

BUILDING POWER

ITALIAN ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM IN LIBYA AND ETHIOPIA

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ITALY HAD A RELATIVELY BRIEF FORAY INTO COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE AND urbanism. The premise of this chapter is that construction in Italy's colonies was, symbolically and politically, simultaneously an exercise in self-construction at a national, cultural level, as well as one in constructing "natures" and "cultures" attributed to the local populations; and, furthermore, that these constructions were both embodied in and reinforced by the physical constructions. The chapter traces the development of an ideology and a practice of colonial architecture and city planning in the context of two of Italy's colonies, Libya and Ethiopia, during the Fascist era (1922–1943). It also focuses on the articulation, both in rhetorical and building practices, of the overall Italian colonial experience and expectations.

The two different settings, and the time span involved, make it possible to observe a shift in the articulation of the Italian experience over time, from an initial nationalist stance addressing Europe, to a racist policy of impressing and governing local populations. In the case of Libya, the very identification with the past that first justified colonial expansion eventually became an impediment. In the abstract, the ideological problems of colonial dominance were overcome through the idea of *modernità* (modernity), but in practice such a stance failed to provide an adequate model for colonial design. In Ethiopia, efficient planning, segregation, and social differentiation implemented a rhetorically simpler and more brutal approach to power from the outset.

The approach I employ here is to some extent comparative, since I carry out a diachronic comparison of different colonialist phases and discuss two colonies comparatively.

However, by no means do I intend to compare the two colonies directly; I view them only as they were constituted and mediated in Italian colonialist discourse. And colonialist discourse, more than anything, is the subject of this chapter.

In this effort my primary sources have consisted entirely of Italian architectural journals of the period, which, apart from archival materials in Italy, are the only sources available on the subject. The advantage of using these journals is that they present the architectural work of the period in the architects' language and in the form they wanted it understood. The disadvantage is that they provide nothing concerning the local populations' views of, or reactions to, the architecture of the colonizers. Ideally, a study such as this should examine local interpretations and reactions, as well as what has occurred since the end of the colonial period. Such additional depth might give some sense as to how Italian spatial structures have endured and been modified or reinscribed, and what adaptations or perpetuations have taken place. Unfortunately, research in Ethiopia and Libya has been daunting, and until this situation is changed, such additional investigations must remain the subject of future work.

In relation to architecture and urban planning, Italian colonialist discourse may be divided into two stages: first, from 1929, when the meanings and forms of colonial architecture emerged as the dominant concern, to 1936, when the shift to a discourse of planning began to occur; and second, from 1937 to 1940, when the new questions of colonial urbanism became fully pronounced.¹

Before turning to these two periods in sections on "colonial architecture" and "colonial urbanism," however, I provide a brief background to some of the key issues in the development of Italian architectural-colonialist discourse. Specifically, I discuss the nationalist character of the Italian colonization of Libya (1911–12), and the very different ideology that shaped the later colonization of Ethiopia (1935–36). I consider the recasting in the 1920s of architecture in Italy as a discipline and a means of cultural self-creation, and I describe the early phase in the journals of colonialist science and transformation: between 1923 and 1928 architectural history, archaeology and geography were all used as implements to give the Italian colony of Libya rhetorical form. Finally, I give a brief recounting of the debates regarding the meaning and form of Italian Fascist architecture, particularly as these concern the debate over colonial architecture in Libya.

PROLOGUE

"Our fathers cleared the path to new civilization . . . we would be failing our country if we did not enlarge our field of activity," said the statesman Francesco Crispi in 1889

(Segrè, 1974, pp.11–12). The Italian Colonial Institute was created in 1906 by the government. A series of conferences ensued, and by 1914 a recognizable ideology had emerged in favor of colonial expansion.

From the start, the language of Italian colonial architecture concentrated on Italy's recognition of its own traces, or "signs," and on Italy's historical destiny as apparent in Libyan buildings and Roman ruins. These traces were seen to indicate Italy's capacity for empire and, therefore, its inevitable (to the expansionists) reacquisition of empire. Just after the beginning of war in Libya in 1911, the poet Giovanni Pascoli expressed the expansionist themes in a speech stressing Italy's right to the Libyan soil on the basis of Roman heritage:

We were already there . . . we left signs that not even the Berbers, the Bedouins and the Turks could erase; signs of our humanity and civilization, signs . . . that we are not Berbers, Bedouins and Turks. We are returning (Segrè, 1974, p.22).

The image of Libya as it had been under Roman rule informed what it was expected to become once more under Italian rule. Although the country was presently a desert because of the "inertia of the nomadic and slothful population," in ancient times it had been "abundant with waters and crops and green with trees and gardens"; Italian emigrants would once again build roads, till fields, and erect houses and ports (Segrè, 1974, p.22). In this way Libya's potential value, its possible suitability for massive settlement by Italians (who would otherwise continue to emigrate to other parts of Europe and to the Americas for work), provided the key to the expansionist position. In antiquity Libya had been known for its abundance and fertility; Italian colonialists now supported claims about Libya's promise with frequent references to Greek and Roman classics and to the ruins of Leptis Magna, Sabratha and the Pentapolis. The name itself, "Libya," which had sometimes been used by the Turkish colonizers, was adopted by the Italians because of its connotations of ancient dominion and empire. According to one recent author:

In ancient times all of North Africa except Egypt was known as Libya. With the destruction of Carthage and the creation of a Roman province known as "Africa," the term "Libya" fell into disuse . . . the name "Libya" was revived by Italian scholars . . . at the turn of the century, and was officially adopted at the time of the conquest (Segrè, 1974, p.193).

Because the architects working in Libya in the 1920s and early 1930s were so preoccupied with deciphering the Roman-ness or the "primitive"-ness of each building,

architectural form became the site of a very deliberate attempt at Italian self-presentation. *Modernità*, a concept that seemed to provide the only escape from the ideological problem of repetition and imitation, was the goal, because it implied a new self-presentation to the rest of Europe. Italy had suffered from the greater successes of other nations, particularly France and England, and the rise of Fascism brought the conviction that Italy could regain and re-manifest its former great status. However, the circularity of proposing that Italy could find its own past in its colony, and that it could create a present national self by designing a historical one, meant that architectural decisions during this period would be just as circular. As I will show, this stage of Italian colonial architecture was fraught with dilemmas, ones that were not resolved with any real success.

In contrast, the later appropriation of Ethiopia was not prefaced with such elaborate historical justifications. As of 1934 the Italian colonialist idiom took on new tones of violence and racism, ones which Mussolini had previously opposed, but which were close to the German position. In 1935 a rapprochement with Germany became apparent, and in the same year the Ethiopian campaign was begun. In 1936, at the end of this campaign, the Italian Empire was proclaimed, and from then on racist rhetoric prevailed, being instituted as legislation in 1938 and 1939, affecting Jews in Italy as well as subjects in the colonies. A shift in architectural and urbanistic rhetoric occurred at the same time. The issues at stake in Ethiopia became control, regulation, planning, and — above all — the direct exercise of power. Race was the most important criterion in the spatial organization of bodies and built forms in the new colony. A building's function was to confront the local population with Italian power; its form was secondary. City form, rather than architectural form, would allow the exercise of Italian domination. Planning would be expected to facilitate distinctions and divisions within the colonial living space between the metropolitan "Self" and the colonized "Other," and it would accommodate and control their juxtaposed existences.

