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Rewriting and city structure

Abstract
Re-taking from literary practices the attitude of critically reworking formal characteristics belonging to something previous, rewriting offers itself as a possible technique for transforming parts of the city. This approach makes it possible to prevent mimetic results, highlighting conversely the substantial texture of the city, selecting its exemplary elements. The rewriting intent breaks down the relationship between memory, as the object of the design action, and narrativity, which is the action that represents, through construction, the space of memory. In the proposed case studies of Aleppo and Mosul the relationship between memory and narrativity becomes a crucial issue for involving the context and its absences, giving the design proposals the interpretative capacity to confer values and new meanings to the city.

"…nullus enim locus sine genio est…"

In the different working hypotheses on reconstruction one of the techniques adopted in rethinking the transformation of some parts of the city is linked to the concept of rewriting. This concept is closely connected to that of the urban palimpsest[1]. Architecture seems to be for the city what memory is for invention. Some literary intertextual techniques can be intertwined in the understanding and deciphering of urban spaces[2].

This reading of the city that combines literary and architectural literary, identity and imagination, memory and creativity, interacts with the construction of architectural space. The plurality of historical phenomena and the stratification of urban structures in the city constitute the categorical aspect of transformations. The historical and aesthetic pluralism evoked in the palimpsest of the city constitutes the paradigmatic aspect of the urban layout, conceived as an alchemical combination of matter and space. Intertextuality, deconstruction, subversion, and rewriting are factors recognized as emblematic of what has been called "postmodernism". These characteristics are universally accepted in the international critical debate as "symptomatic" of the indefinable postmodernism, a heterogeneous and all-encompassing framework in which such recurrent formal aspects draw a complex motif open to analysis. Yet, on the architectural side, more concreteness would be needed regarding the specificity of the discipline of architecture in a particular interest in the physical aspects of the city. The underlying issue is that we are no longer able to understand the essence of the semantic structure of the city regardless of the technical, urban planning or architectural intervention.

Permanence and discontinuity are arranged on two different planes in our artistic or technical work, so that the nature of the city is already always the element "exiled", sublimated, transcended in and by our work. This also implies that the natural link with the city is demonstrated in historical time and in the multiple forms of the city's culture, and its transformation is not admissible without prior understanding of the constitutive datum in a horizon of meaning, therefore in a historical and cultural horizon.

Can we still talk about the evolution of the city, and above all, what is the role of architecture and what does this transformation of the urban layout consists of today?

The phenomenon can be ascribed to certain parts of the city, susceptible not so much to conscious and shared transformation as to rehash, to change, to convert from one state to another, regardless of the formal, aesthetic and therefore architectural premise. This phenomenon is quite evident and well delineated in Mike Davis' 'Geographies of Fear'. For example, security-obsessed enclaves are a logical evolution of the stacks of monads characteristic of contemporary buildings. Models that undermine the identity of cities, not only traditional European and Mediterranean ones. The undifferentiated fabric produced by summations of basic elementary structures is not the continuous city, nothing to do with Soria y Mata's 'Madrid-Ciudad lineal' or Miljutin's Sosgorod.

This new dimension of urban settlement seems completely alien to the founding principle of the idea of the city as a community, as happily testified by those archaeologists for whom cities began to define themselves as such when the space between buildings took on meaning, or rather when the significance of the spaces of relationships began to prevail over that of individual buildings. On the other hand, when it is ascertained that not only the monuments are able to establish reciprocal relationships but also the open free space, the connective space with the mobility infrastructures, the historical dimension of the city changes with the settlement of productive structures in the urban context. This condition, within the constructive development of the city, evolves through a process of transformation determined by the succession of additions, differentiations, oppositions, polarities and architectural integrations. However, if we think of the "theories of permanence" as developed by Marcel Poète, Pierre Lavedan and subsequently taken up by Aldo Rossi[3], the knowledge of the city becomes an essential fact for the understanding and critical decipherment of urban form, for the intelligibility of the aggregative consistency of the primary and secondary elements of architecture. The loss of its formal structure is one of the most striking aspects of the crisis of urban settlement and its discontinuous fragmentation. As long as, 40 years ago, Konrad Lorenz considered the unravelling of the built environment to be one of the «deadly sins of our civilisation». It is therefore necessary to explore the role of persistence in the constituent elements of the city about its inescapable transformation, even in the changing and sometimes contradictory recent tendency towards discontinuous and summary alterations. Recognising the plot and recomposing its parts does not mean simply mimicking the appearance of new buildings. On the contrary, it would be necessary to recognise the substantial plot in the labyrinth[4] of reality, the conceptual and operational elaboration through a critical reconnaissance, oriented towards selecting the elements considered exemplary, and not the mediation between them and the discarded, the insignificant. The way to appropriate the constituent elements of the city is above all to cultivate knowledge of

them. The fact that the architect is called upon to act directly within the physical structure of the city and there compose his or her own poetic world invests the practice of architecture with the responsibility of specific knowledge of that condition. It then becomes decisive to call upon the resources of the specific context, dividing the authentic not only from the apparent superfluous, from the useless illusory, but from the insignificant: *«... Ce qui limite le vrai, ce n'est pas le faux, c'est l'insignifiant... »*[5].

In the project experience, both the paradigm of knowledge becomes an unavoidable fact - if it intends to promote a multidimensional approach also through the contribution of cognitive sciences against any deterministic and a priori mystification in the assimilation of reality - and an epistemological approach around the invoked scientific procedure of the project, able to accept and discern methodologically the authenticity of the contents and the articulation of the phenomena considered. Thus, this research progresses through the reconstruction of underlying traces, sometimes even anticipating its paths, foreseeing its developments, placing in any clue the value of the «figure in the waiting»[6], an act of re-composition of the basic structure of the places. But there is more. If one were to assume that in the assumption «*nullus enim locus sine genio est*»[7], the particular significance of the sacredness of places is not so much linked to the relevance in itself of the individual context, monumental or marginal, natural or artificial, spontaneous or conditioned, etc., but rather to the typical specificity of each individual circumstance of the environment, then man's need to personify places or elements of nature would concern the arcane idea that each place has well-defined characteristics that must be rediscovered and re-valorized in order to enter fully into harmony with it.

This position belongs to a tradition rooted in a classical idea of the sacredness of places. If Latin culture relies on the transcendent dimension of the Genius, Greek culture recognizes itself in the mystical entity of the Daimon, the demon, but with an entirely different meaning from the conventional one: a positive spirit that inhabits every human being with the task of guiding him or her in the fulfilment of their destiny. Platonic philosophy assigns the Daimon not only to people but also to places and things: a house, a city, a mountain, a forest, a clearing, or a river. A legitimate question then concerns the specific role of rewriting in the palimpsest of the city, or at least whether the transformation of the city is susceptible to a critical approach capable of enhancing its physicality. Rewriting then means resonating with the Daimon, or the Genius if you will, provided however that each place can be susceptible to a non-conventional evaluation, in a physical and material sense, considered not only in its "rational" essence, but rather as an inextricable set of different elements, belonging both to the physical and geographical sphere, and to the historical, economic, social, cultural and artistic ones. Note that rewriting here is meant also as the act of designing as a case of the broader horizon of change (imitation, representation, etc.), and a concrete critical and hermeneutic challenge, in an attempt to isolate the differential elements (in the first instance those that are hidden or even unaware) that, standing out against such a mimetic background (repetitive, indifferent), will sanction the significance, both aesthetic and theoretical, of the various operations of transformation of the environment.

