

Managing Emergencies for the Safeguarding of Cities of Art in Corrado Ricci's Correspondence: Ravenna, 'Open City' without Air Defences (1916–1918)

War in History

1–22

© The Author(s) 2022

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/09683445221111939

journals.sagepub.com/home/wih**Eleonora Maria Stella** 

CNR-ISPC (Institute of Heritage Science), Monterotondo, Italy

Abstract

This paper intends to examine the dramatic events which involved Ravenna and its historical pine-wood from 1916, during the First World War. In that terrible year, the centre of the monumental city was for the first time targeted by Austrian bombs, which also threw civilian life into disorder. The emergency also affected Ravenna's ancient pine-wood – a unique piece of natural heritage, rich with history – whose survival was threatened because of the decisions and military priorities of the Italian Supreme Command. These events must be seen in the completely new context of the operation to safeguard the Italian artistic and monumental heritage conducted by the state, with the support of the army.

Keywords

First World War, cultural heritage, safeguard, Ravenna, Corrado Ricci

Introduction

Corrado Ricci (1858–1934) was an important institutional figure in the world of fine arts during the period in which Giovanni Giolitti held power in Italy.¹ The long and decisive phase during which Ricci was in charge of the Directorate General for Antiquities and

1 C. Spadoni and A. Emiliani, eds, *La cura del bello. Musei, storie, paesaggi per Corrado Ricci* Exhibition catalog. (Milano: Electa, 2008).

Corresponding author:

Eleonora Maria Stella, CNR-ISPC (Institute of Heritage Science), 00015 Monterotondo Stazione, Rome, Italy.

Email: eleonoramaria.stella@cnr.it



Fig. 1. Corrado Ricci and Santi Muratori visit the basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna after the bombing on the 12th February 1916 (Classense Library of Ravenna, Photograph Archive).

Fine Arts (1906–1919) was marked profoundly by the tragic and challenging experience of the First World War (Fig. 1).

His unpublished correspondence – the *Carteggio di Guerra (1914–1919)* housed in the Classense Library of Ravenna² – represents a precious testimony, which documents the work carried out under his general direction and describes the immense transport and protection operation undertaken for mobile works of art: paintings, frescoes, sculptural complexes, entire museums and private collections, as well as the protective measures adopted for the more notable monuments of the Triveneto region.

The acquisition of Ricci's correspondence, both institutional and private,³ offers new perspectives for research in the context of the already vast literature on the subject which, it should be remembered, includes above all the direct testimony of the institutional

2 See in particular: S. Secchiari, *Corrispondenti di Corrado Ricci. Indice-Inventario della serie "Corrispondenti" nel Carteggio Ricci della biblioteca Classense* (Ravenna: Società di studi ravennati, 1997); E. M. Stella, "Quelle pitture ardite e disinvolve". *Corrado Ricci fra restauro e conservazione* (Ravenna: Quaderni IRTEC, 1997), pp. 33-36; C. Giuliani, Il Fondo Ricci alla Biblioteca Classense in A. Emiliani and D. Domini, eds, *Corrado Ricci. Storico dell'arte tra esperienza e progetto* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2005), pp. 15-27.

3 In this regard, see the digital archive available on <http://carteggiogdiguerra.cnr.it>

figures responsible for the protection of the monuments and works of art of the Veneto region – above all Venice – Lombardy and Friuli at the time.⁴

It is important to note that for the first time in Italy's history, action was taken to protect artistic and monumental heritage on a vast scale in terms of the removal and transport of works of art, carried out in several phases and on a large scale across the national territory during the entire duration of the conflict. A set of extremely complex operations, even from the point of view of the disassembly of the artefacts and the logistics of their transportation, which were coordinated by the Directorate General of Antiquities and Fine Arts (which at the time was under the control of the Ministry of Education) and carried out thanks to the decisive support of the Supreme Command of the army, whose needs, in many cases, were in conflict with the requests for protection, as we will later discuss in detail.⁵

The privileged, but not neutral, testimony of the director general of fine arts might be considered a marginal source from the perspective of the official historiography of the Great War; another of the pieces making up the institutional life of the country. Analysis of these papers, however, provides an unprecedented perspective on Italy in 1915: the project of a national artistic patrimony which was to be protected in the event of war was defined in an ideological sense.⁶ An operation which, even though financed by the Ministry of War, must be considered one of the effects of civil mobilization, which involved the decisive abuse of state and military power.

The safeguarding of the Italian artistic and monumental heritage, handled for the first time on a national scale by the central government, became a fundamental aspect of the form of support provided by the state. An evident and tangible sign of the extraordinary expansion of its duties in wartime, despite its significant shortcomings in many vital aspects of civil society, which have been highlighted by historians.⁷

In an era of total war, when all of civil society was mobilised for a common purpose, monuments and works of art played an emblematic role of moral redemption, becoming a tangible as well as intangible expression of the nation at war. A process of maturation of the country's civil conscience which, in times of war, had identified itself with the

4 C. Ricci, *L'Arte e la guerra*, in *La difesa del patrimonio artistico italiano contro i pericoli della guerra (1915-1917)*. I. Protezione dei monumenti, *Bollettino d'Arte*, VIII-XII (1917), pp. 175-178; G. Fogolari, *Relazione sull'opera della Sovrintendenza alle gallerie e agli oggetti d'arte del Veneto per difendere gli oggetti d'arte dai pericoli della guerra*, *Bollettino d'Arte*, IX-XII (1918), pp. 185-220; A. Colasanti, *Provvedimenti presi a tutela degli oggetti di antichità e d'arte esposti ai pericoli della guerra*, *Bollettino d'Arte*, IX-XII (1918), pp. 242-252; E. Modigliani, *Relazione del R. Sovrintendente alle Gallerie della Lombardia su operazioni di sgombero degli oggetti d'arte compiute nelle provincie di Vicenza e di Verona*, *Bollettino d'Arte*, IX-XII (1918), pp. 235-241.

5 E. M. Stella, *Note introduttive al "Carteggio di Guerra (1914-1919)"*. Alcune considerazioni sulla politica della tutela del patrimonio durante la Grande Guerra in S. Chiodi and G.C. Fedeli, eds. *Beni culturali e conflitti armati, catastrofi naturali e disastri ambientali*, ILIESI digitale. Ricerche filosofiche e lessicali, IV (2018), pp. 171-179. DOI: 10.19284/ILIESI-RI.04.

6 M. Nezzo, *La tutela delle opere d'arte durante la Grande Guerra, Padova e il suo territorio*, XXX (2015), pp. 25-28.

7 N. Labanca, *Caporetto. Storia di una disfatta* (Firenze: Giunti, 1997), pp. 79-81.

conservative practices of our artistic memories had, in fact, reached its conclusion.⁸ The all-encompassing nature of the conflict made the attempt to protect heritage inseparable from politics. For the first time, art participated in, and entered fully into, the dynamics of the war, which from its beginning posed itself as a clash of civilizations: the Entente powers against the “Teutonic barbarian”, i.e. the Central Empires.

This was the first modern war to be also fought in the media. The action of propaganda played a central role, as confirmed by the Ricci correspondence and also by the immense amount of propaganda published by the warring countries. These aspects have been extensively analysed by critics and can also be recognized in the folds of the whole story in relation to the activity of Ricci and his friend Ugo Ojetti,⁹ art critic and well-known journalist of daily newspaper “Corriere della Sera”, both of whom also contributed to defining the iconography of art in wartime through targeted photographic campaigns.¹⁰

The devices, used as a protective screen for monuments against bombs and grenades, highlighted the desire to offer a reassuring public image of the monuments and make them seem participants in the events of the war.¹¹ This intent, combined with the need to document the protective initiatives of the Italian state, is clearly evident in the rich illustrative apparatus of the publications of the time (Fig. 2).¹²

The image of the country, represented by the monuments being “wrapped up” for the war, played a functional role in conveying the meaning and value of Italian participation in the conflict. But despite this, the protection initiatives were actually mainly triggered by the burgeoning emergency, entrusting them dangerously to the logic of war and the randomness of events. Contrary to this approach, Corrado Ricci chose to act, stretching his limited decision-making powers and succeeding in capitalizing on teamwork.

