
Toward New Models for the Future Islamic City

An Islamic Heliopolis?

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Contrary to an opinion that is still too widespread, Islam does not crush the world beneath the weight of the heavens. Despite its imperious feeling of the Absolute, it does not abolish man's initiative, no more than it denies the presence of things. Certainly, it reminds man of his infirmity, his lowliness, intense and burning, nonetheless, it welcomes him. One could say that Islam allows man to gain in existential warmth what it denies him in ontological dignity. A Muslim, provided he adheres to the *ghayb* and to his message (Koran II, 2), can remain faithful to his nature. He is not invited to partake in a supernature, nor even in a sacredness. Submitted to a transcendental decree in his own *wijdān*, he reunites the existential and the fundamental. His attitudes are characterized by a continual alternating between a plenary life and a devotional one. Let us add to that the indefatigable reference to values of the highest order and to the concrete aims of humanity. That is why many theologians of Islam demand from their religion an absolute competence both in the preparation for salvation and in the management of living within society. And this corresponds fundamentally to this aptitude for recollection (*dhikr*), for recapitulation and for resourcefulness that gives a typological strength to many of the behaviours of Islam which is all the more exemplary in a world threatened with loss of its colour and its meaning.

Since he takes upon himself both transcendence and nature, Islamic man can

rush in pursuit of the objectives of this life, and of the next, without ever sacrificing fundamental principles. However, nowadays, principles change in their foundation and their finality. Putting down roots is no longer looked for in human nature, a nature which might then be only a delegatee of the Essence: for what else did the secular antithesis of *ḥadīth* and *qadīm* amount to? It could be, to use another important Arabic word, that the foundations (*aṣl*, plural *usūl*) might from now on be demanded from the living, from the collective, from the self-production of man, from history. And that could force upon the Muslims a serious bifurcation in their choices.

Islam of today must, and can, treat its problems of implantation in space and especially those of the town. This Islam, at grips with its needs and armed with new means, must accomplish this in terms of a *weltanschauung* reaffirmed through the centuries, but still in the process of a full socio-historical mutation. From its very beginnings, it wished to be urban. Its principles and customs have, despite upheavals throughout history, favoured the urban type over the rural or steppe type, though not without setbacks. However, for all its warmth and vividness, this evidence, which has often provoked in Western man suspicious feelings of exoticism, has not, to my knowledge, provoked the analysis it deserves. The lack of analysis has perpetrated the difficulty which presently faces the countries of Islam in adapting an Islamic model of the town to the inspira-

tions and realizations of modernity, and reciprocally, of adjusting the latter to the demands of a future Muslim identity.

This debate between types and phases of civilizations, aggravated in our times by challenges that are often lethal, cannot be resolved without being differentiated into sub-systems of national and regional varieties. What is valid for Fatimid Cairo is not valid for 'Abbasid Baghdad, and is even less valid for the Isfahan of Shah 'Abbas or for modern Casablanca. What is valid for Indonesia cannot be valid in quite the same way for Senegal. Deficiencies in elucidating the ancient legacy and in localized inquiry, in drastic news of the present, too often unintelligible for the lack of a sufficiently informed and critical approach; a multiplicity, finally, of situations and guises that are often very different, which the word Islam encompasses: all that is accumulated with perplexity and with questioning, or else, at times, with a deceiving and sterile assurance.

A First Model

The Muslim city is by choice a city of God. Every Friday the central mosque, which rings out the call to prayer five times a day, assembles the community (*jamā'a*). From this focal point radiate streets, which branch off into cul-de-sacs. Side streets occasionally lead into the gates of the town, which is protected from the open land by ramparts. Water, necessary to ritual purity, rushes beneath the dwellings, and gurgles in the receptacles of the sanctuaries and the houses. Just as every identifiable quarter can be recognized by its mosque with its weekly sermon, so too it harbours one or more *ḥammāms*, where the nakedness of the body is fleetingly revealed in subterranean shadows. It also contains commercial streets, *sūqs* or bazaars, where boutiques and workshops, divided by types, crowd together. Legal wealth is invested in real estate and in lavish consumption. Illicit gains compete with the devotion to the *waqfs*. The *waqf* undertakes a large part

of the aedileship, assistance and upkeep of monuments. Whether good or bad, the result will thus be the same: enormous personal and real estate liquid assets will be at the disposal of the community, under control of a canonical magistrate.

In the towns, men are classified principally by their function rather than by their

kinship. Men of religious science (*ulamās* and *ṭalabas*), large and small businessmen, artisans and factory workers are recruited indiscriminately from every family. A well-balanced descent line of town dwellers will place its representatives in each of the three sectors. Correlatively, a balance that is felt as eminently moral



Fez, Morocco: craftsman in the madina

Photo: H-U Khan

divides a man's time between places of religious worship, his private life and his production, be they respectively *masjid*, *dār*, and any different specializations. There is ternary rhythm displayed in contrast among canonical reunions of the community (legal or pious speeches), assemblies with an economic function (*sūqs* or bazaars, tanneries, street stalls, warehouses), and an enormous and undefined flux of passers-by. Between these last two, traders and artisans versus passers-by, idlers and consumers, the public crier (*dallāl*) makes himself busy. The coaxing of the *dilāla*, even though he indefatigably invokes the name of God, is an economic brokerage. If one dares say so, his function is the counterpart to the canonic call of the muezzin. The corporate organization of trades balances with the indistinct flow of the crowd, and each of these with the pious Friday assembly. In the prayer-room, which is accessible to everyone, eye and ear converge towards the *minbar* and the *mihṛāb*. In that respect the prayer-room differs from the private dwelling, which is sacred and inviolable even to close friends and certainly to any anonymous contingencies of the street.

The intimacy of private life is in the same way in apposition to two sorts of openness: that of ritual prayers and that of economic acts. The law rules natural movements realistically. It provides for impulses of need and of desire, times and places of anonymity. The explicit rule allows these to happen. The emir, the judge or the *muḥtasib* have no intention of ousting any of these from the secrecy of the houses, the scope of social mores or the intimacy of consciences. Liberalism? Surely, and in both the economic and moral senses of that term. Economic liberalism, in any case, gets along well with religious rigour. Was there not a man among the great founders of rites, who was also a wealthy merchant? From there, too, in terms of modernity, is the coalescence of the ideal of town life with the expansion of the middle classes in Islam.

The Model Put to Question

The above model, which corresponds quite well to what we observed in Fez shortly before World War II, stands out with a singular logic, with correspondences of all kinds and with symmetries of which we have mentioned only a few. Both ethical and functional, it seems, moreover, to be wonderfully similar to physical and mental landscapes. Perhaps this structure seems a little too perfect to have generalizations made about it without some discussion.