Memory and human settlement

It often happens that the practice of the project in its physical consistency, as an active and generative action through an act of volition, even individual, is even considered oxymoronic in the most intransigent and restrictive interpretations within the action, for example, of the discipline of restoration, conservation, archaeology, etc. Therefore, a second question concerns the limits and prerogatives of the architectural project in the process of transformation of the city, excluding it from the phenomena of undifferentiated sociology, from a massified phenomenon of human experience. Concerning the specific attitudes of its exegetes, the city has now taken on a particular categorization: more or less functionalist, utopian or materialist, sacred or blasphemous, ecological or systemic, today even smart[8]. In this attempt to rewrite parts of the city, its form is assumed as an indispensable fact, in Pasolini's sense of the term[9] the form is also understood as a perceptive condition[10].

In this sense, the city as a "petrified text" with its plot, with the invention of its symbols and meanings, remains in a rhetorical dimension, within a "warp" more or less consistent with the unravelling of the recurring figures of its history. The act of transformation also represents a process aimed at moving, superimposing, involving forms and figures extracted from a textual and critical analysis of urban form. In other words, the process of transforming the architectural form generates an idealized place, an architecture that tends to evoke the unfolding of events that have marked the evolution of the city, evoking its narrative structure through the transfiguration of the elements of urban memory. It would also be necessary to dispel some of the simplistic progressions that relegate the city to an abstractly evolutionary dimension, almost a struggle for survival among the species and the presumed primacy of one over the other. So that it is not so much the search for singularities that imprint the seal of uniqueness, but rather its untiring peculiarity to re-write the same elements over the centuries of its transformation, giving life to a phenomenon in which the creative act resists technical annihilation: there is still an area of hope offered by art, that of the city, that gives meaning, welcomes and builds a human order.

This conflict between forms in front of which Pasolini confronts us recalls in more general terms some of Henri Lefebvre's positions in one of his last books on the concept of the "urban "[11].

Far from coinciding with the (ancient) polis and the (medieval) city, the urban replaces them by incorporating them, thus without excluding them as historical moments[12]. In a general sense, and therefore beyond individual specificities, the city was considered a collective work of art by Henri Lefebvre[13], because it was not only the result of the organization of space, but because this space had been ordered according to the needs of the different users who inhabited it, according to their ethics and above all according to their aesthetic sense. Henri Lefebvre also spoke of the right to the city, which, within the rhetoric of the Urban Age, is perhaps too sordidly divided between the advocates of Rebel Cities[14] (as David Harvey put it) and the now conventional idea of participation as a democratic illusion of Droit de la Ville.

On this specific issue, the point of view of a paper by Salvatore Settis[15] is rather stimulating when he argues that the right to the city is clearly a «reflection on the historical city» and that it is a "reflection on the city itself". There would be no doubt that the urban dimension has something

to do with art if we think of the early city, the city so full of symbolic and mythological values. The city to whose production the gods were believed to have contributed. And then the ordered and rational city of Leon Battista Alberti, Filarete, Sebastiano Serlio, Andrea Palladio and Vincenzo Scamozzi, Ledoux, Melnikov, up to Le Corbusier, or that, to quote Richard Sennett[16], in which to seek otherness "the essence of urban culture, that is, the possibility of acting together without necessarily having to be identical".

If we assume that the background is the city, its form, the recognition of its status as a collective fact, a third point would concern the relationship between the architectural project and the sense of the transformations of the physical environment. So that, to find some reasons in the places of the city and to be able to physically transform them, it would be necessary to recognize some constants in the history of the settlement, able to assume, in the complexity of the phenomenon of architecture, also some cognitive ambits not strictly architectural, able to restore in a unitary way the relevant passages in the evolution of the urban settlement.

According to this premise, the history of settlement certainly has an important place. One thinks of Leonardo's extraordinary design for the city of Milan, a route of contiguous streets arranged in a half-circle and a succession of churches arranged in a curved line that almost completes the circumference, as if to transcribe the perimeter of the Celtic oppidum of Milan. Bonvesin de la Riva, in his work *De magnalibus Mediolani*, 1288, wrote: "This city itself is round, like a circle. Such admirable roundness is the sign of perfection". In the 14th century, Galvano Fiamma, inspired by this evocation, drew a plan of Milan formed by two perfectly circular and concentric circles of walls. Of course, this observation does not only take into account urban history in a strictly disciplinary sense, but rather the multiple fields of knowledge that have interfered with the physical layout of the city. Thus, that with history is here interpreted not as an allusive role, but rather as a structural impulse in the urban project. In this sense, it is necessary to proceed rigorously and selectively in evaluating all the tools that the history of the city makes available to the architectural project. Firstly, it is necessary to identify in the folds of historical development a tradition of work in which a conscious area of architectural design has always manifested itself, which has critically intended to historicize the architectural project.

It is not just a matter of activating that attitude towards memory in itself, in the sense of understanding history as a free repertory of forms. Rather, it is a matter of raising oneself from the condition of arbitrariness and carrying out an authentic operation of historicization aimed at grasping both the contradictions and the virtualities that the historical past has given back, to regenerate a critical dimension that the project takes on in connoting a possible transformation of the physical environment. The assumption of a historical dimension means taking responsibility for the past and tradition as much as for the present and future. Therefore, it would be necessary to break down the question of the relationship between memory, which is the object of design action, and narrativity, which is the action that is produced in conceiving, representing, implementing and then designing, through construction, the space that memory celebrates. In this sense, and because of this specific "rewriting" intent, at least in architecture, each project is also a story in itself, since it is almost impossible to trace a generalized taxonomy as an exact protocol ready to assist the physiological uncertainties of the

design process. Rather, to paraphrase Benjamin of the Baroque Tragic Drama[17] (for whom «reflection bends over the work»), in art (if in this case it is art) the work is (must be) always right, in the sense that the work always carries within itself the possibility of subverting schemes, genres and canons, of invalidating (at least in its individual case) established aesthetic taxonomies. In other words, it can falsify any discourse and theory on art. When this is not the case, when it does not happen, when works of art go begging for their legitimacy from discourses, then art (or that particular art) goes through a phase of regression, contraction and decadence. If the work were to be entirely resolved in the discourses that preceded and "prepared" it, it would thereby sanction its own inessentiality. So perhaps a part of the project that in the act of rewriting is not limited simply to certain aspects of formal or typological correspondence, but rather to something deeper, something linked to the generative principles that are at the basis of the nature of the formal characteristics of architecture, those «...to be found, as in English jurisprudence, in the series of cases and sentences to which to refer for a presumption of a formal character...»[18] case by case, as Ernesto Nathan Rogers would have said[19].

An operative case-study

The case study that recurs in the ongoing research on this topic concerns the reconstruction of some cities in the Middle East that were mutilated and destroyed following the well-known "Syrian Crisis" that began in March 2011(Fig. 1). In particular, in the case of the city of Aleppo in Syria and the city of Mosul in Iraq, the heavy bombing compromised a large part of the historical centre, the urban fabric and the monuments of the cities. The theme of the preservation of identity and that of the intrinsic character of this place constituted the horizon of meaning of the different working hypotheses (Fig. 2).

Aleppo lies in a particularly strategic location and has been at the centre of important trade routes since pre-Roman times. It is therefore not for political or religious reasons that the city has stood out over the centuries, but rather for its ability to be a barycentric pole on the trade routes that linked Europe to the Middle East, or the Mediterranean Sea to China. The destruction of the Suq, the economic and commercial heart of the city, thus becomes a particularly significant symbolic attack on the city's ancestral role and identity (Fig. 3). The Al-Medina Suq system remains the city's main market and is increasingly becoming a tourist attraction capable of guaranteeing that positive boost to the preservation and renewal of a historical and complex area, this part of the city has lost the role and commercial importance of the past. Therefore, rebuilding this part of the city, in addition to guaranteeing the minimum conditions for a hoped-for economic and social recovery of the Old City, would mean intervening within those vital nodes of the city itself in rethinking the propulsive role of the Khan, the Madrasas, the Mosques and the city's inhabitants.

