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- The architectural legacy of Mimar Sinan and Ottoman heritage.
- Turkish architecture and its evolution.
- Galata and Genoese colonies in the Eastern Mediterranean.
- Italian architects in the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic.
- Travel literature and the cultural heritage of the Levantine world.

“I arrived in Rhodes by chance, following the traces of a little-known Italian engineer who had worked there during the Fascist era. Over the years, my research led me to reconstruct the life and numerous works of Hermes Balducci—engineer, archaeologist, and university professor—who, through his studies and fieldwork, significantly contributed to the knowledge of the archaeology, restoration, history, and culture of the Dodecanese: from its classical past to the era of the Knights in the Middle Ages, through the Byzantine and Ottoman periods, the Italian presence, and finally the annexation to Greece. In a similar way, Tarık Tüten has likely come across my research on Balducci, which I have scattered over these years of study and travel. I hope that this collection of conversations—once completed—will add a new cultural fragment to that marvellous corner of knowledge that is the Hafız Ahmed Agha Library in Rhodes.”

Luca Orlandi

Visions of the Past: Italian Perspectives on Ottoman Rhodes through the Studies of Hermes Balducci

Abstract

This paper explores the cultural impact of Italian colonial rule in the Dodecanese Islands between 1912 and 1943, focusing on Rhodes and its Ottoman heritage through the studies conducted by Hermes Balducci. The paper briefly investigates the contrasting policies of governors Mario Lago and Cesare Maria De Vecchi, who shaped the islands’ urban and architectural development. Special emphasis is placed on the pioneering work of Hermes Balducci, a young and promising Italian engineer and archaeologist who systematically documented Ottoman architecture in Rhodes during the years of the Italian occupation.

Balducci’s meticulous surveys and publications, including the fundamental book “*Architettura Turca in Rodi*”, published in 1932, provided valuable insights into Ottoman architectural heritage. Despite reflecting the ideological biases of his time, full of fascist rhetoric and propaganda, Balducci’s contributions are a vital resource for understanding the cultural complexity of the Dodecanese during the Italian occupation. By examining both colonial ambition and heritage preservation, this study offers a nuanced perspective on Mediterranean architectural history.

Introduction

The colonial policies undertaken by Italians in the Dodecanese Islands during the period 1912-1943 remain a marginal topic in Italian historical studies. Only in the past two decades have these policies been analyzed comprehensively from diverse perspectives. While the bibliography on the Dodecanese is abundant, it is often plentiful with contradictions. For instance, Italian literature from the Fascist era is heavily saturated with rhetorical language aimed at glorifying successive Italian governments. Meanwhile, Greek literature has often portrayed Italian rule as oppressive, shaped by nationalist narratives that evoke resistance and subjugation. However, in recent years, the academic approach has shifted away from both nationalist Greek perspectives and the overly romanticized Italian narrative of “good colonizers”.

Current scholarship adopts a more balanced analysis, exploring the nuanced impacts of Italian governance in the region, including and magnifying its contributions to architecture, urban development, and cultural heritage. These studies on Italian colonial architecture and heritage preservation has further highlighted Balducci’s contributions within broader themes such as *Italianità*, *Romanità*, and particularly *Mediterraneità*.

For instance, Jones and Pilat’s edited volume (2020) examines the legacy and reuse of Fascist-period architectural spaces, analyzing their role in shaping national identity and architectural discourse. Similarly, Maglio, Mangone, and Pizza’s (2017) exploration of *Mediterraneità* contextualizes Italian cultural and architectural endeavors within the Mediterranean basin, providing insights into how figures like Balducci contributed to these narratives. Valerie McGuire’s monograph (2020a) positions Italy’s colonial experience as a unique intersection of imperial and cultural economies that reshaped the Mediterranean during its period as a “colonial sea”. Orlandi (2021) and Troilo’s (2021) investigations into the re-appropriation of Italian colonial archaeological practices underscores the role of scholars like Balducci in defining the European imperial imaginary. These studies collectively reaffirm the significance of the massive amount of work done by the Italians in the Dodecanese, framing it within contemporary debates on heritage, colonialism, and identity.

Historical Background

On May 4, 1912, Italian troops seized Rhodes during the Italo-Turkish War, marking the beginning of Italy's presence in the Dodecanese Islands. The occupation aimed to disrupt Ottoman supply routes to Libya, a strategic move in the broader conflict against the Ottoman Empire. Although initially intended as a temporary wartime measure, the islands – renamed the Italian Aegean Possessions – became a permanent part of Italy following the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, **FIGURE 1**.



FIGURE 1: The Dodecanese Islands (From: Stefanini, Giuseppe and Desio, Ardito (1928). *Le Colonie, Rodi e le Isole Italiane dell'Egeo*, Torino: UTET, p. 382).