The operations to secure the artistic and monumental heritage of northern Italy from 1915 to 1918 were profoundly influenced by the evolution of military events. These events at the Italian-Austrian front and the stubbornly offensive strategy adopted by Chief of Staff, Luigi Cadorna, had already highlighted the dramatic – and ruinous – consequences of this approach which would cause the deaths of huge numbers of Italian soldiers. At the end of July 1915, the foreign minister himself, baron Sidney Sonnino, admitted the failure of the Cadorna plan; the illusion of a short war had faded in the face of the terrible reality of a ferocious trench war.¹³ Even the initially highly restrictive

8 Nezzo, *La tutela delle opere d'arte*, p. 25.

9 See M. Nezzo, Ugo Ojetti. *Critica, azione, ideologia. Dalle Biennali d'arte antica al Premio Cremona* (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2017).

10 M. Nezzo, *La Guerra dell'Arte: testi, fotografie, immaginario funzionale (1914-1950)*, in R. Biscioni and M. Morgante, eds, *L'immagine della città in guerra. Visioni e identità urbane, documenti visivi e saperi tecnici, Ricerche Storiche*, XLIII (2013), pp. 241-251.

11 G. P. Treccani, *Monumenti e centri storici nella stagione della Grande guerra* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2015), pp. 30-38.

12 U. Ojetti, *I monumenti italiani e la guerra* (Milano: Editori Alfieri e Lacroix, 1917); Ricci, *L'Arte e la guerra*, pp. 175-178.

13 M. Isnenghi and G. Rochat, *La Grande Guerra 1914-1918* (Milano: La Nuova Italia, 2000), pp. 44-59; See also: G.E. Rusconi, *L'Azzardo del 1915* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005), pp. 149-159; P. Pieri, *L'Italia nella Prima Guerra Mondiale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1965), pp. 27-43.

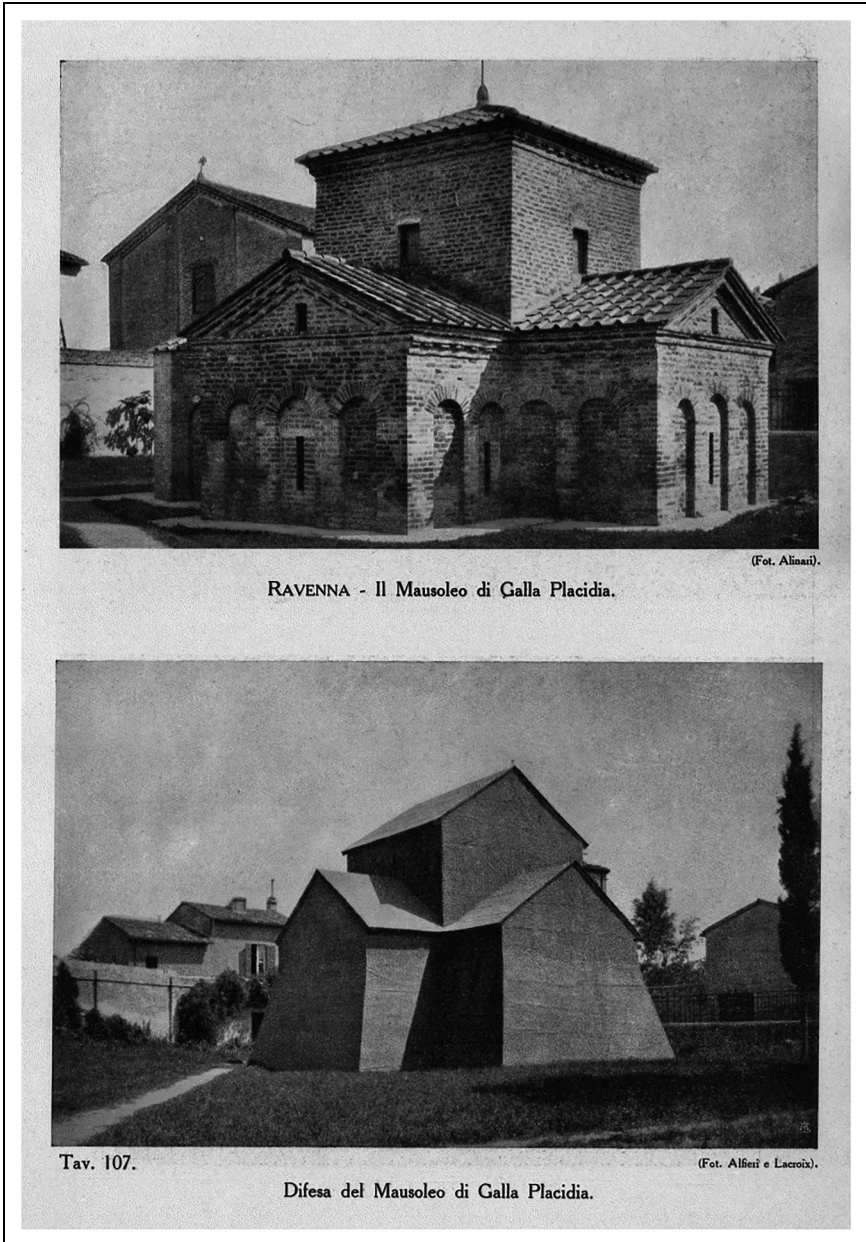


Fig. 2. Ravenna Mausoleo of Galla Placidia (Italy), protective measures (Reproduced from Ricci, 1917).

criteria for saving works of art, therefore, changed with the intensification of the bombings on the cities of art from 1916 and with the increased destructive potential of weapons being used. From that year on, in fact, the Germans, English, Russians and Italians began

using aircraft for long-range strategic bombing missions, attacking communication lines, industrial centres and cities.¹⁴

In this scenario, the threat of Austrian bombings of the monuments of the Adriatic cities had become tangible: the case of the damage to the cathedral of San Ciriaco in Ancona (Marche region) is only the first to have taken place.¹⁵

The widespread damage inflicted on the Italian artistic heritage includes the irreparable loss of the vault painted by G.B. Tiepolo in the Scalzi church in Venice, which was hit by an Austrian bomb on the night between the 24th and the 25th of October 1915 (Fig. 3).¹⁶

Overall, Tiepolo can be considered the ‘illustrious’ victim who suffered most damage from the consequences of the First World War. As an example, we need only think of the complete destruction (on the 26th of November, 1917) of the artist’s allegorical ceiling painted in the main hall of the Villa Soderini-Berti in Nervesa della Battaglia (Treviso, Veneto region) by an Austrian grenade.¹⁷

It should be borne in mind that for the first time, cities, monuments and churches came under the threat of aerial attack, anticipating the much more destructive effects of the Second World War. This fact had a huge impact both on the civilian population and on international public opinion, since it involved, as in the case of Venice, a historical-artistic heritage considered as belonging to the whole of humanity and not simply to a single state. We can understand the importance of this aspect in regard to the sector of artistic and monumental protection since, from the first year of the war, the technicians of the fine arts sector had to deal with the destructive potential of new armaments (Fig. 4).

