

POLYTECHNIC OF TORINO  
FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE  
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***The Vercelli architectural culture in the XVIII century between innovation and restoration"***

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The subject of our thesis aims at outlining the cultural background in the 19th century as far as architecture and restoration in Vercelli are concerned.

For this purpose a point of reference is represented by the activity carried out by the planners of the *Commissione di Pubblico Ornato*, the highest authority in the field of building regulation of the 19th century.

Our research has taken into consideration a period of time starting from 1833 (when the commission was been founded) and stopping about 1884, when new trends in restoration overturning theories until then accepted, began to develop.

On this subject, we mention two events of that year: Edoardo Arborio Mella's death, whose personality characterizes the conception of restoration in the nineteenth century and the building, on the occasion of the Turin Exposition, of the Medieval Village in the Valentino Park planned by the Portuguese Alfredo De Andrade, who started symbolically a new generation of restorers.

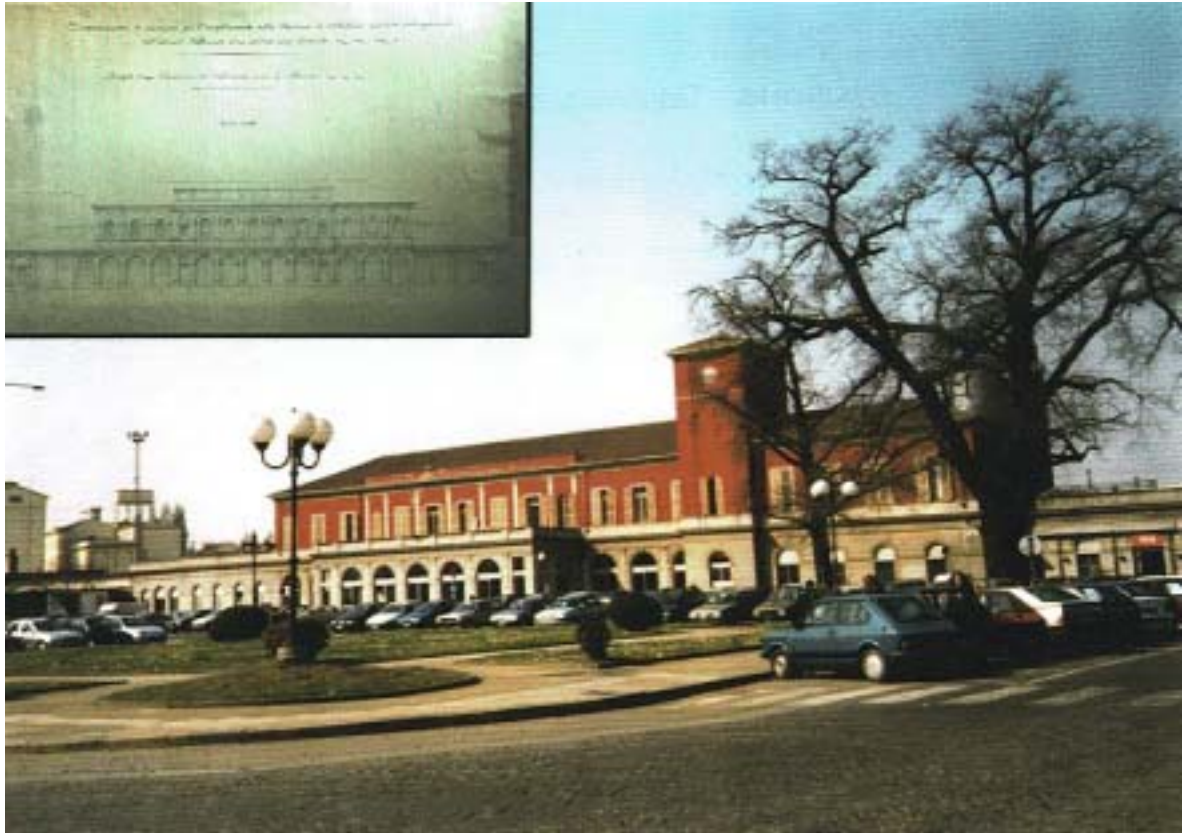
Our survey has been carried out mostly by using the Vercelli archives sources pertaining to the themes taken into consideration; the data so obtained were then integrated and compared with the bibliographical sources that deal with the development of the local urban order.

From the first analysis, the reasons that caused the choice of the most active and influential professional figures of that time have been studied, in order to do a more careful examination of their work by means of the cataloguing of the single plans; the collected data have allowed us to do an extensive catalogue of the plans that they presented to the *Commissione d'Ornato* and that are still kept in the Vercelli archives.

The buildings that underwent the transformations carried out at that time have subsequently been identified through research into last century Vercelli topography and by means of the help of the information found in the texts. Proceeding in this way, it has been possible to consider the above-mentioned buildings in relation to the archive data that we are in possession of and, consequently, to reconstruct the phases of the plans and the stratification of the work undertaken.

Moreover, several forms have been prepared in order to make the survey of the architectural heritage of the 19th century clearer.

