



Tripoli coloniale. Histoire sociale et économique d'une ville sous domination italienne [Colonial Tripoli: social and economic history of a city under Italian Rule]

François Dumasy, Rome, Ecole française de Rome, 2022, 600 pp., €35 (paperback)

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BOOK REVIEW

Tripoli coloniale. Histoire sociale et économique d'une ville sous domination italienne
[Colonial Tripoli: social and economic history of a city under Italian Rule], François

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In this book, the author sets out to study the link between colonial domination and urban planning. In his introduction, he summarizes his methodological intention to move away from a narrative based essentially on the analysis of town planning schemes and rather focus on the social and property dimensions. The documents for this work come largely from the *Archivio Centrale dello Stato* in Rome.

The first chapters of the book present the main issues of control and transformation of urban space by the Italian occupiers in the aftermath of the conquest of Tripoli in 1911. This starting point, however, could have been linked more closely to the end of the Ottoman period. Before 1911, the city had indeed undergone several decades of Ottoman-style modernization, the outcome of a renewed pact of imperialism with the local elites, which had led to the creation of new districts and the introduction of modernized technical planning procedures. Municipal institutions had been modernized, too.

The author does, however, manage to present the issues at stake in the urban transformations after 1911 in a stimulating way. The local stakeholders (institutions and landowners) are clearly identified, as is the way in which the colonial authorities came to control them. The dynamics of the first anti-colonial revolt are also analyzed in detail, as are those of the terrible repression carried out by the Italians. The imposed colonial order is thus seen in a complex light. In order to gain a better understanding of the conditions under which colonial planning thought emerged in Tripoli, François Dumasy also provides a detailed description of the demographic upheavals in the city, the health threat posed by the cholera epidemic, and the emergence of precarious settlements on the outskirts of the city. He follows the reshaping process of the municipal authorities and of the various instruments of transformation of the urban space.

For the 1911 regulatory plan, drawn up by engineer Luigi Luiggi on the basis of projects going back to the end of the Ottoman era, the decision-making mechanisms are carefully analyzed, with a veritable chronicle of the rivalries between military and civil engineers. One of the major contributions of this analysis of planning instruments is that it is carried out in parallel with a precise study of the evolution of the property market and a finely tuned identification of land issues. The vicissitudes in the design and implementation of the urban plan are also linked to other colonial methods of controlling space: control of workers' demands and mediation with the Libyan notables who owned the land. This is one of the most fascinating passages in the book, with its prosopography of the world of land and property ownership. From this emerge both material interests and local aspirations for political dignity. It is a pity, again, that this research effort is not more closely linked to the configurations of the late Ottoman period, which would have given a better understanding of how colonial control altered the nature of the relationship between the city, planning and property.

For the 1920s, interesting pages are devoted to the implementation of social housing policies for Italian settlers. The spatialization of the phenomenon of poverty proposed by the author also gives rise to stimulating interpretations, as does the historical-anthropological analysis of the relationship between Libyan landlords (Jewish or Muslim) and Italian tenants. A similar method is applied to understanding changes in the relationship between populations and urban space through the frequentation of beaches and cafés, as well as through colonial efforts to regulate prostitution, which the author describes in detail.

In this way, the analysis of the conception of the regulatory plan during the Fascist era is contextualized and made more complex, within the framework of a colonial city for which control over society and space took on various forms. François Dumasy's approach, based in particular on a study of the actions of governor Giuseppe Volpi, is highly innovative. The Fascist plan is read as much for its limitations and unspoken ideas and ambiguities as for its planning intentions.

This book offers many new insights into the interpretation of the relationship between colonial power and urban space. The author's great knowledge and precise study of the archives enable him to offer some highly stimulating insights. There is, however, one limitation to the approach: although the colonial archives sometimes make it possible to grasp local sensitivities, the lack of attention to sources emanating from the inhabitants or their resistance networks means that several dimensions escape the effort to make interpretations more complex. This applies to the urban networks of resistance and their links with the interior and the Ottoman Empire, as well as to what could have constituted a micro-anthropology of urban resistance to the colonial intrusion. The fact remains, however, that this book, based on the study of precise and finely documented files, offers interpretations that help to renew the approach to the colonial period from an urban perspective.

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