

Nezar Al Sayyad:

ARAB MUSLIM CITIES

The late seventies witnessed the rise of fundamentalist regimes in many Muslim countries. Nationalistic attitudes brought about an increasing awareness of the cultural values implicit in their urban systems. Governments needed an operational definition of the Muslim city before drawing new planning guidelines, which explains the many conferences and symposiums on the Muslim city sponsored by research groups and political organizations throughout the Muslim world.

Perhaps the most active such organizations were the Aga Khan Awards for Islamic Architecture, the Organization of Arab Towns, and the Franco-British Program on Middle Eastern Cities. Their efforts produced publications that ranged from reactionary treatments by nationalist scholars to the more critical Orientalist approach.

The Organization of Arab Towns sponsored three international conferences but only published *The Arab City*, (1982), edited by I. Serageldin and S. El-Sadek, which dealt with the identity and evolution of the Muslim city from past to present, and presented strategies for planning and conservation. *Islamic Architecture and Urbanism*, 1983, edited by A. German, uses the proceedings of a symposium sponsored by King Faisal University in Saudi Arabia. Like *The Arab City*, the volume contains contributions from all over the world. Kuban's introductory article, which demonstrates the diversity of Muslim architectural styles and urban traditions, challenges the notion of things Islamic, including city form. This article contrasts with the articles by Grabar and DeMontequin, who attempt to identify the Islamic essence of architecture and urban existence in the Muslim world.¹

The research assumptions and trends in these publications have evolved from the cumulative research of orientalist and oriental scholars. The fundamental works of William and Georges Marçais, Jean Sauvaget, and Roger Le Tourneau established a chain of authority in what must be called an orientalist tradition that believed Islam should be credited with significantly increasing the degree of urbanization in the Middle East and the introduction of a characteristically Muslim city form.² To these primarily morphological studies was added the revisionist point of view of Gustaf von Grunebaum, who produced a well-known orientalist stereotype—accused by many of reductionist methods—that presented the “typical physical form of a Muslim city” in terms of institutional structures.³ This model has been adopted by many oriental scholars,⁴ and was not challenged until the appearance of Ira Lapidus's classic *Muslim Cities in the later Middle Ages* (1967). Taking the cases of Aleppo, Cairo, and Damascus, Lapidus investigated the forces that established Muslim cities as functional urban entities in the Middle East. He concludes that Muslim urban society divided essential powers and functions among its different component groups and that urban form was the outcome of the relations among these groups and not defined by a single political or socio-economic body. This line of reasoning is followed by several Oriental scholars in *The Islamic City*, edited by Albert Hourani and S.M. Stern (1970), who explore the characteristics shared by “Islamic” cities with those of Medieval Italian, Byzantine, and Chinese cities.

The Franco-British group has held several conferences in the past few years. *Middle Eastern Cities in a Comparative Perspective*, 1986, edited by Brown, Jole, Sluglett, and Zubaida, resulted from one of those meetings. It deals with problems of comparative

urban analysis, urban policies and social practices, social space and political ideology and their effect on city form and image in several Middle Eastern cities. Half the articles in the book are in French and the editors of the French part seem to have considered it a separate volume having its own title: *Point de vue sur les Villes du Magreb et du Machrek*. The book presents a number of important contributions, at least from a conceptual standpoint. Pickvance's article, “Comparative Urban Analysis and Assumptions about Causality” is essential reading for those interested in applying the comparative approach to any group of cities in the Middle East. Brown's article, “The Muslim City: The Uses of a Concept,” is excellent. He reviews recent western writings on the subject and suggests that current focus on space and urban process represents a positive change because it no longer isolates the Islamic dimension. He predicts, however, that interpretations of the form of the Muslim city based on cultural and religious aspects will continue to dominate the field.

