testify not only to the transience inherent in any compositional process, but also to the will to consider architecture as a concrete response to the pulse of the infinite bonds on which human life is based.

## Discussion

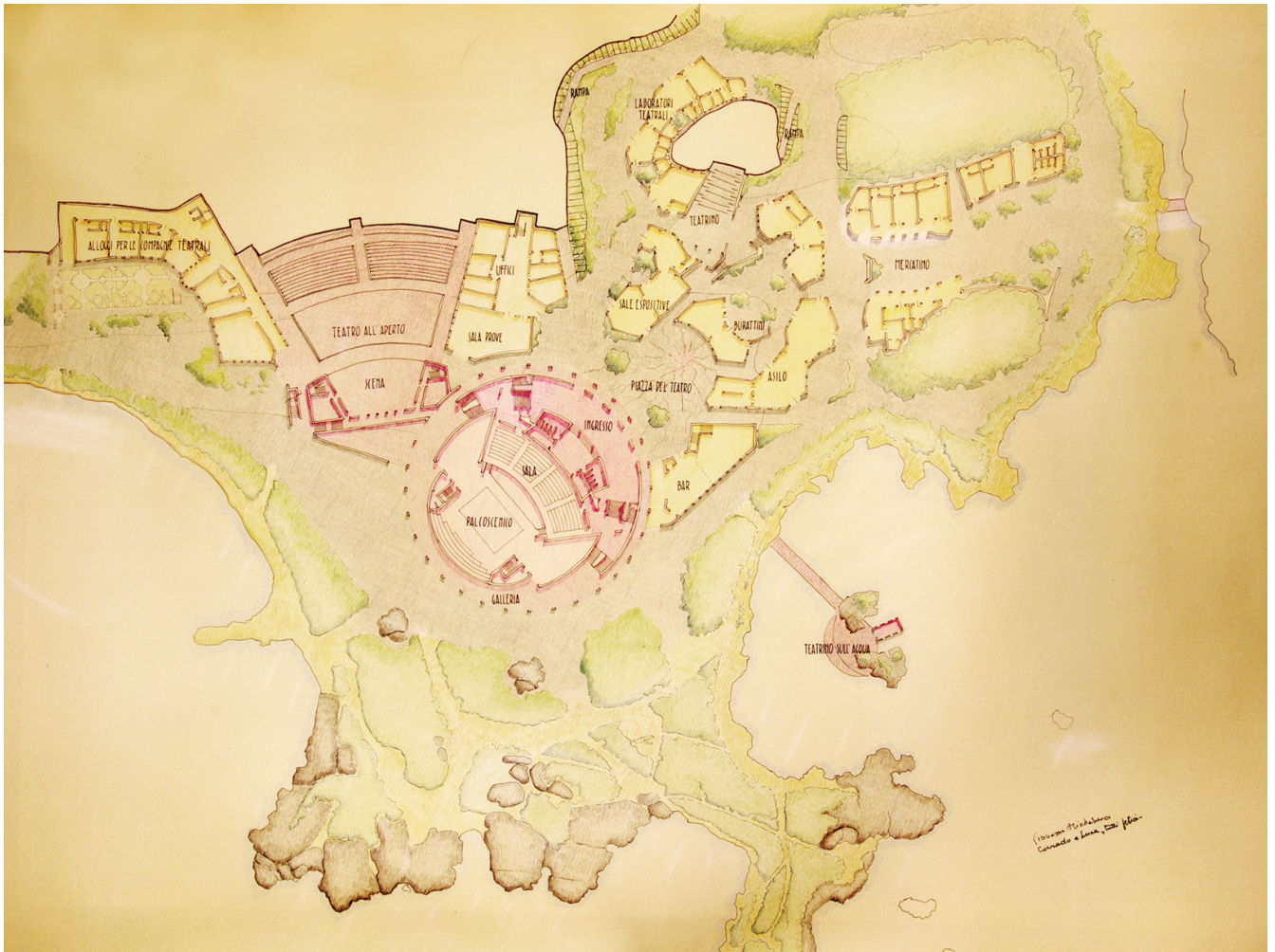
Another recurring feature in Michelucci’s process may be added to these continuities, namely, the predisposition towards openness, an acceptance not only of the vitality of a place’s relationships, trajectories and spirit, but above all of community, of being together. After all, this dimension constitutes the starting point and the finish line of the entirety of his lengthy research and, in this vision of his, the difference among building types counts for little. As a matter of fact, everything is theatre, everything is church, everything is home, everything is city, in this interchangeability of roles that leads to the transformation of the sense of one thing into another, provided that human beings are the true subject-object of every work of architecture, whether built or merely imagined; a human being who is not a spectator but the unconditional protagonist of the space.

At the start of December 1990, the final solution arose from of this collection of sketches, designed together with Corrado Marcetti and Luca Emanuelli, which was then merged with the preliminary plans presented to the city of Olbia only in February 1991, after Michelucci’s death.



**Figure 2**

Giovanni Michelucci, *Olbia Theatre*, drawing of façade with stage tower, 1990.  
Archivio Fondazione Michelucci, Fiesole, Firenze.



**Figure 3**

Giovanni Michelucci, *Olbia Theatre*, preliminary floor plans, 1990. Archivio Fondazione Michelucci, Fiesole, Firenze.

Reiterating their interest in the project, city administration decided to entrust its completion to Marcetti and Emanuelli, but the difficulties caused by the immediate limitations to the budget that had been foreseen from the start, as well as the length of time that had elapsed before the project execution was entrusted to Marcetti and Emanuelli are immediately discernible in the first stage of work, which only took place in 1994.

Given the dimensions of the projected complex, it was decided that it would be built in stages, each phase following the other without deviating from the overall plan. It began, therefore, with the open-air theatre, the document centre, the theatre workshops and the service tower, with the construction of the roofed theatre postponed until adequate funding was found in the future.

In November 1999 the first stage of the work was finished and from the resulting clear volumes one might at first be persuaded of the absence of traditional Micheluccian values. These are immediately to be found however through a more in-depth reading of these juxtaposed masses on rock. That is, one immediately realises, in the sunny nature of the place, that in reality the main architect's ideas had not at all been betrayed by lack of funds nor even by endemic bureaucratic fetters, as much as having been, in reality, only boiled down, that is to say, reduced almost to its iconic essence.

To this, we can add that the stripping down of materials to just three - granite, plaster and metal - the reduction to a minimum of every expressive register, together with the disappearance of every ornamentation, captures the ancient forces in the project. If little or nothing remains of the sketches' visionary nature, the open-air theatre's spacious cavea, the workshops' rectangular volume, the more elongated document centre, together with the circular piazza positioned between the two, as well as the squat mass of the tower, pierced by a rhythm of narrow windows that demonstrate the thickness of the walls, express in their absolute simplicity a sort of archaic energy.

And it is an energy that reveals itself in apprehending how this building, more than a maestro's spiritual testament, is in truth the expression of a *happy* collaboration and sharing of intent, a chorus of responses which is the fruit of a multiplicity of contributions, embodied in this, the most authentic of Michelucci's thought. It is a work influenced by events, altered by contingencies, shaped by the construction site, in the vivacity of a living organism that its principal architect would have liked immensely.

After years of neglect and abandon, the reasons for which certainly cannot be attributed to any fault in the spaces, but to poor management and to short-sighted authorities, the Olbia Theatre has for some time been included in an extensive process of urban renewal involving its complete restoration and partial conversion into the first international music library in Sardinia.

If on the one hand this confirms the absolute value of the Tuscan maestro's architecture, almost always fully detached from a limited understanding of space based solely on function, it also testifies to the symbolic dimension of architectural space as something that goes beyond the immanence of form, a much more subtle, at times inexpressible and ineffable value revealed only through its consonance with place, since "this place is already theatre; someone reciting the text of a Greek tragedy on these rocks would be sufficient. We merely have to make this presence stronger" [4].



**Figure 4**  
*Olbia Theatre, completion of first phase, 1999. Photograph by Davide Viridis.*





**Figure 5**  
*Olbia Theatre, current state, view from the sea, 2020. Photograph by Maurizio Bosa.*



**Figure 6**  
*Olbia Theatre, current state, detail of theatre workshops, 2020. Photograph by Maurizio Bosa.*

## Conclusion

This knowledge of how to capture the essence of a place, of how to translate the spirit in a context, of how to interpret continuities, latent qualities as well as character and identity, constitute the fundamental reference points of an authentic adherence to the Mediterranean character.

And the Mediterranean character that nourishes the Olbia Theatre is circulation, contamination, reciprocity, as well as variability and means of expression, which, in migrating, enrich themselves with innovation as well as tradition, circulating as it evolves.

As the genesis of the theatre and the forms that arose from it demonstrate, the Mediterranean character is no other than a place of meaning - hence of the mind - rather than an immanent dimension, demonstrating that in architecture, it is less about adapting to a set of stylistic features with varying interpretations, and is instead a quality of the soul and of the spirit.

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# MODUS HABITANDI OF THE “TABARKAN NATION” ANALYSIS OF THE SETTLEMENT CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FOUR “NEW LANDS” BUILT ALONG THE MEDITERRANEAN COASTS

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## IL MODUS HABITANDI DELLA “NAZIONE TABARCHINA”. ANALISI DEI CARATTERI INSEDIATIVI DELLE QUATTRO “TERRE NUOVE” REALIZZATE LUNGO LE COSTE DEL MEDITERRANEO

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### **Abstract**

*The study of the events related to the so-called “tabarkan nation”, in particular of the four settlements located along the Mediterranean coasts created over the course of four centuries by coral workers from Pegli (Genoa), has made it possible to recognise and highlight the extent and the mode of transmission of some common characteristics of the way of living in the Mediterranean area.*

*The analysed locations – Pegli, Tabarka, Carloforte, Calasetta and Nueva Tabarca – are the material outcome of complex historical circumstances, due to which the population of Pegli had to migrate in the 15th century to the Tunisian island of Tabarka, and from there to the islands of San Pietro, Sant’Antioco and Isla Plana, “carrying” with them the traditions and technical knowledge, that lead to the founding of the Tabarka (1540), Carloforte (1738), Nueva Tabarca (1769) and Calasetta (1770) settlements.*

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*Lo studio delle vicende legate alla cosiddetta “nazione tabarkina”, in particolare dei quattro insediamenti localizzati lungo le coste del Mediterraneo realizzati nel corso di quattro secoli dai lavoratori di corallo originari di Pegli (Genova), ha consentito di riconoscere ed evidenziare l’entità e le modalità di trasmissione di alcuni caratteri comuni dell’abitare mediterraneo.*

*I centri analizzati – Pegli, Tabarka, Carloforte, Calasetta e Nueva Tabarca – sono l’esito materiale di complesse circostanze storiche che hanno visto parte della popolazione di Pegli migrare nel XV secolo sull’isola tunisina di Tabarka e da lì verso le isole di San Pietro, Sant’Antioco e Isla Plana, ‘trasportando’ tradizioni e conoscenze tecniche e fondando gli insediamenti di Tabarka (1540), Carloforte (1738), Nueva Tabarca (1769) e Calasetta (1770).*

**Keywords:** Cultural Heritage, integrated survey, intangible heritage, tabarkan settlements, tabarkan home



**Figure 1**  
*Pegli and its “colonies” in the Mediterranean Sea.*

### **Historical introduction: the events of the “tabarkan nation”**

In the middle of the 15th century the Genoese obtained commercial control of a large part of the northern African coast [1], obtaining from the *Bey* of Tunis the privilege that allowed them to fish and sell coral along the coast [2]. Following this concession, in 1540 it was established a colony of fishermen from Pegli (Genoa) on the small island of Tabarka, in front of the Tunisian coast (fig. 1). The inhabited settlement, initially composed of a few houses arranged around the church and a small fortification, expanded starting from the following century, thanks to a massive colonisation by the population of Pegli [3].

The island, under the Spanish protectorate from the first half of the 16th century, became a strategic place of fundamental importance throughout the entire military campaign, undertaken by King Charles V of Spain, to repel the Muslims beyond their borders [4].

At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the restrictive measures aimed at tackling the overpopulation of the island, combined with the economic difficulties that followed the commercial competition of Tunis and Bizerte [5], the depletion of the coral reefs and the increasingly frequent pirate raids [6] forced large groups of Tabarkan people, supported by Charles Emmanuel III of Savoy (King of Sardinia), to migrate to the island of San Pietro (Carbonia-Iglesias), founding in 1738 the settlement of Carloforte [7] [8] [9] [10] [11] [12] [13].

The contemporary destruction of part of the settlement of Tabarka by the *Bey* of Tunis and the consequent conversion into slaves of the remaining population in the original colony, marked the

beginning of thirty years of tensions between the ruling Tunisia and the numerous exponents of the European nobility who worked for the solution of the “Tabarkan matter”. Only in 1768 after the agreement between the King of Spain Charles III and the *Bey* of Algiers, who in the meantime had taken possession of Tunis, allowed the ransom of the prisoners who, embarked for Alicante, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1769 and started the colonisation of the “*Insula Plana de San Pablo*”, founding the town of Nueva Tabarca.

The following year, thirty families still remaining on the Tunisian island, favoured and supported by the House of Savoy, migrated to the Island of Sant’Antioco (Carbonia-Iglesias), in front of the Island of San Pietro, founding the settlement of Calasetta [14].

In the context of the Mediterranean area, the story of the “tabarkan nation” represents an interesting case study to ascertain the extent and the manner in which a “minority” culture was able to export its architectural and urban models. Starting from the events that led part of the population of Pegli to migrate to the Tunisian island of Tabarka, and from there to the islands of San Pietro, Sant’Antioco and Isla Plana, the investigation was therefore aimed at verifying the actual transmission, re-proposal and reinterpretation of the distinctive features of each settlement in the subsequent colonies. If from a social and historical point of view, the research on the Tabarkan events had already allowed scholars to trace, in an exhaustive way, the historical, social and economic dynamics, finding a continuity in the so-called “intangible” traditions, the same had not been yet verified in the architectural and urban field [15] [16] [17] [18] [19].

## Materials and methods

The integrated survey of some significant passages of the urban fabric of the centres under analysis has allowed to deepen the knowledge of the material heritage, giving a detailed documentation of the types of buildings adopted, the construction techniques used and the materials used in the construction of the colonies [20] [21] [22].

The integrated survey campaign carried out in Carloforte involved a substantial portion of the fabric – included among Via XX Settembre, the civic museum, the sea and the church – and the rural settlement of “Le Tanche”, recognised as an almost intact prototype of the original settlement. It was also carried out a systematic survey of the buildings in Pegli in via Carloforte, the historical centre of the Genoese village. At the same time, the other Tabarkan settlements (Tabarka, Nueva Tabarca and Calasetta) were analysed in detail, by integrating the data taken from the existing literature with the verifications and the analyses conducted on site.

The architectural survey was essential for the analysis of the urban and building characteristics common to the centres under examination. Given the complex articulation of the four locations the survey was based mainly on the use of phase shift panoramic laser scanners, which offer great accuracy and speed of acquisition of metric data.

At the same time, in order to ensure the correct registration of all the laser acquisitions realised, it was carried out a topographic survey using a total station (Leica TC 706), designed in a functional way to the intervention of the scanner. The topographer, in fact, limited himself to framing in a rigid network the system of targets connecting the different sockets of the scanner, in order to provide a fixed structure for the complete referencing of the survey.

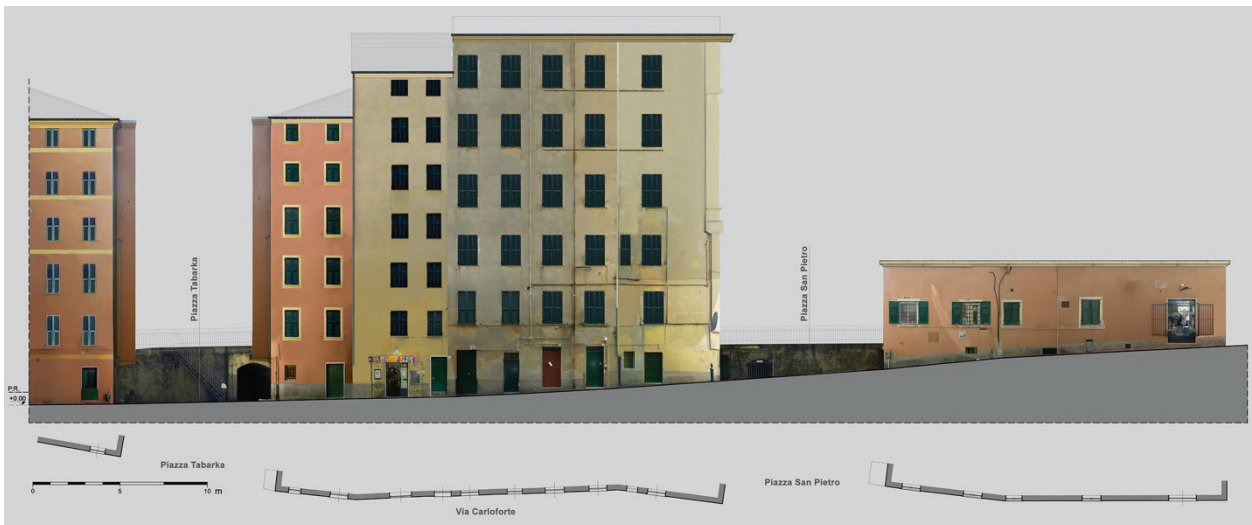
The digital survey has been integrated with direct surveys of the interior spaces of particularly significant buildings. The goal of the research was also in fact to identify the typological

characteristics of the housing units, the dimensional ratios of the rooms and their distribution within the environment, as well as the arrangement of horizontal and vertical connections. Therefore, they were carried out some studies in order to frame the building typology of the area and its evolution throughout the history.

To complete the measurement operations, it was carried out a complete video-photographic campaign to document both the architecture – as a support for its subsequent graphical reconstruction – and the survey operations themselves.

The simultaneous use of active and passive sensors according to well-established integrated survey procedures has made it possible to obtain 3D reality based models, morphometrically and perceptively adhering to the urban areas analysed.

The subsequent operations were aimed at the drafting of two-dimensional graphics of the traditional type – such as plans, elevations and sections – necessary to describe the architecture, and the extraction of photomaps capable of realistically describing both the material and the chromatic data of the building (fig. 2, 3).



**Figure 2**

*Pegli: photomap of a front on via Carloforte.*



**Figure 3**

*Carloforte: photomap of a front on Corso Tagliafico.*

## Results

The analysis was conducted starting from the analysis of the urban fabric, and then descending gradually down the scale, until reaching the single cell that constitutes the housing unit.

The starting model is Pegli, the place of origin of the first Tabarkan settlers, whose layout is formed by a dense urban fabric composed of a series of narrow alleys with different slopes, characterised by stairways and archivolts [23] [24] [25] [26] [27] [28]. This construction method is typical of the Ligurian people, who were able to exploit a narrow strip of land confined between the sea and the mountains.

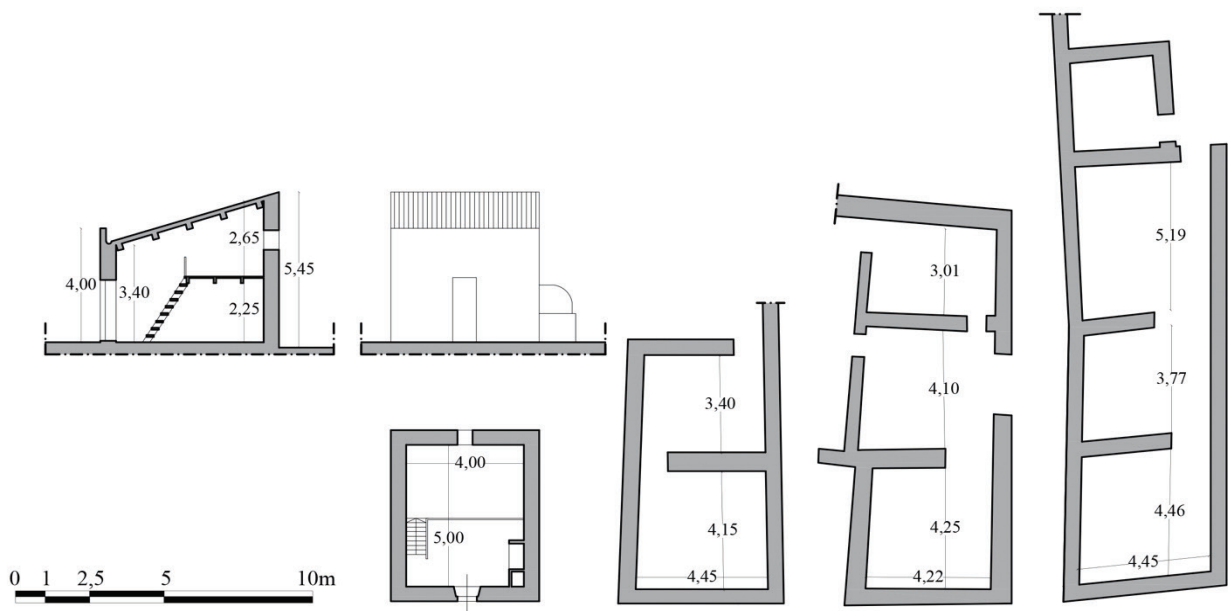
The only colonial settlement that maintains, in part, this characteristic pattern is Carloforte in the area situated close to the first city walls, where the conformation of the land imposes narrow streets with steep slopes. The houses are very close together and form a dense aggregate, with narrow alleys that allow to use rationally the little building land available.

