

Between war and restoration. Stories of contended heritages

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ABSTRACT

In the early Fifties, the monuments repaired after the damages of the war, however numerous, were the minority than the ruined ones awaiting restoration. This was the result, despite the many difficulties of reconstruction, of the method of philological restoration, suitable to the buildings slightly damaged, but not to those that were destroyed in whole or in part. The distance between the categories of G. Giovannoni and the reconstruction of major parts of buildings was proved in all its limits and outcomes almost always destructive of the remaining identity. Based on these findings, the paper aims to argue about the fate suffered by the architectural heritage of Abruzzo, in the various features that the post-war reconstruction assigned to the restoration.

KEY WORDS

World War II, Italy, Abruzzo, restoration, conservation, history of architecture

Premise

The distinction that developed in Italy after the Second World War between the reconstruction of its cities and the restoration of its monuments was a strong one.

The first was associated with an idea of reconstruction as an occasion for renewal not to be missed, and considered an ideal premise for exploiting the voids created by bombs to extend practices of selective demolition and the modernisation of hygienic conditions to previously excluded areas. The second, on the other hand, was conditioned by the temptation to restore everything *where it was, as it was*. This was truest above all at the outset, when mourning was yet to be metabolised and the destruction still too serious to be tolerated (De Stefani 2011; Sette 1996; Marconi 1997).

Linking the rebuilding of cities with the restoration of monuments

was the demand for a reconstruction as desired and urgent as the symbolic value associated with the one and the other was strong, above all in terms of collective identity; the desire to restore identity, more ideal than material, appears to be the discriminating factor of the entire operation. However, only the *why* of the reconstruction was common and shared due to the masses impulses, in the wake of natural or manmade catastrophes. The *how* of the reconstruction, on the contrary, is a field of jarring controversies, and a sign of the gap, in reality, between the approach to the city and the approach to monuments, open to new developments in the first case, and closed to any appeal for renewal in the second.

The transaction between past and present, between modernity and tradition that could be satisfied in the reconstruction of historic centres damaged by bombs, it is a setback in the face of monuments. After the war, restoration proved to be an act of strenuous defence against any form of modernisation. Even when some new concession was made, it was limited to structural aspects, to the recourse to the innovative, technical and material methods already acknowledged in the *Carta italiana del restauro* (The Italian Restoration Charter).

With respect to the debate on the destiny of historic centres, the beginning of a revision to the discipline of restoration has to stop. The already original reflections made in '43 by Agnoldomenico Pica, the promoter of a discerning rapport between old and new, though straightforward and frank, were destined to fall on deaf ears (Pica 1943).

To the same degree, the scenario delineated by Roberto Pane in an article penned prior to the conclusion of the war, commenting on the destruction of the Church of Santa Chiara in Naples, remained wholly theoretical. His hopes for opening toward "taste and fantasy", based on the acquisitions of new ideas about art structured by Benedetto Croce, courageously aimed at liberating the discipline from the narrows of its positivist matrix. However, it would take time to be assimilated and elaborated into a more mature formula (Pane 1944).

Abruzzo, one of the Italian regions that suffered most during the Second World War, was no exception to events common to the rest of the nation. The ferment of initiatives that, despite countless contradictions, accompanied the early stages of the reconstruction of devastated cities did not affect restoration, but remained tenaciously anchored to the certainties acquired prior to the war, during both the phase of surveying

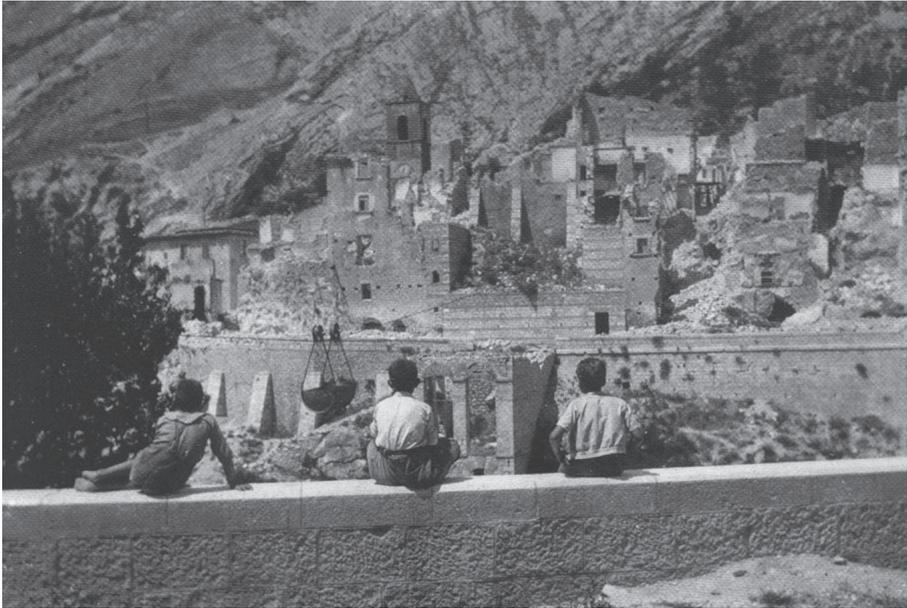


Fig. 1 - Lettopalena, Second World War destructions.

