

## **Implications of Two Colonial Approaches on Urban Expansion of Tripoli, Libya**

*By Fathia Elmenghawi\**

*Colonizers interpret their colonies differently and many urban and planning approaches can be traced. The aim of this paper is to examine the colonial approaches of urban expansion in the city of Tripoli, Libya. It focuses on two distinguished colonial periods, the late Ottomans and the Italians (1830s to 1940s). Both colonizers have approached the concept of modernizing the city differently and both had perceived their approaches to the city's expansion as means of practicing dominance over the colonized under the disguise of facilitating the process of modernization. The striking difference between the two colonizers' plans for the expansion of the city resided in the way they had treated the old city. Under the claim of respecting the 'indigenous culture; the Italians ghettoized old city while endowing the new one with an intense architectural and urban planning orders to project on the ground an Italian national representation. By exploring some archival documents and maps as well as the literature related to these colonial periods, the paper will illustrate how these two colonial approaches influenced the urban growth of the city in the post-independence period (1950s – 1990s) and also became an integral part of the subsequent planning visions of the city.*

### **Introduction**

Tripoli, Libya, has a long history under colonialism starting with the Phoenicians in 7th century B.C. and ending with Italians who have left the city around mid-twentieth century. Each of these periods has left its impact on Tripoli's urban layout. Thus, the city -and its residents- is a product of long foreign hegemony and domination. Throughout the ages architecture and planning were the means used by the colonizers to express their power and ideas. Out of this experience the city has collected a variety of styles that are still attesting to how planning and architecture were used as material instruments in history's relentless drive. Each colonial experience has left its own articulation due to the actions and reactions of both colonizer and colonized. Such a tumultuous history has characterized almost all Middle Eastern and Maghreb cities where the spatial transformations were driven more by the whims of the colonizers,<sup>1</sup> than the wills and practices of their inhabitants.

The two distinguished colonial periods under investigation of this paper are: the late Ottoman rule and the Italian occupation, spanning the period extending between 1850s to 1940s. Though the Ottomans had ruled Libya for more than three and a half centuries, this paper will only concentrate on what is known in Libyan history as the Second Ottoman Rule. This period has followed the initial take-over

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1. Zeynep Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City: French-Ottoman Encounters, 1830-1914* (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 2008), 71.

of Libya by the triumphant Ottoman Empire in mid-sixteenth century when its Navy controlled most of the Mediterranean basin. In total the Ottomans ruled Libya from 1552 to 1912. This long arc of time was divided into three historic periods, the first Ottoman rule lasted from 1553 to 1711, followed by the Karamanli Family's rule (a formally autonomous dynasty) from 1711- 1835<sup>2</sup>; and finally, the second Ottoman rule, which extended from the defeat of the Karamanli family to the Italian occupation of Libya at the end of 1911.<sup>3</sup>

The aim of this paper is to examine the colonial approaches of urban expansion in the city of Tripoli, Libya under the two above mentioned historical periods. The analysis will focus on each period's influence on the city's physical growth and transformation. The paper will then illustrate how these two colonial approaches not only influenced the urban growth of the city in the post-independence period (1950s – 1990s) but also have become an integral part of the subsequent planning visions and proposals of the city.

Examining the colonial approaches to urban expansion in the city of Tripoli will reveal how each colonizer<sup>4</sup> has used ideological and practical ideas to express its power and dominance. The planning and architectural approaches followed by both the Ottomans and the Italians, have used urban contexts as a display to their power, albeit with some significant differences. The similarities and differences can be traced in the way in which both colonizers had treated the old city of the colony as either contexts for expansion or mere relics to marginalize and ignore. Both the Ottomans and Italians have approached the city's expansion as a way to express their dominance over the colonized, though disguising it under the cloak of modernization, albeit with different notions of modernizing cities through urban growth strategies.<sup>5</sup>

A noticeable difference, between the two colonizers' plans for the expansion of the Tripoli, could be found in how both treated the old city. When Ottomans ventured outside the city walls, they related the new growth to the existing city. Italians, on the other hand, have shown little interest to connect the new expansion of the city to the urban fabric of the old city. Thus, Italian massive works to transform and expand the city outside of the old compound have ushered in an entirely new Italian colonial city. Under the claim of respecting the 'indigenous' culture, Italians have, for all practical purpose, made the old city a ghetto, while providing their new city with the needed architectural and urban planning orders that would realize on the ground an

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2. Tripoli was the seat of the Karamanli dynasty, which ruled most of what later became Libya with little control from Constantinople (now Istanbul).

3. Rasim Rushdi, *Ṭarabulus al-Gharb fī al-maḍī wa-al-ḥaḍīr* (Tripoli, Libya: s.n., 1953), 27.

4. At this point, I would like to emphasize the ambiguity of whether to consider the Ottomans as colonizers or as conquerors given that they have the same religion of some countries, over which they took power. However, in terms of some political practices they install in these countries, certain amount of colonial manifestations was appeared. Thus, as it is not the task of this paper to dig into the nature of the Ottoman rule in the Arab-Islamic countries, the term colonizer, in some instances, is metaphorically used.

5. Although the Ottomans had primarily shaped the Arab provinces they ruled, the European colonizers who came after (who subsequent them) outpaced them in terms of the implementation of modernity. Another argument says that the Ottoman and the European colonists were looking at each other while constructing the colony, particularly at the time when both were coexist the Arab Middle eastern and North African countries. For more on the mutual influences between the ottoman and French development projects in the colonies see Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City*.

Italian nationalistic representation. Thereafter, the walled city was left to its own fate, drifting rudderless untouched, so that Italians could still lay claim on preserving the indigenous culture and architecture.<sup>6</sup>

Establishing borders between the colonizer and the colonized was another clear difference between Ottomans and Italian's ideological processes of expansion. Ottomans did not use racial or ethnic segregations in their spatial transformations, whereas Italians' policies on settlements followed separating residential and commercial areas for the European settlers from those for the indigenous people.<sup>7</sup> Though these strategies appear sometime to have been relaxed particularly when creating those "hybrid, or technocratically created, 'organic' (or pseudo-organic) spaces,"<sup>8</sup> the fact remained these spaces were part and parcel of what came to constitute the new Italian urban texture. It has been argued that spaces such as piazzas and the like were designed to encourage the coexistence of different ethnic groups for furthering colonial interests.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, public spaces came to express ideas of dominance, which in turn, have shaped the spatial manifestations of Tripoli urban expansion. In this regard, the paper will argue that another similarity between the Ottomans and the Italians in treating the city's spatial growth can be traced. Both of them made public spaces as the nucleus for expanding first and then connecting to the new open spaces in order to make room for buildings in between. By and large, the following sections will argue that the colonial interpretation of Tripoli's urban fabric by two different colonizers carried similarities as well as differences.

### The Walled City of Tripoli

The old city of Tripoli (Figure 1) the Medina, a result of a long history has survived several periods of domination. The basic street pattern, which still exists today, was laid down by the Romans who also had surrounded the city with walls to protect it against attacks from the interior. This layout of the Roman city, named Oea, later renamed Tripoli, was almost wiped out by the Spanish invaders who controlled the city between 1510- 1551. But such destructions had also stimulated further development of the city and facilitated the process of urban reconstructions under the Ottomans in the following centuries of their rule of *Trablusgarb* – as Tripoli was named during the Ottoman period. The street pattern planned by the Ottomans did not follow the historic Roman layout. The direction of the main roads Sciara Arbaa Arsat and Sciara Jama el-Druj is slightly different from the orientation of the Arch of Marcus Aurelius, which was at the intersection of *Cardo* and

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6. For more information about the Italian perspectives and practices regarding indigenous aspects in the colonies see Mia Fuller, *Moderns Abroad: Italian Colonial Architecture and Urbanism* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Brain McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya: an ambivalent modernism* (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 2006).

