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A living legacy: heritage across borders

I first met Paolo Cuneo through the intermediation of common friends in the early 1990's, when I was beginning to engage in a transformative experience. After being trained in art history at the University of Rome (with a thesis on Frank Lloyd Wright and the visual arts), my increasing interest in Turkey and its built heritage brought me to elaborate a PhD project on the Italian contribution to the architectural history of Istanbul during the 19th century, from the Fossati brothers to Raimondo D'Aronco. This was the beginning of a process of "transculturation", in which I can say I am still moving and living. Paolo Cuneo was not my official advisor but, without his external support, his friendly encouragement, the inspiring discussions we had, and the access he gave me to his library, a project that literally changed my life would have probably never been implemented. Thanks to his guidance, I realized how important it was to contextualize any "foreign" or European

contribution to the architecture of Istanbul into the late Ottoman cultural context, be it Muslim, Levantine, Armenian or Greek. I am now working and teaching in a History Department (at Boğaziçi/Bosphorus University) whose implicit or explicit commitment is to bring back to light the immensely diverse, multicultural past of Istanbul, Turkey and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The astonishing news of Paolo's sudden, unexpected passing away reached me in Istanbul, while I was working on a project that he had initiated, with his ability to arouse enthusiasm among diverse interlocutors. He had convinced the Franciscan community of Sant'Antonio in Pera to pull out of the dust the original project drawings of their church, designed by Giulio Mongeri and Edoardo De Nari in 1905-1912. We therefore managed to have the main plates of the project restored, and displayed in an exhibition at the Yapı Kredi cultural center, with the support of

the Italian Institute of Culture [1]. He did not live enough to see this project materialize. After he left us, several initiatives and publications have been devoted to his memory [2]. However, the energy and commitment that characterized Paolo's personality of scholar, teacher and friend, will always retain the power of inspiring new research, in line with changing academic and socio-cultural scenarios. The selection of essays included in this special issue of DisegnareCON witnesses the topicality and enduring resonance of Cuneo's legacy in the present architectural, urban and spatial culture, characterized by substantial inter-disciplinary, global commitments, and the search for synergy and connections across cultural, regional, national boundaries. The essays presented in this special, commemorative issue, have been here loosely ordered according to geographical and thematic clusters. The collection opens with a section on *African Paths*, including essays that explore past and present dynamics of space-production and monumentality in a broad geography, spanning from Ethiopia to Maghreb and Camerun, with layers that include pre-Roman heritage underneath classical, late-Roman, early-Christian, medieval Islamic, Ottoman and colonial developments. Ludovico Micara, who often collaborated with Paolo Cuneo on research projects in Libya, offers an attentive and inspiring analysis of the "continuous" architectural and urban fabric of Ghadames, a settlement where single living units are deeply embedded in the surroundings, and may not be understood, studied, or preserved and restored in isolation. In the same area, a set of late Roman funerary monuments, effaced in all their surface characteristics and re-codified as totemic "idols" in popular culture, is given historical, artistic and architectural consistence by the archeological reconstructive work of Beatrice Pinna-Caboni. Gerardo Doti explores German colonial projects pre-dating World War I for the port city of Douala (Camerun), with interesting insights into the dynamics of urban segregation and transfer/adaptation of German planning and architectural models, materials, ideas. Little-known monolith-

ic churches, hewn in the rock plateau of Tagray, Ethiopia, are studied by Sergey Klyuev, with important remarks on their typological and formal interconnections, and their conservation problems, while Paola Raffa presents a section of a comprehensive work of survey and digitization in southern Tunisia, exploring the connections between forms and symbolic meanings in the funerary structures called *marabout*. The second section focuses on Armenia, a region to which Paolo Cuneo devoted pioneering research efforts, that left a mark in all successive literature on the Medieval architecture of the Caucasian region. In the view of Kazaryan, author of the first essay of this section, the contribution of Cuneo, and the Italian colleagues who preceded him, to the development of the field of medieval Armenian architectural history, was comparable to the groundbreaking role played by Strykowski in the early 20th century. Kazaryan's study offers a new interpretation of the evolution and meaning of centric structures in Armenian religious architecture culminating at Ani. He underscores references to the classical, late-Roman and early Christian tradition, but also to the symbolism of Heavenly Jerusalem, and traces connections to contemporaneous developments in the Islamic Iranian region. The following essay, by young scholars Marra and Fabbrocino, is an attempt (very topical, one must say, in times of pandemic challenges to research) to use crowd-sourcing and digital technologies for monitoring and assessing in a broad environmental context the state of conservation and risk of monuments like the monastery of Haghpāt. In the last article of this section, also directly indebted to Cuneo's work, Lucchi, Aiello and Zerbini assess the diffusion and persistence of types, historical/political change, and theological symbolism as interacting elements giving meaning to the architecture of the Yeghegis region. In his work on the Islamic city, Cuneo embarked in extensive, ambitious and pioneering projects of survey and documentation, that appear now especially valuable, in view of the loss or damage of a large part of this heritage in recent conflicts.

