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Research, Education, and
Practice in the Era of

‘Post-
Professionalism’



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Archaeological memory and urban morphology: the republican model in the imperial E42

Alessandro Camiz

Abstract

The idea that the modern city should rise on a *tabula rasa* of the ancient city has been promoted since the *Plan Voisin* (LeCorbusier, 1925), and was essentially conceived on the ideology of the destruction of the *ancienne regime*, or to better say the destruction of its space, as a base to build a new world. Nowadays we recognize that demolitions of urban fabric inside historical cities are not conceivable, they were accomplished mostly by absolutist regimes or war bombings, upholding in substance the very same effect. Therefore we should reconsider critically the foundation of the E42 in Rome (1941), shown by fascist propaganda as a *modern* foundation, but planned outside the city centre. Even though meaningful demolitions were accomplished inside the monumental area of the Roman forums in the '30, in a very subtle manner, the archaeological topography of the ancient republican Rome became part of the new E42. The foundation was based on analogous orientations, in relationship with the foundation day of ancient Rome. Form and meaning of architectures, recalling the memory urban parts of ancient Rome, were used as archetypes to symbolize the past glory of Rome. This study presents the comparative analysis of the Palace of Receptions and Congresses (Adalberto Libera, 1938) and of the Temple of Venus and Rome (Hadrian, 121 ad), analyzing the city through models, proposing a new interpretation of the E42 as an *analogous city*. This comparative analysis recognizes in the plan elements of non-immediate perception, tracing a key to understand the *meaning* of the spaces of the city.

Archaeological memory and urban morphology: the republican model in the imperial E42

“Un’analoga visione *classica*,

ma moderna, *modernissima*”

“An analogous *classical* vision,

but modern, *very modern*”

M. Piacentini, *Description of the E42*(Guidoni, 1987, p. 37), (authors' translation).

This article presents a framework for the comparative analysis of the Palace of Congresses and Meetings (Adalberto Libera, 1938) and the Temple of Venus and Rome (Hadrian, 121 ad) experimenting a morphological analysis of the city, focused on the meaning and based essentially on architectural models. By

comparing one of the most significant Roman architectures of the twentieth century with “the greatest sanctuary of ancient Rome” (Coarelli, 1974, p. 100) we are proposing a method for a new interpretation for the Palazzo dei Congressi and for the master-plan of E42, considered though as an inseparable part of that architecture. This comparative analysis finds within the plan of E42 elements that are not immediately perceivable (Guidoni, 1985, p.27) shedding light on the key to comprehend the meaning of public spaces within the city (Guidoni, 1987, p. 33). The new foundation of E42, where the “symbolism of the cross” (Guidoni, 1987, p.36), is the counterpoint to a figure yet to be traced, offers an opportunity to verify the “relationship that modern urban design holds with the ancient city” (Panella, 1989, p. 24). In particular, through the consideration of the meaning of Adalberto Libera’s architectural design, a true “instrument of perception and knowledge” (Guidoni, 1988, p. 79) a deeper historical insight on the foundation of E42 is accomplished.

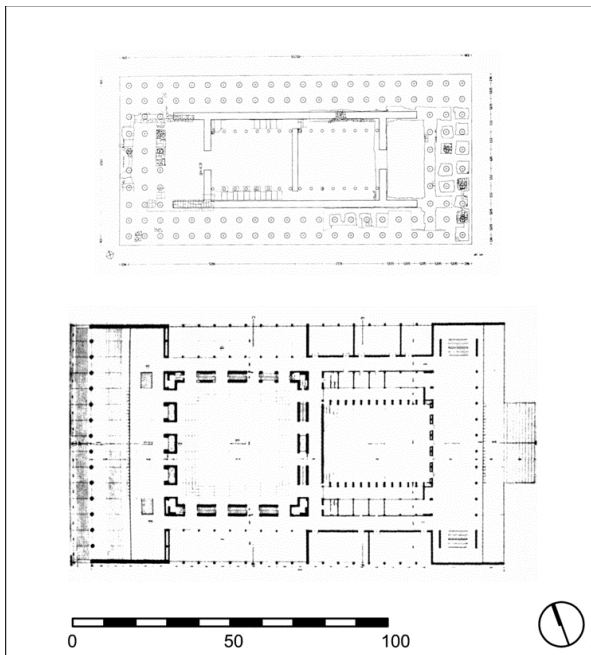


Fig.1 Temple of Venus and Rome: Map of the reconstructed phase of Hadrian, Alessandro Cassatella, Stefania Panella, *Restituzione dell'impianto adrianeo del Tempio di Venere e Roma*, in "Archeologia Laziale" X, CNR, Roma 1990, p.53. Palazzo dei Ricevimenti e dei Congressi, ground floor, from Alessandro Camiz,

