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Collective Performances and Architectural Restorations: Image Creation and Historical Identity in Unified Italy

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At the turn of 20th century, as a recently unified country, Italy was the scene of an imposing national building effort. For the last 30 years, this process has been widely investigated. Following the constructivist trend, embodied by scholars such as Benedict Anderson or Ernest Gellner, historians have highlighted how political pedagogy has been a central feature in the creation of what Italy and the Italians were to become¹. Developing George Mosse's analysis of the nationalization of masses², historians such as Bruno Tobia, Emilio Gentile, Stefano Cavazza or Catherine Brice have looked at civic liturgies and collective performances of unified Italy³. As an example, the great parade set up for the inauguration of the Vittoriano in Rome in 1911 was analyzed as one of the central tools aimed at promoting a sense of national belonging /Fig. 1/⁴. Dedicated to the king that had unified Italy, the National Monument to Victor Emmanuel II had been decided shortly after his death in 1878. The construction was long and the monument was finally inaugurated as part of the commemoration for the 50th anniversary of Unification in 1911. The Vittoriano not only celebrated the monarchy, it actually enhanced the articulation between central and local powers. We can retrace that combination in the iconography chosen for the sculpted decoration through the important place occupied by allegories of the regions and the main cities/Fig. 2/. The participation of localities at the celebration of the king who unified the country was personified during the 1911 commemorations by the presence of more than 5,000 mayors coming from all Italian regions.

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London 1983; Ernst Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford 1983. For the Italian case, see for example: Alberto Maria Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento. Santità, parentela, onore*, Turin 2000, or Gilles Pécout, *Naissance de l'Italie contemporaine 1770-1922*, Paris 1997.

² George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of Masses*, New York 1975.

³ Bruno Tobia, *Una patria per gli italiani, Spazi, itinerari, monumenti nell'Italia unita (1870-1900)*, Rome, Bari 1991; Emilio Gentile, *Il culto del littorio, La sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista*, Rome-Bari 1993; Stefano Cavazza, *Piccole patrie. Feste popolari tra regione e nazione durante il fascismo*, Bologna 1997; Catherine Brice, Maria Antonietta Visceglia (ed.), *Cérémonial et rituel à Rome (XVI^e-XIX^e siècle)*, Collection de l'École Française de Rome, 231, Rome 1997; Catherine Brice, Fulvio De Giorgi, Maurizio Ridolfi, "Religione civile e identità nazionale nella storia d'Italia: per una discussione", *Memoria e Ricerca*, 13 (2003), pp. 133-153; Brice C., "La religion civile dans l'Italie libérale : petits et grands rituels", in *Rituali civili. Storie nazionali e memorie pubbliche nell'Europa contemporanea*, Maurizio Ridolfi ed., Rome 2006, pp. 97-115.

⁴ Catherine Brice, *Le Vittoriano, Monumentalité publique et politique à Rome*, Rome 1998; Bruno Tobia, *L'altare della patria*, Bologna 1998.

The 1911 celebrations took place in the third political cycle after Unification, marked by the rule of statesman Giovanni Giolitti. Succeeding the government of the Historical Left (*sinistra storica*) which had run the country during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, this period was characterized by the greater commitment of the ruling class to a political pedagogy in which the cultural dimension started to occupy a prominent position. Even if the Vittoriano is the most imposing and visually striking element of the cultural production of this time, I will argue, as a part of what the historiography has also suggested, that the image of ancient Italian art was largely more emphasized. Indeed from this period onwards the construction of the notion of *Italianness*, would not ground itself primarily on military, economic or political values and events, but rather on cultural production. In a still greatly divided country, the common denominator of the highlighted nation was mainly a cultural dimension combining artistic and literary elements with the beauty of landscapes. Purposefully fabricated, the idea of the *Bel paese*⁵ was to become a consolidating element for the recently unified nation. In this process, the figure of poet Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) became a trope for the Italian essence as a whole.

