

Leaving the lost “village” confronting today’s Rome

VITTORIO EMILIANI

Abstract: The potential to be recovered is many. It is not by establishing the MAXXI, and perhaps by exporting it to L’Aquila (the last one found), that the problems are solved, when the Macro has already been doubled and when the Palazzo delle Esposizioni, which is practically empty, has existed for decades. The Quirinale stables offer exhibitions that are often essentially tourist packages, not much more. There is a need to offer spaces for artistic innovations.

Keywords: Cavour, property developers, ministerial capital, Mussolini, lack of institutions.

Roman intellectual often resort to self-flagellation about Rome. I remember years ago a book I will never cease to lambast, *Contro Roma* (Against Rome), promoted by Alberto Moravia, though he was Roman, and Rome was the setting of his most important novels, today maybe a bit passé, perhaps, and was solicited by Mario Soldati, Piedmontese, to the call “Rome is death!” That is, civil death. The book, *Contro Roma*, unfortunately recently republished with the addition of some contemporary testimonies, contains a series of rubbish, the usual clichés, and banalities about Rome, until the end Dacia Maraini writes, saying “The fact is we live in Rome like moles. And then we act surprised that Rome is dismembered, destroyed and sold. The fault is as much ours, as we don’t look after it enough..” And among contemporaries, forty years later, Valerio Magrelli is one of the few to take it seriously identifying some things he would like to see realized, a project for Rome. Those who have been committed to Rome have always been men from the north, me included, if you want: Antonio Cederna from Valtellina (Lumbardy), Italo Insolera, Piedmontese of Sicilian origin, Leonardo Benevolo, from Novara (Piedmont), Silvio Negro from Vicenza (Veneto), Franco Ferrarotti from Vercelli (Piedmont). A coincidence? Today I have not heard anything positive,

up to now, of the postwar Roman administration. There is a historical fact: Capital Rome represents the final phase of a unitary process from the Risorgimento in which the city and its inhabitants participated little, if not with the Roman Republic of 1849. A process which, instead, has seen involvement, with the participation of the bourgeoisie and at times the working class, all the other regions of Italy, though in different ways, and through different events. While in other countries it is from historical capitals – such as London or Paris – that the process of unification begins and is promoted. Rome has been the capital of the Church, an element of great religious and cultural value. but politically and also morally it has become a horrible “ball and chain”, let’s admit it, and so it has continued to be at the level of modernization and evolution of customs in addition to the banking (IOR and related) and construction scandals.

Rome emerges as a “minority” Capital, The idea was Camillo Benso di Cavour’s (1810-1861) who, unfortunately, died only two months after the unification. He, taking history into account, maintains that Rome is the only Italian city not to have solely “municipal glories,” which wasn’t entirely true, but it was true. Cavour was genius, at times he could be unscrupulous, by making this claim he asserted the need to decide immediately that Rome had to be the Capital – it was 1861 – and therefore the dock of the Unity of Italy. A fundamental historical argument. But how many agreed? A certain liberal sector, Quintino Sella, and the left of the Risorgimento, followers of Mazzini, of Garibaldi, who see the conquest of Rome as the final redemption, the powerful reduction of papal authority and pontifical powers. Powers that were not truly reduced at the level of worldliness, of finance and construction, the control of buildings and buildable. So much so that the Vatican wanted the Concordat formula not Cavour’s, “free Church in Free State,” anything but reduction... This consented and consents extraordinary benefits.

Thus, a minority capital selected by winning over much resistance, especially on the part of Florence, of Bettino Ricasoli and others, also for its past history. Rome had been great, in the era of kings with the substantial contribution by the Etruscans; the Roman Republic, the Roman Empire, and with the Church itself up to a point. Gregorovius (note: Ferdinand Gregorovius, German historian) himself maintained the Rome, by becoming the capital of a small kingdom, would have to confront the great reality of the past and become great once more in contact with its past. An arduous task, almost impossible. Massimo

