FOREWORD
by Lucio Valerio Barbera

The three cities

The Town Crier

The ancient Greeks, or at least their philosophers, defined a city as a space that extended as far as the voice of the town crier could be heard. An ideal space, yet an uncertain and limited space, much smaller than what could be seen with the naked eye, for example, from the Acropolis of Athens, which dominated much of the territory of Attica, where all the free inhabitants were equal citizens, Athenians. But what the philosophers meant was that, in order to actively take part in the rights of citizenship, these citizens had to assemble in the centre of the Polis, inside the imaginary perimeter, within which their sharp ears could hear the appeals, sentences and decrees, proclaimed in loud voices from the Pnyx or the Acropolis itself. The same thing held true in Sparta, where the perimeter of the city was never provided with material walls, but was defined symbolically by the carrying power of the voices of the Ephors as they read out their edicts. In the early years of Rome also, the *kalator*, the herald of the king, would use his loud and undoubtedly well trained voice to announce from the *Lapis Niger* the decisions made in the *Comitium* to the Sabines, Romans and Etruscans gathered on their respective hills overlooking the Forum; so that they might learn from the decrees and begin to understand their new, shared citizenship.

Afterwards came the walls, which physically delimited the area of the city that stretched out from the foot of its capitol or its fortified citadel but which made the space often much larger, as if the circle of the walls, rather than being built as an unbroken defence perimeter, were meant to give the citizens a physical perception of the strength of their city, which had now grown far beyond the carrying power of the town crier. The heralds and the criers now scrupulously traversed the city streets from the centre to the town gates and back again, preceded by the clash of cymbals or a roll of drums, depending on the local custom and the historical period, as their strutting descendants continued to do up until not so many years ago in Italian towns in the south and in the lower valley of the Po. In ancient times, therefore, the city walls were also a symbolic, petrified representation – Goethe would say *frozen* – of the furthest reaches, house by house, of the voices of the crier; they were the solid limit beyond which he could not pitch his voice, and so beyond which there was no more city. Or rather beyond which no one had the right to knowledge for the purpose of decision-making, as we would say today, and no duty of knowing how to accept the fate of one's city and partake of its modest comforts and take part in its rituals, as was understood for many centuries.

This relationship between the physical boundary of the ancient city and the organisation of information is very apparent in the Roman foundation-city model,

whose extremely restricted size – a good example is the compactness of the original plan of Ostia – is a direct recollection of the size of the standardised Roman military camp, which obviously saw the need to keep its outside perimeter as small as possible for defensive purposes, yet also kept in mind the equally vital requisite of allowing the flow of voice-carried information from the gates to the Praetorium and back again. From these beginnings, the city as defined by the philosophers and military necessity was a place where, if you wanted to lead the life of a citizen, you needed to constantly keep your ears pricked for the voices, sounds and noises with which, in different accents and at different distances, the city talked to you, told you things, explained life and itself to you, and never left you on your own. "May I die," exclaims Seneca in his fifty-sixth Epistle to Lucilius, "if I think anything more requisite than silence for a man who secludes himself in order to study!". And he paints a quick sound picture of the city that is all around him in his house on the Velia in Rome, describing amusingly the hubbub of cries, sounds and noises, all the audible signals engulfing him in his meditations. "But by Hercules," he concludes, "I assure you that this racket (*fremitum*) means no more to me than the sound of waves or falling water." And despite his show of disdain, he tells us that for someone with a cultivated urban ear, the multitude of voices in the ancient city was a natural soulful accompaniment, like the gurgling of a brook or the patter of raindrops; it was the reassuring voice of the urban forest.

And so the city – packed with information, with conciliatory or argumentative relationships, with the voices of crowds, noisy markets, splendid orators, whispers, curses and fights, family get-togethers and political meetings, private storytelling and public altercations, music both sacred and profane, eulogies and imprecations, singing and weeping – the city, enclosed within her walls, shared all this with those who defended her and shut the rest of the world out from the knowledge that within her gates, amidst the waves of words forever being exchanged, she was evolving and tirelessly maturing. Knowledge, that most precious of urban properties. Strictly delineated by its walls, the city was the possessor of that inalienable heritage that was the essence of life for each and for all, and became a shared experience, a neuronal imprint of its collective self, which each citizen had etched into their very psyche, like each human being, so the biologists tell us, has the shape of their own body imprinted deep within the parietal lobe of their brain.

Perhaps still, as we cross the plain of the Po in a modern means of transport some evening, there reaches us faintly inside our car or almost drowned out by the noise of the train, the sound of bells from one of the church bell-towers that every now and again appear on the horizon. The sound calls to us with a two-fold voice, one of the little cluster of houses huddled around it, which we decidedly cannot describe as a city, but which still has the compactness and sense of belonging that the ancient cities possessed, which firmly survives among its scanty dwellings; and the other, the voice of the city of God, which superimposed itself on the city of men when they faced their first crisis, and, with the ostensible intention of

demonstrating that city's frailty and impermanence, adopted its name, its form, its role and its purpose as a symbol of a new universal, eternal myth, and thus allowed it to survive as a perpetually attainable dream, a final hope. In real life on earth this city of God was a city of the city, inasmuch as it reached an agreement between them and the times of the universal church as to the hours and rites of the city's cults, so that the sound of vespers or any other canonical hour was in fact the voice of the ancient herald who called the citizens to their duties within the city walls, but it was also the voice of the new herald that prompted everyone, no matter where they lived, to celebrate the rites of the universal church. For us Italians it is still the call heard from afar, 'that seems the day lamenting its death' and it engulfs you in homesickness for your earthly city and for the love it holds for you; a feeling that is the most straightforward of the outcomes in the vision of Saint Augustine of Hippo, who asserted the coexistence of both cities on earth – the one human, the other divine – both separate yet mirror images of each other, so fused together that the peal of the bell reminding you to raise your thoughts to heaven, wherever it is heard, is still the most powerful summons to heartfelt nostalgia for the city where you were born.

