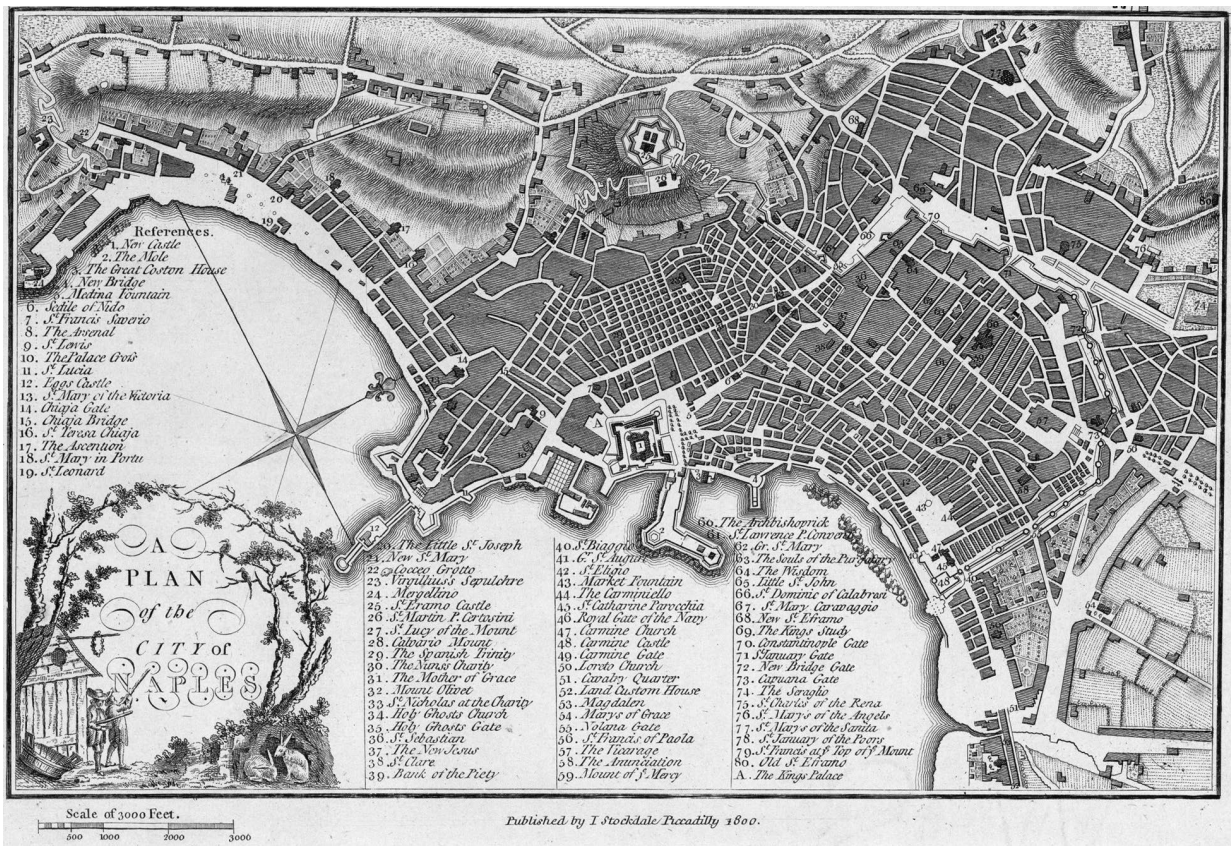


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# NEA-POLIS AND THE LABYRINTH ANCIENT MYTHS AND URBAN COMPLEXITIES



At first I was resolved to speak French, a language phonetically closer to my mother tongue. I know I cannot speak English that well. Mostly I know my pronunciation is not elegant enough for this noble language. I come from the south of Italy, our phonetics are rather different. But yet, the thought of speaking in an American University induced me to choose the English language, because of the respect I have for this Atlantic land and trusting in the tolerance – I hope – that the Americans and you, the Lebanese, will show for the mistakes of pronunciation and syntax that a foreigner makes.

