Fluid Identities

Material Imagination and the Ritual of Water Collection
at the Mineral Spring of Sofia

by
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A thesis
presented to the University of Waterloo
in fulfilmeant of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Architecture

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2010
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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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ABSTRACT

How do we still build for a specific place and culture in the age of globalization, where the notion of culture has become fluid and drawn from a multiplicity of locations? This thesis argues that rather than relying on ideologies of symbols, an authentic regional architecture must derive its meaning through the experience of localized rituals that take place over time, and thus give constancy to place.

The notion of cultural identity in this thesis, is explored through the story of the Baths and the Mineral Spring in Sofia, Bulgaria. This story takes us from the origins of the city of Sofia, through its cultural mutations and transformations and finally to the questions posed by the decommissioned Baths at the heart of the city. The thesis design proposal outlines an alternate architectural strategy to the current proposal: converting the historic Bath House into a prestigious spa center and 'Museum of Sofia'. The alternate design in contrast, addresses the importance of place specific ritual and the still enduring practice of spring water collection - which has now been dislocated from the main Baths square.

The question of authenticity in the design for the Baths Square is strongly connected to the changing notion of cultural identity; the cultural identity of Sofia and its relationship to place is thus examined from a number of perspectives. The origins of identity, as explored in this thesis, are rooted in our responses to a particular environment; a rapport which has framed our social ideologies, cultural practices, and their formal manifestations. However, within the regimes of globalization the concept of cultural identity has become completely uprooted from 'place' and has come into crisis. Identity has thus become a problematic concept in the modern mind – useful in proclaiming our uniqueness and difference, and yet subject to inductivism, manipulation and commodification. In response to this crisis of identification, there is a frantic desire to reaffirm the local and re-envision a collective identity.

This thesis proposes an architecture of the material imagination - which recognizes the multiplicity of our cultural reality today and the impossibility of a singular cultural representation. It creates spaces that are not designed primarily on the visual level of the symbol but rather spaces which are to be experienced sensorially and habitually; only then becoming part of the collective experience and identity of the culture. These spaces reduce the specificity of the symbol as a depiction of 'one' identity, and rather derive cultural meaning from the experience of a unique and hierophantic place, and its living practice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply thankful for the inspiration and encouragement of my supervisor Ryszard Sliwka. Words cannot express the gratitude I feel for the poetic world you have opened up for me. Neither I nor my thesis would have been the same without all of our conversations.

I am also very appreciative for the time and advice given to me by my advisors Janna Levitt and Robert Jan Van Pelt, who helped to make this a stronger and clearer thesis. Janna, thank you especially for reminding me that the body and the human being are at the heart of the spaces we create.

I would like to thank my external reader Fred Thompson for participating on my committee; thank you taking such care in reading and engulfing yourself in this project.

Since access to the Sofia Mineral Baths has been restricted for the past two decades, I am much indebted to the individuals at KIN 'Kulturno-Historichesko Nasledstvo' - the Cultural-Historical Heritage center of Sofia – who so kindly allowed me the rare opportunity to visit and photograph the building. And especially to Valentina Varbanova at KIN who helped me to find much of the information concerning the Baths and Mineral Spring.

Finally thanks to my parents who have been my unconditional support. Thank you for teaching me to read the Cyrillic texts I came across - even when it felt like I was in grade two and not in a Masters program - and supporting me in my search for roots and my own fluid identity. Your encouragement and inspiration throughout this entire journey has meant the world to me.

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THE STORY OF THE

MINERAL SPRING IN SOFIA

Fig. 1.0

The 'Central Mineral Baths' in Sofia and its adjoining 'Banksi Square' are located above the central mineral hot spring that flows from the heart of the city. The original Baths were founded by the Romans in 29 B.C., when the town 'Ulpia Serdica' was established. The town itself was founded in this location in the Sofia Valley due to the presence and distinct properties of the mineral spring. The culture of bathing and mineral water collection persisted during the First (809 -1018 A.D.) and Second (1191-1382 A.D.) Bulgarian Empires when the town was known as 'Sredets'. When the city fell under Ottoman occupation in 1382 the hot spring was used to run the traditional Turkish Bath House - which remained in operation for the next five hundred years. Post liberation (1878 A.D.) the Baths were re-built in the Viennese Secession style as part of the Bulgarian National Revival movement. They were used by the citizens of the new nation's capital Sofia, for the next eight decades - until they came into such disrepair in 1986 that they were permanently closed down. They have thus remained closed and unoccupied for the past two decades.

Today there is an ongoing debate about the restoration and future use of the Baths. Currently there is a transpiring proposal to convert the historic bath house into a prestigious spa center and 'Museum of Sofia'. However this design proposal grossly neglects the still enduring practice of spring water collection that persists outside of the main Baths Square, and turns its back almost all together on the importance of 'place' and the spring itself. The proposal looks at the bath house only as a historic artifact, a hollow vessel whose long standing use and meaning has become secondary. It can now only represent an image of itself and a perceived Sofian identity, rather than act as an arena for the collective practices which defined this place. Consequently through the closure of the bath house and the new proposed program, a vital catalyst of Sofian identity - which had persisted for over two millennia - has been lost.

However the culture of the spring in the collective memory of the citizens of Sofia has not been forgotten. The mineral spring water has been redirected to a smaller adjacent square where people still gather to collect its waters. The mineral properties of the water are mythologized and said to cure numerous illnesses and promote health. The persistent ritual of water collection thus demonstrates how the people of Sofia still hold onto the legend of the spring as a part of the story of the city; even though the current architecture and urban layout has turned its back to its vital importance as a cultural catalyst.

The following series of photographs were taken in the closed down 'Sofia Mineral Baths' and show the Baths in their vast emptiness; wrapped up and preserved but lacking any real charge to ignite a sense of cultural identity for the Sofian people. There is both an absence of water and human presence, which once activated the Baths and gave them an authentic spirit of place. The bath house itself, thus waiting in limbo, can be seen as a metaphor for the absence of the 'genius loci' that once defined the Sofian identity.

Fig. 1.1

Fig. 1.2

Fig. 1.3

Fig. 1.4

Fig. 1.5

Fig. 1.6

Fig. 1.7

Fig. 1.8

Fig. 1.9

Fig. 1.10

THE SITE

There is a point in Sofia, which helped the city to survive through the times and proved to be vital for its organism. I first visited Sofia twenty years ago and being a foreigner I had difficulties finding that point. I strolled along the streets, looking for the church at the big square, so typical for the urban scheme of any European city. I felt overwhelmed by the incomprehensible urban structure of Sofia, which featured the elements of the European cities, yet lacked their integrity and clear logic. Back then I never came upon that point so important for the city. Later on, I realized that it was hidden under a mask I was not even aware of. Now, living in Sofia, I have found out that the main 'acupuncture' point of the city is the building of the Central Baths and the area around it. The area has an unparalleled character. Here the temples of different religions – the Muslim, the Jewish, the Orthodox and the Catholic stand side by side...

There is yet another significant element – the temples and the buildings in the area stand on the foundations of the Roman city of Serdica. This is not so by chance, because people have recognized the power of that place since ancient times. To me, it is in the thermal springs that attract diverse people, cleanse them and bring them above the religious and cultural differences. A dynamic dialogue between nature and humanity takes place here.

Yoshi Yamazaki [1]

a 'Banski Square'
b Sofia Central Mineral Baths
c 'Banya Bashi' Mosque
d Existing Mineral Water Taps
e Film Institute/ Cinema
f Public Market
g Sofia Synagogue
h TSUM Store
i Sveta Petka Church (below grade)
j Statue of Sofia
(formally Statue of Lenin)
k Council of Ministers
l National Assembly
m Presidential Building
n St. George Church (below grade)
o Archaeological Museum
(formally the 'Grand Mosque')
p Sveta Nedelya Church

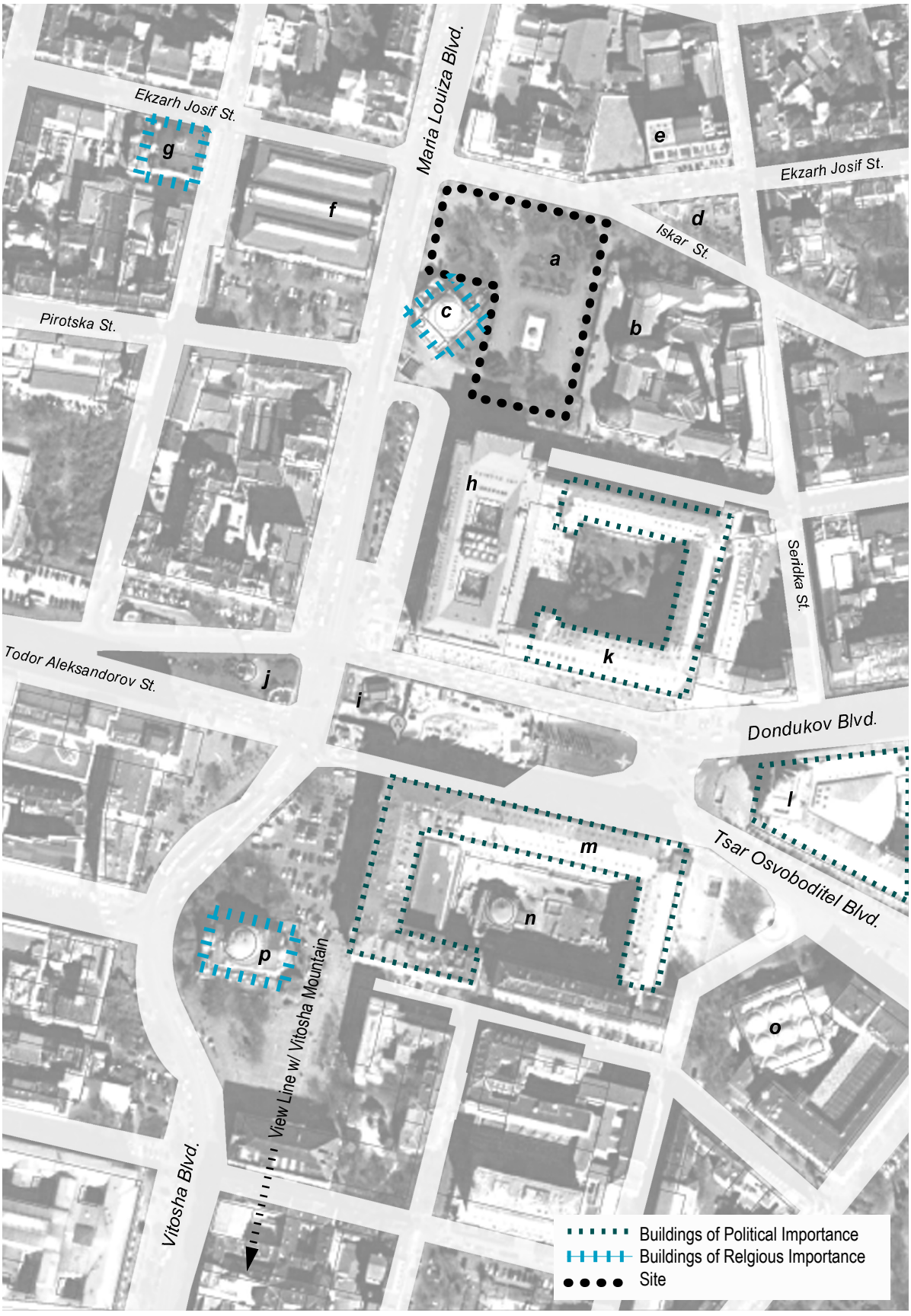

Ekzarh Josif St.
Maria Louiza Blvd.
Ekzarh Josif St.
Iskar St.
Pirotska St.
Seridka St.
Todor Aleksandorov St.
Dondukov Blvd.
Tsar Osvoboditel Blvd.
View Line w/ Vitosha Mountain
Vitosha Blvd.
a
b
c
d
e
f
g
h
i
j
k
l
m
n
o
p
Buildings of Political Importance
Buildings of Relgious Importance
Site

Fig. 1.11

Fig. 1.12

There is a traditional relationship that exists between place and cultural identity. The response of a group of people to their surroundings – to their earthly environment or interpretations of the celestial – is at the root of all cultural belief, custom, and ritual. This connection between people and place is then translated into the urban space making strategies and formal justifications of early architecture. As cultural theorist Gordon Mathews describes, "First the social structures and cultural norms establish standards of human activities in response to the environmental variables and resources, and then architecture provides the mediation by accommodating and reinforcing such standards."[2] Moreover, the social elite which governed over a culture laid claim to a deeper understanding of this relationship and thus justified a control over the space making strategies of the city and its ritual events. This gave them the power to influence the social hierarchies and ideologies of that culture and frame its particular identity. Architecture as a result - through the fabrication of important buildings and the urban layout of the city itself - helped to reinforce and define what we valued as a society and saw as sacred or significant.

The following section examines the influence of 'place' and our environment on the symbols and systems of spatial order that we have used to define our cultural identity. We will look at three distinct spatial strategies employed in this identification. The first is that of *horizontal order* which incorporates ideas of centrality, layout and physical orientation - setting up relationships of order and value in the city. The second spatial strategy is *vertical order*, one whose orders of power and sacrality are rooted in the hierarchy of height. The third, unlike the first two is not an urban strategy, but an architectural strategy which attempts to justify the form of important public buildings through *formal mimicry*. The rationalisation behind these formal representations describes the origins of the architectural symbols that we have now come to identify ourselves by. These spatial strategies will all attempt to show how the formal manifestations of buildings and cities were deeply connected to the cultural beliefs and practices that came from our relationship to 'place'.

Most of our early beliefs and cultural customs can be seen as a response to our geographic context. The unique conditions of 'place' have generated unique cultural responses which we have come to identify ourselves by. The overarching atmosphere and tone created by our natural surroundings can be observed in the difference between the feeling of the vast openness of a desert plain, the sense of voyeurism on a hill top, or the feeling of enclosure in a valley surrounded by mountains.[3] Norberg-Schulz refers to as these ambiences as *Genius Loci*, or the inherent 'spirit of a place': "In all countries in fact we find that the naming of regions and landscapes reflect the existence of natural places which have structurally determined identity. The individual genius loci is therefore part of a hierarchical system, and must be seen in this context to be fully understood."[4]

These qualities of mood and atmosphere often have a direct relationship to the qualities of scale and density that they evoke. In fact we are constantly measuring ourselves up against our surroundings in order to inform our primary understanding of the world. We see proportion and interrelationship of 'constituent elements' and then measure them up against our own bodies.[5] Artist Olafur Eliasson played with this very concept in his work entitled *New York City Waterfalls*. He said that "[a] waterfall is a way of measuring space"[6]; as water always falls at the same speed and people intuitively know this, a waterfall gives people the ability to measure distance and gives them a sense of dimension. Therefore, since we are constantly measuring ourselves up against our environment -both man-made and natural - it is easy to explain how the notion of scale (massive or minuscule) or density (expansive or constricting) can affect our understanding of a place and form our identification with it.

> The notion that the landscape determines fundamental existential meanings or contents, is confirmed by the fact that most people feel 'lost' when they are moved to a 'foreign' landscape. It is well known that people of the great plains easily suffer claustrophobia when they have to live in a hilly country, and that those who are used to being surrounded by intimate spaces easily become victims of agoraphobia.[7]

This example given by Norberg-Schulz illustrates how we get use to a certain quality of density and when removed from this familiar spatial sensation, we can feel displaced. Furthermore, our understanding of these spatial qualities in our natural environment, and our identification with them, is so deep that they often inform the way in which we choose to build. For example in Bulgaria, a country filled with mountain ranges and hence an abundance of caves, the myth of holy hermits finding divine inspiration in these pockets of the mountain led to the building of humble, dark churches with under-scaled and low thresholds which imposed a sense of constriction when entering the space.[8] Similar mimicking of spatial qualities of the natural world in order to generate the forms in which we build, has been used throughout history.

Fig. 1.13

Fig. 1.14

The holy cave in the Rila Mountains where Saint Ivan Rilski, Patron Saint of Bulgaria, spent his years as a hermit.

In addition to creating the basic proportional and physical framework for how we built, our natural environment was the source of the rituals we invented to interact with it. Many cultural myths, divinifications and customs arose from our emotional response to place and our particular dependence on its natural patterns as a way of life. Essentially our need, fear and praise of certain natural features and phenomenons informed the way in which we acted and this things that we revered. In mountain regions there is often an idealisation of a neighbouring high peak; which became associated with greatness or divinity - aka with the dwelling place of the Gods - or as a place of divine

revelation and meeting between earth and sky[9]. In coastal regions on the other hand, there is a reverence for the sea; which is simultaneously seen as the source of food and survival, as well as the bringer of storms and destruction. Often these coastal towns performed ritual acts to pay homage to the sea or the sea personified as a local God. Even more interestingly, the desert which had an eternal, monolithic quality is for this very reason seen as the birthplace of monotheistic religion. Norberg-Schulz draws attention to the fact that "In the desert... man does not encounter the multifarious 'forces' of nature', but experiences its most absolute cosmic properties... The belief that there is only one God, monotheism, has in fact come into being in the desert countries of the Near East."[10] These examples show that each geographic region has its own myths[11] and customs deeply connected to its unique position and place.

Some natural places however not only *represented* divine beings and myths, but were themselves *regarded as* sacred. Historian of religion, Mircea Eliade explains that certain geographic features such as mountains, waterfalls, caverns and stones, are somehow intrinsically sacred.[12] We intuitively look for these places in our environment and align ourselves with them. The reasoning for their *sacredness* can be explained through our instinctual search for the meaning and uniqueness in our place and existence. Lindsay Jones, in the *Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture,* explains that in Eliade's view "...human beings simply cannot lead meaningful lives in undifferentiated, homogeneous space; they must, in order to participate in 'being', and thus become 'real', orient themselves with respect to these hierophantic places."[13] We, as human beings, need to find the *unique* in the world around us, and thereby identify ourselves with it. We cannot live in a world where everything is homogenous, and equal in meaning. This is the essential human condition that has laid the foundations for our desire to identify with a unique

place and culture; to find sacrality in the place which we inhabit and hence give meaning to our existence.

Horizontal Order

Orientation in general is a fundamental and almost instinctual practice performed in one form or another by almost every single society and culture on earth. Norberg-Schulz implies that there is often a direct correlation between cultural identity and the physical act of orienting oneself in space: "Human identity presupposes the identity of place. Identification and orientation are primary aspects of man's being-in-the-world."[14] It is however the unique direction or point of reference towards which we orient, that defines each culture and differentiates it from the rest. It is thus the choice of what to define as privileged in relation to ourselves that frames the culturally pivotal question of our identity.

As discussed, man's relationship to his environment is at the root of most of our cultural beliefs and practices. The physical method of *orientation* was specifically used as a spatial strategy to define our position in relation to the world. As described by Eliade, orientation is "the fundamental process of situating human life in the world... the conscious act of defining and assuming proper position in space."[15] In fact Eliade often equates the principle of orientation in early societies, to religion itself. Orientation, which is reflected in the physical layout of our cities, is at the root of many of our unique cultural values and religious beliefs. Jones expands on this argument:

> Orientation involves finding, both literally and metaphorically one's place in the world – or in the case of sacred architecture, actually constructing one's place in the world. [Thus there exist] complex interrelations between orientation, architecture, and ritual.[16]

Further to merely directing attention *towards* something, the act of orientation inherently renders or articulats one thing to be more meaningful in reference to another. Thus orientation is a way in which cultures have chosen to render certain places as 'sacred' or significant. Yi-Fu Tuan, in *Space and Place*, says that orientation accentuates the difference between "neutral, undifferentiated *space*" and "meaningful *places*". He believed that this demonstrates the tendency of people to convert the former into the latter;[17] meaning that we have an inclination to turn the insignificant and uniform into the meaningful. This again relates to Eliade's notion that we as humans cannot live in homogenous space, but are constantly trying to locate or construct the 'unique' that can define our existence. Directionality is thus an art of choice and one of employed cultural symbolism.

There are several methods that we have traditionally used to orient ourselves within our natural environment: alignment with a significant landscape feature, mythohistoric place or with a celestial occurrence. The first of these orientations is most prevalent in primitive or ancient societies. Vincent Scully in his book *The Earth, The Temple, and The Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*, explains that certain ancient Greek temples aligned towards the dip between two hills or toward the prevalent peak of a nearby mountain. The temple of Apollo at Bassae for example is aligned with the dip between two neighbouring hills; whereas the Parthenon was aligned with the cone of Mount Lycabettus, the highest and most prominent hill in Athens.

The second method of orientation directs participants towards places of mythohistoric importance. It is an architecture of orientation which is based in the specificity of 'place'; however it is one that renders place significant through myth or historical importance rather than through the prominence of a geographic

feature. Perhaps the best example of this form of directionality can be seen in the Islamic religion which builds its mosques and directs its daily prayers towards the holy land of Mecca. This commitment to directionality within religious or belief centered space, demonstrates that even today the principle of orientation can transcend the limits of immediate geographic space and maintain a cultural connection to a unique place.

The final method of orientating with our natural environment is seen in the alignment with celestial event based occurrences. This is an orientation that is not place specific, but rather attempts to understand universal orders and apply them to cultural practice at large. However, though celestial orientation is not about earthly place, it can to some extent express the regional beliefs of the people. The planometric orientation of a city was often aligned with either the sun or the rising and setting of a particular star or constellation - likely associated with a revered local god or leader. The grid in the center of Rome for example, was aligned with the path of the sun during the equinox – a metaphor for imperial kingship. It was designed to be off axis with the overall grid of the city, which was cardinally oriented.[18] This gave an aura of significance to the center of Rome and defined its importance with respect to the rest of the city and Empire.

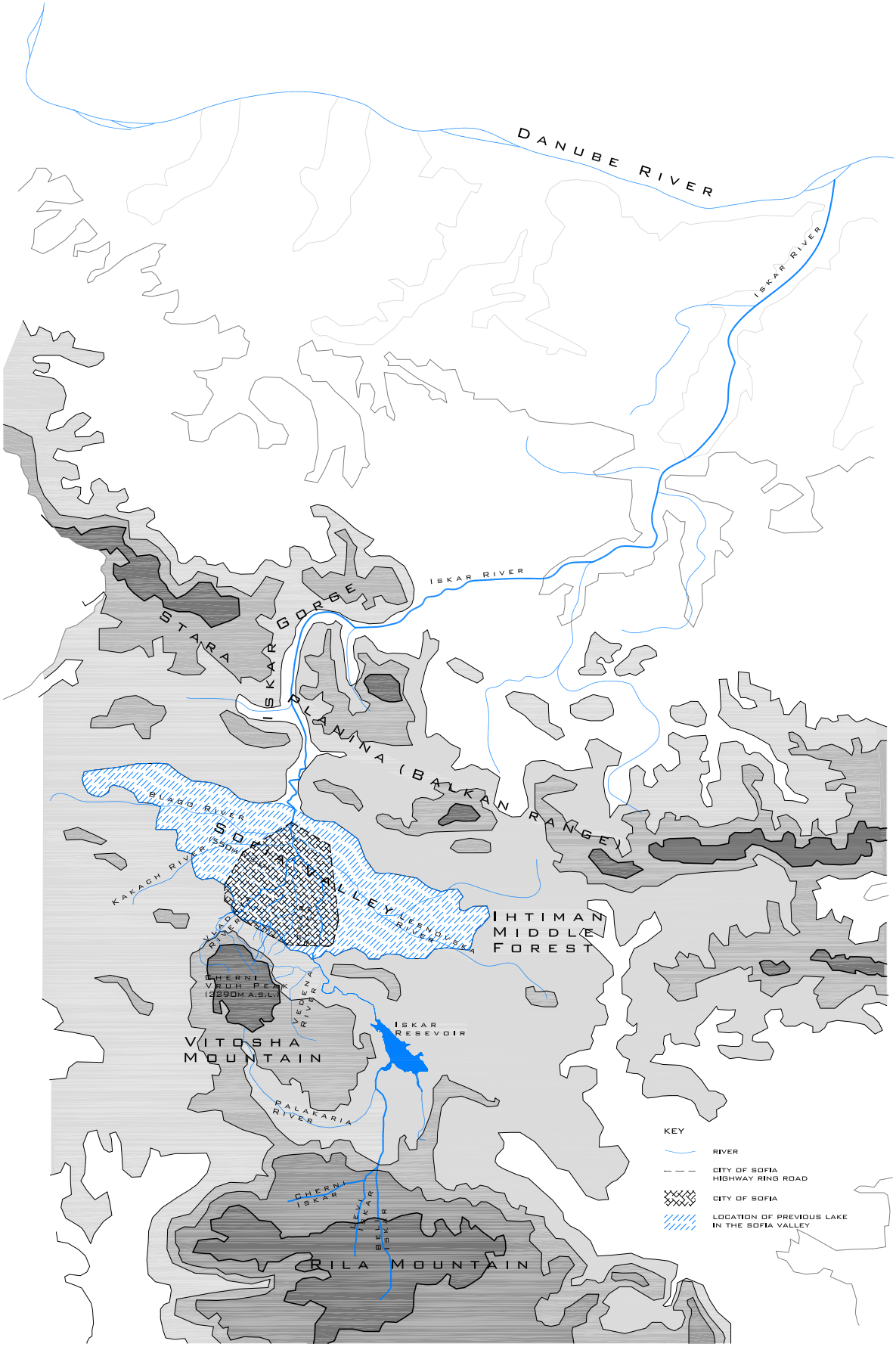
The belief in a greater universal pattern of order adopted by a civilization at large was however malleable to regional customs and relationships to place. In fact in many cases customs and building practices were modified to suite the immediate environmental and cultural conditions of a particular place. Roman settlements for example although typically arranged on a cardinal grid, leave their exact orientation flexible to suite the specificities of the land they occupied.[19] Scully also notes a similar phenomena occurring with the placement of Greek temples. Although the majority of ancient Greek temples were aligned with the east and

the rising of the sun, numerous temples, he notes, were found to align themselves instead with the unique landscape particular to a place: "So each Greek sanctuary necessarily differs from all others because it is in a different place, and each varies from the others in certain aspects of the forms of its temple and in their relation to each other and to the landscape."[20] He is adamant that the perception of 'place' played an important role in the cultural practices of ancient Greeks. Thus it is clear that certain cultural practices which defined a civilization as a whole were still altered or adjusted to suite a specific place or the unique ideologies of the locals. 'Place' thus has traditionally had the power to override general cultural orders and ideologies.[21]

The method of orientation however, is used not only to align with what is valued as sacred in the natural world but to create systems of hierarchy and cultural value within the built world. City streets and view corridors have been traditionally aligned towards a building or place in the city that we have chosen to give value to. Concentric plans are perhaps the purest example of these internal orientations, as they imply a single central focal point which gave significance to the heart of the city. Chinese cities for example used the concentric plan to directly portray social status through the measure of distance from this town center.[22] Single foci city layouts, which were non concentric, existed in medieval European labyrinth towns; where at the heart of the city a church or cathedral was located. Most cities however, rather than a single point of concentration, consist of a complex series of multi- foci. These foci are nodes in the system - typically important public or religious buildings - which are vital to the function of the society as a whole. Norberg-Schulz discusses how the use of multiple foci, connected through a system of path structures in the typical European city, creates the appearance of a meaningful organism.[23]

Fig. 1.15

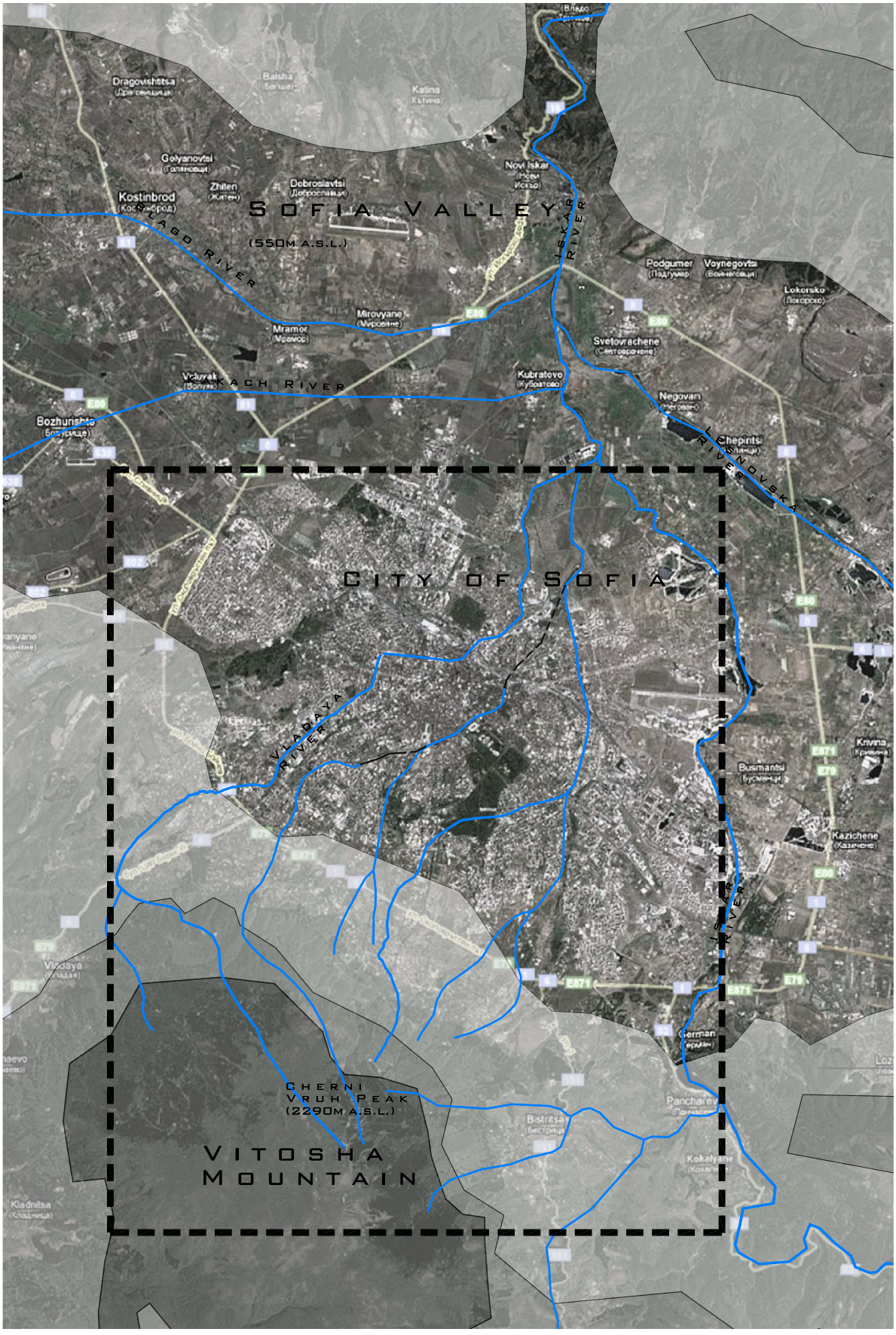
Let us look at Sofia not as a product of Bulgaria, but as a place independent of such limitations of national identity. Let us look at Sofia as a city with its own marks of history; scars of the transience of the cultures that have passed through it. Sofia is first and foremost a valley, a small cradle of culture in the center of the Balkan mountain ranges. A city full of springs; hot mineral waters that have flowed for the many cultures that have passed through this place.



