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THE ITALIAN COLONIAL APPROPRIATION OF INDIGENOUS NORTH AFRICAN ARCHITECTURE IN THE 1930'S

... the native architecture of our Mediterranean colonies presents, for those who may know how to recognize it, all the necessary requirements from which to deduce a perfect modern colonial architecture: rationality in planning, contemporary simplicity of form in exterior appearance, perfect adherence to the necessity of the African climate, perfect harmony with the Libyan nature. When the frequent examples that they propose to us of vivid polychromy applied to affect and brighten up the nudity of the cubic masses and smooth walls are added to these qualities, it will be shown that the native architecture of Libya offers us all of the desirable elements for creating our present-day colonial architecture.

Carlo Enrico Rava, "Di un'architettura coloniale moderna—Parte seconda" (1931).¹

In an eight-part series of articles published in *Domus* magazine in 1931 under the heading "Panorama del Razionalismo," Italian architect Carlo Enrico Rava included a two-part essay, entitled "Di un'architettura coloniale moderna," in which he argued that the problem of a modern colonial architecture was closely tied to the more general question of architectural modernity. Noting that there was an almost total ignorance of the problem of building in the colonial context in architectural discourse, Rava stated that Italian architects working in the Libyan colonies should avoid the direct copying of Roman models. He was also critical of the use of Moorish motifs in colonial architecture, arguing their presence in this region could only be found in the "false and monstrous" constructions built in the years following the Italian conquest of 1911.² Instead of following these historicist approaches, Rava asserted that Italian architects should adapt the forms and materials of the "native architecture" of Libya, which had all of the desirable qualities for the creation of a modern colonial architecture proper to

Fascist Italy. One of the crucial reasons behind the appropriation of these local sources, he notes, was that they were modern. This "modernity," according to Rava, was to be found in their suitability to climatic conditions, their lack of superfluous elements, and their ability to harmonize with the colonial context.³ These indigenous constructions were also seen as an appropriate reference for a modern colonial architecture due to their connection with the Roman colonization of North Africa. In this discussion, Rava makes a distinction between the monumental ruins of sites like Leptis Magna—which he referred to as being "already dead," and having only "a purely archaeological-touristic value"—and the native architecture of the region. According to this view, the so-called Arab house was a reinterpretation of the Roman domus, inheriting both its classical plan and its central courtyard. To borrow from these indigenous forms was thus borrowing from the surviving traces of Italy's own building traditions.⁴

This essay examines the appropriation of local forms by Italian architects working in the Libyan colonies during the 1930's, using the writings of Carlo Enrico Rava and other architects and scholars as its primary point of reference. In this discussion, the crucial issue is not merely the presentation of these indigenous buildings in academic and professional publications, but their re-presentation, that is, how they were interpreted and understood and what motivated these views. This appropriation will be studied in relation to scholarly interest in the indigenous culture of this region; an interest that was largely a product of the political policies developed by the Italian colonial authorities in the early 1920's. The use of local forms will also be viewed against the backdrop of the contemporary fascination with regional culture in Italy. This specifically metropolitan discourse will be examined through the pages of *Architettura e Arti Decorative*: a leading architectural journal that espoused an ap-

preciation of the indigenous traditions of Italy's various regions. Finally, the Italian interest in Libyan architecture will be studied in relation to the much earlier preoccupation with local culture by the French in Morocco under General Hubert Lyautey (1912–25). In this effort, the full range of the Italian interest in the architecture of the Libyan colonies during the Fascist period will be examined.

This essay will argue that the writings of Carlo Enrico Rava offer a quintessentially modernist appropriation of the indigenous architecture of the Italian colonies in North Africa. Indeed, in contrast with the stylistic references to Islamic decoration found in the *arabesques* of French colonialism, Rava proposed an abstract assimilation of the forms and typologies of the local architecture. The assumption was that, on the one hand, this architecture was derived from Roman precedents, thus providing a connection with Italy's past. On the other hand, Rava noted that the indigenous forms of the Libyan colonies reflected a modernist aesthetic sensibility found in their spare, simple forms and their responsiveness to climate. Ultimately, it will be asserted that by viewing Islamic art and architecture as a mere transmitter of ancient and modern Italian culture, the interpretations of Rava and other Italian architects and scholars were reifying a Eurocentric view found in contemporary Western historiography. It will also be demonstrated that the dialectical nature of this theoretical formulation was subject to its own internal transformations through the course of the 1930's, during which time a theoretical and ideological shift took place, from an abstract assimilation of these influences to a more scientific interest in the indigenous culture of Libya. Rather than discuss this transformation as being only the product of a mediation of modernity and tradition, I will argue that these approaches offer two distinct modalities of the same modernity; the first connected to its aesthetic tendencies and interpretive procedures and the second to its historical consciousness. Through the influence of a racially motivated political understanding of the Libyan culture that developed in the late 1930's—an understanding that was largely developed in "scientific" disciplines like anthropology and ethnography—Libyan architecture was increasingly understood by Italian architects and scholars as a timeless repository of an essentially backward people.

ITALIAN COLONIAL POLITICS AND THE DISCOURSE ON LOCAL CULTURE IN THE 1920'S

The interest of Rava and other architects in the architecture of the Libyan colonies was, at least in part, a product of the policies practiced by the Italian colonial authorities in this region. These so-called indigenous politics were initially developed under the guidance of Giuseppe Volpi, who was appointed governor of Tripolitania in August of 1921. The first component of Volpi's indigenous politics was a program to modernize the colony's public infrastructure and improve its economy.⁵ As part of this initiative, the Italian authorities made a considerable effort to create a viable system of roads and public institutions that would serve both military and domestic needs. The improvement of the economy of Tripolitania was linked primarily to agriculture; the Volpi government enacted laws that allowed private companies to claim uncultivated land.⁶ The second component of these indigenous politics was the most crucial in fostering an interest in Libyan architecture by Italian architects. It called for the preservation of the Roman and Muslim historical patrimony of Tripolitania, with the aim of appeasing the local populations. This program began with the creation of a commission to identify buildings and objects of historic, artistic, and archaeological interest. After an initial meeting in November of 1921, this group drew up a list that included two Roman monuments, the ancient castle and walls of the old city, thirteen Muslim religious buildings, and twenty-four private residences. The seriousness of the commitment of the Volpi administration to this restoration program was demonstrated through two legislative measures introduced in early 1922. The first allowed for government regulations that pertained to Roman antiquities to be applied to the conservation of the Islamic heritage of the Libyan colonies as well, and the second established the list of buildings to be preserved.⁷

These legislative changes resulted in a considerable expansion of the responsibilities of the Superintendency to the Monuments and Excavations (*Soprintendenza ai monumenti e scavi*) of Tripolitania. Prior to the governorship of Volpi this group largely presided over the Roman patrimony of the colony; however, beginning in 1922 it assumed responsibility for the preservation of Muslim historical sites. Among the

first projects to be undertaken under this mandate was the restoration of the walls of the old city of Tripoli. The first stage of this project was completed in 1923 under the supervision of the noted archaeologist Pietro Romanelli—who was then director of the Superintendency to the Monuments of Tripolitania. Faced with the ruinous state of the walls—a situation that was a product of both the deterioration of the structure and its partial destruction by the Italian colonial authorities in 1914–15—Romanelli chose to systematize them through a combination of restructuring existing elements and rebuilding selected portions.⁸ While the project followed what seemed to be the objective restoration practices of the field of archaeology, this very objectivity was heavily influenced by a politically motivated desire to recognize the Latin origins of Libyan culture. One of the most substantial gestures made in the restoration of the western wall of Tripoli, near the Bab al-Jadid, was to re-establish its “true” height by excavating down to its lowest level, which was believed to have been from the Roman period. In a similar fashion, the restoration of the castle of Tripoli by the architect Armando Brasini, working in conjunction with Renato Bartoccini of the Superintendency to the monuments, clearly favored a “classic” period of Libyan architecture over all others, that of the rule of Ahmad Pasha al-Karamanli (r. 1711–45).⁹ These attempts to connect the architectural traditions of Tripoli with Italian or Roman origins are not isolated events. They are entirely coincident with the principles of a project carried out by the Superintendency between 1912 and 1918 to free the second-century arch of Marcus Aurelius from what was viewed as centuries of squalid fabric. The restoration began by removing the adjacent buildings and excavating down to the original level, eventually resulting in the substantial demolition of portions of a number of Tripoli’s most famous seventeenth-century funduqs in the name of providing a space to frame the view of this Roman monument.¹⁰

The Volpi administration undertook an equally significant preservation initiative related to the native artisanal industries of Tripolitania, which included jewelry making, metalworking, and carpet weaving. The Ufficio governativo delle arti applicate indigene (Government Office of Indigenous Applied Arts) was founded in January of 1925, with the mission to study these industries, make proposals for their expansion, and promote their sale through exhibitions and displays in Tripoli and Italy.¹¹ In attempting to improve

the artistic production of local craftsmen—who were seen to be practicing an “unclear and impure” interpretation of Arab art—this office provided information, such as representative patterns taken from the indigenous craft industries of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. They also brought in master craftsmen from the same French colonies in order to assist the local workers to learn “more perfect techniques.” It should be noted, however, that these new methods were a return to the practices that “in past times they also performed in Tripoli, but of which almost all traces have been lost.”¹² The Italian authorities saw themselves as restoring artisanal techniques that better corresponded with the “authentic” culture of this region.

At the same time, the Government Office of Indigenous Applied Arts was active in improving the organizational and economic systems of these same craft industries. These improvements involved, among other things, financial support for acquiring raw materials and the systematic upgrading of the quality and cost of these commodities. The enhancement of the distribution system for native artisanal products was largely connected with fairs and exhibitions. The displays included temporary installations, such as the participation of this office at regional events in Italy like the annual Milan Trade Fair, and the creation of a permanent exhibition in Tripoli which was organized in conjunction with the local chamber of commerce (fig. 1). The latter display was located in Corso Vittorio Emanuele II in Tripoli and had the appearance of a metropolitan shopfront that had been reinterpreted through the use of arabising motifs. The image of this permanent exhibition is a perfect expression of the tension between modernization and preservation that marked the Italian intervention into the indigenous culture of Tripolitania under Giuseppe Volpi, which both “historicized” and “modernized” this culture in conformance with a Western viewpoint.

The commitment of the Volpi administration to the restoration of Muslim historical sites and the preservation of native craft traditions in Tripolitania resulted in the emergence of a scholarly discourse on the indigenous architecture and culture of this colony, a discourse that was extremely influential for architects like Rava who were interested in the “modernity” of local building traditions. Individuals like Romanelli and Bartoccini who worked for the Superintendency to the monuments during this period not only supervised restoration projects, they also published their



Fig. 1. Tripoli, Government Office of Indigenous Applied Arts, window display, ca. 1925.

findings in well-known Italian journals like *Bollettino d'Arte* and *Dedalo*. As a consequence, not only did the local architecture of Tripolitania become a valid topic of scholarly interest, but a number of individuals emerged as experts in this field of study. The most prominent of these scholars was Salvatore Aurigemma, who worked for the Superintendency to the monuments of Tripolitania between 1912 and 1919. Although he returned to Italy several years before Volpi became governor, Aurigemma continued his research activities throughout this period, eventually publishing essays on a number of prominent buildings in Tripoli, including the castle and the mosques of Ahmad Pasha al-Karamanli (1736–37) and Mustafa Bey Gurji (1833–34).¹³ In the case of the essay on the Karamanli mosque in *Dedalo* (fig. 2), Aurigemma provided a detailed account of the history of its founder and the Maghrebi influences on its decorative traditions, while not failing to remark that there were “lines and decorative elements from eighteenth-century European art.”¹⁴

The scholarly work of Aurigemma on the indigenous architecture of Tripolitania culminated in the publication of his *Tripoli e le sue opere d'arte* of 1927. As in other essays, in this book Aurigemma recognized the

complex interaction of numerous decorative traditions in the native architecture and artisanry of Tripolitania. *Tripoli e le sue opere d'arte* includes a historical account of the region and the development of its arts followed by a detailed description of a number of individual buildings and art works. These works include the Roman monument of the Arch of Marcus Aurelius, the fifth-century Christian tombs at ‘Ayn Zara, the mosque of Murad Agha from the early Ottoman period (1511–1711), the Karamanli and Gurji mosques from the Karamanli period (1711–1834), and examples of contemporary Jewish, Arab, and Berber artisanry.

Despite the breadth and sophistication of this presentation of local traditions, however, the publication reflects the operative nature of Italian scholarly work in Tripolitania during this period. In the first section the description of Roman colonization closely resembles the Italian colonial authorities’ vision of their own political policies.¹⁵ In this sense, Aurigemma was using a historical and scholarly study of the artistic traditions of Tripoli to link the greatness of its Roman past with the potential of its colonial present.