the damages and that of repairing them. These certainties included the distinction, difficult to shrug off, not only between major and minor architecture – the first made to correspond with monuments, the second with the city – but also between major and minor monuments. This latter was susceptible, in its proposition, to an attention after the war that privileged the first and ignored the second, at best postponed until the arrival of more financially advantageous times that, however, generally arrived late, if at all. Accompanying this situation was the full range of risks of definitive abandonment or, on the contrary, the furies of reconstructions perpetrated outside of any disciplinary boundaries, not to mention far from any media attention common to areas less peripheral to national debate.

Despite events resulting from the presence in Abruzzo after the war of technicians involved in more than thirty reconstruction plans implemented in accordance with Law n. 154 from March 1945, there were few echoes in the region of discussions taking place across Italy between conservatives and innovators on the reconstruction of monuments and cities. This is also because Abruzzo was still considered a region with an appreciable heritage solely from the «period of greatest splendour between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries»: in line with a

long-standing historiographic tradition, conditioned by literary and romantic suggestions, these are the terms adopted by Umberto Chierici. In '42 Chierici was assigned to the *Soprintendenza all'arte medievale e moderna per l'Abruzzo e il Molise* [Superintendence of Medieval and Modern Art for Abruzzo and Molise], based in L'Aquila. His presence in the region – initially as regent, substituting Ugo Nebbia, and after '47 as director – make him a decisive figure for the fate of monumental heritage in Abruzzo, not only that affected by the war, but also that which had formerly escaped any recognition, and thus any attention and conservation (Miarelli Mariani, 1979: 167 ff.; Dalla Negra, 1980: 607-611; Varagnoli, Pezzi, 2004: 509-510; Vinardi, 2004: 264-271; Varagnoli, 2007: 270-281; Serafini 2008).

Wartime damage to monumental heritage, between overstatement and omissions

Faced with the difficulties and delays that accompanied the surveying of damages to the buildings and cities, the rapidity with which a list of monuments damaged by the war in Abruzzo was drawn up is exemplary. This work was summarised by Umberto Chierici in the report on *I danni della guerra al patrimonio artistico degli Abruzzi e del Molise* [Wartime Damages to Artistic Heritage in the Abruzzi and Molise], published in L'Aquila in the spring of 1945.

The report is one of the first of its kind published in Italy. It was second only, together with that by Cesare Fasola – a functionary of the *Soprintendenza alle gallerie di Firenze, Arezzo e Pistoia* – on the vicissitudes of Florence's art galleries – to the report by Bruno Molaioli and Paul Gardner on damages to monuments in the region of Campania, published in 1944 (Coccoli, 2011: 685-688; Casiello, 2011: 66-79).

Accompanying Chierici during his inspections in Abruzzo was Captain Fred H. Maxse, from the Allied Control Council. In his quality as Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Officer for the Allied Military Government for the region of Abruzzi-Marche, it was Captain Maxse who penned the introduction to the report on *Wartime Damages*. Maxse had already been one of the most active regional advisers on monuments, working in Sicily following the institution of the

Allied Commission in Syracuse in July 1943. He had also lent his services to the local Superintendent under a climate of maximum collaboration (Oteri, 2007: 99-101).

The report on wartime damages to monuments in Abruzzo and Molise was proposed by Chierici as the outcome of an undertaking completed after liberation, during the spring of 1944. It was made “province by province”, from Chieti to Campobasso, and focused not only on immobile heritage, but also on moveable works of art in museums across the region. Chierici provided a list and inventory, accompanied by descriptions, where necessary, of urgent measures. It would be a few years before Guglielmo De Angelis d’Ossat established a precise taxonomy of wartime damages and corresponding repairs (De Angelis d’Ossat 1957, 13-28). Chierici’s frequent reference to the diverse levels of damage to Abruzzo’s heritage did however anticipate this spirit. His were heavily conditioned by prejudices that led him to seek damages largely where none were to be found, and to arrive at conclusions as consolatory as they were partial.