Several fields played an important role in the rhetorical construction of the colonies. It was not until 1920 that a university training in architecture, as a discipline apart from engineering and the history of art, became available in Italy. Previously, the study of architecture had been bound up with architectural history, and Italian design was felt to be limited to and by repetition and reworking of antiquated forms. However, in an article of 1924, Venturi made two comments about the significance of the new formal training, ones that voiced themes that would pervade all attempts to develop a distinctly Italian colonial architecture. One was that Italian architecture would now free itself from its academic setting and enter into "the reality of life"; the other referred to "all those who hope to see Italy return to its traditional position of dominance in the field of architecture" (Venturi, 1924, p.125).²

The study of ancient forms also made a contribution to the growing interest in, and documentation of, colonial Libya.³ Archaeology revealed in detail the extent of ancient Roman remains, and even made more recent structures yield traces of Roman influence. According to Romanelli, domestic architecture in Tripoli lacked "art" and had not been in any sense "notable" prior to the Turkish conquest of 1551 (Romanelli, 1923). But after 1551 the city regained its lost monumentality. However, the remoteness of Turkey allowed that country's architectural influence to be downplayed in comparison to Italy's. "After the mid-sixteenth century . . . all the Mediterranean countries [were] re-awakening to the breath of life which our peninsula radiate[d] with the energy and vigor of its renaissance" (Romanelli, 1923, p.193). In other words, the Turks had colonized Libya, but the architectural "art" of their rule was Italian.

Romanelli's study described buildings and motifs as often as possible in Roman, Italian or European terms. For example, despite the fact that the general shape of Tripoli's residential buildings was typically Near Eastern, they were seen to resemble Roman houses more nearly than "Oriental" ones (Romanelli, 1923, p.195). Similarly, ornamental capitals seemed to be "distant memories" of Roman ones; arches were "between the Roman and the Arab"; and local tradition was either called "more Roman and Byzantine than it was Arab," or else it was described as "Romano-Tripolitanian and Byzantine-Tripolitanian" (Romanelli, 1923, pp.200,202,205,206). Romanelli also detected the influences of seventeenth-century Spain and the French Baroque (Romanelli, 1923, pp.204,207).

The inevitable implication of these interpretations was the view that the single persistent and determining architectural influence in Tripoli had been that of the Romans. The fact that traces of their influence were still visible in 1923 was made to signify that Libya's only "culture" had been Italian, and that recent Italian colonization was merely a return to a past (hence, legitimate) condition. Romanelli's essay was a good example of rewriting origin myths to legitimize present situations: throughout the text he worked to establish the Italian character of Tripoli's architecture, and in his final conclusion he argued that the genesis itself of that architecture had been authentically Italian.

Archaeological knowledge was integral to the establishment of colonial power by virtue of depicting an image of a past that was used to set goals for the future; geographers aimed to participate directly. By establishing knowledge of economic, political and physical conditions, they planned to create a solid basis for the elaboration of a colonial domain:

The formation of a colonial science . . . requires, beyond scientific analysis, the accurate and profound knowledge of the geographical

environments and of the societies inhabiting them. . . . The goal [is to] form our own colonial and foreign doctrine supported by a scientific basis. . . . Geography . . . which, understood in its true sense, is physical, political, and economic all at once, is a sure, realistic basis . . . in coping with physical and human problems (Vachelli, 1928, p.159).

It was one of the main roles of geography in successful colonization to study "the human element . . . we need to know and dominate the native, to know how to use him for what he can yield according to his physical and psychical characteristics, to his morals and his religion" (Vachelli, 1928, p.160). The ultimate end of geographical knowledge was to make the best use of the resources available to colonial power. The elaboration of power and the knowledge of the territory in which it was to be elaborated were therefore indistinguishable. Colonization was "a work of gradual construction" (Vachelli, 1928, p.160) which, in itself, meant geographical knowledge. To study, and to construct, expand and colonize, were simultaneous, synonymous activities.⁴

The character of the debate about architectural form in Fascist Italy needs some discussion. Brief though it was, the Fascist period witnessed intense struggles to determine the character and form of its architecture and the identity of those who would design it. Prior to Fascism, in the same period when the hold of Italian nationalism was increasing, Futurism had emerged as a powerful idea with the publication in 1909 of Marinetti's *Foundation Manifesto*. Futurism's major characteristic had been a radical break with past formal and ideological determinisms (Banham, 1960). It had entered the architectural arena with the 1914 exhibition of Sant'Elia's drawings, *Città Nuova* (the New City). Sant'Elia asserted "the historical and human necessity for a radical renewal of Italian architecture, that had fallen into an academic eclecticism lacking any vital spark" (Veronesi, 1964, p.114).

But the Great War marked the end of Futurism's influence. In its wake came a return to classicism in the form of the *Novecento Italiano* movement, whose inability to propose new solutions soon became apparent. In 1926 the *Gruppo 7* (Group 7), an association of seven architects (Terragni, Figini, Pollini, Frette, Larco, Libera and Carlo Enrico Rava) broke away from the neoclassical current. Their aim was to combine Futurism's commitment to industrial form with the *Novecento's* nationalist premise and classicism, leaving aside the former's total rejection of tradition and the latter's overreliance on classical form. The result, Rationalism (*il razionalismo*), became Italy's contribution to modernism in architecture. In terms of form, Rationalism's main components, "the clear expression of structure, strip and corner windows, continuous horizontal balconies or protruding slabs, and the use of exposed concrete and extensive

glazing" (Doordan, 1988, p.49), constituted a vocabulary as essential and universal to modernism as the one arches and columns had provided for classical architecture. The crucial standard for Rationalism was functionality — a building's appropriateness for its purpose and setting.

These architectural criteria were, however, problematic for the period. While the Rationalists were eager to design Fascist buildings, their vision was not well suited to creating monuments representative of Fascist power. Even so, while Italian Fascism rejected Rationalism in the long run, it never settled on any single architectural representation.⁵ By the mid-1930s the *stile littorio*, associated with Marcello Piacentini and distinguished by its simple monumentality, had become the most constant trademark of the Fascist regime. But there were essentially two strains in competition, the historicist and the radical, and the former won out only in that it outlived the latter.⁶

One final caveat is needed concerning *modernità* before turning to a more direct analysis of the journals. This is that the term is not synonymous with "modernism," the modern movement in architecture. My goal here is, rather, to apprehend it as a rhetorical device that was bent to the particular needs of a generation of architects involved in organizing the colonial cultural experience. Although in purely architectural terms it did signify a "modern" quality (i.e., one displaying functionality or Rationalism), there were many instances, such as those quoted below, in which it had no explicit referent, but rather indicated an ideal trait that Italy wished to possess. Its use was largely rhetorical in that it was mainly a statement — albeit vague — about Italian identity within the discursive construction of the Libyan colony.

1929–1936: COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE

The meanings and forms of colonial architecture first appeared as a serious question in Italian architectural journals in the period from 1929 to 1936. Articles at the time generally represented the ongoing process of colonialist construction in one of two ways: as pictorial reports of new buildings with only brief accompanying commentary, or as more theoretical, dogmatic essays exposing the essential themes of colonial architectural thought. The main themes that arose during the period were the following: the use of local forms as a source of inspiration — or at least a measure of comparison; the dichotomy between "Italian" and "African" architectures, and the mediation between them by use of the "Mediterranean" category; the opposition of "Mediterranean" architecture to the classical heritage; and "*modernità*" as a solution to all these dilemmas — the way to a new national identity, and the means of impressing Europe with the new/

ancient Italian spirit. Over the the period a transition in the Italian attitude to Europe also took place, from statements of comparison, to images of competition and warfare.

The pictorial reports, the first type of article common in the journals, were primarily remarkable in that they almost exclusively depicted buildings of a public character: large *piazze*, governors' residences, churches, hotels near beaches and archaeological ruins (now necessitated by the growing popularity of tourism), and, most visibly, monuments (FIG. 1). Middle-class housing and apartment buildings did not appear until 1933 and 1935, and even then they appeared in the journals almost as an after-thought. This, of course, did not mean that housing was not a concern in Libya, nor that it was not being built. It did indicate that it was more significant for Italian readers, and for Europe at large, to witness the visible, monumental facets of ongoing Italian colonialist construction. It was in public buildings that Italy's claim to new status would be best manifested at first. Only later would colonial architecture as a whole, and then the planning of entire cities, become the vehicles for the realization of Italy's power and "civilization" (*civilità*).

