

**FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN ITALY AND ALBANIA.
"THE NEW ARCHITECTURAL METAPHYSICS SPIRIT " IN
ALBANIA OF THE YEARS 1925-1943.**

Ariola Prifti

Center of Albanological Studies

Head of Ethnographic funds

Sheshi "Nene Tereza", Nr. 3, Tirana, Albania

ariola_prifti@yahoo.it

Abstract

This study can be considered an objective analysis of the forms of the new architecture in Albania, from the urban and architectural point of view, recontextualizing this architecture on the one hand in the historical period that has generated it, and on the other in European architectural contemporary landscape. May consider this research as "memory recovery", which can not be understood without the historical and political as an instrument for understanding architectural phenomena. Territorial and urban policies in fascist colonies comprised a variety of complex changes of the geographic, historical and cultural. For this reason, the organization of the territory, urban planning and architecture in these colonies took specific forms, occasionally being adopted by the country, as problems demanding solutions were different.

The case of Albania was to be regarded as unique in being treated like a protectorate, from it's points of contact with Italy for historical and cultural reasons. Metaphysics movement of Italian architecture of the years 20 and 30 is often faced argument of critics also the relation between architecture of the fascist regime and Metaphysics painting. Dechirichiane paintings on the theme "Italian squares" seems to convert in a three-dimensional where it turns into stone painting. Architecture that survives time alone as a witness to the unknown facts, as in dechirichiane paintings with string arch sequences forms, barren landscape on which free architecture explodes in her solitude.

Most modern European architects, from Le Corbusier to Mies Van Der Rohe, remain impressed by these buildings, that Italian architects realized in fascist colonies. In these buildings they saw realized in natural forms and interference intellectualist, the main objectives of the new architecture; their functional side, the lack of decorations, economy, efficient use of materials.

To prepare this study researched a wide historic literature and archive resources, which tried to analyze and interpret according to the present arguments.

Keywords: *New architectural spirit, Friendship between Italy and Albania, Recovery of memory, The new architectural metaphysics spirit.*

Introduction

Different from each other, the Albanian monuments of architecture live in a perfect harmony of unity with their diversity: beside the minarets of the mosques edified quiet church steeple. Besides Roman fortresses, appear strict and gray the houses of medieval towns. In those years Albania's desire to experiment came naturally, but in the best sense of the word, no experiment to experiment, but the desire to create, utilization of environmental resources possessed. Albania, one of the countries with the most singular heritage and rich cultural, must gain consciousness of the responsibility to preserve and pass on the wealth to future generations as an integral part of the universal property of humanity. UNESCO asks us to fulfill this spiritual obligation not only on behalf of future generations of Albanians, but on behalf of future generations of humankind, as when a spiritual value item is lost, is losing all humanity. But first the big losers will be the Albanians and further descendants of the Romans, Italians, co-authors and authors of the Albania architectural buildings of the early twentieth century.

From 1925 to 1943 the main road axes of the cities were outlined in a radial urban pattern. All that remains of the old Ottoman¹ city are mosques and residential homes scattered in different areas. In recent years the Building and Urban Planning Office was founded, and after studying the development of the city by means of master plans, moved the modern centre of the capital to a large central axis, the boulevard, which starts in Scanderbeg square and ends in Littorio² square, which is today called Mother Teresa square. The new Tirana will be constructed in the areas next to this axis, which were previously uninhabited. Famous and young Italian architects will be the authors of these master plans and many other projects for administration buildings including modern private apartments and terraced houses in attempt to create the new and modern districts of the capital. These buildings are characterised by a neoclassic and art nouveau style and modern rationalism but often bear authentic elements of the local culture and architecture. Other cities like Durrës and Valona will be influenced by this development which will include the construction of new administration headquarters, banks and residential buildings.

