

Rehabilitation of El Sourougeya Quarter, Cairo

The complexities inherent to the architectural development of a metropolitan community such as Cairo present an interesting challenge to contemporary urban planners. Our particular study of El Sourougeya Quarter takes into consideration problems arising in the following areas:

- Demographic growth
- Conflict between traditional and modern ways of life
- Consciousness of the environment

Egypt's major problem — that of demography — is due to the rapidly increasing population and compounded by the migration of this population from rural areas to Cairo. Research into high-density accommodation is therefore integral to a realistic architectural study of Cairo. Furthermore, the cultural conflict between traditional and modern lifestyles calls for a model of urban intervention which is concerned with both the country's heritage and the rehabilitation of social and economic activities. An architectural typology should emerge that recognises and reflects the blending of modern and traditional lifestyles.

Choice of Site

Why do we choose Sourougeya as the site of the project? This location, characterised by the intersection of two important streets, El Sourougeya and Mohamed Ali, represents a synthesis of certain events in the history of Cairo. El Sourougeya Street is an extension of El Moez Street, which was the artery of Fatimid Cairo and part of a linear connection among the cities of Fatimid Cairo, El Kata'a, El Askar and Fustat. An analysis of El Sourougeya Street and of the construction of these four towns indicates an important shifting of poles: as power changed hands, it was accompanied by a movement of the seats of government and subsequently by the development of a city around each seat. Today, one recognises a fundamental coexistence of the old and new towns.

The development of Mohamed Ali Street, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, represents the dawning of a new era. An aggressive approach to construction linked the Citadel to El Ezbakeya Square, which symbolised the new seat of power in Cairo.

The realisation of the two streets, El Sourougeya and Mohamed Ali, represents two different historical schools of

thought, and each street has generated its own distinct way of life. Thus a conflict arises, as is often the case in Cairo, where an ancient quarter surrounded by modern constructions does not favour a meeting of old and new. An obvious example of this phenomenon is the ancient port of Boulak, which borders on the modern quarter of Maspero beside the Nile.

The site of Sourougeya — with its ancient and modern sectors — lends itself, therefore, to an architectural model which will include an attempt at dialogue between tradition and modernity.

Choice of Architectural Model

The history of Cairo's development is too rich to elaborate here. In our opinion, a comprehensive study of the city should include its specific history, socio-economic structure, anthropology and culture. And, although we see in Cairo a conglomeration of different architectural styles — Arab-Islamic, Mameluk, Turkish —, it is due more to the emergence of new ways of life after 1900 that Cairo has become such a heterogeneous city.

Historical factors contribute to Cairo's architectural originality, as each part of the city brings its own special past to the heritage of the capital as a whole. Thus, we have decided to follow the conclusions of our theoretical analysis, summarised below, in the development of our project:

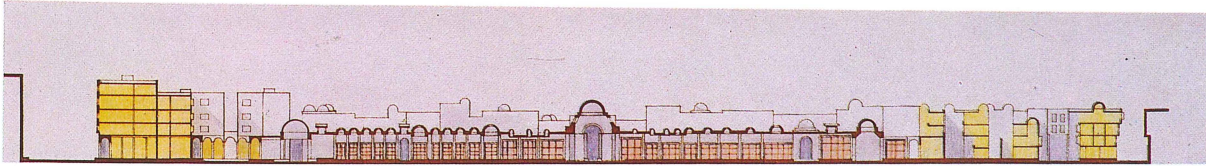
- A consideration of the history of the site.
- The formation of an urban architectural model including two housing typologies: Sourougeya Street (representing ancient Cairo) and Mohamed Ali Street (representing modern Cairo).
- The introduction of urban-architectural elements which allow for the assimilation of new ideas into the contemporary life of Cairo.
- The search for a dialogue between the two ways of life.
- The search for high-density accommodation.

Description of the Project

We have based our project on two scales: domestic and urban.

In assessing the value of this site, we take into consideration its current state of dilapidation and the monuments which exist on it: the Takiyat Al Sulaymania, the Gate and the remains of the Mosque of Qusūn, and the Mosque of Ganem Al Bahlawan. Our goal is to emphasise the designs of these historically important

Text and drawings by
Ayman Harnouda.