At a moment in history when city walls seemed everywhere doomed to fall, Augustine raised up indestructible, eternal walls, to encourage the citizens to love and shore up their own, tottering ramparts. For this reason, Christianity, the first true Christianity, a great revolution in information and the universal spread – strictly selective – of knowledge, can be seen, from many points of view, to have been a super-urban revolution, but not at all an anti-urban one. As Pierre George would say, after the era when power was dispersed among thousands of castles and knowledge among countless monasteries, in the era of triumphant Christianity the walls of cities were rebuilt, enlarged many times, and the cityscape enriched by the towering spires and domes of the cathedrals, which indicated the real or virtual centre within the circuit of the walls, and thus of the urban community. This was the ideal image of the first bourgeois European city, which has survived to modern times, nourishing in the nineteenth century the cultural and social nostalgia of the Romantics, and in the twentieth the dizzying expressionist vision of the Stadtkrone of Bruno Taut directly derived from the image of the Gothic city. "The cathedral with its nave and its bell-tower, its size out of all proportion to its purpose (understood as its function) is like a true Crown of the City", writes Taut describing the medieval city, and he goes on: "The walled city with its towers, the palaces enclosed within the line of the walls, the little bell-towers and the church of the community, all forming a steady melodious cadence that rises in a crescendo to the highest point of the city." The walls gather the close-knit fabric of the city around its apex, which adds the finishing touch to the image of the city as it emerges with a forceful tectonic energy that seems superhuman; around the Stadtkrone, houses, mansions and palaces huddle together like a herd of sheep around their shepherd. The city – and ever more so, the image of the city – becomes a total amalgam of

shared communication with fabricated form, safe in the embrace of its defensive walls. This defensive perimeter was built even before the erection of the cathedrals, and can be seen as the first essential public work that the citizenry committed themselves to building or restoring or enlarging, making appeals to wealth and work for all each time they were to fortify some place that seemed suitable for founding a new city, or to restore an urban function and meaning to ancient ruins, or increase the amount of city space in times of better fortune. For this reason, the circuit of the city walls, a collective enterprise par excellence, with its towers and battlements that demonstrated the power of the city and its jealous safeguarding of all its material and immaterial riches, began to be an icon and a symbol, repeated over and over again on coats of arms and frescoes that yearned to express the glories of the cities of the West. They were all different, and geography lets us tell them apart by their position, their shape, and their functional relationship with their surrounding territory; history describes for us their variety according to the political model under which they flourish, and sociology distinguishes between them according to the merits and specific drawbacks of their life as a community. Yet in all kinds of city, in all their geographical, cultural and economic circumstances, the ancient gesture of choosing and tracing the defensive perimeter – more or less natural, more or less geometric and symbolic, more or less appropriately following the lie of the land – signified not only the physical act of settling the urban community and the birth of its indispensable foundation myth, but also the planting of the first physical footprint of the city in its surroundings and in history. An imprint that became in itself a resource and a link for future generations, acting as guide and a brake and a point of reference for any transformation of the city, almost as if in its original design and in its walls there was planted the seed for a pattern of growth, set up as an inescapable process, even if unable to be described in physical terms and stages that were derived from unforeseen accidents of history. We live in a part of the world where cities without history – I mean, without a long history – are rare indeed, and in our cities we are accustomed to seeing the remains, sometimes massive, often sparse, of successive circuits of city walls, and from their ruins understand the relation between them and deduce the stages that the city's physical imprint has gone through, throughout all its progressive enlargements and mutations since its original point of foundation. We know well that immense or subtle changes in the availability of knowledge and its allocation have always corresponded with progressive changes in the shape of the city's circuit of fortifications. To the extent that words to describe cities such as 'medieval' "Renaissance", "Baroque" or "Enlightenment" immediately conjure up a mental image that is an amalgam of architectural visions, literary memories and historical imaginings, in which, alongside the dazzling architectural forms that characterise every period of style, there emerges, by social type and cultural epitome, the image of classes and orders of people who, in every different age, with different means and different ends, control knowledge.

by Lucio Valerio Barbera

Beyond the walls

The expansion of a city beyond its walls was certainly due to important material changes; most importantly, to the changes in the technology of warfare that rendered city walls worthless as a form of defence. During a short space of years at the beginning of the 1800's, armies had learnt how to enter enemy cities without first besieging them. Vienna in 1809, Moscow in 1812 and Paris in 1814 fell without sieges; the cities were abandoned by their nation's armies as so much dead weight or as if they were mere illusions that could not be defended. In 1815, Brussels was saved at Waterloo, not before its own walls. For some time, London's real defence system had been the sea, and for more than two hundred years the city had boldly ventured beyond her walls, following the worldly desires of her ruling class who had turned the circulation of information and ideas into the very stuff with which to build their wealth and their freedom. The very same year that Paris fell bloodlessly into the hands of the Tsar of Russia, 1814, saw the first rotary presses, heirs of the Industrial Revolution, produce for the London Times one thousand one hundred pages per minute, spreading the news extremely cheaply and reaching all the urban and suburban classes, both the rulers and the ruled.

A little more than twenty years later, steam trains delivered the newspapers to the entire nation; but before the middle of the nineteenth century, information also began to flow along the wires of the telegraph, with no need for physical transfer. In Europe before the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, information by telegraph could already be sent through tens of thousands of kilometres of wire; that disastrous war was not declared by a despatch carried superciliously by hand and accompanied by an armed escort, or on horseback or even by train, from one capital to the other, but by a simple telegram sent from Ems, a tiny fashionable spa town hidden away in the heart of the leafy countryside of the Rhineland. In New York, the six major newspapers collaborated in running the wire service, the extremely efficient telegraphic system for receiving and sending news from and to the whole electrified world, and they were followed by similar alliances between publishers in the other major cities of America. The same thing happened in Europe, in Paris, Berlin, London and Turin. The cities, even when using the parsimonious Morse Code, were becoming for the first time true nodes in a global network capable of distributing to every corner of the world and receiving from every locality a vast quantity of news that could be continuously shaped into the greatest wealth of live information ever accumulated and shared. Cities, of course, continued, as they do still today, with radio, television and the internet, to think of themselves as separate, individual entities; but the Greek philosophers, who for thousands of years were thousands of years ahead of us, would have no difficulty in recognising their ideal city in our global network, where the voice of the town crier, all the criers, instantaneously reaches all the citizens. We ourselves are so unwittingly convinced of this that today, instinctively – and politically – we rebel against the idea that in some faraway place the inhabitants of some exotic metropolis – whom we shall

never meet – cannot fully have a share in the information that flows through the net, almost as if the deprivation of knowledge suffered by people we do not know is an offence to our own citizenship, and puts at risk our Hellenic idea of the city, and is at odds with our innate conviction that we cohabit, along with the remotest human communities, the same global city. For this reason, even foreign policy seems, increasingly frequently, to be domestic policy, and the defence of the rights of others has the feel of a battle fought on the home front, which embroils us ever more directly because it is happening within the invisible confines of the infinite city, which we are beginning to jealously cherish just as the Athenians loved theirs; and we are immersed in all this coming and going of information just as Seneca was in the voices of the ancient city.

