



# LA CASA

ESPACIOS DOMÉSTICOS  
MODOS DE HABITAR

**ABADA EDITORES**

# LA CASA

## ESPACIOS DOMÉSTICOS MODOS DE HABITAR

II CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL CULTURA Y CIUDAD  
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## **Moderna, racionalista y mediterránea: arquitectura residencial durante la colonización italiana en Libia**

### *Modern, Rationalist and Mediterranean: Residential Architecture during the Italian Colonization in Libya*

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#### **Resumen**

El problema de la arquitectura italiana en las colonias africanas fue uno de los puntos centrales de discusión en las revistas italianas en los años treinta. En esta década el debate se centró en torno a la arquitectura "moderna", lejos del eclecticismo tardío y más próximo a las necesidades locales. Especialmente en Libia, donde las primeras colonias fueron establecidas en 1911, la arquitectura italiana mostró semejanzas con la de la costa del Mediterráneo septentrional y mostró raíces "latinas". Mientras que los edificios públicos tenían que mostrar un aspecto monumental y la conexión con la tradición local era menos visible, por lo que respecta a la casa resultaba más fácil reconocer su origen en la antigua Roma, es decir, en la casa pompeyana. Como consecuencia de un rico debate, en el que participaron sobre todo Rava, Pellegrini y Piccinato, se crearon también interesantes prototipos "híbridos".

**Palabras clave:** arquitectura colonial, arquitectura mediterránea, racionalismo italiano, Carlo Enrico Rava, Luigi Piccinato

**Bloque temático:** Arquitecturas de la casa: el espacio doméstico a través de la historia

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#### **Abstract**

*The problem of Italian architecture in the African colonies was one of the central points of discussion on Italian magazines, especially during the Thirties. In the last decade before the Second World War cities and territories were strongly transformed, quite later than French and English African colonies. This meant that the discussion was about a "modern" architecture, far from the late eclecticism and close to the local needs. Especially in Libya, where the first colony was established in 1911, Italian architects found a similarity with the North-Mediterranean coast architecture and saw "Latin" roots. While public buildings had to exhibit a monumental face and the connection with the local tradition was less visible, for the house it was easy to recognize its origin in the ancient Roman models, that means also the Pompeian house. Besides a rich debate, in which above all, Rava, Pellegrini and Piccinato took part, new interesting and "hybrid" prototypes were created.*

**Keywords:** Colonial architecture, Mediterranean architecture, Italian rationalism, Carlo Enrico Rava, Luigi Piccinato

**Topic:** Architecture of the house: domestic space throughout history

## Introduction

The history of Italian colonization began in the first decades after the Unification. The first Italian base in the African territory was established in 1884, when the harbours of Massawa and Assab, in the actual Eritrea, were occupied thanks to an agreement with Great Britain. Afterwards, in 1890, they constituted the Eritrean colony. In this period, a first try to expand the Italian domination on the “Abissinia”, the actual Ethiopia, was not successful. In 1911 the prime minister Giovanni Giolitti declared war to the Ottoman Empire and in the following year the Libyan territory, together with the islands of the Dodecanese, became Italian. During the Fascist time, the idea of a colonial empire was strongly followed, so that in the years 1935-1936 the Ethiopian country was conquered. Gradually, the Italian Fascist Army had the complete control also of the Libyan territory, while in 1936 the A.O.I. (Italian Oriental Africa) was created and included Ethiopia, Eritrea and the Italian part of Somalia.

