

Islamic city is at all building scales, with a multitude of references to the societies and territories that produced it and transformed it over time. It is a reading of the urban landscape carried out with a striking awareness of the methodological value of this source of experience and of its paradigmatic role in the study of urban form. The city is unified in conception yet infinitely varied in its manifestations. Like every organism, it is comprised of homogeneous and complementary parts (*urban nuclei*), each formed by a composite fabric of elements (*building types*) connected by a complex series of links. It is the *routes* that set up the dialectic hierarchy between *nodality* and *anti-nodality* that guides the formation of the fabric and consequent urban polarities (*landmarks*): route, urban nucleus, fabric, building type, polarity-landmark are therefore the basic tools for understanding the Mediterranean Islamic city, but they are, above all, morphological concepts of great methodological efficacy. According to Petruccioli much of the confusion and disorientation in contemporary architecture is caused by the failure to find an alternative to market-oriented individualism, fashionable nihilism and picture-book historicism. He seeks a solution to the traces that human actions leave in the landscape. He is

not simply referring to the macroscopic phenomenon of the Roman *centuriatio*, but also to the primitive routes on top of ridges, landmarks in the urban topography, and signs on façades that signify permanence. These are the elements of spatial and historical continuity that fully represent a record of civilization (p. 9).

The scientific value of this work is not limited to *Dar al Islam*. Using this as a starting point, the whole humanscape is addressed, and has paradigmatic value in the interpretation and planning of different humanscapes. The tools of urban morphology and process typology are here verified and reinterpreted in a rich sequence of case studies, with a single, conscious critical and methodological vision, from the particular to the universal, from the family dwelling to the urban community, and from the territory to the large cultural enclave. Petruccioli's approach is both deductive and inductive, attentive to the physical reality of built environments, but constantly committed to placing them within a broader critical framework, in which the case studies are not fragments of a lost mosaic, but elements of an organic system, in a continual exchange of contents and meanings.

So the book seeks to uncover the settlement logic of the Islamic Mediterranean Basin, and partially completes 35 years of the author's research, in that koine which could be called the final legacy of the classical world, but also perhaps its most interesting modern translation. 'In Syria, in Palestine and Jordan, Islam guides the Byzantine city to the brink of modernity with no sensible breaks in continuity' (p. 224). The vast number of measured drawings, of both buildings and urban layouts, the breadth of the historical perspective within which they are analysed, the scientific awareness with which they are contextualized, and the theoretical and methodological clarity with which they are interpreted, all make *After amnesia* a very interesting experience in the field of urban morphology and building typology. It is a work against which we should measure ourselves in our future research.

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Archetipi di territorio by Anna Marson, Alinea Editrice, Firenze, Italy, 2008, 287 pp. ISBN 8860553008.

Modern urban planning has become a rational discipline mainly focused upon regulating the growth and development of cities. But can planning really address the needs, problems, pressures and changes occurring today within urban territories? Can it really help to shape new settings or better regulate existing ones for the inhabitants, with the aim of integrating them with their social and natural environments?

Anna Marson in her book *Archetipi di territorio* (*Territorial archetypes*) searches for answers to such questions by looking at how meanings, traditions and values related to our habitats have evolved over time. In her own words, she looks for 'archetypes of territory', namely what has remained constant through time and has responded to humankind's most essential needs. She finds a number of archetypes which she analyses from the point of view of different disciplines, such as mythology, anthropology, philosophy, etymology and religion, and then compares them to present cities and landscapes.

Her objective is to find approaches to urban planning that consider both the natural environment and the environment that has been culturally adapted to accomplish a respectful relation between people and nature, and in which humans ultimately become part of nature. To this end Marson says that she wants to rediscover urban planning's 'cosmic anamnesis', 'as a reflexive practice continuously verified on the basis of natural rules, instead of a mere functional or rhetorical technique' (p. 16). Reflecting on archetypes may help to plan sustainable places, whose meanings, well established and rich in symbolic connotations, will not vanish with time.

Suggesting that sustainable planning projects should be based on the study of the role of natural elements in shaping the territory and archetypes resulting from a long process of interaction between nature and man, Marson reports the abuse of natural elements and archetypes by modern society, and by ideologies supporting the use and capitalization of land and exploitation of natural resources.

In most ancient cultures mythical theories about the cosmos were based on the four elements: earth, water, fire and air. Life comes from and depends on the equilibrium among them. They are the first archetypes upon which Marson focuses. She uncovers how, through history, they have been representing a whole system of functions and meanings. At the same time she realizes that today we consider them almost like chemical elements that we own, careless of their power, and make use of for our purposes.

Then Marson focuses her analysis on the city itself and its traditional formation along cultural lines tied to our understanding of our place in the cosmos. Although we can still read systems of rules, symbols and their meanings in many historical centres today, Marson points out that we cannot find the same in modern urbanization. Therefore she continues her search for other archetypes: the urban centre, borders, gardens, and natural areas. From her analysis Marson observes that humans have engaged in a process of progressively losing the balance between distinct parts of the city and consequently losing 'meanings' important to reading the city. She hopes for a recovery of these sensations and archetypes so that knowledge and experiences well rooted in history can be rediscovered.

The book concludes with a proposal for a process by which to recover relationships between planning and territory through memories, an anamnesis of the past, and the study of archetypes and their modifications. Accordingly Marson

distinguishes four needs: to avoid uncontrollable urban growth and to find natural rhythms of growth; to slow down by reclaiming old knowledge and traditional techniques, instead of thinking in terms of logistics, consumption and technological choices; to shape, defined as providing architecture that relates to an urban planning that regains sense, meanings, references and, in Vitruvius's words, '*concinntas*'; and finally, to find again – not trying to dominate nature but utilizing traditional design and spatial processes, and imitating or interpreting nature through a dialogue with territory.

Reviewing the book I found a fascinating journey through history, and through several disciplines, in search of forms, meanings, symbols and traditions to help us discover how places, or territories, have been shaped and successively changed through time. The author investigates why old values and meanings have been lost. Her historical analysis has a colloquial rhythm that is rich in information and references, and stimulates further reading. Identifying what she finds wrong with today's cities and planning, Marson does adopt a circumspect attitude. The choice, relevance and details of some of the arguments about actual problems seem to reflect the desire to provoke and encourage discussion. There is, perhaps, a gap between the accuracy of the historical analysis and the reporting of the present-day urban condition. The author's aim to provide foundations to support a more conscious and reflexive approach to territory is evident.

Archetipi di territorio is thoroughly absorbing. It should prove an inspiration to students of architecture and planning and is also recommended to professional planners and politicians dealing with territory.

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Planning Latin America's capital cities 1850-1950, edited by Arturo Almandoz, Routledge, London, UK, 2010, 282 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-55308-7.

First published in 2002 as a hardback edition, *Planning Latin America's capital cities 1850-1950* was awarded the 2004 International Planning History Society Prize for the best book on Spanish and Latin American planning, and the recent paperback edition not only reflects the continuing