

## Via Palmanova, Milan (1946–early 1950s)

A Rubble Road Through the Modern  
City

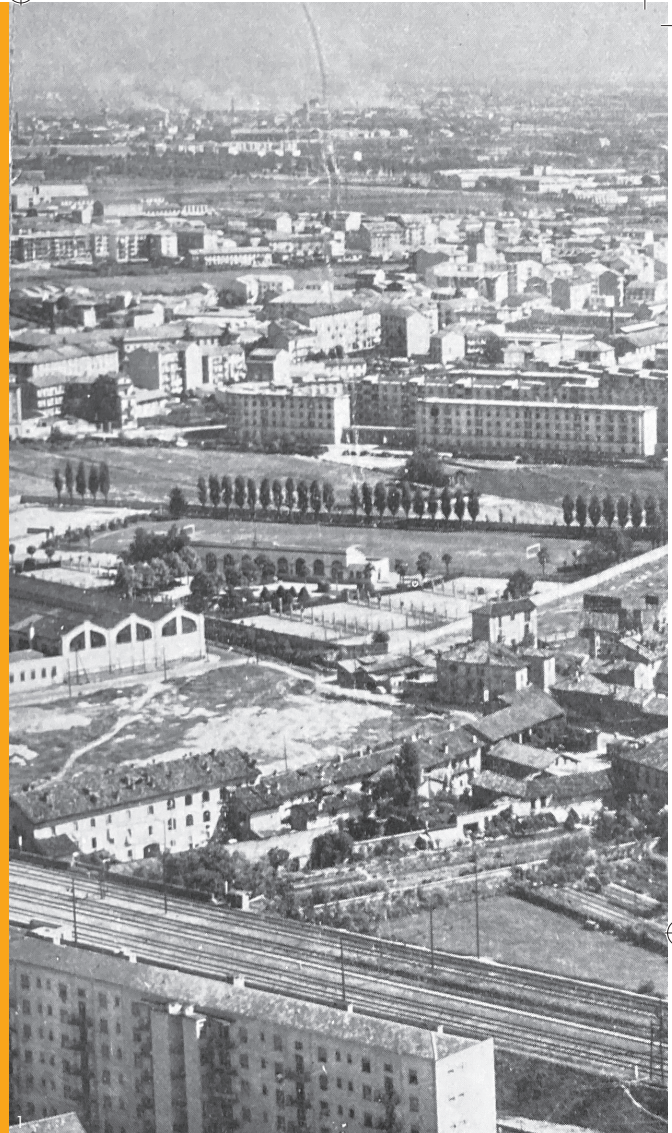
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Via Palmanova, now a four-lane thoroughfare connecting Milan's city center to the outer ring road, was originally a rural path leading to the hamlets of Rottole, Cimiano, and Crescenzago, among others. Plans for its upgrade to a full-fledged vehicular roadway were already included in the city's 1934 regulatory plan. The post-war regulatory plan of 1953 confirmed its role as a fast and direct connection to the motorway system – a *strada di penetrazione* (loosely translated as “collector road”) – providing an alternative to the adjacent and overcrowded Via Padova. Furthermore, it assigned to the road the function of a structural backbone for the new high-density, working-class residential neighborhoods (*zone di espansione*, or expansion areas) to be developed along both its sides. Construction of its roadbed, however, had already begun in 1946 as a matter of utmost urgency, as established by a resolution passed by the city council in a special session in June of that year. In addition to addressing circulation issues and creating employment opportunities, the resolution highlighted the abundant presence of rubble in the surrounding area. It stressed not only the need to remove this rubble, but also the opportunity to put it to productive use: “The urgency of the work is indicated by the



need to use the rubble. If it is left to dissipate in the filling of the quarries, it is unlikely that in the future other equally suitable material will be found, thus leading to a much greater expense, if not to the impossibility of carrying out the works” [July 1946]. The contract signed with the Albino e Luigi Cereda building company also detailed the roadbed's stratigraphy: “The embankment will be constructed using rubble and soil deposited in neighboring areas and in the city itself, arranged in successive layers of 30–40 cm in height, properly compacted with a steam roller and thoroughly watered” [May 1946]. By 1956, *Urbanistica* 18–19 – a monographic issue of Italy's leading journal on urbanism, dedicated



to Milan's 1953 regulatory plan – featured a series of aerial views of via Palmanova, completed and open to traffic, together with its surroundings. The details of its construction history cast new light on these photographs of the booming Italian economic capital: a linear landscape made of rubble from the old city forms the first built artifact and the central spine of a new neighborhood, whose clearly modern buildings – isolated, high-rise residential blocks – were rising on either side. Here, rubble is not only the physical but also the visible foundation of reconstructed Milan. A further episode in the history of Via Palmanova reinforces the view that rubble, its production and reuse, is often integral

to the process of urban growth. The road's starting point is marked by the small Church of San Carlo alle Rottole, once the center of the Rottole hamlet. Dating back to the twelfth century and listed as a heritage monument, it was illegally demolished in 1963 by the construction company of a nearby residential building. In 1966, following nationwide controversy, the Soprintendenza (heritage authority) fined the company and ordered the church's reconstruction according to an "as it was, where it was" approach. The project, directed by restoration expert Liana Grassi, reused as much as possible of the original stones and bricks, most of which had remained on site since the unauthorized demolition.



Figs. 1–3  
Three views of via Palmanova in the early 1950s, published in *Urbanistica*. The rubble-built thoroughfare served as the backbone of the modern city developing along it. Source: *Urbanistica*, no. 18–19 (March 1956): 132, 133, 135.



### Bibliography and Archives

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“Ratifica della deliberazione presa in via d’urgenza

dalla giunta il 14 giugno 1946 per la costruzione del nuovo viale da piazza Sire Raul a Crescenzago” (“Ratification of the resolution urgently adopted by the council on June 14, 1946, for the construction of the new avenue from Piazza Sire Raul to Crescenzago”), July 10, 1946. Archivio di Milano, Cittadella degli Archivi, Archivio storico, Fasc. 171/1950.

*Urbanistica*, no. 18–19 (March 1956): 132–137.