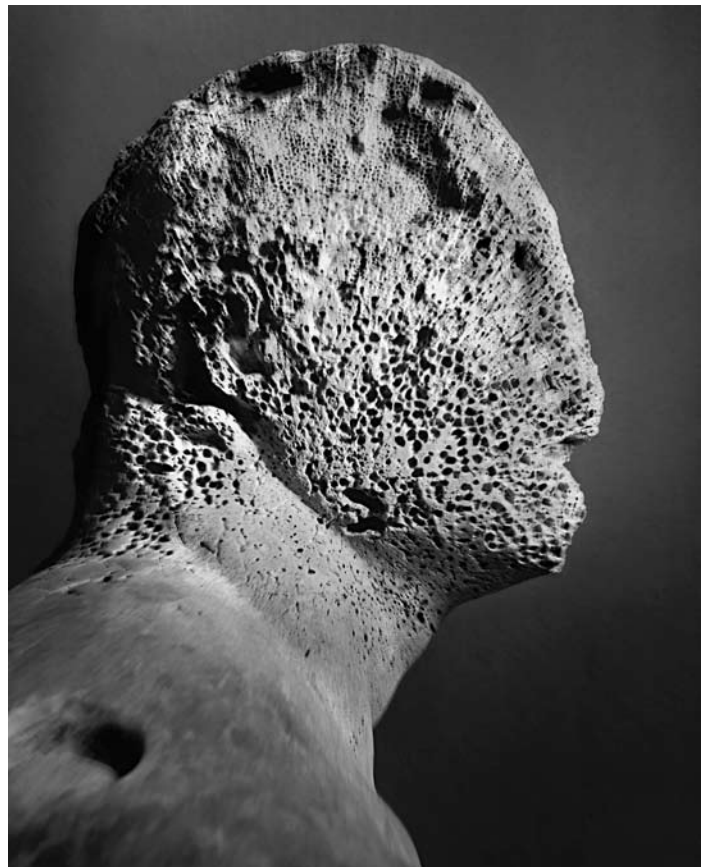


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1.2011



mito mediterraneo



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Il mare in una stanza Piero Bottoni Progetto per Villa Ludolf a Marina di Massa, 1941

Andrea Volpe

“Questa villa vuol riprendere, dallo spirito delle costruzioni latine, l’equilibrio delle masse, dall’uso di vita all’aperto di quei popoli mediterranei, le logge, gli atri e le terrazze. [...] Non sbarrerà il paesaggio ma ne sarà attraversata, il mare o il monte saranno veduti attraverso il suo atrio, a terreno, come in una cornice...”¹

Così Piero Bottoni descrive il progetto per una Villa Latina, presentato al concorso bandito dalla IV^o Esposizione internazionale delle arti decorative ed industriali di Monza per “Una villa moderna per l’abitazione di una famiglia”.² La proposta trova la sua principale ragione d’essere nell’esplicita volontà di radicamento nel luogo, tanto da custodirlo simbolicamente all’interno della grande sala/vestibolo posta al pian terreno. La villa diviene così “soglia tra il mare e la pineta, la quale nei disegni di Bottoni, subito si innalza nelle colline dell’entroterra, come appunto a Bonassola dove la villa è idealmente ambientata [...]. Ed è proprio dall’idea di soglia che l’intero organismo trae la sua ratio costruttiva e il suo modo di disporsi nel contesto. La soglia che al piano terra si dilata nella profondità di un palcoscenico con due opposti fondali, nei due piani superiori si fa linea ideale di fusione fra i due corpi, su cui sono disposti i locali di soggiorno e le camere da letto che si prolungano nel lungo terrazzo, e il corpo verso terra su cui si addensano gli abbondanti servizi e le camere dei ragazzi”³

Dodici anni più tardi, pochi chilometri più a sud della località ligure allora scelta come immaginario sito per quel progetto-manifesto, Bottoni disegnerà un’altra casa che, seppur diversa per scelta tipologica, organizzazione degli spazi interni e carattere da Villa Latina,

ne riprenderà sostanzialmente i modi di relazione col paesaggio; nel caso di Villa Ludolf quello della riviera apuana ai Ronchi di Massa.

Questi due progetti, se posti a paragone, ben descrivono a partire dal comune tema dell’abitare -là idealmente borghese, qui specificatamente nobiliare⁴- non solo la fase dell’esordio e quella della maturità professionale dell’architetto milanese ma la sua straordinaria capacità di lavorare -fin da subito e con continuità- su tematiche ben più ampie e profonde di quelle allora oggetto del coevo dibattito architettonico. Bottoni si distingue infatti dagli altri protagonisti del Razionalismo italiano per una felice predisposizione al dialogo con la tradizione, con la storia dell’architettura, con i diversi caratteri dei luoghi. Un’attitudine che lo porterà a rifiutare con decisione ogni manierismo, compreso quello dell’architettura del Moderno. Tale condizione di non organicità rispetto ai principali gruppi di architetti razionalisti fu resa esplicita in modo molto chiaro fin dal 1928, quando alla I^o Mostra di architettura razionale egli sarà invitato ad esporre solamente gli studi sul cromatismo architettonico (in una sala denominata -non a caso- degli «Isolati»⁵) dopo il rifiuto da parte del comitato organizzatore del progetto per l’ingresso monumentale alla Fiera di Milano, considerato ancora troppo vicino ai caratteri del Novecento milanese; re-taggiato generalmente fatto risalire all’influenza di Piero Portaluppi di cui Bottoni fu allievo al Regio Politecnico.⁶

“Occorre che la dimora odierna anche ispirandosi alla passata abbia il segno, l’impronta, il colore dei tempi in cui viviamo [...]. Non dunque nella nuova de-



