Situated in the industrial district of Ostiense, the Garbatella neighborhood was initially conceived as a garden city in 1920. It reflected contemporary attitudes towards progress, modernity, and the changing role of industry in city planning. Architect and planner Gustavo Giovannoni was a great supporter of the garden city movement and, with the collaboration of Innocenzo Costantini and Massimo Piacentini, adapted this English utopian model calling for a return to nature with low-density, village-style communities in peri-urban settings. The Garbatella was part of an ambitious expansion project that aimed to promote maritime industry in Rome and the extension of the city – north, towards the Aniene River, and southeast, along the shores of the Tiber all the way to the Tyrrhenian sea. The State entrusted the Istituto per le Case Popolari (ICP), a national building society dedicated to public low-cost housing, to build three new garden suburbs that included Ostia Nuova and Montesacro. Architects developed a unique style rooted in extreme economy and a reliance on local, inexpensive building materials. The practice and ideology of this ambitious project, begun under Italy’s young liberal state, were taken up by the Fascist regime with a continuity that belies Mussolini’s claims of having broken with Rome’s recent past.

Because of grossly inflated prices of construction after the First World War – an increase of up to 500% – it was imperative that building be as cost-effective as possible (Ufficio Municipale del Lavoro 105). The decorative style that emerged, however, was not simply about the bottom line: tufa stone, brick, and concrete were indigenous materials that conveyed a powerful sense of identity and place. Together with garden city principles that encouraged rural living and community consciousness, these neighborhoods effectively mediated those social and political aims of the liberal state that sought to remedy the grave housing crisis faced by postwar Rome. However, starting in 1922, the same architectural language and utopian ideals were also appropriated by Mussolini to fuel and bolster the ideology of the Fascist regime. In fact, both governments drew power and meaning from the city’s rich and varied history, communicated through architectural style and materials. Another perspective on Fascist architecture can be gained by reassessing the continuity between projects and initiatives of the previous administration with those promoted by Mussolini. This essay examines how both the liberal and the Fascist state moralized architecture in the Garbatella, the only garden suburb whose plans were successfully carried out and whose layout is largely still intact.
The Housing Crisis of Postwar Rome

In 1918 the Great War was over, but in this time of peace Rome was in a state of crisis. Infant mortality rates had reached alarming numbers and health care practitioners continued their fight against outbreaks of tuberculosis, malaria and the deadly Spanish Flu (Protasi, Rosati and Sonnino 33-36; Salvemini 308-14). In the years that followed the war, the quality of life in Rome deteriorated: government continued to enforce severe food rationing and in 1921 further restrictions were implemented (Talamo and Bonetta 66-67). Inflation was rampant and the cost of food is estimated to have risen five times between the years 1914 and 1925, constituting two-thirds of a household’s monthly budget. Regarding the condition of Italy after the war, A. P. Dennis, American commercial attaché to Italy, wrote: “One’s general impression of the black years of 1919, 1920 and 1921 was slackness – endless, tantalizing, heartbreaking slackness. Tens of thousands of soldiers still in uniform turned their hands to no useful account. Five husky laborers were employed by the state railways to do the work of two men. The country swarmed with beggars. Chaos, disorder, poverty reigned supreme” (Salvemini 150n18). In Rome, homecoming servicemen were faced with harsh realities: an estimated 65% would not be able to return to their previous employment and would likely have to look for work in the building or public sector to support their families (Talamo and Bonetta 184).

The lure of employment drew thousands to Rome, and the majority of immigrants – up to 70% – were of working age, between 20 and 40 years old (Talamo and Bonetta 250). This influx strained infrastructure and services that were already insufficient and aggravated the urgent need for affordable and adequate housing. The steep rise in population was one of the key factors, along with uncontrolled rents and land speculation, that contributed to the housing crisis: it was estimated that 45,000 to 100,000 people – up to 15% of the city’s population – were living in shanties by 1920 (Insolera, Roma moderna 104-05). The state of emergency compelled the City of Rome to address “il problema edilizio” (“the building problem”) in a detailed report issued by the Municipal Officer of Labor, Pietro Delvecchio:

Un problema che specialmente preoccupa in quest’ora così grave per la pubblica economia è, senza dubbio, quello della casa. Se da un lato l’arresto delle costruzioni nel periodo bellico ha reso più sensibile la deficienza di abitazioni, dall’altro costo raggiunto dai materiali e dalla mano d’opera ha troncato i nervi all’industria edilizia e paralizzata ogni attività privata, acuendo ogni giorno più lo squilibrio fra la domanda e l’offerta. In tal stato di cose il problema ha assunto un carattere eminentemente sociale, offrendo costante argomento di minaccia alla pubblica tranquillità e ragione di disagio morale […]. La mancanza di abitazioni sane, comode, attraenti, conduce allo abbruttimento delle classi più umili, mentre per le medie costituisce un profondo tormento morale.

(Ufficio Municipale del Lavoro V)

(A problem that is of especial concern at this time is, without a doubt, that of the house. If, on the one hand, the cessation of construction during the war has aggravated the deficiency in housing, on the other, the combined high cost of materials and labor has severed the nerves of the building industry and has paralyzed all private initiative, increasing every day the discrepancy between demand and supply. In this state of affairs, the problem has acquired an eminently social character, threatening public tranquility and promoting moral discomfort […] The lack of salubrious, commodious, and attractive
housing contributes to the brutalizing of the most humble classes, whereas for the middle classes it constitutes a profound moral torment.)