It is important to recognize that this scholarly interest in the indigenous culture of the Italian colonies was itself profoundly influenced by a parallel discourse that had emerged much earlier in the French colonies in North Africa. In addition to the cultural nationalism of the “civilizing mission” that historians have argued was carried out by the French in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, the colonial authorities in this region initiated educational and research programs related to its indigenous language and culture in their indoctrination of the local populations as French subjects. One of the most prominent figures in this work was Prosper Ricard, who began his academic and scholarly career in North Africa in 1900 by teaching the local populations of Algeria.¹⁶ After becoming inspector of artistic and industrial teaching for all indigenous schools in this colony in 1909, Ricard embarked on a series of research missions that led him to Morocco, where he eventually became inspector of indigenous arts of the regions of Fez and Meknès in 1915. Throughout this period and well into the 1920’s, Ricard established himself as a leading expert on the Muslim arts of the French colonies in North Africa by publishing numerous essays and books on this subject, including *Le travail de la laine à Tlemcen* (1913), written in collaboration with Alfred Bel, and *Corpus de tapis marocains* (1923).¹⁷ Notably, Ricard also published an essay entitled “Il rinnovamento artistico del Marocco” in the

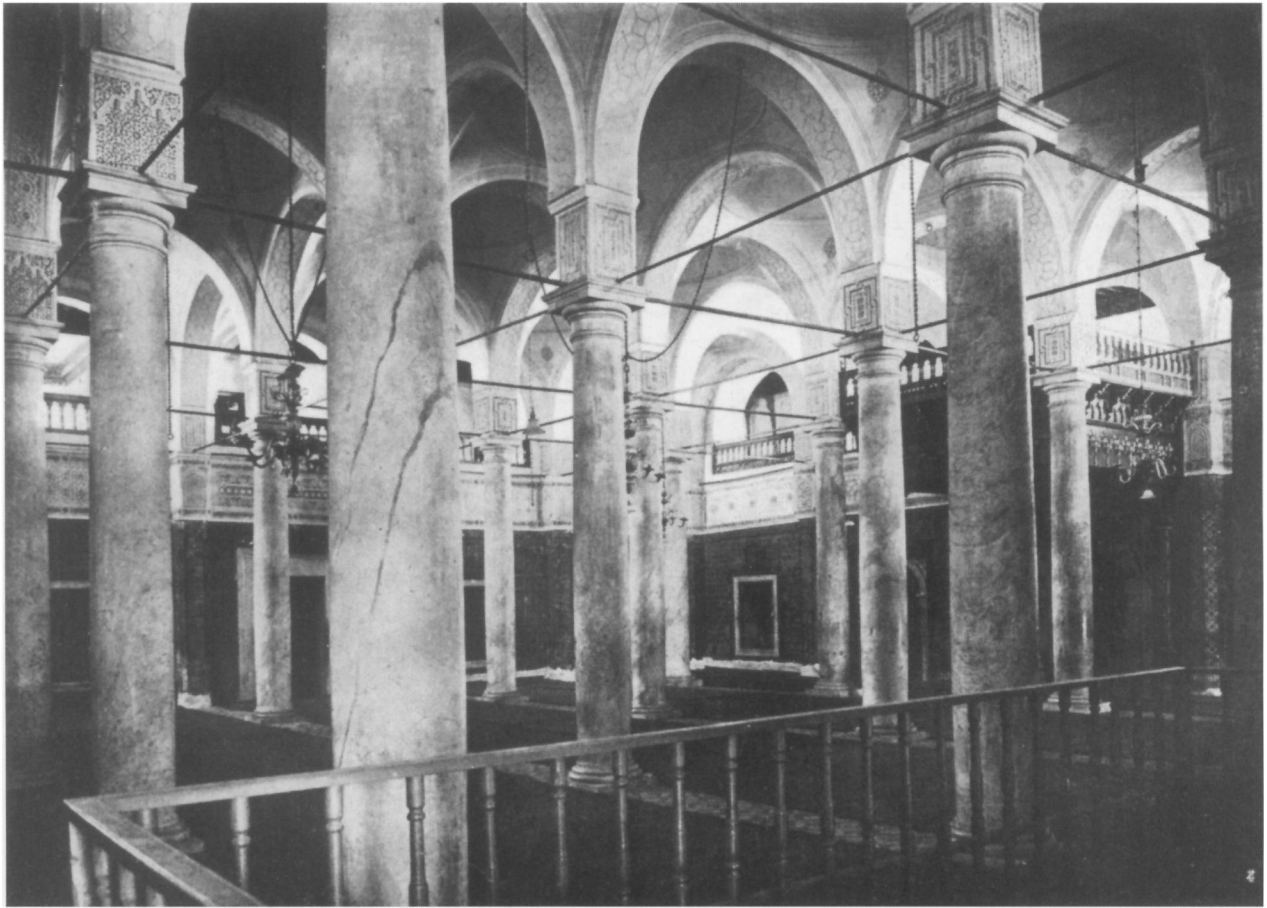


Fig. 2. Tripoli, mosque of Ahmad Pasha al-Karamanli, 1736, interior view. (Photo: from Salvatore Aurigemma, "La moschea di Ahmad al-Qarâmânli in Tripoli," *Dedalo* 7, 8 [January 1927]: 499)

Italian art journal *Dedalo* in 1929, whose publication illustrates his international reputation as an expert on Muslim artistic traditions.¹⁸ This well-illustrated essay provides an extensive presentation of the renewal of artistic and artisanal production in Morocco under the guidance of Ricard and the indigenous arts service of the Direction of Public Instruction of Arts and Antiquities, including the recently renovated courtyard of Dar 'Adiyel in Fez (fig. 3).

Ricard's most influential collaboration was unquestionably his relationship with Hachette publishers, the Paris-based company that produced the *Guides Bleus* and other tourist-oriented books.¹⁹ One of the most widely disseminated of these works, *Pour comprendre l'art musulman dans l'Afrique du Nord et en Espagne* (1924), presents Muslim art in North Africa and Spain according to a modern Western viewpoint, systematically cata-

loguing its constituent elements within an essentially taxonomic system. The importance of the publications of Ricard to the Italian discourse on indigenous culture in Libya lay not only in their popularization of Muslim arts and architecture, but also in the particular views they advanced about those traditions. In *Pour comprendre l'art musulman*, Ricard furnishes arguments about the Roman origins of the Muslim culture of North Africa that would later be taken up by Italian scholars.²⁰

The research of Prosper Ricard on the Muslim arts of North Africa also had a direct impact on the interpretation of Italian scholars of the indigenous culture of Tripolitania in the 1920's. As Director of Indigenous Arts in Morocco, Ricard was hired by Giuseppe Volpi to research the native artisanal industries of this Italian colony. The results of this project appeared in two

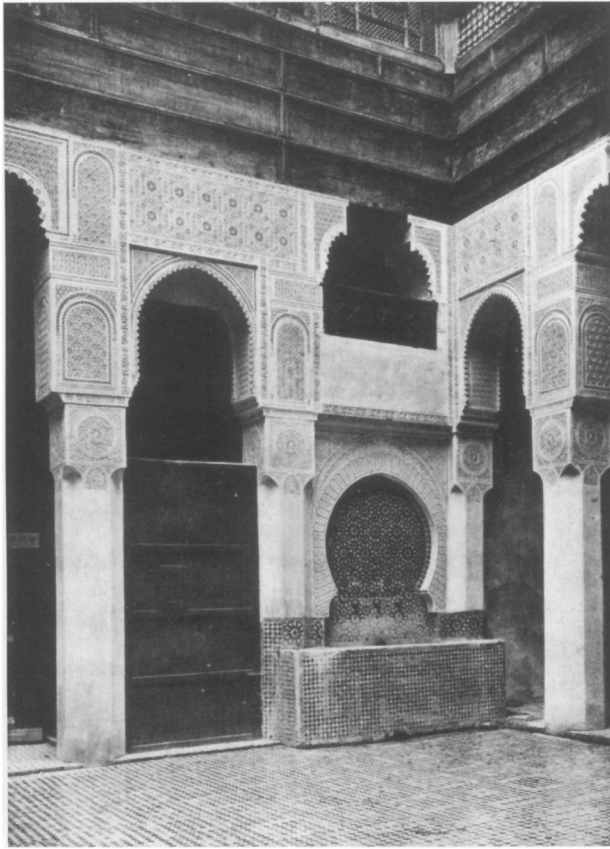


Fig. 3. Fez, courtyard of Dar 'Adiyel, restored 1920. (Photo: from Prosper Ricard, "Il rinnovamento artistico del Marocco," *Dedalo* 9, 12 [May 1929]: 743)

issues of the journal *Rivista della Tripolitania* between January and April of 1926, and were later published in book form as *Les arts tripolitaines*, also in 1926.²¹ In these publications, Ricard surveys the full range of artistic and artisanal production in Tripolitania, from architecture and decoration to regional craft traditions, contextualizing these arts in relation to those of the French North African colonies. In so doing, he laid the interpretive groundwork for future scholarship on the architectural and decorative traditions of Tripolitania, by alluding to their relationship with Roman and Western precedents.²²

In discussing the indigenous craft traditions of this region, Ricard emphasizes the influence of the Berbers, a group which held a great interest for the Italians as a "primitive" society whose culture preceded the Arab invasion of North Africa. The discussion of the Berber

origins of Tripolitanian craft traditions can be understood as a not so subtle validation of the Italian interest in viewing the Libyan culture as built upon Roman foundations. Ricard's essay was clearly an affirmation of the policies instituted by the Italian colonial authorities under Giuseppe Volpi relative to the native artisanal industries of Tripolitania. It argued for a program of preservation that returned to more ancient authentic practices and a modernization that called for the systematic study of these practices to improve the quality and production of these industries.²³ Ricard's arguments thus coincided with the indigenous politics of Volpi in Tripolitania, where the preservation of local culture was closely tied to a policy of economic modernization.

Although the early scholarly research on the native arts of Tripolitania formed a general backdrop to the development of the views of Rava and other Italian architects on its indigenous architecture, a more direct influence was the construction of regional identity in contemporary architectural periodicals. The interest in regional or local architecture was cultivated in the pages of *Architettura e Arti Decorative*, a journal which began publication in September of 1921 under the direction of Gustavo Giovannoni and Marcello Piacentini. This magazine was the official organ of the Artistic Association of Lovers of Architecture, a group that was founded in Rome in 1890 to preserve the historical patrimony of Italian cities.²⁴ Under the guidance of its two editors, this publication provided both critical commentary on contemporary activities in Italy and abroad and scholarly reviews of the history of Italian architecture. With the contributions of architects and critics like Piacentini, Roberto Papini, Gaetano Minucci, and Paolo Mezzanote, this journal became a crucial point of reference for contemporary debates within modern architecture and the decorative arts. It argued for an appreciation of the indigenous traditions of the various regions of Italy through the presentation of current building projects, competitions and exhibitions. Local and national representations were carefully measured against European and international tendencies, which were given ample space in the magazine. *Architettura e Arti Decorative* was also a valuable resource for a more profound appreciation of the historical value of Italy's architectural heritage. Under the guidance of Giovannoni, it provided important historical documentation of the architecture of each province and chronicled recent activities in the area of historic preservation.²⁵ These historical and

contemporary interests were reinforced through the contents of the journal, which combined critical essays with polemical commentary, bibliographic reviews, and reportage of current built projects and events.

The heterogeneous nature of the presentation of local architecture in *Architettura e Arti Decorative* was largely due to the divergent backgrounds and interests of its two editors. Giovannoni's contribution was directly tied to the preservation activities of the Artistic Association. In his writings, he espoused a scholarly defense of the importance of *architettura minore* or "minor architecture," a term that was defined as the anonymous architectural organisms that expressed the distinctive character of particular cities. While this concept was primarily connected to housing, it was also applied to public or religious buildings that were indigenous to a specific place or region. In an article from 1926 entitled "Case del quattrocento in Roma," Giovannoni argued that the medieval house was "closer to the life, . . . the local tradition and sentiment and the positive rationale inherent in regional conditions" than the Cinquecento architecture of Bramante, which was seen to express a more specifically Italian identity.²⁶ The culmination of his collaboration with the Artistic Association was the publication of a series of books beginning in 1926 entitled *Architettura minore in Italia*. By documenting anonymous buildings, these publications were intended to fill a lacuna in the history of Italian architecture.²⁷ They were also used as an intellectual justification for a policy of contextualism in the modernization of historic centers in Italian cities, an approach that Giovannoni himself had developed in his proposals for the systemization of the Renaissance quarter of Rome of 1913 (fig. 4). Largely inspired by Camillo Sitte's *Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen* of 1889, his proposal called for the *diradamento*, or "thinning out," of the area surrounding the Via dei Coronari, an approach that responded both to modern demands and to the desire for the preservation of the picturesque qualities of this quarter in Rome.²⁸ Through the writings and proposals of Giovannoni, historical interest in minor architecture was closely tied to the contemporary debate on the importance of considering historical context in the modernization of Italian cities.

The concept of minor architecture in the writings of Marcello Piacentini was more clearly related to the theoretical discourse concerning the development of a modern architectural aesthetic. In the first issue of *Architettura e Arti Decorative*, Piacentini argued that,

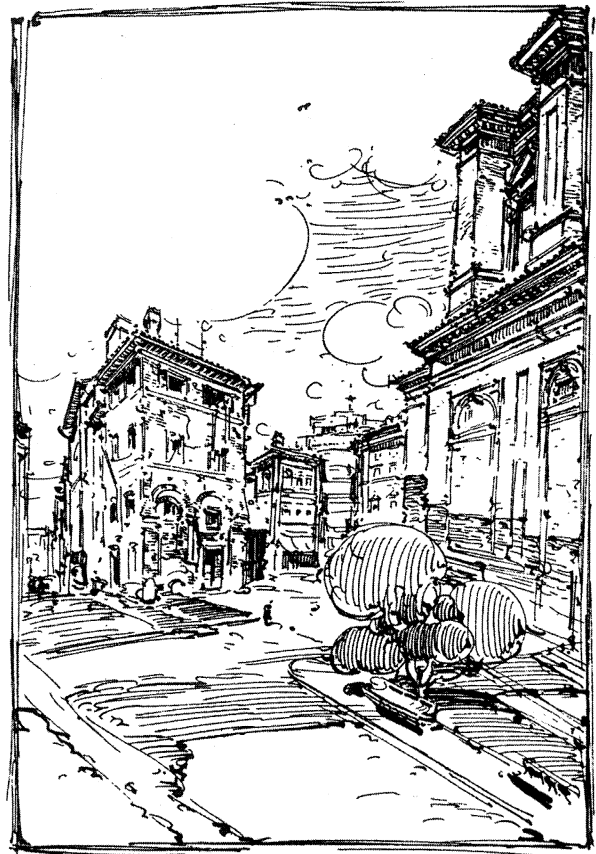


Fig. 4. Gustavo Giovannoni, Via dei Coronari and piazza S. Salvatore in Lauro, Rome, proposal, 1913. (Photo: from Giovannoni, "Il diradamento edilizio dei vecchi centri—il Quartiere della Rinascenza in Roma," *Nuova Antologia* 68, 997 [1 July 1913]: 73)

along with classicism and abstraction, minor architecture, or what he called "rusticism," was one of the key developments in contemporary architecture in Italy and abroad.²⁹ For Piacentini, a modern Italian architecture would derive from a mediation of the fundamental characteristics common to all countries, which he asserted were "sobriety, synthesis, and renunciation," and the permanent principles that resided in the architecture of Italy's past.³⁰ Minor architecture was one of the most important sources of this past, a theme more fully developed in a subsequent article. "Influssi d'arte italiana nel Nord-America" traced the influence of the local architecture of Italy on North American domestic architecture. Piacentini argues that minor architecture reflected a "response to the modest needs



Fig. 5. Marcello Piacentini, Villa in the Parioli quarter, Rome, 1916–18. (Photo: from Riccardo Mariani, “L’Architettura rustica alla Cinquantennale romana,” *Architettura e Arti Decorative* 1, 4 [March–April 1922]: 383)

of life common to all men” and, as such, was an art that was “simple and spontaneous, free of any presumptions.” In considering the contemporary value of indigenous sources, he states, “This architectonic prose, of little personal content, but collective, anonymous, must be revived against the sterile attempts of the architectonic fashions of recent decades.”³¹ The connection between indigenous sources and contemporary artistic production was expressed in a very direct way in the organization and content of the rustic art room at the biennial exhibition in Rome of 1922, where drawings of Amalfi by Camillo Jona, examples of local crafts, and photographs of contemporary architecture were included in the displays. One such architectural

synthesis presented in this exhibition was a villa in the Parioli quarter by Piacentini dating from 1916–18, which was described by Antonio Mariani as “employing rustic themes in the conception of a modern villa” (fig. 5).³²

Giovannoni and Piacentini theorized a concept of minor architecture that was influential in modern architectural discourse and thus indirectly also attracted the interest of Italian architects in Libyan architecture. Their journal *Architettura e Arti Decorative* presented the indigenous architecture of Libya as a particular regional manifestation of this concept. In one of the essays, published in April of 1924, Renato Bartocchini examined the mosque of Murad Agha in Tajurah

(1553) according to the same historical practices as those Giovannoni used to study minor architecture in Italy. The essay combined a detailed history of the Ottoman mosque with drawings and photographs that documented its form and structure. Notwithstanding the apparent objectivity of this presentation, it is quite clear that the reasoning behind the selection of this Muslim religious building was that, as Bartoccini argued, “the architectonic type of the mosque is clearly Western.”³³ The designation of the mosque’s general configuration as “Western” by Bartoccini was tied to its conformance with what he argued were Maghrebi precedents, and thus with the Italian sector of the Mediterranean region. The clear implication was that, for Bartoccini and numerous other Italian scholars, the true indigenous style of Tripolitania was determined by North African rather than Ottoman influences.