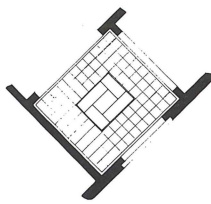


Section AA

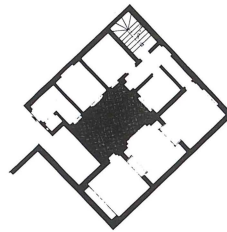


Site Plan

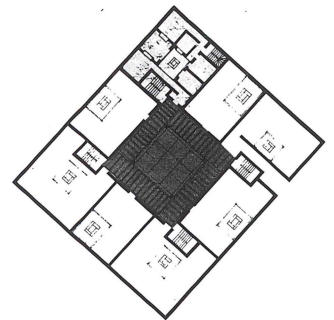
Stages of Urban Development



Courtyard



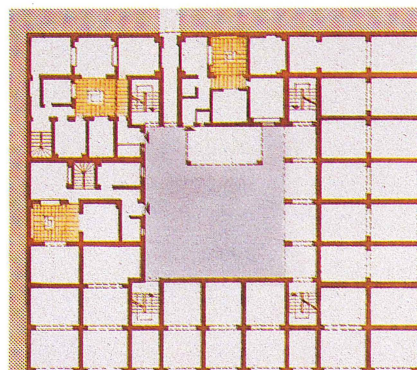
House



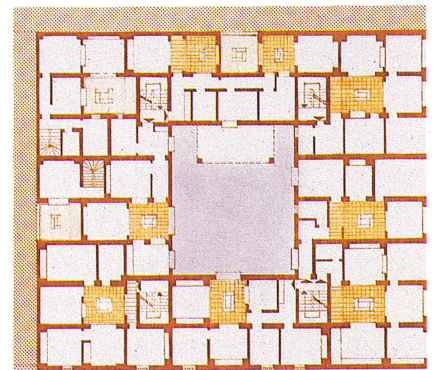
Rab (Collective housing)

Dwelling Typologies

Dwelling for proposed neighbourhood



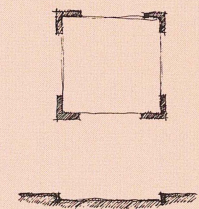
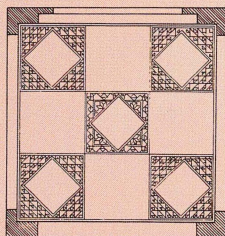
Ground floor plan



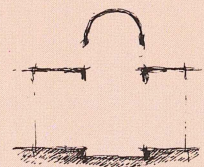
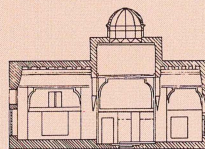
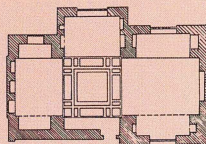
First floor plan

Architectural References

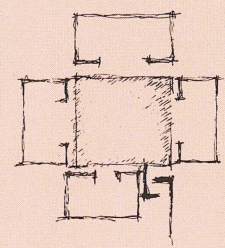
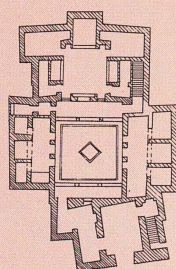
Courtyard