(Etlin 140)

The situation in Rome was certainly rooted in the difficulties faced by the postwar economy and politics; however, the report emphasized that, at its heart, this issue was a moral one. Delvecchio clearly stated that housing not only concerned “public hygiene” but was “also the first step in the spiritual elevation for the working classes” (Ufficio Municipale del Lavoro V).¹

Crisis was not new to Rome. The Great War, in fact, had only exacerbated a situation that government surveys had already identified with disturbing statistics, exposing problems of hygiene, overcrowding, and lack of basic amenities such as heat and water (Vidotto 130-33). The city was essentially unprepared to manage the demands of Rome’s exponential growth since unification, and by 1883 the city was dangerously in debt and faced bankruptcy.²

This tenuous financial situation contributed to the Great Building Crisis of 1886-87 when approximately 40% of construction sites were forced to close, resulting in a stagnant market throughout the 1890s (Ferretti and Garafolo 209). The Banca d’Italia obtained a great number of these foreclosed properties and the Istituto Romano dei Beni Stabili was created to manage them.

In 1903, a portion of these seized land holdings was transferred to ICP, newly founded by Luigi Luzzatti specifically to meet the demand of affordable housing – a question that concerned family values, public health and safety. Luzzatti firmly believed there was a connection between a person’s environment and his physical and mental well-being. He clearly expressed his views on the benefits and the urgency of quality accommodation:

Le famiglie degli impiegati costrette tanto spesso a vivere in misere case saranno illuminate da un raggio di conforto per le indispensabili colleganze dell’igiene della casa coll’igiene dell’anima. L’abitazione decente rigenera e ricongiunge le famiglie disperse e cacciate fuori dagli ambienti malsani nei ricostruiti focolari domestici. Lo Stato se ne avvantaggerà per effetto del nesso morale tra la casa sana e l’animo tranquillo. E noi tutti che lo serviamo, liberati dagli affanni quotidiani, renderemo più intenso e più effettivo il lavoro, la nostra partecipazione modesta ed efficace alla pubblica cosa.

(Bartolini 148)

(The families of employees, so often forced to live in dilapidated houses, will be warmed by a ray of comfort because of the indispensable ties between the hygiene of the home and the hygiene of the soul. A decent house regenerates and brings together families dispersed and thrown out from unhealthy environments in reconstructed domestic hearths. The State will benefit from the effects of the moral connection between a healthy home and a peaceful soul. And all of us who serve [the State], freed from everyday worries, will perform with greater intensity and effectiveness our work, our modest and useful participation to the public cause.)

¹ All translations are my own unless indicated otherwise.

² The population in 1871 was 212,000 and in only fifty years it had tripled, reaching 660,000 (Agnew 230; Kostof 12).
By improving the quality of life of families, Luzzatti argued that society as a whole benefits, including the economy. From its foundation, ICP prided itself on the belief that “una casa bella non voglia dir sempre casa costosa” (“a beautiful house does not always mean an expensive house,” Cecchelli 529-30). Their buildings kept cost at a minimum while the Istituto took great care that savings were not obtained at the expense of solid construction, living standards, or attention to detail. Social utopians long supported the idea that good architecture produced good citizens and that humans – being community animals – cannot thrive in a slum anymore than an animal in a cage (Macfadyen 251). The moral function of public housing and the goal of the Istituto were unequivocally expressed by its director Innocenzo Costantini: “Nobilitare, elevare la casa popolare è anzitutto elevare, educare il futuro cittadino” (“To enoble, to elevate the house of the working classes is, above all, to elevate, to educate future citizens,” Costantini 134).

Ideologically, ICP believed that housing served a civic function that promoted human values and social responsibility; its goal was to elevate not only the living conditions of the working classes but also their social standing through class integration. It was Luzzatti who clearly outlined from the outset that the concern of low-cost housing was not limited to the urban poor or any specific social class: “Noi riteniamo che i benefici dell’Istituto non debbano vincolarsi a una sola classe, ma estendersi a tutti i disagiati” (“We believe that the benefits of the Istituto must not be limited to a single class, but extended to everyone in need,” Cocchioni and De Grassi 27). This view drew support from contemporary circles; in an article concerning English garden cities published in Nuova antologia, Alessandro Schiavi concluded: “Sono preferibili i quartieri misti di persone di classe varie, perché è socialmente nocivo mantenere non solo nel lavoro ma anche nella vita ordinaria la separazione netta fra le varie classi e categorie” (“It is preferable to have mixed neighborhoods with people from various social classes, because it is socially harmful to maintain, not only in the workplace but also in everyday life, a clear separation between various classes and groups,” Schiavi 425). Hard times were not exclusive to blue collar workers, and the struggle to meet basic needs was shared by low-level employees in the service and public sectors including teachers, clerks, and public administrators (Cocchioni and De Grassi 27).

