

This is the author's draft. For published book chapter, see: Hannah Malone, "Architecture, Politics and the Sacred in Military Monuments of Fascist Italy", *Modern Architecture and the Sacred*, ed. Ross Anderson and Maximilian Sternberg (London: Bloomsbury, 2020. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/modern-architecture-and-the-sacred-9781350098718/>)

Architecture, politics and the sacred in military monuments of Fascist Italy

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Introduction

Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime in Italy served its political ends through architecture that was at once sacred and modern. This chapter explores that conjunction of religion and modernity through a group of ossuaries (bone depositories), which were built to house the remains of Italian soldiers who fell in the First World War. Whereas, initially, Italians who died fighting in the war were buried in makeshift cemeteries close to the battlefields, in the 1920s and 1930, their remains were disinterred and re-buried by the Fascist regime within large ossuaries. Located along the former front in north-eastern Italy, the Fascist ossuaries are unique among European memorials for their vast scale and monumentality. Innovative in form, they drew on architectural elements of European modernism and Italian Rationalism, as evidenced by a tendency towards abstraction, simplification and reduction of ornament. At the same time, Catholic symbolism was deployed in order to imbue the monuments with sacred power and to serve a political agenda. As secular sites of pilgrimage, the ossuaries fostered veneration of fallen soldiers through imagery that was explicitly religious. They depicted the dead as martyrs and their death as a sacrifice for the redemption of the fatherland. By imposing a narrative that spoke of salvation, they also helped to silence discordant memories of the Great War as pointless slaughter. As well as bolstering support for the Fascist dictatorship, the monuments were meant to prepare the Italian population to fight in future wars. Their combination of religious and political iconography was in the line with the way Fascism

acted as a 'political religion' or an ideology that adopted religious strategies of propaganda. As the Fascist authorities operated in a deeply Catholic culture, they borrowed tools of persuasion that belonged to the Church. At the same time, they endorsed modern architectural styles as emblematic of the modernity of Fascism. This suggests how, far from disappearing from modern architecture, the sacred was re-invented in new and meaningful ways to serve political functions.

The architecture of Fascist Italy contradicts a stereotypical view of modern architecture as a secular movement that is focused on function, technology and rationalism.¹ Rather, Mussolini's regime engendered buildings that were both sacred and modern, or which drew simultaneously on religion and modernism to serve political goals. Italian Rationalism was exceptional among interwar movements in modern architecture in that it was simultaneously 'cosmopolitan and nationalistic, politically progressive and yet fully committed to the political program of Fascism'. As such, it was ideally suited to Fascist ambitions both to modernize Italy and to revive its national traditions – a paradox that also reflected the coexistence of revolutionary and reactionary factions within the regime.² After the conquest of Ethiopia and the foundation of the Fascist Empire (1936), there was a turn towards traditionalism in ideology, as in architecture. However, the ossuaries emerged from an earlier period in which the Fascist authorities endorsed a range of styles and a unique blend of modernism and tradition.

This chapter will show how religious symbolism and modern aesthetics might work together to carry messages of political propaganda. As such, the ossuaries are particularly interesting as they exemplify how religion can be, not only integral to modern aesthetics, but even expressive of modernity. The monuments are ideal spaces for the modern

reinvention of the sacred, in part, because of their nature as burial sites. While cemeteries are closely bound to ideas of the sacred, they are also sites for architectural experimentation because of the limited functional requirements of a dead body. To show how modernity and holiness coexisted within the ossuaries, this chapter has three parts: the first looks to the context in which they were built; the second shows why they were built or the aims that they were meant to serve; and the third part focuses on how modern architecture used the sacred to fulfil those aims.

Context

Between 1915 and 1918, more than 650,000 Italian soldiers died fighting against Austro-Hungarian and German forces in a relatively small area, which stretches across the north-eastern corner of Italy into what is now Slovenia. Initially, those who fell in battle were buried wherever possible in makeshift cemeteries or mass graves close to the battlefields. Immediately after the war, those burial places were rearranged into small cemeteries scattered along the former frontlines, and which looked like minor civilian cemeteries.³ In 1927, two years after the establishment of the Fascist dictatorship, the authorities declared those modest cemeteries to be unsatisfactory and launched a vast campaign to award honourable burial to the war dead. The regime exhumed the remains of over 300,000 soldiers who had died in battle and re-buried them in new ossuaries, which were built close to the earlier burial grounds and to the former battlefields. The older cemeteries were then demolished.

The authorities summarized the campaign to re-bury the fallen with one word: ‘centralization’.⁴ Whereas before the dead were scattered among a large number of small burial grounds, the Fascists’ programme for reburial meant that remains were

concentrated within fewer, large ossuaries. For instance, the ossuary of Montello is quite small by comparison with some of the others, but still it contains over 9,000 bodies gathered from 130 cemeteries in the surrounding area (Fig. 2). The geographical concentration of the fallen was accompanied by a process of political centralisation in that the campaign was run entirely by a military commission under the Ministry of War. Previously, the commemoration of the fallen had been left to mourners, local councils and Veterans' groups. However, from 1927, measures were introduced that suppressed local initiatives and curtailed the rights of private citizens to erect monuments and to hold ceremonies in honour of the dead. Effectively, the Fascist regime monopolised the right to pay homage to the fallen and brought remembrance under the control of the state. By demolishing the older frontline cemeteries, the authorities were going against the wishes of many of the bereaved and they met with resistance, particularly from the clergy as a group that had a stake in commemoration. Clearly, the aim was not to provide solace or consolation, but to gain political advantages from commemoration. Hence, the sacred was used in a way that placed the Fascist cause above the spiritual needs of mourners.

As to the architects, the military commission that was charged with the construction of the ossuaries had the power to appoint favoured architects without holding competitions. These architects were part of a select group and were chosen either because they were veterans of the Great War, or because they were active within the Fascist party. After General Ugo Cei took over as head of the commission in 1935, he awarded all projects to his favourites – the architect Giovanni Greppi and the sculptor Giannino Castiglioni. Working in partnership under Cei's direction, Greppi and Castiglioni developed original forms that advanced the ossuary as a building type. Although they were at one time prominent, or at least part of the establishment, the designers of the ossuaries have since fallen into oblivion, perhaps because of a tendency

to banish to the side-lines of history those who were tainted by association with the Fascist dictatorship. Despite their current obscurity, these architects created innovative designs that drew on the sacred in new ways.

