

to the mosques of Gailani and Kadhimain in Baghdad, just as I did in Kербala, Kufa and Najef as well.

If it were possible, and I hope it will be for you, I would dedicate my afternoons to buying abstract paintings in the innumerable art galleries in Karrada and Abu Nawas, and I would have tea with my friends from the Museum and the Library, all now gone, having either fled or died; those friends who accompanied me to Basra and Mosul, but also to Hatra, Ukhaider and Ctesiphon, splendid places where I was the only tourist. With the exception of José Luis Sert and Le Corbusier, who of course are far from no-names, I did not know that Baghdad had a relationship with Wright, Gropius, Alto, Ponti, Bofill... I visited the works of Sert and Le Corbusier, though the others belonged to the city about which I read, but never saw. We frequently visited the homage to the fallen in the long war with Iran, in front of the wonderful dome split in two, close to the stadium by Le Corbusier and Saddam City, now Sadr City, designed by Doxiadis. The soldiers assured me that the monument and the stadium still remain standing, just like the old embassy of the United States. The tragic daily chronicle confirms what I had already gathered from visiting Saddam City, that through no fault of his own, Doxiadis' design for an ideal neighborhood had been converted into the most violent and miserable part of the entire city. My imaginary museum of Iraq consists of abstract oil paintings, bronze molds and antique armaments, reminders of days lived to their fullest, yet difficult to repeat, at least in Baghdad. In that museum I have also placed all my hopes; that water shall one day return to the marshes of Shatt El Arab, and the great architects to Baghdad.

Baghdad, November 24th, 2007

CITY OF MIRAGES: BAGHDAD, FROM WRIGHT TO VENTURI

Pedro Azara

1.- PRESENTATION

"The years stretch out in front of us; blood and fire,
I forge bridges with them,
But they become a wall, (...)
For ten years now I have not ceased walking
Towards you, 'City of Mirages!', Destruction of their life!"

(Badr Chaker as-Sayyab, "City of Mirages", The Submerged Temple. Tran. from Spanish: Aaron Feder, Tran. from Arabic: Carolina Fraile')

Wright confused Baghdad with Babylon, but who would not? This is a very meaningful error: the image of Baghdad that one tends to have is of an immemorial city.

But, the truth is that Baghdad is a modern city, compared with Babylon. Besides some modest Sumerian ruins on the periphery of the city, whose name did appear in the era of King Hammurabi, founder of the nearby Babylon (xviii B.C.), and whose infrastructure was attributed to the mythical Babylonian Queen Semiramis, Baghdad is a medieval city. Compared with Sumerian urban centers such as Ur, Uruk (the possible origin of the name Irak), and Eridu, which were formed at the beginning of the iv millennium B.C., and even with Babylon, Baghdad (which means Gift of God or City of the Sun God) was built by al-Mansur, caliph and architect, on the 31st of July of 762, at one fifty seven p.m., following a circular design, common in the celestial cities but also in the nomadic settlements in the desert. The original city resembled a large astrolabe on the ground, a projection of the map of the heavens the day on which it was founded, a date that coincided with the beginning of a new era marked by certain favorable astral positions (especially of Jupiter, the patron god of Babylon). As the grand capital of the caliphate, with more than a million inhabitants, and as the cultural and commercial center of both the orient and the western world, it was sacked both the Mongols in the xiii century B.C., and conquered by Tamerlane at the beginning of the xv century B.C.

Lethargic while in the Ottoman Empire, for the Turks, Central Asians had little appreciation for the Arabs, Baghdad resurged at the end of the First World War, when Iraq, separated from the Empire (German allies) by England and France, and became a British protectorate, with a figurehead king, Faisal I. Iraq gained independence in 1948, but had to fight with the foreign owned petroleum company IPC in order to gain a more equitable share of the oil revenues, which was accomplished in 1952.

Iraq's support of the Middle Eastern Treaty Organization (Baghdad Pact), along with Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and the United Kingdom in 1955, as well as their opposition (along with Iran) to the Soviet Union garnered the support of the western powers, the United States in particular.