From 1912 to 1923, the Dodecanese Islands were largely under the rule of military administrators as governors, including Giovanni Ameglio (1912-1920), a military officer who played a key role in consolidating Italian control after the archipelago's conquest. His early governance focused on addressing logistical and political challenges while laying the groundwork for future infrastructure development. With the rise of Fascism in 1922, the region saw significant changes under Mario Lago, who served as governor from 1923 to 1936. He adopted a relatively moderate approach, attempting to balance Fascist policies with respect for local Greek, Turkish, and Jewish communities. He was undoubtedly a pivotal figure, who promoted a cultural and infrastructural vision that aimed to integrate the Dodecanese into the Italian imagination without alienating the local population. Under his governance, iconic buildings were constructed, and numerous restoration projects were initiated.

In contrast, his successor Cesare Maria De Vecchi – governor from 1936 to 1940 – implemented a more authoritarian regime, emphasizing Fascist ideology and suppressing minority rights. His administration marked a shift toward a more aggressive policy of Italianization, often with polarizing consequences. He promoted “purification” architectural interventions that altered existing buildings to reflect the Fascist regime's style.

Finally, Ettore Bastico (1940-1941) and Inigo Campioni (1941-1943) were the successive military governors, their tenure coincided with World War II and the growing instability of the Italian presence in the area. During this dramatic period control of the islands shifted dramatically: in 1943, after the Italian Armistice, the Dodecanese fell under Nazi occupation, then in the aftermath of World War II was followed by British military administration until the islands' eventual transfer to Greece in 1947.

Rhodes, the largest and most strategically significant island, became a focal point of Italian colonial development. Major infrastructure projects included new roads, waterworks and ports, alongside the restoration of historical monuments. Italian authorities also pursued extensive archaeological research and introduced agrarian colonization policies, establishing new villages to support agricultural expansion. Overall Italian colonial policies in the Dodecanese were marked by ambitious architectural and urban development projects aimed at showcasing Italy as a modern state. While the islands were initially considered strategic military outposts, by the late 1920s, they had been reshaped into tourist destinations. This transformation was actively promoted by the Italian government through specific publications, including (Stefanini, Desio 1928), (Cesari 1930) and (Touring Club Italiano 1930).

Notable architects and urban planners were instrumental in reshaping the islands and designing landmark structures that blended Italian, medieval, vernacular, and Islamic architectural elements. Among the prominent architects contributing to the architectural regeneration of Italian colonies, Florestano Di Fausto (1890-1965) stands out as one of the most influential figures of his time. His work in Rhodes includes the Governor's Palace (1926-1927), a Neo-Venetian Gothic masterpiece designed to evoke Italy's historical heritage, and the Market and Fish Market (1925-1926), which harmoniously blend local and Italianate architectural elements to resonate with the cultural context, including references with the traditional Ottoman caravanserais' typology. Another prominent architect, Pietro Lombardi (1894-1984), designed the Thermal Bath of Kallithea (1928-1930), a spa complex that integrates classical forms with oriental Ottoman influences. Similarly, Armando Bernabiti (1900-1970) contributed to the modernist architectural landscape of Rhodes through his designs of the Town Hall, the Opera Theatre “Puccini” and the Casa del Fascio (1935-1938), while Vittorio Mesturino (1895-1979) played a key role in the restoration and reconstruction of the Palace of the Grand Master of the Knights of Rhodes (1937-1940), reinterpreting medieval styles with a monumental aesthetic that reflected Fascist ideals of grandeur and authority, **FIGURE 2**.



A valuable body of literature providing insights into the impact of Italian architects in the Dodecanese, particularly through studies conducted by Italian scholars, can be found in the works of Antoniadis (1984), Petruccioli (1992), Rocco and Livadiotti (1996), Martinoli and Perotti (1999), (Godoli, Giacomelli 2005), Cigolini and Merello (2008), Orlandi (2010), Maglio (2014) and Livadiotti (2017). These studies explore in an exhaustive manner all the architectural and urban transformations undertaken during the Italian administration, shedding light on their cultural, historical, and political significance within the broader context of Mediterranean colonialism.

To sum up, Mario Lago's administration oversaw major projects, including roads, bridges, hotels, and thermal resorts, exemplified by the above mentioned thermal baths at Kallithea, an extraordinary example of Italian Art deco complex blended with local Ottoman allure (Ivkovska, Orlandi 2020), **FIGURE 3**. However, under De Vecchi's rule, a shift occurred toward emphasizing Fascist and Roman aesthetics, stripping earlier buildings of their "Oriental" and exotic elements.



FIGURE 3: Pietro Lombardi (1894-1984) designed spa complex, the Thermal Bath of Kallithea (1928-1930) that integrates classical forms with oriental Ottoman influences. Photo by the author.

This era saw the construction of modernist and rationalist structures that symbolized the Fascist regime's ambitions, and "Italianness", more aligned with the will of Mussolini's imperialistic vision and research for a 'genuine' identity of the islands (McGuire 2020b). The Opera Theatre "Puccini" by Bernabiti can be seen as a perfect example to underline this new approach in the late '30s, **FIGURE 4**.



