



NUL - New Urban Languages  
Conference Proceedings  
Milan, 19-21 June 2013

Planum. The Journal of Urbanism, n.27, vol.2/2013  
www.planum.net | ISSN 1723-0993  
Proceedings published in October 2013

## Urban transformations

### Ghetto of Rome in the sixteenth century to the early twentieth century

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The purpose of the research is to study a characteristic area of Rome, named Rione Sant'Angelo, where Ghetto was built in the XVI° Century. From XVI° to XX° Century, Ghetto was important for this place because the articulated urban fabric has linked points that became the most important spots also today, but, after the demolition of the walls of the Ghetto, lost their original function.

The urban projects, published after the 1870, proposed, in replacement of the "serraglio", to build four block with Sinagoga which are totally out of the urban context nowadays.

Thanks to the researches that I have done through map collections, old illustrations and photos, historic books and a three-dimensional reconstruction, from which I have extracted important sections, I understand the urban quality and the life which was led in a little space like the Ghetto.

**Keywords:** development, demolition, reconstruction

#### 1. Introduction

Rione Sant'Angelo is the smallest among the Roman Rioni. It is located on the left bank of the Tevere in front of Isola Tiberina and is bordered to the west by Rione Regola, to the north by Rioni Sant'Eustachio e Pigna, east and south by Rione Campitelli and Rione Ripa.

This part of Rome was called Rione XI on May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1743 by Pope Benedetto XIV, but its history dates back to the time of Augusto, since in this area were built the Teatro di Balbo, the Circo Flaminio, the Portico di Ottavia and the Teatro di Marcello, which we can still admire. Therefore an important place since ancient times, that has been a landmark of the capital through the centuries.

During the sixteenth century the area comes back to be the center of Roman life and undergoes a new, decisive transformation when Pope Paolo IV, following the moves of the Patriarch of Venice, decided to build walls intended to confine the area inhabited by Romans Jews. Ghetto of Rome was born in 1555 because of this radical choice and according to the bolla "*Cum Nimis Absurdum*" (Milano A., 1964), from this moment on the structure of Rione will be divided more and more through small streets and large squares linking with accesses to "serraglio delli Ebrei".



Roma centro storico:

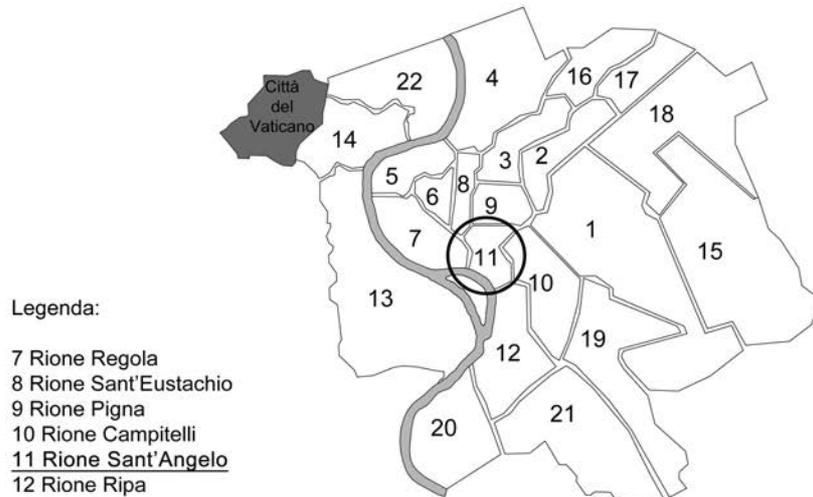


Figure 1: *Rione Sant'Angelo and its location*

These transformations helped to give life and character to one of the most popular Rione in Rome, although nowadays, the existing urban layout is barely comprehensible, having suffered major changes between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These changes are related both to hygienic reasons and ethical motivations - it was unacceptable the existence of a purpose-built “serraglio” for the Roman Jews. After the annexation of Rome to the Kingdom of Italy, in fact, with the new town planning, it was necessary to clean all areas affected by the floods of the Tevere, and, particularly, the buildings of Ghetto, which dipped really inside the waters of the river.

The implementation of the new Town Planning of 1888, caused the complete demolition of the whole Ghetto and the loss of characteristic streets as via delle Azimelle, vicolo del Pancotto, vicolo Capocciuto and the historical via Rua (Benedetti S. et al., 1989). They were replaced by two new roads that divided the area into four blocks, one of which was donated to the Jewish community for the construction of the synagogue, which was opened in 1914.

The Jewish carried on living in this neighborhood and in the surrounding areas, so that on January 16, 1943, in this same place, the German soldiers captured and transferred 1022 Jews to the concentration camp in Auschwitz.

