

A Descending Columbarium

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Master of Architecture  
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Architecture

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## Abstract

The project is a columbarium and crematorium complex. It is located on the Eastern periphery of Blacksburg, Virginia. The site slopes downward to the South East. The project is organized in an axial arrangement following the direction of the slope.

The program of the building does not follow any religious ritual and is culturally determined only in so far as cremation is an acceptable form of disposal of the deceased.

In this sense the building itself becomes a memorial of the dead.

With the exclusion of formal ritual as a guiding principle for an architectural expression of the contemplation of death simple geometric figures are meant to evoke a general sense of proper emotional and intellectual response to the phenomenon of death, perhaps to dying. This approach hopes to allow for individual contemplation of the ending and the end of human life.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to thank every professor that I was lucky enough to work with over the past three and half years at the graduate school. Thank you for making this education possible. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude for the generous guidance from my thesis committee. Thank you Professor Rott, for your directness and your philosophical teachings. Thank you Professor Thompson, for both the lectures and afterhours conversations over the years. They have been of tremendous help. And thank you Professor Cortes, for showing me both the sensitivity in watercolor and the precision in structures. Thank you all so very much.

I also want to say thank you to all my dearest friends, for your honest opinion, your helpful advice, and of course for your company in those sleepless nights spent working in studio. You have made most memorable my days here at Virginia Tech.

And above all, I need to thank my mom. Thank you for your caring and understanding, for your support and encouragement, and most importantly, for being a mom like you are.

Do not stand at my grave and weep,  
I am not there, I do not sleep.  
I am in a thousand winds that blow,  
I am the softly falling snow.  
I am the gentle showers of rain,  
I am the fields of ripening grain.  
I am in the morning hush,  
I am in the graceful rush  
Of beautiful birds in circling flight,  
I am the starshine of the night.  
I am in the flowers that bloom,  
I am in a quiet room.  
I am in the birds that sing,  
I am in each lovely thing.  
Do not stand at my grave and cry,  
I am not there. I do not die.

Mary Elizabeth Frye

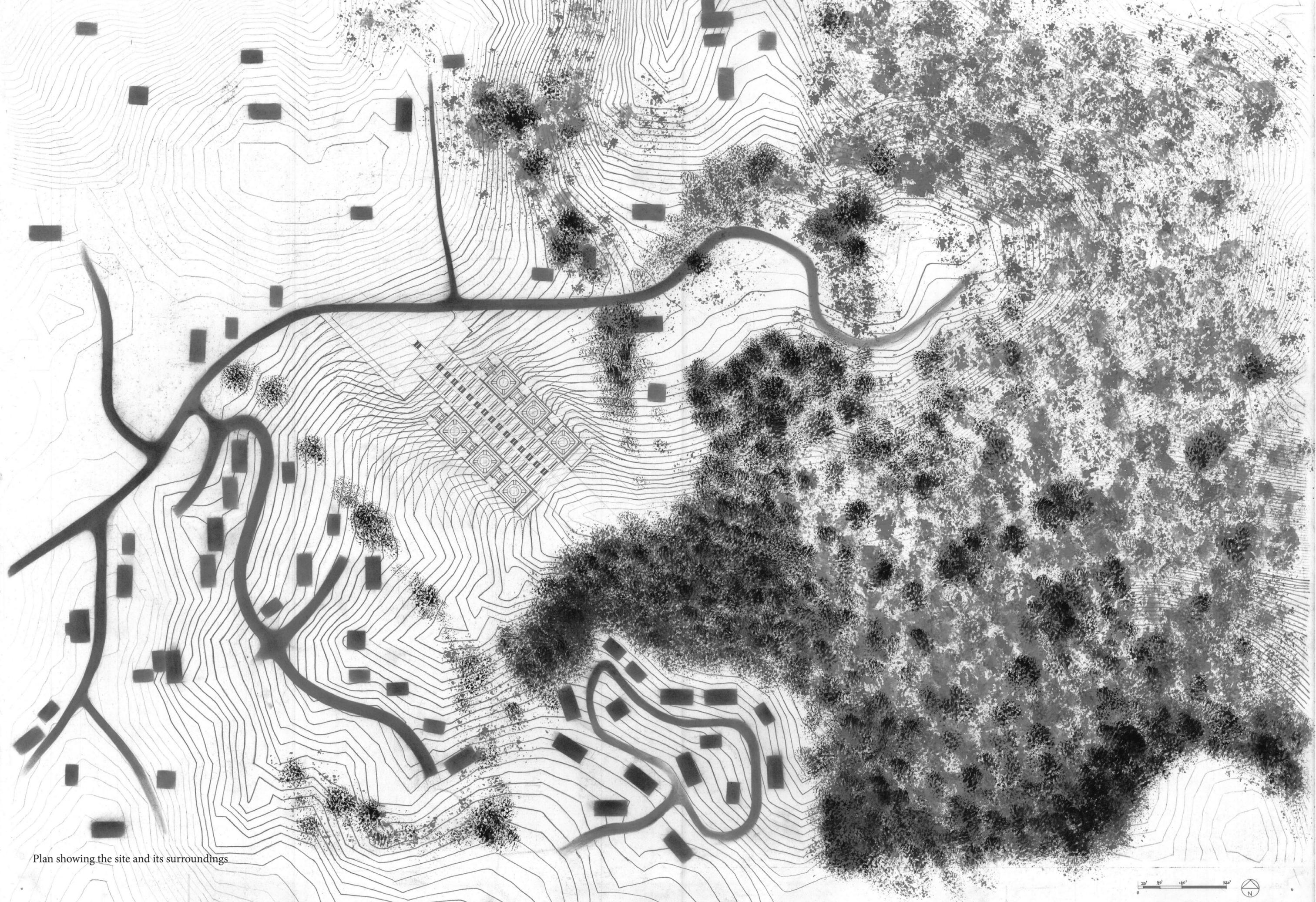
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Site



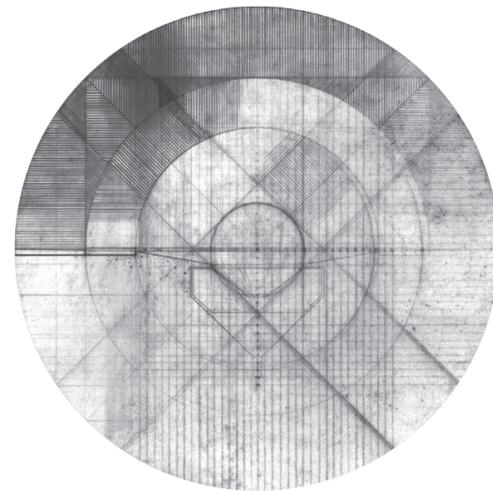
Plan showing the site in relation to the original sixteen squares of the town of Blacksburg