1
Piero Bottoni e Mario Pucci
Progetto della Villa Ludolf, 1941
Fotomontaggio del modello
Tratto da Domus 189/1943, © Editoriale
Domus S.p.A. Rozzano, Milano,
per gentile concessione dell’editore

2
Piero Bottoni
Progetto di “Villa Latina”
IV Esposizione internazionale delle arti
decorative e industriali moderne di
Monza, concorso 1929-30
Veduta prospettica del patio
(positivo b/n 237x267 mm)

Pagine successive:

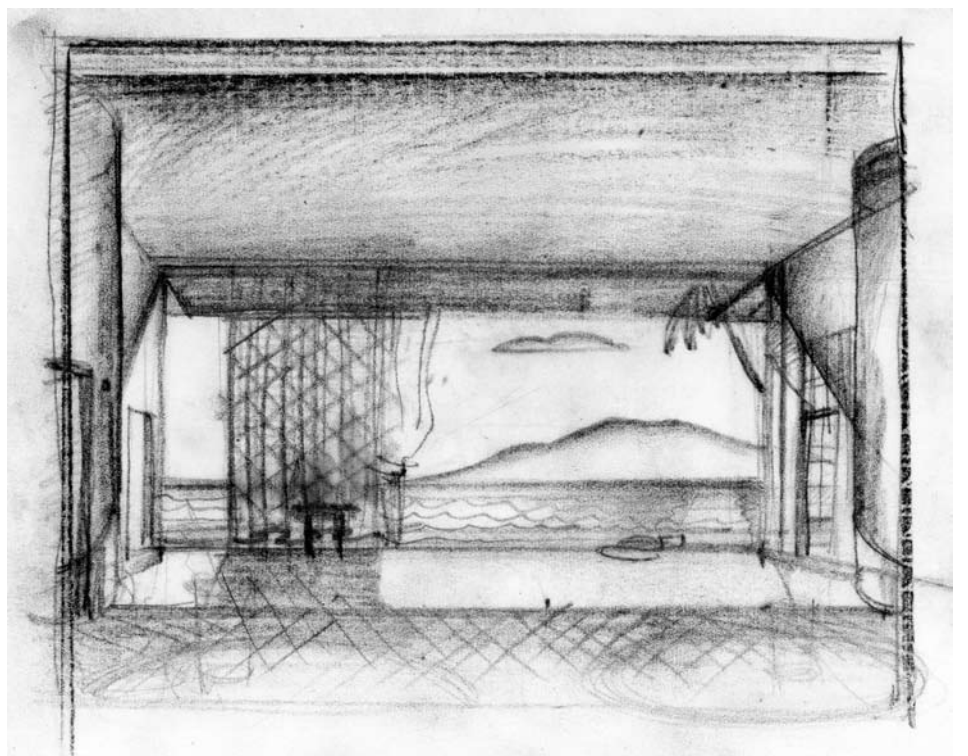
3
Piero Bottoni e Mario Pucci
Progetto della Villa Ludolf, 1941
Planimetria, piante e sezioni scala 1:100, 1:200
(china su lucido 512x1335 mm)

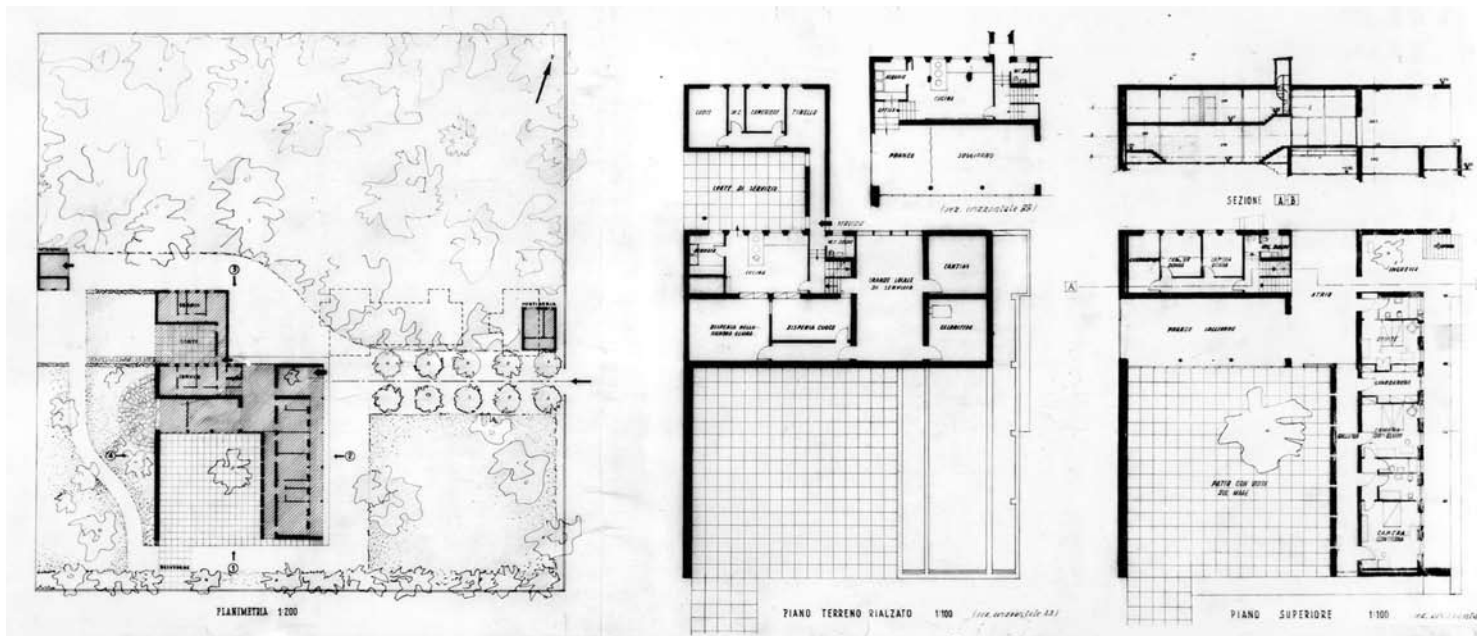
4
Piero Bottoni e Mario Pucci
Progetto della Villa Ludolf, 1941
Prospetti scala 1:100
(china su lucido 470x539 mm)

