


## ARTICLE

## Asmara's architectural heritage as a bricolage: The case of St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral

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**Abstract** Asmara's modernist heritage, adjudged by UNESCO to possess "outstanding value to humanity", combines the architectural practices of locals and former "colonizers", and embodies Eritrea's modernist encounters. In 2017 Asmara was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List under Criteria 2 and 4 and remains Africa's only explicitly modernist site. Employing the concept of bricolage to examine some of Asmara's most notable buildings, this paper questions UNESCO's rejection of Eritrea's claim to Criterion 3, which was intended to acknowledge the essential contribution of indigenous labour and cultural traditions in the creation and articulation of modernism in Asmara. The work focusses on the pre-eminent example of St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral, a building with deep symbolic meaning and material and constructional histories of both Eritrean and Italian architecture. Finally, its bricolages contributed significantly to the production of a unique modernist language that defines Asmara's claims to modernism, a modernism not of Europe, but of Africa.

Eritrea's capital, Asmara, occupies the site of an ancient village that became the locus of the Italian colonial capital from 1900–1941. Celebrated for its modernist architecture and progressive urban planning in an African setting, Asmara embodies the synergy of local and imported construction techniques, which combine local skills and knowledge with a unique modernist architecture born out of a particular colonial experience. In 2017, the city was successfully inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List under Criteria 2 and 4, although it was unsuccessful in convincing the assessors

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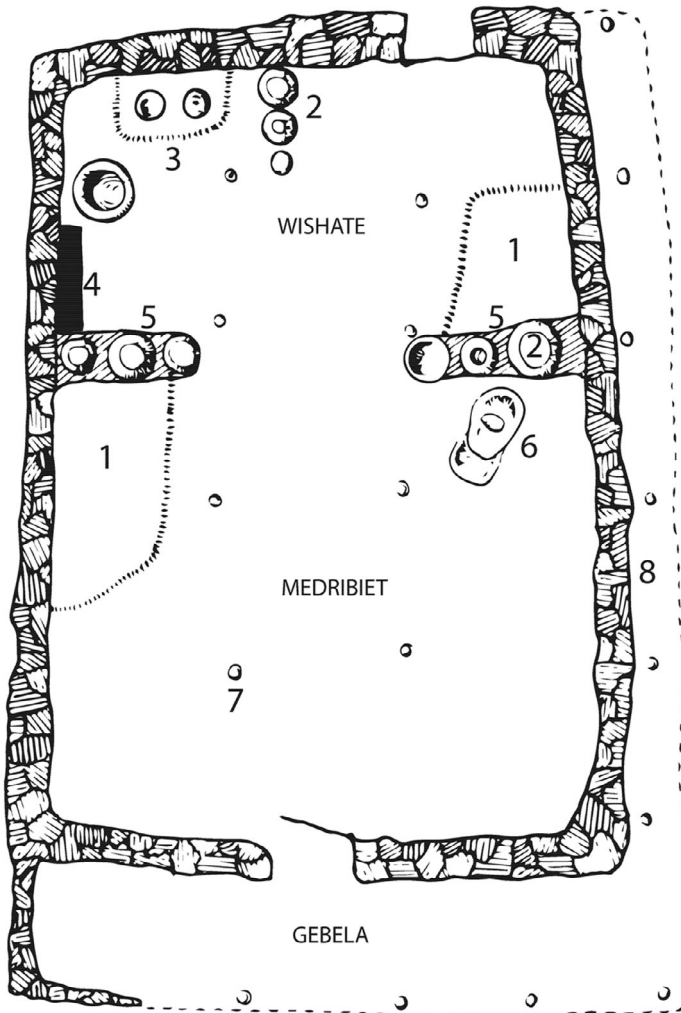
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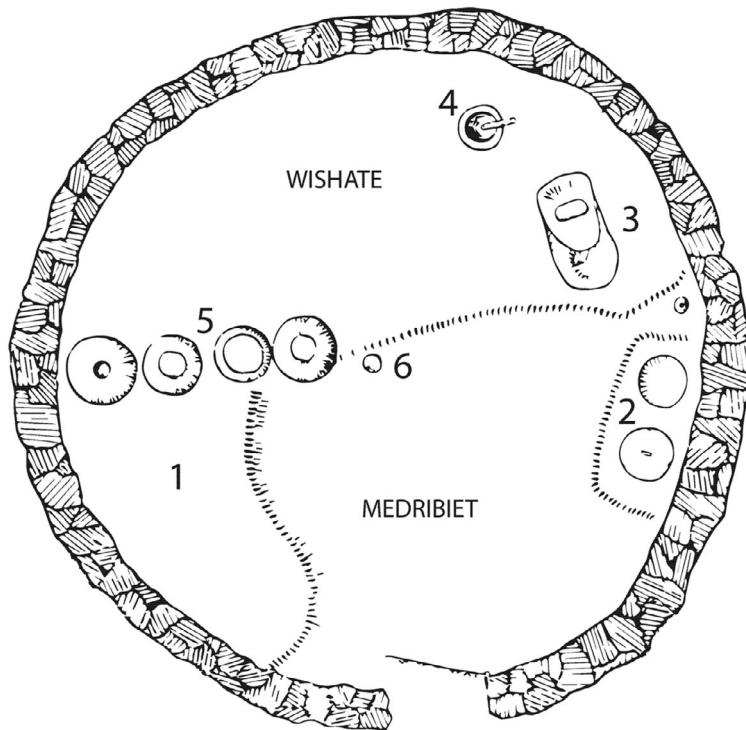
- 1.Niedi(Bed)
- 2.Kofo (Grain container)
- 3.Uton(Hearth stove)
- 4.Kebhi(Cabinet)
- 5.Dividing structure with built-in kofos
- 6.Metihan(Grain Mill)
- 7.Andi(Column)
- 8.Drainage

