

## 24<sup>TH</sup> ION P. IOANNIDES MEMORIAL LECTURE — KEYNOTE ADDRESS

### The 1960 Rome Olympics: Spaces and Spectacle

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*This paper examines Rome's broad-gauged historical and cultural approach to the presentation of its 1960 Summer Games. The casting of the Games as a major cultural event (which included the effective use of Italy's most brilliant and accomplished architects for the design of new sports structures and the Olympic Village), plus the upgrading of significant aspects of the city's general infrastructure, effectively eclipsed the basic realities that Italy was the first ex-Axis power hosting an Olympics since the Allied victory in World War II, and that it was Mussolini's regime which had created and left an indelible mark on the two main centers for the competitions (Foro Italico and EUR). The fact that the occasion of the 1960 Rome Games has proved to be also the last major intervention in the city's urban fabric positively invites reflection on the event's impact and effects, especially now that Rome has entered a serious bid for the 2020 Olympics.*



For its winter 2010 number, to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rome Summer Games, the journal *Spaziosport* assembled about three dozen prominent Italians to reflect on the significance of the Games of the XVII Olympiad.<sup>1</sup> These included medallists of the 1960 Olympics, and also political figures, architects, scholars, and journalists. Some of these individuals were intimately involved in the operation of the Games—most notably, Giulio Andreotti, president of the 1960 Organising Committee—while others knew the event only as history.

One assessment that the contributors repeatedly offered as practically self-evident was that Rome 1960 was “the last Olympiad on a human scale.” The Olympic Village is illustrative. There, a perimeter fence and an elaborate system of checkpoints had limited effect in keeping the athletes separate from their admiring fans. The barrier that divided the quarters for men and women competitors allowed for easy scaling. The national delegations paraded directly from the apartment blocks of the Olympic Village to the opening ceremony in the Stadio Olimpico. That ceremony featured no pyrotechnics—just some Italian military bands, the lighting of the Olympic torch and associated formalities, the parade of athletes, and the release of doves. Human resources for the Games were pared down, even compared to Melbourne 1956 (for instance, the number of referees dropped by about 40%). The track events were run on a clay (not rubber) surface, for the last time in the Olympics.

Another common assessment, rather paradoxical in light of that point about “human scale,” is that the XVII Summer Games mark a turning point for the history of modernity and in that sense “changed the world.” To be sure, as the first Summer Olympics staged for television—21 countries received a broadcast, in almost half those cases live—the Rome Games signal the start of an important aspect of globalization. The images of competition at the Rome Games, both still and moving, remain memorable. These were the Olympics of US track stars Rafer Johnson, Wilma Rudolph and boxer Cassius Clay; where the USSR powerfully asserted its dominance in women’s gymnastics as did Italy in men’s cycling and water polo; where the barefoot Ethiopian runner Abebe Bikila, just 25 years after the Italian invasion of his country, won a dramatic torchlit marathon competition that traversed the Appian Way and finished at the Arch of Constantine.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the new medium of television also cast into the spotlight some pressing political dilemmas of the day. At the opening ceremony, television and news cameras alike captured the image of the leader of the contingent for “Formosa” marching with a handwritten paper sign that read in approximately eight inch high letters “UNDER PROTEST.” At issue was that the official name of the country was “Republic of China.” The United Nations recognized Taiwan as such, but mainland China (which in this period held aloof from the Olympics) did not. The International Olympic Committee, looking forward to the day of communist Chinese participation, “was the first world body to tell [Taiwan] it no longer represented China and to march as Formosa or go home,” as Robert Daley in the *New York Times* put it the next day.<sup>3</sup>

Many in the audience of 90,000 in Rome’s Stadio Olimpico missed the point of the demonstration, for they could hardly have read the lettering. Yet when the debate on the Olympics’ China question was still raging more than seven months after the Rome Games, it was evidently the “television show” of Taiwan’s protest in the opening ceremony that was best remembered.<sup>4</sup> The incident shows concisely the power of television projecting even small-scale effects to world-wide attention.

Of course, friction between China and Taiwan was only a small part of the political “back story” to the 1960 Rome Olympics. These Games threw into high relief Cold War tensions between East and West, civil rights in the US, apartheid in South Africa, and anticolonial sentiment across a range of participating nations—as well as a host of newly emerging problems that ran the gamut from drug use by athletes to ethically questionable running shoe endorsements. These are topics that David Maraniss has covered superbly in his recent book *Rome 1960* (2008, Italian translation 2010), where he makes an excellent case that the XVII Olympiad stands at the end of one era (namely, that defined by World War II) and at the start of new one (namely the current one, in which we live).

One uncontested aspect of the 1960 Rome Olympics was that it served as a vehicle for Italy to transmit a new image of itself to the world. It was just 17 years after the fall of Fascism, and 15 after the end of the Second World War. Broadcast television had arrived in the country only in 1954. Rome deliberately (and cleverly) cast its Games not just as an international contest in sports but as a major cultural event, staged by a city with several millennia of unusually rich history, considerable cosmopolitan charm, and the economic and organizational capacity to execute a complex mega-event for a global audience. Italy’s athletic success in the course of the Games further fueled the country’s pride in the project. The “Azzurri” won 13 gold medals, and in overall medals finished in fourth place behind the Soviet Union, United States, and a combined (for the last time) East and West German team. Press coverage of the Rome Games in all media turned out to be overwhelmingly positive, with the cumulative effect of at least pushing to the side the all-too-familiar images of Italy as perpetrator and victim of the horrific events of World War II.

