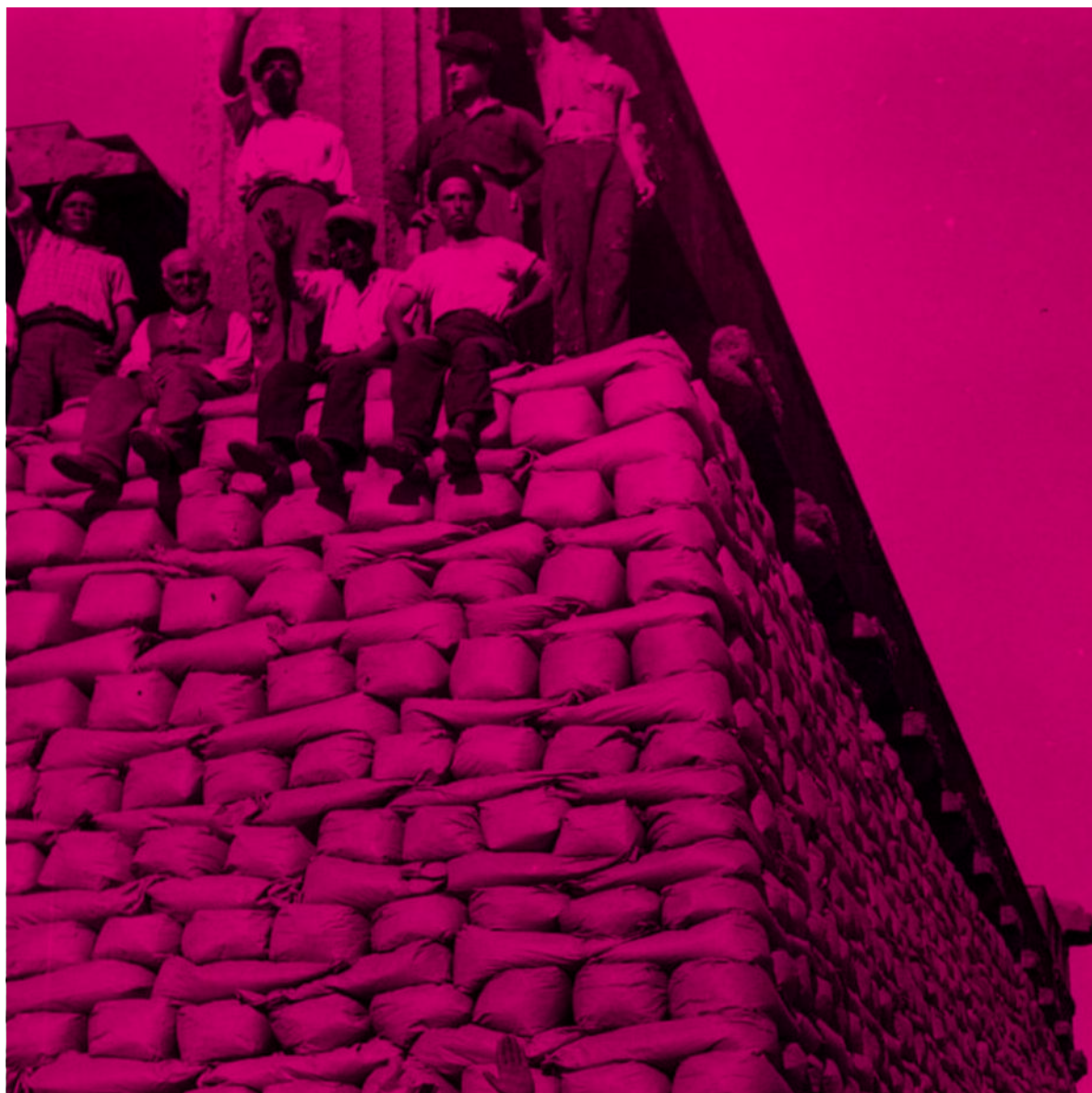




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Histories of Postwar Architecture

n.13 2023
vol. VI

Architecture: War and Peace

edited by

Paulo Pereira

Raffaella Maddaluno

Michel Toussaint Alves Pereira
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Architecture: War and Peace

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Sta Come Torre. The National Monument to the Italian Sailor and the Construction of the Ritual of Memory During the Fascist Era

Fascist Architecture, Brindisi, Italian Sailor Monument, Propaganda, Architecture and Politics

/Abstract

The National Monument to the Italian Sailor in Brindisi is a majestic monument that stands on the Adriatic coast in memory of the Italian sailors who gave their lives to the service of the homeland. This monument is a tangible symbol of gratitude and recognition for the brave sailors who defended Italy and its waters. It is also a “necessary architecture” like all the architectural and monumental complexes designed and built by the fascist regime to receive and commemorate the remains of soldiers who died in war, with particular emphasis on those who fell in the First World War. Such monuments were meant to celebrate them with mass ceremonies to exalt heroism, sacrifice, death in battle, and the sacred nature of victory over the enemy through an elaborate symbolic and iconographic system and the use of spaces – architectural as well as natural and “historic” landscapes.

The decision to build a national monument in Brindisi in honor of the approximately 6,000 sailors who died during the 1915–18 war was prompted by the city’s prominent role in the war, which had earned it the War Cross.

A national competition was announced for the monument, open to architects and sculptors, and 92 projects were submitted, later presented in a special exhibition held in Rome.

The winning project was the design of an enormous rudder monument with a chapel-shrine presented by architect Luigi Brunati and sculptor Amerigo Bartoli, for an estimated cost of 1,200,00 lire.

Construction took only one year, from October 28, 1932, to October 1933 and it was inaugurated on November 4, 1933, in the presence of King Vittorio Emanuele II.

Beyond the monument itself, the construction of the ritual of memory associated with it had a profound significance for the local community and the country as a whole.

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“Why Brindisi Should Return to Its Former Glory”

1

All architectural works promoted by fascism and personally inaugurated by the Duce assume a particular significance transcending the artistic realm to take on political and strategic connotations to the extent that they serve Mussolini's intent to be effective tools for propaganda and mythology building around his personality.¹ [Fig. 1]

It is as if his presence had a miraculous ability to transform the event and, consequently, the architecture into a building block of the identity of the new fascist state. According to this political design, architecture built at the behest of the regime is meant to be part of this identity construction. Their lasting durability is entrusted with the fate of the future memory of fascism and the opportunity to “increasingly assert the regime, multiply its ‘achievements,’ and maximize the fascistization of Italians.”²

As Paolo Nicoloso has thoroughly demonstrated,³ “In Italy, during those years, there was a far-reaching political project, which leveraged architecture to manipulate the consciousness of individuals and control the identity code of the populace.”⁴ In this sense, “endurance also means constructing architectures that last for decades – an aspect clearly pursued – to leave behind signs of fascism for posterity. This architecture was preferably clad in marble.”⁵

The inauguration practice took on a pivotal role in consensus-building and propaganda strategies for the political use of these projects. For the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome, Mussolini intensified this practice by going on a tour to all the regions of Italy: “In these pilgrimages, which took on the form of a ritual – the celebration of his arrival, the large gathering of crowds, the ‘historic’ speech, the promise of return – one feature is salient: its progression through visits marked by architectural objects.”⁶

This was done in the belief that architectural commissions and constructions completed in the regime's ten years of rule would demonstrate its



Fig. 1
Mussolini on a boat in the port of Brindisi, 8 September 1934, Archivio Luce, A00056551.

