

## War memories in *Terra di Lavoro*



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### Abstract

*Terra di Lavoro*, an historical region north of Naples. Their urban centers, with historically, artistically and archaeologically of interest, suffered extensive damage in the Second World War (IIWW). When allied landing at Salerno, the continuous bombing produced heavy losses to the architectural heritage with destruction both in historical centers and in major monuments. The aim of this papers is present some experience on reconstruction applied in *Terra di Lavoro*. This paper was developed through the use of historical analysis. Institutional effort was analyzed in each case described. The outcomes of the economic and social policy conditioning had considerable importance as well as psychological and symbolic order. In conclusion, through the architectural heritage reconstruction, it begins a process strongly characterized by instances outside the scope of the protection and restoration, that pressed on economic and social revival of the nation through a rapid revival of tourism, from the restored face of the main monuments.

**Keywords:** heritage reconstruction, institutional intervention, Terra di Lavoro.

### Introduction

More than sixty years after the end of the Second World War, reflect on the issues concerning damage suffered by the architectural heritage in *Terra di Lavoro*, an historical region north of Naples, and on the interfering events of the time is a very extended and complex feat. The

researches developed in the last years start to explain demolitions substance in analyzed area, although an organic study of the territory about the damage suffered by monuments is still absent. This historiographic lack can be connected to the complex debate on the reconstruction of the southern Italy's heritage after the war, roused by leading experts in the world of conservation and restoration which marginally affects this area.

According to some reflections, it is very clear that, to the problems about reconstructions in southern Italy, there are different choices resulting both from the personalities of the architects of the various operations and the local realities, which are different in all the regions.

From the South to the North of Italy, already before the outbreak of the conflict, personalities such as Chierici and Malajoli encouraged the works of monuments' protection to prevent their loss. Nevertheless, the damage's weigh is enormous, and the reconstruction work is linked to the financial resources, also available by the allied government. The damage caused by bombing and shelling on monuments are in addition to those dued to Italian and allied armies' rule, which warped historic architecture with inappropriate and incompatible uses regarding requests of conservation and protection.

In *Terra di Lavoro*, in the area between Capua and Cassino, several urban centers historically, artistically and archaeologically of interest suffer extensive damage<sup>1</sup>. In the eight months

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<sup>1</sup> From the landing in Sicilia, in June 1943, before the passing on the German Bernhardt, Monte Camino-Monte Lungo-Monte Sammucro, over one hundred bombings are documented in the north of Campania in mid-December. See. Gribaudo 2005; Patricelli 2007; Gioannini, Massobrio 2007.

following the Allied landing at Salerno and the overcoming of the Gustav line in May 1944, the continuous bombing will produce heavy losses to the architectural heritage with destruction both in historical centers, such as Capua, and in major monuments such as the Sant'Angelo in Formis's Basilica (Fig. 1). The emerging view highlights some problematic issues, whose investigation is of interest for understanding the logic that implies the phase immediately following the war, relating to the first post-war reconstruction.



Fig. 01 The cathedral after the bombardments of the second world war (Private archives)

### Institutional efforts for reconstruction

Mainly is essential to understand the role covered in this period by the institutions, in particular the relationship developed between the Soprintendenza of Campania's Monuments and the Provveditorato of Public Works, which is a branch of the Ministry of Public Works. The reconstruction works are largely assigned to the latter, with the aim to quickly come back to the community the heritage damaged by war injuries. It returns into the spirit strongly influenced by

reasons external to the restoration purpose, which aspired to the economical and social revival of the nation through a rapid revival of tourism, based on the image of the restored monuments. So, there is often a conflict between the need to proceed quickly to the physical reconstruction of the cities and the areas of life, pertaining to the provveditorato, and the need to ensure the protection of the damaged heritage, pertaining to the soprintendenza.