FIGURE 4: The Opera Theatre "Puccini" designed by Armando Bernabiti (1900-1970). Photo by the author.

These initiatives had a lasting impact, as highlighted by scholars like Nicholas Doumanis and Vassilis Colonas, who emphasize the enduring influence of Italian architecture and urban planning on the region. From an historical perspective, Doumanis' work (1997) focuses on the cultural and social transformations of the Mediterranean under Italian colonial rule. In his analysis of the Dodecanese, Doumanis explores the interactions between Italian authorities and the local population, highlighting the complexities of colonial policies that aimed to assimilate and modernize while preserving a degree of local identity. He examines how infrastructure development, architectural projects, and urban planning by the Italian administration reshaped Rhodes and its neighboring islands. His research often emphasizes the dual legacy of these projects: fostering modernization while imposing Italian cultural and political dominance. Doumanis also investigates the impact of Italian policies on communal life, particularly how Greek, Turkish, and Jewish populations navigated their identities under Fascist rule. His broader historical perspective situates Rhodes as a case study of Mediterranean colonialism, where architectural and cultural interventions became tools of governance and imperial identity formation, taking distances from the previous multi-ethnic and multi confessional Ottoman world.

Colonas' studies (2002) investigates deeply into the architectural and urban planning initiatives undertaken by the Italian administration in Rhodes and the broader Dodecanese. He analyzes the strategic efforts of the Italian regime to integrate modernist principles with the islands' unique historical and cultural landscapes. Colonas highlights key projects, such as the restoration of medieval monuments, the construction of public buildings, and the development of new settlements, which served dual purposes: preserving historical heritage and asserting Italian cultural superiority.

Colonas' work underscores how Italian architects, influenced by Fascist ideals, sought to create a harmonious blend of traditional and modern elements. For instance, the redesign of Rhodes' town center and the construction of buildings like the *Albergo delle Rose* exemplify this synthesis. He also sheds light on the agrarian colonization policies that led to the creation of new villages, reflecting a systematic approach to rural development and economic integration.

Both scholars recognize the enduring impact of Italian interventions on Rhodes, noting how the architectural and urban changes initiated during this period have shaped the island's identity. They critically examine the paradoxical nature of Italian policies, which simultaneously sought to celebrate local history and impose a foreign cultural framework. Their studies contribute to broader discussions on colonialism, heritage, and the politics of architectural preservation.

Hermes Balducci: A Pioneer in Ottoman Architectural Studies

Hermes Balducci (1904-1938), **FIGURE 5**, was a prominent figure among Italian scholars whose contributions significantly influenced the fields of local culture, heritage preservation, and, particularly, archaeology. However, with the exception of a few relatively recent publications in which his work is mentioned, there are still gaps in the overall evaluation of his figure at a historiographical level (Orlandi 2013); (Michaëlidu, Papi 2019). (Orlandi 2021).



FIGURE 5: Hermes Balducci (1904-1938). Picture courtesy of Balducci family's private collection.

Balducci's work occupies an important place in the study of Ottoman architecture within the Dodecanese Islands. As an Italian engineer, archaeologist, and academic, Hermes Balducci exemplified the integration of scientific rigor with historical preservation during a period when Ottoman contributions were frequently overlooked or marginalized under Italian colonial rule. Born in Fano, Italy, Balducci pursued degrees in chemistry and civil engineering, eventually serving as a professor of Ornament, Applied Geometry, and Survey of Ancient Monuments at the University of Pavia. Although Balducci passed away prematurely at the age of 34, his contributions to architectural documentation and restoration practices left a lasting legacy. His tireless work was highly regarded by his contemporaries, who honored his achievements in commemorative eulogies, including those by Locati (1938) and Molina (1938).

Balducci's academic and professional efforts diverged from the prevailing tendencies of Italian colonial scholarship, which prioritized classical antiquity and medieval Christian heritage while relegating Ottoman architecture to a secondary status. At a time when Ottoman structures were often dismissed as merely picturesque or exotic, Balducci recognized their structural and artistic significance, treating them as integral components of Rhodes' historical identity.

During this period, several renowned Italian archaeologists and scholars actively engaged in the region, with a primary focus on uncovering its historical past. Among them, Amedeo Maiuri (1886-1963) made substantial contributions through his extensive excavations and restoration projects, particularly in Rhodes and other islands, which underscored the historical importance of the area and its connection to Italian heritage. Similarly, Giuseppe Gerola (1877-1938) and Luciano Laurenzi (1902-1966) played critical roles in documenting and restoring the cultural heritage of the Dodecanese, thereby enriching the historical understanding of the islands.