Thanks to a greater liquidity, the young King Faisal II, on advice from modern architects such as Rifat Chadirji (the best

and most well-known Iraqi architect, along with Zaha Hadid, in 1950² founded a public organization dedicated to improving the infrastructure of cities and towns, and of whom were expected rapid results to try to slow down the discontent of the reigning misery (the neighborhoods of mud huts, populated by immigrants from the south, multiplied by the slums of Baghdad). Additionally, there was the possibility of a revolt to install a socialist government like happened in Egypt: the Development Board, that, after a few initial sanitary and irrigation campaigns³, decided in 1955, thanks to the help of a few great modern architects, to redesign and transform Baghdad into an urban center comparable to any Western capital, equipped with all the paradigmatic cultural (an opera, museums, art centers, the university, and sport and recreation facilities) and economic (the national bank and telecommunication headquarters) "equipment". The architect Nizar Jawdat, son of Prime Minister Ali Jawdat, who studied at Harvard and is a disciple of Gropius, and his wife, Ellen Jawdat, who worked as a consultant for the Development Board, established a list of architects who would be hired for individual projects. Although Niemeyer rejected the offer due to ideological differences, Wright, Le Corbusier, Aalto, Gropius, Ponti and Doxiadis accepted the mission to construct buildings, in collaboration with Iraqi architects, as well as agreeing to give conferences in Baghdad that would serve as a model and support for a new generation of architects, tired of being considered inhabitants of the land of "one thousand and one nights".

This was not the first time that Western architects were to build in Baghdad. At the beginning of the 20th century, when the Ottoman Empire was reaching its end, German architects and engineers connected Baghdad and Turkey by rail. Under British mandate, they constructed many public buildings such as the Royal Mausoleum and the Central Train Station, as well as residential neighborhoods, in which Art Deco was mixed with Islamic touches (Ottoman domes covered in blue ceramic, patios with divans, intensive use of brick, etc.), from which, as of 1959, young, studious Iraqis, from the first Iraqi architecture school, wished to disassociate themselves.

The *coup d'état* of General Abdul Karim Qassim, and the death sentence of the king and the hereditary prince in 1958, due to the excessive "Westernization" of Iraqi society⁴, slowed, although it did not interrupt, the projects (the general, in time, was executed in 1963 by members of the Baath party)⁵. The Office of Development, however, was dismantled. Changes to the designs and the lack of capital continually disappointed and agitated the architects.

Successive revolts during the sixties and seventies ended with the bloody arrival of Saddam Hussein as vice-president in 1968, and head of state in 1979. Saddam, through an office of architecture and urbanism of the municipality (Amanta Al Assima, AAA), and with the support of the city mayor, Samir Al Shaikhly, revived the initiative of King Faisal II, placing the first stone for projects such as Le Corbusier Stadium, organizing international competitions for projects such as the State Mosque (over which the secular organization from the 1950's had presided, until this point) and the Museum of Visual Arts. Most importantly, while hiring international architects, and well known builders, primarily North American, he commissioned new financial districts and residential areas, expanding the city primarily on the Western bank of the river, with a larger vision for the definitive transformation of Baghdad into a great capital city, prepared for the VII Conference Summit of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries in September, 1982, which eventually took place in New Delhi. The Hindu architect Charles Correa⁶ compared the urbanization and construction in Baghdad, for its wide scope, although not for its process or results, to the founding of Chandigarh, by Nehru (a politician) and Le Corbusier (an architect). The city became a giant expanse of cranes⁷ that has slowly and helplessly been deteriorated over the years by the wars between Iraq and Iran (1980-1988), the invasion of Kuwait (1990), the two Gulf Wars (1990-1991, 2003-), the occupation of the country, and underground civil war⁸.