Tolerance: this is the very crucial word in our time. I'll come straight to the point.

*“ Qu'est-ce la Méditerranée ? Mille choses à la fois. Non pas un paysage, mais d'innombrables paysages. Non pas une mer, mais une succession de mers. Non pas une civilisation, mais des civilisations entassées les unes sur les autres. Voyager en Méditerranée, c'est trouver le monde romain au Liban, la préhistoire en Sardaigne, les villes grecques en Sicile, la présence arabe en Espagne, l'Islam turc en Yougoslavie.*

*C'est plonger au profond des siècles, jusqu'aux constructions mégalithiques de Malte ou aux pyramides d'Égypte. C'est rencontrer de très vieilles choses, encore vivants, qui côtoient l'ultramoderne : à côté de la barque du pêcheur, qui est encore celle d'Ulysse, le chalutier dévastateur des fonds marins ou les énormes pétroliers. C'est tout à la fois s'immerger dans l'archaïsme des mondes insulaires et s'étonner devant l'extrême jeunesse de très vieilles villes, ouvertes à tous les vents de la culture et du profit, et qui, depuis des siècles, surveillent et mangent la mer ”.*

My apologies for this long quotation by Fernand Braudel. I could have tried to paraphrase his concept, but I wouldn't be able to make – with such simple words, the complexity of the Mediterranean subject clear.

It is dramatically hard indeed to disentangle, from a historiographical point of view, the tangle of events and civilizations, which settled down, interlaced and blended on the shores of this very ancient basin of exchanges.

The first question we should ask is whether there is or not a “Mediterranean dwelling tradition”. And –if so– how recognizable it is within the historic sphere. And, lastly, what bequest distillable from the heritage of a millenary past it is possible to preserve and eventually revalue in the scenery of culture nowadays.

It is not easy indeed to answer these questions; yet we can try, reducing the subject matter to its schematic essence.

Well then, it is undeniable that the Mare Nostrum –re-echoing the ancient Roman denomination– represented the privileged basin of commercial trade and the primary scene of military conflicts for many centuries: it was, consequently, a crucial way for the transmission of different cultures. The etymon itself of the early medieval place-name medium-terrarium refers directly to the image of a water hollow circumscribed, along the whole periplus, by those then considered the lands of the world per antonomasia: Africa, Asia, Europe. Water acting as spatial interval and, at the same time, as physical interconnection: in a word, as medium. Navigation had already spread during the Neolithic age, from the east coasts, interweaving a net of reciprocal commercial exchanges between Egypt, Crete, Phoenicia and Anatolia right from the third Century in this developed area. On the shores of this sea flourished very ancient civilizations (Egyptian, Hebraic, Phoenician, Cretan-Mycenaean, Greek...) and on its waves sailed the “thalassocracy” of the first empires (Carthaginian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic). Many similarities of climate,

traditions, linguistic morphemes and even ethnical traits can be found along the coasts of the lands facing the Mediterranean Sea. And, among the different anthropological phenomenologies, the one recording and retaining the most the signs of this international exchange is architecture.

But let's be careful: not the “learned” architecture, rather the “anonymous” one, expression of cyclical and choral building techniques, approved by a common dwelling culture sedimented through the centuries.

It is commonplace to believe that the Ottoman Conquest of Byzantium (1453) and –even more – the discovery of America (1492) have marked the beginning of the Mediterranean civilization's inexorable historic decline. Sure, the inrush of a new mental continent into the waves of history was dramatic. Nonetheless – if we just think it over – it was something good for our people. The discovery of a new world threw the Aristotelian vision of the universe in crisis and set off the heresies. Atlantis, perhaps, has never existed. But Plato in his Dialogues – Timaeus and Critias – described it, only – let me suppose – to insinuate, in peoples' minds, the suspicion that over the Pillars of Hercules there was another world.

