The Italian Mosaic: The Architect as Historian

MARISTELLA CASCIATO
University of Bologna

Learning Architecture, Teaching History: Schools, Numbers, and Roles

The creation of the Scuola Superiore di Architettura in Rome in 1919 marked the birth of architecture schools in Italy. The historic event took place after a lively debate that lasted more than half a century and revolved around questions regarding the roles of the engineer and the architect (as designers, state employees, and teachers) and around the recognition of their professional status. The debate had originated in 1859, at the time of the establishment of the Scuola di Applicazione per gli Ingegneri di Torino and the Istituto Tecnico Superiore di Milano, both of which were commonly called Politecnici and granted degrees in engineering and architecture. However, it was also possible to become an architect by following the Corso Speciale Superiore of architecture at the already existing institutes and academies of fine arts. The same degree, therefore, was granted to people of two different educational backgrounds: one, technical and scientific, producing the “civil” architect of the Politecnici, the other artistic, producing the “artist” architect of the academies. The two types mirrored two distinct attitudes toward architecture. The first emphasized the technical aspect of buildings, the second their aesthetic appearance, often limited to the design of the façade and of interiors.  

The intense debate among intellectuals, architects, and functionaries of the Ministry of Education at the turn of the nineteenth century was not so much about the value of one type of training over the other as it was about the need for a new professional category for the individual who was at the same time “an expert builder . . . and a knowledgeable and imaginative artist,” capable of working in an architectural and artistic idiom that would define the national identity of a finally reunited Italy. In the years directly preceding World War I, criticism of empty “urban stage sets” was widespread, and the notion of “well-made houses” was favored; Baukunst and Städtebau were the German terms to which theoretical architects constantly referred.

The Scuola Superiore di Architettura in Rome attempted to educate this new type of professional through a curriculum that combined science (producing technical know-how) and culture (expressing itself in the art of building). The architect was to be a technical expert capable of performing on all scales of production, from furnishings to whole cities. The Roman school was accredited in 1921, putting an end to the old questions regarding the nature and validity of architectural degrees. It also became the model for four schools, all called Scuola Superiore di Architettura, whose development was given a boost by fascism: that in Venice opened in 1926, in Turin in 1929, and in Naples and Florence in 1930. Alberto Calza Bini, who was the first director of the school of Naples and later served as secretary of the National Fascist Union of Architects, proudly wrote, “Four cities, four schools, four different missions; but all with Rome at the center as hinge and guide . . . [aiming at the] triumph of Italian architecture.”

The Scuola Superiore di Architettura of Milan was founded in 1933 and was to become unique among Italian architecture schools. As the architecture section of the Istituto Tecnico Superiore of Milan, it had always enjoyed the contribution of teachers from the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera; it was in effect already functioning as a Scuola Superiore di Architettura. In addition, for more than half a century the section had awarded, autonomously, a large number of degrees in “civil architecture”; the students who held these degrees had an excellent reputation in the professional field. The Milanese model was the only one whose ideology and institutional makeup were opposed to those of the school of Rome. In 1932, after the directors of the five independent Superiore schools decided in favor of a “unity of approach” to the curriculum, the Milan institution was forced by the Ministry of Education to change its structure and content. The following year, its architecture section became a school of architecture. Then, in the course of the academic year 1935–36, all the Superiore schools were integrated as architecture departments in their cities’ universities (Facoltà di Architettura di Roma, and so on), with the exception of Venice, which was called the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia (IUAV) and was autonomous with regard to that city’s university. The second half of the twentieth century saw the birth of more architecture schools attached to local universities.
The Facoltà di Architettura at Palermo opened in 1957, that at Genoa in 1968, and at Reggio Calabria and Pescara in 1971. Now the geographical distribution of the schools was balanced, with four in the northern part of the country (Genoa, Milan, Turin, and Venice), three in the central region (Florence, Pescara, and Rome), and three in the south (Naples, Palermo, and Reggio Calabria). The picture remained unchanged for almost two decades. By the beginning of the 1990s, however, the number of schools had risen to fifteen, and the last ten years have seen a boom. Currently there are thirty schools of architecture in Italy. Some cities have more than one, within the same university or at different universities, and some schools have branches in more remote areas. Turin, for example, has two schools in the city and a third in Mondovi; Milan has four, two of which are in Mantua and Como; three schools were created when the IUAV was reorganized; Rome has three schools, two in the Sapienza and one called Roma Tre (Rome Three); Naples has one school in the city, a second at Cava dei Tirreni, and a third in Aversa, near Caserta.

