Local Élites and Italian Town-Planning Procedures in Early Colonial Tripoli 1911-1912

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The Historical Background

The object of this paper is the drawing up of the first Italian colonial Piano regolatore in Tripoli, under the perspective of an analysis of the process (negotiation conflict/imposition) that led to this plan. We aim at putting together our experiences to study a colonial technical and bureaucratic planning procedure under the light of the relationships between a local municipality and an externally imposed form of planning. We will try to understand how things went in Tripoli in the crucial moments of 1911-1912, when the Italians launched their first colonial plan in an Arab city. Our interest is not to study the technical and architectural content of the plan but instead, as historians, to explore the social and administrative context of decision making about colonial planning.

Most of coastal Libya was occupied by Italy at the end of 1911. In July 1911, after France seized Fez, San Giuliano, the Italian Foreign Affairs Minister, advised Prime Minister Giolitti to implement the conquest of Libya, at which Italy had been aiming for a long time. The Italian presence in the Ottoman province of Tripolitania was already strong, mostly through the action of the Banco di Roma, which was pushing its government to launch a military campaign, as did the Nationalists in Italy. The war against the Ottoman Empire and the local Arab resistance began at the end of September 1911, and Italy quickly took control of the main coastal cities. But the occupation of the inner parts of the country proved to be much more difficult.

In November 1911, the Prime Minister Giolitti withdrew from all negotiations with the Ottomans, and declared the annexation of Libya. Talks with the Ottoman Empire resumed only in the autumn of 1912. At the end of 1911, Italy had to prove to the other colonial powers and to the local population that its occupation was to last, and that Italian colonial rule was efficient.

It is in this context that the first attempts to draw up a plan, a Piano regolatore, for the city of Tripoli emerge. The modernization of the city they had just seized

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was a matter of image for the Italians. They had to prove that their rule was more efficient and modern than that of the Ottoman one. But the question was: who was going to be in charge of town planning? The military occupation administration, Genio Civile engineers from the Public Works Ministry, or even the local municipality, inheritors of the Ottoman administration, in which was represented the local notability?

The Italians could not afford simply to abolish the municipality at a time in which they needed support, or at least neutrality, from the urban population. But in Italy, town planning was a highly municipal matter, and colonial conquerors could not even imagine leaving the future of the main city in their colony in the hands of local Arab notables. The Arab mayor remained in office and most of the municipal administration too, but an Italian General Secretary of the Municipality was named in order to control and supervise the action of local urban powers. But even this was not enough for town planning, a field where, in Italy, municipalities had a wide range of powers.

Since national unity was achieved, and even before, town planning had been a municipal competence in Italy. In the early 1860s, the newly unified Italian Kingdom had inherited from a previous Piedmontese law its code on urban regulation. In the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia, town planning had been a municipal competence for decades. Cities like Turin or Nice had been deeply transformed by these procedures, symbols of the power of the local notabilities on urban space. In 1865, the Italian Act on Municipalities confirmed town planning as a matter of municipal responsibility (Legge 20/03-1865, art. 70). This act was later complemented by an Act concerning Public Utility Expropriation (25/06-1885) that gave municipalities the power to implement their plans. These acts were later modified, in 1888 for example, but remained the basis of municipal town planning in Italy until the 1942 Fascist laws on Towns and Plans. From the time, they when had been excluded from the chief responsibility of reforming cities, the Genio Civile, engineers from the Ministry of Public Works, had been trying for decades to gain power in this field. But their only successes were in situations of emergency, such as in Naples after the 1884 cholera crisis, when the State took control of planning and sanitation, through the 1885 special Act. But even this emergency action was not welcomed by municipalities, who feared that Napoles might become a model for the state to curtail municipal powers of cities, and had to face numerous protests from the city council, the mayor and local entrepreneurs in Naples, and even from various municipalities elsewhere in the peninsula.

Even in Rome, the capital city, the Genio Civile administration failed to take control of town planning, and was kept in a role of formal supervision of the activities of the municipal town planning office. In Rome, the 1872, 1883 and 1909 plans were drawn up under control of the municipality. Genio Civile was mostly excluded from the town planning process.

Town Planning in the Colonial Context

In a colonial context, choices about town planning would prove essential. Army engineers and civil engineers were both willing to take control of this field of competence, and within a few months, not only the future of Tripoli was decided, but also the kind of colonial rule Italy would impose on Libya. During the end of 1911 and all 1912 an intense bureaucratic turmoil shook the new colonial administration about the decisions for planning. Both the Army and the Genio Civile wanted this competence to be theirs. Even if it soon became clear that the municipality was to be fully excluded from technical decision-making, the Italians understood very quickly that they were to have to deal anyway with local municipal elites for expropriation procedures. Italians were aware that only a few among urban notables had been considering their occupation positively, or at least had not joined the ranks of the resistance, and avoiding confiscation of their properties was the least they could do.

