

# Blossoming of a Modernist Lexicon. Camillo Autore and the Reconstruction of Reggio Calabria



Daniele Colistra and Francesco De Lorenzo

**Abstract** The reconstruction of Reggio Calabria, which at the time of the 1908 earthquake had about 80,000 inhabitants, was carried out almost entirely after the First World War, between 1920 and 1940. In those years modernism spread rapidly across Europe, thanks also to the improvement of new construction systems and contributions from the artistic avant-garde. However, the city was reconstructed following only partially the new architectural style. Reggio was a provincial city, concerned with creating the largest number of social housing and public buildings in the shortest time, and mistrustful of the experiments. A solid and traditional image was therefore preferred. The main protagonists of the reconstruction are Camillo Autore and Gino Zani. Autore is certainly the one who best represents the rapid evolution of the architectural language from liberty and eclectic canons to modernism, however mediated by that link with the Italian tradition supported (and often imposed) by the fascist regime. Of his vast work we keep 84 projects, almost all completed and built, 33 of which in Reggio Calabria. Retracing the chronological excursus of the works created by Camillo Autore in Reggio allows us to reconstruct—obviously with the limits of a single artist’s point of view—the evolution of architectural language in a particularly significant period of contemporary history. In this essay we will analyse three significant projects by Camillo Autore in Reggio: their realization was preceded by different design solutions in which the evolution from the eclectic-liberty language towards modernism is clearly legible.

**Keywords** Modernism in Reggio Calabria · Camillo Autore

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## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Reggio Calabria was completely destroyed by the earthquake of 1908 and rebuilt in the years between the two world wars; for this reason, the buildings that characterized the era of the reconstruction can demonstrate the relationship between modernity and tradition in the architecture and urban planning of this provincial town in Southern Italy. The first impression you get of Reggio is strongly linked to the tradition of historicist eclecticism; this architectural style was widespread in Italy between the 19th and 20th centuries. The in-depth study of the events of the post-seismic reconstruction, of its protagonists and of the immense amount of graphical drawings available allows us, on the contrary, to have a different understanding.

After the earthquake, the municipal administration, the architects of the reconstruction and the citizens were animated by opposing tensions: one that pushed towards the recovery of historical memory and therefore suggested the reconstruction of the city “where it was and how it was”; the other that had a more radical attitude and supported the adhesion to modernism, an architectural current that in Italy, in those years, was taking its first steps and defining its own poetics. Among the architects involved in the reconstruction of Reggio, Camillo Autore embodies these two opposing positions in an emblematic way. His numerous works, especially the unrealized ones (and therefore, the project drawings), highlight this stylistic dualism.

Architecture has a *material status* (the physical realization of the work), a *graphic status* (the project) and a *theoretical status* (what concerns theory and criticism). Although from a social point of view it is only the construction that has an effective value, also the project and the theory, in their different expressive and communicative configurations, are full-fledged *architecture*, and must be considered in the same way to understand the thought and work of an artist. For example, in the project for the Stazione Marittima in Naples, a suspended competition, according to some, due to the direct intervention of Mussolini [12, p. 673], Camillo Autore shows closeness to modernist poetics not only for his idea of architecture, but also for the graphic techniques used. Almost all the tables are made using the *Prospettiva Novecento*, in which the horizon line is very low or even coincides with the ground line. This expedient gives the project a monumentality much appreciated at the time and very close to the artistic poetics of the fascist regime (Fig. 1).

In the first part of this essay we will show how the reconstruction of Reggio Calabria can be considered a missed opportunity for the spread of modernism in southern Italy. In the next paragraph we will focus on the figure of Camillo Autore, highlighting how he fully experienced the tensions that animated the architecture of his time, remaining in the balance between tradition and modernity. Finally we will analyse in more detail three works by Camillo Autore in Reggio: the church of St. George (1925–1928), also known as Tempio della Vittoria, the Monument

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<sup>1</sup> Daniele Colistra wrote the paragraphs *Introduction, Modernism and reconstruction. A missed opportunity, Elements of modernism in Camillo Autore’s works in Reggio Calabria and Conclusions*; Francesco De Lorenzo wrote the paragraphs *The Church of St. George—Tempio della Vittoria and From a memorial to a monumental fountain*.



**Fig. 1** Camillo Autore, Project for the New Marine Station of Naples, 1933, perspective views

for Vittorio Emanuele III on the seafront (1925–1932) and the Luminous Fountain (1935), also on the seafront.

## 2 Modernism and Reconstruction. A Missed Opportunity

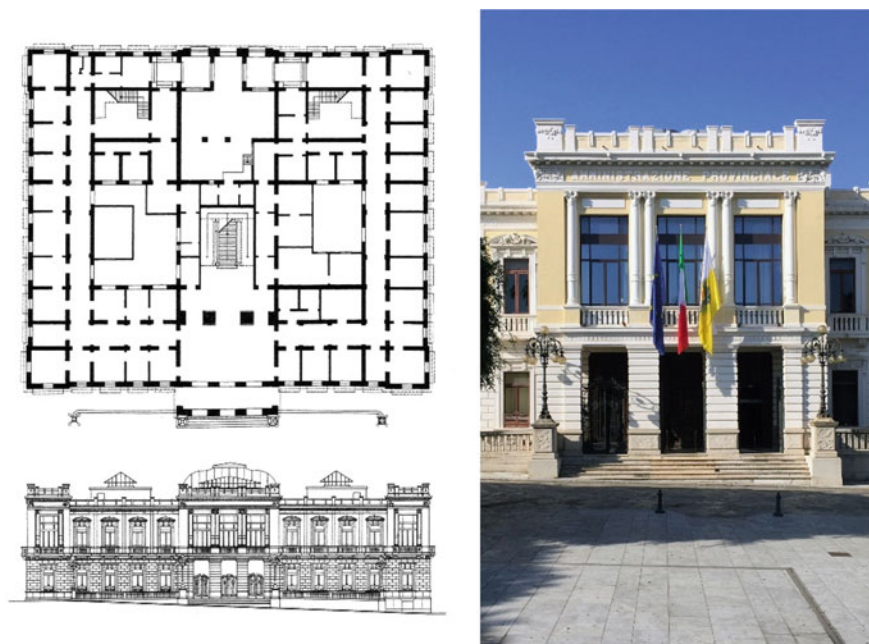
The reconstruction of Reggio Calabria, after the earthquake that destroyed it entirely in 1908, lasted for over half a century. The post-earthquake emergency was addressed with the construction of districts of wooden barracks, equipped with good quality housing and decent living standards [6, pp. 140–145]. In 1915 Italy joined the First World War and the consequent economic crisis, with difficulties in finding the workforce and shortage of building materials, led to the interruption of the construction activity. During the two decades of fascist dictatorship, the reconstruction of the city restarted with great enthusiasm: it was an absolute priority, given that in 1919, eleven years after the earthquake, nine tenths of the population of Reggio still lived in wooden shacks [9, p. 117]. The reconstruction proceeded quickly in the years between the two world wars, it was interrupted again between 1940 and 1945 and was completed in the late 1960s.

