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Marching into Rome: The Gateway to the Eternal City*

Yvonne Elet

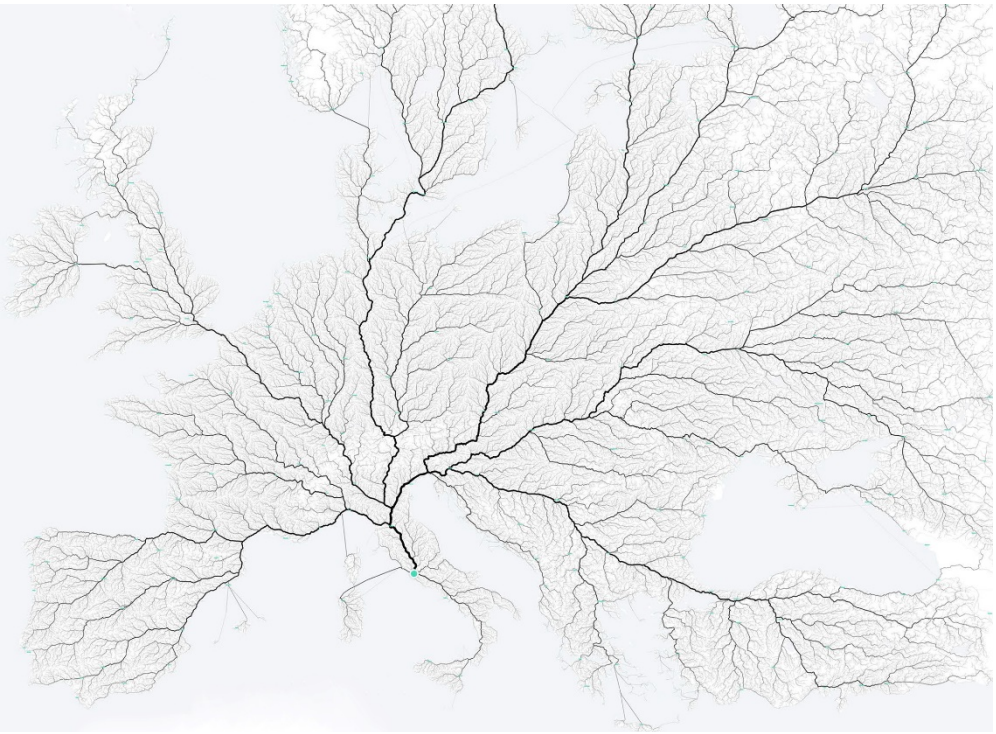

Fig. 1. Benedikt Groß, Philipp Schmitt, and Raphael Reimann, *Roads to Rome*, 2015 (courtesy Benedikt Groß).

The proverbial notion that all roads lead to Rome was recently given new credence by a mobility infrastructure project, in which computational designers and digital geographers studied traffic volume along millions of European routes, highlighting the most heavily trafficked to produce a striking infographic of the roads to Rome (fig. 1).[1] The spidery network of roads converge at a single point on the Italian peninsula—as they have actually done since Roman antiquity. And this point is located precisely where two ancient consular roads, via Cassia and via Flaminia, meet at

*I thank Joshua Arthurs, Paula Findlen, Ernest Ialongo, Marla Stone, Molly Tambur, and everyone else who conceived and realized the SIHS *Marching into Rome* conference on October 28, 2022, as well as Claudio Fogu, Jon R. Snyder, Bradford Bouley, Richard Wittman, Joseph Tumolo, and the anonymous reader for this journal. I am indebted to Prince Giuliano and Princess Fabrizia Dentice di Frasso for access to their private family archive (Archivio Dentice di Frasso, or ADF), and to Fay Davis Taylor for access to the Dorothy Taylor Dentice di Frasso papers (DTDF). This article draws from and expands on material from my book *Urban Landscape in the Third Rome: Raphael's Villa and Mussolini's Forum* (Florence: Edifir, 2023). All translations are my own unless otherwise credited.

[1] Benedikt Groß, Philipp Schmitt, and Raphael Reimann, *Roads to Rome*, data visualization project, Moovel Lab, 2015, https://benedikt-gross.de/projects/roads-to-rome/; Liz Stinson, "Here Are All the Roads that Lead to Rome," *Wired*, December 14, 2015. For this theme in Fascist ideology and decoration, see Flavia Marcello, "All Roads Lead to Rome: The Universality of the Roman Ideal in Achille Funi's Incomplete Fresco Cycle for the Palazzo dei Congressi in EUR, 1940–43," in *Civiltà romana: rivista pluridisciplinare di studi su Roma antica e le sue interpretazioni* 3 (2016): 151–77.

the northern edge of Rome, immediately before the Milvian Bridge. This strategic entry zone to the Eternal City, symbolic for millennia, is a palimpsest of historic markers and memory. Augustus created a narrative sequence of monuments and inscriptions along the wide via Flaminia, leading from the Augustan Arch at the Milvian Bridge through the Campus Martius to the Capitoline.[2] In 312 CE, Constantine defeated Maxentius in a battle at the Milvian Bridge—a historic victory ostensibly spurred by a vision of the cross, which led to his control of Rome and his conversion to Christianity, and effectively institutionalized Christianity in Rome.[3] In 1517, Pope Leo X Medici, who styled himself as an heir to Augustus and Constantine, commissioned Raphael to design a monumental villa and papal *hospitium* in this zone to welcome visiting dignitaries en route to a ceremonial entry into Rome and the Vatican. Raphael sited the complex, which we now know as Villa Madama, on the slope of the verdant Monte Mario, designing new roads through the villa to the Vatican, configuring a new entry route into Rome. The site was chosen for strategic and symbolic reasons: overlooking the bridge associated with Constantine and his supposed Donation of temporal power to the papacy, and under the sign of the cross (an *Oratorio della Croce*), symbol of its religious authority. So diplomatic embassies were meant to trek from one toponym to the other, through the Medici Villa and to the Vatican—perhaps to the Hall of Constantine, where Raphael and his associates frescoed the battle, including the villa overlooking the site—and absorb the messages of Christian, papal, and Medicean triumph.[4] Finally, in 1922, Fascists staged the March on Rome on October 28—the same day as Constantine's battle.[5] Although the March was a diffuse affair, chronologically and geographically—scattered columns of black shirts converged

[2] Diane Favro, *The Urban Image of Augustan Rome* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 208–11.

[3] Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* bk. 1, 28–32, 38–41; Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* bk. 9 (especially Rufinus's translation); Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum* bk. 44; and *Panegyrici Latini* 313, 321. The sources differ on the details of the vision/dream and battle; for which, see C. E. V. Nixon and Barbara S. Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 319–20 n. 103; Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, ed. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 204ff; and Raymond van Dam, "Eusebius' Commentary," in *Remembering Constantine at the Milvian Bridge* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 82–100.

[4] On Raphael's configuration of the roads to Rome as part of a larger programmatic construct encompassing designs for many media—from the villa and its landscape to frescoes in the Vatican Stanze—see Yvonne Elet, "Raphael and the Roads to Rome: Designing for Diplomatic Encounters at Villa Madama," *I Tatti Studies in the Renaissance* 19, no. 1 (2016): 143–75.