Aims

It is important to grasp the purpose of the ossuaries in order to understand how spirituality and modernity served together to further that purpose. The obvious answer to the question of why the ossuaries were built, or why the Fascist state went to great effort and expense to exhume the fallen, is that it helped advance specific political aims. Having seized control in 1922 by undemocratic means, the Fascist authorities needed to legitimize and strengthen their power, and one of the ways in which they did so was through the commemoration of the dead. In particular, they used the ossuaries to serve two political objectives. The first was to ‘re-write’ the memory of the First World War, as a highly contentious and divisive event in Italian history. Few Italians had wanted the war and many thought that, although Italy was on the winning side, the nation had lost much and gained little.⁵ The peace negotiations brought disappointment, and deepened the divisions between those for whom the conflict was a triumphant victory and others for whom it represented a pointless slaughter. The Fascist leadership drew strength from that societal facture and, once in power, imposed its own memory of the past. Thus, the conflict became a keystone of Fascist ideology. As monuments to the ‘sacrifices and glory of the fatherland’, the ossuaries were part of Fascist propaganda that was meant to restore the nation’s dignity, after the conflict exposed Italy’s weaknesses in its military skills, foreign relations and international standing.⁶ They expressed a positive vision of the war, which served to prepare the nation for future military engagements – a function that became

more important with Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Of course, as much as the ossuaries helped to remember history, they were also about forgetting, in that they repressed negative memories of the war and silenced dissenting voices, particularly among pacifists and neutralists.

The second political objective was to foster a cult of fallen soldiers as martyrs for the fatherland. That cult was a useful political instrument because it helped to bind the living together through a common memory of the dead, and to build unity among a population that had been divided by the First World War. The celebration of the death of honourable men helped to enhance Italy's self-image and to reinforce the honour of a nation shaken by conflict. Clearly, any prestige awarded to the nation could be harvested in turn by the Fascist authorities. Moreover, the celebration of the fallen served as a call to arms, as the living were led to believe that they owed it to the dead to fight for their fatherland. At the inauguration of one of the ossuaries in 1938, the Chief of Staff, General Pietro Badoglio, stated that 'to be worthy of the fallen ... all Italians must be ready to follow their example [and to die for Italy]'.⁷ This kind of rhetoric was used to prepare the Italians for new wars and to promote an agenda based on militarism and imperialism.

Tellingly, the Fascist cult of the dead was expressed through the language of Catholicism. The fallen were described as martyrs; their martyrdom was a sacrifice for the redemption of the fatherland; the ossuaries were called *sacrari* or shrines because they enclosed 'relics'. Thus, Fascist propaganda 'spoke' in a Catholic vocabulary that was familiar and accessible to the majority of the Italian population. Christian images of sacrifice pervade the ossuaries, such as the palms of martyrdom at the ossuary of Fagarè, or the statue of Risen Christ at Passo del Tonale (1936). At Pian di Salesei, the low-rise blocks of the ossuary were arranged to form a cross-shaped plan in the forecourt of a pre-existing church. In that each of the blocks represent a battle in the surrounding area, the

deaths are cast as necessary sacrifices for the resurrection of the nation. For the Fascists, it was a way to re-cast the war's losses as having been necessary for Italy's rebirth. The aim was to promote future wars of conquest by promising the fallen eternal life in the national memory.

The Christian paradigm of martyrdom and redemption has long offered a model for noble and meaningful death. The patriotic variant of that paradigm was not a Fascist invention, but rather had emerged during Italy's fight for independence in the nineteenth century as a foundation of national identity.⁸ Fascist propaganda also cast as martyrs those who had died fighting for the regime, thus connecting Fascist heroes with Italy's founding fathers.⁹ This propaganda operated through myths of which Catholicism was a major source. However, the religious element went beyond rhetoric since Fascism was conceptualized as the 'religion of the fatherland', in which the nation replaced God as the object of faith. This convergence of politics and religion has been described as the sacralisation of politics – a process whereby, with the rise of modern nationalism, politicians borrowed ideological instruments that belonged to religion and the clergy.¹⁰ It shows how, with the rise of modern secularization, the sacred migrated from the religious sphere to that of politics.

On one hand, the Fascists relied on the persuasive powers of religion and the political support of the Catholic Church. On the other, tensions emerged between Church and state, as Fascism encroached upon the domain of religion and threatened the autonomy of the clergy. Through the Lateran Pacts of 1929, the Fascist state entered an official alliance with the Vatican, which was meant to resolve conflicts dating back to the Risorgimento, or the struggle for Italian unification.¹¹ In reality, the Pacts were a marriage of convenience, dictated by mutual self-interest, rather than ideological alignment. Whereas the Vatican planned to use the regime to 're-Christianize' Italian

society, the Fascists expected the clergy's support for plans of imperial conquest.¹² Both sides hoped to dominate the balance of power, but were ultimately disappointed. While the Vatican looked to the Fascist authorities to protect its power, the regime depended on the clergy to shape public opinion, particularly among rural communities that lived outside of the sphere of national politics and were more open to religious indoctrination than to nationalist messages. Very shortly after the signing of the Pacts, the Church encouraged Catholics to vote 'yes' in a plebiscite in support of the Fascist regime.¹³ In the end, the Pacts failed to reconcile Church and state because of the fundamental incompatibility of Catholicism and Fascism, as totalizing ideologies that demanded complete control over the hearts and minds of Italians.¹⁴

As a tradition dear to many Italians, the commemoration of the dead presented an opportunity to exercise public influence, which made it a source of conflict and rivalry between the Fascist and clerical authorities. The regime's efforts to control the commemoration of fallen soldiers jeopardised the role played by clergy in that commemoration since the war years.¹⁵ However, in exchange for backing the regime, the clergy was granted a position in Fascist rituals of remembrance. Around the time of the Lateran Pacts, a compromise emerged that apportioned the dead between the Church and the state according to the location of death.¹⁶ In broad terms, those who fell on the frontlines were buried by the regime in ossuaries close to the former battlefields, whereas those who died behind the front were accommodated in urban churches, which were partly or completely funded by the state, but administered by the clergy. Thus, the Fascist authorities appeased the Vatican, while retaining control over the remains of those who died in action – a category awarded the highest position in the hierarchy of Fascist propaganda.¹⁷ Geographically, it meant that the Church tended to urban burial sites, while

the regime had the opportunity to build new ossuaries on empty sites along the former frontlines – on which this chapter focuses.¹⁸