This characteristic is not found in the towns of Nueva Tabarca and Calasetta: this is probably due to the different orography of the land (Nueva Tabarca is a completely flat island and Calasetta is built on a slight slope) and to the different design concept at the base of the settlement (they were designed by military engineers at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century).

Both settlements have an “Hippodamian” type urban structure, with straight streets that cross orthogonally. This type of planning, often re-proposed in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, has nothing to do with Ligurian cities, but it was introduced by the military engineers from Piedmont (in Calasetta) and from Spain (in Nueva Tabarca) at the service of the houses of Savoy and Bourbon.

The Tabarka settlement has no similarities with Pegli, or in general with the Ligurian territory, nor with the colonies previously analysed. Although the distribution of houses on the surface of the island may seem random, it is actually closely related to the position of large water collection tanks, arranged in different sites on the island to meet the needs of the population, since it is an area where water resources are scarce. Each tank could satisfy a limited number of inhabitants and this determined the number of houses that could be built in the surrounding area, certainly not comparable with the high density of the Ligurian residential districts.

Analysing the blocks, it is clear that the colonies are very different from the typical distribution of the Genoese cities. The causes, as already highlighted, are many: from the different orographic characteristics to the lower number of inhabitants to host, to the imposition of new spatial criteria, imposed by the typical rigour of military culture derived from the designers involved (fig. 4).

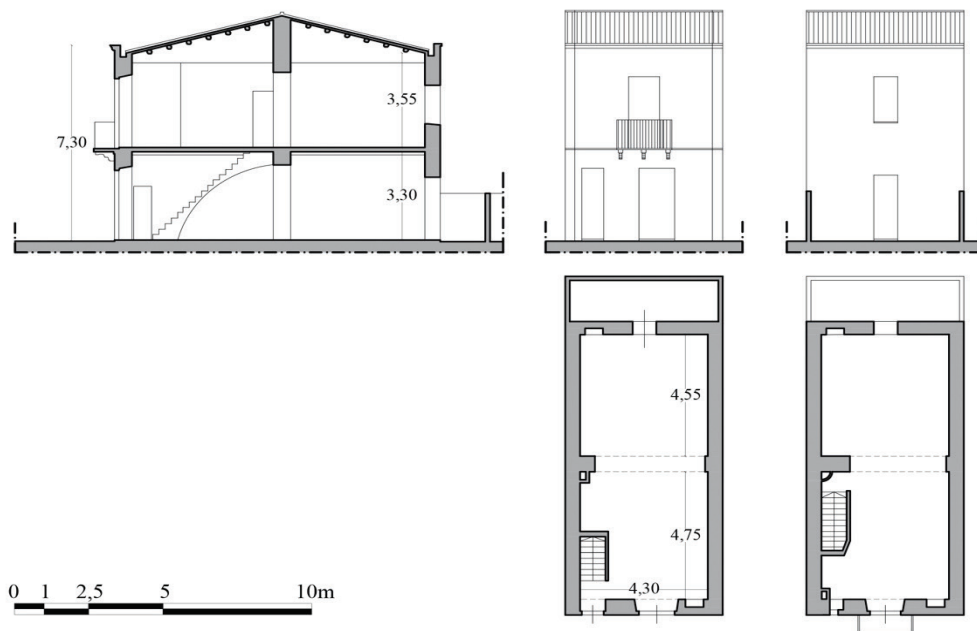


**Figure 4**

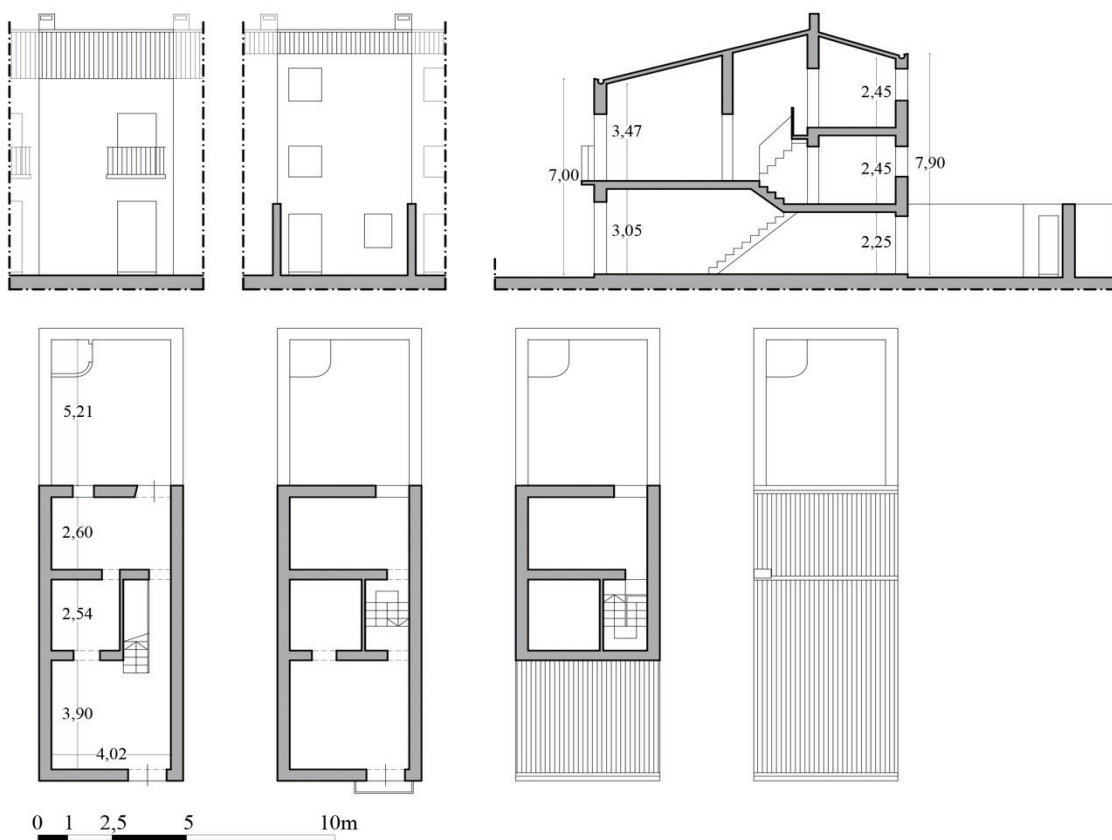
*Identification of the cell-type (on the left) in what remains of the residential building of the Tabarka settlement.*

If the first settlement of Carloforte had installation characteristics that tended to follow the morphology of the land (and in this case, similar to the Ligurian coastal centres), the second expansion of the building is characterised by very wide and isolated roads, defined by the intersection of almost orthogonal roads, creating a rectangular shape. In Calasetta and Nuova Tabarca this subdivision becomes even more rigorous and rational: the blocks are rectangular with a proportion of 2:1 for the greater side on the smaller one (50m x 25m in Nueva Tabarca, 60m x 30m in Calasetta).

In the settlements of Carloforte and Nueva Tabarca, within the blocks the subdivision into lots follows a similar logic, where the units have constant dimensions (4-5m x 10-15m) in order to make the most of the available building area by saturating it with a series of terraced houses. However, if in the Sardinian colony the houses overlook all four sides of the block, in the Spanish colony the fronts are on the two long sides of the block, giving rise to main streets, characterised by the alternation of main facades and secondary streets with perimeter walls without openings (fig. 5, 6).

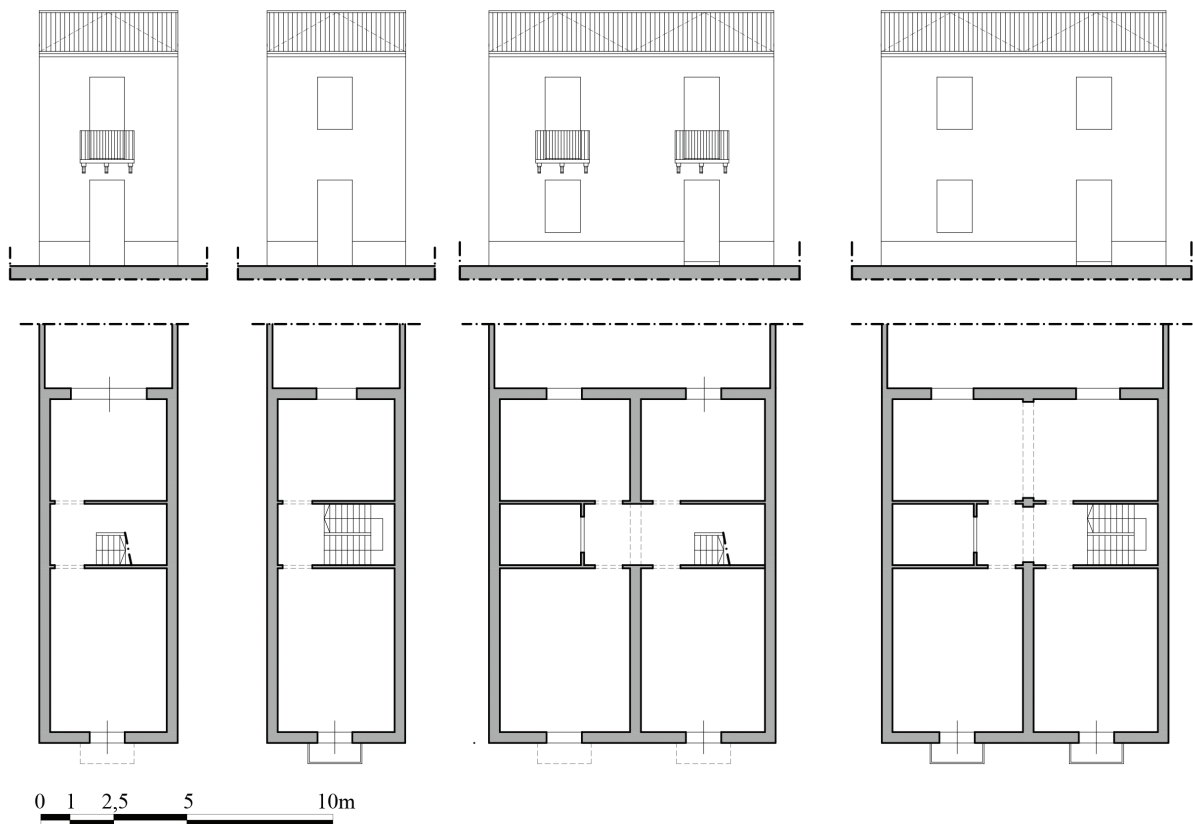
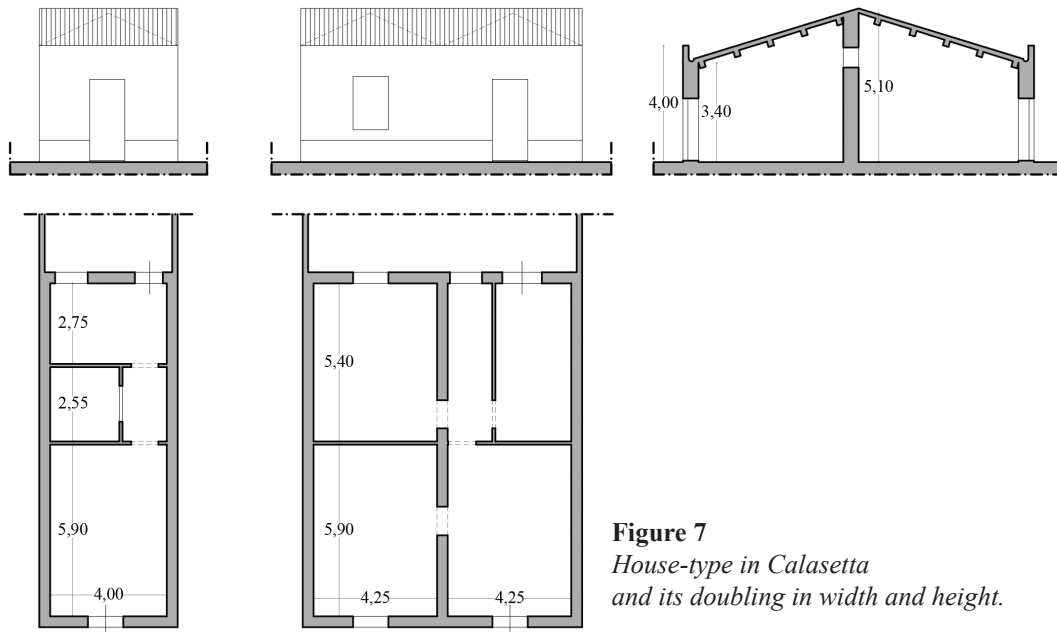


**Figure 5**  
*House-type in Carloforte.*



**Figure 6**  
*House-type in Nueva Tabarca.*

In Calasetta each block is divided into three lots of much larger dimensions (20 m x 30 m), within each of them is built a single real estate unit. This establishes a hierarchy of the road axes: the main ones, wider, overlooked by the building fronts, and the secondary ones, alternating with the previous ones, overlooked by the facades of the back of the buildings (fig. 7).



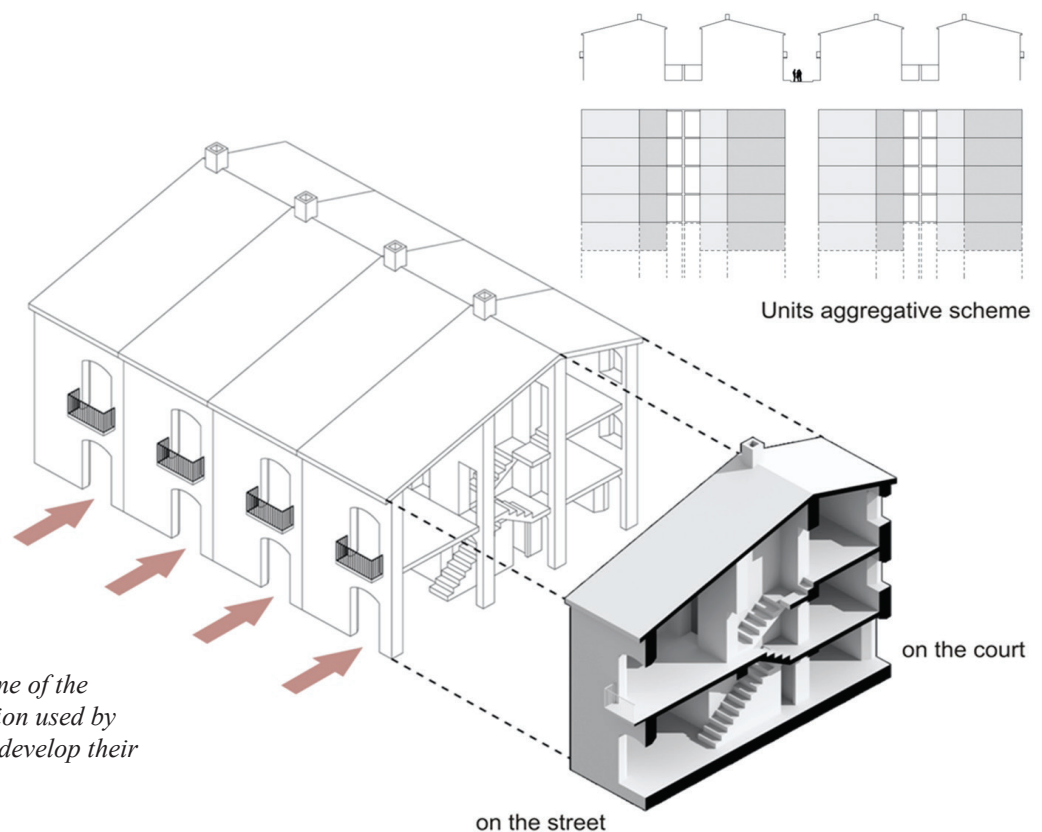
Considering the building structure, it is possible to identify a close relationship between the type of housing coming from the island of Tabarka and the “*baracca* from Carloforte”.

The integrated survey of the complex of “Le Tanche”, in the western hinterland of the island of San Pietro, has made it possible to document its peculiar characteristics and then compare them with those of similar farmhouses found in other colonies, tracing their undeniable similarities.

Most of the examples of “*baracca*” still existing on the island of San Pietro are unicellular buildings with a quadrangular plan, with one access in the facade, a mono-pitched roof and a wooden loft dividing the internal environment between the living area, generally located on the ground floor, and the sleeping area located on the upper floor. In the lot of relevance, fenced by a small wall, there is an underground tank that collects rainwater conveyed from the roof through eaves and downspouts, which is also accessible from the inside of the house, through a well. Conceived as a unitary and self-sufficient building, in some cases it has been paired with another *baracca* or, as in “Le Tanche”, in a series of *baraccas*.

The re-proposal of this typology in an urban environment has required some necessary variations, whilst preserving most of the distinctive features (fig. 8). Over the years, each colony has then developed its own identity and the primordial housing typologies have undergone slow and gradual changes, while maintaining those invariants that still today associate them:

- the use of a single dimensional module (4 or 4.5 meters inside),
- the existence of a single flight of stairs connected to the side wall of the house,
- the use of unicellular space without the use of internal partitions,
- the arrangement on the facade of a few openings strictly necessary from a functional point of view,
- the mono-pitched roofing solution,
- the presence of a rainwater collection tank.



**Figure 8**  
A reconstruction scheme of the original housing solution used by the Tabarka people to develop their settlements.

## Conclusions

The survey conducted has made it possible to document, using the tools belonging to the disciplines of drawing and surveying, the existence of constants and variables in the process of formation and transformation of the Pegli, Tabarka, Carloforte, Nueva Tabarca and Calasetta settlements, unequivocally imprinted in the conformation of the urban fabric and in the buildings typology found in those locations.

Even if it is not possible to prove a direct derivation of the “basic” Tabarkan building types located in the colonies that follow the Pegli model, the analysis carried out have allowed to assert the existence, at least originally, of a relationship between the housing types of the colonies. The characteristics highlighted in the investigations, concerning the building structures of the four urban centres, connect the urban residences to the rural prototype of the “Tabarkan house” in its original form of single-cellular construction in stone, with a square plan and a mono-pitched roof, which although apparently has little in common with the typical Ligurian home, it shows, to a deeper analysis, that the technical and cultural transfer made by the inhabitants of Pegli has found its attestation in the four colonies of Tabarka, Carloforte, Nueva Tabarca and Calasetta.

Despite the diatopic mutations of the same building typology or the use of different solutions in relation to the different orographical and geographical context, it is possible to identify the will, in the urban environment, to characterise the settlements through the repetition of a pre-established scheme, and the use of some identity-related invariants that still today associate the building structure.

## Credits

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Universidad Politécnica de Valencia – ETSA (Spain): Francisco Juan Vidal (Coordinator), Salvador Lara Ortega, Pablo Rodriguez Navarro, Juan Carlos Navarro Fajardo.