5
Piero Bottoni e Mario Pucci
Progetto della Villa Ludolf, 1941
Vista del plastico da Sud-Est
(positivo b/n 85x62 mm)

6
Piero Bottoni e Mario Pucci
Progetto della Villa Ludolf, 1941
Vista del plastico da Nord-Ovest
(positivo b/n 85x62 mm)

7
Piero Bottoni e Mario Pucci
Progetto della Villa Ludolf, 1941
Veduta prospettica
(matite colorate su eliografia 400x750 mm)





vono rivivere le forme esatte dell'antica edilizia [...] ma lo spirito soltanto".⁷ Parole che potrebbero descrivere perfettamente e senza alcuna contraddizione uno dei vertici dell'opera di Bottoni, Villa Muggia. Un'architettura dove le ragioni del nuovo traggono origine e senso dalla presenza del casino di caccia settecentesco, concepito come un altro spazio di soglia. Non solo fra gli interni della nuova ala e l'esterno del parco, ma quale lirico elemento di unione fra eredità del passato, peculiarità dell'ambiente naturale ed istanze dell'architettura razionale.

Appropriatezza, misura, equilibrio. Aspetti che possiamo riconoscere anche in questo progetto apuano del 1941, dove è il paesaggio a generare le figure dell'architettura e viceversa queste ad esaltarne i caratteri unici; come in un mutuo gioco di riflessi: inscindibili, non separabili, necessari l'uno all'altro.

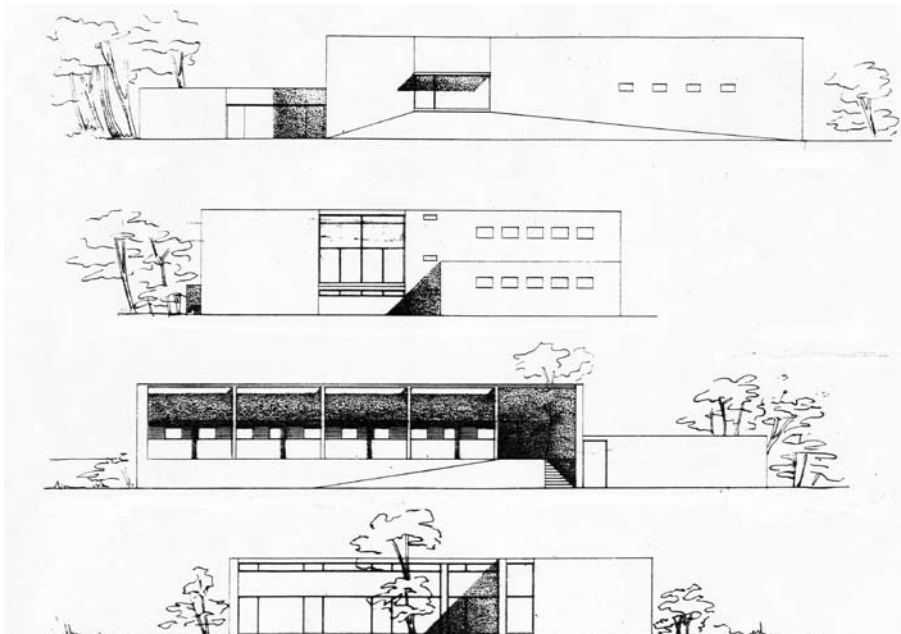
In un lotto tangente al viale a mare, anche all'epoca assai trafficato, Bottoni prevede di insediare la Villa secondo uno schema composto da due corti. Quella minore, di servizio, aperta ad ovest. E la maggiore, di rappresentanza, orientata verso il Mar Tirreno. Tutto l'organismo architettonico è impostato su un basamento (in parte formato da uno zoccolo di pietra, in parte da terra riportata) così da innalzare la quota della corte principale al di sopra del filo del muro che, correndo parallelamente alla strada litoranea, protegge la proprietà dalla violenza dei venti marini. Un terrapieno alberato raccorda il salto di quota sul margine occidentale, mentre ad est



5



6



4

una serie di scale ed una rampa offrono l'opportunità di collegare rispettivamente il patio e l'andito d'ingresso alla quota del giardino. In questo modo dalla corte è possibile tralasciare solamente il mare, escludendo così dalla vista il passaggio delle auto sul viale ed il variegato panorama di ombrelloni, bagnanti e stabilimenti balneari che popolavano, allora come oggi, la vicina riva.

