

Case Report

Unexpected Architectures. Restorations in Romagna Between the Two World Wars

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Abstract: The research here presented is a critical appraisal of some restoration works carried out between the two World Wars in a particular geographic context, which is the Romagna district, in the Northeast of Italy. Starting from two case studies (the Casa del Fascio in Forlì and the Malatesta Library in Cesena) and thanks to the analysis of bibliographical sources, archival documents, and drawings, this research aims at understanding how broader and major theories about architectural restoration are articulated in peripheral background. What emerges are unexpected results: Late and deeply contextualized operations, strongly linked with the national panorama but at the same time chasing for the revival of their own history.

Keywords: Casa del Fascio; Forlì; Malatesta Library; Cesena; restoration; revival; Ariodante Bazzero; Luigi Corsini; Amilcare Zavatti

1. Introduction

The beginning of the 20th century, and above all the period between the two World Wars, represented a very prolific and fruitful period for the growth and development of the Italian culture of restoration, as it was the culmination of an intellectual process that had begun in the second half of the previous century.

As early as 1883, while the European debate split between the Viollet-le-Duc's stylistic restoration and the Ruskin's conservative approach, the Resolution of the Congress of Architects and Engineers held in Rome signed a crucial point in defining an Italian intermediate way. Thanks to Camillo Boito's philology-influenced contribution, architectural heritage started to be seen as a text rich of histories and information where interventions, useful for not losing the "documents", had to be limited to the strictly necessary and identified by clear different characteristics for not occurring in falsifications.

Later on, rooted in this cultural background, Gustavo Giovannoni assumed these ideas and, emphasizing the importance of the traces of the past, whatever historical phase they belonged to, he came to articulate his thought underlying the importance of adopting a scientific method. This evolutionary ideational process found an international acknowledgement exactly after the First World War, thanks to the adoption of the Athens Charter in 1932. This perspective and its principles distanced—at least from a theoretical point of view—both the waiver of intervention and, above all, stylistic completions.

The comparison between the architectural restoration theories and the interventions completed in those years, however, demonstrates a sort of gap between theory and practice. Despite the debate progressively detached from revival, the same scholars and their pupils adopted approaches still influenced by that. It is useful to quote, regarding this point, the Boito's intervention on the Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti in Venice (1879–1883) or the restoration of the S. Andrea church in Orvieto made by Giovannoni (1926–1930). The outcome of the stylistic approach continued fascinating the restorers

for a long time, and the shift perception was revealed to be phasing-in. While in other European countries—France, for example—the ideas of Viollet-le-Duc were mined to great effect, establishing a continuous red thread from masters to continuators, in Italy, the mix of influences led to not so rigorous operative approaches, at least in the very first phase.

Between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, many scholars from the national panorama kept interpreting the certainty of data or the historical sources in order to justify reconstruction or even inventions for recreating a lost image. It was the case of Alfredo D’Andrade in the northwest regions, Luca Beltrami in Milan or Alfonso Rubbiani in Bologna. It was only after the first conflict that it was possible to observe some early, attentive, and rigorous approaches: Gino Chierici’s works in Naples and Tuscany were very relevant in these terms, but this *modus operandi* was far from being shared by the entire nation.

Within this framework, the Emilia-Romagna region was particularly meaningful, especially for what concerns the city of Bologna, which had a legacy of leading scholars headed by Rubbiani that was widely studied by the literature. Though in order to investigate the process of dissemination and acquisition, it is also essential to understand how and when the local backgrounds absorbed the national and theoretical directives.

This research starts, therefore, from the analysis of two case studies that are considered able to make a meaningful contribution in the regional debate, as well as to add a small but interesting tile in the big picture. They are the Casa del Fascio in Forlì and the Malatesta Library in Cesena. Both cities are peripheral contexts, but the rise of Benito Mussolini, a native of these lands, catapulted them into the front line; consequently, new and inspiring cultural impulses crossed them.

The bibliography relating to the two case studies includes mainly chronicled publications that focus more on historical rather than technical data. Furthermore, an architectural restoration point of view is lacking; therefore, this paper aims at deepening the approaches adopted by the two restorations.

For what concerns the intervention in Forlì, three contributions published by Canali and Gori in 1999 and 1995 were fundamental to undertake the research [1–3], and the author has already discussed some early reflections during a conference held in Sorrento in 2018 [4]; here, however, there is the attempt to consider the local Casa del Fascio in a more comprehensive context.