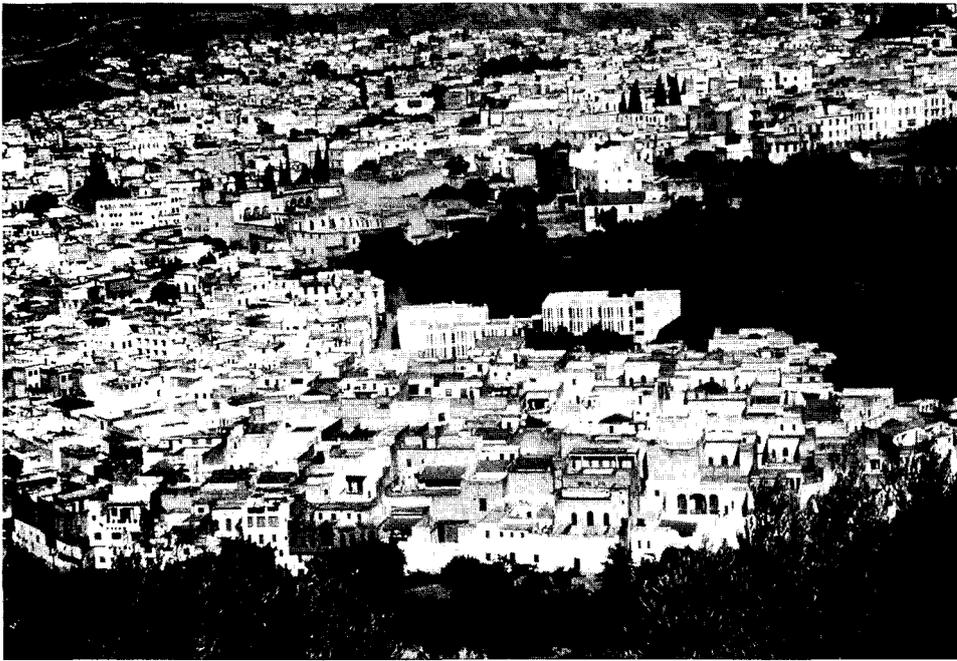
Does it result from a systematic exploration of the towns of Islam in successive eras? Does it not proceed from simplifications imposed by Western observation by the same contrast that, in our days, opposes or even substitutes a quite different order for former situations? These latter could differ from each other in reality: one is tempted to reduce them to an oversimple typology, to coin the term, of a no less simplistic dichotomy between East and West, past and present. Besides, is the model that we have just described valid everywhere and always? Monographic research, which alone could provide an answer to this question, is not sufficiently advanced, to my knowledge, to make the decision.

The story of city foundations, because of the importance it attaches to the foundations of the central mosque, could, however, make one lean toward the affirmative. But it is rare for a madina to be found on virgin ground. Most often one has had to accommodate to either the configuration of the site or to the traces, sometimes considerable and always imperious, of a prior urbanism. It is necessary to take into account the deliberate choices that, within the Muslim order itself, were diametrically opposed. Two extreme examples are the initial square structure of Kufa and the circular design of Baghdad. Dynastic vicissitudes have often imposed either successive changes in the centre, as in Tunis, or additions to different towns, as in Cairo, Aleppo and Fez. In a word, radiocentric arrangement and theological derivation seem to rule the design and the life in the

classic madina. Are they not the result of a generalization after the fact? Is it one that clings to concrete images, but could be valuable only as a reference to an average indicator rather than as a real model (pattern)? In this case the madina itself should be numbered among the other theoretical elaborations of Muslim tradition: dialects supposedly deriving from the classic usage, institutions purportedly descending from the Imamate, and, more generally, the vicissitudes of reality arbitrarily referred to the unity of the principle

Toward a More Elaborate Model

Three remarkable motifs of the landscape of many towns will, however, help us, if not to resolve the problem then, at least, to make some progress through the examination of differentiations and variations that, if confirmed, would bear witness to a certain aptitude of the type to adapt and to change. For the present, research would constitute a good omen. The citadel (*al-qal'a*) is in fact an epicentre whose relationship with the canonical (or theoretical) centre diverts the history of the town. A good example can be taken from the history of Cairo during the Ottoman period. In Fez, the "new town," Fez Jdid, played this role from the time of the Merinids. When there was a conflict, the epicentre (if one may say so) attacked the centre, as was the case several times in Morocco. Along with this decentralization, ethnic origin, physical aspect, customs and the mentality of power which occupied the citadel were substantially at variance with those of the madina. The foreign elements, at least Bedouin and tribal, were often dominant among the people of the citadel, and were sharply in contrast to the middle class. Must we take into account this verifiable and durable heterogeneity? That is not all. What are we to say about the activities of the town? There certain kinds of commerce take on a defensive form, indeed, even tend toward extraterritoriality: *khāns* or *funduqs*, *wakāla* do not have to be



Fez, Morocco: view of the madina

Photo: H-U Khan/Aga Khan Awards

occupied by Venetian or Genoese merchants to stand out by their architecture against the urban texture around them. The *qaysariya* of Fez is used by a middle class that is very jealous of its origins, but the business of importing (especially cloth) plays a precociously significant role: a new aspect that places it in opposition to the *sūqs* of the neighbourhood. A second element of heterogeneity, therefore, has to be introduced into the model.

The madina, which is a market, a giant workshop, a warehouse, bases its activities on its relations with the surrounding countryside which transforms its products and satisfies its demands. The town life may as well be jealous of its privileges; it cannot escape the Bedouin presence. In fact, that presence is solicited. Certain professions and certain quarters devolved upon this contratype. In the long-run these people are assimilated and proliferate there. The names of the town gentry are drawn, in large part, from rural

onomastics. The Bedouin tribe finds in that way its urban sublimation; a response to the tendency of the middle-class has to colonize the agricultural periphery of the town. Thus, even before the demographic explosion of the second third of the twentieth century, or the influx of rurals to the periphery and even to the very core of the city was noticeable, the attention of the social historian and of the urbanist was attracted by the relationship of town and country, which cannot be reduced to a simple antithesis.

What is more, the town is not only form; it is movement; even if we dare follow in the steps of Kevin Lynch, it is "perceived" movement. The images that the crowd perceives and produces are contrasted with the images of permanence linked to a monumental framework and to the regulated rhythms favored by the exercise of rites and by corporate activities. It is toward regularization of these elements that certain efforts of the original

urbanism were striving: the solemn and defensive gates of the ramparts; pierced with alleys or, more infrequently, with avenues suitable for disciplining movement (such as the *Qaşaba* in medieval Cairo, or the *Chāhār Bāgh* in Isfahan); the arrangement of open courts or even of squares (such as the *Jam al-Finā* in Marrakesh).

