

# THE PROTECTION OF ARTISTIC AND ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AND THE ROLE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AS *INSTRUMENTUM IMPERII* DURING ITALIAN COLONIALISM IN LIBYA (1911-1943)

## INTERVIEW WITH MASSIMILIANO MUNZI

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Fig. 01 · Massimiliano Munzi

**M**assimiliano Munzi is the author of numerous essays, including the book *L'epica del ritorno. Archeologia e politica nella Tripolitania italiana*<sup>1</sup>, in which he analyzes the relationship between archaeology and the political ideology that was the basis of Italian colonialist propaganda [fig.01]. The exploitation of archaeology according to imperialist ambitions had a significant impact on the *modus operandi* adopted in archaeological missions, in restoration and consolidation works, in advertising, and in artistic heritage research in the conquered lands. In light of these considerations, this interview will focus on policies adopted by colonialist Italy in the context of safeguarding artistic and architectural heritage in Libya.

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Italy was part of the colonial expansion process initiated by France in the 1830s with the annexation of the port of Assad on the Red Sea (1882), in the territory of what would be the first Italian colony, named Eritrea in 1890. Attempts at expansion in the Horn of Africa continued between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the recognition of the Italian protectorate of the Sultanate of Obbia (1889), located in what would become Italian Somalia, and with the failed attempt to conquer Ethiopia (1896). In 1911, Italy declared war on Turkey over the possession of the territories of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, located on the North African coast. They were annexed by the Italian state in 1912 together with a group of twelve islands in the Aegean Sea, the Dodecanese. In the same year, the Ministry of Colonies was established. During the twenty years of fascism (1922-1943), Mussolini pursued a colonialist policy aimed at strengthening Italy's image and claiming a leading role among other European powers, in particular through the invasion and conquest of Ethiopia (1935) and the foundation of Italian East Africa (1936-1941) [fig.02]. With the liberation of Libya (1943) and the Paris Peace Treaty (1947), Italy finally renounced any claim to the colonial territories, only maintaining the Trust Administration of Somalia until 1960, the year in which Somalia gained independence.

This brief chronological summary centers on the historical period of Italian colonial expansion, highlighting the fact that it developed at two distinct times: a first phase promoted by the liberal governments of the young Kingdom of Italy, between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (1882-1922), and a second phase during the fascist regime (1922-1943). During both periods, numerous initiatives were carried out in the conquered territories in the fields of archaeology, architecture, and urban planning, the latter encouraged especially during the fascist regime.



**Fig. 02.** The Italian colonial territories in 1936 (source: Francesco Fllippi – Noi però gli abbiamo fatto le strade: Le colonie Italiane tra bugie, razzismi e amnesie. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2021, p. 68)

**Michela Degortes** – As you pointed out in your studies, the narrative of Rome’s imperial and civilizing legacy was widely used to promote and justify the Italo-Turkish War (1911-1912). How was the presence of important Roman vestiges in the regions of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, as witnesses of Rome’s glory, exploited for propaganda?

**Massimiliano Munzi** – It is generally known that the myth of Rome’s civilizing legacy represented a fundamental support for the war which had as its objective the conquest of the last two provinces of the Ottoman Empire in North Africa. In fact, the representation of Italy returned to Libya as the heir of Rome had wide dissemination and success in colonialist and nationalist circles. In that context, archaeology definitely played a key role in supporting the alleged Italian historical rights to the lands of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. For example, the nationalist leader Enrico Corradini, during his trip to Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in June-August 1911, met, in Tripoli, the members of the Italian archaeological mission directed by Federico Halbherr. That meeting, which he extensively referred to in the book *L’ora di Tripoli* (Milano, 1911), was a source of inspiration for him to fully express, for the first time, the historical-archaeological motivations for the conquest.

**MD** – Italy was not the first European nation to use the myth of *Romanità* within a colonial context. Let’s talk about the French precedent...