1 See: Philip Cannistaro, *La fabbrica del consenso. Fascismo e mass media* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1975); Renzo De Felice and Luigi Goglia, *Mussolini. Il Mito* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1983).

2 Renzo De Felice, ed., “L'organizzazione dello stato fascista. 1925-1929”, in *Mussolini il fascista* (Torino: Einaudi, 1968), 362.

3 See: Paolo Nicoloso, *Gli architetti di Mussolini* (Milano: F. Angeli, 1999); Paolo Nicoloso, *Mussolini architetto. Propaganda e paesaggio urbano nell'Italia fascista* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 2008); Paolo Nicoloso, *Architetture per un'identità italiana. Progetti e opere per fare gli italiani fascisti* (Udine: Gaspari, 2012).

4 Nicoloso, *Mussolini architetto*, XVI.

5 Nicoloso, *Mussolini architetto*, 6.

6 Nicoloso, *Mussolini architetto*, 4.

industriousness and desire for the social and political integration of the masses, and, most importantly, prove it had kept the promise of modernizing the country, which had been a spark of the fascist revolution. In November 1932, at the start of his tour, going through the city of Brescia with Marcello Piacentini, the architect of Victory Square, Mussolini said specifically, standing next to the square's magnificent buildings, "Words are unnecessary; actions speak for themselves."⁷

In the regime's rhetoric, each architecture inaugurated and delivered to the people was a building block of the modern Italian fascist nation. Most importantly, it became a significant opportunity for communication and building mass consensus both for the political project of fascism and its leader who, as he delivers the architecture to the city, "going to the people," transfigures him into the sole creator of the new nation, represented as one "bustling construction site."

At the end of the summer of 1934, Mussolini's tour, which began on the anniversary of the March on Rome, reached Puglia. After intensive years of visits and inaugurations, by this point, the ceremony has become well-established, having already systematically marked the Duce's presence in all the regions of Italy, both major cities and small towns.⁸

At eight in the morning on September 6th, he arrived at the port of Bari on the Aurora motorship.⁹

Shortly thereafter, Mussolini, the Head of Government, stood on the city's waterfront on a stage set up for the occasion by the local architect Marino Lopopolo.¹⁰

The site chosen is the most defining location of the "great Bari" envisioned by Mussolini:¹¹ a city dramatically revitalized, commandingly facing the Eastern Mediterranean, becoming the emblem of the "new Puglia" landscape that fascism "has – in just over two decades – profoundly transformed. It has put forward Bari with all its energies and resources, the two-thousand-year-old strength of its grand historical and economic traditions, and the powerful cultural and economic infrastructure with which it has since been endowed and its indomitable will, which the fascist regime has extended to Italy, for its new peaceful mission of civilization in the world."¹²

7 Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel, *Benito Mussolini, Opera omnia* (Firenze: La Fenice, 1951-81), 156.

8 See: Victoria De Grazia, "Andare al popolo", in *Dizionario del Fascismo*, ed. Victoria De Grazia and Sergio Luzzato (Torino: G. Einaudi, 2002-2003).

9 "Il viaggio del duce in Puglia", *Il Popolo d'Italia*, September 8, 1934; See also: Silvio Petrucci, *In Puglia con Mussolini: cronache e note di un inviato speciale con il testo integrale dei discorsi editi e inediti pronunciati dal duce nelle giornate pugliesi del settembre XII* (Roma: Società Editrice Novissima, 1935).

10 Antonio Labalestra, "Spazi e riti per le pratiche del consumo nella Bari moderna. Le architetture per il commercio di Marino Lopopolo", *Beyond the gaze. Interpreting and understanding the city*, (September 2023): 435-436.

11 Fabio Mangone, "La costruzione della «grande Bari» negli anni del fascismo, tra ricerca d'identità e omologazione", in *L'architettura nelle città italiane del XX secolo. Dagli anni Venti agli anni Ottanta*, ed. Vittorio Franchetti Pardo (Milano: Jaca Book, 2003), 316-25.

12 See: Araldo Di Crollalanza, "Panorama della Puglia nuova", *Il Popolo d'Italia*, September 5, 1934.

The tour first visited the most important architecture built in the city – from the Victory Stadium¹³ to the administrative buildings along the new Levante waterfront,¹⁴ to the Levant Fair – and then continued to other major cities in the region.¹⁵

The next day he went to Lecce and then Taranto,¹⁶ where he gave a speech at the foot of the new government building by Armando Brasini “which sought to emulate the magnificence” of ancient Roman architecture.¹⁷ The following day, the presidential train, carrying the Duce, accompanied by Achille Starace, Araldo di Crollalanza, and Galeazzo Ciano, left Taranto to reach Brindisi. The ceremony continued in its solemnity with a brief review of the troops lined up from the Navy, Army, and Militia, greeting local authorities. He then boarded a car leading the procession, which was swiftly escorted to the government house, with cheering crowds on the sidelines, for his usual speech. After finishing it, the Duce crossed the crowded square, followed by more enthusiastic cheering, to board a motorboat to take him directly in front of the monument that Brindisi had built for its fallen.”¹⁸

The small boat first crossed the area's entire military area; it went by the sea-plane base, the marine colony, and the Fiume Grande reclamation area and then into the Levante inlet, before reaching the Swabian Castle that overlooks the historic center and ancient Roman port. After a brief stop, the procession set off again to visit the Balilla Naval Academy, where the Duce asked to see the building plans for the new headquarters of the Naval College commissioned by the Italian Youth of the Lictor. The outline of a new building, designed by the Roman architect Gaetano Minnucci, had already been traced in chalk not far away.¹⁹ At this point, at the front of a line of workers waiting to start construction, Mussolini took up a pickaxe and dramatically delivered the first vigorous blows to dig the ditches to place the foundations of the new building. He then reboarded the motorboat:

[...] The boat skirted along the old fishing houses and then left the docks of Corso, densely packed with cheering crowds, and the docks at the Monument to the Sailor. Here too, there was a large crowd of fascist representatives and local people. The demonstration was impressive and led

13 Antonio Labalestra, “L’Arena della Vittoria: un «nuovo tempio della giovinezza e della forza» per la città di Bari”, *Bollettino del Centro di Studi per la Storia dell’Architettura*, no. 4 (2020): 72-74.

14 Gian Paolo Consoli, “La formazione dei lungomare in Puglia durante il fascismo”, in *La Puglia ha ancora qualcosa da dire. Alcune considerazioni sull’architettura ed il paesaggio*, ed. Gian Paolo Consoli and Antonio Labalestra (Massafra: Antonio Dellisanti Editore, 2017), 13-23; Antonio Labalestra, “Si redime la terra, si fondano le città. Il palazzo delle Opere Pubbliche per il lungomare di Bari: tra estetica del potere ed esigenze identitarie”, *Bollettino del Centro di Studi per la Storia dell’Architettura*, no. 7 (2023): 35-48.

15 Ennio Corvaglia and Mauro Scionti, *Il piano introvabile. Architettura e urbanistica nella Puglia fascista* (Bari: Dedalo, 1985).

16 “Il Duce entusiasticamente accolto a Lecce ed a Taranto”, *Il Popolo d’Italia*, September 8, 1934.

17 Antonio Labalestra, *Il Palazzo del Governo di Taranto: la politica, i progetti e il ruolo di Armando Brasini* (Roma: Quasar, 2018).

18 “Il viaggio del duce in Puglia trionfalmente concluso a Brindisi ed a Foggia”.