ICP found inspiration in the garden city movement in England and the success of worker villages such as Port Sunlight (1888) and Bournville (1899), and the city of Letchworth (Giovannoni, “Vecchie città” 456). The theories of Ebenezer Howard, the father of the garden city movement (see his Garden Cities of To-Morrow), emphasized healthful living in a green environment and therefore appealed to contemporary health concerns; moreover, the economic prosperity produced by the reconciled interests of both industry and workers was extremely attractive in Rome’s depressed economy. As noted by Luzzatti, there was a strong connection between positive living conditions and productivity. The first housing project to experiment with these ideas was San Saba, a small neighborhood set within the Aurelian Walls and begun in 1907 (Magrini 139). Designed by Quadrio Pirano, the original nucleus of villini and row houses was built around an open space, a model inspired by worker villages of central Europe (Ferretti and Garafolo 214). Garden city planning stressed the
importance of community facilities, services, and shared spaces in order to promote actively civic pride and a cooperative spirit. This aspect was fully embraced by ICP and became a trademark of their buildings, which included communal roof-top terraces, courtyards, and laundry facilities, but also necessary social services such as schools and daycare. Neighborhoods built by ICP not only provided much needed accommodation but also served as a “possente mezzo di educazione sociale” (“powerful tool of civic education,” Calza Bini 305).

The civic and moral importance of quality and affordable housing was expressed through design as well as decoration. The regional architecture of turn-of-the-century Europe inspired Italian architects to create a vernacular language that spoke to local traditions. This trend, contemporary to the garden city movement, was a reaction to the bleak cityscapes produced by the industrial revolution and the mechanization of society. The production line had reduced workers to numbers, and their barracks-style tenement blocks forced them further into anonymity. Social reformers, including Ebenezer Howard, championed change in the discipline of architecture and planning and, as Giovannoni explains, “una nuova scienza ed una nuova arte” resulted (“a new science and a new art,” 457). In his seminal article “Vecchie città ed edilizia nuova” (“Old cities and new buildings”), Giovannoni denounced nineteenth-century rigid geometric city plans in favor of the “Picturesque” school of thought, in which design gave local context precedence and took into account topography, climate, and local traditions of style and form.

In Rome, the Associazione Artistica fra i Cultori di Architettura was dedicated to the study, promotion, and preservation of the broad category of vernacular, or minor architecture, in particular the urban fabric of the medieval and Renaissance periods (Etlin 129-61; Sabatino). Giovannoni became president of the association in 1910 and was later a regular contributor, along with his colleague Marcello Piacentini, to their publication Architettura e arti decorative (Stabile 73). Giovannoni defined “architettura minore” as “la modesta espressione della casa” (“the modest expression of the house”): these were lesser-known buildings, built by master craftsmen rather than by professional architects, that had been largely neglected and had received little scholarly attention (Giovannoni, “Case del Quattrocento” 241). Between 1908 and 1912, the Associazione Artistica fra i Cultori di Architettura catalogued these buildings, which provided ICP architects – many of whom were members of the Associazione – with a rich vocabulary of decorative motifs and patterns. It is precisely the historic “modest house” advocated by the Associazione that gave visual expression to the contemporary low-cost houses built by ICP. On the occasion of the Terza Biennale di Roma, Carlo Cecchelli praised ICP for its ability to reconcile “la maggiore economia con le esigenze della costruzione solida e ben distribuita, che è particolarmente reclamata dall’ambiente romano” (“greater economy with the demands of solid and well-distributed construction, which is in special demand in Rome,” Cecchelli 529-30). It is this Roman context that produced a style, favored by ICP, called the Barocchetto: robust, neo-medieval, picturesque, this eclectic and historicizing style drew its motifs from the minor architecture of Rome and the Lazio region, as well as from medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque periods. It communicated a Roman identity
that did not have the grandeur of the neo-classical Beaux Arts style exemplified by the Victor Emmanuel monument (1885-1911); instead, it reflected the timeless quality of Rome’s minor architecture, namely, the buildings of the Roman people rather than of the State. The Barocchetto was human in scale, asymmetrical in design, and characterized by the colors of local materials; as a result, it drew its identity from the enduring practice of the artisan, and found its heritage in the traditions of arts and crafts.

*Pro Roma Marittima*

Industry in Rome was a thorny subject and one that met little consensus. Historically, Rome was a service city with modest productivity even throughout the nineteenth century. It was a question of decorum: the myth of Rome conjured images of majestic ruins, not towering smoke stacks, and politicians believed that industry would sully the Eternal City – literally and figuratively – and bring on the presence of potentially troublesome factory workers. However, industry finally found its place in Rome at the turn of the century with the southern expansion of the city and the development of the Ostiense district. Outlined in the 1909 *piano regolatore* by Edmondo Sanjust di Teulada, this development marked a distinct break from the 1883 city master plan that relegated industry and its workers to Testaccio, away from the urban core and poorly integrated into the city’s traffic network (Kostof 12).