Definitions for “Architectural Heritage”

1. According the “Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage, ICOMOS, 1999”³. The built vernacular heritage occupies a central place in the affection and pride of all peoples. It has been accepted as a characteristic and attractive product of society. It appears informal, but nevertheless orderly. It is utilitarian and at the same time possesses interest and beauty. It is a focus of contemporary life and at the same

¹ K. Miho, I. Sukaj, P. Thomo, V. Bushati. *Historia e arkitektures ne Shqiperi (1912-1944)*. (1988) Shtepia Botuese e Librit Universitar. Tirane, 1988, 40.

² Emin Riza. *Historia e arkitektures shqiptare nga fillimet deri 1912*. Tirane, 1987.

³ ICCROM Working Group 'Heritage and Society'. DEFINITION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE, REFERENCES TO DOCUMENTS IN HISTORY. Selected by J. Jokilehto. (Originally for ICCROM, 1990). Revised for CIF: 15 January 2005.

time a record of the history of society. Although it is the work of man it is also the creation of time. It would be unworthy of the heritage of man if care were not taken to conserve these traditional harmonies which constitute the core of man's own existence.

The built vernacular heritage is important; it is the fundamental expression of the culture of a community, of its relationship with its territory and, at the same time, the expression of the world's cultural diversity.

Vernacular building is the traditional and natural way by which communities house themselves. It is a continuing process including necessary changes and continuous adaptation as a response to social and environmental constraints. The survival of this tradition is threatened world-wide by the forces of economic, cultural and architectural homogenisation. How these forces can be met is a fundamental problem that must be addressed by communities and also by governments, planners, architects, conservationists and by a multidisciplinary group of specialists.

Due to the homogenisation of culture and of global socio-economic transformation, vernacular structures all around the world are extremely vulnerable, facing serious problems of obsolescence, internal equilibrium and integration. ...

2. According the “Council of Europe Convention (Architectural Heritage), 1985”⁴.

Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada)

... Recalling the importance of handing down to future generations a system of cultural references, improving the urban and rural environment and thereby fostering the economic, social and cultural development of States and regions; ...

1. For the purposes of this Convention, the expression 'architectural heritage' shall be considered to comprise the following properties:

1. Monuments: all buildings and structures of conspicuous historical, archaeological, artistic, scientific, social or technical interest, including their fixtures and fittings;

2. Groups of buildings: homogeneous groups of urban or rural buildings conspicuous for their historical, archaeological, artistic, scientific, social or technical interest which are sufficiently coherent to form topographically definable units;

3. Sites: the combined works of man and nature, being areas which are partially built upon and sufficiently distinctive and homogeneous to be topographically definable and are of conspicuous historical, archaeological, artistic, scientific, social or technical interest.

⁴ Ibidem.

Albania of the years `30 - ` 40

In Albania, in the `30 - ` 40 is to Albania beat more strongly than in Italy the Tuscan Roman schools, the neoclassical of the michelangiolian ideas, rational ideas with Baroque. Even this crash was not only between different ideas of architects schools, but also of an architect with himself. From Monument Project of 1926 of the Ministry of Brasini Square, evolving into the porch michelangiolian version of the Vatican. Perhaps as a symbol of the wings open and caring Christian Albanian hospitality.

And finally, a decade later, it ends in the rational design of Bert's, with a longitudinal rational stretch along the boulevard in the role of a dekumane-axis, the old border between Tirana, city garden that had preserved as such and New Tirana conceived according to the principles of Bauhausit.



Fig. 1. Bank of Albania under the original project of Vittorio Balio Morpurgo.

The Central State Bank⁵ is without doubt one of the most beautiful buildings of world architecture `40 years. With a comply view in two faceted on broken face, curved where appropriate, the monumental colonnade where appropriate, with the perfect décor and ceramic museum, it is also a triumph of the architect Morpurgo. It was this architect, who ideated the Bank of Durres city quite different from the final project of the Bank of Albania⁶, but also its previous variants for the Bank of Albania are far from the final project.

Bosio reaches its excellence in the building of the boulevard monument, University of Tirana, uniting organically tradition with modernity. maybe Tuscan fortifications. Light-shadow effects of the fortifications izodomik Illyrian walls with the pride of civic tower of Gjirokastra, maybe Tuscan fortifications, bringing tradition no artificial eclecticism, but her spirit, pride, severity and epic tranquility.