While competition is healthy and can help improve the overall quality of education, it is arduous to navigate through the increasingly extensive and intricate network of schools, departments, and programs. The situation has been further complicated by the university reform enacted by the Italian government in 1999, according to which several program options were made available to the university faculties: to maintain the five-year degree course (the old system), to update the five-year degree course with the less-flexible degree course set by the European Union (the new system), or to introduce a division into three course cycles, each with its own end—triennial degree (three years), specialized degree (two years), and research doctorate (three years)—for a total of eight years. In the latter framework, set up in response to EU regulations, each cycle prepares the student for the next one while maintaining its own focus. The purpose of this approach is to create professionals with different levels of competence. It provides richer opportunities for students and imposes stronger demands on the faculty. The multiplicity of programs is a challenge and the outcome is still highly unpredictable.

The flexibility left to individual faculties has resulted in a significant number of schools deciding to allow various options to coexist, which has produced a proliferation of degree programs and greater difficulty in managing the teaching process. The decisions have not been followed up by an increase in the number of teachers, nor a strengthening of facilities. During the past three years, another variable further complicated this state of affairs as a result of the peculiar nature of the university system, split up as it is among the state, the regions, and the private sector. In addition to the architecture schools aimed at training architects, there are now schools of “ingegneria edile” (building engineering) that have established degree-granting programs in engineering-architecture. According to new European Union regulations, these programs train graduates who may practice as architects in all the countries of the EU. There are currently fourteen engineering schools in Italy, distributed fairly uniformly throughout the country.

Within this complex educational system, where different approaches intertwine and which includes, along with architectural sciences, industrial design, conservation of architectural heritage, and landscape architecture, the teaching of architectural history (ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary) forms a common thread—even though its importance varies widely. Almost as though it were a necessary corollary to the cultural training of the architect, all architecture degree programs offer at least one semester of architectural history in the first year. In general, a minimum of two courses in it are required, and the number increases in programs with a clearly historical bent, such as Conservation of the Architectural and Environmental Heritage, which is currently available in eight architecture schools.

On the level of doctoral programs, the teaching of architectural history is aimed primarily at training architectural historians and conservationists. Sometimes different architecture schools jointly offer doctorates in architectural history. There are currently eight such collaborations in effect under different names (History and Criticism of Architecture, History of Architecture and City Planning, Conservation of Architectural, Urban, and Environmental Heritage, and so on). Together the IUAV and the Università Ca’ Foscari di Venezia recently established a “doctorate of excellence” in the history of architecture and the city and restoration (and including art history and literary and art theory). In addition, doctorates with a focus on the history of technology and materials are offered at the engineering schools of Tor Vergata in Rome and the Politecnico in Turin. There are now also numerous university master’s programs with Italian and EC accreditation, as well as some schools that specialize in architectural history, restoration, the preservation of historic cities, and the history and theory of architectural design. All these programs, which are attended for the most part by students with architecture degrees, have produced a cohort of young architectural historians who have been rejuvenating the faculties of Italian architecture schools during the last decade. For architectural historians with doctorates, museums (state, local, and private) and the governmental Soprintendenze ai
Monumenti (the agencies that increasingly engage in research along with preservation and restoration) provide an important professional opportunity.

The history of architecture has also been incorporated into the curricula of degree programs in cultural heritage offered by schools of humanities. In these contexts, architectural history is rarely separated from art history and is commonly taught by art historians. Thus the historical split between technical and humanities schools persists: while the instructors in the architecture and engineering schools are architects by training, there are few architect-historians in the humanities schools.

The relationship between the structure of architecture schools and the teaching of architectural history is described by the Ministry for University and Scientific Research as follows:

The scientific-educational contents regard the history of building activities and of other activities related to the formation and transformation of the environment (gardens, parks, landscapes, cities, and the territory) in relation to the political, economic, social, and cultural context of the various historical periods; the historical subjects concerning specific aspects of those activities, from the representation of architectural space to building techniques; the history of architectural thought and theory; the critical study of architectural works, examined in context with reference to their causes, programs, and uses, in their linguistic and technical modalities, in their constructed reality, in their significance. Paradigmatic fields include: the history of gardens and the landscape; the history of architecture; the history of ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary architecture; the history of city planning; the history of architectural criticism and literature; the history of the representation of architectural space; the history of architectural techniques; the history and methods of architectural analysis.\(^\text{14}\)

