



URBS NOVA

MASTER PLANS AND THE EXPANSION OF ROME

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INTRODUCTION

“The history of the master plans of Rome is in fact the story of the continuous pursuit of these transformations --from the river walls to large public projects and to private illegal building-- in an effort to insert these *a posteriori* in an overall design of the future city.” Cassetti 2001, p.12

Last year’s exhibit at the Studium Urbis, entitled **ROMA DELINEATA**, concentrated on plan-maps of Rome from 1748 to 1870. Physically the city changed very little within that time period. The terminal date for that exhibit was chosen to coincide with the year that Rome became the capital of unified Italy. The reason for this choice is readily apparent: after that date Rome changes radically as a period of rapid growth sets in, so a new way of depicting the city necessarily develops. This year the Studium Urbis exhibit concentrates on the maps illustrating Rome’s urban growth. These are quite different from their predecessors because they not only show the development of the city, but they also indicate plans for its future extension. They are master plans or plans derived from these.

Piano Regolatore (abbreviated PR below) is the usual Italian translation for “master plan”, but it implies something more constricting than the term in English. “No longer just a project, the [master] plan becomes a set of rules.” [Cassetti 2001, p.27] The early Piani Regolatori were very specific and detailed in their dictates as far as the layout of new streets was concerned. Less prescription was given at first to the type of buildings intended to line these streets. Later Piani Regolatori specified the type and density of buildings as well. Concomitant with this was an almost inevitable effect of zoning areas by social class.

Another difference between early and later master plans was that the former made use of preexisting street systems as the carrying framework of the newly planned areas, while the latter employed older streets only as edges to neighborhoods which had an internal structure of their own. Witness to this difference is the use of most of Sixtus V Peretti’s late 16th century street net for the Esquiline area in the 1883 PR as the structural pattern for the new street system. As opposed to this the 1908 PR used the Via Flaminia merely as one long, straight border of the new Flaminio *quartiere*.

Planning in Rome actually began before 1870, toward the end of Pius IX Mastai-Ferretti’s long reign. On the 1866 Census map, dotted lines are used to show a plan for a new network of streets near the Baths of Diocletian. These were planned by an enterprising Monsignor named Frederik Xavier Ghislain De Merode, Pius IX’s minister of war. Tallyrand-like, he survived the upheaval of 1870, and in 1871 was able to carry out the building of his new neighborhood, just as planned, under the new government [Lugli 1998, p.113]. He did this by stipulating a *convenzione* or private agreement with the city government where the owner was

only required to turn public space over to the city, free of charge. This was the first of many such agreements which were to completely transform the unbuilt areas of Rome. *Convenzioni* were outside the scheme of the Piano Regolatore and consisted of detailed plans for the layout of large, privately-owned tracts of land within the city [Cuccia 1991, p.45]. Once built, the new areas were included in the next master plan, thus illustrating another aspect of the Cassetti quote at the beginning of this catalog.

Forseeing the change of government and the future expansion of the city, De Merode had shrewdly acquired a large area between Via delle Quattro Fontane and the Baths of Diocletian (including Villa Strozzi, Orto delle Barberine, and Vigne dei Monaci di S. Bernardo --best shown on the 1748 Nolli map). On this area he planned a wide major street designed on the axis of symmetry of the Baths of Diocletian and leading into the hemicycle of the Baths, to be named Nuova Via Pia after Pius IX (later Via Nazionale). Three narrower streets (now Via Torino, Via Firenze and Via Napoli) fanning out from Via Strozzi (now Via Viminale) were to cross Nuova Via Pia, while a short street linking the three (now Via Modena) was planned as a parallel to Nuova Via Pia.

Not only was this plan executed in full, but some of these streets were later extended to become the determinants for other areas. Via Torino was extended through what had been Villa Montalto (built by Sixtus V) to Piazza della Tribuna di S. Maria Maggiore (now Piazza dell'Esquilino). It is hard to avoid the notion that De Merode had this extension already in mind: the axis of this street is a straight line joining the apse of S. Maria Maggiore to the facade of S. Susanna. Nuova Via Pia, shown as stopping short of Via di S. Vitale on the 1866 map, was later extended to meet Via del Quirinale (now Via XXIV Maggio), and was eventually connected to Piazza Venezia.

One planned street on the 1866 Census map was not built. This was an wide, unnamed avenue leading from Piazza S. Maria Maggiore, through Villa Montalto, to the railroad station (whose head-house was the Botteghe di Farfa, a long narrow building on the boundary of Villa Montalto, facing the flank of the Baths of Diocletian). It was substituted in the 1873 PR by Via Cavour.

We have gone into some detail with the *quartiere* De Merode because it illustrates some of the planning principles used in the early Piani Regolatori. However, the 1873 PR which soon follows, turns to more rigidly rectangular grids in the nearby neighborhoods. Rome, where before this time the grid was virtually non-existent, now begins to take on an unfamiliar checkerboard aspect, the effect of which is to break down the subtle building/street relationships which characterize the older part of town. Whereas in the historic center "...urban space is compact, based on the complementarity between streets and buildings..."[Cassetti 2001, p.11], the new areas develop a much looser weave of urban texture, which breaks down this relationship.

Once set, that is the tendency of all the later master plans. Not only do the streets become wider (often justified for reasons of hygiene and health), but also large open spaces destined to parks, hospitals and governmental complexes reduces the urban compactness. The shaping of urban space tends to disappear. Consider the difference between Campo de' Fiori and Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II. It is not merely a difference in scale, though that too must play an

important part. The continuity of space, the visibility the whole piazza from any point within it and the variation in skyline of the former are all entirely lost in the latter.

The heterogeneous social mix of pre-1870 Rome where workers and artisans lived in the same neighborhood or even in the same building as the upper class owners and professionals, gives way in the city envisioned by the Piani Regolatori, to distinct neighborhoods planned to house homogeneous social groups. In the historic center, with the possible exception of Trastevere, all the Rioni (regions) were once inhabited by members of all social levels. Compare this to upper class Via Veneto area planned and built at the same time (late 19th century) as working class Testaccio at the opposite end of town.

However this exhibit and catalog do not reflect an attempt to enter into a socio-economic analysis of the development of the city: that is too large a task and one sufficiently covered by other authors. Rather the effort here concentrates on studying the maps themselves and the their relationship to the physical development of Rome.

CATALOG

Cat. 1

1873 PIANO REGOLATORE (Cuccia Tav. I)

Cat. 2

1882-83 PIANO REGOLATORE (Cuccia Tav. II)
original in Archivio Captitolino

Cat. 3

1909 PIANO REGOLATORE (Cuccia Tav. II)

Cat. 4

1931 PIANO REGOLATORE (Cuccia Tav. V)

Cat. 5

1962 PIANO REGOLATORE (Cuccia Tav. VII; Mezzapesa)

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