The original circular city, buried since the beginning, perhaps inspired by the enlightening text of the mystic Abdel Hasan al Nara from Baghdad (IX C.) about the "edified, fortified" soul, *Moradas de los corazones*⁹, "You must know that God, praised be He, has created in the heart of the believer enclosed castles with walls all around (...) Then God opened in the house of the heart a door that led to the garden of His misericordia, where he had planted different species of aromatic plants: plants of praise and plants of exaltation...". Seven architects there were, in the culture of Baghdad in the fifties, and they built seven castles (and seven symbols) for justice (Dudok), ordainment (Ponti), knowledge (Gropius), music (Wright), the arts (Aalto), housing and meditation (Doxiadis) and shared sport (Le Corbusier). Sert, received the assignment from the North American government, and Smithson built in London, distributed throughout to illuminate the city, where nature and size conjugated. Significantly, God was not lacking in his own space (like Saddam Hussein, decades later, incorrectly decided to seal the fate of the city). What is left of these centers that should radiate knowledge?

Today, Baghdad is a broken "megalopolis" of seven million inhabitants despite the ongoing emigration since 2003 (in the fifties there were barely half a million inhabitants). The city was subjected to the voracity of foreign builders, but it was once the place where many great architects, now old, found, at the end of their lives, one last renewed source of inspiration to create a unique bookend to their careers. Baghdad was the context in which modern architecture began its swan song.

This exhibition does not display all the projects from Western Architects during the "Golden Age" of Baghdad (1952-1982). Le Corbusier, Aalto and Sert, among others, were commissioned more works (which were never constructed): Le Corbusier, the Center for Electric Services in Baghdad- additionally, he was named director of various other projects: a Civic Center, a Governmental Center, and the universities of Mosul and Rasrah; Aalto, the Center for Mail and Telegraphs. Incidentally, Aalto lost the competition for the headquarters of the National Bank in Baghdad, which was won by the Swiss William Dunkel, professor at the Polytechnic University of Zurich⁹. Sert was commissioned a civic center (of which there is only a sketch). Additionally, TAC (The Architects' Collectaborative, Gropus' studio, founded in 1945) worked in Baghdad (and all of the Middle East) until the bankruptcy of embargoed Iraq, in 1995, ruined them and forced them to shut their doors forever.

Other Western architects designed and built in the Iraqi capital. In the fifties, W.M. Dudok, among others (the Palace of Justice, the Police Headquarters of Baghdad, the Civic Center, planned by the English Studio of Minoprio, Spencely and Macfarlane), Wener March, architect for the Olympic Stadium of Berlin in 1936 (the National Archeological Museum), and Buckminster Fuller, who, upon returning from the city of Kuwait which he was supposed to cover with a giant semi-spherical dome, would have been in charge of the Persian dome for the Bunia Mosque in Baghdad. Under Saddam Hussein's rule, the Danes Dissing and Weitling (partners and heirs to Arne Jacobsen) won the competition for the headquarters of the National Bank in 1978, which was constructed in the mid-eighties. The Canadian Arthur Erickson designed the residential neighborhood of Abu Nawas, on the bank of the Tigris which he could not carry out (but where a Danish-Iraqi team built large, one family homes, inhabited by the elite of Saddam Hussein's government, and now plundered). Ove Arup built a large part of the residential, commercial, and financial districts of Bab al-Sheikh (a zone in which, among others, Ricardo Bofill also had a hand and whose project is included in this exhibi-

tion). SOM, after finishing second in a competition in Baghdad, received the responsibility of designing the urban area of Mustansiriyah, but the first Gulf War ended that job, and Marcello d'Olivo, by order of President Saddam Hussein, built, together with the sculptor Al Rahaal and the architect Hisham Munir, the celebrated and massive *Monument to the Unknown Soldier* (1979-1982), in addition to building residential developments in the capital¹⁰.

Besides Dudok, the best architect to work in Baghdad, without a doubt, was the Egyptian Hassan Fathy, who collaborated with Doxiadis on the Plan for a Greater Baghdad, and devised the interwoven fabric of streets and small plazas in the new city (Fathy also designed a new neighborhood for the Iraqi city of Musayyib, not far from Baghdad).

