

ANTON LAŠČAK

Vila Rafut, Nova Gorica, Slovenija, zgrajena 1912–1914, obnovljena 1928–1929

Rafut Villa, Nova Gorica, Slovenia, built 1912–1914, rebuilt 1928–1929

✍ NATAŠA KOVŠČA 📷 ERPAC – SERVIZIO MUSEI E ARCHIVI STORICI. FOTOTECA MUSEI PROVINCIALI DI GORIZIA.
FRATELLI ALINARI MUSEUM COLLECTIONS, FLORENCE; ALINARI ARCHIVES, FLORENCE
ARCHIVIO DI STATO DI GORIZIA, ARCHIVIO STORICO DEL COMUNE DI GORIZIA
SARUHAN MIMARLIK

Med Gorico, Aleksandrijo in Kairom Between Gorizia, Alexandria and Cairo

Anton Laščak, arhitekt slovenskega rodu, je ustvaril pretežni del svojega obsežnega arhitekturnega opusa v Aleksandriji in Kairu. Edina njegova realizirana stavba v Sloveniji je vila Rafut v Novi Gorici, ena redkih neoislamskih arhitektur v Evropi.

Anton Laščak, an architect of Slovene origin, created most of his many architectural works in Alexandria and Cairo. Indeed, the only one of his projects carried out in Slovenia is the Rafut Villa in Nova Gorica, one of the rare neo-Islamic architectural structures in Europe. 13



PHOTO: ŠPELA VOLČIČ

Anton Laščak (1856–1946) je veljal do začetka novega tisočletja v Sloveniji za prezrtega arhitekta: njegovo ime se je namreč prvič pojavilo šele v dodatku Enciklopedije Slovenije leta 2002. Tudi zapisov o njegovem delu v strokovni literaturi skoraj ne zasledimo, razen v razstavnem katalogu pregledne razstave *Arhitektura v Sloveniji – Mojstri in arhitekturna scena*, ki so jo leta 2008 pripravili v galeriji poslovne stavbe zavarovalne skupine Vienna Insurance Group na Dunaju.¹ Nasprotno pa so na italijanski strani meje zanimanje za preučevanje Laščakove zapuščine spodbudile že raziskave na področju orientalizma v osemdesetih letih 20. stoletja – čeprav zgolj tistih arhitektur, ki kažejo arabske vplive.² Njegove italijanske projekte je podrobneje osvetlila šele prva monografska študija Marca Chiozze *Antonio Lasciac – Tra echì secessionisti e suggestioni orientali*, ki je izšla leta 2006. Istega leta so v palači Attems Petzenstein, ki sodi pod okrilje Pokrajinskih muzejev v Gorici,

pripravili razstavo fotografij in risb njegovih arhitekturnih del iz rimskega Muzeja fotografije Alinari. V zadnjih letih pa intenzivno raziskujejo njegov mladostni opus.³

Razlogov, da se slovenska stroka z Laščakovo zapuščino več kot pol stoletja ni ukvarjala, je seveda več, med drugim tudi pomanjkanje dokumentarnega gradiva, ki je razpršeno v številnih tujih javnih in zasebnih arhivih (kot je zbirka pariške profesorice Mercedes Volait) ter knjižnicah, zlasti v Rimu in Kairu. Najpomembnejši razlog pa je nedvomno Laščakovo izražanje nacionalne pripadnosti. Arhitekt se je namreč rodil v Gorici, v multietničnem okolju, kjer so živele različne narodnostne skupine: Italijani, Slovenci, Furlani in Avstrijci. Vsi njegovi predniki so bili Slovenci iz Soške doline⁴ vendar se je kljub slovenskemu poreklu staršev razglašal za Furlana. Že med študijem na dunajski Politehnikni je v krogu mladih intelektualcev jasno izražal svoje iredentistične težnje, seveda proti habsburški monarhiji, zaradi česar naj bi si nakopal tudi jezo goriških naročnikov,

1 Dr. Bogo Zupančič omenja Antona Laščaka v prispevku »Die Architektur der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts im Slowenischen Raum: vom Architekten Anton Laščak bis zu den Schülern Plečniks bei Le Corbusier / Architecture on Slovenian area during the first half of the 20th century: from the architect Anton Laščak to the students of Plečnik with Le Corbusier«. V: *Slowenien: Architektur, Meister & Szene / Slovenia: architecture, the masters & the scene*. Katalog razstave, Dunaj: Galerija poslovne stavbe zavarovalne skupine Vienna Insurance Group, 2008, str. 24–25.

2 Ezio Godoli, »Antonio Lasciac in Egitto / Antonio Lasciac in Egypt«. V: *Da Gorizia all'impero ottomano. Antonio Lasciac – architetto. Fotografie dalle collezioni Alinari*. Firenze: Fratelli Allinari, 2006, str. 11.

3 Raziskave spodbuja Oddelek za inženirstvo in arhitekturo Univerze v Trstu / Dipartimento di Ingegneria e Architettura dell'Università di Trieste.

4 Priimek je v krstnih knjigah zapisan v različnih oblikah, ki so bile posledica večstoletnega mešanja narodov na tem območju: Lašzhak (v krstni knjigi v Ročinju za Antonovega očeta), Lashzhak (v krstni knjigi za Antonovega deda), Lasciack (v krstni knjigi za Antona v cerkvi Sv. Roka v Gorici), v furlanski literaturi pa zasledimo priimek Laschach. Tudi Laščakova žena Marija Alojzija Plesničar je bila hči slovenskega trgovca iz Gorice.

ki so bili zvesti avstrijski cesarski kroni.⁵ Do zadnjega sistematičnega pregleda arhivskega gradiva iz Fonda goriške občine od leta 1876 do 1883 je bilo pravzaprav uveljavljeno mnenje, da je Laščak zaradi nesoglasij v delovnem okolju tudi emigriral v Egipt.⁶ Nova raziskava, v kateri so odkrili kar petindvajset gradbenih del, podpisanih z Laščakovim imenom, pa potrjuje, da je bil eden najaktivnejših mladih arhitektov v Gorici, čeprav je šlo v večini primerov za manjše adaptacije, pri katerih je imel funkcijo nadzora ali vodje gradbenih del.⁷ Razlog Laščakove selitve v Egipt naj torej ne bi bilo zgolj njegovo svetovnonazorsko prepričanje, pač pa predvsem ambicioznost mladega ustvarjalca, ki se je zavedal svoje poklicne izkušenosti.⁸

Laščak se je po praksi na goriškem gradbenem uradu (1876) in nekajletnem samostojnem delu v stroki leta 1883 preselil v Aleksandrijo, kjer je sodeloval v obnovi mesta, ki so ga leto poprej močno poškodovali angleški topovi ob uporabi egipčanskih nacionalistov. Celovita prenova mesta je pravzaprav pritegnila arhitekta, gradbenike in podjetnike iz vse Evrope, ki so pomembno sredozemsko pristanišče preoblikovali v mesto z evropsko arhitekturo v historičnih slogih.

