



THE SPACE OF THE SPIRIT

an architectural trip through spirituality

Matteo Losurdo
m.835081

supervisor:
Mauro Galantino

(Co-)Advisors:
Giovanni Tomaso Muzio,
Esther Grabiner (Tel Aviv University),
Marco Trisciuglio (Politecnico di Torino)

a.y. 2016 _ 2017
Politecnico di Milano
Scuola di Architettura Urbanistica e
Ingegneria delle Costruzioni
Architecture

THE SPACE OF THE SPIRIT

an architectural trip through spirituality

Matteo Losurdo
m.835081

supervisor:
Mauro Galantino

(Co-)Advisors:
Giovanni Tomaso Muzio,
Esther Grabiner (Tel Aviv University),
Marco Trisciuglio (Politecnico di Torino)

a.y. 2016 _ 2017
Politecnico di Milano
Scuola di Architettura Urbanistica e
Ingegneria delle Costruzioni
Architecture

INDEX

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.A _ THE PROJECT P. 4

1.B _ THE SITE (ABU TOR) P. 8

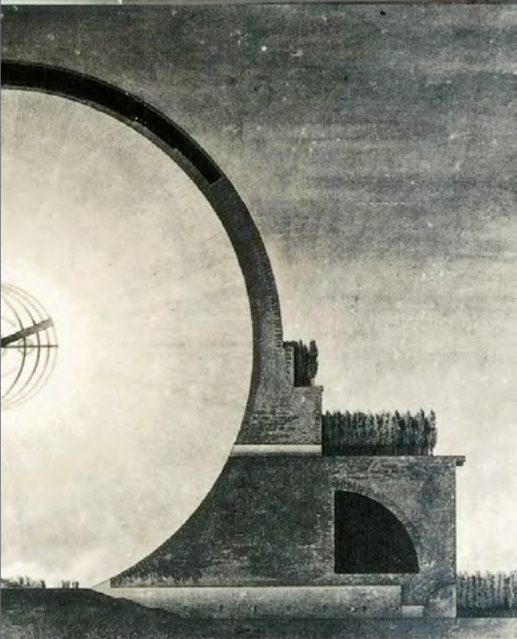
CHAPTER 2

THE SPACE OF THE SPIRIT PROJECT P. 26

INDEX OF IMAGES

01. *Monument to the Negev Brigade*, 2017. Be'er Sheva, Israel (p.5)
02. *Concept (path-room)*, nov. 2016 (p.7)
03. David Roberts R.A., *Jerusalem from the South*, (Hinnom and Kidron Valleys) 1839 (p.9)
04. *The project site (viewed from Mount Zion, north)* (p.10)
05. *Mount Zion (viewed from the project site)* (p.11)
06. *The cliff above Hinnom Valley (viewed towards Silwan, east)* (p.12)
07. *Ancient tombs dug into the cliffs* (p.13)
08. *Project site ground topography, looking towards north-east* (p.13)
09. *Location of the neighbourhood in Jerusalem* (p.16)
10. *Location of the site and relation with the Green Line* (p.17)
- 11-12. *Aerial and satellite view of the project site* (p.18-19)
13. *Comparison of the project's site extension with the ones of other sites analyzed during the research* (p.21)
14. *Overview of the project site (sketch)*, oct. 2016 (p.22)
15. *Overview of the project (axonometric projection from north-east)* (p.27)
16. *Storyboard of the Space of the Spirit* (p.29-31, 35, 39, 42-43, 47, 50-51,54-57, 60-61)
17. *Gate (interior view)* (p.32)
18. *Gate (plan and section)* (p.33)
19. *Skyspace (interior view)* (p.36)
20. *Skyspace (plan and section)* (p.37)
21. *Cave (interior view)* (p.40)
22. *Cave (plan and section)* (p.41)
23. *Earth, Man, Sky (interior view)* (p.44)
24. *Earth, Man, Sky (plan and section)* (p.45)
25. *Floating (interior view)* (p.48)

25. *Floating (plan and section)* (p.49)
26. *Silence and Light (interior view)* (p.52)
27. *Silence and Light (plan and section)* (p.53)
28. *Globe Gate (interior view)* (p.58)
29. *Globe Gate (plan and section)* (p.59)
30. *Overview of the project (plan)* (p.63)
31. *Overview of the project (sections)* (p.64-65)
32. *The project of the Space of the Spirit (plan)* (p.67)



CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.A _ THE PROJECT

1.B _ THE SITE (ABU TOR)

1.A _ THE PROJECT

“Accadrà mai che il cielo un giorno
sbuffando di rabbia gridi:
No, non c'è speranza in me, non sono il cielo.”

Adonis¹

The project of the Space of the Spirit has been developed in parallel with the research, translating into spatial forms the principles that, step by step, emerged from it. As suggested by the conclusions of the research², the forms used are very elementary and simple in themselves but combined in a complex level of interactions.

This principles led to the development of a project that works on two levels. Few “rooms” provide a complete isolation from the context, a feeling of estrangement, in order to find a moment of pause and reflection. The path that connect these spaces is, on the other hand, completely influenced by the natural shape and elements of the context, and the visual relations with some urban landmarks. This path is developed between the two main accesses to the site and it is well defined and directed by the architectural elements. At the same time it does not limit the visitor, that has the possibility, in every moment, to explore a different way to move into the site and between the elements.

In this path, the architecture follows the natural peculiar topography of the site, intervening only to make the movement inside it more comfortable. The natural inclination of the site, in fact, makes the movement inside it not always easy. Few simple staircases have been added to overcome natural obstacles.

In the search for an architecture that appears elementary and “intelligible”, re-evoking the thought of Dom Hans Van der Laan³, the project adopts only one main orientation. This is the north-east to south-west axis that cross the site, connecting the lower and upper parts. This axis is perpendicular to the natural cliffs that the site present above the underneath valley, similar to the way in which all the building around are located, directly facing the valley itself. Transversal paths intersect perpendicularly with the main movement along the axis, leading to some parts of the projects.

Maintaining the same orientation for all the elements permits to appreciate

01. *Monument to the Negev Brigade*, 2017. Be'er Sheva, Israel



the differences in the way the natural light enters each element. Moreover this links the orientation of the project with the cardinal directions, relating the spaces with the sun movement, creating a connection to a wider natural order, as suggested by Eliade⁴.

The elementary shapes used are aimed to suggest and enforce the way in which the space is meant to be used. Following once more the ideas of Dom Hans van der Laan, three positions characterised the spatial experience: standing, sitting and laying. Spaces of transit have a clear directionality and “elongated” shapes, while places in which the visitor is invited to sit down and take a break are square and elements in which it is suggested to lay down and look at the vault use round shapes.

Also the use of materials underlines in a simple way the same concepts expressed thus far. The different shapes of the elements are “connected” and gathered together by the use of the Jerusalem’s stone for the exterior. As already mentioned⁵, this material is required by the municipal rules for the façades of all the buildings of the city, but becomes in this project the tool to give a clear unity to the different free-standing elements. Following then the thoughts of Kandinsky⁶, in the interiors colour is used to enforce the three spatial experiences. A orange stucco finishing marks the transit spaces, suggesting a dynamic movement directed out of the space itself. The elements in which the visitor sits, are left in the neutral standing colour of the exposed concrete, while a blue stucco finishing is applied to the elements in which the visitor is invited to lay, evoking a deep centripetal atmosphere. There is, on purpose, only one exception to these rules, represented by an element, in the middle part of the path. It is the most evident landmark in the project and can be reach from all the directions independently. Its irregular conic shape is built in exposed concrete and the visitor stands inside, even if it is not a “transit” space, to have the possibility to relate himself with the deepest infinite of the earth and the deepest infinite of the sky.

This is a project of a “Luna Park of the Spirit”, where the physical experience of the spatial atmosphere tries to express the “spiritual” need of pause, of reflection of the contemporary human beings. It is meant as a game, as suggested at the end of the research⁷, in which the visitor, accepting to enter its rules, carry out a first fundamental act of reducing his control over perception and, indirectly, over his defined identity, starting point for the seek of universal values, that are the base of this thesis.



1.B _ THE SITE (ABU TOR)

The site selected for the project is located in a central area of the city of Jerusalem, in the northern part of the neighbourhood of Abu Tor, south from the Old City.

The selection of this place occurred after a survey in August 2016 of the areas along the Green Line, that divided the city in two between 1949 and 1967. Even if almost completely erased from the urban fabric of Jerusalem, also due to specific architectural projects that “covered” the scar, the Green Line nowadays still represents in many parts the border between Jewish and Arab neighbourhoods. In fact the denominations “East” and “West” Jerusalem are commonly used and denote two different parts of the city, in terms of population, cultures and life conditions. Placing the project along this line would thus represent the possibility of an easy access from all the different groups that inhabit this city, as well as a reflection on the urban condition of Jerusalem.

The choice of Abu Tor took place for its central position, easily reachable from any point of the city, and for the fact that it is considered a mixed neighbourhood (one of the very few in Jerusalem) of 15500 inhabitants, both Jews and Arab. Despite this definition, today the reality is that it is not a compact and homogeneous area and the division of 1949 still affects Abu Tor. The western part of the neighbourhood (the first four streets parallel to Hebron road) is inhabited by Jewish tenants, the eastern one by Arabs. Before 1949 the neighbourhood was actually a mixed one and was considered well off, composed by upper-class as well as working-class families of all faiths, that started to move here in the last decades of 19th century.

The conditions of the eastern part are very poor, as highlighted by the report done in 2013 by Bimkom⁸, an Israeli not-for-profit planning organization, and the density much higher than in the western part, as immediately visible from a satellite view. These conditions are also the result of the impossibility of expansion of the eastern part, limited on the north by the Jerusalem Walls National Park, on the east by the Silwan neighbourhood (similar in density and conditions), on the south by the Peace Forest in the Yasool Valley. In this last area, starting from 1967, a not authorized neighbourhood (Wadi Yasool) began to rise, in order to alleviate the density of Abu Tor⁹. Nowadays the Israel National Parks Authority



03. David
Roberts R.A.,
*Jerusalem from
the South,*
(Hinnom and
Kidron Valleys)
1839

(INPA) intends to expand the National Park surrounding the Old City walls, at Abu Tor's expense, including also the area of the Haqel Dama Church, placed on the cliff above the Hinnom Valley¹⁰. This expansion is suggested despite the fact that a steep cliff separates the valley from the homes, making the added part completely disconnected from the rest of the National Park.

The situation is therefore complex and difficult and the neighbourhood, even if reunified in 1967, is still affected by a strong mark and strong differences. In the moments of major tension between Jews and Arabs, Abu Tor registers riots, clashes and violent episodes¹¹. On the other side it represents an important occasion of meeting, as the movement inside the area is free, and the project can get benefit from the presence of different cultures and groups in such a close way. The specific project site selected is on the "border" between the two parts, right next to the "no man's land" zone of the 1949 partition plan.

THE PROJECT SITE

The site measures about 6600m² and it is easily accessible from the neighbourhood itself, as well as from the city centre and the Old City, and from





04. *The project site (viewed from Mount Zion, north)*

05. *Mount Zion (viewed from the project site)*

East Jerusalem. It is placed on a cliff above the Jerusalem Walls National Park (Hinnom Valley). The Old City is on the other side of the valley but not completely visible, in an interesting relation of proximity and concealment.

Both West and East Jerusalem are clearly visible, as well as many landmarks of the city, such as the Mount of Olives and Mount Zion.

The access to the site from Abu Tor (southern access) takes place through Hamefaked street, one of the very few that links both the two parts of the neighbourhood with Hebron road, the main connection with the city centre. A rounded ramp represents already the possibility to enter the site and has provided a clear indication to the project.

On the north-east corner of the site there is a connection to Gay Ben Hinom street, an important link between the centre of the city and East Jerusalem (Silwan in particular). This connection is a trail that leads to Hebron road and the area occupied by the Mount Zion Hotel and the Cinemateque (film library). On this trail there is a large gate, that naturally provided a second main access in the design of project.

The site has a complex topography, with many levels and rock masses, with a



06. *The cliff above Hinnom Valley (viewed towards Silwan, east)*

07. *Ancient tombs dug into the cliffs*

08. *Project site ground topography, looking towards north-east*

difference in height of 27 meters between the lower part (north) and the higher one (south). The area is completely empty, except for the present of a small old Jewish cemetery in the north-west corner. The cemetery (and the site through it) has two gated accesses, one pedestrian and one for vehicles. Ancient tombs (dated back at least to 1000 B.C.¹²) are present in the cliffs that separate the site from the Hinnom Valley, excavated in the rock.

Above the site, in the parking area that connect the site with Abu Tor itself, in 1987 was built the Abu Tor Observatory¹³. It is a not covered light structure that mark a panoramic viewpoint but it is very not used, due to lack of sitting places and shadow, and poor maintainance.

From the Observatory a pedestrian path with many steps links to the mentioned trail, that forms the northern boundary of the site. The trail has a very interesting structure made by rocks, trees and walls in Jerusalem's stone.

The position in the city and the natural characteristic of this place, with its inclination, levels, complexity, movement inside, made it a very suitable site for the project of the Space of the Spirit.



NOTES

- 1 Would ever happen that the sky one day
 grumbling into rage will cry out:
 No, there is no hope in me, I am not the sky.
 Adonis, *Concerto Per Gerusalemme* (Bagno a Ripoli: Passigli, 2014), 28.
- 2 See chapter 5.A and 5.B of the other book
- 3 Derives from these thought also the fact that the “room” elements are
 well defined and enclosed, following the idea that architecture should represent
 something perceived immediately as different from the natural environment.
 (see chapter 2.C of the other book). Similar considerations have been done by
 Mircea Eliade, dealing with the sacred space (see chapter 2.B)
- 4 See chapter 2.B
- 5 See chapter 4.A of the other book
- 6 See chapter 3.C of the other book
- 7 See chapter 5.B of the other book
- 8 Bimkom, "Abu-Thor," in *Survey of Palestinian Neighborhoods in East
 Jerusalem*, 2013).
- 9 Ibid..
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Naomi Zeveloff, "Sex, Molotov Cocktails and a Roof that Doesn't
 Leak in Jerusalem's Restive Mixed Neighborhood," *Forward* (09/11, 2014),
 07/11/2016. [http://forward.com/news/208845/sex-molotov-cocktails-and-a-
 roof-that-doesnt-leak/](http://forward.com/news/208845/sex-molotov-cocktails-and-a-roof-that-doesnt-leak/).
- 12 See the historical maps in the appendix B of the other book
- 13 This information is provided by few plates located in the site.