For this reason, the war experience as a whole represents a shared laboratory of experimental ideas and approaches which by necessity entered into a dialogue with military engineering skills.¹⁸

The devastating effects of aircraft on the ground were first witnessed in Belgium and France. Similarly, future developments could be foreseen in the most exposed Italian cities such as Venice, which was also the most vulnerable. The Austrian seaplanes had their bases in Trieste and Pola, between 90 and 150 kilometres from the city,¹⁹ and the toll was, in fact, severe: during the course of the conflict a total of 42 enemy raids were recorded which, in addition to the widespread destruction of the urban fabric and the loss of human lives, provoked a severe and lasting economic crisis in Venice and its depopulation.²⁰ It should be emphasized that when war was declared, the Italian air force had not yet begun to produce the aircraft it needed, as evidenced by the fact that

14 Treccani, *Monumenti e centri storici*, p. 38.

15 Ojetti, *I monumenti italiani*, pp. 11-12.

16 See in detail: G. Manieri Elia and C. Piva, eds, *Tiepolo e la prima guerra mondiale: dagli Scalzi alle Gallerie dell’Accademia* (Firenze: Edifir Edizioni, 2017).

17 A. Moschetti, *I danni ai monumenti e alle opere d’arte delle Venezia nella guerra mondiale, MCMXV-MCMXVIII* (Venezia: Premiate officine Grafiche C. Ferrari, 1929), pp. 82-91.

18 Treccani, *Monumenti e centri storici*, pp. 30-38; E. M. Stella, *Carteggio di Guerra (1914-1919). Corrado Ricci e la protezione del patrimonio artistico durante la Grande Guerra* (Gorgonzola, Milano: Edizioni Quasar, 2021), p. 95.

19 See: G. Scarabello, *Il martirio di Venezia durante la Grande Guerra e l’opera di difesa della marina italiana* (Venezia: Tipografia del Gazzettino, 1933), I-II.

20 B. Bianchi, *Venezia nella Grande Guerra. Storia di Venezia, L’Ottocento e il Novecento* (Roma: Treccani online 2002), I. <https://www.treccani.it>.

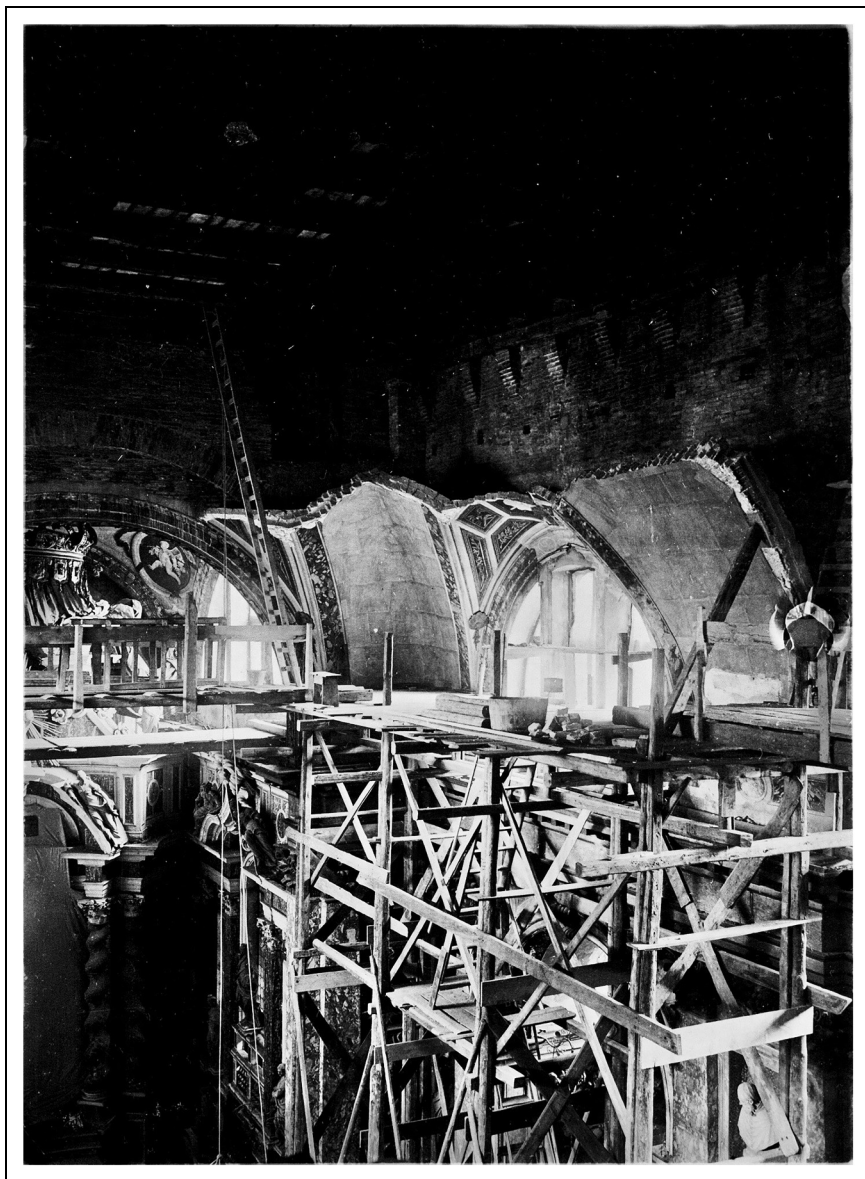


Fig. 3. Venice, church of the Scalzi (Italy). The interior after the bombing (Historical Archive of the Navy).

in May 1915 the Supreme Command had at its disposal only 75 aircraft, most of which were obsolete.²¹ Initially there was strong resistance to the military's adoption and

21 These were old Bleriot, Nieuport and Farman aircraft. See: C. Meregalli, *Grande Guerra. 15-18 dal crollo alla gloria* (Bassano del Grappa: Ghedina & Tassotti Editori, 1994), p. 28.



Fig. 4. Venice, the Doge's Palace, detail of the masonry structures reinforcing the arches (Historical Archive of the Navy).

development of the new aircraft. As proof of this, we have the testimony of the minister of the colonies, Ferdinando Martini, who attributed the delays affecting Italian aviation to the lack of confidence that the General Staff placed in its military potential.²² The Kingdom of Italy therefore entered the war with ineffective and inadequate aircraft, which were, though, constantly being improved and made more powerful thanks to the involvement of the major industrial companies.²³ The entire sector underwent enormous development which over the course of the conflict led to a total production of nearly 12,000 aircraft and 24,400 engines.²⁴ It is clear that the Italian army was able to successfully overcome its initial disadvantage if we consider that 600 aircraft and 7 dirigibles were used daily during the battle of Piave in June 1918.²⁵

22 F. Martini, *Diario 1914-1918*, G. De Rosa, ed. (Milano: Mondadori, 1966), pp. 371-372.

23 Caproni, Fiat, Isotta Fraschini, Vickers-Terni, Ansaldo. See: P. Ferrari and Al. Massignani, *1914-1918 La guerra moderna* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2014), p. 95.

24 The Italian aeronautical industry was better at producing fighter planes than bombers. See in detail: Ferrari, Massignani, *1914-1918 La guerra moderna*, pp. 175-184.

25 L. Scroccaro, Ali su Venezia e terraferma. I campi di aviazione della Marina militare nella laguna, in G. Rossini, ed., *Venezia fra arte e guerra 1866-1918* (Milano: Mazzotta, 2003), p. 129.



Fig. 5. The basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, February 1916 (Classense Library of Ravenna, Photograph Archive).

1916: Ravenna without air defences

The second year of the Great War begins with a very bad omen for the director general of antiquities and fine arts Ravenna native Corrado Ricci.²⁶ On the 12 of February 1916, an Austrian bomb was 'barbarically'²⁷ dropped on the basilica of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, hitting the left side of the facade full-on (Fig. 5).