⁵ *The buildind of the bank of Albania*. Brochure. Tirane 2003.

⁶ Massimo Locci, *Nuova Banca di Albania Memoria e Innovazione*. Concorso per il restauro e l'ampliamento della banca central a Tirana.

Metaphysical movement in architecture

It is a theme Metaphysical movement and contact between Italian architecture twenty three years and is often mentioned by critics. Architects of the fascist regime appears out of the dust arches and columns for their projects, so as we see in the paintings of De chirico.⁷ In the recent years the relationship between architecture of the fascist regime and Metaphysical painting had a high pulse, and therefore the Italian colonial architecture is often compared to the dechirichiane paintings. The exhibition of the year 2002 organized in Rome on raised cities in thirty years in Italy and overseas countries, can be considered as one of the manifestos of this trend, and summarized in its own title "Metaphysics built." However was not aware of the possible identification of architectural paintings dechiricos cities of the era publications never speak to Metaphysics. Some aspects not derivatives, but are undeniably similar.



Fig. 2. Giorgio de Chirico, Italian Square (Piazza d'Italia)
1938 oil techniques on telaio, cm 53 x 70

Discussion

Each generation must rewrite and re-read the story in its own way, without any fear, even with all the pleasure and power of demystify⁸. This is the sense of a work of investigation and critical reading. Projects, photographs, documents, that leads back to the contemporary territory: Albania of the twentieth century, in the backlight of the complex political history of a country that, like few others, was crossing point of strife, of conflict. We have tried to situate the story twentieth-century in a story that began long ago, of conflict and interference to the alternation of models which have changed the structure, with long lasting effects. These materials show the corpus of the projects that the Italian government promotes the whole Albanian territory, during the Fascist period. The architect

⁷ Cesare De Seta 1972, p.121.

⁸ Aurel Plasari writes at the conclusion of his study of Çështja shqiptare (1992).

Gherardo Bosio⁹ was the director of the Central Office for Construction and Urban Planning in Albania. Established by decree of 12.10.1939, the Office was founded with the aim of ensuring the best and most harmonious buildings in Albania.

The collection and classification of projects formed a database that leads to all construction activities on the territory. This is shown by the Report on the work-study by the Office of the Plan of 21.04.1940, where he says that “a copy of all projects will be at the ‘Office, the creation of such a complete record of all activities building of Albania, which has not been equal in any other country”. With that emphasizes the “great importance that will go with time to take on this collection, for any research activity in the construction, statistical and economical. This archive is a “true urban land register that is formed automatically, and that will document in the time, with precision, the magnificent development of Albania”. At the base is the idea to carry out a rational management of the whole territory, enhancing the administrative structures of the main settlements and at the same time, search for unity of style and language of the city and landscape. The elaborate punctually returns the phases of the construction process of the “modern” Albanian cities¹⁰: an ambitious and forward looking project of planning he had, among its objectives, to export the image of Italy as a very important actor in economic and cultural. It is mainly public works projects that retie the red thread of relations with Italy, focusing on the economic and political dynamics and the reasons, which led to investment so big over a relatively short period of time. The study of these projects arrives today to acquire a more complete historical-critical dimension that becomes the basis of the restoration and preservation.

The scientific approach to the critical reading of historical documents, highlights the role of the political-cultural fascism, which focuses on auctoritas of ancient models, declined in the monumental dimension of urban spaces and architecture. A lenticular gleaning of the documents opens very articulate scenarios for personalities involved, backgrounds, schools, interlacements between governance, policy and technical. The study, acquired gradually with the progress of studies, more and more redeems the Albanian history from ordinary and irreducible clichés. What emerges is a plurality of languages, not always coherent with the guidelines given above, but more often careful to listen to the places, customs and the vernacular picturesque, which attracts visitors and Italian architects. These projects constitute the documentary basis which to compare the built heritage in the territory: they are the testimonials in many cases degraded and obsolete, but often not identified within a urban grid constantly changing and an area that keeps track of the signs of a non-cultural management . Aware that the preservation of this heritage, designed as a uniform and organic, goes through a more extensive and widespread enhancement of the city and territory. It was thought a place dedicated to the knowledge of twentieth century in Albania.