[5] Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine at the Milvian Bridge*, 30. The literature on the March is extensive and newly augmented by centenary commemorations; recent scholarship has emphasized the violence of the squadristi and the March as a sequence of actions, rather than a one-off event. See *inter alia* Mario Isnenghi, "La marcia su Roma," in *I luoghi della memoria: strutture ed eventi dell'Italia unita* (Rome: Laterza, 1997), 313–29; Giulia Albanese, "Violence and Political Participation during the Rise of Fascism (1919–1926)," in *In the Society of Fascists. Acclamation, Acquiescence, and Agency in Mussolini's Italy*, ed. Giulia Albanese and Roberta Pergher (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 49–68; Emilio Gentile, *The March on Rome: How Antifascists Understood the Origins of Totalitarianism (and Coined the Word)* (Rome: Viella, 2013); Giulia Albanese, *Il "Corriere della Sera" e la marcia su Roma* (Milan: Fondazione Corriere della Sera, 2018); Giulia Albanese, *The March on Rome: Violence and the Rise of Italian Fascism*, trans. Sergio Knipe (New York: Routledge, 2019); Giulia Albanese, "Reconsidering the March on Rome," *European History Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2021): 403–21; John Foot, *Blood and Power: The Rise and Fall of Italian Fascism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022); Andrea Pipino, ed., "Nascita di una dittatura: come la stampa di tutto il mondo raccontò l'avvento del fascismo," special issue, *Internazionale storia* 4 (October 2022); Salvatore Lupo and Angelo Ventrone, eds., *Il fascismo nella storia italiana* (Rome: Donzelli, 2022). See also the classic documentary of Sergio Zavoli, *Nascita di una dittatura* (1972), and that of Mark Cousins, *The March on Rome* (2022).

on Rome from all directions and many, including Mussolini himself, joined the March via train[6]—Mussolini nonetheless put his own stamp on the symbolic entry zone by siting one of the most significant urban projects of the Fascist period in the area between the Milvian Bridge and Raphael's Villa Madama: the expansive Foro Mussolini (current Foro Italico, fig. 2). He also added two new bridges: the Ponte Duca d'Aosta across from the forum, and a large new entry bridge along the via Flaminia, next to the Milvian Bridge, named the Ponte XXVIII Ottobre (current Ponte Flaminio).[7] Mussolini's bridges and forum reconfigured the zone to create a monumental new gateway to the city, which transumed all earlier projects. In Rome, long characterized by the juxtaposition of ancient and modern, where memory is communicated through spatial relations and toponyms, this strategic zone is exceptionally dense in symbols and meaning. And each era has reframed important toponyms into new narratives. From the outset, the Fascist regime energetically pursued a campaign of urban planning and architectural competitions as political instruments for shaping a collective public sphere; this entry zone to Rome was arguably one of the most visible and strategic of these projects.[8]

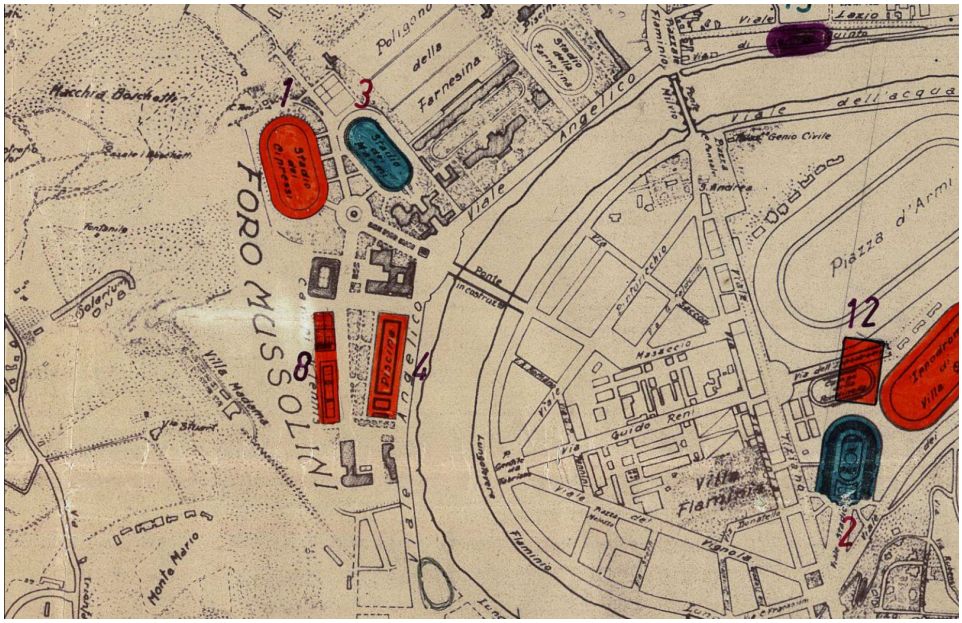

Fig. 2. Regulatory Plan of Rome, 1931, detail (by permission of the Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali—Archivio Storico Capitolino).

This essay traces the interwar construction of this new gateway at a crucial moment for the formulation of national and Roman identity. It further discusses the zone's evolving function as political theater, and considers the importance of this topography, both real and metaphysical, to the present-day identity of the Eternal City. This topic stems from my work on Villa Madama, which, despite being Raphael's late masterwork, is less-than-well studied because it has been inaccessible since the early twentieth century; after a period in private hands it has, since 1937,

[6] On the itinerary of the marchers, see Luigi Villari, *The Awakening of Italy: The Fascist Regeneration* (New York: George H. Doran, 1924), 179–83; and Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 79–82 and passim.

[7] Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine at the Milvian Bridge*, 30.

[8] As noted in the useful summary of urban planning and public works in the *ventennio* by Maristella Casciato, "Building the Public Scene in Fascist Italy," in *Post Zang Tumb Tuuum: Art Life Politics, Italia 1918–1943*, ed. Germano Celant, exh. cat. (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2018), 512–19.

served as the representational seat of the Foreign Ministry. I have been fortunate to have had access to study and photograph the villa for about twenty years, and more recently to discover several untrammeled private archives in Italy and the US that provide a new account of the twentieth-century revival of the villa and recreation of its landscape, which was coeval with the rise of the neighboring forum, opening up the relation between these projects.

In the early twentieth century, when Rome was undergoing the post-Unification transformation from a retrograde, papal city into a modern capital and center of an emerging national culture, urban planners increasingly focused on gardens and green space. The longstanding importance ascribed to the villa garden—in particular, the Italian Renaissance garden—made it a defining element in the development of Roman urban form, for reasons both practical and symbolic. Recently unified Italy looked to historical models to promote a national style symbolizing shared cultural history, real or imagined. The Renaissance garden, characterized as geometric and rational, was privileged for its Italian origins and became an emblem of *italianità*. Fascist politicians and historians popularized a nearly mythical notion of a unified Italian garden tradition, drawing on propagandistic rhetoric and distorting the historical record in ways that are still being unpacked.[9] This rhetoric exemplified the nationalization of the domestic sphere, among other modes of culture,[10] when Fascist ideologues co-opted intellectual polemics about traditional Italian forms versus international modernism, such as Gio Ponti's manifesto distinguishing the *casa all'italiana* from Le Corbusier's *machine à habiter*,[11] to promote the Italianness of house and garden and thereby link modern dwellings with national identity.

Notions of the Italian garden were widely disseminated through publications,[12] and especially exhibitions, including the 1928 *Mostra del giardino romano,* part of the Universal Exposition in Turin (fig. 3). The catalog, written by unattributed author Nello Ciampi, editor of the new journal *Capitolium*, praises the city for the renovation and construction of Roman gardens and green spaces after long neglect, discusses urban greenbelt planning, lists public and private parks (Villa Madama heads the list), calculates green space per citizen, and affirms that Rome has launched "la

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[9] Claudia Lazzaro, "The Italian Garden: Two Different Concepts," in *Ville e giardini italiani: i disegni di architetti e paesaggisti dell'American Academy in Rome*, ed. Vincenzo Cazzato (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2004), 27–30; Claudia Lazzaro, "Politicizing a National Garden Tradition: The Italianness of the Italian Garden," in *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, ed. Claudia Lazzaro and Roger Crum (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 157–69; Raffaella Fabiani Giannetto, *Medici Gardens: From Making to Design* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 1–9; Raffaella Fabiani Giannetto, "'Grafting the Edelweiss on Cactus Plants': The 1931 Italian Garden Exhibition and Its Legacy," in *Clio in the Italian Garden: Twenty-First-Century Studies in Historical Methods and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Mirka Beneš and Michael G. Lee (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2011): 55–77; Anatole Tchikine, "The Expulsion of the Senses: The Idea of the 'Italian Garden' and the Politics of Sensory Experience," in *Sound and Scent in the Garden*, ed. D. Fairchild Ruggles (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2017), 217–53; and D. Medina Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle, and Tourism in Fascist Italy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 2004).

[10] See *inter alia* the classic article by Philip V. Cannistraro, "Mussolini's Cultural Revolution: Fascist or Nationalist?," *Journal of Contemporary History* 7 (1972): 115–39.