As a member of the Archaeological and Historical Institute in Rhodes (FERT), Balducci collaborated with notable figures such as Giulio Jacopi (1898-after 1959?) and Luigi Morricone (1906-1979) to contribute to a broader understanding of Rhodes' complex architectural history, blending archaeological inquiry with rigorous architectural analysis, finalized to the restoration and the recovery of ancient and medieval structures (Balducci 1931), (Jacopi 1932), (Balducci 1933a-b). His multidisciplinary training in chemistry and civil engineering facilitated a methodical and innovative approach to architectural documentation and restoration as well as archaeology. Between 1930 and 1937, Balducci conducted extensive surveys in Rhodes, Kos and Samos, meticulously documenting ancient Roman, Byzantine, medieval, and – even more interesting – Ottoman structures as well.

Balducci's fascination with the island's architectural heritage and built environment as well as traditions and crafts, shaped by its former Ottoman-Turkish conquerors, was sincere and driven by a curiosity for the "other," distinct from his Western background. Notably, even in his study of Ottoman architecture, he applied his expertise with rigor, achieving remarkable insights into this unique culture. At the time, only a handful of works had been published on the Ottoman presence in the islands, with few contributions from Italian scholars.

Among other studies done by Italian in those years on the Ottoman-Turkish heritage, one notable work examines the conquest of Rhodes by Suleiman the Magnificent in 1522. This study, based on Ottoman literary sources discovered at the Hafız Aga Library in Rhodes, was translated and published by Ettore Rossi in 1927. Additionally, Amedeo Maiuri conducted significant research on the vernacular architecture and artistic productions of Lindos, a village in the southeastern part of Rhodes Island (Maiuri 1924a). However, Maiuri's work primarily focused on the characteristics of the traditional "Greek house," reflecting his broader interest in Hellenic architectural forms rather than considering them as a reflection of the Ottoman influence in the islands. It must be acknowledged that, according to Maiuri, if not in architecture, it is in the minor arts and local craftsmanship that the distinctive characteristics of Islamic art should be sought. Some innovations were introduced in the minor arts, such as carved and worked wood, which, along with embroidery and even majolica, represents one of the most interesting expressions of taste and Folk Art in the Dodecanese (Maiuri 1924b).

Other important Italian contributions include Giulio Jacopi's study of Suleiman's Baths, for which he was assisted by architect Rodolfo Petracco in conducting a complete survey of the complex, including drawings and measurements (Jacopi 1930), **FIGURE 6** (next two pages), and Vitalis Strumza's research on the religious complex (or *tekke*) of Murat Reis (Strumza 1934), both located in Rhodes.

As a matter of fact, Balducci's seminal work, *Architettura Turca in Rodi* (1932), represented a significant achievement for what concerns the Italian studies on Ottoman art and architecture. Drawing inspiration from the works of international scholars such as Edouard Biliotti (1881), Cornelius Gurlitt (1912), and Albert-Louis Gabriel (1921), Balducci frequently cited them in his book as essential references for understanding Ottoman civilization in Rhodes. Likewise, he relied on the research of the Genoese diplomat Antonio Baratta on Constantinople (1831) to gain deeper insight into the Ottoman built environment and its architectural masterpieces in Istanbul.



FIGURE 6: The Suleiman Bath in Rhodes. (From: Giulio Jacopi (1898-1959).
"Il Bagno di Solimano." *Dedalo*, Anno IX, vol. I, 1930-31).

The preface of *Architettura Turca in Rodi* by G. Jacopi provides insight into the motivations behind the creation of the book. One of Balducci's primary concerns was to advance studies in a field where Italian scholarship had lagged behind that of other foreign nations with a long-standing interest in the Orient. Additionally, Jacopi highlights the enduring influence of the Ottoman Empire, whose architectural legacy remained prominent in the Dodecanese islands for at least four hundred years. From the cover picture and very first pages of his book, Balducci captures the allure of the 'Orient' and the splendor of the 'Ottoman landscape' in Rhodes, **FIGURE 7**, ultimately portraying it in a poetic and evocative style:

"To those arriving from the sea, Rhodes appears with the low, golden line of its walls, like a hermetic jewel whose sturdy chest hints at the value within. From that concealed assembly of buildings, which outwardly maintains a rugged and menacing silhouette, only the minarets rise into the blue sky, competing with the occasional palm tree – like gigantic stone stalks projecting from the domed mass of the mosque into the boundless azure. As symbols and expressions of a religion, a race, and a world so different from our own, they nonetheless complete, in a marvelous harmony of line and color, the vision of the city rising from the sea, upon which another closed spirit – warlike and monastic – has left its indelible marks" (Balducci 1932, 10).

Balducci's *Architettura Turca in Rodi* is divided into five chapters: 1) an historical background, contextualizing the Ottoman architecture within the broader history of Rhodes; 2) the urban morphology and the public buildings, in which he examines military and civil structures, including market spaces, mosques, and public baths; 3) a specific chapter introducing and exploring religious and funeral Muslim Architecture, i.e. analyzing mosques, tombs, and prayer halls; 4) another chapter related to structural and decorative features, in which Balducci investigated materials, techniques, and aesthetic elements such as tilework and woodcraft; 5) the conclusions, offering insights into the architectural integration of Ottoman and local influences. His documentation was enriched by a profound knowledge of material properties and construction techniques, which guided his restoration proposals or intents. The publication was further enhanced by numerous drawings, sketches, and photographs, all meticulously created by him, reflecting a rigorous and dedicated approach to his work.

