

the Catalan architect Sert, who was an exile in Harvard. He constructed it for the American embassy in the sixties, and it was abandoned when both countries broke their diplomatic relationships.

The concrete walls, barricades, bunkers and reinforced cement walls which have deformed and destroyed the landscape of Baghdad, proliferate in the "green zone" as well. This is a city completely divorced from the outer world which tries to act as the capital city of the former Mesopotamia and dominate the "red zone", as all other neighborhoods in Baghdad are called.

I would like to see Sert's building because it is one of the few architectural works (from those constructed in the middle of the twentieth century to embellish the city), which have suffered no damage and can still be visited, at least from a distance. First it was King Faisal II and later Saddam Hussein: they encouraged ambitious projects to modernize Baghdad, after the end of the British colonial control and after the Baath Party's coup d' tat, respectively. Great international architects were asked for important works: Le Corbusier for a stadium, Walter Gropius for a university campus, Gio Ponti for a ministry, Constantinos Doxiadis for a residential neighborhood, Ricardo Bofill for a large mosque. Le Corbusier's stadium is still open but the Planning Ministry is in ruins and the ideal city designed by Doxiadis became Sadr City, where the poor are packed into their living places. The project of Bofill for a grand mosque was never constructed. That time of Baghdad, city of mirages, city of modern architectural works, was the time when literature and the arts flourished, the time when Iraqi painters were highly valued and excellent magazines of avant-garde poetry were published.

It's been a long time since the restaurants of the Abu Nauas Street were closed. That was the most pleasant street in the city, with its restaurants in the banks of the Tigris river, where the typical fish was served (the river carp or *masguf*, which the clients chose from the jets to fry in the wooden fire), and the old cafes between the eucalyptus trees where people used to play *trictrac* or backgammon. I remember the joy of that street in my first voyage to Baghdad... the end.

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URBANISM IN BAGHDAD BEFORE THE PLANNING: A CODIFICATION BETWEEN THE FATES OF THE ARBITRARY AND URGENT NEEDS (1920 – 1950)

Caecilia Pieri

This text seeks to recall the milestone stages which led to the structuring of Baghdad's urban fabric between those two inflection points that were the beginning of the British mandate, in 1920, and the creation of the Development Board (*Majlis al a'mar*) in 1950 : the first one because it opens, out of all regulatory frame, a kind of expansion and urban layout new to Baghdad, that adapts itself to the profile and needs of a colonial strategy; the second one because it matched the firsts overall 'modern' planning attempts which led to an international consultation. Thanks to those two events, an arbitrary regulation has given Baghdad that look of a low and regular Garden city it still offers in the city centre. Green, spotted with eucalyptus and palm trees, this monochromatic urban entity, where the brick dominates the scene, is not well-known, because it has been built mainly by unknown builders, and, paradoxically, it has been preserved quite well up until now from the mass destruction known by most large Arab capitals over the last thirty years².

We will also show some elements of a contextualization necessary in order to appreciate what was taking shape just before 1950, the date chosen for this exhibition –such events, which were quite complex due to the myriad breaking-offs that reoriented the path to modernity, had made urban politics and the history of politics intimately coincide in a region of crucial geopolitical coordinates, for Iraq as well as for the covetousness that it raises-.

BEFORE 1917: BETWEEN SOCIOCLIMATIC DATA AND SPATIAL-FUNCTIONAL COERCIVE FACTS, A TRADITIONAL URBAN LANDSCAPE.

At a nodal cross between the Tigris and the Euphrates, Baghdad is located over a potential partial floodplain. The supremacy of this river which divides it, like a heart, in two unequal parts, represents a constant concern because devastating floods regularly swept a native habitat of adobe along its way. 'Ville menac e'³ (Vaumas 1962), Baghdad has therefore protected itself by partially spreading along the right bank, sticking out slightly into the river (Al Karkh neighbourhood)

and erecting, to the east of the left bank (Rusafa), equally inefficient dams.