Means

Around twenty new ossuaries were built in the short period of time between 1929 and 1938. Some were constructed at the sites of existing churches, as at Caporetto, Pian di Salesei, Bezzecca, Timau and Schio, but most were created entirely from scratch. In terms of their architectural form, they are remarkably varied and draw on various historical traditions. For instance, the adoption of classical models, albeit in a simplified form, can be seen in the portico at Fagarè (1935) and the triumphal arch of Asiago (1936). Roman classicism had a particular significance for Fascism as the language of empire and of Italian greatness and, in that sense, the monuments were part of efforts to establish a national style and to export classicism from the capital to Italy's remote northern territories. During the Fascist period, Italian architects turned more often to antiquity, than to the Middle Ages, in search of a national idiom.¹⁹ However, the Middle Ages were also a source of inspiration and number of the ossuaries are reminiscent of medieval castles or fortresses – in line with their martial character and their position as guardians of Italy's borders. For instance, the ossuary at Caporetto recalls a medieval fortress, and the monument at Oslavia takes the form of cylindrical towers interconnected by battlements (Fig. 1). This reflected a pan-European trend of medievalist war memorials since the nineteenth century, which ennobled warfare through suggestions of medieval chivalry. In late nineteenth-century Italy, ossuaries were built for the fallen of the wars of independence in the form of medieval turrets, much like the Bismarck towers constructed around the same time in Germany.²⁰ After the First World War, the need to counter a sense

of rupture reasserted this tradition.²¹ In fact, the Fascist ossuary at Oslavia was modelled on the sixth-century mausoleum of King Theoderic near Ravenna – a model which also inspired the design of a Bismarck Tower (1906) at Lössitz in Germany and of a German monument for the fallen (1939) at Pordoi in Italy. Across Europe, medieval references were powerful not only because they could idealize modern warfare, but also because they could commemoration with a sense of the sacred because of associations with Christianity.

Crucially, tradition is always re-invented in a modern form in the ossuaries. At Montello (Fig. 2), classical elements, such as the columns and temple front, are updated or modernised. Equally, the ossuary at Pocol is a modern variation on the theme of the medieval tower in that the historical precedent is stripped to its essentials. As seen in these examples, ornament is limited and the sculpture is subordinated to the architecture. This tendency towards simplification, abstraction and plain geometrical forms reflected the influence of the Modern Movement. Specifically, it showed how Italian Rationalism adapted elements of the International Style to suit a Fascist context; for instance, by adopting simple geometries that were rooted in Italian heritage.²² As well as supporting Mussolini's image as the leader of a modern revolution, the limitation of decoration served to reduce costs – a major concern of the Fascist administration. In line with modern aesthetics, the ossuaries were shaped by a process that minimised detailing to expose the essential form of architectural types. For example, the ossuaries at Pocol and Pasubio are abstract renditions of a tower; Asiago and Stelvio draw on the arch; Fagarè takes the form of a portico; Rovereto recalls a circular temple; and Monte Grappa and Redipuglia are arranged as stairs. The monuments capture the essence of familiar types in order to harness their symbolic capital – particularly with reference to the sacred. The

references have an abstract or generic quality, in that they do not refer to a specific source, but help to evoke timelessness and sacrality. Overall, the ossuaries were shaped by a typically Fascist interplay between tradition and modernity, which stemmed from a desire to create architecture that was at the same time Italian and modern, or which was both rooted in Italy's history and suited to its new status as a Fascist dictatorship.²³ This conjunction of tradition and innovation was manifested through architecture that was modern and religious, or which drew on both modernism and Catholicism.

The ossuaries evoke the sacred mainly in two ways. On the one hand, the presence of chapels, altars, crucifixes and Stations of the Cross makes them explicitly Catholic, reflecting the alliance between Church and regime, and the role of the clergy as officiators in Fascist rituals. On the other hand, there is a subtler sense of the transcendence within the ossuaries, which is not overtly religious, although it draws on the well-worn strategies of Catholicism. This implicit sacrality expresses the nature of Fascism as a religious ideology and as a rival to Catholicism. Although the distinction is between a Catholic and Fascist spirituality, the line between the two is blurred and it is difficult to say where one ends and the other begins. It is also important not to think of 'political' and 'religious' as distinct categories because even the most manipulative propaganda may have appealed to the spiritual feelings of Italians. Moreover, the ossuaries embodied a range of motivations associated with the many agents involved in their design and construction – including military and state leaders, architects, builders and local authorities. In any case, the sacred, as evoked by the ossuaries, was truly modern in that it drew force from mass politics, rather than from institutional religion.

The ossuaries deployed the sacred to serve political ends primarily through their function, form and location. They harnessed the power of religion through their intended

function as sacred sites and as destinations to which the masses would flock in secular pilgrimage to pay their respects or to participate in large ceremonies. This intention was supported by the process of concentrating millions of bones within few locations, but also through the construction of new railways and roads to render the monuments more accessible. Battlefield tourism was a booming industry in the 1920s and 1930s, and was greatly encouraged by the Fascist regime as a ‘pious and sacred ... duty for every Italian’.²⁴ The ossuaries became stations on battlefield tours that were arranged by schools, universities and Fascist clubs for adult recreation. Their sacred aura was enhanced by means of guidebooks, pamphlets, films, photographs, newspaper articles and other forms of publicity, which were targeted particularly at veterans and young people.²⁵ Until the Second World War impeded travel, large numbers of people visited the ossuaries under Fascism. Although it is difficult to know whether visitors really thought of the ossuaries as sacred sites, the high numbers of visitors suggest some success in turning them into pilgrimage destinations. That said, a public official complained in 1938 that the war zones, although ‘spiritually sacred to Italians’, were being ruined by scavengers searching for scrap metal.²⁶

