

The Criticism of Modern Architecture in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract. Modern architecture in Saudi Arabia has come under frequent criticism as being an alien implant which is antithetic to Islamic Architecture and which is environmentally unsuitable for the hot arid environment of Saudi Arabia. Some of the strategies used to mitigate the perceived negative aspects of modern architecture included using traditional motifs in modern buildings, cladding modern building with mud, and restricting facade colors to sand color. Proposals have also put forward to use municipal regulations to force designers to incorporate traditional motifs in modern buildings.

This paper examines the objections to modern architecture and argues that the spread of modern architecture is but one facet of the irreversible transformation from a rural/nomadic society to an industrial/urban one. It also argues that the use of the term 'Islamic architecture' in the present context is inaccurate, and cautions against the introduction of municipal regulations which may stifle artistic imagination and result in a dull environment.

Introduction

Criticism of modern architecture in Saudi Arabia appears in articles from time to time in local newspapers, magazines, professional journals, professional forums, and in books written by architectural critics. Additionally, dissatisfaction with modern architecture in Saudi Arabia is also voiced in private meetings and gatherings. Common criticisms from these sources are that modern architecture is not suitable to the hot arid environment of Saudi Arabia, that it is a deviation from Islamic architecture, that it has led to the disappearance of traditional architecture, and finally, that a large percentage of modern buildings are either too ornate or too abstract.. .

While clearly delineated alternatives have not been suggested, some critics have advocated the utilization of municipal regulations to induce designers and builders to use elements of traditional architecture in modern designs. Some architects and institutions have tried to preserve traditional architecture by incorporating traditional motifs and materials into modern schemes. Some went as far as cladding an entire **building** with mud. In this article, the philosophical and emotional **underpin-**

nings of this criticism are evaluated together with recommended policies for the preservation of the traditional architectural styles of Saudi Arabia.

Background to the Present Situation

In the past forty years, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries have undergone immense changes in the social, economic and the physical environment, as a result of the dramatic increase in national income that has come with the development of the oil industry. In less than half a century, these countries have been transformed from a nomadic and subsistence farming economy into a modern urban/industrial society with per capita incomes that are among the highest in the world.

One of the most important results of this change has been a phenomenal urban growth. Small regional towns have become large cities due to the increase in rural-urban migration, the settlement of a large segment of the nomadic population, natural population increase, and the immigration of a large number of people from outside the country. Large-scale infrastructural improvements have been undertaken. Highways, roads, and wide avenues have become dominant urban features, as municipalities have tried to cope with a huge increase in automobile ownership. Streets which previously were three to five meters wide are now as wide as 80 m. The small winding streets and dense neighborhoods of the past have all but disappeared to be replaced by large office buildings and shopping centers, and by housing developments that show little resemblance to traditional housing layout or appearance.

Naturally, the urbanization process has been accompanied by dramatic social and physical changes. On the economic level, the increase in the cost of labor caused the dwindling or disappearance of many labor intensive industries and professions (such as agriculture and traditional handicrafts) as they could not compete with imported goods or those produced locally using mass production techniques. Quarrying, for example, disappeared long before reinforced concrete became the norm in residential construction, as home-builders began to incorporate concrete blocks into their traditional construction methods, as an inexpensive substitute for stone.

On the social level, tribal and family allegiance have been weakened, to be slowly replaced by professional ties and relations based on similarity of personal traits and educational attainment. The extended family began to be replaced in importance by the nuclear family. At the individual level, the city dweller has been subjected to stresses unknown to the villager, who spends most of his life within the confines of his village. The stresses come from competition among city dwellers for the large number of job opportunities, and from the large number of available choices in selecting spouse, job, residence, friends, and recreational activities. These choices were not available to the villager. At the same time, the more mobile city

dweller does not enjoy the same degree of emotional support the villager receives from his extended family and from his life-long neighbors and friends.

Thus, nostalgia to the rural past still surfaces occasionally, despite the fact that modern technology has provided city dwellers with a higher degree of comfort and luxury in housing, transportation, recreation, medical care, and other aspects of life. **This** is not unlike the romantic movement which appeared in Europe in the eighteenth century as a reaction to the vast changes that the industrial revolution brought. Similar movements do appear in industrial countries from time to time.