In short, we can state that Reggio assumed its current configuration between the 1920s and 1930s: a period in which the modern language of architecture spread in Europe and found fertile ground in Italy as well. Modernism was initially supported by the fascist government, which in the first years of the regime expressed enthusiasm for the stylistic revolution of this figurative avant-garde [3, pp. 81–102; 8, pp. 38–42]. At a later stage, on the contrary, the same regime opposed the stylistic renewal and supported the return to the academy and to the tradition of Roman architecture.

In Reggio Calabria, a provincial city with an economy linked to the agrarian bourgeoisie and the tertiary sector, almost all private clients rejected the modern language and preferred the reassuring aesthetics of liberty, neoclassicism, and eclecticism. These architectural styles appeared to be more consolidated and akin to that upper middle class with which the people of Reggio aspired to identify; but this was delayed compared to the rest of the nation and Europe in general, where this trend had spread at least fifty years earlier [11, p. 317]. To assess the extent and influence of the modernist language in Reggio, it is more appropriate to focus on public buildings and public housing projects promoted by the *Ente Edilizio*, an independent institution created in 1914 with the task of managing assets belonging to the Municipality in relation to barracks, land, existing houses and then providing for the design and construction of economic and popular housing and for state employees [10, p. 39].

From the point of view of the architectural language, the architectures built in Reggio between 1920 and 1940 can be schematically divided into three categories:

- *eclectic and historicist architecture*. In a nutshell, they always reproduce the same compositional scheme, which can be traced back to the Italian tradition of the Renaissance palace: a central building, slightly protruding and tripartite, in which the entrance hall is located and, on the upper floor, the main room; two symmetrical wings, characterized by a succession of identical elements (windows and morpho structural elements); two corner elements, also symmetrical and often bounded by pilasters strips [5, p. 31]. A rich decorative apparatus is usually superimposed on this architectural scheme, consisting of morpho structural elements codified by Renaissance treatises and nineteenth-century manuals (Fig. 2).

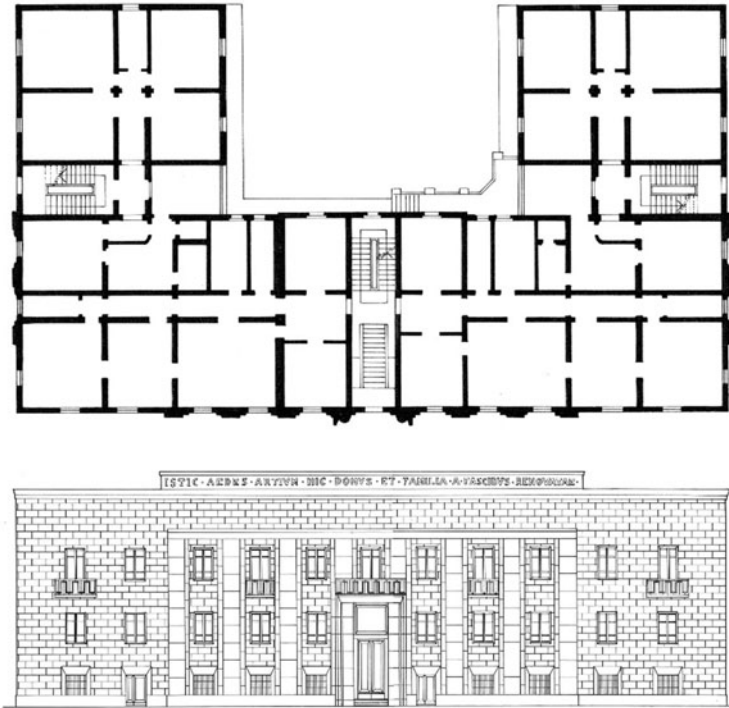


**Fig. 2** Camillo Autore and Gaetano Spinelli, Palace of the Province of Reggio Calabria, 1914–1919 (photo and drawings by Daniele Colistra)

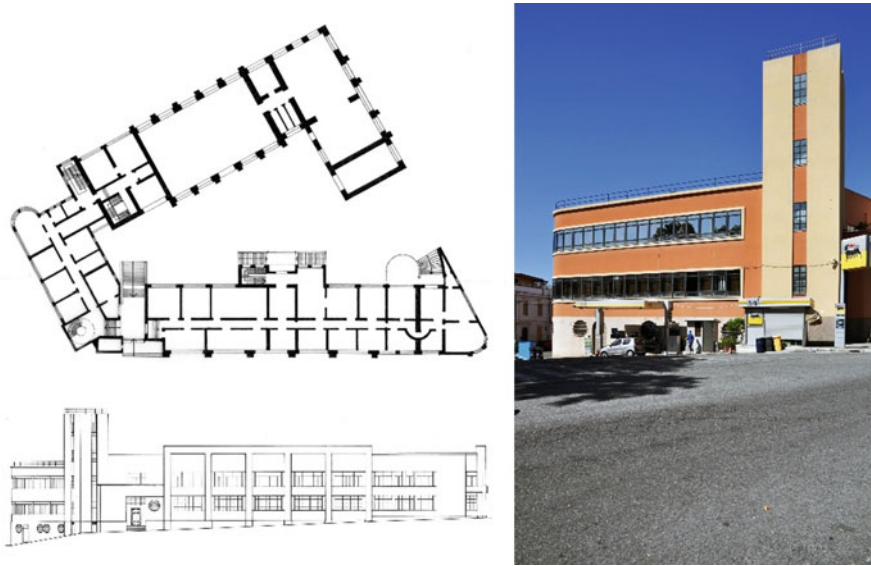
- *architectures that have aspects of modernity* (for example: absence of decorations, simplified morpho structural elements), but which from the compositional point of view are identical to those of the previous category. These buildings are a variation on the theme of the Renaissance palace, whose morpho structural elements are reduced to the essential but at the same time volumetrically emphasized and, therefore, are characterized by a rigorous monumentality (Fig. 3).
- *architectures that clearly welcome the poetics of the International Style*: free plan, which does not follow the shape of the block; absence of symmetries; composition that seeks dynamic balance through elements that differ in shape, geometry and size (Fig. 4).

The architectures belonging to the three categories are not numerically homogeneous. The third category has very few examples, even if they are particularly significant in terms of size, position within the urban layout and the visual strength they give to the surrounding space. The second is quite frequent, however there is a clear prevalence of the first, so it can be stated that the overall image of the city is linked to historicist architecture and therefore appears decidedly anti-modernist.

The *resistance to modernism* in Reggio Calabria is made up of material components (physical constraints or regulatory conditions) and linguistic choices made by the designers to satisfy the aesthetic taste of private clients.



**Fig. 3** Camillo Autore, Block 158 of the Master Plan of Reggio Calabria; facade, before 1936 (photos and drawings by Daniele Colistra)



**Fig. 4** Flaminio De Mojà, *Caserma dei Giovani Fascisti* in Reggio Calabria, 1935–1938 (photo and drawings by Daniele Colistra)

The city reconstruction plan after the 1908 earthquake follows the pre-existing urban layout, and therefore re-proposes the eighteenth-century design by Giovan Battista Mori. A plan based on a chessboard warped parallel to the coastline, made up of almost identical blocks, approximately  $45 \times 65$  m in size. This type of urban system involves the construction of buildings without protrusions, courtyards inside the block, corridors-streets in which architecture is essentially expressed through the concept of *facade*. The architecture of the early years of the reconstruction was bound by an extremely strict Building Regulations; while favouring the use of reinforced concrete and modern anti-seismic criteria [1, pp. 141–145], the Regulations prevented projections and *avant-corps* and, therefore, limited variations with respect to the rigid stereotomy suggested by the shape of the block. Under such restrictive conditions, it was inevitable that the ornamentation became the main element of differentiation and qualification of the architecture.