## 2. The preliminary study

The first approach to the study of the area of Ghetto was carried on through an inspection joined to a photographic collection that show particularly useful to understand the relationship between the remains of the old urban structure of Rione Sant'Angelo and the current status. The traces of the ancient structure are few, mainly related to pre-existing archaeological remains and hardly related to the current structure of the city; therefore it was required an historical and documental analysis to understand how this dynamic and densely populated neighborhood originally was. The study has been going on through the research of a current map, literary and iconographic sources, in addition it was necessary to develop the research about historic sources with the collection of pictures and ancient maps that could show in a clearly way the transformation of this part of the city and the life that was led into the small area also to understand the best methods of constructions and expansion over the centuries. This urban area has been a Ghetto for four centuries (from 1550 until the end of the nineteenth century), so we selected the most significant historical maps for each period, to show clearly the expansion of Ghetto through the centuries highlighting new doors and buildings.

Among sixteenth century's maps we chose the old maps of L. Bufalini (1551), M. Cartaro (1576), S. Du Perac (1577) e A. Tempesta (1593), among the seventeenth century's those of G.B. Falda (1667) and G. De la Fuille (1691). The most useful maps of the eighteenth century are those of G.B. Nolli (1736-44) and G. Vasi (1781) while we selected the maps of L. Nisi Cavalieri (1863) and C. Scarpitti (1916) among those of the nineteenth and twentieth century.



Figure 2. 1551 – Rome of L. Bufalini  
 Figure 3. 1576 – Rome of M. Cartaro



Figure 4. 1577 – Rome of S. Du Perac  
 Figure 5. 1593 – Rome of A. Tempesta

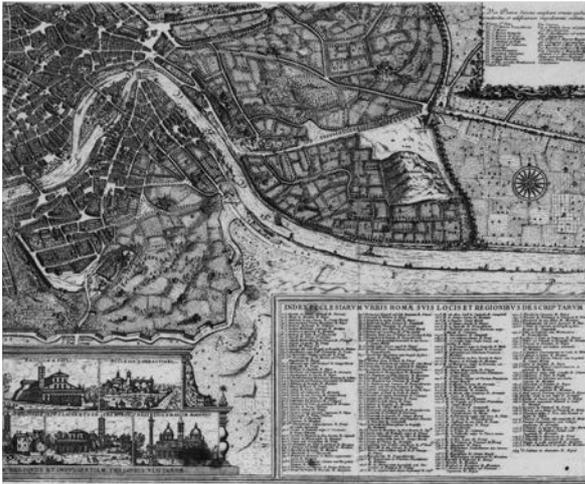


Figure 6. 1667 – Rome of G.B. Falda; Figure 7. 1691 – 1700 – Rome of G. De La Fuille

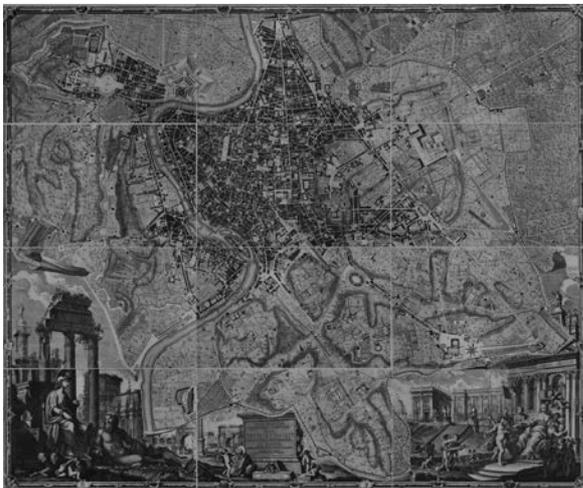


Figure 8. 1748 – Rome of G.B. Nolli; Figure 9. 1781 – Rome of G. Vasi



Figure 10. 1863 – Rome of L. Nisi Cavaliere; Figure 11. 1916 – Rome of C. Scarpitti

The transition from the first maps showing the birth and development of the wall, to the final maps, makes us understand how the district's structure undergoes to a radical and decisive change without leaving any trace of the previous structures. Rome over the centuries underwent major demolitions and new constructions left no trace of historical evidence but display the will to leave a strong imprint on the city. What is striking about the story of the Ghetto it's not only the radical transformation of the urban area over the centuries, but the fact that this way of doing, that belongs to the Renaissance and we might call "old", is employed in recent times so as to leave photographic traces. The image of the area burned to the ground, recognizable only by the remains of the ancient city (Teatro di Marcello and Portico di Ottavia) and the course of the Tevere, dismays and calls to mind the desire to obscure a historical memory that could have been better expressed through the preservation and respect of a fragile old structure.

After selecting the engravings necessary to the study (Milano A., 1964), the next step was to identify the most important topographic points of the city that haven't undergone radical changes over the centuries, so they are the fixed points of the urban history. These places are essential because can help the understanding of urban transformation. The first topographic points are those buildings constructed before "serraglio" as Colosseo, Pantheon, Campidoglio, Piazza Navona and Teatro di Marcello. The second point's selection was inside the Rione and, after a careful study of its history, we chose Teatro di Marcello, Portico di Ottavia, Palazzo Mattei, Palazzo Costaguti, Palazzo Cenci and Isola Tiberina. Due to the practical need to compare the historical and contemporary maps we made two separated comparison researches in order to understand the elements that aren't modified and the transformations of district. We need to emphasize that the points inside the district are mainly sixteenth-century buildings located outside the Recinto of Ghetto; besides the shape of Isola Tiberina changes in all the historical maps, but its location is very important, since it is a point of reference of the area through the centuries.

