

**The construction of the road network
in Italian East Africa (1936-41)
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1 Plans and projects**

ORIGINAL ITALIAN VERSION:

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On the evening of May 9, 1936, Mussolini, from the balcony of Palazzo Venezia, announced to the crowd the "reappearance of the Empire on the fatal hills of Rome". The constitutive decree of the Empire, which places Ethiopia and its inhabitants under the direct Italian sovereignty and appoints the king of Italy as Emperor of Ethiopia, bears the same date, while one of the first concerns of the regime, after having regulated the administration of new possessions, seems to be that of the launch of the plan for the construction of the road network ¹.

In reality, a program of road construction for war purposes in East Africa is already carried out before the conquest of the Empire. In Eritrea, since the beginning of 1935 and until the outbreak of the conflict, some roads and tracks have been built that from Massaua and Asmara go towards the Ethiopian territory: the Asmara-Nefasit, the Asmara-Mareb (Eritrean border), the Asmara-Solcottom (Eritrean border) and the Massaua-Decamerè camionale ². South of Ethiopia, the governor of Somalia, Rodolfo Graziani, in February 1935, began construction of two arteries that go north from the capital: Mogadishu-Bulu Burti-Belet Uen-Musthail, through the Uebi Scebelli valley, and Mogadishu Bur-Accaba-Baidoa-Dolo. In addition, a road is built that joins the two arteries at the height of the towns of Baidoa and Bulu Burti ³. Then, after the conquest, the realization of an efficient road system in the Ethiopian territory is necessary to satisfy at least two needs of different sign.

First of all, the roads are useful for the army to favor the movement of troops still engaged in stifling the actions of the Ethiopian resistance, so in this regard Graziani himself, viceroy of Ethiopia since June 1936, admits that some revolts in the rainy season of the 1937 were "quickly tamed by virtue of the possibility of rapid movement by road" ⁴; secondly, the presence of a road network is the indispensable premise for the program to enhance the occupied lands, which has as its motto "in the road is life" ⁵. The agricultural and industrial development of the colony, with the consequent orders for the private sector, allows the State to offer new economic outlets to large and small companies that for years have been suffering the effects of a severe economic recession ⁶.

The Public Works Minister, Giuseppe Cobolli Gigli, summarizes the two needs in a 1938 work:

At key roads is given a leading role in the defense and promotion of the Empire ⁷ [...] with the construction of the roads there was the military security zones they crossed and continued economic improvement of transport ⁸ .

We find the same concepts in a 1939 script by Giuseppe Pini, president of the IV section of the Council of Public Works:

The problem of the rapid and secure ways of communication of the Empire was immediately [...] presented as fundamental and unpayable, since no activity could profitably take place without the possibility of movement and transport of men, means and materials: the same security and the speed of complete pacification depended on this possibility ⁹ .

Ancora Pini, in a previous work reaffirms the link between the road system and the enhancement of the territory:

The network of the fundamental roads of the empire [...] had necessarily to have a rapid realization, since without fast and convenient ways of communication no value [...] was possible ¹⁰ ;

while, at the end of the work, he comments:

the roads, in their very rapid realization, have suppressed any discontinuity between conquest and development of the territory ¹¹ .

It is not surprising, therefore, that if the administration of the colonies is regulated, the launching of the street plan is not long in coming. On 19 May, in fact, Mussolini issues the following statement ¹² :

The Duce, Minister of the Colonies, traced the plan of the Ethiopian road network, and issued instructions so that the construction of the following basic arteries will immediately be given:

Om Anger-Gondar-Debra Tabor-Dessiè Km 650

Debra Tabor-Debra Marcos - Addis Ababa Km 500

Adigrat-Dessiè-Addis Ababa Km 850

Assab-Dessiè Km 500

Addis Ababa-Gimma Km 300

Total Km 2,800.

In a second time the Addis Ababa-Allata-Neghelli-Dolo road will be built, 1,100 km long. to connect the capital of Ethiopia with the lake region and then with Somalia. At the same time the network of minor connection roads will be built. The roads will be tarred and equipped with all the works of art necessary to ensure traffic in every season and for any need.

To this end, a technical department of the AASS is built in Addis Abeba, employed by the viceroy, with a complete organization of personnel and means for the immediate start of work in

each sector. As construction progresses, roads will be maintained and supervised by road checks and militants (see fig. 1).(*JFS: missing*)

The task of creating the road network is therefore entrusted to the AASS, the Autonomous State Road Company established in 1928 (In 1094 of 17 May) with the "task of assuming the technical management" of the main Italian roads identified by the establishing law itself of the Authority among the streets already covered by the Civil Engineering and Provinces ¹³. There are 137 main arteries, mostly first class ¹⁴ but some also second, for a total of 20,622 km ¹⁵, which take the name of "state roads" ¹⁶. The Minister of Public Works, president of the Company, appoints the members of the Board of Directors and the general manager, responsible for technical management, while the executive tasks are entrusted to 14 traffic compartments. The Company's budget is approved by the Parliament as an appendix to the budget of the Ministry of Public Works, while for its own funding the ASS enjoys some special assets: the proceeds of circulation taxes and advertising, road improvement contributions and that State fixed amount of 180 million per year.

On state roads the AASS performs "accommodation" and "routine and extraordinary maintenance" works. The accommodation activities include the paving, the adjustment of the carriageway, the construction of the artefacts, the construction of the roadhouse houses, the regulation of road signs and the correction of the tracks. This type of intervention initially concerns about 6,000 km of roads chosen among those that are particularly important due to traffic, prestige and decorum ¹⁷. The works, to be completed in four years, are carried out with contracts with deferred payments of about fifteen years and financed in part with loans granted at subsidized rates ¹⁸. Having run out of the first program of 6,000 km, the economic difficulties of the Company, due to some lost revenues ¹⁹, orientate the AASS strategies towards a more limited intervention: on the roads defined as "great communication", work is eliminated by eliminating the "stickiness of the route »And arranging the carriageways only where« traffic intensity »is required; on the roads defined as "local interest" the accommodation operations "are limited to works that are strictly indispensable for road safety" ²⁰. Following these new directives, the "settled" km become 11,453 in 1937 and 13,000 in 1940 ²¹. The "maintenance" activity, on the other hand, is carried out directly by the Company, also through the intervention of the roadmen, on all roads not involved in the work of "accommodation" ²².

In addition to the management of state roads, the law establishing the AASS also entrusts the company with "control" tasks on motorways. The new concept arteries reserved for extraurban car traffic are made by specially constituted private companies, which according to the agreement signed with the State have the right to manage the highways for fifty years. But the financial difficulties faced by the concessionary companies, due to the poor development of the Italian motorization ²³, force the State to intervene ²⁴. In 1933 the Milan-Laghi, the first Italian

motorway, was redeemed, whose management passed to the AASS. The absolute novelty for the Company consists in the collection of tolls, however reduced by a third on the occasion. Following the redemption by the State of the other motorway sections, the Milan-Bergamo in May 1938, the Bergamo-Brescia in 1939, and finally the Firenze-Mare in 1941, the AASS is managing about 300 km of highways, to which must be added the approximately 50 km of the Genoa-Serravalle Scrivia, an artery reserved for trucks, built directly by the State and inaugurated on 28 October 1935²⁵.

It is clear, therefore, how, beyond the management of state roads and most of the motorway network, what Mussolini entrusts to the AASS in East Africa is a completely new task, in addition to being the most important task carried out up to then by the Company in the field of road construction. Minister Cobolli Gigli, as president of the autonomous company, calls upon Giuseppe Pini, president of the IV section of the Public Works Council, to direct the work, which will then become, in December 1939, not by chance, general manager of the AASS, and in February 1943 he will be included in the list of candidates for the Senate²⁶. On 21 May Mussolini granted final approval to the plan and the classification of the AASS in East Africa. The road company in aoi will be formed by a central inspectorate based in Addis Ababa, divided into technical service and administrative service, and four compartments based respectively in Addis Ababa, Asmara, Gondar and Dessiè²⁷.

The road network construction plan is therefore established before the AASS officials can carry out the necessary technical surveys. When the officials of the company of the road arrive in Ethiopia we are by now at the beginning of the season of the great rains (June 1936), which not only blocks the start of the works, but also makes it impossible to carry out the reconnaissance necessary for the preparation of the tracks. The technicians of the AASS do not possess "any colonial experience", and in addition "they lack any study data"²⁸. Thus the only information in the possession of the officials of the autonomous Company is that provided by the officers who conducted the military campaign, but not considered "sufficient for the preparation of the projects"²⁹.

However, in the month of October the technicians of the AASS can start the inspections, ended in December, and are therefore able to make the necessary modifications to the "plan of the Duce", naturally always under "his approval".

Some technical difficulties require the renunciation of the connection between Om Anger and Gondar (the first road of the Mussolini communiqué). The military needs and the possibilities of exploitation of the territory, when not the pressures of the different governorates in which the colony³⁰ is divided, seem instead to suggest the extension of the plan to the construction of other road sections and to the modification of some tracks. In this regard, Minister Cobolli Gigli expressed himself in April 1938:

The routes were set [...] by choosing them from various possible solutions, based on the results of the inspections and considerations of an economic and military nature made by the governors concerned and confirmed by the general government. Addis Ababa-Lechemti was added to the roads arranged in the original plan with the approval of the Duce, whose construction was reported with urgent necessity ³¹ .

Beyond the Addis Ababa-Lechemti road, there is also a connection between Asmara and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, decided in the capital of Eritrea on 5 November 1936 during a meeting "chaired by the Minister of Colonies" ³² . The construction of the road had begun before the end of the conflict and "although it was not among the lines of the network that had been traced immediately after the conquest of the Empire, it had to be completed because it kept the purposes for which it was decreed and begun the construction » ³³ .

Finally the connection between Gondar and Addis Ababa, which in the Duce's plan touches the cities of Debra Tabor and Debra Marcos, is modified to cross the Goggiam, "more fertile and more populated" area ³⁴ , and which, moreover, constitutes the heart of the Ethiopian resistance ³⁵ . The definitive plan entrusted to the AASS therefore includes the following nine fundamental ways:

Road n. 1 of Dogali (Massaua-Nefasit-Asmara) of 116 Km;

Road number 2 of the Victory (Asmara-Dessiè-Addis Ababa) of 1,077 Km;

Road n. 3 of Decamerè (Nefasit-Decamerè) of 40 Km;

Road n. 4 of the Dancalia (Assab-Dessiè) of 485 Km;

Road n. 5 of western Eritrea (Asmara-Tessenei-Sabderat) of 379 Km;

Road n. 6 of Lake Tana (Asmara-Gondar-Debra Marcos-Addis Ababa) of 1,262 Km;

Road n. 7 del Gimma (Addis Ababa-Gimma) of 340 Km;

Road n. 8 of Lechemti (Addis Ababa-Lechemti) of 330 Km;

Road n. 9 by Debra Tabor (Gondar-Debra Tabor-Dessiè) of 360 Km ³⁶ .

The total total was 4,389 km, of which 400 have already been built in Eritrea during the phase of preparation for the war and that the AASS has only the task of arranging (see fig. 2). Some sections of the road n. 6 between Addis Ababa and Gondar and of the road n. 9 between Dessiè and Gondar respectively of 707 km and 330 km, although part of the plan, are not considered urgent, and their completion is not foreseen in the expenditure chapter of the network which therefore covers a total of 3,352 km, of which 2,952 km of completely new roads and 400 km of roads to be set up, for a total amount of 3 billion lire. This figure is reached through a painful bureaucratic process. In fact, initially the Ministry of Public Works had provided a considerably lower expenditure forecast, amounting to around 500. 000 pounds per kilometer. Minister Cobolli Gigli justifies himself in this way with the Duce:

The forecasts indicated in August XIV in lire 500,000 per km [...] concern a broad study done by the Ministry before the wage increase of the workers by 30% and before it was established that the load of the trips should go to the companies, as well as before the order of use of 70% of metropolitan workers ³⁷ .