With the promise of economic renewal, engineer Paolo Orlando relentlessly sought to encourage maritime industry in Rome. In his article “Per lo sviluppo economico di Roma,” he reasoned that as long as the housing crisis remained unresolved, Rome would be economically stunted and shackled by high living costs and inflation (“Per lo sviluppo” 495-500). By investing in transportation, Rome would be able to meet the demands of a growing metropolis and import a range of goods from other Italian cities at lower prices. Romans would benefit immeasurably, and the city – which, as Orlando correctly foresaw, would soon reach a population of a million – would extend to the sea. Orlando founded the Comitato Nazionale Pro Roma Marittima pel Porto di Roma e la Navigazione del Tevere e della Nera in 1904 and later gained support from Mayor Ernesto Nathan and King Victor Emanuel III (Nathan 328-34; Sinatra 15). After campaigning tirelessly, Orlando’s *piano regolatore* of Ostia Nuova was approved in 1911; seven years later a detailed proposal was outlined for a river port near the Basilica of San Paolo to be connected to a second seaport at Ostia by way of a navigable canal, a railway line Roma-Ostia Mare (inaugurated in 1924), and the extension of Via Ostiense (Orlando, “Roma porto di mare” 413-32; Stabile 117-18, 120-22; Tinacci 173-75; Cristallini 245-48). Rome had outgrown the 1909 *piano regolatore*; the City organized a committee in 1916 to produce an industrial plan that would include Orlando’s program designed by Gustavo Giovannoni and Marcello Piacentini (Stabile 117). The Concilio Superiore dei Lavori Pubblici specifically created the Ente per lo Sviluppo Marittimo e Industriale di Roma (SMIR) to manage this enterprise, and appointed Orlando as its chairman in 1919. Orlando’s scheme included the planning of a second garden city significantly located at the terminus of the Roma-Ostia Mare line: Ostia Nuova radiated from a central piazza, whose primary landmark was the railway station.
Garbatella Borgata Giardino
The Garbatella – a joint venture between the king representing the Italian State, SMIR, and ICP – was a symbol of economic progress and industry’s commitment and sensitivity to social needs. For practical reasons, the neighborhood was oriented towards the main transportation lines: the Ostia-Mare railway, Via Ostiense, and the Tiber River. King Victor Emanuel III presided over the groundbreaking ceremony of the Garbatella on February 18, 1920. The event was commemorated by a plaque that was prominently placed in the main square of Piazza Brin:

PER LA MANO AUGUSTA DI S.M. IL RE VITTORIO EMANUELE III
L’ENTE AUTONOMO PER LO SVILUPPO MARITTIMO E INDUSTRIALE
E L’ISTITUTO DELLE CASE POPOLARI DI ROMA
CON LA COLLABORAZIONE DELLE COOPERATIVE DI LAVORO
AD OFFRIRE QUIETA E SANA STANZA AGLI ARTEFICI DEL RINASCIMENTO
ECONOMICO DELLA CAPITALE
QUESTO APRICO QUARTIERE FONDANO OGGI XVIII FEBBRAIO MCMXX

(By the august hand of His Majesty King Victor Emmanuel III, the autonomous Society for the Maritime and Industrial Development and the Institute for Popular Housing of Rome, with the collaboration of Workers’ Cooperatives, offering this quiet and healthy area to the craftsmen of the economic rebirth of the capital, found this sunlit district today, 18 February 1920.)

The inscription clearly politicized the housing project by underscoring the healthful characteristics of this “sunlit district” for the “craftsmen of the capital’s economic rebirth” – a direct reference to Rome’s industrial growth and, specifically, to the railway and dockworkers employed by SMIR. It calls to mind Orlando’s promise that the “incalculable benefits” of a maritime Rome would not only be “political, but also social and moral” (Orlando, “Roma porto di mare” 428).

Concordia was Orlando’s first name for the Garbatella, possibly a tribute to Howard’s utopian city described in his text Garden Cities of To-Morrow (Howard 143). The early design of the Garbatella did faithfully adhere to key garden city principles: the peripheral location was chosen because of its depressed commercial value; its plan clearly reflected the site’s topography; its proximity to both the railway line and Via Ostiense was vital in connecting Garbatella with Rome, the “Central City,” and to the off-shoot cities of Ostia Nuova and Montesacro. Located only four kilometers from the Capitoline Hill, the Garbatella was planned as a self-sufficient community of forty-four individual buildings of various typologies that included lodgings of two to five rooms and a kitchen. A total of 190 residential units and thirty-seven commercial spaces dedicated to shops and stockrooms was built around a central square, Piazza Brin. These buildings were topographically separated into five lotti defined by surrounding curvilinear roads. Each lot was numbered and contained communal spaces such as gardens, courtyards, and laundry facilities; in the case of multi-story blocks such as Lot 5, access was gained through gated entrances that were locked in the evenings by a resident caretaker.
While Giovannoni and his ICP colleagues fully embraced Howard’s ideals of the “town-country” – “beauty of nature, social opportunity, fields and parks of easy access [...] pure air and water, good drainage, bright homes and gardens” – the Garbatella reflects an interpretation of the English model in a Roman context (Howard 46). Two main building types can be identified in Lots 1 to 5: the two-story villino and the larger palazzina, or apartment block. The small villas, comparable to the English cottage, could be grouped together within a lot or combined to create row housing defining a lot’s perimeter (see figure 1). The choice to include larger, multi-storied blocks reflected the preferences of the Roman middle class and contemporary attitudes in building. Legally defined by building code no. 1937 and approved by royal decree in December 1920, the palazzina was considered a solution to the postwar housing crisis, replacing the single-family villino (Fried 28-29; Insolera, Roma moderna 94-95). These five-story apartment blocks became fashionable and a mark of status. The palazzina offered the benefits of the villino – apartments were well lit and ventilated thanks to height restrictions, and residents had access to gardens, a necessary planning element stipulated in the building code – while enjoying greater convenience and security. By incorporating the palazzina type, planners introduced greater variety in their design while appealing to current trends and promoting class integration. The Istituto per le Case Popolari was successful in this regard: in 1921 Garbatella’s population was 3,454 and 53.2% of residents were blue-collar workers (Rivolta 45, 50; Sinatra 25-26).