Behind the images were plenty of substance. Thanks especially to its antique history and significant links to ancient Greece, Rome of course had an outstanding claim as a natural Olympic city. It is telling that since the Amsterdam Games of 1928 the reverse of all Olympic medals had depicted a Colosseum remade whole, as representing the sporting venue par excellence. (One could be forgiven for forgetting that in antiquity the amphitheater was reserved for blood sports.)

The Olympic organizers for Rome 1960 went much deeper than such loose associations and popular perceptions and demonstrated with impressive erudition some of the actual cultural connections between the Hellenic and Italian worlds. For example, they set up the route of the torch so that it first landed on Italian soil in Sicily, at the fountain of Arethusa in Syracuse. That is the spot where the river of Olympia, the Alpheus, was believed, according to ancient legend, to bubble up after coursing under the sea from Greece. The torch's travels then took it through a long series of archaic Greek foundations in Sicily and south Italy. The final leg of the journey that led to the lighting of the main flame in the Stadio Olimpico was run by a 19 year old Italian of Greek extraction, Giancarlo Peris. What added poignancy to these elaborate and thoughtful arrangements was the (unspoken) fact that Italy had attacked Greece within the past two decades—on 28 October 1940—with disastrous results for Mussolini's forces.

Greek-style games had found a permanent home in Rome as early as the first century AD, when the emperor Domitian built a stadium for his Capitoline Games (first in AD 86) whose shape is stunningly preserved by the present-day Piazza Navona. For the modern Games, it was only a series of historical accidents that kept Rome from hosting the Olympics until their 17th planned iteration. The Eternal City was slated to host the fourth Olympiad, for 1908. But two years before the event it backed out, without officially stating a reason; it was widely suspected that the city realized it was not up to the task.<sup>5</sup> Subsequent bids followed for 1920, 1928, and (especially) for 1936, both in the first instance and as a willing substitute had Berlin been stripped of the Games, as was seriously discussed as early as 1933. In 1935 the IOC actually awarded the 1940 Games to Rome, but the city ceded them to Tokyo after protracted side negotiations. The expectation was that Rome in turn would receive the 1944 Games, and in February 1939 Italy made its formal bid, for an Olympics eventually to be cancelled (like the Games of 1940) due to war.

In lieu of the supreme international sporting event, Mussolini instituted a range of alternatives to the Games, such as the "Olympics of Work" in 1936 (with winners in various skill and profession categories designated as "Lictors of Labor"), and an "Olympics of Civilization" for 1942. That latter event was a serious enterprise, a world's fair to coincide with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fascists' March on Rome in October 1922. The fair—entitled the "Esposizione Universale di Roma," abbreviated EUR or simply "E42"—occasioned first a massive geomorphic intervention on a large tract of unusable land that lay south of Rome and north of the old port city of Ostia. Then came the planning and development (from 1937) of a series of significant cultural institutions arranged to maximum effect in a large pentagonal plan coordinated by leading architect and theorist Marcello Piacentini. The notion was that the structures of "EUR" would live on after the 1942 event as a new monumental quarter of the city. The war stalled and then finally put a halt to construction, leaving just one major building fully outfitted and functioning as intended.

It is against the background of this long list of disappointments that on 21 January 1950 Rome announced that it would seek the Olympics of 1960. Giulio Onesti, president of the Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano (CONI), offered the formal bid on 1 November 1952. The accumulated proceeds from the popular soccer lottery known as Toto Calcio was supposed to finance the enterprise.

In the year 1952, improvements had started in earnest on a large Fascist-era stadium in the sports complex in the northwest of the city along the west bank of the Tiber River. The area was formerly known as “Foro Mussolini,” but by then had been renamed “Foro Italico” and was serving as the new seat of CONI. The stadium, first laid out in a spectacular natural setting as “Stadium of the Cypressess” on reclaimed land beneath the green slopes of Monte Mario in 1928, had not been used primarily for team sport or track but for the mass gymnastic and military displays staged by Mussolini’s regime. After an enhancement of 1936-1937, it earned the name *Stadio Olimpionico* or (more commonly) “Centomila,” for its perceived capacity of 100,000. On the liberation of Rome, allied troops of the Fifth Army utilized the Foro Mussolini as a rest center, staging their own games in the complex’s monumental facilities. That led to the more or less complete preservation of the area, along with its iconographic program, on which much more will be said in a moment.<sup>6</sup>

After its makeover in the early 1950s, the new-look stadium was inaugurated as “*Stadio Olimpico*” on 17 May 1953 with a soccer match between Italy and Hungary. The project concretized the city’s Olympic aspirations for 1960, and at the time even prompted some (especially in France) to consider Rome as a more suitable host than distant Melbourne for the 1956 games.<sup>7</sup>

In Paris on 16 June 1955 the IOC finally awarded Rome its Olympics, for summer 1960, over Lausanne, Budapest, Brussels, Tokyo, Mexico City, and an aggressive bid by Detroit (which had offered to pay all athletes’ travel expenses). Perhaps the biggest potential stumbling block was that Italy in the next year was already set to host the 1956 Winter Olympics at Cortina. Yet the Italian delegation successfully made the claim that it was practically ready for the summer 1960 event; Rome only had to build a proper basketball arena, that would double as a venue for wrestling and gymnastics, plus construct a pool for the swimming and diving competition.<sup>8</sup>

That proved to be wishful thinking. In effect, this would be the first Olympics that prompted the host city to reevaluate entirely its public face, and as a result initiate a massive intervention in its urban and regional environment. Over the course of five years—with most of visible activity falling in the short period 1957-1960—Rome deeply transformed its infrastructure, going far beyond new construction of sports venues and practice facilities, to include also the upgrade of the system of roads and bridges, public transportation, its airport capabilities, even its parks and archaeological zones.

