

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Grand Tour in Reverse: Marcello Piacentini's Tour of Germany in 1930 and 1931

Christine Beese

This article examines the impact of German architecture and urban planning upon the work of Marcello Piacentini (1881–1960), one of the most influential Italian architects of his time. Research contextualising his travels within his broad oeuvre of the early 1930s reveals how Piacentini took on the design strategies he observed during his stay in Germany. It also shows that Piacentini's practices of travelling and sketching correspond to the importance he attached to the principle of site specificity in architecture. The paper helps to understand Piacentini's efforts to modernize his architectural language in competition with the rationalist movement and reflects on different modes of travelling in the first half of the 20th century. It also sheds light upon the migration of architectural ideas in Europe during the first half of the 20th century.

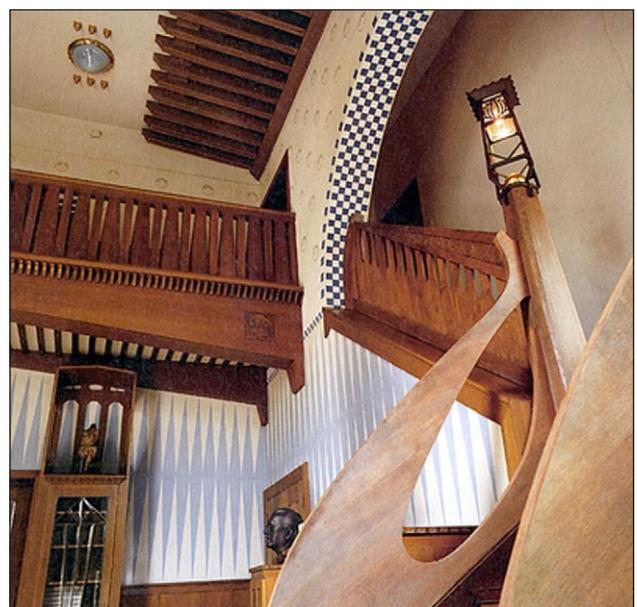
## Introduction

During the 20th century, countless northern Europeans with an interest in the arts travelled south to study ancient fragments or early modern palaces in Rome and Naples. The classical canon maintained a strong influence on modernist architects, like Le Corbusier or Mendelsohn, for whom Italy remained an essential point of reference. It is less evident that some Italian artists and architects crossed the Alps to the north in search of inspiration. However, European interest in German building practices in particular was widespread during the early 20th century. Reform and Secession architecture, brick expressionism, classicism, *Heimatschutz* and Neues Bauen all directed the attention of architects towards Germany and filled many pages of flourishing architecture journals.<sup>1</sup>

Surprisingly, Marcello Piacentini, one of the most influential Italian architects of the early 20th century, also intently observed the German architecture scene and went on study tours in Germany and several other countries. Best known for the World Exhibition E42 in Rome (which today is the EUR quarter), Piacentini is often regarded as the official architect of the fascist dictatorship and as the pioneer of a national neoclassical Italian style. By calling for a return to the classical order and by defending Mussolini's politics of autarchy in 1938, Piacentini himself advanced the image of a traditionalist architect who rejects every foreign influence on Italian architecture. Even though Piacentini never held the position of architect of the State, and was by no means the only architect working for the regime, he was called

Mussolini's first architect – an impression that continues to this day.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this nationalist rhetoric, Piacentini had been concerned with the international architectural scene since the beginning of his career. Between 1910 and 1915 he travelled to Belgium, Germany and North America and was brought into direct contact with the Wiener Secession, Reform architecture and the City Beautiful movement. He especially appreciated the works of Josef Hoffmann and Joseph Maria Olbrich (**Fig. 1**) and applied their architectural concept to his own residential buildings which were realized in Rome during the early 1920s



**Figure 1:** J. M. Olbrich: Glückert-Haus. Mathildenhöhe in Darmstadt, 1909 (Kiesow 2000: 128).



**Figure 2:** M. Piacentini: Sketch for the Cinema Corso, Rome, 1915 (Ciucci 2004: 44).

(De Rose 1995). However, Piacentini's attempts to construct a Secession-style cinema in the centre of Rome (**Fig. 2**) led to a debacle in 1916. The Roman community did not consider the new style to be adequate for its historical surroundings and accused Piacentini of being close to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which was an opponent in the ongoing war. The opposition grew so strong that Piacentini had to redesign the façade at his own cost (Müller 1995).

### Italy — a Young Nation in Search of a National Style

Since the 19th century, Italian architects have wrestled with the development of a national architectural style. In the spirit of the Romantic rediscovery of medieval architecture, Camillo Boito promoted copying the local medieval formal language in the 1880s. At the same time representatives of art academies, like Giuseppe Sacconi, who designed the National Monument to Victor Emanuel II in Rome, revived classical styles which they then combined and exaggerated for representational purposes. The further development of these two trends influenced early 20th-century Italian architecture. While the 19th century had been dominated by the search for a unifying national style, the early 20th century was marked by a multiplicity of objectives. In the tradition of Sacconi, Armando Brasini chose the theatrical effect of neo-Baroque architecture to represent the grandeur of Roman culture. Continuing on Romantic themes, Gustavo Giovannoni endeavoured to promote the further development of everyday Baroque architecture. To modernise historical forms, Giovanni Muzio and other representatives of the Milanese Novecento abstracted and cited classical motives (Ciucci 2004; Kirk 2005; Sabatino 2010).

Although Piacentini appreciated vernacular and classical forms of architecture, he believed that dealing with international architecture would provide particular inspiration for the development of a modern Italian style. These contemporary trends were to be presented to an Italian audience with the help of the newly founded journal *Architettura e Arti Decorative*, where Piacentini gave an overview of exemplary structures from all over Europe in the very first issue, published in June of 1921. It also featured

many German Reform architects, including Peter Behrens, German Bestelmeyer, Paul Bonatz, Josef Hoffmann, Alfred Messel, Hans Poelzig, Hermann Billing, Wilhelm Kreis and Albert Gessner (Piacentini 1921). Piacentini was forced to search for a new architectural style, particularly in the field of public buildings, after the debacle of 1916. Looking at the Doric columns that were integrated into the Palace of Justice in Messina in 1923 (**Fig. 3**) reveals Piacentini's shift to a more archaic classicism, in the tradition of Peter Behrens's German Embassy in St. Petersburg (1911) (**Fig. 4**).



**Figure 3:** M. Piacentini: Palace of Justice in Messina, 1923–28 (Pisani 2004: 51–55).



**Figure 4:** P. Behrens: Embassy in St. Petersburg, 1911 (Collection of the Institute for Art History, Stuttgart).

Piacentini's interests were not restricted to a reform of his architectural style; he was just as much concerned with infrastructural and urbanistic demands. During his first visit to Germany in 1914, Piacentini became acquainted with the competition entries submitted for a 'Greater Berlin' in 1910 and acquired the exhibition catalogue published by Werner Hegemann on the occasion of the General Town Planning Exhibition in 1913. In addition to the comprehensive plans for Berlin, the catalogue featured international examples of civic centres, transport systems and green spaces (Hegemann 1913). Inspired by these new urban concepts, Piacentini himself began to elaborate a study for a 'Greater Rome' in 1915. His first urban plan comprised a new civic centre to be developed at Via Flaminia, a continuous park ring (Fig. 5) and a transport system that connects the main station to various other centres. In contrast to Armando Brasini, Piacentini stressed the polycentric character of the city and refused radical interventions inside the historic city core. By considering requirements of transport and green space, Piacentini's comprehensive plan went beyond the current *Piano Regolatore*, which focused on the development of

new residential quarters. The proposal, however, remained unrealized due to the difficult political and economic situation during World War I (Beese 2016).