A relevant difference between Libya and East Africa has to be highlighted, and this is due, first of all, to the shorter history of Italian colonization in Libya, that goes from 1911 to the end of the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> Yet, working on the Libyan territory, in spite of the Italian Oriental Africa, architects and planners found many similarities with other Mediterranean countries and Italy itself. This is why the present notes deal with the Libyan context, that was without any doubt central for the architectural discussion and for relevant considerations about the meaning of the words “Mediterranean”, “local” and “modern”. During the 32 years of Italian dominion, the European – and Italian – architectural culture changed considerably and quickly. In these years the African towns expanded and were radically modified, so that new buildings were necessary, such as churches, banks and administration sites. In the first twenty years of the Italian colonization, while urban planning was often quite innovative, the architecture showed an attempt to adapt to the different contexts: especially in Libya, the new structures were often inspired by a Moorish or Romanesque revival, or were trying to develop a kind of new Arabic style. During the Thirties, some Italian architects worked to create a modern, rationalist architecture that could be appropriate for the colonies. Among these, Carlo Enrico Rava, Sebastiano Larco, Luigi Piccinato and Giovanni Pellegrini can be mentioned. Due to the limited space of an essay, this discourse is concentrated on these three personalities, who had a primary role in the theoretical debate, omitting other figures, who also had an active role in Libya, such as Florestano Di Fausto, Alessandro Limongelli, Mario Romano, Alfredo Longarini, Alberto Alpago Novello, Umberto Di Segni and many others. Scholars have been asking if it is possible to speak about a Libyan rationalism.<sup>2</sup> The answer to this interesting and problematic question is probably affirmative, but it brings to another one about the possibility that the discussion on modern architecture in the colonies has reflections on the Italian architectural debate and on Italian architecture itself. Especially for the Libyan context, this question appears relevant, opening new paths of future research, even more so because most major surveys on modern architecture, since the heroic period of the Forties, have undervalued, or totally ignored the importance of a South European / Mediterranean modernity, that is made of continuous, reciprocal influences among the different countries.

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<sup>1</sup> For a general overview, see Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia* (Roma - Bari: Laterza, 1988), 2 vols.

<sup>2</sup> Vittoria Capresi, “Il ‘razionalismo libico’. L’architettura risponde alla necessità di essere ‘Coloniale’, ‘Italiana’, ‘Moderna’, ‘Fascista’ e ‘Monumentale’”, in Firenze, *Primitivismo e Italianità. Problemi dello “stile nazionale” tra Italia e Oltremare (1861-1961)*, da Giuseppe Poggi e Cesare Spighi alla Mostra di F. L. Wright, ed. by Ferruccio Canali, Virgilio Carmine Galati (Florence: Emmebi Edizioni, 2012), 287-295.

## 1. Towards a Mediterranean rationalism: the role of the colonies

The first theoretical approaches are to date at the beginning of the Thirties, when both Piccinato and Rava wrote about the colonial architecture. In 1931 Piccinato wrote the item “Colonial buildings” for the Treccani Italian encyclopaedia and in the same year Rava wrote some articles on the magazine *Domus*.<sup>3</sup> Piccinato gave a broader picture of the situation, as he referred to the history of colonization, including the ones of all other European Empires. He was however favourable to a dialectics between European and local tradition. His conclusion was that «the simplicity and the colour of Mediterranean architecture, as well as the volumes and masses of the African one, like in Ghadames and in the Tuareg territory, are totally consistent [...] with modern architecture». An in-depth analysis of the African architectural cultures was not yet developed and especially about Italian colonies very few studies had been developed. In 1931 Rava was much more immersed in the Libyan culture, also from an emotional point of view, than Piccinato. He had a preferential role in the African colonies, also because since 1927 Rava’s father, Maurizio, received numerous important political offices in Libya and from the 1931 to 1935 was governor of Somalia. It’s not a case if among the sources of this Piccinato’s text for the encyclopaedia there was a Rava’s father article on this topic, with which it was affirmed that «we must respect the peculiarity of Tripoli buildings».<sup>4</sup>

