

This analytical framework establishes the key aspects against which the cases inventoried and classified by place are interpreted, allowing us to understand not only the proposed formal solutions but also the evolution of concepts and the circumstantial shifts that influenced them over the 40-year period. An *inventory* constitutes the main documentary body for the research. Each urban intervention is presented using the same descriptive matrix, allowing an individual characterization of each plan at the relevant urban scale. The plans for the cities of Praia and Mindelo, the largest and most important settlements of Cape Verde in demographic, social and economic terms, constitute the largest part of the inventory, relegating the interventions in other locations to a general chapter.

The plans are classified in three basic categories: *foundation*, *expansion* and *transformation*. The focus is on their nature, chronological order and relationships.

Most of the documentary material presented in the book is published for the first time. The existence of a significant part of the documentation was previously almost unknown. The research included the groundwork of identifying and registering previously uncatalogued documents of various formats. Indeed much of this documentary material was all-but-lost following the dismantling of the fascist regime. The graphic reproduction of the plans and their dissemination alone constitutes a major contribution to knowledge.

The final part of the book refines the interpretation by comparing the cities of Praia and Mindelo with the aim of tracing parallels and highlighting singularities in the evolution of approaches to urban development. Unlike other contexts in which the implementation of a European city model prevailed over a long time-span, in the case of Cape Verde the singularity of the topography and the scarcity of natural resources soon led to adjustments to the urban design strategies.

In both its content and approach, the present publication can provide useful support in the interpretation of other former colonial territories, enhancing the study of one of the most widespread, yet poorly explored, aspects of modern urbanism.

References

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Abitazioni primitive. Primitive dwellings by Giancarlo Cataldi, Aión Edizioni, Florence, Italy, 2015, 175 pp. ISBN978-88-98262-34-2.

Primitive dwellings, which is subtitled *the evolutionary process of building types in the world*, is delving into the origin of built forms. Faithful to the Italian approach to built environment morphology, Giancarlo Cataldi, the current President of ISUF, explores the formative period of initial human dwellings and the process through which rudimentary archetypal forms evolved within increasingly complex typological streams. Even the seemingly simplest manifestations of the material culture connote deep cultural significance, enmeshed as they are with cultural habits, religious beliefs, and social, family and gender relationships, and informed by a geographical context and a culturally-embedded building tradition. While acknowledging that reality, Cataldi's efforts are centred on the artefacts, and more specifically on their general morphometric properties as well as on their materials and associated modes of assemblage.

In an impressive synthesizing effort, the work defines and tabulates sixteen main stages in the development of four idiosyncratic types, based on cycles in which shelters gradually evolve into huts and thence houses, and eventually urban houses. The dwelling types are associated with what Cataldi terms geo-material areas, namely the wood areas, the earth areas, the stone areas and the special materials areas. Building cultures and traditions have stemmed from the said areas, based on weaving techniques and carpentry, mud construction, masonry, and techniques making use of animal skins and fabrics for instance. A plethora of cases from Africa, Asia and the Arabic peninsula, the Americas and Europe is used to illustrate various manifestations of these techniques and

the buildings erected by their use. Moreover, this impressive repertory contributes to substantiating the hypotheses that inform the proposed typology. Once established, the typological framework becomes an operational tool for the analysis: further diachronic investigations supply mounting empirical evidence covering ever-growing territories and historical periods. Though introducing this framework and making good use of it, *Primitive dwellings* does not attempt to cover each category with the same level of thoroughness. Shelters, including tents, and huts are given precedence. This is a perfectly understandable decision, considering both the historical, and by extension typological, antecedence of these built forms, and given the greater risk of their disappearance, owing to their inherent material fragility, not to mention threats to the ways of life that they embody.

The shelter building traditions bring us back to the natural shelters used by animals, including other primates, from caves to nests in trees. Though the author does not address the question, they also evoke piling, weaving and digging construction techniques used by other species (Ingold, 2000). The importance of the cultural shift implied by the ability to transform a raw resource into a construction material cannot be overestimated. Simply put, such acts of fecundation of nature by culture has set in motion a specific way for humans to inhabit the world, starting with temporary shelters that would later become permanent, and for instance, change from the use of flexible wood woven in various ways, to building with timber. Cataldi precisely sets about classifying primitive wooden static systems by distinguishing a great range of systems: self-load bearing; elastic suspended; mixed systems composed of components working in compression and traction respectively; systems using flexional properties of wood; systems based on vertical compression, using timber; timber systems using oblique compression; and self-load bearing systems compressing the timber on the ground through its own weight (pp. 27–9). The following sections itemise enclosed shelters based on their overall shapes: hemispheric; haystack and ‘onion’ shaped; ogival, conical, and sloped and flat-roofed shelters. Following the presentation of the singular case of the igloo, he reviews the examples of American earth lodges and sunken shelter forms from Morocco and Italy. A whole section is devoted to tents, traditionally used as shelters by populations practicing pastoral nomadism. The wooden-structured shelters led to more complex constructions: the huts. Cylindrical types include

varieties using mixed construction techniques combining earth and clay walls with wood and straw roofs, some with stone walls with similar wooden roofs, and one example entirely in stone, including a pseudo-vaulted roof. The last series of huts consists of types with orthogonal plans – a characteristic that would later facilitate the combining of multiple cells to create more complex housing forms, and the aggregation of multiple houses in settlements. Only three types are introduced to illustrate the category ‘house’ per se: the northern European alpine Blockbau dwelling; the Nigerian mud-brick dwelling with a vaulted roof; and the Arabic-Mediterranean earthen-wall terrace and courtyard houses using the pisè technique. These last examples predate and to some extent anticipate house types not presented in this book: the Southern-Europe masonry mono-cellular houses, including those that combine masonry for the walls and carpentry for the roof.

Beautifully and abundantly illustrated, both with black and white and colour pictures and graphics, and based on an extraordinary research effort presumably spanning over decades, this constitutes a major contribution on the origins of human dwellings. In addition to the colossal task of documenting numerous types, it offers an incomparable illustration of the pertinence of process typological theories and methods to read and interpret a seemingly boundless object. With the proposed framework in place, generations of researchers are implicitly encouraged to supply new entries to the catalogue, from a growing number of geographical and cultural contexts, and to document house types in particular. Way beyond a mere cataloguing exercise, the expansion of the typology leads in itself to more complex and thorough interpretations. This book should become mandatory reading for every architecture student and for any aspiring urban morphologist.

Reference

Ingold, T. (2000) *The perception of the environment: essays in livelihood, dwelling and skill* (Routledge, London).

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