[11] Gio Ponti, "La casa all'italiana," *Domus* 1 (January 1928): 7, discussed by Maristella Casciato, "The 'Casa all'Italiana' and the Idea of Modern Dwelling in Fascist Italy," *The Journal of Architecture* 5, no. 4 (2000): 335–53 and Flavia Marcello, "*Una macchina per abitare*? Modern Italian Housing between Gio Ponti's *Casa all'italiana* and Le Corbusier's *Machine à Habiter*," in *The Artistic Legacy of Le Corbusier's* Machine à Habiter, ed. Anna Novakov and Elisabeth Schmidle (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 89–220.

[12] Beginning in 1914, the art critic Luigi Dami and feminist writer Countess Maria Pasolini Ponti characterized a distinctive Italian architectonic garden tradition, calling for its revival; Luigi Dami, "L'arte italiana dei giardini," *Rivista mensile del Touring Club Italiano* 20, no. 8 (1914): 553–59; Maria Pasolini Ponti, *Il giardino italiano* (Rome: Ermanno Loescher, 1915); and Luigi Dami, *Il giardino italiano* (Milan: Bestetti & Tumminelli, 1924).

rinascità del *nostro* giardino" (the rebirth of *our* garden), emphasizing the intersection of nationalist notions of the Italian garden with Roman urban planning.[13] Private villas began to be considered along with public parks in a greenbelt surrounding the city (figs. 4, 5); the Janiculum and Monte Mario in the northwest, dubbed the *città aristocratica* (aristocratic city), were singled out as highlights, as Marcello Piacentini, by then emerging as the most powerful architect and urban planner of the *ventennio*, described in his report accompanying the important 1931 regulatory plan. Many private gardens were reconfigured to fit within the greenbelt. So the restoration of Villa Madama and coeval creation of Mussolini's neighboring forum must be seen in the context of these urban planning initiatives; they were integral to the greenbelt plans for this entry zone, at exactly the moment when planners appropriated the so-called Italian Renaissance garden to serve the ideological goals of the Fascist regime.

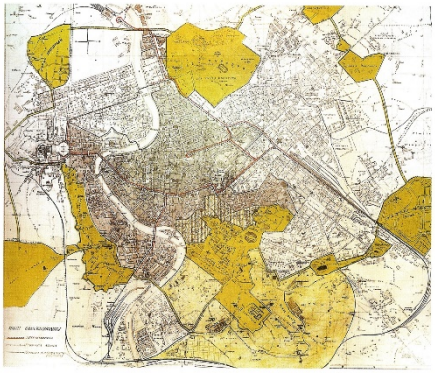


Fig. 3. Raffaele de Vico, cover, exhibition catalog of the *Mostra del giardino romano al Valentino nella Esposizione di Torino 1928* (Vassar College collection, author photo).
Fig. 4. Ring of parks, accompanying the regulatory plan of Rome, 1916 (from Marcello Piacentini, *Sulla conservazione della bellezza di Roma e sullo sviluppo della città moderna* [Rome: Aternum, 1916]).
Fig. 5. Green zones, accompanying the regulatory plan of Rome, 1916 (from Marcello Piacentini, *Sulla conservazione della bellezza di Roma e sullo sviluppo della città moderna* [Rome: Aternum, 1916]).

The twentieth century ushered in a new chapter for Raphael's then-rundown villa. After a varied history under the papal Medici and Farnese families, it passed to the Bourbons, who transformed the estate into a working farm, eradicating all traces of earlier landscaping. In 1913, a cosmopolitan French engineer, Maurice Bergès (1865–1926), and his wife, Maria Clotilde D'Annunzio Bergès (1878–1967, apparently no relation to Gabriele D'Annunzio), undertook the daunting task of reviving the estate and bringing it up to the standards of modern life, an effort cut short by his illness and untimely death.

In 1925, a globe-trotting couple began the most extensive restoration ever undertaken of Raphael's masterwork. Count Carlo Dentice di Frasso was a refined, dashing hero of World War I—a cavalryman, sportsman, and ex-member of parliament from a venerable noble family in Puglia, whose history dates to the eleventh century. In 1923, he married the flamboyant Dorothy Cadwell Taylor, a sharp-witted American heiress, known today only for her sensational

[13] Governatorato di Roma, Azienda Giardini Pubblici (uncredited author Nello Ciampi), *Mostra del giardino romano al Valentino nella Esposizione di Torino* 1928, exh. cat. (Milan-Rome: Bestetti e Tumminelli, 1928), 24. Italics in original.

jewels and social life—her best friends were Cary Grant and Marlene Dietrich, her lovers included Gary Cooper and Bugsy Siegel, and other friends ranged from Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, Tyrone Powers and Orson Welles, to financiers Jules Bache and Otto Kahn, as well as American ambassadors to Italy William Washburn Child and Henry Fletcher, all of whom mixed in various configurations in the Dentice salon at the villa. Crown Prince Umberto of Savoy was a close friend and frequent visitor, as documented in Dorothy's letters, news clippings, and home movies (fig. 6). Expert equestrians, Dorothy and Carlo rode with the Roman cavalry and with close friends, including Finance Minister Giuseppe Volpi, Princess Iolanda of Savoy, Marshal Pietro Badoglio—and once Mussolini himself.

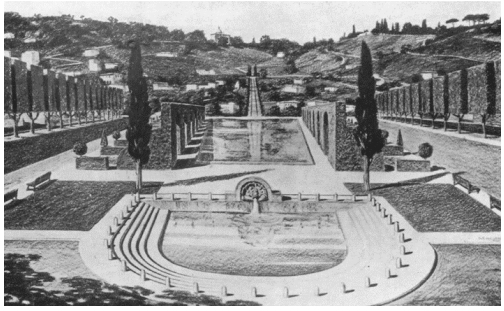
Figs. 6a, b. Stills from home movies of meals in the villa gardens with Dorothy and Crown Prince Umberto, 1927 (Howard Chandler Christy Papers, Special Collections, Lafayette College, Easton, PA).

But Dorothy and Carlo Dentice were not simply socialites, nor were they Fascists. I have traced their work restoring the villa and the powerful salon they fostered there for international business, political, military, and entertainment elites, as well as nobility and royalty: their guest list provides interesting snapshots of international contacts with the Fascist regime. Their restoration of the villa, and especially its landscape, made it a hub of US-Italian exchange at a charged political moment when America was still mostly behind Mussolini.[14] The reinvention and recreation of the villa's gardens is an interesting story beyond the present scope,[15] except to note that it was an iterative process engaging French, Italian, and Anglo-Irish designers, one of whom, Luigi Lenzi, was an architect and urban planner for the Fascist regime at the same moment when the latter was planning the greenbelt across Monte Mario and the villa's role within it (figs. 7, 8). So, the verdant hardscaping of the villa today reflects a style more characteristic of interwar Rationalism than the Renaissance—although the latter is how its gardens have long been misrepresented (fig. 9).[16]

[14] On US-American relations in the interwar period, see David Aliano, "American Travel Encounters with Fascist Italy," in *Philosophy, Travel, and Place: Being in Transit*, ed. Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 1–39; John Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); Gian Giacomo Migone, *Gli Stati Uniti e Fascismo: alle origini dell'egemonia americana in Italia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1980); David F. Schmitz, *The United States and Fascist Italy, 1922–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); and Giorgio Bertellini, *The Divo and the Duce: Promoting Film Stardom and Political Leadership in 1920s America* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

[15] For which, see Elet, *Urban Landscape*, chapters 2 and 4.

[16] A photograph dated December 1, 2005, on the website of the Ministero degli Affari Esteri of a visiting Spanish minister hosted by an Italian minister in the villa gardens included the caption that he is showing "il giardino rinascimentale di Villa Madama" (the Renaissance garden of Villa Madama).