In the words of the leading organism of local conservation, it was «by a miracle [...] that all of the most famous monuments are safe or have suffered non-threatening damages», for the most part roofs. By «more famous» monuments Chierici intended above all the region’s principal medieval churches, whose preservation was due to their fortunate location in isolated areas far from industrial zones and communication lines, for the most part unaffected by wartime destruction that had instead reduced «homes, churches, *palazzotti* (...)» of «minor architecture» to «formless masses of rubble».

Chierici was as highly reassured by the situation of such negligible damage to major monuments, that in his words could be repaired «with little technical or scientific difficulty», as he was unconcerned with the destruction, on the contrary, «of a few minor monuments». It is almost as if the circumstance of being «minor» legitimizes the exaggeration of the entity of destruction that, while serious in many cases, was almost never total. This was the case, for example, of the parish church of Alfedena, and the churches of San Nicola and San Giovanni in Castel di Sangro, in the province of L’Aquila, which suffered serious structural damages though most of the external walls were still standing; this was also the case of the Cathedral of Ortona, in the province of Chieti, whose dome had been blasted open and one side struck by bombing; the

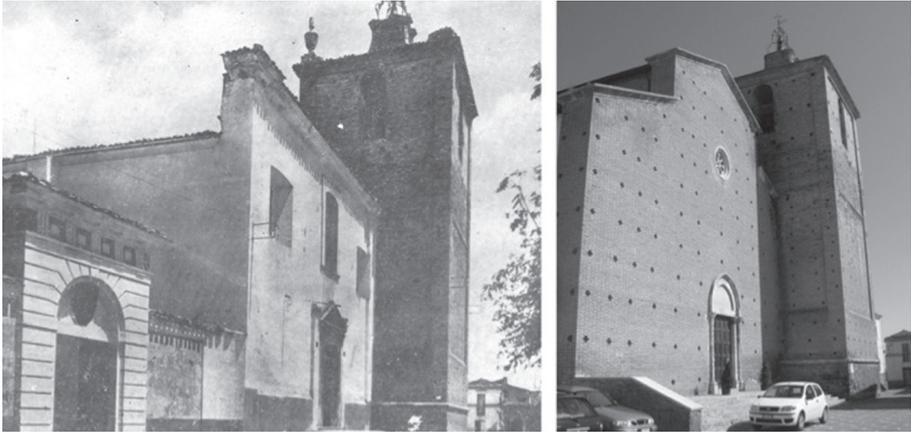


Fig. 2 - Penne, the Cathedral before and after the post-war reconstruction.

same is true of the church of Santa Maria a Mare in Giulianova in the province of Teramo, whose façade, right elevation and bell tower had been spared; and for the cathedral of Penne, in the province of Pescara, where the war spared much more than «merely» the crypt indicated by the Superintendent.

In the confusion between real and perceived damages, other than between damages that were sought out and those ignored, Chierici's report adds little to the destruction of the region's monumental heritage. He limits himself, with a contribution from Captain Maxse, to describing barbarous acts and vandalism in a few churches and libraries, completely ignoring everything else, for the most part violated when not destroyed by the fury of English and American bombs or the offensive acts perpetrated by ground troops. As the Allies were the same group he found himself working with at the end of hostilities to survey the damages and above all program, with their financial support, the reconstruction, the conflict of interest and the political conditions guiding the work of the conversation body are clear and in part comprehensible. The same cannot be said of the lack of attention reserved for the complexity of the region's heritage. Yet this would seem to explain, at least in part, its fate during the phase of reconstruction. The aforementioned survey, province by province, was unaccompanied by any mention of the myriad of other structures, despite their artistic and historic importance, listed in other surveys as destroyed or more less damaged.

In reality, the Superintendent claimed to have completed his

investigation in all areas affected by the war, though in reality it focuses only on episodes he deemed worthy of being visited and studied. He left the rest to the successive reconnaissance of authorities with a more direct local involvement, such as the Civil Engineering Department, under the Ministry of Public Works, or municipal governments commissioned, based on Law n. 154 from March 1945, with transmitting data to competent authorities about damages incurred in individual areas, in order to prepare plans for their reconstruction. It is these planning documents, compared to what was reported by Chierici, that allow for the definition of a much vaster scenario of buildings destroyed or more or less seriously damaged by the war; a scenario delineated what is more a few years later, when part of the damages had already been repaired or simply eliminated by demolishing what was considered dangerous and a risk to public safety.

Slight damages, easy “repairs”, as before the war

The report on wartime damages to the monuments of Abruzzo and Molise precedes another report, published in L’Aquila in December of the same year, once again signed by Chierici and referring to the activities of the Superintendent during the four-year period between 1942 and 1945.

The first of the report’s three chapters is dedicated to work undertaken between 1942 and 1943 – before the region had been bombed – involving medieval structures in the area of L’Aquila and the Adriatic coast that, «due to their poor state of conservation and intrinsic artistic value required more urgent restoration works».

