

THE ISLAMIC CITY AND ITS ARCHITECTURE

A Review Essay*

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This bibliographic essay attempts to shed some light on the state of scholarship about this topic since the mid-1970s to the early 1980s as evidenced in books published. The books and works selected are representative of the literature which is available in English. *The aim is to identify the state of the knowledge in this field up to the early 1980s and whether or not it is developed enough to be useful for those involved in the Islamic city and its architecture; and implicitly to ascertain the attributes which might be of value to those embedded in other cultures.*

Two books are reviewed at some length: *Architecture of the Islamic World* edited by G. Michell (1978), is selected because of its wide circulation and its attempt to address the needs of those involved in environmental design and other related disciplines. *Architecture and Community* edited by R. Holod and D. Rastorfer (1983) is selected as it represents the work of the Aga Khan organisations and programmes addressing Islamic architecture and which has had wide publicity since its inception in 1977. Reasons for selecting the other books and works listed at the end are mentioned in the body of the essay.

Approaches of Earlier Literature

The earlier literature on this topic addressed the monuments of Islamic Architecture following the approach used by Sir Banister Fletcher's *A History of Architecture* (18th edition, 1975). The most recent of those efforts is *Islamic Architecture* by John D. Hoag (1977). In this well produced book containing excellent black and white photographs, plans, sections, elevations, and reconstructions, the author starts the work with a short introduction followed by the body of the work in 18 chapters covering most regions of the Islamic World. The stress here is on describing the monument and providing a sketch of its history, giving notes on influences across time and within regions. The book is a useful reference for the monuments themselves. It would have been much enhanced if one or two pages of colour

**Architecture of the Islamic World: Its History and Social Meaning* edited by George Michell, London, Thames and Hudson and New York, William Morrow, 1978, 1984, 288 pp., US \$40.00

Architecture and Community: Building in the Islamic World Today (Aga Khan Award for Architecture) edited by Reneta Holod and Darl Rastorfer, Millerton, NY, Aperture, 1983, 255 pp., US \$40.00 (h/b), US \$20.00 (p/b)

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photographs were incorporated in each chapter to highlight certain qualities which are not possible to convey in black and white.

However, in the case of the literature addressing the city as a whole, we find more encouraging attempts, particularly since the first quarter of this century. The literature generated was primarily in French, German, and English. By the late 1960s, distinct approaches and methodologies of study were evident. Examples of those efforts in English are: Ira Lapidus (ed.), *Middle Eastern Cities* (1969), Hourani and Stern (eds.), *The Islamic City* (1970), and Carl Brown (ed.), *From Madina to Metropolis: Heritage and Change in the Near Eastern City* (1973). All of these works are edited, i.e. compilations of papers by people from a variety of disciplines; despite their titles they include contributions on architecture and building. The quality is scholarly and represented the state of knowledge at that time. *Architecture of the Islamic World: Its History and Social Meaning*, edited by G. Michell (1978), the first of two books to be reviewed in detail was developed in the spirit of that tradition.

*Architecture of the Islamic World,
edited by G. Michell*

In the preface, the editor says that 'this is the first time that the architecture of the Islamic world has been placed in its cultural setting thereby revealing both its relationship to Islamic society and the unity of its forms and decoration.' He goes on to say that 'this unity has long been recognized, but the complex interplay of theological, sociological, economic, political and technological factors in Islamic culture has never before been analyzed in terms of their influence upon architecture. Regional and chronological variations also form part of this architecture, and this book documents the diversifying elements encompassed by that tradition. A recognition of this unity and diversity, seemingly paradoxically combined, is the basis of any true appreciation of Islamic architecture.' These are precise observations and goals set by the editor, but unfortunately the book does not achieve those aims as will be shown here.

The book is composed of two distinct parts: Part one is made up of an Introduction and six chapters, each one written by a separate contributor. Each of the chapters starts with a collection of numerous excellent photos in black and white and colour on sixteen pages supported by full annotation. These 'packages' of photos can be read separately from the text and in some instances provide a clearer understanding of the essence of the chapter than the text itself. There is no cross-referencing between photos and text, and the reader has to absorb these two elements separately. The second part of the book is a catalogue of key monuments of Islamic architecture, grouped by countries and/or regions. These monuments are sometimes mentioned in the text, but there is no specific cross-referencing between them. On its own this part is a useful reference for the monuments, although the supporting photos are usually too small to provide adequate appreciation of the monuments discussed. However, any strengths or weaknesses in this work rest primarily in the first part, being the backbone of this effort.

