



Entrance of the Embassy garden.



THE SEAT OF THE ITALIAN EMBASSY: HISTORY OF AN AMBITIOUS PROJECT

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1. THE FIRST TEMPORARY OFFICES OF THE ITALIAN REPRESENTATION IN CAIRO (1884 - 1930)

Among the buildings that were erected by Italians, the present seat of the Italian Embassy in Cairo look like one of the most genuine buildings in the Garden City district, and of the whole Italian State property abroad.

The commitment and the tenacity of the Italian professionals – supported by the diplomatic mission – contributed to plant the roots of the Italian colony in Cairo, that recognized in the building its values and sense of belonging.

The story of the previous seats between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 1920s is rather complex, but nevertheless interesting.

Between 1884 and 1908, the Italian Legation was hosted in a very prestigious mansion in Orientalist style. It had been designed by the French architect Ambroise Baudry¹ (1838 - 1906), the brother of the better-known Paul Baudry² (1828 - 1886), an eminent painter. The elegant building was erected in Cairo in 1872 in the exclusive Ismailiyya³ district, as part of the urbanisation program influenced by the work of George Eugène Haussmann⁴ and promoted by Ismail Pasha⁵ (1830 - 1895).

In the beginning, it was the residence of its originator, Baron Alphonse Marie Leopold Delort de Gléon⁶, an



Delort de Gléon Mansion, façade on the Manakh road. Photograph album including sixty-one views of the buildings erected in the new city of Cairo during the reign of H.H. Khedive Ismail Pasha / Bécharde Émile, 1874, F. 30.

Italian Legation, confirmed the intellectual dynamism of the Italian diplomatic corps. Such dynamism could sense from the surrounding environment the stimuli and the cultural ferment of the cosmopolitan city with which the nobleman had come in touch. During the stay of Baron Delort de Gléon, the '*palais arabe*' was a place of cultured and refined interactions focused on the theme of living, studying, promoting, and preserving Islamic art, and on the contamination of Arabic taste considered to be *à la page*, that is to say, modern. The pavilion attached to the house, built by Delort de Gléon in around 1883 with the intention of providing hospitality to artists with a taste for the exotic who were travelling through Egypt, was considered the Cairo equivalent of Villa Medici in Rome, the seat of French Academy. Installing the seat of the Italian diplomatic mission here, represented a strategic choice of no small importance, given the repercussions on reputation that ensued.

At the end of the 19th century, the place had several distinctive features aimed at allowing the transit of culture, regulating connections in international environments and, not least, mediating the relations with the local Government. Among the stately buildings designed by the talented French architect⁸, it was the first to host a foreign Legation⁹. The Belgian Legation that occupied the mansion that the architect built for himself¹⁰ followed suit, as did the French one that was installed in the building that belonged to Gaston de Saint-Maurice (1831 - 1905)¹¹, great *écuyer* of Ismail Pasha. The availability of cultural and aesthetic stimuli provided by the dwellings designed by Baudry had, however, different results. For France, the seat of Count Gaston de Saint-Maurice¹², later acquired by the Quai d'Orsay¹³ in 1886, was functional in establishing a

aristocratic engineer and passionate art collector who arrived to Cairo in 1869 and stayed until 1883 to follow the business activity of his wealthy uncle.

The choice of this mansion⁷ – composed, in its formal aspects, of Arabic-taste furnishing and archaeological show-pieces from the Mamluk and Ottoman eras (such as sculpted frames, plaques with Kufic inscriptions, coffer ceilings, ceramics, mashrabiyyas, muqarnas) – as the seat of the

link with the Arabic tradition, demonstrating the reciprocity of the relationship between the dominant cultures and the host country. In fact, it even housed a *qa'a*¹⁴, a reception room typical of the ancient abodes inhabited by Egyptian notables, that was completely disassembled from an ancient building and rebuilt in the residence of the Count de Saint-Maurice. That relic followed the French Embassy to its new (1934 - 1938) location in Giza, set up in the interior spaces by its designer George Parcq.

For Italy, more simply, the home of Baron Delort de Gléon was an opportunity to demonstrate their participation in a *socialité* charged with resonance and adherence to the prevailing aesthetic and artistic culture of which it was a promoter, with alternating fortunes, through Italian professionals.¹⁵

The stay in that location ended in the first decade of the 20th century, when the Italian Legation migrated to subsequent temporary seat.¹⁶

In 1920 and until 1922, the diplomatic seat in Cairo – entrusted to the Plenipotentiary Minister Lazzaro Negrotto Cambiaso – moved to a property owned by the notable Ahmed bey Chafik¹⁷. Count Luigi Aldrovandi Marescotti (1876 - 1945), Head of Cabinet of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1914 - 1918) and deputy of Sidney Sonnino, Minister of Foreign Affairs (1914 - 1919), arrived in Cairo in March 1923, taking over from the Marquis Lazzaro Negrotto Cambiaso (1916 - 1922), who had held the Cairo diplomatic seat for over six years (1916 - 1922).

When the new Head of Mission arrived, the seat were found to be bare after the exit of his predecessor. Upon his arrival, Aldrovandi noted the inadequacy of the diplomatic seat mainly due to its mod-



Delort de Gléon Mansion, façade overlooking the garden. Photograph album including sixty-one views of the buildings erected in the new city of Cairo during the reign of H.H. Khedive Ismail Pasha / Béchard Émile, 1874, F. 31.



Grand Bey Map details, 1874, (site.duke.edu).



Building at the Racecourse roundabout (later Consulate of Italy), Photograph album including sixty-one views of the buildings erected in the new city of Cairo during the reign of H.H. Khedive Ismail Pasha / Béchard Émile, 1874, F. 39.

est size and to a distribution of the rooms not entirely suited to the official commitments of the High Representatives. At an auction¹⁸ in May 1923, part of the furniture of the Cairo Legation that had belonged to the Marquis Negrotto Cambiaso, made by the well-regarded local suppliers Furino¹⁹ and Sednaoui²⁰, was repurchased at an advantageous price.

Hoping for measures to be put in place for the purchase of suitable premises, Aldrovandi considered the host premises of the Italian Legation inadequate and under-representative compared to those of comparable Countries.

With a resolute spirit, he overcame

the *impasse* attributed to the political context in which his predecessor had worked, aiming for a definitive solution. The new Plenipotentiary Minister believed that Italy could no longer postpone installing its Cairo diplomatic seat in a building suited to the ranks of Diplomacy, and befitting its national prestige, in a highly competitive environment in terms of reputation and administrative capacity.



Seat of the Italian Chancery in El-Haras St., Garden City (in Samir Raafat, A Retrospective Part 3, 3 September 1998), www.egy.com.



Portrait of Senator and Hydraulic Engineer Luigi Luigi, who was well-connected within the Cairene society of the time.

In the years prior to settling in Egypt, Aldrovandi had been able to look at diplomatic politics from a privileged vantage point such as the one presented to him, as mentioned above, within the Cabinet of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sidney Sonnino (1847 - 1924), and as Secretary General at the Paris Conference. Count Aldrovandi Marescotti had continued Government responsibilities with the warring countries between 1914 and 1919, and was able to see the need for a propaganda policy aimed at preserving the strategic balance in order to enjoy the esteem of the other Powers²¹.

Consequently, he launched an appropriate financial investigation aimed at estimating the expenses resulting from the rent of the temporary seat, compared with the value for money provided by the reduction of the prices of the Cairo real estate market²², with the intention of purchasing a new building in Cairo that would adequately accommodate the new seat. However, the budgetary conditions of the Italian Government – which had launched the

ambitious program of settling the entire Italian diplomatic network abroad – did not offer any immediately comforting outlook. The budgetary aspects identified by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in agreement with the *Commissione per gli arredi e sistemazione delle sedi all'estero e del Palazzo Chigi* (C.A.S.E.), which had recently been established to support interventions in state-owned properties abroad, ended up influencing the results of the research. In order to facilitate the procedures related to securing the seat, for the entire duration of his short term – which ended that same year following his transfer to Buenos Aires – Aldrovandi intended to pursue an exchange of real estate properties between Italy and Egypt.

Negotiating such a solution was entrusted, in May 1923, to the engineer Luigi Luigi²³ (1856 - 1931), known for the design and construction of the new military city of Puerto Belgrano in Argentina (1896 - 1902) and for his expertise in hydraulic matters (drainage and design of port facilities), and whose work in Egypt included plans for the expansion of the ports of Suez (1923) and Alexandria (1923 - 1924). The engineer, who was also a Senator of the Kingdom, was a resolute supporter of the administrative efficiency of the Cairo office at the delicate moment of greater political friction between England and Egypt²⁴. The temporary contingencies that favoured the Italian-Egyptian currency exchange rate seemed propitious for the purchase of properties of great value. The serious building crisis that occurred in Rome at that time did not, however, allow decent buildings to be found on the Roman real estate market at reasonable prices, compromising the possibility of an exchange.

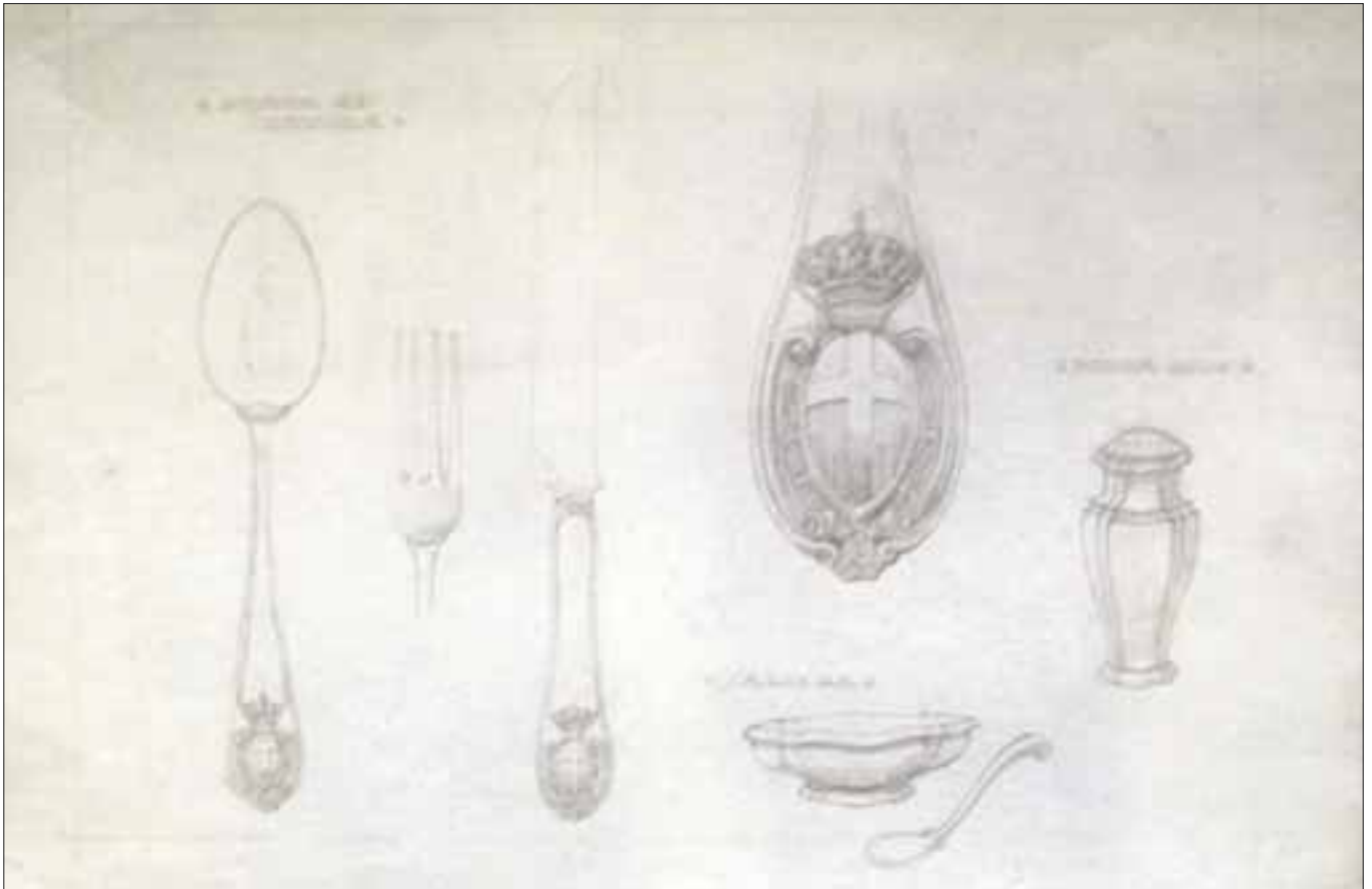
Equally unsuccessful was the Royal Government's proposal, aimed at involving banking institutions for the stipulation of a loan granted by the Ministry of Finance to meet the financial needs necessary for the rental and purchase costs of the diplomatic network's properties.

For lack of an immediate decision, Count Aldrovandi appealed to the Banco di Roma to grant a loan: however, the negotiation was rejected because the transaction was outside the financial plans of the Institute. Subsequently, the idea was put forward of contacting the Egyptian *Crédit Foncier*²⁵, a banking institution more willing to accept financial exposure, aimed at providing loans for real estate transactions with an amortisation schedule equal to a 35-year period, at an affordable rate.

To this end, he took action to search for stately buildings, and considered purchasing the old seat of the German or Dutch Legation, for an amount of three million Italian lire. The negotiations, however, did not come to fruition²⁶.

In February 1924, Count Carlo Caccia Dominioni of Sillavengo, Royal Minister of the Kingdom of Italy, who succeeded Count Aldrovandi, took up the task of pursuing the project that the latter had started. After a careful analysis provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the furnishing costs deemed necessary by Count Caccia Dominioni at the time of his appointment were approved in advance. The demands of the adaptation, in fact, required purchasing the furniture for two bedrooms, a restroom, a sitting and dining room, and a kitchen, for a cost of about three hundred pounds. The needs of the Representation were particularly felt in this singular historical and political juncture. An elegant, neat, and convenient Representation had to correspond to the centre of diplomatic activities in Cairo. The Government, while not having a permanent residence, paid for the furnishing expenses authorized for the dining room by Dino Grandi (1895 - 1988), Member of Parliament and later Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior. The intensification of the ceremonial activity, in fact, called for at least 24 seats. The matter turned out to be very complex, and in fact the furnishings were rented rather than bought, since the purchase of new seat did not appear to be immediately viable. On budgetary grounds, the scarcity of affordable properties to rent in urban settings suited to the expectations of Diplomacy, remained an open question for Italy, which also had to compete with the offices of the Diplomatic Representations of France, the United States of America, Germany, Holland, and the British Empire²⁷.

Pending permanent seat, the most immediate solution was renting an adequately dignified building. Count Caccia Dominioni and the Egyptian Government, represented by the Counsellor to the Court of Appeal of the Mixed Courts, H. E. Mahmoud Bey El-Toayar, a notable Alexandrian who owned property at 130, Qasr El-Ainy St.²⁸ in the elegant Cairo neighbourhood of Garden City, signed the lease contract for new temporary premises, since the old ones had been released back to the owners. The stately building, on two suitably-furnished floors and equipped with a beautiful garden with a garage, consisted of the ceremonial rooms, the living quarters of the Minister Plenipotentiary, the Chancery premises, and an apartment for the first Janissary (who, according to an ancient custom, stayed at the Legation). The rooms were well divided and airy. The building was rented for a fee of 1,640 Egyptian pounds with a contract



Cutlery set with heraldic coat of arms of the House of Savoy, salt cellar, and pepper shaker. Heliographic copy.

for two years, from 1924 to 1926. The rented premises allowed suitable premises for the residence of the Head of Mission and for the offices required for the diplomatic and administrative functions, pending the construction of the new building.

The Head of Mission's residence became operational for all Representative purposes, starting from October 1924. To this end, Count Caccia Dominioni, arranged for the dispatch of linen, especially table linen, silverware, glassware and crockery for the seat.

All the necessary formalities for the lease of the property were carried out, including that of issuing a payment order to meet the last quarter of the rent for the former seat, payable to Hanna Bey Bakhoun²⁹, an Egyptian notable and expert in Coptic art. On 20 March 1925, the Italian Government approved the expenditure of the annual rent with a specific decree of the Court of Audit. At the expiry of the contractual terms, the remission of the lease agreement was arranged, with a clause to free the property in case of sale. Meanwhile, the organization of the aspects concerning the proper functioning of the provisional seat proceeded in parallel to the preparatory stages for any proposals to purchase buildings or land. If on the one hand it was urgent to arrange the set-up of temporary premises, on the other it was necessary to activate the decision-making processes to conduct the appropriate negotiations for the purchase. Renting property constituted a transient state for the diplomatic corps, and it did not ensure adequate national



Portrait of Florestano di Fausto, architect for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

prestige and identity representation in the Egyptian capital. However, the optimistic forecast of leaving the provisional seat quickly was not fulfilled.

In the meantime, several of the negotiations that were launched did not rule out evaluations of financial plans and contractual specifications to address the huge investment that would lead to the construction of the new seat. The time frame was not easily predictable to be able to carry out all the formalities necessary for the fulfilment of the representation requirements, while ensuring the efficiency of administrative function. In the meantime, loose and convenient contractual terms were prepared to guarantee the permanence in the temporary premises, without cost increases. One of the various options, was the possibility of purchasing the leased building owned by El-Toayar. The lengthiness of the procedures forced the diplomatic mission to consider the most advantageous option, in light of market surveys. During the year 1924, the efforts focussed on the development of plans for the soon-to-be-constructed diplomatic seat, resulting in the consultation of professionals to entrust with the search for real estate or building land to purchase. Between 1924 and 1925, Count Caccia Dominioni promoted the complex transactions for a permanent solution. He went to Rome to meet the members of the C.A.S.E. Commission which included the architect Florestano di Fausto, designer of most of the Italian diplomatic offices and the main author of the architectural image of Italian state property abroad. To Florestano Di Fausto, head of the Technical Office at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he addressed the request to draw up a plan for the Cairo office. In a memo dated 30 April 1924, it is clear that Count Caccia Dominioni had encouraged a visit by Di Fausto to Cairo to follow up on the projects agreed upon in Rome, in compliance with the directives of the aforementioned Commission. We can assume that the contacts between the diplomat and the Technical Office of the Ministry prior to May 1924, had induced various companies appreciated by the ministerial body to submit their specifications to the attention of the Plenipotentiary Minister, who was forcing with great diligence. Despite Caccia

Dominioni's efforts to invest Di Fausto with the responsibility of the project, the results of the operations slipped inexorably, because in the meantime the architect was supervising the development of the planning regulations for the Dodecanese island in Rhodes on behalf of Mario Lago, the Aegean Governor³⁰. In a letter addressed on 22 July 1925 to the architect Di Fausto, Count Caccia Dominioni – while congratulating him on the project for the Church of the

Knights of Rhodes which he had just completed as 'Aegean Architect' – urged him to send in a plan and set up the necessary formalities, so that the Cairo works 'would begin at least by the end of the year' (cit.). Contrary to expectations, the solution was not immediate, and the building program turned out to be still precarious.

In 1926, the growing needs of the Chancery offices forced the Marquis Gaetano Paternò di Manchi di Bilici, the new Royal Minister in charge of Cairo, to sign a new lease agreement until October 1927, for the suite of rooms located on the ground floor of a building at 6, El-Haras St. in Garden City, owned by a local subject, E. A. Abemayor³¹, for an annual fee of 180 Egyptian pounds.

Paternò, the diplomat who had been a delegate to the 1919 Peace Conference, was assigned to Cairo first as second-class Minister plenipotentiary in January 1925, and then elevated to the rank of Minister of Italy in May 1926.

In the meantime, the negotiations for the construction of the new seat of the Cairo Representation, despite progressing restlessly, expanded over time, so much so as to require further additions to the rental agreements: it became unavoidable to renew the lease on the temporary seat of the Legation in Qasr El-Ainy St., overlooking the banks of the Nile in the area known as the Mouth of Khalig.

NOTES

¹ The French architect Ambroise Baudry (1838 - 1906) had collaborated in the drafting of the plans for the Paris Opera project with Charles Garnier. In Egypt, he worked on installing the equestrian statue of Mohamed Ali in Alexandria. His professional fortune allowed him to acquire private commissions and for the Khedival court. From 1875 to 1877, he held the role of Chief Architect of the Giza palace. Passionate about the study of the monuments of Cairo, he gathered a collection of exceptional value, later acquired by the Louvre in 1898. The architect often denounced the European plundering of

Egyptian antiquities, which led him to support the creation of an institution responsible for the census and the safeguarding of the monuments of Cairo. He became a member of the Conservation Committee of Arab Art Monuments, created in 1881, until his definitive return to France in 1886. The mastery with which he used the artistic repertoire allowed him to build in Arabic style, for various enthusiasts in Egypt and then in France, giving rise to a philological orientalism. See Mercedes Volait, *Dans l'intimité des objets et des monuments: l'orientalisme architectural vu d'Égypte (1870 - 1910)* in Nabila Oulebsir, Mercedes Volait,

L'Orientalisme architectural entre imaginaires et savoirs, Invisu, Publication de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art, 2009, Paris, p. 233-251.

² Paul Baudry was a pupil of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1845. In 1850 he was awarded the Prix de Rome. During his stay in Italy, he was able to appreciate Italian art and be much influenced by it. Worthy of mention among his prestigious assignments is the decoration of the foyer of the Paris Opéra by Charles Garnier. See the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Volume 3, 1911, entry on Baudry, Paul Jaques Aimé (1828 - 1886), p. 538.

³The Maison Delort overlooked Manakh St., the future *Palais Chawarbi Pacha*. The building changed destination. It was first a private residence, a residence for artists who came from France, then a diplomatic office, subsequently the office of a newspaper, and finally a warehouse. See *Villa Delort de Gléon (Rue 'Abd al-Khaliq Tharwat)*, in *La fabrique du Caire moderne*, 2018, site.duke.edu.

⁴Baron George Eugène Haussman (1809 - 1891), prefect of Paris and urban planner, was the author of the plan for the modernisation of the French capital during the Second Empire that greatly impressed Ismail Pasha (1830 - 1895), who succeeded Said as fifth sovereign and first Khedive of Egypt, to the point of encouraging the urbanization of Cairo with the foundation of new neighbourhoods as a side-event to celebrate the inauguration of the Suez Canal (1869). See Jean-Luc Arnaud, *De l'exposition à l'urbanisation. Le Caire d'Isma'il pacha*, in "Rives Méditerranéennes", no. 47, 2014, p. 45-58.

⁵Ismail Pasha, Viceroy of Egypt in 1863, obtained the title of Khedive from the Sublime Porte in 1867. During his tenure, the grandiose feat of completing the Suez Canal was achieved. He was discharged in 1879, following serious financial disruptions procured by huge investments. See *Encyclopædia Britannica*, s.v.: *Ismail*, p. 875, 1911. Modern urban growth in Cairo began in the 1830s, but it was only during Ismail's reign (1863 - 79) that the city was radically transformed. Ismail ordered the construction of a European-style city west of the medieval core. French urban planning methods dominated the design of the neighbourhoods of Al-Azbakiyya (with its large park), Abdeen and Ismailiyya, all central areas of today's Cairo. At the end of the 19th century, these districts were well developed, but with the beginning of the British rule over Egypt in 1882, they were transformed into a colonial enclave. See Nezar AlSayyad, in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, entry on: *Cairo*, 2021.

⁶A civil engineer, Baron Aphonse Delort de Gléon (1843 - 1899) arrived in Cairo in 1869 to pursue the investments made by his uncle Jean Antoine Cordier as part of the major transformation and water supply works in the city. He conducted financial dealings, a very profitable activity thanks to which he set up a bank. An expert in Arab art, the engineer gathered a rich collection of Islamic and Egyptian art, which was bequeathed to the Louvre in 1912. He belonged to an exclusive circle of intellectuals and travellers who shared a taste for the

exotic and a passion for collecting Islamic art. Among his acquaintances were Odon de Toulouse Lautrec, Albert Goupil (the nephew of the painter Jean-Léon Gérôme) the prefect Ernest de Blignières (who was Minister of Public Works), and Count Gaston de Saint-Maurice.

Delort de Gléon's fame is linked above all to the construction of the rue du Caire at the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1889. See Mercedes Volait, *Architectes et Architectures de l'Égypte moderne*, Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 2005, p. 42.

⁷One of the first oriental-style buildings erected in Cairo in 1872. The house was a collage of classical elements of the Mamluk decorative repertoire: angular scalloped arches with stalactites or shells, a large portico with three horseshoe arches, carved wood; the layout was controlled by a large central hall illuminated by a domed skylight and stained glass windows in the manner of the *qa'a* of Mamluk and Ottoman residences; the painted ceilings were surrounded by epigraphic bands, and the walls covered with marble mosaics; but above all, original fragments – doors, mashrabiyya, architraves and majolicas then called "Persians" (actually of Syrian origin) – were integrated into the building. See Mercedes Volait, *Dans l'intimité des objets et des monuments: l'orientalisme architectural vu d'Égypte (1870 - 1910)* in Nabila Oulebsir, Mercedes Volait, *L'Orientalisme architectural entre imaginaires et savoirs*, Invisu, Publication de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art, 2009, Paris, p. 233-251.

⁸In the last quarter of the 19th century, the architect Baudry, together with two French colleagues, developed buildings that integrated elements of Cairo architecture. His three *maisons* in 'style arabe' strongly influenced the local taste: one for Gaston de Saint-Maurice, one for Baron Alphonse Delort de Gléon, and the Baudry villa. See Mercedes Volait, Jérôme Delatour, Thomas Cazentre, et al., *Le Caire sur le vif. Beniamino Facchinelli photographe (1875 - 1895)*, Publications de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art, 2017.

⁹Gustave Achille Gaston Migeon, in *Le Caire: le Nil et Memphis*, 1906, wrote: [...] m. de Saint-Maurice, grand écuyer des écuries khédiviales, avait fait construire la belle demeure qui est devenue depuis la Légation de France, et où se voit le plus esemble de mosaïque de mambre que l'art arabe ait produites au Caire. Un peu plus loin the Agence d'Italie a pris possession de la charming maison qu'avait eue un banquier, m. Delort de Gléon tandis que

l'Agence de Belgique reprenait à m. Ambroise Baudry, l'architecte, la maison qu'il avait fait édifier lui-même, et où pendant tant d'années, il avait su réunir les plus beaux bois que la démolition de trois vieilles mosquées aviat fait tomber entre ses mains. [...].

¹⁰The Baudry archives have shown that the architect had, in addition to his collection of objects and photographs, a series of casts taken from Cairo monuments from the Mamluk era, and Qaytbay's caravanserai in particular. The architect also drew from this repertoire for the house that he built in Cairo in 1875 - 1879. See Mercedes Volait, *Dans l'intimité des objets et des monuments: l'orientalisme architectural vu d'Égypte (1870 - 1910)*, in Nabila Oulebsir, Mercedes Volait, *L'Orientalisme architectural entre imaginaires et savoirs*, Invisu, Publication de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art, 2009, Paris, pp. 233-251.

¹¹Squire of Khedive Ismail Pasha in 1868, he was a very prominent personality and a member of the French high society of the Second Empire. See Mercedes Volait, op. cit., 2005, p. 430.

¹²The same process, systematized and used on a large scale, produced the imposing palace built for Gaston de Saint-Maurice (1872 - 1881) by Baudry's surveyors, the architects Marcel Gouron and Charles Guimard. Here, the fragments of noble rooms from Ottoman residences, recovered by the Count de Saint-Maurice during the ongoing demolitions in Cairo, are mixed with original creations (namely a painted ceiling executed by the Italian decorator Augusto Cesari). The same applies to the Musafirkhâna palace, where Khedive Ismail Pasha was born. See Mercedes Volait, *Dans l'intimité des objets et des monuments: l'orientalisme architectural vu d'Égypte (1870 - 1910)*, in Nabila Oulebsir, Mercedes Volait, *L'Orientalisme architectural entre imaginaires et savoirs*, Invisu, Publication de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art, 2009, Paris, p. 233-251.

¹³Mercedes Volait, op. cit., 2005, p. 193. It was *une architecture domestique soigneusement étudiée, appropriée aux usages européens, mais conservant de l'architecture arabe ce qu'elle avait su adapter aux conditions climatiques*. [...].

¹⁴Loredana Ficarelli, *Lo spazio domestico mediterraneo. Una casa per il Cairo*, Gangemi, 2015.

¹⁵Ezio Godoli, *Italian Architects, Contractors, Decorative Artists and the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de*

l'Art arabe, in *Italian Architectural and Artistic Heritage in Egypt*, Effigi, Arcidosso (Gr), 2017.

¹⁶ New lines of research are currently underway to fill the documental void. Samir Rafaat, in his studies about Garden City, assigns a building located in Harass Street to the old Italian Legation, without mentioning a date. See *Garden City: A retrospective Part 3*, 3 September 1998, www.egy.com. In Telex no. 585/108 of 25 February 1925, Carlo Caccia Dominioni informs the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Cav. Koch lived in the seat of the old Legation, pending the imminent expiry of the contract that had previously been stipulated with two ladies, Aziza Hanem and Mehri Hanem. See Personnel Archive, Series VIII, Cairo.

¹⁷ Personnel Archive, Series VIII, Cairo, Telex addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10 October 1922. Ahmed Chafik Pasha was the Director of General Services of Diwan.

¹⁸ It was customary for the furniture purchased by the Head of Mission to be returned to the legitimate owner; but, since the transportation costs were higher than the intrinsic value of the objects, the Ministry refused the offer to buy them, and the furniture was auctioned. Personnel Archive, Series VIII, Cairo, Telex signed by Aldrovandi and addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1 June 1923, no. 884/192.

¹⁹ See Register of Professionals, Year XIX, Francesco Furino (Cairo, 1891), graduated 1921, Civil Architecture 1932.

²⁰ They helped to promote the specialization of the art sector with a Bulaq workshop, and became suppliers of the foreign upper middle class and aristocracy, including being commissioned to supply the furniture for the Shephard's Hotel in Cairo. See L. A. Balboni, *Gli italiani nella civiltà egiziana*, 1906, in particular, the 2010 facsimile reprint, supported by the Italian Ambassador Claudio Pacifico. See the Egypt Embassy Fund, Envelope 151. Together with the local cabinet makers Parvis and Jacovelli, the name of the company appears in the list of participants in the Arts and Crafts Section of the International Exhibition of Marine and Maritime Hygiene and Italian Colonial Exhibition held in Genoa in 1914.

²¹ L. Aldrovandi Marescotti, *Guerra diplomatica. Ricordi e frammenti di diario* (1914 - 1919), 1936.

²² See Mercedes Volait, op. cit., 2005, p. 204.

²³ See Personnel Archive, Series VIII, Cairo, Handwritten letter dated 21 May 1923, addressed to Lojaco. Senator Luigi Luiggi writes that [...] the Minister of Italy in Cairo hinted at this possibility: that the Italian Government would offer the Egyptian Government a beautiful villa or building for future use as the Egyptian Legation in Rome, in exchange for a similar building for the use of the Italian Legation in Cairo, which the Egyptian Government would be willing to give or even to have purpose-built for something that is completely satisfactory to our Government. Thus, the difficulties of not owning a building for the Legation in Cairo could be overcome, avoiding the need for construction undertakings which, with the current exchange rate, would be very costly for our Treasury.

²⁴ He was, in fact, an authoritative voice when he sided in favour of safeguarding the consular authority in Cairo. In May 1923, Luigi Luiggi expressed his open dissent against the feared suppression of the local Consulate, deemed necessary to preserve the neutrality of the 18,000-strong Italian colony between the Delta and the borders of Sudan. See Personnel Archive, Series VIII, Cairo, handwritten letter by Luigi Luiggi, dated 21 May 1923. [...]. The Italians in Cairo consider the preservation of the Vice Consulate of Italy in Cairo so necessary both for their protection and for the decorum towards other nations much smaller than Italy, that they are willing to bear the necessary expenses in excess of what the Government would spend with the abolition of the Vice Consulate and the establishment of its substitute. In Cairo, this is a question of police services; of judgments and application of penalties, that is to say of very special services dependent on the Capitulations. I think that the proposal of the Italians deserves consideration, and possibly implementation. [cit.].

²⁵ Personnel Archive, Series VIII, Cairo, Telex signed by Aldrovandi and addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 16 November 1923, no. 2112/402.

²⁶ Personnel Archive, Series VIII, Cairo, 27 November 1923. The seat of the German Legation had been chosen for his stay in Egypt by General Luca Montuori, who distinguished himself in the Italo-Turkish war (1911) and for leading the army during the bloodiest battles of the First World War.

²⁷ Personnel Archive, Series VIII, Cairo, Telex signed by Aldrovandi and addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs on 19 April 1923 no. 642/139.

²⁸ Personnel Archive, Series VIII, Cairo, deed of 8 September 1924, with signatures at the bottom.

²⁹ Bakhoum, or Bacoom. See Julien Auber de Lapiere, *Le Musée corte du Caire, une utopie architecturale*, 50, 2016; see Gawdat Gabra, Gertrud, J. M. van Loon, Stefan, C. Reif, *The History and religious Heritage of Old Cairo. Its Fortress, Churches, Synagogue, and Mosque*, The American University in Cairo Press, 2013. A specialist in Coptic art, his name appears among the members of the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe in *Procès verbal no. 106*, year 1901, alongside that of the Italian architect Alfonso Maniscalco; and again, in *Procès verbal no. 163, Rapport de la section technique*, year 1909, his name appears next to those of the architect Herz Bey and of Saber Bey Sabry. The circles that orbited around the Committee constituted a channel of international cultural penetration in the debate on restoration techniques in which Antonio Battigelli – who was the first Italian to be admitted as a member (1897) – and then Alfonso Maniscalco (1901) took part. In the meantime, there were six years of Italian absence until the participation of Antonio Lasciac, who would become a member of the Committee, starting from June 1910. After him, the architect Achille Patricolo held various roles in 1906, and then again from January 1915 to 1922. The longest-lasting Italian membership, however, was that of the architect Ernesto Verrucci (1918 - 1936). See Ezio Godoli, *Italian Architects, Contractors, Decorative Artists and the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe*, in *Italian Architectural and Artistic Heritage in Egypt*, Effigi, Arcidosso (Gr), 2015, pp. 7-27.

³⁰ D. C., *La varia attività del nostro possedimento egeo*, "Illustrazione coloniale", XV, no. 3 March 1933, pp. 32-33.

³¹ A family of merchants and art collectors, owners since 1888 of an historic antique shop located near the Palace of Tigrane Pasha, in Cairo. See Guido Rossi, *Pasherienaset il lungo viaggio di un sacerdote egizio*, 2020.

2. THE NEED FOR PERMANENT SEAT, BEFITTING THE RANK AND ROLE OF ITALY.

In light of the new balance of power that came about in the aftermath of the First World War, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs set for itself, among other objectives, that of establishing a more efficient and modern diplomatic network, capable of projecting on a large scale the ambitions of a country that had emerged victorious from the conflict. Inevitably, this idealistic aspiration had to face stringent budgetary constraints and a decision-making process that was all the more complex in consideration of such a demanding design. However, there was no lack of insight in every planning process, which in fact proved to be an opportunity for creative experimentation of great stimulus. It was the task of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to become a diligent actor in overcoming any administrative obstacles and, above all, in identifying the necessary resources, in agreement with the other relevant Ministries¹. Between the two wars, the demands for an Italian foreign policy, which was gradually taking shape, led to a considerable acceleration of the modernization plan of the diplomatic offices. Securing an office in Cairo that would match the level of Italy's ambitions was one of the priorities of this design. The reason was the importance attributed to Egypt in international circles, as one of the most important geo-political² outposts on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, due to its formidable strategic position.

The requirements of the diplomatic mission in Cairo, in a moment of political change following the proclamation of the independence of Egypt in 1922, generated a wide debate within the C.A.S.E. Commission chaired by Giacomo Paulucci di Calboli Barone (1887 - 1961)³. The prolific correspondence between the Minister Plenipotentiary Carlo Caccia Dominioni – who was at the head of the Italian diplomatic office in the Egyptian capital from 1924 – and the relevant offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁴ demonstrates the great interest in pursuing this objective. As early as February 1924, *the arrangement of such an important delegation in Cairo had become a matter of particular consideration*⁵. A special Commission, established just a few months earlier (Royal Decree no. 2929 of 2 December 1923⁶) and whose mandate was promptly made operational with a specific decree (18 March 1924), was in charge of identifying suitable functional and aesthetic guidelines for the construction and repurposing of Italian state properties to use as diplomatic premises.

Among other objectives, the Commission aimed at promoting the excellence of the Italian arts and architecture. This practice was borrowed from other departments in the panorama of the Public Administration. The Crispi Government had already made a ruling in Parliament in 1888, with regard to the declaration of the process of Italian civilization, which aimed to promote Italian art and manufacturing in order to keep alive the prestige of the homeland in the colonies, by relying on a Commission formed by the best Italian intelligentsia in the artistic field⁷.

The intentions of the C.A.S.E. Commission, however, needed to find a compromise between aspirations and realistic results, by taking into account the financial resources available from the state budget.

It is therefore interesting to note how defining a plan for the Cairo office was intertwined with issues of a bureaucratic and administrative nature at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Italian Government, aware of the huge financial effort required, intended to carefully evaluate the benefits deriving from the rental costs or, alternatively, from purchasing a property appropriate and sufficient for the functional needs. Even the possibility of requesting a loan issued by the Ministry of Finance in favour of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not ruled out. Therefore, the Mission in Cairo was invited to put forward concrete proposals from which the comparative convenience of purchasing versus renting could emerge.

The univocal criterion to be complied with when scouting for seat of the Royal Representatives abroad, had been identified by the relevant bodies as the 'right decorum'⁸ without unnecessary *luxuries*⁹.

With these premises, the need to provide the Royal Representatives in Cairo with an *appropriate and permanent*¹⁰ seat was evident.

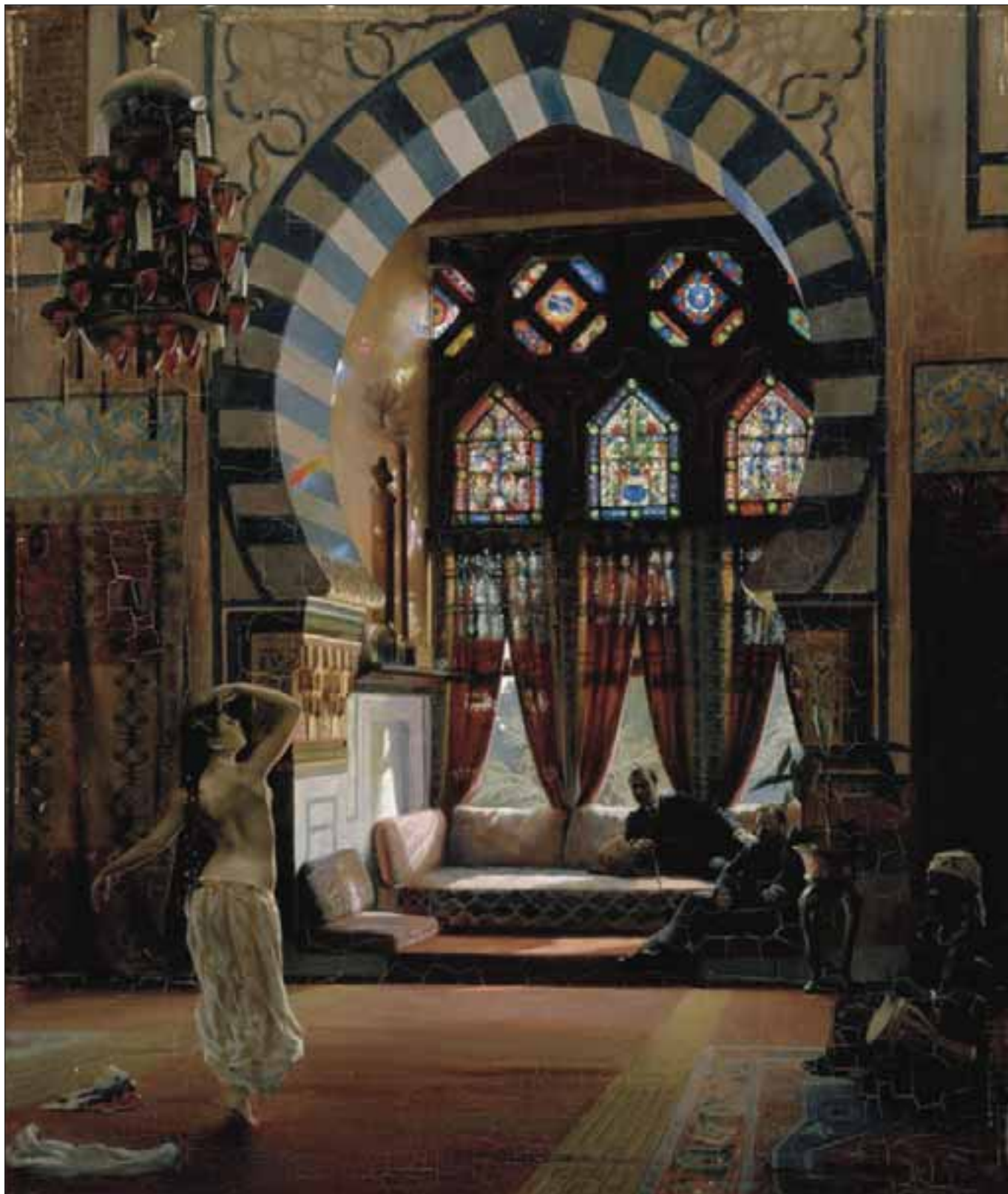
In fact, there was a need to create seat that were sufficient in size, to house all the offices for the handling of administrative actions, and at the same time, to meet the ceremonial and decorum needs. In this regard, the C.A.S.E. Commission decided in a definitive manner on the distribution of the spaces that were expected to characterise the areas to be allocated to the diplomatic offices. They identified the technical requirements, broadly recognized as prerequisite for each diplomatic office. The Cairo plans were expected to include an apartment for the Representative, the private apartment of the Head of Mission (including any service rooms and

annexes for the servants), a Diplomatic Chancery, a Consular Chancery, and some accommodation for the officials¹¹.

The comparison between the specific tools of the project and the overall mechanics of its implementation provided the conditions for the realization of a particular architectural type. If on the one hand there were constraints and conditions for the distribution of the offices, on the other hand there was room for creativity and invention inspired by the context and impressions of the landscape: it was like grafting onto a predetermined plot, the narration of a new and attractive physical space, which thus inaugurated an original, multifunctional and centralized architectural organism.



Giacomo Paulucci di Calboli Barone on an official visit to Italy at the Istituto di Cinematografia Educativa in Frascati, pictured together with Luciano De Feo and Louis Lumière. Archive photo, 1929, Archivio Luce.



Gunnar Berndtson (1854 - 1895), *Almée, an Egyptian dancer*, archive photo. The dancer is portrayed while dancing in the reception hall (*qa'a*) of Baron Delort de Gléon's 'maison arabe' in rue Chawarbi (built in 1872 by the architect Ambroise Baudry), later to become the seat of the Italian Legation (1884 - 1908). The artist was a guest of the Baron in the winter of 1882 - 1883.

The C.A.S.E. Commission was made up of members of the diplomatic corps and prominent personalities from the art world. Among them, a pivotal character was the architect Florestano Di Fausto, appointed consultant member of the Commission and, at the same time, head of the Technical Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs¹². The Technical Office then interacted with the C.A.S.E. Commission, in a strict relation that needed to take into account the complex and diversified systems of the most disparate geographic areas. A long list of activities¹³ highlights how this weighty bureaucratic machine, acting on several fronts, managed at the same time to satisfy the needs of diplomacy between Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and the Americas, also by availing itself, wherever necessary, of local professionals who could assist the Italian work and safeguard the 'Italianness'. Evidently, only the collaboration between the Technical Office and professionals close to the Italian community identified by the Embassies, could result in efficient architectural achievements starting from an in-depth analysis of the different local contexts.

More generally, a strategic vision aimed at expanding political relations and favouring economic returns, represented the necessary impetus for the planning and organization of diplomatic offices. As in other countries, diplomats in Cairo also believed in the potential embodied by Art and Architecture as vehicles for propaganda and cultural penetration: the seat of the Representation became the place par excellence for their manifestation. Since the first temporary offices of the Legation in Cairo, confirmation of this vision can be found, for example, in the rental of the residence of Baron Delort de Gléon or the property of Ahmed Chafik Pasha, head of the Khedivale Cabinet and Director of the *Diwan* (General Intendance)¹⁴.

It was the diplomats who upheld protecting and dynamically promoting the Italian interests through the channels of culture and art, somehow foreshadowing the practices of today's '*soft diplomacy*'. The typically cross-cultural role of artistic expressions obviously favours dialogue and comparison (also through architectural work) between the Italian and Egyptian worlds. Art, fascination and politics thus merged in the suggestions of an architecture of excellence.

In Egypt, among other things, in the newly built residential districts, there was a widespread tendency to take as architectural reference, an Italian style inspired by the Renaissance and late Mannerist model. In this regard, it is interesting to draw a parallel with France, that since the end of the 19th century, had to deal with the need to have its own representative office. Initially, in 1886, the Quai d'Orsay bought the Arabic-style residence of the Count de Saint-Maurice, featuring a perfect correspondence between physical and geographical space, with 'allegorical' references to the traditional *qa'a* that, by definition, was the place of hospitality. The French Agent of the time expressed his opinion on the matter in these terms: "*C'est précisément parce que l'influence de la France en Égypte a subi des atteintes certaines que des signes extérieurs sont nécessaires pour ne laisser de doute dans l'esprit de personne sur l'intention de la France de ne pas renoncer*"¹⁵. Later, the structure of the ancient *qa'a* was dismantled, reassembled, and transformed into a renewed distribution space for the new French diplomatic seat in Giza, designed by the architect George Parcq in 1937, faithful to an ancient design whose nature was more than just architectural.



Beniamino Facchinelli, *partial view of the reception hall (qa'a) in the Gaston de Saint-Maurice mansion designed by Ambroise Baudry (1884).*

The new project took on a political and cultural significance, in continuity with the colonial aims. In terms of visual and architectural communication, our Country aimed to claim greater autonomy in its expressive modes, facilitated by the relations of personal friendship between the ruling houses of Italy and Egypt which were expressed by way of a loose 'understatement'. In the conception of the project for the Embassy of Italy in Cairo, however, there was a deliberate renunciation of what could imply contamination with the *style arabe*. It was a conscious choice, but not a demonstrative one. It was revealing of a frank codification of architecture, free from figurative conditionings and subjection extraneous to the 'Italic' style. In the same years, Italy also built its own diplomatic offices¹⁶ in Tunisia¹⁷, Morocco¹⁸, and Algeria – all countries where the influence of French colonial

architecture was more marked. The building and urban planning program imposed by Marshal Lyautey (1854 - 1934)¹⁹ tended to preserve the physiognomy of the places.

In Egypt, on the contrary, the aesthetic demand took on a perceptual identity value, in which the architectural language – in line with Vitruvian principles – was based on the classical repertoire.

We did not look at the contemporary projects that Italy was carrying out in North Africa in the early 1920s, but rather at formal solutions consistent with a fundamental classicism, which produced more modern results, such as certain State architectures present in the *Oltremare* of Rhodes (Palace of Justice). In 1924, the Italian Government was also building a new Embassy in the United States, also designed by the architect Di Fausto, which would become an aesthetic and functional reference. We can therefore assume that even the first design approach for the Cairo office took into account the pioneering experience of the Washington building in terms of claiming a strong national identity through the architectural language.