Aleppo

In 2001, in the spring – it was not yet April – I went back to Aleppo for the first time in more than thirty years. I had finally managed to find a few days to visit the city, a relaxed visit, which had not been the case when I was last in Syria, working on an exhausting job. After almost a week of serious, concentrated sightseeing on my own, it was now Friday, and the shops in the Bazaar of the Medina were all closed. The streets, below their vaulted arches, were blind and silent. From the few front gates left open, scarce solitary fruit trees in full bloom – were they cherry trees or peaches? – beamed at you from the courtyard of some Khan. "O ye faithful, when ye hear the Friday prayer, pay heed to the instruction of Allah, and cease from all labour." Cease from all exertion, was also my thought, and I had decided to pass some hours of that limpid morning sitting lazily at a table in the great Turkish-style café-restaurant with its huge umbrellas that looked out over the large square between the Ottoman mosque of al-Khosrofieh and the moat of the Citadel, opposite its entrance bastion. I must confess that my fondness for Aleppo, or rather for its Citadel, originated in the profound impression I had had, many years before, when I saw Pier Paolo Pasolini's film Medea. I was struck by his inventive use of cinema and architecture in creating a city built with pieces of real cities far distant from each other in time, space and civilisation: the Corinth of Creon, where the final drama of the myth of Medea is played out, was constructed by putting together the fortified exterior of the Citadel of Aleppo with an invented interior with bits stolen from the Campo dei Miracoli in Pisa, to give the idea that up on the summit of the Citadel, guarded by formidable battlements, there was to be found a space that was architecturally fluent and geometric, formed by a vast rectangular luminous courtyard, clean and straight-edged, compared to the outside, with its jagged earth-coloured bastions rising from a hill shaped like a menacing truncated cone. When, later in the film, the action moves into the half-baptistery, half-palace, we find ourselves deep inside Creon's barbarous royal domain, where, with a touch of uncertainty, I seemed to recognise some mysterious, oppressive interior from the

rock-cut houses of Cappadocia, another of Pasolini's great passions. I was certainly impressed by the poet-director's cinematic virtuosity, but I have to say I was even more attracted by his fantastic urban design project, which led me to the idea of re-constructing a three-dimensional drawing, by trying to match up, like in a collage, the pieces of architecture, the city spaces, the fortifications and the monumental recesses which in the film, are brought together purely by the cuts, dissolves and panning movements of the camera. It was an idea that really appealed to me, but which I carried around with me for years, always meaning to take it up again and finish it whenever the moment presented itself. Inevitably, however, as time passed far away from the eastern lands of the Mediterranean, my curiosity for an adolescent game, like some sort of architectural jigsaw puzzle, changed into a need to carry out some personal research into Aleppo and the ancient urban centres of the Fertile Crescent. Paolo Cuneo, who, among my friends of those days, was the best-informed on the architecture of such eastern cities, lent me hand for quite a while, and stimulated an appetite in me to try to be a more knowledgeable tourist than I had been up till then. And so, after so many years, going back to Aleppo was both an emotional experience and a long-standing commitment, but also an act of atonement towards the city and of gratitude towards my unforgettable friend, Paolo Cuneo.

The three cities
So in the days before that Friday, my visit to the city had been intense, detailed, almost complete, I told myself. I reckoned I had covered everywhere, the historical centre, the modern districts, the outskirts and those furthest reaches to the east where you seem to smell the close breath of the desert. Naturally, I had found new questions to ask which required further investigations. Yet I was at peace with myself for having decently carried out a worthwhile task. The sun was by now high in the sky, and a thin dribble of tourists continued to climb, upwards and downwards, the monumental entrance staircase of the Citadel. Almost automatically I left the Turkish café and joined them. Once again I followed the winding entranceway inside the bastion – five twist and turns under the menacing embrasures from which boiling oil was once poured down – and, avoiding the belvederes where the droves of tourists gathered, I scrambled up the ruined walls of the furthest defences, reached the crest of the fortifications that faced North and finally gazed out on the city, alone, high above, as I loved to do and which I had done more than once in the days before. Compared to the city I had visited thirty years before, what struck me, apart from the massive expansion of the periphery and some new modern demolitions in the historic centre, was the vast number of satellite dishes which literally covered the flat roofs of the city houses, from the centre to the furthest suburbs. We were at the very height of the demand for satellite television and evidently here every family regarded this new technology as the cheapest way

to take their place in the new planetary citizenship. Maybe the "apartment block"
type dishes were not yet so common in Aleppo, which would have certainly greatly
reduced the extraordinary number of those white objects that I saw stuck, one next
to the other, on every building. I thought to myself: "It's the new face of the city
tilted towards the heavens to share in the freedom of knowledge of the global city."

> "All praises be to Allah, we praise him…"; suddenly the well-modulated voice of a
> muezzin booms out into those heavens, amplified by loudspeakers, rendered mysterious
> by distance. And at once there came another hundred, maybe thousands of outbursts of
> other voices, out of time with each other by miniscule yet perceptible intervals, due to
> tiny differences in the clocks of the various mosques and their different distances of each
> minaret from me, who was hearing them at the exact centre of the city, at the summit of
> her battlemented crown: a gigantic, concentrated multi-voiced fugue intoning the words
> of the two canonical raka'at. "We seek help from Him and ask for his protection…" The
> density of sound quite quickly reaches its peak, where it balances on the pinnacle of a
> powerful, omnipresent vibration, unified yet fractured into thousands of separate voices,
> uttered and randomly intertwined in an 'almost-unison'; some of the voices come so close
> to my ears that I seem able to identify from their resonance the different characters of the
> chanters, who stand out in manlike relief from an amorphous mass of sculpture. " He bids
> you not to be forgetful of Him…"; as quickly as it arrived, the immense mass of sound
> dies away like a vast wave which hits the shore and then ebbs rapidly back into the sea.
> "Remembereth thou Allah and He shall remember thee…".