### The Situation in 1929: Urban Development Projects in Brescia and Rome

The rise of the Fascists to power fundamentally changed the chances for employment for architects in Italy. Previously, the State and local councils had been reserved in regards to commissioning building projects. The Fascist regime, however, launched public building activities that opened up entirely new possibilities for architects. Modern building projects, such as post offices, train stations, courthouses, sports facilities, universities and museums, required new technical and design approaches. Piacentini benefited from this new situation, as will be shown by the examples of Piazza della Vittoria in Brescia, the regulatory plan for Rome, the museum in Reggio Calabria, the Palace of Justice in Milan and the Roman University Campus.<sup>3</sup>

In 1929, Piacentini worked on his most important urban design project up to that year. The City of Brescia commissioned him to redesign the historical city centre,

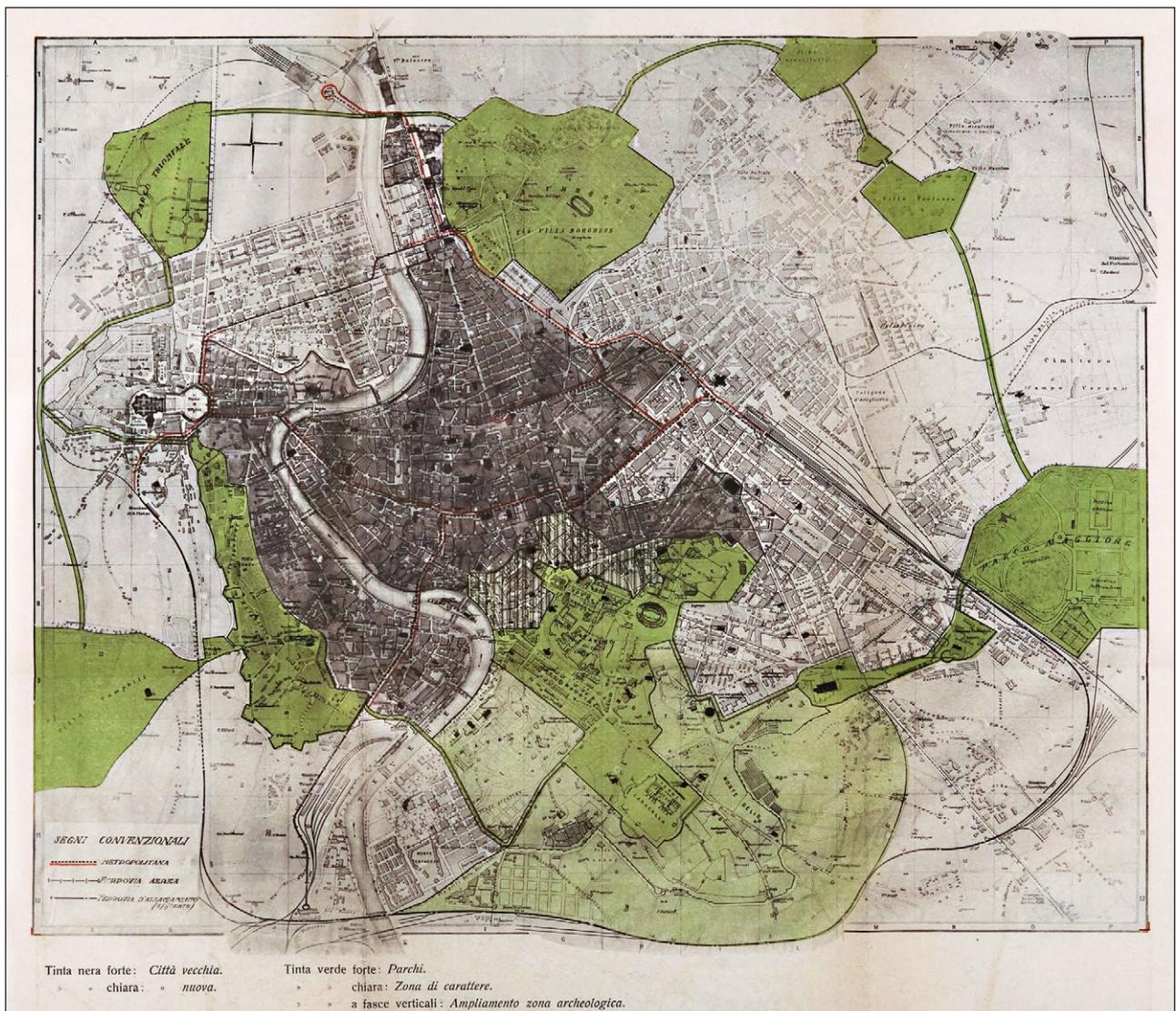


Figure 5: M. Piacentini: Continuous park ring. Urban expansion study for the City of Rome, 1915 (Piacentini 1916).

comprising an area in the immediate vicinity of the awe-inspiring Loggia, which had already been worked upon by Bramante, Sansovino and Palladio. From an urban design perspective, the form and function of Piacentini's project were set; influenced by the teachings of Camillo Sitte, he planned to construct an L-shaped urban square that incorporated the course of the old street and opened up visual axes to important monuments. In addition to the already existing squares (loggia, cathedral and market) he planned a further commercial square ('salotto della città') to be implemented directly at the planned intersection of the north-south and east-west crossing (Piacentini 1932). With these restructuring measures, the City of Brescia sought to position itself as a modern commercial and administrative centre of national relevance. In lieu of the narrow and winding streets of the fish market quarter, with its some 250 stores, a large open square with eight buildings was to be developed according to Piacentini's plans. The central northernmost building, with its prominent positioning, was intended to house the post and telegraph office (Fig. 27), while the tower block at the western corner (Fig. 13) was to be erected by the semi-public insurance agency Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni (INA) (Robecchi 1998).

Since 1925, Piacentini had planned to construct a new urban centre in Rome near the Stazione Termini, which was to become the focus of modern civic life (Torriano 1926). Emanating from the new Lictorian Palace, an axis passes the domiciles of national theatres, post and telegraph office, newspaper and syndicates, a thermal bath and a stock exchange (Fig. 6). Piacentini referred to ancient



**Figure 6:** M. Piacentini: Bird's eye view of the Foro Littorio, Rome, 1925 (Piacentini 1925: 419).

Roman terms ('Foro Littorio') and motifs in order to lend a fascist character to the new square. In terms of architectural style however historicist elements like exedras, porticos and domes recall nineteenth-century buildings like Gottfried Semper's Wiener Staatsoper. Piacentini's eclectic design strategy did not convince the contemporaries who criticized the square for being 'too much "forum" and too little "littorio"' (Voltaire 1926).

The 'Foro Littorio' was part of a wider urban development project which dealt with Rome's urban expansion as well as the development of urban infrastructure. This urban project was influenced by Piacentini's earlier draft of 1915 and was clearly inspired by dense metropolises such as Berlin and Vienna. Unlike such architects as Gustavo Giovannoni or Amando Brasini, Piacentini wanted to install every new public building outside of the historic city. To promote his idea of a new civic centre, Piacentini collaborated with a group of young urbanists (GUR) and supported their attempt to establish the first regional plan for Rome and its surroundings in 1929. In contrast to the common *Piano Regolatore*, a town planning scheme that accounts for one single city, the regional plan embraces several local authorities and often defines their relationship to a growing metropolis nearby. One of the best known examples of an early regional plan is the Greater Berlin act of 1920 by which the German capital acquired territories from the Province of Brandenburg. After Piacentini had presented the GUR plan at the International Urban Development Exhibition in Rome in September of 1929, he was called upon by the municipal committee in March of 1930 to develop a new town planning scheme (Fraticeilli 1982).

### The Situation in 1929: Conflict with the Young Rationalists

Piacentini had become one of Italy's most successful architects with his neo-classical to Novecento architecture style; he was nominated 'Accademico d'Italia' in 1929. However, his hegemonic standing did not remain uncontested. By 1926, a group of seven young architects who had supported the radical simplification and 'rationalisation' of architecture in a similar manner to the international modern movement had been established in Milan. Further members from Rome and Turin soon joined this group. In March of 1928, the forty-three 'rationalists' organised their first exhibition in Rome and presented 'rationalism' as the only true Fascist form of expression (De Simone 2011).

Piacentini reacted to this attack with a tactic of 'embrace-ment'. Many of the rationalists were his students or employees in his architecture firm and he had sympathy for some of their goals. At the same time, he considered the reduction of architecture to merely functional attributes as the deprivation of its artistic potential. On the one hand, Piacentini paid close attention to the movement, attested to its genuine principles and, in August of 1928, dedicated an extensive article in his own journal to it. On the other hand, he openly doubted whether projects like the *Torre dei ristoranti* sketched by Mario Ridolfi or the *Garage per 500 automobili*, proposed by Luigi Figini and

Gino Pollini, could withstand real urban requirements. Piacentini urged the rationalists not to rush anything, but rather to follow him on the path towards moderate, site-specific modernisation (Piacentini 1928a; Piacentini 1928b).

Confronted by the young avant-garde movement, Piacentini considered it an opportune time for presenting his own manifesto on modern architecture. His anthology was intended to be open and pluralistic, rather than dogmatic. Published by Margherita Sarfatti in the Prisma series, the book *Architettura d'oggi* appeared in the early summer of 1930, and presented traditional as well as modern European and North American architecture of the 1920s. It included Wilhelm Kreis's train station in Meissen, Wilhelm Riphahn's Pressa-Pavilion in Cologne and several buildings in Berlin such as Oskar Kaufman's Bechsteinhaus, the Siemens-Komplex by Hans Hertlein, a villa by Mies van der Rohe and Erich Mendelsohn's Kino Universum. With *Architettura d'oggi*, Piacentini sought to address a wider audience and prove that contemporary architecture can be modern without being reduced to its functional attributes (Piacentini 2009).

### Piacentini's Method of Travelling: Ideas and Practices

As already mentioned, Piacentini travelled to foreign countries early on in his career. Due to his close contacts to established architects and politicians, he was officially sent to report on the Internationale Bauausstellung in Leipzig (1913) and to design the Italian Pavilion at the Panama Pacific Exposition, held in San Francisco in 1915. Piacentini seized these opportunities to better acquaint himself with those countries by also visiting other cities such as Darmstadt, Charlottenburg, New York, Buffalo, Chicago, Boston and Washington. On his four-month journey to the United States, Piacentini was accompanied by his wife and other Roman artists who were assigned to decorate the Italian Pavilion. After arriving in New York by ship, the group boarded a train to Buffalo before taking a coach to Chicago and San Francisco.