D’Azeglio, first minister under king Albert, called to the government as Minister of the Treasury and Economy, in a parliamentary sitting declared: “I ask myself whether this Campidoglio is to last eternally, if to the columns and amphitheaters the performance of a locomotive were not preferable.” Cavour, capable of rare subtlety and cruelty, during the discussion, defines D’Azeglio, without ever naming him, “the writer (ed. note: of historical novels) who spoke just earlier and said these things” ... and proceeds to destroy him. D’Azeglio maintains Florence as the solution and proposes a modernist view of the Capital which is not entirely meaningless. The debate drags on, so much so that the first special law for Rome is in 1881. The city is tumultuously overcome by a building fever, followed by a deep banking crisis. Building vicissitudes of large scale speculation in which the Vatican participated and continues participating. Claudio Pavone in his beautiful book, moreover little known, *Gli inizi di Roma capitale* (The beginnings of Capital Rome), published by Bollati Boringhieri¹, 2011, recalls that the cardinal secretary of State, Saverio De Merode, participated on September 19, 1870, that is on the eve of the Breccia di Porta Pia (note: the capture of Rome), at a meeting with other cardinals, builders and bank experts, including count Pietro Bastogi, to decide which building plans to move forward with after the entrance of the Piedmontese. The first law then, 1881 by Crispi, is not, by the way, a law for Capital Rome, it did not effectively intend to recognize Rome as such. It is rather a budget decree for building works. The Chamber of Deputies itself, for years, before the intervention of Ernesto Basile, is a sort of bivouac. Crispi himself says “we are under a tent.” and he wasn’t wrong (the Montecitorio Hall, as it is, would be completed in 1918). The law is understood furthermore as an attempt to concentrate all of the State within Rome, and therefore it is strongly opposed by the federalists, a misunderstanding that continued and continues still today... The federalists oppose a centralized State, they want a federal State. That is, the problem posed is the following: of what is Rome the capital? Of what state? Of the State of the Historical Right, which certainly was a centralized state with some flexibility? Of Crispi’s, an authoritarian, who wants to transform it into the Tiber Prefecture? Of Giolitti’s State who instead is open to local autonomies? Of Mussolinian State, who, once more, obsessively concentrates everything on himself and Rome, or rather Palazzo Venezia, such

1. Claudio Pavone, *Gli inizi di Roma capitale*, Bollati Boringhieri 2011.

that Piazza Venezia becomes a ungovernable crossroads, still to this day? Then Rome, after the war, becomes a discarded capital, because the Christian Democrats play to the lowest common denominator. There is a special law, Pella, 1953, and then nothing, while the city is overwhelmed and upset by immigration and colossal speculation and the most disastrous unauthorized construction. Which will crash down upon the “red councils” in the decade 1976-1985. Onerous heritage for a city which doubles its population every ten years without the means and special instruments by other capitals.

In the past, Nathan's six years (1907-1913) were extraordinary years, because the clerical, real-estate and finance powers are curiously put aside and a planning program is realized – the only time and with efficient and effective results – adequate for a modern city. Recently the question of the *villini* (small detached houses), which has permitted a reinterpretation of the classification and dimensioning of volumetry. And we are as if stunned by the accurate beauty of these modern neighborhoods, with habits of construction that continue almost by inertia, even after Nathan's time, defeated by a few votes in 1913 by the campaign on taxes for residential lots (which Luigi Einaudi himself considered weak). The same first law for Capital Rome in 1881 by Francesco Crispi had received about 200 votes in favor and 74 against, not just a few. And in the debate a sharp member of parliament emerges, Garibaldian, then radical, who observes a “certain envy” by other cities towards Rome. The second Crispi law for Rome, a decade later, will also be opposed, modified, for fear that will favor the centralization of the entire State through the “Tiber prefecture” and the intense debate continues...