Mutata in una sorta di spiaggia analoga, la corte può adesso simulare una diretta prossimità della casa alla battigia. Solo raggiungendo il belvedere, unico lembo del basamento a toccare il muro di recinzione, è svelata l'esatta distanza fra la grande stanza a cielo aperto, cuore della Villa, e la colorata vita del litorale. Attorno a questo spazio in cui la pineta è riassunta dalla presenza di un solo albero e dove a ovest un muro di pietra con alcune finestre evoca il tema del non finito, è organizzato il corpo ad 'L' che ospita le zone giorno e notte. A guisa di cerniera del sistema è posto l'ingresso principale, preceduto da un atrio all'aperto orientato a mattina e, come la serie delle camere, protetto dal riverbero del sole da un loggiato. L'incontro fra gli ambienti del riposo e quelli del pranzo/soggiorno è dunque sublimato come per Villa Latina nel vestibolo. Dove alla "larchissima vetrata orientata a nord che prospetta sul bosco e sul panorama delle Apuane"⁸ è contrapposta la parete trasparente che, chiudendo il patio, inquadra il mare. A sottolineare ulteriormente la volontà di Bottoni di far abitare i committenti non tanto in una serie di ambienti ma

direttamente nel paesaggio della riviera un'altra grande finestra che, posta a mo' di panoramica conclusione del corridoio di distribuzione delle camere, incornicia ulteriormente una porzione di Mediterraneo; l'azzurro del suo cielo, il suo orizzonte lontano.

architetto e collezionista. Suoi i 16 Cézanne oggetto di una recente mostra tenutasi a Palazzo Strozzi nel 2007. Suo il progetto della 'Casa Bianca', la villa che usualmente ospitava in estate i Ludolf ai Ronchi e che avrebbe dovuto essere demolita nel caso il progetto Bottoni fosse stato costruito. Si noti nella planimetria generale le due sagome tratteggiate in prossimità dell'ingresso carrabile alla tenuta che identificano la residenza padronale esistente ed un annesso (probabilmente la portineria). Bottoni dunque ne prevede la demolizione, scegliendo come sedime della nuova Villa la porzione di lotto posta più ad occidente. Una soluzione che forse garantiva una migliore vista sul mare dalla corte sopraelevata.

⁵ Cfr. G. Tonon, *Isolato in Piero Bottoni...*, op. cit., pp. 9-49.

⁶ Dopo aver collaborato appena laureato con Portaluppi al concorso per il Prg di Milano, quest'ultimo si adopererà attivamente per presentare il giovane allievo ad Angelo Albertini per un lavoro da disegnatore da svolgersi nel suo studio di Brescia.

⁷ P. Portaluppi, *L'architettura del Rinascimento nell'ex ducato di Milano. 1400-1500*, Milano, 1914, p. 117

⁸ Cfr. *Una villa...*, op. cit. La presenza delle Alpi Apuane è del resto valorizzata da Bottoni anche nel coevo progetto per lo stabilimento Olivetti Synthesis a Massa-Carrara, di cui poi fu costruito solamente il corpo delle officine a seguito degli eventi bellici. "Basti pensare alla scelta di chiudere con vetrate continue sia il lato nord della fabbrica sia quello del lungo corpo degli uffici [poi non realizzati]: Entrambi gli interni si sarebbero così posti a diretto contatto con lo straordinario paesaggio delle Apuane, mentre avrebbero fruito di una grande luminosità" Cfr. G. Consonni, *Stabilimento Olivetti Synthesis per la produzione di mobili da ufficio a Massa, 1940-42*, in *Piero Bottoni...* op. cit. pp. 303-305. A completare il quadro degli interventi progettati e costruiti da Bottoni sempre nella medesima zona, si ricorda fra gli altri un progetto non datato -simile per soluzioni compositive e di dettaglio a quello di Villa Ludolf e perciò anch'esso databile attorno al 1941 circa - per una "Villa a Marina di Massa". In realtà una piccola palazzina con due appartamenti e negozi che condivide con la magione nobiliare lo stesso tipo di impianto a corte (in questo caso concepita come un giardino) oltre a presentare alcune analogie fra il partito delle bucature lungo il fronte interno dei negozi e le finestre aperte sul patio lungo il corridoio delle camere di casa Ludolf.