In the fast-receding voices, however, I could follow in reverse the same geometric
sequence as from the incipit: from the almost-unison to a few delayed voices to the
last remaining voice, which all alone pronounced words of unshakeable conviction:
" …and verily, to remember God is the highest of virtues", and then the silence. I
instinctively looked towards the horizon, almost as if I wanted to follow with my
eyes the wake of that mighty wave of sound that had just departed, and which,
that Friday, had been first raised in the western half of New Guinea, and followed
the pace of the sun, rising and falling continuously among the islands of Malaysia
and Indonesia, flowing up the valley of the Ganges, crossing the Indus and to
the North bringing in the steppes of Turkmenistan, and pushing ever westwards,
totally engulfing Shiite Persia, orthodox Saudi Arabia, the eastern Mediterranean,
spreading out to the south beyond the Horn of Africa, and, after also drowning
and draining Aleppo, was continuing now towards Egypt and Constantinople,
the deserts of Africa, the Maghreb and the last Atlantic shores of Islam: the voice
of another city of God, the voice of the Ummah. I stayed for a while up there,
leaning on the ancient breached walls, thinking about the three cities that lived
side by side and interacted with one another every day in this place of remote
antiquity; the two youngest – made up of pure communication, of absolute faith
in God, or, conversely, of hope in individual freedom of conscience – now for
some time locked in combat for dominion over the oldest city, formed of earth
and stone, of signs traced in the soil, in the walls, and perhaps still inscribed in
the faulty memories of men; signs like open wounds, full of meaning like the lines

on an ancient face, mysterious, articulate, yet so delicate, seemingly defenseless, maybe even by now quite irrelevant. This city, I thought, which was difficult for me to recognise as the delightful, small, slow-moving city I had known thirty years before, this city that had grown so much yet was also, despite its problems, playing a considerable role in the global network, and looking for news and knowledge no longer at the gates of the Medina or at the foot of the Citadel, nor even in the *raka'at* intoned from the mosque, but seeking it in the electronic language of communication, might seem just like another of those urban centres that in the last few years have abruptly sprouted and grown on the banks of the Ibo or the Pearl River Delta. And yet I catch myself thinking that this very city, which might be thought to be held back by the heavy weight of its past history, may be able to handle the great changes of our time with expectations that are different from the more aggressive instant cities, precisely because it is still so firmly anchored to its original morphological footprint, to the remains of its ancient structures and to the traces of its walls, by now useless, but still an emblem of the city's identity. I began counting the signs of Aleppo's urban destiny that I had been looking for in its monuments and among its houses, in its ancient outlines; and I compared them to its present form, to its almost middle-class suburbs, the lines of its radial and ring roads, and the large irregular districts, some compactly and others meagrely built, that to the North link the city to the open countryside and to the East are already so closely swallowed up in the steppes of Syria. How many times has this city been founded and refounded, destroyed and reconstructed? Burned to the ground, razed and resurrected? Depopulated and re-inhabited? Like some brief prayer, I muttered to myself, in historical order, the litany of its names: Yamkad, Hlp, Hlb, Halam, Beroea, Berya; Halab, as it is to the Arabs, and Aleppo, as even the English call it. I also listed the adjectives with which the ancients described it: thou art white, the milk of Abraham, grey, thou rich in metals; thou sanctuary of Hadad, from thy rock casting to the South thy gaze that arouses the tempest. And I tried not to forget, repeating them in my mind like a hesitant schoolboy, the list of peoples and cultures, the events both tragic and triumphant that the city has witnessed or has survived, overcoming all of them through the power of her incredible prime footprint left in the earth – by whom? By the Amorites? Or even before them? In the Early Bronze Age III, as certain archaeologists say? Five thousand years ago, or only four? – when the place was chosen, a slight slope that from the chalk hills in the East drops to the West and flows like a slow stream around the rock of the Citadel, towards the hill of Al-Aqaba, on the banks of the Nahar Quweik, the river that to the South loses itself in the marshes of El-Matkh.

The morphological footprint
"The distinct conservatism of Aleppo's urban configuration depends to a great extent on the enormous mass of earthworks dating from the palaeo-Syrian period,

which have ensured that the foundation structures of the city have been preserved for four thousand years. The mass of fortifications surrounding the rectangular area of the Bronze Age city, rising to a height of 15-25 metres above the level of the surrounding countryside has effectively had a restraining influence on the future development of the city, and has determined almost decisively the layout of its streets."

I had read and copied out this passage by the young Lorenzo Nigro – today a professor of archaeology at Rome Sapienza University – in his essay *Alla ricerca di Yamkhad, la struttura urbana di Aleppo Amorrea* (Exploring Yamkhad, the urban layout of Amorite Aleppo), published by the Sapienza a few months before my journey to Aleppo. This excerpt, which had ended up in my travel diary along with plans of monuments, dates of ancient dynasties, names of modern urban designers as well as some thoughts of my own, urged me to try to follow the whole extent of these very ancient Amorite earthworks, which involved several difficult uncertain sections and impassable interruptions. For me Nigro's words had shed a different light on all the other studies on the successive transformations of the city that I had examined in the library of Paolo Cuneo and afterwards, in the specialist libraries of the Sapienza.

I found these studies absorbing in their harsh counterpoise of the urban textures contained within the walls or accumulated over the centuries outside their gates, bringing to light the multiple purposes fulfilled by these scarce remnants of the outlines of the city, or of the slope of the building plots, varying by a few degrees, produced time and again by basic technical and cultural changes that took place in the different periods of its history. Yet I was tempted to think that it was all already included, virtually and structurally, in the original footprint of the city created by that gigantic earthwork, which I imagine crowned by towers and battlements – as the Citadel is crowned today – and buttressed by a huge rocky escarpment, like that supporting the defences of Ebla. That immense original work, that wide imposing wall of earth, reinforced or partially enlarged at every major period in the city's history with new fortifications built at its foot, must have seemed, in more recent times, almost an obstacle or a natural feature of the site, a long ridge that often disappeared under the buildings.

Instead, it is the earliest matrix of the city, today almost forgotten under the layers of Roman, Byzantine, Umayyad, Ayyubite and Ottoman constructions; it is the only morphological feature whose presence has, in every historical period, ensured that the city could expand its original organisation of space, which was perfectly coherent with the identity of the place, in relation to its perimeter and its gates, and therefore to the routes that converged on the city and the pattern of its internal streets. Because, I thought then and still think, it was that wall, whose size is related to that of the existing natural features, which gave a permanent anthropological meaning to the meagre geographical details, establishing a close yet efficient relationship between them, setting up absolute hierarchies, giving

to each component, whether natural or man-made, and to itself, functions and permanent meanings as parts in a definitive design – the Citadel in the centre, then the four-cornered walls and lastly the ring of hills to the East and the river to the West – which today we can still perceive and wonder at; for thousands of years, the earthwork has been a link to the city's morphological future. As I stood there on the ramparts of the Citadel, I thought of how everywhere, but especially in this part of the world, the times we live in, with the physical and virtual technologies of the global city that surround us, all seem to endanger the historical purpose of even the strongest and most ancient primordial footprints that have for thousands of years guided the growth of cities. Seen from above like this, obviously Aleppo too seems to have lost its identity and its purpose: the irregular, incomprehensible, gigantic swathe of its outskirts, the demolitions in its old centre, the spread of pretentious modern architectural landmarks, the incessant background noise of traffic, unremitting and wearying, which encompasses, disconnects and pollutes every building, both ancient and modern; all this seems to suggest that our present age has truly eradicated the vital connection between the city and the original design of its foundation. Once the sharing of knowledge has been entrusted to the ether and electronics – and thus also the participation of a larger social and political fellowship in the pageantry of economics and scientific research – the physical existence of the city seems now more of an encumbrance than a resource. For a long time now, the new technologies of transport have also been a factor in this part of the world in destroying the whole idea of the compactness of the city fabric, and have shattered the illusion of maintaining any kind of overall coherence between urban spaces and the traditional functioning of society.

