



An Almost-Forgotten Piece of Marine Architecture in Italian East Africa: The Cape Guardafui Lighthouse and the Fascist Reception of Pharos

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Abstract

An almost-forgotten piece of Italian fascist architecture still stands in Somalia at the easternmost point of the Horn of Africa. This is a lighthouse in the shape of *fascio littorio*, built in 1930. During this period, fascist architecture boomed across Italy and its style influenced and reached the colonies from Libya to the Italian East Africa, as a medium to develop thalassocratic ambitions and to challenge competitors. This paper offers an original view on the real purpose of this controversial marine structure, by exploring its fascist use of Classical elements.

Keywords Cape Guardafui · Somalia · Italian East Africa · Lighthouse · Fascist architecture

Introduction

The coastal environment of the Horn of Africa, the easternmost border of the African continent, consists of wide shores, sandy beaches, rocky promontories, deep waters, strong winds and the near absence of permanent superstructures made of concrete, stones and brick materials. With the Italian occupation of Eritrea and Somalia, long before the Ethiopian military campaign, this marine landscape, characterised by wide open spaces and very few temporary structures, favored the creation of imagery of conquest, not only of lands and shores but also of the water spaces.¹ In this paper, I examine the architectural

¹ Italian East Africa was an Italian colony in the Horn of Africa, which was established in 1936 by incorporating Italian Somalia, Italian Eritrea and the Ethiopian Empire. Among these, Italian Somalia and its territories were initially acquired in the 1880s by Italy, then in 1936 became part of Italian East Africa as the Somalia Governorate. Similarly, Italy purchased Assab via the Rubattino Shipping Company in 1869, then it went under government control in 1882, until the occupation of Massawa in 1885, and the final foundation of the Colony of Eritrea in 1890. With the second Italo-Ethiopian War in 1935–1936, Italy conquered the Ethiopian Empire. In 1936 the Italian colony in the Horn of Africa was named Italian East Africa and divided into six governorates. During WWII, Italian East Africa was occupied by British forces

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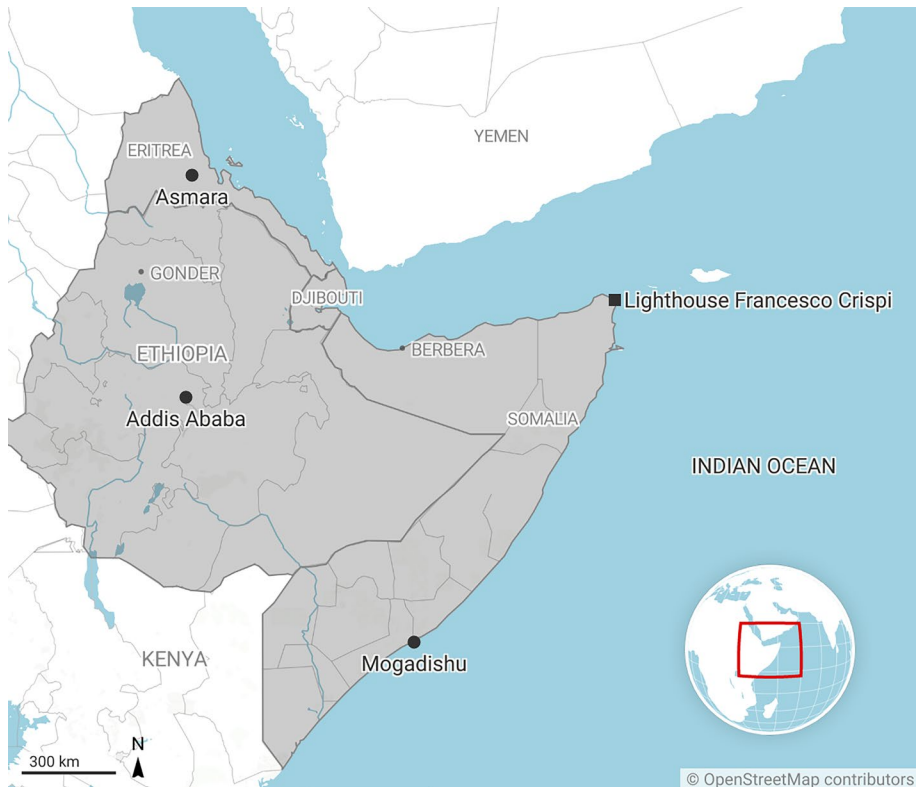


