

The background of the book cover is a photograph of a staircase. The stairs are made of light-colored stone or concrete and lead upwards from the bottom left towards the top left. The walls on either side of the stairs are dark and have a rough, textured appearance, possibly stone or brick. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights.

Mela Books

MUSEUM MULTI- PLICITIES

Field Actions and Research by Design

edited by
Luca Basso Peressut
Cristina F. Colombo
and Gennaro Postiglione

Museum Multiplicities

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MELA BOOK 10 – MUSEUM MULTIPLICITIES: FIELD ACTIONS AND RESEARCH BY DESIGN

Published by Politecnico di Milano

© February 2014, The Authors



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ISBN 978-88-95194-43-1



POLITECNICO
DI MILANO

This Book ensued from the Research Project MeLa – European Museums in an Age of Migrations, funded within the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (SSH-2010-5.2.2) under Grant Agreement n° 266757.
Project Officer: Mr. Zoltán Krasznai



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
European Research Area



Funded under Socio-economic Sciences & Humanities

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www.mela-project.eu

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The Digital Museum/Archive of Overseas Memories

The Contemporary Museum and the Representation of the Italian Colonial Heritage¹

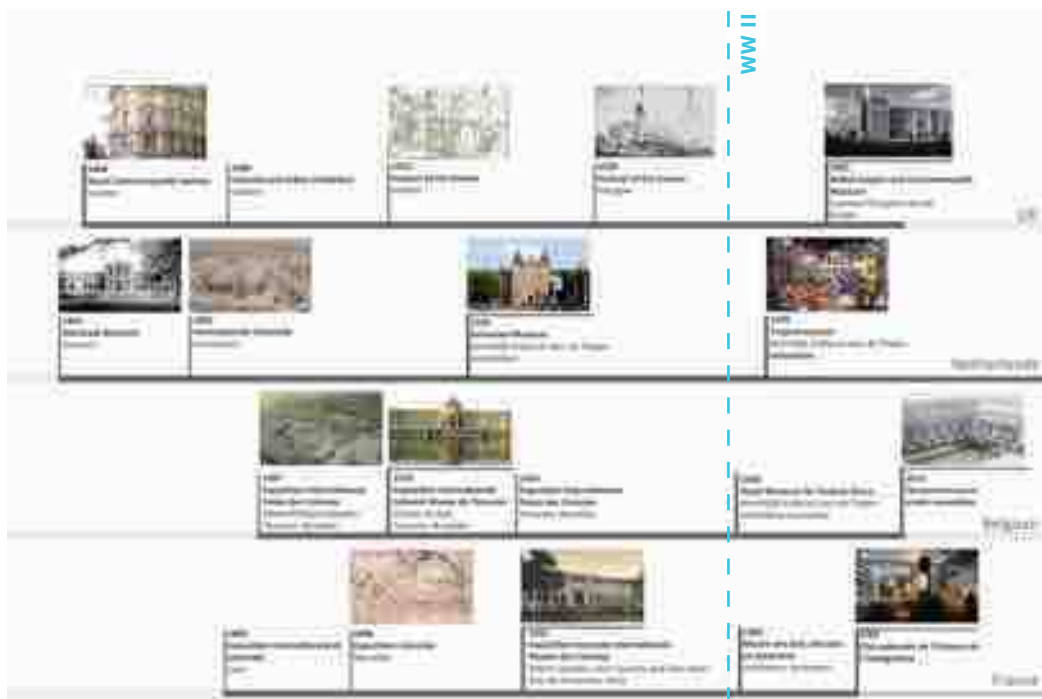
→ LUCA BASSO PERESSUT, ALESSANDRO RAFFA

Between the late nineteenth century and the beginning of World War II, a flush of exhibitions and museums sprang up, devoted to various issues in relation to the colonial adventure of that time, which saw all the major European countries involved in the practice of military and economic occupation of “overseas” countries. The purpose of such exhibitions and museums was essentially to inform citizens about the results of the European “civilising mission,” which the various nations had undertaken in their colonial possessions, especially highlighting the advantages and opportunities for economic development for the colonising countries.

Exhibition and museum narratives were thus developed by each Motherland for its own purpose, they were monologues designed to extol the nation state and consolidate the national identity through the idea of evolutionary superiority in the relationship between “self” and “others.” After World War II, the debate on colonial history became more complex due to some events of fundamental importance: the political process towards independence in Africa and Asia, the growing demand for social recognition on the part of minority groups in North America and in Commonwealth countries such as Canada and Australia. This historical acceleration and “democratization” revealed how the survival of the national framework was closely linked to the continuation of colonialism:

PREVIOUS PAGE, IMG.2.116
— The architectural
postcolonial heritage.
Collage by Alessandro Raffa.

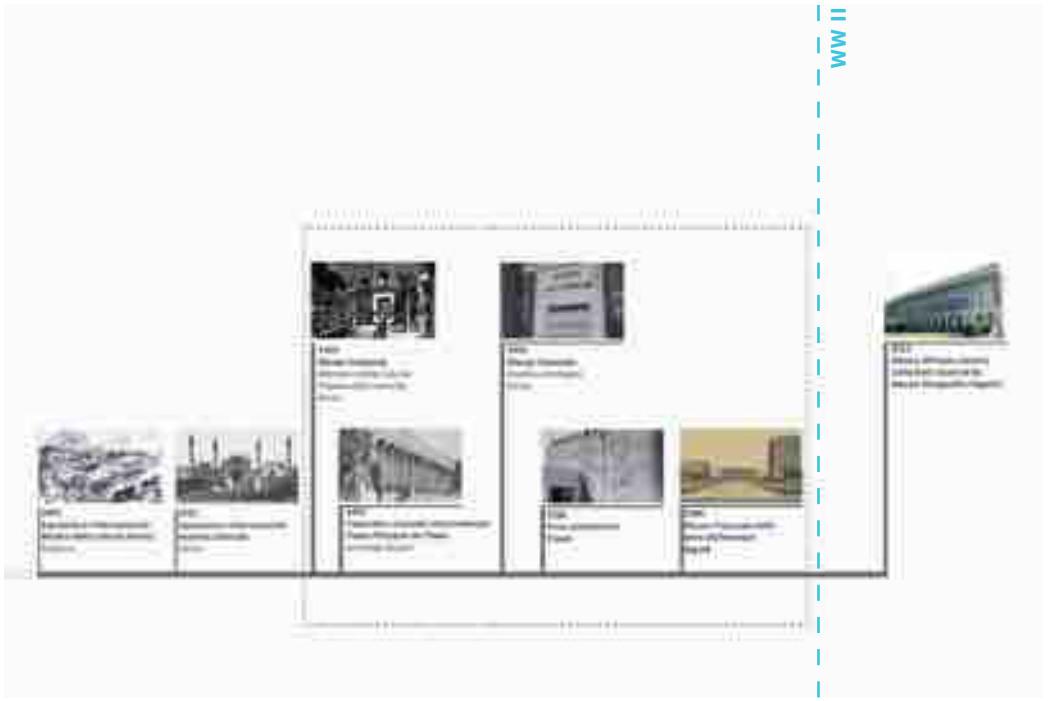
¹ This paper summarises part of a research carried out in the Ph.D. in Architectural, Urban and Interior Design at the Politecnico di Milano (Alessandro Raffa Ph.D. Candidate, Luca Basso Peressut Supervisor).



IMG. 2.117 —
Phenomenology of the
colonial museums and
exhibitions: case studies.
Diagram by Alessandro
Raffa.

when it was called in question, the national paradigm weakened to the point that it was no longer possible to prevent other stories and narratives from becoming part of the official version hitherto dominant. Thus, not only did the end of the colonial order that had prevailed in the nineteenth and twentieth century bring along a global geopolitical shift, but it also started a process of identity redefinition in an era defined as postcolonial. This process has been recently accelerated by the intensification of migration flows to Europe, mostly from former colonies; these have brought along a change in the way “modernity” is being narrated, both today’s modernity and that which somehow looks at a past that no longer appears as before. As a result, museums, as institutions (and architectural structures) designed as means of expression for the political power and as foundation of the national identity, had to, and increasingly have to deal with this change, by calling in question and reconsidering which narratives should they represent through their installations.