Jean-Claude David is undeniably correct when he writes, in his essay *Bab al-Faraj à Alep: un nouveau centre-ville pour de nouveaux territoires extérieurs, pour une nouvelle société?[1]*: "Nouvelles fonctions et nouveaux espaces n'entrent pas dans le schéma spatial de la ville ancienne. Plus essentiellement, ils ne sont pas un produit des 'waqf-s' musulmans, moyen privilégié de production d'espaces publics à l'époque ottomane et plus anciennement.*"* But to dispel any doubts about the need for the society as a whole, with all its classes and cultures, to responsibly acknowledge the urgent demand for change, he adds (ibid. page 33): "Le nouveau centre, qui regorge aussi de signes de modernité, est le produit d'une réorganisation logique de l'espace, en fonction de nouveautés technologiques et sociales, de nouveaux fonctionnements économiques": **... Il répond à des changements plus fondamentaux dans l'essence de la ville et pas seulement d'un de ses groupes constitutifs."** (the words in bold are mine).

Yet cannot these fundamental changes in the city's very essence perhaps be seen as having the same qualities and the same potency as those imposed on the ancient

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1. Jean-Claude David, *Bab al-Faraj à Alep: un nouveau centre-ville pour de nouveaux territoires extérieurs, pour une nouvelle société ?*, "Cahiers de Recherche GREMMO - Monde arabe contemporain", n° 5 – 1996; pag 36

Syrian city by the forceful intrusion of Greek culture in the fourth century BC?
Or as similar to the metamorphosis undergone by the already transformed Byzantine
city when the Arabs invaded? Was the disappearance of the great colonnaded
Hellenistic city streets – which had been ceremonial, processional, as well as used
for trade – beneath the proliferation of tiny, tightly packed buildings, made of
simple materials, crowded around the only open communal and polyfunctional
space of the great Umayyad mosque, not also due to the need "d'une réorganisation
logique de l'espace, en fonction de nouveautés technologiques et sociales, de
nouveaux fonctionnements économiques?"
Was the drastic transformation of the presiding *cardo-decumanus* road system into
a vast network – today we would say "isotropic" – of covered ways (seven miles
in extent), all of which were devoted to various forms of commercial activity,
not the result, then, of the 'Islamic globalisation' which opened up an immense
commercial and cultural world stretching from central Asia to the Atlantic? And
lastly, did this transformation of the city fabric not lead, as today, to the appearance
of a new, important means of transport? Hugh Kennedy can help us here, when,
commenting on the economy of the historical Syrian cities under Islam, he
points out that: "another cause of change was a fundamental shift in the means of
transporting goods. It has recently been argued that wheeled transport effectively
disappeared in the Middle East between the fourth and eighth centuries" and that
"improved techniques of camel domestication meant that pack animals were more
efficient at transporting goods." He concludes: "a simple winding path between
shops and houses, up and down steps if necessary, is all that is needed and... the
jurists only required that two loaded pack animals be able to pass in the public
street. Hence the broad colonnaded street ceased to fulfil an essential function in
the urban environment. The invasion of this valuable town centre space by stalls
and shops soon followed naturally."[2]

The fateful city
Thus despite the harsh difficulties of the present, Aleppo is a city where one can
still make out the presence side-by-side of many different cultures within it, in
the form of stratified historical layers and at the same time, a living, present-day
significance. The Islamic Aleppo was in the same situation as regards the Aleppos
that had preceded it; in fact, as Daniel Brook states: "the souq is evidence of a
larger conversation between cultures."[3] . Not long ago, I discovered from the vivid
writings of Brook that halfway through the 1990's – just at the time of my last
visits to Paolo Cuneo's library – another architect, younger than me, was at the

2. Hugh Kennedy, *From Polis to Medina: Urban Change in Late Antique and Early Islamic Syria;* Past &
Present, No. 106 (Feb., 1985), pp. 3-27
3. *The Architect of 9/11*; Entry 3: Posted Thursday, Sept. 10, 2009, at 9:40 AM ET

same time passionately studying Aleppo for his doctoral thesis, to be presented in Hamburg, and was forming his researches into an ideology, as Brook says, "... based on restoring a supposed Middle Eastern golden age that existed before Western encroachment and secularization", forgetting, or deliberately not remembering, that the district that he had chosen as his object of study and that emblemised the *golden age that existed before*, took its name from a city gate which is now called Bab al-Nasr (the gate of victory) but not so long ago was known as the Gate of the Jews (Bab al-Yahud), and then the Gate of St George, after the saint venerated by the Christian Arabs of Aleppo; in other words, the gate of the city which once belonged to the Chaldeans, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, and which always absorbed all their different urban cultures, religions and languages, adapting them and adapting itself to them. That March of 2001, in Aleppo, had I known, I could never have imagined that only six months later, in September of that year, that young Egyptian architect, another one fascinated by this fateful city, would fly a Boeing 727 into the Twin Towers of New York, to deliver that hopeless message that he blindly believed he had heard in the architecture of the Medina of Aleppo, in opposition to the absolute architecture of the West. Nor would I have been able to stop him.

Reverberations

Unquestionably the most significant aspect of a city's identity is the continuity of its life throughout history; but this aspect is not the result of some timeless permanence of its social, cultural or economic patterns, but of the ability of the city's primordial footprint to absorb and encourage, even guide, the transformations – even radical, revolutionary ones – that are necessary for renewing the dynamic force that the city needs to exist – and resist – in every era of its lifetime. And if the everyday panorama that I am trying to decipher from up here on the Citadel might seem at first sight to be at odds with what I have just stated, all I have to do is to put together, in my mind, two or three modern maps of the city, to see that even today the chess game of the urban dilemma – I mean that of the periodic transformation – is being played all over again on the board set up by whoever founded the first settlement of the city, and who combined together the basic natural and man-made components of the place in a design made to a very lengthy time-scale.

