

eScholarship

California Italian Studies

Title

The Light and the Line: Florestano Di Fausto and the Politics of '*Mediterraneità*'

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9hm1p6m5>

Journal

California Italian Studies, 1(1)

Author

Anderson, Sean

Publication Date

2010

DOI

10.5070/C311008864

Supplemental Material

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9hm1p6m5#supplemental>

Peer reviewed

Please click on 'Supporting Material' link in left column to access image files

The Light and the Line:

Florestano Di Fausto and the Politics of Mediterraneità

Sean Anderson

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.¹

On March 15, 1937 along the Via Balbia, an 1800-kilometer coastal road linking Tunisia and Egypt, Benito Mussolini and Italo Balbo, then provincial governor of Italian Libya, inaugurated the Arco di Fileni, a monumental gateway commemorating two legendary Carthaginian hero-brothers, while on their way to Tripoli to celebrate the first anniversary of the Italian colonial empire. Designed by the architect Florestano Di Fausto, the travertine arch, with its elongated archway and stacked pyramidal 31-meter high profile, was built atop a purported 500 BCE site that marked the division between the Greek territory of Cyrene and Carthaginian holdings to the east. Atop the arch, an inscription by the poet Horace, made popular by the Fascist party with a stamp issued in 1936, emphasized the gateway's prominence in visual terms: "O quickening sun, may naught be present to thy view more than the city of Rome."² The distant horizon of Rome, or more broadly, that of the newfound empire, framed by the arch, condensed an architectural, political, and spectral heroism that was akin to the civilizing mission of Italian colonialism. Here, the triumphant building of the arch, the road that passed through it, and the transformation of the Libyan landscape denoted the symbolic passage of an Italian consciousness into what formerly been indeterminate terrain. While the Janus-like apparition of the arch in the desert marked the boundary between East and West, past and future, for its architect, the site also gave way to the construction of an "eternal" monument signifying the potential of Italian colonial architecture to exist at the border between two worlds.

Arguably one of the most important architects and proponents of Italian modern colonial architecture, Roman architect Florestano Di Fausto, has, until recently, been overlooked by historians of modern architecture. As a technical consultant to the Ministero degli affari Esteri, Di Fausto designed and constructed numerous Italian diplomatic offices throughout Eastern and Western Europe, South America, and the Near East.³ But he is most recognized for his colonial urban planning schemes and government buildings from 1923 until 1940 in the Aegean Dodecanese and Libya. His works in these divergent locales conferred an eclectic sensibility to an already complex negotiation of ancient and modern forms present on the islands of Rhodes and Kos, as well as in the colony of Libya. Moreover, the range of projects Di Fausto completed in both settings attests to Italian modernism's engagement with contextual idioms in the making of colonial architecture and urbanism. Unlike many of the public structures built during the French colonial campaign in North Africa, Di Fausto's built and unbuilt projects refine the

¹ Florestano Di Fausto, "Visione mediterranea della mia architettura," *Libia* 1:9 (December 1937) 16-18; 18.

² The inscription read as follows: Alme Sol Possis / Nihil Urbe Roma / Visere Maius.

³ Most notable among these include the Italian Legation in Belgrade (1924-1926) and Cairo (1928-1930), the Casa degli Italiani in Algiers (1931), the Italian Embassy in Ankara and the Italian Consulate in Tunis (1931-1932). Following his work in the Dodecanese, Di Fausto will briefly work in Albania, designing the Casa dei Funzionari (1927) and the Palazzo Reale di Durazzo for King Zog (1928-1930).

vagaries of traditionalism into a medium that is difficult to categorize. His architecture stands between histories. It is neither modern nor traditional. The works discussed in this essay individually conflate historic precedent with that of Italian modernism while simultaneously redefining the characteristics of both approaches. Yet, Di Fausto's projects must also be seen as a counterpoint to other European modernists of the period, including Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier, who sought to reconfigure and sometimes erase symbolic identities in their plans, façades, and interiors. Di Fausto's prodigious output in the colonies provides a corollary to such architects, including those working for the regime on the Italian peninsula, by intensifying the circuit of European modernism to the colonial context. I intend to situate Florestano Di Fausto's works within the aesthetic and socio-political discussions among Italian architects of the period, especially concerning an inherent *italianità* among Mediterranean vernacular architectures. In this regard, the Mediterranean is understood not as a space of resistance but as a filter through which architects like Di Fausto and others generated a new Italian architecture in the colonies.

Architects working for the Ministero delle Colonie claimed that Italian colonial architecture arose from a shared vision of *mediterraneità*. Gustavo Giovannoni, Giovanni Pellegrini, Alessandro Limongelli, Luigi Piccinato, and Carlo Enrico Rava all published essays in architectural journals deploying the much-debated dialectics of tradition and modernity as a point of departure for the instantiation of an Italian character in the overseas territories. But in whose tradition and by which modernity were such assessments positioned? Invariably, notions of *italianità* and *mediterraneità* shifted according to colony and region. In this paper, I explore Di Fausto's urban projects in Rhodes and Tripoli as falling both within and outside amplifications of *mediterraneità* described in part by architects working along the edges of the colonial sphere. Di Fausto did not publish significantly in architectural journals, suggesting that those discussions concerning the making of a Mediterranean architecture occurred without his direct involvement.⁴ As a result, Di Fausto's urban plans and buildings in Rhodes and Libya crafted modern surfaces of projection imbuing the modern architecture of these locations with ambiguous identities.