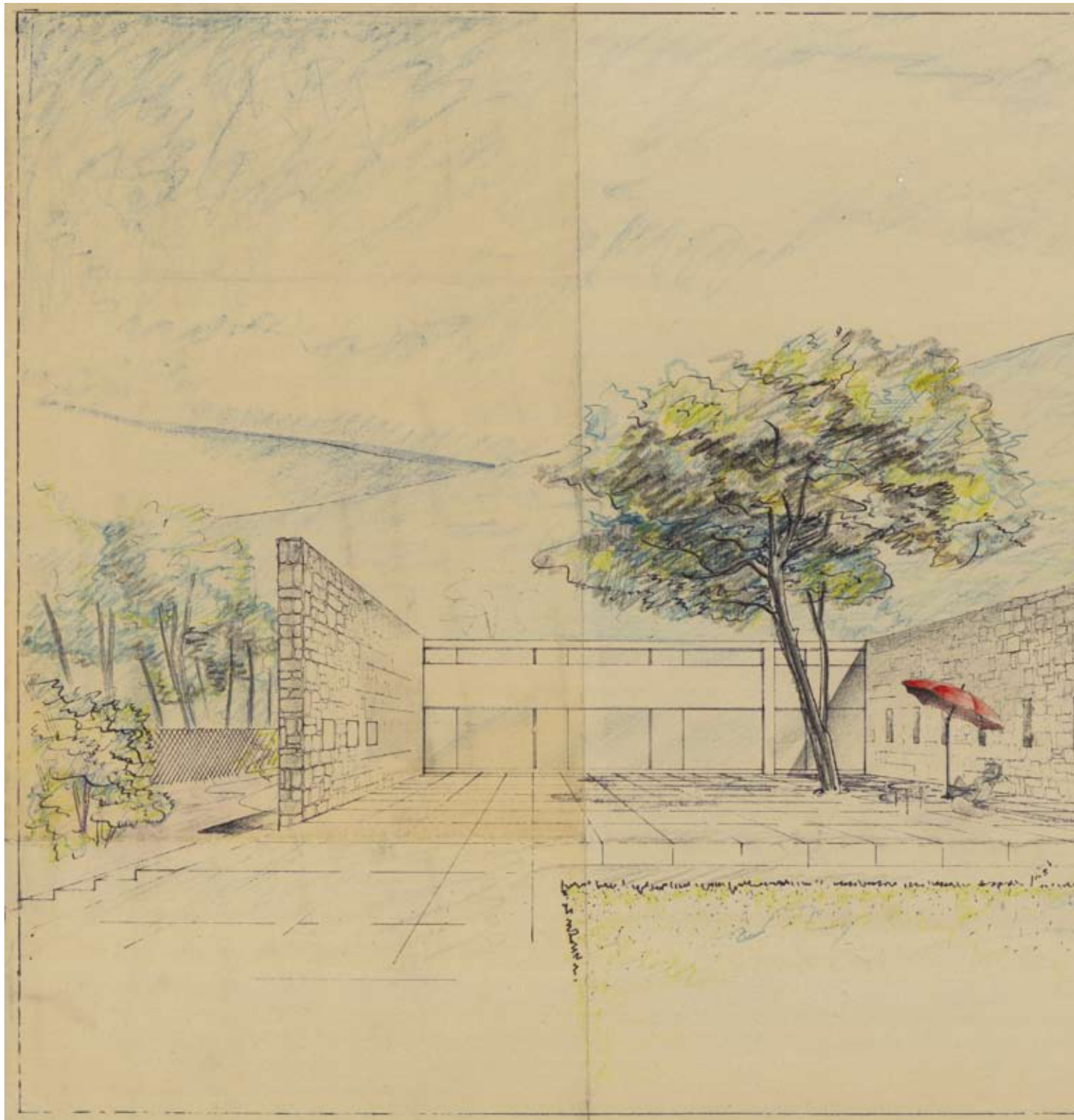
Diverso invece il carattere di questo progetto, per così dire di più modesta levatura rispetto all'altro. Infine ricordiamo sempre a Marina di Massa, la piccola casa nella pineta che Bottoni si costruì nel 1949 per meglio seguire la prosecuzione dei lavori per lo stabilimento Olivetti Synthesis. Da registrare come una recente ristrutturazione edilizia abbia cancellato ogni traccia di questo piccolo capolavoro, oggi reso purtroppo irricognoscibile.

¹ P. Bottoni, *Villa Latina* in AA.VV., *36 progetti di ville di architetti italiani*, a cura dell'Esposizione internazionale delle arti decorative industriali e moderne alla Villa Reale di Monza, Bestetti e Tumminelli, Milano-Roma, [1930], pp. 33-37

² Il concorso promosso da A. Alpago-Novello, G. Ponti e M. Sironi intendeva fare il punto sul tema dell'abitare costituendo una sorta di panoramica sulla nuova architettura italiana. Il bando escludendo "gli estremi della villetta economica e della villa sontuosa [lasciava] libere, entro ragionevoli limiti l'ampiezza e la destinazione (cittadina, in montagna, al mare ecc.)". Su 48 progetti presentati la commissione composta da A. Calza Bini, P. Betta, E. A. Griffini e M. Piacentini ne selezionerà 36.

³ G. Consonni, *Progetto di Villa Latina, IV Esposizione internazionale delle arti decorative e industriali moderne di Monza, Concorso 1929-30* in *Piero Bottoni, opera completa* a cura di G. Consonni, L. Meneghetti, G. Tonon, Fabbri Editori, Milano, 1990, p.p. 166-167

⁴ Committente della Villa è la Contessa Marie Ludolf Fabbri sorella di Ernestine Ludolf Fabbri, ambedue sposate rispettivamente con i fratelli Giuseppe ed Uberto Ludolf entrambe vedove all'epoca del progetto Bottoni. Cfr. *Una villa al mare in Domus*, anno XVI, settembre 1943, n°189, p.p. 392-396. Il testo dell'articolo coincide sostanzialmente con la relazione di progetto di P. Bottoni e M. Pucci. Vi si legge: "La villa è stata studiata in relazione alla planimetria del terreno sito ai Ronchi presso Marina di Massa secondo le necessità di due signore sole ed ospiti o di una famiglia di cinque o sei persone con personale di servizio". Appartenenti ad una facoltosa famiglia borghese fiorentina Marie ed Ernestine erano sorelle di Egisto Paolo Fabbri, interessante figura di artista,



7



maximum expression of the human evolution, structures shown cruelly like a new way to think and aesthetic act. We have to consider also other references, other architectures nearer to us and to Bonadé, in which the typological topic of the helical ramp has been wide developed and perhaps own also to these the planner watched in the action to conceive such solution: between many without a doubt deserve to be remembered the sixteenth century Cisterone in Turin that Bonadé it was sure to acquaintance and the similar Antonio da Sangallo's *Pozzo di San Patrizio*. In an interview, the architect engineer asserted as the original idea had had origin from a conversation with Giovanni Agnelli, but the equilibrium between functional necessity, invention and reference has never not been cleared.