Palazzo dei Ricevimenti e dei Congressi, il progetto per il II grado, in Gaia Remiddi e Antonella Greco, *Il Moderno attraverso Roma. Guida ai progetti romani di Adalberto Libera*, Palombi, Roma 2003, p. c32.

Literature review

The design of Libera's palace has been analyzed by many authors (Rossi, 2011), (Remiddi, Greco, Bonavita, Ferri, 2001), (Muratore, 2007), (Strappa, 1995) without thoroughly investigating the issue of *architectural models*, or rather, without finding the *plastic archetype* that lays hidden beyond this architectural composition. We will see then how this project, together with the Palace of Italian Civilization (Guerrini, La Padula, Romano, 1938) is part of a wider analogous urban design that included some of the demolitions carried out in the archaeological area of the imperial forums of Rome in the same years. Perhaps it was the difficult interaction between Adalberto Libera, radical architect, and Marcello Piacentini classical architect, to give as a result the analogy in question, hence the references, as we will see, are so numerous that they can hardly be ascribed to the category of the fortuitous coincidence.



Fig.2 The engraving represents the Colossus, located between the Temple of Venus and Rome and the Flavian Amphitheater, in the act of measuring the sky and the earth.

Methodology

Let us begin with the exposure of the analogous characters that were identified in the Palace of Reception and Congresses and in the Temple of Venus and Rome, to extend later the analogy to the urban design. First of all we should consider the dual function, and hence the double name, which are common to both buildings. In Libera's project the double name is for sure indicative of a hidden reference already outlined in the announcement of the competition in 1936. While the relationship between the Palace of Italian Civilization, also called the *square Colosseum*, and the Flavian Amphitheatre is evident, less

obvious but equally significant is the analogy between the Palace of Congresses and Meetings and the Temple of Venus and Rome. Maybe because it is not so evident, their relationship is an interesting “non-mimetic symbolic reference” (Camiz, 2003, p. 12), informing some of the guiding principles of the entire urban design of the E42.



Fig.3 The front façade of the Palace of Italian Civilization (Guerrini, La Padula, Romano, 1938), author’s photograph 2004.

In fact the complete urban system of E42 is analogous to the symbolic centre of the republican Rome. The two buildings share the same urban axis of E42 oriented at 290°, and the Temple and the Colosseum have a common symmetry axis oriented at 290° as well. At a close examination the *axis maior* of the Amphitheatre does not exactly coincide with the axis of symmetry of the temple (Meogrossi, 1995), there is a very small difference that can be dispensed for the purposes of this analysis.



Fig.4 The rear façade of the Palace of Congresses and Meetings (Adalberto Libera, 1938), author’s photograph 2004.

The common orientation of 290° coincides with the *axis pariliae*, a direction linked to the foundation of the Temple on April 21st, 121 ad, accomplished by the emperor Hadrian (117-138 ad) and the simultaneous establishment of the *Parilia*, a Roman public festival held on April 21st, date of the mythical foundation of the city in 753 b.C. Following this interpretation the orientation of the *axis pariliae* should coincide with the position of the sun on the horizon at sunset in the *dies natalis urbis Romae*, (April 21, 753 b.C.). This direction, sighted from the site of the Temple, tallied the seat of the *Asylum*, located between the *Capitolium* and the *Arx*, with the *Mons Vaticanus*. It is therefore the foundational axis of the city, *axis urbis*, with a strong symbolic relationship with the landscape and with an astronomical event corresponding to the foundation date. The analogy between the two buildings therefore continues considering the architectural scale and the typology: the double nature of Libera's design is an obvious response in the double cell of the Temple.