Sources of Discontent with Modern Architecture

1 • Environmental performance of modern architecture

Some critics of modern architecture in Saudi Arabia argue that the environmental performance of modern architecture is inferior to that of traditional architecture, **and** that modern building materials are not well suited to the hot arid environment of Saudi Arabia. A frequently cited example is that of concrete blocks, the material out of which most walls are presently made and which is much more heat conductive than the traditional mud walls. The critics also underline the fact that the traditional neighborhoods with their dense settlement patterns and narrow winding streets provided shading from the hot rays of the sun and protection from the scorching sandy storms which sweep the area in the hot summer months. In contrast, the modern detached villas, situated in neighborhoods with wide streets, are exposed to these elements from all directions.

In addition, the critics point out that traditional houses had minimal openings in outside walls which reduced the infiltration of heat from the outside; they relied mostly on interior courts to obtain necessary lighting and ventilation. Modern villas, on the other hand, have large windows in outside walls, making them much more heat conductive than their traditional counterparts. As such, residents of modern villas have to rely on electrical air-conditioning to make their houses more tolerable, puncturing the facades randomly with unsightly holes for wall units which are energy wasting, and a continuous source of noise. The courtyard, an important feature of domestic architecture in Saudi Arabia has **almost** disappeared and has been replaced by an outside garden in which privacy is lacking since neighbors often can see over it.

In summary, these critics argue, while traditional buildings rely on efficient design and construction to obtain comfortable interior climate, modern buildings are environmentally inefficient, hence the need for expensive artificial air-conditioning.

The **above** criticism is only partially valid since it presents only a portion of the total picture. Concrete block walls are more heat conductive than mud walls, no doubt, but are more durable and more resistant to rain. Furthermore, when **com-**

bined with modern insulation materials such as urethane or polystyrene boards, concrete walls are likely to have a higher heat insulation coefficient than mud walls of the same thickness.

Concrete blocks are produced by a mechanized industrial process, having a more uniform quality, higher compressive strength, and are cheaper to buy and erect than the traditional sun-baked mud brick. In addition, concrete blocks accept a variety of finishes. In many parts of Saudi Arabia, coastal areas in particular, mud is simply not available, the soil being mostly sand. Traditionally, houses were built of stone (manually cut and brought from nearby quarries) and burned-limestone mortar, which was later replaced by Portland cement.

In the last ten years, oven-baked clay blocks have become available; these offer the strength and durability of the concrete blocks combined with a higher heat insulation characteristic. Unfortunately, these are not available throughout the Kingdom as they are produced primarily in the central province and shipped to other areas by trucks, thus increasing their cost. In any case, oven-baked clay blocks are produced by a highly-mechanized industrial process and cannot be considered a traditional building material.

In a traditional house, the occupants were obliged to contend with insufficient lighting (small openings in outside walls plus the use of interior courts) in order to obtain a more tolerable interior climate. Modern technology, however, made it possible, through the use of air-conditioning, to obtain both sufficient natural lighting, outside view, and a comfortable interior climate, an alternative which is generally preferable.

The central court has been reintroduced to some modern residences. But since the entire house is air-conditioned it has been necessary to enclose it with glass walls and glass sliding doors. This increased the amount of natural lighting admitted to the house, but also increased the cooling load and the power consumption. Access to this central court is somewhat restricted by the glass enclosure. In some cases, a glass dome is built on the courtyard opening, thus eliminating the need for setting the courtyard apart from the house. Since both solutions are rather costly and space consuming, the use of a central court in modern villas has not been widespread.

It also appears that people prefer not to have party walls (common walls with their neighbors), because these walls reduce privacy and increase the possibility of conflict with neighbors, a frequent problem in traditional neighborhoods. In **Riyadh**, municipal plots were given, free of charge, to some people with limited income with the stipulation that the houses to be built on **these** plots have to be attached to their neighbors from two sides. Many of the recipients petitioned the municipality to exempt them from this requirement, complaining that it reduced their security **by** making it possible for thieves and juveniles to jump from the roof of one house to another [1].

And while small winding streets do provide more shading and more opportunity **for** interaction among neighbors, they are not suitable for modern vehicular traffic and parking requirements. The streets of traditional settlements were designed to **accommodate** the circulation of pedestrians, animals and animal-driven carts.

2 • **The philosophical** objections of the critics to modern architecture

A • The disappearance of **architectural** identity

One of the principle objections of critics of modern architecture in Saudi Arabia is that it has resulted in the disappearance of traditional architectural styles [2,3]. A few decades ago each region had its own distinctive architecture that reflected its climate and its local building materials. Prior to the advent of modern architecture in Saudi Arabia, several regional styles existed. This repertoire of regional styles has vanished, or is about to vanish, as homeowners in all regions are using reinforced concrete, relying extensively on electric air-conditioning for interior climate control **and** engaging the services of design and construction professionals that are likely to **be** educated in different parts of the country, indeed in different parts of the world.

