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MODERNIST RURAL LANDSCAPES ALONG ANCIENT ROADS

Abstract

This contribution addresses the notion of "Uses of Past" against two "modernist rural landscapes" examined in the framework of the MODSCAPES project.[1] Both covering a rather short timeframe, the cases of Northern Greece (1920s) and of the Pontine Plain in central Italy (1930s) represent polar opposites in this respect. In the aftermath of the Greco-Turkish war (1919-1922), rural modernisation of Northern Greece was implemented as a response to a geopolitical and humanitarian crisis. In Fascist Italy, instead, "integral reclamation" of the Pontine Marshes, finalised in 1935, was part of Mussolini's ruralisation policy, a step towards national self-sufficiency, setting agriculture and related "healthy industries" against the disastrous effects of industrial urbanism. Many scholars

[1] Uses of the Past is the title of the Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA) call launched in 2016, which funded the MODSCAPES consortium (2016-2019). Inviting participants to reflect upon the past to gain a better understanding of today's societal questions, the HERA call aimed at taking account of how cultural ideas, traditions and practices were constructed, transferred and spread among different agents and regions. MODSCAPES addressed a number of agricultural colonisation projects implemented during the 20th century, claiming that such projects, however conceived in different political and ideological contexts as part of a nation building strategy, are a distinctive feature of recent European history, and provided a supra-national testing ground for experts from many disciplines.

questioned the monolithic perception of architecture and town planning of the Fascist period, yet the idea of modern Italy empowering the legacy of the ancient Roman Empire was a fundamental part of the political propaganda underpinning major interventions. In Greece, there was no room for rhetorical narratives. The decision to concentrate the majority of Asia Minor refugees in the newly acquired border regions set the priority on cost-efficient standard projects and bottom-up community development. Additional aspects may lead to consider these two case studies as poles apart. The Pontine region was a true repository of projects partially or fully implemented over the long period, whereas Northern Greece emerged from four centuries of Ottoman rule and only some decades of agricultural development triggered by the construction of railway lines. Apparently similar responses to radically different problems, these rural modernisation processes do present a common denominator in the presence of an infrastructural scaffolding (Zarecor 2018) inherited from the distant past, namely the *Via Appia* and *Via Egnatia*, part of the same route from the Adriatic to the Black Sea. Both maintained a strategic role in the new schemes, favouring resettlement operations and the logistics of reclamation. Identifying which elements of the historical palimpsest played a vital part in large-scale resettlement and reclamations schemes, this contribution aims at challenging the very notion of heritage, admitting its functional and symbolic potential as an asset, as part of a "latent order" awaiting future interpretations.

Keywords: Rural modernisation; reclamation; inner colonization; Pontine Plain; Northern Greece

Abstrakt

Artikulli trajton nocionin e "përdorimit të së shkuarës" përkundrejt dy "peizazheve rurale moderne" të marra në shqyrtim në kuadër të projektit MODSCAPES. Ndonëse mbulojnë një hark kohor mjaft të shkurtër, rastet e Greqisë veriore (1920) dhe e fushës e Pontinos në Italinë qendrore (1930) paraqiten të kundërta në shumë drejtime. Pas luftës greko-turke (1919-1922), modernizimi rural i Greqisë së Veriut u zbatua si një përgjigje

përkundrejt një krize gjeopolitike dhe humanitare. Në Italinë Fashiste, në vend të kësaj, "bonifikimi integral" i kënetave Pontine finalizuar në vitin 1935, ishte pjesë e politikës së ruralizimit të Musolinit, një hap drejt autarkisë kombëtare, duke bërë bashkë bujqësinë dhe "industritë e shëndetshme" kundër efekteve katastrofike të urbanizmit industrial. Shumë studiues vunë në pikëpyetje perceptimin monolit të arkitekturës dhe urbanistikës së periudhës fashiste, megjithatë ideja e Italisë moderne që fuqizonte trashëgiminë e Perandorisë së lashtë Romake ishte një pjesë themelore e propagandës politike që mbështeti ndërhyrjet e mëdha. Në Greqi nuk kishte vend për retorikë. Vendimi për të përqendruar pjesën më të madhe të refugjatëve të Azisë së Vogël në rajonet kufitare të sapo përfituara vendosi përparësinë në projektet standarde me kosto efikase dhe për zhvillimin e komunitetit nga poshtë-lart. Aspekte të mëtejshme mund të çojnë në konsiderimin e këtyre dy rasteve studimore si të kundërta. Rajoni Pontino ishte një depo e vërtetë e projekteve të zbatuara pjesërisht ose plotësisht gjatë një periudhe të gjatë, ndërsa Greqia e Veriut doli nga sundimi katër shekullor osman me vetëm disa dekada zhvillimi bujqësor të ndikuara nga ndërtimi i linjave hekurudhore. Përgjigje në dukje të ngjashme ndaj problemeve rrënjësisht të ndryshme, këto procese të modernizimit rural paraqesin një emërues të përbashkët sa i takon një skele infrastrukturore (Zarecor 2018) të trashëguar nga e kaluara e lashtë, e cila gjurmohet konkretisht te Via Appia dhe Via Egnatia, pjesë e së njëjtës rrugë nga Adriatiku deri në Detin e Zi. Të dy ruajtën një rol strategjik në skemat e reja, duke favorizuar operacionet e zhvendosjes dhe logjistikën e bonifikimit. Duke identifikuar se cilët elementë të palimpsestit historik luajtën një rol jetik në skemat e sistemimit dhe rikuperimit në shkallë të gjerë, ky artikull synon të sfidojë vetë nocionin e trashëgimisë, duke pranuar potencialin e saj funksional dhe simbolik si një aset, si pjesë e një "urdhri latent" që pret interpretime të ardhshme.