The Middle East City, 1987, edited by A. Saggaf, differs in that the editors make no attempt to control the nationalistic tendencies of the authors. Sponsored by the Professors' World Peace Academy, the book contains interdisciplinary essays that cover historic and contemporary issues in Islamic and Middle Eastern urbanism. Most of the contributions are from Muslim scholars and represent a common line of thinking, as evident in Saggaf's brief introduction. He states that most scholars disagree with Lapidus, since Muslim cities do have certain distinctive features, and a unique layout and physical design. Saggaf goes on to tell us that the book will not treat the Islamic city as a historical phenomenon but as a contemporary entity capable of providing a harmonious environment for its inhabitants.

Based on this, the book proceeds to ask: How far has the Middle Eastern city come in its urban process? What happened to the older city core? What are the social, cultural and religious implications of this urban trend? Scholars from diverse disciplines and backgrounds attempt to answer, using a variety of case studies, including Samarra, Jerusalem, Cairo, and Beirut.

Among the new surveys, Raymond's book, *The Great Arab Cities in the 16th-17th Century*, is rightfully titled "An Introduction." It attempts to examine the urban condition of Arab cities under Ottoman rule. Raymond asserts his interest in what he calls "this globally underestimated era which was subject to derogatory historical assessment." He states that, although Ottoman domination over Arab Muslim cities brought about generally negative conditions, with little originality in architectural and urban creations, the form of Arab cities during that era reflected influences from the Ottoman capital, local building traditions, and the Mediterranean. The first part of the book deals with the organization of the Ottoman Empire and the characteristics of Arab cities under its veil. This is followed by a discussion of the elements and general features of both the urban center and the residential districts, and finally a review of the practice of imperial Ottoman art in Arab cities and the persistence of local artistic tradition. Raymond's examples are limited to Cairo, Damascus, Aleppo, and Musil. Because the book is only an introduction to an unexplored subject, there is little room for a critique. Its four chapters read like separate papers, each with its own conclusions. The book could have benefited from some integration, and possibly an introduction to explain its structure. Nevertheless, Raymond's book is very useful in providing a review of the literature for the general reader and new research questions and

avenues for research for the specialist. The author should be commended for highlighting this forgotten period of Muslim urbanism.

Msefer's *Villes Islamiques* is a result of research sponsored by the International Union of Architects. The book discusses the types and stages of urban genesis and the formation of various Muslim cities, planned and spontaneous. A survey of the recent urban development of Muslim cities follows, identifying the patterns of growth and change, with emphasis on the relationship of the traditional historic core to the rest of the city. The format is systematic, with a good balance between text and graphics. Msefer employs examples of cities from all over the Muslim world, yet his use of the comparative approach is very simplistic. The entire text is based on secondary sources, and the graphics come from a wide range of documents, including monographs, journals, maps, and travelers' sketches. The book is useful as a manual on traditional and contemporary Muslim cities at different stages of development, but it is of dubious value to the serious scholar.

Hakim's *Arabic-Islamic Cities* is the most controversial and most ambitious of all the new books, representing the new nationalist tradition in the study of Muslim urbanism. Hakim states his objective in the preface: to systematically demystify and record all the building and planning principles that shaped the "Arabic-Islamic" city. His central thesis is simple; he believes that there is an Islamic reason behind the form of Arabic or Muslim cities that justifies arguing that Islamic law has been particularly responsible for the cellular pattern of the Muslim city. He divides the book into three independent parts. The first deals with neighborhood building and maintenance principles under Islamic Law. Citing *fatawi*, or rulings rendered by Malki jurists to resolve urban and

building disputes, Hakim identifies how windows and door locations, building heights, and functional uses were determined, and how these factors influenced the shape of the city of Tunis.

In the second part, he begins by stating that his research has uncovered the existence of a vital, yet unconscious language of physical elements that cut across the city, creating a set of components that were organized in different ways to create the Muslim city. He identifies 13 different elements from which Muslim cities are made, examining the location and form of each, and illustrates this with a beautiful diagram that he calls "morphological analysis."