The introduction titled 'What is Islamic Architecture?' by Ernst Gube starts with a good set of questions, but unfortunately the author's approach in attempting to

answer the essence of the questions is by focusing on the apparent physical qualities of Islamic architecture, i.e. looking at the forms generated by Islamic culture without any attempt to analyse the underlying processes. Form is discussed by reference to Western architectural norms, concepts and criteria, thereby excluding the culture's own determinants and criteria to shed light on the analysis. The article discusses the phenomenon of Concentration on the Interior, then on Form and Function and lastly on Interior Space. The author's main concern is to establish that the term 'Islamic' is justifiable for the architecture of the Muslim world, in comparison with the visual and formal aspects of Western architecture. In short, it is a classic descriptive approach of the phenomenon of urbanism and architecture, thereby setting the wrong tone for the whole book, in contrast to the editor's specified aims as they are eloquently stated in the Preface.

Chapter 1, entitled 'Allah and Eternity: Mosques, Madrasas and Tombs', by James Dickie (Yaqub Zaki) starts off with a good introduction which explains the religious requirements and basis for mosque design and elaborates on the topic under subtitles of Liturgical Orientation of the Mosque, External Features of the Mosque, followed by Liturgical Furniture of the Mosque. In essence he sets out adequately the functional basis for mosque design as a building type. The rest of his contribution is less fruitful as it is largely a historical overview with brief descriptions of the Madrasa (collegiate facility), Khanaqah (monastery) and the Tomb mosque. He then goes on to describe Burial and its dogmatic basis, Cemeteries and The Funerary Garden.

Chapter 2, by Oleg Grabar, is entitled 'The Architecture of Power: Palaces, Citadels and Fortification'. The theme of power permeates the whole article, in some instances overriding other important considerations, particularly when discussing aspects of palatial architecture. The theme of power is more pertinent when viewing military and defensive requirements. Although there is a good attempt to link urban design to architecture or to view architecture in the context of urban design (a major deficiency in most of the literature in the field), the linkage nevertheless focuses on the issue of power only. When discussing Symbolic Power by the example of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, it fails to explain the essence of the edifice, being an enclosure of the rock from which the Prophet Muhammad made a journey to the heavens, and which is an important fundamental reality in the belief system of Islam. The shape and plan of the building is designed to encourage visitors to move around the rock.

Under the sub-title 'The Powerful' the author mentions the institution of the Waqf but does not explain what it is and for what purpose it was established. The Prophet Muhammad specifically encouraged the Waqf system—which is a kind of trust fund in perpetuity with its own set of criteria and norms—to encourage the use of funds in an ongoing manner to benefit people and/or to maintain important facilities, such as mosques. Thus one can take issue with the author when he says that the architecture guarantees the initiator's/owner's prestige and power. Such a determination can only be made when the original motivation is clearly established. At any rate the author admits that 'the whole subject still needs further investigation.' The conclusion is useful because it stresses that uses and activities determined the manner in which built form is used, and thus the association it

generated. This would be in contrast to mosques and some other building types or facilities where function and activities are clear and known. The article would have been much more effective and useful if the author had shown the impacts of decisions by the 'Powerful' on the structure and form of the city or settlement, and whether or not such decisions tended to be similar or unique when viewing a number of cities across time and space.

Chapter 3, 'Trade and Travel: Markets and Caravanserais', by Eleonor Sims starts off with a good and lengthy introduction and brings the subject home by the analogy to the contemporary American Motel and need for gas stations. The sources of information for these facilities and building types is adequately set out as being the buildings themselves and the literary sources, particularly the early Arabic and Persian, and later Turkish. She also mentions the routebooks, lists of roads, settlements and cities by which the extent of the Muslim world was calculated and its taxes computed, geographical writings (which flourished from the ninth century), local historians and the account of travellers. The discussion on the Origins and Characteristics of Trade and Travel Architecture does not provide much insight in understanding the architecture, particularly as it is written in a style which takes the reader from one region to another. There are other sections on Caravanserais, Bridges and the Markets: fabled emporia, bedestens, Khans, hammams and the Waqf. The latter section on markets is useful for understanding the purposes and working of these facilities. The conclusion is illuminating and accurate by clarifying that a small number of architectural forms was used for a large number of functions, and that the sacred (or religious) and the secular are intertwined in activities affecting architecture, which reflects a basic truism of Islamic culture. In addition to the good photo illustrations, the article includes plans of a number of facilities which clarify the text.

Chapter 4, by Ronald Lewcock, is entitled 'Architects, Craftsmen and Builders: Materials and Techniques'. This is one of the better and more useful chapters in the book, due to the substance of the information and its direct relevance to architects. Interesting insights are provided on why information on this topic is scarce, and why the quality of many architectural monuments was of a very high standard—because the architect-designer was able to supervise the work to its completion despite its large scale, due to the speed of construction made possible by the availability of a large work force. This is followed by informative sections on Architects and on Architectural Drawings and Design Techniques.

