

Naples, City of War: 1940-1948. An Urban Catastrophe across Photography, Cinema, and Architecture

War damage, Photographic Archives, Reconstruction, Roberto Rossellini, Federico Patellani.

/Abstract

As it is well-known, Naples was bombed by the Allies between 1940 and 1944 to liberate the city from Nazi occupation. As described by its 16th-century visitors, it was a distinctive and characteristic city whose peculiarities made it a symbol of scenic beauty yet contradictions. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the second episode of *Paisà*, by Roberto Rossellini (1946), was Napoli. The city is as much a protagonist as the two characters in the story; even though the episode is set in the years of the American occupation, it is portrayed by the director as a city still at war.

It was the age of Neorealism, and Rossellini, one of its protagonists, carefully chose the places where to set his story. Focusing on the exteriors, the port, Piazza Mercato, clearly bombed yet perfectly recognizable by the Carmine bell tower, an extraordinary landmark – an example of Neapolitan cultural contaminations –, and the tuff caves, first air-raid shelters and then homes for the displaced, the *senz'altro* (wholeless, lit. lacking everything), the name often used for those who lost everything and often their families in the bombings. Shortly before Rossellini, the city depicted in Federico Patellani's photos seemed unaware of the tragedy that would soon befall it despite being about to enter the war. Naples is an icon for both the photojournalist and the filmmaker, both before and after.

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Introduction

As it is well-known, Naples was bombed by the Allies between 1940 and 1944 to liberate the city from Nazi occupation. As described by its 16th-century visitors, it was a distinctive and characteristic city whose peculiarities made it a symbol of scenic beauty yet contradictions. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the second episode of *Paisà*, by Roberto Rossellini (1946), was *Napoli*. The city is as much a protagonist as the two characters in the story; even though the episode is set in the years of the American occupation, it is portrayed by the director as a city still at war.



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The Systematic Destruction of the City

Naples was liberated from the Nazis on October 1, 1943. Until the liberation of Rome (June 4-5, 1944), it was an outpost: a crossroads for those who wanted to

Fig. 1

Il gasometro di via Stella polare (oggi via via Arnaldo Lucci) dopo il bombardamento della notte tra l'8 e il 9 gennaio 1941 (lit. The gasometer in Via Stella Polare (today Via Arnaldo Lucci) after the bombing on the night between 8 and 9 January 1941), Archivio Storico Municipale di Napoli, nn. 6.002.

return home from exile, re-enter Italy, and document the war. The city had been the capital of a kingdom until 1861; it remained the largest city in southern Italy. Following the demagogic proclamation of the Fascist Empire (May 9, 1936), it was given the role of 'imperial port', recognizing it as a city of cultural exchange and contamination. This centrality condemned it as a military target and symbol of liberation from the Nazis. However, the liberation came at a significant cost.

As it is well known, Italy entered the war on June 10, 1940. Naples was bombed for the first time on November 1; the 1940 bombing was, all in all, focused and aimed exclusively at military targets. The Royal Air Force considered the port and the railroad hubs among the most crucial transportation infrastructure on the peninsula. The bombs were aimed at railroad and port equipment, ships, industrial plants, and fuel depots. Then, the bombings of '41 were already more substantial. The first ones occurred on the night of January 8-9 and focused on the eastern area, the main target being the gasometer on Via Stella Polare (today via Arnaldo Lucci) [Fig. 1]. However, via Roma (formerly via Toledo as today), the Bank of Naples, the Corsea neighborhood, and the Florentine Theater were also hit, legitimizing the promiscuity between military and civilian targets. In 1942, the offensive started to escalate. Throughout the year, air raids had been altogether limited; however, in December, attacks were concentrated, combining British and American bombardments. The Americans entered the war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941); the American invasion of Europe began at the very end of 1942; the Neapolitan bombing raids of December 4 can be considered the outset. It was also the first daytime and indiscriminate air attack. Officially, the target was the cruisers moored in the port. Still, the population of Naples was caught by the sudden bombardment without the attack being signaled by air raid sirens. Other areas were affected, in addition to the port: piazza Municipio, via Medina, via Monteoliveto; in the historic center, an entire building in vico Santa Luciella imploded in the courtyard. The industrial area and the bourgeois district of Chiaia were also affected¹. The RAF had already enacted *area bombing*, that is, the indiscriminate bombing of cities with night raids. This strategy was complemented by the American Air Force, which also resorted to the technique of daylight bombing.

Alongside the destruction of cities and territories, the Allied forces also performed reconnaissance on the territories through air surveys [Fig. 2]. This might seem a bipolar attitude; however, territorial surveys were instrumental in the reconnaissance of places and identifying strategic targets for destruction. Aerial photos are aseptic and less terrifying despite their "ability to perform depictions in an acceptable, harmless, and even fascinating way, killing without showing death, destruction without showing damage".².

The terrible year was 1943; after the Italian defeats in Africa and Russia,

1 Aldo Stefanile, *I cento bombardamenti di Napoli. The Days of Am-lire* (Naples: Alberto Marotta, 1968), 55-60.

2 Caroline Brothers, "Una guerra fotogenica". *Fotogiornalismo e guerra civile in Spagna*, in *Immagini nemiche: la guerra civile spagnola e le sue rappresentazioni, 1936-1939*, (Bologna: Editrice Compositori, 1999), 100-111.



