The Aga Khan Award for Architecture and the Creation of an Islamic
Built Identity, 1976-2007

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Dedicated to the memory of Patrick Rodgers, Sr. and Patrick Rodgers, Jr.
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Part I
Introduction

In 1977, His Highness the Aga Khan IV, spiritual leader of the worldwide Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Shiʿa Muslim community, established the triennial Aga Khan Award for Architecture (AKAA). According to its website, the mission of the AKAA is to “identify and encourage building concepts that successfully address the needs and aspirations of societies in which Muslims have a significant presence.” Special favor is given to “architecture that not only provides for people’s physical, social and economic needs, but that also stimulates and responds to their cultural and spiritual expectations,” as well as to “building schemes that use local resources and appropriate technology in an innovative way” and “projects likely to inspire similar efforts elsewhere.”

Today, after more than thirty years and ten award cycles, the AKAA accounts for the largest part of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, one of several philanthropic agencies that together comprise the global Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). Its success has led to the inauguration of other AKDN programs that deal with similar issues, such as the Aga Khan Historic Cities Program and the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The Award’s $500,000 prize purse stands as the largest among architectural awards and the announcement of its recipients every three years captures global media attention.

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1 Ismāʿīlīsm (or “Sevener” Shiʿism) is a branch of Shiʿa Islam with an estimated following of fifteen to seventeen million followers spread throughout the world (although most live in the Middle East and South Asia). The Aga Khan is the Imam, or spiritual leader, of by far the largest sect of the Ismāʿīlīs, the Nizārīs. The Ismāʿīlīs disagree with the larger portion of Shiʿites, known as “Twelvers,” regarding the succession of leadership following the death of the Prophet Muhammad’s son in law, Ali. Since this initial rift, which occurred in the eighth century, Ismāʿīlīs and Twelvers have developed subtle differences in their practice of Islam. Aga Khan IV is the forty-ninth leader of the Nizārīs, all of whom are thought to be descendents of the Prophet.

The selection process for the AKAA is unique among architectural prizes. As is the case with many other prizes, a Master Jury makes the final selections for the Award. However, in the case of the AKAA, the finalists represent not only the most notable and prestigious new buildings, restoration projects and conservation efforts designed by the most famous architects in the world, but also a vast field of lesser-known projects that the mainstream architectural community might have otherwise overlooked. This is possible by means of a well-established selection procedure. In addition to assembling a new Master Jury for each cycle, the Steering Committee,\(^3\) chaired by the Aga Khan and appointed by the Award’s Secretary General, appoints a number of nominators throughout the Muslim world.\(^4\) Over the course of the two years prior to the selection year, these nominators comb their respective regions of the world for noteworthy projects. These projects must be completed and in use for at least one year.\(^5\)

Upon nomination, the clients and architects of a project are required to submit documentation reviewing the project’s merits and potential shortcomings. Then, based upon these materials and accompanying site plans and photographs, the Jury meets to narrow down a field of several hundred projects to approximately thirty or forty. To each

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3\ The Steering Committee potentially could yield considerable power in the selection process. According to an April 2008 AKAA press release, the Committee is “responsible for establishing the current eligibility criteria for nominated projects, for providing thematic direction to the Award in response to the priorities and issues that have emerged during the recent past, and for developing plans for the cyclical and long-term future of the Award.” However, while the official Jury Statement’s often make reference to the thematic guidance provided by the Committee, it is rather unclear to what extent these prescriptions guide the a Jury’s final selections. When considering this relationship, it is more than likely that the Jury is given full discretion. (Aga Khan Development Network, “Steering Committee for Aga Khan Award’s Eleventh Cycle (2008-2010) Announced” [online], 2 April 2008, accessed 23 April 2009; available from http://www.akdn.org/press_release.asp?ID=675.)

4\ The Master Juries and Steering Committees have shared quite a bit of personnel over the years. Please see the appendix for a list of repeat Jury and Committee members.

5\ Early on in the Award, projects that had been completed several decades prior were awarded. However, more recently, the Steering Committee has decided projects must have been completed within the last two Award cycles. (Aga Khan Development Network, *The Aga Khan Award for Architecture* [online], 2008, accessed 5 November 2008; available from http://www.akdn.org/akaa.procedures.asp.).
of these sites is sent a Technical Reviewer, a researcher who compiles a full report on the project. The Master Jury uses the Reviewers’ final reports, as well as those of the clients and architects, to make its final selections. Each of the two Jury meetings lasts roughly one week. Once the selections are made, the Master Jury releases an official statement and an award ceremony is held that year, normally at a site of historical importance.

Over the past thirty years, the AKAA has compiled documentation on over 7,500 projects of which they awarded the AKAA to ninety-four.

However, locating and recognizing projects that “successfully address the needs and aspirations of societies in which Muslims have a significant presence” is an endeavor not without its complications. Attempting to determine the “needs and aspirations” of any society introduces an inherent degree of subjectivity. Unless the opinion of every one of society’s members is taken into account, any attempt is merely an approximation, comprised as it is of the opinions of individuals entrusted with representing the society as a whole. During the selection process for the AKAA, the judges that form the Master Jury are entrusted with the responsibility of identifying the needs and aspirations of individual Muslim communities throughout the world. Therefore, with each award cycle, the AKAA Master Jury is given the power to articulate a new approximation of Islamic identity for Muslims throughout the world.

In a speech for those gathered at the ninth award cycle presentation of the AKAA in New Delhi in 2004, the Aga Khan elaborated on the intent of the AKAA. He described the goal of the award as the improvement of the “quality of life” in Muslims’

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6 Ibid.
7 The exception is the most recent presentation for the tenth award cycle, which took place at the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A full list of the presentation sites is available in the appendix.
communities, and attributed its creation to a personal concern with “the loss of cultural identity and appropriateness in the architecture and built environments of much of the Muslim world” after centuries of architecture being “one of the great forms of artistic expression.” He attributed this degradation in large part to the adoption of building techniques and styles from the West, which, while easily gaining influence in the region due to the West’s association with “modernity” and “improved quality,” often proved inappropriate to the building’s site and purpose or the climate of the region in which it was built.9

Thus, according to the Aga Khan, the purpose of the Award is to explore the question, “How do we protect the past and inspire the future?” Or, put another way, “how do we reshape and reposition knowledge and appreciation in the public psyche, and among those who play a role in developing human habitat?” The Aga Khan answered this question, saying he hoped to develop an “all encompassing profile of people and habitat” that “promotes awareness and understanding of appropriate technologies and solutions.”10 Thus, awarding the AKAA to worthy projects is the basis for the formation of this profile.

Debate regarding the true identity of Islam began immediately after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE, when choosing his successor divided the then small Muslim community, or ummah, into factions that supported his son-in-law ‘Ali, and one of his first converts, Abu Bakr. Since then, societal developments have institutionalized intellectual debate in Islam, as seen in the various schools of thought on practice and

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10 Ibid.
ideology generated by the practice of *ijtihad*, or the interpretation of the Islamic canon by qualified Muslim scholars. Thus, each project of each award cycle rewarded by the AKAA is one attempt to clarify the identity of a Muslim community and therefore can be understood as engaging in this millennium-old dialogue with all its complexity. As such, several questions comes to the fore: do the awarded projects reflect traditional conceptions of the built environment found in the Qur’an and *Shari’ah*? Does an Islamic conception of the built environment even exist? If so, what building and planning elements does it recommend, and how much plurality in building style does it allow? How do architects and urban planners set about implementing these standards?

This study examines the AKAA’s contribution to the age-old debate about what constitutes Islamic identity. Since this contribution is mainly a product of the choices made by the Master Jury, I will devote the largest portion of the following thesis to an analysis of the buildings and projects awarded the AKAA using the Award’s own documentation, discussed above. Along the way, I will categorize each project by type, dividing the body of this work into chapters on restoration, community revitalization, or new construction. Within each chapter, I will further characterize each project by what I take to be its overarching importance to the Award in general. Ultimately, I find that the Award’s contribution to the debate on Islamic identity has less to do with defining a new Islamic architectural aesthetic, its stated purpose, than with reaffirming what have long been considered Muslim social values.
Chapter I: The Aga Khan and the Creation of the AKAA

It would be a mistake to label the Aga Khan a normal philanthropist. For one thing, his philanthropic activities are undertaken as his community’s Imam, or spiritual leader, not as an individual patron. However, more fundamentally, the Aga Khan refuses to give and then stand back to watch others use his money. Instead, he insists that he take an active role in his philanthropy, building each new foundation from the ground up and remaining on its board to guide its growth. The Aga Khan Award for Architecture is no different in this regard, for today the Aga Khan remains the Chairman of the Award’s Steering Committee, thirty years after the first Award cycle. In this chapter I will discuss the Aga Khan’s influence on the Award over the last thirty years, beginning with its establishment in the late 1970s and continuing to the present day. I will also attempt to locate the Aga Khan’s personal opinions on the spectrum of architectural theory, thereby providing a context for the examination of the awarded projects in later chapters.

Origins

The Award was borne of the Aga Khan’s frustration with the state of architecture in the Islamic world in the early part of his Imamate. In the years immediately following the death of his grandfather, Aga Khan III, in 1957, and his subsequent ascension to the Imamate that same year, the Aga Khan supervised the completion of construction on an Ismāʿīlī hospital in Nairobi, Kenya and initiated the for-profit development of a travel resort in northern Sardinia, Italy. However, in the late 1970s, after deciding to found a new private medical college in Karachi, Pakistan, the Aga Khan found himself with little idea as to how to build a modern teaching hospital that also conveyed the spirit of

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11 The Aga Khan has the power to designate his successor. In this case, he chose his grandson, rather than his son. His reason for doing so is unclear, although some have speculated he believed his community needed a young leader in tune with technological progress.
Karachi, a community heavily defined by its Islamic past. In the opening address of the first of many AKAA issue-based academic seminars at his secretariat in Aiglemont, France in 1978,\textsuperscript{12} the Aga Khan looked back upon this time, saying, “One of my requirements [for the hospital] was that the resulting design should reflect the spirit of Islam. By this I do not mean a soulless mimicry of past traditions of architecture, but a generation of new design, using the aesthetic and practical bases of these traditions.”\textsuperscript{13}

In his eyes, the “soulless mimicry” of which the Aga Khan spoke was the result of a general lack of ingenuity among the architects and planners shaping the built environment throughout the Islamic world. In the third AKAA seminar, held in Jakarta, Indonesia in 1979, he observed, “We are faced today with buildings which obviously do not reflect or respond to Islamic tradition, thought or ways of life, either historical or contemporary. Information about Islamic architectural traditions, physical and social characteristics, cultural accomplishments and contemporary yearnings is scattered and scarce.” He bemoaned the “serious paucity of men and women able to understand and resolve the practical, cultural, social and aesthetic needs of an evolving Muslim world,” and warned that “Of immediate significance to the built environment is the fact that architects, both Muslim and non-Muslim professionals working in the Islamic world, lack cultural and historical training.”\textsuperscript{14} These professionals, along with the majority of contemporary Muslim intellectuals, believed the apex of Islamic culture had been reached nearly a millennium earlier, when the Muslim world was at the forefront of worldwide

\textsuperscript{12} The seminar is basically a gathering of experts on a certain theme related to the Award, such as housing or public space. The proceedings, including the Aga Khan’s introductory speech and the papers that follow, or often published by the AKAA in the years the follow. A list of pertinent seminars may be found in the bibliography of this work.


\textsuperscript{14} Housing Process and Physical Form, Proceedings of Seminar Three in the Series, Architectural Transformations in the Islamic world held in Jakarta, Indonesia, March 26-9, 1979, p. xi.
scientific and cultural achievement. Their conception of an Islamic aesthetic reflected this belief, in that it borrowed heavily from the traditional forms of that period. At the same time, they failed to properly adapt these features to the needs of today’s society, yielding a generation or more of largely unsuccessful construction.

Unfortunately, in the eyes of the Aga Khan, the architecture of the Islamic world suffered from another weakness: uncontrolled Western influence. He expounded upon this point at the Aiglemont seminar, using his own Ismā‘īlī community as a microcosm of the greater Islamic world. He explained that his community, while quite small, was spread throughout the world, and as a result his people were increasingly in contact with a vast number of different cultures, nationalities and languages. He continued, “It is a result of my community’s experience that I have been haunted by one single question: what is the future physical environment that Muslims should see for themselves and future generations in their homelands, their institutions, their workplaces, their houses, their gardens, and their surroundings?” For the Aga Khan, this question was at the time unanswerable, for he found himself “unable to give clear directives to any architect for the creation of an equally soundly conceived and appropriate design solution,” in large part due to the fact that there were “few design objectives and even fewer solutions which could become an inspiration for others.”

“Daily contact” with a multitude of Muslims and non-Muslims is clearly a euphemism for globalization and the increasing interconnectedness of the world’s population. Likewise, a “soundly conceived and appropriate design solution” would be one that melds the influence of Western aesthetics and advances in technology with the cultural identity of the community for which the building is designed. However,

15 Qtd. in Jodidio, Under the Eaves, p. 18.
according to the Aga Khan, the nature of cross-cultural influence makes the development of this sort of “solution” exceedingly difficult. In the second AKAA seminar, the Aga Khan remarked, “All cultures naturally influence each other to a greater or lesser degree; the strongest are those in which the dominant elements remain dominant and refuse to be overwhelmed by external forces. They become stronger still when they retain the ability to select, to absorb that which invigorates and enriches and to reject that which is inimicable.”

Herein also lay a solution, however. Referring to the aforementioned golden age of Islam, the Aga Khan observed that the Western world built upon the technical developments of Muslim civilization to escape the inertia of the Middle Ages. He concluded by suggesting “this be the process by which Islamic architects and designers develop a physical environment, one which will make of their institutions, their work places, their houses and gardens something which future generations may look upon as a true reflection of the spirit of Islam.”

In other words, architects and planners in the Muslim world ought to adopt only the best elements and methods of Western architecture and use these to enhance the built environment and Islamic way of life. According to the Aga Khan, if they failed to do so, they stand the chance of “losing that vital sense of continuity with the past without which I believe we can have no real future.”

Nearly thirty years later, in an interview for a monograph on his life as a patron and builder, the Aga Khan referred to this period of Islamic architecture as the “deconstruction of cultural inheritance.” The problem, he reflected, lay in education, for

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17 Ibid., p. xi.
at the time, “There was no serious analysis of traditions and how they came into place, or
how they could be revived and used in modern buildings.” Without a clear
understanding of his architectural heritage, the Muslim architect or planner tended
towards one of two approaches: blind adherence to traditional forms without due
consideration of contemporary needs and use, or open acceptance of a foreign design that
often proved inappropriate to the climate or site and insensitive to the culture and identity
of the people it was meant to serve.