The analysis of the persistence of the urban structure, the formal order of the Hippodamean city, the linear arrangement along the axes of the ancient Roman cardo and decumanus, the historical core around the Citadel block, represent it with an extraordinary parterre of Hellenistic, Roman, Ottoman, Arab and Armenian-Maronite culture, just to mention the main geo-cultural ancestors.

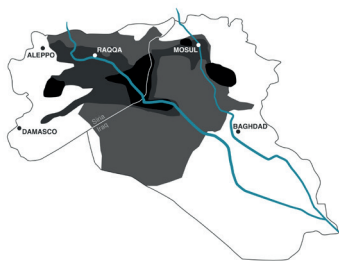The rebuilding hypotheses start from the valorization of the urban voids

Fig. 1
Territories under the control of ISIS in 2014 (light gray), 2016 (gray) and 2017 (black).

Figs. 2 a,b
War destruction on a territorial and urban scale. Aleppo (2a and 2b).
[Davolio / Dogari - Bello Melo - Master Degree Thesis , Politecnico di Milano, April 2019 and July 2021-Supervisor D.Chizzoniti].

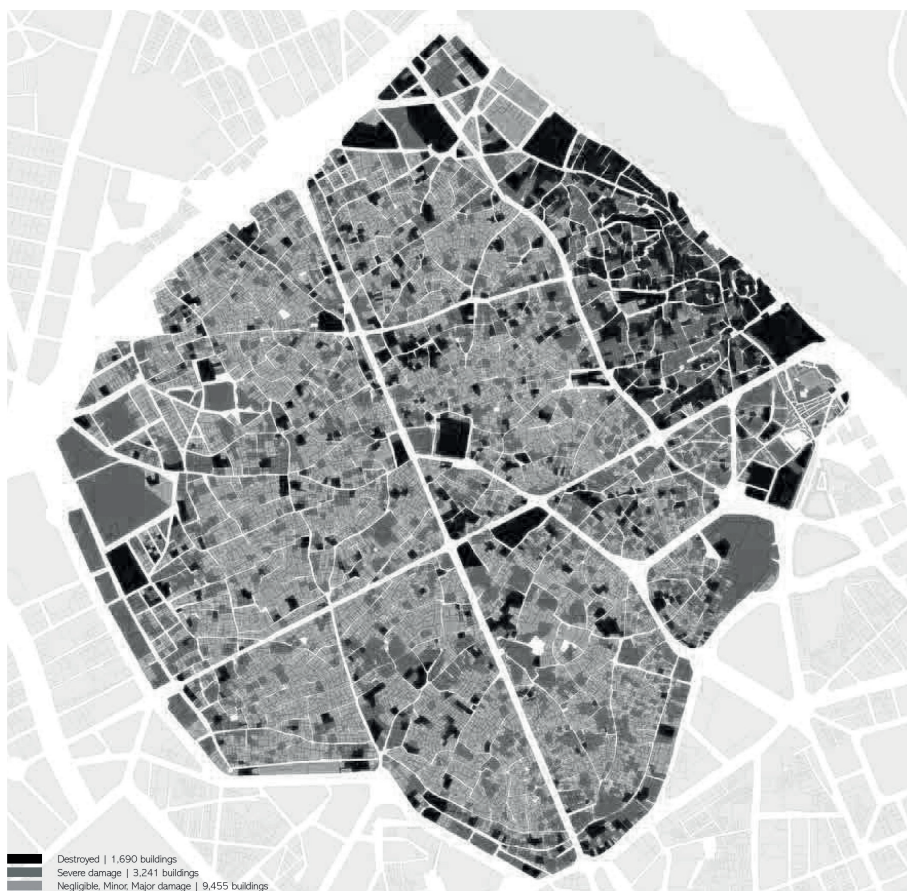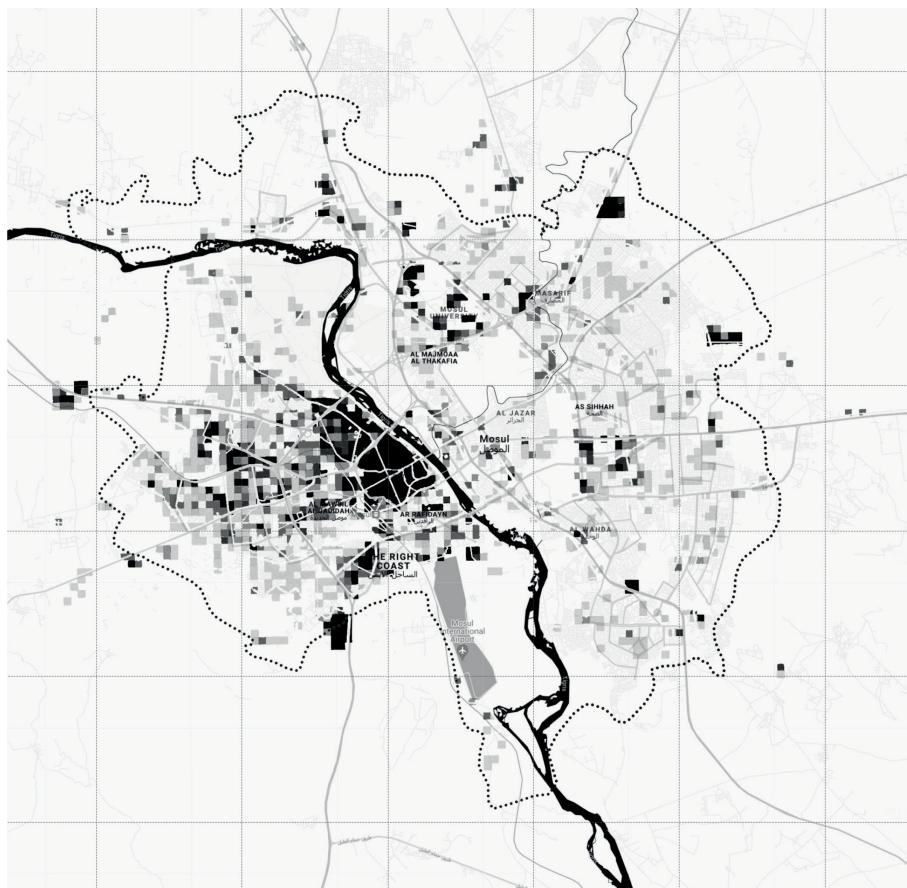MODERATELY DAMAGED
HEAVILY DAMAGED
DESTROYED

Figs. 2 c,d
War destruction on a territorial and urban scale. Mosul (2c and 2d).
[Davolio / Dogari - Bello Melo - Master Degree Thesis , Politecnico di Milano, April 2019 and July 2021-Supervisor D.Chizzoniti].
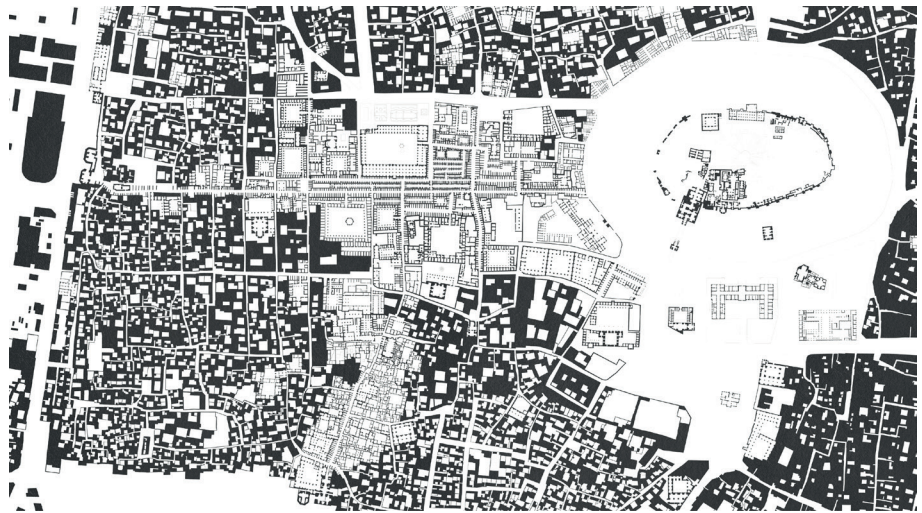

