

# ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTION OF THE CENTENARY OF ALGERIA 1930 BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNISM

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## ABSTRACT

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In 1930, France commemorated the centenary of its occupation of Algeria, marking a significant historical event. On this occasion, prominent public edifices were erected, mainly in the departmental capitals: Algiers, Oran, and Constantine. These structures were accompanied by notable urban enhancements. The aim of this article is to explore the distinctive attributes of these constructions, emphasising the architectural and aesthetic idioms used in their creation. The methodology employed in this study involves a comprehensive examination of archival materials sourced from France and Algeria, as well as the digital library BNF Gallica. By delving into these resources, we aim to uncover the underlying reasons and influences that guided the design and execution of these architectural ventures. The public buildings erected during this period indicate the colonial power's deliberate political agenda, serving as a testament to their strategy of showcasing a modernized Algeria during the centenary celebration. Our analysis sheds light on the intricate interplay between classical and contemporary architectural influences that shaped the Algerian architectural landscape during the centenary celebration. By scrutinising the foremost architectural accomplishments, we can discern how architects and policies converged to define the architectural ethos of this transformative era. A major aspect that emerges from our research is the fusion of traditional design elements with a simplified and streamlined aesthetic, exemplifying the core essence of these structures. The amalgamation of stylised traditional forms with the elegance of minimalist lines and shapes epitomises the principal characteristics of this architectural production.

**Keywords:** Centenary of Algeria; 1930; history; architecture; modernism; tradition

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 1930, France commemorated the centenary of Algeria's occupation, both in Paris and Algeria. This celebration conjured images of imperial triumph, which can be considered in the sense of Nora (1984) and Michonneau (1995, p. 1290) as unique; it did not hold only a symbolic dimension but also a strategic component within the political sphere. The intention behind this action was to underscore the historical record of possession. It served as an opportunity for the colonial power to propagate its notion of *civilising work*, while painting a favourable portrait of *pioneer colonialism* (Raison, 1968, p. 6). In additional, it

highlighted the colonial power's endeavours to enforce its vision of colonisation and solidify its long-term presence.

Algeria's centenary celebration included a political character that asserts triumphalism (Oulebsir, 2004, p. 261). It is an aestheticisation of the French way of existence (Bouayed, 2006, p. 168). To commemorate the French victory in space and time, the political affirmation is converted into an architectural affirmation by looking for symbolism or political implications in various architectural styles (Zevi, 1959, pp. 92–93).

A committee is created to prepare the program for the celebration. It is composed of a *High Council* presided by the Governor-General as a deliberative body and a *General Commission* as an executive body. Governor General Violette appointed M. Brunel, Director of Agriculture, Commerce, and Colonisation at the General Government, as General Commissioner of the Centenary. After his resignation, the new Governor General Pierre Bordes replaced him with Gustave Mercier, son of Ernest Mercier, lawyer, and Vice President of Constantine's Archaeological Society.

The General Commissioner, with the approval of the High Council, set up eighteen technical commissions as advisory bodies. They aim to enlighten the Commissar General, by bringing to carry the experience and knowledge of their members (*Archives of the General Government of Algeria*, 1928a).

During six months of commemorative celebrations, tourists are invited to appreciate the work accomplished by France by discovering new cultural institutions, guided tours, hotels, artistic and archaeological treasures, fairs, and various events. According to Mercier (1931, p. 11), the Commissioner-General, the entire budget should not be spent on short-lived events or propaganda. Still, an important part of it should be reserved for lasting creations and permanent improvements that would enrich the colony. These sustainable creations, in the speech of André Tardieu, Minister of the Interior, gather all the elements of the history of Algeria (Weiss, 1930, p. 83).

On this occasion, many cities were endowed with grand public edifices. By assessing the architectural and aesthetic language employed within the scope of this commemorative event, we aspire to delve into the distinctive characteristics of the architecture erected for this purpose. These buildings showcase captivating architectural and aesthetic elements that hold significance both in symbolism and artistic expression. Their architectural design is influenced by the concurrent national and international political milieu of the 1920s and 1930s, which was in its early stages of evolution. Moreover, these creations are imbued with Algeria intrinsic cultural and historical facets.

Colonial architecture in Algeria represents a fertile field for research. Previous research has focused on Algeria early scientific explorations by Amable Ravoisé and Edmonde Dutheoit (Oulebsir, 1994). The "Service des Bâtiments Civils" took charge of administration and colonisation, constructing public buildings for the colonists and bringing neoclassical architecture from the metropolis to Algeria (Burth-Levetto, 1994).

New approaches to colonial urban planning emerged from the Second Empire to the interwar period (Saidouni, 1995). Algeria's architectural and urban evolution during colonisation was influenced by the military institution, which transformed and re-appropriated the pre-colonial city (Picard, 1994). Municipal authorities, for their part, established the various legal resources to organise the Algerian cities (Belabed-Sahraoui, 2011). Architects and sponsors also adopted a variety of styles (Aïche, 2010; Piaton et al., 2016). The trainings of architects and their profiles reflect the development of colonial society and the position of architects is closely linked to the political context (Piaton & Chebahi, 2017, p. 47). In all phases of colonisation, colonial architecture and urban planning enabled the possession of the colonised territory and control the indigenous population (Çelik, 1997; Wright, 1991). The approach used, whether centred on domination or assimilation, mirrored the intricate interplay of political and military forces within the colonial power. This was manifested through various mechanisms, such as the establishment of regroupment camps, the formulation of urban development strategies, and the conception of new towns. These responses were formulated in direct reaction to the revolutionary wars of the period, as highlighted by Henni (2019).

Many colonial studies provide a deep understanding of the complex dynamics of colonialism and its legacy. In other colonies, between the 1920s and 1930s, Italian architects in Libya and Ethiopia worked to solve several problems of European colonialism concerning the legitimacy of colonial architecture and its relationship to the local population. Architecture was crucial in gaining status in comparison to other European nations due to its control, regulation, planning and power issues (Fuller, 1988, p. 455).

The colonial experiences of other empires mutually shape each other, as illustrated by Morocco's adoption of the protectorate system, inspired by the British model. In turn, Moroccan legislation and regulations were adopted by the French during their mandate over Syria and Lebanon, also, by the Italians in Libya, as demonstrated by Mia Fuller. It was a kind of a network that interconnected these territories, especially considering the significant influence exerted by other poles. Looking at the case of imitation of the

principle of Neo-Moorish architecture in the Italian case (Fuller, 2007, p. 7) reveals an intriguing intersection of architectural influence and cultural expression between empires. The influence of the United States was considerable. Besides, cities in North Africa were influenced by architectural forms from Brazil and Scandinavia which led to transformations in expressions and living styles, even the modernisation efforts of colonial powers also influenced their own territories. Investments, both material and cultural, made in colonies often influenced developments back in the home country. For instance, urban planning principles derived from Morocco's experience and the concept of urban density measurement in Algiers were integrated and adopted in France (Cohen, 2006, pp. 362–363).