This condition is exemplified by Gino Chierici, in reference to the territorially different Milanese area, about reconstruction's interventions on monumental heritage conducted by the Genio Civile: «Unfortunately, it is true that the Genio Civile is not the most appropriate authority to perform any activity on the monumental heritage: it is not the most appropriate because of the lack of specific technical knowledge, the inadequacy of artistic sensitivity, the insufficient historical knowledge, the bureaucratic and administrative methods that impede and prevent the execution of rational restoration, consolidation and defense with a form of strict control other than formal»<sup>2</sup>. In this scenario protection requirements collapse, supplanted by the need to give back to people safe places to restart living. The marginalization of the analyzed territory emerges when it is compared to the interest of authorities in interventions on religious heritage of Naples, except for the cases of the Capua and Teano's cathedrals (Pane, 1957; Casiello, 1983).

Impact is significant on the planning choices in restoration and reconstruction interventions which resort the use of reinforced concrete and formal simplified elements for the remake of lost decorations. It showed unfortunate effect, often linked with the need to ensure employment of unskilled labor in the construction industry

<sup>2</sup> Gino Chierici's letter to the General Management of Fine Arts of 3 September 1944, in Central State Archive, Ministry of Education, fund AA. BB. AA., div. II, 1940-1945, b. 84, issue. 554, Riparazione e consolidamento di edifici monumentali.

through the reconstruction sites. Exemplifying is the case of the church's dome of San Michele Arcangelo in San Pietro Infine, collapsed shortly after its creation (Spinosa, Vitagliano, 2008) (Fig. 2).



Fig. 02 - San Pietro Infine (CE), the post-war reconstruction of the dome of San Michele Arcangelo with the use of reinforced concrete (Zambardi 2003)

In this scenario, the superintendences give directions subordinated to the need of speed, because is urgent, as already mentioned, the need to return to everyday life for population affected by war. Add to that the topics of adaption to new functions and unveiling after bombing of formal configurations previously hidden, spaces and architectural structures under reconstruction.

It is what happens to the Museo Campano of Palazzo Antignano in Capua, badly damaged during the raid at the beginning of September 1943, mainly in the north wing corresponding to the layout of the main facade (Vitagliano, 2008). The restoration began after 1948 and it is supervised by the Genio Civile of Caserta, for the regional Provveditorato to public works in Naples, in complete harmony with the Soprintendenza of Campania's Monuments. The purpose is to quickly rebuild the affected portions of the object

to allow the re-opening of the museum to the public, in a scenario of recovery of normal. The work is managed both by the Soprintendenza of Monuments, as evidenced by the letter from the superintendent Giorgio Rosi to the manager of the Genio Civile and dated July 30, 1948, and by the Soprintendenza of Antiquities, represented by Amedeo Maiuri, who gives the graphs project of museum accomodation to the Genio Civile in February 1950. The first one was interested in a remake as *it was where it was* of the main facade's elements, while the second one was most interested in a new configuration of the archaeological finds exhibition.

The actions of superintendences and provveditorato resulting from a project of funds distribution determined by priorities in the general plan of Italian reconstruction. Moreover, immediately after the front passage and until the spring of 1947, the territory's control is run by a temporary allied government, the Allied Military Government (AMG). It is an authority of the Allied Control Commission (ACC) which deals with the first activities necessary to overcome the emergency phase giving, for example, both immediate assistance to the civilian population in order to prevent outbreaks and relieve discomfort caused by the armies passage, and also prepare the governmental administration and economical organization to return them to Italians as soon as possible. On its behalf the Subcommittee for Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives (MFA & A) works, providing support activities to the Italian authorities of protection in the first works for the safety of the artistic heritage affected by hostilities. But the control activity, as the archive documents explain, is not reduced to a mere verification on the Italian organizations' work. The Subcommittee also intervenes on the operating choices, identifying, in some cases, the criteria for interventions that often go well beyond the safety. Allied authorities required to finance the restoration prefer the *facies* of the medieval churches, such as Santa Chiara in Naples, from