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# IL TEATRO ALL'ITALIANA NEL VENTENNIO FASCISTA. DIFFUSIONE DI UN MODELLO ATTRAVERSO LE COLONIE D'OLTREMARE

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## THE ITALIAN THEATER IN THE FASCIST PERIOD. DISSEMINATION OF A MODEL THROUGH THE OVERSEAS COLONIES

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### Abstract

*The paper, starting from the morphometric survey of the theater of the Academy of Arts in Tirana conducted in 2019, proposes a reflection on the results of the diffusion of the Italian theater style, in the form it assumed in the Fascist period in the Mediterranean lands.*

*Although it is historically recognized that there wasn't a "Fascist theater style"<sup>1</sup> as a direct expression of the regime<sup>2</sup> [1] (as it can be said of the Nazi<sup>3</sup> or Soviet<sup>4</sup> theater), it's possible to state without doubt that the Fascist period was a very prolific era concerning the construction of artefacts dedicated to culture both in Italy and in the colonies that faced the Mediterranean Sea.*

*The use, in the "overseas lands" of workers specialized in the construction of cinemas and theaters involved the transfer of construction techniques and formal stylistic features that can still be documented today in many buildings.*

*The Italian theater style had spread following the projects of the regime architects in the Libyan lands (with the Berenice<sup>5</sup> theater in Benghazi), in the Aegean Islands (with the Puccini<sup>6</sup> theater, now the National Theater in Rhodes), in Eritrea (with the Opera<sup>7</sup> theater in Asmara) and in the nearby Albanian coasts (with the theater of the Academy of Fine Arts<sup>8</sup>, formerly the Opera House of the Albanian Dopolavoro). The interiors reflect a consolidated typology that has long been introduced in all the countries of the Mediterranean area, characterized by the sequence foyer-hall-scenic tower, the horseshoe shape of the hall, the presence of boxes and the accentuated depth of the stage; on the other hand, the exteriors were created using the grammar and syntax of the rationalist language, which had to deal, with different results, with the local cultural style generally far from the Italian, and more generally Central European, style.*

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*Il contributo, partendo dal rilievo morfometrico effettuato nel 2019 del teatro dell'Accademia delle Arti in Tirana, propone una riflessione sugli esiti della diffusione del teatro all'italiana, nella veste assunta nel Ventennio fascista nelle terre del Mediterraneo.*

*Per quanto la storiografia non riconosca un "teatro fascista"<sup>1</sup> come espressione diretta del regime<sup>2</sup> [1] (come invece può essere fatto, ad esempio, per quello nazista<sup>3</sup> e sovietico<sup>4</sup>), si può affermare senza cadere in errore che nel Ventennio vennero costruiti numerosi edifici destinati alla cultura sia in territorio italiano sia in quello delle colonie che si affacciavano sul mare nostrum.*

*L'invio nelle "terre d'oltremare" di operai specializzati nella costruzione di cinema e teatri ha comportato il trasferimento di tecniche costruttive e di stilemi formali tutt'oggi documentabili in molti fabbricati. Con i progetti degli architetti di regime nelle terre libiche (con il teatro di Berenice<sup>5</sup> a Bengasi), nelle Isole dell'Egeo (con il teatro Puccini<sup>6</sup>, oggi teatro Nazionale a Rodi), in Eritrea (con il teatro dell'Opera<sup>7</sup> ad Asmara) e nelle vicine coste albanesi (con il teatro dell'Accademia delle Belle Arti<sup>8</sup>, già Casa dell'Opera del Dopolavoro Albanese) si andò affermando l'edificio teatrale all'italiana. Ma se gli interni riflettono una*

*tipologia consolidata – caratterizzata dalla sequenza foyer-sala-torre scenica, dalla forma a ferro di cavallo della sala, dalla presenza di palchi e dell'accentuata profondità del palcoscenico –, gli esterni vennero realizzati utilizzando la grammatica e la sintassi del linguaggio razionalista di volta in volta declinata secondo il clima culturale locale, solitamente lontano da quello italiano e più in generale mitteleuropeo.*

**Keywords:** Theatre; fascist architecture; Rationalism; colonies; Mediterranean Sea

## Introduction

The opportunity to explore the theme of theaters in the Italian colonies comes from the realization of a morphometric digital documentation campaign<sup>9</sup> of the Theater of the Academy of Fine Arts in Tirana (Albania).

The theatre appears like an Italian one on the inside, but on the outside, it presents pure volumes and rigorous lines [2], without decorative elements, a fullness broken only by the void of the access porch. This is a contrast that allows starting a study on the characteristics of these buildings divided between an external image and a consolidated internal functionality.

It is therefore possible to broaden the reflection by asking if it is possible to identify the common characteristics of the fascist theater in the colonies, by analyzing the peculiarities of the various artefacts built in the fascist period along the Mediterranean coast [3].

## The theatres projected by Italian architects in the overseas colonies

The necessary starting point for this analysis is materialized by the writings that Carlo Rava published (or which directly concern him) in the magazine *Domus* in 1931: in the number 38, in the article “Two projects by architects Sebastiano Larco and Carlo E. Rava”, talking about the competition for the Cathedral Square in Tripoli, the author states that this project “*signals a first stage in that evolution towards more Mediterranean forms whose appearance is extremely interesting in Italian rationalism*” [4]; the motivation is sought in the necessity to get closer to the African landscape and climate, thus using stylistic features of the local tradition. In the previous issue [5], yet, Rava published an article in which he tried to clarify the different currents of rationalism that were emerging in Europe: the more rigorous and unifying one of Gropius and Mies and the innovative one (especially in Austria) that was looking for a national independence; in the second part of his "editorial" he recalls how North American architects had already embarked on the path of adapting to the architectural culture of the place, when they built houses in holiday locations (Florida, California, Caribbean Islands), so as to enjoy nature and the local climate, following a "*current of Mediterranean inspiration*". However, the situation becomes more complicated when this new trend doesn't have to support the ambitions of rich clients, but must be the expression of a regime that, even if it doesn't use theatrical performances as pure propaganda, still needs to export the concept of Italianness<sup>10</sup> in the colonies [6].

### *Puccini Theater in Rhodes*

Governor Mario Lago implements a series of policies on the island aimed at progressively assimilating local populations [7]. A projects which assumes local shapes and volumes is the Puccini theater (fig.1), today the National Theater, designed in 1934 by Armando Bernabiti [8] and built with a reinforced concrete structure, with brick infill, while the cladding is made of a sort of artificial stone

obtained with a mixture of cement, glass and stone powder [9]; and probably is the dark color that partly hides the assimilation to the soft volumetric masses typical of the place (but also of Southern Italy and North Africa)<sup>11</sup>, also if the use of stone in buildings with similar shape is documented on the island (fig.2). In 1937, the year after its completion, Cesare de Vecchi becomes governor and he inaugurates an extremely more rigid period: Rhodes must be monumental and fascist, without local interference; but the theater was already completed and the only addition is the pediment on the South side.

It underwent a very aggressive restoration in 1970 which overturned the interior (however structured as an "Italian theater"); a restoration is currently underway to try recovering the original layout.

***Berenice Theater in Benghazi (Lybia)<sup>12</sup>***



**Figure 1**  
*Puccini Theater in Rodi.*



**Figure 2**  
*Palace of the Grand Masters of the Knights of Rhodes.*

Built in the early thirties by architects Marcello Piacentini and Luigi Piccinato [10], the building follows the most modern achievements of construction theory in the field of acoustics and space organization. Starting from his professional beginning until the early fifties of the last century, Piccinato not only designed theaters but was interested in this theme with studies, conferences and articles on aspects of scenography and, above all, on the modern typology of prose theater. In his research Piccinato addressed not only the theme of the theater typological studies for the creation of an architectural space in which prose, opera and cinema coexisted, but also that of mass theater, a highly debated topic during the 1930s [11].

While the interiors reproduce the spaces of an Italian theater and add movement to the hall with



**Figure 3**  
*Berenice Theatre in Benghazi before and after Libyan Revolution and war against ISIS.*

curves and frames, the exteriors, while remaining within typically rationalist rigorous geometries, introduces a theory of arches corresponding to more than one floor (fig.4), as happens in traditional buildings of Islamic style of the North African area [12].



**Figure 4**  
*Berenice Theatre in Benghazi between 28th October 1931 and 27th October 1932.*

### ***Opera Theater in Asmara (Eritrea)***

The building, project of the Italian architect Odoardo Cavagnari, was built with an agreement between the ARPA Company (Anonima Ritrovi Pubblici Asmara) and the Dilsizian Frères Company of Milan between 1918-1920; it faces the main street of the city (Corso Italia, now Harnet Avenue), at the corner with Beleza Street [13]. The theatre, built in reinforced concrete, is slightly raised from the street: it stands upon a basement covered by stone (most part of the traditional building in Eritrea presents a difference in material between the ground and the first floor), and in front of it there is a shell-shaped fountain in Renaissance style, surrounded by two stairways that go up to the entrance, which is placed under a Romanesque-style porch with seven arches and Ionic columns. The interiors consist of three separate areas (like the Italian theater style), the foyer, the hall and the stage, with an auxiliary space for offices and the backstage. An external walkway on the side wall allows private access to the gallery that runs around three sides of the hall supported by square concrete pillars.

The original project obtained permission to build on the condition that restaurants and tennis courts would also be built, but the liquidation in 1924 of the two companies that had the contract caused the abandonment of the original project, as evidenced by a series of bricks jutting out on both ends of the porch. The renovation of the theater in 1937 was carried out by architects Antonio Vitaliti and Pietro del Fabro who inserted a projection room in the highest row of the gallery.

### ***Theater of the Academy of Fine Arts in Tirana (Albania)***

The building, born as the Albanian Dopolavoro Opera House (O.D.A.) [14], was designed by the architect Gherardo Bosio<sup>13</sup> between 1939 and 1940. The artefact, built in reinforced concrete, presents inside the traditional subdivision of the areas of the Italian theater<sup>14</sup>, curved shaped boxes and balconies and stucco shell-shaped decorations.

Outside, the front, entirely covered in travertine, is located in a city space dominated by the majesty, imposed by the regime, and by the symmetry that also characterizes the other three sides of Littorio square (today Nënë Tereza square). However, the external appearance doesn't only refer to the image desired by the fascist party, but also re-proposes schemes of the local architectural tradition: the theory of close windows with different sizes at various levels and the presence of a high entrance porch located between the two side wings (fig.5).



**Figure 5**

*Main front of the Theatre of Academy of Fine Arts in Tirana, South wing.*

## Discussion

An analysis of the theaters built in the Italian colonies could not be considered concluded with the study of the four cases indicated. Architectures for leisure and free time were also built in Ethiopia and Somalia and were certainly present in Istria and Dalmatia; but if in the case of the latter the end of the fascist regime was too close to be able to think of deepen the theme of entertainment, in the case of the two colonies of central Africa, located inland, Italian culture never managed to integrate with the local one, despite the large quantity of artifacts designed and built, and the traditional architecture remained always completely extraneous from the modern language [15].

The characteristic that link Libya, Albania, Dodecanese and Eritrea, on the other hand, is the proximity to the sea: also if Eritrea doesn't face the Mediterranean, after the opening of the Suez Canal in the second half of the 19th century, the transport of materials and knowledge by sea from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea was encouraged and allowed the Italian expansion in the Horn of Africa.

Certainly, the results of the overlap of Italian and local style were different not only because of the differences in the cultures in which the regime entered, but also because of the different expressive power of the local architectures.

For example, Libya immediately presented itself as a strong interlocutor, thanks to the persistence of Arab-Ottoman culture, capable of inserting its essential features into the rationalist architectural language [12].

Rhodes, on the other hand, already had an architectural concept closer to that of Southern Italy so there was easier to link the tradition of the Aegean Island to the new language retracing paths already traced in the homeland.

In Eritrea there was essentially a lack of an organized city structure and even if the realized architectures partly trace the stylistic features present in the local tradition, essentially the buildings of the regime impose themselves by affirming a strong contrast between what is "modern"<sup>15</sup> and what is "indigenous" [16].

The case of Albania is different, because the country had been seen by the regime as a real expansion of the Italian territory [17]. The different souls of the country (the Ottoman, the Greek and the Slav one) were unable to oppose the planning perpetuated by the architects sent by the regime (Di Fausto, Brasini and Bosio); nevertheless, the image of traditional architecture certainly influenced the architects who spent many years in the colony [18].

The construction of theaters at the beginning of the 1920s is located in an indefinite area between the birth and the progressive affirmation of the cinema (of which fascism made extensive use) and the careful design of the interior spaces of the Italian theater with acoustic and visibility analysis that were becoming more and more accurate.

The solutions adopted within the four theaters are similar: they are not only structural, with the extensive use of reinforced concrete (fig.6) and the numerous differences in height inside that underline the different function of the spaces, but also decorative with the realization of boxes with wavy balustrades, deep frameworks in correspondence with the proscenium and large spaces dedicated to technical equipment (fig.7). These characteristics suggest that there was a theory of theatrical construction that moved through the Italian architects along the coasts of the fascist colonies, despite the different areas in which these buildings were built.



**Figure 6**  
*Inside the Opera Theatre in Asmara.*



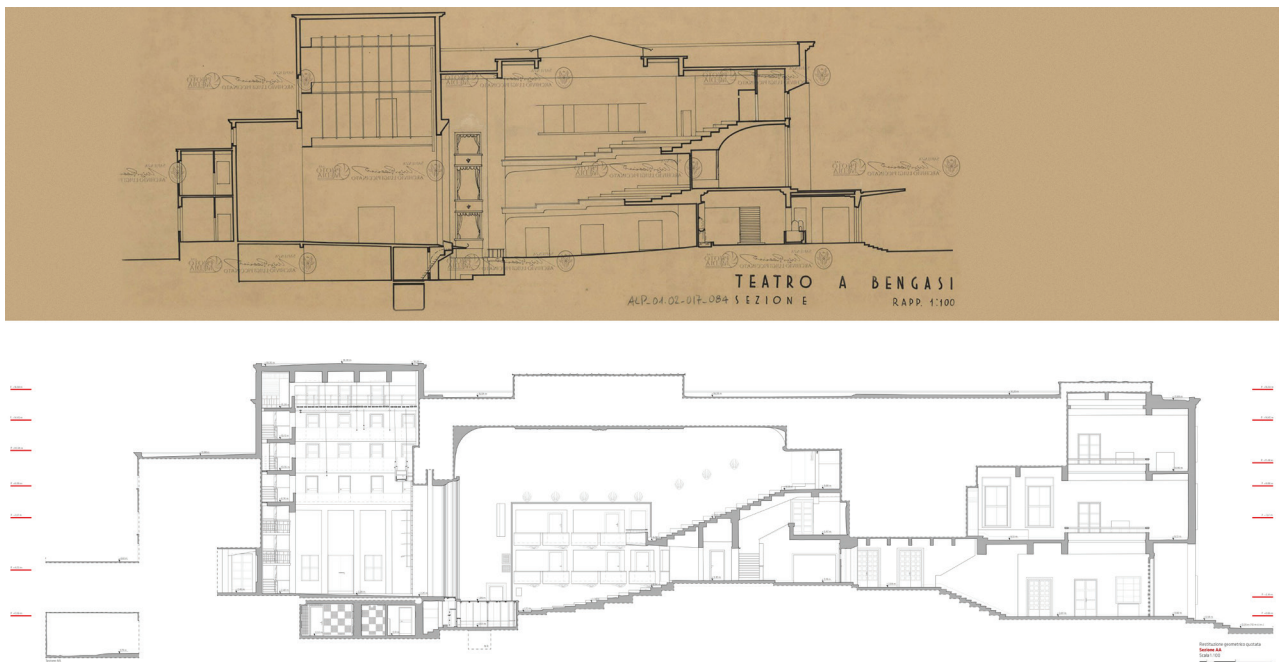
**Figure 7**  
*Hall and boxes of the Theatre of Academy of Fine Arts in Tirana.*

## Conclusions

A descriptive analysis of the external and internal aspects, as well as a study of the events that led to the construction of the theaters, is not sufficient to outline a model of Italian theater in the overseas colonies. From the overlap between the drawings obtained from the restitution of the digital survey of the Theater of Academy of Fine Arts in Tirana and the project drawings of the Berenice Theater in Benghazi<sup>16</sup> (contained in the Luigi Piccinato Archive) it is possible to notice strong similarities in proportions, plan and elevation of the hall, the stage and the scenic tower<sup>17</sup> (fig.8).

The realization of a morphometric survey relating to the two remaining theaters (assuming that the theater Berenice is no longer accessible) could allow to identify further relationships between the buildings that help to define any similarities in the compositional practice followed by the architects of the regime. The individuation of a scheme could allow to recognize other artefacts related to those four, also in other countries not directly under the control of the fascist regime at that time but influenced by the Italian architectural culture exported by Italian architects.

This paper is part of the broader discussion relating to the recovery of knowledge of the artefacts of the fascist era, for many years considered a direct expression of a regime when, in reality, they represented an autonomous evolution of Italian rationali



**Figure 6**  
*Inside the Opera Theatre in Asmara.*

## Notes

1. Non mancarono certamente “indicazioni” da parte del regime sui contenuti degli spettacoli, con censure da una parte e sovvenzioni dall’altra, alle compagnie che adattavano i propri spettacoli all’ideologia corrente. There was certainly a lot of “indications” from the regime on the contents of the shows, with censorship on the one hand and subsidies, on the other, for companies that adapted their shows to current ideology.

2. Alessandro Martini in “Teatri e teatri d’opera in Italia tra le due guerre mondiali. Modelli, protagonisti, progetti” riporta le parole del Ministro della Cultura Popolare Dino Alfieri che nel 1939, parlando alla Camera dei Fasci e delle Corporazioni, avrebbe dichiarato che nella produzione teatrale italiana “al risultato quantitativo non ha corrisposto un pari risultato qualitativo, specialmente per quanto riguarda l’auspicata nascita di un teatro drammatico che esprima i motivi ideali ed i valori dello spirito fascista” (Alfieri D., *Il teatro italiano*, in *Scenario*, 6 giugno 1939, p. 247). / Alessandro Martini in “Teatri e teatri d’opera in Italia tra le due guerre mondiali. modelli, protagonisti, progetti” quotes the words of the Minister of Popular Culture Dino Alfieri who in 1939, speaking to the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations, would have declared that in the Italian theatrical production “the quantitative result did not match the same qualitative result, especially with regard to the hoped-for birth of a dramatic theater that expresses the ideal motives and values of the fascist spirit” (Alfieri D., *Il teatro italiano*, in *Scenario*, 6 giugno 1939, p. 247).

3. “Prendendo il nome dai raduni degli antichi Germani, la riforma del teatro, iniziata nei primi decenni del secolo, era approdata a questa formula nazionalista e tribale in cui mettere in scena antichi cori e nuovi testi di carattere epico, ispirati alle prime battaglie delle camicie brune. Il teatro tradizionale non poteva ospitare questo genere di rappresentazione, che aveva invece bisogno di una cornice immersiva, panica. Per questo motivo furono progettate centinaia di Thingplatzen o Thingstaetten” (Gian Piero Piretto, *Memorie di Pietra*, ed. Raffaello Cortina, 2014). Veri e propri anfiteatri all’aperto, costruiti solitamente su terreni naturalmente movimentati, consentivano di accogliere un gran numero di persone in una cornice molto evocativa: la propaganda in questo caso si basava sia sull’architettura del teatro sia sul contenuto delle rappresentazioni. / “Taking its name from the gatherings of the ancient Germans, the reform of the theater, which began in the early decades of the century, had landed on this nationalist and tribal formula in which staging ancient choirs and new epic texts, inspired by the first battles of the Brown Shirts movement. Traditional theater could not host this kind of representation, which instead needed an immersive, panic setting. For this reason, hundreds of Thingplatzen or Thingstaetten were designed” (Gian Piero Piretto, *Memorie di Pietra*, ed. Raffaello Cortina, 2014). Real open-air amphitheaters, usually built on hills, allow to sit down a large number of people in a very evocative frame: the propaganda in this case was based both on the architecture of the theater and on the content of the performances.

4. Teatro “Agit-Prop”, termine risultante dall’abbreviazione dei sostantivi agitácija (agitazione) e propaganda: forma di teatro didattico molto diffuso nella Russia post-rivoluzionaria (dal 1917 in poi), avente come scopo la propaganda e l’informazione, presso il pubblico analfabeta, degli ideali rivoluzionari sovietici. Ne sono edifici rappresentativi, seppur molto diversi da un punto di vista architettonico, il Teatro Gorki (1930-1935) a Rostov di Vladimir Shchuko e Vladimir Gelfreykh e il Teatro dell’Armata Rossa (1934-1940) a Mosca di Karo Semyonovich Halabyan e Vasilii Nikolaevich Simbirtsev. / “Agit-Prop” theater, is a term resulting from the abbreviation of the substantives agitácija (agitation) and propaganda: a form of didactic theater widespread in post-revolutionary Russia (from 1917 onwards), with the purpose of spreading propaganda and information, to the illiterate public, of Soviet revolutionary ideals. Representative buildings, albeit very different from an architectural point of view, are the Gorki Theater (1930-1935) in Rostov by Vladimir Shchuko and Vladimir Gelfreykh and the Red Army Theater (1934-1940) in Moscow by Karo Semyonovich Halabyan and Vasilii Nikolaevich Simbirtsev.

5. Piacentini M. e Piccinato L., 1927-1932 (Archivio Luigi Piccinato/ Luigi Piccinato Archive\_01.02\_017).

6. Bernabiti A., 1934-1937.

7. Cavagnari O., 1918-1920.

8. Bosio G., 1938-1941.

9. The digital survey, carried out in March 2019 by the CHMLab (Cultural Heritage Management

Laboratory) of DIDA (Department of Architecture – University of the Study of Florence), was undertaken as part of the Framework Agreement between the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Albania, DIDA and the Catholic University Our Lady of Good Counsel of Tirana. Scientific supervisor: Alessandro Merlo; collaborators: Gaia Lavoratti, Francesco Tioli, Francesco Frullini, Giulia Lazzari, Elisa Luzzi, Sara Moreno Sánchez, Michela Notarnicola, Domenico Palattella, Marco Franchini, Vittoria Ghiselli and Alessandro Manghi.

10. In this paper when the terms fascist architecture or rationalist architecture are used, unless otherwise specified (European rationalist architecture, fascist architecture in Italy, etc.), it's always meant the particular declination of the architectural language assumed by the projects carried out by Italian architects in the colonies overseas, as well as in Rava's attempt at theorization.