V Aleksandriji se je Laščak v nekaj letih uveljavil kot eden najbolj perspektivnih mladih arhitektov. Do leta 1888 je načrtoval vrsto reprezentativnih arhitektur, med katerimi velja omeniti najemniška stanovanja na glavni mestni ulici Sherifa Pashe (1883–1888)⁹, železniško postajo Ramleh (1883), ki so jo pozneje prezidali, trgovsko galerijo Menasce (1885–1887) in monumentalne palače za bogate meščanske družine. Originalne fotografije, ki jih hranijo v Muzeju fotografije Alinari v Rimu, kažejo, da se je Laščak sprva izražal v eklektičnem neorenesančnem slogu, v katerem je še čutili vpliv dunajske šole in profesorja Heinricha von Ferstela.¹⁰ Na stavbah iz druge polovice osemdesetih let, kot je palača Aghion (1887), pa so se neorenesančne arhitekturne prvine začele postopoma umikati neobaroku – vizualno bolj reprezentativnemu slogu, ki je bil značilen za njegovo poznejše kairsko obdobje.

Po šestletnem bivanju v Aleksandriji se je Laščak vrnil v Rim. Leta 1895 pa se je ustalil v Kairu, kjer je med njegovo odsotnostjo (1892) prevzel prestol Abbas Hilmi II., dunajsko šolani keditv, ki se je v avstrijski prestolnici dobro seznanil z evropsko kulturo. Novi vladar se je želel znebiti vpliva Velike Britanije (ki je med drugim nadzorovala tudi Sueški prekop), zato je zamenjal vse angleške svetovalce z nemškimi



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⁵ Diego Kuzmin, Antonio Lasciac, *Disegni goriziani / Goriške risbe / Goritian drawings*. Katalog razstave, Gorizia: Biblioteca statale Isontina – Galleria Mario di Iorio, 2014, str. 28.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., str. 27.

⁸ Ibid., str. 28.

⁹ Najemniška stanovanja je naročala in financirala družba bogatih aleksandrijskih družin Société Anonyme des Immeubles d'Égypte, ki je bila tudi naročnik galerije Menasce.

¹⁰ Godoli, 2006, str. 11.

1 Portret Antona Laščaka, ok. 1906–1908; vir: ERPAC – Servizio Musei e Archivi Storici. Fototeca Musei Provinciali di Gorizia.

1 Portrait of Anton Laščak, around 1906–1908; credits: ERPAC – Servizio Musei e Archivi Storici. Fototeca Musei Provinciali di Gorizia.

in avstrijskimi strokovnjaki. Med njimi je bil tudi Anton Laščak, ki ga je leta 1907 imenoval za vodilnega arhitekta kraljevih palač in mu podelil častni naziv *beg* (gospod). Kot dvorni arhitekt pa je sodeloval tudi v Odboru za varovanje spomenikov arabske umetnosti, kar mu je omogočilo, da se je temeljito seznanil z islamsko arhitekturo.

Laščak si je sloves odličnega arhitekta v Kairu pridobil z vrsto veličastnih vil in plemiških palač, zgrajenih na prelomu stoletja, ki predstavljajo novost tudi v slogovnem pristopu. Zasnova aristokratskih rezidenc temelji zlasti na prepletu (evropskega) neobaročnega sloga v kombinaciji z modernimi secesijskimi elementi, ki so bili v večini primerov vezani zgolj na ornamentalno okrasje okenskih in vrtnih odprtih ter notranjo opremo (pohištva in stopnišča). S secesijskim pohištvo je denimo opremil salon rezidence princa Saida Halima (1896–1899), dekorativni secesijski elementi pa so še posebej izraziti na zunanjšini palače Zafarân v Kairu (1901–1902) in pročelju nedavno obnovljene poletne rezidence kraljeve matere v Istanbulu (1900–1901), ki se med drugim odlikuje tudi po elegantnem notranjem stopnišču z izvirnim rastlinskim vitičevjem. Za gradnjo je uporabljal najnaprednejše tehnike, kot so železobetonske konstrukcije (po sistemu Hennebique), ki so mu omogočale načrtovanje velikih salonov. Rafinirane štukaturne dekoracije v notranjih prostorih in pohištvo pa so izdelovali najuglednejši francoski, nemški, belgijski in italijanski obrtniki.

Neobaročni slog, ki ga je Laščak uporabljal za impozantne palače, je seveda poudarjal predvsem ideje egipčanskega plemstva, ki se je zgledovalo po evropski aristokraciji, medtem ko se je z zasnovo trgovskih stavb približal moderni dunajski arhitekturi Wagnerjeve šole.¹¹ Takšna je na primer fasada veleblagovnice Stein v Kairu (1904), ki je reducirana na velike steklene izložbene površine, razčlenjene zgolj s plitkimi pilastri.

Po prevzemu funkcije vodilnega arhitekta kraljevih palač v Laščakovem slogu spet lahko opazimo spremembo, ki se kaže predvsem v obujanju islamskega sloga. Razvil je pravzaprav osebni arhitekturni jezik, ki je temeljil na eklektičnem spajanju historičnih slogov, islamskih arhitektonskih oblik in okrasja (arabesk, mavresk, kaligrafskega ornamenta) ter secesijskih elementov. Zavedal se je namreč, da je imel takšen slog, s katerim so se ljudje lahko identificirali, pomembno vlogo pri oblikovanju nacionalne identitete.¹² Za bogate naročnike kairske aristokracije, ki so se šolali v evropskih prestolnicah, je sicer še vedno projektiral impozantne palače v historičnih slogih po zgledu italijanske arhitekture 16. stoletja.¹³ Medtem ko so poslovne stavbe iz tega obdobja,

kot je palača tržaške Zavarovalnice Generali v Kairu (1911), rezultat prepletanja evropskih slogov s tradicionalnimi motivi iz islamske tradicije.