Empirical attention to the physical qualities of buildings has been, for Cuneo and his team, an analytical tool leading to the definition and conceptualization of typological processes, of spatial constructions, of artistic transfers, of a nuanced "geography" of Islamic architecture, which challenges the broad generalizations proposed by scholars of previous generations, often attached to a colonial and orientalist paradigm of analysis [3]. This is clear in the third group of essays - not surprisingly the richest section - related to Islamic settlements and architecture. Here, the works by Jung and al-Ansi, and by Lala Comneno, written by close collaborators of the master, deal respectively with the Islamic built heritage of Yemen, and with the overall, groundbreaking project of digitalization of Islamic buildings and sources led by Cuneo in the 1980s and early 90s. It would be of utmost importance to update these research experiences (as it has been occasionally done) with current information technologies, integrating the knowledge they produced into present and future scholarship. Some hints in this direction may come from essays like the one by Mediati, Colistra and Arena, who use sophisticated graphic elaborations to visualize the formal and symbolic elements of domed structures, along with their movement across different shores of the Mediterranean. Geometry and archetypal symbolism are also at the core of Fatta and Marraffa's essay on real and imaginary gardens, while graphic analysis of geometrical patterns is the subject of Garofalo's essay on the ceramic decoration of a 14th century Iranian complex. Cuneo was always sensitive to the central role of urbanity in all regions and periods of the Islamic world. Two essays included in this part of the selection deal with two urban realities of "universal" significance: Baghdad, analyzed by Al-Saffar as a complex palimpsest that requires sensitive, diversified practices and actions for the preservation and protection of its historic core, and Istanbul, whose representations in late-Medieval and Renaissance western culture are assessed as a dynamic - and historically contingent - semiotic system by Tunzi. Islam is not directly present, by

rather in the background of the two studies by Perez and Abdoh. The first work highlights context and meanings in the fascinating story of an invented sacred site, conceived for the legitimation of Christian-Islamic co-existence in re-Christianized Granada, but then subverted as a tool of counter-Reformation propaganda. The second essay deals with shared, Pharaonic revivalist elements in free-masonic temples and in the 19th and early 20th-century decoration of synagogues, mostly located in Egypt.

Beyond the scope of Cuneo's specific interests, but certainly close to his method and commitments, are the two last sections, on East Asia and on *Multicultural contexts*. Riavis evaluates the Jesuit attempt to introduce linear perspective into the visual culture of China during the 17th and 18th centuries. While other aspects of European culture and science could be exported, this representational system encountered resistance, on the grounds of its allegedly "falsifying" effect. East and West, China and Europe are closely intertwined in Parrinello's overview of vernacular and westernized spaces, in the Jewish district of Shanghai and in the waterfront settlements of the area. Combining virtual 3D models, photographs and on-site survey, he offers a large-scale documentation of a non-monumental but significant built heritage, evidence of a complex, multilayered transcultural dialogue. The third essay dealing with China, by Campi, Cera and Falcone, approaches traditional settlements and vernacular architecture, with a focus on the symbolic, ritual, social and functional dimensions of threshold and gate. It is the result of an extensive, integrated survey project that made use of the most advanced digital technologies. The section on East Asia is closed by Ibrahim, Jahn Kassim and Abdullah's study of pre-colonial Malacca. Urban form and processes of change occurring with the Islamization of the settlement in the 15th century are analyzed here through historical iconography, narrative sources and field research.

The study by Dell'Amico and La Placa, in the last section of this collection, outlines the historical context and background of the transfer of fortifi-

cation design from Spain to the New World, in the late 16th century. It also employs survey and representation technologies to obtain a comprehensive vision of this kind of heritage. The last two essays approach contemporary urban design and society: Montuori explores Italian mega-structural projects of the 1960s and 70s in relation to the present strategies for the revitalization of the urban peripheries, while Polimeni and Shittu focus on Leicester as a plural, multi-cultural urban scenario, where immigration and co-existence shape the landscape of communal life.

The authors of these remarkable studies have diverse backgrounds in cultural, methodological and generational terms. Some of them have been close collaborators and friends of Paolo, while others, of a younger generation, know him mostly from his scientific production. What brings them together is a commitment to the study of the built environment with multiple, interacting conceptual, historical and graphic tools, and with the implicit or explicit goal of generating awareness, of enriching the relationship of local communities with their own historical environments, with their past and their future. As Paolo once said in a lecture at the Egyptian Academy in Rome, architectural history and the urban environment should be understood "with your head and your pencil". As an art historian I am an outsider, or a passive beneficiary, to the graphic work of the architect, but I understand how he was referring to the interaction of conceptual, historical and visual/representational tools used in his research and teaching activity. Today, the "pencil" he referred to has evolved into the most complex methodologies of virtual reality, reconstruction and simulation, with 3D scanning and drone surveys allowing multi-scalar representations of architectural and urban space. But, as these essays show, a critically informed use of the pencil, or of highly sophisticated representation technologies (which Paolo himself began experimenting) always participates in the creation of a new meaning, a new value, a potential new life for the built heritage of all regions and periods.

NOTE

[1] *Yaşayan çizgiler: Sant'Antonio Kilisesi mimari çizimler sergisi / Segni essenziali: disegni architettonici della Chiesa di Sant'Antonio*, exhibition catalogue edited by Şennur Şentürk, Cengiz Can, Paolo Girardelli, İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Kültür Merkezi, 1996.

[2] For an overview of Paolo Cuneo's bibliography, including works published in his memory, see the Editorial by Simonetta Ciranna in this volume.

[3] Abu-Lughod, Janet L. The Islamic City - Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19.2 (1987): 155-176; Raymond, André. Islamic city, Arab city: Orientalist myths and recent views. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21.1 (1994): 3-18; Aldous, Gregory. The Islamic city critique: Revising the narrative. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 56.3 (2013): 471-493.