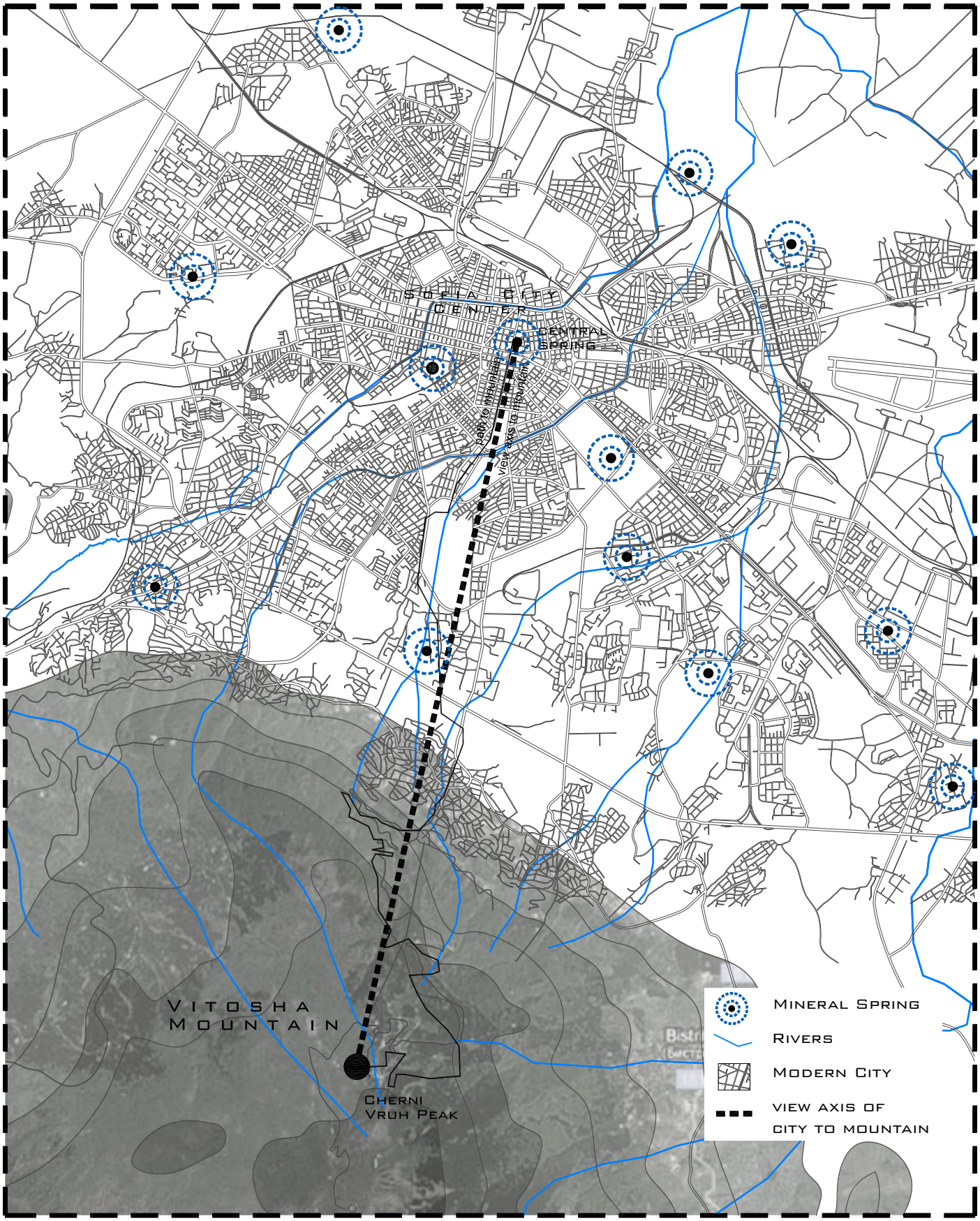
The Sofia Valley *Fig. 1.16*

The city of Sofia is located in the central western Balkans. It is bordered by Stara Planina (The Balkan Mountain Range) to the northeast, Vitosha Mountain to the southwest and the lower Vakarel Mountain to the southeast. The city is connected to the Danube through the Iskar River. Originally the river was blocked by Stara Planina to the northwest, and the whole of the Sofia Valley was a large lake. Over time the river broke through the mountain forming the Iskar Gorge. This drained the lake and left what is now the Sofia Valley.

The valley itself is an area which sunk vertically along a series of fault lines. Owing to this fault line character, it is rich in various mineral hot springs. These springs are located throughout the valley. They surround the historical center of the city in Gorna Banya, Pancharevo and Bankya; but the most important and prominent spring is found at the heart and origin of the city center. This particular mineral spring is rich in hydrocarbonate-natriumsulphate and metasilicium; which are said to cure liver, metabolic and gynecological disorders[24]*. The spring -with its unique mineral smell and steamy 46 degree temperature*[25] *- has drawn civilizations to both drink from and bath in its waters.*

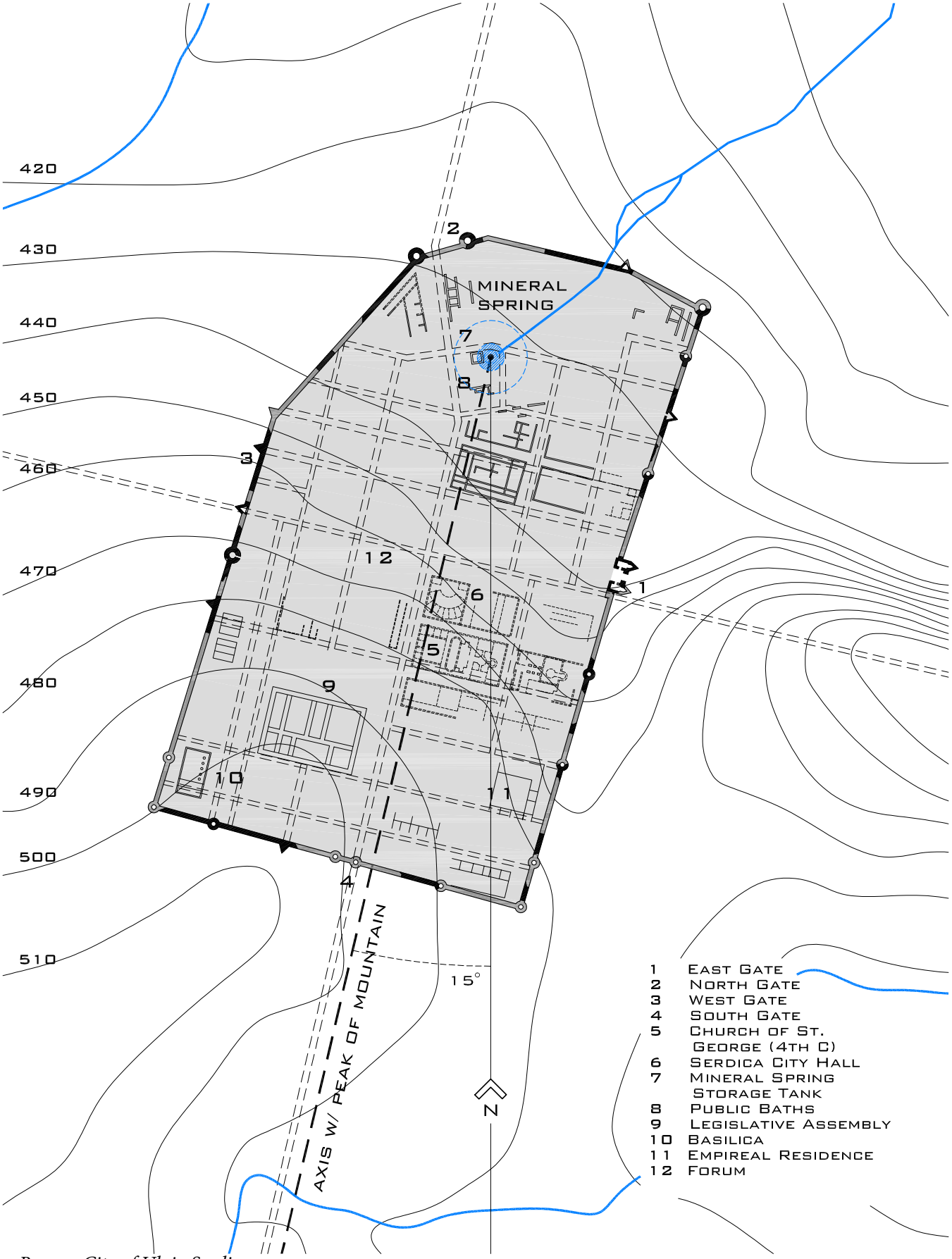


The City of Sofia in Relation to Vitosha Mountain *Fig. 1.17*



The Mineral Springs of Sofia *Fig. 1.18*

The town of 'Ulpia Serdia' was founded by the Romans in 26 B.C, at the meeting point of the North-South and East-West roads of the Roman Empire. It was located on an already existing Thracian settlement, which had benefited from the mineral spring at the heart of the valley. The Romans took advantage of the spring and built a bath house at its source. The town was built on a grid system; however its main axis is found to be 15 degrees off with true north[26]*. Theories as to why are numerous. Sofian urban theorist Hristo Genchev proposes that the town was re-oriented to align its decumanus axis with a neighboring eastern hill, where the 'city of the dead' was located*[27]*. If however we look at the greater scale of the valley and its surrounding mountains, we see that the cardo axis in fact aligns with the highest peak of the area – Cherni Vruh peak located on Vitosha Mountain.*



Roman City of Ulpia Serdica

Fig. 1.19

Archaeological Digs of Serdica *Fig. 1.20*

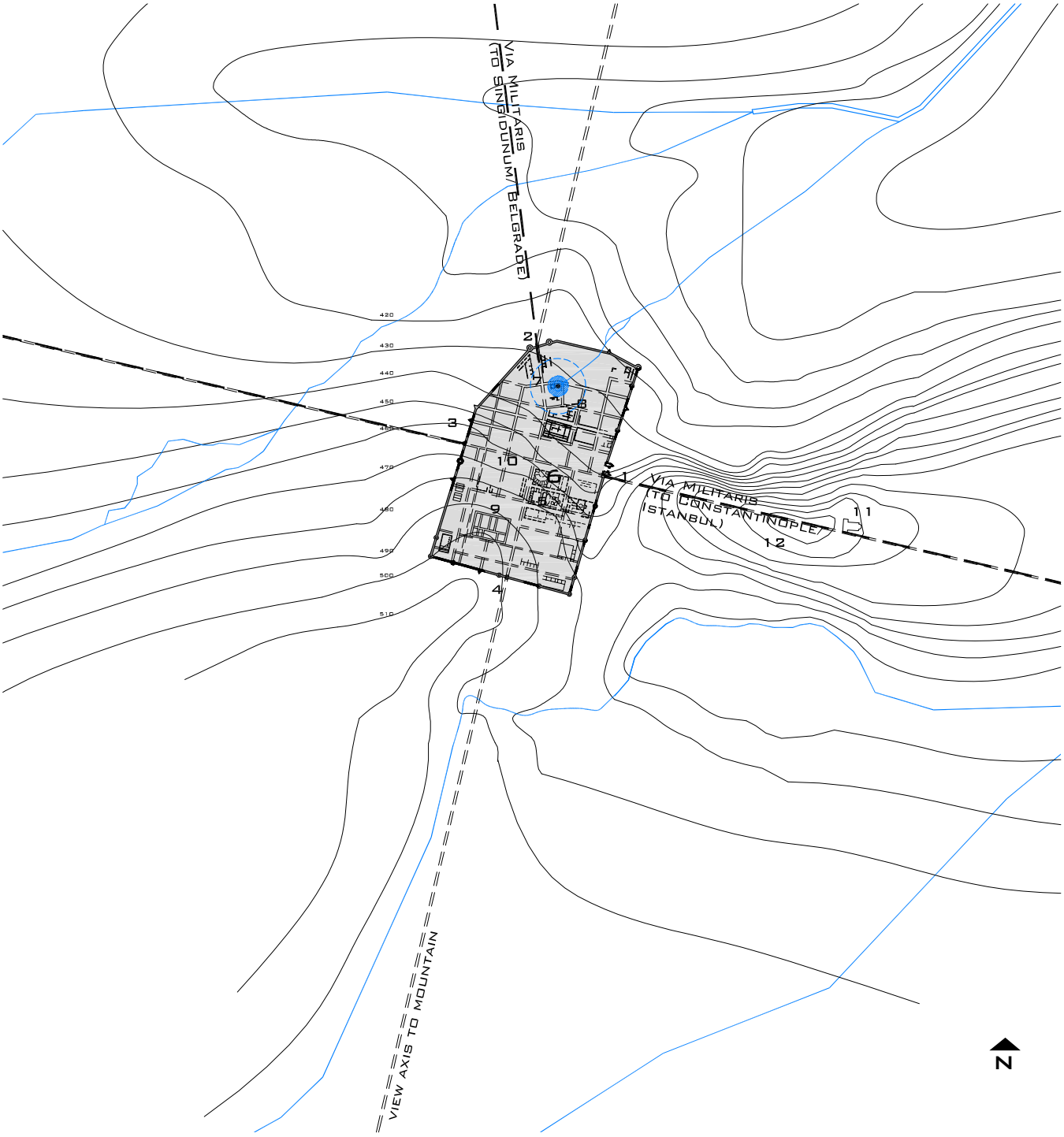
Thus it can be said that what we focus on and revere as a collective, is related to how we orient our cities and what we consider the heart or center of the organism. However, the overall spatial layout of the city does not only define *what* we value but also *how* we function within it. Accordingly the way our cities are laid out reflects the daily social customs and movements that create the fundamental narrative of our cultural identity.

This can be seen in the differing cultural interactions of the citizens of either the grid or labyrinth city. The grid city is based on the principle of open regulated public passageways. It originated so as to align with the four cardinal directions. The Romans then sacralised the grid by creating two main axis that crossed it - the *cardo* and the *decumanus* - giving the city a point of focus and a hierarchy of street typologies. The grid thus allows for public spaces within the city to have prominence and meaning. The labyrinth system however, with its lack of straight continuous paths, does not focus on the public but rather on the private or interior. Streets within these cities are about passage between buildings; placing emphasise on the interiority of structures. The labyrinth system can be seen in most traditional Arabic settlements. Ulya Vogt-Goknil's description of the Turkish labyrinth town aptly accentuates the difference in cultural practice and ideology with the west:

> If we compare the design of a Turkish town with that of a contemporary European town, differences at one stand out: wide straight streets and any organized network of roads and squares and conspicuously absent. In fact the purpose of a Turkish street was none other than a means of communication through a labyrinth of houses. Often it was merely an entry to the house, for between this jumbled collection of houses one often comes across blind alleys. Squares, when they exist, are large open areas, used on market days, and never become a town center, as do market

> squares in Western towns. Trading streets are also rarely found since the bazaar, with its barrel-vaulted streets constituted the shopping center of the Turkish town. Squares were not built as a meeting place for the citizens, just as streets had none of the features of the Italian 'corso' or promenade.. Within the network of roads and houses, the mosque and its Külliye formed a separate district. In European cities, larger buildings like hospitals, schools, hotels or public baths, are to be found widely scattered round the town. They become the focal point of a street, or lend individually to a district. In the Külliye, all these buildings were grouped around the mosque, and together with the latter, they constitute a well-proportioned unit set among wooden houses and irregular clumps of trees.[28]

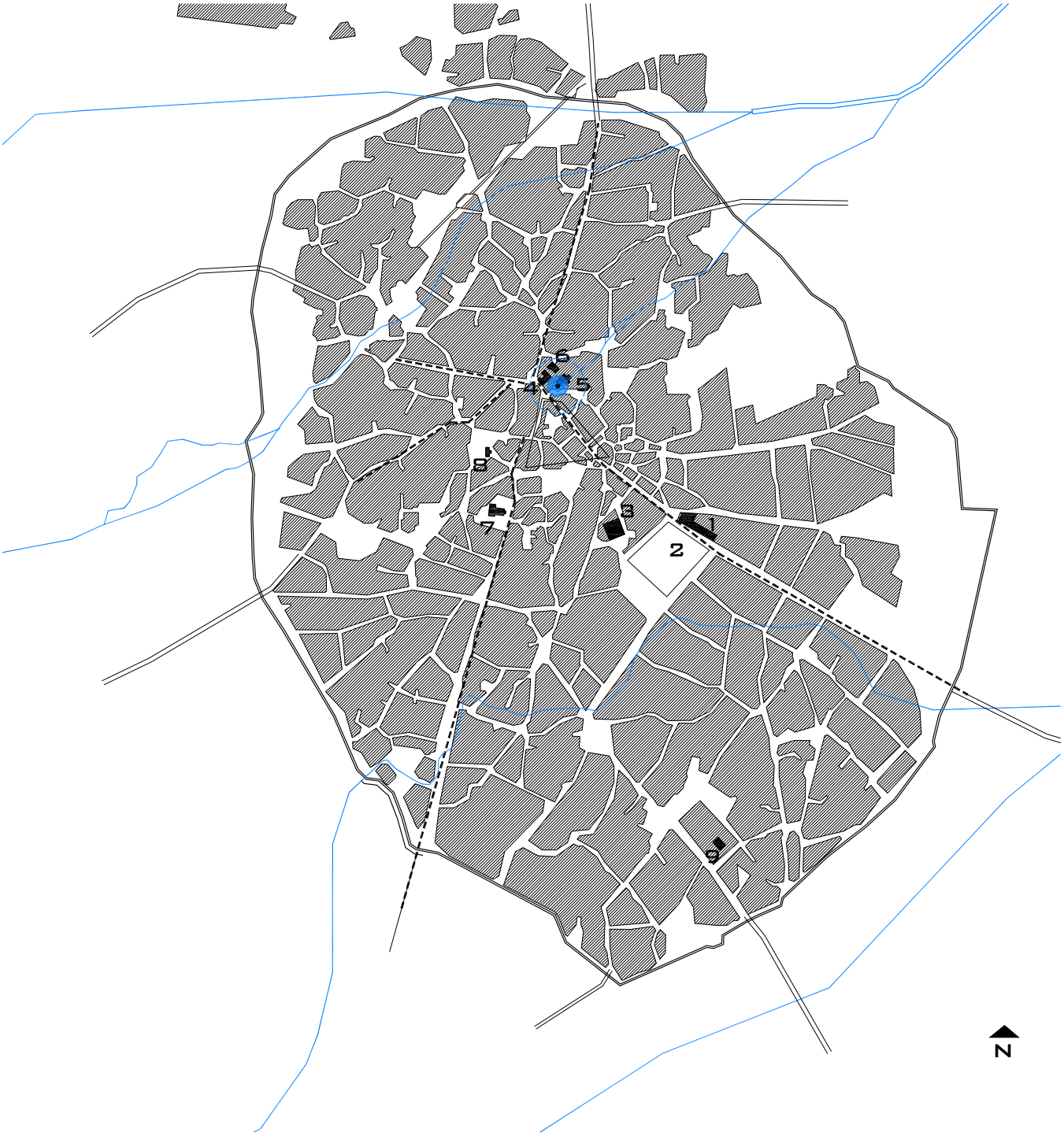
Passage through this labyrinth town furthermore depends on a familiarity with place, instead of on an intuitive, regulated system of order such as that created by the grid. The labyrinth thus creates a subjective experience-based system of orientations and displays a predominance of private rituals within the culture of such a city.



Map of Roman 'Ulpia Serdica'

Scale 1:25000

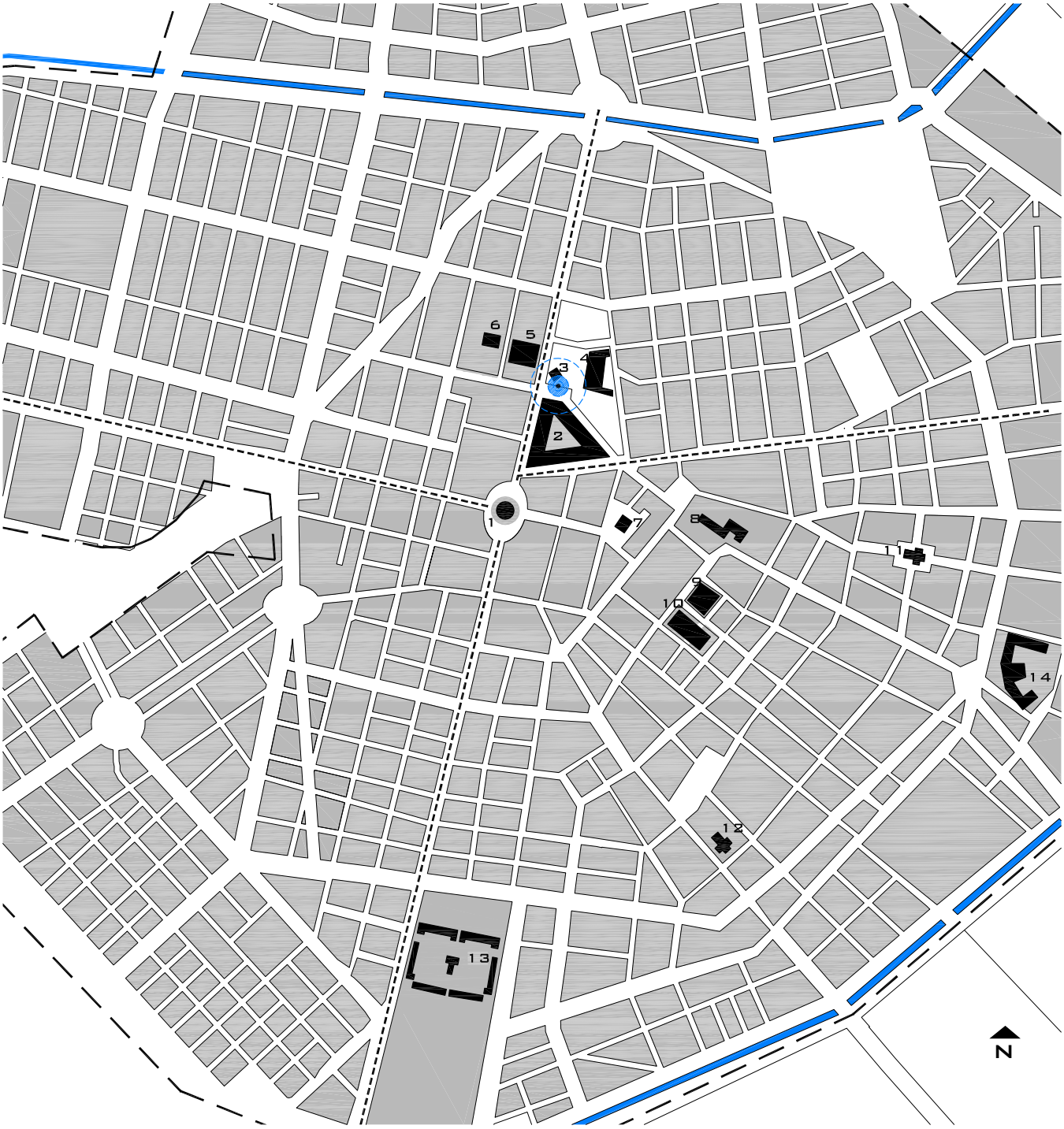
Fig. 1.21



Map of Ottoman 'Sredets'

