

**PRESERVING THE WORLD'S
GREAT CITIES**

THE DESTRUCTION AND RENEWAL
OF THE HISTORIC METROPOLIS

ANTHONY M. TUNG

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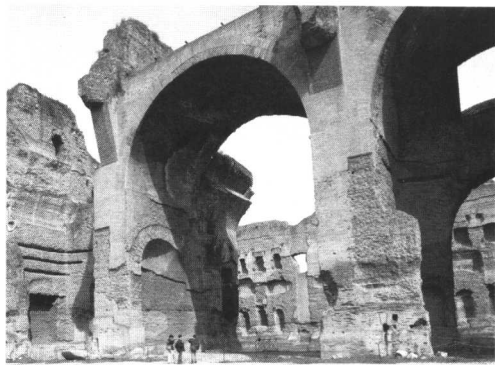
The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand.

—ITALO CALVINO, *Invisible Cities*



A Gothic gateway in Prague. Many remarkable artifacts have been handed down from earlier generations of urban societies which, in their own time, decided to save vestiges of the past as part of the continuing life of the city. The Powder Tower, or Saint Ambrose's Gate, in Prague marks the old line of the city's otherwise vanished fortifications.

ROME



Heritage devoured. The Pantheon (1) is one of the foremost achievements in structural engineering in the history of architecture; it, like many large public monuments in ancient Rome, was built to last for ages. And indeed it has—in large part because of its conversion to a church. Most other imperial landmarks—equally astounding as architectural accomplishments—were over the centuries cannibalized for their materials. Today, only a few skeletal ruins remain, such as the massive arches of the Baths of Diocletian (2).



Adaptive reuse. Across two thousand years, the fortifications of the ancient city have been adapted in numerous instances by different generations of Romans to changing architectural tastes and vehicular circulation needs. At the Porta Pia, facing into the city center, an entry in the Mannerist style (3) was added by Michelangelo to a gateway from the imperial era.



Michelangelo's Piazza del Campidoglio. Looking up the main stairway (4) one sees a conscious fusion of Imperial-Roman and Christian-Renaissance culture. Giant sculptures from antiquity frame the entry to the piazza. A pair of buildings with matching facades flank the square. The Senator's Palace, with its campanile, has also been refashioned in a Renaissance style. Looking at the Capitoline Hill from behind (5), in the Roman Forum, the rear wall of the Senator's Palace sits upon the Imperial Roman Tabularium, which serves as the foundation for Michelangelo's masterpiece of contextual urban design.

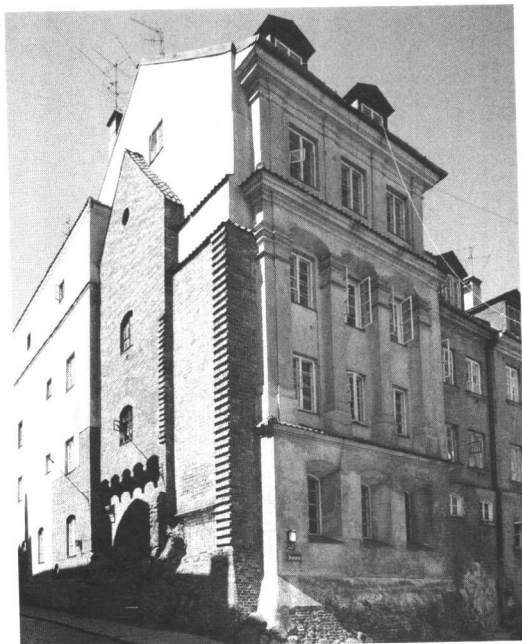


WARSAW



Resurrecting the stolen cityscape. In response to the erasure of their historic capital city by the Germans during World War II, the government of Poland created one of the most comprehensive conservation bureaucracies of any nation in the world. And the Varsovians re-created Warsaw consistent with the image in their memories. Old squares were put back, lost landmarks were rebuilt to the finest detail, the ancient fortifications of Warsaw, lost for many centuries, were made to once more encircle the medieval center (1), and modern urban improvements were introduced, such as the construction of a highway underpass—built beneath the historic zone before fragile masonry streetscapes were reinstated (2).

A museum of urban change. As old buildings were reassembled, previously invisible evidence of their architectural evolution was discovered. Restorers left such conditions revealed, as a matter of public education. Thus, a smaller Gothic masonry profile is expressed along the side wall of a building enlarged in the seventeenth century, heavily damaged in World War II, and today restored (3).