Balducci's main analysis examines the influence of Ottoman settlements on the pre-existing medieval urban fabric, highlighting how numerous noble medieval residences and offices were repurposed into Turkish homes by the newcomers. According to his studies, the old town was divided into two distinct quarters, roughly separated by the road linking the Castellania to Porta Coschino. On one side, closer to the Collachio, lay the Turkish quarter, while the Jewish quarter was situated on the opposite side. By analyzing the urban texture and the dwellings, he also proposes categorizing Turkish houses into two distinct types: those constructed directly along the public road and those designed to face inward, centered around a private, enclosed garden.

Beside the dwellings and the vernacular architecture, the monumental stone buildings left by the Ottomans were largely analyzed by Balducci, especially for what concerns mosques, masjids, and funeral structures, like mausoleums and tombstones.

Among the other collective typologies identified in Rhodes, Balducci lists: the hospital, the soup kitchen, the schools, the library, the baths and the fountains, leaving out however almost all those constructions of the late Ottoman period, perhaps not seeing them – in his standpoint – 'Turkish' enough to be considered as original and too hybridized with Western architectural models, like the Fethi Pasha Clock Tower or some administrative Neoclassical buildings such as the Şer'iye Court.

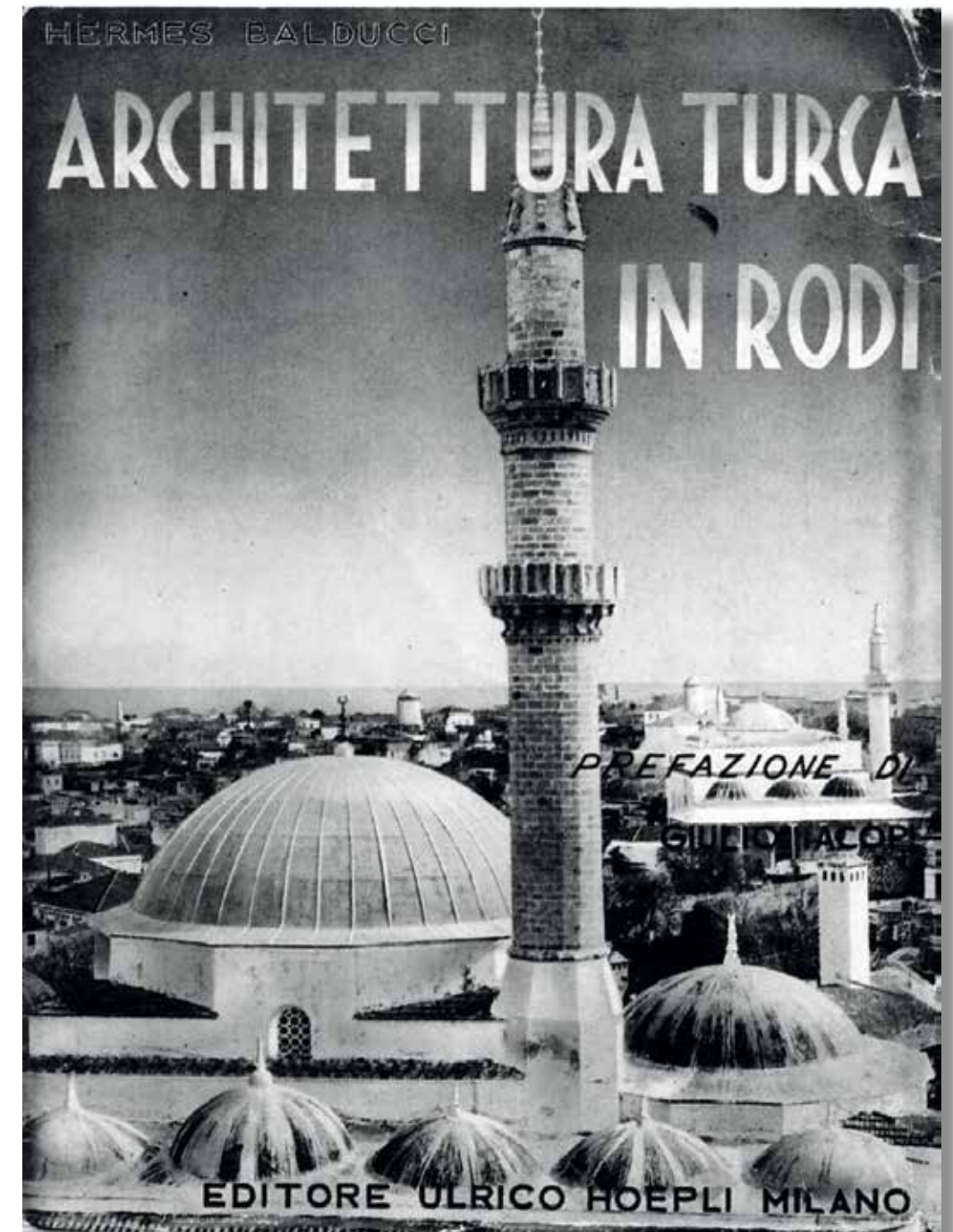


FIGURE 7: The cover of *Architettura Turca in Rodi* by Hermes Balducci (Author's private collection).