It is refreshing to know that many of the techniques used by architects today were in fact used by Muslim architects and builders many centuries ago, such as drawing plans on gridded paper based on the cubit, the use of a system of proportions based on the square and its diagonal, and the use of wooden models. This is an important revelation as it affects the manner in which we can evaluate the architecture produced. The contribution includes sections on the Expenditure on Buildings, Writing on Architecture and the Building Crafts, Craftsmen, and Masonry Techniques-Stonework. The latter indicates that craftsmen/builders were paid per block or area of construction completed, thus having an incentive for building faster. The account on the development of arches would have been much more useful if supported by diagrams. A number of other shorter sections follow on

Brickwork, Clay Walling, Carpentry, Ironmongery, Plastering and Tiling. An interesting point mentioned by the author is that the carver of plaster windows does not repeat the same pattern in another window until many months have passed as a matter of pride amongst the carvers. This tradition certainly enhanced the incidence of the 'quality without a name' which is so much missed in our contemporary environments, and which abounds in traditional architecture. The author goes on to discuss briefly Building Regulations and Arbitration; Building Equipment and Machinery; Special Types of Construction: Vaults, Domes and Minarets. This contribution would have especially benefited from detailed references and footnotes to assist others in developing this area of knowledge.

Chapter 5, 'The Elements of Decoration: Surface, Pattern and Light' by Dalu Jones, is another important and relatively successful chapter. This aspect of Islamic architecture has fascinated both the lay public and specialists and is probably the most discussed. In her introduction the author summarises the essential aspects and principles involved: 'Islamic art is an art of repose, intellectual rather than emotional, where tensions are resolved. It is a conceptual art where questions and answers are finely balanced. Absence of tension is achieved mainly through the subtlety of surface decoration in which patterns are limited to well defined areas but are at the same time infinite in the sense that they have unlimited possibilities of extension. The principles are of repetition and the continuous permutation of motifs and designs. Like water itself, which plays such a unique role in Islamic architecture, the decoration continually reflects and multiplies patterns to provide a 'cool' refuge for the eye and the mind, creating an art which is dynamic and yet unchanging.' She goes on to the formulae: 'This concept of decoration—flexible in nature, independent of form, material and scale—employs a limited number of basic formulae: calligraphy, geometry and, in architecture, the repetition and multiplication of elements based on the arch. Allied with and parallel to these are floral and figural motifs. Water and light are also of paramount importance to Islamic architectural decoration as they generate additional layers of patterns and—just as happens with surface decoration—they transform space.' The contribution is essentially an elaboration of various aspects mentioned in the above quotes. However, the author does not discuss the underlying religious motivation of Islamic art, from which its principles are derived. I will not be able to elaborate on this here due to the limitation of space; however, I would strongly recommend the article 'Appreciating Islamic Art' by Lois Lamya al-Faruqi (1985)¹ for those who want to follow up.

Dalu Jones also discusses surface and space and clarifies the notion that themes are interchangeable both in building design and decoration. The section on General Principles indicates three—(i) interchangeability of same design from one medium to another, and repetition of same design on different scales, often within same buildings; (ii) the expanding or diminishing property of each pattern, its capacity to be repeated ad infinitum; and (iii) the design of each surface can always be discerned, where primary and secondary grids are usually used. These principles and their elaboration would have especially benefited from diagrams. The section on Historical Development is weak and could have been said in less words. The section on the elements of decoration is divided into: Calligraphy, Geometry, Floral

Patterns, the Arabesque, Figures and Animals, Light and Water. The first two and latter two elements are well treated and valuable, although all would have benefited from diagrams. The chapter culminates in a discussion of Islamic written sources and Western views of Islamic decoration. Although transmission of patterns and techniques was going on, according to the author there seems to be no trace of design criteria written by Muslim craftsmen. Of the three Western studies mentioned by the author, clearly that of Owen Jones (1842–45) seems to be pertinent; she quotes from O. Jones in appreciation of Alhambra: 'in Moorish architecture not only does the decoration arise naturally from the construction, but the constructive idea is carried out in every detail of the ornamentation of the surface.' O. Jones goes on to say: 'We believe that true beauty in architecture results from that repose which the mind feels when the eye, the intellect, and the affections are satisfied, from the absence of any want . . .'²

Chapter 6, 'Vernacular Architecture: The House and Society' by Guy T. Petherbridge, is the last chapter and attempts to convey the workings of the settlement as a whole, but concentrates on the house and its social requirements. This takes up about one third of the space allocated, at the expense of the other sections and other issues which are mentioned in passing, such as the legal system governing growth and change. It seems to this reviewer that this chapter could have formed the basis and framework to which all the other chapters would relate. The history and social meaning of Islamic architecture is the title of the book, and thus the understanding of the settlement as a whole is crucial for establishing an intelligent context for all the issues discussed in the book. It is therefore an editorial error to have relegated this material to the last chapter in the book. Given this problem, the chapter does contain useful information but only in a fleeting manner. In the historical background section the author wrongly concludes that the legal basis can be difficult to determine. Had he studied that aspect carefully he would have found a wealth of information to explain the phenomenon of vernacular architecture in the context of Islamic culture.³ We find traces of this deficiency in the section that follows when the author discusses the urban setting as comprising a tripartite system of public, semi-public and private spaces, varying in degree of accessibility and enclosure. In fact the legal system clearly demarcates areas into public and private zones. All cul-de-sacs, for instance, are private zones, the responsibility for which rests with the inhabitants that use them; sometimes this privacy is enhanced and reinforced by the addition of a door at the mouth of the cul-de-sac.