A few days later the superintendent of monuments, Giuseppe Gerola,²⁸ reported the following news with some relief:

I am still amazed and cannot understand by what miracle the mosaics suffered no damage from the terrible explosion. It seems that the bomb was high explosive but did not contain bullets (unlike the fatal one at the Ricovero): otherwise who knows what a mess there would have been.²⁹

26 A. Emiliani, Quattro punti di politica istituzionale, in C. Spadoni and A. Emiliani, eds, *La cura del bello*, pp. 27-43.

27 Term used by Ricci in his note on the margin of the *Indez* of the *Carteggio ai Monumenti di Ravenna 1916* (Vol. I-II) (from now on CMR) Classense Library of Ravenna (from now on CLR), Ricci Archive.

28 See: G.M. Varanini, *Gerola, Giuseppe* in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, Treccani online, Vol. LIII (Roma: 2000), <https://www.treccani.it>

29 Letter from G. Gerola to C. Ricci, 14 February 1916, CLR Ricci Archive, CMR 1916, Vol. I-II, n. 28.

Despite relief at the discovery that the damage was limited to a small part of the mosaics, the day was nevertheless a tragic one, as the first civilian victims were recorded. The unprecedented experience of that massive bombing – 24 explosive devices – would be remembered as a profoundly traumatic event for the city.

The detailed account of the attacks of enemy aircraft on Ravenna on that dramatic day given to Ricci by Santi Muratori – a local librarian and intellectual³⁰ – did not omit the description of bloody scenes: the attack had begun from Porto Corsini but inevitably had extended over the entire city and the railway station. The situation was made even worse by a bomb which hit a tram, with extremely serious consequences. The toll that day was 12 dead and 20 wounded, all civilians.³¹ Obviously, the population was deeply shocked by the sight of the mangled corpses on the main street of the city.

Ten days later, the precious mosaics of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo were still on the ground and exposed to the elements. It took the institutional presence of the director general of fine arts in his hometown to get the restoration work underway before the rains caused further damage to the artefacts.³² The demolition and refurbishment of the old porch were carried out over the following 2 months.

In the context of this emergency intervention, a small dispute was documented between the restorers from Ravenna and those from Florence (sent by the *Opificio delle Pietre Dure*) regarding the method for detaching the theodoric mosaics.³³ Giuseppe Zampiga, who had long experience of restoring Ravenna's mosaics,³⁴ was open about his discontent: he considered the criteria followed by the restorers from the *Pietre Dure* too invasive for the detachment and reconstruction of the mosaics. In fact, as reported to Ricci, "Zampiga says he is outraged to see so many sections of mosaic ineptly removed that could easily have been repaired".³⁵ The situation, however, allowed no time for the discussion or debate of methods, and the work was in fact carried out relatively rapidly, with only the sections of mosaic which were in close contact with the affected façade being removed.³⁶

Contrary to the practice adopted by the Ravenna superintendency of filling the gaps in the mosaic with paint, in this case it was decided to provide for the total restoration of the collapsed decoration.

With respect to the question of making mosaics safe in the early years of the war, Corrado Ricci's active and determined position should be noted:

30 Santi Muratori (1874-1943). This figure is closely connected to the Classense Library of Ravenna of which he was director. In 1916 he also held the position of Honorary Royal Inspector of the monuments of Ravenna.

31 Letter from S. Muratori to C. Ricci, 12 February 1916, CLR Ricci Archive, CMR 1916, Vol. I-II, n. 31.

32 Letter from C. Ricci to G. Gerola, 22 February 1916, CLR Ricci Archive, CMR 1916, Vol. I-II, n. 42.

33 Letter from C. Ricci to S. Muratori, 20 April 1916, CLR Ricci Archive, CMR 1916, Vol. I-II, n. 98.

34 Stella, "*Quelle pitture ardite e disinvolve*", pp. 52-57.

35 Letter from the director of the National Museum of Ravenna to C. Ricci, 5 March 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916, Vol I-II, n. 47.

36 Letter from G. Gerola to C. Ricci, 29 February 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916, Vol I-II, n. 44.

One of the things that most troubled me in Ravenna and Venice was the fatalistic way in which the mosaics were left totally defenceless against the risk of exploding bombs that would certainly have brought about their total or near-total destruction. At first I could think of no better way than that of pasting canvases onto them, having seen how this (the application of canvases) had prevented damage to some mosaics in Rome, to all those in the Baptistery in Florence, and to the few parts treated with the same method in Ravenna[...].³⁷

A debate developed around this issue which also involved the Venetian environment in relation to the no less important problem of protecting the immense and fragile mosaic decoration of the basilica of San Marco. A question that was particularly close to the hearts of both Ricci and Luigi Marangoni, the engineer of the *Fabbrica di San Marco*, who feared the serious risk of large portions of the mosaic falling and the scattering of the tiles.³⁸ Events in Venice were far from reassuring, especially in light of the fire bomb that falls a few meters from the façade of San Marco on the 4th of September, 1916.³⁹

It should be noted that the international legislation of the time, established by art. 5 of the IX Hague Convention (1907), specified the need for commanders of naval forces to adopt specific measures to safeguard “buildings dedicated to the arts, sciences and historical monuments” from bombing.⁴⁰ According to this Convention, monuments were to be marked with specific visible signs. In Ravenna, therefore – though the discussion could also be extended to other cities, above all Venice – a wartime situation was emerging which was symptomatic of the impossibility of applying the Hague Conventions (1899 and 1907), which attempted to address the issue of the protection of monuments of historical and artistic value in the event of war. The aforementioned conventions, not yet contemplating the possibility of air strikes, defined specific limits only for land and naval bombing. In fact, as has been rightly observed, “Their adaptation and their application to aerial bombardment soon proved to be so ineffectual so much so as to be absolutely insufficient, especially in the face of the widespread use of air vehicles”.⁴¹ The public authorities were forced to come to terms with an entirely new type of warfare in a time when anti-aircraft defence was still in its infancy and rudimentary even from a technological point of view.⁴²

The awareness of the enormous risks faced by Ravenna was demonstrated by the pessimistic forecasts expressed by Corrado Ricci to the influential Monsignor Achille Ratti

37 Letter from C. Ricci to G. Gerola, October 1916, CLR Ricci Archive, Carteggio di Guerra (from now on C.G.), Vol. III, doc. n. 109a-d.

38 Letter from L. Marangoni to C. Ricci, 5 October 1916, from Venice, CLR Ricci Archive, C.G., Vol. III, doc. n. 105a-g; Letter from G. Cirilli to C. Ricci, 26 March 1916, CLR Ricci Archive, CMR 1916, Vol. I-II, doc. n. 80.

39 Letter from L. Marangoni to C. Ricci, 9 September 1916, from Venice, CLR Ricci Archive, C.G., Vol. III, doc. n. 85a-c.

40 G. Vedovato, *Protezione del patrimonio storico, artistico e culturale nella guerra moderna*, Conference held on 17 May 1961 in Palazzo Vecchio for the II international congress Société internationale de droit pénal militaire et de droit de la guerre (Empoli-Firenze: Poligrafico toscano, 1961), pp. 3-24.