Kaiser Talib [4,p.128] mentions the fact that until the **1970's**, the majority of practicing architects in Saudi Arabia were non-Saudi Arabs, mostly from Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. He places the blame on these architects for supposedly importing into Saudi Arabia, from their own countries, a style **which** he considers alien to Saudi Arabia environmentally and culturally. The implication **is** that once Saudi architects become the majority in Saudi Arabia this 'alien' style will be replaced by one which is more in touch with local architectural traditions. This is a recurrent theme among many critics of modern architecture in Saudi Arabia [2,5]. Yet it is a gross oversimplification of reality.

First, no group of architects, no matter how clever, can convince a whole population to adopt something in which that population does not **find** useful solutions to their needs. Second, Saudi architects have been designing and building in modern architecture style. In **fact, even** the critics of modern architecture build their own houses of reinforced concrete and rely on air-conditioning like the remainder of the population. Lastly, the countries from which Arab non-Saudi architects come from are similar to Saudi Arabia in culture and natural environment.

B • **Non-conformity** with **Islamic architecture**

Some critics argue that modern architecture is a Western import, a foreign implant which represents a break with 'Islamic architecture' which is distinguished by certain visual features (arches and colonnades for example) and certain design criteria (emphasis on privacy and respect for rights of neighbors, etc.) which is lacking in modern architecture(t). The difficulty with this criticism has to do with the use of the term 'Islamic architecture'.

⁽¹⁾ Critics who expressed this opinion include the late Farid Shafei [6], Osama Al-Johari [7] and Yusuf Al-Tuwain [8].

'Islamic architecture' has been coined by Western art historians to denote many distinct regional styles that have developed in different parts of the Moslem world, in various historical periods, ending in the 18th or **19th** century at the latest. The majority of architecture history books reviewed for this article use Taj **Mahal** (completed 1653 AD) as the latest noteworthy building of Islamic **architecture**⁽²⁾. In fact, Nikolaus Pevsner, a prominent art historian, maintains that "the development of Islamic architecture virtually ceased after the early 17th century; thereafter it succumbed to versions **of** the European Baroque or was reduced to pastiches of earlier styles." [14, p.264].

Under the classification of 'Islamic architecture' several very different styles were grouped together covering such diverse **buildings** such as the Taj **Mahal** in India, the Sultan Hassan Mosque in Egypt, and the Cordoba mosque in Spain. In contrast, the styles of church construction have been more finely differentiated into a number of styles such as Early Christian, Romanesque and Byzantine, Early and High Gothic, Renaissance, Rococo, and **Neo-Classical**. This is understandable since the Western reader of art history textbooks is interested in the architecture of his own culture and surroundings rather than those of **others**⁽³⁾.

The other point to **keep** in mind is that Islamic architecture, as commonly referred to by art historians, is concerned primarily with religious buildings (such as mosques, religious schools, mausolea), and to a lesser degree with governors' places and other public facilities such as caravanserais (inns). This is due to the fact that religious or quasi-religious buildings were the most important buildings during past historical periods, up to the 18th century AD. This might provide another explanation for grouping these buildings under an 'Islamic' category.

Achitectural styles in Moslem countries have developed in response to several factors that are peculiar to each region, not the least important of which are the climate, the available building materials, the state of construction technology, the level of affluence of society, and the local architectural tradition prior to the spread of Islam to that country. Islamic principles provided a unifying factor which primarily characterized religious and civic buildings across the Moslem world. Hence, it was convenient for art historians to group these styles under the general heading of 'Islamic architecture'. Still, one should keep in mind that religion is one among many factors which influence architectural design.

⁽²⁾ In books reviewed for this article, the latest building classified under (Islamic architecture) is the **Badshahi** Mosque in Lahore, Pakistan, which was completed in 1840 [9]. However, the Taj **Mahal** (completed in 1653) was the latest example of Islamic **architecture** in the majority of the books **reviewed**, which includes references [10-14].

⁽³⁾ **Books** that are mainly concerned with Islamic architecture usually subdivide Islamic architecture into a number of regional styles.

As such, the use of the term 'Islamic architecture' in the context of the current architectural styles of buildings of *various* functions is an inaccurate use of the term. When applied to the present architecture in Moslem countries, the term 'Islamic architecture' lacks a clear meaning and definition, hence a departure from it is *ill*-defined as well. When the critics of modern architecture criticize modern architecture on the ground that it does not conform with 'Islamic architecture' they are using the term 'Islamic architecture' in a normative sense, implying that there is a set of criteria that a building must meet to be classified under 'Islamic architecture'. Hence, they should first define what they mean by 'Islamic architecture'.