**MM** – In Italy, the colonialism-archaeology nexus was generated during the 19<sup>th</sup> century through an evolution that was certainly affected by French experiences in North Africa. The ideological valorization of antiquity for colonial purposes was first applied when France took its first steps in Algeria, immediately reclaiming the military, political, and civilizing legacy of ancient Rome. The *Armée Française d’Afrique* was considered to be the direct heir of the Roman *Exercitus Africae*; it was in this emblematic context, that in 1849 the military garrison stationed at Lambaesis carried out the restoration of the tomb of *T. Flavius Maximus, praefectus legionis III Augustae*, adding a new honorary inscription.

**MD** – I would like to delve into the concept of archaeology as *Instrumentum Imperii*. With a very suggestive expression, you defined archaeologists as “colonial vanguards” and as “an instrument of penetration, influence, and knowledge” (Munzi, 2016: 90) with the aim of preparing the ground for military conquest. Were there any archaeological missions in the colonial territories that were financially supported by the Italian state for mere political interests?

**MM** – Speaking of archaeological missions, my thoughts turn immediately to the one conceived and then led by Federico Halbherr in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania on the eve of the outbreak of hostilities with Turkey. Halbherr, a scholar from Rovereto, former founder and director of the Italian Archaeological Mission of Crete, which had led to the birth of the Italian Archaeological School of Athens in 1909, had planned a mission to Cyrene as early as 1899 for purely scientific reasons. But starting a mission in Libya only became a priority, and found financial support, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when to Halbherr’s scientific motivations were added the stringent political necessities of the Italian government, aimed at preparing the military conquest of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica through preliminary means of peaceful penetration and expansion of the sphere of influence. It was on that occasion that Italian historians and archaeologists (Halbherr himself with the historian Gaetano De Sanctis, the archaeologist Salvatore Aurigemma, and the orientalist and Berberist Francesco Beguinot) consciously operated as “colonial vanguards”. In order to fully understand this concept, it seems appropriate to give voice to a British archaeologist, who was a contemporary of the Italians, and who, finding himself in the same situation in a not too dissimilar scenario, showed full awareness of the role of archaeology as a cover for political purposes. Let’s go back to January and February 1914, the setting being the archaeological reconnaissance of the southern Negev, which at the time was still part of the Ottoman Empire. The archaeologist was Thomas Edward Lawrence, who took to the field with Charles Leonard Woolley on behalf of the Palestine Exploration Society. Scientific goals were actually a cover for other purely military goals. The expedition was in fact designed by the War Office to camouflage the need to fill geographic and cartographic gaps, and, more generally, informational gaps about Turkish military presence on the border between Egyptian Sinai and Ottoman Palestine. On board the steamship sailing from Beirut to Jaffa Lawrence wrote: “We are obviously only meant as red herrings, to give an archaeological color to a political job”. This also might have been the thought of Italian archaeologists engaged a few years earlier in the Turkish lands of Africa.

**MD** – Libya’s artistic and architectural heritage came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Colonies, established in 1912, after its annexation to Italian territory. What were the first measures taken by the Italian State for the protection of artistic assets from a legal and administrative point of view?

**MM** – The Italian legislative *corpus* in Libya began three months after the landing of the troops. On 14 January 1912, the commander of the Italian expeditionary force, General Carlo Caneva, issued a decree containing provisions for the protection of the archaeological and artistic heritage of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, relating in particular to: the collection and preservation of local archaeological and artistic material; prohibition of archaeological research without prior authorization; declaration of possession of archaeological and artistic material of local interest; prohibition of export.

On 23 January 1912, Caneva himself issued a second decree, this time concerning the isolation of the arch of Marcus Aurelius in Tripoli, by virtue of which the commander of Tripoli square was authorized to buy or expropriate “the structure called the Arch of Marcus Aurelius and the adjacent buildings”.