Essentially, the section on The Urban Setting could have formed the basis for the whole chapter from which various elements be extracted for detailed analysis. The emphasis on the house as mentioned earlier gives a distorted view of the subject and I will not dwell on that. The sections on the Control of Environment and Industrial Vernacular are reasonably well researched by others and available in various publications, but their inclusion is nevertheless useful. The book *Living With the Desert* by Beazley and Harverson (1982) is about what the author terms industrial vernacular and will be briefly discussed later in this review. Published material on defensive structures is scarce, and its inclusion in Petherbridge's essay is useful, and would have been more so if more diagrams and photos were included. The

section on Popular Shrines and Places of Worship repeats some of the material in Chapter 1.

Part 2 of the book is titled 'Key Monuments of Islamic Architecture' and is totally separate and unrelated to Part 1, i.e. there is no cross-referencing, nor any linkages to any of the chapters in Part 1. It stands on its own and gives the impression that the book is made up of two books bound together. To conclude, the book does contain important and useful information; it particularly succeeds in the photo packages of each chapter, enabling the reader to appreciate the story by going through the photo sequences. The material in some of the chapters is extremely useful as indicated above, and all chapters would have been more useful if detailed footnotes were developed enabling students and researchers to build on the material. The stress on pre-Islamic origins and influences is counter-productive in some cases, and gives the impression that the book is a treatise establishing the linkages between pre-Islamic and Islamic architecture, such as is found in the contributions by Sims (Chapter 3) and Jones (Chapter 5). The material in the book is more about the origins of forms and techniques than on social meaning as the book's sub-title suggests. The material is roughly allocated as forty per cent on origins, forty per cent on descriptions and only in the region of twenty per cent on social meaning. In that sense it represents the state of scholarship by the mid-1970s.

Other Books and Symposium Materials

Encouraging developments have occurred in the field, and two examples are briefly discussed which develop specific areas covered by Michell's book. The first is *Living with the Desert—Working Buildings of the Iranian Plateau* by Elisabeth Beazley and Michael Harverson (1982). This is an excellent and well illustrated study covering the following aspects: building materials and the technology of roofing, which includes flat roofs, arches, vaults and domes; water, its extraction, use of underground water tunnels, cisterns, icemaking by natural means, wind catchers for cooling buildings, watermills, windmills and pigeon towers. *Living with the Desert* is a good documentation and analysis of the sophistication of vernacular architecture as achieved in Iran, and one of the texts strongly recommended for students of architecture anywhere.

Another impressive work in two volumes is *Traditional Islamic Craft in Moroccan Architecture* by Andre Paccard (1980). It is a practical workbook and concentrates on patterns used in decorating building surfaces, their geometric principles, origination and their colour. Calligraphy is also covered, as well as the following materials: clay, stone, gypsum, wood and metal. Water and light are also discussed. The work is an excellent reference for those who want to learn about how decoration is developed and applied, and its technical know-how as developed in the western region of the Islamic world, and as evident in Morocco. This art was kept 'secret' by generations of craftsmen and its unlocking and documentation is an achievement. More research of this kind is necessary in other parts of the Islamic world to document and convey this heritage for future generations.

Finally, and at long last, the field was recently recognised as being important in

the Islamic countries themselves. This was primarily in response to the impacts of rapid urbanisation and building activities in the oil-rich countries, particularly since 1974. Some criticism was voiced regarding the nature and type of built environment produced, as being not related to the heritage of traditional Islamic cities and its architecture. During the same period of recent urbanisation, the Muslim world witnessed the end of the fourteenth century (according to the Islamic calendar) and the dawn of the fifteenth century which occurred on 20 November 1979. This event was celebrated in the form of a number of cultural events during 1980. One such event was an international symposium organised by the College of Architecture and Planning at King Faisal University in Dammam, Saudi Arabia on 5–10 January, 1980. A large number of participants were invited from many countries and the event was very successful. In addition to the ninety papers or so which were submitted in English, the College corridors were full of valuable exhibits on traditional as well as contemporary architecture in many of the Islamic countries. Comprehensive proceedings were never published, which could have included most of the submissions as well as samples from the fine exhibits, recommendations of the symposium and the list of all participants. Instead, a publication was issued in late 1983 entitled *Islamic Architecture and Urbanism*, edited by Aydin Germen of the College. It includes a selection of only twenty-four papers and does not include the recommendations of the symposium nor the list of participants. The latter information was printed in the form of a separate booklet which was not widely publicised or circulated. The publication, however, does include some good papers and covers a variety of topics, but they are not grouped according to a thematic structure and as such the publication is weak. Nevertheless, it is a useful reference for libraries and for those involved in the field.