41 Vedovato, *Protezione del patrimonio storico*, p. 4.

42 Scroccaro, *Ali su Venezia e terraferma*, pp. 129-136.

(the then-prefect of the Vatican Library who would become the next Pope in 1922 under the name of Pius XI) before Italy entered the conflict:

The danger lies in the incendiary bombs dropped from planes and almost all the coastal cities of the Adriatic are more or less exposed, Ravenna perhaps to a greater extent because it is just across the Adriatic sea from Pula, where the Austrian hangars are.⁴³

Above all Ricci's correspondence with his friend Santi Muratori documented his concerns and his active commitment to dealing with these events in terms of the conservation of artworks and monuments. In strictly chronological order, this was Muratori's account of the events of 1916 in Ravenna to his close friend and general director. A terse bulletin, not without criticism of the military authorities who, as the papers show, had left Ravenna and Porto Corsini without an effective air defence:

12 Feb, 12 dead and S. Apollinare.

3 May, attempted destruction of a large part of the city, centre, station.

11 July, bombs on the cemetery

16 July and 13 Sept, other airplanes scouting the Classe area

12 November, fresh aerial assault with bombs, three of which exploded near the station

2 December, alarm without consequences.

I had the honour of being present on each occasion.⁴⁴

One circumstance that made the situation even more difficult for the city's inhabitants was the strict censorship which allowed no disclosure of events, as Muratori sarcastically commented: "All the telegrams sent by the people of Ravenna were written along these lines: 'Everyone well – all the best'. Which meant, We had a shower of bombs here but thank goodness, none of them hit us".⁴⁵

An even more serious fact, which the mayor of Ravenna was forced to report to the ministry of War, was the intolerable delay with which warnings of enemy plane attacks arrived, with easily imaginable consequences.⁴⁶

Ricci, too, did not fail to put pressure on general Alfredo Dallolio⁴⁷ – as well as on ministers Martini, Ciuffelli and Barzilai⁴⁸ – to dedicate their attention to the case of Ravenna, which he defined as an "open city", invoking special protections

43 Letter from C. Ricci to A. Ratti, 7 May 1915, CLR Ricci Archive, CMR 1915, n. 71.

44 Letter from S. Muratori to C. Ricci, 12 May 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916, Vol I-II, n. 125; See also: Letter from G. Gerola to C. Ricci, 3 May 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916, Vol I-II, n. 110.

45 Letter from S. Muratori to C. Ricci, 20 February 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916, Vol. I-II, n. 37 and 37 bis.

46 Letter from F. Buzzi to ministry of War, 3 May 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916, Vol I-II, n. 122.

47 See M. Barsali, *Dallolio Alfredo* in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, Treccani online, Vol. XXXII (Roma: 1986), <https://www.treccani.it>

48 During the second Government of Salandra (from 5 November 1914 to 18 June 1916) Ferdinando Martini was minister of colonies, Augusto Ciuffelli was minister of public works and Salvatore Barzilai minister without portfolio and chair of an advisory commission for the Adriatic and Atesina regions.

for it like those enjoyed by Venice.⁴⁹ During the First World War, similar legal status, which was closely linked to the issue of the protection of cultural heritage, had not yet been applied to any city by specific international legislation.⁵⁰

A subsequent letter from Muratori to Ricci described the atmosphere of tension and panic that reigned in the city. The visit of general Florenzio Aliprandi who commanded the 'V Army Corps' and of which Del Boca provided a brief and merciless portrait,⁵¹ leaves little room for optimism.

The picture that emerges is as disheartening as it is credible:

[general Aliprandi] summoned the heads of department and of the institutes to inform them:

1. That there are no aircraft;
2. That there are no pilots;
3. That there are no cannons;
4. That we are at the mercy of the enemy (his exact words);
5. That any means we do have should be made available for the front and not for the defence of the city;
6. That Bologna Command receives piles of letters asking for defences for individual cities and that if they wanted to please everyone, etc.;
7. That there is nothing for the citizens of Ravenna to do but to have faith in the military authorities;
8. That the announcement of the four cannons assigned to Ravenna was made to satisfy public opinion;
9. That therefore defenceless, disappointed and in addition duped. [...] the city is not even equipped with a searchlight for night raids. We will see Dante's bones scattered outside his uncovered or destroyed tomb.⁵²

In this critical situation, parochial sentiments and rivalry towards other cities, such as Venice and Ancona, which had received better treatment in terms of military defence, also began to emerge. Muratori wrote the following to Ricci's wife, Elisa:

Ravenna is defenceless and the Porto Corsini battery is of no use to the city as the enemy aircraft avoid it. And the station's two small cannons (two ex-cannons) were taken from old ships and are too old. They even appear to be undergoing repairs. They need fighter planes. Venice has flocks of them [...].⁵³

49 Letter from C. Ricci to S. Muratori, 11 May 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916, Vol. I-II, n. 123.

50 See to this regard: G. Vedovato, *La città aperta nella seconda mondiale: i casi di Firenze e Roma* (Firenze: Biblioteca della Rivista di studi politici internazionali, 2002).

51 L. Del Boca, *Grande guerra, piccoli generali* (Torino: Utet, 2007), p. 54.

52 Letter from S. Muratori to C. Ricci, 9 May 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916, Vol. I-II, n. 121.

53 Letter from S. Muratori to E. Ricci, 12 May 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916 Vol. I-II, n. 124.

On the same day Muratori solicited Ricci's intervention even more urgently:

The cannon operators are therefore forced to shoot empirically and to aim as if at sparrows [...].

Dates: May 23, 1915 declaration of war and bombing of Porto Corsini.

February 12, 1916, first air raid on Ravenna

May 3 second raid

Between 23 May 1915 and 12 February 1916, between 12 February 1916 and

3 May a mountain of promises and no action.⁵⁴

Eventually, Ricci's solicitations seemed to obtain a result: general Dallolio informed him that a commission was organizing "a better-coordinated and effective anti-aircraft defence of the principal Adriatic cities".⁵⁵ Specifically, work began to equip the Ravenna and Rimini coastal sector with a team of fighter airplanes which were to come into action from June. Ricci had just returned to Rome from Venice where, on the evening of May 15th,⁵⁶ he found himself involved in the twelfth air raid carried out by the Austrian Air Force which had resumed its attacks on the lagoon city with the good weather.⁵⁷

At the end of May, there was some hope for Ravenna when two cannons and an unspecified number of defence aircraft arrived. Muratori was comforted by this recognition of his city, which felt less abandoned. This was thanks to the interest of his friend, general director of fine arts.⁵⁸

In the following months, Muratori continued to inform Ricci of the progress of the air raids which showed no sign of giving those remaining in the city respite; Porto Corsini was repeatedly hit. He described the raid of five enemy aircraft which attacked the cemetery on the 11th of July, underlining how well the population behaved. On the whole, he believed that the defence of the city was now more effective.⁵⁹

Given this scenario, Muratori considered the preventive protection work on monuments organized by the Ministry of Education useless without effective intensification of the city's anti-air defences which, in his opinion, was still too small and insufficient to guarantee it: "In addition to the lack of commitment, I find here a kind of contradiction. If on the one hand there is a need to resort to protections, on the other hand it will be necessary to intensify defences".⁶⁰ His worries focused on this issue, as he related to Ricci, who he reminded of the dangerous presence of the Almagià bullet factory,

54 Letter from S. Muratori to C. Ricci, 12 May 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916 Vol. I-II, n. 125.

55 Letter from A. Dallolio to C. Ricci, December 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916 Vol. I-II, n. 132.

56 Scarabello, *Il martirio di Venezia durante la Grande Guerra*, pp. 70-71.

57 Letter from C. Ricci to A. Dallolio, 23 May 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916 Vol. I-II, n. 134.

58 Letter from S. Muratori to C. Ricci, 31 May 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916 Vol. I-II, n. 146.

59 Letter from S. Muratori to C. Ricci, 11 July 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916 Vol. I-II, n. 168.