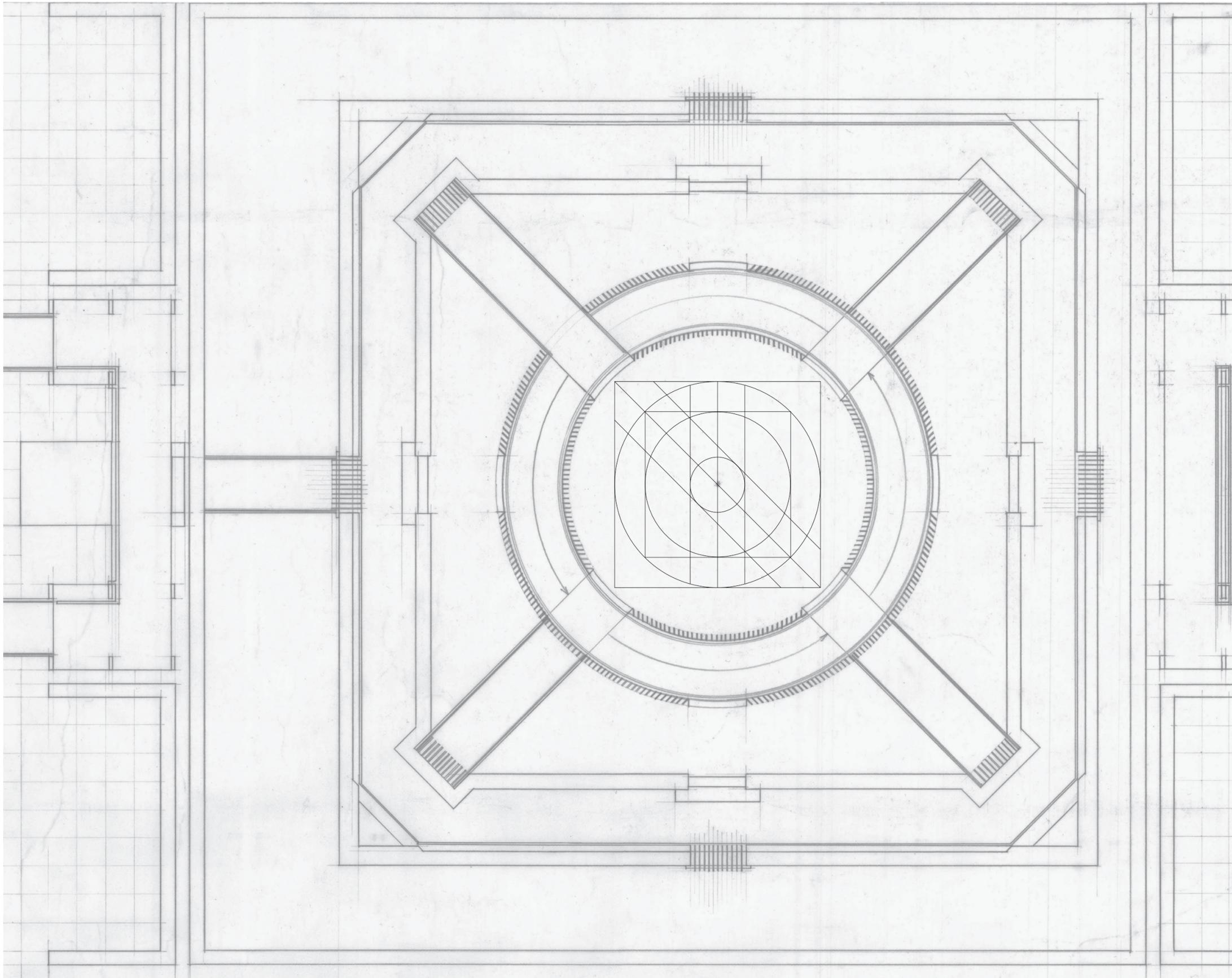


Plan showing the site and its surroundings

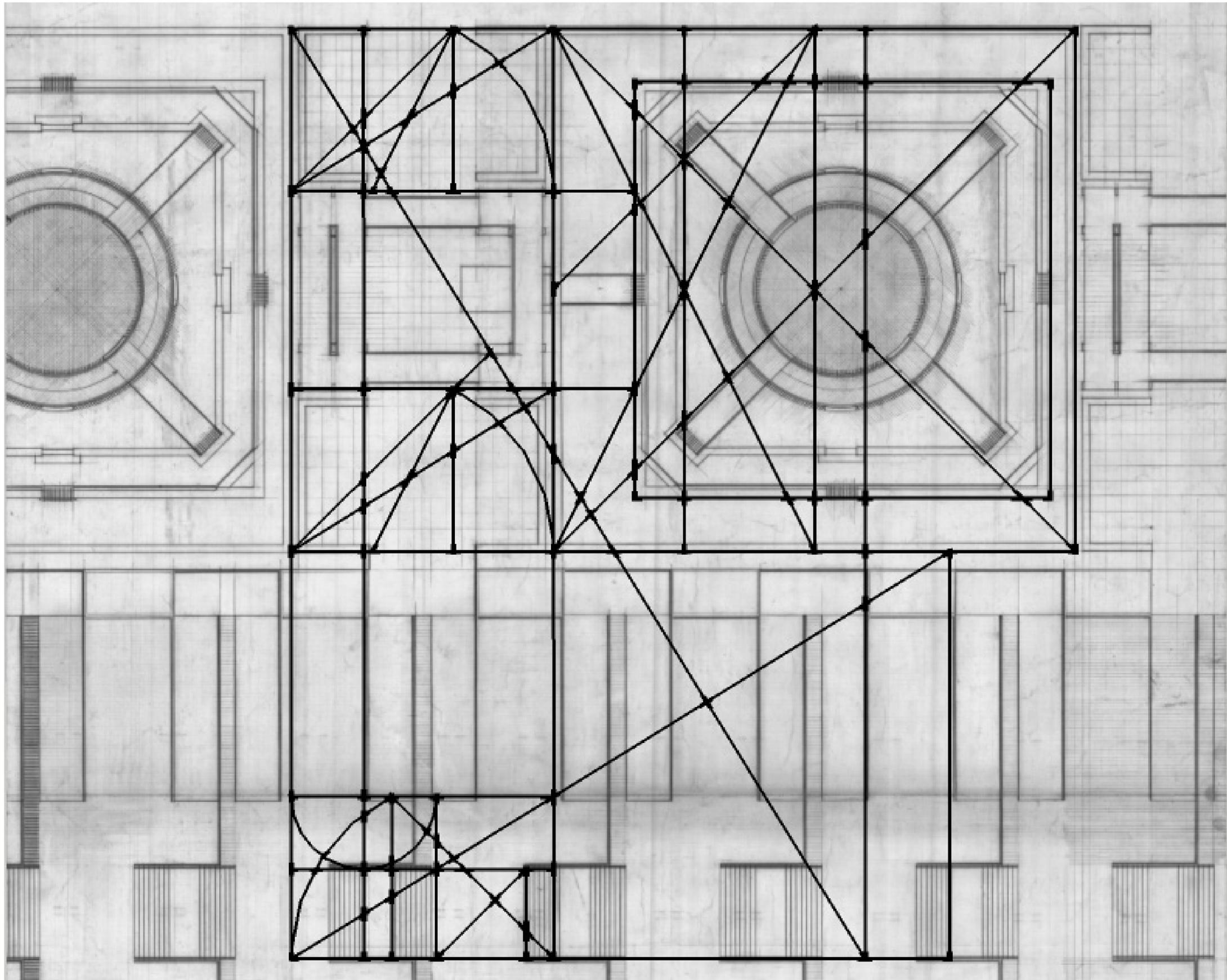


Geometry

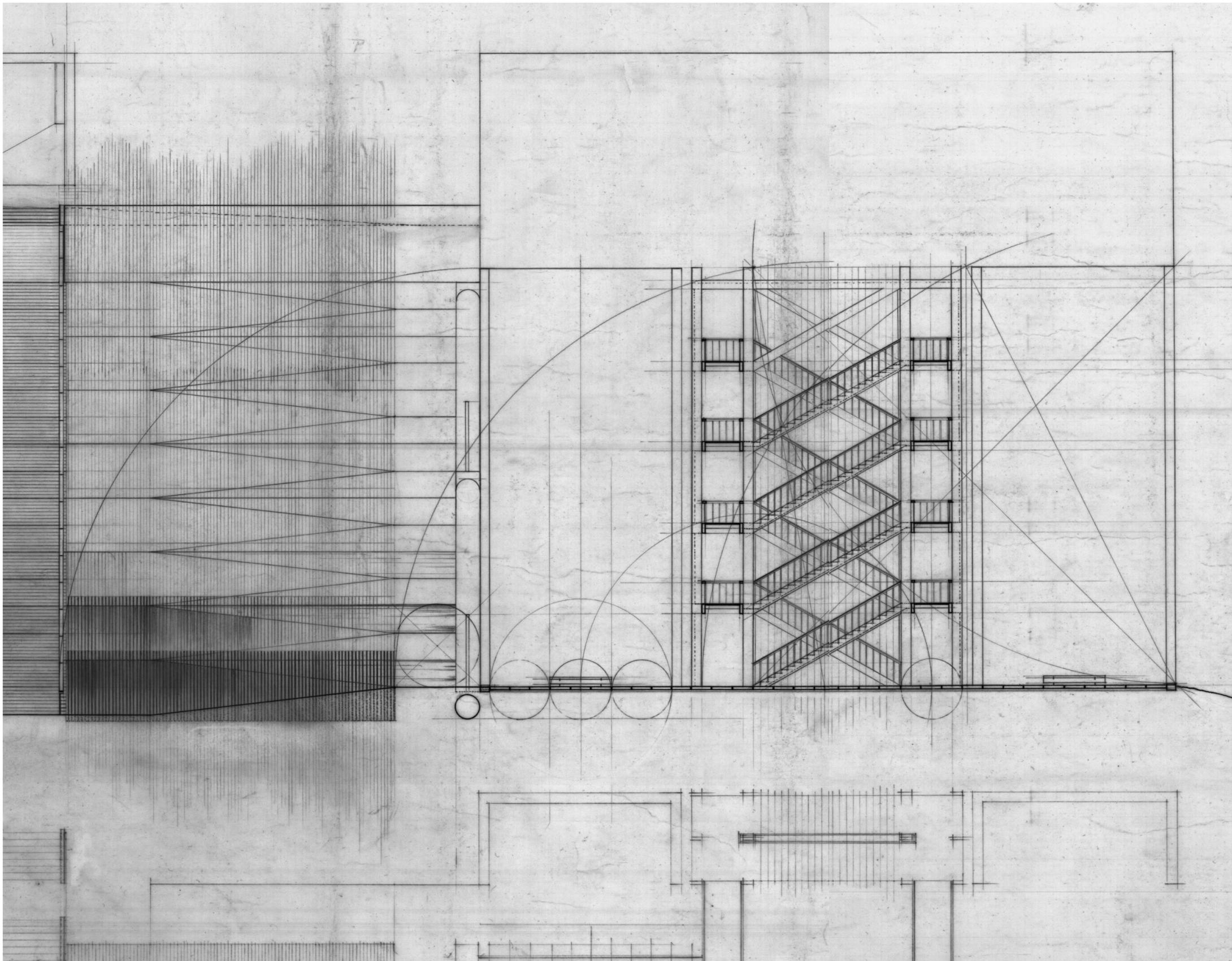




Plan of one storage module of the columbarium complex, showing the geometry of the central court pavings

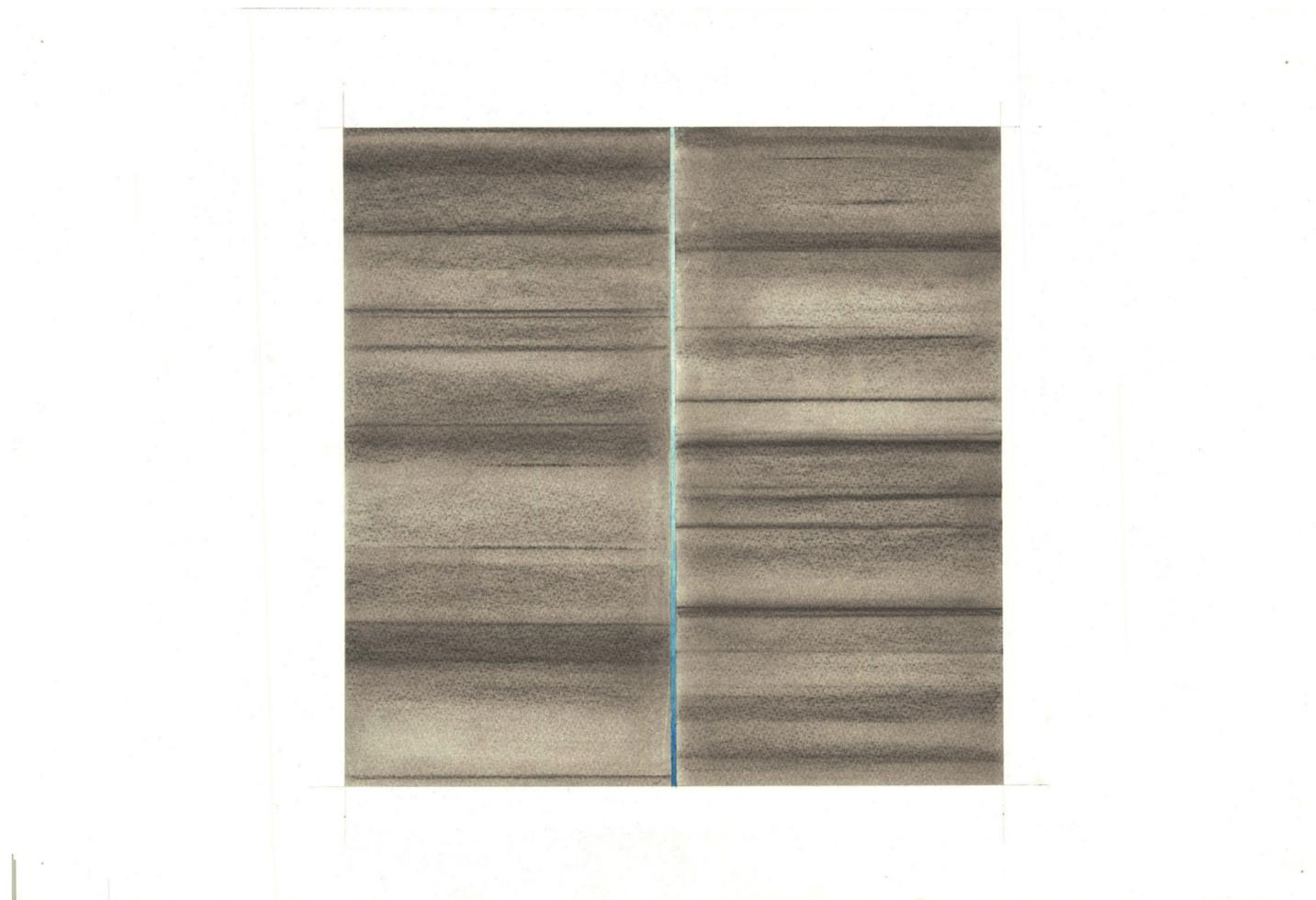


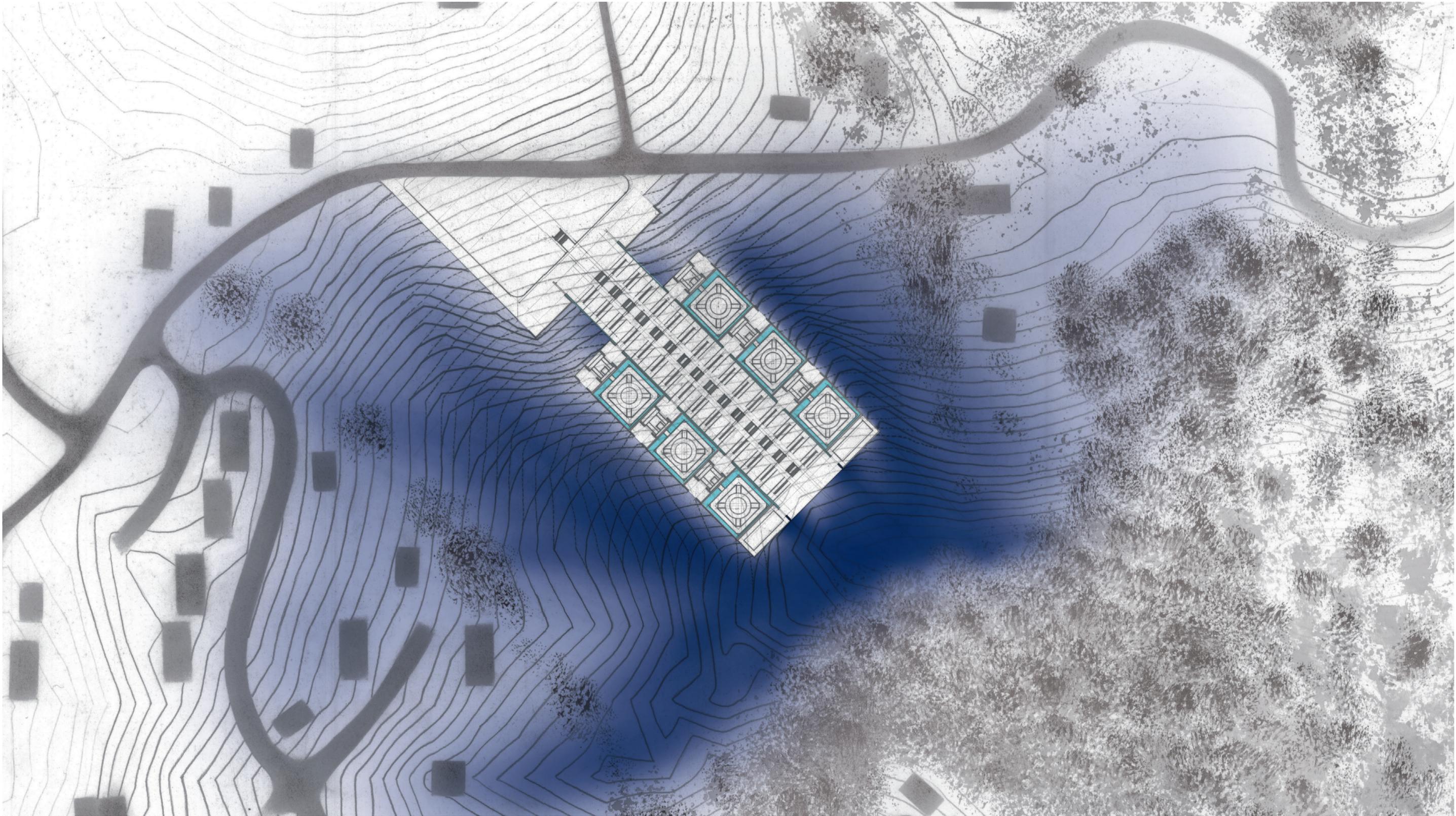
Plan showing the geometric relationship among the columbarium unit, the circulation tower and the central stair-ramp system