**Figure 1.** Plan of a *hidmo*. Drawing made by Biniam Teame.

in the Scientific Advisory bodies of its claims to Criterion 3, “to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared”.

Viewing some of Asmara’s most notable works from the perspective of “bricolage”, this paper questions UNESCO’s rejection of Eritrea’s claims to Criterion 3 by exploring the fundamental role





- |                       |                             |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1.Niedi(Bed)          | 4.Mogdue(Pestle and Mortar) |
| 2.Uton(Hearth Stove)  | 5.Kofo (Grain container)    |
| 3.Metihan(Grain Mill) | 6.Andi(Column/Central pole) |

**Figure 2.** Plan of an *agdo*. Drawing made by Biniam Teame.

of African building traditions, materials and objects in the continent's only exclusively modernist site on the UNESCO World Heritage List. First, the theoretical concept of bricolage supports the connection between classified objects of different contexts and symbolic meanings. This is applied to Asmara's architectural landscape, based on its colonial past and encounters with diverse civilisations. Later, the paper examines materials, methods, and spatial forms that embody cultural values and meanings, and, along with Eritrean labour, skills, and materials, played a crucial role in realizing the modernist architecture of Asmara.

The principal case study, which embodies and expresses these values, epitomizes bricolage: St Mary's Orthodox Cathedral<sup>1</sup>, a building with deep symbolic and cultural meaning. Through its analysis, the paper investigates the value of bricolage in reframing Asmara's modernist identity and seeks to affirm that the acknowledgement of Criterion 3 would have represented an important and formal recognition of the role of Eritrean cultural traditions in shaping modernism in Eritrea.



**Figure 3.** Agdo. Edward Denison's personal archive, 2022. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.com)]

### THE THEORETICAL CONCEPT OF "BRICOLAGE"

The term bricolage was used by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962) to refer to a process or a skill of reusing objects in different combinations in order to create something new and to construct mythological narratives. Developing further Lévi-Strauss' concept of bricolage as the imposition of meanings upon the object, Roland Barthes (1988) highlighted that bricolage is a totality of heterogeneous objects that conceal "symbolic meaning" and are classified. In the architectural discourse, bricolage is analyzed in *Collage City* (Rowe & Koetter, 1978), in which Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter view cities as collages of tradition, history, nature, scaffold and utopia, and Alan Colquhoun's analysis of Michael Graves' work as a bricolage of elements, forms, functions and languages in the essay *From Bricolage to Myth or How to Put Humpty-Dumpty Together Again* (Colquhoun, 1982).