In terms of their form, the ossuaries drew on religious symbolism, often in combination with military imagery. For example, the monument at Redipuglia is composed of a giant staircase with three crosses at the top that were intended to represent the ‘Calvary’ of the fallen (Fig. 3). Akin to Christ, the dead were seen to have sacrificed their lives to redeem the nation and their sacrifice is re-enacted through religious iconography. The sacred imagery interweaves with military symbolism as the dead are represented in military formation. The monument at Redipuglia is the largest of its kind, containing body parts from over 100,000 corpses, of which approximately 60,000 were unknown or unidentifiable. While the unidentified remains were massed within a crypt,

the small boxes containing the known dead were slotted into small niches or alcoves within a grid. Among this great mass, six tombs stand apart: the largest, which is at the front, is that of the commander, the Duke of Aosta Emanuele Filiberto di Savoia, a cousin of the King, who would later become a fervent Fascist. Behind him are his five generals. Behind them, the rest of the fallen are arranged in serried ranks, as in an army risen from the dead that is ready to march into battle under the leadership of its commanders (who in real life were seldom at the front). As described in 1941, 'Redipuglia is not a Cemetery, but a rally of devout sons and warriors ... of the Fatherland'.²⁷ The soldiers' readiness to fight is suggested by the obsessive repetition of the word PRESENTE that runs horizontally along the risers of the ascending steps (Fig. 4).²⁸ This refers to the Fascist ritual of the *appello* or roll-call, when a leader calls out the name of the dead and his comrades answer 'presente' to suggest that the dead are forever present in the memory of the living and always ready to serve their country. Yet, at Redipuglia, the actual identities of the fallen are practically annihilated, as the dead are not remembered as husbands, fathers, and sons, but only as soldiers. There is no sense of the fact that, unlike the 100,000 soldiers, the commanders did not die in battle, but passed away peacefully in post-war Italy. Thus, Redipuglia illustrates how Fascism borrowed opportunistically from Catholicism to bolster a militarist ideology.

The designers of the ossuaries turned to ecclesiastical architecture for practical, aesthetic and communicative solutions. In many ways, churches offered an ideal model for the ossuaries, not only for their capacity to evoke the sacred, but also because for their nature as political places where power is asserted and negotiated.²⁹ While many forms of public and private space express social power, ecclesiastical architecture is special because that power is underpinned by a sense of the supernatural. By dividing between holy and

profane space, church architecture demarcates community. Equally, Fascism sought to redefine the boundaries of the national community – an ambition reflected in the ossuaries and the depiction of the fallen as a cohesive group united by common beliefs. Church design also establishes a hierarchical order based on proximity to the divine or power source. A key principle of Fascist ideology, hierarchy was embodied in ossuaries; for instance, at Redipuglia in the arrangement of the fallen by rank. In general, ecclesiastical architecture offered a blueprint for how the ossuaries might convey sacred meanings, establish rituals, coordinate large groups of people, establish community and hierarchy.

As sacred buildings, the ossuaries stand out and create space, rather than fitting in with their surroundings.³⁰ This is achieved by delimiting the ossuary by fences or walls, which serve a symbolic as well as practical function in that they denote the *zona sacra* (sacred area) around the monument. The enclosure is a traditional element of both ecclesiastical and funerary architecture in that it marks the boundary between the sacred and the profane – between the world of the living and the dead. Given the need to accommodate mass gatherings, they designed the monuments with an eye to voids as well as solids, much like Italian Baroque churches. This space-focused approach created theatrical stages for Fascist events, such as funerals and inaugurations, which affirmed the sacredness of Fascism and re-enacted the victory of the Great War. For instance, the balconies at Montello were designed for ‘religious rituals’ (Fig. 2).³¹ As in ecclesiastical architecture, the ossuaries also incorporated routes for rituals and ceremonies, which might be exterior, as the staircases ascending the terraces in the ossuary of San Candido, or interior, as at the concentric balconies that ascend the interiors at Oslavia, Pocol and Montello. Processional routes served to retain the memory of sacred rituals, even when they were not taking place.

A spectacular route leads to the ossuary of Caporetto (Kobarid), now in Slovenia. Caporetto holds particular significance for Italy as the site of a humiliating defeat in the autumn of 1917, when an enemy attack surprised the Italian army, broke through its defences and forced it to retreat by more than 150 kilometres. That battle left 294,000 Italians soldiers dead and 20,000 square kilometres of territory in Austrian hands. The defeat was a turning point as it laid bare the failures and inefficiencies of the Italian military and government, forcing them to enact the reforms that ultimately led to victory. An outpour of patriotic sentiment after Caporetto mitigated opposition to the war on the Home Front. Although Caporetto represented a painful memory, for the Fascists it was a source of renewal, as Italy's liberal democracy lost at Caporetto, but the nation was reborn under Fascism. In the official narrative of Fascism, Caporetto was Italy's Passion, as death brought ultimate triumph.

The symbolism of the Passion pervades the ossuary at Caporetto, which is located on a hill around 400 metres above town and connected to it by a *Via Sacra* (Sacred Way). Two massive pillars stand at the beginning of the *Via Sacra* in the main square of Caporetto, bearing the star of Italy and the Cross, which represent Catholicism and patriotism as the two symbolic pillars of Fascism. Intended to create a 'mystical atmosphere' for the visitor, the route is flanked by the 14 Stations of the Cross, which are marked with carved slabs by the sculptor Giannino Castiglioni and small piazzas where visitors can stop and pray on their ascent to the ossuary.³² Having first created a *Via Crucis* for the Bernocchi family tomb (1936) in the monumental cemetery in Milan, Castiglioni deployed the motif at the ossuaries of Rovereto, Caporetto and Redipuglia, as an link between Catholic tradition and the cult of the fallen as Christ-like saviours of the nation.³³ Designed by the architect Gianni Greppi, the ossuary at Caporetto developed around a seventeenth-century church at the apex of the hill as a structure of ascending

octagonal terraces that recall military bastions. As noted by the historian Vanda Wilcox, ‘The new fascist memorial was constructed around the old chapel just as the fascist symbolism and iconography were built onto and around the Catholic faith’.³⁴ Whereas the terraces accommodate niches for the remains of over 7,000 dead, a massive central staircase continues the route to the entrance of the church. From the piazza atop the ossuary, ‘one experiences a vision of mystical solemnity’ according to a battlefield guidebook of 1936.³⁵ By integrating Catholic symbols with Fascist iconography, the designers managed to imbue the ossuary with a powerful message of redemption. Thus, each battle, and the resulting losses, represent a step on the path leading to the salvation of the nation. Similarly, at Asiago, the ossuary was built as a gigantic triumphal arch on a small hill, which was linked to the town via an axial route culminating in a monumental staircase.