Several letters written to his father, Pio Piacentini, also an architect, reveal Piacentini's annoyance with the company of the artists.<sup>4</sup> In his view they either depended too much on him or engaged in the local social life far too often. The letters also convey Piacentini's judgement of American architecture and infrastructure. He appreciated the skyscrapers and rail system of New York but rejected the monotony of the single-storey timber houses strung along the endless highways. Piacentini's depiction of the American way of life conveys the typical reflex of a European visitor who applies his own cultural values as a standard of comparison. In the case of Piacentini's trip to the United States, specific local conditions did not appear to have figured in his response, which was predetermined by his attitudes, likely unconscious, about his own cultural superiority. His American letters do not offer any illustrations apart from one hastily drawn sketch, and it is probable that Piacentini did not keep visual records of his American journey.

His motives and mode of travel, however, changed in the 1920s.<sup>5</sup> Judging from a series of sketchbooks preserved in the Piacentini archive, the Roman architect began to plan his journeys strategically and to concede genuine qualities to foreign building cultures. In contrast to his travels to Leipzig and San Francisco, Piacentini's trip to Paris in 1926 was not done for an official duty nor was he accompanied by family members or other professionals. The Roman building tasks with which he was commissioned at that time – such as the Quirinetta theatre, the restaurant of the Rinascente department store and the Montorsi fashion boutique – triggered him to search for practical solutions in Paris, where he visited the Caumartin theatre, the Drouant restaurant and several shops along Rue de la Paix. This time, Piacentini properly noted in a sketchbook all the different materials and artistic details observed during his stay.<sup>6</sup> As a subscriber to the journals *L'Architecture* and *Art et décoration*, Piacentini was well informed about French building activity and was also in touch with Michel Roux-Spitz, a Prix de Rome recipient in 1920 and the editor in chief of *L'Architecte* between 1925 and 1932. After preparing his itinerary with information collected from the journals, Piacentini then travelled on his own and sometimes benefited from his contact with such local professionals as Michel Roux-Spitz in Paris, Robert Schmidt in Essen and probably Adolf Abel in Cologne.

Piacentini most likely pursued this style of study tours in the following years. By subscribing to *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst*, beginning in 1920, and to *Moderne Bauformen – Monatsheft für Architektur und Raumkunst*, beginning in 1923,<sup>7</sup> Piacentini kept track of architectural developments the north of the Alps. Upon the occasion of the Roman Congress of the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning in 1929, he established contact with German colleagues such as Josef Stübben and Robert Schmidt, who may have in turn invited him to visit the expanding cities of the Siedlungsverband Ruhrkohlenbezirk. In 1930, when Piacentini was in search of models of urban building complexes which fulfil both the functional demands of a pulsating metropolis and the formal demands of the conventional urban layout, his attention was once again directed towards the north.

Between 1928 and 1930, *Wasmuths Monatshefte* had reported on Wilhelm Kreis' work in Düsseldorf, Ernst May's settlements in Frankfurt, Adolf Abel's Messehallen in Köln, Paul Bonatz's main station in Stuttgart, a stadium in Karlsruhe and the Große Ruhrländische Gartenschau (Great Ruhrland Horticultural Show) in Essen. Looking at Piacentini's itinerary, these articles must have provided the guidelines for the architect's tours of Germany in 1930 and 1931. However, since he was interested in the special spirit of a place, in the immediate aesthetical, physical and psychological effect buildings and their surroundings exert on the viewer, journal illustrations could not satisfy what he desired to find out. Two travel diaries filled with notes and sketches offer insight into Piacentini's interest for urbanistic situations, local architectural traditions, modern forms and building materials. His sketchbooks do not reveal many personal details, but he presumably travelled alone and by train. In each city, he visited cafés

and restaurants in order to gain a lively impression of the specific character of each place.<sup>8</sup>

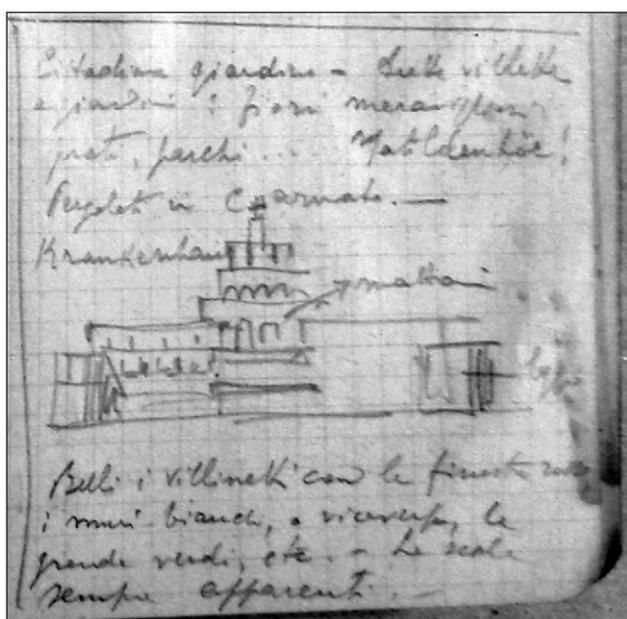
**Piacentini’s Tour of Germany in 1930: Brick Designs and Infrastructure Projects**

Upon the occasion of his first tour, Piacentini decided to travel to Karlsruhe, Darmstadt, Frankfurt and Stuttgart. From September 11 to 12, 1930, he stayed in Karlsruhe and Darmstadt, where he completed sketches of the local train stations. In Karlsruhe, he visited the new Wildparkstadion near the Rhein River and he had a look at the garden city as well as at the Chirurgische Klinik in Darmstadt (Surgical Clinic) by Georg Markwort and Eugen Seibert, which had just recently been completed at the time (Fig. 7). A sketch depicts the elements with which Piacentini was most concerned: the structuring of these massive buildings and their alternating use of materials (Fig. 8).

According to Piacentini’s journal, after this visit he spent three days in Frankfurt from September 13 to 15,



**Figure 7:** Georg Markwort and Eugen Seibert: Chirurgische Klinik (Surgical Clinic) in Darmstadt, 1928 (post-card).



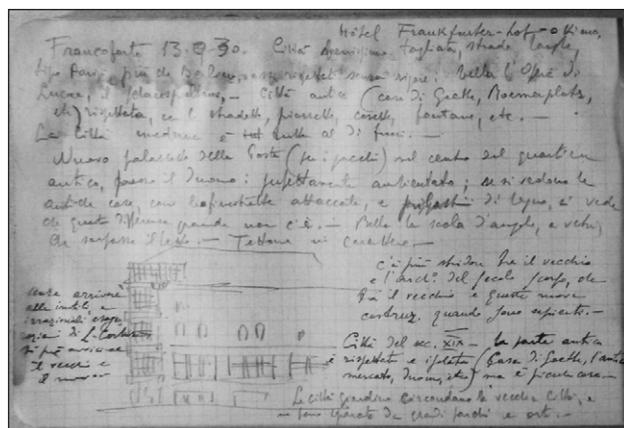
**Figure 8:** M. Piacentini: Journal entry with Chirurgische Klinik, Darmstadt, September 1930 (FPF, 20.3, 645r).

1930. Here he visited many buildings built between 1925 and 1930 under the aegis of Ernst May as part of the urban planning programme ‘Neues Frankfurt’. Piacentini gained a good impression of the newest trends of the Neues Bauen movement and decentralised urban expansion by visiting the Siedlung Bornheim and Siedlung Römerstadt as well as the Großmarkthalle (Large Market Hall) and Riederwald-Schule (Riederwald School) designed by Martin Elsässer (Fig. 9). He even documented the smallest details, such as the clock of the school. Piacentini sought out modern sports facilities, namely Elsässer’s Gartenbad Fechenheim, the Waldstadion and the Bentanobad. He immediately took note of functions he would like to implement in Rome: a theatre, an auditorium and art academy for the area surrounding Stazione Termini, sports facilities, cycling and horse racing tracks as well as swimming pools on the outskirts of the city.

Particular positive opinions Piacentini expressed of more traditional solutions. He positively acknowledged the Frankfurt Opera, which was constructed in a historicist style by Richard Lucae in 1880, as well as the main customs office by Werner Hebebrand which he mistook for a post office (Fig. 10). His verdict was that it was ‘Perfectly adapted to its surroundings, (...) the corner



**Figure 9:** Martin Elsässer: School in Frankfurt-Seckbach, 1925–1926 (Wikimedia Commons).



**Figure 10:** M. Piacentini: Journal entry with Hauptzollamt (main customs office), Frankfurt, September 1930 (FPF, 20.3, 646r).

