

An Overview of Institutional Complexes

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The subject under discussion is public buildings and in particular buildings sponsored by governments, but even this requires further definition. Government building includes a wide range of projects, from desalination plants to regional administrative offices. This paper is not concerned with those; it is limited to examples of government building which occur in major cities. The number of these seems almost certain to increase in quantity and in scale. The question is what impact these buildings have on the cities in which they are built, and what kind of buildings they should be, bearing in mind that they represent a country's government and traditions. There are many examples of government building complexes in the Islamic world. The examples referred to here are extremely limited, perhaps even atypical, but they suggest some questions which are generally relevant.

Government buildings in cities may be classified into two types: those used specifically for national assembly, as in the project for a National Assembly building in Kuwait by Jörn Utzon, or those ministry or office buildings which carry out the day to day government work. A building may consist of some combination of these categories, as does the project for an important central area of Riyadh by the Albini Studio. The latter includes a government reception palace, banquet suites and administrative offices, combined with a cultural centre and a commercial centre (which is not part of the subject under discussion, but is peripheral to it). What

all of these building categories have in common is that they are usually large enough to make an important impact in any capital city. If the government means anything, its buildings should at least be recognizable as the centre of government activity. These buildings have their own generating activities, and these in turn should generate their forms. Moreover, they are all buildings related to a particular cultural background. They might help to form new and regenerated urban patterns which have evolved within particular cultural traditions and climates.

This does not mean, however, that these buildings cannot take advantage of suitable modern techniques. Nor does it mean that they have to be built in some kind of traditional pastiche. It simply means that, apart from the religious buildings and the mosque itself, the most significant edifices that a nation builds for itself are the government buildings. They have a very special place within the city, and their own special forms.

Let us consider the place of such buildings in the life and pattern of developing cities. In order to visualize this more clearly we can start by considering the site and grouping which has evolved in a very different situation—the government buildings of London. The Houses of Parliament, the centre of British government, have a significant place on the river frontage and the view of these buildings is one of the best-known sights in London. The Parliament buildings are associated with Parliament Square and Westminster

Abbey, and adjoined by the principal ministry buildings in Parliament Square and Whitehall. These buildings enjoy a reasonable proximity, and the whole area is clearly seen to be a centre of government although the traffic which passes around Parliament Square is alien to it. Ministries have proliferated in the last thirty years or so, and some have been accommodated on sites quite remote from this central group. Many of these ministries do not require close daily contact with Parliament, and have consequently been distributed on a regional basis. But the fact remains that there is a need for close connection among ministers, their ministries and the centre of government assembly to which the ministers are responsible.

Examples in Kuwait

Twelve years ago the central area of Kuwait consisted of the old town within the semicircular line of the city wall and the sea frontage. The area was not too large to be considered incapable of regeneration by careful and appropriate building. Many of the older buildings had been removed, but the mosques and the central *sūq* area remained to provide some continuity to the general pattern. Buchanan's plans for a developing Kuwait recognized this, and the siting of the public buildings formed the major element in his proposals for the development of Kuwait. Important buildings like the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Religious Affairs (with its associated mosque) were centered on the waterfront around the Seif Palace, and this frontage was to be extended to accommodate buildings of public importance such as a new government Assembly building and the National Museum. All of these central buildings had an important place within the city and were within easy reach of each other.

From this main frontage two areas of town were to be developed, one following the lines of the existing *sūq*, the other extending toward some existing ministries where

land for further development was readily available. These development proposals follow the pattern of organic growth already evident in the central area. The sites for these government buildings seemed appropriate, as they could be well served by the proposed circulation network. The central issue was the discovery of an appropriate building form which could fit naturally into the evolving city within the constraints of local culture and climate.

The National Assembly Building

The site of the National Assembly on the sea frontage is closely linked to the road network which serves both the central area of town and the ministry area. A competition in the early seventies garnered proposals for the construction of this building; the winning entry was by architect Jörn Utzon. In his conception the main sea-front road serves as the principal ceremonial entrance; an inland road running parallel to the sea-front road provides a public entry served by taxis and buses.

