

# History

In 1955 Iraq allied with Great Britain and the United States under King Faisal II, was courting western architects for projects intended to enhance the status of Baghdad.

Gropius, Ericson, Wright, Aalto, Sert, and Ponti were working on a range of institutional buildings.

Le Corbusier was invited to submit designs for an Olympic Stadium complex and permanent recreational facility for Baghdad.

However, it was not until 1957 that the commission was confirmed and Le Corbusier made a trip to Baghdad to discuss the brief and to see the site. At this stage, both were still defined only in general terms. In the meantime, Iannis Xenakis was put in charge of the project, and Georges Pr sent  was secured for all engineering services. The office made a wide study of international precedents (for both design and construction), among which are the drawings exhibited here for Roland Garros and the Parc des Princes (visible from Le Corbusier's flat). Within a few months, the programme and site were clarified and a 'definitive' scheme produced.

On 13th July, 1958, this scheme was accepted by the Ministry of Development in Baghdad. The next day, the monarchy was overthrown, King Faisal and many of his family executed and the republic proclaimed. Other than some financial worries a year later - a threatened boycott of French industries - this does not seem to have had any effect on the development of the scheme, the royal box was simply renamed the presidential box. In April, 1959, Le Corbusier made a second journey to Baghdad, carrying 120 construction drawings.

The Baghdad authorities moved the complex to a larger, less congested site across the Tigris in December, 1959. The new scheme was a relatively straightforward modification of the first, resulting in the second definitive plan of 1961. Among the more than 950 drawings for the Baghdad project in the archives are a complete set of construction drawings for this scheme, produced by the office of Georges Pr sent . Financial difficulties ensued and, on the 9th September, 1964, the Steering Committee of the Planning Board in Baghdad decided to 'postpone implementation of the Baghdad Stadium at the present time and till further modification'. A year later, Le Corbusier died of a heart attack whilst swimming off Cap Martin, France, and this effectively finished the project.

A stadium to a different design, and to a different site-plan, was constructed on this second site by F.D. K. Amaral in 1967. Georges Pr sent  and the Iraqi architect Alex Mesny constructed the Gymnasium in 1981 from the drawings in the Le Corbusier office: it is still named after Saddam Hussein.