7. Krystyna Von Henneberg, "Public Space and Public Face: Italian Fascist Urban Planning at Tripoli's Colonial Trade Fair," in Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, eds., *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 156.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

*Decumanus*, the main axes of the Roman city.<sup>10</sup> Hence, a series of urban patterns began to distinguish the articulation of Tripoli planning structures. Each of these patterns referred to a specific historical period of the city. The classic Roman layout was based on *Cardo* and *Decumanus* as can still be visualized in the original orthogonal grid of the main streets. The Arab-Islamic city with its irregular, curvilinear, and dead-end alleys was superimposed on the Roman grid. The Ottomans' sixteenth-century fortified city can be still seen in the polygonal geometry of the city walls.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 1.** Tripoli's Old City, Where the Original Roman *Cardo-Decumanus* can still be Recognized

Source: Map collection-Perry-Castaneda Library, The University of Texas at Austin. [http:// www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/).

The resulting complexity of the Ottoman Medina of Tripoli was perhaps to the amalgamation of these various foreign influences with their different ways of urban life into a compact urban structure.<sup>12</sup> The walled city saw its flourishing days during the late Ottoman rule, in the late nineteenth-century, when the new reform (*Tanzimat*) had spurred the establishment of many public and civic institutions<sup>13</sup> throughout the

10. Ludovica Micara claims that the identification of the Cordo of Roman Tripoli with the mentioned streets of the Arab-Islamic city is questionable. The author further states that it might be due to the destruction caused by the Spanish troops and the knights of Saint John in the urban area to the west of the Castle as well as the demolition made by the Ottomans in some parts of the city to facilitate conquering it that a shift in the ancient Roman Cordo to the west has occurred. Ludovica Micara, "The Ottoman Tripoli: A Mediterranean Medina," in Salma Khadra Jayyusi, Renata Holod, Attilio Petruccioli, and André Raymond, eds., *The city in the Islamic world, Volume 1*, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 383.

11. Ibid, 384.

12. Ibid, 406.

13. According to the census of July 1911, the year of the Italian occupation the city's population was 29,869 inhabitants – of Muslim, Jews and European christens – distributed in 2,750 houses. The city contained "1,309 shops, 35 Funduqs, 72 cafes, 95 taverns, 3 hotels, 5 inns, 2 cinemas, 1 Arab theater, 1 military steam mills, 45 mills moved by cannels, 43 bakeries, 4 soap factories, 3 leather tanneries, 33

city. The attempt was part of the Ottomans spreading their notion of modernization throughout the provinces.

### **Modernizing Tripoli During the Second Ottoman Rule: Growth of the City Outside the Walls**

The Ottomans, in the last decades of the 19th century, had embarked on urban reform programs in their Arab provinces as part of a larger modernization project. Ottoman interventions on urban fabric in the provinces of Northwestern Africa were not as radical as those carried out in the eastern Arab cities. The principal difference was these interventions, on Maghreb cities, came decades later and were not motivated by military purposes.<sup>14</sup> The programs were carried out under the umbrella of *Tanzimat* reforms, which were aimed at introducing modernity through innovative (modern) urban planning. However, these reforms were not limited to the physical context only, but also brought some administrative and municipal system innovations.<sup>15</sup> For example, the first municipal system in Trablusgarb was established in 1867 and the first municipal building (*Baladiyya*) was a small house inside the walled city.

In Trablusgarb, the Ottoman governors carried out urban reforms<sup>16</sup> that were significant in directing the growth, outside the walled city, toward the south. Ali Riza Pasha, the Ottoman governor who took office in 1867, for instance, was a leading figure in implementing the municipal reform. He was also a fervent partisan of the modernization movement. Because of his efforts, Tripoli started on the path of modernization. Ali Riza, driven by his ambitions to apply what he learned in France, and inspired by the French colonial projects in Algiers, was eager to implement a Western urban management to Tripoli. Hence his many civic projects were based on a strong “desire to modernize following a French template.”<sup>17</sup>

The successive governors of Tripoli had continued Ali Riza Pasha’s mission. Many new projects were carried out in the city of Trablusgarb; new quarters were built outside the walls in accordance to 1909 city plan.<sup>18</sup> It was under Ali Riza Pasha’s governorship that Mazhar Bay, a military engineer, was ordered to draft a map of Trablusgarb. The map outlined the growth outside the walled city. In the

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mosques, 22 synagogues, 1 catholic church, 1 orthodox church, . . . , 5 Italian schools, 2 French schools, 3 Muslim schools, 1 Turkish military college, 2 Jewish schools, 21 Arab schools for boys . . . , 2 Muslim schools for girls . . . 1 Muslim high schools, 6 Turkish primary and secondary schools, 1 Christian hospital, 1 Italian surgery, 5 drugstores, 3 hammams, 1 Turkish town hospital, [and] 1 military hospital. *Ibid.*, 399.

14. Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City*, 98.

15. Jean-Luc Arnaud “Modernization of the Cities of the Ottoman Empire (1800-1920)” in Salma Khadra Jayyusi, Renata Holod, Attilio Petruccioli, and André Raymond, eds., *The city in the Islamic world, Volume 1*, (Leiden: Boston: Brill, 2008), 957.

16. Here I mean in comparison to projects done by the Italians in Tripoli, particularly outside the Walled City.

17. Yet as Lafi claims, Ali Riza Pasha’s projects were not just a copy of Western methods. In fact his goal was to set up genuine technical co-operation with the French by forming modern machinery that included French engineers, who worked in Algiers, as assistants. Lafi, “From Europe to Tripoli in Barbary,” 195.

18. *Ibid.*, 105.

early 1860s there were still not that many constructions outside the walls of the city. Expanding commercial activities outside the walls resulted in building the Suq Azzizia market, named after Sultan Abdulaziz. In order to reflect modernity, the Suq was not designed in line with traditional Arab markets. The shops were situated under arcades that lined both sides along the avenue (Figure 2). Admiring French boulevards, Ali Riza Pasha's Suq Azzizia resembled those arcaded French boulevard of Algiers. Thus Suq Azzizia came to far from a typical common commercial establishment. Gathering commercial facilities along an extended avenue stimulated further growth of the city in the desired direction. It became a catalyst for the new buildings in lands and gardens nearby.<sup>19</sup>

The successive governors of Tripoli had continued Ali Riza Pasha's mission. Many new projects were carried out in the city of Trablusgarb; new quarters were built outside the walls in accordance to 1909 city plan.<sup>20</sup> Ahmed Izzat Pasha (1879-80), Ahmed Rasim Pasha (1881-96), and Hafiz Mehmed Pasha's (1899-1900) implemented governmental and public buildings. All these projects resulted in stimulating a gradual growth of the city outside its walls. Part of these walls was demolished in 1909 to make room for new quarters and for more urban developments.<sup>21</sup> The flourishing of the area outside the walls was highly praised in many publications of the time (Figure 3).