A Possible Solution: The Creation of the AKAA

In order to remedy this troubling situation, the Aga Khan created the AKAA, in
his own words, to “provoke, to mobilize and to premiate a questioning and a thinking
process.” First, a series of seminars on different challenges facing the Muslim
architectural and planning communities would bring together scholars and practitioners
from around the world, encouraging constructive dialogue and enhancing the base of
academic knowledge on the problems that face the Muslim world. Second, as mentioned
in the introduction of this thesis, the Award itself would serve to create a catalogue of
projects, an “all encompassing profile of people and habitat,” that could be called upon in
the future as inspiration for architects and planners who hoped to construct buildings that
were both appropriate and useful to their community.

As William Porter, a participant in the early Award meetings, recalls, the Aga Khan
had not yet defined what was appropriate. Rather, he was “on a search,” “interested
in hearing what the individuals around the table thought,” and there “to listen, to

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19 Interview with the Aga Khan in Jodidio, Under the Eaves, p. 43.
20 Housing Process and Physical Form, p. xi.
Hasan Uddin Khan, who first served as assistant to Renata Holod, Convenor of the Award, and later as its head, agrees with Porter. She recalls that above all, the Aga Khan hoped to “encourage Muslims to look anew at their own situation and create a contemporary architecture for their societies.” Khan acknowledges that the Aga Khan knew he wanted to “develop something that you could intellectually defend as belonging to the country and the culture and that was contemporary at the same time,” and believed strongly that rather than building “traditional” buildings, the architect ought to “understand [his] tradition.” Still, the Aga Khan was ready to leave anything beyond that to the Master Jury’s discoveries.

Outside of architecture, this “profile” of projects had another use as well. It would “encourage an understanding and awareness of the strength and diversity of Muslim cultural traditions.” Throughout his Imamate, the Aga Khan has viewed the existence of pluralism in a world as valuable in and of itself. However, with recent technological advances, diverse communities have come in greater contact with one another. In the mind of the Aga Khan, this development continues to threaten to gradually degrade the cultural distinction of individual communities, paving the way for the disproportionate influence and imitation of a few particularly assertive cultures. “The problem,” he explained during a speech in The Netherlands in 2002, “is that large segments of all societies—in the developing world and the developed world—are unaware of the wealth of global cultural resources and, therefore, of the need to preserve the precious value of pluralism and their own and in others’ societies.” Therefore,

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22 Ibid., p. 21.
23 This profile would be documented in the archnet.org website database. For further discussion of this website, please see the bibliography.
24 *Housing Process and Physical Form*, p. xii.
“groups that seek to standardize, to homogenize or...to normative all that and those around them must be actively resisted through counterveiling activities” by those who understand the value of pluralism. The AKAA, in that it awards projects from all corners of the Muslim world, is one such activity, bringing the natural cultural diversity of the Islamic ummah to the attention of the world.

However, for the Aga Khan, the real value of pluralism lies in its potential to discredit the existence of a “clash of civilizations.” In a speech to the graduating class of 2003 at the Aga Khan University in Karachi, Pakistan, the Aga Khan urged his audience to realize the “need to mitigate what is not a ‘clash of civilizations’ but a ‘clash of ignorance,’ in which peoples of different faiths or cultural traditions are so ignorant of each other that they are unable to find a common language with which to communicate.” Those of an “educated and enlightened outlook,” however, “know their history and deeply value their heritage” while also being “keenly sensitive to the radically altered conditions of the modern world.” These people “are of the firm, sincere conviction that their societies can benefit from modernity while remaining true to tradition,” and it is they who “will be the bridge that can eliminate forever today’s dangerous clash of ignorance.”

In all of these efforts, the Aga Khan acted, and continues to act, under the aegis of the Ismāʿīlī Imamat. In a 2005 speech in Ottawa, Canada, he stated that “A guiding principle of the Imamat’s institutions is to replace walls that divide with bridges that

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25 This idea for a world system in which post-Cold War conflict would be predicated less on realpolitik and more on cultural and religious identities was widely popularized by the writings of political theorist Samuel P. Huntington in the early 1990s.

unite,” and it is undoubtedly true that the very nature of his community, with followers living as minorities throughout the world, was an important factor in the development of his interests in pluralism and diversity. However, fundamentally, the Aga Khan believes his personal faith in Islam requires he take action on any personal conviction that may better the overall quality of life of humanity. In the same speech given in Ottawa, the Aga Khan remarked,

In the case of Islam, there are two touchstones I have long treasured and sought to apply. The first affirms the unity of the human race, as expressed in the Holy Quran where God, as revealed through the Holy Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) says the following: ‘O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your lord, Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from the twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women.” (4:1) This remarkable verse speaks both of the inherent diversity of mankind—the multitude—and of the unity of humankind—the single soul created by a Single Creator—a spiritual legacy that distinguishes the human race from all other forms of life.  

The unity of humanity is more than a simple truth. It implies a responsibility for those Muslims with means to help those in need, for all humans share a common past, descended from one common ancestor and, therefore, related. Being a Muslim of means, the Aga Khan is obligated to help the members of his community, as well as other Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This idea is further developed in the Muslim notion of din and dunya, or the spiritual and non-spiritual aspects of our lives. As the Aga Khan explained in Ottawa,

In the Islamic tradition, the conduct of one’s worldly life is inseparably intertwined with the concerns of one’s spiritual life. One cannot talk about integrity without also talking

27 Ibid., p. 95.
28 Ibid., p. 126.
Thus, one’s personal faith and his public actions are not separate in Islam. Therefore, his piety is a function not only of devotion but of generosity and good deeds. The Aga Khan adheres to this belief, noting that “Throughout its long history, the Ismāʿīlī Imamat has emphasized the importance of activities that reflect the social conscience of Islam, that contribute to the well-being of Allah’s greatest creation, humankind, and that reflect the responsibility Islam places on the fortunate and the strong to assist those less fortunate.”

Hence, “building bridges” has both political and religious value.

Of course, the Aga Khan’s primary vehicle of good works is social development, including architecture. One sees very easily the critical role these Islamic values played in shaping the Aga Khan’s understanding of the AKAA. From very early on he was particularly interested in scale and human interaction with the built environment. At the ceremony for the first round of Award recipients in 1980 the Aga Khan remarked, 

> This recognition of a human scale, of local decisions, of local needs and concerns is, I believe, a profoundly Muslim requirement. It is the expression of that social concern for thousands of separate communities within the whole umma which is so uniquely a central part of the Muslim message. We have recognized an architecture for men, women and children, not yet an architecture for history books and tourists.  

In these few sentences, the Aga Khan alludes to a characteristic of the AKAA that sets it apart from other architectural prizes: namely, the concern for the social impact of the building rather than the built form itself. In response to a question if the Award was not

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29 Ibid., p. 122.  
30 Ibid., p. 19.  
31 Qtd. in Jodidio, Under the Eaves, p. 23.
more about the well-being of people than the architecture itself, the Aga Khan unequivocally agreed, noting that the Award was “born out of concern for the quality of life, rather than just the professional dynamics of architecture as it had been known in the Western world.” As a matter of fact, keeping the AKAA about people was a “moral obligation,” for if the Award’s movers had adhered to the conception of good architecture as it was defined in the Western world, many high-quality but less “architectured,” or professionally planned, buildings would have gone unrecognized. One of the key goals of the Award was to acknowledge the sub-professional processes that created architecture with a positive social impact throughout the Muslim world. Therefore, the Award seeks to downplay the “divide between the professionally trained architect and the builder who comes out of a traditional society, who is a fantastic artist, but who many not have all the technical niceties of the modern architect,” focusing instead on the net-result of new building on communities. Thus, even in the type of project he hoped to premiate, the Aga Khan remained most concerned with helping people.

In an odd way, the Aga Khan’s ultimate goal is a world in which his efforts, and indeed the AKAA, are no longer necessary. At his 2002 speech in The Netherlands, the Aga Khan remarked that while “urgent humanitarian assistance is indispensable…it should be part of a long-term strategy of helping the recipient community develop its own resources, resources that can help improve the socio-economic conditions of the poorer segments of the population and provide charitable support for those unable to work.”

The Aga Khan refers here to a sustainable sort of development in which the recipients of the aid eventually come to own the process of their own improvement. Indeed, this

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32 Jodidio, Under the Eaves, p. 42.
33 The Aga Khan, Where Hope Takes Root, p. 11.
quotation helps to explain the notion of the “profile” of architectural projects mentioned in the introduction and earlier in this chapter. Eventually, the members of a community must take control of the development of their community, and to aid this process, they must be provided a database of “best practices,” a model for replication. In the case of the AKAA, “best practices” take the form of buildings that help improve the lives of people while staying true to the identity of the community or region in which they are located.

**Critical Regionalism**

The Aga Khan’s inclination towards finding architecture “appropriate” to a certain region, a certain people or a certain way of life fits well within the field of architectural theory. In fact one might argue quite convincingly that the Aga Khan is what has come to be known as a “regionalist,” or one concerned more with a building’s interaction with its place and users than with the form of the building itself. Before we examine individual projects awarded the AKAA, it is prudent to examine this school of theory in order to better place the AKAA in the overall framework of architectural theory.

Alexander Tzonis, one of the first theorists to use the term “critical regionalism,” notes the expression was first employed in the early 1980s to describe the development in Europe of an alternative to Postmodernism. In the decades prior to the Second World War, the world of architectural theory and practice had come to be

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dominated by the International Style, a form of Modernism typified by simple forms with clean, perpendicular lines and little or no ornamentation. This aesthetic achieved peak dominance with the 1932 Museum of Modern Art exhibition “The International Style: Architecture Since 1922,” curated by two well-known American modernists, Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., and featuring the works of several prominent Europeans, including Walter Gropius (founder of the influential Bauhaus design school in Weimer, Germany), Mies van der Rohe (Phillip Johnson’s mentor), and Le Corbusier. However, following the end of the Second World War, Modernism began to loose influence in favor of Postmodernism, an eclectic style characterized by the reintroduction of ornamentation and non-orthogonal patterns and surfaces. Some architects who had worked within the International Style, notably Johnson himself, began producing Postmodern buildings, joining the ranks of Charles Moore, Robert Stern, Robert Venturi, and Peter Eisenman, among other prominent postmodernists. However, the movement was soon outpaced by changing tastes, and by the time Tzonis first used the term “critical regionalism” in 1981, Postmodernism had lost a great deal of its appeal in the global architectural community.

Tzonis defines “regionalism” in architecture as “an approach to design giving priority to the identity of the particular rather than to universal dogmas.” As one might imagine, this ideology is not lacking in historical antecedents. For instance, Tzonis notes that in 12th century Rome, as part of an effort to free the city from papal control, a popular republican party leader by the name of Niccolò de Crescenzi commissioned the construction of a small corner building that incorporated a classical Roman colonnade in

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its design. Of course by then the use of the colonnade was anachronistic: the invention of more efficient building methods had rendered it obsolete, in the practical sense. Yet the colonnade was emotive, reminding the Roman citizen of his city’s great past. It is unlikely this escaped de Crescenzi, who ordered that the inscription *Romae veterems renovare decorum* be carved into the side of the building. Tzonis is careful to explain exactly how Casa de Crescenzi qualifies as one of the first examples of regionalism in architecture. He writes that regionalist architecture is a “normative,” rather than “behavioral,” concept, for it does not simply exist, waiting to be discovered. Instead, it must be “made with the aim of helping the construction of a group identity.”

Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, a regionalist style of architecture hints at a conviction held by its supporters that its aesthetic represents a culture distinctive from a larger, sometimes oppressive, power. In other words, as Tzonis explains, regionalist architecture incorporates certain elements in order to “represent aspirations from a power perceived as alien and illegitimate.”

Of course, regionalism and architecture can be used to achieve just the opposite in aims. Imperialists have long recognized the power of the built form in influencing the mentality of a subject people. Still, in its earlier form, regionalism was an “anti-absolutist political and an anti-classical aesthetic programme.” For instance, Tzonis notes that in the literature of several 17th and early 18th century British authors, particularly the Earl of Shaftesbury (1621-83), one finds a definite trend toward naturalism, an ideology strictly at odds with the oppressive formalism of the manicured

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38 Ibid., p. 13.
39 A good example of this is the work of Albert Speer, chief architect of Hitler’s Third Reich.
41 Others mentioned include William Temple (p. 13-14) and Alexander Pope (p. 14-15).
classical garden. In his *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Shaftesbury writes,

> I sing of Nature’s order in created beings, and celebrate the beauties which resolve in thee, the source and principle of all beauty and perfection...Thy being is boundless, unsearchable, impenetrable...We contemplate (Nature) with more delight in these original wilds than in the artificial labyrinths and feigned wildernesses of the palace.\(^{42}\)

In language even more instructive of his feelings for the monarchy, Shaftesbury addresses God, writing,

> Your genius, the genius of the place, and the Great Genius have at last prevailed. I shall no longer resist the passion growing in me for things of a natural kind, where neither art nor the conceit or caprice of man has spoiled their genuine order by breaking in upon that primitive state. Even the rude rocks, the mossy caverns, the irregular unwrought grottos and broken falls of waters, with all the horrid graces of the wilderness itself, as representing Nature more, will be the more engaging, and appear with a magnificence beyond the formal mockery of princely gardens...\(^{43}\)

Although this sentiment pertains little to architecture, the appreciation of “place,” or the context of the land upon which, say, a building is constructed, is very important to the concept of regionalism. To a certain extent, a region’s people and its way of life are defined by the idiosyncrasies of their land, its climate and topography, and in the mind of the regionalist, an appropriate architecture for the region ought to reflect that, not fight it.

This concept was further developed in the writings of the German thinker Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832). In *Von deutscher Baukunst* (1772), Goethe develops the idea of architectural aesthetic specific to a people and its culture. As a student in


\(^{43}\) *Ibid.*
Strasbourg, he struggled to understand the city’s cathedral, designed by his compatriot Erwin von Steinbach, which seemed to ignore the European canon of Gothic cathedral (it would, in fact, come to be an icon of Western cathedral architecture). However, as Tzonis describes, Goethe comes to understand the cathedral as essentially German, identifying it as a “source of pride for himself and the people it belongs to.” He dramatically exclaims, “This is German architecture, this is ours.” It is a building that can be understood by the German people “without the need of an interpreter.” Thus, architecture, when appropriate to its site, is in need of no translation.