Seat of the Italian Legation in Washington, Diplomatic Chancery. Archive photo.



Florestano Di Fausto, perspective view of the Italian diplomatic seat in Washington, 1924.

NOTES

¹ The news published in the bulletins of the Administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, except for some temporal gaps, highlight that in 1920, the Cashier's Office provided for the general maintenance of the premises. From 1922 to 1926, the Administrative Office of the Ministry was divided into various departments, of which the 3rd department, corresponding to the Cashier's, was the Office in charge for the buildings and premises for the use of the Central Administration, their ordinary and extraordinary maintenance, insurance and furnishings, inventories, reports, conservation and maintenance of the Administration's equipment including heating, lighting, miscellaneous purchases, celebrations, receptions, furnishings for the Royal Offices abroad, and "portraits". Therefore, this department performed mixed functions, an arrangement that lasted until 15 November 1923. The Royal Decree-Law no. 2929 for State-owned buildings abroad of 2 December 1923, provided for the authorization to purchase or construction and for the furnishing of buildings used as seat of the Royal Diplomatic Representatives abroad, for a total charge of sixty-four million lire (in the same decree, published in the *Gazzetta* no. 19 on 23 January 1924, authorization was also given to purchase land for the construction of a building to be used as the seat of the Royal Legation in Belgrade, and to purchase a seat for the Royal Consulate of Thessaloniki).

² See Nicola La Banca in *Enciclopedia Treccani*, entry on *Il fascismo e la preparazione della guerra: tecnici e politici*, 2013. [...] it is known that, although somewhat fluctuating depending on the diplomatic situation of the moment, the territorial and leadership ambitions of the regime were very broad, and far superior to the Italian forces: occupying Corsica on one side and Albania on the other, establishing hegemony in the Balkans and over a large part of the Mediterranean, redesigning the borders in Libya, building interest in the Middle East, projecting – as vague as it is disturbing – towards 'the oceans', the Indian ocean via Ethiopia and Somalia, and perhaps even the Atlantic via some sort of influence on the French colonies of North Africa. As it was defined, a 'new Mediterranean order' around the peninsula, as indefinite as disruptive for the existing order of the time. Republican and democratic France, being directly threatened, opposed any Italian expansion. The United Kingdom defended

its role in the Mediterranean to protect Egypt, Suez, the route to India and, in general, its status as a world power. Together, Paris and London had the role of protectors of the smaller Balkan states, direct objects of Rome's ambitions. The nationalist or anti-colonial movements of the Arab countries could on occasion exploit the fascist stance, but they were deeply suspicious of Rome and had opposed the Italian colonial policy, first in Libya and then in Ethiopia. From afar, the United States did not look favourably on the disturbance of European markets that an Italian initiative might cause. [...].

³ Giovanni Tassani, *Diplomatico tra due guerre. Vita di G. P. d. C. B.*, Le Lettere, Florence, 2012.

⁴ My contribution to this study accounts for the rich documentation that I found in the archival collections that I consulted at the Historical Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, hereinafter ASDMAE and the following collections in particular:

the Egypt Embassy Fund, the Albania Embassy Fund, the Morocco Embassy Fund, the Tunisia Embassy Fund, the Turkey Embassy Fund, the Commerce Archive Fund, the Political and Commercial Affairs Fund, the Drawings Fund and the Personnel Archive. The documentary material was analysed in a targeted manner. The objective of the research focused on the collaboration between labour, professionalism and diplomacy to produce architectural and infrastructural systems. In particular, my approach enhances the efforts aimed at spreading the quality of Italian genius abroad, by underlining the complex impact of the Italian expatriate communities in their host countries.

⁵ Personnel Archive, Series VIII, Cairo, handwritten letter signed by Giacomo Paulucci di Calboli Barone, and addressed to Carlo Caccia Dominioni, 29 February 1924.

⁶ Personnel Archive, Ministerial Decrees, b.16, 8 April 1924 - Pursuant to the Royal Decree of 2 December 1923 no. 2929 with which the purchase, construction and furnishing of buildings for the use of Royal diplomatic representations abroad was authorized for a total expense of 1.64 million. Deemed appropriate that a Commission of officials belonging to this Ministry assisted by experts be responsible

for the disbursement of this allocation; deemed appropriate that this Commission be in charge of the arrangement and furnishing of the existing premises as well as of Palazzo Chigi;

We determine: that the choice of properties to be purchased and the study and plans of the buildings to be built for the Royal diplomatic Representations abroad still lacking State-owned premises; the arrangement and furnishing of the offices of such Representations, and of those that already reside in buildings owned or leased by the State, as well as of Palazzo Chigi, is entrusted to a Commission consisting of the following:

Marquis Paulucci di Calboli Barone Giacomo, Head of Cabinet of H.E. The Minister - President;

Cmm'r. Guariglia Giuseppe, Counsellor of Legation - Member;

Cmm'r. Crivellari Quirino, Consul General - Member;

Cmm'r. Viola Guido, Counsellor of Legation - Member;

Off. De Stefani Pietro, 1st Secretary of Legation - Member;

Off. Geisser Celesia di Vegliasco Andrea, 2nd Secretary of Legation - Member

Cmm'r. Papini Roberto, Inspector of Fine Arts, technical expert - Member;

Eng. Florestano Di Fausto, extraneous to the Public Administration, technical expert - Member;

Off. Morini Armando, Vice Consul - Secretary.

The aforementioned Off. Geisser Celesia di Vegliasco Andrea, assisted by Off. Livio Garbaccio, R. Legation Attaché, is entrusted with all the legal and administrative procedures regarding the Commission's jurisdiction, with the sole exception of any strictly technical aspects. The strictly technical aspects are assigned to the Technical Office composed by the aforementioned Cmm'r. Prof. Roberto Papini and Eng. Florestano Di Fausto.

This decree replaces the decrees dated 6 and 10 February last, and will be registered at the Court of Audit, Rome, 18 March 1924.

⁷ Crispi Document Fund, file no. 6, year 1888.

⁸ The orientation of the Ministry seemed to be inspired by the classics, essentially aiming to endorse a Ciceronian approach condemning luxury and overspending.

⁹ Personnel Archive, Series VIII, Cairo, Telex no. 110251/47 of May 1923. The Head of Government replies to the Minister Plenipotentiary Aldrovandi that it is firmly understood that the needs of public finance must be taken into account in any resolutions of the problem, since rebalancing the Country's finances is the basis of all the reforms pursued by the Government (see Mussolini).

¹⁰ Personnel Archive, Series VIII, Cairo, Telex no. 110251/47 of May 1923

¹¹ Each element of this complex system was made up of various areas. The ceremonial suite should include: a vestibule and an anteroom with two attached cloakrooms; a ballroom; a dining room for at least 48 people with an adjoining office; two large lounges; a study-library; a smoking lounge. The Head of Mission's apartment should consist of: a bedroom for the Ambassador, with attached bathroom; a bedroom for the Ambassadress, with attached bathroom; four master bedrooms with two bathrooms; a room for the housekeeper; a study for the Ambassador; a sitting room for the Ambassador. The servants' quarters consisted of: ten servants' rooms with two bathrooms; a wardrobe with cupboards; an ironing room; a housekeeping room for servants. The service quarters consisted of a kitchen with an adjoining pantry; a dining room for the servants; a water closet for the servants; a laundry room with drying room; a wine cellar; a cellar for trunks, a coal cellar, with access from the street; a boiler cellar; a garage for two cars; a room for the chauffeur; a gatehouse (two bedrooms, kitchen, and toilet). If the building had a garden, a room for gardening tools would be needed.

The Chancery should include a waiting room; a counsellor's office; a sitting room; a study for the Ambassador; a room for the head secretary; a room for two secretaries; a room for the Chancellor and clerks; a small room for typists; an archive room with armoured door and safe; two rooms for the military attaché; two rooms for the naval

attendant; two rooms for the commercial clerk; two rooms for the emigration officer; two rooms for the aeronautical officer; two waiting rooms for the employees. The Consular Chancery was to be equipped with: a waiting room; three offices; an archive; a toilet. The accommodation for married staff included: an antechamber; two master bedrooms; a bedroom for guest quarters; the living room; a dining room; a master bathroom; a bathroom for servants; a kitchen; a pantry-office; a housekeeping room. Finally, the accommodation had to be distributed in such a way that it could be used for two or three bachelor officials, if needed.

¹² A restructuring of the ministerial organization chart also aimed to renew the offices to which the area of technical competence was entrusted; namely, Office no. 3 was created for this purpose.

¹³ The tasks that the Technical Office had to attend to in these early stages concerned the Dures, Cetinje, Valona and Scutari offices, where very urgent works had to be carried out. Adaptations were planned in Lisbon, while the Copenhagen office was the recipient of improvement works and preparation designs for the gates. For the seat in The Hague, on the other hand, there was an urgent need for arranging and carrying out refurbishment works entrusted to a local engineer; the Paris residence also needed urgent ordinary maintenance works. The arrangement of the coat of arms on the façade was planned for the Stockholm office. In Jerusalem, the sale of a State-owned area was being pursued through consultations and appraisals, while in Helsingfors (Helsinki) the project to expand the seat was being started.

¹⁴ See *Abbas Hilmi II papers*, reports in Arabic dated 1908 from Ahmed Chafik Pasha to the Khedive concerning renovation work at Ras El-Tin Palace in Alexandria and Abdeen and Ismaïlia Palaces in Cairo, under the supervision of the Architect Antonio Lasciac (HIL / 166 / 468-469,474-475), in *Durham University Library, Archives and Special Collections*. It is interesting to note that during his tenure as Chief Architect of the Khedival Palaces, the architect Antonio Lasciac favoured the relations with Ahmed Chafik Pasha, owner

of the residence rented by the Italian Legation.

¹⁵ Mercedes Volait, *Architectes & Architectures de l'Égypte moderne*, Maison-neuve et Larose, 2005, p.193.

¹⁶ Nicola La Banca, *Oltremare*, Il Mulino, 2007.

The Royal Decree Law no. 3056 of 20 December 1923, published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* no. 24 of 29 January 1924, approved the purchase of land to build the seat of the Royal Consulate in Tunis.

¹⁷ See *Architectures Italiennes de Tunisie*, edited by Silvia Finzi, Italian Embassy in Tunis, 2002.

¹⁸ Maria Concetta Migliaccio, *Casablanca-Rabat: le sedi consolari in Marocco, in Architetti italiani in Marocco dall'inizio del Protettorato francese ad oggi*, edited by Milva Giacomelli, Ezio Godoli, Abderrahim Kassou, Edizioni Polistampa, Florence, 2009, pp. 53-67. The story of the project for the Italian consular office in Rabat (1923) was affected by the influence exercised by the French administration, and their continued attention to the morphological characteristics of the place. Di Fausto himself intervened to modify the stylistic code, sacrificing the classical imprinting in favour of a repertoire cautiously contaminated by Arab architecture. This attitude is also evident in Di Fausto's design for the Italian schools in Casablanca (1923). His plan for the *Casa degli Italiani* in Casablanca is more straightforward, and it draws inspiration from a Mediterranean vision in which figurative concessions are rare. The renovation of the Italian buildings in Sfax and Sousse are marked to defining classicist characters. In Tunis, however, in the design for the Consulate it is possible to find traces of the classical repertoire. For further information, see Maria Concetta Migliaccio, *Florestano Di Fausto's Plans for Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco and Algeri*, in *The Presence of Italian Architects in Mediterranean Countries*, Proceedings of the First International Conference, Bibliotheca Alexandrina 15-16 November 2007, Maschietto editore, Florence, 2007, pp. 22-37.

¹⁹ See *Enciclopedia Treccani*, see entry on: *Lyautey*, Louis-Hubert-Gonzalve, 1934.

3. ITALIAN ARCHITECTURE IN CAIRO AND ITS MAIN PROTAGONISTS.

Starting in the first half of the 19th century and for over a century, Italian architects in Egypt significantly contributed to providing the main Egyptian cities with a modern look.

Over time, numerous intellectuals and professionals increased the ranks of the Italian community, which was also formed as a result of massive political emigration waves (Jacobins, Bonapartists, exiles, anarchists, Carbonari, Mazzinians, Garibaldians, irredentists of the Habsburg Empire, and anti-fascists)¹ as well as due to the manifold promises of development opportunities offered by the Country.

The activities of Italian entrepreneurs, artists and architects spread to Alexandria and the Egyptian capital, along with the rest of Egypt, due to the flourishing development of the construction sector, which was procuring important orders. In Cairo, the expansion of new neighbourhoods and infrastructures, especially during the Khedival mandate of Ismail Pasha, attracted considerable foreign capitals and made the Italian penetration very competitive.



Zogheb Villa in Cairo, around 1904. Located at the beginning of Qasr El-Nil toward Opera Square, it is a small marvel of 19th-century Arab-Mamluk architecture. Its main entrance was on an alley called "Zogheb". Today, this site is home to the old Metropole Hotel.

In Alexandria, following the English bombings of 1882 which had destroyed a large part of the city, the award of the works was just as contended among foreign professionals, for whom a marked resourcefulness prevailed, combined with the competence and support of their respective Governments. The efforts made by the Italian community to be able to occupy an important position in the administration system – and, more specifically, in the construction and artistic sectors – were made by many professionals who knew how to link their name to valuable works. They drew on the solicitations available and their different formative experiences. With their work and the prestige resulting also from the diplomatic action of our Country, the Italian architects played a considerable role in the modernization of Egypt by securing contracts for the Khedival palaces, as well as civil and religious works. By origin and training, the generation of architects to which the Trieste brothers Antonio (1859 - 1898) and Francesco (1861 - 1941) Battigelli and Antonio Lasciac (Gorizia, 1856 - Cairo, 1946) belonged, was able to intercept the artistic movement which found inspiration in the Arabic style, shared by Ernesto Verrucci himself (Force, 1874 - Force, 1945). It was a cultural attitude that privileged the recovery of tradition and reacted against an adherence to Western models in support of an Egyptian ‘nationalist’ style², encouraged by the local political *élites*. Highly esteemed in the colony³, Antonio and Francesco Battigelli provided their services to the Egyptian Government for important works, including designing the Khedive Ismail Pasha mausoleum in the El-Rifai mosque. Worthy of mention is also the partnership between the Battigelli brothers and the Hungarian architect and restorer Max Herz (1856 – 1919), who was part of the prestigious *côté*, and played an active role in the Conservation Committee of Arab Art Monument. Together, they designed the well-known villa of the Danish Consul Zogheb, at the beginning of the century in Cairo. The theoretical assumption underlying the interpretation of the Neo-Mamluk style – adopted as the stylistic solution for the Zogheb mansion – met with the approval of the Italian architectural critics of the time.⁴

The well-recognized skills of some Italian professionals – with their knowledge of restoration techniques and of the linguistic codes of Arabic art – starting from 1897 enabled them to access the *Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe* for the safeguarding of Egyptian antiques, after several foreign mandates that had prevailed over Italy⁵ since it had been established in 1881. Taking part, in different capacities, in the works promoted by the Committee, inscribed several Italian professionals in a very fruitful climate. Their involvement demonstrated a perfect synthesis of architectural notions aimed to create formal reference models, technical knowledge of construction systems, and strong suggestions provided by the environmental context. Antonio Battigelli, Alfonso Maniscalco (1853 - ?), the aforementioned Antonio Lasciac, Achille Patricolo, Carlo Virgilio Silvagni, Enrico Nistri (who would later be entrusted with the interior design of the new Italian Embassy in Cairo), Gaston Rossi, Giuseppe Tavarelli, Giuseppe and Nicola Jacovelli, and the entrepreneur Garozzo are the Italian names who shared that very significant experience with its architectural commitment and the militancy of aesthetic principles based on the theory and practice of the trade. The result of this exercise spilled over into the architectural projects carried out in the Egyptian capital, in an open dialogue with foreign colleagues. A long list of professionals from different backgrounds contaminated the

Islamic style (Egyptianising formalism, Ottoman style, and Mamluk style), depriving it in the beginning of a certain philological rigour.

They gave birth to more eclectic visions in an orientalist taste perspective, which, between the 1870s and 1880s, also enticed French architects (A. Baudry and his circle) and some Egyptian architects such as Husayn Pasha Fahmy (1827 - 1891) and Saber Sabri (1855 - 1915)⁶. A turn towards such suggestions was accomplished with the consolidation of a greater critical awareness, resulting from the creation of the first museum collections, the dissemination of dedicated printed works, and the establishment of the *Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe*. Among the proponents of an erudite Arab style with a greater propensity to the Mamluk tradition, merged with modern building systems, there are numerous Italian architects who characterised the architecture in the Egyptian capital. The Cairo skyline was affected by the dual artistic attitude pursued by the technically skilful and highly creative Italian professionals: adherence to the principles of local tradition – interpreted and updated with modern construction techniques – and the prevalence of an Italian style whose reference lay in the architectural culture of the late Renaissance, overflowing into Baroque classicism.

However, the dominance of forms in the European architecture in Egypt was part of a careful research that pushed Italian professionals to pursue figurative intentions that fluctuated between coherence and contradictions, in order to indulge the client. Among the Western models, French and Italian tastes vied for artistic superiority. In a dense and kaleidoscopic city like Cairo, the exper-

imentation and hybridisations with the offshoots of the architectural culture of the past practiced by foreign colleagues (think of the transpositions of French Baroque classicism derived from Beaux Arts), resulted in late Mannerist and Rococo legacies, interspersed in a convinced Palladianism which drew on the British Palladian style. These spurious quotations pressed academism. The taste for the exotic, ranging between Art Deco drifts and Verruccian archaisms typical of some court architecture⁷, offered a valid alternative to linguistic distortions. In the stylistic westernisation of new buildings, the Italian architecture of the new residential districts was created around these themes. It is precisely in these areas that the better qualified character of the Italian architects emerged. By working on form and technological advancement, they had probed its depth and implications. Not negligible was the privileged position determined by the highly coveted appointment of Antonio Lasciac and Ernesto Verrucci as architects of the Khedival palaces, that influenced the trends and tastes of more than just their compatriots.



Arab Music Institute, (attributed to Ernesto Verrucci).



Ernesto Verrucci, *Byzantine room in the Abdeen Royal Palace*, 1922.

The composite and dialectical Cairo milieu, where multiple forces coexisted, prevented the avant-garde from radicalising itself into programmatic choices.

Some works by Verrucci in the Arabic style were conditioned by the Neo-Byzantine revival. His erudite approach to the stylistic repertoire of the past also comprised some amount of shattering of linguistic coherence that lingered on licences and exceptions, in search of historical roots and complex certainties, an expression of the Khedival dynasty.

Valid demonstrations of his rich stylistic repertoire were the Arab Music Institute in Cairo (1921 - 1929) considered the work of Ernesto Verrucci⁸ and other works of his, such as the Heliopolis Greek Orthodox school (1915, an example of civil architecture expressed in a decorativism with sober forms, not devoid of some indulgence in local references like the use of fluted domes modelled on the *Al-Qarafa* monuments in old Cairo), or the neo Renaissance-inspired interventions on the southern façade of Abdeen Palace (including the classical-style interior decorations of the grand room in the Abdeen Palace apartments for foreign sovereigns).

The continuity and consistency of values, to which the purity of Egyptian monuments aspired to, could be found in Verrucci's works in modern Arabic style. In Cairo, the project for the new Egyptian University with its pavilions (1914), the Fatimid-styled Throne Room (1926) in Abdeen Palace, the tomb of Fuad (1919) and of the Queen Mother in the El-Rifai mosque, are all in the wake of models that reveal an adherence to the formal systems of Egyptian architectural tradition. They did not claim to transform the very representation of the institutions into monuments, but offered to the following generations a path of redeeming cultural autonomy and historical 'dignity'. The Arabic style, based on the Mamluk-inspired revival, dominated the *imprinting* of the Cairo public buildings as shown by the Museum of Arab Art, built to the design of the Italian architect Alfonso Maniscalco (1898 - 1903). The climax of this 'nationalist' experience was the erection of the funeral mausoleum for Fuad in 1939, a work commissioned by his son Farouk to Verrucci, the court architect most disliked by foreign powers for his strategic diplomatic duties which often exceeded his specific tasks. The cenotaph, inspired for its grandeur by the Vittoriano in Rome, transfigured the etymons of Arab culture which had been encouraged by the Egyptian sovereign for his whole mandate⁹.

Among the most recurrent stylistic options that acquired a specific connotation, based on the new urban morphology of the residential districts and their building typology, the neo-16th century character of civic buildings and stately villas became widespread. It was not only the Italian community, one of Cairo's largest, that adopted it, but the Egyptian well-to-do as well.

The palaces belonging to the Egyptian *élites* in the capital, in the years before the First World War, aimed at a radical re-foundation of the architectural tradition that gave in to the lure of European taste. The phenomenon involved the development of curtain walls in the style of the Italian Renaissance palaces, marked by a tripartite succession of modular schemes, from the ashlar base and elevation in smooth bricks, with the insertion of Venetian windows, giant orders and a crowning delimited by horizontal stringcourses and vertical pilasters¹⁰. The western 'disguise' of the façade created a new relationship with the native structural layout of traditional Egyptian dwellings.

The balance between the enunciation of the formal qualities of Renaissance style and the hesitations of tradition was skilfully overcome by the contributions made by architect Antonio

Lasciac. Especially in the Alexandria environment, he carried out the much-anticipated architectural renewal based on the dialectic between opposing trends, when he carried out building works to reconstruct the bombed city (1882). Lasciac's Okelle Menasce (1883) in Alexandria, which was based on the layout of a caravanserai (wakala), constituted a type of building with a combination of residential and commercial functions. The architect subjected the traditional structure to a cosmetic intervention marked by a conventional neo-classicism.

As Chief Architect of the Khedival palaces from 1907 until the deposition of Abbas Hilmi (1874 - 1944) in 1914, Lasciac played a central role in the affirmation of residential works in Cairo.

At first, the attitude of Lasciac – a professional originally from Gorizia, trained in the Middle-European cultural climate – pursued an international spirit for his adherence to the experiences of *modernism* that was gaining ground in Europe. In Cairo, the architect demonstrated that he had assimilated the lessons of international *Art Nouveau*, which he expressed with particular caution and sobriety, by constraining in a personal way the most flamboyant results that this style¹¹ proposed. New architectural formulas were experimented earlier than in Italy¹². The style of his architecture, commissioned from him by the Egyptian aristocracy in Cairo, was in line with the prudent experimentation that distanced itself from the modernist infatuation of the secessionist type, and was appreciated by critics¹³. The Daira Djelal Pasha buildings, erected between 1896 and 1900, affirmed the author's design skills in adopting technological solutions in reinforced concrete in such modernist research.

A vast production between 1895 and 1900 can be viewed as modernist examples of compositional and decorative solutions, such as the Kedina Mère Palace (1896 - 1897) or the Zaafaran Palace at the Abbassiyya (1901 - 1902), in which a neo-Rococo indulgence is more evident. Lasciac's designs were more generally based on an eclectic and neo-academic vein for some residences of the young court elite.

The linguistic form of the elevations made use of galleries and series of arched and mullioned windows, re-proposed in the palace of Prince Djemil Toussum (1898) or in the building that housed the Risotto club (circa 1897). The architectural experience of Lasciac – who, in his Roman period (1888 - 1897), joined the Italian *Associazione Italiana dei Cultori di Architettura* – brought him close to the major protagonists of the national architectural debate, from whom he drew inspiration.

The project 'La Grande Fabrique S. Stein' (1904) was of a more distinctly secessionist orientation, which aimed to satisfy the aspirations of the client.

The Salamlik designed for Omar Sultan Pasha in Bulaq in 1907 was part of a series of works in the Arab



Portrait of Antonio Lasciac, Chief Architect of the Khedival Palaces.

style. The expertise with which he practiced the artistic dimension of Arab imprint demonstrated his new take on these themes, perfected during his stay in Italy. Only in 1910, did Lasciac become part of the *Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe*, a milieu in which he refined his knowledge of the monuments of the Circassian-Mamluk period (1382 - 1517). He poured this newly-acquired knowledge into his designs for the *Assicurazioni Generali di Trieste* building in Qasr El-Nil (1911) and for the seat of Banque Misr (1922 - 1927). The latter project, for the comprehensive view of Arab culture it provides both in the elevations and in the interiors, put Lasciac at the forefront of interpretative Islamic-inspired Egyptian architecture.

On the other hand, the Italian architecture in Cairo – and more generally in Egypt – aimed at educational institutions and Italian State properties, was influenced by the dominant taste that had shaped the motherland, based on historic examples ranging from Gothicism to Renaissance revival.

The main protagonists of Cairo architecture ended up inspiring entire generations of younger architects, who left their mark in the new Cairo neighbourhoods. Worth mentioning among them are Giuseppe Mazza (1891 - ?), Giacomo Loria (1879 - 1937), Tullio Tiburzio Parvis, Marco Olivetti (1881 - 1949), and Paolo Caccia Dominioni (1896 - 1992), to name just the few who became intertwined with the architectural events that brought to the creation of the Italian diplomatic seat in Cairo or who operated in the Garden City neighbourhood, where the seat of the Italian Embassy in Cairo is located.

Giuseppe Mazza was the brains behind numerous apartment buildings located in the most exclusive Cairo neighbourhoods: Garden City, Zamalek, and Heliopolis. His name was mainly linked to the Rotonda Groppi project (1925) – considered a jewel of Deco architecture at the time – located in Midan Soliman Pasha and built by the De Farro company.

Tullio Tiburzio Parvis was the designer of the Bulacco Italian schools (1906). He was the son of Giuseppe Parvis, the Italian cabinet-maker and one of the Egypt's best known decorator of Arabic art. He garnered positive results in drafting the plans for villas and hotels such as the Semiramis hotel in Qasr El-Doubara. He also designed the Helwan-Heliopolis-Cairo electric tram, with an underground station at rue Manakh, one of the most prominent streets in Cairo, where the Maison Delort de Gléon and some prestigious European villas stood, near the place de l'Opéra and the Khedive club.

Domenico Limongelli, an engineer and entrepreneur renowned for his numerous building works, carried out restoration works for the Vatican seat for which he had been operating on a regular basis until 1921. The prestigious seat, located in Muhamad Mazhar Street in Zamalek, a neighbourhood located in Gezira island (and later to become the district for foreign embassies) were completed in collaboration with the Tuscan architect Giuseppe Castellucci (1863 - 1939) in Florentine Renaissance style.

Paolo Caccia Dominioni, one of the leading exponents of Italian professionalism in Egypt, was, among other things, the author of the women's technical school in shari Qasr El-Nil (circa 1930) and of the refurbishment of the technical-commercial school in Champollion Rd (1931). As for residential projects, at the end of the 1920s the engineer signed the plans for the North End house in Gezira (1926), Giuseppe Santi's home near the Qubba gardens (1926 - 1927), the



Three constructions planned and built in Egypt by Paolo Caccia Dominioni, Milanese engineer. Featuring the Aseptic Surgery Pavilion of the Umberto I Italian Hospital in Cairo, the Tennis Club and the Al-Arham newspaper Printing House (from «Domus», no. 43, 1931).

Hugo Guth house, and the Tennis pavilion in Tewfik (1928)¹⁴. His project for the Aseptic Surgery Pavilion at the Italian Hospital in Cairo (1928) involved a modern volumetric plasticism free from any decorative accents, in keeping with the building's functional and structural complexity.

In various ways and with different stylistic approaches, these architects experimented with these trends under the common denominator of the technological advancement of the materials they used for new buildings in the most prestigious residential areas of Cairo.

A parade of villas punctuated Garden City, the district overlooking the Nile where the Italian diplomatic seat was established. Some of these villas, which still survive, are representative of styles ranging from neo-15th century to neo-Palladianism, and neo-Rococo; others present, on their façade, medieval lyricisms not free from Arabizing influences or deco reinterpretations, the work of the best European architects. Among those designers and professionals are some of the aforementioned Italians, including Giuseppe Mazza

who built the Muscat bey Palace at 5, shari Ibrahim Nagib, as well as the Menasce Mayer Villa; Domenico Limongelli, designer of a villa that bears his name and of the Nagib Pasha Villa (1922); and also the work of better known architects like Ernesto Verrucci, author of Villa de Martino (circa 1914) and Antonio Lasciac, designer of the Sherif Sabry Palace. The Florentine Carlo Prampolini (1871-?) – in collaboration with Eugenio Valzania from the circle of Lasciac – designed Beyerlè Palace (1908) in neo-16th century style on behalf of the co-director of the *Crédit foncier Egyptien*. Giacomo Alessandro Loria, who participated in various architectural competitions in the early 1920s, is credited with the three 'Smouha Ades' properties on the corner of shari Nabatat and shari Ismail Pasha in Garden City, as well as the Chawarbi building on the corner between shari Ramses and shari 26 Yulyo¹⁵. Also in Garden City, just like elsewhere in Cairo, the Italian professionals, who dominated the scene together with foreign architects, recreated new forms of expression loaded with unprecedented avant-garde technical solutions for the local aristocracy and the rich bourgeoisie, often in revisited late 16th-century style.

The transition of taste between the late 1920s and the early 1930s did not produce radical results, considering that the younger generations of architects, despite the political change,

remained within the realm of tradition – with the only notable exception of the architectural model experimented in 1931 by Clemente Busiri Vici¹⁶ (1887 - 1965) for the Schools at El-Shatby (Alexandria), which was an example of creative purity.

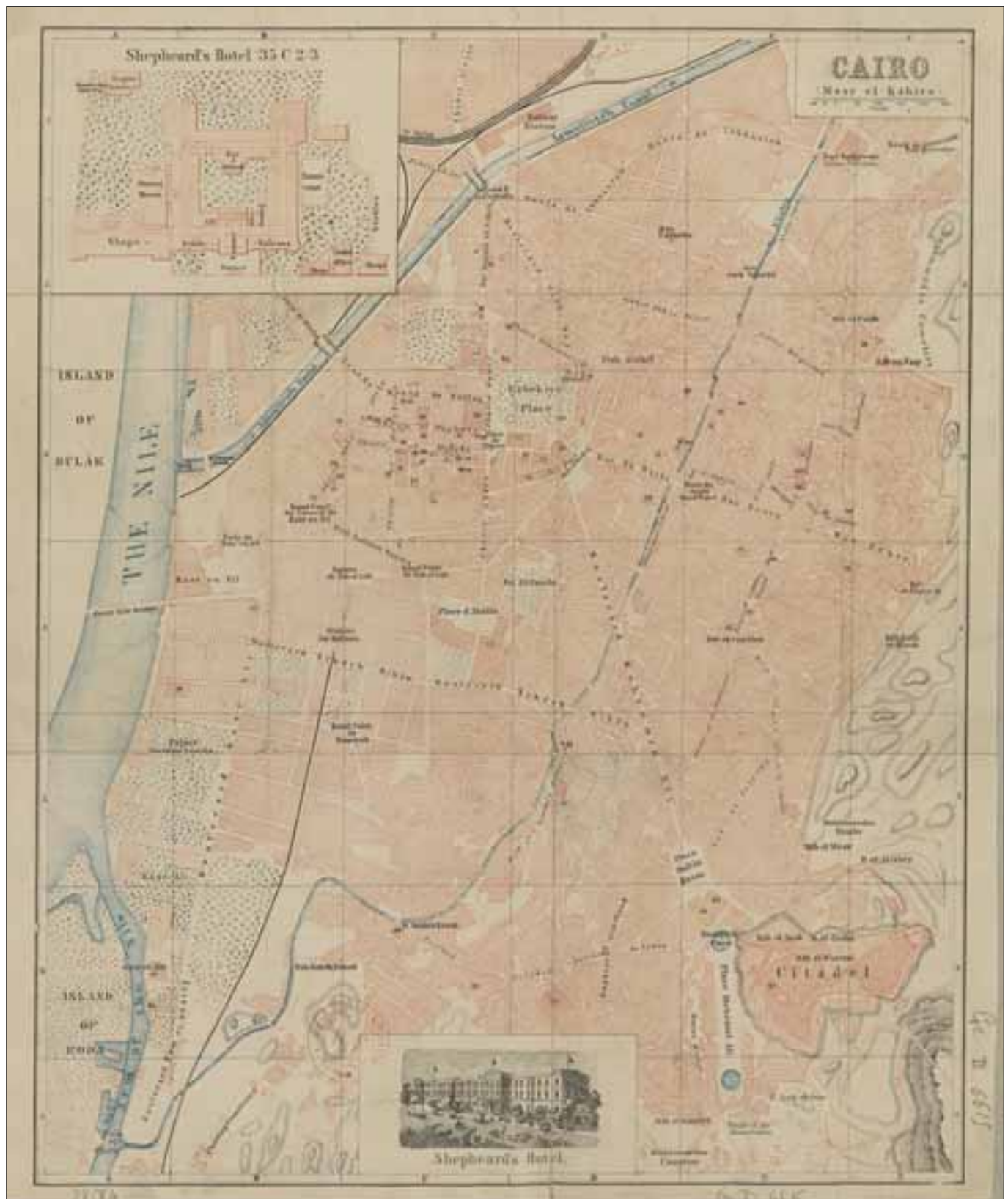
Fundamental, however, was the impulse given by Italian architects to recover the aesthetic values of local tradition, in an effort to honestly return them to their roots, in support of the formal control of urban expansion, in the mixed fragmentation of the modern city.



E. Hanselmann, *Portrait of Ernesto Verrucci* (1926 - 1927).



Cadastral hydrographic map of some land in the north of Cairo, with the garden and holiday palace of H.H. Mohamed Ali, Pasha of Egypt, 1826.



Map of Cairo (Masr el-Kähira), portion of the city with Rawdah Island, Shepherd's Hotel, 1895.

NOTES

¹ Ezio Godoli, *Gli architetti friuliani e giuliani nell'emigrazione politica italiana verso l'Egitto*, 2016, Edizioni Università di Trieste, pp. 123-141.

² See Ezio Godoli, op. cit., 2016, p.125. [...] *An Islamic-inspired address had developed in Egyptian architecture, which had found its initiators in the 1960s in the Germans Carl von Diebitsch and Julius Frantz and in the Italian Ciro Pantanelli and, in the seventies, it had been oriented towards results of greater attention to the recovery of elements of the Cairo tradition by the French Ambroise Baudry, Marcel Gouron Bois-Vert and Charles Guimbard.* [...].

³ To the munificence of the Battigelli brothers we owe the commitment to the donation for the purchase of the land intended for the construction of the Bulacco Italian schools in 1906. The Egyptian Government ceded the ownership of the land of approximately 5,457 metres located in rue Aboul Ela, Bulaq (Zahr El Gamal), estimated at 600 m / m and sold at 300 m / m per metre. The sum amounted to 1,637 Egyptian pounds. The signing of the sales contract took place in June 1901 with the obligation to preserve the intended use of the kindergarten. It was a conditional sale due to the agreed favourable price. The work was financed by cavalier Battigelli as reported in the June

1903 telex no. 1385/223. See Egypt Embassy Fund, Envelope 75.

⁴ Gaetano Moretti, *La villa Zogheb in Cairo. Due parole sull'architettura moderna in Egitto*, "L'edilizia moderna", XII, vol. I, January 1903, p. 1.

⁵ Ezio Godoli, *Italian Architects, Contractors, Decorative Artists and the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe*, in *Italian Architectural and Artistic Heritage in Egypt*, Effigi Edizioni, Arcidosso (Gr), 2017, pp. 7-27.

⁶ Mercedes Volait, *Dans l'intimité des objets et des monuments: l'orientalisme architectural vu d'Égypte (1870 - 1910)*, in Nabila Oulebsir et Mercedes Volait, *L'Orientalisme Architectural entre imaginaires et savoirs*, pp. 233-251.

⁷ Ezio Godoli, *Le architetture in stile arabo moderno di Ernesto Verrucci Bey*, in «Quasar–Quaderni di storia dell'architettura e restauro», no. 18, July-December 1997, pp. 31-58.

⁸ The project is generally considered by Verrucci but it is believed to be the result of a professional collaboration. See Ezio Godoli, *Le architetture in stile arabo moderno di Ernesto Verrucci Bey*, in «Quasar–Quaderni di storia dell'architettura e restauro», no. 18, July-December 1997, pp. 31-58.

⁹ Ezio Godoli, *Le architetture in stile arabo moderno di Ernesto Verrucci Bey*, in «Quasar», no. 18, July-December 1997, pp. 31-58.

¹⁰ Mercedes Volait, 2005, op. cit.

¹¹ Eleonora Bairati, Daniele Riva, *Il Liberty in Italia*, Editori Laterza, Bari, 1997.

¹² Ezio Godoli, *Gli architetti friulani e giuliani nell'emigrazione politica italiana verso l'Egitto*, 2016, Edizioni Università di Trieste, pp. 123-141.

¹³ See *Palazzo Daira Djelal Pascià in Cairo*, "L'Edilizia Moderna", IX, vol. VII, July 1900, pp. 49-50, figs. 33-35 and *Il villino della Daira Djelal Pascha in Cairo*, ibid., X, vol. VII, June 1901.

¹⁴ *Sei costruzioni progettate e costruite in Egitto dell'Arch. Paolo Caccia Dominioni*, «Domus», IV, no. 43, 1931, pp. 65-69.

¹⁵ Maria Concetta Migliaccio, see entry in *Architetti e Ingegneri italiani dal Levante al Magreb*, edited by Ezio Godoli and Milva Giacomelli, Maschietto editore, Florence, 2005, p. 226.

¹⁶ Milva Giacomelli, see entry in *Architetti e ingegneri italiani da Levante a Magreb*, op. cit., pp. 99-105.



Vintage photo of Delort de Gléon Mansion, designed by Ambroise Baudry in 1874, and the seat of the Italian Legation from 1884 to 1908.



Vintage photo of Delort de Gléon Mansion, diplomatic seat of the Italian Legation from 1884 to 1908.

4. THE EARLY PHASES OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ITALIAN DIPLOMATIC SEAT IN CAIRO.

The Italian businessmen in Cairo, who were the owners of the firms that supplied the tender specifications for the construction of the new diplomatic seat¹, were, albeit with their fluctuating fortunes, the most dynamic component² of the local economy and of the production organisation of the Italian colony. The long list of professionals and entrepreneurs involved in the development of its intricate building history highlights the Italian skills and ingenuity within the complex Egyptian social system, full of pitfalls and antagonisms.

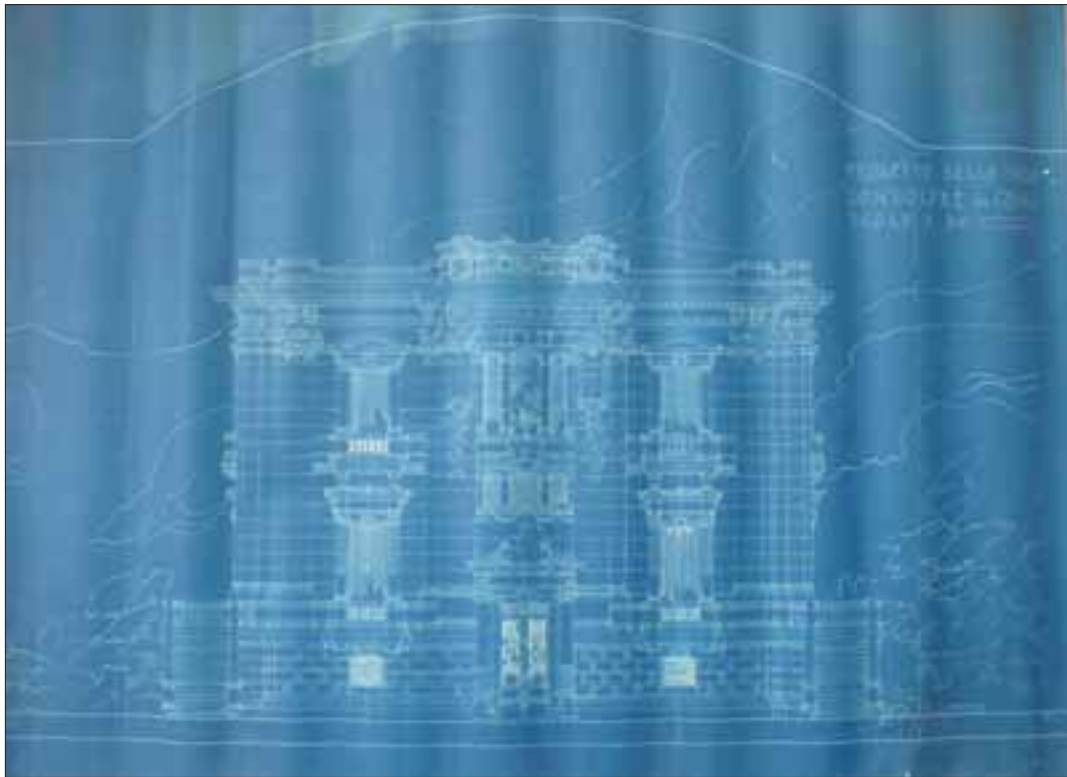
Establishing the new seat of the Diplomatic Mission required evaluating various options and entailed the development of new projects for the building. These were entrusted to well-established Italian architects, who were close to the community, for merit and collaboration. Some of them were assigned the task of finding and evaluating a plot of land suitable for erecting the new building and its appurtenances, as well as of scouting the real estate market for any appropriate stately buildings for sale. This involved specialized firms and Italian professionals operating in the Egyptian area that were well-liked by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They were selected based on criteria of reliability, long-term experience and ability to fathom the potential of the local building context.

Exploration of alternative design paths for the new seat.

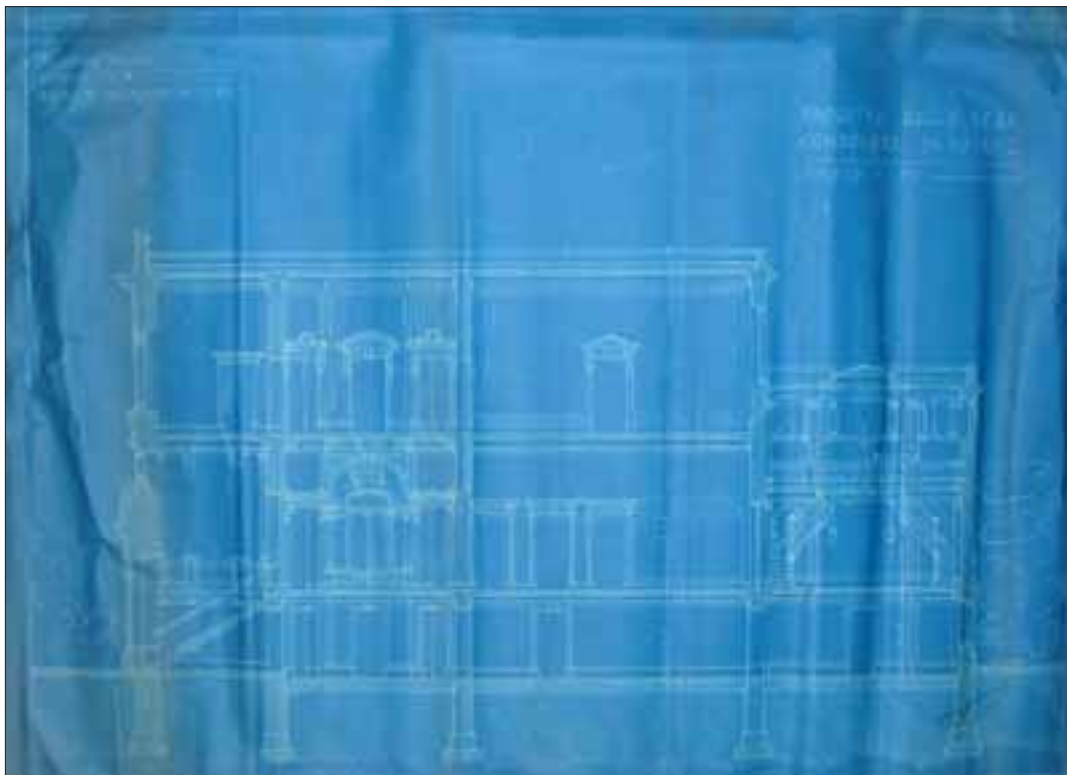
Among the most accredited professionals in the Italian colony, and the one who proved himself most capable of corraling the complex factors to be taken into account in order to carry out a contextual analysis, was Domenico Limongelli, an engineer who worked as a technical expert at the Mixed Courts. A brilliant member of the Italian community, he was a skilled connoisseur of the Egyptian environment thanks to his professional profile, a hybrid role between the architect who signs the project or directs the construction site and the builder/entrepreneur who avails himself of other professionals' designs. Limongelli was consulted on 27 May 1924 by the Minister of the Italian Legation, Count Carlo Caccia Dominioni, to express his opinion on the possibility of erecting a stately building for the seat of the Italian Delegation in a yet undetermined location. Negotiations to purchase the land were still in their infancy. He provided an estimate of the construction costs of a building over an area of about 500 square metres, as suggested by the C.A.S.E. Commission, which had assessed how much space would be needed in the new building. It would have to include at least two or three reception rooms, a dining room for twenty-four people, six or seven bedrooms with three bathrooms, a grand staircase, a service staircase, and four rooms to use as Chancery partially located in the raised basement and with a separate entrance. The outbuildings for the garage and the accommodation for the Arab servants on top of it, as well as the porter's lodge, would be located in the garden surrounding the main building. For outdoor receptions, Limongelli recommended an area of about 3,000 square metres in order to accommodate the tea garden. The new building had to 'be dignified, yet simple and austere, without the burden of stucco and sumptuous decorations'. Limongelli was

asked to report what soil in the chosen urban areas had characteristics suitable for construction. The hygrometric texture of the soil would determine the stability of the building, consisting of basement, *rez de chaussée* and first floor. As a result, the construction techniques suggested by Limongelli included foundation piles and reinforced concrete beams, stone and brick masonry for partitions and corner walls, cement mortar, supporting columns and lintels in reinforced concrete. As for the interiors, Limongelli suggested distinct types of materials, depending on their different uses, whether for the service quarters or for the Chancery. Marble, *Faenza* tiles³, Swedish wood and oak were suggested for flooring and panelling. White gypsum and glue colouring were selected for surface plastering. Limongelli's experience in the building sector and his familiarity with the building regulations of the various districts of the Egyptian capital, which required specific procedures according to the prescriptions of the Cairo Municipality, were very useful in drafting the technical recommendations to be adhered to for the construction of the new seat of the Legation. For this reason, the engineer acted as arbiter in various negotiations, both for the drafting of the plans and for the sale of land and buildings, based on his appraisals. Erecting a building with the specified characteristics would entail ten to twelve months' work, with the help of skilled labourers. The engineer Limongelli had previous experience with several buildings in Garden City, where he had also built a small villa for his personal use – the Limongelli Building, located at No. 4, Hod al-Laban. Moreover, as a result of the experience he had gained with the Tuscan architect Giuseppe Castellucci⁴, who had entrusted him with building the Vatican's diplomatic residence⁵, Limongelli was inclined to design buildings with an Italian imprint, inspired by the Classicist revival. He exemplified both the building experience in all its aspects as well as a certain orientation of taste that can also be found in the 1922 Nagib Pasha villa in Garden City (now the seat of the Indonesian Embassy), which is attributed to him⁶. Limongelli and Castellucci were joined by Tullio Tiburzio Parvis⁷, who had been commissioned to design the consular offices in Cairo⁸, and whose plan was probably adapted for the seat of the Legation. He was born in Cairo and following his father's steps, he graduated in civil engineering from the Valentino Royal School for Engineering Applications in Turin. His father, Giuseppe Parvis⁹, was the undisputed master of fine cabinet-making¹⁰ in Egypt. The engineer – who had been the maker of the consular seat of Port Said and had been awarded several honours by the Italian Government for his philanthropy – prepared a plan for the seat of the Italian Consulate in Cairo. His design, of which the classical lines showed Rococo influences in the decorative exuberance of the building, was on three levels and featured a very impressive atrium. It was probably adapted to the needs of the new seat of the Italian Legation in Cairo.