There are instead many studies dedicated to the Library in Cesena, as UNESCO enlisted it in the program “Memory of the world”; but, in a more specific way, this research starts from the proceedings of an exhibit celebrating the 550 years from the foundation of the Library. The volume was dedicated to the architect–engineer Amilcare Zavatti, to his work and contribution; it published for the first time some of his studies and the inventory of his reorganized archive [5].

The result is a contribution that tries to reflect upon the influences that nourished the intervention on these architectures and thus, in turn, how these case studies could be inserted in a broader panorama. (G.F. and A.Z.)

2. Between Realized and Unfinished. The Casa del Fascio in Forlì

Born as squadron “hideouts” [6] (p. 55), the Casa del Fascio constitutes a building typology developed in Italy between the two World Wars. During the Fascist period, this new typology was progressively studied and defined, but a crucial year was 1932, when the contest for defining different types of Casa del Fascio was launched [7]. In so doing, it contributed to feeding an architectural season marked by great fervor.

Nevertheless, there is no shortage of houses of the regime established inside existing buildings: Restoration was an alternative way to provide Italian territory with imposing or smaller headquarters of the local branches of the National Fascist Party (PNF).

Direct expression of the party, the Casa del Fascio was a place characterized by a strong political–administrative significance. At the same time, it was a nodal pole for the city and its citizens: It offered assistance services, as well as recreational spaces.

In the period between the two World Wars, a very wide production of houses of the regime studded the entire country, from large cities to small rural centers. Thus, also the province of Forlì has been equipped with numerous local headquarters of the party that could have been newly built or obtained from existing buildings. More or less majestic, these architectures had a strong representative meaning. Their pivotal role was materialized by buildings in a balance between “the pride of modesty” and “the monumental rhetoric” [8].

2.1. Forlì: The Casa del Fascio in the Palazzo Albertini

The Casa del Fascio in Forlì has found its location inside an existing building: In Piazza Aurelio Saffi—the ancient heart of the historical city center—it is the Palazzo Albertini that has been converted into the local headquarters of the PNF [9] (p. 37) [10] (p. 21).

As a condensation place of institutional and representative buildings, Piazza Saffi hosts architectures that have undergone not a few revisions during the Fascist period. Some buildings have been demolished in order to leave space for architectures with greater austerity, while other buildings have undergone interventions in order to confer a renewed appearance to the square. Although revisited by virtue of precise functional instances, the buildings facing Piazza Saffi had to answer to a specific objective: They had to emphasize the power of the regime through a recall of the prestigious past of Forlì that was the provincial capital of the land which gave birth to Benito Mussolini. From this perspective, the interventions carried out in the square had to strengthen “the reference to the old ‘heroic’ times of the city” [11] (p. 59) through the enhancement of the history of Forlì between the 15th century—“the age of Melozzo” (Forlì, 1438–1494)—and the first decades of the 16th century—“the age of Palmezzano” (Forlì, 1459?–1539) [12] (p. 36). In practice, this orientation translated into a strong propensity towards past and tradition which, in the interventions on existing buildings, took the shape of a “misleading” reproduction of a glorious past.

The conversion of the Palazzo Albertini into Casa del Fascio testifies the abovementioned orientation. This preexisting building was built in the time frame between the 15th and 16th centuries [9] (p. 37). It belonged to the Albertini family, who also owned the adjacent Palazzo del Podestà. Since the 18th century, other properties have begun to alternate [3] (p. 92) and, in the meantime, the Palazzo Albertini was aging, changing, and expanding. As a matter of fact, on the threshold of the 20th century, it was reported: “in the arches, friezes and terracotta medallions are missing as well as the decorations on the main floor, and we can see traces of the pilaster strips and Corinthian capitals. The top floor is crowned by a loggia [. . .], which is divided into six stone arches supported by capitals of fine execution; the pierced parapet of the loggia is made of cotto tiles. The terracotta cornice is splendid by design; the stone medallions are sculpted” [10] (p. 20) [13] (p. 9). Furthermore, at that time, the complex was “made up of two different buildings, supported by two and three arches respectively [. . .]. The first building, that is the one supported by three arches and bordering the Palazzo del Podestà, has a great artistic value. [. . .] This original part of the Palace is the one above the first three arches; the one that rises on the other two is the modern one” [10] (pp. 19–20) [13] (p. 9).

In the years between the two World Wars, the PNF purchased the Palazzo Albertini. The choice was to allocate it to the Forlì headquarters of the Fascist party, and this operation provided the pretext for redesigning the façade of the complex. Especially, the intention was to “revive” the building “as the glorious Renaissance architects planned and created it” [10] (pp. 20–21). In order to achieve this aim, two designers intervened during the Fascist period. Ariodante Bazzero from Milan was appointed in charge of the first drawing for the reuse of the complex, and he concentrated on the interiors. Superintendent Luigi Corsini drafted the restoration project that extended the focus to the façade in 1929 [1] (pp. 141–143) [3] (p. 92) [10] (p. 21).