The discourse surrounding French colonial architecture in Algeria is rooted in the notion of civilising influence and sustainability. This discourse signifies the aspiration to construct a strong and enduring architectural legacy for forthcoming generations, aligning with the peak of colonial expansion. This rhetoric bears resemblance to the rationalisations offered by other colonial powers, such as Italy (Fuller, 1988, p. 457), wherein colonialism is depicted as bringing forth critical infrastructure, ports, residential structures, and more to previously neglected and barren lands.

Architecture stemming from the 1930 centenary holds a limited body of scholarly exploration. This study endeavours to discern and accentuate this particular facet of colonial architecture. By doing so, it makes a significant contribution to our comprehension of the enduring impact of the French colonial heritage. Within the scope of our investigation, our purpose is to unravel the architectural vocabulary employed during the centenary celebration and uncover the intentions harboured by the architects of this era by examining landmark buildings constructed in Algiers, Oran, and Constantine.

Based on a dichotomous vision, the architects of the centenary raised the question of *tradition* and *modernity* through their projects. On one hand, they were influenced by a modernist impulse by taking inspiration from the modern movement of time. On the other hand, they were controversial by the continuity with the architectural past of Algeria and influenced by the context of the celebration.

First, we focus on the political context of the celebration and trace the contents of the centenary program. Then, we highlight the architecture produced during this time, the influence of colonial power on architects and the architectural quality of centenary buildings, and how these reflect the political, socioeconomic and cultural dynamics of colonial power. This helps us to understand how important is modernism to the centenary.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Our methodology was based on both historical and analytical research on archival documents. We have searched the archives of the General Government relating to the Centenary of Algeria 1930 at the Centre d'archives nationales d'outre-mer in Aix-en-Provence, whose call numbers are GGA 64 S (from 1 to 75). We relied on the archives found in Algeria and the digital archives of the BNF Gallica library. The analysis of graphic and written archival documents has enabled us to reconstruct the centenary's architectural production process.

The comparison of the archival documents, Gustave Mercier's overview (1931), and the collections of the magazine *Les Chantiers nord-africains*, founded in Algiers in 1928, permitted us to dissect and analyse the architectural and aesthetic particularities. The results of this research were obtained after a precise investigation, research, sorting, chronological classification, and the combination of information from different documents.

## 3. POLITICAL CONTEXT AND MEANING OF THE CELEBRATION OF THE CENTENARY OF ALGERIA 1930

This commemoration is imbued with political messages, particularly through the architecture of antique-style buildings and the presence of commemorative monuments. According to Henry (2014), the centenary was intended to showcase the metropolis' power in the face of internal and external threats, affirming the identity of Europeans in Algeria while erasing and appropriating that of native Muslims. The centenary played a role in rewriting history and downplaying the significance of the Islamic period in Algeria, often referred to as the dark centuries. An anonymous columnist wrote in 1830:

Algiers is a somber city, with a harsh landscape, populated by barbarians, soldiers, and citadels. All of these were enveloped by desolation. (Megglé, 1931, p. 17) (Original text is in French, translated by the authors.)

In line with Oulebsir's (2004) perspective, the centenary, as a political celebration, symbolised colonial dominance in Algeria. Its ideological display embodied both *the triumphalism of French colonial rule* and *Algerian malaise* (Henry, 2014), aiming to portray the realisation of France's civilising mission.

Loyal natives, who acknowledged the civilising role of colonial power, enjoyed social, economic, and political privileges, including stable employment, French education, and positions of authority. Advocates such as Belkacem Benthami and Smail Mami have been rewarded for their propaganda efforts (Matheron, 2022, p. 6).

In the 1930s, France found itself amidst a broad wave of confrontation between communists, socialists, and the extreme right, leading to the establishment of the Popular Front in 1936. This political coalition marked an attempt at a collective response to the economic and social challenges of the time, emphasising social reforms and strengthening labour's rights. The reverberations of this political and economic crisis in France were indeed felt in Algeria. The French Communist Party (PCF) supported emancipation movements in Algeria and incited constant agitation against the oppression of colonised peoples. In March 1929, with the centenary's approach, Algerian Federation of the PCF declared that the party must take all necessary measures to ensure that the centenary is perceived by the indigenous population not as a festive celebration, but rather as a reason to organise and fight against imperialism, marking the end of the longstanding agreement to restore Algeria to its rightful owners (Matheron, 2022, pp. 11–14). Algerian immigrant workers in France rallied around the Étoile Nord-africaine (ENA), communist party in 1926, standing against French imperialism and centenary festivities (Hadj Ali Abdelkader and Messali El Hadj). As early as 1928, the communists worked to establish an 'anticentenary', a 'revolutionary centenary'. The prohibition and dissolution of (ENA) led by Messali Hadj, the only evidently nationalist group, provided them with a significant opportunity to present themselves as sole defenders of the country's independence. Communists were the only ones attempting organised resistance (Jansen, 2014, p. 66).

The participation of Algerians during the First World War enabled them to ask for more elected representatives at the Chamber of Deputies in Paris. Before the centenary, natives were increasingly naturalised to the detriment of their Muslim status. Even with naturalisation, discrimination persisted (Meynier, 2014), while Algeria's Jewish population enjoyed privileged treatment thanks to the 1870 Crémieux decree, which granted them French citizenship.

The nationalist militants, such as Ferhat Abbas, Ahmad Tawfiq al-Madanî, and Ibn Badis, staunchly defended Algerian and Muslim identity (Matheron, 2022, p. 9). The period between 1930 and 1933, characterised as a phase of latency (Carlier, 1995, as cited in Matheron, 2022, p. 4), witnessed a surge in radical protests in response to *political provocations*, which shattered the illusions of colonial power. The Algerian political movement, marked by antagonism, further intensified with the establishment of the Association des Savants Musulmans Algériens in 1931 and the Parti Communiste Algérien in 1936.

In parallel with the centenary celebration, the first international Eucharistic Congress in North Africa took place in Carthage, expressing the certainty of French colonial power about its irreversible foothold in the region (Vermeren, 2016, p. 359). The political provocations of colonial power took the opposite turn for Muslim elites, who saw them as an opportunity to react to Algerian malaise and affirmed militarism. The rejection of the centenary helped the national movement to gain ten years, marking a moment to reset the political cleavages in Algeria and the beginning of Algerian nationalism (Henry, 2014; Jansen, 2014).

The centenary was initially organised during Maurice Viollette's first term (1925–1927) as a symbol of reconciliation and political reform in favour of the native population. However, due to the pressure from Algerian colonial lobby (Henry, 2014), Viollette was replaced by Pierre Bordes in 1927, an advocate of triumphant colonisation.

