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THE DIVINE MATERNITY
URBAN PARK CEMETERY FOR THE THREE
MONOTHEISTIC RELIGIONS IN JERUSALEM

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WHY THIS TOPIC?

Apart from a deep personal motivation, the idea to create a common space for the three Monotheistic religions has its roots in the middle-east conflict, the region where I was born and grew up.

People there belong to three main different, yet connected religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam; different in their theological interpretation and rituals,

1. The subject of this intervention is my Graduation Thesis done in 1998-1999 at the faculty of Fine Arts and Applied Arts of USEK, and under the supervision of Dr Maroun Daccache and Prof. Nazih El-Kai.
connected as they share the idea of One God, as well as being the sons of one earthly father: the prophet Abraham.

WHERE TO CREATE THIS COMMON SPACE?

As this space is to reconcile and approach these three religions one to another, the location should be with equal distance to all the three poles; a location which has meaning and value for each of them.

The city of Jerusalem, being sacred for the Jewish, the Christian and the Muslim, was chosen as location for this reconciliation space.

WHY CEMETERY?

Apart from the shared belief that the religious event of the Last Judgment will take place in the Cedron valley surrounding the old city, many believers among the three religions wish to be buried in the hills around the old city.

*When a person passes away, his friends, relatives and parents, are they enemies or allies gather all around his tomb to remember him...*

*It is this moment of gathering around the defunct, of reflecting and thinking, where the three followers may have the chance and the opportunity to start a peaceful rapprochement, leading to a transcendence of all the differences between them.*

*It is the Beginning... from the End.*

PARK CEMETARY

Tombs, graves and monuments abandons in the hilly area around the Old city, known as the Valley of Cedron. From 3000 years before Jesus Christ, the valley has witnessed the edification of many monuments, commemorating the Kings who were buried in this valley. It is one reason why many believers wish to be buried here, where all their ancestors have passed by on their way to heaven.
Cedron Valley: the Necropolis
EVOLUTION OF JERUSALEM

Ironically, the birth, grow and evolution of the old city of Jerusalem had its main root in a water Fountain located near a Rock/Cave in this same valley of Cedron, in the South of the city.

WHERE TO LOCATE THE CEMETERY IN JERUSALEM?

Apart from the “Democratic” and strategic choice of the city of Jerusalem for the cemetery, its site location respects as well the logic of “common”. Be it a coincidence or not, each one of these three communities had a “Rock” as its main site catalysis, which lead them to build their own monument:
The divine maternity
Moriah Rock, Golgotha Rock, and Golden Rock as catalyze for each of the three quarters: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim
The first "Rock" is the one Abraham has used as altar to sacrifice his son Isaac. God later ordered Abraham to build on this same hill called "Mouriah" a temple dedicated to him. It is therefore believed that the first temple was built over the rock, which now stands some meters behind the Wall of Lamentation.

The 2nd "Rock" is the rock known as Golgotha, on the top of which Jesus Christ, the main figure in Christian religion was crucified. This rock was neglected for many centuries, but when the Crusaders entered the City, they decided to build a Church at the place of this rock, now know as the Church of the Holly Sepulcher.

The 3rd "Rock" is believed as being the place from where the prophet "Mahomet". A main figure in the Islam religion ascended to the seventh sky. Muslim, and after their invasion of Jerusalem, decided to commemorate this place with the erection of what happens later to be one of the Holiest place for Muslims: the Golden Mosque.

As conclusion, each religion has its own "Rock" as being the main catalysis to consider this city as a Holly city. Each Rock represents the birth for each community inside the walls of the Old city.

THE ROCK AS A SYMBOLIC/STRATEGIC LOCATION

On the other hand, as seen in the historical evolution of the city, there was as well one single Rock that was behind the birth of the whole city, and no for one quarter.

The Mother "Rock" is located in the valley of Cedron, not far from the walls of the city. It is from a fountain located in a cave under this Rock that the City of Jerusalem took birth, and started to grow. Without this initial Rock, no other Rock would have existed, and none of these communities would have interest in this place. It is because of this Rock that the whole city of Jerusalem existed one day, and still exists...
Therefore, as symbol of Unity, this Rock stands as an ideal location to create a common ground, and where no single monument exists yet.

Apart from this highly symbolic value of this fountain, this location enjoys a very specific characteristic: on an urban scale, this location forms the intersection of the visual axis linking the peaks of the city’s surrounding mountains. These entire visual axes intersect in this point, which makes it a suitable place to erect a monument that will be visible from everywhere.

Moreover, the main streets connecting the new developed city of Jerusalem out of the walls, to the Old city inside the walls heading towards the main doors, converge to one virtual point, situated as well at the same location of the fountain.
Strategic location of the Mother Rock in relation to the city’s morphology
TYPOLOGICAL ANALYSES OF THE EXISTING TOMBS: HORIZONTAL EXPANSION INTO THE GROUND

Around this fountain, many tombs belonging to different periods has been found, another proof that the act of being buried in this valley is very dear and important to the believers. An analysis of the existing tombs and graves will help giving inspiration for the new design of the cemetery: Royal Necropolis, Zacharie’s tombs and Absalom’s tombs.

As a schematic analysis, tombs were divided into three subspaces: Access, Chamber, and the Sepulcher itself. As there was a need for more burial space, a horizontal extension took place, and the soil was dug to provide another chamber, where more tombs could be buried. This composition continued to develop the same way all over the years. As a conclusion, the tomb’s typology expanded from a simple linear type to a more complicated “fractal-like” composition.

