

Roman Germans: Italian Architects Look to Germany

by Marco De Michelis

1927

The Weissenhofsiedlung commissioned by the Deutscher Werkbund and the concurrent exhibition of modern architecture in Stuttgart organized by Ludwig Hilberseimer gave young Italian architects, in particular the 'rationalists' of 'Group 7', a first international platform. The catalogue¹ published not only the early master works of Le Corbusier, Gropius or Wright, but also Figini and Pollini's design for a multi-storey car park; a newspaper building by Larco and Rava; an architectural study by Alberto Sartoris and the futuristic city proposed by Antonio Sant'Elia whose pioneering role had just begun to be recognized in Europe. Two years previously, the first publications on modern architecture by Walter Gropius and Adolf Behne had not contained a single Italian contribution, with the exception of an uncommented illustration of the large FIAT automobile factory in Torino-Lingotto with its spectacular roof-top test course and a brief mention of two futuristic projects by Sant'Elia and Mario Chiattono.²

The year 1927 not only brought the first opening for young Italian architects to present themselves to the international world of architecture, it also offered them occasions for travelling to study German architecture, i.e. the Weissenhof exhibition in Stuttgart, or the new buildings and urban developments in Frankfurt am Main, Celle and Berlin. In September of that year, Enrico Griffini visited Stuttgart and reported on it in a lecture in Milan; in the following year, he wrote about what he saw in the magazines *La Casa* and *Domus*³, expressly acknowledging Richard Döcker, Max Taut and Hans Scharoun, but most of all Mies van der Rohe. This trip to Germany started Griffini on his sustained analysis of questions pertaining to the 'rational floor plan', the results of which he summed up in 1932. In his book, *Costruzione razionale della casa*⁴, he followed up Alexander Klein's studies of residential floor plan articulation, published in Germany in the 1920s, and developed them further by 'Italianizing' them, so to speak.

Griffini was not the only young Italian architect who followed the experiments of the Germans with great interest. As Carlo Belli wrote, 'The Italians came to Stuttgart with their projects on paper – and found a complete city there, erected by the best European architects! The garden city of Weissenhof must have appeared like paradise to our young Italian architects.'⁵ Luigi Pollini and Adalberto Libera, too, visited the model housing estate in 1927, and Giuseppe Terragni even went north twice, first in the autumn of that year to Stuttgart, and four years later to Berlin, in order to view the large estates by Bruno Taut and Martin Wagner.⁶ Giuseppe Pagano had visited them earlier, in 1929, while Ignazio Gardella contacted Ernst May's team when he stayed in Frankfurt am Main in 1931. In the offices of the Italian 'rationalists', monthlies like *Moderne Bauformen* or *Das neue Frankfurt* were consulted regularly, and the Italian architectural journals paid much attention to what was happening in

1 Ludwig Hilberseimer, Julius Hoffmann (eds., commissioned by the Deutscher Werkbund), *Internationale Neue Baukunst* (Bauhausbücher 2), Stuttgart, 1927 (reprint with an introduction by Martin Kieren, Gebr. Mann, Berlin, 1998; *Neues Bauen International. Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen / Gebr. Mann, Berlin, 2002*).

2 Walter Gropius, *Internationale Architektur* (Bauhausbücher 1), Albert Langen, Munich, 1926 (English ed.: Gropius, *The Modern Functional Building*. The Getty Research Institute, Santa Monica, CA, 1996, p. 205).

3 E A Griffini, *Le case economiche dell'esposizione di Stoccarda*, *La Casa* no. 7 (July), 1928, pp. 527-547; Griffini, *Le case del razionalismo moderno alla mostra di Stoccarda*, *Domus* no. 6 (June), 1928, pp. 17-19. See also: Massimiliano Savorra, Enrico Agostino Griffini. Electa, Naples, 2000, p. 66ff.

4 E A Griffini, *Costruzione razionale della casa*. Hoepli, Milan, 1932, reprinted in two volumes in its 4th, extended, edition in 1946.

5 Carlo Belli, *Il volto del secolo. La prima cellula dell'architettura razionalista italiana*. Bergamo, 1988, p. 40.

6 Elisabetta Terragni, *I viaggi di architettura di Giuseppe Terragni. Appunti e immagini dai taccuini*. In: Giorgio Ciucci (ed.), Giuseppe Terragni. Electa, Milan, 1996, pp. 75-85.

1) The Italians (Romans) actually saved the Germans from being eternally dominated by the Huns. The Huns overran and conquered all of Germany, and their power was broken at the battle of the Catalaunian Plains by the Roman General Aetius. The Germans had been subjugated by the Huns for almost a century and without the Romans they would still be servant of the Huns. The Huns were taking their land and their women. 10) I think Italy defeated Germany and Austria in World War I, effectively ending the superpower status of Austria and relegating it to the rank of a small country. 11) well....Italy messed up in the second World War. Saint Petersburg also owes many of its most beautiful buildings to Italian Architects. Italian St. Petersburg - A guide to Italian life in St. Petersburg, Russia. A new exhibition in Germany takes a nostalgic look at the two-way surge of Italian migrant workers to Germany in the 1950s and sun-starved Germans to bella Italia in an era that came before the current transalpine rift. Sun, fun and beautiful women -- Germans headed for Italy's sunny beaches in droves as far back as the 1950s. German Chancellor Schröder may have cancelled his vacation to the sunny Adriatic coast in a huff, but he could still head to the west German mining town of Bochum for a touch of Mediterranean flair. Maybe even some reassurance that the current row with his Italian n German and Italian unification was the fruit of the nationalism in 19th century. German and Italian reunification has similarities and differences. We will look into differences and similarities between German and Italian unification and come to the conclusion. Napoleon made Germans to realize the benefits of unity. He reduced landowner power which improved which improved workers' lives and he dissolved Holy Roman Empire and found Confederation of Rhine reducing the number of states which made trading easier. But also many German people opposed to Napoleon's rule and Prussians felt that they were humiliated militarily. This sparked the nationalism and patriotism in German people. Same in Italy Napoleon sparked nationalism and liberalism.