

HAKIM'S WORK ON TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC AND MEDITERRANEAN URBANISM

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My primary motivation in undertaking research on traditional Islamic environments was to derive principles and lessons from the past which can be used today to improve the quality of our contemporary built environment, regardless of location; and to learn how to develop the framework and mechanisms necessary to allow a culture's identity to be reflected in its architecture and overall built environment, using Islamic culture as a case study. I attempted to identify the lessons available from my research in the form of lectures given since 1978, related publications, pedagogy, and projects.¹

Since completing the research and writing for the book *Arabic-Islamic Cities: Building and Planning Principles* in 1979, published in early 1986, a number of dissertations have appeared on various aspects of this area of study, in addition to several books and articles. I am happy to report the present work was instrumental in influencing the direction of some of those studies.² Reviews of the book have appeared in numerous languages, several authors have made extensive use of material from the book, and a Japanese and

Farsi translations have also been published.³ Yet only few of those works have addressed the processes and the system of rules that were followed in making decisions affecting various levels of the built environment. One of the reasons for the rarity of such studies might be the difficulty in finding reliable original sources; the language barrier and difficulties in reading handwritten manuscripts might be another. Yet without employing such sources and meticulous research, nothing of significance can be achieved. Happily more original manuscripts are being verified, edited, and published in their original Arabic, which should make it much easier for future researchers to use this material.⁴

One of the objectives of my work, mentioned in the Introduction of the book, is the challenge of recycling and testing traditional principles in contemporary and future urban design and architecture. This is an issue of cultural continuity in the built environment. I took this matter up again in early 1981 and have continued to examine it since then in a number of published studies.⁵

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I have used the essential material and core arguments presented in the book in a number of articles.⁶ Other aspects of this field of study were not covered in the book; I have subsequently published complementary material, such as the role of customary practices (*Urf*) and their impact on the identity of towns and cities.⁷ Other important aspects of research related to the Islamic city await study; I have published an annotated list of studies that are needed to develop a comprehensive theory of urban form in traditional Islamic cultures.⁸

As my research has progressed in this field, it has become increasingly evident that the processes underlying the traditional system are the level from which to draw meaningful and practical insights. We should not place undue priority on typologies of the traditional system, as most people involved in the field of architecture and urban design tend to do, since those are in turn controlled and configured by the process and rule system governing decisions in space design and building activities. Thus if we recycle the essence of the process, we can apply it to any typological system and achieve the high quality results associated with the traditional system.⁹ For example, the typology utilized in the Hadramaut region in southern Yemen, as well as in the northern part of the country (as at San'a) and in the architecture found in the major Hijazi cities of western Saudi Arabia, is dramatically different from the predominant typology found in most other parts of the Islamic world, as illustrated by the examples in my book. Yet in all these locations the underlying process and its mechanisms were similar, resulting in the same high quality and sophistication found elsewhere. In other words the process is flexible and dynamic and not tied

to a specific typology.¹⁰

During the mid-1990s I allocated time to uncover the rule system related to the built environment in the early centuries of the Byzantine era, so as to provide an intelligent basis for studying the built environment of Greece before independence in the early nineteenth century.¹¹ The knowledge gained from such an investigation will assist in the further formulation of theory, because the case of Greece represents high-quality achievement in the traditional built environment of a non-Islamic society. The similarities and differences between the two cultures will sharpen our tools for constructing theory and for developing techniques for maintaining the cultural continuity of built environments, with lessons useful for other cultures.¹²

After completing that work in 1998, I embarked on a three-year research project with Zubair Ahmed for uncovering the rules and construction processes that were predominant in Northern Nigeria during the 19th century (see endnote 10). The findings from that work demonstrated how versatile are the rules and processes for construction that were developed by the earlier cultures of the Near East and later by Islamic culture. Muslim scholars in Northern Nigeria and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa based their work on sources from North Africa and on earlier sources from al-Andalus in the Iberian Peninsula.

