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Nile as Laboratory. Exploring River Dynamics through Eighteen Projects.

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Abstract

Inspired by Brandi's (1963) assertion that "Egypt is not a country; it is a river," the Nile becomes the central character, driving both imagination and collaboration in architectural solutions. The NiLab research and design laboratory has been developed for the Egypt Pavilion at the 18th International Architecture Exhibition, the Venice Biennale. As the primary driver of imagination and working together in architecture, water represents the basic choices accompanying the entire journey presented in this volume through six Nile landscapes – Natura, Agro, Urbe, Infrastructure, Industry, and Archaeology. Along them, eighteen project intervention areas have been selected as the scene of an international encounter between Egypt, African populations, and the planet. Together with the Faculty of Engineering of the Ain-Shams University of Cairo (Egypt) and the dArTe Department of the Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria (Italy), 24 international Universities have been invited to build the NiLab, where students, teachers, and young researchers have engaged in concrete design practice to discuss the possible scenarios of a macro-theme: the Nile, an emblematic opportunity to reflect on the theme of water, representative of the planet Earth's rivers, in the wider context of climate change. NiLab's six landscapes are proposed as "mixture" spaces (Coccia, 2016) where to find overlapping and/or disappeared local cultures and interrupted or deconstructed identities. These places produce theoretical and practical questions and doubts, thus becoming fields of experimentation on the project's ontology. It is a critical tool for the current state and, simultaneously, a territory of ideas for the future. Project is therefore engaged as research rather than as a solution to a practical question, aimed at understanding the meaning of the knowledge of the places, even at a theoretical level, the more philosophical boundaries of the topics covered, the relationship between disciplinarity, and the synthesis of knowledge. The NiLab eighteen projects represent research, but also experimentation with a different approach to the dynamics of rivers in different contexts. Thus, sustainability is declined with respect to an architectural and urban design imagination. Ultimately, NiLab offers a unique perspective, treating the Nile not just as a geographical entity but as a living force shaping landscapes, cultures, and the future of our planet.

Keywords: Nile, research, rivers, urban design

Egypt at the time of crisis

The theme of the research proposed for the Egypt Pavilion at the 18th International Architecture Exhibition Venice Biennale is the Nile River as a territory of complex habitation. The Nile responds to the epochal themes posed by the 2023 Biennale - decarbonization, decolonization - as an experimental "laboratory of the future" in its "sympoiesis" (Haraway, 2020) with Egypt, already described by Herodotus when he stated that "Egypt is the Nile, and the Nile is Egypt" (Wilkinson

2017).

On the one hand, are nature, culture, and environment in a millennial narrative; on the other hand, it is the geographical crossroads between Europe and Africa, rich in contaminations along with contradictions and critical historical events. Within this dualism, the architectural project does not remain in the background along our route. Instead, it finds new elements for reflection, insight, and imagination.

Climate crisis, drought, energy sustainability - all these themes call into play the Nile, in an area where 95 percent is desert and 96 percent of the population lives on its banks. The ongoing entropy processes in the delta and along the river - salinization, drought - certainly recall the great stages of civilization. As Jeremy Rifkin wrote:

The vast hydraulic empires of the Middle East, India, and China gave rise to a great leap forward in human consciousness and the first bloom of universal empathic sentiment. But in the end, they were unable to escape the verity of the Second Law of Thermodynamics. A strong body of research into the rise and fall of hydraulic civilizations has shown that while there are many explanations that account for their eventual demise, at the very top of the list is the entropy bill brought by the changes in soil salinity and sedimentation. (Rifkin, 2009)

Of course, besides contemporary catastrophism, there are ongoing, planet-wide environmental processes that require tools and actions, often in rupture with the past.