But the main struggle was between the Army and civil engineers from the Public Works Ministry. Through the setting of a new colonial planning procedure, we can follow the Italian choices in the construction of a colonial rule and the definition of an administrative scheme of competence. In a few months, the relationships between colonial administration and local elites were to be defined. Choices on planning, in an Italian context, where these procedures covered almost all urban fields, were an important sign of how the new power was to impose its rule on the seized province and town.

It is worth noting in this context that the first decisions on planning was the pursuit of the war inside the country, and the extreme fragility of the Italian conquest in the face of the Arab resistance. Planning in early colonial Tripoli was no quiet matter. Municipal elites in Tripoli were still in contact with the resistance inside the province, and even if some of them chose to collaborate with the Italians, most of them remained very prudent. The Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome keeps many letters, which were intercepted by the Italian secret service, from members of the municipality to the chiefs of the resistance. Even those Libyans whose animosity to the Ottomans made them close to the Italians before the conquest, were now beginning to reconsider their position.

In Italian Tripoli, the municipality remained in charge, but soon lost most of its powers. Local elites were excluded from the town planning process, and municipal offices lost most of their urban competences. The municipality, as a place of expression of the Arab municipality, was to become an empty shell. Only later, the Italian were to give back some competences, but in the new context of a municipality controlled by settlers.

Already in October 1911, the Mayor Hasuna Pusha, though remaining in charge, was controlled by a Naval High Officer, Faravelli. As chief of the urban civil services, Faravelli was to act as a Mayor.19 In November, municipal services were reformed according to Italian standards, but the Mayor still had no effective power.
and the offices of the municipality were in fact controlled by the Italians. Thus the municipality never gained any competence in the field of town planning. Municipality then, as representative of local population, was under close scrutiny by the Italian occupation administration. At the same time, planning was discussed between the Army, the Government and the Genio Civile.

A Regio Decreto (18/10/1911) gave the Commander of the expedition troops political power over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, and the army used this power to push its arguments for planning. But speculation was high, and already in November a new Regio Decreto (20/11/1911) aimed at blocking all transactions in land. Representatives from the Army were not innocent in the speculation turmoil. In January 1912, General Caneva, Governor of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, renewed this ban on land transactions and added a ban on rent increases.\textsuperscript{11}

For the military administration, the housing problem became a source of great anxiety, and it is through this question that they came to talk of the need for inaugurating a planning procedure. Pressure was intense from private investors also to lift the ban on land transactions.\textsuperscript{12} A Piano regolatore was seen as a solution. For the Army, and the new landlords, it did provide some protection. The problem was: how to launch a Piano regolatore without losing their special competence on urban transformations? The risk for the Army, in promoting a normal Italian procedure, was to be obliged to surrender competences to normal administrations. Genio civile or municipality in that case. The new battle for the Army in Tripoli became accordingly to convince Rome to let the Plan remain the object of an extraordinary military competence.

Although Italian private investors in Libya stressed in a letter to the Governor the necessity of not doing anything that could offend the interests of the rich Arabs of the city,\textsuperscript{13} the military administration often failed to understand this. In Rome, the Government began to worry about such activities.

Before the drawing up of a plan, the first urban decisions were concessions on public services in January 1912.\textsuperscript{14} But during this same month of January, the Public Works Ministry sent to Tripoli one of its high-ranking engineers, Luigi Luiggi, Ispettore Superiore del Genio Civile, in order to examine the situation of urban projects and to assess the powers of the Army. A few weeks earlier, the Prime Minister Giolitti, responding to the pressures of the civil administration, had given the Genio Civile responsibility for the port and civil works.\textsuperscript{15} In February, an office of the Genio Civile was created in Tripoli.\textsuperscript{16}

In March, Luiggi, back in Rome after his Tripoli journey, published in the Nuova Antologia his first project for a plan for Tripoli: Diagramma di Piano Regolatore dei dintorni di Tripoli. Marida Talamonia has studied the architectural content of this project.\textsuperscript{17} But what is interesting to note here is how little coordination there was, as the archives show, between the Luiggi mission in Tripoli and the colonial administration.

In March we find in the archives the first traces of a planning process.\textsuperscript{18} It is a study by the director of civil affairs in Tripoli about the juridical basis of a plan in Tripoli. He recommends that the interests of “the natives should not be forgotten,” in order to preserve the “cause” of the Italians.