Carlo Enrico Rava’s critical position changed radically during the second half of the Twenties and this evolution is particularly interesting. Before arriving to argue about colonial architecture, in the same year Rava began to write about rationalism, surprisingly retracting what he had declared just a few years before. In an article on *Domus*, entitled “Dangerous turning point. The Italian situation in the face of European rationalism”, he expressed himself against the idea of an internationalist rationalism and in favour of personal and nationalist tendencies.<sup>5</sup> It has to be remembered that in 1926 Rava had been one of the founder of the Gruppo 7, of which one of the precepts was that «architecture [...] can’t be individual anymore».<sup>6</sup> Now Rava distinguished two different kinds of rationalism, one based on an international gathering tendency and the other one on individual expressions. In the first tendency he included Walter Gropius, Erich Mendelsohn, Ernst May, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Mart Stam, Brinkman and van der Vlugt, while for the second one he named, among others, Emil Fahrenkamp, Heinrich Tessenow and Otto Rudolf Salvisberg. Beyond this critical and to all appearances purely disciplinary position, a strong political stance was expressed: from Rava’s point of view, all the architects of the international rationalism were looking to Soviet Union as a new better world, embracing the Soviet «defeatist aesthetics».<sup>7</sup> Even Le Corbusier, because of his will to work in the Soviet Union, was criticized. In conclusion, in the nationalist tendency Rava considered a primary role for the Italian architecture, not thanks to the work of the Gruppo 7 or of the MIAR (Italian

<sup>3</sup> Luigi Piccinato, “Edilizia coloniale”, en *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti* (Roma-Milano: Istituto per l’Enciclopedia Treccani, 1931), 826-827; Carlo Enrico Rava, “Di un’architettura coloniale moderna”, *Domus* IV, n.° 41 (1931): 39-43, 89; n.° 42 (1931): 32-36.

<sup>4</sup> Maurizio Rava, “Dobbiamo rispettare il carattere dell’edilizia tripolina”, *L’Oltremare* 3, n.° 11 (1929), 458-464. As it has been suggested, it’s possible that Maurizio Rava’s article had been written by his son Carlo Enrico: Mia Fuller, “Carlo Enrico Rava, The Radical: First Formulations of Colonial Rationalism”, *Environmental Design: Journal of the Islamic Environmental Design Research Centre* 15-16, n.° 1-2 (1994-95): 151.

<sup>5</sup> Carlo Enrico Rava, “Svolta pericolosa. Situazione dell’Italia di fronte al razionalismo europeo”, *Domus* IV, n.° 37 (1931): 39.

<sup>6</sup> Bruno Zevi, *Storia dell’architettura moderna* (Torino: Einaudi, 1950, 2001), 182.

<sup>7</sup> Rava, “Svolta pericolosa...”, 39.

Movement for Rationalist Architecture), but only thanks to the classical, “Latin” roots, that were opposed to the Nordic ones:

Of this Latin spirit, which Le Corbusier can't get rid of, of this eternal Latin spirit which invades Europe again (it's not a case if the Nordic spirit seeks refuge in Russia), we are the intended depository since centuries: from our Libyan coasts to Capri, from the Amalfi coast to the Ligurian Riviera, everywhere there's a typically Latin, minor architecture, without any age but very rational; it is made of white, smooth cubes, broad terraces and it's Mediterranean and sunny.<sup>8</sup>

Rava's words were intended to underline the leading role of Italian architecture in a particular type of rationalism, where the Latin and the Mediterranean roots were essential, and this was not the case of the architecture of the Gruppo 7 or of the MIAR. In this line of reasoning he put together the Italian Mediterranean coasts and the Libyan ones, emphasizing the close relationship between rationalist architecture and Mediterranean roots, where African ones were included too. This position will cause, some months later, a controversy with Luigi Figini – also coming from the Gruppo 7 – about the correct meaning of the word “Mediterranean”. Figini accused Rava to intend the idea of “Mediterranean” in a superficial way, only looking at folkloristic elements.<sup>9</sup> The idea of “Latin spirit” and that one of “Mediterranean” can be easily overlapped, even because these are words often used by Rava and appeared also as title of another article, always in 1931, where he found this spirit in part of North-American architecture too.<sup>10</sup> It is no accident that his article about colonial architecture, in one of *Domus* following issues, began referring to the previous one about the “dangerous turning point” in rationalist architecture. The relevant change in Rava's theoretical position is related without any doubt to his Libyan experience.