belaboring Italy concealed a strategy to engage Germans in our country to leave occupied territories in central Europe as undefended as possible. The Allied forces lucidly decided to raze several Italian cities, including Naples, hitting it without any distinction between military and civilian targets. In the summer, the most intensive bombing took place. With the fall of fascism on April 25, air raids were intensified to achieve Italy's surrender. On August 2, *The Evening News* reported: "Hotting up begins. Naples bombed"³. Many monumental buildings were severely damaged: piazza Dei Martiri and noble palaces such as Palazzo Partanna, Castel dell'Ovo, Grand Hotel Vesuvio, the Royal Palace⁴ [Fig. 3], the San Carlo theater, Castel Nuovo, the Umberto I Gallery. As it is well known, Santa Chiara's complex suffered the most severe mutilation during the August 4 air raids [Fig. 4]. Neapolitans' emotional involvement was utter. The church burned for days; the rich Baroque apparatuses were lost forever; the loss of a symbolic monument for the city is considered a contributing cause to the spontaneous uprising of the Four Days⁵ (September 28-October 1). Allied destruction had led to the September 8 truce. Still, Nazi reprisals had continued even more ferociously. The University, power plants, Palazzo dei Telefoni, and Mostra d'Oltremare – already partly damaged since 1941 – were pillaged, as well as factories, warehouses, and, once again, the port [Fig. 5]. The 'Quattro giornate' revolt (lit. Four Days) were fomented precisely by the population's exasperation; on October 1, when the Anglo-American troops entered, the city was in a deplorable state: almost half of it was in rubble, there was no water, no electricity, and no food. Until May '44, Nazi bombing continued in pure retaliation.

The city's catastrophe was not controlled by the meager defense strategy put in place since Italy's entry into the war. From August 1939, every civilian housing estate was to be equipped with an air raid shelter to protect the population, and

3 *The Evening News*, August 2, 1943, 17.

4 La facciata meridionale e il giardino pensile (lit. The southern facade and the hanging garden of the Royal Palace), 1943, Archivio Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per il comune di Napoli, in *Palazzo Reale: danni di guerra e restauri. Una storia per immagini dal 1943 agli anni Cinquanta*, ed. Royal Palace of Naples (Naples Royal Palace exhibition, Androne delle carrozze, from Jan. 24, 2023, ongoing).

5 Benedetto Gravagnuolo, "Attualità della memoria", in *Il regno del cielo non è più venuto. Bombardamenti aerei su Napoli, 1940-1944*, eds. Sergio Villari, Valentina Russo, Emanuela Vassallo (Naples: Giannini Editore, 2005), 11-12.

Fig. 2

Avioripresa di ricognizione del quartiere San Giuseppe effettuata dalla RAF il 15 febbraio 1943 (lit. Reconnaissance air-photo of the San Giuseppe district carried out by the RAF on 15 February 1943), Istituto Campano per la Storia della Resistenza "Vera Lombardi", n. 28.24.



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many public places were adapted as shelters⁶. The shelters are documented by the plan of the Provincial Committee of the National Union of Aircraft Protection, *Ricoveri antiaerei e rifugi di fortuna* (lit. Aircraft Shelters and makeshift shelters)⁷ [Fig. 6].

The preservation of the historical and artistic heritage was a priority of the fascist state, which enacted a preservation plan. Partly rhetorically, the Minister of National Education, Giuseppe Bottai, said in 1942, “La conservazione del patrimonio artistico non è soltanto la salvaguardia di un bene comune della civiltà del mondo, ma è un problema vitale per le nazioni interessate: le quali, combattendo, difendono appunto quella tradizione nazionale, quella propria e inconfondibile civiltà che si legittima non meno nella storia artistica che in quella politica di un popolo” (lit. The preservation of the artistic heritage is not only the safeguard of a common asset of the world’s civilization but a vital problem for the involved nations: by fighting, they defend their national tradition, that own and unmistakable civilization. Still, this tradition is legitimized in the artistic history no less than in the political history of a population)⁸. From October 1939,

Fig. 3

La facciata meridionale e il giardino pensile di Palazzo Reale (lit. The southern facade and the hanging garden of the Royal Palace), 1943, Archivio Soprintendenza Archivio Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per il comune di Napoli

Fig. 4

Chiostro del complesso di Santa Chiara dopo il bombardamento del 4 agosto 1943 (lit. Cloister of the monastery of Santa Chiara after the bombing of 4 August 1943), Archivio dei Vigili del Fuoco, Archivio privato Clemente Esposito presso l’Archivio del Comando provinciale dei Vigili del Fuoco, n. 4.058.

6 Sergio Villari, “1940. I primi bombardamenti sulla città” in *Il regno del cielo non è più venuto*, 32-35.

7 Archivio di Stato di Napoli, *Plans and Drawings*, cart. XXXIV, no. 5.

8 Marino Lazzari, “La protezione delle opere d’arte durante la guerra”, in *La protezione del patrimonio artistico nazionale dalle offese della guerra aerea*, ed. Direzione generale delle arti (Florence: Le Monnier, 1942), V-VII. See Francesco Fortino, Claudio Paolini, *Florence 1940-1943. La protezione del patrimonio artistico dalle offese della guerra aerea*, (Florence: Polistampa, 2011); Stefania Capraro, “Protezione delle opere d’arte dei musei civici di Torino tra la prima e la seconda guerra mondiale”, *Palazzo Madama. Studi e notizie*, no. 4 (2020), 222-233.



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superintendents were asked to update the photographic documentation of monuments under their protection. Bottai's words were eloquent and, unfortunately, prophetic: "Fra le misure da adottare per la difesa dei monumenti dai danni della guerra ritengo opportuno includere il completamento della documentazione fotografica dei monumenti presso gli archivi fotografici di ogni sovrintendenza.