In June 1924, the architect Giuseppe Mazza – prompted by feelings of Italianness – drew up a general project for the upcoming Italian Legation. The technical expert worked at I.S.B.A.R. in Cairo, an office that mainly dealt with the planning of agricultural land. He was born in Alexandria in Egypt in 1891 to Italian parents from Amato in Calabria. His studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome, which earned him an academic diploma in 1912, enabled him to master the rich stylistic repertoire that he applied to the buildings he designed for private clients. He, also drawing on a classical repertoire, prepared the design for an elegant, stately building.

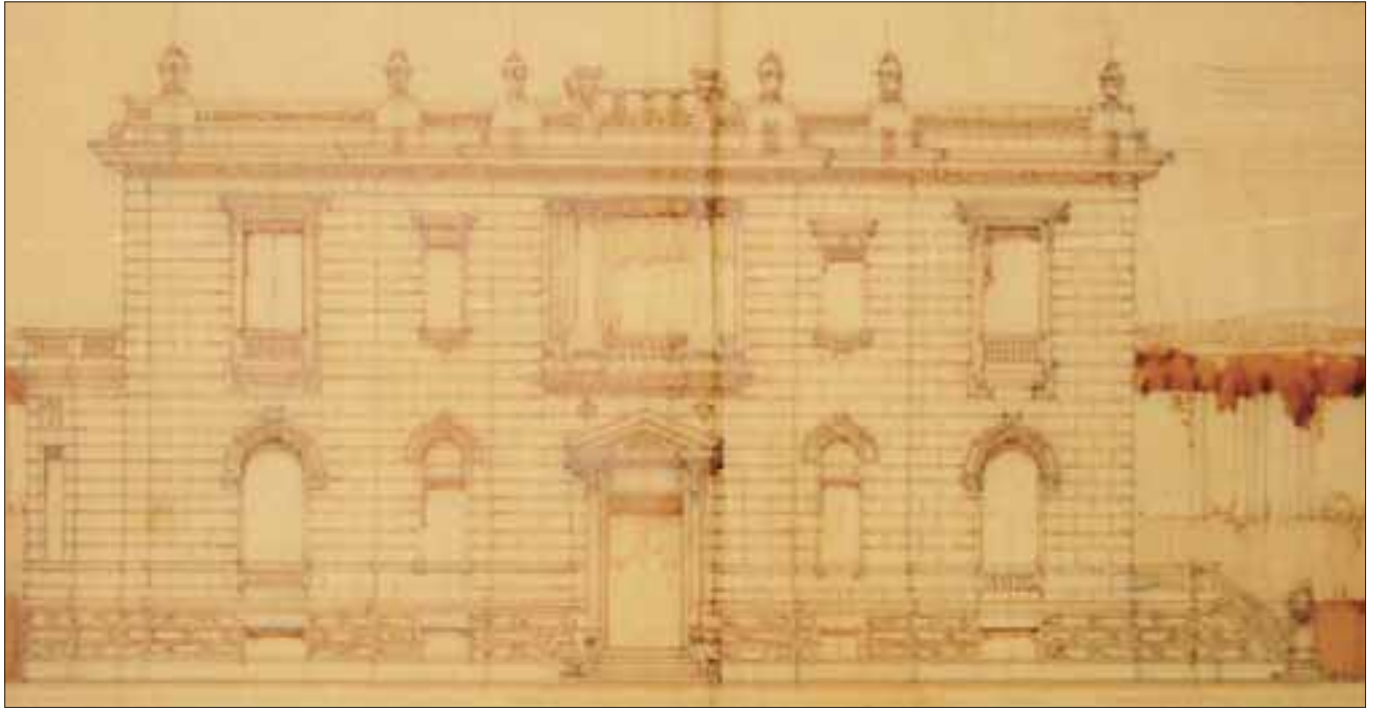


Tullio Tiburzio Parvis, *design for the consular office in Cairo, main façade* (ASDMAE).



Tullio Tiburzio Parvis, *design for the consular office in Cairo, cross section* (ASDMAE).

The composition of the façade – clearly an academic exercise – was inspired by symmetry. The main entrance, surmounted by the trabeated loggia, was slightly set back in relation to the side wings, which were unified by a base of rustic ashlar and a cladding of smooth ashlar. The veranda overlooking the garden and the staircase leading to the side entrance gave the building greater sophistication and decorum.



Giuseppe Mazza, *Stately building for the seat of the Royal Legation of Italy in Cairo*, June 1924 (ASDMAE).

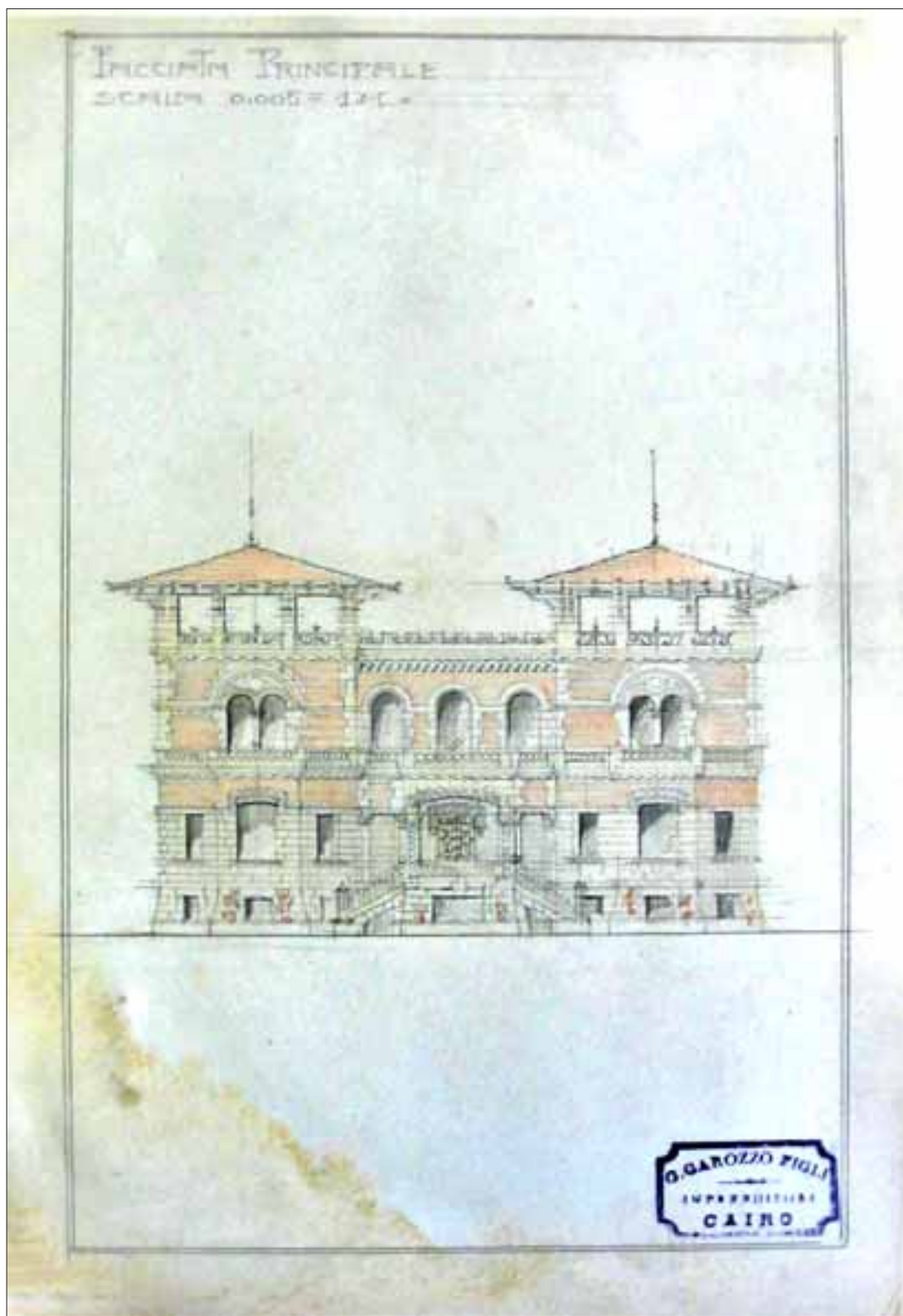
In search of a solution: sounding out the Italian building contractors in Egypt

The Minister Plenipotentiary, Count Caccia Dominioni, consulted a range of specialized firms and building companies, orbiting round the local Italian community, which had established credibility and demonstrated efficiency while working on the main commissions in Egyptian cities.

Among the Italian companies, Caccia Dominioni chose the **Eduardo Almagià** firm from Alexandria, of which the main field of activity was hydraulic works, in Alexandria, in Port Said on behalf of the Suez Canal Company, and in Tripoli. The Almagià firm, which specialised in large infrastructural works, was also occasionally awarded contracts in the field of residential building constructions. Worth mentioning among their civil construction projects is the Benito Mussolini Hospital in Alexandria, carried out between 1922 and 1923 and based on a design by the Italian architect Giacomo Loria. The company was founded in 1868 in Ancona by Eduardo Almagià (1841 - 1921). Initially active in the railway sector, with many commissions in different geographical areas, the business later specialised in port engineering works. In fact, there was no lack of opportunities for the construction of ports abroad. Starting in 1899, the firm was contracted to work in Turkey, Romania, Egypt and Rhodes.



Detail of the entry portal of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, shown in the presence of the construction company's protagonists, among whom one can recognise Giuseppe Garozzo.



G. Garozzo & Sons, entrepreneurs in Cairo, main façade of the design proposal for the seat of the Italian Legation in Cairo (ASDMAE).

In 1911, Eduardo was succeeded by his son Roberto (1883 - 1947), who had obtained the title of engineer at the Polytechnic of Turin. In 1912, the works for the port of Tripoli were carried out. The Almagià company's performance was tested by the engineer (and later senator) Luigi Luiggi¹¹, who, in his capacity as Inspector-Superior of the Civil Engineers, had gone to Tripoli in December 1911 for the construction of the port. The drafting of the plan for the port area of Tripoli was a propitious occasion for him to consolidate his fiduciary relationship with the Almagià firm, which a few years later carried out Luigi Luiggi's plans for the port of Alexandria in Egypt. In Egypt, the firm was based in Alexandria and Cairo.

The company's experience in the port sector laid the basis for its activity at the service of the Suez Canal Company for the construction of the extension of the west dam of Port Said (1911 - 1915), and later for works at Port Ibrahim (1928 - 1930) and Suez (1935 - 1939)¹². The references offered by the Almagià firm in Egypt, combined with the level of expertise achieved and accompanied by the availability of means and resources, increased its reliability and facilitated its being permitted to study the plans for the construction of the diplomatic mission's Cairo seat. On 21 May 1924, the firm was requested to submit a rough estimate for the construction of a villa of about 500 square metres on each level, consisting of a raised ground floor, a main floor, a first floor with a terrace, an attic floor with laundry and services, a pavilion for the concierge and garage, a garden and sewers. The project was estimated at around 10,000 Egyptian pounds.

In the same month, the Cairo entrepreneur **Francesco Garozzo & Sons** was consulted for an estimate for the seat of the Legation. Just like the Almagià company, the Garozzo firm – which was very close to the Egyptian milieu and had developed in the building environment of the host country – could boast a long-standing building tradition in partnership with the most accredited local professionals. Among the pioneers of Italian entrepreneurship was the firm's founder, Giuseppe Garozzo (1847 - 1903), originally from Catania, who had emigrated to Alexandria in Egypt as a master mason in 1862, in the aftermath of the unification of Italy. Hired by the local Italian Workers' Society, he served on the construction sites of the palaces and stables of Ismail Pasha (1863 - 1879). In 1874, the daring entrepreneur founded a building company that *secured* the commission to work on the Giza Palace. Giuseppe Garozzo partnered with another Italian professional, the Neapolitan architect Nicola Marciano, who specialized in the concessions of the *Hennebique* reinforced concrete technological system. This partnership won them several commissions both in Alexandria and Cairo, especially in hotel construction. In 1896 Francesco Zaffrani, an expert in hydraulic works¹³, entered into partnership with Giuseppe Garozzo's firm. The Garozzo & Zaffrani company won the tender for the works on the dome of the Egyptian Antiquities Museum in Cairo (1897 - 1902), based on a project by the French architect Marcel Dourgnon (1858 - 1911). This coveted commission provided an opportunity for a sort of revenge for the Italian professionals, who had been excluded from the planning stages¹⁴. From 1901, Garozzo's eldest sons Francesco and Filippo, who had already been working in the construction field, entered their father's firm. It was only in 1903, on the death of the founder, that the management of the family business was transferred to the eldest sons, who were joined by members of the younger generation. The pride of this enterprise, epitomising over half a century of history of

Italian entrepreneurship in Egypt, was the building of the Umberto I Hospital in Cairo (1901 - 1903), the Italian schools in the *Bulaq* neighbourhood in Cairo, designed by Tullio Tiburzio Parvis (1906), the seat of *Assicurazioni Generali*, designed by Antonio Lasciac in 1911, the Regina Elena primary school in the Bulaq neighbourhood, designed by Paolo Caccia Dominioni (1925), and the seat of the National Bank, designed by Marco Olivetti (1926 - 1927)¹⁵.

Work opportunities gave rise to intricate contract engagement relationships between professionals and local businesses, fuelling the competition for the construction of the diplomatic seat in Cairo even within the more restricted “protectionist” sphere of the Italian community in Cairo. On 23 May 1924, Francesco Garozzo submitted his survey for the *ex novo* construction of the Royal Legation.

The design of the villa consisted of three levels, including a raised basement with a separate entrance for the Chancery, a raised floor at about two and a half metres above the garden level with three reception rooms of 80 square metres each, a dining room for twenty-four people, and two study rooms for the Minister and the secretary.



Garozzo enterprise, Villa Mustacchi.

The building also included a smoking room and a waiting room, an entrance hall, a grand staircase, offices and annexes on the mezzanine floor. The most spacious rooms were to be located on this level. On the other hand, besides the Ambassador's apartment, the upper floor was intended to house the necessary rooms and services to meet the lodging requirements of the diplomatic personnel. The cost of the building was to be set in keeping with the intended use of the building, which did not warrant sumptuous decorations and materials, but still had to be noble, decorous and harmonious. As materials for the finishings, Francesco Garozzo selected marble and wood – considered to have a good, decorative look – for the flooring, and high-quality plaster for the walls.

The required size for the plot of land was estimated at around 2,000 square metres, while the duration of the work was reckoned at around eight months, in order to ensure perfect workmanship of execution. The cost was expected to be in the region of twenty thousand Italian lire. The project submitted by Garozzo envisaged a building in the Eclectic style, in an attempt to ride a trend of taste that, having seen its maximum expression at the end of the 19th century, still contended for artistic pre-eminence with the Renaissance revival style among the Egyptian elites. The plan of the building meant to house the Legation appears to closely follow the design of G. Mustacchi's villa in Cairo.

On 9 May 1925, while the firm was busy building the primary school in the Bulaq neighbourhood, Garozzo submitted to Florestano Di Fausto an update of the tender specifications dated 9 April 1925, which stated the then common prices for construction works in Cairo.

The architect – a stranger to the Cairo context, but well-informed all the same – needed reliable data to be able to make a realistic estimate of the works for the new building. The list of specifications drawn up by Garozzo included a separate description of masonry techniques that demonstrated a profound knowledge of local building practices, knowledge derived from a long-standing relationship with the entrepreneurial reality of the place.

In fact, the Italian entrepreneurs assimilated the secrets of local building craftsmanship that had been handed down through the centuries. Practice and technology, on the other hand, were the areas in which they demonstrated their ability to contribute with their know-how about the modern techniques of reinforced concrete, while nevertheless closely collaborating with local labourers.

The specifications drawn up by the Garozzo firm called for 'Cairo Vecchia' limestone¹⁶ with *talatat* cut¹⁷ for the elevation and foundation walls, while for the foundations the plan was to create conglomerate wells and '*nemella*' (slab)¹⁸ partitions in reinforced concrete¹⁹. For the water-proofing of the construction systems, the company planned to utilise red stone chips (*homrah*)²⁰ combined with hydraulic mortar of lime and sand.

Architecture became a reasoned experience, which captured the whole of the socio-cultural characteristics of the environment of which it was part. Practical and anthropological aspects merged with a pragmatism informed by the latest building technologies and their skilful implementation. Mastering the raw materials and suitable manpower were the core skills of the Garozzo company. The involvement of other firms, non-Italian but still appreciated by the Ministry, is

demonstrated by the specifications provided in April 1925 by **Walter Stross**, an Austrian engineer of Jewish origin (1882 - 1937)²¹, and drawn up on the occasion of the construction of an *immeuble de rapport* for Emile David Adès. Commissioned by this influential trader of Jewish-Syrian origin, the financial transaction was evidently considered safe and competitive in the Cairo building scene, because it was promoted to increase the real estate assets of a lively protagonist of the economic processes of the Egyptian capital, due to the variety and the articulation of his business, which relied on the expertise of Marco Olivetti, a Turin architect of Jewish origin. The list of estimated prices for the construction of the building was the subject of a reliable evaluation, based on a direct survey of the building market. In the description of the specifications for this property, drawn up by Stross, we can easily trace the construction practice which inspired the correct methodological approach to the use of materials and technology, which made it possible for the construction site of the new diplomatic seat to function affordably. Walter Stross, who owned a construction company operating in Egypt and Palestine, was initially accredited in the Alexandrian building sector for his patented concrete and iron barges to transport salt²².

In 1924, the architect Paolo Caccia Dominioni joined forces with the engineer Walter Stross to launch a construction company²³; the partnership would also extend to the Turkish area for the construction of their Ankara seat. Their technical expertise in the use of reinforced concrete emerges from the description of the building specifications, where it is widely used both for the structural parts and for decorative aspects such as the perimeter frame anchored to the shelf of the terrace, for the architraves, for the ribs, secondary beams and floors, and for the stair cage. The materials used draw on local tradition: Massarah style red concrete tiles²⁴ and stony concrete (*homrah*) floors.

The use of *factice*²⁵ (artificial hydraulic lime stratification) for the façade and cornices replaced natural stone cladding due to cost effectiveness.

The construction of the Italian diplomatic seat, which would probably be built on the bank of the Nile, required a type of foundation suitable for the loose and crumbly nature of the soil in such a location. Jules Suria, the entrepreneur to whom the Italian Government turned, and whose credentials are not fully known, envisaged utilizing Strauss-type differentiated poles. Due to the consistency of the soil, which is more sandy than clayey, and in order to avoid the possibility of infiltration by capillarity, the foundations would extend as deep as necessary to rule out the risk of subsidence. On June 12, 1924, **Jules Suria** submitted two kinds of plans. One project involved the use of the best available limestone, with cement mortar for the piers and pillars and cladding in red Sornaga tiles²⁶. The second project developed by Suria, on the other hand, proposed a type of mixed structure: limestone for the ground floor; exposed silico-limestone bricks on the first floor; reinforced concrete ribs for slabs, window jambs, columns and lintels; steel mesh vaults. Reinforced concrete ribs were also envisaged under all the floors, to further bind the building structure. The ceilings would generally be built as caisson ceilings. For his specifications, Jules Suria strictly adhered to municipal prescriptions, drawing up an estimate equal to 17,190 Egyptian pounds.

The emancipation of European architecture replaced the solutions adopted by the Fatimid or Mamluk Arab tradition for domestic architecture, according to which *muqarnas* vaults²⁷ – vari-

ously painted wooden coffered ceilings – wrapped up the formal rooms. The new building proposed for the seat of the Italian Legation in Cairo also adopted these standards, thus breaking with tradition.

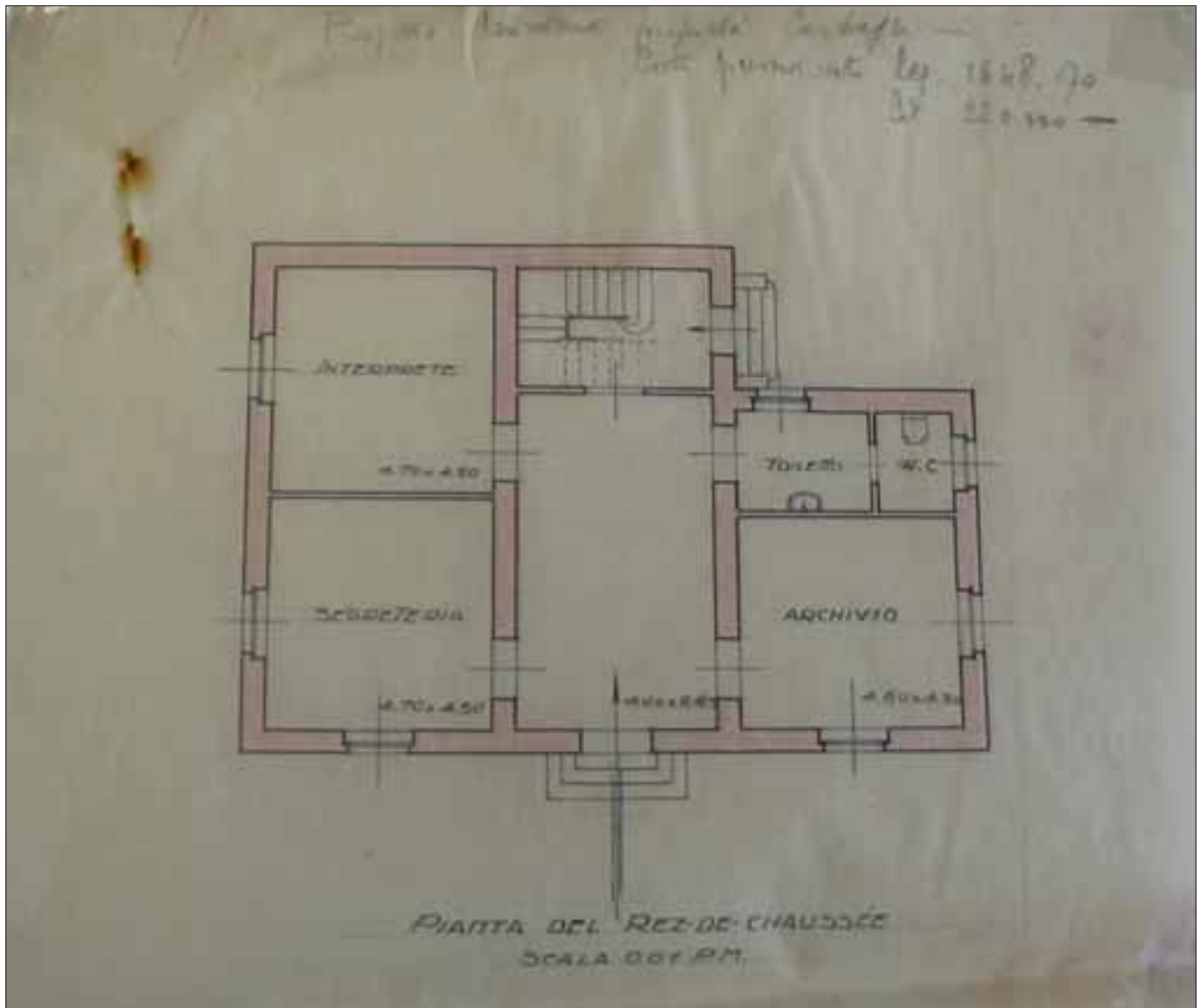
The specifications drawn up by the entrepreneurs invited to tender by the Italian Government are very interesting for the purpose of understanding the technical skills in use. They highlighted the activity of study and analysis that the Technical Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was capable of absorbing from the context, an emanation of the *genius loci* in which it operated. In an area of the African continent whose traditions, customs and habits appeared distant from European building practice due to climatic and hydro-geographical conditions, the architectural model that the Italian Foreign Ministry was preparing to adopt turned out to be the result of informed and thoughtful choices. Experimentation and pragmatism went hand in hand in a self-aware, dialectical process that accurately evaluated the quality of the plans for the construction of state-owned buildings. Florestano Di Fausto, a differently trained architect who was new to Egyptian building practice, readily assimilated its disciplinary aspects, in collaboration with local technicians. He took part in the negotiations to purchase land and buildings, which were entrusted to the best professionals.

The early negotiation steps to select a stately building

Stately buildings located in prestigious residential areas became the subject of speculation by Italian professionals, under mandate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

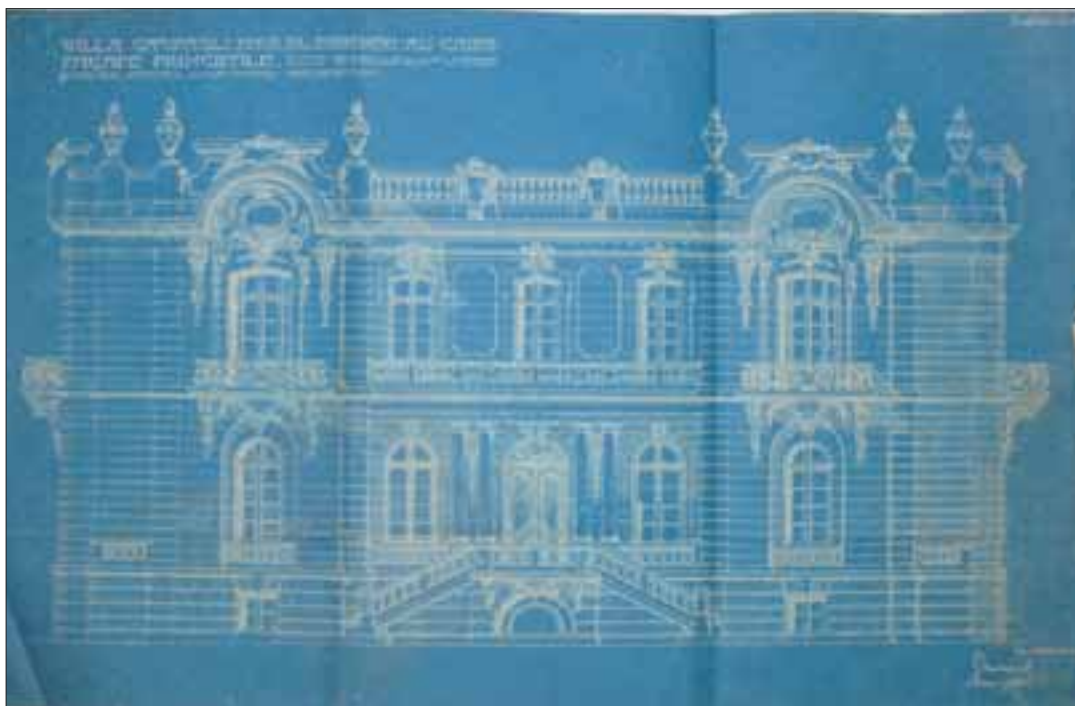


Domenico Limongelli, *Villa Nagib Pasha (now the Indonesian Embassy in Cairo) in Garden City*, archive photo.

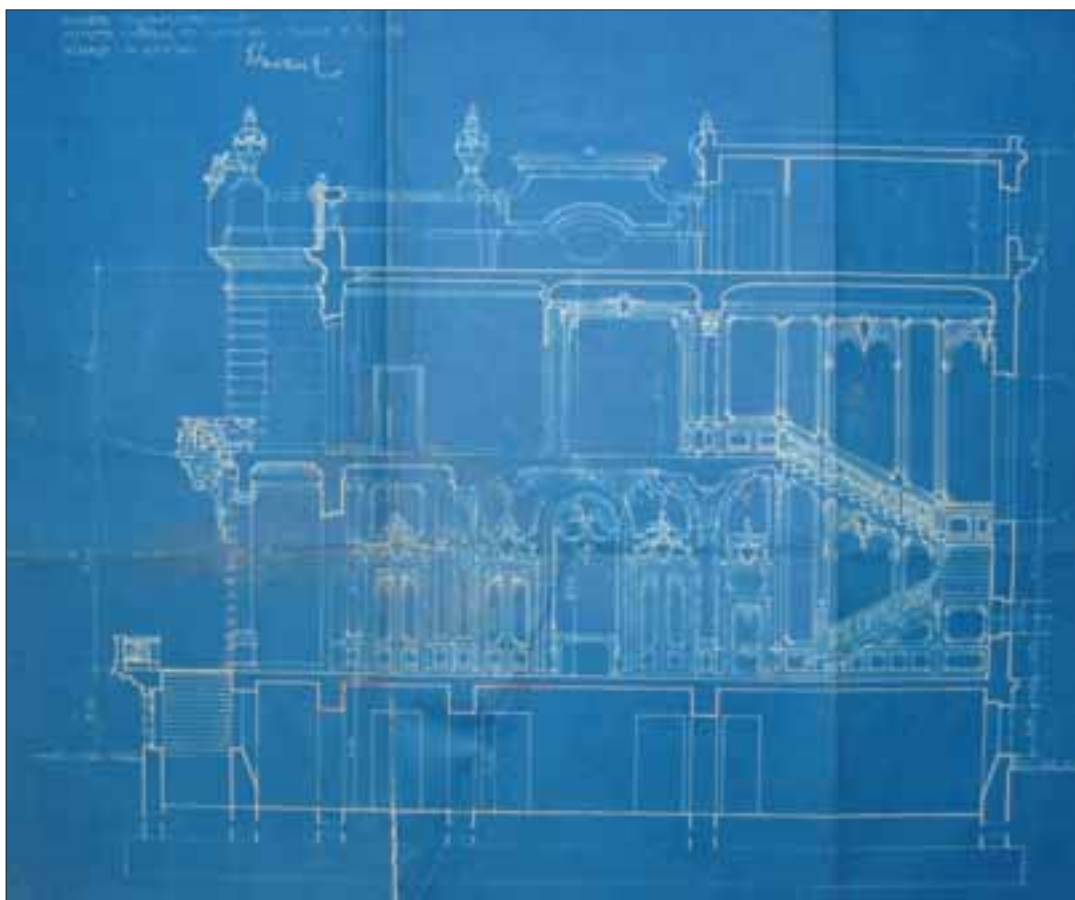


Unrealized design of the Casdagli property Chancery, plan of the rez de chaussée (ASDMAE).

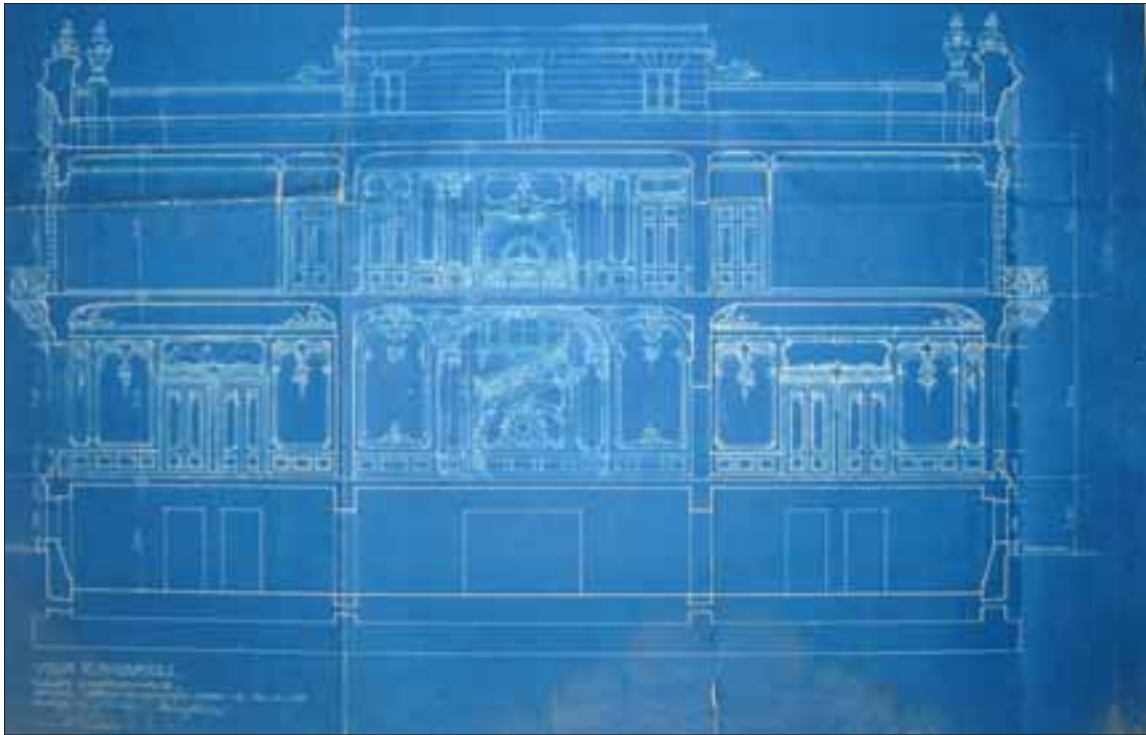
Beside plans for new construction of the Cairo seat, the option of purchasing some buildings located in upmarket residential areas was also taken into consideration. The villa built in 1922 for His Eminence Nagib Pasha, on a project by the engineer Limongelli, at no. 151²⁸, Garden City, was considered for purchase. The negotiation contemplated a verbal option until 10 June 1925, subject to Mme. Nagib securing land for new construction. Having cost about 23,000 Egyptian pounds for a total area of about 2,630 square metres, with a usable surface of 525 square metres plus the veranda, the villa was proposed for sale at 30,000 Egyptian pounds for a total volume of 6500 cubic metres. The additional expenses to adapt the building for use as Chancery, and the transaction costs, would bring the cost up to approximately 4,000,000 Italian lire. The price of the building turned out not to be particularly favourable, after taking into account the additional costs for the construction of the Chancery.



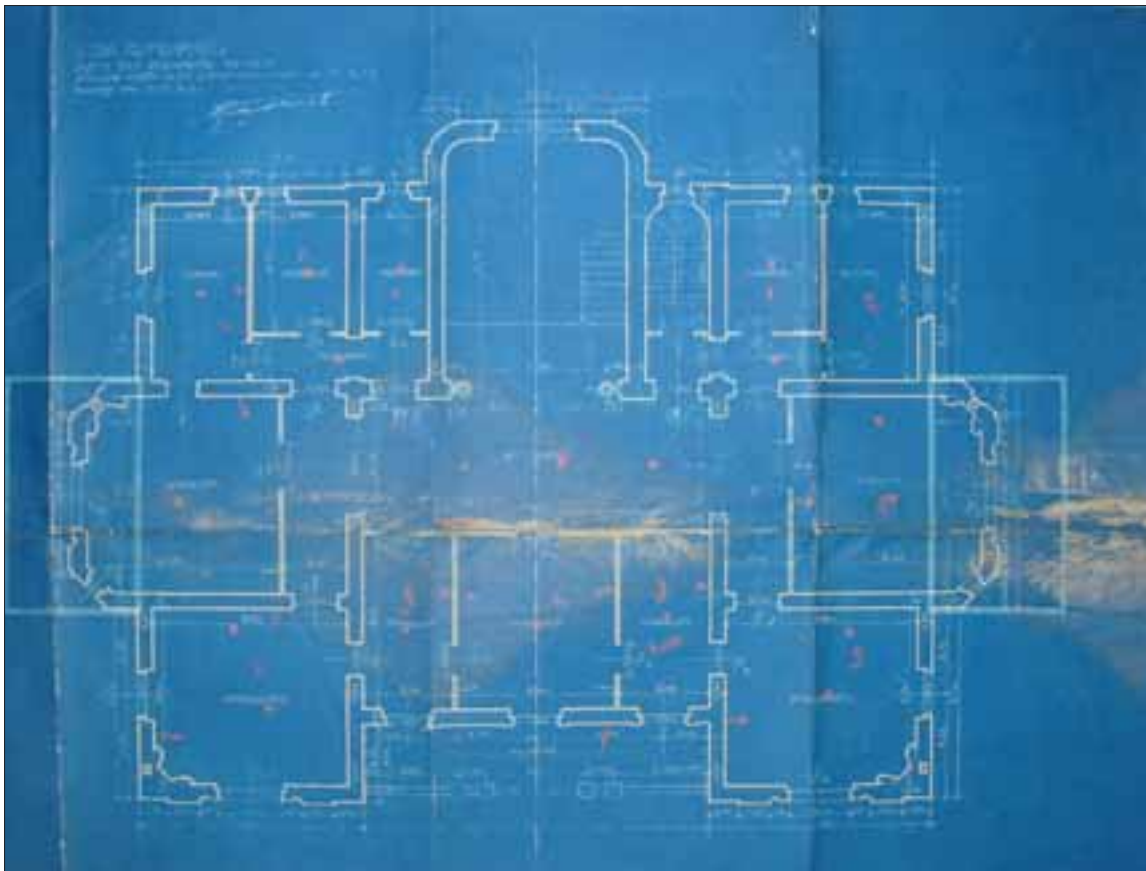
Villa Casdagli, Qasr El-Doubara in Cairo, main façade, Cattai & Matasek atelier (ASDMAE).



Villa Casdagli, Qasr El-Doubara in Cairo, cross section, Cattai & Matasek atelier (ASDMAE).



Villa Casdagli, Qasr El-Doubara in Cairo, longitudinal section, Cattai & Matasek atelier (ASDMAE).



Villa Casdagli, Qasr El-Doubara in Cairo, first floor plan, Cattai & Matasek atelier (ASDMAE).

With its smooth ashlar cladding, the balustrade of the crowning, and the coupled columns supporting the balcony on the main floor, the front of the building was conceived by the Italian designer in the Classicist style. However, this aspect of the building would not fully express the identity values that the architecture of the Italian diplomatic corps aimed for in an expanding city that increasingly assumed the appearance of a multifaceted and boundless metropolis.

The price tag attributed to the Nagib Pasha property was adopted as a benchmark to determine the cost of a new building, based on the 1926 construction costs as listed by the Almagià firm, at the exchange rate for Egyptian currency²⁹.

Another real estate negotiation was among the various options that were evaluated by the Italian Government. In April 1926, the stately building belonging to the wealthy entrepreneur Emanuel Casdagli in Qasr El-Doubara³⁰ came up for sale. Designed by the Cattau & Matasek atelier for a family of wealthy Georgian-Caucasian merchants, the villa had a fine appearance and elegant finishes, and was surrounded by a large garden.

Built around 1910, the two-storey building was located in an elegant residential district, home to important Khedival palaces. The main façade, with a central portico between two side wings, was in the French Rococo style. The interiors were sumptuous and the decorative elements of the halls – including an exquisite Byzantine reception room – gave the building a very respectable appearance³¹. However, the Chancery offices would need to be set up outside the house, in a pavilion the plan of which was designed for that purpose by Marco Olivetti (1881 - 1949), an architect belonging to a wealthy family of Jewish bankers, who worked with the Cattau & Matasek atelier. The construction of the Chancery pavilion was expected to cost about 1,650,000 Egyptian pounds. The building techniques indicated in the tender specifications consisted of the use of concrete for the foundations, reinforced concrete for the beams, and stone and brick masonry.

The purchase did not materialise for the Italian Government. Some time later, the villa became home to the American Embassy.

In order to come up with an initial purchase price offer for the Casdagli building, its appraised value was compared with the value attributed to the villa in Qasr El-Ayni rented by the Legation from El-Toayar, the floor surface and volumes of which were calculated.

The computation was required to establish the possible cost effectiveness of building the diplomatic seat from scratch, based on a volume of 12,000 cubic metres, which was more than what was being planned at the same time for the Washington seat. In the light of scrupulous market surveys, a preliminary estimate of costs for the building of the Italian Legation in Cairo would be around 4 or 5 million Italian lire, for a total volume of 12,000 cubic metres on an area of 2,250 square metres.

Florestano Di Fausto came to the conclusion that the possible alternatives to building from scratch would be purchasing either the aforementioned Nagib Pasha villa or Yousrey Pasha villa located in Dar El-Niaba³². For either property, the estimated price was roughly the same, even though for the Yousrey Pasha villa there appeared to be favourable negotiating margins offered by Schumacher, an engineer involved in the business interests of the owner's brother, Yousrey Bey³³.

The decision to opt for erecting new premises, and the crux of purchasing the best building land

In assessing the possibilities in Cairo, Florestano di Fausto did not fail to evaluate, with extreme meticulousness, the opportunity to purchase building land. The knowledge of the place, resulting from the collaboration between the Technical Office and professionals close to the Italian community recruited by the diplomatic corps, allowed the best approach to the real estate market. Beyond the business interests and the urban innovations that were heavily impacted by municipal regulations, the subdivision of the land in the new, expanding Cairo neighbourhoods represented an ever-changing scene. Environmental factors such as healthiness, hygrometric consistency, proximity to the banks of the Nile – combined with infrastructural factors and economic flows – determined the value of the land and ensured the stability of the buildings to be erected.

To answer these questions, a competent connoisseur of the local business dynamics and real estate market was consulted: the engineer Limongelli provided an expert opinion by listing the low areas of Cairo where the subsoil was subject to infiltration. In his opinion, the area of

Ghezira, including Qasr El-Doubara and Garden City, were very suitable for basement space, unlike the Ismailiyya neighbourhood. Limongelli's assessment was derived from the survey of the annual measurements of the Nile water levels provided by the Nilometer on Rawdah, up to 1923. In fact, the hydraulic balance of the Nile became a decisive factor to test the quality of the land and the resulting commercial value of the building areas. The stability of the riverbed was constantly monitored by the Egyptian Government, which undertook reclamation works and sand fillings along the banks of the river.

In August 1924, Domenico Limongelli was commissioned to draft, on behalf of the Foreign Ministry, an appraisal for the purchase of a plot of land owned by *Commendatore* Fatica, a lawyer, and located on the left bank of the Nile at the English Bridge in Giza, near Bahr El-Aama. It was a plot included in a general development plan for the land located east of the Nile dam. The Egyptian



Plan du Caire, Travaux publics, 1902 - Detail including the island of Rawdah. The survey illustrates the situation prior to the Garden City development plan.

Government had put up for public auction the entire stretch of land between the English Bridge and the Giza pumps, at the price of 35 piastres per square metre. The appraisal included in-depth descriptive details that demonstrated the consistency of the data and the careful analysis of the state of the site to predict any potential threats due to the action of the Nile. The engineer, who benefited from the experience he had gained at building sites, had acquired practical knowledge of the quality of the soils subject to new urbanization, and especially of the soils close to the river banks. Furthermore, his association with business circles and his professional qualification to practice as an expert consultant provided him with the necessary tools to ascertain the property rights and legitimate origin of the real estate, and guarantee the full enjoyment of the asset, in case of purchase. The plots of land that he appraised and documented came from a subdivision into lots, arranged by the few buyers of the whole property. At the peak of the 1906 - 1907 real estate speculation³⁴, the price of land hit 500-600 piastres per square metre, due to the increase in market value. Once the situation settled after the crisis, the market went back to normal. The plot in question was marked as no. 2, from the parcels of E. Cattau & Sons & Co., the leading bankers in Egypt³⁵. The land was proposed to the Italian Legation because of the distinctive position of the site, located inside the area characterised by the infrastructural plan, which included the Rond Point road junction in front of the elegant English Bridge that connected the island of Ghezira to the mainland.

The area was not subject to erosion or carryovers, even though it did not match the land at Abbassiyya in terms of altitude and dryness of the soil. The Italian Government declined the purchase, despite the environmental conditions being convenient with regards to the elevation above the Nile level, the healthiness, and the urban development, and the price – estimated at around 150 Egyptian piastres per square metre – being encouraging. The buildable areas of Cairo that most interested the Government were concentrated around Giza, for they were healthier than those of Ghezira and better exposed than those of Garden City. However, due to economic factors, the areas of the latter were more competitive. Limongelli himself had scouted and suggested a piece of land of about 3,000 square metres in Garden City at no. 32, which belonged to Prince Ahmed Seifeddin's Cairo *Daira* (privy administrative district) and whose *Nazir* (intendant) was H.E. Mohamed Said Pasha (1863 - 1928), the then Egyptian Minister of Education (1910 - 1914). Later, the *Daira* reserved the grounds to erect three of the neighbourhood's most famous apartment structures, known as the Seiffedin buildings³⁶.

Based on the inspections carried out by the engineer Palazzo³⁷, the assistant-in-charge at the Technical Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the data provided by him, Florestano Di Fausto – who diligently supervised the purchase and sale operations – weighed the cost effectiveness of purchasing land in the different districts of Giza, Ghezira, and Garden City. Starting from 1924, the Garden City area was the subject of many negotiations by the Italian diplomatic corps.

At the time of Mohamed Ali, the area had been reclaimed from the marshes, with vast expanses of land transformed into luxuriant orchards. The royal domains of Qasr El-Aaly, with the Palace of Khedive Ismail's mother and two ancient buildings owned by Ibrahim Pasha, became

the object of financial speculation by foreign groups. The hereditary pre-emption rights over the assets were claimed and exercised by members of the royal family³⁸. The Wali of Egypt, Prince Ahmed Kamal Rifaat (1857 - 1907), a descendant by the paternal line, redeemed the property of about 28 hectares³⁹. The appreciation of the site, due to the construction of new connecting bridges over the Nile, increased its value and produced a great profit for the owner.

From an urban planning perspective, the development of Garden City promoted by the *Nile Land & Agricultural Company*⁴⁰, envisaged a residential district unique for the distinctiveness of its design, inspired by organic forms, with blocks marked by curved arches. It was an unprecedented vegetable *forma urbis*, composed of green dunes reclaimed from the marshy area.