He also recommends, in a very interesting remark, the “education of the natives with regard to the modern organization of a municipality”. These recommendations seem to be oblivious of earlier achievements, forgetting that the Ottoman municipality was already well-organized, and that even before the creation of a municipality by the Ottomans more than forty years before, the Arab city had had a rational administrative organization for decades, if not centuries. The Director stated that a real Municipality was a goal to reach in Tripoli. He was the representative of the kind of colonial rule which was more attentive to the interests of the local population but which had not understood that this local population had not been waiting for the Italians, or even the Ottomans, to build an urban administration and that modernization had already been implemented in the field of urban government in the late 1860s.

Since at least the 18th century, Tripoli, like most other Arab cities, had enjoyed a rational urban organization. It had a town council, the Jama‘ at al-bilad, directed by the Chief of the Town, Shaikh al-bilad, head of the Mushikha al-bilad urban administration. This administration had broad urban competences on streets, houses, walls, markets and urban taxes.\textsuperscript{19} It had also control over house building. At the end of the 19th century, the Ottoman municipality, created in 1867 and partially inspired in its shape by European models, only reproduced what already existed before. The Shaikh al-bilad became the Mayor, and Jama‘ at al-bilad members became members of the municipal council.

The Italian administrator also states that his office has prepared a new decree for Tripoli, inspired by the special law for Naples. No sign of collaboration with the Luiggi mission emerges. If the colonial administration wanted to promote its own policy towards planning, without even referring to those whom the government had named for the tasks. Responsible for this plan would be: “the governor, because he is the supreme authority in the colony”, and “the municipal administration.”

To confront the arrival of civil engineers from the Public Works Ministry, the colonial administration tried to invent in Tripoli a mixture of common Italian law and the Naples exception. The edict stressed that the intervention of civil engineers would only be “technical,” and it stated its aim with uncompromising clarity — to “limit the action of Genio Civile.” It also recommended the intervention of the govi in the process of expropriation.\textsuperscript{20} The Army seemed to be rediscovering the Arab existing administration just in order to prevent direct rule from Rome and the Genio Civile over the city.

### Planning Versus Bureaucracy

One month later, the conflict between the colonial administration and the Luiggi mission became even clearer. When the civil engineer Albino Pasini, chief of Genio Civile in Tripoli, adapted the Luiggi plan to local conditions, the civil affairs
made in the plan between works of municipal interest and works of government interest. Also during June 1912, the civil engineer Simonetti was already in Tripoli to draw a more precise plan, as the dispute on administrative competences continued.

In a secret letter to Peano, chief of the cabinet of the Prime Minister, Caruso, director of civil affairs in Tripoli, set-forth an interesting panoramic account of the plan. He wrote that military administrators were unable to deal with the civil administration and that he had himself great difficulty to see a copy of the plan because of the lack of openness from both sides, the Army and Genio Civile. A few days earlier he had indeed written: “I don’t know what is happening about the plan.” As soon as he obtained a copy of the plan, he said, he would give it to the municipality.

It is in this month of June that the government really began to worry about what is happening with the Tripoli plan. Giolitti wrote: “I can’t understand how the chief commander of Libya can have thought he had the competence to approve the plan.”

And in July, a letter from the Public Works Minister Ettore Sacchi to his friend Giolitti shows that the government has already come to a decision: the State will take care of the city, modernization, through the Genio Civile30 — Anyways I share your opinion on the absolute necessity for the State to keep control on the Piano regolatore (…) without interference from the municipality. “An office directly subordinate to the State will have to deal with the implementation of the plan.” “Competences of the municipality have to be limited.” The Public Works Ministry also intended to fight the attempts of the military administration to grant licenses for public transportation or lighting through the municipality. The answer from Giolitti was very clear: “I agree with you on all points”; “I gave orders to limit the competences of the various authorities in Libya”.

By August it was clear that the military administration had lost administrative control over the city: the Prime Minister asked Lieutenant General Briccola not to do anything about expropriation before the arrival of Public Works engineers.32

**The Triumph of the Elites**

In September the Pasini Genio Civile Plan was approved: with two Royal Decrees33 the Genio Civile had won its battle for planning Tripoli, and when in 1913 the Minister of African Italy was created, its position was already strong.