In the interiors, the monumental staircase space constitutes a fulcrum illuminated by zenithal light. Here, marble slabs are flanked by wrought-iron elements realized by the Baldi company from Brisighella, in Emilia-Romagna [1] (p. 144) [3] (pp. 92–93). Nevertheless, as has already been mentioned

above, the representative needs of the regime also required a rethink of the Casa del Fascio façade. Thus, if a stylistic completion involved the portion defined by the three arches that are next to the Palazzo del Podestà, revival extended to the most recent portion of the complex.

Alfonso Rubbiani had taught in Bologna, redrawing the face of the city in a Medieval sense. Luigi Corsini adopted a similar approach in Forlì, even if recovering the Renaissance appearance of the Palazzo Albertini, also by resorting to the invention. Therefore, if the influence of Rubbiani is evident, the theoretical teachings of Camillo Boito and Gustavo Giovannoni are not reflected in operational practice. With reference to the Palazzo Albertini, the result of this is a building with an austere image that apparently dates back to the Renaissance period but actually is the outcome of a 20th century intervention (Figures 1 and 2).

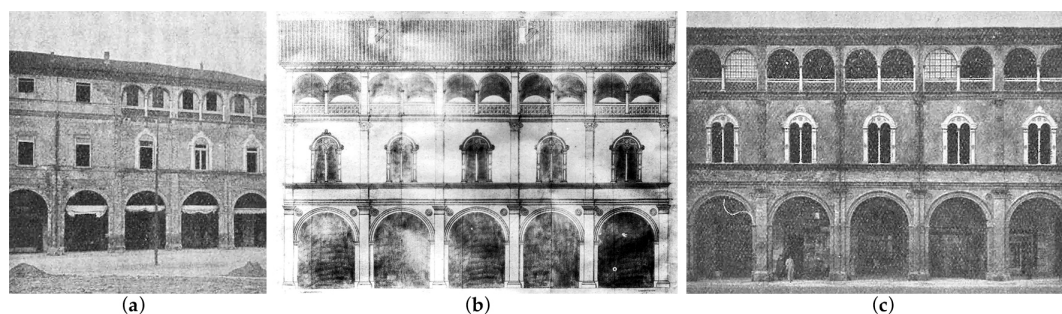


Figure 1. (a) Palazzo Albertini before the restoration [10] (p. 20); (b) Luigi Corsini, restoration project for the façade of the Palazzo Albertini, 1929 [1] (p. 143); (c) Palazzo Albertini (which became the Casa del Fascio in Forlì) after the restoration [10] (p. 21).



Figure 2. The southern side of Piazza Saffi. From the left: Palazzo del Credito Romagnolo; Palazzo Albertini; Palazzo del Podestà (photo: G. Favaretto, 2018).

2.2. Towards a New Headquarters: An Interrupted Project

The restoration of the Palazzo Albertini did not satisfy the definition of the Forlì headquarters of the National Fascist Party. Indeed, despite the building adaption, the will to realize a new, more majestic and “decorous” Casa del Fascio was felt in the following years [14].

During the Fascist period, important transformations of existing heritage affected the southern side of Piazza Saffi, with the Palazzo del Credito Romagnolo, the Palazzo Albertini, and the Palazzo del Podestà, as well as the west side of the square, with the Palazzo Comunale. Along the northern front, demolitions left this area free for the realization of the Palazzo delle Poste e dei Telegrafi and the Uffici Statali, which are buildings designed by Cesare Bazzani from Rome. Moreover, on the east side of the square, the Roman architect Gustavo Giovannoni intervened on the religious complex of San Mercuriale in order to create new views and architectural volumes. Here, the principle of “ambientation” [15] (p. 42) has found concreteness: In Piazza Saffi, attention to monuments did not

stop at individual architectures but expands on the surrounding context. In this perspective, the retreat from the preexisting buildings of the Palazzo delle Poste e dei Telegrafi has made it possible to create new viewpoints aimed at enhancing the prestigious complex of San Mercuriale. Nevertheless, next to its cloister, there was another urban sector that had not gone unnoticed by the regime. As a matter of fact, this lot of land with the 18th century Palazzo dell'Intendenza di Finanza occupied a strategic position: Not only it was close to San Mercuriale, but it could contribute to the redefinition of the appearance of Piazza Saffi. At the same time, the realization of the Uffici Statali could allow moving the functions hosted in the 18th century building inside the 20th century one. Thus, a series of proposals followed the choice of leaving that terrain free from constructions.

The Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà (RAS), a society from Milan, showed interest in the construction of a big hotel for illustrious guests of the city, with shops on the ground floor. For this purpose, Giovanni Muzio from Milan drafted the project. The first design version—with the corner towards San Mercuriale reinforced by a volume rising from the building and crowned by a roof terrace—was opposed by Giovannoni. Therefore, other versions—that saw the addition of a portico, as well as the reduction to a less monumental scale—were presented [2]. Nevertheless, engineer Arnaldo Fuzzi from Forlì—designer of the local Fascist federation—made another proposal concerning the realization of a new Casa del Fascio. This building would have arisen with a view of the square, while the hotel would be built in the rear part of the lot [14,16]. Furthermore, the hypothesis of a triumphal arch on via Allegretti was added at a later time. In this regard, Saul Bravetti and Leonida Emilio Rosetti—who were local designers—also provided proposals, and both the hotel moved to Piazza XX Settembre and the triumphal arch seem to have received suggestions from Giovannoni [2]. Finally, it was Cesare Bazzani that drafted a series of project drawings from which the further hypothesis of realization of the Forlì headquarters of the Banca d'Italia emerges at least (Figures 3 and 4).

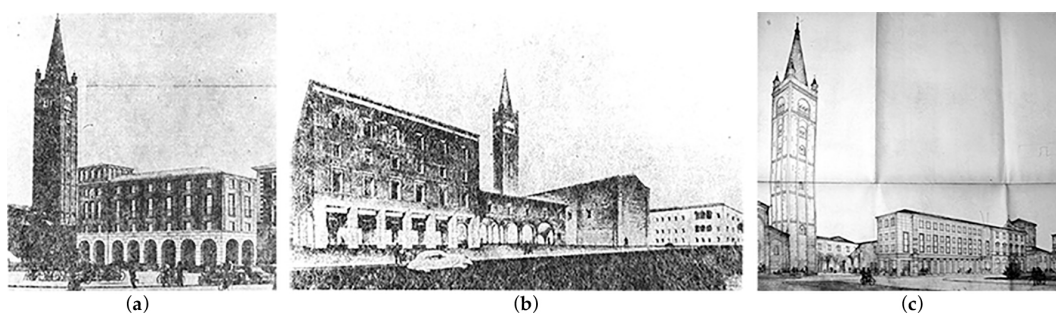


Figure 3. (a) Giovanni Muzio, Palazzo RAS on Piazza Saffi, 1938 [2] (p. 206); (b) Gustavo Giovannoni, arrangement of Piazza XX Settembre, 1938 [2] (p. 209); (c) project hypothesis of a new complex on Piazza Saffi, next to San Mercuriale [17].

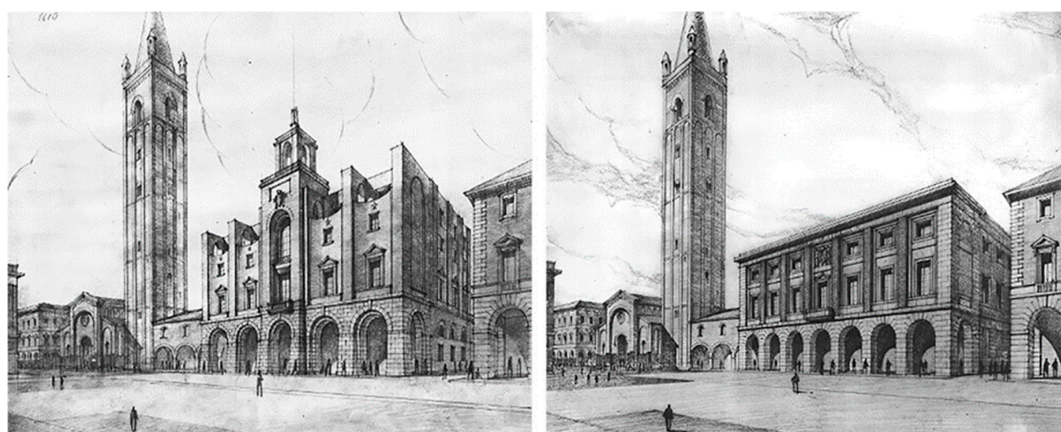


Figure 4. Cesare Bazzani, project hypotheses of a new building on Piazza Saffi [18].

