LE CORBUSIER, AN ARCHITECT ON THE WAY TO THE EAST: IMPRESSIONS AND DRAWINGS

Rocío Peñalta CATALAN[1]

Abstract

In May 1911, the architect known as Le Corbusier, set out on a journey to the Eastern part of Europe and he finally arrives to Constantinople. This travel, which can be placed in the romantic tradition of the Grand Tour, will have an important influence on his future work. In his adventure across the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe, the architect will the starting point for the creation of a modern architecture based on the analogies and the re-reading of the universal patterns guessed in the classic art.

Keywords: Le Corbusier, travel writing, Eastern Europe, Grand Tour, architecture.

Introduction

In May 1911 Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, better known as Le Corbusier,[2] decides to travel throughout the Eastern part of Europe until he finally arrives to Constantinople. This adventure belongs to the Romantic tradition of initiation and formative travels which European young artists and writers used to do for accomplishing their academic instruction.[3] The purpose of this article is to point out to what extent this experience of instruction, initiation and discovery through Eastern Europe will have a clear influence on the future works of Le Corbusier, both in his architectural projects and theoretical reflections.

At the beginning of the 20th century there were two institutions on Western Europe, the academic and the polytechnic, dedicated to the teaching of architecture and both of them counted on with the collaboration of well-known architects in whose workshops apprentices could complete their instruction. In this context, Charles Édouard Jeanneret (1887-1965) is instructed in painting, drawing and engraving, and he also acquires some basic knowledge on architecture at the Advanced Course in Art School at La Chaux-des-Fonds, thanks to his teacher and trainer Charles l'Eplattenier. In 1908 the young Jeanneret collaborates at the Parisian workshop of Auguste Perret, pioneer in the use of concrete for the construction of buildings, and two years later, in 1910, he begins

[1] Universidad Complutense de Madrid

[2] Le Corbusier was a Swiss born theorist of the architecture, designer and painter who later became a French citizen. He is considered as one of the most celebrated exponent of the Modern Movement of the architecture – together with Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, Alvar Aalto y Ludwig Mies van der Rohe–, and one of the most influential architects of the twentieth century. Le Corbusier is a French name. It translates into English as 'the crow like one'. He chose this name in 1920. *Cfr.* Jean-Louis Cohen, *Le Corbusier,* Madrid, Taschen, 2007.

[3] The Great Tour that got its highest apogee in the eighteenth century consisted of a travel across Europe that young men, mainly British but also from other European nations used to undertake in order to accomplish their academic and vital formation with new experiences, by knowing other cultures and approaching to the great classical and Renaissance art works both in Greece and Italy and searching for the exotic of oriental regions. *Vid.* Bruce Redford, *Venice & the Grand Tour,* New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1996.

BDD-A2925 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-13 14:56:10 UTC)

to work as a designer at Peter Behrens' workshop, in Berlin, where he would meet Mies Van der Rohe.[4] In spite of the theoretical and practical instruction that he acquired, Le Corbusier is to a great extent a self-educated artist. For this reason his travels, either the current one we are describing or the one he did previously, in 1907, through Italy, accompanied by his friend Léon Perrin, are essential phases in his formation.

During his first travel to Italy, that Le Corbusier undertook after finishing the advanced course in La Chaux-des-Fonds, he goes across Lombardy, Tuscany and Veneto, visiting cities such as Milan, Genoa, Florence, Pisa, Siena, Bologna, Raven, Ferrara, Verona, Padua and Venice.

Italy was a traditional destination for the formative and initiation travels of European young intellectuals. Since ancient times Vitruvius, Wilars de Honecort, Alberti, Palladio and the Academy promoted the direct knowledge of architectural master-pieces situated in the cities of Tuscany, Veneto and the north of Italy.[5]

Le Corbusier does not travel at random, he uses traveller, aesthete and philosophers' books together with the suggestions of his professor L'Eplattenier as a guide to trace his itineraries. So he goes over the main places of the architectural history following Ruskin, Taine and Palladio footsteps in their works, *Mornings in Florence* or *The Stones of Venice; Le voyage en Italie*, and *The four books of architecture,* respectively. The young Jeanneret plans this travel as a heroic crusade searching for universal truth and knowledge, as a pilgrimage searching for himself and the absolute.