In fact, in March 1937 the AASS contracted 2,246 km of new roads for a total of 2,784,500,000 lire, with an average cost of around 1,240,000 ³⁸ lire. The expenses for maintaining and completing the roads already built, which at that time concern, in addition to the Eritrean roads, also part of the Vittoria road up to Quorum, require instead an expense equal to 396 million lire, with an average cost of about 340,000 lire at km ³⁹ . The total cost would therefore amount to 3,180,500,000 lire. This figure, however, has been revised downwards, as in the Council of Ministers in June 1937 there was a discussion on a figure to be allocated for the work of 3,111,140,000 lire divided into three financial years ⁴⁰ :

Financial year of 1936-37: Lire 900,000,000;

Financial year of 1937-38: Lire 1,650,000,000;

Financial year of 1938-39: Lire 561,140,000.

But the Ministry of Finance expects the total figure to be lowered to 3 billion, and to be divided into four financial years and no longer three according to the scheme:

Financial year of 1936-37: Lire 900,000,000;

Financial year of 1937-38: Lire 1,100,000,000;

Financial year of 1938-39: Lire 500,000,000;

Financial year of 1939-40: Lire 500,000,000.

However, the reduction in expenses does not affect the amounts strictly assigned to the construction and construction of new roads, which are already largely contracted out, but reduces the costs of completing and constructing road maintenance from 85,000,000 to 74,737,597 lire , and from 235.000.000 to 131.122.403 lire the sum destined to the salaries of the personnel of the AASS and to the general expenses.

The distribution of the remaining sum between the various sections already built and to be built is thus sanctioned by the Council of Ministers in June 1937 ⁴¹ :

Roads to be completed and placed:

Massaua-Asmara (road No. 1 of the plan): Lire 39.320.000;

Asmara-Negussè (section of road n. 6 of the plan): Lire 35.090.000;

Nefasit-Decamerè (road No. 3 of the plan): Lire 8,330,000;

Decamerè-Macallè-Quorum (section of road no. 2 of the plan): Lire 59,000,000;

Asmara-Sabderat (road No. 5 of the plan): Lire 255,000,000.

For newly built roads:

Aguissè-Mai Tinchet-Gondar (section of road n. 6 of the plan): Lire 163,000,000;

Quorum-Dessìè-Addis Abeba (section of road no. 2 of the plan): Lire 714,000,000;

Dessìè-Magdala (section of road n. 9 of the plan): Liras 81.400.000;

Assab-Sardò-Dessìè (road No. 4 of the plan): Lire 681,000,000;

Addis Ababa-Lechemti (road No. 8 of the plan): Lire 410,000,000;

Addis Ababa-Gimma (road No. 7 of the plan): Lire 345,000,000.

The total sum amounted to 2,791,140,000 lire. The figure of 900 million lire in the first financial year is reversed from the budget of the East African Ministry already assigned for the 1936-37 year. In fact, while in Rome there is discussion on the sums of the state budget to be allocated to the construction of roads entrusted to the AASS, the Company has already proceeded to distribute the contracts and start work.

This speed is undoubtedly linked to the will of the regime to provide an image of efficiency, but it is also dictated by practical reasons. First of all there is the need to move the troops engaged in fighting local resistance quickly on the territory. Secondly, the great rains of June-September of 1936 make the tracks opened by the army during the conflict impracticable. This means that for three months the center of the Empire remains completely isolated. Addis Ababa and Gondar must be refueled by air. A note among the papers of the Duce's Special Secretariat concerns the content of a telephone interception of January 1937 in which "Colonel Salomone, Commissioner of Gondar,"⁴² . Mussolini then claims that on June 30, 1937, it is possible to circulate on the Asmara-Gondar and Asmara-Addis Ababa⁴³ arteries .

The official publications dealing with the subject insist a great deal on the achievement of this first objective. But if it is indicated on several sides that for June 30, 1937 the road system between Addis Ababa, Gondar and Asmara is insured, the works cannot be considered completed. In fact, Giuseppe Pini states that on 21 June 1937 on the Asmara-Gondar route 411 km of road and 143 km of runway⁴⁴ (554 km out of a total of 580) were completed, while on the Asmara-Addis Ababa route on the same date 835 km were built on road and 265 km on track (1,110 km out of a total of 1,262)⁴⁵ . The same Minister of Public Works, Cobolli Gigli, wrote in April 1938 that only on 30 June 1938 the two routes Asmara-Gondar and Asmara-Addis Abeba "could be said to have been almost completed"⁴⁶ .

Nevertheless, on 21 April 1937 the passenger service on the Addis Ababa-Asmara was inaugurated with a transport organized by the Gondrad company. *Ciro Poggiali*, correspondent of the "Corriere della Sera" in Ethiopia, is an exceptional witness of that first trip, and the words of his diary can shed light on the type of relationship that binds Mussolini to his subordinates, even when they occupy positions of high responsibility:

Evidently no one in that circumstance dared to tell the Chief that in reality the roads had not yet reached that degree of accommodation necessary for such a long and delicate passenger service⁴⁷ .

In addition to the difficulty of traveling by bus the still incomplete stretches of the road, what strikes the journalist most is the fact that:

every 5 km is a construction site that ventilates the fortress, because engineers and workers have first of all to take care to save their skin against rebellion everywhere meandering ⁴⁸ .

There is no trace of this type of difficulty in specialized publications. On June 30, 1939, however, two and a half years after the beginning of the works, the road network entrusted to the AASS can be said to be almost complete, with the exception of some sections on the n. 9 between Magdala and Debra Tabor (255 km) and on the n. 6 between Debra Marcos and Gondar (407 km) ⁴⁹ .

Yet the "road fever" that seems to have seized the high offices of the regime cannot be satisfied with the "only" 3,352 km of fundamental roads. In addition to the aforementioned economic and military motivations, other factors also contribute to the decision taken by the Italian government to expand the road network in Aoi. The construction of the road network is considered by the regime a very useful tool in terms of propaganda to affirm the cultural and technical superiority of Fascist Italy towards the indigenous population, considered completely incapable of acquiring an efficient transport system ⁵⁰ . The road, "Roman construction" par excellence, is the public work that best lends itself, for obvious reasons, to the exercise of a rhetoric aimed at combining the Fascist Empire with the past glories of imperial Rome. Thus the regime tends to emphasize road construction in Ethiopia as "works of civilization", whereby the road becomes the concrete sign of civilizing action carried out by fascism in lands where "abandonment and barbarism had prevailed until yesterday" ⁵¹ .

Therefore in June 1937 the Council of Ministers launched an impressive plan of public works for Italian East Africa that certainly cannot forget the streets. Out of a total planned expenditure of 12 billion lire, as many as 7 billion and 730 million are destined for the construction of new arteries and the completion and accommodation of existing ones ⁵² .

Initially the plan, which runs from 1 July 1936, is articulated over six years, and provides for the allocation of two billion lire a year for public works. At the time of the approval of the decree, however, on 15 November 1937, the 12 billion are thus divided into twelve financial years, starting from the financial year 1936-37 ⁵³ :

Financial year 1936-37: Lire 2,000,000,000;

Financial exercises from 1937-38 to 1945-46: Lire 1,000,000,000;

Financial exercises from 1946-47 to 1947-48: Lire 500,000,000.

Road works include the major communication roads established by the Council of Ministers, secondary roads and runways, whose network "can be determined on the basis of the programs to be decided by the governments concerned" ⁵⁴ according to following diagram ⁵⁵ :

A) Major communications:

1. Addis Ababa-Sciasciamanna-Imi-Mustahil-Fer Fer-Mogadishu of 1,500 km of which part built

- and part under construction: Lire 1,500,000,000;
2. Addis Ababa-Dire Dawa-Harar of 600 Km of which part in course of construction and part having character of track: Lire 600.000.000;
 3. Harar-Giggiga-Fer Fer of Km 900 some of which are under construction: Lire 600,000,000;
 4. Addis Ababa-Gondar of 800 km for the Accefer: Lire 1,000,000,000;
 5. Giggiga-Argheesia of 100 Km for Berbera (Italian-English agreements): Lire 100,000,000;
 6. Giggiga-Burama of 50 Km for Zeila: Lire 30,000,000;
 7. Sciasciamanna-Gimma of 200 Km: Liras 200.000.000;
 8. Sciasciamanna-Uondo-Neghelli-Filtù-Dolo-Baidoa-Mogadishu of Km 1350 of which part having track character under construction: Lire 1,000,000,000;
 9. Gimma-Gore-Gambela of 400 Km: Lire 400,000,000;
 10. Lechemti-Kurumuk of 400 Km for Rosereis: Lire 400,000,000;
 11. Neghelli-Mega of 300 Km: Lire 300,000,000;
 12. Mega-Javello-Agheremariam-Uondo of 400 Km for Addis Ababa: Lire 400,000,000;

B) Secondary roads:

Internal roads of each

Eritrean government : 100,000,000 lire;

Somalia: Lire 200,000,000;

Harar: Lire 200,000,000;

Galla Sidamo: Lire 300,000,000;

Amahara (including all the Scioa): Lire 300,000,000;

Secondary tracks and caravan routes: Lire 100,000,000.

The great communication roads nos. 5 and 6, designed together with the British government, lead to British Somalia. The roads nos. 1, 2 and 8 are the transoceanic roads, which connect the center of the Empire with Mogadishu. Only for "major communications", the project therefore includes the construction of a 6,200 km road network, including the 800 km of Addis Ababa-Gondar⁵⁶, for a total of 7,000 km of roads and a total investment of 6,530,000 lire (see fig. 2).

The first, and as we shall see, the only way of the plan to be completed, is the director n. 2, even if its 485 km route at the end is shorter than the initially planned 600 km. This artery runs parallel to the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway section up to Harar. The lack of sympathy that the regime has towards the French railway is well known, as evidenced by the construction of this road and the design and construction of the Danakil road (the main road n. 4), which connects the capital to the port of new construction of Assab. Both roads, charged with political significance, are intended to make the French rail link between the Red Sea and Addis Ababa superfluous.

Of course in this second and more ambitious project the works for the 9 fundamental roads are not included, given that «since they are already well specified individually in the nature and in the

amount; having a particular urgency; and being finally governed by special rules of execution, it seemed more appropriate to make them the object of a separate framework independent of that of the works envisaged by the program » ⁵⁷ . But despite the fact that "in the mind of the legislator" the expenditure chapters of the two projects were independent "in reality they were at least partly deficient [...] in the forecasts, so much so that the burden of omissions of the first AASS financing can be satisfied by subtracting part of its financial resources from the second » ⁵⁸ . In fact the three billion allocated for the fundamental roads are not sufficient to sustain the expenses that the work requires, as reported by the State General Accounting Office to the Ministry of Italian Africa in February 1939:

for AASS road construction have already committed Liras 2,859,421,262,17 in front of only Lire 2,791,140,000 allowed by the decree, while it is below the sums allowed both for maintenance and for salaries and checks [respectively] Lire 18.866 .899.50 against Lire 74.737.597 permitted, and Lire 21.225.991.39 against Lire 134.122.403 allowed ⁵⁹ .

Amedeo d'Aosta, in December 1937, succeeded Graziani in the position of viceroy of Ethiopia, he is forced to transfer 500 million liras from the budget of the multi-year plan to allocate them to the AASS, late with payments to companies, already in 1938 :

Situation that has now become seriously worrying not only due to the lack of payments to companies whose progress has been in the accounts for some time, but also due to mandatory costs of the inspectorate and AASS. I therefore ask you to ensure urgent provision for the allocation of € 500 million ⁶⁰ .

But even this half a billion more is not enough to cover the additional unplanned expenses of the fundamental roads plan. Despite the viceroy urging the Ministry of Public Works to find the funds elsewhere - "I do not think it is possible that the execution of the AASS program [...] will further damage the multi-year program to the detriment of the other road and public works programs" ⁶¹ - is forced to move from the multi-year plan to divert 140,000,000 lire in the 1939-40 financial year and 150,000,000 lire in the 1940-41 financial year on the main roads. Furthermore, for each financial year a large sum is paid to the company on the road so that it takes care of the maintenance of the Empire's road network, an activity that was not foreseen by the legislator when the funds of the multi-year plan were distributed. But in this regard, the viceroy Amedeo d'Aosta complains:

In the last financial year [1938-39] the AASS Central Inspectorate presented extraordinary maintenance reports on the network [...] which amounted to a total of 115 million [...] the aforementioned surveys concerned, for a significant part, real works from scratch , for integration of the three billion program ⁶² .