The centenary commemoration served as a platform to underscore several key aspects, notably the persistent grip of colonial governance and the collaborative efforts between French colonisers and the indigenous population aimed at suppressing the Algerian political movement. Under the veneer of rhetoric and discourse advocating the unity of both communities—the colonists and the colonised—the centenary celebration operated as a strategic tool wielded by the colonial authorities to facilitate the assimilation of the native population. This was achieved through the attribution of institutions related to social welfare and the revitalisation of indigenous arts, effectively camouflaging their deep intentions.

#### 4. BUILDING BEYOND THE SURFACE: A PROGRAM SUMMARISING A CENTURY

The focal point of the centenary program revolves primarily around the pursuit of sustainable and pragmatic accomplishments, strategically addressing evident necessities across diverse domains such as agriculture, culture, art, communication, health, and philanthropy. Furthermore, the initiative is directed at enhancing architectural and urban landscapes through restoration efforts, building expansion, and urban

beautification. The program encompasses a spectrum of temporary festivities and transient celebrations, including the illumination of public edifices and thoroughfares, as well as captivating firework displays.

Architecture is commonly linked to the representation of power through the creation of prestigious monuments and structures, ostentatious consumption of space, use of imposing heights, and use of high-value materials. The marking of space highlights the exceptional attributes of power while relegating the banality of surroundings (Chadoin, 2014, p. 22). From this perspective, the centenary tends to appear inside urban space and its social supports (Oulebsir, 2004).

Heterogeneous constructions have been established (Melia, 1929), encompassing museums, agricultural houses, commemorative monuments, and indigenous institutions. A multitude of operations are executed in the colonised territory, spanning the construction of novel structures, expansion and redevelopment endeavours, and so meticulous restoration initiatives.

**Museums:** Prior to 1930, the inception of museums in Algeria was characterised by the adaptive reuse of existing buildings and historical monuments, as well as the utilisation of temporary spaces. Notable examples include the Museum of Algerian Antiquities in Algiers and the Municipal Museum of Constantine, which was initially situated in the town hall. Museums' architectural evolution in Algeria finds its genesis in the centenary's commemoration.

To demonstrate the interest of the colonial administration in the country's intellectual and artistic development, the General Commissariat has decided to continue building the National Museum of Fine Arts of Algiers, the Mixed Museum of Fine Arts and Archaeology and Natural History in Oran, and Constantine Art Museum (*Archives of the General Government of Algeria*, n.d.-a). This program aims to promote citizens' artistic taste, improve museum institutions, and solve problems related to municipal museums (Mercier, 1931, p. 223). In addition, this cultural celebration is an opportunity to intensify museum action through the purchase of collections, the enlargement and reorganisation of museums, the buildings conversion into museums, and the installation of exhibitions. It is then an occasion to endow Algeria with a favourable structure for the development of the arts (Cazenave, 2001, p. 103).

In 1930, the museum became an instrument of prestige. It participates in the symbolic imperialism of the colonial regime; it is no longer in the service of public education (Saou-Dufrêne & Djenidi 2017, p. 162). It was an instrument of glorification of the colony and artistic re-education (Boutiaux, 2007).

**Houses of Agriculture:** By the end of 1929, 252 cooperative societies were in operation, embodying the principles of collaboration and agricultural mutualism. As noted by Gustave Mercier, the success of bringing together colonists and natives hinged on the establishment of a cohesive framework, necessitating a centralised presence in every administrative division (Algiers, Oran, and Constantine). This imperative led the centenary program to embrace the establishment of three departmental houses of agriculture, a strategic response to farmers' requirement for unity. These houses were equipped with contemporary agricultural analysis laboratories, catering to the imperative of modernising agricultural practices while fostering cohesion within the farming community (Mercier, 1931, p. 210). The agricultural houses remained centres of testing, analysis and, research to improve the quality of agricultural products. They became a place to learn methods of cultivation, the use of agricultural machines, and to know weather forecast. Later, other Algerian cities were equipped with agricultural houses, contributing to the modernisation of this sector and economic prosperity within the provinces, as well as fostering economic ties between the colony and the metropolis. After the 1929–1931 global economic crisis, France focused on importing products from colonies and, intensify economic exchanges.

**Indigenous institutions:** The indigenous population was not swayed by official speeches and triumphant demonstrations (Melia, 1929, p. 43). Municipal, general councillors, official representatives, and members of the assembly of Algerian financial delegations strongly demanded improvements and reforms, they sought concrete improvements to enhance their social, political, and economic standing. This population has suffered from considerable discomfort and inequality. In Bendjeloul's speech, the term 'indigenous affairs' is an expression that the indigenous can no longer accept; the indigenous must be recognised as French (*Délégations financières algériennes / Gouvernement général de l'Algérie*, 1937, p. 1190).

During the conquest of Algeria, we cannot, as has often been the case, present only a plan for assistance, a promise of hygiene, or some economic improvement to the indigenous population [...]. All of this is separate from the celebration of the centenary, a unique event of essentially national significance, which must be accompanied by special reforms of no less national importance. (Melia, 1929, p. 42) (Original text is in French, translated by the authors.)

As demonstrated by Fuller, colonial politics toward natives influenced architecture and urbanism in the colonies, the colonial administration of an indigenous structure covers the native population, and local *Others* were often disproportionately small in the colonial imaginary. French and British administrations

dedicated greater effort to the documenting and categorising local cultures compared to the Italian government (Fuller, 2007, p. 16).

On the occasion of the centenary, the indigenous population reaped the benefits of a limited number of initiatives aimed at upliftment. These initiatives reflect the intention to empower the indigenous population through education, skill development, and social philanthropy measures. To demonstrate the interest attached to the development of professional education among the indigenous populations, indigenous creations are listed in the category called 'indigenous institutions' and 'help economy of the Metropolis' for which a specific budget has been allocated. The Algerian Assemblies, in support of the indigenous worker and artisan, have formulated a comprehensive program aimed at improving the living conditions of indigenous populations. This initiative was motivated by the 1927 commission established by Mr. Governor General Viollette to address the problem of substandard housing. A delegation comprising both European and indigenous elected representatives travelled to Paris to present this program, which merits endorsement of the high administration. The proposed plan involves demolishing unsanitary and unhealthy dwellings and constructing modern, well-ventilated homes in their place (*L'ikdam*, 1931b). The Indigenous Cities Project was initiated during the centenary year. However, the project faced financial and administrative difficulties, which led to a protracted timeline. The project for the city of Beni Messous was especially problematic as it remained in draft form for over two years (*L'ikdam*, 1932).

The question of indigenous habitat gave rise to numerous debates from the 1930s, even if ultimately it remained confined to a few rare projects, and it gave rise to few achievements at that time. The few successful programs went through a long process of implementation. However, whether they remained on paper or whether they emerged from the ground, totally or partially, all the indigenous cities planned in the 1930s show modalities of borrowing or adoption from vernacular culture. (Aïche, 2014, pp. 109–110) (Original text is in French, translated by the authors.)