The layout of the building is generated from a central hall passing through the building from the ceremonial entrance on the sea-front to the public entrance inland. This central hall affords easy control at the two entry points, and along its length it links together all departments. The organization of the plan is made absolutely clear by this central spine; it becomes the communicating element used by the public and is a public front for all departments. It is in fact a covered street in the tradition of the *sūq*. In addition it is associated with a cafeteria, and is clearly intended to become a general meeting place.

Entering the street from the ceremonial entrance, the main assembly building is on the left and a conference centre on the right. Along the sea-front façade there are lounges and reception rooms. The supporting offices are arranged along the lateral corridors and accessible from the central spine. Each section has its own readily identifiable entry point, and

the use of offices is flexible and easily extendable.

The main design concept is quite clear. Instead of a series of isolated buildings to accommodate each function, with open spaces between them, Utzon's design is for one continuous building within which the larger and more important elements (the central route, the main assembly chamber, the conference hall and the ceremonial entrance itself) are identified by their roof shapes and volumes within the spreading form of the whole complex. The whole complex is only two stories high, above a car park, and it is lit entirely from a number of internal courts around which the offices are disposed. This is a form of building which could continue extending outward until the surrounding boundary wall is reached.

The shade-creating architecture which Utzon designed for Kuwait is quite different from the forms in which most Western building has been conceived. It embraces some ideas, such as the central covered street, which are part of a continuing tradition. It starts from the basic assumption that climate has long influenced the fundamental forms of architecture and should continue to do so today. The structural system of the Kuwait Assembly is certainly contemporary: it is reinforced concrete and involves long spans. The air-conditioning proposals are sophisticated, but it is not a bad idea to reduce the problems inherent in that system by emphasizing the shade-creating nature of the building itself.

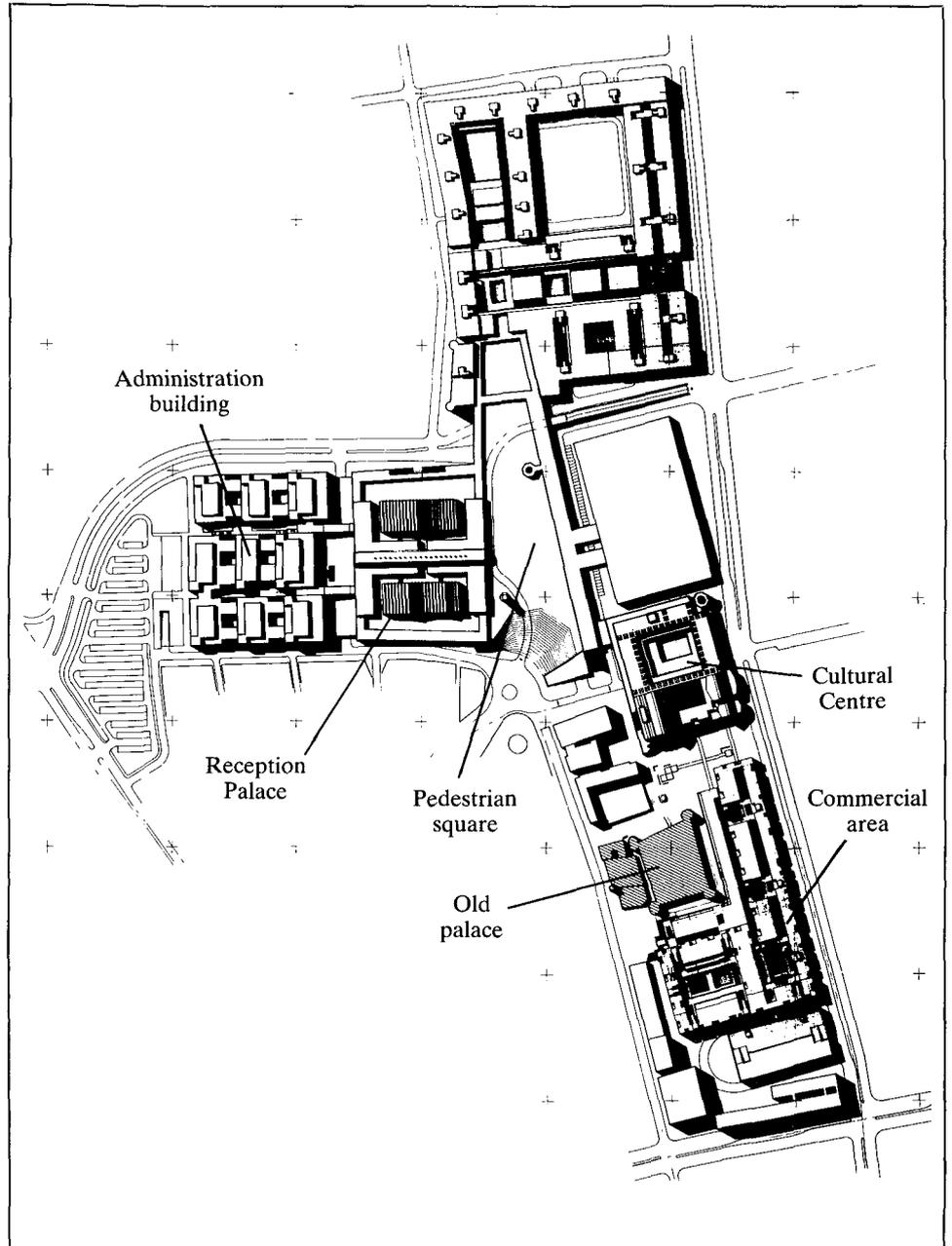
At the time that the Buchanan Plan for Kuwait was being prepared (1968–70), four architectural firms were working on building proposals. A proposal by the Smithsons concentrated on ministry buildings. It is worth noting that the ministries, which are in this case closely associated with adjoining town areas, are conceived in spreading form. Starting from the minarets as focal points in the city, the street network is oriented toward the ministries. The buildings themselves have a basic servicing and structural grid. They are cantilevered outward on the street frontages to form shaded public pathways,