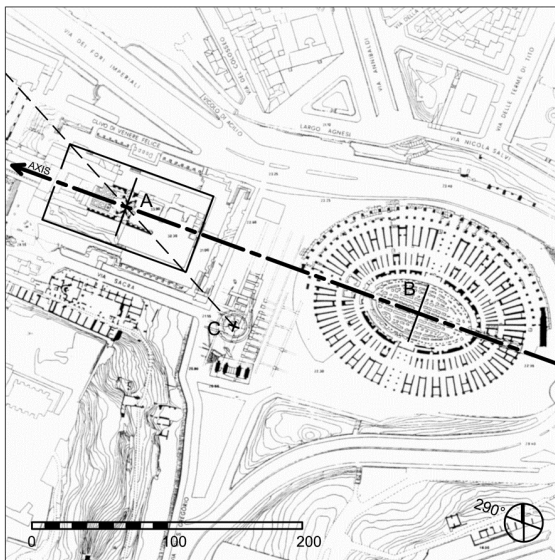


Fig.5 The axis of the system Flavian Amphitheatre - Temple of Venus and Rome: author's drawing on the plan from: Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, *La Valle del Colosseo*, Electa, Milano 1997, p.50.

We should consider that before the restoration done by *Maxentius*, in the Temple of Hadrian there were no apses, but the two opposing cells were separated by a simple straight wall (Barattolo, 1973, p. 268) a configuration that corresponds substantially to the design of the plan of the Palazzo dei Congressi.

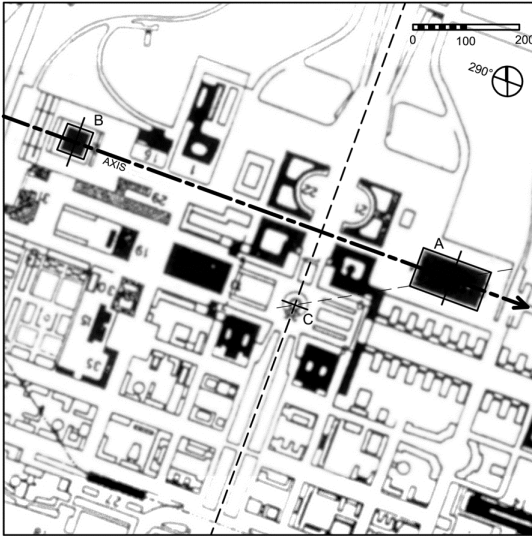


Fig.6 The first transverse axis of the E42 and the alignment of the Palace of Italian Civilization and the Palace of Congresses and Meetings: author's drawing on the plan from, E42 General plan, according to the final draft prepared by the Office of Architecture with the supervision of the architect. Marcello Piacentini, Achille M. Ippolito, *Roma E.U.R. 83, Storia ed Analisi Critica del Quartiere E.U.R. dal piano per l'E2 ai giorni nostri*, Fratelli Palombi editori, Roma 1983, p. 32.

Not by chance Libera describes the building with a “reception hall vast as a temple” (Libera 1941, p. 11), suggesting its archetypal reference without explicitly declaring it. The current configuration of the Temple, with the two opposing apses, belongs to the reconstruction accomplished under the rule of Maxentius after the fire of 283 ad (Lugli, 1946, p.327). The original plan of the building is shown in the archaeological plan (Fig. 1) with the two opposed rectangular spaces.



Fig.7 Aerial view of E42 still in construction, 1953.

Fig.8 I. Gismondi, Model of Imperial Rome scale 1:240.

The comparison of the two plans, at the very same scale, allows us to identify the size, the type and the form of the two building, finding indeed a strong relationship. The reception hall seems derived from an expansion and redesign of Hadrian's building. Looking at the building at the architectural scale, the analogy is further evident: in fact the distance of the granite columns of the palace is 5.00 m (Muratore, Lux, 1990, pp. 78-79), as that adopted for the long sides of Hadrian project is 5.03 m (Cassatella, Panella, 1990, p.53). It is generally agreed on that the design of the columns in the front facade of Libera's project were imposed by Piacentini after the second phase of the competition. Furthermore, the suggestion of De Angelis of Ossat (Manieri Elia, 1983, p. 53), which assumed the presence of an astronomical observatory on the roof of the Temple, in its Massentian reconstruction, finds further confirmation in the large open-air theater located on the roof of the Congress palace, directed to the "eucalyptus forest and the Colli Albani" (Giovannetti, 1940, p. 59) and the Temple of *Jupiter Latialis* which was the other destination for the *axis urbis*.

