

Hall, was named Queen Aliyah Street in the fifties, and Khulafa Street nowadays, and constitutes the axis of the urban renovation project given to Venturi at the beginning of the eighties. I thank Dr. Ghada Siliq from the University of Baghdad for this information.

- 2 Letter from Alvar Aalto to J.A. Douglas, head-architect in Baghdad, on August 6th, 1957 (Museum of Alvar Aalto, Helsinki, box AA43).
- 3 Letter from Alvar Aalto to J.A. Douglas, August 15th, 1957 (Museum of Alvar Aalto in Helsinki, AA43).
- 4 Memoirs of the project for the Museum of Fine Arts, today in the Museum of Alvar Aalto in Helsinki.
- 5 AALTO, Alvar; cited by the newspaper Hufvudstadsbladet, September 9th, 1958; reproduced in SCHILDT, Göran: *Alvar Aalto His Life*, Kirjapaino Gummerus Oy, Jyväskylä, 2007, pgs. 663-664.

HEADQUARTERS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT BOARD AND THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING (1958)

Gio Ponti in collaboration with Antonio Fornaroli and Alberto Rosselli, and Giuseppe Valtolina and Egidio Dell'Orto

All of Iraq depended on the Development Board: towns, cities, and the countryside; the sanitizing of water and irrigation; the construction of dams to avoid destructive flooding in the capital (controlled as of 1954) and water reservoirs; the web of transportation and communications; public buildings (schools, hospitals, ministries) and social housing: a new country emerged due to the revenues obtained from petroleum exports, and finally benefited Iraq.

This office required a representative headquarters to house administrators and executives, under the direct control of the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister. This design was given to Gio Ponti and his collaborators (Ponti himself was never in Baghdad, it was Fornaroli who directed the project, begun after the fall of King Faisal II. The architect and the Iraqi engineer Hisham Al Madfaai, who thought of the solution for the correct application of the ceramic covering in an environment with an extreme contrast in temperature between summer and winter, also traveled from Baghdad to Milan every two months).

The building, composed of two horizontal blocks resting on a giant porticoed platform that covered the entrances and the parking lot (in order to avoid having large structures directly beneath the sun), and inspired by the Pirelli Tower in Milan from the same architect, was close to the vital Bridge of the Revolution (destroyed by aerial bombings from the United States in 1991, and later rebuilt) halfway between the old city and the new areas to the right of the river, including ministry

headquarters and offices.

Regarding the policies of the Development Board, Ponti said:

Architecture is not based on local stylistic motifs that, interpreted by foreigners, are at times naïve and not valid. My intention has been to contribute to the development of Iraq with a perfect building that for climatic reasons is based upon local architecture, an architecture that, for historical reasons, has not preserved genuine examples to which architects can refer.

Baghdad, that important city, destroyed by terrible historical events, and associated in our imagination with Aladdin and the stories of "One Thousand and One Nights", now requires modern and technically perfect buildings. The buildings from the XIX and XX century are of European taste and mediocre design. The current Iraq has its own ambitions for appealing to Wright, Le Corbusier, Aalto, Gropius.

And as for the building (heavily damaged in 2003, and waiting to be restored by the Polytechnic University of Milan), he noted:

Important buildings in Baghdad are covered in or constructed from sand colored bricks. Thanks to the baked ceramic over some parts of the facades, color will return to the city. The blinds are made of aluminum and their surface is silver, which together with the bright reddish tiles, will introduce a touch of happiness in the building.

(Domus, 370, 9 (1960), p. 1)

SECTOR 10 OF THE PARTIAL PLAN FOR WESTERN BAGHDAD (PLAN AND PARTIAL CONSTRUCTION: 1957-1958). NEIGHBORHOOD OF AL-THWARA ("SADR CITY"), PART OF THE PARTIAL PLAN FOR EASTERN BAGHDAD (PLAN: 1958; CONSTRUCTION: 1961-1963)

Constantinos A. Doxiadis (Doxiadis Associates)