The first comparison between the actual city and the 1551 map shows clearly that the urban structure is comparable with the contemporary city, indeed it seems that can be distinguished what would later become via dei Falegnami, via dei Funari e via del Portico di Ottavia. In seventeenth-century maps, as in the later ones, you can better notice the main squares (piazza Mattei, piazza Costaguti, piazza dei Cenci e piazza Campitelli) and the further streets that have played an important role in the history of the Recinto, as via della Reginella and via di Sant'Ambrogio.

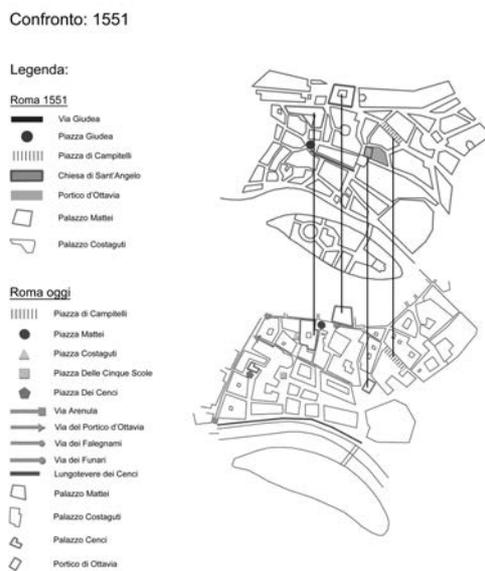


Figure 12. *comparison between Rione Sant'Angelo in 1551 and the current situation*

So the Recinto of Ghetto, is studied through its progressive planimetric development between Via dei Cenci and Teatro Marcello, in a second moment with the addition of the grounds along the bank of the Tevere and finally, with the purchase of the "braccio leoniano" (Benedetti S. et al. 1989). The extension of "serraglio", therefore, seems to proceed according to a gradual expansion of the borders, with the result of contracting the external space. When the planimetric expansion comes to end, contemporarily begins the height development, due to the increase of the resident population, caused by the emigration of Jews coming from the rest of Italy, who thought it was one of the most liberal Ghetto.

### 3. The historical reconstruction

So it was possible to redraw the planimetric organization and then to begin an historical research of all key points of the area, in each map. Thanks to the sources found, it was possible to understand the development of roads, streets and buildings outside the Recinto and rebuild both the network, position and height of "serraglio's" buildings. We noticed that the oldest street was via Rua, which linked the entry from piazza Giudea to the second door, located in the direction of Portico di Ottavia, and to the third door that opened into via di Ponte Quattro Capi ;

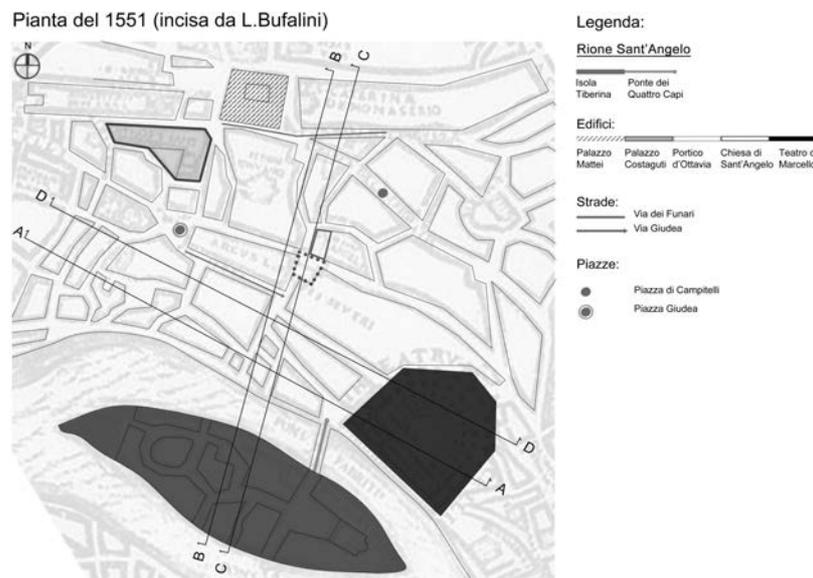


Figure 13. analysis of the map of L. Bufalini

since 1600, after the annexation of lands on the bank of the Tevere allowed by Sisto V, was opened via Fiumara, which was important because it had the purpose of connecting two new accesses in the direction of via dei Cenci and the Ponte Fabricio.