19 Sandro Benedetti and Vittoria Zacheo, Gaetano Minnucci. *Progetti 1896-1980. Vita, concorsi, progetti, opere di un protagonista del razionalismo* (Roma: Gangemi Editore, 1984).

the Duce into the evocative shadows of the shrine, which, in the alcoves of the side arches, holds marbles engraved with the names of the fallen of the Navy from 1866 to the present day: from the long-ago Battle of Lissa to recent glory. The Duce paused in contemplation before each arch and the wooden statue depicting the "Stella Maris." The Head of Government then went up in a lift, used for the first time today, to the top of the rudder rising above the shrine. Here, on the terrace, where the vast port unfurls in a panoramic view, the silhouette of its three extensions resembling an enormous stag's head, the federal secretary presented the Duce with a silver reproduction of the harbor model.²⁰

With this symbolic act, possession was taken of the last work personally overseen by Mussolini, and he solemnly and symbolically delivered it to the cheering crowd and to history. In the very place where Caesar had prevailed over Pompey's troops and which, after the unification of Italy, had become among the most important military and civilian ports of the nation, the ritual of commemorating the memory of the martyrs of the First World War became the ideal scenario and pretext to celebrate the fascist era.

...a new heritage to be placed alongside the ancient one"

The events leading to the construction of the Monument to the Italian Sailor extend many years before its inauguration. They are intertwined with the fate of the city itself and the role given it by fascism, culminating in 1927, when the new province was established in the abolished district of Brindisi, included until then within the administrative boundaries of the province of Lecce.²¹

The consequences of the city's elevation to the provincial capital did not lead to an instant transformation of the urban fabric. With few exceptions, old buildings and convents were adapted for the new public buildings needed for the new administrative role. It would take almost ten years for the demolition to get underway and the provisions of the "City Zoning and Thinning Plan," approved in 1934, to be implemented.²²

This situation is described in the study by Carlo Aymonino and Sergio Lenci, according to which "the plan was slow to materialize due to the city's slow economic development. The initial public projects were completely exceptional, more closely linked to Brindisi's military function than to the modern transformation of its structures".²³

20 "Il viaggio del duce in Puglia trionfalmente concluso a Brindisi ed a Foggia".

21 The Province of Brindisi was established by Royal Decree-Law no. 1 on January 2, 1927, "Riordinamento delle circoscrizioni provinciali", published on the Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno of January 11th. See: Giuseppe Teodoro Andriani, *Da Capoluogo di provincia a Capitale del Regno del Sud* (Brindisi: Grafica Aprile, 2000).

22 Alberto Alpago Novello, "La prima mostra dei Piani Regolatori", *Rassegna di Architettura*, no. 7-8 (year IX, 1937): 285-298.

23 Carlo Aymonino and Sergio Lenci, "Inchieste edilizie sulle città: Brindisi", *Casabella Continuità*, no. 222 (November-December 1958): 21-28.

Notable among these were the Naval College by Minnucci and the National Monument to the Italian Sailor, which according to the two authors, was “one of the least intrusive monuments, fitting in well with the greenery of the northern coast of the western inlet”.²⁴

In addition, starting with the reasons that the Head of Government gave to the representatives of Brindisi visiting the Viminale on January 15, 1927, many references have been made to the role the monument was intended to play in terms of the growth and modernization of the city and its port:

I chose the Province of Brindisi, and I chose it for various reasons: because of the city's merit during the World War, for which I decided that the Monument to the Italian Sailor should be erected in Brindisi; because its port is known to all the world's sailors, considered the safest of all seas and oceans; because Brindisi is destined to the great mission for our expansion; and finally, because Brindisi, powerful at the time of the Roman Empire, must return to its ancient splendor. It is not without significance that the city is today reclaiming its rightful place in the history of Italy, which, according to the will of the Supreme Divine Providence, may have momentary eclipses but can never plunge into the darkness of night.²⁵

The first major project dates to June 20, 1925, when Mussolini himself – in response to requests from the people and administrators of the city – agreed that the National Monument to the Italian Sailor should be erected in this port.²⁶ After the decision was made to erect a monument in honor of the fallen sailors of the First World War, at an earlier point, he had chosen Brindisi in Puglia over Trieste and La Spezia,²⁷ evincing its strategic importance in the Mediterranean chessboard and its decisive role in the outcome of the First World War:²⁸

To the glorious City of Brindisi, whose generous population, despite the repeated assaults from sea and sky, the numerous victims of enemy ferocity, and the unspeakable privations caused by the suspension of all traffic, never bent its spirit, I confer the War Merit Cross. I present for the admiration of Italians the city decorated in the long and bitter war, and because, with its proud character, it effectively contributed to the achievement of the Final Victory.²⁹

24 Aymonino and Lenci, “Inchieste edilizie sulle città: Brindisi”, 24.

25 From the transcript of the meeting reported, among others, see: Vittorio Amedeo Caravaglios, *Il porto di Brindisi: illustrazione storica, geografica, tecnica, economica, corporativa, statistica e tariffaria* (Napoli: Guida portuale del Mediterraneo, 1942), 91.

26 See: Minutes of the Municipal Council of Brindisi dated November 23, 1923 “to vote to His Excellency the Minister of the Navy, Count Thaon de Revel, so that the national monument to the Italian sailor may be erected in Brindisi, the city that has unbowedly bent the enemy's pride during the long and harsh war”; the private letter from the Mayor of Brindisi sent to Achille Starace, requesting to submit this resolution to the Head of Government. Dated March 29, 1924. Both in the folder AS BR cat. 9, cl. 22, b. 3 fasc. 57; furthermore, see the articles: “L'erezione a Brindisi del Monumento al Marinaio d'Italia”, *Giornale di Brindisi*, January 15, 1925; “Brindisi avrà il Monumento al Marinaio”, *Indipendente - Settimanale di Brindisi*, June 24, 1925.

27 See: ACS, PCM, *Written note to H.E. the President of the Council of Ministers*, Rome, June 10, 1925.

28 To reconstruct the role of Brindisi during the First World War, comparing: Angelo Titi, *Alla eroica marina d'Italia* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1924); Saverio La Sorsa, *La Puglia e la guerra mondiale* (Bari-Roma: F. Casini, 1928); Caravaglios, *Il porto di Brindisi*.

29 From the motivation for the award of the War Cross, also reported in: Titi, *Alla eroica marina d'Italia*, 253.

A few days after Mussolini's approval, Vittorio Emanuele III also granted his high patronage to the honorary committee for the monument.³⁰

The process leading to the building of the majestic work began with a resolution of the city council in November 1924 when the city assembly unanimously resolved to adopt the proposal, contributing the sum of 50,000 lire to the expenses.

The civic committee was formed at that point to work to raise the funds needed to build it, adopting diverse strategies: requesting donations, selling commemorative stamps, public initiatives, and concerts by the renowned tenor from Lecce, Tito Schipa.³¹

Despite the committee's efforts, the financial issue was only solved by the contribution of Achille Starace; the vice-secretary of the National Fascist Party, a long-time supporter of the project, formerly appointed extraordinary commissioner of the Italian Naval League. He took on the responsibility of supplementing the amount collected by the Civic Committee since 1925, with 1,200,000 lire.³²

In 1930, Starace, one of the most active proponents of creating the new province of Brindisi, proposed that the architect Armando Brasini of the Academy of Architects be commissioned with the work. At that time, Brasini was completing the grand work of the Government House in Taranto³³ and the House of the Chief Magistrate in Foggia.³⁴



2

Brasini's plan was fascinating;³⁵ his drawings seemed to evoke the legacy of an ancient civilization in conjuring up a magnificent waterfall flowing from an artificial mountain, created for the occasion, to pour into the waters of the port

30 ACS, PCM, *Letter from the Undersecretary to the Presidency of the Council, Giunta, to the Minister of the Royal Household*, Rome, June 20, 1925.