Many centuries later, Columbus –through an egg– discovered the Americas. The opening of new oceanic routes (expanded during the Fifteenth century by the Portuguese, long before the discovery of the “new world”, in particular by Henry “the navigator”) drove the adventure of European navigation towards the circumnavigation of the whole globe in search of the most remote and exotic universes.

This way the Mediterranean Sea lost –definitively– in the cartographic representations of the “new science”, even before in everyone's imagination, the privilege of being the mental barycenter of the earth. Yet, as we can read in Fernand Braudel's monumental and well documented historiographic study *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, the waters of the Mare Nostrum would still be crossed by a close net of European shipping businesses, military conflicts and both commercial and cultural exchanges during the whole Fifteenth century and even later. The vitality of the Mediterranean would be such a subject of interest as to involve –directly or indirectly– not only the lands directly facing the Mediterranean – Spain, France, Italy and others– but even the most powerful states of continental and non-continental Europe. It was an interest –moreover– destined to increase during the following centuries.

I am sorry that I cannot dwell on this matter. Yet, as a concrete example of this situation, we can consider

the opening of the Suez Canal –inaugurated on the 17th of August 1869– which created a beneficial opening into the Mediterranean basin womb.

In order to comprehend the encounter between the Western ideal of democracy with the Arabian tribal traditions, I would suggest to watch once again Lawrence of Arabia.

Thus, once the legitimacy of the Mediterranean civilization concept is acknowledged as object of historiographic analysis, it must still be questioned whether and to what extent the said civilizations show some common traits.

What seems to be crucial in this matter is the contribution of the Annales School. It stands to reason that, during centuries, there have been deep technical and social transformations, but –in the face of the methodological acquisitions of the renewed historiographic school founded by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre in 1929– it appears still undeniable that a close congruence in the “phases” of the transformation within different “historical ambits” cannot really be found: economic, political, social, religious, artistic structures and so on. In other words –as Fernand Braudel clearly explained in the volume we have already mentioned– besides an “événementielle” history (“ultra sensitive” by definition, recording the “short, quick and nervous fluctuations”) besides a “structural” history (changing slower), there is even a “longue durée” history: “the one dealing with the human being and with his relationship to the environment”.

The construction of the architectonic and urban space responds to profound necessities, deep-rooted in the humus of multi-secular cultures and as such, not modifiable according to the “événementielle” rapidity of the so-called technological progress. The principle of the “longue durée” then proves particularly suitable to explain the true meaning of architecture: a sphere of knowledge which keeps within its own disciplinary corpus traits of permanency opposed to others of faster variation. In spite of the sudden fluctuation of political, social, economical and technological events, the history of architecture and of Mediterranean cities has shown, during time, a slow and sinusoidal evolution, not reducible to the naive formulae of “linear” progress. But be careful: the “longue durée” must not be misinterpreted as a sort of immobility of the forms during the course of time. In spite of the existence of a “common history” of exchanges, in spite of the similarities of climate, in spite of the permanence of analogous building traditions, in a word: in spite of everything, the architectonic areas that have grown up on the Mediterranean coasts have developed according to the different and specific qualities of the places, including the very

context of different environmental conditions and of anthropological reminiscences every place keeps, undergoing moreover estimable changes during the course of time. This very plurality of cultures is the historical heritage’s most precious bequest and it would be pretty senseless if we tried to level it in the “globalization” and in the “common market” homologating new idolatry.

We must make a distinction – from a critical point of view – between the idea of “cosmopolitanism” –understood as a dialogue among different civilizations– and that of “internationalism” –which aims to reduce diversity into one sole model– in this way misunderstanding the true meaning of the illuminist ideal of “egalitarianism”. Thus, it is not from the past that the identity of “Mediterraneity” as a sunny and harmonious common international civilization can be drawn. On the one hand, the kaleidoscopic co-existence of different populations has represented, in a historic sense, an extraordinary wealth of interlacements among cultures, races and different idioms, on the other hand it has been the cause of several racial conflicts and religious crusades which –even recently– flooded the land and the sea with blood. Changing the plurality of cultures into a peaceful confrontation of “differences” is not the historical heritage’s innocuous bequest but rather the desirable goal of a civilized common will.