V neoislamskem slogu je zasnoval tudi svojo vilo na Rafutu, ob romarski poti na Kstanjevico, ki jo je začel graditi leta 1909 in dokončal tik pred začetkom I. svetovne vojne. Na trinajstih ohranjenih načrtih, datiranih s tremi različnimi datumi (13. november 1908, 17. maj 1909, 20. november 1910), ki jih hrani jo v Zgodovinskem arhivu Občine Gorica (Archivio Storico del Comune di Gorizia), opazimo, da je sicer kot vodja gradbenih del podpisan arhitekt Girolamo Luzzato, kar naj bi bila tedaj stalna praksa: na projektnih risbah namreč ni bil podpisan projektant, pač pa odgovorna oseba za nadzor gradnje.¹⁴ Risba pa je nedvomno Laščakova, saj so na načrtu fasade vile in vratarnice detajlno izrisani tako posamezni gradbeni elementi (opeka, kamen, stebri) kot tudi ornamentalno stavbno okrasje – detajli, ki jih zasledimo tudi na ohranjenih risbah za kairske palače in nagrobne kapele. Posebno zanimiva je tudi kolorirana risba zasnove celovite ureditve posestva s parkom in dovorno potjo, ki potrjuje, da je bil Laščak izjemno nadarjen risar.

Vila na Rafutu je bila v svoji originalni podobi, o kateri pričajo le redke fotografije, zgleden primer Laščakovega samosvojega arhitekturnega sloga, ki ga lahko opredelimo kot eklektični spoj zahodne tradicije vile in orientalskih arhitekturnih detajlov in dekoracij, povzetih zlasti po mameluškem slogu. Najbolj reprezentativni del stavbe, zgrajene iz armiranega betona, je zagotovo osmerokotni stolp s pokritim lesenim hodnikom in polkrožno betonsko kupolo v obliki minareta na zahodni fasadi.¹⁵ Vhod v vilo krasi kamniti mavrski portal z veličastnim stalaktinim obokom. Med okni vzbujajo največ pozornosti bifore s podkvastimi loki, zasledimo pa tudi triforo z razpolovljenima zunanjima odprtinama. Balkona na vzhodni in južni fasadi, ki slonita na konzolah, sta (bila) po arabskem vzoru delno prekrita s perforiranimi lesenimi opaži. Povsem arabski videz daje vili tudi lesen dekorativni strešni napušč in bogato ornamentalno okrasje, povzeto po krajevni egipčanski tradiciji: dimniki z motivi iz mameluških grobnic ter arabeske na betonskih ograjah balkonov, arhitravih, okenskih prekladah in kupoli. Opozoriti pa velja tudi na masiven kotni stebel, ki je nekoč podpiral dvonadstropni balkon z leseno ograjo na vogalu stavbe.

Podobne islamske elemente zasledimo na vratarnici – opečnati stavbi z mavrskim lokom, ki delno povzema strukturo *salamlika*¹⁶ palače Omarja Sultana v Kairu (1907–1908) – prve stavbe, na kateri je eksperimentiral z mešanjem arabske arhitekture in modernih elementov. Vratarnica, ki je prav tako

11 Ibid., str. 16.

12 Marco Chiozza, Silvia Bianco, »Architettura e identità / Architecture and identity«. V: *Da Gorizia all'impero ottomano. Antonio Lasciac – architetto. Fotografie dalle collezioni Alinari*. Firenze: Fratelli Allinari, 2006, str. 22.

13 Lep primer sta rekonstrukcija vladne palače Abdin (1911) in vila princeze Amine (1910–1915).

14 Kuzmin, 2014, str. 27.

15 Stavbni element, ki je sestavni del sakralnih stavb v islamski arhitekturi, se je v Evropi pojavil po Napoleonovi zasedbi Egipta kot reprezentančni dodatek meščanskih vil.

16 Sprejemni prostor v palačah in hišah, kjer so se zbirali moški. V 19. stoletju je bil v plemiških rezidencah ločena stavba.



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- 2 Veleblagovnica Stein, 1904, Kairo; fotografija nastala okrog leta 1904; fotograf: neznan; zbirka: Fratelli Alinari Museum Collections, Florence; vir: Alinari Archives, Florence
- 3 Banka Misr, 1922–1927, Kairo; vir: ERPAC – Servizio Musei e Archivi Storici. Fototeca Musei Provinciali di Gorizia.
- 4 Palača Hidiva – nekdanja poletna rezidenca kraljeve matere, Bebek, Istanbul, vzhodna fasada; vir: Saruhan Mimarlik – odgovoren za načrte pri projektih obnove in konzultant za gradnjo
- 5 Palača Hidiva – nekdanja poletna rezidenca kraljeve matere, Bebek, Istanbul, monumentalno notranje stopnišče; vir: Saruhan Mimarlik – odgovoren za načrte pri projektih obnove in konzultant za gradnjo
- 6 Palača Hidiva – nekdanja poletna rezidenca kraljeve matere, Bebek, Istanbul, severna fasada; vir: Saruhan Mimarlik – odgovoren za načrte pri projektih obnove in konzultant za gradnjo

- 2 Stein Department Store, 1904, Cairo; photo taken around 1904; photo by: Unidentified Author; collection: Fratelli Alinari Museum Collections, Florence; credit: Alinari Archives, Florence
- 3 Misr Bank, 1922–1927, Cairo; credits: ERPAC – Servizio Musei e Archivi Storici. Fototeca Musei Provinciali di Gorizia.
- 4 Hidiva Palace – the former summer residence of the Queen Mother, Bebek, Istanbul, east elevation; credits: Saruhan Mimarlik – responsible for the drawings of the survey–restitution&restoration projects and consultant in the construction process
- 5 Hidiva Palace – the former summer residence of the Queen Mother, Bebek, Istanbul, the monumental inner staircase; credits: Saruhan Mimarlik – responsible for the drawings of the survey–restitution & restoration projects and consultant in the construction process
- 6 Hidiva Palace – the former summer residence of the Queen Mother, Bebek, Istanbul, north elevation; credits: Saruhan Mimarlik – responsible for the drawings of the survey–restitution&restoration projects and consultant in the construction process

okrašena z ornamentalnimi motivi, med katerimi še posebej izstopata imeni Laščaka in njegove žene, zapisani v kufski pisavi, namreč oblikuje z vilo in parkom, v katerem je zasadil vrsto eksotičnih rastlin in ga opremil z grajenimi elementi, v celovito in slogovno povezano ureditev.

Vila je bila med I. svetovno vojno močno poškodovana. In ker je odbor za obnovo Gorice in Goriške Laščaku za rekonstrukcijo namenil le pičlo odškodnino, češ da gre za luksuzno zgradbo, ni vila nikoli več zasijala v prvotni podobi – čeprav je bila, kot prča arhivska fotografija iz leta 1934, obnovljena po prvotnih načrtih. Nekaj ohranjenih originalnih arhitekturnih kosov z ornamentalno dekoracijo, ki jih pri obnovi niso uporabili, vključno s kaloto kupole, leži še danes v parku.