The mandate of Italian colonial architecture, to explicate the historical via the popular imaginary, reverberated in the making of an Italian modernity, both in peninsular Italy as well as in the fundamentals of its colonial cities. While the modulation of this discourse was indeed a hallmark for the Risorgimento and in part for fascism, the impetus for Di Fausto lay at the fixing of the Mediterranean to an already mediated history. Unlike his early redesign of a niche in St. Peter's Basilica dedicated to St. Pius X, the multiple temporalities of the Mediterranean basin saturated Di Fausto's architecture.⁵ It is therefore difficult to disentangle the leitmotifs of Di Fausto's designs in the colonies from contemporaneous questions about the trajectory of (Italian)

⁴ For a comprehensive treatment of Di Fausto's early works as well as political affiliations see: Giuseppe Miano, "Florestano Di Fausto from Rhodes to Libya," *Journal of the Islamic Environmental Design Research Centre* (1990) 56-71. As of yet, there has been no monograph published on the works of Di Fausto. The first and only work examining the pre-war works of Di Fausto (and not in the colonies) is Michele Biancale, *Florestano di Fausto architetto* (Geneva: Les Archives Internationales, 1932). See the bibliographic entry in the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* 40 (Rome 1991) 1-5 and a discussion in Giuliano Gresleri, Pier Giorgio Massaretti and Stefano Zagnoni, *Architettura italiana d'oltremare 1870-1940* (Venice 1993) 373. Brian McLaren's recent analysis and critiques of Di Fausto's regionalist and contextual projects as part of the larger campaigns for colonial tourism in Libya will be closely observed further in this essay.

⁵ Dedicated in 1923, and carved by Pietro Astorri, the spare niche includes the outstretched figure of the Pope, whose common beginnings as the son of a seamstress and a postman, suggests that through the design, the architect was interested in speaking to a larger population with simplicity and directness. Di Fausto's intimacy with the Church is also found with a 1930 project for the Chiesa Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, in Rome, in which he designed and built the Cappella delle Reliquie to house several Passion relics.

modernism. Faced with the crafting of a modern (colonial) architecture befitting contexts as varied as the Dodecanese and Libya, Di Fausto traverses local vernaculars with a methodology that places political agency in alignment with social, climatic, and technological concerns. Brian McLaren writes, “The Mediterranean architecture of Di Fausto embodied a contextualism that attempted to absorb the characteristic forms and buildings of the local architecture.”⁶ In so doing, Di Fausto asserts the preternatural capacity of the Italian colonial project to continuously redefine the vision of itself while staying true to the origins of place. In his only published essay, Di Fausto asserts: “I have not betrayed my land, nor my sky! And my colonial architecture . . . could not betray it as a result.”⁷ How Di Fausto maintained such an ethics of a mythic yet evanescent landscape is shaped by the twinned courses of Italian colonialism and *mediterraneità*.

In a 1901 text, physical anthropologist Giuseppe Sergi claimed that the Italians were of a “Mediterranean race.”⁸ By 1905, the notion of a pervasive Mediterranean consciousness contributed to a hygienic discourse for the colonies and, in particular, Libya’s capital city, Tripoli. Such calls heed a physical as well as cultural cleansing: “Member of Parliament Giovagnoli states that as the Mediterranean and the Adriatic are Italy’s lungs, if Tripoli . . . should fall under the control of any power, we would be unable to breathe in that area.”⁹ Such fascist presentments resemble those eugenic directives in the colonial context thereby affecting the production of a “pure” and resolutely modern Italian architecture. This *risanamento* of the built environment also connoted the mode by which vision is framed and re-framed by the modern architecture of the colonies. Architects in the Italian colonies unconsciously “captured” indigenous and colonial subjects among their buildings. Prior to the passage of the 1938 racial prohibitions, media representations of the streets of colonial towns and cities allowed for the display of colonial and indigenous populations thus expanding the visual field and its heterogeneous construction. However, discussions of *mediterraneità* as it pertained to race narrowed the means by which colonial architects defined their work. Consequently, Silvia Danesi has argued that notions of *mediterraneità* further destabilized the works of artists and architects working during the period.¹⁰ The rhetorical consignment of the Mediterranean within political and architectural circles contributed to long-held racial biases reifying the colonial subject.¹¹ When observed against the background of Di Fausto’s coding of local vernaculars, such discussions echo those made in the colonies about how and where Italy was conceived. If the Italians “invented” the Mediterranean — its physicality and structuring — the continent of Africa embraced it, opening the Mediterranean as a space across which the flow of culture passed. This will become unifying trope in the ideological positioning of architects working in the Italian colonial possessions.

In 1925, engineer and academic Gustavo Giovannoni voiced his concern for modern colonial architecture by suggesting that Italians forge new spaces from the traditional built environment that reflected a spirit of “ambientismo,” while also considering the Mediterranean

⁶ Brian L. McLaren, “The Italian Colonial Appropriation of Indigenous North African Architecture in the 1930’s,” *Muqarnas* 19 (2002) 164-92; 182.

⁷ Florestano Di Fausto (1937)17.

⁸ Giuseppe Sergi, *The Mediterranean Race: A Study of the Origin of European Peoples* (London: Scott, 1901).

⁹ Camera dei Deputati, “Tripolitania e Cirenaica, parte prima: precedenti parlamentari (aprile 1881-luglio 1911),” in *La XXIII Legislatura 24 marzo 1909-29 settembre 1913* (Rome: Camera dei Deputati, 1913) 1052.

¹⁰ 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) 21-26; 21.