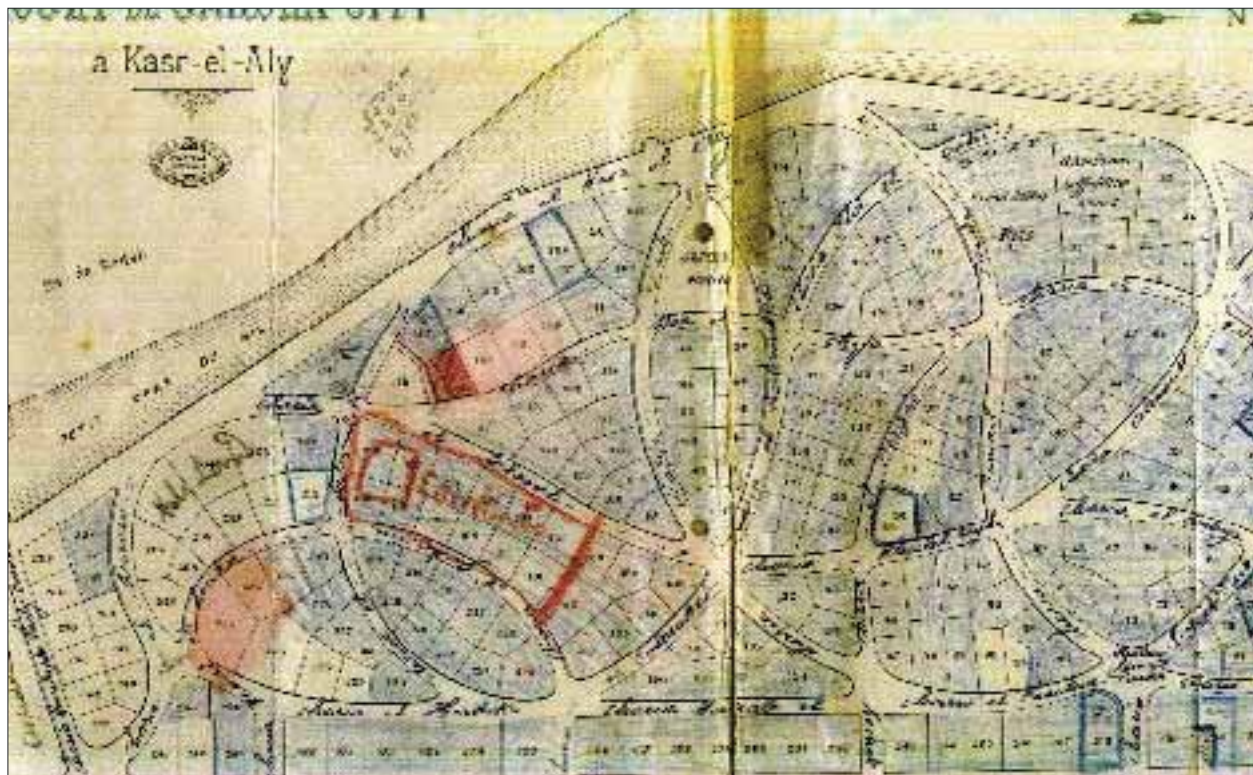
Whereas Domenico Limongelli had suggested the lot belonging to Daira Saeffedin, Di Fausto himself – on the recommendation of local brokers – had taken into consideration the Garden City area, which had been preferred over the Giza and Ghezira areas. An in-depth evaluation was carried out regarding Garden City plot no. 201, estimated at 15,000 Egyptian pounds with option rights until 10 June 1925, and plot no. 159, of about 1600 square metres, valued at 6 Egyptian pounds and 50 piastres per square metre, with option rights until May 1925, through an agent named Henri Mohlo, Assistant Director of the *Nile Land & Agricultural Company*. Under evaluation were also lots no. 26 and no. 27, estimated at 15,000 Egyptian pounds, which were free from purchase options. They consisted of 2,400 square metres and cost about 625 piastres per square metre. The negotiation for lots no. 75 and no. 76, of about 1650 square metres, and priced at about 250 Egyptian pounds, had been conducted by Bahari Bey⁴¹ and by *Cavaliere* Luigi Corsi [Member of the Italian Parliament for the District of Cairo]. The survey into the purchase of land in Garden City also concerned plots no. 174 and no. 160, with the neighbouring no. 161, for which the owners intended to open negotiations to promote building speculations on their own initiative, ruling out any purchase proposal from the Italian Government. In the end, the negotiation focused on lot no. 201, on Qasr El-Aaly.

In May 1925, the architect Giacomo Loria was commissioned to carry out on behalf of the Italian Government the survey of the plot of land meant to house the new Legation building. The architect, who was born in Mansura in 1879 in a Jewish family originally from Livorno that arrived in Egypt at the time of Mohamed Ali, had served as a draftsman at the Municipality of Alexandria. A graduate of the Applied School of Engineers in Turin, Loria had established himself in the colony as a freelancer, winning the architectural competition launched in 1913 for the project of the Italian hospital in Hadra (Alexandria)⁴², among whose jurors was the architect Antonio Lasciac. The construction of the hospital complex, entrusted to the Almagià firm under the direction of Loria, began in May 1922. The good outcome of the building works, which ended in 1925, produced a wide echo in the Italian community and was well-received by the Italian authorities.

Having established himself as a trusted interlocutor for the Italian Government, in 1925 the architect was entrusted with negotiations with local entrepreneurs to contract out the seat of the Cairo Legation. The diplomat Carlo Caccia Dominioni faced difficulties in dealing with the 'file' on the new seat of the Legation, claiming 'to have done everything possible to achieve an accept-

able financial outcome, despite the immense difficulties and pitfalls that were set against him.’ The Italian Government had to navigate an intricate jumble of insidious speculative activities, whereby the ‘*affaire*’ for the purchase of land or real estate could easily prove to be a scam. As permanent assistant to the works, Giacomo Loria assisted Cesare Palazzo, the engineer sent to Cairo by the Ministry with the commitment to monitor operations regarding payment conditions, to report on the progress of the works to the C.A.S.E. Office, and also to carry out inspections in the building site of the boys’ school in Mansoura (1928), a project entrusted to Florestano di Fausto. Later, the architect Paolo Caccia Dominioni took over from Giacomo Loria.

In a nutshell, we can say that the Italian diplomats conducted the research for the site of the Cairo seat with the utmost commitment and the utmost caution, with the aim of keeping Italy’s prestige high. In scouting real estate among the properties available, the diplomats focused on highly qualified circles among the Cairo elite. Despite a scarcity of means, the search for building plots concentrated on the most prestigious residential districts. The plans developed by the best representatives of Italian professionalism were based on valid building models influenced by the prevalent taste in the Egyptian capital, leaning towards Eclectic or Academic architecture. The progress of the Italian search for a building for the new Legation in Cairo followed the same methodological coherence, in an effort to come up with a building program that was more than just a program for building.



Jose Lamba, *Parcelling plan for Garden City in Cairo, 1905* (in Samir Raafat, *Garden City - A Retrospective. Part I*, 6 August 1998). Source: www.egy.com.



Map of Cairo, Detail of Garden City in front of the island of Rawdah, showing the land purchased for the new Italian seat. The survey illustrates the existing development of the district with the respective partial settlements.

NOTES

¹ The research used in this paper is largely based on a systematic photographic campaign (2002-2006) and a survey of the archival collections stored in the Diplomatic Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ASDMAE). This research resulted in a PhD Thesis in History of Architecture and Urban Planning (XVI Cycle), organised by the Department of History of Architecture and Urban Planning of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Florence, with the title, *Florestano Di Fausto, Architect for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Drawings Collection of the Historical Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, discussed in 2006 (supervisor Ezio Godoli), and also resulted in other, subsequent publications.

² L. A. Balboni, *The Italians in the Egyptian civilization of the 12th century*, 1906. See the anastatic reprint promoted by Ambassador Pacifico in 2010.

³ The recommended supplier was Ghilardi of Bergamo, an award-winning manufacturer of water-repellent tiles for terracotta or concrete floors or mosaic terrazzo tiles.

⁴ C. Sanguineti, entry on Giuseppe Castellucci, in *Guida agli archivi di architetti e ingegneri del Novecento in Toscana*, edited by Elisabetta Insabato, C. Ghelli, Edifir, Florence, 2007, pp. 113-119.

⁵ Marco Capponi, *A political and Religious Decision: the new Apostolic Delegates' Residence in Cairo by the architect Giuseppe Castellucci (1923 - 1927)*, in *Italian Architectural and Artistic Heritage in Egypt*, edited by Milva Giacomelli, Ezio Godoli and Ulisse Tramonti, Effigi, Arcidosso (Gr), 2017, pp. 183-198.

⁶ The plot where the building was erected is identified with no.151 (next to the only area planned as public park).

⁷ Maria Concetta Migliaccio, *ad vocem, Architetti e Ingegneri italiani dal Levante al Magreb*, edited by Ezio Godoli and Milva Giacomelli, Maschietto editore, Florence, 2005, p. 268.

⁸ The reasons behind the plan are unclear. Probably it was a design meant for the consular seat in Cairo, given the need to provide the Italian community with adequate premises, and later proposed to host the new Italian Legation in Cairo.

⁹ See Patrizia Piacentini, *Giuseppe Parvis "il re degli ebanisti, l'ebanista dei Re": una famiglia di "designers" italiani di successo in Egitto*, 2017.

¹⁰ Paola Ricco, *Applied Arts and Entrepreneurship. The Story of Giuseppe Parvis*, pp. 31- 47, in *Italian Architectural and Artistic Heritage in Egypt*, curated by Ezio Godoli, Milva Giacomelli, Ulisse Tramonti, Effegi, Arcidosso (Gr), 2017.

¹¹ Milva Giacomelli, *Luigi Luigi's projects for Tripoli*, in E. Godoli - A. Saadaoui, *Architectes, ingénieurs, entrepreneurs et artistes décorateurs italiens au Magreb / Italian architects, engineers, contractors and decorating artists in the Maghreb*, ETS, Pisa 2019, pp. 250-267.

¹² *Construire au-delà de la Méditerranée*, sous la direction de Claudine Piaton, Ezio Godoli et David Peyceré, introduction par Mercedes Volait, Publications de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art, Editions Honoré Clair, 2012.

¹³ *Construire au-delà de la Méditerranée*, sous la direction de Claudine Piaton, op. cit.

¹⁴ On the occasion of the competition for the project of the Egyptian Antiquities Museum, announced in 1894, the most prominent architect in Palermo and exponent of the Liberty style, Ernesto Basile (1857 - 1932), was designated to represent Italy among the members of the jury. The final verdict was issued very hastily, with just three meetings and without Basile, who arrived late in Cairo. The choice, that discriminated against the Italian entrants, favoured the French designers.

¹⁵ *Construire au-delà de la Méditerranée*, sous la direction de Claudine Piaton, op. cit.

¹⁶ Sedimentary rock from the area of Al-Fustat, the primitive urban centre of the Fatimid period, described by travellers at the end of the 19th century as an arid place formed by mounds of soil and *grisâtre* dunes (see Lucien Trotignon, *En Égypte: notes de voyage*, 1890, p. 26). The stability of the building was ensured by placing silico-limestone bricks at the salient and recessed corners (in the case of a curtain wall, or one with non-coplanar overhangs) and for the shoulders (piers) of the openings, connected with lime and sand mortar, in the proportions of one part of lime and two of sand, with the addition of first-quality cement and hydraulic mortar.

¹⁷ The term *talatat*, of Arab origin, refers to a block of sandstone approximately three spans in size: it measures one Egyptian cubit in length and approximately half a cubit in width and depth, equalling 50x25x22 cm. See Arnold Dieter, *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Egyptian Architecture*, I. B. Tauris, 2003. The ancient building tradition, dating back to the Eighth Dynasty of Egypt, at the time of Akhenaten, was used for the construction of the city of Amarna found with archaeological excavations. See Anna K. Hodgkinson, *Technology and Urbanism in Late Bronze Age Egypt*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018.

¹⁸ *Nuovo dizionario universale tecnologico o di arti e mestieri*, volume XIII, Giuseppe Antonelli editore, Venezia, 1834.

¹⁹ The mechanical compression of the soil ensured a solid reinforcement of the foundations in clayey terrains.

²⁰ A characteristic way of processing the stone to reduce it to red chippings called *homrah*, also derived from the crushing of ceramics into a dusty compound. The technique derived from a Semitic tradition used since ancient times for the production of cisterns and vases; its rural preparation still afforded the same simple and surprising spectacle of remote days, crystallized in time. See J. Neil, B. A., *Biblical Illustrator Commentary, Isaiah- Malachi*, volume 3, edited by Joseph S. Exell, 1849.

²¹ See: Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon ÖBL 1815 - 1950, Bd. 13 (Lfg. 62, 2010), S. 424 f. Walter Stross (born in Bagni di Lucca, Italy, 5 September 1882; died in Bardia / Bardyah, Libya, 27 August 1937); the son of Adolph Stross, he belonged to a family of merchants of Czech origin with stores in Alexandria in Egypt and in Cairo.

²² *Schwimmkörper aus Eisenbeton*, (Reinforced concrete floats), Berlin, 1911.

²³ Cristina Pallini, Armando Scaramuzzi, Paolo Caccia Dominioni's work for the Italian Embassy in Ankara in 'Architecture beyond Europe', no. 12, 2017.

²⁴ Site on the bank of the Nile River, located in a southern suburb of Cairo in Helwan, traditionally active in the production of cement mortars.

²⁵ See Egypt Embassy Fund, envelope 232, year 1928. The stucco for "external architraves of windows and doors, cornices, and frames used correctly in Egypt, with little expense and a pleasant effect", is

employed by the engineer Paolo Caccia Dominioni when designing schools and the Italian House in Suez, in October 1928.

²⁶ The Sornaga industry reached levels of high specialization in the manufacture of marble and ceramic tiles and employed over a thousand workers in 1930 alone. Additionally, the Roman architect Mario Rossi (1897 – 1961), an assistant to Ernesto Verrucci, who arrived in Cairo in 1921, and later Chief Architect of the Wakfs Ministry in 1929, author of restoration works and designer of mosques, used it to customise interior decorations.

²⁷ Decorative and structural elements comprised of small niches in the shape of stalactites or honeycombs, present in domes, vaults or gateways. See Loredana Ficarelli, *Lo spazio domestico mediterraneo. Una casa per il Cairo*, Gangemi, 2015.

²⁸ Lot no. 151 corresponds to the internal area of Garden City in the shape of two arches intersecting at the top and bottom vertices (almond shaped), next to the only area intended for a public park.

²⁹ In 1926, one Egyptian pound was worth 123.30 Italian lire.

³⁰ Samir Raafat, *Cairo the glory years*, 2003, Harpocraters. See: Samir Raafat, *The former American Embassy in Egypt - Villa Casdagli*, Egyptian Mail, February 2, 1997.

³¹ Saleh Lamei, *The Restoration of the Villa Casdagli in Cairo, Egypt*, Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archeology & Heritage Studies, Vol. 1, No. 4 (2013), pp.

292-312, Published by Penn State University Press, 2013.

³² The ownership of the property is not easily identified. Saif Allah Yousrey (or Yousri) Pasha (1870 - 1949) was among the first Egyptian diplomats destined abroad, based on the royal decree of 24 September 1923. First posted to Berlin, Yousrey later held the post of Minister Plenipotentiary in Washington, where he presented his credentials on 22 January 1924. See *“L’Égypte contemporaine - Revue de la Société khedivale [puis de la Société Royale] d’économie politique, statistique, et de Législation”*, 1924.

³³ In the 1924 edition of the magazine *“L’Égypte contemporaine”*, the list of supporting members features the name of Soliman Yousry Bey as Minister of Justice.

³⁴ Mercedes Volait, *Architectes et architectures de l’Égypte moderne (1830 - 1950)*, Paris, Maisonnueve et Larose 2005, p. 204.

³⁵ The land was bought in 1912 for 43 Egyptian piastres and 175 pounds per square metre by Mrs. Adila Hanem, daughter of Haidar Pasha, finance Minister in 1879, wife of H.E. Saleh Pasha Yakan (Yeghen). A few days later it was sold to Mr Fatica, a lawyer, in exchange for a building overlooking El Saha and Abel Sebah streets in Cairo. The plot bordered Giuseppe Bey Mosseri’s property on the south.

³⁶ Samir Raafat, *Garden City: a Retrospective. Part 5*, 1 October 1998, www.egy.com.

³⁷ Cesare Palazzo (born in Pontestura, 20 November 1887), Royal Polytechnic of Turin, enrolled in the Register of Engineers in 1933. See *Albo dei Professionisti - Year XIX*.

³⁸ Samir Raafat, *Garden City: a Retrospective. Part 5*, October 1, 1998. www.egy.com.

³⁹ Mercedes Volait, *Architecte & Architectures de l’Égypte moderne*, Maisonnueve et Larose, Paris, p. 204.

⁴⁰ Owned by a group of Syrian-Levantine investors, including Charles Bacos, George Maksud (stockbroker on the Khedival stock exchange), and Frantz Sofio, who commissioned Lamba to design the new Garden City settlement in Cairo.

⁴¹ Aziz Bahari, banker, was the owner of a plot in Garden City, sold in 1916.

⁴² Meanwhile, on the recommendation of the Council of Ministers, the Italian Government had begun negotiations to build the Italian Hospital in Cairo and identified some lands on which to build it, including one plot located north of the island of Rawdah. The hospital was later built in the Abbassiyya neighbourhood, on the road to Heliopolis. See Cristina Pallini, *An Eclectict Architect at Work: Giacomo Alessandro Loria, in Italian Architectural and Artistic Heritage in Egypt*, Effigi, Arcidosso (Gr), 2017.

5. THE FINAL CHOICE: THE PALAZZINA ON THE NILE CORNICHE.

5.1 FROM IDEA TO PROJECT: SYNERGIES BETWEEN THE DESIGNER FLORESTANO DI FAUSTO AND THE MINISTERIAL COMMISSION.

The complex analysis of the real estate market and the financial evaluation, together with the need to develop an organic project for the seat of the Italian Delegation in Cairo, were the elements that determined the choice of opting for an architectural work *ex nihilo*, in Garden City. The search for an alternative to the rejected proposals to buy Villa Casdagli, Villa Nagib Pasha or the building owned by El-Toyar, took shape in the purchase of a plot of land in Garden City, overlooking the bank of the Nile. Among the many plots of land on the market, the one facing the island of Rawdah – almost triangular in shape – was selected.

The area of the land was around 2,750 square metres, enclosed in a fencing of 160 linear metres. Quite early on, it was clear that the new project should aspire to create a building suitable to provide an adequate political and institutional hub. Any other effort made in an alternative direction would represent a compromise not in line with the intentions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Map of the island of Rawdah with its surroundings, Frederik Ludvig Norden (1708 - 1742), *Travels in Egypt and Nubia*, London, 1757.

No stately building, among the ones under scrutiny, met the requirements of housing the seat of the Legation and the Chancery in a single building. Until 1930, the Legation of Italy in Cairo was located in a respectable-looking building in *Qasr El-Ayni* – but detached from its Chancery, located in El-Haras Street, due to the lack of space inside. Both buildings were not Italian State-owned property. The benchmark was no longer a stately mansion with respectable exteriors and large interiors. What prevailed was a long-lasting project, that would inaugurate a new relationship between building and urban morphology, between structural organicity and plastic narration. The Chancery and the seat of the Representation had to be part of a unitary project that would affirm its volumetric cohesion: each block that served a specific purpose should not be a neutral or independent fragment, but part of a single unit integrating distinct functions.

The new project was an opportunity to create an architecture that, on a typological level, responded to the needs of the community and lent itself well to the function of representation.

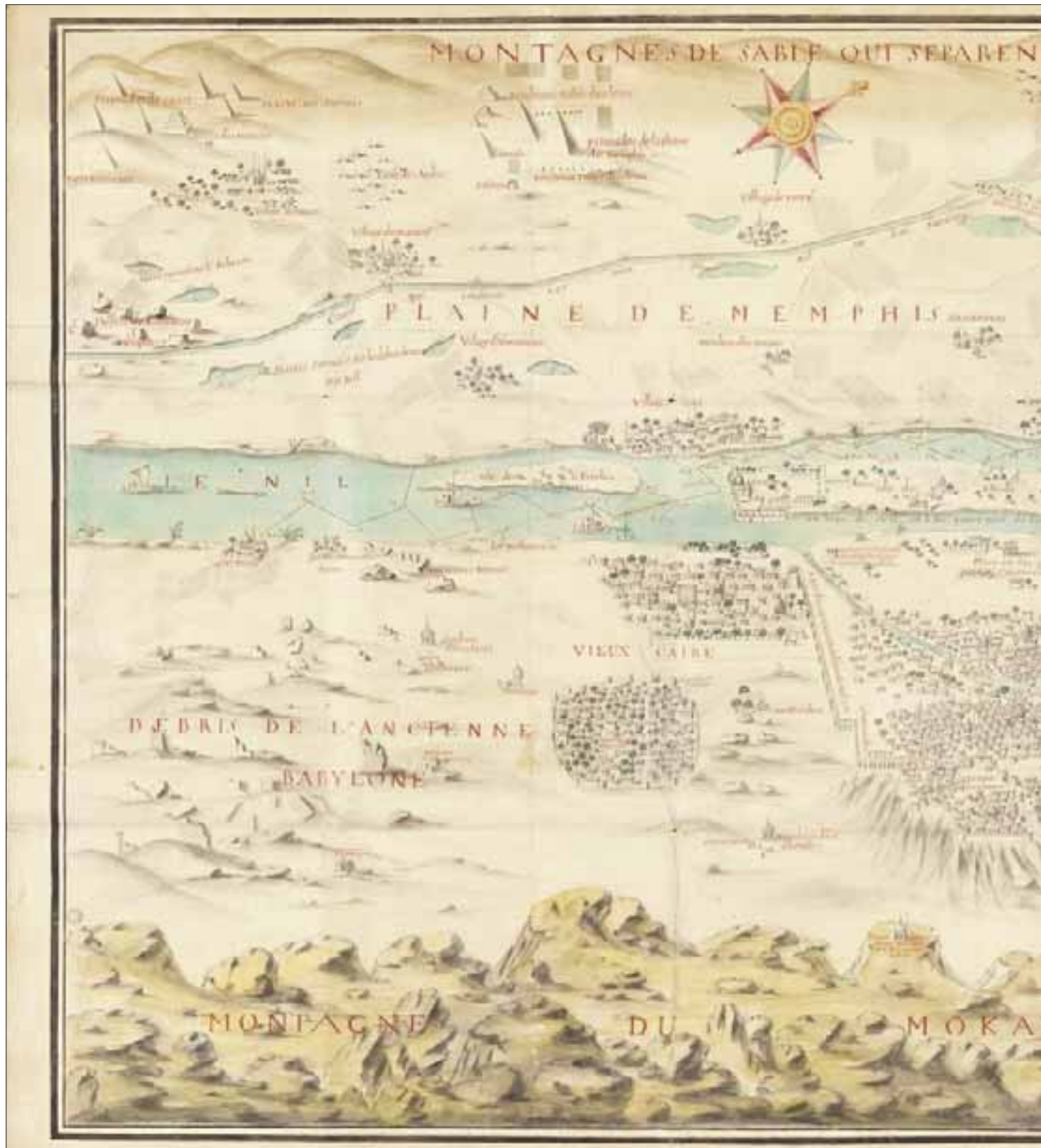
Visually speaking, instead, the building program aimed to obliterate any communicative characters of the architectural language that proposed flattened and differenti-

ated paths between eclectic tendencies and impersonal neo-Renaissance revivals, typical of the residential complex of the district. It was necessary to aim, first and foremost, to develop an architecture that would disengage itself from mannerisms, and communicate the abstract values of the Italian identity. On an urban scale, the new building site created a dialectic relationship with the pre-existing surroundings and with the river-related nature of the place, which was very suggestive. On a practical level, the construction would trigger a commercial impact, favouring the economy of the Italian colony, as well as strengthening the relationship between art and craftsmanship with the motherland.

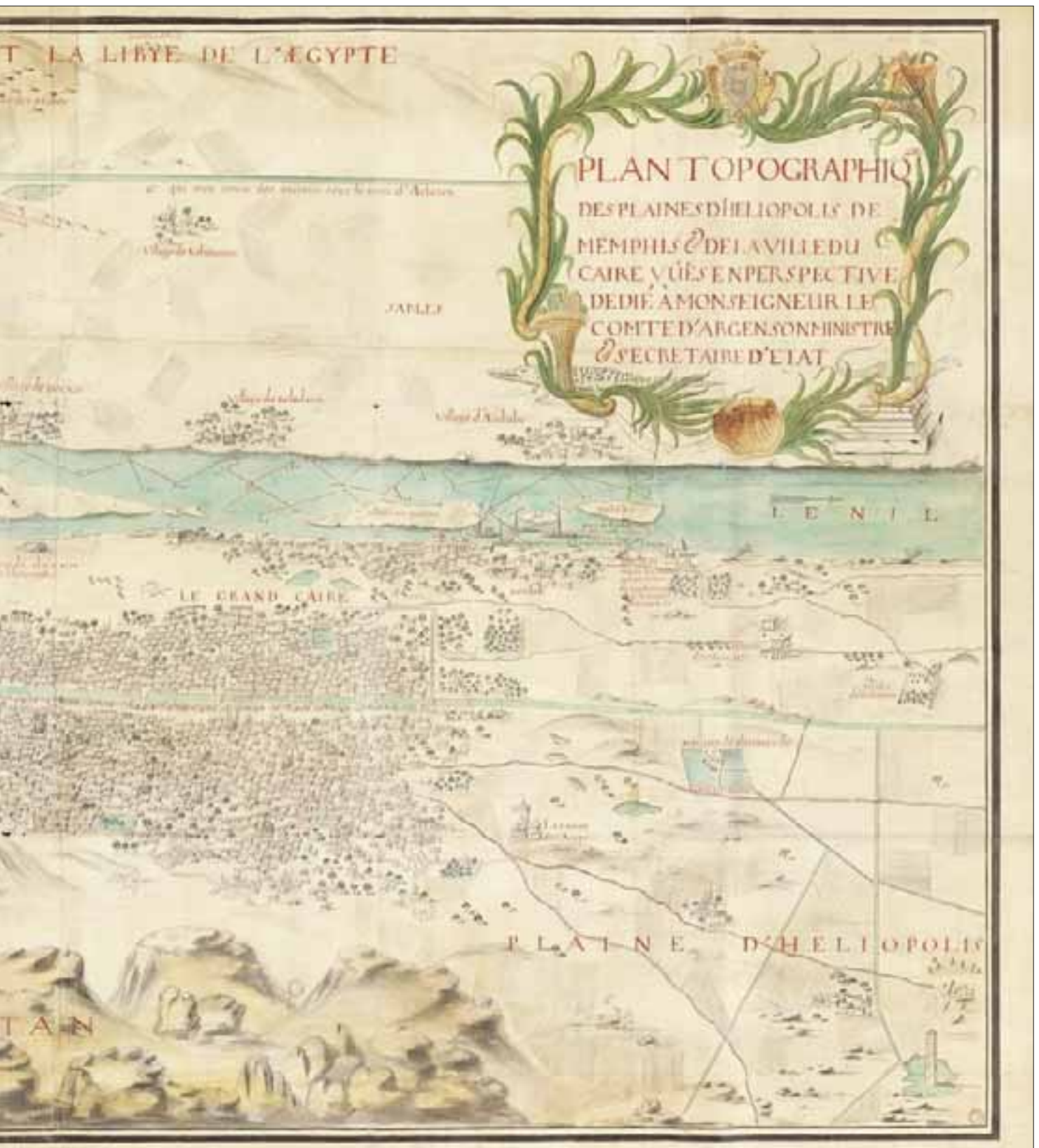


*View of the city of Giza above Memphis with the three Pyramids and the perspective of the Mekyas (Nilometer) from outside the tip of the Isle of Rawdah, Frederik Ludvig Norden (1708 - 1742), *Travels in Egypt and Nubia*, London, 1757.*

The irregular shape of the plot did not prevent the building capacity from being exploited to the maximum within the urban constraints. The shape of the lot took on a guiding role that converted the building into an 'island'. The thinner north end would house the Chancery with an independent entrance. The formulation of the project was part of the intentions of the C.A.S.E. Commission, which intended to attribute itself an urban space to define characters and functions on a state-owned area, where architecture became an instrument available to affirm, in Egyptian land, the interests of the Italian State. The decorative repertoire would reveal more clearly the effort made to recall the quality and ideals of identity. Moreover, such 'ars combinatoria' revealed by the aggregative solution of the external volumes defined the concept of 'place' as a symbol of stability for the community. A precedent of this building program of functional integration can be found in the project for the Italian diplomatic seat in Washington (1924) where the greater regularity of the building plot imposed fewer constraints on the planimetric setting. The farsightedness of the senior diplomats in charge of the project lies in having conceived an ad hoc building: a multipurpose logistics base to carry out both ceremonial duties and administrative activities. Working around the exclusively residential dimension of any stately building, or converting it, would not have provided the added value that we can find in the seat of the Cairo Legation, still current and usable, according to the standards proposed by the High Representation and public fruition. The project was entrusted to the architect Florestano Di Fausto, who had been collaborating with the ministerial body in various capacities since 1919,



Topographical map of the plain of Heliopolis, Memphis and the city of Cairo, perspective views, dedicated to Monsignor Count d'Argenson, Minister and Secretary of State, 1758.



including drawing up the plans for the new seat of the Tokyo Embassy (1920)¹ – a project that surely introduced him in diplomatic circles.

The expense that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had to bear was estimated by Di Fausto at around 4-5 million Italian liras. The fulfilment of the precise needs of the diplomatic mission expressed by the group of experts who formed the C.A.S.E. Commission extended, each time, to the control of the entire building experience. Far from the influences of Arab art so pervasive in North Africa or the eclecticism of Ernesto Verrucci, recognizable in the same years in the Khedival palaces at Ras El-Tin and Montazah in Alexandria, and of Abdeen² in Cairo, Di Fausto preserved the Italian spirit. By aligning his design ideas with the desires of the C.A.S.E. Commission, the architect intended to refer to the classical tradition, borrowing architectural motifs mainly from the Roman style that distinguished the mature 16th century, without neglecting a more modern vision. The considerations of the components of the Commission were based on the stimuli derived from the Italian architectural tradition. A total synergy distinguished the development of the project, as we can see from the signatures of Giacomo Paulucci di Calboli Barone on the drawings, which were individually approved. In particular, the Commission had its say on the global vision and formal sug-



Jean-Pascal Sebah (1872 - 1947), *Old Cairo and Rawdah Island*, early 20th century.

gestion expressed by the compact, 'crystal-sharp', and deeply interconnected blocks, designated to perform their respective functions. The strict articulation of the spaces and their distributive coherence were the object of control, as well as the adoption of decorative elements inspired by classicism. The roots of a reassuring historical continuity were identified in those distinctive traits, and the visions were assimilated until they coincided with the Italian style.

5.2 THE TENDER FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ROYAL LEGATION IN CAIRO.

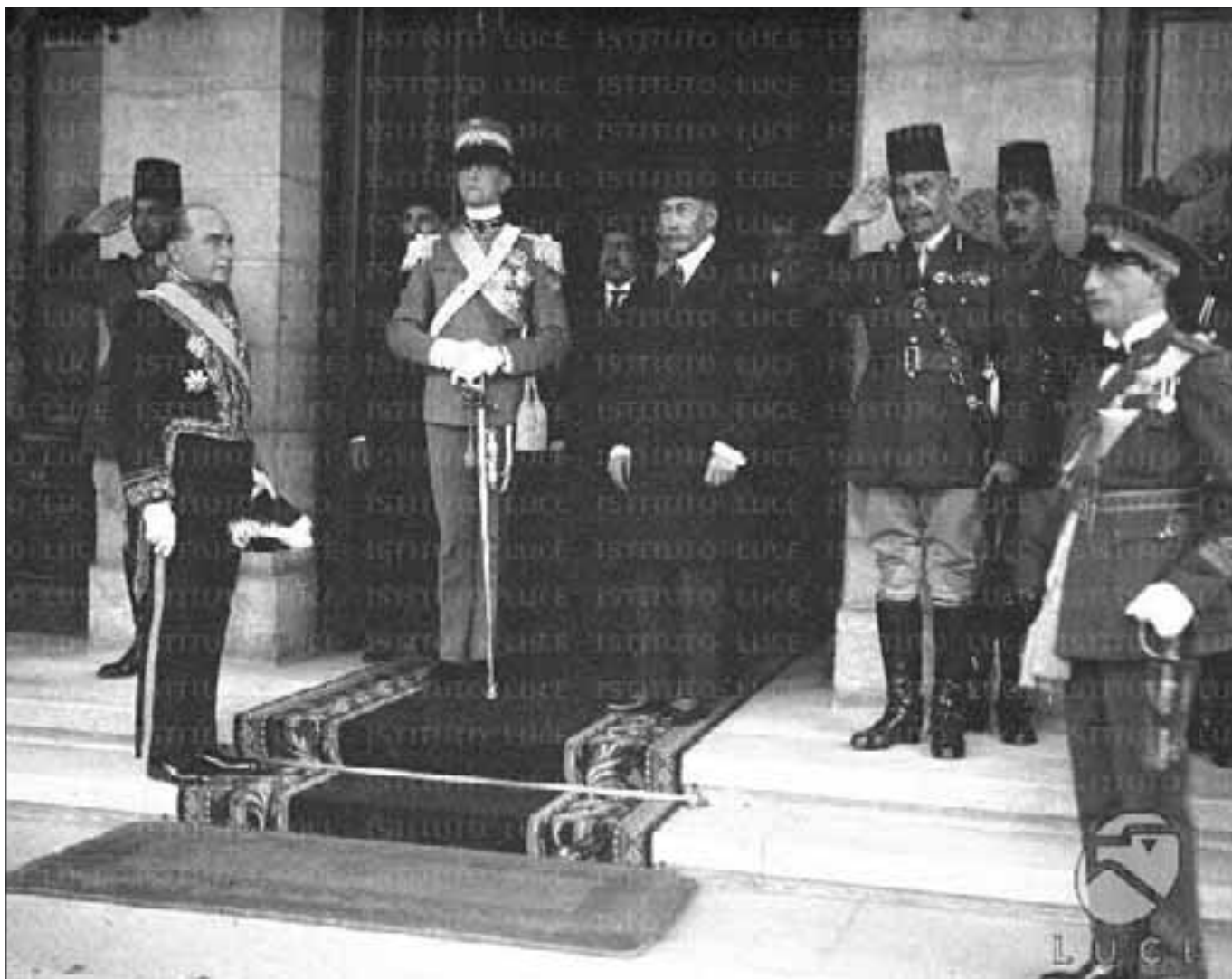
In June 1928, the preparatory phases for the execution of the project were summarized in a list of activities that could be included in different types of contracts: either flat-rate, or including the delivery of the works as they were being built, or including the finishing works, especially regarding the types of foundations of the building. On 9 July 1928, a professional was entrusted with the task of setting up the administrative procedures to provide, *in situ*, the drawing up of documents and the processing of the preparatory documents for the competitive bidding to award the construction of the seat of the Royal Legation of Italy in Cairo. Once the estimate list, the list of the contract specifications, and the requirements were compiled, and the executive designs were added, the 'national' companies politically close to the Ministry were invited to submit their bids for the construction. The Italian companies located in Cairo submitted their bids in the following order: the first company to submit a bid was represented by engineer Limongelli, the second was represented by engineer Garozzo, the third by Mr. De Farro, and the fourth by engineer Carnevali. The documents relating to the tender were accessible to the competitors in the period between 30 June and 1 July 1928. The bids, however, could be deposited at the Royal Legation of Cairo by 15 July, under penalty of forfeiture, enclosed in sealed envelopes that would be forwarded by the Legation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, for examination and appropriate decisions.

The decoration work for the ceremonial rooms, the finishings for the large marble hall, the wrought-iron works,



Portrait of the Minister Plenipotentiary Gaetano Paternò di Manchi di Bilici (1879 - 1949).

the large coats of arms for the façade, the fountain, and the bathroom fixtures were left out from the tender. The Ministry would assign the works by the following 31 August. The contractual agreements included the clause that the Ministry would not be under any obligation to choose the minimum bid, nor to implement the contract. This procedure would relieve the Contracting Authority of any contractual obligations, and ensure it freedom of action. For the technical supervision of the execution of the works, an Italian professional resident in Cairo was indicated. The choice fell on the engineer Paolo Caccia Dominioni (1896 - 1992)³, who, after taking over from the architect Giacomo Loria, agreed to take on the task, and keep Loria's fee at the modest figure of twenty Egyptian liras per month⁴. The Minister Plenipotentiary, Gaetano Paternò di Manchi Di Bilici (1879 - 1949) had the task of collecting the references of the companies participating in the tender-contest, and of transmitting them to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome.



Egyptian soldiers salute the Prince of Piedmont during his visit to Cairo (1928) in the presence of the Minister Plenipotentiary Gaetano Paternò di Manchi di Bilici, Archivio Luce.



Portraits of the engineer Paolo Caccia Dominioni di Sillavengo, Colonel of the Engineer Corps, former commander of the 31st Sappers Battalion in North Africa during the battle of El-Alamein - Director of Works for the Royal Legation of Italy in Cairo (1928 - 1931).

5.3 THE CONSTRUCTION COMPANY.

The company that won the contract had an excellent reputation. It was the construction company founded by Ernesto De Farro (1875 - 1941). The entrepreneur was originally from Piedmont, and a Jew by faith. In spite of his humble origins, he had managed to achieve a remarkable social and financial position that made him one of the best Italian entrepreneurs for reliability and economic solidity, so much so that he was awarded the title of commander of the Italian Crown by *motu proprio* in 1923, and later nominated *Cavaliere al Merito del Lavoro*. Ernesto De Farro, who had arrived in Cairo in 1898, had honed his skills by serving in the office of the Ministry of Public Works (1898 - 1900) and, later, he became assistant to the chief engineer of the construction of the Aswan Dam (1901 - 1904). The De Farro company was established in 1905, combining Ernesto's experience with that of his uncle Ugo, who worked in the construction field, specializing mainly in metal carpentry and reinforced concrete. During World War I, the entrepreneur had worked in Palestine with the British army for road works, and had completed with prodigious rapidity an important building to house the Jerusalem Bible Institute.



Montazah Royal Palace, «Il Messaggero Egiziano della Domenica» (17 giugno 1928).

The De Farro building company acquired civil and hydraulic engineering know-how that enabled it to experiment new construction techniques (soil stabilization with compression according to the avant-garde *Sinus et Compressol* system) and that gave it a competitive advantage in some renowned tenders in Egypt. Among the state-commissioned works carried out by De Farro, are the extension of the Ras El-Tin Royal Palace (1920 - 1925) and the construction of the Montazah Royal Palace (1923 - 1928) in Alexandria, designed by Ernesto Verrucci – a very favourable circumstance that probably made the De Farro firm stand out from the others. The shared building activities had fostered a bond of trust between the company and the architect Verrucci, who was considered the *deus ex machina* of the Italian political activities⁵ in the land of Egypt.

Very early on, De Farro had revealed a philanthropic spirit both in regard to the motherland – where he had founded a home for military widows at Rocca di Papa – and in the

colony. His entrepreneurial fortune was celebrated by the “Messaggero Egiziano della Domenica” (17 June 1928) which dedicated numerous photos to the works carried out by *Commendator* De Farro and *Cavalier* Fiori (partner in the company, with expertise in the management of the construction of the Royal Palaces of Alexandria), including the Palace of Ras El-Tin and Montazah Palace, executed under the auspices of the Italian diplomatic mission.

The engineer Caccia Dominioni supervised the works with diligence from 1928 to 1931, until the delivery of the building site of the Italian Legation in Cairo. He followed the phases of work carried out by the construction company and prepared the variants of the project foreseen for the planimetric updating of the building of the Cairo seat, carried out between May and August 1929, and subsequent integrations. Entrusting Paolo Caccia Dominioni with the operations management task turned out to be a happy solution: the partnership with Florestano Di Fausto yielded positive results in several construction sites in Egypt, and later in Ankara (1935). The close collaboration between the two professionals can be seen in the intense correspondence between them, which shows a diligent attention to the building site of the Legation in Cairo. In a letter dated 3 January 1930, Paolo Caccia Dominioni wrote to Di Fausto, updating him on the work phases and inviting him to come to Cairo for the necessary inspections.



The Prince of Piedmont, during his visit to Cairo (1928), meets the Director of Egyptian Antiquities Pierre Lacau, Archivio Luce.

He complained about the slowdown in the works of the *rez de chaussée* of the diplomatic seat, due to delays in the delivery of ready-made ceilings from Italy. Works continued, with alacrity, on the other floors of the building under construction. In the memo, Caccia Dominioni informed that Di Fausto's plan had undergone some variations due to the municipality not approving the original design of the fences and requiring free gratings at the top, differently from what had been conceived by Di Fausto who had provided them, in the highest part, with a massive masonry cornice. Other changes concerned the garage. The site manager ensured his total availability to avoid any 'hassles' to the designer and expedite the work, so that they could work together on some activities also in the nearby Tunisia. Beyond the technical details, Paolo Caccia Dominioni also indulges in chronicling aspects of Egyptian life. Thus, he writes: [...] "down here you will find a very different environment from what you know: Egypt is changing, there is poverty and unemployment everywhere. In my office, there is a constant line of people looking for work. So, business is bad too, few new constructions⁶ and strong devaluation of finished works, including - alas! - my house that I can't sell"⁷. The De Farro firm, despite the dire contingencies, honoured the contract, proving itself up to the task.



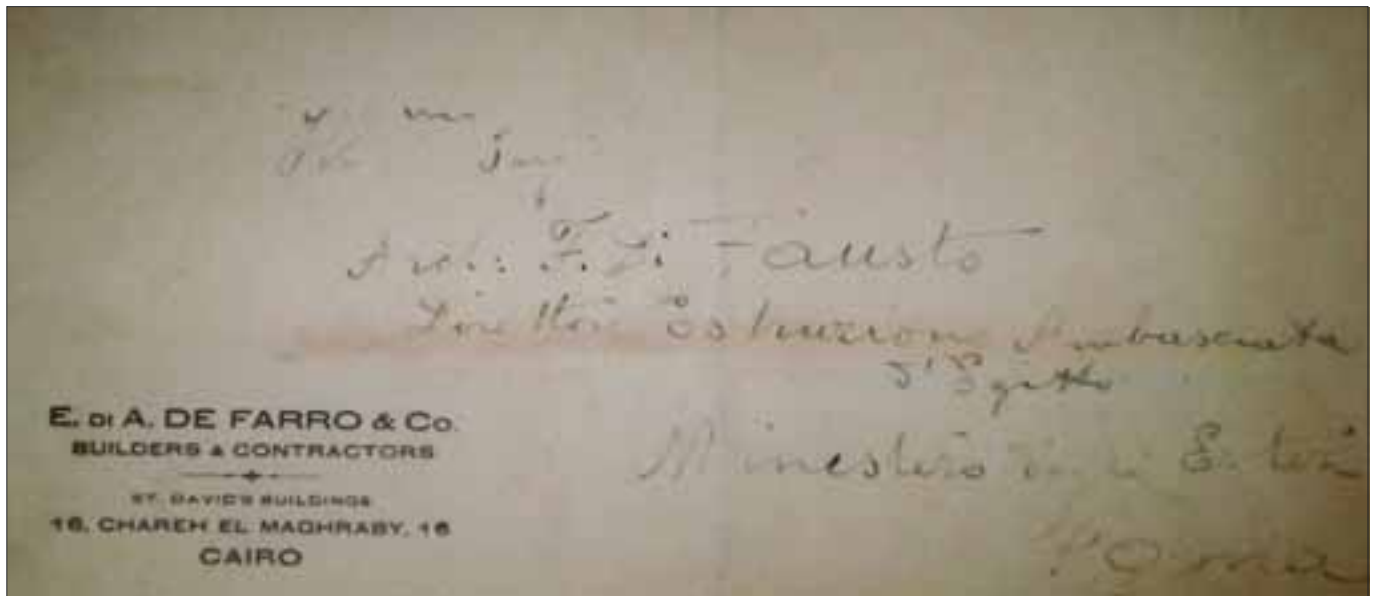
The Crown Prince conversing with the Minister Plenipotentiary Paternò di Manchi di Bilici on the ship San Giorgio in February 1928; in the background, one can see the Royal Palaces of Ras El-Tin in Alexandria, Archivio Luce.



Portrait of Grand Officer Ernesto De Farro, owner of the company of the same name to which was entrusted the construction of the Royal Palaces of Ras El-Tin and Montazah, taken from the «Messaggero Egiziano della Domenica», (17 June 1928).



Cover of the monographic book about Fuad, by Roberto Cantalupo (1891 - 1975), Minister Plenipotentiary of Egypt from 1930 to 1932. The book was published in 1940.



Business card of the firm De Farro, addressed to Florestano Di Fausto.



Oleg Volkoff, *Mausoleum of the Pharaohs, main front, Construction Company Ernesto De Farro & Co*, in *Fotografie di vari edifici*, Egypt, Ministry of Public Works, State Buildings Department.



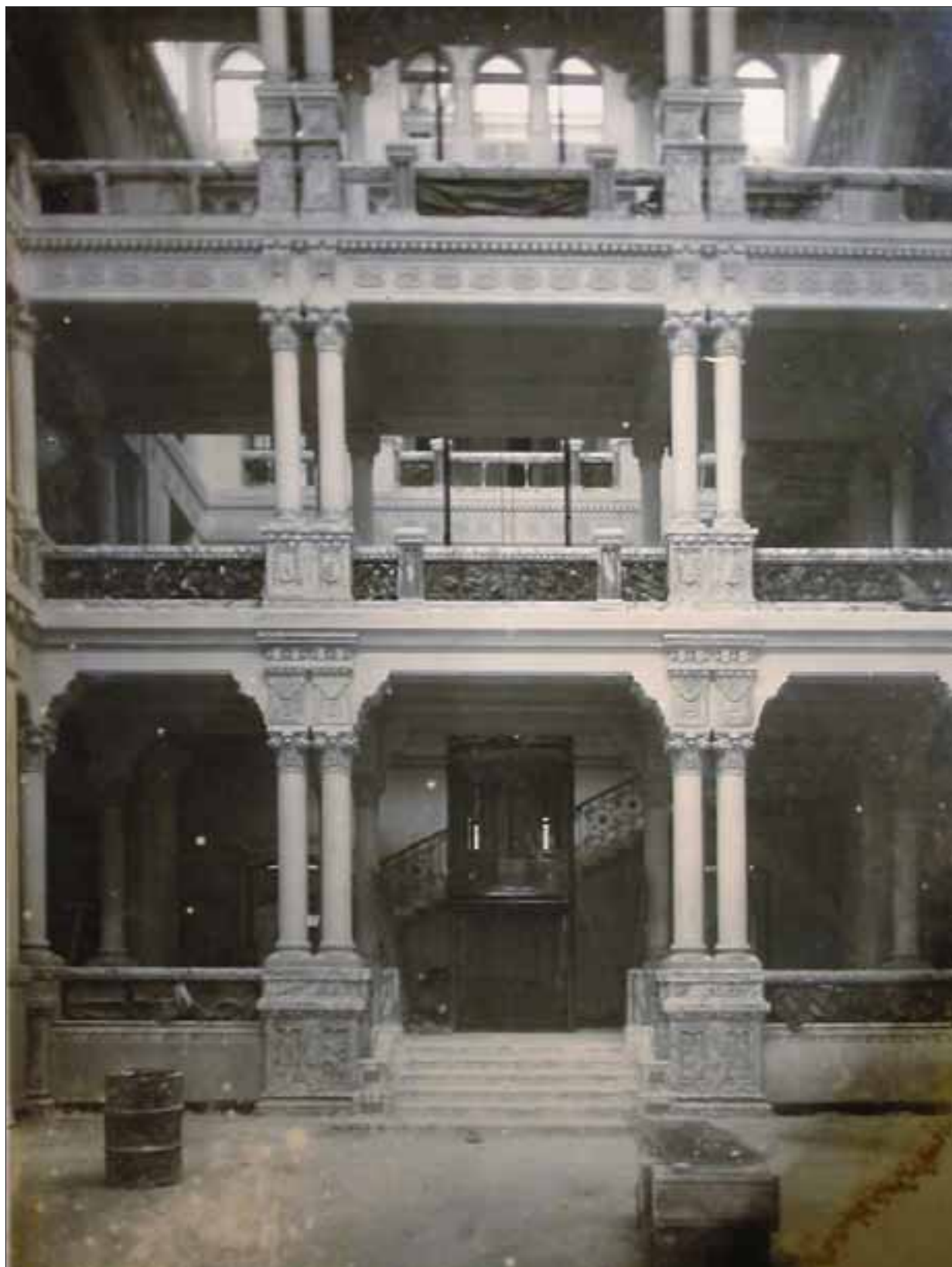
De Farro construction company, *budget standard housing complex, Cairo*, archive image by Del Vecchio from the «Messaggero Egiziano della Domenica», (17 June 1928).



Umberto Dorés, *Dining room of Her Majesty the Queen, Ras El-Tin Palace, Alexandria in Egypt*, design by Ernesto Verrucci, «Il Messaggero Egiziano della Domenica», (17 June 1928).



Umberto Dorés, *Throne room in arabesque style in the Palace of Ras El-Tin with base and columns in Italian coloured marble, Alexandria of Egypt*, design by Ernesto Verrucci. «Il Messaggero Egiziano della Domenica», (17 June 1928).