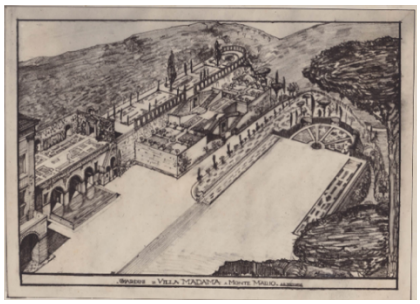


Fig. 7. Regulatory plan of Rome, project for the entrance to the Park of Monte Mario, 1931 (Governatorato di Roma, *Piano Regolatore di Roma 1931* [Milan: Treves-Treccani-Tumminelli, 1931]).
Fig. 8. Luigi Lenzi, *Giardini di Villa Madama a Monte Mario*, 1926 (DTDF).
Fig. 9. Villa Madama, inner garden seen from the building (author photo).

The Dentice acquired the villa in 1925, and Mussolini's neighboring forum was conceived the following year and built from 1928–39, so that the villa restoration and rising forum proceeded in tandem, and the two projects became increasingly intertwined. As is well known, the Foro Mussolini was conceived by the Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB), the powerful Fascist youth organization.[17] Begun as a sports citadel and national focal point for the ONB's activities, the forum quickly grew into one of the most potent symbols of Fascism and one of the regime's major and most fully realized Roman urban initiatives. Throughout the dozen or so years of the forum's planning and realization, its size, scope, function, and plans evolved considerably, in relation with political developments. It served to train youth organizations, host sporting events, present callisthenic demonstrations showcasing the strength of the cooperative body politic, and to bid for the Olympics. And it increasingly served to stage political spectacles and parades for Mussolini and visiting dignitaries, beginning with its formal inauguration in early November 1932 to commemorate the decennial of the March.

The visual and symbolic juxtaposition of the forum and the historic villa overlooking it was important to both the forum's architects, as is evident from their writings and drawings. The Balilla patrons emphasized the earlier history of the zone, notably its Augustan and Constantinian resonances, the beautiful green hillside, and the presence of Raphael's villa. Piacentini emphasized the integration of the forum with its surroundings, describing how Villa Madama and its landscape framed the complex,[18] exemplifying the Fascist practice of framing solitary monuments in a quasi-

[17] Salvatore Santuccio, ed*., Le case e il foro: l'architettura dell'ONB* (Florence: Alinea, 2005).
[18] "Un'opera complessa e grandiosa qual'è il Foro Mussolini non può essere considerata isolatamente, facendo astrazione dell'ambiente che la circonda, ma bisogna prima di tutto rilevare l'importanza urbanistica della sua ubicazione ed inquadrarla nello stupendo paesaggio che le fa da sfondo. Sotto questo punto di vista, nessuna località di Roma poteva offrire una cornice naturale più opportuna della conca collinosa di Monte Mario, dove Villa Madama

mythical urban scenography to create an open-air history museum as a foil to the modern present.[19]

As the plans for the forum expanded in the early 1930s, the Balilla sought liens on the surrounding properties, including Villa Madama.[20] By 1933, planners envisioned that the forum would extend all the way to via Trionfale and via Camilluccia, encompassing the villa and surrounding parkland (figs. 10, 11). Various ideas were proposed for incorporating the villa in the forum complex, including as a museum of the ONB.[21] 1937 was a pivotal year, politically and symbolically, including the Augustan bimillenary celebration. In May, Mussolini marked the first anniversary of empire at the forum, and that fall he celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of the March: *La Stampa* reported that three hundred thousand spectators crowded the forum.[22] Forum plans were expanded to include centers for music, dance, theater, and film to make it a center for all the arts,[23] including an open-air circular amphitheater for classical dance linking the villa to the stadia below (fig. 12).[24]

Fig. 10. Study for the regulatory plan of the Foro Mussolini, 1933; Villa Madama is marked 18.
Fig. 11. Graphic reconstruction of Villa Madama within the Foro Mussolini Regulatory Plan.
Fig. 12. Final systematization of the Foro Mussolini, including the circular dance theater below the villa, 1936

(All from Agnoldomenico Pica for the Opera Nazionale Balilla, *Il Foro Mussolini* [Milan: Bompiani, 1937], with graphics by Pizzi & Pizio).

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stava solitaria testimone dell'arte tra il silenzio dei boschi" (A complex and grandiose work such as the Foro Mussolini cannot be considered in isolation, abstracted from the surrounding environment, but above all it is necessary to note the urbanistic importance of its location and frame it in the marvelous landscape that forms its backdrop. From this perspective, no place in Rome could offer a more apposite natural setting than the hilly basin of Monte Mario, where Villa Madama has stood solitary witness to art amid the silence of the woods.) Marcello Piacentini, "Il Foro Mussolini in Roma. Arch. Enrico Del Debbio," *Architettura* 2 (February 1933): 65–75, at 65.

[19] Spiro Kostof, "The Emperor and the Duce: The Planning of the Piazzale Augusto Imperatore in Rome," in *Art and Architecture in the Service of Politics*, ed. Henry A. Millon and Linda Nochlin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), 270–325, at 287.

[20] As noted by Agnoldomenico Pica, *Il Foro Mussolini* (Milan: Bompiani, 1937), 36. See also Santuccio, *Le case e il foro*, 153–55, 157–58.

[21] Renato Ricci expressed interest in acquiring the villa to house an ONB museum, as the villa site was just above the ONB's Academy of Physical Education, as mentioned in a letter from Carlo Dentice to Dorothy Dentice di Frasso and her father Bertrand L. Taylor, July 1933 (DTDF).

[22] *La Stampa*, October 29, 1937, 1.

[23] Santuccio, *Le case e il foro*, 165–66; Laura Iermano, "Progetti e realizzazioni nell'area della Farnesina," in *Roma moderna e contemporanea* 11 (2004), 643–47, at 647.

[24] For which, see Francesca Di Castro and Sandro Bari, "La Danza, la Giovinetta e il Cacciatore. Il paesaggio simbolico tra Villa Madama e Foro Italico," in *Monte Mario. Dal medioevo alle idee di parco*, ed. Marcello Fagiolo and Alessandro Mazza (Rome: Artemide, 2016), 362–69, at 365–66.

Additionally, the most important architectural competition of the era, to design the Palazzo Littorio, the headquarters and seat of the National Fascist Party—and effectively the representational style of Fascism—was revised, after several years and hundreds of entries, to relocate the site from the city center to the northern tip of the forum.[25] Mussolini dedicated the rising building on October 28, 1937 as part of the fifteenth-anniversary celebrations of the March.[26] Then in April 1940, while still under construction, the palace was redesignated the seat of the Foreign Ministry.[27]

Finally, it was during the crucial year, 1937, that the government took over Villa Madama: the Foreign Ministry first rented it from the Dentice for three years, beginning in May, although they began using it for political entertaining even earlier in the year. In late 1937, the Foreign Ministry indicated to Carlo Dentice the desire to purchase it outright,[28] which was finalized in October 1940.[29] Journalists remarked on the villa's site overlooking the forum and its Renaissance history, noting that it had already housed General Hermann Göring, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, and Foreign Minister Lord Halifax, and would continue to be "La villa dell'ospitalità fascista nella capitale dell'Impero" (the villa of fascist hospitality in the capital of Empire).[30]

The villa's extensive stable complex has a slightly different history (fig. 13). Carlo ensured that the contracts with the Ministry preserved his and Dorothy's right to retain the stables during their lifetimes, and in 1937 he directed the conversion to living quarters. The *Casaletto* or *Scuderie di Villa Madama*, as the complex was known, was fashioned into a lavish home with three salons, six bedrooms, and four baths for the family, which were filled with paintings, tapestries, Persian carpets, and Renaissance furniture; plus an eight-room house for the servants, as well as a kitchen,

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[25] On the vicissitudes of the competitions, the entries, and the symbolism of the project, see *inter alia* Marcello Piacentini, "Il progetto definitivo della Casa Littoria a Roma," *Architettura: rivista del Sindacato nazionale fascista architetti* 15 (December 1937): 699–713; Flavia Marcello, "The Politics of Place: Citing and Re-siting the *Palazzo Littorio*, Mussolini's New Fascist Party Headquarters in Rome," *Architectural Theory Review* 12, no. 2 (2007): 146–72; Alessandra Muntoni, *Roma tra le due guerre 1919–1944: architettura, modelli urbani, linguaggi della modernità* (Rome: Edizioni Kappa, 2010), 280–90.