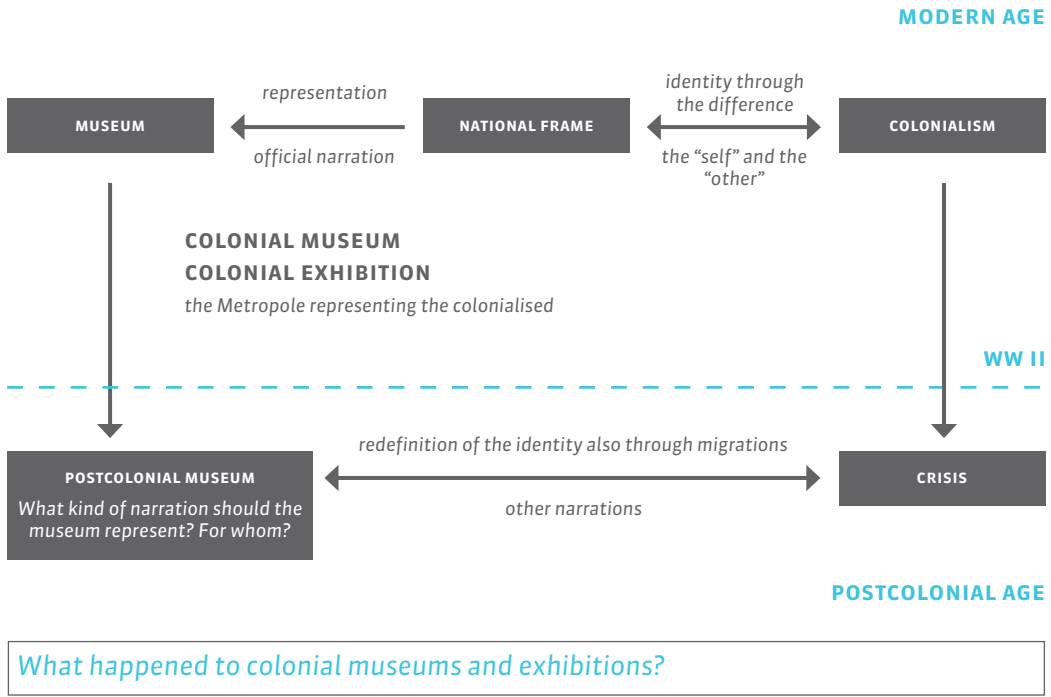
The decolonisation of museums, the recognition and representation of the different cultures that had been subjugated and which are now part of a multiethnic Europe, are therefore a central aspect in this process for the construction of a new European identity, not unlike the legacy represented by the material heritage in former colonies (Marschall 2008). The ongoing postcolonial transformation of ethnographic, anthropological and veritable colonial museums is related to a specific social stance concerning the message these museums should convey to a globalised audience, a stance that is now tending to overcome the Eurocentric vision



of the world (Thomas 2010). If, as stated by Nélia Dias, “far from being ‘negotiated,’ ‘reinvented’ or ‘forgotten,’ the colonial past is just transferred and re-written into a present global concern” (Dias 2008, 309), the conception of a postcolonial museum in our age of migrations requires historical and critical reflections on museographic theories and practices.

In the Netherlands, after Indonesia’s independence in 1949, the Tropenmuseum replaced—while remaining in the same building—the Koloniaal Museum of 1864. In France, the Musée des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie (formerly Musée des Colonies and Musée de la France d’Outremer) was closed in 2003 and its collections transferred to the Musée du Quai Branly. At the same time, the decision to restore and maintain the colonial character in the architecture of Albert Laprade’s Palais de la Port Dorée (built in 1931 on the occasion of the international colonial exhibition of 1931), as setting for the Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration, certainly facilitated a dialogue between past and present on the controversial issues of the relationship between colonisers and colonised, while attempting to build a shared memory. In its “hybrid modernity” (Morton 2000) this architecture still shows clear signs of the past, particularly in its complex internal and external decorative works. The museum still has no section devoted to the history of the colonial exhibition, traces of which are still partially visible in the Bois de Vincennes, or to the history of the building, which the Expo had conceived as a single permanent element: such a narration would have made the dialogue between past and present more accurate and

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Phenomenology of the
colonial museums and
exhibitions: the Italian case,
1922–1940. Diagram by
Alessandro Raffa.



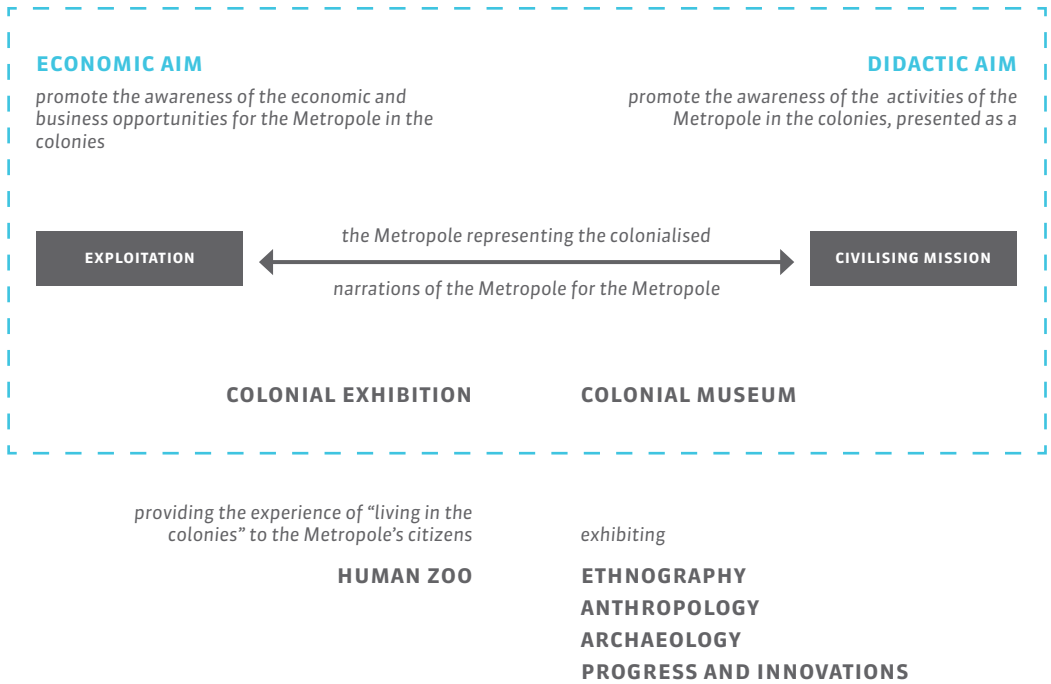
IMG. 2.119 —
Phenomenology of the
colonial museums and
exhibitions. Diagram by
Alessandro Raffa.

better documented. As recently pointed out by Camilla Pagani, this is perhaps symptomatic of the fact that the tragic events of that time are still subject to censorship and “in French cultural policies there is still no awareness of our colonial history.” (Pagani 2014, 343)

In Great Britain, in 2002, the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum of Bristol was opened on the initiative of private entities; the only museum in Europe designed to present the centuries-old British colonial history and its legacy, was however closed in 2008.

In Belgium, the Tervurenmuseum, former Musée Royale de l’Afrique centrale, which is undergoing complete renovation, will reopen to the public in 2017, after years of debate on the need to modernise a museum narrative in which traces of colonialism can still be manifest. As part of this renovation project which provides for the complete preservation of the building and most of the original exhibition settings, the historic architecture and displays are becoming evocative of colonial memories—as a testimony to the museographic culture of the time. The physical distance this project leaves between the historic building and the new wing, containing the entrance and the spaces for temporary exhibitions, emphasises the critical distance between past and present, but does not erode the memory of the past.

So, is there a reticence to reorganise the museum narratives of Europe’s colonial history? Actually, the postcolonial museum issue cannot be separated from the assumption that, in one way or another, every his-



torical museum in the Western world is rooted in colonialism: occupations, dispossessions, acquisitions, marred by strongly unbalanced power relations, and so on. Contemporary museums (in general and especially those devoted to “other” cultures) suffer from the “original sin” of being institutions that were historically created and grown up in the shadow of colonial theories and practices that were developed both in the European states and outside of them, with respect to non-European countries that were conquered and colonised by force of arms (Barringer and Flynn 1998; Bennett 2004).

