



The vernacular & style

Left
**Alberobello, Apulia,
Italy;** the grey stone roofs
of a group of trulli

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We travel not only to see the Parthenon but also the white-washed clusters of houses on the Aegean islands. We admire both but recognise the difference in intention and creation. We also admire without necessarily seeing both – or either – as a possible model.

Architects of the past used the temple frequently and in different ways as a model, rarely the vernacular. Many architects of the present may refer to the vernacular rather than the temple. It seems that our eye may be pleased by what it sees, yet not necessarily accept it as a model. Non-verbal thinking is just as selective as verbal thinking. We want, as it were, to say something and select the relevant memory as the precedent. It is highly analogous to scientific discovery which is not a random search but a selective pursuit of an answer which is already partly formulated as an assumption. Or as Pasteur put it 'chance favours only the trained mind'.

In terms of continuity and innovation, the vernacular is clearly the prime example of continuity; an innovatory vernacular is a contradiction in terms. The vernacular is a prime but certainly not the only example of survival over a long period. The funerary temple of Queen Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari on the Nile dating from 1511–1480 B.C., designed by her architect Senmut, uses what can best be described as proto-Doric columns. A thousand years later the Doric column is widely used in classical Greek architecture, is modified by the Etruscans, is employed by the Romans in Italy and elsewhere and becomes one of the characteristic features of neo-classicism in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. The form shows extraordinary tenacity over three and a half thousand years.

Despite the longevity of vernacular forms as well as of the Doric column we instinctively place them hierarchically in different categories. This is not necessarily a value judgement though it frequently turns out to be one. The trulli of Apulia, for example, occur frequently in the area surrounding Alberobello, are difficult to date and differ little from each other. Churches