[26] Vittorio Vidotto, "Il mito di Mussolini e le memorie nazionali: le trasformazioni del Foro Italico 1837–1960," in *Roma: architettura e città negli anni della Seconda Guerra mondiale; atti della giornata di studio, 24 gennaio 2003* (Rome: Gangemi, 2004), 112–21, at 115.

[27] Following a failed competition to design a new building to house the Foreign Ministry in 1939–1940, the partially built Fascist party headquarters was refunctionalized to house the ministry instead. See Paolo Portoghesi, "La sede del Ministero degli Affari Esteri," in *Artisti italiani del XX secolo alla Farnesina* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Elefante, 2001), 1–14, at 11–13; Maria Luisa Neri, ed., *Enrico Del Debbio*, exh. cat. (Milan: Idea Books, 2006), 375–77 with extensive bibliography; Maria Luisa Neri, "L'antefatto: le proposte di concorso," in *Il Palazzo della Farnesina al Foro Italico* (Rome: Palombi Editori, 2007), 43–64; and Muntoni, *Roma tra le due guerre*, 299–300.

[28] "S. E. Ciano mi ha pregato di farLe presente che sarebbe nelle intenzioni del R. Governo iniziare dei negoziati per un eventuale acquisto di Villa Madama. Desiderando eliminare dalle trattative ogni e qualsiasi intermediario, La pregherei vivamente di farmi conoscere se e quando possa aver luogo a Roma un incontro con Lei" (His Excellency Ciano asked me to inform you that it is the intention of the Royal Government to begin negotiations for the purchase of Villa Madama. Wishing to eliminate from the negotiations any and all intermediaries, I would ask you to let me know if and when a meeting with you can take place in Rome"). Letter from Claudio Cortini, private secretary to Galeazzo Ciano, to Carlo Dentice di Frasso in Kravska, Czechoslovakia, November 18, 1937 (DTDF).

[29] The sale was made by public deed on August 29, 1940, and filed on October 22, 1940 in the Unified Magistrates Court of Rome. It included the provision that "Al Conte Carlo Dentice di Frasso sua vita naturale durante o alla di lui moglie che gli sopravviva, si riconosce il diritto di abitare la dipendenza del compendio immobiliare Villa Madama della società denominata Scuderie o Casaletto" (To Count Carlo Dentice di Frasso during his natural life or to his wife who may survive him is granted the right to live in the dependency property of the company's Villa Madama complex known as the Scuderie or Casaletto). ADF Busta 169, f. 65.

[30] In Quivis, "Villa Madama," *Le vie d'Italia*, 1940, 43–50.

ironing room, coal storage, *cristalleria*, space for two automobiles, and stalls for six horses. The Dentice and their friends spent time there (including Orson Welles during the shooting of his *Othello*), until finally in 1958, after their deaths, the complex passed to the Foreign Ministry, which converted it into the Istituto Diplomatico "Mario Toscano."

Fig. 13. Villa Madama, with the stable complex built by the Dentice in the foreground, ca. 1930 (DTDF).

Mussolini's Forum as Gateway, Garden, and Theater

From the outset, the practical and ideological functions of the Foro Mussolini were intended to transcend that of a straightforward sports citadel, and its variable roles and functions reflected the shifting values of the Fascist Revolution, and the many, at times contradictory, political and cultural ideas in play. At several points in the forum's development, its planners and other government agents generated writings, mounted exhibitions, and staged events that presented the multivalent and shifting meanings that the complex itself embodied. These included the neo-Latin *Codex Fori Mussolini* buried like a time capsule under the forum's first block when it was inaugurated in 1932,[31] a 1937 book produced by the Balilla about their forum, written by Agnoldomenico Pica with stylish graphics by the firm of Pizzi and Pizio (figs. 11–13 above), and exhibitions mounted by the ONB within the forum itself in 1937. All these works were essentially panegyrics on the forum, and they emphasized similar themes: the forum as a monumental gateway to the city; the forum itself as an Italian garden; and the forum as a total theater. And they all stressed the importance of Raphael's villa as part of it, in formal and symbolic terms.

The notion of the forum as a monumental new gateway to Rome was increasingly emphasized as the complex grew in scale and scope; it was understood as the northern end of the city's cardo, with entry via the Milvian Bridge or new Ponte XXVIII Ottobre, extending through the historic

[31] For an analysis, critical edition, and English translation, see Han Lamers and Bettina Reitz-Joosse, *The* Codex Fori Mussolini: *A Latin Text of Italian Fascism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016). See also Han Lamers and Bettina Reitz-Joosse, "Lingua Lictoria: The Latin Literature of Italian Fascism," *Classical Receptions Journal* 8, no. 2 (2016): 216–52; their website "Anchoring the Fascist Revolution: The Classical Languages under Fascism," www.anchoring-fascism.com, accessed June 8, 2023; and Peter Aicher, "Mussolini's Forum and the Myth of Augustan Rome," *The Classical Bulletin* 76, no. 2 (2000): 117–39 at 130–32.

city center to EUR. This axis was significant beyond the city: it was part of the national regulatory plan and transportation network, from Turin and Milan down to Naples and Brindisi.

Perhaps most striking is the insistence with which this sports forum was presented as a garden park, and specifically a *giardino all'italiana*. The original plans by architect Enrico Del Debbio included many garden parterres and trees, and he laid out the stadia themselves like geometric garden beds (fig. 14). The book that the Balilla published presented the entire forum as a garden, and its central area as a *giardino all'italiana*,[32] stating that "Un concetto giardinieresco…è proprio alla base di tutto il vasto impianto urbanistico…La disposizione a largo respiro degli edifici che costituiscono il Foro ha consentito di trattare tutta la zona come un immane giardino all'italiana, e cioè architettonico, severamente ordinato secondo principi geometrici, dosi volumetriche, calcolate misure" (A garden-like concept…is the very basis of the vast urban layout…The widely spaced buildings that make up the Forum enable the entire area to be treated as an enormous Italian garden, that is, architectural, strictly ordered by geometric principles, volumetric measurements, calculated proportions).[33] The book further included many images of the forum "systematized as a garden" (e.g. fig. 15), as well as photographs showing the connection of the forum to the villa's gardens (e.g. fig. 16). Architects and publicists stressed the forum's contribution to the city's green space, part of the rich northwestern crown of parks and gardens. The trees themselves were selected for their contributions to *romanità*: avenues of pine, holm oak, and cypress were understood as symbolic of the Eternal City.[34]

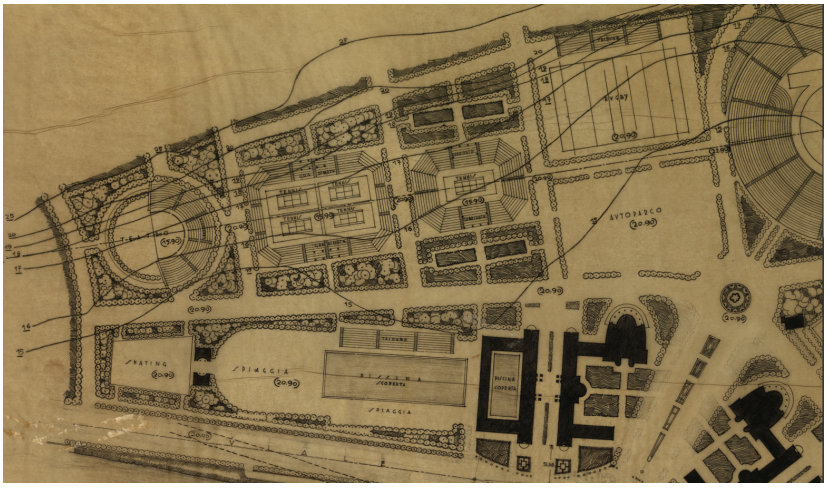

Fig. 14. Enrico Del Debbio, Foro dello Sport, general plan, 1928, detail (photo MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome; Collezioni MAXXI Architettura, Archivio Enrico Del Debbio).