Fig. 1 Map of the Horn of Africa region. “Francesco Crispi” Lighthouse, Cape Guardafui, Somalia (11.8273 N; 51.2702 E) (map by F. Ugolini)

and political message of the *pharos* through a unique case study from the fascist period (1922–1943), a monumental lighthouse originally conceived in 1904 to be the only beacon along the shore of the Horn of Africa, and then rebuilt between 1924 and 1930. While fascist architecture has been analysed mainly from social, political, and historical viewpoints, I focus on the fascist reception of a maritime superstructure—the lighthouse—from Classical antiquity by shifting the analysis to themes of symbolism and identity in Italian East Africa. I explore the shape and purpose of the lighthouse and examine its aesthetic, architecture and style, which were affected by Alexandrian and Roman models as well as by the concept of *romanitas*. I provide conclusions on the perception and reception of Classical patterns in the fascist architecture in a colonial context, such as the Italian Somalia, which hosted several underrated and unexplored pieces of evidence and monuments, e.g. *Albergo Croce del Sud*, *Arco Principe di Piemonte* and *Palazzo delle Poste* in Mogadishu, and provided material for the development of discussions on this topic within the broad Horn of Africa region. (Fig. 1).

Footnote 1 (continued)

in late 1941, and after the war its constitutive parts were administered by Italian and British administrations, before becoming independent in the 1960s. See Calchi Novati 2011; Brioni and Gulema 2017.

One of Mussolini's speeches presents a vivid obsession with control of the waters from the Italian peninsula to the Horn of Africa. This speech took place on 10 June 1940, when Mussolini declared war on France and the British Empire. He concluded this speech, which was given at *Palazzo Venezia* in Rome, by stating that the word “conquer” was winging over and enflaming hearths from the Alps to the Indian Ocean (Knoles and Snyder 1951, 830–1). A few decades previously, the westernmost shores of the Indian Ocean, and more specifically those around the Horn of Africa, had become another *sponda* of Italy and the bulwark for consolidating the borders of Italian East Africa and its control over the waters beyond the Mediterranean (De Felice 1988, 189–95; Atkinson 2005, 15–26).

Apart from the geopolitical implications of this colonial campaign, these words on the inflammation of Italian hearths in war had much deeper roots. Such roots can be found in the regime's desire to dominate the waters and to become a thalassocracy ruling over the Mediterranean and beyond, as well as to compete with major naval superpowers, such as the British Empire and the United States of America (Tamburini 2005, 41–95). In 1926, at the dawn of the fascist regime, Mussolini had given a one-hour talk on the topic of “Rome over the sea” (i.e. *Roma Antica sul Mare*)—assuming that the process of developing maritime skills was inevitable and necessary to achieve the status of a developed country with extra-territorial ambitions. Mussolini poses the Punic Wars as a major point in the development of ancient Roman sea power, and the lecture was given in the same year as Mussolini's first visit to Libya (De Ninno 2017). Almost 15 years later, the *Palazzo Venezia* speech culminated in the necessity of launching a military campaign to “break the territorial and military chains that confine us in our sea” (i.e. “us in our sea” referring to the Italians in the Mediterranean) (Genovesi 1942, 3–31, vv. 1–34; Knoles and Snyder 1951, 831). These talks represent a clear engagement with the ancient Roman ideology of *Mare Nostrum*, which had significant currency in fascist colonial discourse (Genovesi 1942, 1–31, vv. 35–291; Tamburini 2005, 41–95). Also, several pieces of maritime architecture from the 1930s scattered across Italy and North and East Africa highlight these strategic plans and, when placed within a thalassocratic dimension, indicate the ambitions of the fascist regime when dealing with seas and waters (on various types of maritime architectures, e.g. *colonie estive, lungomare, strade litoranee*, see Santoianni 2008; Franchilli 2019; Mira and Salustri 2019). Among these, the construction of a lighthouse in the shape of a *fascio* in on the Horn of Africa, which began in 1924 and was completed in 1930, was a clear signal of thalassocratic ambitions and further colonial aspirations. In this regard, Italian East Africa offered the ideal land and water space for training a nation and for the fascist regime to achieve the status of naval power. Thus, Africa, especially East Africa, played a significant role in fascist Italy's naval aspirations. Here, the introduction, in such a vast territory, of the futuristic fascist marine architecture found fertile, albeit isolated, ground with the intersection of elements of Roman legacy.