The construction, some notes

The Torre reinforced concrete realization roots its origins in the Bonadé Bottino research when he was a calculating assistant of the Lingotto's construction manager and in the influences that at that time leaked from France where the Auguste Perret extraordinary works had already found the right critic consecration and after the great Exposition of Turin in the 1911. The use of the famous *Hennebique* system, kind of *ante litteram* pre-compression, guaranteed a fast realization of great structures characterized by planning flexibility, fire resistance and a durability that, at the time, was thought almost infinite. The realization of the entire structure finished in only hundred days, in the same way of already concluded Sestriere Tower, for which Bonadé gained 500 Liras of that age by a Giovanni Agnelli bet, which supported would have been impossible to realize the building in only four months. Considering only the fourteen coils that form the continuous ramp also that represents in section the vertical building development, would be enough in order to show which is its value in a period in which moulds and frameworks were realized by wood and the loads majority were lifted by arms. The rooms, in origin zenithally illuminated by a glassblock cover, follow the ramp development and the furniture inside, indifferent to the floor inclination, composes the spaces in such way that every host has on hand a defined portion also inside a promiscuity proper of this structures type, where the educational/recreational aim was favored and developed by the architecture at least. The building foundations demonstrate the Bonadé skill in the material and own characteristics use. The distribution of vertical loads from the perimeter towards the center, through the use of concrete struts, has allowed to a better foundation order, smaller plinths sections and a higher digging set up level. The entire structure rests on compacted sand, probably previously concrete stirred to increase the compression resistance.

Modernity

Thirties are maturity age of the architectonic development, not only in Italy but all around the western world in its complex. The consolidation of the new technical knowledges, the asserting of an unknown media arts influence inside of the immense society cultural section, has been the stimulus for which works like *Torre Fiat* that have had the way to be built up. The events course that allowed all this, seems annihilated inside a apparently unsurpassable fencing, constituted by myopic considerations in the field of an idealistic landscape protection, from national normative needs for a long time and, where was not enough, also supranational beyond that from a contemporary society exponential cultural and its technical knowledge impoverishment. Such symbols of modernity live by now its existence like musealisation, in a kind of the *icon condemnation*, an eternal damnation far to reflect other things that not be the same tautology of own presence, nearly to the limit to be an end in itself, or also unsurmountable block. Sad to think that today if also were well-off and illuminated purchaser, also if the technical and normative problems were exceeded, also it was possible to cross any administrative impediment, Fiat Tower in that place, in that way, would not be come true. To the architects of today, sort of *children of a lesser God*, it does not remain that to watch *Torre Fiat* like a contemporary *Hercules Column* and, in the same way of the classic world sailors, think that beyond it nothing can be.

A room with the sea inside

Piero Bottoni - Project for *Villa Ludolf, Marina di Massa, 1941*
by Andrea Volpe

(page 108)



"This Villa is inspired by the spirit of the old Roman Domus: the balance of their architectural masses, their loggias, their hallways and terraces; the open air life style of those Mediterranean populations [...]"

This Villa will not become a barrier for the landscape, but it will let it gently enter inside; the sea and the mountain will be seen from its ground level atrium like in a frame of a picture..."

With these words Piero Bottoni describes "*Villa Latina*". His entry project for "*A Modern Villa for one family*", a design competition organized by the *IV° International expo of modern industrial and decorative arts of Monza* in 1929. This proposal finds its main feature in Bottoni's explicit intention to deeply root the project in the site. A statement literally translated into the ground floor hall, an interior space which symbolically treasures the landscape like a precious gem... According to this concept the Villa becomes "a threshold placed between the

sea and the pinewood, described in Bottoni's drawings as it gently grows on the steep hills of Bonassola, where the Villa is ideally placed [...]. The whole idea of limen generates the project plans, its ratio, its status of architecture exactly placed in the context. This image, which allows the Architect to conceive the ground floor like a deep stage - comprised between two different backcloths, at the upper level is blurred into an ideal line linking the bedrooms and the living rooms."¹

Twelve years later, a few kilometers south of Bonassola, the Ligurian seaside village chosen for that conceptual project, Bottoni will design another mansion. Completely different in terms of architectural typology, circulation layout, plans and character from *Villa Latina*, but surprisingly similar in the way it is carefully shaped to react with the landscape. In the case of *Villa Ludolf* that of the Apuan riviera.

A comparison between these two projects, both sharing a residential theme, becomes significant if we consider them as crucial episodes in Bottoni's career: not only marking his debut and the professional success of the '30's/'40's, but demonstrating his extraordinary capability to explore in a deeper and wider way those aspects commonly discussed in the contemporary Italian Rationalism scene. Bottoni's ability to set dialogues both with the traditional code of architecture and with the different characters of the place - a gift received by his mentor Piero Portaluppi - will lead him to refuse easy clichés or any modernist mannerism. An attitude which often will lead him towards isolation.²

Suitability, balance and sensitivity for the context. All features we can recognize in this 1941 project for Countess Ludolf, where the landscape forms the architectural figures as well as the latter enhance the qualities of the landscape itself. Like in mutual reflection of images, architecture and site are not separable one from the other, being necessary one to the other.

In a plot of land placed along a wide boulevard parallel to the coastal line, Bottoni decides to build two courtyards. The minor one (dedicated to the staff rooms) is opened towards West. The main one, facing the living room and dining room, is rotated towards South in order to frame the view of the Tirrenic sea. The whole building is placed on a podium (partly made with rocks, partly with stabilized ground). In such a way the main patio is raised at the level of the wall protecting the property from the strong sea winds. An embankment with a grove of trees links the level of the living room with the west side of the garden. On the opposite side two fly of stairs and a ramp link the patio and the entrance loggia to the pinewood. Due to the presence of the podium, the view of the sea from the patio is completely liberated from the presence of the cars running on the avenue, apparently busy even in the '40's.

Like an analog beach, the southern courtyard can now simulate a fictitious proximity with the sea. Only from the belvedere it is revealed the real distance which separates the patio from the shore. Surrounding this huge open air room, bordered on the western side by a rocky wall pierced with frame-less windows, Bottoni organizes the 3-bedroom wing (with its portico on the eastern side) and the living room/dining room area.

On one corner of this 'L' shaped figure Bottoni places the main entrance. A vestibule where the rendez-vous of the two wings of the mansion is sublimated through the opposition of two huge windows, both framing the different characters of the northern Tuscany coastal landscape.