Sailing the blue waters of the Mediterranean sea, blinded by the intensity of light reflected from ever moving waves, we can consciously give free course to the nostalgia and lend our ears to the shells’ resonant hollow. Lend our ears to the sirens’ deceiving song, lyrically turning the past into an idyll. But if –as Ulysses did– we stay tied to the poles of reason, we cannot just let ourselves be deceived by a mythological reading of the ancient world and, even less, by the promises of a happy return to the motherland, lost in the wreck of classical civilizations. Out of metaphor, the historical analysis of the cities facing the Mediterranean sea must know how to recognize –in my opinion, with critical distance– the complexity of urban phenomenologies, methodologically telling the ancient myths’ ambition of harmony from the labyrinth of the real growing process of the cities themselves, marked, usually, by a conflict of the “parts”.

Moreover –as Joseph Rykwert has shown in his brilliant work *The Idea of a Town*– the myths conceal, in their legends, seductive enigmas. To comprehend the profound values that are at the origin of the city, we must always keep in mind the ineluctability of the hard fight between order and chaos, harmony and conflict or –if we prefer a geometry metaphor– between sphere and labyrinth.

The city originated, in the mythical imagination,

from the sacrifice of the brother. Not only in the Bible Cain founded the first city after having murdered Abel, but Romulus too, in the Latin-Etruscan legend, sheds on the earth the blood of his brother Remus to consecrate Rome's sulcus primigenius, marked out with the plough.

The phobia of chaos, of the wild forest -which is outside and inside us- where reason can get lost, mixes in the ancestral unconscious with the fear of the brother's children revenge. It was this very fear -for many centuries- to induce men to raise high and cyclopean masonry to defend the abstract layout's delicate founding geometry of the new city. Only in a later historical phase, the solar myth of Anphyonis, the Poet who -thanks to his irresistibly seducing Music- helps men to raise Thebes' walls in the harmony of the balanced measures and of the perfect eurhythmic, comes to dispel the darkness of Cain's tragedy. It is not by chance that -in the Greek tale- Anphyonis is associated with his brother Orpheus, who plays the flute to appease the beasts. It is acknowledged that Plato, Aristotle and other Greek philosophers would define the Polis as the place par excellence of the birth and growth of Civilization, opposing it to countryside and barbarity. And this idea will stay -held in the phoneme of the language- in Rome's culture until our days: civitas and civilitas have a common etymology.

According to this theoretical presupposition, the city is ideally understood as a specular reflection of the universe's perfect harmony. Homo faber knows he cannot reach the Divine Balance with the poverty of his means, but -yet- with the signs' elegance, he aims to reach the epiphany of the poetic dwelling: "Dichterisch wohnt der Mensch". [Heidegger]

Moreover, not only in ancient Greece, but already in the first urban areas in Mesopotamia in the third century B.C., then even in the Nile valley and along the Mediterranean eastern coasts, the city was ideally conceived according to the abstract lines of a rational geometry. The will of reflecting the idealized cosmic harmony in the urban microcosm represents, in a certain sense, not only an architectonic principle from which the logic and the constructive techniques of the city descend, rather a common religious belief.

