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COURTYARD HOUSING IN PALESTINE: TYPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

The study attempts to trace the evolution of the Palestinian courtyard house and proposes a typological analysis trying to understand the changes in the building type of the houses from the past to the present. The typological analysis, as approach, allows us to read, understand and then learn from history.

R. Lewcock, 1988 stresses on the capability of this approach as a useful tool for shaping the future built environment. He says: 'At any given time the man-made world is inevitably the measure we use to determine the direction of change. Whatever we may think of it, the world around us provides the basis for decisions about the future. We are keenly aware of its deficiencies, but not always so aware of its strengths. From time to time it is wise to pause and consider what we might be losing when we change something. The corollary to this is to look back to see whether what we lost yesterday might, with little effort, be regained'.

Why courtyard types in the Palestinian contemporary houses disappeared? Do the new emerging types reflect the sensitivity to our culture? How does typological analysis help to maintain character of our new developing settlement while allowing for change? What is type? How can we benefit from it in our case?

All these questions can be discussed through typological framework, which is a systematic collective representation of reality that allows one to make a diagnosis and relate the need for action and the available instruments. Using typological framework as a reference, one can go on to choose the operational response for a recognized situation that is judged likely to produce such typical effect.

Typology as a Method of Research

Quatremère de Quincy gives a precise definition of an architectural 'type' in his historical dictionary. The word 'type', he says, does not present so much an image of something to be copied or imitated exactly.

Thus the notion of the vagueness or generality of the type which cannot therefore directly affect the building design or their formal quality, also explains its generation quality.

On the other hand A. Petruccioli introduces 'type' as a collective product shared by architects and people at any given time. For him the birth of a type is conditioned by the fact that a series of buildings share an obvious functional and formal analogy among themselves. In the process of comparing or selectively superimposing individual forms for the determination of the type, the identifying characteristics of specific buildings are eliminated and only the common elements remain, which then appear in the whole series. Type is illustrated as a scheme deduced through a process of distillation from a group of formal variants to a basic form or common scheme.

Typological studies were initiated first as a design tool in the Eighteenth Century French Enlightenment and were used to counter the break in the historical continuity and the separation in the building process between the designer and the client. The Enlightenment generated two ideas that represent two sides of the problem: the functional approach and the formal approach.

The interest in urban fabric, as an object of rigorous study and a tool in design methodology, began to emerge toward the end of the Nineteenth Century. It blossomed in the Thirties, was renewed in the Fifties and led lively to international debate in the mid Sixties, that extends through the Seventies. Three schools in Europe began to elaborate theories for the understanding of the built environment and the relation between its elements. All of them were rooted in history, but with differences in using the notion of typology. The schools differentiate between the descriptive,

analytical, explicative and generative criteria of types. They are therefore able to separate conceptually the description, analysis and critique of the historical and existing city.

They are: the Urban Morphology research group of the University of Birmingham inspired by M. R. G. Conzen, the Italian school established by Saverio Muratori, and the school of Versailles in France.

Conzen approaches the typological analysis using small towns of medieval origin in England, in which he developed new concepts. His analysis isolated three basic components of the urban fabric: street, plot, and building. He also introduced an evolutionary perspective into the reading of the plan, intuitively understanding that the growth of the cities does not correspond to an assemblage of pieces.

The theory of Muratori expressed, in the crisis of Modern Movement, the need to formulate design and building on different basic principles. In contrast to Conzen, Muratori believes that either knowledge is systematic or it does not exist at all. His theory is deeply rooted in the post-idealistic philosophy and uses a deductive method that does not accept discontinuities. The method is based on a critical reading of the existing built landscape, on a continuous maintenance of the physical realm, and on formulating a design process able to establish connections with history and memory.

For the Italian school the goal of typological/morphological research is to establish a correct formulation of the design process, and in fact Muratori talks of 'Storia Operativa' (operational history). For the group of geographers of Birmingham the goal of the analysis is to solve the problems of classification for the conservation of the built patrimony; it does not involve design issue at all.

Two important general characteristics differentiate the French school of Versailles from the other schools in its approach to architecture: one related to the dialectic of urban form and social action, and the second related to the dialectic of modern-non-modern. As distinct from the Italian method, here the social component is always the first.

To conclude: the three schools of typo morphology offer an intellectually challenging framework for thinking about the built landscape within the historical context of the city.

Debates about the typo-morphology in the three schools illuminate the use of type in design theory. The schools differentiate between the descriptive, analytical, explicative critical and generative types. They are therefore able to separate conceptually the description, analysis and critique of the historical and existing city from the projection of the future city. They can learn to know the built landscape, to explain it and to theorize about its production without worrying about its future design.

Evolution of the Courtyard Type

This paper is an attempt to apply typological analysis on a built up form in Palestine. Typological analysis could be an instrumental tool to learn from the architecture of the past. Trying to understand the space-form languages and site characteristics of the locality and build on them is one way to respond with sensitivity to the existing world and one way of providing reassuring continuities in a world of frequently irrational, accelerating changes. Three types of house were identified in this study: the courtyard type, the central hall, and the apartment type. The courtyard type was the traditional type that has been used in Palestine till the end of the 19th century. This type is based on a central plan with inward solution; rooms are organized around the courtyard. This courtyard is usually located in a central position near the entrance of the building.