Indeed, when viewed through a contemporary lens, the architectural and artistic features related to the second half of the 19th century Ottoman's architecture vividly embody the essence of the Levantine world, within the Ottoman culture. This cultural and aesthetic synthesis reflects the unique ability of the Ottoman Empire to blend and harmonize elements from diverse traditions – Byzantine, Islamic, Mediterranean, and European – into a cohesive and distinctive identity. Such amalgamation not only highlights the Empire's multi-ethnic and multi-religious character but also underscores its role as a cultural bridge between East and West. This is particularly evident in the period following the *Tanzimat* reforms of 1839, which aimed to modernize the Empire while preserving its rich, pluralistic heritage. Thus, these structures in Rhodes stand as enduring symbols of a Levantine world where diversity and integration were celebrated, offering a glimpse into the cosmopolitan spirit that defined the Ottoman Empire at its height.

Balducci identifies nine mosques within the town of Rhodes: Sciadrevan (or *Şadırvan*, the Mosque of the Fountain), Ali Hilmi Pasha, Murad Reis, Aga, Hamza Bey, Ibrahim Pasha, Regep Pasha, Sultan Mustafa, and Suleiman, one of the most imponent and elegant buildings in the old town, **FIGURE 8**.



FIGURE 8: The Mosque of Suleiman in Rhodes. Photo by the author.

To these are added several mosques converted from older buildings and those of more modest size, such as: Abdul Gelil, Alelnak, Bab Mestüd, Bedestân, Borazani Ali Baba, Cizmegî, Demirli Dolaplı, Enderûn or Kanduri, İlk Mihrab, Jenigieli, Kadi, Kahn Zadè, Kavakli, Khurmaly, Pial-ed-Din, Sadri Celebî, Sikinti, Takyegî, and Uday. Within the walled town of Rhodes in 1932, the Ibrahim Pasha Mosque was the only mosque still in operation and used by the Muslim population. However, Balducci also describes the other mosques, attempting to trace their origins where possible:

“The Sciadrevan Mosque, or the Mosque of the Fountain, located near the bazaar street, occupies the upper floor of a building and replaced a much older mosque at the end of the 19th century, which was destroyed by fire. Its location may correspond to that of the former Church of St. Sebastian. The Ali Hilmi Pasha Mosque stands outside the city walls. Also outside the walls is the Murad Reis Mosque, surrounded by a cemetery that borders the road leading from the Government Palace to the Albergo delle Rose. Upon entering, one finds a cobblestone courtyard, typical of Rhodes... At the far left stands the mosque with its minaret, from which the muezzin calls the faithful to prayer... The temple is inaccurately referred to as the Murad Reis Mosque, as its true name is the Mosque of Ebû-Bechir Pasha, named after its founder, who built it in 1046” (Balducci 1932).

Alongside mosques and masjids, there are also mausoleums (*türbe*), tombstones, and cemeteries, which Balducci regarded as masterpieces of Muslim funerary art. A notable example is the 17th-century Murad Reis Mosque, situated outside the walled town at Sand Cape (*Kum Burnu*). The mosque is surrounded by a cemetery immersed in the greenery and distinguished by the presence of numerous tombs of prominent figures, including the circular *türbe* that houses the tomb of Murad Reis, the admiral who served under Suleiman during the siege of Rhodes in the 16th century or the one for Gazi Memi Pasha, who had great service in the Ottoman navy in the Mediterranean, passed away in 1620, **FIGURE 9**.

Among other various types of buildings and structures clearly tied to Ottoman culture and Turkish-Muslim tradition, baths (*hamam*) and fountains (*çeşme*) hold a significant place. Balducci found these public structures particularly fascinating to study. Indeed, the Turks in Rhodes undertook numerous public works aimed at benefiting the population, primarily to improve sanitation and to properly adhere to the principles of Islam. In this context, baths, alongside mosques, stand out as quintessential symbols of their rule. The Turkish bath thus became a distinctive architectural feature in Rhodes, though its origins may draw inspiration from earlier Roman models. Three main baths were constructed in the town of Rhodes, with only two being entirely new constructions, the Old Bath, unfortunately lost and the Suleiman's Bath, also known as the Yeni or Çifte Hamam, dated 1558, **FIGURE 10** (next page). The bath on the Street of the Knights, however, was partially adapted from pre-existing medieval structures, as Balducci pointed out:

“The Turkish Baths of Rhodes are three: one bath in the Via dei Cavalieri; the Eski Hamam or Old Bath, adjacent to the Market Street, and the New Bath, İeni Hamam, or Mustafa's or Suleiman's Bath. The only one for which a partial reuse of pre-existing structures can be assumed is the Bath in the Street of the Knights. Obviously, only the walls could be reused as partitions for the dressing room, while everything else was reworked” (Balducci 1932, 37-56).