Certainly, the reticence that some museums have shown, and still show on an aspect of the European—cultural and political—history (that of colonialism), foreshadows a possible deletion of such an important part of our history (de L’Estoile 2007). The colonial era is certainly a complex subject, but the representation of the colonies and the colonisers-colonised relationship conveyed by these museums offered an insight of the policies and ideologies of an era. The postcolonial representation of the history of colonialism should maintain and critically reinterpret that narrative. In practice, the colonial museums reorganised from a postcolonial perspective should leave some room for preserving at least part of the original displays, as testimony of that past and the way in which it was trumpeted in Europe as part of an ideology we now abhor, thereby creating a sort of “museum of the history of colonialist ideology” within postcolonial museums. As stated by Susan Legêne, the colonial and ethnographic collections, in addition to being sources of information on

IMG. 2.120 —
Phenomenology of the colonial museums and exhibitions: aims and contents. Diagram by Alessandro Raffa.

MUSEUM	TYPE OF CHANGE	OLD NAME	NEW NAME
Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration, Paris	New institution in a historical building	Musée des colonies Musée de la France d'outre-mer Musée national des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie	Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration
Musée Royale de l'Afrique Centrale (MRAC), Tervuren	Permanent exhibition renovation – Building extension	Musée du Congo (until 1960)	Musée Royale de l'Afrique Centrale
Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam	Permanent exhibition renovation	Koloniaal Museum (until 1950)	Tropenmuseum
British Empire and Commonwealth Museum, Bristol	Closed (active 2002–2007) In 2002 the museum acquired the Commonwealth Institute's collection	British Empire and Commonwealth Museum	British Empire and Commonwealth Museum
Museo Africano, Rome	Closed Colonial collection acquired by the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico Luigi Pigorini (2011)	Museo Africano Museo Coloniale	Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico Luigi Pigorini

TABLE 2.02 — Colonial museums: new names for new narrations. Table by Alessandro Raffa.

non-Western cultures, can also be considered as “archives documenting how European societies and their ideologies were established and, in this respect, they may have a role to play in postcolonial societies.” (Legêne 2000, 101)

On the other hand, museums also represent themselves in the historical facet of their organisation and structures: indeed, they are a heritage that testifies the culture of an era, which has materialised in that specific “museum model,” its organisation, its exhibition devices, its *décor*, its type and architecture.

Therefore, why shouldn't these museums narrate the colonial past and the communication strategies used by colonialism at that time, perhaps also re-considering and re-interpreting their original displays? Wouldn't that be the best way to support a critical discourse on colonialism, on its heritage and on the contemporary forms of colonialism and imperialism, thus activating an intercultural dialogue without erasing the history of a representational model that is now considered obsolete? (Basso Peressut 2014, 151–155).

→ THE ITALIAN CASE

Since World War II, a policy of forgetfulness and general oblivion has prevailed in Italy with regard to our colonial history—Angelo Del Boca explicitly says that “colonialism has been removed from the culture of our country” (Del Boca 1992)—, despite in the last thirty years Italy has been

affected by migratory flows, especially from former colonies (Libya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Albania), which could have triggered positive processes leading to the re-writing of a shared memory.

The “Obelisk of Axum” is a case in point in explaining the dominant attitude with which we have looked at the testimonies of the Italian colonial past. The obelisk (actually an ancient funerary monument) was brought to Rome in 1937 and placed at the Circus Maximus, opposite the building of the then Ministry of the Colonies (now the headquarters of the FAO); in 2004 it was officially returned to Ethiopia, amid many controversies. Upon returning the stele, however, the desire to forget everything that the stele represented, in essence the colonial past, ensued; to date, there is nothing left to remind us of this important testimony.

This more or less conscious process of obscuring the Italian colonial past is also demonstrated by the evolution of our colonial museums (Surdich 2000) and, in particular, the African Museum of Rome, formerly the Colonial Museum. The Colonial Museum, initially set up at the stables of the Palazzo della Consulta in Rome, was inaugurated in the presence of Mussolini in 1923 “to raise awareness on the current production of our colonies and of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, Eritrea and Somalia” (Giglio 1923a, 640).² The objectives of the museum were:

to the extent possible, to make it a perfect instrument to spread knowledge on the economic potential of the colonies under our direct rule in North Africa and East Africa; to connect this instrument with other national financial, industrial and commercial bodies; to advise on the best ways to exploit the Colonies’ resources, especially in terms of raw materials and to increase the imports of manufactured goods and domestic products in the Colonies. (Giglio 1923b, 421)³

In 1935, the impetus to the colonial conquests given by the fascist regime led to the transfer of the colonial museum’s collections to a larger building, at the zoo in Rome. Furthermore, in those years of colonial expansion, the museum was the only one to receive artefacts from the African continent, thereby dramatically increasing its collections. In this regard, Guglielmo Narducci proposed a detailed description of the collections and their organisation into sections:

As soon as you enter the museum, you see a collection of interesting memorabilia relating to our most renowned travellers and explorers; in some rooms, there is a collection of various types of material from our first wars in Africa. In a large hall there is a Historical Exhibition with photographs and reasons for the colonial Gold medals, and a very interesting exhibition of various kinds of weapons used by the peoples living in our Colonies and those seized in the various colonial wars. (...) The ground floor also hosts rich collections of ethnographic material from our Colonies. On the upper floor, among various rooms, there is a large one devoted to gold and silver

² The article is also quoted in Castelli 1992, 114–115.

³ Ibid., 115.

IMG. 2.121 — Map of the Italian colonial heritage. Site network of the Digital Museum/Archive of Overseas Memories: Albania, Dodecanese Islands, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Italy, Libya, Somalia. Elaboration by Alessandro Raffa.



jewellery collections, true gems of their kind, and a remarkable numismatic collection, including one of Arab gold coins of great interest, relating to the various dynasties reigning in Libya over time. (...) Equally interesting are the merchandise exhibitions displayed in various rooms, where in addition to presenting the various raw materials sourced from our colonies, all the related applications and processing of those raw materials, in the industrial and commercial field, are also displayed. (...) The propaganda carried out by the Museo dell’Africa Italiana, which was named such upon the creation of the Empire, goes even further. Each Sunday, films of colonial inspiration are shown in a very wide hall, while the Museum’s photo library, containing several thousand photographs, provides photographic documents on our Colonies to Italian and foreign writers and journalists, a valuable example of colonial propaganda. (Narducci 1941, 140–141)⁴

In 1937 the museum was closed to reorganise the collection and did not reopen until after World War II. In 1941 the new museum regulation appeared in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d’Italia* (Official Gazette of the

⁴ Ibid., 118.

Kingdom of Italy); this was also the last attempt to reorganise the collection on the basis of thematic criteria, finally abandoning the regional criterion previously adopted.

It [the museum] aims to collect and display everything that relates to the conquests, the promotion of civilization and the enhancement of the lands of Italian Africa. (...) A Trade Fair is attached to the museum consisting of permanent collections of samples of raw materials, products and artefacts, to be used for the Italian colonial propaganda during Italian and foreign events. (...) The collections of the Museum are grouped into the following major sections: 1) prehistoric and archaeological; 2) military and historic; 3) coins and medals; 4) ethnographic; 5) economic and social; 6) artistic; 7) photography and films; 8) stamps. (*Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia* 1941, 736)⁵

After the final closing of the museum (1975) and the liquidation of the Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente (2012) to which the museum's assets had been entrusted, the collection was acquired by the Ethnographic Museum Luigi Pigorini, in whose warehouses it is now kept waiting for a new museum narrative that will make it again accessible to the public (Gandolfo 2014).