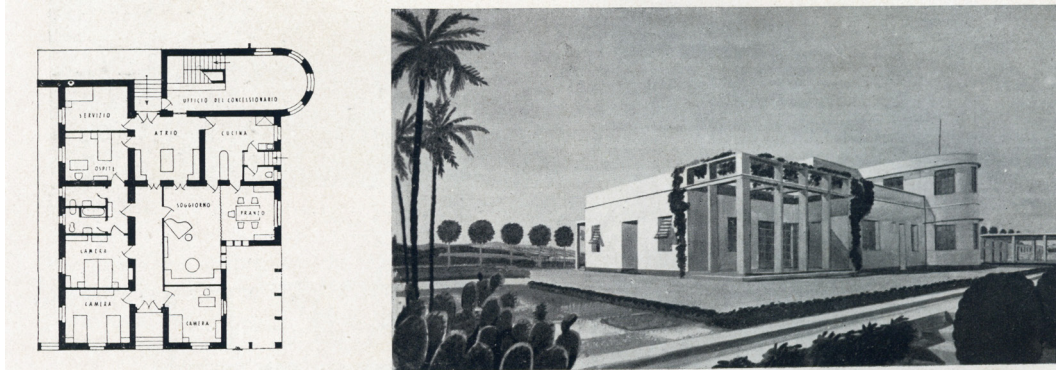


Figura 1: Giovanni Pellegrini, Casa coloniale, V Triennale, Milan, 1933

Fuente: *Architettura* (1934)

## 2. Traditional versus “cubist”

In 1931 Rava's competition project for the cathedral square in Tripoli was published in *Domus*. These words were used to describe the project: Mediterranean, rationalist, colonial. It was highlighted how the local, “indigenous” architecture could show a “Latin spirit” that was proving – again – the familiarity with Italian coastal architecture.<sup>11</sup> The ideas of Rava and Piccinato were

<sup>8</sup> Rava, “Svolta pericolosa...”, 44.

<sup>9</sup> Luigi Figini and Carlo Enrico Rava, “Polemica mediterranea”, *Domus* V, n.° 49 (1932): 66.

<sup>10</sup> Carlo Enrico Rava, “Spirito latino”, *Domus* IV, n.° 38 (1931): 24-29.

<sup>11</sup> “Due progetti degli architetti Sebastiano Larco e Carlo E. Rava”, *Domus* IV, n.° 38 (1931): 22.

embraced by Giovanni Pellegrini, who wrote in 1936 the *Manifesto dell'architettura coloniale*. Pellegrini listed nine points, starting with urban planning and then arriving to the residential buildings. His position seemed to be closer to Piccinato's ideas, especially when he suggested that the houses should be positioned in narrow secondary streets and organized around an inner courtyard, with closed walls on the sunny sides and *loggias* or terraces on the other ones.<sup>12</sup> Fifty-one photographs followed the text of the *Manifesto*, twenty-nine of which were taken by the author. In the short commentaries, Pellegrini gave indication about the adaptability of traditional forms to modern architecture. So, on one hand, from a theoretical point of view, he was following Piccinato's methodology; on the other hand, for what concerns the study and the knowledge of traditional Libyan architecture, he was closer to Rava's approach.<sup>13</sup> However, in spite of Piccinato and Rava, he never found a specific Mediterranean character in the Libyan traditional architecture. He was less interested in finding "surprising" similarities between North African and Italian local traditions. More than the other two architects, Pellegrini reflected on a possible approach to urban planning in the colonies, concluding that the aesthetical consequence of this design was a "cubist" model.<sup>14</sup> In this case he referred to the idea of a difference between main and secondary roads and to the interaction among residential areas, vegetation and urban net, but most of all to the different buildings height, with some towers in the administrative centre and low houses in the residential parts. Nevertheless, he also saw an "elementary cubism" in the traditional, residential architecture of Tripoli.<sup>15</sup> If the photographs of the *Manifesto* showed exclusively traditional architectures, Pellegrini gave some practical indications to defend the house from harsh climatic conditions and then listed the resulting "aesthetic values": «emphasis on the entrance door, concealment of the house interior, austerity of the familiar life, terraces with porches on the facade and on the covering to create a double roof».<sup>16</sup>



Figura 2: Arab House in Tripoli, 1931  
Fuente: *Domus* (1931)

<sup>12</sup> Giovanni Pellegrini, "Manifesto dell'architettura coloniale", *Rassegna di architettura* VIII, n.° 10 (1936): 349-350.