To some extent, the practical aspects of design and construction were at stake; hence the interest in local architectural solutions. Carlo Enrico Rava, an architect who was an important participant in the debate on colonial architecture, and a member of Gruppo 7, pointed to this problem when he wrote that "a knowledge of the architectonic problems of our colonies, of the traditions of their past, of the characteristics of their present, is lacking" (Rava, 1931A, p.39). The Italian architects admired the local forms, insisted that they be studied, and advocated that their best features be adapted in colonial designs. Rava justified these positions, arguing that "the impulse of vigorous primitivity [by which was meant the geometric simplicity of local shapes] is perfectly in tune with our most up-to-date modern tastes" (Rava, 1931A, p.89). However, it is clear from the extent to which authors justified their interest that the virtues of Libyan architecture had to be reconciled with its stated artlessness and inferiority.

Among the justifications used, one was that they were themselves "colonial," since Libya had been colonized by Turkey. Since all colonial buildings were Rational(ist) in form (Rava, 1931B, p.35), Libyan buildings were implicitly appropriate to their setting. With a similar logic, the study of local forms was described as essential to the creation of a colonial architecture:

The original Libyan architecture provides us with all the desirable elements to create our own colonial architecture of today, which should

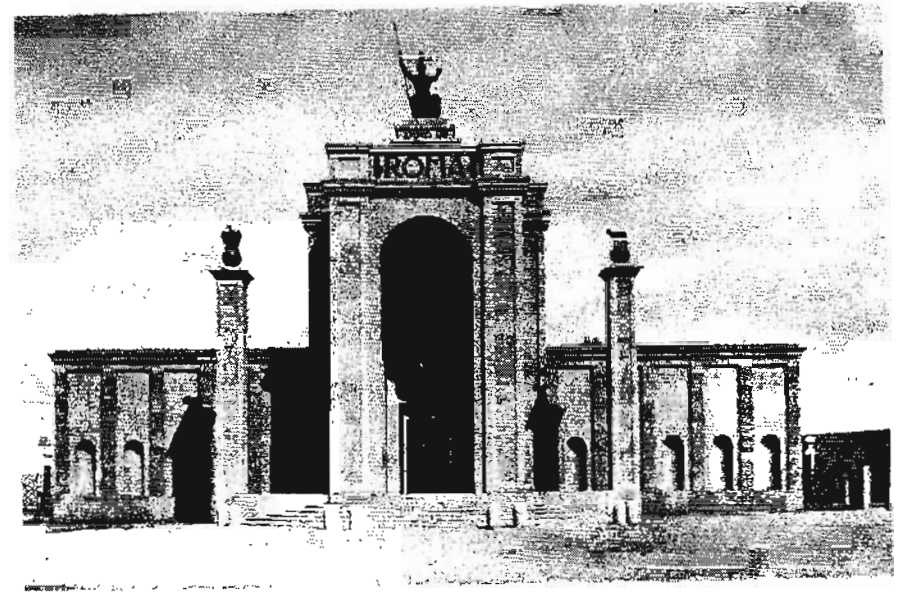


FIGURE 1. Pavilion of the Governatorato di Roma at the Fiera di Tripoli, by Limongelli, 1929. Source: *Architettura ed arti decorative*, 1929, Vol. 8, No. 2, p.517.

be truly worthy of Imperial Italy . . . [these elements are its] Rationalism, most modern simplicity of exterior forms, perfect adaptation to the necessities of the African climate, and perfect harmony with Libyan nature (Rava, 1931B, p.36).

Afterwards came the explicative *tour de force*. The "real" basis for using Libyan buildings as a model was that they were actually Roman. Echoing Romanelli, Rava declared that the local work bore "the true tradition of Rome, the unerasable . . . imprint of its dominion" (Rava, 1931A, p.41). He detected Roman elements throughout North African housing, even "in the primitive Berber architecture."

[This] Roman influence (the real one, that of the practical organizing spirit of Rome . . .), [is] as of now, the most vital [element] in the design of the Arab-Turkish house, whose Rational plan is the exact reproduction of that of the ancient classical house . . . [and] best answers to the climate and the exigencies of the colonial life (Rava, 1931A, p.89).

Such a determination led to the conclusion that architects *must* use local examples, since they were actually the vessels of the Roman spirit. To imitate Libyan forms was therefore not to imitate local forms, but to obey the incentive of "Latinity" (*Latinità*):

The Arab house . . . is nothing more than the ancient Roman house, faithfully reproduced. . . . We will be deriving nothing from the Arabs, but will realign ourselves with the true, great Roman tradition, which has admirably resisted through the centuries. . . . Taking up again, with modernità of intentions, the classical house design conserved in the Arab one, we will perpetuate the work of Rome, creating the new in its traces. . . . We will thus conclude the eternal task of Latinity. . . . [and be able to] renew and complete the still primitive local architecture of our colony, with all the most modern technical and practical innovations (Rava, 1931B, p.36).

This statement contained several solutions to the problem of colonial form. First, by redescribing the Arab house as Roman, architects could imitate indigenous architecture without borrowing anything from the colonized subjects. Thus, Libya was denied history, identity, culture; the country became merely the repository of modern Italy's "roots." Italy could regain a history by imitating an indigenous architecture, basing its present occupation on its ancient status, and gaining new status in the present.

The second rhetorical strategy involved the place of ancient architecture in the present. Even though references to the architectural achievements of the ancient Roman Empire conferred status on the new Italian architecture, to blatantly repeat these achievements was seen as retrograde, unmodern. For example, Rava feared that the Italian Pavilion at the Paris fair (*Esposizione Coloniale di Parigi*), a small copy of the Basilica of Septimius Severus at Leptis Magna, would erroneously lead viewers to believe "that today's Italy, Imperial and Fascist, hasn't the force within to create its own, contemporary, colonial architecture" (Rava, 1931A, p.39). With the addition of the notion of *modernità*, architects could imitate the classical while claiming creativity. Such was the case with Rava's arch of 1931 in Tripoli, said to be "in full equilibrium between *romanità* [Romanity], acclimatization, and *modernità*" (*Architettura*, 1935) (FIG. 2).

Colonial architects could take this rhetorical strategy even further by arguing that restorations of old — if not classical — structures could still be "modern." This was the case with an article presenting a villa in Tripoli restored for Volpi, the first Fascist Governor of Libya. It claimed that despite the villa's traditional structure, it was restored following "the most modern and Rational criteria. . . . It is the first example

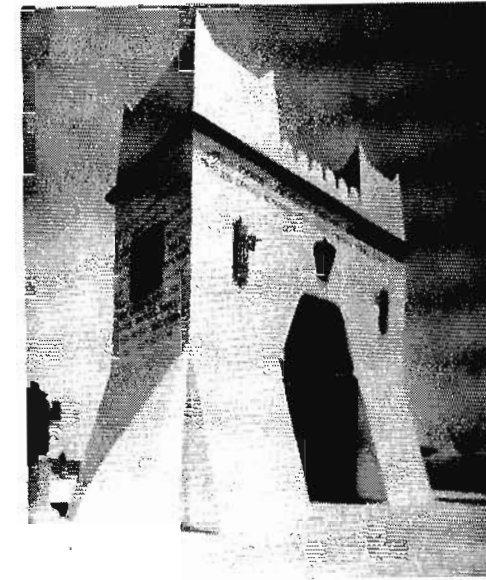


FIGURE 2. Arch in Tripoli, by Rava, 1931. Source: *Domus*, 1931, Vol. 4, July, p.37.

. . . in an Italian colony, of what the French and other foreigners have been doing for already twenty years, in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, giving new life to the old, Arab residences, with *modernità* of intentions and views" (*Domus*, 1931B, 46) (FIG. 3). In this context, "*modernità*" facilitated the appropriation of everything preceding Italian occupation.