In the last section, Hakim presents an interpretation of urban form using examples that illustrate how the building process was governed by religious and political authority. He evaluates the urban form of Tunis and concludes by suggesting that actions by government authorities were more important in determining the location of the city, its central mosque, and burial places, while actions by private citizens shaped the streets, the houses, the walls, and openings. Hakim also suggests that the earlier reliance on Islam as a basis for analyzing Muslim cities was essentially sound. He suggests that the roots of the form of all Muslim cities should primarily be attributed to the building principles that were generated by Islamic divine law. In his words:

All cities in the Arab and Islamic world inhabited by Muslims share an Islamic identity which is directly due to the application of Sharia values in the process of city building. To summarize, the study demonstrates the importance of law through building guidelines as a prime factor which shaped the traditional Arabic-Islamic city and it de-emphasizes climate as a major determining factor.

Obviously, Hakim's book is an im-

portant addition to the literature on Muslim urbanism because it attempts to revive the old "Islamic" argument of the first orientalist school. However, the book's importance should not stop us from asking certain questions. It was published in 1986, yet the introduction is dated 1979. Was the book stalled in the press for seven years and then published in an "as is" condition, ignoring all the relevant material that came out during that period? S. Al-Hathloul's *The Arab Muslim City: Tradition, Continuity and Change*, originally a Ph.D. dissertation at MIT, and published by UMI in 1981, makes exactly the same argument as Hakim and uses similar examples from Tunis and Medina. The title of Hakim's book is slightly misleading; we expect a treatise on Muslim cities, but in fact get a case study of the city of Tunis. In a study in urban history, one expects a better explanation of the time period under study, and of the category "Arabic-Islamic cities." Hakim's is too simplistic, namely that Islam emerged in Arabia and that Arabic is the language of the Quran.

Other problems arise: for example, Hakim's treatment of the city is a formalist and static one. Although he produces one of the best diagrammatic representations of the concept of the Muslim city, his text reveals a vision of the city as merely an assembly of physical elements. He interprets the city more as a still photograph at a single point in time than a living, growing organism. Also, his use of what he calls quantitative and qualitative evaluations of city form is very confusing and adds little or nothing to his argument. For example, he uses the planimeter to measure different areas on the city map of Tunis and, based on this, identifies percentages of the different types of open spaces and functional land uses in the city. From this analysis we are informed that, in the typical Muslim city, courtyards occupy 24.9 percent and services

occupy 29.5 percent of the total area. At no point are we informed of the significance, relevancy, or accuracy of these numbers! In fact, there is no mention of the time period under which the city was analyzed, nor is there any attempt to compare these numbers to their equivalents in other Muslim cities. Hakim's contention that all the cities of the Arab and Muslim world are like Tunis in that they share an Islamic identity that could be directly linked to the application of Muslim law remains unsubstantiated. His suggestion that climate was not a major factor in determining the shape of the Muslim city is even more erroneous, since climate was never even investigated in his research.

In spite of its drawbacks, Hakim's book is a sign that scholarly research on Muslim urbanism is in a healthy state. It reminds us of the different research cycles we go through as academics. First we had the orientalists, then the revisionists, and now we have the nationalists. It is ironic that, to make their point, the nationalists had to revert to arguments originally introduced by the Orientalists. The nationalists have fallen prey both to the Orientalist dogmas they inherited and to their desire to gain legitimacy among their Western peers by opposing the revisionist trends of the late sixties and early seventies. If the cycle continues, in the near future we should get a structuralist or a phenomenological interpretation of Muslim urbanism.

1. R. B. Serjeant, *The Islamic City*, (UNESCO, 1980), and "The Islamic City," in *Alm El-Fikr*, 1980.

2. William Marçais, "L'Islamisme et la Vie Urbaine," in *L'Academie des inscriptions et belles-lettres: Comptes Rendus* (Paris, 1928), pp. 86-100. George Marçais, "L'Urbanisme Musulmane" in *Congres de la Federation des Societes Savantes de L'Afrique du Nord* (Algiers, 1940), pp. 31-48. Roger LeTourneau, *Les Villes Musulmanes de L'Afrique du Nord* (Aiger, 1957) and *Fez in the Age of the Marinides* (Norman,

1961).