This statement elicits many reactions; I will consider those related to the teaching process. The variety of “histories”—a sign of the wealth inherent in the discipline itself—implies a continuity between history of architecture and theory, and that theory is fed by many streams: history of architectural thought, critique of architecture and historiography, and methods of architectural analysis. The persistent chronological subdivision of the history of architecture and urban planning into four periods—ancient, medieval, modern, contemporary—creates overlapping of material and remains a source of confusion. Leaving aside the questionable methodological value of this approach, one could argue for a didactic utility if the four-period structure was used in all schools, but it is not. Even worse is the lack of an effort to mark coherent chronological frames. I am not arguing for a history pigeonholed into rigid categories or for limiting a faculty’s autonomy.\(^\text{15}\) However, reading the syllabi (now widely available on the Internet), one discovers that while the history of ancient architecture now usually includes the Middle Ages (this historical category generally refers to the Romanesque and Gothic, and is itself in need of discussion), some courses in the “modern” segment deal with the Renaissance and Baroque periods, and others begin modernity with the industrial revolution and the avant-gardes. Similar confusion occurs even within the history of contemporary architecture, which is often accused of being merely the handmaiden of criticism; the contemporary, considered the realm of the here and now, sees its time limit its move forward and backward according to the aims of the teachers.

Furthermore, the contradiction implicit in the ministry’s statement between teaching history and being historians merits careful methodological consideration. A last reflection concerns the field of restoration, which is closely linked to the history of architecture. Given the importance of Italy’s architectural patrimony, the preservation of monuments and historic cities is of primary importance for the nation’s cultural identity. The osmosis between archaeology, architectural history, and restoration is increasing significantly. Restoration is nourished by the contributions of historic studies. Nonetheless, the question remains: Should the teaching of the theory and history of restoration be relegated to the architectural historian or the restoration historian?

The Genesis of the Field of Architectural History

Designer and town planner Gustavo Giovannoni (1873–1947) is the central figure in both the founding of the Scuola Superiore di Architettura in Rome and in the elaboration of a method for the history of architecture that served as the basis for the definition of a historical-architectural discipline.\(^\text{16}\) During a decisive moment in art history’s acquisition of institutional underpinnings in Italy, Giovannoni’s relationship with Adolfo Venturi, a highly erudite art historian, allowed him to participate directly in the definition of a new university discipline, which Venturi was attempting to formulate.\(^\text{17}\) In that sense, Venturi was fundamental in the evolution of Giovannoni’s research, helping him clarify the roles of the architectural historian and of the new professional figure, whom he defined as the “architetto integrale” (integral architect).\(^\text{18}\) Beginning in the 1910s, Giovannoni further developed the concept, insisting
that the teaching of art needed to be combined with solid technical and scientific training. This integration was mirrored in the didactic program of the new Roman school, where the goal was to overcome the separation between types of knowledge and to eliminate the distance between the “civil” architect and the professor of drawing and surveying. The “true” architect, according to Giovannoni, was at once an “artist, technician, and person of culture.” As architectural historian Paolo Nicoloso notes, the debate was about “an art that can be taught and of a technical education that does not affect artistic expression.” Nicoloso argues that “the whole didactic structure of architecture schools in Italy was to be constructed . . . [on] this incomprehension put[ting] Giovannoni’s school at 180 degrees from the Bauhaus of Gropius,” which was deemed the most innovative art and architecture school in Europe.

In the program of the Scuola Superiore di Architettura in Rome, each discipline, from history to the sciences, aimed at the creation of an “architectural project artistically and scientifically complete.” Of the thirteen subjects the new school required, more than half were technical. The novelty, as compared to the architecture curriculum of Milan’s engineering school, was the introduction of city building (later transformed into city planning) and the merging of architectural styles into history of architecture. This represented a crucial change in conceiving the history of architecture as a historical process instead of the analysis of stylistic episodes. “The History of Architecture” was included as a preparatory course to be taken in the first two years. Also innovative was the pairing of architectural and art history. Today very few architecture schools offer instruction in art history.

Giovannoni’s two main interests—the role of architectural history in the didactic program, and the definition of a method for the history of architecture—raise questions. To consider the first one, it is useful to return briefly to the time of the school’s founding, when a crucial transition in the relationship between history and design took place. The autonomy of history, the subject of lively debate in the 1960s and ’70s, is today a topic few architectural historians discuss. Pier Nicola Pagliara, an architectural historian at the Facoltà di Architettura, Roma Tre, recently spoke of the “advantage” enjoyed by Italian architectural historians because they are architects and thus profit, for example, from practical drafting experience while researching the original state of a building. However, at the end of the 1910s, architectural history was not seen as a function of historic knowledge and study of the architecture of the past, but essentially, even exclusively, as a function of architectural design. Giovannoni never tired of insisting vehemently on the fact that in teaching it was always necessary to seek the link between “research on the past” and “architectural synthesis.” The study of architectural styles was useful for historicist architectural design. Consequently, there was little room left for modernist architectural expression. This attitude was in line with the myth of “Italianness” that fascism expressed. “For our country,” Giovannoni wrote, “the past is a permanent glory.” As for historical method, Giovannoni recommended analyzing the buildings of the past in all their aspects, a suggestion that fit into the conception of architecture that he himself defined as “integral.”