On a well-known map from Ottoman times – which claims to be from 1912, but which I like to think is a very simple transcription of the first expansion plan for the city ordered by the governor Ra'if Pasha and drawn by his French engineer Charles Chartier in 1900 – there are large external settlements well beyond the walls of the city. Not all of them are recent; some of them are ancient, such as the Christian quarter of Jdeide, which goes back in fact to the re-population carried out after the destruction caused by Tamerlane. We are, however, at the height of the attempts to modernise which would preoccupy the Ottoman Empire right up

to its final years. The size of the city has more than doubled, and the construction outside the walls is equivalent in area to the buildings inside. Those outside, even though quite compactly built, seem to belong to another city: they crowd the city gates, forming great fans of urban fabric, with its streets converging on the entrances to the city. It almost seems that, during the Ottoman Empire, the space that stretches between the walls and the amphitheatre of chalk hills to the North and East was the real predisposition of the city, an unpublished plan that remained hidden for centuries, for thousands of years. In actual fact, those wide fans of urban fabric are the classic forms of expansion beyond the walls that are implicit in any four-cornered city located at the convergence or crossing point of major territorial routes; the form depends on the position and number of the gates, as much as the fabric within the city needs to be arranged, on the other hand, around a orthogonal street system that joins gates set on opposite sides of the defensive perimeter. The shape of the Ottoman city is still strongly influenced by the ancient structure; it is its direct descendant. On its western side, as can be seen from that old map, the city appears to have barely ventured beyond the line of the walls. But in actual fact, on that side the choices have already been made that will define the terms of the city's future development. The course of the river, already reduced to the thinnest of lines, is still skirted by extensive orchards that almost brush up against the main western gates of the city, Bab Antakia – the Antioch Gate – and Bab Faraj, which will become one of the most important focal points of the modern city. But not far from here, a little more to the North, the building of the new district of Aziziye is for the most part completed; it was begun in 1868, beyond the Christian cemetery which until then blocked the spread of the Jdeide quarter towards the river.

Just to the south, squeezed between the new district and the walls, one can see that the first traces of the rectilinear plots of the new modern centre are already clearly outlined; this is, in fact, the Bab Faraj quarter, begun in 1882, and closely connected to the old city centre and its strong commercial traditions. Beyond the river there is only a hint of a large, undefined modern building project, like a vague dream, obviously a product of Ra'if Pasha and his French engineer's aspirations to modernisation. If we take as correct the date of 1912 as claimed for the map, the railway line should be visible; it was built in 1906 on the west bank of the river Qweik, and had two stations – one, the Damascus station, no longer exists, the other, the Baghdad, was built in 1910. Even if the railway is not shown on the map, a new road, leading to the site where the first of the two stations will be built, is clearly visible; this is one of the major thoroughfares of the new city expansion, the present-day Al Khandak road, which was built as a straight continuation of the moat of the northern wall, which had already been turned into, or at least used as, a new important urban highway. Once again, the essential components of the city's original morphological footprint, that is to say, the river valley – supplemented by the narrow curve of the railway line – the range of hills to the East and the irregular rectangle of the city walls, designate the field on which the game of

Aleppo's growth is played, as the city comes to terms with its first metamorphosis in a new era; and that ancient footprint, with its own clearly-defined geometry and its own historical and morphological significance seems capable of withstanding the already disorganised geometry of the first, belated, Ottoman modernisation. Once again, towards the very end of that era, the city, by which I mean the original, long-term design project, seems to declare its independence from the various cultures and languages and religions, and the different ways of living its private spaces and using its public ones, which it has always welcomed and nourished. In 1898, in front of the gate that gives its name to the new centre, Bab Faraj, in place of an ancient fountain, the clock tower was built that still today is one of the more unusual landmarks of the city. It "introduit un nouveau découpage du temps, et une organisation de la journée différente de celle ponctuée par la prière musulmane", as Jean-Claude David notes. And thus, in this extraordinary city, a space is fashioned, even if in a symbolic way, in which, well beyond our own times, the colloquy between tradition and modernity will be played out, the turning point towards the future. That was more than a century ago. And afterwards?

Afterwards – I carried on thinking as I looked out over the city to the north of the Great Mosque – afterwards not much happened, until the end of the French mandate in 1946. The city continued to grow, more or less following the straightforward ideas of Ra'if Pasha: new patches of city towards the west, across the river, towards the railway, a slow development of suburbs to the East and North. The new plan of 1931 by the Danger brothers' *Société de plans regulateur* did not manage to impose its ideas, based on hygiene, circulation and aesthetics, the new missionary triad of the French colonial urban designers in the Middle East. Nor did the variation entrusted in 1938 to M. Ecochard and N. Chéhadé have time to take effect. However, after independence, the 1954 plan of André Gutton – yet again, a French designer – had a decisive, if partial, effect on the city; though often criticised, even widely detested, for its conspicuous western, or rather European, modernist features, I feel that once again, this design project confirmed just how much potency the original urban context had in the passage from one era to another, in overcoming every new predicament. In fact, I think that Gutton, in an overabundance of cultural enthusiasm, was actually attracted by the task of interpreting the millennia of the city's destiny that he read in its morphology and its past history. And so he traced out a great city ring road that joined the semicircle of the hills to the East to the wide curve of the railway line that followed the valley of the river, connecting in one design the parts on the edges of the ancient city footprint. In the centre, the walled city, which is challenged by an emphatic spirit of rationality – Hellenistic, I would say today, when I do not fear resorting to rhetoric.

On his plan, a straight road from the West reaches the Antioch Gate – the Bab Antakia – and then it splits into two and plunges into the Medina in two wide parallel streets, cutting through the ancient fabric and severing it from the central

part, the long rectangle that includes the Umayyad Mosque, the Souq and the Citadel; they then continue East after capriciously cutting through the old eastern districts and the chalk hills. On his drawing of the plan, Gutton writes: "de la mer vers le desert", from the sea to the desert; a literary allusion, more than anything. The direct connection of Aleppo with the sea in Gutton's day had ceased to exist for some time. He knew well that, during the French mandate, the port of Alexandretta, along with the city and territory of Antioch, had been ceded to Turkey; Aleppo had gone back to occupying a completely internal role in the new – and also very ancient - Syrian arrangement, lying in the territory formed by the arc that from Damascus, through Homs, Hama and Aleppo, reached the valley of the Euphrates and curved down towards Baghdad. The implementation of Gutton's plan was interrupted after less than half of his ideas were carried out. However, today, important 'modern' streets cut through the Medina to the North of the great Mosque, following the lines of an extensive network of straight streets, which almost incongruously, in their size and direction, recall the layout of the very first urban settlement, according what the archaeologists tell us. The effect on the traditional city is severe; I mean that the transformation is critical and crucial, totally unsatisfactory and yet alive, because it is solidly anchored to the primordial matrix of the city, which it imitates in a brutal, modern form. After Gutton, in the 1960's, a Japanese urban designer, Banshoya, tried to solve the problems that had appeared in the old city centre. Still today I am struck by the design that he created: a quadrilateral of city streets that almost perfectly mirrors the size and layout of the Amorite walls; he drew his designs probably without having any inkling of this.