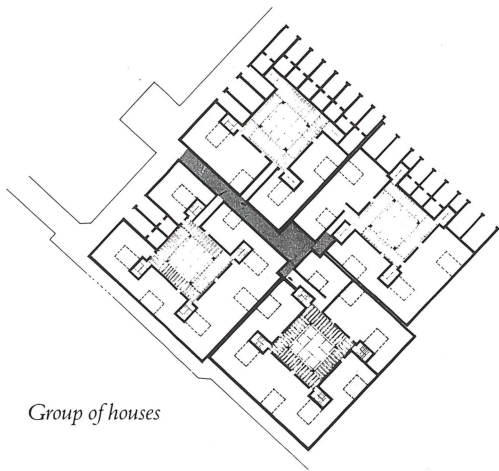


Qa'a

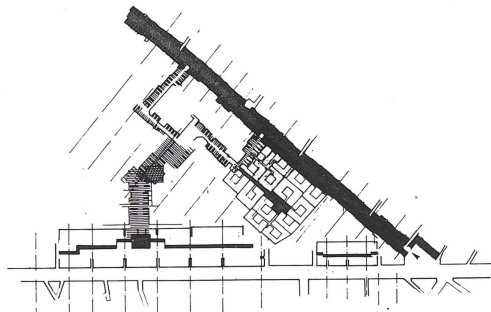


House

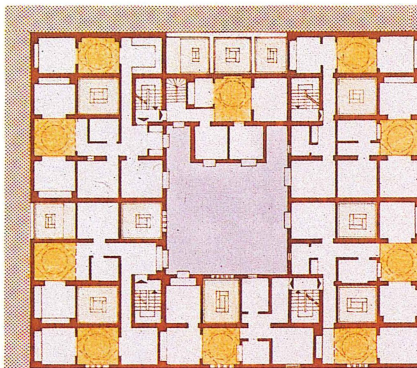




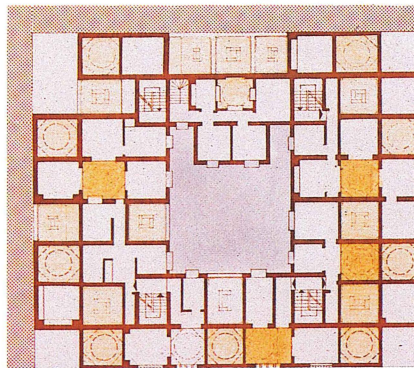
Group of houses



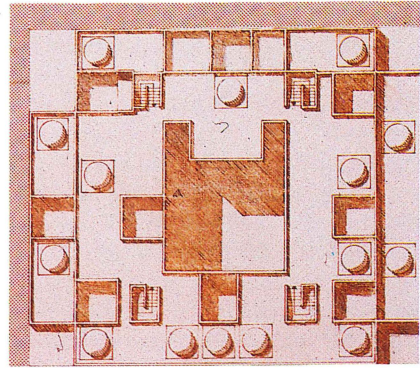
Neighbourhood in urban fabric



Second floor plan

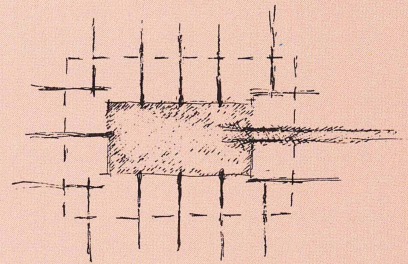
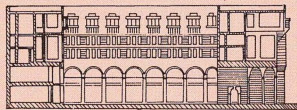
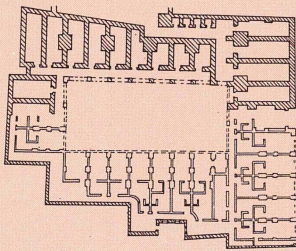


Third floor plan

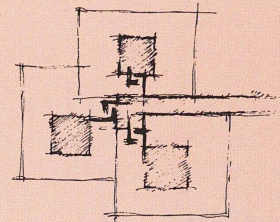
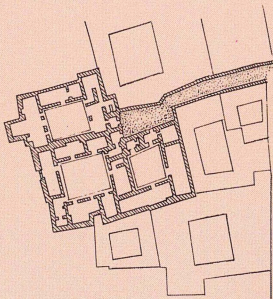


Terrace

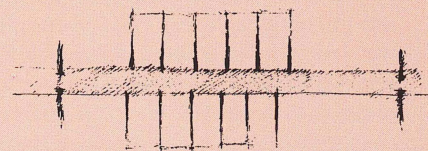
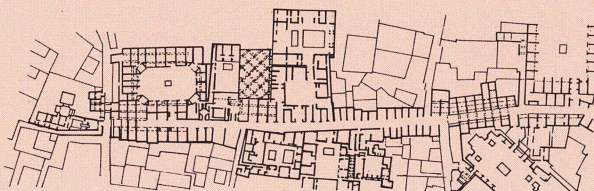
Rab



Darb



Casbah



buildings while using them as the focal points for the development of the project. The Takiyat will be used in structuring the site entrance; the Gate and the remains of the Mosque Qusūn will generate a connection between Mohamed Ali and Sourougeya Streets, highlighting *wakalas* and *souks*; and the Mosque Bahlawan will become a reference point to the entrance of a planned commercial complex.