09. Location of the neighbourhood in Jerusalem

10. Location of the site and relation with the Green Line

pages 18-19
11-12. Aerial and satellite view of the project site

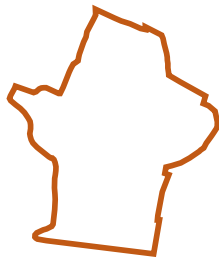








Haram al-sharif / Temple Mount
(Dome of the Rock compound)



project site in Abu Tor



Ethiopian Ortodox Church
(Däbrä Gännät monastery)

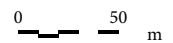


Chapel of the Ascension complex



Church of the Resurrection
(Monastery of St. Mary of the Resurrection)

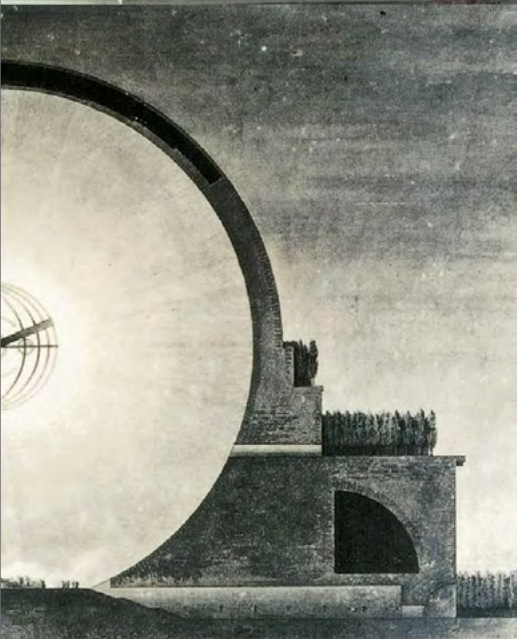
13. Comparison of the project's site extension with the ones of other sites analyzed during the research



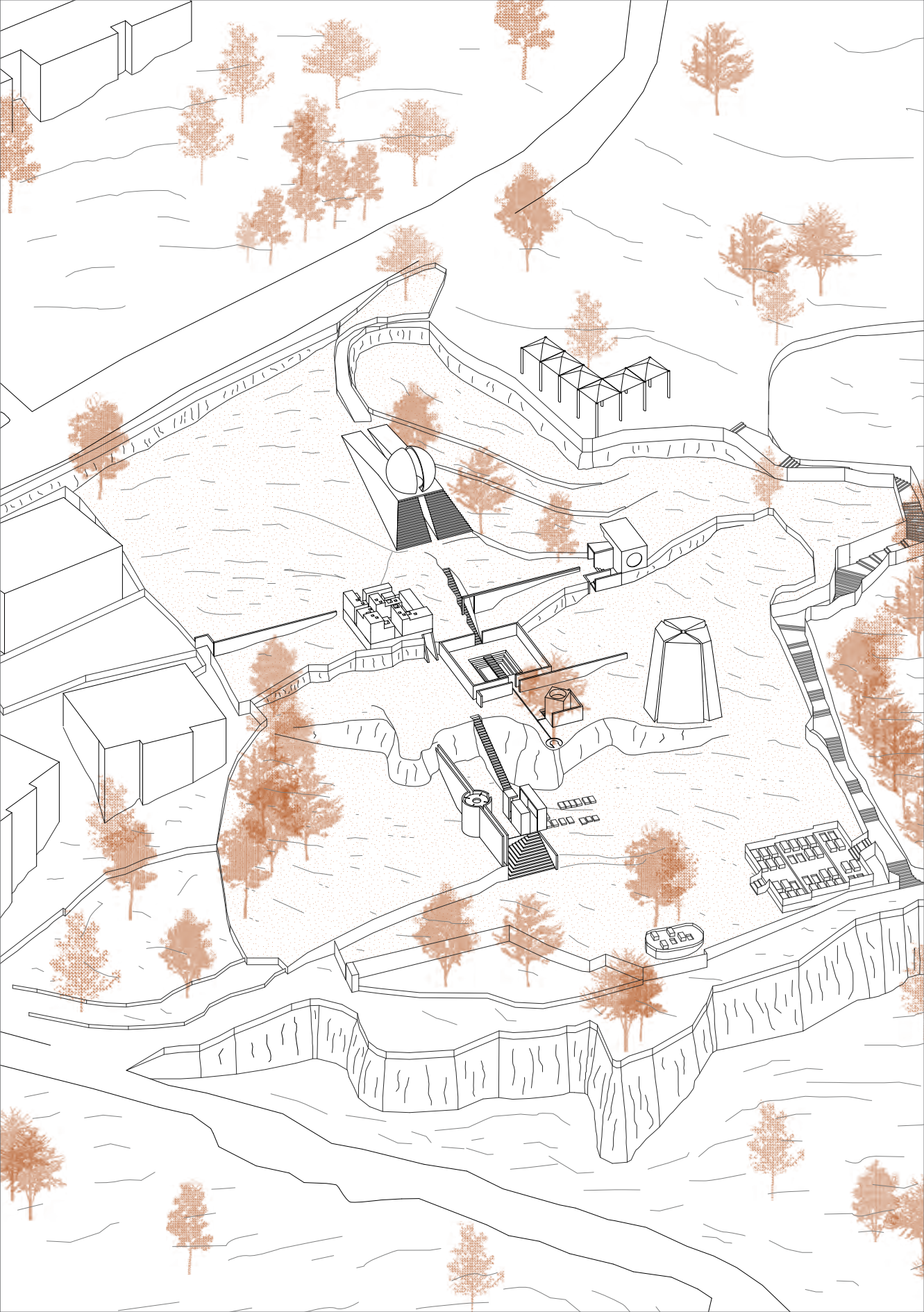


14. Overview of the project site (sketch), oct. 2016



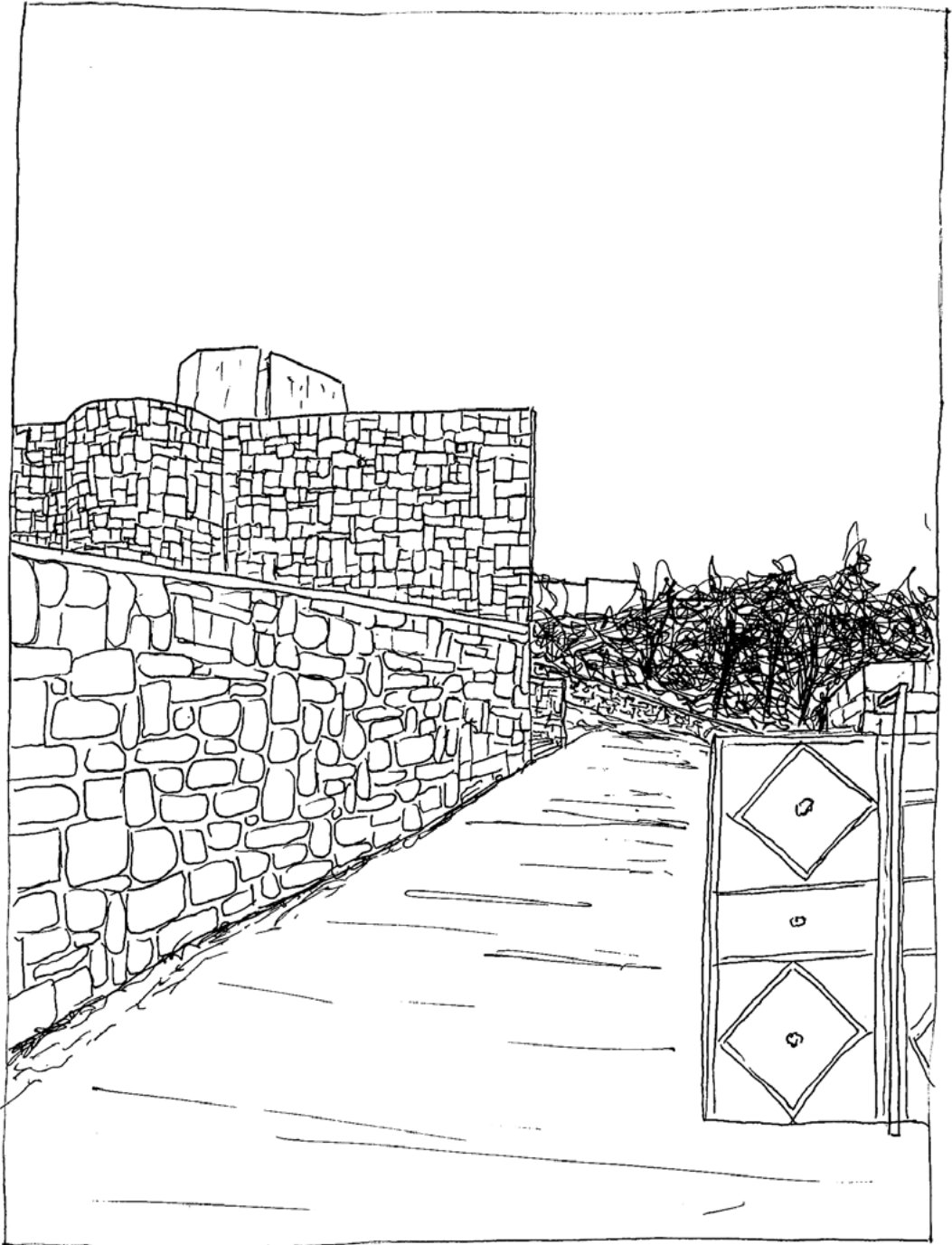


CHAPTER 2
THE PROJECT

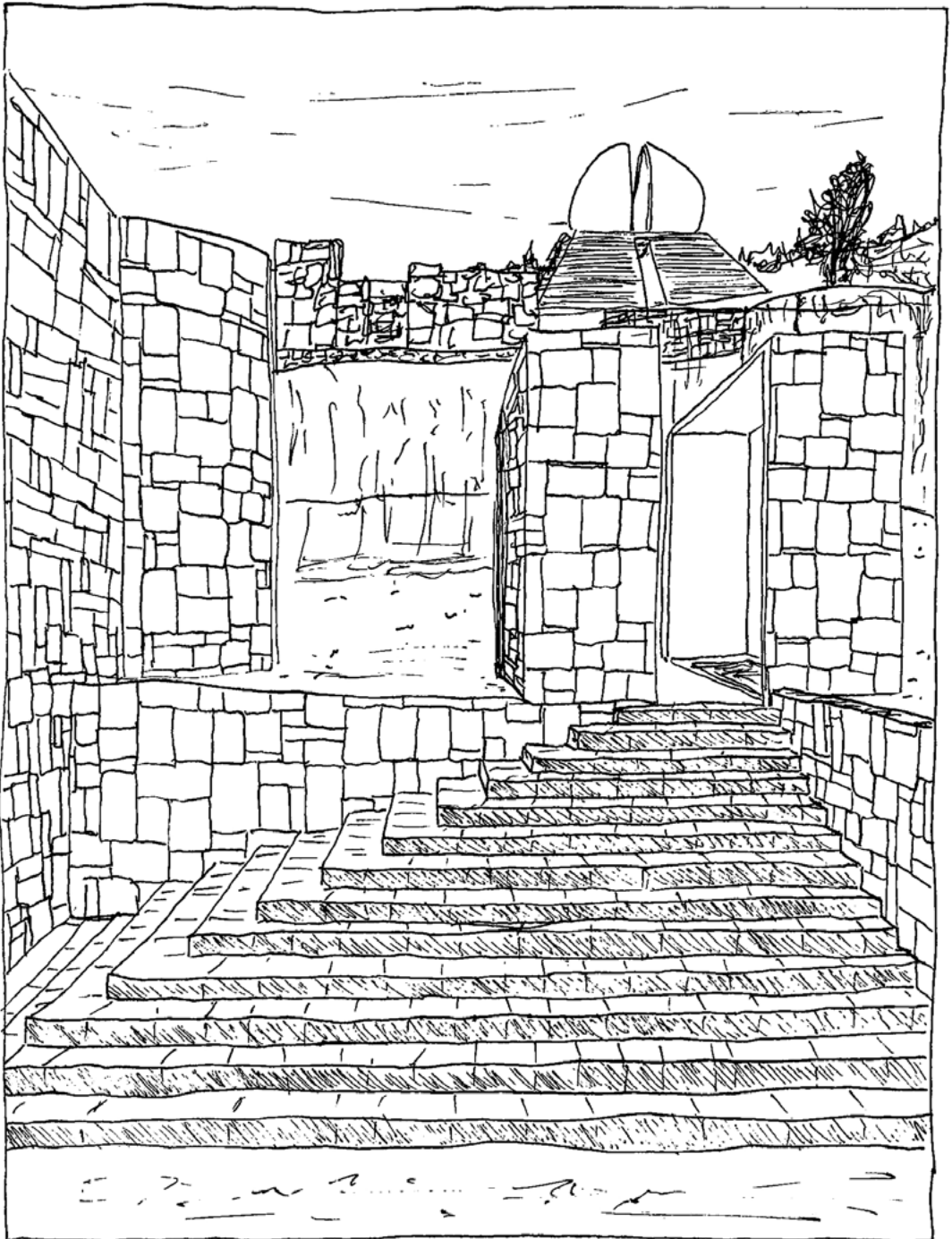




Climbing the slope from the Hinnom Valley, an old gate appears open, proposing to follow the ramp and enter the project site...

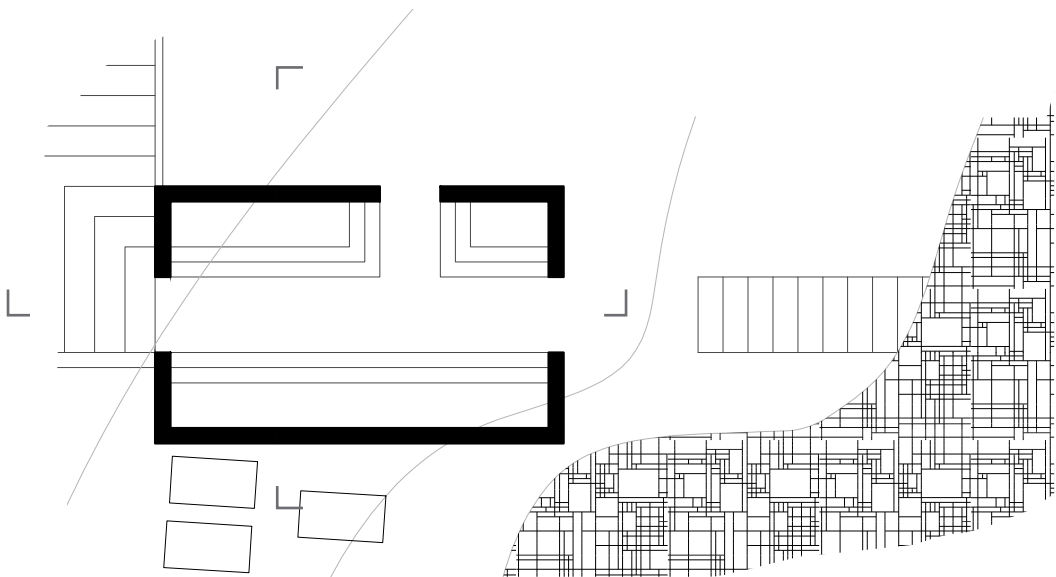
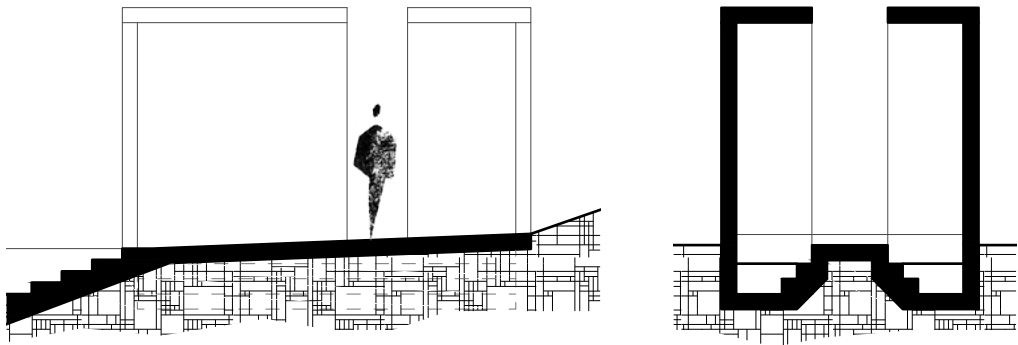


A tall wall in Jerusalem's stone reveals the presence of the first elements and a staircase invites to turn and to start to climb inside the project...



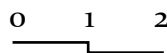
The first two elements are now clearly visible, with an orange invitation to pass through the gate, while in the background the extension of the site starts to appear to us...