During the 19th century, experts began to attempt to define the architectural aesthetic of different regions throughout the world. According to Tzonis, this effort took two forms. First, specialists melded regionalist ideology with existing cultural and folkloric knowledge, identifying “regional enclaves” by spotting trends of common elements or attributes, such as the treatment of the site, the spatial arrangement of the buildings, and common materials or ornamentation styles in existing. Second, individuals and governments commissioned the construction of new buildings that served “as markers to affirm the identity and boundaries of a region and the rights of its appropriation by a group.” If there were no extant structures in the region, the designers or clients set up archaeological studies with the aim of discovering native materials that would lend regional authenticity to their new structures. In most cases, the construction of a regional canon was associated with an ethnic-based nationalist movement, often secessionist in nature: a struggle in the margins against a central authority.

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44 Ibid., p. 15.
45 Qtd. in Tzonis, “Introducing an Architecture,” p. 15.
The trajectory of regionalist architectural theory shifted dramatically with the appearance of the writings of the American historian Lewis Mumford (1895-1990) in the early 1920s. Mumford viewed regionalism not so much as rebellious political ideology, but rather focused more on its potential to engage with universal ideologies and dominant cultures than resist them.47 Mumford envisioned an on-going process of negotiation between regional vernacular styles and what had become, by the 1920s, the global preeminence of Modernism. Mumford was not against Modernism, but felt that an erosion of values had accompanied the coming of the machine and automation: “The brotherhood of the machine,” he writes, “is not a substitute for the brotherhood of people. The problem therefore lies not with science or technology but with society, institutions and morality failures.”48 Therefore, Mumford believed that when it comes to architecture, designers should not try to produce a building entirely divorced from modern sensibilities. He writes, “If one seeks to reproduce such a building in our own day, every mark on it will betray the fact that it is fake, and the harder the architect works to conceal that fact, the more patent the fact will be.” He continues, “The great lesson of history—and this applies to all the arts—is that the past cannot be recaptured except in spirit.” Therefore, “Our task is not to imitate the past, but to understand it, so that we may face the opportunity of our own day and deal with them in an equally creative spirit.”49

Mumford recognized that the “spirit” of the past was an exceedingly imprecise concept. However, he argued that this process required due time, as well as a certain degree of natural development. The manifestation of a truly regional architecture was not simply a matter of “using the most available local material, or of coping with some

47 Lefaivre, “Critical Regionalism,” p. 34.
simple form of construction that our ancestors used, for want of anything better, a century or two ago.” The regional is not simply “the rough, the primitive, the purely local,” but an aesthetic character that would only come with repeated inquiry and sufficient patience. This sentiment is echoed in Mumford’s belief that a regional aesthetic cannot merely consist of superficial styling that alludes to that region’s past, but must also be practical, in that it must “closely meet the actual conditions of life” and make “a people feel at home in their environment.” In short, good architecture should make an effort to “reflect and enhance the purposes and ideals which characterize a particular age and people.” Therefore, while the architect must meet the functional needs of the community, he may not do so in any way he pleases. Instead, his designs should “serve something more than the immediate needs,” reflecting “the degree of order, of co-operation, or intelligence, or sensitiveness, that characterize community.”

Thus, we see in this short history of regionalism a number of similarities in sentiment between these regionalists and the Aga Khan: the primacy of the past and historical memory (De Crescenzi), the importance of nature and climate and, therefore, of place, on design (Shaftesbury), the sensible use of materials and technology with a focus on people (Mumford), and finally, the importance of the native aesthetic, or in the words of Goethe, an architecture “in need of no translation.” As we move into the next part of this thesis, we must keep these ideas in mind. Do the premiated projects reflect the Aga Khan’s outlook or that of a typical regionalist? If so, do these regionalist values share anything in common with the values of Islam?

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50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p. 38.
Part II

In the previous chapter, we explored the Aga Khan’s interest in establishing an architectural award and found his personal values much in line with the critical regionalist school of architectural theory. However, while the Aga Khan continues to exercise significant influence over the direction of the Award as the Chairman of the Steering Committee, it is important to note that once the Committee appoints the Master Jury, the Aga Khan ceases official involvement with the selection of the winning projects. Thus, it would be a mistake to assume that the premiated projects as a whole directly reflect the values enumerated in the Aga Khan’s various public speeches. Therefore, we must undertake a detailed assessment of the close to 100 projects awarded the AKAA over the past thirty years.

The ultimate goal of this process is to identify any underlying trends that may be helpful in clarifying the Award’s impact on local, regional and global conceptions of Islam as a faith, a culture and a way of life. I chose to divide the body of award-winning projects into three broad categories: projects that focus on the restoration of buildings or preservation of neighborhoods or whole cities (Chapter 2), projects that aim to produce a positive social impact beyond the scope of architecture and planning (Chapter 3), and projects that represent entirely new contributions to the built environment (Chapter 4).

This method creates both advantages and disadvantages. For instance, themes will not always neatly fit within one of the three categories of projects. A characteristic of a project typically valued by the Award’s juries over the past ten cycles could possibly be found in a new construction project, a conservation plan, or a community development scheme. Therefore, the reader will notice some repetition in the following chapters. On
the other hand, this form of categorization is useful in that it roughly mirrors the different approaches demanded of an architect or planner by the nature of a project. In other words, a restoration project naturally presents a different set of challenges and potential solutions than does a new construction project. As such, similar types of projects should be considered together.

Furthermore, it must be noted that this discussion will not include each and every project awarded over the course of the AKAA’s history. Not only do space constraints preclude such efforts, but also the awarded projects are, in my view, of different levels of interest and importance. Therefore, the projects I present here are only the ones I determined to be most pertinent to the discussion at hand. While this obviously opens up this work to my own subjectivity, by reviewing each and every project on its own merit and referencing as many projects as possible, I have made every effort to limit the subjectivity of the analysis that follows.

In the interest of clarity, I should note that of the ninety-four awarded projects, twenty-six are located in the Middle East, twenty-six in Africa, thirteen in South Asia, twelve in Turkey, twelve South-east Asia, and five in Europe.\(^\text{52}\) Twenty-two of these ninety-four projects are restoration efforts, twenty are community revitalization projects, and forty-four are new construction projects. The reader may gain an idea of how many projects within a category pertain to a certain theme by the lists of pertinent projects I include in the footnotes.

\(^{52}\) In these calculations, I included Iran in the Middle East category and Uzbekistan in the Europe category, although both are certainly peripheral. In the case of the universal building systems (discussed later in this thesis), I placed these projects both in their region of origin, the Middle East.
Chapter II: Restoration Projects and the Preservation of the Islamic Past

This chapter examines those awarded projects that sought, and in some cases continue to seek, to either restore an individual building or number of buildings of importance, or set out to preserve an entire village or city ward. Although the Aga Khan first initiated the AKAA in response to what he took to be the excessive influence of Western architecture on the new construction taking place throughout the Islamic world, it is clear from his speeches that his interests lie not only in the future of Muslim architecture but also in its past. Therefore, while the Award focuses on shifting the architectural norms of the region from mimicry of alien Western forms to designing within an “appropriate” Islamic aesthetic, the search for the latter must start with the past, for Islam today is the summation of centuries of development. Thus, we find in the AKAA profile a noticeable awareness of the past, manifest here in the awarding of a number of projects that in each case aspire to preserve the built record of a former time through restoration efforts. The following discussion aims to flesh out a number of trends common to these restoration and preservation projects with an eye towards both the Aga Khan’s personal inclinations and the critical regionalist framework established in the previous chapter.

Authenticity

Perhaps the most important trend in this category of projects is the importance placed on the authenticity of restoration efforts by jury after jury. My own use of the word “authenticity” (one not officially employed in AKAA publications) refers to a commitment on the part of the restorer or preservationist to approximate as closely as possible the building materials and methods deployed at the time of a building’s first
construction. For instance, while juries may appreciate the use of traditional mortaring techniques or the reuse of local stone foraged from the surrounding site, they are liable to denigrate anything but the most sparing use of concrete or steel reinforcement. In order to better understand this articulated ideal, let us examine several projects in which it is particularly evident.

Awarded the AKAA in its most recent cycle (2004-2007), the Amiriya complex of buildings in Rada’a, Yemen (southeast of Sana’a, the capital city) once served as the eponymous private residence of the Amir Ibn ‘Abd Al-Wahab, the last sultan of Yemen’s Tahirid dynasty in the very early years of the 16th century. The site, which is comprised of an ornately painted prayer hall, a madrasa and several rooms that probably served as private quarters for the sultan, stands out in modern day Rada’a. The whitewashed plaster exterior of its buildings are juxtaposed with the simple earth and brick construction of the rest of the city (figure 1).

However, less than thirty years ago the complex was in disrepair following several centuries of neglect. On all but one side (due west), the façades bulged and sagged and most of the complex’s flat ceilings had collapsed. Perhaps most importantly, and causal to the buildings’ deterioration, the qudad, an ancient waterproofing substance of Roman origins made of lime mortar and volcanic composite, had fallen off or cracked in several places, leaving the interiors of the buildings exposed to the elements. The restoration project, led by the Iraqi conservator Dr. Selma Al-Radi and one of the first

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53 Following the death of Sultan Amir, imams of the conservative Zaydi order allegedly deemed the prayer hall’s decoration a distraction to worshippers, closed it and cut off its waqf funding. (Homi K. Bhabha, ed., Intervention Architecture: Building for Change (The Aga Khan Award for Architecture: 10th Award Cycle), New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2007, p. 86.)

54 Completed Technical Reviews for the 1986 and 1995 Award cycles and was a member of the 1989 and 1992 Steering Committees.
ever in Yemen, began in earnest in 1983 and was funded by the governments of Yemen and The Netherlands.\textsuperscript{55} A second phase of restoration occurred from 2003-2005, when a self-funded Italian team from the Centro Conservazione Archaeologica in Rome set about restoring nearly 600 square meters of wall and dome paintings, mostly located in the prayer hall.

In her Architectural Review for the project, Al-Radi describes how she and Izzi Muhammad Gas’a’a, the master mason on the project, constantly discussed “how to ‘reverse’ or rather ‘reinterpret’ traditional building techniques for the purposes of restoration.”\textsuperscript{56} For instance, in the 1950s, concrete made qudad virtually obsolete in Yemeni construction, offering a far less labor-intensive method of mortaring stone. After much trial and error, and by seeking the advice of older masons who had learned the craft of qudad masonry in their youth, Al-Radi and her team recreated the proper ratio of ingredients and utilized the traditional mortar in their restoration. Al-Radi latter published the formula, leading to its use throughout the country.

This commitment to traditional materials is echoed in other parts of the project. For instance, after the restoration team removed the old layers of damaged qudad from the roofs of the complex buildings, they found that the ceiling support beams were rotted from water damage. Rather than repair the roof structure with modern pressure-treated lumber, the team found a producer who grew ‘ilb, the specie of tree from which the beams were originally extracted, and set about cutting down and drying the trees to size in accordance with traditional Yemeni custom. Similar appreciation of the past led the

\textsuperscript{55} The Dutch Tropen Instituut of Amsterdam served as the administrative arm for the project from 1983-1988. Around the time of the beginning of restoration, the Dutch government had already committed to improving the infrastructure of Rada’a. The American Institute for Yemeni Studies took on administrative responsibilities from 1996-2003.

team to repair the interior walls not with modern drywall but with mud and straw. Even in their efforts to strengthen the site’s stonework, the team was able to use a method indigenous to the region in all but one case, whereby they removed one stone at a time, cleaning the infill and joints, and then replacing it with new mortar. This method is described in Italian as “scucio-cucio,” or in English, “unstitch-stitch.”

Al-Radi notes that the restoration of the Amiriya complex has “awakened” a new “local awareness of the aesthetics of architecture.” While the Yemeni had once been among the “greatest vernacular builders, inventing a myriad of local styles,” awareness of this heritage is rare among Yemenis, who “prefer to build in the so-called modern style using concrete with a stone façade,” incorporating traditional decorations. The end result, according to Al-Radi, is a “hideous mess.” However, through the attention Amiriya receives from the news media, Yemen’s architectural heritage is gaining greater appreciation among the masses, which will serve to not only preserve other important monuments of the past but also initiate the creation of a modern, distinctly Yemeni aesthetic for new construction in the country. Thus, the project has a legacy of influence beyond the walls of the complex, developing a new norm for restoration and taking another step toward the discovery of a new “appropriate” architecture for the Muslim world.\(^57\)

A similar example of this sort of project is the Great Omari Mosque, awarded the AKAA in 1989. Situated in the city of Sidon, Lebanon, roughly forty-five kilometers south of Beirut, the 13th century mosque stands on the foundations of an ancient Crusader fort. Although the structure had long been neglected due to lack of funds for maintenance, it suffered severe damage from shelling and gunfire during the Israeli

\(^{57}\) Al-Radi, Architect’s Review, p. 6-7.
invasion of 1982 when it served as a main center of the Lebanese resistance. By the end of the offensive the vaulted prayer hall, three domes of the *riwaq* (open-air arcade or portico) and several supporting walls had collapsed, the minaret was detached from the main building, and the surrounding land lay pockmarked by the intensive Israeli bombing effort.

The restoration process began before the occupation ended when a native of Sidon, Rafiq al-Hariri, offered to build the community a new mosque. However, the community preferred to rebuild the older building and work began under the aegis of restoration expert Dr. Saleh Lamei Mostafa, financed by al-Hariri and completed by his own construction company. Of primary importance were the interventions necessary to rescue the building’s structural integrity and prevent its imminent collapse. Nevertheless, Dr. Lamei Mostafa first ordered a thorough workup of the soil, mortar and stone used in the mosque, also recording the types of fabrics used inside. This step reflects a wider concern for the authenticity of the materials to be used during the restoration. For instance, when it was determined the minaret would need to be completely rebuilt, each stone already in use was carefully brought down, numbered, then put back in its original place. Extra stone was salvaged from adjacent lots and worked with hammer and chisel (*figure 2*). Workers cleaned stones by hand with water, eschewing new modern chemicals and mechanical cleaners.

Similar sensitivity is found throughout the restoration; the process required workers to relearn several traditional crafts. Furthermore, extensive research was done before replacing the wooden doors and shutters, lattice windows, chandeliers and lanterns in order to determine the appropriateness of these replacements to the period of the
mosques first construction (*figure 3*). Most importantly, very few new materials were introduced to the site. An epoxy resin was used to consolidate walls and fill cracks, while the only other “intrusive modern material,” as described in an official AKAA publication, was steel used for reinforcement.