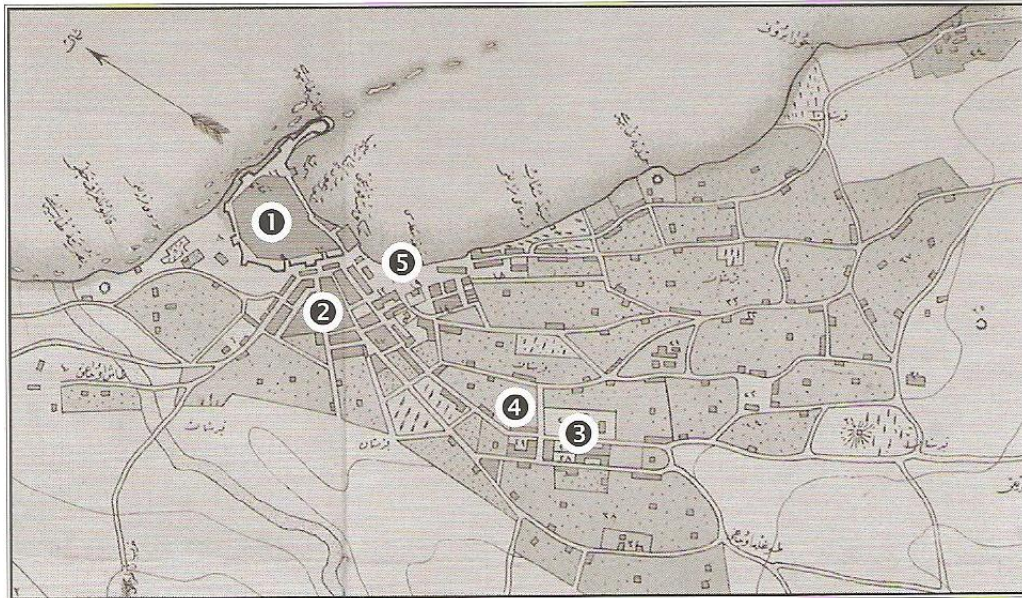
**Figure 2.** *Trablusgarb, View of Suq Azzizia*

Source: Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City*.

19. Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City*, 103-104.

20. *Ibid*, 105.

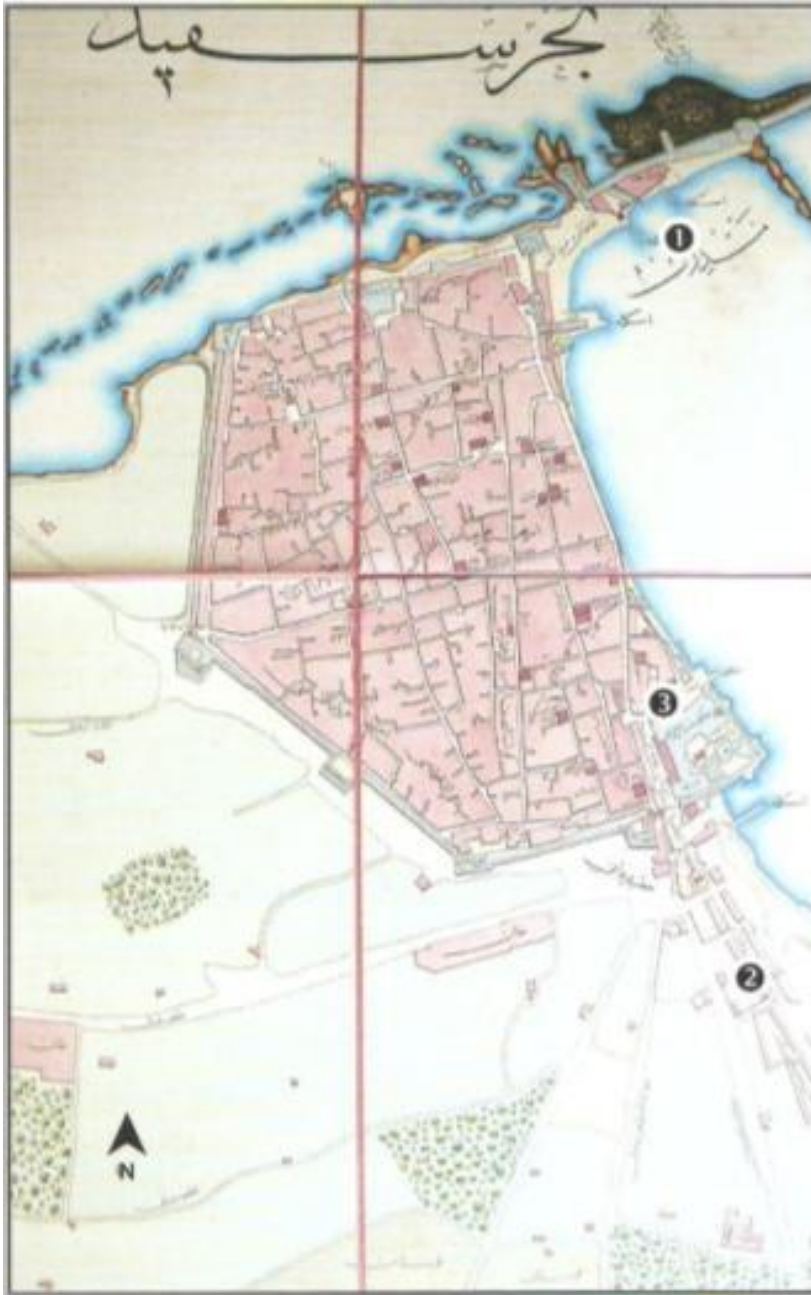
21. Mia Fuller, "Preservation and Self-Absorption: Italian Colonization and the Walled City of Tripoli, Libya," in Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, eds., *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 134.



**Figure 3.** *Trablusgarb, the Growth Outside the City Walls During the Ottoman Rule*  
 Source: Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City*.

### **Ottoman's Approach to Tripoli's Growth: Connecting Public Spaces**

Ottomans' approach for expansion outside the walled city was relating it to what was taking place inside the walls. The continuity of space was central to the growth of the city and the building of new quarters outside the walls. The expansion was conceived as an addition, that's enlargement, to the old city. Thus, the building of Suq Azzizia, at a focal point of the new Azzizia Avenue, which was an extension of intra-muros Saray Avenue, was a good example of a modern planning approach at that time. What distinguished this planning approach was its way of connecting such public spaces, between the old inside the walls with the new ones south of city walls, by the new Azzizia Avenue, an artery which was designed specifically to form a path for further growth to the south (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** *Trablusgarb, Plan of (1883) Showing the Connection of the Clock Tower Square (3) with Suq Aziziya (2) via Aziziya Artery*  
 Source: Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City*.

As in most Arab-Islamic cities, Tripoli has no large open public spaces, besides those modest spaces attached to mosques.<sup>22</sup> However, during the late Ottoman rule, clock tower squares started to appear in cities ruled by the Ottomans, and Tripoli was not an exception to this new type of public space. Erecting clock towers in the

22. Hasan-Uddin Khan, "Identity, Globalization, and the contemporary Islamic City," in Salma Khadra Jayyusi, Renata Holod, Attilio Petruccioli, and André Raymond, eds., *The city in the Islamic world, Volume 1*, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 1036.



Ottoman provinces during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century took a phenomenal pace. They were seen to “express the modernity of the post-Tanzimat period.”<sup>23</sup> They became a symbolic feature of Ottoman public monumental planning, during a period when the creation of new public squares or the expansion of the already existed ones was taken as synonymous for modernity. These spaces with their clock towers became prominent places for public display. Clock tower and their squares were also built to commemorate important political events and royal ceremonies for the Sultans’s ascension to the throne, etc.<sup>24</sup>

The first clock tower was built in Trablusgarb, in 1860s during Ali Riza Pasha’s (Figure 5).<sup>25</sup> governorship. Since the markets in the Arab-Islamic cities not only link public spaces together but also serve as the community’s focal point, the Ottomans have erected their clock towers in their centers. To differentiate these towers from mosques’ minarets, they were given a different shape and limited height. Most of these structures were freestanding and square-shaped or polygonal easily distinguishable from rounded-shaped minarets. In 1898, a grandiose clock tower was built in an open space at the end of Suq al-Mushir. This square-shaped structure was in a graceful neoclassic Ottoman piece of 18 meters high, square-shaped and ornamented with marbled Corinthian columns, with a clock on each of its four sides, and topped with an elegant dome (Figure 6).<sup>26</sup>

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23. Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City*, 146.

