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*Fascism's Adriatic Empire: Architecture and Cultural Politics in Italy's Interwar Oltremare*

### **Abstract**

Despite dismal economic prospects, the Italian Fascist regime invested heavily in the design and development of modern building projects at every imaginable scale throughout its annexed territories of the Eastern Adriatic between the world wars. From regional planning and urban design to civic works and domestic architecture, the physical landscapes of the Adriatic borderlands were remade to announce the political and cultural triumph of Fascist imperialism as a regenerative force of European culture. My doctoral dissertation, "Fascism's Adriatic Empire: Modern Architecture and Cultural Politics in Italy's Interwar *Oltremare*," reevaluates the role of modern architecture and civil infrastructural projects undertaken in the newest Italian provinces carved out of Yugoslavia's Adriatic coast and their maritime connections to the principal ports of the Italian Peninsula.

Rather than dictating prescribed cultural policies from the national capital, Mussolini's Fascist regime granted municipal governments significant autonomy in developing local strategies for urban planning and architecture. In order to connect these liminal coastal provinces, an extensive network of maritime spaces was designed and constructed—from ship passenger terminals to port infrastructure and mobile vessels themselves, much of which remains absent in architectural histories of the Italian interwar period despite having physically stitched the seaborne empire together, from Trieste and Zara, to Ancona and Naples. My dissertation posits maritime architecture as a both a medium deployed to reinforce Italian territorial claims across the Adriatic Rim and beyond on the level of culture, and a series of technologies of mobility which spatially linked the metropole to the national peripheries. In making the otherwise discrete objects of seaborne vessel and maritime infrastructure relational, a dynamic and ephemeral spatial order of colonial governance is revealed within the spatiality of the sea itself.