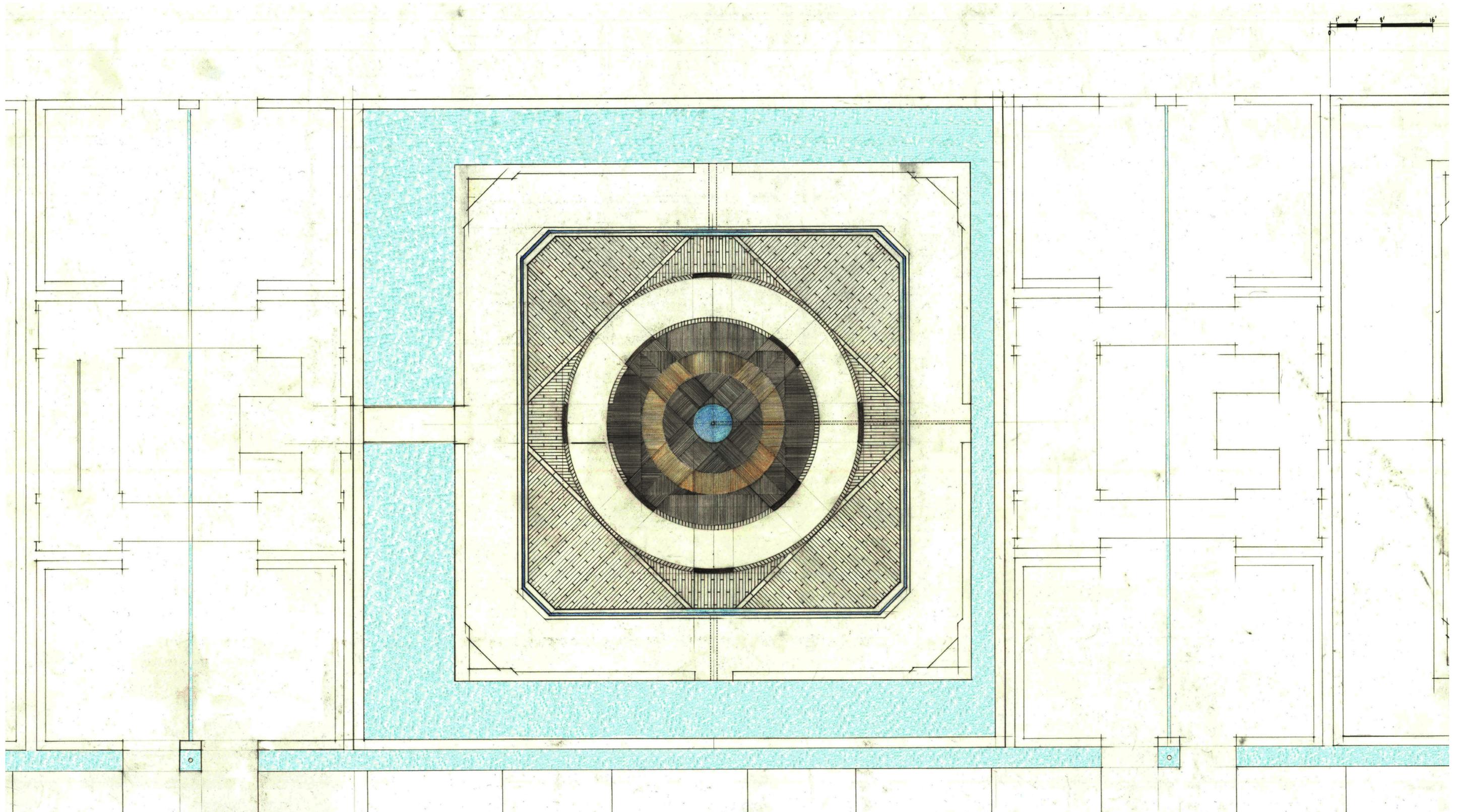
Section showing the geometric relationship between the circulation tower and the central stair-ramp system

Flow

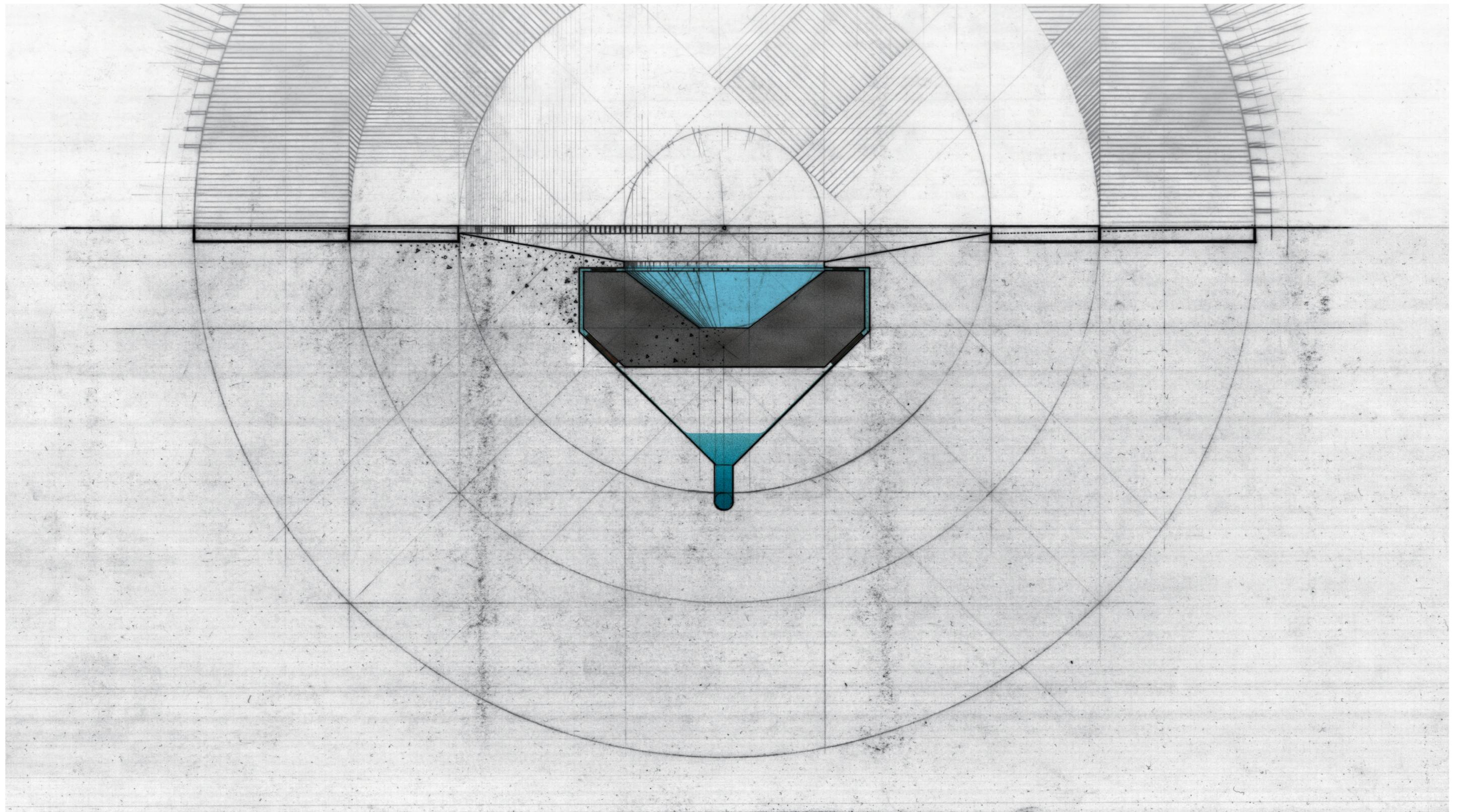




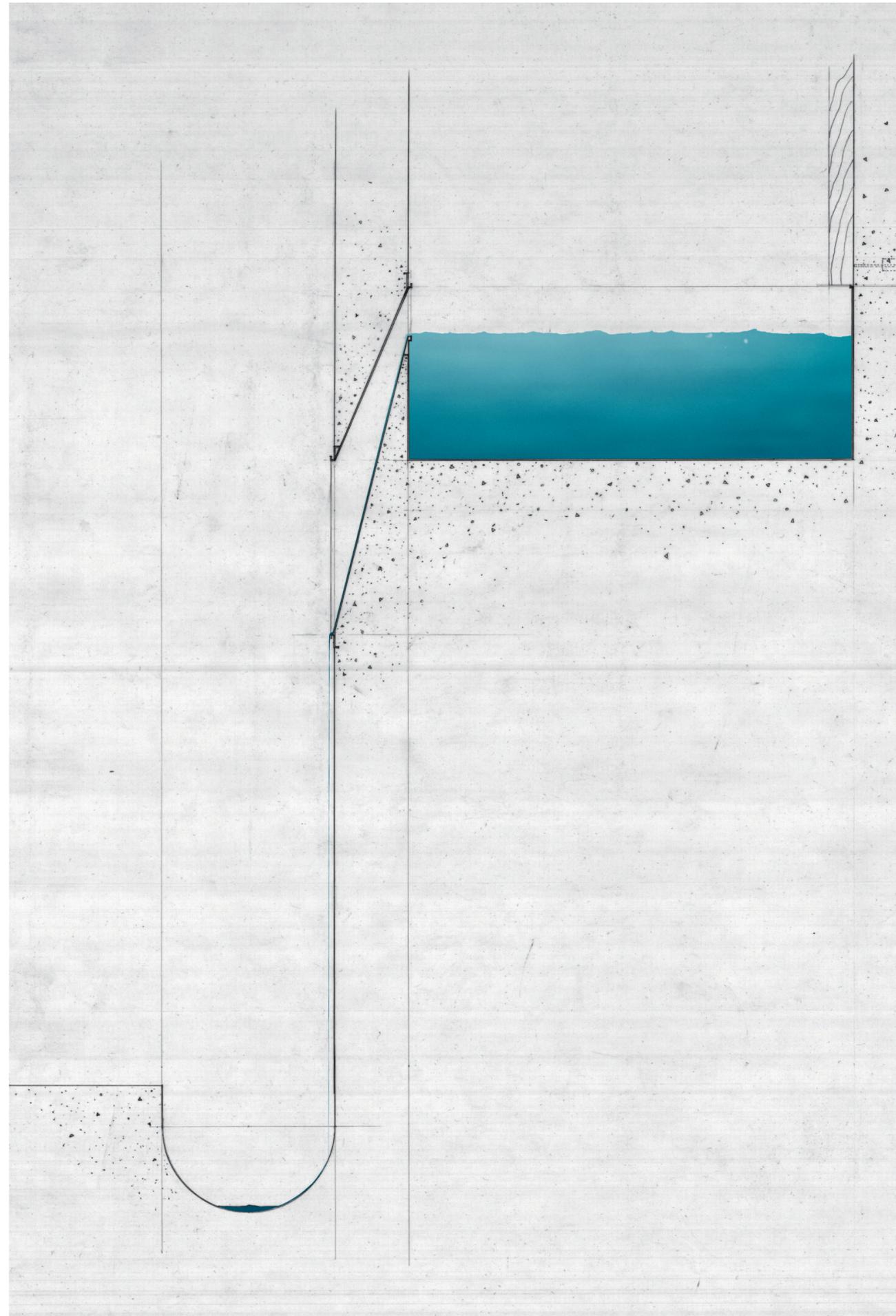
Plan showing elements of the water system



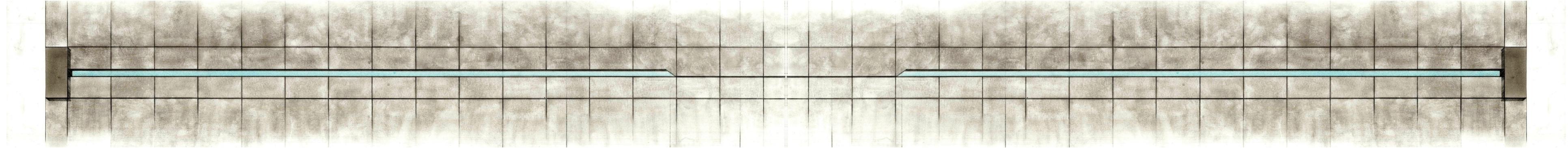
Plan showing elements of the water system