In a similar way to "*Villa Latina*", Bottoni conceives the entrance lobby as a stage, where the view of the pinewood trees -with the stark profile of the Apuan Alps in the background- meets the presence of the sea, with its blue sky and its far horizon. Transforming the atrium into an emotional, poetic, space.

¹ G. Consonni, *Progetto di Villa Latina, IV Esposizione internazionale delle arti decorative e industriali moderne di Monza, Concorso 1929-30, in Piero Bottoni, Opera completa*, G. Consonni, L. Meneghetti and G. Tonon (Eds.), Fabbri Editori, Milano, 1990, pp. 166-167.

² See G. Tonon, *Isolato in Piero Bottoni, Opera completa*, G. Consonni, L. Meneghetti and G. Tonon (Eds.), Fabbri Editori, Milano, 1990, pp. 9-49.

Hassan Fathy, the desert poetics

by Viola Bertini

(page 120)



Through the open door out the big window opposite you could see the wasteland stretching into the distance, its thick darkness unrelieved by a single glimmer of light. Its impressive silence broken only by occasional laughter borne in on the dry and refreshing breeze - forceful and clean, like the desert itself - that blew between the window and door.

Nagib Mahfuz, *The thief and the dogs*, 1961

The architectures of Fathy rise from the desert, they take their root in the ground.

The desert is a concrete place and a symbolic space, a meeting point between the earth and the sky which shaped the culture of the Arabic people. The heat, the light, the sandstorms and the djinn, evil spirits carried by them, are elements to shelter from, closing the house from the outside and opening it to the inside, towards the court looking at the sky. Fathy writes that architecture is the result of the interaction between man and his environment, when man is called to satisfy his own needs, both physical and spiritual, and that the proper environment for an Arab is the desert. In the answer that man gives to this hostile climate the Egyptian architect finds the origins of his own culture, the shape of his own houses, the structures of his own cities. Fathy looks

at the past, at the craftsmanship and at the language of tradition. A tradition that is a collective heritage gained with difficulty, a body of rules and codified spatial systems, which takes an operative and creative value. All this doesn't exclude the role of invention, a term understood in its Latin sense of *discovery*, as a founding act at the base of the designing process.

Hassan Fathy was born in Alexandria in 1900; when he was eight he moved with his family to Cairo, where he graduated at *King Fuad I University* in 1926. The choice of looking at tradition, which is the base of his poetics, develops in a specific artistic and intellectual context. Indeed, starting from the Twenties, different groups of artists rise in Egypt. They are all part of a cultural trend moving from the request for political independence in search of a new national identity. An identity which is found both in the cultural roots of the country and in the rural world. The privileged subjects of representation are scenes from everyday vernacular life, often mixed with issues and features borrowed from the ancient wall paintings. The idealized image of the villages, the attraction for myth and the narrative vocation is always accompanied by the belief that Egypt will rise again from its origins and from a sleeping Mediterranean past. In opposition to the clichés of *Orientalism*, that is the vision that the West has of the East, languages able to express a feeling of authenticity are experimented.

In the same way, the research Hassan Fathy leads with his work is a search for appropriateness: the appropriate form of dwelling in relation with a user who is not anonymous, the appropriate architectures in relation with the context. But the context itself is, in this case, an invention. It is the result of a process of abstraction aiming to build an idea of place, referring to the Arab-Islamic world as a whole. According to this, the watercolours of Fathy, whose production is developed in parallel with the proper design drawings - more technical and aimed at building - are a sort of *manifesto*. Subject of these pictures are glimpses of vernacular architectures, stage designings depicted as Persian miniatures, fantastic landscapes, pharaonic scenes and building projects where the coexistence of plans and elevations directly refers to antiquity. In the latter, in particular, there is a superimposition of logic and poetry: the two-dimensional representation coexists with a narrative dimension, carried by the symbolic elements. Thus, in the watercolours for New Gourna there appears the fertility goddess *Hathor*, whose presence is intended to be a good omen for the success of the project, the ibis which protects the homes and the sycamore tree which means regeneration. On the whole, what is put up is an imaginary and idealized world in which the limits between past and present are confused and whose undefined spatial horizon covers the basin of the Arab-Islamic *koinè* as a whole. The specificity of the site is denied in favour of the idea, what emerges is the spirit of the place. Thus, the poetry of Hassan Fathy wants to aspire to the universal as regards the cultural background of reference.

Likewise, its architectural paradigms are not unique, but, looking at models that go beyond the immediacy of the place, they refer to a common substrate, which is placed by the architect at the base of a collective identity. Fathy's architectures are the result of a composition of forms, shapes, decorations, technological devices, materials and types codified in the bosom of tradition. The definition of such a repertoire of elements partly moves from a simplified reading of the historical city, in order to identify the persistence of the marks common to different contexts, capable of defining the generic character of the Islamic architecture. These elements are partially discovered in the dimension of a trip. The trip in the rural Delta, where farmers build their houses with sun-dried earth bricks, and the trips in the region of Nubia, where the entrances of the houses are decorated with *claustra* carved in the mud and where the ancient ability to construct domes and vaults without the use of formwork still remains. In some degree, again, these elements derive from the study of the medieval quarters of Cairo, but also of Rabat, Marrakech and Tunis, from the observation of Arabic noble mansions and, more in general, of court architecture. Their transposition, be it geographical or semantic, is justified either by the use of examples from history or by functional reasons and is often carried by the use of the technique of analogy. Thus, for example, the use of the Nubian vault also in very different contexts is legitimized both by constructive reasons (it makes possible to cover areas up to three meters without using materials different from earth, which are expensive and not available in loco) and by quoting the granaries of the Ramesseum in Luxor or the Coptic necropolis in Bagawat or the Fatimid cemetery in Assuan as evidence of the deep reasons rooted in time for this architectural element. The use of the vault in Egypt dates back to its origin and therefore its use is valid in spite of the context. Otherwise, the use of the *grand layout of Qa'a room for the humble room of the peasant*, as well as for housing units in urban situations, is legitimated by its symbolic value and by the worthiness as climate device that this special system assumes. However, its repeated use as a compositional unity, particularly in the project of rural houses, causes an emptying of meaning of the element itself, which loses its primary function of representation and its uniqueness, remaining as a memory of shape.

