

Once upon a time in Pergamon: Reality and Representation in the Hellenistic City

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A current trend in archaeological scholarship is to produce hyper-real reconstructions of ancient ruins with three dimensional modeling programs such as 3-d Studio, sketch-up and/or photoshop. Visually impressive, these images produce a false sense of completeness. While such architectural fantasies seems harmless, on certain occasions they may reflect and reproduce repressive political ideologies. An example to such a powerful imagery was 3d reconstructions of Taksim Artillery Barracks, which were produced in a book called Ghost Buildings in 2010 (Figure 1). This book included 3d renderings of ten non-existent monumental buildings from Byzantium until 1950's in Istanbul with the premise of what if they still existed. Inspired by these imagery, Turkish Government attempted to rebuild Artillery Barracks as a shopping mall in place of Gezi Park as a part of pedestrianization of Taksim project even though Gezi Park was under protection as a public green area by The Cultural and Natural Resources Protection Committee. Gezi uprising started as a public outrage at the decision in 27 May 2013 to prevent demolition of the park and reconstruction of Taksim Artillery Barracks.



Figure 1. Taxim Artillery Barracks as Reconstructed by PATTU

In order to prevent such deception and prevention of the use of reconstructed images as a template for reality, I develop a methodology in reproducing the 3-d images of the Hellenistic city of Pergamon in Turkey. In these imagery, I combine the multiple levels of “reality” into a collage. In order not to lose touch with the present, I present 3-d architectural renderings within the current setting. In other words I collage 3-d reconstructions with the photos of ruins. As you see in figure 2, in the reconstructed image of the Sanctuary of Dionysos, the present state of ruins are given as much presence as the 3-d architectural renderings. In my reconstructions, the idea is not to construct a representation of a past reality, but to preserve an effect of reconstruction.



Figure 2. The Sanctuary of Dionysos Reconstructed by architect Erdal Kondakci

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On some occasions ancient imagery such as a wall paintings are added to my collages so that the reconstructed image shall also give information about the past functions of monuments. For instance, in Figure 4, a wall painting from Pompeii (figure 3), which represented a sacrificial ceremony performed in front of a temple, is added to the stairs of the Temple of Dionysus so that the viewers could get an idea about the ceremonial use of the staircase.

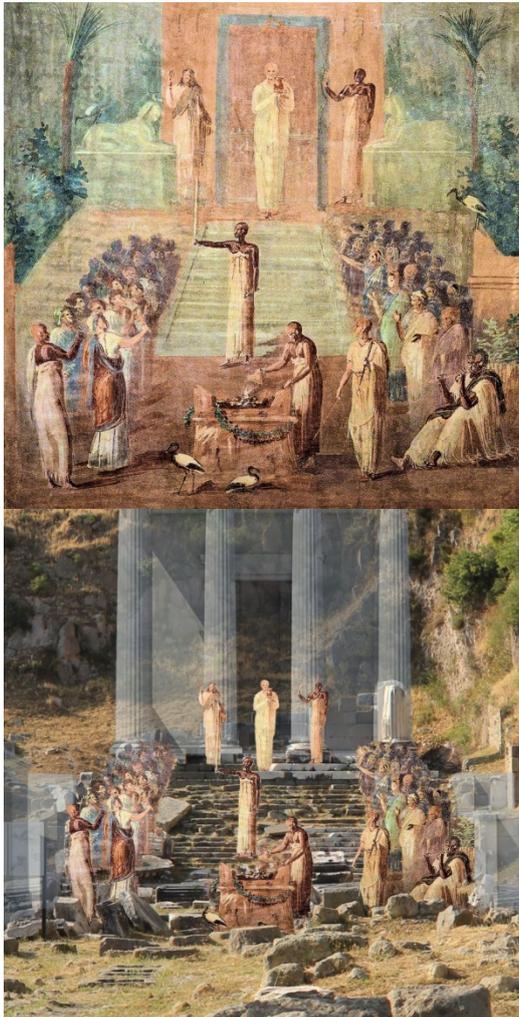


Figure 3 (left). A wall painting from Pompeii representing a sacrificial ceremony
Figure 4 (right). The stairs of the Sanctuary of Dionysos with the superimposed sacrificial scene ©Ufuk Soyoz