31 See the folders for the sale of "stamps pro Monumento" ACS, PCM aa. 1931-33, 14.4, n. 4047/3 the folder dedicated to the press review of the pro-monument concert of Tito Schipa at the Teatro Verdi in Brindisi, AS BR, ASCB, cat. 9, cl. 22, b. 3 fasc. 57.

32 ACS, PCM, *Letter from Serafino Giannelli to Achille Starace*, Rome, June 29, 1928.

33 Labalestra, *Il palazzo del Governo di Taranto. La politica, i progetti e il ruolo di Armando Brasini*.

34 Mario Pisani, *Il Palazzo del Podestà di Armando Brasini a Foggia* (Melfi: Libria, 1997).

35 "Il monumento al Marinaio d'Italia. Presentazione e commento del progetto di monumento redatto dall'architetto Armando Brasini", *Indipendente*, no. 22 (1930): 1; Michele Biancale, "Il Monumento al Marinaio", May 27, 1930; "Il monumento al Marinaio d'Italia nel progetto di Armando Brasini", *La Tribuna*, May 23, 1930; "Il monumento al Marinaio d'Italia che Brasini erigerà a Brindisi", *Il Giornale d'Italia*, May 30, 1930; "Il monumento al Marinaio d'Italia del progetto di Armando Brasini", *Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, May 24, 1930; "Il monumento al Marinaio sull'Adriatico. Il grandioso progetto dell'arch. Barsini", *Popolo d'Italia*, May 24, 1930.

Fig. 2
A. Brasini, Monument to the Sailor of Italy in Brindisi, 1930, pencil and charcoal on glossy paper, Archivio Accademico San Luca, FAB23.01.

of Brindisi. [Fig. 2] The project, a version of which is at the Accademia di San Luca in Rome,³⁶ takes up the theme that Brasini had explored in 1918 when preparing the designs for the Monument to Victory in the First World War at Monte Pizzocco.³⁷ However, Brasini and his architecture no longer exerted the appeal that had made him, in the eyes of the Duce, “the architect of Imperial Italy.”³⁸

Brasini’s plan, despite its interesting expressive symbolic effect, was not favorably received by the municipal administration and the promoting committee. It met with the same fate as the plan offered, without charge, by Saverio Dioguardi, an architect from Bari; both plans would have required too great an expenditure³⁹, not compatible with the financial capacity of the commissioning committee.

The importance of the theme and expectations for a work of such significance, nonetheless, required a remarkable design and a style befitting the celebration of the values of the Italian maritime tradition and its decisive role in the Great War. In the context of these needs, the decision took shape to make use of a competition.⁴⁰ The competition was published primarily in the *Architettura* magazine, edited by Marcello Piacentini, to give it wide publicity. The magazine published first the announcement, then the results of the competition, and, in 1934, an extensive article about the completed monument.⁴¹ [Fig. 3]

The competition announcement, open to Italian architects and sculptors, gave clear instructions about how to present the proposal, emphasizing that criteria of sobriety, solemnity, and austerity should guide the submissions.⁴²



3

36 Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, Fondo Armando Brasini, Monument to the Italian Sailor in Brindisi, pencil and charcoal on glossy paper, dimensions 83 x 69,5 cm, signed lower right: A. Brasini / to the Italian sailor A. VIII, inventory FAB23.01. See also: ACS Fondo Armano Brasini, series 6, file 13.

37 Regarding this project, compare the documents: Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, Fondo Armando Brasini, Progetto per il Monumento alla Vittoria della I Guerra Mondiale a Monte Pizzocco, Vittorio Veneto, inventory FAB04.01 and FAB04.02.

38 From the handwritten dedication at the bottom of a photo of Benito Mussolini: “To Armando Brasini, Architect of Imperial Italy (...) Mussolini July 1923”. ACS Roma, Archivi di Architetti e Ingegneri / Brasini Armando / Documentazione fotografica / Fotografie / 14.

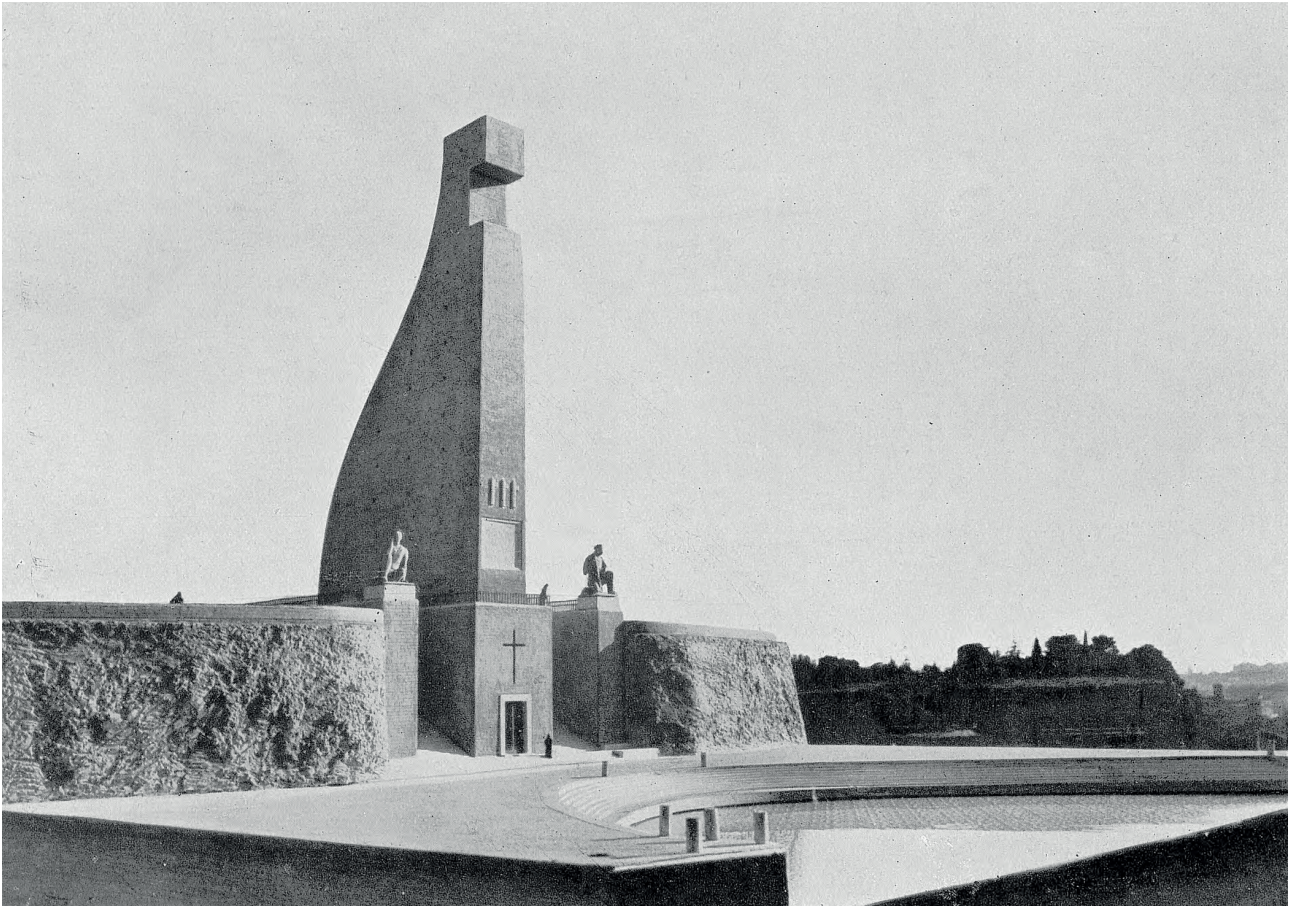
39 For Dioguardi’s project, an estimate of 10 million lire is considered, comparing: ACS, PCM, *Lettera di Serafino Giannelli ad Achille Starace*, Rome, June 29, 1928.

