

## Chapter 6.

# BASE BUILDING

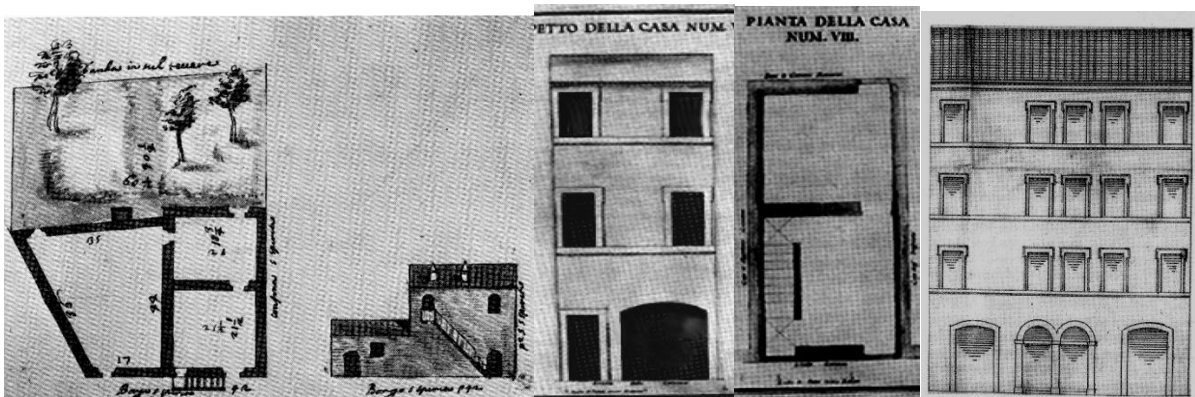
G.Strappa

The most successful examples of a congruent and proportionate overlap of the modern city with the ancient one is in large part due to the “recasting process” of the existing urban fabric.

The act of recasting is not the simple union of elements, it is a plastic modification, a collaboration that implies a structural mutation: the merging and gathering of the individual units into a single whole, into a new unity of a higher degree.

The Renaissance palace is, when it derives directly from the fabric, a critical recasting, made with the decisive contribution of the architect who operates the aesthetic synthesis at the end of a "necessary" process. To fully understand its meaning it is essential to mention, at least, the matter of this recast, which, in many areas and especially in Italy, consists of single-family houses.

A particularly significant example, from this point of view, is the form of the dwelling house in the Roman area, whose roots date back to the types used from the XI century, in an environment that, due to the low population density, could be considered in large part semi-rural (26).



*The basic "matter" of the organic plastic melting process in the Roman area.*

*Profferlo house*

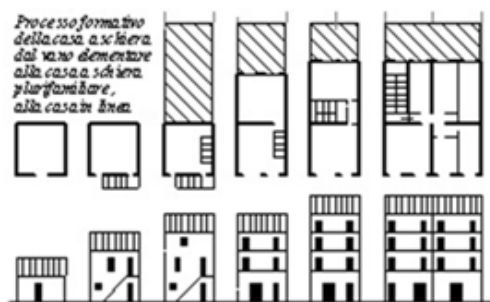
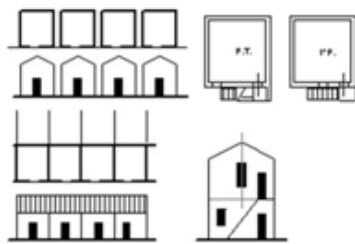
*Row-house*

*Unification of the facade in two row-houses recast.*



Roman row-houses in the Ghetto quarter, in piazza Trilussa and in Campo de' Fiori.

The buildings are mostly one-storey (*domus terrinea*), often scattered among the ruins became a “second nature”, isolated in the center of the land on which they stand or grouped in some settlements that had formed, as in Campo Marzio area, near the river. Only later, with the spread of the multi-storey house (*domus solarata*), the parts of the house clearly specialize, with the placement on the ground floor of the shop or the atrium and, on the upper floor, of the living spaces properly said, whose formation is evidenced by the appearance, at the end of the 12th century, of the term "camera" to indicate the specialized space for rest.



