During the 1930s, Clemente Busiri Vici constructed for the Management dei "Fasci Italiani all'Estero" schools and other offices for the Case d'Italia in Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt. In this period, Italian political policy regarding Egypt is intent in trying to oppose British and French superiority in the area. In order to do so, the Management dei "Fasci Italiani all'Estero" projects a national image of prestige and decides to set in motion the construction of buildings which are representative of Italian architectural culture. It is in this context that Clemente Busiri Vici carried out his professional career. He draws up the plans for the Casa d'Italia in Port Said, the "Regie Scuole Littorio" in Alexandria and the "Scuole Italiane" in Cairo. The building of the two schools is a good opportunity offered by the then Minister Parini to the architect to experiment with innovative plans in which to incorporate elements of research and to break away from the current models of scholastic building construction.

Busiri Vici uses an avant-garde language which is part of the architectural expression of the beginning of Italian Rationalist Architecture. The plans drawn up for constructions in Italy are more prudent, more oriented toward a line of thinking and an architectural taste already tested and, therefore, less exposed to criticism. Even in the summer seaside camp in Cattolica, we can see that he experimented in an uncommon formal line, not very academic.

In Alexandria, following the direction of the city's growth in the direction of Ramleh, the Scuole Littorie are built at Chatby. The school is constructed on an area of approximately 30,000 sq. m. When Busiri Vici builds here, in this sort of "city of education" which on a functional level distinguishes this portion of the city, there are already in this quarter a British school, a Greek school, the Frères school and a French High School along with various other schools. The building complex is constructed by Ernesto De Farro's construction firm under the supervision of the architect Rodolfo Rustichelli, who replaces Clemente Busiri Vici, and the engineer Carlo Bonucci, who works for De Farro's firm. The construction is built upon a shaft/well type foundation and uses the technique of bearing walls and reinforced concrete beams for a covered floor area of approximately 7,700 sq. m. About 5,000 sq. m. are realized in the first stage. The first building phase is completed in 1933 and does not include the Aula Magna, the nursery school or the boarding school. In the blueprints of the project published in the news magazines of that period, there appears a two-storeyed entrance and a high school of music, neither of which were ever actually built and were, perhaps, part of a more ambitious programme.

In addition to the aforementioned constructions, the plans provide for middle schools, elementary schools, athletic-sport grounds and services. The desire to create, through this Scuole Littorie complex, a counterweight to the important and already consolidated British and French scholastic institutions, in reality, never fully materializes. The realization of only a part of the pavilions produces a defective organism and those pavilions inaugurated constitute an incomplete didactic cycle. The architectural complex suffers because of the missing Aula Magna; an imbalance is produced among the volumes, which lose their pole of composite union. The Aula Magna, in fact, even in its rhetoric structural symmetry, would have constituted with its 2,000 person seating capacity, the nucleus and the composite fulcrum of the entire building complex. The proximity of the Frères Boarding School and the desire to affirm, with this construction, the importance of the Italian schools, are without doubt at the base of its classicist planimetric composition. This is tied to a rigid symmetry with volumes arranged on the ground floor rising up from the sport grounds towards the Aula Magna, as in a theatrical scenography. But the single parts of the building complex, if analyzed in detail, demonstrate a masterful use of volumes and simple shapes, with solutions that already foreshadow certain developments oriented toward a modernism of a higher aesthetic quality. The rigid symmetry of the building complex is tempered in the successful solution of the eastern and western elevated, semi-circular steps covered by a cantilever roof. Another point of interest in the composition of the horizontal planes is found in the two headpieces north of the scholastic pavilions. The professional qualities of the architect find here another occasion to show themselves in the interior design and furnishing of the building complex. Clemente Busiri Vici also pays particular attention to the climate; planning a series of porticoed walkways which unite all the buildings of the complex in such a way as to ensure a long sequence of shaded areas, against which the simple volumes of the va-
SCUOLE LITTORIE D'ALESSANDRIA D'EGITTO. THE EASTERN SEMICIRCULAR STEPS IN THE 1933 VERSION.

SCUOLE LITTORIE D'ALESSANDRIA D'EGITTO. THE MAIN ENTRANCE ARCADE. FROM: "L'ARCHITETTURA ITALIANA", SEPTEMBER 1935
rious pavilions stand out. This arcade assumes a rhetoric note only in the central pronaos where the symbols of the political regime are concentrated: the "fasci littori" and the tri-colour mosaic above the main entrance.