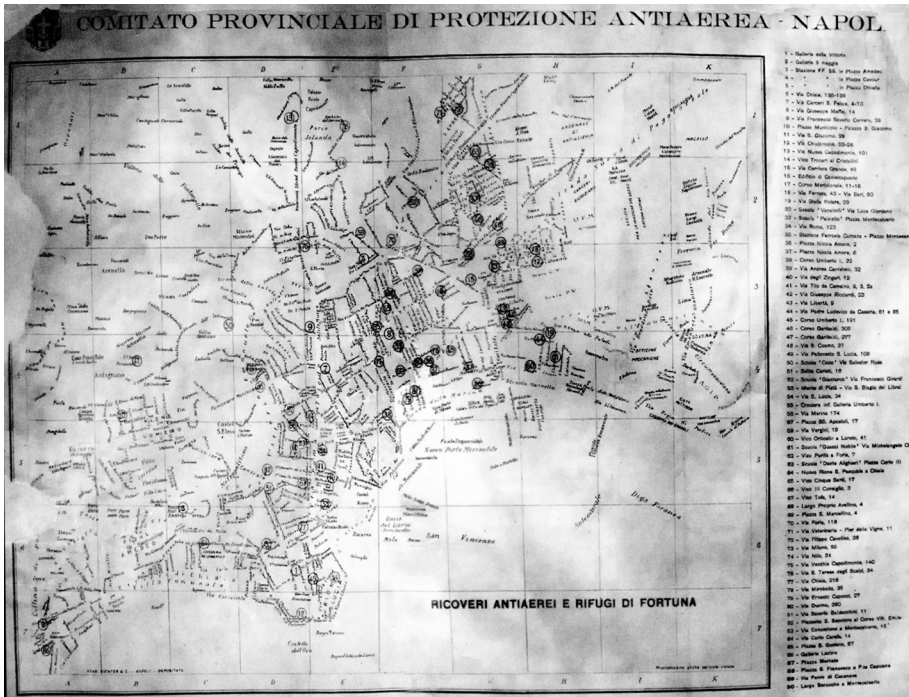
Se è doveroso, infatti, prendere ogni possibile misura per evitare e attenuare i danni di guerra ai monumenti è altrettanto doveroso raccogliere tutti i dati che eventualmente potessero occorrere per il restauro dei monumenti colpiti o mutilati. Che poi il monumento fosse interamente distrutto, la fotografia che perpetuasse il ricordo di tutti i particolari del monumento scomparso, acquisterebbe un valore incalcolabile" (lit. Among the measures to be taken for the defense of monuments from the ravages of war, I consider it appropriate to include the completion of the photographic documentation of monuments in the photographic archives of each superintendency. Indeed, while it is incumbent to take every possible measure to avoid and mitigate war damage to monuments, it is equally incumbent to collect all data that might be needed to restore affected or mutilated monuments. Were the monument destroyed, a photograph perpetuating the memory of the vanished monument's details would acquire incalculable value).⁹

From '44, the city's slow recovery began, and synergies were established between the public administration and the military government of the Allied Forces (AM-GOT). Naples was supplied with water, food, and electricity; the main suburban communication roads were restored. In the meanwhile, poverty led to the black market, prostitution, widespread lawlessness, and even the radicalization of organized crime. Its historical and artistic heritage continued to be sacrificed to accommodate the Allies, who occupied valuable public buildings: the Royal Palace, the National Museum, the Floridiana, and Mostra d'Oltremare,

9 Ministry of National Education circular of October 29, 1939, in Valentina Russo, "1941. La distruzione del porto e dell'area orientale", in *Il regno del cielo non è più venuto*, 38-49: 44-45. See Letizia Galli, *Il restauro nell'opera di Gino Chierici (1877-1961)* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1989), 121-122.

Fig. 5

Piazza del Carmine il campanile e edifici adiacenti dopo il bombardamento diurno del 4 agosto 1943 (lit. Piazza del Carmine the bell tower and adjacent buildings after the daytime bombing of 4 August 1943), Archivio del Comando provinciale dei Vigili del Fuoco, n. 3.2262-3.



to name but a few.

The city was in a deplorable state: gutted neighborhoods, severely damaged monuments, and uninhabitable homes. The surviving Neapolitans, who had not left the city for the province, where the bombings would have notoriously only been sporadic, were exhausted, tried by fear and hunger¹⁰. Naples was once again called to be the paradigm for many other Italian cities and Italy itself. However, as its historical contradictions have shown, it was also the starting point for rebirth, a symbolic place: “Forse anche per questa condizione, di avamposto geografico e simbolico di elaborazione del lutto nazionale, Napoli è entrata prepotentemente nell’immaginario collettivo del dopoguerra italiano, con il suo bagaglio di sventura e distruzioni, alimentando generosamente il repertorio figurativo delle nascenti poetiche neorealiste” (lit. Perhaps also due to this condition, as a geographic and symbolic outpost of national mourning, Naples strongly entered the collective imagination of postwar Italy, with its heritage of misfortune and destruction, generously feeding the figurative repertoire of the rising Neorealist poetic)¹¹. The city appeared almost hidden by the rubble of public and private buildings. Its deplorable physical state was interpreted as a metaphor for the degradation of customs caused by rampant poverty that forced the poorest sections of the population to make do, resorting to whatever expedients they could. The urban fabric was torn as a result of the bombing. Many Neapolitans lost both their homes, which were already precarious and hygienically unsatisfactory and their families, essentially decimated. The pages of *Il Mattino* reported the iconic definition of *senz'attutto*.

Fig. 6
Comitato provinciale di Protezione antiaerea - Napoli, *Ricoveri antiaerei e rifugi di fortuna*, Archivio di Stato di Napoli, *Piante e disegni*, cart. XXXIV, n. 5.

10 Francesco Soverina, “L'autunno del fascismo a Napoli. Dalle leggi razziali alla dissoluzione del fronte interno”, in *Meridione sud e nord del Mondo*, no. 2-3 (April-September 2014): 175-208: 203.

11 Sergio Villari, “On the Value of War Images”, in *The Kingdom of Heaven Has No More Come*, 16-25: 16.

The Bombed City between Propaganda and Documentation

The phenomenon of city bombing dates back to the 17th century when the use of artillery in sieges became more common; sometimes, it was documented visually, especially in the 18th century, by urban views. But it was with photography at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries that wartime destruction was systematically documented¹².