11. Luigi Piccinato writes in the paragraph dedicated to colonial buildings in the entry "Colonia" of the Italian Encyclopedia (vol. X, 1931, pp. 826-827), referring to the Mediterranean character that unites Southern Italy and the Aegean Islands, "massive architecture, white and bright, closed on the outside, rich in volumes and poor in decorations".

12. Today the theater has suffered enormous devastation after the Libyan revolution and the fight against ISIS (fig.3).

13. The influence of the Florentine school of the Thirties is particularly evident in his works, in comparison with the projects of other architects who worked in the colonies.

14. In this case there are two foyers due to the necessity to link the entrance to the parts of the building dedicated to the classrooms: so the first is an exo-foyer and the second is the real access to the hall.

15. Anyway, the external image of the opera house architecture follows an eclectic style (which brings together various architectural styles historically widespread in Italy) which also departs from the rules of colonial rationalism.

16. In particular, the comparison is between the section AA of the Theatre of the Academy of the Fine Arts in Tirana and the longitudinal section of the Berenice Theatre in Benghazi marked as ALP\_01\_02\_017\_084.

17. The foyers are not comparable because they relate to very different exteriors and with the accessory functions that they must host from time to time.

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# ARCHITECTURAL SHAPE AND CULTURE OF THE ASHKELON ANCIENT CITY

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## FORMA E CULTURA ARCHITETTONICA DELL'ANTICA CITTÀ DI ASHKELON

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### Abstract

*The Mediterranean Sea is one of the ancient cornerstones of the Earth. Different peoples met and clashed in the Mediterranean area, leading to the birth of a culture that marks its distinction in the choral dimension. Manifestation of civilization is architecture in its different scales. The city, therefore, is a synthesis of many units that are recognized in a common structural and cultural denominator. Traces of certain dynamics can be found in the city of Ashkelon, on the south-east coast of the Mediterranean.*

*The path presented proposes a reading of the urban layout of ancient Ashkelon in order to obtain those cultural traits of Mediterranean matrix, putting it in relation with the other urban realities of the basin.*

*The dialogue that different peoples, at different times, but inhabitants of the same place, have managed to weave in the mutual recognition of belonging to the same culture, the Mediterranean one, is made up in an overall picture.*

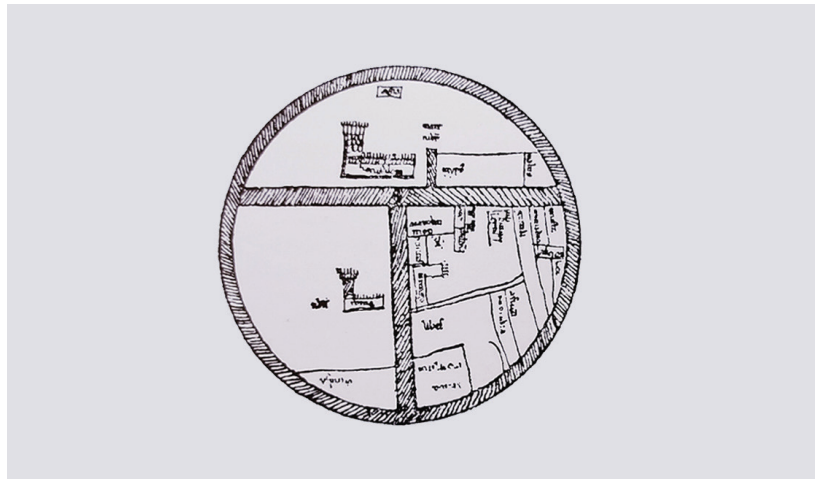
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*Il Mar Mediterraneo si pone tra gli antichi capisaldi della Terra. Popoli diversi si sono incontrati e scontrati nell'intorno mediterraneo, portando alla nascita di una cultura che marca la sua distinzione nella dimensione corale. Manifestazione di civiltà è l'architettura nelle sue diverse scale. La città, perciò, si fa sintesi di tante unità che si riconoscono in un comune denominatore strutturale e culturale. Tracce di certe dinamiche si riscontrano, nella città di Ashkelon, nella costa sud-est del Mediterraneo. Il percorso presentato propone la lettura dell'assetto urbano dell'antica Ashkelon per ricavare quei tratti culturali di matrice mediterranea, ponendola in rapporto con le altre realtà urbane del bacino, arrivando a ricomporre in un quadro d'insieme quel dialogo che popoli diversi, in tempi diversi, ma abitanti dello stesso luogo, sono riusciti ad intrecciare nel reciproco riconoscimento dell'appartenenza ad una medesima cultura, quella mediterranea.*

**Keywords:** Ashkelon, Map of Madaba, Cesarea, Cardo-Decumano, Waterfront

## Introduction

There are many points of view from which it is possible to observe the Mediterranean dimension; each of them gives back, in the specificity of its position, a different projection which however always proves to be insufficient to be able to recognize the reality of the Mediterranean. The geography, from the historical to the contemporary one - in spite of the transformations brought by the passage of time - shows us an internal sea, which in the annular circuit of its basin has joined the lands of three continents. Through the far open ends of its longitudinal axis has extended its limits towards the oceanic waters and the transoceanic regions of West and East (Fig.1). Anthropology tells us of a very flourishing "cradle of peoples", which, even if in the different customs, languages and traditions, have been able to recognize in this sea the value of centrality which is so clearly expressed by its name: mediterraneus, "in the middle of the lands". So, a void between full that has rooted its identity in its territorial limits, making them the threshold of a real cultural world. We can consider it, therefore, a wide-ranging polarity, which has been able to scan and orient terrestrial life around itself, and beyond.



**Figure 1**

*Globe with T-O scheme, taken from a Sallustian codex dating back to the XII century*

Are posed those conditions that have led man, from being an inhabitant of spaces, to a citizen of places and bearer of civilisation. Eloquent and always valid, is the expression which the Greek geographer Strabo, in the first century B.C., uses in his treatise *Γεωγραφικά*, precisely the Mediterranean: *<From this point of view "our sea" possesses a great superiority and it is therefore by following it that we will begin the tour of the world>* [1]. Inevitable, moreover, is the reference to Portulans and manuscript nautical charts, witnesses of navigational experiences [2] and of the woven network of maritime routes along which, for centuries, both the merchant and military fleets of the coastal populations have sailed. They constantly strived to conquer that supremacy over the waters which, alone, would have assured them control of power in the surrounding regions. The important strategic value that the Mediterranean has always assumed, thanks also to its geographical and climatic location, has given it a degree of authority that has never failed, not even when the borders of the world expanded beyond the Pillars of Hercules, shifting the attention of men towards the Atlantic space [3].

In such a complex place there could only be an equally articulated culture, whose originality consists of a semantic stratification, neither reducible nor classifiable according to defined categories. The undisputed author of such a work was undoubtedly the plurality of peoples and civilisations, who crossed, contaminated and succeeded one another, collecting and nourishing the legacy left by the previous ones, by virtue of the recognition of a common denominator that included them all.

The attractive and unifying force of such a cultural identity - despite its subtle boundaries - has represented in the past, as it continues to do in the present, that one true continuous line capable of outlining the features of a single face with a thousand expressions. As a source of this, the future life of the Mediterranean environment cannot be thought of without taking into account this core full of founding meanings, source and vector of growth [4].

In this panorama, it proves inevitable to consider architecture, and in particular public architecture on an urban scale, the product of man's need to give space and form to all those aspects that coordinate his experience, from social, economic and political to cultural and cultural. Within the relationship between Mediterranean culture and the Mediterranean city, in the dynamics of exchange between these two realities, the coastal settlements, the so-called port cities, have played and undoubtedly play a first order role. Compared to the inland cities, because of their border position, these have experienced phenomena of exchange and colonization, which, in turn, have acted on their conformation, bringing rapid transformations, substitution and overlapping of the built space [5]. Moreover, the crossing of land borders has made these realities supporters of the triggering of a radiation dynamic that has projected and spread the seeds of the collected characters towards the continental areas.

The observations described in this contribution, part of a wider research on the urban and architectural history of the ancient city of Ashkelon, located on the Levantine coast between Jerusalem and Gaza. They pursue the intention of bringing out the characteristics of Mediterranean culture, using the urban compositional structure of the Israeli city mentioned above as an instrument of investigation. The outlines of these factors will then allow a direct comparison with other situations, related to it for historical and political geographical reasons, so as to show the concrete connective and ordering capacity that the Mediterranean Sea has had towards those lands of which it is the centre.

### **Ascalona**

Ashkelon is a Mediterranean coastal city in the southern district of Israel, 50 km south of Tel Aviv and 13 km north of Gaza. Its name refers to the root of the word "shekel" [6], which indicates the unit of weight, the official Israeli currency both ancient and modern, in reference to its great importance as a port centre for merchant activities in the past. Moreover, the same word, identifies a variety of "allium", the shallot cultivated in those lands and exported throughout the Mediterranean in many cities of the Roman Empire [7].

Ashkelon, historically founded by the Canaanites in the 20th century B.C., then ruled by the Egyptians in the 14th century BC, developed with the Philistines (9th century B.C.) in biblical times its importance as a port city. It was followed by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, and the Greeks with the conquest of Alexander the Great in 332 BC. He was succeeded by the Maccabees, the Hasmoneans and then the Romans in the 1st century B.C. who built the Roman walls on the Canarian terraces. During the Byzantine period (4th-7th centuries A.D.), in addition to the conversion to Christianity, the prosperity of Ashkelon, which became an important centre for the grain trade and the export of wine, culminated. Later, we have the Arabic period (7th-12th century AD) where the city was completely destroyed and then rebuilt and fortified, becoming Muslim. The Crusader period followed to liberate the Holy Land, when the southern border of the Latin Kingdom was established. In 1187 Salah al-Din (Saladin) defeated the Crusaders and conquered the strongholds. In 1191 his army was defeated at the battle of Arsuf (Apollonia) by Richard the Lionheart, but Saladin still managed to demolish the fortifications of Ashkelon before the Crusaders entered the city. In 1240 it was again fortified by Richard I of Cornwall, but in 1270 the Muslim forces led by Sultan Bybars conquered and destroyed the port city for good [8].



**Figure 2**

*Map of the ancient city of Ashkelon in historical succession in the reading on which scholars converge today*

The ruins of the cities were then brought to light during the Ottoman period (XVI-XX century A.D.) thanks to the archaeological mission of Lady Hester Stanhope in 1815. The site was then examined by Palestine by the Exploration Fund (PEF) of Conder and Kitchener during the British Survey of Western Palestine in 1874-75, leading to a reference cartography. In fact, from the second half of the 20th century, thanks to the increasing use of topographic maps, sources of study of historical geography, Palestine became the object of archaeological surveys and excavations. Thus, the first scientific excavation in Ashkelon was conducted by archaeologist John Garstang and his assistant W. J. Phythian Adams of the Palestine Exploration Fund in 1920-1922. An underwater investigation by the Center for Maritime Studies of the University of Haifa (1985-87), the expeditions of the IAA (Israel Antiquities Authority), which conducted underwater and coastal studies (1992-97) and those of Leon Levy (1985 - 2006). One of the main objectives was to be able to determine the position of the ancient port - historically attested, but not found during the excavation campaigns carried out - and to be able to understand the changes in the settlement patterns of the peoples who inhabited that area [9].

In 1964 the archaeological park of Ashkelon was created under the National Park Authority to protect the findings of the ancient coastal city. Ascalona, today, is located on the coast in the form of a semicircle, whose diameter extends along the south bank, while the arch lies to the east. The territory, characterised by wells that at the time provided a large supply of fresh water, slopes down towards the sea. To the south it is covered with sand and morphologically higher able to block the dusty material carried by the wind blowing from the desert regions from the south-west.

The sea front, and its port, have always played an important role in history, although the exact location of the latter has not yet been defined. Its position may have changed over time. In the ancient south-west wall towards the sea is the presence of granite columns coming out horizontally from the sandy wall of the coast probably placed to reinforce the walls. The town is also surrounded

by a line of remains of fortified walls to the north, east and west. There are four gates in the wall circuit: the first of these, facing east, is called Porta Maggiore or Jerusalem Gate, because it faces the Holy City. The second is the Jaffa Gate facing north, towards the nearby city of the same name, the third to the south is the Gaza Gate, while the fourth, facing west, is presumed to be the Sea Gate, which is still under discussion today [10].

The Ashkelon site, therefore, is articulated in a complex way, identifying two main areas called North Tell and South Tell which represent a specific north-western and south-western area within which findings and excavations were made during archaeological expeditions, based on a grid of 100x100m units, useful to identify specific research areas. Inside we find the stratification of archaeological and architectural remains: some ruins of rooms facing west, in the centre the remains of the colonnaded structure of a Basilica, several wells and to the east, the Church called S. Maria Viridis and the Roman Theatre [9]. Currently, through the zenithal territorial views we can distinguish two road axes: one east-west and one north-south. The latter connects the Jaffa Gate with the Gaza Gate, probably referring to the road called "Via Maris", the ancient trade route that crossed the plain parallel to the coast of Palestine, connecting Alexandria with Damascus, passing through Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Joppa (Jaffa) and Dor.



**Figure 3**  
Map of the Levant coast  
(Itinera Hierosolimitana  
Crucesignatorum I, XII-XIII  
century) with the Via Maris  
route highlighted in red

## Investigation methods

Since talking about Mediterranean culture means talking about something elusive, where, often to the concrete data are added a series of immaterial factors, the use of only written sources, which historical, archaeological, and geographical literature provide, proves not to be exhaustive, if not even, in some cases, misleading. The complexity of the theme requires an analysis built on the ground of the comparison, starts from a reading of the urban fabric. Then descends to the level of the architectural layout, until it picks up signs recorded in the general unity of the genesis and evolution of the city organism. In this sense the research moves from the original matrices, which over time have followed one another, leading to the ultimate present image. Among all the historical matrices that are stratified in ancient Aschkelon. The attention has focused on that of the Roman period, that civilisation which, being characterised by its nature by a high degree of structuring, has managed to engrave traces from solid foundations, capable of resisting the action of both anthropic and natural events. In support of this choice, it is also good to remember that the Roman people are a founding people of cities, and a winning idea of cities, because they were ordered according to a system of open and closed spaces that made the urban fabric permeable to the different actions and needs, both private and public, of its inhabitants. Inevitably Rome, the great metropolis, imposed itself from the very beginning as the mother and matrix of this real culture of living and building. Its resonance force was such that it reached all the edges of the Mediterranean coasts with their port cities, which in turn were the proponents of an expansion of this influence also in the continental hinterland regions. *"The over 400 localities known to have been used as ports in Roman times"* [5] attest to the primacy of the Roman matrix in the size of the Mediterranean city and demonstrate the reasons for its structural resilience in later periods.

## Discover Ascalona thanks to the Mediterranean matrix

Starting therefore from a reading of the urban fabric, we can see the similarity in the architectural layout of Ashkelon with that of the city of Caesarea (Israel), located further north, 42 km from Haifa. This theme, which probably did not go unnoticed by scholars, has not yet had the right consideration in the fact of being able to get a reading on how the waterfront was organised by the Roman people in the Middle Eastern area of the Mediterranean. Therefore, considering the studies carried out on Caesarea (Fig. 4) and those to be developed on Ashkelon (Fig. 5), it is evident the location of the corresponding elements in both cities, such as the presence of the double external fortification structure that organizes a sort of free area with a defensive role, which contains the most functional part of the city where the theatre, the stadium or the amphitheatre is located.

**Figure 4**

*Map of the current archaeological evidence of ancient Caesarea. Note the orientation of the buildings of the Basilica and the minor Stadium, the layout of the double walls and the Crusader settlement.*



**Figure 5**

*Map of the current archaeological evidence of ancient Ashkelon where the possible double layout of the walls and the classical buildings of the Basilica and the Theatre are reported in analogy to Caesarea.*

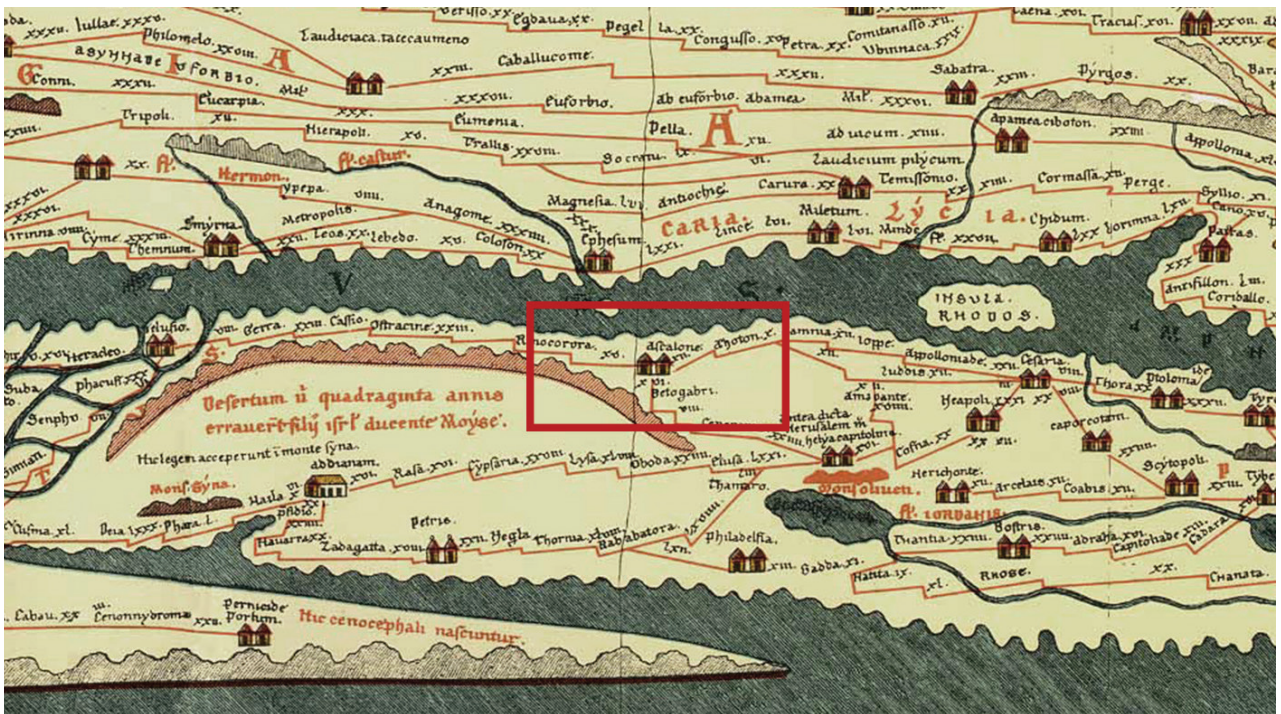


The layout of the double wall with moat is also found, in the Sanudo map, in the ancient port city of Akko (Israel), located further north of Caesarea. It is therefore possible to identify a constant in the structure of the fortification that follows a twin-track layout [11].

In this logic we can pose the first question and identify in Caesarea the location of public structures such as the Basilica and the area of the Forum which follow a very precise orientation, that is the cardo-decumano one. In Ashkelon, on the other hand, this arrangement seems to differ from the traces that are identified as the cardo-decumano, the latter being considered today as the stretch corresponding to the "via Maris". We further observe that a trade route so practiced cannot be suitable for the security and defence of a fortified city where goods entering and leaving were controlled by duty payments. Therefore, the first problem that is posed is the exact identification of the Via Maris, which is probably divided into two diverticules, one internal controlled and one external located in the hinterland adjacent to today's Ottoman quarter. The latter, in turn, is another aspect to be explored in relation to the findings of remains from the medieval Crusader period in that area which testify to the presence of a market or trade road passing outside the fortified city.

The second question, instead, is linked to the comparison of the representation of the city of Ascalona within the historical maps. For the Roman period reference is made to the Tabula Peutingeriana [12], while for the medieval period to the Map of Madaba [6]. The first, based on a Roman military road map of the 4th century AD with a north orientation on the right side, seems very eloquent as far as the organisation of the external road axes of Ashkelon is concerned. It is identified by a symbol made up of two towers with a double sloping roof crowned by a round apex, with long, narrow doors, separated from each other but linked by two pen strokes, one at the base and the other at roof height. The image gives a description of the city as a safe, fortified, station, identified with the representation of the two knightly towers next to the east gate. There is also an east-west road that arrives directly in front of the Jerusalem Gate (east) and two south and north axes that seem to be offset from each other. (Fig.6)

The Map of Madaba dating back to the 6th century A.D., since it is considered by archaeologists to be an extremely reliable representation of Jerusalem from the Hadrian period, with the thistle, the decumanus medium and the identification of the Damascus Gate, we consider the representation of Ashkelon, depicted from an aerial view overlooking the interior of the city itself, to be equally consistent. Slightly in a foreshortening position - perhaps to indicate the uphill slope towards the



**Figure 6**

Ascalona, Tabula Peutingeriana, Roman road map of the 4th century A.D. The relevant cartoon identifies a turreted wall and the streets to the north, south and east of the city of Ascalona with a view from outside the walls.

southern part of the area - is the turreted gate to the east, that of Jerusalem, from which the decumanus can be seen, which forks up to the waterfront, defining a trapezoidal area. The cardo instead stops at the height of the Basilica, interrupting the colonnaded part that continues westwards and identifying either a gap or the interruption of the same, as happens in Jerusalem. (Fig.7)

**Figure 7**

Overlapping of the location and orientation of the road axes of the Madaba map on the site of the current ancient Ashkelon. The main reference is given by the Gate of Jerusalem and the position of the Basilica found. Note how the mosaic offers a view of Ashkelon from the waterfront.