"When I was 19 years old I went to Italy for breathing the air […] after this long travel that lasted for about one year, where I pilgrim free with my rucksack on my shoulder, free of improvised initiatives, I went over the countries on foot, on horseback, by ship, by car, facing up to the diversity of races […] I acquired this conviction that a new century was there, in the twentieth century, and also that everything that was being done it was already revolutionary; that a continuous movement, forward, without return […] epoch after epoch, leads, to its hour, to the nations towards a point which is ahead, ahead".[6]

The architect does not hesitate to praise this adventure, presenting himself as the lonely hero facing a strange and hostile world, pioneer in charge to open unexplored paths to art and architecture. So, some years later, in an interview with Robert Mallet, referring to his first client and what he himself did after finishing the project of Fallet House, Le Corbusier explains, *"Il m'a donné la commande de sa maison; j'avais dix-huit ans quand j'ai eu la commande; je l'ai faite de dix-huit à dix-neuf ans. Après cela je suis parti à travers le monde*

[4] Guadalupe Salazar González, "Barragán y Le Corbusier, dos caminos y lugares de encuentro", in *El proceso creativo: XXVI Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte,* edited by Alberto Dallal, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2006, p. 53.

[5] With this aim, Colbert established the Prix de Rome in 1663, and the English monarch George III, in 1770, granted a travel-scholarship for the most brilliant architecture students (Salazar González, "Barragán...", *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68). We have no certainty about that Jeanneret had the benefit of that reward nevertheless he criticizes harshly the prize in his work *Vers une architecture* (1924). *Vid.* Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture,* Paris, Les Éditions G. Crés, 1924, p. 145; translated by John Goodman as *Towards an Architecture,* London: Paul Getty Trust, 2007, p. 212.

[6] Le Corbusier *apud* Salazar González, "Barragán...", *op. cit.*, p. 68. All the translations are of the author of this article.

BDD-A2925 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-13 14:56:10 UTC)

pour continuer à prendre des initiatives"[7] (He entrusted me his house; I was eighteen years old when I received the charge; I made it when I was between eighteen and nineteen years old. After that I went across the world to continue taking initiatives).

The expression *"à travers le monde"* results excessively ambitious for what it was really no more than a travel as the one so many students had begun conducted by their anxiety for learning and living new experiences. Nevertheless this vocabulary is very significant in the context of Modern Movement[8] whose followers considered artists as a part of an intellectual élite that was predestined to inaugurate new times. As a matter of fact either reports or photographs taken in his travels invite us to consider that young Jeanneret travelled by himself but he was actually accompanied by his course fellow, Léon Perrin. In spite of that Le Corbusier did not mention anything about his fellow-traveller and always presented his journeys of youth as true heroic deeds.[9]

With the same solicitude in May 1911 he starts a second travel across the East of Europe that will take him to Constantinople. During seven months and parting from Dresden Le Corbusier together with his friend Auguste Klipstein, go across Bohemia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey.[10]

In the course of this journey, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret takes a route notebook in which he registers his impressions, makes a lot of sketches and outlines some projects. Starting from these notes Jeanneret writes numerous articles, some of them will be published in *La Feuille d'Avis* of La Chaux-des-Fonds. Afterwards he organises and completes these texts until he fits them into a book titled *Le voyage d'Orient* that should be edited by Gaspard Vallete and published in 1914 in *Le Mercure de France.* Nevertheless the beginning of the First World War stopped its publication and the manuscript was forgotten among Le Corbusier's files (pp. 9-10).

Fifty years after this journey, the architect decides to publish *Journey to the East;* he takes the text again, corrects and annotates meticulously it without needing to resort to

[7] Le Corbusier *apud* Fernando Zaparaín Hernández, *Le Corbusier: artista-héroe y hombre-tipo,* Valladolid, Secretariado de Publicaciones, Universidad de Valladolid, 1997, p. 38.

