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Architects working in the Eternal City have, from the Renaissance onwards, drawn inspiration from Antiquity for the design of their buildings. This architectural tradition of taking both compositional devices and decorative details from Antique sources, breathing new life into them, and incorporating them into fresh designs can be appreciated readily by anyone visiting Rome today. Yet many of the buildings that one might admire on such a pilgrimage are the undervalued buildings of Roma Capitale, erected in the late 19th century by a forgotten generation of young Roman architects working to construct the new capital of a united monarchical Italy.

The survival of this particularly Roman architectural tradition into the 20th century is remarkable, for the frantic transformation of the Eternal City into a modern European capital after 1870 brought with it a demand for a whole series of new building types, together with a bewildering pallete of new materials and technology. These challenges were tackled by the architects of the day with the confidence which one can only expect from those who possess a profound grasp of their cultural traditions, and the results of their labours are worthy additions to the rich architectural heritage of Rome.

Before focusing upon specific architects and buildings, however, it is instructive to consider for a moment the physical state of Rome in 1870. The population of the city at this time numbered some two hundred and thirty thousand, seventy percent of whom were illiterate, and within the Aurelian walls only half of the area was occupied by the urban fabric: the rest was divided into secluded gardens for grand Renaissance villas and agricultural land. Sheep and goats were a common sight in the streets and squares, and the Tiber regularly burst its banks, which it had done since Antiquity. This was the Rome so lovingly described by the guide books of Augustus Hare, the novels of Francis Marion Crawford, the evocative watercolours of Ettore Roesler Franz, and in the work of early photographers who were active in Rome from the late 1840s.

The breach of the Aurelian Wall at Porta Pia by the royalist troops of the House of Savoy on 20th September 1870 was the crowning act of unification for the state of Italy. Soon afterwards the capital of the nation formally moved from Florence to Rome, and with this shift of power came an urgent need for radical action to transform the picturesque but backward and decayed city into a modern capital of a suitable scale and grandeur to compete with Paris, Vienna and the other great European capitals.

Baron Hausmann, having recently completed his transformation of the French capital was consulted as to how Rome should be adapted to perform its new role. After some deliberation he concluded that the future development would lie on and about Monte Mario outside the fabric of the old city: but only more recently, however, has his prophecy been fulfilled. Similarly, the Piedmontese statesman Quintino Sella tried with limited success to create a new administrative core outside the historic city along the Via XX Settembre, and instead the historic fabric of Rome was altered and adapted by the new administration to enable it to function as the heart of the capital. The reasons for overlaying Roma Capitale on the historic fabric were both practical and ideological. On the one hand, the state simply did not possess the funds to devote to such a massive building enterprise, nor was there time to build a new city. On the other hand, the whole reason for making Rome the capital of the nation was to forge a national identity with the cultural and historic splendours of the Eternal City. As Camillo Cavour, Prime Minister of Italy and architect of the Risorgimento, had said in 1860, “Our fate is to see to it that Rome, which in twenty five centuries has accumulated every kind of glory, becomes the splendid capital of the Italian Kingdom.”

The central problem, therefore, was how to adapt the historic fabric and link it with the new quarters required for the rapidly expanding population, whilst deracializing Papal Rome which had for more than 1000 years been under the administration of St Peter, and establishing instead King Vittorio Emanuele II and the House of Savoy at the heart of the nation.

Within two weeks of the breach of the Aurelian wall, a Commission was set up to prepare a master plan (Piano Regolatore) for the “expansion and embellishment of the city”. After several abortive attempts, a master plan was finally approved by the city council in 1873 and, although never formally sanctioned by the state, this plan was used to control much of the urban activity during the early years of Roma Capitale (Fig. 13.1). Within the historic centre a number of existing streets were widened to open up the heart of the city. The Master Plan Commission pronounced that these new streets need not be straight or uniformly wide, but could be irregular and discontinuous for the sake of sparing bits of extant construction.
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Pius IX, the last pope-king, had begun to expand Rome to the eastern hills on the healthy high ground of the Esquiline and the Castro Pretorio, and the new railway station was erected on the Viminal by the Baths of Diocletian. It was planned to link these new quarters to the historic centre by means of a new artery, the Via Nuova Pia, which soon after 1870 became the Vía Nazionale. 13 Pius IX's plans had only begun to be realised before 1870 but, all the same, they were incorporated into the master plan of 1873 and the development of the eastern side of the city formed the first phase of the construction of the capital. The development of the Esquiline was laid out around the established routes of Pope Sixtus V's so-called star plan, centring on the Basilica of St. Maria Maggiore, to "avoid unnecessary destruction and to respect the valuable buildings," and to connect the area effectively with the rest of the urban fabric. 14 The Piano Regolatore of 1873 also made provision for the embankment of the Tiber and, after this work had been carried out, development began of the Prati di Castello to the North of the Borgo/Vatican 15 which had until then been an unhealthy marsh. 16