About a year later, from 28 February–5 March 1981, another symposium took place in Medina, Saudi Arabia entitled *The Arab City: Its Character and Islamic Cultural Heritage* and its proceedings were edited by Ismail Serageldin and Samir El-Sadek. The leading sponsor of the symposium was the Arab Urban Development Institute, an agency of the Arab Towns Organisation. A number of the individual organisers were the same as for the previously mentioned conference in Dammam, and the Medina conference should be viewed as an extension of the earlier conference. The themes, approaches, and concerns were the same as those voiced a year earlier, except that the later symposium was titled *The Arab City* because of the organisers' charter and responsibility to the Arab World. The proceedings were published in two volumes, one in English and the other in Arabic, of which the English volume contains the more interesting and useful contributions. It is well produced and edited and contains forty-one papers grouped in four parts: Approaches and Definitions, Past and Present—The Evolving City, The Challenge of Conservation, and Strategies for the Future. It also contains a large number of illustrations, and on the whole is a useful reference. Both publications resulting from the symposia in Dammam (1980) and Medina (1981) represent to a large extent the state of the art, as available in English, in this field.

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture

In 1977 the Aga Khan called for better awareness of aesthetic, cultural and social aspects of architecture on the part of architects and clients, and launched a series of five seminars, the purpose of which was to exchange opinions and attitudes, and to identify criteria for evaluating and selecting projects from the Islamic world which would be recognised and awarded for their specific contribution. The seminars covered a wide range of issues.⁴ An international network of confidential nominators was established, who identified a wide range of projects completed between 1950 and 1977. Each project was extensively documented with materials provided by the architect and client. Two hundred projects were screened by the Steering Committee, thirty of which were then verified on site by a technical review team. All completed dossiers were presented to the Master Jury, which selected fifteen projects for the first award, and presentations were made to the winners in October 1980 at the Shalimar Gardens in Lahore, Pakistan, by the Aga Khan. The cycle of awards is once every three years. Awards were also given to a selection of eleven projects in September 1983 during an award ceremony held in Istanbul, Turkey. The 1986 award ceremony was held on 24 November in Agadir, Morocco. Six projects received awards out of over two hundred nominations.

The book *Architecture and Community: Building in the Islamic World Today*, edited by Holod and Rastorfer (1983) was produced to present the winning projects of the first cycle of awards.⁵ This book is reviewed here as in many ways it represents the efforts of this well publicised Award programme. An excellent preface by the Aga Khan starts off the book which covers the issues leading to the establishment of the award, the criteria for selection, the emphasis for an award process based on search, and the challenges for the future. It clearly communicates the depth and commitment by the Aga Khan and the programme he has established. It is followed by a lengthy introduction by the editor Renata Holod which attempts to set the tone for the award programme and the book at hand. She says that the fifteen projects selected for the first award can be considered as a kind of barometer of architectural thinking and activity in the countries of the Islamic world, but the reverse in fact is true, the projects representing a small minority of successful projects in these countries. The bulk of building and urban activities today in most of those countries represents at best copies of Western models. Most clients and high-level government officials have rejected their sophisticated tradition in building and processes of urbanism.

Holod attempts to identify some of the lessons which can be drawn from this elaborate procedure of reflection and selection, by discussing the characteristics shared by the Muslim world today, the issues which arise as one looks at the projects as a group and proposing a broader conceptual framework for an evaluation of this architecture. She identifies four common aspects which are shared by most Islamic countries: massive migration to the cities; the effects of colonialism and modernisation; participation in Islam as a religion and culture; and sharing a rich architectural past. An important observation is that when colonialism ended it left a gap between past and present and also left technology which did not evolve out of the past and has affected architecture considerably.

And in many ways colonialism turned into cultural and technological dependency.

In some other countries that were not colonised by Europeans, such as Saudi Arabia, the net effect of the former phenomenon occurred due to the drive for modernisation. Holod correctly points out: 'The rich reservoirs of experience, tradition, and public image inherent in precolonial architecture were not activated in the search for a new architectural identity. This was particularly true because at least the external forms of the older architectural traditions had at times been subverted for the official buildings of the colonial administrations themselves. The new clients, decision makers, and architects turned instead to the most current images available for expressing the aspirations of their new nations. These images, techniques and ethos were found within the international style generated by the Modern Movement.' She goes on to say 'Yet, the physical presence of a vast and varied architectural heritage, which has not, for the most part, been integrated into the international language and culture of architecture, remains a challenge to all architects building in the countries of the Islamic world. The heritage is there to accept, to reject, or to engage in a dialogue by understanding its concepts and its idiom and by building upon it.' She feels that the fifteen projects and short essays gathered in the book, and considered as a whole, suggest a number of recurring patterns which may help in understanding the nature of the emergent architecture of Islam. These are: (a) development of a body of thought about the nature of a built environment that is culturally and economically responsive to the present and future societies of the Islamic world; (b) applied thinking, involving the development of tools and programmatic strategies that ensure a close fit between the perceived needs and the designed project that identify the skills necessary to carry such a project to its successful incorporation into a particular built environment, and that embody the important potential for replicability; (c) the range of complexity and appropriateness of contemporary building practices available within the Islamic world; (d) the variety of roles clients have played in the realisation of projects; and (e) the occurrence of expressive form which evokes or which quotes deliberately and directly from past sources.