Together with Iraqi architects and artists, these and other studios participated in the celebration of the age of the "splendor of Baghdad", in the words of Ignacio Rupérez, now sunken deeply in one thousand and one nights.

"The paradise of storms collapses. Savages dance ceaselessly in celebration of the night. And, one hour, I went down into the bustle of a boulevard in Baghdad where companies sang the joy of new toil, in a thick breeze, constantly moving about but unable to elude the fabulous phantoms of the heights, where they were to have met again."

(Arthur Rimbaud, "Cities", *Illuminations*, Trans: Daniel Sloate)

Notes

- 1 Sayyab (1926-1964), born close to Basra, was a great contemporary Iraqi poet, critical of the accelerated modernization, "westernization" and extensive urbanization of the country, under oppressive regimes (he was exiled at the beginning of the 1950's), but was the first to use free verse in a poetry previously dependent upon traditional forms of versification.
- 2 Upon the death of his father in an automobile accident in 1930, the new king, Faisal II, was four years old, for which reason his uncle, Emir Abdul-Ilah, was regent until the king was of age, in 1953. The Development Board was formed on April 24th, 1950, by Abdal-Ilah in the name of his nephew. I thank Caecilia Pieri for this precise detail.
- 3 The Development Board was composed of nine members: The Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, The Minister of Development, five notable Iraqis (H.E. Sayid Jalal Baban, H.E. Sayid Abdul Maid Allawi, H.E. Sayid Abdul Jabbar el-Chalabi, H.E. Dr. Abdul Rahman el-Jalili), and two foreign experts (C. H. Nelson, North American specialist in irrigation, and M.G. Ionides, English specialist in industry).
- 4 The "pro-Nassarian", *coup d'etat*, as it was qualified by the press at the time, brought the country to the brink of civil war (after the recuperation and regrouping of the forces loyal to the king who were heading for the capital). Furthermore, there loomed the possibility of an invasion of all the Middle East, particularly Lebanon,

- Syria, Jordan and Iraq, while at the same time there was "great unrest in Turkey" and "precautions" were taken in Persia (Iran) "by the French, English and North American armies (which led to the attack on the North American embassy in Baghdad, designed by Jose Luis Sert, despite being protected by tanks). In addition, the king of Jordan (an state allied with Iraq) was assassinated, an act "incited by Baghdad". The Foreign Secretaries from the West evaluated the possibility of an "eventual Russian intervention", while "Peking (recognized) the revolutionary regimen of Baghdad". Petroleum "continued to flow normally" from the wells of the Iraq Petroleum Company. The reader should consult, for example, the articles from the newspaper "*La Vanguardia Española*" from the 15, 16 and 17 of July, 1958, on pages 12, 14, 15, 21 (from Tuesday, July 15th); pages 15, 18, 19, 21 (Wednesday, July 16th); and page 18 (Thursday, July 17th). The cruelty with which the victims were treated led to the new regimen claiming that the king actually died from a heart attack after receiving a blow from the Hereditary Prince (*Times*)
- 5 The international architecture competitions continues even after the revolt, such as the ones organized by the Electric Service of Baghdad for their headquarters in the capital, in which all "qualified architects, not including those from Israel" could participate, and whose jury was presided over by Gio Ponti and included the architects Jaafar Allawi from Iraq, and the Belgian I.G. Platounoff (Netherlands Institute of Architecture, DUDO 0130, 212 M. 124). The government also planned, but did not follow through on, an opera house in Baghdad in November of 1962 (after assigning the project to F. L. Wright)(LEVINE, Neil: "Plan for a Greater Baghdad", *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright*, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 495, n. 75).
 - 6 CHADIRJI, Rifat, MUTSCHLER, Carlfried: "The Bab al-Sheikh Project", BENTLEY SEVCENKO, Margaret (ed), *Continuity and Change: Design Strategies for Large-Scale Urban Development*, The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1984, p. 64.
 - 7 Baghdad was not the only Iraqi capital in which Western architects intervened in the eighties. For example, José Antonio Corrales presented a design for a hotel in Mosul, facing the Tigris, in 1979-1980. I am grateful to Monica Gili for this information.
 - 8 As Ricardo Bofill recalls, it was not infrequent in the eighties to find Spanish industrialists carrying briefcases, which they were not shy to show, housing containers with chemical weapons, in the Spanish airplanes that flew to Baghdad. The production of components and chemical weapons has given way to hypocritical discussions about ethics in the Basque Country (in which are located the majority of the companies well known for having weapons experts, such as old members of ETA), bringing to the table question of the destination of such arms and the jobs that would be lost if the fabrication of such products were prohibited (see http://www.sindominio.net/singuerra/armas_ee.html).
 - 9 Abdel-al-Hasan al-Nara de Bagdad: *Moradas de los corazones*, ed. de Luce López-Baralt, Trotta, Madrid, 1999, p. 84
 - 10 On the Dunkel Project, see: "Neubau Nationalbank für Irak in Bagdad", *Schweizerische Bauzeitung*, 43, October 1955, ps. 680, 682. Dunkel made also a wonderful project for the offices of the Central Electric Company in Baghdad (two very slim glass towers): "Internat. Wettbewerb um das Bürogebäude für das Elektrizitätswerk von Bagdad", *Schweizerische Bauzeitung*, 13, March, 1961, ps. 200-203
 - 11
 - 12 An exposition about the work of Marcello d'Olivo in Baghdad, "Marcello d'Olivo: architettura per Bagdad" took place from the

