

Events

FORTMED 2026

International Conference on Fortifications of the Mediterranean Coast

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Now in its ninth edition, the International Conference *FORTMED Fortifications of the Mediterranean Coast* has confirmed its role as one of the leading scientific events dedicated to the study, conservation, and enhancement of Mediterranean defensive architecture. The 2026 edition took place in Rome on 19, 20, and 21 February, at the Fontanella Borghese and Borghetto Flaminio venues, and was organized by the Department of History, Representation and Restoration of Architecture (DSDRA) and the Faculty of Architecture of Sapienza University of Rome. The Roman edition reaffirmed the international and interdisciplinary vocation that characterizes the Conference, bringing together scholars, researchers, and professionals from different disciplinary backgrounds interested in defensive architecture and fortified heritage. The scientific programme was structured around seven thematic areas that guided the organization of parallel sessions, fostering dialogue among different methodological approaches and between historical, technical, conservation, and management perspectives on Mediterranean fortifications. The Conference organization, coordinated by Michele Russo and Marta Acierio, was supported by an Advisory Committee, a Scientific Committee,

a Technical-Scientific Secretariat, and an Operational Staff. The scientific activities were also supported by the work of the Track Chairs, responsible for assigning contributions to the seven thematic tracks that structured the Conference programme and guided the parallel sessions.

The figures for the 2026 edition testify to the growing interest of the scientific community in the study of defensive architecture. Following a double-blind peer-review process conducted by an international scientific committee, 162

scientific papers were selected and subsequently published in the Conference proceedings, collected in three volumes of the Defensive Architecture of the Mediterranean series. Published by Sapienza Università Editrice and UPV (Universitat Politècnica de València), the Proceedings are assigned ISBN and ISSN codes and made available in open access (<https://www.editricesapienza.it/book/11178>). All publications produced throughout the first nine editions can be accessed directly from the Conference website (www.fortmed.eu), contributing

Fig. 1. Poster of the event.



to the international dissemination of research results on fortified heritage.

The Conference opened with institutional greetings at the historic Fontanella Borghese venue, in the Aula Magna of the Department of History, Representation and Restoration of Architecture of Sapienza University of Rome. Welcome addresses were delivered by Antonella Polimeni, Rector of Sapienza University of Rome; Daniela Esposito, Director of the Department of History, Representation and Restoration of Architecture; Stefano Catucci, Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Architecture; and Carlo Bianchini, Vice-Rector for Architectural Heritage. These were followed by representatives of major scientific organizations: Maurizio Caperna, Vice-President of the Italian Society for Architectural Restoration (SIRA); Ornella Zerlenga, President of the Italian Union for Drawing (UID); Maurizio Di Stefano, President of ICOMOS Italia; and Guglielmo Villa, Vice-President of the Scientific Committee of the Italian Institute of Castles. Their contributions offered different perspectives on key Conference themes and highlighted the value of the event as an opportunity for interdisciplinary and international dialogue on the knowledge, conservation, and enhancement of fortified heritage. The opening session concluded with the official inauguration of the Conference by Pablo Rodríguez-Navarro, President of the International FORTMED Association, together with Michele Russo and Marta Acierno, chairs of *FORTMED 2026*.

The morning of 19 February continued with an introductory discussion dedicated to the relationship between cultural heritage and the contemporary city, coordinated by Marta Acierno. Participants included Simone Quilici, Director of the Colosseum Archaeological Park; Alessandro D'Alessio, Director of the

Archaeological Park of Ostia Antica; Stefano Borghini, Official of the Colosseum Archaeological Park; Adele Cesi, UNESCO representative at the Italian Ministry of Culture; Giulio Mirabella Roberti from the University of Bergamo; and Valentina Garramone from the Directorate of National Museums of the City of Rome. The discussion emphasized the strategic role of historical heritage as a cultural and identity resource for contemporary cities, focusing on both the opportunities offered by enhancement processes and the challenges associated with managing complex contexts characterized by significant historical and monumental stratifications.

The morning concluded with the keynote lectures, chaired by Michele Russo. Donatella Fiorani reflected on fortified heritage as a tool for understanding the historical and territorial transformations of the Mediterranean and the challenges related to its conservation. Pilar Chías Navarro explored the relationships between fortified systems, territorial networks, and cultural connections across both sides of the Atlantic, highlighting the role of defensive architecture in shaping shared landscapes and identities. The afternoon of 19 February marked the beginning of the five parallel scientific sessions, organized into seven thematic tracks that structured the Conference programme. The papers addressed topics related to the history of military architecture, heritage documentation and knowledge processes, surveying and representation methodologies, conservation and restoration projects, as well as strategies for heritage management and enhancement. Across the various sessions, the widespread adoption of digital technologies for the study and communication of fortified heritage confirmed a growing trend toward integrating such tools and methodologies

within research. Numerous contributions focused on integrated surveying methods, HBIM models, GIS systems, virtual reconstructions, and immersive applications, demonstrating the increasing interest of the scientific community in tools capable of supporting the documentation, analysis, and enhancement of defensive architecture.

The sessions continued throughout 20 February, encouraging discussion among scholars from diverse geographical and disciplinary contexts. The case studies presented included coastal fortifications, castles, watchtowers, urban defensive walls, and defensive landscapes located throughout the Mediterranean region and beyond, offering an up-to-date overview of current research on fortified heritage.

The diversity of contributions confirmed the multidisciplinary nature of the Conference, which continues to serve as a meeting point for architectural historians, architects, archaeologists, engineers, conservators, representation experts, and specialists in digital technologies applied to cultural heritage. This plurality of approaches fostered a broad and cross-disciplinary scientific dialogue capable of connecting different research methodologies and scales of analysis, while drawing renewed attention to this distinctive category of cultural heritage.

Alongside the Conference activities, the photographic exhibition *The Walls of Rome in the Contemporary City*, curated by Marta Acierno, Alessandro Lanzetta, and Michele Russo, attracted particular interest. Through photographs, video contributions, and research materials, the exhibition reflected on the relationship between the historic walls of Rome and the contemporary city, interpreting these structures not merely as remnants of

the past but as active elements in shaping the urban landscape and the social dynamics of the city.

During the second day, and for the first time in the history of the Conference, a plenary session was dedicated to international research projects focusing on fortifications. This initiative aimed to demonstrate how the study of fortifications can serve as common ground for exchange and collaboration among different research groups, fostering the development of international networks and joint projects.

The second day concluded with the final plenary session, during which the Best Paper Awards were presented to

contributions distinguished by their scientific quality and originality. The session also featured the presentation of the next Conference edition, *FORTMED 2027*, scheduled to take place in Valencia at the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV), under the coordination of Pablo Rodríguez Navarro and Teresa Gil Piqueras, before the closing remarks. The third day, traditionally devoted to the direct exploration of cultural heritage, offered participants the opportunity to visit the Domus Aurea. The visit provided an important field-based learning experience, allowing participants to complement the theoretical reflections developed during the Con-

ference with direct observation of one of Rome's most significant archaeological complexes.

The 2026 edition of *FORTMED* concluded by further strengthening the Conference's role as an international reference point for studies on fortified heritage. The high quality of the papers presented, the participation of scholars from numerous countries, and the ongoing dialogue between historical, conservation, and digital approaches confirmed the Conference's ability to promote interdisciplinary exchange and international scientific cooperation on issues related to the knowledge, protection, and enhancement of defensive architecture.

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