¹¹ For a discussion of modern Italian architecture and race in colonial Libya, see Brian L. McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Colonial Libya: An Ambivalent Modernism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006) 79-104.

basin as that which “bears witness to present-day Italy’s always lively potentiality, perennially on-fire genius.”¹² Six years later, colleagues Carlo Enrico Rava and Luigi Piccinato debated the sources for a Mediterranean architecture. Rava invoked *la mediterraneità* to bridge the simple categorizations of Italian and Arab architecture in his theorization of Rationalist architecture. For Rava, son of Maurizio Rava, general secretary to Tripolitania, the Mediterranean was a totalizing force and inflected a certain hierarchy among vernacular architectures. Whether found in the Dodecanese, Libya, indeed all the colonies, the Mediterranean was the basis for a lasting *italianità*. According to Rava, “the general Mediterranean character which . . . renders the very Italian local architecture of our Libyan coasts akin to that of our other Mediterranean coasts.”¹³ Piccinato, on the other hand, railed against such custodial presumptions with his entry on colonial architecture for the *Enciclopedia*, writing that “the local architecture on the coasts of Africa, in character, is not so much Arab as it is Mediterranean . . . an architecture of masses, white and luminous, simple, closed to the outside, rich in volumes and poor in decoration.”¹⁴ The embrace of the vernacular, whether it was the profile of a Tuscan farmhouse or the organicism of a Berber settlement, prefigured attempts by architects such as Di Fausto and others to create a purity of form within the colonies that evoked mythic and historic claims to the land. Consequently, an irascible Italian identity was forged by an emergent modernism in the Dodecanese and particularly in Libya, setting the stage for the perpetuation of the regime’s autarchic principles.

Di Fausto’s 1937 essay describing the influences of climate and region in the determination of Mediterranean architecture reflects a meshing of both Rava and Piccinato’s early claims. Through acts of “purificazione,” Di Fausto simultaneously problematized the medium of modern architecture as well as assessed the limits and meanings of an Italian colonial modernity. *Mediterraneità* became an overarching taxonomy into which acts of “spontaneous minor architecture,” like that found among the original settlements in the colonies, influenced the design of spatial typologies.¹⁵ In his plans for the new port of Rhodes and the Piazza Cattedrale in Tripoli, Di Fausto reworked the imperial character of Italy buffeted by an aesthetic vocabulary that was at once accessible and innovative.¹⁶

Appointed governor of the Dodecanese following the islands’ annexation in 1922, Deputy Minister Mario Lago moved to Rhodes the same year. Di Fausto was directly called upon by Lago soon after and lived in Rhodes, remaining there off and on until October 1926. Among ministry documents and propaganda, a language of renovation was used to describe both archaeological and architectural operations as early as 1913, the year after Italy’s initial occupation of the Dodecanese, when improvements were made to the primary aqueduct and the

¹² Gustavo Giovannoni, “Commenti e Polemiche, Edilizia Rodiese,” *Architettura e Arti Decorative* IV (1924-1925) vol.2, 474, 476, 478-79, 480.

¹³ Carlo Enrico Rava, “Di un’architettura coloniale moderna (parte prima),” *Domus* 4:41 (May 1931): 39-43, 89; 89.

¹⁴ Luigi Piccinato, “L’edilizia coloniale,” in *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere, ed Arti*, vol.10 (Rome and Milan: Treccani), 826-27; “La casa in colonia, il problema che si prospetta ai nostri architetti,” pts.1 and 2, *Domus* 9 (1936); and “Urbanistica ed edilizia coloniale,” *Architettura* XV (1936).

¹⁵ Silvia Danesi is referring to the photographic documentation of vernacular architecture by Giuseppe Pagano. She writes, “mediterraneità became a unifying category . . . with which to reconcile nationalism and foreign culture.” Danesi soon after suggests that the term took on the life and incidence of other categorizations including “hierarchy, romanità, italianità, and classicità.” Silvia Danesi (1976) 21-22.

¹⁶ A number of proposals were made to reconfigure the primary piazza of Tripoli including the unbuilt design of Alessandro Limongelli in 1931. See: *Rassegna di Architettura* 5:9 (September 1933) 397. The redesign of the Piazza Italia is treated extensively in Brian L. McLaren (2006) 28-30.

installation of street lighting. A team of archaeologists was at once dispatched to the islands to begin the process of rebuilding the fabled Colossus in addition to excavating several sites that had tangible Roman signifiers. But the contentious urban domain of Rhodes and other island settlements became the primary site for Italian architects and planners.

One of the first undertakings for Di Fausto in Rhodes was the drawing up of a new city plan early in 1926, including the organization and definition of the city's predominant port area adjacent to the central historic Castello of the Knights of Rhodes. In addition to simplifying the visual and physical access to the historic center, the plan proved to be a system by which the architect used modern Italian buildings to situate the historical. Soon after his final drawings were presented to the Governor, Luigi Piccinato commented in an essay: "If, by Italian virtue, a new city is to arise, it has to be beautiful and at the same time grandiose, and in the environment of Rhodes it must not appear out of place."¹⁷ Under Di Fausto's direction, the entire ancient walled city was retained — a political and spatial strategy he would later duplicate in Tripoli. Outside the historic walls, Di Fausto envisioned a "Garden City" plan organized about the installation of *villini* and squares, presumably into which the former occupants of the ancient area would be moved. Despite corrective measures planned for the historic center, the old city of Rhodes became a physical and symbolic double for the embodiment of a new Italian city.¹⁸