Destroyed | 1,690 buildings
Severe damage | 3,241 buildings
Negligible, Minor, Major damage | 9,455 buildings

Fig. 3
The city of Aleppo before the destruction due to the civil war.
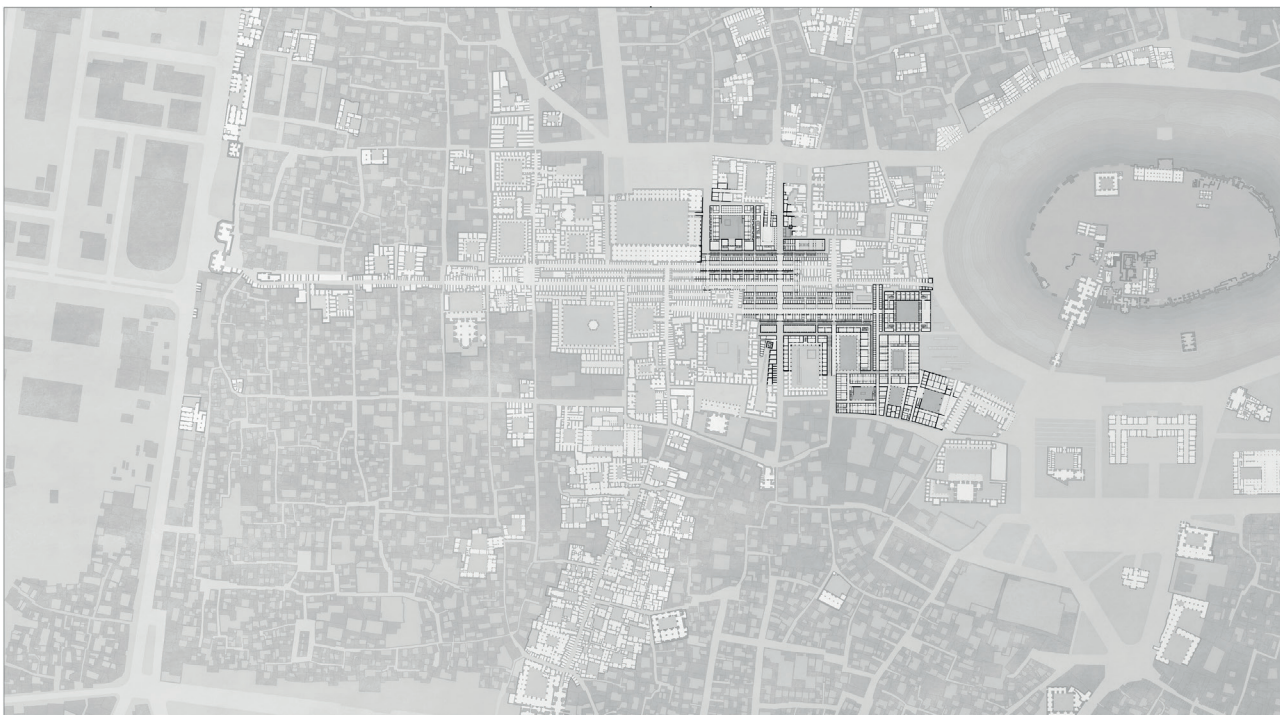[Davolio - Master Degree Thesis , Politecnico di Milano, April 2019, Supervisor D.Chizzoniti].

Fig. 4
The revival of some invariances: the linear structure of the souk and the courtyards.
[Gugunava - Sozuneri - Master Degree Thesis , Politecnico di Milano, December 2018, Supervisor D.Chizzoniti].
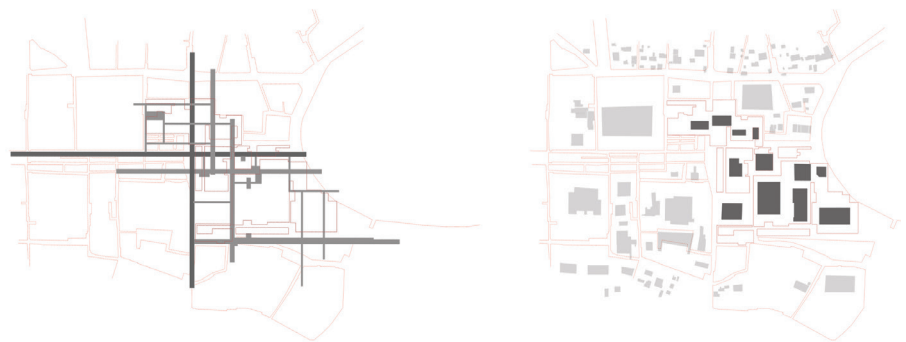

left by the bombings around the Great Mosque, a building traditionally surrounded by public and collective activities able to offer a high rate of interaction between the different social activities. With the recent episodes of war this system has been compromised, and it has therefore been necessary to rethink it through the insertion of new complementary activities (from some sectors linked to the production of local handicrafts to workshops for arts and crafts directly related to the reconstruction) in an attempt to reconstruct the necessary complexity starting from the same elementary arrangement of elements that characterized the original version of the Urban Bazaar system (Fig. 4). Another aspect concerns the reiteration of certain typological "invariances" which maintain a constant arrangement with a variable function: the combination of the fixed arrangement of the central space of the madrasa, combined with adjoining student housing units, similar to a religious college through the interposition of four Iwans built in the middle of each courtyard front, thus producing a cruciform arrangement in contrast to the continuous flow of the space of the traditional prayer hall; the evolution of the traditional sequence of the hammam (public bath) which by monumental adoption of the sequence of the thermal rooms of Roman origin (calidarium, tiepidarium, frigidarium) reinvents an exclusive sociality in the ritual of ablution.

Thus, in the hypothesis of reconstruction, these attempts take on the theme of continuous functional contamination as an antidote to type-morphological undifferentiation, in an attempt to exorcise the tendency underway in a large part of the glossy architectural culture that superimposes the neutrality of form on the complexity of the program of activities (Figs. 5-9).

