

was later changed to the left bank, in a zone that was in a period of expansion. The Phillips Pavilion could not be moved. Different facilities (such as the wave pool) were ruled out. Construction began on only one part of the project (the gymnasium which was the most developed design from Le Corbusier) in 1979 (forteen years after Le Corbusier drowned in the sea), and were headed up by Présenté, who the government had put in charge of the executive project, and which concluded in 1983⁷, already under the rule of Saddam Hussein. The stadium, called Al Sh'ab, was finally constructed by a Portuguese architect F.K.D. Amaral⁸ in 1966 (and inaugurated with a match between Iraq and Portugal). After being closed for a year and a half, Al-Shaab Stadium reopened for soccer, in a league game, Saturday, December 1st, 2007.

The gymnasium is composed of two parts: a closed block, dark and compact, made of cement, with a curved metallic covering, and a small sports track in full sunlight, with stands on both sides. Various ramps, one of which spirals around a central pylon, give access to the upper part, outside (one terrace) and inside (stands reserved for the press) of the building. The covered part, in a T shape, has adjacent stands on three sides, around the track, while a heavy metallic sliding door closes off the fourth side, which, upon opening, allows the open air playing field to expand the interior area, and becomes a stage adjacent to the covered space.

The presence of ramps, both straight and spiral, has been interpreted as a reference to the architecture of antiquity, (Mesopotamian and Egyptian) and to the beginning of the Islamic world. In particular this refers to the spiral ramp of the minaret of the Samarra Mosque, from the IX Century (whose upper part was damaged in 2005 by the civil war), which is considered to be an adaptation of the straight ramps of the Mesopotamian ziggurats. Regardless, this type of interior and exterior access was already a staple in the projects of Le Corbusier since the 1930s⁹.

For Le Corbusier, the gymnasium was not dedicated only to sporting activities. Rather, it was conceived of for "meetings, opera, orchestras, and basketball"¹⁰. The building has suffered from the years of war and the current chaotic situation. However, the project, theatrical and not very practical, like the majority of projects from Le Corbusier (the ramps, in full sunlight, are punishing almost year round, as are the outside stands), has kept the complex from being put into full use (though it is well preserved and hosts both infant and youth sports teams).

Notes

- 1 Le Corbusier Foundation, Paris, inv. number E-2-16-128
- 2 Iraq Museum, Baghdad, inv. number IM55357. The translation of the text of the tablet is not included in the present text because it is incomprehensible if not annotated in detail. The vocabulary included refers to distant realities; the triangle, in Akkadian, was called a nail's head (for its similarity to said object). The reader should refer to the translations and commentaries on this text in, for example: FRIBERG, Jöran: *Amazing Traces of a Babylonian Origin in Greek Mathematics*, World Scientific, Singapore, 2007, pages 97-100; HØYRUP, Jens: *Lengths, Widths, Surfaces. A Portrait of Old Babylonian Algebra and Its Kin*, Springer, New York, 2002, pages 231-234. I would like to thank Jaume Llop (Institute of the Antique Middle East, University of Barcelona) for the location, the inventory number and the bibliography of this piece, as well as Jordi Abadal for the complementary bibliography.
- 3 Le Corbusier Foundation, Paris, document from May 29th, 1957, inv. number P4-2-36.
- 4 Letter to a minister, 1963 (Le Corbusier Foundation, Paris, inv. number P4-5-98)
- 5 Letter from Joan Prats to Le Corbusier in the Le Corbusier Foundation, Paris, inv. number P4-1-112(3). Answer to Le Corbusier to Joan Prats, inv. number P4-1-119.
- 6 Le Corbusier requested that the stadium face the river, close to Gio Ponti's building, so that the water could enter the grounds (LE CORBUSIER, "carnet L50", FRANCLIEU, Françoise de (ed.): *Le Corbusier Sketchbooks, vol. 3, 1954-1957*, The Architectural History Foundation and MIT Press, New York and Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1982, n. 1072).
- 7 The majority of studies state that the project was developed in between 1973 and 1979. However, the University of Baghdad affirms that works was started at the end, not the beginning, of the 1970's, and they finished in 1983. The total embargo, this time cultural, impedes us from having dependable statistics outside of Iraq.
- 8 I owe this information to Dr Ghada Siliq (Architecture Department, School of Engineering, University of Baghdad). Construction of the stadium had been set, weirdly enough, for 1953 (GANS, Deborah: "Saddam Hussein Gymnasium 1980", *The Le Corbusier Guide*, Princeton Architectural Press, Princeton, 1987, p. 146), and in 1967 (TAJ-ELDIN, Suzanne: "Baghdad: Box of Miracles", *The Architectural Review*, 181, 1079, January 1987, p. 82).
- 9 TAJ-ELDIN, Suzanne, MOOS, Stanislaus von: "Nach Plänen von...Eine Gymnastikhalle von Le Corbusier in Bagdad", *Archithese*, 3, 83, May-June 1983, p. 42. TAJ-ELDIN, Suzanne: *Op. Cit.*, p. 82: the author cites the ramp of the Egyptian temple of Queen Hashepsut.
- 10 LE CORBUSIER, "carnet L50", FRANCLIEU, Françoise de (ed.): *Op. Cit.*,