First, great changes have occurred in history along the Nile - the construction of large reservoirs and the artificialization of the banks. Those were all often too nonchalant globalization-aimed actions, distorting the relationship between city-countryside, nature, and sustainability. Despite this, water and hydraulic landscapes in Egypt still represent the identity elements of both the past and - especially - the future. Eyes are still centered on the Nile as an infrastructure, economy, myth, and historical landscape identity. This pervasive gaze is, at the same time, often dismayed concerning the awareness of the “grammatical” richness of water. As a fluid body, it imprints identity and character on the landscape through its geological, morphological, and vegetational connotations in its relationship between action, technique, and environment. Also, concerning transformations, this dismayal risks losing the necessary balance between functional needs and symbolic design features. Undoubtedly, a desacralization process has taken place over the years in places where sacrality has always been present in nature, architecture, and memory, representing a universal material and intangible heritage. Uncontrolled pollution and the “colonization” of shores by production processes often detached from their contexts and indifferent to possible environmental and landscape relations have altered the thousand-year-old dynamics of a fluid threshold that had made water/land interactivity a universal territorial value. As Gaston Bachelard states:

Water dominates the fluid, unhindered language, the continuous, interrupted language, the language that makes the rhythm more elastic, that gives uniform matter to different rhythms. (Bachelard, 2006)

In this sense, the Nile has imposed itself on the geography of the desert through a liquidity that imprints biodiversity and new morphological, ecological, and territorial complexities. These must be evaluated and updated in the design language as well, especially in an epochal phase increasingly projected toward resource entropy.

Moreover, the Egyptian area is suspended between the Mediterranean - hence European - belonging and the African continent, pervaded by strongly identity-based cultural overlaps and interpretations to be broken down into precolonial, colonial, and global. It synthesizes a landscape and ur-

ban hybridization, which must be recovered at the scale of places and their authentic expressions. In a history that seems to be marked by often traumatic interruptions, perhaps it is necessary to reconnect the threads of the interaction with local resources on the economic, productive, cultural, and social levels. Thus, architecture can also rediscover the languages of the future and sustainability in the African continent and introduce them back into the international debate with their historical and geographical potential. It is a crucial node also if we consider the destructive effects of climate change on the deltas of major rivers such as the Nile, Ganges, Mekong, etc. will result in the displacement of millions of people by 2050 (European Commission, 2008).

The Nile project

Despite the geographical dimension, as the Nile is one of the largest river basins on the planet, its imagery lives in a unified idea where the scale relationship alternates between large and small, between a place of nature and a place of the Gods. The yellow desert and the blue line are signs of a perennial synthesis that requires considering a project as the result of a single thought, unfolding and taking shape unitarily. In this sense, we speak of the “Nile Project” as an attempt to re-think it without losing the desire for unity built throughout history and memory. We speak of unity in the awareness of a project that reflects on the need to find the correct definition of the reality of the Nile: not a single megalopolis, nor a limitless building continuum “lost in its immensity. Without ever reaching itself. Nor being able to get out of itself” (Paz, 1995) but a fluid linear sign to easily escape from and get lost in the “labyrinths” of the desert. Thus, it is a linear edge of water, needing a name against the elusive possible definitions of contemporary cities and territory. However, it is still relatable to a single region with complex and extraordinary morphologies despite the epochal and territorial changes that have taken place, starting with the large artificial dams. It stretches for two hundred and sixty kilometers from the Aswan Dam to the Delta on the Mediterranean Sea, with its five hundred meters of navigable width and one hundred and thirty-four islands laden with biodiversity. Such is the site of the project, concentrated on a few points yet projected toward a single ideal and physical tension. The Grand Tour on Nile, the research journey conducted for the 2023 Biennale through the navigation of the Nile from Aswan to the Mediterranean, re-proposes looking from the water in a spatiotemporal conception that evokes the sense of passage and landscape. Water is central, as a vital resource to be safeguarded and restored in its expressive and poetic power. The watercourse is considered a body in the natural and urban landscape. Its changing form receives continuous modifications through its banks and edges due to currents, fluidity, and the soil it bathes, crosses, invades, and shapes.