Accustomed to working with monuments and the problems of restoration, thanks also to his father Gino, his illustrious interlocutor, and in-situ conservation experience gained in Calabria and Piedmont, with his first restorations in Abruzzo, Chierici confirmed a working practice that remained strictly faithful to the principles adopted for decades. Principles that in Abruzzo he was able to enrich with noteworthy professional and technical contributions. The term *ripristino*, refurbishment, he often uses to refer to a sum of actions expressly focused on restoring form and structure to buildings that had lost them, due to circumstances independent of the war that, however, ended up

being linked to it. A *ripristino* was undertaken, according the Chierici, at the churches of Santa Maria in Valle Porclaneta at Rosciolo, San Bartolomeo at Carpineto della Nora, San Panfilo at Tornimparte, Santa Giusta at Bazzano, San Francesco at Castelvecchio sub equo, and San Pietro ad Oratorium at Capestrano. In all cases, the “absolute sincerity” of the restoration is guaranteed in his words by operations to remove and reconstruct the roof, the integration of columns no longer able to support their loads, the reinforcement of masonry structures using reinforced concrete ring beams, as well as the scraping away of finishes applied to internal surfaces. In addition to a practice of consolidation based prevalently on the use of modern materials and techniques, the interventions in these churches already reveal the Superintendent’s marked interest in *exposing* surfaces held to be original, whether in bare stone or decorated with frescoes. For this exposure the poor state of conservation of the structures in reality provided only an alibi. His practice was thus perfectly aligned with that of his predecessors, who utilised the works successive to the earthquake that struck the Marsica area in 1915 as an ideal occasion for eliminating parts held to be incongruous, in general Baroque, condemning them to a fate that in Abruzzo would last many years, spurred on by the damages of the war and not only (Varagnoli and Pezzi, 2004: 530-532).

If not for a vaster campaign to recover parts of the structure damaged by bombing, there would have been no interruption between operations carried out before and after the war. With the exception, as mentioned, of the few destroyed buildings listed in official records that, however, were unluckily too damaged but also “minor”, and thus the object of works that could be postponed and dealt with, as we will see, outside of the canons of philological restoration, for better and worse.

Melding the pre- and post-war periods is the circumstance of slight damages to major monuments, governable only through «works of reparation», in other words interventions necessary to «save them from further degradation». This is how Captain Maxse expressed the situation in the report on wartime damages, when referring to works financed by the Allied Government. Works begun immediately following the cessation of hostilities in the region, between the spring and summer of 1944, and for the most part concluded at the end of the following year. While a report on the activities of the four-year period appears to describe a still-embryonic situation, without a doubt war-inflicted

damages were «for the most part repaired» through works of «integral refurbishment», where possible, or, in more serious cases, through the restoration of surviving portions while awaiting more favourable circumstances to proceed with definitive solutions.

With the exception of costing details, the report on wartime damages and that on the activities of the Superintendent's office until 1945, in reality coincides with the period relative to the reparation of war-inflicted damages. Besides the report on «works completed in the two-year period 1942-1943», the second also contains a conclusive chapter on «restorations completed or in preparation in 1945». It confirms a broad range of action according to an unchanging method that employed nineteenth-twentieth century principles of distinguishability, simplification and notoriety adopted as the *fil rouge* of any operation.

Of the twenty-seven monuments involved in post-war reparations, twenty-three are in Abruzzo. Primarily roof repairs, works also involved wall constructions, with more or less extensive reintegrations. This is the case in Guardiagrele, a town in the province of Chieti heavily damaged during the war. Here the Superintendent's list includes the three churches of Santa Maria Maggiore, San Francesco and San Silvestro, all with damaged roofs, façades and sides.

The restoration of the church of Santa Maria Maggiore was particularly difficult; the right portico had been destroyed and damages suffered by a fresco by Andrea Delitio. Using an approach that clearly privileges the beautiful Maiella stone façade, almost entirely occupied by the body of the three-storey bell tower, Chierici used similar stone blocks for the restoration and an abundant quantity of brick for the portico. The attempt to leave evident though subtle signs, simplifying forms, applying seals, distinguishing materials, can be seen in the assembly of surviving elements and the integration of lost ones, offering one of the most convincing post-war examples of philological restoration in Abruzzo. The project is the only example in the region, though it earned a mere mention in a document drawn up by the Ministry of Public Education on *La ricostruzione del patrimonio artistico italiano* [The Reconstruction of Italian Artistic Heritage] published in Rome in 1950.