The Barocchetto is fully expressed in both villino and palazzina types, where “special attention,” as noted by Innocenzo Costantini, general director and supervisor of building in the Garbatella, was given to a building’s texture, produced by intricate brickwork and rusticated tufa blocks, and to its color – a palette of earth tones specifically derived from the local area. No detail was too small: gutter spouts fashioned into exotic animals, loggias with delicate colonnettes, and decorative chimney pots personalized each lodging. Costantini believed it was this individual character and array of variety that humanizes “the house for the modest classes.” In a published progress report in 1922, he wrote: “In questa borgata l’Istituto per le case popolari in Roma ha cercato [...] di battere una nuova via, di tentare espressioni più varie, più moderne della casa per le classi umili, espressioni che si legassero da un lato alle tendenze più recenti dell’edilizia e dall’altro allo speciale riguardo che merita l’ambiente romano” (“In this neighborhood the Istituto per le Case Popolari in Rome has attempted [...] to pave a new way, to find new and more varied, more modern interpretations of the house for the modest classes; interpretations that are tied on one hand to the most recent building trends, on the other, to the special attention that the Roman context deserves,” Costantini 132-34). Although seemingly contradictory, it was in fact the capacity of vernacular architecture to adapt and reinvent itself constantly that made it new while never severing its connection with the past. The style of Garbatella’s houses was modern – not by denying Rome’s architectural history, but by embracing it.

Fundamental to the Garbatella’s regional identity was its sensitivity to Rome’s defining characteristic as a palimpsest. The city cannot be pigeonholed into any single period or style: the ancient fabric coexists with subsequent periods and these layers, both horizontal and vertical, visually expose the
vicissitudes of time, producing an “eternal” quality (Agnew speaks of a “vertical palimpsest,” 238). Perhaps the medieval city best exemplifies this phenomenon: only a shadow of its former imperial self, Rome in the Middle Ages was forced to re-use and recycle ancient materials in the construction and decoration of its buildings. The medieval aesthetic was based on spolia, the literal borrowing of ancient fragments, just as the revival of antiquity during the Renaissance and Baroque periods relied on the imitation of classical models. I argue that it is the deliberate imitation of spolia and the irregular appearance of the palimpsest that gives the Garbatella its unique regional identity. Details such as the fragmented Corinthian capitals as decorative flourishes to the brick balconies in Lot 5, or simulated blind arches as in Lot 2, where a small square window and doorway are punctured as though opened in a subsequent period, carefully seek to recreate a style that is the product of millennia (see figure 2). However, the Garbatella’s palimpsest was not weathered by time but created ex novo, and the attempt to recreate this effect through faux spolia and varied building materials lends an air of theatrical delight to the picturesque backdrop of the neighborhood.3

This palimpsest style was inspired by buildings catalogued by the Associazione Artistica fra i Cultori di Architettura and, in two notable cases – Casa dei Crescenzi and Casa de’ Manili – the displays of spolia were public statements of the patrons’ Roman heritage. Giovannoni, in his article “Case del Quattrocento a Roma,” regarded Casa de’ Manili as being of “singular importance” and noted that its patron, just as the baronial Crescenzi before him, dedicated his house to Rome and its “rinascita” (“renewal,” 249). Inscriptions found on the buildings’ façade made explicit reference to Rome’s past and to themes of cultural and political renewal. Niccolò Crescenzi declared that his house was built “to renew the ancient ornament of Rome”; Lorenzo de’ Manili, boldly dating his house “from the year Rome was founded,” claimed it was built “as Rome is renewed to its ancient splendor” (Clarke 12-13, 229-30).4 For the Crescenzi house, the statement was deeply political since it coincided with the restoration of the ancient Senate in the twelfth century; in both instances, the patron’s intentions are validated by their Roman status, substantiated in turn by their use of spolia. Giovannoni argued that ground floor arches, mullion windows, and loggias were trademark characteristics of a minor architecture that continued to be popular. The stylistic persistence of the “medieval house” even throughout the fifteenth century blurred rigid stylistic divisions between artistic periods. It is precisely this continuity that imparted minor architecture with the virtues of truth, tradition, and the unwritten knowledge of the master craftsmen. Its longevity can be attributed to the associations made between this architecture – which Giovannoni describes as essentially “romanesca” – and the conservative values of the “popolani” and tenant farmers (Giovannoni, “Case del Quattrocento” 245).

3 I would like to thank Scott J. Finn for sharing his impressions of the Garbatella and for our many discussions that have helped clarify and have contributed to my ideas of the “palimpsest style.”

4 For a transcription of the inscriptions of Casa dei Crescenzi, see Gallavotti Cavallero 108; for Casa de’ Manili, see Pietrangeli 48.
Tinged with nostalgia, the medieval house represented “everyman” and had strong connections with the Agro Romano; it was thus appropriate that its palimpsest style was adopted by Giovannoni and ICP. The use of *spolia* was long associated with themes of renewal and rebirth and, as the commemorative plaque reminds us, the Garbatella was built for the “artefici del *rinascimento* economico della capitale.” The vernacular style was deliberately chosen to project the morals and traditional values of the working class and the Roman countryside; combined with the utopian ideals of the garden city, the Garbatella was instrumental in promoting Roman industry as socially responsible and in convincing critics of its civic and economic success. The Garbatella’s romanitas is evident when compared to the Piedmontization of nineteenth-century neighborhoods such as Prati, Esquilino and Ludovisi—whose identity is bound to the Kingdom of Italy and clearly references its former capital of Turin (Insolera, *Roma moderna* 34). The Garbatella instead comes from a different tradition, rooted in social needs and public housing projects with a style that is self-consciously Roman.