The present condition of the building complex demonstrates two things: that the building has been enlarged and elevated in the course of the years, not at all in a manner consistent with the original plans. The quality of the portion built in the 1930s is superior to the portions later added. Notwithstanding the general state of abandon and disrepair, the buildings are still today used as a school.°

The school at Shubra in Cairo, of much smaller dimensions than that of the one in Alexandria, is planned for that section of the city which is positioned along the main artery connecting the train station to the canal, El Ismailia toward north.° The plot of land upon which the school is to be built is approximately 8,500 sq. m. and is a rectangle whose short side, toward east, runs along the important street to Shari Shubra. The plans, drawn up shortly after those for the "Scuole Littorie" in Alexandria, present elements of a more advanced design, in the use of the language of rationalist architecture. The asymmetric distribution of the plan and the use of original curvilinear elements constitute the composite value of this work. In addition, the horizontality of the building complex is expressed rhythmically in the sequence of the bodies of the classrooms. The composition is realized in the insertion of the circular sectors of the classrooms onto the distribution galleries, alternating left and right, with a counterpoint play between the flat and curved surfaces which gives lightness and airy expansiveness to the whole of the construction. Here, too, as in the plans for Chatby, the building complex is articulated upon a central pole. Here the central pole is the gymnasium, whereas in Chatby, it is the Aula Magna. This pole, indicated by the standard-bearing tower, the so-called "command deck", into which the two arms of the classrooms are inserted, supports all the planimetric elements of the building complex. Also in this case, the buildings which complete and close the building complex and which are to be built on the western plot of
land, were never constructed: that is, the porticoes around the open-air gymnasium, the refectory, the swimming pool, the kindergarten and the crèche.

In May 1934, Clemente Busiri Vici draws up and signs a variation, reducing its size with respect to the original version of the plans published in Architettura Italiana in January of the same year. The new plan redimensions and redefines the rear portion of the building complex: the constructions planned for the northwest and southwest corners of the plot are eliminated; the area behind the covered gymnasium remains unbuilt upon; the swimming pool is placed in line with the body of the gymnasium. The result of these changes is a mutilated organism, even though it contains a correct solution of the rear portion of the plan. The rear portion of the plot of land remains free, fenced in by a wall analogous to the anterior wall even if it is quite different in its substance, seeing as how it is 2 m. high and does not permit a view of that portion of the building complex that the architectural journals continue not to publish.°

Today, this portion of the plot, towards the west, is cluttered by constructions spurious to the original language of the building complex, even if they do have, at least in part, something in common with the vocabulary of that period.

Taking into account that the research carried on until now has not furnished reliable records regarding the remodelling of this portion of the building complex, the hypothesis that the completion occurred in the period immediately following the year 1935 and was conducted using Busiri’s own plans, or in any case, with a stylistic method in keeping with that of Busiri, is possible. In the 1935 version, the terminal headpieces of the bodies of the classrooms are realized only one floor high, with roof terraces and with a crowing of pergola more consistent with a vernacular language, that has little to do with the severity of the volumes of the classrooms. Today these headpieces appear superelevated and padded.®

Other superflotation and aggregation of volumes occur toward the southwest corner of the plot: these, too, differ from both the original as well as its variant.

To sum up: the actual state of the building

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ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT. THE ITALIAN SCHOOL IN CHATBY. THE EAST SIDE OF THE BUILDING. SUPERELEVATIONS AND ADDITIONS ARE ADDED ONTO THE ORIGINAL WORK. FOR A COMPARISON SEE FIGURE BY THE AUTHOR, 1989
CAIRO. ITALIAN SCHOOLS. GROUND FLOOR PLANS AND LONGITUDINAL SECTION. THE HALFTONE SCREEN AREA INDICATES THAT PORTION NOT BUILT IN 1935
complex, in a rather dilapidated condition, allows us to discern at least two operations of completion and enlargement. In the first phase the work proceeded with a mimetic idea in mind, in an attempt to carry out a language consistent with the first. In the second, and more recent, phase, a rather brutal filling up of the plot of land, evidently in order to meet certain functional needs. The present day use of this building complex, in contrast to that in Alexandria, is entirely different from its original intents. In any case, the presence of this valuable piece of architecture remains evident in the fabric of the surrounding city. In fact, Clemente Busiri Vici, more so in this building complex than in the one in Alexandria, creates a free-style composition of obvious plastic value, void of any of the regime's stylistic elements, such as "fasci litori" and towers. This work is inserted in one of the most intense periods in the history of modern architecture and the building complex assumes today a testimonial importance of a characterized and recognizable presence.

The critical sensitivity matured by our present-day culture requires that widespread programs be enacted in order to safeguard and protect monuments of modern architecture. The schools of Shubra and Chatby are both a valuable architectonic testimony of an epoch and an irreplaceable document to conserve and hand down to future generations.

We have seen how both the building complexes have been tampered with and modified but their remaining architectural quality forces us to include them among those works that we hope to restore, or at least to save from further insult.