Thus, we see in these two projects a commitment to authenticity; in this case the improvement of a structure without losing sight of its place in the context of history. This idea of remaining true to the character of a building is found elsewhere in this category of projects. For instance, it is often noted in much of the literature regarding the award-winning restoration efforts that workers completed only the most urgent interventions critical to maintaining the structural integrity of a building. They often avoided superficial repair work in order to show the age of the structure and prevent innovation where the original detailing was deteriorated beyond comprehension.

A very good example of this sort of deliberate incompletion of restoration for the sake of historical understanding is found in the effort to repair the Al-Abbas Mosque (awarded the AKAA in 2004) in Asnaf, Yemen, a rural area southeast of Sana’a. This classical cubic structure dated to around 1125-1126 and erected under the auspices of the Sultan Musa bin Muhammed al-Fitti, one of the last of the sultans of the Sulayhid dynasty that ruled Yemen from 1046-1137. The mosque, named after a holy man believed to be buried on the mosque’s grounds, is a simple cubic structure free of any noteworthy design elements save for its intricate coffered ceiling, one of the only of its kind still preserved. The wooden ceiling is gilded and painted in tempera. It displays

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59 A number of other projects within this category share a similar approach to materials and methods. For another example please see Al-Aqsa Mosque in Al-Haram Al-Sharif, Jerusalem (awarded in 1986)
eighty distinct geometric and floral motifs with apparent influence from other cultures, including those of the Sassanid (of Persia), Fatimid\textsuperscript{60} (of modern-day Egypt) and Ghaznavid (of Central Asia) dynasties.

By most expert accounts the ceiling represents a significant contribution in the effort to understand the artistic sensibilities of 12\textsuperscript{th} century Yemeni society. Unfortunately, in the early 1980s the ceiling began to rot and warp, prompting the Yemeni Government’s General Organization for Antiquities, Museums and Manuscripts to petition the French Center for Yemeni Studies for their help in its preservation. UNESCO funding financed the dismantling and removal of the ceiling to the National Museum at Sana’a, at which point the French hired archaeologist and conservator Marylene Barret to restore it in 1986.

This was done at a fine level using cotton swabs and solvent to first clean the ceiling boards and then diluted resin to fix the decorative features. In so doing, as the official AKAA publication notes, the restoration team respected the history of the ceiling.\textsuperscript{61} For instance, in several places the tempera paint was completely washed away. At these locations, rather than in-painting, restorationists decided to leave the areas as they were found. When the team inserted a new board into the ceiling, they left it undecorated or painted it only on its ends, leaving the middle part bare in order to help distinguish between the ceiling’s new and old elements. Other parts were left untouched altogether in order to show the state of the ceiling before the restoration (figures 4, 5). Once this step was finished, the team transported the individual boards back to Asnaf and reassembled the ceiling on a new supporting structure on site.

\textsuperscript{60} The Sulayhid dynasty was nominally a part of the Fatimid dynasty.

\textsuperscript{61} Philippa Baker, ed., \textit{Architecture and Polyphony: Building in the Islamic World Today} (The Aga Khan Award for Architecture: 9\textsuperscript{th} Award Cycle), London: Thames and Hudson, 2004, p. 70.
In its citation for the restoration the Jury noted that the project “demonstrates a sensitivity in dealing with the building as a living fabric.” Indeed, it appears the primary virtue of the project in the eyes of the Jury was its restraint against an over-restoration of the building. The danger of over-restoration lies in the complications of record, or lack thereof. For instance, in a case for which the original state of a building is unknown, a team may find itself so caught up in restoring the building to its former glory that they loosen scientific and historical standards of research (in place to assure the accuracy of the restoration process) or abandon them altogether, at which point innovation without basis takes hold. With this kind of innovation, the true spirit of a building as intended by its architect and his benefactor is lost. Thus, in the eyes of the AKAA Jury, projects committed to preserving the past with exactitude was must be commended. “Invent nothing” commands Shafiq al-Imam, conservator of Azem Palace in Damascus, Syria and winner of the AKAA in 1983.

**Adaptive Reuse**

In many cases these restorations are viewed as interventions to preserve the monuments of the past in the face of new pressures from modernization and globalization, whether overpopulation, traffic congestion, or demolition, in order to make way for new buildings or thoroughfares. These buildings are not always restored for their inherent value. In fact, the AKAA has emphasized the importance of finding new purposes for old buildings, commonly known as “adaptive reuse.” In a sense, this is a way of accommodating the new within the old—a way of using an old shell for a new

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63 Over-restoration is a constant issue for the Jury. For an example of a project in which this restraint was in question, see the AKAA publications on Shah-Rukn-i-‘Alam, Multan, Pakistan (awarded in 1983).
64 Another fine example of this sort of project can be found in the restoration of the Darb Qirmiz Quarter, Cairo, Egypt (awarded the AKAA in 1983).
purpose. Likewise, projects that were able to integrate an historic building into the fabric of a more modern, homogenous city have also been favored by the juries over time. Both of these trends have implications for our understanding of modernity and Islam, and therefore deserve further attention.

An illustrative example of adaptive reuse is the National Museum in Doha, Qatar, awarded the AKAA in its first cycle. Official AKAA publications trace the origins of the project to the oil boom of the 1960s and 1970s, during which time a number of struggling North African and Middle Eastern countries experienced an unprecedented injection of export income. As the AKAA notes, with this prosperity came “the inevitable alteration in traditional life styles, values, and sense of heritage.” It was in the face of these changes that the Qatar National Museum was founded “to preserve for posterity essential physical artifacts, mental images, and historical facts and ideas.” Here, Qatars can come to “learn about the past, gaining insights into their own history and identity.”65 The purpose served by the museum is echoed by its physical attributes.

Preparations for opening a national museum in Qatar began when H.H. Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamed Al-Thani ascended the throne in February 1972. The complex chosen to house it is the Amiri Palace, the former seat of the ruling Al-Thani family. The Palace was originally built in the nineteenth century when Doha stood under Ottoman suzerainty. Sheikh Abdullah bin Qasim Al-Thani, head of the city’s ruling family, desired a seat of power separate from the Ottoman garrison in the center of the city. He built the Amiri on the shores of the Persian Gulf and ruled there until 1923, at which point the Ottoman Empire was dissolved, native rule reestablished, and the Al-Thani seat of power

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moved back to the city’s core. Unfortunately, the complex went out of use a mere fifteen years later and by the 1970s stood in near ruins.

In order to suitably prepare the complex for its new use the planners and restorers made a number of significant changes. For instance, the complex originally consisted of five individual courtyards separated on each side by walls that divided the space into a public governing section and private living quarters for the Sultan and his two sons. To make the compound more accessible and friendlier to the public, the courtyard walls were knocked down and the courtyards relandscaped and integrated into a single space. Also, due to the degree to which the buildings were damaged, several had to be dismantled and rebuilt on their original foundations. This was done both with traditional and modern materials. Many of the decorative elements were either simplified or embellished.

In many ways these changes seem at odds with the aforementioned theme of retaining the authenticity of the past. However, according to the AKAA, the ultimate goal of the project was “to preserve the ambience of the traditional setting and to present the space and spirit embodied in the old buildings as ones worthy of preservation and of consideration for contemporary applications.”

This goal was tested when it became apparent that two new buildings, one for a Museum of the State and another for the Marine Museum and Aquarium, would be needed to accommodate the new museum’s collections. The former required three floors, yielding a height that would easily dwarf the existing Palace buildings. In order to avoid this outcome, the architects of the building sank the structure down one floor, building the bottom level underground. The front façade was arcaded to reflect the arcades of the rest of the complex while the other façades were kept simple. The latter building was pushed to the shoreline, echoing the

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66 Ibid., p. 171.
location of the Palace before land reclamation efforts pushed the coast out to accommodate a new corniche road. The architects were careful to ensure that the building remain lower than any of the palatial walls, and though they choose to build a thoroughly modern facility, they rendered the exterior white in keeping with the rest of the buildings (figure 6). Thus, while major changes were made and some sense of the Amiri’s past was certainly lost, a restoration effort at least considerate of that past allowed for the preservation of an important part of Qatar’s history that now accommodates a Museum whose mission is to do the same.

The National Museum of Qatar is clearly an effort not only to blend new buildings into an old complex but also old buildings into a new landscape. This cause was also taken up in the restoration of the Old City in Bukhara, Uzbekistan (awarded the AKAA in 1995). Bukhara, a city roughly 500 kilometers southwest of the capital of Tashkent, dates as far back as the first millennium BC. It came to preeminence during the eighth century AD when it was conquered by the famous Umayyad Caliphate, under the patronage of which it became a famous center of Islamic culture and scholarship. In the official publication for the 1995 AKAA recipients, the city’s oldest district, home to nearly 500 ancient monuments, is described as a “jewel of medieval Muslim urbanism.”67 However, under Soviet governance the district was neglected in favor of expansion and new construction, leaving many of its oldest buildings dilapidated and the area economically unviable.

While Uzbekistan gained independence only in 1990, restoration of the Old City began in the 1970s under Soviet administration. The restoration focused on a number of...

key ancient monuments, including mosques, *hammams* (baths), stores and private residents, each of which was found an appropriate new purpose after intense historical research into its former function. More important than the individual intervention, however, is the holistic approach taken in the restoration effort. Following the Soviet withdrawal the restoration team began to tear down the “modern eyesores” of the 1950s, opening up new vistas that better complemented the ancient buildings. Infrastructure improvement accompanied this destruction as roads were paved in order to keep down the dust. Water and electricity were added. Slowly but surely, this long-suffering “derelict slum” turned back into “a viable, functioning, living urban space with a cultural and aesthetic focus that is attractive to local visitors and foreign tourists alike.”

As life returned to the district, these monuments of the past were reintegrated into the rest of the city. As the official AKAA publication observes, these buildings are “no longer isolated, like objects on show in a museum, but are once again in context, restored and knit into a thriving and bustling city in harmony with the surrounding modern areas of new Bukhara.” Likewise, the technical reviewer of the project, the aforementioned Selma Al-Radi, notes the project put the old town to “versatile and everyday uses,” making it “an essential as well as entertaining part of peoples [sic] lives” without making the district into a “theme park.” In the eyes of the AKAA, with its newly found life the Old City’s “sense of place has been enhanced,” a benefit to the city and its inhabitants and an incentive for other cities to follow suit. The project’s success “sends a strong

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69 Ibid., p. 5.  
71 Ibid.  
message to the rest of the Islamic world of the importance to restore and reinvest old towns with new ways of life.”

**Revitalization and Sustainability**

The ability of a project to contribute to the community has proven to be an extremely important criterion for the AKAA and its juries over the last thirty years. Often this contribution takes the form of social or economic revitalization, whether through the increased local employment of local craftsman and masons, the reclamation of formerly lost (and potentially profitable) traditional tradecrafts, or the creation of a tourist attraction and subsequent industry. The concern here is for a program or plan that accounts for future prosperity, or in the case of a long-term project, a model, whether legal, economic or bureaucratic, that allows for continued involvement in restoration and preservation efforts, as well as “replicability” (or the potential for employing that model elsewhere). This theme obviously ties in with the Aga Khan’s concern for social impact and improvement of quality of life (discussed in Chapter 1), a value we will explore in the context of actual projects in this section.

For instance, in the restoration of Ali Qapu, Chehel Sutun and Hasht Behesht, three magnificent Safavid palace buildings in Isfahan, Iran (awarded the AKAA in 1980), efforts were made by the Istituto per Studii Medio e Estremo Oriente (IsMEO), an Italian restoration organization hired by the Iranian government to run the project, to train and equip a number of young Iranian experts with the skills needed to work in the industry.

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73 Davidson and Serageldin, *Architecture Beyond Architecture*, p. 29. Other projects that fit within this category are Rüstem Pasa Caravanserai, Edirne, Turkey (awarded in 1980), Ertegün House, Bodrum, Turkey (awarded in 1980), Kairouan Conservation Programme, Kairouan, Tunisia (awarded in 1992), Palace Parks Programme, Istanbul, Turkey (awarded in 1992), New Life for Old Structures, various locations, Iran (awarded in 2001), and Old City of Jerusalem Revitalization Programme, Jerusalem (awarded in 2004).

74 A word used often employed in AKAA publications.
beyond the completion date of the project. IsMEO encouraged the National Organization for the Conservation of Historical Monuments of Iran (NOCHMI) to establish its own construction department with experts in masonry, plastering, carpentry, woodworking and mirrorwork, thereby ensuring the availability of a well-trained work force and avoiding the need to contract work out to individual firms. The Instituto also involved students of the Isfahan School of Fine Arts in the restorative painting of the three structures, negotiating with the School to have the work count as part of the normal curriculum. The organization handed out more than 100 certificates of collaboration, given to those who had worked with the organization for five-years, thereby certifying these workers’ experience and improving their chances of future employability on similar projects in Iran, a country rich in ancient monuments and complexes (figure 7). Finally, IsMEO’s involvement in the project provided a means to involving the Italian government (in cooperation with the government of Iran) in the financing of the study of architectural and painting restoration for nineteen Iranian students in Italy. In all, 100 percent of the labor the project was Iranian.  

To the juries, just as important as the education of the workers on a project is the education of that project’s direct beneficiaries: the community. In the Old City of Jerusalem Revitalization Program (awarded the AKAA in 2004), the Welfare Association, a Geneva-based organization concerned with improving all aspects of the lives of Palestinians, developed a community outreach program that aims to alert the public to the value of historic buildings and directly involve them in the process of restoration and revitalization of their neighborhoods. This outreach program organizes

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76 Davidson and Serageldin, Architecture Beyond Architecture, p. 87.
the publication of documentation relevant to a project, sets meetings, workshops and lectures at local schools and religious organizations and organizes summer camps for children, thereby encouraging a sense of community pride in the Old City.\textsuperscript{77} The future agenda of the program calls for the establishment of a public information center with all the documentation relevant to the project open for public perusal as well as the founding of the Jerusalem Institute for the Preservation of Architectural Heritage in Palestine.

According to \textit{Aysıl Tükel Yavuz, author of the On Site Review, the outreach program is essential to the project’s overall success, for “a balance must be established between the services provided for the population and the conservation of cultural property, and the link is the user.”}\textsuperscript{78} In other words, the appropriate restoration of a building accounts for the needs of that building’s future user.

The final project in this category that I will discuss is the Rehabilitation of the City of Shibam, Yemen (awarded the AKAA in 2007). Shibam is an isolated city of mud-brick high-rise buildings dating to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (\textit{figure 8}).