According to the Ministry of Public Works and the companies participating in tenders, the continuous upward revision of the cost of basic roads is due to two factors: the new discipline of

labor relations introduced during 1937 which involves the increase of labor costs and higher costs related to the transport of materials carried out via Massaua, ie on the roads built by the regime, compared to those expected via Djibouti, that is, using the much-deprecated French railway line. The funds of the multi-year plan therefore, in addition to financing the construction of further roads and the construction of all the other public works of the Empire, are also destined to the completion of the fundamental roads, as well as to the maintenance of the road network. In the course of 1938 some difficulties in the State budget impose a further delay in the multi-year plan, which goes from twelve to twenty years, making available for every financial year starting from 1938-39 only 500 million ⁶³ .

This leads to considerable difficulties in the design and implementation of the works. In fact, if on the one hand the regime expects almost immediate realization of roads, ports, public buildings, on the other it defer payments over time, thus allowing participation in public works only to large companies, the only ones that can afford to anticipate required capital ⁶⁴ .

This new reduction in the amounts available annually forces the Italian Ministry of Africa to review the plan envisaged by the 1937 decree. In June 1938 a new road construction project is approved which, compared to the previous one, requires the renunciation of one of the three roads transoceanic, the central one from Belet Uen to Sciasciamanna, "given the importance of the other two eastern and western lines on which work has already been carried out for very large amounts" ⁶⁵; project that involves the reclassification of roads, along the lines of the one introduced in Italy, between busy roads, first-class roads, second-class roads, and safe-transit tracks. Thus the plan of June 1938 provides for the construction of the following streets ⁶⁶ :

1. Gondar-Gorgorà (road of great traffic) - east shore of the lake Tana-Bahar Dar-Debra Marcos-Ficcè-Addis Ababa first-class road (to complete the direction n. 6 of the fundamental roads);
2. from the eastern shore of Lake Tana to Debra Tabor-Magdala, a second-class road (completing the main road n. 9);
3. Gorgorà-western shore of Lake Tana-Bahar Dar, a safe transit track;
4. from Assab-Dessiè near Millè, to Addis Abeba-Dire Daua, a busy road;
5. Addis Ababa-Moggio-Ausch-Dire Daua, partly a busy road and partly a first-class one;
6. Lechemti-Ghimbi (second-class road) -Dembidollo-Gambela, a busy road;
7. from Addis Abeba-Moggio to Soddu-lago Margherita-Allata, first class road;
8. Gimam-Maggi, a second-class road;
9. Belet Uen-Giggiga, first class road;
10. Mogadishu-Dolo-Neghelli-Allata, first-class road;
11. Allata-Mega, first-class road;
12. Harar-Giggiga-towards Harghesia, first-class road;
13. Giggiga towards Zeila, second-class road;

14. Aiscia for Giallo-Zeilo second-class road;
15. Ghimbi-Zurmuk, a safe passageway;
16. Say Daua-Harar, busy road;
17. Mogadishu-Belet Uen, busy road;
18. Belet Uen-Mustahil, track.

But even this project soon turns out to be too ambitious for the financial resources made available by the multi-year plan. The Italian Ministry of Africa is therefore forced to launch a program of urgent road works with a total cost of 800 million lire to be divided over five financial years to date from 1 July 1939, for an annual figure of 160 million of lire. As usual, this system means that the contracts are to be distributed "between the companies which, due to their technical and financial equipment and the way in which the work is carried out, can sustain the payment in installments in 5 years while providing for the execution of the works in the period prescribed by the specifications that are shorter than the aforementioned term » ⁶⁷ .

The planned roads are therefore reduced to the following:

1. trunk Debra Tabor-torrent Targhia on the director Gondar-Dessìè (to complete the director n. 9 of the fundamental roads);
2. Addis Ababa-Soddu-Allotà;
3. Gimma-Magi;
4. Lechetmi-Gambela ⁶⁸ .

The total amounted to 1,506 km. The viceroy, in concert with the Italian Ministry of Africa, entrusts the construction of these tracks to the AASS, which distributes the contracts between August and September 1939. Among the companies that win the works, the following should be mentioned: the sicelp , the Anonima Strade, the foods, the Igliari, the Ciardi, the Astaldi, the Valente, the Scala, the Mediterranea, and the sabic ⁶⁹ .

In January 1940, Gimma-Sirè was also contracted, which was not included in the project of the previous July.

In the financial year of 1939-40 the construction of these roads is intended for the entire amount foreseen (160,000,000 lire), but in the following year, 1940-41, the figure is lowered to around 52,000,000 lire (plus the almost 16.000.000 liras destined to the construction of the Gimma-Sirè).

The plan of the fundamental roads, started near the conquest, aims to develop the connections between the center of the Empire and the Red Sea, then in the north-east direction, in order to unite the capital Addis Ababa and the city of Gondar with the ports of Massaua and Assab. The multi-year plan, in its successive versions, instead wants to link Addis Ababa with the Indian Ocean, and therefore with Mogadishu, and with the western area of the Empire. It then moves in a south-westerly direction.

At the end of 1939, as far as the first project of 1936 was concerned, all the main roads were built except for some sections on the Addis Ababa-Gondar (road also included in the subsequent multi-year plan) and on the Gondar-Dessiè. Regarding the second project of 1937 only Addis Ababa-Harar is completed. It also works on two of the three transoceanic roads that must connect Mogadishu to the center of the Empire. Regarding the third project of the streets of an urgent nature, we work only on some sections, between Gimma and Sirè, between Lechemti and Ghimbi, between Gimma and Scioa Ghimira (see fig. 3).

The incomplete realization of the multi-year plan is due to the reduction of the annual sum available for the works, which from the initial two billion lire is reduced to 500 million, and from the need to finance with these funds the works of the fundamental roads and the maintenance of all the Ethiopian road network. The authorities are therefore forced to review the multi-year plan from time to time, continuously limiting its scope, while Italy's involvement in the world conflict obviously causes the interruption of all the works ⁷⁰.

2 The nine fundamental roads

On October 3, 1936, the Minister of Public Works, Cobolli Gigli, and the Minister for the Colonies, Alessandro Lessona, went to Ethiopia to follow the work on the main roads. But as we have seen, the plan is not yet well defined. What seems clear is that Mussolini expects tangible results in a short time. Together with the two ministers, then, the technicians of five companies leave to entrust the work on the main trunks by private treaty, subject to costs and routes. Having read the situation, the first works are entrusted to the company sa Puricelli of Milan, and to the companies Saverio Parisi and Vaselli of Rome. These are three companies that years ago had already secured the large road contracts in Italy ⁷¹.

Particularly interesting is the figure of Piero Puricelli, owner of the largest Italian company in the field of road construction, the Società Anonima Puricelli Strade e Cave, which is considered the key man in the realization of the first Italian highways. In fact, it is his project for the first road reserved for car traffic in Italy, the Milan-Lakes, whose very fast construction times show not only the strong political interest in the work, but also the considerable technical skills of the companies involved. Mussolini receives Puricelli on November 23, 1922, a few days after the establishment of his government, and grants approval to the builder's project. From that moment on, all the bureaucratic steps have been overcome very quickly. ⁷². The recognized competence of Puricelli ⁷³ is not limited to the motorway field. His road construction company, inherited from his father, as well as being among the largest in the sector in Italy, is among the first Italian companies to carry out important works abroad ⁷⁴. Puricelli is also indirectly one of the promoters of the same institution of the AASS. In the years leading up to the creation of the Azienda della Strada, it presents a grandiose project to restructure the network of first-class

roads ⁷⁵, in which it suggests the creation of a National Road ^{Authority 76}, and when the AASS distributes road works contracts, its company is naturally one of the main contractors. In 1929 alone it received 32 lots of works for a total of 165 million ⁷⁷. But according to the opinion of Alberto Beneduce, president of the IRI, to Puricelli's remarkable "technical capacity" in the field of road construction "the necessary administrative and financial capacity does not correspond" ⁷⁸. In fact, his company has been struggling in great economic difficulties since the early Thirties. Puricelli ascribes the financial problems of his company to the system of postponed payments for the works contracted by the AASS, which force the company to discount the credits with the banks, paying large sums of interest ⁷⁹.

A different view is the president of the IRI, who instead calls into question the scarce economic-financial competence of Puricelli, who according to Beneduce is not able to lead a society that has become too large and with too many commitments, in Italy, in Europe and in Africa ⁸⁰. It is Puricelli himself who admits that he is not very "practical with administrative problems" ⁸¹. In 1933, given the economic difficulties in which his business is struggling, Puricelli is forced to request the Duce's intervention to obtain an extraordinary assignment of 1,600 km of road works ⁸²; but despite this new contract the situation of his company remains critical ⁸³, so much so that Puricelli is forced to ask for the intervention of the IRI to detect his debts towards the Commercial Bank, and to obtain a personal loan. In return, it offers its credits to the AASS for the work carried out and the amounts it will collect from the Company of the Road for work still to be done. Thanks to the intervention of the IRI, Puricelli is back in possession of the entire stock of its company ⁸⁴, but despite other loans, including one of 35 million from the Consortium for subsidies on Industrial Values, it is not able to revive the fortunes of the his company, and is forced to withhold the sums received in payment from the AASS ⁸⁵. Given the critical situation of Puricelli, Beneduce turns to Mussolini proposing the passage of the Puricelli Society to the ire, thus arguing:

the passage of the Society to the ire [it is necessary, Ed.] unless the State wants to constitute the absurd of being the client of himself, through a person who, without invested capital, remains in the fortunate situation of acquiring itself all the profit, if the company earns, and to pour in the state all the loss, if the Company loses ⁸⁶.

Obtained the consent of the leader of the Puricelli Company's transition to IRI, the operation is hampered by Puricelli himself, with an anticipatory capacity denoting nose and right entrature, aware of the new possibilities open to his business from colonial conquest ⁸⁷, claims the removal of the Company's activity in Africa and the possibility of creating an independent company, the "Puricelli Società per Lavori in ao" cleansed of debts, owned and under its control ⁸⁸. Beneduce is once again opposed to this operation, in that, in this case, "the most profitable work in progress and the one for which the State has the greatest interest, ie that of the AO would remain reserved

for Senator Puricelli" ⁸⁹ .

Moreover the president of the IRI is convinced that the old Puricelli company, due to its importance, cannot be excluded from road works in Africa, and that for its new Puricelli company it would never find credit, given that «not even the last bancarella [sic] of Italy anticipates a penny "and that" has debitucci in the range of 20-25 thousand lire " ⁹⁰ . In order not to compromise Puricelli's political position, among other things, the president of the Milan Fair, at the suggestion of Beneduce, in March 1936 the Società Anonima Puricelli Strade e Cave passed to the IRI, but Puricelli became its honorary president with a salary of 500,000 annual lira and the right of redemption for five years ⁹¹ . Puricelli will remain honorary president until 1940, when he decides not to exercise the right of redemption and to abandon the company definitively, which will become Italstrade sa ⁹² .

The Puricelli Company, the only company that works on the construction of the main roads to be controlled by IRI ⁹³ , is the largest beneficiary of the first contracts awarded by the ASS. In fact in December 1936 the Azienda della Strada contracted 14 trunks to 13 companies distributed as follows ⁹⁴ :

Section Quoram-Dessiè-Addis Ababa: Section

n. 1 food company Km 23;

Section n. 2 company Gola Km 22;

Section n. 3 company Valente Km 38;

Section n. 4 Ciardi company Km 40;

Section n. 5 firm Anonima Strade Km 80;

Section n. 6 company sa Puricelli Km 383.

Section Axum-Mai Timchet-Gondar:

Company Ragazzi Km 210 (this section is entrusted with the section Debarech-Gondar while between Axum and Debarech the military engineering works).

Assab-Dessiè section: Section

n. 1 company Vaselli Km 250;

Section n. 2 firm Ceratto Km 105;

Section n. 3 company sa Puricelli Km 150.

Section Dessiè-Debra Tabor-Gondar:

Ditta Bernero-Iacazio Km 250 (this section is entrusted with the Dessiè-Debra Tabor section, the section to Gondar remains to be contracted out).

Addis Abeba-Lechemti section (up to 35 Km from Ambo):

Tronco n. 1 company samicen Km 55;

Section n. 2 company Astaldi Km 65.

Section Addis Abeba-Gimma:

Ditta Parisi, Km 340 ⁹⁵.

From this distribution of contracts, which covers more than 2,000 km of new roads on the total 2,952 km, it emerges that the companies most involved in the work, in addition to sa Puricelli, are: Parisi and Vaselli of Rome, and Bernero of Genoa (see fig. 4).