Yet also in the important preliminary report on the planning and conservation problems of Aleppo, prepared in 1980 for UNESCO by Stefano A. Bianca, Jean-Claude David, Giovanni Rizzardi, Yves Beton and Bruno Chauffert-Yvart on behalf of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, there emerges the same extraordinary power of correspondence with the primordial morphological footprint of the city. The clever diagrams illustrating the urban policies recommended by these experts verify the need to create a ring road that is even wider than Gutton's, that would more extensively include the features on the edges of the city – the semicircle of hills to the East and the river valley to the West. Within the ring road there is a road system that approaches the old walls and that, with a different awareness from that proposed by Gutton – but this is thirty years later – puts the historical city at the centre of a road system that is in part already in existence and in part new, and which acts as a sort of external reverberation to the city walls and creates a filter before reaching the Medina.

From then on all the general urban plans for the city seem almost to be intent on persevering in the efforts to experiment with the primordial footprint at its maximum extent, brushing up against it with increasingly wider rings of freeways circling the mother circuit of the ancient city walls. Meanwhile, even at the time of my visit to Aleppo, to the North and to the East there was a renewed impulse

towards the unplanned building of intensive poor housing, inhabited by country people and sedentary Bedouin, as had happened under the Ottomans, and in almost every historical era prior to our own. Today I know that since my last visit a real industrial satellite city has been under construction to the North-East, at Sheikh Najjar, along the main road leading to the Jazira, the great semi-desert area between the Euphrates and the Tigris. This new city of Sheikh Najjar, conceived as one of the new urban hubs of an ambitious programme of new industrial cities that would be rationally planned and self-sufficient, should reduce the proliferation of industrial zones in the fabric inside the ring roads, and could perhaps absorb a good part of the workforce migrating in from the outlying countryside. Even if the general planning scheme appears to include it in the system of concentric ring roads outside the circuit of the walls, perhaps Sheikh Najjar can be seen as the first true step away from the direct reverberations of the city's footprint.

As I write these words, these are difficult times for the nations on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, but if today I were once again standing on the Citadel on a clear day, as the days were on my last visit to Aleppo, and looking towards the new city of Sheikh Najjar, out of sight behind the hills, I would still like to imagine it spread out on the Syrian steppe like a well-ordered Roman *castrum*, and hope that its builders feel the responsibility of having to some extent inherited the task that faced the architects of the great Umayyad Qasr, when they, like their modern counterparts, but unlike them fully aware of the past, grafted their astounding designs onto the greatest, most stable and most ancient morphological footprint of Syria, the fertile crescent of which Aleppo is perhaps only the most fascinating locality.

This book

That afternoon I stood for quite some time on the Citadel, picking up the threads of my thoughts on that extraordinary city and the links that I saw that lastingly bound its future to its ancient founding design. It was the last day of my visit to Aleppo, and I knew it would be some time before I returned. I moved to go back down to the Medina only when the sun began to set, and while climbing down from the Citadel I wanted to think over my old intention of reconstructing architecturally Pasolini's urban illusion. However, I began a noisy debate with myself in my head between the urge to enter into Pasolini's poetic procedures in a creative fashion*, a posteriori*, and the ideas that my encounter with the real, historic Aleppo seemed to suggest to me. I felt a kind of misgiving about gratuitously manipulating the architecture of the city, even if it was only in the virtual fantasy world of digital simulation. In other words, I didn't want to evade the politically correct task I had set myself of making it clear that this beguiling game of mine had nothing to do with alienating myself from what was really significant about the city, "emblematic of the use of a form divorced from its social and historical original

context, ...commoditised and consumed without any interest in the social context that produced it", as Heghnar Watenpaugh would have severely reminded me, some years later, in his intensive study of the commercialisation of the significance and the historical materials of Aleppo, *Knowledge, Heritage, Representation; the Commercialization of the Courtyard House in Aleppo*[4]. In actual fact, amidst all my mental strife, I merely wanted to find a way to reach another objective, different, and thus much less clear, that I was trying to make blossom within my mind: to find evidence in other cultural environments, in other cities – perhaps less fatal than Aleppo, but no less important in their ability to define their urban culture, and more decisively engaging with modern times – of the real tenacity over the centuries of the compliant role of their urban footprint and its reverberations. And among the features of that footprint I felt that the most significant was the original defensive perimeter, be it natural or man-made – with its physical consistency, its geometry, its vestiges and its symbolic meanings – and that it was here that I would have to begin my search for a way to unravel the skein of this quest of mine, which by now had aroused my enthusiasm. Of course, I also realised that the work entrusted to me in those days by the School of Architecture in Rome would make it extremely difficult for me to personally accomplish either one of these missions. And in fact, this turned out to be the case.

For this reason, some years later, I was interested – and pleasantly surprised – to find that Anna I. Del Monaco was contemplating a piece of research that did not seem to me so far removed from what I had left to lie dormant in my own personal waiting list after that now long-ago afternoon spent on the Citadel of Aleppo. Anna had recently attended a doctoral seminar by Antonino Terranova, in which she was invited to describe a part of the city of Rome based on her personal criteria of interpretation, using either general or specific texts and visual materials. At first, she chose as a subject of research the analysis and interpretation of the course of the Tiber, which cuts through the city's urban fabric and interacts with significant sections of the modern city where it meets the new rapid transit highways and the Great Outer Ring Road. Antonino Terranova, however, suggested that she should include the Aurelian Walls in her study – another essential component of Rome's primordial footprint - which he, as a critic and a designer, had studied as a structure that was also related to the identity of modern Rome, and for which he, along with his research group, had recently created an extensive, up-to-date restoration project. Anna I. Del Monaco, as she explained later, was attracted by the three-way contradiction between the complete loss of the Wall's original function, the role it had nevertheless played in determining the morphology of the modern city, and the new meanings it had obtained, which were mostly symbolical and landscape-oriented, in the contemporary city. She took as her point of interest the "shift" or the change in overall significance that had allowed the ancient walls to fulfil new

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4. Heghnar Watenpaugh, *États et Sociétés de l'Orient Arabe en quête d'avenir,* Geuthner, Paris 2007, pg. 217

undeniable functions within the city. Anna I. Del Monaco belongs to a generation who quite naturally base their vision as architects on their living awareness – as Lewis Mumford had already foretold – that if yesterday the city was a world, today, the world has become a city. Or to put it less simplistically, we should say: it has become "a city of cities", also to show how much this new generation is indebted to Saskia Sassen, above all, and his idea of new geographies of centrality created through the network of global cities, the real focal points of command for the world economy.