The city was rebuilt according to a precise idea of conservation: “where it was and how it was”, in the words of Pietro De Nava, Councillor for public works of the Municipality and author of the Reconstruction Plan approved by Royal Decree on May 5, 1911. Although in his speeches De Nava constantly referred to the continuity of a tradition that dates back to Magna Graecia, he supported the urban model of the nineteenth-century bourgeois city and his project reproduces in an almost identical way the enlargement and accommodation plan drawn up by the Municipal Technical in 1898, which in turn constituted the expansion of project designed by Mori in 1785. In the session of the City Council of 16 October 1909, De Nava stated that “the master plan means graphic lines; for its implementation, executive projects are

needed, which must be regularly approved”. This statement demonstrates, in his point of view, the downgrade of the importance of the urban project.

De Nava’s master plan aroused the enthusiasm of the population; above all because it kept the urban lots and the subdivisions of the property almost unchanged, particularly in the central areas of the city, and therefore the procedure of expropriation for public utility was little applied.

On the contrary, the reaction of De Nava’s colleagues was very critical; Gino Zani called the plan “very ugly and irrational”; Gustavo Giovannoni criticized “the layout of the streets, all alike, and of the blocks, all alike, the vulgarity of the geometric groupings of buildings”; Ernesto Basile defined the descents towards the sea as a “wind canal” and preferring the beauty of the Renaissance cities with their “crooked and suggestive” streets [5, pp. 26–28]. Therefore, none of the architects involved in the reconstruction hoped for a modernist turn but, even, their criticisms appeared even more conservative than the choices made by De Nava.

The fate of private housing was inevitable: rivalry between families favoured a competition based on the ostentation of decoration; it almost seems that the population, marked by the tragedy of the earthquake, affirmed its existence in life by re-proposing the past rather than venturing towards modernity which, in those years, was represented by the myths of speed, of the bright colour, of the racing car, of the factory. Even the public buildings and residences built by the *Ente Edilizio* followed the same cliché; the few architects in the city were forced to draw up an impressive number of projects in a very short time, often adding minimal variations to the same compositional scheme.

In brief, we can say that during the reconstruction Reggio did not take up the challenge of modernism; on the contrary, it rejected it, choosing to remain linked to a late nineteenth-century urban image that still today, even if compromised the phenomenon of unauthorized buildings of the second half of the twentieth century, retains its own recognizability and original formal composure.

### **3 Elements of Modernism in Camillo Autore’s Works in Reggio Calabria**

Camillo Autore was born in Palermo on 14 June 1882. Son of an engineer-architect, he graduated in architecture with full marks and honours at the Royal Application School for Engineers and Architects of Palermo on 12 February 1912 (Fig. 5). His mentor was Ernesto Basile, one of the leading exponents of Italian liberty and architecture between the 19th and 20th centuries [13]. Immediately after graduating, Camillo Autore moved to Reggio where, until 1914, he took the position of section engineer of the Technical Office of the Town Plan and subsequently, until 1919, he was engineer at the Provincial Technical Office. In 1919 he left his office job to concentrate on his academic career, becoming Enrico Calandra’s assistant at the chair of Ornate Design and Elementary Architecture of the Faculty of Sciences of the Royal University of



**Fig. 5** Portrait of Camillo Autore in his study



Messina. In 1930 he became holder of the chair and in 1936 he was appointed full professor of the chair of Technical Architecture of the Faculty of Engineering of the Royal University of Padua. He died the same year in Merano.

Camillo Autore's professional activity, carried out in parallel with his academic career, was intense. Of his vast work we have 84 projects (33 of which in Reggio Calabria), almost all completed (Table 1). There are also 10 projects from the period 1920–1923 and one from 1930–1935 whose documents do not indicate the place where they should have been built.

The chronological excursus of Camillo Autore's activity in Reggio allows us to define—with the limits of the point of view of a single artist—the evolution of the architectural language in a particularly significant period of contemporary history, the one in which modernism is spreading and, for a short time, becomes dominant. Among the architects of the reconstruction of Reggio Calabria, Camillo Autore is certainly the one who best represents the rapid evolution of the architectural language from liberty and eclectic canons to modernism, albeit mediated by that particular link with the Italian tradition supported, and sometimes imposed, by the government fascist.

The employment in the municipal offices of the Reconstruction Plan, during the first two years spent in Reggio, did not prevent him from dedicating himself also to professional activity, which had become more and more intense after the transfer to the Technical Office of the Province. Camillo Autore worked for private clients, but

**Table 1** List of architectures designed by Camillo Autore in Reggio Calabria and its Province

| Autore's architectural works in Reggio Calabria (city centre) |           |            |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Seafront Project  | 1912      | Built      |
| Technical School Piria  | 1912–1914 | Built      |
| Primary School Tremulini                                      | 1912–1914 | Built      |
| Valentino House   | 1912–1914 | Demolished |
| Grammar School Campanella                                     | 1914–1919 | Built      |
| Palace of the Province  | 1914–1919 | Built      |
| Land Registry, Board of Ed. (decorations)                     | 1914–1919 | Not built  |
| Zaban House   | 1920–1926 | Built      |
| Travia House  | 1920–1926 | Built      |
| Morena House  | 1920–1926 | Built      |
| Mazzitelli House  | 1923      | Built      |
| Memorial for Vittorio Emanuele III                            | 1925–1932 | Built      |
| Church of S. Giorgio  | 1926–1928 | Built      |
| Church of Spirito Santo                                       | 1926–1932 | Built      |
| Church of S. Caterina   | 1926–1932 | Built      |
| Church of S. Lucia  | 1926–1932 | Built      |
| Church of S. M. Odigitria                                     | 1926–1932 | Built      |
| Church of S. M. del Soccorso                                  | 1926–1932 | Not built  |
| Facade of Block 158   | Ante 1936 | Built      |
| Lido Comunale   | Ante 1936 | Not built  |
| Luminous Fountain   | 1935      | Built      |
| Autore's architectural works in Reggio Calabria (province)    |           |            |
| Rural Schools   | 1912–1914 | Built      |
| Drommi Cottage, Scilla  | 1920–1926 | Built      |
| Giovanna di Savoia Nursery School, Archi                      | 1926–1927 | Not built  |
| Church in Martone   | 1926–1932 | Not built  |
| Church in Bagnara   | 1926–1932 | Built      |
| Church in Cerasi  | 1926–1932 | Built      |
| Church in Casalnuovo  | 1926–1932 | Built      |
| Church in Oppido  | 1926–1932 | Not built  |
| Church in Villa San Giuseppe                                  | 1926–1932 | Built      |
| Church in Molochio  | 1926–1932 | Built      |
| Church in Palizzi   | 1926–1932 | Built      |
| Church in Melicuccà   | 1926–1932 | Not built  |

above all for the institution where he was employed, for which he designed, in addition to the offices in Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, also the arrangement of the seafront and some schools (Primary School of *Tremulini*, Grammar School *Campanella*, Technical School *Piria*, several rural schools). Subsequently he was commissioned by the *Opera Interdiocesana* of Reggio Calabria to carry out the reconstruction projects of numerous parish churches destroyed by the earthquake. After 1920, Camillo Autore's professional activity is increasingly consolidated; in 1921 he moved his professional studio and residence to Messina, intensified the competition activity at national level and carried out projects in various cities, while continuing to work intensively in the Strait area: in Messina with the great projects of the *Palazzata* and the *Fiera*, in Reggio continuing to follow the public works already started and to build private residences.