[8] The Modern Movement is a current of international tendency that begins from the European vanguards at the beginning of the twentieth century and expands all through the twenties. The period between the Wars with regard to architecture was dominated by the commonly named International style. In an attempt for replacing the diversity and apparent confusion of the nineteenth century, the buildings constructed in this period are distinguished for some common characteristics: as a general rule they are composed by simple stereometric shapes, they have the aspect of unitary volumes, the essential materials of construction are concrete and glass and they have no decorative details. This tendency is based in the principle that architecture is 'the unavoidable produce logical of cultural and technical conditions at that period', and all those that shared this belief were considered exponents of a Modern Movement that was recognized in 1928 with the foundation of the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM). *Cfr.* Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Arquitectura Occidental,* Barcelona, Gustavo Gili, 2004, p. 188.

[9] Zaparaín Hernández, *Le Corbusier..., op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.

[10] Between March and October 1911 they visited the cities of Dresden, Praga, Wien, Vác, Budapest, Baja, Giorgavo, Belgrade, Knajevaz, Naitscha, Bucharest, Tarnovo, Galvoro, Schipka, Kasanlic, Adrinopla, Rodosto, Constantinople, Daphne, Brousse, Mount Athos, Thessaloniki, Athens, Itea, Delphi, Patras, Brindisi, Naples, Rome, Pompei, Florence and Lucerne. *Cfr.* Le Corbusier, *El viaje a Oriente,* Barcelona: Laertes, 2005, p. 9. From now on in quotations referred to the same edition of the book only the number of the page will be indicated.

BDD-A2925 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-13 14:56:10 UTC)

any other document. The first edition of this diary, a testimony of the author youthful discoveries, dates from 1965, fifty-four years after it was written.

The book gathers a fundamental experience in the configuration of Le Corbusier's architectural aesthetics, and he himself will consider the text as well as *"an important and significant documentation about the decisive year of his formation as an artist and architect"* (p. 10). Although he recognizes that at the time of his journey *"he still is not enough prepared to judge everything"*.[11] Further on, he will resort to this rich file of drawings, sketches and annotations compiled along his youthfulness to abstract his experiences and observations, to establish some analogies and interpret them again.

This adventure along Eastern Europe allowed him to approach the great architectural works, sketching them, taking some notes from nature which is the preferred technique for the academic institution that fomented the mimicry and the sketch. At the same time Le Corbusier could know the architecture by testing it since, according to the polytechnic school, the architecture must not be taught, but it could only be learnt by means of exercises and personal experience.[12] So then Jeanneret managed to consider his youthfulness travels *"as an equivalent to university education in which he had joined together techniques, reflections principles and impressions that would help him to establish his own way"*.[13]

Precisely the diary of his travel to the East comes across some intuitions and ideas that still would take a long time to be developed and applied to architecture and urbanism. Jeanneret begins his adventure as it was a mission related to the discovery of a characteristic architecture of modern era but *"taking root in the eternal values of the Antiquity"*.[14]

During his stay in Berlin Jeanneret wasn't still really aware of the necessity of a modern architecture adapted to new times but he devoted his efforts to the creation of a regional style for the Jura's valley, his homeland. It is by the time of his travel across the East when it appears the first glimpses of Le Corbusier's later urban utopia based on classicism, ideal geometries and basic shapes. So as Fernández Cabaleiro expounds, *"A basic premise of Towards an architecture and its later production was clearly enunciated when he was twenty-four years old: the greatness of past inventions should be repeated no by means of imitation but through reiteration of constants and the pursuit of magnificence equivalent in modern terms"*.[15]

Journey to the East

The annotations he takes in his diary *Le voyage d'Orient* reveal Jeanneret's interest in men' distinctive characteristics, cultures and landscapes of each one of the regions travelled across. The architect tries to understand and register each one of these details by means of conceptual sketches, drawings and synthetic comments.