An even more clearly operative view of the “minor architecture” of Tripolitania in *Architettura e Arti Decorative* was provided by Pietro Romanelli in his article, “Vecchie case arabe di Tripoli,” published in the January 1924 issue. This essay was a direct product of the policies of the Volpi administration, presenting eleven of the twenty-four private residences that had been singled out for preservation in November of 1921.³⁴ In so doing it followed the approach taken by other scholars of architecture, categorizing these courtyard houses into three distinct groups based upon their age and their architectural influences. Romanelli also overlaid a political agenda on this scholarly one, arguing that “the plan of the Tripolitanian house, in its simplicity, is closer than any other Eastern house to the Roman one.”³⁵ The attempt to connect the native architecture of this region to specifically Italian influences persisted throughout the essay, which asserted that the decorative schemes of buildings like the Karamanli house in Tripoli (ca. 1790; fig. 6) related to seventeenth-century Italian sources and that the craftsmen that built many of these projects were “without a doubt Italian.”³⁶ The arguments advanced in Romanelli’s essay—that the indigenous house in Tripolitania originated from Roman precedents and related to Italian influences—became the predominant view of Italian architects like Carlo Enrico Rava in the late 1920’s and early 1930’s, providing intellectual and scholarly justification for their use of these local forms.

CARLO ENRICO RAVA AND THE APPROPRIATION OF INDIGENOUS NORTH AFRICAN ARCHITECTURE

Despite Volpi’s preservation program, which fostered a scholarly discourse on the Libyan vernacular, and the theorization of minor architecture as the basis for a contemporary architectural expression in the pages of *Architettura e Arti Decorative*, Italian architects practicing in Tripolitania during the early 1920’s initially showed little interest in indigenous constructions. The new architecture of Tripoli during this period was dominated by an eclecticism that alternated between arabized and classicized references. The main protagonist in the latter of these approaches was Armando Brasini, who was the most influential architect in this colony during the governorship of Giuseppe Volpi, working on the restoration of the castle (1922–23), the Monument to the Fallen (1923–25), and the urban proposal for a seafront boulevard named after Volpi (1922–24). As an architect trained in the conservative academic environment of Rome, Brasini practiced a form of eclectic classicism that has been described by one commentator as a “scenographic union of great monumental architecture.”³⁷

With the hiring of Alessandro Limongelli as art consultant to the city of Tripoli in 1928 and the subsequent appointment of Pietro Badoglio as governor of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in January of 1929, this situation changed quite dramatically. Although educated in the same environment as Brasini, Limongelli was one of several architects from the Roman school—others were Pietro Aschieri and Mario De Renzi—whose classicism was firmly grounded in a modern aesthetic sensibility. In the colonial context of Tripolitania, the modern *romanità* of Limongelli—a term used by artists and critics during the Fascist period to refer to the self-conscious use of classicism as a political statement—was carefully integrated with the local architecture.³⁸ Synthetic qualities are clearly evident in his 1931 proposal for the restructuring of Piazza Italia in Tripoli (fig. 7). Working with the existing walls of the old city and an appreciation of the definition of its open spaces, in this project Limongelli integrates a classicized urban image of the modern metropole with the environmental characteristics of the built landscape of North Africa.

The architectural discourse in Tripolitania was thus gradually opening itself to the influences of contem-

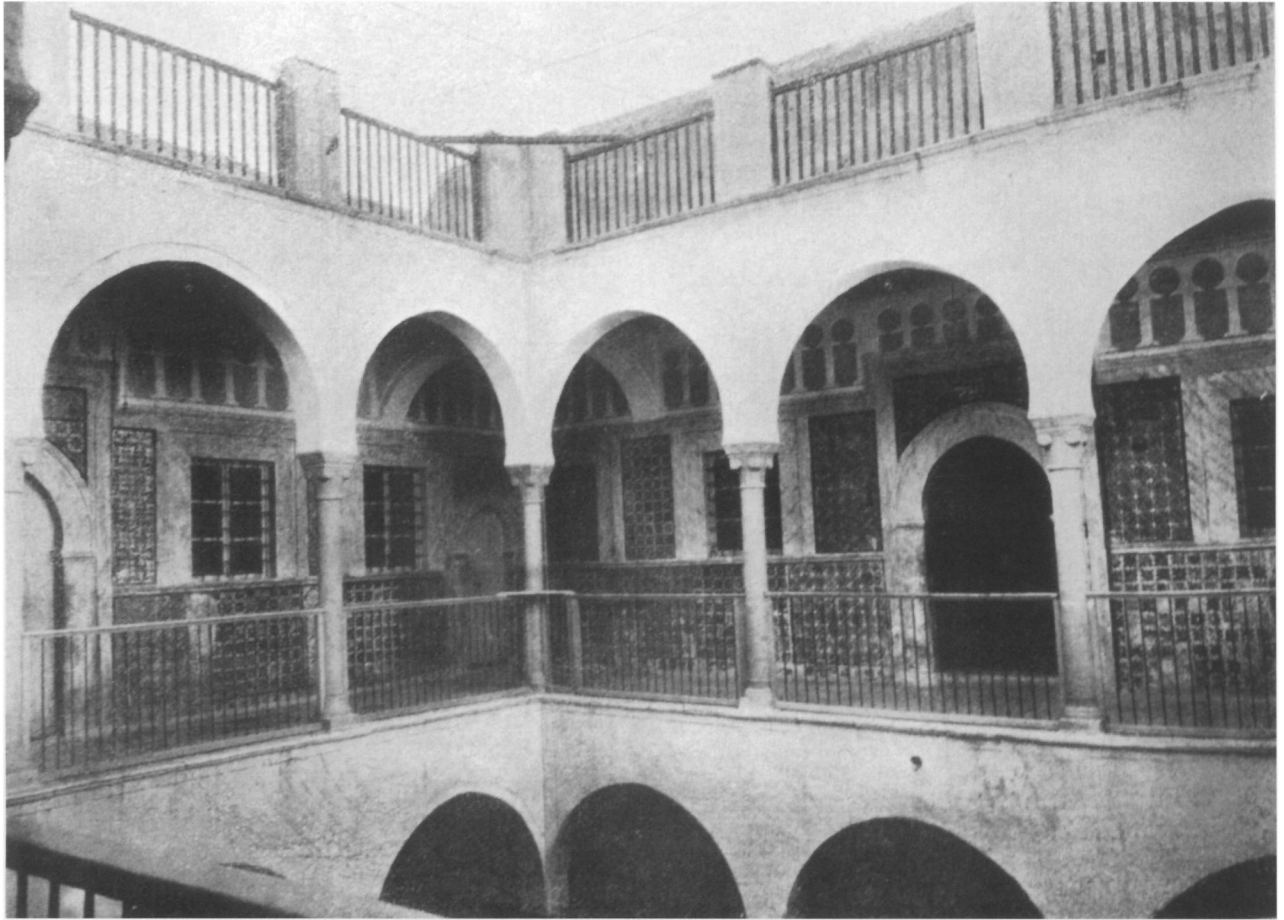


Fig. 6. Tripoli, Karamanli house, ca. 1790, courtyard. (Photo: from Pietro Romanelli, "Vecchie case Arabe di Tripoli," *Architettura e Arti Decorative* 3, 5 [January 1924]: 194)

porary architectural discourse in Italy. The most important of these influences was Italian rationalism, a movement that was initiated by a group of young Milanese architects called the Gruppo Sette in 1926 with the publication of a series of manifestoes in the journal *Rassegna Italiana*. Widely regarded by architectural historians as the first sign of a modern Italian architecture that was explicitly aligned with Northern European tendencies, these manifestoes espoused an architecture that was the direct product of logic and rationality: celebrating the renunciation of individualism, the inevitability of production standards, and the spirit of the series.³⁹ This movement was brought to the colonial context through Limongelli's organization of a number of national competi-

tions for public projects—including the Piazza della Cattedrale competition of January and December of 1930—which solicited the participation of architects like Carlo Enrico Rava, Adalberto Libera, Giovanni Pellegrini, and Luigi Piccinato.⁴⁰

One of the important political figures in this development was Maurizio Rava, general secretary of Tripolitania from March of 1927 and father of the architect Carlo Enrico Rava. As a key adviser to Governor Badoglio, the elder Rava wrote an influential report on the present and future development of Tripoli which he submitted to its mayor in September of 1929.⁴¹ This report, which was published in various colonial journals that same year, is an important reference point in the theoretical discourse on the creation of a con-

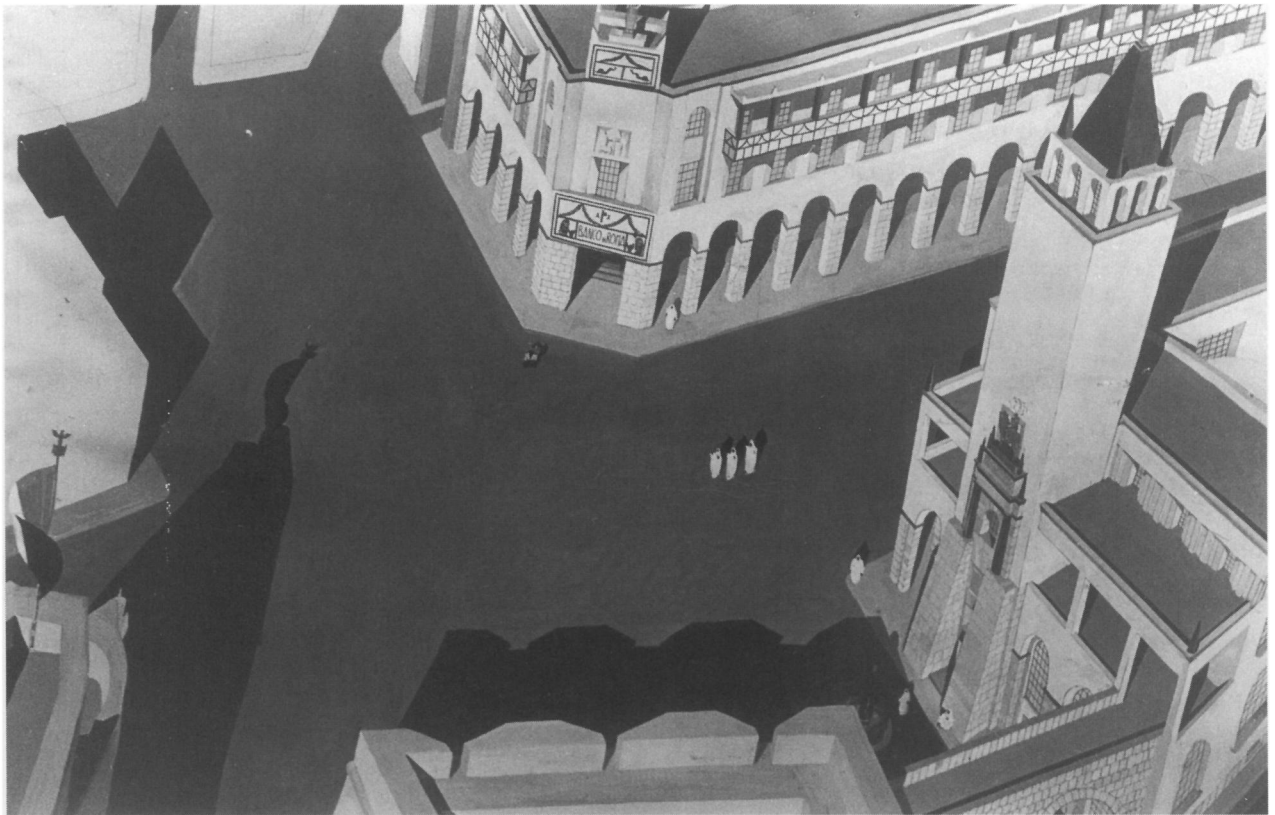


Fig. 7. Alessandro Limongelli, proposal for rearrangement of Piazza Italia, 1931. (Photo: from "Architettura coloniali italiane," *Rassegna di Architettura* 5, 9 [September 1933]: 397)

temporary architecture for the Libyan colonies. Although the essay's authorship is unclear, there is no doubt that it expressed the views of the elder Rava.⁴² Published in the journal *L'Oltremare* under the title "Dobbiamo rispettare il carattere dell'edilizia tripolina," it calls for the preservation of the local character of the city of Tripoli through a careful program of conserving the most representative existing buildings and introducing new structures that would be in harmony with the colonial environment. This is an approach to planning and development that was derived quite directly from Gustavo Giovannoni's proposals for the modernization of Italian cities. The latter's contextualist method was to be implemented in the old Arab and Jewish quarters of Tripoli where, according to the author, "the impression of Africa and the East" could still be found. It was also applicable to the buildings of the surrounding oasis landscape, which "in their local *minor architecture* ... represent the *true Arab style*

of Tripolitania" [emphasis in the original]. Not only did this essay argue that it was no more costly to pursue this policy than to allow the city to develop randomly, it also claimed that the preservation and enhancement of the most characteristic quarters of Tripoli were the means to "assure the future of the city as a great tourist center."⁴³

In addition to making suggestions for planning Tripoli and the surrounding oasis, "Dobbiamo rispettare il carattere dell'edilizia tripolina" offered arguments concerning the creation of a modern colonial architecture. It was suggested in this essay that "the simple house of local architecture . . . born in the same locus, offers an exemplary and characteristic example of how one can construct in North Africa."⁴⁴ The basis for this suitability was multiple, the first being the visual effect of such indigenous constructions. These qualities were evident in the "geometric and alternating play of volumes," and the "coloration of the vast smooth

walls with lively and soft hues." There was also a typological basis for the appropriation of the Arab house, which was typically organized around an outdoor courtyard. The author asserts "the Arab patio is . . . the ideal and most logical solution that is also *intimately ours*, since it goes back in its time to the classical house of ancient Rome" [emphasis in the original].⁴⁵ Moreover, the courtyard was understood as an important means by which local constructions accommodated the climatic demands of the North African environment. This concern was evident in the contrast between the utilization of verandahs or covered spaces and ample greenery within the courtyard, and the restricted use of openings in relatively mute exterior walls. In concluding this essay, the author argues that, due to the modernity of the "simple linear and cubic combinations" and "smooth and bare walls" of these local sources, "it will be simple to fuse all of the technical specialization and practical comfort of the most modern European constructions with the local characteristics."⁴⁶