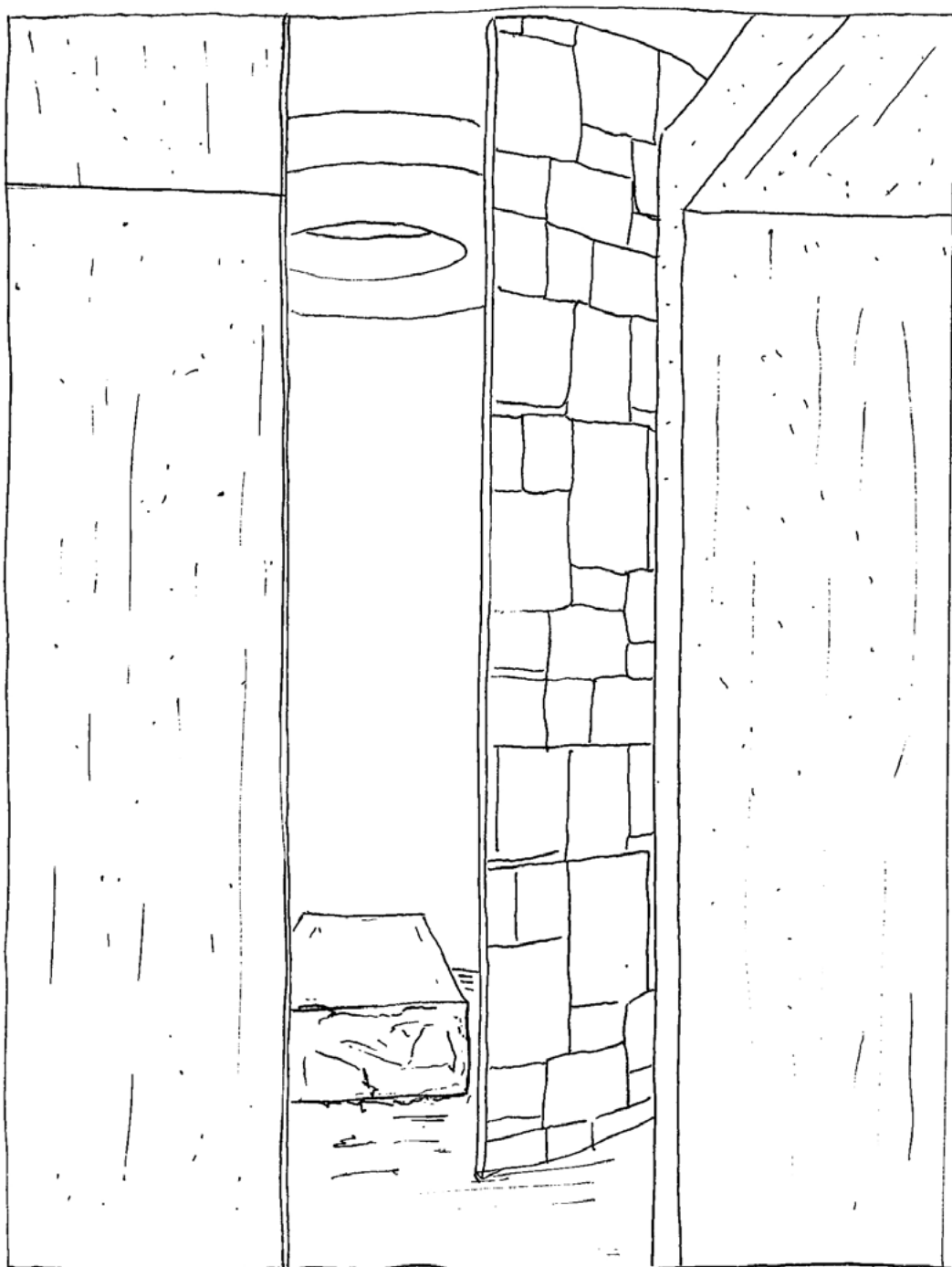




GATE

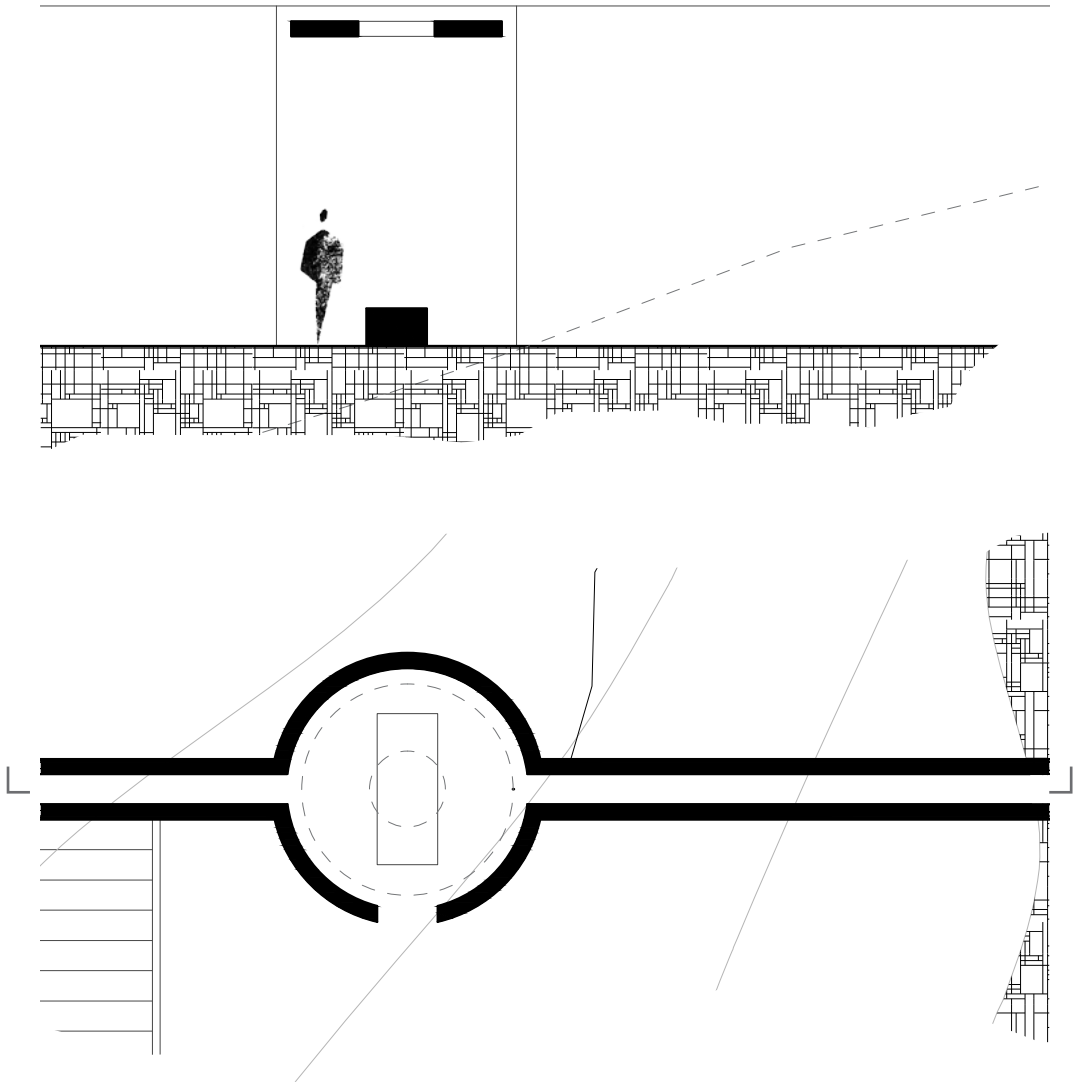
An open “gate” that marks the beginning of the project. The directions are suggested by the floor and the roof, symmetric, that invite to continue straight towards a long staircase, but show also a secondary way, towards the Skyspace.





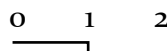
As in the city gates, there is always a secondary direction, turning left, we are invited to lay down towards the sky...

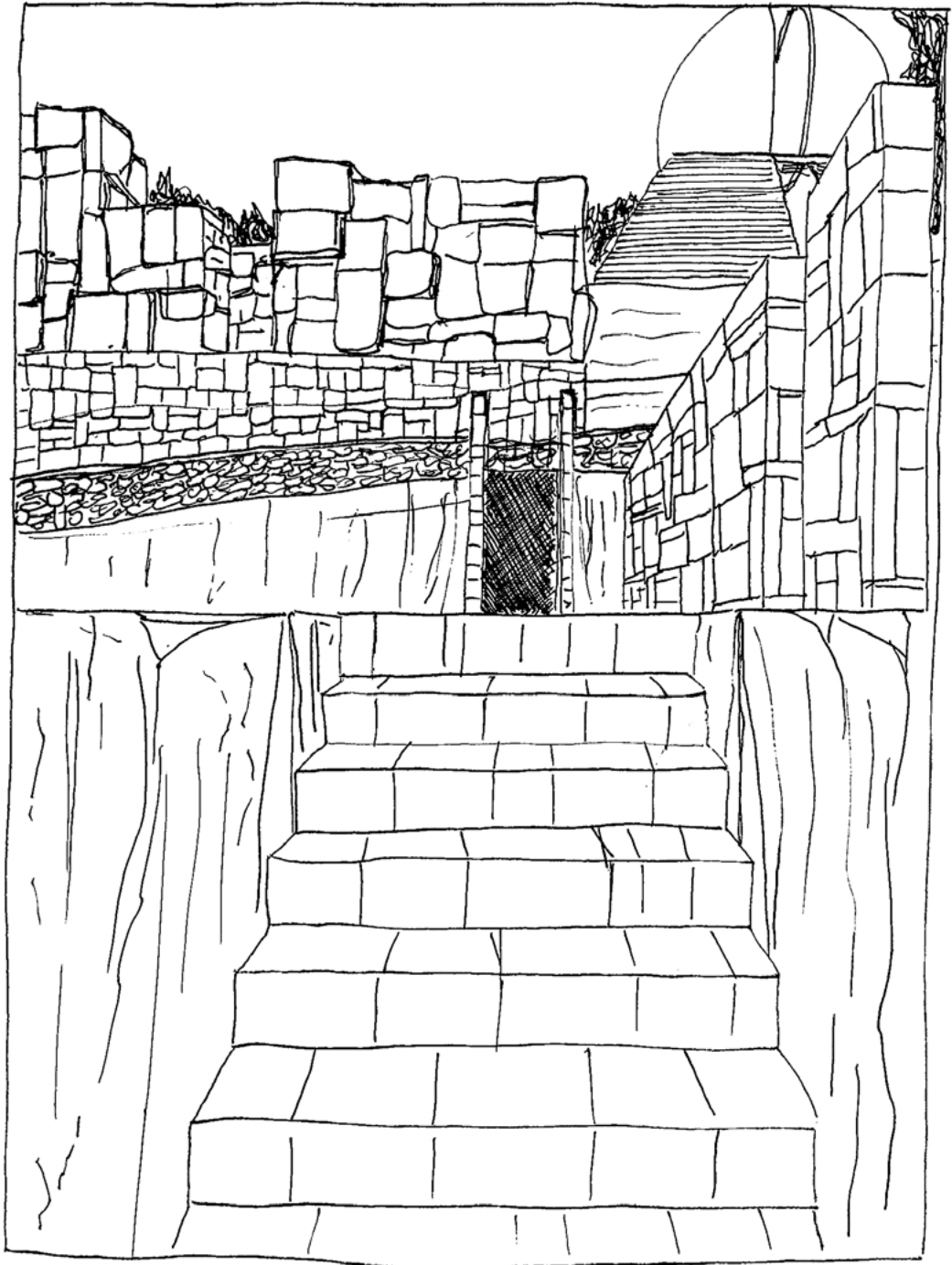




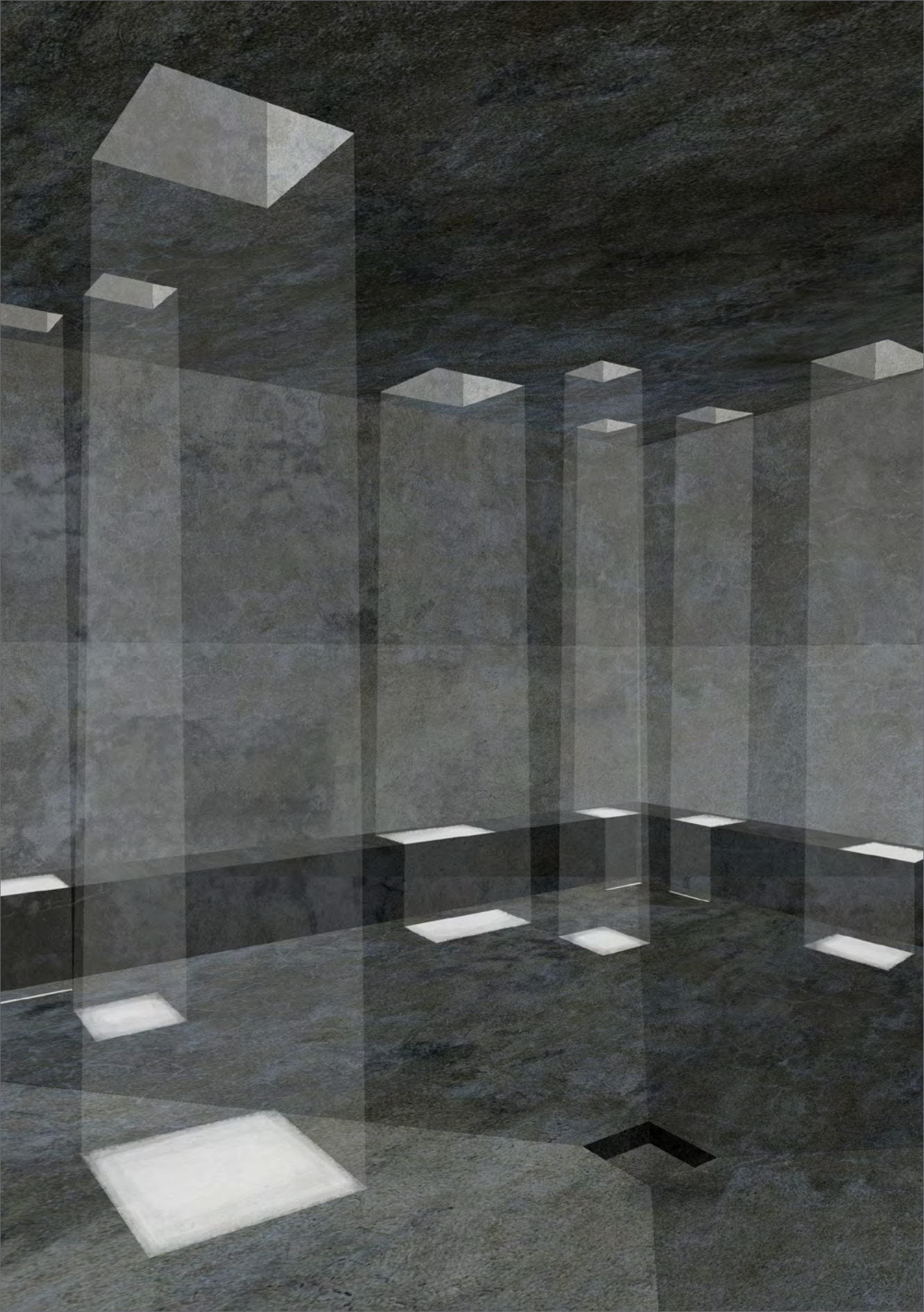
SKYSPACE

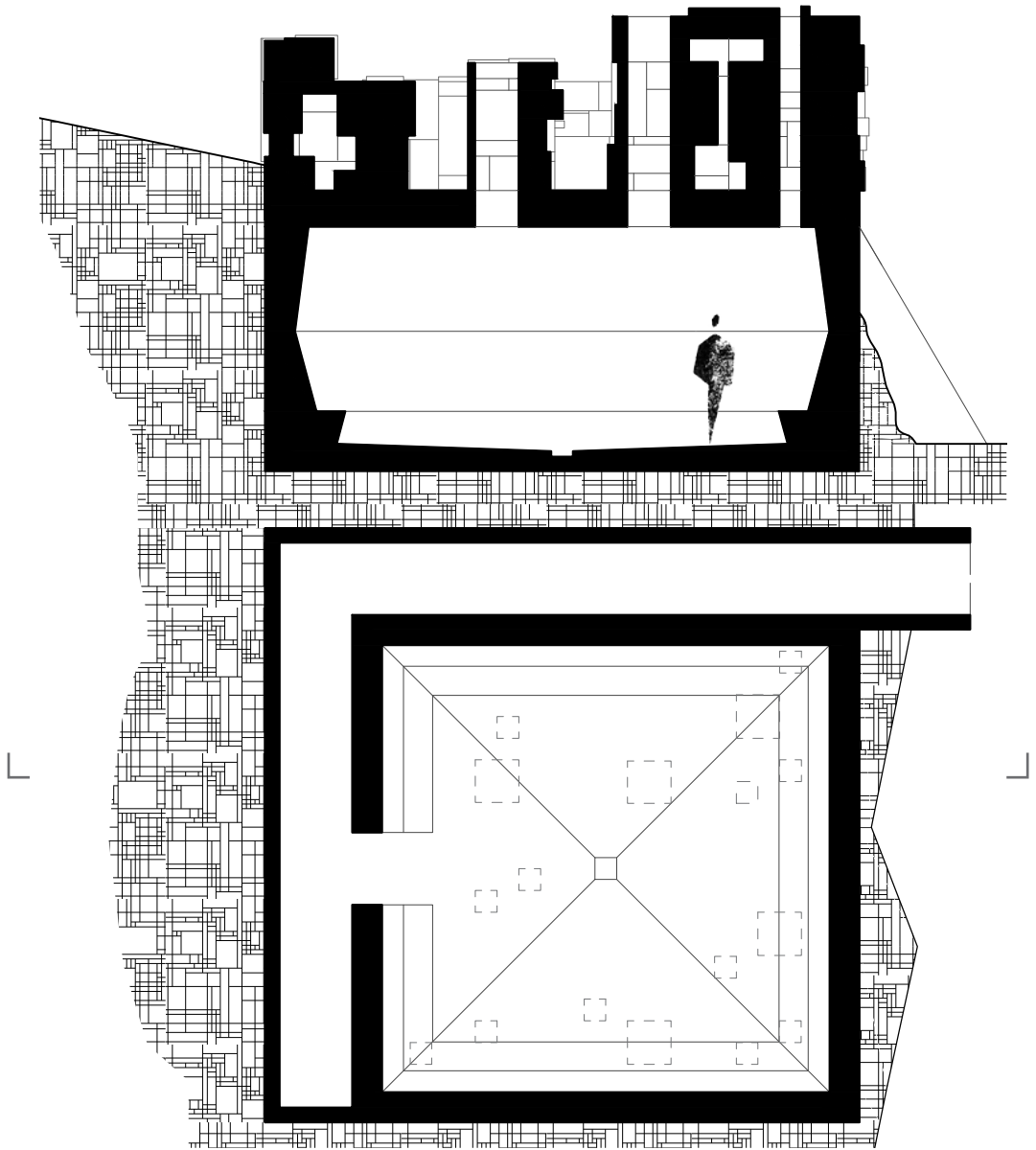
A cylinder in which it is suggested to lay down on the stone “altar” to look at the sky from a round opening in the suspended roof. The closed shape of the cylinder is broken by two long and narrow “corridors”, creating a space that is well defined but at the same time open.