In Italy, World War I was highly publicized even before entering the war (May 24, 1915) through a copious production of picture postcards to convince neutralists that it would be a quick war¹³. They were almost always prints of drawings by well-known illustrators, often ironic; photography was used only rarely, while it was employed extensively later to document the terror of the trenches.

There are many photos of the Second Conflict; in particular, recounting this short *excursus* of the Neapolitan tragedy involved the consultation of several images preserved in various photographic archives. These include the Superintendency for Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape for the City of Naples, the Naples Municipal Historical Archives, the Campanian Institute for the History of the Resistance “Vera Lombardi”, and the Historical Archives of the Provincial Fire Brigade Command, whose iconographic holdings were displayed in the exhibition *Il regno del cielo non è più venuto. Bombardamenti aerei su Napoli, 1940-1944* at Sala della Loggia in Castel Nuovo, curated by Sergio Villari, Valentina Russo and Emanuela Vassallo¹⁴. The extensive photographic documentation was made by firefighters during rescue operations; at the time of the exhibition, it was essentially unpublished. These shots did not indulge in the fascist rhetoric of those years, exclusively aimed at documenting the state of deterioration of the building as it appeared to rescuers, without distinction of value among the subjects photographed: a monumental building of particular historical-artistic value was equally photographed as a building of little value [Fig. 7]. More photographs are preserved in private cultural institutions such as the Parisio Archives¹⁵.



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12 Stella Casiello, “Ricordi e frammenti in città”, in *Il regno del cielo non è più venuto*, 12-15.

13 Enrico Sturani, “Le cartoline della grande guerra. Quali?”, in *La grande guerra. Società, propaganda, consenso*, eds. Dario Cimorelli, Anna Villari (Cinisello Balsamo: SilvanaEditoriale, 2015) 79-97.

14 Villari, *Il regno del cielo non è più venuto*. The exhibition, curated by Sergio Villari, Valentina Russo, and Emanuela Vassallo, was held in Naples, Castel Nuovo from December 16, 2003 to January 16, 2004.

15 The Archivio Giulio Parisio preserves not only the Giulio Parisio collection but also the Roberto Troncone collection (<https://www.archiviofotograficoparisio.it/>, last accessed October 2023). See Marco Iuliano, “Dagli archivi fotografici Parisio e Troncone: immagini per la Modern Heritage List”, in *La Mostra d’Oltremare. Un patrimonio storico-architettonico del XX secolo a Napoli*, ed. Francesco Lucarelli (Naples: Electa Napoli, 2005), 26-43.

Fig. 7

Edificio di San Gregorio Armeno dopo il bombardamento pomeridiano del 1° marzo 1943 (lit. San Gregorio Armeno building after the afternoon bombing of 1 March 1943), Archivio del Comando provinciale dei Vigili del Fuoco, n. 1.152.

The photos take on even greater value when compared to the journalism of the same years; until 1944, the press was not objective in reporting catastrophic wartime events, as it was notoriously tightly controlled by censorship. Print media emphasized marginal news; the *War Bulletins* succinctly listed damage and casualties. Until 1943, attempts were made to describe the efficiency of the state's safeguarding policy against attacks. From May onwards, pretending was no longer possible; however, in an attempt to justify the heavy losses, the Allies were called "bandits"¹⁶ or "air gangsters"¹⁷.

In this case, the contribution of Istituto Luce was also marginal: as a consensus tool of the regime, it did not make newsreels on the bombings. Indeed, the documentation of the war has remained patchy on this issue until recently. Only in the last years of the twentieth century was the Combat film footage made by military cinematographers in the National Archives of Washington poured into the Italian institute's archive. Thus, Istituto Luce has filled a serious gap in the history of our country¹⁸.

Comparing Federico Patellani's and Roberto Rossellini's Narratives

The short visual narrative on the backdrop of the events of systematic destruction in Naples can be seen with the stories of photojournalist Federico Patellani and director Roberto Rossellini (1906 - 1977). Patellani was the first Italian photojournalist with a great artistic sensibility and several forays into Neorealist cinema¹⁹. Rossellini, notoriously one of the most famous Italian filmmakers, was the father of Neorealism, along with other well-known Italian filmmakers. This current had already appeared in literature and photography; however, due to censorship and the almost total interruption of film production due to the conflict, it did not have the development it later achieved at the war's end²⁰. However, there are some notable experiences: *4 passi tra le nuvole* directed by Alessandro Blasetti in 1942, considered a precursor of Italian neorealism, with Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943) and Vittorio De Sica's *I bambini ci guardano* (1943).

Patellani's shots between 1937 and 1947 and the Neapolitan settings of Rossellini's *Paisà* – distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in 1946 – showing the city and its material and moral rubble are essentially tangential.

Patellani (1911-1977) was born to a middle-class Milanese family in Monza; he studied law to please his lawyer father. However, his inclinations, which he later

16 Editorial note, "I misfatti dei banditi dell'aria", *Rome*, May 7, 1943.

17 Editorial note "I gangsters dell'aria", *L'Illustrazione d'Italia*, May 30, 1943.

18 Roberto Olla, *Combat film* (Rome: RAI-ERI, 1997).

19 Francesca Capano, "Napoli 'città d'oltremare' nel racconto fotografico di Federico Patellani", *Eikonocity*, no. 2, December 2023, 59-75.

20 Emery Taramelli, *Viaggio nell'Italia del neorealismo. La fotografia tra letteratura e cinema*, (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1995); Enrica Viganò ed., *Neorealismo: la nuova immagine in Italia, 1932-1960* (Milano: Admira, 2006).