Ob izbruhu I. svetovne vojne, ko so kralja Abasa Hilmija II. odstavili, se je Laščak, sicer zagrizen Italijan, a vendar avstrijski državljani, znašel v nezavidljivem položaju. Angleži so ga izgnali na Malto, od koder pa se je kmalu zatekel v Rim, kjer je po končani vojni intenzivno razmišljal o rekonstrukciji močno porušene Gorice. Ohranjeni načrti sicer pričajo, da je posamezne arhitekturne naloge reševal že med bivanjem v Egiptu. Pred odhodom v Aleksandrijo je denimo zasnoval rekonstrukcijo cerkve Svetega Srca, ki so jo začeli graditi po njegovih načrtih, dokončal pa jo je Maks Fabiani. Načrtoval je prenovo najstarejšega srednjeveškega dela Gorice (Borgo San Rocco), ki leži tik po gradom, a so celotno območje v tridesetih letih 20. stoletja porušili. Predvidel je adaptacijo fasade cerkve sv. Roka, pred katero je postavil vodnjak – prefinjen preplet klasične zasnove, staroegipčanskega elementa (obeliska) in rastlinskih secesijskih detajlov, ki predstavlja eno izmed redkih realiziranih del v Gorici pred I. svetovno vojno. Pripravil je več urbanističnih načrtov za ureditev posameznih

predelov Gorice, kot je preureditev območja ob železniški postaji Transalpina (1905). Leta 1917 je izdelal tudi regulacijski načrt za povojno ureditev mesta, vendar ga je odbor za obnovo Gorice in Goriške zavrnil, osnovno shemo pa je leta 1921 prevzel njegov mlajši sodobnik Maks Fabiani.

Po zavrnitvi urbanističnega načrta obnove Gorice so Laščaka naročila dvorjanov ponovno vodila v Kairo, kjer je v tridesetih letih 20. stoletja ustvaril nekaj boljših projektov. Med slednjimi izstopa stavba Banke Misr (1922–1927), ki je morda najlepši primer njegovega odličnega poznavanja islamske dekorativne umetnosti in mojstrstva v združevanju različnih ornamentalnih stilov, kar dokazujejo tako dekorativni vzorci na marmornatih tleh kot tudi vrhunsko izdelani leseni stropovi.

Laščakovo življenje in delo, za katerega je leta 1927 prejel prestižno nagrado rimske Akademije Sv. Luke, je bilo tudi v poznih letih razpeto med Egiptom in Gorico: v Aleksandriji je zmagal na natečaju za železniško postajo (1946), v Gorici pa je načrtoval ureditev glavnega mestnega trga Travnik/Piazza Vittoria (1938). In čeprav je poletja preživel v Gorici, v svoji vili ni nikdar živel. Še več, leta 1939 jo je pri Zavarovalnici Generali iz Trsta zastavil v zamenjavo za življenjsko rento. Umrl je v Kairu leta 1946, kjer je tudi pokopan.

Čeprav v Laščakovem izjemno obsežnem opusu opazimo tudi sledove modernih evropskih arhitekturnih tokov, ki jih je nedvomno dobro poznal, se njegovo delo ni nikdar izvilo iz okvirov zgodovinskega eklekticizma. Arhitektovo mojstrstvo obvladovanja metjeja se kaže predvsem v dobri tehnični podkovanosti in dognanem spajanju različnih arhitekturnih slogov zahodnih in vzhodnih tradicij v skladno celoto. Ohranjena dela, tako originalne risbe kot tudi stavbni in dekorativni elementi na vili Rafut, pa pričajo tudi o izjemni pozornosti do obravnave detajlov. ❷



Laščakova vila Rafut, 1927. Vili sta bila namenjena obnovi in obnovi. Vili sta bila namenjena obnovi in obnovi.

Architetto Ant. LASCIAK bey



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7 Vila Rafut, 1912–1914 (1928–1929); fotografija nastala okrog leta 1930; fotograf: Del Vecchio, Aristide; zbirka: Fratelli Alinari Museum Collections, Florence; vir: Alinari Archives, Florence

8 Vila Rafut, 1916, vratarnica; vir: ERPAC – Servizio Musei e Archivi Storici. Fototeca Musei Provinciali di Gorizia.

7 Rafut Villa, 1912–1914 (1928–1929); photo taken around 1930; photo by: Del Vecchio, Aristide; collection: Fratelli Alinari Museum Collections, Florence; credit: Alinari Archives, Florence

8 Rafut Villa, 1916, entry lodge; credits: ERPAC – Servizio Musei e Archivi Storici. Fototeca Musei Provinciali di Gorizia.

Until the start of the new millennium, the architect Anton Laščak (1856–1946) went rather unnoticed in Slovenia, with his name appearing for the first time in the appendix to the 2002 edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Slovenia*. There are hardly any records of his work in the reference literature, with the exception of the catalogue for the exhibition entitled *Slovenia – architecture, the masters and the scene*, staged in 2008 in Vienna, in the gallery of the Vienna Insurance Group commercial building.¹ On the Italian side of the border, however, interest in studying Laščak's legacy was first spurred by research in the field of orientalism in the 1980's – although this interest was limited only to that architecture which demonstrated an Arabic influence.² Laščak's Italian projects were further highlighted in a monograph by Marco Chiozza, Antonio Lasciac – *Tra echì secessionisti e suggestioni orientali*, published in 2006. That same year an exhibition of photographs and drawings of his architectural works from the Roman Alinari Museum of Photography was shown in the Attems Petzenstein Palace, which falls under the auspices of the Land Museums of Gorizia. More recently his early works have been attracting a growing amount of attention.³

1 Dr Bogo Zupančič mentions Anton Laščak in his contribution entitled »Die Architektur der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts im Slowenischen Raum: vom Architekten Anton Laščak bis zu den Schülern Plečniks bei Le Corbusier / Architecture on Slovenian area during the first half of the 20th century: from the architect Anton Laščak to the students of Plečnik with Le Corbusier.« In: *Slowenien: Architektur, Meister & Szene / Slovenia: architecture, the masters & the scene*. Exhibition catalogue, Vienna: Gallery of the Vienna Insurance Group commercial building, 2008, p. 24–25.

2 Ezio Godoli, »Antonio Lasciac in Egitto / Antonio Lasciac in Egypt.« In: *Da Gorizia all'impero ottomano. Antonio Lasciac – architetto. Fotografie dalle collezioni Alinari*. Firenze: Fratelli Alinari, 2006, p. 11.