Third, by invoking the term "Mediterranean," colonial architects could overcome the difference between their categories of "Italian" and "African." These two formed a necessary dichotomy for the architects, but since they wanted their designs to be both "purely" Italian and similar to local ones, some common ground had to be found. "Mediterranean"-ness solved this problem, since it allowed Libyan architecture to be "really" Italian, thanks to "the general Mediterranean character which . . . renders the very Italian local architecture of our Libyan coasts akin to that of our other Mediterranean coasts" (Rava, 1931A, p.89). This "general Mediterranean character" eliminated all the problems posed by history and historical relationships. Rava's Mediterranean vision was one of "white cubes and sunny terraces . . . natural and climatic conditions themselves generate the architectonic forms . . . no element is superfluous . . . it fully satisfies our modern aesthetic" (Rava, 1931B, p.32).

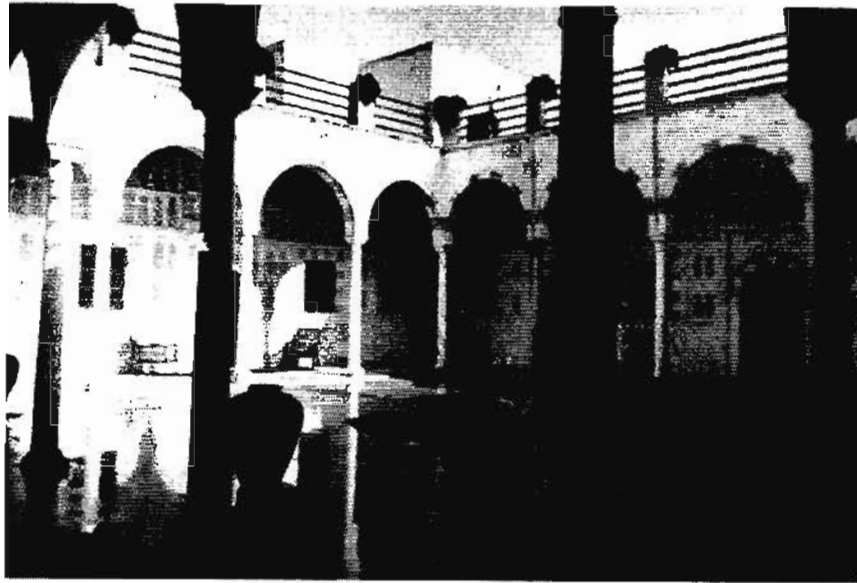


FIGURE 3. Governor Volpi's villa in Libya. Source: *Domus*, 1931, Vol. 4, April, p.45.
FIGURE 4. (FACING PAGE) Church at Suani-ben-Aden, Libya, by Rava and Larco, 1931. Source: *Domus*, 1931, Vol. 4, March, p.33.

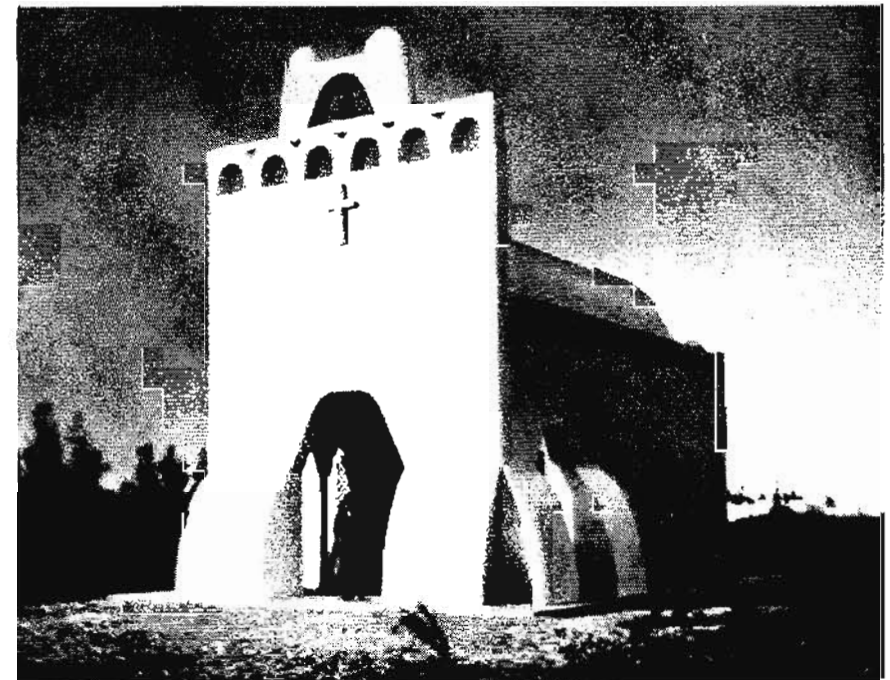
In their design for the new church at Suani-ben-Aden near Tripoli (FIG. 4), Rava and his associate Sebastiano Larco avoided the complication of a building being simultaneously "Roman" and "African" by referring to "Mediterranean" traits and evolution:

The fusion of originally Romano-Christian elements with indigenous African elements, which is inspired by the historical evolution itself, and therefore the architectural evolution as well, of Mediterranean Africa, suggests the elements on the basis of which to create an architecture which would be religious and colonial, but above all modern (Rava and Larco, 1931A).

Thus, if a building was "Mediterranean," it could be both "Italian" and "African" without conflict; and if it was Mediterranean, it was modern, since it was both functional and ahistorical. The notion of Mediterranean-ness was particularly appropriate for certain categories of building. "Popular housing" was described in one instance in terms of the "Mediterranean" tradition, not the (classical) Roman: "the architecture is derived from

the typical motifs one finds on our Mediterranean shores, where every plastic element has an eminently structural value" (*Architettura*, 1933).

Designs could also be criticized as "too classical" or "too Mediterranean," with the two qualities set in contradiction to one another. For example, although the theme for the second competition for the Piazza della Cattedrale in Tripoli in 1930 was "an appearance fit for a large modern city," all the projects submitted were found to suffer from one of two major flaws: they were either characterized by "an excessive stylistic adherence to the types of minor Mediterranean housing," or they showed "too great an emphasis on classical monumental styles." The latter group shared a "common will to create an expressive architectonic whole, monumentally inspired by Roman tradition, with forms which nonetheless are in harmony . . . with certain local tonalities." The winning project (FIGS. 5,6), which fell into this second category, was chosen because it was "pure in its Italic derivation." The dichotomy between minor Mediterranean building types and the Roman classical heritage was usually stated and negated at the same time: buildings could both be classical and reflect local forms.



"Modernità" was most often the final statement in these definitions and descriptions. It was implied that the addition of available characteristics (i.e., primitive/local or Italian/classical) would yield more than the sum of its parts: a modern character and a new Italian identity.⁷ Two rationales were at work here. The more superficial was the concern of the colonial architects with uniformity: again and again, they called for Italy's new status to be unequivocally expressed in a distinct, uniform style. *Modernità*, whatever else it meant, described this hoped-for accomplishment. The other rationale had to do with the notion of history implied and the claim that all Libyan architecture was in truth Roman. Libya was denied any history or identity of its own; its architecture had only one *raison d'être*: the safekeeping of modern Italy's "roots," which were now to be the starting point for Italy toward its future. With the statement of "*modernità*," Italy, or the Latin spirit, became both antecedent and consequent.