From the analysis of the map of the eighteenth century it is clear that the road network become thicker in order to organize, in the better way, the internal connections, so via delle Azzimelle links via Rua with piazza delle Cinque Scole to the North side, vicolo Capocciuto and Via Catalana in the East, but, after crossing piazzetta delle Azimelle and piazzetta Catalana, it is possible to reach also via Fiumara located in the South of Ghetto. Furthermore from piazza Rua, situated in the North, walking through the street of the same name, we come to another important point of Ghetto that is piazza delle Tre Cannelle, which is a melting point of the three main streets: via Rua, via delle Azimelle and via Fiumara.

It is important focusing on the history of Piazza delle Cinque Scole, that gathered the five Jewish Schools: the *Scola Nova*, the *Scola del Tempio*, the *Siciliana* with Italian rite, the *Castigliana* with Spanish rite and the

*Catalana*, the most important from architectural point of view, because it was built by Girolamo Rainaldi in 1628.

Outside the Recinto, piazza Giudea played an important role because it was the meeting point between Via di Sant'Ambrogio (which started from Piazza Mattei), via di Santa Maria del Pianto and via di Pescheria (which started from piazza di Pescheria); as well as, this square was important because it marked one of the historic entry to the Ghetto with also piazza di Pescheria, where was located the fish market.



Figure 14. analysis of the map of G.B. Falda

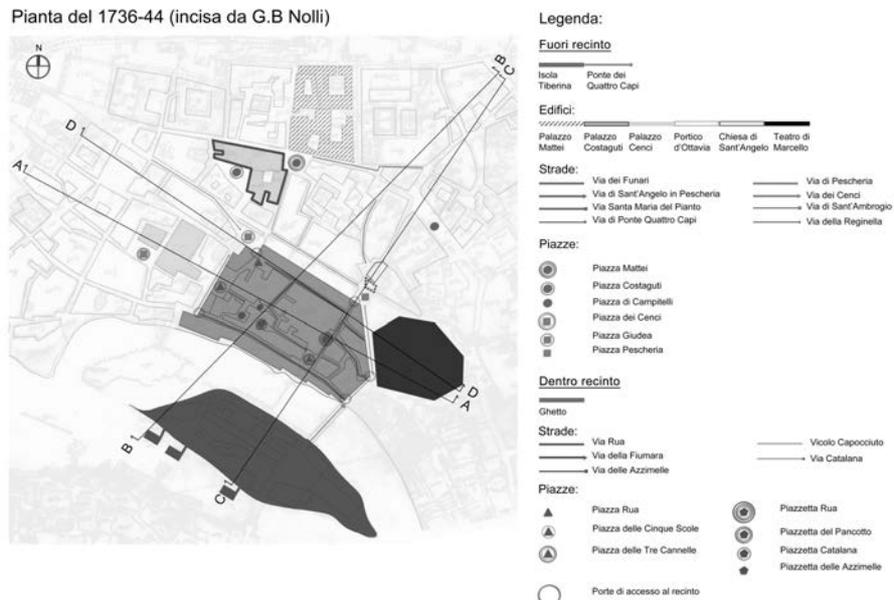


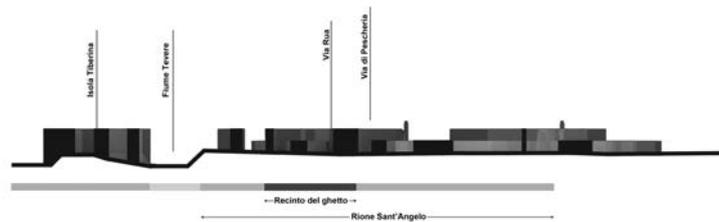
Figure 15. analysis of the map of G.B. Nolli

The Jews were allowed to go to these places only in specific times, because their life inside the Recinto was limited by strict rules relating to both the hours of opening and closing of doors, at sunrise and sunset, and rules relating to signs of identification needed to be recognised when they crossed the doors of the Ghetto; moreover, the laws regulated the work that could be carried out by the Jews, in fact in the papal law was clear that they could not work in any commercial activity except selling rags and used clothing. Also, as it was written, they could not own any real estate, so they began to collect gold and money that could be lend to popes and anyone else (Milano A., 1964).

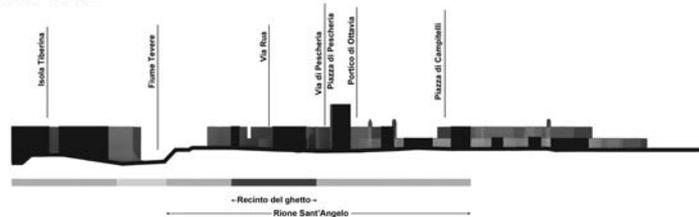
#### 4. Reconstruction of the height development

In order to better tell the story of this part of town it is necessary to find historical sources that allow us to suppose the heights of buildings (Bonaga E., Flammini M., 1975). For this reason it is needed to build the three-dimensional model to extract significant sections necessary to understand the architecture of Ghetto comparing with the architectural and urban language of surrounding area. So, four sections were made: two transverse and two longitudinal following the development of the area that follow the course of the river. The first two were chosen in order to explain the expansion that arrive at the bank of the Tevere and the relationship with the Isola Tiberina, the other sections are useful to understand the progressive contraction of the surrounding neighborhood and the relationship with Teatro di Marcello and noble buildings. From the analysis of the sections is clear that the area, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, has a remarkable development in height, up to reach an average height of buildings to six floors.