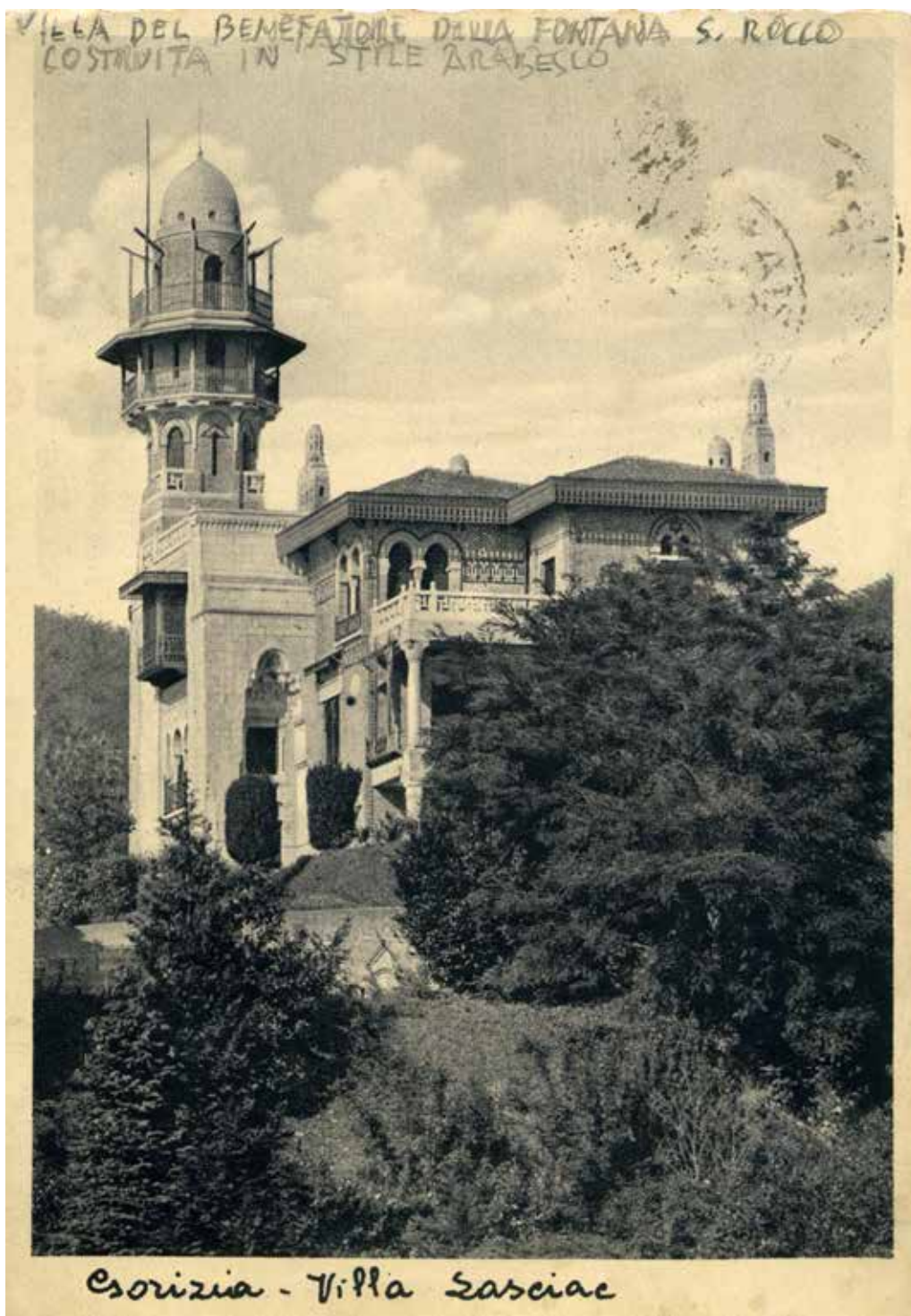
3 The research is promoted by the Department for Engineering and Architecture of the University of Trieste / Dipartimento di Ingegneria e Architettura dell'Università di Trieste.

There are many reasons why the Slovenian architectural profession has ignored Laščak's legacy for more than half a century, one of them being the lack of documentary evidence, which remains dispersed in numerous foreign public and private archives (such as the collection of Mercedes Volait, a professor in Paris), and libraries, especially those in Rome and Cairo. But the most important reason is undoubtedly Laščak's open declaration of national identity. The architect was born in Gorizia, in a multi-ethnic community where different groups lived side by side: Italians, Slovenes, Friulians and Austrians. All of Laščak's ancestors were Slovenes from the Isonzo valley⁴, but despite his Slavic origins he considered himself Friulian. During his studies at the Vienna Polytechnic, he already clearly announced his irredentist tendencies to the circle of young intellectuals. Of course, these tendencies were against the Habsburg Monarchy, which made him fall out of favour with clients in Gorizia, loyal to the Austrian crown.⁵ Until the most recent systematic overview of the material kept in the archive of the Gorizia municipality and covering the years between 1876 and 1883, the prevailing opinion was that Laščak had emigrated to Egypt due to the conflicts in his working environment.⁶ However, the results of new research, in which as many as 25 construction works signed by Laščak have been discovered, shows that

4 His surname is spelled differently in the different parish registers of baptisms, which is a consequence of centuries of mixed nationalities in this region: Lašzhak (in the parish register in Ročinj, for Anton's father), Lashzhak (in the parish register for Anton's grandfather), Lasciack (in the parish register for Anton himself, in the Church of St. Rocco in Gorizia), while in Friulian literature we see the surname sometimes spelled as Laschach. Laščak's wife, Marija Alojzija Plesničar, was also the daughter of a Slovenian tradesman from Gorizia.

5 Diego Kuzmin, *Antonio Lasciac, Disegni goriziani / Goriške risbe / Goritian drawings*. Exhibition Catalogue, Gorizia: Biblioteca Statale Isontina – Galleria Mario di Iorio, 2014, p. 28.

6 Ibid.



he was one of the most active young architects in Gorizia, even though he mainly worked on smaller adaptations where he would perform the function of a supervisor or construction manager.⁷

The reason for Laščak's move to Egypt was therefore not only his political and philosophical beliefs, but the ambition of a young architect who was aware of his professional expertise.⁸

After completing a period of time with the Gorizia Construction Bureau (1876), and after a few years of independent architectural work, Laščak moved to Alexandria in 1883, where he took part in the reconstruction of the city, severely damaged a year earlier by the British cannons that had been used to suppress the uprising of Egyptian nationalists. The comprehensive reconstruction of the city attracted young architects, builders and businessmen from all over Europe. This important Mediterranean port was thus transformed into a city with European architecture of many historic styles.

