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At the end of each chapter, there are books and papers mentioned, which have directly influenced the author's point of view. A generic bibliography is not given, since it is constantly renewed and complemented with new, important contributions.

This book talks about architecture, about the concerns, the pursuits and the achievements of its people, and about how their work has been perceived.

Just as any other narrative, however, this account is by its very nature unfair—not only because Western architecture is overrepresented in it, but also because it leaves out of the picture thousands and thousands of buildings in which real people were born, brought up, lived, and died. Small jewels, monuments of vanity, or simply ordinary—all were the product of toil and the receptors of dreams; for that reason alone, they do not deserve the oblivion into which they are pushed deeper with each new reference to other, seemingly slightly better, slightly more important, or slightly more celebrated contemporary buildings.

With the unkindness and arrogance associated with our power to choose, to remember, and to forget, this book looks at the past through the lenses of someone who—in the chaotic complexity of the universe of edifices—seeks to understand why and how people build.

The past emerges unexpectedly in its proximity. This is probably the best vindication of those who devoted their time and efforts to create day by day, stone by stone, the environment in which we live today.

This book is a guide for reading architecture of yesterday with our eyes focused on tomorrow. It is written with the hope that it will spur the reader to search for other views and to complement his/her knowledge with further reading and the examination of other sources; and to look around him/her once more at the magic of the world surrounding us.

# ARE THERE ARCHETYPES IN ARCHITECTURE?

## The Terra Amata Huts

Unlike clothes, buildings cannot be squeezed into the back of our closet or taken to the local charity shop when no longer in fashion; they are meant to stay. Not having the chance to design new ones for the upcoming season, architects would like their buildings to withstand the test of time and not be seen as obsolete the day after; owners who pay good money to have the buildings erected expect their investments to have value for as long as possible; and users insist that certain things be done the way they “should” be done, no matter how fascinated by innovative ideas they might be. This is why the question “are there archetypes in architecture?” has been central to architectural theory throughout the ages, and still retains, to some extent, its validity. An archetype in architecture is a form that we keep reproducing, more or less deliberately, acknowledging therein an irrefutable wisdom and an appeal that may never perish. “Form” is used here in the original sense of the term: as the structure, organization or essential character of something, rather than merely its appearance. An archetype, then, is a paradigm that incorporates what is important and perennial, and as such one that can adapt to specific contemporary requirements over changing times, while maintaining all its primary qualities.

Watching children drawing pictures of their dream homes in the almost stereotypical shape of a small house complete with roof and smoking chimney, one feels as though he/she is witnessing an archetype in architecture. This might well be so. In the remote past, humans evidently used to build huts fairly similar to our own perception of an essential dwelling: the simplest imaginable shelter with a smoking chimney.

In the nineteen-sixties, a team led by Henry de Lumley discovered at the site of Terra Amata in Nice, southern France, vestiges of large huts erected 400,000 years ago—although other scholars doubt his interpretations completely or date the finds tens of thousands of years later; 400,000 years is a long time. The human species, to which the individuals

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Hut, Terra Amata, France, circa 400,000 years before today; reconstruction by Henri Puech/Musée de Terra Amata/Ville de Nice

who built the huts belonged, was extinct long ago. Modern humans came to Europe from Africa about 40,000 years ago. The Parthenon was built 2,500 years ago; Leonardo da Vinci conceived his flying machines 500 years ago; and the first underground railway line began operating in London 150 years ago.

De Lumley’s excavations revealed that several meters beneath the current surface of the ground, earth and sand were thinner in texture in some places. He interpreted this as dirt accumulated in holes born by tree branches pinned to the ground; the wood disintegrated over time, but left traces on the walls of the holes, providing further evidence to support his assumptions. The holes, clustered in several groups, were not perpendicular, indicating that the branches converged together forming real roofs. The huts, erected along what would have been the seaside at that time—to offer temporary shelter to humans coming to the area to hunt or fish—were oblong, measuring approximately eight to twelve by four to five meters. At the center of each hut, traces of fire were found; probably at the top an opening was left to let the smoke out. Also uncovered here and there were clusters of similar objects—fragments of stone, animal bones, food remains, etc.—suggesting that the space inside each hut had been organized so that different activities (preparing and cooking food, tool making, sleep, etc.) should take place in distinct zones, similarly to modern dwellings.

Traces of a more recent but still very early dwelling—150,000 years old—were discovered inside a cave only a few kilometers away from Terra Amata. At Grotte du Lazaret, a number of large stones circumscribed an

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