Fig. 03 - Napoli, internal view of the Santa Chiara's church before the Allied bombing of 1943, photographic archive of the Superintendence for Architectural Heritage for Naples and its province (ASBAN).

which all the surviving Baroque layers will be removed in accordance with a method adopted by several superintendents in the South (Figg. 3-5). In the report following the preliminary investigation of the damage suffered by Teano city, marked by considerable loss to the religious structures as a result of military operations, Captain F.H.J. Maxse highlights the need to recover the capitals «debarochise them», stressing not only the damage's substance but also the direction of a possible future intervention. This attitude is again clear when considering the Subcommittee made up of leading figures by the world of American culture, often formed through the study of the Italian artistic heritage.

The Allies behavior was not always exemplary towards the monumental heritage. Overlooking the Montecassino's event and the reasons for its bombing, the story of the Fieramosca castle in Mignano Monte Lungo is significant. In March 1944, the New Zealand troops try to enter in Cassino, but attacks do not give desired results. Therefore, it becomes necessary for propaganda to make a newsreel to be sent in homeland that describes the reasons for the company's failure caused by the German resistance. But the current conditions do not allow filming on the battlefield live. After the fighting, troops are sent to the



Fig. 04 - Napoli, internal view of the Santa Chiara's church after the Allied bombing of 1943, photographic archive of the Superintendence for Architectural Heritage for Naples and its province (ASBAN).



Fig. 05 - Napoli, internal view of the Santa Chiara's church after restoration work.

rear in Migliano where were the remains of the Fieramosca castle, already marked by numerous air raids between September and December 1943. This place is considered perfect for filming by cameramen. The shooting begin simultaneously with the castle's shelling by soldiers to simulate the battle (Fig. 6-7). Only at the end of the shoot, the British troops, under the supervision of the Subcommittee's officers, will undertake to pull out of the rubble artworks still preserved inside (Angelone, 2011, p. 20).

This scenario shows that, approaching Cassino along the front line, the destruction and depredation increase in a territory that will pay heavily for its proximity to the Gustav Line. This contingency is associated with the lack of attention to the northern territory of Campania both by the organs of protection and by the organization of allied support, due to a lower density of monumental buildings than in the capital. To understand this case it is necessary to go back to 1944, when the Superintendent to Campania's monuments and galleries Bruno Molajoli and the Subcommittee's Major Paul Gardner, in drawing up the report on the work on higher risk emergencies, signaled only three significant events in *Terra di Lavoro*: the Capua and Teano's cathedrals and the Sant'Angelo in Formis's basilica. Awareness of the reconstruction action

### **Awareness of the reconstruction action**

By several cases investigated emerges the awareness that reconstruction actions, realized mostly by Genio Civile, do not follow criteria always consistent: if for architecture differs according to the damage suffered, for historic towns urban accommodations sometimes arise from need to resolve problems, such as roads, and to improve the living conditions of the people, rather than to implement reconstruction plans. All that happened neglecting what was the meaning of these towns, especially those partially destroyed.



Fig 06 Mignano Monte Lungo (CE), the arrival of the New Zealand troops before the filming that simulates the battle (Angelone 2011).



Fig 07 Mignano Monte Lungo (CE), simulation of the battle near the Fieramosca castle. (Maslowski 1993)

It is curious to note that the same rules for the reconstruction's plans for war-damaged build up areas (D.L.L. n. 154, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1945) in the Chapter I urge the identification of the city center's characters and the reconstruction of the residential area in existing perimeter, ensuring the preservation of its traditional character (Casiello, 2011, p. 11). But the story hints at a wider problem, evident in the words of Joseph Rykwert about urban planners and architects who, already between the two wars and also during the second World War, were prepared to face the difficulties of the reconstruction of most of the European cities: «We thought of being able to rise from the smoldering and tragic ruins a series of rationally planned and new designed cities and to ensure the survivors and veterans' happiness. These professionals looked like pioneers of a new and better world; their job was to be based



Fig. 08 - San Pietro Infine (CE), a frame from the film *The Battle of San Pietro* by director John Huston.