Despite the collections frequent reorganisations, the eclecticism, complexity and, at times, the confusion with which the materials were presented, continued to be the hallmarks of the Colonial Museum. These characteristics showed how close the link was between the Colonial Museum and the numerous exhibitions and colonial shows in which sensational effects and exotic suggestions prevailed on scientific rigour, in order to meet the public's interest. This abandonment by the museum of the scientific method developed within the context of ethnographic museums, also revealed the propagandistic approach that characterised this museum: the artefacts of the collection, decontextualised, helped create the setting necessary to extol the "civilising mission" that the Motherland had undertaken vis à vis the Colonies. Also, as mentioned previously, the paramount objective of the colonial museum, in addition to increasing the interest in and knowledge on colonial domains, was to show the citizens of the Motherland the development opportunities that the colonial enterprise would promote. This aim was a further point of contact with the many colonial exhibitions held in the Motherland as well as in the Italian colonies and in other European countries. To name a few: the Eritrea Colony Exhibition at the Palermo Exposition in 1891, the colonial section of the International Exhibition of Turin in 1911 and of the Colonial Exhibition in Genoa in 1914, the Colonial Pavilion at the Trade Fair of Milan in 1928, the three Italian pavilions at the Colonial Exhibition in Paris in 1931 (illuminating examples summarising the fascist rhetoric ranging from archaeology, the "Roman world" myth and futurism),⁶ the Trade Fair of Tripoli, inaugurated in 1936, and finally

5 Ibid., 119.

6 "Taken as a whole (...) the Italian Section [of the Paris exhibition] testifies to the fact that antiquity was considered not only as a source of inspiration and justification, but also as part of the regeneration process inherent in the fascist utopia. Presenting reproductions of Leptis Magna and the medieval



the “Mostra Triennale delle Terre d’Oltremare” (Triennial Exhibition of Overseas Lands), inaugurated in Naples in 1940. As we will see, the last one represents not only a summary of the debate on colonial architecture that spread across the Motherland in the 1930s, but also of the exhibitions on Italian colonialism (and not only) in Africa.

The Triennial Exposition of Overseas Lands was inaugurated in Naples on 9 May 1940 in order to meet the need for an outstanding economic, commercial and tourist centre focused on the role of Italy in the lands under its colonial rule. According to the plans of the fascist regime, Naples was to become the Empire’s gateway to the Mediterranean sea and the construction of the trade centre of colonial inspiration was supposed to strengthen the link between Naples and the overseas lands. The impact of this operation on the city of Naples is not only linked to economic and image factors. Indeed, originally, the exhibition was designed to be a large equipped park and the very centre of the future western expansion of the city as envisaged in the 1939 Master Plan. In practice, however, the construction of the exhibition grounds limited integration with the city and the new westbound expansion, from the point of view of public space. The site plan which, not unlike many of the cities of fascist origin, reinterprets the Roman urban fabric, is constructed through an orthogonal grid that is not immediately obvious. The design of the green areas and the positioning of the pavilions structures break the linearity of the paths and delimit spaces characterised by terminal elements which, from a perceptual point of view, recompose their fabric by the perspective (Carughi 2005, 46). As an example: at the intersection of the access path to the exhibition and that of the green area characterised by the evocative Fontana dell’Esedra placed at right angles to it, stands the Tower of the National Fascist Party, later renamed the Tower of Nations, which functions as central hub for the entire exhibition and for the urban expansion. The exhibition park, with a total area of 72,000 square metres, was completed in just three years (1937–1940), based on the spatial layout designed by Marcello Canino while Luigi Piccinato and Carlo Cocchia designed the open space and the greenery. It should also be emphasised that the green areas were completed with species of trees from the colonies which, together with the pavilions, should make the visitors experience “the perfect feeling of living overseas.” (Dal Pozzo Gaggiotti 1940, 57)

The exhibition was a complex narrative that included themes developed in previous colonial exhibitions and shows: the Italian expansionist and civilising mission, the continuity between the Roman Empire and fascist colonialism, the antinomy technological progress/backwardness and civilisation/barbarism, the comparison between the pre-fascist and fascist colonialism (Dore 1992, 52).

Rhodes side by side with a clearly futuristic construction, somehow suggested that Fascist Italy while aiming to revive the glories of the past, yet intended to reinterpret and renew the meaning of that past.” (Carli 2004, 232)

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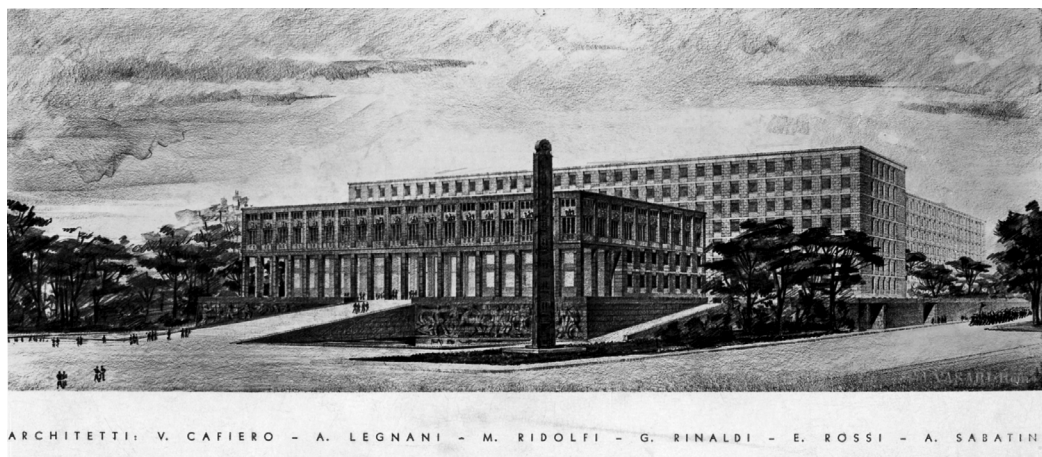
2.122–129 — Views of the exhibiting galleries of the African Museum in Rome in the late 1930s of the 20th century. © IslAO (Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente), Rome. Archivio IslAO.

IMG. 2.130 — “Exposition Coloniale Internationale” (International Colonial Exhibition), Paris, 1931. Exterior view of the Italian Pavilion. The building reproduces in a smaller scale the Basilica of Septimius Severus in Leptis Magna, discovered during the Italian excavations in 1927 (Marangoni 1931, 239).



IMG. 2.131 — International Colonial Exhibition, Paris, 1931. Interior view of the Italian Pavilion. In the foreground the Venus of Cyrene, discovered in 1913 by Italian soldiers in Cyrene, Lybia (*Guide officiel de la Section Italienne à l'Exposition Coloniale*. 1931. Paris: Publicité de Rosa, pl. 7).





The architecture of the pavilions, characterised by multiple styles that document the various architectural experiences of the twentieth century, the design of the open space and the urban layout represent one of the last contributions to the debate on the character of modern colonial architecture in Italy that pervaded the motherland in the 1930s. After the destruction of the war and the decline of recent years, this interesting example of “colonial city in a Modern setting” has been the subject of a redevelopment project since the second half of the 1990s, with the aim of leveraging its environmental architectural and artistic heritage. In 2005 a petition was filed to include the Overseas Exhibition within the historic centre of Naples, which is already a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