A Fascist-Colonial Lighthouse in the Horn of Africa

The lighthouse is located at Cape Guardafui at the top of a promontory in the Puntland region. This land-spot forms the geographical apex of the Horn of Africa. The Cape is close to the town Ras Asia, next to the Guardafui channel, facing the archipelago of Socotra in the north of the Somali Sea (Chittick 1979, 273–7). The Cape and its territory have been well known since Classical antiquity. Strabo describes the Elephas Mons, or Cape Elephant, which should correspond to Ras Filux, 45 miles west of Guardafui (Strab.,

16). Cape Guardafui is also mentioned as *Aromata Promontorium* in the *Peryplus Mari Erythraei* from the first century AD onwards, which refers to this land-spot together with other settlements in the Somali littoral (Casson 1989, 11–34, 271–8). Greeks defined this as an emporium and seaport of the Horn of Africa, more specifically a “promontory of the spices” because of the notable production of resins and herbs in this area.

Aromata was frequented by merchants who sailed from Egyptian ports to reach the Somali coast and the six ports from Zeyla to Damo, before navigating the open sea towards India (Chittick 1979, 273–7). Ptolemy reports in his *Geography* the story of Diogenes, a merchant who, returning from India, was taken by northern winds to the settlement of *Aromata*, after 25 days of navigation (Lennart Berggren and Jones 2002, 68–76). Ptolemy also refers, citing Marinus of Tyre, to a merchant named Theophilos who sailed from Rhapta to *Aromata* in 20 days. Ptolemy cited traders who were aware of the distance of *Aromata* from Arabia Felix coasts, reinforcing the fact that it may have served as a trans-shipment port for sailors coming from India (Casson 1989, 115). The Cape is also briefly mentioned as the “lands of aromatics” in the lost fourth century inscription known as *Monumentum Adu-litanum*, whose text is known through the *Cosmas Indicopleustes* (Wolska-Conus 1968, 372–8).

During the Middle Ages, the Cape was named “Guardafui” by seafarers who adopted the “lingua franca” to say “look and escape”, which was a reference to the threat of piracy and the risks of sailing around the Cape. From the early 19th to the early twentieth century, the Cape was controlled by the British authority, which ruled over the Puntland region. At the very end of the nineteenth century, the British government gave part of this region to Italy, which established the Italian Somalia (Alpozzi 2015, 25–7, 58–9). Beginning in 1899, the Italian authority conducted surveys to plan the construction of a lighthouse which had to serve as a seamark for the sailors of the main maritime powers of the period. The project came to light in the early 1920s, more specifically in 1924 when a preliminary simple metal signaling tower, named “Francesco Crispi”, was built and inaugurated (Fig. 2).² During this period, the lighthouse area suffered several attacks from large-scale local insurgency. Thus, for multifaceted reasons, including a sea-landmark that attests to the dominion over insurgents, the fascist government built a massive, strong and monumental stone lighthouse that was inaugurated in 1930 and was reinforced in the shape of the *fascio littorio* (Alpozzi 2015, 137–41) (Fig. 3).

The lighthouse adhered to the canons of the 1930s’ aesthetic, when fascist architecture and art boomed across the Italian peninsula, and crossed the borders as a means of neo-imperial propaganda and colonial rhetoric (Falasca-Zamponi 1997, 15–88; Nicoloso 2011, 6–32; Marcello 2018, 325–69; Nicoloso 2018, 295–340). The propaganda nomenclature of the Ministry of Popular Culture (*Ministero della Cultura Popolare*, abbreviated to *MinCulPop*) here exploited extensively the textual and visual tradition of the *pharos* in Classical antiquity. The monumental lighthouse at Cape Guardafui was designed by the architect Vincenzo Gregoretti, an active figure in Italian Somalia who also constructed the theatre and cathedral of Mogadishu, as well as the triumphal arch dedicated to Prince Umberto (Alpozzi 2015, 138–44). The effort involved in reinforcing and rebuilding the *pharos* by making it in the shape of a *fascio littorio*, a tall cylindrical tower on a trapezoidal base, is described by authors of that

² The naming of the lighthouse after Crispi is relevant to Italy’s colonial history of East Africa. Between 1887 and 1891, Francesco Crispi was the Prime Minister of Italy at the time of the defeat in the Battle of Adwa (1891), so naming such highly symbolic monument after him in East Africa indicates a sort of historical vindication of Crispi’s colonial agenda. See Alpozzi 2015.