“*La monumentale Roma del XX secolo*”

Many urban strategies practiced under the liberal government remained constant during the subsequent Fascist regime. Large-scale slum clearance continued in the historic center, and decentralized planning and city expansion to peripheral and rural areas were favored, as in the case of the Garbatella. Under Mussolini, the garden suburb would quickly expand and become one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in an effort to solve the persisting housing problem. ICP continued to adhere to certain key principles of garden city planning: emphasis on nature and rural values, organic street planning, shared communal facilities, and attention to regional identity through design and decoration. These ideals were coherent with the initiatives of the liberal regime, and, as we shall see, were equally effective in supporting those of the Fascist rule.

From the very onset of Fascism, the myth of Rome and its importance in creating a Fascist mythology were clearly articulated. On April 21, 1922, on the occasion of the founding of Rome, Mussolini declared:

Roma è il nostro punto di partenza e di riferimento; è il nostro simbolo, o se si vuole, il nostro mito. Noi sogniamo l’Italia romana, cioè sagga e forte, disciplinata e imperiale. Molto di quel che fu lo spirito immortale di Roma risorge nel Fascismo: romano è il Littorio, romana è la nostra organizzazione di combattimento, romano è il nostro orgoglio e il nostro coraggio: “civis romanus sum” […]. I romani non erano soltanto dei combattenti, ma dei costruttori formidabili che potevano sfidare, come hanno sfidato, il tempo.  

(Mussolini 278)

(Rome is our point of departure and reference; it is our symbol, or if you wish, our myth. We dream of a Roman Italy, that is, wise and strong, disciplined and imperial. Much of what created the immortal spirit of Rome rises once more in Fascism: Roman are the fasces, Roman is our organization in battle; Roman is our pride and our courage: “I am a Roman citizen” [...] Romans were not only soldiers, but formidable builders that could defy, as they did defy, time.)

In this address, Mussolini exalted Rome’s military history but recognized that *Roma aeterna* owed its status to its building tradition. He defined essential
Roman qualities as “wise and strong, disciplined and imperial” and, like the liberal regime, exalted a “Roman Italy.” Nation building had been the motivation behind large-scale projects such as Via Nazionale and Corso Vittorio Emanuele; these focused the city towards its new visual anchor, the Vittoriano, namely, the symbol of newly unified Italy (Atkinson and Cosgrove 28-49). Projects such as these – but also the slum clearance of the Jewish Ghetto and the neighborhood dell’Oca – required extensive demolitions; this too is a legacy that Mussolini inherited (Insolera, “L’urbanistica” 478n1). Fascist rhetoric compelled planners and archaeologists to expose the ancient layers of the city at seemingly any cost. In the years that followed, nationalism and Roman pride justified these *sventramenti* – literally, “urban disembowelments” – which devastated whole neighborhoods in the historic center, leaving thousands homeless.

The connection between rhetorical projects, such as the isolation of the Capitoline Hill which Mussolini defined as a problem of “grandeur,” came at a high cost and contributed to those of “necessity,” namely, housing and infrastructure. In a famous speech made on April 21, 1924, Mussolini acknowledged the housing crisis while justifying his urban politics that aggravated the situation:

*I problemi di Roma, la Roma di questo XX secolo, mi piace dividerli in due categorie: i problemi della necessità ed i problemi della grandezza. Non si possono affrontare quest’ultimi se i primi non sono stati risolti. I problemi della necessità sgorgano dallo sviluppo di Roma e si racchiudono nel binomio: case e comunicazioni. I problemi della grandezza sono di altra specie: bisogna liberare dalle deturpazioni mediocri tutta la Roma antica; ma accanto all’antica ed alla medioevale bisogna creare la monumentale Roma del XX secolo.

(Mussolini, *La rivoluzione fascista* 4: 93)

(I like to divide the problems of Rome, the Rome of this 20th century, into two categories: the problems of necessity and the problems of grandeur. The second cannot be faced without resolving the first. The problems of necessity flow from the development of Rome and are enclosed in this duality: housing and communications. The problems of greatness are of another type: it is necessary to liberate from the mediocre disfigurements of the old Rome, but next to the ancient and medieval it is necessary to create the monumental Rome of the 20th century.)

(Painter 4)

By 1924, Mussolini had ordered demolitions to “liberate” the temples at the Foro Boario and began work at Trajan’s Forum. Over the next five years the pickaxe, a symbol of Fascist urban renewal, would fall in the areas of Largo Argentina, Theater of Marcellus, Campidoglio, Forum of Augustus, the Roman Forum, Circus Maximus, and the Markets of Trajan. Mussolini did not acknowledge the cycle of empire building and the displacement of the urban poor caused by these very demolitions, treating the housing problem, instead, as