**MD** – Did Ottoman legislation already exist regarding the protection of artistic assets?

**MM** – The Ottoman jurisdiction had a statist character that was well in line with Italian legislative experiences. Article 3 of the Regulation of 21 February 1884 decreed that objects of archaeological and historical interest belonged to the state: “All objects of antiquity existing in the Ottoman Empire, which are discovered through excavations or which are recovered from the seabed, lakes, coastlines and waterways, belong in full right to the State”.

**MD** – What were the institutions delegated to protect and safeguard the artistic and architectural heritage in the conquered territories?

**MM** – The decrees issued by General Caneva in 1912 were followed by the royal decree of 6 February 1913, n° 87, which reiterated the obligation of prior authorization of the Ministry of Colonies for the performance of any kind of archaeological research, and above all, by that of 24 September 1914, n° 1271, which ultimately systematized the entire matter. Its 13 articles regulated the ownership and state protection of historical and archaeological assets, excavations, discoveries, and exports. I would just like to stress the importance and modernity of Article 1 (“Immovable and movable property or items that have historical and archaeological interest, existing in the territory of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, whether they are already uncovered or are found by excavation or by accident, are owned by the State”) and Article 4 (which prohibits “any work that alters or hides monuments, ancient buildings or their ruins, included in areas that, by decree of the governor, are declared monumental for the historical and archaeological interest that they offer”). Finally, with Article 13, the establishment of archaeological services, later called *Soprintendenze* (Superintendencies), of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica was initiated (“The minister of colonies has the right to provide, with his decrees, for the organization of the archaeological services of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica and the personnel who will be assigned to them”). It should be noted, however, that in February 1912 an Inspectorate of Monuments and Excavations of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica had already been created within the Ministry of Public Education. Entrusted to Aurigemma, it remained in operation until November of that year.

**MD** – The first monumental intervention carried out in Libya by the Italian government was that of the Arch of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus in Tripoli [fig.03], of the 2nd century AD, under the direction of the archaeologist Salvatore Aurigemma (1885-1964). Ottoman-era buildings adjacent to the arch were demolished to restore the monument to its original appearance. In general, an attitude that seemed to favor only the preservation of the archaeological heritage of the Roman and imperial ages, to the detriment of Arab and Byzantine remains, united the archaeological interventions of the colonial period, whose matrix always remained anchored to political ideology. Was Aurigemma’s approach, as head of the Superintendence between 1913 and 1919, more moderate in this regard?



Fig. 03- Marcus Aurelius Arch, 165 AD, Tripoli, Libya (source: Wikimedia Commons)

**MM** – As is evident at the colonial exhibition opened in 1914 in Genoa, Salvatore Aurigemma, superintendent for Tripolitania, chose to showcase, in addition to the monuments of Roman civilization (the “large amphitheater” of Sabratha, the inscription of the arch of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus in Tripoli, Aphrodite Anadyomene and Artemis of Ephesus from Leptis Magna, the mosaic of the seasons and fights in the circus from Dar Buc Ammera villa at Zliten), also the documents of Libyo-Punic cultural preexistence (for example, the neo-Punic dedication of the proconsul L. Aelius Lamia to Ammon from Ras al-Haddaggia and the Romano-Libyan mausoleums of Ghirza) and the later evidence of Christianity (the necropolis of Ain Zara).

Although influenced by nationalist rhetoric regarding *Romanità*, which he shared in the years of conquest, he did not underestimate the role of the Punic element, to which he attributed the beginning of Tripolitan agrarian development, he published the Christian necropolis of Ain Zara and took an interest in medieval and Islamic Tripoli.

Aurigemma’s attitude therefore appears, ultimately, to be in tune with the paternalistic and nationalistic tones of liberal Italy first, and compatible with the discourse of Christian *Romanità*, elaborated upon during the following twenty years, but substantially free from the ideological excesses of the nationalist, and then fascist, myth of imperial Rome.