As seen at Caporetto, Asiago and elsewhere, staircases are prominent in the design of the ossuaries. Their function is to create long, taxing routes, which visitors were meant to ascend to give thanks for the sacrifices of the dead, and to express their faith in that for which lives have been lost. The ossuary at Redipuglia is a ‘staircase to heaven’, too big to be climbed, but visitors ascend by smaller, criss-crossing stairs at the sides of the monument (Fig. 4).³⁶ The fact that paths are unnecessarily long, wide and steep shows that ritual, rather than practicality, was the main concern. Often, the stairs lead to balconies where visitors could pause to admire the view, as is the case at Oslavia, Rovereto and Montello (Fig. 2). Demanding routes require commitment of the visitor, as a symbolic sacrifice to the dead and a re-enactment of the Calvary. The obvious precedent is the *Scala Sancta* (Holy Stairs), a recreation of the staircase that Christ ascended before his interrogation by Pontius Pilate, which Catholic pilgrims climb on their knees as an act of penance – the most famous example of which is in the Lateran Palace in Rome. The

Scala Sancta inspired the design of Giuseppe Terragni's memorial to First World War (1928–32) at Erba Incino near Como, which the architect described as 'the first modern monument to the fallen built in Italy'.³⁷ Formed of a vast staircase ascending to a hill-top shrine, the memorial is steeped in references to ascension. In that visitors climb to a terrace where they can pause and admire the view, there is an evident link with the ossuaries. The motif of the staircase may also be connected to Jacob's ladder – a biblical reference to heaven-bound ascent that Le Corbusier used in a design for a villa.³⁸ In fact, the ossuaries may be read in LeCorbusian terms as '*promenades architecturales*' (architectural promenades) where circulation structures the viewer's impressions in a way that conveys meaning.³⁹ In general, Terragni's architecture is emblematic of how the designers of the ossuaries, and other architects of the Fascist period, harnessed the sacred to express Fascist power.⁴⁰ In line with a conception of Fascism as a new religion, Terragni sought to create 'mystical space' through geometrical forms and abstract references to ecclesiastical architecture.

Ideally, the route is always upward so as to evoke ideas of spiritual ascension. Clearly, architects were making the most of sloping terrains, as the sites where Italian soldiers fought, and where later the ossuaries were built, are largely mountainous. However, they were also drawing on a long-standing tradition of verticality in religious architecture, as represented by the vertiginous heights of Gothic cathedrals. Through verticality, designers pursued a 'spiritual beauty' according the head of the commission that built the ossuaries.⁴¹ There are connections with the *sacro monte* (literally, sacred mountain), an Italian Renaissance tradition whereby chapels were set within a landscape, typically along an ascending pathway, and accommodated life-size statuary that depicted religious scenes.⁴² Located largely in the regions of Lombardy and Piedmont, the *sacri monti* are a relatively unique phenomenon in religious architecture, which sprung from a

desire to offer an alternative destination for pilgrims in the late-fifteenth century, when travel to the Holy Land was becoming increasingly hazardous. The Fascist ossuaries are akin to the *sacri monti* in that the visitor is engaged by means of an uphill route that is articulated through architecture and sculpture. Similarly, in 1920–2, the architect Eugenio Baroni designed a modern *sacro monte* to serve as a monument to the *Fante*, or infantryman, which was to be built on the former battlefield of Mount San Michele.⁴³ The design represents the soldier's path to war and death through a succession of grouped statues that are arranged along staircase. By depicting the sacrifice of the fallen as a Via Crucis, Baroni sought to create 'a route of prayer, purification, with slow pauses for meditation'.⁴⁴ In that the project focused on the suffering of soldiers, rather than the triumph of the nation, it was eventually blocked by Mussolini as incompatible with Fascist propaganda. However, its combination of the *sacro monte* and the *Scala Sancta* acted as a model for the the ossuaries – with the difference that they shifted focus from death to 'resurrection'.

Another well-known precedent in Italian religious architecture is the abbey of Sacra San Michele, near Turin, which was founded in the tenth century.⁴⁵ Perched on a scenic mountain-top, the abbey complex includes a strenuous route for pilgrims up the steep Staircase of the Dead (*Scalone dei Morti*), so called because it was originally flanked by tombs. Although the idea of uphill pilgrimage was by no means exclusive to Italy, these examples point to a long tradition in Italian architecture of ecclesiastical buildings sited on mountains that are reached via ascending paths.

In their upward thrust, the ossuaries differ from a opposite tradition in funerary architecture that burrows into the earth. That tradition is represented by the cemetery designs of eighteenth-century French revolutionary architects, such as Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, Étienne-Louis Boullée and Jean-François Blondel.⁴⁶ In the Fascist Party

headquarters in Como, Terragni placed the floor of the shrine of Fascist martyrs on a slightly lower level than the atrium from which it is accessed in order to heighten a 'sense of funerary religiosity'.⁴⁷ This 'buried architecture' (to use Boullée's expression) suggests descent into the underworld, rather than ascent towards the heavens.⁴⁸ By contrast, the ossuaries are more triumphant than mournful.

As evidenced by these examples, sacred symbolism was not just appended to the ossuaries through ornament, but expressed through the buildings' volumetric forms. This meant that religion was a constituent element of the modern aesthetics of the ossuaries – part of what made them look modern. As religious traditions converged with modernist aesthetics, designers engaged with models of church architecture, which traced a line between the simple, white spaces of medieval Cistercian monasteries and the architecture of the Modern Movement. Since the late eighteenth century, the sacred expanded from ecclesiastical architecture to other building types, such as museums, libraries or government buildings, which could be endowed with a holy aura because of their cultural value.⁴⁹ As monuments to the dead, performing a largely symbolic function, the ossuaries were ideally suited to take on sacred connotations. They show how, with the decline of organized religion, the sacred could shift from the sphere of religion to that of politics.