It provides the houses with a comfortable internal environment, providing calm and air during the long, hot dry weather. Within the courtyard, women were able to move freely without any fear of being seen by the neighbours. Around this courtyard many rooms of different uses are gathered; a guestroom, bedrooms, and a utility room, which includes a kitchen, and storage space. Every room has a single door opening into the courtyard.



Fig. 1
Typical courthouses in Palestine

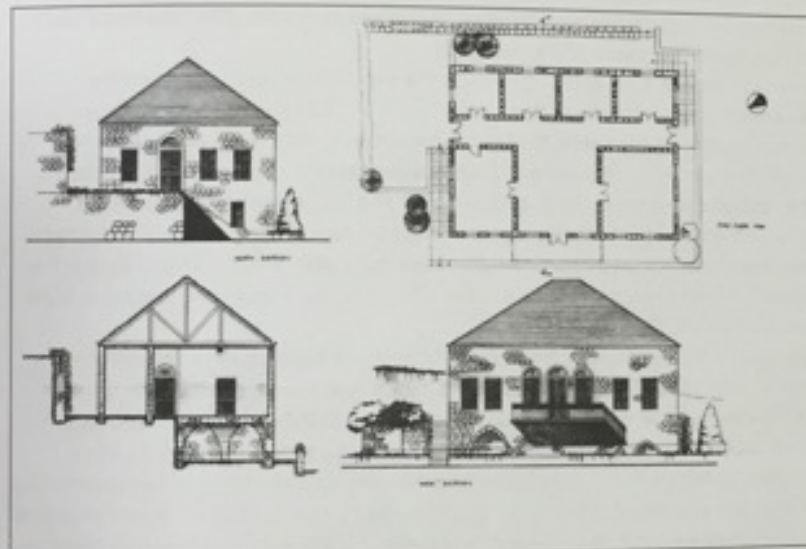


Fig. 2
The transformation of the court in central hall house

Usually the availability of these specialized rooms depends on the economical situation of the house owner, but they are normally in large houses and buildings. The rooms are of a sufficiently large size to accommodate nuclear families within each of them. In this vaulted construction larger rooms have a higher ceiling than the small ones.

The second type is known as Elia house, which comes from Elia, Arabic Ala, and means highly or over on.

If the classical construction material in Mesopotamia was loam we find that popular material used in the Mediterranean region is stone, especially in a region that is rich with natural stone.

Only at beginning of 19th Century we found new classical roof form.

The second type is a central hall type, which is essentially a development of the central courtyard type as result of transition from an open central courtyard into a covered one. This type is found in the fringe of the historic cities and it was affected by the Turkish and colonial influences.

The third type is the contemporary one, which is still used today, and it comes into two categories as a detached single house or an apartment building.

The need to distinguish rates of change in the structure of a building is observed for these types in seeing which one evolves according to a continuous process, and which one emerges as a result of a partial break.

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The Mediterranean Courtyard House 11

Fig. 3
The central hall type



For example, changes occurred in the courtyard type was at two levels.

One, which is the hall type considered as evolution, or some call it adaptation, of the original type of the house. This adaptation happens according to the quality embedded in the type as response to changes.

Adaptation as defined by Cataldi does not only mean observance of or a passive defence against nature, but continuously evolving space implying the addition of new buildings, so long as they fit in with

the building heritage. So we can consider that hall type maintain the continuity of the past form. On the other hand we can call the other kind of changes that happen in the courtyard as densification. In this case many spaces have been added inside the courtyards to be used by the residents to meet their need of extra spaces mainly services, such as kitchen or bathrooms. These added spaces affect the visual quality and the spatial character of the courtyard.

Given this view, it is necessary to revalue the expectation associated with the generative power of the type. Seen as instrument of transformation more than formation in its proper sense, the plan, or the project, necessarily involves the substratum into which it is set and therefore necessarily engages with the 'past'.

The rational character of the project changes and is susceptible to dialectic: rationality does not necessarily reside more in the fact of using a logic dissociated from existing conditions, establishing an importable eternal order, than it does in the capacity to make use of the nature of the context for an intervention that knit it more successfully into the flow of history.

The object does not register the passage of time in a homogeneous fashion at every level of order in its structure. It is possible for change to occur at the level of architectural details without alterations at the level of the disposition of rooms and construction. Likewise, it is possible for a house to be added as a part in a more complex composition and still impose its dimensional characteristics and requirement for light and orientation. Thus in the flow of history any built object (a house or several houses together) tends to be subject to a partial conditioning from previous forms and to have a partial influence on the form of successive interventions. This dialectical interconnection of form in time between forming and formed suggests the hypothesis of a morphogenesis of built form. This means that, in the production and configuration of a built object, everything does not originate in the will and freedom of creator; the process also involves non-intentional elements.

Conclusion

We can say that using an approach that takes into consideration the types of the past might be of great value. It can produce conceptual tools and make architectural language richer. It is important to realize that the continuity is not linear. The architect should search for the truth and not be distracted by illusion. This requires a total vision of the environment and not just partial solution to its problem at different scales.

One needs to identify the values of a city within the unity of its diversity (specificity); we cannot look for a single value for the whole city, even if it existed, because it is in continuous change. The values of a city are associated with its capacity to regenerate itself in forms that permit its citizens to identify a line of continuity between past, present and future.

This is the process of urban transformation, aiming at maintaining a creative process of regeneration of the diversity within the context of the communication and unity of the community.

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