

of the University of Baghdad; and finally, thank you to *la Presidencia de Honor de Su Alteza Real la Infanta Da Cristina*, without whose constant collaboration and encouragement this project would have been greatly diminished. Overall, we have tried to make sure that this be a project of collaboration, between Spain and Iraq.

Notes

- 1 LEVINE, Neil: "Plan for Greater Baghdad", *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996, p. 495, n. 67.
- 2 Thanks to Mouafaq Jawad Ahmed Al-Tai, Khaled Al-Sultany, Hisham Al Madfai, and especially to Ghada Siliq, for sending articles and Iraqi bibliographic references impossible to find in Spain.

PRESENTATION: ANOTHER TALE OF TWO CITIES

Ignacio Rupérez (Baghdad)

I would like to begin by clarifying two things; First, that the origin of this exhibition lies in e-mail conversations between Pedro Azara and myself. Second, that my eventual superiority compared with the majority of the readers/visitors is only due to my experiences living in Iraq, and in Baghdad in particular. I have gained my knowledge from books, from friends, and from travels while I lived there during the last years of Saddam Hussein, with only my books remaining after the invasion and occupation of the country. The time of travels and friends is over, but not the books, which, in the midst of disaster and war, can still explain how one can illuminate this chaos; not even people such as Pedro Azara have documented, even more than what we felt, that in Iraq there were better times, that there was a place for the best architects to work. Moreover, I have enjoyed the most pleasant days and a most interesting life in Baghdad, who of course is not in her best moment right now. The surprise upon discovering how much Baghdad had to offer in past decades is quite painful, because even in the nineties there were still remnants of the past glory of a city now forced to kneel; a city that would be humiliated time and again *this* century as well; being converted into a damned city, with an extremely difficult recovery ahead, whose misfortunes remind us of the Biblical curses upon Babylon and Nineveh, one destruction after another.

I am currently trying to keep the bibliography of Iraq up to date, though I am not trying to return to Basra or Mosul, or visit Babylon, Nineveh, Assur or Al-Hadr. I cannot even travel

through Baghdad as I once did, for today one should move about as little as possible, and never without armored cars, armed guards, and bulletproof vests. The protocol for journeys is so strict that it is preferable not to travel due to the extreme embarrassment of arriving at the host's house with all the required paraphernalia. The same happens when someone is invited to *your* house. It is also better not to try to leave Baghdad if not by airplane or helicopter. Helicopters are even used to journey from the airport to the Green Zone, which only intensifies the ridiculousness of people's claims to have "visited Baghdad", when, in fact, they barely set foot in the city, and never in the Red Zone. Fortunately, that is where I reside, in the Red Zone. I say fortunately because in the Red Zone I am more aware of the city. Besides, since it is supposedly the least secure and least desirable area, it is not targeted by mortar fire. The best thing to do in Baghdad these days is to go unnoticed, to live hidden, to not stand out, to hide behind the walls and books, connected to the Internet, leading a less than exemplary life, which would be unbearable without the knowledge that there had been a real life in the city of yesteryear.

That "real" life of before, however, was exactly the opposite of what life is like in the city of today. When I arrived in Baghdad the city was already affected by the international sanctions, and in December of 1998 it once again suffered bombings, this time in Operation Desert Fox. Destroyed on various occasions by the Mongols of Hulagu and Tamerlane in 1258 and 1400, by the Murat Ottomans in 1638, and by the allies of Schwarzkopf and Franks in 1991 and 2003, evidently all those barbarians left Baghdad with very little artistic patrimony. Besides, upon first glance, Baghdad seemed to be a city with little Arab influence, with low-lying houses and large avenues, highways and bridges, as if by design, the city were trying to be some sort of Los Angeles. Thus, Baghdad is not El Cairo or Damascus, with better historical luck. Of course the city suffered blackouts, but the nightlife was still bustling in summertime on the banks of the Tigris. The population, and the children and elders in particular, suffered from the accumulated deficits due to the years of sanctions, but nothing could be worse than what has come since then, what is being suffered now. Similar to Beirut, the city became accustomed to living with its sorrows, without knowing how deep they would eventually run. It was a lively city, inhabited by proud people. I toured the city from top to bottom, taking long walks through the neighborhoods without large avenues or highways; the streets of Karkh and Russafa, Kadhimain, the neighborhoods on both sides of Saddum Street. I was even able to gain entrance

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