⁹ G. Gresleri, *La via dell'est: da Tirana a Lubiana*, in *Architettura italiana d'oltremare 1870-1940*, a c. di G. Gresleri, P.G. Massaretti, S. Zagnoni, Venezia, Marsilio Editori, 1993, pp. 323-331. Cfr. L. Billeri, Bosio e i piani urbanistici per le città dell'Albania, in Gherardo Bosio. *Architetto fiorentino. 1903-1941*, cit., pp. 75-86.

¹⁰ Per il piano regolatore di Rodi cfr. P. Sica, *Storia dell'Urbanistica*. III, 2. *Il Novecento*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 1978, p. 508; F.I. Apollonio, *Architettura e città nel Dodecaneso*, in *Architettura italiana d'oltremare 1870-1940*, cit., pp. 316-319; S. Martinoli, E. Perotti, *Architettura coloniale italiana nel Dodecaneso. 1912-1943*, cit., pp. 457-464.

Signs, traces, memories, in the space of virtual visions materialize many possible routes.

A place of engagement and discussion, where it can find new visibility and spreading the knowledge of architectural and urban projects, now preserved at the Central Archiv¹¹ of the Technical Construction. All this, with the aim of stimulating a perspective of awareness. So, to expose, promote, manage those assets acquires a dual polarity: preserve and enhance this heritage of drawings, make this heritage a tool for study and research for future projects of restoration and innovation. Founded in 1939 to control the planning of the whole Albanian territory¹², and since then continuously updated with new projects, the Archive contains tens of thousands of drawings concerning, architecture, gardens, furniture design, which may represent the core of the Exhibition Center of an museum indoor e outdoor of Architecture. The spread of this knowledge can help to consolidating the identity of the culture of the twentieth century and to monitor the quality of the current development process. In fact, the comparison between design, building and conservation status can take the evidence of a manifest and can increase the database of spatial territorial and urban living strategies. While we emphasize the most representative buildings and monuments built by the Fascist period¹³, there is a progressive impoverishment of the diffused heritage. Hence, the urgency of new combinations between the immaterial and material, pictures and things, to motivate a consciousness of the culture of twentieth-century, that acknowledges the continuity between past and present choices. Since several years Tirana is in the middle of profound changes that tend to attract the entrepreneurship interest on global standards. This process has resulted in actions aimed primarily at increasing values of the position of urban rent, with a heavy impact on existing heritage and the quality of the new. A new global vernacular is rampant, as the city it expands and remodels with urban forms unsustainable. This makes it necessary to increase even more a critical approach to knowledge through upgrade opportunities, study and discussion.



Fig. 3. Fascism House (Casa del fascio)

¹¹ Paolo Nicoloso, *Mussolini Architetto*. Torino, Einaudi, 2008.

¹² Maria Adriana Giusti. *Albania, Architettura e Citta' 1925-1943*. (2006) Finito di stampare nella tipografia Bandecchi & Vivaldi, Pontedera per conto di artout – Maschietto Editore, Firenze Dicembre 2006.

¹³ Paolo Portoghesi, *I grandi architetti del Novecento*. Roma, Newton & Compton Editori, 1998.