Further, the inclusion of the wall painting into the reconstruction of the Hellenistic imagery was not solely made on the basis of a superficial similarity. Rather as will be shown below the superimposition of architectural and painterly imagery was based on ancient perspectival system, *skenographia*. *Skenographia* was a painterly and architectural design method that applied Euclid's geometric definition of vision to art and architecture. *Skenographia* codified a common language among Hellenistic painters and architects and a common viewing experience of both painting and architecture along a visual or geometric movement axis. In other words *skenographia* connected a series of images alongside an axis into a coreography that would correspond to the movement of users within architectural space.

In order to better explain what I just said, let's look at a wall painting from Pompeii and a perspectival image of an Hellenistic sanctuary of Artemis together. The perspectival similarity of the Pompeian painting and the Hellenistic sanctuary are that, both are designed on a space-positive mentality. As the picture frame, the temple, the icon of the sanctuary is framed with a spatial frame constituted by the stoas. The second principle is that both the Pompeian painting and the Hellenistic sanctuary tends to take shape around an axis. Just as the axis of the sanctuary conditioned the relationship between the temple and the spectator on a three-dimensional and temporal continuum, the axis of the Pompeian painting was a spatial axis, that is the painter not only ordered the surface of the wall with the axis but also he determined the ideal viewpoint of the observer coordinating the eye of the spectator with the picture plane. This is an important premise, for it would mean that *skenographia*, the design method that applied Euclid's geometrical definition of vision to art and architecture not only codified a common language, a spatial code among the Hellenistic painters and architects, but also a common viewing experience of both painting and architecture.