Finally, the assemblage of these invariant elements, extrapolated from the many traditions which the Arab-Islamic tradition is made of, conceived according to often pre-defined rules and answering criteria varying from time to time, gives rise to the architectures of Fathy and build the contexts in which they take place.

From the assemblage of morphological memories and in the rut of tradition comes the plan for the village of New Baris (1965), a small town in the middle of the New Valley, south of Kharga Oasis. Designed to accommodate 250 families and to work as a model settlement in a program of urbanization of desert lands, like the other villages by Fathy, it remained unfinished. The few accomplished buildings rise today like a ruin from the sand, the material of which they are made and to which they are slowly returning.

The urban structure, elementary in its parts, gives up the complexity of the ancient city in favour of a strict hierarchy of the inner residential open spaces. In fact, the system of the pedestrian paths and of the semipublic courts suggests a new reading of the traditional village. This system does not only think about social relationships and family identity, but also about the movement of the human body in space and about the dynamics of visual perception, put in relation with the apparently irregular configuration of the streets.

The linearity of the main routes, orthogonal as in a new foundation city, contrasts these irregular configuration. They are mainly designed to respond to vehicular requirements and they go along with the shape of the ground, thus following a pre-defined rule that is antithetic to the one which internally orders the parts the city is made of.

The houses - both for farmers, employees or administrators - are all usually built around a central empty space. This is because Fathy identifies the fundamental characteristic of the Arab house, and more in general of the Mediterranean house, with its introversion. Basically they are the result of the juxtaposition of invariant special systems extrapolated from the tradition, be it noble or rural, and articulated around the core composition of the court.

Public buildings, instead, condense into a centre working as a hinge between the two parts of residential tissue and set up as pieces of the city. The planimetric configuration of each of these buildings recalls a consolidated typology, assuming a representative value compared with the totality of the urban plan. As in the case of residences, the courtyard, the introversion resulting from that and the juxtaposition of figures in plane and space define the nature of public buildings. As characters having their own individuality and, at the same time, bound together by a narrative sequence of repeated elements, the public buildings enliven a scene that, once again, alludes to a specific idea of place, which is expression of a generic *Arab feeling*.

On the whole, the New Baris project is emblematic because, when studied by the architect both at the urban scale and the architectural one, it shows that process of synthesis and abstraction which is the base of Fathy's architectures. In fact, it moves from a broad repertoire of elements coded in different historical and geographical areas, but all related to a similar cultural dimension, makes a choice between them and, through their assemblage, builds a new context and new architectures.

The ultimate consequence of this process is the invention of a new language, the reinvention of tradition itself.

Last stop Constantinople by Serena Acciai

(page 136)



Istanbul, the city where geography provokes history wrote Brodskij,

Pera, Stambul, Scutari - a trinity for Le Corbusier,

The fairy of the thousand lovers for the Turks,

Ummelunià, the mother of the world in the Koran,

Three in One for Umberto Eco, who explains how the city emerged as a mythical and fascinating place for the Western World when it became the symbol of Ottoman grandeur and capital of the Muslim Antichrist.

And perhaps this is the way that through the centuries the myth of Constantinople is born, through the eyes of those who had reached her, the travelers, the writers,

and the architects who loved, described, and designed her, and who thus contributed to increasing her allure. *City of the cities* for some; for Mehmet II who conquered her she was a dream and a desired bride for many years, as for N. Hikmet who never ceased to sing of her throughout imprisonment and exile.

City that is built up upon herself and that lives as she always has lived, not by substitution but by addition. City where the ancient is truly a source of design, *whose karma is in being a crossroads of civilization*, that Bridge that Pamuk too sees in his Istanbul.

In this port which is in reality a mosaic of ports, in this city made up of many cities that in the end are only one, there exist characteristics which distinguish the architecture: above all the constant presence of water, even as a horizon which runs through the constructed fabric, and then the legacy of the ancient city, that is the erosion of classicism as a principle of architecture.

Sedad Hakki Eldem, architect of Istanbul, who worked *for and with* Istanbul for all his long life, realized in the metropolis on the Bosphorus his greatest architecture. Fragments of constructed city which are integrated as contributions of Modern into that genealogy of architectures that lead to the evolution of the city in time.¹

Aristocratic architect, descendent of a wealthy Ottoman family, Eldem was educated between Munich and the Academy of Fine Arts of Istanbul and early in his career began to design the great architecture of the city, beginning with the Topkapı Palace. Eldem read his city as an Ottoman but also and above all through the surveys, drawings, and engravings of Western scholars.

Particularly important are Müller-Wiener, German archeologist who through surveying rediscovered all of Sultanahmet, bringing the past to life, and I.Melling, German architect who in the XIX century arrived in Istanbul for a brief stay and remained 18 years to sketch views of the Bosphorus.

Eldem was intimately involved in the architectural and urban experiences of the city and her memory. He worked for Istanbul through those elements which A. Rossi defined constitutive of the architecture of a city- *monuments and houses*- and today his works remain scattered throughout the city as exemplifications of