In the first book of his *De Architectura*, Vitruvius with masterly clearness states the criteria and the rules dealing with the foundation of a city, re-echoing the theories of Deinokrates, of Hippodamus of Miletus, and other Hellenistic writers, inferred in turn from the oldest Egyptian and Asian rituals concerning the foundation of towns. Thus we can draw -with sufficient historical trustworthiness- the settling principles widespread in the classical age during

the Roman domination of the Mediterranean area, as for example the choice of a place dear to the gods and exposed to the winds, or the definition of the fortification walls' building techniques and the hierarchy of the urban layout, conceived as the harmonic crossover of hinges and decumans with, in the middle, the symbolic forum. In the archaic myths the foundation of the cities was often ascribed to a divinity or to a hero buried in the middle of the themenos, and this proves the sacral value the ancients ascribed to these urban geometries, although this was contrasted by the facts and often forgotten by later urban evolutions. As I cannot venture in the gnosiologic Odyssey in search of the seducing analogies and differences peculiar to the many places of the Mediterranean, I will try to expound, in this synthesis, the dialectic between the primary will of Harmony and the inescapable complexity of the urban labyrinth, choosing, as an example, my very own city, Nea-Polis, founded by the Greeks about two thousand five hundred years ago.

The sacral essence of the foundation principles was well known to the Greeks who -as they founded Nea-polis- chose a place of great importance both for its orographical qualities and, at the same time, for the plentifulness of its natural allegories: a fertile plain, rich in woods, placed between two (magical) volcanic phenomena, protected northwards by mountainous heights similar to stone shields erected against cold winds, but open southwards to the sea's blue hemicycle, with a natural landing by the river Sebeto's mouth. Eastwards the sun rises behind Vesuvio's enigmatic cone and, westwards it seems to set just in Averno's water circle, just where in Campi Phlegraei -that earth burning with sulfur vapors- the fluid initiatory way discloses itself to the descent towards the infernal chthonic divinities.

The establishment of the new city was traced out with geometrical rigor, exemplary for the harmonic balancing of metrical relationships, properly calibrated according to the place and articulated on a neat orthogonal network of hinges and decumans. Yet it would be a mistake to read such technical perfection as a will of absolute rationality. On the contrary, right since its origin, the city of the logos was wrapped in the labyrinthine spirals of the myth.

*"The Ancients -wrote Italo Calvino- represented the spirit of the city, with that much of vagueness and that much of preciseness, this operation requires; evoking the names of the gods who had presided at its foundation: names corresponding to environmental elements' personifications such as a water-course, a structure of the ground and a vegetal species, meant to grant its persistence as image through*

*all the following transformations, both as aesthetic shape and as symbol of the ideal society. A city can go through catastrophes and middle-ages, can see different races following one upon the other in its houses, can see its houses changing, stone by stone, but must – at the right moment – under different shapes, find again its gods”.*

Naples has metaphorically transfigured the meaning of its foundation in the myth of Partenope, inferred from an older cult of the mermaid, deep-seated in the pre-existent city of Palepoli. As in other legends, different allegorical meanings have blended and mingled with esoteric enigmas during the course of time, giving birth to a semantic entanglement, which is indeed very hard to disentangle from a scientific point of view.

Yet we can try the hermeneutics of the myths, because –as Carl Gustav Jung and Károly Kerényi suggested– under the apparent naiveté of the tales, are hidden profound anthropological values of everybody’s oneric sphere.

In the oldest version of the myth, Partenope was a hybrid of human kindness and animal wildness: the face of a “virgin” young girl and the body of a bird (and not of a fish, as in the later and more famous legend). According to the legend, the winged virgin was the daughter (together with her two sisters Ligea and Leucosia) of the river-god Acheloo and of mother-earth Persephone. In the chrysalis of this fantasy, a forest of symbols is held which refers to nature’s primary elements: sky, earth, water and underworld. But there’s more. Leading her life among the rocks and the woods along the sea coasts, Partenope had been trying in vain to seduce Ulysses, giving him –through the sweetness of her singing– the deception of the delighted return to the motherland (in another apologue we read that she meant to inebriate him with her melody and then drag him with her claws in Persephone’s hellish womb). Refused by the “hero of knowledge” who was moved by the wind of an unrestrained will of new experiences, the mermaid committed suicide, throwing herself from the highest point of a rock (katapontismòs), and her body dragged by the waves was stocked among the cliffs of the Neapolitan gulf. In the ancient myth Partenope’s body was buried in Megaride, the landing islet of the old Palepolis, even though in later narratives the virgin’s grave was transferred inside the walls of Neapolis, according to the widespread belief of the foundation rites. The exact location of the grave remains uncertain. Some sources point out to a cave beneath the present church of San Giovanni Maggiore, but other sources place it at the very heart of the new city, that is to say in a naos within the ancient walls (fifth century