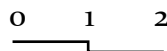
Back to the main direction, a long staircase leads to a dark hole, attracting us inside the cliff, while above, masses of rocks are piled in weird shapes...

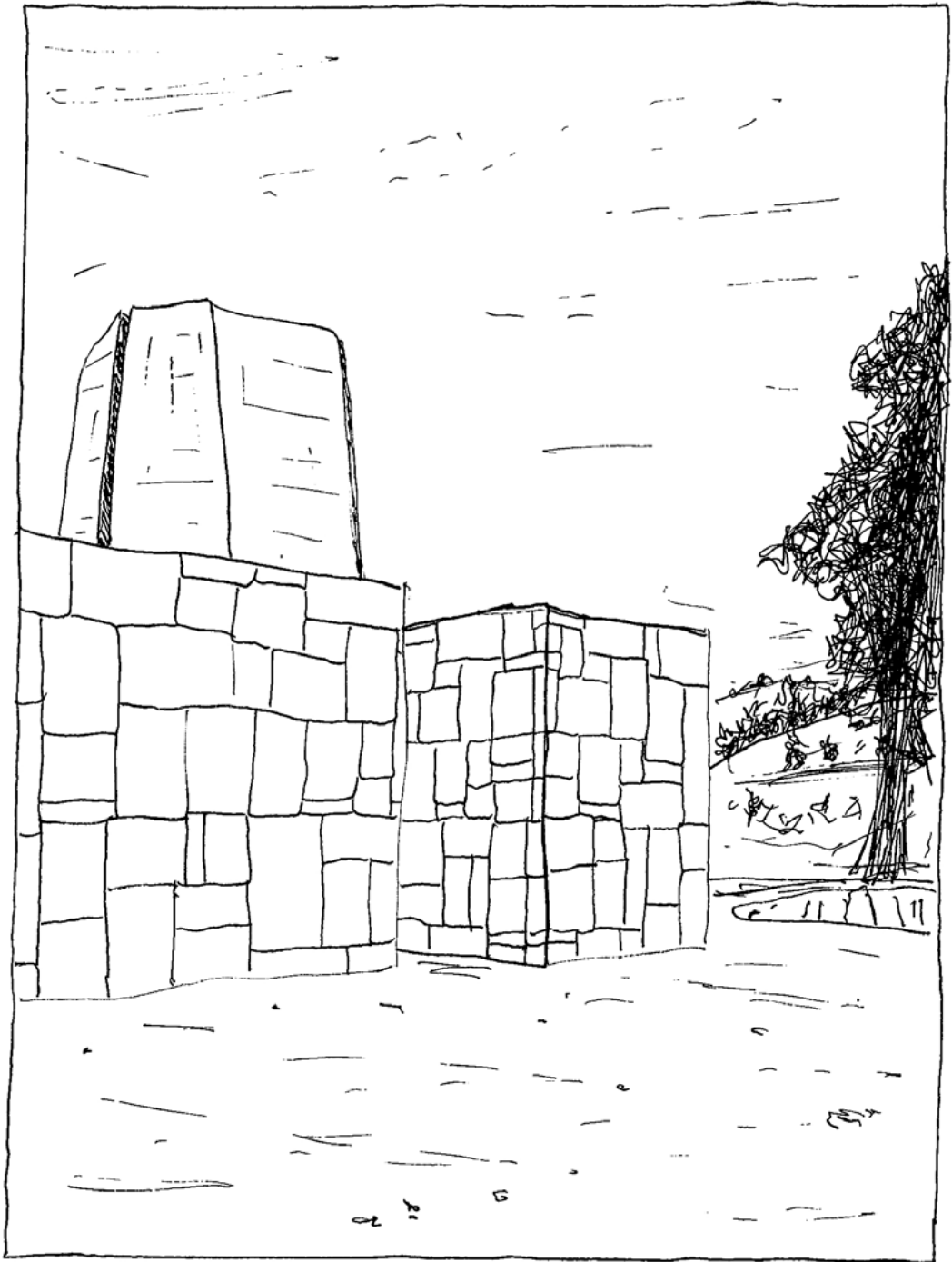




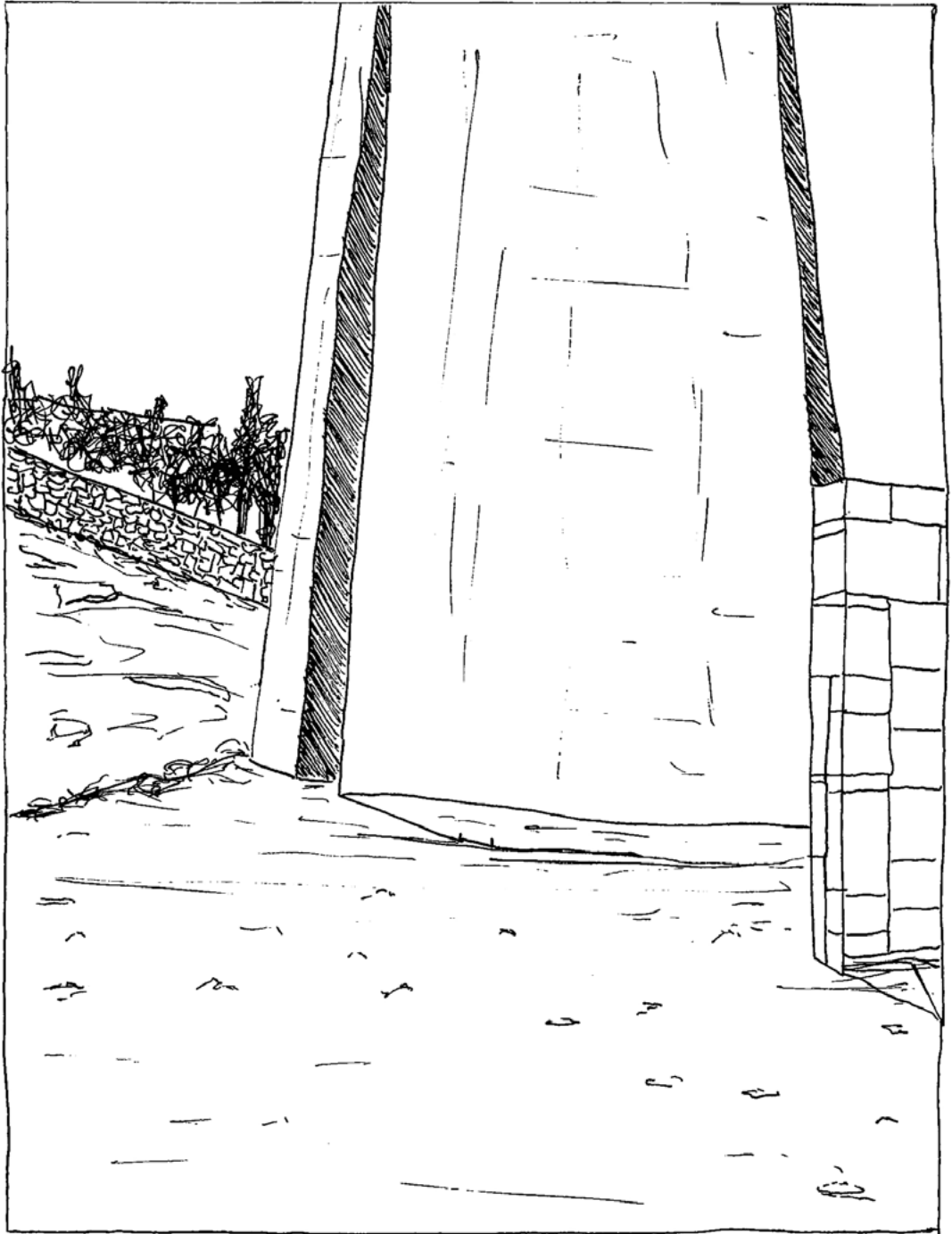
CAVE

A cylinder in which it is suggested to lay down on the stone “altar” to look at the sky from a round opening in the suspended roof. The closed shape of the cylinder is broken by two long and narrow “corridors”, creating a space that is well defined but at the same time open.

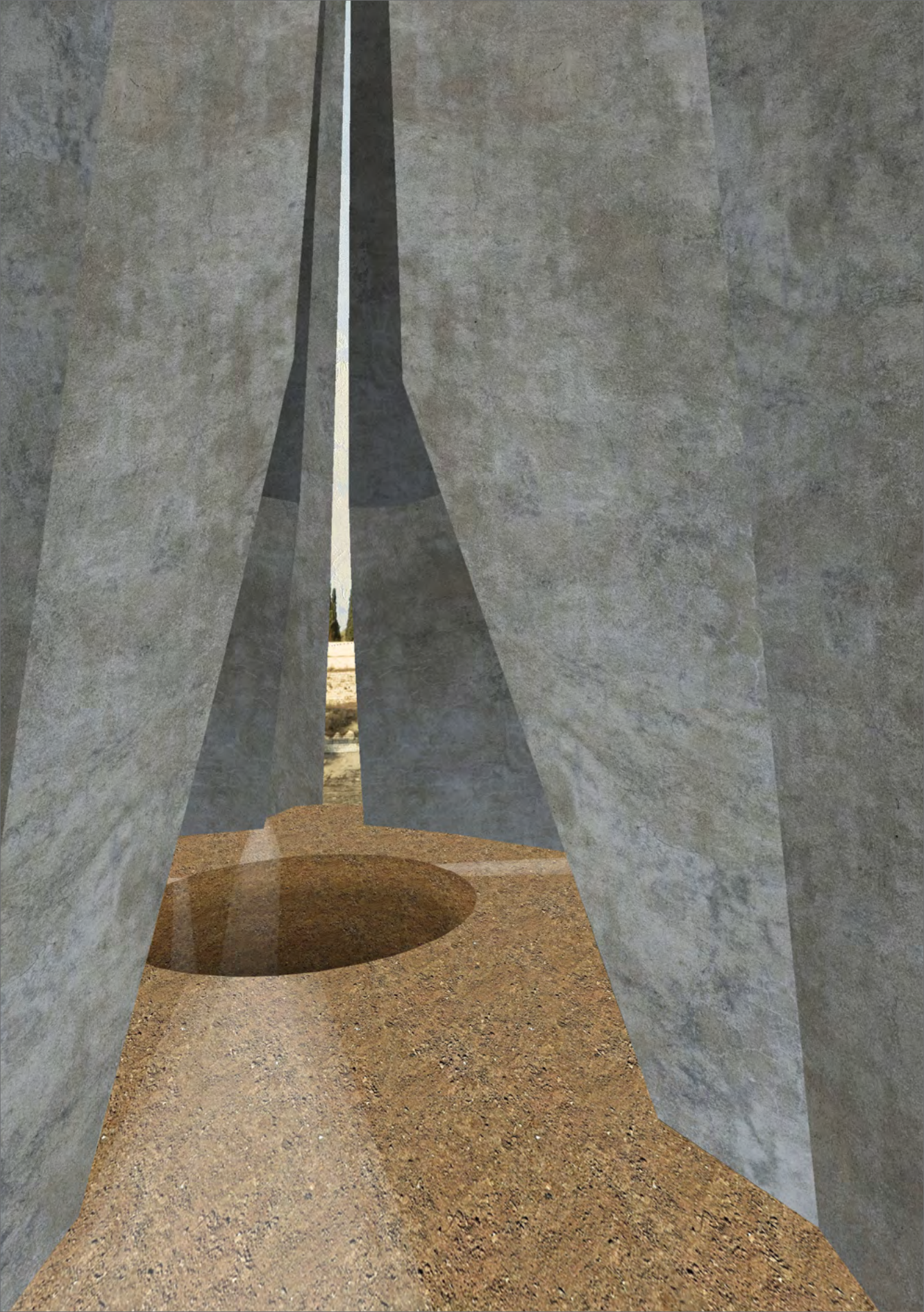


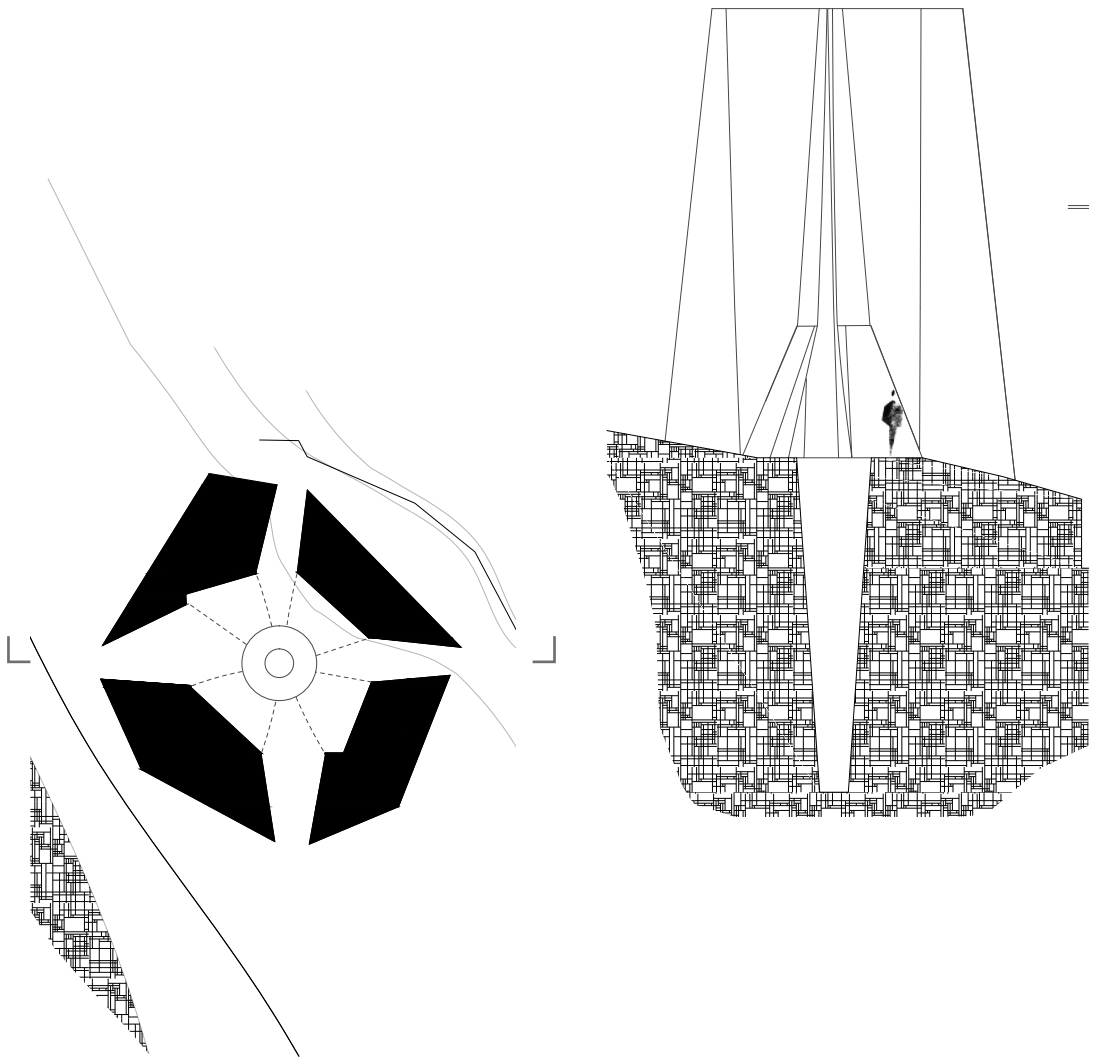


Back to light, the Mount Zion is right in front, but on the left a mysterious totem conquers the attention and a tiny passage may help us reaching it...