Vestibule of Montazah Palace in Alexandria of Egypt, designed by Ernesto Verrucci, construction company De Farro, archive image from «Il Messaggero Egiziano della Domenica», (17 June 1928).

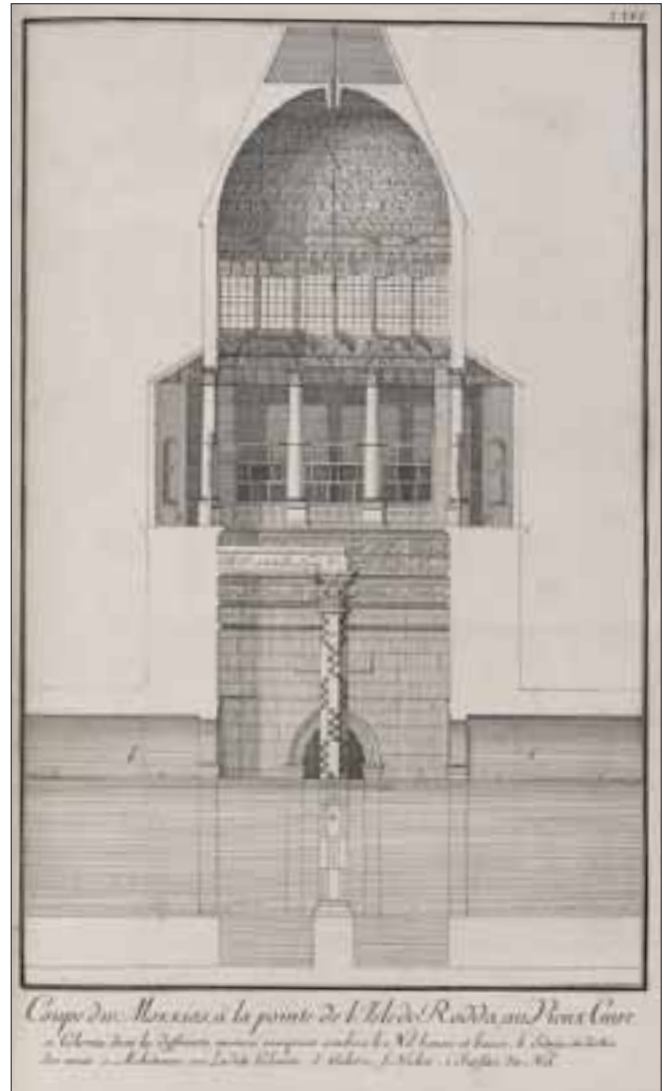
5.4 A SIGNATURE ARCHITECTURE BETWEEN ART AND LANDSCAPE.

Elevations.

The natural barrier of the Nile – the island of Rawdah – and the thick vegetation that characterizes the residential district of Garden City are the background of the building of the Royal Italian Embassy designed by Florestano Di Fausto. That pleasant place had flattered the collective imagination of European travellers, becoming a beloved narrative theme for the quaintness of the landscape, which was included in the itineraries of visits to the city of Cairo. In 1857, Justin Taylor⁸ (1789 - 1879), a writer, traveller, and philanthropist, described it as follows: [...] *L'île de Roudah (dont le nome signifie jardin), située en face du Kaire, est un délicieuse oasis couverte d'ombrages et semé de ruines monumentales. Elle est jointe au Vieux-Caire par un pont de bateaux établi vis-à-vis d'un des bastions de l'ouvrage à cornes d'Ibrahim Bey [...]. Deux belles routes ont été tracées dans l'île par le Français [...] ils y ont aussi construit un moulin à vent à six ailes situé à la pointe septentrionale de l'île. Vers l'autre extrémité se trouve le célèbre Nilomètre ou Mekyas [...]. Sa destination était de mesurer officiellement la hauteur de la crue du Nil [...].*⁹

Again, in 1880, the French painter Charles Gabriel Lemonnier¹⁰ (1743 - 1824) outlined the colours that the landscape took on with the finesse of pictorial strokes that characterized his paintings, describing the place: [...] *L'île de Rodah, brillante de fleurs et de verdure, et les riantes campagnes de Gizèh se prolongent jusqu'au désert libique, tout rose au lever du jour, mais d'un rose tendre et diaphane, avec des demi-teintes bleuâtres.*¹¹

The Egyptologist Arthur Rhoné¹² (1836 - 1910) sketched the place at the beginning of the 20th century, just after the creation of the urban layout on the opposite bank of Garden City. He thus relates to the place, expressing its environmental value: *le petit bras du Nil, souvent tari, qui se glisse entre le rivage et la grande île de Rauda s'enlevant d'un vert vigoureux sur l'horizon de la plaine de Gizèh [...].*¹³



Section of the Nilometer at the tip of Rawdah Island, Old Cairo, in Frederik Ludvig Norden (1708 - 1742), *Travels in Egypt and Nubia*, London, 1757.



Beniamino Facchinelli, (1839 - 1895), *To the island of Rawdah*, from the collection of photographs taken by the Italian photographer between 1873 and 1895, as part of an interesting photo-shooting campaign of the monuments of Cairo commissioned by the Conservation Committee of Arab Art Monuments before the restoration works.



Beniamino Facchinelli (1839 - 1895), *Rawdah Island* (1873 - 1895). In his passionate shots, he reproduces scenes of daily life immersed in the intense light of the river landscape.

It was considered to be one of the places dearest to dreamers, where one could admire “magical African sunsets, full of mist and yet delicate in hue”, according a printed chronicle of 1932¹⁴. The sight wandered “on one side among the vegetable gardens and villas that provide Rawdah with an ornate and tender belt up to the opposite Bridge of Abbas II, against the remote and motionless backdrop of the Pyramids of Giza. On the other, one could glimpse in its pomp of green, the southern tip of the great island of Gezira” and admire, between the two islands, “the widest and most majestic space of the Nile” traversed by boats, “while the sail masts of the Arab boats repeatedly draw on the horizon the figure and momentum of the scimitar.”¹⁵

The architect was fully aware of the scenic nature of the site and accepted the intriguing challenge of inserting the building into it. The silhouette of the building had to stand out against that background full of history, without being overshadowed. It was on that scenic backdrop that the designer projected the sober and elegant spectacle of modern Italian style. The two factors of the landscape – a finite space on the one side, fading into the horizon on the other – remained separated by their contrast. The design idea was to intentionally evoke, on the level of visual representation, the exaltation of Pharaohs and Caesars alike.

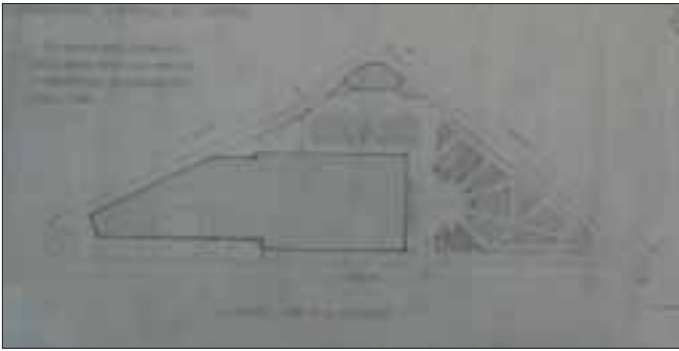


Beniamino Facchinelli (1839 - 1895), *Boats on the Nile*, 1873 - 1895.

A fine perspective view, which illustrates the project of the architect Di Fausto, features the Italian Legation building along the *Nile corniche*. The pencil drawing, dated December 1925, seems to create, as in a photomontage, the façade that looks towards the northern tip of the island of Rawdah; in the background, the silhouettes of buildings separated by lush trees. The view gives us a foretaste of the setting in Garden City, Cairo's most beautiful modern district for



Florestano Di Fausto, *Royal Italian Legation in Cairo*, perspective impression along the Nile canal, 8-XII-1925 - view towards the island of Rawdah.



Florestano Di Fausto, *Study of the general plan of the Italian state property with location of buildings.*

the morphology of its plots crossed by non-straight roads, immersed in greenery, which provided unexpected perspectives¹⁶.

It was in this scenic framework that the design idea presented by Di Fausto to the C.A.S.E. Commission took shape. The building enjoyed two privileged views: one over the Nile, the other towards the city.

The construction adapted to the pseudo-isosceles triangular shape of the building plot: the base facing the Nile shore, opposite

the island of Rawdah; one vertex coinciding with the entrance to the Chancery; the opposite one intended for a garden.

The façade along the *Nile channel* consisted of an aggregation of volumes lying on almost the entire major base of the polygon that defined the lot. The building thus conceived, seen from the side of the Nile, appeared as a majestic complex. The cadenced rhythm of the volumes, high and low, reduced the visual impact. An expedient of no small importance that tended to rarefy the volumetric mass of the buildings, so that the degrading heights interrupted the monotony of such a large perspective.

The aggregation of the aligned volumes is a strong point of the project, which emancipates itself from the idea of the mansion, to become a multifunctional building. This model, halfway between a patrician villa and a noble manor – like some buildings of the Brenta valley, from which it evidently draws inspiration – and partially isolated in its enclosure, embodies a specialized and innovative architecture. The residential type becomes a dynamic organism: an expression of an institution at the service of the community.

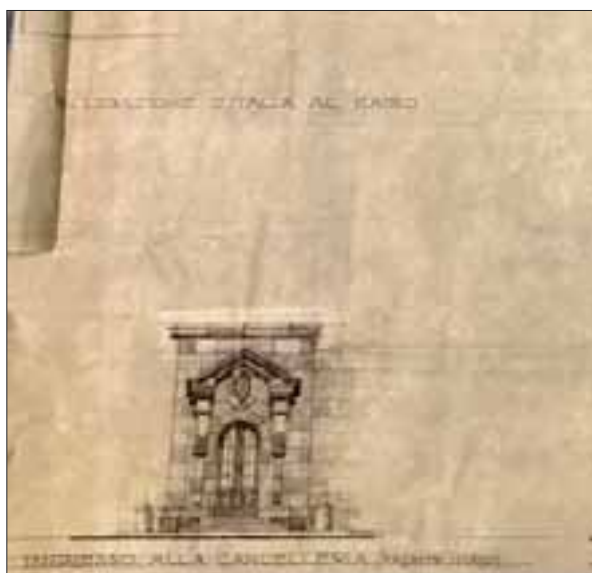


Florestano Di Fausto, *Royal Italian Legation in Cairo*, elevation along the Nile Canal (version with front porch and enclosure with monumental entrances).

The first known version of the project, which dates back to December 1925, inaugurates a coherent system of architectural combinations. The elevation presents four buildings *along the Nile canal*, preceded by a fountain basin. The sequence of volumes is marked by a first compact block that hides the vestibule of the Chancery, the raised portico (which establishes a relationship with the outside) with three arches. In the central one, a fountain can be glimpsed, while the side ones are protected by balustrades.

Next, there is a rusticated front porch leading to the main atrium of the palace, the premises of the Embassy on the *rez de chaussée*, and of the apartment of the Head of Mission on the upper floor. Two entrances opened on the perimeter wall: one next to the offices; the other, more monumental and with a cautiously mannerist imprint, at the vertex of the lot. Both were equipped with pairs of obelisks. The alternation of the heights of this building body provided a perceptual rhythm for the juxtaposition of the shadows that each building would cast on the other.

The first project hypothesis meant to relate the building with the urban context, without creating a diaphragm with the city. This building with the offices of the Chancery and the seat of the Representation, incorporated in a spatial *unicum* which loomed directly over the fifth street, was surrounded by fencing only on the garden side.



Florestano Di Fausto, first version of the entrance to the Chancery (north front), ca. 1925.



Legation Seat, construction site along the Nile canal, archive photo (ca. 1929).



Detail of the porch under construction along the Nile canal, archive photo.





Florestano Di Fausto, *Final version of the entrance to the Chancery (north front).*



Current north front with additional floor.

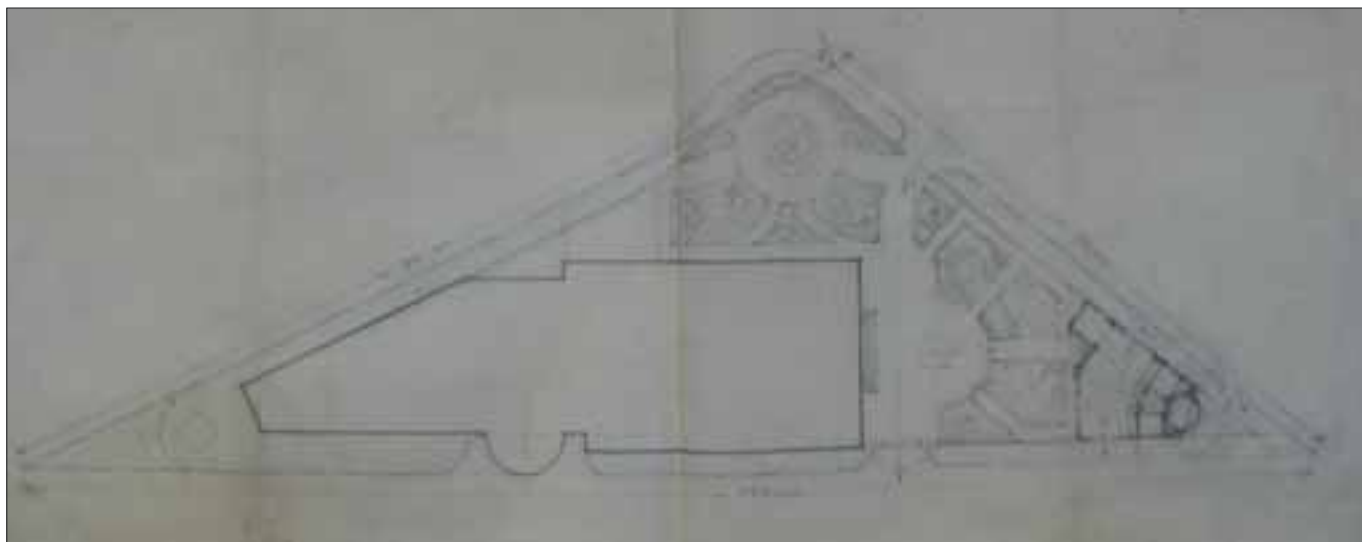
The Chancery opened directly on an open space characterized by a basin used as a fountain that contributed to the urban décor. Its location could be meant as a tribute to the local tradition spread during the Mamluk era. The public fountain (*sabil*) was offered to the community¹⁷ by a benefactor by means of a *waqf* (donation). Many such examples of very fine workmanship were present in Old Cairo. Some of them represented a real pole of attraction for wayfarers. The fountain conceived in this version of Di Fausto's project constituted a tangible sign in the environment in front of the building of the Chancery that fulfilled an aesthetic and urbanistic, as well as a moral mandate to encourage ablation and refreshment. The commission promoted a participatory architecture which, implicitly, called for dialogue between different cultures. The urban planning rules adopted by the City of Cairo for Garden City¹⁸ did not provide for its realization. The portion of the Chancery that extended on the front along the *Nile canal* had, on its wall face, a large insert for an inscription.



Architectural detail of the decorative apparatus (north front).

The small portico that was connected to the Chancery was slightly higher. Through its arches, separated by Tuscan pilasters, you could see an open area that referred to an inner courtyard with a central fountain. It acted as a source of light and air for the inner rooms of the Chancery, as per the classical and Mediterranean tradition. The small portico was a sort of ideal hinge connecting the administrative area with the vestibule of the ceremonial quarters. After the arches, the robust and monumental entrance to the Legation was arranged.

In correspondence with the main entrance that allowed access to the rooms of the Representation, the foyer stretched out with a front porch, projecting beyond the profile of the building. Three tall semi-circular rusticated arches defined the concave portico system in contrast with the convexity of the road profile, obtained only in the entrance area, as if to create a widening.



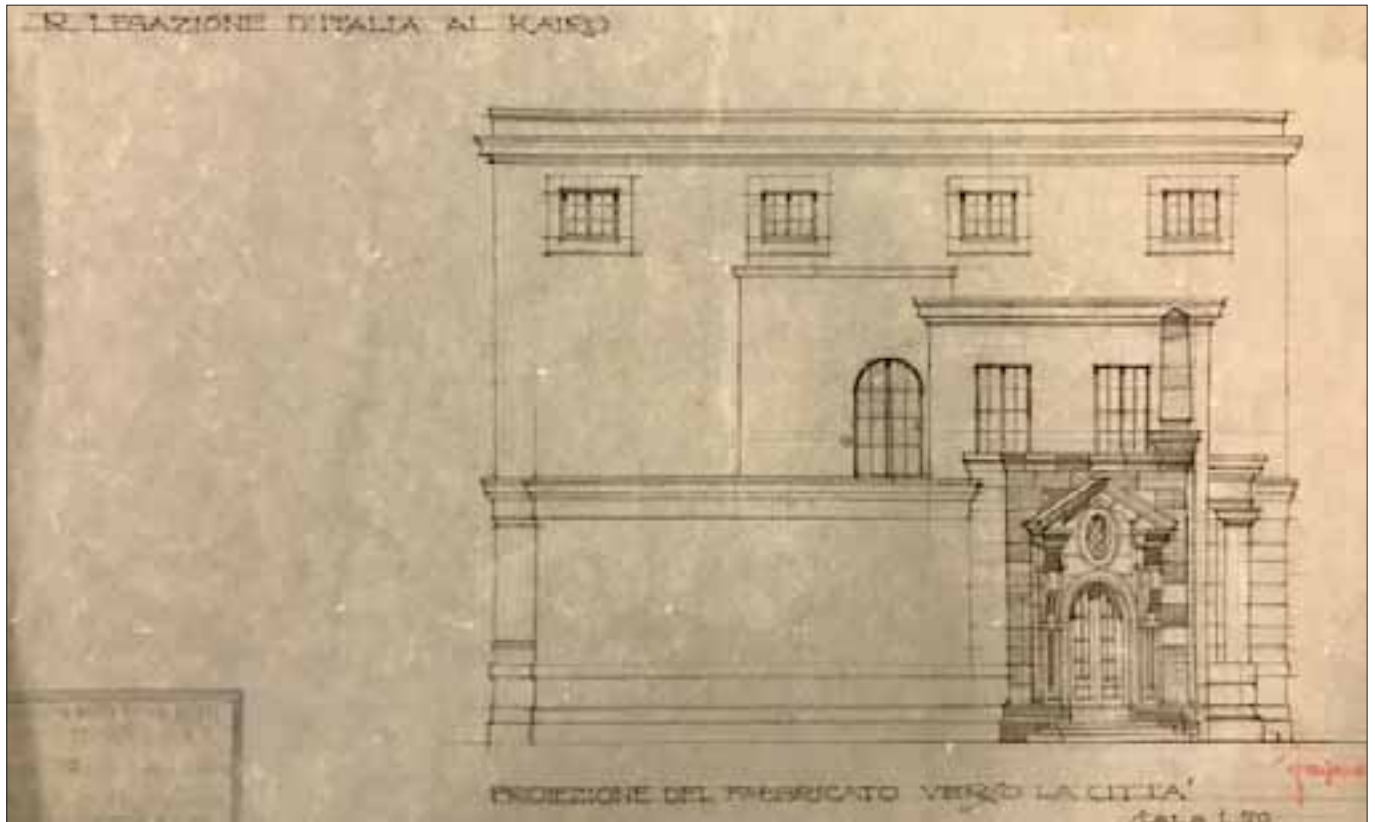
Florestano Di Fausto, *General layout study*.

This solution was perceived as an invitation to enter the building, referring to the classical forms that the atriums and courtyards of the historical palaces took on, interpenetrating in a scenic vision. The desire to expand the access to the building on the Cairo road, with the intention of prolonging the view of the main atrium, seems to indulge in certain solutions adopted by the architect Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola (1507 – 1573) for the Palazzo Farnese in Caprarola.

The façade on the *Nile canal* underwent some variations between 1926, 1927 and 1928. One version concerned the alignment of the heights between the Chancery building, crowned by a balustrade, and the small portico with the insertion of an acroterial obelisk¹⁹ (approved by the C.A.S.E. Commission).

This created a visual goal on the Chancery. The inclination of the project – which was also influenced by Paulucci di Calboli Barone's suggestions – regarding the insertion of obelisks, welcomed classical declinations in forms that were at times mitigated, at times declared, in the search for a historical dimension linked to the past, that would project certainties and lasting identity values into the future²⁰. Sobriety became a cautious response to any excesses, and a

coherent method legitimized by an aesthetic study that, in principle, exalted simple and elegant forms, reconsidered as a contemporary ideal of beauty.



Florestano Di Fausto, *projection of the building towards the city*.

The view from the entrance of the Chancery projected the building towards the city. One could see the building grafted to the main volume of the Representation that dominated the body. Observing the building from a distance, created a perspective of sloping volumes. This optical effect has been lost with the additions that have affected the building in more recent years.



Perspective view of the Diplomatic Chancery and Representation along the Nile Canal (archive photo post 1948).



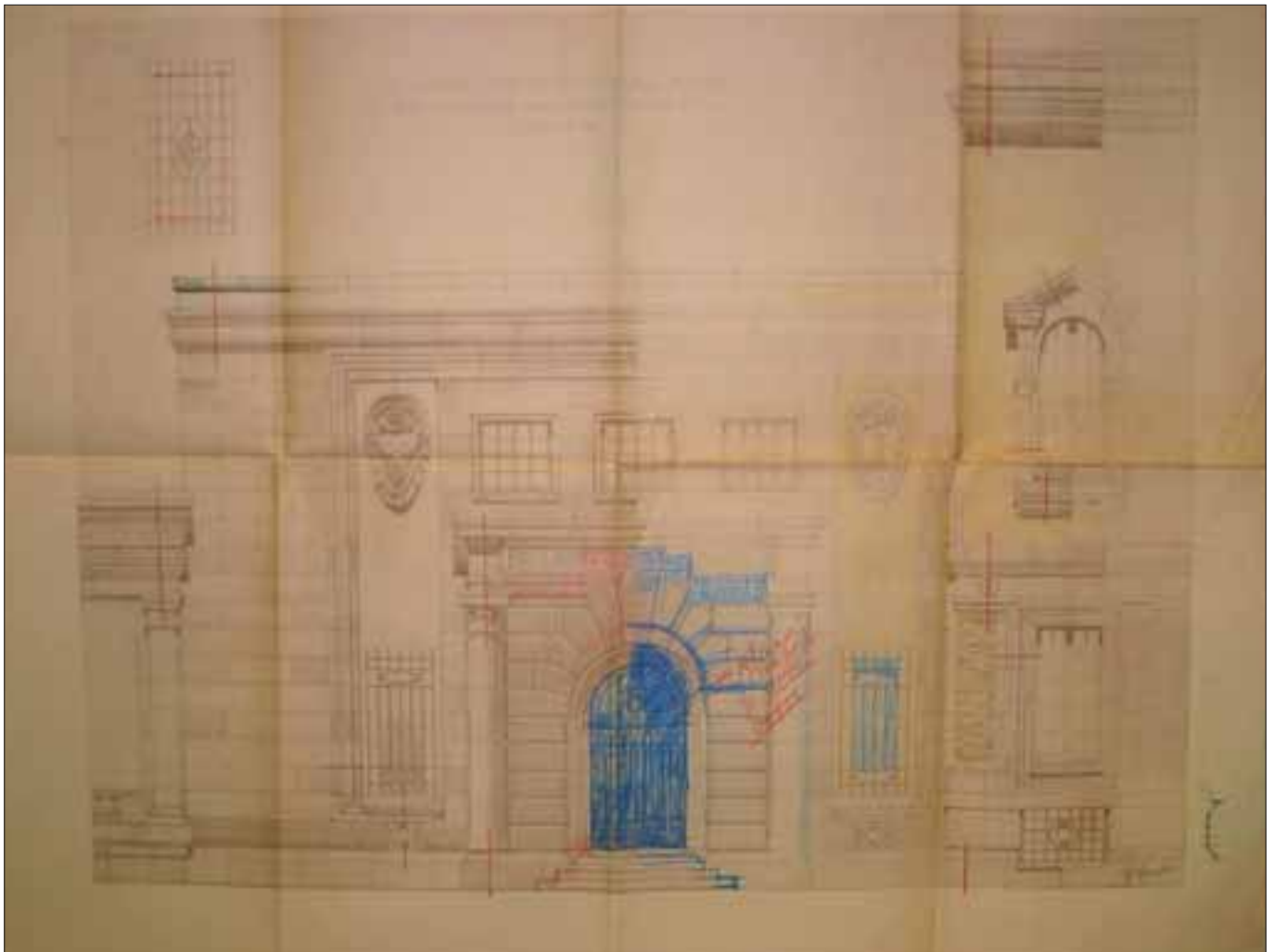
Sideways view of the Chancery at the intersection between Corniche El-Nil and Abdel Rahman Fahmy Street.



*Detail of the main entrance
(1948 archive photo).*



*Detail of main entrance
with additional floor (post
1948).*



Florestano Di Fausto, *Architectural detail of the main entrance to the Legation on the Nile Canal side* – pencil sketch rising the arch by one ashlar.

The most significant modification concerned the entrance to the atrium of the Representation, whose front porch was replaced with a monumental gate with a round arch, inscribed between Tuscan columns. Placing the main entrance outside the cubic mass of the Legation has an urbanistic and typological value. "It aims to provide the whole building with a central point of reference as well as an organizational hub"²¹. It was a reinterpretation of the Italian palazzo which, in the classical sense, placed the main entrance on the main wall, not outside it. The shift of the visual plane that focuses on the volume of the entrance – figuratively isolated from the building on which it depends – highlights its organizational function as a junction between the two poles of the Chancery and the Representation. This solution represents a new experience that breaks down the space to recompose it in a completely original way. This effect faded with the addition of the upper floor, unforeseen in the initial project.

The entablature of the portal is interrupted by raised keystones that vaguely recall the entrance of Villa Giulia by Vignola. Above it there are three square windows between two coats of arms. A fine forged iron²² gate screens the entrance.



Florestano Di Fausto, Table 11, *Royal Legation of Italy in Cairo*, architectural detail of the main entrance on the façade on the Nile Canal.



Florestano Di Fausto, *Main entrance gate in forged iron*. Recent photo of main entrance gate with artistic canopy.

Another modification concerned the front of the Representation, where a series of seven windows opened on the upper floor: a sort of clerestory that allowed natural lighting of the interior on the continuous façade.



Florestano Di Fausto, *Royal Italian Legation in Cairo, elevation along the Nile canal* (version that includes the alignment of the heights of the Chancery and the portico with the insertion of the acroterial obelisk and the arrangement of statues on the boundary wall).



Florestano Di Fausto, *Palace of Justice in Rhodes, 1924*.

The reference to the Mannerist solution of the gable window is evident²³. However, the most explicit inspiration would seem to be the State buildings in Rhodes²⁴ for the significant impact they have on the urban fabric. In particular, the gabled windows or portals, in the Rhodes Palace of Justice, perceived as emotional entities, participate in the strong image mediated by the narration of classical architectural elements.

The reference model in the motherland, however, seems to be provided by the tympanum windows of

the second floor of Palazzo Farnese in Rome (the Doric architrave, frieze and cornice with semi-circular light are preferred to the Ionic order). The boundary wall would feature statues in plastic pose, citing the Roman statuary in the patrician villas of the Italian 16th century. The proposition on the curtain wall of full-round statues, or of obelisks at the entrance, marks the visual goal that seems to respond to an urban planning program that is not at all unrealistic²⁵.



Florestano Di Fausto, Plate 10, *Royal Legation of Italy in Cairo, façade along the Nile canal* (final version with the small portico lower than the body of the Chancery and the main entrance. The top of the Representation building ends with a bow window).

In another version, the building of the Chancery on the *Nile Canal* front, raised by one floor for the offices, had three porthole windows on the façade surmounted by a mixtilinear frame. Below the three windows, covered by iron grating, was placed a rectangular framed insert, meant to house an impressive sundial²⁶.



Oblique view of the entrance to the Chancery with the large insert on the front of the Nile Canal. (Archive image, circa 1948).



Detail of the sundial on the front of the Chancery (Nile Canal side).



Florestano Di Fausto, *side elevation towards Rawdah Island* (8 December 1925 updated version).



Florestano Di Fausto, *side elevation towards Rawdah Island* (version with glazed loggia on the rez de chaussée).

In this variant, which will be adopted, the small porch was lower, confirming its function as a hinge between the adjacent buildings. The new element of this version of the project concerns the insertion of an apsidal space that expands the ballroom towards the garden. The building ended on the front towards the island of Rawdah with an extension of the interior space with a circular section that was called 'chiostrina' (small cloister) in Di Fausto's lingo. Designed around 1928, the spatial arrangement served as a winter garden, accentuating the contact with nature.

The façade on the front of the *Nile Canal* makes this Representation seat full of charm. *In this place singularly favoured by the enchantment that moves from the surrounding aspects, the design solution combines construction and environment in a balanced and harmonious relationship. The brown hue that gives the façades an austere look, and the clear strips that highlight the projecting parts, give it a character all its own, which makes it immediately recognizable to those who wander in those pleasant surroundings, among the many other and often pretentious buildings lined up along the Nile*²⁷. The connection with the surrounding environment²⁸ is tackled expertly by Di Fausto, who was developing in the Aegean islands²⁹ his vision of the

Mediterranean³⁰. We could recognize in this Cairo experience the author's tension to redesign the place, sublimating the relations between the environment and the buildings, engraved in the light of that latitude. Nature and architecture are pervaded by the same aura. The architectural language is conceived according to parameters of clarity that acknowledges the matrix of Mediterranean constructions and the correspondence between form and function. Suffice it to mention the stereometric vision of the building, that three-dimensionally develops volumes aligned on a single axis. The reference to pure geometry is a clear tribute to the modernity of architectural thinking in the Mediterranean area. The study and the arrangement of longitudinally-aggregated high and low volumes, are perceived – like an *enfilade* of spaces lying on the bank of the Nile – in an ideal path³¹ that stretches in the dazzling light of the Egyptian sun.

While the view of the Nile landscape prevails, marking the main façade on the *Nile canal* with its conspicuous structure, the façade overlooking the island of Rawdah and the garden offers a

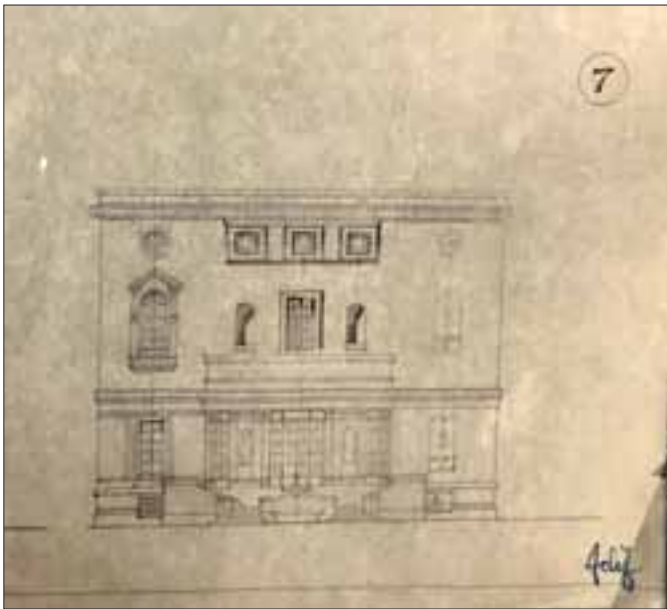
more intimate and private dimension. An early 1925 version included a glazed loggia on the *rez de chaussée* level, leading into the garden.

The garden façade was later updated.

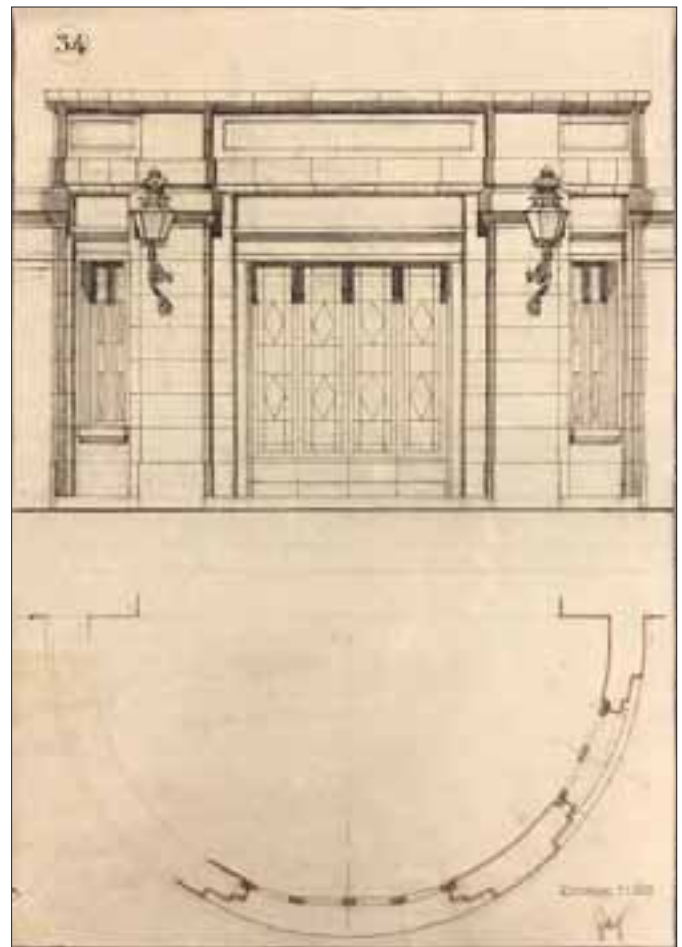
Its composition preserves the narrative thread of the main front. The side elevation over Rawdah island features a veranda overlooking the garden. The balcony on the main floor with its projecting parapet framed between two symmetrical aedicules, surmounts this architectural element that advances from the perimeter wall of the building. Baobab trees full of fragrant flowers that open at night and sycamores with large rounded crowns to provide daytime shade would have made a luxuriant outside garden, accessed directly from the glass extension (which Di Fausto calls “chiostrina”), of the ballroom through a graceful semi-circular staircase.

The aim was to increase the natural light in the interior and to create a direct dialogue with nature. The formal elements of the classical repertoire persist: ashlar band basement, two tall rectangular windows, two gabled windows, ox-eye windows arranged at the ends of three square windows. The freer layout is embodied in a lively and unexpected character.

As the protagonist of the façade – the style of which is more modern – stands forth the semi-circular tribune (bow window), which, with its huge windows framed by sharp, parallel silhouettes, uncloses the wholeness of the inner envelope of the ballroom and opens a glimpse of the dense foliage. With this spatial outgrowth of the inner hall, the architecture bursts into the vigorous vegetation of the site, thus creating an enchanting winter garden.



Florestano Di Fausto, *Elevation towards Rawdah Island* (version with balcony overhang on the second floor, opening onto the garden and staircase connecting the *rez de chaussée*).



Florestano Di Fausto, Plate 34, *Detail of the entrance to the garden from the ballroom* – elevation and portion of the circular-section plan of the ballroom extension (ca. 1928).



Bow window as seen from the garden of the Legation.



Oblique view of the Corniche El-Nil from the garden.

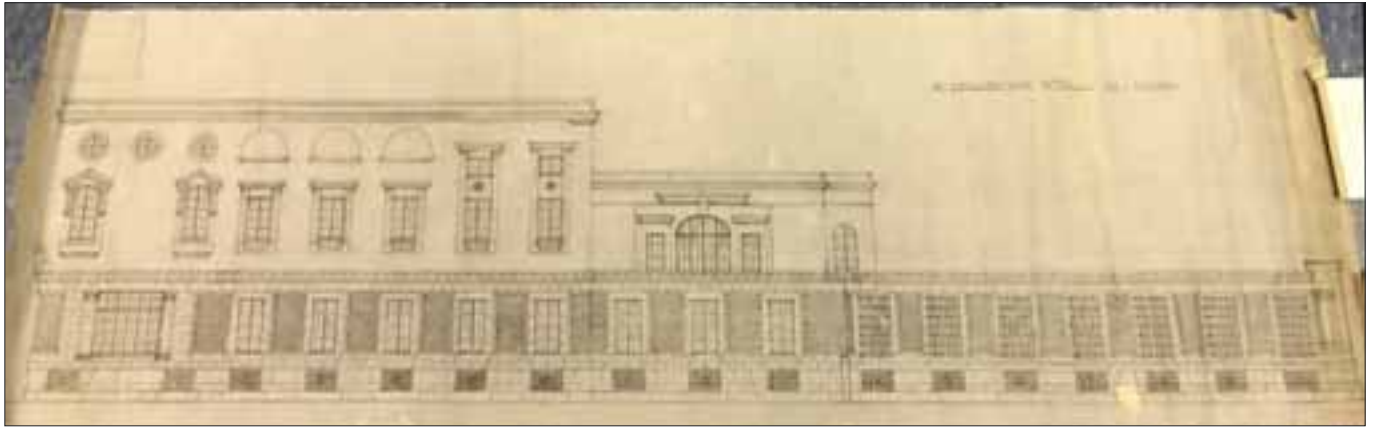


*Garden side painting of present Italian Embassy on Corniche El-Nil (formerly Qasr El-Aaly), (in Samir Raafat, *Garden City: A retrospective Part 4*), www.egy.com.*

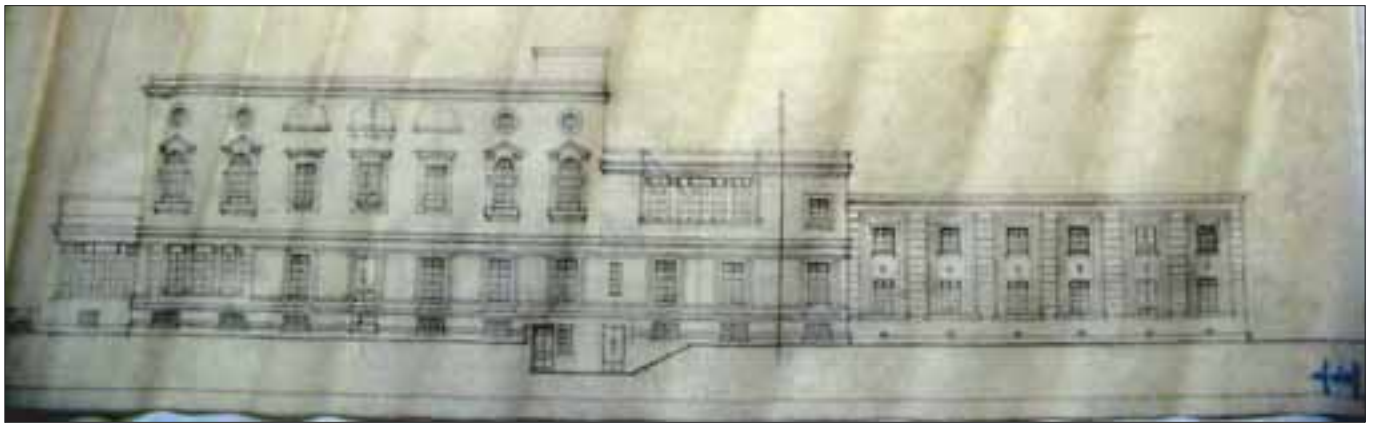
Nowadays, a columned bow window rises from the *rez de chaussée* to the upper floor. Two different designs of the rear elevation defined the treatment of the building's façade. In the first version, the façade consisted of two volumes of different heights: the higher one corresponding to the official seat of the Legation, the other coinciding with the Chancery rooms. On the lower level, with the exception of a glazed side opening inserted between two Tuscan columns, a line of rectangular windows was distributed along the entire length of the façade. Rectangular panes covered with grilles, appropriately placed in the enclosure in the same rhythm as the windows on the façade, determined the continuity of the composition. The upper floor tended towards symmetry. On one far side, two windows with tympanum supported by corbels flanked three rectangular trabeated windows; on the other far side there were two tall rectangular windows, rising to the second floor, the glazed frames of which were separated by a band decorated with a patera. While on the main elevation along the Nile the second floor is blind, windows were visible on the rear elevation, where three bull's-eye windows preceded three semicircular (arched) openings. On the adjacent lower volume a large arched window, inserted between two rectangular compartments, vaguely resembled a pseudo-Serliana window. A variety of window types emerged in the modular rhythm of the façade of the rear elevation, some with arched or circular lights, some others with tympanum or architraves. The resulting composition appeared disjointed and uncertain, despite the fact that the tendency towards symmetrical balance was a prerequisite for classical modularity. The different solutions for the openings clearly betrays the rela-

tionship with antiquity and with the Mediterranean tradition; suffice it to mention the circular elements recalling the portholes of Roman architecture³² and of river bridges.

The design variant of the rear elevation, however, provided for three buildings of different heights that tended to rebalance the wall faces to the advantage of symmetry and rhythmic parties that marked the openings. The body of the building that coincided with the rooms of the



Florestano Di Fausto, *Royal Legation of Italy in Cairo – rear elevation*.



Florestano Di Fausto, *rear elevation*.

Chancery was extended, determining a more pronounced visual impact of the masses. The ashlar plaster alternated with inserts of panels defined by mixtilinear casings in which rectangular windows were framed, separated by a decorative band. In the central volume corresponding to the vestibular wing, the large pseudo-Serliana was modified and updated in the shape of a Tuscan loggia. On the other hand, the body of the building coinciding with the Representation presented, in a clear compositional balance, only the gabled windows and the rectangular architraved windows on the first floor. At the level above it, the openings were arranged so that the semi-circular windows were inscribed between pairs of portholes.

At the *rez de chaussée* level, the series of rectangular windows of the building was broken with a glazed loggia. The façade ends with the small ‘cloister’ similar to a bow window.



View of the rear elevation.

The pursuit for types of openings that stand out on the rear façade should not be taken lightly – both in view of the context, and in view of the developments of modern architecture. The building, which extends mainly longitudinally, requires a variety of holes in the wall fabric to break its flatness. Although the volumes that make up the entire building are of different heights and lie on staggered levels, the perspective effect of this wing was meant to have a perceptive interaction. Moreover, the lack of cantilevered balconies invalidated the chiaroscuro effects. The need for a multifaceted dynamism is interpreted through solutions adopted for the framing of windows of various types, including variously shaped jambs with raw cut or architraves: configurations³³ which demonstrate the close relationship between basic stylistic elements, and the overall architectural structure. The material interruption of the wall is charged with ‘luministic’ vibrations, punctuated by the alternation of solids and voids, thus accentuating their semantic value and a tighter composition on the surface. Its appearance is significantly more modern, due to the liveliness of its signs. Still, the changing of the signs does not result in a stylistic handbook: we can recognize the attempt to create a new punctuation on the architectural text inspired by tradition³⁴.

Di Fausto’s works do not allow comparisons with experiments similar to the Cairo building. It is possible to guess a certain influence generated by architectures of the motherland, where solutions that herald modernity coexist³⁵, similar to what this building aspires to, while remain-



Florestano Di Fausto, *Entrance hall on the front along the Nile canal.*

ing enveloped in the ganglia of classical rigor and stereometric rigidity. However, Di Fausto's modernity is far from that proposed by certain Italian architects who, in the early 1920s³⁶, translated the classical or neoclassical mark to make it perceptible in a symbolic metaphysical key³⁷. There, Di Fausto does not intend to convert the classical repertoire into a stylized drawing of the forms to relieve them of that gravity that distinguishes them. Certainly influenced by the results of modernity, persuaded to a taste in the early Piacentini³⁸ style, he cautiously threads any 20th-century developments.

The discourse of Di Fausto's architectural text is based on the classical repertoire, establishing a continuity with the history of Italian architecture, not in order to import its forms with a his-

toricist purpose, but to collect its spiritual heritage. In this project, Di Fausto uses classical elements as an indispensable reference. His convinced adhesion is meant to transmit the Italic sentiment, even if he is not indifferent to a (still uncertain) simplification of the shapes, stripped of any excesses and translated into clear geometries. His 'Italian style', which does not translate into a 20th-century acceptance, rather proposes a measured and acute reflection on aesthetic canons based on the Vitruvian cultural tradition and its Mannerist derivations. The architectural grammar⁴⁰ results in a personal research, rather than in formal inertia.

Interiors.

A monumental vestibule opens onto a 'pincer' staircase decorated with a full balustrade in fine veined marble. Pairs of Tuscan columns in marmoridea⁴¹ (imitation marble) anticipate the surprise. The grandeur of the materials makes it austere. Lean volumes and square contours soften in both natural and artificial light. In the beginning, the balustrade of the staircase was not supposed to be in marble, but in forged iron⁴². In fact, the beautiful technical drawing of May 1929 reveal the intentions of the designer, who had created iron inserts decorated with a scale-patterned ornamentation taken from the classical repertoire.

The landings are airy and lead into the gallery which retains the marble flooring⁴³.

The Gallery is covered with a barrel-vaulted ceiling of white coffered panels. Characterized by a clear and light geometry, the decoration of the ceiling seems to accompany that of the ashlar of the double-leaf doors, based on a design by Di Fausto. The clear volume of the gallery leads directly into the reception halls.

The interiors of the diplomatic seat seem to weave a variegated and suggestive canvas that reveals the timeless charm of the Representation seat. The ceilings embellished with geometric stuccoes, the fireplaces, and interior fixtures, are studied in detail by Di Fausto. The architect shows great attention to the details of the furnishings. A coherent architectural sense of decoration insinuates itself into his projects for the Italian Embassies. Di Fausto does not, however, stray into that segment of creation called interior design, which remains a virtually unexplored field for him.

Here we find an extraordinary complementarity in the decorative choices. The architecture of the interior spaces and the articulation of the rooms lend themselves to an adequate setting for the rooms of the Representation. Even if a hierarchy is assigned to each of the rooms for the function they perform, the access path to each room is fluid, clear, dynamic. The spaces on the ground floor are modelled by light; their sequence reveals an unaltered modernity. The (main) ballroom is comfortable and elegant. The space is large and airy; in it, nothing is accidental. The aesthetics are sober. No concessions to glitz; everything is fine-tuned with the light that penetrates from the outside.

The *atout* of that space is its extension towards the garden with a semi-circular volume reminiscent of an apse (bow window). The chronicles of the time describe it as a '*vast hall ending in the apse with sufficient free space to serve, as appropriate, for official balls, readings, conferences, and music auditions.*



View of the staircase from the first-floor landing leading to the Ambassador's private apartment.



Entrance to the vestibule from the main door on the Corniche El - Nil with a 'pincer' staircase in the background.