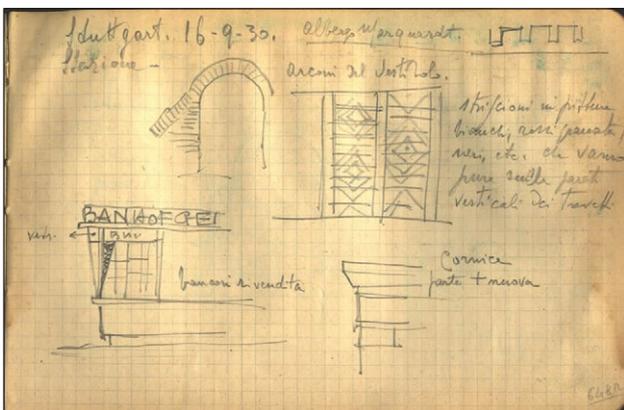
staircase of glass, which overshadows the roof, is beautiful'.<sup>9</sup> In his opinion the example of Hebebrand's building shows that old and new can, by all means, harmonise as long as there is no 'unnecessary exaggeration of the likes of Le Corbusier'.

Piacentini spent the last day of his tour, September 16, 1930, in Stuttgart. As expected, he was interested in the buildings of the *Stuttgarter Schule* and completed numerous sketches of the railway station designed by Paul Bonatz, specifically the stone archways (Figs. 11, 12). He had previously praised Bonatz in *Architettura d'oggi*:

Paul Bonatz is the most balanced and harmonic of all. His Stuttgart railway station, moderate, organic, full of character, is without a doubt one of the most important works of modern art. (Piacentini and Pisani 2009: 22)



**Figure 11:** P. Bonatz: Main hall of the Stuttgart railway station, 1914–1928 (Tamms 1937: 20).



**Figure 12:** M. Piacentini: Journal entry with the archways of the railway station, Stuttgart, September 1930 (FPF, 20.3, 648r).

Across from the railway station, Piacentini took a coffee in the new Hindenburg building, a commercial complex that included two separate blocks with a passageway encased by multi-storey arcades. By experiencing the everyday life of a place, he once more sought to get in touch with what he called the city's 'psicologia urbana' (Piacentini 1914).

One particularly impressive sketch reveals Piacentini's interest in the Posthochhaus (post office high-rise) Stuttgart, characterized by a sequence of three tall volumes followed by a lower one, advancing toward the street (Figs. 14, 15). A balcony with tall, arched windows suggests that the interior space was expanded over two floors. A stone frieze decorates the upper edge of the façade. After his return to Italy, Piacentini included in his Italian projects direct references to these buildings he had seen in Stuttgart. From the Posthochhaus Piacentini derived the motif of a frieze of broken triangles that decorates the upper edge of a passage, connecting Piazza della Vittoria and Piazza del Duomo (Fig. 16). At the Stuttgart main station, Piacentini had observed an ornamental handling of the brick for the masonry arches, an element he immediately applied to the post office façade in Brescia. On November 10, 1930, Piacentini actually suggested also using bricks for the façade of the INA tower.<sup>10</sup> The building department of the INA agreed to Piacentini's new plans, which now included a staggered brick building with multi-storey arcades. Analogous to the façade of the Brescia post office, reliefs were to be added above the windows (Fig. 13).



**Figure 13:** M. Piacentini: INA tower in Brescia (Photo: C. Beese, 2009).



**Figure 14:** Posthochhaus (post office high-rise) Stuttgart (post card).



**Figure 15:** M. Piacentini: Journal entry with Stuttgarter Post (postal service), Stuttgart, September 1930 (FPF, 20.3, 648v).

### Piacentini in the Spring of 1931: Struggle for a National Style and New Public Projects

Not all of Piacentini's fellow architects appreciated his designs for Brescia. On the occasion of the Second Exhibition of Rationalist Architecture in March 1931, Pier Maria Bardi presented a photo collage in his Galleria d'Arte di Roma which showed works by Giovanni Battista Milani, Gustavo Giovannoni, Armando Brasini, Cesare Bazzani and Piacentini arranged with cheap products such as cigarette packets to create a 'Panel of Horrors'. The disparaging collage included Piacentini's INA tower and the post office building in Brescia. Bardi's goal in presenting the collage was to establish Rationalism as the national style. In fact, Mussolini did speak positively about the young movement but did not, however, issue an official statement on the subject (Tentori 2002).

Two months before the opening of the exhibition, Piacentini had explained in Ugo Ojetti's journal *Dedalo* 'Where rational architecture is unreasonable' (Piacentini 1931b). He repeated what he had already expressed in 1921 and 1928 – that rationalism is suitable for 'functional buildings', but not for representative architecture. The so-called reasonable architectural style was by no means reasonable in every case – many of the artistic materials were of lesser quality and many building elements would not do their function justice, as they



**Figure 16:** M. Piacentini: Zigzag ornament on the throughway to the New Cathedral in Brescia (Photo: Beese 2009).

were being uncritically adopted from other countries with other prevailing climatic and social conditions. He especially criticised the house Le Corbusier designed for the Weißenhof Siedlung in Stuttgart. During his visit to Stuttgart in 1930, Piacentini had found the undefined open space below the building abandoned and littered (Piacentini 1931b).

Piacentini even responded directly to Bardi's attack. On May 2, 1931, in an article in *Giornale d'Italia* called the 'Defence of Italian Architecture', he agreed with the rationalists that architectural renewal is important. However, he called upon them to participate in the existing process instead of rushing things at the cost of quality. Modern forms should be adapted to the needs and mentality of specific countries – otherwise they would remain anti-national and would not be suitable for representing Fascism (Piacentini 1931a). In light of his own approach, Piacentini's critique of the rationalists seems hypocritical. He accused them of adopting solutions of functional architecture from other countries, while he himself travelled to Germany to gain inspiration for his own building projects.

Work on the town planning scheme for Rome, meanwhile, had come to an end. After having presented a first version to Mussolini on October 30, 1930, the commission submitted a final plan in the spring of 1931 that was legally approved on July 6 of the same year. Although Piacentini's proposal to shift the civic centre had been excluded in the final version of the plan, he accepted the official result and began to focus on the creation of smaller architectural

entities. In addition to the construction site in Brescia, Piacentini was busy with two new projects in the summer of 1931. On the one hand, he agreed to design the Museo della Magna Grecia on June 20, 1931, a project commissioned by the city of Reggio Calabria. To prepare for this new project, Piacentini requested a site plan, which he received prior to his departure (De Marco 2010). On the other hand, he was expected to receive the commission of the construction of the Palace of Justice in Milan in November of 1931. Apparently, he had already completed initial sketches for the building by the end of 1930 (Maulsby 2014).

### Piacentini's Tour of Germany in 1931: Commercial High-Rises and Exhibition Buildings

Piacentini's second tour led him to Zurich, Cologne, Düsseldorf and Essen. After having crossed the Alps, he arrived in Zurich on August 25, 1931, where he visited the Neue Börse (New Stock Exchange) by Walter Henauer and Ernst Witschi. Similar to the Schocken-Kaufhaus in Stuttgart, the Zurich building has horizontal window rows and an external staircase, which connects the two building wings at a 90-degree angle (Fig. 17). Piacentini took note of this solution with the comment, 'double-glazed staircase with daylight, central glass tambour with three elevators' (Fig. 18).<sup>11</sup> Such prominent handling of building parts, which only serve as an access way to the building, was not common in the tradition of Italian architecture. The sketches that follow his Neue Börse entry depict Piacentini's thoughts on how he could apply staircases featuring



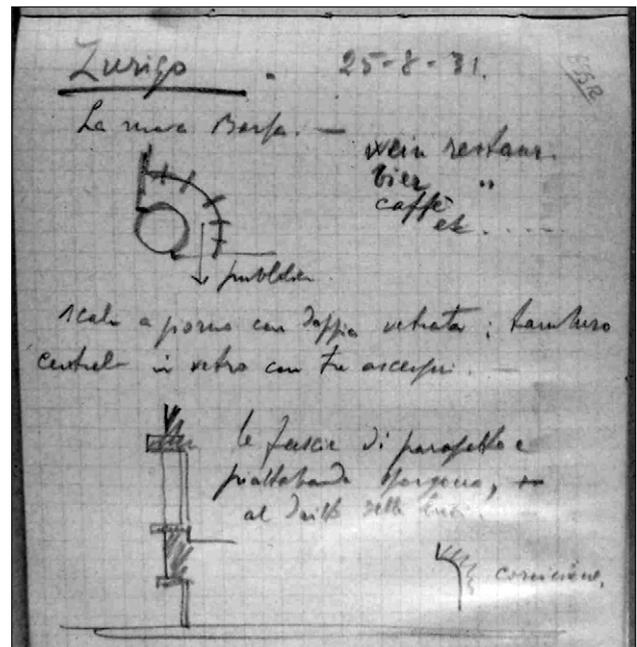
**Figure 17:** W. Henauer and E. Witschi: Neue Börse (New Stock Exchange), Zurich, 1928–30 (*Das Werk* 18/4, 1931, p. 101).

windows within the context of his Brescia project. He even tried to apply semicircular protruding building structures characteristic of Neues Bauen to the building of Brescia's Chamber of Commerce (Fig. 19).