Fig. 2 “Francesco Crispi” Lighthouse in 1924 (courtesy A. Alpozzi)

period. Among these, Augusta Perricone Violà emphatically refers to the lighthouse by stating that Italy wanted to reassess the grand symbol of the Guardafui *pharos* and to ascribe to it a much higher meaning. She also reports that, as a symbol of Italy’s past grandeur and marvelous rebirth, the bright light shed by the beacon illuminates the route for sailors to avoid risks and obstacles. She emphasises the silent, tenacious *ascari* and Italian soldiers who extracted enormous blocks from local stone quarries, and then worked hard to model the stone and give it the shape of a *fascio*. Finally, Perricone Violà pompously declares that, from the night of 3 May 1930, the light of the *fascio littorio* illuminated the routes of the world (Perricone Violà 1935). She also gives details of the opening ceremony of the lighthouse at Guardafui. This is



Fig. 3 “Francesco Crispi” Lighthouse in 1930 (courtesy A. Alpozzi)

also confirmed by an inscription placed at the gateway of the tower basement, which reports the lettering “1930 year VIII”. Another account, namely “Rapporto di Mogadiscio”, by Francesco Formigoni, refers to the 1930 fascio-shaped *pharos* as the “real and sole Guardafui”, which replaced its predecessor and ceased the lucrative business of wreckers. Then, in more recent years, Tiziano Terzani noted in his diary on 7 October 1993 that he was close to passing Cape Guardafui, which is the Cape in the Horn of Africa with the lighthouse shaped like a *fascio* (Alpozzi 2015, 141).

Aspects of *Romanitas* in the Guardafui Lighthouse

The Cape Guardafui Lighthouse exploited features and construction models that recalled the monumentality of the Classical era, which represents a model for 1930s' fascist Italy art and architecture.³ Major lighthouses from the Hellenistic and Imperial periods were noted for their majestic dimensions and scopes, such as those at Alexandria and Portus. On the features of the Alexandrian lighthouse built in the early third century BC, ancient literary sources report the existence of this wonder constructed to provide help and guide ships into the port at night. Strabo mentioned the dedication of its architect Sostratus to the “Saviour Gods”, who planned the structure. Similarly, Pliny the Elder and Lucian referred to Sostratus as the architect who built the *pharos*. Later, in 1154 Al-Idrisi, a geographer, mentions the construction and size of the beacon (Reddé 1972, 845–72; Giardina 2010, 59–63). The structure had foundations in stone, a furnace on its top, and was built primarily with blocks of limestone and granite. It consisted of different shapes, squared on its base, octagonal in the middle, and cylindrical on its top. The lighthouse was commissioned by Ptolemy I Soter, and completed thereafter by Ptolemy II Philadelphus. The structure was c. 103–118 m (m) tall, with a tower that would have been c. 97 m high, on a square base of 30 × 30 m, which, according to Flavius Josephus, was visible from a distance of c. 55 km (McKenzie 2011, 38–42).

Regarding the Roman lighthouse of Portus, built in the first century AD, Suetonius reports that the Emperor Claudius “built upon piles a very lofty tower, in imitation of the *pharos* at Alexandria, on which lights were burnt to direct mariners in the night” (Suet., *Claud.*, 20; Keay et al. 2005; Keay and Paroli 2011). Again, Suetonius, as well as Cassius Dio and Herodianus, report that the lighthouse was built on top of an island located between the two moles at the entrance of Claudius' harbour. They also argued that the foundation was formed by the wrecked ship that Caligula used to transport an obelisk from Egypt to Rome (Suet., *Claud.*, 20). The stones, which consolidated the foundation, were brought by large ships, and piled up facing the harbour, with the pile gradually rising to a kind of rampart. When describing a similar structure promoted by Trajan at Centumcellae, Pliny the Younger stated that the lighthouse “saves countless lives by providing a haven on this long stretch of harbourless coast” (Plin. the Younger, *Ep.*, 6.31). Regarding Claudius' lighthouse, very little is known about its dimensions, but Suetonius' evocative passage suggests that it was very similar in size to the one at Alexandria (Morelli et al. 2011, 47–65).

Similarly, several signaling towers from Classical antiquity and later periods often imitated the lighthouse at Alexandria (Trethewey 2018). Replica and later models from Dover, Leptis Magna, Misenum and Ravenna were built during the Imperial period to serve multifaceted purposes (Quilici 2017, 45–6). Among these, the lighthouse also stands as a symbol of the Imperial power, authority and religion. For instance, the Capri Lighthouse at Villa Iovis, where Tiberius resided after leaving his role as *princeps*, was also constructed on the highest point of the island, and especially in this case the tower served as a specific symbol of the emperor and of his presence in the area (Tuck 2008, 325–6). Roman

³ The use of the fasces relates to an ‘official’ fascist architectural style, which was the *stile littorio*. Similarly, this style is visible in the architecture of the façade of the *Palazzo delle Esposizioni* in Rome during the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (28th October 1932–28th October 1934). See Piacentini 1937, 307–32; Kallis 2018, 45–79; Cianfarani 2020: 10–54.

lighthouses illuminated waters, but also marked the Imperial presence, hegemony and control over waters and harbours, by mirroring the earlier Alexandrine pattern (Suet., *Claud.*, 20.3).