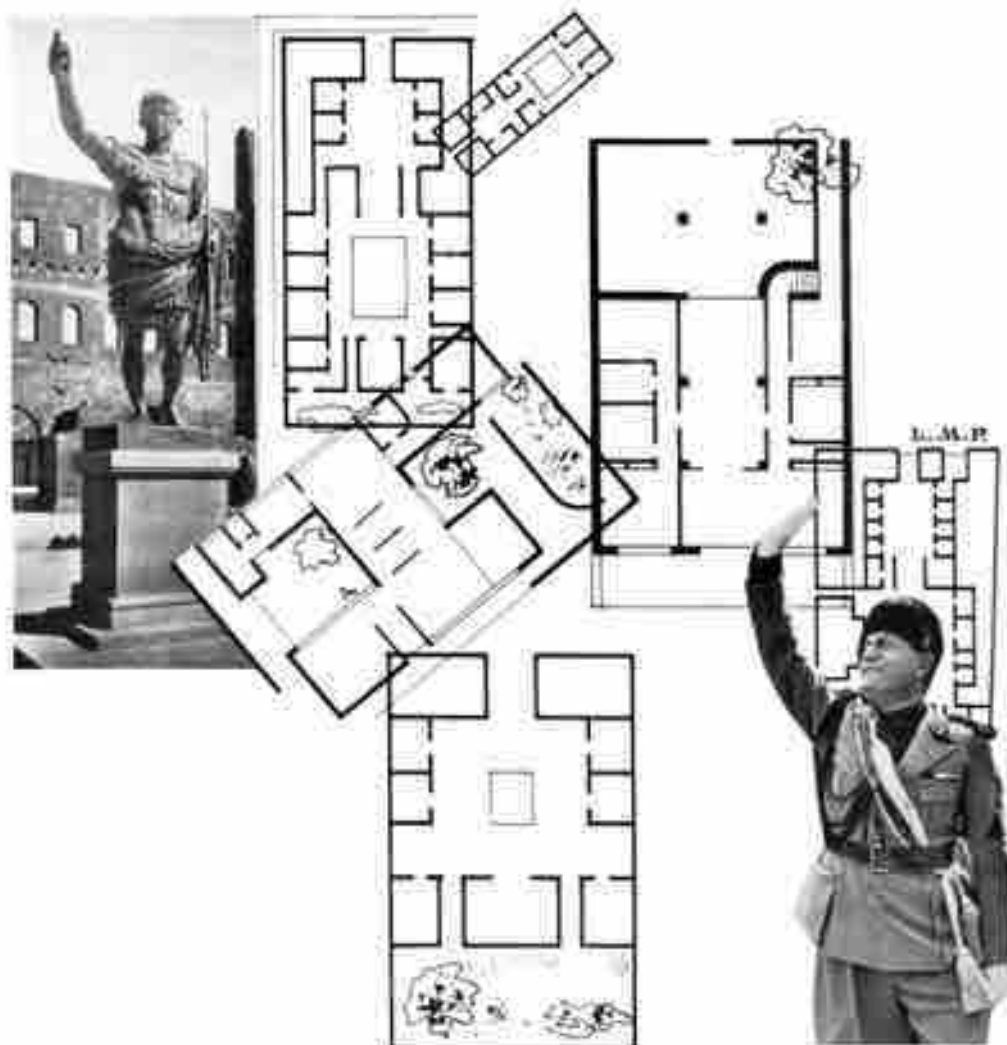
The Overseas Exhibition, however, shows that, according to the propagandistic plans of the fascist regime, the city was intended as the most powerful tool to represent the Italian identity in the world. Indeed, especially between the 1930s and 1940s, architecture and urban planning in the colonies became the direct emanation of a specific project for the self-construction of the national identity, also aimed at obtaining international recognition for Italy as a colonial power.

Within this framework, major urban, infrastructure and architectural works were undertaken that involved the main colonial cities, including the Eritrean city of Asmara, which, due to the quality and quantity of public and private works carried out there, was nicknamed “Little Rome.” Asmara is undoubtedly the colonial city of Italian origin that is most well-known and studied at international level⁷; its peculiarity lies in having been a place of experimentation for all the trends that crossed the architectural culture of the 1930s in the Motherland (from historicist revivals to the Novecento, the Art Deco, Futurism and Rationalism), and

IMG. 2.132 — Mario Ridolfi in collaboration with Vittorio Cafiero, Giulio Rinaldi, Ettore Rossi (first and second level competition), Wolfgang Frankl, Alberto Legnani, Armando Sabatini, Ministero dell’Africa Italiana (Ministry of Italian Africa, now Fao headquarter) in Rome (1937–38; 1951), final project, perspective view with the Obelisk of Axum in the foreground. © Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, Roma. Fondo Ridolfi-Frankl-Malagricci, CD.53.f10.

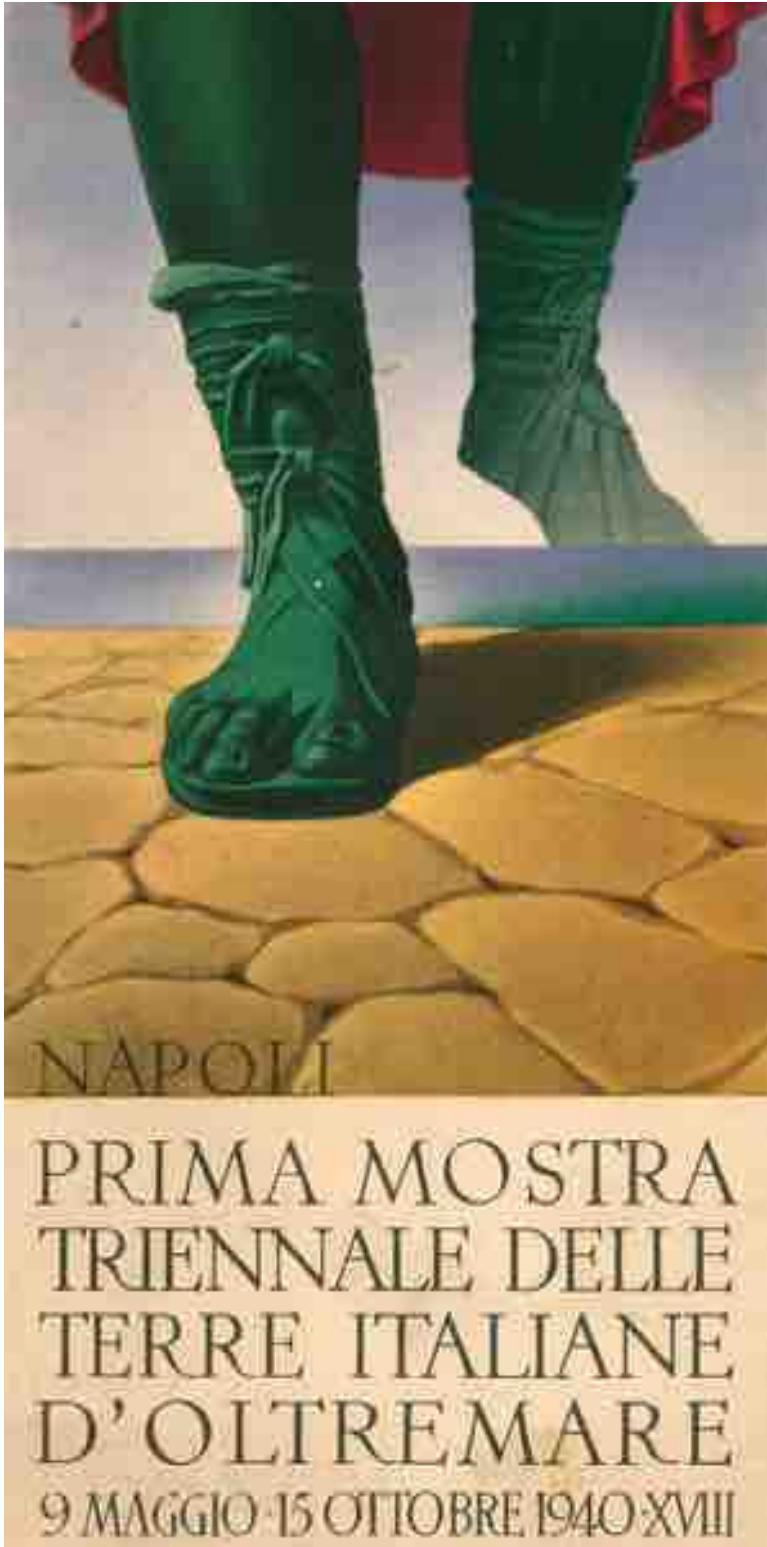
⁷ An important contribution to the dissemination of knowledge on the modern architectural heritage of Asmara built since the early 1920s, was given by the Cultural Assets Rehabilitation Project, which was launched by the Eritrean government in 2001, producing an inventory of about 850 buildings and the cataloguing of the related archival documents.

ROMA 754 A.C.-1935 D.C.