Parading with Dante

Shortly after Unification, in 1865, commemorations were organized in Florence to celebrate the sixth centenary of the birth of Dante (in 1265). All the partakers gathered at the foot of a new monument dedicated to Dante, sculpted by Enrico Pazzi, which was erected in front of Santa Croce church in Florence /Fig. 3/. As it was demonstrated by Bruno Tobia, 1865 Dante reaffirmed the values of Risorgimento, the movement of national unification. Whereas it was coming to an end, after the exaltation of military campaigns, the first doubts were already emerging. Its installation in front of the church of Santa Croce, which had become the pantheon of Italy during the nineteenth century, was particularly symbolic. Dante imposed himself as the great man capable of summarizing all the glories of Italy in the context of national liturgy, but this time right in the middle of the square, center of the national life⁶. A recently published study demonstrates that in spite of historians' ironical judgment of these events, they were extremely successful, gathering 50,000 enthusiastic Italians from all over

⁵ *Bel paese* is a term that refers to Italy, according to a famous verse of Dante ("Del bel paese là dove 'l sì sona", *Inferno*, XXXIII, 80). It was also the name of a book dedicated in 1875 to the natural landscapes which widely circulated in the recently unified Italy and participated to a better knowledge of national geography: Antonio Stoppani, *Il Bel Paese*, Milan 1876.

⁶ Tobia, *Patria*, (n. 3), p. 80-81.

the country to Florence in May 1865⁷. In a similar way, we should reconsider the importance of the commemorations of the sixth centenary of the death of the Florentine poet Dante Alighieri⁸. Held in 1921, those celebrations remain to date a largely unexplored episode.

They had already been decided upon shortly before the beginning of World War I, but by the end of the war their meaning shifted to incorporate the celebration of the victory against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The association between this military dimension and Dante was partly the result of the value the poet's figure had gained during the Risorgimento. During this time, Dante started to be considered as the father of the Italian nation for a series of reasons: his contribution to the development of the Italian language, the opposition to foreign intrusions in Italian national politics of the 14th century and also for having dreamed of national unification more than five-hundred years before its fulfillment. Having fought for Florence and then forced to political exile, Dante was considered as the model of integrity and civic commitment. Besides, the infinite admiration for his poem made him the model of the Italian artistic geniuses. Finally, because of his exile and the multitude of episodes from the *Divine Comedy*, almost the entire Italian territory could be referred to through his figure⁹. For all these reasons, Dante and the *Divine Comedy* (one being similar to the other) were chosen to represent the newly promoted Italianness¹⁰.

At the end of World War I, Dante appeared as one of the main (and few) expedients to build consensus in a country plagued by inflation, strikes and violent political oppositions, mainly between Socialists and Fascists¹¹. In this context, the celebrations were marked by conspicuous military presence and parades, but also by a claimed, even if superficial, concord between the opposed political parties.

A remarkable feature of these celebrations is the fact that the homage to the national Poet was not pursued through the erection of new monuments (as it had been in 1865) but by

⁷ Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, *City and Nation in the Italian Unification, The National Festival of Dante Alighieri*, New York 2011.

⁸ If Mahnaz Yousefzadeh considers that the "1921 Sixth Centenary of Dante's death and the 1965 Seventh Centenary of his birth surfaced as scholarly and literary events, but Italian society as a whole barely concerned itself with the affairs", she gives no evidence of that assumption. Yousefzadeh, *City and Nation* (n. 7), p. 12.

⁹ Not only the unified Italian territory but beyond as Dante was certainly the main reference to support the irredentist movement, as it is proved by the statue of Dante in Verona (Ugo Zannoni, 1865) and in Trento (Cesare Zocchi, 1896). Bruno Tobia, "La statuarìa dantesca nell'Italia liberale: tradizione, identità e culto nazionale", *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée*, 109/1 (1997), pp. 75-87.

¹⁰ On the so-called "concept of Dante" or "dantism" during the 19th century, see Carlo Dionisotti, "Varia fortuna di Dante", in Id., *Geografia e politica della letteratura italiana*, Turin 1967, pp. 255-303; Thies Schulze, *Dante als nationales Symbol Italiens (1793-1915)*, Tübingen 2005; Eugenia Querci (ed.), *Dante vittorioso, Il mito di Dante nell'Ottocento*, Turin 2011.