Fig. 5
The project for the Aleppo souk.
[Davolio - Master Degree Thesis , Politecnico di Milano, April 2019, Supervisor D.Chizzoniti].
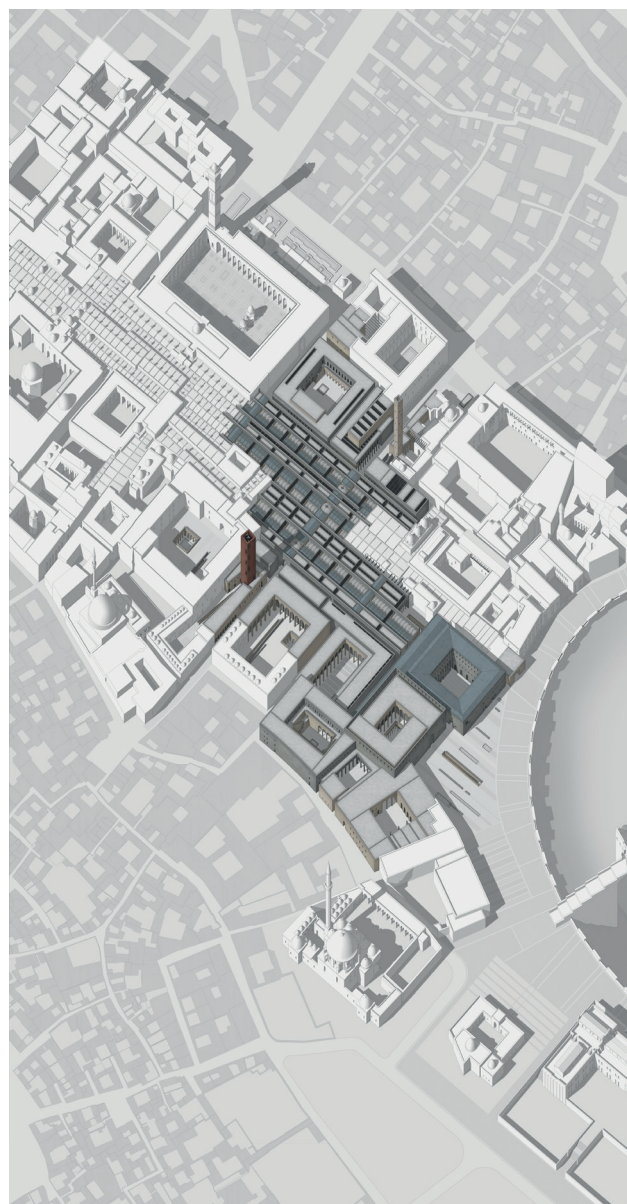
Fig. 6
The project for the Aleppo souk, axonometry.
[Davolio - Master Degree Thesis , Politecnico di Milano, April 2019, Supervisor D.Chizzoniti].
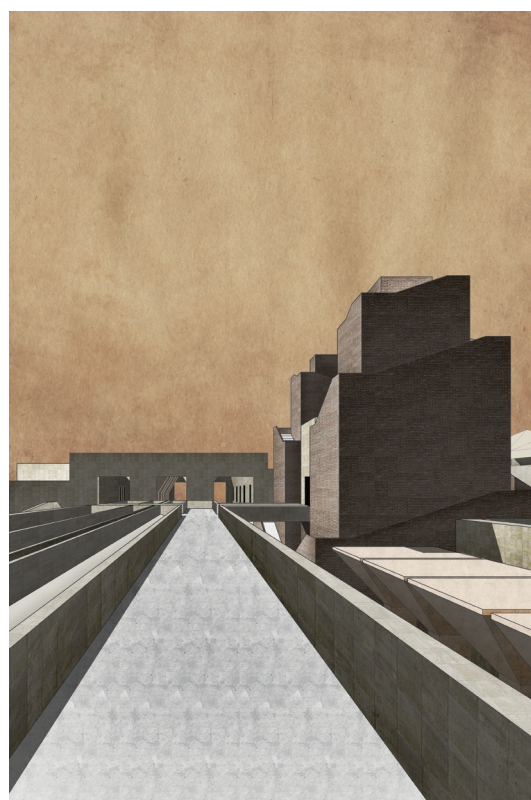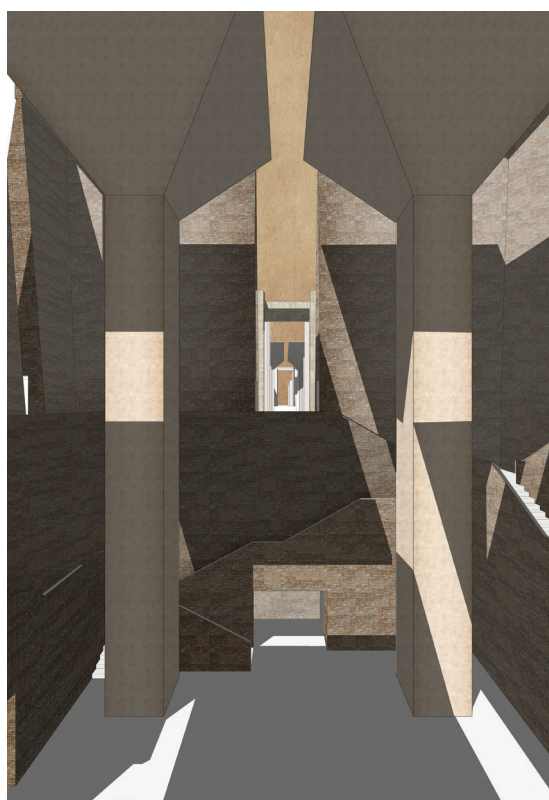
Figs. 7-8-9
The project for the Aleppo souk, urban sections; views.
[Gugunava - Sozuneri - Master Degree Thesis , Politecnico di Milano, December 2018, Supervisor D.Chizzoniti].

City and figuration

Finally, the fourth point concerns the overcoming of the rewriting process, the figurative nature of the work of art, from the single architectural artefact to the most basic artefact produced by visual language. This nature is linked to memory, which has inspired both content and formal aspects. While the pure science of the image, and in particular the theory of the figurative act, moves in the direction of recognising the autonomy of artistic data, contemporary aesthetics continues to stiffen figuration as an act of artistic volition in the aseptic fixity of its perfection, regardless of the conditions of the surrounding environment. In other words, it is a question of restoring to figuration its autonomous vitality and the authority of its action, the one that was originally typical of the myth of art and that the imperative of reason has emptied of its incisiveness and fertility.

It would therefore be necessary to remove figuration from this paradoxical destiny of pure anesthetization and to regain its original prerogatives, thus creating a wider experimental domain for the project. In a historical succession, the permanence of symbolic elements has interacted positively with artistic and architectural achievements. In the absence of admissible and direct references, the culture of architectural design has always revealed its own critical value which, beyond direct sources, is advanced by experimental approaches that place the question of transformation on a less empirical level, let us say more inductive, aimed at a possible interpretation of presence as a finding, and its idealization as an absence. It is not just a question of physical and material absence.

Above all, it is an apparent presence, when the physical absence is synonymous with a missing aspect related to culture, identity, tradition and society. At this specific juncture, design has a concrete role in trying to make these absences not only apparent but also present, bringing the project back to a conceptual threshold, restoring a form of critical awareness in the relationship between the artefact and the new construction. This second aspect is more related to a certain creative, experimental attitude, and therefore particularly fruitful than the deductions of simple conservation, invoking a more complex approach that relies on design action aimed at enhancing not only the individual finding? but the entire context. What is the significance in this experience of regenerating the concept of absence? It is a hypothesis that moves from a metaphorical reconstruction, not similar but possible, in which the constituent elements are recognized allegorically, without simulating established philological truths, but rather authentic interpretations of meanings restored in a conceptual key. It is a procedure in which architectural design plays a central role in moving the plan from the claim of objectivity to that of a possible interpretative action that, case by case, induces the project to give new meanings and values to the single proposal.

Along these lines, and in a completely experimental way, another circumstance of work has made it possible to verify 'case by case' the opportunity to interact with a tragically extraordinary context such as that of the city of Mosul in Iraq. Lying on the Tigris River, the city faces the ruins of the Assyrian empire of Nineveh (Fig. 10), an archaeological park on the opposite bank of the river, in an area that was regularly flooded, creating a damp and very fertile soil. These two polarities have conditioned the urban form by identifying from the beginning the opposite banks of the river, the right bank with Nineveh and the left bank with the Old City, as autonomous and independent elements. The total area of the Old City is

Fig. 10
The city of Mosul and the contrast with Nineveh.

Fig. 11
The strategic project for Mosul (from left to right: a center for education, the central mosque, the reconstruction of a portion of the Souq and the Citadel museum).

about 250 hectares and consists of 251 'mahala' districts on both sides of the Tigris. Its location at the crossroads of important trade routes and the heterogeneity of its culture have promoted this centre as one of the most important in the Islamic world. The old city is extremely rich in historical buildings such as mosques, churches, monasteries and schools and the famous citadel.