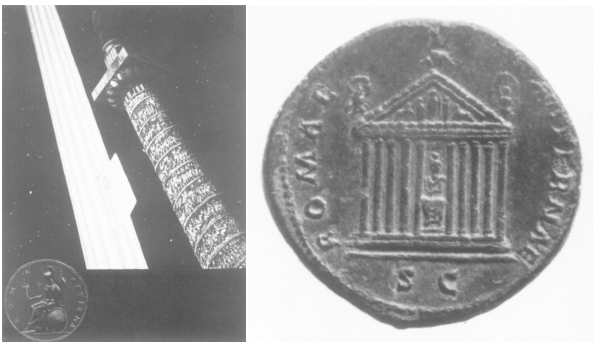


Fig. 9,10

Following the series of analogies, consider the insertion of the *colossal size* in Libera's project: in fact, the size of the Receptions hall, a square of 35.50 m. (Muratore, Lux, 1990, pp.78-79), corresponds exactly to the height of the Colossus of Nero, 120 Roman feet. (120x29.6 cm = 35.50 m). Svetonius describes the giant statue in his *De Vita Caesarum*, placing it in the entrance hall of the *Domus Aurea*, the villa of the Emperor Nero, on the same site later occupied by the Temple of Hadrian. "Vestibulum eius fuit, in quo colossus CXX pedum staret ipsius effigie" (Svetonius, VI, XXXI, 5). Also the two lateral ramps of the Temple (the *via sacra* to the left and the ramp built by Muñoz) resemble the two fountains on the sides of the Palace of Receptions and Congresses continuing on the sides as service paths for the access to the lower floor. Finally, the comparison between sections and elevations reveals the coincidence of heights and architectural picture.

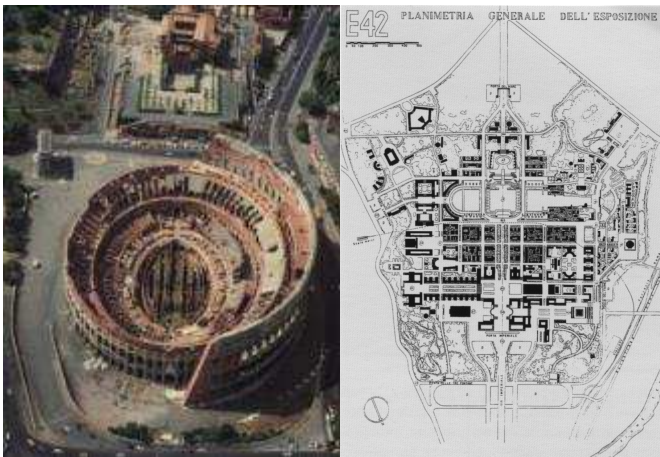


Fig.11, 12

The restoration work on the temple made by Muñoz from December 1934 to April 1935 is perhaps the premise for the design of E42, which began with the first inspection on the Universal Exhibition in October 20th, 1936 until the publication of the General Plan of the World Fair in April 1937, the competition for the Palace of the Italian Civilization in 1937 and the first degree of competition for the Palace of receptions and conferences launched in June 20th, 1937. Finally, to highlight the continuity of the system of urban alignments during the Middle Ages, when the Coliseum became the center of the cross basilicas of the city as has been amply illustrated by Guidoni, so this is a symbolic tradition spanning the ancient history of the city of Rome to be re- interpreted

with the E42 plan providing an eloquent example of the symbolic function of continuity from ancient to modern times.