¹¹ Giovanni Sabbatucci (ed.), *La crisi italiana del primo dopoguerra. La storia e la critica*, Bari 1976.

interventions on old buildings. In spite of the military and political meaning of the celebrations, the organizers decided that the best way to commemorate Dante would be through the restoration of ancient buildings. The works conducted on the occasion of the centenary of Dante's death are representative of a new relation established between architecture and the construction of identity within the Italian national building process at the beginning of the 20th century. This connection eventually resulted in a radical transformation of Italian urban centers that, in a specific form of medievalism, were reshaped to embody the quintessence of a fantasized Middle Ages Commune.

These projects were carried out in several parts of Italy, mainly in the central regions along Dante's path of exile or in places somehow evoked in the *Divine Comedy*. In a more particular way, Florence and Ravenna, respectively the place where Dante grew up and where he died, were the centers of important restorations developed at an urban scale. They were jointly conducted by local committees and the national administration for historical heritage preservation.

Ravenna, the invention of a counter "Altar of the Nation"

Mainly because Dante had died there 600 years before, Ravenna was chosen as the main center for the celebrations¹². Most of the architectural interventions concentrated around the tomb of the poet and San Francesco, the church where his funeral had taken place. This area of the city was renamed the "zona dantesca". The announced goal of the church's restoration was to return the building to the appearance it had during the funeral of the poet¹³. In practice, the realization of this ambitious project implied the complete removal of the late eighteenth century stucco decorations in search of what was proclaimed as a character of "severity, austerity and simplicity¹⁴". A leading protagonist of the centenary in Ravenna, Santi Muratori described these architectural interventions as a painstaking search aimed at "seeking Dante and wanting the church of Dante, waiting for a miracle to happen¹⁵". The term of invention, or reinvention, of the past is here perfectly appropriate¹⁶. This work produced a new architecture,

¹² For a more complete description, see: Thomas Renard, "Restauration et invention : les célébrations du centenaire de la mort de Dante à Ravenne (1921)", *Histoire de l'art*, 68 (2011), pp. 9-18.

¹³ Maria Giulia Benini, *Luoghi danteschi, La Basilica di San Francesco e la Zona Dantesca a Ravenna*, Ravenna 2003.

¹⁴ Cecilio Arpesani C., "Restauro del S. Francesco di Ravenna", *Arte Cristiana*, IX/ 9 (1921), p. 264.

¹⁵ Santi Muratori, "La chiesa dei funerali di Dante. S. Francesco in Ravenna", *Rassegna d'Arte Antica e Moderna*, 9 (1921), p. 298.

¹⁶ Here one obviously thinks about the notion of inventing traditions by Hobsbawm and Ranger according to which elements from the past are recovered to form new traditions that, while pretending to be ancient, carry

a church with a medieval tone that was not connected to any particular state of its history /Fig. 4/. When reading Muratori evoking the expectation of a miracle, one cannot help but compare the way the architectural activities were conducted with the *inventio sanctæ crucis* – the invention of the True Cross – where the term *inventio* stands for the discovery of a relic. Conducted as an archeological excavation, the restoration represented the religious quest for relics of the national poet. But of course the miracle did not occur and the church of Dante was not the reappearance of the fourteenth century one, but a creation of the early twentieth century.

Relying again on the religious metaphor, the tomb of the poet, a small neoclassical mausoleum built by Camillo Morigia in 1780-81, was described by Santi Muratori as an altar able to become the symbol of the nation¹⁷. Following this conception, the burial monument appears as a counterpart to the already mentioned Vittoriano which was in its turn commonly referred to as *Altare della Patria* ("Altar of the Fatherland"). But to the overbearing and grandiloquent rhetoric of the Roman monument, the tomb opposed the silence of meditation and the severity of Dante's face /Fig. 5/.

The church of San Francesco and the poet's tomb were the center of a program of restorations that was to form the so-called "zona dantesca". This was supplemented by other restoration works spread across the city. They were to constitute the different stops along the path of the processions organized during the festivities from September 11th to September 14th 1921 /Fig. 6/. The first day was dedicated to the parades of army and navy representatives to the sound of military fanfares¹⁸. Leaving from the train station at 8 a.m., the procession went along the church of San Giovanni Evangelista, which had also been restored and cleared from posterior buildings so as to emphasize the pittoresque vision one could have walking along the current viale Farini. Arriving on Vittorio Emmanuele square, the participants could admire the restored facade of the Palazzo Veneziano del Comune, the administrative head office of the commune, on top of which a frieze painted by Adolfo de Carolis bears Michelangelesque accents. From there, the procession went to the zona dantesca and ended in front of the tomb. Here the music stopped and the flags were lowered. The religious character of the

contemporary objectives by justifying institutions or cultural practices. Here the tradition is merging with the architectural form. Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983

¹⁷ Alfredo Lensi, Santi Muratori, Corrado Ricci, *Il secentenario della morte di Dante, 1321-1921: celebrazioni e memorie monumentali per cura delle tre città Ravenna-Firenze-Roma*, Milan 1928, p. 129.