Housing forming process in roman area

From the end of the XIII century, under the pressure of urban growth and the increase in population density, the type of aggregate house was consolidated, with two walls shared with the neighbouring units. The notarial deeds (27) begin to indicate rights and duties on the common walls, *parietes communes*, and the conscience of a building aggregate as a body shared by different units, whose architectural

correspondent is the arising of the urban fifth, representation of the solidarity of building units associated along a common route. It is now considered normal that a house has a wall in common with the adjacent one and that this is built with the contribution of the two owners that use it, reimbursing the builder who may have already built the wall on which the new building has the right to lean against. As evidence of the new building solidarity, only in the event of a dispute an *ambitus* divides the units (as in the ancient *domus*), a narrow space of about one palm and a half (about 35 cm), used only for the flow of water (28). Similar processes are developed in many other areas, particularly in central-southern Italy, where the most basic forms of row-house consist of the repetition of single-cell houses adjacent to each other by means of a common wall orthogonal to the facing route.

Exemplary are the Matera's "lamioni", constituted by single-celled spaces, not always regular, with a barrel vault roof orthogonal to the route, which form the aggregate by simple repetition, beginning to constitute an embryo of an urban organism; the definable "next phase" by logic (even though it could be a synchronic variant of adaptation to the topography) is the two-storey type on sloping soil, which in section has independent rooms distributed on both routes at the upper and inferior level.

Similar results, but of progressive complexity, are constituted by the houses with overlapping dwellings, served by independent staircases that connect the external space to the domestic one without any mediation (which allows us to still speak of single-family dwellings), as can be seen in different European areas, from the embryonic examples of residential aggregates directly linked to the route in the Neapolitan area, to the traditional Dutch types that survived even in modern and contemporary buildings. In a particularly densified urban environment the increase (originally the doubling) of the elementary cell within the same building unit, takes place in depth, occupying the part of the pertinent area immediately adjacent to the cell facing the route, and vertically, always maintaining, however, the monocellular dimension on the road. It will remain the basic dimension in the formation of the urban fabric even in phases of recasting and multi-family transformation.

As mentioned, with the formation of a second floor, the cells specialize in forming the space for the shop on the ground floor and using the upper one for the dwelling itself. This, initially served by a *profferlo* (outside stair), is reached in the following types by an inner staircase to which corresponds, on the road, a specialized opening distinct from that of the shop, making internal specialization comprehensible externally.

The development of the row-house takes place, therefore, above all for doubling of cells, with progressive specialization of the rooms: on the ground floor, beyond the

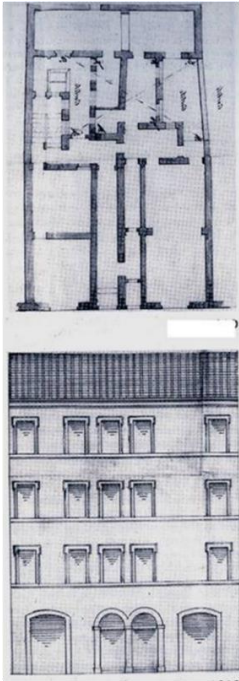
shop (or beyond the atrium), the stairwell, the passage to the pertinent area, the warehouse, and on the upper floor the dwelling proper, which increases the degree of specialization with the progressive vertical multiplication of the cells and the distinction of the living from the sleeping area. In the Roman area the position of the staircase varies according to the different uses of the ground floor.

In the shop house, the staircase is generally arranged orthogonally to the external route, in direct correspondence with the entrance, so as to clearly separate the specialized rooms from the living quarters through a wall also needed to support the floor beams oriented parallel to the street. In the atrium house, a full residential building type, the staircase is preferably arranged parallel to the route, in the bottom of the first room, with the first steps on the side opposite to the entrance, so as to obtain a sufficient height to allow direct passage from access to the rear room and to the pertinent area.