For the sake of clarity, we will divide Camillo Autore's works in Reggio Calabria into three categories:

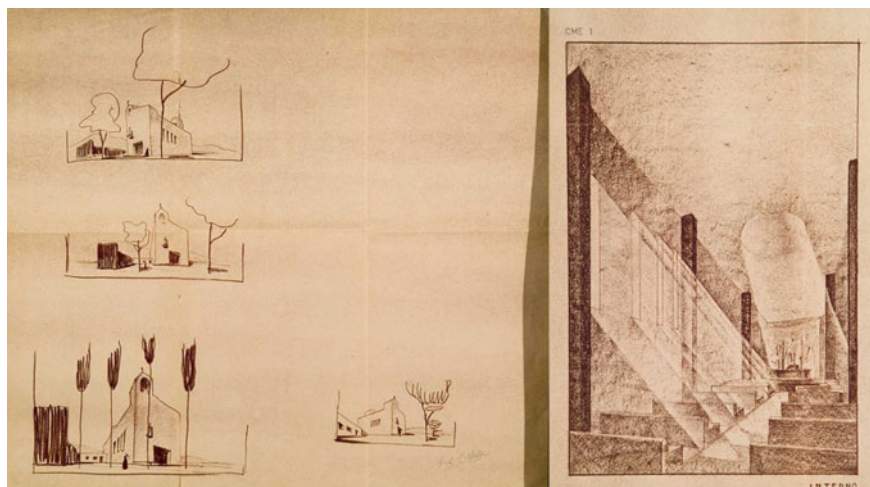
- private residences (small villas and single-family homes);
- churches;
- public buildings (schools, offices, urban spaces, monuments).

The private residences designed in Reggio by Camillo Autore are all attributable to a consolidated tradition which, from a morphological and typological point of view, has clear links with late 19th century manuals that he knew in depth (the numerous books and magazines of his private library are listed in [4, pp. 24–29]). Reception rooms are large, even in small buildings; on the outside, the decorations and some typical elements of historicist eclecticism (for example: the turrets that rise above the main volume, often at the corner of the building) suggest a conditioning of the client who identified with the bourgeoisie of the big cities.

Outside Reggio, Camillo Autore built private residences mainly in Messina; the characteristics of these buildings are similar to those just described.

In the design of private residences, the relationship of Camillo Autore with modernism can be considered almost non-existent; however, it must be remembered that these projects date back to the period 1912–1924, years in which the International Style was not yet born or, in any case, it did not yet have its own identity and had not yet spread.

The churches designed by Camillo Autore in the province of Reggio between 1926 and 1932 are 15, 6 of which located in the city centre. Eleven of these projects, commissioned in 1926 by the *Opera Interdiocesana* of Reggio Calabria, have been built. The instructions of the Superintendency were very binding. In his autograph curriculum vitae, Autore wrote that these projects “for particular historical needs had to be inspired by traditional local architecture (Romanesque, Norman, Renaissance, Baroque)” [7, p. 19]. In these buildings, unlike what he did in private residences, Camillo Autore drastically reduces the decorations, opting for smooth morpho structural elements made with materials of a different colour from the rest of the facade. This choice gives these buildings a naked monumentality that refers to the formal rigor of modernism and are more evident in the project drawings; the actual construction and subsequent renovations have attenuated the character of modernity.

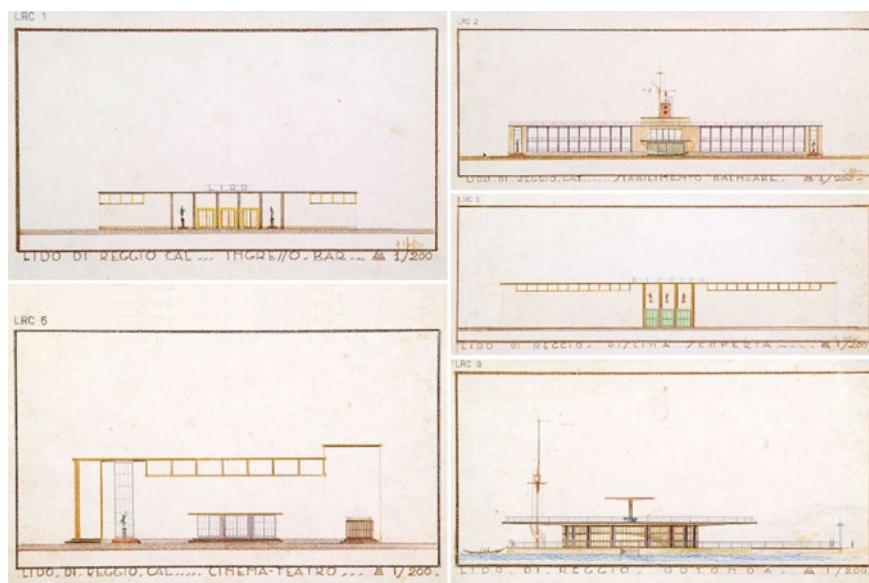


**Fig. 6** Camillo Autore, Project of the church of Melicuccà, before 1932; volumetric studies and interior view

A separate case are the church of St. George—Tempio della Vittoria (whose design process, as we will see in the next paragraph, is different from that of the other churches) and the church of Melicuccà (of which we only keep a sheet of perspective and a view of the interior). Although from the volumetric point of view it recalls some Arab-Norman architecture of southern Italy (such as San Giovanni dei Lebbrosi in Palermo), this church demonstrates Camillo Autore's interest in spatial elements typical of modernism (Fig. 6).

Public buildings designed by Camillo Autore are difficult to describe schematically. Unlike private residences and churches, almost all built in Reggio and Messina in a short time span, projects for a public client relate to different places and are often the conclusion of a design competition (Cinema Odeon, Fair, Military District, Banco di Sicilia in Messina; Palace of Justice in Vibo Valentia and Campobasso; Genio Civile in Cosenza; Town Hall of Pesaro; Town Hall and School in Mascali). The public buildings designed by Camillo Autore in Reggio Calabria cover a large period (from 1912 to 1935) and are very different both in typology and in architectural language. From the linguistic point of view, we can schematically define three groups:

- projects attributable to eclecticism (seafront project, 1912–1914; rural schools, 1912–1914; palace of the Province, 1914–1919; decorations for the Land Registry and the Board of Education, 1914–1919);
- projects between tradition and modernism (Technical School *Piria*, 1912–1914; Primary School of *Tremulini*, 1912–1914; Grammar School *Campanella*, 1914–1919; Luminous Fountain on the seafront, 1935);



**Fig. 7** Camillo Autore, Project of the Lido of Reggio Calabria, before 1936); elevations of the main buildings

- projects in which adherence to modernism is unequivocal (Monument for Vittorio Emanuele III, 1925–1932; design for the facade of Block 158; unrealized project for the *Lido Comunale*) (Fig. 7).