Central Rhodes was considered an "ancient" city, with its walled quarter and nearby new settlements constructed on the periphery of the enclosed center. Within the walled city, however, the term "restoration" pointed to the removal of signs indicating the buildings' Ottoman past. One might link this to an archaeology of surfaces in which colonial architects such as Di Fausto, Alessandro Limongelli, and Armando Brasini, in addition to those architects on the peninsula including Giuseppe Terragni and Marcello Piacentini, sought to reveal that which had been hidden under the accumulated layers of misapprehension and misuse.¹⁹ For Rhodes, this meant the stripping of post-medieval *mashrabiyya* and visually "liberating" the vestiges of the center from five centuries of Turkish dominance. [Figure 1] Unlike in Italy, where the augmentation of medieval buildings in towns such as San Gimignano and Ferrara allowed for such embellishment to stress a building's or city's visual connection to the past, these acts stand in direct contrast to the new architecture implemented under Di Fausto along the waterfront and port area in Rhodes.²⁰ In Di Fausto's plan of Rhodes Town, the application or *insinuation* of medieval and Renaissance-style motifs sought to reinforce an Italian character abroad. As recent scholars have noted, Di Fausto's recycling of vernacular elements among the volumes and façades of these new buildings was the syncretic equivalent of what one critic called a mixing of "clandestine stylistic blends." Such was Di Fausto's discerning ability to fabricate seemingly Byzantine motifs while underscoring the convergence of Ottoman and Italian spaces.

One of his central structures in Rhodes is the Palazzo Governatore of 1926, a quasi-Venetian structure reminiscent of the Palazzo Ducale with its *sgraffito* of alternating stripes and

¹⁷ Luigi Piccinato, *L'edilizia Coloniale*, 827.

¹⁸ Similar urban doubles, or "copies," can be found in colonial Morocco, where, under Lyautey, the construction of *villes nouvelles* adjacent to the ancient medina was a matter of hygienic separation as well as allowing for the colonial emplacement of the "native" colonial subject.

¹⁹ Marida Talamona approaches the works by these and other architects working under the auspices of the Ministero delle Colonie in "Libya: An Architectural Workshop," *Rassegna* 51 (September 1992) 62-69; 71.

²⁰ See D. Medina Lasansky, "Towers and Tourists: the Cinematic City of San Gimignano," and Dianne Yvonne Ghirardo, "Inventing the Palazzo del Corte in Ferrara," in Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum eds., *Donatello Among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005) 113-32; 97-112.

contrasting materials, crenellations, and gothic arched windows. [Figure 2] Likewise, the design of the new market [Nea Agorà; νέα αγορά] became the hinge among the new town, walled city, and the Mandrakion port. Like the Palazzo Governatore, a semi-public arcade invites comparison to the Islamic context with the exterior arcade's absorption of the street into the building. Neither inside nor outside, the arcades of the palazzo and the market point to Di Fausto's sensitivity to the climate as well as attention to the scopic disciplining of commerce. The interior of the market, with its semi-circular courtyard ringed by stalls and shops, foreshadows Di Fausto's 1932 renovation of the artisanal Suq al-Mushir in the medina of Tripoli. In both examples, as Brian McLaren has shown, "an ambiguous territory between restoration and new construction" was opened by Di Fausto's colonial architecture that "was largely dictated by the demands of the tourist economy."²¹ Moreover, Krystyna von Henneberg has written that Di Fausto's "Artisan's Market [in Tripoli] challenges the notion of a clear and defensible divide between the modern and adaptational in Italian imperial design."²² Caught between the rehabilitation of historic forms and determining a wholly new mode of building with regard to context, Di Fausto later retrofits other fortified buildings from the Ottoman period in Libya while restructuring the commercial and visitor's area around the Arch of Marcus Aurelius in Tripoli. In other words, through Di Fausto's studied use of complementary forms from ancient Italy, Greece, and later Ottoman patterns, the Palazzo Governatore and the new market, like its architect, embodied the liminality of *mediterraneità*.²³

Hybrid in function and outlook, the central market's polygonal enclosure surrounds an interior pavilion for fishmongers; an entrance pavilion surmounted by a dome; and an entirely porticoed center. [Figure 3] The appearance of *arabiscances*, those accents derived from Near Eastern architecture, act as appropriative comments; the repetition of essentialized arches and abbreviated columns extends the mercantile aspect of the structure. Di Fausto's design for the Albergo delle Rose, a large tourist hotel complex perpendicular to the primary route of the port, is an example of the architect's assimilation of the minimal forms exhibited by its precursor, the Castello of the Knights of Rhodes. Seeking to forge a touristic enterprise adjacent to the confines of the historic city, the architect adapts the domed tower and flanking structure to accommodate guestrooms, restaurants, a casino, and a garden.²⁴ With extensive stucco ornamentation affixed to the façades, Di Fausto flattens decorative patterns as a means to offset the minimalist aesthetic favored by modernists and perhaps introduce a more inviting scene for visitors. In the February 19, 1933 edition of *Il Messaggero di Rodi*, a commemorative album of images highlighting the tenth anniversary of Mario Lago's rule, a large number of photographs depicted scenes from Di Fausto's various buildings including the Albergo delle Rose, shown from a distance, as well as the pivotal market along the main route of the new town. Photographs clearly indicate that inside

²¹ Brian L. McLaren (2002): 182.

²² Krystyna von Henneberg, "Imperial Uncertainties: Architectural Syncretism and Improvisation in Fascist Colonial Libya," *Journal of Contemporary History* 31:2 (April 1996) 373-95; 385.