and on other faces they can be adjusted to relate to existing conditions. Again the buildings are comparatively low—predominantly three or four stories—and again, we note the spreading form and the shaded entry of light into the building itself.

These examples in Kuwait, together with Pietila's work on the more specialized ministries around the Seif Palace, raise interesting questions about the kinds of government buildings which might be developed, and the effect which these could have on urban form. But the situation is not always so clear. Many government buildings in larger capital cities, such as Riyadh, have already been built. Several of these are along the main highway from the airport to the city centre, a kind of ceremonial approach road. But more buildings may be required, and where are these to be placed? What type of buildings should they be? How can they be related to other important public buildings which may be required by the city? The new buildings will undoubtedly cover considerable areas in the city centre, and it is important to consider in advance the questions which these will raise.

The Riyadh Government Complex

One proposal for the central area of Riyadh, the work of the Albini Studio in Milan, has recently been published. The siting of these buildings had its origin in an overall plan for the city developed by Doxiadis. This plan established the city's road network and the special area in which government buildings were to be introduced. However, the Doxiadis scheme suggested a form of development involving isolated buildings with communicating links. The area which has now been studied by the Albini group is a large one, and one section of it contains the old Muzmak fortress with its sloping mud walls and rounded corner towers. This is an important building, closely connected with the history of the unification of Saudi Arabia. The area has been planned to include a



Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: general master plan of the Government Complex. The roof plan shows the position of the main groups of buildings, defined by agreement with municipal and other authorities. The buildings are not isolated, but form a compact horizontal form linked by shaded pedestrian routes or galleries. The junction of the arms of the plan is formed by a pedestrian square, with the mosque in the centre of the larger arm. Adjoining this is the Cultural Centre and a Commercial Centre built around the old mud Palace which is to be used as a museum. The shorter arm includes the official Reception Palace facing onto the Square, and the municipal and regional administrative buildings. Architects: Albini Studio (Franco Albini, Franca Helg, Antonio Piva, Marco Albini)

Plan: Albini Studio

commercial centre, a new cultural centre which makes a library and information service available to the public, a series of suites, reception and banqueting rooms for use by the King and the Governor and, adjoining these, administrative offices for the municipality, the emirates and the police.

