

The Architecture and Urbanism of Rome's Wholesale Market

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Rome's Wholesale Market opened in June of 1922, just four months before the fascist seizure of power in Italy's capital. This turned out to be a propitious coincidence for a regime that saw agriculture as key to improving Italy's economic situation, engine for modernization, and tool for eventually realizing imperial ambitions. Food was literally integral to nation building, both actual and ideological. As such, Mussolini's government promptly claimed the Wholesale Market as its own achievement, featuring it often in fascist propaganda as an exemplary building for the sanitary provisioning of food in the capital. The Wholesale Market was to be the central—and centralizing—complex within Rome's food distribution network that would also include neighborhood market halls.

My seminar traces the development of Rome's Wholesale Market, the most important architecture of the city's food provisioning system, from Unification to fascism. The city's original intention to establish a network of covered markets was predicated on improving hygiene and ensuring public health in the new capital that was growing exponentially in population and metropolitan area. Under the liberal government, legislators and urban planners conducted extensive analyses to find the best locations for food provisioning structures that would work well with Rome's geographic features and transportation system, reflecting the city's concerns for sanitation and access to food. However, when the fascist regime took control of Rome and eventually set up the Governatorato (fascist-appointed municipal government) in 1925, the city's Wholesale Market and neighborhood markets became the sites at which the government exercised unprecedented biopolitical control of comestible resources.

My pre-paper provides some background information on the history of food provisioning in Rome in the nineteenth century, beginning with the slaughterhouse reform under Pope Leo XII, to the early twentieth century, when the Giunta of Mayor Ernesto Nathan finally realized the city's plan to construct a single Wholesale Market. My presentation uses maps (especially the regulatory plans) to illustrate the locations of planned markets in relation to post-Unification Rome. I also analyze the architecture and organization of the Wholesale Market, tracking the changes to its design from commissioning to opening.