¹⁸ Soprintendenza per i Beni Architettonici e Paesaggistici per le province di Ravenna, *Archivio documenti*, RA 4/26, Comando della divisione militare di Ravenna, *Omaggio dell'Esercito alla Tomba di Dante*, Ravenna, September 7th 1921.

commemorations was openly embraced as participants referred to the parade as a pilgrimage to the “sanctuary of Dante”. The military character was also obvious as the army had offered a silver wreath to Dante’s sepulcher, thereby completing the bronze doors, resulting from the melting of an Austrian cannon. The link between the celebration of Dante’s national character, the army omnipresence and the recent end of World War I was obvious to any eye. According to general Sani, in charge of delivering the speech on behalf of the army, the offering of the silver wreath meant to reward Dante’s national awareness and sense of duty¹⁹. If Muratori wanted to see the 1921 celebration as not only Italy but also a humanism of nation’s concord²⁰, the ceremonies highlighted even more the patriotic nationalism.

In the climate of violence and confrontation between the rising fascist party and the socialists, the celebration had been thought of as a moment of concord under the auspices of the Poet. This hope was shattered by the events of September 12th – when the inauguration of the restored buildings saw the intrusion of five thousand fascists gathered at the tomb after a march on foot from all over Romagna /Fig. 7/. This was one of the first and major demonstrations of power of young fascists from central Italy. In Ravenna they committed violent acts, such as the fire of the seven communist circles and the *Federazione cooperativa socialista*²¹. A few months before the March on Rome, this epilogue foreboded the subsequent appropriation of Dante's myth by the Fascist Regime²².

Florence, urban scale, a scenario for performing identity

In Florence as in Ravenna, the commemorations reached an urban scale. The interventions systematically sought to recreate the image of late thirteenth and early fourteenth century stone facades. The association of this architectural character with the figure of Dante was not new. Already in the early twentieth century, a house had been demolished to make room for a small plaza and two facades were reconstructed of the so-called *Casa di Dante*, the house of Dante, in what was in fact a merely hypothetical location²³.

The works conducted in Florence redefined even more strongly the image of the historic center, as the trauma caused by the destruction of the second half of the nineteenth century

¹⁹ Lensi/Muratori/Ricci, *Il secentenario* (n. 17), pp. 106-112.

²⁰ Santi Muratori, “Il secentenario della morte di Dante”, in Id., *Scritti danteschi*, Ravenna 1991, p. 188.

²¹ “Il saluto dei fascisti a Dante”, *Il resto del Carlino*, September 12, 1921.

²² See for example: Domenico Venturini, *Dante Alighieri e Benito Mussolini*, Rome 1927.

²³ Three commissions were necessary (1862, 1868 et 1902) to finish this controversial project successfully. The works were finally completed in 1911 by Giuseppe Castellucci. Archivio Storico del Comune di Firenze, *Comune di Firenze, Lavori e servizi pubblici, Case di Dante*, CF 7368.

was important. For a short time Florence had been capital of Italy in 1860-65. From this period onwards, the local government had sought to transform the city along the lines of the changes that had affected other major European capitals such as Paris or Vienna. After the first extension of the city along Poggi's masterplan in the 1860s, an economic crisis stopped the transformations that eventually took place later in the 1880s. Under the term of *Risanamento* most of the historical buildings around the old market (*mercato vecchio*) and the Ghetto – the popular heart of Florence – were destroyed to make room for bourgeoisie *neocinquecento palazzi*²⁴.

Quite significantly, the building where the so-called “haussmannization” was conducted according to the hygienists' agenda had stopped, the Parte Guelfa Palace in Piazza San Biagio, became the main site of the restorations promoted for the centenary of Dante. On the facade of the palace, in addition to the inevitable coronation crenels, a wide mullioned window was restored and an outside staircase reconstructed upon a drawing found in the Codex Rustici, a fourteenth-century manuscript /Fig. 8/²⁵. Just as in Ravenna, the major part of the works were meant to create an area dedicated to Dante around the casa di Dante. These were completed by others reminding the poet's life and works.

