

## Architecture at the Center and Edge of Empire

Italian Fascist era architecture encompasses a series of styles. Neoclassicism, Art Deco, Starved Classicism, Rationalism, Vernacular, and Futurism all found a place within Mussolini's empire. My proposed project, "Architecture at the Center and Edge of Empire," aims to track the different manifestations of architecture underneath the fascist regime in Italy by looking at four locations: The cultural centers (i.e. Rome and Naples), the Italian hinterlands (i.e. Sabaudia and Arborea), the Dodecanese Islands in Greece, and Asmara Eritrea. (see map fig. 1)

In the cultural centers of Italy the projects tended to be highly rhetorical, favoring rationalism with strong allusions to classicism, while in the hinterlands, with a more tabula rosa condition, the project tended to be more utopic shedding some of the referentially Italian styling in favor of a stricter rationalism<sup>1</sup>. When moving farther from the power base of the empire the architectural projects begin to have more diverse adjacencies. The necessity to assert Italian cultural dominance resulted in both more traditional and more radical forms. The Palace of the Grand Master of Rhodes, which once housed the Catholic Italian order Knights Hospitallers, was restored (and in the process almost wholly rebuilt) to link the now Greek Island to an Italian past, giving hereditary credence to the Italian occupation. Furthermore different Italian governors had separate vision for the island of Rhodes, Mayor De Veechi (1936-1941) engaged in a process of purification strip, stripping existing buildings (many built by Italian occupiers) of non-Italian elements<sup>2</sup>. Elsewhere in the Dodecanese the styles of rationalism and futurism have strong showings (fig. 2). The distance from the center of the empire and the distance from the capital of the dodecanese region (Rhodes) seemingly allowed for less strict control of style and thus experimentation. Also, perhaps due to their long history there, in the Dodecanese the Italians are mythologized as "good colonizers," (see Captain Corelli's Mandolin for a work of fiction that expresses this idea) a notion that further complicates the rationale of the architectural colonizer and the architecturally colonized<sup>3</sup>.

In 1935 the Italian magazine Domus ran a spread linking the rectilinear floor plans of Roman imperial architecture to the current regime, and then compared these rectilinear forms to the circular floor plans to the newly conquered "barbari" (barbarians) of East Africa (fig. 2). In this spread Architecture is used as a rationalization for colonialism while simultaneously connecting the new regime to the Roman Empire. Even so, in the midst of creating this history and critiquing the non rectilinear, the fascist regime was simultaneously patronizing projects in the futurist style in Eritrea<sup>1</sup>. These (highly emotive) futurist projects incorporated curved seemingly "illogical" shapes that were used as the basis for cultural inferiority (fig. 4). Manifesting most clearly in the capital of Asmara, this paradox is emblematic of the many slippages present in the architectural project under fascism<sup>4</sup>.

In order to interrogate these questions and provide resources for the research of these questions by other members of the academic community at a later date I propose to visit the locations listed above (more detailed account of locations provided in travel itinerary), perform on the ground and archival research, document the projects extensively, produce architectural drawings of select works that do not yet have this documentation, and compile this information into a book. The main focus will be to interrogate the connection between cultural production, political regime, and colonialism. Focusing on the oscillating rigidity and looseness of these connections under the Italian regime.

Note: This research project proposes travel to Asmara, Eritrea. While the borders of Eritrea are considered dangerous the capital (Asmara) is considered quite safe with consular services provided by the United States government. I have several US citizens who have recently traveled to Eritrea as resources.

## Itinerary:

June 16th: Arrive in Rome

June 16th - 21st: Rome and adjacent area including archives\*

June 21st - 24th: Latina and Sabaudia

June 24th - 28th: Arborea, Sardinia

June 28th - 29th: Travel to Rhodes

June 29th - July 5th: Rhodes architecture\*\*

July 5th - 11th: Travel in the rest of the Dodecanese (based off information acquired in Rhodes but also certainly including Laki, Los and Kos, Kos)

July 11th - July 25th: Travel in Eritrea\*\*\*

August 1st - September 1st: Production of documents

## Budget:

Transportation to Rome	\$400
Transportation in rest of Italy	\$400
Food & Lodging Italy	\$1,800
Transportation to Rhodes	\$200
Transportation throughout Dodecanese	\$300
Food & Lodging Greece****	\$780
Transportation to Eritrea	\$500
Eritrean Translator and local guide	\$300
Food and Lodging Eritrea	\$1,400
Transportation to United States	\$1,000
Material costs:	\$920
Emergency Fund	\$1,000
Translation services	\$1,000
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>

\*The projects that surround Rome are much better documented and I expect will not require as much time to examine.