The focus of the work in these years was principally on making suitable for Olympic sport the two preexisting dedicated cultural and leisure zones, Foro Italico in the north of the city and EUR to its south, and on providing the infrastructure needed to link the two. But the effects of Rome’s Olympics effort radiated throughout the metropolis and its surrounding area. Closely coordinated planning resulted in an exquisite set of sports facilities, innovatively balanced between central and decentralized locations, which were considered at the time to be the world’s best and still even now almost all extant and in active use.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the most notable attributes of Rome’s response to receiving the Games include the identification of sites offering the least environmental impact, the premium placed on use of public land, inventive use of both preexisting facilities (extending quite remarkably to archaeological and historical sites) and temporary structures, relatively low cost new construction put out to the ordinary bidding process, the speed of execution of new structures, and an unusually strong commitment throughout to issues of post-event reuse.

Indeed, as early as September 1955, “the [Italian National Olympic] Committee thought fit to disprove the widespread opinion that the projected venues in Rome were being constructed solely to meet the requirements of the Olympic Games...it would be more exact to say that the...venues, useful in that they meet an obvious lack at Rome, were to be constructed in occasion of the Olympic

Games but not because of these.”<sup>10</sup> That guiding principle of long-term utility extended well past the sports venues. A prime example is the Villaggio Olimpico, built in the Flaminio district (on the eastern side of the Tiber, across from Foro Italico, the former “Villa Glori” area) on land reclaimed from squatters and envisaged from the start as future housing for government workers.

It certainly helped Rome’s effort that many of the giants of Italian modern architecture who had made their name before the war were active, available and committed to the mission of the 1960 Olympics: Marcello Piacentini, Adalberto Libera, Annibale Vitellozzi, and the brilliant Pier Luigi Nervi, who had worked in various ways on the EUR project, as well as Enrico Del Debbio and Luigi Moretti, the master planners of the ex-Foro Mussolini.

It seems safe to say on the basis of international press reports that most of the million or so visitors to the Games and the millions more who would connect to the city via television perceived Rome as a vibrant, thoughtfully modernized city. The cityscape was enhanced by several forward-looking monuments north and south of the historical center, chief among them Nervi’s Palazzetto dello Sport in the Flaminio district and the Palazzo dello Sport on the Valchetta hill overlooking the EUR district. These were partially prefabricated buildings built in 14 and 18 months respectively, for which each won instant recognition for their engineering, architectural, even cultural significance. On the eve of the Rome Olympics, LIFE magazine highlighted Nervi’s “big” and “little” sports palaces in a dazzling nine page color photo spread by Mark Kauffman entitled “Italy’s Top Builder Designs New Roman Arenas: Spectacular Structures for Olympic Games.”<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, “images of the Palazzo dello Sport, in particular, were transmitted around the world,” as architectural historian Susan Schafer has remarked. “Publications in Europe, the US, even Japan, reported on the modernity of the building’s style, how it was a reflection of a New Rome and with that a New Italy, and that it represented the potential for the formation of a new national identity, full of symbolic, democratic potency and fully purged of its Fascist past.”<sup>12</sup>

Yet some of the “new” buildings and a good number of the infrastructure projects were simply realizations of long-deferred plans, executed by individuals who had reached prominence in Italy’s prewar period. The task of completing the southern Olympic zone of EUR, where work had essentially stopped in 1943, was entrusted (not without criticism) to its creator, Marcello Piacentini. At EUR, the Palazzo dello Sport itself has its origins in Nervi’s and Piacentini’s pre-war designs for the Valchetta hill, and the actualized building, as Susan Schafer has shown, saw a significant degree of collaboration between the two.

In another notable case, Enrico Del Debbio took his original 1933 drawings for an outdoor Olympic pool, and joined forces with Annibale Vitellozzi to produce a plan that was built in the Foro Italico precisely where originally envisaged a quarter of a century previous. The pool, according to the architect Maurizio Clerici, who worked for Vitellozzi, “involved a special shape which, exploiting the existing dip in the ground, was inspired by the design of the Circus Maximus.”<sup>13</sup>

Such sensitivity to geomorphic considerations and cultural dialogue with the historical context was a hallmark of many of the constructions, both permanent and temporary, for the Rome Games. That holds true even at remote locations such as the rowing and canoeing area at Lago Albano, a site 12 miles southeast of Rome, where the designers in constructing the stands had to take heed of both protecting archaeological remains and not obscuring the spectacular landscape. The unusual depth of the lake prompted the invention of the clever “Albano Buoy system” for marking the course, now an international standard. More intrusive to the topography of the secluded site was the construction of a new automotive tunnel directly leading to the lake.

Of course, it was in Rome where the construction of new roads, bridges and underpasses would most radically transform the urbanistic profile. Underpasses such as that at Piazza Brasile at the

northern edge of the historical center meant the destruction of numerous older trees. Much more consequentially, the new Via Olimpica, a high-capacity road (already envisaged by 1942) linking the Foro Italico and EUR complexes, cut right through the city's largest green space, the Doria Pamphili park. The construction of an entirely new Leonardo da Vinci Airport at Fiumicino—which was ready in time for the 1960 Games, but used only for the arrival of the Soviet athletes' contingent and then closed for narrow technical reasons for months to follow—had a decisive effect on the whole pattern of growth to the city's west in the subsequent five decades.

The fact that the occasion of the 1960 Olympic Games has proved to be also the last major intervention in the city's urban fabric positively invites reflection on their impact and effects, especially now that Rome has entered a serious bid for the 2020 Olympics, with planned use of many of the same basic sports sites that have served the city since 1960. On completion for the Games, those facilities were widely viewed as the best the world had to offer.

