THE SADI QASABA OF MARRAKESH

As a result of recent research on Islamic urbanism, the Islamic city no longer appears as an abstract entity, but as a multitude of varied and complex town structures. It is no longer possible to identify one standard type of Islamic city, and behind the obvious common features such as at Lahore, Damascus or Fez, there are significant, and no less obvious, differences.

ROYAL CITIES

A very special group is formed by royal Islamic cities: these are complex structures, created for and by the sovereign, destined to house him and his whole court, including harem, slaves, servants, guards, craftsmen and civil servants. These cities are much more than simple palaces. They combine the different functions required of daily princely life, with the need for security, the exigencies of government and administration. The complex structures which respond to all these requirements are "cities" by extension according to the number of people they house and the variety of their occupations. But their population is, of course, very different from that of a normally developed city which has its own administrative and social structures, and its own connections between the different social groups both within the city itself and in the surrounding country. The status of all those groups within royal cities depends directly on the personal relationship with the sovereign; usually this urban population has no ties with the people of the surrounding region.

The evolution of this urbanism is evidently tightly bound up with the concept of sovereignty. The governmental system of the Umayyads was still quite near to the ancient Arabic principle of "primus inter pares". With the Abbasids, or at least with al-Mansur, a much more elaborate and more rigid system had come into being. At the same time, secular princely architecture underwent a spectacular change. From individual palace structures (the "desert castles"), cities with classical prototypes (Anjar), and seignorial cities (Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi), to capitals such as Baghdad and Samarra, the process is rather more a transformation than an evolution. The circular city of Baghdad is the first well known example of royal Islamic urbanism. Samarra and Aghlabid period Raqqat go back to the 9th century, while the Fatamid foundations of SabraMansuriyya and al-

Qahira, and the Spanish-Umayyad Madinat al-Zahra belong to the 10th century. In the western Islamic world there are the Qala of Banu Hammad, Almohad Marrakesh and the equally Almohad, but never finished, Rabat, the Marinid Fez al-Jadid, the Nasrid Alhambra, the Sadid Marrakesh and the Alawi royal cities of Meknes, Marrakesh and Rabat. In the eastern Islamic world, Lashkari-Bazar is an outstanding example. A great many royal foundations were destroyed and still await excavation, as for instance the Mongol Il-khanid creations. The Timurid Shah-i Sabz, Samarkand and Herat are worth studying from this point of view, as are, for later periods, Bukhara and Khiva. The Safavid port of Isfahan is, in fact, a true royal city, though the separation from the bourgeois part of the town is less distinct here than in most other cases.

Mughal creations like the forts of Agra, Lahore, Allahabad, Shahjahanabad and, most of all, Fatehpur Sikri are fine examples of Islamic royal cities, but at the same time they belong to a properly Indian tradition of royal urbanism which existed from the time of ancient India up till the 19th century. It would be interesting to distinguish those features that are Indian in Mughal cities from those that are part of the Turco-Persian legacy, and those that are specifically Islamic.

A special kind of royal city is that which lodged a whole dynasty, for instance the Alhambra, Sadi Marrakesh, or Safavid Isfahan. The most outstanding example is the Topkapi Saray, the occupation of which outlasted other similar royal foundations. The original layout of the Topkapi was little changed throughout the centuries, though particular arrangements were often modified. The history of this royal city is a reflected image of that of the Ottoman dynasty, which, from the end of the 16th century, lived on the glory of the past, and at the same time was confined by it.