In October 2002 I was invited by the Congress for the New Urbanism to make a presentation at their annual Council conference on Byzantine and Islamic Codes, which was held that year in Santa Fe, New Mexico. My presentation

was transcribed and is available online. It was revised for publication and appeared six months later in the *Council Report III/IV*, 2003.¹³

In a keynote address to the *First International Conference on Heritage, Globalization and the Built Environment*, held in Bahrain on 6-8 December 2004, I addressed the issues of ecology, sustainability and learning from tradition. There the emphasis was on integrating the knowledge from science, particularly ecological principles, with principles derived from traditional urbanism practice and the policies that are needed for our cities to achieve sustainability.¹⁴

I intend to continue with these efforts and sharpen my findings to make them more and more suitable and applicable to current and future practice. My continued work as a consultant for various projects, especially those located in historic towns and heritage districts of cities, will help achieve those goals. I hope others will join me in these efforts. The world will be a much richer place for it.

Notes

¹ Various publications are cited in the endnotes below. In addition there are also the following: "The contemporary benefits of traditional mid-east urbanism", *Proceedings of First National Conference in Urban Design*, New York, October 1978; B. Hakim (ed.) *Sidi Bou Sa'id, Tunisia: A Study in Structure and Form*, Technical University of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Canada, 1978 (high quality reprints are available from Books on Demand, from this link: <http://wwwlib.umi.com/bod>). *Arabic-Islamic Cities: Building and Planning Principles*, 2nd Ed, 1988 is also available

from the same source). On incorporating the insight gained from this research in architectural pedagogy, see "Teaching history by searching for Emics and Etics", *Design Studies*, 12/1 (1991): 19-29. For using that insight in practice, I have written a forthcoming article titled: "Generative processes for revitalizing historic towns or heritage districts". Two cases are discussed there: Albuquerque, New Mexico from 1983, and Muharraq & Manama, Bahrain from early 2006.

² My lectures and personal interaction with academics and their students during the period 1977-1986 have influenced the content and outcome of a number of Ph.D. dissertations. The earliest that I am aware of, which cited a 1977 draft of chapter one of *Arabic-Islamic Cities*, is by Mahmoud Daza dated 1982 from the University of Pennsylvania. A brief history of events associated with the research and preparation of this book was published in Arabic in the Saudi engineer's magazine *al-Muhandis*, no. 8, (Dhu al-Hijja 1408/ July 1988): 67. Additional details can be found in the "Communication" published in *MESA Bulletin*, 26/1 (1992): 150-52.

³ Some of the reviews in English were published in the following journals: *Housing and Planning Review*, 41/4 (1986); *Mimar* 22 (1986); *Third World Planning Review*, 8/4 (1986); *Progressive Architecture*, 68/1 (1987); *The Geographical Review*, 77/2 (1987); *Cities*, 4/2 (1987); *MESA Bulletin*, 21/1 (1987); *Journal of Architectural Education*, 41/2 (1988); and *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 6/1 (1989). At least two books, that I am aware of, have used extensive material from the book: A.E.J. Morris, *History of Urban Form*, 3rd Edition,

.1994; and G. Broadbent, *Emerging Concepts in Urban Space Design*, 1990. A Japanese edition was published in Tokyo, December 1990, and a Farsi edition was published in Tehran, 2002.

⁴ For example: Ibn al-Rami's manuscript was not available in published form when I worked with it. The first unverified edition was published in Morocco by *Majallat al-Fiqh al-Maliki wa al-Turath al-Qada'i bil-Maghrib*, 2/ 2,3,4 (1982): 259-490. This was followed by a reliable scholarly verified edition by Abdul-Rahman al-Atram in 2 volumes, *al-llan bi Ahkam al-Bunyan* (Riyadh, 1995). A more recent edition using the same title was published by Ferid ben Slimane (Tunis, 1999). Another important manuscript by Ibn al-Imam, Isa ben Mousa al-Tutaili, was verified and published in Saudi Arabia by Ibrahim ben Mohammad al-Fayez, *Kitab al-Jidar*, (Riyadh, 1996). It was also verified by Muhammad al-Numainij and published by ISESCO, (Rabat, 1999), and four years later by Ferid ben Slimane and al-Mukhtar al-Tulaili (Tunis, 2003).