40 See: Maristella Casciato, “I concorsi pubblici per gli edifici pubblici”, in *Storia dell’architettura italiana. Il primo Novecento*, ed. Giorgio Ciucci and Giorio Muratore (Milano: Electa, 2004), 208-233; Paolo Nicoloso, “I concorsi di architettura durante il fascismo”, *Casabella*, no. 683 (November 2000): 4-7.

41 Comparing folders II and IX of 1932 and folder II of 1934; these latter ones are extremely useful for reconstructing the events related to the competition phases.

42 Published in full in the daily newspaper *Indipendente*, Brindisi, January 30, 1932.

Fig. 3
Cover of the magazine,
Architettura, no. IX, (September
1932).



The second article of the announcement emphasized that the monument, as “a symbol of national gratitude and deference, should be primarily constituted of an imposing ‘stele’ formed by blocks of sea rock (natural smoke color) rising austere for 30-40 meters,” specifying that “a shrine should be carved into the base where plaques will be placed to eternalize the names that in epic deeds of peace and war over the centuries have linked their names to the glorious Italian Navy.”⁴³

The judging committee was chaired by the honorable Achille Starace, who had become the Secretary of the National Fascist Party. The committee included the sculptor Romano Romanelli, representing the Academy of Italy;⁴⁴ Admiral Giuseppe Cantù, representing the Ministry of the Navy; architect Enrico Del Debbio, representing the National Federation of Professionals and Architects; and Serafino Giannelli, the city magistrate of Brindisi.⁴⁵

Out of the 92 different proposals submitted,⁴⁶ first prize was awarded to the project named for the motto “*sta come torre*” [“Stand as a tower”] by architect

43 *Indipendente*, Brindisi, January 30, 1932.

44 See: Romano Romanelli, *Romanticismo velico. Ricordi di guerra, di mare, di caccia* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1940).

45 Compare with the correspondence from Achille Starace to the Mayor of Brindisi, Serafino Giannelli, AS BR, ASCB, cat. 9, cl. 22, b. 5 fasc. 27.

46 A report on the submitted projects is provided by the newspaper *Indipendente*, Brindisi, January 30, 1932.

Fig. 4
Photograph of the sketch,
project of the Monument of the
Sailor of Italy, *Architettura*, no. II
(September 1934): 65.

Luigi Brunati and sculptor Amerigo Bartoli.⁴⁷ It features an enormous rudder, with a reinforced concrete structure clad in limestone blocks from Puglia and standing over 52 meters tall. [Fig. 4]

The description of the project in *Architettura* magazine reports that:

The monument was planned very close to the sea. An inlet in the shape of a parabola is carved into the quay itself, a small harbor on which the monument stands at its apex. The rocky promontory on which it is set is cut almost perpendicular to a horizontal section, which is a reverse parabola, wider than the other. The shrine is separated from the two narrow stairs and covered by five ribbed vaults whose sections are very elongated parabolas, placed directly on the ground. Each vault corresponds to two side recesses holding stone seats above which are plaques with inscriptions celebrating the deeds of our famous sailors. At the end of the shrine is a wooden statue of the Virgin Mary Stella, lit from above. The plateau around the monument was landscaped with pine and oleander trees in rows arranged radially like an imaginary wake left by the rudder.

Tying for second place – and rewarded with a prize of 5,000 lire – were the project with the motto “luce di gloria” [“light of glory”], by the architect Angelo di Castro and sculptor Enrico Martino, and “Oltremare,” by architect Emanuele Mongiovi and sculptor Francesco Coccia.

The first project takes a decidedly futuristic approach, depicting “the Italian sailor standing on a pointed prow, surrounded by the light of the lighthouse at night,” raised on the base of the shrine, on whose walls the deeds of the sailor, in peace and in war, are immortalized.⁴⁸

Mongiovi and Coccia’s project proposal was also inspired by the shape of a rudder and is crossed by a “vigorous” coffered arch; yet though it reflects “the characteristics of Lictorian style, both in form (the use of the arch element) and in its monumental dimensions,” it is notably less dynamic than Brunati’s design.⁴⁹

All the projects were presented at the exhibition in the former Barberini granary on Via XX Settembre in Rome⁵⁰ Of these projects, editors of *Architettura* highlighted the one by Ruggero Michahelles with sculptor Ernesto Thayaht, presented by the group of architects Gino Cancellotti and Alfredo Scalpelli with sculptor Cesare Vecchi, the project by architect Gino Fiorini, a project by architects Aldo Mascanzoni and Oriolo Frezzotti with Francesco Barbieri, and one by the architect Rubens Magnani with Bruno Viola.

47 Giuseppe Appella, *Amerigo Bartoli* (Roma: Leonardo Arte, 1990); Giuseppe Appella, *Amerigo Bartoli. Opere dal 1903 al 1971* (Roma: Edizioni della Cometa, 1995).

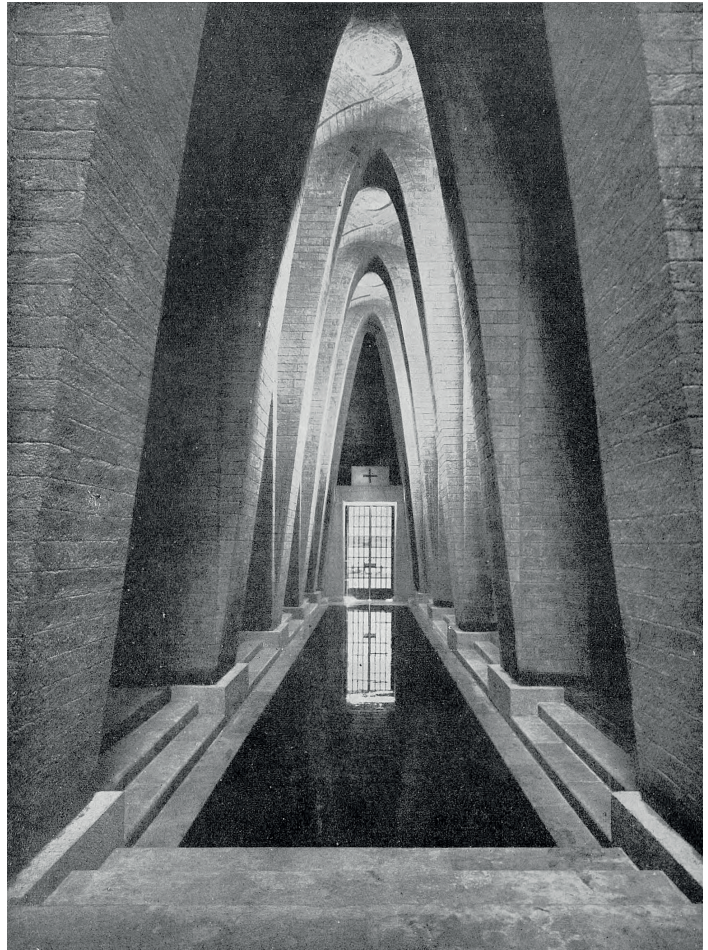
48 “Il concorso per il Monumento al Marinaio italiano in Brindisi”, *Architettura*, no. X (September 1932): 463.