Fjalë Kyqe: Modernizimi rural; bonifikimi; kolonizimi i brendshëm; Fusha e Pontinës; Greqia e Veriut

Introduction

Italian journalist Paolo Rumiz (2016) published an account of a journey from Rome to Brindisi concluding that, despite neglect and dilapidation, the founding myth of the Appian Way still resounded through its vestiges. Its decline paralleled the decline of Rome, leading to a revival of the earlier foothill road from Velletri, Ninfa, Piperno and Terracina, away from which there were only trails, sheep tracks, rivers and canals, seasonal and permanent swamps (D'Erme 1983, 159). Rumiz's travelogue turns into a space-time diorama, shifting from daily occurrences to historical events: Italic peoples, consuls and emperors, enemies and legions, the apostle Peter and his successors and, in addition, the protagonists of a lost everyday life: horse guards, shepherds, cowboys gathering rushes, owl hunters, carters and farm labourers. Rumiz, however, keeps stressing the irreplaceable importance of first-hand experience. Even more so – we may add – when reflecting upon the relationship between place identity and future scenarios. Some landscapes do bear witness to the interwoven threads of recent and distant pasts, revealing the "latent order" which oriented their transition into future spatial assets. Approaching buildings and landscape in their complementary relationship may help us venture beyond the linearity of descriptive analyses, understanding some modernist rural landscapes as a repository of projects. Our overarching goal here is to reassess the distinctive features of a given territory that reclamation and rural colonisation schemes activated as potential resources throughout history.

For what concerns the Appian Way, while topographical memories of earlier travellers[2] may help us recapture its long-term dimension, some of its sections reveal *per se* the immanence of the past in the construction of modernist rural landscapes. This happens along the straight parallel to the Linea canal, whose aura of Romanness was our trigger and shall be our focus. Along this line of thoughts, we shall also consider the Egnatia Way,

[2] Including the British archaeologist Thomas Ashby who explored the ancient routes in Latium and their surviving monuments (2003).

extending the route to Byzantium,[3] thereby defining "the suture line between the Faith of the East and that of the West" (Rumiz 2016, 76).

Based on repeated journeys,[4] we shall compare two itineraries across regions subject to land reclamation and inner colonisation in the early decades of the 20th century. The first from Cisterna di Latina to Ponte Maggiore along the Appia Way, the second from Thessaloniki to Giannitsa along the Egnatia Way. Building on personal experience in conjectural mapping, this contribution also aims at showing how a map may condense knowledge to orient transformations to come (Fig.1).

Fig. 1 Map of the *Via Appia* and *Via Egnatia* from Rome to Byzantium. Drawing by A. Korolija.

[3] Originally, the road only went as far as Formia (312 BCE), reaching Capua in 307 BCE. Half way through the 3rd century BCE, the Appian Way extended to Beneventum and, around 190 BCE, to the ports of Tarentum and Brundisium. The construction of the Egnatia Way across the Adriatic begun some decades later, in 146 BCE.

[4] Our research implied on-site surveys, often guided by friends, colleagues and local experts in search of every possible physical evidence, and abiding crosschecking of cartography, photographs and literally sources of different kinds.

In the footsteps of Goethe

In February 1787, Johann Wolfgang Goethe crossed the Plain at dawn on a trip to Naples and, having reached Fondi, entrusted to a letter all his amazement at finding the road in a far better state than expected.

> "Conceive to yourselves a wide valley, which, as it stretches from north to south, has but a very slight fall, but rises again considerably towards the sea on the west. Running in a straight line through the whole length of it, the ancient Via Appia has been restored. On the right of the latter, the principal drain has been cut […]. By means of it the tract of land to the right has been drained and is now profitably cultivated. As far as the eye can see, it is either already brought into cultivation or evidently might be so, if farmers could be found to take it […]." (Goethe, 1817, 190-191)

On approaching Terracina, large patches planted with willows and poplars increased Goethe's confidence in the success of the whole enterprise. In fact, he had the chance to admire the seemingly Roman grid of canals and roads perpendicular to the Appian Way only ten years after its construction. In 1776, Pope Pius VI had entrusted the work to engineer Gaetano nico[5] who proposed excavation of a canal - Linea Pio – collecting a network of ancillary drains and running parallel to the Appian Way for 21 km (Rappini 1777; Nicolaj 1800; Folchi 2002), thereby facilitating the transfer of people and goods to the port of Terracina.[6] Trade was back on the Appian Way, whose remaining monuments staged the reclamation scheme. The metrics of the new canal and ancillary drains, embankment, deviation and widening works were only some of the technical problems at hand. Many bridges had to be repaired and new ones built. The timing of the operations and related logistics depended on the Appian Way. Once rebuilt, it became a key axis for the supply chain and the organisation of workers' accommodation, religious and sanitary facilities (Folchi 2002).

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[5] Hydraulic engineer Gaetano Rappini (Bologna, 1734 - 1796) had made a name for himself for the canalisation of Comacchio.