B.C.) which became later the base of the Dioscuri temple (first century A.D). This is the temple which overlooked the scenery of the agora, namely the forum with its impressive hexastyle pronaos, two Corinthian columns of which still remain, set in the beautiful Eighteenth century facade of the present church of San Paolo Maggiore.

But the most suggestive tale is the one describing the mermaid’s metamorphosis into the very morphology of the landscape, laid along the arch of the gulf, with her “head” leaning eastwards on the height of Capodimonte, her “body” surrounded by the walls of the city and her “foot” (or tail) facing west, dipping into the sea, appearing on the surface in Piedigrotta, in the hilly promontory of Posillipo. The rite of the city’s foundation dissolves, this way, in the cult of landscape. You know what a deep love the Greeks felt for nature and their attitude towards a poetic transfiguration of the *ùóis* (fusis) in the lines of the building process. Just think about the metaphor of the column as stone translation of the trunk of a tree.

Thus it is surely not superfluous to question the reasons which induced this sea population to dig – ever since the first settlements– caves and cuniculi in the darkness of the subsoil to raise then –with the some material withdrawn from the hypogean cavities– the temples dedicated to the solar divinities of Olympus.

It will be the tuff –with its warm yellow color and its tactile roughness– to imprint the primary material stamp to the building culture of the place, which will remain during the centuries as a sort of metahistorical image: the malleable stone of the supposed cave of the Sybil in Cuma, of the cave at the foot of the Monte di Dio dedicated to a very old solar cult, of the Piscina Mirabilis in Bacoli (enlarged in roman times) and of the hypogean cavities in the Eumenidi and Virgin’s valleys, re-utilized by the Christians as catacombs hidden among ancient sepulchers many centuries later. Besides reasons of practical nature, which induced people to carry out stone caves, military cuniculi, water tanks and other kinds of technical works, the mystical reasons must not be neglected.

“The Greek knowledge” –as Giorgio Colli would say– conveyed both by Dionysian and Apollonian cults, shows a “hermaphrodite” sensibility based on an ambiguous osmosis between opposite items: between life and death, joy and sorrow, light and shadow, Eros and cruelty, ecstasy and fury, female and male. In the myth of the Sibyls itself –which shows several analogies with the mermaids as, for example, that both are supposed to be “virgin”– the darkness of the cave is closely connected (by

antithesis) to the brightness of Apollo's ray, which cannot penetrate the penumbra of the cave's mazes. The Cumae Sibyl (as well as Daphne who, in Delphi, turned into a laurel tree to escape Apollo's attempts) refused the love of the sun god, receiving nonetheless the oracle talent, strengthened by a millenary longevity. Hidden in the darkness, the old virgin entrusted her prophecies to words she wrote with her teeth on laurel leaves, letting them then to be scattered by the wind.

The bequest of this ancestral oneric substratum will remain during centuries, returning in different epiphanies: similar, but never the same. As an example I would quote the analogical stratification of mystery rites that historically followed one upon another along the "Cocceo Crypt". It is an exemplary gallery of high Roman engineering, dug between the third and the second century B.C., at the foot of the hill of Posillipo to link, in more linear way, the civitas neapolitana with the Campi Phlegraei. Yet, since the beginning, the fanciful aberrations of the solar cult –practiced, since remotes times, in a cave existing before the gallery– mixed with logical planning.