The final result assumed a scenic character which was to serve as the stage for the performance of identity that characterized the centenary celebration. In that sense, it is striking to note that one of the main architects of the restoration, Giuseppe Castellucci, also architect of the aforementioned Casa di Dante, was called in 1921 to design the *mise en scène* of a film depicting the life of Dante, *Dante nella vita e nei tempi suoi* /Fig. 9/²⁶. It does not come as a surprise then that resembling the frames of the film, the highlight of the centenary in September 1921 was huge in costume procession, on this occasion the participants' outfits were borrowed from another film expressly made for the celebration²⁷. Under the eyes of King Vittorio Emanuele III, enthroned in the center of the loggia dei Lanzi in the piazza della Signoria, the procession restaged the triumphal entry of Florence's troops after the victory of Campaldino in 1289. Dante was directly involved in this battle as a soldier in the Florentine's troop /Fig. 10/.

²⁴ Carlo Cresti, *Firenze, capitale mancata : architettura e città dal piano Poggi ad oggi*, Milan 1995, Gabriella Orefice, *Da Ponte Vecchio a S. Croce, Piani di risanamento a Firenze*, Florence 1992.

²⁵ Sara Benzi, Luca Bertuzzi, *Il Palagio di Parte Guelfa a Firenze*, Florence 2006.

²⁶ Biblioteca Classense di Ravenna, Fondo Ricci, *Centenario dantesco*, vol. V, P. 5 et 7. For a discussion about cinematographic adaptation of Dante, see: Gianfranco Casadio (ed.), *Dante nel cinema*, Ravenna 1996.

²⁷ The film was called *La Mirabile visione*, Archivio Storico del Comune di Firenze, *Comune di Firenze, Secentenario Dantesco*, 5064, lettera del Comitato per il Secentenario della morte di Dante al sindaco Garbasso, Florence, May 18, 1920.

The parade organized for the opening of the commemoration in June 1921, had already emphasized this military dimension /Fig. 11/. With the ending of the war the army got largely involved in the commemorations, celebrating Dante as a soldier. During the celebrations of June a commemorative column paid by the army was also erected on the site of the battle of Campaldino. Ultimately Dante's year was concluded by an official ceremony held in the *Salone dei Cinquecento*, celebrating the end of World War I in front of Michelangelo's *Genius of Victory* installed here for the occasion.

Even though nowadays the commemorations are almost completely forgotten, personal accounts such as the journal of art critic Ugo Ojetti, confirm their undisputed popular success²⁸. In the previously recalled context of financial and political crisis, the government and the local powers invested considerable amounts of money and time for these commemorations, an effort that reflected the patriotic and nationalist relevance of these events.

The dozens of restorations conducted on this occasion deeply transformed the aspect of the urban landscape as we can see it today. Most interventions tended to highlight the humanistic character of the city from central Italy, presenting features freely interpreted on the base of late Middle-Ages or early Renaissance examples, and often eliminating later transformations from the 17th and 18th century. Everywhere the tone was similar: removing coating to reveal the stonework in which semi-circular arch and mullioned paired windows as well as putlog holes were regularly and symmetrically inscribed. The aim was to accurately fabricate a coherent and unified image. The choice of these two historical periods as a reference for these restorations – or better recreations – had not originated in the intellectual milieu that promoted Dante's commemorations. Rather it was largely the result of a leading stream of historical research that was conducted during the nineteenth century and had tended to identify in the age of the Commune – the latter interpreted as an Italian specificity – and its pretended “independence” a founding stone for what was to become modern Italy²⁹. To summarize, the architectural references arbitrarily drawn from the Middle-Ages and early-Renaissance paradoxically managed to provide through the Topos of the autarchic Commune and its specific artistic creation a unifying element to be valued by all Italians. If this architecture was

²⁸ Ugo Ojetti, *I taccuini 1914-1943*, Florence 1954, p. 48.