BARBARI 1935



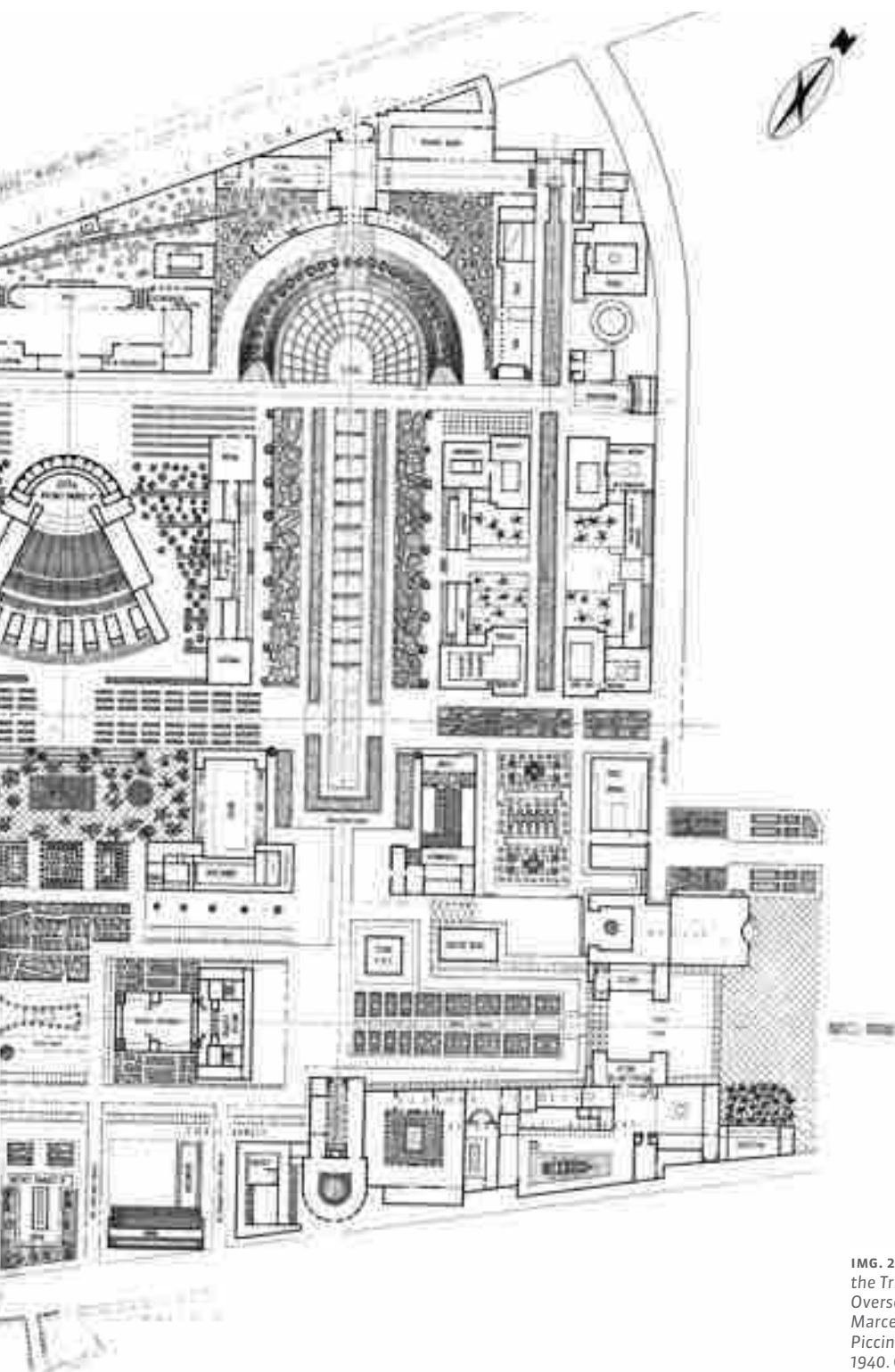


PREVIOUS PAGE, IMG. 2.133 — “Civilisation”. Image published in the editorial of the architectural magazine *Domus*, February 1936. The article proclaims a presumed superiority of the Italian civilisation over the barbarous Ethiopians (Levi Montalcini et al. 1936, 3).

THIS PAGE, IMG. 2.134 — Leaflet of the first edition of the “Mostra Triennale delle Terre d'Oltremare” (Triennial Exhibition of Overseas Lands), Naples 1940.

TRIENNALE D'OUTREMER
PLANIMETRIA GENERALE
RAPPR. 1:1000





IMG. 2.135 — Site plan of the Triennial Exhibition of Overseas Lands, Naples. Marcello Canino, Luigi Piccinato, Carlo Cocchia, 1940. © Archivio della Mostra d'Oltremare.



IMGS. 2.136–140 — Views of the first edition of the Triennial Exhibition of Overseas Lands, Naples, 1940. Nove Maggio square (Dal Pozzo Gaggiotti 1940, pl. 2), above on the left; Pavilion of the Colonial Conquests (Dal Pozzo Gaggiotti 1940, pl. 1), above on the right; view of the exhibition “L’eterna tradizione dell’Impero di Roma” (The eternal tradition of the Roman Empire) inside the Tower of the National Fascist Party (Dal Pozzo Gaggiotti 1940, pl. 4), in the middle; Pavilion of the Italian Expansion in

also of interesting cases of hybridisation with local architectural tradition. Here the colonial architecture was the foundation for building a lasting urban identity, which generated a strong sense of belonging among its citizens (although at the time of the Italian rule the urban structure was rigidly segregative); this was followed by government protection programmes aimed at obtaining the inclusion of the colonial city in the lists of UNESCO Heritage.

Asmara and the Overseas Exhibition are definitely an exception in the immense colonial architectural heritage (consisting of infrastructure, public spaces and buildings, production areas, fair settlements, residential architecture as well as military facilities and segregation areas) which, having been forgotten, risks disappearing also due to the political instability in some of the former colonies.



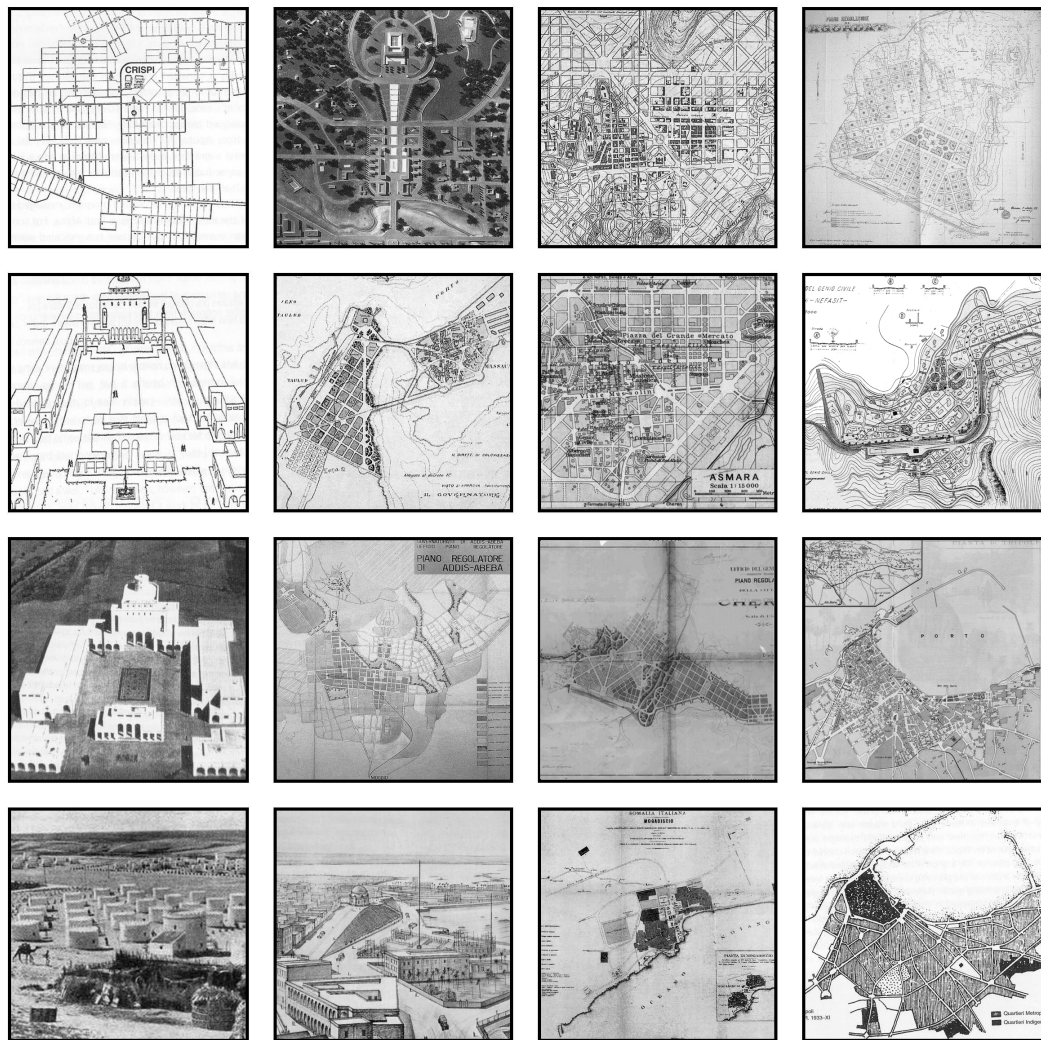
→ RETHINKING THE ITALIAN COLONIAL HERITAGE

Migration flows from former colonies to the Italian homeland, which in recent times have become increasingly tinged with dramatic motives, the numerous initiatives by some segments of the scientific community and civil society (both from former colonies and former colonising countries) aimed at a recovery of the colonial past, acknowledgment of the value of past testimonies (with a view to obtaining an effective and long-lasting international protection against oblivion and the troubled political vicissitudes of those places), make the process of re-memorisation of our complex colonial history no longer avoidable, as evidenced by recent studies (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2012).