49 “Il concorso per il Monumento al Marinaio italiano in Brindisi”, 460.

50 “I bozzetti per il Monumento Nazionale al Marinaio d'Italia. L'onorevole Starace visita l'importante Mostra”, *Indipendente*, no. 31 (year X, 1932): 1.

After the commission's work was approved by the Duce, as was customary, preparations for the opening of the construction site began, with the contract awarded to the engineering firm of Armando Simoncini⁵¹. Under the direction of architect Brunati, it was started on the tenth anniversary of the "March on Rome": October 28, 1932.

The monument was built, adhering closely to the project, following the sinuous line of the helm rising from the level of the shrine and the steps that contain it, soaring commandingly skyward. Only minor changes were made during construction including replacing the two large statues of sailors, originally planned on the sides of the helm, with two cannons from Austro-Hungarian ships sunk by the Italians during the war.⁵² A few years later, two anchors were added, which were also war loot, from the Tegetthoff and Viribus Unitis battleships.⁵³ They took their place on the sides of the monument in the upper square.



5

The most substantial modification involved the square's arrangement in front of the entrance to the shrine at sea level.⁵⁴ This area was initially bound by a system of arches not part of Brunati's original proposal. It was then resized based on the parabolic perimeter dock design, sloping down to the sea.⁵⁵ The original solution, inspired by the Ripetta river dock on the Tiber, intended to frame the shrine in the adjacent extension of the sea delineated by the new side retaining walls, was abandoned in favor of a simpler, less expensive linear quay.

The shrine inside the base is the element of the monument with the greatest evocative power. [Fig. 5] This space, 27 meters deep, is accessed from the lower square through an independent entrance to a space with a single nave, divided into five bays with cross vaults, designed to suggest a ship's inverted hull. [Figs. 6-7]

51 The foundation of the company "Impresa Simoncini, costruzioni ferroviarie, edilizie, cemento armato" dates back to 1921. Born in Magione, Umbria, the company moved to Brindisi in the early thirties where, in addition to the construction of the monument structure, it contributed to the realization of an innovative sulfuric acid production plant, the first nucleus of the "Montecatini" chemical complex.

52 See page 2 of *Il giornale di Brindisi*, June 29, 1933.

53 The relics come from the naval action of Premuda. In this regard, compare: Franco Favre, *La Marina nella Grande Guerra* (Udine: Gaspari, 2008).

54 In this regard, refer to the documentation: AS BR, ASCB, cat. 9, cl. 22, b. 5, fasc. 97.

55 In this regard, refer to the documentation: AS BR, ASCB, cat. 10, cl. 9, b. 1, fasc. 9.

Fig. 5
View of the crypt, *Architettura*,
Architettura, no. II
(February 1934): 71.

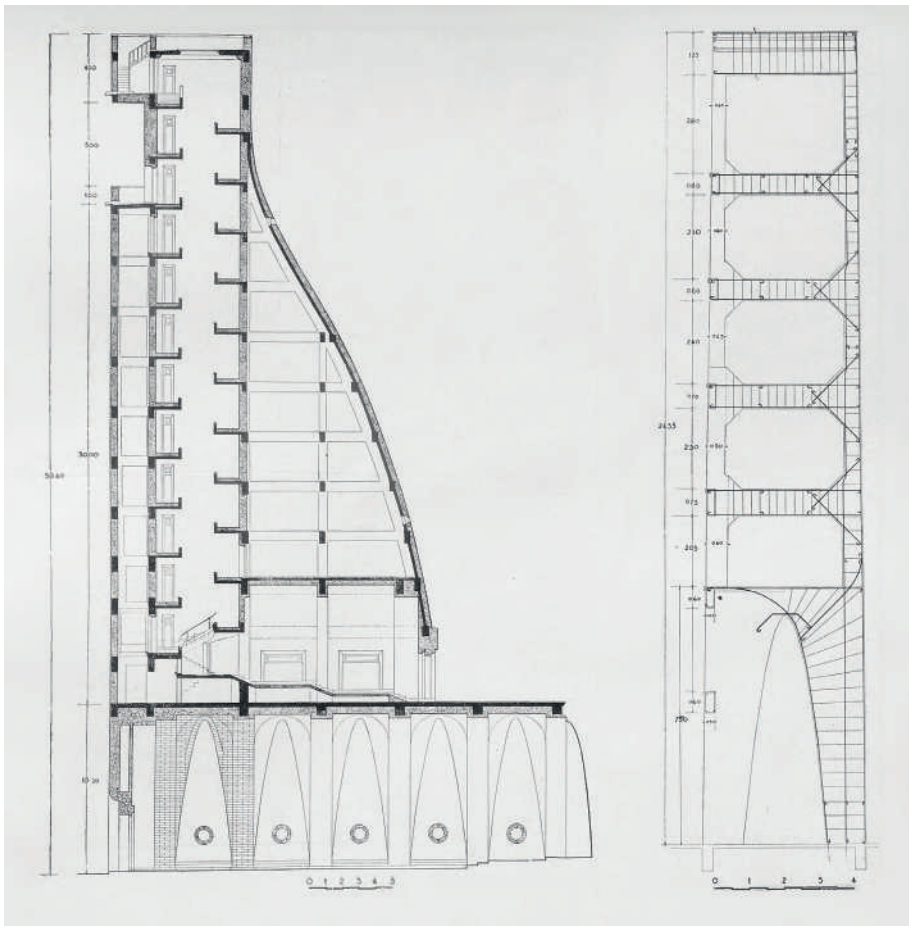
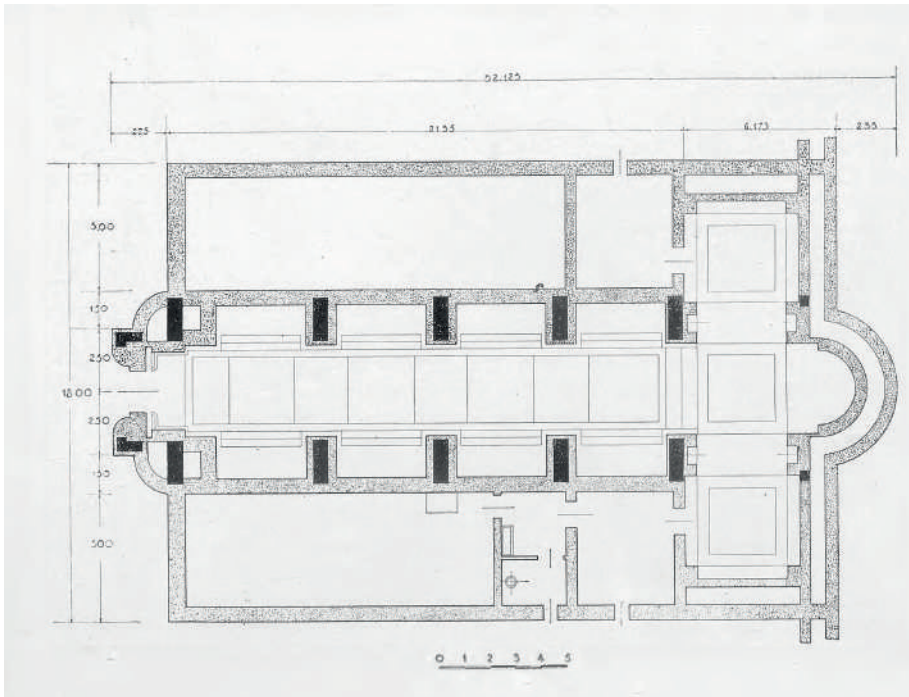
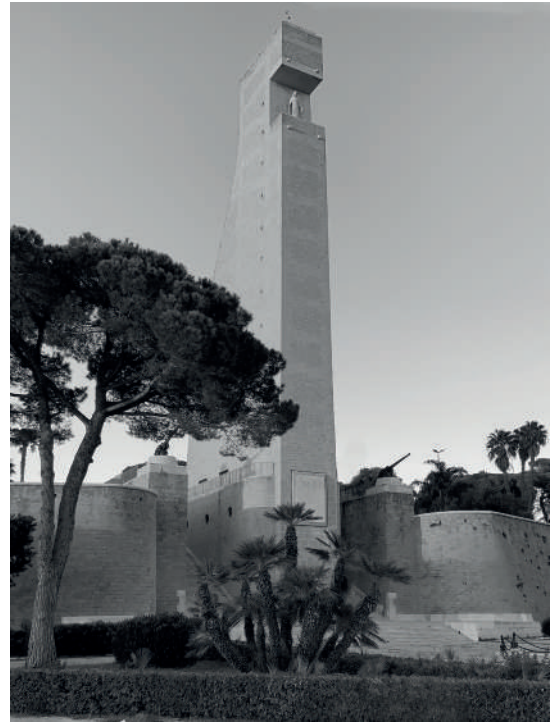