²⁹ There is a wide bibliography concerning the 19th century's myth of the Middle Ages. In the Italian case, the European movement that began during the pre-romantic period mixed with specific values in line with the Risorgimento. See for example: Ilaria Porciani, “Il Medioevo nella costruzione dell'Italia unita: la proposta di un mito”, in *Il Medioevo. Immagini modelli e miti tra due popoli nell'Italia dell'Ottocento: Germania e Italia*, Pierangelo Schiera, Reinhard Elze (ed.), Bologna, Berlin 1988, pp. 163-191.

performative in increasing the sense of belonging and the idea of Italianness, the performance itself of the parade intensified both the message and the participation of the population to this historical recreation.

The fascist promotion of festivals

The 1921 historical corteges constituted the starting point for several festivities later established under Fascism. Often initiated and directed by the same administrative cadres, architectural restorations continued along the same lines. Festivals and parades on the other hand acquired a much more prominent role. As opposed to ephemeral, occasional celebrations, Benito Mussolini's fascist regime preferred annual festivities. During the ventennio, a whole set of festivals were reactivated, the most important being the Calcio Storico of Florence, Arezzo's Giostra del Saracino, Gioco del Ponte in Pisa, the palios of Asti, Fucecchio, Legnano, Ferrara and obviously Siena.

These events were often organized by the local bodies of the National Fascist Party and supported by the National Recreational Club (*Opera Nazionale del Dopolavoro*). It is rather easy to understand these activities as an integral part of a totalitarian agenda trying to control individuals and their bodies in all aspects of life, entertainment included³⁰. But at the same time, those festivities pursued municipalist and touristic objectives. Stefano evidenced a series of objectives carried on by the organizers of those festivities³¹. First they participated to an ideological reconstruction of the past aiming at maintaining social balance. Then they favored the love for the small fatherland and therefore the great fatherland with the subordinate classes. Finally they highlighted religious as much as war virtues. This last dimension, also widely emphasized by Medina Lasansky, coincided with the myth of the Fascist man by accentuating values of strength, courage, youth and masculinity among the participants in the various games

Festivities were often presented as the authentic re-enactment of ancient celebrations dating back to the end of the Middle-Ages or the Renaissance. In fact most of these festivals had some precursors between the 14th and the 16th century, for example it seems that the most

³⁰ Those festivals and their relations with Medieval and Renaissance architecture were best studied in: Medina D. Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle and Tourism in Fascist Italy*, University Park 2004. For an historical point of view on civic liturgies and popular celebrations, see Gentile, *Il culto* (n. 3), Cavazza, *Piccole patrie* (n. 3).

³¹ Cavazza, *Piccole patrie* (n. 3), pp. 211-213.

ancient race in Arezzo was organized in 1535 and Asti claimed an origin as ancient as 1275³². But over the centuries, they dramatically changed as far as scope, nature, periodicity, places and participating parties were concerned. Most of them disappeared during the 19th century as in Arezzo, Asti or Pisa. In most cases their current characteristics, rules and costumes should be considered as 1920s and 1930s creations. Thus in 1930 was held the first calcio in costumes in Firenze, the next year the reintroduction of the Giostra del Saracino di Arezzo, in 1933 the Palio di San Giorgio in Ferrara and in 1935 the Gioco del Ponte in Pisa³³.

The most famous example of these recreations is the Palio, the famous horse race staged twice a year in the Tuscan city of Siena which opposed the 17 *contrade* (districts) of the city. A virtually unique case, the Palio has been staged continually since its establishment in the 14th century but its character, location, participants and function have been greatly altered throughout the years. Furthermore, during the Middle-Ages and Renaissance the Palio was one of many other celebrations taking place in Siena and it was not exclusively held in the city, as other similar celebrations took place in many other towns. The festival was revived under the lead of podestà Bargagli Petrucci, who during a meeting with Benito Mussolini was granted the exclusive right to use the name Palio to designate Siena's festivity³⁴. In 1924 a special commission received the mandate to redefine the rules of the game, the "restored" version of which was eventually inaugurated in 1928. The costumes were redesigned under the direction of four, then renowned, painters who drew inspiration from 15th century Siennese painting. All formal aspects were placed under the control of a specific commission; fascist politicians, historians, architects and professors were between its members. Thus, one may perceive how a certain type of philologic history participated to a reinvention of the past which, through performance, should imposed itself visually into the urban space, by means of costume and ceremonial ornament colors but also by the restored facades of the buildings.