We will be able to . . . consider that we have impressed . . . [in our buildings] . . . the lasting sign of our present greatness, of our new civilization. We will find again . . . the Latinity of an architecture which

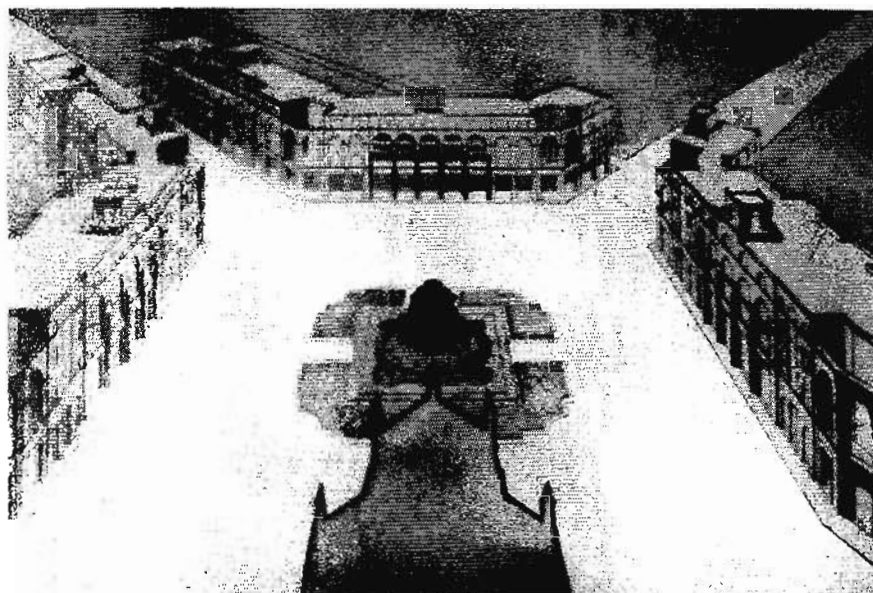


FIGURE 5. *Piazza della Cattedrale* competition, winning project by Morandi et al., 1930 (Tripoli). Source: *Architettura ed arti decorative*, 1931, Vol. 10, No. 2, p.437.

is, above all, profoundly Mediterranean . . . [and with it] that rebirth of a "Mediterranean spirit" . . . the moment [has come] for the creation of a truly modern colonial architecture of our own (Rava, 1931B, p.36).

Italian writers were well aware of French and English colonial building forms. Comparisons were drawn to Lyautey's accomplishments in Morocco. English architects, too, had made successful choices:

England never feared losing its prestige in its efforts to create its colonial architecture for the use of Europeans, by which it succeeded in imposing, in all its territories, the now universal 'bungalow' type, the perfect organism for the life of whites in the colonies! (Rava, 1931B, p.35).

This type of comment, which initially served as justification for the interest in other nations' colonial architecture, later became an encouragement to try to do better: "Italy . . . can do much better than other peoples have, by avoiding their mistakes and

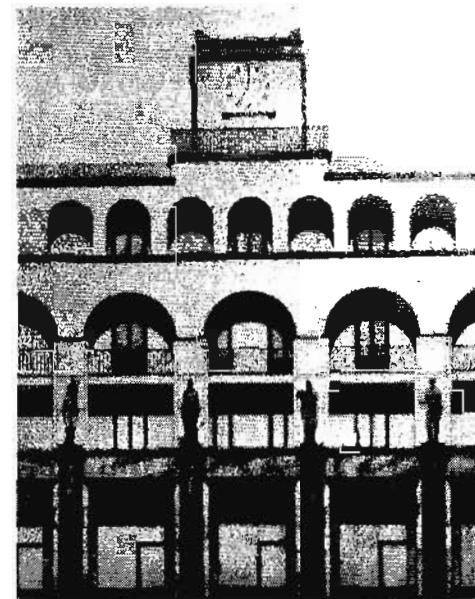


FIGURE 6. *Competition for the Piazza della Cattedrale in Tripoli*, winning project by Morandi et. al., 1930. Source: *Architettura ed arti decorative*, 1931, Vol. 10, No. 2, p.436.

assimilating what they learned at great costs" (Piccinato, 1936A, pp. 22–23). Italy was expected to compete with Europe; Italian architects were called upon to create works which "reflect the ideal climate of their time, the climate of Latin *modernità* . . . the . . . Rationalist architecture of Europe awaits a supreme gift . . . from the Italians, who have arrived late on the scene: the gift of free intelligence" (Rava, 1931C p. 43).

The colonies, at peace, were a site in which to do battle with Europe, and colonial architecture was the means, or weapon. "We are the fatal and secular vessels . . . of this eternal Latin spirit (*spirito latino*) which is returning to invade Europe" (Rava, 1931C, p. 44). From this point of view, architects were themselves soldiers in this "war of cultures" with Europe. This military analogy is in accord with the journals' tone. In 1932 *Architettura ed Arti Decorative* became *Architettura* as it came under the direction of the National Fascist Union of Architects (*Sindacato Nazionale Fascista Architetti*). This organization was represented by Marcello Piacentini, who stated that the journal's new aim would be to strive for good totalitarian architecture, "in accord with the political, social, and civic aspirations of the Italy of today" (Piacentini, 1932, pp. 1–2).

In 1936 a shift in the rhetoric employed in the journals appeared. At this time, "colonial architecture" explicitly became a problem of "colonial architectonic politics" (Rava, 1936A, p. 8). With the recent acquisition of Ethiopia, many of the initial motifs of colonial architecture were reworked and reiterated with new enthusiasm. According to Rava, "it [was] an entirely new concept of 'building politics' . . . which must be formed" (Rava, 1936A, p. 9). Looking back, architectural errors committed in Libya were pointed out. To prevent their repetition, a "unitary vision" was called for, which should be implemented by sending young architects to the colonies under the supervision of more experienced ones. "In this way a true and proper hierarchy would be created . . . which should itself be directly controlled by the State, through the Ministry of the Colonies," increasing the emphasis of the military model for a disciplined, efficient colonial architecture (Rava, 1936A, p. 9). The most experienced colonial architects should form a Colonial Architectural Council (*Consulta Coloniale per l'Architettura*), "so as to guarantee control over all the principal architectural and urbanistic problems . . . which should all be framed by a unitary programme . . . one single great work plan" (Rava, 1936A, p. 9).

The comparison of Italy's architectural approach with those of other European nations remained a major topic in 1936, but the Italian outlook was becoming more critical and more specific as to what was worth studying. For example, when Rava visited some of the French and English colonies, he determined that on the whole, France and England had not had much success in living up to "the great problem of colonial architecture. . .

the only significant example of unified organization in a grand style, especially in terms of urbanism, is provided by French Morocco, essentially thanks to the work and will of that great colonialist, Maréchal Lyautey (Rava, 1936A, p. 8).

Along with the repetition of old concerns, there also appeared many new signs of attention to detail, especially in the discussion of plans for Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital. For the first time separate quarters for colonists and natives were mentioned. But spatial differentiation within the city extended far beyond racial distinctions:

[In these plans] we find principles which are fundamental to the healthy and vital creation of each new colonial center, such as the total separation of the European city from the indigenous city, and an adequate zoning study (. . . allowing for a zone of refined neighborhoods, one middle-class, one . . . popular . . . and an industrial zone, one for hospitals, etc.) (Rava, 1936B, p. 29).

Another new feature was the need for an impressive, monumental city center, "where all the military and civic offices [would] be together" (Rava, 1936B, p. 29). Here the planners were consciously using the French transformation of Rabat as a model. Rava wrote that this city had "a true and proper governmental acropolis, dominant in the midst of vast gardens . . . this experiment in Rabat . . . is to be thought of as an example of the affirmation of power" (Rava, 1936B, p. 29). The purpose of monumentality was no longer to impress Europe alone; for the first time (in the literature), it was directed to the indigenous inhabitants of the colony. In the plan for Addis Ababa the architects consciously used the "concept [of] acting upon the indigenous mentality, impressing it with the isolated grandeur of power" (Rava, 1936B, p. 29). It was not only the central offices which were thought of as a means to this end: "A point . . . of capital concern relative to the prestige of the conquering nation vis-à-vis the submitted populations, is that of the residences of civil servants and the military," which therefore should be particularly Italian and *moderno* — in a word, colonial (Rava, 1936B, p. 29).