Classification has been, already in European antiquity, associated with rhetoric's processes of *partitio*, *dispositio*, *inventio*. It is a system that organizes rules, parts, genres, and styles (Barthes, 1988). It can also open a discourse between ordered objects, activating the possibilities to interact. Therefore, *order* coincides with the *invention* of new meanings. This quality lies in the concept of bricolage, as classified objects are in dialogue with each other, producing new meanings. Consequently, there is a dialogue between the contexts that the objects represent. Ultimately, bricolage introduces the aesthetics of apportioning, rejecting classical coherence, emphasizing variety and interaction between materiality, memories, typologies, rhythms, and styles.





**Figure 4.** Monkey-head technique, Asmara: Africa's Modernist City. Nomination Dossier for UNESCO World Heritage Listing, Asmara Heritage Project., 2016. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions)]

The objects might be material or representational fragments that can be visually perceived as “cognitive elements” that recall their origins. Through memory, the process of recognition, classification, and localisation, which contributes to self-knowledge and creative reinterpretation of the subject as a totality of thoughts and actions that unify past, present, and future, producing meaning (Cassirer, 1944), bricolages “communicate” with the viewer, affecting their perception and experience in the built environment.

#### **ASMARA'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT: AN AFRICAN CITY'S ENCOUNTERS WITH THE “OTHER”**

Asmara, an urban landscape that possesses various meanings, styles, and bricolages, is a former colonial city that developed its cultural identity through its encounters with many civilisations through trading networks and colonial and quasi-colonial experiences over millennia (Denison et al., 2003). Its proximity to the Red Sea connected it to the border of present-day Ethiopia,

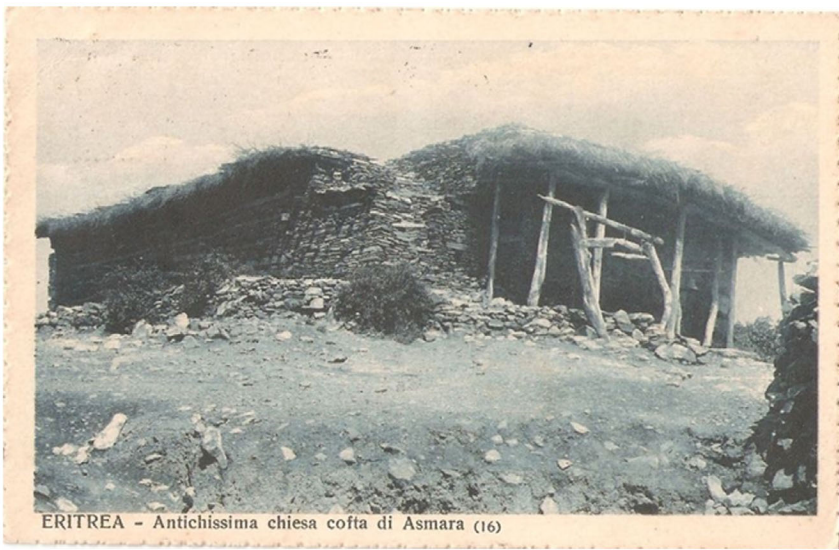




**Figure 5.** St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral in 1895. Biniam Teame's personal archive, 2022. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions)]

associating it with assorted civilisations throughout the region. Among other ethnic, social and cultural groupings, Eritreans came into contact with Italians, Yemenis, Ottomans, British, Ethiopians, as well as settlers such as Greeks, Swedish, Jews, Indians, Armenians and Sudanese (Asmara Heritage Project, 2016). This explains Asmara's cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, and the importance placed on the values of tolerance and unity. In the built environment these values were marked through the creation of buildings dedicated to various religions, to commercial and residential accommodation, and to public spaces.