TRANSFORMATION FROM HORIZONTAL IN THE GROUND, TO VERTICAL TOWARD THE SKY

So here we reach an important point for the design of the new cemetery. Besides its symbolic and religious meaning, the new cemetery to be designed has to solve an urban problem: the expansion of the cemeteries around the city. Normally, cemeteries represent an eternal existence, and it is very difficult to remove or demolish them. Therefore, their horizontal expansion threatens the urban fabric, as they continuously spread all over the city.

One solution is to create a vertical expansion rather than the horizontal one. To do so, the strategy adopted in the horizontal expansion of the old tombs was transformed into a vertical one, giving birth to the Tower Cemetery.

Therefore, every step in the conceptual strategy of the Horizontal expansion is transformed into a new strategy of Vertical expansion. In the resulting system, instead of digging horizontal tunnels and rooms inside the ground, a new mechanism was created: tombs are buried one under another, so when a new tomb arrived, the whole previous tombs move vertically upward. The Horizontal expansion...became a Vertical expansion.
Transformation of the horizontal expansion to the vertical expansion of the necropolis’ development

In this vertical expansion, every pair of columns functions as an elevator for Tombs: when a new tomb is inserted, all the others tombs already buried move upward. As a consequence, tombs will fill the tower during a long period of time.
HOW TO DESIGN THE TOWER-CEMETERY?

As a cemetery is the last place for the Body, a gate from which the Soul enters eternity, the cemetery’s design is totally inspired from the Human Body.

The Human body is made of four main elements, and these elements are reflected in the design of the tower, to the smallest detail.

- The first element is the Skeleton/Structure: the structural system is based on an orthogonal grid, representing the two geodesic directions used by the three religions as direction for the head of the defunct. As for the module, the measurement used is the “Coudee”, a measurement used at that time, measuring around 50 cm.

- The 2nd element is the Skin/Floors: the strategy of shaping each floor in the tower is the result of a confrontation between the three religions: a sacred number, extracted from the Credo of each religion, is used as basic measurement for cutting the floors and distributing them all over the tower. The Jewish Credo calls for 13 articles of belief; The Christian Credo calls for 3 articles of belief; The Islam Credo calls for 2 articles of belief.

- The 3rd element is the Nerves/Circulation: the circulation inside the tower is conceived in a way to reflect the 4 stages of life: Childhood, Teenage, Adult age, and Old age; as well as linking the three symbolic squares, each representing one religion. In elevation, the tower unifies three symbolic elements, which are common for the three religions:

  - the Water from the fountain on the ground floor’s piazza;
  - the Fire of the flame, due to the gas coming out from the disintegration of the buried body inside the tombs;
  - the Light out of the fire.
  - The evolution of the towers all over the years, felt in the fact of being filled in by tombs, symbolizes human being evolution in time: Birth, Childhood, Teenage, Adult, Old, and Death.

- The fourth element is the DNA/Tombs: many columns hold the whole building, and between each pair of these columns, tombs are to be “buried”.

Every time when a new tomb has to be added, a mechanical system, integrated inside the columns, moves up the whole tombs previously buried. Depending on the space left between the previous buried tomb and the new tomb, many spatial effects will be created in the upper floors: door, window, chair, limit, partition… and it is in the endless combination of these elements – as many pairs of columns exist in each floor – that the metaphor of DNA is used: depending on each combination, a different space is created in each floor, which will change every time a new tomb is inserted from the bottom burial piazza.
The four elements of the body as a generative concept of the tower cemetery: Skeleton, Skin, Circulation and DNA
Instead of the traditional burial system, where the body is buried underground, and where not enough air is available for fastening the disintegration of the body, the new system is a metallic tomb suspended between a pair of columns, and connected respectively to each of these two columns with a pipe: the tomb absorbs or "breathe" the air from one column, and rejects or "expires" the gas to the other column. This gas will serve to burn the flame on the top of the tower, so that from the city, one can see the flame of his relative buried there, in the tower, with all the symbolism that this visual act carries on.

The injection of oxygen inside the coffin (top) fastens the disintegration process and results in reducing the original coffin size (middle) to 20% the original size (bottom), therefore saving space and easing the density problem.
This system helps to fasten the phenomena of disintegration of the body, in a way that after a certain period of time, the body will become pure skeleton, which can be placed in a smaller box, then taken by the defunct relatives to another local cemetery closer to their home neighbourhood.
All over the years, the tower cemetery will be filled with tombs, climbing their way up toward physical and “spiritual” disintegration.
The Tower Cemetery will function as a vertical urban park, where people can enjoy the scenery of Jerusalem, spend the day praying, meeting, socializing, drawing, and contemplating. It is a space where horizontal families (on earth) meet vertical families (in heaven). Hanging gardens, promenade and urban furniture animate the space.
VISIONS AND UTOPIA

Architecture is not always about real buildings in the world, it is also about ideas, about vision, about manifestos... which actually will turn out one day to be the reality we are surrounded by.

In this project, with all the potential strong objection and strict disagreement from local and international authorities against it, as being a tall tower in a very old city, it still carries in its concept a certain message of peaceful reconciliation through architecture.

But, who knows, if one day we will be assured that designing and building this tower will definitely bring peace to the Middle East, then we need to re-question the criteria of architectural heritage.

After all, if there is no other solution for the reconciliation except this one, then why not?