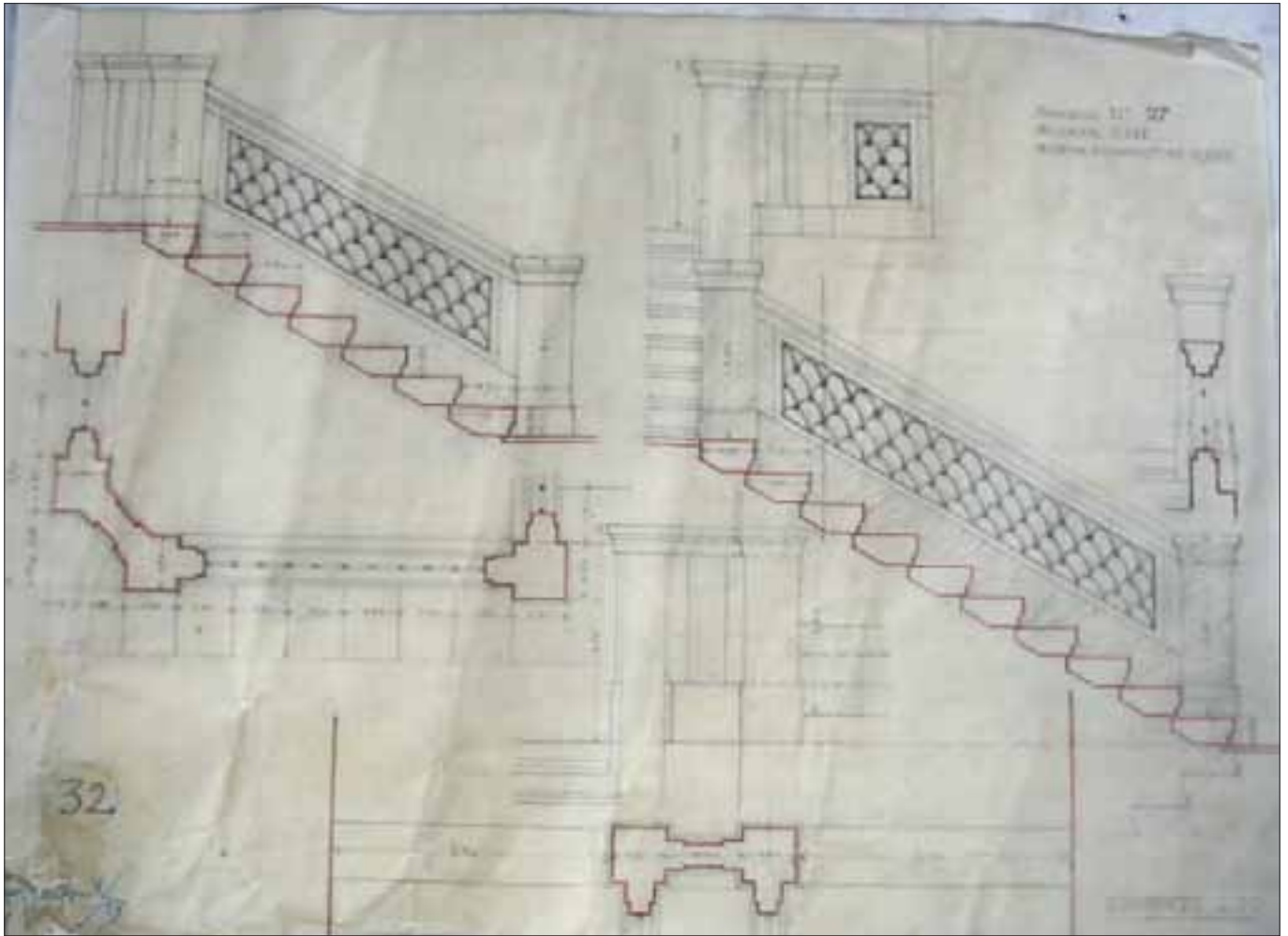




Detail of the marble balustrade of the ramp of the staircase at the entrance to the Ambassador's private apartment.



Staircase leading to the Ambassador's private apartment.



Florestano Di Fausto, *Technical drawing of the detail of the marble staircase (May 1929) with inserts with forged iron scales ornamentation.*

Conceived not without daring, this grand hall is adorned at the four corners with multiple columns, which contribute to vaguely remind us of a presbyterial space, especially for the layout of the interior volume, enclosed in the curve of an apse-shaped recess', reports a chronicle of the time⁴⁴.

Today, it houses a very comfortable meeting space, furnished with sofas and chairs elegantly arranged in the area between the windows which let in light and nature. These elements, in a perfect synthesis, tend to cancel the enclosed space between full and empty elements. The ceiling decoration creates a lively visual counterpoint to the fading of space, generated by the transparency of the windows, to which it reconnects with a rhythmic play of geometries underlined by the lightness of white and the contrasting colour. Solid and hollow, light and colour, make this winter garden unique.

The main hall joins the hemicycle with a symmetrical pair of light imitation marble (*marmoridea*) columns of the Tuscan type on a grey base. Columns and twin fireplaces, designed by Di Fausto (1929), retain the taste of the time still unaltered. The red lounge, featuring the twin fireplace of the one opposite in the main hall, takes its name from the curtains and upholstery: a bold colour palette. This space emerges like a fluid and soft brushstroke against the backdrop of the large main hall. The visual stimulus is penetrating into the interior light. The space is

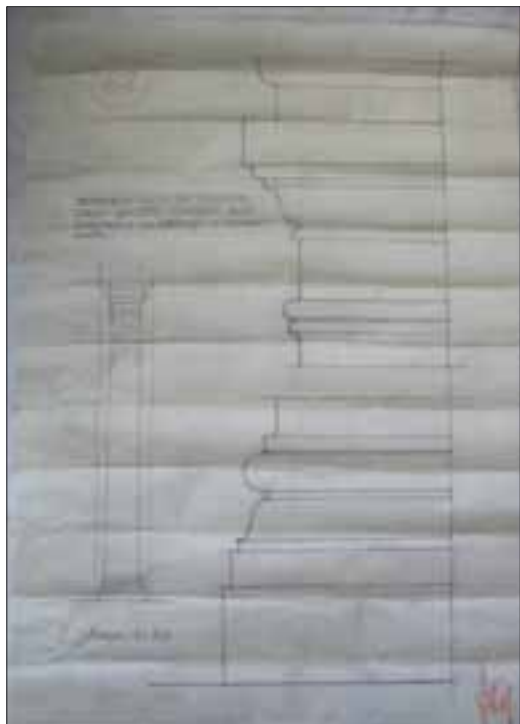


Gallery leading to the ceremonial halls.



Semi-circular extension (bow window) of the lounge overlooking the garden, seen from different angles.





framed by columns and by the ceiling decoration that simulates longitudinal beams. The mirrored double-leaf doors, designed by Di Fausto, reflect this colour.

The dining room is set in a boiserie of fine walnut briar panels that line the walls. Display cabinets housing the precious furnishings and tableware of official lunches, alternate with wooden wall panelling. On the back wall, the Levanto marble fireplace with matching red-brown veins, gives an even stronger character to the room, and establishes a lively conversation with the past: a reassuring sign of the history of the project and of the workers who took part in its realisation. The shape of the fireplace for the dining room is replicated in the Ungaretti room.

Florestano Di Fausto, *Detail of the columns of the gallery adjacent to the 'chiosstrina', meant to be made from imitation marble (marmoridea). The architectural order corresponds to the Tuscan style, according to Andrea Palladio's interpretation as detailed in Book I, Chapter XIV, I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura, 1570.*



Red lounge.



Red lounge.



Red lounge.



Red lounge.

The chronicles of the time describe it as follows: *‘more austere than any others is the dining room, thanks to the wooden panelling that covers it all around and to the elegantly grave character of every colour, of every piece (chairs, table, chandelier) and every decoration’*⁴⁵.

The *working room* – today the Ungaretti room – instead, features the large fireplace in white ‘pavonazzetto’ marble with ashlar sectors, designed by Di Fausto for the dining room, which recalls in a very simplified way the austere 16th-century fireplaces (attributable to the transliteration of the type of fireplace described by architect and piers with rustic ashlar, defined by the treatise writer Sebastiano Serlio as ‘a rustic mixed Doric work’)⁴⁶, pride of the Italian tradition.

The classicism of the forms, the cleanliness of the lines, the ceilings embellished with geometric stuccoes designed by Di Fausto are not an exercise





Dining room seen from different angles.

*Dining room.*



in style, but an intimate reflection on the relationship between exterior and interior, architectural space and living space. The design experience defined the interior decorations, essentially aiming to promote manufacturing excellence and to spread Italian beauty. The more or less complex assemblages, made of stucco or wood, envisaged modules, frames and decorations in line with the updated interpretations of the classical repertoire, which exported the Italian taste⁴⁷.



View of the Ungaretti room.



Bust of Giuseppe Ungaretti (Alexandria in Egypt 1888 – Milan, 1970) with detail of the door designed by Di Fausto.



Detail of the fireplace in the Ungaretti room.

The Italian manufacturing industry was preferred. The works regarding the decoration of the building were removed from the contract specifications of the construction company, to be entrusted to specialized firms operating in Italy. The commissioned Italian companies supplied the artifacts for to the grand interior staircase, provided the works and supplies for the finishing and decoration⁴⁸ of the atrium and reception rooms, including the vestibule, the covered loggia and its fountain, the ceilings and fireplaces in the dining room and ballroom. The furniture and part of the decorations came from Italy. The furnishings sent for the Cairo office were an opportunity to show off the skills of Italian craftsmanship. The wife of the then Minister Roberto Cantalupo (1891 - 1975) also played a part in the set-up. The furniture was commissioned to Melchiorre Bega⁴⁹, an architect of Emilian origins and owner of the firm of the same name, who collaborated with Di Fausto in several offices of Italian embassies abroad⁵⁰. The successful designer was able to create the new furniture for the Embassy with seduc-



Fireplace designed for the dining room (reproduced in the Ungaretti room).



Florestano di Fausto, *Type of door to the first floor.*

which each room was conceived: however, as we have noted regarding the exterior architecture, they tend to reconcile modernity with tradition, with an inevitable prevalence of the latter, in harmony with the particular – and in their turn traditional – uses of the space. Room after room, furniture and furnishings have a special intonation or cadence: resulting in impressions of gaiety, magnificence, or severity, depending on the case. A great deal of attention to interior decoration emerges from the drawings for the ceilings. In particular, we can see the skilful combination of geometric elements, including lobed lozenges, boxed profiles in a checkerboard pattern or with dense polygonal decorations, already defined by Di Fausto, who was the author of the detail drawings, starting from May 1928. Geometric patterns were preferred to the floral one⁵², which suggested an allegorical program inspired by the *Sala degli Scarlatti* of the Doge's Palace in Venice or the Vatican apartments.

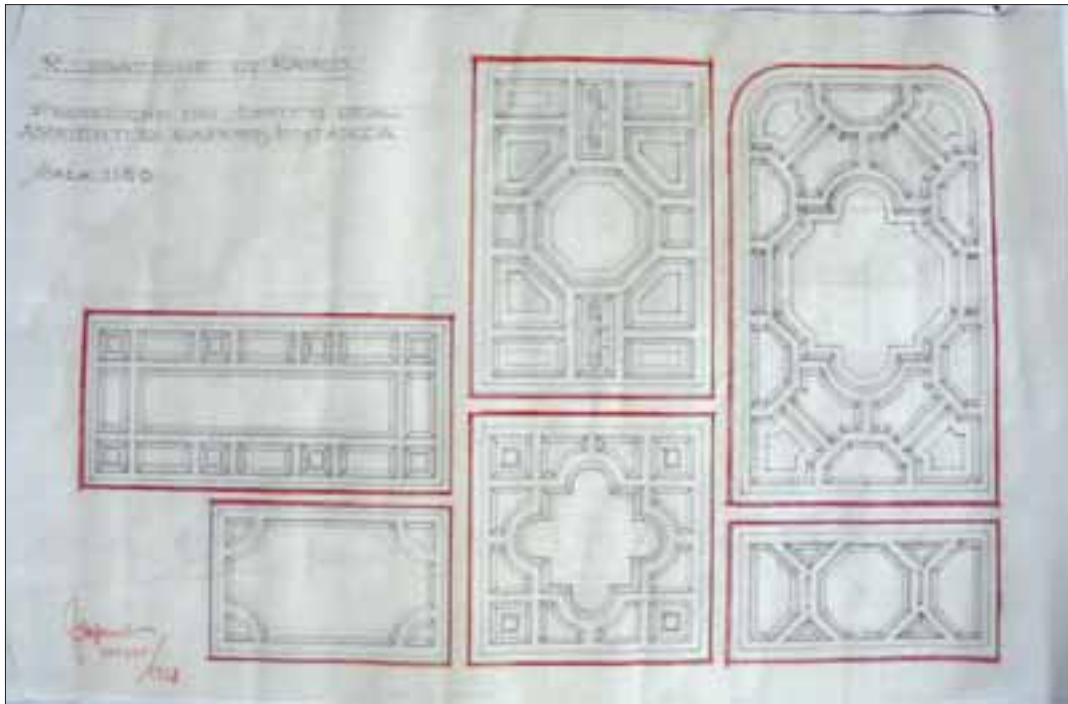
The ballroom would have a set of two twin fireplaces set with Doric architrave, with a truncated pyramidal hood in sight, and distinguished, respectively, by the Latin inscription *nec prope, nec procul*. The completed version retained the main shape of the drawings, except for the hood, which was concealed in the masonry.

For the making of the fireplaces in the ballroom, the most visible place of the Representation, Di Fausto prefers African marble⁵³. The reasons for the choice can be found

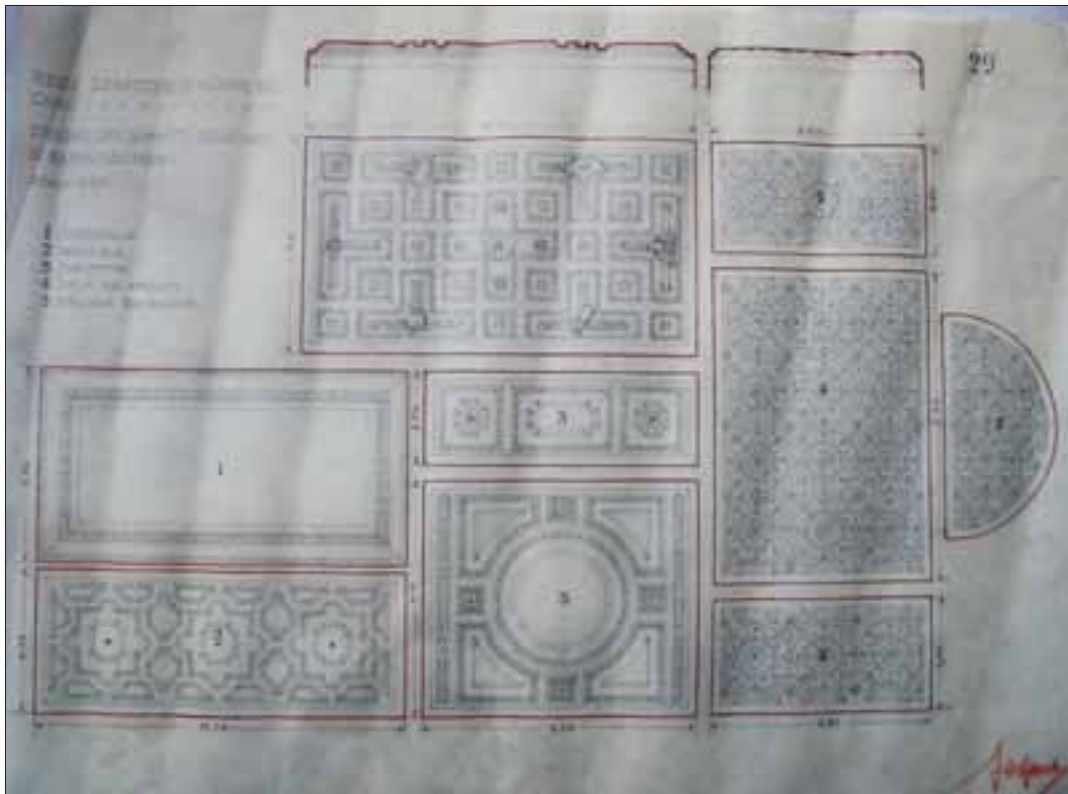
tive design solutions that he had also refined in the nautical sector. The furnishings do not propose a hybrid and discordant model with the architectural project. The furniture seems to be the product of a natural evolution of taste declined in a modern key, that does not subvert the principle of unity between architecture and decoration, container and content, but preserves the 'ratio' of the design articulation⁵¹. From the chronicles of the time, we read: *The character of the furniture corresponds, room by room, to the taste with*



Beniamino Facchinelli (1839 - 1895), *detail of a ceiling showing the rich carving work of Arab art, taken from the main hall of Gaston de Saint-Maurice's mansion.*



Florestano Di Fausto, *Projections of the ceilings of the rooms of the Representation*, 1928. Version of the decorative apparatus with geometric motifs.



Florestano Di Fausto, *Drawing of the ceilings of the reception rooms (vestibule, gallery, lounge, dining room, ballroom)*. Version of the decorative apparatus with floral motifs (garlands, festoons, ovoli) inspired by the ceilings of the 16th-century apartments of Italian palaces, and in particular by the Sala degli Scarlatti of the Doge's Palace in Venice.

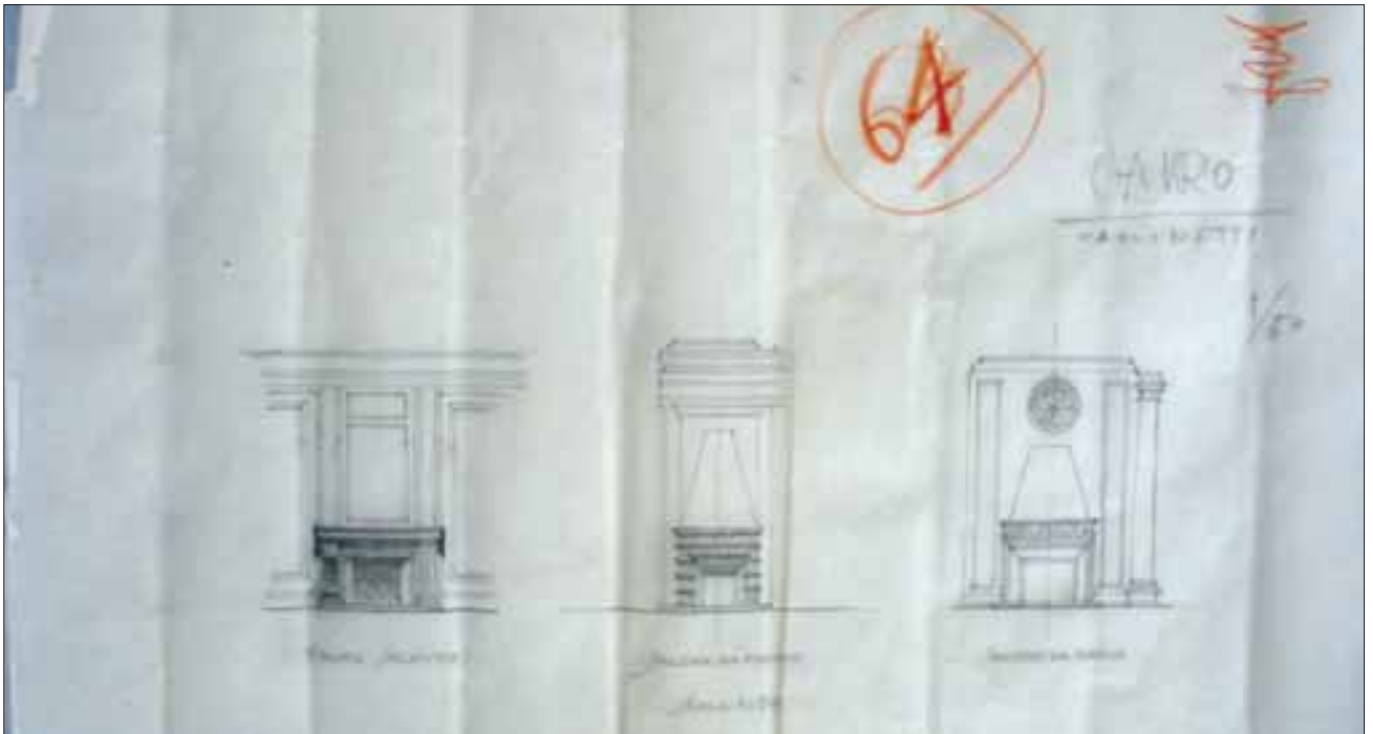


Detail of the ceiling of the Sala degli Scarlatti in the Doge's Palace in Venice (by Biagio and Piero da Faenza, 1501).

in a clear homage to the site, and to the Roman tradition of ancient statuary that had its granite rock supplied from the provinces of the Empire, on the southern side of the Mediterranean⁵⁴. The building of the Cairo Representation was completed in 1931. Ever since its inception, it was able to enclose – as if in a casket – the ambitious program of promoting and perpetuating the best Italian architectural tradition that dialogues with the past, with nature, and with the surrounding environment. The exploratory process underlying the project cannot be defined only as an investigation into the technical and

formal updating of architecture, but as the foundation of a cultural process permeating the decorative arts and the refinement of taste.

From this examination, we can understand that the idea of furniture⁵⁵ for the new seat of the Representation refrained from pursuing Arabizing instances or from relying on antiquarian trends, which often adorn the Embassies with furniture coming from the royal palaces or state properties of the motherland. The spirit of the Representation is renewed for the elegance of its ornament, which is accompanied by functionality. A cautious transition of taste is also made for



Florestano Di Fausto, Studies of fireplaces for the first lounge, for the dining room, for the ballroom.

the furnishing accessories: the parade seems to yield to the avant-garde. The shapes become agile. The experimentation in the Cairo seat opens up new experiences for conviviality. The character that the furniture imposes on the surroundings responds to the process of transformation of society – and, implicitly, to the guidelines of the Ministry launched, in those years, in the act of re-defining the ranks of Diplomacy⁵⁶. It exhibits, according to an updated mentality, the refinement of taste – an expression of values rooted in the culture of antiquity and in the mastery of craftsmanship – that increasingly qualifies as a specialisation of manufacturing industries and of the Italian artistic genius. A new concept of Representation, inaugurated with the Cairo seat, is reconciled with the idea of hospitality, recreating comfortable and modern environments in their living dimension, where Beauty is perceived through the proud uniqueness of an ante-lit-teram version of *Made in Italy*. From that juncture, the senior diplomats had evidently grasped the potential to have a vast program attributable to the concept of “eu zen” (living well), “eu prattein” (acting well), which was equivalent to making the artistic and architectural intuition correspond to the political one. In the early 1920s, with the shift in political conditions, the planned seat constituted an action aimed at promoting modernity.

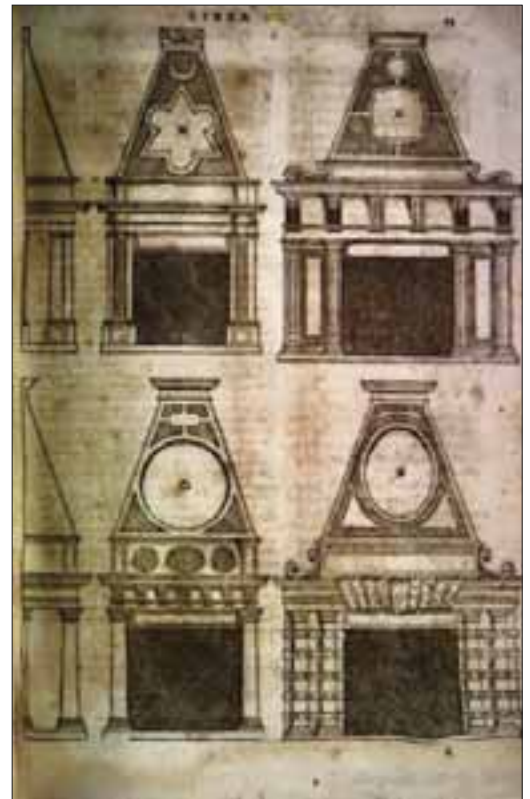
The current taste, according to new parameters and according to a sensitivity attentive to grasping the conscience of the Italian artistic magisterium, reconnected the cultural and ceremonial aspects to the call of historical continuity. The attention for the Italian image turned out to be not only a question of an architectural nature, but it encompassed the sphere of the art of hospitality, which ended up coinciding with a cultural attitude of



Candido Portinai (1903 - 1962), *Portrait of Donna Sofia Cantalupo, the wife of the Minister Plenipotentiary, who contributed to the set-up of the furnishings of the Italian Legation in Cairo between 1931 and 1932.*

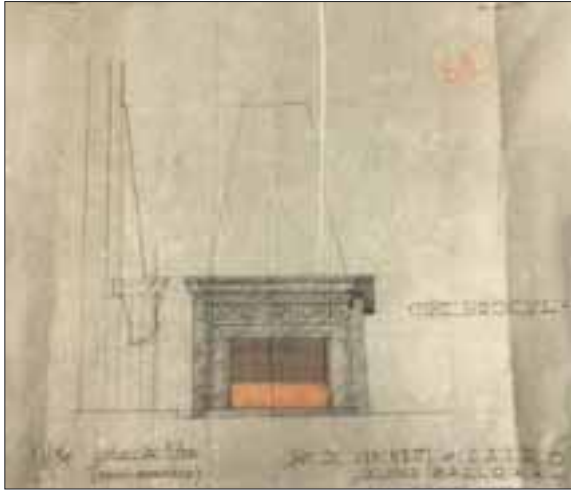


Ginori tableware in Egyptian style based on the model of the service for the Khedive Ismail.

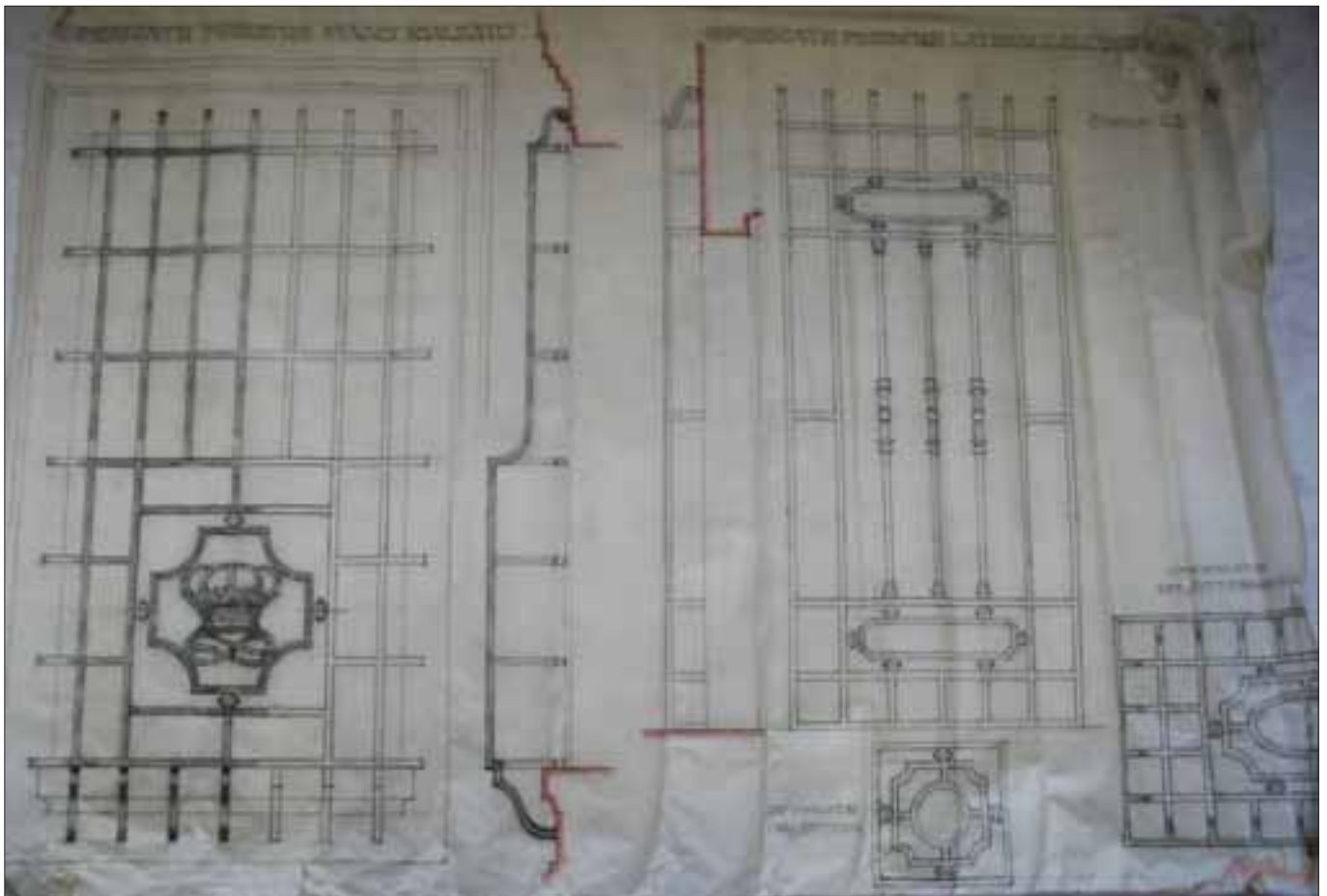


The seventh architectural book by Sebastiano Serlio from Bologna. Dealing with many accidents, which may occur to the architect, in different places, and in different forms of sites, and in the restorations, or restitutions of houses, it is as we have to do, for the services of the other buildings, and similar things, ... In the end there are six buildings added, with their plans and shapes, made in different ways, to build villas for great princes. By the aforementioned author, in Italian and Latin. *Sebastiani Serlij Bononiensis Architecturae liber septimus. ... Ex muse Iac. de Strada ... former typographical workshop Andreae Wecheli, 1575, Chapter XXVIII.*

'Italian' living. Not only the best professionalism, but also the best Italian entrepreneurship contributed to it – from Frette for the linen, to Ginori⁵⁷ under the direction of Gio Ponti⁵⁸, that supplied the Representation with accessories which made it appear modern and sober, and where the present time and memory foreshadowed a promising future to which the Italian community, through the intercession of Diplomacy, entrusted its legitimate aspirations.



Florestano Di Fausto, *Fireplaces for the ballroom.*



Florestano Di Fausto, *Drawing of the railings for the windows on the mezzanine floor and for the side windows at the entrance.*



One of the fireplaces in the main hall, in marble of the 'bigio fiorito' variety.

NOTES

¹ Maria Concetta Migliaccio, see entry in *Architetti e ingegneri italiani dal Levante al Magreb*, edited by Ezio Godoli and Milva Giacomelli, Maschietto editore, 2005, p. 143-174.

² Between 1919 and 1936, the architect Ernesto Verrucci oversaw the extension and restyling of the interiors of the Abdeen Palace in Cairo, alternating the Renaissance style trends with the Arab-Byzantine taste: the transformation of the staircase in Louis XVI style, the Renaissance-style billiard room, the royal apartments, the Arab-style throne room, the apartments for visiting foreign royalty (1927 - 1930), the Renaissance-style vestibule, the Italian theatre, buffet, exedra, pergola. See Ezio Godoli, *Le architetture in stile arabo moderno di Ernesto Verucci Bey*, in "Quasar", no. 18, July - December 1997, pp. 31-58.

³ Cristina Pallini, *Architecture of Engineers Paolo Caccia Dominioni before El Alamaein (1924 - 1938)*, in *Italian Architectural and Artistic Heritage in Egypt*, edited by Ezio Godoli, Milva Giacomelli and Ulisse Tramonti, Effigi, 2017, p. 199-217. See Maria Concetta Migliaccio, entry in *Architetti e ingegneri italiani dal Levante al Magreb*, Maschietto editore, Florence, 2005, pp. 109-113.

⁴ See Egypt Embassy Fund, envelope no. 232.

⁵ In the 1920s, Italy and Egypt established friendly political relations. In this regard, we cite the telex written by Count Caccia Dominioni of Sillavengo, on the occasion of the presentation of his credentials to Fuad, when he was allowed to deliver the speech in Italian. Although some press organs, in particular «Al'Arham» - of nationalist tendency - had opposed the use of Italian as a diplomatic language, even the predecessor, Count Aldrovandi, in January 1923 was reserved a similar treatment on the occasion of the delivery of his letters of credentials. In the telex it is reported that, after the reading of the speech, Fuad entertained himself with great affability with Count Caccia Dominioni, expressing very flattering appreciations for the Italian diplomatic mission. In his report addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he represented

the warm cordiality of sentiments shown towards Italy. Count Caccia Dominioni was able to establish courteous relations with Zaglul Pasha, Egyptian Prime Minister (26 January - 24 November 1924), through exchanges of visits, recognizing that the favourable provisions towards the Italian Royal Government had been firmly planned, already at the time of his inauguration, by the *chargé d'affaires* Armando Koch and through a policy of consensus. See Personnel Archive, Series VIII, Cairo, Telex 10 April 1924. In this relaxed political climate the figure of Ernesto Verrucci stands out. As architect of the Khedival Palaces, he was able to weave a web of privileged relationships between the two Governments. Verrucci's accreditation in the court environment was a continuous *crescendo*, favoured by the affinity of tastes and the Masonic ideas that he had in common with Fuad, a passionate admirer of Italy for having conducted his military studies there as a young man. A polyglot and lover of worldly pleasures, the architect from the Marche region was the chosen companion, witty advisor and favourite interlocutor in the institutional journeys that Fuad made around Europe. Soon, this association benefited Italy and the Italian community in Egypt. The favours resulting from the fine diplomatic work reconciled a political leaning between the two countries. The fact that Fuad wished for an Italian education also for the young prince Farouk, aiming at shaping his moral and intellectual character as an Italian-style king, is reflected in the confidential tones delivered to his trustee Verrucci as we can see from a 1932 very confidential letter received by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His youth military training at the Turin Academy still engraved in his memory, he wanted his son to spend a long period of time in Italy, and hoped that he would be joined, on his return, by an Italian general of broad culture and clear political ideas (he was probably alluded to an important figure such as the well-known General Vittorio Asinari di Bernezzo, aide de camp to the King of Italy, who distinguished himself in the battle of Custoza). Fuad's *Italophilia*, especially in the first years of his reign, had caused much concern to the foreign powers and England. See

Egypt Embassy Fund, b.254 I, letter of 6 April 1932.

⁶ Although the time was clearly unfavourable to real estate investments, the Italian Government had an ambitious plan for school building, especially in the Egyptian hinterland. Ernesto Schiapparelli, an archaeologist at the head of the Italian Association of Missions Abroad (ANSMI) and Piero Parini, a prominent figure at the head of the Italian Directorate for Schools Abroad (DIES), were the main proponents. The promotion of the educational process of the community had to be safeguarded in defence of the Italian language and culture, especially in the peripheral areas of the country which attracted shares of the population absorbed in the occupational sectors with a strong primary and secondary vocation such as the mining site of Koisser. The professionals worked together on the construction site of the Port Said Church. The professional partnership also extended to the project for the Ankara office in 1935, which however was accomplished only starting in 1937 after Paolo Caccia Dominioni's return from the East Africa campaign.

⁷ See Egypt Embassy Fund, envelope no. 232.

⁸ Isidore Justin Séverine Taylor, *La Syrie L'Égypte, La Palestine et la Judée: Considérées sous leur aspect historique, archéologique, descriptif et pittoresque*, Paris, 1857.

⁹ The island of Rawdah (whose name means garden), located opposite Cairo, is a delightful oasis covered in shade and scattered with monumental ruins. It is joined to Old Cairo by a pontoon bridge established in front of one of the bastions of the horn of Ibrahim Bey [...]. Many beautiful roads were laid out on the island by the French [...] they also built a six-winged mill on the northern tip of the island. Towards the other end, is the famous Nilometer or Mekyas [...]. Its purpose was to officially measure the height of the Nile flood. [...].

¹⁰ *Cinque mois au Caire et dans la Basse Égypte* by Charles Gabriel Lemonnier, 1880.

¹¹ The island of Rawdah, resplendent with flowers and greenery, and the cheerful countryside of Giza extend to the Libyan desert, all pink at dawn, but of a soft and diaphanous pink, with blue halftones.

¹² Arthur Rhoné, *L'Égypte à petite journées: Le Caire d'autrefois*, 1910.

¹³ The small arm of the Nile, often dried up, which slides between the shore and the large island of Rawdah, rising in a vigorous green on the horizon of the Giza plain [...].

¹⁴ «L'Avvenire di Tripoli», *La nuova sede della Legazione italiana*, V, 124, 28/5/1932.

¹⁵ «L'Avvenire di Tripoli», op. cit.

¹⁶ Considered the most beautiful suburb of Cairo, Garden City was designed in 1905 by the engineer and botanist Josè Lamba according to a free, visionary, and nonconformist design idea. Among the unusual morphology of the blocks formed by arched shapes, stands out – in a more or less symmetrical position with respect to the entire urban complex – the shape of a lot with two intersecting arches so as to resemble the profile of a carp. See Samir Raafat, *A Retrospective Part I*, 6 August 1998, www.egy.com. Rather than being inspired by freshwater fauna, it would seem likely to be the shape of an eye (at which point, one might wonder if it is possible to hypothesize a reference to Egyptian esotericism, which is appropriate by Masonic iconography). The lot in question housed at one end the only public space intended as a neighborhood green. The other lots created a private and enclosed space. Josè Lamba (? - 1914), had attended the renowned *Ecole nationale d'Horticulture* of Versailles, founded in 1874 by Pierre Joigneaux to train skilled gardeners. The French landscape architect had the opportunity to perfect his experience in the field of botany, and between 1898 and 1900 he had been awarded various prizes at prestigious juried competitions. He was also inspired by the arrangement of the gardens of the *Société des Bains de Mer* of the Principality of Monaco. The planting of the exotic vegetation destined to the *Petite Afrique*, the most striking section of the Monegasque gardens designed by Edouard André (assistant to Baron Hausmann) in 1893, represented a successful solution of rooting of tree species on arid soil, exposed to a hot summer climate. See «Journal de Monaco», 7 May 1901, 44th

Year, no. 2235. Lamba, *dessinateur-paysagiste* with registered office in boulevard Malesherbes, 37, Paris, appears among the exhibitors at the Exposition Générale d'horticulture of 28 May 1898. In the *Arts et Industries Horticoles* section, he is awarded the second prize and a gold medal for ranking in the 84th competition 'dessins, plans de jardin et parcs' (sur plans cotés et programmes fournis par la Société). In the same edition, he ranked in the *Concours imprévus*, with the delivery of an artistic object. His name appears among the competitors at the Exposition Universelle de 1900 à Paris, "Liste des Récompenses, Extraits, Groupe VIII, Horticulture et Arboriculture, 1901, Paris". See «Bulletin trimestriel / Société d'horticulture de Limoges», 1898. Lamba ranked second and was awarded a silver medal in the 27 June 1900 competition. Edouard André was part of the jury. In 1904 Josè Lamba, on behalf of the Egyptian State, carried out surveys for the drainage of Egyptian land, in «L'Égypte contemporaine. Revue de la Société Khédiviale [puis de la société sultanieh, de la Société Royale] d'économie politique, de statistique et de législation», 1915. In 1912, the agricultural engineer, an expert of the Mixed Courts, was based in rue Cherif, 6 and to Midan Al Ismailiyya, n. 5, in Cairo. He was the author of the paper *L'Avenir de la culture du Coton dans l'Afrique du Nord (Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc)* in «Bulletin / Association cotonnière coloniale», Paris, 1912. In order to write it, Lamba went on a study and tourism trip in Morocco, from 15 September to 15 November 1912, with an itinerary between the Oudjda and the Middle Atlantic, as can be seen from the insertion in the number of the «Touring club de France, Revue mensuelle», 22nd year, June 1912. Lamba died prematurely in a car accident in Heliopolis. His daughter Jaqueline Lamba, a very young fatherless woman, married André Breton and joined the surrealist movement.

¹⁷ Mercedes Volait, *Architecte e Architectures de l'Égypte moderne*, Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 2005, p. 177.

¹⁸ See *Servitudes in The Nile Land & Agricultural Cy*. The Municipality of Cairo issued urban planning regulations for the Garden City district, according to which strict rules had to be observed for the benefit of health and landscape. The area along the Nile quickly became an upper middle class residential district for which it was

necessary to establish an urban planning regulation that regulated building permits extended to buildings for residential use only, such as prestigious villas and elegant *immeubles de rapport*. On the other hand, the establishment of buildings for public use or for use as cafes, restaurants or boutiques was ruled out. The height of the buildings could not exceed eighteen metres above garden level, with the sole exception of the crowning of the façades or other decorations: an indispensable condition to guarantee the panoramic view of the district. To limit the environmental impact, the building could only be built on two thirds of the land. Each construction could not stand on the roadside but the building site area had to be placed at a distance of two metres from the enclosure or the neighbouring wall. The garden, which surrounded each building, had to rise about sixty centimetres and less than a metre above the level of the road, to which it was connected with a grassy surface. The regulation expressly forbade a masonry curtain wall facing the road. The fence was required to have a *grille de clôture en fer* up to 2.50m of height along the road, with a masonry base from 30 to 60 centimetres high, with a free end in forged iron. Moreover, the health of the neighbourhood was also to be protected by the installation of septic tanks in the absence of a municipal sewage system.

¹⁹ The humanistic aspect of the treatises is not negligible, according to which the palaces crowned by pinnacles or obelisks, of Sansovinian origin (think of the Marciana Library), mark the 'old-style' forum. The reference to the popular interpretation of the Venetian people is not marginal, since obelisks, when not considered as chimneys, were the distinctive sign of the palaces for the captains 'da mar'. See Mario Nani Mocenigo, *Venetian naval history: from Lepanto to the fall of the Republic*, Rome, Ministry of the Navy, Cabinet Office, 1935. See also the studies edited by Elena Bassi, Giannantonio Selva, *Architetto veneziano*, Cedam, 1936, and those by Giulio Lupo, *La forma "all'antica" del comignolo veneziano: l'obelisco*, ArchHistor III (2016) no. 5, to which reference is made. Nevertheless, the construction in Rome of some pyramids dating back to the 1st century BC, such as the Cestia and the Meta Romuli (no longer existing) demonstrates the convergence and reciprocity of the Egyptian and Roman cul-

tures, that make use of continuous cross-references.

²⁰ This intentionality outweighed the exceedingly redundant *Brasinian* results through which Roman architecture recreated the atmospheres of Bernini's style and Baroque past. The contemporary story of the Tirana Development Plan, initially entrusted to the architect Armando Brasini (1879 - 1965) between 1924 and 1925, was a significant experience that corroborated the building program of the Italian Diplomacy. The renunciation of architectural emphasis, particularly by Brasini, meant for the Diplomacy an economy of expenditure. It is not by chance that the elaboration of the plan for the Albanian capital, simplified in the sobriety of its forms and execution, was signed by Di Fausto and commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See Maria Concetta Migliaccio, *Identità e architettura nell'esperienza albanese di Florestano Di Fausto*, in *Architetti e Ingegneri italiani in Albania*, edited by Milva Giacomelli and Armand Vokshi, Edifir, Florence, 2012.

²¹ «L'Avvenire di Tripoli», cit.

²² The design would be adopted again in the Italian diplomatic premises in Buenos Aires.

²³ The 'kneeling window' is widely used in the Tuscan area. The model is present in Palazzo Medici Riccardi based on Michelangelo's intervention. The solution, typical of Mannerism, refers to a window opening surmounted by tympanums and supported by *poggioli* (corbels) that support the sill. Other examples are attributable to Bartolomeo Ammanati for the Pitti Palace and to other late Mannerist architects.

²⁴ See Florestano Di Fausto's works in Rhodes, such as the *Palazzo delle Poste* (1927 - 1928); the *Palazzo di Giustizia* (1924), and the *Scuole Regie Maschili*, in collaboration with Carlo Buscaglione (1924 - 1925).

²⁵ In one of the versions of the project, measured obelisks line up in an unprecedented perceptual compromise on the boundary wall. In the Rome of Sixtus V, the ancient obelisks not only represented the signal of power, but their positioning established the perspective hinge of the ambitious project to redesign the city. This phatic function between obelisk and town planning location stimulates that communicative

intent in which Rome's obelisks from ancient Egypt are recalled. Transported in the imperial period, when Rome came into contact with the civilization of the pharaohs, they were absorbed into the common perception to be placed in Roman temples to profess the cult of Egyptian divinities. The reference to the Mausoleum of Augustus of the 1st century BC with the two granite obelisks (now placed in the Quirinal and Esquilin squares), transported from Egypt and placed at the entrance of the funerary monument celebrating the battle of Actium in 31 BC and the submission of Antony and Cleopatra, comes to mind. The figurative debt of the past metaphorically referred to a semantic message, through precise architectural elements, from whose relationship cohered a harmonious and assonant whole or more simply the reference to vaguely *Brasinian* visions.

²⁶ The idea of placing a time-measuring device in the wall insert of the Chancery arouses amazement as much as curiosity, both for its size and for the distinctive sign that becomes a focal point that catalyses the gaze. Indeed, the Italian tradition boasts numerous examples of dials or sundials on façades, to be understood as a decorative element, both functional and attractive, that confers prestige to the building. The dial 'metaphorically' alludes to the scansion of 'Italic' time. The calculation of time, marked by the gnomon that sends its shadow projected by the sun, inevitably fulfils the purpose of paying homage to the Egyptian civilization that was among the first to measure time (the oldest instrument in use was a rudimentary sundial, dating back to 3,500 BC).

²⁷ «L'Avvenire di Tripoli», cit.

²⁸ Ezio Godoli, *La via della mediterraneità delle architetture di Florestano Di Fausto per le isole dell'Egeo*, in *L'architettura dell'altra modernità*, Proceedings of the XXVI Congress of Architecture Studies, Gangemi, Rome, 2007.

²⁹ Michele Biancale, *Florestano Di Fausto*, Editions Les Archives Internationales, 1932.

³⁰ Florestano Di Fausto, *Visione mediterranea dell'Architettura*, 1937.

³¹ Here, instinctively, is rooted the narrative path of Di Fausto's Mediterranean spirit that follows the elaboration of his concept

of architecture applied in the Italian overseas territories, from the Aegean Sea to the southern shore of the Mediterranean, and, finally, to the Libyan deserts. In retrospect, his creative effort in the Aegean area is reflected in an ideal lyricism that aims at the purity of forms.

³² An example is the mausoleum of Eurisace (ca. 30 BC) at Porta Maggiore in Rome. There is also a reference to the so-called *oeil-de-boeuf* openings of the 19th-century Egyptian palace architecture of Ras El-Tin in Alexandria of Egypt: the palace of Mohamed Ali's harem, built in 1828, which draws inspiration from the 'Turkish style', and of which we know the interventions of the architect Pietro Avoscani (Livorno, 1816 - 1891), and of Ernesto Verrucci later.

³³ The different types of existing openings seem to be resolved in the 'archetypes' of Serlio's Treatise, with particular reference to Sebastiano Serlio, *Delle finestre nelli tetti*, Chapter XXXIII, Book VII, in *I sette libri dell'Architettura*, 1575.

³⁴ Sebastiano Serlio, *Quarto libro, Regole generali di architettura sopra le cinque maniere de gli edifici: cioe, thoscano, dorico, ionico, corinthio, et composito, con gli essempli dell'antiquita, che per la maggior parte concordano con la dottrina di Vitruuio*. Printed in Venice for Francesco Marcolini Da Forli, 1537.

³⁵ The modernity of the building can also be found in the technological solutions. The thermal conditioning of the interiors required an appropriate study of the window fixtures, as can be seen from the plate which includes special charts designed to guarantee the correct execution of the openings during the construction phase. Some of them were provided with a 'vasistas' device (obscured by roller shutters, as stated in the tender specifications and indicated in the executive drawings of the windows, in which the boxes for the roller shutters are inserted).

³⁶ A. Bona, *Città e architettura a Milano da Novecento al razionalismo: 1921-33, in Storia dell'architettura italiana. Il primo Novecento*, edited by G. Ciucci - G. Muratore, Milan, 2004.

³⁷ Fulvio Irace, *Cà brutta*, Officina, Rome, 1982.

³⁸ Mario Lupano, *Marcello Piacentini*, Editori Laterza, Rome -Bari 1991.

³⁹ Paolo Nicoloso, *Gli architetti di Mussolini*, Franco Angeli, Milan, 1999.

⁴⁰ Di Fausto's drawings reproduced in this section, come from the Drawings Fund of the Historical Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, following a photographic campaign conducted by the author on the occasion of her PhD thesis, discussed in 2006.