Chierici was very cautious in his approach to emergency interventions for the most heavily damaged buildings. He was also driven here by the safety of quantitatively limited operations, which served to postpone works until more responsible and consistent projects – not only in



Fig. 3 - Ortona, destructions in the old town.

financial terms – could be developed. Emergency works were carried out in the parish church of Alfedena, at the end of 1945, by simply bracing the still-standing bell tower after removing debris. This approach can be seen above all at the cathedral of Ortona, whose restoration does not appear on the list of planned works issued in December 1945.

“The reconstitution of parts demolished by bombing (and) the refurbishment of exposed elements” was instead announced by Chierici for the church of Santa Maria a Mare at Giulianova. At the end of 1945, a total of 57 thousand Lire was spent on the “temporary” consolidation of the surviving façade. This work involved the construction of two buttresses and the strengthening of the columns in the crypt. The fact that the church was, in the opinion of the Superintendent, a «truly gracious example of Romanic architecture», in all likelihood was a source of greater security, in this case, to the planning of a restoration that, during its realisation, begun in 1947 though on-going for many years, arrived at a solution as deluding as it was attentive to reiterating the original design and repeating its forms (Moretti, 1971: 524; Moretti, 1972: 96-97; Miarelli Mariani, 1979: 74, 183).

Despite the fact that the schematic nature of its forms, the uniformity of materials, and the regularity of the new works render the building unmistakably new, the reconstruction guaranteed that the church resembles the ancient one and remains an important example in the history of Abruzzo architecture. This was sufficient, with some forcing, to situate the intervention within the confines of philological restoration. Certainly, in this case the destruction was too widespread to ensure the exercise of distinguishability, and the subtle discriminant between unity of style and unity of line is not resolved in favour of the notion of *dove era, come era* [where it was, as it was], which disorients and misleads. As with the most famous Italian examples – the abbey at Montecassino, the church of San Ciriaco at Ancona, the clock tower at Faenza, the bridge of the Holy Trinity in Florence and the Scaliger bridge in Verona, all reconstructed with a faith in documents, and the possibility to recover as many pieces as possible – once again, the phrase *where it was, as it was* reveals all of its value as a cliché, only necessary after the war to cultivate the illusion of a collective ceremony in which restoration became a symbolic act capable of making up for an offence suffered.

Beyond philological restoration. Reconstructions in the style of, though simplified and contextualised

An evident circumstance, in Chierici's second report, is the end of the emergency and the bereavement elaboration of the war. This occurred rapidly in Abruzzo, not only in relation to the reconstruction of the city, but also the restoration of its monuments. The same period, from '45 to '53, dates which can be respectively linked to first-hand documentation by Chierici himself on the situation of restorations in Abruzzo and his departure for Piedmont, can be summed up in a grey area in which a drop in attention toward the rehabilitation of heritage appears to be balanced by the legitimisation of a freedom of intervention difficult to classify. The situation would not change in the coming years. The shortage, if not total lack, of documents from this period, aggravates the possibility to trace the histories of buildings that can only be explored in their current state. States that, when compared with historic photographs, exalt the circumstance, fortunately attenuated by time, of interventions that in the majority of cases neither duplicated the ancient original, as in the

questionable example of Santa Maria a Mare at Giulianova, nor, on the contrary, with some rare exceptions, radically substituted it, in its form and material substance. Hence they are hybrid interventions, otherwise definable as reinventions or redesigns, where the re-reading of buildings totally or partially destroyed has used styles which evoke ancient ones, though without conviction; the use, in other words, of a modern set or of an updated past in forms-materials-building techniques, that compared monuments to the urban fabric. This approach radicalized difficult to manage themes and linked all heritage to the same destiny of revision and transformation.

If for major monuments with minor damages the criteria of philological restoration constituted a safe protection against transformations, despite forced acts dictated by contingencies, for heavily damaged minor monuments in Abruzzo there exists a singular symmetry with the reconstruction of inhabited centres. They were also almost always minor and susceptible to transformations that could be carried out by derogating to practices of selective demolition and specific eliminations recommended in official documents on reconstruction. Given that, as with cities it was considered sufficient to exploit the voids created by bombs to improve the urban structure, in terms of road networks and land divisions, for works of architecture, whether homes or monuments, there was an illusion that it was sufficient to replicate materials, building heights and colours to guarantee continuity and a less strident relationship between ancient and new. There is more. As the reconstruction delay handed the city over to local technicians rarely up to the task, with results often more destructive than the bombs, those monuments that had escaped works of reparation carried out immediately after the war fell into the inexperienced hands, almost always far from the control of institutional organisms of conservation. In the few documents available, the name of Chierici and those colleagues who succeeded him at the helm of the Superintendent of Abruzzo, are almost always linked to the engineers from the Civil Engineering Department. There was also an unfair relationship that meant they were subjugated or at least subaltern; the first incapable of new approaches suitable to the reconstruction of large parts of buildings and the second anchored to a purely practical and technical vision of intervention. This relationship defines Abruzzo in terms of the entity of wartime damage and the reconstruction that followed, though it is well known that the situation was common to

all Italy. In fact, as Guglielmo Zuconi observed, the post-war phase introduces almost no changes whatsoever to institutional structures (Zuconi, 1998: 262).