Another way in which the monuments evoked the sacred was through their location in the landscape – grouped along the former frontlines, the ossuaries contributed to an official Fascist policy to turn the battlefields into sacred sites. The battle sites were accorded special status in a decree of 1922, which describes their role as a 'temple' for the teaching of the 'new religion of the fatherland' (i.e. Fascism).⁵⁰ Following the conventions of Fascist propaganda, the battlefields were consecrated by the blood spilt for the redemption of the fatherland. As well as acting as geographical markers of the landscape of war, many of the monuments were placed in areas that previously belonged

to the Austro-Hungarian empire, and which Italy gained as a consequence of the First World War. Thus, they staked a claim on land acquired through the loss of military lives and justified the price paid for the new territory. They were also part of efforts to ‘italianize’ the Slavic and German populations of those areas, which involved the brutal repression of local languages and cultures.⁵¹ Whereas the ossuaries were described as ‘sentinels of the fatherland’ protecting Italy’s new borders, their role was really as admonishments to the local population and as ‘outposts’ for a future conquest of the Balkans.⁵²

A number of the monuments are located high on mountains were of strategic importance during the fighting, since both sides sought to gain the high ground. For instance, the ossuary on the apex of Monte Grappa, at an altitude of almost 2,000 metres, is a powerful symbol of the Italian victory, in that here the Italians fought uphill against the Austro-Hungarian forces (Fig. 5). The location had religious, as well as military, significance. Before the First World War, in 1901, the Catholic Church declared Monte Grappa a ‘sacred mountain’ and placed at its peak a statue of the Madonna. During the war, when Monte Grappa was the site of some of the bloodiest battles, Italian soldiers adopted the Madonna as an object of veneration. After the establishment of the dictatorship in 1925, the Fascist authorities wanted to created their own monument to victory. Thus, Monte Grappa became a contested site for two competing forms of holy propaganda, as Church and state both sought to place their mark on the mountain. An early project for the ossuary of Monte Grappa shows how, initially, the Fascist leadership agreed to preserve the statue of the Madonna at the centre of the composition. However, a later project presents a compromise, as the statue of the Madonna is kept intact, but it is shifted to a new location on top of a new chapel. In effect, this second design re-frames, or re-contextualizes, the religious monument. Significantly, there is also

a new arrival in this second project in the form of a colossal statue of Italy, personified as an Amazonian woman and escorted by a smaller foot soldier. With the appearance of Italy, the Madonna has a rival. In this second design, the cult of the Madonna and the cult of Italy (or of the motherland) are placed in opposition. Eventually, the ossuary was built following a third and final project, and the original chapel of the Madonna was demolished. While the statue itself was kept, it was hidden within a new chapel of Fascist design. The clergy protested and threatened that there would be a popular insurrection, but the Fascist state had won the argument. By enclosing the Madonna in a new structure, the regime effectively managed to convert a space of the Church into a monument of the state.

The ossuary of Monte Grappa is evidence of the power that the Fascist state had acquired by the early 1930s. Its novelty shows when it is compared with an earlier monument at Pasubio, which is unusual as an ossuary of the First World War that preceded Fascist rule, but avoided destruction. The case of Pasubio exemplifies the way in which the remembrance of the fallen passed from the control of the Church and civic bodies to the Fascist state, in that the ossuary originated as a joint initiative of the clergy and civil society, but was taken over by the military as representatives of the regime in 1924. The military authorities maintained the religious core of the original design and, as a result, the ossuary at Pasubio centres on a statue of the Madonna, which is set within a chapel and encircled by frescoes depicting saints. Lavishly decorated with sculpture and painting, Pasubio is more traditional in design than Monte Grappa. Its lighthouse form recalls the tower-shaped ossuaries that were created in the nineteenth century for the fallen of the Risorgimento, and lacks the open spaces for the gathering of the masses, which are characteristic of later Fascist ossuaries.⁵³ At Monte Grappa, political symbols

replaced the centrality of the Madonna, suggesting how sacred power might derive from politics, rather than from religion.

The case of Monte Grappa is emblematic of the struggle between secular and clerical powers for monopoly over the spiritual. It illustrates how the Fascist regime appropriated religious symbols to serve political ends and how those symbols were couched in modern architecture. The ossuary is imbued with spiritual connotations, in that it is shaped like a ‘tower of Babel’ with ascending and concentric rings (Fig. 5). Once more, a staircase ascending to a hill-top chapel evokes the idea of heavenly ascent. A triumphal route runs long the crest, on each side of which a flanking monument commemorates an individual battle (Fig. 6). As at Pian di Salesei, this *Via Sacra* is intended to represent Italy’s route to victory in the First World War. As the hill-top location evokes the idea of ascension, the vistas are integral to the experience of visiting the monument. Moreover, in that signs of the war remain in the craters below, the landscape suggests a sacred cycle of death and re-birth, or of sacrifice and regeneration. At the inauguration of the ossuary of Asiago, the head of the commission that built the monuments described ‘a sacred land, sown with the dead, for the blossoming of the Victory’.⁵⁴ Whereas at Monte Grappa the stripped-back aesthetic suited the image of a modern dictatorship, the spiritual suggestions drew on religious traditions; thus, the modern and the sacred worked together to convey Fascist power.

With the fall of Mussolini’s regime in 1945, the ossuaries were ‘de-fascistized’, or stripped of some of the Fascist symbols, but by no means all of them. Today, they occupy an ambiguous position in Italian heritage. Although they have lost their original function as instruments of Fascist propaganda, they retain their sacred power. Some of the

ossuaries have been re-invented as national monuments and are used to accommodate state and military ceremonies. Others are appreciated for their architectural qualities and their value as memorials to the fallen. It is interesting that, although the monuments have been re-interpreted in the light of current politics and culture, their religious content has not been entirely effaced. The ossuary of Redipuglia is significant in this respect in that, despite its militaristic symbolism, it has been adopted as a monument to peace by the Catholic Church and other religious groups, which points to the persistence of religion as a lens through which to view modern architecture.

Conclusion

Italy's ossuaries demonstrate how, under Mussolini's regime, modern architecture evoked the sacred as an instrument of propaganda. Principally, the monuments had two aims, these being to re-write the history of the First World War, and to foster a cult of the fallen to serve political ends. To fulfil those aims, they harnessed both modern aesthetics and spiritual imagery. In particular, they deployed the power of religion through their function, form and location. The ossuaries illustrate the nature of Fascism as a quasi-religious ideology that drew opportunistically on Catholicism. More importantly, however, they highlight the role played by spirituality in modern architecture. They testify to the fact that modernity and religion were not mutually exclusive languages, but rather worked together to serve the political ends of the Fascist regime. Today, the ossuaries are still an important part of Italy's architectural heritage and illustrate the enduring presence of the sacred in contemporary culture and in the interpretation of modern buildings. Now, as under Fascism, the ossuaries demonstrate how spirituality is fundamental to the aesthetics and meaning of modern architecture.