However, none of this was achieved on the lot of land with the Palazzo dell'Intendenza di Finanza during the Fascist period. War events stopped the abovementioned design aspirations, and only in the postwar period an office building was built on a project by Piero Portaluppi from Milan [2]. The Second World War therefore caused the collapse of the will to build the new headquarters of the Casa del Fascio in Forlì that remained an interrupted project. (G.F.)

3. Between Philology and Revival. The Malatesta Library in Cesena

While Forlì was trying to define a new appropriate image for the Dux's homeland, neighboring Cesena was also dealing with a similar problem of identity, despite starting from completely different assumptions and ambitions.

Here, the rise of the Fascist regime never found an enthusiastic mass adhesion; its penetration was difficult and contrasted, and the search for elevating the city during this period did not seem to find a straight reason in the rhetoric of the political party. On the contrary, it was an architect-engineer, whose faction was probably far from Fascism [19], who personified this season on renewal, prompted by a deep and spontaneous commitment with his city of origin. His name was Amilcare Zavatti.

3.1. Amilcare Zavatti and the Malatesta Library: An Unsolved Proposal

Born in Cesena on 9th December 1869, Zavatti started collaborating with the leading cultural institutions at the end of the 19th century, in order to actively promote and monitor the protection of the city's cultural heritage. In 1902, he was entrusted with the execution of the measured drawings required to inscribe the main monuments of the town, the Malatesta Library, into the National Monuments List, and thanks to his constant dedication and skills, he was designated Honorary Inspector of Monuments from the local Superintendency in 1928 [19]. That is why, in the aftermath of the First World War, he certainly could not remain impassive faced with the critical state of preservation of this humanistic Library, "famous throughout the civilized world" [20].

Malatesta Novello—learned patron and lord of Cesena from 1429 to 1465—had commissioned the architect Matteo Nuti to transform and expand a wing of the St. Francis Convent. The aspiration was to create a prolific humanistic center inspired by the Florentine context and, above all, to house his collection of precious illuminated codices [21]. Remarkably, at his death, Novello decided to bequeath this heritage to his citizens, giving life to the first civic library in Europe, never fundamentally altered since.

However, the Napoleonic era and the transformation of the convent into a barrack profoundly threatened the preservation of the Library, requiring significant restoration works. In 1923, the director of the cultural institute, Manlio Torquato Dazzi, authorized an intervention on the Nuti's hall, involving the removal of the light lime layer added on the plasters during the military phase, and the substitution of the fixtures with wooden windows and leaded glasses from the Murano isle. He required also a general structural exploration for the other parts of the wing [19,22,23]. This renewed attention brought to light the unused and neglected adjacent spaces where the Pius VII's library too should have been placed. Like Malatesta Novello, also the Pope, born Barnaba Chiaramonti, had, in turn, decided to leave his collection as an inheritance to his hometown, Cesena.

At this point, Amilcare Zavatti, as a keen connoisseur of the history of the building, decided to develop a project for these spaces, specifically known as Piana Library. Thanks to previous professional assignments [24], he had had the opportunity to carry out a noticeable static analysis of the complex, revealing his high engineering skills. He firstly remarked that the whole wing had recorded a perceptible rotation of the perimeter walls toward the secondary cloister, which had required a thickening of the northern wall in the past for keeping the structure stabilized. Thus, as the following step, he decided to undertake a series of tests on the plasters continuing the removals started during the previous works and that allowed him a careful reading of the traces of the past recorded by the masonries (Figure 5). What he was interested in the most was understanding the transformative events

recorded by the building over the centuries and, at the same time, better comprehending the structural problems through a sort of *antelitteram* stratigraphic analysis of the façade.

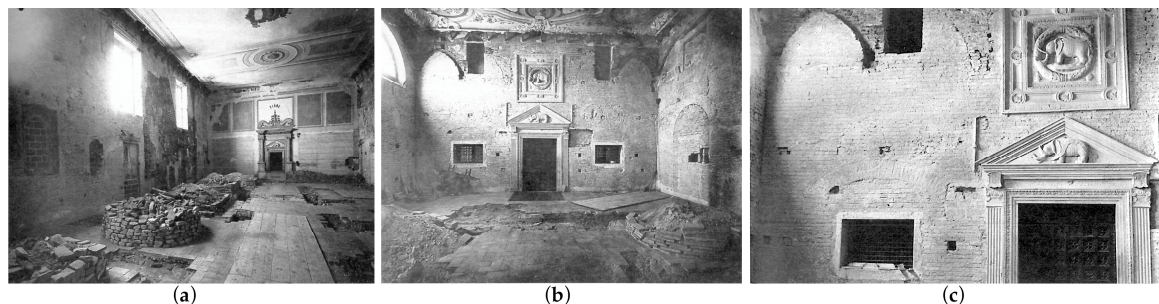


Figure 5. Malatesta's wing in the St. Francis Convent. Stratigraphic tests executed after the 1925 works. (a) The Piana Library, photo: Tartagni [5] (p. 67); (b) the entrance to the Malatesta Library, photo: Tartagni [5] (p. 66); (c) detail of the stone entrance portal to the Malatesta Library, photo: Dellamore [5] (p. 63).