Scale 1:25000

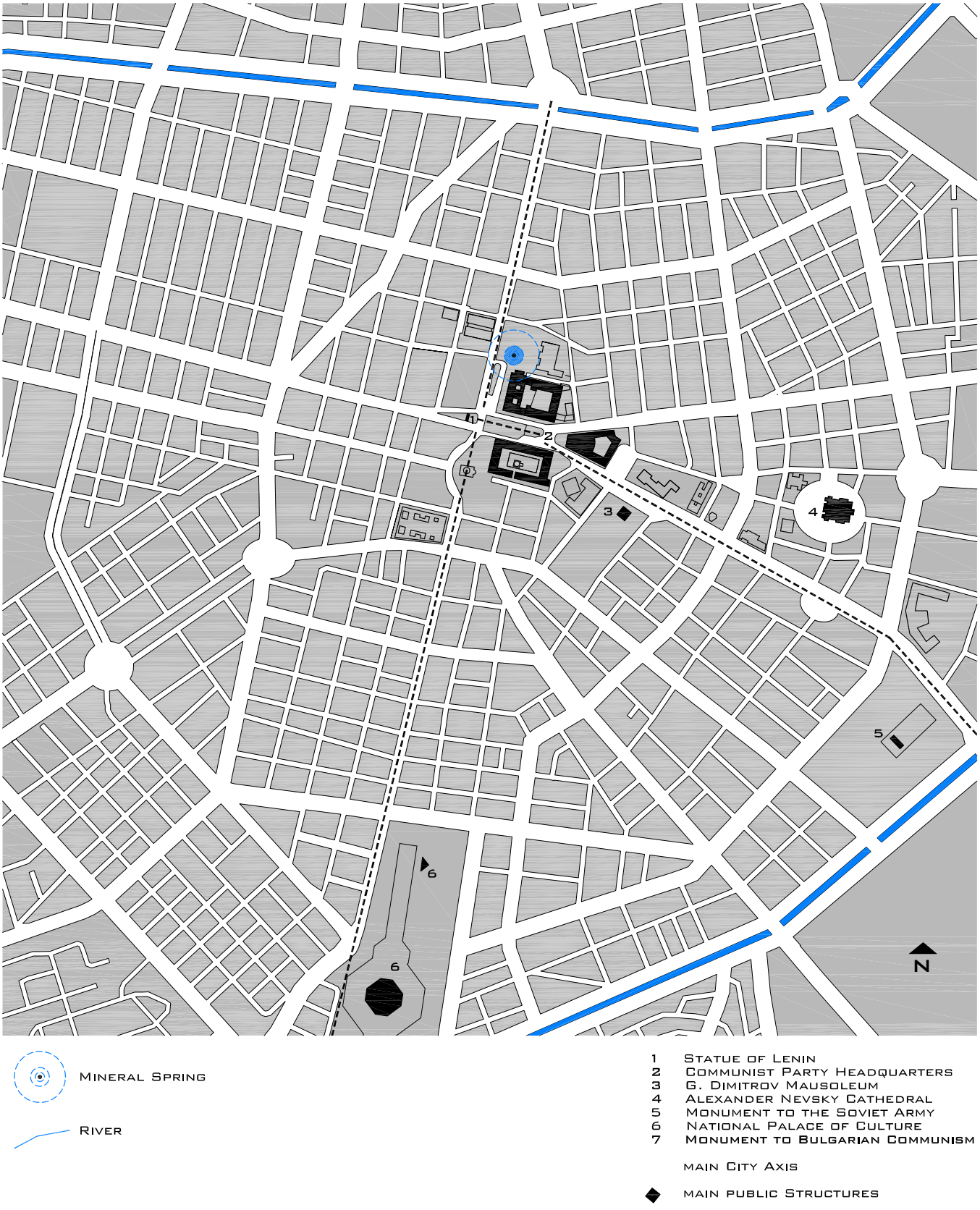
Fig. 1.22



Map of National Revival Period Sofia

Scale 1:25000

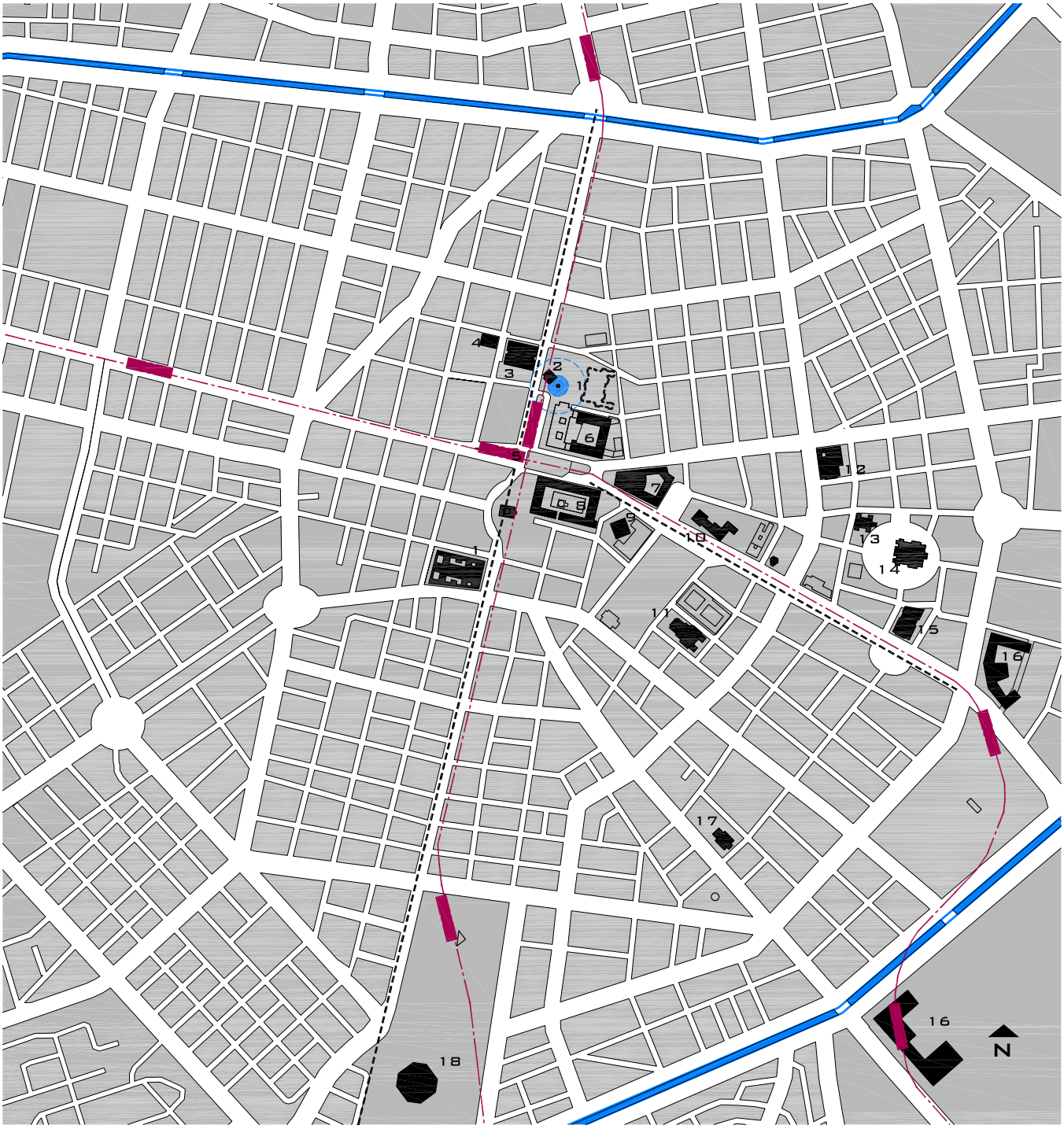
Fig. 1.23



Map of Sofia under the Socialist Regime

Scale 1:25000

Fig. 1.24



Mineral Spring

River

main City Axis

main public Structures

Proposed Metro Lines

Proposed Metro Stations

1 Sofia Mineral Baths (Furture Museum of Sofia)
2 Banya Bashi Mosque
3 Public Market
4 Sofia Synagogue
5 Statue of Sofia
6 Council of Ministers
7 National Assembly
8 Presidential Building
9 Archaeological Museum
10 National Art Gallery
11 National Theatre
12 Opera House & Ballet
13 Sveta Sofia Church
14 Alexander Nevsky Cathedral
15 Parliament
16 Sofia University
17 Sveti Sedmochislenitsi Church
18 National Palace of Culture

Map of Sofia today

Scale 1:25000

Fig. 1.25

Aerial Photograph of Sofia; late 19th Century *Fig. 1.26*

Throughout the evolution of the city, height has been used as a symbol of status; it can either denote accessibility and equality, or exclusivity and hierarchy. It is perhaps most commonly used to express the division among social orders in the city and to illustrate – through the feature of height – the most important building, hence institution in the city. Jones states that "Correlations of physical height and 'high places' with social status (and perhaps relative sacrality) do, in fact, provide the most cross-culturally common means of expressing and, to that extent, perpetuating social meaning via architecture."[29]

The importance of the church or cathedral in any medieval European town for example was not only horizontally expressed through its central position, but also vertically as it was the tallest building in town and no other structure was allowed to surpass it. Another example of the vertical ordering of social hierarchy is seen in the architecture of Hindu India, where the rigid caste structure was reflected in the relative dwelling heights of each class. The house of a slave or servant, *Sudra*, could not exceed two and a half stories; that of a merchant, *Vaisya*, up to four; warriors, *Kshatriyas*, up to five and half, the priestly *Brahmins* up to six and a half; and that of the King up to seven stories."[30]

The level platform and in contrast, the raised podium have also been used to illustrate the differing ideologies of various institutions and to denote their inclusivity or exclusivity. In Islam both the college and the mosque were typically built on planes that were level with the rest of the city. Whereas the palace complexes of certain Islamic leaders were built on a symbolic 'raised throne' in order to denote the untouchable place of the head of the state.[31] Likewise if we look at ancient Rome and ancient Athens, we see that the vertical positioning of religious vs. political institutions was also significant in the cultural structure

of each society. In Athens the Acropolis, which housed numerous temples to the Gods, was placed on a hill above the city. In fact in Greek, acropolis or *acropoleis* comes from *akros, akron* meaning edge and *poli* meaning city.[32] This had direct implications that the placement of these temples was sacred, located at the edge or high meeting point between the earthly world and the divine. The temples, and specifically the *cella* containing the statue of a God, were accessible only to those few privileged. The Agora however, a democratic place of assembly, was closer to the city implying an openness and aura of inclusivity. In Rome on the other hand, the Forum, a place of public gathering contained both the governmental buildings and the majority of the temples of the Gods. The forum was thus a center for political, judicial, as well as religious rituals. The temples themselves though were not considered spaces of equality, as they were still raised on a podium to denote their sacredness; but the inclusivity of their location was important. Above the Forum however was the abode of the Emperor, raised up on the Palatine Hill; a privileged position symbolizing the ultimate overarching power of the Emperor over the state. The difference between the political systems and values of these two ancient civilizations - both with similar pagan beliefs but one a democratic state and the other an Imperial power - is evident in the vertical spatial structuring of their cities.

Today verticality implying order and power in the city, is still witnessed by the presence of tall buildings that define the skylines of our cities. Anthony King, author of *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture Urbanism Identity*, explains that the skyscraper is an icon of American identity and modernity; one that was later adopted by many emerging powers to demonstrate their modernity and economic strength.[33] The skyscraper symbolises the vital shift of patronage from local or nation institutions to those of global corporations, which now frame our spatial identities.

The Banya Bashi Mosque, meaning 'Many Baths Mosque', is located directly over the thermal spring flow way on Banski Square in Sofia. *Fig. 1.27*

Typical medieval buried church;
Sozopol, Bulgaria
Fig. 1.28

During the Ottoman Empire the social class structure was divided into four millets of religious definition. The Ottomans practiced significant religious tolerance during their reign; however the Islamic millet still held highest rank in the social hierarchy of the Empire and indulged in certain privileges[34]*. The dominance of the Islamic millet was spatially represented through the strategy of height.*

At the beginning of the occupation, any construction or renovation of religious spaces was strictly forbidden. As time went on however, construction was permitted but was restricted by height. Specific regulations were imposed on the limitations of the height of buildings that belonged to other millets: "Ottoman Empire brought regulations on how the cities would be built.... special restrictions were imposed concerning the construction, the renovation, the size and the bells in Orthodox churches. For example, an Orthodox church's bell tower had to be slightly shorter than the minaret of the largest mosque in the same city."[35] *Churches in the Balkans built during the five hundred years of occupation, were thus often buried partially below ground so as to meet the dictated height requirements. This has led to a religious building style unique to the Balkans, of modest, subverted exteriors - often sunken or lowered - and intricate interiors.*

The Church Sveta Petka *Fig. 1.29 -1.30*

The Church Sveta Petka from underground *Fig. 1.31*

The Church Sveta Petka from underground *Fig. 1.32*

The Church of Sveta Petka is a Bulgarian Orthodox church built in the medieval period (late 14th Century), during the Ottoman occupation. The single nave church, located just south of the Mineral Baths, is partially buried into the ground. It is currently surrounded by two major city streets that engulf it at an upper level. The church itself can now only be accessed through the underground pedestrian tunnel of the city metro.

As a society we look to find the unique in our surroundings, giving it particular cultural value and meaning. We have traditionally mythologized certain natural features or occurrences, and have then mimicked them or translated them into our own building practices; giving reason to form. Hindu temples for example were designed to literally symbolize the shape of the sacred Mount Meru[36] and even Neolithic tombs, *dolmen*, mimicked cave interiors - aka mythological "earth wombs"[37]. Jones refers to the architecture of direct formal mimicry as *homology,* "architecture that presents a miniaturized replica of the universe". Translations of these natural forms or systems were not limited to literal mimicry, but were also 'representations' of perceived natural or cosmic systems. Certain Amazonian tribes for example built their longhouse, the *maloca*, as a representation of their universe. The ceiling represented the shape and constellations in their sky and the floor structure was the earth under which they were known to bury their ancestors. This is the fashion of building that Eliade refers to as the architecture of *imago mundi*[38]: building as a sacred representation of the image of the world. Norberg-Schulz also refers to this method of building as a symbolic representation of the world around us:

> The architecture of early civilizations may therefore be interpreted as a concretization of the understanding of nature, described... in terms of things, order, character, light and time. The processes involved in 'translating' these meanings into man-made forms have already been defined as 'visualization', 'complementation', and 'symbolization'...[39]

This representational or formal mimicry was used in order to, at the most basic level, justify the use of form and render the building significant through its symbolic meaning. As Jones

explains, "[h]omologized architecture engenders trust and respect, and thereby opens people to the kind of receptivity, or suspension of disbelief that is requisite to transactions of meaning and transformative experience."[40] Thus symbolic formal mimicry was an effective formal building method in many societies, as the direct representation of the form or mythologized cosmic system was inclusive and easily recognized by the vast majority of the participants of that culture.

Many cultures however, such as the classical Greeks, did not mimic or represent the image of the universe in their buildings. They did nevertheless conform to universal or natural laws which they revered as divine. This is the formal manifestation of architecture that makes reference to our surroundings through a more subtle alluding to the proportions and geometries derived from natural observations, rather than a literal mimicry of form. This architecture that Jones refers to as *convention*, "architecture that conforms to standardized rules"[41], was seen as an attempt to find a system of correct proportions that could apply to all building practice. The derivation of these sacred ratios and proportions came from a multiplicity of different studies of patterns and rhythms in nature. Alberti's study of human anatomy and Augustine's analyses of sounds and music were both performed in order to find aesthetically pleasing formulas and proportions that could be used in the generation of form.[42]

But of course these perfect proportions were intellectualized and became to a certain extent the privileged knowledge of the building elite; thus creating a divide between common man and those who understood the 'scared ratios' and the true meaning of these architectural forms. For this reason this is an architecture based in exclusively, in which the meaning of the symbol is meant to be accepted as a 'given truth' instead of understood

on a primal and universal level. Thus these symbols which have become the primary building blocks in our architectural history are merely recognizable vessels which can be infused with new and evolving meaning.

All of the formal justifications discussed above offer, as Jones explains, a "means of establishing an aura of order and legitimacy, and thus making buildings and occasions alluring..."[43]. Once such a system of formal justifications was established by a culture, it became a set of recognized symbols or 'style' that could be spread throughout its regions of influence. Buildings thus became important cultural icons or symbols that would later be elaborated and reused to support the similar beliefs and customs of a culture, as well as used to reinforce a unified sense of identity.

Within this chapter we have discussed the various origins of *cultural identity* and the spatial strategies that were used to define it. We have looked at how 'place' and our environment have influenced our cultural ideologies, symbols and building practices. However our discussions so far have looked at cultural identity as if it were a pure concept, rooted and reliant on 'place'; when in fact we do not live in such an isolated void that would allow a single culture to remain entirely distinct from another. The reality is that we border, share communication networks, and interact with various nations who maintain differing values and customs. We are thus constantly subject to the influence of their cultural values and systems of order; which we domesticate through a process of cultural synthesis. The next chapter looks at this process of cultural synthesis and how culture came to evolve independent of place.

This chapter looks at the relationship of symbolic architectural form and cultural meaning; observing how *culture* was altered during a significant time of social change. This will enable us to analyze the effects of cultural meaning and symbolic form on one another; a difficult relationship to dissect in a time of social stability as the normal symbiotic evolution of the two is so deeply intertwined.

Transformations in the city at such a time occurred either through the change of meaning of existing form or through a physical change of form. In the scenario of the change of meaning of an existing form, we see the ability of a symbol to take on new meaning. This demonstrates the adaptability of the symbol to act as a vessel for infused cultural identity. In the second scenario as form is changed - either by its destruction or replacement - there is an immediate sense of loss of identity and a striving to reconnect and re-identify with 'place'. A new sense of identity however is achieved only through a gradual process of ritual use, rather than by its immediate meaning derived by form. This demonstrates the inability of architectural or urban form to directly impose meaning onto a society and change its cultural identity.

Change of identity and cultural meaning then comes only through a repeated ritual use of 'place' and a experiential re-familiarization with its new symbols and forms. As such, the power of experience advocates for meaning derived from use, rather than meaning arising from static symbol. The balance between form and meaning, in the synthesis of a new cultural identity, thus demonstrates the dialectic relationship between architecture and cultural practice.

The meaning or function of a single building can change over time as the ideology or practices of a culture change. In the case of gradual transformation over time, both *culture* and form evolve together in a natural process of synthesis. In fact, it is quite common for a single object or symbol to carry different meanings for different people, or to change meaning over time as the needs or habits of the users change. For this reason we often see that architectural forms which exist in our cities today, tend to embody multiple or juxtaposed meanings. The singular and unadulterated significance of any form in our day and age is hard to find. What is of interest to us in this section however, is how the meaning and ritual use of a space can be abruptly changed without the alteration of its formal typology.

In a time of social change, existing buildings within the city were often kept but *invested* with new cultural meaning. Jones notes that it is "the subversive use and apprehension... of always-superabundant, pre-existing civic and public constructions, rather than the erection of new forms, that provides architecture's greatest utility to social revolutionaries."[44] It was often easier to re-infuse an existing 'symbol of national pride' with a new cultural meaning, than it was to build a new structure that was devoid of any historical value or cultural significance. In a way, if the building still carried a vestige of significance - however unrelated - in the collective memory of the people, the rituals that took place within it could be altered. This draws attention to the cultural significance of the symbol itself, rather than the persistence of its meaning.

A vivid example of this change of meaning and ritual can be seen in the numerous Byzantine churches that were converted into mosques during the Ottoman Empire. During the takeover of Constantinople, and later the rest of the Balkans, the Ottomans

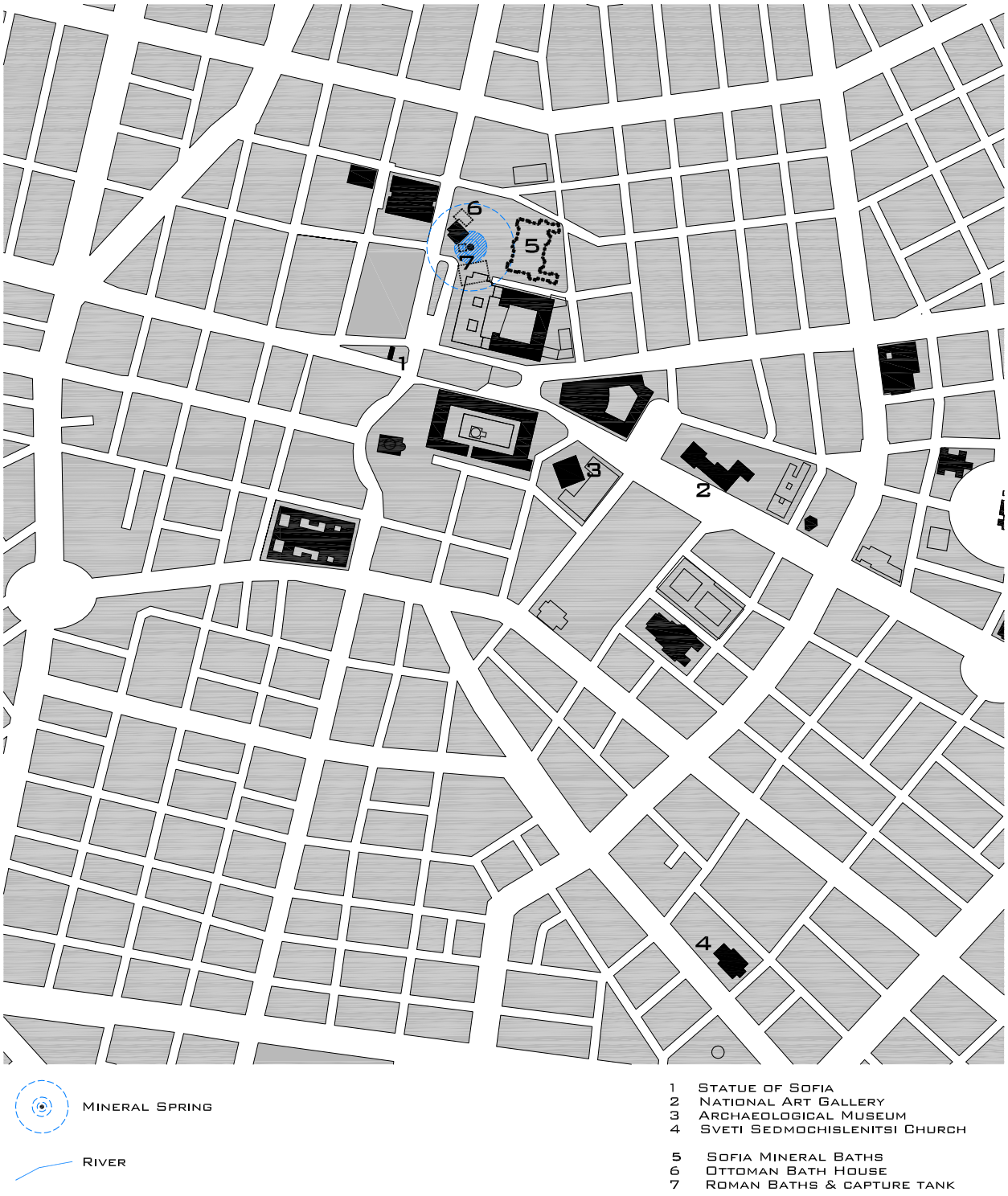
converted nearly all churches, monasteries, and chapels - including the famous Hagia Sophia - into mosques. Of course in addition there were also many new mosques built throughout the Empire, but the conversion of the grandiose Byzantine churches was a necessary strategy in order to both erase the supremacy of the church and to establish control over the iconic images of the conquered Empire. Considering the original form of the mosque prior to the occupation of Constantinople was so different from the Byzantine church, this is clearly not a case of similar forms being altered by mere decoration to suite meaning.

No major structural changes were at first even made to the Hagia Sophia.[45] Only a wooden minaret, a prayer niche, and a pulpit were added to ensure the rituals proceedings of Islam, over those of Christian practice.[46] The general form of the building - the domes, supporting structure and detailing - remained the same; whereas the practical use of the building transformed the space inside.[47]

The Hagia Sophia, which was formally known as the Church of Holy Wisdom, is still in existence in Istanbul today. However the building was turned into a museum in 1924 after the Ottoman collapse and the creation of the new Turkish republic. The people of the Turkish republic refused to - understandably so - consider returning it to the Orthodox Church. It is arguable that in many ways it cannot return or belong to either religion for both have claims to it. The Hagia Sophia is thus a perfect metaphor for the importance of the cultural symbol, but the transience of its cultural meaning.

Change of Form

At a time of social change however, not all buildings are kept and reused to ensure an ease of transition. The typological form of a city or specific building is often altered due to a new requirement for its social use or function, or in *order* to change its meaning or



Map of Symbolic Buildings with adapted Meanings and Uses

Scale 1:7500

Fig. 2.0

1

Statue of Sofia
Fig. 2.1

Former Statue of Lenin *Fig. 2.2*

In the four decades under the Socialist Regime, the Statue of Lenin looked over the main public gathering space in the city of Sofia. Today the statue has been taken down and replaced with the statue of Sofia, Goddess of Wisdom.

2

National Art Gallery *Fig. 2.3*

The 'National Art Gallery' occupies the former Royal Palace which was built in 1882 when Bulgaria became a Kingdom. The Palace itself was built on the grounds of the old Ottoman town hall. The selection of this site, the destruction of the old town hall and the rebuilding in a new 'European' style symbolized an official shift of power from the Ottoman period. The Palace was used as the primary residence of the Royal family until after WWII when the socialist regime gained power and gave the space to the National Art Gallery. A larger and more imposing political headquarters were then built adjacent to the former palace; implying an aggressive takeover of power of one regime from another.

3

Archaeological Museum | Former 'Grand Mosque' *Fig. 2.4*

Büyük camii or the 'Grand Mosque' was built in 1474. It was the largest and oldest mosque in Sofia. Post liberation from the Ottoman occupation however, the mosque housed the National Library. Then in 1905 it was officially inaugurated as an archaeological museum.

4

Sveti Sedmochislenitsi Church *Fig. 2.5*

Sveti Sedmochislenitsi Church was originally built as the Imaret Mosque in 1528 during the Ottoman Empire. It was also known as the 'Black Mosque', named after the dark granite of its minaret and its hauntingly dark interior. It was built on the site of an early Christian temple dating back to the Roman Period. During the liberation period however, the building was used as a prison. In 1902 it was once again converted into a sacred space; when the minaret was demolished and the exterior was largely remodeled. This now Eastern Orthodox church is perhaps the most haunting and silence space in all of Sofia.

5

'Sofia Mineral Baths' *Fig. 2.6*

6

Ottoman Bath House *Fig. 2.7*

7

Roman Baths *Fig. 2.8*

The 'Sofia Mineral Baths', 'Ottoman Bath House' and 'Roman Baths' all evoke a similar meaning and propose a parallel ritual of use. The buildings that contained these baths and captured the waters of the spring, may have differed in style and size but they all endorsed a similar practice and created a hierophantic space for the various and differing cultures that have shaped Sofia.

association. The destruction of existing symbolically significant forms is important strategy in the manipulation of cultural identity. King suggests that since a public building portrays the political, cultural or administrative institutions of a nation, to its people and to the world, during an invasion or change of regime the importance of its destruction becomes increasingly iconic.[48] One of the most symbolic destructions of such an icon was the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, as it implied an immediate change of social and cultural order. In this and in all like cases, the act of destruction is performed not with the intent of gradual assimilation but with the immediate connotation of a loss of identity and an awareness of change. In *A City Without Walls*, Jianying Aha describes a post Cultural Revolution Beijing and the sense of loss the city endured after walls were dismantled by the communist regime. For the reason that Beijing had lost "its distinctive character", Aha equates the loss of the walls of the city with a loss of identity.[49]

Building a new form or 'in a new style' was likewise intended to show the presence of a new cultural order within the city. It not only contrasted the new social system with that of the previous, but created an abrupt break with the traditions and ideologies of the past. The British used this strategy of "aggressively foreign styles... [as a] deliberate stark contrast to the indigenous architectural styles."[50] The European villa in particular, during the colonial period, symbolised a new social hierarchy within the state. The 'villa' replaced the residential form of the previous social upper class as the icon of prestige and power. In China even today, the 'villa' - derived from European formal origins - is seen as a sign of privilege.[51]

In addition to the aggressive symbolic strategies of architecture, subtle changes in materially and spatial quality were used to manipulate identity. Michael Parker Pearson and Colin Richards,

in Architecture and Order: Approaches to Social Space, write that "most constructions exert power in ways that are not so obviously coercive. Space commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures, routes and distances to be covered."[52] Thus the change of materiality, scale and spatial layout of the city, also greatly inform our identification with a 'place' and the way in which we use and move around it.

The qualities of scale, density and materiality in our environment, as discussed earlier, have a profound effect on our familiarity and identification with a certain place. In the 1989 documentary film 12 Registi per 12 Città, twelve directors are each asked to make a short film about one of twelve Italian cities. Each director finds a way to display the unique identity of the particular city and present it in under ten minutes. Bertolucci's portrayal of Bologna[53] is especially impactful. The whole film follows a group of children as they run through the cobblestone streets of the city. They run through the various widths of streets, around tight dark corners, up and down the stairs of various churches; all the while the distinct echo of their feet against the stone streets is heard reverberating off the stone buildings. The character of Bologna is thus described through the subjective experience of its light quality, materials, sounds and scales.

Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space*, believes that this subjective experience of 'place' gives a true sense of personal belonging to the individual. He explains that when we relate to a space, we in fact charge it with our own sentiments and create our own image and memory of it. The stronger this poetic image of place is in a person's mind, the more the individual can find themselves identifying with it. Furthermore Bachelard believes that it is through *repeated* experiences and rituals, that we come to 'own' an object or a place. The day to day rituals in the space we inhabit, allow us to form personal and intimate relationships with the different parts of our dwelling. In our domestic environment

it is housework, familiar duty and any form of mechanical action that form the everyday habits which ultimately dominate our memory. The same memories and connections are formed to the urban objects and spaces of the city that surround us. The paths we follow and the daily rituals we abide by within this built environment ultimately inform who we are and how we relate and identify with our surroundings. Thus our subjective understanding and daily ritualised use of our built environment is fundamental to our collective identification with a specific place and the cultural practices that charge it.

If however these spatial qualities and pathways of movements that we are so familiar with are altered, we feel lost and displaced. When this occurs we instinctively feel a pressing need to reacquaint ourselves with our environment, and thus through a gradual process of re-familiarization and repeated experience we eventually come to feel a renewed sense of belonging. In his book *Camouflage*, Niel Leach states that architecture plays a vital role in the formation of our personal identities. He claims that if we are placed in the unfamiliar we will eventually assimilate that which was once foreign and come to identify with it. We instinctually do so in order to, as Leach implies, feel connected to the immediate world around us: a natural human desire to belong to a place or a tribe. The feeling of belonging is thus intimately linked to our identification with a place and culture.

> Environments which were once unfamiliar become appropriated with our symbolic horizons, so that with time they come to appear deeply familiar. Nothing is alienating forever. Eventually any space will become familiar... It is as though we human beings are dominated by a compulsion to return to the familiar, or, when there is nothing familiar to be found, to familiarize ourselves with the unfamiliar.[54]

Thus far we have examined how built form prescribes ritual and meaning, and how it registers it. The question put forth is, at what point does a cultural practice overpower the imbedded meaning and associations of a form, and at what point can architecture control and prescribe the participant's movements and interactions. Even though built space does influence people and how they react and move within a space, it is still ultimately the people who pattern their own movements and hold onto the beliefs and customs that are central to their culture. For despite the fact that our built environment *can* manipulate the cultural identity of a place – through the control of its form or iconic meaning – there is still a level of will and habit that can transform the built in return. There are thus limitations to the influence of architecture as a static, solely symbolic concept.