[6] At Terracina, Pope Pius VI promoted construction of Borgo Pio, the lower town by the port.

The parallel narrative extolled the new embankment on the old stone roadbed, the Linea Pio embedding the ancient *Decennovium*,[7] and the distance between drains dictated by Roman milestones.

Getting back to Goethe, he noticed with much appreciation the embryos of future staging posts: long thatched sheds and the masonry structure at the centre of the level, identifying the operational and symbolic centre of reclamation near the ruins of a Roman mausoleum. Rappini himself advocated its construction instead of the portable wooden sheds used at the time in malaria-ridden sites. So far from Rome, a masonry structure was much safer for both men and tools.

Crossing the Pontine Plain from Cisterna to the Portatore Canal

Anyone driving to the Pontine plain from Termini station misses the first monumental stretch of the Appian Way (Fig. 2). Thereby the threshold of the Eternal City shifts to the much-discussed architectural/urban ensemble of Rome's 1942 Universal Exposition. After about 60 K, passed the National Park of the Castelli Romani, we reach Cisterna, where Rumiz spotted the languages of India and Pakistan spoken by immigrant farm laborers and a number of Italian dialects (2016 71). At Cisterna, back in the 1930s, delegates of the Opera Nazionale Combattenti (from now on ONC)[8] received families from the provinces of Ferrara and Treviso, providing them with livelihood and working tools (Folchi 2013) before reaching their assigned farms west of the Appian Way. Those to the east were mainly for settlers from the nearby foothill towns. Lined with slender pine trees framing opposite views, the road marked a boundary. In the aftermath of the First World War, when the Rome-Naples railway line was near completion, Gelasio Caetani launched an earlier reclamation scheme, whereby the family palace at Cisterna acted as a logistic centre.[9] It

[7] The *Decennovium*, mentioned by Latin historians and by many 18th century travellers, was a canal for towing boats parallel to the Appian Way.

[8] National Organisation of ex Service Men.

[9] Built from 1560 to 1574 on the ruins of a pre-existing fortress. The Caetani famly, originally from Gaeta, has controlled the Pontine Plain since the late 13th

also hosted the Committee for Peasant Literacy,[10] advocating an educational approach based on the appreciation of the local environment, art, and architecture (Cantatore 2021, 67-68). Its teachers commuted daily in gigs, bicycles and mules along the semi-flooded Appia Way to hold classes in huts or demountable cabin-schools scattered in the quadrangle formed by the Alban foothills, the Lepine Mountains, the wooded coastal dunes and Mount Circeo (Caetani 1924, 361). At Casal delle Palme, facing each other across the road, we still find the long two-storey farmhouse, which, in the late 1930s, hosted the Red Cross anti-malaria centre[11] and the small rural school built in 1921 for the children of seasonal peasants, reclamation workers and, since 1927, new settlers living in ONC farms.[12] This is just one of the cottage schools in the Roman countryside, often integrated by an experimental field, the teacher's apartment or the doctor's office, and a small bell tower. They all looked like chapels against the austere beauty of the plain with its ubiquitous reed huts (Morpurgo 1921, 366). Unlike urban schools, they had a domestic character meant to evoke the social role of the family (Corradini 1911).

Up to Terracina, the Appia Way (Fig. 3) runs straight through a perspective gallery of maritime pines. Some 2 km before the Epitaph Road,[13] it crosses Rio Martino, cut through the dune in 204 BCE and reused as an outlet for the Collector of mid-height waters in the 1930s.[14]

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century. In the early 1920s, Gelasio Caetani conceived a reclamation scheme hinged on family properties, which the Italian Government intended to undertake with all the latest technical means. See: Caetani 1924; Sottoriva 2014.

[10] The *Ente morale Le Scuole per i contadini dell'Agro Romano e delle Paludi Pontine* recognised in 1921.

[11] The Italian Red Cross run eleven anti-malaria centres in the area; some providing day-hospital facilities, others functioning as hospitals for workers and settlers.

[12] A few years after its construction, this school accommodated up to one hundred children. It gradually lost importance with the raise of new villages.

[13] The name refers to a marble aedicule with an inscription from 1786 celebrating the reclamation undertaken by Pope Pius VI.

[14] The 32-km-long Collettore delle Acque Medie collects water from minor creeks and small rivers.

Vestiges of the ancient past and functional infrastructure were equally essential to finalise integral reclamation. The Epitaph Road was an earlier *decauville* linking the railway station, the stone-quarry of Monticchio, and the road intersection of Quadrato, a repairing and storage station with a water tower, upgraded in 1927 as an antimalarial station with a school and a small church, the embryo of Littoria/Latina.

Some 5 km north of Latina, at Tor Tre Ponti (ancient *Tripontium*)[15], the road widens up into a square encompassed by three buildings concatenated at right angles, all dating back to the last decade of the 18th century. Francesco Navone, architect of the Reverend Apostolic Chamber, designed the imposing church, whose gable-less façade framed by pilasters and cornices resembles that of a palace. Gaetano Rappini, the hydraulic engineer in charge, designed the adjacent Capuchin convent, which also served as a barn. On entering the building, we still find a lifting hole in the ceiling. At full capacity, Tor Tre Ponti could accommodate engineers and technicians, a cavalry district and a picket for riflemen. In Gelasio Caetani's plan, the complex (now seat of the Roffredo Caetani Foundation) was meant as a storage centre for the nearby Eschido Farm. Tor Tre Ponti, however, is the first of the five staging posts from Cisterna to Terracina at the confluence of pre-existing watercourses into the Linea Pio Canal. Differing in size and rank yet sharing the same three-arched portico, all corresponding to Roman *stationes*.