In the Albini proposals, the main layout follows an L-shape. At the junction of the two main groups of buildings is a large open square surrounded by colonnades, over a central parking area which serves the total group. The adjoining arms are again connected by covered links from this central square, and a mosque will eventually be included in the scheme. The points to be noted are that again the buildings are low, three or four stories depending on the ground level. This makes the round towers of the mud fortress higher than the general roof level. The museum, library and royal reception rooms are identified once again by roof shapes which rise above the level of the surrounding buildings. The concept is that of a spreading form rather than a high-rise, but since the component parts of the scheme are large, the links take the form of covered walks and colonnades.

When overlaid on the existing city pattern, the large scale clearly becomes an important consideration. In this case, the architects have broken down the scale by the detailed treatment of individual buildings. They have deliberately rejected the accepted formulae of Western cultures, and have resisted the attempt to implant a style. Instead, they have tried to base their solution on the conditions and the context in which they found the problem itself. Clearly, it is not easy for architects without roots in a culture to interpret that culture and to give it an appropriate contemporary expression. Whether they succeed depends ultimately on some consensus from the users who are part of the culture which the buildings serve.

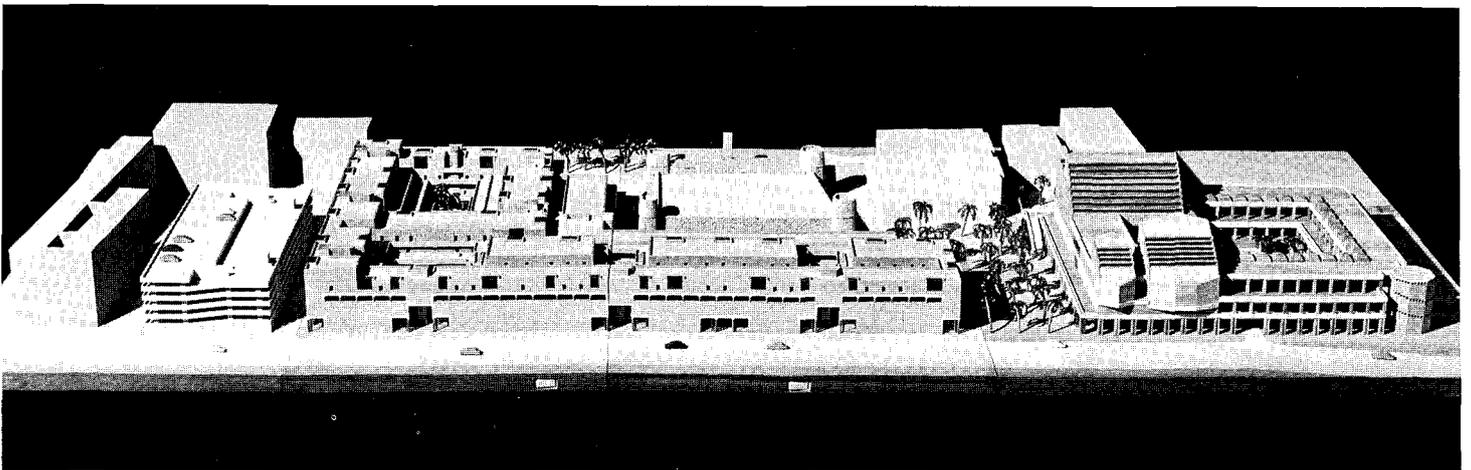
Government Buildings: Taif

The new government building at Taif in Saudi Arabia, completed about two years ago, might be taken as a final example. Taif is not a typical urban situation; the town is located in the hills at a considerable altitude. The government building is intended to provide comfortable working

accommodations for the ministers and senior government officials during the summer months. Despite its somewhat uncommon location, the design principles adopted at Taif and the methods used to construct this building provide some points of general interest.