⁴¹ The 'marmoridea' columns, despite the simplicity of the marble substitute material adopted for obvious budget reasons, highlight the skill of a sector of artistic craftsmanship applied to construction. Starting from the mid-19th century, in Rome, the appearance of industrial workshops for the processing of 'scagliola' imitation marble led to a widespread use of this practice, which gained considerable notoriety. See Marina Marcelli, *Le industrie romane dall'occupazione francese all'avvento del Fascismo*, 2014.

⁴² The use of decorative forged iron in Egypt was a fortunate opportunity for experimentation for experienced Italian master craftsmen of the art. Think of Alessandro Mazzacutelli (1865 - 1938), a blacksmith decorator and master 'battiferro' (in Ojetti's words) and his circle, which also included Sante Mingazzi (1867 - 1922), the maker of the shelters for the Theatre of Alexandria in Egypt; or Umberto Bellotto (1882 - 1940) who had collaborated with Ernesto Verrucci in the Ras El-Tin palace, also in Alexandria. Di Fausto's drawings for the railings, gates and suspension and wall lamps intended for the Cairo seat, to be made in forged iron, show an admirable skill in the design and elaboration of geometric decorations and openwork compositions or stylized racemes. If we compare the Cairo project with Di Fausto's contemporary ones for the Tunisian state-owned offices, we notice the collaboration with the architect Vito Mario Giglio (Tunis, 1882), an Italian designer working in Tunisia, known as a designer of forged-iron fittings. The latter had assimilated a recognized skill in the art of iron forging from the thriving climate of the French colony. In this case, Di Fausto was flanked by a local professional, which invalidates his authorship. The project for the Egyptian seat, on the other hand, proposes an autonomous stylization

and representation of the iron decorations, showing Di Fausto's affection for a sober and balanced graphicism, equidistant from Deco reminiscences.

⁴³ The marblework was entrusted to the expertise of the renowned Italian firm Medici. See Priscilla Grazioli, *Medici Marmorari romani*, Vatican City, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1994.

⁴⁴ «L'Avvenire di Tripoli», cit.

⁴⁵ «L'Avvenire di Tripoli», cit.

⁴⁶ Serlio, Book IV; see *Libro VII, De camini & camere al costume d'Italia*, in *Tutte l'opere di architettura di Sebastiano Serlio bolognese; dove si trattano in disegno, quelle cose, che sono più necessarie all'architetto; ... con l'aggiunta del settimo libro*, 1618.

⁴⁷ It is worth remembering the importance of the furnishing solutions presented at the various editions of the Monza Expos in the 1920s, to be considered as examples of the interior design entrusted to talented architects. Undoubtedly, the showcase offered by the Expos marks the Italian artistic orientation to be disseminated abroad. Educating Di Fausto – or, rather, the members of the Permanent Commission for the furnishings of the foreign offices of which Roberto Papini was also be part, in the pursuit of an Italian style – was a necessary peculiarity for the achievement of modernity. On the recommendation of Guido Marangoni, a note arrived in Cairo in December 1925, drawing attention to the Monza Exposition “which is becoming increasingly important in Italian artistic life”. Marangoni, in fact, informs Roberto Papini – then inspector of Fine Arts and member of the C.A.S.E. Commission, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – of the intention of the organizing committee of the Biennial Monza Expo to have a representative of the Egyptian crafts at the 1927 Exhibition. For the occasion, the Committee's president Luigi Mangiagalli (1850 - 1928), a Senator of the Kingdom and Mayor of Milan, had addressed an official invitation to the Egyptian Minister of Public Education (see Egypt Embassy Fund, Envelope no. 206). Through Roberto Papini, the diplomat in Cairo, Count Caccia Dominioni, was urged to promote cultural exchanges and the circulation of decorative arts. These were years of ferment for the dissemination of Italian taste, which tried to

assert itself on the international scene and to find a foothold among the leading personalities of the time. Guido Marangoni, just a few years later, in 1928, would take on the role of director of the magazine «La Casa bella». The artistic climate created the right milieu for cultural mediation and generated reinvigorating stimuli for Italian art.

⁴⁸ Among the firms to which the artisan work was entrusted, mention should be made of the Nistri Brothers Decoration Company of the Pisan Enrico Nistri (1871 - 1922), who had arrived in Cairo in 1901, owner with his brother of an important furniture company specialising in decorations, second only to the Parvis firm.

⁴⁹ Giuseppe Miano, *Florestano Di Fausto, Melchiorre Bega et la Regia Legazione d'Italia au Caire*, in Mercedes Volait, *Le Caire-Alexandrie, architectures européennes, 1850 - 1950*, Cairo, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 2001, pp. 57-63.

⁵⁰ If the theme of living becomes a diriment aspect in the many Expos, the need is nevertheless felt to develop a stylistic criterion for the furnishings of the diplomatic missions. The style to be adopted for the ceremonial furnishings entered the national debate. The finest minds of the time were involved in the search for a remarkable solution, and even a competition was called. Starting from 1924, in parallel with the design of the building, the Ambassador Giacomo Paulucci di Calboli Barone himself, together with the journalist Manlio Morgagni from Forlì, announced a competition for the furnishing of Italian Embassy seat abroad, published on the pages of the illustrated magazine of «Il Popolo d'Italia» in January 1926. The competition called for the creation of a modern national style in the art of furniture. In the magazine, we can read that the object was *providing the seat with fine modern furniture, rather than – often even fake – antiques* (cit.). [...]. The chosen theme, despite being inspired by practical needs, gave the artists great creative freedom, so long as they kept in mind that also in this field, we want to reach the affirmation of a modern Italian style of furniture, responding to the daily use of an inhabited apartment and, at the same time, in tune with the character of nobility and balanced taste that are the pride of tradition. Each project will be the pride of Italian artists, whose genius must be measured not by the useless

vagaries of a wild imagination, but by the extent to which they will know how to combine beauty and the need for Italy to be adequately represented in the world, also through the decor of its modernly-furnished seat. The foreign seat has the honour of representing the majesty of the Motherland and of the King in a foreign land – at the same time, it must be the home of the Ambassador's family, as well as and a ceremonial and reception location. As such, it should resemble the apartments of the magnificent Lords of the Renaissance, for whom the artists created the masterpieces of antique Italian furniture including cabinets, chests, tables, chairs, armoires, beds, bookshelves, chandeliers. In the absence of a defined aesthetic program, the guidelines of the competition announcement invited to adopt an Italian and modern character. The announcement invoked a national style, unpolluted by the Nordic and foreign models that had dominated the Expos. The Commission was made up of Gelasio Caetani, Honorary Ambassador of His Majesty the King, a diplomatic engineer and former member of the C.A.S.E. Commission, together with the Marquis Giacomo Paulucci di Calboli Barone, counsellor of His Majesty's Legation, head of the Cabinet of His Eminence Benito Mussolini; to *Commendator* Roberto Papini, Chief Inspector of Fine Arts, together with Donna Margherita Grassini Sarfatti (1880 - 1961), art critic of «Il Popolo d'Italia»; and prominent architects such as Alberto Calza Bini, Gustavo Giovannoni, and Marcello Piacentini. The winners were named in 1927. For the furniture section, only eight competitors were selected – four of which were rejected due to lack of adherence to the competition theme. The winners were Tommaso Buzi and Gio Ponti. «La Rivista Illustrata Il Popolo d'Italia», 1926, Year IV, Issue no. 1, January 1926, p. 7.

⁵¹ It is evident that Di Fausto moves in the field of design as an architect who defines the individual elements of the composition in constant coordination with the Technical Office, following the dictates proclaimed by Roberto Papini himself (see Roberto Papini, «Emporium», May 1923, vol. LVII) calling for a consonance between the exterior and interior of the architectural spaces. The comprehensive approach of Di Fausto's project provides even the tiniest

details, such as the knobs for the handrails, or the door carvings.

⁵² The carving work seems to deliberately the rich decorative apparatus distilled from the ceiling tradition of Arab art. The fine 16th-century Italian ceilings from the Venetian and Roman palaces – such as the Palazzo Ducale or Palazzo Farnese, whose elegance and craftsmanship are borrowed – inspired one of the versions of the ornamental modelling for the ceilings of the ceremonial rooms of the diplomatic premises.

⁵³ The fireplaces in the main hall were made of flowery grey African marble (on a grey background with white and pink veins and clasts). The marblework was entrusted to the expertise of the prestigious Italian firm Medici.

⁵⁴ *I marmi colorati della Roma imperiale*, exhibition catalogue edited by M. De Nuccio, L. Ungaro, Marsilio editore, 2002.

⁵⁵ If we analyse the question of the furnishing of the spaces of the Representation – despite the alternating events mainly due to the regency of the Ministers Plenipotentiary who took turns in the absence of a definitive seat – the preference always fell on the request for 'respectable' furnishings. As can be seen from the correspondence, the furniture commissioned by Negrotto Cambiaso before 1923 was bought locally from the Furino and Sednaoui firms (see Personnel Archive, Series VIII, Cairo, telex of 12 March 1923). Aldrovandi obtained part of the furniture from his predecessor; Count Caccia Dominioni's furniture included, among other things, a large oriental rug made in Smyrna. Among the 'luxury' furnishings there are only 'a sofa and two leather armchairs', (identical to those that were purchased the year before for the Cabinet of His Eminence Senator Contarini, still visible in the Farnesina palace), 'since the sofa and armchairs in red pseudo-damask certainly did not provide decorum to the Offices'. The furniture of the temporary premises was integrated by 'a cabinet and a glass cupboard made in a very simple but artistic way by the Jacovelli firm' (see Personnel Archive, Series VIII, Cairo, telex no. 207/225 - 11 June 1924).

⁵⁶ Luigi Vittorio Ferraris, *L'amministrazione centrale del Ministero degli Esteri italiano nel suo sviluppo 1848 - 1954*,

Biblioteca della "Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali", Florence, 1955.

⁵⁷ The relations between the *Azienda Manifatturiera Ginori* of Florence and the Egyptian circles date back to the thriving time when Ismail Pasha (also called Ismail the Magnificent, Khedive of Egypt between 18 January 1863 and 8 August 1879), commissioned an exquisite set of tableware back in 1872, for the inauguration of the Suez Canal (See Patrizia Piacentini's studies, and in particular, *L'Egitto di Gaetano Lodi e il servizio del Khedivè in porcellana Ginori*, Polistampa, Florence, 2011). The drawings inspired by the Arab tradition were masterfully interpreted by the designer Gaetano Lodi, born in Crevalcore. The talented artist had gained credit in Egypt in the circle of the architect Ambroise Baudry, who was firmly established in the Cairo milieu. In particular, Gaetano Lodi had the opportunity to collaborate in the decoration of the grand foyer of the *Palais de l'Opéra* in Paris, under the architect Charles Garnier, where Ambroise's brother, the painter Paul Baudry, worked as a decorator. In Cairo, the Italian artist took part in the decoration of the *harem* and *selamlık* halls of the Giza Palace. This events add further elements to the historical reconstruction of the commitment and the most significant contributions to the process of acculturation and diffusion of Italian art in Egypt, particularly encouraged by the diplomacy of our country. At the time, the Italian consul Giuseppe de Martino played an important mediating role. It is also recalled that the provisional seat of the Italian Legation was located in the splendid setting of the 'palais arabe' designed by Ambroise Baudry, which belonged to Delort de Gléon. Before the property was leased to the Italian diplomatic mission, the garden pavilion hosted foreign artists of great renown, becoming a true hotbed of international culture and art. The events related to tableware set in Egyptian style, take on a daring character if we consider that the payment of the production costs to the manufacturing company was very troubled, following Ismail's dismissal. The tableware is said to have been donated by Ismail to His Highness the Prince of Wales, who visited Egypt first in 1875 and again in 1876, on his way back from a trip to India. Even after his exile in Naples, Ismail was forced to honour his debt with the Ginori Company. The

Company's economic penetration in Cairo was attempted again about a decade later. In fact, in March 1892, a private negotiation was started for the sending to Egypt of a luxury set of tableware and bedroom china on the initiative of a commercial agent, Nicola Sabbag, a resident of Alexandria in Egypt, who had heard of the renovation plans for a wing and of the dining room of a Khedival Palace (probably the restoration and renovation works of the Abdeen and Koubbeh Palaces, in progress in those years). Thinking that the official tableware at the court of Khedive Abbas Hilmi, who had just taken office, could also be renewed, he hired the Ginori firm for the possible commission. The crates that were shipped comprised samples as follows:

Saucer, Egyptian style decoration, gold background on the indentation with blue stars, A.H. monogram in the centre, surmounted by the Royal Crown; Saucer, blue background, yellow rosettes and a letter A, surmounted by the Royal Crown; Perforated plate, decorated with gold and colors with an M.J monogram, surmounted by the Royal Crown; Saucer, with indentation and gold background, decorated with blue fans and an M.J. monogram, surmounted by the Royal Crown; Saucer, "gran fuoco" blue band deco-

rated with intertwined cherubs and gold chrome at the end of the indentation with an A.H. monogram, surmounted by the Royal Crown; Saucer with a covered edge, decorated with golden pending elements filled with carmine and green flowers, letter A in the centre in graffitied gold, surmounted by the Royal Crown.

The total cost was 268.40 lire. Two plates of drawings for bedroom china were sent to accompany the crockery samples. The various pieces decorated in the Egyptian manner of which the order consisted, together with the drawings, were sent by the Director of Ginori to the Italian consular agency in Alexandria. The tableware supply remained in stock in the crates at the Consulate in Alexandria for a long time, the big deal having flopped. The reasons for the failure of the Ginori product export in Cairo are due to a lack of intermediation by the local Government, since it was a private initiative whose management was entrusted to a disreputable person. The then Minister in Cairo, Licurgo Macciò, took an interest in the affair, and having ascertained the causes of the unsuccessful deal, consulted His Eminence de Martino Pasha, who expressed his perplexities, since the Khedive had never solicited the supply of a

luxury table service. Therefore, Licurgo Macciò arranged for the return of the crates to Italy on 6 March 1894, when the well-packed samples were entrusted to the Florio and Rubettino shipping company, following the request of the Ginori Director on 26 February 1894. See the Egypt Embassy Fund, envelope 46

We thank the Ginori Doccia Museum for their collaboration, and Livia Frescobaldi for her willingness to provide information on this matter. For more information, see the recent studies relating to the Ginori porcelain manufacture. See M. Teresa Giovannini, Oliva Rucellai, *Gio Ponti. La collezione del Museo Richard-Ginori della manifattura di Doccia*, Maretti Editore, 2015. We also thank Stefania Ruggeri, Federica Onelli and Paola Busonero of the Diplomatic Historical Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for always showing great helpfulness and for addressing with great competence and care the research therein conducted. Thanks also to Ezio Godoli, Milva Giacomelli, and Francesco Perfetti for their assistance.

⁵⁸ Silvia Cassiodoro, *Gio Ponti. Scena e design, un unico modo*, in Edibus, Vicenza, 2016.



Ippolito Caffi. *Cairo, Sultan Hassan Mosque*, 1844. © Photographic Archive. Fondazione Musei Civici, Venice

HISTORY OF THE ITALIAN COMMUNITY IN CAIRO

by Antonio Verde and Marco Cardoni

BEGINNINGS

The geographical proximity between the Italian peninsula and Egypt has, since ancient times, favoured contacts between their respective peoples, albeit with varying degrees of intensity during different historical periods. Among the first communities to arrive in the modern age, we should take note of the significant migration of Italian Jews who left Tuscany – and especially Livorno – and arrived in southern and eastern Mediterranean countries in the 18th century.

In the Ottoman era in particular, it was the “capitulations” – the agreements by which the Sultans granted certain privileges to European countries – that played a significant part in the intensification of trade relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean, especially thanks to the Genoese and Pisan merchants. The Napoleonic adventure would represent a further stimulus to the growth of European interest in Egypt and vice versa. After reconquering Egypt from Turkey, Mohamed Ali, who in 1805 would assume the supreme government office of Viceroy, with the hereditary title of Pasha, fully understood the role of European science and technology, not least for military purposes; understood it so well that he decided to surround himself with an ever-



increasing number of foreign “advisers”, experts in various sectors, who would have a crucial role in leading the country towards the new era.

A case in point is Carlo Rossetti. Born in 1736 in Venice, he had emigrated to Egypt where he founded some thriving commercial activities. Thanks to his entrepreneurial skills, he was able to establish strong ties with several Mamluk governors, and with Ali Bey and Mohammed Ali in particular. Impressed by the ability demonstrated by the Italian in the exploitation of Egyptian mineral resources, the latter made him one of his most trusted advisors. Rossetti inspired many reforms, both in the economic and cultural fields. For example, he organised the Italian visit of the Maronite al-Masabki, who could therefore learn the art of typography and later become the director of the Bulacco printing house. Here, with ink and paper from Livorno, the first Arabic-Italian dictionary was printed in 1822.

Bernardino Drovetti, an explorer and collector of Egyptian antiquities, also came into contact with Mohammed Ali during his numerous trips to Egypt, and he so impressed the Pasha that he



Dancers and singers in Luxor, 1880. Photo by Antonio Beato (Francis Amin Collection).

too was included in the ranks of his advisers, especially during the debate on administrative reforms deemed necessary for Egypt.

Special mention should be given to the large group of political exiles – patriots, Republicans and Freemasons – who had participated in the failed European revolutionary uprisings of 1820-21. These were people who sought refuge in the Ottoman Empire, of which Egypt was part at the time, to escape persecution at home. Among them, Pietro Avoscani from Livorno, who would become the designer of the Cairo Opera House, was the first artist to have a connection with the members of the Egyptian court. Other Italians known in Egypt for their political activity were Francesco Mancini, exiled by the Pope for his Bonapartist sentiments, and, later, Ciro Pantanelli, who arrived in Egypt with his father (who also had been exiled for political reasons).

The mass migrations at the end of the 19th century would bring another large group of Italians to Egypt. Over time, this would include engineers, architects, professors, doctors, lawyers, artists, artisans, small traders, and technicians, who were attracted by the huge opportunities offered by the rapid modernisation process in the country, including major works such as the Cairo-Alexandria railway, completed in 1856; the construction of the Suez Canal, starting in 1859; massive hydraulic and irrigation works; and the creation of a more developed civil infrastructure – hospitals, schools, universities, law courts, etc. All of them were assured cultural and religious tolerance and granted legal and economic privileges.

THE GREAT MIGRATION

It was in this context that the Italian presence in Egypt gradually began to increase. Thanks to their skills, the Italians soon reached positions of absolute prestige, often acting as advisers to the elite of the time and proving instrumental in shaping the evolution of modern Egypt.

Besides the individuals who were able to directly influence political leaders, it should be noted that gradually the Italian presence began to extend to many diverse areas of Egyptian society, thus contributing decisively to its development. For example, prominent personalities, jurists and scholars who were members of the influential Commission for Public Debt, worked in the Ministries and in the Courts of Justice. In the Egyptian army, navy and civil service, the contribution of our officers was also of great importance. Several Italian personalities were moreover the creators of some of the most important and essential services of the Egyptian state: the statistical service was founded in 1876 by Federigo Amici from Bologna; Lorenzo Masi from Livorno, together with other fellow countrymen, organised the first land register; whereas the first post office was opened in Alexandria by Carlo Meratti. In 1847 Luigi Negrelli, also of Italian origin, was the author of the project later adopted by De Lesseps to create the Suez Canal.

As the Italian community in Egypt strengthened – both numerically, and in terms of cultural influence – the first newspapers, as well as cultural and educational institutions, began to appear.

Also because of the formidable reputation of the Italian culture, the Khedive of Egypt, Ismail Pasha, would commission Giuseppe Verdi to create an Egyptian-themed original opera for the

inauguration of the Suez Canal in 1869. It would turn out to be *Aida*, one of the greatest masterpieces of the Maestro from Busseto, performed for the first time in December 1871 at the Cairo Opera House. This building, completed just two years earlier by Piero Avoscani and modelled after the Scala opera house in Milan, would unfortunately be destroyed by a fire a century later in 1971 (and then rebuilt elsewhere, in a different style).

Egypt's strong policy of encouraging foreign relations was decisive in those years in the consolidation of the constantly growing, high-level Italian presence. Thus, since the first decades of



Cairo Opera House in a 1869 picture, Piero Avoscani architect. Source: https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Khedivial_Opera_House

the 19th century, in a local context that was becoming more and more multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan, the Italian community expanded considerably, reaching over 60,000 people on the eve of the Second World War, when Italians became the second largest foreign group in the country, amounting to over a fifth of the total number of foreign residents, immediately after the Greek community.

Alexandria was the most popular and sought-after destination for settlers, who came from all sorts of places to seek their fortunes, although many also settled in Cairo, since the activities of the two main cities were quite different.

Traditional tradesmen – pharmacists, photographers, watchmakers, goldsmiths, carpenters, cabinet makers, tanners, tailors – concentrated in the capital, whereas businesses related to cotton (presses, industrial spinning mills), industry (foundries, workshops), the maritime sector, and new manufactures (including, for example, matches and cigarettes) settled mostly in Alexandria.

CONSOLIDATION AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Towards the end of the 19th century, the Italian community in Cairo amounted to around 18,000 people according to estimates; and the Italian influence on the social, economic, health-care and artistic life of the Egyptian capital had objectively become huge. Italian was the language of the new national postal system (which, as mentioned earlier, had been created by an Italian) and, at least until 1876, Italian would also be the language commonly used by the Egyptian State administration.

It was especially after 1882, the year of the bombing of Alexandria and the beginning of the English occupation of Egypt, that the Italian influence in the country began to suffer a certain decline. The loss of positions of rank within the bureaucratic apparatus, however, would be compensated by the arrival of skilled workers and labourers participating in the realisation of major public works, such as the first Aswan Dam, the Nile Delta Dam, and the great iron bridges over the Nile. Thus, albeit with different roles and positions, attracted by favourable economic conditions, the Italians would continue to shape Egyptian society even in the following years, giving life to thriving communities with their own cultural, educational and health institutions.

The depth of the Italian influence in Egypt is also attested by the spread of the language, which, as already mentioned, for a long time was widely used in the commercial, legal and administrative fields, as well as in everyday life. In fact, to this day, the Egyptian dialect includes many terms of Italian origin, such as “moda” (fashion), “fattura” (invoice), “guanti” (gloves), “robivecchi” (junk dealer), “gamberi” (prawns), and more – still quite easily recognisable, despite the differences in accent and pronunciation. This legacy is due among other things to the creation of many Italian schools over the years, which played a very important role as instruments of cultural diplomacy.

The first Italian school in Egypt dates back to 1732 with the founding of the Franciscan School (although it seems that missionaries of that order had already started some school activities in Upper Egypt in the Mamluk era); and basic education would long be provided by religious institutions. This is a thriving tradition, which still continues today thanks to the Don Bosco Salesian Institute for mechanical and electrotechnical technicians, with branches in Cairo and Alexandria, where classes are held in Italian. The first free and secular educational institution was created in 1860 by the *Luce d'Oriente* (“Light of the Orient”) Masonic lodge. Other Italian schools were opened later, especially in the early decades of the 20th century, ranging from elementary to secondary schools, including technical and professional training institutes.



Ippolito Caffi. *Egypt, Resting Caravan*, 1844.
© Photographic Archive. Fondazione Musei Civici,
Venice.



In 1901 it was the Italian State itself that bought land in Cairo, pledging to use it for a school complex. Later known as Bulacco (from *Bulaq*, the name of the area where it was built), the building was erected based on a project by the architect Giuseppe Parvis to house the “Principessa Maria” preschool, the “Giuseppe Garibaldi” boys’ school and “Umberto I” girls’ school, the Course for Ladies’ Crafts, the “Leonardo da Vinci” professional night school, and the “Vittorio Emanuele II” Royal High School-Lyceum-Technical Institute.



The Turin architect Giuseppe Parvis, a friend of Khedive Ismail, in his factory in an 1885 photograph. Considered to be the greatest furniture manufacturer of the time, especially of furniture in the arabesque style, he won the gold medal for Egypt at the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris. Many of his works still decorate the Egyptian royal residences (Francis Amin Collection).



Period furniture manufactured by the architect Giuseppe Parvis (Francis Amin Collection).

This complex would later be used also as an internment camp for Italian civilians during the World War II; at the end of the conflict, it reverted to hosting an Italian school – the “Leonardo da Vinci” – as well as the Dante Alighieri National Society, the Italian Charitable Society and the Italian Recreational Club. Until 2015, the Bulacco was also an historical seat of the Consular Chancery of the Embassy of Italy.

The cultural ferment in which the Italians of Egypt were key players extended to all fields, including cinema, in which they were at the forefront. The first-ever film screening in the country was due to the Italian Enrico Dello Strologo (in 1896, in Alexandria). The first screening of a film with sound recorded on disc also took place on the initiative of two Italians, Aziz Bandarli and Umberto Malafasi Dorès, while in 1912 it was another Italian, Leopoldo Fiorello, who added Arabic subtitles to the projections. After the success of the first foreign films, a significant local production activity was also started, often entrusted to foreigners.

The first film made in Egypt was *Madame Loretta* (1919), followed in 1920 by *La Tante Américaine* and in 1923 by *La Bague de Soleimane*, all three of them directed by Italians. Altogether, between 1929 and 1945, Italian directors made over forty films, almost all melodramas.

Also worthy of mention is the work of some photographers, such as Antonio Beato and Luigi Fiorillo, whose art has preserved for us the powerful images of the Egyptian archaeological heritage – which quickly rose to worldwide fame – as well as images that constitute a priceless record of the lesser-known corners of the major cities and the most remote areas of Egypt.

The Italian imprint on the very structure of the Egyptian capital was remarkable as well, thanks to many architectural works that can still be admired in the city centre. Among them are the Palace of Prince Kamal El-Din Hussein, designed in 1906 by the great architect Antonio Lasciac from Gorizia, and the Club of Oriental Music (now called the Institute of Arab Music) by Ernesto Verrucci, inaugurated in 1922. There were also many Italian construction companies, such as Edoardo Almagià, Savigliano, Bracale, De Farro, and Dentamaro Cartareggia. The Egyptian Museum itself, inaugurated in 1902, was built (based on a French project) by the Italians Giuseppe Garozzo and Francesco Zaffrani, who were among the leading builders of the time.

Finally, worth mentioning are two very important personalities who have contributed to shaping modern Italian literature, both born in Egypt and educated in Egypt (in Alexandria) in their early youth: Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, born in 1876 (the son of a lawyer who worked, among other things, for the Suez Canal Company) and Giuseppe Ungaretti, born in 1888 (the son of a worker employed in the excavations of the Suez Canal, who died tragically from a workplace accident).

Social activities, associations, financial institutions

Starting from the mid-19th century, the spirit of solidarity among the members of the Italian community resulted in the founding of some entities that proved crucial for the development of the whole of Egyptian society. Among welfare associations, we should mention, for example, the Italian Charitable Society (*Società Italiana di Beneficenza*), founded in Alexandria in 1850 and then also in Cairo in 1868, and the Mutual Aid Society among Italian workers (*Società di Mutuo Soccorso tra gli operai italiani*), founded in 1865 in Cairo, the statute of which appointed Giuseppe Garibaldi as honorary president in perpetuity.

Starting on 14 December 1900, under the presidency of Consul Odoardo Toscani, the Italian Charitable Society of Cairo undertook the construction of the Umberto I Italian Hospital. Over the years the hospital, which became operational on 20 December 1903, has had an extremely important role for the Italian community, for the Egyptians and for citizens from other countries, and it is still active and thriving today as a centre of excellence in the local healthcare panorama.

In consideration of the longevity of the Umberto I Hospital, its widely acknowledged prestige, and the very important role played by the Italian Charitable Society (SIB) in founding the hospital, the SIB, on the initiative of Italian Ambassador Giampaolo Cantini, has recently taken

over, on the basis of an act of concession, the state-owned premises of the former Italian Consulate in Port Said to create a local branch of the hospital.

Italian initiative also promoted the foundation of various associations geared towards commerce and culture, such as the Italian Chamber of Commerce (opened in 1885), the Italian Circle (1888), and the local section of the Dante Alighieri National Society (inaugurated in 1898). Furthermore, from the end of the 19th century, some Italian banking institutions began to open offices in Egypt – *Banca Commerciale*, *Banco di Roma* and *Credito Italiano* among them. These were not simple liaison offices, but were set up as banking companies under Egyptian law. Operating in Egypt since 1905, for example, *Banco di Roma* had expanded throughout the country by acquiring the premises of other banking institutions; together with *Credito Italiano*, it eventually created the Italian Commercial Bank for Egypt and the *Banco Italo-Egiziano*, with offices in Cairo, Alexandria and eleven more Egyptian cities. On the other hand, *Banca Commerciale* founded the Italian Commercial Bank for Egypt, with branches not only in Cairo and Alexandria but also in other cities, such as Mansura, Minieh, Tanta, and Fayum. Today the most significant Italian banking presence in Egypt is the *Intesa Sanpaolo* Group, which holds the majority of AlexBank's shares.



1956 lottery ticket in support of the Italian Hospital in Alexandria.



L. Fiorillo, 1895 - Antonio Lasciac's Tousson-Neamatullah Palace - Ismail (now Tahrir) Square (Francis Amin Collection).



The Franciscan Seminary of Giza in 1938. Work of the architect P. Molli. It was a concentration camp for Italians during World War II (Francis Amin Collection).

ATTUALE SEDE DELL'A.N.C.I. IN CAIRO



La facciata

Printing and publishing

Speaking of the publishing business, mentioned earlier, Italian-language newspapers and periodicals thrived starting in the late 19th century. A collection of the most important publications of the time is still being kept at the Italian Archaeological Centre in Cairo.

The *Giornale d'Oriente* was founded in April 1930 from the merger of two pre-existing publications, *Messaggero Egiziano* and *L'Imparziale*, founded in 1876 and 1892 respectively. The *Giornale d'Oriente* was considered one of the best newspapers in Egypt and the Middle East, focusing on international politics and Egyptian, local and Italian news, as well as sports, fashion and entertainment. During the Fascist era, it actively supported Mussolini's policies.

The fortunes of the *Giornale d'Oriente* declined during the war. Its circulation went down, and for some time it was even closed by the Anglo-Egyptian authorities. It finally went out of business in the 1950s.

Among the other noteworthy publications, we should mention *Lo Spettatore Egiziano*, a newspaper founded in Alexandria in 1845, which was certainly among the longest-running, surviving at least into the second half of the 1950s.



Front page of "L'Imparziale", 24 May 1915.



Front page of "Il Giornale d'Oriente".

THE GREAT WAR

The beginning of the First World War in 1914 represented a traumatic moment for the Italians in Egypt, who were called to arms when, on 24 May 1915, the Kingdom of Italy entered the war alongside the Allies. The recruits and volunteers numbered about 5,000 men. Most were sent to the Italian front in France and Albania. Others were deployed to Palestine to strengthen the allied Levant front.

After the war ended in November 1918, some of the Italians of Egypt who had participated in war operations decided not to return there, choosing to move back to Italy or relocate to other European countries. Among them was Giuseppe Ungaretti, who would never return to his native country and would eventually settle in Paris.

BETWEEN THE TWO WARS

Several associations of former soldiers and officers took charge of the reintegration of survivors into Egyptian society. The victims of the conflict belonging to the community were just over 250, but there was a large number of disabled and mutilated people. The already flourishing landscape of Italian associations – thus far active above all in the sports, cultural and welfare fields – expanded even further due to the blossoming of various associations for the mutilated and wounded, and for war orphans, ex-combatants and officers on indefinite leave. To honour the fallen, their names were engraved on large commemorative plaques placed in the Italian consulates of Alexandria, Cairo and Port Said, in the Bulacco Italian school and on the war memorial of the Latin Cemetery in Cairo.

At the end of the conflict, about 20,000 Italians were permanent residents of Cairo, and their economic and social position – just like that of the large colony in Alexandria, the colonies in the Suez Canal area, and in minor settlements – continued to remain very good.

King Fuad had ascended to the throne in 1917 and was a good friend of King Vittorio Emanuele III, since in his youth he had lived in Italy following the exile of his father Ismail, and had studied for three years at the Military Academy of Turin. He surrounded himself with various Italian counsellors, including Ernesto Verrucci, the architect of the royal palaces.

However, due to the Great Depression, starting in 1930 the scenario changed rapidly, and by 1939 over 10,000 Italians had left the country in search of new job opportunities, either in Italy or in the promising Ethiopian colony.

King Farouk, who ascended the throne in 1936 following the death of his father Fuad, also had great sympathy for Italy. He spoke Italian and had many Italians in his service (hairstylist, photographer, portrait artist, painters, etc.), the most famous of whom was Pugli bey, a young electrician whom he elevated to the rank of private secretary and confidant. He also called back into his service the architect Verrucci – who had recently been sent away by the English ambassador Miles Lampson under suspicion of being a fascist spy – as honorary chief architect of the royal palaces.

But the sovereign's great esteem for Italy notwithstanding, Egypt was now increasingly determined to reclaim greater economic and organisational autonomy, facilitated in this both by the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty, which sanctioned its formal independence, and by the end of the regime of capitulations (following the 1937 Montreux Convention).

CADUTI PER LA PATRIA E PER IL RE COLONIA DI CAIRO		
Agostinelli Egizio	De Lorenzo Salvatore	Nalandrino Salvat.
Andreozzi Francesco	Del Mar Renato	Mancini Cesare
Ardizzone Adolfo	De Riz Luigi	Marchettini Gius.
Bartolozzi Egidio	De Rosa Giuseppe	Marino Francesco
Binosi Elio	De Santis Antonio	Martini Maurizio
Bon Umberto	Diclich Vittorio	Monteverde Manlio
Boni Manlio	Embabi Ismail	Muller Gustavo
Bosello Presilvio	Fattucci Raffaello	Nuzzo Luigi
Cairolì Ernesto	Festa Mario	Orlandi Armando
Calabro Pasquale	Finzi Raoul	Patti Antonio
Callaga Giovanni	Fiorani Egizio	Pattonico Raoul
Callaga Vittorio	Foti Amedeo	Perugia Gastone
Callendo Arvedo	Frosini Silvio	Poleja Antonio
Campos Guido	Fumarola Giovanni	Rampazzo Carlo
Canistracci Rosario	Galli Giuseppe	Reck Giovanni
Cantafio Alessandro	Garozzo Umberto	Rossi Raoul
Cantafio Francesco	Giardino Salvatore	Santini Armando
Carpanese Alfonso E.	Bigliotti Clemente	Santini Bruno
Celent Giacomo	Giorgi Arnaldo	Sava Pietro
Chiari Artidoro	Giunta Pasquale	Scialom Edmondo
Cifarelli Romolo	Grimaldi Angiolo	Sergi Antonio
Cohen Hensi Lazzaro	Kaiser Luigi	Tommasi Umberto
Crisafulli Sante	Lagana Santo	Tos Riccardo
Croce Letterio	Lencioni Salvatore	Toscana Salvatore
D'Angelo Rosario	Lorenzi Tesco	Tragni Egizio
Della Vedova Gugl.	Lucchesi Vezio	Veneziani Daniele
De Leonardis Nicola	Lupi Ezio	Vicini Enea
De Leonardis Saverio	Luri Giuseppe	Zizza Salvatore

The Italians fallen in the Great War - From the book Le Opere e la Fede dei Combattenti Italiani di Cairo by Emmanuele Paldi (Francis Amin Collection).



Fot. A. Del Vecchio — Cairo.

Cairo. Monumento eretto alla memoria dei Caduti nel Cimitero latino di Terrasanta.

As a consequence, the country gradually introduced new regulations that increasingly protected local labour. This soon caused the dismissal of all non-Egyptians still present in the different administrations, and a crisis for many small and medium-sized foreign companies, no longer shielded by the regime of the capitulations.

The economic difficulties would be further exacerbated by Italy's adoption of the Racial Laws in 1938. Although not directly applicable in Egypt, they nevertheless generated tensions within the Italian community, which was in the process of progressively but rapidly shifting towards Fascism, while its most influential and wealthy component had thus far been members of the Jewish community, who therefore drastically reduced their subsidies to Italian institutions, boycotted their welfare activities, schools, businesses and finances, and even considered applying for naturalisation in the host country.

During the Fascist era, many Italian initiatives in Egypt were aimed at building sports facilities. Worth mentioning in this respect is the Littorio Stadium in Giza, a structure with modern sports facilities suitable for top competitive events. It was entirely financed through handouts – not always voluntary – and contributions of materials from the Italian community in Cairo. Also notable in the field of sports was the National Federation of Combatants (*Federazione Nazionale Combattenti*), controlled by the regime and located in the building of the Fascist Party in Cairo. On the island of Zamalek, on a ship anchored to the bank of the Nile, was situated the Venice Nautical Centre (*Circolo Nautico Venezia*), a venue for sporting activities as well as social events.



Ernesto Verrucci's Oriental Music Club (today called the Arab Music Institute) - Photo by Shafik Zaqlama (Francis Amin Collection).

Less important, but nevertheless noteworthy, were the many recreational facilities built by the National After Work Program (*Opera Nazionale del Dopolavoro*), which became popular both in Egypt and in Italy, and which further contributed to uniting the Italian community.

Besides Fascist-inspired institutions, various religious institutions also continued to operate on Egyptian soil at the time. They were active in the school and hospital sectors, as well as in the management of cemeteries and some orphanages. Some of them had been present for a very long time, such as the Salesians of Don Bosco, the Marist Brothers, and the Fathers and Sisters of Nigrizia (who took the name of Comboni Missionaries in 1962).

In any case, Fascist propaganda would prove very effective in the Italian colony, and the Fascist National Party ended up being virtually synonymous with Italianity even for those in the Italian community who until then had been mostly indifferent towards the regime. The Ethiopian War turned out to be a significant ideological cement, and it greatly worried the British authorities, who continued to play a decisive role in the management of power in Egypt, and who feared that, in the event of a conflict, the Italians of the colony might represent a serious threat – especially given the relationship of unity that had formed between the Fascists and the Green Shirts of the Egyptian nationalist party.

WORLD WAR II

The British planned in advance how to deal with the possible emergency, while the Italian residents – partly misled by the official announcements of the regime – were taken by surprise by the declaration of war on 10 June 1940. Except for senior Fascist officials, who fled to safety in time, almost all Italians were left stranded in Egypt and many were interned by the British. However, evidence from the time shows that most of the community felt confident in a victorious outcome of what they believed would be a “lightning war” that would soon bring things back to normal. Instead, the approximately 8,000 internees would only be released in 1947, after being separated for years from their families, which in the meantime had been left without either sustenance, resources or work.

POST-WAR PERIOD UNTIL 1956

With the peace accords, Italy had to pay significant war damages to Egypt, but it secured the agreement that the assets that had been seized from the Italians during the conflict would be returned to them. The years that followed were also characterised by robust economic growth, which the Italians of Egypt were able to take advantage of.



An announcement in the “Corriere d'Italia” launching a fundraising campaign in favour of the prisoners of war.

However, the situation was destined to change rapidly in just seven years. In 1952, in fact, the “Free Officers” caused a drastic change in Egyptian history with the coup that overthrew the monarchy. The repercussions of this regime-change would also immediately affect the foreign communities residing there. Indeed, the resulting nationalisation campaign was followed by a ban on public and private companies employing Europeans.

In particular, after the announcement of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal in July 1956, the fear of a possible large-scale conflict with Egypt at its centre spread throughout the Italian community. As a consequence, many women and children left at the time. The plan was to temporarily leave the country until the situation settled, making it possible to return safely. Husbands and fathers, on the other hand, in many cases stayed on Egyptian soil for a longer period in order not to lose (or in the hope of regaining) their jobs.

At first, the returning Italians of Egypt were housed at the Emigration Centre in Naples, which had originally been created to house emigrants waiting to leave for other countries (especially America and Australia). The start of the Suez War in November made it clear that many would never return to Egypt. The worsening of the socio-economic conditions of the country had made searching for an occupation more and more difficult, and the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli War had undermined the sense of security that Italians had until then felt about the country. There was a further problem regarding the Italians of Jewish origin, who suffered the consequences of new and more stringent Egyptian legislation that prohibited any connection with the State of Israel.

In Italy, the arrival of the Egyptian refugees posed a political question that proved hard to tackle due to the challenges presented by the attempt to reintegrate a community that had been living abroad for many years, and that, for manifold reasons, would inevitably end up feeling “foreign” in the ancient Motherland. These people also needed to be granted refugee benefits, since for the most part they had lost all possessions.

In the new Egypt, the nationalisation policy implemented by Nasser had made the country increasingly inhospitable, and there was also a growing general hostility towards foreigners that – although directed primarily against France and Great Britain, the countries which had come out defeated in the Suez conflict – did not spare Italy altogether.

However, the part of the community that, despite everything, decided to remain in Egypt would manage with great tenacity to preserve its own culture and characteristic identity, keeping alive their traditions and the use of the Italian language up to the present day.

THE ITALIAN COMMUNITY OF CAIRO TODAY

In recent years, the size of the Italian community in Egypt, although not comparable to the pre-war period, has shown signs of new growth, mainly due to the staffs of Italian companies operating in the country, small entrepreneurs, and tourism operators. Another component, albeit a smaller one, consists of those who elect to live for most of the year in Red Sea resorts, having bought property there.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of dual citizenship appears to be increasingly common, especially due to the acquisition of an Italian passport through marriage.

Therefore, comparing the data from the Registry of Italians Residing Abroad (AIRE), we can see a steady and constant increase starting in 2013, when our resident compatriots numbered 3,163, up to 2020 (the latest data available), when their presence peaked at 5,517 (Table A). This is a very significant figure, especially in comparison with other foreign communities. Such an increase represents a notable trend reversal compared to the first decade of the 2000s, as Table B shows.

There is also a not negligible group of Italians belonging to the so-called “historical community”, which emigrated to Egypt between the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, and which has now reached in many cases the third, fourth and even fifth generation.

The Italians of Egypt have preserved the national, cultural, social and linguistic characteristics of their Motherland, whilst being fully integrated into the local society. They are a small but

Table A - *Numbers of Italians in Egypt during the last decade, as shown by the Register of Italians Residing Abroad (AIRE) at the consular district of Cairo.*

Year	Number of AIRE members in the consular district of Cairo	Percentage increase over the previous year
2010	2935	—
2011	3124	6%
2012	3066	-2%
2013	3163	3%
2014	4294	36%
2015	4468	4%
2016	4767	7%
2017	4931	3%
2018	5086	3%
2019	5433	7%
2020	5517	2%

AIRE members in the consular district of Cairo. Source: MAECI - DGAI - Office VIII.

Table B - *Numbers of Italians residing throughout Egypt in the first decade of the 2000s*

Year	AIRE members Cairo	AIRE members Alessandria	Total Egypt	Source
2001	5484	1171	6655	<i>Maeci Statistical Yearbook 2001 (data as of 01/01/2001), page 70.</i>
2009	3247	960	4207	<i>Maeci Statistical Yearbook 2010, page 126.</i>

Genova 1/11/41.

Cara Mamma,

Spero che la presente ti troverà in buona salute e così lo è di me e di Umberto.

Spero che avrai ricevuto tutte le cartoline che ti ho mandato il mese passato, questa è la prima di questo mese. Qui nulla di nuovo, ho ricevuto una lettera da Genova dove mandano i saluti di tutti parenti della Doria e una lettera dalla zia di Trieste. Essa pure saluta a tutti come pure saluta Bice e Henri. Dirai a Bice che ho risposto a sua madre mandandogli i saluti e gli auguri per le feste da parte di noi tutti.

Qui sempre la solita vita, di giorno fa caldo e la sera fresco. Ieri abbiamo fatto una bella spaghetтата.

E te come stai? Spero benone - fai sempre attenzione a questi cambiamenti di tempo. Domenica eravamo da Gaetano - andiamo a trovarli quasi ogni domenica e ogni mercoledì - anche loro stanno bene.

Tanti saluti alla famiglia Castorena a Bice e Henri. ecc.



Attilio Serra - Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary to Egypt at the outbreak of the Great War (Francis Amin Collection).



(Francis Amin Collection).

socially highly organised component, and still constitute the backbone of the main Italian charitable institutions in Egypt.

Compared to the last century, not only the composition but also the geographical location of Italian residents have radically changed. Alexandria, the city that first welcomed and integrated the budding Italian community, was hit the hardest by the counter-exodus following the Suez War. Also, the areas affected by the construction of the Canal, such as Port Said, which was once alive with Italian schools and associations, today retain only a modest legacy of that past.

The situation is different in Cairo. As a matter of fact, in the capital there are many Italian institutions that remain important points of reference for the community, such as the Embassy, the Consular Chancery, the Institute of Culture, the Trade & Investment Agency (ICE), the Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), and the Italian-Egyptian Chamber of Commerce.

Moreover, the Umberto I Hospital, which is managed by the *Società Italiana di Beneficenza* (SIB), and which is a reference point for the whole community, and where most of the staff speak Italian fluently, is still operating and indeed expanding.

Finally, the vast majority of institutions providing educational offerings in Italian are also in Cairo. Suffice it to say that, out of seven universities which offer degree courses in Italian, four are located in the city of Cairo alone: the University of Ain Shams (“Al-Asun” Faculty of Languages and Faculty of Humanities); the University of Cairo (Faculty of Humanities); the University of Al-Azhar (Faculty of Languages and Translation); and the Misr University for Science and Technology “MUST” (Faculty of Languages and Translation). The latest survey by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation¹ shows that in the 2017-2018 school year, the number of those who – at various levels and in different learning contexts – attended an Italian course on Egyptian soil was 120,364, putting Egypt in fifth place worldwide after Australia, Germany, France and the United States.

It is therefore clear how the linguistic and cultural heritage left by the



The jewelers Pietro and Raoul Bajocchi in 2010 in front of their store, in Abdel Khalek Sarwat street, established in Cairo in 1900. The Bajocchi jewelry is the oldest Italian company still operating in Egypt and in the Middle East as a whole (photo available on www.greategypt.org).

19th-century Italian colony in Cairo – in the form of various schools, associations, and institutions – has preserved the prestige of the Italian language to this day, and that said heritage still plays a very important role on the Egyptian scene.

On the whole, the community of Italians in Egypt remains a lively component of the social, economic and cultural fabric of the country. Its size is growing, and it features a significant presence of successful entrepreneurs. The Italians – deeply tied to their origins, yet fully integrated – are considered bearers of positive values and admired for their qualities as “ambassadors of Made in Italy”: from language to culture, from science to the arts of their Motherland.

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NOTE

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, “L'italiano nel mondo che cambia – 2019”, page 19.



Alexandria, Muntazah Royal Palace (1923 - 1928), by architect Ernesto Verrucci.



HISTORICAL NOTES ON THE ITALIAN COMMUNITIES OF ALEXANDRIA AND PORT SAID

by Camillo Giorgi and Chiara Saulle

Over the years, the city of Alexandria played a leading role in the Mediterranean, not only as a guardian of ancient knowledge through its great Library, but also as a crucial hub of trade routes between Europe, Africa and – via the routes that led from the Red Sea to India – with the East. Alexandria was therefore characterized as a cosmopolitan and commercial city, a meeting point between different peoples and cultures, capable of arousing widespread admiration for its attractions, including the historic lighthouse, as well as for the vibrant cultural melting pot that enlivened the city.

A significant presence of Italians in Egypt can be recorded since the era of the Maritime Republics, following the so-called capitulation agreements that were gradually granted by the Sultan. But it was only since the 19th century that the number of Italians increased significantly, especially due to the modernization policy of Egypt carried out by the new Pasha Mohammed Ali. Many professionals, traders, artisans, and workers were attracted by the construction of large infrastructural works – first and foremost the Suez Canal¹.