Mohannad has tears in his eyes, his wife Marwa tries to console him and together they set off to see their house, abandoned more than a year ago to seek shelter in the eastern part of the city, liberated by the Iraqi army in January 2017, many months before the end of the July battle. Thankfully, our little house was not razed to the ground. With some renovation work we could live there again. But we don't have the money and the government is not planning to rebuild either the basic infrastructure or private homes20 (Bellingreri, 2008).

Unlike Aleppo, the strategy adopted set up intervention hypotheses on some specific points of the historic centre as a consolidation and reconstruction of its essential activities (Fig. 11). The reconstruction has privileged a point-based strategy around some of the city's central nodes: the ancient Citadel, the old part of the Suq and a few blocks from the great al-Nuri Mosque, of which only part of the entrance door and the dome remain; even of the famous leaning minaret, the city's symbol, only the base remains intact (Fig. 12). The mosque reconstruction project starts from the assumption that, once an asset has been deliberately destroyed, it is quite problematic to think of adopting a 'where it was as it was' strategy to rebuild it in its original form. On the contrary, the methodological approach adopted envisages the assumption of some complex elements regarding a critical reconstruction, both from a typological and figurative point of view, starting also from some urban facts related to the reconstruction process and based on the analysis of the settlement structure of the city and the specificity of the site.

Therefore, for the reconstruction of the Al-Nuri complex, the gap between the original urban entity and the trace of the surviving fragments is considered as a possible opening to contemplate the option of a critical reconstruction in which new activities and functions are placed within

Fig. 12
The mosque in its post-war state of destruction.

Fig. 13
*UNESCO International Competition for the reconstruction of the Al Nuri Mosque, plan.
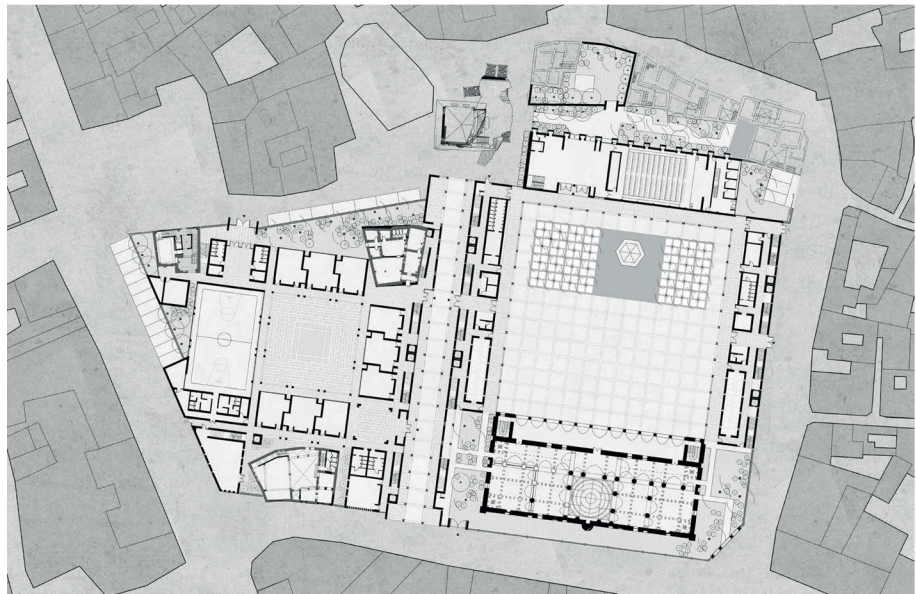
the physiological transformation of the whole complex. Following this methodological line, the project foresees the introduction of new structures and activities starting from the preservation of the morphological character of this specific context mainly characterized by a sequence of full and empty spaces as closed intervals in the organization of introverted spaces and cohort urban continuum of the historical city.

The proposed complex consists of a set of educational, public, and religious facilities organized according to a hierarchical system of courtyards. On a compositional level, the relationship of the orthogonal volumes with the existing buildings mediates between the monumental contrast of the worship building and the sought-after congruity with the forms of the surrounding urban fabric. The new structure confirms in an interpretative key the density that produces the typical figure-background relationships of the existing urban structure. The fringes between old and new structures are mitigated through the green system. The teaching facilities are housed in the western block organized on a two-story building where the common areas, classrooms and administrative offices are arranged around a courtyard capable of enhancing the emptiness of the collective space as the fulcrum of the composition of the different volumes. On the western side of the area there is a building for sports activities which houses spaces for different types of indoor activities. A system of paths at different heights allows free circulation of the entire complex, emphasizing the sense of unity between the different functions housed. The existing structures are gathered around the school structure, housing the library and cafeteria, while remaining structurally distinct from the rest. The entire educational complex is divided from the eastern block by a multi-level open pathway, a large Stoà evoking the way the monumental colonnade adapted and transitioned into the structure of the Suq. The elements are organized by a sequence of retail spaces arranged within an alleyway that acts as foreshortening and leads towards the monumental ruins of the existing minaret.

The Mosque is at the heart of the project. The proposal was conceived as a major rewriting of the essential layout of the building destroyed by bombing so that the priority objective was a critical reconstruction in reinterpreting the existing parts preserved with scrupulous care in redefining through a clear perception of separation between the new spaces designed and those recovered. Conceptually, the design actions tend to enhance the presence of
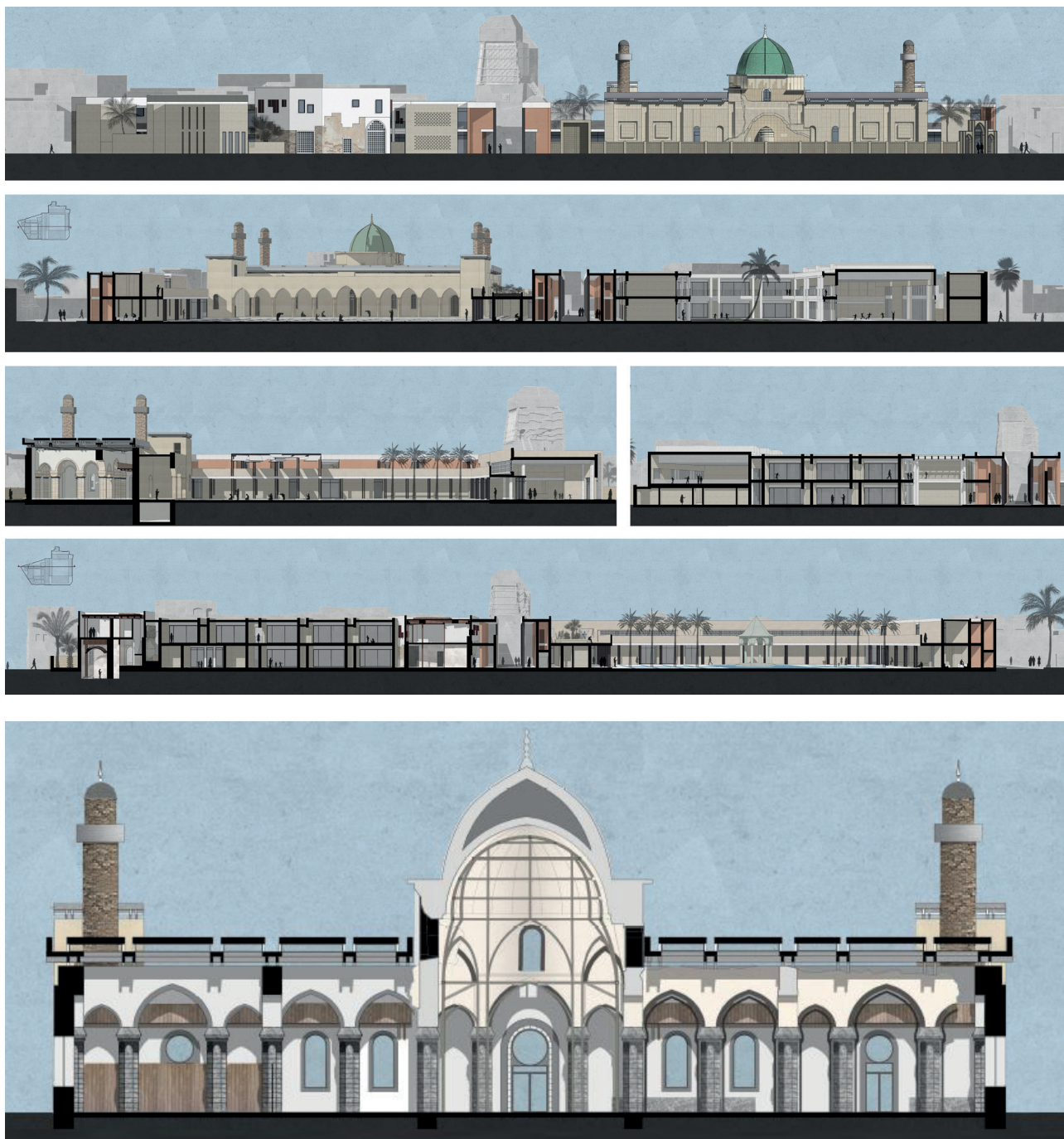
Figs. 14-15
*UNESCO International Competition for the reconstruction of the Al Nuri Mosque, sections and elevations; section on the mosque building.