The next, after four Roman miles (nearly 6 km), is Foro Appio. Recently converted into a Spa Hotel it originally housed the maintenance technicians at the confluence of Cavata River. It corresponds to ancient *Forum Appii*, where travellers could board barges pulled by mules or horses and reach Terracina when the Appia Way was impassable (Rumiz 2016). Recent archaeological findings have shown that *Forum Appii* was also a service and exchange centre for the surrounding area.[16] A road loop across

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[15] The old toponym refers to a nearby three-arched bridge across Ninfa River dating back to Theodoric the Great, including a tower (now disappeared), a mill, farmland, and a fish farm.

[16] Widely documented in literary sources, Foro Appio has been excavated by a team of archaeologists from Groningen University since 2012. See: Fabi 1856, 47.

the road takes us to Borgo Faiti, a small village belonging to the Ferraioli family, upgraded in 1933 with the addition of stores and the "dopolavoro" recreation centre.

The nearby Migliara 43 lines a late-18th- century drain and blends into the Road of the Lepine Mountains (Via dei Monti Lepini). When lined with trees acting as windbreaks, the abstract geometry of the one-roman-mile grid (which does not follow the line of maximum incline) turns into spatial units that the eye can perceive, related to ONC farm-houses[17] hovering between the original standardised vernacular and its subsequent customization.

After two miles, we reach Bocca di Fiume (Rivermouth), a second-rank staging post at the crossing with Migliara 45, connecting the logistic centres of Borgo Capograssa and Borgo Grappa with Casal Traiano, an experimental farm built in the aftermath of Pius VI's reclamation. At the crossroads with Migliara 48, we find another abandoned anti-malarial clinic of the Italian Red Cross, a complex of small pavilions (in line with the then cutting-edge principles of hygiene and functionality in hospital architecture) built when land subdivision was under way in 1933.[18] This small roadside clinic also served the surrounding countryside, confirming the interdependency of healthcare facilities and infrastructural network. After eradication of malaria, the complex would be available for road maintenance services.

In its close proximity, on 18 December 1935, Mussolini laid the first stone of Pontinia. That day he stood next to the camera on a podium in

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[17] Ugo Todaro, chief engineer of the ONC, Opera Nazionale Combattenti, conceived about twenty standard types, in order to avoid excessive monotony, and to meet the progressive differentiation of production.

[18] For a detailed description of this clinic see the report by the Pontine Reclamation Consortium (1935) entitled *Opere Complementari alla Bonifica - Lotto XII Ponte di accesso a Pontinia ed opere varie a scopo igienic*o, 29 May 1935. The building programme - an outpatient clinic for a maximum of 7 beds and a doctor and two nurses in residence - changed in the works, adding a secondary unit for 14 beds. The main building was expandable and had three entrances in connection with adjoining pavilions, which hosted the garage, the laundry and the kitchen.

front of a blackening crowd. With the new political course, public life regained an order made tangible by the geometric voids of the new towns, moulding peasant masses into solid blocks.

Some scholars (Ciucci 1980; 2002; Tentori 2006) have questioned the location of Pontinia in the quadrangular area intercepted by Migliara 47 and 48 in between the Appia Way and the late-16th century Sisto River. Moreover, a recent exhibition at the National Museum of 21st Century Arts (MAXXI) in Rome brought back in the limelight Le Corbusier' ambitions on the new rural town (Talamona 2012). We should not overlook its vicinity to the main staging post halfway through the marshes, corresponding to ancient *ad Medias*, mentioned in the Peutinger Map.[19] Sheltering the functional units necessary to carry out reclamation works and their subsequent maintenance, this monumental multipurpose building was intended as the embryo of a new town, whose model to scale aroused the enthusiasm of Archduke Ferdinand on his way to Naples in January 1780 (Folchi 2002, 151-153). Its fine symmetrical façade conceals the internal complexity: granaries, ovens and wheat grindstones, lodging for managers, employees, soldiers and permanent workers, a tool store and a smithy forge, a hospital and a prison.[20] The church, the guardhouse and the main staircase graft onto the double-height Greek-cross atrium accessed by the giant portal framed by Roman milestones. Upon entering, we find ourselves in an antiquarium, in front of Roman vestiges embedded in the walls, just few meters from toiled fields and drainage canals. Ponte Maggiore, the last stop before Terracina, corresponds to Migliara 53

[19] The Groningen Institute of Archaeology produced conjectural maps depicting ancient *Forum Appii* and *ad Medias*, exhibited at the Museo dell'Agro Pontino MAP. Both sites appear in the late-18th century watercolour views by Carlo Labruzzi.