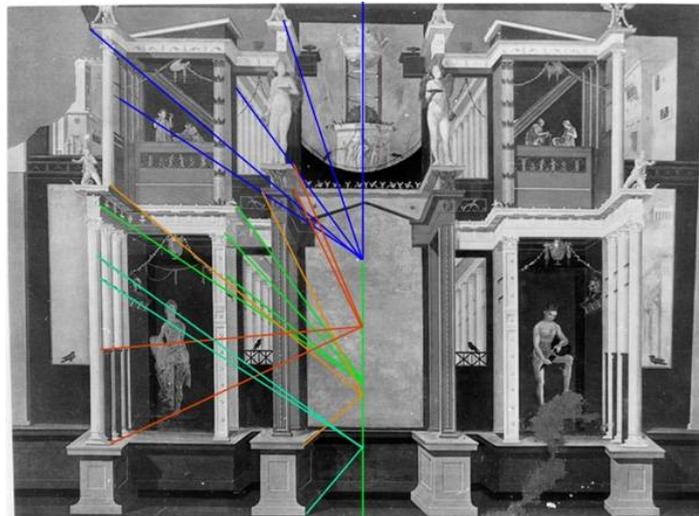


Figure 5. "Theatrical Room," House of Cryptoporticus

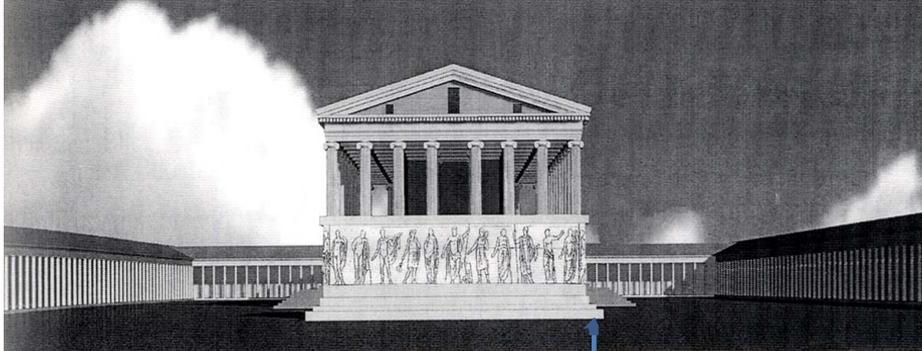


Figure 6. Temple of Artemis at Magnesia

To demonstrate what I just said, we must turn to Pompeian paintings in their original context. In Pompeian houses the pictorial space was deliberately made continuous with the space outside it. The (cubiculum II) paintings in the House of the Griffins on the Palatine constitute the earliest example in Rome (Figures 7-8). Here, the shading system of the column bases emphasizes their projection and their perspectival decrease in size coincides with the direction of the actual movement and light source (Figure 8). The painted column bases of Cubiculum II in the House of the Griffins position the viewer on an axis, defined by the entrance door and the visual axis at the back wall from the room's entryway. A person entering the room is expected to progress along this long axis, prompted by the centralized composition on the back wall and the placement of an *emblema* with a design in cut marble (*opus sectile*) marking that axis. The paintings belonging to the mature phase of the Second Style (60-40 BC) more directly address the spectator's movement. In the Boscoreale cubiculum for instance (Figure 9), each view opening up behind the fictive colonnade has its own visual axis. While moving along the axis, he or she is expected to assume positions defined by the visual axes of each scene. If the viewer does not position him or herself along the axis, he or she will experience perspective deformation.



Figure 7. Cubiculum II from the house of Griffins

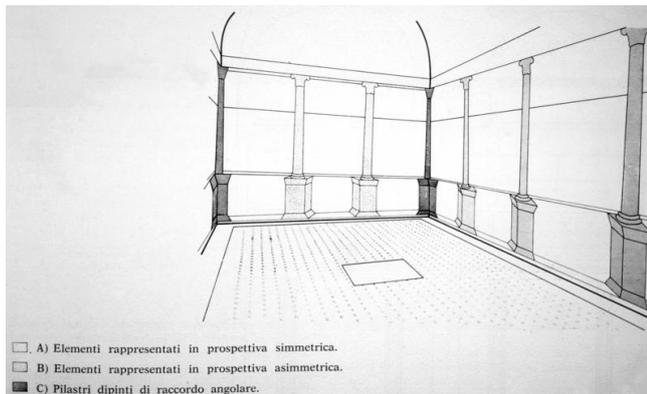


Figure 8. House of the Griffins- perspective schema



Figure 9. Boscoreale Cubiculum

As the Romano-Campanian painters, the Hellenistic urban planners were intensely engaged with the observer as they controlled the location and angle of vision, coordinating what is seen and ideally, from where it is seen by an visual axis that sometimes turned into a geometrical axis ordering the sanctuary into a symmetrical layout. Appropriate to the template provided by *skenographia*, reconstruction of a series of images along these axes also corresponded to the coreography of the event that is meant to take place within architectural space. Hence my 3d renderings not only give information about the past architecture but also produce a framework for the performance of events such as theatrical performances, processions and sacrifice.

For instance, the Sanctuary of Dionysus is meant to be seen and hence reconstructed as a series of snapshots along the two hundred meter long terrace (figure 10-12). This is because the sanctuary precinct had likely been used as a processional ground for a confrontation of the Hellenistic kings with their subjects. The perspectival mechanism inherent to the theater precinct created almost a cinematographic setting in which the Pergamene citizens came face to face with their king for a duration. The spatio-visual setting allowed a visual and hence power exchange between the king and his subjects. This exchange started from the entrance of the precinct (figure 10) and became more intense as the Hellenistic citizens of Pergamon walk closer to the temple front where they would see the Hellenistic king on stage (Figure 11). This visual exchange culminated in front of the altar where the citizens would perform a sacrifice in kings' honor as likely presented on the Pompeian wall painting (figure 12).

In conclusion, my reconstructions differ from the general trend in 3d architectural renderings in two basic way. First is their fictionality; their re-constructed realitys is

made obvious with the juxtapositions of 3d rendering with the current photos of the ancient ruins. Second, my images are informed by ancient spatio-visual code *skenographia*, and hence they do not form individual images but they constitute ensembles produced from the human viewpoint. These ensembles create a scenography for the unfolding of an ancient event hence they are like a storyboard for a movie.



Figure 10. The view of the Temple of Dionysus from the entrance precinct ©U. Soyoz



Figure 11.The temple of Dionysus from the middle of the precinct ©U. Soyoz



Figure 12. Temple of Dionysus, close-up ©U. Soyoz