In turning now to look in greater detail at the architectural activity of the period, it is clear that the advent of Roma Capitale caused a significant upheaval of the architectural establishment of the city. Before 1870, the majority of architectural commissions for those practitioners working in Rome were connected in some way with the Roman Catholic Church. However, the shifting of the capital to Rome, and the consequent divide between the 'black' and 'white' aristocracy, presented the established architects with a dilemma. 17 Should they, on the one hand, retain their allegiance to the Vatican and the black aristocracy or should they, on the other hand, align themselves with the white aristocracy and the new Royalist regime and vie for the many lucrative and exciting commissions that formed part of the ambitious plans for the new capital? When faced with this situation, many of the established architects of the day remained loyal, and, in so doing, effectively left the stage vacant for a rising generation of young architects to make their names in the building of Roma Capitale.

The architecture erected in the early years after 1870 can be broadly divided into two distinct categories. The 'Neo-High Renaissance,' or 'Neo-Cinquecento' style was used predominantly by those architects who worked on commissions controlled by the city council: the majority of the buildings erected in this period are designed in this manner. But a number of architects worked in a 'Neo-Antique' style, particularly those whose commissions came under the direct supervision of the state. Unlike the Neo-Cinquecento buildings, many of those in the Neo-Antique style incorporated cast iron elements, a building material which had only become widely available after Italy had established her own heavy industry for the development of her navy and the railways.

Neo-Cinquecentismo had been in vogue constantly in Rome since the High Renaissance, a fact which, in itself, is indicative of the pace of change in the city before 1870. 18 The majority of the architects working in this style had been trained at the notoriously reactionary and antiquated Accademia di San Luca in Rome. The curriculum of this Papal Academy, founded in 1577, had remained largely unchanged since its formation, 19 and was described by Camillo Boito 20 in an article on the teaching of architecture:

"... the Genius can prove himself later when he has learned the elements ... The talented, when he has mastered these principles, does not pass himself by following in the footsteps of another, nor does he attach himself to the arm of anyone, but instead he develops his own technique. The teaching at the famous Accademia di San Luca follows precisely this principle.


As soon as the young know how to copy from life, from paintings and from sculpture, they turn to that great museum that is Rome, learning, seeing, imitating ...”

In another article on the hotly debated choice of an appropriate style for buildings in the new capital, Boito pronounced that,

“In the city, where the Antique tradition has made itself so strongly felt ... to import a ‘foreign’ or ‘Italian’ style to Rome out of the blue would be a bolt in its history. In Rome, today's architects can, with the elements of Roman architecture, put together the modern style, creating a new organization and a new aesthetic. From the time of Bramante on, without leaving Rome or moving from ancient sources, an integral world of artistic concepts and ornamental forms is to be found. There is no need to call upon the ‘charm’ of modern foreign architecture, nor any of the ‘beauty’ of the medieval period, because the past of Rome and the creative fantasy of the artist are sufficient for everything.”

This article, so clearly putting the case for modern Roman architecture, caught the mood of the time and was often quoted by the architects of Roma Capitale in their own writings. 21 The great architectural treatises of the High Renaissance, such as those by Serlio and Vignola, 22 had been constantly in print in Italy from the time of their original publication. These texts formed a crucial part of the curriculum for the students at San Luca and were to be found on the shelves of the studios of all the architects working in Roma Capitale. 23 Serlio, as a young man, had worked with Peruzzi in Rome, 24 and his architectural treatise provided students with a rich diet of forms and details inspired by antique precedents. He took, for example, the cyma reversa bracket from the frieze of the crowning tier of the pilasters on the Colosseum and reworked it to form a bracketed version of the Doric triglyph which he showed in a plate for a door-case designed in the order. 25

Vignola, another seminal architect of the High Renaissance, also drew heavily from Roman Antiquity for inspiration in his architectural treatise. 26 For example, he took the Doric order from the fornix of the Theatre of Marcellus, notable for its unusual dental cornice with a crowning cavetto moulding, added an idiosyncratic double torus base and published it in his treatise. 27 From the time of its publication, Vignola's treatise was unsurprisingly popular with Roman architects and consequently his Doric order is used freely in the city, even, as Krautheimer 28 has identified, in the baroque architecture of Bernini. 29 At the Villa Giulia in Rome, 30 Vignola took Serlio's cyma reversa triglyph bracket and added a console bracket to support the crowning cornice, but instead of centring his bracket over the order in the conventional manner, he placed one on either side of the centre line of each pilaster. At the Palazzo Farnese at Caprarola, 31 completed shortly afterwards, Vignola modified the Villa Giulia entablature, this time centring the brackets over the pilasters. This latter design is illustrated in his treatise, and was subsequently reworked by Bernini for the crowning entablature of the Palazzo Odescalchi in Piazza di SS. Apostoli. Such an understanding of the evolution of architectural form from Antique sources in Rome formed a significant part of the curriculum at the Accademia di San Luca, and its graduates consequently emerged with a sound understanding of the architectural forms and architectural traditions of their city.