Yet the success of the spaces for the 1960 Rome Olympics was hardly inevitable. A new (2010) Istituto Luce documentary by Leonardo Tiberi, "Sul Filo di Lana" ("On the Finish Line"), treats the Rome Games against their Italian political background. The film examines in detail Rome's late start after the award of the Games in 1955, and conveys in particular the frenzied activity of the years 1957-1960, which saw much political in-fighting, painful delays in construction, and even at the last minute some major technical glitches. In the remainder of this essay, I will devote myself to a single thread of the story of Italian planning for the 1960 Olympics, one that concerns the most serious obstacle that Rome and Italy faced in what one might now be called their "rebranding."

Just about a year before the start of the 1960 Rome Summer Olympics, Italian Premier Antonio Segni's government found itself in Parliament defending the very propriety of the main site of the Games. At issue was not the suitability of the central sports venues, existing or soon to exist. Rather, the problem for Segni's Christian Democrat government had to do with the fact that the Olympic Stadium sat squarely on the former Foro Mussolini, the most strident and aggressively physical expression of Fascist ideology and propaganda that the Duce's regime had succeeded in creating in its more than two decades in power. Even a full 14 years after the conclusion of World War II, the whole complex—as we have seen, preserved by the Allied Fifth Army and now renamed the Foro Italico—was in its essentials completely extant. The Fascist iconographic program for the site was so extensive that in just the past three years two monumental statues of the mid-1930s have been rediscovered *in situ*, long hidden by the overgrowth of vegetation.<sup>14</sup>

Think back to the year 1959, as one walked to the main site of the Games in the most direct approach from the future Olympic Village. That was across the Duca d'Aosta Bridge to the Olympic Stadium positioned beneath the leafy slopes of Monte Mario a few hundred yards from the west bank of the Tiber. Before even crossing the River one plainly could read on the other side the inscription MVSSOLINI DVX. That is because the name and title were carved vertically in massive letters—each more than three feet tall—on a brilliant white obelisk that totalled 770 tons in weight, and 120 feet in height, topped with a gleaming bronze pyramid still covered with 70 pounds of gold.<sup>15</sup>

Directly to the right of the first two letters of the title DVX (Latin for 'Duce') was carved in deep relief a ten foot fasces, the essential symbol of Mussolini's totalitarian state. On an adjoining face of the obelisk, the side facing north, was found the words OPERA BALILLA ANNO X. That inscription gave as the monument's date the tenth year of the Fascist era, i.e., 1932. It also indicated the sponsoring organization—the Fascist youth group Opera Nazionale Balilla, founded in 1926 by then 29 year old party vice-secretary Renato Ricci.

Approaching the obelisk, there was a lot for the viewer to take in. To the left and right, gigantic and (even for 1959) rather futuristically designed constructions in distinctive “Pompeian” red. They were marked with the letters ISEF, for the Istituto Superiore Educazione Fisica, founded in 1952 with university status granted in February 1958.

However the buildings formerly housed the living, learning and training areas of the Accademia Fascista di Educazione Fisica, which Renato Ricci in 1928 had entrusted to the young and relatively unknown architect Ernesto del Debbio to build as the core of this new-style monumental sports forum.

At the end of 1928, the year that saw the construction of the Accademia di Educazione Fisica, Ricci personally visited the United States—including the great universities of Harvard and Princeton, as well as the Boy Scouts of America national headquarters in Manhattan. Ricci’s overarching goal was to turn the new Accademia into a premier laboratory for a new generation of physical education instructors, schooled also in military practices and Fascist party thought. From the scouting movement, Ricci aimed to learn how to optimize the formation of the youth of his Balilla as “integral Fascists,” equipped according to Mussolini’s ideal with books as well as a rifle—but knowing no other educational system.

The Foro Mussolini was the epicentre of the whole experiment, where in mass summer encampments the Balilla pitched tents amidst the Accademia buildings and sports facilities. The success of Ricci’s architectural and educational experiment was so instantaneously striking that Mahatma Gandhi, on his visit to Rome in December of 1931, spent an entire day visiting the complex, mixing with boys from the Balilla movement.<sup>16</sup>

The fact that Italy was quickly and somewhat independently emerging as a world sporting power facilitated Ricci’s ambitions. The year 1930 marked the third time that the nation had won the competition known as the International University Games. In 1932 Italy had an impressive medal haul at the Los Angeles Summer Olympics, second in total number after the United States. In soccer, Italy hosted the 1934 World Cup, and took the championship—repeating the achievement when France staged the games in 1938.

By then, Ricci had seen his Opera Nazionale Balilla officially displaced by a new youth organization, the Gioventù Italiana del Littorio of Fascist party secretary and CONI president Achille Starace. On stepping down as Opera Balilla president in October 1937 Ricci still could make the claim to have created throughout Italy 890 Balilla houses, 1470 gymnasiums, 2568 playing fields, and 22 swimming pools.<sup>17</sup> And the Accademia di Educazione Fisica continued after Ricci as the symbolic and practical center of this new nation of sport. A highly polished short Istituto Luce documentary of (apparently) the year 1941 entitled “Atleti del Foro Mussolini” conveys well the Academy’s lavish facilities as well as an idealized image of the daily life of its cadets during this later period.