60 Letter from S. Muratori to C. Ricci, 26 September 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916 Vol. I-II n. 215.

whose activity on the Candiano canal is documented from 1916 to 1918.⁶¹ A factor Muratori considered decisive and which explained the interest of the Austrian planes in flying over the city. He even specified, “It is very clear to me that the lack of effect the Pope has had on Ravenna derives from this inconvenience”.⁶²

The Ravenna affair continued with further requests from Ricci to obtain more soldiers to be used for protecting artworks and at least eight anti-aircraft guns. This time, he asked Vincenzo Scialoja⁶³ – “given his authority for his ‘Adriatic’ mission”⁶⁴ – to intercede with the ministry of War. Agreeing with the requests of the director general, the minister Paolo Marrone announced the allocation of funds for Ravenna and its monuments, specifying at the same time the impossibility of assigning more soldiers; they could provide only prisoners of war.⁶⁵ He communicated this directly to Ricci with the undoubted intent of flattering him, identifying his work for the protection of national monuments with propaganda initiatives.⁶⁶ These were a strategic aspect of the war effort whose importance Italy was then beginning to recognize, albeit late and ineffectively.⁶⁷

The funding received for Ravenna proved insufficient to actually carry out the work, as was made clear by a series of letters from Gerola in the early months of 1917 in which he expressed his discontent and described the difficulties to the director general.⁶⁸

Ricci’s desperate – though fruitless – attempt to communicate with the Court of Vienna through the Pope in order to attenuate the situation of the city by virtue of its artistic relevance dates back to this period. In this regard, his own words revealed his state of mind and the futility of his pleas:

I worked with my authoritative fellow citizen Father Giovanni Genocchi, rector of the Missionari of Sapienza, to persuade the Pope to influence the Court of Vienna in order to distract those barbarians from bombing an open city like Ravenna with the risk of damaging some of its magnificent monuments. This was well known in Ravenna, but was distorted until it became a rumour that I had written directly to Zita, the Empress of Austria!⁶⁹

61 F.R. Scardaccione, ed., *Ministero per le armi e munizioni: contratti. Inventario* (Roma: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1995), pp. 107, 190, 232, 289.

62 Letter from S. Muratori to C. Ricci, 26 September 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916 Vol. I-II n. 215.

63 Scialoja Vittorio (1856-1933) was a minister without portfolio in 1916-1917 and headed the War Propaganda Office Abroad.

64 Letter from C. Ricci to A. Galante, 29 September 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916 Vol. I-II, n. 217.

65 Letter from P. Marrone to V. Scialoja, 15 October 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916 Vol. I-II, n. 257.

66 Letter from P. Marrone to C. Ricci, 21 October 1916, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1916 Vol. I-II, n. 259.

67 See, in particular: L. Tosi, *La propaganda italiana all'estero nella prima guerra mondiale. Rivendicazioni territoriali e politica delle nazionalità* (Udine: Del Bianco, 1977), pp. 35-78; M. Nezzo, *Prodromi a una propaganda di guerra: i rapporti Ogetti*, *Contemporanea*, VII (2003), pp. 319-322.

68 Letter from G. Gerola to C. Ricci, January 1917, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1917 Vol. I, n. 3.

69 See Ricci's note on the margin of the Index in CLR Ricci Archive, CMR 1917, Vol. I.

Following the rout of Caporetto, the situation became increasingly critical since, given the enormous advances the Austro-German army had made in the Veneto region, the real emergency now was the risk of an imminent invasion of Venice.⁷⁰

Through Muratori, Ricci put pressure on the archbishop of Ravenna to take the precious Throne of Maximian to the Vatican, and above all worried about protecting the famous statue of Guidarello Guidarelli.⁷¹

In fact, despite his proven patriotism, he was unable to completely conceal his pessimism when he wrote to Muratori:

I sincerely hope that the enemy will soon be halted and chased away, but my hopes are one thing and the facts are another. It is therefore no bad thing to be sufficiently cautious [...] Do not forget that in extreme times the need (for materials), especially metal, is furious. Why, for example, cannot the Archbishop entrust these objects to the Vatican for the duration of the war? [...] Ah, what days! The work of my office to transport to safety the artistic heritage of vast swathes of Veneto and Lombardy is impossible to describe.⁷²

Though not hiding the profound aversion to socialism which he shared with Ricci, Muratori's vision was even more pessimistic. It is clear that the defeat at Caporetto had greatly shaken the certainties of the ruling classes and of the Italian bourgeoisie and created an even deeper fracture in society, exacerbating class conflict.⁷³ Italy was completely unprepared for the seriousness of the event, and the matter was especially disconcerting for the army's top brass, Cadorna and Badoglio, who were responsible for enormous errors of judgement that would have immense repercussions from both a military and non-military perspective.⁷⁴ Thanks also to the silence imposed by censorship, the defeat immediately assumed political and symbolic significance for both the ruling and popular classes. The prospect of the collapse of the liberal state has been amply highlighted, and fear of this collapse had a profound effect upon civil society,⁷⁵ there even being talk of the Caporetto disaster being the result of a moral crisis in the army.⁷⁶

Muratori communicated to Ricci the refusal of the archbishop of Ravenna to transport the works of art to Rome because, given the critical turn of events, Rome, too, was considered to be in danger; an attitude which, in reality, revealed a deep-rooted diffidence towards the Italian state:

70 F.R. Liguori, *La difesa del patrimonio artistico italiano contro i pericoli della guerra*, in G. Rossini, ed., *Venezia fra arte e guerra 1866-1918* (Milano: Mazzotta, 2003), pp. 173-181.

71 See: C. Ricci, *Arte retrospettiva: la statua di Guidarello Guidarelli*, *Emporium*, Vol. XIII (1901), pp. 289-305.

72 Letter from C. Ricci to S. Muratori, 13 November 1917, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1917 Vol. I, n. 220.

73 See: Labanca, *Caporetto*, pp. 78-84.

74 Del Boca, *Grande guerra*, pp. 175-188.

75 Labanca, *Caporetto*, pp. 61-87.

76 P. Melograni, *Storia politica della Grande Guerra 1915-1918* (Milano: Mondadori, 1998), pp. 400-404. For a thorough overview of the various accounts of the defeat at Caporetto, see: M. Isnenghi and P. Pozzato, *Oltre Caporetto. La memoria in cammino. Voci dai due fronti* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2018).

Apart from the German advances and the collapse of the Italian forces, the fact is that various naval commands are being transferred here from Venice, that Porto Corsini is being filled with airplanes, that Candiano is a submarine station and who knows what else. There are frequent air raids and we must be prepared for anything. There's no point deluding ourselves: the horizon is worrying on all sides. Signor Corrado. The fate of Ravenna hangs by a thread. In their blinders, the Bolsheviks of Italy have led us to this, and plan even worse.⁷⁷

The reference to the enemy's huge propaganda campaign involving the distribution of pamphlets from aeroplanes and which, Muratori believed, had made an impression on the population of the countryside, which was largely of socialist and republican ideas is interesting:

[The Austrians] have returned to the reasons for our disaster, announcing 26,000 prisoners and 2,500 cannons; they advise us to no longer attempt impossible resistance; they urge the people to undertake a revolution like that in Russia if they want peace. Call it coarseness, foolishness, whatever you like, but in the countryside it has an effect. [...] the hatred against "the gentlemen who wanted the war" continues to grow, and the [?] of the spirits now makes all the rural plebs invoke and wish for the arrival of the Austrians: the most reasonable of them rejoice in our worst defeats because in this way, they say, the war will end.⁷⁸

Faced with the blunt refusal of the religious institution to authorize transport to Rome, Ricci succeeded in his intent only thanks to the mediation of monsignor Achille Ratti who vouched for the precious deposit.⁷⁹ In the letter, the general manager could not conceal from Ratti his pessimism, which justified these measures regarding the city. Note his difficulty in balancing his position with his efforts to appear patriotic and trusting:

I, of course, think that the enemy will be stopped and driven back and will not come down this side of the Po anyway, but in any case Ravenna will in all probability be exposed to aerial bombardments of extreme seriousness. For ourselves, we can have faith in the best possible outcome; but the measures must be taken from fear of the worst.⁸⁰

Finally, at the end of December 1917, Muratori was able to announce to Ricci that the situation in Ravenna had normalized. This good news, however, was followed by a new looming threat, as we will see in more detail below:

I think, however, that it is a great satisfaction for you to have linked your work as Director of the A. and B.A. [Antiquity and Fine Arts] to such a terrible period of history. Here in Ra. [Ravenna] everything is ready for any eventuality – in the event of danger even the library would be

77 Letter from S. Muratori to C. Ricci, 17 November 1917, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1917, Vol. I, n. 224.