---

[11] Le Corbusier *apud* Salazar González, "Barragán...", *op. cit.*, p. 68.
[12] Guadet *apud* Salazar González, "Barragán...", *op. cit.*, p. 53.
[13] Begoña Fernández Cabaleiro, "Le Corbusier: una arquitectura para el hombre", in *Espacio, Tiempo y forma, Serie VII. Historia del Arte,* vol. 13, Madrid, UNED, 2000, p. 569.
[14] *Ibíd.*, p. 571.
[15] *Ibíd.*, pp. 570-571.

BDD-A2925 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-13 14:56:10 UTC)

Journey to the East is preceded by an inscription *"to my brother, the musician Albert Jeanneret"* whose portrait accompanied le Corbusier during his tour across Europe: *"Your portrait did the journey from one extreme to the other –The Danube, Istanbul, Athens– among useless bit of papers in which it got lost; I had nothing to do with it. It was your portrait but not wholly. I sketched it without noticing you it, at Wald-Schenke of Hellerau, for 1910 Christmas […]. In this way I visualized you and I think you are like this"* (p. 13).

This inscription certainly carries out the function of a *captatio benevolentiae* because the author of the diary justifies the limited quality of the text by mentioning the fact that it was written for its publication in *La Feuille d'Avis* of La Chaux-des-Fonds, a task that prevented him enjoying completely his journey: *"[…] these lines written for a public –who were not really interested– tarnished the enjoyment and disturbed the serenity I was invited in by all in those latitudes"* (p. 13).

The book begins with a short chapter titled "Some impressions" in which Le Corbusier refers to previous moments of departure, he presents the reasons and objectives for his travel and reflects on the beauty of landscapes generated by modernity, where nature fuses with twentieth century urbanism and the new construction materials. *"The great avenues flooded by greenness, covered with an asphalt so polished by cars as the west sun is reflected in an infinite line of fire marked out by one thousand of trees as black columns that seemed to me in certain moments like impressive creations"* (p. 18).

Le Corbusier praises for this eclecticism opposite to romantic landscapes, medieval cities or traditionally admired constructions, so, according to the architect *"there are overestimated fames"* (p. 19). In his opinion *"first of all, beauty is made of harmony"* and that it is what he pretends to find in his journey to the East, *"[…] Far from the Northern complicated architectures –answers to a sun persistent call, of wide lines of blue seas and big white walls of temples– to Constantinople, Asia Minor, Greece, to southern Italy […]"* (p. 19).

The first chapter, after this brief introduction, is a "letter to the friends of 'art workshops' of La Chaux-des-Fonds" in which he addresses to Léon Perrin –who had been his fellow-traveller for Italy four years before– *"to speak about vessels, rustic vases of popular crockery"*. During his stay in Hungary Jeanneret and Klipstein go across Budapest's bazaars, the small towns of the Hungarian plain and the Serbian Balkans in search of craft pieces of ceramics, true models of a rural art that keeps out of fashions and the taste of last times. *"We had to run away from the invader and contaminant 'Europeanization' as far as the quiet refuges in which the great popular tradition –becoming extinct and promptly sunken– survives"* (p. 23).

So then Le Corbusier establishes differences between Eastern and Western Europe. Countries from the East still maintain traditional techniques of production, each object is unique and beautiful in spite of its imperfections; nevertheless in Western countries occupy the first place fashions and massive production, values that menace to expand all over the Continent and 'contaminate' the purity of rural art, an *"amazing creation of aesthetical sensualism"*. Jeanneret considers that art is superior to sciences, since it is capable of exciting the sensuality (p. 23). In this sense he offers an absolutely sensorial

BDD-A2925 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-13 14:56:10 UTC)

description of vessels that with so much enthusiasm he has acquired throughout his travel:

"You know well these pleasures, to touch the generous belly of a vessel, to caress his graceful neck, and then to explore the delicacy of its outline. Then with the hands returned deep into the pockets and the half-closed eyes, to allow oneself to be enraptured for the enchantment of enamels, the splendour of yellows, the velvety texture of blues […]" (pp. 21-22).