A fluid point of view within the Nile is the choice and the prerequisite to achieve a critical view. In contemporary times, standpoints have too often been indifferent and unaware of the land-water relationship, perpetrating pollution, excessive threshold mineralization, irrational exploitation of resources, and destruction of biodiversity and collective memory. This temporal narrative starts from the water and identifies sequences of a complex and irrationally expanded settlement system, of an invasive and obsolete industrial economy, often imported from outside, placed before a soil linked to geomorphological dynamism, layered with history and nature.

In this sense, rather than as a summation of projects, we speak of the Nile project as a general dimension or a new utopia capable of going beyond pre-existing elements. The underlying cultural vision shall not be configured as superstructural but attentive to the relationships with nature, the environment, and the built heritage.

It is a utopia of reality, not aimed at the abstraction of totalizing models. Instead, from its critical and cognitive charge, it conceives a project as constructing new imaginaries for the future in a

pacified balance between nature and artifice, local resources, and innovation. This is why it may be the most appropriate alternative to globalization: along with economic interests, the latter builds landscapes of cultural and social misunderstanding, outlining new connotations of colonization. Without renouncing disciplinary idioms and tools, this project does not start from scratch and a tabula rasa. Instead, it aims to help re-compose a fabric characterized by natural and territorial grammar, historical iconographies, forms, memories, and local cultures.

Thus, NiLab proposes the Nile River as a Laboratory of reflection and knowledge, of ideas and experimentation, through six landscapes - Agro, Nature, Urbe, Industry, Infrastructure, and Archaeology. These do not constitute separate geographical and thematical spheres. Instead, they are perspectives on deconstructing places and landscapes whose boundaries blur and interpenetrate into a complex design dimension yet focused on local geographies and their possible interpretation and enhancement modalities. They are standpoints to describe the long Nile and its settlements in a complexity of unified social, cultural, and historical value, where the project is tasked with repositioning its gaze beyond the existing elements, beyond performative solutions as the only answer to current problems, to aspire to and imagine new configurations concerning issues of sustainability, climate crisis and new energy needs, resource sharing and a different dialogue with nature.

This design perspective aims to overcome the widespread positions in the contemporary debate around climate change issues, often dictated by an environmentalist approach and the attribution of the disruption of the biosphere purely to the action of human civilization, by resorting to the Anthropocene narrative (Crutzen, 2014) to denote the current geological epoch. According to Nicolas Bourriaud, it is an “ambiguous” term for Nicolas Bourriaud in which “the human is reduced to its effects,” setting the current climate emergency as a man-made technical condition that humans can remedy.

This perspective

[...] legitimizes practices to convert the Earth into a human paradise, according to outdated urban and “new nature” or nature-garden clichés. Despite these views, it is life, and not human beings alone, that is the long-lasting engine driving the world in the making. (Sanford 2023)

At the same time, more complex reflections emerge, multiplying the standpoints of the current themes by inviting us “to be inside the problem” (Haraway, 2020). The underlying idea is of a “being” that corresponds to the need to take time to experience relationships and develop “tentacular thinking” (ibid), where nature itself is a system of relationships, of which we are a part.

Climate is the name and metaphysical structure of mixing. For there to be climate, all elements within the space must be mixed and recognizable. (Coccia, 2016)

In this sense, Nilab’s six landscapes are proposed as “mixing” spaces (ibid) where to find overlapping or disappeared local cultures interrupted or deconstructed identities that must be observed from a pre-colonialist standpoint: spaces of a network in a “world we should share with other forms of life” (Bourriaud, 2020). In this sense, the six landscapes formulate theoretical and practical questions and doubts and become fields of experimentation on the project’s ontology. Beyond individual and specific solutions, a project itself becomes a critical tool to analyze the existing elements and yet a field of ideas for the future, capable of communicating the principles of self-determination and cultural independence.