Thanks to his professional experience, he was able to reconstruct the foremost transformations of the wing and to assume the Malatesta configuration as corresponding to a central corridor with the monks' cells placed on the sides (Figure 6a). According to this interpretation, and because of the abovementioned structural problems, he rhetorically evaluated the possibility of demolishing and rebuilding the outside longitudinal walls for solving the balance problem. However, the idea did not satisfy him, especially from a theoretical point of view: "after all, even if we tear away from the reasons of the heart, the regular rebuilding of these overhanging walls will be reprehensible. Indeed, if the main architectural elements could be redone with a relative fidelity, the small traces, the almost imperceptible signs, the seemingly negligible minutiae with which the building tells its story would escape a precise reproduction, and in any case, it would lose any value of authenticity" [20].

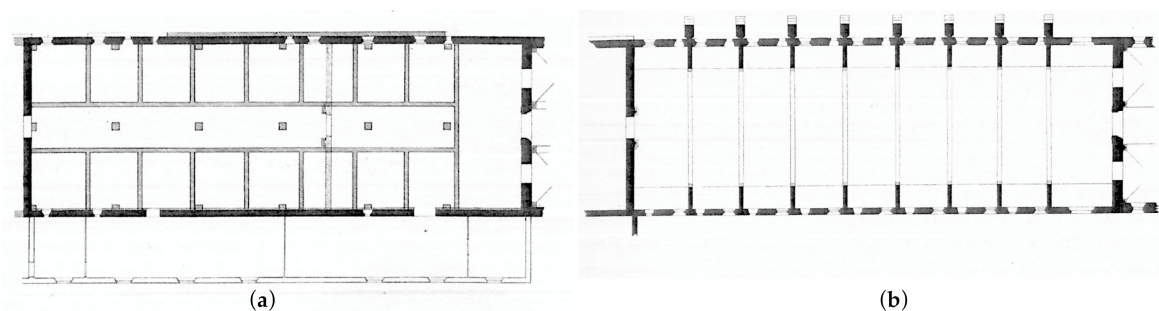


Figure 6. Amilcare Zavatti, Malatesta's wing in the St. Francis Convent. Project of restoration. (a) Evolution of the interior space [5] (p. 10); (b) project plan [5] (p. 11).

Therefore, he proposed a new internal configuration inspired by the Notary Hall of the Prior Palace in Perugia [20], which was considered one of the highest examples of the Italian gothic architecture. Notably, Zavatti proposed to demolish the existent transversal wall built in 1804 and to reinforce the emptied volume with a sequence of big internal masonry arches corresponding to the former chambers' partitions (Figure 6b), and next, he advanced the idea of contrasting them with a series of matching buttresses applied on the external façade [20] (Figure 7). Convinced that a reinforcement should not "abstract from the care of the form", he was genuinely concerned about their "exterior appearance", to the extent that he designed each single feature avoiding them looking like "temporary and bulky props" and even proposed an alternative minor solution involving the use of iron chains [20]. In addition to that, he rethought the roofing system: Barrel vaults were foreseen for the rooms, while a trussed structure for the entrance vestibule. Moreover, he proposed to move the

stone portal from the 1804 demolished wall to the new lobby and also to place two commemorative epigraphs on the sides of the main opposite portal. As accessory works, he proposed the demolition of a structure leaning against the main building since 1841 in order to better illuminate the rooms and, in the end, he intended to reopen some windows too, but only those used during the Malatesta's Age [20]. Once again, specific attention was given toward a determined historical phase.

