

# Conference of Heritage and Urban Development Cairo

## "Rehabilitation with people participation"

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### Introduction

One of the major problems facing the old Cairo preservation efforts is that the older houses are being turned down and are replaced with modern apartment buildings. Such modern buildings are built with very little or no consideration to the Islamic Architecture existing in this area. As far as domestic architecture the "committee" that listed monuments to be saved has mentioned only few large houses as monuments to be saved.

Earlier when Napoleon came to Egypt, his Archeologists were greatly interested in Ancient Egyptian monuments and have documented in Cairo some Mosques, but probably did not have the time to work on domestic architecture. The list of plates drawn by the Mission in "La Description de l'Egypte" includes only the house Bayt El Sennary in Sayeda Zeinab which was actually the residence place for Napoleon at that time.

Apparently it was difficult to get into the houses where people lived, and naturally the Mosques and public buildings were more impressive for documentation.



View from El-Azbakya towards the south "Description de L'Egypte"

But when we look to the issue of the culture, we will find out that houses and places where people live are of great importance. The study of domestic architecture is actually the only way to relate to every day life of the people.

Naturally, we can tell about the customs and habits of the people easily by studying the nature and organization of living spaces in domestic architecture. In our search for the identity of the Egyptian architecture it will always be the case that we will have to relate to the culture of the people. And in this regard we need to give stress to and find out about the roots of Egyptian Architecture, not only by studying large monuments but also by studying people's habitat and domestic architecture in general.

**The Architectural and social significance of 19th century houses of old Cairo**

During the last 15 years in the college of Architecture at Alazhar University, we had the chance to study several areas within what is called now as historic Cairo.

The study of the houses of the 19th and early 20th century was our main concern.

Through this study we came to realize certain facts about the architectural significance of these houses, and also to understand the social sides related to its architectural features.

These houses of old Cairo were of interest to us, more so than houses of say the Heliopolis area, or what was named Ismailia in downtown area. This is due to the historic location of these houses within the Medieval Islamic Cairo, and secondly because of the features of these houses in old Cairo, which shows that they were built by the ordinary Egyptians for typical

Egyptian families.

In fact we will find out through some close investigations of the types and features of such houses, that they were designed to fit certain Egyptian social needs. To our knowledge there is no domestic architecture that fits more into the notion of "Traditional Domestic Architecture" than what we can find within the historical Cairo area.

In this aspect they are not what can be called European Architecture built in Cairo, like in the case of Heliopolis or the Cairo center Ismailia developments. There is no doubt that some of the European Architects like (Lasciac), were so sensitive in their interpretation of an architectural idiom that fits into the architectural Heritage of Egypt, which rendered such architecture to be in harmony with the culture and the society.

In this paper we will review some typical traditional houses of the 19th century architecture in historical Cairo and will describe and discuss three different examples representing such architecture. The first of these examples is THE TYPICAL FAMILY HOUSE. Such typical example is the house

with a small entrance court. The main family floor is in the first floor. The ground floor is usually for shops on the street: The Mandara or guest reception room and the storeroom openings onto the court area. The Mezzanine is for kitchen and storage facilities as well as for living of the servants.

The main floor on the first floor level is entered through the stairway either to a guestroom or to the "Sala", or the main living space in the middle of the house.

The Sala in the center of the house, cleaves the house into the guest quarters on one side and the bedrooms on the other side.

The Sala in this case has taken the roll of the court as the historian professor Sawsan Nweir would like to say.

The main room of the house overlooking the street has the Mashrabia as an overlooking projected element to use, for privacy and protection of the rooms.

The Mashrabia of the 19th century house is a development of the older Memlook type Mashrabiyya but a bit closer to the contemporary exposed balcony.

Nineteenth century Mashrabiyya is actually a protected balcony with shutters covering the whole height of the person, or an outdoor balcony with shutters around its periphery.

#### EL DAR

A typical example for this traditional house is the house of Sokkar in Elmahgar Street close to the Citadel.