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5 Dates of demolition work: 1923 Foro Boario; 1924 Forum of Trajan; 1926 Campidoglio, Largo Argentina, Theater of Marcellus, Forum of Augustus; 1927 S. Maria in Aracoeli, Roman Forum; 1928 Circus Maximus; 1929 Trajan’s Markets (Insolera, *Roma fascista* 89).
According to Mussolini, the solution to the housing problem was to colonize the Agro Romano. Fascist rhetoric idealized rural life and propagandistic newsreels positively portrayed farmers and the benefits of open-air and hard work; this was done in support of Fascist agricultural policies, in particular, Mussolini’s marshland reclamation schemes (Sorlin 51-52). Early Fascism had been predominantly an urban phenomenon, but Mussolini was quick to argue that the regime was now fully committed to the welfare and concerns of the “rurali,” whom he identified as “mezzadri, fittabili, piccoli proprietari, giornalieri” (“sharecroppers, tenant farmers, small land owners, day-laborers,” Mussolini 2: 285). Mussolini was not only addressing his largest contingency of party supporters – according to a survey conducted at the Congresso di Roma in November 1921, 24.3% of Fascist card holders were agricultural workers. He was also politicizing the countryside (De Felice 6-7): “[...] il patriottismo non è più sentimento monopolizzato (o sfruttato) dalla città, ma diventa patrimonio – anche – delle campagne” (“[...] patriotism is no longer a sentiment monopolized [or exploited] by the city; instead it becomes the property – also – of the countryside,” Mussolini 2:289). Rural life became an instrument to define national identity and duty; in Rome, it justified the relocation of thousands to the periphery and to the new Fascist borgate. The first of these – Acilia, inaugurated in 1924 – was located fifteen kilometers outside the city and completed for those who had lost their homes in the demolitions of the ancient fora and for the Via del Mare (Insolera, Roma fascista 14; Isolera, “L’Urbanistica” 478). However, the foundation of “Borgo Acilio” dated back to 1915, when it was begun under the liberal regime (Talamo and Bonetta 187; Torelli Landini, “Opifici all’Ostiense” 256). The repopulation of the Roman countryside had also been an instrumental aspect of promoting maritime Rome, which, according to Orlando, was also the solution to the housing crisis. Both regimes glorified rural life in an attempt to realize their ambition of extending Rome to the sea. Ostia, however, would not turn into the great port city Orlando had envisioned; instead, it would become Roma Lido, the seaside resort of the capital.

Garbatella Borgata Fascista

The “problems of necessity” were all too evident in the Garbatella: its population swelled from 3,454 in 1922 to 23,178 only four years later by absorbing the masses displaced by Fascist sventramenti and the removal of shanty towns in the areas of Ponte Milvio, Porta Latina, Portonaccio, and Ponte Lungo (Stabile 165-68; Sinatra 32). The situation worsened after 1923 when the government passed legislation to remove rent controls implemented during the war, which subsequently caused prices to soar, tragically leading to widespread evictions (Insolera, Roma moderna 113). ICP responded immediately by introducing two new types of housing: the first, based on the villino model, was “rapid housing,” which allowed architects to draw from a range of basic modules that could be built with extreme efficiency and economy. The second, the “super-block,” elaborated on the palazzina model but encompassed entire
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city blocks, such as Plinio Marconi’s Lot 8, the first of its kind to be built (Rappino 176; Stabile 163-64). Marconi’s solution still retains the essence of the *palazzina* in terms of status, function, and decoration, but on a much larger scale (see figure 3).

Within the Garbatella three distinct areas were built. Starting in 1924, the “Quartiere per sfrattati” provided shelter to those evicted from the city; from 1925, the “Quartiere per sbaraccati” predominantly housed families displaced from the shanties being demolished; and, from 1926, the “Quartiere delle case a riscatto” was an attempt to diversify the social make-up of the neighborhood by giving people the opportunity to buy their homes with the aid of government subsidies. Architects continued to stress shared spaces and services in their designs by planning communal clotheslines, laundry facilities, parks and gardens, playgrounds, and small storage areas located in the entrance halls. As the Garbatella expanded and incorporated new building typologies in an effort to meet the rising demand of affordable housing, the underlying principles of the Picturesque, as defined by Giovannoni, were not abandoned. The perimeter of the lots conformed to the area’s topography and roads were gently curved, instead of meeting at ninety-degree angles. Vernacular forms were adapted and included exterior staircases, loggias, mullion windows, and textured surfaces through the use of mixed materials. Most important, all three *quartieri* were centered on small open spaces – Piazza Masdea, Piazza Sapeto and Largo Randaccio – which contributed to the spontaneous and organic character of the Garbatella’s general plan.

With growing numbers relocating to the Garbatella, the need for services and facilities was pressing. In 1926, in addition to the construction of the elementary school at Piazza Longobardi, Innocenzo Sabbatini introduced the multi-functional super-block as an innovative solution (Rappino 196). Lots 12 and 13 provided apartments and artist studios, but the former was also designed to house the “Palladium” cinema-concert hall, whereas the latter accommodated a public bath complex that provided shower and bath facilities along with spaces dedicated to barbers, hairdressers, and beauticians. The Palladium and Public Baths were importantly located around Piazza Bartolomeo Romano, which was now one of the Garbatella’s central squares; the focus had shifted away from Piazza Brin, whose importance had diminished after the city abandoned the river port project in 1923, when SMIR’s property holdings were liquidated (Torelli Landini, “Il sistema” 152). The concentration of public services around a square recalls Howard’s diagram entitled “Ward and Centre of Garden City,” where the city’s core is lined with public buildings: a museum, a hospital, a library, a theater, and a concert and town hall (Howard 53). The location of services reflected the neighborhood’s growth pattern eastwards begun in 1925 with the construction of rapid housing in Lots 14, 21, 25 and 26 (Rappino 178).

