

POLITECNICO DI TORINO  
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**Honors theses**

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**Prison architecture between 1729 and 1864. A survey conducted through some funds of the Archivio di Stato of Turin**

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The aim of my thesis is to investigate and reconstruct the development of compositive models that characterized prison architecture between eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Piedmont, through the direct analysis of coeval documents, treatis and manuals written during those years.

The first part of the research aims to outline the building of some prisons, analyzing them through comparison with other Italian models. Eighteenth century is very important for prison buildings. It was during the Enlightenment, a period of great change and human theories sometimes utopistic, that begins the definition of the prison as a new concept: a second Copernican revolution, where the prison system is no longer understood as a place of torture for those who were relegated, but as a place where happened a process of correction that would moralize the human beings.

With the Enlightenment and the birth of the Philadelphian and Auburn systems - which have their implementation in Savoy - the prison begins to be reviewed by architects and reformers, by interpreting the places and interior spaces, no longer left to chance as it was in the past, recreating a perfect course, where reformed prisons became the place for rehabilitation of the criminals<sup>1</sup>. In Italy the first moments of the development of architectural theory on the theme of imprisonment coincide with the construction of the prison of San Michele in Rome<sup>2</sup> (1704), which will become a fundamental model for the formation of the next buildings for imprisonment. These structures will experience a radical change with the adoption of the Benthamite Panopticon model (1791), which will redefine a new system focused on the control. The Benthamite model, which had its strength in the centrality of control, becomes the fulcrum of a new way of structuring the prison, reversing the role of architecture that is no longer made to be seen and admired from the outside, but goes within the structures, analyzing the perfect way to control who is inside. No coincidence that this model will be later, after having generated a positive buzz, widely criticized for its alienability against those who were inside.

<sup>1</sup> RENZO DUBBINI, *Architettura delle prigioni*, cit.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

The second part of the work, however, further defines the transformations of the model of prisons in the nineteenth century. To do this, we must leave our frontiers, and extend our research in America, with Philadelphian and Auburn models, where they changed the concept of prison: the *penitentiary* was established, that greatly revolutionized the architecture of prisons<sup>3</sup>.

The revolutionary idea of the American penitentiary will be discussed extensively in Italy and will be implemented in Piedmont: Carlo Alberto (1831-49), promulgator of a major prison reform (1838), in fact, initiate the construction of large prisons in the state. In writing this part of the work, I will focus on defining a new prison architecture, which will start with the creation of the prison in Alessandria and will grow throughout the century in the territories of Savoy. Another important point to investigate, in addition to the creation of new structures, will be the reuse of existing structures suitable to the needs of the structures for imprisonment.

In this part we will analyze in more detail the architecture produced by the new standards and new rules that will be outlined throughout the century. Looking at the drawings for prisons between 1825 and 1844, regardless of the Royal Notes and Royal Patents issued between 1833 and 1864, and by analyzing in detail the construction works, we can define more precisely the events that led to the definition of the model of the penitentiary today.

<sup>3</sup> RENZO DUBBINI, *Architettura delle prigioni*, cit.

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