In addition to private companies, in the construction of fundamental roads the AASS also involves the military engineering, albeit for a very low percentage of jobs, since the participation of the Genius is limited to only two paths: from the old Eritrean border up to Quoram on the road of Victory and from Axum to Debarech on the road to Lake Tana towards Gondar. Furthermore, the military engineers are responsible for arranging and maintaining the tracks necessary for the transport of men and materials to construction sites.

In the course of 1937 the works for the remaining sections are then assigned until a total of 50 companies are involved ⁹⁶. Among these, the main ones, in addition to the aforementioned ones, are: sicelp (Italian Construction and Public Works Company), samicen (Mantua Joint Company Construction and Navigation Companies), the scale (anonymous Colonial Society of Works in Africa), and F. Ili Gondrad. It seems that the political line is to involve the largest number of possible companies, so as to "make every province of Italy participate in the exploitation of the Empire" ⁹⁷.

In fact, the 373 construction and road companies authorized to operate in Ethiopia in May 1939 belong to almost all the regions of Italy, although obviously Lombardy, Piedmont and Lazio are the regions of greatest origin ⁹⁸ (see fig. 5).

The road works carried out in Eritrea and Somalia before the conquest of the Empire had been contracted according to the directing system, which entails for the client, in this case the State, the burden of management and control of the works, and also a greater business risk, as companies are paid for reimbursement-expenses. As far as the works of the main roads are concerned, on the other hand, the tenders are made to measure, at pre-established unit prices by means of regular procurement contracts. The contract to size will not reimburse expenses to the companies as the contract to directing, but a price that can vary depending on the actual quantity of works performed by the ⁹⁹. This circumstance, together with the fact that "in the first phase it was not possible to define the prices for the entire logs, because not all of them were viable" ¹⁰⁰, contributes to exceeding the overall costs of the work, the ceiling of the 3 billion lire initially foreseen. It is precisely the tight timeframe imposed by the Duce for the start of the works to require "the adoption of the contract to size" ¹⁰¹. A possible alternative would have been the contract to body, or flat rate, in which the price is fixed and invariable, that is, it does not change with the variation of the quantity of the works carried out by the company. But such contracts make it necessary to draw up a detailed plan of the work, so as to give the companies a certain

margin of safety for the return of the costs, and they require longer times for the beginning of the works, times that the regime is not prepared for to grant. The absence of a detailed plan therefore, not only excludes the adoption of the contract to the body, but makes the contract to measure more risky for the State, as a customer, given the uncertainty on the final costs of the work that this system involves.

The figure of three billion lire initially allocated for the realization of the main roads is certainly impressive. Equivalent to around 4,762 billion lire in 2004 ¹⁰², equal to about 2,459 billion euros, and represents about 0.5% of the average gross national income of financial years ranging from 1936 to 1940 on which the expenditure was divided, and moreover it is equal to about 1.7% of the total expenses and equivalent to 17.5% of the expenses in public works supported by the State in the same period ¹⁰³.

The distribution of procurement of Ethiopian roads therefore arouses great interest in the Italian construction world, also due to the high earnings that the involvement in the construction of the work allows those who have capital to invest. Ciro Poggiali, the correspondent of the "Corriere della Sera" in Ethiopia, is surprised that the cost to build a km of road in Ethiopia amounts to 1,200,000 lire when "in Italy they are made with 350,000 lire" ¹⁰⁴. Even Minister Cobolli Gigli, in some of his articles written in defense of the economic advantage of the main roads, admits that the cost of the road network in Ethiopia, «1.240.000 per km» ¹⁰⁵ it is much higher than that which one would have in Italy, even though "the cost of African roads is perfectly justified by many coefficients that have weighed heavily on labor and materials especially in the first phase of the program" ¹⁰⁶, and above all from the orography of the territory, since even in Italy "with the same geographical conditions one would arrive at [spend, ed] 1,000,000 lire per km" ¹⁰⁷.

But for some it seems that the fundamental roads have been really good business. According to the Consul of the Militia Bonacorsi, the main beneficiaries of the conquest of Ethiopia "were those entrepreneurs who worked exclusively with the State" ¹⁰⁸. The impression of strong gains linked to the realization of the fundamental roads seems to be confirmed also by the interception of a telephone conversation, received by the Duce's special secretariat, between the lawyer Alberto Beer and Signor Pisano, in which Beer "says he anticipated the brother 50,000 lire who went to or where he took jobs for 200 million for the construction of the imperial road to Gondar. On another occasion he says he has earned 110 percent » ¹⁰⁹. Perhaps behind the surname with the foreign flavor of the lawyer Beer hides the company with the Italian name (Italianized?) Of Bernero, actually engaged on the road to Gondar.

The first construction site opens in November 1936 at Dessiè, a fundamental network hub, in the middle of the Vittoria road (Addis Abeba-Asmara) and the arrival point of the Dancalia road (which starts from Assab). Subsequently the works depart from Addis Abeba, from Asmara and later this month also from Gondar. But it is only in December that the shipyards can operate in

full efficiency.

One of the major problems that the AASS has to face is paradoxically the transport "of the workers, of the workers' means, of the materials and of the foodstuffs" ¹¹⁰. The main means of transport in the lands of the former negus is the railway linking Djibouti to Addis Ababa which, according to Minister Cobolli Gigli, is "insufficient" ¹¹¹ given its "very low potential" and given that it is a railway "built and operated by a French company and that moreover is part of a port outside the Italian territory" ¹¹².

Companies are therefore forced to advance by building tracks that coincide with the definitive layout of the road or run parallel to it, on which the transport of men and materials takes place. Whenever possible the tracks built during the military campaign for the advancement of the troops are used.

Always bearing in mind the objective of enhancing the occupied lands, the construction of the road network must guarantee the "regularity and safety of transport" ¹¹³; the roads must therefore be tarred, with a slope of no more than 6% and curves of no less than 30 meters, with the exception of some stretches along the roads of Eritrea and along the roads of Lake Tana and Debra Tabor, where paths with slopes of 8% and curves with a radius of 15 meters are inserted. The width of the sections is 8 meters of which 6 are paved. But in some high traffic routes that flow into the capital Addis Ababa, the street level reaches 9 meters wide, 7 of which are paved. The ballast is formed by a frame of cylindrical stone with a thickness of 25 cm, and by 15 cm of crushed stone in layers. The road surface is shaped, with two slopes, with a slope of 4%. The works of art are generally in masonry with arches, concrete or stone. Reinforced concrete is limited to cases in which the structure is required by indispensable technical needs, such as for example the arched bridges of great light, the Omo Bottega, the valleys of the Tecazzè in Debarach and the Abrancagua. The only iron works of the entire road network are the two bridges over the Tecazzè and the Barca ¹¹⁴.

To the maintenance of the fundamental roads, particularly important in a territory like the Ethiopian one beaten for six months of the year by more or less intense rains, and comprising vast isolated areas, they provide about 150 Italian roadmen belonging to the AASS, whose dependencies are assigned of the indigenous roadmen who are chosen among 14-year-olds because at that age "they show lively intelligence and the ability to learn" ¹¹⁵. Dressed in uniforms, these Ethiopian children stay in tukul, that is, in masonry buildings 4 meters in diameter, in the immediate vicinity of the road. They collaborate with teams of adventitious roadmen hired among the natives when particularly important works are needed, which happens quite frequently during and immediately after the season of small rains (February-May) and of the great rains (June-September) ¹¹⁶.

The maintenance of the road network entrusted to the AASS is one of the items that most weighs

on the budget of the Italian Ministry of Africa. The Minister of Public Works, acting as president of the AASS, perhaps to justify the continuous requests for funds to be allocated to the Company, expresses a veiled criticism on the speed with which the AASS was forced to complete the plan : the damage that occurred during the rainy season [...] would certainly have been less if the roads through a less rapid construction could have reached a greater consistency than settling ¹¹⁷ . But the speed with which public works are carried out is one of the main features on which the regime, as we have seen, is not willing to compromise, in order to show its entire capacity for realization.

3 The labour used

The first Italian workers «sent by the Duce» ¹¹⁸ for the construction of the main roads landed on 9 November in Massaua and on 11 November in Djibouti. They are a nucleus of 3,500 workers that Mussolini reviews in Piazza Venezia before departure. Between November 1936 and January 1937, about 30,000 workers arrive in Ethiopia from Italy. But these do not seem sufficient to the AASS that requires a further dispatch of 12,000 workers who arrive in March of 1937. The Commissariat for Internal Migration is the body that has the task of regulating the influx of labor from Italy towards the aoi and of coordinating the transfers of workers between the various governorates of the Empire and between the various companies.

The maximum presence of Italian workers at the sites of the main roads is reached in June 1937 with 63,530 units. In December of the same year this figure dropped to 20,000 units. On the other hand, the number of indigenous workers increased from 43,520 in June 1937 to 52,742 in December 1937 to reach the highest point of 56,600 the following year. To these, however, must be added the approximately 46,000 Sudanese and Yemenite workers who mostly work on the Dancalia road (la Assab-Dessiè), where for the high temperatures reached it is not possible to make the Italians and Abyssinians work.

In total, in December 1939 the work on the main roads required 25,570,000 days of Italian workers and 42,000,000 days of black workers, of which 15,685,000 belonged to the Sudanese and Yemenite workers ¹¹⁹ .

The working relationship between the workers dedicated to the construction of the roads and the related firms follows a difficult path, similar to that of all Italian workers in Africa, even before the conquest of the Empire.

As for the road works carried out in Eritrea before the start of the conflict, tens of thousands of workers belonging to the military engineering are employed, but also to private companies, including sicelp, Puricelli, Parisi, Vaselli, and the Gondrand. The Cabinet of the High Commissioner Emilio De Bono takes care of the provisioning, assistance and health protection of the workers, with disastrous effects on working conditions. Workers are no longer respecting the

trade union regulations in force at home, as is evident from the comment by Guido Battaglini, appointed by De Bono to deal with the situation of ¹²⁰ road construction workers :

the contrast between some trade union rules [...] and the pressing needs of a colony appeared [...] so that those canons appeared not applicable [...] that mass of men [the workers] had left from their own land without having had the minimum vision of the work to be done, especially in particular areas ¹²¹ .

This is also confirmed by the Fascist Confederation of Industrialists, claiming the socio-economic differences between the motherland and the colony:

The opportunity not to create, at first, the trade union organization, and consequently also the corporate order that rests on it, was suggested, above all, by the need to contain the equipment of the institutes on the limits required by the needs of the nascent imperial organism. Quite different from those of an already mature economic and social situation ¹²² .

Therefore the workers are classified in the Workers Units and divided into centuries, companies, groups and groupings. The contract has a duration of five months, the minimum wage is 25 lire per day for unskilled workers, the maximum is 35 liras per day for skilled workers, for a ten-hour work day, and a half-day weekly rest ¹²³ . Sometimes night shifts are set up and piece work is distributed. The workers are responsible for the costs for the transfer to the construction site and for the often lacking food. The housings consist of shacks or curtains. De Bono himself does not hide from the duce the difficult conditions in which workers are forced to work:

the question of housing, provisioning, and moral and religious assistance of this workers' mass was a seriously serious matter [...] there were many complaints [...] very dependent on promises made at home to workers who went beyond the bilateral contract commitments [...] many workers have come here without wanting to form the consciousness of the sacrifices to which they must submit. Miracles were expected but the east anti-fascist miracle ¹²⁴ .

The working conditions at the Eritrean road construction sites are made even more difficult by the serious shortcomings of the medical-health structure that follows the workers, as witnessed by General Caffo, of the superior command of the military engineering, who in these terms refers to De Bono:

Deficiency of medical officers in relation to the number of construction sites and the mass of workers; for example for all the yards between Massaua and Saati that will soon reach the strength of 2,500 workers and in a torrid climate, there is only one doctor. All doctors have drug deficiencies and almost completely lack quinine, bismuth, serum calmette and anti-tetanus serum ¹²⁵ .

With regard to the health protection of workers, the report of a site manager is even more worrying:

in Africa we used the work of the doctor to incite the worker to work in the most adverse conditions we can ever imagine. The results were more than positive, even when death made its victims in the African shadow of the lowland, confirming its inexorability ¹²⁶ .