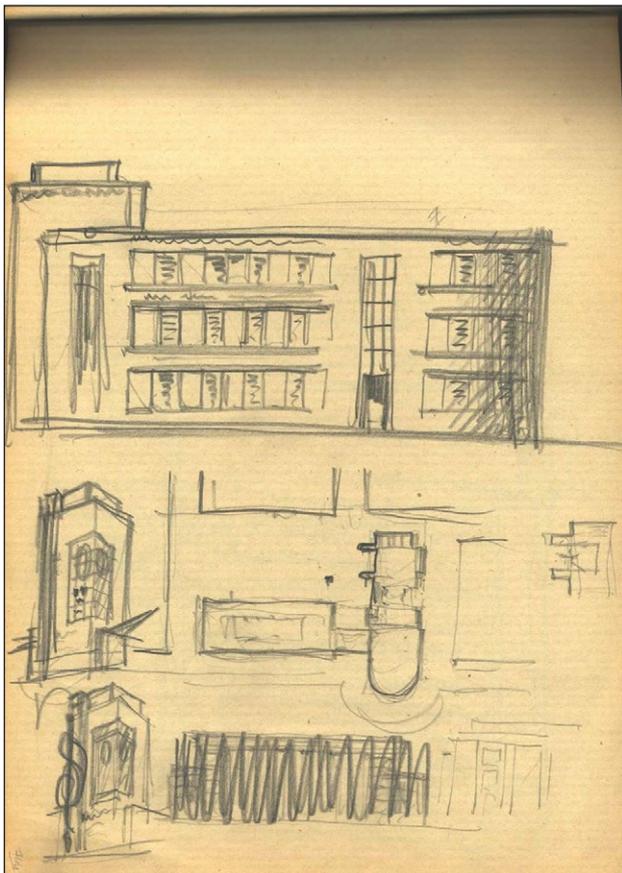
Piacentini stayed in Cologne between August 26 and 28, 1931. He visited Jacob Koerfer's Westdeutsche Bodenkreditanstalt at Kaiser-Wilhelm-Ring 17–21 and noted the portal's graded profile as well as the vertical windows (Fig. 20). After seeing Koerfer's Neumarkt building (New Market), which had been featured in *Wasmuths Monatshefte*, Piacentini continued from there towards Deutz. In 1928, during the press exhibition *Pressa*, the Stadtbaurat (director of the municipal planning office) Adolf Abel had ordered brick façades to cover the exhibition halls, the construction of an exhibition tower and the expansion of the so-called *Staatenhaus*. It is possible that Piacentini knew Abel, since the latter had been a scholarship student at the German art institute Villa Massimo in Rome in 1929. Piacentini's journal from his 1931 trip contains sketches of the Deutz exhibition entrance arch as well as the lantern of the tower. Once again Piacentini's pluralistic idea of modern architecture becomes obvious: While Abel's and Koerfer's buildings exhibit elements of the *Reformarchitektur*, the uniformly designed national pavilions and Riphahn's exhibition building for the Kölner Presse (Cologne press) represent the principles of Neues Bauen.

For Piacentini, Wilhelm Kreis's architecture played an especially important role. In *Architettura d'oggi*, he stated,

Even Wilhelm Kreis, who was a revered master long before the war and was famous for his still classicist department stores, has changed completely within the past years and, in following less daring directions, has created buildings of remarkable modernity. (Piacentini and Pisani 2009: 22–23)



**Figure 18:** M. Piacentini: Journal entry with the Neue Börse (New Stock Exchange), Zurich, August 1931 (FPF, 21, 655r).



**Figure 19:** M. Piacentini: Sketches for a modernist version of Piazza della Vittoria in Brescia, August 1931 (FPF, 29, 744–21).



**Figure 20:** J. Koerfer: Westboden Building, Cologne, 1931 (Rheinisches Bildarchiv Köln, RBA L 03 314/1074).

Piacentini's stay in Düsseldorf enabled him to personally inspect Kreis's Wilhelm-Marx-Haus and the GeSoLei (Great Exhibition for Public Health, Social Welfare and Physical Exercise) premises.<sup>12</sup> Realistic sketches of the Wilhelm-Marx-Haus in Düsseldorf, with its protruding and receding building structures and tower grid, which looks like Gothic tracery, can be found in Piacentini's journal, evidence of his continuing interest in architectural ornamentation.

On August 30, 1931, Piacentini arrived in Essen. Employees of the municipal building authority were most likely expecting him. Two years prior to his visit, Piacentini had met Robert Schmidt, a councilman in Essen and director of the Ruhr Coal District Municipal Association (Siedlungsverband Ruhrkohlenbezirk SVR) in Rome. Upon the occasion of the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning Conference, Piacentini and Schmidt together chaired a session on the modernisation of historical cities (Piacentini 1929). Piacentini's archives contain a typewritten two-page spread titled, 'Round Trip through Essen and Surroundings', which lists 41 points of interest and was possibly commissioned by Schmidt.<sup>13</sup> His personal contact to Schmidt as well as the typewritten document suggest that Piacentini was officially received and shown around.

The Municipality of Essen had great interest in presenting to a wider audience the many public building projects realised in the 1920s under the direction of Ernst Bode, head of the municipal planning and building control office. In a publication of his own, Bode presented various sites, such as the cemeteries in Essen-Huttrop and Essen-Schönbeck, the restructured Burgplatz (a central square) with the Baedekerhaus and Lichtburg, the Kinderklinik (Children's Hospital), the bathing facilities and the wholesale market and the slaughterhouse (Bode 1929). The list given to Piacentini also included the new Steel Church, the Nordstern coal-mine, the Grugapark (Great Ruhrland Horticultural Show of 1929), the garden city Margarethenhöhe and countless other projects. Further examples of top-class *Reformarchitektur* had been constructed in 1928–29, such as Jacob Koerfer's Deutschlandhaus, Ernst Knoblauch's RoBa office building (Fig. 21) and Alfred Fischer's SVR administrative building.



**Figure 21:** E. Knoblauch: RoBa-Haus, Essen, 1928 (Cremers 1929: 1).

According to Piacentini's journal entries, his hosts took him to the Burgplatz in Essen, where he completed a sketch of the Lichtburg (Figs. 22, 23). The drawing shows the symmetrically designed main façade with its continuous strip windows and a cantilevered roof above the ground level. Even Otto Bartning's steel church is documented on this page. Some other sketches illustrate Piacentini's interest in the use of metal for lattice structures, window

frames and letterings. In the case of the Kinderklinik, Piacentini focused on the receding floors, which 'fan out' the building structure. This solution provides optimal lighting to the continuous windows and balconies, since the upper storeys do not cast a shadow upon those below. His verdict: 'very well done' (Figs. 24, 25).<sup>14</sup>

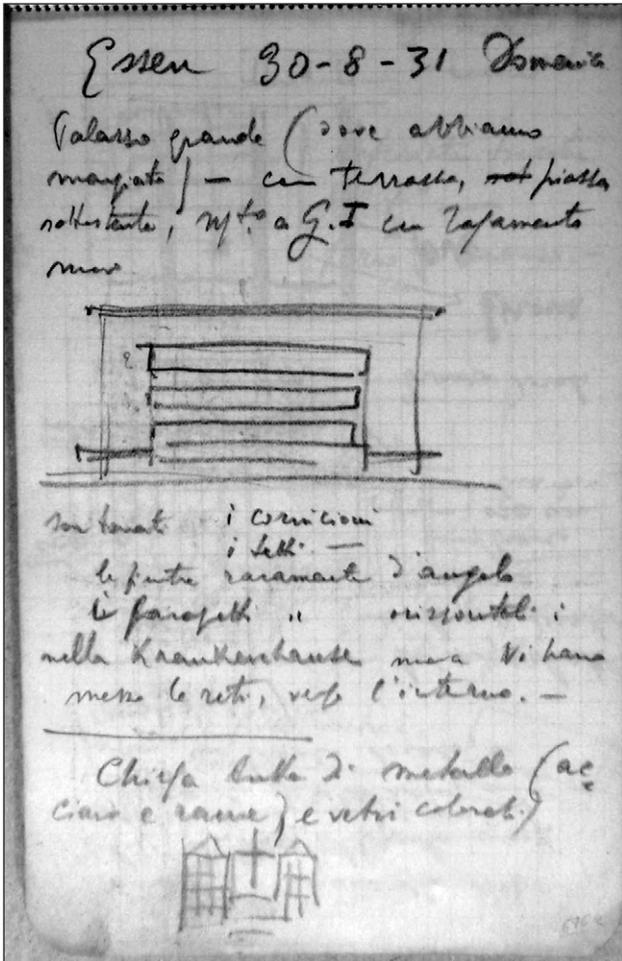


Figure 22: M. Piacentini: Journal entry with Lichtburg and Stahlkirche, Essen, August 1931 (FPF, 20, 676r).