This new comprehensiveness of details within an overarching plan arose with the opportunity for colonial urbanism through the planning of entire cities, some of them new, in Ethiopia. Colonial urbanism was an expanded field for the same concerns that had defined the more fragmented efforts of Libyan colonial architecture. Its broadest hope was "to realize . . . in the most genuine Fascist spirit . . . the totalitarian concept of a truly Imperial affirmation" (Rava, 1936B, p. 30).

As for architecture, by 1936 a clearer picture of its actual elements had begun to emerge. Whereas in 1931 the function of design was still described as "to create a typical exotic

atmosphere" (Rava, 1931D, p.34), by now a sort of typology — albeit weak — of colonial housing types and features was being developed alongside the inclusive plans for cities in Ethiopia. This reflected the colonialists' special housing needs in connection with their way of life:

To create a cool shelter by which to screen the sun out . . . [and the] blinding light, the heavy dust . . . and which . . . provides spacious areas fit to receive friends and contain that social life which is characteristic of life in the colonial cities; this is the physiognomy of the house in the colonies (Piccinato, 1936A, p.23).

One architectural feature, the verandah, was essential: "it is . . . the place of rest and leisure during the coolest hours of the day . . . [where] one welcomes friends, receives guests, relaxes, reads," and thus it must be regarded as "an important constituent element" rather than as an accessory to the house (Piccinato, 1936B, pp.16–17). Courtyards were also accorded much importance, and tribute was paid to the bungalow, "the most typical and . . . most genuine house-form of the European civilization in the tropical colonies" (Piccinato, 1936B, p.15).

As the scale on which colonial dominance by means of architecture increased with the possibility of colonial urbanism, so too did the attention paid to smaller details. Previously, it had been thought that Italian architects should learn from local forms, but the specific ways in which this was to occur had never been clear. Now architects were surveying local materials and judging one-by-one whether they were useful to the colonial life. For instance, a new type of door was needed for the life of the colonists, one that would allow for both closure and ventilation, a sophistication not necessitated by the natives' "much more primitive and modest needs" (Piccinato, 1936C, p.9).

The sum of these changes was that by 1936 "colonial architecture" was no longer informed by a vague set of statements, but had diversified in the Ethiopian context into several sets of concerns, one being the beginnings of colonial urbanism per se, and another a simplified, more direct approach to the designs of particular buildings.

1937–1940: COLONIAL URBANISM

In 1937 *Architettura* elaborately documented some of the major plans and precepts that had been initiated in 1936 for the "new" cities of Ethiopia. In fact, these cities were for the most part already in existence, but by virtue of their planning efforts, the Italians

considered them to be of their own design. Clear distinctions were drawn: plans must be different for cities of different populations, "according to whether the new cities will have a reduced white population and thus an essentially colonial character, or a numerous Italian population and urbanistic traits similar to those of European cities" (Bosio, 1937A, p.419).

Control, of inhabitants and the movement of traffic, as well as of the construction of buildings following a systematic plan, was the predominant concern. Exact spatial delimitations and the relative situation of areas were the substance of urbanistic discourse. Each and every building must form part of, and be determined by, a preconceived comprehensive *piano regolatore* (regulating plan) (Bosio, 1937A, p.421). But control was also seen as permeating the very shape of the city and its possible development: "Every urban zone will be subject to precise norms which will regulate (*regolano*) construction, in urbanistic discipline and in perfect correspondence with the regulating plan (*piano regolatore*), following a program of succession" (Bosio, 1937B, p.776). This kind of control was also an essential part of the planning process itself, which was both supported and directed by an array of plans and aerial views of the city sites (FIG. 7).

The primary guideline for planning was race. Most planning details followed from the separation of blacks from whites, and from the effort to keep blacks as invisible as possible to whites, while ensuring that "the natives" could not help but see the visible signs of white power.

For all the cities under consideration (Addis Ababa, Gondar, Jimma, Dessye), particular concern was given to provisions that would allow traffic to be directed to and from markets so as to expose the whites to the locals as little as possible:

An important problem is to channel the traffic of caravans away from the national traffic: caravans and the indigenous traffic will end up in the indigenous quarter . . . It must reach the indigenous market and quarter without going through the [Italian part of the] city. The national market will be separate from the indigenous one, although it will have frequent commerce with it (Bosio, 1937A, p.427).

Locals would have restricted access to the Italian market: "the natives will be conceded commerce in such zones, but in no case will they reside in them" (Bosio, 1937B, p.774). Indigenous quarters were also planned around the need for access by whites to their (indigenous) central civic buildings: "the Coptic church, amid a composition in green,

will dominate the quarter; one *piazza* will contain the tribunal, the indigenous school and the hospital" (Bosio, 1937B, p.774). But the problem remained of isolating whites from blacks as much as possible, even in their entry into the "native" areas: "functionaries will be able to go . . . [to this same *piazza*, by a] road independent from the indigenous traffic" (Bosio, 1937B, p.774). Not only did control include residences and the sites of daily activities and commerce, but blacks and whites were also to move within the city with as little contact as possible.⁸

On a larger scale planners perceived the city proper as an instrument of dominance:

It will be possible to plan concentric cities with urban zoning plans centered around a knoll or spur, where, as though it were an acropolis, the buildings of Government, the element of conquest and domination, will constitute the urban hierarchy of the city which should formally make evident the predominance of white over black, and visually admonish that every piazza seeks our supremacy over the infantile, primitive indigenous population (Bosio, 1937A, p.429).⁹

This was an explicit statement that space and landforms, as well as the way these were built up, were the vehicles and expressions of power — and consequently indistinguishable from the extension of power. At this moment in the development of Italian colonial architectural thought there emerged a sort of cognitive colonialism, an attempt no longer merely to control Ethiopians or their movements, but to ensure that the habitat of the "native" population was pre-inhabited by an Italian power, which was to be, in the natives' perception, everywhere.

One way of achieving this effect was to absorb, or take on, the visible aspects of the previous ruling power. The planners responsible for the new plans for the already-existing city of Addis Ababa wrote that "the insertion of the new center among the buildings which already represented the major expression of the Abyssinian dynasty's reign, reaffirms the total superimposition of Italy's domination" (Guidi and Valle, 1937, p.761). But it would be erroneous to conclude that the only human subjects of this planned control were the non-Italians, even though the texts emphasized the colonists' accommodation, and they never used the term "control" in connection with the colonists' daily lives and movements. The ultimate impact of planning could only be in the control of all traffic. Furthermore, planning entered in far greater detail into the aspects of colonists' lives than into the lives of nonwhites.

Another point of interest is the manipulation of landscape, the search for effect, in the segregation of blacks from whites. In contrast to the utter artifice of such planning,