A soldier from the engineering department describes the situation of his construction site in February 1936:

sleeping badly, barring [sic] rains and other discomforts [sic] our body is no longer in its normal state [sic], it has worn down, we cannot eat it is a general deterioration of the field, and especially to see certain sudden deaths, that these doctors cannot explain; (or diseases of Africa, or the little experience as soon as they graduate send them here without practice still not qualified to the civil profession) so who takes of half is the sick that in a package goes with the shoes in the sun, this is the motive [sic] main ¹²⁷ .

Moreover, for the works on Eritrea's most important road, the Massawa-Decamerè, in seven months 247 Italian workers and 500 indigenous workers lost their lives: more than three and a half workers a day.

In the months following the conquest of Ethiopia the discipline of labor relations is going through a frantic phase, characterized by the "confusion of competences originating from the multiplicity of provisions of different authorities" ¹²⁸ . During 1937 order sheets were issued by the Party Secretary and decrees by the General Governorate governing the matter ¹²⁹ . The labor relations in aoi suffer the consequences of the particular emergency situation existing in the newly conquered lands, which does not allow extending the corporate union order in force in Italy to the Empire. The extraordinary result is that the Party assumes the exclusive competence on the discipline of the employment relationship, completely replacing the State. In each governorate where the Empire is divided, a Federation of the Party is established, on which the local Labor Office depends, a body responsible for reporting the failure to execute the pacts of work and the provisions for social security and assistance, attempting to settle disputes (the attempt at conciliation must always precede the judicial solution),

Also in Addis Ababa resides the Fascist Inspectorate of Labor and Production, appointed by the Party Secretary in concert with the Italian Minister of Africa, who has the task of controlling and coordinating the labor offices. Even the union organizers sent in aoi, "with the preventive authorization of the PNF secretary" ¹³⁰ are placed in the Labor Inspectorate or in the Labor Offices, organs of "direct party emanation" ¹³¹ , which "in the absence of the trade union order corporative [...] have the trade union representation of the economic categories » ¹³² .

In East Africa, therefore, the discipline of labor relations is governed by norms and principles that radically deviate from those applied at home. In fact, in Italy, as envisaged by the corporate union order, the bodies responsible for monitoring the correct execution of employment contracts and the supervision and coordination of the individual economic operators ¹³³ depend on the Ministry

of Corporations ¹³⁴, and are therefore organs of the State. In East Africa, on the other hand, these same bodies are appointed and controlled directly by the PNF.

As if that were not enough, the inspector and federal secretaries of the AO are "part of all the commissions that the general government and the individual governments of the AO have created or will create, as far as it has direct or indirect reference, to the economic and social sector » ¹³⁵. Thus, the phase following the military conquest of the Empire, that of economic valorization, is marked by a strong political intervention, in which the Party "is organically and officially inserted into the economic life of the Empire" ¹³⁶.

The strong political characterization of labor relations is also evidenced by the classification of national workers of the AO in the workers' units of the MVSN. It is a sort of "militarization" of the national workforce that gives it its characteristics, we would almost say "work brigade". If this initiative has the declared aim of «giving an impression of homogeneity to the mass of workers, to be able to achieve an orderly recruitment of them and to make the work of assistance and protection of labor rights more effective» ¹³⁷(but with how much efficiency we will see later on), at road sites it becomes possible "to regulate the treatment of workers who can be assigned [...] to any work [...] in any condition of climate and environment" ¹³⁸; nor should we forget the fact that in this context the workers of the fundamental streets are divided into handpieces, centuries, cohorts and legions ¹³⁹, dressed and «equipped as soldiers» ¹⁴⁰, even if with the gun «70-87, model 16 of war prey ». Few indeed "are armed with our 91" ¹⁴¹.

If the Party's action in aoi protects the "labor rights" it certainly protects the interests of the industrialists, as the homonymous Confederation states:

This balancing action is due to the fact that, although the workers are not protected by their rightful rights, wages have been kept within reasonable limits (it is known that the 8-12% increase granted in 1937 in Italy was not extended to the aoi), and if some of the industrialists' requests have found the support of the Party ¹⁴².

However the working conditions of the workers at the sites of the fundamental roads seem better than those of the workers engaged in Eritrea before and during the conflict. The working day goes from ten to eight hours, the weekly rest becomes one day, the cost of the transfers falls on the companies and no longer on the worker, the pay rises to 33 lire per day for the minimum, to 45 lire per day for the maximum, plus the indemnities for work in poor areas (in the eastern and western Lowlands, above three thousand meters, etc.), requiring "an expense that is about four times that which is had on the works carried out at home" ¹⁴³.

The companies are responsible for providing accommodation, in barracks or in tents. However, piecework remains, mandatory overtime, night shifts, while the food provided by the companies, for quality and quantity standardized to that due to troops in East Africa plus the improvement fee, must be paid by the worker.

The new discipline of the employment relationship is one of the reasons for which the Ministry of Public Works is strong to justify the continuous revision upwards of the cost of the work entrusted to the AASS. Among the elements that contribute to the rise in labor costs are indicated, in addition to the increase in wages, the rule that gives companies the cost of workers' transfers from ports to construction sites, and above all the rule that regulates the presence of indigenous workers in the maximum percentage of 30%. In fact, the pay that belongs to local workers is considerably lower than that of an Italian worker of equal qualifications. The maximum pay of the Ethiopian masons amounts to about 9 liras per day compared to the 45 lire of the Italian masons ¹⁴⁴ .

However, the law allows companies to request the application of a different percentage of indigenous workers in special cases to the labor offices, which must be authorized by individual governments. The information provided in this regard by technical publications on fundamental roads tell us a total of 25,570,000 days of work by white workers and 42,000,000 days of work by black workers for the construction of the main roads on June 30, 1939 So the authorizations were granted in bulk, or, as it seems more likely, the rule was disregarded.

The rather high pay, and the difficult economic situation that one lives at home, attracts first in Eritrea, and then in Ethiopia, a mass of people who do not always possess the requisites necessary for the work to be carried out. Guido Battaglini, referring to the first groups of workers sent to Eritrean roadworks, declares:

Many of the national workers were those who had never taken a work tool in hand and who had perhaps tried to force the door of good luck in this way [...] in those first brackets was sent down anyone, 12 school teachers, 4 pharmacists, 3 lawyers, 9 watchmakers and several barbers ¹⁴⁵ .

The High Commissioner De Bono finds in the workers an "enormous quantity of tailors and shoemakers, of waiters, scaccini, deformed hunchbacks, of cardiacs, epileptics, mutilated leg and one even missing an arm" ¹⁴⁶ . The situation does not seem to change after the end of the war. About the first groups of workers sent by the leader to build the main roads Ciro Poggiali declares:

1,000 Campania workers arrived in our militia. They should all be laborers, masons, carpenters. In the mass you discover hairdressers, shop assistants, shoe shiners. The high pay has led them to defraud hiding their true profession [...] will be used for road layout. A somewhat expensive workforce evidently [...]. The Duce gave himself the graphs of Italian unemployment from the regions in which it was the strongest he drew the masses to send to or without any consideration of their actual working qualities ¹⁴⁷ .

With the introduction of the rules governing the discipline of work, the situation of these workers, improvised and otherwise, seems to improve, at least as regards those hired by private

companies. In fact, at the military engineering department, there are those who do not notice many differences. There are deficiencies in terms of security;

Departed only with weapon and work tools, all day without eating, slept outdoors without blankets, without any security measures with the rebels who are nearby ¹⁴⁸ .

from the point of view of food;

eat dry, always biscuits; and to work a lot, two biscuits and very little meat, they manage with some calf found around, or goats, scattered by nearby mountains, cooked on the grill, smoked, without salt; very good the same [sic] this meat, or fish that abounds in the river; this certainly is not good salt [...]. We had a small fat donkey this morning, we didn't see the engineers this night if they ate [sic] ¹⁴⁹ .

and from the health point of view:

The medical lieutenant [...] from the beginning, as soon as he came to this battalion he visited, and gave rest, to the sick. [But the major] wanted only work, [...] now [...] no longer has humanity. Yesterday a soldier asked for a visit, he felt ill, gave him the internal service. The morning ¹⁵⁰ was found dead .

But even among the workers hired by private companies, the problems are not lacking:

There were serious companies and companies that didn't pay. The food was one of them. If we were not silent they would repatriate us [...] we were all sick to the intestine because we ate badly and the food was not very clean [...] the company never paid us. They only gave us every 15 days. 70-90 lire saying that the remainder due to us would have given it to us at the end of the first year of work. We ate badly, a lot. Sometimes there were also worms in the soup, and for this reason I got intestinal diseases [...]. My friend WB tried to protest, but the overseers were all from the Fascist militia, mistreated him and returned him, because they said he put a tad and talked too much. We slept in bunks with 2 bunk beds, and the roof of the cabin, being made of sheet metal, conveyed an infernal heat [...]. ¹⁵¹ .

That despite these difficult living conditions, tens of thousands of people decide to leave for the air, it is easily explained by one of them:

Life here is like that of soldiers in regard to discipline, eating and sleeping, but what do you want, for me it is the same as if it were the past life, because even there [in Italy], there was no work, eat and sleep ¹⁵² .

The news on the treatment of the workers in aoi must not be unknown to the Duce, according to the numerous reports that arrive at his secretariat. This is the case of some telephone interceptions, in which it is stated that "assistance to the works [i] on the way leaves much to be desired" ¹⁵³ ; or in which there are "complaints about steamers' conditions for transporting workers to or" ¹⁵⁴ ; or in which one speaks "about about 70 Turin workers who have returned from the work of Cyrenaica and have not yet had either pay or know how much they will have to

have" ¹⁵⁵. But among the papers of the secretariat of the Duce we also find letters from simple workers, such as that of "an African war volunteer and volunteer of the Spanish war who turns to the Duce to complain about the great disgrace that the officers make towards the workers" ¹⁵⁶. But more significant than all the notes addressed to the Duce by the Party, in which it is reported that "a group of workers are badly treated by an enterprise of the aoi" ¹⁵⁷, or that the "legionaries of Scianò complain that the meal is administered in the a quarter ration » ¹⁵⁸. Of course not even a word about the treatment to which indigenous workers are subjected, assigned to the heaviest jobs and with the lowest pay, as a Puricelli worker states:

We Italians were treated better than the natives [who] were paid 4 lire a day, plus they were given a ration of flour every evening ¹⁵⁹.

In fact, besides the enormous difference between the wages of Italians and that of indigenous people, it is the regulation of labor relations itself that establishes that "national workers must never be united, with equal functions, to indigenous labor" ¹⁶⁰, introducing rules of real racial segregation:

Housing and premises for the consumption of meals by national workers must be clearly separated from those of indigenous workers. At the canteen and housekeeping services of the national workers, indigenous personnel may be used, with due caution in hygiene and cleaning ¹⁶¹.

Even a worker engaged in the construction of roads does not miss the distance between certain rules and the alleged work of civilization that the regime claims to achieve:

Africans were sometimes treated badly, even though we workers were told before we left that we were going to bring civilization ¹⁶².

4 Cargo and passenger transport

In addition to facilitating the movement of troops on the territory, the road network must allow the movement of goods and people within the Empire. For this purpose, with the law of December 30th 1937, a special body is created, the citao (Italian Transportation African Eastern Company) placed under the control of the Ministry of Italian Africa and the Ministry of Finance with the participation of the General Governorate and individual governments of East Africa. The citao must establish and manage the automotive services for the transport of things and people on behalf of the public administration and for the transport of things and people on behalf of private individuals on the following communication routes determined by decree from the Ministry of Italian Africa:

1. Massaua-Asmara-Decamerè-Macallè-Addis Abeba;
2. Massaua-Gondar;
3. Assab-Sardò-Dessiè-Addis Abeba;

4. Border of French Somalia-Dire Dawa-Addis Ababa;
5. Addis Ababa-Gimma;
6. Addis Ababa-Lechemti;
7. Dire Dawa-Harar-Mogadishu ¹⁶³ .

But the citao is not equipped with the necessary means to carry out the foreseen tasks, and also clashes with a de facto situation that sees the presence on the Ethiopian territory of numerous private companies operating in the freight transport sector. The institution is therefore forced to "take full account of the pre-established interests" ¹⁶⁴ . With viceregal decree of August 31st 1938 n. 1018 the functions of the citao are therefore reduced to «assume, control and regulate all the transports of goods with vehicles on behalf of private individuals, institutions, civil and military» ¹⁶⁵ , to watch over the companies, to propose to the government of the rates, to take the transport of any goods and distribute it among private companies.