At the start of the XX century, Baghdad is still nothing more than the district head of one of the three Ottoman *vilayet* of Mesopotamia. Hamlet of about 100,000 inhabitants, it offers the appearance of a traditional *medina*, that is, a *zuqaq*—or conglomeration of stacked rooms—crossed by a labyrinth of narrow and winding alleys with a three-level hierarchy of main avenues, secondary streets and alleys. Till 1915, a unique street a little bit larger waved parallel to the river (An Nahar street, lengthened in 1910), but it was the Tigris which constituted the sole cross traffic axis and it could only be crossed from east to west through two bridges made from ships: one between Rusafa and Karkh, which represents the central core of the city, and another one, about five kilometres upstream, that separates Kadhimiya and Adhamiya, two small towns grown around both sanctuaries. Adhamiya, on the left bank, venerates Abu Hanifa's sanctuary, founder of the Sunni-Hanafite rite; in front of it, on the opposite bank, towers the sanctuary of the seventh and eighth Shiite imams, under the two golden domes of Kadhimiya's mosque whose silhouette has belonged to the town's customary iconography since the XVI century.

The basic element of this ultra-dense urban fabric is a local variant of a central courtyard (*hosh*) house, an introverted habitat of solid brick walls which directly faces the street. A house with one sole access door. At this room's level, closed around a family cell with an interdependent privacy, the street façade is decorated with *shanshils*; these carved wood projections, with railings and windows often rounded, which are used to filter light, heat and views from the outside, but also to air, extend and normalize the space of the reception rooms⁴, in comparison to the *zuqaq*,.

Between 1869 and 1872, governor Midhat Pacha, an Ottoman reformer imbued of European culture, partially demolished the city walls and opened a first entrance at Karkh for the tram drawn by horses⁵ but a new regulation is disclosed without a real future and the urban expansion remains contained within the ancient influence. From 1915-1917, German engineers⁶ open, between the North Door and the South Door, the first big street called 'New Street' (today Rachid Street) parallel to the river course. However, the kick off for the first phase of a modern urban expansion won't take place till the launch of the British mandate administration.

BAGHDAD 'GETS OUT OF ITS WALLS': THE BRITISH MANDATE, OR HOW TO ADAPT A COLONIAL STRATEGY TO THE IRAQI SINGULARITY

In the months after their entrance to Baghdad, in March 1917, the British built a dam under the directions of hydraulics engineer Sir William Willcocks. This way they prepared the ground for an urban expansion that would serve as a frame and an experimental ground for their takeover of the country by way of a political configuration which wasn't straightforward. Since the Sykes-Picot agreements in 1916⁸, relations between Arabs and Europeans are, effectively, marked by negotiations, counter-negotiations and other sudden changes revolving around multiple power struggles induced by the breaking of the Ottoman Empire. Finally, after a violent Arab uprising in 1920, a local temporary government, pragmatically settled in Iraq by the British, elected Fayçal of Arabia in 1921 (thirty-ninth descendant of the Prophet) as king of a country whose borders recover, more or less, those of ancient Mesopotamia.

Under a mandate supposedly guiding it to independence, that kingdom is, nevertheless, sovereign on paper, and the Iraqis quickly show themselves hostile even to the idea of the mandate. The British wanted to give a particular air to the erection of Baghdad, capital of this 'newly' reunified country, as a symbol of this singular 'new institutional and political distribution' (Lavagne d'Ortigue); urbanism and architecture want to show themselves as 'vectors and mirrors of the power, incentives of the economy and means of social control, even societal' (Pieri 2005). Since the end of the year 1921, two additional objectives are imposed: the political resolution over the control of the existing town and the formal modernization through an innovative town, in its morphology as well as its functionality.

The British mandate inaugurates via an urban expanse *ex nihilo* the opening of the first site which would become Baghdad: 'The British are used to stretch their military field, their administrative services and their residences over large expanses of land, clearly different to the areas taken up by the locals' (Vaumas 1962). New axes are traced, others are lengthened to unite strategic points and make them accessible to carriages: the consulate (A), which will stay at Sinak till the fitting-out of a new residence at Karkh in 1931, the clubs (B), those temples of British socialization, the airfields (C) and the railway workshops (D), vital for the links, and finally the Hinaidi military headquarters (E), unofficial embassy which held most of the political decisions.