However, this very movement plays a part in the very essence of urban equilibrium. Explosive, varied and picturesque (cf. the *sūqs* in Mosul, in Aleppo or the bazaar in Tehran) the crowd, ('amma, plebs, ra'ā') or even rabble (*awbāsh*) which wanders in innumerable waves through the side streets, which strolls by the displays of goods, which gathers around public storytellers and overflows the sanctimonious Friday assembly. The crowd introduces an element of risk. It introduces anonymity as a force or act in the very heart of something which intends to be so orderly. Necessary for the citizens' profit, the crowd also constitutes a hazard because of its potential to riot or pillage. It illustrates in every instance the unpredictable element in any given situation, a fact that is so clearly emphasized in *The Arabian Nights* and in the literature of *Maqamat*. When at nightfall it stops its whirling movement, it ebbs towards gates and doors, or even slumbers on the ground. Even though its movement has been somewhat reduced by its occupation of the suburbs, such as the Maidan in Damascus, or the *rabads* in Cordoba or Tunis, its threat is equal to its vitality. The crowd, much more than the middle class, carries the world within itself. And the Egyptian novelist Nagib Mah'fz' was not wrong, in *Awlād h ārati'nā* (*The People of Our Quarter*), in making the crowd a pillar of the future of humanity.

If the town's shape frequently assumes this circular form, the sociological scheme that we are beginning to perceive would lead us to think rather of an ellipse. And even, let us dare say, of an ellipse with several foci for the radiating regularity that the initial model suggested gives way to several imbalances. In this constant inflexion one could see yet another regularity. Let us say instead that the

historical irregularities or transgressions of the type in the several cases we have mentioned above are themselves statutory

We shall add a visual remark. The urban web affects the form of the puzzle or the daedalus. How could it be otherwise when most of the designs result from pressures that are brought to bear in every direction from the housing units and are animated by an expansive vitality? The house in the madina does not limit itself to fulfilling the interstices of an order imposed from outside. From within, it exerts pressure on its own walls. Although it itself is moulded in a quadrangular design, it forms in general, with the other houses, asymmetries or curvilinear outlines. The orthogonal order and its chessboard projections, if not at all synonymous with an "absence of soul," as Spengler would claim, would signify wherever they appear, the intervention of another mentality: the imperious projection of a superior power, a sultan, a shah or a khedive; a Hellenistic heritage as in Latakia; or already an imitation of the West. The "essential" madina (let us dare use the word coined by Peguy) does without any directional planning. In no way is it unchanging, as the contrasts between it and the new town would lead us to believe. On the contrary it is, we think, in a constant state of oscillation, as is every living organism. But with its vicissitudes, it re-establishes a balance which needs no conceptualization, or hardly any institution. If its structure is not of itself explicit, it makes itself felt by the thousands of details of communal living closely attuned to the use of space

It therefore shares in that "*visuisme*" which to C. Fourier was a principle of social progress. Without the least idealistic or symbolic prejudice, it creates an order that can be perpetually reorganized and re-established and in which, in a way that we find rather curious, it entrusts the role to picturesque marks and to emotional encounters that elsewhere is the prerogative of directional planning and municipal administration.

The Urban Message of the Koran

The corrections that we have just suggested for our present model could not, however, replace an induction founded on a monographic exploration of a sufficiently broad spatial and temporal scope. Since we lack an inquest, which might through comparison, establish a statistical model of the urban experience in Islam, we can and we must turn to the single document which is valid in law and in fact for every moment and for every place in Islam: the Koran

As a society, Islam flourished after the Hegira. Those ten years during which it established itself and functioned in what might be called the "prophetic republic" can be considered highly exemplary. It was a town-life republic, cutting through the desert and the surrounding steppes. Although essentially agricultural, it exalted an urban model, conceived as such from the beginning and founded by one of the operations known in ancient Greece as synoecism. Medina, *al-Madina*, thus appeared as a city par excellence. The Arab root *m d n*, suggests the idea of a permanent settlement and also that of the enjoyment of a natural perimetre. The city is thus located "in the heart of the land," *fi ust 'umma ard'in* (*Lisan al-'Arab*). *Al-madina*, plural *al-mada'in*, appears seventeen times in the Koran, either in the generic sense, or to refer to Medina, and for the lack of a word of its own, had a hundred metaphorical names. *Qariya* occurs much more frequently than madina to designate a bourgade, or important village (large or small). The word is used in the sense of a hospitable hearth and a source of sweet water rather than a grouping, if one is to trust a likely etymology. In the case of the madina it is rather the aspect of grouping that prevails. The urban conjunction that the Prophet introduced was based, as we know, on a compatibility between distinct elements. Its unity remained pluralistic, and retained for quite some time dissident factions or ones that were secretly hostile (*al-Munafiqin*). This composition was reflected, it seems, in the countryside as ethnic neighbourhoods

which the assembly united periodically; "assembly" being the literal translation of mosque. It is not unlikely that the fact that the Jews of Medina lived in separate "small forts" (*at'am*, plural *ut'um*) underlined and animated a differentiation which finally resulted in their expulsion.

In Medina, the presence of the Revelation saturates the city without it being essential for us to suppose its having any part in municipal administration. The range of the muezzin's voice, on the other hand, is of great importance. It covers an auditory perimetre which itself has morphological merit. Certain rites will evoke a debate on the question: Is it possible for a town to have several mosques with a weekly sermon? In fact the neighbourhood coincides with the vocal perimetre of the *idhn*. In Islam, from the very beginning, an urbanism of the sign seems to have emerged, quite contrary to the Roman-type urbanism, which is founded on geometry and regulation.

To make the Koran or the Sunna say more on the topic would be to extrapolate beyond reason. Insofar as the dwelling is concerned, on the other hand, the knowns become more explicit in the sacred text, if one knows how to group them. *Dār*, which we translate today by "house," refers rather, in the Koran, to the "country," to the "land"—hell, for example, or the afterlife. It is the word *bayt* which means "dwelling." This word, from an old Semitic root, has in Arabic a link with nighttime supported by its etymological link with the verb *batalyabitu* (spend the night), and the adverb *biyatan* (by night). Night is the time for "holy sleep," and thus for peacefulness, for "repose" that the root *s k n*, implies with metaphysical implications. Night also postulates "settlement," "cotenancy," and almost "legitimacy," which the root *b.w.* evokes (cf *mubawwa' sidq*, "in the sight of truth" (Koran X, 93). In this connection let us mention the etymological flights of fancy that the old Germanic root, meaning both "build" and "inhabit," inspires in Heidegger. At the very least, the Koran's acceptance of *bayt* to mean "dwelling" is so consistent that it authorizes the figura-

tive usage. The “house of God” that one would never take literally refers to either Abraham’s sacred stone or to the *Ka’ba*. The spider’s web suggests metaphorically “the frailest of houses” (Koran XXIX, 41). Concurrently, elements of concrete analysis or of visual qualification come to shade usages in a distinctive and ramified manner. According to lexicographers, *bayt* would already represent a complication of *khibā*’ or “primitive tent.” If there exist houses of “little embellishment,” *zakhrāf*, they would consist only of animal or vegetal material. *Bayt sha’r*, the dwelling of skin, is still seen today in the Algerian south, for example, or in the Bedouin tent. The *bayt* is already of composite structure. That is so true that the analogy that makes it a homonym of the other *bayt*, the “line” of a poem would be founded, according to the *Lisān*, on its articulation in functional parts. Another progression and one has a “large house,” called instructively *al-muz’illa*, the “shady one.”