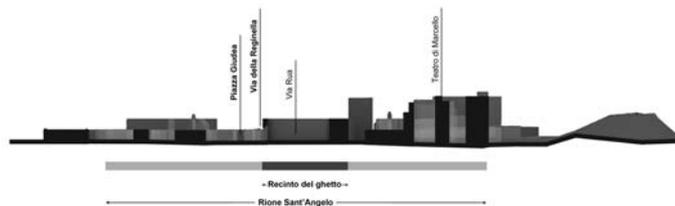
Sezione BB - 1576.



Sezione CC - 1576.



Sezione DD - 1576.



Sezione AA - 1576.

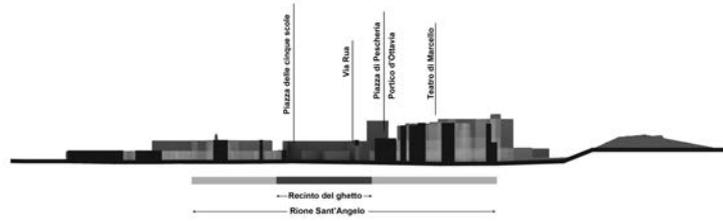
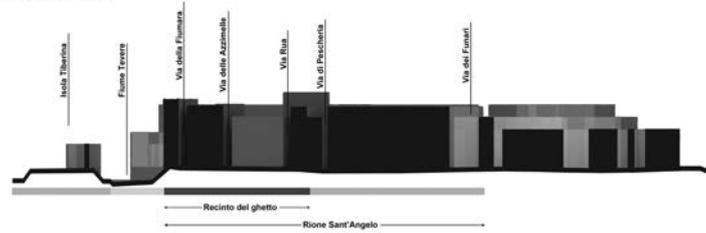
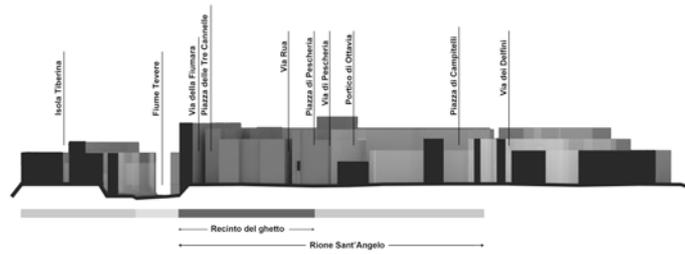


Figure 16. sections of the first Recinto of Ghetto and surrounding buildings

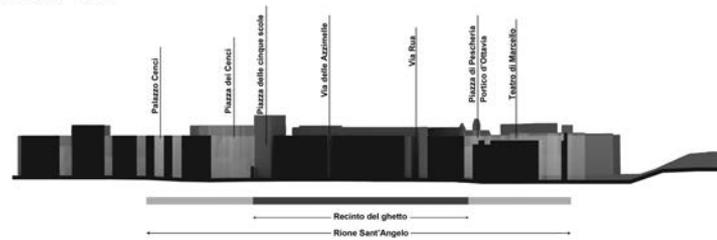
Sezione BB - 1863.



Sezione CC - 1863.



Sezione AA - 1863.



Sezione DD - 1863.

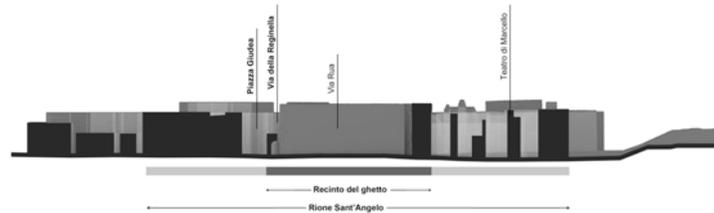
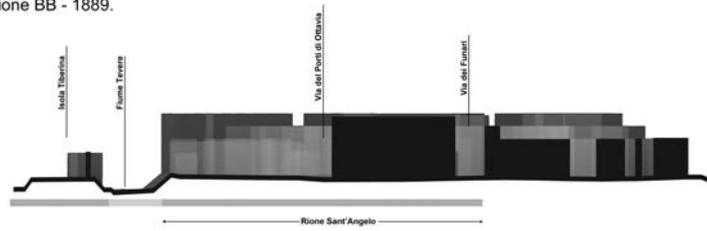