[20] According to the 1820 survey, the wing towards Rome housed a large oven and a bakery, the henhouse, the woodshed, the pantry, a stable, as well as a barn and a contingent of soldiers. The southern wing towards Terracina consisted of the staging post proper with its large stable, a garage for coaches, saddlery, various barns, and the prisons; the inn and related activities occupied a separate unit. Workers and employees lived on the upper floors, leaving the attics for the barns.

cutting through the plain from Sabaudia to Mazzocchio pumping station. If Mazzocchio was a flagship in reclamation technology,[21] Sabaudia epitomised the successful integration of architecture, planning and urban design. Rightfully, engineer Cesare Albertini singled out Littoria, Sabaudia and Pontinia as "cities of roads" (1934, 241). Indeed, these urban structures appeared as junctions integrating new and pre-existing roads. Located on the shores of Lake Paola, in close proximity to Domitian's villa, Sabaudia grafted onto Migliara 53 with a series of squares framing views of Cape Circeo, the scene of the legendary encounter between Ulysses and Circe, the Sorceress.

This interplay of roads shifting into a longitudinal system of squares and the calibrated proportions between public buildings and open spaces, led Piero Bottoni to consider Sabaudia the best example of Italian rationalist planning, heralding the success of the overall reclamation (Carfagna 2009, 304).

Fig. 2 View of the Appia Way at the crossing with Migliara 47. Photo by C. Pallini, November 2021.

[21] Mazzocchio was the biggest pumping station in Europe at the time, including seven pumps produced by RIVA and Franco Tosi from Legnano which made it possible to drain the 9,000 hectares from the Quartaccio basin by raising the water by almost 5 m into the Ufente River and eventually into to the sea.

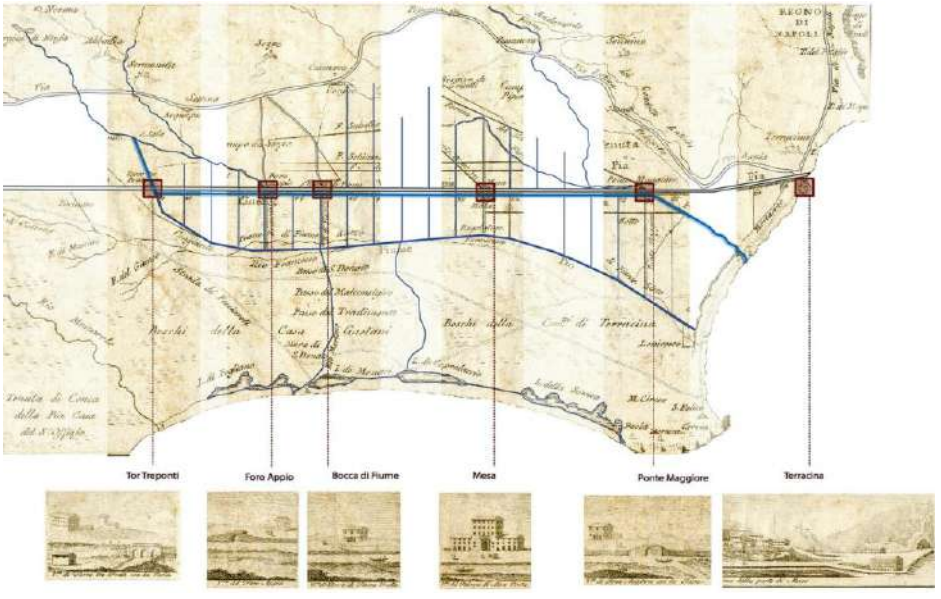

Fig. 3 Map of the Plain from Cisterna to Terracina, showing the rectilinear stretch of the Appia Way lined by the Linea Pio canal, the perpendicular drains and the staging posts. Elaboration by A. Korolija, from D.Pronti, *Pianta topografica del Circondario Pontino*, 1788, Rome State Archive.

The Egnatia Way in northern Greece, from Thessaloniki to Giannitsa

The *Via Egnatia* extended the Appian Way across Illyria, Macedonia, Thrace and the Hellespont, forming the axis of the Roman Empire, the only good road on that route for more than 2,000 years (O'Sullivan 1972, 11; Zachariadou 1996). It provided southern Italy with a short-cut to the Aegean starting from Apollonia (Valona) and Dyrrachium (Durrës) and reaching Asia at Byzantium. Halfway was the port of Thessaloniki, where the western and eastern routes formed a wedge merging into the *decumanus maximus*. Modern Vardar Square has replaced the Golden Gate portrayed by Cousinery (1831). Some years ago, though, anyone driving eastbound in front of the railway station could spot some half-ruined *hans*[22] and an

[22] In the Ottoman Empire, a *han* was a roadside inn where travellers could rest, recover and trade.

endless row of bus terminals,[23] a meeting point for daily labourers search of jobs in the *Campania*, as many used to call the alluvial plain of the Thermaic Gulf (Leake 1835, 259; Cvijić 1918, 50; Ancel 1930, 194). A bit further, there were: the railway yard, the old textile and food industries, leather factories, tobacco manufactures, and just beyond the artificial drain of the Eastern Railway Company there were the refinery, petrochemical and steel plants. In front of the industrial area of Sindos, across the road, is the village of Anchialos, whose grid layout reveals at once its raison d'être and date of birth: a settlement for the rural refugees who arrived from Asia Minor in 1923 after the Greco-Turkish War, destitute people whose only asset was the common origin from the same village.[24] Most of them settled in the New Lands of the North, doubling the percentage of Greek population (Hastaoglou-Martinidis, Pallini 2021).