The royal city is distinct from a citadel flanking a more or less independent town. Such fortified princely dwellings were a particular feature of the later Middle Ages and were the obvious reflection of a less solid, more limited royal authority. Nevertheless, the bounds set between the personal city of a sovereign, the dynastic royal city and the simple citadel are often fluid. Fatehpur Sikri and Meknes evidently belong to the first type, the Topkapi Saray and the Alhambra to the second, the citadel of Damascus to the third; on the other hand,
AIR PHOTOGRAPH OF MARRAKECH, SOUTHERN PART OF THE CITY WITH SA'DI QASABA
(DOCUMENT OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF GEOGRAPHY)
the citadel of Aleppo should be classed as a multi-dynastic royal city.
To arrive at a closer understanding of Islamic royal urbanism, it is first necessary to define the constant features of these royal foundations by examining them one by one. The next step is the comprehension of the specific functions and needs underlying the particular architectural forms of individual examples. This functional approach gives us the key to an understanding of the royal builder's own more or less conscious attitudes to his own sovereignty and its architectural representation. Such an investigation should adopt dialectical methods, combining literary and archaeological sources. Used on a large scale, it should help to establish some kind of classification for these royal cities.
The purpose here is neither to set up an exhaustive list of royal cities of the Islamic world, nor to elaborate their typology; it is simply to propose a method based on a study recently made in Morocco and briefly presented here.

THE SADI QASABA OF MARRAKESH
The qasaba of Mawlay Ismail in Meknes is well preserved and is certainly one of the most characteristic royal cities; the Sadi qasaba of Marrakesh was built a hundred years earlier and is more difficult to comprehend, but it is none the less worth examining from the same point of view. The Marrakesh example was built within the walls of the Almohad qasaba of the 12th century, but most of the interior buildings seem to have been the work of the Sadis. It is in a bad state of preservation, but its original appearance can nevertheless be reconstructed through studying the remaining ruins, a Portuguese drawing of 1585 and some contemporary Arabic and European descriptions. Modern Marrakesh largely covers this part, which makes an exhaustive archaeological survey impossible to carry out. To add to this difficulty, it is not always evident which walls belong to the Sadi period and which are Almohad; furthermore, the datings within the Sadi period are not always certain either. In spite of these restrictions, it is possible to recognize the principal features of the Sadi royal city.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
The Sadi dynasty came from Arabia in the 14th century and settled in Susa. Its success in the 16th century was due to its military pro-

Plan of the Sa'di Qasaba (from Koehler)
building. Nevertheless, his other brother, Ahmad al-Mansur (1578-1603), Mansur undertook considerable changes to the qasaba immediately after his accession to the throne, especially the erection of a great palace for receptions. But at the death of Ahmad al-Mansur, building activity in the royal city ceased.

DESCRIPTION

The Sadi qasaba is of approximately rectangular shape and covers about 44 hectares. Its surrounding wall dates back to the Almohad period. The interior space was clearly divided into three parts: the section to the west was open to the public and contained the utilitarian and public institutions; the central part was devoted to the private life of the sovereign; and the east part had gardens which were apparently open to the public. This superficial division can be made more precise: the main entrance, Bab Agnaw and the Friday Mosque, both of the Almohad period, are in the northwest quarter. The Sadi shrines are on the south side of this mosque. From this northwest quarter a long street led south, parallel to the western ramparts. At the level of Bab al-Tubul (Door of the Drums), it crossed a second perpendicular rampart, which was the prolongation of the south wall of the Sadi necropolis. But this last mentioned wall does not appear to have continued as far as the western, outer rampart; it stopped at Bab al-Tubul, which had a ceremonial (rather than topographical) function, since it was used for announcing the appearances of the sovereign. This northwest quarter had granaries dating from the Almohad period, powder-magazines and the "first Christian prison". Immediately south of Bab al-Tubul there were the arsenal, the "second Christian prison" and the stables. Although the descriptions of this part of the qasaba are quite vivid, it is difficult to interpret them alongside a Portuguese drawing of 1585 since a terrible powder explosion in 1569 (or 1562) had brought about some changes. The drawing ignores the earlier layout; the literary descriptions, though not consistent, seem on the other hand to refer to the earlier layout. But there is at least no doubt that these elements were located in this part of the qasaba.
The Portuguese drawing "gives" much more space to the parts which seemed important to its author. Thus the proportions of the design are incorrect, although the real distances are indicated in paços, and it is easy to calculate the real measurements. The distance from Bab al-Tubul to the south rampart is much greater than it appears from the drawing. At about 180 m. the north-south street abutted the northwest corner of a wide place, the Asaraq or Great Mashwar, which was situated in front of the district of the palace proper. At the entrance from the Asaraq to the palace, the royal tribunal took place. The Asaraq seems to have measured about 180 m. by 90 m. The houses of high officials were on its south side. Further south, there was a more or less cultivated garden district, extending as far as the southern ramparts. To the east of the place, a door with a watch tower led to the inner Mashwar which was much smaller. An east-west street departed from here. On its south side were the royal services: the customs house, the treasury, tent store, kitchens and stables. After about 250 m. this street turned north and led, after about 150 m. to the Badi, the official reception palace. The area between the Friday Mosque to the west, the east-west street to the south, the reception palace to the east and the ramparts to the north, was occupied by a mosque, the lodgings of the royal family, the hammams and a guest-house.