Following the Italian occupation of Asmara in 1889, the settlement became the capital of what became Italy's African Empire (Africa Orientale Italiana) in 1900 and was later furnished with an architectural plurality displaying various historicist styles including Novecento, Rationalism, Monumentalism and Futurism (Denison et al., 2017). Between 1935 and 1941, from Italy's invasion of Ethiopia to its defeat to the Allies, Asmara became a city celebrated for its modern urban planning and the ubiquity of modernist architecture. Construction slowed almost completely in 1941 when the British Military Administration took control of Eritrea, until 1952, when Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia. Eritrea did not gain independence until 1991.



**Figure 6.** St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral in 1900, 1920 and 1940. Biniam Teame's personal archive, 2022. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cua.12917)]





**Figure 7.** Load bearing stone and bell in the towers of St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral. Edward Denison's and Biniam Teame's personal archives, 2022. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/can.12507)] 21511972, 2022, 2, Downloaded from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/can.12507> by University College London UCL Library Services, Wiley Online Library on [12/01/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions>) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

## FROM LOCAL OBJECTS TO ST. MARY'S ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL'S BRICOLAGES

The presence of modernist architecture has been associated with an attempt to dissociate with the past and its various historical forms and practices. The modern way of life and capitalistic modes of production led to a gradual rejection of the preservation of the existing image of the built environment. So, in Asmara, the adaptation to the existing pre-colonial environment was limited to the topography of land and a few notable architectural works (Zagnoni, 2017).

However, Italians relied on Eritrea's local materials, labour and building techniques to construct the modernist built environment in Asmara and elsewhere throughout the colonial territory of Eritrea. In particular, granite, wood, marble, sandstone, basalt and, later, cement, brick and colored tesserae were abundant in Eritrea (Asmara Heritage Project, 2017). Also, Eritrean labourers possessed the expertise to use these materials in many different ways including dry stone walling, quarrying, chiseling, and dressing. The most common material in Asmara was basalt, a hard and impermeable material that was fashioned into blocks 30–50 cm (approximately 1 ft) thick, which were ideal for foundations and load bearing walls. Basalt gave the modernist architecture of Asmara a distinct character. In many cases, it is concealed behind plaster, but is also found exposed or presented in a pattern on the façade, especially at the ground level (Asmara Heritage Project, 2017).



**Figure 8.** A 4th century AD excavated Byzantine church on the Eritrean coast displaying building techniques similar to those used in many modernist structures in Asmara as seen in the detail of the layered façade of St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral. Biniam Teame's and Thomais Kordonouri's personal archives, 2022. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

Besides the almost ubiquitous use of Eritrean materials and labour, in a few of Asmara's modern structures, one can identify the combination of European Rationalism with spatial typologies and construction techniques of indigenous architecture. These include the *hidmo*, the *agdo* and *aderash* (Asmara Heritage Project, 2017).

The *hidmo* is a dwelling typology found only in the Eritrean highlands, recognized by its rectangular form, constructed from wood, stone and soil and covered by a flat roof. Generally, the indoor space of a *hidmo* is divided into at least two rooms, which are separated by earthenware food silos, and host the daily activities of food preparation, meetings and sleeping (Asmara Heritage Project, 2017). These spaces can be accessed through a main doorway from the front of the building and one or two other doors at the rear (Figure 1). The roof is extended at the front forming a shelter over the entrance that also houses livestock at night. In larger *hidmos* belonging to wealthy families or nobles, there is a reception hall used for feasts. Its construction<sup>2</sup> consists of dry-stone walls that are typically a metre thick (3 ft) and a roof built with timber beams formed of whole tree trunks laid next to one another and overlaid with branches and bound with soil. Additional tree trunks are used as columns to provide internal support. The number of timber poles required is determined by the size of the house (Mussie, 2021).

The *agdo* or *agudo* is a typical dwelling typology found in rural areas of Eritrea. It is characterized by its circular plan, measuring about 3 m (about 10 ft) in diameter (Figure 2). Its structure involves a central pillar of strong wood that reaches the roof (Abraham, 2021). Its walls are constructed from stone and sometimes covered in soil and dung for insulation. A conical roof is made of thin wooden pieces tied to the planks covered with grass. The interior is divided into two rooms, with only one entrance (Figure 3). Food preparation usually takes place outside. The two-storey form of the *agdo*, which is rare, is called an *aderash* (Asmara Heritage Project, 2017).