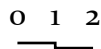
After passing in a narrow “corridor”, the totem reveals itself in all its greatness...

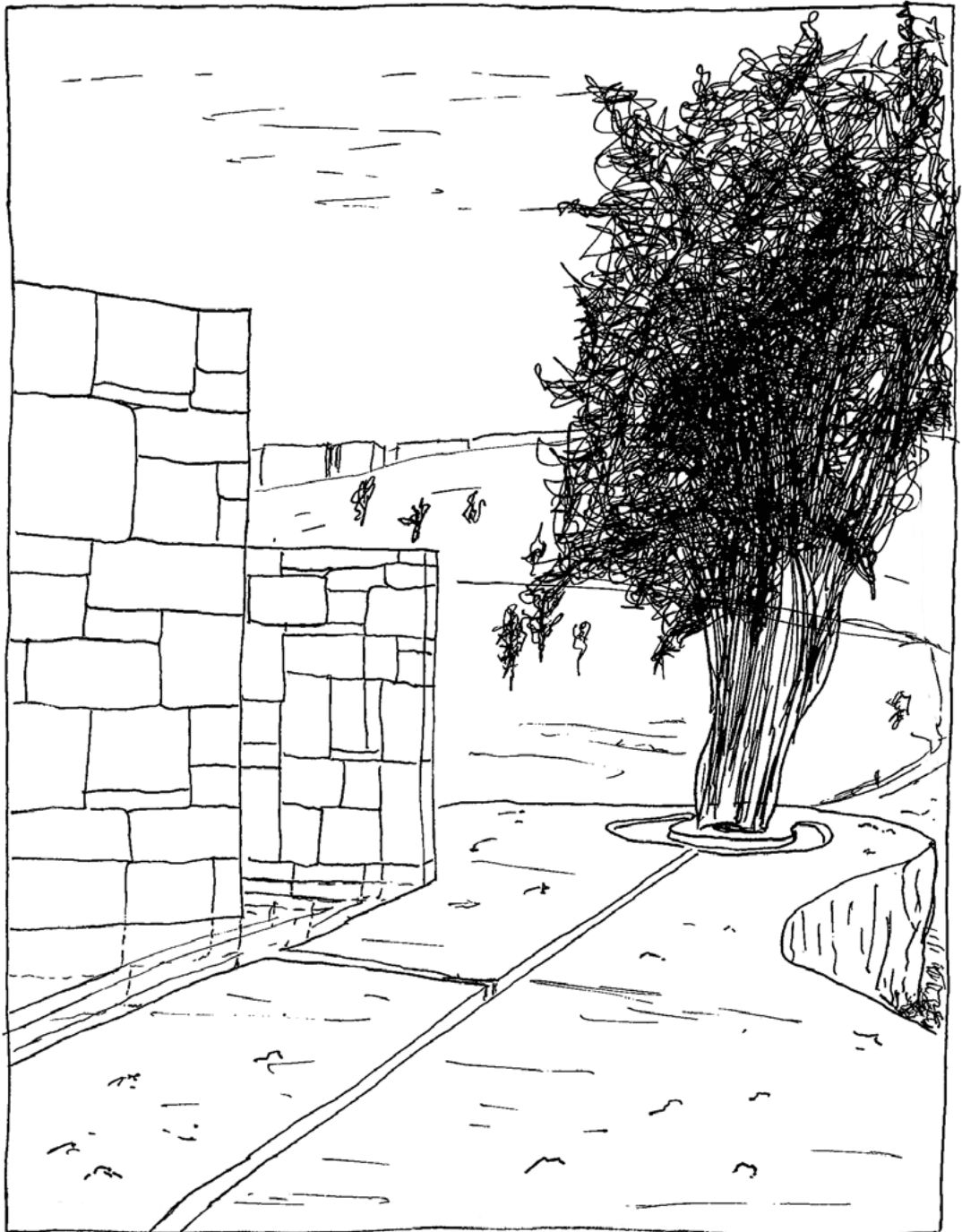




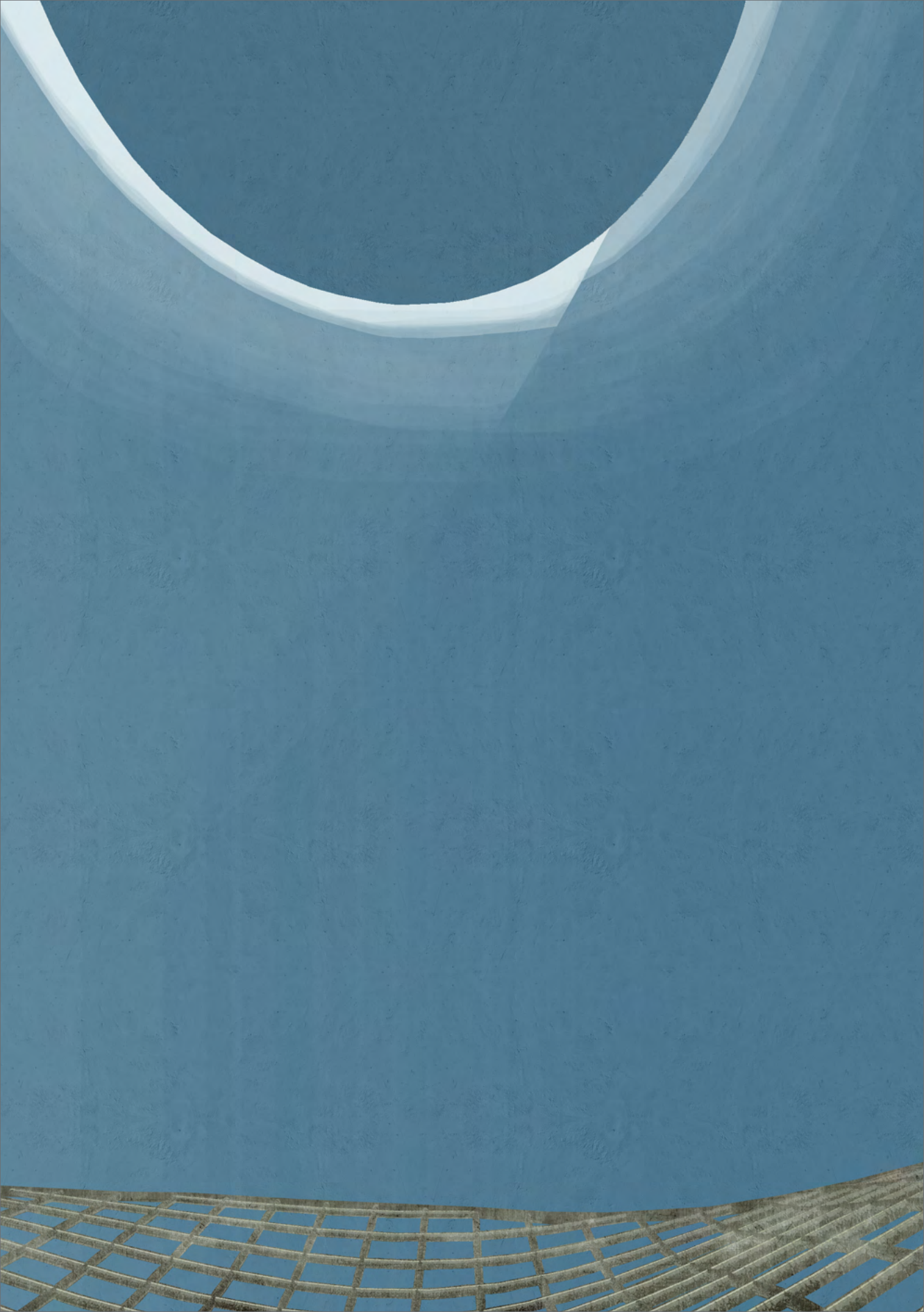
EARTH, MAN, SKY

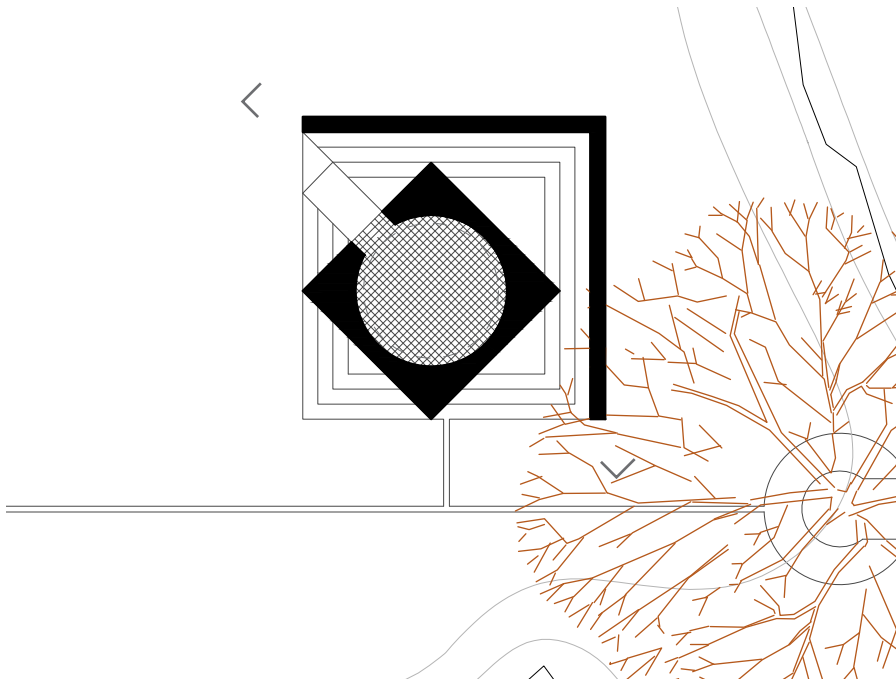
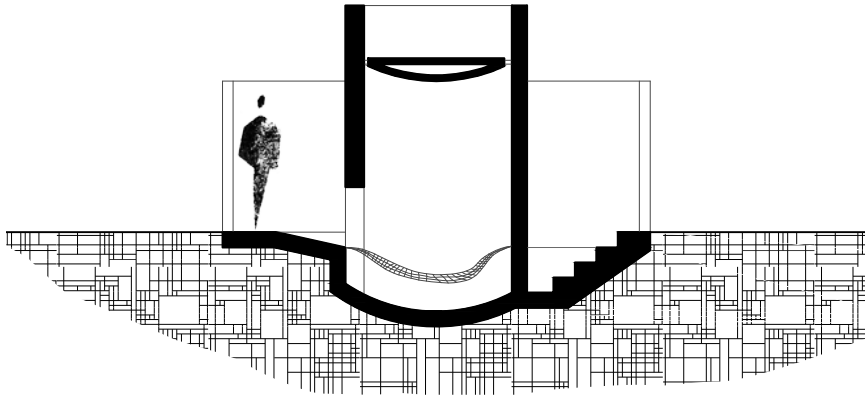
Man, as the midpoint between the infinite depth of earth and the infinite depth of the sky. Focal point of the whole project, due to its height, this element has four accesses, as it can be reached following various paths, to find inside a symmetric equilibrium of a hole to the sky and a hole to earth.





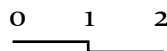
Back few steps, a water canal brings us to discover a small pavilion floating on the water, before giving life to a big tree...