This last connotation deserves some development. Let us first re-read the passage from the Koran:

And it is God who has appointed
a place of rest
for you and your houses, and He has
appointed for you
of the skins of cattle, houses
you find light
on the day that you journey, and on
the day you abide,
and of their wool, and of their fur,
and of their hair
furnishing and an enjoyment for a while.
And it is God who has appointed
for you coverings
of the things He created, and He has
appointed for you
of the mountains refuges, and He has
appointed for you
shirts to protect you from the heat, and
shirts to protect
you from your own violence.
(Koran XVI, 81)
(Translation by A. J. Arberry,
The Koran Interpreted, N.Y. 1973)

How could one fail to retain from this passage, the evocation of protective shade?

Just as clearly too, the semantic dichotomy between the night that shields and “the Day of Resurrection” (Koran XVII, 60) awakes instructive associations. Is it not strange that the place in the book where the term *bayt* occurs most frequently should be precisely the Sura XXIV, the Sura of Light? One could justifiably also call it, if allowed, the optic sura. There are fourteen occurrences of this term in the same sura, out of sixty-five in the whole Koran. As it happens, this sura decrees a moral code of sex and privacy, in addition to that of legal evidence of the publicity of witnessing and punishments. One would not be exaggerating such relationships to infer from them the link between secrecy and the consummation of the marital act. “He created for you, of yourselves, spouses that you might repose in them.” (Koran XXX, 20). To the sleep of night, to the movement in the harsh light of day, a third term seems to emerge, in the moral as in the material sense: the “light-shadow,” i.e., sexuality, which “clothes” two bodies, one with other (c.f. the roots *l.b.s.* and *b.t.n.*). It implies, in a licit sense, the intimacy of the house with a semi-seclusion of women. Thus, the *muḥḥasana* (literally, “the strengthened one”) will dispense to her companion, and will receive from him, pleasures devoid of any sinful nature. The legitimate couple will be protected from the rest of the world by a prohibition, *ḥarām*, popularized by the too famous “harem” of our exotic tales. The house itself must be protected because it is as vulnerable (*’awra*) as the erogenous parts of the body. That, at least, is what the defenders of Medina claimed the day the factions were attacked. They would have lost heart if the Prophet, when establishing a defense trench, had not sufficiently “covered” the town (Koran XXXIII, 13)

Protection, intimacy, concealment: would it be superfluous to evoke these arrangements of light and darkness, whose evocative message so many towns and dwellings in Islam maintain to this day? It will not be necessary to resort to the extreme example of the *sarādib*, “multiple-storied basements” of Iraq, to

measure what certain architectural types can accomplish in terms of correspondences, not only between established norms, but also between the structure of the subconscious and an interpretation of rhythms.

The House with Courtyard, Inverted Space

One can legitimately suppose that Medina rearranged to suit a new Law, a dwelling in which archeology could have discerned the contribution of many civilizations. Sumer would be therein recognized, no doubt; and, subordinately, the Greco-Latin affinity, without mentioning other influences. Let us, however, ignore what would demand specialized research containing a multiplicity of unknown factors, and let us turn our attention to several impressions that are still very much alive. Take for example, the shady courtyard (*wasat’ al-dār*) “*ust’ ed-dar*” as they still say in Maghreb. It is an enclosed space protected morning and evening from the “fury of the sun” (Taha Husein) by the walls which surround it, and vulnerable only to the midday sun. This interior courtyard is still called *mraḥ* in Maghreb, a name also given to the circular esplanade formed by the circle of the encampment (*duwar*). There the flocks gather at night. *Raḥ’a yaruḥ*, “come in at evening,” also means, by an instructive trope, “find the wife again, consummate the marriage.” From these places of security they will depart in the morning to disperse in the open space.

But let us return to the interior courtyard of the urban houses. This space, which the building protects on all sides, seems symmetrical to that which spreads out indefinitely around the city. Packed with information, it throws itself open to the four winds. This space responds to the ecological encircling of the town by intense social and cultural forces. Around the space, porticoes and porches (*eyvans*) make holes in the walls, opening into rooms. In the building itself, the empty space pushes the walls back rather than



Cairo, Egypt: courtyard of Bayt al-Razzaz

Photo: R. Lewcock

allowing itself to be shut in. In their surface it digs niches, sunken spots, alcoves (*kuwwas*, *tawas*, *qbus*). On the street it protects itself by *mashrabiyyas*, hanging shelters, or the balconies and overhangs of today which the use of reinforced concrete exaggerates. The house, a place of intimacy and fulfillment, is thus in many respects an empty space which responds to the pressure of space with its own leap towards the exterior. The energy of this leap is proportional to the strength of the still-patriarchal family which lives in the dwelling: strength comprised of children, alliance, goods, experiences. Similarly, the Bedouin encampment spreads out onto the steppe according to the quantity of human families it contains and the number of animals.

If the external, horizontal space invites you to unlimited wandering, the space in the house is unevenly arranged in depth and in height by means of disconnections. It does this with a complexity that is not controlled, as is Western architecture, by

the superimposition of planes. Increases in height, sunken surfaces, high and low floors modulate the interior space with such a refinement of detail that this game of flattened planes and volumes makes up, to a great extent, for the relative poverty of the furnishings. Poverty? Those carpets, are they not ostentatious "ground furnishings?" Well, as it happens, we shall see that the usage of Bedouin carpets in the city dwellings is but an added feature of inverted reference to the surrounding space. The carpet is a reduction, or rather an "iconic" reminder of nature, but of a nature that is abstract and magnified by domestic art. It is not insignificant that the carpet's design and colours (whose basic ingredient is the sap of plants) lend their mottled vegetation to family intimacy, to their aesthetic pleasure and their repose.