FRAMMENTO DEL MOSAICO DI MADABA

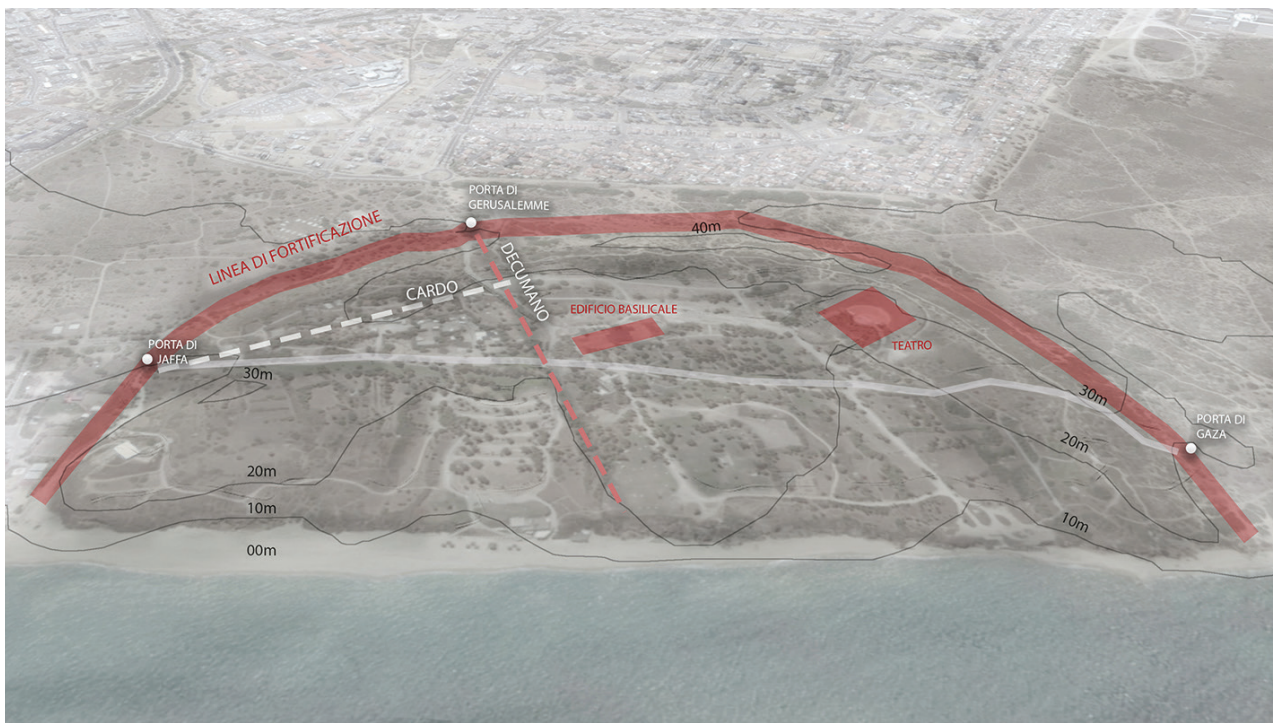


## Conclusions

The analysis carried out on the Tabula Peuntingeriana and the Map of Madaba would give us a different interpretation regarding the morphology of the territory of Ashkelon, compared to how it appears today: If we therefore make an overlap between the zenithal aerial image of the present city and the representation of the same in the Map of Madaba, orienting them, we find that the cardo-decumano alignment of the historical map coincides as direction and position with the exact orientation of the Roman Basilica [13], then Byzantine Church. So, if the Basilica follows the cardo-decumano alignment, as in Caesar, the location of the axes currently identified may not be completely exact. The east-west axis forks until it intersects with the north-south axis, which interrupts the colonnaded part and continues southwards, reaching a gap or its own conclusion, and continues towards the sea front creating a trapezoidal space. In front of this trapezoidal area could be the access to the sea, since there is talk of the presence of a port still unidentified, which however seems to follow morphologically the forms of today's site. What has just been hypothesised will be further verified with in-depth studies of the sector both as regards the fronts, the differences in height, the definition of the resilience of the port settlement, and the orientations of the Roman cardo-decumano mesh, which was taken up by the Byzantines and later used and expanded by the Crusaders. (Fig. 8) All this leaves a trace on the territory, the Basilica becomes the architectural key of the city. This, therefore, is only the beginning of a wider research that will continue with the investigation of the successive temporal phases until the 19th century, the Ottoman era, focusing on the buildings that characterized the area examined. It turns out how Ashkelon can be organized thanks to the comparison of its structure with that of the Mediterranean cities [14] where there are local constants that are repeated in a logic of territorial analogy that together with the ancient cultural matrices are assimilated and then updated over time. The references to be investigated for the morphological and formal analogies will surely be Caesarea, as we said, and Leptis Magna (now Libya) another very

**Figure 8**

*Territorial view of the new research layout where the so-called Via Maris could be depowered in favour of a thistle slid eastwards lying parallel to the remains of the Roman Basilica.*



important Mediterranean city in the classical period. The research carried out must be the starting point to make these doubts and analogies, significant evidence, aiming at giving back a new vision, currently not unitary and not correct, of the ancient port city of Ascalona.

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# AROUND URBAN MEDITERRANEAN

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## ALLA RICERCA DI UN MEDITERRANEO URBANO

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### Abstract

*Beyond the geographical notion, the Mediterranean is an 'evocative box' of landscapes, stories, people. It is - among "a thousand things together" - "a region of cities" (F. Braudel, 1949), in which, as Predrag Matvejevic wrote in 1987, "the inhabitants of the Mediterranean belonged more to cities than to the state or nation. In fact, the cities were for them state and nation and also something more". Maurice Ayamard also wrote that much more than the climate, geology and topography, the Mediterranean owes its unity to a network of cities and villages around which the Mediterranean space was formed which is animated by it and receives life from it. Comparing the Mediterranean landscape to a very long film, the Mediterranean cities would appear in all its scenes. Cities stratified over time, metropolis "mother cities" (from meter and polis), grow over time, always adding and evoking particular sensations in the collective imagination, iconic images sometimes stereotyped. Between nostalgia, exoticism, clichés, Mediterranean cities are rooted in our imagination, incorporating differences within deep roots, generating heterogeneous urban landscapes, the result of cohabitation and relationships of different natures. Research on the relationship between the city and the Mediterranean mainly emphasizes the uniqueness of the dense "network" of human settlements, the connections between these, in short, the "connectivity" (P. Horden, N. Purcell, 2000).*

*In an attempt to get out of a 'zenithal approach' to the theme and starting from the construction of a scientific reference platform, the contribution tries to evolve the 'paradigm' of the Mediterranean City in Urban Mediterranean, positioning the Mediterranean as a noun and not as an adjective that identifies the geographical space. On the one hand this presupposes asking ourselves 'if the Mediterranean city exists', which city or cities that more than others can be defined as Mediterranean and on the other it implies deepening what is meant today by 'Mediterranean', where we recognize it in places ordinary life: in urban landscapes.*

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*Oltre la nozione geografica, il Mediterraneo è un contenitore evocativo di paesaggi, di storie, di uomini. È - tra "le mille cose insieme" - "una regione di città" (F. Braudel, 1949), in cui come scriveva nel 1987 Predrag Matvejevic "gli abitanti del mediterraneo appartenevano più alle città che allo stato o alla nazione. Le città infatti erano per loro stato e nazione e anche qualcosa di più".*

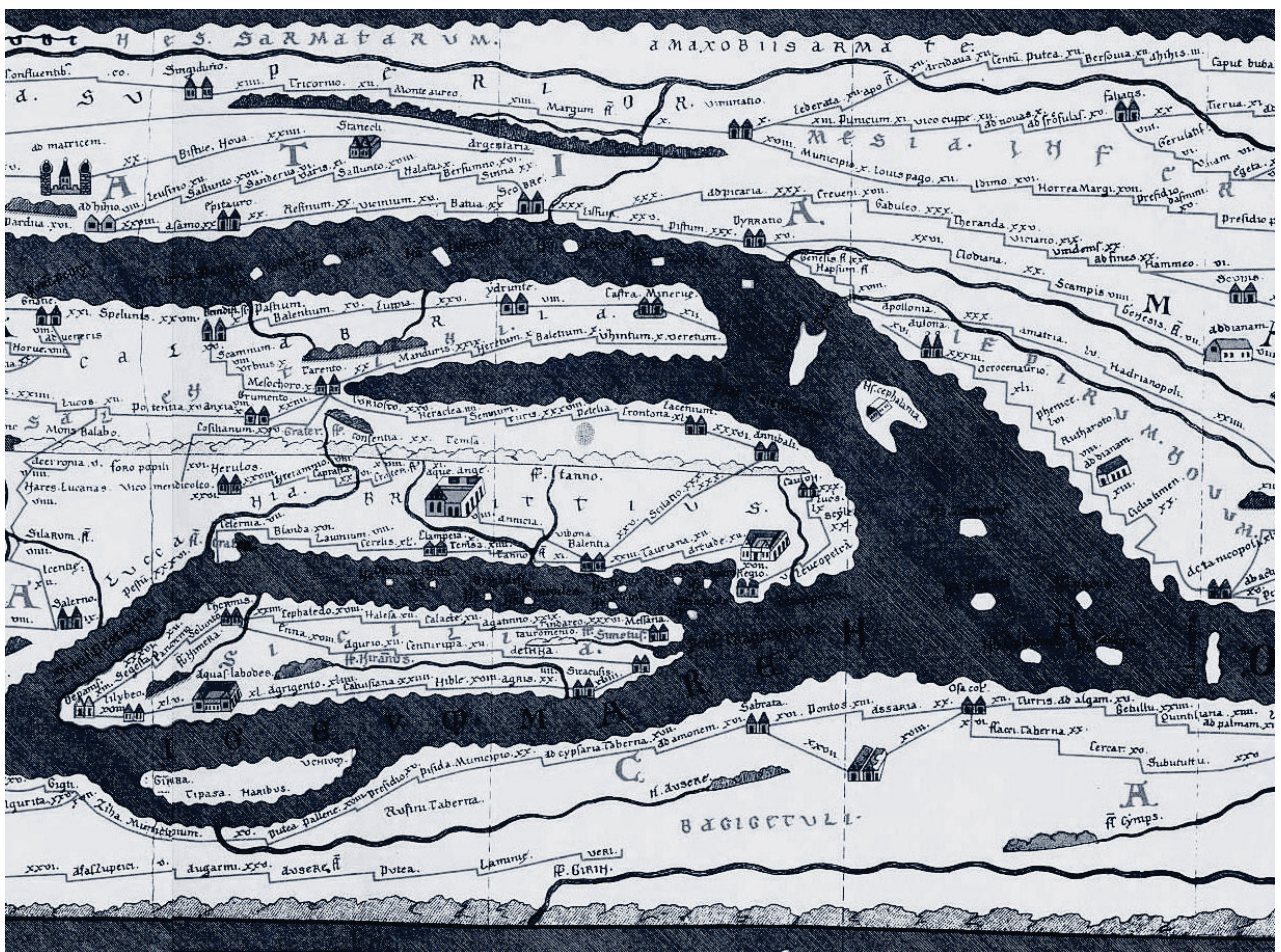
*Anche Maurice Ayamard scriveva che molto più che al clima, alla geologia e alla topografia, il mediterraneo deve la propria unità a una rete di città e di borghi intorno ai quali si è formato lo spazio mediterraneo che ne è animato e ne riceve vita. Paragonando il paesaggio mediterraneo ad un lunghissimo film, le città mediterranee comparirebbero in tutte le sue scene. "Meticce", stratificate, metropoli "città madri" (da meter e polis), crescono nel corso del tempo sempre aggiungendo ed evocano nell'immaginario collettivo particolari sensazioni, immagini iconiche talvolta stereotipate. Tra nostalgia, esotismo, luoghi comuni, le città mediterranee sono radicate nel nostro immaginario, inglobano differenze all'interno di radici profonde generando paesaggi urbani eterogenei, frutto di convivenze e di relazioni di diverse nature. Le ricerche sulle relazioni tra città e mediterraneo mettono in evidenza principalmente l'unicità della fitta 'rete' d'insediamenti umani, le connessioni fra questi, in sintesi la "connettività" (P. Horden, N. Purcell, 2000). Nel tentativo di uscire da un 'approccio zenitale' al tema e a partire dalla costruzione di una piattaforma di riferimento*

scientifico, il contributo prova a evolvere il ‘paradigma’ della Città Mediterranea in Mediterraneo Urbano, posizionando il mediterraneo come sostantivo e non come aggettivo che identifica lo spazio geografico. Da una parte questo presuppone di domandarsi ‘se esiste la città mediterranea’, quale sia o quali siano città che più di altre si possano definire mediterranee e dall’altra implica approfondire che cosa si intende oggi con ‘Mediterraneo’, dove lo riconosciamo nei luoghi ordinari di vita: nei paesaggi urbani.

**Keywords:** Ashkelon, Map of Madaba, Cesarea, Cardo-Decumano, Waterfront

## Introduction

This contribution is a section from the doctoral research that I am developing on the evolution of the ‘Mediterranean city’ in relationship to global changes. The ‘Mediterranean city’ is an apparently well-known theme that holds many surprises. In recent history, the cities of the Mediterranean have been widely observed from multiple disciplinary points of view: geographical, historical, economic, urban, and political. Geo-formal roles/devices have been attributed to these cities, such as ‘hinge’ city, ‘frontier’ city and ‘exchange city’. Although much has already been written on Mediterranean cities, the contribution attempts to deal the theme, linking the main recent contributions on the evolution of the topic on the *Mediterranean city*, starting first from an ontological question: Does the Mediterranean city exist?



**Figure 1**  
Reti. Frammento di “tabula peutingeriana”.

## Telegram from an 'inner city'

As G. Pace already reported in 1998 “*Many are ready to study solutions for the ills of the 'Mediterranean city', without having had the time to ask themselves if it really exists, and what the Mediterranean city means*” [1]. It does not physically exist as “*Locus Solus*” [2] and searching for existence may appear misleading, but as F. Naselli also underlines in 2003 “*The paradigm of the Mediterranean city is so impressed in our memory that any degradation it should suffer, would not be enough to cancel it or even make it unpleasant*” [3]. Each of us has in mind an image of this city that fascinates the collective imagination with infinite 'portraits of urban landscapes' of Venice, Istanbul, Algiers, Marseille, Barcelona, which correspond to 'atlases of sensations', to atlas of iconic images sometimes stereotyped. Both words, *city* and *Mediterranean*, generate a kaleidoscopic complexity, multiform, for the extent of the connected meanings and their evolution dynamics, which arises first of all from difficult correspondences, in both terms, between the geographical space 'frozen' on a map - observed from an overhead look - and the real urban space instead is constantly changing - observed by an 'oblique' look three-dimensional. For Fernand Braudel, “*cities, motionless points of the maps, feed on movement*” [4] and, again for the famous French historian, the *Mediterraneo* itself is a “*space – movement*” [5], a system of roads, of land and sea connections linked together. In a certain way this idea of 'movement' that merges *City* and the *Mediterraneo* could constitute a concept of words and images that precedes the idea of a Mediterranean city as a physical space, and 'moves' within of the cognitive space, individual and collective. A 'movement' that is found in our thinking that leads to conceptualize an urban environment that is the result of an association of frames, places, stories, voices, experiences, which we have codified in our minds united with the historicization of some spaces of the city, like the square, - an agora originally in the Greek polis - the streets, the monuments, the urban nature. You could probably consider the Mediterranean city as an 'inner city' – in a emotional way as an *intimate* space – that likes to think it exists but that it is only the result of free and empirical connections of our subjectivity and that sometimes we meet in reality but that but that we can't focus simply because it's not there. This idea of space of movement of F. Braudel can also be recognized in the migrations of the people, of the species of exotic plants that characterize the evolution of the Mediterranean area, and in the constant geopolitical oscillation to which the Mediterranean is subjected by its nature as a 'fluid border'. The Mediterranean city could be one of the cities told by Italo Calvino in 'the invisible cities', which extends beyond a geographical border and leaves room for the poetic image of a sensitive, utopian, virtual city, “*Despina can be reached in two ways: by ship or for camel. The city looks different to those who come from the land and to those who come from the sea*” [6].

Can the positions of the city on the sea and the climatic zone be exhaustive to define the Mediterranean belonging of a settlement? If on the one hand, as F. Braudel observes, delimiting the Mediterranean only with the olive tree and the palm tree “*means giving primacy to the climate, the decisive creator of human life [...] but what frontiers to draw when it is no longer a matter of plants and of animals, but of men not stopped by any limit, who overcome all barriers ?*” [7]. Maurice Aymard underlines that “*Much more than the climate, geology and relief, the Mediterranean owes its unity to a precociously established and remarkably tenacious network of cities and villages: it is around it that the Mediterranean space was formed, which it is animated and receives life from it*” [8]. The Mediterranean cannot be considered only a 'climatic fact', and as Marina Fuschi states it is rather “*an area of complexity*” [9]. “*The Mediterranean is not a simple belonging*”. “*There are places where the sea is denser and firmer, particularly in the gulfs and near the islands. Elsewhere it becomes more common and ordinary, so much so that we can easily exchange it with the other seas. Different facts contribute to this, coming not only from the marine presence or from the surrounding shore but*

perhaps also from the Mediterranean past itself” [10]. In this past, the Mediterranean man “before the birth of the world of the sea and cities, citizens and navigators, began by being a shepherd” [7]. Considering the Mediterranean as a ‘city region’ implies that the very narrow definition of the Mediterranean which “essentially includes cities projected towards the sea, has its validity in various historical moments but is misleading as a primary definition” [7].

If on the one hand the 'Mediterranean city' is not attributable to a specific city, and on the other hand the climate and the coastal position cannot be exhaustive to define a ‘Mediterranean belonging’, from here one could overcome the commonplace that sees the Mediterranean city mainly as a seaside city and instead consider again the Mediterranean city – in a geographical meaning, an *internal* position – as an ‘inner city’. According to Urbano Cardarelli we can also hypothesize “the global shape of the Mediterranean city”. That is “at the same time, both the form of physical space and of economic and social space: both the fruit of the millenary crystallization of spatial relationships” [11].

This idea of a *millenary space* coincides with a historical urban nucleus, and we can write again of an ‘inner city’ – in the urban shape meaning, like downtown of the city – rooted in time. This ‘general idea of a Mediterranean city’ contains “the environmental characteristics, the wealth of resources, the continuous evolution of civilizations closely in contact, which over time have led to a changing network of economic-political relations, which has materialized in such a strong urban structure to be extended to inland regions, and to a continuous hybridization of construction techniques and architectural styles.” [11].

Last but not least, another stereotype rooted in the topic of the Mediterranean city is that of attributing a negative meaning to the Mediterranean adjective referring to cities as “an immense, often shapeless agglomeration of houses and services of the lowest order found in underdeveloped countries” [12] and here we can again approach the Mediterranean city to the ‘inner city’, – intended as a suburb – as sections of a large city in or near its centre often when crowded or ruined.