In the following paragraphs and in the conclusions, we will see in more detail how much the modernist language of Camillo Autore can be defined as original, and how much it refers to the work of other authors.

#### 4 The Church of St. George—Tempio della Vittoria

In the first twenty years after the earthquake, the cult in Reggio was practiced inside emergency facilities, mostly made of wood or mixed masonry-wood. The church of St. George inside the walls (another church dedicated to St. George, patron of Reggio, is located outside the ancient fortified medieval city), before being severely damaged by the earthquake, was located on Corso Garibaldi (main street) in a narrow and long plot of land, next to the former provincial orphanage. The shack church, donated by the Pope, was rebuilt in the same lot. It turned out to be one of the most beautiful shack churches built in Reggio at that time. It was decorated by the painter Ignazio Gulli and it was employed for the religious ceremonies for twenty years, before being demolished. Its appearance was different from the other emergency

churches, and its small size made it inadequate for the large number of worshippers in that area.

In 1924 the parish priest, canon Demetrio Moscato, constituted a committee “to erect in Reggio a votive temple to the eternal memory of love and faith for the Glorious Fallen of the Great War”.<sup>2</sup> The new church of St. George was chosen to become this great votive temple, and it was named Tempio della Vittoria. This idea was shared by the City Administration too. The new church should have been much larger and imposing than the nineteenth-century church and the shack church. It should also have been built in a central and visible place.

It is possible to reconstruct the history of the project of the church from the first notice of competition until its construction through the documentary sources preserved at the Municipal Historical Archive and the State Archive of Reggio Calabria, in addition to those preserved at the Historical Archive of the Diocese of Reggio Calabria-Bova.

The plot of land chosen for the construction of the church was at the border with the church shack, where the former provincial orphanage destroyed by the earthquake stood. The first competition for the design of the Tempio della Vittoria was held in 1926 and it was won by the project of Enrico Calandra and Camillo Autore (Fig. 8, above).

Although in Italy, during the Fascist period, the architecture reflected the ideals and values of the regime, with rigorous and monumental volumes with regular shapes and no frills, giving the buildings a solemn and solid image, the eclectic style continued to be widely employed in Reggio.

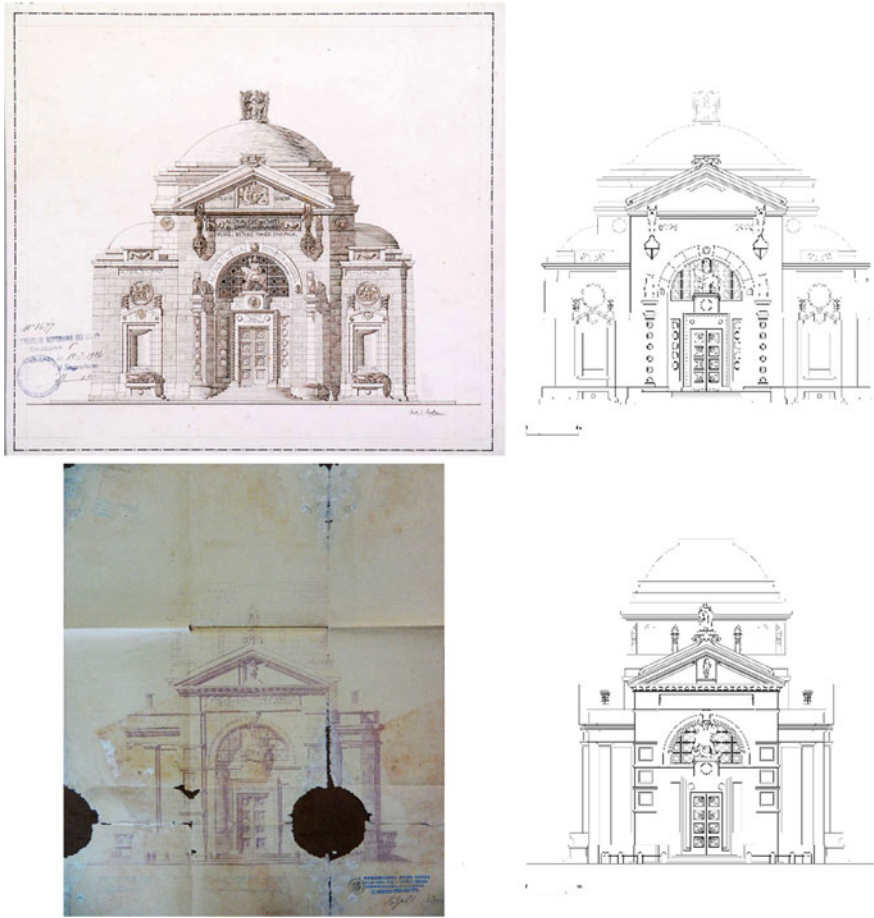
In the winning project, the building was surrounded by adjacent buildings and it contained in part decorative elements of the liberty, in floral and foliar motifs at the top of the dome, on the pediment and as an ornament of the niches placed on the main facade, in addition to the zoomorphic shapes on the capitals of the columns that framed the main entrance. The building thus turned out to be of an eclectic style with an evident influence of the rationalist style juxtaposed by liberty elements.

This design idea, however, did not please the new municipal administration “who wanted to have for the *Tempio* a completely isolated building from the side buildings, so that it could draw from its isolation, greater and better monumental character”.<sup>3</sup> A second competition was held in January 1927, and Camillo Autore made considerable changes to his project (Fig. 8, below), responding to the requests of the administration.

For the execution it was chosen to revise the idea proposed at the first competition, this time in collaboration with the painter and sculptor Francesco Jerace. Almost completely deprived of any reference to liberty architecture, the design of the length of the facade was reduced in size, in favour of a greater development in elevation. The dome had to be seen from every point of the city, amplifying the monumentality of the work, which was essential and prominent among the liberty buildings of the context

<sup>2</sup> Historical Municipal Archive of Reggio Calabria (ASCRC), *Fondo grazia, giustizia e culto*, envelope 1, fasc. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Historical Diocesan Archive of Reggio Calabria-Bova, *Opera interdiocesana*, envelope 41, fasc. 2.



**Fig. 8** Camillo Autore and Enrico Calandra, Project of the church of St. George (above); Camillo Autore e Francesco Ierace, Project of the church of St. George (below) (redraws by Francesco De Lorenzo)

in which it would arise. The reduction of the plan also allowed the construction of a side cloister, which would replace the church shack avoiding the proximity with other buildings.

The main façade, as well as the two side elevations, clad in artificial stone, recall the monumentality of Roman architecture with an alternating rhythm of sober pilasters and bas-reliefs representing scenes of soldiers who died in war. There are still some statuary elements such as the representation of St. George on horseback placed on the entrance portal or the sculpture of difficult interpretation placed at the crowning of the pediment. Liberty decorations are replaced by flame-shaped decorations.

