

Libya

A. Kassou

The landing of Italian troops on the shores of Tripoli in 1911 was the start of the Italian occupation of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, unified in 1934 as Libya. On this vast territory, the politics of fascist power would leave their mark, mostly in the 1930s, with monuments symbolizing new ideologies. Thus, if the architecture of the 1920s was somewhat similar to what was being built elsewhere at the same period, with relatively clear references to Art Deco or *Arabisance*, in the 1930s there was a significant break with the past and with the architecture of neighboring countries. Architecture at the service of the fascist regime is probably most starkly epitomized by the equestrian statue of the Duce with his sword drawn. This is in addition to the Triumphal Arch on the coastal road built by Florestano di Fausto, an architect representative of the fascist regime who had conceived in Libya, among other monuments, the Grand Hotel in Tripoli. One of the major acts of Italian colonization in Libya was the creation from scratch of many agricultural villages aimed at housing settlers. These villages, housing between 1,000 to 1,500 inhabitants, were built around a main central square bordered by buildings such as a church, the Casa del Fascio, the office of the chief of Police, a school, and a cafe. Among these is Gioda, al-Krarim Rural Settlement in Tripolitania built in 1938 by Umberto Di Segni.

Libya was the first of the Maghreb countries to achieve independence in 1951, but in 1969, a military coup toppled the Monarchy, and a dictatorship was instituted in this vast country, rich in oil and gas reserves but with a tiny population of less than two million in the 1960s, and less than six million at present.

The welfare state followed by a police state achieved a lot in the 1970s and 1980s: housing, schools, health-related buildings, and infrastructure, some of which born out of nowhere. Among the remarkable major projects of the time is the Garyounis-Benghazi University designed by James Cubitt and Partners and built between 1968 and 1978.

With the exception of some important buildings in the Capital and less so in Benghazi (both of which were bases for national companies and administration), little remarkable architecture was produced. The progressive removal of the embargo in the 1990s gave the opportunity for French, British, and Italian companies to win commissions for large-scale projects funded by oil revenues. The overthrow of the Gaddafi regime in 2011 has plunged Libya into uncertainty; this makes it hard to speculate on future architectural production in the country.

Texts translated from French by Georges Rabbath