The state initiates the construction of the first mass developments, linear ground floor housing or two-level homes,

always with a central patio. In either bank of the Tigris, to the east along the A-B axis and then following the river bank, an urban draughtboard, woven of straight streets and a 'clearly visible layout even before the houses are built'⁹ is developed, in a series of steps, at the end of the 20's. In these rectilinear streets, the *shanashil*, which has become essentially decorative, tends to open itself up as a colonnade-type *verandah* and the faade livens up with balconies and openings which gradually grow in number. The importation of this new urbanism starts to reorient the notion of family privacy (Raouf 1985) as it intervenes within the interior/exterior relationship. It is the end of the traditional single-model habitat of Baghdad, 'expression of the social organization of their inhabitants, that happily illustrated the material and spiritual demands common to the Arab family, in its role of repository of an ancient social tradition' (Al Ashab 1974); as the house opens up to the exterior, the inhabitant evolves as well, as he does not remain as closed off or protected from the street. Iraqi historiography is not wrong in this sense, when it generally sees in this phase the first significant modernisation '  l'occidentale' within a previously uninterrupted socio-urban process.

Although little or no destruction took place within the old quarter, there was an innovation: the British endeavour to number neighbourhoods (*mahallas*) and houses. For the first time, every room has a one-off address if it belongs to an identified neighbourhood, most of the time due to a tribal regrouping (Coke 1927). The country's modernization involves the rationalization of the urban space through regulations alien to local customs, authentic formatting that also, and over all, gives the social body some control. Over and above its image value, the urban planning plays therefore a capital role within the provision of a colonial space, as a product and a socio-political strategic or interactive tool (Crimson 2003).

GARDEN-CITY, NEW REGULAR CITY: RADICAL MUTATION OF URBAN MODEL, RISKS OF THE ARBITRARY

It is bizarre to find out that the breaking-off of urban culture traces the historical breaking-offs, even in Baghdad, where the modelling of the urban space is, from the start, an exclusive prerogative of the central power. Notwithstanding, it is not an accident that an urban regulation of great importance took place close to independence, declared in October 1932. In a capital that has become a powerful focus of attention particularly due to the oil peak since 1927, a legislation needs to be imposed: the fast expansion is the result of a conquest of new

land for development subsequent to the removal of the flooding threat, a growing internal migratory pressure whose control represents a major political bet for the current powers, and, finally, by the administrative unification (unification of Rusafa and Karkh forming a unique municipality). A law takes control in 1931, but it will soon expire, because it keeps the principle of division in *mahallas*, which left every *mukhtar* (head of *mahalla*) free to apply his own rules, and the urban expansion remains initially slowed down by that traditional cut. Whereas, the migratory flux intensifies particularly due to a rural exodus occurring at this time¹⁰ and, finally, a law is enacted in June 1935: it is the Building and Road Law (n  44, *Iraqi Official Gazette*).

The introduction of this law marks a crucial change of direction in the origin of the image that is currently shown in the centre of all big Iraqi cities, redesigned during the same period, due to its codification of the residential space: the layout of its streets, its buildings' heights, building licenses, etc. A crucial change which is arbitrary and generates new urban and architectural forms at the same time; therefore it brings in new practices in town.

It rests upon some essential principles: zoning, ratio of road routes according to the zone types, alignment (*istiq ma*) in length and height, division of plots in six different sizes, from 100 m² to 2,000 m². The nature of the zone is stated according to the plots' predominant type as well as the coefficient of roads and public equipments allocated; every municipality is free to adapt the law to its territory, as long as it respects the basic principles. In this sense, for example, it constitutes an obligation to ascribe a minimum length of six metres to main roads, four metres to secondary ones, and three metres to *cul-de-sacs*¹¹, projecting shapes are banned in plots of sizes 1 and 2, or not spreading beyond and over the public road leads in many cases to the disappearance of the traditional *zuqaq* when that municipality decides to redesign a neighbourhood. Equally, the owner who wants to fit out or renovate his asset is often forced to transfer part of the land to the State or to acquire some more so that the property becomes correctly lined up. As no real compensation is planned for the former case, and no loan is granted *ad hoc* for the last one, the consequence was swift to come, and it represented a determining factor for the city fabric up until nowadays: many owners leave their traditional homes to move to the new neighbourhoods with regular plots of land and lengthy avenues bursting with detached or semi-detached homes. Besides, by establishing regulations for the ground occupation coefficient and setback in relation to the street, the law urges new buyers to displace their homes within the plot, favouring gardens, the