It is clear at this point that, now more than ever, the contemporary museum must take charge of the colonial legacy, in all its often painful com-

Orient (Dal Pozzo Gaggiotti 1940, pl. 40), below on the left; Pavilion of the Italian Oriental Africa (Golden Cube). Courtesy Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Cinisello Balsamo, Milan, fondo Patellani), below on the right.

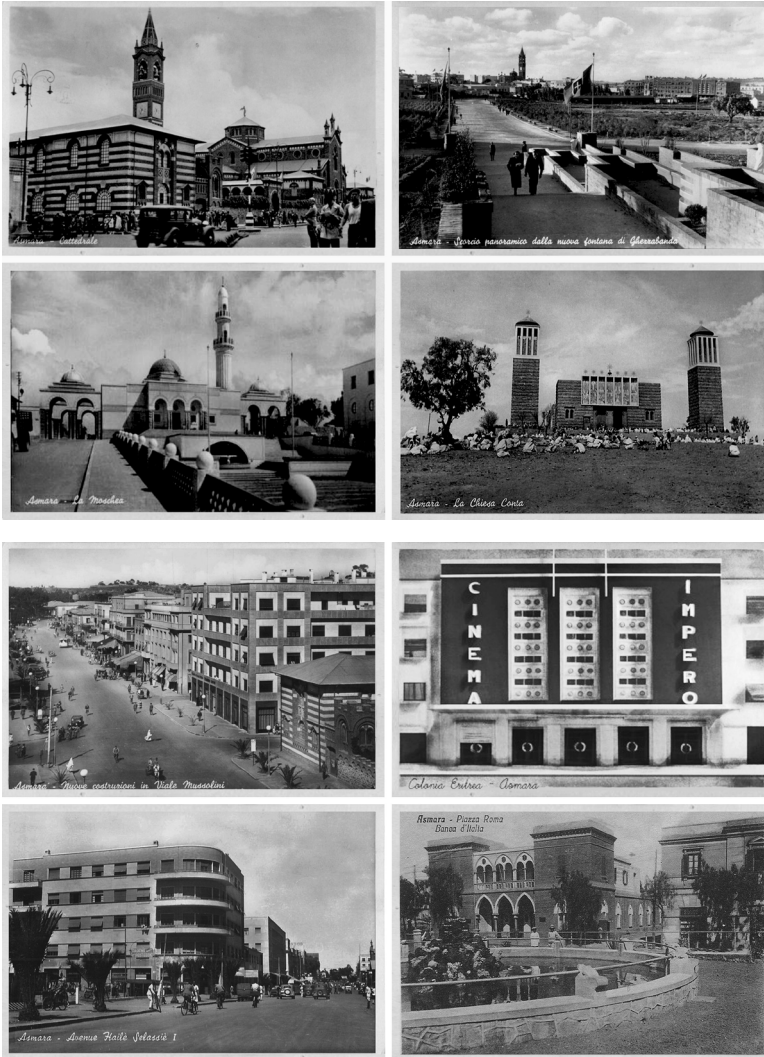
THIS PAGE, IMG. 2.141 — Triennial Exhibition of Overseas Lands, Naples, 1940. Pavilion of the Italian Civilisation in Africa. Main hall with the bas-relief by Pericle Fazzini *The Missionary Fathers* and the map of the missionary expansion in Africa (Dal Pozzo Gaggiotti 1940, pl. 9).



IMG. 2.142 — The city as a medium for representing the Homeland: new urban expansions, new towns and agricultural settlements. Elaboration by Alessandro Raffa.

plexity, by compensating the “trauma of a truncated memory” (Chambers 2013, 276); it must also present itself as a place for building a collective and shared memory, from which specific identity dynamics should develop. The representation of colonialism opens up a number of important questions about museums: what kind of museum? how should we represent and share individual and collective memories? how should we collect, exhibit and protect a heritage that, due to its historic roots, is spread on a global scale?

The conception of a postcolonial museum in our era of migrations requires historical and critical reflections on museographic theories and practices. For example through innovative strategies of involvement and participation, considering that, when the “other colonised people” move to Europe, they become part of ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities who claim their recognition as individuals who are part of society.



IMG. 2.143 — Picture postcards from Asmara, Eritrea, printed when the city was an Italian colony. Private collection.

From top left to bottom right: St. Joseph Cathedral, inspired by Lombard Romanesque architecture (arch. Oreste Scanavini, 1922); Gheza Banda fountain against the backdrop of the Cathedral (arch. Lorenzo Azzoni, 1938); Al Khulafa Al Rashiudin Mosque and the facing square (1931); Bièt Christiàn Coptic Church (known as Enda Mariam Cathedral. Arch. Ernesto Gallo, late 1930s–early 1940s); aerial view of Mussolini boulevard, later Avenue Hailé Selassié I; main façade of the Cinema Impero (arch. Mario Messina, 1937); residential buildings in Mussolini boulevard; Roma square and the Palace of the Banca d'Italia (1926).

The topics covered in the Conference on Italy's colonial heritage, held in Amsterdam, April 20, 2012 are crucial in this regard:

- How does the population living in these once colonised territories look back on the Italian presence? Which traces of Italian colonialism can be found in the literature, art, official history, and architecture of these people or in whatever material and immaterial heritage is thought to carry the collective memory?
- How much has really changed in the Italian perception of the country's colonial past since 1965, when Angelo del Boca began to reveal the atrocities hidden behind the image of "italiani brava gente"? What developments have there been in public opinion and in the literary, academic or political views?



IMG. 2.144 — Examples of different scale buildings constituting the colonial architectural heritage: infrastructures, public spaces, public buildings, manufacturing plants, private buildings, traumascapes. Elaboration by Alessandro Raffa.

- Can expressions of a hybrid identity be found in Italy or in former Italian colonies that show a reconciliation between the assertion of a “local” culture and the recognition of an Italian influence?
- What significance is given to ancient ruins of the Roman Empire in the former Italian colonies where these have been found? In what way have these archaeological sites formed the image and the self-perception of the Italian colonisers and of the “local” population? (<http://www.dagmar-reichardt.net/sites/default/files/download/italian-colonial-heritage-conference-expose.pdf>)

An important part of this process for the definition of shared memories is the architectural and urban heritage created during the Italian colonial period and which still has a relevant presence in the “overseas lands,” albeit endangered by ongoing conflicts in those countries or by architectural degradation and neglect that more generally affect countries where poverty and economic crises are endemic factors.

As stated by Pauline van Roosmalen,

Conceived and realized at a time when European nations established empires around the globe by ruling colonies that were often far more extensive than the territory of the motherland, heritage from those days and regions bears witness to a former world order and its transitory character.