The very fact that architecture can come to represent different values and rituals over time, is an indication that form is in a dynamic dialogue with cultural practice. There is always a level in which a ritual is ingrained in a culture, where it won't budge; as there is also a point where it will give way and the habits and daily rituals of the inhabitants will slowly and subversively change. It is this very dialectic relationship between ritual and form that is so interesting; the way in which each provokes the other and tries to come to equilibrium. Thus the relationship between people and their built environment is in a constant dynamic balance.[55]

Though it is important to understand the early correlation between culture and architecture in order to understand how meanings, symbols and rituals in architecture bound themselves to a collective identity; the very process of isolating these symbols and practices - and thus defining a *culture* - has become increasingly more complex due the effects of globalization. As cultural anthropologist Gordon Mathews writes:

> Anthropology was largely based on the study of traditional societies, and generally assumed the constancy and homogeneity of those societies: one was born within a cultural tradition and lived more of less within its guidance, in terms of beliefs and behaviour, and in terms of religion, food, dance, and housing. However, many anthropologists in recent decades have become sceptical about the idea of bounded, fixed, largely unchanging culture. Insight into how states invent culture and mask it as tradition in order to propagandize their citizens is one reason for this: governments often invoke 'culture' as a means of bolstering their own legitimacy. A second is globalization. Cultural borders have become porous, with people, goods, and ideas ceaselessly moving across societal boundaries...[56]

Cultural influence and hybridization is not a new phenomenon; however the rapid speed and global extent that it has reached has created the unprecedented condition which has led to a crisis of identity. This chapter examines how globalization has reduced geographical limitations on cultural influence; thus expanding the number of different places that influence simultaneously comes from. This in turn generates an overwhelming multiplicity of hybridized cultural practices and building styles. *Transnationalism*, as the direct result of global migrancy and ease of access to worldwide influence, has not eliminated 'locality' but rather created an array of 'multi-local' identities. Culture is now seen as a fluid and complex concept that is no longer uniquely linked to its immediate context. Immediate 'place' as a direct influence on identity, has become only one part of the diverse influences of real or imagined simultaneous *multi-places*.

Global migrancy trends and the unprecedented access to worldwide information have largely eliminated the traditional geographic limitations of cultural influence. As a result a new type of cultural entity has emerged. *Transnationalists* by definition lay claim to more than one culture, and connect to more than one place as a source of identity. King states that they "*...move between a family network abroad and back home, maintaining many different racial, national and ethnic identities.*"[57]

The spaces in the city which best exhibit the effects of globalization on cultural identity are found not in the homogeneity of the business center, but rather in the neighbourhoods and suburbs which embody transnationalism. These suburban settlements and neighbourhoods draw as much cultural influence from places abroad, as from within the local domestic national borders. They are places where authentic tradition is carried over into a new context; either as a product of nostalgia or through habitual use. King uses the term *globurb* to describe these neighbourhoods whose identity is not limited to the local. He says these small scaled areas come to denote culture outside of the influence of the nation in which they are located:

> [S]paces and locations far smaller than state, region, or city are mobilized in identity formation. Various spaces, at different scales, take on identities invested in them by their inhabitants: not just cities, but villages and neighbourhoods; not just villages, but markets and festivals; not just streets, but lots and vehicles; not just dwellings, but rooms and clothes.[58]

The inhabitants of Los Angeles's Chinatown for example still have a greater cultural connection to China than to California and the United States in general. In *Anatomy of a New Ethnic Settlement: The Chinese Ethnoburb in Los Angeles*, Wei Li describes LA's San

These series of maps are divided into roughly 50 year segments - showing the overlap of cultures which have influenced the shaping of Sofia throughout history. The first column illustrates the boundaries of influence of the ruling civilization. The second column, the overlap of these boundaries over time - shown as a series of superimposed opacities, which in turn highlights the concentrated zones of influence as proportionate to time. These diagrams are meant to demonstrate the transience of culture in relation to the constancy of 'place', and show that the borders that 'define' a nation are fluid and ever changing over time.

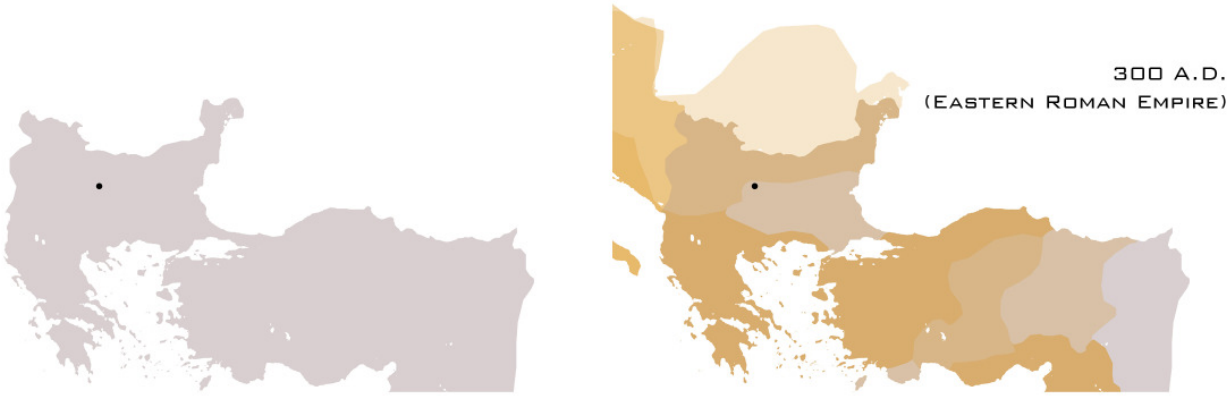
4th C B.C.
(Thrace)

44 B.C.
(Thrace)

14 B.C.
(Thrace)

14 B.C.
(Roman Empire)

180 A.D.
(Roman Empire)


300 A.D.
(Eastern Roman Empire)

600 A.D.
(Eastern Roman Empire)

700 A.D.
(Eastern Roman Empire)

681 A.D.
(First Bulgarian empire)

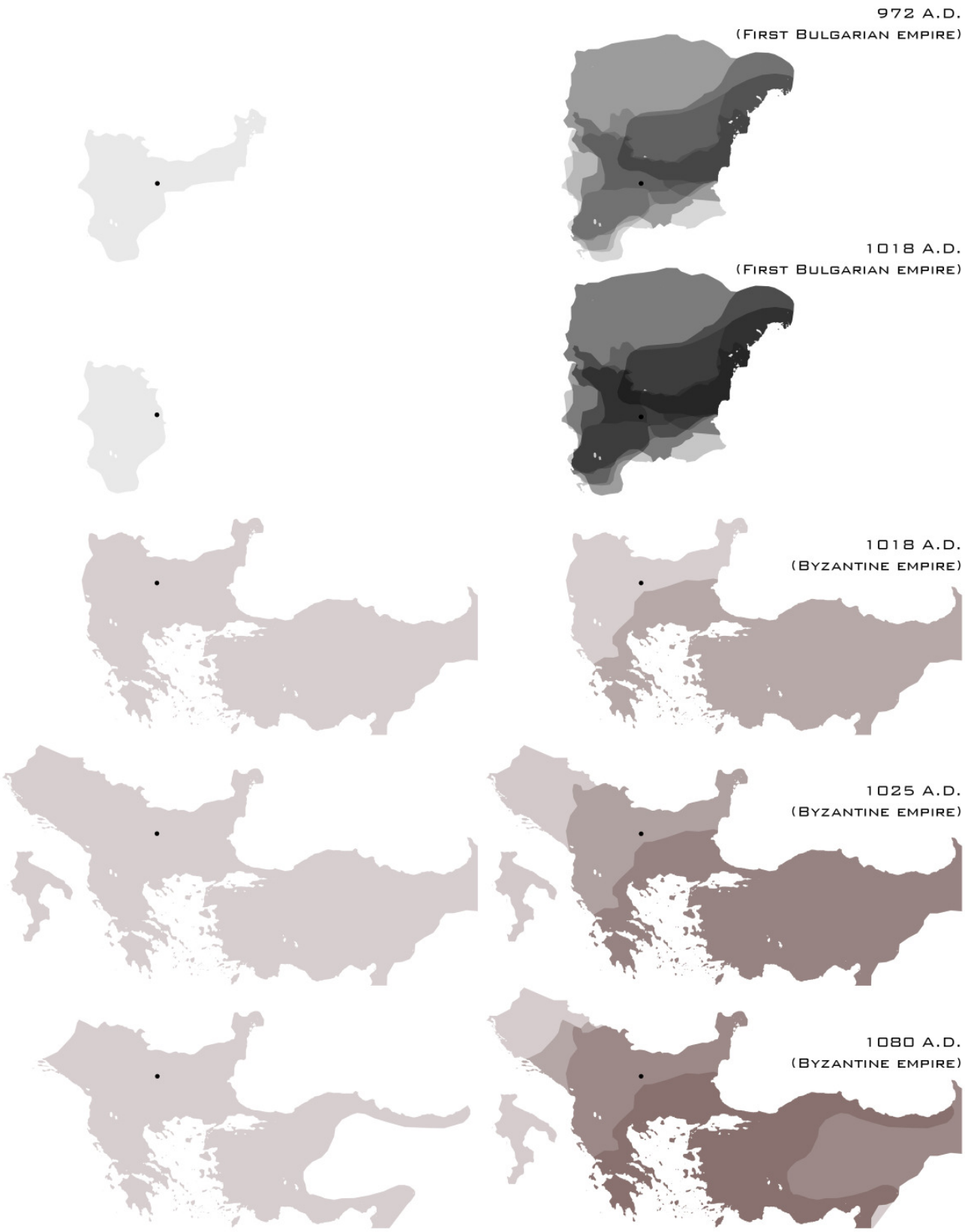
809 A.D.
(First Bulgarian empire)

889 A.D.
(First Bulgarian empire)

927 A.D.
(First Bulgarian empire)

950 A.D.
(First Bulgarian empire)

960 A.D.
(First Bulgarian empire)


972 A.D.
(First Bulgarian empire)
1018 A.D.
(First Bulgarian empire)
1018 A.D.
(Byzantine empire)
1025 A.D.
(Byzantine empire)
1080 A.D.
(Byzantine empire)

1081 A.D.
(Byzantine empire)

1100 A.D.
(Byzantine empire)

1185 A.D.
(Byzantine empire)

1185 A.D.
(Second Bulgarian Empire)

1197 A.D.
(Second Bulgarian Empire)

1207 A.D.
(Second Bulgarian empire)

1218 A.D.
(Second Bulgarian empire)

1257 A.D.
(Second Bulgarian empire)

1280 A.D.
(Second Bulgarian empire)

1355 A.D.
(Second Bulgarian empire)

1371A.D.
(Second Bulgarian Empire)

1396 A.D.
(Second Bulgarian Empire)

1451 A.D.
(Ottoman Empire)

1481 A.D.
(Ottoman Empire)

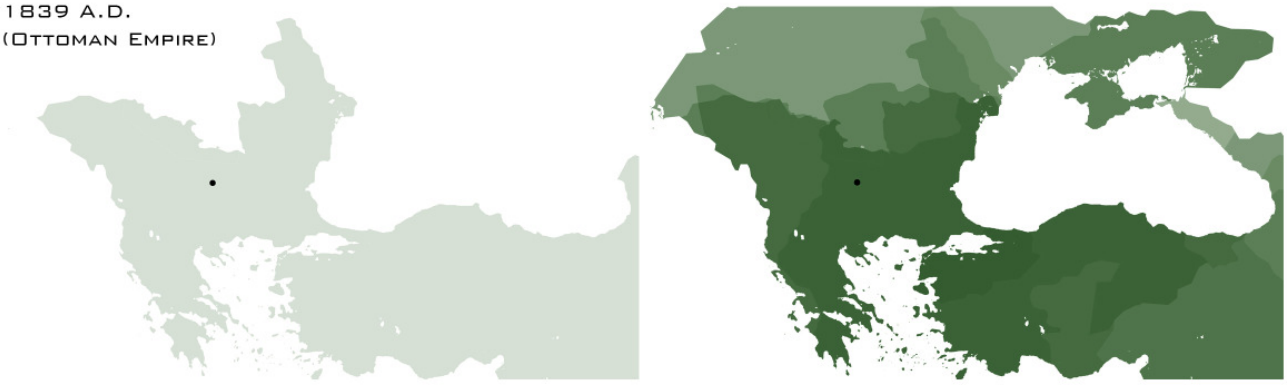
1520 A.D.
(Ottoman Empire)

1566 A.D.
(Ottoman Empire)

1683 A.D.
(Ottoman Empire)

1807 A.D.
(Ottoman Empire)

1839 A.D.
(Ottoman Empire)



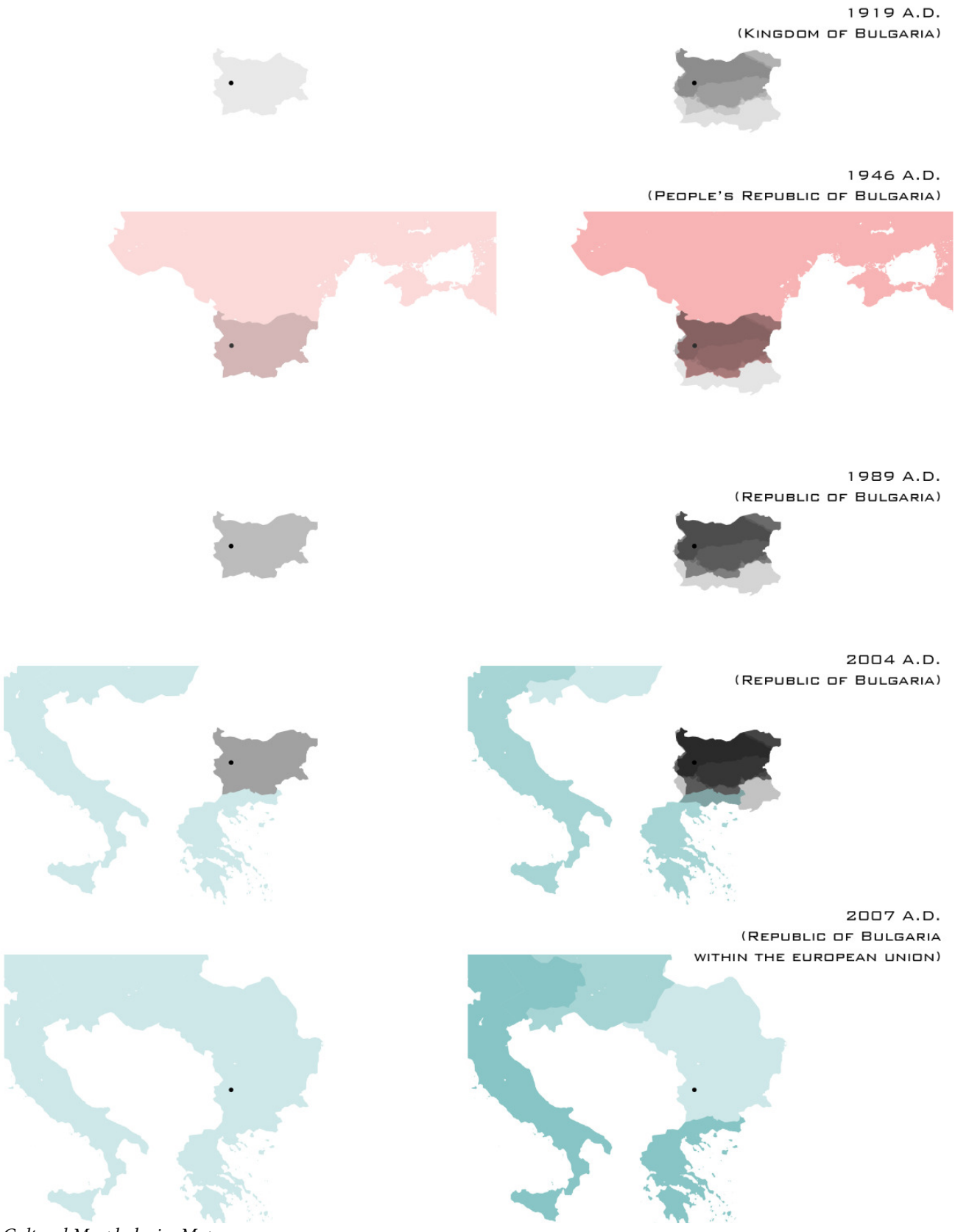
1839 A.D.
(Ottoman Empire)

1878 A.D.
(Kingdom of Bulgaria)

1885 A.D.
(Kingdom of Bulgaria)

1912 A.D.
(Kingdom of Bulgaria)

1913 A.D.
(Kingdom of Bulgaria)



Cultural Morphologies Maps

Fig. 3.0

Cultural Morphologies | Total Map *Fig. 3.1*

Gabriel Valley where Chinese immigrants live through their own network. They eat their own types of food, speak in their mother tongue, stay up to date through newspapers, radio and television in Chinese dialects, and import name brands, chains and supermarkets from home. Technology in the age of globalization has made it possible for cultural group to still keep connected to the cultural influences that shape their individual identities and daily practices. And so, through these forms of media and the migration of 'local' symbols, a cultural group is able to maintain a relationship to a geographically distant place. The adaptation of a new physical environment is thus performed in order to create a sense of identification with it; as well as to indicate to the outside community the extent of the cultural group's spatial presence and cultural uniqueness. The unique symbols, colours, smells, characters and customs are all visual and sensorial clues that one has stepped into a different 'space' that has a unique link to another context.

However despite the clear cultural link that exists between Chinatown and China – as the origin of many of the cultural symbols, beliefs and practices - the inhabitants of Chinatown have separated themselves from their country of cultural origin and have adapted to an extent, to their new physical and cultural context. Though one does not become assimilated to a new culture simple by being placed in its context, neither does one escape the influence of one's new surroundings. John Gumperz, author of *Language and Social Identity, explains that* "[e]ven established immigrant communities are no longer able to survive in commutatively isolated separate islands."[59] Immigrated inhabitants thus maintain the dual influences of two (or more) cultures. New identities are forged from the interaction with a new place and social context, but in addition old identities are being maintained and fuelled by a still thriving connection to a

'place' beyond domestic borders. One can relate to the culture of two very distinct places, which in turn generates a constant synthesis of identity hovering between local context and distance place of origin.

Not only does 'place' and context become important in the creation of new subjective hybrid identities, but the migrated cultural practices of a group can also transform a local established culture. The very presence of Vancouver's Chinese immigrant population - in Chinatown and across the city – has significantly changed the local culture of Vancouver. The immigrant culture influences the host community in a gradual adaptation of their cultural practices and symbols. As another example of such a cultural synthesis, the influence of the NRI (Non-Resident Indian) community in Britain has been so profound that recently in a speech given by British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook on British national identity, chicken tikka masala was proclaimed as "a true British national dish".[60] It is thus apparent that cultural definitions, traditions and symbols change to match the migrant and transnational world we live in. King perhaps sums it up best when he states that "Cultural globalization is no longer conceptualized in terms of the emergence of a homogenized global culture... Instead, cultural globalization is recognized as a complex of diverse phenomena consisting of global cultures originating from many different nations and regions."[61]

Real and Imagined 'Localities'

The NRI community in Britain and the United States hovers between the identity of two places. According to King in the cultural space of 'the West', the objective of the NRI is to look, act and be as Indian as possible. All acts are performed in order to demonstrate a uniqueness of origin. In India on the other hand, the same NRI community demonstrates their difference in

relation to the local Indian population; appearing more Western and following Western customs.[62] Hence in response to each particular cultural and spatial context that a transnationalist group engages with, they are compelled to act in an altered way and reflect on their own identity differently. Relating to this comparison on a personal level, I too find that there is a direct correlation with context of 'place' and the actions and responses of people that identify with a dual-identity. Within my immigrated family there is often a nostalgic recollection of our place of origin; a utopian view of the culture and an emphasis on the particular traditions we have kept alive abroad. I feel connected to the country I was born in because I share many of the same traditions as its people. However, upon returning I always find myself not belonging to this place. I am so withdrawn from the current state of affairs and the evolved cultural practices of the people, that I grasp onto my new identity as a means of explaining my exclusion. My idea of Bulgarian ideologies and traditions is thus idealized, nostalgic and removed from the current context-reliant dynamic culture.

Dual-identities thus do not link us equally to each 'place'. It is one thing to understand and relate to the place where the cultural practices and beliefs you follow have originated from; but we must recognize that those places become part of the fantasized and idealized realm of our imagination. They are imagined places that represent the uniqueness of our subjective identity, which in turn helps to separates us from the foreign and unfamiliar or the homogeneous and meaningless that we find around us. In reality these 'places' are much different, as they have been transformed by a new cultural reality. That is the reason we often feel like strangers in the distance places we presumed 'define' us. As Ignasi de Sola-Morales wrires in his book *Differences: Topographies of Contemporary Architecture*:

> While this ubiquitous society, this global village, generates experiences of simultaneity, multiple presence, and the constant generation of new stimuli, it has also produced feelings of profound estrangement. We are strangers in our own land, as Julia Kristeva has suggested, acknowledging the paradox that our modern universality simultaneously engenders expulsion and exile.[63]

It is the need for 'place' and an immediate and unique connection with it that allows us to feel the comfort of belonging. These distant places are still a part of our identity, and represent the places and diverse ideologies that formed who we are. However unless they are experienced habitually, in the Bachelardian sense, they remain places of the 'unreal'. They are merely imagined cultural environments that many of our beliefs, customs and traditions make reference to. A place of 'reality' is grounded in everyday uses and rituals; it forms what we physically identify with and the context in which our own practices can evolve. It is this true connection to our immediate physical environment that is still the most important influence in the definition of our dynamic and complex identities.

Thus it can be said that we now live with the sense of belonging to multiple places. Some completely real, others hovering between the real and imagined. Religious space is another example of such a cultural space that transcends immediate locality in the city and connects us to a distance or metaphysical place that influences our identity. People can be British and Islamic, Turkish and Islamic or Indian and Islamic. Meaning they respond to the geographic, climatic and cultural patterns of Britain but also orient their prayers to a completely different epicentre of the world, Mecca. This example of Islam demonstrates a culture's appreciation for how the roots of a particular place informed the

foundations of their beliefs and customs. They relate to both the place where they reside – the physical world where they operate – and to the metaphysical place that they associate with their beliefs and perhaps origins. Religious belief is thus perhaps the finest example of a mythic place we carry with us into another part of the world.

King also talks about the fact that "cultures are not necessarily confined or situated in a particular space or place"[64] and states that "[It has become] difficult to actually speak about 'the local' because, in many ways, the local is not in contradistinction to the global as it is not always static. It moves around."[65] And yet place and context as we have seen, do have a very important influence on our evolving identities. In societies today there is perhaps not an elimination of the local, but rather a reliance on plural localities. Because of transnationalism, cultural entities within a particular nation still frequently identify with two or more 'places'. I am both Bulgarian - aware of the place of cultural origin of the traditions I take part in - but also Canadian, taking part in practices that form the basis of cultural life where I reside. Identity is thus not a question of cultural purity, which no longer seems to exist, but one of *transculturalism*. Cultural influences and connections are so multilayered and subjective to each individual community, that hundreds of thousands of diverse combinations and cultural landscapes now exist; each in reference to a multiplicity of different places and origins. King sees migrancy and the resultant transnationalism as the root of the phenomena of "fluid and multiple identities that cross multiple racial, national and ethnic lines".[66]

Cultural identity within one place cannot be reduced to one identity or even a hybridized version of identity, as it is constantly referencing a multitude of unique places and practices which do not meld to become one. They rather exist in both places – real and imagined – at the same time. And since it is impossible to

look at transnationalism as a mere hybridization of multiple cultures, this makes the question of building to suite a local cultural identity even more complex. If you don't *have* to be in a specific place to participate in its culture, the question becomes how can we build for a specific cultural entity when the culture responds to a multiplicity of different places. Perhaps the answer will come not from building for a specific culture, but rather for a specific place *as* a context for transcultural interaction and evolution.

4 THE ARCHITECTURE OF IMAGE, NOSTALGIA AND IMAGINATION

Due to globalisation and the resultant presence of juxtaposed cultural practices and symbols, we have entered into a crisis of identity. In response to this crisis we have searched to affirm our individual identity and have used architecture to reassert our uniqueness. We have often reverted to either the *architecture of the image* or the *architecture of nostalgia*. The first is an architecture that draws on both images of its own past, as well as those of other cultures. The conglomeration of these images is conceived of through a process of selection – picking and choosing the desired forms to represent and portray one's identity. This architecture is primarily based in image-making, symbols *selected* to represent a culture. This is what Gordon Mathews calls the architecture of the 'cultural supermarket'[67]; where we choose from an assortment of available symbols and *invent* the image of our identity. The *architecture of nostalgia,* often referred to as vernacular architecture or regionalism, hinges on the nostalgic desire for a less complex definition of culture. It is an architecture that draws on the memory of the past, which in turn is often glorified or selective. It uses forms and calls on traditions of the local past, with no regard for how they are used in the present. Because it does not relate to the reality of the transcultural present and its synthesised rituals and identities, this architecture remains only a stagnant representation of a vanished culture. Mathews states that both of these forms of architecture do not register the reality of culture today:

> There has been, on the one hand, the idea that one can appropriate from all the world's architectural forms as one chooses, regardless of what culture they may come from; this view has most recently been given the label of postmodernism in architecture. On the other hand, there has been the idea that those of different cultural backgrounds have full and largely exclusive possession of their own architectural forms; this idea has been expressed in various schools of architecture, including regionalism, critical regionalism, and most recently, new traditionalism. Both these ideas are problematic. Neither 'the cultural supermarket' nor 'cultural purity' is sufficient for comprehending cultural identity today, and this is as true in architecture as in any other field.[68]

In contrast to these forms of architecture is the *architecture of material imagination*, which is not dependant on formal representation or the use of architecture as a 'foci', where symbol is used to imply meaning. Rather architecture here is used as an arena where the experiential qualities of space and material generate meaning through daily ritual use. It does not ignore images or histories, but similarily does not depend on them to generate meaning. It is perhaps best described as an architecture of 'place', creating a context where *transculturalism* can thrive and from which culture can evolve.

Sang Lee and Ruth Baumeister portray a series of dialectical oppositions that they claim exist in contemporary architecture: global versus local, unique versus generic, hybrid versus homogenous. Their book, *The Domestic and the Foreign in Architecture*, is an exploration of these dialectical oppositions. The discourse between the *foreign* and the *domestic* – and the evolution and outcome of their exchange - is of particular interest in the definition of our contemporary culture and its physical manifestation:

> [Architecture] is the intersection of the crisscrossing dimensions of not only aesthetic, scientific and cultural, but also of socio-political, economic and ideological interests and influences. As a result, urgent questions have arisen regarding the role of architecture in the representation and identification of a society's concept of culture, specifically with regard to the balance within it of the domestic and the foreign.[69]

However, due to the complexity of the current networks of influence, the process of identification has become a complicated one. One in which trying to decipher *what* is domestic and *what* is foreign is slowly becoming impossible. The *foreign* is present in almost any contemporary culture. This is simply because we cannot avoid being infiltrated by global systems of communication – media, language and technology – and foreign systems of representation – products, symbols and images. Thus the presence of the *foreign* has very much become a part of our own identity; both spatially and habitually. As Kings also states, the "'[f]ramework of spatial analysis' expands beyond nation, through means of physical influences"[70] We can no longer look only within our national boundaries to define our cultural identity and the way we build.

As a result, 'local culture' has become a juxtaposition of a multitude of *foreign* and *domestic* cultures and origins. Culture is no longer seen as a direct product of local place, nor its historical and cultural context. This is the main difference between the cultural identity of the past and that of the present. A single unique identity can no longer represent a group of people who are residing in one place. Furthermore, due to global standardization of building practices, the porousness of borders and the fluidity of information and materials, cities and cultural practices around the world are becoming homogeneous in character. The fear of this homogenization and the loss of a sense of distinctive *domestic* identity, has thus led to a longing for the return to the unique and 'local' which had previously shaped our identities. This has culminated in the search for ways to recreate or establish our identity through architecture.

The proposition of returning to or defining a unique local identity through architecture can however be problematic. First, as was discussed in the last chapter, *culture* itself in our globalized world no longer relates to one single place or one specific set of cultural practices. The second problem is that any attempt to return to a former identity is stagnant and nostalgic. Nothing can come out of the traditions and forms used only to preserve an identity; not recognizing culture itself as constantly evolving and dynamic. The final problem is in the act of selecting a symbol to define an identity. This raises the question of who is choosing the meaning and weather that meaning is recognized or diluted in modern culture.

Architecture of the Image

Lee and Baumeister state that architecture is indeed capable of projecting identities onto its people: "[A]rchitecture is no longer considered simply as the discipline devoted to the production of space. Rather, it is seen as an ideological enterprise, capable

of producing and projecting memories and identities..."[71] As we have seen methods of identification have been used throughout history to define the boundaries of cultural influence and regulate the lands ruled over by one sovereign or one system. These methods ranged from the use of symbols - images, icons or architecture - to the ritualised employment of culture through distinct beliefs and practices. Due to *transnationalism* however there is a lack of unified cultural practices and beliefs among the inhabitants of one nation. This renders the use of symbols an increasingly important strategy in the generation of national identity and the legislative unification of its citizens.[72]

However, the very idea of 'one nation' has become hard to define as global boundaries have become unclear. A global blurring and porousness of physical borders has taken place that has made it almost impossible to look at the 'nation' or national identity, as anything other than a political and legislative strategy. National identity is thus no longer linked to cultural identity, but rather as an image based identity enforced by politicians and power patrons.