To provide a more precise idea of the size of the Italian presence in Egypt and of its two major communi-

ties in Cairo and Alexandria, the most significant statistical data for the period from 1871 to 1937 are shown below:

	Egypt	Cairo	Alexandria
1871	13906	3367	7539
1882	14251	4969	11579
1907	34926	13296	16669
1927	52462	18571	24280
1937	47706	16443	22881

Table 1: Statistics showing the Italian presence in Egypt from 1871 to 1937.² According to some estimates, the real presence in the years in question may have been much greater, since many Italians were not registered in the official registers, especially before the 1930s.

In 1927, 472 Italians were also recorded in Port Said, 1273 in Suez, 1767 in Lower Egypt and 1108 in Upper Egypt. About half of them were born in Egypt. The main Italian regions of origin are, in numerical terms: Sicily, Apulia, Campania, Veneto, Calabria, and Tuscany. According to several authors, the 1927 census represents an underestimate. For a more realistic figure, the total number of Italians should be increased by about 10,000³.

Worthy of mention among the most illustrious offspring of the Italian community in Alexandria are Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888 - 1970) and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876 - 1944). Ungaretti's father, originally from the province of Lucca, was employed as a worker in the excavation of the Suez canal. From historical records it appears that Giuseppe Ungaretti completed his primary education in the school year 1900 - 1901, having attended (at least in the last 2 years) the Salesian schools in Alexandria⁴.

Beginning from the second half of the 19th century, the first Italian state schools began to operate in Egypt. A boys' boarding school with about 200 students launched its first elementary classes in Alexandria in 1862, while the girls' school started in 1879. The following tables list the royal Italian state schools operating in Alexandria and Port Said in the early 1900s, with attendance data.⁵

As for private institutions, the girls' schools of the Franciscan Missionaries, which began to operate in 1883, by 1904 could lay claim to 286 regis-

DOCUMENTUM
Nativitatis et Baptismi


PAROECIA S. CATHARINAE V.M.
ALEXANDRIÆ EGYPTI

IN DEI NOMINE: AMEN

In Lib. Baptismorum VII Pag. 81 N. 219 inseritur

Cognomen Ungaretti

Nomen Giuseppe, Antonio, Giovanni

Patronus Josephus

Nat. Alexandriae

die 10 mensis Februarii anni 1888

Ex Antonio Giovanni et
Maria Lucardina

Baptizatus a R.P. Joseph Maria Bona

die 15 mensis Februarii anni 1888

Parochus: Eugenius Michiardi

Mentor: Benedictus Chamignani

Confessio: /

Matrimonium: /

Extract from Giuseppe Ungaretti's baptismal certificate.

Students enrolled in the Regie scuole italiane governative in Alexandria in Egypt

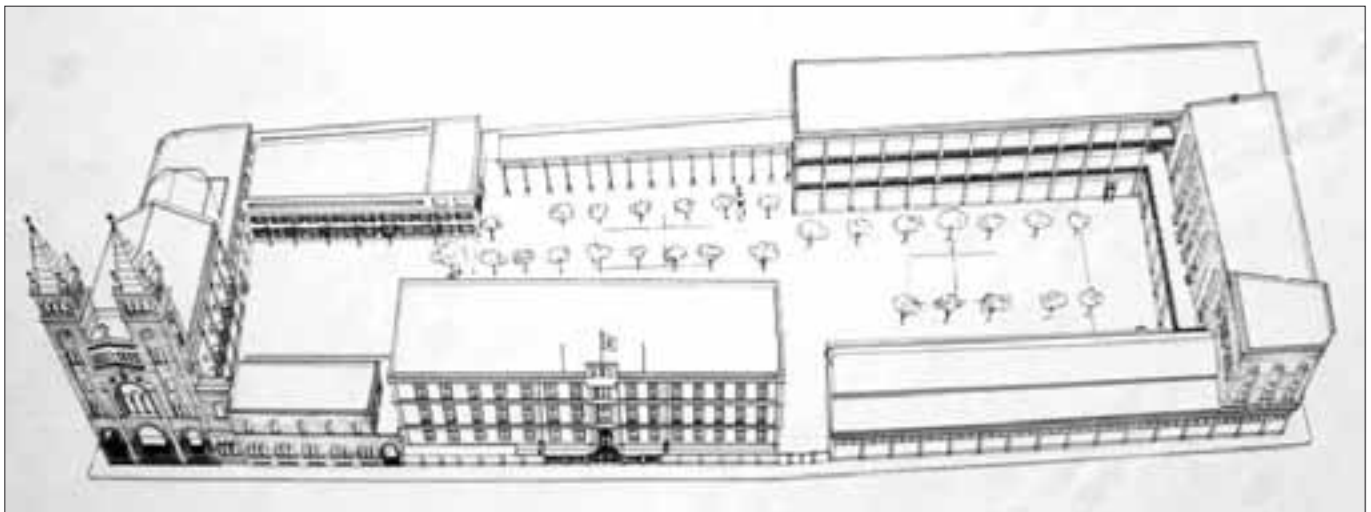
	1901-1902	1902-1903	1903-1904	1904-1905	1905-1906
Commercial technical school with secondary school course	97	84	72	72	83
Primary school for boys	650	558	577	507	532
Evening school for adults	120	90	153	150	208
Girls' school	520	510	528	456	450
Kindergarten	165	190	165	150	181

Regie scuole italiane governative in Port Said

	1901-1902	1902-1903	1903-1904	1904-1905	1905-1906
Primary school for boys	60	65	60	70	66
Evening school for adults	67	70	60	70	78
Girls' school	182	200	222	231	168

tered students, 167 Italian and 119 foreign. In 1892 the “Savoia” Institute for Girls was inaugurated. Aimed at the more affluent sector of the population, again in 1904 it had 133 pupils, 99 Italian and 34 foreign.

In 1897 – one year following the arrival of the Salesians in Alexandria – it was the turn of the Don Bosco schools, still active today in Egypt as charter schools in the sectors of technical and professional education⁶.

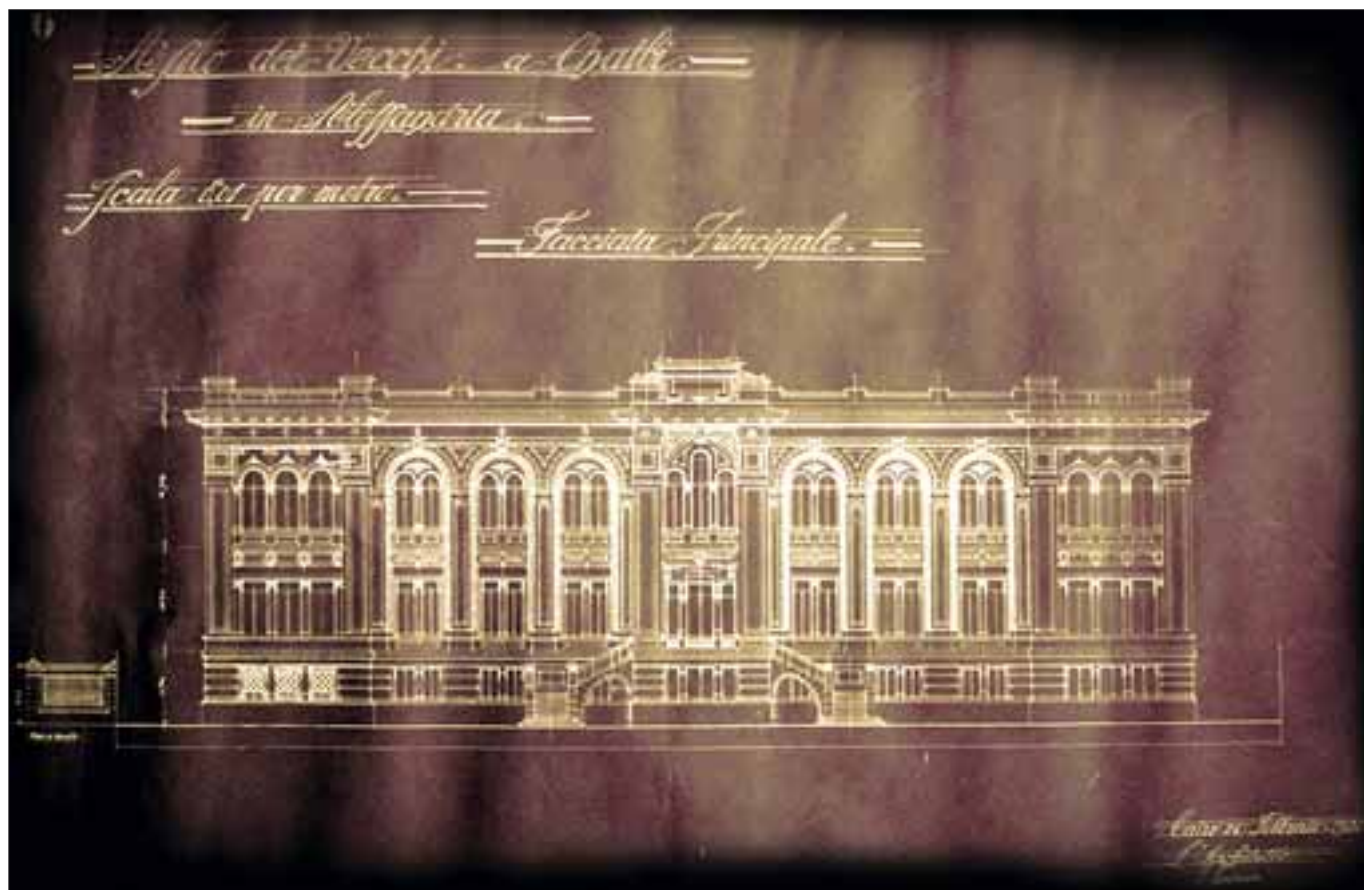


General view of the Don Bosco complex in Alexandria (1902 - 1937) from the project of the engineers Crescentino Caselli and Loris Pagano. Source: Mohamed Awad, “Italy in Alexandria, influences on the built environment”, Alexandria Preservation Trust 2008, p. 177.

SOME ITALIANS WHO ARE NOTED FOR THEIR WORK IN THE MODERNISATION OF EGYPT

The contributions offered by Italians to the development and organization of the Egyptian state in the most diverse sectors are remarkable. It was Enrico dello Strologo, having obtained the exclusive rights from the Lumière family, who first screened a film in Egypt – in Alexandria, in November 1896. In the period between 1929 and 1945, over 40 films were made by Italian directors. Lorenzo Masi from Livorno organized the Egyptian land registry, while his fellow citizen Michele Meratti (widely known as Carlo) created – again in Alexandria, between 1824 and 1828 – a private post later known as the “European Post”. It remained in Italian hands until 1865, when it was purchased by the government and became *Posta Egiziana*⁷. Federigo Amici from Bologna founded the statistical service⁸ in 1876, while the author of the project (first proposed in 1847⁹) adopted for cutting through the Isthmus of Suez, was Luigi Negrelli from Trentino.

The contribution that has left the most evident traces, however, was provided by Italian architects, engineers and builders in the construction of numerous public and private buildings and in the recovery of the historical and archaeological heritage. Among the many who worked in Alexandria, in particular in the building sector which served the resident Italian community,



Project for the main façade of the Vittorio Emanuele III Retirement Home in Alexandria, 1927 (architect: Ernesto Verrucci). Source: <http://casadialessandria.blogspot.com/2007/11/il-luogo.html>

worthy of mention is Ernesto Verrucci (1874 - 1945) from the Marche region. From 1919 to 1936, he held the position of Chief Architect of the Royal Palaces, and among his many achievements, he designed the great Royal Palace of Muntazah (1923 - 1928) and the Retirement Home named after Vittorio Emanuele III, built by the Italian company De Farro & C. on land granted by the Egyptian Government on 29 September 1929, for a period of 99 years.



1932 photo of the Vittorio Emanuele III Retirement Home, Moret studio photo album, Alexandria. Source: <http://casadialessandria.blogspot.com/2007/11/le-origine.html>



1997 photo of the Vittorio Emanuele III Retirement Home in Alexandria. Note the 1940s addition of the top floor. Source: <http://www.aaba.ch/>

As chief engineer of the Civil Engineering Department seconded to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, architect Errico Bovio worked on the design of several Italian state-owned offices abroad. Active in Egypt around 1910, his achievements include the Italian Consulate of Alexandria (with the Italian construction company Lanari), the *Regie Scuole Italiane* in Alexandria and the Italian Consulate in Port Said¹⁰.

Both consulates served a rather large and varied Italian community for several decades. Since the end of the Second World War, the number of Italian immigrants in Egypt gradually began to decrease. The Italian Consulate in Port Said closed in the early 2000s, although the building remains the property of the Italian State. In 2020, a concession agreement was signed between the Embassy and the SIB of Cairo in order to renovate the existing buildings and set up a branch of the Italian Hospital of Cairo. The Italian Consulate in Alexandria continued to operate until 2014. Today it houses the Honorary Consulate in the basement, serving a community of about 1000 Italian residents, while for the use of the upper floors a concession agreement was signed with the Bank of Alexandria of the Intesa San Paolo Group.

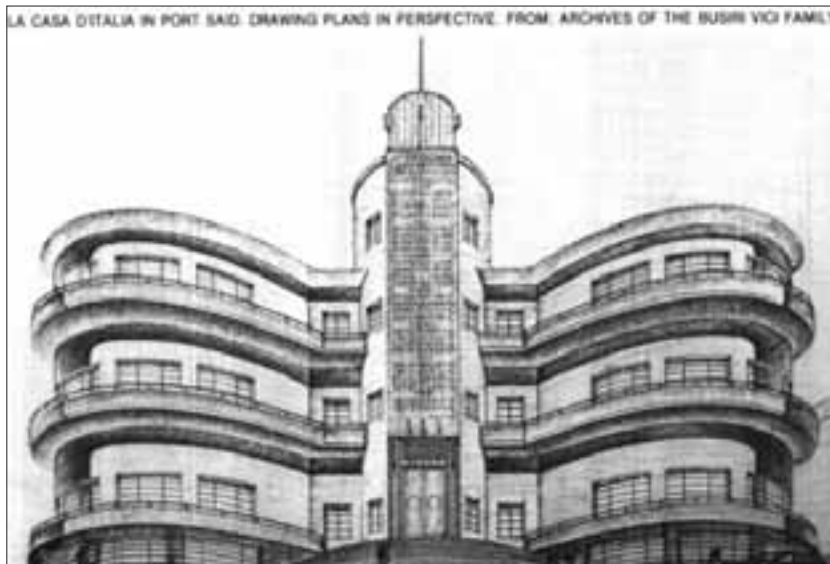


Italian Consulate in Alexandria, 1917, by architect Errico Bovio, in a 2006 photo by Olivier Guignard. Source: <http://www.aaba.cb/photos/consulat-it.htm>



Italian Consulate in Port Said, by architect Errico Bovio, early 1900s photo. In 1936, the Italian colony that depended on the Italian Consulate of Port Said consisted of about 6000 people¹¹.

<https://www.facebook.com/664834270335362/photos/a.664841023668020/1876964122455698/>



Casa d'Italia in Port Said, 1935-39, by architect Clemente Busiri Vici, perspective drawing.

Distinguished for his renewal of the Rationalist architectural style, the Roman architect and engineer Clemente Busiri Vici (1887 - 1965) worked in Egypt in the 1930s. Commissioned by the Directorate General for Schools Abroad, he designed the lictorian schools in the El-Shatby district of Alexandria, which were inaugurated on 9 March 1933.

He was later in charge of the design work for the *Casa d'Italia* in Port Said, erected in the 1935 - 1939 period.



Casa d'Italia in Port Said, 1935-39, by architect Clemente Busiri Vici. Source: vintage postcard.

The building served as a cultural centre for the local Italian community. It also comprised a theatre, a large library, and a cinema¹².

Of particular importance is the figure of the engineer Paolo Caccia Dominioni (1896 - 1992), active in Egypt since 1923 as a designer and construction manager. After the war, from 1954 to 1958, he oversaw the design and construction of the Italian shrine of El Alamein at the request of the Italian government. In this task, he could count on both his past experience as a member of the Italian army on the El Alamein front in 1942, and on his previous assignment in 1948 for recovering the bodies that were still missing and reorganizing the cemetery built by the English in the area known as “Quota 33”¹³.

The Italian studies and contributions in the field of religious architecture are also significant. Among them, noteworthy are the architects Mario Rossi (1897 - 1961)¹⁴, Eugenio Valzania (1880 - 1930), and Giacomo Alessandro Loria (1879 - 1937) who provided important contributions to the design and construction of several mosques, among which the “Al-Mursi Abu Al-Abbas” of Alexandria deserves particular mention. In 1913, the architect Loria won the design competition for the new hospital in Alexandria (reserved for Italian architects residing in Egypt). The work, begun in 1920, was then completed in 1923.



A recent photo of the entrance to the Italian military shrine of El Alamein, by engineer Paolo Caccia Dominioni. Source: <https://classicisminmodernity.tumblr.com/post/152349282586/sacrario-militare-italiano-di-el-alamein-paolo>

In the history of modern Egypt, Italians have also distinguished themselves in the field of healthcare. From the very beginning of his reign, Mohamed Ali relied on Italian doctors, both in the civil and military sectors. Among the most well-known names are the Apulian Ludovico Colucci, who arrived in Egypt in 1804, a court physician who would later be one of the founders of the Italian hospital in Alexandria¹⁵. In the military sphere, the name of Francesco Grassi stands out. A doctor from Pistoia, health manager of the Navy hospital and a distinguished epidemiologist, he was responsible for devising effective quarantine measures against the plague in the first half of the 19th century.

Ludovico Colucci's son, Antonio, was also awarded the title of Pasha by Khedive Ismail in 1873. He would become President of the Alexandria Health Administration, providing for the rationalization of health measures to prevent plague and cholera.

Towards the end of the 19th century, two crucial institutions were created, again in Alexandria: the Federation of International Associations of Public Assistance in Egypt (FAIPAE) between 1865 and 1870, and the *Società Italiana di Beneficienza* (SIB), in 1868. The former was a charitable initiative by Italian volunteers (who trained as nurses and were supervised by volunteer doctors) towards Italian families: a real emergency relief organization. The SIB, still operating in Cairo and Alexandria under consular patronage, is an association that provides assistance to indigent or sick compatriots. The SIB currently manages the Vittorio Emanuele III Retirement Home which welcomes elderly Italian and foreign citizens.



Italian military shrine of El Alamein (1954 - 1958), by engineer Paolo Caccia Dominioni.
Source: <http://www.ehabweb.net/italian-military-shrine/>



A Recent photo of the chapel adjoining the Vittorio Emanuele III Retirement Home in Alexandria.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the libraries of the Italian Cultural Institute and the Franciscan Centre of Christian Oriental Studies in Cairo for making available books and magazines on the presence of Italians in Egypt; Francis Amin for sharing information, documentary materials and images of the era; Rev. Renzo Leonarduzzi for the documentation and information on the Salesian schools in Alexandria; Nadim Kanawati for the photos, videos and documents; and finally, Franco Greco for the precious advice and guidance provided.

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¹ Marta Petricioli, "La comunità italiana in Egitto", in *POLOSUD semestrale di studi storici* no. 3-2013, p.40.

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⁹ Marco Valle, "Suez il canale, l'Egitto e l'Italia", Historica Edizioni 2018, p.64.

¹⁰ Maria Concetta Migliaccio in "Architetti e ingegneri italiani in Egitto dal diciannovesimo al ventesimo secolo", Maschietto editore 2008, p.125.

¹¹ Marta Petricioli, "La comunità italiana in Egitto", in *POLOSUD semestrale di studi storici* no. 3 - 2013, p.44.

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¹⁴ Mariangela Turchiarulo, "Costruire in stile, l'architettura italiana ad Alessandria d'Egitto, l'opera di Mario Rossi", ed. Gangemi 2015.

¹⁵ Aldo Prinzivalli, "Ospedali e medici italiani in Egitto tra ottocento e Novecento", in *Quaderni di Oriente Moderno*, no. 88-2008, p.169-184. JSTOR www.jstor.org.



THE ITALIAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE

by Davide Scalmani



The Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo is located in a building in Zamalek, a neighbourhood on the island (*gezira* in Egyptian Arabic), which divides the course of the Nile by the area of the Bulaq district.

Originally designed as a residential villa, the building was erected in the period between the two world wars on the land recently parcelled out for development by the Egyptian royal family. Driven by financial needs, the monarchy had in fact decided in those years to sell to private individuals land and properties belonging to its own assets. In Zamalek, for example, the prestigious Gezira Palace, which had been built by Khedive Ismail in 1869 on the occasion of the inauguration of the Suez Canal, was transformed into a hotel (now the Marriott Hotel, near the Institute).

In the 1920s and 1930s, the land around Gezira Palace was acquired largely by foreigners, who built luxurious single-family mansions there. The opportunity was particularly attractive especially for some wealthy members of the British colony, who seized it to settle in one of the most characteristic places of the city and near the Gezira Club, a prestigious sports centre and the social hub of the English community. The location of the Italian Institute at number 3, El-Sheikh El-Marsafi, with its

sober and elegant architectural structure was originally a private villa built according to European taste on one such plots of land.

Later, before the Second World War, the villa housed the Polish Embassy. After the conflict, it was finally bought by Italy to make it the seat of the Italian Cultural Institute. The building,



The Institute library.

flanked by other buildings that were erected at a later stage, has an elevation of three floors above ground and includes a small garden on the street side.

The seat of the Institute now comprises an auditorium (with a capacity of about 150 seats), a library with about 34,000 volumes, a gallery for exhibitions, classrooms for Italian language and culture courses, and staff offices.

Inaugurated in 1959 during a visit by the President of the Council of Ministers and Foreign Minister Amintore Fanfani, the Institute has since carried out its cultural promotional activity in the various fields in which it operates. Conducted according to the principles of cultural relations, the institutional mission was originally intended to foster opportunities for dialogue with its Egyptian counterparts, to promote mutual understanding, and to develop collaborations and joint projects.

Aimed at highlighting the most significant aspects of the Italian presence in Egypt, the initiatives carried by the Institute played an important role since the beginning of its activity. A starting point widely used in the early years was the common Mediterranean roots, together with the exchanges and relations between the two cultures whose roots lie in the remote past. More generally, we can say that the long-term perspective and the articula-



The entrance to the Institute's auditorium.

tion of contacts between civilizations were the corner stones that guided the main cultural activities. It is no coincidence that the Arabic and Islamic scholar Umberto Rizzitano, born in Alexandria, was appointed director of the Institute at the time of its official inauguration. He would go on to become professor of Arabic language and literature in Palermo. The appointment of professor Rizzitano drew an ideal line of continuity with the Italian cultural presence in Egypt dating back to the first half of the century. In particular, he reaffirmed the teachings of Carlo Alfonso Nallino, the greatest Italian scholar on Arabic and Islamic Studies, who was the founder of the *Istituto per l'Oriente* (Institute for the East), and of the other Italian professors who had been called by Prince Fuad to contribute to the development of the newly founded University of Cairo.

Therefore, the birth of the Institute took place in the wake of Italian Orientalism, with the aim of acting as a bridge between Italian and Arab culture. The goal was initially aimed mainly in the direction of promoting the Arab heritage in Italy and Europe – with a focus on the translation of literary works from Arabic – and to the subject of dialogue between religions. The need to map the complex local situation was also very much felt at that time as a prerequisite operation for building the necessary network of relations with Egyptian cultural institutions.

The early years of the life of the Institute revolved around these missions, and the promotional activity was often entrusted to teachers and local experts



Egypt Travel Magazine (n. 54, february 1959).



The wooden staircase between the offices and the classrooms floor.

who lectured on the themes and important figures of Italian cultural history. As many as six Italian cultural attachés, professors from the rolls of the Ministry of Education, assisted the Director by organizing the events and services of the Institute: Italian language and culture courses, the library, the newspaper archive, and also the record archive, with public listening sessions of the Institute's collection of classical and opera music record, a form of collective music enjoyment usual in that time.

From the second half of the 1960s, without ever losing sight of pursuing the dialogue with local milieus, the Institute began to present to the Egyptian public some of the most relevant aspects of Italy's contemporary cultural production and its dynamics. In fact, the general awareness that cultural promotion represented a key element of the overall perception of Italy and its dynamics had grown over the years. These new cultural policy guidelines found original developments in Egypt, prompting the Directors to establish programs that were increasingly representative of the Italian developments of the time. Openness and intellectual vivacity have characterized the Institute ever since, which soon became one of the most popular cultural centres in the Egyptian capital.

In those years, the schedule of events appeared to be aimed at giving a renewed representation of Italian society and its cultural effervescence. A proliferation of initiatives focused on contemporary Italian artworks and artists, especially in the visual field such as Enrico Baj, Emilio Scanavino, Ignazio Moncada, and Giulio Turcato. The promotion of Italian photography was also showcased through exhibitions organized by the staff of the Institute, and the same happened more recently with design.

Since the 1970s, the promotion of Italian cinema also met with increasing success, in collaboration with Egyptian festivals. Incidentally, it is worth noting that the global success of Italian cinema after the Second World War has its roots specifically in Egypt, since cinema was brought there by Italian entrepreneurs who gave pioneering screenings in Alexandria under the concession of the Lumière brothers, founded the first Egyptian film production company, and opened the first cinema. Over the years, the Institute promoted a vast range of works, from *film d'auteur* to comedies, from experimental and social issue films to RAI television dramas and the best documentaries. This



The Institute seat in an archive photo.

is how the Egyptian public was able to become acquainted with the works of Visconti, Rossellini, Fellini, Petri, Bolognini, and many other key names in the history of Italian cinema.

PROGRAMMA

I GRANDI MUSICISTI ITALIANI

GIACOMO PUCCINI (1858 - 1924)

Parte Prima (ore 19 - 19.45)

- LA BOHEME — Atto Primo.
- LA BOHEME — Atto Secondo.

Parte Seconda (ore 20 - 20.45)

- LA BOHEME — Atto Terzo.
- LA BOHEME — Atto Quarto.

Orchestra e cori della National Broadcasting Corporation, New York.
Direttore: Arturo Toscanini.
Luigi Alvaresi, Anna McFay, Jean Pons, Francesco Valerini.

PROSSIMAMENTE

- Sulla serie "Storia della musica italiana": La Nona sinfonia di Beethoven nel 1824.
- Sulla serie letteraria: Alessandro Manzoni.
- Sulla serie "Folklore musicale": "Folklore musicale italiano".
- Sulla serie "La poesia e la prosa futurista": "Pagine di prosa e poesia futurista".

Notizie di carattere storico-critico su italiani ed in arabo saranno a disposizione del pubblico nelle Sale delle audizioni.

البرنامج
كبار الموسيقيين الإيطاليين

جياكومو بوشيني (1858 - 1924)

الجزء الأول (من الساعة 19 إلى الساعة 19:45 مساءً)

- البوهيمية — الفصل الأول
- البوهيمية — الفصل الثاني

الجزء الثاني (من الساعة 20 إلى الساعة 20:45 مساءً)

- البوهيمية — الفصل الثالث
- البوهيمية — الفصل الرابع

أوركسترا وكورس محطة الإذاعة الأمريكية بـنيويورك
بقيادة أرتورو توسكانيني

لدينا الباشي-آي-آي ماكاي-جان بيرس-فرانيسكو فالينري

قريباً :

- من سلسلة " تاريخ الموسيقى الإيطالية " :
- توسكانيني أوركسترا في إيطاليا في القرن التاسع عشر .
- من السلسلة الأدبية : ألساندرو مانزوني .
- من سلسلة " موسيقى الفولكلور " : الفولكلور الإيطالي .
- سلسلة " الشعر والفن futurist " : " فصول من الشعر والفن futurist " .

سيكون تحت تصرف الجمهور في بقعة الاستماع عشرة ملصق باللغة العربية والأجنبية
تحت إشراف من الوحدة الثقافية .

13 - 14 dicembre, ore 20.00
PIERO DE SERRES
con Maria Rossi e altri cantanti, con orchestra
Balletti in costume con Musicisti di teatro e Balletti
Musicalisti italiani da Sergio Pagani
Balletti e i Balletti del Teatro di Milano

15 dicembre, ore 20.00
PIERO DE SERRES
con Maria Rossi e altri cantanti, con orchestra
Balletti in costume con Musicisti di teatro e Balletti
Musicalisti italiani da Sergio Pagani
Balletti e i Balletti del Teatro di Milano

16 dicembre, ore 20.00
PIERO DE SERRES
con Maria Rossi e altri cantanti, con orchestra
Balletti in costume con Musicisti di teatro e Balletti
Musicalisti italiani da Sergio Pagani
Balletti e i Balletti del Teatro di Milano

17 - 18 dicembre, ore 20.00
LA SINFONIA DI BEETHOVEN
con Maria Rossi, Maria Rossi, Sergio Pagani
Balletti in costume con Musicisti di teatro e Balletti
Musicalisti italiani da Sergio Pagani
Balletti e i Balletti del Teatro di Milano

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13 - 14 ديسمبر، الساعة 20.00
بييرو دي سيريس
مع ماري روسي وأخرى الغناء، مع orchestra
Balletti في costume مع Musicisti من theatre و Balletti
Musicalisti italiani من Sergio Pagani
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17 - 18 ديسمبر، الساعة 20.00
السفينة لـ بيتهوفن
مع ماري روسي، ماري روسي، سيرجي باغاني
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**PIER LUIGI NERVI
BOZZETTI E PROGETTI**

ISTITUTO ITALIANO DI CULTURA E ARTE
GIUGLIANO 1970 - GENOVA 1971

ITALIAN FILM DAYS

8th - 13th January 1973



13 - 14 dicembre, ore 20.00
PIERO DE SERRES
con Maria Rossi e altri cantanti, con orchestra
Balletti in costume con Musicisti di teatro e Balletti
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The Institutes' Cultural programmes (1967, 1971, 1973).

Drama was significant in the Institute's programme of live performances, with authors such as Pirandello and Eduardo De Filippo and with tributes to the great protagonists of the Italian scene, but a prominent role is occupied by music, and especially opera. The Italian presence in Egypt in the world of music is a story unto itself. Since the 19th century, Italian musicians, con-



The Opera House, destroyed by fire in 1971.

ductors, and music teachers have provided a fundamental contribution to the development of Western music in Egypt. In Cairo and Alexandria, conservatories and music schools founded by Italians have trained generations of Egyptians to discover Italy's musical civilization.

The most notable episode of the Italian musical influence was the invitation that Khedive Ismail issued to Giuseppe Verdi. The great Italian composer was in fact commissioned to create an opera to celebrate the opening of the Suez Canal. This is how *Aida* was born. Destined for worldwide success, today it is considered by the Egyptians an authentic expression of their national identity. Famously, *Aida* was first performed on 24 December 1871 in Cairo, two years after the opening of the Canal, due to the Franco-Prussian war and the siege of Paris, which prevented the sending of costumes made by French tailors. The opening of the Suez Canal was instead celebrated with a sumptuous performance of *Rigoletto*, on 1 November 1869. To reiterate the overwhelming Italian influence in this field, it should be noted that also Italian was Pietro Avoscani, the architect of the Cairo Opera House, for which he drew inspiration from Piermarini's design for the Teatro alla Scala in Milan. Originally from Livorno, Avoscani moved to Egypt in 1837.

Such a glorious past could only inspire the Italian institutions to maintain a position of pre-eminence in the world of music. The programming of the Opera House was organised around “opera seasons” dedicated to European national repertoires. The Italian season was the most popular event of the Opera programme, attracting the attention of a large Egyptian and international audience. This shaped, in close contact with Italian music and artists, the taste of an audience that felt close to European culture, appreciated its musical traditions, enjoyed listening to famous performers and participated with pleasure in the gatherings and social occasions that served as a worldly corollary to the shows.

Another area of conspicuous Italian influence, and the main area of interest of the Institute’s activity to date, is architecture. The modernization of Egypt initiated by the Khedivate

required the work of European planners and architects. Prominent among them were numerous Italians, who designed some of the most iconic buildings in the capital and in Alexandria. The distinctive trait of architects such as Antonio Lasciac, Ernesto Verrucci, Domenico Limongelli and Mario Rossi was the ability to assimilate different languages and codes, based on their solid design skills combined with a happy freedom in the adoption of local influences. The result was an eclectic style in which orientalist elements mixed with a taste for proportion and harmonious decoration. A new generation of Italian designers active in the 1930s then introduced a style inspired by the Rationalism which was in vogue in Italy at the time. Paolo Caccia Dominioni stood out among them for his language that produced a blend of Modernism and Rationalism, as well as Clemente Busiri Vici, who was influenced in his turn by Futurism. Much appreciated by the clients of the time, after a spell of relative oblivion the Italian architects and engineers working in Egypt are now studied with interest and rediscovered – not least thanks to the activity of the Institute – as an example of an Italian building style open to integration, and original in its results.

A peculiar feature that distinguishes Cairo from other Italian cultural institutes is the existence of an Italian Archaeological Centre, a branch of the Institute located Downtown. Strongly pursued



Presentation booklet of the Italian opera season at the Opera House (1950).

by its Director Carla Maria Burri, an Egyptologist and extraordinary leader for many years of bilateral cultural relations, the Centre is at the service of the numerous Italian archaeological missions operating in Egypt, engaged in research and study that takes place in a significant area of cultural relations, marked by the ups and downs of the complex relationship between Egypt and Western countries.

Although this is little known, in Egypt there are considerable opportunities for the diffusion of the Italian language, both because of the number of students – about 120,000 young people learn the language in schools and universities – and for the quality of the motivations underlying the choice to study Italian. Faced with this important demand for Italian tuition, in addition to running the language and culture classes provided for by the Common European Framework, the Institute also organises training courses intended for teachers of the Italian language, aimed at improving the curriculum and strengthening the link between research and teaching.

In this brief overview of the Institute, we cannot overlook the promotional activity of Italian books and writers, carried out in collaboration with the Departments of Italian Studies and the Egyptian publishing world. Here, too, the historical background is not negligible, and it speaks of a sort of pre-eminence of the Italians in Egypt. The first printing house was founded by Italians, and among the very first volumes that came out were an Italian-Arabic dictionary and the Arabic translation of *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli.

The Italian community that flourished in Egypt at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries gave birth, among other things, to a copious production of newspapers and magazines, part of which is preserved in the historical newspaper archive of the Institute. Two great names of the Italian literary 20th century took their first steps in local periodicals and publications, an extraordinary fruit of the Italian literary heritage that links back to Egypt. Giuseppe Ungaretti and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, both born in this country, were destined to establish themselves in Italy and



From the Institute's archive (1975).



The façade of the Institute in an illustration by Francesco Pagnini.

in the world with clearly defined profiles, but with a peculiar literary identity both Italian and Mediterranean, European and cosmopolitan, which had its roots in the Alexandria of their time.

The presence of Italian writers and the literary contacts between Italy and Egypt do not stop with the two authors just mentioned. Fausta Cialente, Enrico Pea, and Leda Rafanelli are other voices of an intellectual community that led the literary and civil modernization in the two Countries. Today, the Institute is committed to showcasing contemporary Italian writers and the institutions that promote their work, such as the Strega Prize or open calls to support translation, and to drawing the attention of the Egyptian publishing world to quality Italian publishing.

Today's cultural projects of the Institute are in continuity with the aforementioned policies. Art, music, design, fashion, photography, cinema, Italian language, literature and theatre, human and social sciences, archaeology, preservation and enhancement of the cultural heritage, but also gastronomy and fashion, Italian lifestyle, and cultural tourism, are now part of the Institute's many promotional activities.

For some years now, among the promotional axes developed by the network of Institutes were the so-called “integrated promotion” initiatives, meant to present a comprehensive image of our Country. Culture, scientific research, industrial production, and communication initiatives are all required to participate in a coherent strategy under the common denominator of Italian lifestyle, which is proposed as a unifying message. At the heart of this strategy, there lies a new appreciation of the economic value of culture, and the growing role of cultural industries and creative enterprises as propellers of economic and social growth.

The latest studies on the economy of culture, clearly show that the revitalization of cultural industries and businesses starts with *core activities*: art, museums, conservation of cultural heritage, care of the landscape and the environment – all highly significant sectors also in Egypt. In these areas, the promotion of Italy can take place with renewed effectiveness, according to a model of cultural policy in which the intangible values of the humanistic and inclusive tradition are intertwined with activities aimed at the market for cultural goods and services. In Egypt there is a strong demand for culture as an overall educational aspect of individuals and society, a lever to enrich human capital, an instrument of civil growth, and a drive towards change. This is why Italy’s promotional action is linked to the Italian creative ecosystem, which must be presented in its diversity and representativeness.

As such, the Institute presents itself as a cultural space open to Egyptian society, and at the same time as a meeting point between cultural professionals, Italian creative companies, and their Egyptian counterparts. It offers opportunities for contact and scope for new projects, but new models of dialogue are also built based on the relationship between past and present, between culture, economy, and territory. The lines of development of the new programmes point in a number of different directions, also thanks to the collaboration with the European partners and the EUNIC group: reflecting on the relationship with history and intercultural dialogue; capacity building in the areas of cultural economy and of the new professions related to the management and enhancement of cultural heritage; young people’s and marginalized women’s empowerment and access to culture; experiential models of cultural consumption and sustainability: these are some of the areas of proximal development of the Institute’s cultural action in the coming years.

We opened our excursus on the Institute by describing the Zamalek seat and their inauguration more than 60 years ago. We now wrap it up with a consideration that is also a wish. New promotional channels are transforming the places where culture is produced and distributed. The dynamics triggered by the processes of interaction and online communication have produced a universe which is in complex and sometimes unpredictable evolution. Today the social channels of our Institute – let us call them our virtual seat – are visited every day by thousands of people who are informed, educated, and have fun in the digital world. The current pandemic has only accelerated a process that was already underway. It has also pushed us towards the progressive digitization of our cultural offerings. We have opened new Italian language courses online, designed and produced new types of events for digital use. These initiatives are appreciated by a rapidly growing public, showing a new demand for Italian culture. In this context, our Institute has continued to carry out its mission by not moving away from its guiding. Therefore, our hope is that the unavoidable renewal of our promotional activities will contribute to widen and deepen that dialogue between peoples and cultures that has been the *leitmotiv* of our history.



THE ITALIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CENTRE

by Giuseppina Capriotti Vittozzi



The Italian Archaeological Centre is part of the Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo and has its seat in a beautiful building in the city centre, at 14b, rue Champollion, not far from Tahrir square and the Egyptian Museum.

There is no precise information available on the construction and inauguration of the building. It was originally used as the seat of the Consulate of Italy in Cairo and it is likely that it was a State property, then transferred to Egypt as compensation for war damage. The property, currently owned by Misr Real Estate Assets, was leased to the Italian State.

It is on the corner between rue Champollion and Mahmoud Bassiouny Rd, in an important area of the city centre, and it is located in a block that shows a strong Italian influence due to the presence of buildings belonging to the school of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Egypt, whose courtyard the library of the Archaeological Centre overlooks: these buildings, erected between the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, were designed by important Italian architects working in Cairo, such as Paolo Caccia Dominioni, Domenico Limongelli, and Adolfo Brandani¹.

The building that houses the Archaeological Centre may date back to the 1930s, based on its style that clearly reflects





the Italian architecture of the time, well present in Cairo with valuable buildings clearly attributable to it. It is an eight-storey building, of which the first houses the Italian Archaeological Centre, while the rest are residential.

The beautiful entrance to the residential part of the building opens onto the corner, highlighted at the top by the two coats of arms of the Kingdom of Italy (in the imperial variant²) that frame the balcony of the former Consul's office. The upper floors stand out in the eyes of passers-by for the smooth and enveloping lines of the long masonry balconies, a true hallmark of Italian architecture of the time. As is well known, Egypt saw a considerable blooming of Italian Functionalist and Rationalist architecture, of which Pier Maria Bardi emphasised the Mediterranean spirit, which was increasingly distinguishing Italian architectural research from that of other European countries. Adolfo Brandani, an Italian-Egyptian architect who was very active in the 1930s, stressed how the adoption of foreign

architectural models in Egypt was erasing the local tradition of “white walls”, in favour of European models that were not suited to the climate and brightness of Egypt.

On the contrary, Italian Functionalism, with its simple curved lines and brick balconies, represented a bridge between tradition and innovation, responding to the needs of the local climate and culture³. Therefore, the rue Champollion building well interprets these Italian architectural models in Egypt: the emphasis of the corner façade, underlined by the clear bands of the continuous balconies, matches other constructions in Cairo from those years, and especially the eight-storey residential building erected in 1934 on Antikhana Street to a design by G. E. Falorni, which was presented as a “very modern house”, yet still bearing the influence of Mediterranean architecture⁴.

The Italian Archaeological Centre (just like the Consulate before it) has a separate entrance on rue Champollion and occupies the entire first floor of the building. The sinuous lines of the beautiful interior staircase are enriched with elegant Savoy knots. In the large and bright atrium, there is a plaque dedicated to the Italian-Egyptian victims of both World Wars. The interior layout of the Archaeological Centre includes a main office, a library, and a large conference room. The classrooms that open on a long corridor are currently used for Italian language courses held by the Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo.

The Italian Archaeological Centre of the Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo plays a fundamental role in assisting archaeological missions and individual scholars and research groups at various levels (in the mezzanine, among other things, a storage room houses equipment from the archaeological missions, that often deposit their dusty luggage here after returning from excavation

campaigns). Above all, the Centre facilitates the relations with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of the Arab Republic of Egypt, especially regarding the paperwork for concession requests and permits. In addition, the Archaeological Centre is active in promoting the image of Italian archaeological missions and the relationships of Italian researchers with their Egyptian or foreign counterparts operating in Egypt. There is also considerable commitment to promoting the presence and image of Italian institutions for cultural heritage such as museums, with their promotion, restoration and accessibility expertise.

The Archaeological Centre also organises conferences at its premises, particularly to present the results of the Italian archaeological excavations and restorations in progress. Meetings, exhibitions and seminars are also organised off-site, with the aim of giving better visibility to the Italian efforts and to foster partnership initiatives.

For the purpose of disseminating the results, both specialist and general publications are issued. Since 2004, scientific articles and excavation reports have been published in *RISE (Ricerche Italiane e Scavi in Egitto - Italian Research and Excavations in Egypt)*, which since 2018 is accessible online on the website of the Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo. In recent years, following a need expressed by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities itself, publications for children and young people are also being edited in Italian and Arabic, aimed at promoting a better awareness of cultural heritage. The library of the Archaeological Centre, after the first major acquisitions due to the initiative of Carla Maria Burri, has continued to expand its collection, mostly thanks to exchanges with other institutions and donations from the Italian archaeological missions and individual scholars. On the occasion of the 2008 inauguration, volumes sent by the National Research Council increased the section dedicated to Italic and Phoenician-Punic archaeology. The library, therefore, offers a precious opportunity to explore archaeological themes through rare or even unique bibliographic materials in the Egyptian panorama.

Furthermore, one of its rarest collections concerns documentation that is not strictly archaeological in nature: it is a collection of Italian newspapers published in Egypt between the late 19th and the early 20th century, a precious source for learning about the history of the large and lively Italian community in Egypt and a living testimony of a cultural presence of which, even today, the very rue Champollion building is an important symbol.

NOTES

¹ *L'Imparziale*, 20 March 1928; *Il Giornale d'Oriente*, 15 May 1931. I wish to thank Professor Ezio Godoli for his valuable pointers.

² The crown above the Savoy coat of arms in the bas-reliefs of the building, in fact, is a stylisation of the Caesaro-Papist crown of the Emperor of Ethiopia, as explained by the Director Paolo Sabbatini, whom I thank for this piece of information.

³ On these topics, see M. Giacomelli, *Clemente Busiri Vici e il rinnovato volto dell'architettura italiana in Egitto negli anni Trenta*, in E. Godoli – M. Giacomelli, *Architetti e ingegneri italiani in Egitto dal diciannovesimo al ventunesimo secolo*, Florence 2008, pp. 161-183.

⁴ *Rassegna di architettura. Rivista mensile di architettura e decorazione* 1934, pp. 27-28: http://www.casadellarchitettura.eu/fascicolo/data/2012-04-27_446_2435.pdf.



The corner façade of the Italian Archaeological Centre in an illustration by Francesco Pagnini.

CARLA MARIA BURRI

by Giuseppina Capriotti Vittozzi

When presenting the Italian Archaeological Centre, we cannot overlook the character of Carla Maria Burri, to whom we owe the creation of this facility to support Italian archaeology in Egypt.



Photo: Giacomo Lovera. Courtesy of the Carla Maria Burri Association.

After graduating from the University of Milan with a thesis in papyrology under Professor Sergio Donadoni, Carla Maria Burri arrived in Egypt following an open competitive exam for teaching abroad; she was then appointed cultural attaché at the Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo in 1964, where she held the position until 1981. Her first commitment was to create an Archaeological Section at the Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo, and from the very beginning her determination and enthusiasm showed in the creation of a solid support network for Italian archaeology in Egypt. 1970 was obviously an important year: in May, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Aldo Moro¹ visited Egypt, and as Carla Maria Burri herself later recalled, the Archaeological Section became the “Archaeological and

Arabistic Studies Section” with its dedicated budget, thanks to an inter-ministerial decree strongly championed by Aldo Moro himself². Those were years of extraordinary activity.

Carla Maria Burri fostered a strong support for the Italian commitment in Egypt, starting with the UNESCO Campaign for the monuments of Nubia launched in 1960 following the decision to erect the great Aswan dam, which would completely submerge them. The extraordinary feat of saving the monuments of Philae was part of this campaign, and an Italian partnership consisting of Condotte d’Acqua and Mazzi Estero won the international tender for the relocation of the temples, which was carried out in the 1970s. On this occasion, Egypt decided to donate to the countries involved in the rescue some of the Nubian temples removed from what would become the bed of the great Lake Nasser. The oldest of them all, the small temple of Ellesiya, was donated to Italy, and is now on display in the Egyptian Museum of Turin. It was Carla Maria Burri who followed the complex procedures for the expatriation of this important artifact, a rock temple from the time of Thutmose III cut from the rocks of Nubia, where it was carved out and sculpted shortly after the half of the second millennium BC.

In the same years, Carla Maria Burri started the restoration of the Samakhana, a splendid wooden theatre of the whirling dervishes, which was in serious decay: the project, directed by Giuseppe Fanfoni, not only salvaged the valuable building, but turned it into a hands-on educational facility where many Egyptian restorers were trained.

Throughout her formidable activity, in those years Carla Maria Burri continued to operate from the Italian Cultural Institute, where she formed a large, specialized library to serve and promote internationally Italian archaeology in Egypt.

After 1981, Carla Maria Burri served in other European locations, until she returned to Egypt in 1993 as director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo, where she would remain until 1999. It was on that occasion that she worked to establish another important opportunity for Italian archaeology in Egypt: a location with adequate spaces for the growing activities of the missions, and the remarkable library she had assembled. In agreement with the Embassy, she restored the former seat of the Italian Consulate at 14b, rue Champollion, and turned it into the seat of the Archaeological Section.

Carla Maria Burri was appointed Knight Commander of the Order of the Star of Italy by the Italian Government in 2008, and died in Crema on 15 November 2009.

¹ <https://patrimonio.archivio.senato.it/inventario/archivio-centrale-dello-stato/aldo-moro/struttura>.

² C.M. Burri, *Storia della Sezione Archeologica dell'Istituto Italiano di Cultura al Cairo*, in M. Casini (edited by), *Cento anni in Egitto. Percorsi dell'archeologia italiana*, Milan 2001, pp. 240-241.



Ellesiya Temple. Sandstone. New Kingdom, reign of Thutmose III (circa 1479 - 1425 BC). Gift from the Egyptian government to Italy (1966). Image reproduced by kind permission of the Egyptian Museum of Turin.