A unique construction method found only in the highlands of northern Ethiopia and Eritrea is the "monkey-head" (Figure 4). Its name derives from protruding, rounded-off wooden cross-members (dowels) used to bind the horizontal layers of wood and stone in a wall. This method predated the introduction of lime mortar to Eritrea from Yemen in the mid-17th century. The dowels provide lateral strength and flexibility as a response to seismic activity. Since these protruding dowels





**Figure 9.** St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral. Edward Denison's personal archive, 2022. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions)]

resemble small heads poking out of the wall, they acquired the name “monkey-head” (Asmara Heritage Project, 2017, p. 261). Some Italian architects adopted this technique in their designs, albeit superficially.

### ST. MARY'S ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL

St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral can be seen to constitute a form of bricolage combining Italian Rationalism and African vernacular building. The building dates from the 13th century. Later, when the four villages that occupied the plain of Asmara were united by the women of each village, following years of skirmishes, the church occupied an important site for the villagers of Asmara, and, after the Italians arrived, it remained of vital importance to the indigenous Eritrean Orthodox community (Asmara Heritage Project, 2017, p. 261). Until the early 20th century, the church was a *hidmo*, built using the monkey-head technique and surrounded by a wall and trees<sup>3</sup>, topped with an Orthodox cross. As Cogliati (1901) noted in *Tre anni in Eritrea*, it resembled more a “cave than a temple” (Figure 5). The interior was decorated with brightly colored paintings of saints on the walls and stored sacred scriptures.

The first form of bricolage appeared in 1920, when the Italians took the original vernacular architecture into consideration in a total redesign and reconstruction of the church (Figure 6). The





**Figure 10.** Interior views of St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral with its frescoes. Edward Denison's personal archive, 2022.  
[Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

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**Figure 11.** Exterior detail of mosaics. Edward Denison's personal archive, 2022. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

architect who designed the new church that replaced the *hidmo* structure was Ernesto Gallo. In his design he assimilated the *agdo*-style in the roofs of the two towers that were positioned at each corner of the church and used for storage. The main church, rectangular in plan, had a raised central nave. Also, its stone walls were built displaying the monkey-head technique, with dowels of white juniper (Asmara Heritage Project, 2017, p. 240), possibly recycled from the earlier church.

Later, in 1938, this church was replaced by an even larger church designed by the architect Giuseppe Malaguti, following Gallo's style, but simplifying and enlarging its form. This church, which still survives, also comprises two massive towers at each corner and the main building between them (Figure 6). Its construction, principally using local stone and brick, strongly reflects the Italians' dependence on local materials, construction techniques and labour. Despite the appearance, reinforced concrete has been used sparingly in the construction of the church. Most of the walls are built using load bearing stone, even in the 12 m tall (about 40 ft) towers (Figure 7) whose walls reduce in thickness towards the top and are strengthened only by concrete ring beams near the base, middle and at the top, where the distinctive vertical concrete frame supports the weight of the bells.

With the exception of steel reinforcement bars, concrete, and paints, this bears a striking resemblance to the construction methods employed in a 4th century church excavated on the Eritrean coast and said to be one of the oldest Christian churches in sub-Saharan Africa (Asmara Heritage Project, 2017, p. 240). Echoing this ancient church in its layers of different materials, St. Mary's façade





**Figure 12.** Exterior detail of the main entrance. Edward Denison's personal archive, 2022. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/sura.12587)]

is also made of layers of stone slates and brick (Figure 8). Also, continuing Gallo's design, the towers, have retained their *agdo* roofs, but these were separated from the layered stone by additional vertical openings of concrete, reinforcing the Rationalist character of the church.

The main building has many Rationalist features that display Lombardi architecture, having a rectangular plan with a modern-style interior with colonnades surrounding the nave (Figure 9). Its ceiling is parallel vaulted with lights at either end that may be seen from outside as a line of semi-circular apertures (Asmara Heritage Project, 2017, p. 240). Moreover, the interior is decorated with colored frescoes of religious figures (Figure 10).