3. Gustave Von Grunebaum, "The Structure of the Muslim Town," in *Islam: Essays in the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955).

4. Jairazghoy, *Art and Cities of Islam* (Asia Publishing House, 1965). Adel Ismail, *Origin, Ideology and Physical Pattern of Arab Urbanization* (Karsruhe: University Dissertations, 1969). Ahmed Monier, *Cities of Islam* (Beirut: BAU Press, 1971).

The Arab City, I. Serageldin and S. El-Sadek, Arab Urban Development Institute, 1982.

Islamic Architecture and Urbanism, A. Geramen, King Faisal University Press, 1983.

Middle Eastern Cities in a Comparative Perspective, edited by K. Brown, M. Jole, P. Sluglett, and S. Zubaida, Ithaca Press, 1986.

The Middle East City, A. Saggaf, Paragon House, 1987.

The Great Arab Cities In the 16th-17th Centuries: An Introduction, A. Raymond, New York University Press, 1984.

Villes Islamiques: Cités d'hier et d'aujourd'hui, J. Msefer, Conseil International de la Langue Francaise, 1985.

Arabic Islamic Cities: Building and Planning Principles, B. S. Hakim, KPI, 1986.

LETTERS

To the Editors:

I am writing in regard to Martin Pawley's Fall 1987 review of *Sustainable Communities* (Sim Van der Ryn and Peter Calthorpe, editors). In it, he makes some snide remarks about a chapter I contributed to this book and juxtaposes two quotes out of context, which prompts me to write this letter.

In an early section of this chapter, I discuss the increasing need for child care: "... it's predicted that by 1990 eighty percent of all preschool children will be in day care which means not only more provisions for day care, but more work opportunities in or close to residential neighborhoods for both men and women, more possibilities of part-time and flex-time work, and greater accessibility to public transport." (p. 122) Six pages later, in a section on attempts to create safer and more livable cities, I describe the Dutch experiments with "woonerf": "Another successful form of street 'reclamation' is the Dutch 'woonerf.' A journalist whose child had been killed by a car got together with other bereaved parents and started an organization lobbying for safer cities. It was called 'Stop the Child Murders.' The result was a form of redevelopment of streets which is now very successful in Holland, and which has spread to other West European countries. In a 'woonerf,' cars and people freely mix, but on a very controlled basis." (p.128)

Here is how Mr. Pawley refers to these quotes:

"Clare has a way with simple ideas: for example, 'By 1990, 80 percent of all preschool children will be in day care' or 'Stop the child murders.' Is there a connection between children in day care and child murder, or is it all a matter of housing layouts?"

Not only does Mr. Pawley juxtapose two quotes that had nothing to do with each other (a cheap tactic not uncommon among reviewers), but then there is the matter of form of address. It seems scarcely conceivable that in the late 1980s there should be such a clear example of sexist attitudes either expressed or published in the review of a book. When discussing the various authors represented in this book, Pawley consistently employs either the full name or (subsequent to first mention) the surname of each author. Except, that is, for myself—the only

female contributor—whom after initial identification is referred to several times merely as Clare.

I find this condescending and sexist attitude quite unacceptable. Considering the world-weary, seen-it-all tone of Mr. Pawley's review, perhaps he should better spend his time educating himself in non-sexist vocabulary and forms of address.

Clare Cooper Marcus
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Professor Cooper Marcus is quite right to object to my familiarity in referring to her by her Christian name in my review of Sustainable Communities, while using the surnames of the male contributors to the anthology. I can now see that this was offensive and I unreservedly apologize.

However, if it is a cheap tactic of reviewers to take quotations out of context, so is it a knee-jerk reaction of those who speak or write rashly to claim that this has been done. I might with equal justice object to Professor Cooper Marcus's omission of my reference to Charles Manson's "family" in the passage from the review that she quotes.