24. These plazas with their iconic watchtowers became central public spaces in regional cities of the Ottoman Empire, such as Izmir, Tripoli, Jaffa, and Jerusalem. See Salim Tamari, “Confessionalism and Public Space in Ottoman and Colonial Jerusalem,” in Diane E. Davis, Nora Libertun De Duren, eds., *Cities & Sovereignty: Identity Politics in Urban Spaces* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 62.

25. Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City*, 146-47.

26. James Azema, *Libya handbook: the travel guide*, (Chicago: Footprint Handbooks Ltd, 2000), 73.



**Figure 5.** Trablusgarb, a Clock Tower Built by the Ottomans  
Source: Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City*.



**Figure 7.** Trablusgarb, Another Clock Tower Built During the Reign of Sultan Abdulhamid  
Source: [http://www.slide.com/s/vvooUgmN1D\\_AfMBc8wS8BXCcwo1rNSqH?dir=1](http://www.slide.com/s/vvooUgmN1D_AfMBc8wS8BXCcwo1rNSqH?dir=1).

With such an important clock tower square and prominent location, Ali Riza has planted a reference point for the city's future expansion. The clock tower was close to the residence of the Ottoman royal family, *al-Saraya al-Hamra* (the Red Castle) occupying the eastern quadrant of the old city. Starting from this clock tower square through an old arch one passes to the Suq al-Mushir commercial street before crossing the walls from one of its gates – an open arch, an artery was created connecting to the new Azzizia Avenue (Figure 4). The square became a triggering point for old city's extension, opening the doors for further systematic growth to the south, which was carried out under new reforms for modernizing the city. This artery led into a commercial public space of Suq Azzizia. Hence, new quarters flourished and new public buildings were built along the new artery, which has become one of the principal streets of the radial system which formed the city's urban fabric. Once again, we see how the growth was promoted through linking open public spaces with each other.

The radial pattern can be viewed as dictated by typography as by the need to connect the old city to the new expansion. These new paths took their reference points in the castle, the city gate, and the public space outside the city walls. This public space was to become later a significant Italian architecture showcase in the southern part of the city. Thus, continuing the notion of systemizing the city growth through the concept of connecting public spaces in the city.

### **Tripoli Under Italian Colonialism 1912-1940s**

Italy invaded Libya at the end of September 1911. A combination of resistance and negotiations were followed by the already declining Ottoman Empire in the hope to thwart Italian attacks on their last remaining North African province. Italy mounted its campaign against Libya in part out of jealousy from other European powers and in part to find a solution to its chronic high unemployment. Italy suffered from lack of 'living space' and wanted to catch up with her French and British counterparts in Africa. Italians planned to show the world's colonial powers how the Roman heritage could be claimed again. Their plan was to convince the world they were not invading Libya but merely returning to their ancestors (Romans) lands in Africa (Figure 8). Moreover, they shared European slogans and were eager to prove being more modern and efficient colonizers than what they had been replacing, the Ottomans.<sup>27</sup>

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27. Nora Lafi and Denis Bocquet, "Local Elites and Italian Town-Planning Procedures in Early Colonial Tripoli 1911-1912," *The Journal of Libyan Studies* 3, no. 1, (2002), 60.



**Figure 9.** *An Image Depicting Italians as Returnees Not Invaders*

Source: Fuller, *Moderns abroad*.

Italian imperial dreams to be established in Libya were from the start built on the notion of *Romanità*. But the Fascists have recognized the political value of *Romanità*, enlarging it greatly and rapidly, in the same enhancing it through Roman archaeology, which bound the concept to itself.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the neo “Roman colonizers” were intent as their ancestors on projecting their imperial ideologies on the ground

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28. D. J. Ian Begg, “Fascism in the Desert: A Microcosmic View of Archaeological Politics,” in Michael L. Galaty and Charles Watkinson, eds., *Archaeology Under Dictatorship* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2004), 20-21.

in practice as in theory. Indeed, the Fascist's strong belief in their supremacy has established a direct connection between the notions of hegemony and the building of the colony. Italian colonialism, like all the European colonialism, was carried under the ideological banners of the superiority of their races and civilization, summarized by the French slogan of '*la mission civilisatrice*' and by Rudyard Kipling's 'the white man's burden'.<sup>29</sup> Thus, exploitation packaged in ideological overtones of superiority, drove Europeans to settle and build cities in many parts of the world, Africa was no exception. Tripoli, among other cities in North Africa, thus became an active theater for such theoretical colonial fantasies, translated into destructive campaigns interrupted by vast physical changes in the fabric of the city.

### The Italian Interventions in the Walled City

The Roman ruins in the old city of Tripoli became the main focus of Italian officials and practitioners. The Arch of Marcus Aurelius, dating to 163 AD, was the most important single Roman-era's vestige in the area. This relic was the focus of Italians since as soon as they took over Tripoli. Many attempts were made to revive it through architectural and planning efforts.<sup>30</sup> For Italian administrators of Tripoli were not happy to see the proof of their ancestor's presence in Libya in such appalling conditions (Figure 9). Surrounded by Arab and Ottoman buildings, which Italian administrators had little interest to save, the 'magnificent' arch was so cramped to be nearly invisible. Consequently, an extensive clearing was carried out in the area around the historic arch, demolishing almost all the surrounding structures to abstract the cramped arch from its historical roots, its surrounding background. Thus, Italians' priorities came to be limited to searching and preserving what remains of the Roman Era (Figure 10).

Italians claimed their work done inside the walled city was to preserve the Arab city while restoring the Roman ruins. Italians did not intervene extensively inside Tripoli's old walled city. The debate about how to preserve the indigenous architectural and cultural artifacts while modernizing the colony was at the centre of planning colonial discourse from the 1910s and beyond. Italian officials called for the preservation of the culture and environment in the colony as part of their "*politica indigena*" (indigenous politics), which they thought would support their modernization attempts.<sup>31</sup> But this call was done out of Italian respect for the indigenous culture *per se* but rather "according to the demands of metropolitan society."<sup>32</sup> Hence, the little preservation to indigenous culture that was done; it was defined primarily by Italian authorities according to strictly western perspectives.

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29. Peter P. Ekeh, "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17, no. 1, (Jan., 1975), 95; Edmund Burke III, "Theorizing the Histories of Colonialism and Nationalism in the Arab Maghrib," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 20, no. 2, (Spring 1998).

30. Fuller, *Modern Abroad*, 77.

31. McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya*, 81.

32. *Ibid*, 7.



**Figure 9.** Arch of Marcus Aurelius During the Ottoman Period

Source: <http://younis71.maktoobblog.com/category/>.



**Figure 10.** Arch of Marcus Aurelius After the Italian Rehabilitation

Source: [http://www.temehu.com/Cities\\_sites/Tripoli.htm](http://www.temehu.com/Cities_sites/Tripoli.htm).

The old city was given some attention by early 1920s and in the second master plan of the early 1930s. The intention was translated in rehabilitation forays to strengthen what already existed without causing drastic changes or widespread demolition. For instance, the main objectives of Tripoli's master plan, drafted in the beginning of the 1930s, were to implement new modern infrastructure of roads and

public services while preserving the existing character of the old city and the oasis located on its periphery.