Plan-section showing the rainwater gathering assembly at the center of the columbarium central court



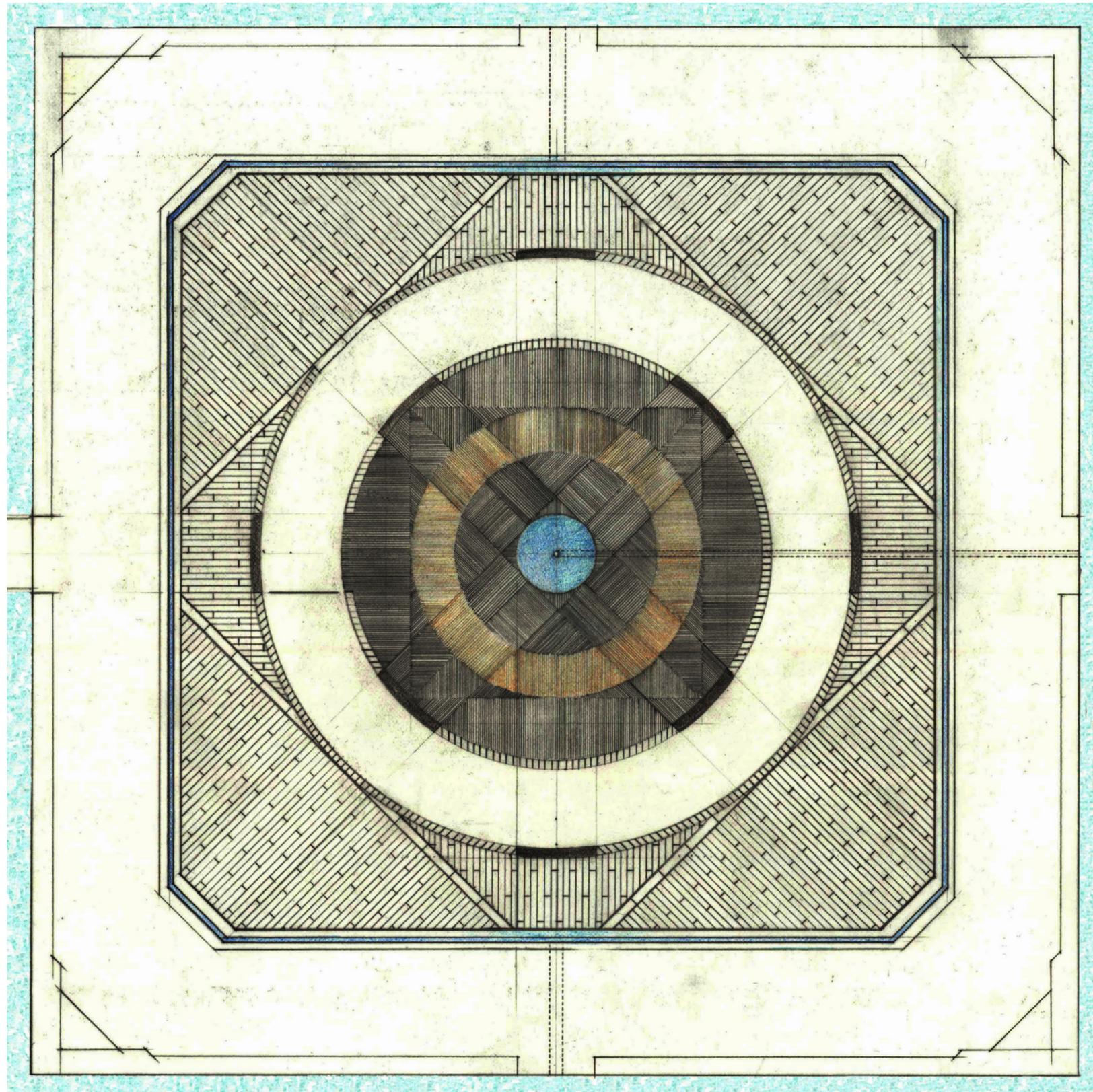
Section showing an opening on the concrete wall surrounding the columbarium that allows excess rainwater to spill over into the canal next to the central stair-ramp system



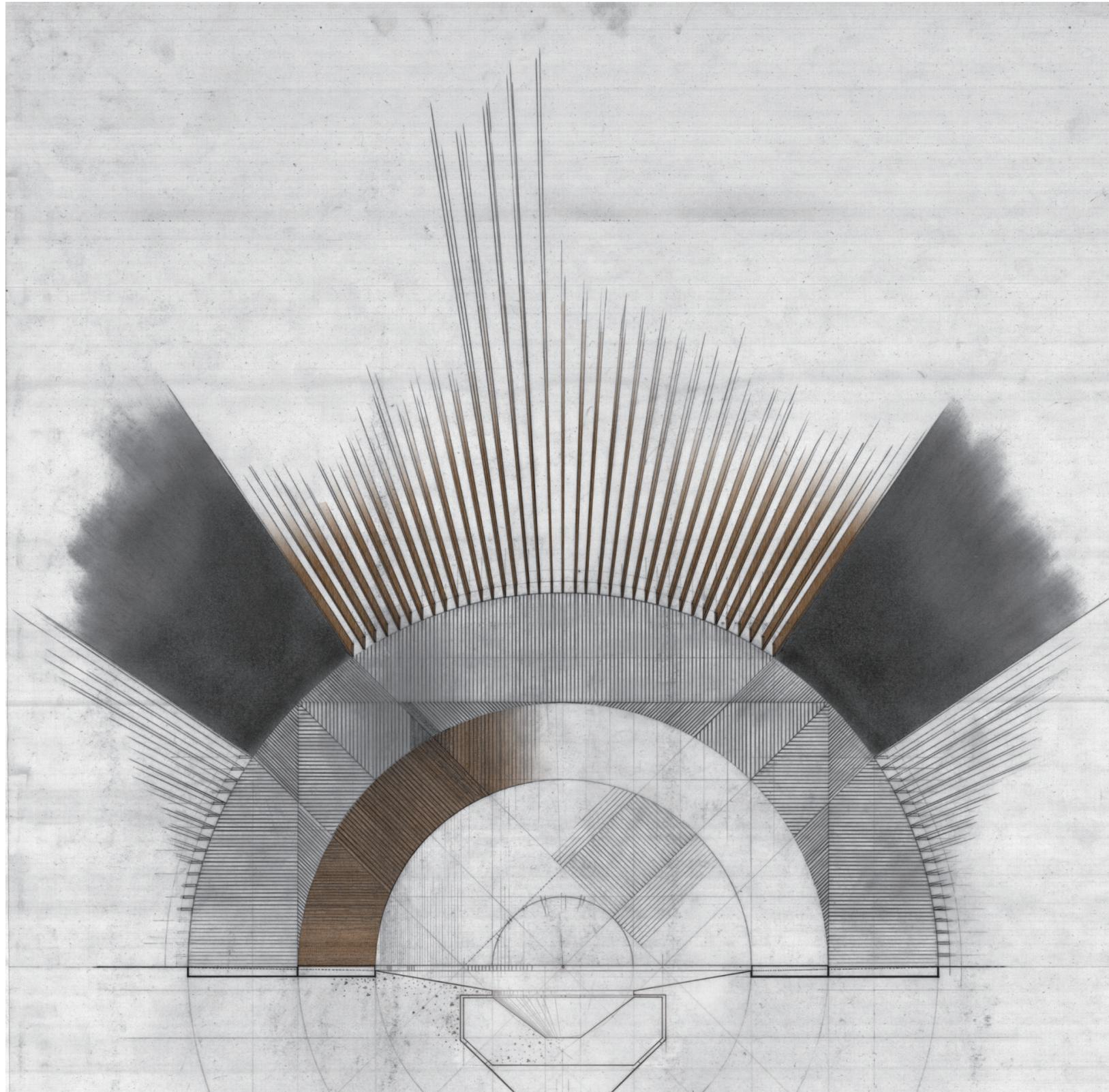
Plan showing tributary canal that bisects the plaza below the circulation tower