The second typical example for 19th century houses is Byt El Set Sakna in Sayeda Zcinab. Basically this house is what we call EL DAR HOUSE which was built for a large family. The house is composed actually of three houses in one single building around a center court that is entered from the street through a covered area. Such a design allowed few houses to use a single semi private court that is entered by the horse cart from the street.

The ground floor was used as shops on the street. The servants quarters and the typical storage rooms opened onto the court. The first floor is kept for the owner and the organization of its layout typical with the Sala in the center opening onto the court.

Usually, the Sala was directed towards the North breath.

The third example for modest houses is Bayt Abu El Hassan that is what we can call an apartment building.

Although this building was built for ordinary people it still has kept traditional features for the small apartments within it.

The Mashrabia on the main room facing Elmahgar Street is a typical Masrabia totally protected. And has colored gloss panels; the area of the apartment is only so meters square. And the layout is simply a Sala and two rooms.

#### The Priority for rehabilitation

The area of historical Cairo is about 6 km square, containing about 6 thousand houses.

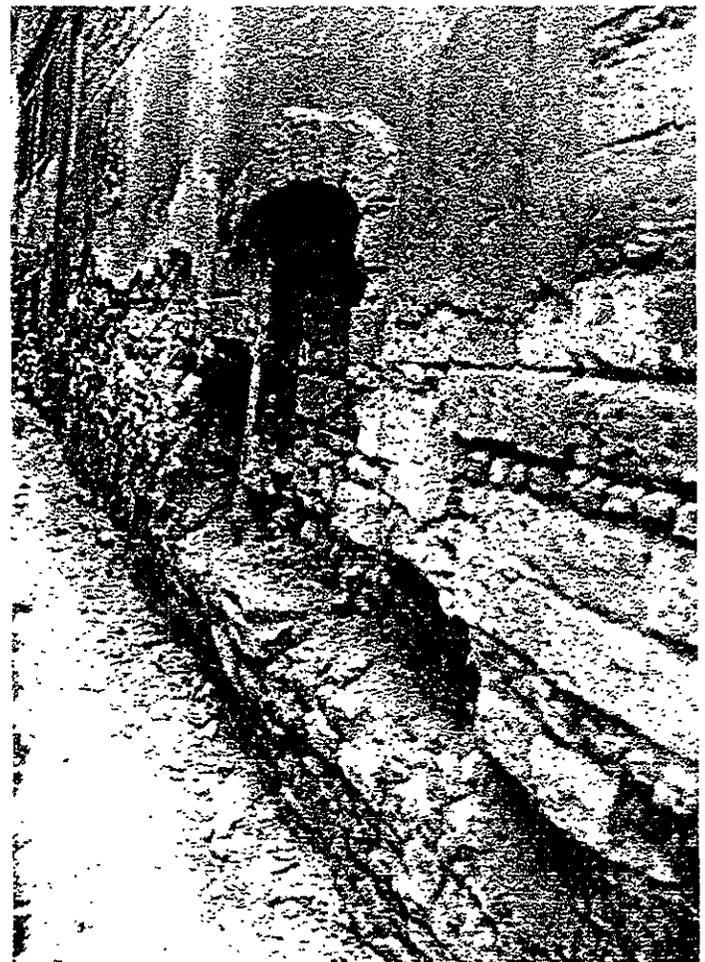
Although most of these houses are not of great historical value since there 100 to 150 years old, but the character of most of the houses is of the traditional type. Usually simple built of stone and bricks in wall bearing type. They are generally of around 100 years old and they blend very well with the Islamic monuments in the area.

Certainly the effort of rehabilitation should be directed mainly to the areas that are closer to the monuments. This particularly is true along the main Kasaba of old Cairo. Along the axis between the Northern gates of Bab

Zuwela and Bab el-Nasr up to el-Azhar and el-Hussein area down Bab Zuwela area and further down the main center of Ibn Tuloon Mosque and the Citadel.

The total number of houses to be rehabilitated has not been defined but a rough estimate of one thousand houses would not be an exaggeration.

