

Atlas

Architectures of the 21st Century

Africa and Middle East

THIS ATLAS is the third volume of a series of four which update and substantially develop the work published in 2007 by the BBVA Foundation, *Atlas. Global Architecture circa 2000*. The initial project dealt in a single volume with the architecture of the planet at the threshold of the millennium, and aimed to take stock of the most important works completed after the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, an event that marked the end of the Cold War and also the end of the ‘short 20th century’ that began in 1914 with World War I. With the perhaps too ambitious purpose of reflecting at the same time the ‘state of the world’ and the ‘state of the art’, the book combined what Franco Moretti calls ‘distant reading’, through ten long essays by experts on the different regions of the globe, with the ‘close reading’ provided by the detailed documentation on the most noteworthy buildings of the period, grouped into the same geographical areas. Inspired by the conceptual history of Reinhart Koselleck, this collective project tried to offer a broad panoramic account of the recent past through something like a convergence of stories, tightly interwoven to create a tapestry where all the main currents that shape our time are combined with the distinctive features of the regions and the singularity of events, so that the smooth continuity of patterns becomes the weft that ties together the changes, innovations and events that alter the course of history.

The positive reception of the first project encouraged the BBVA Foundation to take on an even more ambitious endeavor: documenting with four volumes, published in consecutive years, the latest architecture of the different continents. With the same intellectual coordinates and publishing characteristics as the previous edition, this project has several new features, beyond the very obvious one of multiplying the extension by four and the less evident one of increasing the works published per volume to almost double the initial number. In the first place, it only covers works completed very recently, transforming the broad historical balance of the first book into an attempt to register the realities of the present; with a similar purpose, it includes unbuilt projects, extending its reach to an immediate future; lastly, it eliminates the restrictions of the first *Atlas*, which only featured three works per region and one building per office (compelled by the synthetic nature of the account), so allowing the most significant countries and the architects with greater international presence to assert their dimension and influence. The result, as can be seen in this volume, are publications less stringently modulated than the initial *Atlas*: while maintaining the division of each book into ten geographical chapters, the extension of the essays and the number of featured works and projects are commensurate with the relevance of the region in question.

Dividing the planet into four areas necessarily called for a continental criterion, though somehow modified to make the volumes even in extension. The insufficient demographic size of Oceania was solved by adding the Pacific to the Asian continent; the two (or three) Americas are dealt with in a single volume; the smaller economic scale of Africa was made up for with the inclusion of the Middle East; and Europe includes the Russian territories in Asia. Hence, the first volume, *Asia and Pacific*, took off in the territory of ‘The Great Game’ and traveled through the continent all the way to the ocean; the second volume of the series, *America*, explored it from the Arctic to the Southern Cone; the third volume, *Africa and Middle East*, goes from Southern Africa to the Bosphorus; and the fourth and last, *Europe*, will start the itinerary in Russia to conclude it at the *finis terrae* of the Iberian Peninsula. This volume covers the third stage of the journey, with an architectural tour through lands that still bear the imprint of European colonialism or the Ottoman Empire; where independence has produced bittersweet fruits, as much in Sub-Saharan Africa as in the Islamic world, now in very deep turmoil; where extreme inequality is usually more related to oil reserves than to endogenous development; and where extraordinary building cultures, whether historical or vernacular, compete in disadvantage with the standardizing forces of globalization.