Material

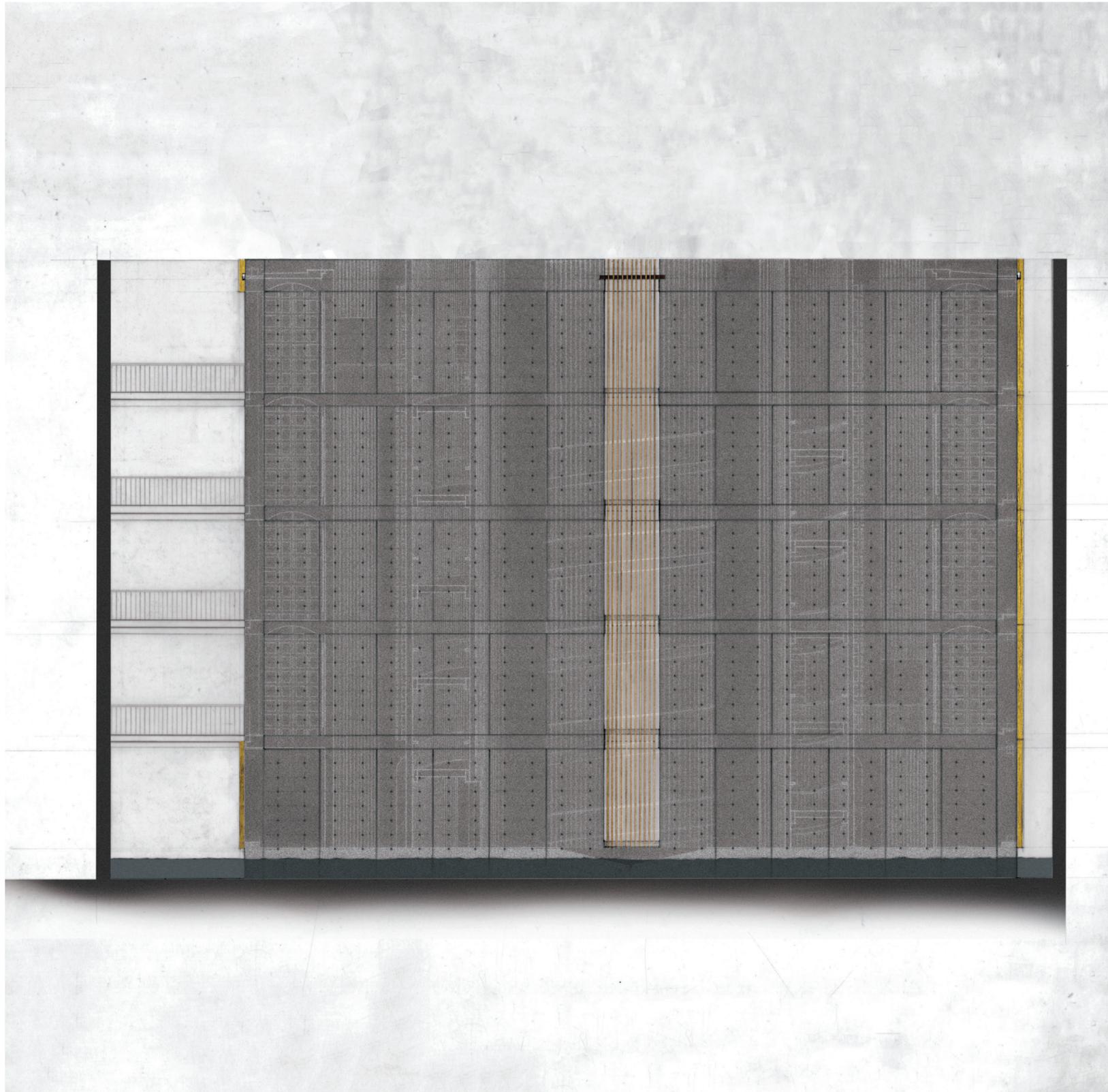




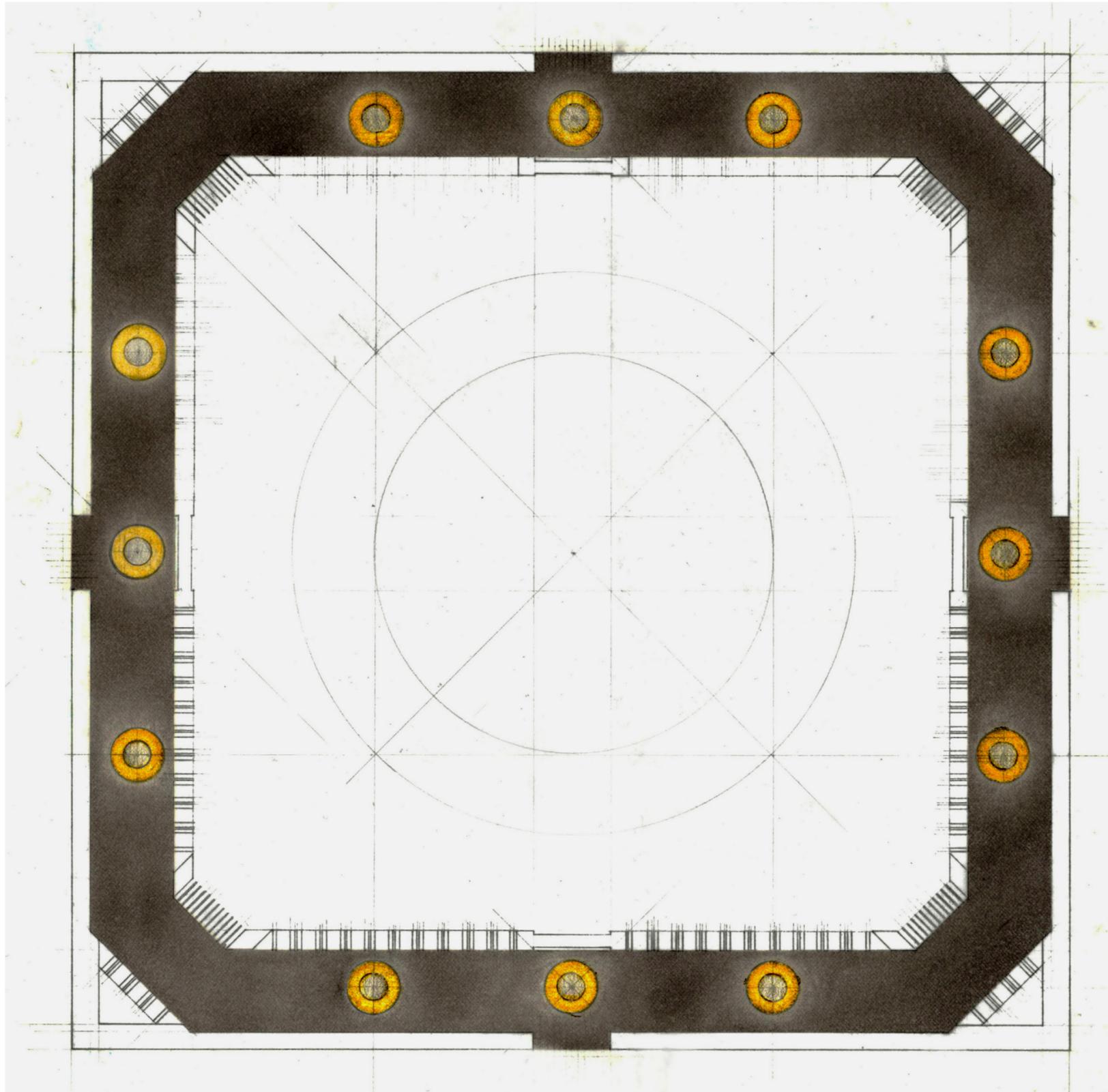
Plan showing the paving patterns of the central and outer courts of the columbarium unit; the paving is consisted of wood and stone slabs



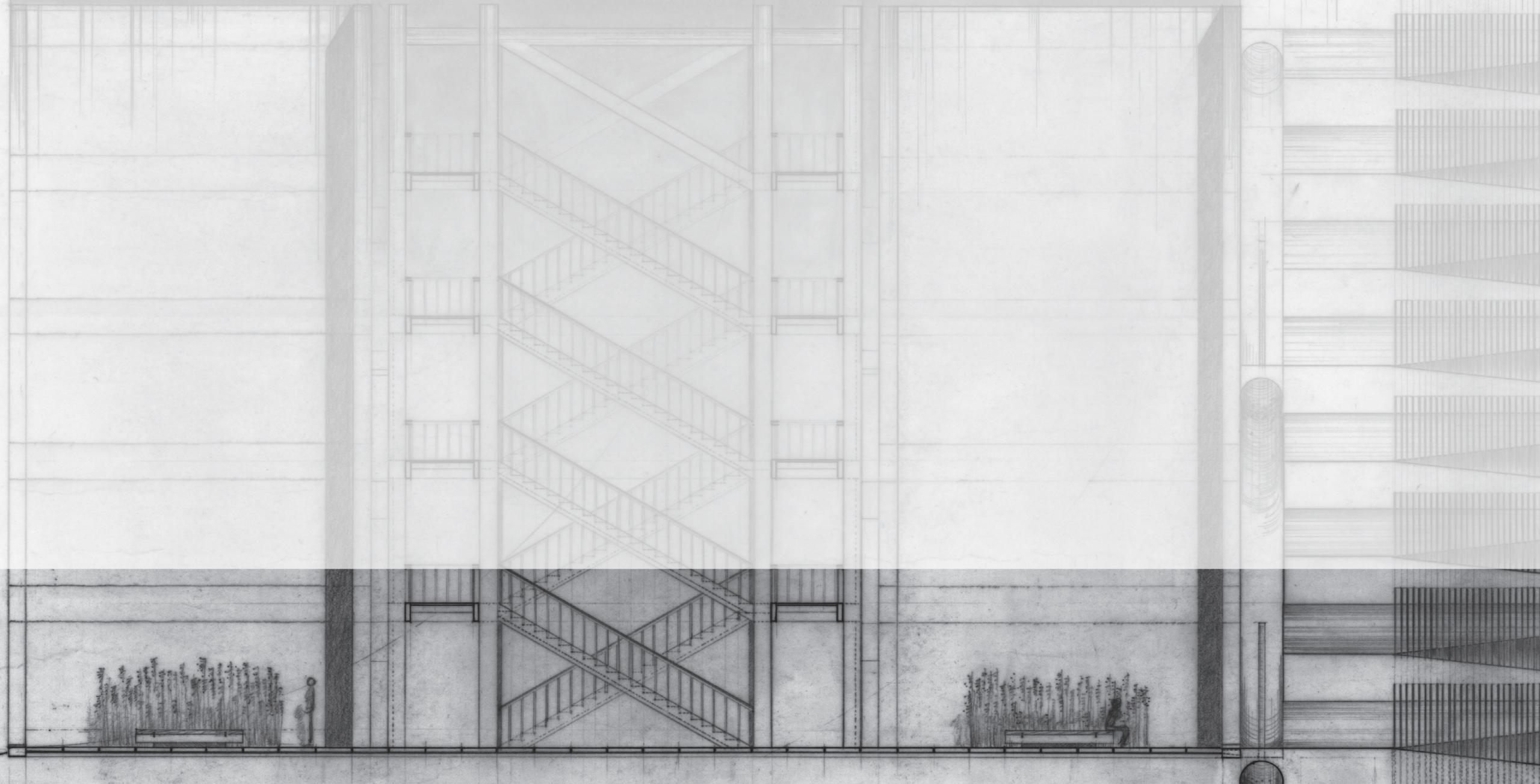
Plan-perspective showing half of the central court and the wooden strips filled in between two concrete supports



Sections showing vertical wood louvers penetrating a concrete wall on the ground level of the columbarium unit

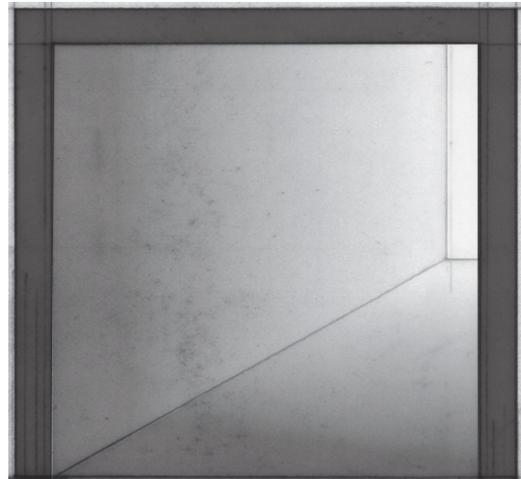


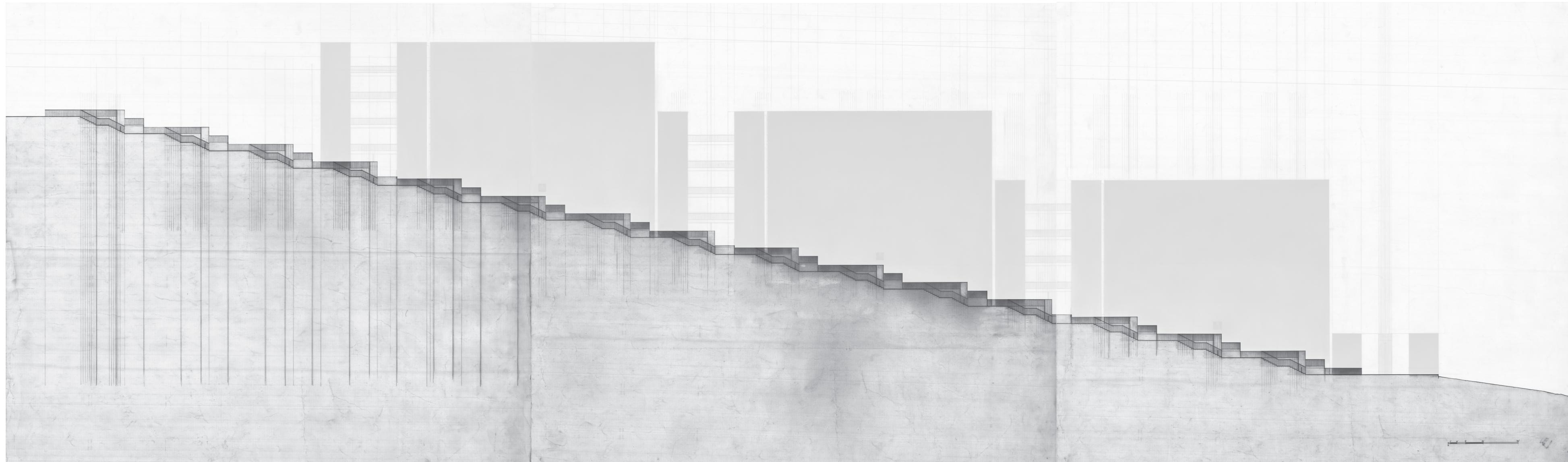
Reflected ceiling plan showing the lighting fixtures that distribute light diffused by wood facing



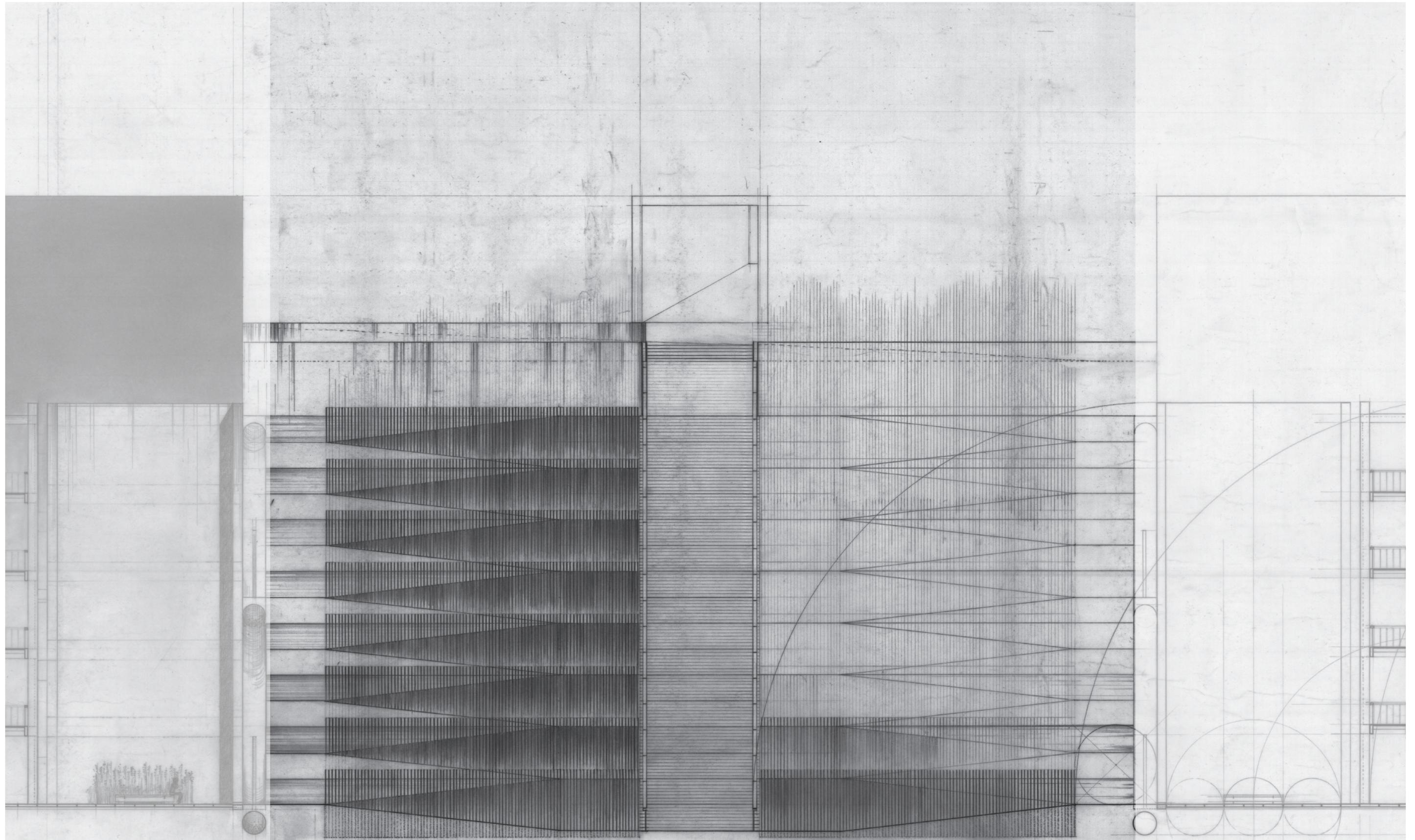
Interior section-elevation of the circulation tower showing the growth of reeds