Throughout the colonial period, there exists a paradox between a policy aimed at improving the living conditions of Algerians on one hand and a discriminatory perception on the other hand, due to their architectural inferiority, the 'indigenous' housing projects are destined to disappear (Boufassa, 2020, p. 3).

In addition, the centenary program aimed to create social assistance edifices such as orphanages, preventoriums, asylums for the elderly, and shelters for the destitute. Simultaneously, the initiative included the establishment of schools to not only create job opportunities but also to support indigenous populations through employment, and revive traditional artistic practices. Examples of these efforts include the creation of traditional weaving centre in Tlemcen, a pottery school in Kabylia, and artisan hubs in the southern territories, and the construction of the House for the Elimination of Begging on the streets of Constantine (*Archives of the General Government of Algeria*, n.d.-a).

The centenary commemoration disappointed the hopes of our population. It was not marked by any really effective measure in favour of the indigenous people, the lanterns extinguished, the standardised speeches finished, we find ourselves facing the reality that results in increasing pauperism and the abandoned indigenous masses. To their fate, outdated agricultural methods, and social dramas always open: usury, unemployment, destruction of livestock, excessive taxation, imperfection of the assistance and hygiene regime, shocking inequality, and so on. (*L'ikdam*, 1931b) (Original text is in French, translated by the authors.)

In many articles published in the indigenous newspaper "*L'ikdam*," there was a strong expression of discontent among the indigenous populations in the Centenary of French Algeria. This anniversary was seen as an opportunity to fully recognise the political rights of Muslim natives and to have representation in the French Parliament. Despite government's promises, expectations were largely unmet. The centenary was marked by moral failure, which stirred unrest among the concerned populations. This disappointment fuelled a growing and assertive indigenous public opinion demanding the same reforms. Although the presentation methods for these demands might be different, the objective remained consistent (*L'ikdam*, 1931a).

**Other works:** The program included the construction of a radio broadcasting station in Algiers, which served colonisation as propaganda. At that time, it represented not only a powerful organ of information but also the most penetrating means of propaganda (*L'Afrique du Nord illustrée*, 1929, p. 12), which will later be used for the intellectual, economic, and social progress of Algeria. There were other achievements, such as the Constantine working house designed by architect Tarabella in a classic style, weather stations in the southern territories, and the Hall of Fine Arts of Pierre Bordes in Algiers. The program included other projects that were pending for budget insufficiency.

Commemorative monuments were erected on the occasion of the centenary in many Algerian cities such as Boufarik, Sidi Ferruche, Dély Ibrahim, Constantine, la Calle, and Ouargla. From a historical and

touristic point of view, the centenary fund subsidised municipal projects in order to recall the memory of political and military men such as the erection of a monument in memory of the governor general of Chanzy, the repair and beautification of the Tirman statue, restoration of the memorial column of Sergeant Blandan in Béni-Méred, and erection of the memorial monument in memory of Captain Lamy (*Archives of the General Government of Algeria*, 1930).

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The ambitious centenary program provided a platform for in-depth reflection on the modernisation of architecture in Algeria. The architects of the centenary, under the guidance of the colonial administration and the Centenary Architecture Commission, played a remarkable role in the architectural production of 1930.

### 5.1 Discovering the architects of the 1930 Centenary

The Architectural Commission of the Centenary took care of the realisation of the architectural projects planned for this festival. It is composed of French architects born in Algeria, France or issued by a grand family of colonists who were very active in Algiers during the 1930s. Most of them are architects of the DPLG, qualified by the General Government, who have completed university studies in a school of architecture recognised by the French government. After the Great War, only architects graduated from National School of Fine Arts in Paris could have a DPLG title; they were renowned and ensured the management of major projects (Voldman, 1995, p. 26), such as Gabriel Darbédéa (Algiers, 1869–Algiers, 1949; student of Rodin), Jacques Guiauchain (Algiers, 1884–Paris, 1965), Charles Montaland (Lyon, 1871–Algiers, 1946; student of Paul Blondel), and Marcel Christofle (Constantine, 1877–Algiers, 1956). In the twenties, DPLG architects took over the monopole of public commissions, most of which were for prestigious state-financed buildings (Piatine & Chebahi, 2017, p. 42).

The commission also included architects of the second plan (non-graduates) who had an engineering background or trained at school of the Fine Arts of Algiers (such as Etienne Guérineau, Georges Garnier, Charles Rosazza (Algiers, 1887–Saissac, 1980), and Ardoine Ramalli (Castegnato (Brescia), 1886–?) (*Archives of the General Government of Algeria*, 1928b).

The French architects were active in the Association of Algiers Department, in which Mr. Darbédéa was president in 1927. They referred to the Code of *Guadet*, which governs the fundamental principles of architect's profession. They asked that the public order is entrusted to professional architects of recognised competencies, and that the role of Rural Engineering and the Provincial Services is limited to the viability of settlement centres and road works (*Les Travaux*, 1927).

The architects of the commission were not allowed to compete in the execution of the centenary projects according to the conditions set by the president of the Commission (*Archives of the General Government of Algeria*, 1928b).

With diverse professional backgrounds and tendencies, they have shared public and private commissions in major Algerian cities, and have even taught at the School of Fine Arts in Algiers. Architect's training has a strong effect on architecture (Volait, 2017). They contributed to giving a distinct character to the buildings of the centenary through their observations formulated from financial, technical, functional, and aesthetic perspectives. Architectural projects are approved only after receiving favourable opinions from the commission of architecture. In addition, the Commissioner General Gustave Mercier could provide reservations to architects in charge of the projects, which are granted to the winner of competitions proclaimed by the General Commissioner or other relevant contractors. It can also be assigned through private contracts bestowed on the president of the Superior Council.

The project of the broadcasting station of Algiers should have a certain artistic character. The house of agriculture of Algiers has the aspect of a factory. It should be improved, and the pavilions of the general exhibition of the centenary in Oran should have a unity of character as well. These were the comments of the Commission architects who expressed their spirit to improve the archduke production of the centenary and created a homogeneous character of the buildings (*Archives of the General Government of Algeria*, 1929a).

Other communal architects collaborated in the architectural production of the centenary in Algerian cities, and architects from Algiers often accompanied them. Paul Simonpieri, architect in Bougie, designed under the auspices of Paul Guion the school Atelier of Weaving in Bougie. Tarabella, architect in Constantine, built the house of the worker in Constantine, Charles Thibaudier architect DPLG in Tlemcen, and Paul Ferrant, architect in Algiers, constructed the school of pottery in Tlemcen.

The international context favourable to the modern movement influenced architectural production in Algeria for a modernist vision, which highlights the Mediterranean character of Algeria. Architects called

'Algerianists' played a significant role in advancing the avant-garde architectural movement (Malverti, 1991, as cited in Aïche et al., 2006).