opening of windows and leaving the *hosh* aside in the interest of the covered central hall. The city centre will become impoverished because the old houses are rented to new occupants, typically emigrants that have come from all over the country attracted by the capital: peasants that have left the South or the arid central land, Kurdish and Turkmenish highlanders. Right then, the home with *shanashil* undergoes a socio-functional transformation that gives its actual looks to a whole part of the city core: whole families live crammed at the upper level while at the ground floor small stores, wholesaler's and workshops are settled.

At Rusafa's heart, more to the east but always parallel to the Tigris, a second way is opened between 1936 and 1937: the King Ghazi Street (nowadays Kifah Street). The principle of urbanism on concrete piles is imported from Europe over a distance of more than three kilometres, and, probably, via colonial models¹² with buildings of one or two levels with a double function: accommodation upstairs and stores in the ground floor. But here again, no general layout. Real razing, this street prompted the demolition of ancient homes without redesigning the traditional 'organic' fabric: right after the porticos and the buildings with *brise-soleil* appear false doors, rounded bows and other thick balconies of a first and shy international modernism, the secret homes with *shanashil* remain upright in their narrow and somber alleys¹³.

THE QUESTION OF MODEL: A SUSPENDED DEBATE

Generally speaking, the Iraqi historiography is not soft with this law, considered as 'extremely mechanical [...] and a good reflection of the lack of expertise that characterized Iraq in those days, as well as the bureaucratic arbitrariness with which the State handled urban issues' (Raouf 1985). We oppose this modern roads layout, uselessly wide and expensive in maintenance and transports, to the traditional urbanism, the same way we oppose this new habitat, vulnerable to heat and others' eyes, to the home with *shanashil* whose undeniable climatic and aesthetic virtues allow an idealization of tie-dye nostalgia. This line of argument, otherwise acceptable, has to be however replaced within the wider context of the modernity/tradition debate, which covers, among others, the model question, the westernization/modernization and the exported urban planning, the interaction between local initiatives and the persistent colonial interferences (after independence, British are still widely dominant within the local economy), the status of the individual in relation to the group, where the collective privacy/individualization of the space comes from, etc.

From my side, I am tempted to equally see there, *mutatis mutandis*, (and with all the nuances enforced, specially taking into account those forty years out of step) an effect comparable to the one the *tanzimat* could have had in other capitals. If we take, for example, the new urban regulations enforced in 1891 in Beirut, we can recognize those principles of land classification in various arbitrary sizes or forced alignments in relation to an imposed street length, and this redefinition of the territory that reaches the limit among private space, public space and collective space becomes apparent as a misappropriation of the public prerogatives over the private property. In relation to the *cul-de-sacs*, for example, basic element for the *zuqaq*: in Baghdad, as in Beirut, those changes simultaneously show a radical will of transformation and renewal from the side of the central power, and its clash with the traditional city practices. 'This regulation, widely inspired by the west [...] tackles the question from a purely technical angle, as only the length of the streets seems to be a determinant parameter' (Ghorayeb 2000). Nevertheless, at the end, the theoretical result would be to remove the *cul-de-sacs* due to the imposed widening and to strip the inhabitants of this space management'. We are in both cases, and even though the topography of both cities is completely different, faced up to an extremely regulated urbanism that 'creates a clear breaking-off with the former way of space production, that was based on differing concepts' (*ditto*).

RIGHT BEFORE THE 50'S, AN EXACERBATING URBAN DICHOTOMY

A fourth way parallel to the Tigris, Sheikh Omar Street, is traced in 1944, at the limit between the inhabited zones and the urban areas of waste ground under the ancient influence. But that does not mean that a global plan is considered¹⁴. To the contrary, tensions grow between different zones and urban practices: within the core of the historic quarter, often impoverished, the old remain in favour of the *shanashil*; in the outskirts¹⁵, the new villas are detached or not, counting out the *sarifat*¹⁶. This division, which nurtures the threat of a dichotomy close to implosion, is also a phenomenon that Baghdad shares with other big ex-colonial capitals. The areas that attract the different local bourgeois strata are from now on structured, in effect, depending on their adaptation skills to new determining factors, essentially, socio-economic: 'The denominational segregation cracks up and the Christians start coming to live side by side with the Muslims, something unthinkable in preceding times in the ancient Baghdad. [...] well-off populations of all

