

**Harald Bodenschatz, ed.**

*Städtebau für Mussolini: Auf der Suche nach der neuen Stadt im faschistischen Italien* (Berlin: DOM publishers, 2011).

On the occasion of the appointment of Filippo Cremonesi as first *Governatore* of Rome on December 31 1925 Mussolini declared the basic principles behind the future urban development of the eternal city: 'As in the times of Augustus's first empire', the *Duce* proclaimed, the *urbs* was again to be 'wonderful', a lodestar for 'the peoples of the whole world', 'great, orderly, and powerful.' To this end 'everything that cast a shadow upon it' was to be 'cleared from the trunk of the great oak tree.'<sup>1</sup> This metaphor captures the concepts underlying the urban development of Fascist Italy and the colonies of *Oltremare* quite precisely. Fascist urban planning had a chronopolitical dimension that can be grasped as a process of 'excavating modernity' as Joshua Arthurs has recently shown:<sup>2</sup> the Fascist present and the anticipated even more heroic future were to be linked with Italy's glorious past. Additionally, all those pasts that appeared shameful and unworthy through the Fascists' antihistoricist and antipassatist lens, were to be obliterated. It comes as no surprise that the Fascist ideal or myth of *romanità* pervaded all the construction projects in the Italian capital as well as in the rest of the peninsula and the *impero*.

As Harald Bodenschatz, the editor of this splendidly illustrated volume and former professor for the sociology of architecture and urban planning at the Technische Universität Berlin, and his team of authors show, Mussolini's 'New Rome' was the product of an 'archaeological urban development.' Its most important tool was the *piccone*, the pickaxe, which served to 'unbury and liberate the most august monuments of antiquity' as Mussolini stated on April 9 1927 before the *Società romana di storia patria*, from the 'parasitical encrustations which were accumulated in centuries of neglect.'<sup>3</sup> While presenting the master plan for Rome in the Senate on March 18 1932 the dictator also made clear what he thought of the scenic Rome which the tourists of the grand tour so admired: 'His Majesty the Pickaxe is entrusted with all the picturesque filth, the latter is destined to crumble and it has to crumble in the name of decency,

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- 1 Benito Mussolini, 'La nuova Roma,' in *Opera omnia*, Ibid., vol. 22 (Florence: La Fenice, 1957), 47–48. Mussolini's address is reproduced in the appendix of *Städtebau für Mussolini* along with further speeches and documents.
  - 2 Joshua Arthurs, *Excavating Modernity: The Roman Past in Fascist Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).
  - 3 Benito Mussolini, 'Nemi ed Ercolano,' in *Opera omnia*, Ibid., vol. 22 (Florence: La Fenice, 1957), 341. Cf. Emilio Gentile, *Fascismo di pietra* (Rome, Bari: Laterza, 2007), 71.

of hygiene, and, if you will, also in the name of the beauty of the capital.<sup>4</sup> The Italy of the hoteliers, which the Futurists had so despised, had to be eradicated to make space for a militant race of New Romans. The chronopolitical dimension of Fascist urban planning, that served not least to legitimate the regime, is therefore closely linked with its social dimension: the spatial reordering of Italian cities served to bring forth a new social order. It was an essential element of the Fascist programme of *bonifica* or reclamation and thus an instrument of the modernist gardening state.<sup>5</sup>

As Rome and the new urban districts that the Fascists erected at the city's gates stood at the centre of Fascist urban planning policy, roughly half of this opulent book is dedicated to it. Yet the authors, none of whom are historians but rather themselves urban planners and architects, also look into the new towns that were erected in the erstwhile malaria infested Pontine marshes and elsewhere in the course of the regime's autarchy policy, as well as into the renovation of Italy's numerous other historic centres and into the implementation of racist policies of segregation in the urban layout of the new empire's colonial cities. Whereas the authors have certainly reached their aim of providing a systematic survey of urban planning in Mussolini's Italy, they have not achieved their objective of doing this against the backdrop of the other European dictatorships or of the few remaining democratic regimes of the interwar period. This would have required concrete comparisons with Le Corbusier's megalomaniac plans for Paris, Speer's visions for Berlin or the realisations of the socialist city in Stalinist Moscow.<sup>6</sup> Yet this is a minor flaw as Bodenschatz, Daniela Spiegel, Uwe Altröck, Lorenz Kirchner and Ursula von Petz have assembled a wide-ranging compendium on the history of Fascist urban design that lays down further groundwork for a historiographical analysis in terms of Karl Schölögel's 'reading of time in space' and will have to be consulted alongside other decisive publications of recent years.<sup>7</sup>

4 Benito Mussolini, 'La Roma di Mussolini,' in *Opera omnia*, Ibid., vol. 25 (Florence: La Fenice, 1958), 86.

5 Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004). For the gardening state: Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

6 For the latter, we can consult Harald Bodenschatz and Christiane Post, ed., *Städtebau im Schatten Stalins: Die internationale Suche nach der sozialistischen Stadt in der Sowjetunion 1929–1935* (Berlin: Braun, 2003).

7 In addition to the before mentioned studies: Aristotle Kallis, 'The "Third Rome" of Fascism: Demolitions and the Search for a New Urban Syntax,' *The Journal of Modern History* 84 (2012): 40–79; Aram Mattioli and Gerald Steinacher, ed., *Für den Faschismus bauen: Architektur und Städtebau im Italien Mussolinis* (Zurich: Orell Füssli Verlag, 2009); Antonio

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Pennacchi, *Fascio e Martello: Viaggio per le città del Duce* (Rome, Bari: Laterza, 2008). See also: Karl Schlögel, *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit: Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2003).