The Regional Administrations, the offices of the Civil Engineering Department, the Superintendents for Monuments and the staff of the *Direzione Generale delle Antichità e Belle Arti* [General Direction for Antiquities and Fine Arts], found themselves working under unchanged administrative bodies, though referring to ministries entirely different from one another in their culture, professionalism, and financial possibilities. Furthermore, the Ministry of Public Works, with its decentred structures, enjoyed a firmly rooted and efficient structure. Above all, it had access to greater financing than the Superintendents, dependent upon the Ministry of Public Education. This meant that the Ministry of Public Works appeared to be the only institution capable of facing up to the enormous task of reconstruction, which also included the restoration of structures protected by the Laws of 1939, which were to have been the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Education. The passage from this point to the handover of these structures to unprepared personnel is a quick one, with the risks feared by the leading cultural figures of the era of being unable to control the «passage from pure and simple consolidation to the *ex-novo* reconstruction of imposing masses of buildings» (Pane, 1950: 10). This is how Roberto Pane expressed himself in 1950. Equally efficient are the words of Andrea Barbacci, from a few years later, when he expressed his appreciation for the best efforts demonstrated during the reconstruction, realised however «without a reasonable organisation, and having entrusted the majority of works to the Civil Engineering Department», in other words, to offices unfamiliar with the «existence of problems of aesthetics» (Barbacci, 1956: 156).

In Abruzzo, merely quoting the lists found in Chierici's two reports, the solutions adopted in many of the buildings are exceptional, by defect, as the greater damages suffered during the war. These latter were assumed as a premise for interventions legitimized solely by the principal of simplifying forms that, in final analysis proved to be a boomerang, for the forced diversity between ancient and new that was too pedagogic and conventional to be convincing.

The most glaring examples include the cathedral of Ortona, erected in the twelfth century and at the outbreak of war a unique palimpsest

of gothic and eighteenth century motifs (Gavini, 1927-28, fig. 619). The story of its reconstruction stretches into the 1970s, under the Superintendent Mario Moretti (1966-1973), though it appears to have originated immediately after the war, in hands extraneous or at least far from the offices of the Superintendent. The Roman engineer Dagoberto Drisaldi, head of the Civil Engineering Department of Ortona and commissioned with the reconstruction of the dome, had already commented on the project in a local publication from 1946. He provided details that appear referable to a work already in an advanced state, and in fact corresponding with the current structure, with its heavy reinforced concrete structure up to a height of 40 metres. The pride in a dome that the engineer claims to be «among the largest of those constructed with this system» is evident, and appears to silence any qualms about conservation, timidly hinted at in the clarification that of the four columns supporting the new dome, three are original (Drisaldi, 1946: 1-5). There is no information about the bureaucratic mechanism that saw the project pass into the hands of the architect Alfredo Cortelli, credited with its completion, and works involving the bell tower and façades. Cortelli was the architect of different reconstruction plans, including that for Popoli, in the province of Pescara, not to mention, above all, a member of the Technical Administrative Committee of the *Provveditorato alle Opere Pubbliche dell'Aquila* [Public Works Commission of L'Aquila]. He worked initially alongside Chierici and later, after '53, with Raffaele Delogu. This meant that in Abruzzo Cortelli enjoyed a political and professional power flaunted in the face of evident conflicts of interest tied to his multiple roles. It is probable that his contribution was decisive when speaking of the reconstruction of the cathedral and including the removal from the site of all portions of the city fabric that had concealed it from view prior to the war. It is an interesting coincidence that the system of cutting away entire urban blocks adopted in the reconstruction plan for Popoli, for reasons of mobility and hygiene, but also to bring value to its monuments, was applied in Ortona to the creation of Piazza San Tommaso after the war by eliminating a spine of homes facing the fourteenth century portico. The resulting building is clearly different from the original, less for the presence of new parts, and more due to the simplified forms used to express a sad and anonymous appearance. The same gothic portal, attributed to Ortona's own Nicola Mancino, was re-erected, with an



Fig. 4 - Ortona, St. Thomas Cathedral destruction.

evident “archaeologizing” taste, against a wall of brick too broad and neutral to serve as a worthy counterpoint. Yet, not only in comparison with the aforementioned example of Guardiagrele, but also the extreme case of Santa Maria a Mare at Giulianova, even here, the piles of brick at the feet of the building and the photographs of the status quo should have led toward a reconstitution *where it was as it was*, or, on the contrary, have stimulated a contemporary revision. Instead, the preference was for a stylistic manipulation of a poorly reinvented medieval architecture, also inside the church. All to the detriment of pre-existing Baroque elements, though wholly in line with the much more clamorous clearing works carried out by Mario Moretti at Santa Maria di Collemaggio at L’Aquila and Santa Maria Maggiore at Lanciano.