Although the 1914 Simonetti plan34 empowered governors to approve small variations to the general directions, the power of the Public Works Ministry on the colonial town was set for three decades. Thus in a few months from the end of 1911 to the summer of 1912, the municipality lost most of its potential power, as did the Army. The municipality had the misfortune of being defended by some military authorities whose power was to be temporary and of having to face a the Genio Civile bureaucracy whose desire to exercise a technical control over the colonial
city was very intense. But in this process the Italian colonial authorities failed to link local elites to the process of planning, and failed to confirm the powers of a real municipality. The results, planning being a municipal competence in Italy, and this competence being denied to Tripoli’s elites, was an early example of Italian incapacity to preserve Italy’s tiny support among local notables. The Tripoli colonial Municipio consequently had little power, and was not “local”, as it did not represent local elites at all. It was logical for Giolitti, who even in Italy wanted to reduce the power of municipalities in planning procedures, to make this choice. But in the context of the war going on inside the country, local notables in Tripoli, except for a few families linked to the Italians for financial reasons, saw no reason to support an Italian occupation that had proved from the very first months that it had nothing to do with the previous Ottoman presence, which had always respected the wish of local elites to rule the city.

NOTES

1. This paper was first presented at a conference of the International Planning History Society in Helsinki in September 2000.
10. Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Tripolitania, 1912, fasc. 11T.
12. ACS, PCM, Tripolitania, 1912, fasc. 6.
13. Ibid.
14. ACS, PCM, Tripolitania, 1912, fasc. 6, Comitato promotore. Società per il commercio in Tripolitania a Cirenaica, 20/01/1912.
15. RD 26/01/1912 che da facoltà alle amministrazioni di Tripoli e di Bengasi di concedere l’esercizio dei più urgenti servizi pubblici.
17. RD 94, 01/02/1912.
18. Loc. cit. Luigi aimed at preserving the medina, at providing it with sewers, and building the colonial city outside the city walls.
19. ACS, PCM, Tripolitania, 1912, fasc. 6, Direzione degli affari civili in Tripolitania, 20/03/1912.
21. In 1911 the Italians had named a pro-Italian qadi. ACS, PCM, Tripolitania, 1912, Letter 29/10/1911. In November 1911 a Careva decree regulated the Kadi administration.
22. ACS, PCM, Tripolitania, 1912, fasc. 6, Direzione degli affari civili in Tripolitania, 14/04/1912.
23. Ibid., 6, Prot 2007.
24. Ibid., fasc. 6.
25. Ibid., fasc. 6, 06/06/1912.
26. Ibid., fasc. 6, 09/06/1912.
27. Ibid., fasc. 6.
28. Ibid., fasc. 6, lettera riservata 21/06/1912. 29. Ibid., fasc. 6, Prot 30/07, 09/06/1912.
Book Reviews


The Price of Terror, "the story of the Pan Am flight 103 families’ search for justice" (p. xiv), is compelling reading, especially in the aftermath of the 1 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. The authors describe, sometimes in numbing detail, the efforts of the relatives of the victims of the Pan Am 103 outrage to bring to justice the perpetrators of the most catastrophic terrorist attack on Americans to that time. The attack on Pan Am flight 103 killed more Americans than the sinking of the Lusitania. The nose cone of the doomed plane became an icon of international terrorism.

Allan Gerson earned a doctorate in international law at Yale University, and during the Reagan administration served as counsel to US ambassadors at the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick and Vernon Walters. He has also held senior positions in the U.S. Department of Justice and as a Senior Fellow for International Law and Organization at the Council on Foreign Relations. Jerry Adler is an author and senior editor at Newsweek. Told in the third person, their book often reads like an immodest memoir of Gerson, who worked off and on for a number of years as legal counsel for some of the relatives of the victims of Pan Am flight 103.

The authors focus on the bureaucratic and legal aftermath of the attack. In so doing, they sketch an intriguing picture of the convoluted nature of the American political and legal systems. Often slow and expensive, both systems regularly visit frustrations and indignities on the very people they are meant to serve. From this perspective, the book is an unintended testimony to how complicated and protracted legal manoeuvrings can become in a litigious society like the United States, especially when tens of millions of dollars are at stake. America is often described as a country of laws, but the message here is that America is a country of lawyers.

In the process, Gerson and Adler, provide a road map for those victimized by the more recent tragedy. Based on the Pan Am flight 103 case, victims of the terrorist acts on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon can expect years of toil, expense, and disappointment in their parallel search for truth and compensation.

In addition, the Pan Am 103 story offers considerable insight into many aspects of contemporary U. S. foreign policy. The authors rightly depict the Reagan administration as eager to take on Libya because, as they quote a retired CIA analyst. "We only want to pick a fight with those we can beat" (p. 91). In so doing, the objective was not necessarily the removal of Qaddafi but rather the isolation of his regime. The Reagan administration, in effect, benchmarked Libya as an example of the kind of international behaviour Washington refused to accept.

The George H.W. Bush administration later displayed a marked ambivalence towards terrorism. Under considerable political pressure, Bush eventually