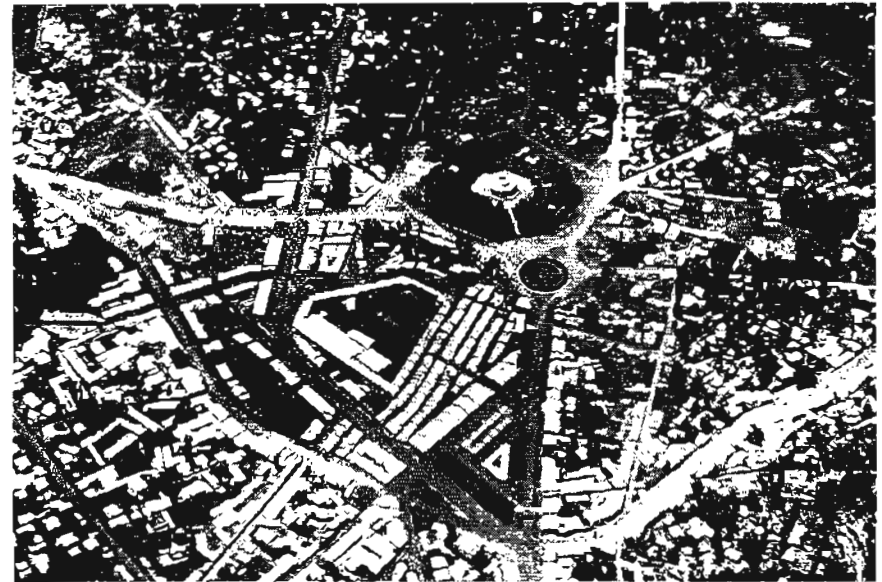
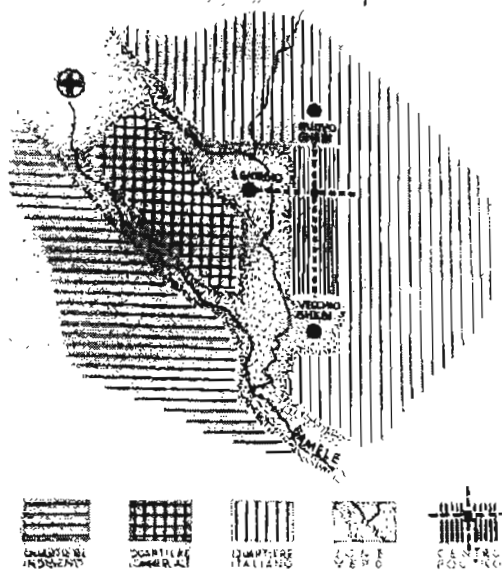


FIGURE 7. Aerial view of Addis Ababa (n.d.). Source: *Architettura*, 1937, Vol. 16, No. 2, p.757.

barriers were thought of as "natural," just as was the barrier differentiating black and white. The actual barriers were either "green" (that is, vegetational), or they were of water, as was the case in Addis Ababa, which was divided by two riverbeds that channelled seasonal floodwaters (FIG. 8):

It is these torrents . . . which will provide the means . . . for imposing the regulating plan (piano regolatore) with respect to the segregation of the indigenous city. . . . The fundamental criterion . . . is the net separation between indigenous and Italian quarters . . . the torrents . . . constitute the natural lines of separation (Guidi and Valle, 1937, p.760).

Elsewhere, "green . . . will constitute . . . the best frontier between the Italian quarter and the indigenous one (the latter always being downwind), and efficient protection from the epidemic diseases frequently found in the unhygienic indigenous life" (Bosio, 1937A, p.431).¹⁰ "Green" should also play a part in the indigenous areas themselves, which were described as "uniform and gathered together in organized plans to



facilitate ventilation. . . . The abundant vegetation will interrupt the uniform monotony of these rudimentary complexes . . . it is useless to pave the roads" (Bosio, 1937A, p.431) (FIG. 9).

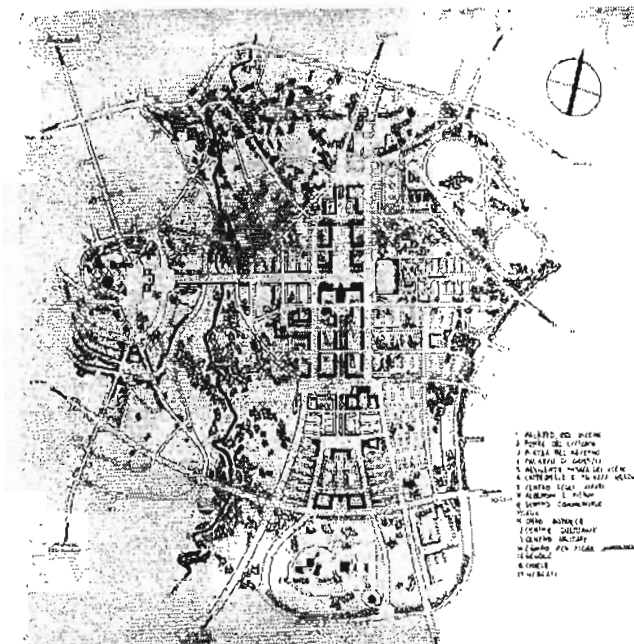
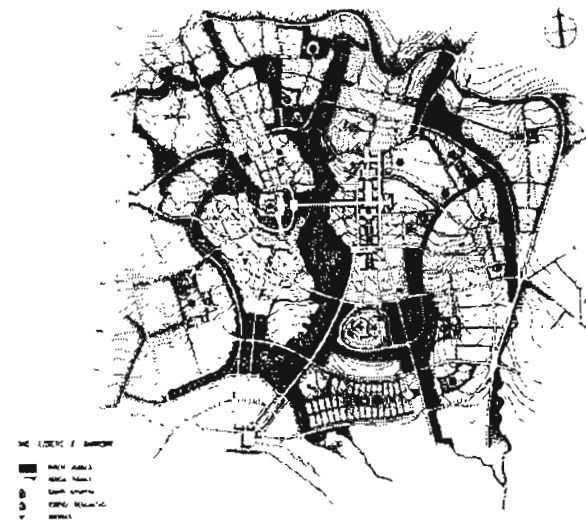
Meanwhile, the contents of the Italian "center," which were to be protected from the local presence by these barricades of vegetation, should "have a practical architecture, simple and dignified, rich in frescoes, mosaics and sculptures . . . the best affirmation of today's Italian capacity for artistic expansion" (Bosio, 1937A, p.425). These areas should also contain vegetation; but here landscaping was to serve as an ornament or as an interruption of monotony, rather than as a "natural barrier" against blacks or their diseases (FIG. 10).

■ ■ ■

FIGURE 8. (ABOVE) Addis Ababa, riverbeds and the distribution of "quarters" (quartieri). Source: *Architettura*, 1937, Vol. 16, No. 2, p.765.

FIGURE 9. (FACING PAGE, TOP) Addis Ababa, showing areas marked for parks and vegetation. Source: *Architettura*, 1937, Vol. 16, No. 2, p.766.

FIGURE 10. (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM) Addis Ababa, showing landscaping and public buildings in the center. Source: *Architettura*, 1936, Vol. 16, No. 2, p.768.



Throughout these plans, the indigenous living areas were referred to as "quarters," usually in opposition to the Italian "city" or "center."¹¹ This reflected an attitude toward the locally found structures which was the opposite of that in ascendance during the earlier planning of Libya. In Ethiopia, the initial premise was that there was little or nothing that Italian planners could learn from the local buildings or overall layout: in general, the Ethiopian cities were perceived as unplanned, haphazard, "disordered" (Bosio, 1937A, p.422). Addis Ababa, in particular, was qualified as "the true Negro city, that is, the unhappy result of the incapacity that blacks on the whole and Ethiopians especially have for [organization]" (Guidi and Valle, 1937, p.755).

The categories used in the planning of non-indigenous zones were the following: service, industrial, military, residential (upper-class, apartment buildings, working-class — these "each with a garden"), schools, sports complexes, markets, hospitals and hotels (Bosio, 1937B, 1937C, 1937D).¹² Other major guidelines for planning, besides the definition of a center/acropolis and its quality of "triumph" (Bosio, 1937B, p.744), included the placement of "more economical but nonetheless distinguished" residences in close proximity to this center (Guidi and Valle, 1937, p.763). The indigenous market, although at a safe distance, was situated in relation to the Italian one so as to be a source of entertainment, or local flavor, especially for the tourists:

The suk is immediately adjacent to the European commercial zone, off the road which connects the old and the new centers, since it is, as in all colonial cities, one of the major attractions for the resident Europeans as well as for the tourists (Guidi and Valle, 1937, p.762).