On the exterior, a vertical frame divided into seven parts, each representing the seven sacraments of the orthodox church, contains mosaics designed by the Eritrean-Italian artist Nenne Sanguineti Poggi in 1963 (Figure 11). An Orthodox cross crowns the ensemble, while below, the main entrance comprising a pair of round-arched doorways set back in stepped frames is finished in bold red tesserae (Figure 12).

A large gate and a wall, in a similar style and material to that of the church, enclose the entire compound (Figure 13). At the front stands an auxiliary building, known as Deghe Selam (Figure 14), built in 1917 and designed by the engineer-architect Odoardo Cavnari (Asmara Heritage Project, 2017, p. 240).



**Figure 13.** The compound of St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral. Biniam Teame's personal archive, 2022. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

In 1945–1946 new rooms were added, so, today, the building serves as office space for the church. Deghe Selam (Figure 15) features many reinstated references to Eritrean indigenous architecture and cultural practices, such as the conical concrete roofs of the *agdo*, placed above the central core of the building and its ends, walls and pillars that imitate the monkey-head technique (Figure 16) under the concrete crossbeams, and frescoes in the Eritrean Orthodox style (Asmara Heritage Project, 2017, p. 240). Further symbolism has been incorporated in the detailing, such as the water-spouts, which are made to represent the head of an animal resembling a panther, in frescoes of different designs, and in other elements in concrete referring to the first *hidmo* church.

## THE VALUE OF BRICOLAGE FOR ASMARA'S SUBSCRIPTION IN UNESCO'S WORLD HERITAGE LIST

As mentioned, bricolage is a result of classification, which in turn belongs to the processes of rhetoric. In this way, it is connected to the invention of new meanings. The bricolages of St. Mary's Cathedral conceal rhetoric through metaphors of Eritrean cultural traditions in a new framework that can be communicated to the viewer through cognitive elements, which recall memories of Asmara's pre-colonial past, contributing to the construction of the collective identity of the city, linking people to their history. In particular, rhetoric is a result of the imitation of traditional forms, such as that of *aderash*, which, as analyzed, symbolizes the religious institution, according to the Eritrean traditions. Moreover, the *hidmo* form of St. Mary's refers to the initial *hidmo* church, whereas the *agdo* roofs are also a reference, but now they are detached from the main structure, reminding viewers of the encounter with the "other" Rationalist architecture. As for the monkey-head technique, it is reproduced in both St. Mary's and Deghe Selam in a "modern" framework, as layering in the façade, connotating the ancient church. Ultimately, St. Mary's Cathedral's bricolage constitutes a significant archive for Asmara, where the Rationalist architectural forms of colonialism negotiate enduring traditional techniques, forms, and narratives of the pre-colonial Eritrean past, which are considered valuable for the future cultural identity of Eritrea, activating memory, encouraging self-knowledge and creative reinterpretation of the Eritrean past, and producing new meanings.

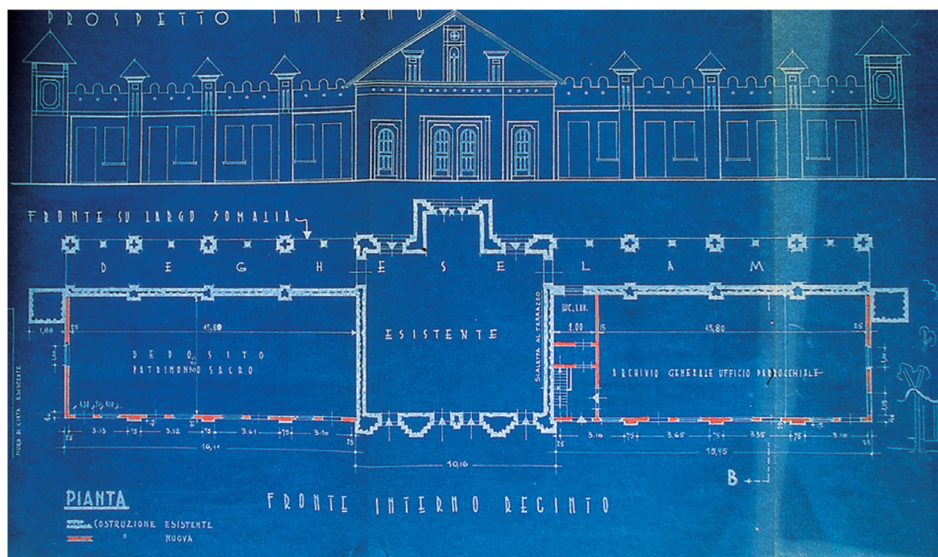




**Figure 14.** Deghe Selam of Enda Mariam (St Mary's Church), designed by Odoardo Cavagnari, 1917. Biniam Teame's personal archive, 2022. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cuan.12301)]