<sup>13</sup> Giovanni Pellegrini, "L'architettura romana nell'Africa settentrionale", *Rassegna di Architettura* VIII, n.° 10 (1936): 345-348.

<sup>14</sup> Pellegrini, "Manifesto...", 350.

<sup>15</sup> Pellegrini, "Manifesto...", 360.

<sup>16</sup> Pellegrini, "Manifesto...", 350.

### 3. Modern colonial architecture

In many of his articles on colonial architecture, referring to the Libyan context, Rava wrote that the Arabic house had inherited its form from the ancient Roman one, as it was equally based on a central courtyard; he then remembered an element coming from the time of the Turkish domination, that is the wooden porch with a upper belvedere.<sup>17</sup> He wanted to point out that in Libya there's no trace of any Moorish influence, unlike what had happened in Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, and that a similarity with the Mediterranean tradition is instead relevant. This similarity appeared confronting the houses in Amalfi, Ischia and Capri with the Greek ones and with the Libyan ones: «nature and climate engender architectural forms, and this is the reason why these ones seem still today perfectly, and in an incomparable way rationalist». Rava considered these kind of houses perfect also from an aesthetic point of view, as they «fully satisfy our modern aesthetics».<sup>18</sup> In this famous article in *Domus* about modern colonial architecture, the author didn't give any real model of a modern colonial building, except – surprisingly – for some North-American houses, built in Florida and California respectively by Marion Sims Wyeth and Rudolph Maria Schindler, but considered them as a heritage from a sort of Spanish-Latin culture. Instead, Rava gave an enthusiastic description of the Villa of the Pashas in Tripoli, then Villa Volpi di Misurata, an old monumental building that was renovated with the supervision of Alix Cavalieri Krasinokoutsky. It's not by chance that the villa was the only subject of another article for *Domus*, also published in 1931.<sup>19</sup> In the eyes of Rava, it was an example of traditional architecture, which was also Mediterranean and “Latin”. Nevertheless, it was not a new project of a contemporary architect.



Figura 3: Villa Volpi di Misurata, Tripoli  
Fuente: *Domus* (1931)

<sup>17</sup> Carlo Enrico Rava, “Di un’architettura coloniale moderna”, *Domus* IV, n.° 41 (1931): 89.

<sup>18</sup> Rava, “Di un’architettura...”, 32.

<sup>19</sup> “Dimore d’eccezione. Vedute della villa Volpi a Tripoli”, *Domus* IV, n.° 40 (1931): 45-50.



Anyway, to readapt an old, luxurious residence was possible, of course, only for a very few people and did not give a complete answer to the question of new colonial buildings. In 1936 Piccinato tried to give an answer making a difference between the tropical areas and the North African region with hot and dry climate: in the Tropes the bungalow type, that is a one-floor house free from every side, should have been the most appropriate, while in the dry climate it would have been too easily exposed to wind and heat. So, in a place like Libya the best solution could have been both a three-floor building with two-floor apartments without central corridor and the central courtyard single-family house. Of course, there's a great cost difference between the two types, and the first one should have been conceived for less wealthy people.<sup>20</sup>



Figura 4: S. Larco, C.E. Rava, Hotel "Agli Scavi di Leptis Magna", 1928-30  
Fuente: *Domus* (1931)

While Piccinato gave some practical and concrete answers to the problem of the colonial house, Rava had studied this theme for years and was already building there, even if not properly "houses". Since the beginning of the Thirties, always together with his colleague Sebastiano Larco, Rava could build some important architectures in Libya and show them on the main Italian magazines. For instance, on *Domus* were illustrated the church for the city of Suani-Ben-Aden (1930), 30 km far from Tripoli,<sup>21</sup> or the well-known Hotel "Agli Scavi di Leptis Magna" in Homs (1928-30), organized around a central courtyard and meant to be at the same time "seafaring" and appropriate to the climate.<sup>22</sup> Anyway, in his publishing work, Rava tried to give

<sup>20</sup> Luigi Piccinato, "La casa in colonia. Il problema che si prospetta ai nostri architetti". *Domus* IX, n.° 101 (1936): 13-14.