¹ Richard A. Etlin, *Modernism in Italian Architecture, 1890–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), xiii; Julio Bermudez, "Introduction", in *Transcending Architecture*, ed. Julio Bermudez (Washington, D. C.: CUA Press, 2015), 6.

² David Rifkind, *The Battle for Modernism: Quadrante and the Politicization of Architectural Discourse in Fascist Italy* (Venice: Marsilio, 2012), 10, see also 11–3.

³ Lisa Bregantin, *Per non morire mai: la percezione della morte in guerra e il culto dei caduti nel primo conflitto mondiale* (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2010), 193–233.

⁴ Archivio del Commissariato Generale per le Onoranze ai Caduti, "Memoria sulla sistemazione definitiva delle salme dei militari italiani caduti in guerra", 11 March 1930.

⁵ Giovanni Sabbatucci, "La Grande Guerra come fattore di divisione," in *Due nazioni: Legittimazione e delegittimazione nella storia dell'Italia contemporanea*, ed. Loreto di Nucci and Ernesto Galli della Loggia (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003).

⁶ 'dei sacrifici e della gloria della Patria', plaque at the foot of the monument.

⁷ 'degni', 'si sentano sempre pronti a seguirne il mirabile esempio', *Il Comune di Asiago per la inaugurazione del Monumento ai caduti: Altipiano dei Sette Comuni* (Padua: Tip. del Messaggero di S. Antonio, 1938), 10.

⁸ Lucy Riall, "Martyr Cults in Nineteenth-Century Italy", *The Journal of Modern History* 82, no. 2 (June 2010): 255–87, <https://doi.org/10.1086/651534>; Hannah Malone, *Architecture, Death and Nationhood: Monumental Cemeteries of Nineteenth-Century Italy* (London: Routledge, 2017), 104–18.

⁹ Roberta Suzzi Valli, "Il culto dei martiri fascisti," in *La morte per la patria: la celebrazione dei caduti dal Risorgimento alla Repubblica*, ed. Oliver Janz and Lutz Klinkhammer (Rome: Donzelli, 2008): 101–7.

¹⁰ Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (London: Harvard University Press, 1996); Emilio Gentile and Robert Mallett, "The Sacralisation of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 1, no. 1 (1 June 2000): 18–55 [<https://doi.org/10.1080/14690760008406923>].

¹¹ John F. Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism, 1929–1932: A Study in Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1–6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 104, 167–8, 191.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 57–8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁵ Patrizia Dogliani, “Constructing memory and anti-memory, the monumental representation of fascism and its denial in Republican Italy,” in *Italian Fascism: History, Memory, Representation*, ed. R. J. B. Bosworth and Patrizia Dogliani (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001), 15; Oliver Janz, “Mourning and cult of the fallen (Italy),” *1914–1918 online: International Encyclopaedia of the First World War*, 4 [https://encyclopedia.1914-1918online.net/article/mourning_and_cult_of_the_fallen_italy].

¹⁶ Bregantin, *Per non morire mai*, 262–3.

¹⁷ A text of 1925 (quoted in Bregantin 2010, 92) differentiates between the ‘fallen’ who were killed in action and the ‘dead’ who died away from the battlefields.

¹⁸ After the signing of the Lateran Pacts in February 1929, the clerical and Fascist authorities agreed to build the ossuaries of Treviso and Mantua, respectively in April and June of that year (Bregantin, *Per non morire mai*, 256–8).

¹⁹ There are exceptions under the form of references to the medieval city-state: Richard A. Etlin, “Nationalism in Modern Italian Architecture, 1900-40,” in *Nationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Richard A. Etlin (Hanover and London: National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1991), 88–109.

²⁰ Barbara Miller Lane, *National Romanticism and Modern Architecture in Germany and the Scandinavian Countries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 222–6; Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 13–4, 54.

²¹ George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 100–3; *ibid.*, 286.

²² Rifkind, *The Battle for Modernism*, 16.

²³ Etlin, *Modernism*, xvii, xxiii, 377–390; Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001), 136–7.

²⁴ Consociazione Turistica Italiana, *Sui Campi di Battaglia: Il Cadore, la Carnia e l’alto Isonzo* (Milan: CTI, 1937), 8, cited in Vanda Wilcox, “From Heroic Defeat to Mutilated Victory: the Myth of Caporetto in Fascist Italy,” in *Defeat and Memory: Cultural Histories of Military Defeat in the Modern Era*, ed. Jenny Macleod (London: Palgrave, 2008), 55. See also: Dogliani, “Constructing memory and anti-memory”, 18

²⁵ See, for instance, footage of the burial of General Gaetano Giardino in the ossuary of Monte Grappa in 1936: <https://youtu.be/4D2qtocBS94>

²⁶ Archivio Storico dell'Ufficio dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Fondo L3, VIII, 6, cartella 259, letter from the Gen. Renato Michelesi to Direzione Generale TCI, 10 March 1938.

²⁷ 'Redipuglia non è, dunque, un Cimitero, ma una adunata di figli devoti, di guerrieri ... della Patria', Attilo Fuiabo, *Credo nella resurrezione degli Eroi* (Milan: Corticelli, 1941), 227. See also: Ministero della Difesa, *Sacrari Militari della Prima Guerra Mondiale: Redipuglia*, 7.

²⁸ The PRESENTE motif originated with the martyrs' shrine that was designed by Adalberto Libera and Antonio Valente for the exhibition of the Fascist revolution in Rome in 1932 (Etlin, *Modernism*, 414–5).

²⁹ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 9–21; *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3–11.

³⁰ See Karla Britton's chapter in this volume.

³¹ 'funzioni religiose', Archivio Commissione Generale Onoranze ai Caduti, Sezione Tecnica, Montello, 'Progetto disegni, dettagli per la costruzione, Felice Nori', 18 July 1931.

³² 'atmosfera mistica', Archivio Commissione Generale Onoranze ai Caduti, Sezione Tecnica, Caporetto, Atti amministrativi 1935–9, 'Capitolato ditta Vittorio Marchioro', 22 August 1936.

³³ Anna Maria Fiore, "La monumentalizzazione dei luoghi teatro della Grande Guerra: I sacrari di Giovanni Greppi e Giannino Castiglioni (1933-1941)," (PhD diss., IUAV: 2001), 77.

³⁴ Wilcox, "From Heroic Defeat to Mutilated Victory", 56.

³⁵ Consociazione Turistica Italiana, *Sui Campi di Battaglia*, 249 cited in Wilcox, "From Heroic Defeat to Mutilated Victory", 56.