The progressive progress of the works on the single itineraries of the fundamental roads involves the replacement of the sections of track with bituminous sections and causes the lowering of the costs of freight transport: thus on the main artery, the Massaua-Addis Abeba, the cost of transporting a quintal of goods goes from 500 lire in April 1937, to 200 lire in July of the same year, to reach 120 lire in 1939 with a four-day trip. But thanks to the Danakil road the connection of the center of the Empire with the Red Sea can move from the port of Massaua to that of Assab, which however is under construction. Following this new path the costs of freight transport between Addis Ababa and Assab go down to 60 lire per quintal ¹⁶⁶ . The trucks use for this route a day and a half instead of the four needed to travel the stretch between Massaua and Addis Ababa. These figures are also heralded by the Minister Cobolli Gigli, who is forced to reiterate the economic advantage of the work following the attacks from abroad, where "on the African roads of Ethiopia [...] disparate rumors circulate and erroneous judgments are made and from time to time inaccurate news also arrives in our country » ¹⁶⁷ . The Minister writes some articles in "La Stampa" in which he insists on the cheapness of transport costs obtained with the construction of fundamental roads, so as to "close the mouth of certain foreign scribes who are trying to prove that Italy has had one setback from the colonization of Ethiopia » ¹⁶⁸ .

To deny at least some of the minister's statements remain the grievances of the companies, which were also made by Cobolli Gigli himself, on the rising costs of transporting men and materials linked to the use of Massaua-Addis Abeba compared to those provided using the Djibouti railway -Addis Abeba, but also the Senate statements by the undersecretary of the Italian Ministry of Africa Terruzzi, which indicates "in the high cost of transport" ¹⁶⁹ one of the causes of the difficult economic situation in Ethiopia.

In any case, according to the Minister Cobolli Gigli, between Addis Ababa and Massaua in the months of May and June of 1937 there are about 300 heavy trucks per day loaded with over 1,500

tons of goods ¹⁷⁰ .

As far as passenger transport is concerned, the citao organizes eight major communication lines which also include the overnight stays of passengers in hotels of the company. The lines are:

1. Massaua-Asmara-Gondar (with overnight stay in Asmara and Adi Arcai);
2. Massaua-Dessiè-Addis Abeba (with overnight stay in Quiha and Dessiè);
3. Assab-Dessiè-Addis Abeba (with overnight stay in Dessiè);
4. Addis Ababa-Gimma;
5. Addis Ababa-Ambò (on the director of Lechemti);
6. Mogadishu-Chisimaio (with overnight stay in Modum);
7. Mogadishu-Dolo (with overnight stay in Baidoa);
8. Mogadishu-Bulo Burti-Rocca Littorio (with overnight stay in El Mos) ¹⁷¹ .

The lines of great communication are reserved for whites. For the natives there are routes in the area around the capital. Only in some secondary connections the Ethiopians can travel together with the Italians, but in separate compartments, placed at the back of the car, without windows.

5 Road or rail?

The interest of the regime for the development of transport in the Empire is immediately oriented towards the birth of a large road network, neglecting, at least initially, the possibility of developing the railway network. At the time of the conquest, in Ethiopia there are three narrow-gauge railway tracks: the 350 km Massaua-Asmara-Biscia; the Mogadishu-Afgoi-village Duke of Abruzzi of 113 km; the Djibouti-Addis Ababa, of "very limited potential" ¹⁷² in the opinion of the Minister of Public Works Cobolli Gigli.

But the railway is considered an antiquated means of transport by the regime, which seeks speed, speed, modernity; typical characteristics of the automobile, as we can read from the columns of "Il Messaggero":

the railway is no longer the road of modern times, which are in a hurry and pretend to go everywhere by car. The car has ousted the ¹⁷³ engine .

Later, the possibility of developing rail transport in the Empire is nevertheless taken into consideration, to be immediately discarded. Among the many projects proposed ¹⁷⁴ , the attention of the government falls on the construction of a railway line of about 850 km that connects the capital Addis Ababa to the port of Assab, parallel for at least half the way to the Danakil road, naturally in direct competition with the French railway ¹⁷⁵ . But some factors, according to the Minister Cobolli Gigli, recommend in any case the postponement to when the burden will have decreased [given that] once the roads are finished, transport prices will be significantly lower than the current ones and [...] realized the economic autarchy of the empire in the sectors of interest, the workers' wages and the cost of the masonry works may be contained in

much more modest limits and [there will be] the possibility to use for traction electric energy produced by future water systems [...] and by thermal plants fueled by local fuels which, with research in progress, can be brought to light ¹⁷⁶ .

Which is equivalent to a nearly definitive shelving of the project. The development of rail transport also seems premature to the Fascist Industrialist Confederation:

All the scholars on the subject of transport agree on the point that railways are not to be talked about until the empire's agricultural, industrial, commercial and demographic developments prove the system of trucking on ordinary roads insufficient and uneconomic ¹⁷⁷ .

Of course, Puricelli himself, while admitting the need to develop rail transport in Ethiopia, to which he assigned "the transport of large quantities of goods and travelers over long distances" ¹⁷⁸ , refers to "the formulation of a program" for the realization of the railways in the 'Empire after the "start of the traffic" on the road.

In addition to the building contractors, from the pages of the "Fascist Almanac of the People of Italy" the voice of another supporter of road constructions rises: the automotive industry:

Road or rail? [...] It is the opinion of the technicians that the struggle for the operating economy with regard to the railway is carried out in favor of the road, by virtue of the gigantic progress of the automotive industry ¹⁷⁹ .

It has in fact reached "such results, which will stimulate growth in the great work of economic and social value of the empire, that the genius of the leader gave us" ¹⁸⁰ , as stated by the main industry in the automotive field, the Senator Giovanni Agnelli.

In fact, among the technicians, opinions on the convenience of railway development in aoi are conflicting. In an article published in "Il Messaggero" of 4 June 1936, close to the conquest, the engineer Ferruccio Mezzani, professor of transport economics at the Polytechnic of Turin, clearly declares himself in favor of the development of road transport because they have fewer plant costs compared to rail transport which, in Ethiopia, require 1 or 2 million per km for a narrow-gauge railway and 5 million per km for a standard double-track railway, while «roads are built with 500,000 lire per km » ¹⁸¹ . Transport costs also make the road cheaper than rail. In fact, according to Professor Mezzani, the cost of transport by rail amounts to about 20 cents per quintal per km in the case of a narrow-gauge railway, and varies between 10 and 8 cents per quintal per km in the case of a railway with line characteristics main. But, if on the roads the "big trucks [...] with engine of the power of 250 horses are used" ¹⁸² produced by "our car factories" the costs of the transport on road they go down to around 7 cents to the quintal per km.

On the contrary, Antonio Marra, author of a publication on transportation in the Empire in 1940, claims that narrow gauge railways of 1.067 m, which "prevail throughout Africa" ¹⁸³ , can be built with an investment of 700-800,000 lire per km. The cost of transporting a quintal of goods on a hypothetical Assab-Addis Ababa railway with these characteristics would amount, according to

Marra, to about 17 lire, well below the transport cost on the corresponding truck, equivalent to 60 lire per quintal .

Beyond the technical considerations, the need to provide the Empire of a first communications network as quickly as possible and the need to extend Italian control throughout the territory, make it almost obligatory, in the immediacy of the conquest, the choice of the road, which seems less expensive, more rapid and which, above all, allows a more widespread penetration. But even later, when the fundamental roads are under construction, the regime continues to ignore rail transport. In fact, even the multi-year plan of public works at the end of 1937, despite the abundance of means made available, does not initially provide for the construction of any railway line. We recall that of the 12 billion allocated by the plan for the construction of public works in the Empire, 7 billion and 730 million, about 64% of the total, are destined for the development of transport, and are all dedicated to the construction of new roads, excluding prior the possibility of developing an integrated transport system. It was only in the course of 1938 that the possibility of constructing the Assab-Addis Ababa railway was again discussed, using part of the funds of the multi-year plan. However, the financial difficulties of the State impose the reduction of the annual installment of the fund available for public works. This makes any project for the development of rail transport completely impossible and at the same time, as we have seen, involves a continuous revision of the road plans, which,

In the spring of 1941, Italian troops were forced to sabotage Ethiopian road connections, above all by destroying bridges, to try to slow down the advance of the British ¹⁸⁴ and, following the surrender of the viceroy Amedeo d'Aosta, the magazine "Africa Italiana" hosts a comment by Mussolini, who even on this occasion does not fail to exalt, albeit with involuntary and self-defeating irony, "those great marvelous roads of the entire African continent on which their [Englishmen] forces were able to march quickly mechanized » ¹⁸⁵. Beyond the questionable demonstrations of pride of the Duce, at the end of the Second World War, the Foreign Office itself admits that the construction of the roads in Ethiopia represents the greatest event in the history of transport of the African country, since for the first time the roads built during the Italian occupation they made it possible to transport goods and passengers with motor vehicles on several routes, helping to break the isolation in which several regions of the Empire had been located for some time ¹⁸⁶ .

References

1. See R. De Felice, Mussolini the Duce. The years of consent. 1929-1936, Einaudi, Turin 1996, p. 759. In essence, a bibliography on the construction of the aoi road network is still non-existent. For a first survey, see M. Antonsich, Addis Ababa 'caput viarum'. The streets of the Duce in Abyssinia, in "Limes", n. 3, 2006 and R. Pankhurst, Road Building During Italian

- Occupied Ethiopia (1936-1941), in "Africa Quarterly", vol. 15, n. 3, 1976.
2. Cf. G. Pini, The fundamental roads of the Empire, in *Industry in the Confederazione Industriale Fascista*, Usila, Rome 1939, p. 52; P. Calletti, the autonomous state company of the road in the decade 10 July 1928 vi-30 June 1938 xvi, Ricci, Rome 1938, p. 86.
 3. See G. Cobolli Gigli, *Imperial Roads*, Mondadori, Milan 1938, p. 45.
 4. G. Cobolli Gigli, On the operating results of the fundamental roads. Collection of articles published in "La Stampa" between March and April 1939, sl., Sd.
 5. The enhancement of the Empire, in "La Domenica del Corriere", 10 July 1938.
 6. See V. Castronovo, *Economic History of Italy: from the nineteenth century to the present day*, Einaudi, Turin 1995, pp. 305, 311.
 7. Cobolli Gigli, *Imperial roads*, cit., P. 26.
 8. Ivi, p. 190.
 9. G. Pini, The road network of the Empire, in "Italian Africa", December 1939, n. 12, p. 1.
 10. G. Pini, The fundamental roads of the Empire, in "Edition of the economic review of Italian Africa", Rome 1937, p. 5, also in "Economic Review of the Colonies", August 1937.
 11. G. Pini, The roads in Italian East Africa, in "Italian notebooks, series xv, L'Africa Italiana", 1942, p. 22.
 12. Reported in Cobolli Gigli, *Imperial roads*, cit., P. 14.
 13. Calletti, the autonomous state company of the road, cit., P. 9.
 14. The Royal Decree 2505 of 15 December 1923 divides the Italian roads into five classes: the first includes the high-traffic roads, the second the roads that connect the provincial capitals with each other or with the ports, at the third the internal roads of a province, on the fourth the internal roads of a municipality, and finally to the fifth the military roads open to civil transit in time of peace.
 15. See Calletti, the autonomous state company of the road, cit., P. 11. In the same publication, Calletti, general manager of the company, states that subsequent classifications and declassifications of road sections bring the network managed by the AASS to 20.686,678 km on June 30th 1934 (excluding the sleepers of centers with more than 20,000 inhabitants) and 20,801,567 km in 1938 (more 654,795 km of sleepers in centers with more than 20,000 inhabitants).
 16. The main roads of the network include: the consular roads (Aurelia, Cassia, Flaminia, Salaria, Tiburtina, Casilina, Appia, Ostiense, Emilia); the road of the Padana Inferiore (Turin-Alessandria-Cremona-Mantova-Monselice); the road of the Padana Superiore (the Turin-Mestre); the Abetone and Brennero roads (Pisa-Modena-Verona-Brennero), see Ln 1094 of 17 May 1928.
 17. Including the consular roads in the sections that come out of the capital, or some of the most

important border roads such as the Ligurian trunk of the Via Aurelia. See Calletti, the autonomous state company of the road, cit., P. 51.