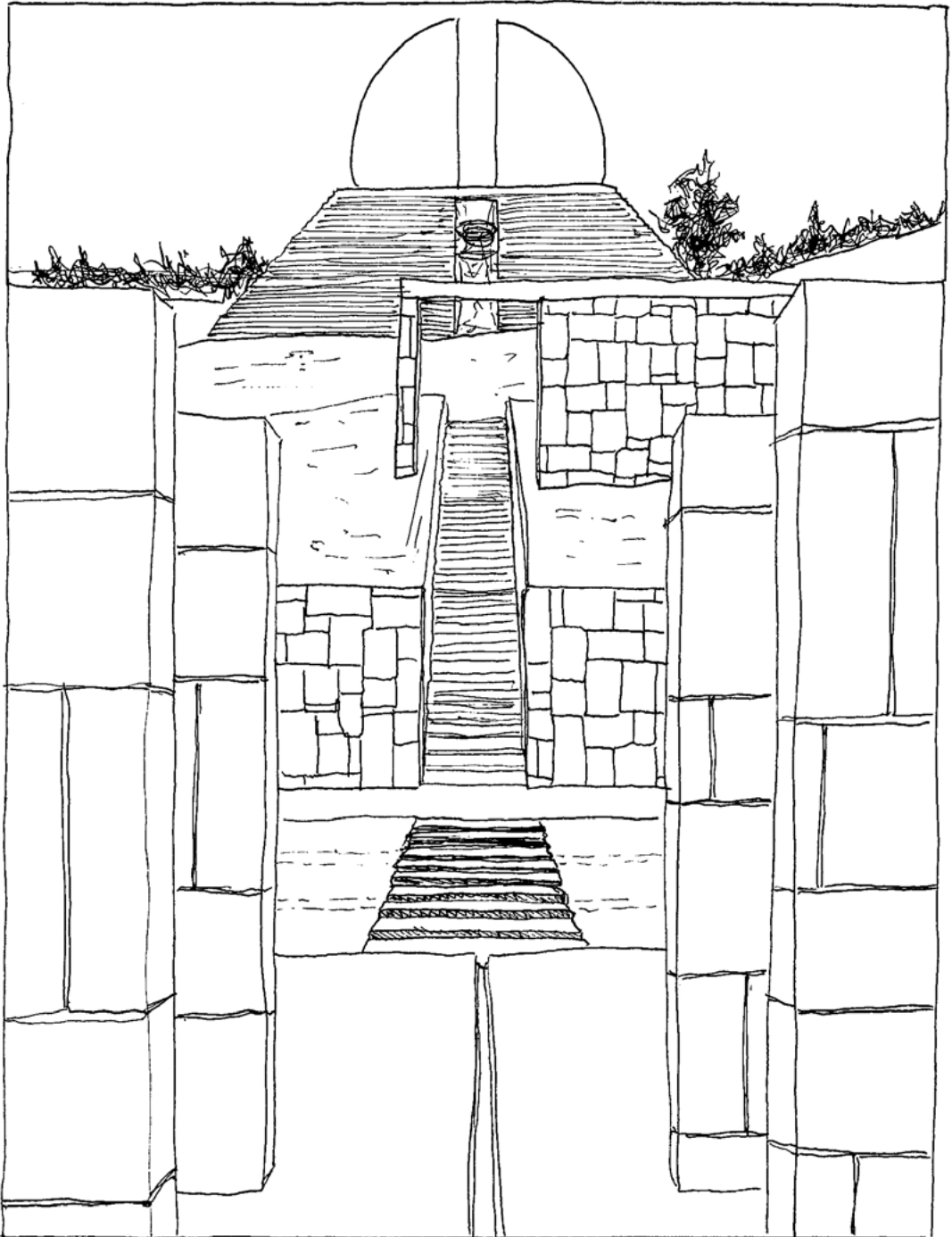




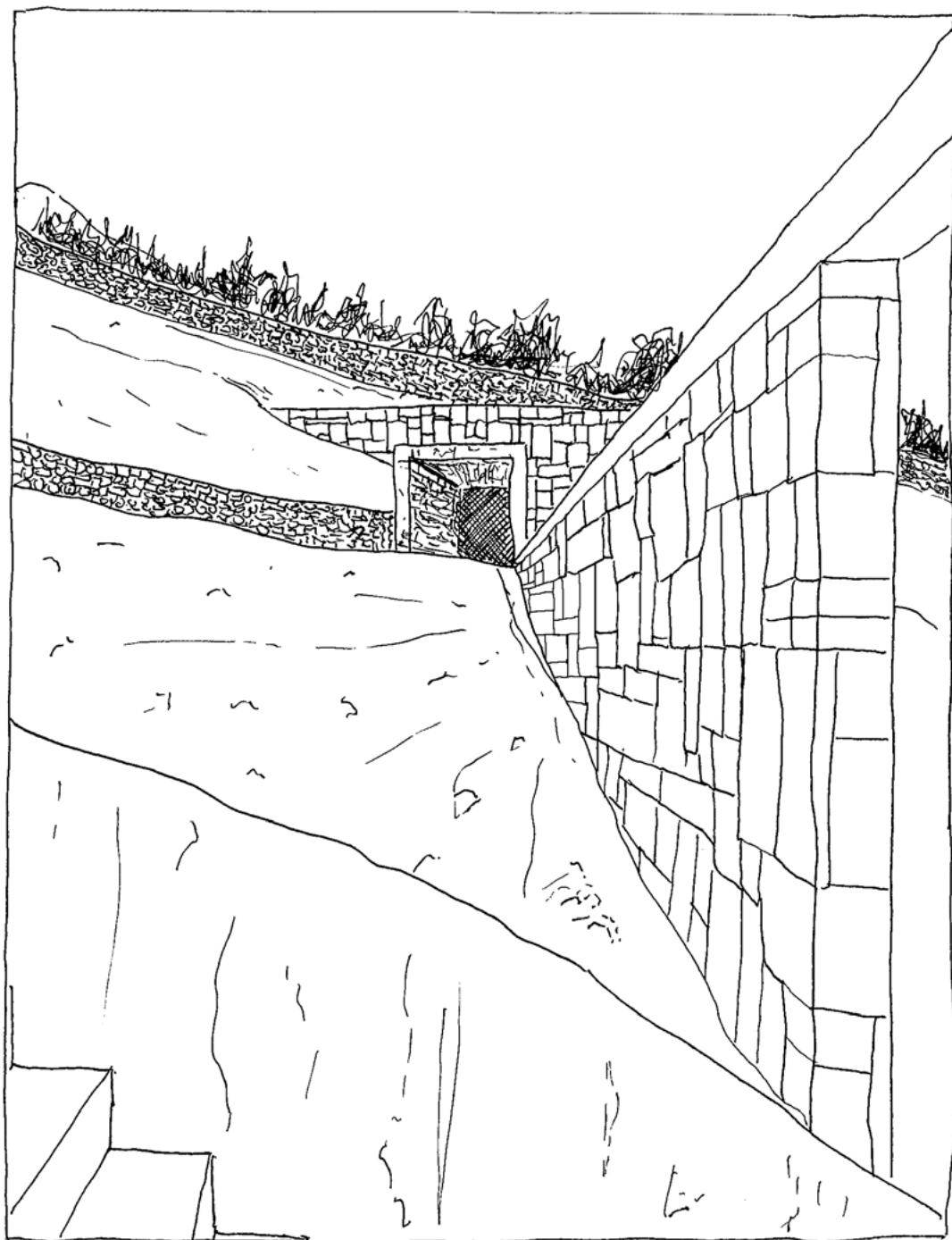
FLOATING

A small pavilion “floating” on the water. Inside the visitor is forced to lay on a net, as there is no stable floor, “floating” above the void. In this position the sky is not visible, but only the light the filters on the sides of the roof, “floating” on the space.



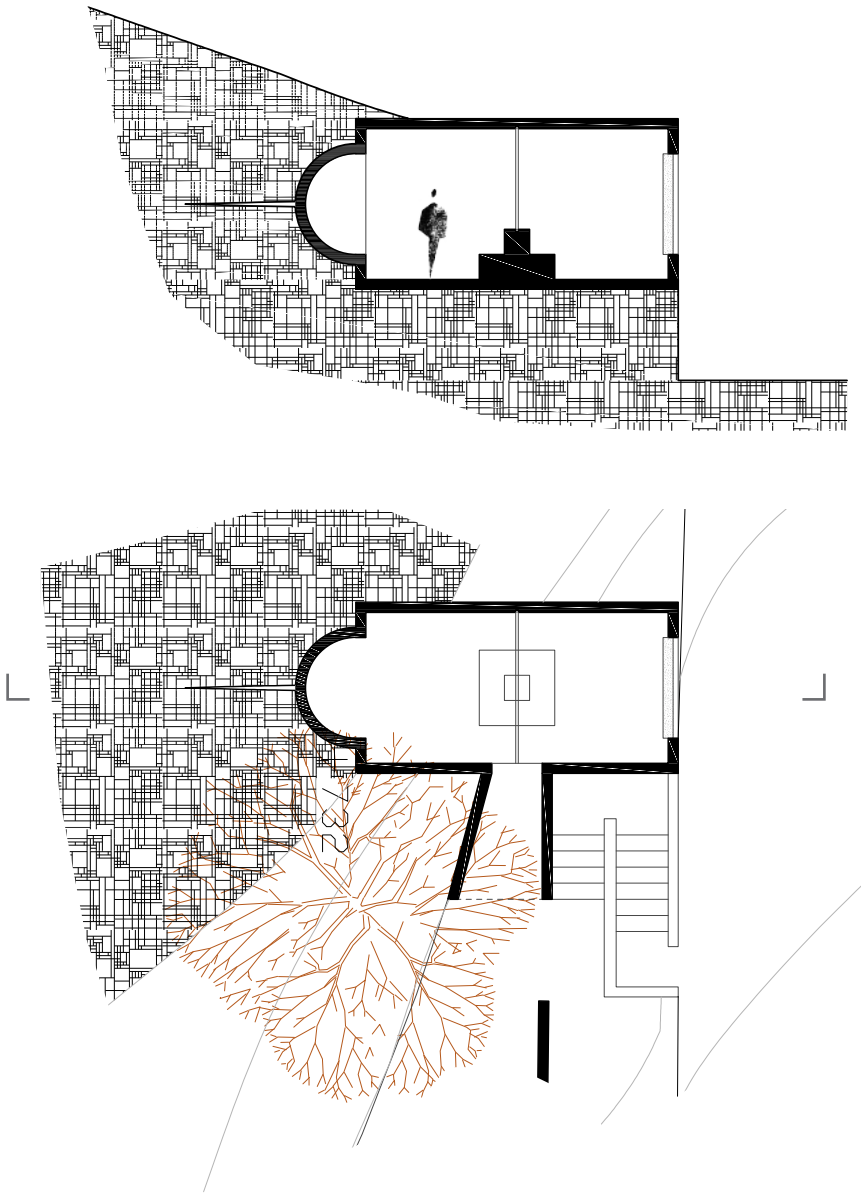


Following the canal in the opposite direction, a court opens to our sight its “purification” pool, while another staircase is waiting for us to keep on climbing...



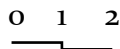
Proceeding our trip, right after the “arch”, on the right, a stone wall leads to a room that was not visible before...

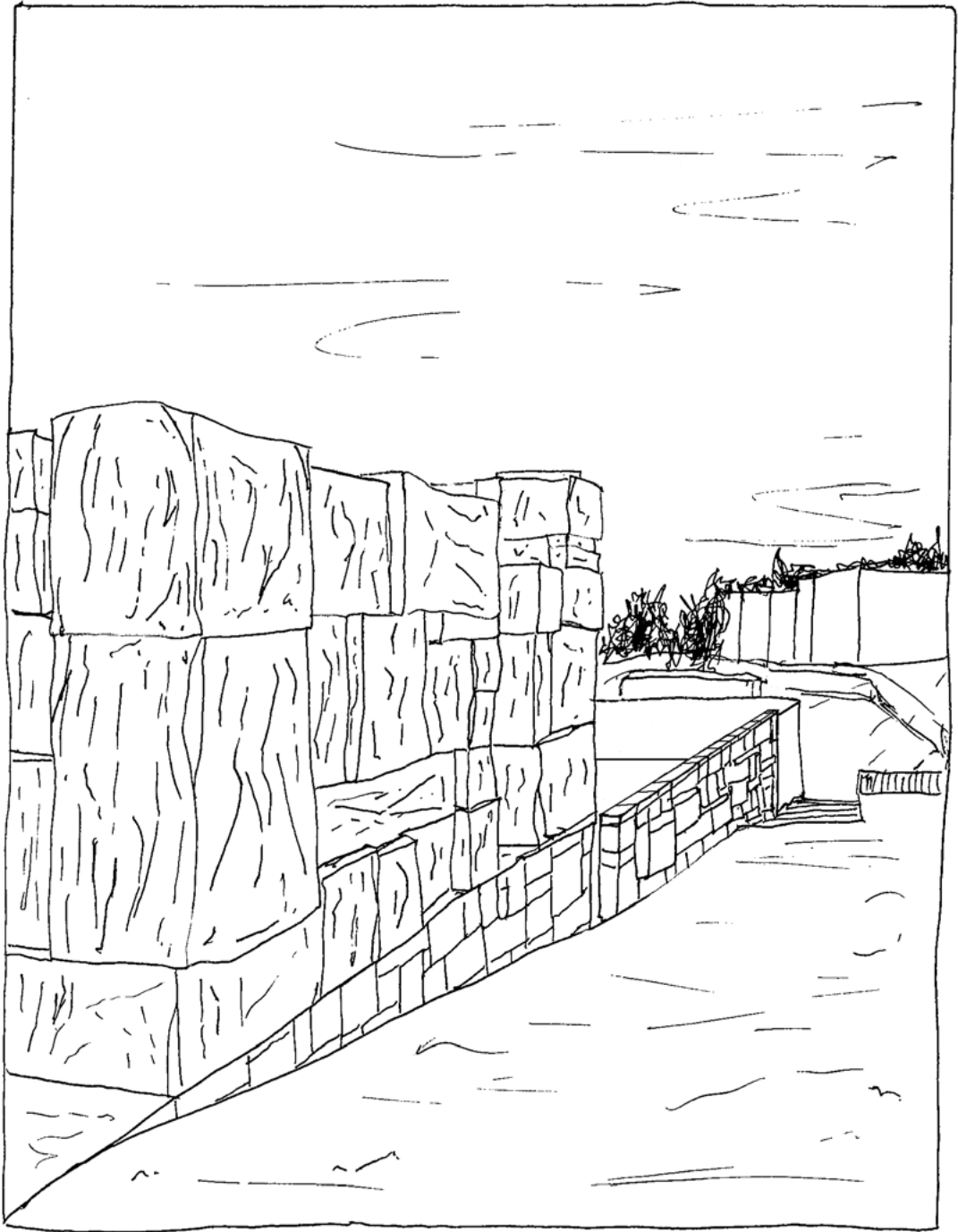




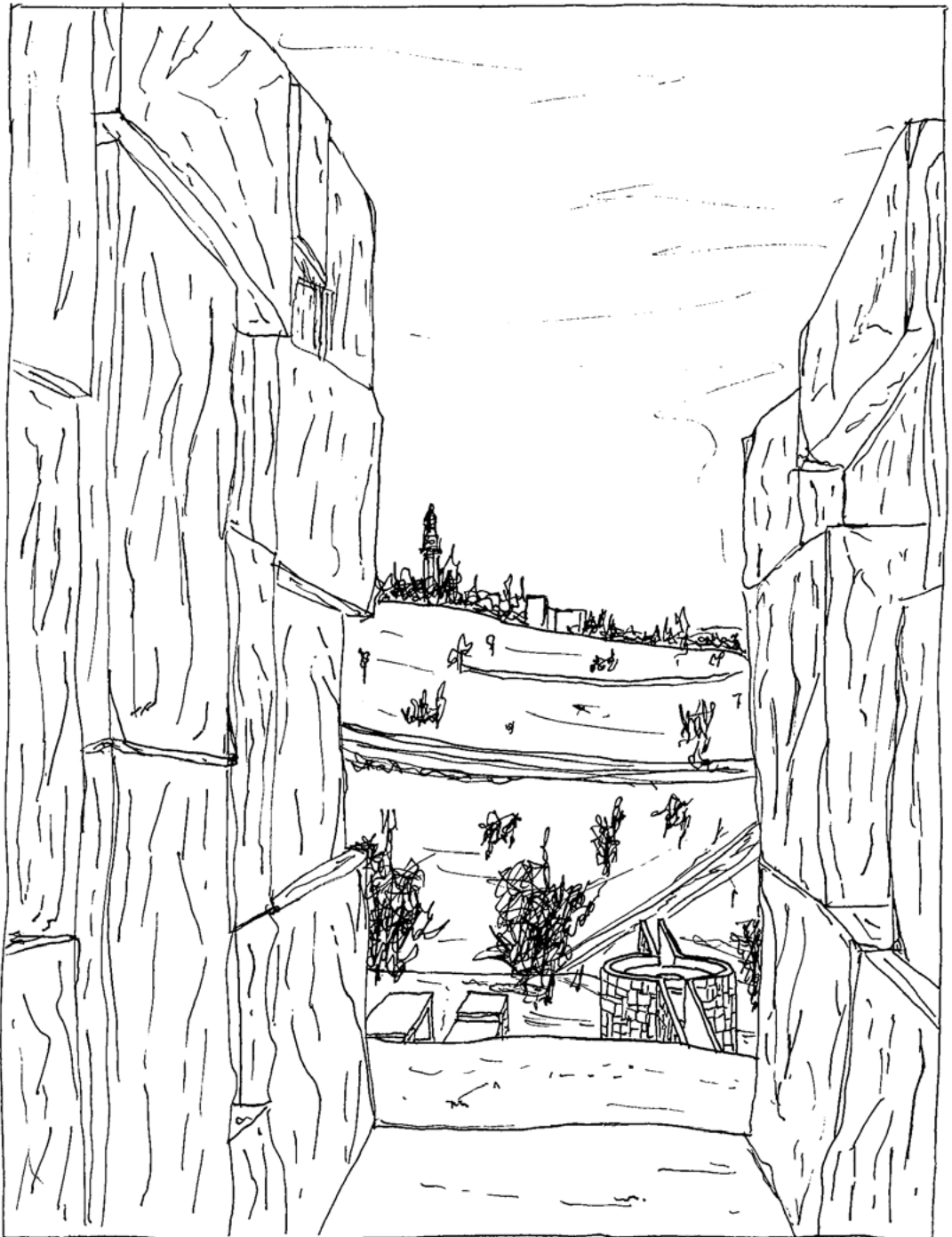
SILENCE AND LIGHT

Sitting in the middle of the depth of darkness-silence and the depth of light, where both are present but their infinities are not visible. Each one of these elements occupies symbolically a space of 3 by 3 by 3 meters, merged together by the hinge represented by the seat.