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indulged, were toward photography, film, and painting. In 1935, when enlisted in the Italian army, he participated in the African campaign as an officer in the Engineer Corps, officially beginning his career as a reporter and putting aside the law degree he had obtained. However, Federico's father himself, a Milanese lawyer with an office in Monza, was responsible for Federico's passion. He had begun photographing alongside his amateur photographer father at a very young age. Enlisted in the army for the Ethiopian campaign²¹, he embarked from Naples; in this first Neapolitan sojourn (1935), he immortalized the city before its destruction. In these early images by Patellani, the Neapolitan capital seems

Fig. 8

Federico Patellani, *Viaggio verso l'Africa. Napoli: scorcio del porto con il piroscafo ormeggiato* (lit. Journey to Africa. Naples: view of the port with the moored steamship), 1935, Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Cinisello Balsamo, *Federico Patellani*, PR. 4/FT. 43.

Fig. 9

Federico Patellani, *Viaggio verso l'Africa. Napoli - Posillipo - casa addossata alla roccia* (lit. Journey to Africa. Naples - Posillipo - house leaning against the rock), 1935, Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Cinisello Balsamo, *Federico Patellani*, PR. 6/FT. 5.

21 Giulia Della Torre, "Patellani, Federico", in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 81 (Rome: Treccani, 2014) (https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/federico-patellani_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/, last accessed September 2023).

unaware of what was about to happen. Among the most photographed places are the port, monuments, and landscape²² [Fig. 8] – among the most celebrated European landscapes in historical iconography, second only to those of Rome or Venice – . Beyond the places, the reporter, still an amateur, captures the most intimate features of a unique city. Among these, he shows its ‘porosity’²³ [Fig. 9], to use the term widely used today, quoting the description of Naples published by the philosopher Walter Benjamin with Asja Lacis, a Latvian theater director, in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* journal in 1925, one year after their stay in Capri and Naples: “Come la pietra, così anche l’architettura di Napoli è porosa. Costruzione e azione si permeano in un susseguirsi di cortili, portici e scaloni.



Tutto è fatto per custodire la scena in cui costellazioni sempre nuove, sino ad allora imprevedibili, possano accadere” (lit. Like stone, so too the architecture of Naples is porous. Construction and action permeate each other in a succession of courtyards, porches, and stairways. Everything is done to guard the scene where ever-new, hitherto unpredictable constellations can happen)²⁴. From a recently rediscovered typescript; we know that the full version of the sentence continued with these words, “Quando a raggrupparsi in un locale sono i tedeschi, questi devono sempre separare e mettere in fila tavoli e sedie. Gli italiani, invece, si spargono ovunque, chiacchierano ai tavoli e reclamano sempre più spazio. Eppure, essi si comportano in modo molto più discreto che non i tedeschi nel loro buon cantuccio” (lit. When Germans group in a club, they must always separate and line up tables and chairs. On the other hand, Italians spread out everywhere, chatting at tables and claiming more and more space. Yet they behave much more discreetly than the Germans in their good little corner)²⁵. Patellani’s image of Naples between 1936 and 1940 shows a city built on and with tuff, unconsciously indulging Benjamin and Lacis’s words – but we do not know if Patellani had read *Neapel* –.

Patellani was in Naples again between 1939 and 1940, after the painful experience of the war in Africa and the other dramatic experience of the campaign in

22 Federico Patellani, *Viaggio verso l’Africa. Napoli: scorcio del porto con il piroscafo ormeggiato* (lit. Journey to Africa. Naples: view of the port with the moored steamship), 1935, Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Cinisello Balsamo, *Federico Patellani*, PR. 4/FT. 43.

23 Federico Patellani, *Viaggio verso l’Africa. Napoli - Posillipo - casa addossata alla roccia* (lit. Journey to Africa. Naples - Posillipo - house leaning against the rock), 1935, Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Cinisello Balsamo, *Federico Patellani*, PR. 6/FT. 5.

24 Walter Benjamin, Asja Lacis, “Neapel”, *Frankfurter Zeitung* (August 19, 1925).

25 Walter Benjamin, Asja Lacis, *Napoli Porosa*, ed. Elenio Cicchini (Naples: Libreria Dante & Descartes, 2020), 16.

Fig. 10

Robert Capa, *Il Vado del Carmine e piazza Mercato dopo i bombardamenti* (lit. The Carmine gate and Piazza Mercato after the bombings), 1943, © Robert Capa © International Center of Photography/ Magnum Photos Italia).

Russia. Now a professional reporter for *Tempo*, he had experimented with the photo-text for the weekly magazine – shots with extensive captions – importing the American weekly magazine *Life*²⁶ model. Again by coincidence (?), Robert Capa reached Naples on October 1, 1943, in the aftermath of the ‘Quattro giornate’, following the Fifth Army, which had awaited the popular liberation of the city at the Chiunzi Pass. He dedicated touching photos to the city; those notes of the Nazi murder of the twenty teenagers at Jacopo Sannazaro High School shot by the Germans were published in *Life*²⁷. Capa was, of course, struck by the people, the poverty and desperation; he, too, dwelt on the devastation of the port area and Piazza Mercato. The shot in the catalog at the Italian headquarters of Magnum Photos²⁸ is truly striking. It portrays *Vado del Carmine* (lit. Carmine’s gate), through which the bomb-damaged buildings of Piazza Mercato can be seen [Fig. 10]. The gateway was built when the city walls were being decommissioned; it had a monumental function as it replaced the ancient *Porta della Conceria* (lit. Tannery Gate), which was demolished for the redevelopment of Piazza Mercato promoted by Carlos de Borbón in the mid-18th century and entrusted to Giovanni Bompiede. In the 1970s, following the construction of New Marina Street, the Baroque piers of the 18th-century gateway were moved to the flowerbed south of the new road axis. The urban environment portrayed by Capa preceded the post-war work. The door qualified by the alternation of mixtilinear rocks of different materials, marble, and piperno, was also noted by Giuseppe Ungaretti in 1932, who thus described it as “due pilastri [...] pepe e sale [...] piantati con durezza come cardini in un forziere” (lit. two ... salt-and-pepper ... pillars ... planted hard as hinges in a chest)²⁹.