Turning now to consider how this education system affected the buildings of Roma Capitale, let us concentrate first upon the architects working in the Neo-Cinquecento style who drew heavily upon the treatises of the High Renaissance for their inspiration, rooted, as has been seen, in Antiquity.

By far the most skilful exponent of the Neo-Cinquecento style was Gaetano Koch, who, when he died prematurely in 1910, was acclaimed by his contemporaries as “without a doubt, the prince of contemporary Roman architects.” Upon graduating from the Accademia di San Luca, Koch quickly established himself in the young capital and within a few years was enjoying some of the most prestigious commissions of the day.

The project to design the arcaded palaces at the Piazza dell’Esedra at the head of the Via Nazionale provided Koch with a splendid opportunity to display his talents (Fig. 13.2). It was decided that the line of the exedra from the Baths of Diocletian should be retained with the building of two symmetrical crescents on the antique foundations, which would function as a grand gateway into the new capital from the railway station at the side of the Antique bath complex. For the engaged columns of the arcade, Koch reworked Vignola’s Doric order, but with Serlian cyma reversa triglyph brackets over the arches in the end pavilions. The majority of the remaining architectural details, however, take their cue from Vignola.

Antique victories bearing laurel wreaths are used as caryatids and replace the uppermost tier of pilasters on the pavilions at each end of the two crescents (Fig. 13.3). Above these figures, broken segmental pediments contain cartouches surrounded by allegoric groups, and the composition is dramatically completed with victory eagles standing on pedestals on each corner. It is clear from this composition that Koch processed a solid grasp of the symbolism of the decorative forms commonly found in Antiquity that he had undoubtedly gained whilst at San Luca, and the rich embellishment of these structures clearly indicates their perceived importance in the hierarchy of new buildings erected in the city.

Half way down the Via Nazionale on the left hand side is arguably Koch’s finest public building, the Palazzo della Banca d’Italia, the seat of the new central bank of Italy (Fig. 13.4). The overall form of this long building, with two courtyards separated by a central staircase, takes it’s inspiration from Fuga’s 18th century Palazzo Corsini in Trastevere which in turn draws inspiration from a design in Ammannati’s unpublished treatise from the High Renaissance, La Città. The handling of the long elevation looks to Bernini’s Palazzo Odescalchi, with unadorned walls at either end, framed by pilasters, and engaged columns across the central bays. The proportions of the main group of rooms on the piano nobile, as Meeks has identified, look to Palladio’s work at the Palazzo Chiericati in Vicenza, which was inspired by the latter’s detailed study of the Baths of Caracalla in Rome.

Between the arched headed windows on the rusticated ground floor of the Banca d’Italia are a sequence of ships pews or rostra (Fig. 13.5), an architectural symbol of victory whose origins lie in the beaks of the ships captured after the battle of Actium in 338 BC which adorned the speakers rostrum in the Forum Romanum in Rome. Rostra are to be found on many of the triumphal public buildings of Roma Capitale.

The crowning cornice of the Banca d’Italia presented Koch with a problem, since a conventional entablature of an appropriate size to cap this enormous structure would clearly have resulted in cantilevered stones of an unmanageable size. So instead Koch introduced acanthus leaf and scroll brackets into the frieze, and these support modillions in the cornice (Fig. 13.6). The resulting unification of these two parts of the entablature enabled Koch to reduce the overhang required to provide a satisfactory crown to the whole composition. For the design of the acanthus and scroll brackets in the frieze, it appears the Koch may have drawn inspiration from the soffit of the cornice of the Temple of Castor in the Roman Forum and it is quite feasible that, especially in light of his training, Koch would have decided to draw inspiration for his innovative detail from an Antique source.
Koch gained great respect from his peers for his pioneering work in modifying the traditional Roman palazzo formula to provide simple apartment blocks for the large numbers of middle class bureaucrats pouring into the new administrative offices of the capital. The composition and decoration of these buildings, unsurprisingly, relies heavily upon the treatises of Serlio and Vignola, giving his designs a peculiarly appropriate Roman flavour. One can appreciate, both from visual evidence and from contemporary accounts such as that supplied by Marcello Piacentini, that these sources from the High Renaissance were clearly used by the majority of architects working in Roma Capitale, albeit often with less grace and skill than Gaetano Koch.

Another architect of similar calibre was Pio Piacentini. His Florentine design for the Banca d'Italia was rejected in favour of Koch's more Roman design, but on the other side of the Via Nazionale, Piacentini was commissioned to design the Palazzo delle Esposizione, a grand new public building to provide a venue for the exhibition of the fine arts of the new nation (Fig. 13.7).

