

Alessandria (IT), Palazzo delle Poste [partly extant] - 1941

PEOPLE

Ivaldi, Paolo

Victorio Emmanuele III rege et imp(eratore), Benito Mussolini publicam rem moderante feliciter / ad commercium inter absentes fovendum et nummularia negotia expedienda aedes aptiores / novensili arte absolutae die Urbis natali XI kal(endas) Maias anno Dom(ini) MXMXLI a Fascibus restit(utis) XIX

When Victor Emmanuel III was king and emperor and Benito Mussolini was successfully governing the State, a more suitable building was constructed to foster trade between distant peoples and conduct financial affairs. This modern-style edifice was completed on the City's birthday, on 21 April 1941 AD, the 19th year of the Fascist era.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The inscription is still partly visible at the Palazzo delle Poste in Alessandria (Piazza della Libertà 23, former Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II). It was reportedly authored by Monsignor Paolo Ivaldi (1905–1961), a Latin scholar and priest of the diocese of Alessandria, as noted by his nephew Nino Ivaldi (Venticinque 2019). The building itself was designed by Franco Petrucci (1905–1982) and commissioned by the Ministry of Post and Telegraph. Since its original design in the late 1930s, the Palazzo has undergone numerous modifications, and the Latin inscription reflects its rather turbulent design history.

When the project was first presented in 1939 to Benito Mussolini, local authorities did not receive it favourably. Both the city's *podestà* and the prefect believed its style clashed with the architectural context of the historic centre (Volpi 2012: 118). This objection led to the formation of a review committee, which included Mussolini's favoured architect, Marcello Piacentini (1881–1960). The committee issued a strongly negative assessment (Volpi 2012: 119). In its final decision, the committee approved the sober, rationalist style on the condition that the initially unadorned façade be embellished. These embellishments included the prominent Latin inscription, which was unusual for this type of building. The inscription was flanked by three faces on each side, and the words 'Poste e Telegrafi' were placed above the central entrance. A mosaic, designed by Franco Petrucci and executed by Gino Severini (1883–1966), was added to the lower register of the façade and its two sides. The mosaic depicts the history of communication through a blend of ancient and modern elements in a recognizably Fascist style. Despite these enhancements to the original design, local

authorities continued to dismiss the building. The prefect even referred to it as the ‘ugliest building in Piedmont’ (Volpi 2012: 121).

Following the fall of Fascism, the fasces framing the Latin inscription were removed, though the more subtly integrated fasces within the mosaic persist. Moreover, the Fascist references were eliminated from the inscription, including the entire first line mentioning the king and Mussolini and the Fascist-era dating at the end. As a result, the inscription appears somewhat misaligned, seeming positioned too low and ending abruptly.

The inscription was set on the façade using large bronze capital letters. The original text starts with a phrasing that refers to King Vittorio Emanuele III and Mussolini, reflecting the ancient Roman epigraphic tradition of listing the consuls in office as a method of dating. The text proceeds to describe the activities occurring in the post office, such as mail correspondence (*commercium inter absentes*) and business transactions (*nummularia negotia*). The building is portrayed as the most suitable place (*sedes aptiores*) for these operations since the previous post office on Via Cavour in Alessandria had grown inadequate (Volpi 2012: 111). Ivaldi then described the building’s style as ‘in modern style’ (*novensili arte*), referencing the Italian Stile Novecento, an artistic movement closely associated with Fascism. This style seeks orderly and monumental lines by contrasting full and empty spaces, serving as an antidote to the eclectic and versatile designs of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These earlier styles were typical of bourgeois and Umbertine Italy, which Fascism sought to transform. It is notable that the inscription prominently mentions Rome’s birthday on 21 April, highlighting the central role of Rome in Fascism’s cult of the nation.

Inside the building two more Latin inscriptions are displayed over two doors: *Absens fit litteris praesens* (‘The absent becomes present through letters’) and *Advolant verba electro per orbem* (‘Words traverse the globe thanks to electricity,’ referring to the electrical telegraph).

Bibliography

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Façade of the Palazzo delle Poste, Alessandria (as of 2011). © Davide Papalini. Licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/).



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