The architecture between the two wars changed, and the Society of Modern Architects (SAM) was created by Hector Guimard and Frantz Jourdain in 1922, which reacted to certain principles professed by the School of Fine Arts. It refused recopying and overloaded ornamentation, inciting creativity to revive tradition. The architects of SAM society were free to express their technical ways and preferences, and that architecture must be young and alive. Modern architects sought respect for materials, harmony of lines, simplicity of exteriors and ingenuity of plans. They want to have architecture adequate to their uses, their customs and their ideas and to the glorious conquests of contemporary science; they declared war on copying, faking, counterfeiting and decaling (Jourdain, 1930, p. 116).

The architects of (SAM) will influence the architecture in the Metropolis and consequently in the colonies. Some of them will have a great influence on modern architecture in Algeria, particularly August Perret and Marcel Lathuillière. A group of young architects, including Marcel Lathuillière, Albert Seiller, Xavier Salvador, and Léon Claro, presented the city with an initial generation of modern structures. The contemporary architectural movement in Algiers has generated considerable interest. Critics have focused not only on the Neo-Moorish style, the final form of eclectic historicism, but also on the compelling alternatives provided by Le Corbusier's innovative ideas (Chérif, 2017).

The question regarding colonial administration and architects posed through the architectural production of the centenary is whether to showcase a new facet of modern Algeria by departing from previously known architectural styles, demonstrating the embodiment of power through the incorporation of metropolitan shapes, or utilising local elements to serve as a form of peaceful presence while minimising overt confrontation.

## 5.2 Centenary buildings between tradition and modernism

Since 1924, Algerian policy has focused on modernising and developing the country's infrastructures; roads and railroads have been extended, and ports have been modernised (Simon-Nicaise et al., 2012, p. 59). It was in the wake of modernity that the centenary program reflected the futuristic vision (Cazenave, 2001) of colonial administration, which adopted modernism like other colonial empires in the 1930s as a way to signify a change from the first century of French rule. Italy used modernism as a form of design rather than an obvious architectural style (Fuller, 1988, p. 462).

Modernity justifies colonial domination. Colonisation is evoked as a mean of sustaining the natives from poverty and diseases. Modernity is intrinsically European and imperialism carried it out of Europe (Volait, 2017).

The centenary committee's modernist vision was adopted in several architectural creations, such as Algiers Hall of Fine Arts, the Museum of Fine Arts and the House of Agriculture. Even with the emergence of new materials (reinforced concrete), the architecture produced is not detached from its historical context, which presents a bridge between the classicism of metropolitan architecture (Greco-Roman) and the tempting modernism of the thirties. The architects of the centenary were responsible for projecting an image of modernity in collaboration with the colonial administration of Algeria.

Centenary architecture was a compromise between reference to classical tradition and modernism. It is not expressed as a style, but as a certain character that distinguishes it in relation with the choice of materials, ornamentation, choice of site, and so forth.

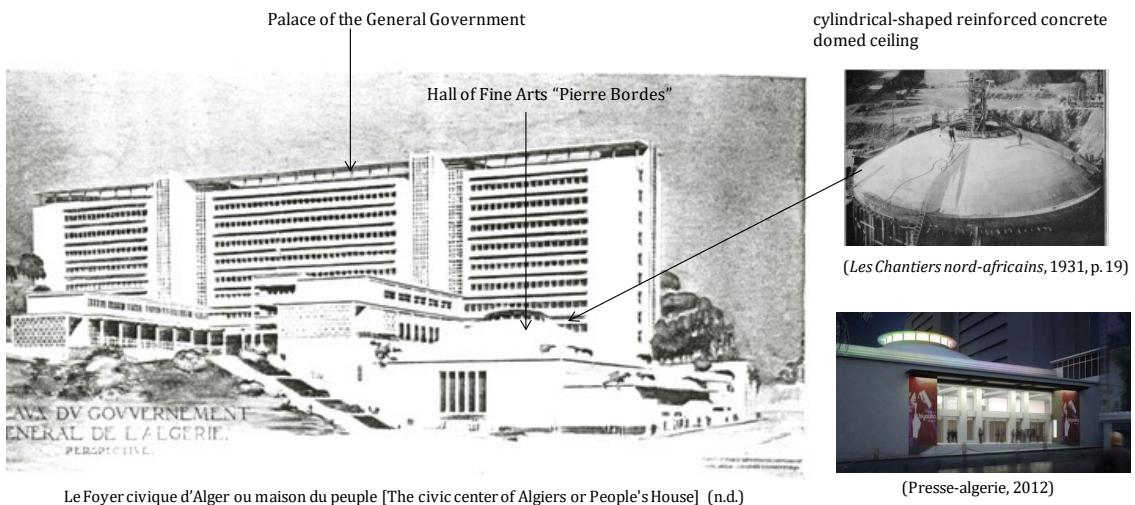
The architectural buildings produced during the centenary of Algeria reflect a wide variety of aspects, both local and modern. Meanwhile, when modernism begins to express itself in the metropolis as in the colonies, we talk about modernism, modern spirit, and international architecture (for example, the building of the exhibition of the Sidot house in Casablanca and the Palace of Justice in Rabat):

The architecture of the whole (the Palace of Justice in Rabat) was influenced by town planning, which required construction of length [...]. The decoration of the facades will be very sober. (*Les Chantiers Nord-Africains*, 1930, p. 73) (Original text is in French, translated by the authors.)

Léon Claro (Oran, 1899–Gien, 1991) played a significant role in the formation of modern movement; he was greatly influenced by Le Corbusier and Perret. He built, in 1936, the civic centre in Art Deco style and he also reproduced, in 1930, the Centenary House in the indigenous style which replicates the traditional house of the Casbah.

Neo-Moorish architecture greatly facilitated the advent of modern architecture. Its whiteness, large bare walls, numerous details, and even the fantasy in its composition gave it a general coloration quite similar to that of modern buildings. The only difference was in the decorative elements; however, these decorative elements have been simplified in recent years. Consequently, without any friction, modern





**Figure 1:** The Hall of Fine Arts of the General Government Pierre Bordes next to the Palace of the General Government in Algiers. It was built by Jacques Guiauchain. Source: interpreted by the authors, 2024

The architect was creative to ensure the proper acoustic functioning of the room. Despite the audacity of form and technique, he managed to ensure the solidity, function, and beauty that he sought. Based on architecture's modern principles, he removed the interior walls and left large spans inside the room (Mercier, 1931). Infrastructure works were entrusted to companies A. Perriere and C. Dumius, C., Paris, and limited company of the old establishments Zublin and C. of Strasbourg. The construction of this structure required the excavation of 41,000 cubic meters of rocky soil. A low rectangular configuration was designed to avoid obstructing the view of government palace's office floors.

The same architect demonstrated his modernist conceptual approach by creating the House of Agriculture in Algiers (Figure 2). The building is a monumental monobloc with a large central hall to ensure lighting and ventilation of the interior offices, with a pyramid-shaped cover formed by successive rectangles placed one on top of the other to crawl the monotony and provide a crystallising effect. The facade has a sober appearance with rational shapes of balconies (*Les Chantiers nord-africains*, 1929, p. 144). The Centenary Architecture Commission invited the architect to develop the decoration of facades. It was a challenge to impose the modernist touch of architecture at a period when questions about modern architecture were in full reflection; however, the architect built a functional, rational, and innovative building.