The blind walls of the galleries are articulated with Corinthian pilasters that, in the centre of the building, break forward to become free-standing columns framing the grand triumphal arch entrance (Fig. 13.8). The forest of columns leading up the grand staircase form a subtle light filter to help the eye adjust from the intense light of the Roman summer to the more gentle light in the galleries. The spandrels of the triumphal arch contain victories bearing laurel wreaths and the central keystone supports a victorious eagle also with a wreath. Above the main cornice line, an attic over the entrance supports an allegorical group that crowns the whole composition. From such studies of the work of Piacentini, Koch and their contemporaries, it is clear that the architectural establishment at this time, together with other sectors of society, had a reasonable knowledge of the symbolic meaning of antique decorative forms. The majority of Piacentini's work is in the more sober Neo-Cinquecento style, but the commission for the Palazzo delle Esposizioni fell under the umbrella of the state administration, and this may account for the more Neo-Antique flavour of the design.

Let us turn now to consider the second category of building which I identified earlier, namely those designed in a Neo-Antique style. Compared with the quantity of buildings designed in the Neo-Cinquecento style, the Neo-Antique buildings are far fewer in number, and all of them were erected by only a handful of architects working in the capital.

One such man was Ettore Bernich who, in 1883, designed the aquarium in the Piazza Mandredo Fanti near the centre of the new Esquiline Quarter of the city (Fig. 13.9). This building, intended as a place for public education, was one of a number encouraged by Quintino Sella, Piedmontese statesman and Comptian Positivist who, when asked what were his plans for Rome replied simply "knowledge".

The Aquarium building consists of an elliptical hall, around the edge of which are grouped the tanks linked internally by a cast iron gallery that allows the viewer to promenade and view
the fish (Figs. 13.10-13). Externally, a grand triumphal arch forms the entrance to the aquarium, with a large apsidal portico flanked by Doric aediculae (Figs. 13.11 & 12). The Doric order on either side of the entrance portico is of particular interest. The soffit of the brackets or mutules in the cornice contain little pegs called guiae as is commonly found with the Doric order, but Bernich added an additional row of guiae to the edge of these mutules. This idiosyncratic detail bears close resemblance to the antique 'Doric of Albano', from a nymphaeum of Domitian's villa at Albano, designed by Rabirius in the late 1st century AD. The related character of Rabirius's nymphaeum and Bernich's aquarium would provide a neat conceptual link which might explain the latter's use of this particular Antique order.

Below the curved echinus of the capital of the Doric order, an unadorned disc forms another distinctive feature. A similar detail may be found on the Doric order of the Basilica Iulia in the Forum, the excavation of which coincided with the erection of the aquarium.

is possible, therefore, that Bernich consciously used this detail from a great public building of Antiquity to adorn his own public building.

In the early 1880s Bernich had assisted the English archaeologist Parker in the excavation of the Baths of Agrippa behind the Pantheon, during the course of which the beautiful dolphin, trident and palmette frieze, visible today, were discovered. Having already
Bernini drew heavily from Canina's publication in the internal decoration at the aquarium, where many of the details have playful maritime references: for example, dolphins with curling tails take the place of conventional volutes on the capitals of some of the pilasters. This theme is continued with fish scale iron railings on the staircase, modelled on antique transennae, and with a balcony supported on large rostra on the first floor that displays the House of Savoy coat of arms. The remaining wall areas are covered with painted panels portraying a variety of well-known subjects from classical mythology and important scenes from the building of Roma Capitale.

Although the exterior fabric of the aquarium was relatively poorly constructed, its scholarly detail, its innovative use of cast iron and its rich internal colour scheme make it one of the most interesting and imposing Neo-Antique buildings constructed in the early years of the capital.

Bernini's other buildings in Rome exhibit a similar delight in the reworking of antique details. For example his palazzo facing the Colosseum fuses Vignola's Doric order from the Theatre of Marcellus with Rubtius's Doric of Albanum in the corner crowned the rusticated ground and first floors (Figs. 13.14 & 15). The giant order which unites the piano nobile and second floor is Corinthian, with an eagle replacing the usual rosette under the abacus of the capital, similar to that found on the Corinthian order of the Portico of Octavia. The overall form of this palazzo, however, with a rusticated base, a giant order and pavilions above the main cornice line, owes more to the High Renaissance and Serlio's idealized palace façades from his Five Books of Architecture.