The fact that colonizers and colonized variously reinterpreted local symbolisms and values in order to construct a monumental architecture, St. Mary's Cathedral exhibits an African conceptualisation and materialization of modernity, which, as Achille Mbembe (2021) argued, does not reflect the western perception, where “modernism signalled a particular attitude towards the present and a conscious rupture from the past”, but rather, it contains continuities with traditions and practices that predate and survive the colonial. This is also evident in Asmara's history, since the aforementioned cultural values including local materials, techniques, symbolisms as well as other intangible qualities, such as language, institutions, and national identity, remained authentic despite the city's transformation from an indigenous centre of administration to a colonial city, and then to a modern capital of an independent country. In particular, after the post-colonial period, Eritrea underwent a second wave of quasi-colonialism under different Ethiopian regimes, during which Ethiopians attempted to destroy Eritrean national identity, denying local languages and traditions (Denison et al., 2017). Asmara became an emblem of Eritrean resistance, symbolizing loss and promise, expressed through music, poetry, and theater. Throughout the Cold War, actors, artists, sculptors, and authors celebrated Asmara as a symbol for the larger quest for national independence (Denison et al., 2017).

Despite this preservation of cultural identity and traditions, UNESCO chose not to endorse Asmara's claims to Criterion 3: “to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared”. However, Asmara has been inscribed, like most modern urban sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List, under Criterion 2



**Figure 15.** Plan and elevation of Deghe Selam designed by Odoardo Cavagnari, 1917. Nomination Dossier for UNESCO World Heritage Listing, Asmara Heritage Project., 2016. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

for “exhibiting an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design”, and Criterion 4 for being “an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history” (UNESCO, 2017). Actually, architectures of bricolages (Figure 17), which highlight materially the dialogue with the “other”, but also the return to the original local traditions and the preservation of intangible heritage while competing with other civilisations, make a strong case for Asmara’s inscription under Criterion 3. This acknowledgement would formally emphasize the significant role of Eritrean and, by extension, African cultural traditions in realizing a modernism of Africa and of the distinction of this experience from other modernist encounters – an embodiment and endorsement of multiple modernities. Such endorsement would support ongoing efforts to equitably reframe and decentre modernist heritage by centring the experiences not merely of Africa and Africans, but of all those who Campbell-Stephens (2021) refers to as the “global majority” who have been marginalized, omitted or othered by modernist history and historiography. As it is, by acknowledging only Criteria 2 and 4, Asmara’s inscription remains bound to largely European experiences and interpretations of modernism. The recentring of Africa and African experiences within the modernist project is an important aim this paper shares with *Modern Heritage of Africa* and, through the concept of bricolage and the site of St. Mary’s Orthodox Cathedral, the authors hope to have contributed to this aim.