Symbols that come to represent the nation hence become problematic as they are seen as icons of a selected or conceived identity; they become symbols of infused meaning. Though there are many symbols that are traditionally used to represent the image of national identity - flags, coat of arms, national colours and abstract symbols - architecture is still seen as one of the most significant symbols of identity. However, architecture does not solely reveal an innocent desire to represent our identity. It is after all a selective process of creation which takes into account the *image* that we want to portray to the world and identify with. There is always a level of choice - the concealed, altered or imagined - within any *image* we choose to be represented by. Architecture thus when used on its symbol level is a tool of identity manipulation. For example, as Lee and Baumeister point

The notion that nations and cities are now represented by architecture as an image, is highlighted in a photo essay by Stefanie Burkle entitled Windows to the World .76 The photos in the series are all taken at an amusement park in Shenzhen, China where some of the best known built monuments representing different cultures of the world are presented all together at one-fifth the scale. This frightening display of icons, as Lee and Baumeister describe it, is "an explicit example of an architectural icon born in a specific cultural context that has turned into an abstract and superficial nation of progress."77 The Shenzhen amusement park is an example of how architecture can be used to represent an image-based idea of a country or culture. It is devoid of authentic meaning and any actual attachment to belief, process and ritual that place it within the meaning of that place. A distressing reality of how cultures can be reduced to an icon, a guide book image: place without context.

Fig. 4.0

Fig. 4.1

out, architecture on a large scale in Dubai and China "could be considered a conscious attempt to enhance a country's self-image and gain broader international acceptance, as well as a means of serving domestic interest."[73] Identity in this case serves both to idealize the current systems of hierarchy and ideology to locals, as well as to create an image of the country to those outside its borders. Its design becomes a fine balance between functional domestic intentions and image-making on a global scale, it is the creation of an architectural 'branding' of the city. King also refers to the use of architecture as an iconic emblem that comes to represents a nation to the rest of the world:

> Recognizing that New York is imagined, and imaged, through its Manhattan Skyline, or Moscow by the stark walls of the Kremlin and bulbous towers of St Basil's cathedral, I want to focus attention on the central synecdochal importance of the materiality and visibility of the building, in constituting and representing not only the city, but also the nation, as well as different, distinctive worlds... In what is now a totally institutionalized mimetic television convention, it is the White House, the Houses of Parliament, the Duma or the Eiffel Tower which – subliminally elided into the capital city – is used to mediate the meaning of the Nation to the gazes of the World.[74]

The selection of images and symbols we shoes to identify ourselves by becomes complex. Due to global porousness and the ease of access to diverse products and images, Gordon Mathews points out that we now live within a "global 'cultural supermarket', in which the world's cultural forms, in areas from food to religion to music to architecture, are to some extent available for appropriation by everyone."[75] We select images with a disregard for their origin, as it has to an extent become irrelevant

to their meaning. Symbols are esteemed for their particular contemporary meanings and affiliations, and are thus employed to produce a similar significance in a different cultural context. We see all of these symbols as available for appropriation and assemble them as we see fit; much like a collage of a romanticized identity.

Furthermore because in the 'cultural supermarket' the final amassing of form is dependent on the ideological views of the patron, the 'style' of the build environment is not reflective of the actual cultural practices and identities of the populous. Because these images are *selected*, it becomes clear that they are symbols of invented culture. Mathews gives an example of what he calls the architecture of the 'cultural supermarket' by referring to the way in which British architects in Malaysia combined Islamic and Italian Renaissance forms in colonial government buildings, "creating a religiously-sensitive assertion of imperial authority, and a new cultural hybrid."[76] Mathews states that this becomes a problem as our identity thus is dependent on the desired outcome of the privileged patrons:

> If all of the world's cultural traditions are held to be available for global appropriation, as postmodernism implies, then it is the rich and powerful who in arenas such as architecture are most able to engage in that appropriation, leaving out everyone else. If, on the other hand, the world's cultural traditions are held to be available only to those who 'belong' to such traditions, as regionalism, critical regionalism, and new traditionalism imply, then the cultural hybridity of the world today is denied in favour of a cultural purity that no longer exists. Those who believe they possess their culture are perhaps possessing no more than a mirage.[77]

This architecture does not directly copy or reproduce a form, but rather creates a new amalgamation that has come from

the process accumulation and adaptation of a form or symbol. The level to which this synthesis naturally occurs and to which it is derived in an attempt to *create* culturally relevant spaces, perhaps reflects the authenticity of the product. For the process of *inventing* the way in which these symbols work together is an act of cultural selection.

Architecture of Nostalgia

The *architecture of nostalgia* – also known as regionalism or vernacular architecture – is a style of building which is also based in the symbol, but one that uniquely references its *own* image products. Here, place of origin of the symbol or form, implies an entitlement to its use and possession. Identity through the eyes of *the architecture of nostalgia* is a direct product of not only place specificity, but local historical and cultural context. However because this architecture is founded on the longing for a less complex definition of culture, it uses forms and symbols only up to the point in history when culture became complex and fluid; there its forms have become frozen in time. It thus turns a blind eye to the realities of *transculturalism* today where context and local cultural traditions are no longer only functions of each other.

Preservation and the recollection of images and traditions of the past, has given us a nostalgic comfort in the contemporary identity crisis. However the act of turning to the past for a reference carries many difficulties; for the historical past is a complex and subjective thing with no absolute and universal reality. De Sola-Morales argues that this search for the quality of the absolute in the past is ultimately doomed to enter into crisis over and over, as it is impossible to establish any absolute reference in the diverse, complex nature of contemporary time and culture. Michael Foucault similarly argues that we are living

in an "epoch of simultaneity and juxtaposition".[78] Cities do not contain only one type of building and cannot be identified by one era. Similarly buildings do not belong to one era or represent one cultural ideal. They are often reused, rebuilt, juxtaposed and altered to suit the times and evolving cultural conditions. And even if buildings remain the same in form, as discussed in the second chapter, they can take on different and juxtaposed meanings.

Architectural representations of a culture are thus complex vessels for identification that cannot be taken as chronological or pure representations of a cultural history. And because cultural identity is a superimposition of times, histories, and practices that have all touched and transformed it, the isolation of individual histories and identities is futile. In turning to the past, there is no one pure answer. For in reality there is no longer *one* symbolic or formal reference around which we can center our identity. Especially since we have been influenced by multiple cultures over history, the very act of *selecting* what is uniquely *ours* is an act of a cultural purging and a rejection of other valid sources of influence. Thus the absurdity of associating one culture with one 'style' or set of symbols is what has lead to many of the failures of regionalism. As Gordon Mathews claims, "People seek to reclaim their roots, despite the fact that in many cases these supposed roots have largely eroded."[79]

This strategy of preserving the cultural purity of the past is in fact a relatively new idea. Michael Foucault explains that one of the greatest obsessions of the nineteenth century is the theme of history, which was seen as an accumulation of the past. We are now living in an age of 'museumization' where we are transfixed with the idea of library and the museum, with recording and preserving the past. In a museum we tend to only observe rather than connect to the artifacts. But because we can only relate to

something through dynamic participation, we cannot *create* a connection with an object, tradition or cultural narrative unless we can in some way experience it. Thus if we do not live with the everyday rituals or beliefs of our culture, they do not become a part of our authentic identity. The inexperience-able city thus is only a museum of objects that have become part of our historical past.

Here the definition between static vs. dynamic traditions and cultural practices becomes important to the debate. Static tradition is chosen to perpetuate only one vision of a culture, and is therefore closely related to *image-making*. Dynamic traditions however, recognise the natural process of evolution and change. Spaces for such dynamic traditions offer a choice of use - rather than a prescribed one - and thus become open to future cultural synthesis. Nezar AlSayyad argues "that tradition must not be interpreted simply as the static legacy of the past but rather as a model for the dynamic interpretation of the present."[80]

AlSayyad also notes that "many nations and communities have resorted to heritage preservation, the invention of tradition, and the rewriting of history as forms of self-definition."[81] He claims that we have however reached the end tradition, or rather of our conception of tradition "as a repository of authentic and hence valuable ideas that have been handed down from one generation to another."[82] The notion of tradition in the era of globalisation is no longer only related to a specific place and a unique group of people.

Furthermore, current cultural practices have outlived 'traditional' form. Mathews gives us the example of "the wealthy young Japanese who builds a traditional Japanese house only to find that he cannot live kneeling on tatami mats, having been brought up in a world of Western chairs..."[83] This example clearly shows the misbalance between certain current practice and 'traditional' architectural form. However as we have seen, in

order to create an authentic cultural representation there must be a dialogue between ritual practice and form. If not, the form or symbol is only a nostalgic desire for a lost tradition. As Mathews aptly states, only "[i]f culture is defined not as static and pure but as dynamic and hybrid, then regionalism can be not a matter of the dead cultural past but of the dynamic cultural present."[84]

Architecture of Material Imagination

Physical context is the tangible reality that has given birth and cradled a multiplicity of diverse civilizations. It is not the creator or the representation of a culture, but rather its stage. An arena that remains a constant, while the cultures that evolve or move through it perform among the sets they have created. Context is the constant while culture is the fluid and transient. 'Place' is the outcome of these fluctuating realities. It is thus not a blank arena, but a charged space of multiple realities and meanings.[85] Place furthermore exudes its own unique spatialities, densities and flows that have all influenced the primal reactions of cultural entities and framed their identities. But since *culture* itself is dynamic and constantly flowing between a multitude of sources of influence, we cannot forever link *this* culture to *this* place. We must then accept 'place' as a charger or instigator for cultural identity, but not its insoluble root. Any customs, beliefs and practices may arrive to this place that do not relate to it, but become something else because of it. Likewise, cultures that spread away will evolve to be something different based on the influence of their future contexts. So 'place' is not the fixed root of a culture, but rather the physical context and charged spirit that plays an important role in the formation and evolution of its identity.

A place however does not hold the same meanings for all civilizations and cannot revolutionize people to act and believe

the same things as the cultures before. Nevertheless, it does carry fundamental elements and atmospheres that are important, 'sacred' or essential to all civilizations. These are the fundamental elements or spatialities that provoke analogous emotions and actions from all human beings, and thus can arouse and shape a culture. The spring as a source of water for example, represents life and necessity to all civilizations and its ritual collection is thus paralleled in many cultures. Though it may conjure up different mythologies and contrasting processions of ritual use for each, it does however carry a symbolic value that *is* fundamental to each cultural entity. This value in turn shapes the space of the city that surrounds it and influences the acts of the inhabitants.

Thus the specificities of place – be they natural or man built - become catalysts for the dynamic evolution of cultural practices, beliefs and their formal manifestations. For any form of belief, practice or ritual that becomes part of our cultural identity – and we in turn carry with us - was framed or inspired by a given context or place. As King points out, "[p]hysical, spatial, architectural, urban and landscape realities... [are the] essential material conditions and mental referents, without which other cultural practices and forms of representation (in addition to architecture, planning and urban design) – writing mapping, ethnography, film, photography, painting – would have been impossible."[86]

As discussed in the last chapter, contemporary cultural identity is in a constant state of flux hovering between real and imagined, here and there, truth and idealization. Identity is anything but one objective reality, and can thus not be represented by only one set of symbolic geometries. Gaston Bachelard explains that the house and city are first and foremost geometric; however as we live in a world that constantly borders on the real and unreal, our

personal experience of these tangible geometries goes beyond their mere form and gives them intimate, charged qualities. In this way when we experience a place we make it our own, we transcend geometry: "In this dynamic rivalry between house and universe, we are far removed from any reference to simple geometrical forms. A house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space."[87] Though built forms are the symbolic indicators of identity, they are in addition habitually charged by the movement of people and their subjective connections; giving them a deeper sense of identity. How we interact and ritually use our built and natural landscape therefore makes us who we are. The shared sense of belonging then to one specific 'place' forms the identity of a collective, regardless of its individual transculturalist practices and ideologies.

Therefore, in order to therefore approach the design of a space of cultural identity, we must do so with a heuristic approach over a strictly formal and symbolic one. Place-specific and experiential architecture can bring together a *culture* through its unified ritual use of space; only then instilling on them a common sense of spatially manifested meaning. As Deborah Hauptmann writes "Simply put, issues of identity (as shared articulations) are not, so to speak, represented, but practiced – inclusions/exclusion at the levels that are most subtle and most difficult to discern; they generate urban patterns of practice and habits of movement and encounters that remain unarticulated in most urban or architectural analysis."[88]

Bachelard describes *imagination* as a concept that exists in the margins of the real and unreal. *Imagination* cannot be dreamed up, he notes, without existing images that we have pulled from reality, but its sequencing is entirely based in the unreal.

Imagination then can be a way of looking at architecture not only as an image-maker, but as a vessel for the subjective identities that hover between the 'real' and 'unreal'.[89] It is an architecture in acceptance of these multiple identities which inevitably exist in the world today; recognizing that hybridities come out of their interaction in a shared context. This architecture hence focuses on 'place' as an arena for cultural synthesis, establishing a context in which these individual imagined identities can come together and create a moment of culture through a shared ritual.

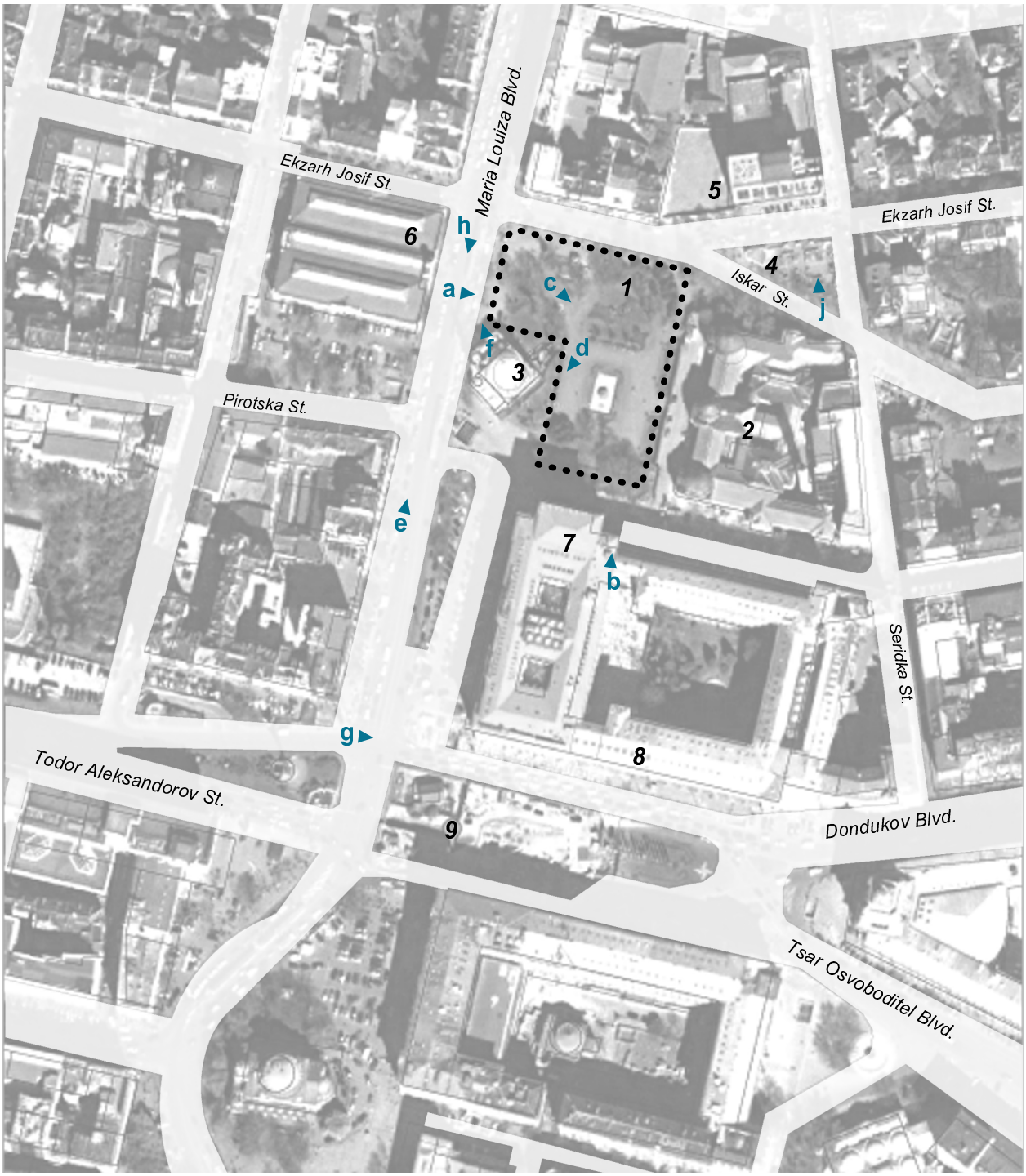
Bachelard further makes a distinction between *formal imagination* and *material imagination*. The former gives rise to images that are visual representations of a formal object, whereas the latter triggers images that are evoked directly from matter. Bachelard explains that "matter is the very principle that can dissociate itself from forms."[90] He says that in our society we often suffer from a lack of the *material imagination* as we fail to "de-objectify objects and deform forms – a process which allows us to see the matter beneath the object."[91] There must be a balance between form and matter in our subjective understanding of the world. This balance allows a recognition of that which is at the essence of the world that engages us; the indescribable and sensorial which adds a depth of experience that extends past the merely visual.

The *architecture of the material imagination* therefore does not turn its back on the images of collective memory and historical context, but alludes to them through experience rather than symbol. It is an architecture that acknowledges that the multi-platform nature of culture today cannot possibly be represented through only symbolic images, and that cultural meaning hence comes through the subjective experience of 'place' and its unique context. Thus through its scale, density, materiality and use, architecture can create a unique moment in the homogenous

that surrounds us. It is these pockets of unique meaning within the city - which arise from the specificity of 'place' - that generate identity. The only way we can build for a *specific culture* is to build for a *specific place*. This allows the reality of *transculturalism* to charge the context it is given through ritual experience and in turn find cultural meaning. Only then does regional architecture transcend the conceived ideology of symbols and through the experience of localized rituals and place, embody identity.

THE SITE

| PART 2



1 *'Banski Square'*
2 *Sofia Central Mineral Baths*
3 *'Banya Bashi' Mosque*
4 *Existing Mineral Water Taps*
5 *Film Institute/ Cinema*
6 *Public Market*
7 *TSUM Department Store*
8 *Council of Ministers*
9 *Sveta Petka Church (below grade)*

Existing Site | Photo Key
Fig. 4.2

a *view of 'sofia mineral baths' from main street* *Fig. 4.3*

b *view of 'sofia mineral baths' from public corridor through adjacent building* *Fig. 4.4*

c *view of 'sofia mineral baths' and existing square* *Fig. 4.5*

d *view of backside of 'Banya Bashi Mosque'* *Fig. 4.6*

e *approaching view of 'Banya Bashi Mosque'* *Fig. 4.7*

f *view of public market* *Fig. 4.8*

g *sunken 'Sveta Petka Church' and government buildings* *Fig. 4.9*

h *view of axis with Vitosha Mounatin (showing 'Banya Bashi Mosque' & 'Sveta Nedelya Chruch')* *Fig. 4.10*

j *ritual collection of water at the existing mineral water taps*

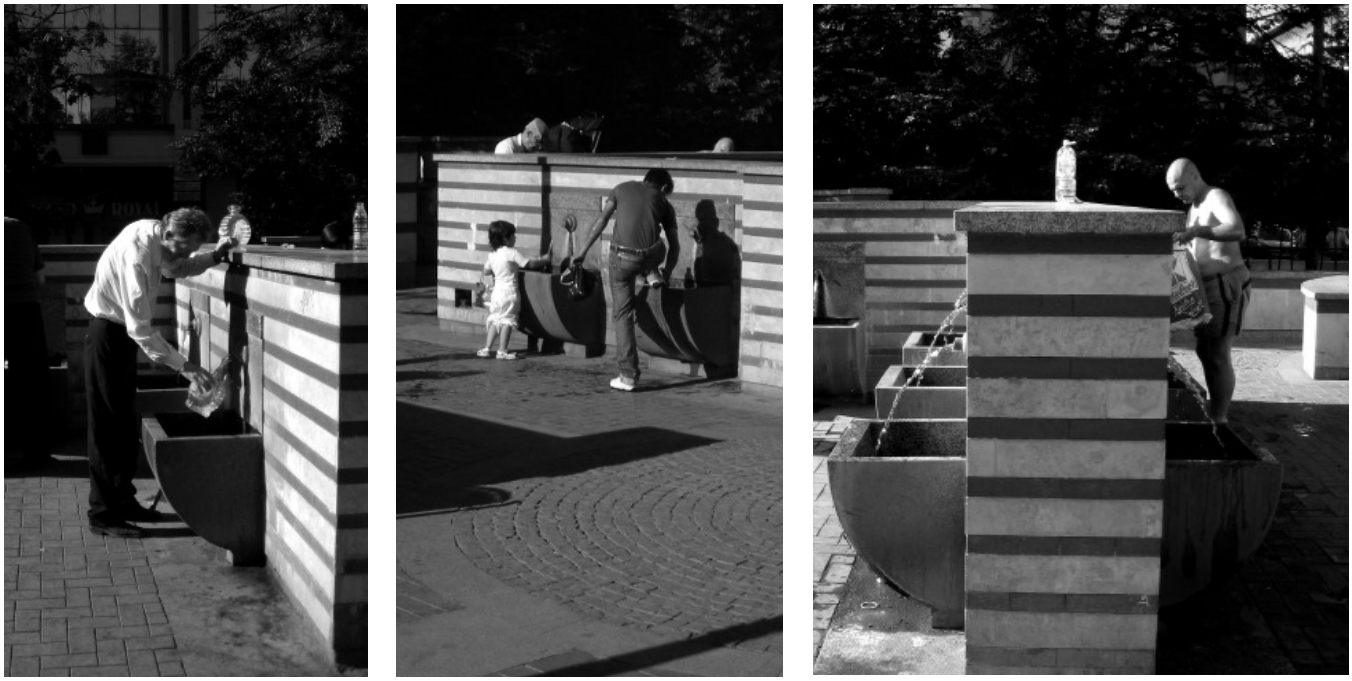


Fig. 4.11

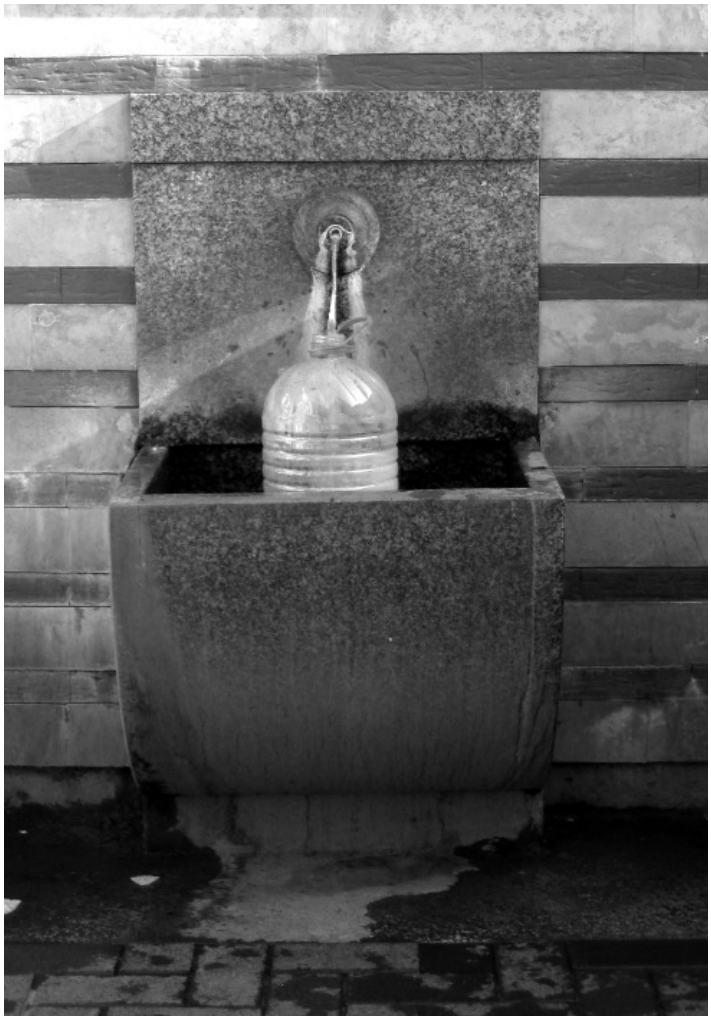


Fig. 4.12

Fig. 4.13

THE DESIGN PROPOSAL

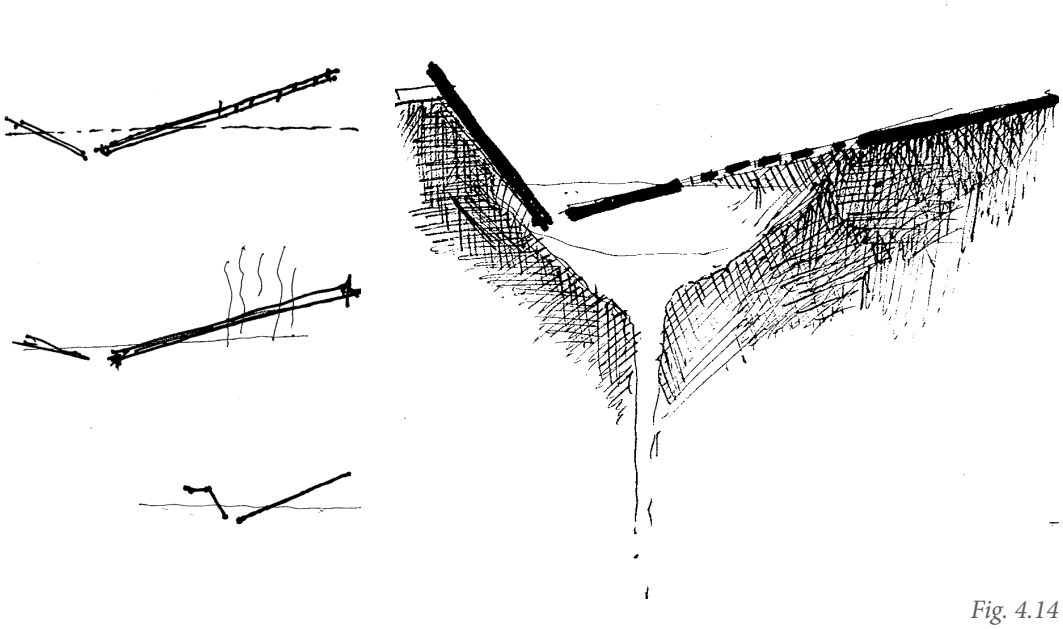


Fig. 4.14

The design for the square in front of the Baths is a sunken plaza which slopes towards the source of the spring and towards the buried ruins that lie beneath the modern city. It is the conscious act of unearthing and revealing the superimposed layers of 'place'. Currently the ruins are either inaccessible or reached through a system of below grade passageways that connect the proposed new metro stations. Sloping the square towards the level of underground stations and the ruins, links the modern city to the ancient in a quotidian way.

The descent is created by two slanting planes which meet at the lowest point: the source of the spring. An axis is created at this junction between the planes that is oriented with the mountain; an important alignment to the origin of Sofia. There is a constant presence of the spring water and its specific characteristics throughout the square. Water in its liquid form is both drunk, collected, and engaged with. At the lowest point – where the east and west planes meet – the source emerges to form a shallow pool of heated water. As the east plane rises above the level of the spring to meet grade, the floor surface is partially perforated allowing the steam generated by the hot spring to rise. This creates a field of steam which reminds the occupant of the presence of the natural and hierophantic below. Along the north wall, a narrow slot pours out water at intermittent taps. This wall acts as the main point of activity of the plaza, where place embodies ritual.