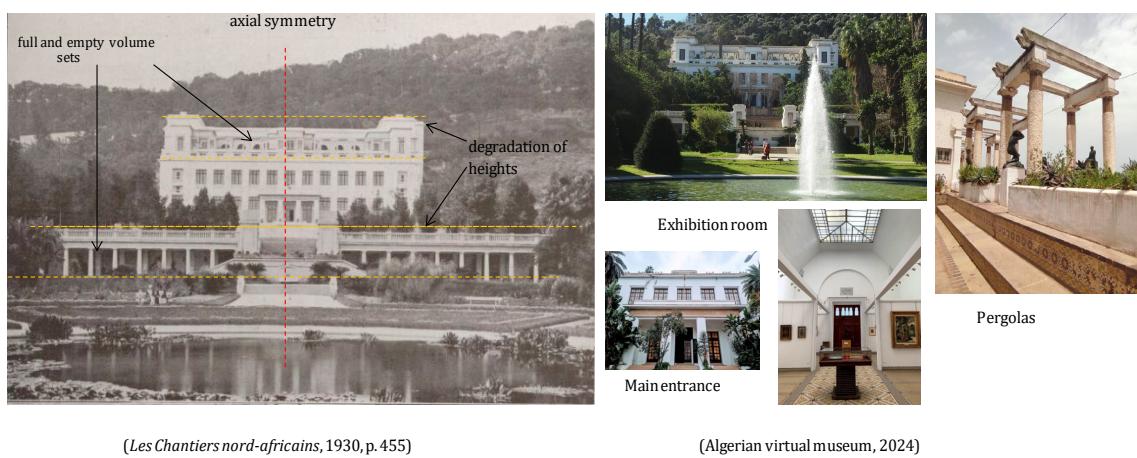
**Figure 2:** The House of Agriculture in Algiers, built by Jacques Guiauchain (*Les Chantiers nord-africains*, 1929, p. 143)

The Centenary Architecture Commission has drawn attention to urban practices associated with the landscape field, with a focus on the conservation of Algerian cities' natural beauty, particularly in Algiers. The commission has emphasised the need to protect the city's gardens and green spaces, which crown the Bay of Algiers, and to integrate landscape design harmoniously into the urban environment. Additionally, the commission sought to balance technical requirements with respect to the site in order to safeguard wooded hillsides from the encroachment of multi-storey buildings. The commission expressed its concerns that

visitors may be shocked and offended by the contrast between the current state of the Bay of Algiers and its historical descriptions, which have often lauded it as one of the world's most beautiful bays. Despite this, the commission recognises the development needs of Algiers conurbation (*Archives of the General Government of Algeria*, n.d.-b).

One of the iconic bindings of the centenary that matches with the local directives of urban policies is the Museum of Fine Arts in Algiers (Figure 3), built by the architect Paul Guion (Guelma, 1881-Boissy-l'Aillerie, 1972), in collaboration with his colleague Régnier. The architectural design of the building is a testament to their profound understanding of both modernist principles and the unique characteristics of the Algiers' landscape. With their extensive experience in projects among them "Le Jardin d'essais d'el Hamma", the resulting structure seamlessly integrates into its surroundings, demonstrating a harmonious blend of nature and contemporary design.

The resultant building is perfectly integrated into its site and is spread over three platforms, with a height difference of 33 m between first and third levels, offering a striking visual representation of architectural prowess and serving to provide attractive panoramic views of the surrounding environment, including the verdant expanse of the garden and the picturesque bay of Algiers. The architects incorporated carefully specific architectural elements that give the building a Mediterranean touch, the inclusion of a pergola crowning the building, use of ceramic tiles, and the integration of terraces and garden reflect the local identity and climate of the city of Algiers (*Les Chantiers nord-africains*, 1930, p. 456). Basically, the Museum of Fine Arts in Algiers stands as an outstanding example of the architectural production of the centenary, it uses modernist principles with a deep understanding of the local landscape, climate, and culture, fuelling debates on architecture in Algeria, where architects see that Mediterranean architecture is more suitable for the Algerian climate and site.



(Les Chantiers nord-africains, 1930, p.455)

(Algerian virtual museum, 2024)

**Figure 3:** The Museum of Fine Arts in Algiers. Source: interpreted by the authors, 2024

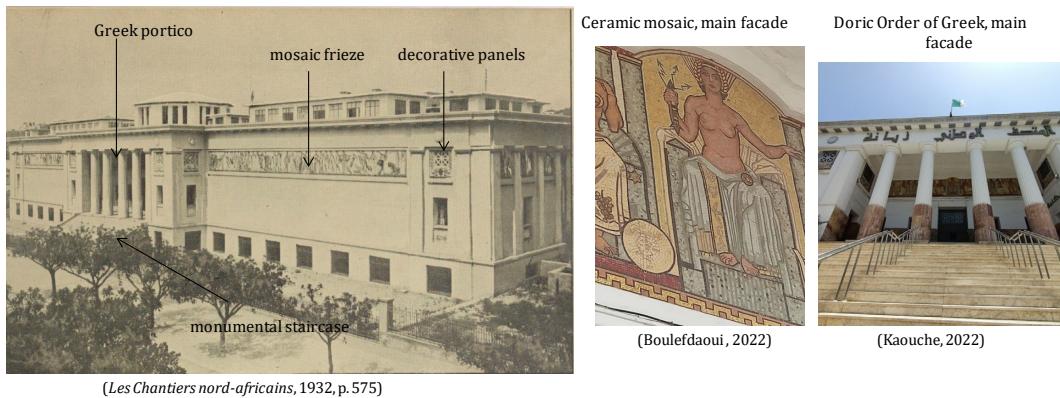
In Oran and Constantine, architectural manifestations of the centenary are conveyed through contemporary and understated structures yet laden with profound symbolism. This significance emanates from the intricate employment of decorative elements that refer to the Metropolis.

French architects have returned to classical forms, much like Italian architects (Fuller, 2007, p. 100). They used the Art Deco style, which sought ancient roots. Many buildings of the centenary use historic modernism to legitimise the presence of colonial power as reflected in the statement below:

In the political dimension of ornamentation, its capacity to stylize a sign laden with references to the reality of power, dignity, function, and social valuation is to be explored. (Bonne et al., 2010, p. 27) (Original text is in French, translated by the authors.)