78 Letter from S. Muratori to C. Ricci, 17 November 1917, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1917, Vol. I, n. 224.

79 Letter from C. Ricci to A. Ratti, November 1917, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1917, Vol. I, doc. n. 226.

80 Letter from C. Ricci to A. Ratti, November 1917, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1917, Vol. I, doc. n. 226. See also Letter from A. Ratti to C. Ricci, 20 November 1917, BCRA, F.R., Cart. Monumenti. 1917, Vol. I, doc. n. 228.

gathered together in a single shipment for a possible departure. Very bad news regarding the requisition of the pine forests of Ravenna. Farewell, glory and beauty of thirty centuries! And there is no escape. The needs of the military – or better, of the war – take precedence. An agreement has been made with the Mayor to press for the Classe area to be left alone, but it is a horrendous thing. People say: we will replant it. Can you do anything? I fear you cannot [...].⁸¹

As we know, due to a series of factors, between November and December the Italian army won the battle on the Piave. On the German side, by the end of November, the Italian front had become completely secondary to the western one, and German troops and materiel were in fact withdrawn.⁸²

The convulsive flow of Ricci's correspondence testifies to a vision of events that gradually became more positive than that during the first post-Caporetto operational phase: the end of October 1917. In those days the news coming from the front was extremely worrying, since after the day of the fateful breakthrough in Caporetto (the 24th of October), the retreat of the Italian army had ended on the 8th of November between Grappa and Piave, where the front line had stabilized.

In the first days of November, the Directorate General of Fine Arts could only count on the strength and commitment of several isolated figures – supervisors Gino Fogolari, Ettore Modigliani, Giuseppe Gerola, Arduino Colasanti and of course the brilliant lieutenant Ugo Ojetti – who were sent to strategic operational locations to handle what were emergency conditions. The organizational structure of the safeguarding, based on the coordination of the central government, was seriously jeopardized. This was also due to the enormous logistical problems linked to the difficulty of communications and the scarce availability of military personnel and railway vehicles for the transport of enormous quantities of works of art – the entire artistic and bibliographic heritage of the Triveneto region – that had to be secured beyond the Apennines: in Rome, Pisa and Florence. An ambitious but also extremely risky undertaking, which took shape from the end of October 1917, continuing unabated and with enormous difficulties until the spring of 1918.⁸³ It should, however, be emphasized that the organization of the protection, in logistical and economic terms, it was largely military in nature.

The case of Ravenna's Pinewood

1917 – without doubt the worst year of the war for Italy – ended with another emergency for Ravenna which involves its historic pine forest, threatened, in this case, by the Third Army of the Italian army, which in December of that year requisitioned it in order to cut it down for timber.⁸⁴

Recognition of its value in environmental and identity terms had been in place since the late nineteenth century when the pine forest had seen the number of its admirers increase thanks to its centuries-old history, rich in cultural references.⁸⁵ Its powerful symbolic value

81 Letter from S. Muratori to C. Ricci, 24 Decemebr 1917, BCRA, F.R., Cart. Monumenti. 1917, Vol. I, doc. n. 240.

82 Labanca, *Caporetto*, p. 67.

83 Stella, *Carteggio di Guerra*, pp.147-160.

84 Letter from S. Muratori to C. Ricci, 24 Decemeber 1917, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1917, Vol. I, n. 240.

85 The pine forest of Ravenna is represented by Dante in the XXVIII Canto of *Purgatorio* and hosts the short story by Nastagio degli Onesti on the fifth day of the *Decamerone*.

had a particularly historical-literary origin, which had proved helpful to the unitary process of building a national identity.⁸⁶ From this, a local debate had begun on the fate of the Ravenna pine forest in which its artistic-cultural needs were in conflict with the agricultural development of the area and its profitability as a source of timber.

It was in this context that the draft law was conceived in 1905 by Ravenna native Luigi Rava, who promoted a cultural operation that proved somewhat questionable in terms of its actual success in safeguarding the forest, and which was criticized for this reason by Ricci. However, the Ravenna pine forest was recognized as a national monument, and was the first example in Italy of this new type of safeguarding.⁸⁷

At the end of 1917, such recognition was considered secondary with respect to the priorities dictated by the *pro salus patriae* needs of the war. After having confirmed that the order to cut down the pine forest had been issued by the Supreme Command, Ricci did not hesitate to write a persuasive letter to prime minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando on the 28th of December:

Distinguished Friend, I make recourse directly to you, invoking your help to avoid an event which, in addition to serious artistic consequences, would certainly also have serious moral consequences. In 'Purgatory', Dante defines the pine woods as "Divine forest, dense and alive".⁸⁸

Another no less important aspect that needs to be considered was the impact on foreign public opinion and the dishonour that the destruction of the historical pine forest would bring to Italy, which was on the front line of the ideological opposition that the protection of the artistic heritage had assumed during the conflict in the face of the artistic heritage's inevitable loss and destruction.⁸⁹

The minister of Education, Augusto Berenini, imposed restrictions on the military administration so that at least the Classe pine wood should be preserved intact, addressing president Orlando in these terms:

All this represents not a concession but the greatest sacrifice that can be made so that the wonderful and famous pine forest of Ravenna is not sacrificed. I repeat in all conscience that if the world of scholars and artists, returning to Ravenna after the war, no longer found the pine forest, they would ask themselves if it had been worth protesting against the damage done to the monuments by our enemies when we did not hesitate to ruin one of the most sacred things that Italy possessed [...].⁹⁰

The story of Ravenna's pine forest during the First World War continued and ended during an intense negotiation between the General Superintendency of the Army, president Orlando and the heads of the departments involved: the hon. Roberto De Vito, then

86 A. Malfitano, Luigi Rava e la lotta per la nuova pineta "storica" di Ravenna, in A. Varni, ed, *A difesa di un patrimonio nazionale* (Ravenna: Longo editore, 2002), pp. 91-119.

87 See: L. Piccioni, *Il volto amato della Patria. Il primo movimento per la protezione della natura in Italia nel 1880-1934* (Trento: Editrice Temi, 2014).

88 Letter from C. Ricci to V.E. Orlando, 28 December 1917, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1917 Vol. I, n. 244.

89 See in particular: M. Nezzo, Accenni nazionalistici negli scritti d'arte su periodico: 1914-1920: una campionatura, *Tecla. Temi di critica e letteratura artistica*, I (2010), pp. 91-97.

90 Letter from A. Berenini to V.E. Orlando, 6 January 1918, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1918, n. 8.

general commissioner for national fuels and Augusto Berenini.⁹¹ The municipality of Ravenna was forced to accept a compromise solution – accepted and approved with pragmatism by Ricci – which, in principle, provided for the conservation of the entire Classe pine forest and the transfer to the military administration of a part of the San Vitale pine forest.⁹²

Unfortunately, it was the subsequent definition of the (not inconsequential) details of this negotiation – the exact delimitation of the areas granted for cutting and subject to revision according to military needs – that complicated matters and ultimately frustrated attempts to prevent the further depletion of the woodland.