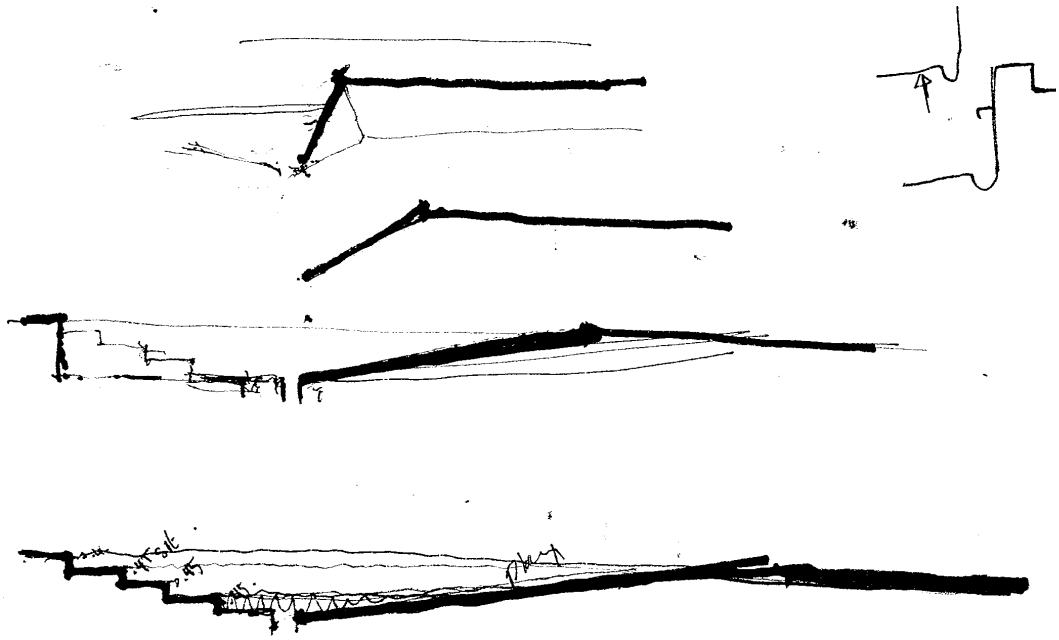


Fig. 4.15

Physical Properities

Temperature: 46˚C

Chemical Content | hydrocarbonate-natriumsulphate and metasilicium

Capacity: 16 l/s

Material Imagination

Steam: blurs boundaries and alters depth

Haptic Sensation: temperature change on skin

Melting: temperature difference in winter season

Smell: Unique Aroma

Interacts with Stone: the 'sodium salt' erodes pores in stone, leaves white residue as relique of passing time

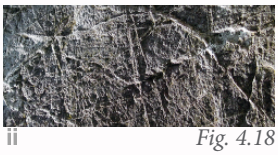
Interacts with Copper: the sulfur compounds tarnish the copper; relique of passing time

Auditory: sound of rushing of water

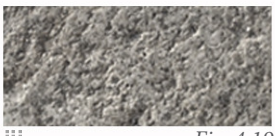
Fig. 4.16

Materials

i *Fig. 4.17*

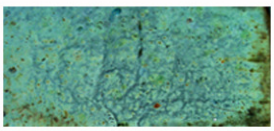


ii *Fig. 4.18*



iii *Fig. 4.19*

iv *Fig. 4.20*



v *Fig. 4.21*

i *local honed monozite stone*
ii *local rough monozite stone*
iii *local hammered stone*
iv *locally mined copper*
v *tarnished copper: by water*

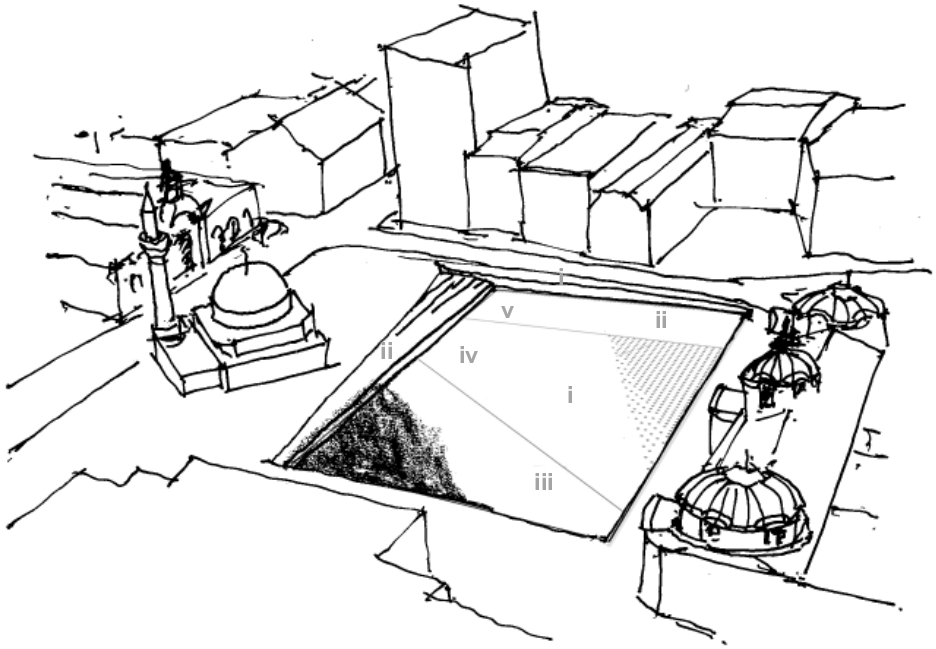
Ground Texture

1 *existing paving* *Fig. 4.22*

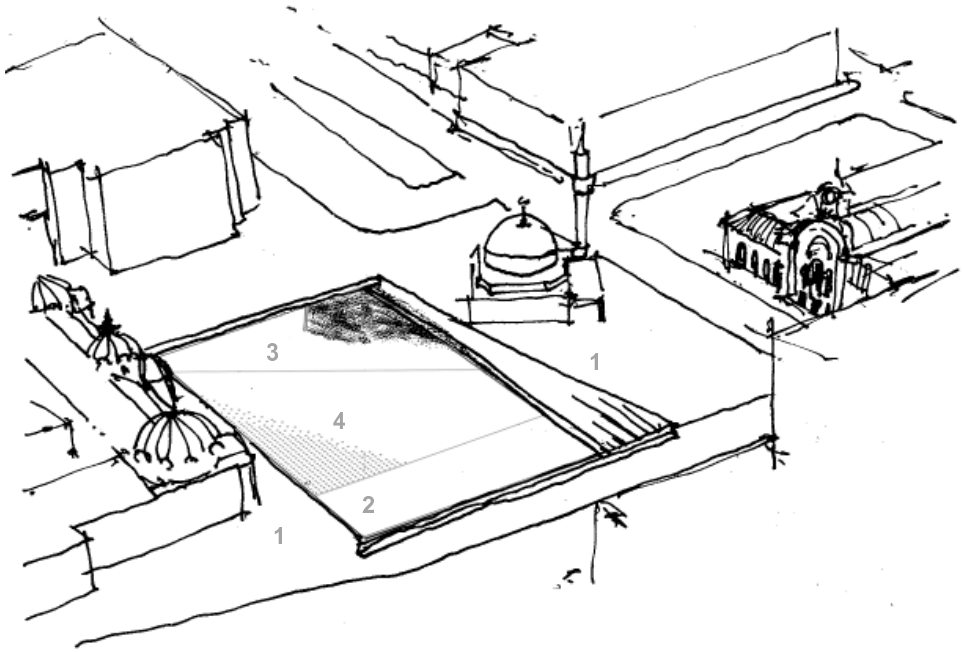
2 *new paving w/ drainage grate* *Fig. 4.23*

3 *stepped slope* *Fig. 4.24*

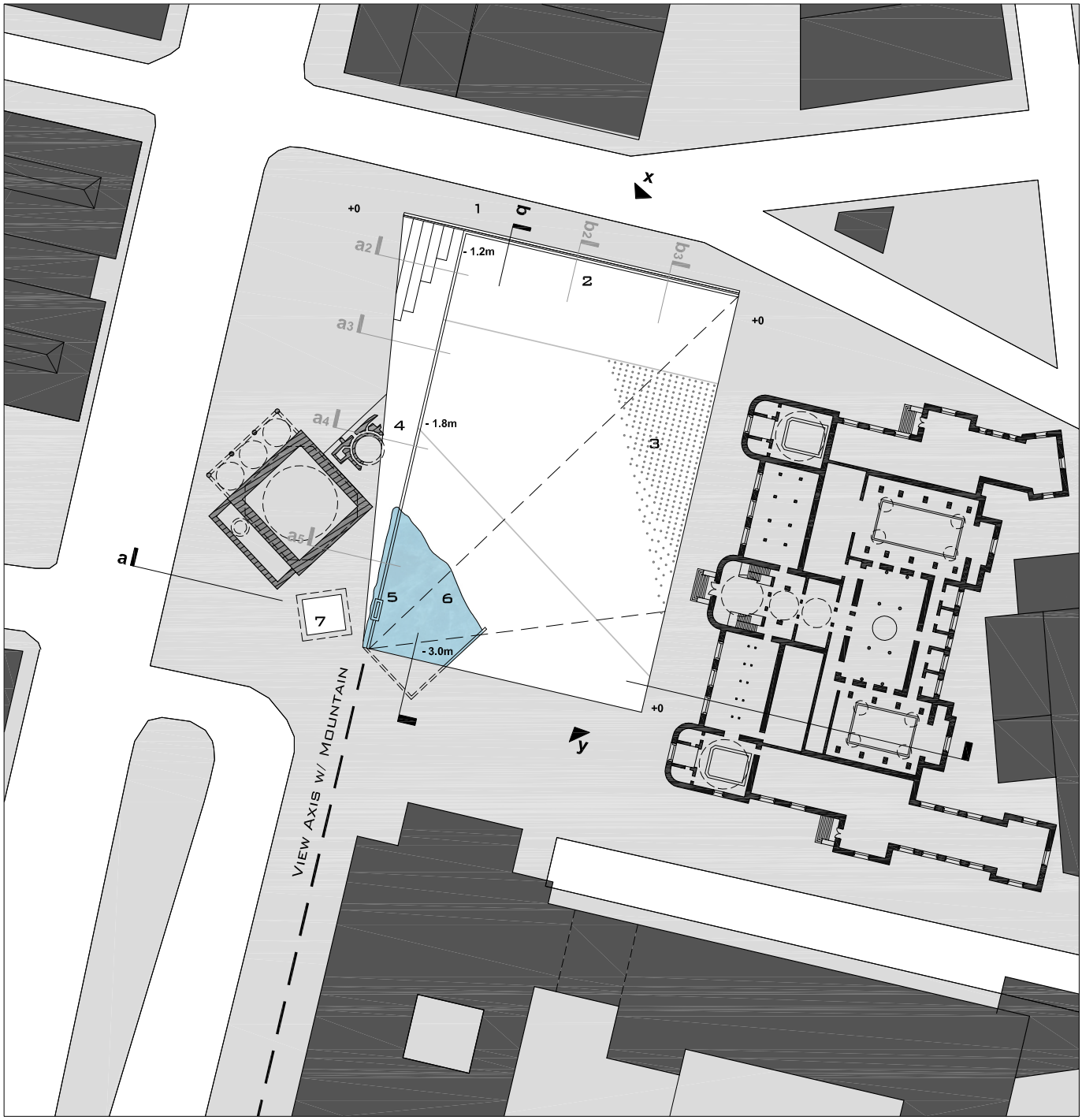
4 *perforated stone* *Fig. 4.25*



x *site perspective* *Fig. 4.26*



y *site perspective* *Fig. 4.27*



Plan of Mineral Baths Square | Street Level

Scale 1:1000

Fig. 4.28

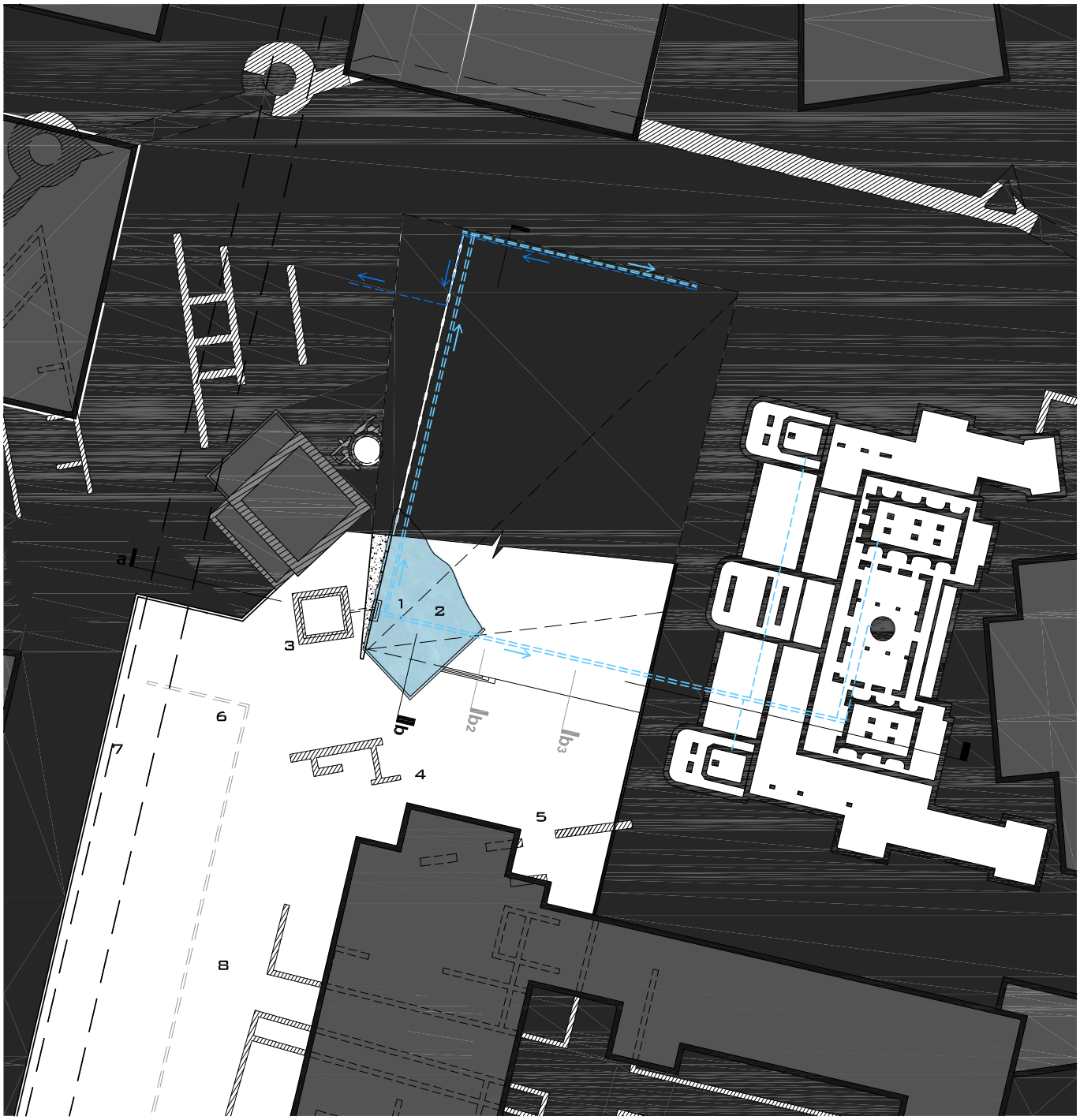
1 Seating Area
2 Fountain Wall
3 Perforated Floor: Steam Field
4 Ottoman bath ruins
5 Spring Source
6 Shallow Spring Water Pool/ Winter Skate rink
7 Light Well (to Roman capture Tank Below)

Roman Ruins

Medieval/ Ottoman

National Revival Period to Modern Day

Ruins Below Grade *Fig. 4.29*



Plan of Mineral Baths Square | Lower Level

Scale 1:1000

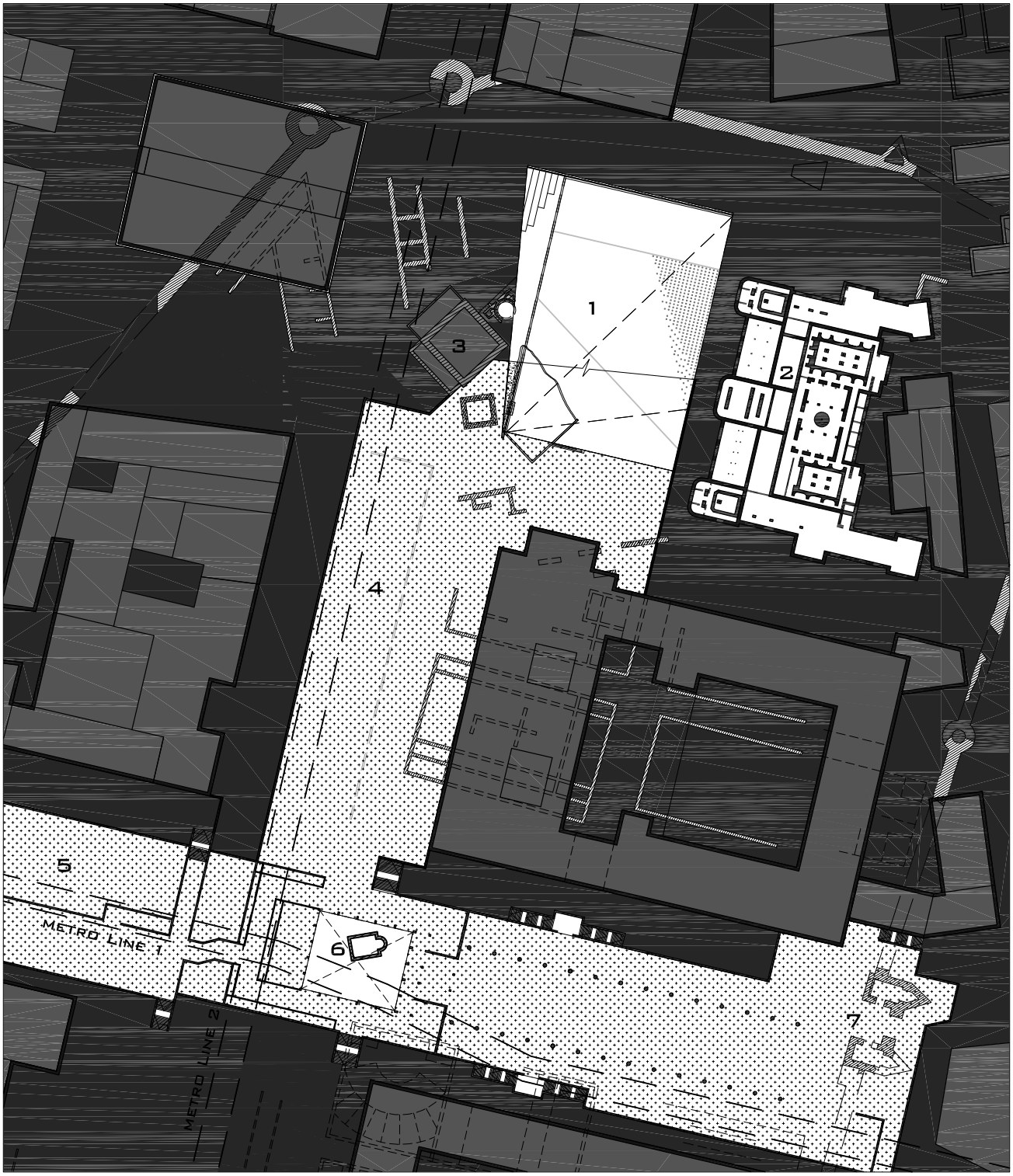
Fig. 4.30

1 Spring Source
2 Shallow Spring Water Pool
3 Roman Capture Tank (light well above)
4 Roman Bath Ruins / Lower Level Plaza
5 Lower Entrance to tsum Store
6 New Metro Station 'Serica' Line 2
7 New Metro Line 2 (Dashed Below)
8 Passage way to Sveta Petka Church & Metro Station 'Serica' Line 1

Roman Ruins

Medieval/ Ottoman

National Revival Period to Modern Day



BUILDING FOOTPRINT

BELOW GRADE (INACCESSIBLE)

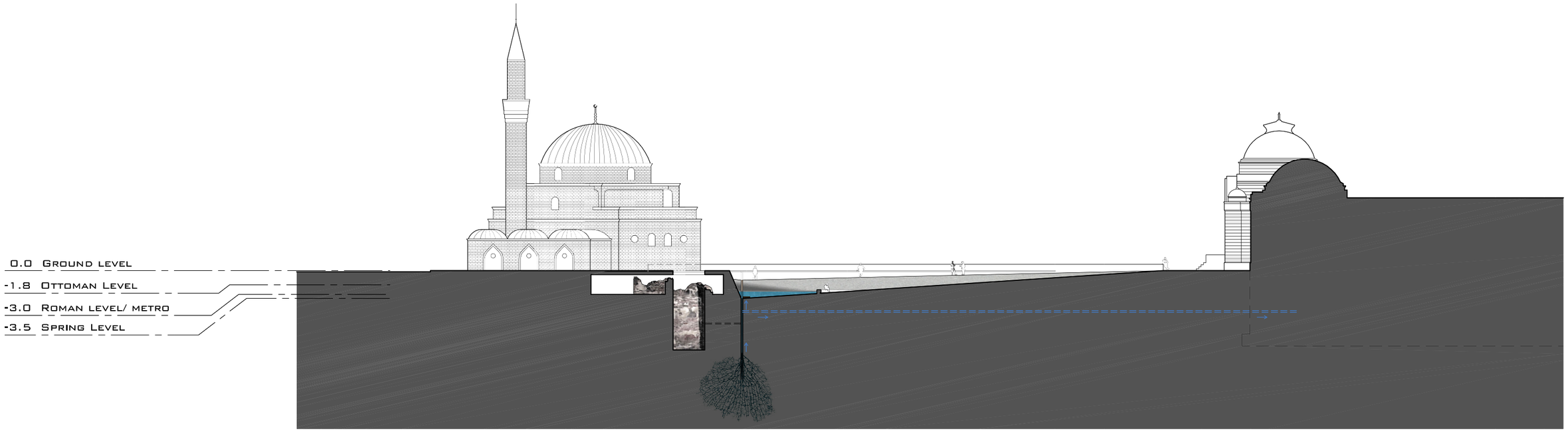
BELOW GRADE (NOT OPEN TO ABOVE)

1 MINERAL BATHS 'BANKSI' SQUARE
2 SOFIA MINERAL BATHS
3 BANYA BASHI MOSQUE
4 FUTURE METRO STATION 'SERICA' LINE 2
5 FUTURE METRO STATION 'SERICA' LINE 1
6 SVETA PETKA CHURCH (BELOW GRADE)
7 ROMAN 'EAST GATE' RUINS

Site Plan | Lower Level

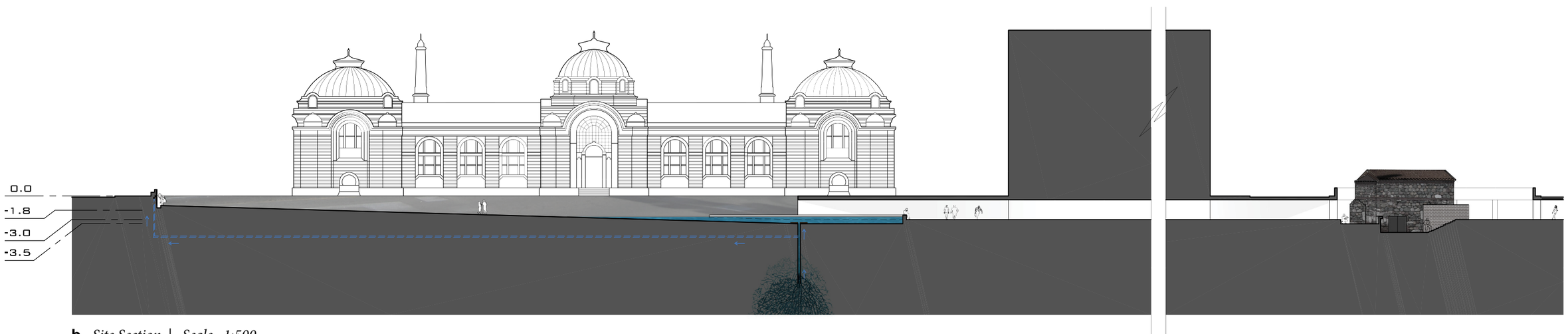
Scale 1:1750

Fig. 4.31



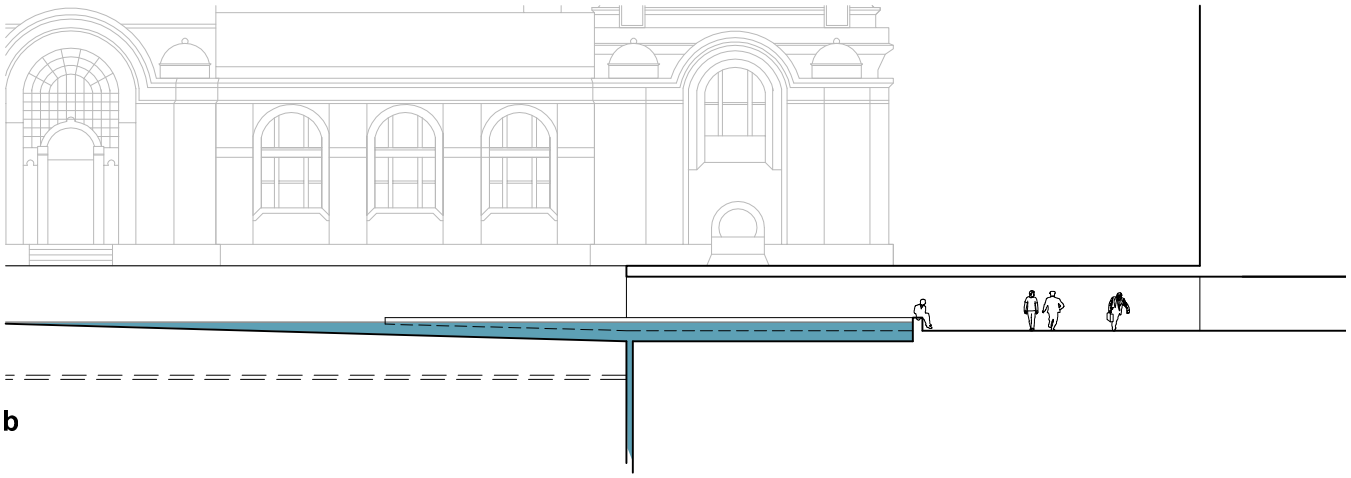
a *Site Section | Scale 1:500*

Fig. 4.32

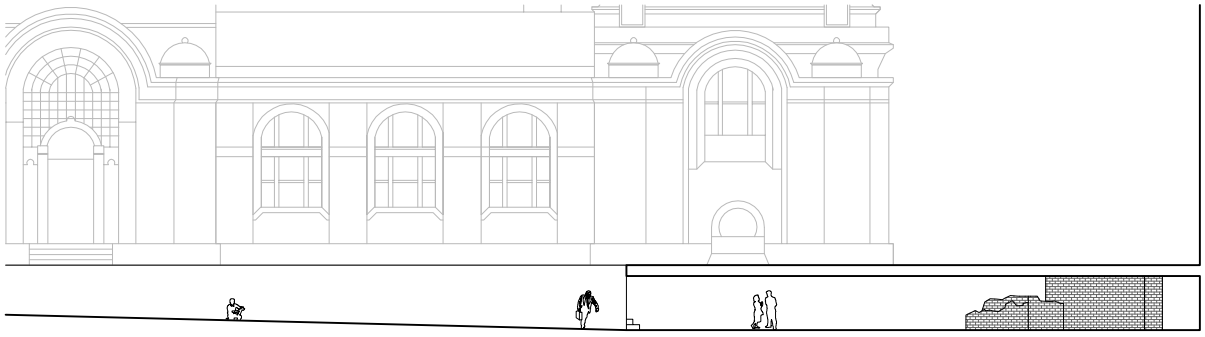


b *Site Section | Scale 1:500*

Fig. 4.33



b



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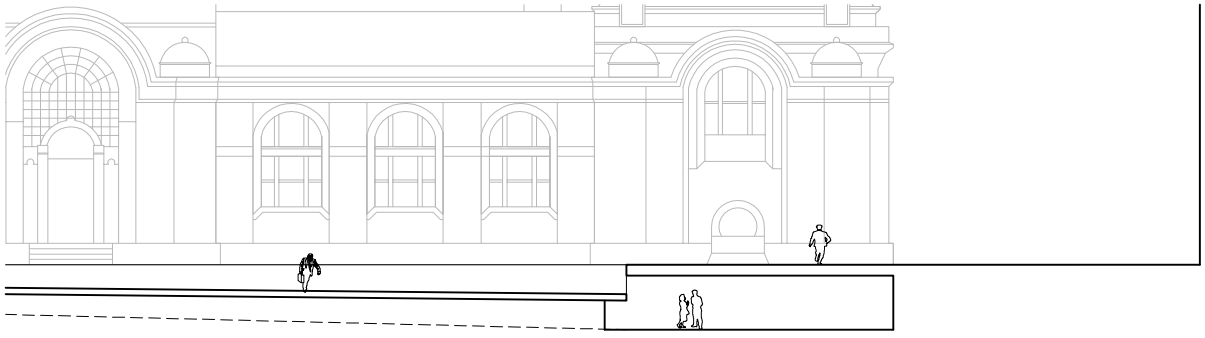
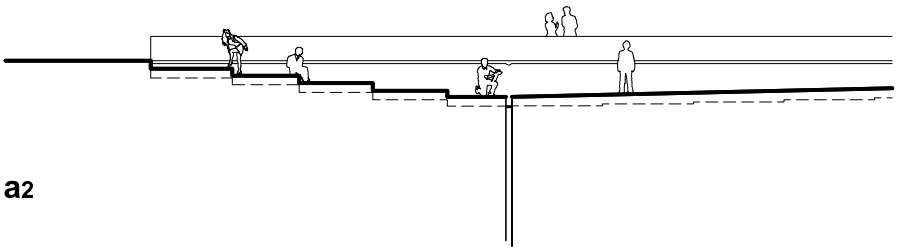


b3

Cross Sections | East Sloping Plane

Scale 1:350

Fig. 4.34



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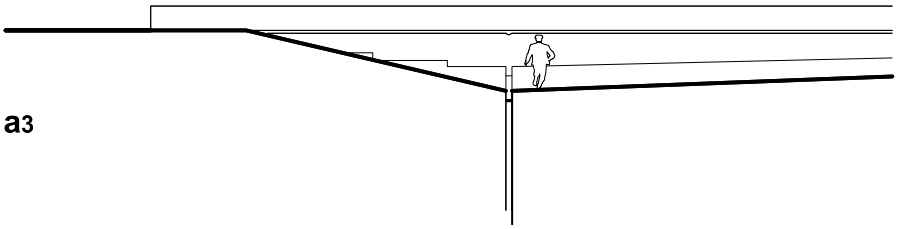