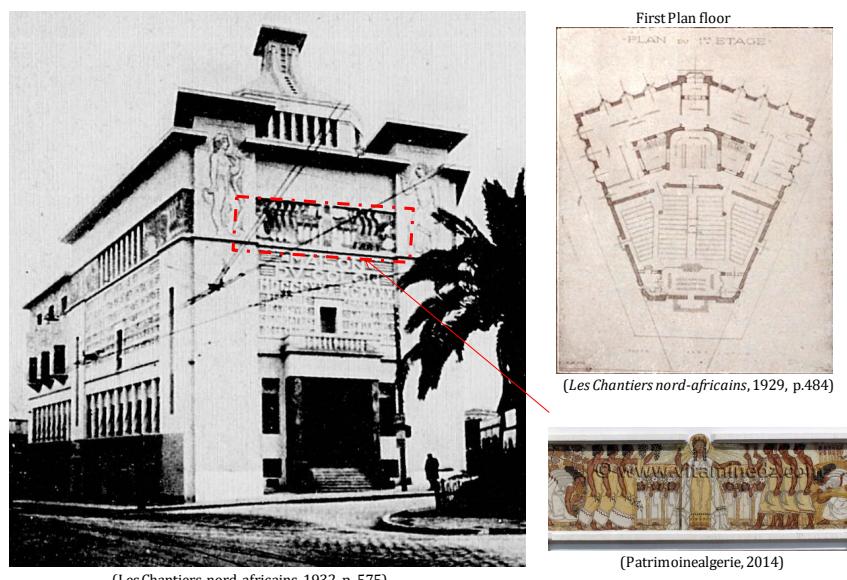
In Oran, Georges Wolff (Saint-Étienne, 1873-Toulon, 1970) built a palace of arts, which included the construction of a museum, a library, a conference hall, and a hall for teaching the arts (*Archives of the General Government of Algeria*, 1928c). The entire project is located on the north side of Boulevard Iéna and is perfectly integrated into the site on a triangular plot with a built surface of more than 3000 m<sup>2</sup> (Figure 4).

The building was presented in Art Deco style by combining Greek elements with a modern style. It is marked by the sobriety of its lines, which are marked with a gigantic mosaic frieze with a length of 75 m. The main facade is marked by a porch, a Greek portico and decorative panels (*Les Chantiers nord-africains*, 1929, p. 89).



**Figure 4:** The Palace of Fine Arts in Oran, built by Georges Wolff. Source: interpreted by the authors, 2024

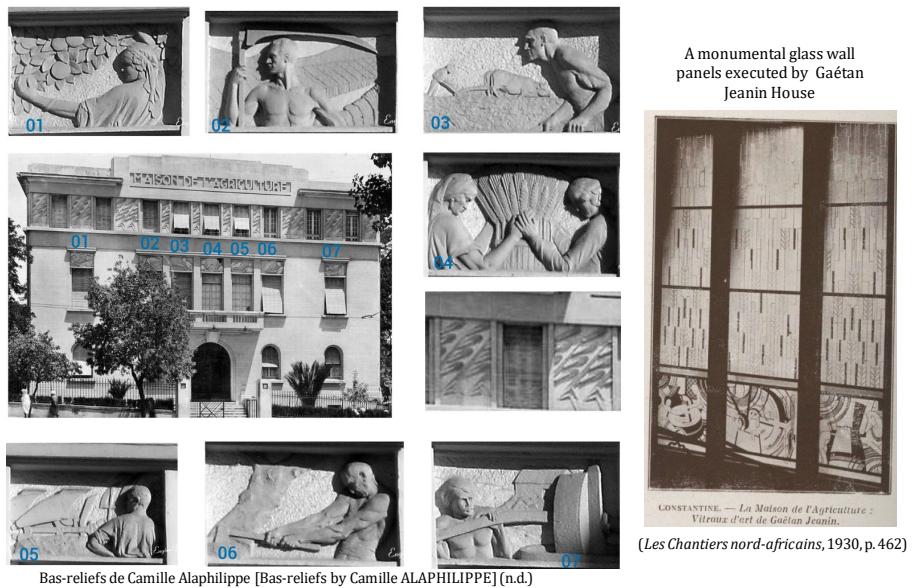
Georges Wolff, in collaboration with the architect Brunier, designed the House of Colon in Oran. This architectural endeavor was imbued with the essence of Art Deco, exemplified by frescoes expertly executed by the Tossut House. The ornamental choice of the building, depicted by frescoes portraying scenes related to agricultural work, reflects a profound reflection of the symbolic and historical significance of the building. In this case, the architects of the centenary converged towards a glorification of the Colonat, highlighting the colon as a vital element of colonisation. Through this representation, architects glorify agricultural labour and emphasise the role of the colon in this process. The chosen ornamental style testifies to their intention to celebrate the economic achievements and technological advancements of their time (Figure 5).



**Figure 5:** The House of Agriculture of Oran, built by Georges Wolff. Source: interpreted by the authors, 2024

In the same aesthetic choice, the architect Ange Journeau, laureate of the silver medal of 1925 International Exhibition of Decorative Arts and associate member of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts (*Archives of the General Government of Algeria*, n.d.-c), undertook the construction of the House of Agriculture in Constantine, employing a semi-classical architectural style that is characterised by a refined Mediterranean note (Figure 6). Journeau described it as a contemporary architectural embodiment of its era. The facade exudes a sense of understated sophistication, adorned with symbolic bas-reliefs depicting allegorical scenes representing agricultural labour. Notably, a central panel features two figures—one indigenous and one colonist—symbolising the spirit of fraternity of European and indigenous communities. A monumental glass wall panels, composed of black and silver enamels, is made by a renowned house of modern stained glass Gaétan Jeanin. It represents wheat spikes and the three Roman and Berber mills (Mercier, 1931, p. 219). The architect put forward an image of a laborious and glorious settler for ornamentation, thus resembling the Colon monument in Boufarik, built by the sculptors Bouchard and Bigouet and the architect Salvador, in the form of a bas-relief, which represents the main military pioneers of colonisation, the doctors of the early

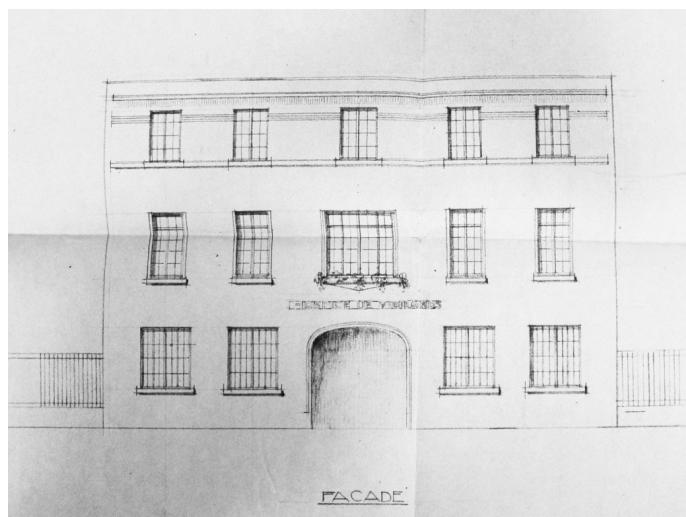
times of the conquest, and on each side, men and women busy working the land (*Archives of the General Government of Algeria*, n.d.-b).