Giulio de' Angelis was one of the few architects working in Roma Capitale who, although Roman by birth, had received his architectural education at the Polytechnic of Milan. At that time, Milan was the most prosperous and industrialized city in the peninsula, and this fact, combined with the proximity to the rest of Europe, resulted in many of the early Italian cast iron buildings being erected there. These revolutionary structures appear to have fired the imagination of the young De Angelis for, after graduating, he returned to his home city and produced many of the finest iron buildings in Rome over a short period in the early 1880s. His Rinascence department store on the Via del Corso was the first such building in the new capital (Fig. 13.16). De Angelis's composition has striking similarities with that of the Antique gates of Verona as illustrated in Serlio's treatise, where a giant arcade is
surmounted by two smaller arcaded galleries. The open façade proudly displays the iron structure, whilst also providing ample space for elaborate window displays. The interior of the building boasts a light cast iron structure with the various floors of the shop united by a central atrium, the detail of which draws inspiration from the plates of Canina’s ‘Schette Forme’. Externally the bronze rostrum on the corner pilasters emphasize the triumphant air of the building sited on the corner of Piazza Colonna, the heart of the new administration.

Sadly, however, De Angelis’ clients were all badly affected by the financial crash in the 1880s and he was forced to abandon architectural practice for a career in conservation, during which he restored a number of antique monuments.56

Arguably the best known and most criticized building in Roma Capitale is the monument to King Vittorio Emanuele II overlooking Piazza Venezia (Fig. 13.17). Much has been written about this pompous, self-conscious monument, although most of this criticism is, as David Watkin has correctly identified, focused upon the position of the building rather than the architectural form and detail.

When Vittorio Emanuele II died in 1878, it was decided to host an international design competition to erect a suitable monument to the father of the Risorgimento. Competitors were free to locate their design wherever they pleased: the winning scheme by a young Frenchman, Henri-Paul Nénot, was to be sited in the Piazza dell’Esedra in front of the Baths of Diocletian. A central monumental column was to be surrounded by a D-shaped arcaded screen, at the middle of which a grand triumphal arch framed the entrance to the Via Nazionale. But Nénot’s design was discovered to be related to his Grand Prix design of 1877 and this fact, combined with discontent that the competition for an Italian monument had been won by a Frenchman, led to the abandonment of Nénot’s scheme.56

In 1882 a second competition was held, although this time the site was on the northern side of Capitoline Hill which, since antiquity, had been the seat of secular government of the city. In
this way, modern Rome took its place alongside Michelangelo’s Campidoglio and the ancient Roman fora. But this was not the whole story. Erecting a monument on the Capitoline Hill involved the demolition of the tower of Paul III and of the convent of S. Maria in Aracoeli, thereby erasing Catholic connections with this important site and establishing in their place the House of Savoy. During the 1880s, Catholic subversion threatened the stability of the royalist regime and so the siting of the Vittorio Emanuele monument was highly political. As Domenico Farini, President of the Senate, recorded in his diary, “Italy had to do something big to show the Vatican”.

Most would agree that she succeeded.

A little known architect, Giuseppe Sacconi, won the second competition, and the project was to occupy him until his untimely death in 1905, after which, the completion of the monument was supervised by Koch, Placentini and Manfredo Manfredi.

Those who care to look beyond the obvious criticisms of Sacconi’s creation are rewarded with an extremely articulate architectural design. Externally the decoration of the various terraces draws heavily upon ancient sources with, for example, rostra, victories, military trophies and garlands of oak leaves: the latter are without their acorns, which, in Antiquity, was a recognized funereal motif (Fig. 13.18). The labyrinthine interior contains an extraordinary sequence of vast exhibition halls, modelled upon ancient Roman bath buildings (Fig. 13.19). These are linked by a grand staircase which gently winds up through the various floors before arriving, finally, at the crowning colonnade from which one is rewarded with remarkable panoramic views of Rome. In front of the extraordinary theatrical backdrop a pedestal supports the huge bronze equestrian statue of Vittorio Emanuele, facing north across the Piazza Venezia towards the Via del Corso.

The monument can be seen as one of the most brutal anti-papal acts of the new administration and it is significant that its siting, its decoration and the overall composition, which draws heavily on the ancient terrace sanctuary at Praeneste (Palestrina), are detached and unconnected with Antiquity. For it was the commission to forge this link with the Antique which formed a key part of the new administration’s attempts to loosen the grip of St. Peter on the new capital.

Apart from the monument to Vittorio Emanuele, the other well known and much maligned building of the early years of Roma Capitale is the vast Palazzo di Giustizia (1889–1911), on the Prati di Castello near the Vatican (Fig. 13.20). The palazzo is approached on axis via the Umberto I Bridge which, it had been suggested, emphasize that it was the House of Savoy which had brought law and order to the capital. The architect of the Palace of Justice, Guglielmo Calderini, skilfully manipulates the orders to weave together this vast composition, the heavy rustication and ornamentation of which owes a good deal to Piranesi’s fantastic engraving.

Another new bridge, named after Vittorio Emanuele II, was erected to link the Vatican with the historic centre. At either end of this elegant stone structure, tall plinths bearing the House of Savoy’s coat of arms support two pairs of antique victories: those facing the city proffer laurel wreathes, whilst those facing the Vatican hold swords, once again clearly demonstrating the manipulation of antique symbols for particular political effect (Figs. 13.21–22).