By comparison, the Francesco Crispi Lighthouse built by Gregoretti was c. 19 m high, placed over a rocky promontory, on a square base of c. 6.20×6.20 m, and developed over four levels, with a light signal that extended from the top of the beacon for c. 25 nautical miles. The tower was built on a foundation of white stones, and was shaped like a *fascio littorio*. The beacon spread light by launching three intermittent red signals every 15 s. Thanks to the stratagem of building this gigantic signaling tower over a rocky anchorage, the structure reached an elevation of c. 244 m; so, it was much higher than many previous examples from Classical antiquity. While the idea to build a monumental *pharos* in partnership with other naval superpowers, such as the British Empire and France, was soon aborted the plan to restore the previous small beacon and build a gigantic lighthouse in imitation of the wonders of the past became the medium for pursuing the desired scopes (Fig. 4).

Although the newly conceived Guardafui beacon was not as monumental in size as its Classical predecessors, this marine construction was a supergiant of the sea thanks to the natural elevation of its homonymous promontory. The architecture of the *fascio littorio* beacon was partially successful in achieving the constructors' goal of replicating Greco-Roman models. First, because the lighthouse contained evidence of *romanitas*, which is also visible in several public and infrastructural buildings of that time (Fleming 2006, 127–37; Fuller 2007, 87–106; Olariu 2012, 351–75). In fact, similar patterns that replicate the massive use of large stones and *opus quadratum* technique occur in the foundations and first level of the Somalia lighthouse. Second, the architectural programme of the Guardafui Lighthouse plays on different levels, including the imitation of mega structures such as the *pharos* of Alexandria and that of Portus, making a parallel between the authority of the Hellenistic and Imperial rulers and that of fascism in colonial and provincial contexts, along with the idea that a modern reception of an ancient pattern also shapes an identity of belonging to Roman ancestry and, finally, the legacy that this relationship between *romanitas* and fascism creates a legacy that can be seen as a message for eternity.

The monumental superstructure at the peak of eastern Africa is a pretentious warning of the “moral and intellectual superiority of the regime” over the world, as well as an exhibition of the roots that link Italians with their ancient predecessors.⁴ The *pharos* carries clear geopolitical implications, signaling the limit reached by fascist Italy in conquering and establishing its supremacy on a further *sponda*, enabling the Italian visionary idea of the time of competing with naval giants of the twentieth century. At the same time, the Guardafui Lighthouse, which predates 1935's invasion of Ethiopia, represents a limit to Italian imperial expansion in East Africa, thus stressing the fascists' needs for establishing full control of both the Horn of Africa and the key marine routes to the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

The idea of *romanitas* would have been clearly delivered through the only maritime superstructure constructed in the easternmost point of the African continent, working as a marker (and warning) of the presence of fascist Italy there (Nelis 2007, 391–415). What can be seen at Guardafui is a colonial exhibition of a monumental building whose significance

⁴ The Guardafui Lighthouse also expresses the tension between antiquity and modernity in fascist architectural aesthetic. See Stone 1998, 25–44; Nelis 2011; Arthurs 2012, 9–28; Kallis 2018, 45–50; Painter 2018, 683–97.