3

Communist Warsaw. The re-created Old Town was surrounded by a modern conglomeration of mass-produced housing blocks common to cities behind the Iron Curtain (4).



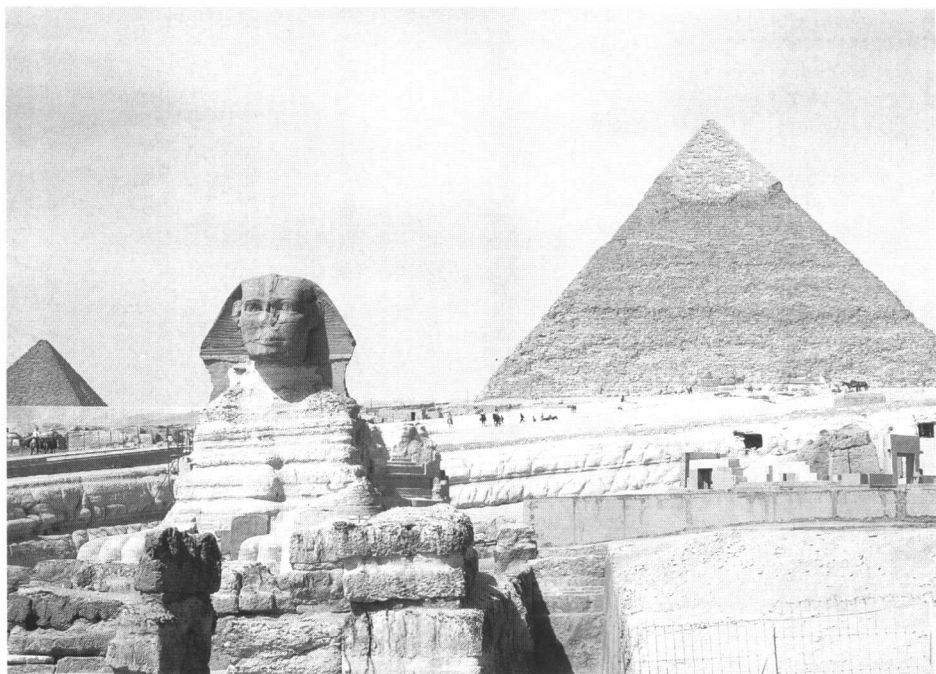
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Monuments of conscience. Memorials to the victims of German repression haunt the urban landscape, as in a sculpture commemorating the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (5).