Moreover the festival underwent several changes in order to become more "disciplined". It meant having every recent modification removed to come back to the "historical character of the pure Middle-Ages³⁵" but also eliminating all behaviors that seemed inappropriate according to the picture of the city and its inhabitants they wanted to show visitors. Alcohol

³² Comune di Arezzo, *Considerazioni sulla giostra del saracno e la storie di Arezzo*, Arezzo 1987, p. 11 and Cavazza, *Piccole patrie* (n. 3), pp. 202.

³³ Cavazza, *Piccole patrie* (n. 3), p. 199.

³⁴ Idem.

³⁵ "Per il Palio", *La Nazione*, Cronaca di Siena, June 20-21, 1926.

and cigarettes were forbidden, along with the habit of hissing the opposing contrade and more generally any behavior straying away from the “gentilezza medieval” of Siena.

Besides the redesign of the performative elements of the Palio, the urban space where it took place was also largely redesigned, in accordance to previous experiments such as the ones we have described on the occasion of Dante’s death centenary in 1921. Actually on this occasion, the city of Siena also developed an ambitious program of commemoration, including in particular a study by Gino Chierici, aiming at the restorations of houses from Dante’s time, and the cloister of the old church of San Cristoforo in Piazza Tolomei, which bore the memory of confrontations between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines³⁶. These works, funded by the city and the Public Instruction ministry were a prelude to a vast campaign during the fascist period. Just as behaviors had been disciplined, they endeavored to clean the city. Architect Gino Chierici was entrusted the thorough restoration of the Piazza del Campo, widely altered to match the perfected medieval image, such as the entire Palio ceremony.

We can observe the same link between recreation of a presumed medieval festival and restoration of a non-less supposed medieval state of buildings in San Gimignano /Fig. 12/³⁷. A vast program to restore the city had been initiated in 1855 by the restoration of the Palazzo Comunale on which Giuseppe Partini added crenels as often in his works. There again Dante had an important role to justify the works that culminated in 1921 under the supervision of Gino Chierici³⁸. The works continued during the fascist period led by art historian Peleo Bacci while the city carnival was being revived on the model of Siena and was subjected to a similar medievalization strategy³⁹.

The Palio is just one of several Renaissance festivals reintroduced and reshaped during the late 1920s and early 1930s by local leaders of the National Fascist Party. As another example, on May 4th 1930, the game of *Calcio* was reintroduced in Florence on the occasion of the four hundredth anniversary of Emperor Charles V’s siege of the city⁴⁰. The game is a peculiar and violent amalgam of rugby and soccer. The recreation of the game in 1930 was marked by a huge parade of more than 700 men dressed in colorful medieval costumes. The urban itinerary

³⁶ “Siena. I festeggiamenti danteschi”, *Arte e Storia*, April-June 1921, pp. 77-78; *Bollettino d’arte*, 2/1/10, March 1922, p. 480.

³⁷ Maria Luisa Masetti, “Fedelmente infedele: San Gimignano”, *Quaderni medievali*, 21 1985, pp. 161-186.

³⁸ “S. Gimignano. Restauri per il Secentenario dantesco”, *Arte e Storia*, April-June 1921, p. 77.

³⁹ “Da S. Gimignano. Il carnevale mascherato”, *La Nazione, Cronaca di Siena*, March 2nd, 1927. Leonardo Antognoni, *Dal carnevale alla festa dell’uva: l’organizzazione delle feste popolari a San Gimignano nel ventennio fascista*, Poggibonsi 2010.

⁴⁰ Lasansky, *The Renaissance* (n. 30), pp. 63-68.

stretched along the best preserved medieval and Renaissance streets, passing behind the most famous building and ending in Piazza della Signoria. The game took place in Piazza Santa Croce, the same site where in 1865 was erected the statue of Dante.

The architect in charge of the “aesthetic organisation” of the celebration, Alfredo Lensi already directed the celebration of 1921 on behalf of the *Ufficio Belle Arti e Antichità* of the city of Firenze⁴¹. For the Calcio Storico, he designed all the costumes drawing inspiration from Renaissance Old Masters such as Titian, Vasari, Pinturicchio, Signorelli etc. Journalist Alessandro Pavolini’s strenuous efforts in the organization of the Calcio were rewarded with a successful career within the regime’s ranks culminating at his appointment as Minister of Popular Culture.