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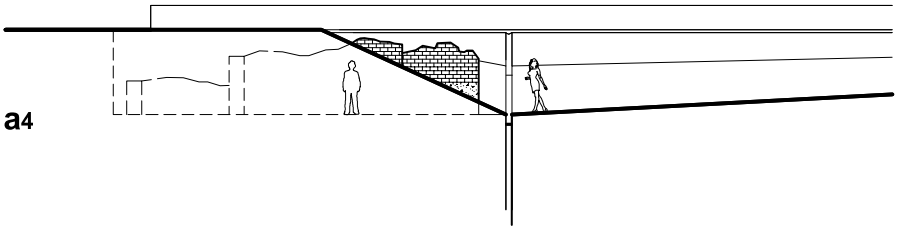

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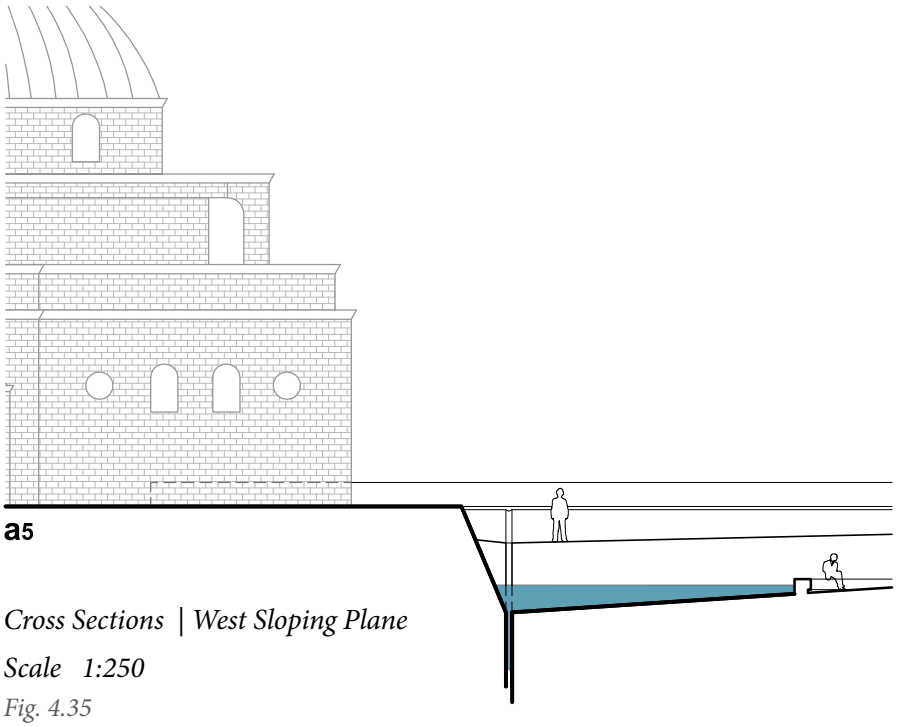
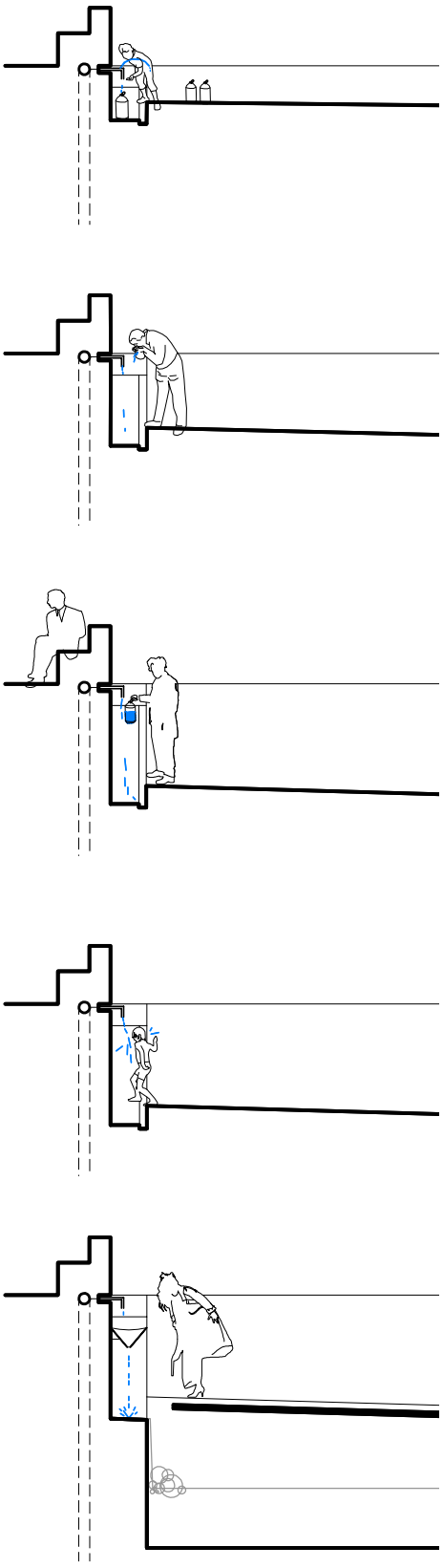


a5

Cross Sections | West Sloping Plane

Scale 1:250

Fig. 4.35



Section Details | North Wall

Scale 1:100

Fig. 4.36

Fig. 4.37

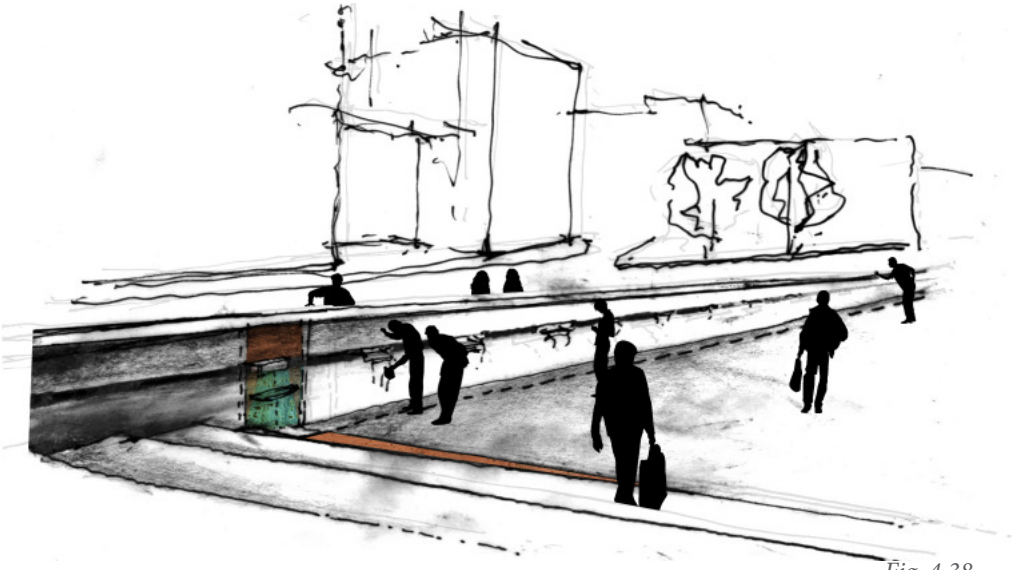


Fig. 4.38

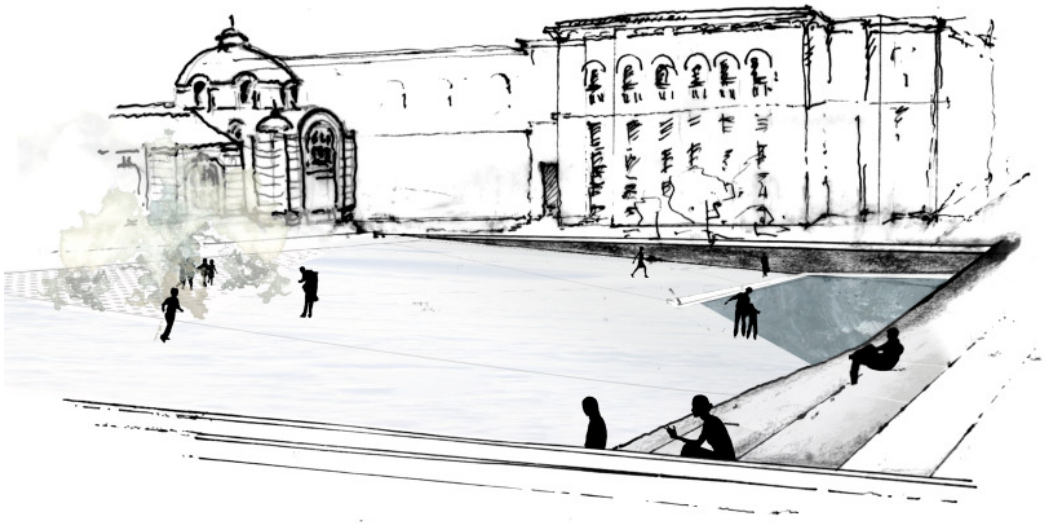


Fig. 4.39

Fig. 4.40

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2 Mathews, Gordon. *Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalization: Implications on Architecture*, in Lee and Baumeister, eds., *The Domestic and the Foreign in Architecture*, pp. 49-50.

3 "The plain, thus makes extension as such manifest, whereas the valley is a delimited and directed space. A basin is a centralized valley, where space becomes enclose and static. Whereas valleys and basins have a macro or medium scale, a ravine (cleft, gorge) is distinguished by a 'forbidding' narrowness. It has the quality of an 'underworld' which gives access to the 'inside' of the earth... Hills and mountains are spatial complements to valleys and basins, and function as primary space-defining 'things' in the environment... denoted by words such as 'slope', 'crest', ridge', and 'peak'. We have already suggested that the presence of water may emphasize the place-structure of the surface relief... But water also generates particular kinds of spatial configurations: island, point, promontory, peninsula, aby and fjord...The island thus, is a place par excellence, appearing as an 'isolated', clearly defined figure."; Norberg-Schulz. *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, pp. 37-38

4 Norberg-Schulz. *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, pp. 42.

5 Barrie, *Spiritual Path, Spiritual Place: Myth, Ritual, and Meaning in Architecture*, pp.48.

6 Eliasson, TED Talk: *Playing with Space and Light*.

7 Norberg-Schulz. *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, pp. 47-48.

8 Lecture by the lead archaeologist and restoration expert, given at the Boyana Church, Sofia. 21, July, 2009.

9 Norberg-Schulz tries to explain early human scared regard for the mountain by explaining that the ancients most often explain creation, or the coming into being of the world, as the marriage of heaven and earth. Mountains belong to earth but are reaching in to the heavens, and hence become a sacred representation of marriage of the two worlds; a sacred threshold. Norberg-Schulz. *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, pp. 24-25.

10 Norberg-Schulz. *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, pp. 45.

11 "The landscape where he lives is not a mere flux of phenomena, it has structure and embodies meanings. These structures and meanings have given rise to mythologies (cosmogonies and cosmologies)... A phenomenology of natural place ought to take these mythologies as its point of departure. In doing this, we do not have to re-tell the tales, rather we should ask which concrete categories of understanding they represent." Norberg-Schulz. *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, pp. 23.

12 Eliade, Mircea. *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*. As quoted in Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, pp. 34.

13 Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. As quoted in Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, pp. 34.

14 Norberg-Schulz. *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, pp. 45.

15 Eliade, Mircea. *Encyclopedia of Religion*. pp.10. As quoted in Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, pp. 26.

16 Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, pp. 26.

17 Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*.

18 Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, pp. 71.

19 Pearson and Richards, *Architecture and Order: Approaches to Social Space*, pp. 39.

20 Scully, *The Earth, The Temple, and The Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*, pp. 3-4.

21 Another example of the fine tuning to local conditions, is found in the orientation of the pyramids of Egypt. As is known the Egyptian pyramids have their four pyramidal sides aligned almost perfectly with the four cardinal directions. With such accuracy that often they are only found to be only a fraction of a degree off. The buildings faced southward into the direction of the source of the Nile, believed by Egyptians to be the bringer of fertility. However there is evidence to show that the Egyptians of the north placed less emphasis on the source of the Nile and aligned their buildings with the east, the rising of the sun, rather than the traditional south. Sourced from: Pearson and Richards, *Architecture and Order: Approaches to Social Space*, pp. 39.

22 Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, pp. 309.

23 Norberg-Schulz. *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, pp. 176.

24 Gercheva, *Sofia: 120 Years as Capital of Bulgaria*, pp. 56

25 Gercheva, *Sofia: 120 Years as Capital of Bulgaria*, pp. 56

26 Genchev, *Sofia: Thinking In Space and Outside of Time*, pp. 66

27 Genchev, *Sofia: Thinking In Space and Outside of Time*, pp. 66-70

28 Vogt-Goknil, *Living Architecture: Ottoman*, pp. 56-57.

29 Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, pp. 136.

30 Volwahsen, *Living Architecture: Indian*, pp. 57.

31 Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, pp. 136.

32 Dictionary 3.0, *Acropolis*. <http://www.dictionary30.com/meaning/Acropolis>

33 King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture Urbanism Identity*, pp. 5-11

34 Gerolymatos, *The Balkan Wars: Myth, Reality and The Eternal Conflict*, pp. 75-78

35 *Christianity and Judaism in the Ottoman Empire*. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_the_Ottoman_Empire>

36 Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, pp. 40.

37 Norberg-Schulz. *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, pp. 52.

38 Imago Mundi is a term used by Eliade in *The Sacred and the Profane*

39 Norberg-Schulz. *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, pp. 50-51.

40 Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, pp. 46.

41 Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, pp. 298.

42 Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, pp. 298.

43 Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, pp. 300.

44 Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, pp. 139.

45 Later through the centuries various additions were made by successive sultans, all to ensure their mark on the mosque. The Hagia Sophia itself was so potent and beautiful that it remained the principle mosque in the Ottoman Empire for nearly 500 years. Vogt-Goknil, *Living Architecture: Ottoman*.

46 *Sacred Destinations, Hagia Sophia* <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/turkey/istanbul-hagia-sophia>

47 Furthermore, following the conquest of Constantinople, not only were the majority of Byzantine churches converted into mosques, but Turkish mosque architecture itself departed from the Seljuk tradition and underwent major changes. It is said that the formal influence of the Hagia Sophia in particular resulted in the creative transformation of this mosque architecture. In fact during the first few years of occupation, the Ottomans had already built several mosques which mimicked the Hagia Sophia. Not only were they similar in plan but with they were built with an adopted single dome - instead of the multi-domed cubic plan of the Seljuks - and made the transition of adjoining rooms through domed quadrants, instead of walls dividing up the space. One thing that did not change however was the iconic minaret, a tower for the ritual call to prayer. In fact numerous minarets were added to the Hagia Sophia throughout the centuries, gradually altering its external form. Thus the adapted use of an existing space and symbolic form led to the synthesis of a new formal typology. Vogt-Goknil, *Living Architecture: Ottoman*.

48 King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture Urbanism Identity*, pp. 4.

49 King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture Urbanism Identity*, pp. 114.

50 Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, pp. 311.

51 King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture Urbanism Identity*, pp. 123.

52 Pearson and Richards, *Architecture and Order: Approaches to Social Space*, pp. 3.

53 *Bologna*. Produced and directed by Bernardo Bertolucci and Giuseppe Bertolucci, in *12 Registi per 12 Città*.

54 Leach, *Camouflage*, pp. 4-5.

55 This is the 'chicken and egg scenario' of architecture, since both form and function need one another to evolve and perpetuate the natural cycle of cultural synthesis. Pearson and Richards - in reference to Howard Harris and Alan Lipman's Social Symbolism and Space Usage in Daily Life" – say that "Architectural determinism proposes two casual relationships (Harris and Lipman 1980): that either behaviour determines the architectural form of an environment ('form follows function'); or that behaviour is the result of environment ('function follows form')."; Pearson and Richards, *Architecture and Order: Approaches to Social Space*, pp. 5.

56 Mathews, Gordon. *Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalization: Implications on Architecture*, in Lee and Baumeister, eds., *The Domestic and the Foreign in Architecture*, pp. 47.

57 King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture Urbanism Identity*, pp. 92.

58 King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture Urbanism Identity*, pp. 91-92.

59 Gumperz, *Language and Social Identity*, pp. 6.

60 Speech given by British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, on British National Identity on April 19th, 2001. As quoted in Mathews, Gordon. *Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalization: Implications on Architecture*, in Lee and Baumeister, eds., *The Domestic and the Foreign in Architecture*, pp. 49.

61 Crane, Diana. *Global Culture: Media, Arts, Policy, and Globalization*, 2002. As quoted in King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture Urbanism Identity*, pp. 31.

62 King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture Urbanism Identity*, pp. 137-138.

63 Sola-Morales, *Differences*, pp. 99

64 Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J. *Culture, Power and Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, 1997. As referred to in King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture Urbanism Identity*, pp. 128.

65 King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture Urbanism Identity*, pp. 92.

66 In reference to Cairns, Stephan. *Drifting: Architecture and Migrancy*; King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture Urbanism Identity*, pp. 92.

67 Mathews, Gordon. *Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalization: Implications on Architecture*, in Lee and Baumeister, eds., *The Domestic and the Foreign in Architecture*.

68 Mathews, Gordon. *Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalization: Implications on Architecture*, in Lee and Baumeister, eds., *The Domestic and the Foreign in Architecture*, pp. 51.

69 Lee and Baumeister, eds., *The Domestic and Foreign in Architecture*, pp. 13.

70 King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture Urbanism Identity*, pp. 89.

71 Lee and Baumeister, eds., *The Domestic and Foreign in Architecture*, pp. 15.

72 "...disparate set of personal identities, as evidenced by their ethnic affiliations, their religious allegiances, their views of personal morality, their ideas about what is valuable in life, their tastes in art, music and so forth. In all these areas there is less convergence or agreement than there once was. Yet at the same time the individuals and groups having these fragmented identities need to live together politically, and this means finding some common basis or reference point... Citizenship is supposed to provide this reference point. Our personal lives and commitments may be very different, but we are equally citizens... [We share] a common legal status, a formally-defined set of right and obligations..." Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity*, pp. 41.

73 Lee and Baumeister, eds., *The Domestic and Foreign in Architecture*, pp. 15.

74 King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture Urbanism Identity*, pp. 4-5.

75 Mathews, Gordon. *Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalization: Implications on Architecture*, in Lee and Baumeister, eds., *The Domestic and the Foreign in Architecture*, pp. 47.

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77 Mathews, Gordon. *Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalization: Implications on Architecture*, in Lee and Baumeister, eds., *The Domestic and the Foreign in Architecture*, pp. 53.

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83 Mathews, Gordon. *Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalization: Implications on Architecture*, in Lee and Baumeister, eds., *The Domestic and the Foreign in Architecture*, pp. 52.

84 Mathews, Gordon. *Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalization: Implications on Architecture*, in Lee and Baumeister, eds., *The Domestic and the Foreign in Architecture*, pp. 54.

85 In reference to Anthony Giddens Theory of Structuration, The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration (1984) and Derek Gregory and John Urry, Social Relations and Spatial Structures (1985) (p.3): "Giddens' theory of structuration has provided a useful conceptual approach: social structures (as embodied in traditions and social rules) have a dialectical relationship with human actions. Structures are both the medium and the outcome of social practices. They are modified continually as the actions that constitute them change. As Gregory and Urry have pointed out, as a result of structuration theory, 'spatial structural is now seen not merely as an arena in which social life unfolds, but rather as a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced.'"; Pearson and Richards, *Architecture and Order: Approaches to Social Space*, pp. 2-3.

86 King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture Urbanism Identity*, pp. 57.

87 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, pp. 47.

88 Hauptmann, Deborah. *A Cosmopolitan View on Thinking and Being-in-Common*, in Lee and Baumeister, eds., *The Domestic and the Foreign in Architecture*, pp. 90.

89 The concept of places of 'reality' and the 'unreal' is discussed in Chapter 3, section entitled Real and Imagined 'Localities'

90 Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, pp. 2.

91 Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, pp. 12.

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APPENDICES

The Acupuncture Points of Sofia by Yoshi Yamazaki
(http://abitare.bg/en/story/acupuncture-points-sofia)

A city just like the human body has its vital "acupuncture" points referred to in Feng shui as the "dragon points". When these points are treated with knowledge and care the organism is alive and active. The opposite often leads to complications and sometimes even to death. The history of cities is shaped by the care for and the good functioning of these points. An active and vibrant city is as charming as a person in a good shape. Sofia has a rich and long history. Many peoples have passed through here, different cultures and political systems have changed, but the city is alive to this day. There is a point in Sofia, which helped the city to survive through the times and proved to be vital for its organism. I first visited Sofia twenty years ago and being a foreigner I had difficulties finding that point. I strolled along the streets, looking for the church at the big square, so typical for the urban scheme of any European city. I felt overwhelmed by the incomprehensible urban structure of Sofia, which featured the elements of the European cities, yet lacked their integrity and clear logic. Back then I never came upon that point so important for the city. Later on, I realized that it was hidden under a mask I was not even aware of. Now, living in Sofia, I have found out that the main "acupuncture" point of the city is the building of the Central Baths and the area around it. The area has an unparalleled character. Here the temples of different religions – the Muslim, the Jewish, the Orthodox and the Catholic stand side by side and that's really impressive. I'd call it "the Jerusalem of the Balkans" if that'd be appropriate.

There is yet another significant element – the temples and the buildings in the area stand on the foundations of the Roman city of Serdica. This is not so by chance, because people have recognized the power of that place since ancient times. To me, it is in the thermal springs that attract diverse people, cleanse them and bring them above the religious and cultural differences. A dynamic dialogue between nature and the humanity takes place here.

The Central Mineral Baths, designed by Architect Petko Momchilov and constructed in the beginning of the 20th century, brought about an extremely successful inclusion of the power of that spot into the city texture. Here the inhabitants and the guests of Sofia stayed in touch with the mineral water and could communicate with each other. People would not only cleanse their bodies, but would also take a moment of relief from the material world, the vanity of secular life and the restrictions of their religious beliefs. Probably somewhere else the construction of baths in the centre of the town may seem eccentric, but in the case of Sofia that was logical. Ever since the times of Ottoman Turkey, this place featured a mosque and some small baths next to it. The construction of the Central Baths helped a lot for accelerating the modernization of the town, called back then "the little Vienna". The square in front of the Baths was used as a market place while the little side streets were full of inns, coffee houses and workshops. The street connecting the Baths square and the square in front of the King's Palace played an important role for the viability and the significance of this place for the city. That was the Trade Street and it was something of an artery for Sofia. It was often mentioned in the

local urban folklore – for example in the lyrics of the song "George the Cute Lad": Every night I take a walk on Trade Street, And frolic with the ones I meet.Listening to that song, my mind evokes the images of dressed-up ladies and dandies who'd exit the Baths and walk along Trade Street, looking at the windows of the numerous shops. This makes me smile and happy to be a part of the history of this city. After the Americans bombed Sofia, Trade Street was almost totally destroyed, and later on the socialist urban-planning completely wiped it out from the city's organism. Now the enormous department store TZUM, the Council of Ministers, the former Communist party headquarters and the Presidency stand at the same location. The result is "thrombosis" – the area around the Baths remains isolated, the atmosphere of the town is impaired and this makes the place totally devoid of its role. The new urban planning is the reason for the chaos and the problems of other key streets of Sofia, such as Pirotska Street and Maria Luisa Boulevard all the way to the Lions' Bridge.

The fate of the Central Baths also remains uncertain. The premises were functional until the end of the 1970's, some partial repairs followed, but as a whole the building is gradually falling apart. Obviously it was not on the priority list of the city authorities, but was only used until some water and sanitation problems were solved and the construction of the new residential complexes was completed. Probably going to the baths was also considered a decadent heritage from the Ottoman culture and I have noticed a strange intolerance to the monuments of the past here in Bulgaria. Many discussions of ideas and different architectural projects related to the future of the Baths have been going on for years now. However, that only turned it into a target for suspicious private interests. The latest project presents an option with quite a short-term perspective, opposite to the real need of the city for consistent and sustainable long-term solutions.

Thinking about the future of Sofia, I would like to see that special place regain the importance it enjoyed about a century ago and that "acupuncture" point of the city to be pressed again. The Baths should remain Baths and not be transformed into a quasi-museum or pseudo luxurious spa centre. The social function of the baths as a cultural institution dates back to the times of the Roman thermal baths. The baths in Budapest are a good example of that. I realize that this would not be easy as it would require funding, skilled masters and clever architects, but there is the possibility for leaving some important heritage for the future. The conservation and the reconstruction of such a site would be difficult, not only because construction technology has changed, but because people had a different way of life one hundred years ago. The Baths and the area around could become a tourist site of Sofia just like the St. Alexander Nevski Cathedral. Architects are the ones to provide a reasonable solution. I was shocked, upon visiting the Baths not long ago, when I compared its current status to what I saw five years ago. What is being performed at the moment are basic, amateur repair works, far from restoration, but rather an insensible and unprofessional "implanting" of new materials. I would not like to go into details about the results of the present project. I wish architects would learn from the good practices in this field, such as the reconstruction of the Prague castle, based on the project of the Slovenian architect Josip Plecnik, or the works of Carlo Scarpa in Italy. The citizens of Sofia should realize that they are at a crossroad, and it is up to them to preserve what is left from their urban heritage or otherwise lose it forever.

The Sofia Echo: Cloudy Bath Water by Magdalena Rahn | Mon, Feb 27 2006
(http://sofiaecho.com/2006/02/27/648888_cloudy-bath-water)

WITH the opening of Ivo Hadjimishev's photography exhibition, Bains de Sofia, Bains de Budapest, at Sofia's French Institute on February 15, there also came the reopening of a long-standing debate: the fate of Sofia's municipal baths. While guests and officials milled about, admiring the photographs depicting Hungary's historic spas and balneologic centres, sipping Bulgarian vintages and nibbling hors d'oeuvres, there was also talk of Sofia's own baths, and what will become of them, be they a city spa centre, or a city museum.

French ambassador Yves Saint-Georges introduced the Bulgarian-French-Hungarian exhibition, accompanied by Katherine Suard, cultural counsel and director of the French Institute, Ivo Hadjimishev and Hungarian ambassador Jeno Faller. The baths in Budapest and Sofia and the rest of Europe are a connection between the East and the West, he said. "They're not only baths, however. They're a place for all of society. They're a place for socialising, of expression, of movement, of art. The Europe that is enlarging must absolutely preserve these parts of its cultural heritage," said Saint-Georges.

Over a two-year period, Hadjimichev photographed baths in Hungary. He noted that they are a good means of attraction for tourism and income for a country. As to Bulgaria, "Why should the baths be a museum?" he said. Maria Konaktchieva, head of public relations at the French Institute, echoed his thoughts. "We must alert the Bulgarian public that there they have a cultural heritage to preserve," she said.

The following evening, February 16, the institute held a round-table discussion on this topic. Ambassador Faller opened the talks by saying that in this area of Europe, there are baths worthy of preservation. He recalled how the photographs recall the richness of Sofia's baths. "Not only tomorrow might we restore the baths," he said, "but also put them to the benefit of Sofia's citizens. This is a citizen debate." Todor Boulev, deputy chairman of the Union of Bulgarian Architects Creative Board, guided the evening. Two important issues surround the baths, he said. One is that they are an historic part of Sofia's identity, and the other, that whatever the outcome, it must be beneficial, profitable for the city.

One of the architects for the planned museum, Stanislav Konstantinov from the firm Kali-99, affirmed that the Sofia city museum would be a place uniquely for culture. "Sofia has a very high (historical) cultural level," he said. "Sofians have been deprived of seeing their culture. Why? It's a culture that dates centuries; there's an incredibly large selection of objects of huge value that no one among us could see." The building itself is of parallel significance, he noted. Konstantinov described how the museum would be alive and interactive and include the history of the baths in a special area. "What is there in Sofia in way of museums?" he asked. "Almost nothing!" For these reasons, he said, "the museum will be very valuable for us".

Todor Krustev, professor at the University of Architecture and president of the Association of Cultural Tourism, countered this pro-museum optimism. He told how the history of water - public spas, baths - in Sofia goes back to its origins as a Roman city. After that, there were medieval baths.

Then, after Bulgaria's liberation from the Ottomans, talk arose of building another bath, this in the centre of the city. Construction occurred from 1912-14, with the still-giving thermal spring as the heart of the building.

Krustev pointed out that Sofia's municipal baths are in an ideal location, with Central Hali, the mosque and the synagogue all in the vicinity. "We musts preserve the baths, because it makes our lives much more interesting," he said. "The baths should remain baths, and all other ideas are ridiculous." He recalled how, in 1997, former mayor Stefan Sofianski proposed turning the building into the location of government offices, contesting that since the baths belonged to the city, the city had the holding decision power. "What is the alternative?" he continued. "Will the pool be called back into existence? What will be the fate of the flowing waters?"

To Krustev, the subject dealt with three main points: the baths as the symbol of Sofia, as a "sacred connection to the supreme waters", and as a marketable value. For the last case, he said, all that is needed is the will and the right, a balance between public and municipal interests. "Someone needs to take control of the difficult restoration and construct a bath that will benefit 10, 15 years later," Krustev said. The most important factor is good investment, organisational and management strategies, he said. "We should follow European tenancies and build a bath, not a museum or a building for the mayor," he concluded.