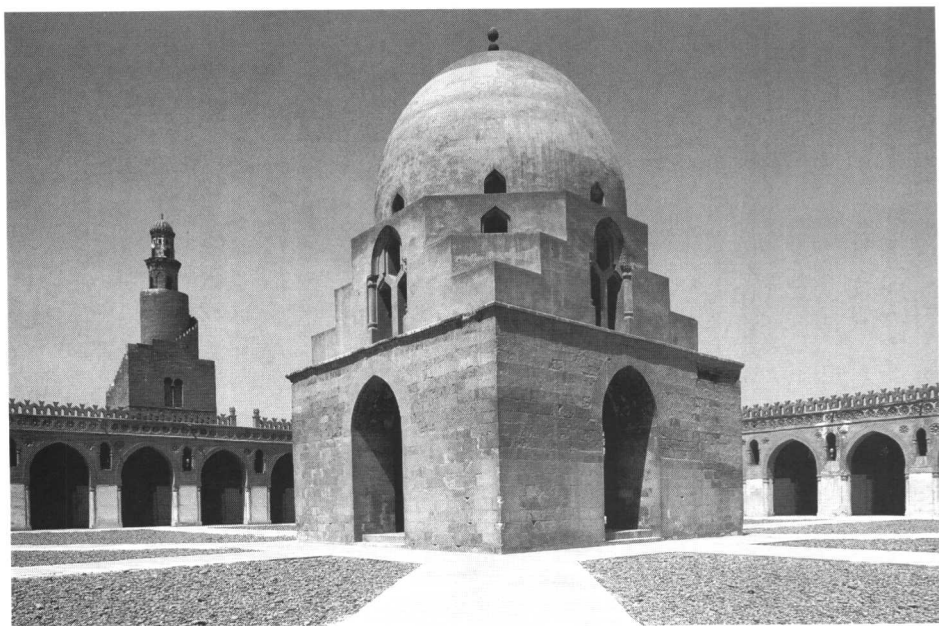


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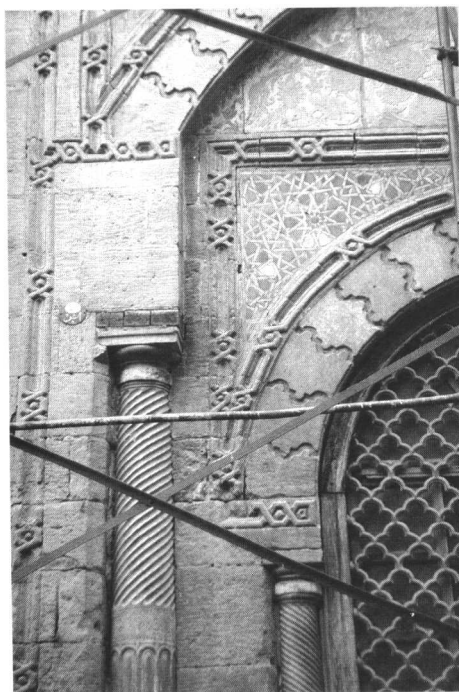
CAIRO



Treasures of civilization under assault. The modern megacity of Cairo holds two peerless architectural patrimonies: at its periphery, the Great Pyramids and Sphinx of Giza (1), and at its center, a medieval Muslim cityscape (2) of numerous wondrous monuments such as the Mosque of Ibn Tulun (3), a pinnacle of accomplishment in world architectural history. Uncontrolled population growth, pollution, poverty, and a culture of illegal settlement expose both of these legacies to continuous hostile environmental siege.



3



4



5

A conservation dilemma of daunting complexity. Less than half of the city's sewage is treated; it flows directly into the ground water table, producing acids and microbes that devour the stone foundations of monuments. Automotive and industrial air pollution render the rain caustic, thus attacking the upper parts of buildings as well. Extended poverty depletes building maintenance. Heightened population density increases the wear on structures. Deteriorated masonry eventually crumbles to the touch (5). A recent earthquake has exacerbated the damage (4).



1

A legacy of celebratory pinnacles.

For centuries, Moscow's architectural crown of myriad eclectic churchtops and towers made it distinct. The city's tradition of architectural creativity had deep vernacular roots, in the hundreds of churches (2), constructed and reconstructed as Moscow was several times destroyed and rebuilt. At the heart of the settlement, in Red Square, this broad cultural expression reached its formal culmination. The fantastic onion dome turbans of Saint Basil's and the tent roofs of commercial structures like the Lower Trading Rows (1), as well as the towers of the Kremlin (3), were the epitome of a joyful and particularly Russian architectural accomplishment.

In 1918, with the establishment of the Communist state, all religious institutions were banned.



2



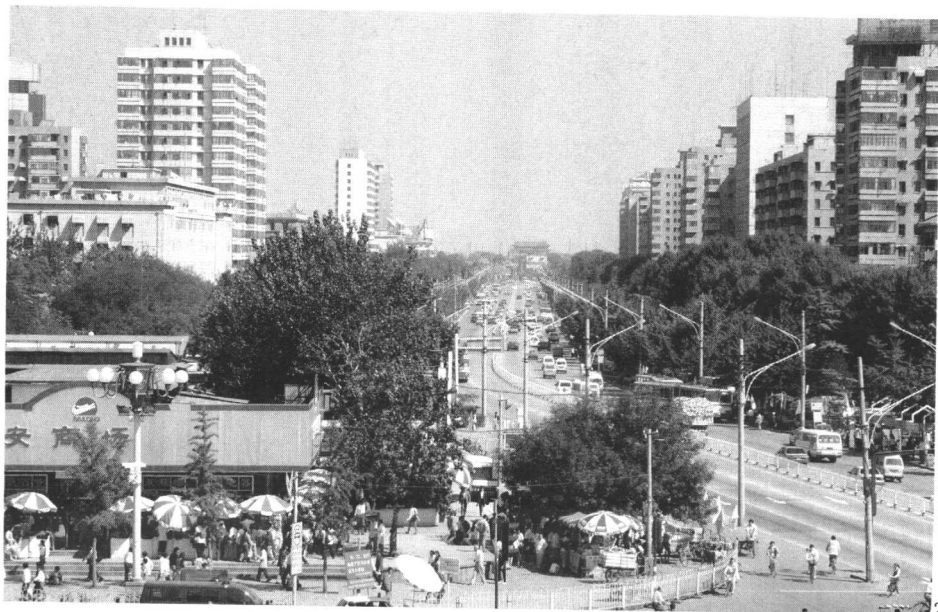
Urban planning via ideology. Communist propaganda required that Moscow be modernized as a symbol of Soviet progress, and waves of prefabricated housing blocks inundated the urban landscape (4). The ambience and scale of the old city was fractured, thousands of historic structures were demolished, and surviving churches were dwarfed (5).