The restoration of these buildings is of less interest to us than the effect the project has had on the community, for as it is said in the official AKAA publication for the project, “the motor of this rehabilitation project is not the preservation of buildings but rather the creation of new economic and social structures that will restore the vitality of the city” by giving “local people the means and the confidence to take concrete steps towards improving their lives.”\textsuperscript{79} This was achieved by providing a subsidy to the inhabitants of the oldest buildings in Shibam, who in the past had essentially been taxed for their living arrangements by the legal prohibition of development rights and building to a lower

\textsuperscript{77} Baker, \textit{Architecture and Polyphony}, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{79} Babha, \textit{Intervention Architecture}, p. 35.
building standard. The subsidy, in conjunction with funding provided by the residents themselves, provided the necessary capital for the owners to undertake the restoration of their own properties. The owners hired the master builder of their choice and managed the construction budget. This effort created a new-founded interest in the community and its culture as well as a new source of capital and a number of community-based organizations, most focusing on the adult education and tradecraft, began to spring up. As the working population became more skilled and more employable, the quality of life in the city began to improve.\textsuperscript{80}

Thus, we see three values come to the fore after examining these restoration projects: authenticity, adaptive reuse and the replicability or sustainability of a project. All three values have an obvious champion in the Aga Khan, the regionalist. Authenticity and adaptive reuse represent a respect for the past, manifested in careful knowledge of the specific history of a building, neighborhood or city and its people. In Chapter I, we found that the Aga Khan believes the future of Islamic architecture will be found in its past and that regionalists believe any people must look back before they can more forward. Likewise, the replicability or sustainability of a project alludes to a future place in time where the AKAA is no longer needed, for the Muslim communities of the world will have regained their sense of architectural identity as well as their ability to help themselves. This is an ideal the Aga Khan has mentioned before. But are these values Islamic? Before I attempt to answer this question, let us first look at the other two categories of projects: community revitalization and new construction.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., p. 38. Other projects with positive impact beyond the built environment include the Conservation of Sidi Bou Säïd, Tunis, Tunisia (1980), Conservation of Mostar Old Town, Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina (1986), Conservation of Old Sana’a, Yemen (1995), Rehabilitation of Hebron Old Town, Hebron, Palestine (1998) and the Rehabilitation of the Walled City, Nicosia, Cyprus (2007).
Figure 1: The Amiriya complex, Rada’a, Yemen

Figure 2: Salvaged stone. Great Omari Mosque, Sidon, Lebanon.
Figure 3: Period lanterns. Great Omari Mosque, Sidon, Lebanon.

Figure 4: Coffered ceiling with incomplete section. Al-Abbas Mosque, Asnaf, Yemen.
Figure 5: Detail of incompletion. Al-Abbas Mosque, Asnaf, Yemen.

Figure 6: Integration of new and old buildings. National Museum of Qatar, Doha, Qatar.
Figure 7: A traditional mason. Ali Qapu, Chehel Sutun and Hasht Behesht, Isfahan, Iran.

Figure 8: City of Shibam from nearby elevation. Shibam, Yemen.
Chapter III: Community and Infrastructure Development Projects

We have examined the projects that seek to rehabilitate ailing buildings and neighborhoods. Let us move on to projects that hope to do the same for entire communities. In a way, the following are both the least and most architectural projects awarded by the AKAA. In a conventional sense, these projects are forays into urban planning, in that they concern the greater organization of buildings and the vital infrastructure for living rather than the design of the buildings themselves. On the other hand, these projects engage with the architecture of life: the tectonics of successful living.

In this chapter, I will approach these community development and revitalization projects in much the same way as in the previous chapter, attempting to find key themes shared by a majority with the goal of discovering the AKAA’s contribution to the fields of urban planning and, in a broader sense, development studies.

Many of these projects are straight-forward infrastructure development programs.81 They deal with building new sewage or water systems, improving traffic patterns or regularizing slums by providing more stable, simple housing. Although these projects represent successful efforts at revitalizing a town, city or region and can be quite interesting in their own right, I will not discuss them at length here, for methodologically they approach infrastructure development in fairly conventional ways. Instead, this section will focus on two themes, universality in development and defining public space, and the ways in which awarded projects have defined them over the years.

“Universality” in development is in many ways a rephrasing of “replicability,” discussed above in Chapter 2. By its use, I mean to highlight a trend in these community and infrastructure development projects of methods designed to be viable anywhere in the world. The following two projects—one a microfinance project, the other a universal building system—both represent an attempt to develop a strategy of development simple enough that it can be replicated throughout the world.

The Grameen Bank Housing Program in Bangladesh (awarded the AKAA in 1989) was started in 1976 in the village of Jobra, Bangladesh by Dr. Mohammed Yunus, then Director of the Rural Economics Program at the Department of Economics, part of nearby Chittagong University. Jobra is in rural Bangladesh and at the time its poorest inhabitants lived on marginal lands in poorly-constructed shelters or improvised homes, exposed to the monsoons, floods and cyclonic storms that plague the small country in South Asia.82 These are conditions not uncommon to Bangladesh: at the time of the publication of the 1989 Award’s gazetteer, Bangladesh’s population numbered seventy-eight million, eighty-five percent of whom lived in rural areas. Sixty percent of those were landless, and destitute as the national average per capita income was just US $140 per annum.83

Yunus started the Program to provide credit to the rural, landless poor for use in income-generating activities, such as weaving, mat-making, pottery-making, sewing, small scale trading and the rearing of various kinds of small livestock (all of which can be done on very little land). Before Yunus started Grameen, the poor had trouble

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acquiring the start-up capital needed to buy the materials and tools for each of these trades, for regular banks were hesitant to lend to people without collateral. However, with Yunus’s plan borrowers required no collateral, instead receiving a loan with a very low interest rate and paying off their debt through their own commercial and artisanal activities. To insure this repayment occurred on time, Grameen required that borrowers organize themselves into small groups, normally composed of around five borrowers that took out a loan together. If one of the five defaulted on a payment, the other four did as well. Thus, as such, members were incentivized to ensure their partners paid on time.\textsuperscript{84}

Since then the Program has become a fully-functioning bank with private investors and a highly structured program of lending and borrowing. The Bank also added a Housing Loan Program to its lending portfolio in October 1984 in response to demands for better living conditions as borrowers’ incomes went up. The Program makes funds for construction available to members of the bank in good standing. Loans can be taken out in two denominations: one to cover the cost of constructing a very basic home, the other for a slightly larger one (\textit{figure 9}). The size of these loans has been perfected over time as the Bank has come to understand the general cost of materials in the area. Just enough is provided to cover construction and bank officials refrain from involving themselves in the design or construction processes. The work is completed by the borrower, who is therefore able to tailor his new home to his needs and lifestyle.\textsuperscript{85}

By June 1988 Grameen had distributed US $133 million with a 98.32 percent recovery rate. At that time, estimates of membership were made at around 53,000,
increasing as the Bank started more and more branches throughout the country. Each of these branches is fairly self-contained, allowing the Bank to continue to expand without the need for a large and expensive hierarchy. In general, this sort of system of micro-lending could be replicated anywhere in the world where poor populations are in need of credit to start up businesses and build homes, thereby giving it powerful potential for improving the quality of life in developing countries.

The second example of universality in development is the Sandbag Shelter Prototypes (awarded the AKAA in 2004). These prototypes buildings were designed by Iranian-born California-based architect Nader Khalili. Khalili, who saw a global need for housing: there are nearly seventeen million refugees and displaced persons in the world today, most of these victims of natural disasters and wars. His research in the deserts of Iran and California yielded a system of building using just simple sandbags, filled with the earth available at the site and barbed wire. This “Superadobe” system is extremely simple. Soil from the surrounding area is packed into natural or synthetic sandbags, often with a stabilizing material such as cement, lime or asphalt emulsion. These bags are then placed in circular courses, held in place by four-point, two-strand, galvanized barbed wire, and built up into single- and double-curvature compression shells corbelled at the top to form domes (figure 10). These structures are load-bearing and tensile, thereby resistant to earthquakes and other seismic activity; they are domed, thereby protected from hurricanes by their aerodynamic form; they are made of sandbags filled with earth, thereby resistant to the damage of floods and fires and insulated against both hot and humid and cold climates.

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86 Ibid., p. 65.
87 Ideally the bags are synthetic, ultraviolet-resistant and degradable. The last requirement allows temporary buildings to return to the earth naturally after use. (Baker, *Architecture and Polyphony*, p. 55)
The plan for an individual structure can be tailored to the needs of its inhabitants. In general, the larger domed space is surrounded by attached ancillary spaces used for various purposes. The structures are often temporary and after use can be allowed to naturally degrade. Alternatively, they can also be rendered with mud daub or any other plaster finishing and fired for a more permanent abode (figure 11). As the Jury pointed out in their Citation for the project, the sandbag structures are not imposed on a landscape, but grow out of it, and the minimal training needed to master the technique allows for inhabitants to participate in the construction of their homes. The buildings have not only been used by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Program as shelters for refugees coming into Iran from Iraq in 1995, but the structures proved structurally sound enough to be awarded California building permits. This sort of earth architecture holds tremendous promise for accommodating misplaced persons or the extremely impoverished in remote areas where suitable building materials and funding are not readily available.88

Defining Public Space

Our second theme, the division between public and private space, is quite important in Islam. Traditionally, this concept is defined in relation to the home and often mentioned in the same breath with the separation of women from non-familial men. The allegory of the harem is also quite closely associated with the public/private division. This concept is also defined in relation to the mosque, which serves both as a house of prayer and a place for political gathering. However, the following two projects develop a more nuanced, less Orientalized conception of public space in Islam. In the eyes of the

juries the public space should be a place of quiet and contemplation, whether for the individual or the family.

Samir Kassir Square (awarded the AKAA in 2007) is located in the busy Central Business District of Beirut, Lebanon and was designed by Vladimir Djurovic, a Lebanese landscape architect. It was commissioned by Solidere (also known as the Lebanese Company for Development and Reconstruction). Solidere has been rebuilding the war-damaged central area of Beirut since the mid-1990s and today stands as Lebanon’s largest company, having been granted powers of eminent domain by the Municipality of Beirut. The Square is comprised of two old ficus trees large enough to shade the entire space encircled by raised timber deck, a reflecting pool with a cascade at one end, and a long bench of solid stone. The space is bordered on three sides by buildings and by a street on the fourth side (figure 12).

The Square is less important for its landscaping than for what it provides. In the words of the 2007 Jury, “The importance of this work lies not only in the assimilation and transformation of its context, but also in what it necessitates, or rather how it actually transforms. This project conceives the public urban space as a shift in the city’s rhythm. It emerges as a contemplative space where the diverse is celebrated and allowed to exist in serene silence.”89 This is achieved in part by the reflecting pool, which separates the Square from the busy street to the west and blocks out the noise of traffic, as well as the ficus trees which cool the space during the hot Beirut summers. The Square’s importance lies in the fact that it does not attract activity. As the AKAA noted, “In the way it draws people towards it, the square highlights the positive role that public spaces can play as

89 Babha, Intervention Architecture, p. 20.
places of refuge, calm and contemplation—at a time when many of the public spaces in our cities are being programmed primarily for leisure and recreation.”

Bagh-e-Ferdowsi, in Tehran, Iran (awarded the AKAA in 2001) is another example of this sort of public space. The creation of this garden, located on the slopes of the Alborz Mountains to the north of the city, must be framed in its recent history. Since the 1950s rapid population growth in Tehran has created pressure for land, leading to the destruction of many of the public and private gardens in the city. Recently the Tehran Municipality has supported many efforts to protect the natural environment on the outskirts of Tehran. Bagh-e-Ferdowsi, one of these projects, is a thirty hectare park with a series of steep gullies and impressive, large boulders. Changes to the site included a number of paths up the slopes of the site, terraces, squares, sculptures and plantings, all designed to mesh into the natural topography of the land. The design also called for four cultural houses—one each for the four ethnic groups of Iran (Azeri, Kurdish, Turkmen and Zagros)— as well as an amphitheater to be built into the slope.

In the official AKAA publication, the appeal of the Bagh-e-Ferdowsi is described in much the same as it is for the Samir Kassir Square. The presence of traditional Persian oasis gardens with water courses running throughout creates a tranquil area for contemplation. The park is very popular among the public and is visited by thousands of visitors on the weekends including young people, couples and families. Some come alone in search of a quiet place to think, while others in groups picnic or visit the four cultural houses.

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90 Ibid., p. 22.
92 Ibid., p. 138.
houses, or watch a show at the amphitheater.\textsuperscript{93} Most important, the project provided a space outside the city to be used for whatever purpose Tehran’s resident’s desire.\textsuperscript{94}

The projects discussed above are interesting for the fact that each one focuses more on human activity than theie built form. The Grameen Bank strives first and foremost on lifting people out of poverty. Part of this process, of course, is building adequate shelters for the poor. When considering the greater scheme of the program, however, of primary interest to Yunus and his colleagues is providing the capital to start a business, for with financial success comes improvement in the physical well-being of the rural poor. Likewise, the two garden projects focus on providing a public space for contemplation and relaxation. Admittedly, the garden has historically been an important part of the Islamic built environment. It was often attributed spiritual significance as a parable for heaven through landscaping that referenced paradisiacal imagery found in the Qur’an. However, these gardens examined in this chapter lack specific references to these antecedents, and are notable for the space they provide, not their design. Finally, the Sandbag Shelter Prototypes, designed to become a universal building system, presents a way to help displaced peoples build semi-temporary shelter anywhere in the world. The prototypes, while inspired by the shelters of the nomadic tribes of Iran, do not draw upon any known Islamic aesthetic and their universality could even be interpreted as counter-regionalist, in that it does not encourage an architecture defined by place. Still, these projects could still be interpreted as Islamic, if not for their contribution to an aesthetic

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., p. 140.
\textsuperscript{94} Other projects in this category include Hayy Assafarat Landscaping and al-Kindi Plaza, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (1989), Landscaping Integration of the Soekarno-Hatta Airport, Cengkareng, Indonesia (1995) and Re-Forrestation Programme of the Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey (1995).
then for the values which they endorse. This possibility will be taken up in the conclusion after we examine the new construction projects in the next chapter.
Figure 9: A typical, small house funded by Grameen. Location unknown.

Figure 10: The construction of a sandbag shelter. Location unknown.
Figure 11: The plaster interior of a finished shelter. Location unknown.