Fig. 6
Floor plan of the crypt,
Architettura, no. II
(February 1934): 66.

Fig. 7
Section of the monument,
Architettura, no. II
(February 1934): 67.



8 - 9

The bronze statue of the Madonna “Stella Maris” by the sculptor Amerigo Bartoli is at the end of the nave. Large slabs of black marble on the sides of the nave and the floor are engraved with the names of the 5,992 sailors of the Royal Military Navy and the Royal Merchant Navy who had fallen since the Unification of Italy through to the monument’s inauguration.

“To enter the shrine, climb the steps from the lower square. If you prefer to reach the higher deck, where there is a bridge accessing the hollow of the rudder, go down another staircase. From there you can make your way to the viewpoints of the side rotundas. The small entrance into the rudder’s interior also lets you reach the top of the monument using the stairs or an elevator. From here, there is a panoramic view of the city.”⁵⁶ [Fig. 8-11]

Conclusion

The Monument to the Italian Sailor was inaugurated on November 4, 1933, in the presence of King Vittorio Emanuele III and Duke Thaon de Revel, representing the Head of Government. The solemn ceremony required lengthy, meticulous preparation by the executive committee because of the presence of the king and the highest authorities of the state as well as the massive participation from all over Italy. This required ten special trains for former sailors and members of the Naval League.⁵⁷

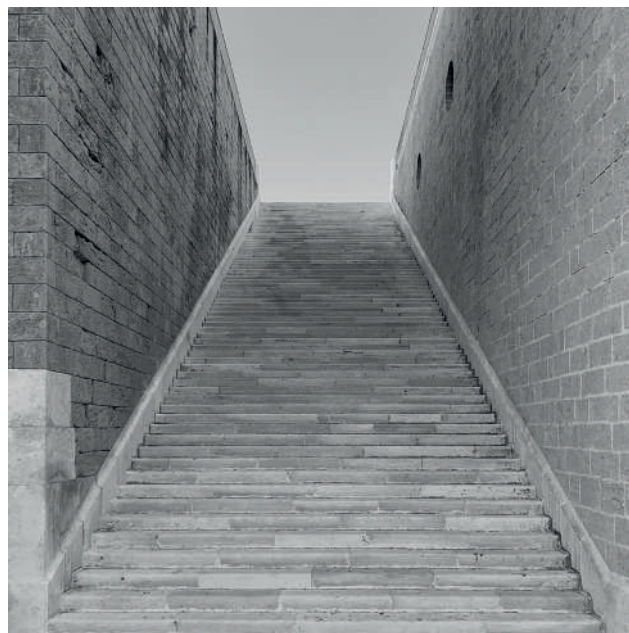
On the inauguration morning, as the special trains arrived, the participants

⁵⁶ ASB, *Brindisi 1927-1943. Da capoluogo a capitale. I progetti, le architetture* (Brindisi: Alfeo, 2000), 125-132.

⁵⁷ “Oggi il sovrano inaugura a Brindisi il Monumento al Marinaio”, *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, November 4, 1933; see also the documents relating to its inauguration: AS BR, cat. 9, cl. 22, b. 3 fasc. 57.

Fig. 8
View of the monument from
the staircase towards the port.
Photo by the author.

Fig. 9
View of the staircase from the
square at the entrance to the
crypt. Photo by the author.



10 - 11

were organized and escorted to the port, where the Navy set up a floating bridge, over 250 meters long, to let the crowd reach their assigned positions. The local and provincial fascist organizations, the disabled veterans, and soldiers gathered at different assembly points before marching in procession upon the arrival of the king:

The Monument to the Italian Sailor now stands, built at the behest of the Duce and through the steadfast efforts of the Naval League, in its austere solemnity at the gates of the Adriatic Sea. It is not only a perpetual and deserved tribute of honor and glory, and, first a foremost, a reminder and an act of faith.⁵⁸

Yet, despite the large crowds at the inauguration, it paled in terms of attention compared to the celebration almost a year later during Benito Mussolini's visit. In the presence of the Head of Government, the architecture of the Monument to the Italian Sailor of Brindisi, costing 2,300,000 Italian lire, took on a greater meaning beyond simply memorializing the fallen of the Great War. His presence, his ritual acceptance and delivery to the people, was a moment of group awareness repeated from city to city, conveying to the crowd a sense of belonging, identity, and engagement with fascism and sending a message of consensus and strength, clear in the early reports from the time:

the sailors of our merchant navy, who bravely fought in the Great War alongside the military navy, now form a solid mass, infused with the highest patriotic sentiments, and aware of their mission to propagate these sentiments in the world.⁵⁹

Fig. 10
View of the base of the monument with access to the crypt. Photo by the author.

Fig. 11
View of the monument from the seaward quay. Photo by the author.

58 These are the words Achille Starace used to describe the work.

59 These are the words Costanzo Ciano reported in the celebratory volume of the Ministry of the Navy: Ministero

The entire history of the monument in Brindisi, from its conception, the proposals by Brasini, and the competition results to its completion, is part of a broader narrative, reflecting the “theme of what role architecture should play in a fascist state.”⁶⁰

The events in Brindisi, both in their timeline and themes, correspond closely with the discussion by Pier Maria Bardi in his *Report on Architecture* from 1931.⁶¹ This is particularly true concerning the role of support and representation that architecture is intended to fill in terms of fascism’s achievements so as to “create a new heritage to place alongside the ancient one” to found “a new art, an art of our times, a fascist art.”⁶²

The monument in Brindisi unquestionably fits into this new heritage intended to become part of Italy’s cultural tradition, alongside the glorious architectures of the past with which it has a joint responsibility for defying the passage of time and forming a new foundation of Italian historical memory.⁶³

Port monuments appear to be a recurring theme in the political construction of consensus within totalitarian regimes, including beyond this specific case in Italy. They often appear as a reference point when national identity is closely tied to a nation’s maritime history.

