

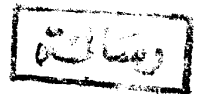
DESIGN ~~PROJECT~~ ^{Fundamentals} OF ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE
Aesthetic evaluation of the Islamic domestic
architecture in Egypt
during the Mamluk and Turkish period (1245-1805)

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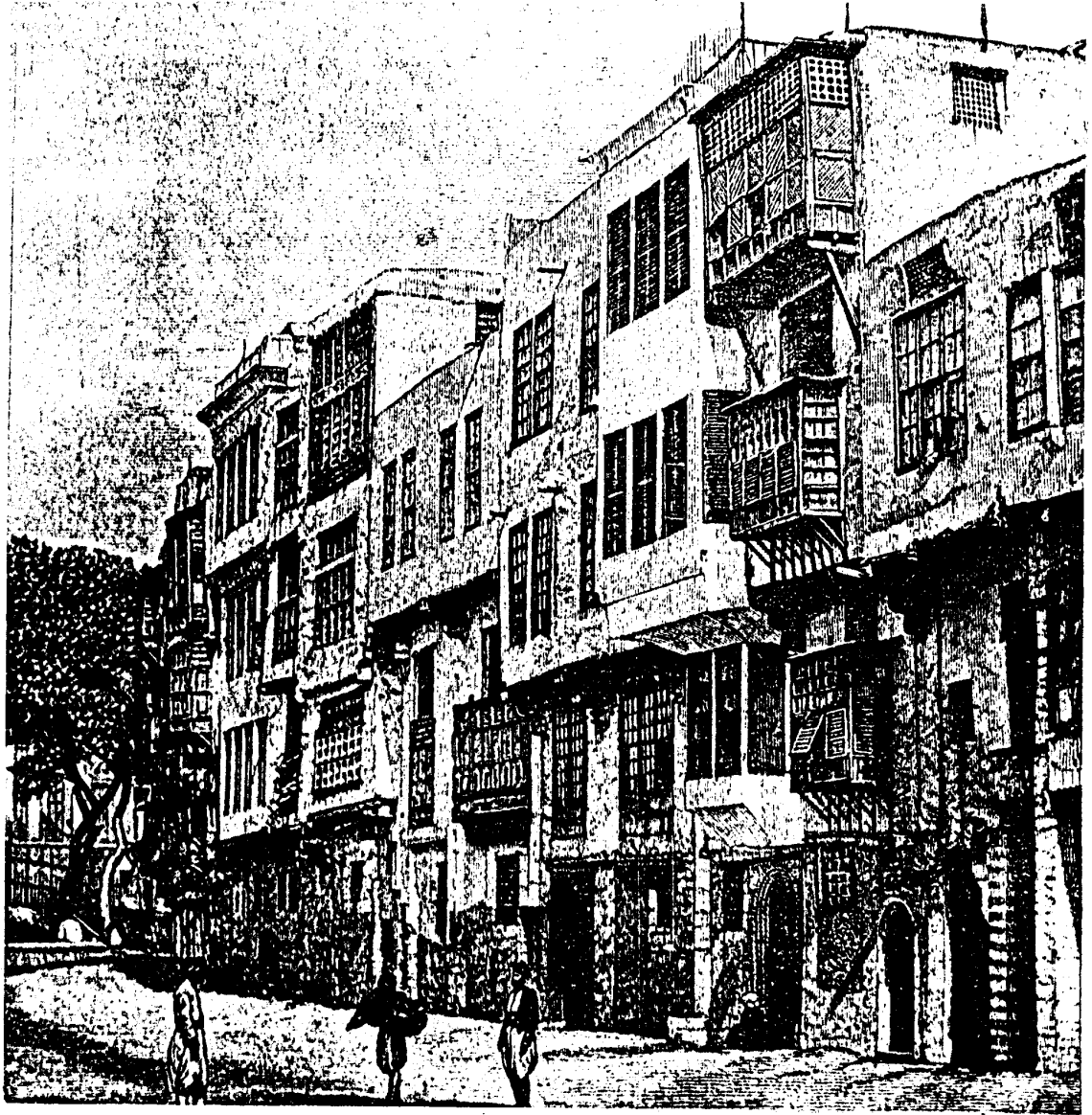
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وأجته مجموعة منازل بشارع في القاهرة



① A GROUP OF HOUSES AT CAIRO . (18th C.)
Reference: Poole, S.L., *Social life in Egypt*.