Fire is a central element in the symbology of the church. It is also represented with bas-reliefs in the centre of the tympanum. Fire is in fact “a synthetic expression of

love and sacrifice [...] [which] worthily symbolizes the love of the Calabrian people for their fallen Sons on the field and the sacrifice of those who sacrifice the invincible youth for the greatness of the Fatherland. But [...] it is also the symbol of purified Souls in elevation to the Great Light".<sup>4</sup>

The will of the designers to reduce to the essential is noticeable also inside the temple. It is composed of a single nave with four chapels on each side. Every pictorial element, even if referring to war scenes or in commemoration of the fallen, disappears in favour of a formal and artistic minimalism in which the image of the fire is approached by that of the chalice (symbol of the presence of Christ) and faces of soldiers.

The natural lighting inside the *Tempio* is also reduced to the essentials: it enters only from the dome and the window placed on the entrance portal, not visible from the outside.

However, the project carried out from 1928 to 1934 does not faithfully reflect today the design that Autore proposed for the second round of the competition. But since there is no variant of the project among the papers found in the archive until today, it could be assumed that some modifications have been made during the construction of the building.

Some considerations can be formulated through a purely visual analysis, such as the elimination of any statuary work on the façade, as well as the flame-shaped ornaments, reported exclusively on the wooden door. In other cases, it is necessary to rely on modern instrumental survey to assess the differences with the original project. We used a laser scanner with phase modulation measurement system (Faro Focus 3D X330).

38 scans between the inside and the outside of the building were carried out, reducing the default parameters set by the instrument with a significant consequential reduction of time, without sacrificing the quality of the result. The overall point cloud was quite dense and precise (Fig. 9). Among the parameters used we reported specifically the size of each scan (scan size) equal to  $10,240 \times 4,268$  pts and 21.09 Mpts with a distance between two beaten points (point distance) of 6 mm/10 m.

The context in which the *Tempio* stands makes a survey with the exclusive use of a laser scanner particularly complicated. The presence of buildings that, although detached, appear to be very close to the church, a treadmill on the road that runs along the right of the building, and two large trees in front, hindered the detection operations. Access to the terraces of the surrounding buildings was not possible or was not significant to make a real contribution to the final model of the façade.

Although the obvious difficulties prevented the survey of the outer part of the roof and the portion of the dome not visible from the road, the operations carried out were sufficient to reach some conclusions (Fig. 10). Compared to the project presented at the second competition by Camillo Autore, the heights of the fronts on all four sides remain almost unchanged as well as the external dimension of the dome drum equal to 13.10 m. This data is confirmed by the report drawn up by the *Società Anonima Costruzioni Edilizie*, the company to which the works for the construction of the

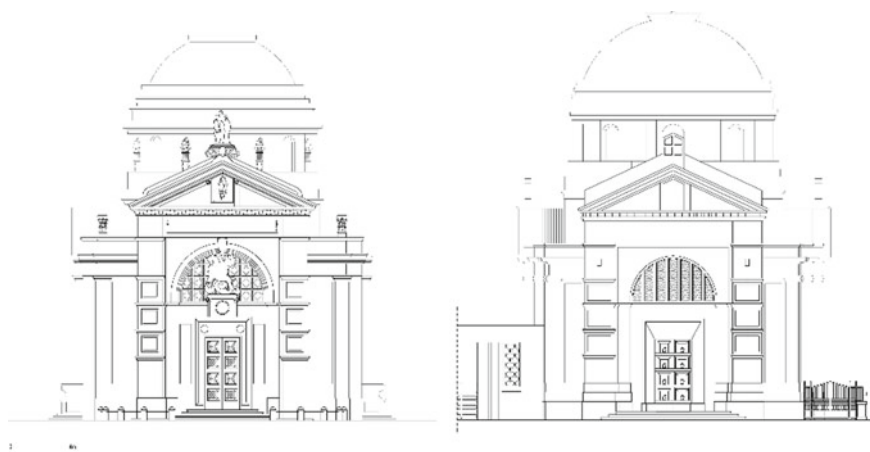
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<sup>4</sup> ASCRC, *Fondo grazia, giustizia e culto*, envelope 1, fasc. 8.





**Fig. 9** Church of St. George: axonometric view of the point cloud of the and main façade (graphic elaboration by Francesco De Lorenzo)



**Fig. 10** Church of St. George, comparison between the second competition project (left) and the project built (right) (drawings by Francesco De Lorenzo)

*Tempio* were entrusted. The height of the dome varies by almost a meter and a half compared to the original project, presumably to make the church more visible from a wider area of the city.

The stylistic evolution dictated not only by the requests of the municipal administration but also by the mutation of an architectural thought that reflected the authority of the fascist regime, leaves today an austere and monumental architecture (Fig. 11), symbol of the rationalist architecture of the Thirties in Reggio Calabria.



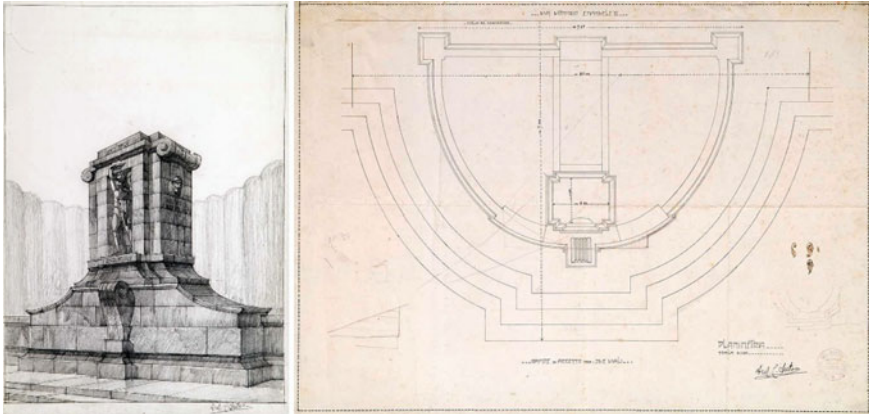
**Fig. 11** The church of St. George nowadays (photo by Francesco De Lorenzo)

## 5 From a Memorial to a Monumental Fountain

The earthquake and the tsunami of 1908 destroyed the Porto Salvo landing stage (Fig. 12), located on Via Plutino (now Falcomatà seafront). Here landed Vittorio Emanuele III in 1900, immediately after his father was killed, touching for the first time the national soil as King of Italy.