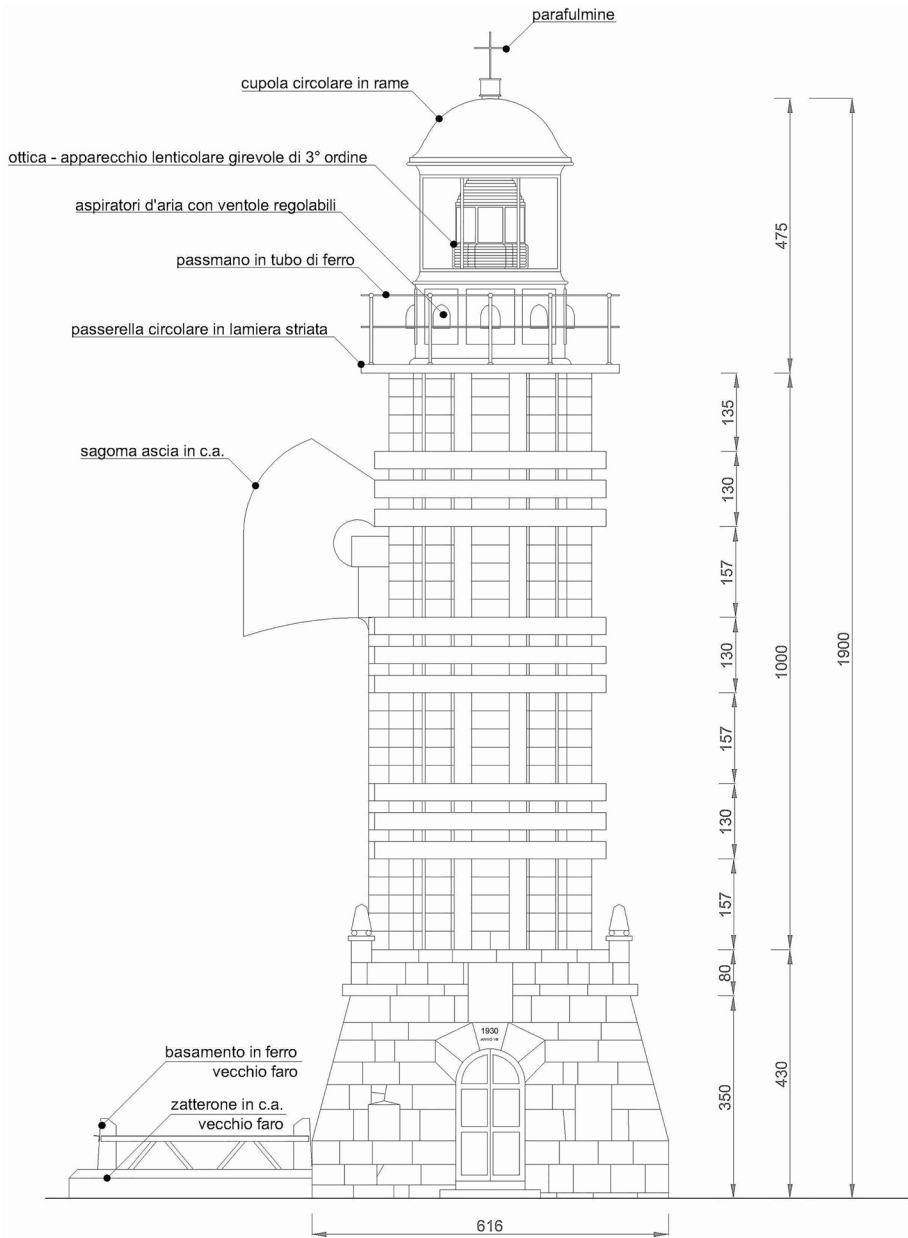


Fig. 4 Sketch of the “Francesco Crispi” Lighthouse (courtesy A. Alpozzi)

is both propagandistic and triumphal. Mussolini and his architects intentionally adopted the polysemic symbol of the *pharos* to communicate a message of triumph together with imperialistic and colonial standards. The fascist appropriation of the *pharos* situates Mussolini and the Savoia family as the proper successors of the Roman *princeps*, thus legitimising the presence of Italy in Africa as ensuring peace and stability in the region. The

controversial messages into which the fascist government assimilated the *pharos* from the Classical antiquity were an appropriation that marked the growth of the authority of Mussolini and his *gerarchi*. The presence of the lighthouse indicates an attempt to ambitiously expand the idea of conquest well beyond and outside the canonical borders of the Italian peninsula and Libya (Agbamu 2019, 157–77). Therefore, the rebuilding at Guardafui is a solid indicator of the ambitions and scopes of the future of the regime. Within a few years, the Italian Somalia would become one of the first *sponde* to fall during WWII, and the active *pharos* in the Horn of Africa would cease to illuminate the Indian waters with the aim to *fascistizzare*, interrupting the imperial programme to become a naval superpower.

The Symbolic Significance of a Fascist Lighthouse in Italian East Africa

The Guardafui beacon contains further multiple symbolic aspects that go far beyond the idea that fascist Italy desired to conquer a *posto al sole*, including maritime aesthetic, colonialism and propaganda (Figs. 5, 6, 7, 8). The Guardafui Lighthouse does not signal the presence of a harbour, but it is reminiscent of a seamark, as often seen in Classical antiquity (Tuck 2008, 325–6). The construction of the lighthouse, at such a high point of the promontory, provides evidence of the association not only with the *pharos* at Alexandria, which illuminates the waters in the Levant, but also with the mainland Horn of Africa, adjacent to the Indian Ocean—the seas in which fascist Italy aimed to conquer a space. The lighthouse stresses the presence of fascist government in Africa; therefore, from a propagandistic viewpoint the beacon was closely connected with the Italian expansion in the region, favored by the later Ethiopian campaign. When looking at the list of monuments promoted by the fascist regime to celebrate and emphasise its role in colonial contexts, the lighthouse was considered a necessary structure, as if it were a medium through which to