Drawn by the exceptional challenge where the doctor and the engineer, the architect and the merchant had their place near the settler himself, French geo-politician Jacques Ancel left us a priceless account of the physical transformation entailed by this process (Ancel 1930). New settlements like Anchialos followed a regular grid layout drawn on-site by the engineers and surveyors of the colonisation service. The first settlers came from the homonymous wine-growing village on the Black Sea, followed by others from Stenimacho, Pyrgos and Sozopol. Nearby Agios Athanasios (former Cavacli) - recently come to the forefront for the discovery of two frescoed Macedonian tombs - received refugees from 25 villages of Eastern Thrace and 7 villages of Asia Minor, who found their first shelter in the pre-existing farms around the small church of Saint George, now the oldest building in town.

After the junction with the national highway, we finally reach Gefyra ("bridge" in Greek), a synecism of Topsin, Néa Sozoupolis and Néa Métraï

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23 Now moved to the Macedonia Intercity Bus Station inaugurated in 2002.

24 The Peace Treaty of Lausanne, signed on 24 July 1923 between Greece and Turkey, established the compulsory exchange of population between the two countries. This imposed 1.2 million Christian Orthodox (50,000 families) to leave Turkey and resettle in Greece, where their number amounted to almost one fourth of the total population.

dating back to the 1920s. While Topsin, dating back to the 15th century, was inhabited by native families of Vlachs, Sarakatsans and Kastaneriotes[25] (Garde 1996, 119), Néa Sozoupolis was established by 300 families of Bulgarian wine growers and Néa Métraï by 230 families of farmers from the Eastern Thrace. West of Ano Gefyra, along the old Vardar road, is the Museum of the Balkan Wars housed in Jacob Modiano's eclectic mansion (1906) where Greek and Ottoman generals discussed the handover of Thessaloniki to Greece (1912). This fine building was part of a model farm bearing witness to the rural turn that Ottoman reclamation plans (Hastaoglou-Martinidis, Pallini, 2021) induced in the local commercial elite. Jewish entrepreneurs like Modiano bought land from Turkish or Albanian owners and resettled Greeks from Chalkidiki or Vlachs from Pindos, whereas *Donmeh* like Hamdy Bey[26] built villages on the opposite bank for Greeks from Chalkidiki, Olympia and the Islands (Bérard 1897, 204-205). At the turn of the 20th century though, only one-twentieth of the vast flood-threatened plain was under cultivation, despite the natural asset provided by the Vardar valley as a channel for modern trade (Bérard 1897, 15, 155). About 30 km from Thessaloniki, the Egnatia Way passes the new bridge over the Vardar, from where one can catch sight of the old ruined Vierendeel bridge set on the artificial embankments which inaugurated the reclamation works. Before anything else, it was a matter of protecting from floods the marshy lowlands of the plain and working fast to avoid failures on site. Reclaiming the plain for agriculture and protection of

[25] Vlachs is a term use to define the populations of the southern Balkans (Greece, Albania and Macedonia) who spoke dialects close to Romanian. The Sarakatsan were transhumant shepherds living in the mountainous regions of continental Greece. Kastaneriotes were people from Kastaneri, a small village north of Kilkis (we owe this piece of information to prof. Vilma Hastaoglou-Martinidis).

[26] The *Donmeh* community emerged in the second half of the 17th century following a massive conversion to Islam of Jews living in the large cities of the eastern Mediterranean. Their increasing importance in late 19th century Thessaloniki is testified by the fact that, in 1893, Hamdi Bey became mayor and managed the extension of the city and the procurement of major urban services: water supply, gas lighting, public transport.

communication[27] entailed large-scale embankments works, damming, river realignment and repair, drainage of swamps and lakes, as well as building and repair of bridges and roads (Pepelasis, Minoglou 1993). In 1925, the Foundation Company of New York, a world leader in hydraulic and sanitation works, roads, railway and bridge construction, undertook reclamation works in the plain and the lower Vardar Valley. The swampy lake was drained by December 1937, but the overall works achieved completion only in the 1940s, due to the lack of detailed plan and long-term financing arrangements, and to the high incidence of malaria.

Off the main road before Chalkidona (former Iéladjik), a neo-Byzantine hall church built with demolition stones (possibly from the nearby minaret) overlooks a lawn quilted with carved stone disks, backed by curtain of trees following the Vardarovassi Canal. This is an abandoned cemetery of the Bogomili (Fig. 4), a medieval Christian sect, whose influence on heretical movements in Western Europe awaits further clarifications (Tashkovski 1975, 8). At Chalkidona, we find the junction to the old national road to Athens, cutting through the whole extent of the reclaimed plain.

Fig. 4 View of the Church of St. Peter and Paul in the Cemetery of the Bogomili (9th-10th century). Photo by C. Pallini, 1999.

[27] These included the Egnatia Way, the railway lines to Athens and Belgrade, as well as the port of Thessaloniki, which risked silting.

The Egnatia Way (Fig. 5) branches off into a secondary road almost dovetailing the contour line at +10 m above sea level. Some two kilometres ahead, we cross a narrow canal with concrete banks, draining water from the Vardar into the plain near the village of Paralymni, "by the lake," possibly one of the few fishermen hut villages encompassing the former marshy. Refugee settlement, predating reclamation, turned the *Campania* upside down. Each village, either renovated or created from scratch, had its own experimental field so that, with the help of the agricultural experts of the colonisation service, the cultivated area increased considerably (Ancel 1930, 195).