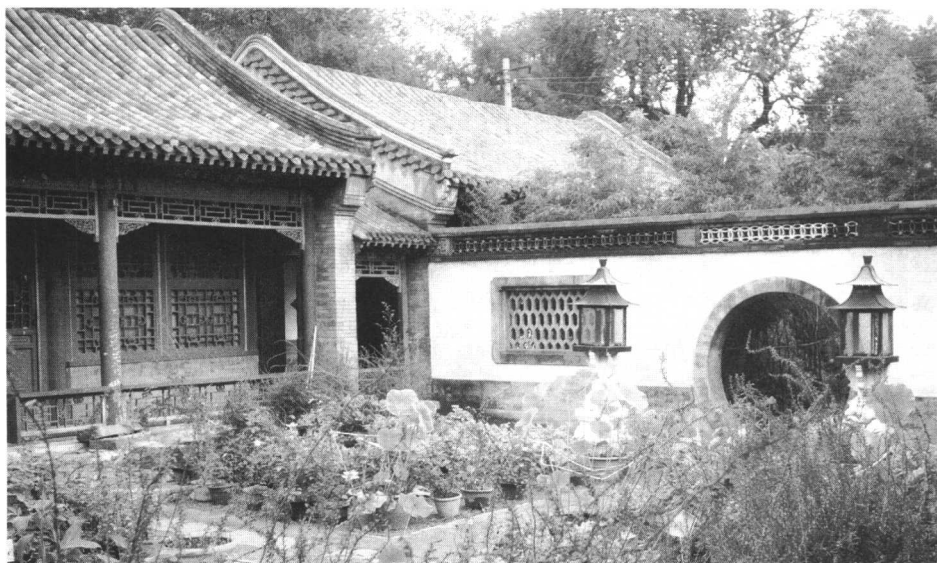
Shoddily constructed, the new residential towers soon deteriorated, while historic buildings decayed from decades of neglect. As Communist rule came to an end, Moscow was left with a mammoth bill of deferred repair.



Deconstruction of an unparalleled patrimony. As the Communists assumed power in 1949, they inherited one of civilization's singular urban artifacts: the vast, intact medieval cityscape of Beijing—an integrated object of environmental art whose architectural parts, such as the Forbidden City (1), were set in alignment with the poles of the Chinese cosmos.

Modernization, dogma, and the influence of anti-conservation Soviet planning advisors would cause numerous historic assets of the Chinese capital, as in Moscow, to be torn down. The broad avenues of the old city were zoned for ad hoc high-rise development (2) and the historic milieu was fractured.





3

The dawn of preservation? After the Cultural Revolution, and with the fall of the Gang of Four, government was reformed and a policy of architectural conservation was adopted. Off the main thoroughfares, along the city's narrow byways, dilapidated residential compounds, when restored (3), reflected the subtle and mysterious beauty of millennia of Chinese cultural development.



4



5

In commercial areas, old streetscapes of intricately carved wooden shopfronts awaited reclamation (4). In those few areas where the authorities established historic districts, the transformation was astounding (5).

The mutability of Communist governmental policy presents an uncertain future. Will the remaining vernacular beauty of historic Beijing be saved or erased in the twenty-first century?



Conservation and economic equity. In the age of wind-driven ships, the exotic tropical city of Singapore commanded a lion's share of the Asian-European trade. Yet by the end of World War II, the city's commercial vitality had faded, and poverty, illegal settlement, and economic underdevelopment cast a pall over its future.

Remarkably, by the 1990s, the island city-state had achieved one of the highest standards of living in the world and 80 percent of Singapore's families owned the place where they lived. But this single-minded effort to create economic justice for its inhabitants also resulted in unrestrained development that replaced the city's colonial commercial center with a ubiquitous contemporary urban environment (1, 2).