In Nile Landscapes, the focus is traced back to water in its wetting, connecting, crossing, transforming, affecting, and shaping different environmental and urban conditions. This is its strategic direction: an opportunity to rethink natural and urban spaces and the infrastructural system -

roads, levees, canals, dams, cable networks - conceived as a spatial device endowed with architectural and landscape quality, not just technical character.

They are now required to undergo a genetic mutation, standing as something more than the functional response that brought them into being, for how increasingly technically perfected it may be. As already mentioned, their required added value concerns the possibility of influencing the places with which they come into contact at multiple levels. On the one hand, they can control their own impact; on the other, they can give multiple responses to territories or cities, whose opportunities for reorganization can only often derive from their “smart” presence, while plans or programs can no longer guarantee them. In times when the term Smart is compulsively applied to any activity [...], the real smartness of new infrastructure should be aimed at improving the physical appearance and livability of the territories it serves. (Ferlenga, 2012)

Therefore, the River edge can be taken as a threshold, a moving boundary, a zone of exchange, a variable thickness, as a “blur” that relates to the “changing and dynamic” nature of water, implying the conception of an open form. In this dilation, the edge can be “a vehicle for a fusion between city and landscape, interpreting the aspiration for a feeling of fusion with nature in the urban subconscious” (Piccarolo, 2019), an “interactive edge” (Nicolin, 2014). It can be a “thickening” of bands with open and flexible ties, conforming new “porosity urban,” where the landscape is taken “as active surface, structuring the condition for new relationships and interactions among the things it supports” (Wall 1999). One could speak of a Third space between land and water, a hybrid landscape designed to “accommodate” mutability, overcoming traditional coastal and levee management in favor of an integrated and multidisciplinary dimension, as a multiscale process of acquisition of knowledge and skills, overturning the current perception of the water element to translate it into the dimension of landscape.

Projects and research

In this edition of the Architecture Biennale, the approach is apparently to show relationships that attempt to respond to an idea of contemporaneity and multidisciplinary complexity rather than architecture, often circumventing the work of architects and the very statutes of their profession. The proposal of the NiLab Laboratory to invite research groups and schools of architecture to reflect on the Nile River with drawings and projects seems to go against the trend. Evidently, for many editions, the Architecture exhibition of the Venice Biennale has attempted to overcome an approach where projects and the production of “forms” were the structural connection with the society and habitat of the planet. The risk is the disconnection with the transformation processes of the city and territories from architecture and concrete design action. Even with the same “suggestions” and “assumptions” needed for architectural projects, ecology, landscape, artificial intelligence, technology, finance, resource scarcity, etc., cannot override the proper disciplinary field of architecture. The epochal changes and articulations of a complex and contradictory contemporaneity undoubtedly challenge the historical connotations of the city and the territory. Thus, this requires the architectural capability of finding new tools, modes, and roles to analyze, describe, and then design them in a project. Indeed, decarbonization, climate change, and decolonization transform attitudes, ways of living, and consumption habits, reminding us of the need to review architectural approaches and ways of thinking, identifying the limits of each knowledge, along with ethical and political implications. Undoubtedly, these approaches require interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary, yet this does not mean confusing languages and being unable to separate expertise. Otherwise, the project would be assigned a purely formalistic value, reduced to aes-

thetic design, incapable of posing a public and collective value, in full awareness of the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, especially at a time of globalization and technocracy, threatening places and cities.

The architect – now as in previous historical moments – serves the society where they live. [...] The architect has often played the role of advisor and proposer as well as implementer. Not rarely, they have even gone so far as to cast themselves – in the past – in the shoes of the thinker, the utopian, the dreamer, declining the etymology of the project in its most direct and immediate sense: an evocation - here and now - of the future (in Latin, *proiectus* the action of casting forward, thus projecting).