denominations move from their old, very diverse *mahallas* [...]. For the first time, the traditional groups are incorporated within the same group, and it is this phenomenon that is reflected in a new urban development scheme.' (Al Ashab 1974). On the other hand, the denominational and tribal factors remain predominant in underprivileged neighbourhoods, more widespread and densely populated by emigrants pushed into the limits of the urbanised world, joining the spiral of an aggressive urban 'modernization', not harmonious, and choked by the frights of an up-and-coming active nationalism and an ardent political instability¹⁷: all that already foretells the third world.

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The town planners –the agency of Minoprio, Spencely and McFarlane (United Kingdom), and then Konstantin Doxiadis (Greece)– then had to confront a contrasting, potentially explosive situation when they were summoned by the Development Board from 1952 onwards to conceive the first real master plans. However, after the last big floodings of the Tigris in 1954, the erosion of the Wadi Tharthar depression and the construction of Samarra's reservoir (1956) upstream from Baghdad, it was possible to be optimistic with regard to how the river control would mark the kick-off of an urban peak definitively clean of its main physical threat. But the growing political state of unrest of the 50's, which would end in the revolution of 14th of July, 1958, will make these plans outdated. It will be necessary to wait for the PolService and the 1970's to see a specific start of siteworks of a master plan.

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Notes

- 1 PhD in progress: 'Urban modernity of an Arab capital: Baghdad, 1921-1958', co-tutee by the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales*, Paris (director: Pr. Jean-Louis Cohen) and the Amman University, Jordan (director: Pr. Ihsan Fethi).
- 2 To underline this astonishing state of preservation, which I personally verified in 2006, doesn't try to minimize the often alarming state of buildings due to numerous causes and, over all, the current disfigurement of the city caused by the location of concrete obstacles which block the access to certain streets for security reasons, and even the view.
- 3 'Threatened city'.
- 4 The *shanashil* is the Iraqi version of the projecting window that can be found in similar socio-climatic contexts throughout many countries of the Arabic-Muslim world.
- 5 To unite pilgrims from Kadhimiya to Bab al-Nuwwab, near the bridge from which they will soon reach the Shorja central market.
- 6 British rivals in Iraq since the XIX century, the Germans were allies of the Ottomans and invested in technical establishment. Their most celebrated project, which remained unfinished, was the 'Berlin-Baghdad Bahn', Baghdad's railway.
- 7 This is Pierre-Jean Luizard's expression (to collate bibliography).
- 8 The first ones drew up the region's distribution between British sovereignty (Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan) and the French (Lebanon, Syria).
- 9 Oral statement of Naïm Kattan, Canadian writer of Jewish Iraqi origin born in Baghdad in 1928. His first memories date back to the beginning of the 30's.
- 10 Marked by an agrarian reform unfavourable for the peasants (Land and Settlements Law, 1934).
- 11 The traditional *cu-de-sac* could drop up to two metres.
- 12 The government architect is, for the first time, an Iraqi, Ahmad Mukhtar, recently qualified in the United Kingdom, and the adoption of European models seems logic. But the impossibility to access the administrative sources on the spot, due to security reasons, has not allowed me yet to determine a precise ground for this choice.
- 13 Some secondary sources mention a first attempt of general layout led by two Germans between 1936 and 1937; but my research on the exact names, complicated by the problem of German patronymics' transcription into Arab and then their retranscription into English has proved itself fruitless for the time being.
- 14 Adhamiya and Kadhimiya were administratively annexed to Baghdad in 1943.
- 15 Those outskirts make up what today is known as central Baghdad.
- 16 Shanty dwellings of earth huts: this informal rural habitat proliferates in waste grounds, further away from the dams, but also in the middle of the city, close to the rich neighbourhoods with which they

often set up a complex interdependence. Due to its extent, this phenomenon represents a separate issue which is impossible to deal with within this article's framework.