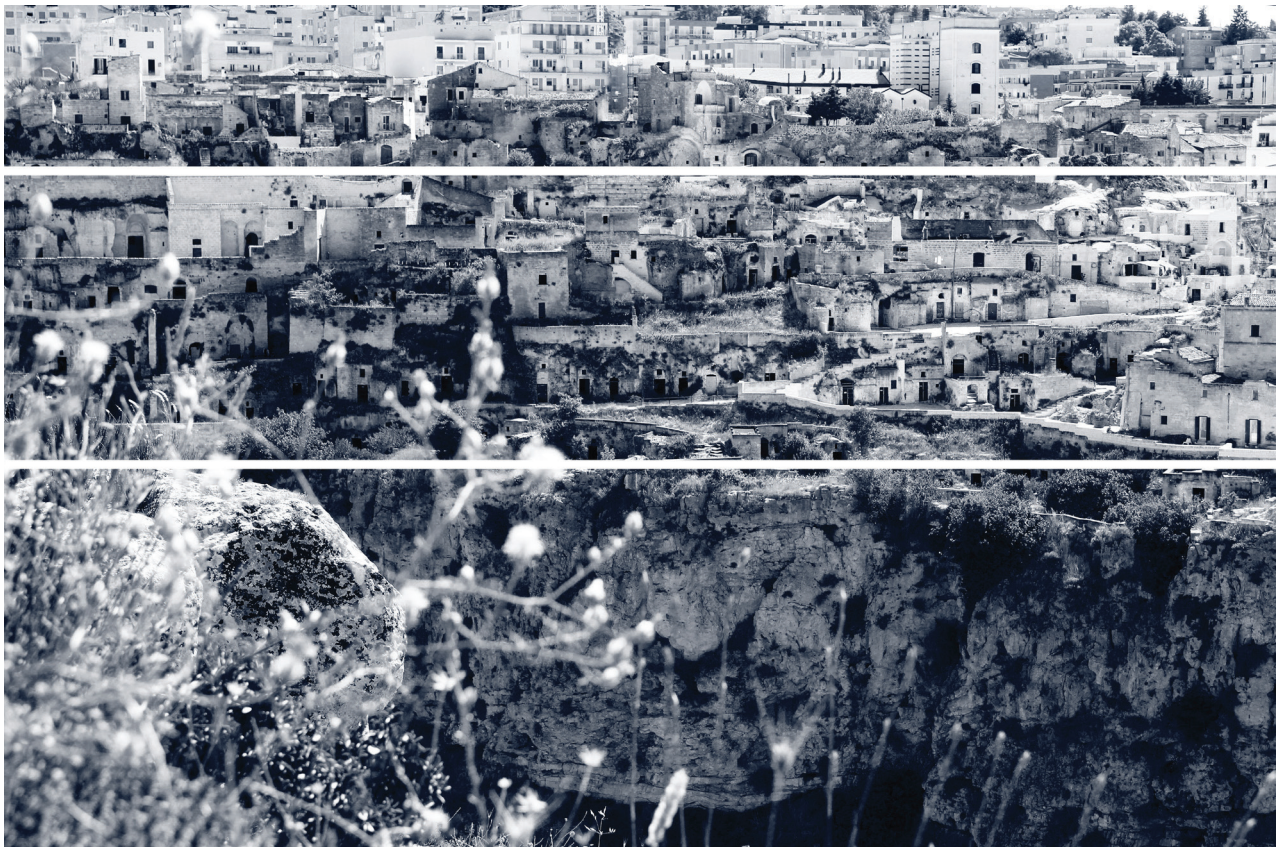
This interpretation of ‘inner’, can also be recognized from the etymology of the Mediterranean adjective, from the latin *Mediterraneus*: *Médius* - in the middle - and *Terraneus* - land - in the middle of the land, albeit absolutely referring to the sea that is located between Europe, Africa and Asia. Leaving from abstraction of a Mediterranean town, oscillating between imaginary reality and stereotypes, it seems fitting to overcome the ‘two-dimensional relationship’, the Mediterranean city and groped most daring interpretive approaches to capture instead of dwelling dimension.

As M. Prezioso suggests, we could speak not of a *Mediterranean city* but of the *Mediterranean of cities* [13]. From here you can try to evolve the idea, the paradigm, of the *Mediterranean city* in the *Urban Mediterranean* - intended as an expression of the ‘common tones of the diversity of Mediterranean urban landscapes’.

First of all this implies to deepen what the ‘Mediterraneo’ means and where it is recognized in ordinary places of life: in urban landscapes.

## Genealogical Mediterranean

“Dare to say what the Mediterraneo is, is always risky” [7]. Braudel asked himself this question in his most influential work: “How to define the Mediterranean?” [4]. On the other hand, the Mediterranean and the discussion on the Mediterranean are inseparable from each other, as Predrag Matvejevic recalled [10]. Writers, poets, historians during the twentieth century have interpreted



**Figure 2**

*Strati. Foto di Leonardo Pilati, Matera, Italia, 2019.*

the Mediterranean with passion, illusions, metaphors, and stories. For example the writer George Simenon wrote, *“The Mediterranean is... The Mediterranean is... the Mediterranean is... I stay like this with the pen in mid-air, in serious difficulty, as when as a child standing in front of the blackboard, I shifted the weight from one leg to the other and in the meantime I was looking for a compassionate companion out of the corner of my eye”* [14]. This ‘poetic focus’ on the Mediterranean theme already begins with the history and evocative character of the word as the Tunisian writer Emma Belahj Yahia recalls *“the word is pronounced and here is a scene, a memory, a fear, nestled in each of its syllables, a hope”* [15]. Mediterraneo is a perennial source of inspiration, taking up the title of the 1933 Inspirations Méditerranée conference by Paul Valéry, which also led to *“the abuse of clichés in literature, descriptions and repetitions of all genres”* [10]. But let's proceed in order. The etymology of the Mediterranean word has been reconstructed several times in a long itinerary that begins with Gaio Giulio Solino in the 4th century, who first used the adjective mediterraneus in his *Collectanea rerum memo- rabilium* and continues with Isidoro di Siviglia, who lived in the 6th century which was the first to use the word Mediterranean not as a generic neutral adjective, but as a noun referring to the sea [16]. A much more recent issue is that of understanding the Mediterranean as a 'subject', as a noun not referring only to the sea. Mediterranean as a *“unity with “its environmental and climate characteristics with its people on three continents”* [7], appears for the first time in 1876 thanks to the geographer French anarchist Élisée Reclus in which the title of the third chapter of the first volume of his Southern Europe *Nouvelle géographie*. In 1933 Paul Valéry described Mediterraneo as a *“device, a machine to produce civilization”* [7]. The French archaeologist Charles Parain in 1936, during his grand tour, defined the Mediterranean *“as a transition zone”* [7], a large 'ecotone' between a river with little Mediterranean features and mountains. Instead, Albert Camus ‘interpretation of

the Mediterranean connects directly to the spaces of the cities of some countries of the basin *“It is not classic and orderly, it is widespread and turbulent, like the Arab neighbourhoods or the ports of Genoa and Tunisia. This triumphant taste of life, this sense of oppression and boredom, the deserted squares at midday in Spain, this is the real Mediterranean at the siesta.”* [7]. An idea completely different from that of Paul Morand, French writer and diplomat who in 1937 defined the Mediterranean as *“the calm climate of fine tones, the homeland of melodious rhythm, not that of disjointed sounds and discordant tumult”* [7].

In 1945, at the end of the Second World War, Lucien Febvre, a French historian and co-founder of *Les Annales*, during a long-lasting course on Europe spoke of the *“solid space of the Mediterranean”* [17], a double space with flexible and conceptual borders that contextual. F. Braudel, the French historian of reference on the subject and a pupil of Febvre, in 1949 answered the question with which he opened the paragraph by saying that the Mediterranean is a *“sea closed by its lands”*, *“Is it not above all a sea between mountains?”* [4]. Still in 1949 F. Braudel defines the Mediterranean as a *“liquid continent”*, an extensive geographical definition, subsequently transformed in 1971 by the fisherman from Halicarnassus - Halikarnas Balıkcısı - into the *“Sixth Continent”* [7]. Always starting from the question what is the Mediterranean in 1977 Braudel coined the best known definition of the Mediterranean *“A thousand things together; not a landscape but innumerable landscapes, not a sea but a succession of seas, not a civilization but a series of civilizations ‘one on the other’”*. [5]. Ten years later Predrag Matvejevic Croatian writer and academic in his *Mediterranski Brevijar* define the Mediterranean as the *“sea of proximity”* [10], in a book that in the future English translation of 1999 by M. Henry Heim intercepts the word landscape again rewriting the title in: *Mediterranean A Cultural Landscape*. In 1991 the French historian Anne Ruel writes of interpreting the Mediterranean as *“an invention, a recent product of our vision of the world”* [18], an invention of geography. For the writer Manuel Vincent it is *“an inner sea”* [19], which we all keep in our memory, a call to reflect on the growing phenomenon of mass tourism that worried the French writer. For the French geographer and sociologist Bernard Kayser Mediterranean is *“a myth, an image”* [20] fragmented by the distances between the north and south of the Mediterranean basin, by the advance of a united Europe, and perhaps we could add today with the advent of nationalisms. The genealogical Mediterranean continues with the Italian historian F. Cassano within his *Pensiero Meridiano*, in which he writes how what is relevant about the Mediterranean is *“its status of border, interface, mediation between peoples”* [21]. The 'production' of definitions during the 1900s is such as to be able to identify two constant, almost obsessive trends: the search for a definition that establishes the boundaries and the extension of the Mediterranean space as a function of the construction of a Mediterranean unity; the attempt to get out of a geographical adjectival connotation and define what is meant by Mediterranean as a noun, trying to keep together more elements, more possible meanings. The idea of the Mediterranean fluctuates and will continue to oscillate in relation to the evolution of societies, history, geography, politics, climate, thus excluding the possibility of an exhaustive and concise answer to the question of F. Braudel with which it began the paragraph. In the wake of an impossible definition instead, a constellation of keywords, of meanings, emerges from the Genealogical Mediterranean that allow us to try to interpret the urban Mediterranean in the ordinary places of life: *device, ‘transition’ zone, turbulence, fine tones, solid, liquid and sixth continent, cultural landscape, proximity, invention, still “inner”, image, interface, mediation.*

## Looking for the traces

This multiplicity of meanings suggests the idea of a Mediterranean urban landscape as a large possible container of diversity and similarities. Being a recent idea that of the Mediterranean understood as a heterogeneous area, united, in continuous evolution, if with the Mediterranean city



**Figure 3**  
*Medina Nuova*. Foto di Leonardo Pilati, Fez, Marocco, 2019.

we can mean an ‘*inner city*’ with multiple meanings – in an emotive way, of internal settlement in a geographical sense, of historical city, of suburb in decay - Mediterranean Urban instead we could understand it primarily as a contemporary urban dimension of the ‘liquid continent’. In particular, the Mediterranean as it is understood today, - as a unity in variety - referring to lands, peoples arose in relation to the European colonial period and then to the complex process of decolonization. We could therefore consider primarily as an urban Mediterranean area what in France is defined with *Ville Nouvelle* by which we mean “*planned city, the creation of which was decided by administrative will and in general within the framework of a development policy*” [22]. The meaning is large and includes different urban realities: cities built outside urbanized regions for industrial purposes; new capitals built outside the large urban agglomerations for internal political reasons, for defensive strategies or to favour the development of specific areas; new cities built seamlessly within metropolises; new parts of cities located in spatial continuity with a large agglomeration intended to guide and structure the development of the suburbs. Starting from some of the meanings that emerged from the genealogical Mediterranean, it appears fitting - albeit risky - to overcome the impossible search for a single urban model and instead hypothesize *urban traces in movement* of the urban Mediterranean that can be intercepted in Algiers as in Marseille, Florence or Fez or in the many urban landscapes of the Mediterranean. For example, the *devices* that by their nature connect and disconnect in the urban Mediterranean could correspond to the ports of the cities, but

also the hotspots where immigrants arrive as well as religious structures. We could also understand the *devices* as real machines such as the motors of the air conditioners on the facades or roofs of the houses that constitute real ‘climate spies’. Or we could understand satellite antennas as *devices* on the balconies of houses ‘that make integration visible to us’. The *transition zone* could be interpreted as a crossable area and as a medium-small passage filter that connects us from one space to another, from one landscape to another in a short time. The tourist flow that characterizes the Mediterranean area immediately makes us think of this *state of transition* that we can recognize in the streets of the urban Mediterranean. The *turbulence* that A. Camus wrote is something that we can find in the tension between the ‘thrust of modernity and primordial roots’. These tensions are encountered in the spaces of cities, where it is the relationships between the inhabitants that are tense rather than the relationship between the spaces that compose it. The *proximity* can be recognized in crowded markets where the density of bodies and things - which has always characterized the Mediterranean urban area - is evident. We can intercept the role of *interface* in the port / city areas but also in the ‘thin margin’ between the urban Mediterranean and the countryside or hilly areas. The *mediation* could be sought in the threshold space between 'inside and outside', (in-between) as a subtle contact line in the urban Mediterranean between domestic, private, and public spaces such as streets and squares. A series of frames of the urban Mediterranean appear clearer to us now in which diversity, similarities, unity in variety emerge: contrasts.

## Acknowledgements

I thank my research tutor Prof. Anna Lambertini for orienting me carefully in this ‘*Mediterranean navigation*’ and I thank the cluster of professors in Landscape Architecture of the Florence School of Architecture for their precious advice on the work.



**Figure 4**  
*Devices. Foto di Leonardo Pilati, Piombino, Italia, 2020.*

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# FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR THE RESTORATION AND RECOVERY OF THE THEATER OF THE ACADEMY - UNIVERSITY OF ARTS IN TIRANA.

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## LO STUDIO DI FATTIBILITA' PER IL RECUPERO DEL TEATRO DELL'ACCADEMIA DELLE ARTI A TIRANA

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### Abstract

*This paper presents an interdisciplinary research work on Architectural Design carried out by a group of professors and researchers (coordinated by Prof. Fabio Capanni) within the Department of Architecture of the University of Florence. The research topic was the restoration and the refurbishment of Theater of Academy of the Arts in Tirana designed and built by italian architect Gherardo Bosio (and collabs) between 1939 and 1943. The original title of the research was "Feasibility Study for the restoration and the recovery of the theater building of the University of the Arts in Tirana".*

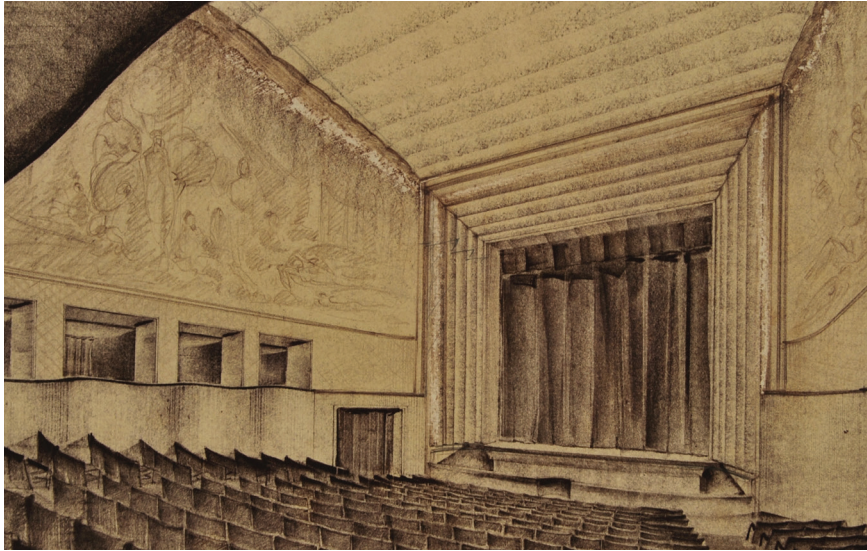
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*Questo saggio presenta un lavoro di ricerca interdisciplinare sul progetto di architettura, condotto presso il Dipartimento di Architettura dell'Università degli studi di Firenze da un gruppo di docenti e ricercatori guidati dal Prof. Fabio Capanni.*

*La ricerca ha avuto come obiettivo il recupero ed il restauro del Teatro dell'Accademia delle Arti di Tirana, progettato e costruito dall'architetto italiano Gherardo Bosio e dai suoi collaboratori tra il 1939 ed il 1943.*

**Keywords:** Tirana, Albania, University of the Arts, Theater, Italian Architecture

## Introduction

Architecture Department has a stable relationship with the city of Tirana due to the double degree with the Catholic Faculty “Our Lady of Good Counsel” whose Faculty of Architecture is chaired by prof. Fabio Capanni. Here many professors from the University of Florence are engaged in classes and labs. Furthermore, at Architecture Department of Florence are ongoing researches on architecture and urban planning of the twentieth century in Albania [1]. These researches took part



**Figure 1**

*Gherardo Bosio, interior view (AEGB) 1939.*

during last ten years within the PhD programs in Architectural and Urban Design, and still some of them are focused on Italian architects who designed and built architecture in 1920-1945 years in Albania in particular at the Central Office for Albanian Construction and Urban Planning [2] office (1939-1943).



**Figure 2.**

*Theater seats, Photo R.Renzi 2020.*

## Teather and monumental complex of italian buildings in Tirana.

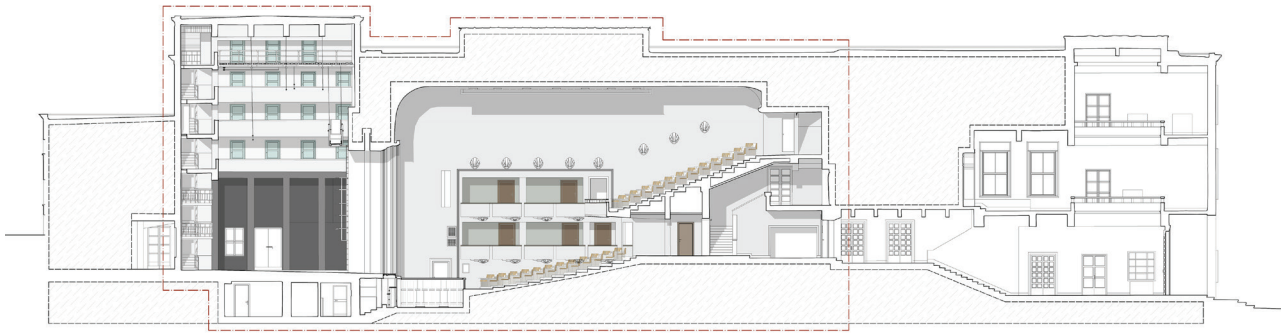
The theater of the University of the Arts of Tirana [3] is considered one of the most significant examples of Italian architecture of the first half of the last century and its relevance is considered primary in the Albanian architectural panorama [4]. So, the feasibility study had as its main objective to identify a number of good practices-methods to be adopted for the restoration of the theater hall and its technical supply to be in line with contemporary rules and laws. These operations could be intended as a new systematic “adaptation” with a specific target aimed to safeguard building’s historical, cultural and architectural values.



**Figure 3**  
*Gallery, Photo R.Renzi 2020.*



**Figure 4**  
*Corridors to access small stages, first floor Photo R.Renzi 2020.*



**Figure 5**  
*Feasibility Study, Cross Section.*

The study [5] has invested various aspects necessarily linked one to each other: from urban planning and regulatory ones to historical and architectural; from structural and technological supply to those related to acoustics, up to the finishes and furnishings which, in this specific case, have a significant value and contribute to determining the particular value and character of the building.

Safeguarding has taken as a guide principle. It was dictated, in addition to the awareness of the objective value of the building, by the current legislation which, in the context of the Urban Planning Regulations of Tirana, defines the theater as an asset protected by the Ministry of Culture, in subordinate to the Institute of Cultural Monuments “Gani Strazimiri”.

The stylistic unity of the building, which can be found from the general composition to the finishes and furnishings, was taken as one of the key values around which to develop the Feasibility Study. Although the current state of the building is substantially the original Design made by Gherardo Bosio and collaborators of 1939, over the years some parts have undergone changes that have made it more difficult to identify the situation and the identity of the original project.

Some substitutions of furnitures and interiors (pavements, wall colors, bathroom sinks and toilets, seats, armchairs, wardrobes etc) and in some cases, as in the hall, should be noted; or even some changes in the use of spaces and places have emerged, sometimes with suppressions of rooms and some spaces.

From 1943 to 2020 the surrounding of Tirana changed significantly in the settlement structure of the monumental area of the city.

In fact, starting from the end of the second war conflict, a moment preceded by the departure of the Italians, the city was populated by new architectures that arose mainly to occupy the free areas in the great urban axis designed by Italian architects, Armando Brasini, Florestano Di Fausto and Gherardo Bosio.

Subsequently, new volumes arose and saturated those free spaces of “pause” placed between the buildings that in the original project had ensured the perception of the places, rhythmically timed between the great monumental axes and the wide Square entitled to Mother Teresa. This space was thinned in order to appear such as an elevated and monumental acropolis of the capital.

Currently the situation is fully saturated and also presents modifications and additions regarding the Italian buildings designed by Bosio for the monumental acropolis.

The Politecnico, born as an in line shape building with a central big, mass, tower, has undergone the birth of two “wings” sides which, joined with a third building on the back, have shaped the creation of a central courtyard system, actually very large even compared to the already vast original plant.

The theater building of the University of the Arts had, after the end of the original project, the building

of two volumes attached to the scenic tower with probable function of structural reinforcement of the tower itself; a third building is also attached to the rear part of the scenic tower and joins the two buildings that have risen to the side of it.

These three volumes have a pretty functional use and support both the activities of the theater and the activities of the University of the Arts. In the north-side space a linear building has arisen, about 15 meters from the theater building and placed in the parallel to the theater hall. On the back, beyond the scenic tower, some buildings were built and today are used by the University of the Arts.

The original features of the original theatrical building are deeply linked to both the linguistic definition of the Polytechnic building and the Archaeological Museum which completes the monumental triptych. In fact, it also included the recently demolished stadium. In common there is a particular attention to a *classic* topic of the architectural project that will figures the design practice of Gherardo Bosio both in Italian, African and Albanian projects [6].



**Figure 6**  
*Feasability Study, Interior view.*

## Research Methods

Taking note of the current situation of the monumental system represented by the three buildings: Polytechnic (originally born as Casa del Fascio) - Archaeological Museum (originally born as the place of the Albanian Littoria Youth) - University of the Arts (originally born as the place of the Albanian Opera Afterwork), the Feasibility Study started from the constitution, step by step, of a cognitive framework which, starting from an in-depth historical-archival research, was then clarified by means of a series of inspections and a direct survey of the building carried out with cutting-edge methods and tools.