It belongs to the realm of tangible evidence of a past that, assuming colonialism as we knew it will not re-occur, has faded away forever. It is this

particular condition that gives rise to the need to determine whether it is “because of” or “in spite of” its colonial context that this heritage is of special interest and importance. (van Roosmalen, 123)

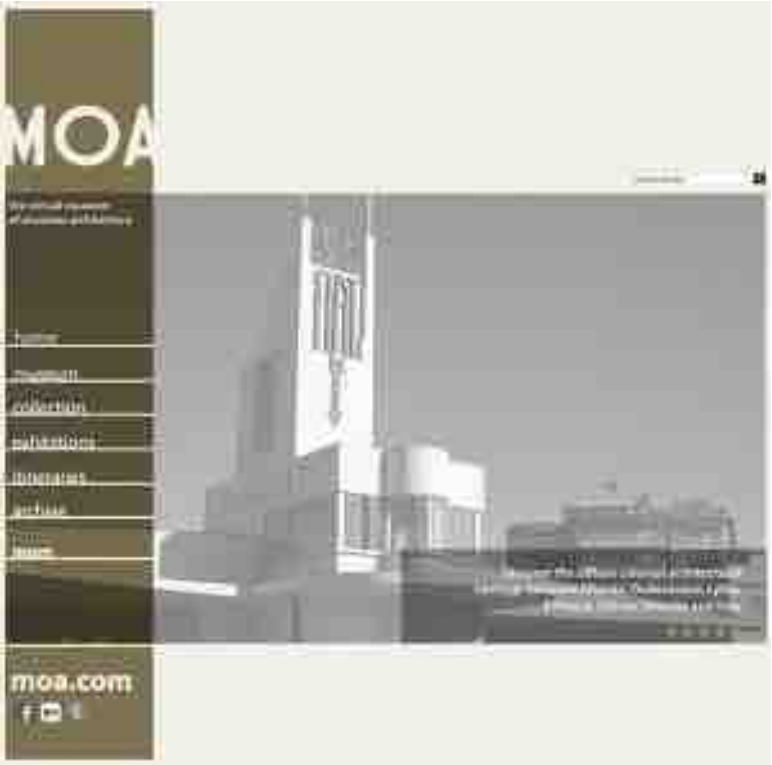
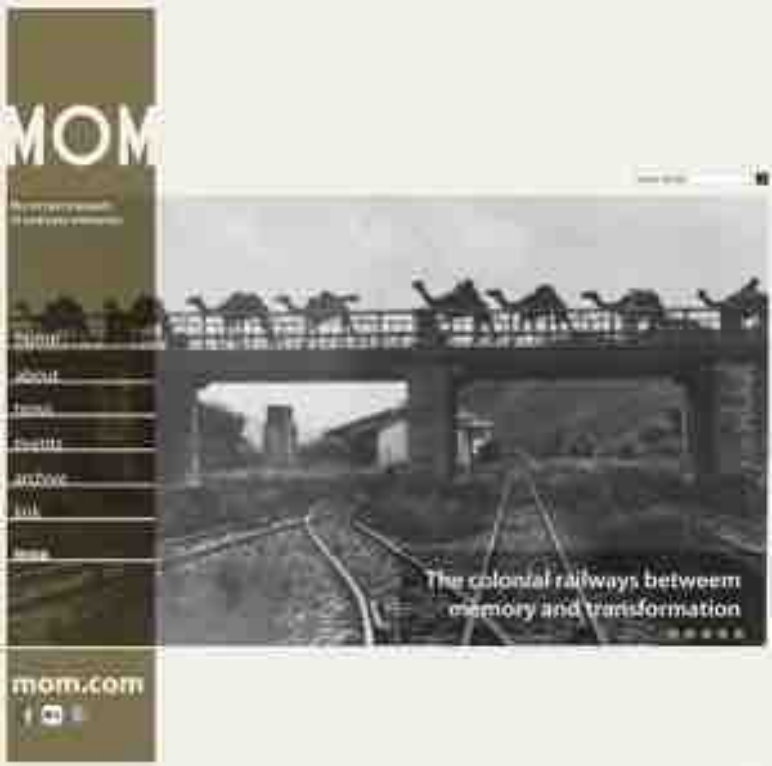
Quite a few studies and publications have been produced in recent years on issues concerning the physical heritage of the territories of former Italian colonies in Africa (Gresleri et al. 1993 and 2008; Besana et al. 2002; Lo Sardo et al. 2005; Fuller 2007), and the historical reconstructions of events related to the conquests and the political events of that period, marked by racism, violence, plunder (Del Boca 1976–84 and 1992). What is missing is perhaps a recap and an overall narrative enabling multiple and cross-cutting readings.

A “Digital Museum of Overseas Memories” may provide an answer to all these questions; a museum that could be part of a network structure of ongoing projects in Italy and in the former colonies, capable of holding together the tangible and intangible aspects of Italian colonial history. The objectives of this platform are: to shed light on the colonial events in all their complexity, to promote a multidisciplinary approach to the subject; to promote the construction of an “Archive of Overseas Memories”—in connection with other experiences (see the “Immaginari (post) coloniali” project, 2014)—through the collection of materials, their digitisation and organisation in order to ensure greater accessibility not only to scholars but also to all those who are interested in the colonial topic; finally, thanks to its open and dynamic structure, to become the main forum of debate on colonialism, in which visitors not only explore the various topics but also suggest questions and reflections.

This platform would give access to a web page dedicated to the colonial architecture; the idea is to make it a reference point for professionals or simply for anyone looking for information on the vast, and often forgotten, colonial architectural heritage of Italian origin. The collection of this virtual museum of Italian overseas architecture is, by its own history, spread on a global scale; such a transnational museum needs to be online in order to present and disseminate a collection, made up of buildings, public spaces, infrastructure, cities and new settlements, whether already built or just designed in the age of Italian colonialism. Thus, while the goal is to promote the knowledge and study of this sort of architecture, much work remains to be done regarding the building of an inventory and the cataloguing of the fragments that make up this “fragile” heritage. In fact, such inherent fragility is a direct result of the forgetfulness that often permeates it and which means that, day by day, this heritage is eroded, producing a memorial vacuum as well as a cultural loss. Thus, in addition to promoting the knowledge and study of the colonial architecture of Italian origin, this “museum” would also aim at increasing awareness of the importance of this heritage, so that positive mechanisms for its protection and enhancement, including at an international level, may be triggered thereby offering opportunities for tangible action.

Translated by Language Password

IMGS. 2.145-146 — Home page of MOM (Museum of Overseas Memories) website. Elaboration by Alessandro Raffa.



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MeLa* - European Museums in an age of migrations

Research Fields:

RF01: Museums & Identity in History and Contemporaneity

examines the historical and contemporary relationships between museums, places and identities in Europe and the effects of migrations on museum practices.

RF02: Cultural Memory, Migrating Modernity and Museum Practices

transforms the question of memory into an unfolding cultural and historical problematic, in order to promote new critical and practical perspectives.

RF03: Network of Museums, Libraries and Public Cultural Institutions

investigates coordination strategies between museums, libraries and public cultural institutions in relation to European cultural and scientific heritage, migration and integration.

RF04: Curatorial and Artistic Research

explores the work of artists and curators on and with issues of migration, as well as the role of museums and galleries exhibiting this work and disseminating knowledge.

RF05: Exhibition Design, Technology of Representation and Experimental Actions

investigates and experiments innovative communication tools, ICT potentialities, user centred approaches, and the role of architecture and design for the contemporary museum.

RF06: Envisioning 21st Century Museums

fosters theoretical, methodological and operative contributions to the interpretation of diversities and commonalities within European cultural heritage, and proposes enhanced practices for the mission and design of museums in the contemporary multicultural society.

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Jamie Allen, Jacob Bak, Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design, Denmark

Christopher Whitehead, Rhiannon Mason, Newcastle University, United Kingdom

Iain Chambers, l'Orientale, University of Naples, Italy

MUSEUM MULTIPLICITIES

FIELD ACTIONS AND RESEARCH BY DESIGN

The present book collects experimental works led by several research teams involved in the MeLa Project—presented in the first section of the volume, titled “actions”—and undergraduate students in Architecture attending the Politecnico di Milano—organized in a section called “Research by design”—whose common purpose is to challenge the traditional idea of exhibiting and introduce participative practices able to promote a better cultural integration and dialogue.

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COVER IMAGE — “Doris Weimann: Re-Entering the Difficult Heritage.” Elaboration by Elina Mannetti.

MeLa-European Museums in an age of migration



Financed under the European Union's Science & Innovation

ISBN 978-88-95184-47-1