²³ The use of these elements, while basic, is reminiscent of Giuseppe Pagano's interest in the vernacular architecture of peninsular Italy while editor of the magazine *Casabella*. In his 1936 text *Architettura rurale italiana*, Pagano and Guarniero Daniel use highly selective photographs of a then unrepresented aspect of Italian architecture to resuscitate the centrality of vernacular forms in Italian modernism. One may suggest that Pagano's turn toward the vernacular is a conscious protest against the increased spectacularization of the Fascist "armored" façade. In this case, autochthonous elements are not necessarily "old" or derivative, but rather an expression of function and specificity.

²⁴ When Mario Lago was replaced as governor, Cesare De Vecchi was appointed in December 1936 and immediately ordered that all extraneous Deco ornament be removed from the façade of the Albergo delle Rose.

and out, the market structure was based on economic and visual exchange. [Figure 4] Akin to postcard images of *indigeni* taken in the colonies, Di Fausto's new market fixed a panoptic discourse of economic and social viability in the modern colonial city. The colonial gaze, foregrounded by modern architecture, cemented the status of Rhodians as colonial subjects. [Figure 5]

Di Fausto was able to negotiate the voluble histories of the island(s) with a blending of Italian signifiers demonstrating the ambiguous territory between historicity and modernity for the architect in the colonial context. In Rhodes and on the nearby island of Kos, Di Fausto pursued an "appropriate" Italian architecture modeled on the figurations of an ancient past.²⁵ He strove to advance the limits of *purificazione* among preexisting buildings, both inside the medieval walls and outside in the new city of Rhodes. "By translating the *medioevo* to the island," according to D. Medina Lasansky, "the regime legitimized their claim to Rhodes as an extension of Italian territory."²⁶ That which was being decoded here, however, was an erstwhile Mediterranean character located not in the structures themselves but in the territory between old and new. Di Fausto's and other architects' structures lining the rehabilitated Mandrakion Port, renamed the Foro Italico, including a dominant cinema on axis with the Palazzo Governatore, was a means by which the colony projected an image of itself using a novel syntax. Such is the case in Asmara, Eritrea, as well as later in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where Italian architects considered themselves as arbiters of a collective memory in order to fashion proverbial newness within the colonial capitals. In the Dodecanese, Di Fausto generated spaces and buildings that simultaneously obliged precedent while embodying an unrestricted Italian modernity.

By contrast, in Tripoli, the historic center or medina remained on the edges of the public's consciousness in the renovation of the dominant colonial or Italian public spaces. Behind its rusticated walls, the Tripoli medina was an isolated space for the performance of exotic "native" gestures.²⁷ Similarly, one writer claims that retaining the walled portion of Rhodes "in harmonious isolation,"²⁸ the old city became a vehicle by which the image of a new picturesque city emerged. Referring to the broader representation of Rhodes as both an ancient and modern city, Gustavo Giovannoni earlier quipped, "What will be the stylistic character to give to the buildings of the new town? Will it be advisable to continue along the path of ancient repetitions and imitations indicated by the architect of the church now being built? Frankly, no. In our view, it would be a very serious mistake."²⁹ Since, as Eliana Perotti has suggested, one of the goals of the regime was to preserve historical structures associated with the Knights of Rhodes in addition

²⁵ Most notable among his buildings on other islands include, in Kos, the design for the Palazzo Governatore, similar in scale and form to Rhodes's Palazzo Governatore (1926) and the Chiesa dell' Agnus Dei (1926-1927).

²⁶ D. Medina Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle and Tourism in Fascist Italy* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2005) 197. Lasansky writes, "[I]t was such historical references that somehow reaffirmed the Italian character of the institutions housed in these buildings." 196-97. See also Lasansky's, "Urban Editing, Historic Preservation, and Political Rhetoric: The Fascist Redesign of San Gimignano," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 63: 3 (September 2004) 320-53.

²⁷ A similar treatment of said "gestures" can be found in the descriptions of Giovanni Pellegrini's unbuilt work in Libya. Plinio Marconi, "L'architettura della colonizzazione della Libia. Opere dell'arch. Giovanni Pellegrini," *Architettura* XVIII (1939). See also: Mia Fuller, "Preservation and Self-Absorption: Italian Colonization and the Walled City of Tripoli, Libya," in Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller eds., *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 131-42.

²⁸ Florestano Di Fausto, reprinted in M. Biancale, *Florestano Di Fausto architetto* (Geneva: Editions "Les Archives Internationales," 1932) 20.

²⁹ Gustavo Giovannoni, "Commenti e Polemiche, Edilizia Rodiese," *Architettura e Arti Decorative* IV: 10 (1925) 478-79.

to fabricating new structures using a reductive medieval style, the buildings along the sea edge of Rhodes Town visually and spatially restructure the island's primary port of entry, with a modern Italian identity.³⁰

The most striking element in the city plan of Rhodes is Di Fausto's strident linearity along the waterfront and among other boroughs in the new town. [Figure 6] The road network developed under the same auspices as those for all the colonies allowed for the preexisting terrain of the island to be uncovered. As a result, Di Fausto "allowed for certain remains and alignments of the orthogonal mesh laid down at the foundation of Rhodes in 408-407 BCE by Hippodamus of Miletus."³¹ Conversant with other seaside colonial cities, the bracketing of the waterfront and the horizon allows for the manufacture of two artificial natures: that of the colonial city and its Mediterranean mirror. With the new market at one edge and the sea at the other, the Foro Italico binds the historic port and its new architecture. The assemblage of government and communal structures placed in between the two edges embody in name and disposition symbolic allegiances to *Romanità*. Coincidentally, Di Fausto's master plan was engineered at nearly the same time as the eponymous sporting complexes in Rome among whose halls and fields the regime's locution of physical might continually reference the ancient hero. In his urban plans and buildings for the Dodecanese, Di Fausto shies from the making of copies. Rather, among his acts of renovation and excavation in Rhodes, the architect imparts an iconography of *mediterraneità*: what it means to be Italian, that is, a conscious and perpetual negotiation of the colonial and modern.