On the other hand, the contemporary architect often falls prey to intricate dynamics, which leads them to see [...] their own role as a “specialized operator” within a much larger and composite process where their own project evidently represents a mere “stage.” (Biraghi, 2019)

In this sense, we speak of the project as research . That is, we see it as somehow untied from the relationship between the question and concrete response. Instead, it is projected to understand and question – also on a theoretical level – the meaning of the knowledge of places, the more philosophical boundaries of the topics covered, and the relationship between disciplinarity and synthesis of knowledge. The academic environment is undoubtedly a more congenial field for the “research project” related to pure experimentation and innovation. Research is the foundation of the university and, as Karl Jaspers says:

... the university accomplishes the original desire to know, which in the first instance has no other purpose than to experience what is possible to know and what we become through knowledge; it realizes the pleasure of knowing in observing, in the method of thinking, in self-criticism as an education in objectivity, but it also accomplishes the experience of limits, of what is not known and also of what must be born in the act of knowledge (Jaspers 1946)

Thus, giving space to the university and architectural schools, where research is inherent in professors’ structural activities, means bringing the project back into a broader architectural dialogue, more open to the system of scientific relations. This dialogue develops horizontally between Western and Eastern experiences, between different languages, and through global questions that move from the specificity of places and their settlement history and represent new challenges for architectural design. Ecology, nature, sustainability, technology, globalization, and the digital revolution become issues in the discussion of design and theory in the process of inventing and constructing architecture without renouncing their statutes and languages. This dialogue is even more vital in territories like Egypt, too often threatened by globalization prevailing over local settlement systems. In this framework, we metaphorically consider the projects for the NiLab modern and ideal Nilometers , cognitive tools for the places along the Nile, sensors of the identity status of landscapes and urban systems, along with their visionary projection, harbingers of a new “cooperation with the natural context that we have learned to perceive as the ‘environment.’” (ibid)

Dialoguing with the great signs of Egypt’s settlement history, which had intensely fascinated Luis Kahn, the projects retrace the journey of the Nile through the primacy of the language of drawing, relating nature and transformation, the existing elements and the imagined futures, in a newfound centrality of the body, often challenged by ongoing processes. These paradigmatic moments, exploring settlement and architectural modalities, are expressed in their character of form and measure, dialectically interacting with nature and the soil without misunderstanding and yielding to

ecological fading or, on the contrary, technological dominance.

In summary:

The project for Geziret-El-Dahab for Cairo - Dahab Island, Cairo - intervenes on one of the islands of the Nile, actual "living creatures" whose existence is linked to the dynamism of water and the nourishment they provide. Biodiversity, the original rural environment, slow movements without the aid of machines, the values of silence and coexistence between man and nature: these are the basis of a vision of "keeping the existing environment" through operations of maintenance and rationalization of pedestrian transportation, low urbanization level, land/water threshold preservation. There is an attempt, that is, to keep away the noise of the looming megalopolis with its immediate "globalized" skyline.

A friendly giant for rebalancing nature - Karaman Island, Sohag - is an "ecological machine", a new "umbilical cord" nurturing the "flower island." It is an out-and-out infrastructure linking tradition and innovation, developed like the great bridges over the Nile, aimed at connecting nature and man-made work. The cultural and research center, a catalyst for functions and new figures in the landscape reflects on the agricultural systems of the future without giving up the identity of a rural economy.

Axis Naturae - Philae Island, Aswan: in the wake of a visionary utopia, a cyclopean aqueduct connecting the Nile with the Suez Canal, the Persian Gulf to the east, and the Gulf of Guinea and the Mediterranean Sea to the southwest and north, constitutes a corridor or modern geographical "Noah's Ark", promoting transhumance and migration of animals and plants, in search of habitats escaped from the climate crisis and at the same time nourished by the water of the Nile itself, perpetuating the myth of the river as the origin and producer of civilization.

Reweaving Edfu - Edfu, Aswan - reflects the sacred relationship with the river and human settlement characterized by the geometry of the agricultural soil texture and the majestic archaeological ruins. In this sense, in addition to marking the reconquest of the threshold between land and water, the architectural promenades along the river's edge, appear as new figures born from processes of hybridization between nature and man-made. Light, air, and climate - i.e., the characters of the place - stand as project elements in dialogue with the architecture, along with fragments of rural soil that invade public land within urban design.