Another type of construction that strongly reflects Turkish sentiment and contributes to the hygiene and decorum of the city is the public fountains. Balducci categorizes them based on their placement: isolated fountains, such as those for ablutions paired with mosques or those in squares, and fountains integrated into walls, often along the town's fortifications. According to him, the latter, in particular, exhibit a high artistic character and one of the best example analyzed by him is the one in Piazza dell'Armeria (*Tersane çeşmesi*), a small gem nestled near the sea walls, close to what was once the Ottoman shipyard, now Symi Square, **FIGURE 11** (next page).

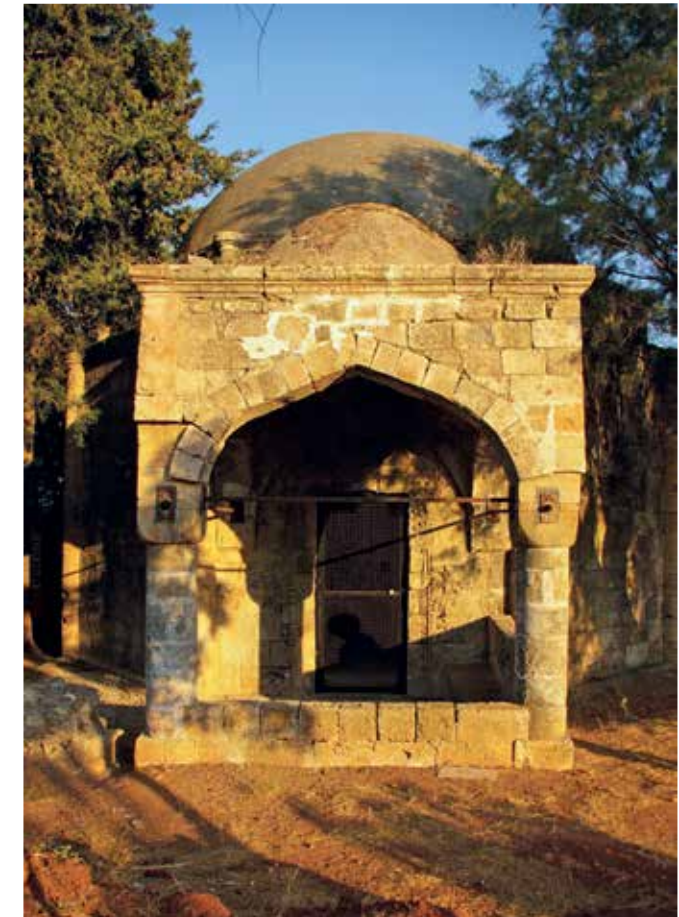


FIGURE 9: The mausoleum of Gazi Memi Pasha. Photo by the author.



FIGURE 10: The Suleiman Bath. Photo by the author.



FIGURE 11: The Fountain in Symi Square. Photo by the author.

Among other public buildings, Balducci described the library of Hafız Ahmed Ağa, located near the Mosque of Suleiman: “[It] consists of two domed halls interconnected by doors and windows. The first hall is used for reading, while the second houses approximately 800 manuscripts and books. In the outer courtyard, there are several *oda* (small rooms) designated for readers of the Quran.” (Balducci 1932,66)

Overall, the book was acknowledged by Italians (Rossi 1933), and achieved significant success, especially in Türkiye, where it was translated and published just over ten years later by the scholar Celalettin Rodoslu under the title *Rodos’ta Türk Mimarlığı* (1945). In the decades that followed, this translation of Balducci’s work laid the foundation for other Turkish scholars to explore and document the Ottoman architectural legacy preserved in what are now the Greek Islands (Çelikkol 1992, Konuk 2008).

Balducci’s documentation extended to articles in Italian academic journals, where he explored residential architecture and adaptive reuse practices within the Ottoman context. For instance, his article, published in *Ticinum*, provides a detailed analysis of a noble Turkish house in Rhodes, owned by the Alajali Ascîa bint Mehemed Mustafâ Agâ family (Balducci 1933c).

The above mentioned Turkish house is described as a representative example of post-1522 Turkish architecture, reflecting the domestic life of the Ottoman era, which was characterized by a clear separation between public spaces (*selamlık*) and private quarters (*haremlık*). Balducci examines its spatial organization: the ground floor features a veranda and storage rooms, while the first floor includes residential rooms, a second veranda, and a small bath equipped with a sophisticated heating system. Particularly noteworthy is a window in the *haremlık*, allowing women to discreetly observe the *selamlık* veranda without being seen.