In antiquity, the greater part of the *Campania* was either submerged or waterlogged. Over time, waters from the Voras, Vermio and Paiko mountains silted what was once a sea inlet (Hammond 1972; 1979; 1988). Pella, the capital of ancient Macedonia, stretched from the port to the Egnatia Way, holding a favourable position to access the route along the right bank of the Vardar.

At this point, we cannot but follow the British geographer William Martin Leake, who travelled the region extensively, spotting its few remaining vestiges with the help of ancient sources. In 1835, on his way to Edessa, he only met some small caravans of camels and found the plain sparsely populated and poorly cultivated, yet feeding a great number of herds and flocks, hares, plovers and woodcocks. One hour and 10 minutes after crossing the Vardar, he noticed a tumulus on the right, then five more nearly in a line, the last at a stone's throw from Alaklisi: Allah Kilise (Church of God) in Turkish. This village, also called Agii Apostoli (Holy Apostles) in Greek, or Postol in the local Slavic language, had replaced the fortress of ancient Pella rising amphitheatrically on the hill (Leake 1835, 260-266). Seen from afar, the tumuli marked the intersections of secondary roads (Schmidt-Dounas, 2016). On the left, an immense marsh extended southward towards the sea and westward towards Mount Olympus. Descending from Alaklisi into the main road, fragments of former buildings emerged from the fields and the foundations of a wall – whose edge was parallel to the road at the distance of half a mile - faded into the marsh. Polybius was true: Pella stood upon a southwest-sloping height bounded by impassable marshes, from which the citadel rose like an island

built upon an immense embankment. In 1918, refugees from Bulgaria preceded those from Eastern Thrace and in 1926 Agii Apostoli was renamed Pella.

Three kilometres to the west lies Néa Pella, which Jaques Ancel (1930, 152) described as a village of thatched cottages for refugees from Tsiflikioi in Eastern Thrace. Before reaching the roadside park with a playing field and the chapel of Agia Paraskevi (after an icon from Tsiflikioi), the Egnatia Way laps the site of Roman Colony of Iulia Augusta Pella (45-30 BCE). Néa Pella well epitomises the grid of perpendicular roads whose width indicates their hierarchy, forming identical blocks for small houses, all the same, row on row, each with its backyard. Uphill along the main road is the early-1940s neo-Byzantine church, the school and, further up, the football ground.

After just 9 km, we reach Giannitsa, our final destination, lying on the foot of Mount Paiko. It is not easy to recognise the few remaining vestiges of Yenice-i Vardar (literally the "new town by the Vardar") in what now appears to be a provincial agricultural centre. The Ottomans founded it in the late 14th century as a bridgehead towards the Balkans (Kiel, 1971) and, in 1430, Sultan Murad II moved from here to conquer Thessaloniki. Ancel reported that Giannitsa - centre of the Colonization district since 1923 - bore little resemblance to the small Turkish town he once knew. A town that travellers extolled for its vast market and huge caravanserai (Demetriades 1975; Nomikos, 1993). Some vestiges were to be found on the elongated hill above the plain; to the south, the old city spread out in rubble, with a last minaret still standing. Turks and Bulgarians had left the field clear for Thracian refugees, still wearing their brown knickerbockers, tight at the ankles, a red belt, a waistcoat and a short brown jacket. They were all sturdy planters of tobacco, corn and vines. White rural houses identified the Thracian neighbourhood of the north, whereas a new district of grey workers' houses was rising towards the south-west. Out of 9,128 inhabitants, 5,383 were refugees, of whom 4,501 were farmers (Ancel 1930, 193-194).