After only a few years, Laščak established himself as one of the most promising young architects in Alexandria. Up to 1888 he would design a number of representative structures, including the apartment building on the main street, Rue Sherif Pasha (1883–1888)⁹, the Ramleh Railway Station (1883) which was later rebuilt, the commercial gallery Menasce (1885–1887), and monumental palaces for rich bourgeois families. The original photos, kept at the Alinari Museum of photography in Rome, show that Laščak first endorsed a neo-Renaissance style which displayed the influence of the Vienna School and Professor Heinrich von Ferstel.¹⁰ With the buildings from the late 1880's, however, such as the Aghion Palace (1887), the neo-Renaissance architectural elements started to give space to a neo-Baroque style which was visually more representative and remained typical of his later Cairo period.

After having spent six years in Alexandria, Laščak returned to Rome only to settle in Cairo in 1895. During his absence from Egypt, Abbas Hilmi II (1892) came to power, a Vienna-educated khedive, or viceroy, who became very familiar with European culture during his studies in the Austrian capital.

The new ruler wanted to abolish the influence of Great Britain (which controlled the Suez Canal, among other areas of strategic importance), that is why he replaced all his British advisors with German and Austrian experts. Among them was Anton Laščak, who was appointed the chief architect of royal palaces in 1907, and received the title of beg (Sir). As the royal architect he also participated in the Committee for the Protection of Monuments of Arabic Art, which enabled him to become thoroughly acquainted with Islamic architecture.

⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

⁹ Rental apartments were commissioned and funded by a company of rich Alexandrian families, Société Anonyme des Immeubles d'Égypte, which also commissioned the Menasce gallery.

¹⁰ Godoli, 2006, p. 11.



10

9 Vila Rafut, 1934 (foto: G. Paternolli); vir: ERPAC – Servizio Musei e Archivi Storici. Fototeca Musei Provinciali di Gorizia.

10 Vila Rafut, situacija vile s parkom; vir: Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, Archivio Storico del Comune di Gorizia (1830–1927), b. 901, f. 1184/I, prot. 9888/1909

9 Rafut Villa, 1934 (photo: G. Paternolli); credits: ERPAC – Servizio Musei e Archivi Storici. Fototeca Musei Provinciali di Gorizia.

10 Rafut Villa, villa with the park, situation plan; credits: Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, Archivio Storico del Comune di Gorizia (1830–1927), b. 901, f. 1184/I, prot. 9888/1909

Laščak built his reputation as an outstanding architect in Cairo with a number of magnificent villas and palaces built at the turn of the century, which represented a certain novelty in terms of style. The concept of aristocratic residences was based on the intertwining of the (European) neo-Baroque style in combination with modern Secessionist elements, which mostly featured in the ornamental decoration of window and door openings, along with the interior furniture and staircases. He used Secessionist furniture in the parlour of Said Halim Pasha's residence (1896–1899), and made the Secessionist decoration particularly visible on the exterior of the Zafaran Palace in Cairo (1901–1902), and on the façade of the recently renovated summer residence of the queen mother in Istanbul (1900–1901), which has, among other features, an elegant interior staircase with original undulating, plant-derived motives. Laščak used the most advanced construction techniques, such as reinforced concrete (following the Hennebique system), which enabled him to design spacious parlours. The refined stucco decorations of the interior and the furniture were produced by the most renowned French, German, Belgian and Italian craftsmen.

The neo-Baroque style that Laščak applied to such breath-taking palaces mainly followed the ideas of Egyptian nobility, who sought to emulate the European aristocracy, while in designs for commercial buildings he was closer to Modern Viennese architecture, as promoted by the Wagner School.¹¹ An example of this is the façade of the Stein Department Store in Cairo (1904), reduced to large glazed shopping windows, interrupted only by shallow pilasters.

After Laščak assumed the duties of the chief royal architect, his style again underwent another change, visible above all in the revocation of the Islamic style. Laščak developed his personal architectural language, based on an eclectic merging of historical styles, Islamic architectural forms and

decorations (arabesques, mauresques, and calligraphic ornaments) and Secessionist elements. He was aware that his style, with which people could identify, played an important role in forming of the national identity.¹² While Laščak continued to design magnificent palaces in historic styles following the example of the Italian architecture of the 16th century for his wealthy clients from among the Cairo nobility who had been educated in European capitals,¹³ his commercial buildings from that period, such as that for the Generali Insurance Company in Cairo (1911), are the result of intertwining both European styles and traditional Islamic motifs.

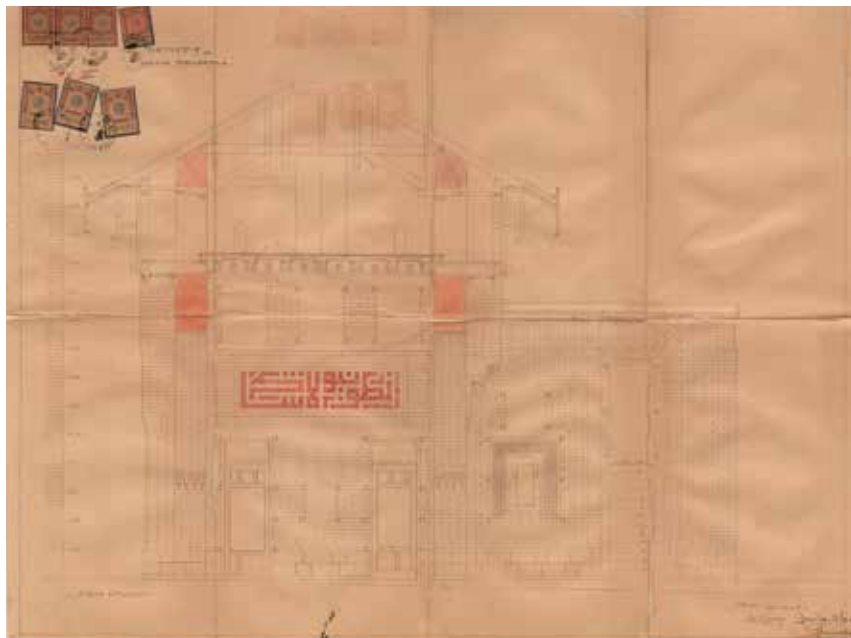
Laščak applied the neo-Islamic style to his own villa in Rafut, along the pilgrimage path to Kostanjevica which he started to build in 1909 and finished just before the beginning of World War I. The thirteen preserved design plans, bearing three different dates (13 Nov 1908, 17 May 1909, 20 Nov 1910), archived in the Historic Archives of the Gorizia Municipality (Archivio Storico del Comune di Gorizia), show that architect Girolamo Luzzato was signed as the head of construction, which was an established practice at that time – the design project was not signed by the architect, but by the person responsible for supervising the construction.¹⁴ But there is no doubt that the drawings and the plans were made by Laščak, for the plans for the façade of the villa and the entrance feature detailed drawings of both the individual construction elements (bricks, stones, pillars), as well as the decorative building ornamentation – details that we can later trace on the preserved drawings for the palaces in Cairo and the funerary chapel. A very interesting detail is the coloured sketch of the complete project for the estate, its park and access road, which proves that Laščak was also an extremely talented draftsman.