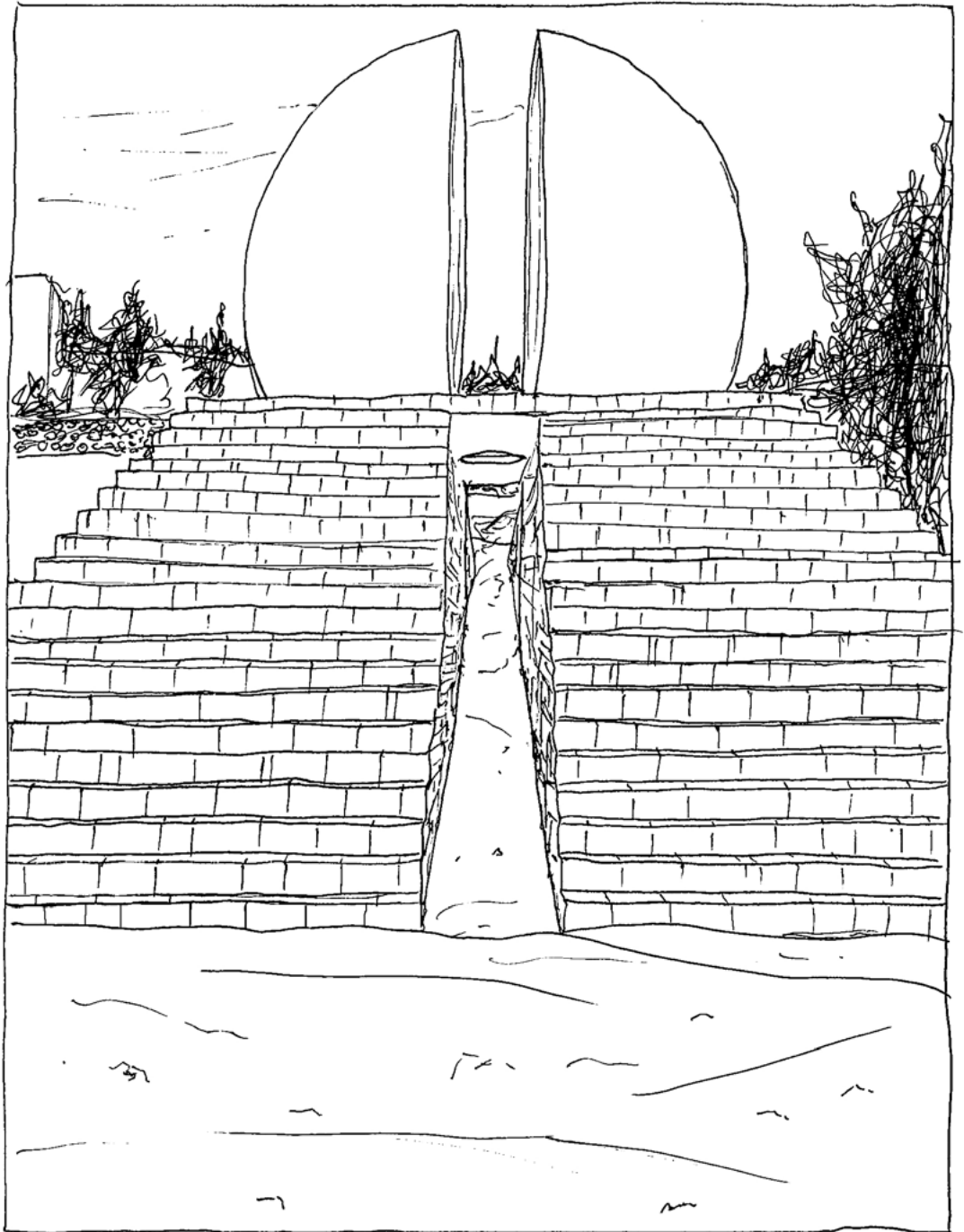




Going back, overpassing the previous staircase, the massive piles of rocks are now in front of us, attracting us to their labyrinth...

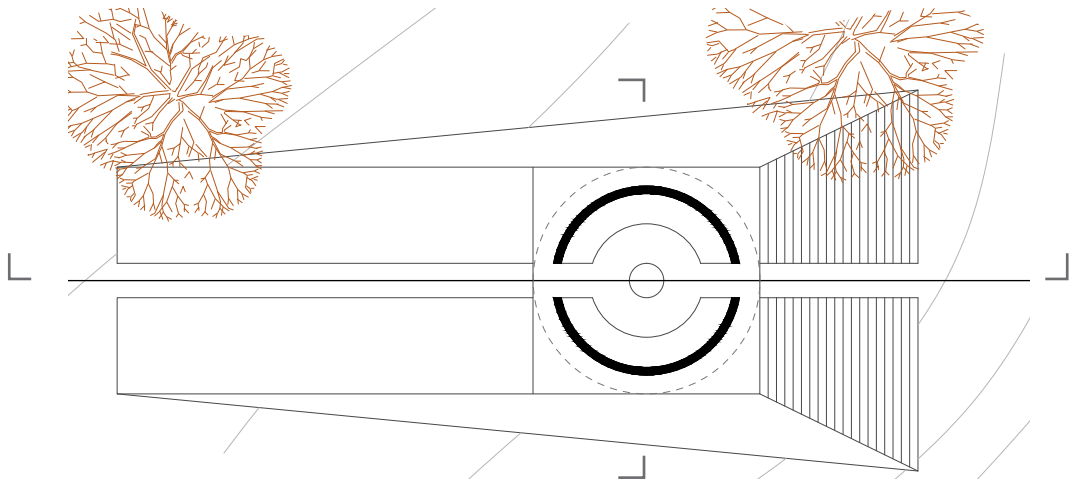
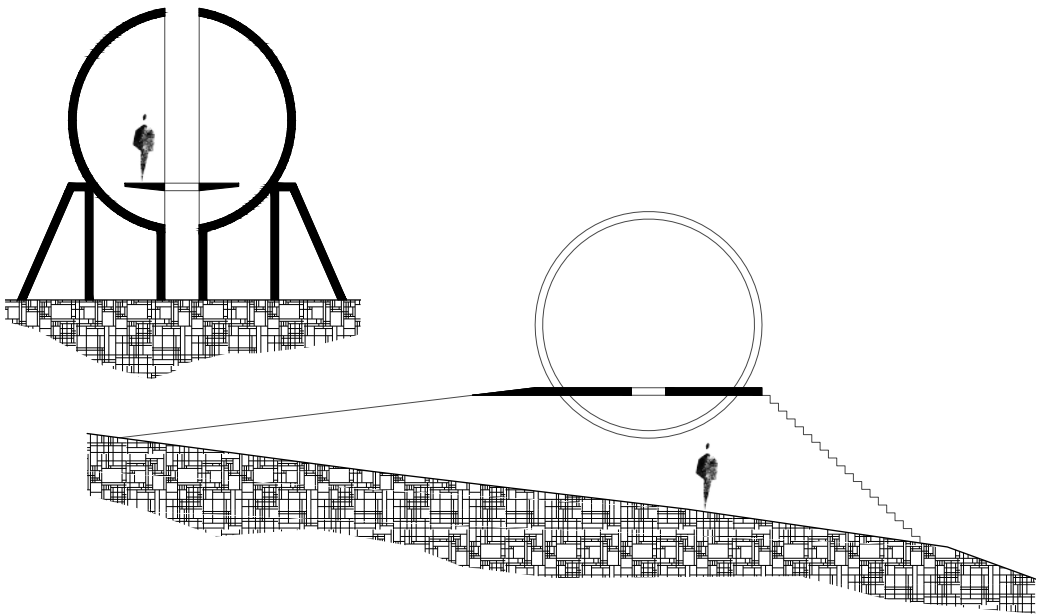


Overcoming the labyrinth we may reach its end, completely open towards the landscape, finally looking at Mount Zion and the Old City behind it...



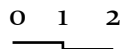
Out of the labyrinth, a massive double staircase gives us the option to climb it and explore the globe, or to pass its threshold, towards Abu Tor...

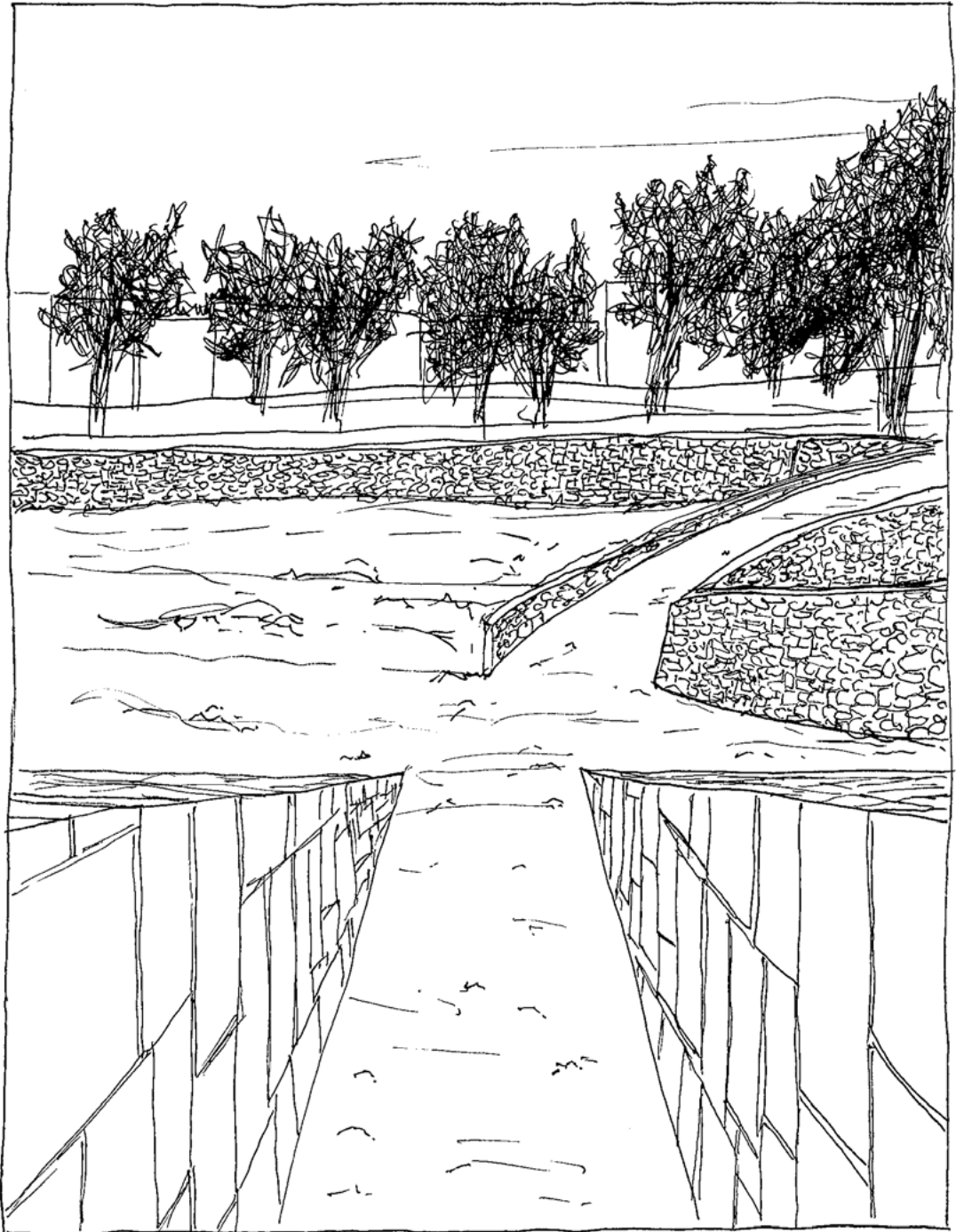




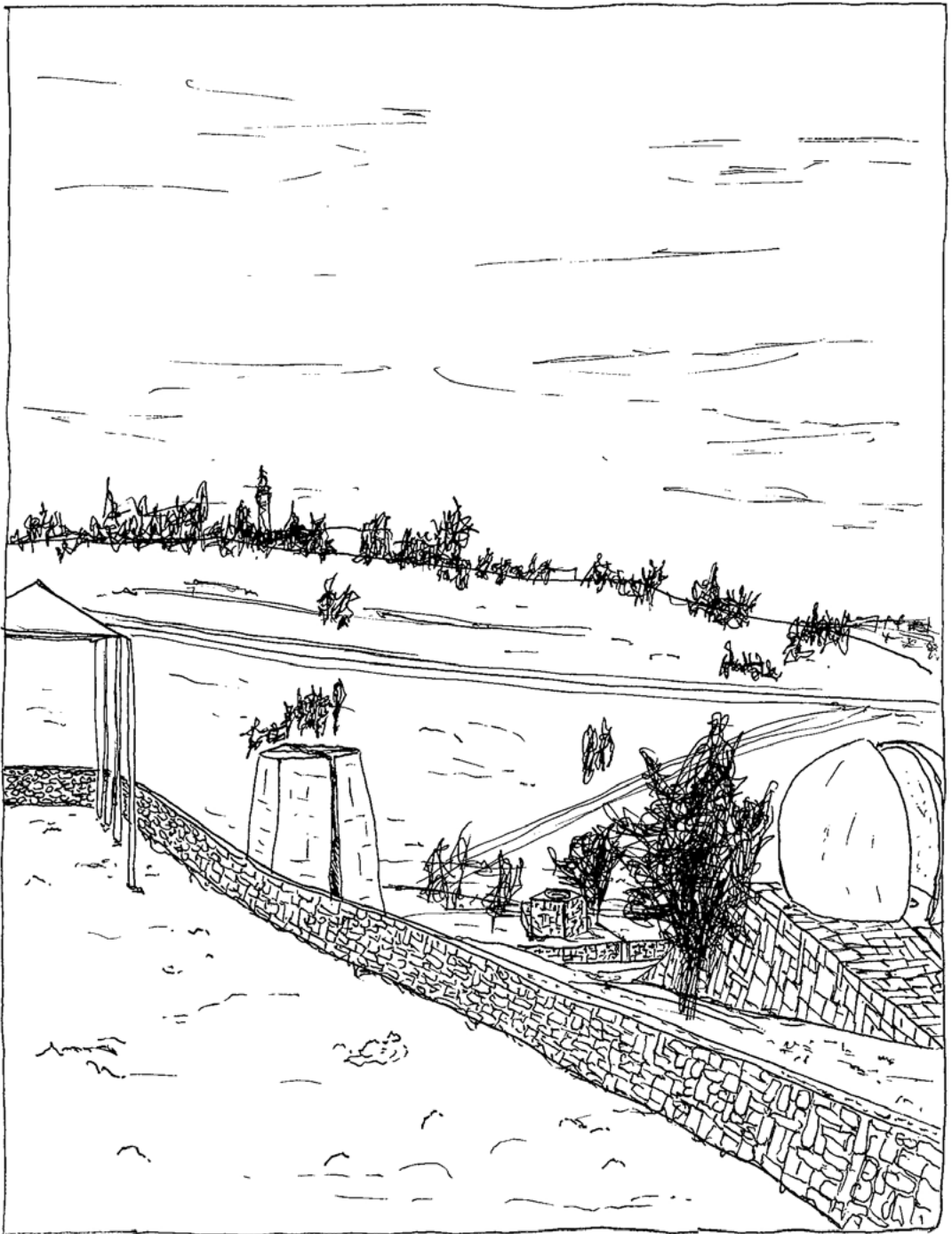
GLOBE

The upper threshold, with two different possibility of movement. The lower path follows the natural inclination of the ground, while the upper one, passes through a space defined by two semi-spheres. Here the invitation is to look at the wide context, the Old City in one direction, Abu Tor in the other.