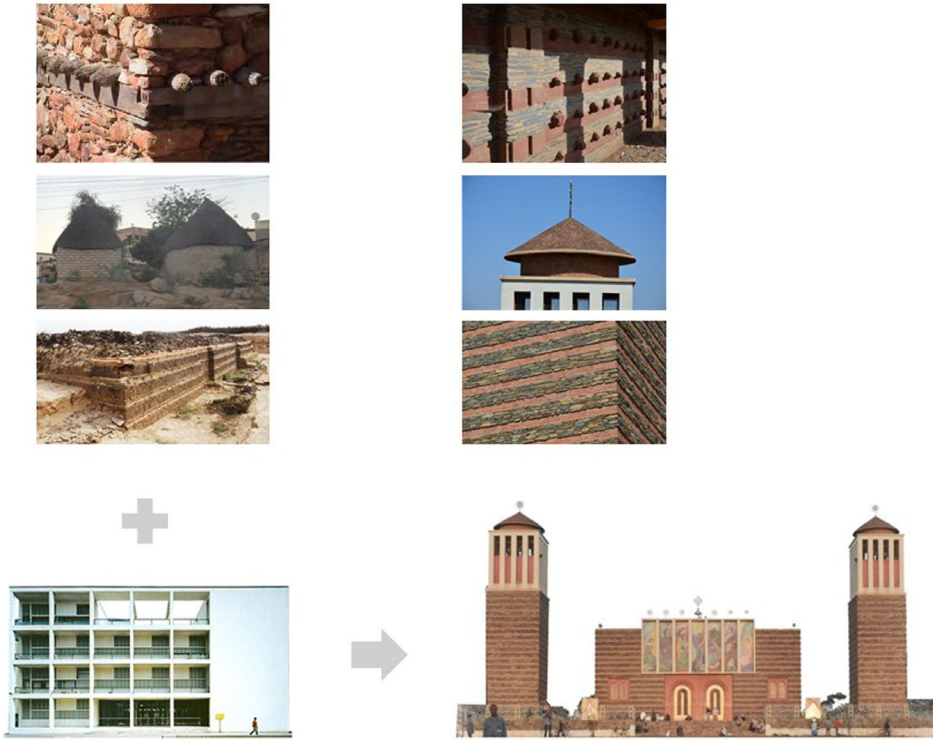


**Figure 16.** The Deghe Selam alternating slate and wood layers in monkey head style, designed by Odoardo Cavagnari, 1917. Biniam Teame's personal archive, 2022. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.com)]

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, Asmara does possess “outstanding value to humanity”, but not for its urban and architectural modernism framed within a European conceptualisation. Its image belongs to those to whom the city belongs (Denison, 2017). Despite the colonizers’ limited adaptation to the pre-colonial environment of Asmara in line with European modernism’s tendency to reject historicism or tradition, Eritrean conceptualisation of modernity, which is based on the continuity of cultural traditions, left its imprint in the shape of the modern built environment in the colonial period.

These traditions were expressed through the use and reliance on Eritrean labour and expertise whose efforts have gone largely undocumented and, unlike the work of Italian architects, bear no record in any archive. The most conspicuous example might be St. Mary’s Orthodox Cathedral, a bricolage that derives from previous forms including Eritrean and Italian Rationalist forms, built with local stone following indigenous construction methods. Through imitation, reuse, and reproduction of all these references, this work becomes monumental and meaningful. Its constituent elements act as cognitive elements that are connected with symbolisms and cultural values from Eritrea’s past that will acquire new meanings and significance in the future of architecture. At the same time, the bricolage gives birth to new dialogues between different styles, featuring authenticity and variety. Ultimately, it is an archive that evokes memories of the pre-colonial and colonial pasts, establishing the



**Figure 17.** A bricolage of African modernism. Collage made by Thomais Kordonouri, 2022. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

sense of place and producing meanings that present different possibilities and future identities for Asmara that are not bound or defined by colonialism.

Finally, Asmara's modern identity derives from Asmara's pre-colonial past. It relies on the re-statement and continuity of architectural and cultural traditions, as it is evident in bricolages, and the survival of the intangible heritage of Eritrean civilisations despite wars, colonialism, and encounters with other cultures. Asmara fulfills UNESCO's Criterion 3 because these traditions have always been an integral part of the authentic modernist language that defines Asmara's claims to modernism, a modernism not of Europe, but of Africa.

**END**

## NOTES

1. St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral is known locally as Nda Mariam.
2. "A single *hidmo* can consume one hundred trees and have a lifespan of more than half a century. Up to twelve tree trunks supporting the weight of a roof constructed from layers of branches bonded with soil, while its stone walls are often close to a meter (3 ft) thick." (Asmara Heritage Project, 2016, p. 260.)



3. This technique was first seen in the Kidane Mihret church of Senafe built in the Axumite Empire (A.D. 100–700). (Ministry of Information Eritrea, 2020. <https://shabait.com/2020/06/27/stone-architecture-in-eritrea/>).

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