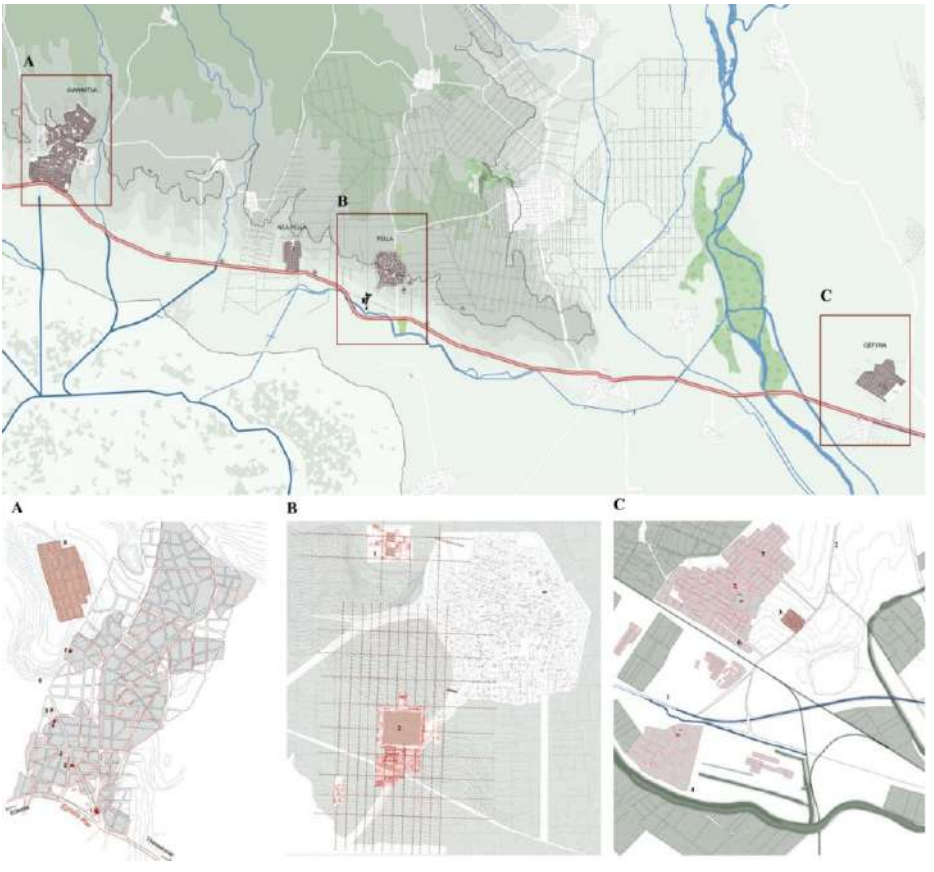

Fig.5 Map of the Egnatia Way from Gefyra to Giannitsa, showing a detail of Giannitsa (A), Pella (B) and Gefyra (C). Elaborations by A. Korolija based on maps by the Greek Military Geographic Institute (1977) and re-drawings by D. Erdim and C. Pallini.

[A]. Map of Giannitsa superimposing late-1920s plans to the pre-existing layout. Legend. 1. Great Mosque, 1510; 2. Evrenos Bey hammam (1390-1400); 3. Mausoleum of Evrenos Bey; 4. Clock tower (1753-54); 5. Mausoleum of Ahmad Bey, late 15th c.; 6. Evrenosoglu Ahmad Bey hammam, ca. 1490; 7. Evrenosoglu Ahmad Bey Mosque, ca. 1490; 8 Thracian refugee quarter.

[B]. Map of Pella, former Agii Apostoli, near the archaeological site of ancient Pella (in red):

Legend: 1. Royal Palace; 2. Agora close to the Egnatia Way.

[C]. Map of Gefyra. Legend: 1. Egnatia Way; 2. Old Vardar Road; 3. Former Modiano Farm; 4. Lower Gefyra (former Topsin); 5. Sozopol (Upper Gefyra); 6. Metres (Upper Gefyra).

Concluding remarks

When approaching rural development and colonisation processes, we often come across narratives (imbued or not with the rhetoric of the time) presenting modernisation to a decisive leap forward, almost equating it to an erasure of the past.

The case studies of the Pontine Plain and Northern Greece differ in many ways: the overall purpose of the reclamation scheme in the nation-building process, the extension and significance of the regions concerned, the number of settlers and new settlements, and the part played by architecture and town planning. In fact, a comparison between the wilderness heartland region of the Pontine Marshes and the newly acquired border territories of Northern Greece shows how vestiges of the distant, and most recent past played a key functional role while also making the past - in general - available for new identity narratives.

We believe that a project-oriented-approach may greatly contribute to unravel these complex dynamics, trying to understand the process from within, the actual sequence, and rationale of each physical transformation. For this, the late-18th century reclamation of the Pontine Marshes provides a good example of a project based on the thorough interpretation of the permanent and variable physical features in a dynamic relationship with the pre-existing infrastructure. Incidentally, the significance of the Appia Way - with its staging posts also serving the nomadic and scattered rural population – was re-framed: a modern infrastructure of the Papal State.

Crossing modernist rural landscapes along two sections of the same long-distant route, we understood that the reciprocity of town planning, architecture, and urban design owes much to the "latent order" embedded in the historical landscape palimpsest. Obviously, we are borrowing this notion from Andre Corboz (1983), who referred it to the land, as the result of natural and artificial transformations, a sequence of superimpositions and erasures of natural-artificial elements, thereby shifting the focus from the outcome to the process and moving beyond the dichotomy between new and old.

Endless reclamation attempts of the Pontine Marshes deposited not only a conspicuous body of knowledge and data, but also roads and canals

eventually embedded in the 1930s reclamation scheme, rather more pragmatic than Rappini's. Those attempts dovetailed catchment areas, embedding natural and artificial waterbodies and functional infrastructure, be it the Rome-Naples railway, a decauville or an old sheep track.

The rural modernisation in Macedonia generated a slightly different narrative. The little Greek nation, then consisting of four and one-half million people, had its numbers increased, within the space of a few weeks to nearly six million, while losing, simultaneously, part of its territory. In such conditions of emergency, the combined standardisation of planning and architecture produced a dramatic landscape change, achieving a new category of monumentality in the relationship with the monumental tumuli and the legendary archaeological sites uncovered ever since.

Thinking of the "land" – to put in Corboz' words - as a never-ending construction site, we may also refer to Italian urbanist Gian Franco Di Pietro (2002), who conjured the metaphor of landscape as a literary text where the vestiges of the past are as in-text quotations. By using the powerful metaphor of landscape as "the remains of homeland," Di Pietro referred to the palimpsest as a distinguishing feature of the Europe, whereby physical traces of antiquity and more recent past stand side to side in stark opposition to waves of mass-urbanization.

Some fifty years ago, anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) coined the notion of thick description referring to interdisciplinary contextual interpretations common among social scientists, but not so much among expert on spatial sciences and architecture. Nonetheless, we can hardly approach any spatial aspect of large-scale reclamation and agricultural colonization schemes without venturing into thick descriptions. This because the conspicuous economic and political efforts were paralleled by a broad spectrum of technical knowledge, but also by imaginative and cultural challenges.

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