**MD** – In 1922 a list of buildings of historical, artistic and archaeological interest in Tripoli was created, which included the Arch of Marcus Aurelius but also some mosques and private houses...

**MM** – By the ministerial decree of 31 January 1922, n° 20, the executive regulation of the aforementioned royal decrees was issued, which also provided for the establishment of a commission in charge of drawing up and updating a list of immovable and movable property of historical-archaeological importance. Consequently, on 12 April of the same year, by governor's decree, the list of buildings of historical, artistic, and archaeological interest in Tripoli was published, including the arch of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, the tomb of Gargaesc, thirteen Muslim buildings of a religious nature, the castle, the restored walls, and finally twenty-four private houses for their characteristic local architecture.

**MD** – During the Italo-Turkish War, Italian military action had a significant impact on local artistic and architectural heritage. The reuse of existing structures for military purposes, the excavation and opening of trenches and communication routes led to destruction and loss but, as you have pointed out, also important archaeological discoveries and the drafting of maps and topographical surveys. What was the role of the *Istituto Geografico Militare* (Military Geographical Institute) in this context?

**MM** – During the war, Italian soldiers became familiar with Libyan antiquities. They came across them continuously, while advancing on the ground or building roads, trenches, and fortifications, often reusing monumental tombs and historic farmhouses. Although some monuments were damaged or destroyed this way, the topographical documentation of the ancient ruins certainly made progress. The first topographical maps of the Military Geographical Institute became a resource, still valuable today, due to the precision required by stringent military demands. Military topographers drew up the first topographic maps of ancient cities: Sabratha was surveyed on a scale of 1:12,500 in 1913, Leptis Magna in 1914 on a scale of 1:10,000 and the following year on a scale of 1:2,000. Not to mention the map sheets of the entire Tripolitania in 1:100,000 scale, which appeared in 1915 in a provisional edition, which record toponyms of the Turkish era and the ancient ruins scattered throughout the territory.

**MD** – The archaeological discoveries made during the conflict in Libya were often publicized and spread about by the military through the printing of postcards and brochures. In 1913 an exhibition was also set up with the found artifacts. What was the purpose of this type of initiative?

**MM** – In fact, the rhetoric of Rome's return spread widely in Italian society through an intense patriotic propaganda that made use of pamphlets, postcards, and medals. Military achievements and conquests were also highlighted by using images of ships, legionaries, and Roman monuments.

In this context, archaeological discoveries fortuitously made by Italian soldiers during the operations had great resonance. For example, a statue of Artemis Ephesia was found in 1912. The Bersaglieri unearthed it during the construction of Fort Vittorio Emanuele on the hill where the amphitheater of Leptis Magna was buried. The discovery was widely publicized as an auspicious omen for Italian fortunes in Libya. But we may also recall the tombs of Gargaesc, a locality near Tripoli, which were discovered in March 1912 by the 82<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment. General Caneva himself came to visit the necropolis.

The archaeological materials found in this early period, together with those that already decorated some public offices in Khoms in Ottoman times, were set up by then-Lieutenant Francesco Stroppa of the 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (who incidentally was the author of a 1912 booklet on Leptis Magna for the benefit of the families of soldiers fallen and wounded in the battles of Lebda) in Khoms in an *antiquarium*, inaugurated by Colonel Vittorio De Albertis in 1913.

With this and other initiatives of attention to archaeological heritage, the army staged a sort of reappropriation of the past, which, as we have seen, the interventionist circles had claimed as their own.

**MD** – From a technical and scientific point of view, the *modus operandi* of Italian archaeologists was strongly criticized in the aftermath of the liberation of Libya by British troops in 1943. You noted that “the hasty removal of post-classical stratifications was rightly stigmatized by the British archaeologists who arrived in Tripolitania in the wake of the Allied troops”. How does the scientific approach of Italian archaeologists compare to the context of other contemporary European experiences in this field?