Figure 6. sections of the latest expansion of Ghetto and surrounding buildings

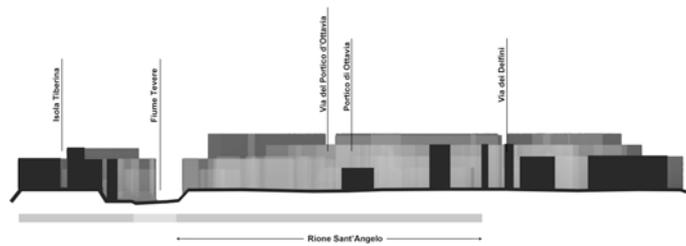


Figure 7: *demolition of Ghetto and building of Sinagoga*

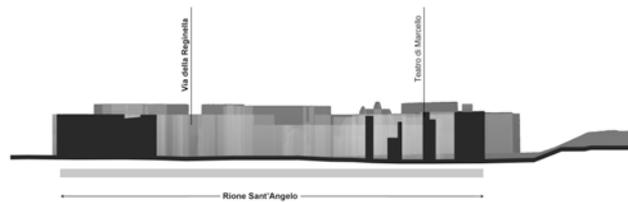
Sezione BB - 1889.



Sezione CC - 1889.



Sezione DD - 1889.



Sezione AA - 1889.

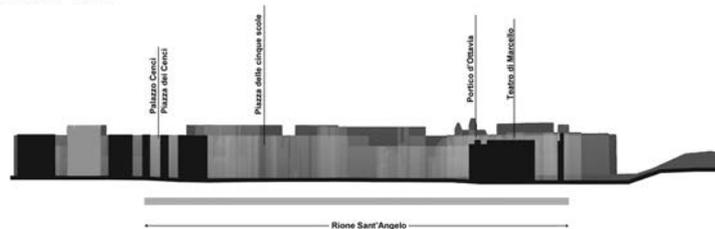


Figure 8. *sections of Rione Sant'Angelo after demolition of Ghetto*

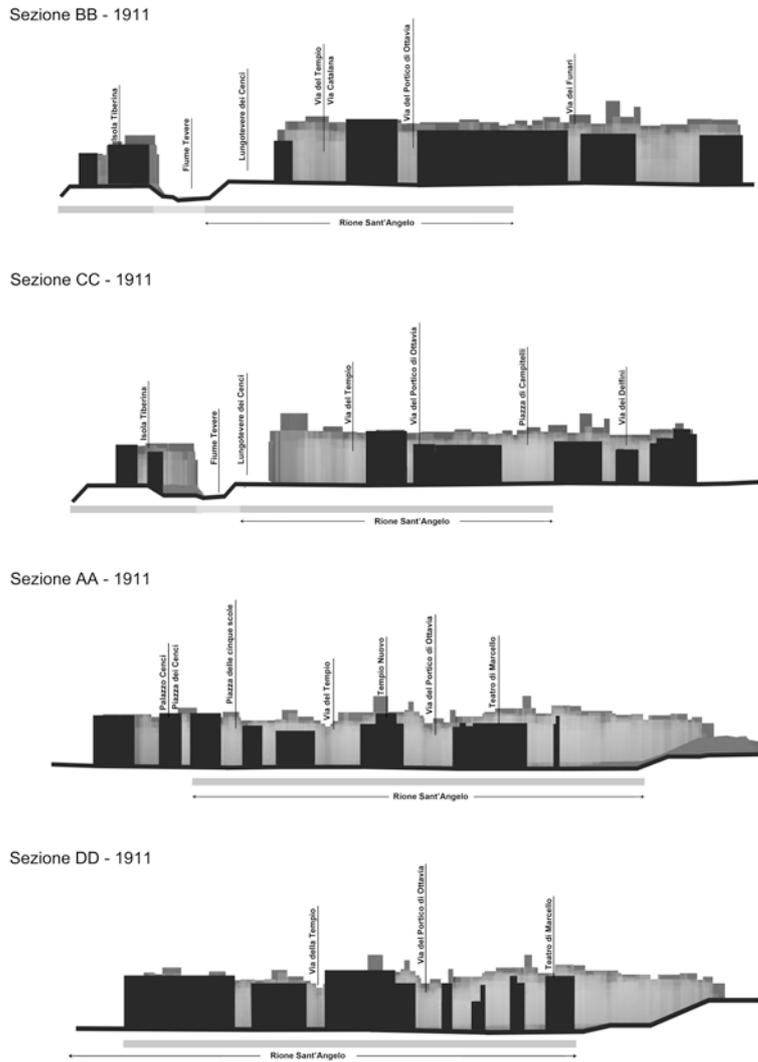


Figure 9: sections of Rione Sant'Angelo after reconstruction of four blocks

It is shocking the fact that the area, which is characterized by narrow streets and a particular development of the heights of its buildings, become, suddenly, an empty space, due to the total demolition of all buildings inside the Recinto, and ending with the twentieth-century reconstruction of four blocks including Tempio Nuovo.