Aside from the erection of such politically charged monuments the new administration decided that certain antique structures should be used for state occasions to assist in the forging of a national identity. To this end, it was decreed that the kings of united monarchical Italy should be buried in the Pantheon. Consequently, the tombs of Vittorio Emanuele II and Umberto I, each richly encrusted with Antique iconography, are to be found on either side of the great rotunda, together with that of Raphael, whose remains were moved there to accompany the fathers of modern Italy. Such was the importance of the ancient structure that in 1883 Baccelli, the Minister of Public Instruction, removed the two curious bell towers which had been added by Bernini in the 17th century to restore the monument to its ancient splendour.

Similarly, the church of S. Maria degli Angeli, created by Michelangelo within the original structure of the Baths of Diocletian, was adopted for state occasions. Vanvitelli’s undistinguished entrance façade, added in the 18th century when he altered the orientation of the church, was removed in time for the international festival of the arts and archaeology in 1911 when Roma Capitale proudly showed herself to the rest of the world as a modern European capital.

One of the final acts of the Papal administration of Pius IX had been to bless a sober new fountain marking the head of the ancient Aqua Marcia in Piazza dell’Esedra in front of the church of S. Maria degli Angeli. The prominent position of this fountain, together with the symbolic connection with Antiquity, ensured that the papal monument was soon replaced by the racy Fontana delle Naiadi (‘Fountain of the Naiads’) by Rutelli in 1900 (Fig. 13.23) described in a contemporary guidebook as showing “naughty nymphs frolicking with sea creatures in positions one does not always want to show to children” (Fig. 13.24). A satirical postcard of the time demonstrates that the erection of the new fountain was clearly seen as an anti-papal act (Fig. 13.25).

However, this self-conscious adoption of the Antique for particular political effect represents, as has been seen, only one aspect of the use of Antiquity as a source of inspiration by the architects of 19th century Rome.

The extraordinary development of Rome after 1870 is an enormous subject that has, for too long, remained in the shadows of the history of the Eternal City. The period is often only referred to in passing and under such derogatory titles as ‘The Rape’ or ‘The Third Sack’.

But whilst the building of Roma Capitale is by no means the most distinguished period in the history of the city, many of the architects of this frantic period did manage to carry the long established architectural traditions of their city into the 20th century. It can only be lamented that in more recent times, Roman architects have self-consciously abandoned the traditions of their city, preferring instead to root their work in the barren soil of International Modernism.

The results of this ingress of Modernist ideology into Rome is the ever thickening crust of concrete blocks which have neither the architectural nor the urban qualities of their 19th century ancestors. Yet, whilst the suburban sprawl of Rome today continues at an alarming rate, the centre of the city remains trapped in a time warp with the prohibition of any new development in the heart of the capital. Such paralysis, though widespread throughout the world, is clearly not healthy for the life of any town, and it is particularly tragic that even Rome, the Eternal City, has succumbed finally to this disease.

However, the rich architectural fabric of the centre of Rome clearly demonstrates that working within the spirit of the traditions of the city by no means stifles the creativity or imagination of the architect, whilst at the same time ensuring that the contribution of each generation respects the established architectural character of the extant buildings.

If only those responsible for the development of Rome today could be re-united with the threads of their rich architectural traditions, one could be sure that these would be woven in new and interesting ways, and that archaeology and innovation could be fused again in the development of the Eternal City.
1. On 28th September 1870, the Aurelian Wall was breached at Porta Pia by troops of the Hoose of Savoy. The capture of Rome was the crowning act of the Risorgimento that had preoccupied the Italian peninsula for much of the 19th century. In 1867 the state of the capital was declared, but Pope Pius IX had retained control of Rome, protected by the French. In 1868 the capital of Italy was moved from Turin to Florence. Shortly afterwards, the French withdrew from Rome under the impression that moving the capital again, with all that that would entail, was unlikely. The Franco-Prussian War also played a part in this decision. As a result, Rome was captured after a token bombardment. This chapter focuses on the architectural and urban activity that took place in Rome in the early years of the capital. Of the first few years of activity was started in the city to celebrate 50 years of the state of Italy (FRUTAZ 1962, PI 576; PANTONI 1988). There was something of a priority in finishing major building projects in time for the 1911 festivities, much as there has been for the 2000 Games. For the general historical background, see BARTOCCHI 1969; CARRACCOLO 1984; CLARK 1985; 12-17; CROCE 1989; CUCcia 1981; FIAT 1970; GLOREY BOLTON 1970; HIBBERT 1985; 244-45; INSOLERA 1980, 299-310; KOSTOF 1975; MACK SMITH 1989, 3-35; MEES 1996, 255-406; PERIODI 1988; ROMA CAPITALE 1-3; ROMA 1977; 730; SANANFILO 1992.