**Fig. 12** Jules Gaildrau, The departure of the Garibaldians from the landing stage of Porto Salvo, 1860



**Fig. 13** Camillo Autore, Project of the Monument for Vittorio Emanuele III, 1925; perspective and planimetry

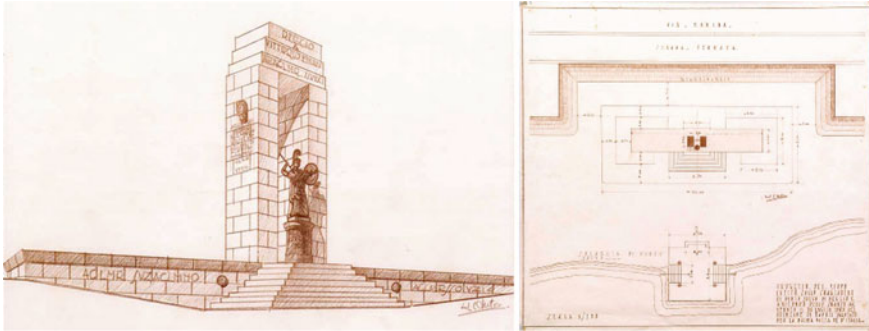
During the reconstruction of the city, on the 25th anniversary of the landing of Vittorio Emanuele III, the City Government asked Camillo Autore to design a monument to commemorate the event.

Among the archival documentation, it is possible to find the autograph drawings of the first project of the memorial, which was never built. According to Autore’s first project, the memorial should have stood between the old via Plutino (named via Marina in the drawings of Autore) and via Vittorio Emanuele III (Fig. 13). It was a rectangular column, not excessively towering upwards, rather squat, surmounted by an Ionic-style capital. In the column there was a bronze sculpture representing a torchbearer. The monument rested on a base with protruding curved molding and was entirely covered in marble.

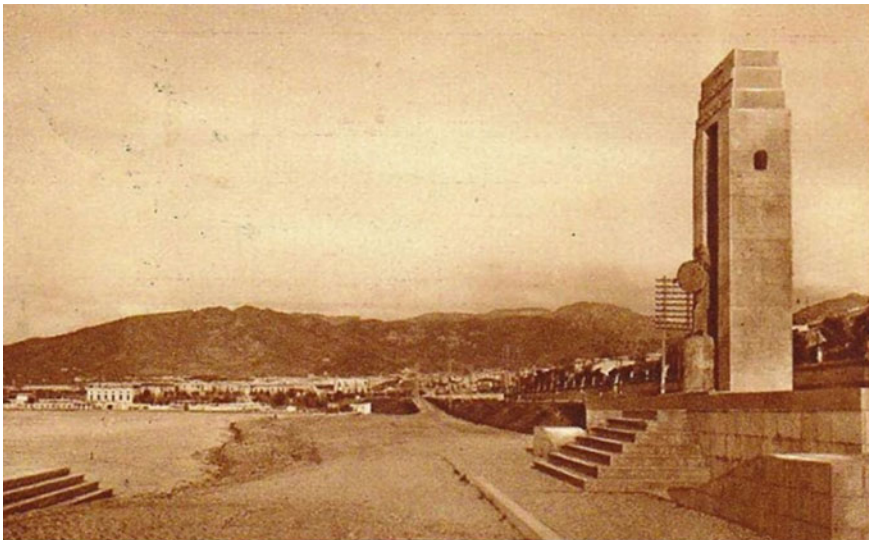
The memorial shows the symbolism of fire (in the figure of the torchbearer) that in 1927 will be adopted for the ornaments of the Tempio della Vittoria.

In the same way as the second project of the church of St. George, although conceived with some references to the eclectic style (the Ionic capital and the volute located below the bronze statue), on the memorial there was an evident and widespread tendency to disregard decorations, in favour of austerity and monumentality dictated by the simplicity and rigour of the forms.

Decoration disappears completely in the second project of the marble trilitic memorial, built in 1932. Located at the point where the Porto Salvo landing stage stood, between the via Marina and the coast (Fig. 14), the monument stands as a soaring trilitic system entirely covered with marble. A bronze statue of Athena Promachos, goddess of reason and war (made by the sculptor Antonio Bonfiglio), was placed at his feet, on a staircase. The entire statuary system was positioned to protect the city, facing the sea (Fig. 15), the place from which, historically, the enemy arrived.



**Fig. 14** Camillo Autore, Project of the Monument for Vittorio Emanuele III, 1932; perspective and planimetry



**Fig. 15** Vintage photo of the original arrangement of Monument for Vittorio Emanuele III

Two bronze soldier heads were positioned on the two sides of the trilithic system. Below one of them, the marble was engraved with the proclamation of May 24, 1915 with which Vittorio Emanuele III announced the entry of Italy into the war.

During the reconstruction of the seafront in 2001, the former City Government wanted to symbolically rebuild the pier destroyed by the tsunami. The marble monument was repositioned no longer oriented towards the sea, but towards the city (Fig. 16). The mayor Italo Falcomatà in fact claimed that the *real enemies* were inside the city and not outside it. The monument was completely restored in 2016.

However, the first project of 1925 was not abandoned. After the construction of the church of St. George, it was necessary to create a physical and philological



**Fig. 16** The Monument for Vittorio Emanuele nowadays (photo by Francesco De Lorenzo)

connection between the monument and the Tempio della Vittoria. In fact, if the first commemorated not only the King and his landing in Reggio, but also the entry of Italy into the war, the other was built as a temple in memory of the fallen in war.

The 1925 trilitic monument was thus repeated by Autore, no longer as a commemorative element but as an element of purification. Maintaining the material aspect and much of the formal aspect, Autore transformed his project into a fountain. In the collective imagination, in fact, water, depending on historical periods, has taken on various symbols including that of time, life and death, purification from sin.

To enable the realization of the new project built in 1936 (Fig. 17), the frontal part of the staircase was removed and replaced by a large semi-circular marble tub. This would collect water from two small side waterfalls. Inside the first tub was inserted a second one, smaller and concentric to the first, in marble, which would retain gushing water. The work took the name of *Fontana luminosa* (Luminous Fountain), also known today as *Monumental fountain* and *Brides' fountain*. The rear of the memorial was also removed for space reasons or, more likely, to balance the entire work.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to find the autograph drawings of Autore related to the project of the fountain. Again, to better appreciate the variations compared to the original design, instrumental survey is used. Because of the small size of the monument and the positioning between two very busy urban streets, it was preferred to conduct a survey through photo modelling.<sup>5</sup>

The photographic detection operations took place on a cloudy day, to avoid the presence of any shadows that could have created difficulties in the phase of alignment of the images and relative restitution of the three-dimensional model. A digital SLR camera with a fixed and focal lens of 50 mm has been used, maintaining the resolution

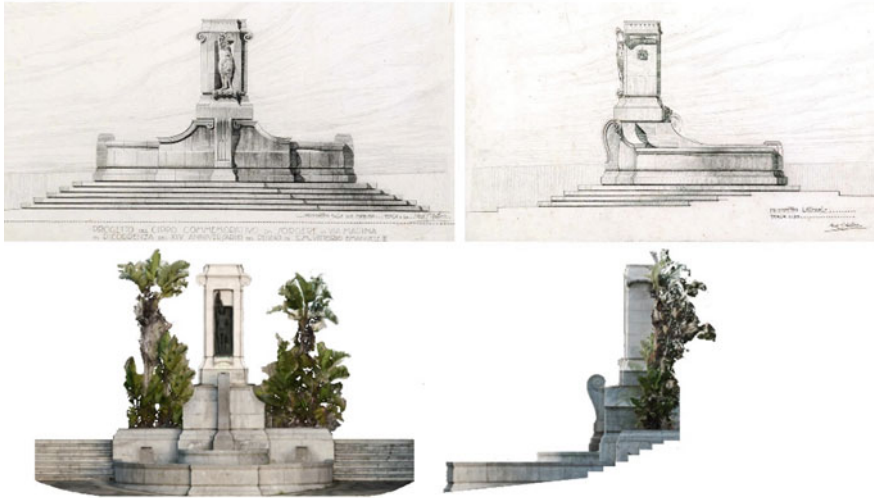
<sup>5</sup> The survey was performed by the student Francesco Deluca in the Architectural Survey Course directed by Daniele Colistra in the academic year 2015/2016.