It is indispensable to highlight that the reconstruction of the heights of the buildings means the possibility to make a little mistake because of the iconographic sources available to us until the nineteenth century: in fact the documents, that we can use to decide the height of each building, are books, or ancient “pseudo perspective” maps, that are often inexact and approximate.

The three-dimensional reconstruction has also an important purpose to make clear, through the rendering of its parts, the quality of life led into the high-rise, which didn't allow the lighting of the streets below and the lower floors, and the poor condition of those who lived in homes built along the Tevere, almost inside its waters. The images extracted from the three-dimensional model were also used as "urban virtual construction site" with the purpose to show the expansion of this part of the city both in its planimetric development and in its significant transformations in height.

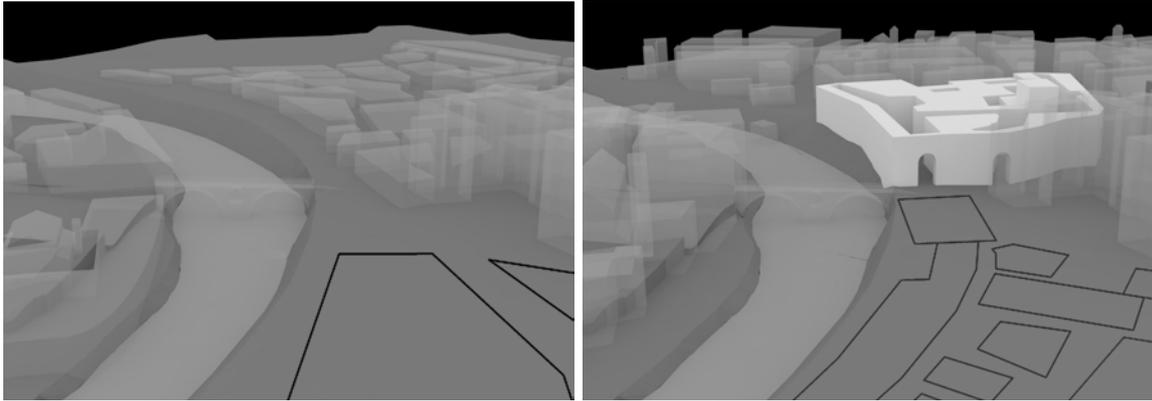


Figure 10. 1551 - before building of Ghetto  
 Figure 11. 1667 – Recinto of Ghetto with new lands along the banks of the Tevere

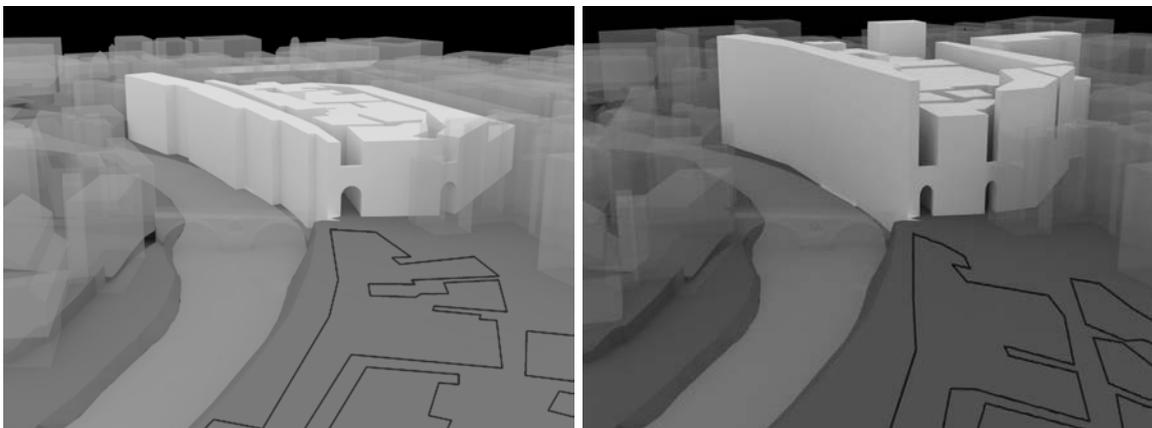


Figure 12. 1748 – Recinto del Ghetto and development of buildings  
 Figure 13. 1863 – Recinto del Ghetto with new lands of “braccio leoniano”