"World weary" or not, I found the arguments, even the title of "Design as if People Mattered," naive, self-validating, and contradictory. What is the point of providing play areas that can be supervised from the home, if the home is unoccupied during the "very difficult time between 2:00 and 6:00 p.m."? What is new about communal kitchens and shared entrances? The first has been the subject of unsuccessful experimentation for 80 years; the second was the norm in 19th-century housing long before it gave public housing a bad name. Is Professor Cooper Marcus actually saying anything at all when she claims that 4-6 households sharing an entry "can work," while 10-12 "may lead to conflict"? Should she endorse, especially at second hand, a claim that any housing layout will "Stop the Child Murders"—especially when it is clear that, in the case in question, the Dutch journalist's child was not "murdered," but killed by accident?

The most important thing the housing layouts Professor Cooper Marcus describes have in common is that they are all isolated examples

that run counter to the long-term multifold trend toward social fragmentation that is reflected in decreasing household size and increasing household formation in all Western countries. This plus the economic opportunity attendant upon massive demand, explains all the "waiting lists" to which she refers, without the need to drag in and glorify minor design variations.

Martin Pawley

To the Editors:

Nezar AlSayyad's 2,000 word essay ["Arab Muslim Cities," *DBR* 14] attempts to discuss seven books, including my *Arabic-Islamic Cities: Building and Planning Principles* (1986). The reviewer allocates 40 percent of the article to it, presumably because it is in his words "the most controversial and most ambitious of all the new books." He poses a number of questions and issues which require my response.

The reviewer starts with a preconception that the literature on this topic should be categorized into distinct ideological camps according to the approach inherent in the work. This attitude is unfortunate and biased, as it predetermines appreciation and understanding. In fact, the thrust of my work was to achieve the opposite of what he contends. (Compare, for instance, the reaction of Janet Abu-Lughod in her short review of the book in *MESA Bulletin* [21/87], and the recent review by Amos Rapoport in *Journal of Architectural Education* [41/2, Winter 1988].) With respect to specific issues raised:

- The reasons for the title of the book and the categorization of "Arabic-Islamic Cities" is explained adequately in the Introduction.

- The time period from which sources were obtained for Tunis is from the early twelfth to the late nineteenth centuries, as indicated in the book.

- Regarding treatment of the city in a formalist and static manner, information on change and growth was difficult to assemble; however, when data was available it was incorporated, as in fig. 16, p. 73.

- The quantitative data on Tunis was in fact used to compare with other cities, as indicated on pp. 114-117.

- AlSayyad argues that I have not adequately substantiated my contention that traditional cities in the Arab and Muslim world are similar to Tunis in that they share an Islamic identity that

could be directly linked to the application of Muslim law. Since 1984, however, I have accumulated adequate data to prove without any doubt that this is so. I hope to publish this evidence in the future.

- As to my finding that climate was not a major factor in determining the shape of Muslim cities, I have assumed that the reader is familiar with the abundant literature about this interpretation and felt it was unnecessary to refute that in the book.

- Regarding AlSayyad's questioning of dates of completion and publication, I completed writing the book in July 1979, but it was not published until 1986. This was due to: (a) the generally slow process involved in finding a suitable publisher, (b) a number of moves and other personal circumstances which prevented me from accelerating the process, and (c) the manuscript remaining with the publisher for two-and-one-half years before it was published.

Yes, it was published essentially as it was when I completed it in mid-1979, primarily because I felt that no new material had appeared in the interim that would have justified revision of the work. As for Al-Hathloul's Ph.D. dissertation, which the reviewer mentions, I was fully aware of it. I believe my work influenced him and others who followed. This was mainly due to two visits I made to MIT. The first was in April 1977 when I shared my findings with some faculty at MIT and Harvard and was asked to discuss their ramifications with a number of graduate students, including Al-Hathloul. I also made them aware of the significance of Ibn al-Rami's 14th-century manuscript, "Kitab al-'lan bi-Ahkam al-Bunyan" ("The Book for Communicating Building Solutions"). (This is one of the most important sources I have found. Although mentioned earlier by Robert Brunschvig in his article "Urbanisme Medieval et Droit Musulman," *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* [Vol. XV, 1947], I believe I was the first after him to use it extensively.) The second visit was in February 1981, when I presented my completed findings through numerous seminars and a public lecture. Since then I have continued to lecture and publish a number of articles on this topic. (The most comprehensive and recent article, which in a way supplements what I have in the book, is published in Vol. 3 of the *Encyclopedia of Architecture* [Wiley, 1988].)