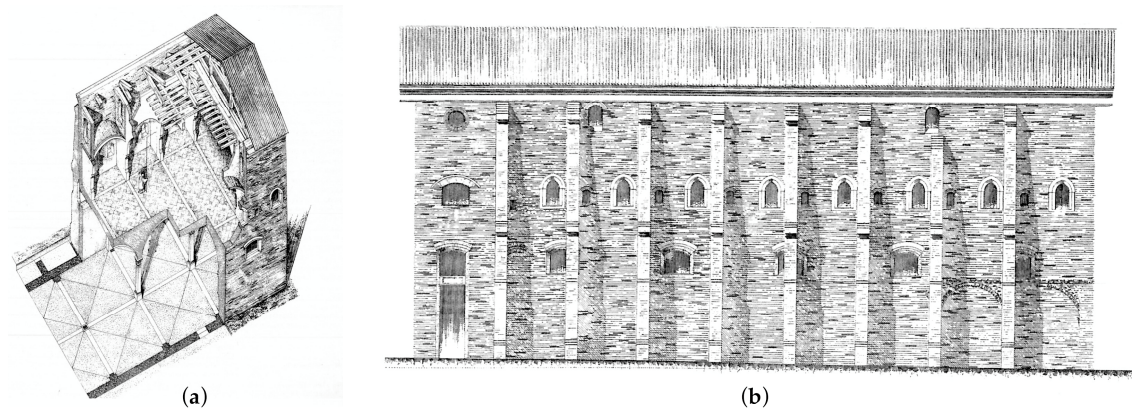


Figure 7. Amilcare Zavatti, Malatesta's wing in the St. Francis Convent. Project of restoration. (a) Axonometric [5] (p. 9); (b) façade characterized by the buttresses [5] (p. 14).

Despite the detailed proposal, the events slowed the process down. The heirs of the Pope claimed and obtained the legacy of their illustrious ancestor, and this caused the premises of the project to sink. Nevertheless, the state of conservation of these spaces did not live up to the monumentality of the neighboring Library. It was only in 1930 that the approval arrived, just partially, together with the rejection of an additional project presented spontaneously by Zavatti and concerning another identity-making place for Cesena, namely the Medieval fortress facing the main public square, known today as Piazza del Popolo (Figure 8).

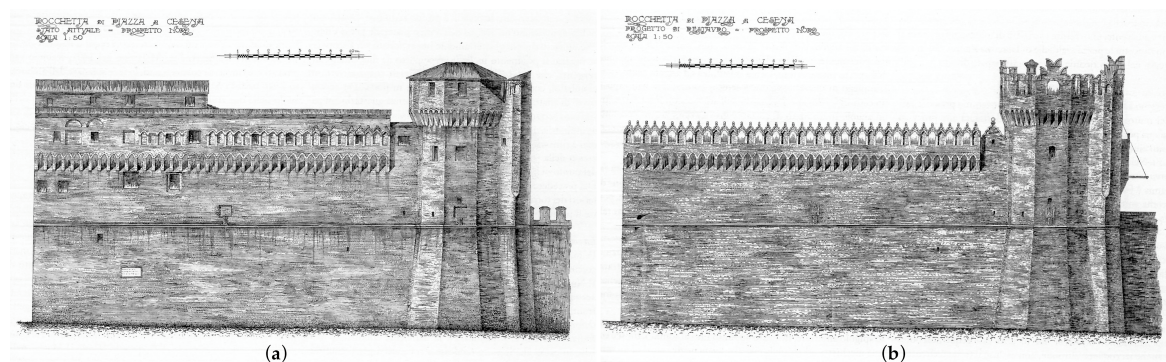


Figure 8. Amilcare Zavatti, Fortress facing the main square. (a) State of conservation [5] (p. 185); (b) project of restoration [5] (p. 187).

The Superior Council for Antiquities entrusted Gino Chierici, returning from the 1931 Athens Conference, to assist Zavatti in the subsequent planning stages of the Library [19]. The Ministry seemed inclined to not trust him, after having judged his proposal for the fortress potentially able to transform the “traditional character and aspect of the monuments” [21]. It took a further two years for the project of the Library to be implemented, but it was the new director Alfredo Vantadori that presented the ultimate one. The whole local community gave Zavatti credit for it [25], but the core parts of his project were refused: Neither the inner arches nor the external buttresses were built.

3.2. Inserting the Malatesta Library in a Bigger Picture

In addition to the early solution proposed and the final choice adopted, what is relevant to consider in order to depict the cultural context is Amilcare Zavatti's approach, and above all the subject of his attention.

Between the lines emerges the willingness to strengthen the relationship of the city with its "golden era", which was recognized to be the urban Renaissance experienced under the Malatesta's domain during the 15th century, as happened for Forlì. It was no coincidence that Zavatti had spontaneously proposed the restoration of the Medieval fortress, too (Figure 8). It was a meaningful piece of architecture, a fruit of the military treatises of that time, the same Matteo Nuti had designed it in 1466, and Zavatti had very high regard for his "technical science".