The analysis of the various components of the building, from the architectural to the structural ones, from the technological supply ones to the acoustic ones, finally completed the cognitive picture.

In a first phase, in addition to an in-depth survey of the bibliography available on the specific topic, an analysis of the original project was carried out at Gherardo Bosio Archive (that is placed in Pelago, next to Florence), at the Ferdinando Poggi Archiver (placed in the Vieusseux Literary Scientific Cabinet in Florence), at the Construction Technical Archive of Tirana, at the archive of the University of Arts in Tirana, and at the archive of the Istituto Luce in Rome. With the documentation acquired it was possible to develop an historical profile of the events that led to the birth of the building in 1939 by Bosio and his valuable collaborators, including Poggi and Lambertini.

From this analysis, moving on to a perfect combination of original drawings and on site historical photographs of building phases it has been possible to retrace the original design and the final design build by Gherardo Bosio and collaborators between 1939 and 1943.

Parallel to carrying out this first phase of bibliographic-archival investigation, the direct, digital and three-dimensional survey was carried out through a set of on-site campaigns. It is necessary to point out that the inaccessibility of some environments made their “reconstruction” necessary by comparing the data of the digital survey with the original drawings by Bosio and the difficulty, or impossibility, of obtaining all the data necessary to outline the state current building, both from an architectural and plant engineering point of view, has made it difficult to develop the studio which may appear, even if minimally, to be perfectible.

The survey was carried out thanks to the use of laserscan technologies which, with about one hundred shooting points, have allowed a faithful and reliable reconstruction of the interior, exterior and roofs of the building complex. This type of survey gave the chance to build a complete model of the building, based on point-cloud technology which also allowed to explore and imagine even the inaccessible portions. The technology used also made it possible to acquire, through the numerous shooting points, some station-points photographed; these, which can be explored with the possibility of horizontal rotation of about three hundred and sixty degrees, including the upper and lower parts not framed in the photograph, constitute an extremely detailed wealth of information.

Subsequently, an extensive photographic campaign allowed, thanks to about one thousand and three hundred shots, to reconstruct and map the current state of the building in all its parts made accessible. The set consisting of the digital survey and the photographic campaign constitutes the most detailed survey of the current state of the theater building to date and allows, together with the information described below, to monitor all future changes from now on. The accuracy of this information system also made it possible to better understand some elements of unclear and immediate correspondence with the original project. The state of the final project (1941-1942) in fact does not correspond to the current state of the building in some of its parts, albeit of no particular importance.

Subsequently, the analysis of the architectural components, interiors and furnishings was developed by a detailed analytical catalog based on the specificity of the intervention, which represents the “core” around which the various parts that make up the Studio of Feasibility.

The almost one hundred and fifty “analytic sheets” dedicated one to each single room, in addition to detecting the current state of each space both from the dimensional point of view and from the material point of view and its finishes, highlighted the correspondence to the original state of the various parts that they compose it, and trace a recovery hypothesis compatible with the basic principle of safeguarding and protecting the building.

The principle of the analytic sheet is in fact to trace a synthetic analysis by points; in addition, the sheet, a real operative tool for architectural design, hosts a detailed description of the current state divided by items and punctually defines the interventions to be performed for the recovery of the analyzed environment.

The sheets are flanked by a series of documents, mainly plans and sections, with precise indications referring to the room-by-room interventions; the drawings also contain the representation of the spaces suitable for the changes necessary for the adaptation of the theater to current regulations and the updating of the plant system. The works are accompanied by two internal views of the room that anticipate the appearance proposed by the interventions for the recovery of the theater.

The cognitive framework was implemented by the analysis of the structural system, initially developed thanks to the consultation of the documents of the original project and by the analysis of the photographs of the construction site of 1939-1942 [7], to which were added inspections and punctual endoscopic investigations.



**Figure 7**  
*Feasibility Study, Interior view*

The acoustic quality of the room was the subject of particular attention: direct tests and measurements were carried out and simulations were carried out on a digital model to verify the characteristics of the current acoustic performance. Moving from these data, then was possible to imagine physical interventions aimed to guarantee the protection of these acoustic resonance characteristics and, if possible, their improvement.

Regarding the performances that the theater once restored will have to guarantee, there is certainly the safeguarding of the current acoustic quality of the hall, which is the flagship of the University of the Arts and of the whole city of Tirana. In this regard, the study has identified the solutions for maintaining the current acoustic quality and preview some measures for its further improvement thanks to the replacement of curtains, currently not present the originals, with sound-absorbing panels placed in strategic positions and integrated with the walls. existing.

The technological supply equipment played a decisive role in the Feasibility Study: having acknowledged the need to prepare a completely new system of systems, an air treatment solution adequate to the functionality of the room was preview; initially with motors placed on the underground floor and inlet placed below the seats of the stalls and the gallery with shots were instead considered in the roof vault of the room. This system was subsequently reduced to have a minor impact on the supporting structures of the hall and the gallery.

With regard to the design of the electrical and special systems, the location of the main vertical distribution channels in the scenic tower was identified. A special care was taken to image the layouts of the distribution of the technological systems, so that they do not modify the architectural image of the interior spaces, also providing for any shielding compatible with the architectural features of the building. The Feasibility Study also included an economic evaluation of the intervention and a forecast of the planning and implementation times.

The system of interventions preview in the Feasibility Study had the purpose of not altering the original characteristics of the building and to restore all its main architectural components and, where this was not considered possible, was thought to use new materials, furnishings and objects all based on Bosio's original design and on Italian supplies of the time.

By limiting the perimeter of the interventions to the internal space, particular attention was paid to integrating the original condition of the theater with the technological supply equipment necessary to make the building completely adequate to contemporary standards and in compliance with current regulations.

Once the goodness of the reinforced concrete structural framework of the building and its good state of conservation have been verified, structural reinforcement interventions have been thought mainly on the scenic tower for its system of machinery and a reinforcement of the floors of the stalls. Also, in the gallery a structural reinforcement was thought in order to allow the passage of the necessary air supply channels initially thought, then abandoned by changing the approach to the mechanical systems.

## Conclusion

The Feasibility Study therefore, if on the one hand it prefigured a philological restoration, on the other it previewed a technological adaptation, starting from the observation that the current system supply equipment was completely obsolete, inadequate and therefore to be totally dismantled, making prevail the original character of this important example of twentieth century Italian architecture, of its spatial systems, of its structural characteristics, of its multiple identities expressed thanks to highly refined interior architecture.

## Notes

- [1] XXII PhD programme Cycle (2007-2009) Analisi dell'opera progettuale di Gherardo Bosio. Tematiche a confronto (Riccardo Renzi); PhD programme Cycle XXV (2010-2012) Tracce dell'architettura italiana in Albania 1925-1943 (Armand Vokhsi); PhD programme Cycle XXVII Ciclo (2012-2014) L'architettura razionalista italiana d'oltremare. Gli edifici teatrali tra analisi e confronto (Andia Guga). Furthermore, since 2017 the Department of Architecture has a research agreement with the Gabinetto Scientifico Letterario Viesseux (Florence) for a complete research on architecture and urban design made by Ferdinando Poggi title as: studio dell'opera progettuale di Ferdinando Poggi (ref. R. Renzi).
- [2] Cfr. G. Paladini, Ricordi di un Ufficio di Urbanistica Integrata, in «Bollettino Tecnico», 10-11, 1954, pp. 118-123.
- [3] Cfr. R. Renzi, Gherardo Bosio. Opera Completa 1927-1941, Edifir, Firenze, 2016, pp. 278-301, pp. 318-325, pp. 362-363 e pp. 365-367.
- [4] The building, owned by the Albanian state, is protected by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and the Institute of Cultural Monuments. It is currently the seat of the Rectorate (in the recently restored head building), and theater of the University of Arts, Academy of Arts.
- [5] The feasibility study, coordinated by Prof. Fabio Capanni and written in Italian and Albanian, was conducted for the client Trans Adriatic Pipeline AG (TAP); full title: Feasibility study for Restoration, Reconstruction and Refurbishment of Concert Hall, at the University of Arts in Tirana. The working group of the Department of Architecture was composed as follows: survey prof. Alessandro Merlo with Gaia Lavoratti, Giulia Lazzari, Domenico Palatella, Francesco Tioli, Michela Notarnicola; historical, urban and architectural design Prof. Fabio Capanni, Riccardo Renzi, with Andia Guga; structural aspects prof. Giacomo Tempesta with Jacopo Vitale; acoustics prof. Simone Secchi; economic evaluation and planning prof.ssa Alessandra Cucurnia, three-dimensional internal views Alberto Becherini. The working group of the Department of Architecture made use of the collaboration of the Albanian studio Atelier 4 based in Tirana which, in the figure of the architects Olsi Efthimi and Altin Premti, coordinated the studies on the plant aspects developed by Eng. Spiro Drita and Eng. Dëshira Mena.
- [6] About theme of the classic as a recurring element in architectural design topic in Gherardo Bosio's work see R. Renzi, Gherardo Bosio. Le ville, Alinea, Firenze, 2010 and R. Renzi, Regime e rappresentazione. Il padiglione del lavoro italiano in Africa ed il padiglione dell'Albania alla Mostra Triennale delle Terre d'Oltremare del 1940, in «Bloom», n. 13, 2012, pp.73-77.
- [7] These documents are both in Gherardo Bosio Archives and Istituto Luce Roma archives.

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R. Renzi, Regime e rappresentazione. Bloom; 2012; 13, 73-77.

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**TEN BRIDGES AT LA MADDALENA.**  
**MEDITERRANEAN METAPHORS IN THE POST-ENVIRONMENTAL AGE**

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**DIECI PONTI A LA MADDALENA.**  
**METAFORE MEDITERRANEE NELL'ERA POST-AMBIENTALE**

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**Abstract**

*The article comments on the experience of a workshop held in the Mediterranean archipelago of La Maddalena. The workshop focused on the regeneration of the area after the project failure of an exclusive Yacht Club which was built in response to a formerly abandoned Arsenale. The theme is paradigmatically used to define questions, rather than solutions, on the current environmental issue by employing a working methodology based on story telling and metaphors as productive fictional devices of creative criticism and products of an aesthetic approach in contrast to scientific truth and 'experts'. Final reflections are devoted to natural reserves as heterotopias sacrificed in the name of environmental protection and with an invitation for a new ecology of the mind with the awareness that the disaster is already in place.*

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*L'articolo commenta l'esperienza di un workshop tenutosi nell'arcipelago mediterraneo di La Maddalena. Il workshop si è concentrato sulla riqualificazione dell'area dopo il fallimento del progetto di un'esclusivo Yacht Club costruito in risposta a un Arsenale precedentemente abbandonato. Il tema è paradigmaticamente utilizzato per definire domande, piuttosto che soluzioni, sull'attuale questione ambientale impiegando un metodo di lavoro basato sul racconto di storie e metafore come dispositivi fittizi produttivi di critica creativa e prodotti di un approccio estetico in contrasto con la verità scientifica e degli "esperti". Le riflessioni finali sono dedicate alle riserve naturali come eterotopie sacrificate in nome della tutela ambientale e con un invito ad inaugurare una nuova ecologia della mente con la consapevolezza che il disastro è già in atto.*

**Keywords:** Aesthetics, Entanglement, Heterotopia, Fictionalism, Post-Environmental Condition  
Estetica, Entanglement, Eterotopia, Finzionalismo, Condizione Post-Ambientale

## Prologue

In 2018, the Sardinia Region with other local authorities asked Heterotopia, an international network of young architects, to imagine a future for the archipelago of La Maddalena and particularly for the area of the former arsenal after the abandonment of NATO forces and the failure of the ambitious and exclusive yacht club that should have been one of the main centers of nautical tourism in the western Mediterranean. Ten years after its completion it still lies abandoned with the result of increasing the already long list of works of the *Incompiuto Italiano*, ‘the most important architectural style from the Second World War to today’ [1].



**Figure 1**

*The Column of Solitude (Hannah Beard). Hannah awoke to the sound of clinking coming from the water's edge. Rather like the sound of the miner's tool in the granite quarry, yet this was more rhythmic, more systematic. Cogs turning, something moving... Hannah's half-asleep brain was processing this noise, which was also accompanied by the slamming of doors and excited voices. Of course! The bridge! She leapt to her feet and clambered onto a stool to peer out of the boat's circular window. The bridge was formed of three parts. Exactly halfway between Caprera and La Maddalena stood a tall granite column and platform. Nobody was sure how and when this strange looking fortress was placed in this part of the ocean, meaning numerous stories had been formulated over the years. However, everyone seemed sure about its function, which was to connect the two halves of the bridge. Hannah had often wondered why the bridge was cut into two halves that rarely joined and why it hadn't been designed so you could cross it whenever you liked. Her father explained that it was to do with the wind: The wind was an extremely powerful force in the archipelago of La Maddalena, which could cause damage to the bridge and danger to those who crossed. Therefore, the bridge's two halves spent most of their time nestled against the shoreline where they were protected from the elements. Only when the wind was low and the weather conditions perfect did the cogs turn, clinking systematically to turn the two halves to meet in the middle at the granite column.*

*Hannah sped out of the door to join the crowds gathering in anticipation to watch this process. But something about the atmosphere seemed strange. There was more excitement than usual, but also fear. She suddenly noticed the strong wind whipping her hair all over the place. The weather conditions were wrong. The bridge should not be opening. Every now and again this unexplainable phenomenon occurred and no one could explain it. Hannah had marked the dates of these unregulated bridge swings in her journal over the past two years but couldn't identify a pattern. They seemed to be completely random and she was intrigued by such events. Her thoughts were interrupted as the bridge clunked into place. Now pieced together, the bridge became purposeful and grand, framing the granite column which became a gathering point. Within moments, the bridge was transformed into a bustling street and Hannah was swept up in the moving crowds. Ever since she could remember, her favourite thing to do was to watch every one gathered around the granite column. She scrambled up on the bridge's outer wall to get a better view. There, glancing up was where she saw it. Glinting between a crack in the granite column was a startled eye. It blinked, she gasped, the warning bell sounded. The bridge started to separate and panic broke out.*

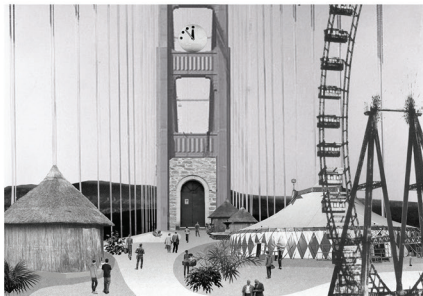
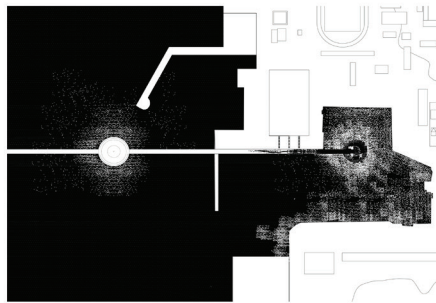
In response, Heterotopia selected eighty 'explorers' from various parts of the world who, for nine days and nights, established their work camp in an abandoned quarry (Cava Francese) under the guidance of eight architectural firms, eight advisors and guests from different disciplines.

The following pages recount the experience of this workshop with particular reference to the working group coordinated by the author and Traumnovelle, a Belgian architectural studio.

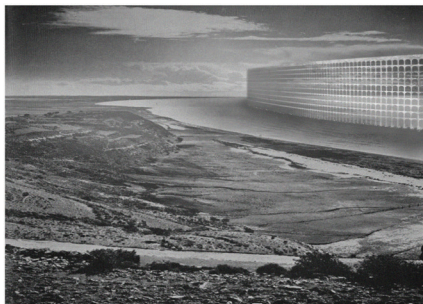
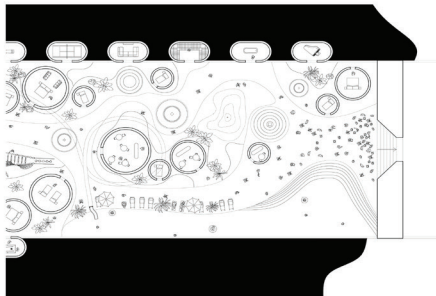
Among the eight titles, conceived to articulate the workshop, the group coordinated by the author and Traumnovelle was assigned the title of «Insularity, Isolation and Reconnection». It was a subject of incredible foresight and a forerunner of many contemporary issues such as: the distancing in which the materiality of space re-emerges as a fundamental element in an age in which space seemed to be definitively obliterated to the advantage of time in its accelerated version of contemporaneity; the rediscovery of the Sartrian discomfort of density [2]; the isolation and the unambendable need



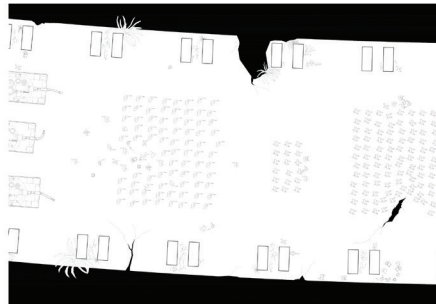
Madli Kaljuste • Fountain



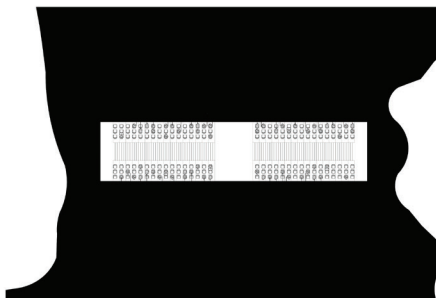
Romina Totaro • Voluntary tourism



Oskar Dagerskog • The last Parade



Emanuela Enna • Good Catch



**Figure 2**

*Fountain (Madli Kaljuste) – Voluntary tourism (Romina Totaro) – The last parade (Oskar Dagerskog) – Good Catch (Emanuela Enna)*

for contacts which, in the days of the *lockdown*, explored the rediscovery of the indestructible, and indispensable need for connection between humanity and to nature that even in the beautiful scenario of La Maddalena seems not longer possible in its original purity. Every year, in addition to the millions of tourists, estimations made in on the occasion of one of the most evocative exhibitions on the Mediterranean by Studio Azzurro, report that « 600,000 tons of oil, [...] 25,000 tons of zinc, 9,000 tons of organic substances, 4,900 tons of lead, 2,900 of chrome , 200 of mercury, and more than 90 tons of pesticides end up in the Mediterranean» [3, p.122].



**Figure 3**  
*Forte di Punta Rossa. Stazione Torpedini. Rotating coastal battery.*

This is an oxymoron that has been grasped as the paradigm of the natural catastrophe taking place today and updated by the new plastics emergency that afflicts one of the richest ecosystems in the world, and making it the sixth bigger zone for plastic pollution as well. In light of these considerations, the ‘prefiguration’ of ten bridges was assigned as a project theme, and as metaphors to restore the connection between human and non-human in the age of the environmental catastrophe represented by La Maddalena: – par excellence – an heterotopic Mediterranean controversial mix named so by ‘markings’ of military outposts, paradisiacal natural scenarios, plagued crystalline waters, migrations and tourist appropriation.

## Method

To explain the method used for the development of the project we can start from the present: precisely from the ongoing dispute between ‘deniers’ and ‘neo-hygienists’ in the Covid-19 affair; from the biased environmental debate; and more specifically, from that different positions that arose when, on 20 October 2003, a NATO nuclear submarine hit a shoal in La Maddalena. The subsequent survey of the quantity of Thorium 234 was judged alarming by respectable research centers while others, equally authoritative, attributed it to granite sediments of the island, however, inside normal levels.

In all these 'disputes' it is possible to see how the 'question of truth' represents the only element in supporting and adhering to different positions. This issue refers to the Pilate's uncomfortable question of 'what truth is'. From the numerous debates on the topic it is easy to understand how, today, it corresponds to the possession of facts, of 'objective' data, and irrefutable scientific theories that both parties are struggling to produce with the unfortunate result of invalidating one of the fundamental principles of truth which is the principle of non-contradiction.