Giovannoni advocated a “positive method,” based on direct observation of the monument, moving from the “most humble details” to a “complete survey,” from “data of documentation” to “stylistic comparisons with other monuments.” While the approach was inspired by the “comparative method” that Banister Fletcher had codified, Giovannoni began to assert that the discipline was autonomous and specific. He continued to make this claim in the following decades, and it affected the “operative history” propagated by Bruno Zevi immediately after World War II.

In distancing himself from the methods that focused purely on appearances, and which were favored by the Venturi-trained art historians, Giovannoni identified drafting and surveying as the specific tools of the architect (it is not accidental that the architects of the Renaissance, whom Giovannoni studied, entertained an analogous view). His emphasis on the graphic representation of the architectural organism owes much to the seventeen hundred tables illustrating the two volumes of Auguste Choisy’s Histoire de l’architecture (Paris, 1899). That history “is not just any history,” Guido Zucconi rightly observes, “but is a history of architecture written by engineers and aimed at a readership of engineers,” the very audience Giovannoni had in mind. In Choisy’s axonometric sections Giovannoni had found the substance of the “positive method” that made it possible to register the transformations a building type had undergone. The purpose was not to represent architecture as a painter might, but to understand proportion as well as materials.

Giovannoni was more than an admirer of Choisy; he absorbed the French historian’s teaching to the degree that he even imitated Choisy’s manner of representing buildings. Throughout the 1920s and more so in the following decade, Giovannoni’s colleagues at the Scuola Superiore in Rome imbibed his teaching and historical research method, even if their rendering techniques and skills never attained the force of the engineer-humanist’s architectural synthesis of classical sources.

The field of restoration, a more practical branch of
architectural history, grew stronger thanks to the French-inspired positivism Giovannoni energetically pursued. Closely connected with this method of analysis of materials and the related discipline of history, restoration became the testing ground, especially in the latter half of the 1930s, for many professional architectural historians who were graduating from the Italian architecture schools. Here again Giovannoni’s contribution was in his elaboration of a theory of restoration and of method, in which he distinguished between “living monuments” and “dead monuments.” He used elements of these concepts in the “restoration charter” of 1931, a document that sets down the procedures for restoration work, and, above all, in the 1939 law “On the protection of natural beauty,” which he wrote with the jurist Leonardo Severi.

At this crucial juncture, the need for scientific study of architectural history, coupled with the principle of “scientific” restoration, acquired clear cultural significance. In its many applications, the history of architecture—a discipline distinct from the history of art—required new scientific rigor. In 1937, Giovannoni founded Paladio, the first Italian magazine on the history of architecture, and the following year he began a lively debate with Venturi on the method to be used in historical research. The occasion was Giovannoni’s review of volume 11 of the monumental Storia dell’arte italiana, edited by Venturi, on the architecture of the cinquecento. The engineer-historian criticized the nonchalance with which the art historian attributed the artistic paternity of works on the basis of stylistic observation and not on documentation, suggesting his old teacher’s indifference to architecture. This criticism indicated his desire to give a new foundation to the discipline because a “positive method” could not be absent “in the study of a positive work,” that is, a piece of architecture. Giovannoni’s words sound almost like a warning to us when he laments “the scarcity . . . of plans, of sections, of graphic renderings of architectural details, of information on technical and administrative methods, of studies of the organism of the building and of the intrinsic reasons for its construction (which in turn are linked to the social and economic conditions of its time).”

Giovannoni’s method of understanding starts with the delicate operation of reading the architectural text before proceeding to its interpretation. Every step forward broadens his comprehension of the realms of creativity. It is not only science, but also intuition; not only knowledge, but also interpretation; not only authenticity, but also imagination; and not only methodological rigor, but also narrative power that underpins the profession of the historian.

These concepts have influenced three significant histories of twentieth-century architecture published in Italy in the second half of the twentieth century: Bruno Zevi’s Storia dell’architettura moderna (Turin, 1950); Leonardo Benevolo’s Storia dell’architettura moderna (Bari, 1960); and Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co’s Architettura contemporanea (Milan, 1976).