The site chosen for the government buildings is in the centre of the city, adjacent to the *sūq* area and on a large plot enclosed by the walls of an old fort. These walls have their main entry points in the centre of each cardinal face. One of these, in the western wall, could be approached directly from the King's Palace. An entrance in the east wall gives access to the site from the public square. The placing of the building in the enclosed area has been conditioned by these entrances and by the need to leave space for future related buildings. These concerns have remained constant throughout the development of the scheme, as has the intention to design a shade-creating building.

When the programme was much smaller, the initial scheme took the form of an even grid of tall columns supporting an overall roof. Entrance halls and connecting spaces became colonnaded areas with



Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. model of part of the Government Complex. From left to right, the car park, Commercial Centre building with the old Palace behind; the Cultural Centre Architects: Albini Studio

Photo: A Ballo

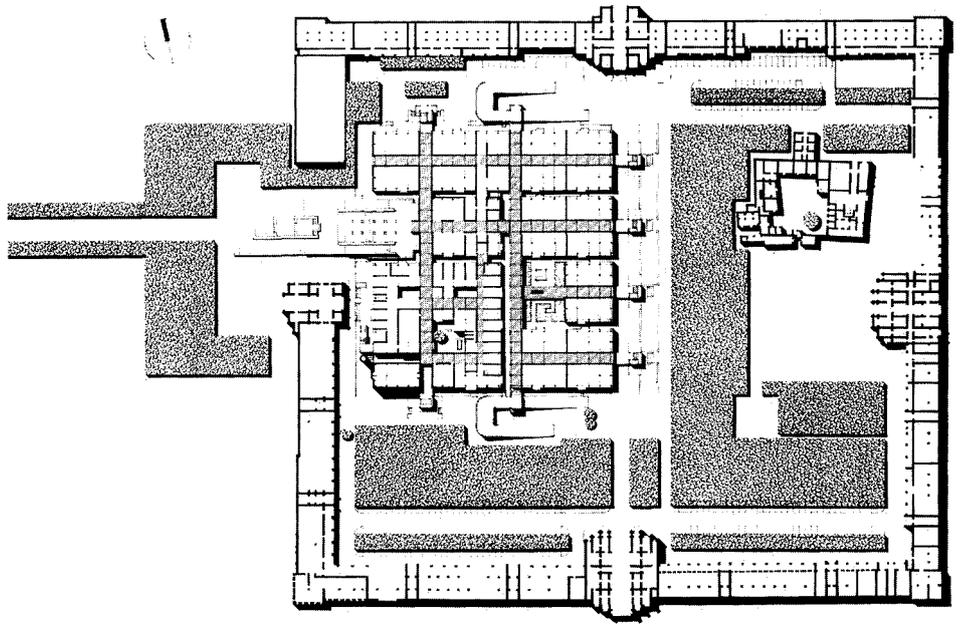
long diagonal views. Apertures in the roof allowed natural light to illuminate the enclosed gardens. All suites and rooms for the ministers were planned below this overall cover.

As the scheme developed and the number of ministries and support staff increased, a two-story solution became necessary. The original siting and the shade-creating idea remained, but it became desirable to develop and give significance to the main points of entry. All main rooms, including the ministers' suites, were placed at the main first floor level, while the ground floor contained rooms for the supporting staff.

The principal entrances were raised to first floor level. The main ceremonial entrance on the west side could be approached along a landscaped avenue which led to a ramped approach to the shade-creating reception portico. The public façade on the east is approached from the public square; its four elevated main porticoes mark the points of entry to the main ministry groups. The forecourt is landscaped, leaving possible sites for a future mosque and additional ministries.