At the same time, the chosen figurative reference for the project of the Library and the same fortress revealed a specific personal interest in Medieval architecture that was effective to the point of inserting his work in a regional (but also national) panorama of neo-medievalist inspiration, even if with at least two decades of delay [26]. The architect-engineer spent much time studying Medieval architecture and wrote many essays about other buildings of his land [5], and this helped him in working by analogy. Although the national debate had already concluded on the importance of giving equal attention to all the phases of life of a building, when describing the results of the tests on the masonries, he stated that only the Malatesta's part deserved the restorers' attention [20]. In addition to that, when working on the fortress, he would have given great emphasis to the Venetian-gothic decors of the lodge, and his proposal aimed at cleaning and emphasizing the reading of those existing elements, such as the battlements and their finials, that were able to bring back the mind to an ideal Medieval castle.

In this way, he established a sort of continuity with that local tradition whose reference-matrix had been established in Bologna at the end of the 19th century, starting from the experiences of exponents such as Alfonso Rubbiani, Raffaele Faccioli, and later, Superintendent Luigi Corsini as well. As evidence of a direct link, a prolific correspondence among Amilcare Zavatti and these scholars is well documented, and his texts reveal how he openly considered Alfonso Rubbiani's restoration of the St. Francis church in Bologna as a model [5]. The choice of the external buttresses could be considered as a tribute to it.

However, despite this assumption and though he knew very well the ideas of Viollet-le-Duc—he possessed all his main books [19]—his approach to restoration could not be defined as stylistic. Something had happened in the Italian debate, and Amilcare Zavatti demonstrated having acknowledged it. He never invented; he pursued a specific figurativeness, but this was always induced by material evidence and reached through a rigorous philological method. Significant to this point is the proposal for the Middle Age-inspired arches placed in correspondence of the ancient walls but most of all the carefulness and concern regarding what he called the "value of authenticity" [20], which was conveyed, according to his opinion, through the same small traces whose study and preservation were considered essential from Boito on.

In conclusion, it is possible to recognize here the first pursuits of a rigorous method, an approach attentive to the reading of signs that clarifies Zavatti's awareness regarding his contemporary national debate, even if the outcomes of his work are still far from a linguistic point of view. (A.Z.)

4. Conclusions. Chasing a Renewed Image for the Cities

The experiences described here and the related events demonstrate how the period between the two World Wars represented for these peripheral cities belonging to the Emilia-Romagna region an attempt, more or less successful, to regain possession of a specific image of the city—the one able to forcefully remind a glorious past. This image, as was the case for other Italian cities, is linked to the era that most strongly characterized their history and, in both cases, it is the period from the 15th century to the first decades of the 16th century.

In Forlì, the treatment of the façade of the Casa del Fascio resorted both to revival and stylistic completion in order to emphasize the Melozzo and Palmezzano's era as a fundamental period for the history of the city. In Cesena, it is the choice to work on the Library belonging to the Malatesta family itself and the willingness to illuminate the transformations occurred in that period that testifies the search for an urban image able to build a renewed and shared collective identity.

The process—started in the big centers at the end of the 19th century because of the necessity of nourishing a national spirit after the Italian Unification in 1861—arrived in the small towns, such as Forlì and Cesena, with a little delay but with a considerable impact. In the same years, although the national theoretical debate had gone beyond the stylistic position, it is possible to observe similar approaches in the surrounding territory. The interventions of Giulio Ulisse Arata for the Casa del Fascio in Bologna and Dante's Area in Ravenna [27], or the works executed on the Town Hall buildings overlooking the Piazza Cavour in Rimini [4] are exemplary in these terms, as they all represent an endeavor to use the past in order to build contemporaneity.

This method is stronger in some cities than in others. If in Forlì, the new arrangement of Piazza Saffi offered a glorious but “false” appearance, in Cesena, the search denied the stylistic inventions to pay attention to the traces of the passage of time, but nevertheless the outcome of the proposal is a revival—exactly what the national debate was trying to oppose and criticize, at least according to the theory.

Hence, the case studies of Forlì and Cesena show an adhesion to the abovementioned regional tendency as they continued to privilege, or to appear as, stylistic completions and revivals despite the ongoing theoretical formulations. By contrast, the comparison with the big picture of the academic debate in Italy—the one emerging from the official Charters and documents—attests to an effective divergence.

In this sense, if compared to a broader panorama, these restorations lead to unexpected results, expressly late if judged from both a figurative and ideological point of view, but at the same time in the wake of the regionalisms experimented not only in Emilia-Romagna but also in other Italian regions. Interestingly, this discrepancy between theory and practice was revealed to be an essential feature of the slow process of transition from the stylistic revival to the more contemporary demands proper of the discipline. (G.F. and A.Z.)

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