

STONE ARCHITECTURE

ANCIENT AND MODERN CONSTRUCTION SKILL

Towards a “new architecture” of the book

It is always a great loss for any creative work not to be able to include the memories of the occasions that generated it and the inspired moments in which its structure was sketched out. I have learned that the conception of any idea incorporates elements of both contemplation and vision; the conception of an idea involves, if only for a moment, a flash of light and the arrangement of things where only a confused mass seemed to lie an instant before. I would be satisfied with this book if it only succeeded in giving off a glow in the “glittering darkness” of our present.

The point has now been reached where, from this unusual perspective, I can recall the *kairos* (the propitious moment of the call to action), the questions I asked myself as preparation for the planning of *Stone Architecture*, and the actions taken during the “post-idea” period related to the production of the book itself.

August 1999. Surrounded by motionless ruins on the sunny acropolis at Velia, a few kilometres from Poseidonia, I focus the old SLR camera, which had become a natural extension of my body and inner vision of the world. Beneath the turquoise Mediterranean sky, I was in search of the origin of the “brick style”, and Velia was turning out to be, from this standpoint, a site packed with surprises.

The ring tone of the mobile telephone broke the silence and the magic of the place. The unexpected and friendly voice of Enrico Fontana, on behalf of LUCENSE in Lucca, brought me an invitation and an opportunity. He was calling to put at my disposal sufficient resources and contacts for the undertaking and even the planning anew of a project that had already been defined both in my mind and on paper: the exploration of the vast horizon represented by stone architecture. My mind was soon made up.

From the start, the slow preparation for the project involved careful reflection on the means by which the contents of the book would be investigated and presented. The most appropriate solutions were sought.

It has been emphasised several times how for at least a century the long tradition of architectural treatises has been broken. Works of systematic, comprehensive study, attempts at a general summary and bringing up-to-date of the discipline’s theoretical foundations, have all become increasingly impracticable and, in consequence, dispensed with by architects.

In addition to treatises, the production of planning manuals (whether technological or typological) seems to have been obfuscated in the models developed and made available to planners over the last few decades.

Equally discouraging is the state of health of other types of architectural literature today—monographs of architects, building catalogues, and books of criticism or history; those publications that do exist are related to the “periphery” of the discipline that in general deal with—evasively and hagiographically—the transformations taking place and the value of the contemporary situation, to the extent that they are considered by most to be valueless.

Faced with this state of uncertainty, if not crisis, what direction should I take? Was there any sense—I wondered at a certain point of the mental process that prepares the ground for any idea—in attempting to compose in a different manner the most distinctive and crucial elements in the various types of existing literature, in an effort to produce a “new architecture” of an architectural book? New in its content and its structure, new in its vision of the subject through a different use of its photographs and diagrams, etc., new in its breakdown and hierarchy of its levels of information, and new in its graphical presentation and communication of the theme.

It would therefore be neither a treatise, nor a manual, nor a book of criticism or history, nor a catalogue, but a book that straddled the different genres. A printed work resulting from fusions, associations and new elements integrated with the materials examined.

I like to present this book as an “archaeological place” that has tried to keep alive the memory of different genres. If I were to deconstruct and analyse the book, I would find narrative passages, fragments of ideas and thoughts, and elements “uprooted” with a certain violence from contexts I have learned to know, appreciate and love and which, perhaps for this very reason, I instinctively

wanted to revive here with the hope of throwing new light on the mystery of the world and the life of the book of architecture.

The underlying aim of *Stone Architecture* is not to redefine the universal language of the “lithic style” based on the age-old traditions of Classical expression—which I have also examined—or the formal articulations of contemporary works, but to search for a single place of convergence that offers practical help in reconsidering and re-enabling one of the most ancient and representative types of architecture.

Although assembled through processes of association to create a single corpus, the contents of this book are presented in a manner that allows them to be dealt with separately. They cover three general themes: the *foundations* (i.e., the design culture, the sedimentation of the concepts and ideas that underlie stone architecture), the *constructive methods and practices* that together define the technological style with their prescriptive and essential attributes, and finally the *contemporary works* that, in their bringing of the “lithic style” up to date, enhance, shift and modify the balance achieved by the design culture to date.

This three-part breakdown of the book is matched by a symmetrically structured presentation of the text, photographs and drawings in the innovative graphical layout with its differentiated composition and paging.

We have thus returned to the medium, the narrative device that I searched for right from the start (and in the end found thanks to the creative talent of Massimo Pucci) to enhance the contents of *Stone Architecture*. It is my belief that “thinking” and “communicating architecture”—on a level with “designing architecture”—means associating and connecting elements of different origins, character and importance; it means creating hierarchies and constructing conceptual structures able to bring to mind a memory consisting of images that can calmly be “consulted” and “explored” from different perspectives.

April 2006. The printed work is ready and packaged. All it is missing are these brief jacket notes, the purpose of which is to provide an “approach”, an “entry” for those readers it is soon to meet. I wonder, in these final moments, if I have written *for* these readers or *also for* them.

I have no ready answer. A *post scriptum* may provide a sort of map to retrace the steps of my journey, but also to provide a reply to this question posed right at the end of the project.