Holod's introduction is perceptive and thought provoking, but her discussion of the latter four patterns relative to the fifteen projects is at best skimpy and does not tie down effectively the issues raised in the winning projects; thus it is left to the reader to absorb her analysis and link it to the projects, a time consuming task at best. Yet it is the understanding of the relevance of these projects within an evaluative framework that is so crucial to communicate. A major omission from the introduction is the question of the urban fabric, what is the impact of large-scale city-wide decisions on the building scale? The reality in most Islamic countries today that the layout of new roads built in this century to accommodate the car has had a major impact on the emergent architecture. The layout of road systems followed the grid pattern and the related planning techniques for subdivision of land and the allocation of land uses. All of these were regulated by legal codes which were imported wholesale from Western countries. Yet we know that the way land is used and subdivided should primarily follow policies emanating from the culture itself. Islam has specific views on these aspects of human activity. Thus the context for architecture, i.e. how a specific site is generated for construction, is a

most crucial issue for investigation. Yet it is missing from the introduction and from most of the essays selected for the book. I believe this is a major omission on the part of the Award Programme, the roots of which might be traced to the contents of the seminars.

The book contains ten essays followed by a documentation of the fifteen projects and the Chairman's award to Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy. In this review I will comment on the essays as they represent an effort related to the objectives of the first pattern. According to Holod the first five essays deal with theoretical and conceptual issues and the latter five deal with the more particular problems of practitioners that discuss a range of practical and attitudinal issues. All of these essays were selected from the literature generated by the five seminars mentioned earlier.⁶ Eight of ten essays were taken from the last two seminars held in October 1979 and May 1980, presumably representing the participants' thinking at that time. After carefully reviewing all essays, I have come to the conclusion that my interpretation of the contributions and the clustering they fall under is different from the editor's suggested two clusters. Accordingly, I will discuss them under three headings: *Theory* concerns are by M. Mahdi, M. Arkoun, N. Ardalan and O. Grabar; *Policy* concerns are by M. ul-Haq, Y. and S. Lari, and D. Kuban; the latter two are also concerned with issues related to *Practice*, the concern of C. Correa, M. Serageldin and F. Vigier and I. Serageldin.

The essays by Mahdi, 'Islamic Philosophy and the Fine Arts', and by Arkoun, 'Islam, Urbanism, and Human Existence Today', are the least developed for the purposes of establishing a theoretical construct, and yet they fall in this category. The former author is a specialist in Islamic philosophy and the latter in Arabic literature, and both their backgrounds are essential for contributions towards an understanding of Islamic architecture. These papers are good examples of the editor's reliance on contributions presented at previous seminars without further development to fit a more permanent format for a book. Ardalan's essay, 'On Mosque Architecture', concerns itself with the issue of beauty in Islamic architecture and how to develop criteria for this. An important concept emanating from Islamic values and which applies to building design is that of Beauty Without Arrogance, and when there is any connotation it reminds the user of God's beauty, presence and infiniteness. Ardalan suggests a methodology for determining typologies for various building types for the contemporary Islamic world derived from traditional prototypes of the various ecological and/or cultural regions of the area. He suggests the use of a systematic inventory, and discusses the example of the mosque. He uses a two-part methodology: (i) origin of mosque design, including its pre-Islamic influences; (ii) cataloguing the occurrence of generic forms and typologies from a survey of major mosques. A visual language of vocabulary and grammar emerges, the former dealing with aesthetic concepts and models of the building's components, and the latter relating to the various systems of organising these parts into a coherent whole. The theoretical challenge lies in externalising the criteria and design methodologies for successfully understanding and using the grammar, and the interpretation of the vocabulary without having to 'copy' historical examples. The essay opens up a window on a vast area of knowledge awaiting study.