**MM** – In the Italian archaeological practice of the time, non-stratigraphic excavation (or digging) was the rule and it is not surprising that the archaeologists of the Superintendence had intensively adopted it in Libya. The colossal and hurried excavations continued uninterrupted until the years of the Second World War, without any concern for the stratigraphic method, but rather paying attention to the aspects of strategy (excavation “*alla bersagliera*”, carried out in a hasty manner, or using the “oil slick” method, as Renato Bartoccini theorized).

As for the comparison with other experiences, the Italian archaeological approach could be considered substantially in line with French experiences in North Africa, also with regard to excavation strategies and methods. In the French Maghreb, monumental buildings of Roman cities and legionary camps were unearthed through extensive non-stratigraphic excavations. The first stratigraphic investigations in Libya were not carried out until the years 1947-1951, during the British Administration, when John Bryan Ward-Perkins and Kathleen M. Kenyon conducted excavations at Leptis Magna and Sabratha.

**MD** – There were also many positive aspects in the context of Italian archaeological missions, for example, the considerable technical capacity in restoration and the extension of topographic investigations in both urban and rural areas...

**MM** – Conservative restoration and anastylosis were considered a natural continuation of the excavation; obviously, here again, scientific motives were one and the same with those of teaching, tourism, and finally imperial propaganda. These achievements in the area of restoration are certainly some of the greatest achievements of Italian work in Libya and aroused admiration among foreign colleagues. In contrast, topographic research in rural areas was not particularly popular, after the pioneering explorations conducted by Salvatore Aurigemma and Francesco Beguinot in 1911 some months before the outbreak of the Italo-Turkish war. Consequently, according to the political agenda, funding went towards large urban archaeological centers of the coast, in full harmony with the all-urban propensity of Italian classical archaeology. The only census, albeit partial, of rural settlements (specifically of Gebel Nefusa), is due, not surprisingly, to a military man passionate about archaeology – Francesco Corò, *Vestigia di colonie agricole romane. Gebel Nefusa*, Rome 1929 [fig.04]. Otherwise, there were only occasional and isolated recoveries of extra-urban monuments not included in a comprehensive project of knowledge of the territory.

**MD** – The instrumentalization of archaeology in support of imperialist rhetoric was accentuated during the twenty years of fascism (*Ventennio Fascista*). The patronage of archaeological excavations and restoration works, as well as major urban redevelopment projects and new roads were among the elements that characterized the work of the fascist governors in Libya. The juxtaposition of restored ancient glories with those of the new century, that is, works of architecture and urban planning, were the expression of the *Romanità* myth interpreted in fascist terms, that was, as you wrote, “making Italians the Romans of modernity” (Munzi, 2001: 39). In this sense, among the architects of fascist colonial archaeological propaganda, the figures of the governors of Tripolitania Giuseppe Volpi (1877-1947) and Italo Balbo (1896-1940) stand out. What were the main archaeological enterprises sponsored by Giuseppe Volpi during his tenure as governor of Tripolitania (between 1921 and 1925)?

**MM** – Giuseppe Volpi’s mandate to the government of Tripolitania coincided with the first phase of the military “reconquest” of the colony and, regarding archaeology, with Renato Bartoccini’s activity. In line with the directives and aspirations of the governor, who did not skimp on funding, Bartoccini oversaw the setting up of museums in Tripoli and Khoms-Lebda and launched the grandiose excavations at Leptis Magna and Sabratha. The strategy for large areas had both scientific and tourist purposes (Bartoccini published archaeological guides for the Museum of Tripoli, Sabratha, and Leptis Magna).