These articles present a comprehensive, urbanistic approach, in which the criteria for planning were explicit. They were not issues in themselves: the point was to put together cities, not to be modern, define *modernità*, or be Latin in spirit, but to be dominant on the ground. In comparison, the previous work in Libya had been on a microscopic scale and dependent on a number of emotionally loaded but otherwise unclear, impractical motifs. Certainly the overt racial distinctions that served as premises in Ethiopian planning made the task much clearer than in Libya, where writers had been persistently caught up in the dual attempt both to distinguish Italy from Libya and to assimilate the two on the basis of some historical or "spirit"-ual common ground.

It appears as though the Italian architects and planners were only fully able to practice "colonial architecture" in structuring the colonization of a country (Ethiopia) that had been acquired without the presumed justification of historical right (as Libya had been). In a rhetorical sense, perhaps what had "entitled" Italy to colonize Libya, its

former identity with and ownership of it, was also a major impediment to any straightforward planning for the colonists in Libya, since it led to complications in the formulation of a clear difference between colonizers and colonized in the organization of colonial space. In other words, the colonial architecture developed in the Libyan context was overprescribed and thus limited in its scope by the closed circle of the very cultural categories, and the complex relationships among them, which were meant to facilitate its development.

Two reasons stand out for this difference in approach. First, the conquest of Ethiopia was a Fascist venture, and was not so much ideologically based in matching Europe on its terms as it was in the notion of Italy as an imperial power in the world. Second, the architects of the late 1920s and early 1930s had been Rationalists, and their principal interest had been in modern, functional architecture. By contrast, the planners of Ethiopia preferred monumentality and a deliberate articulation of space and power. In Ethiopia the point was to demonstrate Italian power over the local audience by designing powerful buildings and cities. Buildings were political, aesthetics were secondary. The *piano regolatore* of Ethiopia was not so much a rhetorical device as an instrument. Whereas *modernità* had been abstract, the effort in Ethiopia was as practical as possible.

While the emphasis in Ethiopia was on planning on a vast scale, the counterpoint of that scale appeared in 1940, when Italian colonial urbanism also appeared as a concern with the details of urban living. At this point interior decoration, the furnishings of urban colonial life, became a full-fledged market in the architectural journals. The point of the new designs was to "provide high-class accommodations for every need of the colonial life" (Rava, 1940, p.21). What were once seen as primitive, indigenous traits now became subject to stylization. Colony dwellers were categorized as "nomads" or "settlers," and were told to purchase their furniture accordingly. There were textiles, Italian in design but hand-woven by Libyans. And earthenware dining services were designed to "renew the old techniques of North African potters . . . (who themselves perpetuate an art inherited from Rome, the colonizer and conqueror)" (Rava, 1940, p.22).

The "Mediterranean" trait was thus transposed from the design of living quarters to the ornamentation of those quarters, where it no longer reflected national identity. Otherwise, the trait was newly imputed in that it was Libyans, not Italians, who were re-finding their "roots" in the "primitive" by means of the "modern." Their products were destined to be marketed in Italy:

The return of the indigenous craftsmen to the primitive sources, free from the infiltrations, adulterations and superimpositions of an entirely false

Arab/Moorish "style," from a false local bazaar coloring, will be brought about on modern designs of a very controlled taste . . . [this will be] an anti-exotic production, of a happily "Mediterranean" character . . . which should make it appropriate and refined, not only for the colonies, but also in Italy (Rava, 1940, p.23).

EPILOGUE

By the end of this progression in Italian colonial-architectural discourse, its most interesting aspect is the diversification of foci which had taken place. Initially, isolated buildings — removed, as it were, from any political, geographic or urban context — had held the colonial architects' attention; they were in search of "art." The focus was still on individual buildings when the object of the architects' search shifted to *modernità*. It was with the conquest of Ethiopia that architecture as a manifestation and a means of power itself became the topic. The transition was aided, no doubt, by the awareness of Lyautey's works in Morocco and of the contemporary architectural discourse in Nazi Germany. From this time on the whole city, urban space, and planning were invested with political meanings. Hence, the focus of such work — apparently suddenly — became expanded as much as possible. Yet at the same time the expression of Italian power also confined itself to such small dimensions, such as furnishings, as to be politically trite.

The most extensive use of space, land and territory in the colonies as a bed of power came in 1939 when Libya was decreed to be Italy's "fourth shore" and, therefore, no more than a territorial/spatial extension of Italy. It was also then, when native Libyans suddenly found themselves not in Libya, but in Italy, that they were "barred from acquiring metropolitan citizenship" — that is, from being Italians — by another decree which created a "special Italian citizenship" (*cittadinanza italiana speciale*) (Segrè, 1974, pp.104–105). The most global effect of power by spatial means was to change Libyans in Italian Libya overnight into virtual immigrants into Italy, whereas the initial aim of Italian colonization had been to allow Italians to emigrate to Libya.

NOTES

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1. Italy had other colonial involvements outside of Libya and Ethiopia. Before the end of the nineteenth century it had acquired, mostly by commercial treaties, parts of both Eritrea and Somalia. With Libya, it also gained control of the islands of the Dodecanese; but these were considered a "possession" rather than a colony. Then in 1939 the Italians also occupied Albania. However, colonial architecture depicted in Italian journals of the period is confined to Libya and Ethiopia, and this is reflected here. The dates I am using, awkward as they may seem in relation to those of Fascist history, are determined by the breaks and reorientations in the architectural journals.
2. All translations from Italian sources are mine.
3. In metropolitan Italy archaeological finds also had an enormous impact on the forms valued by Fascist architects (see MacDonald, 1982).
4. See Foucault on "the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power" in geographically analytical knowledge, and the "circulation of notions . . . between geographical and strategic discourses" (Foucault, 1981, p.69).
5. See Shapiro (1985) for an account of the regime's shifts.
6. See Benevolo's further analysis of the fact that all totalitarian regimes of the period (namely, those of Italy, Germany and Russia) blocked the modern movement. Despite the vast differences between them, in each case efficient national control was best suited by the predictable forms of neoclassicism (Benevolo, 1971, pp.574–76). Also see Simeone (1978) for a comparable phenomenon in folklore studies.
7. This dual concern with, and reference to, the indigenous local styles and the styles of the colonizing nation is also found in the discourse of British colonial architecture in Delhi (compare to King, 1976, p.32).
8. See King on Horvath's model of the colonial city, ". . . of which the major explanatory variable is dominance . . . this latter variable . . . partially accounts for the fact that . . . the component sectors of the colonial city were kept separate, deliberately preventing the development of . . . diffusion and interaction" (Horvath, 1969; King, 1976, p.14).
9. This notion of architectural artifacts seeking "supremacy" in and by themselves is also found in the Fascist architectural thought of Germany. Compare the statement of Hitler's architect, Albert Speer, in a recent interview: "my buildings were intended, as I specified in 1936, not only to express the nature of our movement. They were to be a part of the movement themselves . . . For Hitler [building] was one part of the political will of the National Socialist movement" (Leitner, 1982, p.48).
10. King calls this spatial gap between black and white areas for the protection of health, "the 'sanitary space'" (King, 1976, p.37). "Physical space in the colonial settlement and between it and the indigenous city, is organised according to mid- and late nineteenth century . . . medical theories which . . . assume a causal connection between aerial distance and bacterial infection" (King, 1976, p.37).
11. King describes this in connection with colonial cities in general: "The social, the racial, and the spatial were embodied in explicit linguistic and conceptual form: 'the native city', 'European hospital', 'Black townships'" (King, 1990, p.9).
12. Rigorous separation of urban areas is, according to King, the defining principle of colonial urbanism: "the colonial city is that urban area . . . most typically characterised by the physical segregation of its ethnic, social and cultural component groups" (King, 1976, p.17; emphasis in original). The planning categories reflect the colonial social structure, which, in contrast to the indigenous one, "was increasingly differentiated in terms of occupation, income, life-style and . . . location, style and scale of residential expectation" (King, 1976, p.36).

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ON THE ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM OF
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