In fact, for the best of this new generation, a full understanding of organisational forms and the urban aspects of globalisation is the absolute basic necessity for any assumed development of their own credibility as researchers and contemporary architects. They are dealing with a real world where there is competition between the global cities that outgrow national boundaries, and in which, perhaps for the first time in history, the functions of the city seem to be able to evolve without being particularly dependent on the condition of the territory, or are even completely indifferent to the morphology of the place, and to its history. For each of these global cities to function and be successful – and on them depends the worldwide flow of information and exchange – it appears that all that is required is a system of rapid information networks, great airports, a Central Business District, as they say today, and international-style hotels – all of which can certainly be provided by historically established cities, but which can be transplanted anywhere; to the point where Sassen's network of global cities could appear to be a planetary layer made up not so much of cities, as of formidable, identical facility nuclei, autonomous but interconnected, categorically implanted into the physical structure and human-scale individuality of the cities and of the territories that house them.

For this layer to function properly, it is essential that there is a considerable degree of separation as regards social phenomena such as immigration, overcrowding, rapid urban growth and transformation, which are actually triggered by the success of the new city facilities: this layer of modern functional focal points often needs to display a certain amount of indifference as far as the city is concerned, in order to survive the competition.

I was able to be present, at the invitation of Antonino Terranova, at the mid-term dissertation given by Anna I. Del Monaco on the Aurelian Walls of Rome, as her contribution to the topics raised in the seminar; today I recognise that this was the real starting point of Anna's research, which lasted for several years, and gave rise to this book, which therefore owes much to the unforgettable teaching of Antonino Terranova. Although she was supposed to deal with the rapport between the Aurelian Walls and the modern city of Rome, she began, perhaps surprisingly for some of those present, by examining the system of global cities, among which she included Rome. She ordered these cities into a succinct classification, almost a canon: some of those in the new geographical network of globalisation are cities that for centuries have belonged to the elite ranks of capital cities of knowledge and

power: London, Paris, New York, Beijing, Tokyo, for example, to which she added Rome. Others are more recent metropolises of major importance, such as Sidney, Hong Kong, or Shanghai. Others again can be regarded as metropolises principally because of the vast nature of their human problems and also the hopes that reside in them: Mumbai, Kuala Lumpur, Mexico City and São Paulo, for example. Others are real *instant cities* created under possibly transitory circumstances, like Shenzhen in China; and yet more can be seen as the height of artificiality rendered possible by current city-creating technologies, as well as displaying the most astonishing contradiction between environment and the human condition, only overcome by dint of a special, albeit long-term economic situation, as is the case with the fantastic, disturbing new cities of the Arab Emirates.

But then Anna I. Del Monaco introduced a new classification, which this book clearly explains and which was the basis of her research; her idea was that among the focal cities of this complex, multifaceted network, two types could be clearly distinguished: on the one hand, the new urban organisms, which she calls *unanchored cities*, which include the huge African metropolises and the *instant cities* of the Far East, great agglomerations that grew extremely quickly, powerful magnets for masses of people and for immense economic resources, unstoppable and yet frail urban organisms, created by out-of-the-ordinary geo-economic and political conditions that suddenly came together in one place on the planet, in which historical time is not yet consolidated and which do not display any assurances of a stable future. On the other hand, those cities which, by contrast, have founded their development and their transformations on the deep ground-rock of their own past history, Anna I. Del Monaco calls *anchored cities*; although they often experience contemporary urban phenomena such as dimensions, socio-economic metamorphosis and rates of growth that are quantitatively equal to and qualitatively similar to those that drive the development of the unanchored cities, unlike them, they *anchor* their changes to the physical and symbolic substructure of their historical memory. These anchored cities, however, would appear to be those predestined to traverse the present and the future with a greater likelihood of survival, by transforming and adapting yet preserving their living identity, and to remain, even in the most unforeseeable future scenarios, as representative emblems of our times and the continuity of human history.

However, one of the major problems in both anchored and unanchored cities, which modern urban designers totally lack the tools to deal with, in terms of control and planning, is undoubtedly that of the impermanence of the city boundaries caused by the outward spread of the city into vast territories, without any established principles of design, or even controls on the expansion. In this event, Anna I. Del Monaco points out, the ongoing redefinition of the *anchored city*'s boundary, in other words its *limes*, is nowadays one of the most stimulating subjects of research into the contemporary city, since it sends deep roots into the city's past, almost

always directly or indirectly linked with its ancient defensive perimeter, whether natural or man-made. Thus the *limes* is essential in defining the identity of the whole city, and acts as the strongest anchor to its own history; it is the legacy of the original monumental infrastructure, complex and authoritative in form, on which the events marking the periodic transformations in the city's way of life have continuously accumulated.

In her book, after introducing the concept of unanchored and anchored cities, with a wealth of original bibliographical, geographical, historical and iconographical references, Anna I. Del Monaco chooses as examples of the latter Rome, Beijing and New York, which represent three different, basic types of city, each anchored to its location, its history and its permanent process of development; as if over time, by the addition of successive layers or by the strong permanence of its original design – yet for each of the three cities in very different ways and with very different materials – a specific structural model, an imperishable design, a singular process of transformation of its strong identity has been specified; a real form of DNA that regulates even irresistible contemporary metamorphoses, with an enormous capacity for adapting to different historical conditions.

In the second part of the book, after analysing the historical and physical structure of the three cities, Anna I. Del Monaco identifies the limes as the basic element within them that is responsible for the continuity of the historical design and features of each one of them, and at the same time, that is a distinctive, fundamental focal point for the changes the city has gone through over the ages. Naturally, what is important for me is not a certain similarity in perception between this book and my own experiences, but the fact that from my reading of it, it transpires that its author has supplemented her research with a large amount of information and reflection gathered during long careful visits to the three cities; visits that were not only intellectual and scientifically thorough in the documentation of their history, their physical appearance and their original attributes, but above all that were true journeys to places where she had lived – apart from Rome - as a visiting scholar at Columbia University in New York and at Tsinghua University in Beijing, at different times and on repeat visits, when she combined her experiences as a student with a direct knowledge of the city, by emotionally intermingling with its spaces, its configurations, the tangible signs of its past – the most suitable way for a working architect to use her creative sensibilities and her imagination to acquire real knowledge of a city.