Fig. 04. Francesco Corò, *Vestigia di Colonie Agricole Romane*, 1929 (source: [www.libreriagovi.com](http://www.libreriagovi.com))

Obviously, non-stratigraphic excavations and restorations proceeded extremely quickly, to the detriment of archaeological documentation of the late Roman and Islamic periods. In Leptis Magna, in particular, Bartoccini wanted to immediately give a new direction to the excavations, turning away from the provisional nature of mere sondages, which he believed had characterized them at the time of his predecessor Pietro Romanelli. Through substantial funding by Volpi, the excavation of the Baths of Hadrian and the Severan Forum was undertaken in order to rejoin the two complexes by means of ancient road arteries, purposefully brought to light.

Tripolitanian archaeological exploits were internationally consecrated by the Conference of Roman Archaeology, held in Tripoli (with visits to the excavations of Leptis Magna and Sabratha) from 1 to 5 May 1925. Sponsored by Governor Volpi and the Minister of Colonies, Prince Pietro Lanza of Scalea, the conference attracted widespread interest from the international antiquities' scene, with the participation of scholars from various European countries and the United States.

**MD** – During Italo Balbo's mandate (1934-1940), the area of the Arch of Marcus Aurelius in Tripoli was renovated based on the design of the architect Florestano Di Fausto (1890-1965), with the intention of isolating the Roman monument from the surrounding urban fabric, to highlight the symbol of Rome's power. The Arch was also restored and consolidated between 1936 and 1937. Balbo, however, also took care of restoring the Medina. Was this type of intervention also more related to the intent to implement tourism in Tripoli?

**MM** – In the intervention strategy sponsored by Balbo, the purpose of tourism was certainly at the forefront. For example, Rodolfo Micacchi, director of the Inspectorate for Schools and Archaeology of the Ministry of Colonies, reminds us of this in clear terms. In drawing up an account of the 1934 activities in the *Rivista delle Colonie*, Micacchi stated that the new governor had fully understood the importance of excavation and restoration activities "both for scientific purposes, and in order to attract an increasingly numerous flow of tourists in Libya by bringing back the charm of the ancient cities, and has granted greater resources and more direct involvement". Balbo was also responsible, more generally, for a qualitative leap in the tourism organization of Libya, with the implementation of an integrated plan, including a new and efficient coastal road, the Via Balbia, as well as hotel infrastructure [fig.05] and special automotive services for grand tourism managed by the newly established (1934) *Ente Turistico Alberghiero* (Hotel Tourism Authority) of Libya.

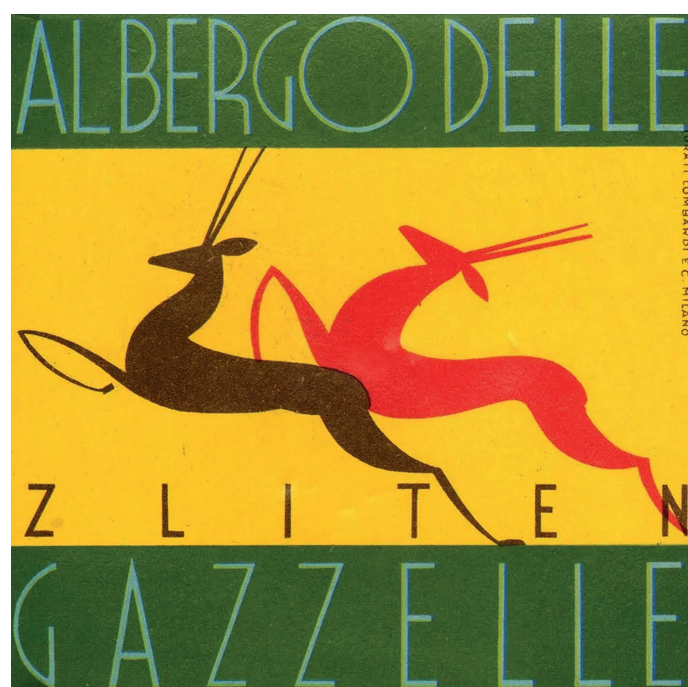


Fig. 05- Zliten, Albergo delle Gazzelle, by architect Umberto Di Segni (1936): luggage label (source: www.ebay.com)