Otello lolita

1 Not very many articles written on Clemente Busiri Vici's work exist, or at least not in a quantity proportional to the vastness of his professional activity. He works in Italy and abroad in the years between 1920 and 1960, with a particularly intense period in the 1930s. The sole contribution, even if only partial, concerning his works, remains that which is contained in the portion dedicated to him in L'architettura di Saverio Busiri Vici e canni su alcuni altri architetti della sua famiglia, I (1651-1974), n.d. pp. 39-60.
On this occasion, I wish only to give an initial and partial cognitive contribution concerning Busiri Vici’s work, limited to those realized in Lower Egypt. The plans for the “Casa d’Italia” in Port Said are drawn up in 1936. The building covers an area of 1,100 sq. m. with a cubature of 14,493 cm. — a basement, a ground floor and two more floors. The supporting structure is in reinforced concrete. The central element, a lighthouse type lantern, perhaps can be accused of excessive monumentalism in its explicit show of rhetorical decorations: “fascist lilliput” and quotations from Mussolini. The monumental vision is even more fanatical if we consider the fact that the zoning regulations provided that the façade overlook an open area destined to be used as a public park. All in all, the building complex in its volumetric curves and in the airy expansiveness of its composition, possesses an indisputable aesthetic validity.

In the course of the 1930s, Clement Busiri Vici completes numerous works in Italy, North Africa, Europe and in South America. We are faced with a professional who carries out an important activity, even for sheer volume of work, in both the public work sector, as well as for private purchasers. This leads us to suppose the existence of a numerous staff of collaborators, who obviously influence the drafts of the projects, leading to diverse and differently oriented results. In addition to this, we are in a period in which various tendencies, if not various “styles”, coexist in the works of the architects who populate the international scene. Therefore, within this intense activity carried out abroad, the horizon, in which the construction of the two schools should be placed, widens. The possibility to work in areas of the world, different from each other in terms of culture, with plans of an analogous typology, becomes, for the architect, an experimental gymnasium, whose research tends to obtain diverse and quality results, without reducing itself to a simple exportation of always the same prototypes.

Roberto Cantalupo and Piero Parini send the Foreign Minister on April 21st 1921, on the occasion of the anniversary of the founding of Rome, a telegram, announcing the laying of the foundation stone of the Scuole Italiane in Alexandria. See Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Esteri (A.S.D.M.E.), Affari Politici, Egitto, 2 (1931).

The engineer, Ernesto De Farro takes part in the construction of the Aswan Dam, the reinforcement of the foundation of the Tempio di Philae and the restoration of the great hypostyle hall of the temple of Karnak. The company founded by De Farro constructs various buildings in Egypt, among which the Royal Palace of Montaza. See Annuario degli Italiani in Egitto, edition of the Pubblicità Italio-Egiziana, Alexandria, 1933, pp. 135-137.

See: A. Regaglioni, “Scuole italiane in Egitto”, L’Ingegneria, 22, Dec. 1935/XIV, pp. 918-926. The article illustrates, with advertise typical of the prose of that period, also the school in Cairo. In any case, it is never made clear, neither in the text nor in the illustrations, the difference between what was actually built and what was hypothesized on the drawing plans. The illustration in question is on p. 928.

Even a superficial examination of the work is sufficient to note how the superstructures added on do not manage to correctly follow the circular structure of the underlying walls built in 1933. The replastering over the original walls is also evident. The volumetric heaviness of the additions takes away consistency and measure from the composite structure, which was based on the horizontal development of the pavilions.

The school is inaugurated October 28th 1935. See Regaglioni, op. cit., p. 928.

This ambiguity of information appears certainly more evident for the Alexandria school, whose first work phase was completed in 1933, if we take into account that in 1935 the architectural journals still published illustrations including the non-existent portion. As far as the Cairo school is concerned, the so-called “official” version of the building complex is printed; that is, the one from the original plans. In reality, the school is inaugurated in October 1935 still incomplete, but no photographs taken of the rear portion of the plot of land which show this incompleteness, are published.

I would like to thank Antonello Busiri Vici, Clemente’s son, for his kind collaboration which allowed me to understand this phase of the construction. Some of the photographs and some of the plan drawings, contained in the family archives, are testimony to this incomplete, but formally closed and consistent stage of the development of the building complex. The illustrations of the two schools can be found in many of the numerous specialized publications. See M. Pa., “Scuole italiane ad Alessandria d’Egitto”, Architettura ed arti decorative, XII, 1933, pp. 275-282; “Scuole italiane di Scicliura”, L’Architettura Italiana, XXIX, January 1934/XII, pp. 12-15; “R. Scuola Littoria d’Alessandria d’Egitto”, L’Architettura Italiana, XXX, March 1935/XIII, p. 97; “Scuole Littorie - Alessandria d’Egitto”, L’Architettura Italiana, XXX, September 1935/XIII, pp. 307-311; “Scuole Italiane di Scicliura (Cairo)”, ibid., pp. 312-313; Regaglioni, op. cit.

For a photographic documentation of this phase of the construction, I refer to the cited publications and in particular to the September 1935 edition of L’Architettura Italiana. The confrontation between the photographs and the actual condition of the buildings is a scanty but effective testimony to both the transformations undergone as well as its present state of deterioration.

THE BODIES ADDED ON TO THE WEST SIDE OF THE BUILDING.