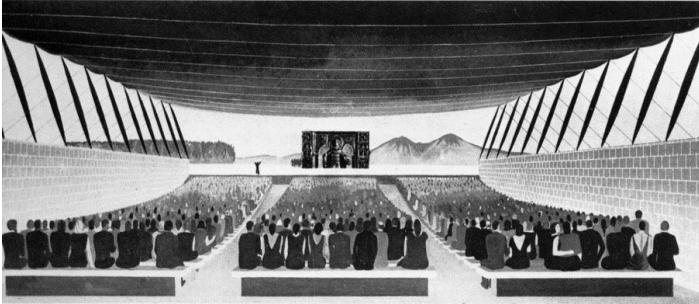


Fig. 13



Fig.14

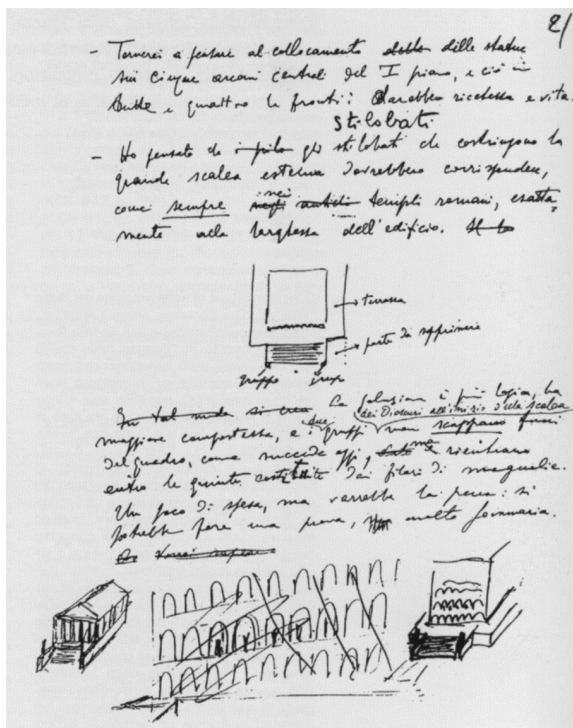


Fig.15 Marcello Piacentini, manuscript commentary on the first version of the project of the Palace of Italian civilization: the use of classical models is evident.

Results

Turning to the urban design, we can outline how some of the relationships of meaning and form which bind the *Meta Sudans*, the Colosseum and the Temple, can be found as equivalents in the E42. Similar but mirrored is the *ratio* of the *Meta Sudans* collimating the diagonal of the plan of the Temple and the central obelisk of E42 collimating the diagonal of the plan of the Palace of Congresses (Fig. 5, 6). The relationships between the points A, B and C of the plan of the ancient centre of Rome appear reversed in the points A, B and C of the plan on the E42. The Palace of Congresses and the opposite Palace of Italian Civilization thus constitute the two cornerstones for the definition of the modern image of E42 as as hidden and analogous equivalent to the monuments of ancient Rome, an urban system linked to the foundation of E42 and its meanings.



Fig. 16

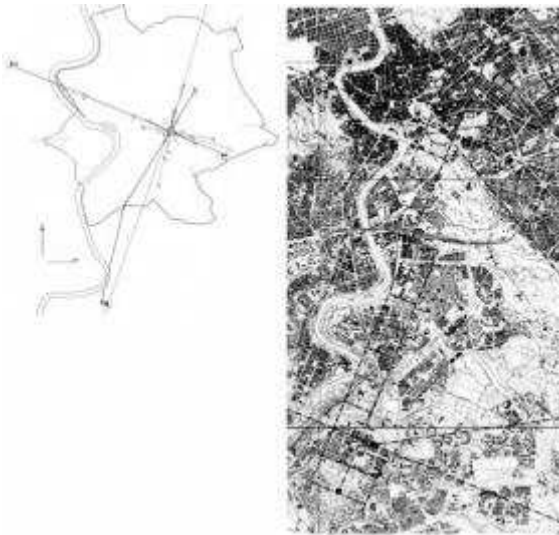


Fig.17 Rome and Christian Rome: basic scheme of the models of spatial organization, from E. Guidoni, *Urbanistica di Roma tra miti e progetti*, Roma-Bari 1990, p. 21. (left) Large plan of Rome and E42, author's drawing on City of Rome, 1:10:00 scale, aereo photographic plan, november december 1961 (right).