Descent

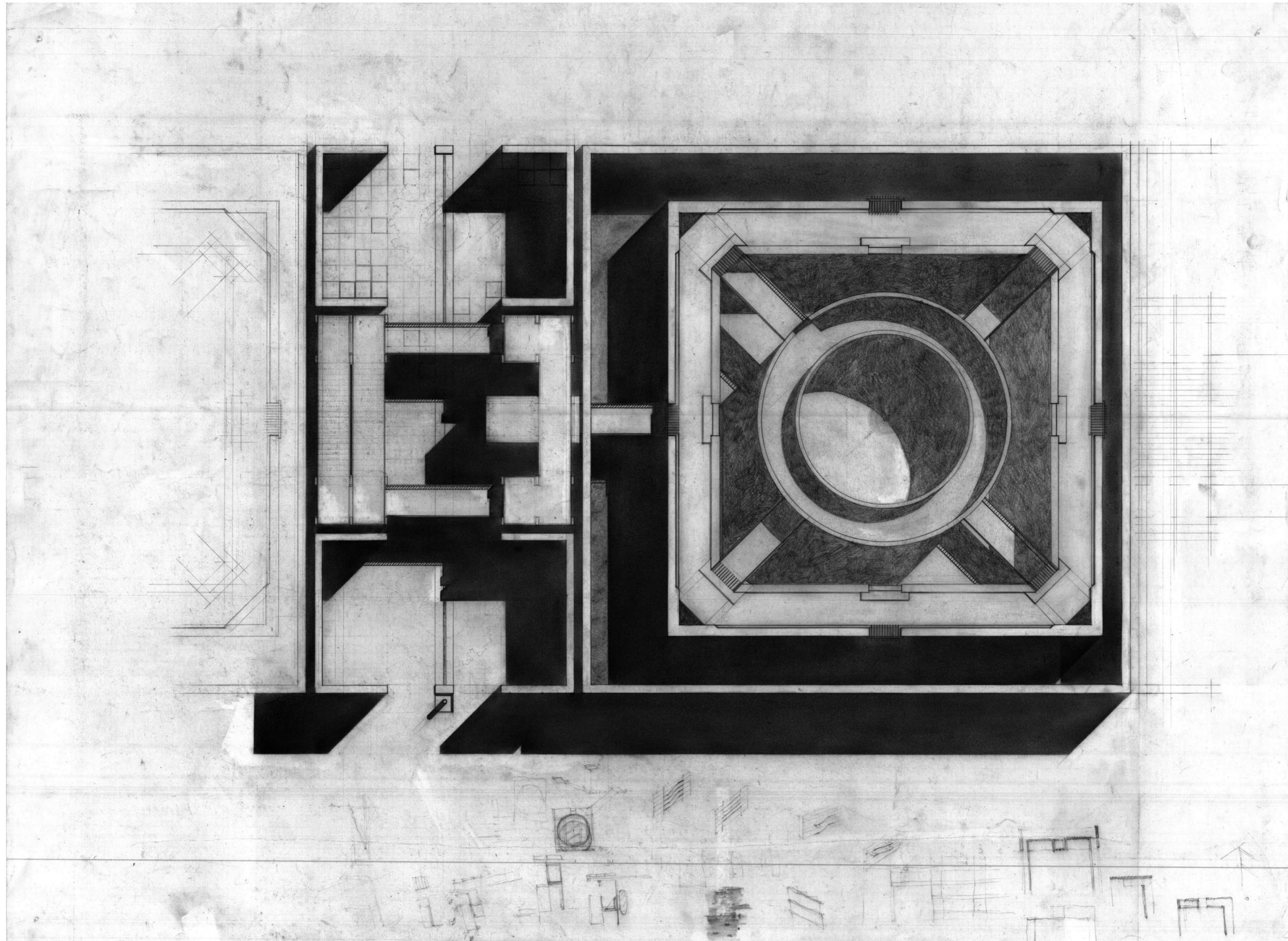




Longitudinal section of the central stair-ramp system

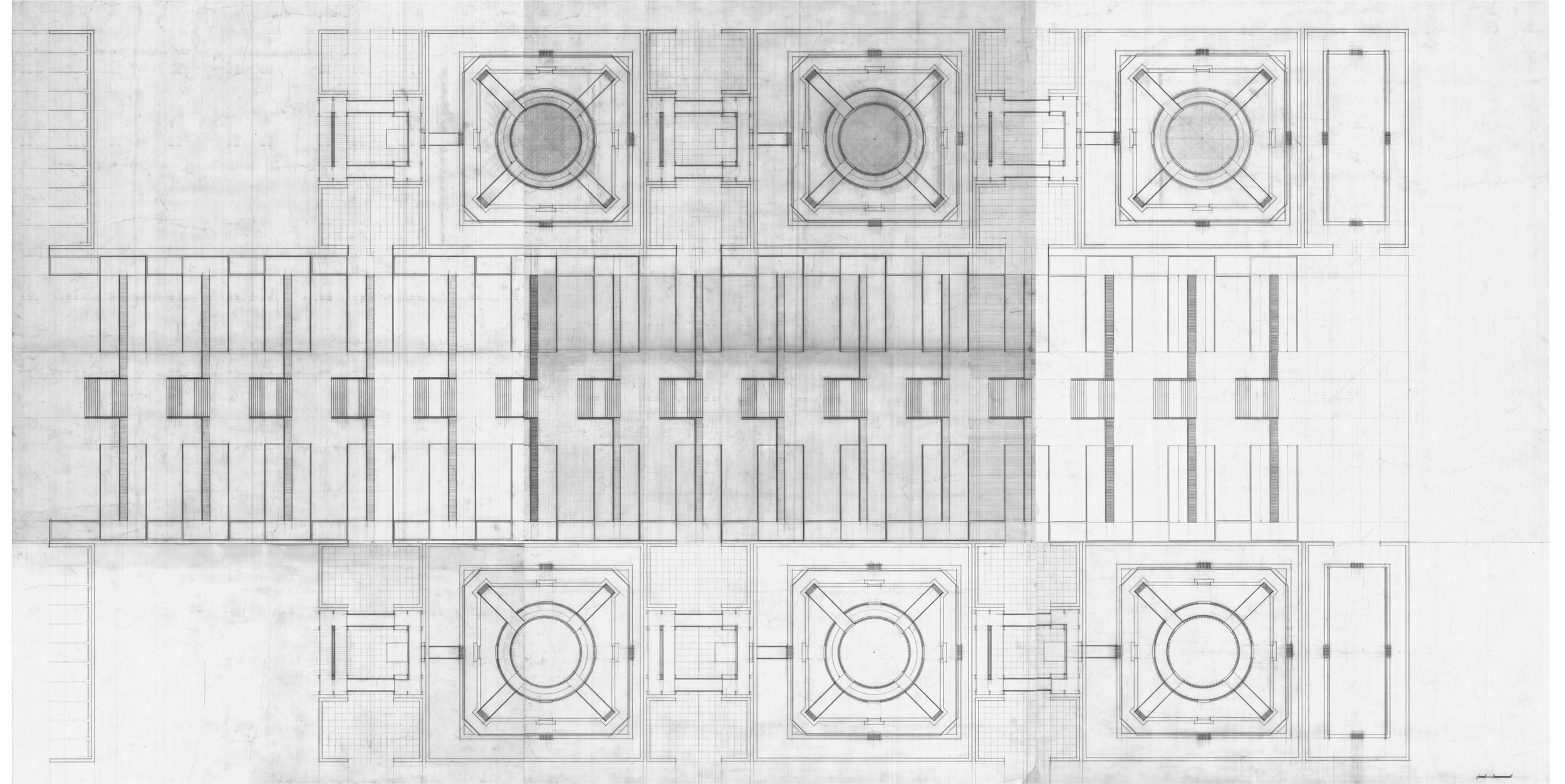


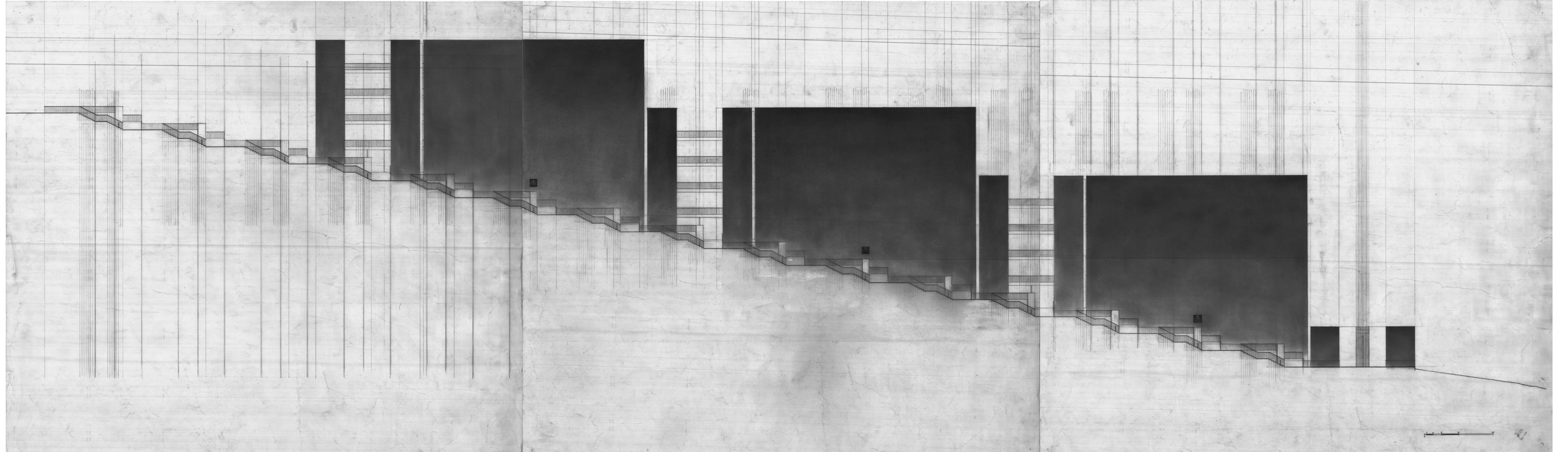
Elevation of the central stair-ramp system