INTRODUCTION

This study is an attempt to evaluate the aesthetics of the Egyptian Moslim dwellings, particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth Centuries. This evaluation realized the impact of the socio-cultural, economical and technical aspects of the period on its architecture. Beside family life, philosophy religion and individual characteristics were reflected also in the design of the dwelling units.

We could say that the architecture of that period had highly aesthetical values. These values could inspire new spiritual principles for our contemporary architecture. They could play as a link between our past cultural inheritance and our present civilization.

Study of legacy and historical architecture is of great value only if we are aware of its complexity and overlapping causes and effects (1). One should differentiate between variable dynamic aspects which change by time, such as the socio-cultural aspects, and other aspects which remain almost constant, or slightly affected by time, such as the climatical ones. However in this thesis, both aspects have been analysed from the aesthetical point of view, taking into consideration the following points:

1. The analysis of the constant aspects shows examples of clever good practical and natural solutions which have been tried and developed for hundreds of years. They could be used nowadays as ready-made solutions, or as inspiration for similar ones, within the limits of modern materials and modern methods of construction.
2. The analysis of the variable aspects could give us insight in the origins and basic roots of the socio-cultural background

of the Egyptian Moslim house. It gives also insight in the **nature** of the evolution process. This could surely help us to shape the modern house in the right way. From the spiritual point of view, traditions and social habits change slowly and superficially in the East, but not basically.

3. The domestic architecture of that period, on one hand, is a reflection of a complexity of combined factors such as religious, political, social, cultural, spiritual and economical. On the other hand it is a reflection of the technological and craftsmanship standards at that time.

4. The domestic architecture of that period had been controlled by certain aesthetical values, standards and proportional canons which the thesis tries to explain in the following chapters.

Studies in Moslim architecture in Egypt have traditionally been concerned with monumental buildings; mosques, mausoleums, Military architecture and other works of the governors. This study will concern itself with residential dwellings : small and grand houses (beyts), tenement blocks for foreign merchants or for the poor, religious housing, and soldier housing on the outskirts of the city. Primarily, I shall give more stress on the grand beyts because they exhibit, architecturally, more values than any other type of dwelling.

Methodologically, I began by analysing the houses and their inhabitants. I classified these into two major categories: houses for the masses of people, built for domestic reasons, and houses built specially for special classes of people like the Daraveeshes (monks). Beside detailing the physical characteristics of the architecture, the technological aspects of the epoch, and climatical considerations, I also dwelled upon the reflection of the social life of the people themselves. In chapter one, I

1. See : Dr. Abdel-Fattah, K., Essay in "the effect of climate on the old Iraqi town and house", Khartoum Magazine, Dec.1967.

outlined the socio-cultural aspects of the Mamluk and Turkish periods so as to gather informations about their life styles, beliefs and attitudes. I have therefore stressed how these affected the design of architectural elements, and analysed aesthetical and perceptual qualities on the basis of such physio-psychological considerations.

Before I analysed the aesthetical qualities in detail in part III, I briefly defined and clarified the theoritical aspects on which such a criteria could be made in part II, chapter three. First, I defined the aesthetic values, then I classified the appeal to these values in two ways: the appeal to intellect and the appeal to emotions (see: chapter 3). Then I classified the architectural crit into: the objectivists, the expressionists and the subjectivists. At the same time, I classified the scales of aesthetic values, in relation to the design factors, basing this classification upon "the research programme on systems of judgement of architectural design" by Dr. S. Hassid.(2). However besides, I took into consideration the physio-psychological reactions of the beholder.

The major task then became to select the architectural elements of the house which seem to be universal for the Egyptians, and to explore and analyse the embedded aesthetical values in them, and to evaluate them basing the study on the beholder's reactions to them. I have also been trying to describe these reactions on the basis of recent researches about man's reactions to objective and subjective aesthetical values.

2. Hassid, S., A research programme on systems of judgement of architectural design, (College of architecture, University of California, Dec. 1958).