Fig. 16
*UNESCO International Competition for the reconstruction of the Al Nuri Nuri Mosque, bird's eye view of the complex.

Fig. 17
*UNESCO International Competition for the reconstruction of the Al Nuri Mosque, view of the Al Hadba minaret.

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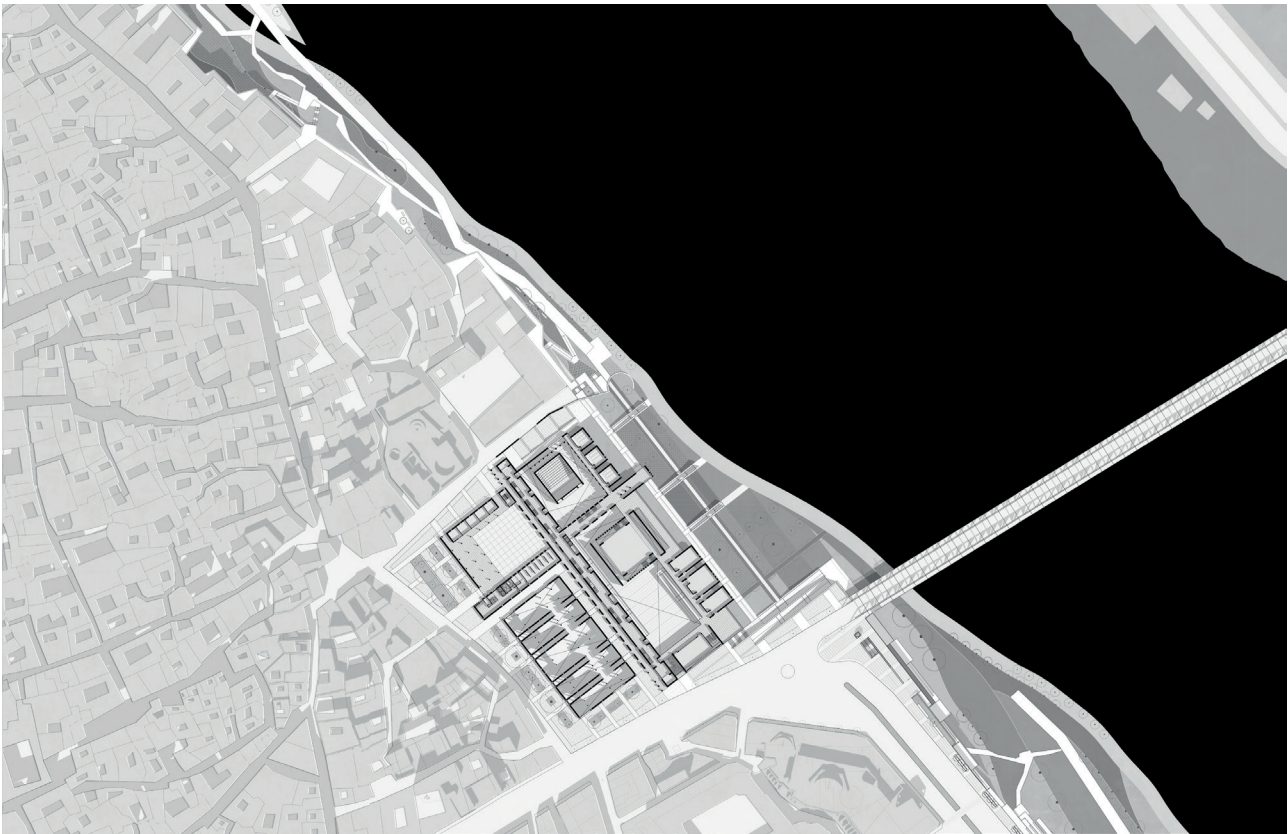
Fig. 18
Citadel Museum, floor plan.
Dogari - Bello Melo - Master
Degree Thesis , Politecnico di
Milano, July 2021-Supervisor
D.Chizzoniti].

the monumental architectural relics that survived the bombings (the main body of the mosque, the large prayer hall, the central dome, the colonnade behind towards the garden, the ablution pavilion) through a perennially conceptual structure that places the relationship between the historical presence and the new intervention not in terms of opposition, but as a discretely composed unity, where the composite whole of different eras is revealed. The design of the greenery has been conceived according to two distinct principles. The concept of the Islamic Garden was revisited and used as the theme of the large prayer courtyard. It has been interpreted as a forest of date palms growing among a dense network of water channels flowing towards a central basin. In this basin is the monument surrounded by waterspouts. The other green areas were conceived as shady gardens where one could protect oneself from the hot climate, to find in prayer the tranquillity necessary for contemplation and meditation. The garden of Al Nuri's tomb was conceived as a special episode, a "hortus conclusus" capable of enhancing the symbolic role of the founder's tomb.

In this sense, the value of the project is linked to the recognition of the deepest sense of the place, the context, the city, through the authentic enhancement of all the components of the architectural space, giving a concrete meaning to the figuration, as iconographic substance, and as iconological value. In such cases, the role of architectural design is also to preserve absence by creating new conditions for the affirmation of authentic ideas. The basic idea behind this thesis is to operationally reconstruct the relationship between narrative structure - capable of representing absence, what was and is now only present as memory - and architecture.