City into Nature - El Fawal Island - Behira: part of the archipelago of islands born from the Nile, El Fawal constitutes a place of biodiversity and indigenous agriculture to be safeguarded from globalized expansive processes of settlement and production. The project proposes a large green park/forest, an ecological lung with an experimental agricultural research and enhancement laboratory at its center, a true sentinel for soil defense and balance between nature and man-made. The stereometric and compact appearance of the building recalls the idea of a fortress and guardian of research and innovation - and, in this case, of identity and tradition.

Egyptian Topography, Sa El Hjar - Gharbia: A hydrographic network, archaeological presences of the former capital in the 26th Dynasty, rural landscape related to a regular agricultural fabric enhanced by P. Klee in the drawings of his trip to Egypt, a compact city whose expansion 'erodes' agricultural soils, constitute the elements under consideration in the project. In this sense, the agricultural park and the urban park dialogue in a mutual enhancement of the existing topography

and iconic signs – natural and man-made – in a reinterpretation of the rich historical iconography.

Archi-Culture - Naqada – Qena: The idea is to rediscover a landscape and architectural balance between one of the oldest cities in Upper Egypt (4,000 B.C.) on the banks of the Nile with one of the most significant archaeological presences related to the cult of the dead and a historical agriculture centered on sugarcane. The relationship between the urban and the rural and rethinking the water-land threshold are the main elements of the project. Aiming to combine memory and the future, the project hierarchically identifies three axes and focal architectural points on the tourism and tertiary level in a newfound centrality of the Nile.

The Two Cities - Tell El Amarna, Menia: The current relationship between the historic city and the archaeological city characterized by ‘indifference’ and the impossibility of mutual exchange is reversed into a dualism, with the buffer zone as an opportunity to create a memory trail. An out-and-out incision is performing, serving as a watershed and a glue between the two sides at the same time, creating an open-air museum that collects archaeological artifacts and stratifications, capable of producing knowledge and evocative vision of one of the most important sites among the capitals of ancient Egypt. Archaeology then has an active role in regenerating the city and providing a new tourism modality.

Operative Void - Downtown, Cairo – operates on an existing modern and contemporary part of the city undergoing decentralization and thus new reconfigurations. The central point is the dialogue with the ancient city and the contemporary need for sustainability. The gaze is turned to the interiors of historic mosques to propose a new urban organism, conceived as a great void, to resume settlement morphologies where the interior-exterior mediation can be found. Thus, the future Downtown is a void/oasis, bounded by an edge/enclosure that determines the sense of living of the Islamic and ancient city, in its distributive principles, in the relationship between full and empty, in the relationship between architecture, green spaces, and water.

Inclusion in Another World - High Dam – Aswan: Over time, on the one hand, the Aswan High Dam has fulfilled issues of security and resource rationalization; on the other hand, it still stands as an interrupted project in terms of landscape, environment, and land use. Desert, river, and infrastructure represent three different Ecologies, three components of a possible vision that still need re-connection. In particular, the scale of infrastructural intervention can be the pivot to rebalance the river as “nature” with the wilderness as “antinature.”

Between the Infrastructures: Light, Water, and Public Spaces - Magra El Oyoum, Cairo: The remnants of the ancient aqueduct, metabolized by the current uncontrolled building sprawl, provide a cue and an anchor for the regeneration of public space on the theme of sustainability within the city of Cairo. In fact, the ruin is rethought as a service infrastructure between old and new, around which urban and collective outdoor spaces are developed. Water, light, and solar energy are the language and characterizing elements of the hybridization idea of a sustainable infrastructure that reaffirms memory and innovation.