Recently, in dealing with Villa Borghese, I re-read the parliamentary debate regarding the acquisition by the State for 3,600,000 Lire, a significant sum (which includes the Galleria) so that the “Villa be for the Romans.” The documentation shows that, previously, the magistrate, placing constraints on Villa Borghese, had protected the aims of the Borghese family, who wished to follow the example of the Ludovisi family whose villa of the same name had been destroyed to build Via Veneto and the neighboring areas. The destruction of Villa Ludovisi had robbed Rome of what had been considered the most beautiful garden in the world. Gabriele D'Annunzio, the only intellectual not from the north, also not Roma, struggled and would fight

with extreme vigor to denounce this type of speculation, alteration, and destructions carried out in Rome, as well as Bologna and Florence. To buy villa Borghese and Galleria Borghese as a public heritage required twenty years of debates, a, then, very real radical and anticlerical campaign in the “Messagero” (note: newspaper based in Rome).

Then comes Mussolini who invests colossal sums of money on Rome: demolition, tearing down, reconstructions in littorio style. Even regarding the Tiber. Mussolini proved to be so egocentric that with the “drizzagno di Spinaceto”, (note: project to straighten a section of the Tiber river) shortens a section towards the mouth by 3 km. The hydraulic power of the river, which can no longer extend into the swirls of the bays, it vents by digging backwards, with dangerous effects all the way to Ponte Milvio. The amount of aggregates, gravel and sand having been reduced, from the hills to the sea, because of the dams, the current pounded against the foundations of the *muraglioni* (massive walls), especially near the site of Teatro Olimpico, creating “fontanazzi” (hydrological outflows). Artificial sills had to be built to retain that little bit of sand necessary to raise the level of the river.

I am recalling this singular episode (the “*drizzagno*” was in 1941...) to show how so many funds were invested on Rome, even in the most senseless manner. I think we can affirm that Mussolini was responsible, in the end, for many ills of modern Rome, because he had created and thus unloaded onto the city problems unsolvable even now. In truth, he fervently wanted and realized a hierarchical city, in the historical center wealthy families of middle-upper bourgeoisie, in the mono-block districts the whit-collar workers and then outside, like in the *borgate* (outskirts) like Primavalle, the first historical borgata, and then many others, including the unauthorized housing, the poorer classes (including the “subversives”, once residents of the historical districts). Of the throngs of immigrants in those years, despite a law in force that outlawed internal migrations, the regime pretended not to see them. Rome had to be once more that of emperor Augustus. Mussolini installs some industries, for example Breda. Previously only Ernesto Nathan – who knew entrepreneurship since his youth, having worked at the Borsa di Milano (stock exchange) – had attempted to root industries in the capital. But, discovered, transporting Biella’s industrial culture to Rome proved to be very difficult.

Even the Christian-Democratic mayor Salvatore Rebecchini embraces and advocates the idea of a ministerial capital, without excessive industries and consequent “*agglomerazioni operaje*” –

conglomeration of workers – (as Quintino Sella organizer of the Third Rome had established), despite the left pressing to create some industrial zones, not next to Rome, but close enough. What one wants is a “clam” Rome. The Campidoglio over the years become a Christian-Democrat hegemony, a kind of branch of palazzo Chigi, without much autonomy. There was the 1953 Pella law that allocates extraordinary funds for Rome, but it is an entirely isolated episode. We have to come to 1984 (Craxi-Mammi), thirty years later to a special law for Rome, which would be approved in 1990. The first law that establishes stable (which they won't be) funds for Roma Capitale. And precisely thank to them, in 1995, in Rome it was possible to realize one of the greatest cultural investments in Italy, that is the *Auditorium. The Parco della Musica* (Park of Music), which, by the way, it is so little talked about. An investment of 230-240 billion actualized during Rutelli's mayorship, (during which the vice-mayor Walter Tocci was in the front lines: the tender failed, one reopens bids) opens bids only on invitation to architects who have already realized the Auditorium. Behind this is the hand of the elderly ex socialist minister Giovanni Pieraccini who is the somewhat secret organizer of this operation. Little is said about all this. The previous city councils, the “red” ones in 1976-85, were crushed by the problem of unauthorized building in the *borgate*. To regularize the *borgate* was a gigantic operation which lay largely on the Municipality. Tocci mentioned the thousand billion invested by the Municipality of Rome alone to recover over a decade a “non-city” with at least 250,000 residents. These are enormous figures, and also enormous political efforts. Then it would seem that after there was nothing else. Someone mentioned the Veltroni model, the Rome model, with which I don't agree. I believe that the Rome Model is much ado about nothing, or just much cement if you want. In fact it didn't work: the Fiera di Roma is always on the verge of bankruptcy. The MAXXI (Museum of Contemporary Art), which cost more than the Auditorium (200 million dollars) does not seem to me to be working all that well. The Città dei Giovani (City for Youth) in Ostiense is still just a dream. The Auditorium not only was completed, but is doing just fine and earns 67% of its introit from ticket sales, sponsors and donations. The Teatro La Scala in Milan is nowhere near this accomplishment. Again in Milan, Arcimboldi failed miserably. Why don't we say these things instead of feeling sorry for ourselves? This frankly I do not understand.