There are still other symmetries. This highly individualized house cuts through the tumultuous anonymity of the crowds. Similarly, its architectural structure, which

allows for an emptiness in the heart of the buildings, stands in contrast to the compactness of an urban block, which is barely penetrated by small alleys. Thus, the highly elaborate excavations of the dwellings contrast with the massive anonymity of an urban block. In fact, seen from above, the town looks like a continuous design, punched to be sure with a thousand hollows, the courtyards, but upon which one can move about along the terraces almost without touching ground. The terraces are, to be sure, really feminine territory, a confidential place, but this massive continuity is animated with a swarming mobility through its cracks, its alleys, in its covered narrow thoroughfares (*sabat's*). And the Friday assembly, which reunites the heads of the families, synthesizes this combination of hollow and filled spaces, of immobility and movement beneath a big vertical sign. Which sign? That of the minaret? Of course. But Islam has no need of material props to evoke, in its great corporate moments, a pure immateriality which is in its spirit and ultimate destiny. "Say! He is God, One, God the everlasting refuge. . . ." (*Qūl huwa Allāh aḥad Allāh al-samad*—Koran CXII 1,2).

Cosmic Symbol or Sociogram?

Muslim art could provide us with a vivid illustration of this schema. A figure reoccurs *ad nauseam* in Arabic and Persian ornamentation. It is represented by two superimposed and rotating squares. Would it not offer us a sort of ideogram for all that we have been discussing? It is not insignificant that the architectural part and the sociological and behavioural schema that we have just described should express itself in a thousand visible stucco motifs, embossed on copper, or sculpted on wood or formed in ceramic. This comprises a sort of recapitulation or reiteration which is very familiar to Islam. Nor is it without interest that the figure in question corresponds exactly to that which the projection of a dome on squinches would trace on the ground. It has also

been noted that a repetitive form of the oriental building, namely the *qubba* (cupola, dome), accomplishes in its own way the circular resolution of the square of its base, the alchemical squaring of the circle.

But let us stop in time along the path of symbolic interpretations which, suggestive as they might be, are not free of arbitrariness. In the rotating square we were able to see a configuration of the world: in the arrangement of quarters of a particular Saharan oasis the reference to the cosmic tree: in the dome on a square base the juncture of earth and sky. Without wanting to minimize these architectural correspondences, nor indeed the elaborations that the esotericism of the Sufis derives from them, let us say that the framework, within which our approach is situated, is intended to be strictly socio-historical. Even the mention of the Koran, to which we had recourse, and the importance that is attached to the religious

establishments of the town, was not induced by idealism, much less by symbolism, but rather by a historical positivism which here affirms itself even so far as to be self-explanatory.

Our first model, that of a city unfolding around a sacred centre where civil authority would derive from the Imam and where science would be valueless except as an offshoot of the commentary of the revealed text, forms a part of the social and psychic reality of Islam. This must be taken into account, yet left open for reconsideration or correction in the second stage of analysis.

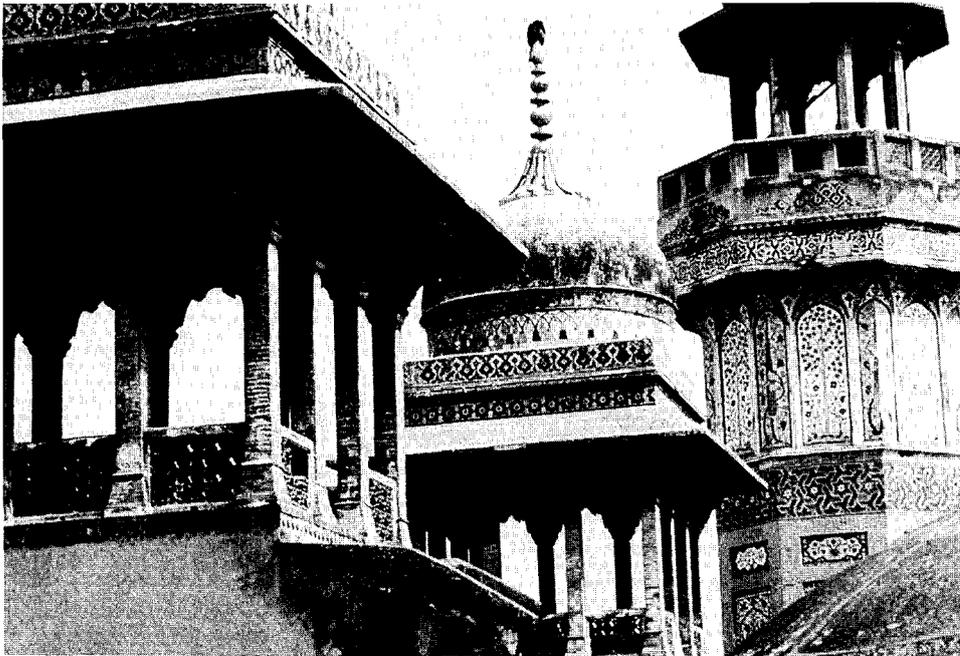
We shall not pursue the above findings with speculative considerations which are more or less esoteric. What we shall reconsider is the role that certain characteristics of urbanism, of architecture or embellishment play in the manifestation of a social order. This "iconical" part (C. S. Peirce) of the urban system seems to us to be of great consequence. And similarly the

"shiftings" or intercategory junctures take place in the town between the most diversified orders of things: symmetric modulations of exterior and interior spaces, forms of monuments, omnipresent decorative marks of reference or attitudes and movements that correspond to the iconic in the collective life.

Town/Country Correspondences

Just now we spoke of a three-dimensionality of the madina: orthodoxy, business, production. It parallels closely that of the Bedouin countryside: fertility of the fields and the flocks, violence of war, magical and religious ritualism. The government, product of war, is supported by rural taxation, and supposedly joins with the *'ulamā* to ensure the reign of orthodoxy. Understandably, it isolates itself within the citadel and has cautious relations with artisans and the middle class. Whence the polycentric model that we thought we could develop. One of its advantages is that it allows for the insertion of the town into the open countryside.

Let us take a closer look. Middle class capitalism has settled in with its style, its language and its mind at the antipodes of the Bedouin encampment. It still participates, in its own way, in the same aggressive radiation. The Islamic city-dweller is not, as has been said too often, the antithesis of the Bedouin: he is the first term of an alternation. This was quite clear to the Umayyad caliphs, who alternated between living in town and in the desert. In recent times, the dichotomy between the city-dweller and the Bedouin has been able to nourish many political maneuvers, notably during the colonial regime. It has given rise to a solidarity in resistance to oppression, a solidarity which surprises Western man. The nationalism of the 1920s, which came to power almost everywhere in the forties, asserted itself fully only through this synthesis between tribal bitterness and the language of the bourgeoisie. The medieval town also manifests the synthesis clearly. A basically



Lahore, Pakistan: cupolas of the Wazir Khan mosque

Photo: K. Mumtaz

warlike power, backed up by a Bedouin rear-guard inserted its own home, the citadel, into the middle class order which itself was inserted into the tribal environment.