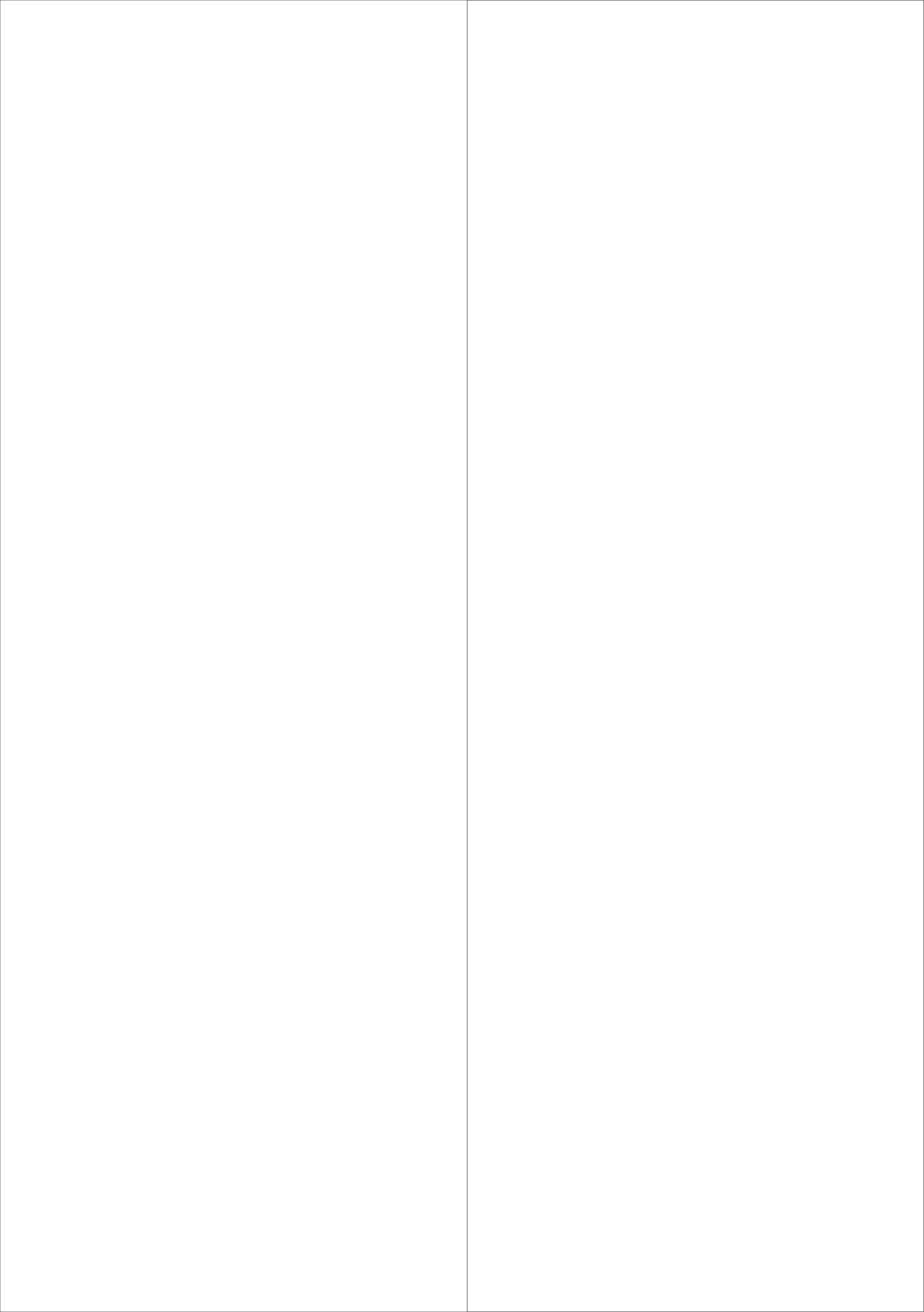




Passed the globe, a round ramp leads us to the end of the trip, out of the site, back to reality...

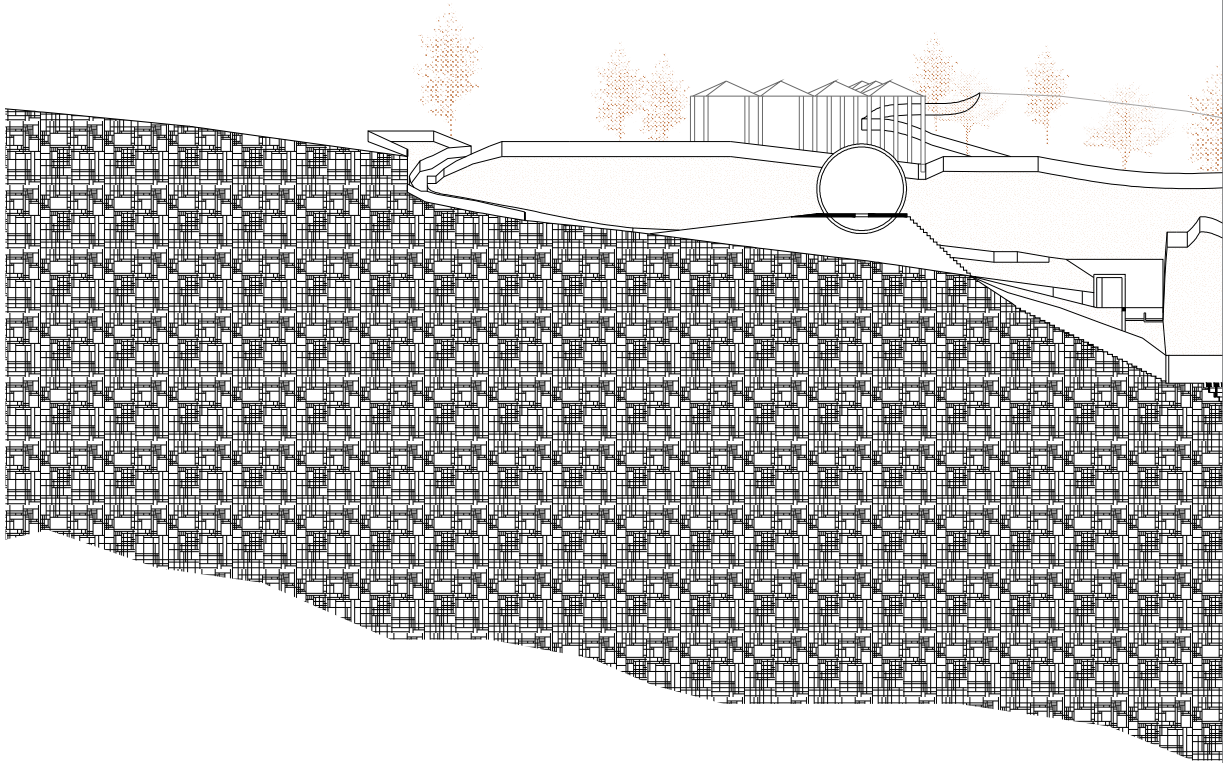


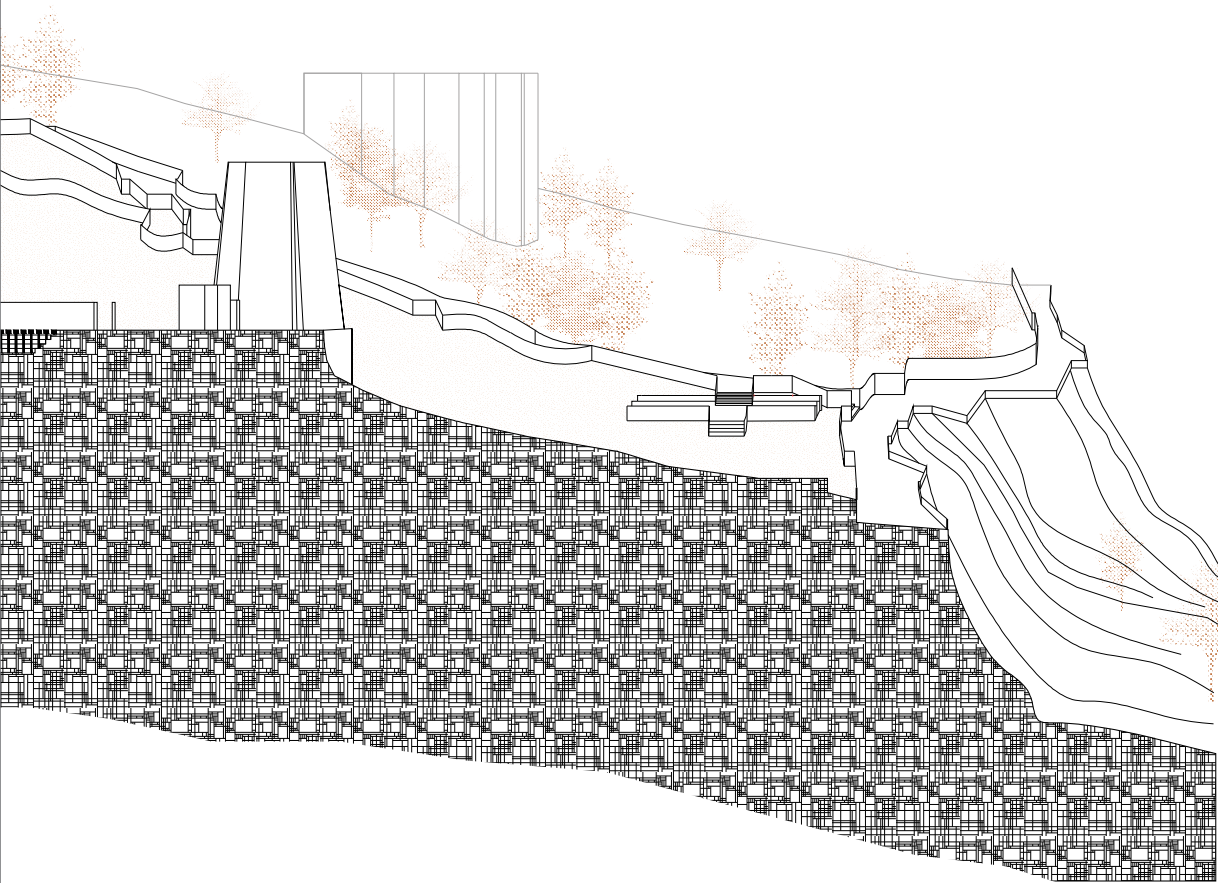
but before reality hits again, a back glance shows us the full dream in its wholyness, revealing further possibilities to live it...



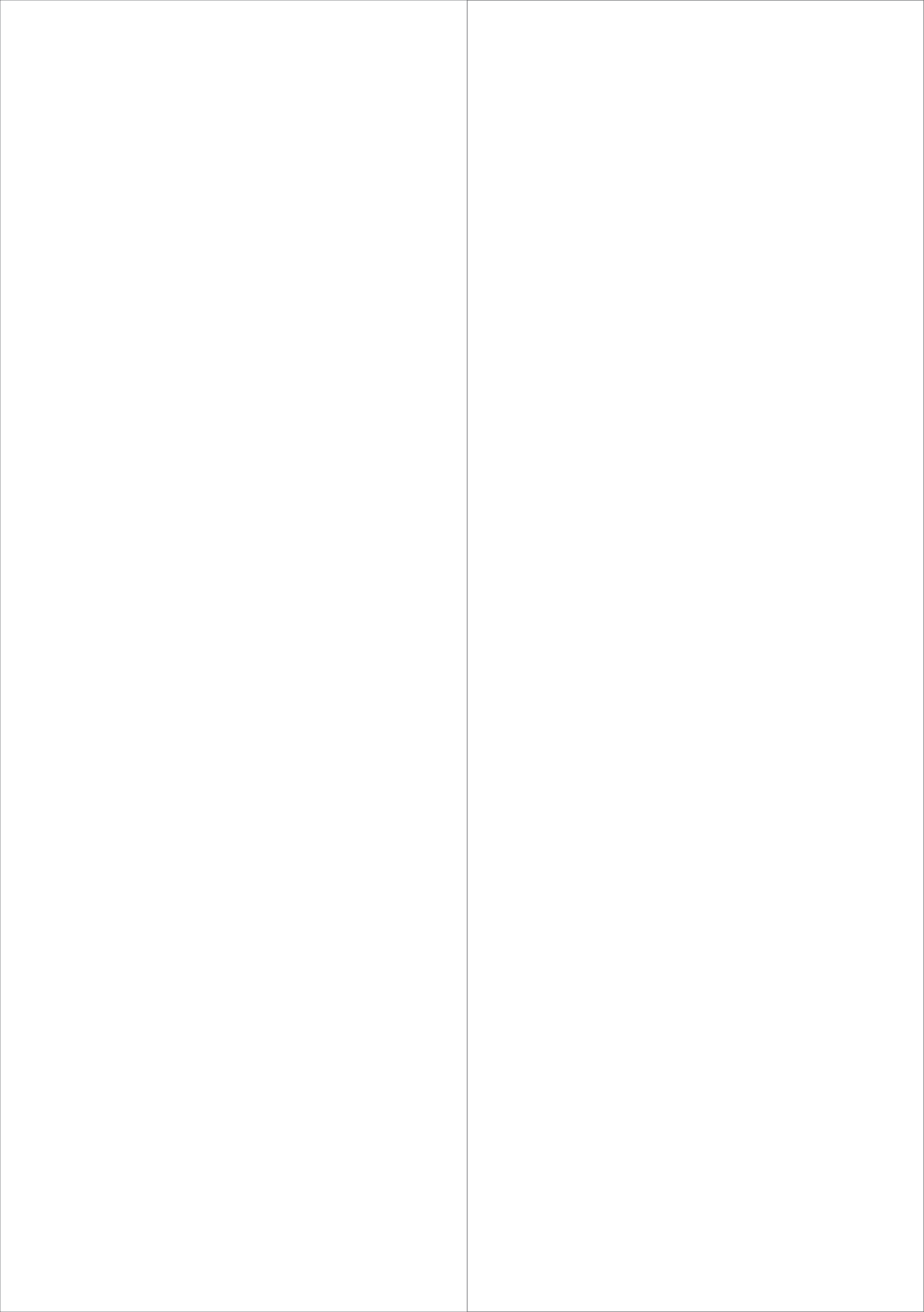


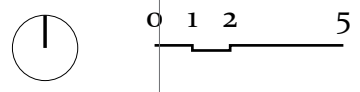
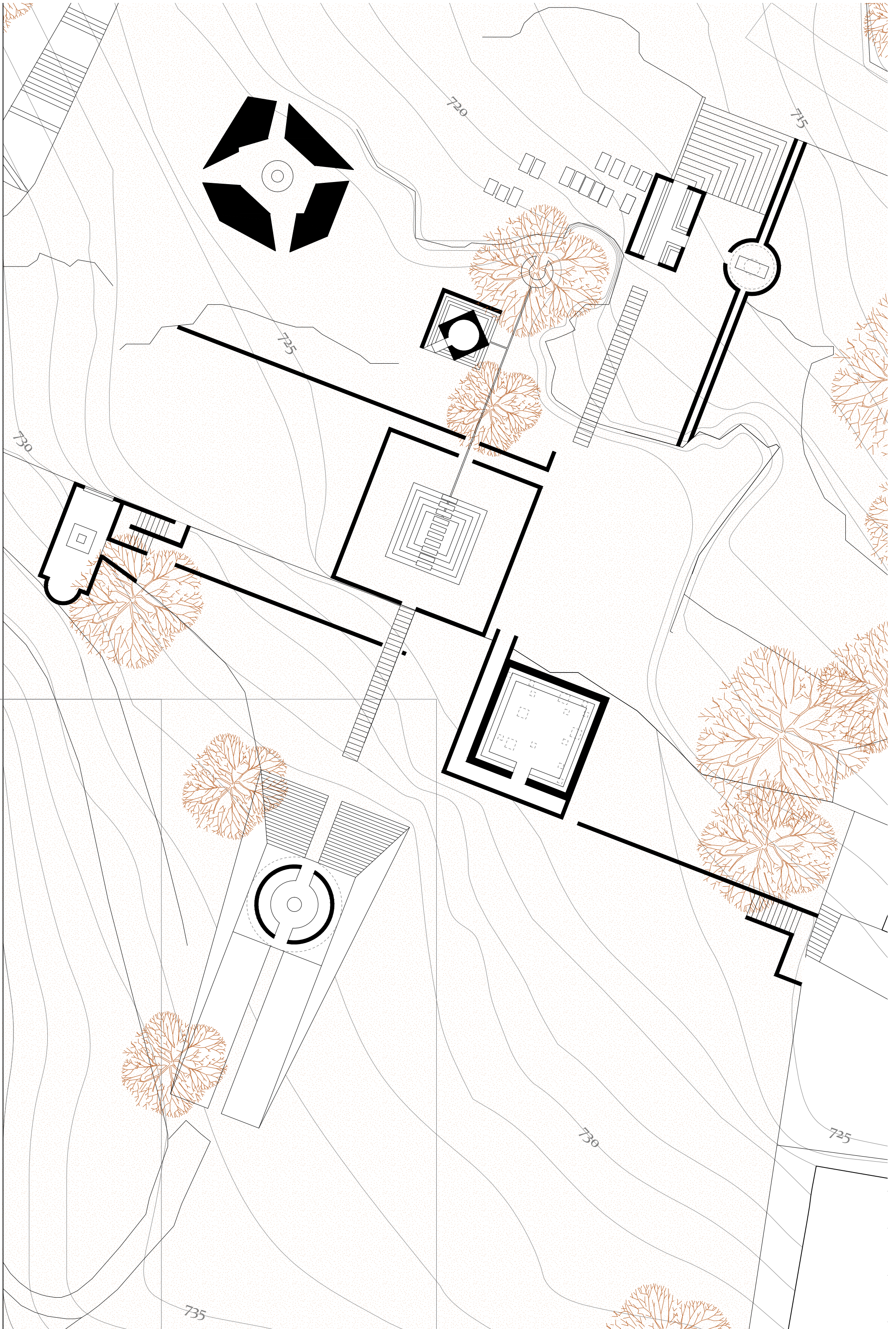
0 5 10





0 5 10





JERUSALEM, APRIL 2017