Fig. 5 “Francesco Crispi” Lighthouse in 2012 (photo by A. Alpozzi)



Fig. 6 Aerial view of the “Francesco Crispi” Lighthouse in 2012 (photo by A. Alpozzi)



Fig. 7 Aerial view from NW of the “Francesco Crispi” Lighthouse in 2012 (photo by A. Alpozzi)

conquer the vital space over the seas (Santojanni 2008, 13–45). While the public intervention in the creation of these buildings for the fascists was a fact, clearly visible in hundreds



Fig. 8 “Francesco Crispi” Lighthouse in 2012. Details of the *fascio littorio* shape (photo by A. Alpozzi)

of public and monumental buildings, it is also remarkable to see that their architecture in the 1930s reflected the view of the world on the part of the Italian authority. The signaling tower in the Horn of Africa is a public building that arguably belongs to the category of propagandistic architecture, conceived as Somalia was the point at which fascist colonial adventurism entered the Horn of Africa (Anderson 2020, 166–78).

The Guardafui Lighthouse represented the seamark of a maritime route that connected fascist Italy to Italian East Africa. The Guardafui *pharos* also stresses the advancement of the Italian imperial ambitions and the path followed by Mussolini in pursuing Roman roots. This structure had an aesthetic and propagandistic value, rather than a logistical one, as it had poor seafaring and maritime purposes. Very few accounts of the period describe its functions, and this is perhaps due to the fact that such a sea marker lacked a real harbour space, and was therefore meaningless from this viewpoint, although it would have conveyed specific narratives. In fact, the presence of the *fascio littorio* at the top of the lighthouse—the symbol of the regime’s imperial ambitions and endeavours—sought to represent an allegory of Rome’s brightness that showed the way to the world, as also indicated in the expression: “African promontory that the love of the Italians shaped like an altar of the fatherland” (Alpozzi 2015, 111–5). The lighthouse was an exhibition of strength, and the *fascio littorio* embodied the power of the Italian nation, and its light over the easternmost spot of Africa. By mirroring several symbolic pieces of architecture of Somalia, this fascist marine structure became a symbol of occupation and a memento for the local population of the Italian presence over there, as also suggested by the cathedral of Mogadishu, the arch of Prince Umberto and the palace of the Governor, as well as the *Colonna Littoria* (Santojanni 2008, 169; Polezzi 2012, 336–59; Alpozzi 2015, 143–4). The symbol of the *fascio* indirectly mirrors the Jupiter Soter on top of the Alexandrian *pharos*, or the *genius* of the harbour at Ostia, also placed at the pinnacle of the lighthouse, thus acting as a protector for those sailing over the threatening water of the Cape, and implicitly remembering

that, thanks to the fascist lighthouse, navigation was now safe and secure. The role of protector for sailors is here pursued by the fascist government that wanted to take on this role to emphasise the superiority of the regime. Sailors passing by the shore of Guardafui recognised the *fascio littorio* rather than paying attention to the light on top of the beacon, thus acknowledging the presence of fascist Italy in those lands and, more importantly, seas.

Apart from the *fascio littorio* shape, the Guardafui Lighthouse lacks substantial decoration in comparison to the Classical examples, but in this absence resided the sense of an aesthetic of eternity in which an idea of strength is given by the stones and the heavy construction technique of the *opus quadratum*, which often in 1930s' public buildings represented a way of imitating Roman architectural patterns (Gentile 2007; Lamers and Reitz-Joosse 2016). The solid foundations on top of the promontory are themselves symbolic of the ability of the constructors to build a high tower modelled on the Alexandrian example in a challenging coastal environment; thus, in the fascist rhetoric it was a way of domesticating liminal spaces.