Figure 12: The square from a distance, surrounded on three sides by new construction. Beirut, Lebanon.
Chapter IV: New Construction Projects

New buildings are by far the most tangible examples of the Islamic aesthetic identity endorsed by the juries of the AKAA. I began this thesis by discussing the impetus for the Award’s creation: one man’s displeasure with the encroachment of the Western Modernist aesthetic on traditional Islamic ideals. One of the endorsed values we have encountered in our exploration of the awarded projects so far—the primacy of place—is also found in the newly-constructed buildings that have received the AKAA. Of primary interest to this chapter is the interplay between East and West, between the “traditional” and the “modern.” The following chapter will serve primarily to explore the ways in which architects have attempted to meld these two paradigms, sorting the genuine attempts at accommodating conceptions of the Islamic past from the buildings that represent token Islamic flourishes on a Western-style base.

Modernity and Traditionalism: Avoiding Pastiche

The Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA) in Paris, France was awarded the AKAA in 1989. The project's origins can be traced to 1980, when representatives from eighteen Arab states[^5] met with the French government to discuss the establishment of an academic body devoted to encouraging the study of Arab history, politics, and culture in France and to promoting Arab-French cultural exchange. The French government obliged, agreeing to provide the land and establish a foundation of public utility subject to French law. The Arab states took on the responsibility of funding the building’s construction. After a proposal to site the building in the fifteenth arrondissement was rejected by a neighborhood alliance in 1981, the Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, found a spot on the Seine River in the more prestigious and centrally located fifth arrondissement.

[^5]: Libya and Egypt joined the contingent in 1984 and 1989, respectively.
Within the fifth lies the Latin Quarter, home to a number of the city’s best educational institutions and brimming with intellectual vigor. Located just to the north of the IMA, across the Seine in the fourth arrondissement, is the very symbol of French Catholicism, the Cathedral of Notre Dame. The presence of this ancient monument of Christianity confers upon the IMA’s location a certain symbolic significance, as the latter in a sense serves as the former’s Muslim counterweight.96

After inviting seven young architectural talents to submit preliminary designs for the project, the selection committee, headed by then-President François Mitterrand, settled upon the proposal of the young Frenchman Jean Nouvel who at the time had realized just a small number of minor domestic projects. In its built form, Nouvel’s vision is laden with symbolic meaning.97 It could be said that the building’s form tangibly reflects its rather intangible goal—the exchange between Arab and French cultures. For instance, to the south, facing away from the Seine and in towards the neighborhood, the building’s rectilinear façade is composed of 240 square grids, each in turn comprised of metal modules of different shapes that move to form different geometric patterns that filter in between ten and thirty percent of natural light. These grids are a clear reference to the mashrabiyya, a wooden grille made of polygonal blocks used to cover a window or balcony and provide shade in Muslim vernacular architecture (figure 13). However, on the other side of the building, Nouvel specified a highly polished curvilinear façade that literally reflects the Parisian cityscape beyond the Seine’s Right Bank, including Notre

96 Serageldin, Space for Freedom, p. 139.
97 With new buildings, the symbolic meaning of their elements and the intent of the architects is often attainable through interviewing and questioning. This is not the case for older buildings with non-existent historiographies. Nevertheless, even if we do not know the intent of the architect himself, architecture like any other art form takes on meaning even after the design process is complete, as viewers impose their own understandings on form, site, and decorative detail.
Dame. Between these two sides (i.e., in the center of the building) a long slit was cut out off the building’s footprint, forming a narrow passage that leads to an enclosed courtyard (figure 14). The courtyard is an important feature of Arab architecture (as it is in the architecture of many warmer climates), whereas the narrow passage is a feature thought to be present in most unplanned Arab cities. Thus, the IMA building has an Arab Muslim core, which is sandwiched between a traditionally Arab façade to the south and to the north by an archetype of Christian architecture—Notre Dame.\textsuperscript{98}

Other aspects of the building point to this same idea. For example, Nouvel appears to follow the norm in Islamic architecture of a simple exterior that hides a richer, more interesting interior. This concept is referred to throughout the AKAA literature on the project as “introversion.”\textsuperscript{99} Still, the interior of the IMA is still muted compared to that of some of the grander Islamic buildings. The building’s gallery space, where artifacts from the Arab world are often displayed, is finished in a low-key décor that is museographically advantageous\textsuperscript{100} and which allows the treasures of the Arab world to take center stage. The lack of decoration on the IMA points to a larger value of the AKAA, namely, the avoidance of “pastiche of Islamic motifs and designs.”\textsuperscript{101} While the AKAA literature includes a few sheepish attempts to liken the spiral staircase to a minaret, the building itself seems to avoid any superficial imitation of Islamic or Arab building elements or decoration. The argument could be made that the 

\textit{mashrabiyya} façade is imitative, given that the building is air-conditioned and shading the interior

\textsuperscript{98} Serageldin, \textit{Space for Freedom}, p. 147.
\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{101} Serageldin, \textit{Space for Freedom}, p. 147.
from the hot sun is unnecessary. However, this feature of the IMA appears to fall on the right side of the thin line that separates imitative and referential architecture.

This last point is an important one, for it touches upon the question of the architecture’s cultural identity. Is the IMA a Western or an Arab building? While the goal of the architect may well have been to leave this question unanswerable, a survey conducted under the purview of the project’s Technical Reviewer, Atilla Yücel, found that most visitors believed the building was thoroughly French, and not Arab, in feel. While the southern façade was thought to be Islamic by survey participants, it was found that the building’s technology, including the mechanized masharbiyya, is “so present in the foreground that many people notice only this aspect in the building which induces them to relate it to the future and not the past.” Thus, a reference to the beauty of a traditional building element was lost in the spectacle of the feature’s impressive technology. Nevertheless, the survey found that the building was well-visited (although overwhelmingly by non-Arab non-Muslims) and most Arab visitors communicated their pride in it.

Avoiding “pastiche” of Islamic motifs is also reflected in the National Assembly Building of Bangladesh, designed by the American architect Louis I. Kahn. The origins of the building (awarded the AKAA in the same year as the IMA) can be traced back as far as the departure of the British from the Indian subcontinent in 1946 when the British Raj was replaced by Hindu India and Muslim East Pakistan and West Pakistan. Upon

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103 However, Nouvel almost did make this mistake. In the Technical Review, Atilla Yücel notes that Nouvel considered encrusting one quarter of a dome on the top of the building in order to “make the tower more apparent and also to constitute another Arab (or Islamic) connotation via architectonic forms.” (Technical Review, p. 24)
104 Yücel, Technical Review, p. 41.
105 Ibid., p. 44.
106 Ibid., p. 40-46.
independence, West Pakistan came to dominate the bifurcated state and in 1959, in an attempt to relieve the tension between and better connect the two regions, the Pakistani government decided to set up a second capital in Dhaka, East Pakistan. In a power-sharing deal, the parties involved agreed the secretariat would remain in Islamabad, the capital of West Pakistan, while the general assembly would meet in Dhaka. In 1962 the East Pakistani government hired Louis Kahn to design a National Assembly complex. Although construction began four years later, it was unfinished in 1971, at which time civil war broke out and West and East Pakistan became Pakistan and Bangladesh, respectively. The complex remained unfinished in 1974 when its architect died. Nevertheless, despite this adversity, the finishing touches on the complex were completed in 1983, more than twenty years after the start of the project.

While the complex accommodates a great number of services and even provides in-session housing for members of the Assembly, the grandest of all the buildings is the Assembly Hall, a central octagonal cylinder with eight attached blocks surrounded by a moat. The entrance to the Hall is through a prayer hall, an idea resulting from, according to the AKAA, “the realization that the meaning of assembly attains a spiritual dimension when applied to community participation, which is what any Islamic community does when it goes to the mosque.” While Kahn understood legislative assembling to be an inherently spiritual process, he did not make the connection to Islam. He reportedly said, “Architecture as the thoughtful making of spaces can inspire the transcendence required of the acts of men assembled, gathered from all corners of the nation for the making of

107 Serageldin, Space for Freedom, p. 129.
the laws that give them the basis for a way of life for Pakistan.” Whatever his intention for the prayer hall, it is clear Kahn did not see the Assembly as an entirely secular building.

That being said, the building certainly is not overtly Islamic. It lacks the domes, minaret, and arches often used to identify an Islamic building in an architecture verging on “pastiche.” Instead, the building draws its inspiration from regional architecture, namely the aesthetic of the Mughal Empire which ruled the subcontinent from 1526 to 1707. The AKAA citation notes three Mughal buildings—the Red Fort in Agra, the Lal-Bagh Fort in Baharpur, Dhaka, and the mausoleum of the second Mughal Emperor, Humayun, in Delhi. The influence of these monuments on Kahn is in fact very clear in his building in Dhaka. All three make use of the red sandstone typical of Mughal architecture, an aesthetic incorporated into the Assembly Hall complex through Kahn’s use of red brick for a perimeter office building. Interestingly, each of the three monuments appears to have supplied Kahn with part of the overall structure for his building. The Red Fort supplied Kahn with the inspiration for his eight attached blocks, which resemble the fort’s visually impenetrable and hulking walls (figure 15). The Lal-Bagh has a distinctive double-layered façade, where the three front entrance doors are sheltered by a decorative overhang. This feature seems replicated in the triangular, rectangular, circular, and semicircular cut-outs used throughout the complex for entrances and to let in light (figure 16). Finally, Humayun’s mausoleum features a large, central

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108 David Wisdom, Architect’s Review, available from http://www.archnet.org, p. 7. This document was written after the death of Kahn by his colleague.
109 Serageldin, Space for Freedom, p. 131.
110 The Aga Khan Trust for Culture completed restoration on this complex in March 2003.
columnar chamber (which contains Humayun’s cenotaph) and the entire tomb is fronted by an elaborate watercourse akin to the Assembly building’s moat (figure 17).

It is clear the building reflects a number of other influences beyond the regional. The building’s clean lines are thoroughly Modernist; its bulky mass is a clear indication of Kahn’s Brutalist tendencies. Yet, he managed to also incorporate a distinctly indigenous feel to the building, keeping it from feeling out of place in a South Asian Muslim society. According to a paper written by the chief engineer of the Public Works Department in 1967, this achievement had much to do with Kahn’s avoidance of pastiche. He writes that in the Mughal period, the dome, the arch and the vault were utilized for practical purposes (i.e., to cover a round space or to span an opening). With time, the use of such elements became synonymous with “Islamic Architecture.” Then, as modern building materials, such as concrete, steel, and glass, were invented, these elements became largely obsolete, for these new materials could be used for the same function without the same form. However, according to this engineer, “In the name of ‘Islamic Architecture’ a fraud is being perpetuated,” as domes are placed atop flat roofs and arches are unnecessarily fitted into rectangular openings. The engineer also noted that this sort of architecture “can appeal only to those who are fond of outward manifestation of religion without the basic and fundamental purity of thought and action.” While the modern architect cannot know what the architects of the Mughal (or any early Muslim society) may have done with the materials and technology available today, the engineer continued to comment that the “originality, purity and honesty that exude from their creations leads one to believe that they would have made use of the

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111 The official AKAA publication for the project identifies these other influences as classical antiquity (Roman, Greek) as well as the classic Beaux-Arts education, which stresses Western European styles from the Renaissance period to the twentieth century (from Palladio to Le Corbusier).
present day materials and techniques in their true and pure form” and concluded that this sort of architecture in which materials are used honestly to create the necessary forms is “truly ‘Islamic Architecture of the modern age.’” Thus, Kahn’s use of concrete, a material AKAA Juries tend to look upon negatively in the restoration of classical Islamic buildings, finds legitimate use here for he utilizes it to forge a new aesthetic of Modernism imbued with the Islamic past, rather than simply imitating it.

The line between pastiche and new aesthetic is not always so clear. For instance, in the Hajj Terminal at King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (awarded the AKAA in 1983), the American architecture and development firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM) chose to use hundreds of tent-like structures, a form so often associated with the Bedouin of the region, to cover an outdoor area meant to accommodate hundreds of thousands of *hajjis* (Muslim pilgrims) headed to Mecca on the *hajj* (pilgrimage). While pilgrimage to Mecca, a requirement for all Muslims able to make the journey, was once the reserve of the upper echelon of Muslims throughout the world, the number of *hajjis* has grown exponentially with the discovery of massive oil reserves in the Middle East and the concomitant petro-wealth that has enriched the region. To accommodate larger crowds the Saudi government commissioned a new terminal devoted exclusively to providing a place for the *hajjis* to wait for the processing of the necessary documentation (which apparently can take more than a day’s time) before making the seventy-kilometer journey west to Mecca.

The terminal consists of two separate but identical tented pavilions, each of which is comprised of five modules which in turn contain twenty-one tent units. Each of the ten modules contains an air-conditioned area designated for processing arrivals through

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immigration and customs, as well as a regular outdoor support area that provides a place to eat, sleep, wash, take care of one’s finances and post mail home to relatives. The AKAA jury notes that the design concept “echoes” the “traditional tent structures that worked so well in desert climates” (figure 18). The Teflon-coated Fiberglas roof material of which the tents are made blocks out all but seven percent of sunlight, maintains cooler temperatures in a climate that often reaches up to 130 degrees Fahrenheit, and reflects seventy-five percent of solar radiation. One of the lead architects for the project, a Bangladeshi, Fazlur R. Khan, notes that the Terminal is a “very Saudi place” and that the tent system is a new interpretation of older Arab Bedouin life-styles. While these observations and those of the Jury are true, perhaps the most interesting interpretation comes from the AKAA publication itself, which notes, “One of the essential factors in the concept of the support area is that it does not impose the conventional ‘airport discipline,’ which would be alien and uncomfortable to most pilgrims,” for “most have saved all their lives to make the journey, and this is probably the first and last time they will be traveling by air.” The concept of the support area, which allows hajjis to spread out their carpets and cook their own food, “conforms with the spirit of hajj.” According to the architects themselves, this is of extreme importance, for the Terminal not only serves as a practical resting spot before the final push to Mecca, but also becomes “not only an entry to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but the gateway to the Holy Land—the gateway to [Mecca].” The Terminal, in recreating the “traditional desert tent village,” recalls the “traditions of an Islamic heritage” in an

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114 Ibid., p. 126.
115 Ibid., p. 125.
attempt to inspire the *hajji* to complete the final requirement of Islam as first communicated through the Prophet Muhammad.\footnote{Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Architect’s Review, available from http://www.archnet.org, p. 9-10.}

Unlike the IMA and the National Assembly of Bangladesh, the Hajj Terminal is less a modern interpretation of the traditional Arab or Islamic vernacular than a direct imitation of it. There is little obfuscation of influences, and the design could easily be interpreted as kitsch. However, it is hard to say if this project would have been as successful with a different design strategy. As mentioned above, the structure does deal well with the unique climatic challenges of its location and is highly people-oriented as evidenced by the concern it takes for accommodating the cultural requirements of the *hajjis* it would serve. Thus, the message here is that while the image of the tent village is held as representative of Arabia in the minds of many in the West (as evidenced by the quotation taken from the Architect’s Record), in this situation the use of the tent-structure is acceptable as the most appropriate utilitarian solution to the requirements of the design brief.