18. The decree of 4 February 1929 n. 172 authorizes the AASS to contract loans with the institutions indicated in it at a rate to be established by agreement between the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Corporations.

19. The state fixed contribution of 180 million will not always be fully covered. Furthermore, the expected increase in the collection of motor vehicle taxes occurs only in the first financial years. Subsequently, the tax reductions and the facilitations in the payment of them, cause a contraction of the revenue destined to the AASS, see Calletti, the autonomous state company of the road, cit., P. 15.

20. Ivi, p. 30.

21. See L. Bortolotti, History of building policy in Italy: properties, construction companies and public works from the first post-war period to today (1919-1978), Editori gathered, Florence 1978, p. 154.

22. The maintenance of the arranged roads on the other hand is charged to the contracting firms of the accommodation. See Calletti, the autonomous state company of the road, cit., P. 34.

23. See S. Maggi, History of transport in Italy, Il Mulino, Bologna 2005, p. 110.

24. In a letter of 2 March 1932 to Mussolini, Piero Puricelli, owner of the anonymous company Puricelli Roads and Cave, which holds a large package of shares in the Autostrade Company, almost all of the capital of Milan-Lakes, more than half of Milan Bergamo, participations of the Milan-Turin and the Florence-Mare, asks for the redemption of the actions from the State for the financial difficulties in which the society is debated; cfr. ACS, Special Secretariat of the Duce - henceforth SPDD - reserved correspondence, b. 60, fasc. "Puricelli (Soc. Anonima)", subfasc. 1, letter from Puricelli to Mussolini dated 2 March 1932.

25. The Milan-Turin area is still under private management, with an intense traffic, Naples-Pompeii and Padua-Mestre. The Rome-Ostia is reclassified as a national road. See Maggi, History of Transport in Italy, cit., P. 111; M. Moraglio, For a history of Italian highways: the period between the two world wars, in "Urban History", n. 100, July-September 2002, p. 23.

26. ACS, SPDD, ordinary correspondence, fasc. 551.038, letter from Nicolò de Cesare to the Cabinet Chief of the Council of Ministers of 21 February 1943.

27. See Calletti, the autonomous state company of the road, cit., P. 84.

28. Cobolli Gigli, Imperial roads, cit., P. 190.

29. Ivi, p. 15.

30. The aoi is divided into six governorates: Addis Ababa then Scioa, Amara with capital Gondar, Harar with capital of the same name, Galla Sidama with capital Gimma, Eritrea with capital Asmara and Somalia with capital Mogadishu.

31. Cobolli Gigli, *Imperial roads*, cit., P. 54.
32. acs, spdd, ordinary correspondence, fasc. 509.837, "Exactly for HE the Head of Government".
33. Cobolli Gigli, *Imperial roads*, cit., P. 55.
34. Ivi, p. 177.
35. See Antonsich, *Addis Ababa 'caput viarum'*, cit., P. 136; Pankhurst, *Road Building*, cit., P. 49.
36. Pini, *The road network of the Empire*, cit., P. 1. In previous publications by the same author, the mileage relating to some roads is slightly different. See by the same author, *The fundamental roads of the Empire*, in "Edition of the economic review of Italian Africa", Rome 1937, also in "Rassegna Economica delle Colonie", August 1937, and *The roads of Italian East Africa*, in "The roads", n. 6, June 1938, quoted in Antonsich, *Addis Ababa 'caput viarum'*, cit. We have chosen to privilege the article by Pini of 1939 which we believe to be more precise as it is produced last in a chronological sense and after the conclusion of the work.
37. acs, spdd, ordinary correspondence, fasc. 509.837, "Exactly for HE the Head of Government".
38. Minister Cobolli Gigli in a note for the Duce (see previous note) rounds the average cost to 1,200,000 lire.
39. In this case the Minister curiously rounds the figure to 350,000 lire.
40. acs, Acts of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (henceforth pdcm), Ministry of Italian Africa, 1936-37, fasc. 185, "Note for the Duce".
41. acs, Ministry of Italian Africa (henceforth mdai), Directorate General for Civil Affairs, Multi-year plans for construction, building, health, b. 102, fasc. "Twelve-year consolidated plan", dated August 26, 1937 published in the "Official Gazette" of October 15, 1937.
42. acs, spdd, ordinary correspondence, fasc. 500.002 / i, telephone interception n. 0357.
43. See Pini, *The Road Network of the Empire*, cit., P. 1.
44. The tracks are built before the roads to make the flow of workers and materials possible. They often follow the same route as the road, but they can also follow a parallel path. In some cases the tracks built during the military campaign are used.
45. Pini, *The fundamental roads of the Empire*, cit., P. 5.
46. Cobolli Gigli, *Imperial roads*, cit., P. 21.
47. C. Poggiali, *Diary in aoi*, Longanesi, Milan 1971, p. 204.
48. Ibid.
49. Pini, *The road network of the Empire*, cit., P. 7.
50. The first road works in Eritrea date back to 1890 when Emperor Menelik ii builds a track that from Addis Ababa leads to the Eritrean border and begins work on a road network to be developed near the capital and by a road that connects Harar with Say Dawa. It is Menelik himself who issues the concession for the construction of the French Djibouti railway. Haile Selassie then takes the railway line to Addis Ababa, creates a department for public works and in 1930 starts a

road construction program that, if completed, would have included about 6,000 km of imperial roads. At the time of the Italian conquest however, according to the Minister Cobolli Gigli, of the roads built only the Addis Ababa-Addis Alem of 56 km with artificial ground, dating back to the time of Menelik, and a stretch on the Addis Ababa-Gimma of 15 km with a natural bottom, are passable during the rains; cfr. Cobolli Gigli, *Imperial roads*, cit., P. 40; A. Marra, *Communications and Transportation in the Empire*, Tipografia Stige, Rome 1940, p. 87; Pankhurst, *Road Building*, cit., Pp. 21-2.

51. Lector, *The Road to Victory*, in "Annals of Italian Africa", 1938, p. 182.

52. acs, Acts of the pdcm, mdai, 1936-37, fasc. 184, "Royal decree concerning the consolidation of the State's contribution to balance the budget of Italian East Africa and the allocation of 12 billion for an organic plan of public works in the air". Approved on 15 November 1937, published in the "Gazzetta Ufficiale" of 15 January 1938, converted into l. of 15 April 1938 n. 695.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. The connection between Addis Ababa and Gondar had already been foreseen in the plan of the fundamental roads, but excluded from the chapter of expenditure of the network because it was considered non-urgent.

57. acs, Acts of the pdcm, mdai, 1936-37 fasc. 184, Royal decree concerning the consolidation of the State's contribution to balance the budget of Italian East Africa and the allocation of 12 billion for an organic plan of public works in the aoi. Approved on 15 November 1937, published in the "Gazzetta Ufficiale" of 15 January 1938, converted into ln 695 of 15 April 1938.

58. acs, mdai, dgaacc, multi-year plans, construction works, building, health, b. 102, fasc. "Consolidated Plans 1939-40", report by the Undersecretary of State Terruzzi to HRH the Duca D'Aosta, Viceroy of Ethiopia.

59. acs, mdai, dgaacc, multi-year plans, construction works, building, health, b. 102, fasc. "Consolidated plan management office", note from the State General Accounting Department addressed to the dgaacc.

60. acs, mdai, dgaacc, multi-year plans, construction works, buildings, health, b. 102, fasc. "Multi-year plan", telegram of the viceroy Amedeo d'Aosta of 24 August 1938 addressed to the Ministry of Italian Africa.

61. Here, telegram of the viceroy Amedeo d'Aosta of 3 March 1939 addressed to the Ministry of Italian Africa.

62. VI, note sent by Amedeo d'Aosta to the dgaacc and to the Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs of the Ministry of Italian Africa.

63. Ivi, annexed to the decree of November 15, 1937.
64. In reality, even large companies seem to be affected by the system of deferred payments.
65. acs, mdai, dgaacc, multi-year plans, construction works, buildings, health, b. 102, fasc. "Consolidated plan management office", Plan of the fundamental viability of the Empire approved June 4, 1938.
66. Ibid.
67. acs, mdai, dgaacc, multi-year plans, construction works, buildings, health, b. 102, fasc. "Multi-year plan", note addressed to the viceroy of Ethiopia by the undersecretary of state at the Italian Ministry of Africa Attilio Terruzzi.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. See Pankhurst, Road Building, cit., P. 54.
71. See Bortolotti, History of building policy in Italy, cit., P. 169.
72. The agreement between the State and the construction company and concessionaire, the Società Anonima Autostrade, was signed on 1 December 1922. On 17 December, the agreement was approved with a decree published on 9 January 1923. The Council for Public Works pronounces favorably on February 27 of the same year; cfr. acs, spdd, reserved correspondence, b. 60, fasc. "Puricelli (Soc. Anonima)", subfasc. 1, letter from Puricelli to Mussolini dated 21 November 1932; Bortolotti, History of building policy in Italy, cit., P. 108; Maggi, History of transport in Italy, cit., Pp. 108-9.
73. Puricelli's consultancy in the motorway sector is also required abroad, so much so that in 1932 the Milanese manufacturer launched the proposal to build a network of European motorways, and in 1937 he planned the construction of the Rome-Berlin; cfr. Maggi, History of transport in Italy, cit., P. 108; Bortolotti, History of building policy in Italy, cit., P. 154.
74. In April 1938 Puricelli agreed with the Yugoslav Public Works Minister, Stosovic, to build the Belgrade-Brod section of Belgrade-Zagreb, for an amount of 300 million lire; acs, spdd, reserved correspondence, b. 60, fasc. "Puricelli (Soc. Anonima)", subfasc. 1, letter from the director of the "Piccolo" Dino Alessi to Mussolini.
75. Puricelli's is not the only road restructuring project. Giovanni Agnelli, interested in the development of car traffic, and Romolo Vaselli, a construction builder, like Puricelli, a protagonist in road works in Italy and Africa, also present their projects aimed at a general restructuring of the Italian road network; cfr. Bortolotti, History of building policy in Italy, cit., P. 120; Moraglio, for a history of Italian motorways, cit., P. 19.
76. acs, spdd, reserved correspondence, b. 60, fasc. "Puricelli (Soc. Anonima)", subfasc. 1, letter from Puricelli to Arnaldo Mussolini dated 13 January 1928. According to the testimony of the Hon. Del Fante to the VII Chamber Commission of 22 April 1955, reported in Bortolotti, History

of building policy in Italy, cit., P. 120, note 46, Puricelli's projects, on the initiative of the Minister of Public Works Giurati and Pio Calletti, future general manager of AASS, are forfeited and placed among the objectives of the Company Company of the Road.

77. acs, spdd, b. 60, private correspondence, fasc. "Puricelli (Soc. Anonima)", subfasc. 1, letter from Puricelli to the Minister of Public Works of 29 August 1930. On 17 March 1930 Puricelli in a letter to the Undersecretary of the Ministry of the Interior, Leandro Arpinati, argues for the need to extend the action of the AASS, limited to accommodation of 6,000 km of the network, at all 20,000 km of state roads.

78. Letter from Beneduce to the Duce's special secretariat, transmitted to Mussolini by the secretary Osvaldo Sebastiani on 16 February 1936.

79. Ivi, letter from Puricelli to the Minister of Public Works of 29 August 1930 and letters from Puricelli to Mussolini of March 2, 1932 and February 16, 1933.

80. IV, "Memorial of the IRI reserved for HE the Head of Government", 4 February 1936.

81. Ibid.

82. acs, spdd, b. 60, private correspondence, fasc. "Puricelli (Soc. Anonima)", subfasc. 1, letter from Puricelli to Mussolini dated February 1934.

83. In December 1934, the Banca Commerciale Italiana is a creditor of Purielli's company of around 380 million lire and owns a third of the company's shares. The remaining two thirds of the shares, owned by Puricelli, are however pledged to the same bank for a personal debt owed by the manufacturer to the institution; cfr. acs, spdd, reserved correspondence, b. 60, fasc. "Puricelli (Soc. Anonima)", subfasc. 1, "Puricelli", reserved for HE the Head of Government, 4 February 1936.