Unfortunately, these critics have not offered a clear definition of 'Islamic architecture' in their writings. For the sake of argument, they could employ the following criteria for the determination of 'Islamic architecture' when applied to the present situation:

- a • Buildings designed by Moslems.
- b • Buildings constructed by Moslems.
- c • Buildings that are designed according to the Islamic rules covering building design.
- d • Buildings that are constructed according to the Islamic rules covering building construction.
- e • Buildings that are located in a predominantly Moslem country
- f • Buildings that are used by Moslems.

These alternatives constitute an exhaustive classification scheme. Yet, if we apply any of the above criteria we find that an ultra-modern building such as the Passport Administration building in Riyadh (Fig. 1) is just as likely to meet this criteria *as* any traditional building. Therefore, modern architecture is as 'Islamic' as any of the historical styles in *which* the famous mosques and palaces of Egypt, Spain, and Turkey have been built.

Islam as a religion does not specify for its adherents any particular style of architecture. It does require Moslems while building to provide their family with adequate privacy and take into consideration the welfare of one's neighbors and the rest of the community by not causing others any harm or discomfort or adversely affecting their capacity to enjoy their own premises. Within these limitations, a modern building is not inherently any less 'Islamic' than a traditional one.

Certainly, the mere fact that a building contains arches and colonnades does not make it 'Islamic'. After all, arches, domes and colonnades have been used in a *mul-*

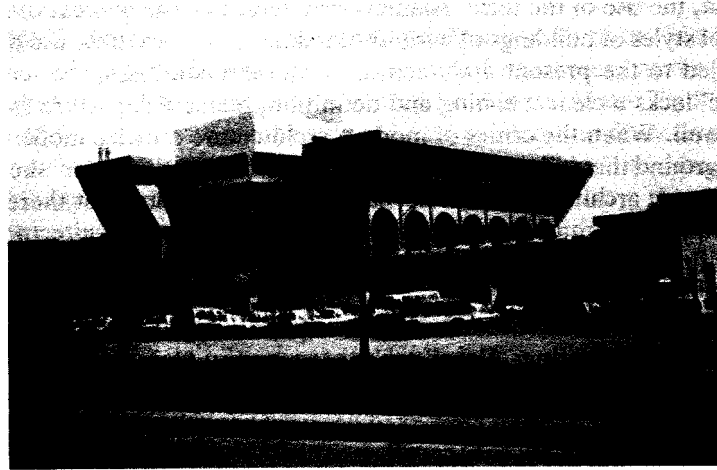


Fig. 1. The Passport Administration building, Riyadh

titude of historical styles, around the world, starting with the Romans. If we assume for the sake of the argument that these forms and others are ‘purely Islamic’ forms, i.e., used primarily by different Islamic civilizations throughout history, does that justify limiting ourselves to these forms now?

Arches and colonnades have been overused, even banalized, in the misguided search for ‘Islamic architecture’. Ward Thompson of the Omrania design firm which has designed many noteworthy buildings in Saudi Arabia and won many competitions, notes that “there is sometimes an obsession with the Arab arch. Clients quite often demand this but it can be badly overdone. Why should the West be obsessed with **Doric** (Greek classical) arches? Why should the East be forced to live with Arab ‘arches?’” [15].

Bukhari [16] agrees that the use of the term ‘Islamic architecture’ in the modern context is inappropriate, since that term has been used to denote specific historical styles. Instead, he proposes the term ‘Moslem architecture’ to denote any architectural development in Muslim countries. Although I sympathize with Bukhari’s aim, it is not clear how the current ‘Moslem architecture’ is likely to be any different from modern architectural styles in non-Moslem countries. Hence, it is probably more useful to admit to ourselves that modern architectural styles in Moslem countries are Western styles which we are using because they meet our needs for comfort, ease of maintenance, etc., just as we are using modern Western technology in transportation, medicine, communication and other aspects of our life.

3 • Visual aspects of modern buildings

The critics note with disfavor the excessive decoration of some modern residences as well as the excessive abstractness of some modern institutional buildings. Over indulgence in decoration is clearly visible in modern domestic architecture in Saudi Arabia, where the facades of a private villa may be cluttered with colors, lines, masses, several finishing materials, and a large number of decorative motifs such as arches and elaborate window frames. Nevertheless, one has to appreciate the fact that decoration (of houses, clothes, and artifacts), along with conspicuous consumption are two traditional means of displaying wealth in most societies, particularly for the newly rich. In modern Saudi Arabia, the excessive decoration of private villas, inside and outside, is due to the desire of owners to display their newly acquired wealth.