But to return to the area of the Mussolini obelisk itself, as it stood in the Foro in 1959. Looking away from the buildings of the Accademia and straight ahead at a distance was the low façade of the Olympic Stadium, a bowl with more than half its seats below “zero level.” But to get to it one had to traverse the long expanse once known as the Piazzale dell’Impero. This pedestrian avenue connected the Mussolini monument to another, slightly later symbol of the era, a fountain supporting a “floating” 42 ton sphere. (It balanced on a bronze plate not quite 16 inches in diameter.) The overall design of the Piazzale was that of Luigi Moretti, arguably the most important Italian architect of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who succeeded Del Debbio in 1933 as the principal planner and architect of the Foro Mussolini. The overall effect of the Piazzale was aesthetically powerful, but also a primer in Fascist history and ideology.

Underfoot for the whole length of the Piazzale was perhaps the most expansive stretch of mosaic art in the world, hurriedly executed in spring of 1937, especially to trumpet Italy's acquisition of the kingdom of Ethiopia in the previous year. The pavement design was by the premier artists in that medium active under the regime—Gino Severini, Angelo Canevari, Achille Capizanno, Giulio Rosso. These mosaics are what especially raised the ire of the left-wing opponents of Segni's Christian Democrats in the parliamentary debates of fall 1959 over the Olympic venues.

The tone of the mosaics is unmistakably triumphalist. The plan of the old imperial Rome is explicitly compared with that of the new Foro Mussolini, both completed and anticipated. Throughout there is much blending of the Roman past with the Fascist present, with emphasis especially on athleticism. Yet some depictions are painfully literal. An Ethiopian in native dress raises his right arm in the Fascist salute to an Italian soldier. A truck filled with Italian soldiers sports a machine gun and a black flag emblazoned with the Fascist war cry, "me ne frega," which translates exactly as "I don't give a [expletive deleted]." Everywhere in the Piazzale are inscriptions in the mosaic tesserae with dizzying, chantlike repetition of Blackshirt slogans, "Duce, to us!;" "Many enemies means much honor;" "It's necessary to win, but more necessary to fight;" or simply "Duce Duce Duce." Mussolini's title shows up 100 times in all.

That is hardly the last of it. On either side of the central spine of the Piazzale are arrayed 11 slabs, each about eight feet high, also the work of Luigi Moretti. The Fascist regime managed to inscribe 17 of the set of 22. As one progresses from east to west, the viewer is confronted with commemoration of "red letter" dates such as Mussolini's founding of his newspaper "Il Popolo d'Italia" (15 March 1919), the "March on Rome" (28 October 1922), and the establishment of the Opera Nazionale Balilla (3 April 1926), down to the 9 May 1936 "Proclamation of Empire" after the conquest of Ethiopia. The fact that three blocks bear subsequent inscriptions heralding the fall of Fascism and the formation of the Italian Republic does little to mitigate the general effect.

True, with a bit of effort, it was possible for the visitor of 1959 to approach the Stadio Olimpico without treading on the Piazzale dell'Impero. Now, to the left of the obelisk was situated the Accademia's music building and its spectacular covered swimming pool. Yet a winding route around that complex unavoidably took one within sight of an imposing marble figure of a youth on the march with rifle on shoulder, sculptor Aroldo Bellini's 1936 personification of the Balilla youth movement.

There was a more convenient route through or around the ex-Accademia building to the right of the obelisk, called "Palazzo H." (Its ground plan resembled the letter—pronounced "acca" in Italian—apparently an intentional pun on "Accademia.") But still that brought one past Del Debbio's unsettling Stadio dei Marmi of 1932. That was a heavy, Hellenized stadium for which 60 Italian provinces each had contributed a monumental male nude statue in a different athletic pose, weightily extolling the ideals of Mussolini's national sports program. The statues on the north side of the stadium stood in outline against Del Debbio's later (1937) planned headquarters for the Fascist Party, to be the largest building in Italy. That was inaugurated only in 1956, as the seat of Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Planned for this general area, but never realized, was an architecturally innovative square that Moretti had designed for the mass armed mobilizations of Fascist party members called "adunate." Capacity was meant to be 400,000, apparently the regime's rationalized answer to Bernini's elliptical piazza at St. Peter's.<sup>18</sup> What caused the Vatican actual alarm was the plan for a 120 meter colossus figure in a geometric loincloth representing Fascism (but looking distinctly like Mussolini). Announced in May 1936 as a gift by the Balilla, the work of casting actually started but was disrupted by the war. Had the statue been realized, it would have displaced the dome of St. Peter's as the dom-

inant feature of the Roman skyline as one approached the city from the north, and competed with it as a landmark from virtually every other direction.<sup>19</sup>

The ex-Foro Mussolini occupied drained marshland on the left bank of the Tiber a little over 2 kilometers north of the Vatican, somewhat removed from the historic center of Rome. But for Italians of a certain age—essentially anyone over 25 years, and especially those between the ages of 25 and 40—the complex was firmly fixed in the collective memory and imagination.

For a start, in the 1930s and early 1940s, the official newsreel corporation Istituto Luce and its affiliates continually churned out documentary footage of the mass gymnastic and martial displays that took place in the Stadio Olimpico and Stadio dei Marmi. From these newsreels—dozens can be viewed today on the Archivio Istituto Luce website<sup>20</sup>—it is clear that one main point of these stadia was for a very small number of party leaders and guests to view an enormously large number of participants, an inversion of the normal order of spectacles.

Perhaps the most extreme instance of this type of display came in May 1938, the nighttime entertainments for Adolf Hitler at what was then called the “Stadio Olimpionico.” Those started with grand-scale precision drill routines on the stadium floor, glorifying symbols of Nazi and Fascist power. Purpose-built light towers crowned with eagles, fasces and swastikas illuminated the thousands of performers. The spectacle then transcended the bounds of the Olympic Stadium, when the audience turned to watch “Lohengrin” performed on a gigantic stage set, built for the occasion on the slopes of Monte Mario. All of this was captured on camera and widely disseminated to the Italian public via newsreels (still preserved today on the Istituto Luce website).