This worship for objects, for the perfection of its lines and shapes, for the harmony of its colours, is closely connected with the Purism, a pictorial movement initiated by the painter Amédée Ozenfant (1886-1966) and Charles Jeanneret himself, between 1918 and 1925, that afterwards it extended to the rest of aesthetical manifestations. The Purism pretends to achieve as maximum stylist purification as possible by means of the use of colours, lines and pure shapes. Thus, in that primitive art Le Corbusier detects *"the instinctive appreciation of the organic line"* on the part of *"the small town potter […] whose fingers unconsciously respond to the orders of the secular tradition"* (p. 24).

In this comparison established by Jeanneret is the foreigner, 'the other', who takes advantage over the Western man, who gives up from his roots and traditions with the only objective to obtain economic benefits: *"what a contrast to set them up against the shapes […] of an astonished silliness, conceived nobody knows by whom in the anonymity of the big modern factories; […] I do not know either anything more lamentable than the present mania to disown the traditions without another purpose that to create the desired 'novelty'"* (p. 25).

In search of these patterns of primitive art Le Corbusier and his traveller-fellow undertake *"endless deeds"*, they make *"marches and countermarches even under a torrential rain"*, –at torrid noon hour they travel over the small towns of the Hungarian plain and descend the *"Ali Baba caverns"* (p. 22). These expressions are a good example of the hyperbolical vocabulary with whose Le Corbusier presents himself as an adventurer hero, ready to face to the dangers of unexplored paths, characteristic terminology of the romantic travellers that searched for the roots of Western civilization in the Mediterranean. This was precisely the mission that Le Corbusier entrusted himself and because of that he travelled over Italy, Greece and Turkey, where still remained vestiges of great empires of the Antiquity.[16]

The architect admired the Mediterranean landscape, the rocky coasts, the blue sea, the whiteness of whitewashed walls and, at the same time, the contrasting vivid colours of the South of Italy and Greece, the morphology of small towns perfectly adapted to environment irregularities.

The voyagers decide to make a little detour in their itinerary in order to arrive to Istanbul from across the sea, *"in the classic manner"* (p. 83) and by this means to appreciate the beauty of the panorama that presents in front of their eyes.

"[…] we were on the bridge, completely aware, when the Seven Towers showed in outline. Then some small mosques appeared, immediately behind the big ones and the palaces of Bizantium; finally St

[16] In following journeys, Le Corbusier will continue travelling over the classic world, in his visits to Algiers, Catalonia, The South of France –Provence, maritime Alps and Côte d'Azur– and Morocco.

BDD-A2925 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-13 14:56:10 UTC)

Sophia and the Seraglio. In the end we entered into the Gold Horn, between Pera, dominated by the tower of the Genovese and Istanbul, spread with minarets –each one up on a hill, face to face. I felt a deep emotion as I had come to adore these places I knew how beautiful they were" (pp. 83-84).

The landscape of the Turkish cities excites a religious feeling in Le Corbusier that uses a sacred language in his descriptions: *"Pera, Istanbul, Scutari, a Trinity! Yes, because the Sweet Death has its altars in all of them and brings into an alliance the hearts in the same serenity, in the same hope"* (p. 85). In the same way Jeanneret describes the Turkish spirit, full of faith, serenity and hope, a soul that melts with the pink and blue of sky and sea landscape; but, at the same time, Turkish are full of rage and melancholy.

"I would say something about the Turkish soul […]. There is serenity with no limits in it. We call it fatalism in order to diminish, let us call it just 'faith'. It is a question of an unlimited and cheerful faith. […] But what about their keen eyes and like eagle beak noses? They are traces of the storms that suddenly burst into real cyclones. It must be glorious the sight of their upsurges, of their unrestrained rage! A frightful and lacerating hydra burrows deeply into their pink soul; the excess of serenity causes affliction by means of melancholia" (pp. 88-89).