\*\*Once in Rhodes available information on architecture becomes much more sparse as there has been little to no cataloguing done of it. Much of the itinerary will be based off encounters and leads received once on the islands. The same applies to Eritrea. Sites include Villa De Veechi (Mussolini's abandoned villa), Palace of the Grand Master of Rhodes, Palazzo Governale and surrounding buildings, Nea Agara, Italian lumber town, and what I can find there

\*\*\*Eritrean projects are barely documented and when they are they are in the form of noncritical photo essays, lacking name or location. I am currently in contact with a photographer who has engaged in such a project. I am also in contact with the Architecture Program at the Eritrea Institute of Technology in Asmara.

\*\*\*\*I am a Greek-American with family in the dodecanese, significantly reducing living costs in this area of the trip

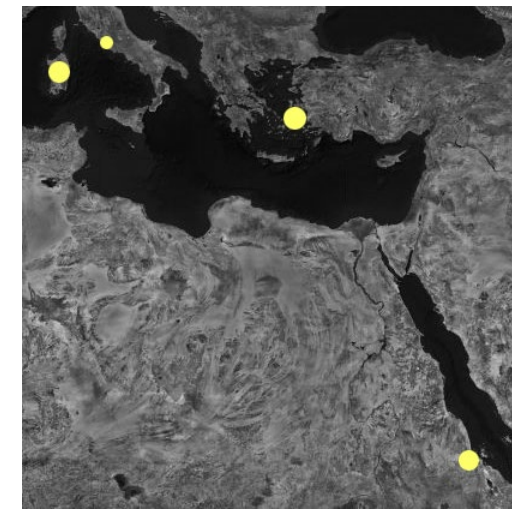


fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 4

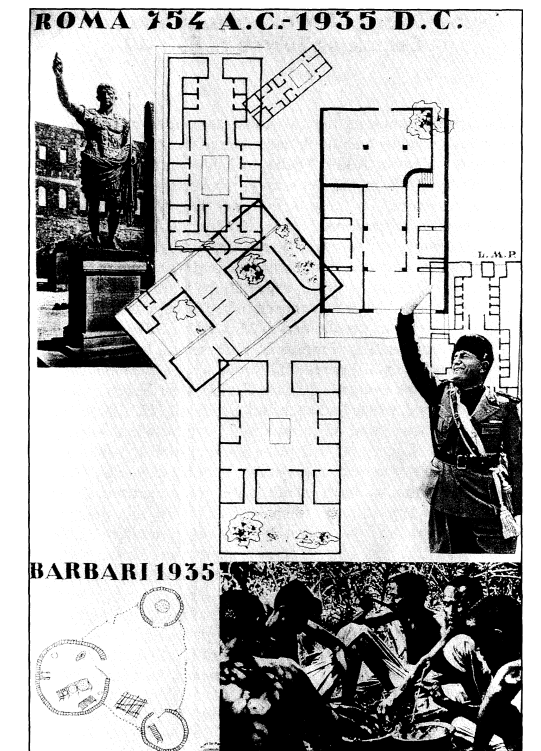


fig. 3

## Bibliography:

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2. Antoniadis, Anthony C. "Italian Architecture in the Dodecanese: A Preliminary Assessment." *Journal of Architectural Education* (1984-) 38, no. 1 (1984): 18. doi:10.2307/1424773.
3. Doumanis, Nicholas. "Italians as "Good" Colonizers: Speaking Subalterns and the Politics of Memory in the Dodecanese." *Italian Colonialism*, 2005, 221-31
4. Fuller, M. "Wherever You Go, There You Are: Fascist Plans for the Colonial City of Addis Ababa and the Colonizing Suburb of EUR '42." *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no. 2 (1996): 397-418.
5. Eli Durst, Photographer. <http://www.elidurst.com>
6. Yiorgis Yerolymbos, Photogtapher. [www.Yerolymbos.com](http://www.Yerolymbos.com)