Figs. 19-20-21
Citadel Museum, elevation from the Tigris River; sections; axonometric cross section.
[Dogari - Bello Melo - Master Degree Thesis , Politecnico di Milano, July 2021-Supervisor D.Chizzoniti].
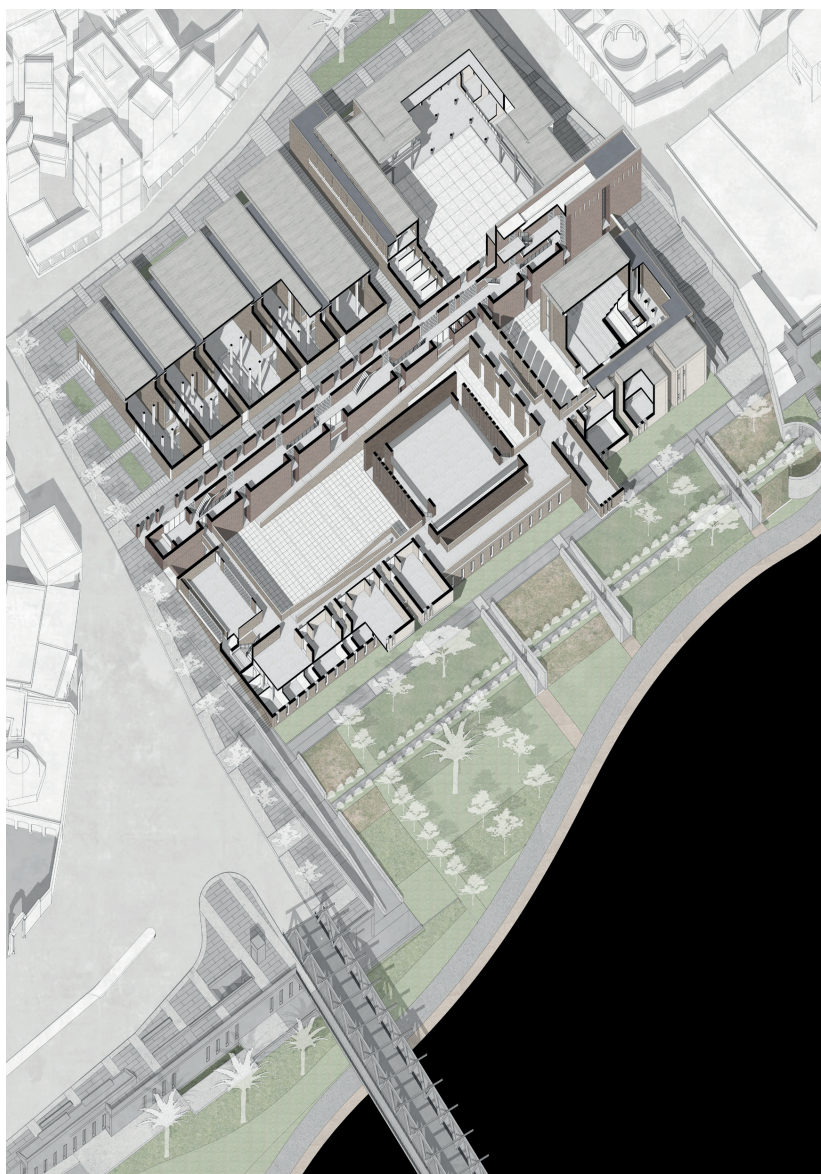
Notes

[1] Palimpsest, a term adopted by Swiss professor André Corboz from medieval parchments, which were scraped and rewritten several times, but on which traces of the past remained. André Corboz, Il territorio come palinsesto in Casabella no. 516, September 1985, pp.22-27.

[2] The procedures of generative grammar suggest that a written text, and more generally any syntagmatic element, a union of meaning and signifier, can be transformed into a second syntagmatic element, starting from a critical reorganisation of the units of which it is composed. This critical process is called rewriting. The same happens in architecture when the criterion of revitalisation prevails over the exclusive criterion of conservation of the historical artefact. That is, when an act of transformation (re-construction, re-forming, re-organisation, etc.) is the result of a critical re-elaboration of the formal characteristics belonging to something previous.

[3] Marcel Poète, Introduzione all'urbanistica, Einaudi, Torino 1958; Pierre Lavedan, Geographie des villes, Gallimard, Paris, 1959; Aldo Rossi, Architettura della città, Marsilio, Padua, 1969.

[4] Recognising Dedalo's patronage of architecture is a fact linked to the profound structure of the creative experience of the project. Daedalus proposes to sensitively experience the difficulties of the labyrinth through the body in space. The same wisdom of Theseus moves in the labyrinth the thread that would have saved him from the intriguing mesh of the unexplored paths.

[5] Renè Thom, Predire n'est pas expliquer, Flammarion, Paris, 1991, p. 132.

[6] Manfredo Tafuri, Il frammento, la "figura", il gioco. Carlo Scarpa e la cultura architettonica italiana, in F. Dal Co, G. Mazzariol (eds.), Carlo Scarpa. Opera Completa, Electa, Milan, 1984, pp.72-95.

[7] Quote written by the Latin grammarian and commentator Servius Marius Honoratus (4th-5th century AD) at the end of the Aeneid.

[8] See, Francoise Choay, Le città. Utopias and realities, 2 vols., Einaudi, Turin 1973; Lewis Mumford, La città nella storia, Castelvecchi, Rome, 2013; Adriano Olivetti, Città dell'uomo, Einaudi, Turin, 2001.

[9] In the documentary "Pasolini e la forma della città", broadcast on 07/02/1974, the writer and director Pier Paolo Pasolini explains to Ninetto Davoli the reasons why he chose to film the town of Orte with his camera to comment on the theme "the shape of the city"

[10] Roberto Chiesi, La realtà violata. Annotazioni su Pasolini e... La forma della città (1973-74), "Libero. La rivista del documentario", no. 4, 2006,

[11] Henri Lefebvre, Urbain (L'), in Id., Le retour de la dialectique. 12 mots clefs pour le monde moderne, Messidor, Paris 1986, p. 160.

[12] These different notions designate the double tendency of social space towards concentration and (peripheral) extension. All this is independent of the concrete urban reality, which is so multiform that it is impossible to establish authenticity: "city" is "civitas", linked to a Sanskrit root, while "urbe", is probably linked to "orbis", in an inclusive sense; "polis" is linked with the Sanskrit "pur", in the sense of fortress; but there are also the Germanic "stad", enclosures and fortresses such as "town" and "grad".

[13] Henri Lefebvre, Space and Politics. The Right to the City II, Ombre Corte, Verona 2014.

[14] David Harvey, Rebel Cities. Urban movements from the Paris Commune to Occupy Wall Street, Il saggiatore, Milan, 2013.

[15] Salvatore Settis, Come è bella la città di qualità, in "Il Sole 24 ore", Sunday 3 June 2018.

[16] Richard Sennett, Il declino dell'uomo pubblico, Bompiani, Milan,1982, p.136.

[17] See Walter Benjamin, *Il dramma barocco tedesco*, Einaudi, Turin, 1999.

[18] See Guido Canella, Conservazione, Restauro, Rivitalizzazione, Reversibilità, in Ananke, no. 38, March 2003, pp.101-104.

[19] See Ernesto N. Rogers, *Il problema del costruire nelle preesistenze ambientali* (The problem of building in environmental pre-existences), report given to the Comitato Nazionale di Studi dell'INU chaired by Prof. Giuseppe Samonà, Rome 23 March 1957 and published in *Esperienza dell'architettura*, Einaudi, Turin, 1958, pp. 311-316.

[20] See Marta Bellingreri, *Questa è una città dove la gente vive*, (This is a city where

people live), in Panorama, no. 32, July 2008... Still in the old city, the great church of the Dominican Friars, Our Lady of the Hour, which also houses a convent and a large library, is partially destroyed: for three years its underground level and crypt were used as a military training camp; militants from all over the Middle East, indeed from all over the world, slept there. Finally, the great pride of the citizens who study archaeology and art history, here is the old Jewish quarter of Mosul, already in decline over the last sixty years, after the departure of many Jews from Mosul to Baghdad or Israel. In the half-destroyed and abandoned houses one can clearly recognise the characters of the Hebrew language, engraved on the walls and also on the structure of the Synagogue. «This ancient synagogue was the subject of my dissertation», says Laila Salih, a Baghdad University graduate in archaeology. «We have to do everything to preserve it». Together with fellow geologist Faisal Jaber, they have been trying to monitor monuments and archaeological areas in and around Mosul since the first months of the liberation. «Until churches and mosques, synagogue and historical houses are restored, Mosul cannot come back to life. The history of Mosul and the tolerance, multi-confessionalism and openness of its inhabitants is written on these walls, not on the blood that was shed on the banks of the Tigris», says Jaber, who lived abroad for years and has now returned to take care of his decimated city.

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