³⁶ Etlin, "In face of death", 41.

³⁷ Letter written by Giuseppe Terragni to Pietro Maria Bardi in 1932, quoted in Bruno Zevi, *Giuseppe Terragni* (London: Triangle Architectural Publishing 1989), trans. Luigi Beltrandi, 42; see also Etlin, *Modernism*, 522; Daniele Vitale, "1926-1932, Monumento ai caduti di Erba Incino" in *Giuseppe Terragni: opera completa*, ed. Giorgio Ciucci (Milan: Electa, 1996), 307–12. Terragni also incorporated a staircase into the tomb (1934–5) commissioned by Margherita Sarfatti, Mussolini's lover and influential figure in the art world, for her son Roberto, who had fallen in the First World War: Alessandra Muntoni, "1934-1935, Monumento a Roberto Sarfatti, col d'Echele", in *Giuseppe Terragni*, 445–51.

³⁸ Flora Samuel, “Architectural promenades through the Villa Savoye,” in *Architecture and Movement: The Dynamic Experience of Buildings and Landscapes*, ed. Jones, Peter Blundell, and Mark Meagher (London: Routledge, 2014): 44–9, here 46; Ross Anderson, “All of Paris, Darkly: Le Corbusier's Beistegui Apartment, 1929-1931” in *Le Corbusier, 50 years later: International Congress* (Valencia: Universitat Politecnica de Valencia, 2015), 4.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4995/LC2015.2015.928>

³⁹ Samuel, “Architectural promenades”, 44–5. Thomas L. Schumacher noted how Terragni applied the promenade structure of Le Corbusier’s villas to the design of tombs: *Il Danteum di Terragni: 1938* (Rome: Officina, 1980), 80–2; “Tra, intorno e dentro i monumenti e le tombe di Terragni,” in *Giuseppe Terragni: opera completa* (Milan: Electa, 1996): 229–39, here 229.

⁴⁰ Etlin, *Modernism*, 445, 447, 522–4. The project for a Danteum (1938), or monument to Dante, by Terragni and Libera is another example of an ascending, spiritual journey, articulated by architecture.

⁴¹ ‘*bellezza spirituale*’, Archivio Commissione Generale Onoranze ai Caduti, Sezione Tecnica, Monte Grappa, Letter of Gen. Giovanni Faracovi to Valentino Pellizzari, 10 May 1929.

⁴² Rudolf Wittkower, “‘Sacri Monti’ in the Italian Alps,” in *Idea and Image: Studies in the Italian Renaissance* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978); Mauro Quercioli, *I Sacri Monti* (Rome: Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 2005).

⁴³ Massimiliano Savorra, “La rappresentazione del dolore e l’immagine del l’eroe: il monumento al Fante,” in *L’architettura della Memoria in Italia: Cimiteri, Monumenti e Città, 1750-1939*, ed. Maria Giuffré et al. (Milan: Skira, 2007); republished as ‘Il monumento al Fante sul monte San Michele al Carso, 1920-1922’, in *Le pietre della memoria. Monumenti sul confine orientale*, ed. Paolo Nicoloso (Udine: Gaspari, 2015), 71–91; Quinto Antonelli, *Cento anni di Grande guerra. Cerimonie, monumenti, memorie e contromemorie* (Rome: Donzelli, 2018), 58–61.

⁴⁴ ‘*una via di preghiera, di purificazione, a soste lente di meditazione*’, Eugenio Baroni, “Il bozzetto “Fante”. Nel concorso nazionale per il monumento-ossario al Fante sul monte San Michele”, 1920–1, quoted in Franco Sborghi, ed., *Eugenio Baroni (1880–1935)* (Genoa: De Ferrari, 1990), 90.

⁴⁵ I am grateful to Peter Carl for bringing this source to my attention.

⁴⁶ Richard A. Etlin, *Symbolic Space: French Enlightenment Architecture and Its Legacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 172–80 and “In face of death: Calming the mind, mining the soul,” in *Der bürgerliche Tod: Städtische Bestattungskultur von der Aufklärung bis zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert/Urban*

Burial Culture from the Enlightenment to the Early 20th Century, ed. Claudia Denk and John Ziesemer (Regensburg: Verlag Schnell and Steiner/ICOMOS Nationalkomitee der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2007), 35–45.

⁴⁷ Giuseppe Terragni, “Il Sacrario dei Martiri comaschi nella Casa del Fascio di Como”, *Quadrante*, 35/36 (October 1936), 52, quoted in Etlin, *Modernism*, 447.

⁴⁸ Étienne-Louis Boullée, “Architecture, Essay on Art,” trans. Sheila de Vallée, in *Boullée & Visionary Architecture*, ed. Helen Rosenau (New York: Academy Editions, 1976), 90; See also Etlin, “In face of death”, 37.

⁴⁹ Bermudez, *Transcending Architecture*, xiii; see also Karla Britton’s chapter in this volume.

⁵⁰ ‘tempio’, ‘nuova religione di Patria’, Archivio Storico dell’Ufficio dello Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito, Fondo L3, VIII, 6, cartella 259, ‘Decreto-legge che dichiara ‘monumentali’ alcune zone...del teatro di Guerra italo austriaco 1915-1918’, 20 October 1922. Soon after taking power in 1922, Mussolini signed a decree that originated under the previous government, and which declared the battlefields to be ‘monumental sites’. The original proposal was for the battlefields to be ‘sacred’, but this proved to be too difficult so the wording was changed: Archivio Storico dell’Ufficio dello Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito, Fondo L3, VIII, 6, cartella 259, ‘Proposta per la consacrazione dell’Altopiano Carsico a monumento della Guerra nazionale’, 12 November 1920; Bregantin 2010, 223–9

⁵¹ Anna Vinci, *Sentinelle Della Patria: Il Fascismo Al Confine Orientale: 1918-1941* (Rome: Laterza, 2011), 161–68.

⁵² Dogliani, “Constructing memory and anti-memory”, 15.

⁵³ Bruno Tobia, *Una Patria per Gli Italiani: Spazi, Itinerari, Monumenti nell’Italia Unita (1870-1900)* (Rome: Laterza, 1991), 181–200.

⁵⁴ ‘santa terra seminata di morti per il germogliare fecondo della Vittoria’, quotation by Ugo Cei in *Il Comune di Asiago*, 12.