<sup>21</sup> "La nuova chiesa di Suani-Ben-Aden presso Tripoli", *Domus* IV, n.° 39 (1931): 32-33; "Chiesa di Suani-Ben-Aden (Tripolitania). *Rassegna di Architettura* IX, n.° 3 (1931): 97.

<sup>22</sup> "L'Albergo agli Scavi di Leptis Magna. Degli architetti Larco e Rava", *Domus* IV, n.° 44 (1931): 21; "L'Albergo agli Scavi di Leptis Magna a Homs. Architetti S. Larco e C.E. Rava", *Rassegna di Architettura* III, n.° 8 (1931): 297-299; "Un albergo a Leptis Magna degli arch. Larco e Rava", *La Casa Bella*, n.° 47 (1931): 10; "Architetture libiche degli Arch. Carlo Enrico Rava e Sebastiano Larco", *Architettura e Arti Decorative* X, n.° 13 (1931): 682-687; "Albergo Leptis Magna a Homs. Arch. C.E. Rava

some images of models also for modern residential architecture in the colonies. Writing about rationalism, he referred again to the problem of the colonies and mentioned some contemporary building, such as the House Riley in Tripoli, Villa Et-Tuin in Ghadames and House Lattanzi in Ain-Zara.<sup>23</sup> This last one was also partly criticized because of the round arches and of the artificial stone cladding, while the first one was related to the English colonial type of the “bungalow” for its wooden porch and praised for its little garden (*jardin miniature*) with pergolas, frameworks and birds’ cages.<sup>24</sup>



Figura 5: S. Larco, C.E. Rava, Eritrea and Somalia Pavilion, VIII Fair of Tripoli, 1933-34  
Fuente: *Architettura* (1934)

The most emblematic colonial building realized by Rava and Larco was the Eritrea and Somalia Pavilion for the eighth Fair of Tripoli (1933-34). Here was more than ever clear what the authors intended for “Mediterranean” and “colonial” modernity. The building is organized around a courtyard and with two main facades, one on the square and one along the road. The facade on the square had a monumental, but geometrical gate, while the other one is characterized by a wide, white open-air loggia upon the double staircase. On the pages of *Domus*, Giovanni Pellegrini commented that the work had a «Mediterranean tone», that the monumental gate had a Somali origin and that the traditional elements were «revised and synthesized in a very simple modernity made by essential lines».<sup>25</sup> Looking at the building, the interior seemed to come from the ancient Roman house, while the facades, even though white and Mediterranean, are symmetrical and balanced with a marked classical appearance. This work should have deny the doubts of Ottavio Cabiati, who two years later, in 1936, reflected on colonial architecture with a

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(collab. S. Larco)”, *L’Architettura Italiana* XXX, (August 1935): 277. The work is also shown by Alberto Sartoris, *Gli elementi dell’architettura funzionale* (Milano: Hoepli 1935), 328.

<sup>23</sup> Carlo Enrico Rava, “Specchio dell’architettura razionale. Conclusione”, *Domus* IV, n.° 46 (1931): 34-40.

<sup>24</sup> Rava, “Specchio dell’architettura...”, 34.

<sup>25</sup> Giovanni Pellegrini, “Per la moderna architettura coloniale italiana”, *Domus* VII, n.° 78 (1934): 11-13.

sharp critical spirit. He asked rhetorically if the deep and incessant analysis of the Arab, Berber and Saharian traditions by Rava and Pellegrini would produce folkloristic architecture, exactly what both of them were trying to avoid.<sup>26</sup>



Figura 6: L. Piccinato, Colonial House, V Triennale, Milan, 1933  
Fuente: L. Piccinato (1933)