Besim Hakim, AIA, AICP
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I started my review by mentioning that Hakim's book was an important addition to the literature and I ended it by saying that its publication was a sign that scholarly research on Muslim urbanism is witnessing a healthy revival. I believe that no scholarly work on a cultural subject, like the Muslim city, could be free of an inherent ideology. It is naive to think otherwise. Most contemporary authors recognize this and some would even attempt to identify their ideological positions or state their scholarly biases at the outset. An author who does not do so leaves it up to the readers to interpret or classify the work, and should not complain when they do just that.

I indicated that we need a better explanation of the category "Arabic-Islamic Cities" because the one that Hakim offers (that Islam emerged in Arabia and that Arabic was the language of the Quran) is too simplistic. Yet he insists that the reasons for the title were adequately explained in his introduction. Even if this is the case, how can a author justify calling the book "Arabic-Islamic Cities" when it is only a case study of Tunis?

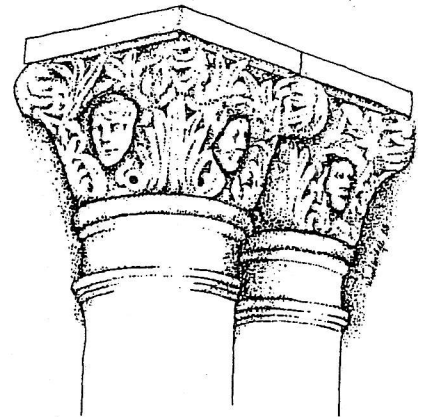
Although Hakim acknowledges that issues of change and growth were difficult to incorporate, he nevertheless refers us to fig. 16, which primarily illustrates the "development(al) sequence of Khuṭba mosques in Tunis." Does a small map showing the location and chronology of a few mosques adequately address the complex process of urban formation? I don't think so.

By his own confession, the contention that the traditional cities of the Arab Muslim world are similar to Tunis is not substantiated in the book. The issue of climate is not addressed at all. Why then does Hakim refer us to his unpublished work or private data, which he claims will "prove without any doubt" his theories? And where do we find this "abundant literature" which supports his "finding" that climate was not a major factor in determining the shape of Muslim cities? If this is true, then he should have elaborated on the sources of his "interpretation."

With regard to the discrepancy between the dates of completion and publication of the book, I do understand the problems involved in publishing a work on the history of Muslim cities. But to say that no new material in the interim could have changed matters reflects Hakim's disregard for many of his colleagues, including the editors and authors of the other books which were included in my review.

I still have faith in and regard for Hakim's scholarship, and he was very brave to have undertaken such an endeavor. My review, however, was not about him but about his book.

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Diana Woodbridge

REPARATION

Dell Upton's "Where the Heart Is" (*DBR* 14, pp. 69-76) suffered from some unfortunate errors in editing for which *DBR* would like to apologize. In particular, on page 74 in the concluding sentences of the second paragraph, the quotation marks were deleted from a passage of James Gowans's *The Comfortable House*, making it appear to be Upton's rather than Gowans's point of view. The paragraph should read as follows:

"Certainly some of the poor others were trying to become middle class, but many middle-class people were trying hard to keep them out. The others' disturbing lifeways were the threat against which the comfortable house asserted 'security in the sense of defense against the world; roots in the past, especially a colonial and English past; and virtue in the sense of family stability,' and against them stood the suburbs that Gowans loves: 'Unfortunately, from a doctrinaire ideological standpoint, these suburbs worked as humane and livable environments on principles of enlightened self-interest, that wicked old Adam Smithish doctrine. In sum, post-Victorian suburbs were altogether too individualistic, too inegalitarian, for architectural opinion in the 1960s. But for the decades from 1890 to 1930, they were perfect—perfectly comfortable.'"