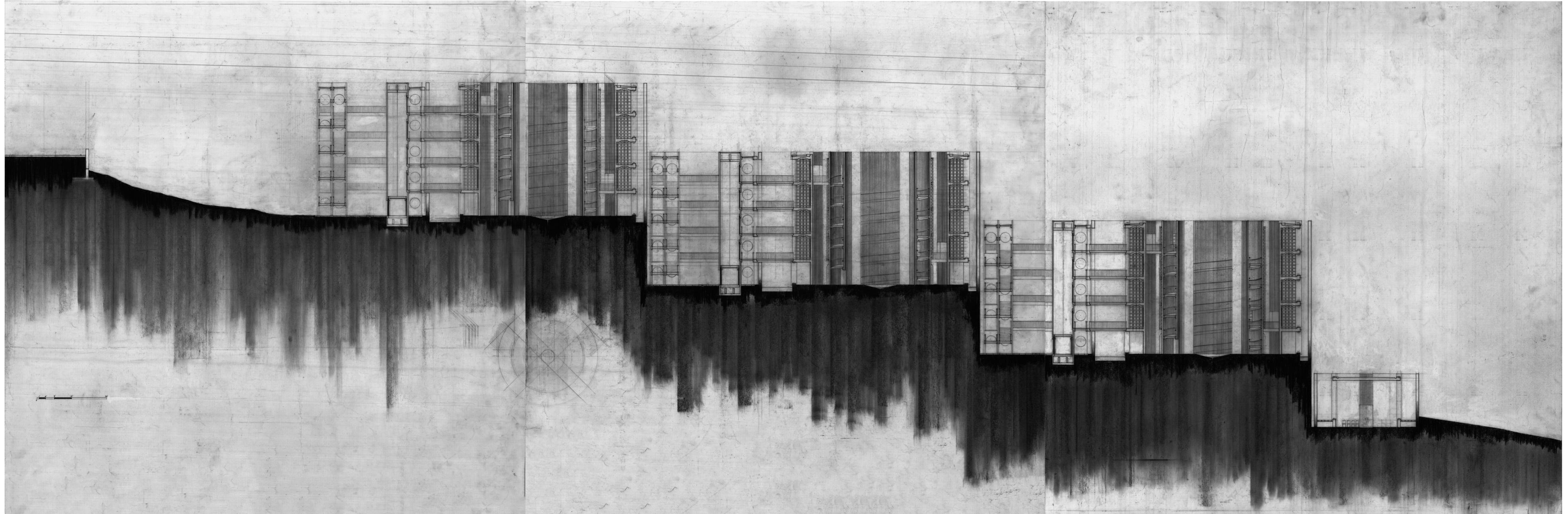
Partial plan of the columbarium unit showing the shadow cast by morning sun