⁵ A framework suggesting how to learn from the past was first published in the *Proceedings of the conference on the Preservation of Architectural Heritage of Islamic Cities*, Istanbul, Turkey, 1985, published in Riyadh, 1988, pp. 305-17. It was further developed and published in *Al-Muhandis* (*Ibid.* note 2, pp. 2-6, in English), and then further refined and presented at the *Second International Conference on Urbanism in Islam*, November 1990, Tokyo, Japan, available in the proceedings volume (1994), pp. 377-84. Its final form was published in *Cities*, 8/4 (1991): 274-77, which also includes detailed citations of my other published work in this field. (to download, click here>> http://archnet.org/file-storage/download/1.+Hakim_1991-RecyclingSuccesses.pdf?inode=348108).

The components of the framework were further elaborated with examples in the encyclopedia article (cited in note 6 below). The rules and design guidelines that were developed for the Muslim community in Abiquiu, New Mexico, in early 1981 were published in *Proceedings of the 74th Annual Meeting of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture*, New Orleans, March 1986, pp. 109-19. An expanded version followed in *Review 86*, UPM, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, November 1986, pp. 11-28. (to download, click here>> http://archnet.org/file-storage/download/2.+Hakim_1986-AbiquiuGuidelines.pdf?inode=348109). That project represented an attempt to recycle the rules and know-how of the traditional system and adapt it to contemporary conditions on location in Abiquiu, New Mexico.

⁶ "Arab-Islamic urban structure," *The Arabian Journal of Science and Engineering*, 7/2 (1982): 69-79; (to download, click here>> http://archnet.org/file-storage/download/3.+Hakim_1982-ArabUrbStructure.pdf?inode=348110), "The representation of values in traditional and contemporary Islamic cities," *Journal of Architectural Education*, 36/4 (1983): 22-28; (to download, click here>> http://archnet.org/file-storage/download/4.+Hakim_1983-JAE?inode=348111), and the article "Islamic Architecture and Urbanism," *Encyclopedia of Architecture*, vol.3 (New York, 1989): 86-103. (to download, click here>> http://archnet.org/file-storage/download/5.+Hakim_1989-EncyArch.pdf?inode=348112). The case study of Saudi Arabia is used in this encyclopedia article to analyze the changes that occurred due to the abandonment of the system that created the traditional built environment

and the consequent adoption of imported Western values and techniques to create new settlements and cities in that country. This was followed by "Rule systems: Islamic," *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK, 1997): 566-68. (to download, click here>> http://archnet.org/file-storage/download/6.+Hakim_1997-EncyVernArch.pdf?inode=348113). All of these articles summarize and/or elaborate on the essential findings in the book and also address contemporary and future issues of cities in the Arab and wider Islamic worlds.

⁷ The results of my research on the *Urf* were first published in the *Proceedings of the International Conference on Urbanism in Islam*, Tokyo, Japan, October 1989, vol. 2 (Tokyo, Japan), pp.113-38. A revised version was subsequently published as chapter 7 of the book *Islam and Public Law*, ed. by C. Mallat (London, 1993). A further revised, expanded, and illustrated version titled "The 'Urf' and its role in diversifying the architecture of traditional Islamic cities" was published in *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 11/2 (1994):108-27. (to download, click here>> http://archnet.org/file-storage/download/7.+Hakim_1994-JAPR?inode=348128). Due to the importance of this topic, it should be viewed as an extension of the book.