In November 1918, after the war was over, commissioner De Vito described it to Ricci as an «abomination». Despite the precise provisions of the ordinance, the relentless deforestation of other portions of the historic pine forest of San Vitale had already begun.⁹³

Conclusions

These events described above highlight the difficulties of protecting the artistic and monumental heritage of north-eastern Italy in a period of total war such as the Great War. In such a complex and unprecedented context, conservation issues clearly became secondary to the nation's military priorities which, as we have seen, became incompatible with the needs of safeguarding.

The circumstances of the war clearly highlighted the limits of the actual operational capacity of the Directorate General for Antiquities and Fine Arts, due to its non-decision-making role with respect to other departments and the scarcity of financial means with which it found itself operating. This notwithstanding, it should be stressed that the entire operation of protecting cultural heritage was effectively the first safeguarding operation of unified Italy and was carried out across the national territory. It was made possible thanks to the new organizational and legislative structure of the “Italian system of fine arts”⁹⁴ devised by figures such as Corrado Ricci.

It is in fact necessary to recognize the active and increasingly powerful presence of the state in the action of the superintendencies themselves (peripheral offices of the Directorate General of Fine Arts) since before the beginning of the conflict, which reached its peak in the crisis generated by the defeat at Caporetto. In its most dramatic moment, the war highlighted a break with the past: the real danger of being invaded by the Austro-Germanic army underlined the collective and fundamentally unitary value of safeguarding initiatives for the artistic patrimony of the more remote

91 Letter from A. Berenini to R. De Vito, 22 February 1918, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1918, n. 24.

92 Letter from S. Muratori to C. Ricci, January 1918, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1918, n. 6.

93 Letter from R. De Vito to C. Ricci, 18 November 1918, CLR, Ricci Archive, CMR 1918, n. 219.

94 A. Emiliani, La nascita e il cammino del “sistema delle arti” (1907-2007) in *Dizionario biografico dei soprintendenti storici dell'arte (1904-1974)* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2007), pp. 17-29.

municipalities and cities of north-eastern Italy. A fact that shows, once again, how this dramatic experience was the country's first unifying experience.

These considerations allow us to confirm the validity of the method and preventive approach adopted by Ricci, understood both as the planning of interventions and the recruiting of highly qualified figures with a clear understanding of the events and political dynamics in progress. Above all, it reaffirms the relevance of the far-sighted policy of the preventive campaigns of transfers imposed by the central powers, which was not fully implemented due to the set of factors that came into play regardless of the specialized issues of the safeguarding work, in particular, the numerous difficulties raised by both local administrations and religious institutions, which reflected municipal divisions and mistrust towards central government and which were the cause of delays and, in some cases, a serious obstacle to the transfer of works of art. As evidenced by his papers, these issues and controversies, some of which took on a certain public resonance, made Ricci's role much more burdensome for the entire duration of the conflict.

After the defeat of the central empires, Ricci did his utmost to protect Italian interests during the peace talks, favouring a policy aimed at claiming back Italian artistic heritage from Austria.⁹⁵ In September 1919, however, he resigned from his role as general manager due to conflicts with the new administrative structure of the government of F. Saverio Nitti.⁹⁶ The same year, Ricci was appointed the first president of the Institute of Archeology and History of Art in Rome and held important positions in the archaeological field until his death (in 1934) thanks to his position in the fascist regime.⁹⁷

It has been noted⁹⁸ that the initiatives taken by the Directorate General for Antiquities and Fine Arts and by the Superintendencies of Monuments and Galleries of northern Italy for the protection of the artistic and monumental heritage during the First World War doubtlessly represent a significant point of reference for understanding the protection plans developed in the 1930s in anticipation of a new war. Although this fact is not mentioned in official publications of the time, the photographic and archival documentation confirms the close link.⁹⁹ In terms of strategies of intervention and timing, the continuity with the defence program implemented for the Great War is evident,¹⁰⁰ confirming it as a pilot project. In fact, the large scale transfer of movable works of art to safe shelters began in 1940. Much has been written about these events and the complexity of the Italian

95 Stella, *Carteggio di Guerra*, pp. 181-190.

96 Stella, *Carteggio di Guerra*, pp. 13-20.

97 M. Pomponi, L'Istituto Nazionale di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte in E. Parlato, M. Pomponi, C. Valeri, eds, *Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte, contaminazioni, innesti e dissonanze* (Gorgonzola: Edizioni Quasar, 2019), pp. 133-156.

98 F. Cristiano, I piani di protezione: le origini, in A. Capaccioni, A. Paoli, R. Ranieri, eds, *Le biblioteche e gli archivi durante la seconda guerra mondiale: il caso italiano* (Bologna: Ed. Pendragon, 2007), p. 2.

99 P. Callegari and V. Curzi, eds., *Venezia: la tutela per immagini. Un caso esemplare dagli archivi della Fototeca Nazionale*. Exhibition catalog (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2005).

100 S. Rinaldi, I monumenti italiani e la guerra in M.G. Fadiga, ed., *Protezione e recupero del patrimonio culturale durante I conflitti* (Roma: Ugucione Ranieri di Sorbello Foundation, 2011), pp. 69-87.

scenario.¹⁰¹ The damage this time involved the entire national territory; the increased destructive power of weapons combined with the systematic raiding of the Nazi authorities made the damage inflicted on Italy's artistic and monumental heritage that much more tragic. The strategy adopted by the Austrian air force to intentionally damage monuments during the First World War has been highlighted.¹⁰² This strategy aimed principally to strike the cities containing the largest amount of artistic heritage which, due to their symbolic nature, were targets of extraordinary power from an emotional point of view. The low altitude at which the aeroplanes flew made it possible to define with some precision where the bombs would fall, which demonstrates the ruthlessness of Austria's plan to damage the Italian monumental heritage.¹⁰³

Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges funding support from the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of Italy as part of the initiatives for the 'Centenary 1915-18'.

Funding

The authors received funding support from the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of Italy as part of the initiatives for the 'Centenary 1915-18'.

ORCID iD

Eleonora Maria Stella  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7296-2514>

-
- 101 Here I will only mention: P. Rotondi, Capolavori d'arte sottratti ai pericoli della guerra e alla rapina tedesca, *Studi Montefeltrani, III, S. Leo* (1975), pp. 7-34; A. Emiliani, L'opera di tutela per la salvaguardia del patrimonio artistico nella guerra 1940-45: Pasquale Rotondi ed Emilio Lavagnino in L. Ciancabilla, ed., *Bologna in guerra. La città, i monumenti, i rifugi antiaerei* (Bologna: Minerva, 2010), pp. 9-22; F. Bottari, *Rodolfo Siviero. Avventure e recuperi del più grande agente segreto dell'arte* (Roma: Castelveccchi, 2013), pp. 69-86; I. Bruno, La salvaguardia del patrimonio artistico di Montecassino durante il secondo conflitto mondiale: opere, personaggi, vicende, in C. Bajamonte, M. Nezzo, *Arte e Guerra. Storie dal Risorgimento all'età contemporanea* (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2021), pp. 161-175; R. Cassanelli, "Guerra contro L'Arte" in Friuli Venezia Giulia. Le difficoltà della tutela, 1940-1945, in R. Cassanelli, R. Fabiani, R. Scopas Sommer, eds, *La protezione dei monumenti e delle opere d'arte in Friuli Venezia Giulia nella seconda guerra mondiale* (Trieste: Riccigraf, 2021), pp. 93-118.
- 102 Treccani, *Monumenti e centri storici*, pp. 108-109.
- 103 For an account of the damage and destruction during World War I, see Treccani, *Monumenti e centri storici*, pp. 39-108. In particular see: Appendice -Statistica delle chiese rovinata dalla Guerra compilata a cura dell'Opera di Soccorso per le chiese rovinata dalla guerra, pp. 131-136.