When the Greek engineer and urban planner (of Bulgarian origin) Doxiadis received the assignment of various general plans for the cities of Kirkuk, Irbil, Basra, and most importantly, Baghdad, and for the massive construction of housing for lower, middle and upper class populations, he had already shown his good understanding with the North American government to develop a repertoire of ideas regarding life and

its reflection in an urban social structure: an aggregate of small communities (of agricultural and Protestant origin) organized around public spaces with a market, public services, and a sanctuary (church or mosque) and whose study and implementation in Europe, the Middle East and Africa was financed and supported by the Ford Foundation and Harvard University, with whom Doxiadis maintained excellent relations. In this sense, Doxiadis facilitated the Marshall Plan in Greece, and rebuilt towns and communities, applying his studies of Ekistics (from the Greek "oikos", house), or science of human settlements. Based on graphs and outlines in which the form or style of the buildings was not decisive, he analyzed the distribution of housing, services and public spaces, movements and relations between neighbors, and pedestrian and vehicular circulation, based on urban studies, economy, anthropology and sociology, among other human sciences, and advocated a lifestyle that could be applied in any part, free from corseted traditions and imposing monuments.

It is now, when the social progress of our time, together with industrialization and urbanization, has brought up the problem of housing so that the interest of all types of experts has been awakened, and they have begun to work to confront this problem. It is then when the necessity for a new science that combines the skills of an economist, a sociologist, a political scientist, and an expert in cultural questions with those of a technician to solve the problems of housing. This is the science of Ekistics, a science that studies and tries to resolve the biggest problems with housing, and the problems of human settlements, large or small (...) It is about the science of human habitat in its entirety.¹

The General Plan for Baghdad, and the Partial Plans for Western Baghdad, and for Eastern Baghdad propose the creation of two large residential areas, equipped with all the requisite services (markets, sanctuaries, schools, day care centers, recreational and sporting areas), on either side of the river, among which the one on the east of the river stood out. Of a rectangular form it was structured along a new, straight canal, parallel to the Tigris, which joined two bends in the river, following, in part, the model of the linear city of Madrid from Arturo Soria. A grid, formed by large avenues which channeled vehicular traffic around the exterior perimeter of the neighborhood, formed large blocks or sectors divided into small residential communities around a public plaza (unusual in the Middle East) which offered all the services necessary for the physical and spiritual life of the neighborhood. Narrow pedestrian streets and dead end alleyways, between modest, uniform one

story dwellings, were to help the residents get around easily. The houses, quite economical, were constructed out of common materials from the area, using traditional techniques, although the use of huge, prefabricated concrete lattices and the placement of patios not in the center, but on the side of the houses (perhaps for compositional motives), impeded the regulation of temperature, turning the houses into ovens.

Doxiadis (whose methods are admired and followed by Rem Koolhaas) had many multidisciplinary studios at his disposal, in which hundreds of specialists (urban planners, architects, archeologists, historians, sociologists, economists, geographers) worked in different European, African and Middle Eastern cities. In only four years, he constructed or restored hundreds of housing settlements throughout the country: 20,000 new dwellings, 30,000 restored, and thirty something villages, although relatively few in Baghdad.

The General Plan for Baghdad was abandoned after the coup, and the rescission of the contract between the new, less pro-Western Iraqi government, and Doxiadis. They built a few housing developments or communities in the capital (whose location in the dense urban jungle cannot be precisely established these days, due to the destruction from war, and the impossibility to travel freely and safely through the city), among which the neighborhood now called Sadr City sadly stands out. This was built at the beginning of the sixties, when Doxiadis had already had to abandon Iraq, and where the inhabitants of the miserable mud hut shanty towns were placed. They also constructed places for workshop/technical schools to make building workers and other trades. Doxiadis returned to Baghdad in the seventies for design new general and partial plans for the Kurdish/Iraqi city of Kirkuk.

Currently, Iraqi experts have severely judged Doxiadis' urban plans, which required the destruction of old neighborhoods and agglomerations. Today, the neighborhood of Al Thawra (the Revolution), later called Saddam City, and later Sadr City (an homage to an imam executed by Saddam Hussein), mainly inhabited by Shiites and lacking in public services due in part to the abandonment propagated by Saddam Hussein's government, is one of the most degraded and dangerous parts of Baghdad: a true dead end street, whose constrained forms are inhabited by occupants as a reminder of the oppression that they have suffered.