The arguments presented by Maurizio Rava in this essay constituted the first attempt to articulate a theory of a modern colonial architecture for the Libyan colonies that was based on indigenous sources. However, it was not until his son Carlo Enrico Rava's publication of the two-part essay entitled "Di un'architettura coloniale moderna" in *Domus* in May and June of 1931 that these ideas entered architectural discourse, where they were presented as part of a more general proposition for a new direction for modern Italian architecture.⁴⁷ Indeed, these essays were published as part of a "Panorama del Razionalismo" that argued that Italian architects should seek a more independent direction proper to their Latin cultural roots, a direction whose inspiration would be the indigenous architecture of the Mediterranean region. This *mediterraneità*, as it was referred to by contemporary architects and critics, was one of several terms (*latinità* and *romanità*, were others) that entered the contemporary debate concerning the appropriate identity for a modern architecture proper to the Italian Fascist state.⁴⁸

The discussion of the indigenous architecture of Libya in "Di un'architettura coloniale moderna" is both analytical and prescriptive, attempting to identify its major characteristics and derive a precise program for contemporary architecture from these observations. This two-part essay is also compelling testimony to the extensive amount of travel the younger Rava undertook in Tripolitania between 1928 and 1931. Not only

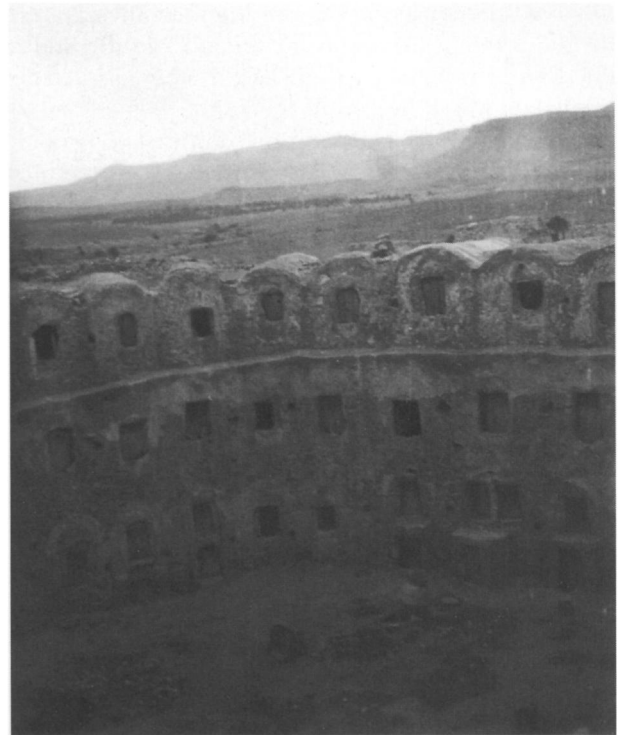


Fig. 8. Castle of Qasr al-Hajj, Rava photograph, February 1930. (Photo: from Carlo Enrico Rava, "Di un'architettura coloniale moderna—Parte prima," *Domus* 41 [May 1931]: 41)

are his arguments primarily illustrated with his own photographs, but the depth and complexity of his observations reveal his first-hand experience of indigenous constructions. Therefore, this essay is a hybrid of programmatic statements typical of the architectural discourse and prose of Italian colonial literature, with synthetic and polemical assertions framing fragments of direct experience with the colonial context.⁴⁹

In "Di un'architettura coloniale moderna—Parte prima," Rava provides a relatively heterogeneous reading of Libyan architecture, arguing that it was the product of a complex exchange of influences. He notes that during what he called the Maghrebi Middle Ages, this exchange took the form of "a continual movement of ebb and tide between the always vital Roman-Byzantine traditions" and "the new primitive but vigorous constructions of the black populations of the Sudan."⁵⁰ He illustrates the first of these influences with a discussion of the Berber castle at Qasr al-Hajj (fig. 8), whose circular arrangement, he argued, derived from the Roman amphitheaters whose monumen-

tal ruins still existed along the Mediterranean coast. For Rava, the influence of the Sahara and the Sudan was evident in constructions like the ancient citadel at Mizdah, which he connected to the villages discovered by the Seabrook expedition southeast of Timbuktu.⁵¹ Indigenous Libyan architecture was thus presented in this essay as an interaction between Roman and African influences. The most compelling repository for this interaction, according to Rava, were the settlements constructed by the Berber populations of the sub-Saharan regions of Tripolitania. In fact, he argued that not only were the Roman and Sudanese forms assimilated in these building traditions, but it was through the survival of the Berber culture that these sources were eventually passed on to the Arab populations of the Libyan coastal region.⁵²

The most concrete example of a synthesis of these two traditions offered in Rava's essay was the city of Ghadamis; an oasis settlement on the edge of the Sahara that he had already visited on two occasions. The status of this city as one of the most important stopping points along the caravan routes from the heart of Africa to the Mediterranean became, in this discussion, a metaphor for the interaction between Roman and African sources. Like the city itself, the architecture of Ghadamis, Rava stated, "has also been a place of transition and exchange between the forms of *latinità* and those of Saharan-Sudanese Africa."⁵³ Although he notes that the Sudanese stylistic characteristics were most evident in the crenellated towers of the houses, he also describes the central mosque of Ghadamis as a "bewildering example of Byzantine penetration." This mosque was presented as the epitome of this intercultural exchange. Rava argued that its courtyard was enclosed with walls derived from Sudanese architecture, and yet it contained panels similar to a Byzantine chancel screen that alternated with an edicule that was reminiscent of the Roman houses at Ostia.⁵⁴ In summarizing his general discussion, Rava notes there was a more recent, but no less important, influence on the Libyan vernacular architecture. He argued that during the period of its domination by Ottoman governors, the introduction of wooden loggias and roof terraces into the patio of the Arab house led to a reinterpretation of this essentially Roman source, adapting it to the necessities of the African and Mediterranean climate. This Ottoman contribution was presented as an architectural corollary to the colonial status of the region.⁵⁵

In concluding the first part of his essay, Rava pro-

vided a synthetic summary of what he regarded to be the principal qualities that made Libyan architecture a suitable model for a modern colonial architecture. The first of these qualities was its Roman origin. However, rather than an archaeological or stylistic connection to the classical tradition, he was interested in the "practical and organizing spirit of Rome" that was "still very vital in the scheme of the Arab-Turkish house." For Rava, the rationality of the indigenous house had to do with both its derivation from a Roman precedent and its correspondence with the functional and climatic demands of the colonial context.⁵⁶ A second quality which he identified in Libyan architecture was what he described as "the impulse of a vigorous primitivism that . . . derives from its relations with the populations of the South." This tendency could be traced in the use of simple geometric forms in buildings like the mosque in Qasr al-Hajj, a building which Rava also linked to the works of Russian constructivism (fig. 9).⁵⁷ The final characteristic Rava identifies in the indigenous architecture of this region was what he described as the "composition of blank rhythms of cubes and parallelipeds—opposing the cool shade of the patio with the sun and the blue of the large superimposed and alternating verandahs and roof terraces." These qualities, which he argued could be found in the simplest Arab house found in the oasis of Tripoli (fig. 10), were linked to the indigenous architecture of the Italian Mediterranean.⁵⁸

After defining the primary characteristics of Libyan monumental and domestic architecture in "Di un'architettura coloniale moderna—Parte prima," Rava dedicates the second part of his essay to establishing a direction for the architecture of Italy's Libyan colonies. Noting that almost nothing constructed by Italy in these territories was colonial architecture, Rava proceeds to offer some suggestions through a discussion of the architecture of North America and that of British colonialism. In the first case, he argues that the domestic buildings of California, "with their cubic masses and their white walls, and their wooden loggias and balconies," would be perfectly at home in Libya.⁵⁹ According to Rava, a similar formal solution was provided by the bungalow, which the British used as an almost universal type to house the metropolitan populations in the colonies. He then connects this contemporary colonial architecture with the indigenous architecture of Libya, comparing the wooden pergola of the Cutting house in Los Angeles by Garvin Hodson with the garden pavilion from the villa of



Fig. 9. Mosque of Qasr al-Hajj, Rava photograph, February 1930. (Photo: from Rava, "Di un'architettura coloniale moderna —Parte prima," 42)

Hasan Pasha near Tripoli. For Rava, all of these structures were "incredibly rational" in relation to their solution to the problem of the colonial environment.⁶⁰ The final paragraphs of his second essay restate the general thesis of his argument: that the indigenous architecture of Libya possessed all of the qualities necessary to create a modern colonial architecture. However, in the process the Arab identity of Libyan indigenous architecture was largely removed in favor of emphasizing its *latinità* and *mediterraneità*, qualities that explicitly link it with Italian culture. Rava alludes to this exclusion in concluding his essay, stating, "We will not derive anything from the Arabs, but . . . we relate to the real, the great tradition of Rome, that admirably endured through the centuries, and today rejoins us."⁶¹

This inquiry into the contemporary value of Libyan architecture was not just closely tied to modern architectural discourse: its very means of analysis were also modern. In tracing out an exchange of influences that historicized the indigenous architecture of the region, Rava was utilizing the kind of approach that was traditionally practiced by art historians like Lionello Venturi, which called for the classification of individual works within larger categories or movements. It is also important to recognize that Rava's experience of the local architecture and his dissemination of its image were fundamentally modern. It was through the detached mode of encounter of the metropolitan traveler in the colonies and the lens of the camera that "indigenous architecture" was appropriated and eventually deployed. The primitivism of the pure geom-



Fig. 10. Arab house in the oasis of Tripoli, Rava photograph, December 1929. (Photo: from Rava, "Di un'architettura coloniale moderna—Parte seconda," *Domus* 42 [June 1931]: 33)

etries of the cubic, spherical, and pyramidal forms of the mosque of Qasr al-Hajj was not so much present in the original structure as it was crystallized in its image, which was already determined by a modern photographic aesthetic like that demonstrated by Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* (1923).⁶² The interpretation Libyan architecture offered by Rava in "Di un'architettura coloniale moderna" was also derived from and participated in a specifically colonial discourse. It was the theoretical manifestation within architectural discourse of a Fascist politics which asserted that Libya "was Roman and returns to Rome."⁶³ In affirming the fundamentally Roman basis for the indigenous architecture of this region, Rava was defining the identity of its architecture as the inevitable product of past colonialism. However, his *mediterraneità* was not only deploying the kind of imperialist rheto-

ric typical to Fascist Italy, it was constituting an imperialist project by claiming the indigenous identity of this architecture as Italian.⁶⁴ The identity of the architecture of Libya had thus already been rendered colonial, connecting its presumed historical past with its Fascist present.

The arguments presented in Rava's two-part essay were an important reference point for Italian interpretations of local Libyan architecture in the 1930's. Although the appreciation of indigenous forms very much depended on the earlier precedent of the French in Morocco, the particular fusion of local references with a contemporary architectural expression was somewhat unusual to the Italian case. The *arabisation* practiced by the French in the colonies of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco always maintained a clear separation between local decorative patterns and modern forms.

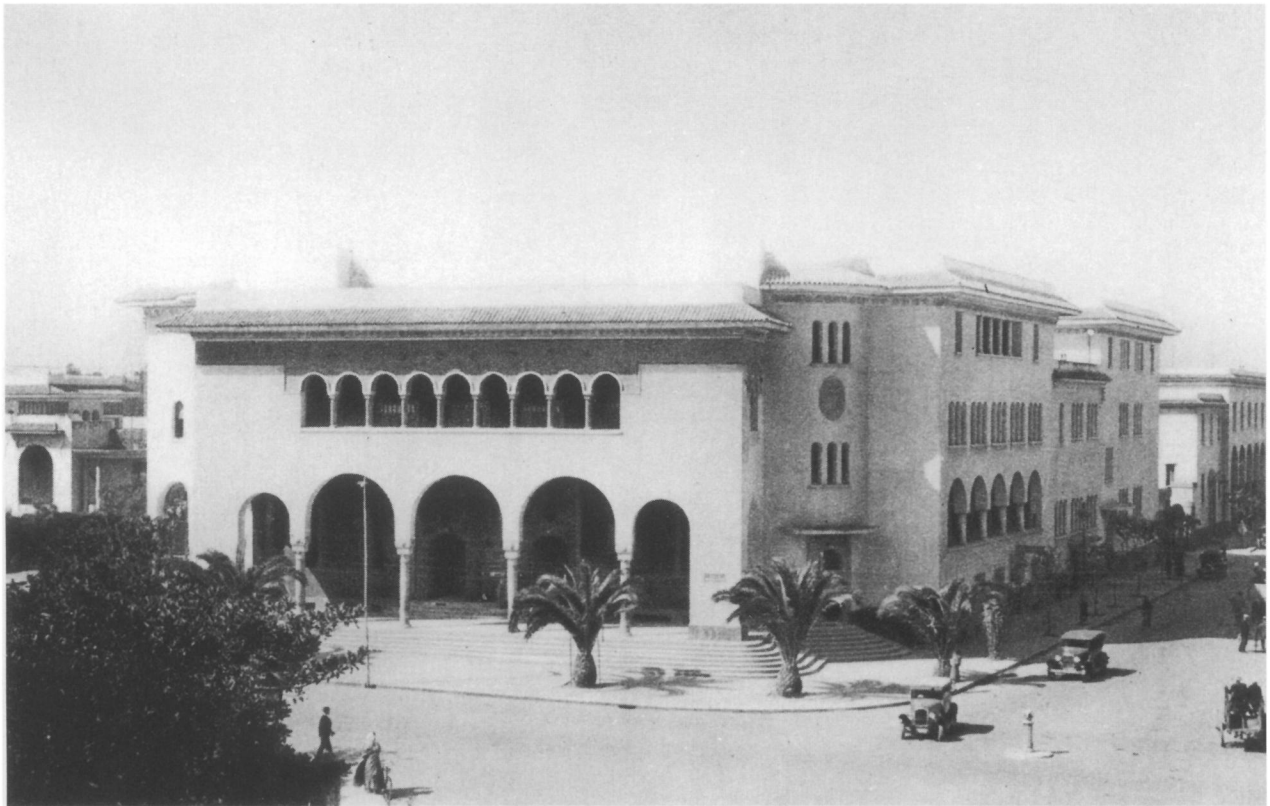


Fig. 11. Adrien Laforgue, Central Post Office, Casablanca, 1920, view. (Photo: from Léandre Vaillat, *Le Visage français du Maroc* [Paris: Horizons de France, 1931], p. 8)