There would so many things to talk about. Rome is a city that at

times has had a distinctive character. With the Giolitti government, with Nathan, but without creating a special administrative-political model. Mussolini tried with the Governorship but which yields no significant results (except the beginning, unfortunately, with the demolition of the magnificent tramway line in Rome). Today there is also the question of the relation with the Lazio Region. It is absolutely necessary to take up the proactive dialogue for Rome once more, which cannot but be a special government, much like Berlin, where there are municipalities but a strong central nucleus. In the meantime what are Capital Rome and the metropolitan area? They aren’t anything for now. Does the Metropolitan area exist? On paper. The Region now has its configuration and it has, as always, a conflicting relationship with the mayor (now mayoress), who does little or nothing. The president of Lazio Region strives for high goals and has managed the Region, not in everything, but in some things, efficiently. The Region is economically stronger than Capital Rome. Someone mentioned RAI (the national broadcasting company), which was born in Milan and then handed to Rome. Even a program of appreciation of RAI, by radically changing the governance would be desirable. Because what we have seen with the Renzi-Giacomelli law and now with the “yellow-green” government is no longer a business, it is a *dépendance* of Palazzo Chigi.

The potentialities to be recovered are numerous. It is not by instituting MAXXI, and maybe exporting it to L’Aquila (the latest gimmick), that problems are solved, when Macro has been made twice as large and when Palazzo delle Esposizione has existed for decades, and is practically empty. The Scuderie del Quirinale (Quirinale Stables) offers exhibitions that often are tourist packages, but not much else. There is the need to offer space to artistic innovation. In the last thirty years in Rome, three symphonic orchestras have closed: RAI’s, an excellent one, was abolished when the *professors* of RAI Board of Directors (Demattè president) abruptly, in my opinion, *de facto* abolished three out of four orchestras. The BBC has six, ARD which is the federal public network in Germany has the same number. Following, even the orchestra of Lazio Region closed, a good orchestra directed by an excellent Chinese conductor, born in Shanghai who speaks with a Florentine accent, Lü Ja.

Even the orchestra privately founded by the Roman Foundation of Emanuele Emmanuele is in the group of vanished orchestras. There are interesting vocal groups, especially polyphonic, there are formidable organ festivals for ancient instruments, activities that could bloom with little. Or the blossom and are left to wilt. Ancient music, in fact, to date

does not have its own house of music in Rome. It could be the large Sala Borromini in the complex of the Vallicelliana Library, as committees and associations have been asking.

This is why I wish we would talk of proactive proposals and not just self flagellation. The Vatican, despite the admirable and courageous efforts of Pope Francis, remains an economic, financial and real estate power which conditions the city of Rome. That the incident of cardinal Bertone is hushed up, and not only that one, is extremely serious. Pope Francis himself, who is struggling against conspiracies, last December, commented on the question of empty convents, deploring how convents have become luxury residence, such as the one designed by Borromini in Via Garibaldi. I close with a curiosity, in carrying out various investigations with "Il Messaggero" we have tried to discover the number of tourist beds in the various confraternities and convents. We have estimated about twenty thousand. There is a beautiful and explicit national website called "Dormire dalle suore" (Sleeps at the nuns'). I wish that all the places where one can sleep at nuns' or monks' in Rome could be so advertised and that it would be possible to make them pay the taxes that they should pay. Just like the IMU (municipal property tax) on ascertained properties.