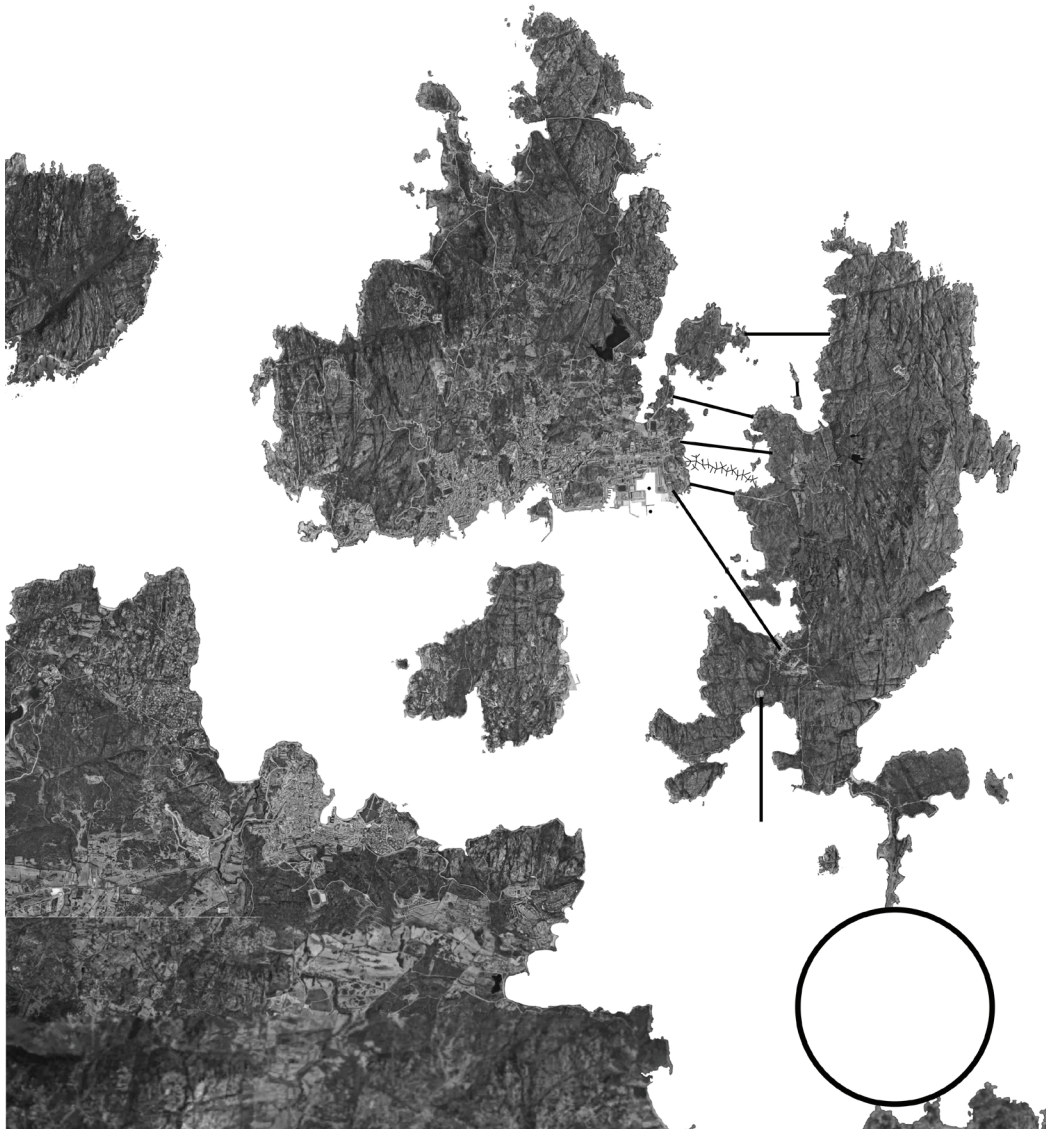
In this *empasse*, it was decided to go back to Armstrong's statement in which he declares that truths are made true by reality [4, p.78], shifting the question of truth to what can be considered 'real'.

In these terms, it is evident that the 'real' cannot depend on its materiality, on its location in space; nor its importance from physical quantities, especially in the case of human action, which is not a phenomenon that underlies the literal description of the natural sciences.

As Harman argues, it is emblematic that 'things' like the East India Company, although they are

**Figure 4**

*Ten Bridges at La Maddalena (Masterplan).*



not material entities that can be domiciled in a specific place (as the quark is), is nevertheless to be considered a real 'thing' that survived in multiple and changing forms for 193 years [5, pp.28-29].

Therefore, we can consider 'real' everything that manifests itself through effects and 'affect', first, our senses in the double sense of impressing and embodiment, and secondly our intellect and imagination.

It follows that beyond the rational interpretation of technicians and specialists and beyond simple relativism, there are other possible realities and truths to be investigated.

There are other methods of giving meaning to our relations with the world and to the way we project its transformation, since delegation to subjects-bearers of monological truths is no longer acceptable. These methods refer to the common feeling of people, to aesthetics as the science of 'imperfect' feeling [6] and to that needs of the 'second naïveté' of the Natural Realism that is the ways through which people experience the world [7].

*Senses and sensibilia* are not disillusionment, on the contrary, they are an enrichment and a way of questioning dominant thought, physicalist rationality and the 'labeling' that, in the contemporary communication has become an even more sophisticated and incontrovertible device for control. *Senses and sensibilia* are opposed to this reductionist labeling, including the scientific one, that does not contemplate human experience and those universal ones that are unamendable like desires, work, sufferings, joys, death: 'transcendences' capable of putting humans in communion with other humans whom it is necessary to give voice to, gathering facts, *fétiches*, myths, poetries, tales, and chants.

The sense making of our actions begins by reconsidering the criteria by which we choose and order things on our operating table: this table is the real/true heterotopia also defined by dreams, passions, and probably – as Foucault wrote – by ghosts, eventually irreconcilable [8]. In the light of all these considerations, designing and then building architecture in a place is not just about placing an efficient and sustainable building. It is also an act that impacts the 'sign' and social sphere whose manifestations are not linearly derivable from causative chains as occurs in physical and natural phenomena. Its rationality can be disregarded for imponderable reasons, including poetic-emotional ones.

Based on these considerations it was decided to ask for the writing of short stories as the most convenient tool to start the project. Pages of a diary, letters, memories of living a bridge, yet to be figured; devices of creative criticism, refusal of hegemonic truths or realist adherence. Storytelling responds to the conviction that the common experience persists beyond continuous improvement and – therefore – the change of scientific laws. It provides the ultimate factor of truth verification beyond the evidence provided by technicians. Storytelling does not try to stage the everyday obviousness of common sense, but it can be the interpreter of ethical necessity, as defined by Pierre Dardot [9] of the "common sense" of sharing the individuals' experiences, in our case, beyond the authoritarian imposition of the sciences and, in the specific case, beyond the specialism of architectural project.

Alongside the stories and on the basis of the suggestions raising from their words, workshopers were asked to prepare drawings and photomontages in the form of metaphors, Derridian devices of blinding / intensification of reality [10] and, as advocated by some exponents of Object-Oriented Ontology philosophies, tools to access the world in an 'alternative' way since any project of knowledge and / or transformation of the world is ultimately a construct unable to fully describe the complexity of the world.

Knowledge, including scientific knowledge, and design are achieved through approximate simulations in which simplifications and 'tricks' are introduced to 'patch up' missing data. They are realized through fictions, behaviors of the 'as if' theorized by the philosopher Vaihinger [11] who made it clear that fiction is not to be considered a scam or a lie. Although it uses artifices that are not totally exact or truthful, fiction is to be considered a pragmatic device that is accepted in its imprecision and / or partial falsity to act, as the Latin root of the term, in which *ficta* comes from *acta*, action, implies. Paraphrasing Austin [12], the word 'how' takes on that 'adjusting' character that allows us a productive approximation.

As a productive linguistic aid, the fictional device of metaphor is however different from that of scientific or design simulation. The design simulation is, in fact, based on reductive mechanisms of simplification while the metaphorical fiction is based on 'growth' mechanisms that open up new perspectives, even unimaginable. Using Harman's words, we can differently say that metaphor, unlike the analytical design simulation, is the method of *building upward* [5, p.87] rather than *digging downward*; the method of *coupling* rather than the *uncoupling* one of analytical discretization.

Metaphorical fiction is a theatrical device in which 'things', that are not necessarily true, coexist and interact with others not absolutely certain; fantasy with realism, insignificant facts with others totally evident from which surprisingly more productive results can emerge than the analytical-prosaic approach of the scientific rationality. The metaphorical emphasis deliberately surrenders to the knowledge of reality to replace it with fictions where objects and subjects are eclipsed in favor of a new factuality where singular entities blend in an indestructible way. The result is a new reality that is not sanctioned by Cartesian principles of separation nor, as Milleassoux argued through the principle of 'ancestrality' [13], by the 'correlationist' dependence between humanity and its surrounding environment. The metaphor interprets the interpenetration, the entanglement between otherwise non-communicating entities and acts as a causative device that opens up to the aesthetic dimension of the project.

Metaphor, like the theatrical mask, is therefore an aesthetic artifact, probably among the first of humanity, which through concealment and fiction makes it possible to prefigure and stage different states of being, of possible futures in which we participate in indissoluble way beyond the scientific description since «we are not just observers, but place our chips on the casino table: or rather, we place *ourselves* on that table» [5, p.83]. It is due to the ability to determine belonging to a future that metaphors surpass experts and specialists in decreeing the adhesion or rejection of a project since its fulfillment is not a question of truth or reliability, but of the shared feeling between 'real' people.

## Results

The projects of ten bridges thrown between the islands of La Maddalena are to be considered as metaphors of the possible relationship with ideal places of isolation and untouched nature; pretexts to reveal what human footprint is still possible in the face of the environmental disaster. Ten different metaphors of the ways to trample and travel the world in the era of catastrophe.

As mentioned, their representation relies on narrative and metaphorical figurations since knowledge, truths and actions can no longer be based exclusively on objective data or evidence of science. These certainties have drawn hard, unassailable borders of exclusion or, even worse, have been used for maximalist forms of "strategic essentialism" which have ended up excluding any 'unscientific' arguments to the point of inhibiting and weakening any political and negotiating action [14]. Instead, these projects declare the need to welcome the multiple and the multi-form. They summon

elements that are also fantastic, emotional or insignificant but sometimes decisive in redefining a new relationship between humanity and nature, or rather to fully narrate a natural humanity. These projects are born from the desire to intensify reality beyond the verisimilitude, rather than reassure it; to stage forms capable of understanding (to gather within us) the dispersed multiplicity in the world and to establish shared, albeit confused, relationships [15] in order to get new directions, new paths to take.

***The impossible return to nature.*** The first bridge/path is the one where every hypothesis of return to nature and liberation from technological dependencies is invalidated. In the *Disconnected – Connectivity* project, the mirage of Marc of escaping the crises of the Contemporary to embrace the renunciation of *samnyasa*, vanishes in the disappointment of a nature that is not the idealized one on the screen surfaces. What is revealed is not only the biophysical inadequacy deprived of technologies, but the impossibility of dissolving ways of life and thought that are now defined through the daily use of artifacts. The concern to adapt humanity to technological intrusiveness is long gone. The adaptation was accomplished by transforming any resistance or escape from homologation into ‘instagrammable’ forms of rebellion as it is now clear that no one is willing and able to renounce their lifestyles as they suspect that this means giving up life.

In *Up and Down*, rejoining Caprera, where a community of shepherds lives freed from the dopamine rhythms of Western society, we can find another figuration that stages impossible forms of retrogressing towards the primitive condition without sin. On closer inspections we discover that trees, the green pastures of the hills and the «beauty of natural processes» are supported by a technological infrastructure that does not produce the artifice of Leonardo *dipintore* who disputes and competes with nature for aesthetic astonishment. It is the actual and unavoidable condition of existence that can no longer be untangled and distinguished.

***Miscegenation and dominant meme.*** The human/environment dualism has now been solved in miscegenation, in forms of hybridization beyond the ancient boundaries between *materia prima* and *materia operata*. Even inorganic matter has become an intelligent *objectile*. Humanity is beyond the use of simple tools adapted to its own hand to grind shells and obtain pigments to trace magic-propitiatory symbols. After Lucy, the devices to adapt and domesticate the habitat to their own needs have evolved into machines, freed from the biological power to acquire forms of intelligence. In the last moments of the universe these ‘machines’ have been able to multiply an excess of agents and accelerate the chain and the magnitude of effects [16]. A sort of leverage that launches humanity into the unavoidable abyss where the medium anticipates and addresses goals and new forms of hybridization appear: a scenario in which the devices – nowadays intelligent – besides performing functions, dispose and inexorably reinforce the memes of the dominant thought.

In this symbiosis, ways of thinking and lifestyles are self-perpetuating and, as stated by H. W. Bush, are not negotiable because no one is willing to give up their prosperity in which s/he lives or promised and is seen as ultimately attainable. Rather, and without any qualms, every danger alarm is deactivated; every siren is silenced.

Technological potentialities, mutually supported by the virility and optimism of the dominant thought, cannot be intimidated. We march orderly and impotent in the parade (*The Last Parade*) towards the ineluctable and necessary ‘modernization’ in the conviction of being able to control the results and its collateral effects that, if negative, can be compensated or externalized, namely displaced elsewhere and assigned, in time and space, to someone else. The circular bridge is going nowhere; it is a celibate machine where every purpose that is not the only repeated gesture is canceled. Without causes and destinies, only effects remain. We need to accept and take them seriously.

**Domain myths.** In the bridge of the *Grand Guarantor of Porkyland*, perfection and happiness are guaranteed by mathematically infallible algorithms. They protect the paradise transferred to the earth until the surplus is manifested in deafening alarms that signal the overcoming of the allowed equilibria. It is at this moment that, whatever the cause, some inhabitants will experience the effects of agents considered inanimate or governable. It is at this moment when humanity recognizes how the feedback of unbridled well-being habits transform themselves into an object that succumbs and the environment into a looming subject. It is in the middle of these deafening alarms that humanity wonders how it is possible to avert the catastrophe without changing the symbolic world through which it is represented.

Admiring from a window the spectacle offered by eco-engineers at work in the *Fountain Bridge* purifying pollution or reducing concentrations of carbon dioxide is an illusion. Every element of the world is a 'nearly-subject' and everyone is called on stage to play their part without causal privileges and distinctions. There is no longer any 'other' place where someone can isolate oneself at safe distances, nor peaks higher than others from which to dominate the landscape or distant orbits that authorize harmonious holistic visions where even inequalities and conflicts emerge peacefully.

The Burkian sublime ecstasy of the catastrophe no longer exists because everyone is 'thrown into the world' and exposed to the materiality of the air we breathe, of the food we eat, of the diseases that strike us [17].

Although Hannah seeks a better view and notes in her journal the unexpected movements of the wind she cannot find a rule (*The column of Solitude*). The regularity of the world is a convenient representation that smooths the friction of the real while the unexpected and the exception are the irreducible norm that escapes unpredictably from every control even when the conditions seem favorable. The artifex is powerless. He can only assess «with a spirited eye» when something goes wrong, since Mother Gunga knows nothing of the arithmetic used by Findlayson to build the magnificent Kashi bridge over the Ganges [18].

In the *Found Pieces* tale/bridge, the father realizes that breaking up his beloved daughter Caprera into fragments will not assure him of the possession or the re-composition of what she was, despite the construction of «new routes to see a new corner of the island». He matures the awareness that the analytical rationality that decomposes and subsequently recomposes according to criteria of conformity and differentiation is impractical. What it was is lost. At the most, what is possible to obtain is a monument of memories: a melancholy perception of a non-recomposed presence. Cristopher Alexander will no longer be able to move the balls one at a time towards the final position because it is no longer possible to isolate them or consider their sum as better; since there are no longer final positions other than monumental inventions to be celebrated [19]. Everything is singular and at the same time internally manifold so that the only feasible thing is to collect as many pieces as possible with all available means and without prevalence of faiths and certainties since the exterminations have always occurred in the name of religions, progress, and more recently under the banner of sustainable development and / or environmental protection. Environmental engineers and managers, on the one hand; gardeners, landscapers, and naturalists, on the other, proclaim themselves custodians of the planet with their particular and incontrovertible truths. They validate –even if in different forms – the undisputed development of Western thought.

**Sacer Ghetto.** Where scientific studies tell goodness and feasibility of needful interventions for the modernization of society, on the other hand we assist the proliferation of actions in which fragments are segregated and sheltered from «... any trace of tourism to preserve the specialty of the area».

The bridge of *Voluntary Tourism*, designed to resemble a cruise ship, tries to replicate the experience of being on the island ahead. This is the metaphor of the many de-localizations that have been consumed in the name of protecting nature. It is an 'other place', which defines itself as a nostalgic simulacrum of originality and whose otherness is an artificial intensification of precluded experiences. The island, instead, has been transformed into a sort of 'sacer' place which, in the original etymology, is a segregated entity waiting to be deprived of life without guilt for the killers.

Ghettos sheltered from the catastrophe where their death has already been decreed. Their vitality is replaced by an unreal condition of control, order, and security such as in the projects of rehabilitation and environmental enhancement where each fragment is organized by specialists to structure and to expropriate visitors' experiences creating the most classic of heterotopias: utopias aimed at 'immunizing' the catastrophe which looms outside the perimeters of their demarcation, but – at the same time – victims sacrificed for an equally utopian purification. As Foucault wrote, they are places where we believe we are entering, but excluded from participation. In this sense the only utility attributable to these places is that of the dystonic mirror of the hotel rooms where the pleasure, deriving from the experience of a perfect order, should turn into malaise due to our ordinary disorder [20]: artificial paradises that, more than the sirens of alarm of science on the imminent catastrophe, should make us 'feel' the realized catastrophe. What allows us the ease of walking barefoot in a well-groomed meadow has already produced irreversible or reversible effects in arcs of time that transcend humanity. In the sacredness of such places, something is perceived that exceeds the immediate, unmentionable sensitivity, but that we can 'learn' through an aesthetic sensation of 'perturbation' which is not the one producing the romantic sublime since every vestige of God has disappeared from the causes [21]. These places are, therefore, heterotopias to be lived as aesthetic acts in their spring nature to evoke questions before solutions; useful places to understand, without fears and false hopes, that humanity is naturally tangled in the wrecks of the Post-Environmental condition where all privileges have disappeared for tourists, spectators or holders of knowledge. In this condition the aesthetic perception of the environmental catastrophe is the first necessary act since it is capable of activating a Kantian experience of self-awareness of thought and, according to Lyotard's elaboration, the pre-a priori of thought that predisposes every possible presentation.

***For a new ecology of mind.*** The emergency does not concern the environment, already actualized in catastrophe. Emergency concerns the western thought that, in the name of overcoming the apocalypses of the past (modernization) incessantly incurs in producing catastrophes. Memes that focus attention and gigantic investments on the reduction of carbon dioxide by perpetuating the idea that those problems are solved by going back, in very western manner, to the root causes when there is no certainty of the reasons, but the effects are obvious and neglected. They plan to build happy cities with low environmental impact where the air for the privileged few has finally been purified, but – as Calvino wrote– where no one knows where the garbage ends [22].

Every corner of the world is colonized by memes that challenge any finitude in the name of desiring freedoms for naked individuals trapped in the Market that is not free at all, and where they lose any possibility of mutual support. Even humanity has become a commodity: an asset for which there is demand but which is offered without qualitative differences and negotiable – as far as possible – on the price list. The aesthetic perception of the environmental catastrophe is therefore the way to perceive other forms of disturbance deriving from fitness anxieties, inadequate and unsuccessful illnesses that are amplified in the material cult of a permanent adolescence increasingly seduced/sedated by sparkling toys continuously bigger and more expensive. This condition determines feelings of guilt without, however, producing an awareness of the need to evolve towards a responsible active maturity. A process that is naturally inevitable and where human belonging to

nature would be shown (*Jasmines hatch at night*) but suffocated in a ‘childish stagnation’ where Pluto allows a glimpse of wealth for all; undermine all the other gods from the Parthenon; intrude a *sensus communis* of the world forged by the knowledge of the experts and the seduction of goods. The result is the expropriation of any aesthetical experience felt as authentic. Instead of establishing themselves through the practices and actions of the individual, common sense imposes itself on them as a previous reification that defines and subjects them to empty entities such as community, nation, globalism where only consensus is granted.

Instead, and as Hannah Arendt and then Pierre Dardot claim, common sense should be constituted through a co-active relationship of use, management and care between things and subjects, eventually becoming – ultimately – a ‘sense of the common’ which disposes us to choose and to establish specific communities [9].

In the Post-Environmental condition humankind must understand that the subjects do not belong to any society or community but they are singularities without identifiable identities (*Good Catch Bridge*) that fray in what they like to be and re-connect themselves for the aesthetic sensation that determines them. It is essential that this way of being can no longer be determined by the expertise of bankers, managers and technocrats. The urgency of the catastrophe and the *aisthetis*, as its feeling, offer new hermeneutics and new possibilities to face the world with a sense of survival [23, p.34].

Ultimately, it is also indispensable that mankind takes over language again in the apocalyptic forms of its archaic meaning which is not a way to bear the unbearable, premonition of the end or eschatological hope, but to disrupt unveiling because in the past humanity has experienced the fallibility of the sciences, the disasters of interest in ends, the impossibility of redemption after the end.

It is language of caution learned by returning to the Afterhere where all transcendence and privilege have dissolved; where the *interesse* (the interest) is replaced by the *inter-esse* (the intra-being) as the expression of the intricate relationship of each agent, that is the interdependence and the complexity of physical, biological and cultural singularities. A language that is also contradictory and enigmatic, a language speaking of happy reunions and painful ends, since, if for Shakespeare the journeys end where the lovers meet, along the Great Wall of China lovers meet to melt their love, nevertheless they work to survive [24].

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