As to the extreme abstractness of some modern buildings, the roots of this phenomena date back to the first half of this century when practitioners of modern architecture over-reacted to what they considered extravagant indulgence in decoration that was prevalent in Europe at the turn of the century. The development of steel and glass construction technology enabled architects and developers to fill city centers, in the U.S.A particularly, with unattractive but 'functional' glass boxes. This has led to an adverse popular reaction against modern architecture. In Europe, the use of unfinished concrete facades produced similar results. In Saudi Arabia, the extent of both styles is limited, yet the few examples available could only provide additional support to the popular hostility to modern architecture. It should be stated, however, that an extremely abstract form is not an inherent characteristic of modern architecture. Rather, it is a design decision that architects take in the interest of functionality (as they define it) and/or their own concept of architectural beauty.

Solution Advocated by **the** Critics

1 • **Changes in** municipal regulation and **architectural** education

Unfortunately, no one has been able to propose a viable alternative to what they consider an unsatisfactory state of affairs with regard to current 'Islamic architecture'. The late **Farid** Shafei was considered to be an authority on Islamic architecture, and in his latest book on Islamic architecture he devoted two chapters to a ponderous discussion of the present condition of 'Islamic architecture'. His book is symptomatic of the confusion surrounding the concept of Islamic architecture. Without much substantiation and without a clear definition of 'Islamic architecture', he concludes that presently the development of 'Islamic architecture' has stagnated.

As to **the** future of 'Islamic architecture' and what direction it should take, Shafei gave no advice beyond the strange assertion that some diverse and well known Western architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Buckminster Fuller, Pier Luigi **Nervi** and others, have been influenced by some aspects of Islamic architecture

(pointed arches in particular). He seems to suggest that by studying these works, practitioners of 'Islamic architecture' may find certain guidance [6,pp.209-262].

The curriculum of architectural schools in Saudi Arabia has been singled out by some critics as being responsible for graduating architects who lack sensitivity to their own culture. In particular, the courses of basic design and architectural graphics are criticized by Al-Johari [7] as being responsible for installing the 'language of Western cubist arts' in the minds of architectural students.

Municipal regulations have also been criticized for encouraging the spread of the detached villa, by requiring home-builders to leave a minimum distance of two meters between the building itself and the garden wall [2]. The apparent aim of this regulation is to insure a minimum clearance of four meters between any two houses in order to obtain sufficient lighting and ventilation. There are also suggestions to adopt municipal regulations to guarantee the incorporation of traditional motifs and decoration in the facades of modern buildings [2].

On the other hand, Yusuf Al-Tuaim [8], when in capacity of deputy editor of *Al-Benaa*, suggested the creation of an Islamic Architecture Research Center, with a rather extensive mandate, covering training students to be more sensitive to their Islamic architectural heritage, rewriting and evaluating curriculum in architectural schools, examining municipal building laws, educating the general public, advising government officials, etc.

Another interesting development is the establishment in the University of Um Al-Qura in Makkah of a Department of Islamic Architecture to graduate architects intended to be more versed in Islamic architecture, and presumably more capable of designing buildings which are more suited to Islamic societies.

2 • Using traditional motifs and materials in modern buildings

A • Incorporating traditional motifs

There are several regional styles of traditional architecture in Saudi Arabia, with each having its own facade treatment and motifs. In the Central Province, the dominant motifs are the sawtooth parapet wall, the small triangular windows and some triangular relief decoration (Fig. 2), while the mashrabiyyah is the most prominent motif in traditional architecture of the Western Province. In the *Aseer* region, horizontal lines of stone shingles characterizes some traditional facades, while in the Gulf region, vertical window bays is a distinguishable characteristic of local architecture.