It would take a lot of effort to make a comprehensive collection of representations of the Foro Mussolini and its various monuments in film and smaller media. In fact, the obelisk was famous even before it was an obelisk.<sup>21</sup> From 1928 on, Italy and indeed the world followed through newsreels and the press the whole process of the quarrying of the marble in the Alpi Apuane. Then came the transport of the 300 ton main shaft from its ‘find spot’ 2000 feet above sea level, to the port of Marina di Carrara, and from there by water, eventually up the Tiber to the Foro. The first and last phases were the most dramatic. It took 10000 working days to move the obelisk the first 1000 yards, in places down 60 degree gradients. Raising the obelisk into place required a technical ingenuity not seen since the days of Domenico Fontana, the architect and engineer who in 1586 moved the Vatican obelisk to its present position in the Piazza San Pietro. The parallels did not escape Mussolini’s regime. While the main shaft of the obelisk travelled by barge, some of the lateral portions—clearly addressed on the stone in large painted letters to “Foro Mussolini”—were dragged gratuitously through the Piazza della Rotonda past the Pantheon, and then again through Bernini’s piazza past St. Peter’s.

After its dedication in October 1932, depictions of the obelisk were almost ubiquitous on youth organization medals, membership cards, certificates, awards, and report cards for almost a dozen years. That was just one of the avenues through which the Mussolini obelisk was made into a national symbol, one that necessarily impressed itself deeply onto the contemporary Italian consciousness.

On 7 October, 1959, the attack on Premier Segni’s position on the Foro Italico came to a head. In a rancorous session in the lower house of Parliament, Socialists and Communists clashed with Segni’s Christian Democrat-led coalition government on the question of whether the vestiges of Italy’s Fascist past should be allowed to remain on the Olympic site of the imminent future. Demolishing the obelisk, or even erasing its deep inscriptions, would incur prohibitive costs, argued the government. Concerning the mosaics and their inscriptions, Segni’s adherents cited a variety of points, such that leaving the material intact showed the Republic’s confidence in itself.

As the Associated Press reported of the debate,<sup>22</sup> “Fascist deputies booed as Socialist members argued that the Fascist inscriptions would embarrass some foreign athletes or make them think that Italy did not regret its Fascist period.” Not publicly mentioned as a factor, but quite evident even to the foreign press, was that the Christian Democrats needed these neo-Fascists to hold their slim majorities in Italian national government and Rome city hall, which saw parallel dissension on the issue.

Yet Segni’s government was not long to last. In the six months leading up to the 25 August opening ceremony of the 1960 Olympics, Italy saw three different premiers: Segni, then briefly (starting 25 March), Fernando Tambroni, followed on 26 July by Amintore Fanfani. The government of Fanfani spurned the support of neo-Fascist votes in Parliament, which broke the deadlock on the *Foro Italico*. By August 8th—just two and a half weeks before the start of the 1960 Games—workers appeared on the *Piazzale dell’Impero* to start chiselling off inscriptions glorifying Mussolini; Fanfani himself was believed to have given the order. Over the course of the following week, the neo-Fascists retaliated with pro-Mussolini graffiti that they painted “on the Tiber embankments and other conspicuous places night after night,” as the *New York Times* reported. Municipal clean-up crews could hardly keep up.<sup>23</sup>

Soon the eradication of symbols in the *Foro Italico* halted, for simple want of time and (surely) to keep memories of Mussolini contained in the received media of marble and mosaic and not also throughout the city’s historical center in fresh paint. The upshot? The dispute hardly mattered to the international audience. For Americans, an iconic image of the Games was that on the 12 September 1960 cover of *LIFE* magazine, where US gymnasts Doris Fuchs and Sharon Richardson performed a handstand in the *Stadio dei Marmi*, against the backdrop of the monumental statues and the buildings of the ex-*Accademia di Educazione Fisica*. The official postcard of the US Olympic team portrayed the team in the same setting, marching through the *Stadio dei Marmi* on its way to a tunnel that led to the opening ceremony before 90,000 in the *Stadio Olimpico*.

Looking back, it is not surprising that the Fascist relics of the ex-*Foro Mussolini* failed to become a major factor in the world’s assessment of the 1960 Rome Games. For against the 23 years of the Fascist regime, the Olympic organizers had quite deliberately marshalled 2,713 years of the city’s history. I have remarked on how the procession of the torch forcefully reminded the world how Sicily and southern Italy had seen extensive archaic Greek colonization. The official poster offered another powerful memory trigger. There the Capitoline wolf with infant twins is the focal point, which takes the viewer back to the eighth century BC and the figures of Romulus, Rome’s founder and first king, and his brother Remus. Supporting the wolf is the capital of a column, adapted from a figured marble example from the Baths of Caracalla, that portrays a Roman athlete crowning himself. The rendering of the date 1960 in Roman numerals “MCMLX” (which the Olympic planning committee stipulated in the design competition as a prerequisite) emphasizes contemporary Rome’s continuity with its antique history.

The Greek, Roman and even Etruscan past all found a prominent place in the official Olympic exhibition “Sport in History and Art” at the *Palazzo delle Scienze* in EUR. Professor Guglielmo de Angelis d’Ossat, Director General of Antiquities and Fine Arts for Italy, spent three years preparing the show, with loans from over 100 Italian museums and 30 libraries, and a scope that extended into the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Medieval and Renaissance Italy was on display in the *Circus Maximus* over the course of five nights preceding the opening of the Games. There crowds that reached 40,000 viewed enactments of traditional contests such as the crossbow competition between the Umbrian town of Gubbio and Tuscan Sansepolcro, or the 27-to-a-side match of “Florentine football,” a 16<sup>th</sup> century game that combines elements of soccer, rugby and wrestling.