¹² Marco Chiozza, Silvia Bianco, »Architettura e identità / Architecture and identity«. In: *Da Gorizia all'impero ottomano. Antonio Lasciac – architetto. Fotografie dalle collezioni Alinari*. Firenze: Fratelli Alinari, 2006, p. 22.

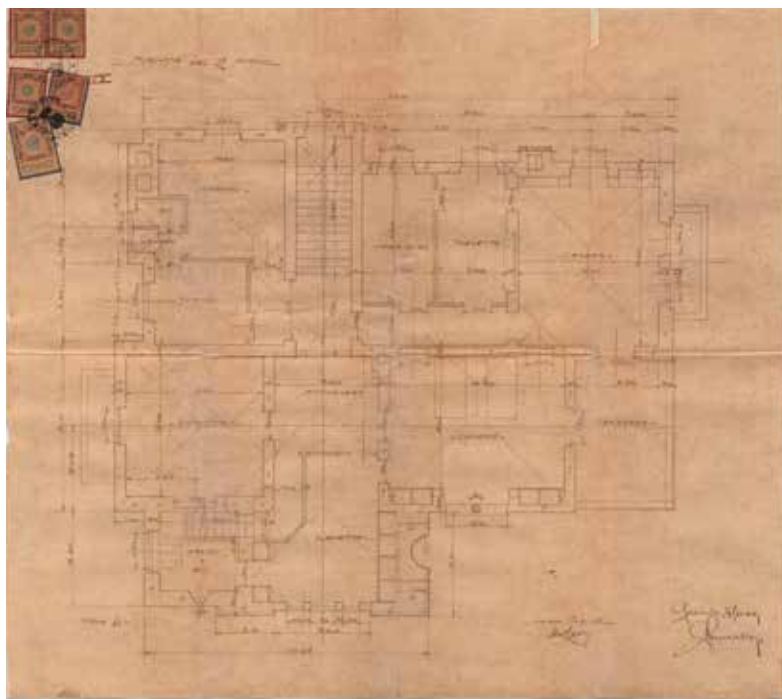
¹³ Good examples of such reconstruction work can be found in the Abdeen governmental palace (1911) and the Palace of Princess Amina (1910–1915).

¹⁴ Kuzmin, 2014, p. 27.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 16.



11



12

In its original state, testified only by some rare photographs, the villa in Rafut was a model example of Laščak's original architectural style, which can only be defined as an eclectic combination of the Western tradition of villas, merged with oriental architectural details and decorations taken from the Mamluk style. The most representative part of the building made of reinforced concrete is most certainly the octagonal tower with a covered wooden corridor and a semi-circular concrete cupola, shaped as a minaret on the western façade.¹⁵ The entrance to the villa is embellished with a Moorish stone portal with a magnificent stalactite arch. Our attention is drawn to the horse-shoe biforas, but we can also see a trifora with halved lateral lights. The balconies on the eastern and southern façades rest on consoles, and were covered with perforated wooden panels in Arabic style. The Arabic influence is further emphasised by the decorative wooden roof eaves and rich ornaments taken from the local Egyptian tradition: chimneys with motifs from Mamluk tombs and arabesques on concrete balustrades of the balconies, on architraves, window lintels and the cupola. Worth noting is the massive corner pillar which supports a two-story balcony with a wooden balustrade on the corner of the building.

Similar Islamic elements can be seen on the entrance lodge – a brick building with a Moorish arch which partly emulates the structure of the *salamlik*¹⁶ for the Omar Sultan Palace (1907–1908) – the

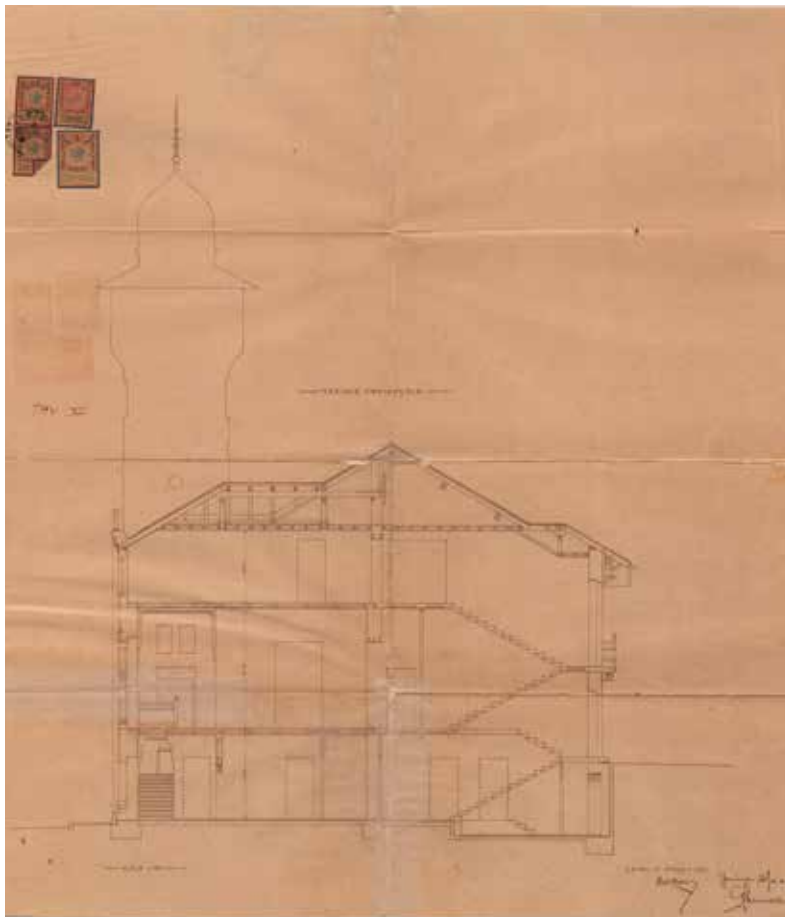
first building where Laščak experimented by mixing Arab architecture and modern elements. The lodge is also decorated with ornamental motifs, where the most interesting ones are the names of Laščak and his wife written in a Kufic script; this structure forms a comprehensive, stylistically coherent whole together with the villa and the park in which Laščak planted a number of exotic plants and introduced many built elements.