As a good architecture student, Le Corbusier never stops paying attention to the urbanism of Western cities. Near the edge, in Galata, houses pile up over and above and, for the narrow streets *"a populace of dockers and seamen drink mastic, sell the produce of fishing and eat garlic seasoned foods"* (p. 87). *"The piers of the Gold Horn are bad planned and the Mouth of the New Bridge is in a precarious situation; the streets precipitate into it […]"* (p. 87) originating a funnel effect. In the way to Istanbul this 'impure' atmosphere that impregnates the streets and even the Allah temples is still perceived: *"the streets prostitute themselves renouncing its centuries of Turkish way of life selling at avaricious merchants"* (p. 87). Fortunately the passer-by can move away from this colourful town ascending through lined with graveyards and *türbes*[17] streets in order to recover peace beside a beautiful fountain, a temple surrounded with cypresses or the wall of a garden that protects jealously the odalisques (pp. 87-88).

On Mount Athos, Le Corbusier discovers the sense of monastic life and experiments the true silence, he shares roof and food with popes and pilgrims by lodging at a monastery and admires the architecture of Byzantine churches. *"[…] I saw close by the first convent. […] That vision endures as the most exciting, the most distinguished and beneficent. There was over there an arcade of ancient fortress and the smooth face of the wall catapulted the section of the cells with their galleries facing the sea, towards the celestial elevations"* (p. 154).

From his landing in the port of Daphne he imagines that whatever surrounds Mount Athos is full of significance. Landscape becomes a comprehensible symbolical geometry. *"In the irradiation of evening the pyramid of Athos appeared into sight from nowhere!"* (p. 151), Le Corbusier observes.

"I felt the incantation of these primary elements –the sea, the mountain and its immortalized by the Virgin symbol– and the intoxicating embrace of a wet nightfall that voluptuously emanated from that slope in warm fragrances adherent to so many new trees, to so many always symbolic species –mulberries, olives, figs, vines, huge thistles and the unalterable hollies–, and also some cypresses that surprised us

[17] Monumental mausoleums of the Ottoman sultans.

BDD-A2925 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-13 14:56:10 UTC)

higher up already, in a landing, after the sun remained silent, as if twenty gloomy sentinels were looking after that cloister […]" (p. 153).

However, for Jeanneret the deepest architectonic experience of his journey was the Acropolis of Athens. *"To see the Acropolis is a dream that we cherish even without aspiring to make it reality. I do not know very well why this hill contains the essence of artistic thought. I am capable to evaluate the perfection of its temples and I recognize there are not ones so extraordinary anywhere; and I have accepted a long time ago that this must be like the deposit of the holy guide, as a basis of any mensuration of art"* (p. 189).

In Athens Le Corbusier visited the Parthenon every day for many weeks and he drew it from different angles and under different lights. The temple of the Acropolis turned out especially attractive for the architect due to the perfection of its geometry and its proportions. The ruins of Antiquity constituted the pattern of permanent values, so that is the reason why Jeanneret talks of universality.[18]

The Parthenon melts into landscape, reflects its colours, the architecture adapts perfectly to the orography of the terrain and the placing of the building has been carefully studied.

"From the top of the hill the closed contour girdles the temples by its steps and projects to the sky the distinctly tightened columns. On the slope of the road leading to the Parthenon, the stairs carved in the pure rock already interpose a first barrier. But the great marble steps hang over them as a decisive obstacle for the man climbing. […] In the halfway point of the estuary in which deep the temple raises, the sun describes its trajectory towards the twilight; and in the midsummer heat, its solar disc at evening melts with the earth in the very axis of the building itself" (pp. 192-193).

The experience of the Orient as an architectural influence

The travels as well as the readings, some experiences and the influence of other architects and artists are essential for Le Corbusier's formation as an architect because they complete and even replace the formal instruction.[19] To a great extent, his architectural work shows the knowledge that his initiation travels and youth readings provided him with. By means of symbolic analogies he recovers, in his following creations, the memories and annotations of his travels and visits to the emblematic places of architecture and he incorporates some historical references.[20]

In this case the historical analysis of architecture is not only the simple study of antecedents but it pretends to serve as a basis for the creation of an architecture that adapts itself to modern postulates and generates new theories.[21] It is known as *Zeitgeist* or