[32] Pica, *Il Foro Mussolini*, 37.
[33] Ibid., 97.
[34] As noted by Pica, *Il Foro Mussolini*, 97. On symbolic species, see Sonja Dümpelmann, *Maria Teresa Parpagliolo Shephard (1903–1974): Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklung der Gartenkultur in Italien im 20. Jahrhundert* (Weimar: VDG, 2004), 162–72; and Franco Panzini, "Pines, Palms, and Holm Oaks: Historicist Modes in Modern Italian Cityscapes," in *Modernism and Landscape Architecture, 1890–1940*, ed. Therese O'Malley and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 117–36 at 120, 123, and passim. On the historic, ecological, and symbolic compatibility of pines, holm oaks, and cypresses in Rome, see Tessa Matteini, *Paesaggi del tempo: documenti archeologici e rovine artificiali nel disegno di giardini e paesaggi* (Florence: Alinea, 2009), 120–28.

Fig. 15. Photo showing Foro Mussolini systematized as a garden park.
Fig. 16. Photo showing the view of Foro Mussolini from the villa's gardens.

(Both from Agnoldomenico Pica for the Opera Nazionale Balilla, *Il Foro Mussolini* [Milan: Bompiani, 1937], with graphics by Pizzi & Pizio)

Pica's volume for the Balilla also treated the forum as theater, listing the varied theater spaces planned for the complex, and inserting the forum and villa into the contemporary discourse on the crisis of traditional theater and new forms of modern theater to reach a mass audience.[35] He specifically likened a planned *cavea* in the forum to Luigi Vietti's *megateatro*, a 1935 competition proposal for an open-air arena to seat 15,000.[36] In his conclusion to the book, Pica discussed the round, open-air dance theater planned to connect the villa and forum, relating it at once to ancient forms, and also to Walter Gropius's avant-garde notion of the *Totaltheater,* which Gropius himself had presented in Rome just a few years earlier.[37] Jeffrey Schnapp has noted the linkages among mass theaters, political rallies, and sporting events at the time.[38] Pica thus inserted a Renaissance villa, dance theater, and sports forum-cum-garden park into the mix, arguing for an explicitly Roman synthesis which blurred distinctions among traditional forms and the avant-garde; he remarked that we may note "proprio qui, sotto il cielo di Roma, la perenne fecondità e la perenne bellezza di talune idee antiche, e, insieme, la classica sostanza di certe idee modernissime e, diciamo, di avanguardia" (especially here, under the sky of Rome, the perennial fecundity and

[35] On Mussolini's 1933 speech calling for a theater of the masses, see Patricia Gaborik, *Mussolini's Theatre: Fascist Experiments in Art and Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), chapter 5; on contemporary experimentation of Italian impresarios with new forms of mass theater, drawing on Soviet Russian models and in dialogue with Weimar developments, see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "*18 BL*: Fascist Mass Spectacle," *Representations* 43 (Summer 1993): 89–125; and Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "Border Crossings: Italian/German Peregrinations of the 'Theater of Totality,'" *Critical Inquiry* 21 (1994): 80–123.
[36] Pica, *Il Foro Mussolini*, 99. For Vietti's *megateatro*, see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Staging Fascism:* 18 BL *and the Theater of Masses for Masses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 40 and 43; and Yann Rocher, *Théâtres en utopie* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2014), 174–77.
[37] Pica, *Il Foro Mussolini*, 99. Gropius had presented at the Italian Royal Academy's Volta conference of 1934, which was dedicated to the subject of mass theater and convened by Luigi Pirandello; for which, see Schnapp, "Border Crossings," 83–84, 119–22; and Schnapp, *Staging Fascism*, 116–20.
[38] Schnapp, "Border Crossings," 123.

beauty of certain ancient ideas, and, together with these, the classic substance of some of the most modern and, we may say, avant-garde ideas).[39] We may see the slippage among many different forms of contemporary theater that the forum was to encompass: a theater of theaters, for various modes of cultural production. Raphael's villa was, therefore, to be englobed in Mussolini's forum in a collective of culture, sport, and spectacle. Different types of theaters were planned for varied audiences, from the intimate political theater of the villa, through the high-culture dance theater down the hillside, to the mass spectacle of the sports stadium (however blurry the distinctions between "private" and "mass" audiences could be). Although the dance theater was never realized, both villa and forum served these functions.

The Foreign Ministry's acquisition of the villa did indeed restore the building and gardens to their original function as a theater of diplomacy for visiting heads of state, and the ministry immediately began using the villa as its representational seat, in tandem with the forum. A visit to the villa was the culmination of the tightly curated itinerary for Adolf Hitler's state visit to Rome in May 1938, a week-long festival when all the city became a stage for spectacle. Although the arts theaters of Mussolini's forum remained unfinished, a production of Wagner's *Lohengrin* was staged in one of the stadia as the spectacular finale to his visit—an Italian realization of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art)—after which Mussolini and Hitler dined at Villa Madama.[40] Although the villa was used for privileged, small gatherings consonant with its scale, select events were captured on photo and film for a broad audience, such as the Luce newsreel in July 1938 promoting the significant visit of Hungarian Prime Minister Béla Imrédy to Rome (fig. 17). The film features a long shot of Imrédy and Italian Minister of Popular Culture Dino Alfieri walking down the main axis of the villa's garden to the accompaniment of bombastic martial music; the camera then pans to show the ministers' view of the stadia below, which the announcer identifies as the new Foro Mussolini.[41] This shot follows the longstanding Roman practice of linking important symbolic locations via sightlines, now deployed via mass media (fig. 18).[42] That the book published by the Balilla included many photos highlighting views of the forum from different areas of the villa complex suggests that these sightlines were widely understood as meaningful connections (e.g. fig. 16 above).

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[39] Pica, *Il Foro Mussolini*, 99.

[40] Maddalena Vianello, "La visita di Hitler a Roma nel maggio 1938," in *Roma tra fascismo e Liberazione*, ed. Istituto romano per la storia d'Italia dal fascismo alla Resistenza (Milan: Angeli, 2006), 67–92; and Paul Baxa, "Capturing the Fascist Moment: Hitler's Visit to Italy in 1938 and the Radicalization of Fascist Italy," *Journal of Contemporary History* 42 (2007): 227–42.

[41] *Giornate romane dei ministri ungheresi*, directed by Arturo Gemmiti (Rome: Istituto Luce Cinecittà, July 27, 1938), https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=lzofs7g_HPQ&noredirect=1.

[42] For this point and Raphael's attention to sightlines around the villa, see Elet, "Raphael and the Roads to Rome." For networks of sightlines between significant villas and monuments, which serve at once as belvedere and focal point, see Marcello Fagiolo, "Gli assi segreti delle ville nel sistema sacrale del 'Latium Vetus,'" in *Il Giardino storico nel Lazio: indirizzi per la conservazione e il restauro*; *atti del convegno* (Rome: Associazione Dimore Storiche Italiane, 1990), 16–26; Marcello Fagiolo, "Da Villa Madama a Villa Giulia e al Gianicolo. Gli assi della memoria storica," in *Roma: il verde e la città; giardini e spazi verdi nella costruzione della forma urbana*, ed. Roberto Cassetti and Marcello Fagiolo (Rome: Gangemi, 2002), 31–48; Roberto Cassetti and Marcello Fagiolo, eds., "Introduzione," in *Roma: il verde e la città*), 15; and Marcello Fagiolo, "Systems of Gardens in Italy: Princely Residences and Villas in Rome and Latium, Savoy Piedmont, Royal Bourbon Naples, and Bagheria, Sicily," in *Clio in the Italian Garden: Twenty-First-Century Studies in Historical Methods and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Mirka Beneš and Michael G. Lee (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2011), 81–114.