It is interesting to note that the use of traditional motifs in modern designs has been concentrated mostly in the Central, and to a lesser extent, the Western regions. This is probably due to financial and technical considerations. Giving the parapet

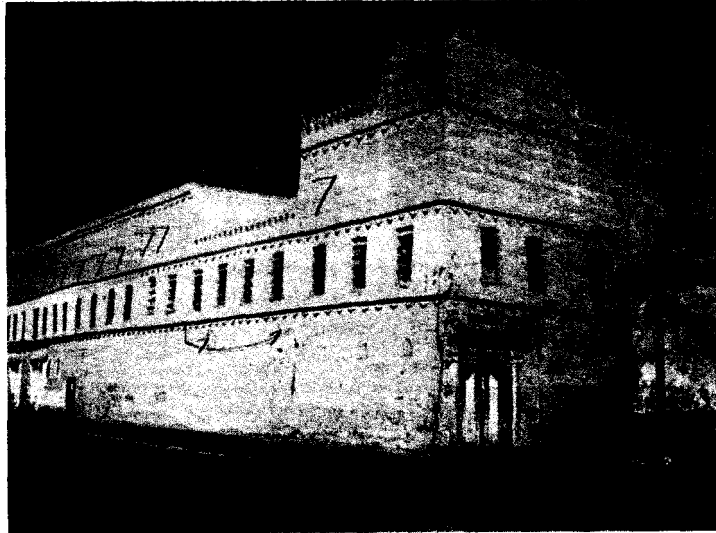


Fig. 2. A traditional house in Riyadh

wall a **sawteeth** edge requires little additional expense, if any. On the other hand, adding mashrabiya to windows represent a large financial outlay. Thus, in modern buildings of the Western region, mashrabiya mostly found in institutional buildings or in the houses of the wealthy. In the Southern and Eastern regions, the 'neo-traditional' trend has not been adopted. In addition to financial reasons, it is possible that designers did not find a technically satisfactory way to incorporate traditional motifs in modern structures or were not strongly motivated to do so.

In Riyadh, there are many private residences and a few office buildings whose facades utilize traditional motifs. Some of the pleasant buildings of this style include the Annex to the Ministry of Urban and Rural Affairs (MUMRA) in Riyadh (Fig. 3), the UN Agencies office building in Riyadh (Fig. 4), and some residences (Fig. 5).

On the other hand, examples abound in Riyadh and Jeddah where traditional motifs were applied unskillfully, resulting in visually dull and unattractive buildings. Two recent examples of this are the branch office of the Municipality of Riyadh on **Salah Eddin** St. (Fig. 6), and the building of the Municipality of Jeddah (Fig. 7). The last example is rather intriguing, since the mashrabiya was originally used to provide privacy to the women folk of the house, while keeping the windows open for breeze. Its application in a large scale project, in an office building where there is not a single working women, does have an ironic side. Another interesting case is the Datsun showroom in Jeddah, which uses traditional motifs of a different region, that of the Central region.