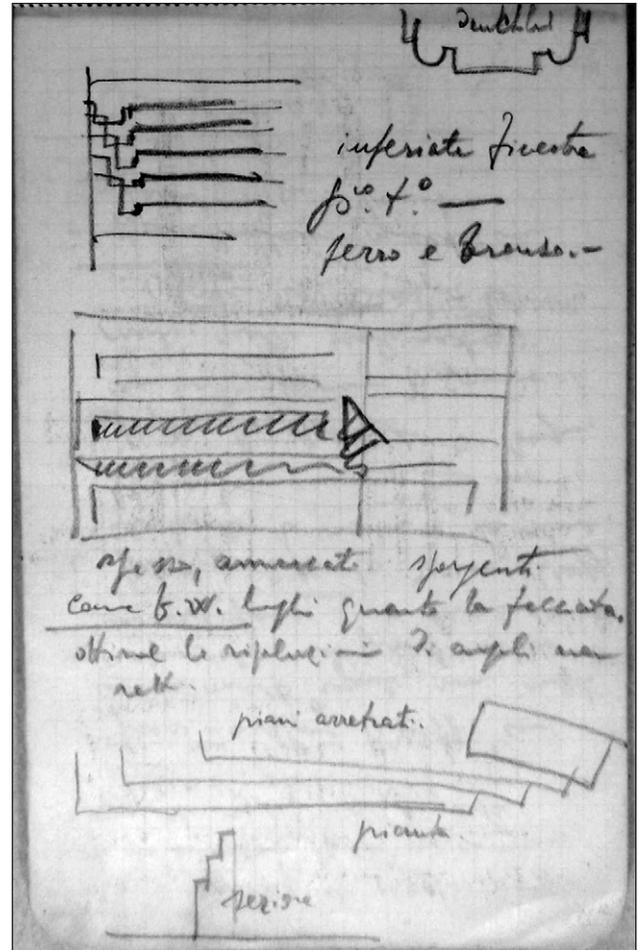


Figure 24: M. Piacentini: Journal entry with floor plan of the Kinderklinik (Children's Hospital), Essen, August 1931 (FPF, 20, 677r).



Figure 23: E. Bode: Lichtburg, Essen 1928 (post card, 1934).

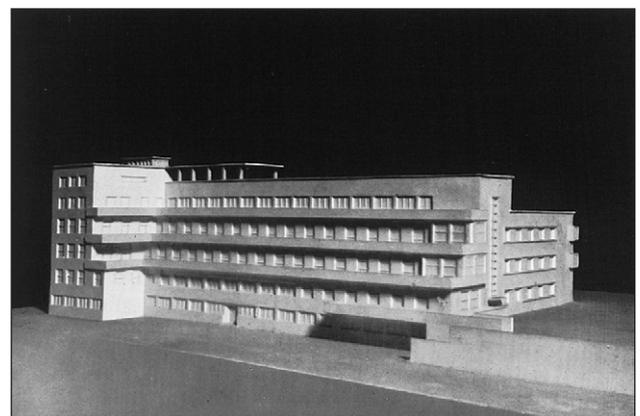


Figure 25: Hochbauamt Essen: Model of the Kinderklinik (Children's Hospital), Essen, 1929 (Bode 1929: 28).

### Effects of the 1931 Tour: Portal Solutions and Modernisation Trends

Piacentini used his time in Germany well. The many pages of his travel journal as well as the many ideas which later resulted from his observations serve as evidence of this. First and foremost, his experiences affected his project in Brescia, where he even modified important elements of the INA tower and the post office building after construction had already begun. However, the study tour also inspired fundamental ideas for other projects, such as the museum in Reggio Calabria, the Palace of Justice in Milan, Piacentini's own villa on Via Camilluccia as well as the Città Universitaria (University City) in Rome.

The new features of the INA tower can be recognised on the upper parts as well as on the backside of the building. The cube-like construction, which in sketches dating from 1930 featured only square openings, now featured a horizontal panoramic window for the top-floor restaurant and stone latticework (Fig. 13) based on the models of Jakob Koerfer, Wilhelm Kreis and Adolf Abel. Piacentini excluded arched windows on the rear side of the building and instead introduced horizontal cornices such as those seen at the RoBa-Haus in Essen (Fig. 26).

The central post office building was also subject to a major change. While the already approved design of the entrance portal included arcades, the final façade is adorned with an entrance hall with four pillars and a beam (Fig. 27). Instead of a brick covering, Piacentini used light and dark marble, which covered the building in bands. Piacentini might have taken the idea of an entrance structured by pillars without bases and capitals from Kreis's portal within the GeSoLei exhibition in Düsseldorf (Fig. 28). He justified the changes by arguing that the original façade did not take the characteristics of the surroundings into account.<sup>15</sup> Considering the fact that the

same portal solution also inspired the design of further entrances, the weakness of this argument becomes obvious. In the Palace of Justice in Milan (1932–40), massive and tall pillars define the entrance, which recedes behind lateral building structures; the main University building in Foggia (1929–33) exposes a similar arrangement. In fact, after the attack of the rationalists Piacentini aimed to simplify his formal language and refrained from using classical elements like arches and columns.<sup>16</sup>

Notes from Piacentini's journal, dating back to spring 1932, provide insight into early ideas for the museum in Reggio Calabria. A staircase in form of an L-shaped glass cube is placed in front of a rectangular building structure which has no base but features continuous square window openings. A freestanding tower protrudes from one side of the building (Fig. 29).<sup>17</sup> According to his own statements, while he adopted the square window openings from Cologne, the idea of a protruding staircase possibly originates from Hebebrandt's Zollamt (customs office) in Frankfurt. The museum plans that were submitted in 1932 provided evidence of numerous changes (Pisani 2004): The staircase on the northern side was now integrated into the building structure and only a cylinder



**Figure 26:** M. Piacentini: Rear side of the INA tower, Brescia, 1932 (FPF, ff. 64.2).



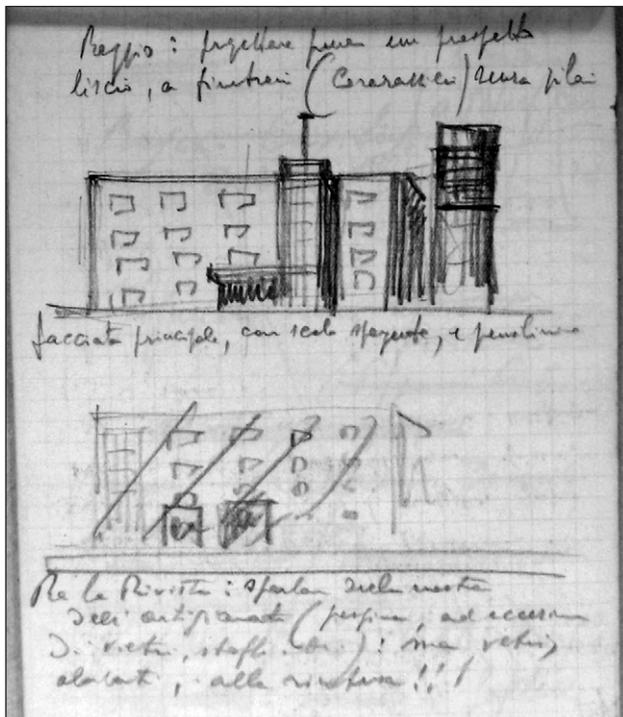
**Figure 27:** M. Piacentini: View of the post office in Brescia (Photo: C. Beese, 2009).



**Figure 28:** W. Kreis: Ehrenhof of the GeSoLei exhibition, Düsseldorf, 1925 (Nerdinger 1994: S. 122).

forming a rounded corner remained of the western tower (Fig. 30). As sketched, the curved volume is similar to that of the Neue Börse in Zurich. While the windows facing the main square featured square openings, on the eastern side, after three rows of windows, Piacentini switched to continuous pillars. The continuous glass walls behind the pillars provide visitors with a sea view from all levels of the building<sup>18</sup>

The same double-page spread in Piacentini's journal that features the sketches for Reggio Calabria also shows a note for the Città Universitaria in Rome. The building ensemble, which he was to build soon, was to be characterised by a simple formal language and absolute stylistic unity as opposed to the Piazza della Vittoria in Brescia (Fig. 31). Based on the model of the Bodenkredit (mortgage bank) in Cologne and Lichtburg in Essen, the buildings were to emanate calmness and no forced search for



**Figure 29:** M. Piacentini: Sketch for the museum building in Reggio, journal entry, fall of 1931 (FPF, 20, 682).



**Figure 30:** M. Piacentini: Design for the Museo della Magna Grecia, Reggio, 1932 (Pisani 2004).

originality.<sup>19</sup> Piacentini wanted to orient airy staircases to generous open spaces and even considered including pilotis, which, in the case of the Weißenhof Siedlung, he had openly criticized. On April 6, 1932, Mussolini rejected Piacentini's first plan for the Città Universitaria on the grounds that it was 'too decorative and theatrical' (Nicoloso 2006: 234). Presumably to satisfy the Duce's demands, Piacentini subsequently integrated modernist elements into his repertoire that could also be accepted by Pietro Aschieri, Giuseppe Capponi, Giuseppe Pagano and Giovanni Michelucci, the young rationalists who were also included in the planning process of the Città Universitaria.