Conclusions

I began this essay by promising to discuss the methodological concerns raised by the study of Italy's colonial city planning in Albania¹⁴, which I can only offer as a series of questions that will drive my future studies. Many issues raised by Italian imperial architecture and planning are similar or identical to those in other countries' colonies, and so these questions are familiar ones. This architecture tried to lay the foundations of a modernist abstract language combined with classical ideals and synthesized more details approved by the regime. One range of questions deals with the reception of the city's design by both Italian and Albanian populations. Still nowadays some of the principal buildings host the same programmatic functions for which they were originally built. But what is the specifically political content of Italian colonial architecture? How precisely, can a building be imperial? Much like fascist-era architecture in general, the buildings in Albania require careful analysis to understand how they came to represent specific ideological concepts, and how they continue to function after that political context has been removed. On the other hand certain gestures in the Italian structures bespoke a relationship to Albanian historical architecture. So the study of this type of architecture offers us a potential model of how to combine archival and field research. In the architecture and planning of Albania we can read many of the concerns that animated Italian colonial policy under fascism. Through this complicated process, from design to construction until the present condition, to read the Albanian heritage of the twentieth century in its relationship between history and contemporary, with the aim to enhance and consolidate the identity of historical document, is the authentic reason and the main purpose of this study. Above all, it represents the quest for order in a landscape whose European inhabitants found to be despairingly chaotic.

References

Art & Trashegimi, nr. 4, Dossier Tirana, Rikthimi i Muzave, maj 2012.

Emin Riza. Historia e arkitektures shqiptare nga fillimet deri 1912. Tirane, 1987.

Giuliano Gresleri, Massaretti, Pier Giorgio, Zagnoni, Stefano. Architettura italiana d'oltremare 1870-1940. (1993) Venezia: Marsilio, 1993.

G. Gresleri, La via dell'est: da Tirana a Lubiana, in Architettura italiana d'oltremare 1870-1940, a c. di G. Gresleri, P.G. Massaretti, S. Zagnoni, Venezia, Marsilio Editori, 1993, pp. 323-331. Cfr. L. Billeri, Bosio e i piani urbanistici per le città dell'Albania, in Gherardo Bosio. Architetto fiorentino, 1903-1941.

¹⁴ Giuliano Gresleri, "1936-40: Programma e strategia delle <<città imperiali>>", in Architettura italiana d'oltremare: 1870-1940, eds. Giuliano Gresleri, Pier Giorgio Massaretti, e Stefano Zagnoni (Venezia: Marsilio, 1993), 178-201; e Gresleri, "Architecture for the Empire", Rassegna, 14 (September 1992):36-51.

ICCROM Working Group 'Heritage and Society'. *DEFINITION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE, REFERENCES TO DOCUMENTS IN HISTORY*. Selected by J. Jokilehto. (Originally for ICCROM, 1990). Revised for CIF: 15 January 2005.

L'amicizia tra Italia e Albania: passato, presente, futuro. (2006) La presenza italiana in Albania nella prima metà del XX secolo. Complesso di Vicolo Valdina, Roma 21-26 novembre 2006.

Maria Adriana Giusti. Albania, Architettura e Città' 1925-1943. (2006) Finito di stampare nella tipografia Bandecchi & Vivaldi, Pontedera per conto di artout – Maschietto Editore, Firenze Dicembre 2006.

Maria De Santis, Giuseppe Terragni. Casa del Fascio, Como, 1932-36, in Costruire in laterizio. Grandi Maestri. n. 117, maggio-giugno 2007.

Massimo Locci, Nuova Banca di Albania Memoria e Innovazione. Concorso per il restauro e l'ampliamento della banca central a Tirana.

Nerital Ceka. Apollonia: history and monuments. Tirana, 2005.

Paolo Portoghesi, I grandi architetti del Novecento. Roma, Newton & Compton Editori, 1998.

Paolo Nicoloso, Mussolini Architetto. Torino, Einaudi, 2008.

K. Miho, I. Sukaj, P. Thomo, V. Bushati. Historia e arkitektures ne Shqiperi (1912-1944). (1988) Shtepia Botuese e Librit Universitar. Tirane, 1988.

Koco Miho, Profesor arkitekt Kristo Sotiri, Jeta dhe vepra. (2005) Botimi i dyte. Tirane, 2005.

Sculture di Antonio Maraini dal 1908 al 1942. (1944) Album realizzato dall'artista nel 1942; il memoriale dell'artista, radatto nel Settembre 1944.

The building of the bank of Albania. Brochure. Tirane 2003.