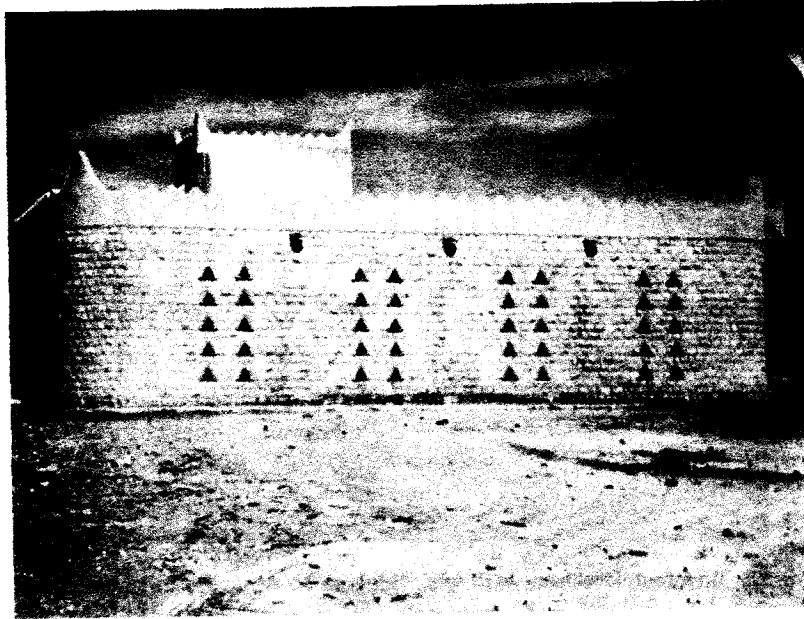


Fig. 3. The annex to the Ministry of Urban and Rural Affairs, Riyadh



Fig. 4. The United Nations Agencies office building, Riyadh

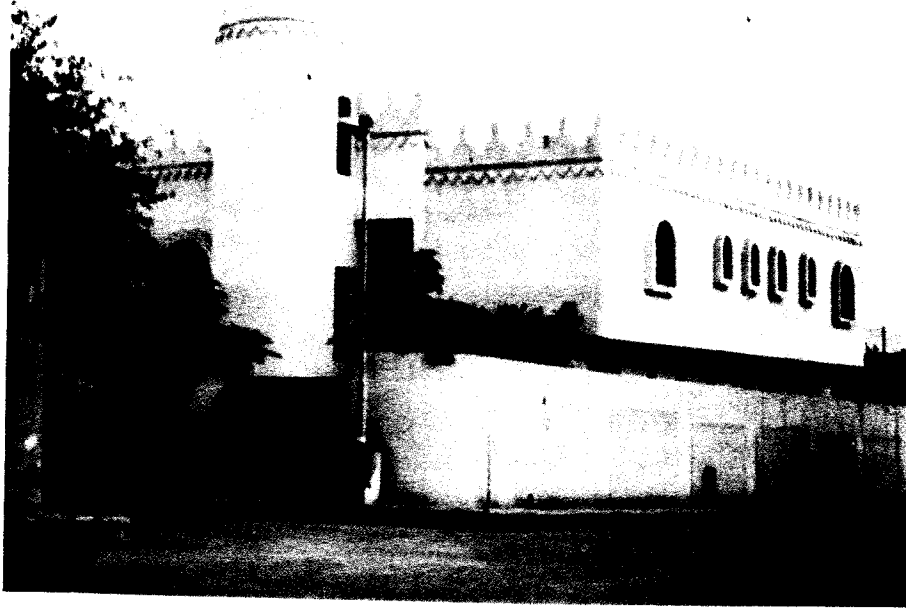


Fig. 5. A modern **villa** with traditional motifs



Fig. 6. **Riyadh Municipality Branch Office, Salah Eddin St., Malaz**



Fig. 7. Jeddah Municipality, Jeddah

B • Exclusive use of sand colors

This is probably the least successful method to give a modern building a traditional appearance. A whole housing or commercial complex is finished with one color, usually that of sand or a close derivative. The apparent rationale is that using colors of traditional materials (sand, stone, mud) gives the building a local character. The result, unfortunately, is large-scale monotony. This is evident in the housing compound belonging to Ring Abdul-Aziz City for Science and Technology (Fig. 8), and in the Commercial Center of Riyadh Diplomatic Quarter, especially since there is little variation in the textural pattern of these facades.

C • The use of mud finish

Covering the whole building with mud is the most spectacular of all methods used to give a traditional face to modern buildings, but it is costly. Hence, it has been reserved for commercial buildings. Furthermore, since mud tends to erode badly with rain, it is sprayed with a thin coating of transparent polymer to make it waterproof. One example of this style is the Grand Celebration Hall in Riyadh, designed by Mohammed Al-Sabik (Fig. 9). It is a large one-storey building which houses a large banquet hall and a number of smaller meeting halls. The building is used for large gatherings such as large wedding receptions and banquets. It is a modern building with a steel structure that allows the creation of large column-free spaces. Yet the exterior walls of the building are finished with mud to give it a traditional appearance. Recently, few other buildings have been built with mud finish.

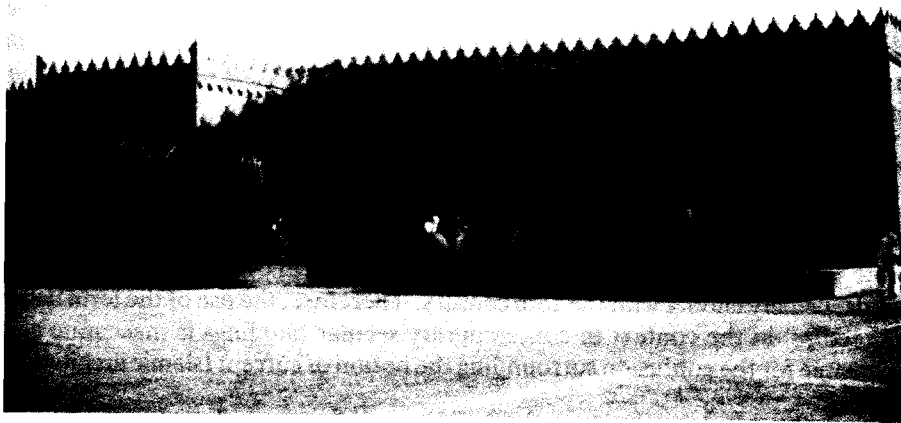


Fig. 8. The housing compound of **King Abdul Aziz** City for Science and Technology



Fig. 9. Grand celebration palace, Riyadh

Conclusion

The reaction of the critics against modern architecture, as we have delineated, can be attributed to three factors: 1) the desire to preserve the traditional architectural styles of Saudi cities and towns, 2) confusion at what constitutes 'Islamic architecture', and 3) dissatisfaction with the extreme abstraction of some modern architectural forms as well as with the chaotic appearance of a large majority of modern villas, due to the overuse of ornaments and the presence of too many building materials in their facades.