This quality is expressed quite clearly in the discrepancy between the arabized exterior of Adrien Laforgue's post office in Casablanca of 1920 (fig. 11) and its plan, which was structured on metropolitan precedents.⁶⁵ In her discussion of the international colonial exhibition in Paris in 1931, Patricia Morton argues that the tendency to create a clear separation between metropolitan and colonial was related to the fear of hybridity that underlay the French colonial project.⁶⁶ In the Italian case the indigenous politics that were initiated by Volpi in Tripolitania embraced the cultural traditions of the local populations while at the same time redefining them according to the standards of modern Italian society. The fusion of the metropolitan and the indigenous into a single architectural identity was a deliberate political strategy rather than a threat to colonial order. One example of how this political agenda influenced architecture is Sebastiano Larco and Carlo Enrico Rava's project for the pavilion of Eritrea and Somalia (fig. 12), which was

constructed for the Eighth Tripoli Trade Fair in 1934. Like the essays of Rava, this building is a complex exchange of influences that combined an entrance portal of Somalian derivation, a *mashrabiyya* and tile floor patterns of Eritrean inspiration, and a courtyard space that referred to vernacular Mediterranean constructions: an architecture where the modern and the indigenous were made to coincide perfectly.⁶⁷

RACISM, IMPERIAL POLITICS, AND THE CHANGING ARCHITECTURAL DISCOURSE OF THE LATER 1930'S

The discourse on the native architecture of Libya that was expressed in the writings of Rava was subject to a number of transformations in the late 1930's, transformations that were largely the result of new political exigencies. Following the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935 and Mussolini's declaration of an Italian empire in May of the following year, the



Fig. 12. Sebastiano Larco and Carlo Enrico Rava, pavilion of Eritrea and Somalia, Tripoli Trade Fair, 1934, view. (Photo: from *Rassegna di Architettura* 6, 7 [July 1934]: 281)

emphasis of the Fascist government shifted to its colonies in East Africa. The East African empire became an important part of domestic economic politics as Italy pursued a policy of autarchy, or economic self-sufficiency, in response to sanctions from the League of Nations. These colonies were the most recent trophies of Italian imperialism, and as such they enjoyed a more substantial economic commitment from the Fascist government.⁶⁸ In part owing to the imperial rhetoric generated by the conquest of the East African colonies, the indigenous politics of Libya—then governed by Italo Balbo (1934–40)—took on a more authoritarian, even racist, tone, a quality that is apparent in the legislation that eventually incorporated Libya into metropolitan Italy in January of 1939. Arguing that there was a fundamental difference between the Arab-Berber populations of the coastal regions and the Negroid races of the southern military zone, Balbo

decided that the former should become a province of Italy but the latter would remain a colony.⁶⁹

Under the weight of these increasingly racially encoded colonial politics, the theories of Rava on the contemporary value of Libyan architecture gave way to two separate tendencies in architectural discourse. The first of these was provided by Giovanni Pellegrini, a Milanese architect who relocated in Libya in the late 1920's to join the Public Works Office of Tripolitania. He became one of the most active architects in Libya during the Balbo era, constructing numerous private villas, some urban housing projects, and several agricultural town centers.⁷⁰ His most important contribution to this theoretical discourse was his "Manifesto dell'architettura coloniale," published in *Rassegna di Architettura* in October of 1936. This essay extended the principles developed by Rava to the consideration of the design of colonial cities in North Africa.

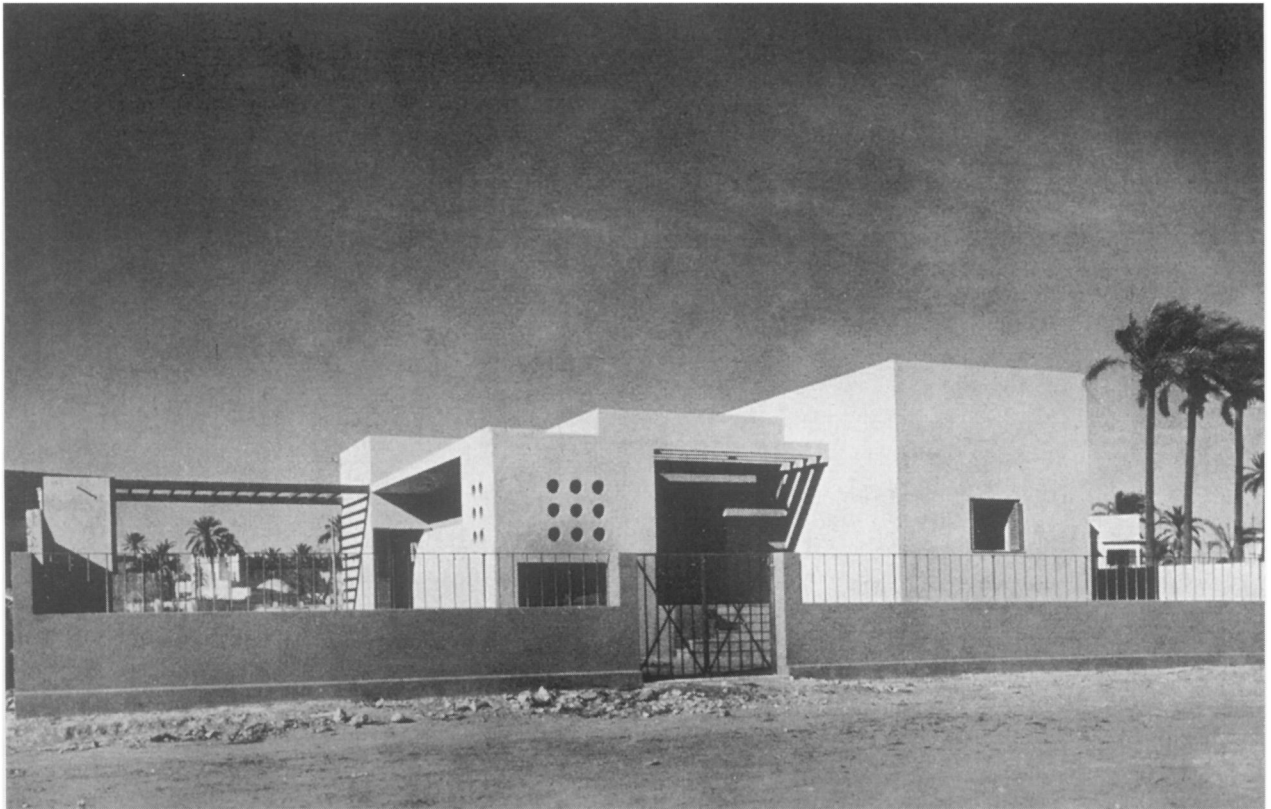


Fig. 13. Giovanni Pellegrini and Vittorio Agujari, Villa Salvi, Tripoli, 1936, view. (Photo: from Alberto Sartoris, *Gli elementi dell'architettura funzionale. Sintesi panoramica dell'architettura moderna* [Milan: Ulrico Hoepli Editore, 1941], p. 624)

Pellegrini called for the utilization of indigenous elements, such as porticoes, pergolas, and ample vegetation along the streets to deal with the demands of the climate. He also argued that the urban aesthetic of colonial cities should be related to the local architecture, recommending that buildings be “modeled plastically” in order to attain the “effect of mass and polychromy.”⁷¹

A second aspect of this manifesto which linked it with the writings of Rava was its use of the Arab house as the basis for housing in the colonial context. Unlike his earlier essay, however, in this one the local architecture was instrumentalized by Pellegrini as the source for typological models and practical solutions. He argued that the appropriateness of the Arab house to the North African climate was primarily related to its central courtyard, but enhanced through elements like loggias, galleries, and vegetation. The aesthetic of the exterior of these houses was linked to the con-

cealment of their interior and the consequent austerity of family life.⁷²

Pellegrini's manifesto proposes that indigenous sources be used as the basis for contemporary colonial architecture. In so doing he rejects both “folklorism” and “false imitations,” arguing that “returning to tradition means to evolve it.” Identifying climate as the fundamental determinant of architecture, he proposes a fusion of the examples provided by indigenous constructions with modern technical and aesthetic practices.⁷³ Although on the surface this would appear to be the same theoretical position that Rava had offered some five years earlier, there are some significant differences. In the Rava's “Di un'architettura coloniale moderna,” Libyan architecture was subjected to a historical scheme that theorized its Latin and Mediterranean identity. In Pellegrini's “Manifesto,” which was accompanied by an extensive series of photographs, the local architecture of Libya was not subordinated

to scholarly categorization. Indigenous constructions were “selected” according to a modern technical and visual sensibility as solutions to the problem of climate and the basis for a contemporary aesthetic.⁷⁴ This approach is evidenced in projects like Pellegrini’s Villa Salvi (1934) in Tripoli (fig. 13), which he designed and executed with the engineer Vittorio Agujari. In this project, the massing of the indigenous constructions in the oasis of Tripoli and their characteristic shading devices were fundamentally transformed into an explicitly modern work. Its modernity was later recognized in the publication of this project by Alberto Sartoris in *Gli elementi dell’architettura funzionale* (1941), a book that provided a panorama of modern architecture throughout the world.⁷⁵

The second of the two tendencies in architectural discourse was closely tied to the indigenous politics of the Governor Italo Balbo, who was appointed to this position in January of 1934. Through the creation of a building commission in February of that year, all aesthetic and technical matters relative to building activities in the Libyan colonies were put under the control of a single body.⁷⁶ It was through this group that a program of restoration of Roman and Islamic historical monuments and construction of new public institutions was undertaken. The key protagonist in this initiative was Florestano Di Fausto, an architect who was already well known for his work on the regulatory plan and public buildings of the colony of Rhodes during the late 1920’s.⁷⁷ The Mediterranean architecture of Di Fausto embodied a contextualism that attempted to absorb the characteristic forms and building traditions of the local architecture. Although his work in Libya was wide ranging, and included a number of public buildings that adapted urban metropolitan forms to the colonial environment, his most representative projects presented a distillation of the Libyan building traditions. In some of the most direct examples of the adoption of local forms, like his proposal for the restructuring of the Suq al-Mushir (1932) in Tripoli, Di Fausto entered into the ambiguous territory between restoration and new construction, an approach that was largely dictated by the demands of the tourist economy.⁷⁸

The theoretical position of Di Fausto was expressed in an article entitled “Visione mediterranea della mia architettura,” published in *Libia* magazine in 1937. In this essay, Di Fausto speaks of his approach to an architecture for Italy’s Mediterranean colonies, which he asserts had always been, and should continue to

be, based upon a careful reading of the local architecture. In an impassioned discussion of the sizable body of works that he constructed throughout this region—in Italy, in Rhodes, in Kos, as well as in Libya—he emphasized the deliberate and studied process of design by which he developed a reciprocal relationship between these projects and their historical and environmental context.⁷⁹ This is an approach to colonial architecture that calls for the literal appropriation of local references into a contemporary expression. Seen in this way, his architecture was a mediation between innovation and imitation, an approach that Di Fausto regarded as outside the current trends in architectural discourse. Although he recognized a more localized and specific dimension to the architecture of this colony, for Di Fausto the Arab identity of the Libyan vernacular was merely one of a series of possible regional expressions. Through a process of direct incorporation, this identity was to be reenacted as part of an eclectic architectural vocabulary for the purpose of harmonizing what was built with the spirit of the place.⁸⁰ This approach to colonial architecture is perhaps best expressed in his tourist-oriented projects, like his design for the Albergo-casinò Uaddan in Tripoli (fig. 14) of 1935, which sought to create a contemporary architecture proper to a regional context. Located along the eastern seafront, this project is a complex assembly of different building elements that responds to both its seafront location and the diverse architectural heritage of the city of Tripoli. This last relationship is largely by way of analogy—the composite nature of its forms and stylistic references being comparable to those of the old city, which was marked by a combination of Roman, Arab, and Ottoman interventions.⁸¹

The writings of Pellegrini and Di Fausto indicate that an understanding of the dialectical and contradictory nature of Libyan architecture as theorized in the writings of Carlo Enrico Rava, in which various indigenous Mediterranean and Latin influences interacted, was lost or abandoned in the late 1930’s. Under the weight of Italian imperial politics, an interest in indigenous Libyan architecture was displaced to the margins. After 1935 this interest was evident primarily in housing (Pellegrini) and restoration and tourist-oriented works (Di Fausto), leaving the most significant public buildings to be constructed in a Fascist-inspired *romanità*. The theoretical trajectory that had been initiated by Rava had dissipated in favor of these two distinct and narrower readings. While the



Fig. 14. Florestano Di Fausto, "Uaddan" hotel and casino, Tripoli, 1935, view from west seafront. (The Mitchell Wolfson Jr. Collection—Fondazione Regionale Cristoforo Colombo, Genoa, Italy)

writings of Pellegrini abstracted the local architecture in accordance with technical and climatic demands and thus may appear to be more scientific in approach, the same can be said of the "Visione mediterranea" of Di Fausto, whose preservationist view of indigenous forms was supported by an equally modern set of premises. This kind of "scientific" interpretation of Libyan architecture was advanced in contemporary scholarly discourse in essays like Fabrizio Maria Apollonj's "L'architettura araba della Libia," published in *Rassegna di Architettura* in December 1937. In discussing the monumental architecture of Libya, Apollonj argues that it "appears induced by a thousand influences," that allowed it to "reach very picturesque effects and [was] also sometimes of notable beauty."⁸² However, the multiplicity of sources was ultimately viewed as a

sign of weakness of the monumental tradition of this region rather than a sign of strength. In discussing the vernacular architecture of Libya, Apollonj finds positive qualities, observing that "nothing is more suggestive than the bare and taciturn appearance of an Arab house." At the same time recognizing the attraction of this so-called Arab house, he specifically rejects the idea that such buildings should inspire a contemporary colonial architecture, stating, "It may be absurd to attempt to resolve the problem of modern colonial architecture in Libya by means of a plain and simplistic utilization of local motifs."⁸³

Like the indigenous politics of Italo Balbo that created a political structure for Libya corresponding to racial categories, the arguments presented in "L'architettura araba della Libia" applied a racially-motivated



Fig. 15. Libya, Troglodyte house, Jabal Nafusa region, postcard, ca. 1937.

scientific discourse to architecture. Apollonj draws an analogy in this essay between the architecture, which he described as having “a primitivism, frank and free of any real artistic consistency,” and the people, whom he described as “a poor and static population.”⁸⁴ This reading of architecture as the direct expression of a people and its culture was closely tied to contemporary research into the culture of the Libyan populations by anthropologists and ethnographers like Emilio Scarin, a professor at the University of Florence. His book, entitled *L'insediamento umano nella Libia occidentale* (1940), was the culmination of a program of research on the housing and patterns of living in western Libya that began as early as the first congress of colonial studies in 1931.⁸⁵ One of the important subjects of research to Scarin and others was the so-called Troglodyte house of the Gharyan and Jabal regions (fig. 15), which was seen to be an authentic repository of the customs and practices of the local populations. How-

ever, this “scientific” reading of the Libyan people through their cultural artifacts must be understood as having political connotations specific to Italy in the late 1930's. At the same time that the Fascist government instituted its “Provisions for the Defense of the Italian Race” in November 1938, a number of noted scholars of colonial matters contributed to the journal *Difesa della Razza*, whose mission was to theorize a racial science that would support Fascist imperial politics. An example is Edoardo Zavattari's “Italia e islam di fronte al problema razzista,” in which the author asserts that while Muslims are anti-racist, they are “Islamists” in that they only accept those that adhere to Islam into their community. According to Zavattari, the desire of the Italian colonial authorities to separate the races coincided with the preference of the Muslim populations to segregate themselves from non-Muslims.⁸⁶