84. Ibid.

85. Letter from the President of the IRI to Mussolini dated 29 May 1935.

86. Ivi, "Puricelli", reserved for HE the Head of Government, 4 February 1936.

87. It should be noted that the war in Ethiopia is still in course, but evidently the orders already obtained in Eritrea and the future projects for the enhancement of the colony make Puricelli guess, and as we shall see not only to him, the earning possibilities that the conquest of the Empire can offer to Italian companies in the field of road construction .

88. acs, spdd, reserved correspondence, b. 60, fasc. "Puricelli (Soc. Anonima)", subfasc. 1, letters from the President of the IRI to Mussolini dated February 13, 1936 and February 14, 1936.

89. Letter from the President of the IRI to Mussolini dated February 13, 1936.

90. vii, letter from the secretary Sebastiani to Mussolini of 16 February 1935.

91. Practically excluded from the activity in the field of road construction, Puricelli tries, without too much success, to return to its old love for highways. On October 27, 1938, he wrote a letter to Mussolini in which he supported the "timeliness and timeliness" of a program of motorway

projects that could respond to the "need to find new sources of employment in the kingdom" and the possibility of giving "greater work in workshops that may be partly lightened by the production of war material ". In 1940 he wrote to Sebastiani claiming the originality of one of his plans for the construction of the Rome-Brenner motorway in May 1937, asking the Presidency of the consortium for the current project "limited to Rome-Bologna". In 1942 he writes directly to the Duce, from which he obtained the general assent to set up a parastatal entity for the study and creation of a motorway network after the end of the war, to convince him to start the project before the conflict ended; cfr. acs, spdd, reserved correspondence, b. 60, fasc. "Puricelli (Soc. Anonima)", under-account. 1, 2.

92. See acs, spdd, private correspondence, b. 60, fasc. "Puricelli (Soc. Anonima)", letter from Puricelli to the Società Anonima Puricelli Strade e Cave of April 23, 1940.

93. acs, iri nera, b. 24, "Notizie iri (1933-1943)", interest related to the aoi.

94. Bortolotti, History of building policy in Italy, cit., P. 169; acs, spdd, ordinary correspondence, fasc. 509.837, "Exactly for HE the Head of Government".

95. In reality the contract of the Addis Ababa-Gimma assigned to the Parisi company in December 1936 concerns 353 km; cfr. Bortolotti, History of building policy in Italy, cit., P. 171. But the length of the road at the end of the works will be equal to 340 km.

96. Cobolli Gigli, Imperial roads, cit., P. 87. For a complete list of companies involved in the construction of the main roads, including the smaller firms, to which the remaining kilometers were contracted, see D. Fossa, Italian Labor in the Empire, Mondadori, Milan 1938, pp. 395-6.

97. "Corriere dei Costruttori", 20 September 1936, quoted in Bortolotti, History of building policy in Italy, cit., P. 208.

98. Industry in aoi Confederazione Fascista Industriali, Usila, Rome 1939, pp. 352-3.

99. See A. Cuneo, Public and Private Procurement, Hoepli, Milan 1937, pp. 33-4.

100. Cobolli Gigli, Imperial roads, cit., P. 15.

101. Ivi, p. 17.

102. Reference years 1937-2004, from Istat, The value of the lira in Italy from 1861 to 2004.

103. The data on total expenses were taken from the Italian state budget from 1862 to 1967, vol. ii, Rome 1969, Ministry of the Treasury-General Accounting Office, taking into account the actual payments net of interest on the debt of the financial years in question, also published on the website of the Bank of Italy at the address <http://www.bancaditalia.com>. The result does not change if we consider the slightly discordant data of the normal and exceptional expenses reported in FA Repaci, Public finance in Italy, Einaudi, Turin 1962, tab. 92, p. 329. Data on the gross national income were taken from the historical statistics of the Bank of Italy published on the institute's website. Data on expenditures for public works were obtained from Repaci, The public finance in Italy, cit., tab. 101, p. 354, taking into account the classification of actual

expenses according to normal services.

104. Poggiali, *Diario in aoi*, cit., P. 34. The average figure of 350,000 lire a km to build a road in Italy is also confirmed by Pankhurst, *Road-building*, cit., P. 42, reported in Antonsich, *Addis Ababa 'caput viarum'*, cit., P. 141.

105. G. Cobolli Gigli, On the results of the exercise of the fundamental roads, articles appeared in "La Stampa" between March and April 1939, sl., Sd.

106. Ibid.

107. Ibid.

108. Pankhurst, *Road Building*, cit., P. 42.

109. acs, spdd, ordinary correspondence, fasc. 500.002 / i, telephone interception n. 3102 between the lawyer Alberto Beer and Mr. Pisano, November 9, 1936.

110. Cobolli Gigli, *Imperial roads*, cit., P. 18.

111. Ibid.

112. Pini, *The road network of the Empire*, cit., P. 1.

113. Ivi, p. 3.

114. Ibid. and Pini, *The roads of Italian East Africa*, cit., p. 323.

115. G. Pini, *The road in Italian East Africa*, in "Quaderni italiani serie xv, L'Africa Italiana" n. 4, p. 19.

116. Ibid.

117. Cobolli Gigli, *On the results of the exercise of fundamental roads*, cit.

118. Pini, *The road in Italian East Africa*, cit., P. 21.

119. See Pini, *The Road Network of the Empire*, cit., Pp. 5-6.

120. Actually Guido Battaglini leaves for Eritrea on the explicit invitation of the High Commissioner De Bono to direct the Press and Propaganda Office. But on the steamer that takes him to Massaua he meets the future Head of Press and propaganda of Eritrea designated by the Ministry of War! A testimony of the overlapping of skills that characterizes the administration of the colonies.

121. G. Battaglini, *With SE De Bono, in the whirlwind of a preparation*, A. Airoidi, Bologna 1938, p. 32.

122. C. Giglio, *Industrialists and workers in the organization of the party in aoi*, in *the Industry in aoi Confederazione Fascista Industriali*, cit., P. 19.

123. Taking into account the ten-hour working day, the pay is only slightly higher than that received in Italy. In the province of Udine, for example, according to the supplementary provincial contract of 1929, a mason earns about 2.85 lire an hour; cfr. Provincial union of fascist trade unions of the Industry of Udine, *Collection of the economic part of the contracts stipulated from 25 April 1929 to 27 October 1929 and of the disputes resolved*, La Panarie, Udine 1929.

124. Telegram by De Bono to Mussolini of 12 July 1935, in Battaglini, With SE De Bono, cit., p. 42.
125. Battaglini, With SE De Bono, cit., P. 176.
126. Ivi, p. 127.
127. N. Labanca, Places in the sun: diaries and memories of life and work from the colonies of Africa, Italian historical museum of war, Rovereto 2001, p. 20.
128. Giglio, Industriali e lavoratori, cit., P. 19.
129. Leaflet of the Party Secretary n. 722 of 22 January 1937 and related additions (n. 838, n. 992, n. 1152) and decree of the general government n. 83 of 10 March 1937.
130. Giglio, Industriali e lavoratori, cit., P. 22.
131. Ivi, p. 29.
132. Ivi, p. 35.
133. These institutes are the Corporate Inspectorate, which incorporates the Labor Inspectorate, and the offices of the corporate economy which operate on a provincial basis.
134. See G. Bortolotto, Workers Protection, Hoepli, Milan 1936, p. 243; Id., Labor Code: coordinated collection of the main provisions in force with codes and indexes, Usila, Rome 1938, p. 167.
135. Sheet of provisions n. 899 dated 8 November 1937, in Giglio, Industriali e lavoratori, cit., P. 34.
136. Ivi, p. 22.
137. Battaglini, With SE De Bono, in the whirlwind of a preparation, cit., P. 363.
138. Ivi, p. 271.
139. There are six legions of workers constituted in aoi, one for each governorate: Arnaldo Mussolini in Scioa, Reginaldo Giuliani in Amara, Filippo Corridoni in Harar, Luigi Valcarengi in Galla Sidama, Ivo Oliveti in Eritrea and the Luigi Razza in Somalia; cfr. Fossa, Italian Labor in the Empire, cit., P. 280.
140. Cobolli Gigli, Imperial roads, cit., P. 94.
141. Fossa, Italian Labor in the Empire, cit., P. 288.
142. Giglio, Industriali e lavoratori, cit., P. 35.
143. Pini, The fundamental roads of the Empire, cit., P. 14, also in "Rassegna Economica delle Colonie", August 1937.
144. Regulation of employment relationships of Italian and foreign citizens treated in the areas of the AO, art. 55; in Industry in aoi, Confederazione Fascista Industriali, cit.
145. Battaglini, With SE De Bono, in the whirlwind of a preparation, cit., P. 113.
146. Ibid.
147. Poggiali, Diario in aoi, cit., P. 34.

148. Labanca, *Posti al sole*, cit., P. 21.
149. Ivi, p. 151.
150. Ivi, p. 152.
151. I. Taddia, *The memory of the Empire, autobiographies of East Africa*, P. Laicata, Manduria 1988, p. 81.
152. *Fascist Confederation of Industrial Workers, The Heart of Workers in the Fascist War*, Cappelli, Bologna 1937, p. 39.
153. acs, spdd, ordinary correspondence, fasc. 551.038, telephone interception n. 0357 of 20 January 1937 between two unknown persons.
154. Ivi, telephone interception n. 3346 of 29 November 1936 between two trade unionists.
155. Ivi, telephone interception n. 6684 of 13 August 1936 between a trade unionist and a party exponent.
156. Letter, February 2, 1938.
157. Ivi, memorandum of June 23, 1937.
158. Letter, note of April 16, 1937.
159. Taddia, *The Memory of the Empire*, cit., P. 109.
160. Regulation of employment relationships of Italian and foreign citizens treated in the areas of the AO, art. 35, in *L'Industria in aoi Confederazione Fascista Industriali*, cit.
161. Ibid.
162. Taddia, *The Memory of the Empire*, cit., P. 119.
163. A. Crispo, *Communications and Transport, in Industry in aoi Confederazione Fascista Industriali*, cit., P. 84.
164. Communications to the Chamber, Efficiency of services and management assets. Statements by Undersecretary Terruzzi, in *"Il Messaggero"*, 19 March 1938.
165. Crispo, *Communications and Transport*, cit., P. 87.
166. Pini, *The road network of the Empire*, cit., P. 6; Cobolli Gigli, *Imperial roads*, cit., P. 190.
167. Cobolli Gigli, *On the results of the exercise of fundamental roads*, cit.
168. Ibid.
169. Budgets in the Upper House. The fervor of works in the Empire in a strong speech by Undersecretary Terruzzi, in *"Il Messaggero"*, 26 May 1939.
170. Cobolli Gigli, *Imperial roads*, cit., P. 27.
171. Pini, *The road in Italian East Africa*, cit., P. 21.
172. Cobolli Gigli, *Imperial roads*, cit., P. 27.
173. The program of the Empire, in *"Il Messaggero"*, 5 June 1936.
174. See Marra, *Communications and Transport*, cit., P. 145.
175. This section was to be the first section of the railway connection between the Red Sea and

the Indian Ocean, which from the port of Assab, passing through the capital, was to lead to Mogadishu or alternatively to the port of Brava; cfr. Marra, Communications and Transport, cit., P. 151.

176. Cobolli Gigli, Imperial roads, cit., P. 28. To favor projects aimed at researching energy and mineral resources of which, according to propaganda, Ethiopia would be rich, a special organization was born, the amo (Mining Company East Africa).

177. Crispo, Communications and Transport, cit., P. 98.

178. P. Puricelli, in "Imperial Italy. Special issue of the Illustrated Magazine of Italian Africa ", 1937.

179. F. Ciarlantini, What does Ethiopia offer us ?, in " Fascist Almanac of the People of Italy ", a. 1938, p. 197.

180. G. Agnelli in "Imperial Italy. Special issue of the Illustrated Magazine of Italian Africa ", 1937.

181. Railways or motorways? in "Il Messaggero", 4 June 1936. In reality, 500,000 pounds per km are the first expenditure forecast by the Ministry of Public Works that was largely exceeded during the works.

182. Ibid.

183. Marra, Communications and Transport, cit., P. 146.

184. Pankhurst, Road Building, cit., P. 56.

185. The Duke of Aosta in the epic of the Amba Alagi, in "Italian Africa", August-October 1941, p. 14.

186. Pankhurst, Road Building, cit., P. 57.