The organization of a city into sectors is not, of course, purely the job of the architect; but the architect can certainly contribute, along with a specialist in matters of traffic, an economist, and an urban geographer, to the understanding and

nature of urban landscapes, of the synthesis of the axis of the direction of the cities. It is without a doubt within the sector where the architect can create the architectural space and draw the architectural synthesis itself. And it is within the sector where we must conform with the aesthetic not of the machine, but rather of the man. The machine, the car, will be confined to the grand avenues where it is pertinent (...)

In the human sector, on the contrary, where people walk, the values of architecture continue to be the old ones. An architectural scale exists within the house, which can connect with the architectural space of an exterior patio, and this, in turn, with the street, from the largest or smallest plazas or even from the park (...). These human sectors are going to replace the antiquated city block, and will become the basis of the city of the future (...)

If there is not a large number of cars, or we do not want them circulating through the (residential) streets, but rather maintain them at a certain distance, then the streets will have dimensions that are only human. In this way the streets can be better, from the micro-climatological point of view, for hot zones, able to create a greater sense of community, besides being more economical in their construction, maintenance, etc. That is how the streets are that we have designed in projects for Iraq and other warm climate countries. They are not only more economical for the city and the inhabitants and better adjusted to the local conditions, but they also create a much better space that allows people to feel at home inside as well as outside of their own houses. Making men feel at home in any part of a city is one of our biggest obligations, especially if we want to be and continue being the owners of our cities.

(DOXIADIS, Constantinos A.: *Arquitectura en transición*, Ariel, Barcelona, 1963, pgs. 121, 123, 126, Trans. into Spanish: Xavier Rubert de Ventós)

Notes

1 DOXIADIS, C.A.: "Engineers and Housing", pgs. 2-3

IRAKI HOUSE IN LONDON (1960-1961)

Alison and Peter Smithson

"Iraq has an excessively rich history to be inspired by, a climate that displays a sudden flowering in the desert in spring; pleasant autumns; an architecture as varied as the history of the country; a legendary capital- Baghdad; objects of trade as old

as dates: all this remains somehow gathered in the Iraqi House project, but it is subdued, almost secretly arranged at the discrete service of the principal theme" (Alison and Peter Smithson, memoirs of the project)

The so-called "Iraq House", destroyed in 1970, formed the headquarters of the Iraqi airline. Situated in the center of London, (Picadilly Road, number 188), it stood out from its neighbors and the very visible offices of the North American company Pan Am. Peter and Alison Smithson commented that the Iraqi airline company, upon being so small, looked to distinguish itself by an almost personalized treatment of the passengers, and by promoting some unique cultural characteristics of the country. Perhaps with a bit of British humor, the architects mentioned the regional dress of the stewardesses.

The location was very small. It consisted of an elongated space, with a narrow façade facing the street, whose color scheme (white, black and green) on the signpost (symbols and letters) evoked the country's flag. The tubular form, which was reticent of an airliner's carriage, was even accented with a curved covering of the walls and ceiling.

The glass façade was deeply set back, trying to call the attention of the passers by (the English, they alleged, enjoyed meeting in front of a hole), who, upon coming closer, discovered a deep ditch or well behind the window, like a bird's eye view, similar to that of an archaeological excavation, at the bottom of which was a recreation of a scene with a mannequin dressed like a Bedouin, with a falcon. The architects maintained that falconry, of Arab origin, was imported to Europe twice: with the creation of the first union or European conscience, with Charlemagne, and, centuries later, when the crusaders returned from Palestine, tired and dazzled.

This symbol of flight (which united two different cultures), with which the space of the gallery opened, was repeated on the wall at the end, in a reproduction of an Assyrian relief (in the British museum) that showed a man-bird (a protective deity of the home).

In the middle there was nothing, or almost nothing. The wavy walls were sand colored, the floor the same, with one continuous bench built into the wall, covered with small, fabric mats. There were only two rectangular displays, covered with tiles with oriental motifs, which, according to the architects, evoked the sudden and fragile flowering in the middle of the desert, after the fleeting rains announced and carried forth by the flight of the birds.

The Iraqi House (the only project from this exposition not carried out in Baghdad), commissioned by the government of