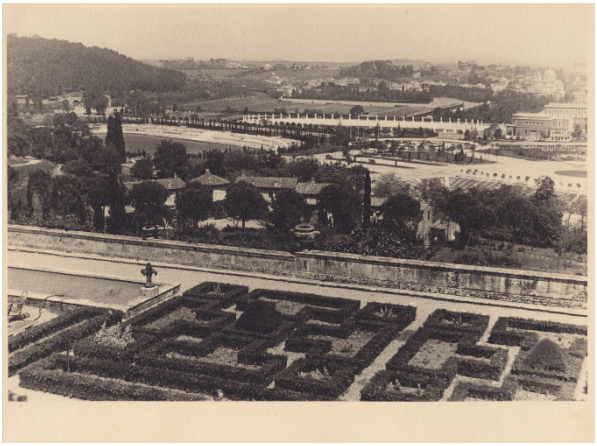

Fig. 17. Villa Madama, inner garden, with Hungarian Prime Minister Béla Imrédy and Italian Minister Dino Alfieri, July 20, 1938; photograph taken in conjunction with the Luce film *Giornate romane dei ministri ungheresi* (photo Luce, author collection).
Fig. 18. View from Villa Madama's gardens to the Foro Mussolini below, ca. 1930 (DTDF).

The forum itself became one of the regime's premier stages for performing Fascist power, hosting many events presented in front of large crowds. Consonant with the emerging relation between architecture, cinematography, and mass spectacle, these events were captured for mass distribution via newsreels and widely shown in theaters and squares. Antonella Greco has compared the forum to a photogenic cinematic set crowded with extras.[43] Such filmic representations constituted yet another type of innovative theatrical spectacle. Many of these newsreels covering rallies, mass youth callisthenic spectacles, or other events in the forum included Villa Madama; the camera often panned back and forth across the Stadio dei Marmi to focus on the villa and Palazzo Farnesina as backdrop, framing the action (e.g. fig. 19). In this case, however, the villa was not stage but scenery. Such images of the villa realized Piacentini's rhetoric and the forum planners' ideas about the green hillside as background or frame, and the villa as crown. Piacentini described the green hills on the northwest of the city as an "ampio anfiteatro boscoso" (grand woodland amphitheater),[44] and he noted that Villa Madama was the singular structure amid the woods, "dove la vegetazione folta ed intatta suggeriva quasi la visione di quegli sfondi che nell'antichità classica erano prescelti a circondare i teatri e gli stadi" (where the dense and unspoiled vegetation almost suggests a vision of those backgrounds in classical antiquity chosen to surround theaters and stadiums).[45] Marcello Fagiolo has likened Piacentini's vision of an exedra of green hills to Renaissance and ancient precedents, noting Pliny the Younger as the source for the concept of the woodland amphitheater.[46] This longstanding nature-as-theater metaphor took on a new valence in the Fascist era; we see the theatricalization of urban landscape, connected to Fascist mass theater, consonant with the theatricalization of all Italian life.[47]

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[43] Antonella Greco, "Il Foro Mussolini: architettura ed arte," in Santuccio, *Le case e il foro*, 173–92 at 190.
[44] In his report to Mussolini accompanying the 1931 regulatory plan: Governatorato di Roma, *Piano Regolatore di Roma 1931 Anno IX* (Milan: Treves-Treccani-Tumminelli, 1931), 26.
[45] Marcello Piacentini, "Il Foro Mussolini in Roma. Arch. Enrico Del Debbio," *Architettura* 2 (February 1933): 65–75 at 65.
[46] Marcello Fagiolo, "Da Villa Madama a Villa Giulia e al Gianicolo: gli assi della memoria storica," in *Roma: il verde e la città*, 31–48 at 43–47; Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* V, VI, 7.
[47] On "fascism's wholesale theatricalization of Italian life," see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "*18 BL*: Fascist Mass Spectacle," in *Representations* 43 (Summer 1993): 89–125, at 91.

Fig. 19. Foro Mussolini, Campo Dux, with Villa Madama on the hillside above, 1934 (unidentified photographer, author collection).

This confluence of the villa and forum was not foreseen at the outset of forum planning, which evolved significantly over a dozen years. But the twentieth-century history of villa and forum exemplify the so-called "Fascist layer" in Rome, reconciling conservation, symbolic appropriation, and innovation.[48] In Rome's entry zone, we see the Janus-like looking backward and forward of both the Leonine and Mussolinian projects, where each attempted to transume the past to create something new.

With their expansive visions for the forum, interwar designers sought to outdo Raphael's incomplete masterwork and, further, to recontextualize it within a total theater of sport and culture—only to have their plans partially left on the drawing board, too. The fate of the Foro Mussolini reflects what Aristotle Kallis characterized as the "fascist grandiose *nonfinito*,"[49] its plans interrupted by the war, by a shift of efforts to the E42 project, and finally by the fall of the regime. So, the totalizing modern vision for Rome's entry zone crumbled with the fall of Fascism. The post-Fascist neutralization of Mussolini's forum began shortly after his arrest on July 25, 1943; the complex was renamed the Foro Italico just a month later. It was occupied by Allied troops and used as the Rest Center of the US Army, whose presence inadvertently served to deter iconoclasm.[50] Thereafter, it was split up among several different organizations: if Mussolini was

[48] On the "Fascist layer" of palimpsestic Rome as a spatial and historic concept, see Aristotle Kallis, "'Reconciliation' or 'Conquest'? The Opening of the Via della Conciliazione and the Fascist Vision for the 'Third Rome,'" in *Rome: Continuing Encounters between Past and Present*, ed. Dorigen Caldwell and Lesley Caldwell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 129–51; and Aristotle Kallis, "'*In miglior tempo…*': What Fascism Did Not Build in Rome," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 16, no. 1 (2011): 59–83 at 63 and passim.

[49] Kallis, "'*In miglior tempo…*,'" 60, 78.

[50] Photos of the US Army Rest Center on the Piazzale dell'Impero show US troops around the obelisk inscribed *Mussolini Dux*, to which a sign was affixed reading "US Army Rest Center"; illustrated in Memmo Caporilli and Franco Simeoni, eds., *Il Foro Italico e Lo Stadio Olimpica: immagini dalla storia* (Rome: TOMO Edizioni, 1990), 269; and discussed in Anna Mascorella, "Reinterpreting Fascist Built Heritage: The Reuse of Rome's Foro Mussolini," in *Routledge Companion to Global Heritage Conservation*, ed. Vinayak Bharne and Trudi Sandmeier (London: Routledge, 2019), 409-25. Sandro Bari crudely caricatures the American troops whose presence saved the forum as "quei ragazzoni provenienti da fattorie del Montana o casamenti del Bronx o stalle del Texas" (those big boys from the farms of Montana or the tenements of the Bronx or the stables of Texas), awed by the splendor and genius of the

hanged and his corpse desecrated, his forum was dismembered. It was effectively separated into two main sectors: the Foreign Ministry and the Foro Italico, the latter comprising the sporting complex and a heritage site (fig. 20).

Fig. 20. Site of Foro Mussolini, now divided into the garden park of the Foreign Ministry, with villa at top left and palace at lower right, and the Foro Italico, comprising the sporting complex and heritage site (Google maps, CNES/Airbus, Maxar Technologies, map data 2023).

In the first sector, the Foreign Ministry's administrative seat became—and remains today—linked to Raphael's nearby villa, its representational seat, and to the Dentice's lavish stables which still serve as a diplomatic center. They all constitute a theater of diplomacy, set largely within a giant garden park, and connected by winding boulevards through the landscape. Villa Madama continues to function as the Ministry's representational space; heads of state still frequent the villa and its gardens, where they dine, stroll, and converse—or at least play the role for the cameras. Since the palace of the ministry was only realized post-war, the linkages of villa to ministry, and ministry garden park to forum, were never realized during the *ventennio*, in reality or in the public imagination, making the independence of those parcels from the forum seem natural. Especially for the villa that long predated the neighboring forum, its brief tenure in Fascist hands did not taint its longstanding importance as a Raphael masterwork.

In the second sector, many of the sporting facilities have gone on to serve important competitive functions: the Foro Italico was the site of the 1960 Olympics (for which the outsized central stadium was constructed), and it is the current seat of the Olympic Committee and the Italian Open.[51] It also serves as a community recreational sports center, where children play soccer and adults jog. The sporting functions of this sector, and the adjoining ministry palace, mostly

Italian artists. In Sandro Bari, "Il Foro Mussolini e la damnatio memoriae," *Strenna dei romanisti* 66 (2005): 13–26, at 16.