Aspects of the design for the famed Argentine-American architect César Pelli’s Petronas Towers, two skyscrapers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (awarded the AKAA in 2004), could also be criticized as a pastiche of Islamic motifs. The project first came about in 1990 when the Malaysian government, in an effort to encourage growth in the commercial district of the capital city Kuala Lumpur\footnote{César Pelli, Architect’s Review, available from http://www.archnet.org, p. 3.}, sponsored an international design competition for the first phase of a new city center development project. Aside from the Towers (specified at 4,500,000 square feet), the Kuala Lumpur City Center today is comprised of another 6,200,000 square feet of mixed-use space, including two other
office towers, retail and entertainment facilities, and underground parking for 7,000 vehicles. The Towers complex, aside from office space for the Malaysia’s national petroleum company Petronas and private companies, contains a science center that focuses on petroleum technology education, an art gallery, a conference center, and an 850-seat philharmonic concert hall. The two stainless steel towers, each eighty-eight stories high, are connected at the forty-first and forty-second floors by the “Skybridge.” This serves to connect facilities shared by the two towers, including a conference center, the building’s prayer room, and an executive dining room. The towers taper at six intervals and each is topped by a spire and 73.5 meter pinnacle. Construction began in 1993 and finished in 1997. In the interim, the Towers were certified the world’s tallest building by the Council of Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat.118

While the décor of the building is thoroughly Malaysian, making extensive use of traditional crafts and indigenous materials and patterns, the exterior of the building is of more interest for our purposes. According to the AKAA official publications, Pelli, like Louis Kahn, drew upon the architecture of the region for his design, “inspired by the minarets, stalactites and dome forms that are found in Kuala Lumpur’s heterogeneous architecture” and that express “the multicultural nature of Malaysian society,”119 which includes Buddhist, Hindu, British, Mughal Indian, Chinese, and Moorish influences.120 However, the more palpable Islamic influence is found in the geometry of the two towers that are shaped like the common Islamic geometric design of two interlocked squares

118 The Petronas Towers are no longer the tallest, having been replaced in January 2009 by the Burj Dubai, a skyscraper under construction in Dubai.
forming an eight-pointed star (figure 19). In its usual form the 8-pointed star is a geometric pattern found in decorative tiled or painted decoration throughout the Islamic world. This aspect of the building is only truly evident when viewing the building from above, and even then it is muddled by the presence of semicircles inserted between each of the eight points (added to increase the floor space of each level). Still, the fact that this symbol allegedly played an important part in Pelli’s design process is significant. Can the use of this geometry truly be considered an Islamic influence?

In his account of the design process for the building, Pelli addresses the eight-pointed star in abstract terms. He writes,

The most important artistic decision was to make the towers figurative and symmetrically composed. The symmetrical arrangement was avoided by early modernists precisely because of its symbolic quality. The towers are not only symmetrical but figurative, creating an also figurative space between them. This space is the key element in the composition. Each tower has its own vertical axis, but the axis of the total composition is in the center of the void. Lao Tse has taught us that the reality of a hollow object is in the void and not in the walls that define it.

Thus, the “most important artistic decision” in the design of the building was not choosing the Islamic motif that may have provided a shape for the building’s towers, but deciding to have two towers in the first place. In fact, the use of the motif was probably a decision of convenience: it is a symmetrical shape that lent the towers symbolic impact in the realm of architectural criticism. The presence of the eight-pointed star in the Islamic architectural vocabulary simply made it a useful motif for this purpose.

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121 Pelli, Architect’s Review, p. 3-4. This design can be seen when viewing the building from above, although semicircles were added between each of the eight points to provide more floor space.
122 Ibid., p. 4.
This is not to say that the towers display no Islamic influence. The buildings appear to reference much of Malaysia’s native aesthetic. This was a requirement expressed in the brief for the building, for the project’s Technical Reviewer mentions that Pelli was asked by Petronas to create “a place that people can identify as unique to Kuala Lumpur and Malaysia.” The Chairman of Petronas acknowledged as much when, during his review of the finished building, he said, “We wanted something extraordinary and that is what Mr. Pelli gave us. His design has elements of Islamic architecture identifiable with our country. The other architects’ designs looked as if they could be built anywhere.” Thus, from the point of view of the critics and the clients, the building displays clear Islamic architectural elements.

The Petronas project has significance beyond its aesthetic characteristics. In their citation for the Towers, the Jury indicated that the project deserved the Award for its innovative use of technology. As the tallest building in the world at the time of completion, Pelli’s design utilized a number of technologically advanced systems, such as an immense tremor dampening device. However, what is more interesting is that Pelli attempted to reference both Islamic and Malaysian culture in perhaps the most Western and Modernist symbol of all: the skyscraper. In many parts of Asia and especially in Malaysia, population explosions necessitate more construction upwards as available land becomes scarcer. The Petronas Towers are an attempt to solve this problem while maintaining sensitivity to the local culture. As it says in the official AKKA publication for the project, “The complex combines modern technology with a sense of cultural identity and a sensitive responsiveness to its setting to create a powerful icon that

123 Qtd. in Technical Review, p. 6.
symbolizes the country’s progress…the Petronas Towers embody an innovative and
creative balance between modern global technology and local culture, making an
important statement for the people of the region.”

Thus, like the other projects discussed in this chapter, the Petronas Towers represent a significant attempt to
accommodate the Islamic and the Western.

Sensitivity to Place

As discussed in Chapter 1, sensitivity to place is important in the values espoused by both the Aga Khan and those who subscribe to the critical regionalist school. In this section, we will examine how this concern manifests itself through architecture that is successfully adapted to a certain climate or topography, or both.

The Moulmein Rise Residential Tower in Singapore (awarded the AKAA in 2007) displays impressive sensitivity to the tropical climate of its site, which is hot, humid and rainy with monsoons from the northeast from December to March and from the southwest from June to September. Rather than rely upon mechanical systems to cool their twenty-eight storey residential high-rise, architects Wong Mun Summ and Richard Hassell chose to borrow a number of low-energy strategies of cooling found in the vernacular architecture of the region. These include carefully orienting the building north-south in relation to the sun’s location throughout the day, building deep overhangs

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above many of the buildings windows to reduce direct heat penetration into the interior and keeping the building footprint narrow and perforating many of the internal and external walls in order to allow for significant cross-ventilation (*figure 20*). Summ and Hassell also decided to use monsoon windows—horizontal openings that let in the breeze from below but not the rain from above—to allow for ventilation during heavy rains, a device purportedly borrowed from the typical longhouses of Indonesia and the vernacular architecture of Malaysia and Vietnam (*figure 21*). As a result, the building responds extremely well to its site, necessitating very little use of artificial climate control mechanisms.

The Royal Netherlands Embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (also awarded the AKAA in 2007) displays similar sensitivity to place in that it is well-integrated into the existing environs of the site. Located on the outskirts of southern Addis Abba, the embassy structure cuts through the site’s sloping terrain on an east-west axis. The design of the building is quite interesting—it is an extremely modern, massif-like structure with a roof garden that, in the words of the AKAA, is “at once archaic and modern,” belonging “as much to the Muslim, Christian and indigenous peoples of Ethiopia as it does to its Dutch homeland.” However, more important here is the building’s interaction with the site. The design brief for the building (and for a number of other Dutch embassies throughout the world) stressed the need for respect of the local environment. The building maintains the contours of the land, building into several natural knolls, thereby using the sloping terrain to create a number of entrance points into the complex (*figure 22*). This technique also minimizes the intrusive scale of the

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The design team, an Amsterdam-based partnership of two Dutchmen Dick van Gameren and Bjarne Mastenbroek, was also extremely careful not to disturb the sites vegetation or wildlife, avoiding manicuring the landscape to any set plan. In this way, very little is imposed on the site; rather, the embassy accommodates itself to the site, suggesting a metaphor for the Dutch mission in the host country.

**Using Traditional Building Methods**

In contrast to the urban, modern buildings discussed above, a number of the awarded buildings, particularly those located in more rural areas, were designed by architects (and sometimes craftsmen) who chose to utilize traditional style and forms. Two examples of this sort of approach are examined below.

The Mopti Medical Center in Mopti, Mali (awarded the AKAA in 1980) was constructed as a part of a national plan to make modern medicine available to citizens throughout the country, particularly in under-served rural areas. The Center contains two wards, one for men and one for expecting mothers, as well as two clinics, one for general patients and the other for child services. In designing the building, architect André Ravereau aimed to “adequately relate the facility to the site’s sensitive environment…; to create a structure that would not interfere with the traditional customs of families visiting and cooking for patients,” as well as “to construct the project in a manner inspired by the local traditional techniques of building with natural dark clay called banco; and to achieve a high level of thermal and lighting efficiency without

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relying on sophisticated systems.”¹³⁶ For the most part, the construction of Ravereau’s design utilized traditional methods used for working with banco bricks; the only “ameliorating” technology was the use of a hand-operated press (rather than wooden moulds) to produce a denser brick faster. Cement and reinforcing steel were also used to upgrade the stability of the building technology common to the area.¹³⁷ The end result is a hospital that blends into the vernacular of the city and that suits the lifestyles of its users (Figure 23, 24).

A more recent building of this type, the School in Rudrapur, Dinajpur, Bangladesh (awarded the AKAA in 2007), represents many of the same values. The architect, Anna Heringer, visited Bangladesh through a German NGO and returned later to build a school with her German design partner, Eike Roswag, in the small town of Rudrapur. Heringer and Roswag designed the school in such a way as to allow its construction to be feasibly hand built by local craftsmen, pupils, their parents and the school’s teachers in four months, thereby familiarizing them with their future school (figure 25).¹³⁸ The building utilizes a mud brick construction technique native to the region. Before the school’s construction the use of mud brick was “much maligned in the area,” for it was susceptible to fungus, produced a dark, dank interior, and often remained structurally sound for no more than ten or fifteen years.¹³⁹ However, the architects developed a number of technical improvements for the mud brick. Whereas in the past the bricks were formed with wet loam (a mixture of sand, silt and soil), for the school in Rudrapur a technique was developed by which the loam was mixed with straw, rice and

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 86.
¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 86-7.
¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 147.
¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 150.
jute (using the treading power of cows and water buffalos) and then applied directly to the wall frame (which is made of bamboo, which grows in large amounts in the area, lashed together with jute rope) in layers (figure 26, 27).\textsuperscript{140} After drying for several days the walls are then trimmed with a spade to a smooth surface. This technique was named “Wellebrau” by the architects, and resulted in a tougher construction material with longer potential longevity. The success of the school’s design has revitalized the use of mud brick in the area; the next phase of the project calls for the design and construction of a prototype mud-walled home.\textsuperscript{141}

In summary, we see in the body of newly constructed buildings a reaffirmation of the importance of place with buildings tailored to their climate and topography and the special premiation of projects that utilize local building methods. More importantly, we find a number of projects that actively struggle to balance that which is decidedly local with that which is foreign and modern. In doing so, these premiated projects make important contributions to our understanding of “appropriate architecture.”

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., p. 150.
Figure 13: Steel mashrabiyya at the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France (above). Typical mashrabiyya. Location unknown.
Figure 14: Plan of the Institut du Monde Arabe. The curved façade faces the Seine River, while the flat façade is comprised of *mashrabiyya*.
Figure 15: Massive presence of the National Assembly Building of Bangladesh (above) and the Red Fort of Agra.
Figure 16: Double-layering of the façade in the National Assembly Building of Bangladesh (above) and the Lal-bagh Fort in Baharpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
Figure 17: Plan for the National Assembly Building of Bangladesh with its columnar center structure (above), and a plan of Humayun’s Tomb in Delhi and the center domed structure that covers his cenotaph.
Figure 18: The Hajj Terminal. A view of the tent-structure from inside (above) and of the “tent village” from above.
Figure 19: One of the Petronas Towers from above. The eight-pointed star is evident.

Figure 20: The narrow footprint of the Moulmein Rise Residential Building. Singapore.
Figure 21: Monsoon window in Moulmein Rise. Singapore.

Figure 22: The Royal Netherlands Embassy is built into the topography of its site. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
Figure 23: The Mopti Medical Center from above. Mopti, Mali.

Figure 24: The walkway that runs through the Mopti Medical Center. Mopti, Mali.
Figure 25: Students and locals help construct bamboo framing. School in Rudrapur, Bangladesh.

Figure 26: Detail of mud masonry, bamboo framing, and jute lashing. School in Rudrapur, Bangladesh.
Figure 27: Cows and water buffaloes tread on loam, rice and jute mixture before it is applied to structural walls. School in Rudrapur, Bangladesh.
Chapter V: Conclusions

Now that we have explored the prevalent themes and values evident in the body of winning projects over the last ten cycles, we can explore their implications for the creation of the “profile” of successful Islamic architecture discussed in the Introduction.

In *Traditional Islamic Principles of the Built Environment* Hisham Mortada argues it is impossible to attempt to define an Islamic aesthetic through examination of traditional Islamic sources, such as the Qur’an or *hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet and his companions), for these sources mention nothing directly related to an ideal built environment. However, Mortada observes that the Qur’an and *hadith* do prescribe an ethical code by which all Muslims are encouraged to lead their lives and that this ethical code dictates what could be thought to be the ideal environment for Muslims.

Simply put, the Qur’an and *hadith* demand that the built environment systematize life in such a way that the worship of God is the preeminent activity, the application of *shari’ah* (the legal and ethical code by which many devout Muslims attempt to live their lives) is enhanced, and the essential rights of human beings are not intruded upon. However, beyond locating the city mosque in a widely accessible part of a municipality, meeting such abstruse requirements must be perplexing for the contemporary planner or architect. For one thing, the interpretation of *shari’ah, hadith* and even the Qur’an is ongoing and contentious, to say the least. Furthermore, as in many other faiths, it is likely some of the tenets of Islam were regional in provenance—rarefied local customs and ways adopted into the practice of the faith. The aesthetic many consider Islamic in character must have developed over time through the many iterations of design executed

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by local architects building throughout the Islamic world.\textsuperscript{143} The Islamic style, as such, was less deliberate or ideologically-based than it was a result of regional conditions.