Such correspondences are precisely what interest us. The ubiquitousness of the dome and the rotating squares, while offering a characteristic motif, leads us to a structure where their relationships which constitute and the correspondences they produce count more than their material consistency or even their form. And these forms themselves count perhaps more as references of a system than as achievements in themselves. Below, we shall try to draw certain practical corollaries from this idea which diverges, as one can see, from all aestheticism.

The Organic and the Critical in Confrontation in the Modern East

Whatever else, I would like to think that this too-rapid analysis will have made clear two indisputable characteristics of urbanism in Islam.

- 1) The subtlety of spatial treatments: they make the city become not the opposite, but rather the counterpart and, even to some extent, the total realization of the open country.
- 2) The unity of a system which from dimension to dimension and from level to level plays upon reminders, landmarks and connections. It is quite justifiable to qualify it as "organic" in the sense given to the word by utopic socialism—whence the strengths of appeal that still emanate even today.

For a century at least, and in an increasingly ravaging manner, the expansion of industrial societies (powers, models, languages) disturbs the Afro-Asiatic world to such an extent that its very identity is being compromised. It seems Muslim towns, by necessity, have undergone the change in a more conspicuous and more irreversible way than many other categories of these societies. The madina,

which was already encumbered by suburbs and whose competitive energies have for the most part been undermined by centuries of decadence, is now in unequal competition with the new quarters. Its ancient labyrinths, torn up by road workers or speculation, are being emptied of their riches. They are becoming proletarianized, while the imported new town, a place of acculturation and deterioration much more than of contact and exchange, is superimposed or added to the old site.

In 1924, over most of the Islamic world, the end of the Ottoman caliphate marked the foundering of a point of reference and the end of a plenitude. Most of the Muslim countries were colonized and they resented the intrusion deeply. Pan-Islamicism seemed inept, ineffective in new situations. Nationalism, a growing force at the time, is far from being able to maintain the old harmonies. It was born out of trouble and it spread trouble. Even without having to cope with rising socialism, it is out of context. Similarly, the deterioration of moral standards, the distortion of psychism, the breaking up of a social order are all reflected in the face of the towns, where the foreign presence is no longer the only visible sign of the rupture of the ancestral whole. From the '30s on, the suburbs and the slums have erected countertypes that are endlessly gaining in importance and which both contrast to the new town and the madina. The right for life claimed by these innumerable arrivals was a challenge to both the colonial power and the old hierarchies. It was also felt, to use Henri Lefebvre's phrase as a "right to the town." Perhaps these still disorderly energies are not devoid of a sense of values; their participation in decisive struggles proves it, and the battle of the Casbah of Algiers is the symbol of it. The old dialectic of the regular and the accidental, which was formerly illustrated in the heart of the madina by the opposition between the legal populace, dominated by high-class business and religious authority on the one hand, and by the masses in their rags, hazardous and rebellious on the other hand; will this dialectic adapt itself to the

new times? Democracy would find its reckoning there. Architecture, as well as urbanism, should assist in this.

The realization of this hope, which we expressed in an already out-of-date article written in 1959, does not depend on the decision of experts any more than on the attitudes of the intelligentsia. However, the intelligentsia and the experts could propose questions, if not solutions. Questions which keep in mind that it is not simply a matter of coping with the technical imperatives of a modernization of urbanism and architecture, or just the demands for an answer to the multiple needs of an urban life. It will be a much more urgent matter of participating in a debate between different civilizations.

The organic, then, is dead or will die. We are all involved in a critical era. An iron age, if you like, one which will not be satisfied with eclectic solutions. Not only is the well-being of the happy few at stake, but the terrestrial destiny of multitudes. Likewise, the arena of action has changed. The town is no longer the enclosure where the conflicts between the norm and the accidental were resolved in forms and in rhythms. It has become the battlefield where there is confrontation between galloping democracy and exclusivity, luxury and poverty, cosmopolitanism and traditionalism, demands and repressions.

To be sure, this problem is not peculiar to the East. Aside from national and cultural idiosyncrasies, it has common denominators, both technological and sociological in many countries. These have been well described by Lewis Mumford in the United States and by the Buchanan Report in England, among others. But in Islam it takes on a more serious and more implacable turn. It is aggravated by the telescoping of eras and strategies. It is not that rival schools of modern urbanism (culturalist with Camillo Sitte, sociotechnical with Gropius or Le Corbusier) cannot find an application in the East. They, in fact, find many. But the option for industrialization or revival, the more-or-less enthusiastic or restrictive attitude to the latest techniques, the social choices

that the styles of architecture and urban designs from the West imply, have been introduced here into the uncertainties of identity. The argument over decisions does not arise only from aesthetic and sociological rivalries, as in Paris over Les Halles, but also from the moral antithesis which in the East opposes two imperatives which are apparently equally powerful: that of the safeguard of an authenticity backed up by religious faith versus that of a modernism haunted by the movement of the world around it, an antithesis exemplified by Gournah or Chandigarh!

A Working Hypothesis

In Europe the succession of fashions and the rivalry between schools of thought allow a certain degree for correction and equalization. Someone like Ricardo Bofill can today react against the rather excessive impact of industrial dynamics and the effect of functional reduction on the architecture and the urbanism of the last fifty years. His new aesthetics will not appear as a disavowal but rather as a useful complement, a compensation of industrial progress. The same is not true in the East. The countries there have so many glories to re-establish, so many delays to catch up on. There, in every case, modernization constitutes a preliminary for a return to authenticity. How else could this return succeed without arms and equipment and, indeed, popular support? This dilemma, in which so many talents are involved, is largely fallacious. It smacks rather of timidity in the analysis than of actual contradictions.

First of all one must make the following assertion. All things considered, in the East of the last third of this century, one can no longer safeguard this authenticity, because it is besieged on all sides, dislocated in entire sections, and, in the best of circumstances, deformed by its very resistance. Still, if one can no longer safeguard authenticity inasmuch as one assigns it to the past, another no less realistic (but this time optimistic) hypoth-

esis does not prevent one from constructing a new authenticity which would belong to the future.