**MD** – What other works were sponsored by Balbo?

**MM** – In addition to the aforementioned restoration of the castle and arch of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus in Tripoli, together with the renovation of the square commissioned to Florestano Di Fausto, the priority objectives of his governorship included in Leptis Magna the excavation of the Severan basilica and forum and in Sabratha the restoration of the theatre, precisely because of their strong impact not only scientifically but also in terms of tourism and the strong return on image. The latter, rebuilt by Giacomo Guidi and completed by Giacomo Caputo, became the icon of Sabratha and in a broader sense of Italian archaeology in Libya.

**MD** – Giacomo Caputo was the last to hold the Superintendence of Libya from 1936. The list of criteria established in his “excavation directives”, which you quote in your book, is particularly indicative of the work of the Superintendence under the fascist regime...

**MM** – Given that you mentioned them, I think it may be useful make a full report of these “directives”, which Giacomo Caputo listed in the aftermath of his appointment as Superintendent in 1935:

*1) Political motive: to consecrate, even scientifically, the full dominion, full in form and in space, of our Colony. 2) Touristic motive: to take into account the current and potential tourist development guidelines. 3) Financial motive: to adapt the expenditure to excavations that can be carried out in order to achieve a result that is not fragmentary but complete each time. 4) Scientific motive: to conduct excavations in the manner and locations classifiable as: Class A – Centers of ancient life made famous through information that has been handed down to us by writers of the past [...]; Class B: locations that are very favorable to the probable solution of archaeological questions.*

We can see that political, touristic, and financial motivations preceded the scientific ones, proving that, no different than previously, the latter were not a priority. Compared to the prevailing Romanist policy of the regime, Caputo's position was certainly politically correct, although it ultimately did not appear to be as deeply rooted when compared with Renato Bartoccini's staunch national-fascist adherence and the scientific interpretation of *Romanità* that Pietro Romanelli was developing in the thirties.

**MD** – To conclude, from the point of view of the protection of artistic, archaeological, and architectural heritage during the period of Italian colonialism in Libya, do you believe that it is possible to mitigate criticism and draw a positive conclusion?

**MM** – Regarding activities to protect Libyan cultural heritage during the colonial period, one can only arrive at a mixed conclusion, given the coexistence of scientific, military, and political motivations, the latter favoring imperial discourse, together with the colony's tourist development. However, I believe that an overall assessment must be expanded to include the meritorious rescue work carried out by Italian archaeologists during the Second World War. The Superintendence of Libya, and in particular Gennaro Pesce, the inspector for Cyrenaica, remained active even in the most dire moments of the conflict, having the arduous task, entrusted to him by the dying colonial government, of preventing archaeological heritage from falling into the hands of the enemy and, more generally, from being damaged by the fighting. Also by means of vehicles made available by the Italian Army, it was possible to transfer movable cultural property items from war-torn Cyrenaica to Tripolitania. There was then full cooperation with archaeologists serving in the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army (Lieutenant Colonel Mortimeer Wheeler and Major John Bryan Ward-Perkins) and subsequently with the Antiquities Officers of the British Military Administration. To them we owe the adoption of antiquities protection measures, including the resumption of Italian Superintendence activity with the return of Italian personnel to the abandoned territorial offices.

And indeed, I would like to conclude this interview with the words of Gennaro Pesce, written after the war, which reveal the deep cultural ideal that animated that salvage operation:

*In the whirlwind of war, in the midst of a humanity brutalised by a lust for destruction, it is difficult to defend cultural values. The Italian Army in Libya promoted this defence and while in the tragic upheaval of defeat, concerned itself with these ideals. The British Military Administration, the successor of the Italian one, and now the autonomous State of Libya have continued and continue our work, in homage to that "religion of antiquity" which is felt by every civilised people.*

**MD:** Thank you very much for doing this interview.

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