Especially in some of his private commissions, Piacentini drew important elements from the designs of Neues Bauen. The northern elevation of his own villa on Via della Camilluccia in Rome is defined by round columns which carry the upper floors like pilotis and open the ground floor for garages. A half round pavilion to the northeast loosens up the cubic building structure. Inward balconies and irregularly distributed square windows characterise the south side, which also features the building entrance (Fig. 32). A peristyle surrounded by multi-storey arches opens the west side and frees the view onto a rose garden. While elements like corner windows and inward balconies are reminiscent of Ernst May's settlements in Frankfurt, the garden design with its pergola and water basin seems indebted to earlier examples of the Wiener Secession, such as the Palais Stoclet in Brussels, admired by Piacentini 20 years earlier.



**Figure 31:** M. Piacentini: Bird's eye view of the Roman Città Universitaria, 1925 (Piacentini 1935: 3).



**Figure 32:** M. Piacentini: Southern view of the Villa Piacentini, Via della Camilluccia, Rome, 1930–1932 (Pisani 2004: 101–09).

### Site-Specificity in a Globalized Context

In an apparent conflict, both Piacentini and the rationalists claimed to support a typical Italian architecture by interpreting international tendencies. Obviously, they already faced the paradox of 'how to become modern and to return to the sources, how to revive an old, dormant civilization and take part in the universal civilisation' as Paul Ricoeur later put it in his essay, 'Universal Civilization and National Cultures' (Ricoeur 1965). These contradicting aims seem to have guided both Piacentini and the young rationalists – only their reference points differed. In contrast to the rationalists, Piacentini regarded the single building in context with the existing conventional city. He aimed to modernize the city infrastructure without dissolving its traditional organisation along streets and squares. For this reason he remained attached to cities like Paris, Berlin and Vienna where architectural renewal seemed to be anchored in the specificity of the place.

Due to the importance of local conditions, climate, topography, building materials and traditions, Piacentini could not content himself with illustrations in journals and books. As in Bergamo, where he sat down in cafés to study the 'psicologia urbana' (Piacentini 1914), Piacentini felt the urge to come into physical contact with specific buildings and their surroundings by visiting the cities personally, sketching architectural solutions and residing in central hotels. His criteria for selecting the destinations were precise; every object he recorded corresponded to a current design task Piacentini faced in Italy. For Brescia he was in search of a public urban architecture that was inserted into the given structure and offered an artistic treatment without regressing to a historicist pattern. In Rome he tried to reconcile historical aspects to the modern city by dividing zones that differed in function and character.

Despite his harsh reply to their attacks, the critiques of the rationalists did not leave Piacentini unaffected. Especially during his second tour of Germany, he expressed interest in buildings characterized by new solutions for spatial distribution. As the sketchbook entries show, he considered elements such as glass staircases and projecting towers, although rarely realised in the end. Only Piacentini's private villa features a half-round pavillion. In general, the villa on Via Camilluccia stands for Piacentini's efforts to integrate the principles of Neues Bauen into his own architecture language. In contrast to most of the other buildings, the villa features neither a base nor an attic. Piacentini consciously tried to do without every type of hierarchical element. However, the building still does not seem to be fully developed. Alessandra Muntoni describes it as a 'daring collage of incongruent findings' (Muntoni 2010: 68).

In the case of public buildings, such as the post office in Brescia or the Palace of Justice in Milan, Piacentini adhered to a monumental layout, emphasized by a vertical main entrance and dominated by solid material. Although he appreciated horizontal lines and rounded corners, which were important characteristics of Neues Bauen, Piacentini called for vertical structures if required by representative

and functional purposes (Piacentini 1931b).<sup>20</sup> It is not in the structure of the single building but in the overall layout of an architectural entity that the rationalists' criticism and the experiences of his second tour of Germany gained influence on Piacentini's urban projects. In Brescia, Piacentini had searched for variety in height and volume, ornamentation and materials in order to imitate the composite nature of the historical surroundings. However, in the case of the Roman Città Universitaria, he seems to anxiously search for a unity of style as he observed at the Bodencredit-building in Cologne and at the Lichtburg in Essen.

This change may also have been caused by a further attack launched on Piacentini's eclecticism by exponents of the rationalist movement. In 1932, Bardi scoffed at the Piazza della Vittoria in Brescia, accusing Piacentini of delivering

the worst possible proof of his work. It is self-evident that the style should have been one, not three, eight, twenty. (...) This is an architectural composition that clearly betrays that His Excellency sketched it between one or another trip to Germany. (...) It is incomprehensible why Italians, who have their own tradition in brick architecture, should apply the Stuttgart style in Brescia. (Bardi 1932: 20)

In the light of the virulent struggle over a genuine Fascist architecture, it is understandable that Piacentini decided to generalize and unify his style after 1931. In the strict sense, a site-specific architecture cannot represent a supra local identity. Therefore, he no longer focused upon the individuality of local and traditional motifs but instead developed urbanistic solutions, uniformly designed along traditional streets and squares which in turn became Piacentini's guiding principles after his second tour of Germany.

### Piacentini: World Citizen or Tourist?

Piacentini's interest in German architecture and his way of travelling in general must also be seen in the context of the contemporary debate on the relationship between art and industry and subsequently on the architect's self-conception in the face of changing professional requirements. It is not by chance that the most prominent exponent of this debate, Le Corbusier, spent one of his four years' travel in Germany. As a Swiss decorative arts student who was supposed to pursue a career in the local watch-making industry, the young Jeanneret was sent to Germany by his teacher Charles L'Eplattenier to report on the decorative arts movement in April 1910. In particular, the Werkbund's activities and Peter Behrens's work for the A.E.G. attracted international attention and strengthened Germany's reputation in the field of industrial design (De Simone 1989).<sup>21</sup>

Some similarities can be found between the artistic development of Piacentini and that of Jeanneret. Considering their picturesque attitude, the latter's

sketches of historical German market places correspond to Piacentini's positive remarks on Nuremberg's quaint historic city center. Jeanneret's 'Étude sur le mouvement d'art décorative en Allemagne' (Le Corbusier and Troy 2007) emphasizes the importance of Joseph Hoffmann, Joseph Olbrich, Theodor Fischer and Alfred Messel, as well as Piacentini's report of 'L'Esposizione d'architettura di Lipsia' (Piacentini 1914). In both cases the young professionals were sent to Germany by well-established sponsors not only for journalistic but also for educational purposes. They were both particularly interested in the work of designers who had trained as artists before turning to the field of architecture, such as Peter Behrens. But while Jeanneret became personally engaged with, and received practical training from, German designers, Piacentini remained a 'tourist', content to purchase Fritz Hoeber's book on Peter Behrens (published in 1913) for his Roman library.

The architects' diverging travel practices and purposes reflect fundamental differences with regard to their artistic self-conception. Jeanneret defined himself as an 'impenitent traveller, borne into all corners of the world' (Le Corbusier 1948: 18). Already during his first time in Paris in 1908, the 21-year-old had expressed a feeling of artistic loneliness and emptiness, leading to his struggle for his own idealistic way and the search for an artistic home. It was by the technique of drawing that he hoped to gain inspiration for his own work: 'To draw oneself, to trace the lines, handle the volumes, organize the surface (...) all this means first to look, and then to observe and finally perhaps to discover (...) and it is then that inspiration may come' (Le Corbusier 1960: 37). By breaking down what he saw and reducing it to abstraction, he became both: mentally engaged and intellectually distant. When Jeanneret returned to Paris in 1917 he decided to cultivate the attitude of an interesting stranger by taking on a new identity as 'Le Corbusier'. As Herman van Bergeijk put it, 'he had finally created a point of confidence and rest in himself' (van Bergeijk 2003: 76).

In contrast to Jeanneret, Piacentini did not feel the need to be trained abroad, to leave his native environment for more than an excursion. As the son of a well-established architect, he was deeply rooted in Roman artistic circles and never questioned his affiliation with the centuries-old Roman society. Even his role as an architect and his attitude towards architecture can be seen in that light. While Jeanneret wanted architectonic monuments to be seen in their own right, unchallenged from the later historic urban tissue, Piacentini had in mind all the layers and interrelations that constitute the urban environment.<sup>22</sup> He did not define the architect's role as an individualistic artist but as a 'chêf d'orchestre' who gives artistic guidances, always depending on local traditions and specific building tasks. Although being convinced of the importance of Italian traditions, he acknowledged that other countries came up with original solutions worth dealing with. But while leaving his native environment temporarily, 'home' remains his point of reference and every foreign experience is seen in the light of domestic requirements.