Three Historians and Three Books

By a singular coincidence, the destinies of Leonardo Benevolo, Bruno Zevi, and Manfredo Tafuri—three architect-historians—came together after World War II in the Scuola Superiore di Architettura in Rome. The first two were teaching in a highly innovative manner compared to the Roman academic tradition, while the third was first a student and then a teaching assistant, enjoying extensive contact with the other two.

In 1961, Benevolo won a position as full professor in the university system and was invited to Palermo; his academic career never brought him back to Rome. However, it was during his Roman years that he wrote Storia dell’architettura moderna, a response to the history published by Zevi exactly ten years earlier.

Zevi was awarded the chair of history of architecture in 1963, two years after Benevolo’s departure. His intense involvement in many aspects of the field soon made him a central figure in the architectural culture of democratic Italy. In 1945, he cofounded the journal Metron and the Associazione per l’Architettura Organica (APAIO), and published a seminal book, Verso un’architettura organica. That fall, he was invited to become a professor of architectural history at IUAV. His historical research continued unstintingly. During this period, he also published Saper vedere l’architettura (Turin, 1948) and Storia dell’architettura moderna; the latter was the first book of this sort written by an Italian historian. Zevi’s history was opinionated, proposing ways of creating a collective ethic in postwar Italy. He wrote of the avant-gardes, of movements that are culturally revolutionary, and of masters inspired by prophetic intuition. He admitted his account lacked continuity; he worked with tangled chronologies, denied cause-and-effect relationships, commenced and recommenced from different geographical areas.

A decade later, historical continuity took over. In Storia, Benevolo considered architecture in the context of a broad social fresco, and he emphasized its epoch-making passages. History remained magistra vitae, even if modernist research in the 1920s had finally interrupted the ancient bond between history and architectural design. “Modern architecture,” Benevolo wrote, “by interrupting the use of
the models of the past for contemporary practice, made possible a contact with tradition that was more just, historically determined, and that gave a new stimulus to historical studies.”

Zevi’s return to Rome from the IUAV in 1963 took place just as the student movement was getting started, with the first slogans calling for a culture and a school system for the masses. Tafuri, newly graduated in 1960, was among those urging the students to demand a revolutionary reorganization of the architecture school and to insist on the hiring of individuals who were emphatically aligned with modernism, Zevi among them. Zevi was the star of the lively polemics Italian architecture experienced at the end of the 1960s. His early withdrawal from the school in Rome in 1979 was not provoked by a loss of faith in the modernist project, but was a rupture with the university, which was incapable of playing an active role in the cultural and professional training of the new generation. His pedagogical approach is best described in his own words:

I have tried to teach history in the light of contemporary art and culture. For thirty years, at the beginning of every lesson... I asked the students and myself: Why are we dealing with this? And only after having found a modern key for reading the past was I able to find the operative interest in analyzing its products. . . . At that point, history was no longer a boring obligatory passage in the students’ curriculum; it was the most valid scientific laboratory for architectural design. I cannot conceive of criticism except as historical criticism.

This position, which clearly reflects Zevi’s belief in “history as the method of making architecture,” was diametrically opposed to Tafuri’s historical approach. In the slogan “There are no critics, only historians,” Tafuri not
only insisted on the fact that criticism and history made for a tautology (because history always has a critical function), but he also invited historian-architects to focus on the problem and not the object. In 1966, he won the chair of history of architecture in the university system, and two years later, not much over thirty years of age, was appointed at the IUAV. He had already acted as the protagonist on the Roman scene and written on the architecture of Frederick II in Sicily, the ideas of William Morris, the Roman Baroque, modern architecture in Japan, and Ernst May. He published Ludovico Quaroni e lo sviluppo dell’architettura moderna in Italia (Milan, 1964), the first authentic historical synthesis of Italian modern architecture from fascism to postwar neorealism.

Tafuri’s work as a historian matured in the years of the economic boom and the affirmation of the center-left in politics. In 1968, his approach to history that cast a penetrating light on contemporaneous yet disparate events bore fruit in his Teorie e storia dell’architettura. The following years were filled with passionate research, with contributions by a formidable team of assistants and students, “between design and design criticism, ... between history and historical criticism, between history as design and historical design, between rigorous philology and civil commitment,” as Giorgio Ciucci, who was part of the group, wrote.