Grabar's 'Symbols and Signs in Islamic Architecture' is an important and thought provoking essay, in which he poses the problem in the form of questions: 'Is there an Islamic system of visually perceptible symbols and signs? What are the sources of the system, the revealed and theologically or pietistically developed statement of the faith, or the evolution of visual forms over fourteen hundred years? In what fashion and how successfully were signs and symbols transformed into building forms? How valid is the experience and memory of the past for the present and the future?' He goes on to suggest three methods for approaching these questions: (i) pure theory; (ii) Islamic written evidence; and (iii) the monuments. In the first approach he deals with the idea of symbol, sign, image and the referent. The symbol depends on predetermined conventions, habits or agreements which are not in the object but in those who share it. Therefore the problem becomes one of defining the semantic field of a symbol by finding the area in time or space of its contractual agreement with a social group. He provides the example of the minaret, which is a sign and becomes a symbol when it reminds one of Islam, or when it appears on a postage stamp. Thus the sign attribute is fixed and the symbol attribute variable depending on the charge given it or the feeling of the viewer.

Approach two on written evidence is discussed by posing a number of questions, and the author admits that others with more knowledge of texts would be able to shed light on the issues raised. Another important observation he makes is when to view texts as synchronic documents and when to view others as having a diachronic nature. Obviously the Quran and some of the literature developed by the Fiqh⁷ and its impact across time must be viewed of the latter category. In this reviewer's judgement the methodology of using the written evidence is probably the most complex and demanding, yet possibly the most fruitful in terms of the potential results for developing the basis of a theory. The third approach is to rely on monuments, and here the author's choice of the term monuments is restrictive. Had he chosen the term built environment it would have provided a wider context and area for study. One of his propositions to seek a symbolic system in the decoration and geometry used in Islamic architecture is sound, but there is much material available in the various levels of the built environment from which to seek symbolism. For example, the legal system as it affected building practice, particularly at the scale of the neighbourhood, had major implications on built form;⁸ its resulting relationships and system of arrangement was discernible across time and place. It provides a great deal of material from which to seek meaning, symbolism and developing the basis of a theory. Although the author limited the physical arena of inquiry, he nevertheless soundly proposes 'Can one extend the point to propose that the true uniqueness of the Muslim visual symbolic system lies not in the forms it takes but in the relationship it creates, indeed compels, for its users?'

Mahbub ul-Haq's essay 'Islamic Architecture and the Poor People of Islam' is the leading one addressing the question of policy. How do you make architecture relevant to people, particularly when two-thirds of the Muslim population in the world is poor? Can such an architecture be based on Islamic values of equality, accessibility, mass participation and cost effectiveness? This might suggest that the experience from the vernacular is more important to understand and learn from

than that of monumental architecture, which has always been the subject of admiration and study at the expense of the former. Mahbub ul-Haq poses a number of important questions, the most significant being 'Can Islamic architecture develop in those Muslim countries that still deny equality of opportunity to their own people, that still violate every principle and the very spirit of Islam, and that are still run by vested interests? Isn't the revival of Islamic architecture part and parcel of a much larger movement, a much wider struggle for a real renaissance of the true spirit of Islam?'

Yasmeen and Suhail Lari's essay 'On Recreational and Tourist Complexes' also addresses the question of policy, particularly when they say 'We ought to question the validity of so-called symbols of progress, particularly in the context of high-rise buildings and comparable engineering feats: they abound in the West, but are they suitable, appropriate, and relevant to us? In the context of economic development, emphasis should be placed on the evolution of life styles that save energy, time, materials, and foreign exchange; efforts should be directed toward moving away from those symbols of progress that are important only because of their high visibility and their supposed allusions to success.' After discussing aspects of the heritage relevant for buildings for tourism, they indicate the following issues to be considered for building design: (i) learn from indigenous solutions for controlling environment; (ii) expenditures on buildings should not be influenced by 'international' standards; and (iii) all actors involved—clients, developers and government agencies—should seek alternative solutions to those in the West. A thoughtful statement from two Pakistani practising architects, but they do not make any suggestions for new ideas for recreational facilities suitable for Islamic countries, as the title of their essay suggests.

The essay by Dugan Kuban from Turkey, 'Conservation of the Historic Environment for Cultural Survival', essentially deals with policy issues relevant to conservation. Kuban suggests a policy that would regard all the traditional built fabric in cities as a given to be maintained as long as possible, and not allow economic determinants to dictate land use and redevelopment. He does suggest a planning technique which could be used which he calls 'reverse planning'—that is to assume total preservation, then make changes or remodel as the need arises. Although the goal and intent are worthwhile, the author does not suggest ways for actualising such a policy in Turkey, nor the means for implementing it—particularly in a secular and very Westernised country which does not view its Islamic cultural heritage with any special favour.

The essays that deal with practice issues are three, although only two are of value. The one by Charles Correa, 'Urban Housing in the Third World: The Role of the Architect', is particularly illuminating, reminding us that the role of the architect lies more in city planning and site planning than in the design of the housing units. He convincingly argues that whatever the architect does, he cannot bring down the cost of housing for the poor relative to their economic level. He also clearly demonstrates the myth that higher densities in urban areas is one of the answers to the problem. The architect can make a contribution if he is involved in locating appropriate sites in urban areas which are easily accessible to the job markets, and he can work with communities on site layout and organisation, and

relegate the design of the units to the people. These observations certainly confirm the value of the traditional experience of the housing sectors in Islamic urbanism by emphasising the important role of people in shaping their immediate built environment and in designing their housing units.