Let me explain. The conservation of remains, brought to light more or less exactly from their heritage, is largely a matter of nostalgic idealization and is felt by most to be incompatible with the demands of what is commonly called progress. Is it, therefore, necessary to denounce the "myth of progress," the dangers of primary education, of democracy, of technical achievements, large architectural projects and cancerous suburbs? Will it be necessary to contrast the splendour of lost paradises with the sad ransoms of modernity? All is possible, and we must realize it if we cling to an elitist philosophy, to a *khāṣṣa* ideology. But it would be impossible to envision seriously the scope of collective achievements. There is no monasticism in Islam (*Lā rahbāniya fi' al-Islām*). The initiatory rituals seem to us no more adapted to the extroverted and largely community-oriented attitudes of historic Islam than to the contemporary impetus of the masses. Besides, in what country can one reckon that the peoples' hopes confine themselves to demands of salary and of well-being, or intercontinental exchanges, or is it the expansion of the media which is making the universe simultaneously accessible? As we can see clearly in the case of the ecological movement, which was born in industrial societies at a time when the peasant classes were being dispersed, nature exists no longer, ergo nothing organic either, except by and despite artifice. But it is up to us to master and finalize this artifice.

What is more legitimate, then, is that man's completeness, his harmony with the universe should depend both upon his instinct and upon his utopia. They can be achieved from now on through struggles with and problem-solving of the present. We have no hope of attaining them except through the afterlife of the industrial age. As sovereign as this age might be, truly it has been unable to create a civilization equal to its needs and its means. Instead of concluding from this assertion a fall-

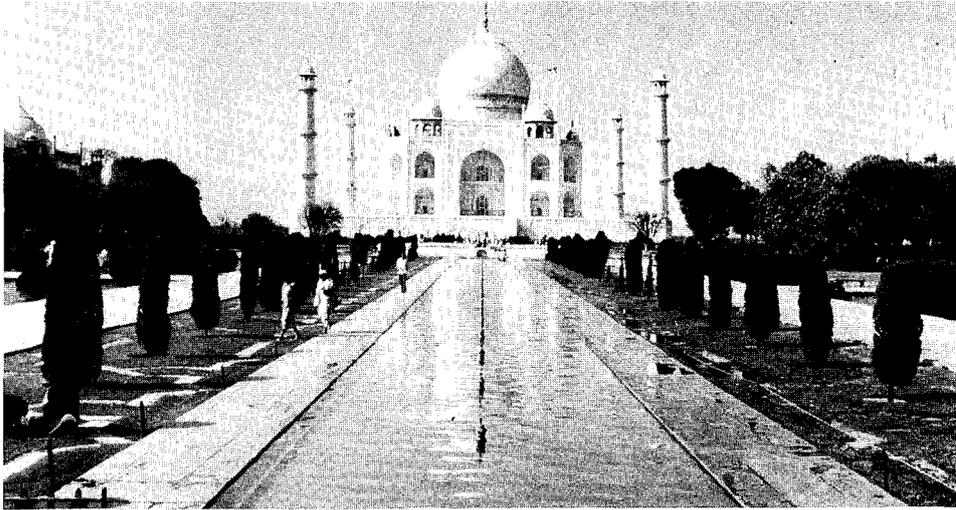
acious need to turn back, we should realize the existence of a need to build the very civilization that an industrial age has been unable to build. We must try to build it beyond its deficiencies with the help of its material and conceptual means.

This civilization would have to be pluralistic, or nothing (i.e., both wide and transcultural or nothing). Therefore, we can predict the certainty of the role Islamic civilization would have in this rebuilding. A civilization, true, to be renovated in its basics and according to its basics. Did not the Prophet say: "At the beginning of each century I shall send a reformer to my people, that he might renew their religion"?

For a True Defense of the Specific and the Authentic

When one studies the Basilica of Monreale in Sicily, several indications come to light concerning the way in which the conflicts of different civilizations were presented and resolved. The identity of the whole has incorporated numerous Arab accretions, especially ornamental ones. Reciprocally, the Mosque of Kairouan, of which it has been said that "the space alone is Arab," has collected Romano-Byzantine features but integrates them to its system. Despite its heterogeneous character, it is as Islamic and Arab as Monreale is Christian and Norman. These two cases confirm what we already knew, namely that the meaning of a whole resides not in its elements but in the combination of those elements. This is true of every product of the mind and of work, in every social and cultural category: economics, religion, arts and customs. This fact could throw a decisive light towards the solution of the theoretical and practical problem that we have introduced in this study.

We believe that for an Islamic architecture or urbanism, it is not a matter of inserting, in a cosmopolitan reconstruction, a motif taken from Fez, from Isfahan or from the Taj Mahal. Pointing to the Taj Mahal, one might add in passing that it has had such a



Agra, India the Taj Mahal

Photo: W Porter/Aga Khan Awards

strong appeal for international artisans. Unlike the Taj Mahal, reincorporation of fragments of an old style into a building conceived according to a system adopted from other systems can be charming on the aesthetic level. On the national level, it can be reassuring. For all that, it does not serve an identity. What would be necessary, we believe, would be the revivification of the original system, the Islamic one in the generic sense, by incorporating into it all foreign elements (materials, techniques, even styles) that could be considered suitable. Of primary importance is that the system be safeguarded. Every great civilization, in the long run, is but a system of variations and constant reuses.

In fact the falsification of the system is not at all due to such reuses, which Islam has used to a great extent in its great centuries (think, for example, of the civilizing influx that it drew from Greek philosophy, from Mazdean theosophy, from Nabatean agriculture). Instead, it is due to the fact that one clings to certain aspects, taken out of their original context and where one would search in vain for a paradoxical continuation of sameness in the adhesion implicit

in otherness. And it is that, unhappily, which is the most often seen.

It is true that the task of revitalizing a system (and not of making a fetish of a motif of it, of inserting it into an alien system) can be seen to be arduous both in theory and in practice. "So difficult is the usage of what is national," said Holderlin. And in that we find once more one of the dialectics of our times: that of the specific and the general, of the particular and the global. To elucidate these antitheses is to define a problem. Alas, the treatment of this problem comes up against a multitude of practical difficulties, as well as mental habits. A vicious circle is formed.

The first true procedure is then to come up with a specific system. This specificity no longer resides within our familiar horizons, which, obviously, are a result of haphazard sedimentations of time. We have no reason to accord privileges to those sedimentations. And the Muslims have less cause than anyone else, for they were led to dependency by them. For example, how far back in time should we search to elicit a model? As far as the "great centuries?" But which century would one choose for Cairo? That of Ibn

Tulun or those of the Mamluks? According to us, the model is nowhere to be found. It is necessary to create an abstraction based on the strength of factual and historical and architectural studies, and literary and psychological studies too, through a process of rigorous analysis.

An added problem crops up with the first difficulty of a rigorous investigation which, on every level or sub-level of civilization, would provide not only the aspects of a style, but its internal number, so to speak. The art of the urbanist and architect functions in the empirical present, and must respond to a concrete need, which is generally uninterested in any deeper investigation. The investigation will produce a system that, inasmuch as it will be an upholder of true authenticity and not of its circumstantial accretions, will be far too cold. Since it will be abstract (as scientific rigorousness demands), it will only work if it rallies the "human, all too human" support of the city-dwellers and of everyday life.