A consequence of all this activity was Tafuri’s founding, in 1976, of the Department of Critical and Historical Analysis on the ashes of Zevi’s institute of architectural history. The term “Venetian school” of architectural history began to enter the architectural lexicon. In the same year, Architettura contemporanea, which he wrote with Francesco Dal Co, one of his first students, was also published. Significantly, the word “history” was not included in the title. The authors intended to delineate the dialectical nature of historical space and the lack of a unified narrative of the history of modern architecture, a condition that dated to the Enlightenment; they thus argued for many beginnings for many histories. Their aim was to bring the historian back to his role of “concrete” intellectual and enable architecture to “present” history and the contemporary situation. They proposed a methodology that was not based on the traditional periods and schematic terminology since these reinforced the notion of a seamless historical development.

Of these three “histories,” only Benevolo’s is still included in course syllabi. The other two have been abandoned as textbooks, even though Zevi’s was reprinted in expanded form shortly before his death in 2000. They have been reborn as subjects of textual and historiographical analyses, and the causes of their consumption and/or obsolescence as historical products form topics of examination, but younger generations of teachers have no direct link with them.

Publications
The Italian architectural publishing industry is continuously expanding, despite the general crisis brought about by the domination of the industry by a few large corporations, the prohibitive costs of photographic rights and publishing translated editions, and so on. Some topics are overexposed, excessively publicized, and often related to ephemeral fashions and taste. Students play a significant role in determining a book’s success or failure. They are also voracious consumers of ephemeral or disposable materials, such as information taken from the Internet and photocopies, which are discarded after being used for a paper or project.

Today the two most popular textbooks on the history of twentieth-century architecture are translations from English: Kenneth Frampton’s Storia dell’architettura moderna (Bologna, 1982; Modern Architecture: A Critical History [London, 1980]), and William J. R. Curtis’s L’architettura moderna del novecento (Milan, 1999; Modern Architecture since 1900 [London, 1982]). In addition, the syllabii of broad survey courses invariably include David Watkin’s Storia dell’architettura occidentale (Bologna, 1990; A History of Western Architecture [London, 1986]).

Monographs abound in Italian publishing, covering all periods and even minor architects. Equally ample is the field of architectural magazines, which includes a few excellent architectural history journals. Even though long-respected publications such as Casabella and Domus, still much enjoyed by students, devote sections to architectural history (as articles and book reviews), their focus is clearly elsewhere. Historical research, in terms of documentation and interpretation, finds reader expression in the few journals dedicated specifically to the field. They include Annali di Architettura, published by the Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio in Vicenza; Quaderni di Palazzo Te, Bollettino del Centro Studi di Storia dell’Architettura, a publication bearing the name of the institute already active in Rome in the 1920s; Quaderni di Storia dell’Architettura, published by the school of architecture of the Sapienza in Rome; and the new series of Palladio, the magazine published in the 1930s by Giovanni. Naturally, the primary audience for these periodicals is scholars and students in the field.

By contrast, anthologies or readers on specific subjects are rare. Students overcome this obstacle with an avalanche of photocopies—of shared books, of volumes borrowed from the library, and of sources downloaded from the Inter-
net. Brief works with succinct descriptions furnishing essential information on a period or movement are likewise completely lacking. The Storia della città series, edited by Donatella Calabi and published by Laterza, is a response to this lacuna. The publisher states: “The books examine the history of urban morphology from ancient Greece to the present day. The principal theme of each volume is the relation between the organization of urban spaces and their architectural forms, illustrating the economic, institutional, and cultural forms that explain the most important processes of transformation of the settlements.” Ten books are planned, of which La città del primo rinascimento, by Calabi, and La città dell’ottocento, by Guido Zucconi, have already appeared. These publications have dual goals. On the one hand, they aim to acquaint readers with a history that is not exclusively or even closely tied to the development of cities in Italy or the Western world. The expanding of the horizon is a consequence of recent scholarship on the history of the city and of the built and the natural environment. On the other hand, they intend to reconnect architecture and the city.

A more academic position is taken by Electa’s series Storia dell’architettura italiana, of which Dal Co is the general editor. Five books have been published to date: Il quattrocento (Francesco Paolo Fiore, ed.), Il primo cinquecento (Arnaldo Bruschi, ed.), Il secondo cinquecento (Claudia Conforti and Richard Tuttle, eds.), Il settecento (Giovanna Curcio and Elisabeth Kieven, eds.), and Il secondo novocento (Dal Co, ed.); volumes on the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth centuries will appear in the next two years. These publications have opened up the history of Italian architecture to investigation by an international roster of scholars and have defined a new approach, which can be shared with students. The books have also helped enlarge the field of experts to include architectural historians as well as art historians. They are, as well, excellent examples pointing to the end of a sort of provincialism from which Italian architectural history has suffered. The successful collaboration on these series by historians from many countries and cultures signals a rejuvenation of the discipline.