[18] Fernández Cabaleiro, "Le Corbusier...", *op. cit.*, p. 569.
[19] Salazar González, "Barragán...", *op. cit.*, p. 78.
[20] Already from the nineteenth century, the architecture theoreticians, as Durand, in his work *Recueil et parallèle des edifices de tout genre* (1800), proclaimed that imitation was not the proper method of architecture but this must be based on suitability and economy. In 1850 Reynaud, in *Traité d'architecture,* basing himself in the principle of no imitation suggests that the mimesis must be based on the feeling that shapes expresses but never in the shapes themselves as Le Corbusier will do in his first stage. *Cfr.* Salazar González, "Barragán...", *op. cit.*, p. 56.
[21] Zaparaín Hernández, *Le Corbusier..., op. cit.*, p. 107.

BDD-A2925 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-13 14:56:10 UTC)

'age spirit'; that is to say that to each historical moment matches a determinate artistic and architectural style that must be correctly interpreted and assimilated in the construction of every building in order to avoid the revivals.

The Acropolis is of interest as long as it can be seen from the modernity. In this way Le Corbusier was inspired by the location of the Parthenon, dominating the landscape from above to decide the place and design of Ronchamp chapel (1958); whereas annexe chapels are an iconic analogy of Catalonian chapel he visited in 1928 and he had drawn a sketch of it. In 1956 in order to design the Shodam house, in Ahmadabad, Le Corbusier appeals to Florentine palaces he visited during his travel across Mediterranean Europe, especially to Guadagni palace (1490) of which loggias and Venetians he now adopts as a protection against a hot climate. In projecting residential houses, as the Savoie Ville or the Schwob Ville –also known as the 'Turkish Ville'–, Le Corbusier refers to Italian villas designed by Palladio, securing a natural environment without adjoining, planning the building as a sculptural unity in the landscape.[22]

Throughout his travel Le Corbusier admires the architecture in its relation with the environment and tries to understand the ways of life generated by this relation.[23] *"The place is the text in the architectural composition […] in the travel (1911) […] I found the architecture established in its place. And more than that the architecture expressed the place –speech and eloquence of man as lord of places […] you can make to come in our houses […] from the inside, your architectural work will join together with the place. But from the outside, it will make up".*[24]

In his famous "five points for a new architecture" (1926), that defined the general proprieties of the functionalist building, Le Corbusier would develop, among others, the concept of relation between construction and landscape. Following these principles the building must rise on the terrain by *pilotis* and thus it got spatial continuity and free circulation; the *cover* is converted into *terrace,* which restores the union between the building and the surrounding landscape; the *endless window* opens the inner space and puts it in touch with the outside nature.[25]

In the classical architecture Le Corbusier recognises constant structures or universal patterns that he will take as a starting point to establish analogies in the design of his buildings. These analogies are neither stylistic nor based in the shape or on the ornamentation, but that they start from those permanent values which the architect finds in the great architectural works from Antiquity.

[22] Salazar González, "Barragán...", *op. cit.*, p. 64.
[23] *Ibíd.*, p. 75.
[24] Le Corbusier, *Mensaje a los estudiantes de arquitectura,* Buenos Aires, Ediciones Infinito, 1993, pp. 29-30.
[25] Norberg-Schulz, *Arquitectura occidental, op. cit.*, p. 190. Le Corbusier applied these principles in his most important works by the end of 1920' what determines his general architectural character: the suburb of Weissenhof (1927), The Palace of Nations in Geneve (1927-1928), The Savoir Villa in Poissy (1928-1929), The Swiss Pavilion in Paris (1930-1932).

BDD-A2925 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-13 14:56:10 UTC)

Le Corbusier was a member of the Modern Movement that aimed to create an international architecture, a work of art of universal value.[26] Because of that the architect starts from these intuitively constant patterns of the classical architecture in order to find a unique model or type. This search, in the case of Le Corbusier, tended to the standardization, supported by prefabrication and influenced by the principles of industrialization, low cost, efficiency and a bigger volume of production.[27]

His Citrohan house (1922) was the starting point of lengthy search for a standard housing, a process that culminated with the Marseille unity of habitation.[28] In the framework of machinist civilization Le Corbusier describes life of inhabitants of his projects, families-type who reside in *machines of inhabiting* putting up with depersonalization and standardization. The new housing, the *machine for inhabiting,* includes and even determines all possibilities of modern life.