Sabbatini repeated this model in Piazza Michele Carbonara, with a series of four “suburban hotels” – Lots 41, 42, 43, and 44. These multi-functional super-blocks of even greater proportions were originally designed as dormitories to provide short-term accommodation while more permanent lodgings could be

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6 “Quartiere per sfrattati”: Lots 14, 15, 16, 20, 25, 26; “Quartiere per sbaraccati”: Lots 28-33, 37-38; “Quartiere delle case a riscatto”: Lots 52-55 (Stabile 165-82; Rappino 179-93).
secured. Services provided were open to the entire neighborhood: chapels, police offices, health clinics, daycare and refectories. Private and shared rooms separated by gender could be found on the first floor, with shared bathroom facilities; larger living spaces on the upper floors were reserved for families with children (Rappino 190; Santilli 107). Certain lots provided specialized services: for example, Lot 41, The White Hotel, housed a maternity ward; and Lot 42, The Red Hotel, included an elementary school (Sinatra 96-97). Although Sabbatini originally designed these suburban hotels as transitional and temporary housing, it was found that few residents actually vacated their lodging after they arrived; as a result, by the mid-1930s, ICP converted these lots into apartment blocks (Cocchioni and De Grassi 147n11).

These super-blocks designed by Sabbatini were distinguished not only by their size and purpose, but also by their decoration. In Piazza Romano, two dominant styles of the Garbatella are set side by side: the enduring Barocchetto of Lot 8, and the new Scuola Romana of the Public Baths and the Palladium (Regni and Sennato 35-54; figures 4 and 5). The numerous archaeological digs promoted by Mussolini, especially those conducted at Ostia Antica, sparked a renewed interest in antiquity exemplified by Sabbatini’s distilled classicism of curving porticos and triangular pediments (Ciucci 87). These motifs immediately establish connections with Rome’s ancient past; however, it is not the triumphal architecture of Imperial Rome that is celebrated, but rather its private counterpart. In a two-part article published in *Architettura e arti decorative*, archaeologist Guido Calza, who led the excavations at Ostia in 1913, wrote: “L’abitazione ostiense è dunque l’abitazione della borghesia e del popolo di Roma […]. Gli esemplari ostiensi qui raccolti e descritti documentano le origini latine dell’abitazione moderna e aprono un interessante capitolo dell’architettura privata romana” (“The house of Ostia is therefore the house of the middle classes and of the populace of Rome […]. The examples of Ostia here gathered and described document the Latin origins of the modern house and open an interesting chapter on Roman private architecture,” Calza 3, 6). The Roman “insulae” – intensive housing models that could accommodate a large number of residents – were understood as the precursors to the modern *palazzina* (Calza 521-31). As noted by Calza, the *insulae* were historic examples of middle- and lower-class housing; they provided an appropriate model for the *Istituto per le Case Popolari* that spoke to a Roman vernacular rooted as deeply in local traditions as the minor architecture of the Barocchetto. There is a striking resemblance between the brickwork of the cantilevered arches supporting the first-floor balcony of Sabbatini’s Public Baths and the House of Diana in Ostia Antica. Rome is the great urban palimpsest and the architecture of the Garbatella reacts and responds to different layers. In Lot 12, Sabbatini chose a formal classicizing façade for the Palladium; along Via Odera, conversely, the lot’s perimeter is made of irregular-height, asymmetrically arranged, deep wooden eaves with exposed rafter tails (figure 6). The crenellation, blind arches, and rusticated tower decorated with lion masks recall the same eclectic and theatrical flair of Garbatella’s first phase. The juxtaposition

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7 For more on the excavations at Ostia, see Dyson.
of styles – even within the same lot – is striking but not jarring; rather than antagonistic, they are different expressions of the same Roman identity.

Conclusion
In the first ten years of planning and growth, the Garbatella underwent fundamental changes; thousands were relocated as this garden suburb was transformed into a Fascist borgata. Despite the sharp rise in building density, the architecture and planning of the Garbatella continued to foster successfully a sense of community, while the decoration preserved its individuality and regional characteristics, exemplified by the Barocchetto and the classicizing Scuola Romana. These characteristics make the Garbatella an excellent case study of how liberal and Fascist regimes practiced common urban strategies. Both governments supported decentralization and the development of the Roman countryside as solutions to the enduring and socially crippling housing problem. Rural life was idealized; the liberal state was inspired by social utopian ideals to promote maritime industry, whereas the Fascist regime used it to reinforce its mythology, family values, and notions of romanitas. The Garbatella’s location significantly evoked Rome’s past. Set between the Basilica of San Paolo Fuori Le Mura and the Pyramid of Caius Cestius, along the pilgrimage route of the Via delle Sette Chiese, the neighborhood rested upon the catacombs of S. Commodilla and ancient pozzolana quarries (Costantino 121). The place chosen to house the “craftsmen of the capital’s economic renaissance” was the supposed site of Rome’s twin city, Remuria, founded by Remus. Furthermore, the self-conscious referencing of the palimpsest allowed both the liberal and Fascist regimes to lay claim to a Roman heritage. Ideologically, therefore, the Garbatella was connected to Rome even though it was physically located outside of its walls: the perfect combination of ruralità and romanità.

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Figure 1: A *villino* in Lot 3
Figure 2: Palimpsest Style: a *palazzina* in Lot 2, detail of the entrance situated in a blind arch
Figure 3: Super-block Lot 8, an elaboration of the palazzina model
Figure 4: Super-block Lot 13 Public Baths
Figure 5: Super-block Lot 12 Palladium entrance from Piazza Bartolomeo Romano
Figure 6: Super-block Lot 12 entrance from Via Cravero