## Conclusion

In contrast to his earlier travels to Brussels, Leipzig and San Francisco, Piacentini's trips to Germany in 1930 and 1931 were not done as an official duty. Two personal incitements primarily motivated his first tour of Germany in 1930: In connection with his current commissions – Piazza della Vittoria in Brescia and the *Piano regolatore* of Rome – Piacentini was interested in civic architecture as well as in infrastructural facilities. Due to his competition with the young rationalists, he also felt the urge to modernize his architectural style without renouncing site-specificity. Thus he visited places that were already part of a certain canon, like Bonatz's Main Station in Stuttgart, as well as modern projects recently finished, like the Neues Frankfurt coordinated by Ernst May. As a subscriber to such journals as *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst*, and on the basis of contacts with German urbanists like Joseph Stübben and Robert Schmidt, Piacentini was well informed about the German architectural scene with its prominent examples of *Reformarchitektur* and Neues Bauen. Equipped with a small travel-diary and a pencil Piacentini took notes of different building materials and sketched elements of ornamentation which he subsequently used for his architectural designs in Brescia.

Piacentini's second tour of Germany in 1931 was also influenced by his interests in civic architecture, commercial buildings, high-rises and museums. But while in 1930 his main concern was with the variety of decoration and materials, his attention now shifted towards building structure and the distribution of functions. The new perspective probably resulted from an increasing power struggle with the rationalists who claimed the status of official state architects and blamed Piacentini for pursuing an eclectic style unable to represent the modernity of fascism. Influenced by the prospect of public commissions like the Museo Magna Grecia in Reggio Calabria, the Palace of Justice in Milan or the University Campus in Rome, Piacentini sought to develop a representative architectural language that was modern, classical and Italian at the same time. In particular, the work of Wilhelm Kreis in Düsseldorf and recent examples of *Reformarchitektur* in Essen inspired Piacentini's designs for the Roman University Campus, characterized by a unity in form and style. His private Roman Villa, however, shows elements of Neues Bauen and may therefore suggest that Piacentini privately fancied modernist solutions.

By editing the book *Architettura d'oggi* Piacentini aimed to demonstrate his expertise in international architectural tendencies. However, in public he did not refer to inspirations deriving from his trips to Germany, and unlike other architects, he never sought to publish his travel diaries. This seemingly contradictory behaviour can be explained by a general conflict that affected Piacentini as well as the rationalists: Given that both parties claimed to represent the truly fascist character of Italian architecture, neither could admit any dependency on international tendencies – may they be neoclassical or modernist. This might also be the reason why after his second trip to Germany Piacentini no longer focused upon the individuality of local

and traditional motifs but instead developed urbanistic solutions, uniformly designed along streets and squares. Site-specificity should be maintained by keeping the conventional urban grid and modernity should be gained by reducing ornamentation to a minimum. Although the political and artistic climate prevented Piacentini from citing his international sources, he nevertheless continued searching for artistic inspiration by travelling abroad.

Unlike Piacentini's travels to San Francisco in 1915, when he was convinced of his own cultural superiority (as also expressed in correspondence), his trips across the Alps were marked by a greater openness towards foreign artistic practices and traditions. To German artists he admitted the ability to create original solutions which became valuable also for his own needs. But in contrast to Le Corbusier, who claimed to 'be borne in all corners of the world' (Le Corbusier 1948: 18), Piacentini did not define himself as a world citizen and remained closely attached to his native Roman environment. Neither did he ever live abroad, nor did his stays in Frankfurt or Cologne exceed the short period of three days. Comparable to a tourist's motivation for travelling, domestic requirements guided all of Piacentini's foreign travel experiences. In that sense, it can be argued that Piacentini adhered to the centuries-old tradition of the Grand Tour.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For further information on the architectural scene in Germany, see Pehnt (2005).
- <sup>2</sup> During Mussolini's regime the balance of power among architects and architectural styles shifted constantly. Traditional Roman architects like Cesare Bazzani, Armando Brasini or Enrico del Debbio, as well as modern proponents like Adalberto Libera or Pietro Aschieri, received state commissions, as pointed out by Ciucci (2002). For a comprehensive study on Piacentini, see Beese (2016) and Lupano (1991). A first analysis of Piacentini's relationship to Germany was undertaken by Scarrocchia (1999).
- <sup>3</sup> For further information on these projects, see Beese (2016), Robecchi (1998), Casseti (2005), Bardeschi (2010), De Marco (2005), Pisani (2004), and Guidoni (1985).
- <sup>4</sup> FPF, busta ff. 27. Two letters written by Piacentini to his father, Pio, one from Chicago (March 12, 1915) and one from San Francisco (April 14, 1915).
- <sup>5</sup> All travel journals are located in the Fondo Marcello Piacentini, Università degli studi di Firenze, Biblioteca di Scienze Tecnologiche, Architettura (FPF).
- <sup>6</sup> FPF, taccuino, busta 20, Piacentini's travel notes to Paris 1926.
- <sup>7</sup> FPF, busta 20, list of the journals purchased between 1920 and 1926, page 19.2. *Wasmuths Monatshefte*, published since 1914 in Berlin and edited by Werner Hegemann after 1924, represents a 'moderate modern' line. *Moderne Bauformen*, published since 1922 by the Julius Hoffmann Verlag in Stuttgart, focuses largely on Southern German architecture.
- <sup>8</sup> In Stuttgart, for example, he had coffee in the Hindenburgbau, while in Essen he took lunch at the Lichtburg. FPF, taccuino busta 20, Piacentini's travel notes.
- <sup>9</sup> FPF, taccuino, busta 20, Piacentini's travel notes in Frankfurt. September 13–15, 1930.
- <sup>10</sup> Archivio Storico INA, Fondo Immobiliare, Verbali Consiglio del Comitato Tecnico from November 10, 1930.
- <sup>11</sup> FPF, taccuino, busta 20, Piacentini's travel notes in Zurich on August 25, 1931.
- <sup>12</sup> The Great Exhibition for Public Health, Social Welfare and Physical Exercise [Große Ausstellung Gesundheitspflege, soziale Fürsorge und Leibesübungen (GeSoLei)] in Düsseldorf took place from May to October of 1926 on the former fair grounds in Düsseldorf Pempelfort. As leading architect, Wilhelm Kreis was responsible for the overall urban design plan as well as for individual buildings, such as the Ehrenhof. Today, the Ehrenhof contains the Museum Kunstpalast (Nerdinger/May 1994).
- <sup>13</sup> FPF, Supplement to the travel journals, busta 20, typewritten double-page spread, titled, 'Round Trip Through Essen and Surroundings'.
- <sup>14</sup> FPF, taccuino, busta 20, Piacentini's travel notes in Essen on August 30, 1931, Children's Hospital.
- <sup>15</sup> M. Piacentini, Building report, AMC Roma, Pacco Brescia, Document Nr. 0549.
- <sup>16</sup> Piacentini's decision not to make use of columns and arches in Rome's Città Universitaria led to a famous debate between the traditionalist journalist Ugo Ojetti and Piacentini in 1933 (Neri 1982).
- <sup>17</sup> FPF, taccuino, busta 20, Piacentini's travel notes from fall of 1931 with sketches for Reggio Calabria.
- <sup>18</sup> The building, finally realized in 1935, was in fact much more conventional than the sketches. Five window axes, which are separated by medallions on the first and second floor, stretch alongside the interior portals in mirror symmetry. On the rear side of the building, the impression of a multi-storey glass façade structured only by pillars is lost entirely.
- <sup>19</sup> 'University: Simpler buildings with large windows (Cologne), less exhibition, absolute stylistic uniformity (...) Much calm, no forced search for originality and play of lines (Bodenkredit in Cologne, Lichtburg in Essen). Buildings with many floors, like Le Corbusier's style, sparing with the terrain and construction, comfortable stairs, wide, airy, also exterior, large lifts etc. (...). Under the buildings open space for walks and roofed recreation, gardens, stairs, glass pavilions, rain shelter (...) large illuminated signs etc.' FPF, taccuino, busta 20, Piacentini's travel notes from spring of 1932.
- <sup>20</sup> See also Giuseppe Pagano's observations (1931) on Piacentini's idea of monumentality.
- <sup>21</sup> In addition to his trips to Karlsruhe, Stuttgart, Munich, Darmstadt, Berlin and Dresden, Jeanneret worked for five months as a draughtsman in the Berlin office of Peter Behrens.
- <sup>22</sup> In 1936, regarding the architectural competition announced by the Fascist party for building new headquarters next to the Colosseum in Rome, Le Corbusier stated: 'I preferred how the antique monuments were before, isolated from modern life; the things of the past are designated for pilgrimage, objects of study, of devotion of respect of critical examination. These

purposes need calm, solitude, they require a certain time of reflection; if put next to modern life they suffocate' (Muñoz 1936: 32).

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The paper broadens the view on some topics that are touched on in my book *Marcello Piacentini: Moderner Städtebau in Italien* (Beese 2016). Whereas in my book Piacentini's travels served to explain the changing design of single projects, they will now be examined in their own right, taking in consideration Piacentini's urges, aims and modes of travelling more generally.

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The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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