2. LANCIANI 1988, 171-74. For the progressive post-1870 erosion of the disabitato within the walls, see FRUTAZ 1962, PI 573-75.

3. Francis Marion Crawford was an Italian American author whose contemporary novels such as Dom Omra (1902) give a unique insight into the mood of the period in Rome. See ROMA 1977, Nos. 8, 28, 59, 105, 107, 126, 149; HIBBERT 1980.

4. Etore Roeser Franz (1845-1907) painted some 120 views of Rome before the rude awakening of the city, after 1870. This collection, known affectionately as ‘Roma Sparita’, is on view at the Museo di Roma (MASO and VENDITTI 1981).


7. Many of the new ministries were initially housed in former monasteries or convents that, some have argued, was symbolic of the end of the Papal Regime. But this move was also an extremely practical solution to the problem of finding suitable buildings to accommodate the new bureaux before the state could afford to erect new headquarters. For example, the Domescine of the Ministry of the Минistero della Finanza e del Tesoro, di Difesa, and di Agricoltura (north, west and north-west of the Battle of Diocletian respectively), and the Ministero d’Interno (West of St. Giovanni). Another wave of such buildings was erected under Mussolini’s order along the Via Visone, and on the Via della Magione. (BARTOCCHI 1981; KOSTOF 1973, 6).

8. The population of Rome numbered more than 500,000 by 1900 (KOSTOF 1973, 6).

9. The Commission of eleven architects and engineers was led by Pietro Camporese; see LAVORI 1870. For a full discussion of the early master plans, see CUCcia 1981; INSOLERA 1989, 300-35; KOSTOF 1973, 41-50.

10. PIANO 1873, 6-7; FRUTAZ 1962, PI 536-37; KOSTOF 1973, 54-56.

11. The relatively sensitive approach to carving new arteries through the extant fabric of Rome contrasts strongly with that adopted in Paris where potholes were cut at right angles to the main streets and with little concern for what stood in the way of these new axial routes. For post-1870 architectural excavation and conservation in Rome, see EINAUDI 1978; Nos. 39-21; LANCIANI 1980; MOTTI 1953, 120-29.


13. The area surrounding the eastern end of the Via Nuova Pia was acquired in the late 1860s by the notorious Cardinal De Mercelde, minister of the Papal Regime, once it had been decided to erect the railway station by the Baths of Diocletian. De Mercelde began to develop his quarter in April 1867 on the gardens of the Villa Peretti, built by Sisto V, having gained approval from the city council to develop the land between the exedra and the Via Quattro Fontane and to retain the semi-circular shape of the exedra. See FALERNO 1986; KOSTOF 1973, 52-53; ROMA CAPITALE 12, 295-325.

14. PIANO 1873. For the star plan see FRUTAZ 1962, PL 527, 259; INSOLERA 1980, 171.

15. The Prati district lies between the Borgo and Monte Mario (FRUTAZ 1982, PL 522; BRIACCI 1975, 80-3; BECCHETTI 1983, No. 60). Plans to develop the Prati di Castello were also begun under the regime of Pius IX. Hence the papal preference to rehouse in more healthy parts of the city: PALAZZI S. Giovanni, S. Marco, Quartoile.

16. The ‘Black (Non)’ aristocracy retained their allegiance to the Pope and refused to have anything to do with the administration. See CRAWFORD 1888; 1892; GLOREY BOLTON 1970; HIBBERT 1985, 277-78.

17. I am indebted to Dr Janet Delaine for helping me to establish that the main sources for building materials (for example, fragments of stucco, Portland and pepperino) in the early years of Roma Capitale were the same as those that had been in constant use since Antiquity. See DELAINE 1995.

18. A common misconception is that the architectural training in Rome at this time was merely copying that at the Ecoles de Beaux Arts in Paris. In reality, it is, as Victor Edgerton (1900) states, the reverse.

19. Camillo Boito (1836-1914) has been described as the ‘Italian Ruskin’; see MEEKS 1966, 207-9 for a discussion on the man, his ideas on architecture and his influence. For some of his numerous articles, see CRIPPA 1898.

20. CRIPPA 1898, 147.

21. CRIPPA 1885, 63-66.

22. For example, see KOCH 1893, 40.


25. See PIANTONI 1953, 72.

26. Serlio worked with Baldassare Peruzzi (1481-1536) from 1514 until the sack of Rome in 1527. Peruzzi was a considerable scholar of Antiquity, and his master’s enthusiasm for the Antique clearly rubbed off on Serlio. His treatment of the first book to codify the Five Orders, together with instructions on how to construct them and examples of compositions from Antiquity, from the Renaissance and of his own designs.

27. SERLIO 1584, Book 4, Chapter 6, Fol. 23.

28. During the 16th-century Vignole’s treatise was published in special Roman editions including examples of the author’s work’s overset in northern Latin.