The emergence of this racially encoded reading of

the architecture and culture of Libya can also be traced through the continuing intellectual production of Carlo Enrico Rava, who published extensively after the announcement regarding the Italian empire in Africa in May of 1936. The most comprehensive of these efforts was a series of three essays that appeared in *Domus* beginning in August of 1936 under the title "Costruire in colonia."⁸⁷ In these writings, Rava argues for the development of a "building politics" proper to the task of constructing buildings in the Italian colonies of Africa. The idea was that there should be a unitary structure supervising the building process that was intended to lead to the formation of a "totalitarian concept of building in the colonies." This concept was "a truly imperial affirmation" that, according to Rava, "will no longer only be a fusion of art and science, but the highest expression of the art of the State."⁸⁸ The politically-charged imperial connotations of these views were underscored by their suggestion of a racial reading of colonial architecture. In discussing the image of the Italian authorities in the colonies in Africa, Rava felt the existing public buildings were inadequate to the stature of the new empire. He argued that "the question of the dignity and prestige of the race" was of the highest order, "and each building's aspect must carry its imprint."⁸⁹

In this theoretical discourse, the colonial context had become the pretext for themes that would fully emerge only some two years later in one of Rava's last essays to be published before the outbreak of World War II. Entitled "Architettura di razza italiana," it appeared in the journal *L'Architettura Italiana* in January 1939.⁹⁰ In it, Rava traces a continuous line of thinking in his programmatic writings that relates to the question of Italian racial identity and asserts a purity in Italian architecture that he links to the contemporary campaign for the defense of the Italian race. The article exposes a fault line in Rava's theoretical practice in the late 1930's and reveals certain problems that may have always existed in his attempt to create an Italian identity for modern architecture in Libya through a recourse to local sources. The indigenous architecture of Libya was not only constructed by Rava as a repository of traditional culture, it was also the material basis from which an identity could be produced, an identity whose designation as "Italian" disguised an oppressive politics of exclusion and racial purity.

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NOTES

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1. The original quotation is as follows: ". . . l'architettura originaria delle nostre colonie mediterranee presenta, per chi li sappia riconoscere, tutti i requisiti necessari a ricavarne una perfetta architettura coloniale moderna: razionalità di planimetrie, attualissima semplicità di forme nell'aspetto esteriore, perfetta aderenza alle necessità del clima africano, perfetta armonia con la natura libica. Quando poi, a queste qualità, si aggiungano i frequenti esempi che essa ci propone, di vivaci policromie applicate ad interessare e ravvivare la nudità delle masse cubiche e delle lisce pareti, si vedrà che l'originaria architettura della Libia ci offre tutti gli elementi desiderabili per creare una nostra architettura coloniale d'oggi." Carlo Enrico Rava, "Di un'architettura coloniale moderna—Parte seconda," *Domus* 42 (June 1931): 36.
2. In this first essay, Rava states that "the problem of a contemporary colonial architecture is one of the aspects of the general problem of architectonic modernity and, consequently . . . was directed . . . to be taken into consideration from the rationalist point of view" ("Di un'architettura coloniale moderna—Parte prima," *Domus* 41 [May 1931]: 39). In this article, Rava is quite critical of the architect Armando Brasini's project for the Italian pavilion at the international colonial exhibition in Paris in 1931, for copying the Roman basilica of Septimius Severus in Leptis Magna (*ibid.*, pp. 39–40). With regard to the Moorish influence, he states: "There have never been traces in Libya of that Moorish architecture that has instead gained a hold in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Arab Spain." He then notes, "The only Moorish [architecture] that exists is that, false and monstrous beyond any description, that distinguishes many constructions erected . . . by us" (*ibid.*, p. 89).
3. The modernity of these indigenous constructions was described as follows: "The conditions of nature and of the climate are here themselves the generators of architectonic form, and so these still appear today perfectly, unsurpassably rational, so also their exterior appearance, in which no elements appear superfluous (because all derive spontaneously of planimetric necessity), fully satisfies our modern aesthetic, so finally, this architecture, born from the most elementary logic, harmonizes like no others with the colonial landscape" (Rava, "Di un'architettura coloniale moderna—Parte seconda," p. 32).
4. In the first of these essays, Rava argues that the architectonic traces of Rome left in Africa had two aspects, the first of these being "an already dead part, which has a purely archaeological-touristic interest and value, and is represented in the monumental ruins." The second of these aspects was

discussed as the “part still alive . . . seen again in the Arab houses, which have inherited the classic rational plan of the ancient Roman house, and, from its central courtyard, they have derived the patio, around which it identically distributes their rooms” (Rava, “Di un’architettura coloniale moderna—Parte prima,” p. 41).

5. The activities carried out by the Volpi administration in favor of modernizing the colony of Tripolitania were presented in a commemorative volume published after his governorship, entitled *La rinascità della Tripolitania. Memorie e studi sui quattro anni di governo del Conte Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata* (Milan: Casa Editrice A. Mondadori, 1926). For a good secondary source, see Sergio Romano, “Governatore in colonia. L’amministrazione,” in *Giuseppe Volpi. Industria e finanza tra Giolitti e Mussolini* (Milan: Bompiani, 1979), pp. 113–20.
6. For a detailed discussion of the policies with regard to land and agriculture, see Claudio Segrè, “The Volpi Era: Colonization and Capitalism,” in *Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 47–56. Segrè notes that the Italian authorities argued that the claiming of uncultivated land was based upon Muslim law, which stated that any individual could use land for agriculture as long as it was cultivated—becoming public domain after three years of laying fallow. This rather questionable interpretation, along with the poor records kept by the Ottoman authorities, allowed the Italians to claim almost all of the best agricultural land.
7. This commission was comprised of citizens and functionaries and advised by Hasan Pasha Karamanli, who was considered to be knowledgeable above all others. The buildings on this list included Roman monuments like the Arch of Marcus Aurelius in Tripoli and Muslim religious buildings like the mosque in Tajurah. The private houses were from the period of Ottoman domination, from the seventeenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The law that put Muslim monuments under the protection of the superintendency of the monuments and excavations of Tripolitania was passed on 31 January 1922, and the list of buildings was formalized with a law passed on 12 April 1922. See Renato Bartoccini, “Gli edifici di interesse storico, artistico ed archeologico di Tripoli e dintorni,” in *La rinascità della Tripolitania*, pp. 350–52.
8. Pietro Romanelli, “Restauro alle mura barbaresche di Tripoli,” *Bolletino d’Arte* 2, 12 (June 1923): 570–76. This article provides a broader presentation of the history of the transformation of the walls of Tripoli under the Italians, with detailed information on the restoration of specific portions, including photographs showing the wall before and after the work was completed.
9. Renato Bartoccini, “Restauro nel Castello di Tripoli,” *Bolletino d’Arte* 4, 6 (December 1924): 279–84. This article also presented photographs of the restoration project before and after the work was completed. A specific connection was made during a discussion of one of the secondary courtyards, where several of the column capitals were said to follow contemporary Italian precedents. The idea of the Karamanli period (1711–1835) as a “classic” one also had political implications, as this was a time where the Libyans were free of Ottoman control.
10. Salvatore Aurigemma, “L’Arco di Marco Aurelio in Tripoli,” *Bolletino d’Arte* 5, 12 (June 1926): 554–70. This site was eventually completed according to a project by the architect Florestano Di Fausto, which called for the substantial alteration of the “Fonduk dei Maltesi” (restored in 1738), the “Fonduk Gheddara” (restored 1850) and the “Fonduk er-Raccah” (restored 1773). The impact of this project was somewhat unflatteringly presented in the following essay: Rodolfo Micacchi, “L’arco di Marco Aurelio in Tripoli e la sistemazione della zona adiacente,” *Rivista delle Colonie Italiane* 8, 10 (October 1934): 824–39.
11. The precise mission of this office was: “(a) To study the conditions in which the typical industries of Tripolitania have developed; (b) Propose to the Governor the eventual provisions to intensify the production of these industries; (c) Organize the exhibition of Tripolitanian products in Italy; (d) Plan and direct a permanent exhibition to sell products in Tripoli” (Francesco M. Rossi, “Le Piccole industrie indigene,” in *La rinascità della Tripolitania*, p. 517).
12. The larger context of these statements is as follows: “Secondly master craftsmen will be brought to Tripolitania from Tunisia, Algeria, and also from Morocco to bring more perfect techniques to the Tripolitanian workmen, and to resume techniques in past times they also performed in Tripoli, but of which almost all traces have been lost” (ibid., p. 518).
13. For a brief discussion of the scholarly and research activities of Aurigemma, see A. Gabucci, “Aurigemma, Salvatore,” in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 34, 1 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1988), pp. 205–7. Three of the essays published by Aurigemma are “Il castello di Tripoli di barberia,” in *La rinascità della Tripolitania*, pp. 535–63; “La moschea di Ahmad al-Qarāmānli in Tripoli,” *Dedalo* 7, 8 (January 1927): 492–513; and “La moschea di Gūrgi in Tripoli,” *Africa Italiana* 1, 4 (May 1928): 257–85.
14. Aurigemma, “La moschea di Ahmad al-Qarāmānli in Tripoli,” pp. 504–5. Aurigemma proceeds to remark that such “contaminations” are characteristic of the indigenous architecture of Libya, which was formed by numerous external influences. In this case, he was referring to the expulsion of Muslims by Philip III of Spain in 1610, a nucleus of whom stayed in Tunisia and a smaller group in Tripolitania.
15. Aurigemma, *Tripoli e le sue opere d’arte* (Milan and Rome: Luigi Alfieri Editori, 1927). In discussing the success of the Roman Empire in Africa, Aurigemma argued that the transformation of the province was not a direct work of the imperial Roman government. Rather, he stated, “the campaigns did not prosper but by virtue of the Roman element established in the territory or the indigenous element renewing itself within the Romans, and then becoming part of the great Roman state” (ibid., p. 33).
16. For a biography of Ricard’s early career, see C. E. Curiner, “Ricard, Prosper-Marie-Eugène,” in *Dictionnaire national des contemporains, contenant les notices de toutes les personnalités vivantes, françaises ou demeurant en France, qui se sont fait connaître*, 6 vols. (Paris: Office Général d’Édition, 1901–18).
17. Alfred Bel and Prosper Ricard, *Le travail de la laine à Tlemcen* (Algiers: A. Jourdan, 1913); and Prosper Ricard, *Corpus de tapis marocains*, 8 vols. (Paris: Geunther, 1923).
18. Ricard, “Il rinnovamento artistico del Marocco,” *Dedalo* 9, 12 (May 1929): 742–70. The activities of the indigenous arts service included study, instruction, and an exhibition pro-

- gram, a program that was largely the basis for the renewal of artisanal industries in Tripolitania.
19. The publications of Ricard with Hachette included *Le Maroc* (Paris: Hachette, 1919); *Les merveilles de l'autre France; Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc; le pays-les monuments-les habitants* (Paris: Hachette, 1924); and *Algérie, Tunisie, Tripolitaine [et] Malte* (Paris: Hachette, 1930). Ricard also published an earlier guide book to the town of Fez (*Guide de Fès: renseignements pratiques, aperçu historique, organisation municipale, principaux monuments, excursions urbaines et suburbaines* [Fez: Imprimerie Municipale, 1916]).
 20. Ricard makes these arguments in the preface to this publication, where he boldly states: "Roman Africa continues to live, in effect, through its hundreds of thousands of settlers returning from Sicilian, Mahonian, Maltese, Italian, Spanish, and French shores to populate its towns and make its Numidian countryside fertile" (Prosper Ricard, *Pour comprendre l'art musulman dans l'Afrique du Nord et en Espagne* [Paris: Hachette, 1924]).
 21. Ricard, "Les arts tripolitains, parte I," *Rivista della Tripolitania* 2, 4 and 5 (January–February, March–April 1926): 203–35 and 275–82; Ricard, *Les arts tripolitains* (Rome: Tipografia del Senato del Dott. G. Bardi, 1926).
 22. In discussing the architectural traditions of Tripolitania, Ricard notes, "We are, as in Tunisia, at the point of contact between East and West, where Turkish and Maghrebi civilizations have penetrated while leaving them profoundly influenced by Italy" (Ricard, "Les arts tripolitains, parte I," *Rivista della Tripolitania* 2, 4 [January–February 1926]: 205).
 23. In the second of these essays, Ricard almost exclusively discusses the Italian authorities' initiatives in the area of the indigenous arts of Tripolitania, noting the recent establishment of a government office of indigenous applied arts, and validating attempts to return to older and more authentic techniques by connecting them with his own work in Algeria and Morocco (Ricard, "Les arts tripolitains, parte I," *Rivista della Tripolitania* 2, 5 [March–April 1926]: 286–87).
 24. For a detailed analysis of the activities of the Artistic Association, see Richard Etlin, "A Modern Vernacular Architecture," in *Modernism in Italian Architecture, 1890–1940* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 129–61. For an investigation of the planning implications of this group's activities, see Etlin, "Contextualism and the Reasoned Picturesque," in *ibid.*, pp. 101–28.
 25. In its first year of publication, historical presentations in this journal included the following: Corrado Ricci, "La porta di San Pietro di Perugia," *Architettura e Arti Decorative* 1, 1 (September–October 1921): 17–31; and Papini, "Il chiostro delle majoliche in Santa Chiara di Napoli," *Architettura e Arti Decorative*, 1, 4 (March–April 1922): 325–38. In addition to essays, the journal contained a monthly "Cronaca dei monumenti," gave titles of recent publications, and reported on the activities of the Artistic Association.
 26. Giovannoni, "Case del quattrocento in Roma," *Architettura e Arti Decorative* 5, 6 (February 1926): 241–57. This article argues that the architecture of the quattrocento was more expressive of the regional character of Rome and provided the precedent for Renaissance developments. It is interesting to note that the architecture of the Renaissance was seen to express an Italian, as opposed to a Roman, identity.
 27. Although many more volumes were planned, only three of these publications were produced between 1926 and 1940. The first two of these were on the city of Rome, while the third was on the province of Lazio. See Associazione artistica fra i cultori di architettura in Roma, *Architettura minore in Italia*, vols. 1 and 2, *Roma*; vol. 3, *Lazio e suburbio di Roma* (Turin: C. Crudo & Co., 1926–40).
 28. See Giovannoni, "Vecchie città ed edilizia nuova," *Nuova Antologia* 48, 995 (1 June 1913): 449–72; and "Il diradamento edilizio dei vecchi centri—il Quartiere della Rinascenza in Roma," *Nuova Antologia* 48, 997 (1 July 1913): 53–76. Giovannoni argues that in order to respond to the need for hygiene in historic centers while preserving the local artistic aspect, the *diradamento* is the preferred solution.
 29. See Piacentini, "Il momento architettonico all'estero," *Architettura e Arti Decorative* 1, 1 (September–October 1921): 32–76. In this article, Piacentini provides a general survey of foreign architecture, characterizing these tendencies as all deriving from the same impulse for simplification, the suppression of false structure and the reduction of decoration.
 30. Piacentini, "Il momento architettonico all'estero," p. 72. In concluding this article, Piacentini states: "We have seen what the differences are between the various national schools and what are the new laws common to all. We must persuade ourselves of this and find in our past, and even more in our homes, the fundamental and permanent principles of our race. With only these two elements we must find our way."
 31. Piacentini, "Influssi d'arte Italiana nel Nord-America," *Architettura e Arti Decorative* 1, 6 (July–August 1922): 536–55.
 32. In an article reporting on this exhibition, Antonio Mariani argues that rustic architecture "is something more than a picturesque moment in the landscape, it is an architecture in its own right" (Mariani, "L'Architettura rustica alla Cinquantennale romana," *Architettura e Arti Decorative* 1, 4 [March–April 1922]: 379–85).
 33. Bartoccini, "La moschea di Murad Agha in Tagiura (Tripolitania)," *Architettura e Arti Decorative* 3, 8 (April 1924): 345. In this discussion Bartoccini notes that the founder of the building, Murad Agha, was the first governor after the reconquest of Tripoli by the Ottomans in 1551. The fact that the building conformed to Maghrebi typologies, rather than Ottoman ones, was without question one of the reasons that it was so interesting to Italian scholars. It was also noted that the columns of the mosque were scavenged from the abandoned Roman town of Leptis Magna.
 34. Romanelli, "Vecchie case arabe di Tripoli," *Architettura e Arti Decorative* 3, 5 (January 1924): 193–211. Romanelli was superintendent of monuments and excavations in Tripolitania until 1923, and credits the research in the essay to the initiative of the Volpi administration. This program was described as follows: "These houses of artistic and historical interest have been recently, on the initiative of his excellency the governor of Tripolitania, the Honorable Count Volpi, recognized one by one and subjected to a special disposition of guardianship. On the occasion of this census work it was possible to enter into many of these [buildings] and gather the rudiments for their study."
 35. *Ibid.*, p. 195. In discussing the Roman origins of the Arab house, Romanelli argues that "fundamentally this is the general and recognized type of house in all of the coun-