In the Satyricon, Petronio placed in this very cuniculus the orgiastic myths dedicated to Priapo. Even more trustworthy is the hypothesis that rites dedicated to the god Mitra have been practiced there, confirmed by Capaccio as he states that in fifteenth century a tombstone dedicated to the god Mitra was found "in media crypta pausilypana". Very meaningful is even the analysis of the city of logos, that is to say the research into the basic principles and the building rules of the nuova polis' urban structure.

Geometric principles soon reflected on the regular rural layouts, until they reached the harmony of the centauratio during the Roman age. Between 1489 and 1493 Fra Giacomo da Verona, an "extremely learned monk", Humanist of great prestige and translator of Vitruvius's *De Architettura*, spent four years in Naples at the court of Alfonso II of Aragon with the purpose of verifying the urban principles described in *De Architettura's* liber primus (paragraphs 5,6,7). Naples was indeed the only city in Italy founded on a rigorous and geometrical urban layout.

The other main subject –protracting during the centuries– was the relationships between the city and the sea. It is not a mere chance that to welcome the travelers in the port a statue of the mermaid was erected, an *èternel féminin*, with her plentiful gushing breasts in a fountain designed by Domenico Fontana at the end of the XVI century, on a street, S. Maria del Pilar, which he himself had leveled and paved to connect the Molo Grande and the Molo Piccolo.

Besides the phantasmagorias, it is a matter of fact that the port has represented the privileged entrance to the city for many centuries, the place par excellence for the encounter of different people and languages. This "limit" (limes) urban section –a big square on the water, with its long landing wharves stretched out like stone arms among the waves– has dominated the Parthenopean historical iconography. Indeed, it is just from the sea that Naples was painted in the beautiful Tavola Strozzi, the first reliable representation of Naples' urban structure, the occasion of which was the triumphal return of the Aragon fleet after the victorious naval battle in Ischia against Giovanni D'Angiò on the 12th of July 1465.

Thus, in the modern age, the port was still considered as a representative place, the "face" per antonomasia of the city, to the design of which architects and engineers have dedicated imaginative skills, not limiting themselves to solve problems of technical nature, rather making the wharves even more precious with statues, fountains, towers, portals and scenographic constructions. In its metamorphosis this facade was developed together with historical building processes as the image reflected in the water of the city, as in a game of reciprocal reflections.

Only in recent times this symbiosis has been interrupted with a rigid Customs barrier taking its place, preventing the direct contact between the population and the gulf, even along the most ancient tract of urban coast: thus we can justify Ortese's metaphor as she says that "the sea doesn't wash Naples any longer".

Still in Eighteenth century views –and in particular in Antonio Joli's painting "Neaples from the port"– the wharf appears swarming with people walking along the seaside, with the passing of coaches along the well paved landing wharf in the background of big ships at moorage, while the octagonal baroque fountain –with its perspective of the avenue leading to St Giacomo's church at the foot of Vomero's green hill, surmounted by St. Elmo Castel's tufaceous mass– shows the main ways to the city.

Not indulging in a pathetic nostalgia for past times, it must still be questioned what the historical reasons have been that have led to the present "detachment" between Naples and its port. Why have they come to be two autonomous entities, one indifferent from the other? And, at last, what remains today –in the so deeply changed image of the city– of a millenary past of stories and myths? At very first sight, nothing or quite nothing at all. The city has turned into a wide labyrinth where reason can loose its bearings unless it chooses to follow

Ariadne's fil rouge. Only the beauty of nature has survived the assaults of bad building industry and bad town planning.

It is not a chance that the souvenir image par excellence of Naples –that is to say the greeting postcard– doesn't show, as a symbol of the city, a significant building as, for example, the Tour Eiffel in Paris or Big Ben in London. Naples' tourist postcard shows, still today, the pine trees standing out in foreground in the scenery of the gulf's waters, moved by the wind, and overlooked, in the background, by the great mass of the fuming Vesuvio.