Pre-dating the monument in Brindisi, the German Bund Deutscher Marinevereine commissioned a commemorative monument to honor the fallen of the First World War. This grand commemorative complex on the beach of the outer fjord of Kiel on the Baltic Sea features an expressionistic red brick tower that rises an impressive 85 meters, its design inspired by naval architecture.

The monument, designed by architect Gustav August Munzer and built between 1927 and 1936, was part of a strategy to raise public awareness of the values and traditions of the German navy, highlighting its efficiency and



12

della Marina, *Al marinaio d'Italia* (Novara: De Agostini, 1933), 12.

60 Giorgio Ciucci, *Gli architetti e il fascismo. Architettura e città 1922-1944* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1989), 108. See the paragraph entitled “Compiti per l’architettura”, 108-113.

61 Pietro Maria Bardi, *Rapporto sull’architettura (per Mussolini)* (Roma: Critica fascista, 1931).

62 From Benito Mussolini’s speech in Perugia on October 5, 1926, delivered at the Academy of Fine Arts, later published in *Critica Fascista*, no. 2, 1926.

63 Emilio Gentile, *Fascismo di Pietra* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2007).

Fig. 12
Laboe Naval Memorial.
Photograph taken by Kapitän
R. Rossow on the day of the
inauguration, May 30, 1936.

technological advancement as a guiding force of the National Socialist nation.⁶⁴

This was made clear in the project's presentation motto which explicitly refers to the history and traditions of the German navy – *Unsere Kriegs-Marine*⁶⁵ ("Our Navy") – contributing to the significant prestige and international recognition the monument garnered even before its inauguration, which took place in May 1936 in the presence of Adolf Hitler himself. [Fig. 12]

In Portugal, under the regime of António de Oliveira Salazar, there was much glorification of the myth of the *descobridores*. This was initially a means of political legitimization and later a tool to influence the masses, in which there is a recognizable ⁶⁶ "intention to maintain a certain ideological control over them."⁶⁷

Among the most interesting of such examples is the site of the Fortress of Sagres in the Algarve, an architectural complex built in the 15th century, associated with the Age of Discoveries and the figure of Prince Henry the Navigator. The site received particular attention during the "Estado Novo" period, one of whose key ideologies was celebrating the Lusitanian history and the figure of Prince Henry. At one of the regime's largest propaganda events – the 1940 Centenary Celebrations – the celebration of his legend played a predominant role. The decision was made to build a monument to Prince Henry in the Fortress of Sagres as a "testimony of gratitude and a noble example of belief in the homeland."⁶⁸

To these ends, several competitions were launched between the 1930s and 1950s, with no winners, aimed at promoting the idea that Portugal had once again become a great colonial nation.⁶⁹



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64 For the events related to this monument see: Peter Stahnke and Myron Voyjtowitsch, *Munzer, Prof. Gustav August (1887-1973), Architekt und Schöpfer des Marine-Ehrenmals in Laboe* (Düsseldorf: Grupello Verlag, 2000).

65 Translation "our navy".

66 See: Antonio Costa Pinto, *The Blue Shirt. Portuguese Fascist and the new State* (Boulder: Columbia University Press, 2000); Daniele Serapiglia, "Goffredo Adinolfi, Ai confini del fascismo. Propaganda e consenso nel Portogallo salazarista (1932-1944)", *Storicamente*, no. 3 (December 2007); Mario Ivani, *Esportare il fascismo. Collaborazione di polizia e diplomazia culturale tra Italia fascista e Portogallo di Salazar (1928-1945)* (Milano: Clueb, 2008); Giulia Albanese, *Dittature mediterranee. Fascismo e colpo di stato in Italia, Spagna e Portogallo* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2016).

67 Serapiglia, "Goffredo Adinolfi, Ai confini del fascismo. Propaganda e consenso nel Portogallo salazarista (1932-1944)", 20.

68 Joaquim Manso, "Carta ao sr. Presidente do Ministerio a proposito do monumento ao Infante. D. Henrique", *in* *ivi*, March 4, 1933.

69 For more on the role of architecture in Salazarist propaganda see: Jorge Ramos Do O', *Os anos de Ferro: O dispositivo cultural durante a "Política do Espírito" 1933-1949* (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1999); Helena Mantos,

Fig. 13

Padrão dos Descobrimentos. Photograph taken by Casimiro dos Santos Vinagre during the exhibition "Mundo Português" in Lisbon, 1940.

These projects essentially failed, ending in the erection of the *Padrão dos Descobrimentos* by the sculptor Leopoldo de Almeida, based on a design by architect José Cottinelli Telmo.⁷⁰ [Fig. 13]

The influence of Italian architecture, especially the monument in Brindisi, is clear in both projects developed for the competition and the final version of the monument built in Belém. The influence is apparent in the symbolic value of the construction as well as in the naval metaphor, closely mirroring the scope of the monument in Puglia.⁷¹

The example of the Monument to the Italian Sailor is key to fully appreciating the use of architectural events within fascist propaganda dynamics. It also offers an interesting opportunity for international comparisons about the role that naval values played in nationalist propaganda during the interwar period.

As we have sought to demonstrate here, this aspect was key in several European national contexts, particularly concerning the role architecture can play in a totalitarian state based on the dialectic between the political content and architectural value of monumental works. Within the diverse contexts described – Italy, Germany, and Portugal – the opportunity to invest in works with high evocative power was considered, before all else, in terms of representing the idea of a “new” state through a “new style.” They also reflect language rooted in strong cultural identities corresponding to a nationalist vision of radical socialism as it was being established in each of these national contexts.⁷²

Salazar. *A propaganda* (Lisboa: Temas e debates, 2010); Pedro Vieira de Almeida, *A arquitectura no Estado Novo. Uma leitura crítica* (Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 2002).

70 José Ângelo Cottinelli Telmo, “O que costumam ser e o que podiam ser os monumentos comemorativos”, *O Diabo*, no. 12 (16 September 1934); José Ângelo Cottinelli Telmo, “Renovação da fisionomia da cidade”, in *Primeira Reunião Olisiponense*, ed. Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, vol. 2 (Lisboa: Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 1948); Ministério das Obras Públicas, *Relatório da Actividade do Ministério nos anos de 1957 e 1958*, vol. 1 (Lisboa: Ministério das Obras Públicas, 1959); José Ângelo Cottinelli Telmo, *O Padrão dos Descobrimentos* (Lisboa: C.A.P.O.P.I., 1960); José Augusto Rodrigues França, *Os Anos 40 na Arte Portuguesa* (Lisboa: Livraria Bertrand, 1982).

71 For a detailed reconstruction of the events surrounding the competitions and the monument, see: Annarita Gori, “Tra Sagres e Lisbona: progetti museali e identità nazionale nell’Estado Novo portoghese”, *Memoria e Ricerca. Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, no. 54 (January-April 2017): 61-80.

72 Marcello Piacentini, “Il momento architettonico all’estero”, *Architettura e Arti Decorative*, no. 1 (May-June 1921): 32-76.

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