The author highlights the house’s simplicity and functional layout, as well as its austere aesthetic, influenced by the Turkish nomadic tradition. The description of the house was meticulously integrated with detailed plans and a few sketches. Interestingly, a perspective drawing of the house attempts to present the structure in a distinctly ‘rationalist’ style, as though Balducci wanted to establish a connection between the traditional vernacular architecture and the emerging Italian architectural influences on the island, FIGURE 12.



FIGURE 12: Perspective view of the Turkish house (From Balducci, (1933c). “Casa turca in Rodi”, *Ticinum*, 8, p. 3.)

Balducci emphasizes the importance of documenting such buildings due to their inherent fragility and the continuous transformations they undergo over time, and overall, he criticizes the state of abandonment and the urgent need for restoration of Turkish architecture in Rhodes but acknowledges the efforts of the Italian Governorate in restoring certain buildings, such as the Ethnographic Museum or the of the mansion (*konak*) of Hasan Pasha into the headquarter of the Italian electric company SIER (Società Industrie Elettriche Rodi). Unfortunately, the latter, after the Italian domination was slowly abandoned and it is still in very poor conditions, waiting to be brought back to its splendour, **FIGURE 13**.

In other way, these contributions meticulously reported in Balducci's monography on the Ottoman heritage in Rhodes are particularly valuable as many of the structures he studied have since been lost or neglected, making his records indispensable to contemporary researchers and conservationists.



FIGURE 13: The Hasan Pasha mansion. Photo by the author.

Conclusion

The Italian occupation of the Dodecanese Islands represents a complex chapter in Mediterranean history, marked by cultural exchanges, architectural innovation, and colonial ambition. While architects like Florestano Di Fausto and Pietro Lombardi introduced new styles that blended local and Italian influences, scholars like Hermes Balducci played a pivotal role in interpreting the region's Ottoman heritage.

Balducci's work serves as a valuable historical record, highlighting the need for further research into the Ottoman architectural legacy in the Dodecanese. This case study underscores the importance of examining colonial histories through a balanced and multifaceted lens, acknowledging both their contributions and their contradictions. As pointed out by Lucia Orlandi about the role of Balducci as an archaeologist and a scholar:

“Despite this framework, and beyond the historical-political assessments that may arise from it, Balducci's studies on the Dodecanese (as well as those conducted in Pavia) reveal a genuine scientific interest that transcends mere rhetoric and unfolds in an encyclopedic manner: from construction techniques to architectural forms and the functional organization of spaces, from artistic and epigraphic culture to archival sources. All these aspects portray a scholar who was both curious and meticulous, capable of uniquely combining historical synthesis with an analytical approach – rigorous and technical – in the study of monuments.” (Orlandi 2021, 18)

Although Balducci operated within the ideological framework of Italian colonialism, his work reflected a genuine recognition of the cultural and historical value of Ottoman architecture. Today, some of Balducci's archival materials – sketches, drawings, photographs, and field notes – are preserved at the Italian Archaeological School of Athens (SAIA), where they continue to contribute to both academic research and ongoing restoration efforts.

The critical reception and contemporary significance of Balducci's work have been relevant and consistent; while his conclusions occasionally reflect the biases of his era, his meticulous records remain invaluable for reconstructing the architectural history of the Dodecanese Islands. His studies offer a counter-narrative to the colonial tendency to marginalize Ottoman contributions, highlighting the complexity and richness of Rhodes' architectural heritage. Through his research, Hermes Balducci demonstrated that architecture is far more than a collection of buildings. It is a historical narrative, a dialogue between conquerors and the conquered, a tangible expression of cultural identities meeting and transforming. As Balducci wrote: “Domes and minarets leave an indelible mark on the city of Rhodes, reminding us that every architectural conquest is a dialogue between past and present.” (Balducci 1932).

The studies conducted at the time, even by respected and rigorous scholars such as Balducci, reveal however a bias that reflects a tendency to assert a certain cultural and artistic superiority – something that is now evident to contemporary scholars. This attitude was not devoid of ideological influences; in the Italian context, for example, it was strongly pushed by fascist propaganda, which sought to justify Italy's dominant role in the Mediterranean by constructing a supposed superiority of Italian civilization over other traditions.

However, these prejudices did not disappear with the end of that historical period but continued to shape both academic and popular narratives, leading to simplifications that have persisted over time. A significant example is the tendency to mix and confuse the terms “Turkish” and “Ottoman,” using them interchangeably when, in reality, they refer to specific historical, cultural, and ethnic realities. While this equivalence was often accepted uncritically in the past, today's academic debate leans toward a more nuanced and conscious analysis, aiming to delineate more precisely – not only politically but also ethnically and culturally – the boundaries within which the various identities of the Ottoman world developed.

This critical evolution goes beyond a mere terminological revision; it is part of a broader reassessment of the past, where the goal is not only to recognize the errors of past perspectives but also to build a more balanced and inclusive understanding of historical interactions between civilizations.

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