- tries of the East." At the same time, he asserts that this type developed, amplified, and modified itself "to correspond better to the necessities and particular habits of the people whom the house served" (ibid., pp. 195–96).
36. Ibid., p. 211. In discussing the craftsmanship of these houses, Romanelli notes: "Another influence was exercised on the Tripolitanian masters, and not in small measure, and it was that of the coeval art in Europe, and more particularly that of Italy." He then explains: "Many of these unknown masters, or at least their most valid and able collaborators, were without a doubt Italian, slaves taken by the barbaric ships to Tripoli, and there obliged to work for the Pashas or their ministers."
 37. Gian Paolo Consoli, "The Protagonists," *Rassegna* 51 (September 1992): 54. The larger context for this statement is as follows: "Brasini was the architectural arm of Volpi, who wished to transform the small and Berberesque Tarabulus El-Garb (Tripoli) into an active 'Oltremare' metropolis where the mark of Italian domination would be evident. Though he claimed to have studied a master plan for the city, Brasini was in reality only interested in monuments: the towns imagined by Brasini are formed by the scenographic union of great monumental architecture."
 38. Consoli characterizes Limongelli's work as follows: "He evolved his language in his search for an architecture both Classical and Mediterranean, reinterpreting Romanity in light of the version given to it by local architecture: horizontality of line, simplicity and clarity of volumes, the elimination of decoration, neatness and whiteness of the surfaces are the constants of Limongelli's mature works" (ibid., p. 57).
 39. The original members of the Gruppo 7 were Ubaldo Castagnoli, Luigi Figini, Guido Frette, Sebastiano Larco, Gino Pollini, Carlo Enrico Rava, and Giuseppe Terragni. The connection between their manifestoes and contemporary architectural discourse in northern Europe has been made by numerous historians, including Dennis Doordan (*Building Modern Italy: Italian Architecture 1914–1936* [New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988]; and Giorgio Ciucci, *Gli architetti e il fascismo: Architettura e città 1922–44* [Turin: Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, 1989]).
 40. These competitions and other related projects allowed young Italian architects like Rava, Libera, and Piccinato to turn to the colonies for opportunities not available in Italy. Pellegrini, a recent graduate of the Politecnico of Milan, moved to Tripoli in the early 1930's to work for the municipality and ended up producing a significant body of rationalist-inspired villas, several of which were published in Alberto Sartoris, *Gli elementi dell'architettura funzionale* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli Editore, 1941).
 41. Maurizio Rava was a painter, journalist, and politician, whose political career in the Italian colonies began when he became general secretary of the governor's office of Tripolitania under Emilio De Bono in March of 1927. He then assumed the post of vice-governor of this colony from October of 1930 until July of 1931, when he was appointed governor general of Somalia by Mussolini (Edoardo Savino, *La nazione operante: Albo d'oro del fascismo* [Novara: Istituto geografico De Agostini, 1937], p. 90).
 42. This essay was published as "Per una Tripoli più bella" in *L'Avvenire di Tripoli* on 22 September 1929. It was then published, again with Maurizio Rava listed as the author, as "Dobbiamo rispettare il carattere dell'edilizia tripolina" in *L'Oltremare* in November of 1929. Its authorship is questionable, as it was published a third time, and in a somewhat modified form, in Carlo Enrico Rava's *Nove anni di architettura vissuta, 1926 IV–1935 XIII* (Rome: Cremonese editore, 1935) as one of his own writings. In this final case it was titled "Tripoli e l'edilizia coloniale moderna."
 43. In speaking about the old city, this essay stated that "apart from the comfort of the European city, [the foreign visitor] finds the impression of Africa and the East in the old indigenous or Jewish quarter." Of the oasis, the author notes, "There are frequently constructions in Arab gardens along these streets that cannot be defined as villas or urban houses, which, in spite of their modest aspect, have in their local *minor architecture*, an extremely great importance. In fact, these are the ones that represent the *true Arab style of Tripolitania*" [emphasis in the original]. The tourist value of the city was described as follows: "These characteristics represent the possibility of greater attractions each day for Tripoli, and it would be criminal to diminish it even by a little amount or destroy it, when completing it instead means assuring the future of the city as a great tourist center" (Maurizio Rava, "Dobbiamo rispettare il carattere dell'edilizia tripolina," *L'Oltremare* 3, 11 [November 1929]: 458–59).
 44. This essay asserts that the use of a Moorish style in Tripolitania was a bizarre and deplorable tradition: "These rather gloomy buildings, beyond disfiguring the almost always beautiful region in which they rise, represent in their interior the height of discomfort..., while the simple house of local architecture . . . born in the same locus, offers an exemplary and characteristic example of how one can construct in North Africa" (ibid., p. 462).
 45. Of the formal or visual qualities of the Libyan vernacular, this essay argued: "One has only to open one's eyes and *see*; for the *general mass of the building*, the Arab houses, that are almost always extremely balanced in the geometric and alternating play of volumes, offer innumerable models to inspire" [emphasis in the original] (ibid., pp. 462–63). The author later speaks of the "coloration of the vast smooth walls with lively and soft hues according to the wall or its exposure; colorations in which the Arab houses are masters, and that under the beautiful African sun and sky give the indigenous quarters a particular charm." This essay also offers the same argument about the Roman origins of the courtyard as Carlo Enrico Rava does in "Di un'architettura coloniale moderna" (ibid., p. 463).
 46. Ibid., pp. 463–64.
 47. "Di un'architettura coloniale moderna" was published in two parts in May and June of 1931. These were the fifth and sixth of the eight essays to be published under the title, "Panorama del Razionalismo." The first four essays (published January–April 1931)—"Svolta pericolosa. Situazione dell'Italia di fronte al razionalismo europeo," "Spirito latino," and "La necessità di selezione" (part 1 and 2)—contained all of the essential aspects of his theory for a modern Italian architecture. In the final two essays, Rava provides further detail in "Giovanni architetti nordamericani" (July 1931) and reacts to the criticism of his arguments in "Conclusione" (November 1931).

48. For a general discussion of this debate, see Silvia Danesi, "Aporie dell'architettura italiana in periodo fascista-mediterraneità e purismo," in *Il razionalismo e l'architettura in Italia durante il fascismo* (Milan: Electa Editrice, 1976), pp. 21–26.
49. Of the twenty-two images presented in these two essays, fifteen were taken by Rava and all but three of these are contained in the two photo albums kept in the private collection of the Rava family. These two albums are themselves important documentation of the sites which he visited in his travels to Tripolitania during his total of nine months of stay between 1928 and 1931. In addition to the city of Tripoli, his travels included the southern sub-Saharan regions of Nalut and Ghadamis. It is interesting to note that Rava published a book, *Viaggio a Tunisi* (Bologna: Licinio Cappelli editore, 1932), which chronicles his visit to Tripolitania in March of 1931.
50. Rava, "Di un'architettura coloniale—Parte prima," p. 43.
51. In discussing the Roman influence, Rava notes that the castle at Kabao provides a more aboriginal and less organized prototype to the castle at Qasr al-Hajj, which was described as "a kind of Colosseum of the steppe some 200 kilometers from Tripoli, in the circular scheme of the Roman amphitheater, a scheme which through the grandiose ruins of amphitheaters that still survive in the African Mediterranean, have made a deep impression on the imagination of the indigenous persons." He goes on to note the "survival of not only the Saharan architectural elements . . . but of true and proper constructions of the Sudanese type at a distance not relatively great from the sea (250–400 kilometers)." He then proceeds to cite both the Berber guard tower in the valley of Jado and the ancient citadel at Mizdah located at the edge of the Hammadah al-Hamra desert, connecting these with the villages of the Habbe tribe discovered by this American expedition (*ibid.*, p. 43).
52. In this essay, Rava states that the Roman influence was preserved in part through its continuation in Byzantine forms. He then proceeds to note that it was "through the long narrow alliance of the Byzantine principles of the coast with the Berber principles of the Jabal (mountain) against the Arab invader, that the primitive Berber architecture was transfused with numerous elements of Roman derivation, elements which the Berbers, in their turn, then passed on to the Arab-Libyan architecture, in which they are still today evident and viable" (*ibid.*, p. 41).
53. Rava visited Ghadamis on two separate automobile excursions, the first from 3 to 15 February 1929, and the second, of approximately the same length, beginning on 17 March 1921. In speaking about the role of Ghadamis in connecting central Africa with the Mediterranean, Rava stated: "This fascinating hypothesis may be presented . . . that the mysterious and very distant Ghadamis . . . fabled city that unites traces of Rome to those of Timbuktu, and which represented a great center of Tuaregh civilization and culture, as it was the greatest caravan junction through which the Mediterranean communicated with the basin of the Niger, has also been, in some small way, the place of transition and of exchange between the architectural forms of *latinità* and those of Saharan-Sudanese Africa" (*ibid.*, p. 89).
54. Of the African influence on Ghadamis, Rava notes: "It shows obvious Sudanese stylistic characteristics, and, with its house-towers crenellated on the edges, it makes one think of the fabled capital city of the great sultans . . . which it resembles." In discussing the Roman influences on the mosque of Ghadamis, Rava notes that what made these references remarkable was that these elements were not physically borrowed, but "executed on site . . . by the hand of local workmen" (*ibid.*, pp. 42–43).
55. Rava presents the Ottoman contribution as follows: "The most recent influence on the development of Libyan architecture, the Ottoman domination, introduced the use of wooden loggias and roof terraces, elements of a character essentially colonial, much in tune with the landscape of Mediterranean Africa and befitting the necessities of its climate—thus renewing and varying the possibilities of the Arab patio inherited from the porticoed courtyard of the ancient Roman house" (*ibid.*, p. 89).
56. Rava enumerates this first source as follows: "The Roman influence (the true, that is, the one of the practical and organizing spirit of Rome, not that of archaeology, of style, of the ruins, is also imperial), still very vital in the scheme of the Arab-Turkish house, whose very rational plan is the exact reproduction of that of the ancient classical house, and still today constitutes, at the same time, the type of house that best corresponds to the climate and the demands of colonial life, that best harmonizes with the African landscape" (*ibid.*, p. 89).
57. The second source is described as follows: "The impulse of a vigorous primitivism that, superimposing itself on the Roman scheme, it derives from its relations with the populations of the south (Sahara, Niger, Sudan), which leave their trace in that predilection for simple forms, cubes, and parallelepipeds, truncated pyramids and spherical caps, cones and truncated cones, that culminates in the astonishing composition of parallelepipeds crowned by a spherical cap and by a pyramid, constituting the mosque of Qasr al-Hajj which, although rough, makes one think in centuries of distance, of the abstract creations of the very recent Russian constructivists" (*ibid.*, p. 89).
58. These final qualities were described as follows: "The general Mediterranean characteristic that, as much through the Roman scheme of the house, as through the composition of simple and linear geometric masses which has been spoken of, composing blank rhythms of cubes and parallelepipeds, opposing the cool shade of the patio to the sun and to the blue of the large superposed and alternating verandahs or roof terraces, relates the Italian local architecture of our Libyan colonies to that of our other Mediterranean coasts from Capri to Camogli" (*ibid.*, p. 89).
59. In this essay, Rava argues: "Almost nothing that we have constructed in Libya is colonial architecture. Until today, save for very rare exceptions, we have made in the colony the false Moorish and the authentic Floreale, on the better houses, the classicism of the style manuals with some Renaissance accents." The architecture of California was described as possessing the same qualities that linked the architecture of the Mediterranean together, a common response to the climatic demands of these regions which was expressed as their "sense of *latinità*" (Rava, "Di un'architettura coloniale modern—Parte seconda," p. 34).