Thus we must ask: is it possible to put together –as in a puzzle– the thousand smithereens into which the imago urbis bequeathed from the past has been broken? Or should we perhaps forever give up trying to re-establish a harmonic relationship between building industry and nature? Should we resign ourselves to the advent of a modernity which, proceeding with faster and faster acceleration, could irreversibly cancel –through a technological process– every single trace of the past?

I really don't think so. Personally I think technique is the highest achievement of human intelligence. Nonetheless, technique is nothing but an instrument that culture must use with great mastery. Consequently, I am not afraid of a fated technological future where there would no longer be any quality and respect for the environment. And that is the crucial subject matter of the discussion nowadays. We must side on one or the other side of the barricade. We must choose whether to stay on the side of those who believe in the chance of an anthropological reformation of architecture and urban planning or, on the contrary, on the side of those who accept and want to increase the soulless leveling of the All is Baseness homologating globalization?

Let's go back then to our subject: Naples, my beautiful sea-city. It is my personal opinion that foreign visitors have played a very important role in making us understand the profound value of our history. Looking at our places with "different" eyes –that is to say: eyes that weren't "inured" to our landscapes– they could see this way what escaped the inattentive look of the city's inhabitants, exhausted by the harshness of everyday life. Among the several foreigners who visited our city I will remember here only some of them.

First of all Wolfgang Goethe who, in a letter addressed to his friend Humboldt, stated that he had caught with more immediacy than by reading so many Homeric books, the most authentic essence of the ancient Greek civilization by visiting the peasant houses along the slopes of the Vesuvio and the Pompeian ruins which survived the wreck of

the classical age.

Then Karl Friedrich Schinkel who came to Naples for the first time in 1803 and managed later to transplant, in the rigid German climate, the chilliness of the pergolas and the elegance of the white Mediterranean houses.

And still Josef Maria Hoffmann who dedicated some unforgettable pages to the architecture of the Island of Capri –published in March 1897 in the review "Der Architekt"– exalting the absolute simplicity of the rural houses' pure volumes.

And lastly Walter Benjamin who caught the similitude between the "porosity" typical of the Tufa stone and the "porosity" of the urban structure, drawing in this way one of the most figurative images of Naples in the essay he wrote together with his friend Asja Lacis and published in the "Frankfurter Zeitung" in 1925.

In recent times the School of Architecture in Naples has invited architects from different countries to engage in the crucial planning subjects within Naples' urban re-qualification. I am referring in particular to the "Projects for Naples" of 1987. Among the most interesting planning proposals I would like to remember the project for the Waterfront developed, with masterly poetic fascination, by Carlo Aymonio, Aldo Rossi, Alvaro Siza and others. Also very meaningful has been the exhibition with the title "Underneath Naples: Ideas for the underground city" (1988), based on the fascination of that kind of architecture achieved through "subtractions", digging into the womb of the city caves and hypogean architectures.

I just cannot conclude this short contribution without remembering the importance of Le Corbusier, who came for the first time to Naples on the 10th of October 1910. He visited the streets and the squares of the city. He caught with his camera –a Cupido 80– the lights and shadows on the facade of the Chiesa del Gesù. Then he traveled to Pompei, going on his first Voyage d'Orient. To this voyage he dedicated his first manuscript, which, by the irony of fate, was the last book published by Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, born in la Chaux-de-Fond on the 6th of October 1887.

Few days before dying he had noted in the Cabanon cave in Cape Martin these words:

*Au cours des années, je suis devenu un homme de partout. J'ai voyagé à travers les continents. Je n'ai qu'une attache profonde: la Méditerranée.*

*Je suis Méditerranéen, très fortement.*

*Méditerranée, reine de formes et de lumière.*

*La Lumière et l'Espace...*

*La Mer c'est mouvement, horizon sans fin.*