But most striking and evocative was the wholly original idea to use Rome's archaeological and historical monuments as the setting for some of the most important athletic events. The idea was not part of Rome's pitch at the 1955 IOC meeting in which the city received the 1960 Games.. Rather, it seems to have emerged—perhaps of necessity—in the winter of 1955/1956 when the organizing committee made its evaluation of facilities needed for the Games. In a report of 31 March 1956, the committee suggested to the Executive Board of CONI “that it might be appropriate, in view of the thousands of years of Rome's history, to hold some events included in the programme of the Olympic Games in the Basilica of Maxentius, in the Caracalla Baths and along the Appian Way.”<sup>25</sup> Wrestlers would compete in the Basilica of Maxentius, by far the largest standing structure in the old Roman Forum. Gymnasts were assigned to the similarly imposing Baths of Caracalla, a 20 minute walk to the southeast.

And for the first time in Olympic history, the marathon would neither start nor finish in the main stadium. Rather, the race would start at the foot of Michelangelo's Campidoglio staircase, with a route taking the runners down the Via dei Fori Imperiali skirting the Colosseum and (later) the Baths of Caracalla, and then on the modern Viale Cristoforo Colombo through EUR and past Nervi's gleaming new Palazzo dello Sport to points beyond. Return was via the Old Appian Way, with its ancient funerary monuments and catacombs, all culminating in a finish hard by the Colosseum at the fourth century AD Arch of Constantine. Plus—this too was completely new—the marathon was to be run at night. The concept was a compelling one, and offered the incidental advantage of shifting the spotlight away from the ex-Foro Mussolini. Final approval for Rome's daring suggestion for this event came from the IOC only in late September 1957.

The idea to use the 1650 year-old Basilica of Maxentius and 1750 year-old Baths of Caracalla turned out to pose immensely difficult technical problems, which the organizers needed to solve in close cooperation with the Archaeological Superintendency for Rome.<sup>26</sup> The first issue was that the ancient walls of both structures required long-delayed consolidation work. Then, there was the Superintendency's stipulation that for the creation of audience and competition areas, no ancient masonry was in any way to be touched. Questions of water supply, sewage, lighting, locker rooms, judges' meeting space, media centers and the like further complicated matters. The principal solution was the insertion of temporary installations into the historical venues, particularly elaborate in the case of the gymnastic equipment and viewing stands for the Baths of Caracalla. Planning for the weather was another factor. “While the sun blissfully shone throughout the [wrestling] events held at the Basilica of Maxentius,” recounted architect Maurizio Clerici, “during the gymnastics competition the structure was stress-tested by a Roman end-of-summer storm with strong winds and pouring rain.” There was however one pleasant surprise in this exercise in the antique. Clerici notes that “in both the Basilica of Maxentius and the Baths of Caracalla the original sewage system could be used, albeit in some sections only.”

Rome's broad-gauged historical and cultural approach to its Games, coupled with its effective use of Italy's most brilliant and accomplished architects, effectively eclipsed the basic facts that it was the first ex-Axis power hosting an Olympics since the Allied victory in World War II;<sup>27</sup> and that it was Mussolini's regime which had created the two main centers for the competitions (Foro Italico and EUR), and indeed the whole design environment for the city's “new” sports structures.

For the positive message that Rome 1960 wanted to convey, a look at Italy's program for its commemorative postage stamps is instructive. Its 1960 Olympics issue saw nine stamps in all, with an adaptation of the “Romulus and Remus” Olympic poster as the lowest denomination (5 lira), ranging up to a 200 lira stamp. (The cost of sending a first class letter within Italy was then 30 lira.) Of the

eight remaining images, half depicted sports-themed classical statuary—including a Roman magistrate with napkin in hand, whom only the truly erudite will have recognized as signalling the start of a chariot race. The other part of the stamp issues represented Rome's newest sports facilities: the Stadio Olimpico (1953), the Velodrome at EUR (1960), and Nervi's 1957 Palazzetto and 1960 Palazzo dello Sport. This was the face that Rome sought to show to the world, an image of antiquity balanced with cutting-edge modernity.

In the winter 2010 number of *Spaziosport*,<sup>28</sup> Italian cyclist Sante Gaiardoni recalled the moments following his victory in the 1000m sprint at the Velodrome, for one of the two gold medals he received in the Rome Games. Premier "Amintore Fanfani approached me to hug me and besides congratulating me...whispered the heartfelt words that thanks to my triumph I was the country's pride because I had helped him feel proud to be Italian!" That same journal features a recent interview with Giulio Andreotti, president of the 1960 Organising Committee, who himself later served three times as Italy's prime minister. He stated candidly that the Games showed "that the country was capable of atoning and getting over defeat in the war." To what degree the 1960 Rome Olympics "changed the world" is a matter for continued thought and discussion. What does seem certain is that the organization of the Games addressed squarely the negative perceptions of the Italians' sternest critics—themselves.