The villa was heavily damaged during World War I. Moreover, since the renovation committee of the Gorizia municipality only approved the payment of a very meagre compensation, on the grounds that this was a luxury building, the villa never regained its former glory – even though it was renovated following the original plans, as testified by a photo from 1934. A few original architectural pieces with decorative ornaments which were not used in the reconstruction can still be seen lying around the park.

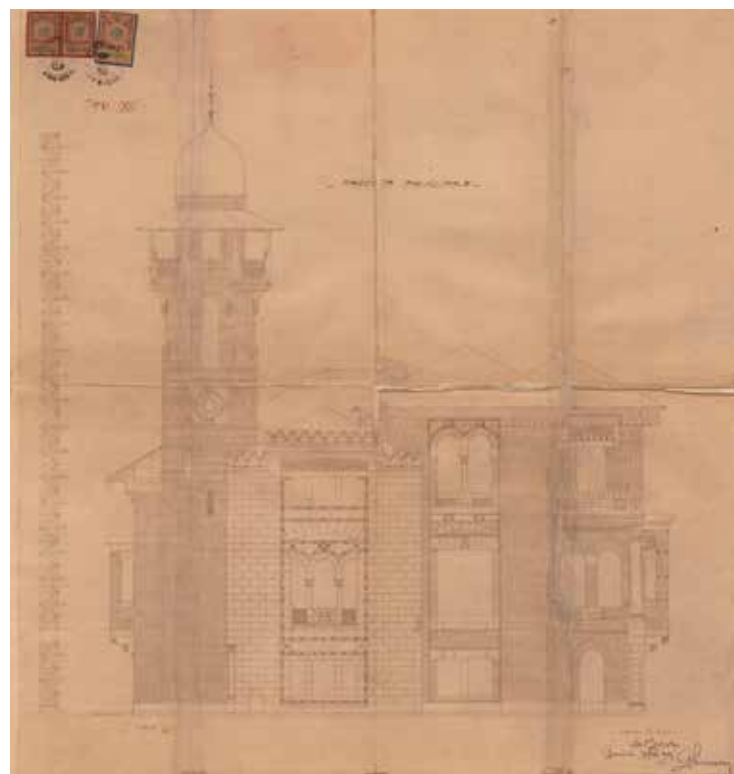
Following the outbreak of World War I, when Abbas Hilmi II was ousted, Laščak – a convinced Italian yet nevertheless a subject of the Austrian crown, found himself in a difficult situation. The British expelled him to Malta, and he soon emigrated to Rome where he started to devote his attention to the reconstruction of a heavily demolished Gorizia. The preserved architectural plans show, however, that he already started to solve individual architectural tasks while still residing in Egypt. Before leaving for Alexandria, for instance, he designed the reconstruction of the Church of the Holy Heart, which started to be built according to his design and was later finished by Max Fabiani. Laščak also designed the renovation of the oldest, medieval part of Gorizia (Borgo San Rocco) located directly

¹⁵ This construction element, which in Islamic architecture is a constituent part of sacral buildings, began to appear in Europe following the occupation of Egypt by Napoleon, as a standard addition to bourgeois villas.

¹⁶ Men's reception area in palaces and houses. In the 19th century aristocratic residences, this was a separate building.



13



14

11 Vila Rafut, vratarница, prerez; vir: Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, Archivio Storico del Comune di Gorizia (1830–1927), b. 901, f. 1184/I, prot. 9888/1909

12 Vila Rafut, tloris prvega nadstropja; vir: Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, Archivio Storico del Comune di Gorizia (1830–1927), b. 901, f. 1184/I, prot. 9888/1909

13 Vila Rafut, prerez; vir: Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, Archivio Storico del Comune di Gorizia (1830–1927), b. 901, f. 1184/I, prot. 9888/1909

14 Vila Rafut, glavna fasada; vir: Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, Archivio Storico del Comune di Gorizia (1830–1927), b. 901, f. 1184/I, prot. 9888/1909

11 Rafut Villa, entry lodge, cross-section; credits: Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, Archivio Storico del Comune di Gorizia (1830–1927), b. 901, f. 1184/I, prot. 9888/1909

12 Rafut Villa, groundplan of the first floor; credits: Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, Archivio Storico del Comune di Gorizia (1830–1927), b. 901, f. 1184/I, prot. 9888/1909

13 Rafut Villa, cross-section; credits: Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, Archivio Storico del Comune di Gorizia (1830–1927), b. 901, f. 1184/I, prot. 9888/1909

14 Rafut Villa, main elevation; credits: Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, Archivio Storico del Comune di Gorizia (1830–1927), b. 901, f. 1184/I, prot. 9888/1909

underneath the castle, but the whole area was entirely demolished in the 1930's. He foresaw the adaptation of the church facade of St. Rocco, in front of which he placed a fountain – a refined combination of a classical form, an old-Egyptian element (an obelisk) and plant-derived Secessionist details, which is one of the rare works in Gorizia that was realised before World War I. Laščak prepared several urban development plans to regulate certain areas of Gorizia, such as the plan for the renovation of the area along the Transalpina Railway Station (1905). In 1917 he also made a regulation plan for the post-war renovation of the city, but the renovation committee of Gorizia and of the Gorizia region rejected this, even though its basic structure was adopted in 1921 by Max Fabiani, Laščak's younger contemporary.

After the rejection of his urban development reconstruction plan, Laščak again received commissions from the Egyptian royal court and moved to Cairo where he created, in the 1930's, some of his best projects. Worth mentioning is the Misr Bank building (1922–1927), which is perhaps the most beautiful example of the architect's knowledge and use of Islamic decorative art, and his mastery in combining different ornamental styles, as demonstrated by the decorative patterns on the marble floor and the expertly crafted wooden ceilings.

Laščak received a prestigious award from the Roman Academy of St. Lucca in 1927 for his achievements. Even in his later years his life and work were divided between Egypt and Gorizia: in Alexandria he won the competition for the railway station (1946), while in Gorizia he designed the layout for the main city square of Piazza Vittoria/Travnik (1938). Although Laščak used to spend his summers in Gorizia, he

never really lived in the villa. What is more, he ceded the building to the Generali Insurance Company in Trieste, and received a life annuity in return. He died and was buried in Cairo in 1946.

Even though Laščak's body of work shows traces of modern European architectural movements, which he undoubtedly knew well, his work never went beyond the framework of historic eclecticism. His mastery of his profession is displayed above all in the technical excellence and well-considered merging of different architectural styles stemming from the western and eastern traditions, producing a comprehensive, harmonious whole. The preserved works, however, his original drawings, as well as the construction and decorative elements of the villa in Rafut, also testify to his meticulous attention to detail. ☉