Areas that contained some traces of Roman heritage in the colony, specifically in the Old City of Tripoli, were placed at the center of action. Most significant work, therefore, was carried out in areas, which have attracted Italian administrators and their architects' interests. Florestano Di Fausto, for example, was one Italian architects whose work in Tripoli included proposals for the ongoing master plan of Tripoli. He actively participated in projects that have addressed a wide gamut of areas from the restoration plans of Roman ruins in the old city, to the relationship between the new and the native city, and to modernizing the colony through planning and architecture. Restructuring the area around the Arch of Marcus Aurelius was one of his well-known projects, which came to embody a model of a colonizer's intervention in a colonized setting carried out under the banner of historic preservation (Figure 11). His preservation model required a considerable amount of demolition of the many 'native' humble structures, which surrounded the Roman ruins to disconnect them from what has been regarded as dissimilar historical contexts.<sup>33</sup>



**Figure 11.** *Arch of Marcus Aurelius, Area Restructured by Di Fausto (1938)*

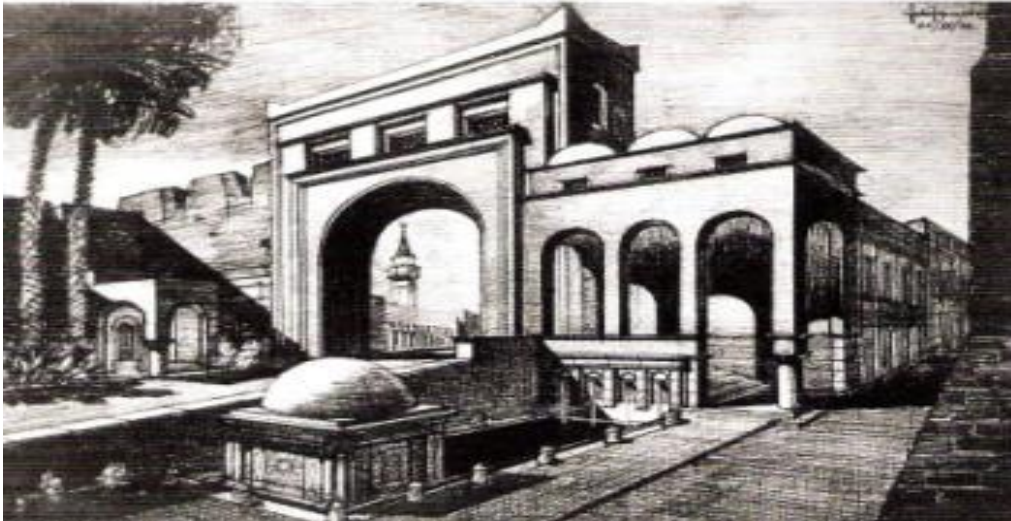
Source: McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya*.

Di Fausto has given good examples in other projects in lending attention to the transition areas between the indigenous architecture and the modern colonial city. This was clearly shown in his proposal of restructuring Suq al-Mushir (Figure 12), where the difference between the historic structure and new construction was perfectly blurred.<sup>34</sup>

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33. McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya*, 98.

34. *Ibid*, 91.



**Figure 12.** *Plan of Reorganizing Suq al-Mushir by Di Fausto*  
 Source: McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya*.

### Tripoli's Urban Fabric Transformation During Italian Occupation

As soon as Italian troops set foot in Tripoli, they formed a colonial administration with the dual mission of settling the newcomers as well as pacifying the native resistance. Tripolitania thus stayed under direct military governorship during the first years of the occupation. Even though the uprisings and resistance were still in full gear, Italians lent great attention to planning and built environment issues in general. Earlier, in the winter of 1912, there were heated discussions about what constituted the fundamentals for the city's future master plan. Luigi Luiggi, a high-ranking engineer, was sent by the Ministry of Public works to Tripoli in January of the same year to inspect the situation of urban projects there. His mission was to advise a plan for the colony based on his findings and to set then the priorities for the development of the infrastructure according to what existed already. Luiggi came up with ideas of reforming the port and how to redistribute both private and public buildings in Tripoli.<sup>35</sup> His proposals underlined the issues of costs and pressing time problems. After spending nearly two months in the city, Luiggi went back to Rome to publish his plan for Tripoli, which became the first master plan for a colonial city drawn by the Civil Corps of Engineers in Rome (Figure 13).<sup>36</sup> Marida Talamona has reviewed the architectural implications of this plan.<sup>37</sup>

The essentials of this first Italian master plan of Tripoli dealt mainly with the construction of new quarters and how to guide their future expansion while limiting interventions on the Arab City (the walled city) to a minimum.<sup>38</sup> Luiggi's suggestions came to constitute a radical approach for the growth of the colonial city that would

35. McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya*, 23.

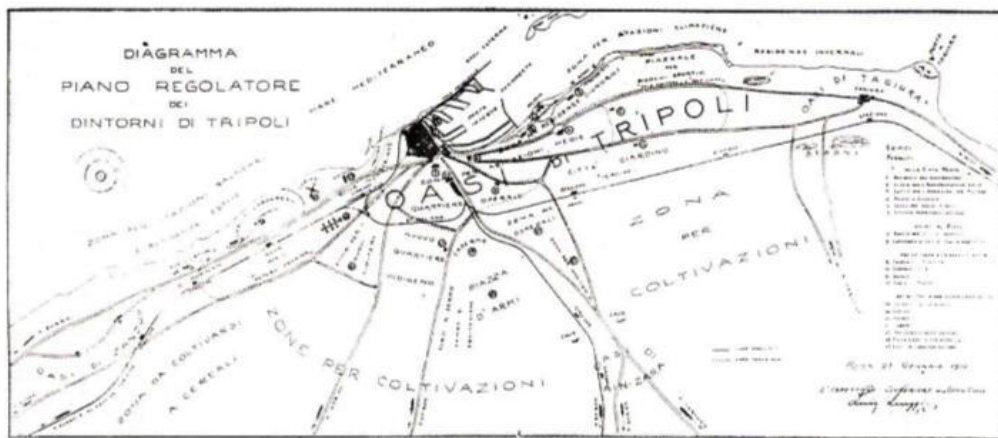
36. Fuller, 2007, 73.

37. Lafi and Bocquet, "Local Elites and Italian Town-Planning Procedures in Early Colonial Tripoli 1911-1912," 62.

38. Fuller, 2007, 151.



amount to a complete and new city for the metropolitan population. The city was named the “garden city” and its center was located next to the existing castle. The land to the southwest was allocated for industrial uses, and the rest of the surrounding areas were designated for agriculture.<sup>39</sup> Luiggi, in his plan, has proposed additional streets to connect the existing routes that radiated from the castle. In his view, the new roads would function as “the Rings of Vienna, the Boulevards of Paris, or the Crescents of London.”<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, a tramway system was also suggested to make movement between home and work – for the Italian workers – as easier as in modern cities. The main intention behind these proposals was modernizing the region to make it suitable for the program of demographic colonization. Despite this Master Plan’s innovative features, Luiggi’s scheme for Tripoli remained largely unrealized due to political instability in the region.<sup>41</sup>



**Figure 13.** *Tripoli's Master Plan (1912) by Luigi Luiggi*

Source: McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya*

Back in Rome, however, colonial cities were increasingly becoming a subject of national concern, particularly when officials concerned with planning considered architectural and planning policies essential to represent Italian control over the colony.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, a major wave of construction took place during the 1920s under Giuseppe Volpi and Emilio de Bono leaderships, as governors of Tripolitania between 1921-1925, and 1925-1928 respectively.<sup>43</sup> Some public works were initiated to establish an Italian presence in the colony. For example, the erection of an open

39. McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya*, 23.

40. *Ibid.*, 21.