#### 4. The colonial house: concrete prototypes

Even though his considerations about colonial architecture are slightly following those of Rava, Piccinato's dedication to this theme produced an iconic building: the colonial house, built for the Fifth Triennale in Milan in 1933. This was a demonstrative building, which was never inhabited, and for this very reason it took on a kind of paradigmatic role. Rava's and Pellegrini's ideas, perfectly shared by Piccinato, seem to have inspired the house. This was indeed a building with an inner courtyard, closed on the outside and open through the central space, just like a Pompeian house; there were some Arabic elements, such as the "S-shaped" (a *baionetta*) entrance – to avoid every look from the outside – and the *mashrabiya* windows for the air circulation; the house was nevertheless modern, thought for a European family, with a pool, fitness equipment and a vast living room on two levels.<sup>27</sup> The space composition was made of different "L" shaped volumes with a not irrelevant influence of Loos, Mies van der Rohe and Le

<sup>26</sup> Ottavio Cabiati, "Orientamenti della moderna architettura italiana in Libia", *Rassegna di Architettura* VIII, (1936): 344. Cabiati was one of the authors, together with Alberto Alpago Novello and Guido Ferrazza, of the town-planning scheme for Bengasi in 1930.

<sup>27</sup> Luigi Piccinato, *V Triennale di Milano. La casa coloniale* (Milan: Pizzi & Pizio, 1933); Luigi Piccinato, "La casa coloniale", in *V Triennale di Milano. Catalogo ufficiale*, ed. by Agnoldomenico Pica (Milan: Ceschina, 1933), 467; Luigi Piccinato, "La casa coloniale", *Architettura* XII, special issue (1933): 52-53.

Corbusier.<sup>28</sup> From both a methodological point of view and a stylistic one, the house can be compared with the contemporary Rava and Larco Pavilion for the Tripoli exhibition, as it showed a modern face which could establish contacts with the local culture. In both cases the general Cabiati's accusation of going through folkloristic images is unfounded, even because almost always the adoption of Arabic details is due to climatic and not stylistic reasons.

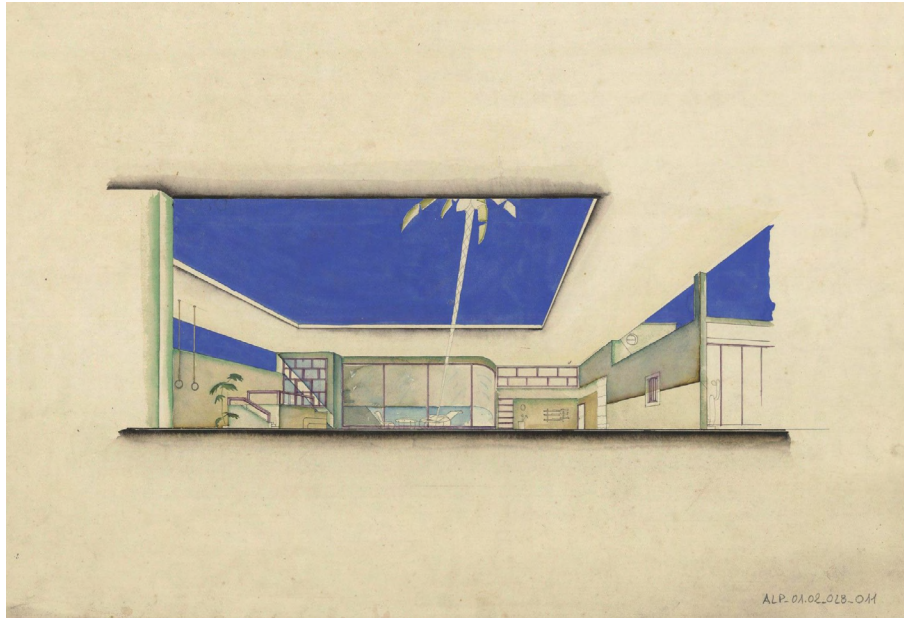


Figura 7: L. Piccinato, Colonial House, V Triennale, Milan, 1933, Inner Courtyard  
Fuente: Archivio Luigi Piccinato, Rome