**Figure 6:** The House of Agriculture of Constantine, built by Ange Journeau. Source: interpreted by the authors, 2024

Constantine is one of the cities with a large number of indigenous inhabitants, according to statistics given by Gustave Mercier, there were more than 80,000 indigenous inhabitants, this population lives in conditions of precarious existence suffers from begging in the street. A Committee of notables of the Jews population asked the higher council to resolve this phenomenon, in the interest of health and public safety it would be appropriate to create an asylum to accommodate the unfortunate of all origins and especially Muslim beggars (Mercier, 1931, pp. 367–369). The asylum for the elderly and beggars is located at Mansorah. The building, designed by architect Ange Journeau, prioritises functional interior space over aesthetic language. It maintains a neutral aspect, with no ornamentation. The approach of the architect reflects an emphasis on maximising usability and accommodating the intended activities within the space (refectories, rooms, and interior courtyard); indigenous institutions are often built in modest architecture that reflects no character (Figure 7).

Cohen talked about colonised population and local reception of a colonial architecture and urban planning, which can be considered at the same time as a kind of oppression and modernisation that gives more pertinent question, raised by Paul Ricoeur, about history and memory (Cohen, 2006, p. 356).



**Figure 7:** Project of asylum for the elderly and beggars at Constantine, established by Ange Journeau. Source: *Archives of the General Government of Algeria* (1929b)

The architecture of the 1930s combines the simplicity of the modern style with the decorative aspects of Neo-Moorish and Mediterranean architecture (Picard, 1994, p. 129). Several buildings have modernised the landscape of the Algerian capital, notably the palace of the General Government by Jacques Guiauchain, built between (1930–1935), the town hall of the brothers Niermans, built in 1934, the casino of Algiers (Aletti Hotel), built in 1930, and the work of architects A. Bluysen and Richard from Paris, who built in a classical style, buildings with interesting modernism through the removal of unnecessary elements (*Les Chantiers nord-africains*, 1931, p. 99). This era opened up new ideas, renewing architectural language and allowing new needs to emerge.

Centenary buildings converge at a common point that they are designed in a contemporary manner, although they incorporate decorative elements from the metropolis or utilise local components; the prevalent architectural features exhibited an aspect of modernisation within the colony.

The political and socioeconomic circumstances that emerged after Algeria's centenary had a significant impact on the country's colonial architecture, in particular, due to the suspension of construction activities during World War II and the subsequent economic crisis, the political context and the liberation movement. New development plans followed one another, in order to meet the challenges of demographic and economic growth (Chérif, 2017), in the 1950s, it led to a shift towards a policy of large groups, as outlined in the Constantine plan. This resulted in a surge of activity in housing construction with a focus on using new materials and meeting the evolving requirements of the built environment. Following Independence, modernist ideology has predominated in urban planning (Filali et al., 2023). After the first decade of independence, Algeria found itself in a phase of reconstruction and restructuration, relying first on colonial heritage, and urban planning instruments of the 70s continued the steps of Constantine's plan. According to Jean-Jacques Deluz, the built framework of the 60s and 70s offers architectural formulas of a certain mediocrity and minimalist functionalism, which calls for the internationalisation of architecture through the use of international architects for the development of large projects (Chérif, 2017, pp. 146–148). Post-colonial architecture is in search of identity and finds its bearings in regional and Arab-Muslim specificities.

Even after the independence, colonial policies persisted, exerting influence through established institutions, legislative structures, and the continued presence of technicians involved in planning and construction. Hegemony persisted beyond coercion, with an extended and sometimes renewed presence of these technicians. The very first post-colonial initiatives often served as direct reactions to policies implemented by the occupying powers (Cohen, 2006, p. 366).

Following Algeria's independence, centenary's structures experienced different endings. Some buildings, originally intended to be lasting works, were valued and remained intact in their original locations, and have kept their initial function to this day. There are, for example, the National Museum of Fine Arts of Algiers, National Public Museum of Cirta, the House of Agriculture of Constantine and the National Museum Ahmed Zabana in Oran. Other buildings were reconverted, the House of Agriculture in Oran became the Palace of Culture of Zeddour Brahim Belkacem, and the Hall Pierre Bordes converted to Ibn Khaldoun's Cinema Hall. The buildings of the centenary like others after independence were renamed with names of Algerian martyrs and historical personalities. Indigenous institutions like the orphanage of Sidi Mabrouk in Constantine were reconverted to police school.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The architects who were entrusted with the centenary projects were DPLG architects with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Many of them had the privilege of designing prestigious public buildings in Algiers, Oran and Constantine, and they brought wide experience and expertise to the construction field. Whether metropolitan or Algerianist, they played a significant role in modernising the Algeria's architectural landscape.

The Centenary Architecture Commission, with due consideration for urban planning instruments, local climate, landscape, and local identity, concentrated on balancing technical requirements, aesthetic aspects, and functional necessities in a modern manner. This Commission played a pivotal role in overseeing the architectural production of the centenary celebration, under the directives of the high colonial administration.

The ornamentation of some centenary buildings featured the art deco style, which incorporated traditional decorative elements such as columns and pilasters in a non-obtrusive manner. These elements were combined with bas-reliefs and geometric motifs to evoke the grandeur of ancient civilisations, including Greek mythology. The buildings also glorified the French colonial presence by depicting the lives of colonists and the labour of French investment. Some architects emphasised the local identity by incorporating Mediterranean features such as terraces, gardens, and arches, which they believed demonstrated the

potential for modern architecture to be adapted to local context. The colonial power showcased its expertise in construction, combining political and symbolic issues in a monumental and imposing manner. In particular, the construction of imperial edifices such as museums and houses of agriculture exemplified this. The facades, characterised by their linear precision, coalesced seamlessly with classical decorative components, establishing a sense of harmony. The restrained elegance of the facades, the balanced arrangement of horizontal lines, the inclusion of central heating systems, and the provision of water and electricity infrastructure characterised these buildings as contemporary architecture that was emblematic of its time. However, the native institutions had a more functional architecture with neutral appearance.

The year 1930 marked a significant turning point in the architectural landscape of Algeria, which was heavily influenced by the national and international political circumstances context. This period of modernisation was initiated by the French government. The House of Agriculture in Algiers and the House of Students, among other notable projects, exemplify the influence of contemporary architecture on the region. The construction of the future courthouse and consular palace, among other planned projects, will undoubtedly contribute to the ongoing development of Algerian architecture (*Les Chantiers nord-africains*, 1937, p. 349).

It is crucial to study the historical, technical, and aesthetic aspects of a building to identify and enhance its historical value. Our study can guide future preservation efforts and highlight its unique characteristics. This allows for a deeper understanding and appreciation of a building's architectural and historical significance. Today, Algerian policy towards colonial heritage has been characterised by a delicate reconciliation with the country's colonial past.

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