THE NORTH AMERICAN EMBASSY IN BAGHDAD (1955-1959)

José Luis Sert

The North American government chose José Luis Sert, Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Design, to design the embassy

in Baghdad. Some surmise that this was due to the good relations the U.S. government maintained with Harvard University, and the university's predisposition to promote a determined conception of society in the Middle East, inspired by small communities of workers and puritans, for whom the austere modern architecture, free from ornaments and aristocratic references, constitutes an adequate frame and symbol. The location consists of a thin strip of land perpendicular to the Tigris River, in the "new part", expanding in the fifties, in front of the old city. This zone, a bit isolated, was chosen by the bourgeois for the construction of houses, and by the Soviet Union, China, and the USA, for their embassies in the fifties.

The enclosure, of large dimensions, is composed of various light colored buildings, spread over a wide garden facing the river: the ambassador's house, housing for the employees, and administrative buildings, among others. While the administrative and representative functions are located close to the entrance, the housing, along with more private recreational areas, are located in front of the river, whose flooding, which used to periodically devastate the city, was definitively controlled after the 1950's, thanks to dams built up river. A canal, which even passes below one of the building, runs throughout the premises, feeding fountains and ponds.

The harshness of the climate, especially in summer, required the use of all types of lattices, pronounced eaves and separate double roofs, which allow air circulation. The presence of trees, which were preserved, influenced and helped in the placement of the buildings.

These, despite being insulated, contrary to what happens in the dense traditional urban Arab style, have interior patios with fountains, and do not face the garden. The North American Embassy was only located in this complex for a few years. At the beginning of the seventies, with the first crisis between the United States and Iraq, the complex was first under control of the Iraqi Minister of the Interior, and, afterwards, directly under control of President Saddam Hussein, who lived in a nearby palace and used Sert's complex for his own private use, and for meetings with high ranking military personnel. The same was done with a nearby property of Nourri Al Seed, Prime Minister for King Faisal II, which was converted into a recreation area with a pool.

Until recently, officials hoped to restore and rehabilitate the complex: after the fall of Saddam Hussein, and while the new North American Embassy was (and is) being built right in front, on the opposite bank (a massive, fortified complex), the U.S. Government used Saddam Hussein's palace as their headquar-

ters, and Sert's buildings are used as a reception area for those who were not authorized to enter the embassy. When the new location is finished, Sert's buildings, in relatively good condition (at least until recently), and whose interiors have not been modified, will be returned to the Iraqi government.

However, since a few months ago, the complex (which has been bombed), is closed, abandoned, surrounded by tall cement walls; the North American authorities in Baghdad are not aware that the complex was the headquarters of their own embassy, nor do they know who José Luis Sert is: it may even be too late to recover what may well have been his finest work of art.

PLAN FOR A GREATER BAGHDAD (1957-1959)

Frank Lloyd Wright

"Art, architecture and religion are still the soul of any true civilization. They are the elements which determine for how long a civilization will survive..." (F. L. Wright)

"Iraq turned out to be a fabulous country, but quite real. King Faisal has given me an island of a nice size in the Tigris for the cultural projects of the state: the opera, the art gallery, the university; and wide bridges that connect to the city on one side, and to the university on the other." (F. L. Wright)

In January of 1957, Frank Lloyd Wright received the assignment of designing an Opera House for Baghdad. Even though his name had not been chosen by the Development Board, his indirect friendship with both the Iraqi Prime Minister, who was an acquaintance of Frances Nertin, one of Wright's assistants in his workshop in Taliesin, and with the architect Rifat Chadirji, facilitated his being welcomed to the Iraqi capital.

The choice of Wright to design a large public building could be surprising, given his typical attention to intimate, interior spaces (contrary to Le Corbusier, who sculpted enormous exterior designs). However, as Wright showed upon visiting the Mesopotamian collections of the Archeological Museum in Baghdad, shortly after arriving, his enthusiasm for Sumerian art, characterized by its introspection (and the fact that in the conference he gave in Baghdad, Wright declared that Sumerian art had influenced Greek art), and his consider-