Between 1938 and 1940, Patellani documented the construction site of the Mostra d’Oltremare and then the grand opening event³⁰. The Mostra was opened on May 9, 1940, the anniversary of the proclamation of the Empire, with a solemn ceremony, closed a little more than a month later, on June 10, for Italy’s entry into the world conflict. In Patellani’s shots dedicated to the city, nothing dramatic seems about to happen. The places are the same as in the 1935 passage: Neapolitans crowd streets, public places, restaurants, and bars³¹ [Fig. 11, 12]. The same serene, rhetoric-free attitude can be perceived in the photos he dedicated to the Mostra d’Oltremare, which clash with the official,

26 Giulia Della Torre, “Patellani, Federico”.

27 *Life*, (1st and 8th November 1943), 32-33, 28-31; Robert Capa, *Leggermente fuori fuoco* (Rome: Contrasto, 2022); first edition: *Slightly out of Focus* (New York: H. Holt, copyr., 1947).

28 International Center of Photography, Magnum Photos ITALY.

29 Luciano Rebay, *Le origini della poesia di Giuseppe Ungaretti* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1962), 188.

30 Francesca Capano, “La Mostra delle Terre Italiane d’Oltremare a Napoli: l’antefatto 1936-1939”, in *History of Engineering / Storia dell’Ingegneria. Proceedings of the International Conference, atti del 5° Convegno nazionale AISI*, eds. Salvatore D’Agostino, Giulio Fabricatore (Naples: Cuzzolin, 2014), II, 1225-1237; Gemma Belli, “Un altro sguardo: Federico Patellani (1911-1977) e la Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d’Oltremare”, in *Delli Aspetti de Paesi. Vecchi e nuovi Media per l’Immagine del Paesaggio: Rappresentazione, memoria, conservazione*, eds. Annunziata Berrino, Alfredo Buccaro (Naples: CIRICE, 2016), I, 593-602.

31 Federico Patellani, *Porto di Napoli. Folla passeggia lungo la banchina in occasione della partenza del piroscafo “Conte di Savoia”* (lit. Port of Naples. Crowd strolls along the quay upon the departure of the steamship “Conte di Savoia”), 1939-1940, and *Esposizione triennale Terre d’oltremare. Scorcio di uno degli accessi al polo fieristico, 1940*, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Cinisello Balsamo, *Federico Patellani*, PR. 309/FT. 38, PR. 335/FT. 34A.



11



12

quite propagandistic ones proposed by the magazines *Architettura*, *Costruzioni Casabella*, *Domus*, *Emporium*, *Le vie d'Italia*, *Napoli Rivista Municipale*, and *Illustrazione italiana*. Istituto Luce newsreels confirm this regime-pleasing image of the city³².

During these years, another famous photographer and preeminently architect and publicist also passed through Naples. That was Giuseppe Pagano (1896-1945), who traveled to the islands and archaeological sites with his family³³. According to the studies performed to date, he devoted very few photos to

Fig. 11

Federico Patellani, *Porto di Napoli. Folla passeggiata lungo la banchina in occasione della partenza del piroscafo "Conte di Savoia"* (lit. Port of Naples. Crowd strolls along the quay on the occasion of the departure of the steamship "Conte di Savoia"), 1939-1940, Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Cinisello Balsamo, *Federico Patellani*, PR. 309/FT. 38.

Fig. 12

Federico Patellani, *Esposizione triennale Terre d'oltremare. Scorcio di uno degli accessi al polo fieristico* (lit. Triennial exhibition Terre d'oltremare. View of one of the entrances to the exhibition), 1940, Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Cinisello Balsamo, *Federico Patellani*, PR. 335/FT. 34A.

32 Capano, "Napoli 'città d'oltremare' nel racconto", 61.

33 Cesare de Seta, ed., *Giuseppe Pagano fotografo* (Electa: Milan, 1979); Gabriella Musto, "El archivo fotográfico de Giuseppe Pagano/The photographic archive of Giuseppe Pagano", in *Giuseppe Pagano. Vocabulario de imágenes / Images Alphabet, exposición*, ed. Daria de Seta (Valencia: Lampreave & Millán, 2008), 232-244.



Naples: a quite unusual monument, the cloister of Santa Maria di Monteoliveto³⁴, and the very famous Triumphal Arch of Alfonso de Aragón in Castel Nuovo³⁵ [Fig. 13], houses' condition³⁶ [Fig. 14] – houses containing houses – as Benjamin had shrewdly noted with Lacis and an emblematic image dedicated to the almost obsessive passions of Neapolitans: the game of lotto³⁷. However, Pagano was notoriously more interested in other themes of the city and landscape, such as rural architecture, to which he had devoted the famous 1936 exhibition for the Milan Triennale, curated with Guarniero Daniel³⁸. Pagano knew the Mostra well; he later wrote a wise article on the Arena flegrea (lit. Phlegraean theatre) by Giulio De Luca in the November 1940 issue of *Costruzioni Casabella*. Pagano was first a regime architect and later a protester of its policies; thus, he was deported to Mauthausen, where he died. He had several interests; therefore, his shots referring to 15th-century and 17th-century Neapolitan architecture and the additive transformation of an established fabric, as seen in the above shot, are even more significant.

In the early postwar years, Patellani was again in Naples, the ideal subject of

34 Giuseppe Pagano, Napoli: cortile a fianco delle poste nuove ex chiostro del convento di Monteoliveto (lit. Naples: courtyard next to the new post office, ex cloister of the Monteoliveto convent), undated but 1935-1940, and Napoli: cortile del palazzo a fianco le poste nuove ex chiostro del convento di Monteoliveto (lit. Naples: courtyard of the palace next to the new post office, ex cloister of the Monteoliveto convent), Archivio privato Giuseppe Pagano, Vol. 18, no. 45; vol. 18, no. 11, in Gabriella Musto, *Un architetto dietro l'obiettivo: l'archivio fotografico di Giuseppe Pagano*, PhD diss., Dipartimento di Storia dell'architettura e Restauro, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, 2008, cycle XIX.