Our present time has to take advantage of all its modern means for a persuasive rhetoric (an Aristotelian rhetoric, of course) of urban and house settings. The "functional," the "useful," the "bargain" are only one side of it. The "beautiful," the "unanimous," or at least the "suggestive" and the "convincing" should guide them just as much. One or another of these different qualities, which in fact are quite contradictory, are very often pursued concurrently, by this or that urban or architectural project, which will put them forward as a justification or *raison d'être*. If what I have just said is right, these qualities should from now on be considered as mere means of persuasion, the axis of the project being always this stubborn reconstruction of authenticity in the modern and of the specific in the global, which should be one of the moral codes of our times.

Here, however, among all the difficulties which arise from the removal from the usual environment, from acculturation, from influences, from the pressure of the outside world on the Islamic habitat, there intervenes a favourable adjutant: the

extraordinary continuity with which this society turns to its sources, its attachment to the inaugural, its faculty for perpetual recurrence, for indefatigable recuperation of identity.

From the Model to Utopia

One can, in any case, legitimately assume that the unifying and singular behaviour which is characteristic of Islam will survive the upheavals of modernity. It is by and in modernity that it aspires to self-realization, an ambition that is fully justified by its impact in history and its capacity for the future. This ambition is one that is very widely shared, and one which the architect and the urbanist, among others, must keep in mind as long as their aim is to serve the hopes and crying need of the majority with their art. Here again they will find their surest guarantee in their fidelity to authenticity and to specificity. But may I say again that these two qualities do not reside in the empirical restoration of the past (cf. Viollet-le-Duc's Carcassonne). They consist in reprojecting into the collective living, both present and future, the algorithm of an identity. By algorithm we mean the dynamic configuration that the analysis will have extracted from realized works and even more from their potentials. At this degree of abstraction (but of an abstraction that is provisional), the model that we are going to propose will have but little connection with the radio-centric image of the madina, and let us admit that we will minimize the value of its polygons, domes, minarets and fountains, perhaps to keep them simply as points of reference in a system.

- 1) This Islamic town, a circumscribed modulation of space, will cut through the space around it, but will at the same time respond to that space with a sort of inversion of rhythms and forms.
- 2) The town will attempt to integrate in a reciprocal manner, order and movement, which would balance each other out in the allotment of empty spaces and

filled ones, aiming for harmony between the regular and the accidental, between need and desire.

3) The distribution of light and shade will organize in the town the respective domains of public and private life. Correlatively, it will define the collective and familial and the productive and cultural.

4) The neighbourhood will be the module where these different dichotomies will function, inasmuch as the neighbourhood is an autonomous sub-multiple of the town. This sub-multiple will itself be articulated, according to case and level, in individual or collective habitats.

5) The diversity, or even the organized heterogeneity among the neighbourhoods will be functional, or more exactly multidimensional. Four main foci (religious, municipal, university, economic) will command the general layout with their reciprocal interference, and large avenues will stress their relationship of exchange.

In the last paragraph can be recognized the modernist avatar of the great mosque, of the citadel, of the madrasa and of the *qaysariya*, familiar motifs of the old madina. In earlier paragraphs one can recognize the transposition of ancestral elements which to us seemed most characteristic. This demultiplication does not mean a renouncement of unity. If it seems necessary for a long time yet to admit the dichotomy in knowledge and its expansion in a religious and in a non-religious centre, the public services themselves will have to manifest their ability to complement each other. To put it differently, the initiative of the neighbourhoods, which operates for a "vital community," will have to manifest its links (by diverse details of urbanism or architecture or decoration), with the central municipal agency. Later we will see what I plan to do with what were formerly the town's ramparts.

As it progresses, our model will also become utopian. By that I mean the project will include the participation of

dreams and games, with this forced corollary that rationality could never reign alone in the model, but should make room for what Hegel called "the irrational concept." That was already present in the madina of the golden age and that is why we are still excited by the evocation of adventures in Granada, Cairo or Baghdad. Utopia also reminds us of those plans of a radiant city, the Heliopolis that every nation dreams of at one time or another, and in whose series Farabi lies between Plato and Campanella.

An Islamic Heliopolis

We see this madina of the future undominated by empirical reminders, by vain restorations of Cordoba or Basra. Distributed according to a quadrimensional order, it will arrange a quadruple radiation in multiple waves, whose intersections will determine a woven pattern. The design of its avenues will enhance the liaison between its four foci. Thus it will obey their presence in every one of its areas and neighbourhoods, just as formerly it was intended to obey God's presence. But it would also know how to organize a variety of games, of celebrations and contingency for the poor and the marginal.

City in the sun, it will also be city in the shade: squares enclosed in neighbourhoods, the curvilinear network of secondary roads, interior courtyards, the sun-screens of façades and still more features our present technique allows for; all will recreate an interplay between light and shadow to offset areas where daylight will systematically reign. For sure the madina will remain faithful to the aesthetic features that its sensitivity demands, but it will not confine itself to these. Of more importance for it will be the fact that its urbanists, architects, painters, sculptors and decorators ignore the academic diffusion of genres and create forms which, from volume to surface, from basic structure to ornamentation complement and complete each other. The algorithm, like the word of God formerly, will not only

underlie the order of the whole. It will also blossom forth in images and blazons at the level of the neighbourhood and indeed within the very dwellings.

Justifiably anxious to solve its municipal problems, the madina will temper its municipal order with the organization of peripheral energies (e.g., neighbourhood committees, syndicates, youth organizations). Anxious to create (which naturally it does not confuse with productivity only) it will alternate work with leisure, regularity with the effervescence of numerous *mahrijāns*.

Exalting in its configuration as in its economic and cultural roles, its ability to complement the surrounding countryside, it will all the same maintain the clarity of its message. It will not be dilated into suburbs; it will not grow tentacles. It will have replaced the ramparts of former times with another aureole of demarcation, with an aureole of stadiums, of palestras, of communal houses where the cultural and the magistral will re-establish their former fertile alliance, far from the four part loci of order. This encircling vestibule of urban life, in some ways its accomplishment, will be much more worthwhile, will it not, than the zone of lowly professions, of cemeteries and dung heaps which used to surround the madina? But the madina would perhaps have kept the monumental door of the enclosure (which did survive), to keep the feeling of a threshold.

The town will be without enclosure. Encircled neither by pressures from without nor by prohibitions within, it will safeguard its distinctive being through the thousands of references and the solemnity (in the eyes of God as well as man) attached to an act of entering and leaving a system. And this act will, of course, be free.