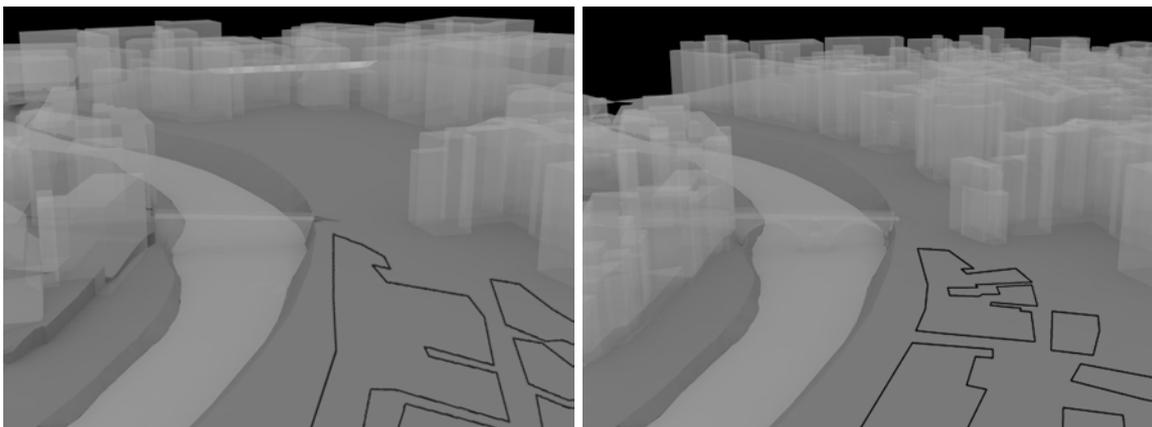


Figure 14. 1889 – after demolition of Ghetto  
 Figure 15. 1911 – after reconstruction of four blocks

Finally three-dimensional parts of Ghetto, of which was present photographic sources, have been modeled in a well-defined way in order to get the feeling of deprivation related to the time of demolition, thus describing the relationship between heterogeneous parts of the same district and following rough destruction of which remains mark in urban and architectural heritage.



Figure 16. late '800 – *piazza delle Cinque Scole* and its three-dimensional reconstruction



Figure 17. late '800 – *via di Pescheria* and its three-dimensional reconstruction

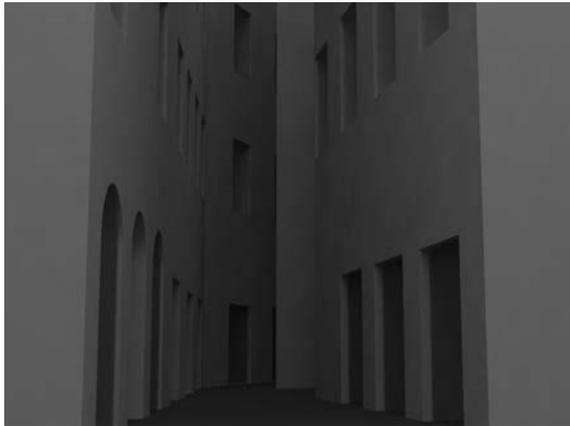


Figure 18. *late '800 – via Rua and its three-dimensional reconstruction*

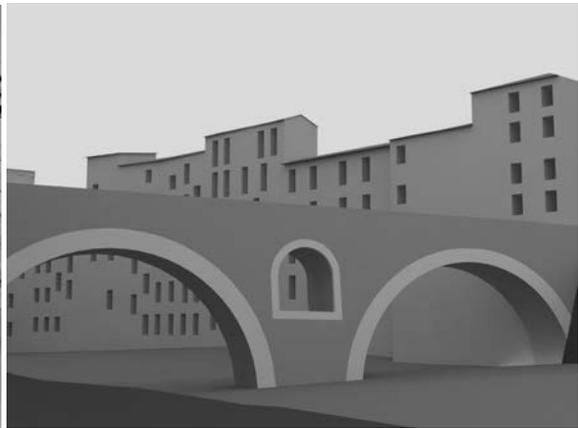


Figure 19. *late '800 – buildings of Ghetto along the banks of Tevere, ponte Quattro Capi and three-dimensional reconstruction*



Figure 20. *late '800 – demolition of Ghetto*  
Figure 21. *early '900 – reconstruction of four blocks with Sinagoga*

In this way it is possible to analyze how over the years, after a gradual contraction and construction of the surrounding area, the complete destruction of the Ghetto created an empty space that can hardly be filled and, of course, the purpose has not been reached with the building of four new blocks that are clearly out of context.

The problem comes out because the Recinto has created a thick urban network so as to make some points such, as piazza Giudea, which was used, with also piazza di Pescheria, as a meeting and exchange point; also piazza delle Cinque Scole had a main role in the Jewish culture whereas up to now is used for a parking area. When these focus point were removed, there is no more the close link and the homogeneity inside the district, so nowadays people who goes through piazza Mattei is very confused, because they haven't any reference point in the heart of the area.

The impression, about this situation, is going through an urban design, which is regulated by narrow streets that serve both the sixteenth-century palaces of noble families of the Rione Sant'Angelo and the poorest groups of buildings of different heights located one close to another, and then in another one characterized by big twentieth century buildings with a road system simple and rational.

The idea, that brought to the choice to cut so hardly into the urban area, hasn't replaced the architectural language that connected the Ghetto to the rest of the city, but in this way it caused a deeper wound through the construction of the Sinagoga, in Art Nouveau style, and other twentieth-century buildings that are completely unable to create a coherent architectural link with the rest of the district.

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