The solution adopted in Ortona is a mixture of restoration/simplification/falsification, worse even than that used in the church of San Benedetto at Ferrara, to which it is often compared (Sette, 1997: 280; Treccani, 2011: 81). In this project, the reconstruction of



Fig. 5 - Ortona, the rebuilt Cathedral.

the building by Giovan Battista Aleotti from 1621, while revealing its dubious antiquity, reduces the ambiguity of the stylised exercise in modernism that subtends it, and renders more tolerable its drift into a miserable surrogate of the lost original.

Also paradoxical is the story of San Pietro e Paolo at Alfedena: a twelfth century church with four naves and bell tower incorporated in the façade was simplified with respect to the original, reconstructing the columns, but not the ancient wood roofs, preferred here in coffered concrete for the central nave and flat concrete for the side naves. The result is a brutal concrete box that violates the very memory of the original from the 1300s. The ancient portal features integrations too evident to be credible, while the coloured mosaic of the lunette is an undue intrusion, and the exterior elevations, as denounced by Miarelli Mariani, make the church more akin to a typical mountain dwelling than a religious building. Once again, the works were monitored by an engineer from the Civil Engineering Department, at the request of

the bishop of Trivento. This reconstruction realised during the mid-1950s exploited the scarce resources available for works in reinforced concrete, for both the vertical and horizontal structures, eliminating any embellishment or decoration and, as the results demonstrate, also any attempt to restore the original building, reduced to mere stones that only partially redefine the façade and bell tower.

The incapacity of restoration works involving the most damaged buildings, or those held to be such, to establish a dialogue between the few parts that survived the war and the numerous parts to be reconstructed, appears to be the most characteristic element of the post-war period in Abruzzo. Not only with respect to the positions of stylistic imitation adopted by Giovannoni (Giovannoni, 1944: 201-212), but also to those that, with different foundations, beginning with the writings of Roberto Pane on the church of Santa Chiara in Naples, proposed seeking assistance from fantasy and creativity, with a call to the historical and aesthetic origins of contemporary culture (Guerriero, 1995).

Leaving aside the restorations of major monuments mentioned above, diverse though fundamentally tied to the so-called intermediate theory, or theory of «minor damages», according to the definition of Agnoldomenico Pica, which can be positioned within a scenario suitable also to times of peace, the others failed miserably. They abandoned the cautions of scientific restoration without attempting, on the contrary, to adopt formative projects capable of intelligently facing up to the problem of the co-existence between parts, even when present in local culture.

An interesting example is the church of San Rocco in Orsogna, semi-destroyed during the war, and brought to national attention thanks to a 1948 article by Mario Rivosecchi, published in *Rivista Abruzzese* (Rivosecchi, 1948: 44). To the debate at the time on the necessity of expanding the horizons of restoration, the Roman art historian added a reflection on the theme of the encounter between ancient and new, as interesting and unprecedented for the region as it was sterile in its successive developments. The project for the reconstruction of the church, entrusted to Antonio Provenzano, the same Roman architect commissioned with the reconstruction plan for Orsogna, Rivosecchi recognised the merit of having found “a balance between the exasperated critical experience and the call instinctively felt by an artist