Fig 10 - San Pietro Infine (CE), remains of the village destroyed after December 1943 at the arrival of military doctors (Maslowski 1993)



Fig. 09 - San Pietro Infine (CE), reduced to ruins then the December 1943. The eviscerated church of St. Michele Arcangelo can be seen looming over other buildings in the village (Maslowski 1993).



Fig 11 - San Pietro Infine (CE), buildings destroyed after December 1943 (Maslowski 1993)

on statistical research and technical efficiency. The story had nothing to teach; it spoke only of the dark times that were. It was a vision full of optimism» (Rykwert, 2003, p. 3). It is the case of San Pietro Infine's center, just before the Gustav Line, tragically involved in military operations and idealized by director John Huston in the film *The Battle of San Pietro*<sup>3</sup>, reported by Times as «the best war movies made until then» (Maslowski, 1993, p. 86). Because of the war about 140

citizens died, a tenth of that age's population, including twenty victims of German massacres (Zambardi, 2003). Immediately after winning the country, allies formed a team of workers chosen among the civil escaped from the war's fury with the task to demolish all the precarious and dangerous buildings for the city's safety. Even architectural structures for which the demolition was not essential and that in other contexts would be saved or at least made safe, were destroyed

<sup>3</sup> The original title of the documentary is St. Peter, as it appears on the home screen of the same, but the commentators of the film, the director and his biographers have always cited as *The Battle of San Pietro*. See. Maslowski, 1993, p. 336, n. 33.



Fig 12 - San Pietro Infine (CE), the new city, built on another site between 1945 and 1950.

during demolition operations by order of the allied officers (Fig. 8-11). The bell tower of the Sant'Antonio da Padova's church is among of these.

The new city, built *ex novo* on another site between 1945 and 1950, is the first evidence of Italian post-war city planning, still imbued with fascist monumental character and totally forgotten by historiography (Fig. 12). Rather than working on the existing building, of which 98% had been destroyed to during the homonymous battle and after the operations of evacuation and securing performed by the Allies, it is decided to create a new independent center in the valley, through the appeal of substantial US funding<sup>4</sup>. The actions perpetrated against San Pietro Infine, although they were determined by opportunities' motivation and were isolated in the national reconstruction

in Italy, exemplify the attitude of the architectural heritage in *Terra di Lavoro*: it was forgotten by protection agencies, which were too busy to operate primarily in Naples after the war, and it becomes the object of attention by the Genio Civile, the operational arm of the Soprintendenza of Public Works.

### Conclusions

Not always embraceable criteria are on the basis of the often radical design choices that leave little room for the needs of conservation and protection. The goal, as repeatedly it was stressed, is to give back a condition of return to normality to populations suffering for more than three years of military conflicts. The outcomes of the economic and social policy conditioning had considerable importance as well as psychological and symbolic

<sup>4</sup> To apply for funds to allied command, please refer to the State Archive of Caserta, reg. 22, issue 2, *Allied Control Commission, Public Work and utilities sub-commission*, Estimate of work to be carried out, 29th September 1944. For the expert's report attached to the request, see State Archives of Caserta, reg. 22, issue 2, Ispettorato Superiore del Genio Civile based in Naples, Corpo reale del Genio Civile Engineers, Caserta 14th September 1944. *Danni di Guerra. Perizia dei lavori urgenti per le demolizioni, sgombri, ricostruzione casa comunale e del cimitero di San Pietro Infine.*



order. In this sense, through the architectural heritage reconstruction, it begins a process strongly characterized by instances outside the scope of the protection and restoration, that pressed on economic and social revival of the nation through a rapid revival of tourism, from the restored face of the main monuments.

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## Gremium