This central palace district was flanked, on the east, by a garden zone. The Badi itself had, on its east side, a private garden, the Arsat al-Zulaj, which was a kind of prolongation of palace. Outside, between the eastern ramparts and this garden, a rustic area is clearly shown on the Portuguese drawing and equally described by the literary sources. There was a water pool in the south. This part seems to have been open to the public and has been described as a beautifully landscape park.

The Badi palace has often been described, and its ruins are still spectacular. It is evidently a transposition, on a much larger scale, of the Nasrid Lion's Court at the Alhambra. There are vivid evocations of receptions held here in the days of Ahmad al-Mansur. Most noteworthy from our point of view, is the fact that the palace was integrated into the royal lodging quarters, and that it was "therefore only" accessible to the guests of the sultan. Thus a second pattern supersedes the tripal-
guard, on eating, on recitations of religious poems, on the gifts of the sultan and on prayers. The importance which Ahmad gave to this building, its size and its sumptuousness, tallies with the literary sources. Ahmad seems to have preferred the diplomatic rôle to that of a warrior. He wanted to impress and to convince, not so much by heavy defensive constructions, as by the beauty and the splendour of his receptions. The contrast to Meknes, again, is startling.

The forms taken by the function of housing cannot be precisely determined. The types of lodging belonging to the various social levels of the population of this city are now definitively lost; only the dwellings of the Christian slaves are known from description, but these are not precise, and the prisons of the slaves are not characteristic for the rest of the inhabitants.

The function of acquiring and stocking of goods needs comment. Although there are mentions of powder magazines, these are comparatively few; on the other hand, the customs houses, especially for the Christians, appear to have been numerous. One
of these was situated near the centre of the inner palace district. This means that even the Christians had easy access to this part. The particularly violent anti-Christian propaganda of less than 50 years before seems to have been forgotten. As a matter of fact, Ahmad himself was interested in trade and favoured it as much as possible; he seems to have preferred active trade to passive storage.

CONCLUSIONS

Thanks to the Portuguese drawing and to contemporary descriptions, it is possible to reconstitute and to interpret the ruins of the Sadi qasaba. The function of protection obviously did not take a preponderant place in the mind of its builders. The relations with the madina must have been peaceful, since the rampart on the madina side (north) was particularly at risk with at least three doors. Contacts with strangers, Christians as well as other Muslims, were frequent and trusting, based on trade and diplomacy, and there are several architectural arrangements which give evidence of this. The reception buildings were remarkable and dominated the layout of the qasaba. Architecture shows that the religious function was assimilated in a specific way in accordance with the desire to legitimate the secular power of the dynasty. An analogous use of religion is perceptible up to the court ceremonial (known by descriptions) and up to the architectural decoration (in the ornamental inscriptions in the Badi where prayers and religious invocations are constantly integrated in the context of autocratic presentation of the sovereign’s glory).