⁸ See B. S. Hakim "Urban form in traditional Islamic cultures: further studies needed for formulating theory," *Cities*, 16/1 (1999): 51-55. (to download, click here>> http://archnet.org/file-storage/download/8.+Hakim_1999-FurtherStudies.pdf?inode=348129). Of the fifteen topics suggested in that article, there are three that I would like to see investigated very soon. They all deal with the processes of

land demarcation and subdivision in the early formation of Islamic cities: the study of the principles and workings of land allotment (*lqta*), the revivification of land (*lhya*) within and on the fringes of settlements, and the processes of territorialisation of land (*lkhtitat*), particularly at the neighborhood and building cluster levels. For my views on the state of scholarship concerning the Islamic city and its architecture to the early 1980s, see my review essay in *Third World Planning Review*, 12/1 (1990): 75-89. (to download, click here>> http://archnet.org/file-storage/download/9.+Hakim_1990-TWPR?inode=348130).

⁹ For suggestions on how the traditional rule system can be revived and used as a mechanism to revitalise and preserve the character of the traditional sectors of towns and cities in the Maghrib countries of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, see my article: "Reviving the Rule System: An approach for revitalizing traditional towns in Maghrib," *Cities*, 18/2 (2001): 87-92. (to download, click here>> [http://archnet.org/file-storage/download/10.+Hakim_2001\(b\)-RevivingRuleSystem.pdf?inode=348131](http://archnet.org/file-storage/download/10.+Hakim_2001(b)-RevivingRuleSystem.pdf?inode=348131)). The substance of this article was first presented in Tangiers, Morocco, June 1996, at the conference entitled: "The Living Medina: The walled Arab city in architecture, literature, and history," sponsored by the American Institute of Maghribi Studies. The same approach suggested there could be used in other regional / cultural contexts.

¹⁰ This is corroborated by the findings of a recent study I undertook with Zubair Ahmed of the traditional rules and their manifestation in the unique neighborhood clusters found in Northern Nigeria and illustrated by examples from Zaria.

The results of our work titled "Rules for the built environment in 19th century Northern Nigeria" is published in the *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 23/1 (2006): 1-26. (to download, click here>> http://archnet.org/file-storage/download/11.+Hakim_2006-JAPR?inode=348132).

¹¹ See my extensive study published as "Julian of Ascalon's treatise of construction and design rules from sixth-century Palestine," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 60/1 (2001): 4-25. (to download, click here>> [http://archnet.org/file-storage/download/12.+Hakim_2001\(a\)-JSAH?inode=348133](http://archnet.org/file-storage/download/12.+Hakim_2001(a)-JSAH?inode=348133)).

¹² For a comprehensive analysis of Byzantine and Islamic codes and how they influenced traditional developments as we observe in the vernacular towns and cities and their architecture surrounding the whole of the Mediterranean basin, including the lessons for contemporary practice-- see my forthcoming chapter: "Mediterranean Codes in History: Origins, Context, Impact, and Lessons for Contemporary Practice" in the book, edited by Stephen Marshall, titled *Urban Coding*, Routledge (forthcoming late 2008 or early 2009).

¹³ The full version of my transcribed presentation is available online at: <http://www.charrettecenter.net/Hakim>. A Shorter version is also available online from that web site and from the publisher's web site: <http://www.tndtownpaper.com>. It is also available in published print form in the *Council Report III/IV*, published by The Town Paper, Gaithersburg, Maryland (2003): pages 42, 43, 63. The issue of learning from traditional Mediterranean codes

is discussed there. Since then I have further developed the parameters of this problem by integrating knowledge available from science, particularly the phenomenon of complexity, and the insight from the underlying processes of traditional urbanism. I have discussed aspects of this confluence in the Nigeria study (see note 10 above) and recently, in more detail, in a chapter in the forthcoming book on urban coding (see note 12 above).

¹⁴ The text of my presentation is available in the published proceedings of that conference, pages 17-28. (to download, click here>> http://archnet.org/file-storage/download/13.+Hakim_2004-BahrainKeynote.pdf?inode=348134).