Historicity befitted Rhodes and falls squarely with the remaking of Italy's "Quarta Sponda," Libya. Among his urban projects as well as those structures for Italian settlers within the colony's interior, Di Fausto chose not to loosely deploy Arab semaphores. Instead, by working through an adaptable modernism, he attempts to contain and proffer colonial mimesis. Colonial Libya provided an empirical domain in which Di Fausto further crafted his telling of Italian modernism. More so than in the Dodecanese, Libya, for the architect, showcased the spectrum of *mediterraneità* with an unbroken aesthetic lineage. In the words of the poet Giovanni Pascoli, "We are close to this land . . . we were there before; we left signs that not even the Berbers, the Bedouins and the Turks have succeeded in erasing; signs of our humanity and civilization, signs that indeed, we are not Berbers, Bedouins and Turks. We are returning."³² This notion of uninterrupted movement and visual exchange across the Mediterranean, just as one might pass through the Arco di Fileni, underscores the works by colonial governors such as Italo Balbo, as well as his predecessor Maurizio Rava, in reshaping the colony and its ground into an appendage of its northern occupier. Di Fausto will deliberately link his projects in Libya to the ground itself, formerly a space of an unmitigated Italian presence. By reorganizing vernacular elements with respect to how they are seen (and not just how they operate), Di Fausto's civil projects in Libya act as a visual register of the context while spatially detaching themselves from the very sites in which they are drawn.

³⁰ See Eliana Perotti, "Il patrimonio medievale. Strategie d'appropriazione," in Simona Martinoli and Eliana Perotti, *Architettura italiana nel dodecaneso 1912-1943* (Turin: Edizione della Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1999).

³¹ Giuseppe Miano (1990) 57.

³² Giovanni Pascoli, "La grande proletaria si è mossa . . . (1911)" in Giovanni Pascoli, *Patria e umanità. Raccolta di scritti e discorsi*, 3d ed., (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1923), 234-48; 243. See also: Carlo Enrico Rava, "Tripoli e l'edilizia coloniale moderna," in *Nove Anni di Architettura Vissuta 1926 V-1935 XIII* (Rome: Cremonese Editore, 1935) 65-75.

Di Fausto “returns” to the colonial sphere in 1932 when he succeeds Alessandro Limongelli as the Architecture Consultant to the City of Tripoli and began a series of renewal projects for the city between 1932 and 1934. Prior to his arrival in Libya, Di Fausto, along with Armando Brasini, worked on the regulatory plan of Tirana, Albania, and the design of the King’s Palace. The successive number of Di Fausto’s works in Libya was in part due to his close friendship with the governor Balbo. Following Pietro Badoglio, the infamous combat pilot assumed the governorship of the colony in January 1934.³³ However, for both Balbo and Di Fausto, nostalgic reminders of Italy stubbornly followed their careers and structures. Ever the showman, Balbo is said to have asked a visiting minister, “Have you come to visit the exile? For, as you know, I am here in exile.”³⁴ If Di Fausto was testing a range of definitions for *mediterraneità* in the Dodecanese, Libya became not the place of his own exile, but a site for his assiduous use of these forms framed by a new vernacular. [Figure 7]

Italian and American scholars have illuminated the disjunctures among colonial visions of Libya and the ever-present influence of Italian architectural circles in the refashioning of a colonial modernity.³⁵ The varied social and physical terrains of Libya did not burden Di Fausto. His numerous government commissions assumed a commanding role, producing an architecture that supplemented *italianità* while masking the rationalist intentions of a bespoke *mediterraneità*. [Figure 8] In Libya, Di Fausto directly incorporated elements of the traditional built environment in order to produce a modern, yet distinctly Italian, expression. According to the architect, such works spoke to his maintenance of “the fundamental character of clarity and structural organicity, of sobriety, and simplicity of form, of perfect adhesion to function.”³⁶ For example, en route to the periphery of the Sahara, Di Fausto reinvents a vision of the Mediterranean with two seemingly identical tourist hotels, the Hotels Nalut and Jefren, as well as the Hotel ’Ain el-Fras in the town of Ghadames.³⁷ [Figure 8] These structures abbreviate the desert sites and its nearby inhabitations into doubled icons — easily visible from the desert road and town center — reminding the visitor of such Italian and Islamic motifs as centralized courtyards and arcaded passageways. In addition to establishing an optical congruency with the immediate context, these buildings eschew common elements of European modernism with a regionalist vocabulary. While not necessarily considered pastiche, the use of autochthonous elements common to North African colonial architecture, including simple archways and courtyards, recall Di Fausto’s compilation of distinct forms in Tripoli as well as Rhodes, asserting the buildings’ autonomous embrace of a totalizing Italian modernity.

³³ One of the most extensive discussions of Balbo’s years in Libya can be found in Claudio Segrè, *The Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974). The Italian translation followed entitled *L’Italia in Libia. Dall’età Giolittiano a Gheddafi* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978).

³⁴ R. Gilardi, “L’altro uomo: Italo Balbo,” *Visto 7* (1 February 1958) 18. Balbo would remain the governor of Libya until his premature death in 1940 at Tobruk.