41. The reason for Luiggi plan not to be realized was the conflict between the civil and the military administrations about who was responsible for the urban planning in the colony. The conflict was of civil engineers in Rome vs colonial administration. In addition, the conflict between the colonial administration and the Luiggi mission reached its optimum when the civil engineer, a chief of civil engineers in Tripoli, adapted Luiggi’s plan to local conditions, a direct intervention from the Prime Minister was required. The Prime Minister’s wise involvement was a significant factor behind preventing the Army to take control of the city’s urban space transformation. Lafi and Bocquet, “Local Elites and Italian Town-Planning Procedures in Early Colonial Tripoli 1911-1912,” 63-64.

42. Fuller, 2007, 76.

43. von Henneberg, 1996, 383.

public space, Piazza Italia, to connect a major artery named Corso Vittorio Emanuele III, previously was known as Sharah Azzizia. Surrounding this square were public institutions that were essential to Italian civic life, as the town hall, cathedral, and the courthouse (Figure 14).<sup>44</sup> In addition, a beautiful boulevard was erected along the waterfront, extending the city toward the east. The boulevard was designed by the Roman architect Armando Brasini, and was named Lungomare Conte Volpi. It exemplified the European boulevard with magnificent buildings such as Miramare Theater, the Grand Hotel, and the bank of Italy aligned along its course, forming the new skyline of the modern Italian colonial city (Figure 15).<sup>45</sup>



**Figure 14.** Tripoli, Corso Vittorio Emanuele III (1925)

Source: McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya*

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44. McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya*, 24.

45. *Ibid.*



**Figure 15.** Tripoli, Lungomare Conte Volpi, (Late 1920s)

Source: Old Libyan Photos Collectors <http://www.facebook.com/groups/25522864778/>.

By mid-1920s, Italians began to transform Tripolitania from little known neglected Ottoman province to a vibrant modern European colony. Colonial press of the time had described the changes brought to the capital of the region, Tripoli, “from a crowded and unsanitary conglomeration of Ottoman structures, with unpaved streets and open sewers, into the 'pearl' of the Mediterranean.”<sup>46</sup> The new city, full of multi-story decorated buildings and with beautiful wide boulevards, was contrasted in many publications to the old city with its filthy narrow streets and low modest buildings. Most of the changes to the city were to accommodate the influx of Italian migrants.

The 1912 master plan was already overtaken events Balbo, in 1934, approved a new plan for the city. This plan was drawn by the Milanese architects, Novello, Cabiati and Ferrazza,<sup>47</sup> between the years 1931 and 1933, aimed to double Tripoli’s population, following the basic principles of 1912 plan.<sup>48</sup> When the city spread to the east the roads connecting the new areas were not enough to handle the traffic to center of city. Therefore, a number of new arteries were added to the radial grid to link with the existing street network. Thereafter, the city was divided into separate districts<sup>49</sup> (Figure 16). McLaren indicated this scheme was common in the Italian

46. Von Henneberg, “Imperial Uncertainties,” 383.

47. They are members of *Novecentisti*, which is one of Italian Leading architects’ offices in the 1920s and 1930s. They also contributed in the planning of the city of Benghazi. Fuller, *Moderns abroad*, 158.

48. The census of the Tripoli stated that between 1928 and 1933 the population of the city had grown from 63,400 to 88,900 inhabitants. *Ibid.*

49. McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya*, 29.

planning approaches of multiple centers, where each center has its own local facilities. A separation of high-density areas, as the waterfront from other areas located in the vicinity of the city in order to keep some balance between buildings and green open spaces.<sup>50</sup>

The Separation of the new European quarters from adjacent native settlements has created dual cities, which were features of colonial urbanism.<sup>51</sup> Mia Fuller listed three colonial urban models deployed by Italians in their colonies. One of these models and the most related to the topic of this paper is the colonial dual city model, which was based on leaving untouched the existing city, the indigenous city, but with diminishing role.<sup>52</sup> Italian architects in the 1920s and 30s, operating under the Fascist government, have used their colonial possession to experiment on a larger scale their urban planning methods and architectural forms. A clear distinction, thus, was made separating “Italian” from “primitive” architecture, and favoring the former at the expense of the latter (Figure 17).



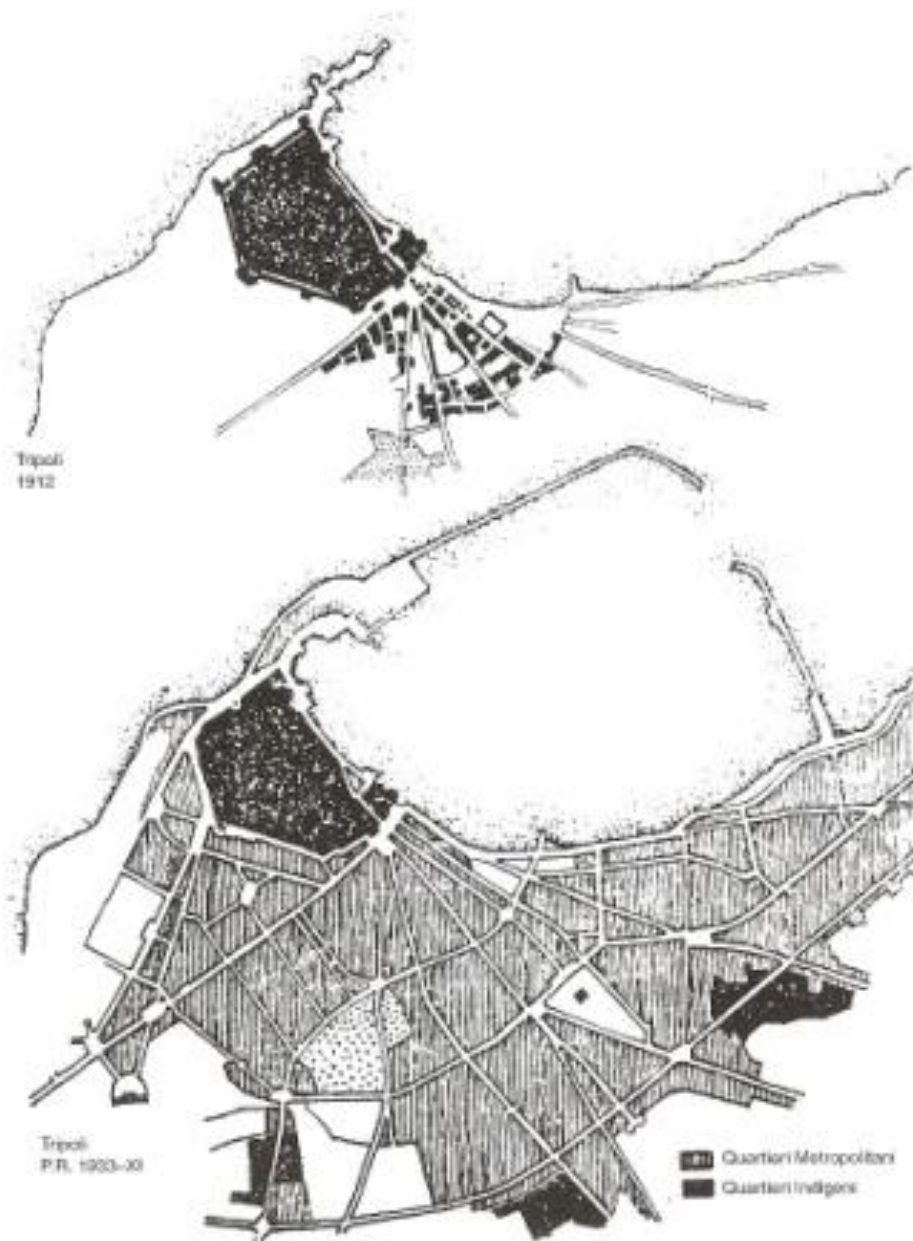
**Figure 16.** *Tripoli's Master Plan (1933) by Novello, Cabiati and Ferrazza*  
 Source: McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya*

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50. Ibid, 30.