29. Anyone who has attempted a design in the Doric order will inevitably have encountered problems in spacing the triglyphs and metopes in the frieze. The triglyphs, which are half a diameter wide should be centred over the order and the metopes between these triglyphs. In the cornice, mutate brackets align over the triglyphs. In the abstract this sounds straightforward enough, but the problem becomes evident when one tries to integrate this rigid horizontal proportioning system with arches and other vertical elements, as at the Theatre of Marcellus—see FREARD DE CHAMBRY 1664, 167. The solution in this particular Antique example adopted by Vignola is brilliant in its simplicity. By using an essentially Ionic entablature with the Doric order and by suppressing the decorative detail in the frieze, the problem of the triglyph space disappearing as the cornice contains dentils rather than mutules, the horizontal proportioning become infinitely flexible to co-ordinate easily with other elements of the design. It is this neat solution to one of the most taxing problems facing architects working with the Doric order which has ensured that Vignola’s version has remained so popular since its original publication. For the ‘triglyph problem’ in classical architecture, see COULTON 1977, 80-4.

30. See KRAUTHEIMER 1985, 37-47.
De Angelis went to restore many historic buildings in Lazio and the Abruzzo and directed the conservation works of the Births of Caracalla (DELAINE 1997, 43).

WATKINS 1989, 680.


For a detailed account of the competitions and design of the monument to Vittorio Emanuele II, see the two volumes of the catalogue VITTORIANO 1988, and now also HARRIS (1993, 1994). See also FRUTAZ 1962, Pls. 556, 563–64; MANACORDA and TAMASSIA 1985, 128–35; BECCITI 1993, Nos. 128–29.

BOETHIUS 1978, 168–74; COARELLI 1982, 137–48. The upper sanctuary at Palestina had recently been restored by Luigi Costanzo.

I am indebted to my fellow scholars Robin Williams and Terry Kirk for their help with finding my attention to this juxtaposition. Cf. FRUTAZ 1962, Pl. 550.

GUGLIELMO CALDERINI (1837–1916); see SGRABI 1991, 6.

See MEERS 1966, 354.

Others constructions may be seen in a similarly anti-popul light. The heresiciars’s monument (1890), on the site of papal executions in the Campo di Fiore, has Giordano Bruno’s statue facing the Vatican (BECCHITI 1993, No. 116). The same (1911) flashed the colours of the national flag at the Vatican from the top of the Gianicolo. In the south part Prati, the Piazza Cola di Rienzo (named for the 14th century secular leader during the papal Avignon Captivity) is connected by the Via Cola di Pizzano Risorgimento, the latter lying directly below the pope’s Belvedere appartments.

In AD 608–10 the Pantheon had been the first pagan temple in Rome to be converted directly into a church (S. Maria ad Martyres) when it was gifted by the eastern Roman usurper Phocas (FINE LICH 1966, 38–40; KRAUTHEIMER 1980, 72; LEOUN 1846, s. v. ‘S. Maria ad Martyres’, 219). More recently, it was famously stripped of its bronzework by Pope Urban VIII and Bernini’s ‘tom-eat’ campanil was added (FINE LICH 1966, 24); BECCITI 1993, No. 43. See also KRAUTHEIMER 1985, 124–9). For the 1787 royal funeral the Pantheon façade was ‘restored’ in temporary materials with classicising pedimental sculpture, statuary and a new inscription overlaying the Hadrian’s ‘Agrippan’ text: VITTORIO EMANUELE II IL PADRE DELLA PATRIA. Thus the non-popul origins of the building were reasserted and emphasized (ROMA 1977, Nos. 112–13).


See MORO 1966, 234–36. For the more simple predecessor decorated with four ‘Egyptian’ lions see BECCITI 1993, No. 115.

Many of the buildings in the Centro Storico date from this period of Rome’s history date that is either ignored or, more likely, not appreciated by many who write about the city. The Neo-cincocento buildings of the post 1870 era, by large, blend remarkably harmoniously with their older neighbours. It is staggering that, in view of the above and the contents of this chapter, few guide books even bother to mention the period. Much of what has been written is lamentably poor, and precious little on Rome Capitale has been published in English (GUTTRY 1950; REED 1950; HIBBERT 1985, 274–75, 280–83; SALVADORI 1990, 126–27).

Roma Faustina is beyond the ambit of this paper, but its combination of grandiloquent planning, ruthless clearance and rapid, largely unprepared, large-scale archaeological excavation contrast badly even with the post-1970 boom (CEDERNA 1989; BARROEIO 1980; MANACORDA and TAMASSIA 1985; HIBBERT 1985, 209–91; KOSTOF 1972; MOATTI 1993, 139–42). There is a worry that the Gianicolo has dictated a simple archeological work in the city’s monumental centre (see BENSARD 2000).

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