O.A.S.I. KE-MET Infrastructure of the living world - El Qanater El Khayreya - Shubra Elkhema: The project is set at the confluence of the Mietta and Rosetta branches of the Nile, an oasis of relevant biodiversity and ecological balance, and stands as a meeting place of material and immaterial values. Reconciliation with the “Living” river through ‘amphibious’ filtering and intermediary devices - piers, pergolas, covered temporary spaces, functional volumes, soil modeling - is com-

bined with reflection on the relationship with the institutional governance of places, in a vision of harmonious coexistence between agriculture, fishing and tourism.

City of Boats - Ezbet El Borg – Damietta: Here, the symbiosis of water and land, city, and fishing is completely fulfilled. Endless sails, docks, boats, varieties of color, and the smell of water lead to evocative imagery of the “city of boats”. This is acquired as a project idea, both on the level of metaphor and the concrete level of image. Natural and man-made forms, stacked over time, characterize an identity landscape form for tourism of places, conceived as wind, light, and water, but also history, material work, and the art of building.

Retrofitting [Industrial] Ecologies - Naga Hamady, Qena - The need to redevelop an obsolete and heavily polluting industrial system, an obvious sign of the desacralization process of the Nile, encourages rethinking a stretch of riverfront along with its relationship with the urban and agricultural landscape. The abandonment of old production systems leads to constructing a complex infrastructure, where manufactories, businesses, residences, and an agricultural park coexist under the banner of sustainability and the use of recyclable resources. The “large dimension” has been chosen and developed horizontally on the river edge through signs with recognizable geometry, in a direct dialogue with the great monuments of Egyptian archaeology.

From Concrete to Nature. Green Industries Headquarters for a Renewed Development of the City - Helwan, Cairo: “The great beauty” of Egypt’s monumental tradition, which has inspired universal art and architecture (the project cites K.F. Schinkel’s scenographies for Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*), underlies an ethical need to compensate a place that, after being appreciated for its charm as a spa and world resort until the early 20th century, has become a polluting industrial and mining center superimposed on historic and natural landscapes. The idea is to initiate a transition process between the man-made landscape of production, some of whose parts are considered modern archaeology, and the agricultural and riverine landscapes, reconstructing a new multipurpose citadel based on a settlement system where the grid of the large industrial scale serves as a “regulatory layout.”

Abydos, Act of Palimpsest - Abydos Temple, Sohag - operates on a geographical area where the clash for possession of territory between the green nature of the Nile and the yellow desert is still evident. There is still a sharp line dividing the agricultural edge of the rural settlements and the large sacred archaeological area, which was once intended to safeguard the tombs of the pharaohs. In this sense, the project of the entrance locates the places of reception and knowledge (museum, workshops, services) while tracing directions and axes of orientation, as interpretation keys to monuments and sacred places scattered in the desert just in front.

Elroda Nilometer - Cairo - Gardens of Nile and Archeological/ecological Park - intervenes in the sites of Egypt’s first Muslim capital, south of Cairo. Agrarian landscapes and Nile waterscapes are marked by significant iconic presences: the Nilometer, an architectural device for controlling and monitoring the Nile, and vast abandoned archaeological areas. The project stands as an operation of land reorganization according to a measurement unit derived from Egyptian cubits (about 70 m), reconfiguring water spaces and new soil clods as metaphors for the island landscapes of the Great River. The Nilometer fulfills the dual function of an archaeological artifact and, at the same time, an active landmark for the new park and the surrounding landscape.

Floating Institution - Qaitbay Citadel, Rosetta: A hybrid, swampy liquid belt is interposed between

the magmatic agglomeration of the village and the fluid of the Nile. Despite careless expansion indifferent to the ecological and environmental values of the site, which are present in a vast iconography, especially from the Napoleonic period, the symbiosis with the landscape and various production and manufacturing activities is still present. The project attempts “landscape restoration,” with the settlement principle of water plots that “urbanize” the river as a new structure for the public space, reconstructing historic palm groves, and hybridizing the edge, with explicit evocative references to historical iconography.

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