Through the under graduate and the graduate researches done in historical Cairo between 1990 and 1993, at Al Azhar University. We have identified several houses to be investigated for rehabilitation. Usually, the criteria were the architectural and historical



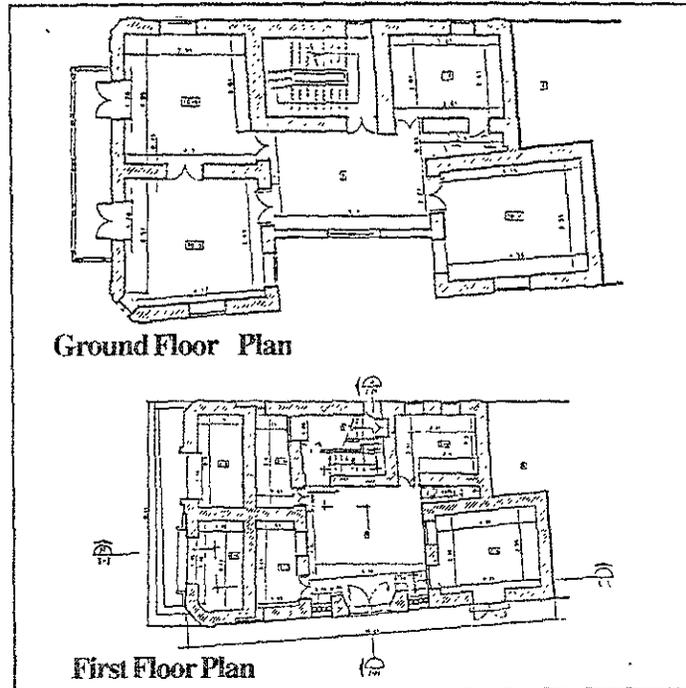
Decay in the lower part of the wall Bayt Sokkar  
19th century house.

value together with the location close to the monuments. Since such work of rehabilitation of non listed traditional houses is of no great concern to either the authorities of Antiquities or the Cairo governorate, we thought of performing an actual experiment of rehabilitation on one of the houses of old Cairo. By simply asking the residents and owners of the houses, it was found out that the owner occupied houses are the ones that are interested for rehabilitation.

In 1995 we started the experiment on one house for the first experiment of rehabilitation in Bab el-Wazir area. With a very small contribution from Gothe institute we started the rehabilitation of the house of Sokkar. The task we have set was the renewal of all the water and sewer network of the house.

The main reason for the collapse of these old houses is the same, it is the decay of the Masonary walls of the ground floor of the house due to the decayed pipes of water and sewers and the bad connections too the main sewers or to the house cesspool.

Usually, the foundations of the houses are in good condition; the water table in most areas is a lot lower than the foundation level. The problem is mainly due to surface drainage water. This mainly is due to the infiltration of water from sewers and water network of the house itself.



Bayt Sokkar

**The second experiment for rehabilitation.**

This project was named three houses of old Cairo it was financed and supervised by the American research center. The project was managed and performed by United Consultants firm of Cairo with the help of staff members and students from the department of architecture at Al Azhar University. The project actually dealt with 4 houses in the area of Bab Elwazir all the four houses are inhabited and the work of rehabilitation was done while the residents are living in their houses. Although there is a risk involved in the process, there was no other way that we could perform the rehabilitation.

The residents had no place to go during the time of rehabilitation. Only in very few cases, the families were able to va-

cate the house for a short period of time.

**The Rehabilitation Process**

Considering the extent of the amount of houses that ought to be rehabilitated in all historic Cairo area. We realized from the beginning that such an effort will have to be done

in an order of Priority. So we should start with houses of better architectural and historical value.

Secondly because of the big number of houses that needs rehabilitation this activity should be best performed with the participation and cooperation of the residents, after all they are the ones that will have to continue the process of maintenance later on.

In this respect we have identified few houses to start with, where the residents were interested to do the rehabilitation, and also to provide help and participate in process as much as possible.

Owners that actually live in their houses were quite eager to do the rehabilitation-, on the other hand owners not living in the area, would rather sell the house for developers, since the rent control acts has rendered their houses as a no income producing assets.

What share did the residents do ?

The residents provided materials like wooden beams, new pipes for sanitary network, or new sanitary units that they want to install instead of old ones.