60. The connection between the American and British sources and the indigenous architecture of Libya is described as follows: "Today these identical characteristics, inevitably common in all the colonial constructions because they are rational, can also be found in Libya, imported . . . by the Ottomans" (ibid., p. 35).
61. Ibid., p. 36.
62. It is quite evident from the two photographic albums of his travels in Tripolitania that Rava utilized a process of selection not unlike that employed in Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* (Paris: Editions G. Cres, 1923). Rava's photographs of the mosque of Qasr al-Hajj show an interest in white walls and pure solids similar to that espoused by Le Corbusier in this famous publication.
63. This statement comes from a speech made by Mussolini during his visit to Tripolitania in April of 1926. The following is the larger context: "It is not without significance that I draw my wish to this shore of the sea that was Roman and returns to Rome and it is particularly significant that I spread out all of the Italian people around me, a united people of soldiers, of colonists, of pioneers" (Mussolini, "Speech at Municipio di Tripoli," 11 April 1926, *Scritti e discorsi di Benito Mussolini*, vol. 5, *Scritti e discorsi dal 1925 al 1926* [Milan: Ulrico Hoepli Editore, 1934], pp. 318–19).
64. Rava characterizes the appropriation of the Libyan vernacular as follows: "taking back, with a modernity of intention, the scheme of the classical house preserved through the Arab one, we will continue the work of Rome, creating the new on its traces, not obtusely repeating what it did in distant centuries, and does not have any reason to live today." He then proceeds to argue that only through repeating and concluding "the eternal work of *latinità*" and "drawing from the analogy between the indigenous Libyan forms and those of current Rationalism," will Italian architects produce "the lasting sign of our present greatness, of our new civilization" in North Africa (Rava, "Di un'architettura coloniale moderna—Parte seconda," p. 36).
65. The project of Laforgue was one of numerous public buildings constructed in Morocco that arose from the regulatory plan of Morocco by Henri Prost, who was the municipal architect of this colony under Lyautey. François Béguin refers to the *arabesances* of Morocco as follows: "The Moroccan *arabesance*, which Prost and Laprade developed in close cooperation with Lyautey, stands out from earlier variants for its sobriety and a homogeneity of inspiration which is immediately perceptible in the general aspect of all the public buildings" (Béguin, *Arabesances: Decor architectural et tracé urbain en Afrique du Nord, 1830–1950* [Paris: Dunod, 1983], p. 61).
66. In her Ph.D. dissertation on the International Colonial Exposition, Patricia Morton makes the following comments about the idea of the hybrid in French colonialism: "The hybrid is another one of colonialism's illegitimate offspring, the product of cross-breeding between the metropolitan and the colonial. It was the horror of colonialist fantasies: the mixture of superior populations with inferior ones that produced entities neither French nor indigenous" (Morton, "The Civilizing Mission of Architecture: The 1931 International Colonial Exposition in Paris," Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1994, pp. 12–13).
67. In its publication in *Domus* it was stated that "one thing that will strike the reader will be the 'Mediterranean' intonation that pervades it, intonation that... seems to have reached an excellent level of expression." The element to which this Mediterranean quality was linked was the large verandah, which was seen to provide an intense play of light and shade ("Per la moderna architettura coloniale italiana," *Domus* 7, 6 [June 1934]: 11–12).
68. Martin Clark notes that Italian troops invaded Ethiopia on 3 October 1935, with the Italian empire being declared by Mussolini on 9 May 1936. Shortly after the initial invasion, the League of Nations applied economic sanctions which, according to Clark, were largely ineffective. They did, however, result in the policy of autarchy which meant that imported goods were replaced by their Italian equivalent. The colonies in East Africa thus became substitutes for the export markets that were lost. Although this preserved Italian industry and labor, its impact on the national economy was severe, as a huge deficit arose from this investment in the colonies (Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871–1982* [New York: Longman Inc., 1984], pp. 266, 281–82).
69. Italo Balbo describes the populations of the coastal region as "of superior race, influenced by Mediterranean civilization, capable of assimilating the spirit of our laws and evolving on a more elevated plane of social life." Much less is said of the populations in the desert regions of Libya, other than their inability to assimilate into metropolitan society (Balbo, "La politica sociale fascista verso gli arabi della Libia," in *Convegno di scienze morali e storiche. 4–11 ottobre 1938–XVI. Tema: L'Africa*, vol. 1 [Rome: Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1939], p. 734). This division is between the four coastal provinces of Tripoli, Misratah, Bengazi, and Derna and the southern military zone, which would always have a colonial status.
70. For a general outline of Pellegrini's career in Libya, see Consoli, "The Protagonists," pp. 58–59. His projects were also published extensively in contemporary journals. For a collection of his urban projects and villas, see "Alcune opere recenti dell'architetto Giovanni Pellegrini a Tripoli," *Rassegna di Architettura* 10, 10 (October 1938): 415–26. His projects and proposals for agricultural town centers are collected in Plinio Marconi, "L'architettura nella colonizzazione della Libia. Opere dell'Arch. Giovanni Pellegrini," *Architettura* 18, 12 (December 1939): 711–26.
71. This essay begins with a list of general principles for the design of colonial cities, outlining the problems of climate and suggesting an approach for the design of elements of this city, such as primary and secondary streets, public buildings, and housing. After a section which discusses the Arab house in some detail, he concludes this discussion with a summary of the aspects of the indigenous architecture that could apply to the city and the house. The following are the practical means provided for the resolution of climatic factors: "streets protected by porticoes and by vegetation if they have traffic; narrow with pergolas if they have minor traffic in the housing districts." The following are the aesthetic consequences: "modeled plastically, cubist not metallic, effect of mass and polychromy" (Pellegrini, "Manifesto dell'architettura coloniale," *Rassegna di Architettura* 8, 10 [October 1936]: 349–50).
72. Of the Arab house, Pellegrini states: "It shows us, in action,

- the best architectural expedients and the best solution for the adaptation of the life of man to the geographical and climatic conditions." He lists the aspects of this house that could apply to the colonial house. The climatic factors were "internal courtyard with loggia; a glazed, hanging roof garden, airy galleries (rather than corridors), filters for light and air." The aesthetic results were: "exaltation of the portal, concealment of the interior of the house, sense of austerity of the family life, terraces with loggias in the façade and over the covering like a double roof" (ibid., pp. 349–50).
73. With regard to the relationship between the modern and the indigenous, Pellegrini notes: "All of the solutions that the practice of the indigenous constructions demonstrate as effective (houses with a central courtyard, solid walls, narrow streets) should be utilized, resolutely fusing them with everything that modern technique teaches, and the modern aesthetic shows" (ibid., pp. 349).
 74. The "Manifesto" was followed by a series of fifty-one photographs, twenty-nine of which were taken by Pellegrini. The remaining photos were the kind produced by local studios for tourist consumption. Each image was accompanied by a title and brief commentary. This text provided a literal identification or a general geographic location, along with a description of its particular applicability to the task of creating a contemporary architecture (ibid., pp. 351–67).
 75. The Villa Salvi was one of four projects of Pellegrini published in this book; the other three were the Casa a Mare Zard near Tripoli (1933), the Villa Putaggio near Tripoli (1938), and the Case per impiegati at Homs (1936). These projects appeared in the third edition of this book, which was published in 1941 under the subtitle "Sintesi panoramica dell'architettura moderna." This was a completely revised edition of the book, of some 950 pages, which represented modern architecture in fifty-eight different countries. The countries represented were from Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, North America and South America, and Asia (see Sartoris, *Gli elementi dell'architettura funzionale*).
 76. The commission was created by a governmental decree on 21 February; it was made up of members drawn from the colonial administration, the municipality, the technical office, the superintendency of monuments and excavations, and two consultants, the architect Florestano Di Fausto and the engineer Stefano Gatti Casazza. It was the responsibility of this commission, among other things, to preside over the execution of the regulatory plan for the city of Tripoli. For more information on the building activities in Libya under Balbo, see G. Bucciante, "Lo sviluppo edilizio della Libia," in *Viaggio del Duce in Libia per l'inaugurazione della litoranea*, pp. 1–17.
 77. Although Di Fausto executed few works in Italy, he was well known through his projects as part of the technical office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs between 1922 and 1932. In this period he executed public works in many cities abroad, including Belgrade, Cairo, Algiers, Ankara, and Tunis. His work in Rhodes began in 1923 for Governatore Lago, where he prepared the regulatory plan and was responsible for numerous public buildings, including the Palazzo del Governo (1926). After Alessandro Limongelli's death in 1932, Di Fausto assumed the post of Consulente for the Municipio di Tripoli. For examples of his work, see Michele Biancale, *Florestano Di Fausto* (Geneva: Editions "Les Archives Internationales," 1932).
 78. In addition to his project for the Suq al-Mushir, Di Fausto's restoration works included a series of projects related to the castle and adjacent piazza. These began with the restructuring of the piazza and related connections to the old city (1935), the relocation of the office of the governor in the castle, and demolition of the existing jail (1937)—a project that also involved the reorganization of the interior courtyard spaces—and finally the renovation of the existing archaeological museum (1939). Other projects in Tripoli included the restructuring of the area around the Arch of Marcus Aurelius (1937). Outside of Tripoli, Di Fausto was involved in the adaptation of fortified buildings from the Ottoman period for barracks and military outposts in places like Murzuq, Brak, Ghadamis, and Garagesc.
 79. In speaking about this contextualism in his essay, Di Fausto argues: "What my works bring to light—as regularization and incrementation of a poorly densified city, as new quarters and new buildings—on the coast of the eastern Mediterranean, and in the circle of the island of Rhodes, and in the rock of Kos and in Asia Minor and in the city of Tripoli, and within the Libyan platform, and in Tunisia and in Algeria—gave testimony that not a stone was placed by me without filling myself with the spirit of the place, making it mine—and it is only after this that the new work arose, similar to the flowering of a tree that needs first to deepen its underground roots" (Di Fausto, "Visione mediterranea della mia architettura," *Libia* 1, 9 [December 1937]: 16).
 80. In a manner not dissimilar from the assertions of Rava, Di Fausto argues that the essential definition of this region is according to its great civilizations, with other populations merely adding to this legacy: "Architecture was born in the Mediterranean and triumphed in Rome in the eternal monuments created from the genius of our birth: it must, therefore, remain Mediterranean and Italian" (ibid., p. 18).
 81. The exterior appearance of the Uaddan hotel combined references to the characteristic forms of the monumental architecture of Tripoli, such as the mosque of Turghut (1604). These features include a minaret-like tower and the multi-domed volume of its theater. The interiors of the bath complex had a similar composite approach, with a combination of Roman mosaic floor patterns and a spatial frame that is an abstract reinterpretation of Ottoman precedents. For information on the historic architecture of Tripoli, see Muhammed Warfelli, "The Old City of Tripoli," *Art and Archeology Research Papers* (Tripoli: Department of Antiquities, 1976).
 82. A more complete quotation of the statement of Apollonj is as follows: "This Tripolitanian monumental architecture, although naturally presenting a general structure that inserts itself in the great trunk of Arab art, appears induced by a thousand influences, mainly of Roman and Western origin: but still not missing heterogeneous influences as, for example, Persian or Turkish. It achieves effects that are very picturesque and sometimes also of notable beauty, as in the principal mosques of Tripoli and in the mosque of Homs" (Apollonj, "L'Architettura araba della Libia," *Rassegna di*

- Architettura* 9, 12 [December 1937]: 455–62).
83. Speaking of the so-called Arab house, Apollonj states: “The atmosphere of peace and mystery that reigns in these streets emanates exactly from these very houses, composed on the exterior by a cube of stonework, decorated on the façade at three quarters of its height by a horizontal pilaster, and perforated only by an entrance portal and by some occasional small windows. It is a question of a simple architecture, if it can even be called architecture: nevertheless it corresponds perfectly to the closed and abstentionist mentality of the Arabs, who in their house seek a refuge against the external physical world for themselves and their families” (ibid., p. 459).
 84. The larger context of these statements is as follows: “While the contemporary [Italian] building art is the extreme point of arrival of a long aesthetic evolution . . . in the forms of Arab architecture we find ourselves in the presence of a primitivism, frank and free of any artistic consistency, which cannot but be proper to the spontaneity of the constructive spirit that inspired it and to the effective immediacy of means with which it is explained. On the one hand, we have the extreme refinement of a civilization that has reached a position, if not final, certainly extremely advanced and often utopian; on the other, the intuitive spontaneity of a poor and static population” (ibid., p. 461).
 85. Scarin presented “Tipi indigeni di insediamento umano e loro distribuzione nella Tripolitania settentrionale” (*Atti del Primo congresso di studi coloniali*, vol. 4 [Florence: Sicc B. Seeber, 1931], pp. 24–39) at the first congress in 1931. The organization of the 1940 book follows a rigorously scientific approach: it is divided into three major sections, (1). Il territorio; (2). La popolazione; and (3). L’Abitazione. Through these sections the geographic, climatic, racial and linguistic characteristics of the region and its population become a pretext for the major part of the study, which is the various forms of indigenous housing (Scarin, *L’Insediamento umano nella Libia occidentale* [Verona: A. Mondadori, 1940]).
 86. This provision, which was called the *Regio decreto-legge 17 novembre 1938–XVII, n. 1728, recante provvedimenti per la difesa della razza italiana*, was presented to the presidency of the council of ministers for passage into law on 25 November 1938. In his article Edoardo Zavattari, the director of the Institute of Zoology of the University of Rome, states: “There does not seem to be any antinomy between Italian racist politics and Italian philo-Islamic politics . . . the defense of the Italian race from any mixing with the races outside of Europe, particularly Asian and African, does not, in fact, imply a concept of lessening the Islamic populations, who want above all the recognition of the full liberty to follow their religion” (Zavattari, “Italia e Islam di fronte al problema razzista,” *Difesa della Razza* 1, 2 [20 August 1938]: 14–15).
 87. The editors at *Domus* published a short note along with the first essay of Rava, stating: “*Domus* has presented this problem before with the articles of Piccinato (May and June of this year). In them the theme of colonial housing was conceptually and technically posed. But a work of architectonic collaboration, active in those building directives that the *Governo* has assumed in the colonies, is incumbent on Italian architects. With this article of Rava, *Domus* intends to give a contribution to this general problem that may be defined as colonial architectonic politics” (Rava, “Costruire in colonia, I,” *Domus* 104 [August 1936]: 8).
 88. In the essay in *Domus*, Rava recommends “a totalitarian concept of building in the colonies that will only permit the realization of a truly imperial affirmation, considering an urbanism that will no longer only be a fusion of art and science, but the highest expression of the art of the state, as the greatest factor of expansion of the conquering and healing civilization” (Rava, “Costruire in colonia, III,” *Domus* 109 [January 1937]: 23).
 89. In discussing the public face of Italian authority in the colonies, Rava stated: “I repeat (as I also said about the housing for civil and military functionaries and employees, which it seems may have begun in a few areas of the empire) that in this branch of architecture more than in any other, the question of the dignity and prestige of the race is placed above all others, and each building aspect must carry its imprint” (ibid., p. 27).
 90. In this essay, Rava traces the continuous line of thinking in his programmatic writings about the question of an Italian racial identity. One of Rava’s primary motives in linking Italian Rationalism with racist politics was to legitimize the movement to face the scrutiny of the Fascist authorities, who were increasingly critical of the European outlook of Italian architecture. He was also quite clearly underscoring his own unique contribution to Rationalist discourse, defending himself against accusations of internationalism by distinguishing his writings from the more intransigent views. In so doing, he describes the transformation of Rationalism through his writings as “not an involution, but instead a logical *evolution*, of unsuppressibly Italian men, above all faithful to a spirit of *nationality* and of *race*” [emphasis in the original] (Rava, “Architettura di razza italiana,” *L’Architettura Italiana* [January 1939]: 41–42).