The first housing type, found near Sourougeya Street, derives from ancient Cairo's traditional way of life, which was characterised by a certain solidarity among its people. Today, traditional activities maintain sectors of economic, cultural and social life around the *Qasaba*.

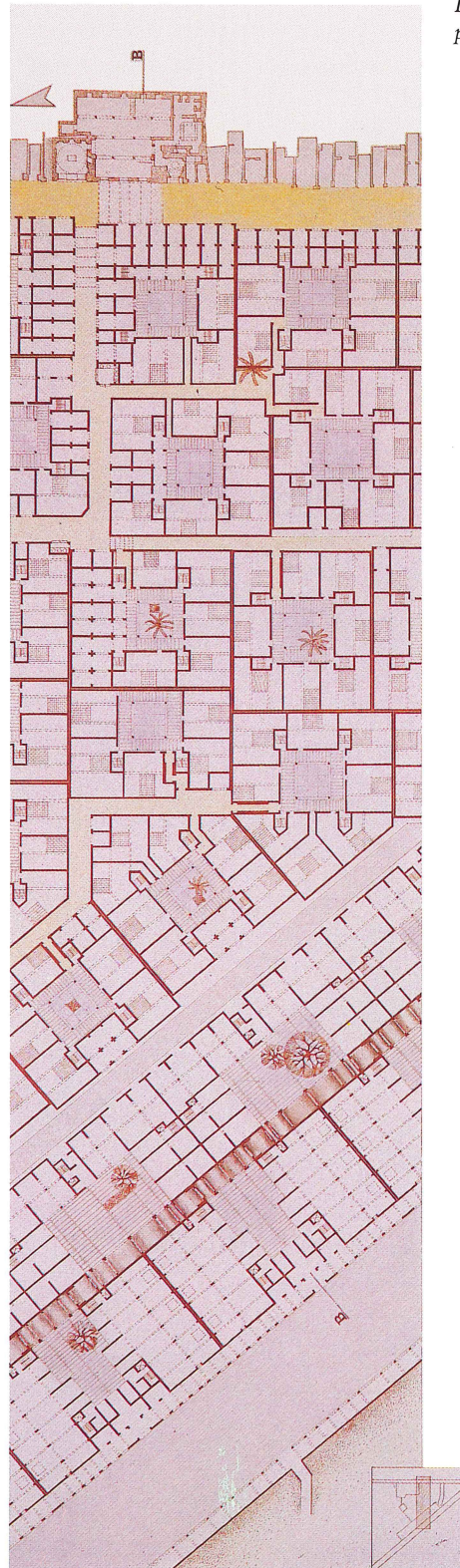
This housing type is further based on the concept of the *Rab*: collective habitation arising from a need for high-density accommodation, whose courtyard, a place of work and social activity, is a centre of communal life. Each individual house of the *Rab* includes an internal courtyard which, as a central area for the family, provides both privacy and climate control. This model allows the possibility for high-density accommodation as well as a very good coefficient for land usage (in the whole site we calculate an average of 1700 inhabitants per hectare).

The second housing type makes use of existing architectural elements found on Mohamed Ali Street, which serves as the site's outer limit. Plans include the reconstruction of the ruins of the arcade and the design of a new internal arcade, which will connect the squares that serve as a basis for this popular housing type.

A large commercial complex, allowing vital socio-economic exchange, will be the articulation between these two housing types, whose coexistence recognises both the ancient and contemporary history of the site. With the eventual diversification of social classes, the space can be structured to accommodate the development of socio-economic and cultural life and to promote a dialogue between tradition and modernity, which does not exist at present.

Conclusion

We are aware that an in-depth socio-economic study of the site as it relates to present-day Cairo is necessary for a project as complex as this. This project has allowed us to investigate an urban form, and hence to verify some of our theories about architecture. However, in practice, an operation such as this should be undertaken in stages, and requires the coopera-



Plan showing the two proposed housing types.

tion of the site's inhabitants. Thus, the architect has a dual role in this project:

- To determine the focal points which will structure the urban patterns.
- To structure the housing unit in accordance with the inhabitants' desires for the appropriation of their space.

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