20th to the 26th of September of 2004 in the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Parma (Italy). By order of the Minister of Public Works of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed Bin Laden, d'Olivo made a project for the university city in Riad in 1958, a "photocopy" of Wright's project for Baghdad (ZUCCONI, Guido (ed.): *Marcello D'Olivo. Architetture e progetti 1947-1991*, Electa, Milan, 1998, pgs. 10, 77. Also refer to LUPPI, Ferruccio, NICOLOSO, Paolo: *Marcello D'Olivo architetto*, Mazzotta, Udine, 2002).

IRAQ AS IT WAS AND STARTING OVER

Ignacio Rupérez

It looks as if with Iraq's invasion, war, and occupation, since March 19th, 2003, the country has gone back to the days when it was not even a country: to 1917, for instance, when Baghdad was conquered by General Maude's British forces. Then (as now with General Franks' USA soldiers), it was announced to the local population that the foreigners had come to free them and not to conquer them. Honestly, it would be better for the Iraqis to not be "freed" by those battalions which always find, after the supposed victory, the beginning of another real war. They find a disobedient and brutalized country, full of guerrilla fighters, criminals, and terrorists, not really patriots, where rebellion coincides with domestic violence among the different groups: Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, and Assyrians. A paroxysm of multiple aggressiveness when a national idea which never was too strong takes too long to configure itself, or simply breaks into thousands of fragments corresponding to different local, tribal, religious and ethnic interests, and feelings. Generally speaking, this was the panorama when the British occupied that country which still was not called Iraq, but it is also the situation now, decades later, when a country called Iraq is occupied again.

When World War I finished, Iraq did not yet exist: it was created when the Ottoman Empire was defeated, with the Versailles Peace Conference, the Treaty of Versailles and all the family of treaties: Trianon, Saint Germain, Neuilly and Sévres. By means of this last treaty, France and Great Britain split the Turkish Middle East territories: France took control over modern-day Syria and Lebanon, and Palestine-Israel, Jordan and Iraq went for Great Britain. All this was legally established under warrants by the League of Nations, but it was actually very much politically determined by a previous agreement between both countries from 1916: a secret treaty called the Sykes-Picot, as well as the so-called Balfour Statement (1917) which years later led to the division of Palestine and the creation of the State of Israel. The Sevres Treaty was not accepted by the Turkish