The debate on whether modern architecture is antagonistic to what is called 'Islamic architecture' is due primarily to the misuse of the term 'Islamic architecture'. 'Islamic architecture' is a term that has been coined by Western art historians to denote the styles of mostly religious buildings in Moslem countries in past historical periods, usually ending with the 18th century. Therefore, the use of the term 'Islamic architecture' in the context of contemporary secular buildings is inaccurate and is responsible for the confusion surrounding the notion of current Islamic architecture.

Critics of modern architecture in Saudi Arabia fail to consider that the transfer from traditional architecture to modern architecture is only one facet of the *irreversible* transition from a rural/nomadic society into an urban/industrial one. Meanwhile, nostalgia to the past is essentially a reaction against the multitude of changes that the Saudi Society has been going through during this transition. As a result, the qualities of earlier life-styles are exaggerated and traditional construction methods and urban patterns are unduly glorified. Such reactions also appeared in the West after the advent of the industrial revolution, and still reappear there from time to time.

The desire to preserve the architectural identity of Riyadh and other cities is commendable. But how realistic is this desire? And how should this be accomplished? We live in an age in which technical advancements do not recognize borders. As soon as a new material or process is invented it is exported or produced worldwide. The industrial world is becoming increasingly homogeneous. The modern architecture in Tokyo does not differ significantly from that in New York, London, or Rio de Janeiro.

We cannot realistically expect people to keep using traditional materials and processes simply in the interest of preserving tradition. At a lecture which **Kenzo Tange** gave at King Saud University two years ago, I asked him if in Japan it was felt necessary to give modern architecture a specifically Japanese style. **He** replied that there has been some unsuccessful attempts to do so in the early part of this century. Since that time, the idea of clothing a modern building in a traditional Japanese garb has been discredited. It seems that we are now going through the same experience which Japan went through several decades ago.

This is not to say that we should totally discard our architectural heritage. **Traditional** and new motifs can be developed and incorporated into modern designs, but it should be a matter of choice, not regulation, and it should be applied with a high degree of finesse and sensitivity. Covering a whole modern building with mud is not devoid of deception, although there is some elements of novelty in it, and it does **have** some energy-saving effects. The three examples of mud-covered buildings in Riyadh are rather elegant. Nevertheless, I do not cherish the prospect of having this pseudo-traditional style becoming the predominant one in Riyadh.

The efforts to regulate the appearance of buildings, in order to make look like traditional buildings, are misplaced. There is space in our cities for the traditional, the neo-traditional, and today's architecture. If, on the other hand, we make regulations that oblige designers to use particular ornaments, materials, or color combinations we are likely to produce a dull and dreary environment.

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انتقادات للعمارة الحديثة في المملكة العربية السعودية

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ملخص البحث. توجه انتقادات كثيرة للعمارة الحديثة في المملكة منها أنها من إنتاج حضارة غربية عن النطقة وهي تتعارض مع مفاهيم العمارة الإسلامية ولا تلائم البيئة الصحراوية الحارة في المملكة. وقد جربت عدة طرق لتخفيف سلبيات العمارة الحديثة كما يراها البعض. من هذه الطرق إدخال حليات تقليدية على التصميمات الحديثة وتغطية المبنى من الخارج كلية بالطين واقتصار الألوان المستخدمة في الواجهات على لون الطين أو الرمل. كما قدمت اقتراحات لإصدار قوانين بلدية لإرغام المصممين على استخدام الحل التقليدي في التصميمات الحديثة.

تدرس هذه المقالة الاعتراضات الموجهة إلى العمارة الحديثة وتحادل أن انتشار العمارة الحديثة في المملكة ما هو إلا واحدة من ظواهر الانتقال من مجتمع بدوي ريفي إلى مجتمع حضري صناعي. وتحادل المقالة أيضا أن استخدام مسمى «العمارة الإسلامية» بالنسبة لعمارة عصرنا الحاضر استخدام غير دقيق لهذا المسمى. وتحذر المقالة من تبني قوانين بلدية قد تحد من إبداع المصممين وتؤدي إلى بيئة عمرانية رتيبة ومملة.