These forms provide, for each building, a present-day or archive photograph, its position in the urban order and bibliographical information.



Railway Station

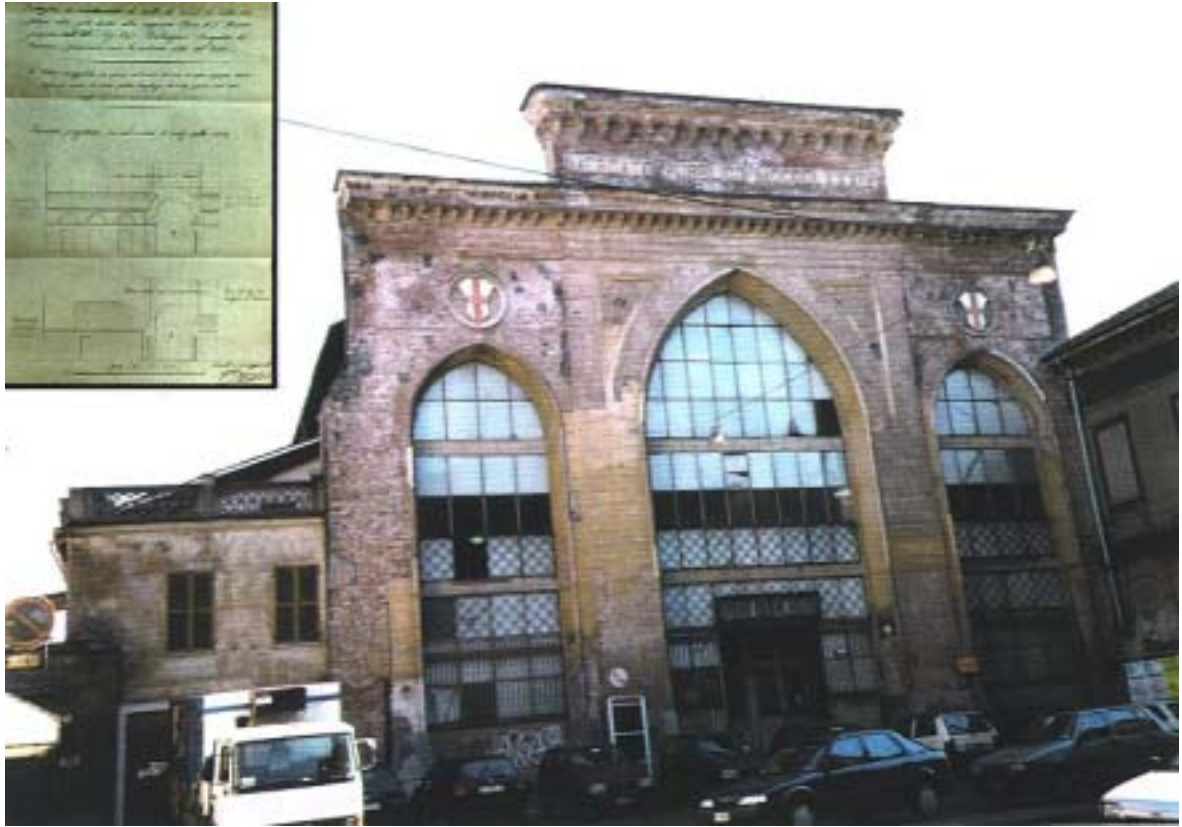
The recognition of some emblematic cases, which we analysed more deeply, allowed us to put in evidence the themes concerning the innovation and the restoration that characterize the cultural ferment of the 19th century.

The highest expression of engineering culture in Vercelli is represented by the achievement of the railway network and the station, in which planners and English workers were engaged in order to face the new requirements that technological progress created.

The development of the railway lines joined the appearance of service structures in the territory and the position of the Vercelli railway station was so conceived as to be subordinated to the train routes.

As regards the architectural conceptions, we follow their evolution through the several interventions in private housing, executed according to the prescriptions of the *Commissione di Pubblico Ornato*, most of them aiming at regularising the facades of the buildings facing the public ways and at straightening out the network of roads.

In particular, the reconversion of the buildings adjoining the *ex-eremitani's* monastery and of the surrounding areas into private residences is analysed: Arborio Biamino, Cantono Ceva and Pugliese Levi Houses.



Old S.Marco Church



Tizzoni Home

In the 19th century there were several transformations connected with the religious housing in consequence of the suppression of the monastical orders; sometimes it was completely remoulded and made suitable for totally different, if not extraneous, functions. This is the case of the *ex-eremitani*'s church, St. Marco, modified and altered in order to be intended as the seat of the urban Public Market.

The last chapter focuses on the specific themes of restoration, with the analysis of the theories that take shape under the influence of the Mellas and inside the *Istituto di Belle Arti*: the restoration in neo-gothic style of the front of Tizzoni House, result of the collaboration between G. Locarni and E. Mella, represents a significant application of these concepts and for this reason is examined.

The survey we have set forth allowed us to follow the phases that caused the transformation of taste that in relation to architectural culture in the 19th century, by studying them in the Vercelli context.