Arezzo offers maybe the most obvious example of the relationship between festival recreation and architectural restoration⁴². The architect Giuseppe Castellucci was once again in the limelight with the almost complete restoration of the Piazza Grande in Arezzo, also the stage for the re-invented popular festival of the Joust of Saracen, *Giostra del Saraceno* /Fig. 13/. A joust in which men on horseback charged a wooden figure made in the image of a Saracen. The restorations were completed in 1934, three years after the reintroduction of the festivity in 1931. The main targets of Castellucci’s project were all the square’s perimeter facades, three carefully restored medieval towers that were lifted and crowned with Ghibelline battlements. In this case the spectacle was clearly enhanced by the architecture and vice versa.

Even if fascism’s reappropriations of the imperial roman past are much more known and discussed⁴³, the medieval Commune was clearly used by the party, at least in central Italy, as an historical identity marker. This is further proved by the casa del fascio (house of fascism) built in Arezzo by the same Castellucci in the same years in a *neo-trecento* style.

What seems fundamental in the restorations, without overemphasizing their arbitrary nature, is the key role they played in the definition and display of the visual identity of Italian historic cities. It would be misleading to consider these architectures only as the backdrop for a

⁴¹ Alfredo Lensi, *Quaderni di ricordi*, Florence 1985; Alfredo Lensi, *Il gioco del calcio fiorentino*, Florence 1931; Marina Gennari, “La nascita dell’Ufficio Belle Arti e Antichità del Comune di Firenze”, in *Cento anni di restauro a Firenze*, Florence 2007, pp. 15-29.

⁴² The case is well studied in the already mentioned study of Medina Lasansky. Lasansky, *The Renaissance* (n. 30), chapter 3.

⁴³ For classical example : Henry Millon, “The Role of the History of Architecture in Fascist Italy,” *Journal Society of Architectural Historian*, 24 (1965), pp. 53–59 or William MacDonald, “Excavation, Restoration, and Italian Architecture of the 1930s,” in *In Search of Modern Architecture*, Helen Searing ed., New York, 1982, pp. 298-320.

performative identity. The visual aspects of these urban landscapes would not only contribute as a set to the composition of the city and its inhabitants' identity, but truly give it form and meaning. They reinforced civic identity drawing on local history and local sites. At the same time, by means of an entertaining event, they fostered the sense of belonging Italians felt towards their historical heritage. Restorations and rituals appear as parts of the same process consisting of a visual and symbolical inscription of historical identity within the shape of the built environment. As Medina Lasansky writes, "the festival successfully masked politics as historical traditions⁴⁴". This certainly reminds us of the concept of invention of tradition developed by Hobsbawm and Ranger⁴⁵. Even if in the Italian case, we must insist on the fact that in spite of serving contemporary purposes, those described are reinventions based on real historical events.

I have tried to stress the continuity between the liberal period and the fascist regime in terms of architectural forms and privileged historical and literary references. If we were to highlight the differences, one would be the Regime's focus not only on the cultural and artistic aspects of *Italianness* but also on the physical dimension of the celebrations, an aspect the Regime particularly concentrated on. Minister of press and propaganda under Mussolini, Lando Ferretti noted that such games were the demonstration of "youthful strength", and "the spiritual rebirth of a new era in which such initiatives have brought hidden treasures, traditions, and histories back to life⁴⁶." This was a time when the physical condition of the Youth represented a great preoccupation for the government: free time was regulated by the after work organizations and sports like soccer largely promoted. Festivals participated in the promotion of ideal values such as bravery, virility, sportiness as well as violence, a complex constellation of elements used as the very building blocks of the new fascist man. An act of political and socio-cultural engineering that sought legitimacy under the rags of history.

⁴⁴ Lasansky, *The Renaissance* (n. 30), p. 73.

⁴⁵ Hobsbawm Ranger, *The Invention*, (n. 16).

⁴⁶ Lando Ferretti, preface to Virgilio Salvestrini, *Il Gioco del Ponte di Pisa*, Pisa 1932, p. XX, quoted in Lasansky, *The Renaissance* (n. 30), p. 65.