[51] Luca Masia, Dario Matteoni, and Piero Mei, *Il Parco del Foro Italico: la storia, lo sport, i progetti* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2007). The Italian Open is known today as the Internazionali BNL d'Italia, an ATP and WTA Masters 1000 event.

enabled a neutralization of these spaces, although it is impossible to fully separate the buildings and landscape from the political and ideological history they were conceived to embody.

But at the center of the Foro Italico lies the Viale del Foro Italico—originally the Piazzale dell'Impero—essentially a Fascist heritage zone. It has prompted some changes, but nonetheless preserves explicitly Fascist imagery, from the obelisk inscribed "Mussolini DUX" and marble blocks inscribed with a Fascist *res gestae*, to mosaics with Mussolini's slogan "Molti nemici molto onore" (Many enemies, much honor) and the fasces (figs. 21–23). This site has sparked ongoing debate from the late 1950s to the present.[52] It exemplifies Italy's practice of allowing the survival of significant Fascist material heritage, a subject of increased scrutiny in recent years, including a recently-launched project to map monuments and sites.[53] The city's neglect of this zone perhaps reflects a deliberate strategy to represent the demise of the Fascist experiment; yet the site continues to be a locus for contemporary neo-Fascist groups to gather and post messages. Thus, this political stage remains one of the most prominent examples of what has variously been termed "difficult," "undesirable," or "dissonant" heritage.[54]

Figs. 21–23. Viale del Foro Italico (former Piazzale dell'Impero), mosaic decorations, 2014 (author photos).

The entire area once earmarked for the forum is a dissonant zone indeed, encompassing the ministry garden park wrapped around a sporting complex, with a Fascist heritage site in the middle—a problematic mix of memory, heritage, politics, aesthetics, and entertainment. But if the

[52] Francesco dal Co, "La casa delle armi di Luigi Moretti e il destino del Foro Italico," *Casabella* 682 (2000): 4–7; Vittorio Vidotto, "Il mito di Mussolini e le memorie nazionali: le trasformazioni del Foro Italico 1837–1960," in *Roma: architettura e città negli anni della Second Guerra mondiale*, 112–21 at 116-121; Bari, "Il Foro Mussolini e la damnatio memoriae"; Valentina Follo, "The Power of Images in the Age of Mussolini" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2013), 119–23; Davide Lacagnina, *La Farnesina: il palazzo, gli artisti, le opere* (Rome: De Luca Editore, 2019); and Ankie Petersen, "Contesting Heritage: Shifting Political Interpretations of Rome's Foro Italico," in *The Routledge Companion to Italian Fascist Architecture: Reception and Legacy*, ed. Kay Bea Jones and Stephanie Pilat (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2020), 111–25, including a discussion of the 2017 Fiano bill proposing the erasure of Fascist inscriptions.

[53] Ruth Ben-Ghiat, "Why are So Many Fascist Monuments Still Standing in Italy?" *The New Yorker*, October 5, 2017; Giulia Albanese, ed., "I luoghi della memoria dell'Italia fascista," accessed May 26, 2023, www.luoghifascismo.it.

[54] Joshua Arthurs, "Fascism as 'Heritage' in Contemporary Italy," in *Italy Today: The Sick Man of Europe*, ed. Andrea Mammone and Giuseppe A. Veltri (New York: Routledge, 2010), 114–27; Nick Carter and Simon Martin, "Dealing with Difficult Heritage: Italy and the Material Legacies of Fascism," in "The Difficult Heritage of Italian Fascism," special issue, *Modern Italy* 24, no. 2 (2019): 117–22, with earlier bibliography. See also now Carmen Belmonte, ed., *A Difficult Heritage: The Afterlives of Fascist-Era Art and Architecture* (Milan: Silvana, 2023), published after this article went into production.

relation of these parcels is apparent in an aerial view, it is unclear at street level in this sprawling zone, amid a disorienting tangle of traffic-snarled roads.[55]

What do we make of the longue-durée legacy of this zone as gateway? For millennia, it saw the arrival of conquerors, dignitaries, and pilgrims; yet in 1870, the Royal Italian Army breached the city gates at the Porta Pia, rather than entering via the Milvian Bridge to the Porta del Popolo, and even for the March in 1922, Mussolini and many of the black shirts simply arrived via train. Fascist planners and propagandists nonetheless placed great emphasis on the Foro Mussolini as gateway. Since the *ventennio*, the widespread adoption of the automobile and the addition of a ring road around the city have provided many points of entry, and the rise of rail and air travel has altered the arrival mode of most visitors, further diluting the potency of the Milvian Bridge area or any single zone as gateway, functionally or symbolically. Moreover, what was for thousands of years a liminal zone, outside the Aurelian walls and off most maps of the city, has seen the explosive growth of the city up to and beyond its borders, englobing this former periphery into the urban fabric, or at least the peri-urban zone. So forces of urban growth and technological advancement have done as much to dismantle the Fascist gateway to Rome as have deliberate acts, and the very notion of an entry zone has fundamentally changed. Yet the current regulatory plan of the city draws attention to the north-south cardo, from the intersection of the via Cassia and via Flaminia before the Milvian Bridge down to EUR, noting that this historic axis and the Foro Italico are among the most fundamental sources of Rome's modern identity as capital city in the current millennium.[56]

Of course, with the explosive growth of modern cities, many theorists have explored the disjunction between physical space and its function or symbolism.[57] Yet palimpsestic Rome wears the mantle of the Eternal City. History has shaped not just the form, but the imaginary of Rome. And, since antiquity, Romans have understood their city via relational networks of physical monuments, organizing memory by spatial places into a sort of metaphysical topography.[58] So it

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[55] On the contrast of bird's-eye and pedestrian modes of knowledge in urban experience, see Filippo de Vivo, "Walking in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Mobilizing the Early Modern City," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 19, no. 1 (2016): 115–41.

[56] "Il tracciato Flaminio-Fori-Eur, oggi un asse definitivamente storicizzato...è segnato dai quattro più importanti interventi urbani unitari realizzati nel Novecento: il Foro Italico, l'area archeologica centrale, la via Colombo, l'Eur. Essi costituiscono le primarie 'risorse' per il riconoscimento dell'identità moderna di Roma città capitale del 2000" (The Flaminio-Fori-Eur route, today a definitively historicized axis... is marked by the four most important urban interventions carried out in the twentieth century: the Foro Italico, the central archaeological area, via Colombo, and EUR. They constitute the primary components that define the modern identity of Rome, capital city, in 2000.) Comune di Roma, Dipartimento alle Politiche della Programmazione e Pianificazione del Territorio – Roma Capitale, Ufficio Pianificazione e Progettazione Generale, PIANO REGOLATORE GENERALE, Ambito di programmazione strategica Flamino-Fori-EUR, accessed June 14, 2023, http://www.urbanistica.comune.roma.it/images/uo_urban/prg_adottato/i7_02.pdf.

[57] Notably, *inter alia*, Henri Lefebvre, "La production de l'espace," *L'Homme et la société* 31, no. 1 (1974): 15–32; Manuel Castells, "Space of Flows and Space of Places," in *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996 and 2000).

[58] For the notion of "metaphysical topography," see Ann Vasaly, *Representations: Images of the World in Ciceronian Oratory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Among the rich literature on Roman memory, see Diane Favro, "The Roman Forum and Roman Memory," *Places* 5 (1988): 17–24; Favro, *The Urban Image of Augustan Rome*), 5-7, 10; Karl Galinsky's *Memoria Romana* project, accessed June 14, 2023, www.laits.utexas.edu/memoria/index.html; and Karl Galinsky, ed., *Memoria Romana: Memory in Rome and Rome in Memory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014); Charles Burroughs, *From Signs to Design: Environmental Process and Reform in Early Renaissance Rome* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990); and Elet, "Raphael and the Roads to Rome," 166–69.

seems that, whether contested or open, or however porous in reality, Rome retains the notion of a northern gateway into the city, consonant with the long-ingrained notion that all roads do lead to Rome.