PART (1)

CH.1

A BRIEF HISTORY

(SOCIO_CULTURAL AND ECONOMICAL)

1.1 HISTORICAL APPROACH

During their period in Egypt, the Ayyubids replaced the native Egyptian employees with foreigners brought by them from Turkey and Kugaz in Central Asia. They were first mainly employed as body guards for the Ayyubids governors to protect them from any unexpected assassins or danger by the natives, or from each other. These foreigners were called Mamluks, (Fig. 2), an Arabic word derived from the past participle of the verb "malaka"; to possess, means owned or belonging to, and was applied to white male slaves who had been captured in war, or purchased in the market (1).

The power of the Bahrites Mamluks grew steadily until they overthrew the existing authority in 1245 A.D. They continued to govern the country for about 132 years (1245-1381 A.D.). However, they remained isolated from the Egyptians, paying no attention to their social needs and preventing them from ruling themselves.

The Circassian Mamluks (Burjites Mamluks) who came after the Bahrites Mamluks, governed Egypt during the period (1382-1517 A.D.) (2). Every one of them tried to be the sole authority, which led to confusion and internal wars.

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1. Creswell, K.A.C., The Moslim Architecture of Egypt, Vol. 2, p. 135, (Oxford, Clarendon press, 1959).
 2. Poole, S.L., The Story of Cairo, p. 199., (Dar el-Nahadah el-Masria, Cairo, 1950). Translated to Arabic by: Hassan, H. & I., and Halim, E.

In 1616-1517 A.D, Sultan Selim (the first) governed Egypt, and was followed by other Turkish governors. They continued to rule Egypt until 1805 A.D. and were related to the Khalifas Ottomans in Istanbul. A down fall in the general conditions of the country happened during this period, in contrast to the Mamluk one. This was mainly due to two main reasons: first, the discovery of a new way to India around Africa, by Vasco de Gama and his fellow seafarers, secondly, Sultan Selim (the first) sent most of the clever designers and carftsman to the Asetana to work for the Ottoman Khalifa. By the end of the seventeenth Century, and during the eighteenth one, a scientific interest had appeared. The grand merchants and sheikhs were particulary concerned with the establishment of private and public libraries which helped in encouraging the scientific researches. However, in fact, it can be said that most of the social activities in Egypt did not progress, but were stagnant or in a process of decline(3). In this research, we limited ourselves to the Bahrites & Burjites Mamluk period, and the Ottoman period till the end of the 18th C.

1.2. THE SOCIO - CULTURAL (4) AND ECONOMICAL ASPECTS

The socio - cultural aspects which may include: the religious and spiritual, the social structure and character

3. Ibrahim, SH.E., Cairo, pp 197-209, (Dar el-Hilal, Cairo, 1954).
4. "Socio-cultural forces can be seen in many different ways. The term "genre de vie" used by Max Sorre includes all the cultural, spiritual, material and social aspects.... I would further suggest that the socio-cultural component of the 'genre de vie' is the sum of the concepts of culture, Ethos, world view, and National character used by Redfield, which he defines as follows:
 - Culture- The total equipment of ideas and institutions and conventionalised activities of people.
 - Ethos - the organized conception of the thought.
 - World view - the way people characteristically look out upon the world.

of the people and, the political, plus the economical aspects, had to a great extent, and proportionally affected the design of domestic architecture during this period.

1.2.1. RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS.

Religion played a great part in social life of the Egyptians. Sheikhs who suffered from the inadequate conditions prevailing in Egypt gave up every thing for religion, and entered **Khaniqahs** to live and to carry on their ritual purposes (5). This sufi tendency was brought by the Ayyubids from Iraq and Iran. They were commonly called 'Daraweesh'. To get more of an approachment with the Egyptians, the Mamluks were pre-tenious in building, **Khaniqahs** and other religious and public buildings.

While Judism formally prohibited all art activity (Exodus XX, 4,5) and christianity asked its followers to disdain this life, and to think only of the life to come (Matt. VI, 24, 25), the Moslim religion, on the other hand, helied to encourage the creation of art and architectural works. The Koran and the injunctions of the Prophet Mohammad contain the following points:

- i. The Koran had brought to the Egyptians new habits, as regards the situation of women and other members of the

National character - The personality type of people, the kind of humanbeing which greatly occurs in his society". Rapoport, A., House Form and Culture, p. 48, (prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1969).

5. See: Ashour, S.A., Egypt during the Bahrites Mamluks period, (Dar El-Nahdah el-Masriah, Cairo).