The essay by M. Serageldin and F. Vigier, 'Changing Roles and Procedures in the Design of Public Buildings', calls for the participation of users in the design of public buildings and clearly indicates the stumbling blocks which come in the way of instituting authenticity in the design of these buildings. The essay unduly stresses the role of the professional and the architect, thus suggesting in the concluding remarks specific reforms to professional curricula in architecture.

As mentioned earlier, a major fault in the book is the re-use of essay material which was originally intended for a seminar format. The editor could have imposed a rigorous format for re-writing those essays, and could have also solicited other material from outside the family of early participants in this programme. It is hoped that future books of the Aga Khan programme will be more scholarly, as there is a very large vacuum in knowledge which needs to be filled very rapidly. Contributions which are not rigorous enough and do not address themselves directly to the task of filling the knowledge gap will in the long run be wasteful and counter-productive.

It is very difficult for any well-intentioned programme to be effective if it does not view the larger context of architecture. The impression is that the Aga Khan programmes are unduly concerned with form, and not with the societal processes that generate urban form and architecture. There is also not enough integration between city planning and architecture in the discourse as evident in the publications and activities of the Aga Khan programmes. This reviewer would suggest the following to make the contributions of these programmes more effective: (i) develop an agenda for research topics to cover the whole gamut of issues, with the specific purpose of developing a sound theory for Islamic architecture and urbanism usable for the present and future, and adaptable to the various conditions currently prevailing in the Islamic countries; (ii) solicit and support top quality research from the most able people you can find anywhere in the world; (iii) institute an award programme for research and publications; and (iv) allocate adequate funds to translate key works to the languages of the Islamic countries.

Concluding Observations

As indicated at the outset of this review essay, the aim has been to identify the state of knowledge in this area of study in terms of its usefulness to those involved in the planning and design of the Islamic city and its architecture, and by extension to academics involved in these areas. However, those in other disciplines such as geography, archaeology, and art history might also find this reviewer's observations and criticism helpful.

The bulk of the literature in this field was generated by those outside the environmental design disciplines. For instance, if we take into consideration the backgrounds of the contributors to the two works reviewed here in detail, we find that in the case of *Architecture of the Islamic World*, the majority are art historians,

except for one who is an architect. In the case of *Architecture and Community*, more of the contributors have architectural backgrounds, but very few of those have undertaken serious research in this area of study. This has resulted in essays focusing more closely on issues in the field, but not necessarily of a scholarly standard where a high level of reliability is expected. This is not to say that the contributions of those outside the field of environmental design are not useful or needed. The fact is they are needed, but one should be aware that it is more difficult for such individuals to generate material which successfully relates to issues of relevance to those in the field, who are seeking material which is directly helpful in formulating a guiding framework for criticism and design action.

The art historian, for instance, who addresses architectural matters has difficulty in achieving a holistic interpretation, as was mentioned elsewhere.⁹ This can only be rectified by interdisciplinary efforts and collaboration between individuals with different skills and background.

NOTES

1 al-Faruqi, Lois Lamya, 'Appreciating Islamic Art' in *Arts and The Islamic World*, 3 (3) Autumn 1985, pp. 31–37.

2 Jones, Owen, *The Grammar of Ornament*, London, 1856, as cited by Dalu Jones.

3 This reviewer has devoted a chapter on this aspect in his book *Arabic-Islamic Cities: Building and Planning Principles*, London, Kegan Paul International and New York, Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1986.

4 The titles and dates of the seminars are: Toward an Architecture in the Spirit of Islam (April 1978), Conservation as Cultural Survival (September 1978), Housing: Process and Physical Form (March 1979), Architecture as Symbol and Self-Identity (October 1979), Places of Public Gathering in Islam (May 1980). Proceedings are published and available from the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 32 Chemin des Crets-de-Pregny, 1218 Grand-Saconnex, Geneva, Switzerland.

5 It seems that the award programme intends to publish a book for every cycle of awards. A book about the 1983 awards was also published, entitled *Architecture in Continuity: Building in the Islamic World Today*, edited by Sherban Cantacuzino, published by Aperture, Millerton, New York, 1985. It is less ambitious than the first, with fewer essay contributions, but follows the same format and quality of production as the first book.

6 Op. cit., note 4 above.

7 For a brief definition of Fiqh, see this reviewer's contribution in 'The Representation of Values in Traditional and Contemporary Islamic Cities', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 36 (4) Summer 1983, pp. 22–28.

8 Ibid., p. 23.

9 Refer to the argument by James Marston Fitch in 'Experiential Context of the Aesthetic Process', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 41 (2) Winter 1988, pp. 4–9.

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