Even though the particular architectural forms of the Sadi qasaba are specific, as a whole it follows the general principles of Islamic royal cities. Its size, its surrounding ramparts and its Friday Mosque near the entrance making it accessible to the inhabitants of the madina as well as of the qasaba are common features. It had its military and its official quarters (at the west and at the southwest sides), its tribunal near the entrance to the royal lodgings and, above all, the great place, Asaraq or Mashwar, equally common, between the public area and the royal living quarters. The rough division into open quarters, into half-open administrative parts and into private and closed parts is normal for this type of town.

But it is this last division, which seems omnipresent in Islamic royal town planning, that is not clearly delimited here. The placing of the official Audience Palace in the living quarter, the Christian customs house near the same quarter, and the surrounding public gardens are surprising features. The relative accessibility and number of buildings intended for pleasure make this qasaba more akin to Nasrid Alhambra than to Alawi Meknes, in spite of the undoubtedly North African style of the whole. Like the Alhambra, the Sadi qasaba is a dynastic royal city, but its creation is much easier to identify: it can be attributed to two sovereigns who were brothers, Mawlay Abd Allah and Ahmad al-Mansur. If the first started the construction, it is nevertheless the latter who gave it its decisive character. As we can actually comprehend it is the architectural achievement created by and for Ahmad. This sovereign was known as a cultivated, open-minded, reflective and well-organized personality, and his reign was a period of peace and prosperity for Morocco. His royal city bears witness to this.

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1. The bibliography on Islamic urbanism has become very abundant during the last 20 years. There are all-embracing synthesis as well as detailed studies of particular towns. Geographical field work, archaeological surveys, historical and philosophical research has resulted in a considerable refinement of knowledge. Of the various colloquia which have been dedicated to the subject of the Islamic city, two are particularly important: A.H. Hounani and S.M. Stern, eds., The Islamic City, Oxford 1970 (colloquium of 1965), and I.M. Lapidus, ed., Middle Eastern Cities, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1969 (colloquium of 1966). These two books and the following publications will permit to the reader to reconstitute the essential of the general bibliography: E. Wirth, "DIE orientalische Stadt. Ein Überblick auf grundsätzige Forschungen zur materiellen Kultur", Saeculum, 26 (1975), pp. 45-94 (mainly geographical approach); I.M. Lapidus, Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Cambridge 1984 (2nd edition). B. Johansen, "The all-embracing town and its mosques: al-misr al-gami", Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée, 32, 1982,1-2, pp. 139-161 (historico-philosophical approach). The two precedent issues of Environmental Design (n. 0, 1984 and n. 1, 1985) are devoted to Islamic urbanism in India and in Maghrib (mainly archaeological approach).


3. For this huge subject see the recent and interesting study of R. Milhenbrand, "La Dolce Vita in early Islamic Syria: the evidence of later Umayyad palaces", Art History, 5 (1) 1982, pp. 1-35, (with a great number of bibliographical notes).


9. M. Terrasse, "Recherches archéologiques d'époque islamique en Afrique du Nord", Comptes Rendus de l'Aca-


32 Marmol says 1596, Torres 1562, al Yatmani 901 H, 1573-74: Marmol being generally well informed, most authors follow his dating.

33 The word mashwar is actually used in Morocco for these spacious places situated in front of the sultan's palaces and destined particularly to military parades. The word asaraq is of Berber origin and means generally "courtward", in (closed) "space". Only in Marrakesh and in Tunis did it designate the Royal Place, in the qasaba of Meknes, it is reserved to a long passage between the different parts of the royal city. For Tunis, see A. Daulatli, La Kasbah de Tunis, Tunis, 1974.

34 Judging from the description of Thomas Legendre, in Marrakesh between 1618 and 1625 (Sources inédites..., op. cit., note 29, France, v. 2, p. 400).


36 The Christian slaves seem to have lived first in the houses of the Christian militia and then in the no longer used Almohad granaries. The descriptions make obvious that the houses of the militia had a patio, whereas the granaries were vaulted halls divided in a lower and a upper storey. Cf. Koehler, op. cit., n. 31.