## Endnotes

- 1 *Spaziosport. Trimestrale di Architettura per lo Sport* 13 (January/March 2010). For this paper, I owe thanks especially to Paolo Pedinelli (Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano), who has several times guided me through off-access sites in Rome's Foro Italico and shared with me his learned privately published writings on the history of that sports complex, and Ann Keen (Rutgers University), whose own work on the post-war architecture of the Olympic Games through 1976 first prompted me to examine this topic. It is also a pleasure to thank Sandro Bari, Jonathan Coble, Francesca Di Castro, Federica Fagnani, Giusi Faustini, Valentina Follo, Richard Grubman, Kiel Moe and Richard Wittman for their on-site conversations at variously Foro Italico and EUR. The factual material in this paper as regards the 1960 Rome Summer Olympics is based on the official report: Organizing Committee of the Games of the XVII Olympiad, *The Games of the XVII Olympiad: Rome 1960*, two volumes (Rome: Organizing Committee of the Games of the XVII Olympiad, 1960). Mistakes remain my own.
- 2 For the 1960 Rome Olympics as "the last on a human scale," see *Spaziosport* 15, 17, 19, 21, 26, 40; for the paradox of such a Games "changing the world," see especially the remarks of current Rome mayor Giovanni Alemanno at page 15.
- 3 Robert Daley, "The Parade: History, Tragedy and Politics," *New York Times*, 26 August 1960, 16 (with photo of protest as sole illustration).
- 4 See, for instance, George E. Sokolsky, "These Days," *Washington Post*, 12 April 1961, 17, and in greater depth on the television coverage, David Maraniss, *Rome 1960: The Olympics That Changed The World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008) 136-137, especially 96-97.
- 5 See further, Maraniss, *Rome 1960*, 60 (influence of 1906 Vesuvius eruption on Rome's decision).
- 6 For a concise history of this site and its preservation by the Allied Fifth Army, see Borden W. Painter, *Mussolini's Rome: Rebuilding the Eternal City* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), especially 153 with n. 29.
- 7 On Rome as a possible substitute host for the 1956 Summer Olympics (widely reported in spring 1953), see e.g., "French Leader Proposes Forcing Australians to Give Up Olympics," *New York Times*, 5 April 1953, 83.
- 8 "Rome is Selected for 1960 Olympics," *New York Times*, 17 June 1955, 29.
- 9 For what follows below on the infrastructure, see in general *Spaziosport*, especially 48, 50, 67, 71, 78, 90, 92, 141. For a highly detailed (and to my mind overly critical) account and analysis of the urbanistic planning of the Rome Games, see Giuseppe Telesca, "Tra Berutti e l'Immobiliare. Le Olimpiadi del 1960 e la trasformazione urbanistica di Roma," *Passato e Presente*, 67 (2006), 43-68.
- 10 See Organizing Committee, *The Games of the XVII Olympiad*, vol. I, 31.
- 11 *LIFE*, 15 August 1960, 44-46, 51-56.

- 12 Susan Schafer, "The Need for a New Monumentality: Marcello Piacentini and the Completion of the EUR for the 1960 Rome Olympic Games," paper presented at conference *The 1960 Rome Olympic Games*, American Academy in Rome, 1 October 2010.
- 13 Clerici interview from 1991, cited by Gigliola Del Debbio in *Spaziosport*, 57.
- 14 See Edoardo Sassi, "Il 'cacciatore' al Foro Italico, scoperta una statua di 70 anni fa," *Corriere della Sera*, 25 October 2009, with details of the discoveries by Paolo Pedinelli and Sandro Bari of statues of a "hunter" and (unique for the Foro Italico) a nude female figure. The 1936 "hunter" on its base stands over 13 feet tall.
- 15 On the obelisk, see now the magisterial work by Maria Grazia D'Amelio, *L'obelisco marmoreo del foro italico a Roma. Storia, immagini e note tecniche* (Rome, Palombi Editori, 2009).
- 16 The bibliography on Renato Ricci, his Opera Nazionale Balilla, and the Accademia di Educazione Fisica is massive and growing. Two recent items of particular note (each with full bibliographies of previous work): Ornella Stellavato, "La nascita dell'Opera Nazionale Balilla," *Mondo Contemporaneo*, 2 (2009), 5-81; Alessio Ponzio, *La Palestra del Littorio. L'Accademia della Farnesina: un esperimento di pedagogia totalitaria nell'Italia fascista* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2009).
- 17 Sandro Setta, *Renato Ricci: dallo squadristo alla Repubblica sociale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1986), 126.
- 18 As Jonathan Coble has suggested to me.
- 19 On the statue, see Painter, *Mussolini's Rome*, 47 (underestimating projected size and extent of completion).
- 20 <http://www.archivioluca.com>.
- 21 On what follows, see D'Amelio, *L'obelisco marmoreo*.
- 22 "Segni Party Saves Relics of Fascism," *Washington Post*, 8 October 1959, 5; for the larger context through an international lens, see e.g., Barrett McGurn, "Duce Shrine Sits on Olympic Site," *Montreal Gazette*, 5 December 1959, 2.
- 23 The eleventh-hour eradication movement was followed in the international press. See *New York Times*, "Fascist Symbols Go for Rome's Olympics," 9 August 1960, 2 (suspected involvement of Fanfani); Paul Hofmann, "Italy is Enjoying an Olympic Calm," 16 August 1960, 33 (for the quoted material).
- 24 On this, see the appreciation of Harald Lechenperg, *Olympic Games, 1960: Squaw Valley and Rome* (New York: Barnes, 1960), 337.
- 25 The Organizing Committee, *Games of the XVII Olympiad*, 27.
- 26 For what follows below, with the quotes, see Maurizio Clerici in *Spaziosport*, 78-79.
- 27 An essential insight, the formulation of which I owe to Richard Grubman.
- 28 For the quotes below see *Spaziosport*, *Trimestrale di Architettura per lo Sport* 13 (January/March 2010), 36 (Gaiardoni) and 10 (Andreotti).