51. Çelik, 2008, 86

52. Fuller, *Moderns abroad*, 8.



**Figure 17.** *Tripoli in 1912 and 1933 Master Plan, European and Native Quarters*  
 Source: Fuller, *Moderns Abroad*.

### **An Italian Approach for Tripoli's Expansion: Connecting Urban Public Spaces**

The city of Tripoli grew dramatically during the Italian occupation. Most of the constructions began to expand the city, outside the walls of the old city, southward along the new boulevards. Italians, at the beginning, have adopted what the Ottomans had already demarcated as paths for growth of the city. Even the street names were

kept the same as mentioned by Ethel Braun when describing the day she met with the Italian military governor, General Garioni, at the beginning of Tripoli's occupation. At the time most of the area was still vacant and the few existing buildings dominated the city as Braun described the scene: "It is a blazing hot day, and the rose-pink walls of the old castle glow in the sunshine as we pass out of the Via Azizzia up the long slope of the ramparts leading to the entrance."<sup>53</sup> Eventually, Italians have begun creating their own image of benevolent patrons for the city by partial urban and architectural makeovers that have paid some attention to the public face of the city. A major and significant project that has been previously mentioned was the formation of the public open space, Piazza Italia, just outside the walls in front of the historical castle (Figure 18).



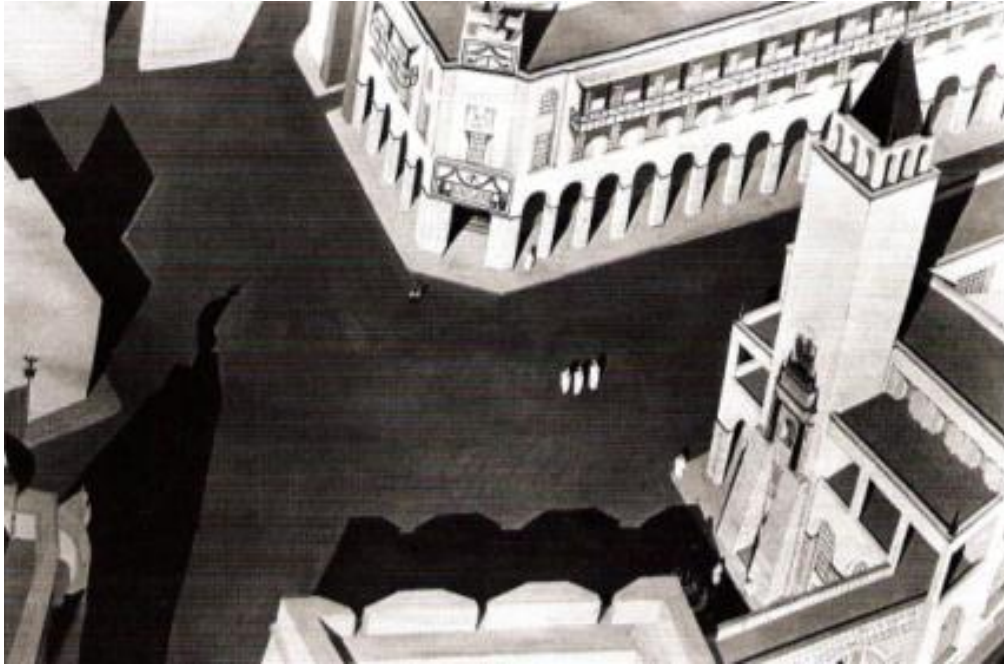
**Figure 18.** *Piazza Italia, Tripoli (1920s)*

Source: Old Libyan Photos Collectors <http://www.facebook.com/groups/25522864778/>.

In Tripoli, Piazza Italia was the first Italian conception of public space in a colonial context where the natives' city layout constituted a significant part of the setting rivaling the new colonial modern city. The piazza was meant to mark the difference between native architecture and its colonial rival, set the transition area between them, where many of the public buildings erected around it have still an ambivalent architectural style. Limongelli's 1931 proposal was to restructure Piazza Italia by merging the two stylistic traditions, those of the colonized and the colonizer, in one urban public space (Figure 19). Limongelli's work was "tempered by an abstract modernist aesthetic. The modern *Romanità* of his work is adjusted to integrate with environmental qualities and characteristic forms of the local architecture."<sup>54</sup>

53. Ethel Braun, *The New Tripoli and What I saw*, 53.

54. McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya*, 28.



**Figure 19.** *Proposal for Restructuring Piazza Italia (1931) by Limongelli*  
 Source: McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya*.

The spatial formation of Piazza Castello, which was named after the historic castle, can be attributed to two reasons: the diminishing role of the old city defensive walls and the growing importance of the new modern city center.<sup>55</sup> When the historic castle no longer functioned as a citadel, its surrounding area was opened up for architectural use. This area was a marginal piece of land encompassed by the open market outside the city walls, and extended across the waterfront (Figure 20).<sup>56</sup> The master plan of 1912 required a significant part of the city walls be demolished to open up “the luminal area between the medina and the new town to European constructions.”<sup>57</sup> The Piazza, then, marked the boundaries between the Arab medina to the west and the modern city to the east and the south. It was open to the port from the north side and formed an extended apex to a set of seven radiating streets running through the heart of the new city.<sup>58</sup>

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55. Krystyna von Henneberg, “Piazza Castello and the Making of a Fascist Colonial Capital” in *Streets: Critical Perspective on Public Space*, ed. Zeynep Çelik, Diane Favro, and Richard Ingersoll, 135- 150 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 138.

56. *Ibid.*, von Henneberg, 136.

57. *Ibid.*, 139.

58. *Ibid.*, 137.



**Figure 20.** Open Market Area beside the Castle Before it was turned into Piazza Castello  
 Source: Old Libyan Photos Collectors. <http://www.facebook.com/groups/25522864778/>.

Tripoli's image kept changing when a number of government and architectural enterprises were built during the 1930's. A significant change occurred with the shift of the city center away from the Piazza Castello towards the newly built Piazza della Cattedrale in the recently added areas in the southeast.<sup>59</sup> The new piazza, completed in 1928, named after the cathedral of San Cuore di Gesu, was the work of Governor Italo Balbo's favorite architect, Di Fausto, who was credited to have launched the piazza as a colonial public space. Di Fausto labored to create direct visual and physical connections between the piazza and the waterfront. For him, the connection to the Mediterranean Sea, as an end-in-itself, and at the same time a link back to Rome, was symbolically significant also for reinforcing the notion of Mediterranean-ness.<sup>60</sup> Di Fausto's passion to fuse the Mediterranean-ness' notion into architecture was clear in his article "The Mediterranean Vision of My Architecture," which has grounded his entire body of work on the notion of Mediterranean-ness. Adding that "Architecture was born in the Mediterranean and it triumphed in Rome.....thus it must remain Mediterranean and Italian."<sup>61</sup> His vision of *Mediterraneità* can be clearly found in Piazza della Cattedrale where Di Fausto has promoted an Italian space, in clear contrast to Arabic-North African space, yet forcefully harmonized with it.<sup>62</sup> Di Fausto's task was to face "complex negotiation of economic, social, and historical practices captured within the interlocking piazzas of the city and

59. Fuller, *Moderns abroad*, 168.

60. Fuller, *Moderns abroad*, 168.

61. Fuller, 130.

62. Sean Anderson, "The Light and the Line," 10.



buildings themselves.”<sup>63</sup> In this set of intricate problems, he was able to assert the cultural and historical primacy of the Mediterranean region and to emphasize geographical and climatic influence on architectural manifestations.<sup>64</sup> Thus, his notion of distinct Mediterranean architecture was based on the idea of adjusting the general plan to fit with local forms and the environmental demands.