At the Fifth Milanese Triennale of 1933 also two Pellegrini's works were exhibited, even though only by drawings as they hadn't been realized. These were two colonial little villas, one for a rural area and one for an urban centre. It's interesting to point out the difference with Piccinato's built prototype, as they are not organized around a central courtyard – in spite of what Pellegrini will write on the Manifesto three years later – but have a central room for air circulation, as in the Arab tradition.<sup>29</sup> Beyond the two sample projects for the Triennale, Pellegrini realized many residential buildings in Libya, thus providing concrete examples of his modern, but colonial architecture. The opinion of Plinio Marconi about these works on the "official" magazine *Architettura*, was significant: Pellegrini «could keep intact his talent of truly Italian and modern architect, adapting this ability to the local construction tradition and to some peculiar influences of native art, without repeating forms coming from afar, but preserving his abstract expressive values».<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Andrea Maglio, "Luigi Piccinato: la «casa coloniale» alla V Triennale di Milano", in *L'architettura della villa moderna*, vol. I (Gli anni della grande sperimentazione 1900-1940), ed. by Antonello Boschi and Luca Lanini (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2016), 105-110.

<sup>29</sup> "Villetta a Tripoli. Arch. Giovanni Pellegrini", *Rassegna di Architettura* VI, n.° 6 (1934), 280; Giovanna D'Amia, "L'urbanistica coloniale di Giovanni Pellegrini e la pianificazione dei villaggi libici". *Territorio. Rivista del Dipartimento di Architettura e Pianificazione del Politecnico di Milano*, n.° 57 (2011): 126.

<sup>30</sup> Plinio Marconi, "L'architettura nella colonizzazione della Libia. Opere dell'arch. Giovanni Pellegrini", *Architettura* XVIII, n.° 12 (1939): 713.

## 5. Conclusion

Writing on Florestano Di Fausto, Benedetto Gravagnuolo highlighted the theoretic stature of Carlo Enrico Rava «who in *Viaggio a Tunin* (1932) and other writings gives strong reasons for his transition from “rationalism” and the deliberately “abstract” movement of the Gruppo 7 to an emotional awakening towards new imaginative horizons revealed by “Mediterranean” and “modern” colonial architecture». <sup>31</sup> Also thanks to his journeys to Libya in 1927 and 1929, Rava really immersed himself in another culture and this genuine fascination was the base of his architectural research. Due to the contact with this new, old world and the inevitable resulting shock, he had to readapt his theoretical approach. For him, as for Pellegrini, Piccinato and other architects, to deal with the theme of colonial architecture meant the opportunity to change the former, purely rationalist positions and at the same time rediscover, or at least reconsider Italian rural and minor architecture. In the same years in Italy there was a great interest in this subject, as it was demonstrated by the Triennale exhibition of Pagano and Daniel in 1936, in which also Pellegrini took part, or by the researches conducted by Bernard Rudofsky, Luigi Cosenza and Roberto Pane. Every architect involved in the Libyan colonization had of course a different approach, as the way to relate to local tradition was always filtrated through their personal sensibility. Preferring an anti-monumental architecture, closer to the minor one, also Pellegrini had to distance himself from a certain *milieu* he previously associated with. <sup>32</sup> Actually he distanced himself from Cabiati and Alpago Novello to get closer to Pagano and Daniel. The encounter with the Mediterranean “Fourth Shore”, as Italian reporters called it, was from many points of view full of consequences and could show how modernity could be flexible and multifaced.

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<sup>31</sup> Benedetto Gravagnuolo, “Florestano Di Fausto’s Libyan Pavilion as a model of Italian architecture overseas”, en *The Presence of Italian Architects in Mediterranean Countries. Proceedings of the First International Conference. Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> November 2007* (Florence: Maschietto Editore, 2008), 13.

<sup>32</sup> Giovanna D’Amia, “The Work of Giovanni Pellegrini in Libya”, in *The Presence of Italian Architects in Mediterranean Countries. Proceedings of the First International Conference. Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> November 2007* (Florence: Maschietto Editore, 2008), 85.

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