It is into this climate of unsure identity that the Modernists entered, armed with a coherent, ideological aesthetic that quickly gained preeminence among clients and builders. So, how did so much tension come to exist between Modernism and the Islam? According to Mortada, this strained relationship is rooted in the association of modernity with the West, as well as a subsequent failure in the Muslim world to find a way to accommodate the advantages of Western modernity with the principles of Islam. Mortada borrows from the work of Saleh al-Hathoul in explaining the problem. He describes the modernists as a class of young Muslims unwilling to accept traditional Islamic authority and confident in the benefits of wholesale acceptance of new technologies from the West. The traditionalists, on the other hand, are hesitant to separate the same technology from its potential adverse effects on traditional Muslim society. The inability to reconcile modernity with Islam has led many Muslims to begin to consider Islam a spiritual influence in their lives, rather than as a practical guide for living.\textsuperscript{144}

This failure to reconcile modernity with Islam has largely to do with Islamic concerns regarding \textit{bid‘a}, or innovation, in the faith itself.\textsuperscript{145} While innovation in science, medicine and technology are encouraged in Islam, inventing within the faith is a sin. However, with a faith that claims to provide an entire code for living, the distinction between these two types is not always so clear; innovations in the former disciplines that

\textsuperscript{143} In the words of philosopher and AKAA Jury member Reinhard Schulze, “‘Islamic architecture’…is not a concept per se; it derives from those professionals who have constantly reinvented building traditions as Islamic.” (Reinhard Schulze, “The Grammar of Architecture” in Baker, \textit{Architecture and Polyphony}, p. 140.)

\textsuperscript{144} Mortada, \textit{Traditional Islamic Principles}, p. 127.

\textsuperscript{145} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 130.
result in drastic changes in the way Muslims live their lives could be considered intrusions on the faith. This problem also has to do with the methods in place for developing *shari‘ah*. *Shari‘ah* has emerged over a millennium through the learned examination of the Qur’an, *Sunnah* (the ways and manners of the Prophet Muhammad) and *hadith* by qualified Islamic scholars. This process is known as *ijtihad*, or “interpretation.” However, the *mujtahid* (a practitioner of *ijtihad*) has always walked a fine line in his work, for while some recognize that diversity of opinion is a strength of the faith, others fear this diversity may lead to *fitna*, or schism, within the global ummah.

There are a number of conditions, however, that, if met, would permit the adoption of Western technological modernity. In the words of Mortada, the adoption of the new technology, or any outside influence for that matter, would have to enhance “the role of man on earth as God’s *khalifah* (viceregent),” provide “benefit to other Muslims,” not result in “mental or physical offence to others” and prove adaptable to Islamic principles.\(^\text{146}\) There is plenty of traditional evidence to support this claim. For instance, a hadith is recorded in which the Prophet says to his companion who he had known during the period of *jahiliya* (the period before the revelation of the Qur’an), “Look to those moral practices you had in the *jahiliya*, and apply them in Islam; give security to your guest, be generous toward orphans, and treat your neighbour (the stranger who is under your protection) with kindness.” This anecdote is often understood to have condoned the adoption of non-Islamic norms into the ummah, eventually making them an actual part of Islam. In other words, the Islamic way of life is organic in the first place, and Muslims may expect it to continue to change over time. Another hadith suggests a similar sentiment, for the Prophet states, “I was a Hidden Treasure, and I desired to be known, so

I created Creation that I might be known.” Thus, followers of Muhammad may borrow ideas from outside the ummah, for all these ideas have their origin in Allah. As mentioned above, the ideas must provide public benefit the public (known in Arabic and Islam as al-Maslaha al-‘Ama). However, others remain hesitant about adopting Western concepts, even if it is in fact permissible. For example, the well-known scholar Mohamed Idrus believes the built environment should come organically from place. From a practical standpoint, Western models may not be as efficient or appropriate for the Muslim world due to differences in lifestyle, climate, and a host of other important conditions that shape the architecture of a place. Therefore, Western models should only be used for comparison.

The ten juries that have served the AKAA over the past thirty years have certainly wrestled with these issues. It is clear, both from the comments of the Aga Khan and the buildings that have won the Award, that the AKAA stands for a distinctively regionalist architecture. We can deduct this conclusion from the importance placed on climate and topography (as seen in the Moulmein Rise residential building in Singapore and the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Addis Adaba) and vernacular building techniques (as seen in the Mopti Medical Complex in Mali and the school in Rudrapur, Bangladesh). Yet, other projects, such as the National Assembly Building in Bangladesh, the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris and the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, are built in an ultra-modernist aesthetic, albeit one with nods to the past. Can these two strands within the Award really be reconciled?

147 Ibid., p. 131.
148 Ibid., p. 137.
From the very beginning, the Aga Khan took issue not with the Modernist movement itself, but with its often inappropriate implementation in the Muslim world. While the AKAA is meant to reward so-called “Islamic Architecture,” it appears from his speeches that the Aga Khan was not necessarily looking for this as such; instead, he was searching for an architecture that responds to place—a people and their way of life. In other words, in the eyes of the Aga Khan, it is only because faith is an important part of a devout Muslim’s daily life that the architecture that serves him should reflect Islam.

Anyhow, the *ummah* is so diverse that one approximation of its architectural identity would doubtless prove unrepresentative of its pluralism. These two strands can be reconciled: modernism is acceptable so long as it is tailored to a place—its history and its people. Anyone can design in this type of Islamic architecture—professional architect, local mason, Muslim or non-Muslim. In the words of Jury member Brigitte Shim, modernity “depends on the historical experience of the specific civilization”¹⁴⁹ Indeed, in the discussion of these modernist projects in Chapter 3, it appears this sentiment is well-expressed.

So, why even award examples of vernacular architecture? After all, there are inherent advantages to some kinds of modernist design. For instance, there is little doubt that the population of Mopti would have been better served, medically speaking, by a modern hospital building. After all, medical standards are generally much higher in the West and our hospitals are built to accommodate these standards of practice. It seems the answer is that the juries, while not encouraging a submission to the past, believe these vernacular forms hold an immense amount of promise, particularly for the world’s poor. They are often cheaper to build and better involve the community in that they can

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potentially employ a number of its workers (as seen, for instance, in the construction of
the medical center in Mopti). These projects also hold an immense amount of interest for
those who are not so poor. They represent a region, its culture, and perhaps its Islamic
past. Examples of this sort of architecture are in high demand, especially by those setting
about to build modern buildings that respect a regional or religious history. This also
explains the importance of authenticity in the restoration projects discussed in Chapter 2.
As we saw, regaining the knowledge of how to make qudud for the Amiriya Complex in
Yemen, scavenging stone native to the area to rebuild the Great Mosque in Sidon,
Lebanon, and being careful not to improvise in the restoration of the painted ceiling of
Al-Abbas Mosque in Asnaf, Yemen are important in that they represent a great concern
for exactitude in preserving the past, for it is past endeavors that will inspire the built
environment of the future.

The purpose of the AKAA is not to define what is or is not Islamic in architecture.
Essays included in the official publications of the award may attempt this, but progress is
rarely made beyond discussion of the architecture of the mosque. Rather, the AKAA
represents an attempt to encourage more widespread understanding of the cultural
identity of a religion as manifest in the built environment and to encourage the architects
of a region to understand their architectural predecessors. The process could be
transplanted to any other part of the world. Nevertheless, while the AKAA does not
define what exactly constitutes Islamic architecture, it does champion a number of
distinctively Islamic values.

150 In fact, even the mosque is up for reinterpretation under the purview of the Award: the Mosque of the
Grand National Assembly, Ankara, Turkey (awarded the AKAA in 1995) is designed as an abstraction of
the typical mosque, with many of the typical elements of the mosque, such as the minaret and mihrab,
radically reconsidered.
For instance, the body of award-winning projects is replete with examples of projects that attempt to help the less fortunate. Nader Khalili aimed to find a way to shelter refugees and the displaced when he set about designing his sandbag structures. Other projects, such as the school in Rudrapur, Bangladesh or the Grameen Bank Project, seek to provide essential services and improve the lives of the rural poor. Improving the quality of life of those in need is not just a value espoused by the Aga Khan, but by Islam too, in which one of the four essential tenets is providing zakat, or alms to the poor. His effort to combat poverty directly relates to the Aga Khan’s keen interest in the future of his faith and the world in general. In his article, “Architecture vs. Extremism,” Michael Z. Wise writes, “The Aga Khan abjures militancy in favor of diplomacy and sees investments that promote economic self-reliance in impoverished nations as a means of combating extremism.”151 The AKAA not only encourages that which will improve the lives of the poor but also those projects that reflect a positive dialogue between East and West.

Besides providing for the poor, the premiated projects display another quintessentially Islamic value: environmental awareness. As Mortada points out, the Qur’an is clear that the relationship between man and nature is one of utilization, for it says, “It is He who sendeth down rain from the skies; with it We produce vegetation of all kinds…Behold! in these things there are signs for people who believe.”152 However, this relationship is also one of stewardship; man must be sure to maintain the harmony and balance of nature as he utilizes it. In the Qur’an, it says, “There is not an animal (that

152 Su. 6:99, Qtd. in Mortada, p. 48.
lives) on the earth, nor a being that flies on its winds, but (forms part of) communities like you.”

Over the last three chapters, we have seen projects that have utilized the natural resources available nearby as well as projects that have been careful to maintain the delicate natural balance of the building site.

Quite the same could be said for the projects that define new public space; the distinction between public and private space in Islam is evident in the planning of a family home and the central location of the public mosque and the general separation of commercial and residential sectors in many Islamic cities, for instance. The awarded projects that reinterpret the traditional idea of public space stress contemplation, an activity normally reserved for private space, rather than providing a place for gathering. Still, the Samir Kassir Square and Bagh-e-Ferdowsi engage with an age-old division of space in Islam, a dictate guided by shari’ah.

While the AKAA does not endorse an Islamic aesthetic, it does engage a number of traditional Islamic ideals. Most important of all, the AKAA champions the concept of identity, whether religious, regional, cultural or otherwise. Perhaps Anna Heringer and Eike Roswag, architects of the school at Rudrapur, articulated it best when justifying the use of mud-brick for the school in their Architects Review: “We believe that architecture is more than shelter. It is ultimately connected with the creation of identity and self-confidence.” It is this process of discovering Islamic identity, rather than proscribing it, that obsesses jury after jury and represents the purpose of the Award and the vision of the Aga Khan himself.

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153 Su. 6:38, Qted. in Mortada, p. 51.
154 Ibid., p. 75-78.
Appendix

Location of Award Ceremonies
2nd Award Cycle (1981-1983): Topkapi Palace, Istanbul, Turkey
3rd Award Cycle (1984-1986): Badi’ Palace, Marrakesh, Morocco
4th Award Cycle (1987-1989): Citadel of Saladin, Cairo, Egypt
5th Award Cycle (1990-1992): Registan Square, Samarkand, Uzbekistan
7th Award Cycle (1996-1998): The Alhambra, Granada, Spain
9th Award Cycle (2002-2004): New Delhi, India

Persons Serving On Multiple Master Juries and/or Steering Committees
Selma al-Radi (SC: 4th, 5th, 7th, 8th)
Mohammed Arkoun (SC: 3rd, 4th, 5th; MJ: 6th, 7th)
Homi K. Babha (MJ: 10th)
Sherban Cantacuzino (SC: 2nd, MJ: 1st)
Sir Hugh Casson (SC: 1st, 2nd)
Charles Correa (SC: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 8th, 9th; MJ: 4th)
John de Monchaux (SC: 4th, 5th)
Balkrishna V. Doshi (SC: 7th; MJ: 5th)
Peter Eisenman (SC: 7th, MJ: 6th)
Abdou Filal-Ansari (SC: 9th, MJ: 8th)
Frank Gehry (SC: 6th, 8th, MJ: 5th)
Oleg Grabar (SC: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, MJ: 4th)
Zaha Hadid (SC: 8th; MJ: 7th)
Arif Hasan (SC: 5th, 6th; MJ: 7th)
Jacques Herzog (SC: 9th, 10th)
Renata Holod (SC: 2nd, 6th, MJ: 5th)
Charles Jencks (SC: 7th, MJ: 6th)
Hassan-Uddin Khan (SC: 2nd, 3rd, 4th)
Dogan Kuban (SC: 1st, 2nd)
Ronald Lewcock (SC: 5th, MJ: 3rd)
Glenn Lowry (SC: 9th, 10th)
Fumihiko Maki (3rd, 5th)
Adhi Maersid (SC: 7th; MJ: 5th)
Rahul Mehrotra (SC: 4th, 9th)
Luis Monreal (SC: 7th; MJ: 6th)
Charles Moore (SC: 4th, 5th; MJ: 2nd)
Mohsen Mostafavi (SC: 9th, 10th)
Farshid Moussavi (SC: 10th, MJ: 9th)
Azim Nanji (SC: 7th, 8th; MJ: 5th)
William Porter (SC: 1st, 2nd, 3rd; MJ: 4th)
Modjtada Sadria (SC: 10th, MJ: 9th)
Saedjatmako (SC: 1st, 3rd)
Ismail Serageldin (SC: 3rd, 4th; MJ: 2nd)
Ali Shuaibi (SC: 6th, 7th, 8th; MJ: 5th)
Dogan Tekeli (SC: 6th; MJ: 5th, 7th)
Billie Tsien (SC: 10th; MJ: 9th)
Han Tumertekin (SC: 9th; MJ: 10th)
Bibliography

Primary Sources

Award Publications

These publications are the official gazetteers of each award cycle. They normally consist of the official jury announcement, scholarly essays on various aspects of architecture and Islam, and, most importantly, sections on each awarded project, the latter usually based upon the report of the Technical Reviewer.


Seminar Publications

These publications act as the records of the numerous seminars held by the AKAA. They generally include the opening address of the Aga Khan, which normally frames the topic at hand, as well as the various papers given. The following sources are listed chronologically by seminar date.


Speech Collections

Online
The Aga Khan Development Network is a clearinghouse of AKAA press releases, Aga Khan speeches and other announcements. Archnet functions not only as an online community for architects and planners but also a database of official AKAA publications, including Technical Reviews, Architect’s Reviews, On Site Reviews, pictures, plans and seminar papers.


Other AKAA Publications


Secondary Sources