**Fig. 17** The Luminous Fountain nowadays. In the background, the dome of the church of St. George (photo by Francesco De Lorenzo)

of the photographs always equal to or greater than 5 megapixels. The photographs were taken by rotating the camera around the monument about  $15^\circ$  at a time. The profiles of the textured mesh obtained from photo modelling are superimposed and flanked by the autograph drawing of Autore depicting the 1925 monument (Fig. 18). In particular, from the side profile it can be noted that, in addition to the presence of the double semi-circular tank and consequent elimination of part from the staircase, two differences stand out to the eye between the project and the fountain realized. First, the volute placed under the statue is carried forward compared to its original location, while the statue of the torchbearer is pushed back and inserted in a niche carved inside the column, so as not to be seen in the prospectus in question.

It is possible to notice that, although the overall height of the monumental fountain remains unchanged compared to the original drawings, the rectangular column is



**Fig. 18** Comparison between the Project of the Monument for Vittorio Emanuele III, 1925 and the Luminous Fountain

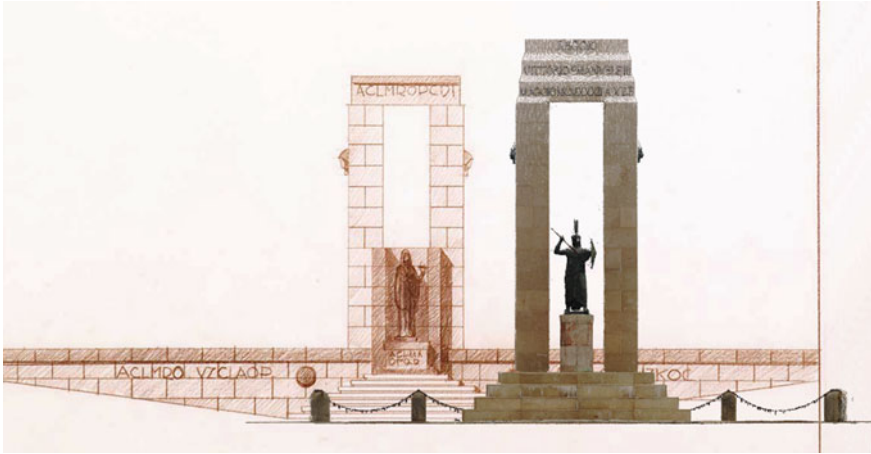
more slender at the expense of a less monumental base, suitable to contain tanks for the water collection.

Regarding the marble monument built in 1932 on the shore of the city, a dissimilar methodology to the previous one will be used to see any inconsistencies between the design and the realization of the work. It must be said that, with the redevelopment of the waterfront in 2001, the original plinth was demolished. Therefore, the current floor on which the base of the statue of the Goddess Athena rests will be used as a ground line.

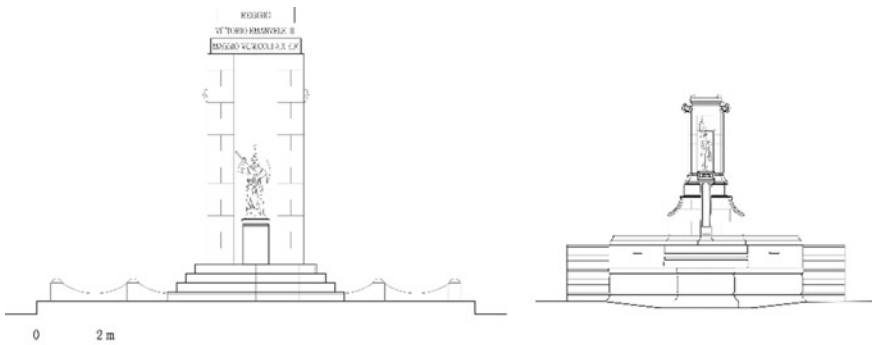
Given the size of the trilithic monument, significantly greater than the fountain, it was preferred to proceed with survey through laser scanner. Six scans were enough to obtain a dense cloud, sufficient to be compared with the project autograph drawings (Fig. 19).

The size of the scans compared to those of the church of St. George survey was halved, bringing them to  $5,062 \times 2,134$  pts, with a maximum distance between two beaten points of 12 mm/10 m. The marble monument is much smaller in size, less detailed, and the scanner could be positioned closer to the parts to be detected. In addition, there were no obstacles. The choice to reduce the quality has halved the detection time per scan (Fig. 20).

Compared to the project design, it is possible to see immediately that the trilithic system made up not of one, but of three overlapping architraves. This certainly implies a greater overall height of the work that is perceived more soaring upwards. The statue was placed on a cylindrical plinth (and not shaped like a box) also higher than the one designed by Autore and it also lacks any floral decoration. Finally, there



**Fig. 19** Comparison between the final draft of the Monument for Vittorio Emanuele III, 1932, and the present monument



**Fig. 20** Comparison between the Monument for Vittorio Emanuele III and the Luminous Fountain (drawings by Francesco De Lorenzo)

is no wall placed behind Athene, allowing the observer to look over the statue and walk 360° around it.

Exactly like the case of the church of St. George, it is possible to highlight the extreme synthesis of a modernist architectural thought, in which the purity of the forms, deprived of all ornaments, gives back to the works realized greater solemnity and rigor.



## 6 Conclusions

Camillo Autore carries out his professional activity in Reggio Calabria during a period in which the evolution of the architectural language is in turmoil. The possibilities offered by the new materials (first of all reinforced concrete), the contribution of the figurative avant-gardes and the circulation of ideas in art, favoured by the dissemination of magazines and international exhibitions, allow the establishment of modernism and the International Style in many European countries. In Reggio reinforced concrete has been widely used in an innovative way; however, the city was not ready to welcome a renewal of its overall image and preferred the aesthetics of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. The reconstruction of the city has given Camillo Autore numerous professional assignments; he has proven to have a perfect mastery of both classicist and modernist languages. In other Italian cities he was able to express his poetics with a decidedly modern language, especially in the drafting phase of the project (the execution was often traced back to more traditional styles). In Reggio, Camillo Autore favours eclectic language, or monumentalism appreciated by the fascist regime, such as the church of St. George—Tempio della Vittoria. An exception is the monument to Vittorio Emanuele, whose rigor is so extreme that it can be defined as proto minimalist. But in all of his works, especially in public buildings (therefore devoid of stylistic conditioning by private clients), the seeds of modernism are evident; seeds that in the provincial cities of southern Italy would blossom thirty years later than in the rest of Europe, when the International Style had lost its renewing energy and had become a standardized coded language for architecture.

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