"Within art scope this depersonalization was translated into a taking of position by the Modern Movement for the object, the objective, the abstract, the objectionable, the shape without any kind of significance or relation with the external reality. We are in the presence of the object autonomy in relation with the subject. In fact we can distinguish the progressive abandonment of the human elements in art, of everything of subjective or transcendental may be in it. At the first moment whatever could only seem an aesthetical option on art and style carried out to a complete conception of man and his behaviours".[29]

Le Corbusier identifies the depersonalized man with the artisan that acquires importance as opposed to the unique and personal artist. The work of art must not already pursue a platonic ideal of absolute beauty but it converts into another object-type. As it is already seen during his travel through the East, Jeanneret looked avidly for the pieces of craftsmanship, *"remains charged of history and idiosyncrasy of people who produced them"* but, at the same time, as the result of an anonymous production based on the application of standardization criteria. The artisan with his mass production becomes the motor for the society from the perspective of community.[30] This idea will end in the creation of Le Corbusier's objects-type that should be used by the families-type into the *machines for inhabiting.*

Conclusion

As we have seen before, the initiation adventure of Charles-Édouard Jeanneret across the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe, his experiences, memories, notes and

[26] The objective of Modern Movement was to create an international architecture of a model unique. This idea of architectural autonomy facing the various and conditioning reality of context breaks with the historical memory and proclaims the function and utility as the only legitimate ways to generate the shape. *Cfr.* Zaparaín Hernández, *Le Corbusie...r, op. cit.*, p. 14.
[27] Salazar González, "Barragán...", *op. cit.*, p. 62.
[28] Norberg-Schulz, *Arquitectura occidental, op. cit.*, p. 190.
[29] Zaparaín Hernández, *Le Corbusier..., op. cit.*, p. 63.
[30] *"In the inter-war period it emerges the taylorization Le Corbusier will be captivated by. The assembly lines of Ford factory in Detroit will become a point of reference of what might be the new artistic production, a precise repetition of objects-type, the art of objects of common use, open to all people, an anonymous art but a collective one"*. Zaparaín Hernández, *Le Corbusier..., op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

BDD-A2925 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-13 14:56:10 UTC)

sketches suppose an important baggage that will come to the surface in his following creations. In that way, by travelling towards the origins of the Western civilization, he finds the starting point for the creation of a modern architecture based on the analogies and the re-reading of the universal patterns guessed in the classic art.

Bibliography

Cohen, Jean-Louis, *Le Corbusier,* Madrid, Taschen, 2007.

Fernández Cabaleiro, Begoña, "Le Corbusier: una arquitectura para el hombre", in *Espacio, Tiempo y forma, Serie VII. Historia del Arte,* vol. 13, Madrid, UNED, 2000, pp. 567-577.

Le Corbusier, *El viaje a Oriente,* Barcelona, Laertes, 2005.

Le Corbusier, *Mensaje a los estudiantes de arquitectura,* Buenos Aires, Ediciones Infinito, 1993.

Le Corbusier, *Towards an Architecture,* translated by John Goodman, London, Paul Getty Trust, 2007.

Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture,* Paris, Les Éditions G. Crés, 1924.

Norberg-Schulz, Christian, *Arquitectura Occidental,* Barcelona, Gustavo Gili, 2004.

Redford, Bruce, *Venice & the Grand Tour,* New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1996.

Salazar González, Guadalupe, "Barragán y Le Corbusier, dos caminos y lugares de encuentro", in *El proceso creativo: XXVI Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte,* edited by Alberto Dallal, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2006, pp. 47-89.

Zaparaín Hernández, Fernando, *Le Corbusier: artista-héroe y hombre-tipo,* Valladolid, Secretariado de Publicaciones, Universidad de Valladolid, 1997.

BDD-A2925 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-13 14:56:10 UTC)