At the end of the 1970s, Einaudi of Turin undertook the publication of a monumental series titled Storia dell’arte italiana, consisting of seventeen volumes brought out over the course of more than a decade. The books were interdisciplinary and constituted two types. One was a chronological monograph, dedicated to the art and architectural history of a particular century. Examples included Ciucci’s work on fascist architecture and urbanism, and Manfredo Tafuri’s study of Italian architecture from 1945 to 1985. The other group had a methodological bent and investigated the history of cultures, patronage, and representation, among other topics. By contrast, at Electa, Dal Co’s aim is more modest. He is gathering the most advanced studies on each period while questioning certain historiographical prejudices. The choice of subjects and authors is thoughtful; the geographical scope is wide and not limited to the powerful academic centers, and many of the contributors are not Italian.

The multiplicity and diversity of these efforts show the urgency of rethinking issues of methodology and content in the discipline of history. Focused analysis of a work of architecture is only the first step toward its translation into historic terms and its transmission as a historic document.

Translated by Barry Fifield

I am indebted to many colleagues for contributing information to this article. Claudia Conforti, Fulvio Irace, Fabio Mangone, and Giuliana Mazzi made helpful suggestions on the occasion of the organization of the conference “La didattica della storia dell’architettura e la riforma,” Department of Civil Engineering, Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata, 7 June 2001. I thank Giorgio Ciucci for his generosity; his aid was precious, as was that of two doctoral candidates, Roberto Dulio and Maddalena Liberti. Giorgio Di Loreto, chief librarian at the Biblioteca Centrale of the school of architecture at the Università degli Studi di Roma La Sapienza, facilitated my research, supplying me with data and texts on the history of the school itself. The Fondazione Bruno Zevi in Rome and Beatrice Bettazzi have been equally generous in providing me with archival materials. Special thanks go to Arnaldo Bruschi.
Notes
2. The definition is that of Camillo Boito, an architectural theorist and professor at the Accademia di Belle Arti of Milan, “Sulla necessità di un nuovo ordinamento di studi per gli architetti civili,” Giornale dell’Ingegneria, Architettura e Agronomia 9 (Dec. 1861), 724–48. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this article are mine.
5. The episode has been the object of a careful historical reconstruction by Paolo Nicoloso, published in his Gli architetti di Musolini. Scuole e sindacato, architetti e massoni, professori e politici negli anni del regime (Milan, 1999), chs. 1–4 and passim.
7. Decree of the Ministry for University and Scientific Research of 3 Nov. 1999, no. 509. The decree also introduced new regulations regarding academic credits; see www.illaboratorio.net/erifoma_01.html.
9. Here is how Fabio Mangone, a professor of architectural history at Naples 1, describes the situation of the school, one of the most crowded in Italy: “The Neapolitan observatory is significant enough because seven different courses of study are envisioned: seven possible degrees, to which sometimes there is not one corresponding specialist degree, but two. I have to say that only in the course corresponding to the European degree, the traditional five-year one, has there been some reflection on what the role of history of architecture should be. . . . In this case, teaching the history of contemporary architecture is planned for the first year, a course in institutions of history of architecture, mostly modern, the second year, and in the fourth year a course in the history of the city and of the landscape. . . . Great importance has been given, moreover, to the history of theory in the specialized master’s degree programs because it deals with themes that are very popular in architectural design courses. . . . The course on the restoration and conservation of architectural and environmental heritage is divided into two specialized areas, one more focused on reuse and the other more directly concerned with conservative restoration. . . . There is in these cases a very strong demand for a specific history of construction techniques. . . . It is right that someone dealing with conservation has a precise and articulated understanding of techniques, not only those employed in the great monuments, but also those used in the nineteenth-century city.” Fabio Mangone, report presented at the conference “La didattica della storia dell’architettura e la riforma,” Università degli Studi di Roma “Tor Vergata,” 7 June 2001.
10. See article no. 85/384 of the Council of the European Union concerning the reform of the educational system.
11. Francesca B. Filippi, “I 2 corsi in ingegneria edile-architettura attivati quest’anno,” Il Giornale dell’Architettura (Dec. 2002), 2. See also the articles in the same issue dedicated to the new teaching program and the curricula for the degree courses in engineering-architecture.
12. In architecture schools, courses in artistic disciplines (art history, aesthetics, and visual communications) are limited in number and are restricted to optional courses to be taken in the final year. The faculty are specialists in art history, philosophy, history, and related fields. Students may take courses in these disciplines in other schools. But the situation is changing rapidly; it is sufficient to note that of the three new schools born of the reconfiguration of the IUAV, one trains professionals in “Design and Arts,” granting degrees in the visual arts, spectacle, theater, etc. See www.iuav.it.
13. The curricula of the doctoral program in architectural history are also undergoing changes. For example, regarding the oddly titled doctorate of excellence formed by the partners IUAV and the Università Ca’ Foscari di Venezia, there is a plan to establish three new doctorates in architectural history with a clear interdisciplinary focus, linked to art, aesthetics, and industrial design, in addition to the more traditional fields of historical studies and conservation. The doctorate of excellence dedicated to the history of architecture and the city, art history, theory, and restoration has recently started its first cycle. I thank Marco Pogacnick and Massimiliano Savora for this information.
15. It is useful to quote the warning of Paolo Prodi, a historian and teacher at the Università di Bologna: “The artificial division of time into years, centuries, and millennia means nothing and very often defies thinking because a historian has difficulty resisting the temptation of taking possession of these boxes and using them to give coherence to a disorderly complex of phenomena.” Prodi quoted in Claudia Conforti, “Instruments et méthodes d’étude de l’architecture contemporaine,” in Formel, Les Cahiers, 132.
17. I wish to acknowledge the very useful exchange of ideas on this point I enjoyed with Roberto Dulio, who is currently completing his doctoral thesis, “Bruno Zevi. Le radici di un progetto storico, 1933–1950,” at the Facoltà di Architettura 1, Turin.
21. In Pagliara’s position on the usefulness of graphic records and surveying, there is an echo of Giovannoni’s views, which have directly influenced the architectural historians who graduated from the Scuola Superiore di Architettura in Rome in the interwar years; these views influenced later generations as well, though less directly. For Bruno Zevi’s cutting condemnation of Giovannoni and Vincenzo Fasolo’s “Scuola Romana,” see “Voragine and lanconata della ‘scuola romana’ di storia dell’architettura,” in Flavia Colonna and Stefania Costantini, eds., Principi e metodi della storia dell’architettura e l’eredità della “Scuola Romana.” Atti del Convegno Internazionale Roma, 26–28 marzo 1992 (Rome, 1994), 33–35.
22. Giovannoni did so, for example, in the speech he delivered in 1932 when the new building of Rome’s school of architecture opened in the Valle Giulia neighborhood. Arnaldo Bruschi has reflected on Giovannoni’s concepts and on the links between history and design and the use of history as a design tool in two essays: “Il ruolo della storia dell’architettura,” in Giorgio Simoncini, ed., L’insegnamento della storia dell’architettura. Atti del Seminario Roma, 4–6 novembre 1993 (Rome, 1994), 11–16, and “L’insegnamento della storia nella Facoltà di Architettura di Roma e le sue ripercussioni nella
progettazione e nella storiografia,” in Franchetti Pardo, La Facoltà di Architettura, 75–84.