35 Giuseppe Pagano, Arco di trionfo di Alfonso de Aragón di Castel Nuovo (lit. Triumphal arch of Alfonso de Aragón of Castel Nuovo), undated but 1935-1940, Archivio privato Giuseppe Pagano, vol. 7, no. 15, in Gabriella Musto, *Un architetto dietro l'obiettivo*. I thank the architect Musto for reporting the images.

36 Giuseppe Pagano, Il prospetto posteriore di un palazzo napoletano (lit. The rear façade of a Neapolitan palace), undated but 1935-1940, Archivio privato Giuseppe Pagano, vol. 7, no. 13, in Gabriella Musto, *Un architetto dietro l'obiettivo*. I thank the architect Musto for reporting the images.

37 Giuseppe Pagano, Napoli: il lotto (lit. Naples: the lottery), undated but 1935-1940, Archivio privato Giuseppe Pagano, vol. 18, no. 33, in Gabriella Musto, *Un architetto dietro l'obiettivo*. I thank the architect Musto for reporting the images.

38 Giuseppe Pagano, Guarniero Daniel, *Architettura rurale italiana* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli editore, 1936).

Fig. 13

Giuseppe Pagano, Arco di trionfo di Alfonso de Aragón di Castel Nuovo (lit. Triumphal arch of Alfonso de Aragón of Castel Nuovo), undated but 1935-1940, Archivio privato Giuseppe Pagano, vol. 7, no. 15 (I thank the architect Musto for reporting the images).

Fig. 13

Giuseppe Pagano, Il prospetto posteriore di un palazzo napoletano (lit. The rear façade of a Neapolitan palace), undated but 1935-1940, Archivio privato Giuseppe Pagano, vol. 7, no. 13 (I thank the architect Musto for reporting the images).



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16



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Fig. 15

Federico Patellani, *Matera. Sopralluoghi per il film "La Lupa"*. Veduta della città (lit. Matera. Inspections for the film "The She-Wolf". View of the city), 1952, Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Cinisello Balsamo, *Archivio Federico Patellani*, sup_10070_0002059.

Fig. 16

Federico Patellani, *Italia Dopoguerra. Napoli. Strada corre a fianco di una scarpata in tufo con edificio scavato all'interno* (lit. Post-war Italy. Naples. The road runs alongside a tuff escarpment with a building excavated inside), 1946, Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Cinisello Balsamo, *Archivio Federico Patellani*, PR. 950/ FT. 28A.

Fig. 17

Federico Patellani, *Italia Dopoguerra. Napoli. Due donne in divisa militare parlano sedute sul davanzale di una finestra* (lit. Post-war Italy. Naples. Two women in military uniforms talk while sitting on a window sill), 1946, Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Cinisello Balsamo, *Archivio Federico Patellani*, PR. 954/FT. 5A.



18 - 19

neorealist poetics. The relationship between the photojournalist and the cinema was very close. His Milanese beginnings had seen him with Carlo Ponti as producer, then assistant director alongside Alberto Lattuada from *The La lupa*³⁹. Many of Patellani's photos are dedicated to the Sassi of Matera, ideally close to the Neapolitan 'porosity'⁴⁰ [Fig. 15].

So when he was in Naples to document the republic's referendum for the republic – the city was notoriously royalist – he saw it not only as a symbol of rubble but also as an icon of recovery. The debris of fallen buildings is the backdrop for the city's rebirth, where people, though on their knees, try to survive and recover. Patellani also recounts about the *senzatutto*, who inhabit the tuff caves. Excavated to find the material to build the city, formerly used as shelters, they were then turned into promiscuous makeshift houses⁴¹ [Fig. 16]. But life goes on, as shown by women wearing military clothing⁴² [Fig. 17] or children playing in Piazza Plebiscito with the backdrop of the Royal Palace or the colonnade of the Church of San Francis di Paola, one of the monuments severely damaged and requisitioned by the Allies. Great impact is produced by the shots devoted to the port, from where people left for wars, but also to emigrate to America or to return from war after imprisonment. The port is almost in rubble but always a place to dream of journeys, reunions with broken families, or destinations for a better life⁴³ [Fig. 18].

39 Alberto Lattuada, Federico Patellani, *Matera 1953* (Milan: Humboldt Books, 2017).

40 Federico Patellani, *Matera. Sopralluoghi per il film "La Lupa"*. *Veduta della città* (lit. Matera. Inspections for the film "The She-Wolf". View of the city), 1952, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Cinisello Balsamo, *Archivio Federico Patellani*, sup_10070_0002059. Many photos of Matera by Patellani were published in 1952 for the reportage *Italia magica*, dedicated to occultism, a phenomenon widely practiced in the south.

41 Federico Patellani, *Italia Dopoguerra. Napoli. Strada corre a fianco di una scarpata in tufo con edificio scavato all'interno* (lit. Post-war Italy. Naples. The road runs alongside a tuff escarpment with a building excavated inside), 1946, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Cinisello Balsamo, *Federico Patellani Archives*, PR. 950/FT. 28A.

42 Federico Patellani, *Italia Dopoguerra. Napoli. Due donne in divisa militare parlano sedute sul davanzale di una finestra* (lit. Post-war Italy. Naples. Two women in military uniforms talk while sitting on a windowsill), 1946, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Cinisello Balsamo, *Federico Patellani Archives*, PR. 954/FT. 5A.