Others at the discussion agreed with the political bent of the baths' fate. Anne Bergramian, cultural attache at the French Institute, noted that the entire municipal counsel, including the mayor, had been invited to attend the roundtable. Of these, only Deputy Mayor Irina Savina deigned to come. "This theme is absent from the public sphere, despite its importance," said Antony Galabov, a sociologist at the Bulgarian Academy of Science's Institute of Sociology, noting how, in the past three years, there have only been four publications on the issue. "The public isn't informed about the battles. A large part of (Sofia's) history is related to water." "Maybe in 15 years it'll be a casino," said Svetla Gruncharova, director of architectural science at New Bulgarian University. "There are a lot of ideas in tourism. We're fighting, ignoring our history." Or, whether one prefers a museum or prefers a city spa, as Todor Boulev said: "We can't leave the fate of the baths in the hands of politicians."

The Fate of the Building by Stanislav Konstantinov

(Article by architect Stanislav Konstantinov, of firm Kali-99, for the "Stay, Stay, Stay" exhibition held at the under construction 'Central Mineral Baths' in Sofia. Oct 11-25th 2008)

The building of the Central Baths holds huge significance for Sofia – both from the perspective of the city's memories and as an architectural complex. In 1998, the Sofia Council decided for the building of the Central Mineral Baths to be adapted and turned into Sofia Museum. Special section of the building would be left for the mineral water. A national competition was opened and 15 projects participated in it. The first prize was awarded to our team – lead by Arch. Stanislav Konstantinov and staffed by Arch. Iglika Lyutskanova and Arch. Alexander Genchev.

What made our project so competitive to win the competition was that our proposed solution met the requirement not to interfere with the main interior spaces of the building. Our proposal further developed the major axis by adding a newly formed space at the spot of the demolished middle section. The area of the two swimming pools will be used as a venue for social contacts, exhibitions, discussions, and concerts. In the attic space, we have provided for a library for 2,500 titles and a reading hall. The competition proved, in an irrevocable way, that the building could be adapted to the new functions while emphasizing all its spatial and functional possibilities.

We, as authors of that project, have no doubts that the building can change its functions. This is a common practice in European capital cities and some of the most interesting venues for new social contacts have been created in a similar fashion. Here are some of the main arguments, supporting that thesis. The warm mineral water and gases constantly demolish the texture of the building, which at present is in a bad condition as a construction. The further saturation of the site with moisture would contribute to its total dilapidation. The spring's water flow capacity of 17 l/sec is not sufficient for supplying the swimming pools and simultaneously providing for the water-filling facilities near the baths. Such buildings (public baths) have long lost their traditional hygiene functions. The surrounding space provides no possibilities for designating parking spaces. There are no hotels nearby and the building is not located in a rich park environment.

The possibilities, provided by other mineral springs of Sofia, can be used in proper hydropathical centres in the suburbs of Ovcha Kupel, Gorna Banya and Bankya. The comparison between the Central Mineral Baths of Sofia and the Baths in Budapest is improper and unnecessary. The biggest ones among them are "Szechenyi" (opened in 1913 and having 11 indoor and outdoor swimming pools) and "Gelert" (opened in 1918, with 7 indoor swimming pools, outdoor swimming pools) part of the building was concessioned to be turned into a spa center for a period of 25 years. The concessionaire will have to act in accordance with the pre-investment research of 2006. The spatial solutions of the latter do not differ from the project approved at the competition.

Sofia Museum and the spa centre will have complete structural independence. This will facilitate the effective management of a building split in two venues with different functions and run by separate legal entities. The reconstruction of the museum section is at an advanced stage and I hope that at the end of this year the building will start welcoming the citizens and the guests of the capital city.

SECONDARY SITE PROPOSAL

|SITE ON VITOSHA MOUNTAIN

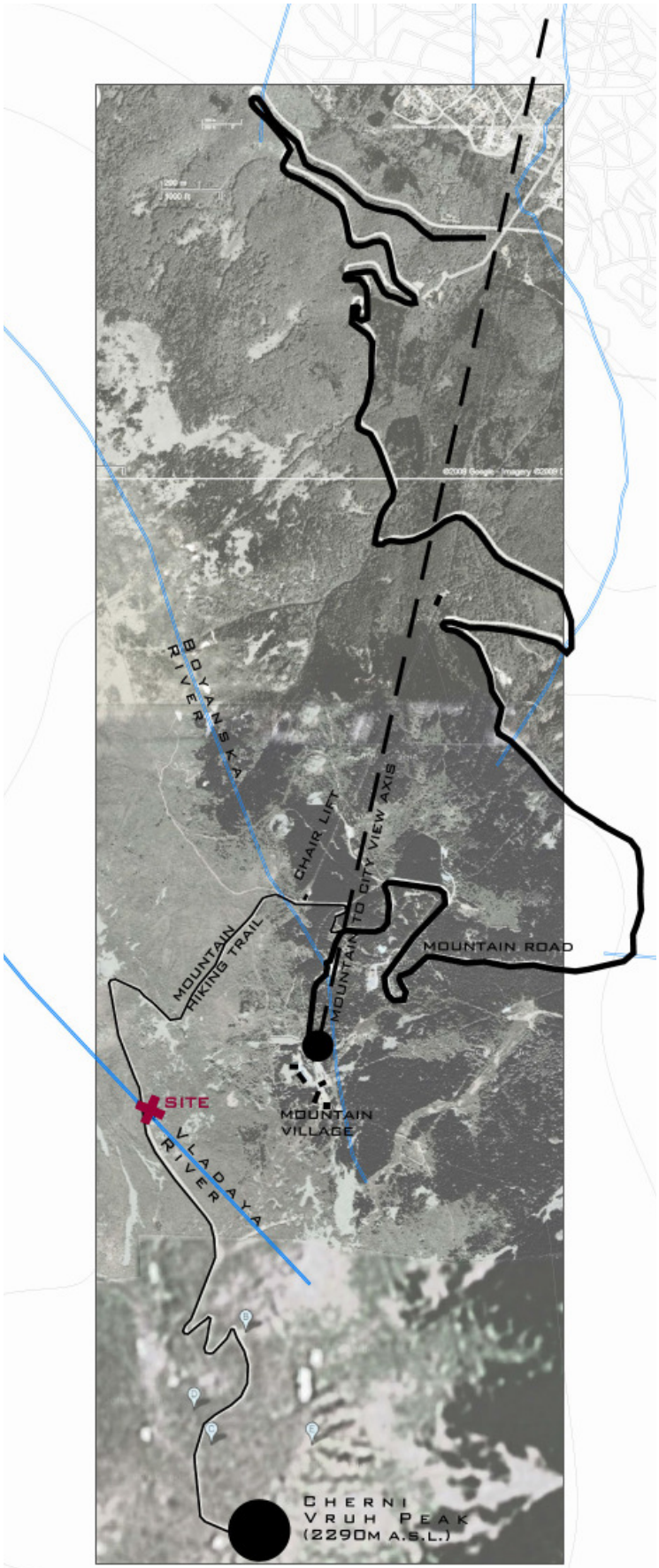
The main axis of the city has always been - except during the time of Ottoman occupation – an alignment between the central mineral spring and the peak of Vitosha Mountain, Cherni Vruh (Black Peak). Even today the axis is in existence in the historic city center framed by the prominent commercial promenade Vitosha Street. This axis is primarily a visual connection between the city and the mountain; however the path to the mountain is easily accessible and travelled by many Sofians who journey to the national park located at the top of the mountain.

Both of the anchor points on the axis - the central mineral spring and Cherni Vruh peak - evoke a sense of origin, source, and primacy. The two sites I have chosen for a design intervention in Sofia include the square at the mineral water source and a hiking rest station, or traditional mountain 'hija', on the mountain where the hiking path crosses the source of the main river that runs into the city.

One enters the building through two walls - two slices in the mountain - along which water from a pool above pours down. The visitor is engulfed all at once by the overwhelming sound of the water and the coldness of the stone walls. There is a ramp that rises alongside the walls. At the end of the ramp, Cherni Vruh Peak is framed; however, visible and immense, it is still out of reach. This axis of the ramp framing the peak is also the axis by which the sun rises on the morning of the winter solstice - a day of origin.

The second axis one experiences once inside the building is the framed view of the city. As the building is surrounded by water however, the city in the frame is actually obstructed. The Sofia Valley, with the Balkan Mountains in the background thus appears to be filled in with water. This moment is meant to be one of poetic recollection, drawing on the origins of the valley as a prehistoric lake. Once the visitor exits the building the city of Sofia below is once again revealed.

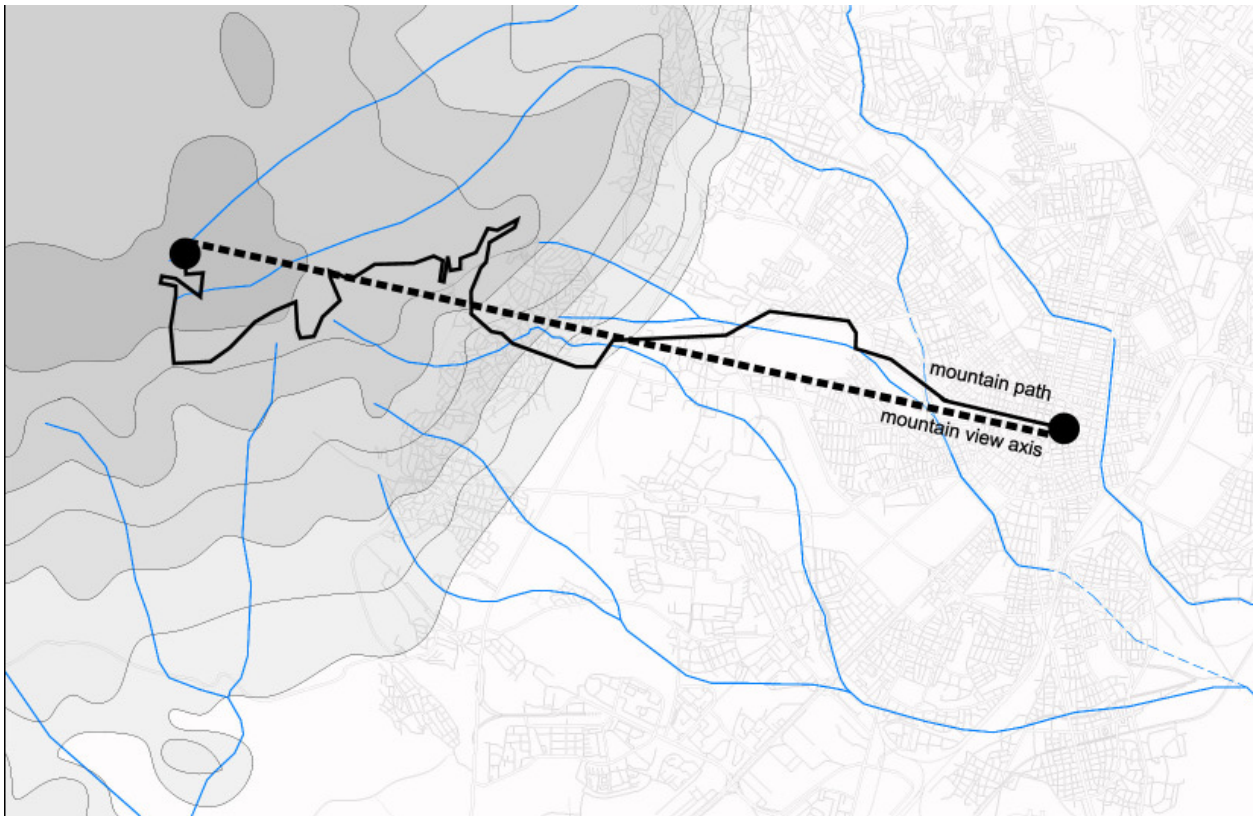
In addition the building contains one final concealed moment. As the walls of the two axes are skewed from one another, the light entering from the south wall into the main space is obstructed. The linear beam of light that enters the space, is only revealed on one day of the year - at noon of the winter solstice. This phenomenon is based on the idea of the sacredness of cyclical time: a time that does not have a history, beginning or end. This is to be a building that can be experienced outside of historical time, based only in subjective ritual experience.



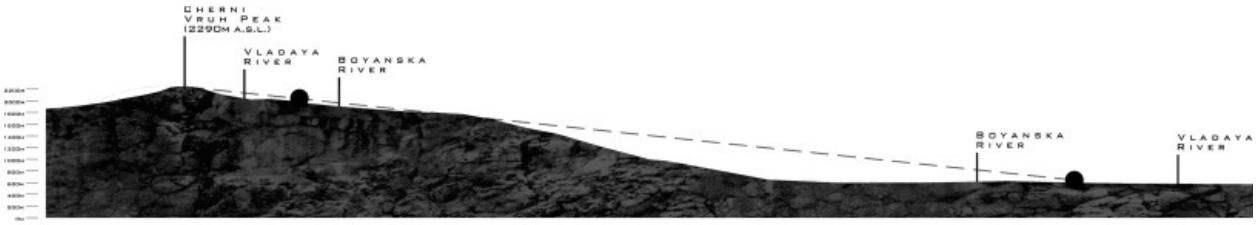
Site Plan *Fig. A.0*

City to Vitosha Mouantin Axis *Fig. A.1*

Section of Vitosha Mouantin and Sofia Valley *Fig. A.2*



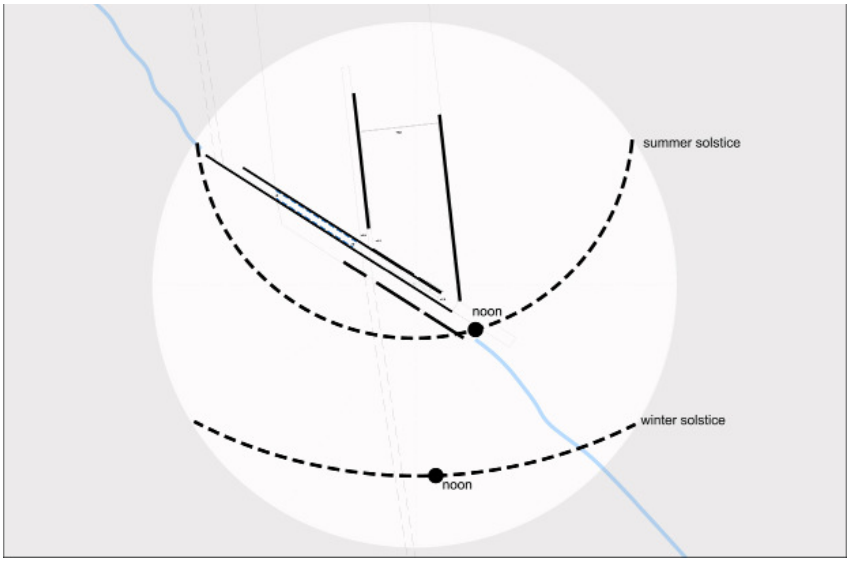
City to Vitosha Mouantin Axis *Fig. A.3*



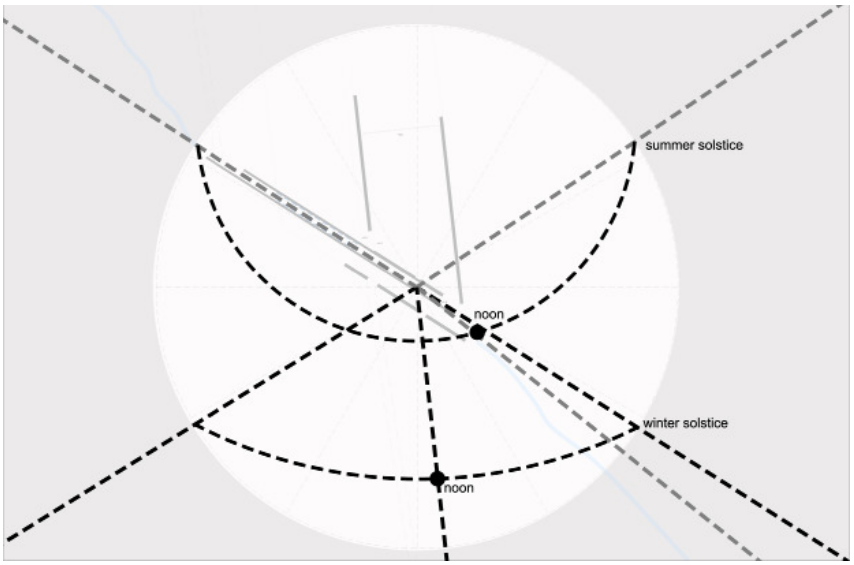
Section of Vitosha Mouantin and Sofia Valley *Fig. A.4*

Path on Vitosha Mountain - along the yellow markers *Fig. A.5*

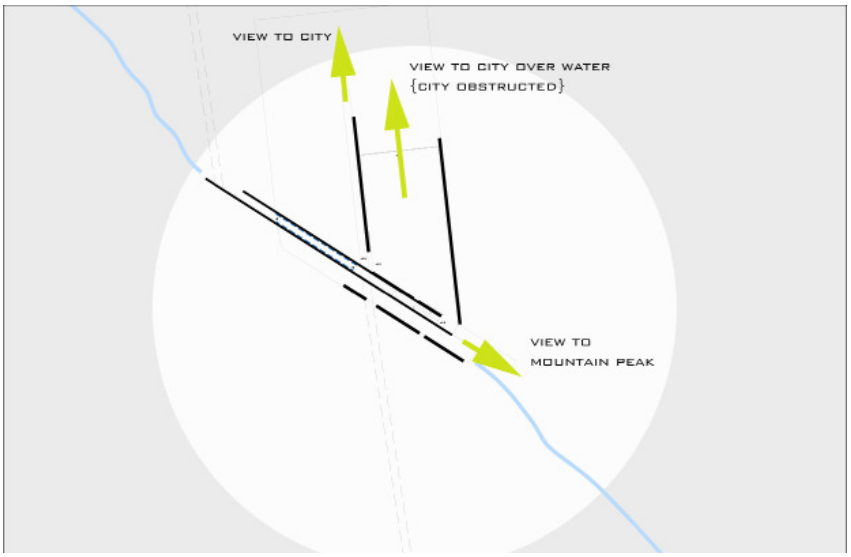
View of Cherni Vruh Peak *Fig. A.6*



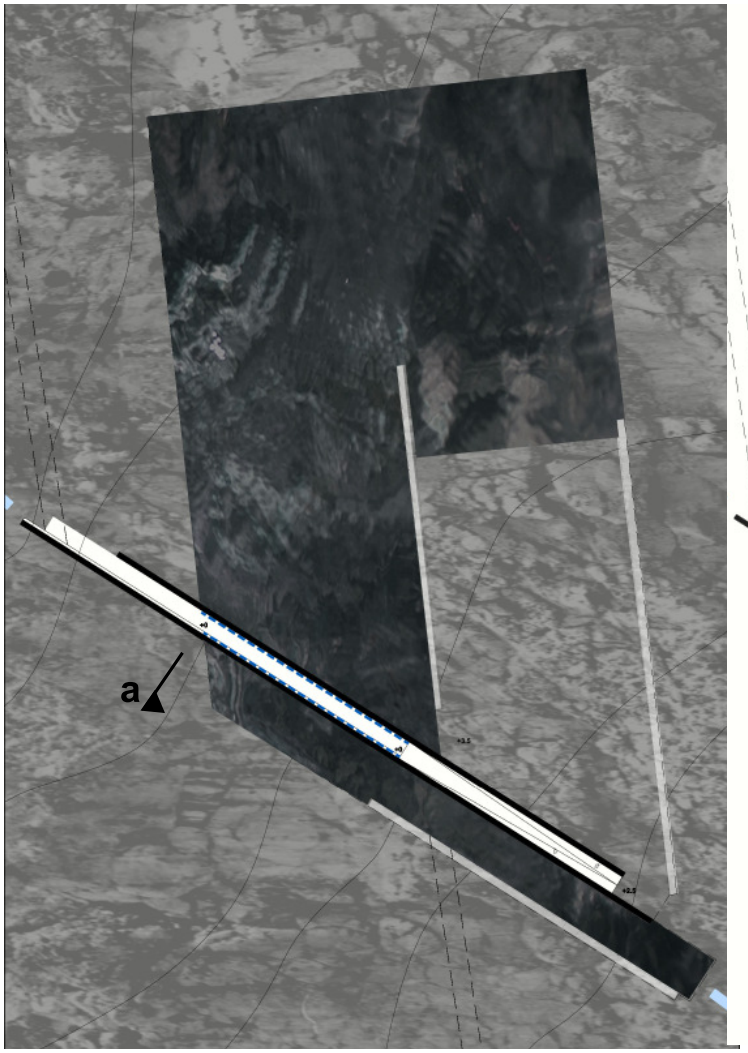
Solstice Diagram *Fig. A.7*



Solstice Axis Diagram *Fig. A.8*

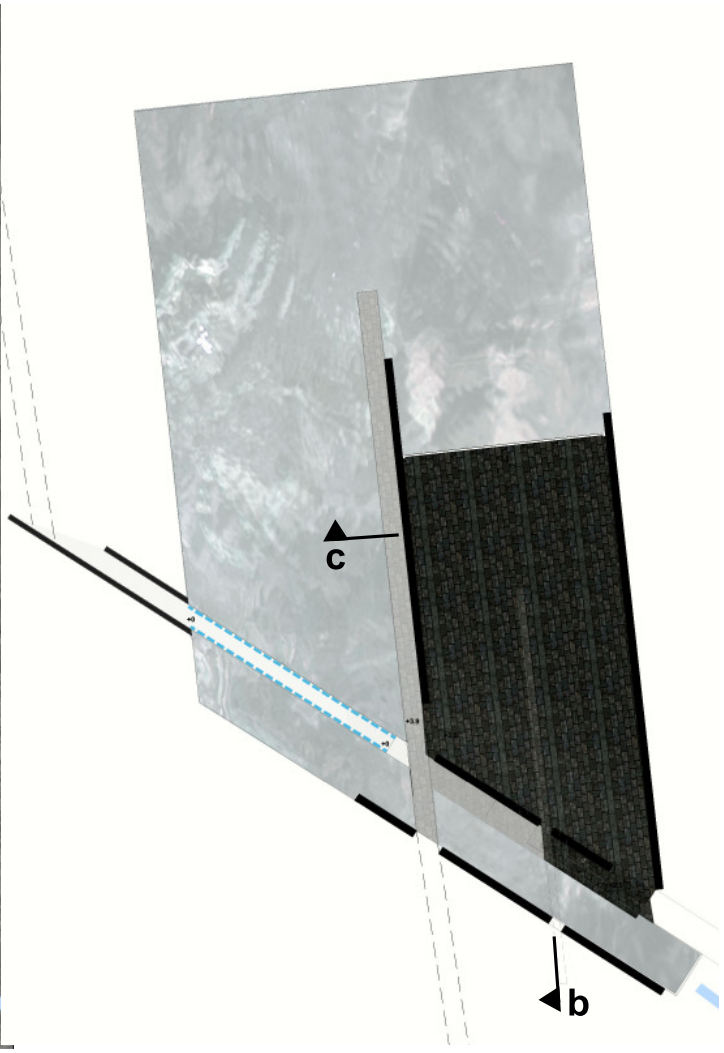


View Axis Diagram *Fig. A.9*



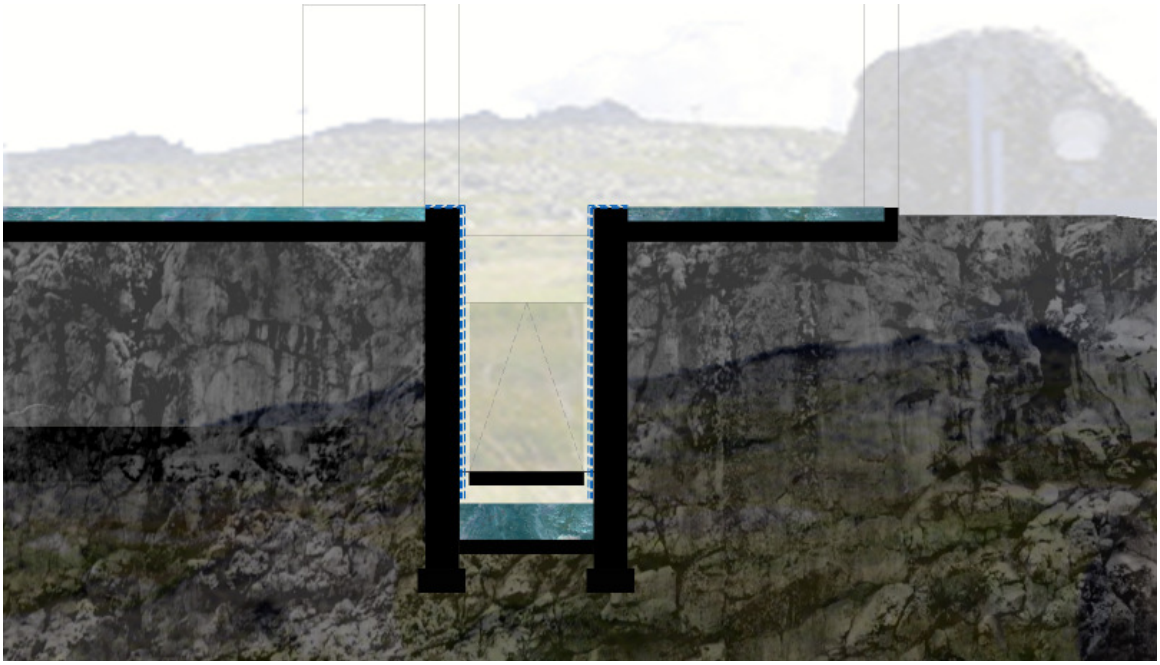
Lower Floor Plan

Fig. A.10

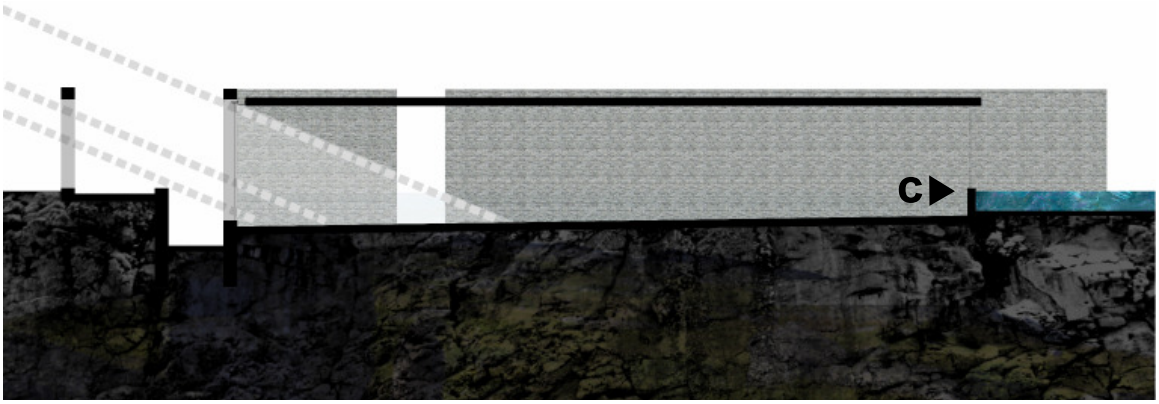


Upper Floor Plan

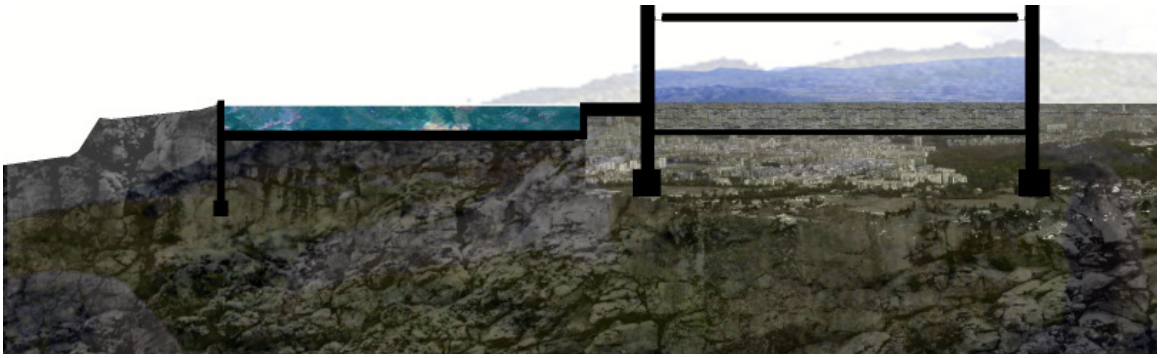
Fig. A.11



a *Entrance* | *ascending between the waterfall wall* *Fig. A.12*



b *Longitudinal Section* | *sun entering space noon of winter solstice* *Fig. A.13*



c *Cross Section* | *view of city obstructed by water infront of submerged floor space; recalls origin of Sofia Valley as a primordial lake* *Fig. A.14*

View of City from Vitosha Mountain chairlift *Fig. A.15*