23. Gustavo Giovannoni, Questioni di architettura nella storia e nella vita (Rome, 1925), 52.

24. Note, for example, the contrast with Eugène Emanuel Viollet-le-Duc, who in other ways inspired Giovannoni. Viollet-le-Duc insisted on the complete autonomy of historical studies in relation to design. The differing positions reflect, on the one hand, the development of history as a science in the first half of the nineteenth century and, on the other, Giovannoni’s negative view of the study of architectural history in Italy.


27. Paolo Fiore notes with some bitterness that the “history of architecture no longer provokes interest in the schools, nor does it stimulate new research, which is generally left to art historians. The tradition of the architect-historians of the nineteenth century, represented by the Frenchman Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814–1879) or by the German Heinrich von Geymüller (1839–1909), was not completely lost in the following century; I am thinking of the Englishman John N. Summerson (1904–1970), architect by training, and of the Italian Gustavo Giovannoni (1873–1974), who was one of the founders of architectural schools in Italy.” He continues with an acute analysis of the role of architectural history in university teaching in Italy throughout the twentieth century. Paolo Fiore, “Recherches en histoire et formation des architectes. L’Exemple du palais Della Rovere à Savone,” in Frommel, Les Cahiers, esp. 113–15.


Illustration Credits
Figure 1. Archivio Arnaldo Bruschi, Rome
Figure 2. Archivio Fondazione Bruno Zevi, Rome

TEACHING THE HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE 101