43 Federico Patellani, *Napoli. Sbarco in Italia di settecento ex prigionieri* (lit. Landing in Italy of seven hundred former prisoners), 1946, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Cinisello Balsamo, *Federico Patellani/ Stampe Modern*, STMOD_31_ST_CQ.

Fig. 18

Federico Patellani, *Napoli. Sbarco in Italia di settecento ex prigionieri* (lit. Landing in Italy of seven hundred former prisoners), 1946, Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Cinisello Balsamo, *Federico Patellani/ Stampe Modern*, STMOD_31_ST_CQ.

Fig. 19

Screenshot from Napoli by Roberto Rossellini: Pascà takes Joe's hand and they cross the city.



20 - 21

In the same years, Rossellini shot an episode of *Paisà*⁴⁴ in Naples. The film chronicles the crossing of Italy by the 'liberating' allies. In the Neapolitan capital, Joe, an African-American soldier, meets Pasquale, an orphaned street urchin; *Naples* is the second episode's title⁴⁵. Many of Rossellini's exteriors are identical to those in Patellani's photos. The ruined city is the setting for the encounters of the two protagonists: Pascà - the dialectal diminutive of Pasquale - takes Joe by the hand and directs him to reach the presumably makeshift theater, where they attend the puppet show [Fig. 19]. This is one more coincidence between the two artists: years later, in 1951, Patellani also photographed the Olimpia Theater, where the puppet show was held. The photojournalist documented the exterior of the run-down building and also the company putting on the show⁴⁶ [Fig. 20].

The port is still one of the most filmed exteriors by Rossellini: while severely damaged, it is crossed by the protagonists. In addition to the unmistakable panorama, it is also possible to immediately recognize the precise location: the city's landmarks, such as the Immacolatella building, designed by Domenico Antonio Vaccaro in the mid-18th century, allow viewers to get their bearings; the silhouette of a steamship [Fig. 21]. One of the most famous scenes is the one with the protagonists sitting on the rubble: drunk Joe dreams of a better future upon returning home; the scene is set again near the port, in another iconic location, Piazza Mercato. Rossellini mercilessly notes the almost destruction of the urban environment, recognizable by the unmistakable Carmine bell tower [Fig. 22]. The jeep of the armed forces crosses the city, and this is an opportunity to document the state of degradation of Naples. Via Marina is almost destroyed, opposite the port boundary, while Corso Umberto with the University [Fig. 23], represents the 'rehabilitated' city. After the late 19th-century plan conducted

Fig. 20

: Federico Patellani, *Italia del Sud. Napoli - Teatro Olimpia - ingresso* (lit. Southern Italy. Naples - Olimpia Theater - entrance), 1951, Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Archivio Federico Patellani, sup_10090_0000741.

Fig. 21

Screenshot from *Napoli* by Roberto Rossellini (1946): Pascà takes Joe's hand and they cross the port.

44 Fernaldo Di Giammatteo, *Roberto Rossellini* (Scandicci, La nuova Italia: 1990).

45 Giuliana Muscio, "Paisà/Paisan", in *The cinema of Italy*, ed. Giorgio Bertellini (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 31-42.

46 Federico Patellani, *Italia del Sud. Napoli - Teatro Olimpia - ingresso* (lit. Southern Italy. Naples - Olimpia Theater - entrance), 1951, Museo di Contemporary Photography, Cinisello Balsamo, *Federico Patellani Archives*, sup_10090_0000741.



22 - 23

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within the Naples City Rehabilitation for the lower districts, the districts of Porto, Mercato, Pendino, and Vicaria, where the cholera epidemic had developed in 1884, were gutted. The wide streets, indifferent to the medieval layout, were qualified by palaces with historicist curtain walls that gave Naples the image of a decent, 19th-century city.

The epilogue shows the city's true nature: a porous underbelly that welcomes Neapolitans. Joè joins Pasquale, who had stolen his shoes, at his house to take them back, but the house is a shelter. It is a tuff cave converted back into housing for those *senzitutto*; Pasquale symbolizes those who have nothing left and are forced to make do. Crowds of children gather around the American soldier, hoping to receive something, perhaps American chocolate [Fig. 24]. There is no difference between the tragic days of war and these postwar days; the cave/house could be an air raid shelter but also the makeshift home for those who had nothing left because of the bombing. The city is still a metaphor for poverty, a life of hardship, and rebirth, like for Patellani. In these scenes, Rossellini's Naples transcends the Ocean: "Napoli oriente favoloso, opera dei pupi, commedia, ventre materno nell'infanzia negata, filo spinato, sciuscìa, neri 'venduti' come

Fig. 22

Screenshot from *Napoli* by Roberto Rossellini (1946): Pascà and Joe sitting on the ruins in Piazza Mercato, in the background the Carmine bell tower.

Fig. 23

Screenshot from *Naples* by Roberto Rossellini (1946): the jeep crosses corso Umberto.

Fig. 24

Screenshot from *Naples* by Roberto Rossellini (1946): the tuff quarry used as the home of Pasquale and other *senzattutto*.

schiavi” (lit. Naples fabulous orient, puppet opera, womb in denied childhood, barbed wire, shahs, blacks ‘sold’ as slaves)⁴⁷.

Unfortunately, the tragic events of World War II are dramatically relevant these days. The case of Naples should be a warning. The city was heavily bombed despite being far from the battle lines; this military strategy then opened new horizons toward the terror tactics perpetrated in later wars, which have seamlessly – but we have realized it only recently – spanned the second half of the twentieth century until sadly our days. In the many images documenting, more or less objectively, the disaster, the city’s ruins rise as monuments, evidence of the civilization of culture, official and popular history, continued to these days despite the war.

⁴⁷ Giulia Fanara, “Paisà”, in *Enciclopedia del Cinema*, (Rome: Treccani, 2004) (https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/paisa_Enciclopedia-del-Cinema/), last accessed September 2023).

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