³⁵ See, for example, Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002); Mia Fuller, *Moderns Abroad: Architecture, Cities and Italian Imperialism* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Krystyna von Henneberg, “Public Space and Public Face: Italian Fascist Urban Planning at Tripoli’s Colonial Trade Fair,” and Brian L. McLaren, “The Architecture of Tourism in Italian Libya: the Creation of a Mediterranean Identity,” in Ruth Ben Ghiat and Mia Fuller eds., *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 155-66; 167-78.

³⁶ Di Fausto (1937) 16.

³⁷ For an extensive analysis and description of these hotels, see Brian McLaren, “From Tripoli to Ghadames: Architecture and the Tourist Experience of Local Culture in Italian Colonial Libya,” in D. Medina Lasansky and Brian L. McLaren eds., *Architecture and Tourism: Perception, Performance and Place* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2004) 75-92; 86-87.

However, Di Fausto's format for the Piazza Cattedrale in Tripoli presents an Italian space in stark contrast to that of the Arab or North African. [Figure 9] Here, the essence of *mediterraneità* is found: a complex negotiation of economic, social, and historical practices captured within the interlocking piazzas of the city and buildings themselves. The rationalized façades have been transposed onto the ground. It is the façade's line, the persistence of the horizontal, which stretches to the vanishing point of Rome. If the spaces Di Fausto designs in Rhodes implied a certain closeness, an interpersonal and racial proximity; in Tripoli, public spaces encourage a physical and internal disengagement. [Figure 10] Citing Di Fausto, McLaren writes that the architect in his Libyan projects is "making a cultural and historical assertion of the primacy of this region which 'seems in its beat to almost be confused with the heartbeat of the world'."³⁸ Central to the piazza and adjoining arcades of Tripoli, the indigenous Libyan, the Italian colonial, and foreign tourist are permitted to observe, at a remove, a compound modernity of building and person alike. These spaces are not closed but centrifugal, pressing the colonial subject to its territorial limits.

It is among Di Fausto's lesser-known designs, a series of agricultural centers and *villaggi di colonizzazione* scattered across Cyrenaica in the Eastern region of the country as well as closer to the capital in Tripolitania, that offer an intriguing comparison to those buildings already discussed.³⁹ Di Fausto will oversee the construction of at least six villages, including housing and civic buildings throughout the provinces.⁴⁰ Led by Di Fausto, the ministero prepared prototypes for housing Italian settlers in the borderlands of the major cities in Libya. The complexes are not conceived within the limits of a precise Mediterranean architecture. Rather, each of these interconnected centers alludes to the icons of the rarefied Italian town: piazza/mosque, arcade, campanile/minaret.⁴¹ [Figure 11] Furthermore, the housing and urban typologies used for the *villaggi* as well as their orientation were unique first to the Pontine Marshes in which Italian architects and engineers first radicalized the *città nuove* organized and built by the Opera Nazionale Combattenti [ONC]. Having transferred these spaces to the Islamic context, the *villaggi* take on new symbolism for their refined monumentality — and disappearance into the landscape. Di Fausto effectively enacts a visual *ripristino* of the Islamic vernacular while containing colonial and fascist sentiment. The continuity of the *strade imperiale* connecting each *villaggio* to a larger center ultimately provides the psychic and physical link to Rome.

Humble only in their current state, the *villaggi* disclose *italianità* and an undeniable congruency between the myths of *mediterraneità* and the modern. The complex landscape of Cyrenaica and indeed Libya has superseded that of the Mediterranean edge. [Figure 12] The structures' depiction among illustrations in media of the period further confers a vision of the colony as composed of its sublimated population and a projective modernity. [Figure 13] Into these semi-urban, semi-rural spaces, today many of the former houses of the *villaggi* are replaced

³⁸ McLaren (2006) 184.

³⁹ From 1921 until 1925, Governor Giuseppe Volpi instituted a number of directives strengthening an agricultural-based colonization of Libya. See Sergio Romano, *Giuseppe Volpi. Industria e finanza tra Giolitti e Mussolini* (Milan: Bompiani, 1979), 113-20. For a discussion of the architecture of these agricultural centers, see "I nuovi centri per la colonizzazione della Libia," *Rassegna di Architettura*, X (1938) 357-63 and "La realizzazione dei centri rurali per la colonizzazione demografica della Libia," *Rassegna di Architettura*, XI (1939) 9-12.

⁴⁰ These include the Villaggio Oliveti (Tripoli, 1935-1938), Villaggio Maddalena (Benghazi, 1936), Villaggio D'Annunzio (Benghazi, 1938), Villaggio Battisti (Derna, 1938), and Villaggio Oberdan (Benghazi, 1939).

⁴¹ A broad, incisive discussion of analogous processes being reworked by fascist architects on the peninsula can be found in D. Medina Lasansky (2005).

by contemporary Libyan “revolutionary” adaptations adjacent to their precedents, in which a few Italo-Libyan farmers store their grain and animals. [Figure 14]

Among these structures, the Mediterranean remained a static entity while peninsular Italy underwent peremptory change. For an architect of the colonies, Di Fausto’s *purificazione* seen in Rhodes and in Libya is analogous to the forwarding of his hitherto enigmatic *mediterraneità*. Di Fausto merged the surfaces of Italian modernism with the visual remains of regional histories. Such adaptations became a source for and stage through which he enacted modern corporeal structures. In this manner, the modern architecture of Di Fausto was no longer an extension of the colonial power but, like the Mediterranean itself, a broad space governed within the dictates of Italy’s appropriated metaphysical language of self-preservation.