In addition to these typical and generalized solutions, there are obviously many other possible dislocations of the stairs due to local influences or to the presence of substratum types, as in the case of the external staircase that occupies the pertinent area of in the Florentine "court-row-house" originated from the consumption of the pre-existing *domus*.

The character of the facade on the road, in the spontaneous row units formation phases, is directly indicated by the size and position of the openings, with the specialization often showed by the door with shop bench for displaying on the ground floor, and smaller opening for access to the stairs and the pertinent area. It is also indicated by the tectonic nodes, as the windowsill line (*marcadavanzale*) in plastic areas, expressing the different character (plastic-masonry or elastic-wooden) of the types pertinent to different cultural areas.

It is from this urban matter that it originates, by aggregation of individual units into new multi-family organisms (the "in linea" house), the modern city. It is a process originated by the life that flows in the city in formation and by the work of the masons who follow the instances for renewal and transmit the results. A process in which, initially, the architect does not intervene.



Roman multifamily house derived from row-houses recasting

Only from the middle of the XIX century, on the other hand, does he become aware of the buildings character intended as the result of an ongoing process: as an increase, not a substitution, of a patrimony of technical knowledge still active. But he hesitates before the new task of designing building fabrics. The construction of the new Roman fabric is exemplary of this phase of fertile uncertainty, when designers such as Giuseppe Carnevali, Giulio De Angelis, Augusto Innocenti, Gaetano Morichini, Giulio Podesti, Virginio Vespignani, deal with the theme of housing with the spirit of those who still design the great monuments, according to the traditional role of the architect who draws unrepeatable urban episodes.

The late XIX century designer, in fact, still has a strict custom with the design of “emergencies”. When this role is transformed he "appropriates the problem of the fabric, of the building connective, of the houses - writes Gianfranco Caniggia - it seems that he does not change at all the image he has of himself. It can be affirmed that, paradoxically, when he designs houses he tends to produce "something else": another and more sublimated product, analogous to what his predecessors had conceived for centuries "(29). In the new quarters, the rigidly serial structure of multi-family dwellings is thus associated, favoured by the massive nature of the Roman house, the image of the palace, despite the difficulty of governing the vertical repetition of the floors and the size of the mezzanine, according to rules borrowed from the courtly language. Forced to deal with concrete and urgent problems, for which he has only antiquated tools, the architect begins to take refuge (starting a tradition that will last over the next century) in the privileged space of the upper middle class building, where he experiments with the renewal of the language

through syncretisms with ongoing experiences in other European areas, such as in the works of Raffaele Canevari, Andrea Busiri Vici, Giulio Magni.

Exemplary is the fortunate story of the latter, favoured by direct contact with different national versions of European modernism. If during his stay abroad his research (30) oscillates between the historicism of the major public works and the modernism of private professional occasions, from the early XX century, back in Rome, he relates the memory of foreign experiences with the local architectural climate. Villa Marignoli, one of his most mature works, is the exemplary text of a changing language, where not only the echoes of the Middle European historicist constructivism are evident, but also of the forgotten legacy of the Roman syncretisms of Edmund Street (31).

The sequence of architectural stratification (base, elevation, unification, conclusion) remains, both in the production of the high-middle class demand and in the large multifamily housing. It has now become a code, disconnected as it is from the constructive reasons that had originated it.

The external composition, organized by stratification layers, will remain for a long time, in Rome as in Palermo, in Florence as in Bari, at least for all the 40s of the XXI century, even in the most updated works. See the modern use of the base, originally derived from the solution of stability problems and then simplified and codified, which allows not to contradict the masonry-plastic logic of the external fronts, unlike the solutions used (typical that in *pilotis*) in the connection to soil of modern international works.

In modern elevation solutions, the link between constructive and expressive data of the building often remains solid and legible even through the extensive use of the cladding. As well, it shows some forms of permanence the unification band (often absorbed in elementary volumes, as used in modern Central European production). Finally, great attention is paid to the conclusion, to the roof or to the attic, the negation of which constituted one of the luckiest theoretical simplifications of the Modern Movement.