



## BOOK REVIEWS

**Sétif, patrimoine architectural moderne de F. Hennebique à J-H Calsat (1930–1962)** by *Assia Samai-Bouadjadja*, El Ibriz Editions, Algiers, Algeria, 2017, 178 pp. ISBN 978-9931-457-23-7.

This is a welcome contribution, in French, to the historiography of modern colonial architecture in Algeria. Subjected to French colonial rule for over a century (1830–1962), this North African country is characterized by a colonial heritage of incalculable value. Urban developments in Algeria have been marked by the clarity of their spatial layouts and formal expression, as well as by their material richness. In spite of the political circumstances of their origin, these environments are now integral parts of Algerian material culture and urban identity. Yet this colonial heritage has been ignored for a long time by public authorities and other actors in urban development. A polemic exists regarding the standing of the architectural heritage and its formal recognition in a political and institutional context that is coping, still, with post-independence turmoil and a muddled national identity. This book constitutes a first step in such necessary recognition, and carries some sense of urgency in the face of material decay. It sheds light in particular on the products of French colonial architecture in Sétif between 1930 and 1962, a period marked by the construction of large urban and architectural projects largely influenced by the modern movement. The urban and architectural history of the Algerian city is retraced through the example of that city, which has experienced the passage of many civilizations and cultures through its territory: Amazigh, Numidian, Roman, Byzantine, and then French. The latter period has arguably produced the most important heritage, in that it is still integral to the spatial configuration and functioning of the urban organism.

The book begins with a presentation of the firms that had worked on the design and building of 51 projects. Among these firms, the eponymous companies of François Hennebique and Auguste Perret, the Société Pieux Franki, and the office of architect Henri-Jean Calsat, stand out for their contribution in shaping Sétif's landscape. Following a brief introduction to the city and its formation and transformation through time, historiography centres on the development projects. An inventory provides a meticulous description based on archival documents and surveys as well as historical records. Chapters are dedicated respectively to downtown, which corresponds to the intramural city, the railway station suburb, Cité des Cheminots (the Railwaymen Ward), Cité Levy, Cité Bel-Air, the Pinède, Cité Bouaroua, and the former *non-aedificandi* zone. Each chapter reviews between four and twelve buildings and large-scale urban facilities built over the period. Each chapter follows the same model. A plan indicates the buildings and large facilities that are under consideration. These are amongst the city's most prominent structures to this day, due to their architectural quality, functional importance and historical standing: for example, the City Hall, the main post office, and the famous Carlone building. In addition to pictures and architectural plans, inventory cards provide detailed descriptions and pertinent information, including on the sequence of design and construction, the prime contractor and project manager, the construction material, technical procedures and technologies used, old and current names, and designations. Generously illustrated and easy to read, access to substantial research and analyses is provided for a wide readership. Though clearly anchored in modernity as manifested in Western civilization, the architecture described is inspired by local culture. Researchers have designated the phenomenon with different

labels, referring to it as *arabisante*, *algérianisée* or indigenous architecture. The design approach flourished with the coming of age, from the 1930s onward, of a generation of architects of European origin, though many were born in Algeria, proposing a Mediterranean-inspired architecture emulating local Algerian heritage.

This thorough and pertinent contribution prepares the ground for the characterization of French colonial built heritage in Algeria, while constituting a model practical handbook for researchers to follow. It provides an indispensable stepping stone and a prerequisite for the protection, preservation, enhancement and showcasing of that heritage. Its relevance is in its demonstration of buildings and urban fabrics in their typological and morphological diversity, and in its illustration of the range of construction techniques and specialized knowledge. It is pertinent to readers interested in North African architecture, urban form, and heritage, including researchers working on built environment history and morphogenesis, and practitioners concerned with the harmonious integration of old and contemporary architecture.

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**Persian historic urban landscapes: interpreting and managing Maibud over 6000 years** by *Eisa Esfanjary*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, UK, 2017, 242 pp. ISBN 978-1-4744-1278-0.

The main message in this book is that a detailed survey of historical urban development and its principles has much to teach us about creating a balance between ‘continuity’ and ‘change’, a balance between two seemingly paradoxical paradigms. On one hand, the existing valuable historical heritage of an urban landscape demands preservation and conservation to safeguard continuity; on the other hand, contemporary requirements of modern life are undeniable and demand spatial changes. Therefore, the challenge between conservation and modernization has always been the subject of conflict between urban conservationists and modernists since the emergence of modernity and the

industrial revolution (Rogers, 1999). Eisa Esfanjari has attempted to find a synthesis out of this argument by formulating an approach to support the management of the historic urban landscape of Maibud, a desert city in the heart of Iran.

The book comprises three main parts and eight chapters. Part one, in three chapters, offers a conceptual framework clarifying the rationale for the context and the methodology (chapter 1). This part provides the reader with a concise theoretical backbone of the study based on the progressive awareness of conservation ideas during the last two centuries (chapter 2). The approach to the concept of urban landscape conservation is embedded in the discipline of ‘urban morphology’ (chapter 3). By overviewing the historical and morphological evolution of the city of Maibud, the application of the approach to this city is discussed in the second part of the book (chapters 4, 5 and 6). Part two also includes a detailed examination of earthen construction material – mud brick. Chapter 7 describes how mud brick has sustained and evolved over a long period and has contributed to the formation of different building patterns. In part three, the final chapter, the book attempts to draw a policy-oriented synthesis between the conceptual framework and the case study through which some potential policies, design guidelines and conservation framework can facilitate management and decision making.

The book contributes to the fields of heritage conservation and urban morphology and their applications. It reviews chronologically the work of influential thinkers that represents different attitudes to conservation; from monumental conservationists James Wyatt (1746–1813) and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814–79) to minimal intervention and romantic ideologists John Ruskin (1819–1900) and William Morris (1834–96); from radical modernism and the controversial idea of ‘Grands Boulevards’ of Baron Haussmann (1809–91) to contextualism and ‘artistic principles’ of Camillo Sitte (1843–1903). The first half of the twentieth century in general, and the destruction and reconstruction crises during and just after two World Wars, shifted the attention of urban planners away from the harmonious development prompted by the movements of the late-nineteenth century. The modern movement has encroached on the old and removed the distinctiveness of places with outstanding values in many cities around the world. This has eventually become the concern of many urbanists as reflected in the outcomes of different international congresses such as the Athens