The fascist regime presented the marine architecture of the Guardafui Lighthouse and its symbolic value as part of the heritage of Classical patterns in Somalia, seeking to develop and bequeath a sense of monumentality previously conveyed by Emperors Augustus, Tiberius and Claudius, where the beacon was not only a signaling tower but also a metaphor for the identity and ideology of the principate (Tuck 2008, 325–30). This symbol is conceived to mark Italy's presence in the Horn of Africa and announce the Italian desire for control in the region, as well as future imperial aspirations and the regime's thalassocratic vision (Ertola 2017, 70–8). Thus, the lighthouse and its *fascio* symbolic shape do not imply an immediate celebration of triumph, but rather anticipate imminent military achievements, such as the campaign in Ethiopia that began a few years later. This military and naval advancement in the region represents a pretext for creating a narrative of maritime hegemony. On their journey from Italy in the 1930s, the Italian troops involved in the Ethiopian campaign passed by the Horn of Africa and viewed such majestic architecture that expressed the pressing need for colonial expansion and recalled the ideological narrative of their Roman imperial ancestry (Marcello 2011, 223–7). The lighthouse holds features of Classical superstructures, such as building techniques and *opus quadratum*, which provide a direct view of Mussolini's expansion plan achieved also through the careful monumentalisation of the promontory. The *pharos* faces the ocean and watches over the entrance to the region via the Red Sea or the Indian Ocean, where Italy had ambitions and geopolitical interests.⁵ Also, it was clear to the viewers of this monument that the Horn of Africa was included in the Italian colonial plan as the *terminus* for Italy's expansion and achievement of the status of maritime superpower.

Conclusions

There is wide exploitation of the concept of *pharos*, its meaning and the legacy of this vertical structure through the centuries (on this topic, see Reddè 1972; Giardina 2012; Ugolini 2020). The construction of the Guardafui Lighthouse demonstrates the influence of Roman architecture, in the form of a marine structure that conveys a new ideological message

⁵ The Suez Canal allowed Italy to consider the Red Sea an extension of the Mediterranean, which supports even further the association of the Guardafui Lighthouse with Italian claims over *Mare Nostrum*. See Trento 2012, 273–307.

about fascist government and its aspiration to rule well beyond the national borders. The fascist regime's plan to monumentalise newly conquered territories conveyed claims of control and hegemony over the water and coastal spaces, through the assimilation and creative translation of Classical architectural models (Malvano 1988, 65–87). The presence of squared stones and the *fascio littorio* decoration, with its colonial message, were adopted as a medium through which fascists could claim their Roman ancestry, justifying their imperial maritime policy in the Mediterranean and beyond. The lighthouse aimed to anticipate the next step of the fascist regime in the process of becoming a major thalassocratic entity, as the architectures and their narratives, which were previously exclusive to Rome, were exported to the eastern frontier of the African continent. The limits imposed by lack of construction materials and infrastructures in the Horn of Africa acted as an ideological impulse to emphasise the endeavors for the construction of “eternal” buildings and justified the action of the fascist regime to occupy and extensively dominate lands and waters (McLaren 2021, 53).

In the Horn of Africa, fascism wanted to perpetuate its Roman legacy by borrowing architectural examples from Classical antiquity which were exploited to occupy a space intended for posterity. The fascist regime pretentiously sought to associate the Guardafui Lighthouse with Classical models to anticipate and justify imminent conquests in the region by Mussolini, thus indicating that this structure was constructed as part of a program to control extra-Mediterranean routes and make fascist Italy a naval superpower, capable of competing with the British Empire, France and the United States (De Felice 1988, 189–95). What can be noticed at Guardafui is the fact that the exhibition of such a monumental building aimed to be an eternal seamark for the future of the Italian Empire. Within a decade, fascist Italy would have lost its *posteo al sole*, after a short phase of domination of the Ethiopian and Somali regions, abandoning its dreams of glory with a disastrous and tragic war, and leaving a lighthouse in the shape of *fascio littorio* as a marker of its failure.

The Guardafui Lighthouse in the marine environment of the Italian Somalia denoted the fascists' obsession with replicating in an “innovative” manner the ancient architecture. This lighthouse was built in the earliest phase of the architectural program of the fascist regime – when monumentality and *romanitas* were often confused in a miscellanea of propagandistic and theatrical attempts – and the signaling tower tried to challenge the almost eternal Hellenistic-Roman lighthouses (Berezin 1997, 245–52). Since evidence of Classical lighthouses are provided only by textual and visual sources, the fascist *pharos* at Guardafui, which is still visible on top of the promontory, accidentally becomes a timeless and still meaningful testimony (Tucci 2020, 336–7). After WWII, and especially at the end of the Italian provisional government in Italian East Africa in the 1950s, the Guardafui Lighthouse was never replaced by, or restored as, a modern beacon. With its unmistakable Classical features, i.e. the fasces, this lighthouse was a mixture of aesthetic and propagandistic effects and, in the 1930s, it incorporated all the elements of fascist Italy's maritime ambitions.

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