The image of the two coupled buildings collimated by the obelisk dedicated to Marconi was adopted as the “base of the first transverse axis of the E42” (Calvesi, Guidoni, Lux, 1987, p.321) and has been used in urban design as a device for the transposition of the ancient symbolic centre of the city. Through the shifted replication, tilted into another system, the same tracks were repropose as architectural images bearing the hidden meaning of the symbolic center of the republican Rome. It is not a coincidence that in the same year Mussolini proceeded in demolishing the *Meta Sudans*, the symbolic of center the Augustan Rome, as we outlined, maybe with the intention to replicate that system in the *new-town* of E42. It is a reversal of the system of urban relationships, here proposed in a varied configuration with a similar topology. At this point we can attempt to describe the superstructural aspect of this operation: if Hadrian used the urban space for the assertion of his imperial authority, through the construction of a temple on the site of the atrium of the *Domus Aurea* with the displacement of the colossal statue of Nero, Marcello Piacentini has implemented the reversal of the relationship between Rome and Venus, by placing a similar Colosseum instead of the Temple with the intention to address the urban development of Rome towards the sea, in the south east area, or perhaps to reverse the course of history. Through the direct comparison of the two systems, it becomes even more evident as the palace of Italian civilization is one of the cornerstones of the first project of the E42 (Guidoni, 1988, p. 26), since the building has been designed tangent to the continuation of the *axis major* of the Flavian Amphitheatre and thus represents the fulcrum of the model adopted (fig. 17). Its role is clear, that of a “dominant point intended to impose itself in the landscape” (Guidoni, 1988, p. 26). Piacentini already described the plan E42 using these words “An analogous *classical* vision, but modern, *very modern*” (Guidoni, 1988, p.37), also stating that the “character is informed to classical tracks” with the necessity to adopt the “divine proportion”.



Fig. 18

It is possible to find a number of Egyptian triangles in the plan of the E42 in a perfect similarity with the system of the valley of the Colosseum. From the form of the city, the analogy continues into the iconographic program adopted by the regime. In the competition for the poster propaganda for E42, it was imposed on all participants to enter in the image a coin with the eternal Rome (fig. 9). The obverse of this coin (fig. 10), representing the Temple of Venus and Rome, hides the occult side of a precise ideological program implemented through urban design in the E42 . It is a meaningful example of the Roman way of comprehending urban design, where references to history are outlined without falling in the mimicry of some the historicist architecture of those years. In this particular case, the representation requirements of the regime have been reflected in a clever architectural, urban and propaganda invention, perhaps due to the interaction between Piacentini and Libera. The first transverse axis of E42, along the main axis of the settlement, appears from the earliest plans of the project. The two buildings are placed at the two ends of the axis, characterized by an eccentric symmetry as if they were background of the urban scene. It seems quite clear, therefore, what was meant to be the role of the imperial street: a dorsal column on to which innervate a sequence of “great lateral compositions” (Piacentini), each characterized by its symmetry and meaning and

linked by a series of simple geometric relationships, the series of the Egyptian triangles. Just as Hadrian had done to the Pantheon, Piacentini, or whoever was the creator of this design, accomplished the “rollover for 180 ° of the monument itself” (Manieri Elia, 1986, p.4) turning the “sacred optical axis toward the sacred sanctuary of *Tusculum* from the Capitoline *Auguraculum*” (Manieri Elia, 1986, p.51) implementing a specific technique: the urban symbolic capsizing as foundational and hegemonic practice. This technique has found a good echo and is clearly reflected in the architecture developed by Libera, adopting a “a complete redefinition of the language” (Guidoni, 1988, p.77). Finally, looking at the fig. 17 you can easily see how the *axis minor* of the Flavian Amphitheatre is tangent to the outer edge of the Palace of Italian Civilization. The distance from the center of the amphitheater to the front of the temple facing the Tabularium, once doubled, becomes the unit describing the entire urban system and measuring the E42. It's a unit that enhances the relationship between the antique and the modern city, articulating the settlement and its distance from the center with an uniform layout. Its measure is given along with the founding and direction of the *axis urbis* and is deeply rooted in the archaeological monuments of Rome, deriving from history and archaeology the fundamental compositional inspiration for the design of the modern urban project.

Altitude	Azimuth	Date	Rise	Set
+00° 00' 06"	290° 30' 29"	21 April 112	4.58.20	19:17:11
+00° 00' 11"	290° 58' 28"	21 April 1942	4.58.26	19:20:29

Tab. 1. Historical ephemeris of the sunset direction in Rome on the foundation dates, April 21st 112 AD (Temple of Venus and Rome), April 21st 1942 (E42). Author's elaboration using Skymap Pro v9.0.9, Copyright 1992-2002, C.A. Mariott.



Fig. 19, 20.

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