- 17 *Coup d'état* pro-German of Rashid Al Gaylani, reoccupation of Iraq by the British forces (1941), *wathbah* (uprising) of

To build a stadium: Le Corbusier's project for Baghdad, 1955-1973

Rémi Baudouï

The commission's context

The commission apparently took place during the first semester of 1955. It was probably a direct commission from the minister of the Development Board and Ministry of Development, Nadim Pachachi. From the start, while the site of the future facility was currently under discussion by the Town Planning Consultants, the program included a stadium for 50,000 spectators, which contained a football stadium and athletics tracks; a 50 metres swimming pool and some adjoining ones for 5,000 individuals, a gymnasium for 3,000 individuals...¹

The Iraqi context that embraced this project was that of the start of the reign of the young king Fayçal II, who had reached his age of majority in April 1953. Despite the difficulties –riots of 1952 due to the renewal of the agreement between the Iraqi Petroleum Company (IPC) and the Iraqi State, a difficult agrarian situation, and an important dissatisfaction of the working class–, the existing exterior policy was clearly focused in the direction of the West, especially to the U.S.A. and U.K., and opposed to the Soviet Union. Under the insistence of the U.S.A. and the U.K., Iraq joined, with the U.K., Turkey, Pakistan and Iran, in an equal defensive coalition, whose objective was to ensure their collective security against the Soviet Union. This constituted Baghdad's agreement, undersigned in 1955².

The regime's orientation seemed to be particularly reflected in Baghdad's municipality, which had been deliberating on strategic urban planning and had been aiming to achieve an orientation resolutely marked in favour of modern architecture. The Ministry of Development was the driving force behind all of these plans being set into motion. In 1956, the moment when Le Corbusier's assignment for Baghdad's municipal stadium took administrative form, the Catalan José Luis Sert was hired by the U.S.A. to build their embassy in Baghdad³. In 1957, the architect Walter Gropius will see himself hired to design Baghdad's new university by Iraq's first minister, whose son,

Nizar Ali Jawdat, had been Gropius' pupil⁴. In 1963, architect Carlo Ponti finished the construction of the Ministry of Development. The new opera house would be designed by Frank Lloyd Wright right before his death. Finnish architect Alvar Aalto was commissioned the museum's construction...

Le Corbusier's interests in a project of this nature

Everything seems to show that between the decision taken by the Iraqi party and Le Corbusier's acceptance, at least, more than one year had lapsed. That was not due to the architect's lack of interest for the project. Several reasons should be mentioned here:

In the first place, and without any doubt, Le Corbusier's firm had an agenda full of commissions. The year 1955 remained committed to the construction of Chandigarh's city in India, the works at the Spinners' Association palace and the museum of Ahmedabad, and the cities of Shodhan and Sarabhai. It was also the time when the commission for the National Museum of Western Fine Arts of Tokyo was shaping up. And, in respect to French commissions, Le Corbusier's firm hands in the church of *Notre-Dame-du-Haut* at Ronchamp that same year, it finishes *Jaoul's* housing and *l'unité d'habitation* in Rezé-les-Nantes, it builds the Home of Brazil within the campus of Paris University, and it manages the site works of the monastery at La Tourette. It also receives the commission to make some studies to build a *ville radieuse* in Meaux and the stadium and cultural centre of Firminy, as well as the *unité d'habitation* of Briey-en-Forêt. This represents an extremely heavy program, which justifies, from 1956 onwards, a reorganization of work conditions between Le Corbusier and André Wogenscky, head of his firm promoted to associate.

Then, there is a suspicion from Le Corbusier's side of any commission that does not translate itself into facts or a financial agreement, which would somehow validate the seriousness of the proposition. The financial argument represents an important motive for Le Corbusier. He regularly complains of not having any money and being dispossessed of his own work by all kinds of selfish misers. In May of 1954, he tells in his notebooks what he thinks he has heard about himself: '*He has always been a very wealthy man*', and he immediately adds, this time without quotation marks: *at 67 years of age I lead a terrible life to be able to... support the younger ones (who are my family)*⁵. This 'victimization', which cannot be taken seriously, must be ignored, bearing in mind the information we now have in our hands in relation to his personal fortune⁶.