

Events

FORTMED 2025

International Conference on Modern Age Fortifications of the Mediterranean Coast

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Since its first edition in 2015, hosted by the Universitat Politècnica de València (Spain), the international FORTMED conference – dedicated to the study of Mediterranean fortifications – has established itself as a key annual event for the academic and scientific community. The 2025 edition took place in Caserta on April 10th–12th, promoted by the Department of Architecture and Industrial Design (DADI) of the University of Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli.”

The conference organization, coordinated by Professor Ornella Zerlenga and Professor Vincenzo Cirillo, was supported by an Advisory Committee, a technical-scientific secretariat, an operational staff, and several Topic Chairs, responsible for assigning the submitted papers to one of the seven thematic areas that structure the conference. This framework ensured a clear organization of the contents within the proceedings and enabled effective planning of the oral sessions.

The figures for the 2025 edition highlight a growing interest in the subject of defensive architecture: following a double-blind peer review process carried out by an international scientific committee, 195 papers were selected. These were published by DADI PRESS (University of Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli”) and edUPV (Universitat

Politècnica de València) in the Defensive Architecture of the Mediterranean series, equipped with ISBN/ISSN codes and available in open access. A large portion of these contributions was presented during oral sessions organized in parallel tracks.

The academic sessions were opened by institutional greetings and keynote lectures, offering diverse perspectives on key conference themes.

On the morning of April 10th, three keynote addresses were delivered: Professor Leonardo Di Mauro (former Professor of Architectural History at the University of Naples Federico II), Architect and artist Cesare Battelli, Professor Andrés Martínez Medina from the Universidad de Alicante (Spain).

The first keynote, titled *Fortifications of the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily: Research Advances and Misguided Restorations*, examined the evolution of studies on the fortified heritage of southern Italy. Through extensive archival documentation, Professor Di Mauro highlighted ongoing research opportunities while also recognizing significant progress in methods for analysing military heritage. However, he strongly criticized the frequent implementation of misguided and imaginative restoration interventions that compromise the original architectural integrity of many historic buildings

– exemplified by the emblematic case of the Castle of Rocca Cilento.

The second keynote, titled *LIMES. Digital Fortifications* was delivered by Cesare Battelli. His presentation showcased an artistic and theoretical investigation centred on the reinterpretation of the concept of the wall in contemporary terms. Starting from historical examples such as Persian gardens and the Cyclopean walls of Ancient Greece, Battelli introduced a critical reflection on the notions of boundary, threshold, and virtual wall in the context of architectural representation and storytelling mediated by artificial intelligence.

The third keynote, *El Muro del Mediterráneo en el siglo XX*, presented by Professor Andrés Martínez Medina, focused on a project aimed at identifying, cataloguing, and analyzing the network of bunkers distributed along the Mediterranean coastline. Using integrated methodologies, the initiative seeks to lay the groundwork for valorisation and conservation strategies for this “uncomfortable” heritage.

Sessions organized by topic continued April 11th. The papers covered a broad range of themes – from historical and documentary research to theoretical frameworks, from built heritage analysis to geomaterial characterization, from digital heritage to cultural heritage man-



Fig. 1. Event poster

agement, and a miscellaneous section. This thematic organization encouraged a multidisciplinary and cross-cutting exchange, reflecting the complex nature of military architecture, which demands collaboration across various specialized fields.

The wide array of case studies presented attracted a scholarly audience from Italian and Spanish universities and research centres, as well as from numerous other Mediterranean and non-Mediterranean countries. This international dimension reinforced the conference's identity as a platform for academic dialogue and knowledge exchange, fostering the development of new research networks and collaborations. Furthermore, it encouraged a comparative approach to geographically diverse yet historically and conceptually similar contexts of fortified land-

scape construction and transformation. At the close of the second day, the traditional and highly anticipated Best Paper Award ceremony took place, honouring one outstanding paper in each topic area based on peer review evaluations and the quality of the oral presentations. The third day of the conference, traditionally devoted to field exploration, offered participants the opportunity to visit two significant architectural sites: the fortress of Sant'Elmo, overlooking the city of Naples, and the medieval village and castle of Caserta Vecchia. These visits provided a valuable occasion to complement theoretical approaches with on-site observation, reinforcing the link between academic research and built heritage.

The 2025 edition of FORTMED concluded with notable success, both in terms of scientific quality and the high

level of international participation. Special attention was given to the announcement of the next edition: the IX FORTMED conference, to be held in Rome on February 19th–21st 2026, and hosted by the Department of History, Drawing and Restoration of Architecture (DSDRA) at Sapienza University of Rome.

The announcement was met with strong interest from attendees, further confirming FORTMED's central role as a venue for scientific and interdisciplinary debate on Mediterranean defensive architecture. Edition after edition, the conference continues to expand the international research network, promote the understanding and safeguarding of fortified heritage, and stimulate new reflections on its representation, conservation, and valorisation in the contemporary context.

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