Whenever possible they would provide some money to spend on certain items like toilet units. In other cases owners and residents provided the workers to work as part of the effort for rehabilitation. But always the management of the operation and



Bayt Sokkar before rehabilitation



Bayt Sokkar after rehabilitation

the technical side of it was provided naturally by the architect in charge and his team of supervision.

### Elements for Rehabilitation: -

The most important elements that were replaced and renewed or changed in this process were: -

1 - The Decayed and almost failing parts of the walls, especially in the ground floor, these were replaced as of original, with good quality limestone from Mokatam Hills. The walls closer to water network were the most vulnerable ones and in some cases also walls on the street, close to ground level.

2- The water and sewer network pipes and taps, which were the main reason for decay and dilapidation.

3- The sanitary units were always replaced with new ones. In some cases new units of bathrooms were added to improve the facilities of the house.

4- The stair and its handrail was either replaced completely or in some cases partially.

5- The woodwork of the bal-

conies and windows was either replaced or restored as of original.

6- The roofs of constructed wooden beams with the flooring of Ma'sarani stone tiles or cement tile, were part of the rehabilitation process. Where necessary particularly some wooden beams needed renewal and in few cases the whole roof was replaced totally by a new roof.

7- The exterior plasterwork was either redone completely or partially.

8- The wall cracks were dealt with by inserting wooded beams to overcome the cracks if the walls were not replaced totally.

9- The roof was insulated where necessary and new tiles were installed with water drainage.

### The social aspect of rehabilitation

The participation of the residents in the process of rehabilitation was always an important factor for the success of this project. We have always tried to increase the people's input in this process in many aspects. As far as

cost and effort sharing in the project we can conclude that the overall sharing has been around 10% of the total cost of materials but has increased in one case to be about 30% of the total cost of materials used.

The tables below give details about the share of resident's participation in each case. Certainly involving the people in the process have proved to be quite important. Those who participated more felt a sense of pride to what they have contributed, and also to what should be done as far as any alteration or addition of facilities likes a bathroom in their house.

In this process we have come to stress our conviction that rehabilitation as well as restoration should be done with the user or the future use in mind. In general we will note that unemployment and lack of skills or education is a common factor in great percentage of the residents of this area. (Figures) .

The improvement of the skills of the people may be in the area of crafts production can be of great asset to raise their standard of living.

Opening a shop of souvenirs for the tourists that cross this historic area can be of great help to the residents who will naturally be more appreciative to the tourists, if they can increase their income through such an activity.

In some houses it is quite feasible to open shops to serve the tourists or to serve the people of the area, such an element as shop opening or improvement of a workshop can be part of the rehabilitation projects in the future. ✻

## Synopsis

### \* Subject of the Issue Our historic gardens are eroding

Dr. Yehia El Zelay  
Egypt used to be famous for its beautiful gardens with rich trees. That heritage has eroded due to the urban development everywhere. The trees were brutally cut. The government to issued the regulation that preserve the green areas including gardens and parks. The government has payed great efforts to maintain this heritage and restore it. However those efforts did not really achieve the goals. (P. 10)

### \* Technical Article Fire Alarm Eng. Sahar Yasseen (P.16)

### \* Project of the Issue The Islamic porcelain museum

Dr. Aly Rafaat  
The museum, which used to be the private palace of prince Amro Ibrahim, is located on Guezira street. That Palace consists of three floors, the basement, the ground floor and the first floor on an area of 850 m<sup>2</sup>. The palace which is of Islamic architecture and includes a great number of porcelain antiques. (P. 19)

### \* Architectural Competitions The competition for constructing the headquarter of the housing and construction bank. Nasr city.

Arch. Ahmed M. Melo  
Arch. Ragae Said  
Arch. Ayman Kamaledin  
The Housing and Construction Bank has initiated an architecture competition for designing the headquarter building of the bank. The project won the first prize. It comprises the different administration offices of the Bank in addition to administrative areas, housing, commercial center, movie theater, and several other entertainment activities. (P. 26)



Bayt El-Sitt Awatef  
before rehabilitation



Bayt El-Sitt Awatef  
during rehabilitation