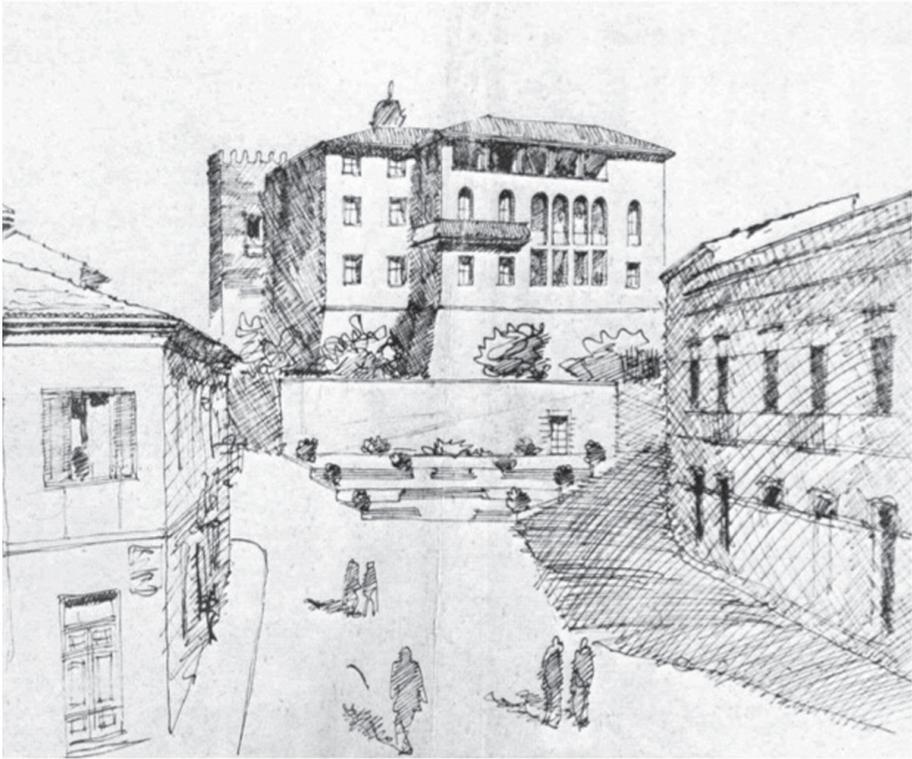


Fig. 6 - Miglianico, the restoration of the Castle, design by Francesco Bonfanti.

in the places and in vitality of tradition”. A balance that, however, was lacking in the final result, which can be ascribed to a context as far from the institutional and professional world in which it began. In lieu of the building designed by Provenzano, with a horizontal façade clad in stone, respectful of tradition but clearly new, there stands an anonymous plastered building devoid of any volumetric articulations, either inside or outside.

Though unknown, Abruzzo is home to numerous examples similar to Provenzano’s project for Orsogna. This confirms how after the war the region lost any possibility to explore diverse approaches to the restoration of its heritage, despite possessing the resources. The many churches restored “on paper” by the architects and engineers of the reconstruction of Abruzzo’s historic settlements, are not to be found on Chierici’s lists and useless when compared to how they would be implemented. All the same, they express a desire for their reintegration, even making recourse to formal invention, colour and relations of



Fig. 7 - Miglianico, the Castle today.

proportion. They are also much more than late Romantic experiments in contextualisation and stylistic simplification, with a capacity to demonstrate an attention toward the relationship between new and old that does not renounce tradition, but instead updates it, in its functions, forms, materials and building techniques. Eloquent proof comes from a unique example to the region: the intervention at the castle of Miglianico by Francesco Bonfanti, the architect commissioned together with Filippo Masci to develop the reconstruction plan for Francavilla. From the late 1940s Bonfanti was also responsible for the restoration of the castle, largely destroyed during the war, and acquired by Masci as his new home (Erseghe, 1986: 31-35).

The attempt to establish a relationship between conservation and design, between modernity and tradition, was here translated into an approach to the existing that had never been so forthright in Abruzzo. Even the church of San Franco in Francavilla, reconstructed by Ludovico Quaroni atop the ashes of the fourteenth century structure destroyed



Fig. 8 - Francavilla, St.Franco Church.

during the war, is in reality a complete substitution of the original, intentionally far from any reading of its predecessor. This is not the case in Miglianico, where the architect remained at a great distance from any temptation to establish a *tabula rasa* with respect to the past.

The fortunate fate of the castle at Miglianico is not common to other castles in Abruzzo damaged during the war. Most of those recovered were subject to manipulations unrestricted by any principle. This is true, for example, of the castle at Sette, near Mozzagrogna, situated in an area of the Sangro valley that suffered heavily during the war. Abandoned for decades it was later reinvented using a lagging and improbable medieval language, presented as a suggestive *location* for ceremonies and cultural events.

Even the castle at Sette is an exception within the panorama of buildings forgotten by the reconstruction. Symmetrical with the voids in the urban fabrics of historic centres created by the bombs and never filled, even their monuments were for the most part left in ruins, even

when they could have been inserted within new figurative contexts.

The state of abandonment and ruin that continues to plague many of Abruzzo's monuments, is another defeat for the post-war reconstruction, from which restoration cannot simply walk away. The incapacity of linking monuments and urban fabric, and the lack of a desire to look to restoration as a practice that went beyond the category of simple repairs to major monuments, were lethal circumstances for the most damaged and less accredited structures of official historiography. It is here, as mentioned, that philological restoration failed, demonstrating an inability to dialogue with either the culture of urban planning or that of architecture. It thus became an accomplice to a practice suspended between ignorance and fury, susceptible to the whims of circumstance and far removed from any principles focused on conserving the important values at stake.

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