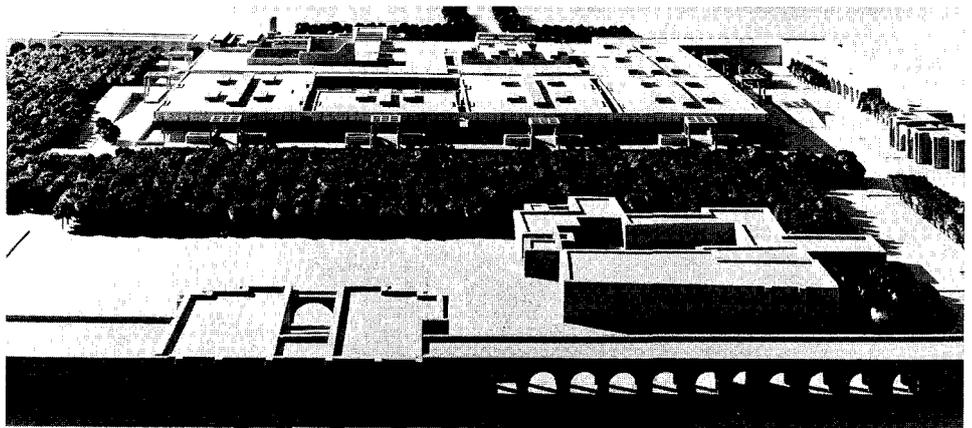
The east and west sides are the principal points of entry. The two remaining sides have entrances for the ministers to approach by automobile. These ramp entrances are connected by a spacious corridor (the "Ministers' Corridor"), which gives the ministers privacy of access to their particular ministry and links them to the Council of Ministers area.

At this principal level, a simple grid of galleries or spacious corridors links all entrances and all component parts of the building, providing easy horizontal connecting movement. The ground floor reflects this pattern: the support staff for each ministry is at this level, with direct vertical stair connections to the ministers' level overhead. The access galleries are double-height and serve both levels, and both are lit by daylight from shaded roof lights. The roof overhangs all walls, and carries hanging trellises to screen the windows from direct sunlight. Shaded gardens inter-



Taif, Saudi Arabia: plan of the government buildings, showing their relation to the buildings already on the site. Architects: Sir Leslie Martin and David Owers

Plan: L. Martin



Taif, Saudi Arabia: model of the government buildings (view from the east) This view shows the porticos at the principal entries to the ministries. The model reveals the spreading form of the building. Narrow slits in the roof provide daylight for the shaded gardens between the ministry buildings

Photo: L. Martin

penetrate the plan and all rooms look out onto planted areas.

The building can hardly be said to have elevations. It is a continuous mat of building, and the external form changes to reflect the changing pattern within. The silhouette reveals the porticoes which mark the entry points, the mosque, the audience hall and principal meeting areas. The consistency of the building is maintained by its materials. The structure is formed by a grid of reinforced concrete columns 5.6 metres apart. This is subdivided into a finer grid of ribs which provides a regular coffered ceiling over the rooms on the main floor. All larger rooms are roofed and lit with a precast shaded roof light system; this builds up the stepped form of the loftier spaces, a fact which is clearly recognizable externally. This use of light screening by means of timber trellises is worth emphasizing. It is one solution to the problem of creating brilliance without glare in a country where the light is harsh.

The building is faced in local stone. The hanging window screens and the internal *mashrabiya*s are of teak, while the standard rooflights were precast. The building was erected by a Saudi contractor, and as access to the site by the mountain road was difficult, most of the joinery was made in a factory on the site. The production of the building and the standards of finish achieved were undoubtedly helped by the building of a test assembly, in which the structure, finishes, joinery and installation of services were all demonstrated in the early stages of the building process.

- 2) Should it be recognized that varying government requirements and administrative needs will have their own organizational patterns and groupings? These can be a starting point for formal arrangements that would recognize variety and individual distinctions, and could relate government buildings to their own background.
- 3) With these bases, and recognizing the great importance of technical advances in structure and services, should we not recognize that planning for shade and for the control of natural light is part of a long tradition which might be continued?
- 4) Could these basic requirements be assisted by local contributions from the construction industry itself, which might concentrate on developing certain specializations: woodworking, stone-cutting, precast elements for shade-creating rooflights, etc.?
- 5) Could such general considerations help to establish a continuing and developing contemporary tradition?

Questions

These examples raise the following questions:

- 1) Are government buildings in Islamic cities numerous and important enough to have a major impact on those cities? If so, could planning policies for future buildings regard this as an objective?