Upon Di Fausto’s departure from Libya, following Balbo’s untimely death in 1940, the architect was commissioned to design two complexes for the 1940 Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d’oltremare in the Fuorigrotta district of Naples.⁴² Situated along one of the major routes bisecting the fairground, Di Fausto designed the pavilions for both the Dodecanese Islands as well as that for Libya — assembling a collection of easily recognizable forms and attributes including a minaret, antiquated surfaces, gothic inspired façades, arcades, and generous courtyards. [Figure 15] Echoing the advertisements printed for the *mostra*, in which a gargantuan Caesar Augustus steps across the Mediterranean onto the shores of Italy, so too does Di Fausto’s architecture confront both the colonial context and that of Italy. Like his elegiac Arco di Fileni, Di Fausto’s treatment of *mediterraneità* bridges a fractured landscape of visual and spatial oppositions. He writes, “Not a stone was placed by me without filling myself with the spirit of the place, making it mine.”⁴³ Ironically, the architecture that he chose to exercise at the *mostra* and in later works was the very image imparted to the colonized overseas — now reflected, albeit self-consciously, on the Italian peninsula.

⁴² Upon returning to Rome, Di Fausto soon became an influential political leader in the Constitutional Assembly and the Legislature. His postwar works include the reconstruction plan of the city of Subiaco (1945-1953), the restoration of the city’s cathedral San Andrea (1945-1952), the general offices housing the Cistercian order in Rome (1947-1955), and an intervention in the Benedictine sanctuary of Montevergine in Avellino (1948-1961).

⁴³ Florestano Di Fausto (1937): 16. The original quotation reads as follows: “Non una pietra è stata da me posta senza che io prima mi sia riempito dello spirito del luogo sì da farlo mio.”

Bibliography

- Ben-Ghiat, Ruth and Mia Fuller. *Italian Colonialism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Biancale, Michele. *Florestano di Fausto architetto*. Geneva: Les Archives Internationales, 1932.
- Camera dei Deputati, "Tripolitania e Cirenaica, parte prima: precedenti parlamentari (aprile 1881-luglio 1911)." In *La XXIII Legislatura 24 marzo 1909-1929 settembre 1913*. Rome: Camera dei Deputati, 1913.
- Danesi, Silvia. *Il Razionalismo e l'architettura in Italia durante il fascismo*. Milan: Electa Editrice, 1976.
- Di Fausto, Florestano. "Visione mediterranea della mia architettura." *Libia* 1:9 (December 1937)
- Fuller, Mia. *Moderns Abroad: Architecture, Cities and Italian Imperialism*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- _____. "Preservation and Self-Absorption: Italian Colonization and the Walled City of Tripoli, Libya." In eds. Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller. *Italian Colonialism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Gilardi, R. "L'altro uomo: Italo Balbo." *Visto* 7 (1 February 1958).
- Giovanoni, Gustavo. "Commenti e Polemiche, Edilizia Rodiese." *Architettura e Arti Decorative* IV:2 (1924-1925).
- Gresleri, Giuliano, Pier Giorgio Massaretti and Stefano Zagnoni. *Architettura italiana d'oltremare 1870-1940*. Venice: Marsilio, 1993.
- Labanca, Nicola. *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002.
- Lasansky, D. Medina. *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle and Tourism in Fascist Italy*. University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2005.
- _____. "Urban Editing, Historic Preservation, and Political Rhetoric: The Fascist Redesign of San Gimignano." In *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 63:3 (September 2004).
- Lasansky, D. Medina and Brian McLaren. *Architecture and Tourism: Perception, Performance and Place*. New York: Berg Publishers, 2004.
- Lazzaro, Claudia and Roger J. Crum eds. *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005.
- Martinoli, Simona and Eliana Perotti. *Architettura italiana nel dodecaneso 1912-1943*. Turin: Edizione della Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1999.
- McLaren, Brian L. *Architecture and Tourism in Colonial Libya: An Ambivalent Modernism*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006.
- _____. "The Italian Colonial Appropriation of Indigenous North African Architecture in the 1930's." *Muqarnas* 19 (2002).
- _____. "The Architecture of Tourism in Italian Libya: the Creation of a Mediterranean Identity." In eds. Ruth Ben Ghiat and Mia Fuller. *Italian Colonialism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Marconi, Plinio. "L'architettura della colonizzazione della Libia. Opere dell'arch. Giovanni Pellegrini." *Architettura* XVIII (1939).
- Miano, Giuseppe. "Florestano Di Fausto from Rhodes to Libya." *Journal of the Islamic Environmental Design Research Centre* (1990).
- Pascoli, Giovanni. *Patria e umanità. Raccolta di scritti e discorsi*, 3d ed. Bologna: Zanichelli, 1923.

- Piccinato, Luigi. "L'edilizia coloniale." In *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere, ed Arti*, vol.10 (Rome and Milan: Treccani).
- _____. "La casa in colonia, il problema che si prospetta ai nostri architetti," pts.1 and 2, *Domus* 9 (1936).
- _____. "Urbanistica ed edilizia coloniale," *Architettura* XV (1936).
- Rava, Carlo Enrico. "Di un'architettura coloniale moderna (parte prima)." *Domus* 45 (1936).
- Romano, Sergio. *Giuseppe Volpi. Industria e finanza tra Giolitti e Mussolini*. Milan: Bompiani, 1979.
- Segrè, Claudio. *The Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.
- Sergi, Giuseppe. *The Mediterranean Race: A Study of the Origin of European Peoples*. London: Scott, 1901.
- Talamona, Marida. "Libya: An Architectural Workshop." *Rassegna* 51 (September 1992).
- Von Henneberg, Krystyna. "Imperial Uncertainties: Architectural Syncretism and Improvisation in Fascist Colonial Libya." *Journal of Contemporary History* 31:2 (April 1996).