### **Tripoli’s Urban Fabric: From Independence and After (1951 – 1990s)**

The urban form of Tripoli’s Center was transformed during the Libyan regimes ruled the city after Independence. During the period of the monarchy (1952-1969), no significant projects were erected in the city center nor were building blocks or public spaces altered.

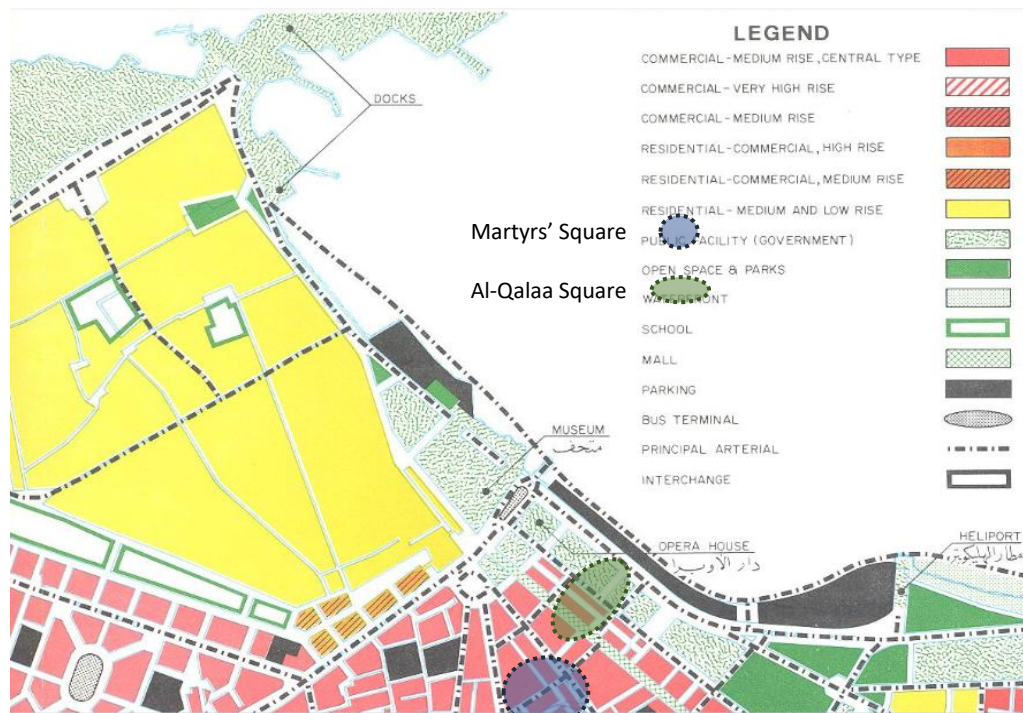
Between 1966 and 1968, Whiting Associates International (WAI) and Henningson, Durham & Richardson prepared Tripoli Comprehensive Master Plan based on the Five-Year Development Plan (1963-1968). The final report was submitted in November 1969. The report alluded to the city’s Corniche and its splendid boulevard, along which the Italians in the 1920s placed a row of magnificent buildings, as one of the city’s main attractions. Despite this, the master plan proposed reclaiming a piece of land from the sea for building an express road parallel to the Italian boulevard, which, in 1952 and because of its importance in the city, was renamed Adrian Belt Boulevard, after the United Nations envoy who helped in the process of Independence of the country.

The main purpose for erecting the Express Road was to facilitate transport of goods from the port to the cities located the east of Tripoli. The suggested area of sea reclamation was on average 50 meters in width along a segment of the seafront approximately 1,100 meters long. The proposed road would be built at the edge of the reclaimed land, and the strip remained between the new road and the old promenade to be used as parking lots. Additionally, a helicopter-landing platform was proposed near the parking lots (Figure 21).

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63. Ibid.

64. McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya*, 184.



**Figure 21.** Tripoli Master Plan by WAI, 1969

Source: Report of Tripoli Comprehensive Master Plan, 1969.

Then, during Gaddafi's regime (1970 – 2011), Tripoli's Center underwent dramatic physical changes, particularly after the 1970s. Two major master plans for Tripoli were proposed and carried out in 1981 and 2007 with a focus on the city center. The layout of the city was remarkably altered, especially its main urban space, Martyrs Square, and along the seafront.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the city's magnificent waterfront, which was built by the Italians in the 1920s, was subjected to destructive alteration. Three of the most significant Italian buildings, located along the seafront, were demolished: the Grand Hotel, Al-Mahary Hotel, and the Bank of Rome. Moreover, a large amount of land was reclaimed along the waterfront as a result of the government's intentions for redeveloping the commercial port, building the express road, and introducing new recreational spaces along the sea promenade. The alteration in the seafront allowed for introducing new urban spaces for recreational activities. After implementing the Express Road on the reclaimed area in the late 1970s, a vast area remained between this road and the sea line. A wide promenade, the Corniche, and the Grand Park were proposed (Figure 22).



**Figure 22.** Existing and proposed Green Spaces in the City Center and along the Waterfront

Source: The Urban and Architectural Character. Land Use Regulations, 2010.

A dramatic change in the city fabric took place during Gaddafi's Regime. This change in urban fabric was driven by political intentions rather than to achieve urban planning solutions. Gaddafi chose Martyrs Square (previously Piazza Castello), the chief historic square in Tripoli, to showcase his political ideology and military power. The political ambitions of the leader surpassed the historic significance of the space and the display of power came with a large price. The enlargement of the square required the demolition of some of the buildings that had defined the space over five decades. The ground surface of the square was painted green and the square was renamed the Green Square to reflect Gaddafi's political ideology expressed in his book, the *Green Book*. Although the square carried significant political meaning, it continued to be used as a parking lot, which was desperately needed at this commercial hub in the city center.

Another significant transformation in the city fabric driven by economic and political forces was the filling in of the waterfront in the city center that resulted in a disconnection of Martyrs Square from the waterfront. Again, one purpose of this change was to display the regime's accomplishments through infrastructure projects. At the beginning, the new public spaces established on the new waterfront were used for political ceremonies and events, but eventually those spaces became part of the recreational facilities in the city center.

## Conclusion

This paper examined the colonial approach in urban expansion of Tripoli. It demonstrated that public space was a key tool used by each political regime to express its political ideology and to respond to economic conditions and social events. Both the Ottomans and the Italians used public space to transform the city and to organize its future expansion. Creating connections between public spaces was central to the growth of the city and the building of new quarters outside the walls. Similarly, the Italians focused on public space in their expansion of the new

colonial city established just outside the Old City walls. Public spaces such as Piazza Italia and Piazza Castello were employed as the main vehicles for implementing their modernization scheme and for expanding their new city in the colony. The Italian approach of building new European quarters adjacent to native quarters resembled the renowned colonial concept of dual cities.<sup>65</sup>

After Independence of the country in 1951, no significant alterations happened in the city although important master plan was proposed. Based on this proposal, a dramatic change in the city fabric took place during Gaddafi's Regime. This change in urban fabric was driven by political and economic intentions rather than to achieve urban planning solutions. The enlargement of the main public square and the filling in of the waterfront in the city center with the newly established recreational spaces were the examples of this change in the city's urban fabric. With all this dramatic expansion of the city, the traces of the two colonial approaches – happened during the Ottoman and the Italian periods – are still evident in the city fabric and were used as the catalyst for the further growth of Tripoli in the subsequent political periods.

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