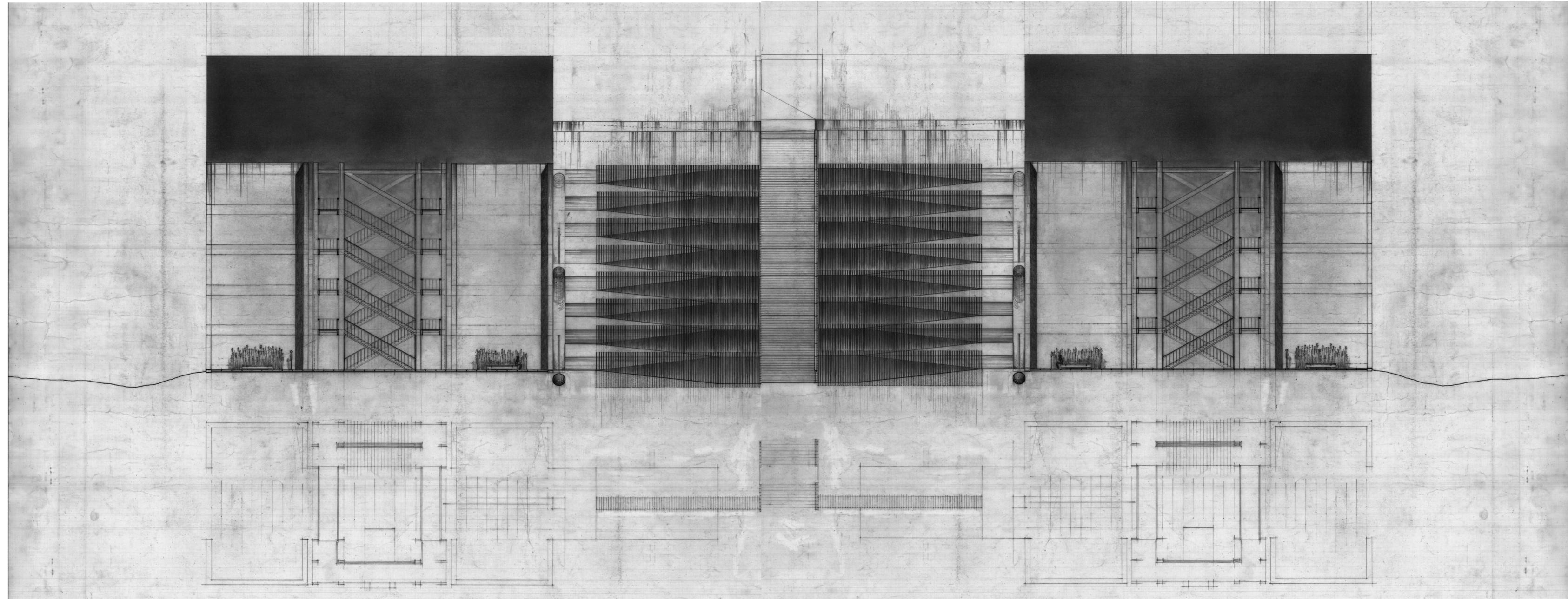
The Building



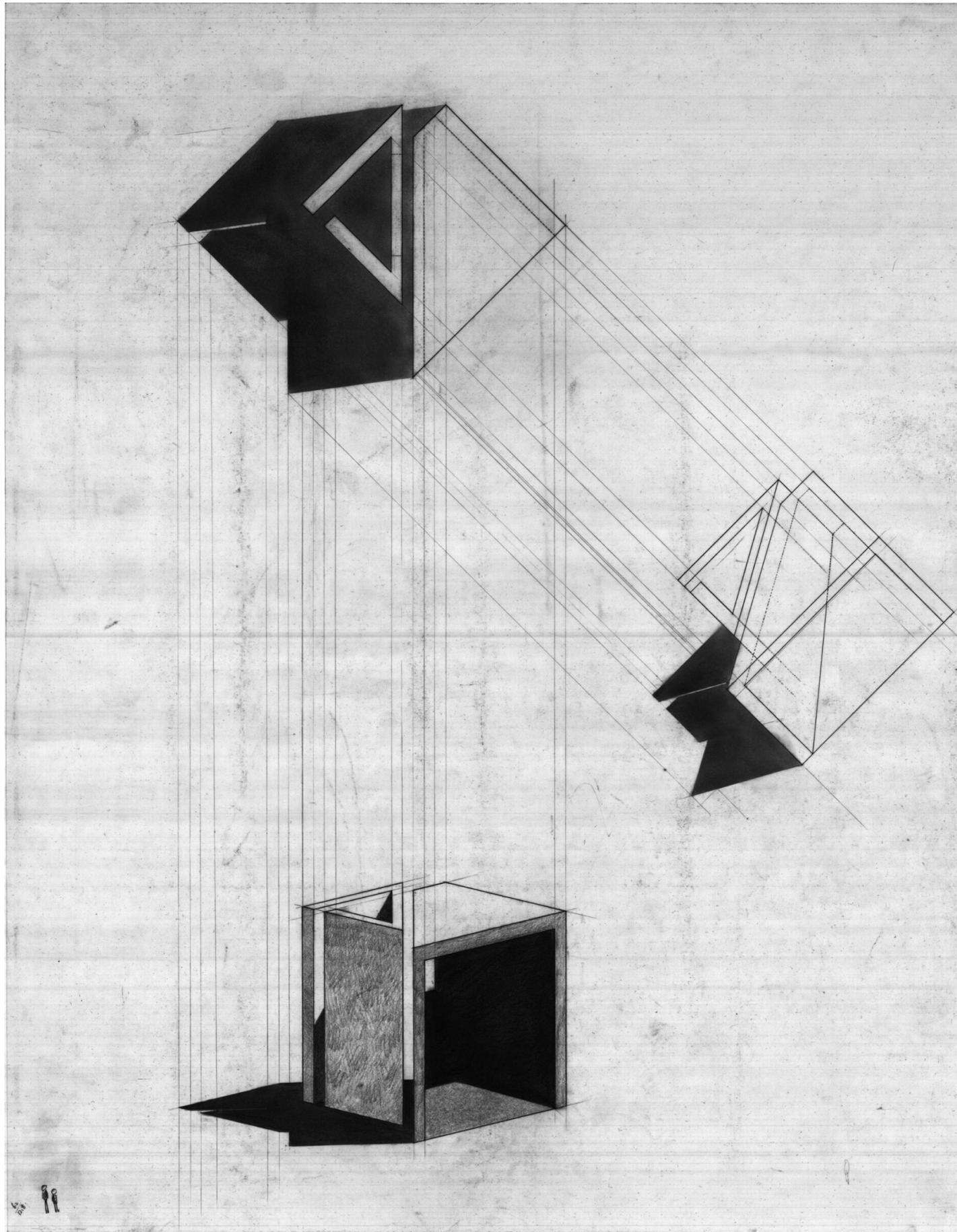


Longitudinal section cut through the stair-ramp system

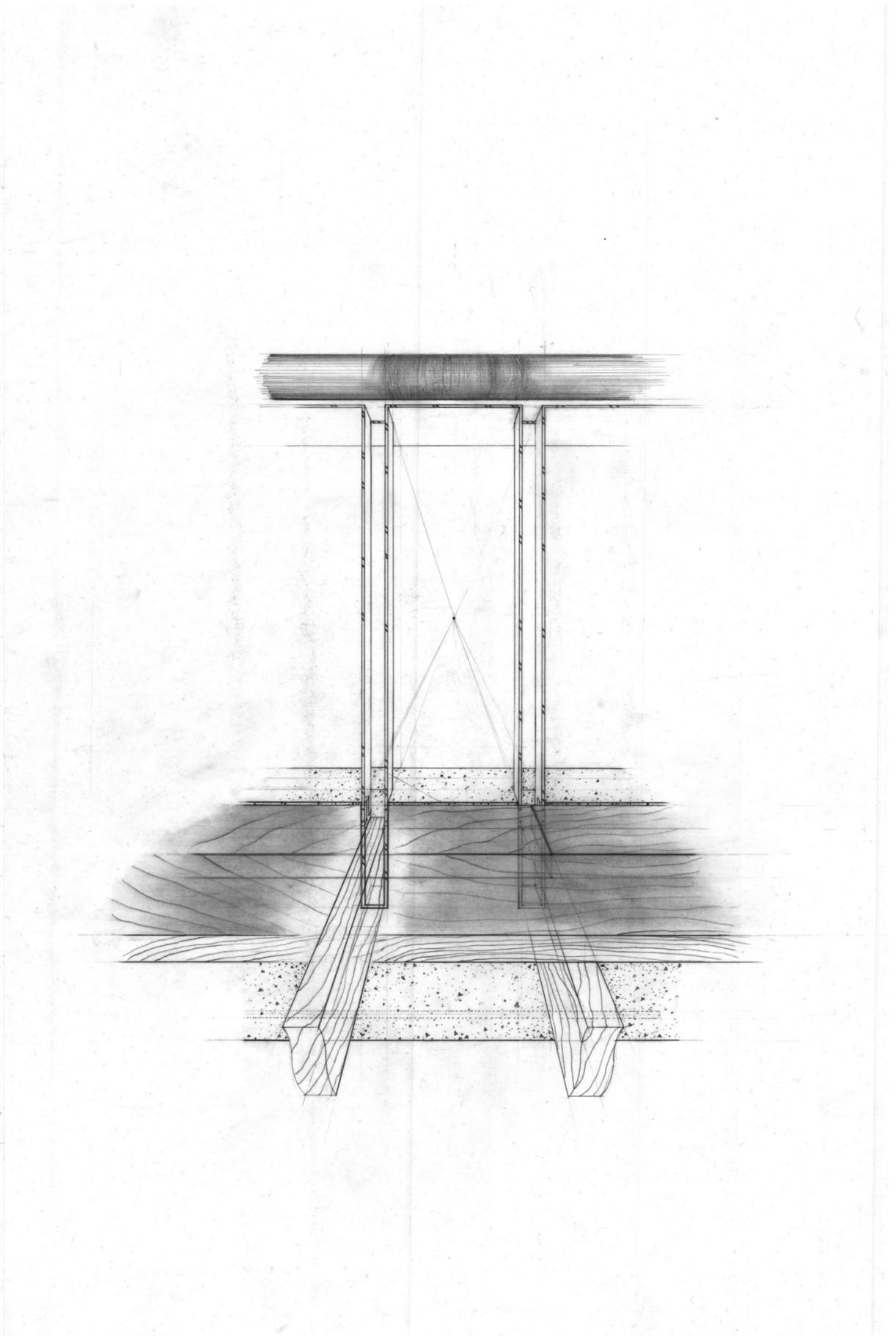
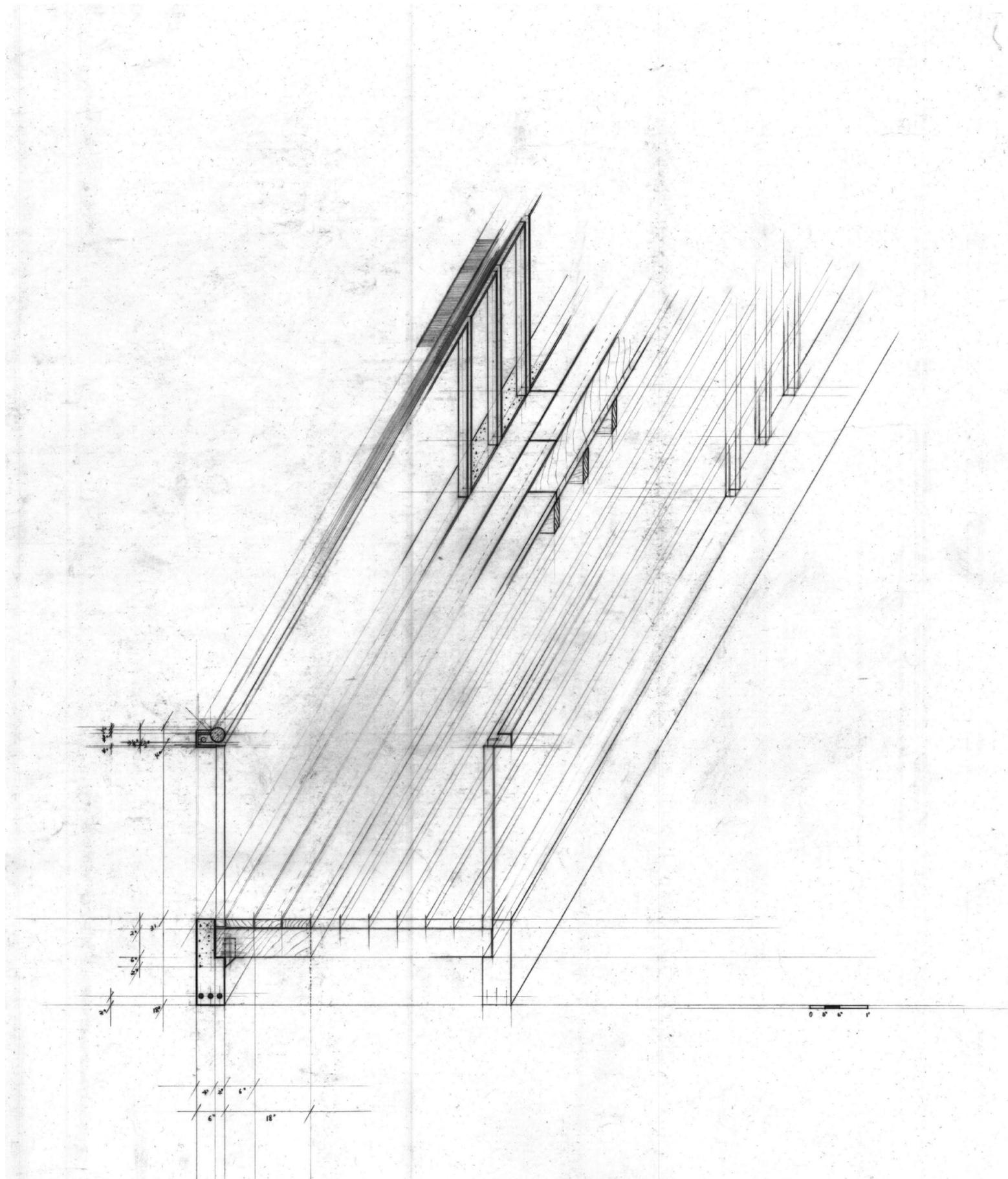




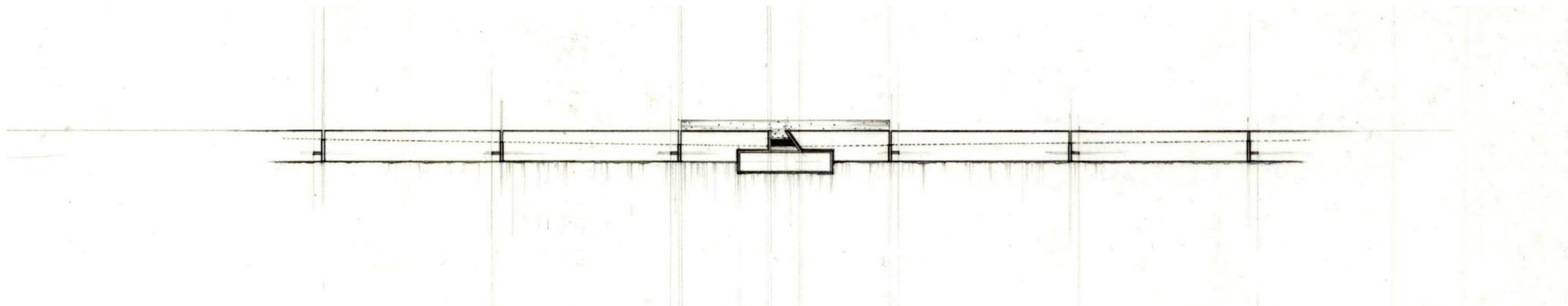
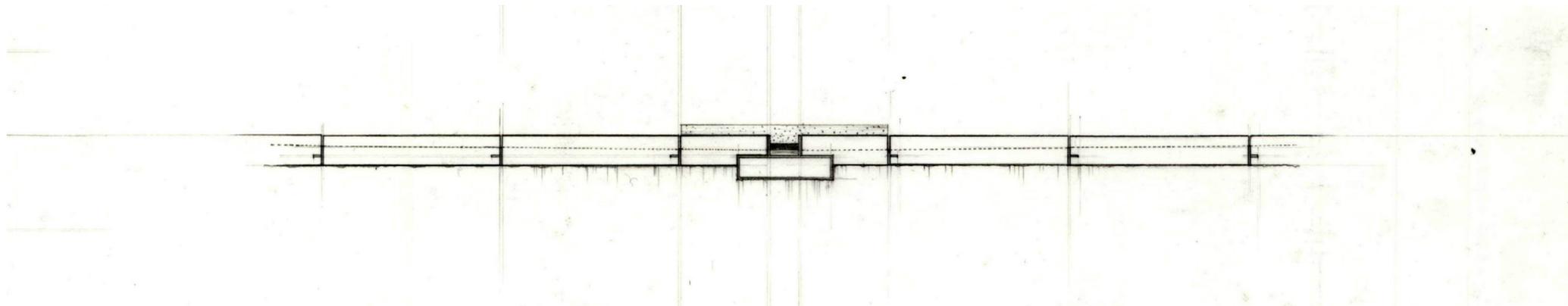
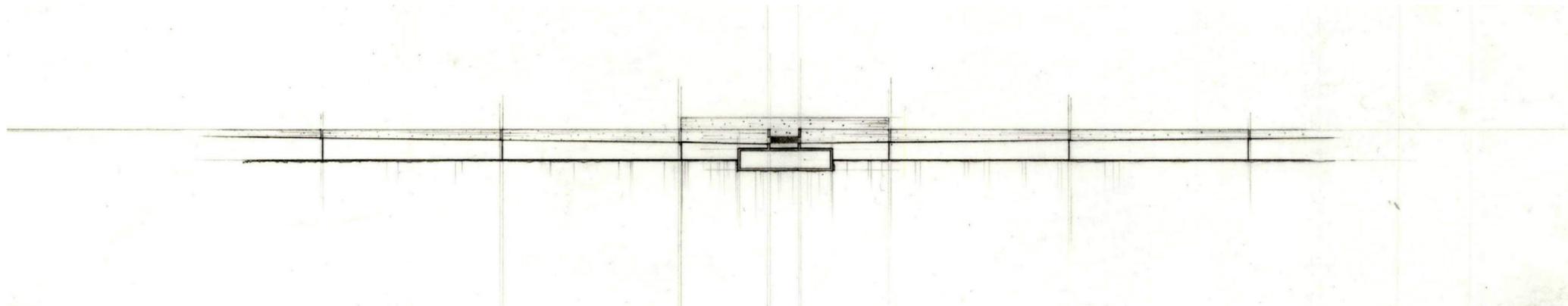
Details



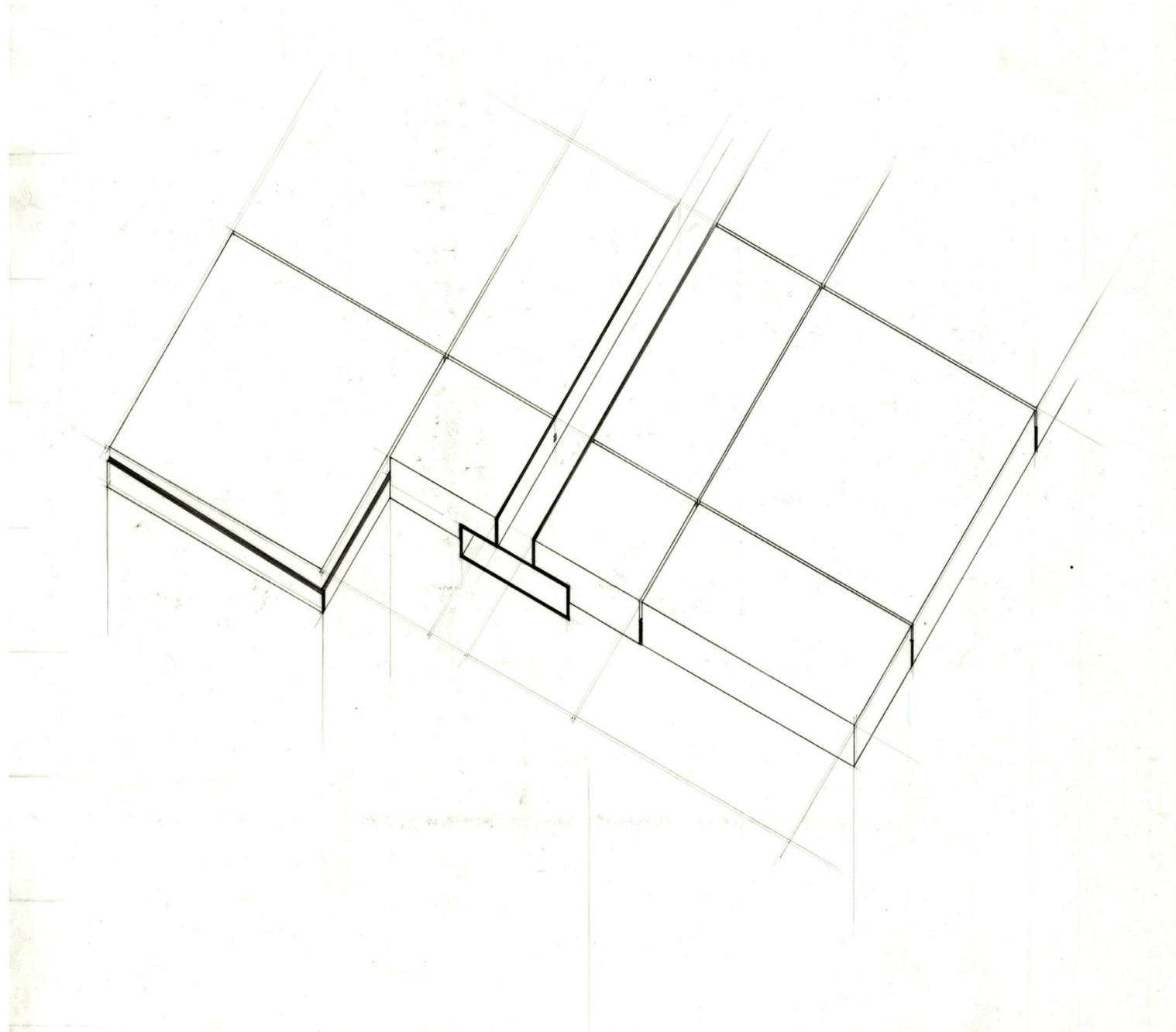
Structure that marks the entrance of the columbarium-crematorium complex



Details of the bridge-links connecting circulation towers with columbarium units



Cross sections of the tributary canal in the middle of ciruclation tower plaza



Details of the tributary canal in the middle of circulation tower plaza

Photos

